

## Outsider

### 1

The dusty Wastelands seem to spread out forever. Like a blanket, on the horizon, all he could see was the same rocky, rusty brown landscape. The sun beat down on the ground, bombarding him with heatwave after heatwave. The odd cactus popped up from time to time, the green contrasting against the orange landscape.

Tyler glanced at his watch, he'd been scavenging for what, 2 hours now? Hardly any spoils. Going to be a rough day today. Tyler Phoenix continued to walk through the desert, squinting as he searched the ground. If you asked Tyler Phoenix to describe himself, he'd respond there's not much to describe.

Standing at an average 5ft 10, his scruffy brown hair stuck up in all directions, thick and slightly long. He was twenty, his face young yet hardened. His build was lean, but muscular, fit enough to survive in the Wastelands. He had a sandy coloured jacket draped on him, underneath a battered t shirt and similarly battered jeans.

The jacket was in best condition, barely a bit of dust clung to it. His hazel eyes were observant and piercing, constantly observing information and storing it. He gripped his staff from time to time, grip constantly tensing and relaxing. The staff- sleek, thin black bar he crafted in his spare time.

## Outsider

Staffs were rarely used in the universe, they were difficult to master combat wise. Only Marauders really used them. Their magnetic ability to deflect bullets, once forged properly, was useful.

But Tyler had learned enough to defend himself, as he often did in the Wastelands. He added a few hidden blades and surprises in there too, from his scavenges.

As he continued to stroll, he stopped when he noticed dark shadows slumped beside a tall rock. Tyler slowly unsheathed his staff, walking slowly towards the figures. He instantly recognized the bodies of two men- ravaged completely, by the jackyls. He circled the perimeter slowly, making sure none of the vicious bastards were still there.

But all he could see was the same landscape- the same dusty rocks. He relaxed slightly, his grip loosening. Suddenly, a creature leapt on his face, completely blinding him.

He struggled back and forth, cursing. *Get the fuck off.* He prised the ugly bat like 'thing' off his face, as the teeth in its underbelly opened. He grabbed his staff and jammed it in the screeching creatures mouth, before it could react. He pressed a small button - a short needle shot out the top, right into its stomach mouth. It crumpled, lifeless, in his hand.

## Outsider

He tossed it away, with disgust and began searching the bodies. As he knelt, he noticed how badly the body had been attacked- huge chunks of flesh torn out of its side and legs, all rotting. Turning it over on its belly proved to be a mistake- the foul stench of rotting flesh hit him instantly.

There wasn't much left of their faces at all- Tyler could barely make out what species they were- if they were human or alien.

"Poor fuckers." he muttered, as he pocketed the corpses wallet.

It would have to do for today. Time to head his favourite bar in the Wasteland's: Barry Blitz's.

He strolled through the heavy wooden doors of the small bar. Tyler noticed the quiet atmosphere in the bar, as his eyes scanned the room. There were only three regular customers. They were all different species of aliens, either drinking in solitude or on some sort of device.

He observed a couple of humans, foreign, sitting at a booth, quietly talking. He didn't stare for too long, but he noticed the coloured jackets and the gear they had strapped to their waist: they were Marauders.

The elite special operations military force. Not sure who they were after, but he doubted it was him. He walked

## Outsider

straight to the bar, where Barry, a native Blitzonian, stood, methodically wiping the table.

The Blitzonians were strange species: they looked physically like humans but completely adapted to their environment, the same dusty brown as the ground outside. They had a single hole in their face, with only a tongue attached.

"The usual, then?" he growled in his native tongue. Tyler sat on the chair, barely glancing up. "Yeah. More than one too."

He replied in Universal Basic. He quickly poured the red whisky into the glass with expert precision and slid it to Tyler. Tyler did not try to make conversation, and Barry knew well enough not to.

Tyler's quiet personality was well known locally.

Tyler hated Blitz. His home planet was one of the worst planets someone could possibly live on, particularly for a human.

It was not poor by any means, there were plenty of scummy criminals and corrupt businessmen making a fortune from the resources, sucking the planet dry. Of course, Tyler was stuck in the worst region of Blitz: The Wastelands. There was nothing of interest in the

## Outsider

Wastelands. Unless you mean the frequent stabbings and murders that take place daily.

In the Wastelands, nearly everyone was a criminal, and through no choice of his own, Tyler was also included. He barely got by on scavenging, providing for both him and his father. His life was terrible. He chugged the red whisky again, daydreaming of all the other planets in the universe. He couldn't though.

He didn't have a ship, and he couldn't leave his father alone. He always wanted an exciting job, like a bounty hunter or a mercenary. Travel the galaxy, go on mental adventures. Big money was a bonus. Tyler felt it would help fill the emptiness that had always poured in him, through his heart and body.

Tyler listened as he heard Tupac's 'Me Against the World' ring on the jukebox. He liked old Earth songs, especially this one.

Why? Tyler didn't know exactly why he felt so without a purpose. He knew it was a variety of personal reasons. Sure, he could wield a staff and survive in the wastelands, but he was not special.

He was not a Chosen warrior. He was a mediocre, quiet guy, stuck on a pointless planet.

This mediocrity directly linked to him having no purpose. Maybe he wasn't mediocre, maybe he just doubted

## Outsider

himself too much. He wasn't living life, life was slowly dragging him along, until the end. He had no one in his life, no mentor, no love interest. He did things alone.

As he continued to reflect sorrowfully, he heard the creak of the door opening. He heard loud voices instantly pierce the silence, as well as heavy footsteps. He heard them rapidly approach, until a fist slammed down beside his whisky.

He slowly looked up, his eyes meeting the face of a grey hairy alien with large pink lips and a huge tube-like ears, flanked by two humans and another of his kind.

"You little rat. Where's the money, Phoenix?" Tyler sighed, exasperated. More of these fucking goons.

"Lisk will get his money, alright? Soon."

He snorted through his ears, and leaned his hairy face closer. "Soon isn't good enough. Lisk wants it *now*."

"Get out of my face."

Tyler withdrew his staff. Barry watched from the bar, mildly interested, not attempting to stop the confrontation.

"Listen, you little worthless shit. The boss has connections, that'll make your life hell."

Tyler heard the open threat loud and clear. He didn't care. "Either pay up now, or you and your old man die."

## Outsider

Tyler heard enough. He wasn't in a patient mood. He swung his staff around quickly, whacking him in his ear tube.

He crumpled to the ground silently, but his minions pounced. He dodged some fists, and leapt on to the bar, to gain some distance. He knew he was in worse trouble when he saw one of the skinhead humans draw a machine blaster.

He was grabbed roughly by the leg by the other skinhead, falling off the counter and landing on his back with a grunt.

He ignored the dull pain in his back, attempting to recover. Then he heard a yell, and watched the man fall to the ground. He watched from the ground as the two Marauders dispatched the three goons, with ease. Tyler got to his feet, quickly, before jabbing his staff into the blaster held by the human.

He looked up, shocked, before Tyler hit him in the face. He yanked out the staff, and whacked him in the jaw.

He spun around, only to see that the other henchmen were similarly on the ground, motionless, the Marauders standing triumphantly over them.

He looked at the Marauders silently, and they stared back. One wore a green leather jacket, with stripes on it.

## Outsider

He had slick, long brown hair, combed back and brown stubble, with noticeable grey hairs. His bright blue eyes were calm and in control, looking slowly around the room.

He looked to be middle aged, and had an aura of command and leadership about him. His face was wrinkled, and battle hardened. Tyler understood he had seen and experienced things.

Tyler could instantly tell he was the commanding officer.

The other stood behind, ordaining a dark blue jacket. He was much younger, looking to be around Tyler's age, with extremely short brown hair and was clean shaven.

His eyes were chestnut brown with and barely concealed anger hidden beneath. He came across with brash confidence. Not arrogance, but not far off either.

"Thanks." Tyler finally exclaimed. "But I didn't need your help."

The older one laughed. "You bloody well did mate."

His face hardened again, business like. "And we need your help. We want to recruit you into the Marauders."

## Outsider

### 2

Tyler looked at them for a few moments, waiting to hear the punchline. Neither of them smiled.

*The hell do these guys want? "The hell do you want?"* he asked out loud.

The older one scratched his beard, a look of exasperation on his face. The younger one spoke up. "You sure about this guy, Captain?" "Trust me, Owen." The older one responded. He turned back towards Tyler.

"My names Captain Terry Hart, the leader of this little squad. This lads Commander Owen Scallow, my second. We know all about your reputation, and you're the perfect third guy for our squad."

*Reputation?* Tyler rubbed his temple, feeling a headache coming on. "How am I 'perfect'? Why me?" Captain Hart gestured around him.

"This, lad. You've managed to survive against the toughest gangs in Blitz. You're handy with that staff, which we know you've built yourself. You're smart, and think outside the box. We've monitored your big smuggling jobs. You're all the things a good Marauder should be."

Tyler couldn't believe this. Out of nowhere, the best military organisation wanted to recruit him with no formal training? It couldn't be real.

## Outsider

"Well, you've got the wrong guy. There's nothing special about me, I've barely managed to survive here." Tyler kicked an unconscious goon, before continuing to talk.

"I can't abandon my father either. I couldn't go even if I wanted to." He definitely did want to go. "Your father is taken care of." Captain replied instantly.

"There's three Republic soldiers guarding his house as we speak, making sure no one enters. I can show you through the camera feeds. And your debt will be paid off- once we get back to headquarters."

Captain began to take something out of his pocket, before Owen Scallow cut through.

"Captain, we don't have time for this. Lisk will be sending his whole crew. We need to leave, sir." Captain quickly spun around and began walking.

"Owens right. We better get to the ship before more arrive."

Tyler didn't need any further encouragement. His father was taken care of. They promised to pay off the debt soon. He's waited his whole life for an opportunity like this. He bolted behind Captain Hart as the three strolled out the door, excitement coursing through his veins.

They quickly jogged behind the bar, Tyler close behind. He felt a glare in his eyes and shielded his eyes, searching for any sign of a ship. Sure enough, they had a

## Outsider

ship. A sleek silver ship, that seemed to adapt to the environment.

It was slim and quite big, the nose of the ship jutting out ahead of the cockpit, it's four legs planted firmly to the ground. Captain slapped the ship twice and a door opened on its underbelly, stairs slowly unravelling like a stepladder.

As Tyler entered behind his new comrade, he was quickly stunned. It was technology that Tyler had only seen in magazines and books. The inside was made of shiny, black metal, with various lights flashing all around the ship.

Tyler took a moment to look around, take it all in. This was going to be his ship too. As Owen rushed off to the cockpit, Captain tossed him a mini screen, along with clothes.

"There's the camera feed. No one is going near your father or his house without being thoroughly searched and checked." Sure enough, the grainy footage showed three men clad in black, all heavily armed and poised to fire, guarding the front door of his house. "Plus, some new clothes. You can't wear those bloody rags if you're going to be a Marauder.

He relaxed a little, giving the screen back to Captain. At least he wasn't completely leaving his father for dead. He'd try to return soon enough. Tyler decided not to ask many other questions: he'd waited for an opportunity like

## Outsider

this his entire life. Captain was at a bench now, fiddling with a gun.

"You've built up some bloody debt with this Lisk guy. But don't worry, you have my word I'll get the money to pay it off."

"Take us to the objective, Owen. C2 mothership." Owens head popped out the cockpit, confusion etched on his face.

"Captain, shouldn't we head to Sioma Prime? Our recruit won't become an official Marauder until run by the Board of Generals."

Captain shook his head, before straightening up from the bench.

"No time. The mission situation is going south, very fucking fast. The Board will wait."

"Co-ordinates set for the C2 mothership." exclaimed Owen, after a slight hesitation.

Tyler knew there had to be a catch. It still seemed to surreal, that this would suddenly happen. These two appearing out of nowhere and offering him a dream job. He wasn't even officially commissioned, whatever that means. Still, that's not going to stop him now.

3

"So here's the deal." began Captain, as he fiddled with panel in the centre of the room.

"C2 are being a group of cunts at the moment. You know who they are?"

Tyler, who watched as a hologram popped out the panel, nodded. "Yeah. The robot company."

Captain jabbed at a few buttons on the circular button, where rows and rows of writing appeared.

"Bang on. They're the top weapons and robotic manufacturing company in the Universe, bar the government themselves. They have decided to invade Atlantis." Another image popped to life: A planet. Tyler examined it: it looked like the pictures of Earth he's seen. Green land, patches of ocean dotted around the

## Outsider

planet. He could almost see the wildlife on the grainy hologram. It looked, well, amazing. Tyler had never seen so much colourful wildlife before.

"What are they getting out of it?" Tyler put forward, his eyes fixed on the planet.

"Natural Resources. Plenty of iron, titanium and alloys on this planet. There's even a possibility of them opening a factory there, to build even more battle robots. And the government can do fuck all. They're holding one of the planets famous people hostage."

Another image flashed, replacing Atlantis. It was of a human woman, and a very good-looking woman. Tyler instantly noticed this, as he found himself looking at her long brown hair, and the sharp features of her face, most of all her round blue eyes.

"Zoe Lalland. One of the most famous actors in Universal Movies, and a national treasure for Atlantis. Because they have her, the Republic government has made us sit on our arses twiddling our thumbs for the last few months."

Captain thumbed a few more buttons, and a new figure popped up. Tyler, jarred by the change, now found himself looking at a very smug and arrogant looking man. *Prefer to look at her, actually.*

## Outsider

His blonde hair looked to be combed back, and he had startlingly bright blue eyes. His sharp cheekbones only added to his features, making him look even more smug. The smile didn't help matters, completing the corporate asshole look.

"This is Karl Baastian, CEO of C2. He's orchestrated this scheme, and he's been kind enough to meet for negotiations. That's our job."

Captain shut off the panel, and looked at Tyler, waiting for something. Tyler took all this in. *Fucking talking?*

"You recruited me to talk to these corporate assholes? I don't know what my reputation is, but I'm not much of a bloody talker."

Captain laughed at that.

"Negotiations is a very fucking loose term, lad. It's never just 'negotiations' when we're involved. It's going to get messy. If he keeps his robot army in Atlantis and keeps the actress, then we have authorisation to bring him in. We are a military unit, we weren't sent to talk."

Captain tossed a clear piece of plastic, which Tyler caught deftly. "Earpiece. Essentially invisible." Captain elaborated. "You won't be side by side with us all the time, it's the best form of communication."

## Outsider

Tyler rammed it in his ear, expecting to hear some sort of crackling or feel uneasiness. It fit like a warm glove, like it was a part of Tylers body.

Captain held out a handgun, pointed the handle towards Tyler. Tyler shook his head quickly, perhaps too quickly.

"No. I'm not a big gun guy, sir, I prefer to use my staff." Tyler just about caught the gun as Captain tossed it to him.

"Take it anyway. You never know when you might need it."

Captain turned on his heels and headed down the long corridor behind the panel. "We'll be there soon enough. Get yourself ready."

Tyler found himself standing in the central room alone. He had ordained his new clothes, a fresh pair of jeans, and a fresh camo top. He kept his sandy jacket, it was too nice to discard.

He found himself in an internal debate, about whether he should go up to the cockpit.

He should, if he was going to be in a team with this Commander Owen, he should try to get to know him. He scaled the metal ladder quickly, taking it two rungs at a time, and leaped into the cockpit.

## Outsider

He found Owen in the middle of various panels, fiddling with two gear stick-things, occasionally pressing a button.

He didn't turn around to greet Tyler. After a moments silence, Tyler decided to start the dreaded small talk.

"How'd you end up as a Marauder?"

Owen glanced behind him, before turning back to the colossal window in front of him, staring out at the endless black ahead.

"Through the Academy. Like everyone else."

The silence stretched out, and Tyler wondered what else he could say. Tyler hated small talk with a passion. Finally, Owen broke the silence.

"Don't make any more small talk. I can't be bothered right now."

Tyler let out a sigh of relief, before Owen continued talking.

"I don't know much about you. You're just a random scavenger from Blitz, who barely fits the bill to join us. But, Captain seems high on you, so I'll give you a chance. You better not let the team down here. You've got to prove yourself, prove you should be a Marauder. The Marauders are built on respect and trust, you've got to earn both."

## Outsider

Tyler was stunned by the sudden outburst, but he deduced Owen had that opinion of him.

"I'll prove myself." Tyler simply responded. Nothing else needed to be said. There was another silence, as Owen continued to pilot towards their destination.

"We're almost there." Owen stated, as he steered towards a grey dot in the distance. As the ship edged closer, he couldn't believe the size of the C2 mothership.

It was massive, a huge, chunky ship, with what seemed like endless amounts of smaller ships pouring out its side, like bees from a beehive.

On its massive nose, stuck out two pipes- which Tyler quickly realised were cannons. *The firepower of those things* thought Tyler, shocked. How the hell were three men supposed to survive an attack in this thing?

"Nut up, lads." Captains voice called from below. "It's go time."

4

As they landed in the motherships hangar, Tyler did not see an improvement in the situation. In the massive grey hangar, he saw dozens of humanoid robots walking around, carrying boxes and marching up and down mechanically.

They had a square head, with huge square chest. Each one seemed to have red plated armour on their chest, each one branded with a C2 logo.

As Tyler followed his team members down the stairs, he saw Captain was greeted by a man in a red uniform.

He looked old, and worn out, his grey hairs and wrinkles clear. Tyler didn't like the look of him, he screamed 'corporate kiss ass'.

"Gentlemen, you've arrived." He extended his hand to Captain, who barely glanced down, continuing to stare a hole through the assistant.

"Right, um... Mr Baastian is dying to see you, I'll take you to him."

"Oh, he would be dying, if I had my way." muttered Owen, and Tyler suppressed a smile.

They were led through various corridors, all looking similar to the last, each absolutely crowded with the C2

## Outsider

robots. Tyler noticed one room particularly. There was machinery all over the place, and they seemed to be rapidly building robots, attaching limb to limb in a matter of seconds, before they'd be fully functional, marching and walking like all the others.

The machine didn't slow down at all.

They eventually reached their destination, a large meeting room with a desk, various chairs crowded around each one.

Sitting at the top, was Baastian, flanked by three battle bots. He stood up, and brushed off down his expensive looking suit.

"It's always good to see Marauders. The peacekeepers, the problem solvers of the galaxy. Hopefully you can resolve this problem pretty quickly."

He began, wearing a huge (fake) smile, flashing white teeth.

"Good to have you seeing our facility, how efficient we are, and can be."

Captain pulled out a chair, and sat down on it rigidly, with Tyler and Owen following suit.

Tyler was interested to see how his new Captain would handle this guy.

## Outsider

"Where's the girl?" he simply asked, eyes locked on Baastian. Baastian sat back in his chair, hands behind his head.

"She's not here. She's in a secure facility in Atlantis, where she will stay until we get what we want.

Which I'm sure you've come here to provide, because otherwise, you're wasting your time, and frankly, mine."

Captain folded his arms, never taking his eyes off Baastian. He let the silence build, and Tyler noticed a slight gleam of sweat on Baastian's forehead. "What do you want?" Captain finally stated, after the silence had built considerably.

Baastian grinned again, a smug smile, wiping his forehead quickly.

"Unrestricted access to all Atlantis resources, a number of bases around the planet and a zone to keep all resources- without any access from the Republic."

*No wonder he's sweating- it was a ballsy move. Not to mention stupid.* This guy is trying to fleece the Republic.

Captain seemed to share that sentiment. "You're havin' a bloody laugh, mate? You think the Republic will allow all that? You're fuckin' delusional. Your lucky these fuckin negotiations are happening at all and we're not blowing your facility to bits."

## Outsider

Baastians smile disappeared from his face.

"That or she dies. Now, give me a minute to confer with my.... colleagues."

He nearly bolted out of the room, accompanied by his robot bodyguards as Owen banged the table. The door shut quickly behind him, as Tyler wondered who these colleagues were.

"What a knob. He's got some fuckin' nerve coming out with that shit." Captain scratched his beard thoughtfully. "There's something else going on here. No way a guy like him could do this on his own. I don't think he's really in charge here, this goes deeper than that."

"Let's just get him and leave. Stick to the plan." Owen cut in.

"Looks like there's no easy way out of this ship." Captain responded. Tyler decided to voice his opinion.

"I think Owens right. He looks like he's planning something, by how he nervy he was. The sweat is a dead giveaway. We should just 'arrest' him, or whatever you call it, and get him to tell us where Lalland is."

Captain stood to his feet. "Probably the best call. Move, quick, before they catch on."

As soon as the words left Captain's mouth, Baastian rushed into the room accompanied by three bots, hand

## Outsider

behind his back. Tyler tensed, ready for Baastian to fire. Before Baastian could even open his mouth to speak, Captain whipped out a handgun out of nowhere, and shot two of the bots in quick succession.

He lunged, his fingertips grasping for his shirt, but Baastian barely slipped away, disappearing behind the bots flowing in the room.

"He's not getting away! Quick!" yelled Captain, as he unsheathed a hunting knife. Tyler watched all this transpire, still, before he heard gunfire by his ears.

Suddenly snapping out of his reverie, he spun his staff and hit the bot in its head. Despite its bulk, the metal crumbled under Tylers staff, collapsing. He quickly grabbed a huge metal fist lunged towards him, and trapped it with his arm. Adrenaline flowing, He kicked the bot heavily in the chest, and it had little effect.

Still holding the arm, he thrust his staff through the bots chest, 'killing' it. Tyler smiled at his handiwork, before sprinting into the hallway. It was then that he saw the problem: there were hundreds of the bots pouring into the hallway, from everywhere, all firing at them. Tyler dived back into the room, as the bullets rushed at him, where Captain was already taking cover behind the wall.

"Shit!" Captain stated, clearly frustrated. "We can still get him, Captain." Owen piped in. "Let's just-"

## Outsider

"Just what? It's bloody suicide out there, Owen! There's too many. Our only shot of nabbing him was when he was here. We have to get back to the ship and retreat. If the ship isn't already torn apart."

Tyler looked out at the bots, dozens crammed into the hallway, all mechanically firing at the small room. He wasn't scared, the rush he was getting, he could do anything. Tyler was loving his first mission as a Marauder, even if it was going badly.

"Those bots aren't that tough. They can be outsmarted. We can still get him."

Captain shook his head, exasperated with his unit. "He's already gone by now. We need to leave, now."

Captain grabbed a few grenades from his belt, and tossed them out the doorway. He held his hand out, before a hissing noise filled the air. Captain headed out, Tyler close behind, as the smoke instantly hit Tyler.

He wandered into the smoke, hoping he was heading the right way. There was wild, inaccurate fire coming from inside the white smoke, as Captain returned the fire and Owen whipped out a blue staff, and swung at a few silhouettes.

Tyler soundlessly followed them into the door on the left, entering the massive hangar. Tyler crouched behind a

## Outsider

box, glancing over at the squads of bots. The ship was on the far side, along with various C2 branded ships.

They were trying to figure out how to open the ship, prodding and poking at it. There were only about five. He could handle five easily. Tyler stood up, ready to fight.

However, Captain roughly dragged him back into cover and pointed at a spot on the balcony above their ship.

A bot stood behind a mounted mini gun, scanning the area. This bot wore green armour, as opposed to the red. Tyler assumed it was a commanding bot.

"Double check your surroundings and watch your back, always."

Tyler stared at the turret, his head buzzing with ideas of how to dismantle it. But, before he could offer, Owen interrupted. "I'll take out the turret, sir."

Captain nodded his affirmation. "We'll deal with the metal bastards over there."

Captain crept out of hiding, and muttered. "We're knee deep in enemy territory here, lad. Last thing we need is them finding us again."

Tyler nodded, understanding. He crept behind Captain, watching the squad, still facing towards the ship.

Up at the balcony, Owen had grabbed the bot from behind, but the bot had a firm grip on the gun. There was

## Outsider

a struggle between the two, and the gun went off. The loud *chkchkchk* noise stabbed the air and the bots were alert, guns swinging towards Owen.

*Their backs are turned.* Tyler leapt at the bots, and swung his staff forcefully. He caught two of the bots in his frenzy, and the three bots now were focused on him. However, they all dropped quickly, shot dramatically by Captain.

"We have to go!" Captain yelled, opening the ship.

As Tyler went to follow his teammates into the ship, he felt something roughly grab his leg.

He fell to the ground with a thump, turning on his back to see a bot had vice-like grip on his leg.

Tyler kicked at the bot frantically, noticing the ship taking off. *They can't abandon me.*

"Get the fuck in here, Phoenix!" he heard Owens voice reverberate in his ear.

Tyler delivered another kick to the head, smashing its head inwards. His vision focused down the hangar, where an army of bots was marching towards him. All their guns were pointed right at him, ready to tear him to bits. He scrambled to his feet, and sprinted towards the ship, hovering outside the hangar door.

## Outsider

The door was still open to the ship. Captain stood by the open door, waiting. They weren't close enough! "Jump for it!!" he bellowed. How the hell was he meant to jump that? It was at least five metres!

*Just do it.* He leaped, with all his power. He reached the doorway, hitting the bottom edge hard.

He grunted in pain. He was half hanging out of the ship, his legs dangling out the edge. He heard bullets ping off the ship, and began to climb back in more frantically. His hands didn't have a strong enough grip, He could feel himself slowly slipping.

Panic filled his body, as he grasped for something to cling to, before a hand grabbed his arm.

"We don't leave men behind." Captain exclaimed, dragging him into the ship.

Tyler sat on the floor for a moment taking everything in as the ship darted off.

They failed the mission.

*I nearly died out there.* Tyler grinned to himself. He loved every second of it.

## Outsider

### 5

"We fucked it." Captain stated. They all sat in the cockpit, where Owen was piloting the ship. Tyler could take a good guess where they were going next.

"Slimy bastard got lucky." Owen swore. He gave Tyler a quick look, a look Tyler deciphered quickly. Frustration and anger. "I'll wipe that smug smirk off his face soon enough."

Captain waved him down. "We'll get him. The objective has always been to secure Lalland, first and foremost. We know she's on Atlantis now, we just gotta find her there. We have intel on where her location could be."

Captain turned to Tyler, who waited to be chastised for his short comings.

Tyler was annoyed at himself. He got caught up in the excitement of the mission and nearly fucked up the whole thing.

"One thing you should know about Atlantis." Captain began.

"Is that the humans and the native species, the *Gond'ai*, are at odds. The *Gond'ai* blame the humans for ruining the natural wildlife of the planet by building their cities, and the humans think the *Gond'ai* are savages.

## Outsider

The C2 invasion didn't help things, now the Gond'ai are blaming the humans for the invasion. It's a messy situation, and we're going to be caught up in it." Tyler listened, closely.

"We're landing in the middle of Gond'ai territory, cause all the capital is overrun. We have to get through a forest to reach the capital."

Captain turned away, no sign of anger or frustration on his face.

Tyler watched Owen direct the ship towards the lively planet, breathing a sigh of relief. They- well, Captain, anyway, - didn't seem to blame him. He won't let the team down again.

The planet really was something beautiful, Tyler had never seen anything like it in the flesh before. The grass was bright green, with the trees being different shades of blue and green. The colours flooded Tyler senses. Owen had directed the ship into a small patch of grasslands, just outside an immense forest. The ship landed quietly, as the sound of animal life filled the air. Captain gathered up his weapons, before heading out the door first.

"Stay frosty, lads. They won't like us, but we need them to get through this forest."

## Outsider

As they stepped outside into the grass, Tyler instantly noticed a pile of dead animals, directly beside a burnt tree. The corpses themselves were scorched, parts of skin blackened. It wasn't just the Gond'ai here.

"They have no reason to trust us."

Tyler heard Owens voice among the noisy forest. His face was focused, crystal clear, but he could hear the anger in his voice.

"Look at what humans have done."

Tyler had to reluctantly agree. Humans can be ruthless. It was a human that created this robot army.

Captain turned his head slightly, as he headed into the forest.

"They can be reasoned with, Owen. They're not bloody savages like everyone assumes."

Tyler felt his feet crunch on branches, as he entered the dark forest. The various noises of the animal creature suddenly felt hostile, as he walked further into the depths of the forest. Tyler tensed up, as he observed his surroundings, noticing the shadow of a small creature crawling on the tree.

Tyler nearly jumped, as he stepped on a small dark green rodent, which turned an angry orange before scuttling off.

## Outsider

Just as Tyler was getting used to the forest, Captain suddenly halted. He seemed to be staring at the tree in front of them, his hand raised. As if from nowhere, green figures emerged from all around them, looking very hostile.

As Tyler slowly looked around at all them, they all were armed: spears, bow and arrows, wooden swords. They were approaching quickly, all weapons raised directly had.

Tyler gripped his staff as he noticed Owen do the same. "Don't." Captain warned quietly. "We can avoid this fight." Tyler released the grip off his staff, as he began to study the Gond'ai more carefully.

Their skin was completely grass green, their eyes large, and black.

Their 'hair' looked more like sea weed, green strands falling from their head. Three advanced, while the others stayed stark still.

Tyler suddenly saw an arrow pointed at his throat, the black eyes staring a hole through him. One, carrying a spear pointed at Captain, began to make a series of clicking noises. He seemed to be the chief or the leader, a blue streak down the centre of his face and body distinguishing him from the rest.

"Chief Borsa says humans are not welcome here." said the one targeting Tyler, in near fluent English.

## Outsider

"Humans work with the metal men." Chief Borsa paused, before continuing to click.

"You leave our forest now, or you all die." Captain barely flinched, as he began to talk.

"We're not with the metal men. We're here to stop them, we need to get through the forest."

As the request was translated, Chief Borsa seemed to get even more agitated as he snarled and clicked.

"You lie. You wish to deceive us like the other humans." The translator paused, before he turned to Borsa and seemed to debate with him quickly. Borsa seemed to have a change of heart. "You will not die, but you will remain as prisoners." The translator relayed. "You-" An explosion suddenly cut through the message.

## 6

The ground beneath them shook momentarily, as screams and gunfire was heard in the distance.

The Gond'ai instantly began to click to each other, looking panicked. Besides this, their aims didn't waver, Tyler had an arrow still directly by his throat. He gulped, as he heard a familiar *clank clank clank* fill the air.

## Outsider

Tyler could just see, out of the corner of his eye, a few bots emerge from the forest.

In a flash, most of the Gond'ai swivelled towards the bots, weapons pointed directly at them.

But then, Tyler could see their faces drop, in a mixture of anger and apprehension. Tyler slowly turned his head, towards the bots. And then he saw it.

Three bots stood there, but one of them, had a small child Gond'ai child. The boy dangled from the bots arm, as he had it in a rock solid grip around its waist, with a gun to its head.

The child looked horrified and confused, its head darting around, tears streaming down his face. The sight instantly angered Tyler: it was just a kid. It was not involved in this. He tried to move, but the Gond'ai held him firm.

"The Marauders. Hand them over." One robot spoke, its robotic voice reverberating around the forest.

Borsa looked clearly pained, without hesitation, he gestured towards some of his tribe. A few warriors jumped down, and roughly grabbed Tyler. He didn't struggle despite his instincts screaming at him to do so, he wasn't going to get a kid killed.

"We can help. Let us go." Captain said in a low voice, to the nearest Gond'ai. They didn't dare respond. Tyler

## Outsider

found himself beside the bots, as he was roughly grabbed. He saw Owen slowly grab his staff from his belt, soundlessly.

The bot stared at him, its void eyes analysing them. "Targets retrieved." He reported. "Kill the hostage."

"NO!" the translator yelled. As the bot turned his gun back towards the boy, Tyler saw his chance. He quickly grabbed his staff and hit the bot in the back of its head, crumpling the metal.

Captain dived at the kid, scooping him up in his arms and pushing him away from the action. Owen, similarly, took out the other two bots quickly. He dismantled the bots with an aggressive grace, spinning and lunging with a quick finesse that took care of the bots with ease. Tyler noticed his skill far exceeded his own, he had a unique fighting technique. As the bots were all destroyed, the kid ran to the Chief, hugging his leg.

Chief Borsa stared at them silently, a look of relief and surprise crossing his face; He began to slowly click, shaking his head in shock. "The Chief gives you a thousand thanks. You have just saved his nephew.

He- We all had been convinced, humans were selfish and destructive. But you three proved that statement wrong. We welcome you into our forest with open arms." Captain steps forward. "The people of Atlantis didn't do this to your forest. It's C2, the makers of these metal men.

## Outsider

They're the enemies." As Captain talked more to the tribe, Tyler glanced at Owen. "Good teamwork." He muttered. He needed to defrost some of this coldness Owen still had towards them. "We did what we had to do." Owen simply stated, beginning to walk as the tribe began to move.

## 7

Forest rat tastes nice. Tyler was surprised, when he bit into the crisp rat, that the flavour and texture was extremely appealing. He sat at the campfire, chewing his forest rat thoughtfully. Owen was fiddling with his staff on the left of him, and Captain was jabbing the fire aggressively, like it owed him money. A subject Tyler was all too familiar with.

The Gond'ai allowed them free passage through the forest, towards the city. They also gave them artifacts, medallions and metal triangles, as gifts. They seemed to represent a religion, a God that they worshipped.

It was well appreciated. Tyler got the impression the Gond'ai didn't hand out these artifacts easily. Tyler got a personal gift too. After the 'rescue', the kid he saved approached him warily.

## Outsider

Tyler didn't know what to expect, but the kid grabbed his hand, and started rubbing a dead bug on it.

On reflection, it was pretty painful- the bug still latched onto him, even though it was dead. He was convinced that the kid was playing some weird game, but when the kid was finished, there was an elaborate blue pattern covering his hand.

'The warriors mark' is what the kid called it. It was a series of blue lines spiralling in a square shape, covering the back of his hand.

Tyler was honestly touched, that they would consider putting this mark on him. But as he stared at the mark by the campfire, he knew in his heart he hadn't earned it. Not yet. He hadn't even become a fully-fledged Marauder yet.

"You did good." Tyler looked up to see Owen speaking, still fiddling with the staff, before putting it down. "I didn't think you'd save the kid, but you did. You put yourself on the line for that kid. I respect that. That's what we're about. Protecting the innocent."

Tyler smiled in response. He was slowly growing on Owen.

"Yeah." Captain stated. There was a pause, in which Captains eyes seemed to be lost in the fire, as if recalling a lost memory. "You put yourself on the line for that kid. But you wait for my orders. It's a key rule in the

## Outsider

Marauders, we're just like the Republic army, or the defence force. You obey orders, no matter what. You're new to this, but you'll learn this quick.

I'm the Captain here. Same goes for you Owen. It's been five bloody years and you still run off, nearly killing yourself. Quit bollocking around, both of you."

Captain seemed to relax, his muscles releasing the tension in his shoulders and neck. His face brightened. "We set off towards the city at 08:00. Get sleep, the big days tomorrow." Captain lay down on the leaves without another word.

Tyler stayed upright, looking at the forest. It was like a new world in the night. Shadows flitted around the corners of his eyes, quick flashes. As he lay down on the uncomfortable forest floor, Tyler felt pressure. He took some responsibility for Baastian getting away, he couldn't fuck up this retrieval mission. He lay down, the buzzing of his thoughts preventing him getting rest.

As he turned on his side, he noticed Owens arm exposed. On his forearm, he saw a small tattoo, an intricate design of a knife going through a shield. Owen caught him peeking, and anger flashed on his face. "That's private!" he snapped, facing away from Tyler.

Sighing, Tyler lay down on the leaves. He was still getting used to being in a team, he was a loner in nature. He willed himself to sleep.

## First Dream

*Black. Darkness was all he saw, with smoke drifting in and out of view. The chasm seemed endless, all Tyler could see was the smoke.*

*It stung, his eyes watering from the smoke. He raised a hand slowly, and waved the smoke away.*

*Then, in the distance, he saw it. Two figures, vague outlines, but clearly people- one was standing upright, the other was kneeling.*

*It seemed to be submission. Tyler approached warily, closing the gap between him and the shadowy men. As he approached, details fizzled into view, crackling like a TV. The features of the man kneeling came into view. He was wearing a black hood, but his face was visible.*

*He was not human, but some other species. His face was covered with a blue and black pattern, lines and jagged slashes of black across a dark blue skin. He could make out his hair behind the hood, what looked like a black mohawk sat. His head was bowed, but he could see his eyes. They were black, and dark. They sucked the little light of the chasm, and only a faint outline of orange around the black, which burned like a raging fire.*

## Outsider

*As Tyler looked to the other figure, he was shocked by what he saw. Nothing. The man/alien was completely shrouded in black, like a silhouette. He could not make out any features whatsoever on it, just a figure, an indistinct figure.*

*He noticed the kneeling mouths man moving, but no sound was coming out. They were communicating somehow, he realised. As he focused on his lips moving, he began to hear faint whispers- abrupt words, blaring through the eerie silence. He focused more, channelling all his attention on the figure.*

*Suddenly, their voices came loudly into earshot.*

*"-It is a problem Never." The voice was distorted. Heavily distorted, deep and indistinct. The kneeling man's mouth was closed, so Tyler assumed the silhouette was speaking. "A problem that must be solved."*

*Never lifted his head slightly, so he was facing the silhouette. He seemed to be looking at a spot on the face, Tyler realised he must be able to see the silhouettes true form.*

*"Yes, Leader. They will be dealt with." His voice was deep and menacing, and was loud, in a quiet way. It unsettled Tyler. "I have killed dozens of Marauders, these will be no different."*

## Outsider

*"It will be different." The Leader responded, but did not elaborate.*

*"Good. We will rise again. The Fallen will rise again, Never. Go and deal with it."*

*Then, it fizzled. Tyler saw his vision blur and he felt a searing pain in his head. He groaned as he grasped his head, before he was shot back to reality.*

## 8

He leapt up, in a shock. Tyler could feel the sweat pouring off his forehead, and drenching his entire body. His mind tried to process, as he looked around, seeing no one.

Tyler knew exactly who the Fallen were. The arch rivals of the Marauders, a paramilitary organisation that reaped havoc all over the universe. Their motivations were unclear, but their crimes were some of the worst.

They have committed genocide, stole priceless artefacts, and even blew up planets. Except, they had been wiped out by the Marauders over a century ago. Everyone knew the story. They had tried to invade Sioma Prime, the capital of the Universe, where the Marauders prime base was. They had infiltrated the central base, but were wiped out, most imprisoned or killed in the conflict. They were finished as an organization. But, the dream was

## Outsider

extremely vivid, he could still remember the details. It couldn't have been a coincidence. He hoped it was. He was well aware of how dangerous the Fallen were.

There was always a *General*, and a *Shadow Hand*, the personal second in command and warrior of the *General*. Tyler quickly figured out this 'Leader' was the *General*, and *Never* was the *Shadow Hand*.

That is, if this is actually real and not some strange dream.

"About time you got up." Captain dropped grass outfit at his feet. "C'mon, we're oscar mike."

Tyler lay on the grass, staring at the giant city that lay miles ahead. Owen and Captain were to the left of him, both peering through the binoculars and sniper scopes at the city.

Scouting it out. Tyler kept his mouth shut about the dream. He wasn't convinced it was true yet, so he didn't want to add more pressure to the team. They had enough on their plate.

Still, it still worried him, niggling him at the back of his mind. *I have killed dozens of Marauders before.*

"It's swarmed, like we thought." Captain interrupted his worries.

## Outsider

"Barely a patch of ground without a bot squatting there"

He had handed over the sniper scope, which Tyler peered through. Sure enough, there were bots all over the city, patrolling, herding citizens, barking orders. "We stick to the mission route. In the rear and flank the house."

"What house?" Tyler asked.

"You'll know it when you see it. Classic celebrity house, big and flashy." explained Owen.

Tyler found it strange that Baastian would just keep her in her own house. It seemed too obvious.

"Cut the talk. We need to move, and keep it quiet, too. These robots have enhanced sensors."

They crawled, very slowly, towards the city, caution guiding them. Once they reached it, Tyler observed it in its full glory.

The ground was not concrete, or cement, but grass. It was like someone just dropped a city in the middle of a field. The only concrete was the roads, which were lightly covered. As they took cover behind a yellow building, Tyler saw the extent of the occupation.

There were bots around every corner, walking back and forth. Watching everything and everyone. Down every street and lane, there were at least a few patrol bots,

## Outsider

marching up and down. How could these people live like this? In constant fear. *I suppose, I have lived like that too. Constant fear of failure.*

They headed towards the police station, the checkpoint. As expected, watching it from a parallel building, bots had overrun it, 'acquiring' it from Republic police.

The 'acquiring' was not pretty either, as Tyler could see a massive shredder in an alley adjacent to the station, blood spatters all over it.

He turned his head in disgust.

"Once we clear the station, we should be in the clear. All the cameras in the packages house are hardwired to go directly there, so we cut the feed."

Captain peered over. "Not looking good. We're bound to get seen on main street if we don't move quickly, and quietly."

Owen was staring off in the other direction, in which Tyler saw a bot hassling a woman and her child.

"Restricted access to the south of the city. Return to your homes immediately." The bot barked in her face. "I have to go there, my husband works in the police station. Please." Tears were starting to run down her face, and the boy looked scared, burying his head in his mothers leg.

## Outsider

The bot stared at her blankly, before repeating himself. "Restricted access to the south of the city. Return to your homes."

Owen spat on the ground. "Bloody bastards. Just destroyed a whole family and couldn't care less."

"Move!" Captain stated urgently, as he bolted across the street.

Tyler soon sprinted close behind, until they were beside the shredder.

Captain risked a peek out, before returning.

"We're clear. Entering side door."

Owen went beside the door, jamming something in the metallic lock. It fizzled, then Owen grabbed the handle and opened slowly.

Captain barged in, as Tyler followed him cautiously. He fired a series of shots from his handgun, precise as ever, as Tyler looked in to see two collapsed bots, behind the glass of a police desk.

Suddenly, seeing something dart in the corner of his eye, he swung his staff in an arc. He felt the staff connect with hard metal, and watched the crouching bot fall to the ground.

## Outsider

"Sneaky bastard hid behind the door." Captain muttered, before advancing towards a door directly in front of them.

He approached the door cautiously. "They know we're here at this point. So might as well." He booted the door hard, as the wood splintered beneath his feet.

Instantly, gunfire ricocheted around them, filling the silence with the loud gunfire.

Tyler dived behind an adjacent wall, cursing at the sudden outburst.

But, Owen didn't panic, in fact, he didn't even take cover. Instead, he casually got a grenade out of his belt and threw it in.

Upon hearing the explosion, Tyler got up and composed himself. Captain fired a few extra shots in the room, as Tyler entered the room along with Owen.

A man in red uniform was cowering in the corner of office room, no more surviving bots to protect him.

"Don't move." Owen warned, as they both had weapons trained on him. His hand was leaning on a desk, right beside a big button.

"Tyler, grab him." Captain said, evenly.

"Wait... Hold on!" he yelled frantically, as Tyler roughly grabbed his collar. He physically dragged him towards

## Outsider

Captain, as he controlled his temper. This guy has helped cause this mess. He threw him at Captains feet, and Captain hunkered down, glaring into the officials eyes.

"Disable the cameras in Lallands house." The man shook his head, eyes darting around the room.

"I can't. Baastian will have my head, please." Captain grabbed him by the collar, getting into his face.

"I don't care. Disable the cameras." Suddenly, the man started rummaging around in his pockets.

"Here, I can get you credits. How much? As mu-

Suddenly, Owen darted forward and hit him in the face. The outburst startled Tyler, as he watched the officials head snap back. He knew Owen had a temper, like he did, but he never seen him this angry.

Captain didn't attempt to stop Owens rage.

"We don't want your dirty money!" Owen snarled. "All you corporate slime bags care about is money, isn't it? Fuck you. " Captain grabbed him again.

"It's my turn next." Finally, he caved. "Wait, wait" he gasped, as he spat blood and teeth out of his mouth. "I'll do it, I'll do it. Please, just let me go after!"

## Outsider

"Right." Captain announced, as he finished taping the official roughly to a leather chair. "Now, we can retrieve the package."

Tyler looked at the official, squirming and muttering in the chair. "What about him, sir?"

Captain stared at the official, who was beginning to tear up, before turning towards the back exit. "Leave him. Let the people deal with him."

His eyes widened, as muffled protests were heard under the tape on his mouth. Tyler followed his squad out the room, only glancing back once at the man. He felt a tinge of sympathy for him. The people in the city won't go easy on him. The sympathy was soon squashed as he remembered the woman and her child. He left the room without thinking twice.

They were back in the green city, as the vivid and beautiful city hit him again. As they crawled behind the police station, Tyler observed the bots congregating around the station.

"They'll figure out they're compromised quickly at this rate." whispered Captain.

"We need to pick up the pace." And, they did pick up the pace. Captain began darting behind another building, as Tyler and Owen attempted to keep up.

## Outsider

He was quick, yet silent, methodically moving and pausing when a bot patrol would pass. All the while, Tyler was taking in details about the city. This half of the city was essentially empty, a ghost town with nothing but patrol robots marching routinely in their designated areas.

Empty buildings and at times, just silence. It was uncharacteristic for a city. Tyler had begun to get used to the silent moving from building to building, when they stopped suddenly behind a blue garage. Captain cautiously peered out from the wall.

"We're here. Perimeter looks clear." Captain narrowed his eyes, as Tyler peeked out. Mansion was the perfect word to describe it. It was a huge, white mansion, with dozens of windows covering the face. The garden in front was immense, even a little pond in the middle. How the other half live.

"This isn't right." Owen mumbled, searching for signs of life.

"It's way too quiet." Captain exclaimed. "Either they've sent bots out to the city, or we're walking into an ambush."

Tyler instantly was on guard. They were right, it was way too exposed. Baastain wouldn't leave his one bargaining chip so vulnerable. They silently drifted around the back of the house, keeping out of sight.

## Outsider

"Reached entrance point." Captain quietly said to himself.  
"Entering."

Captain slid open the window with little difficulty, and climbed inside. As Tyler clambered through the window, he found himself in a large kitchen. A bot had his back to them, occasionally beeping, staring out the window.

"It's mine." Owen leapt on the bot, and with the help of his staff, managed to prise its head off. He gripped the head in one hand and put it his backpack. Tyler had no clue why. "Kitchen. Clear. We're running low on time, we gotta head upstairs."

And they headed up a rickety wood staircase, which creaked as Tyler stepped on it. "Shh!" hushed Captain. "Watch your steps!" Tyler carefully climbed the staircase, doing as he was told. As they reached upstairs, it was just as fancy and extravagant as the bottom.

There were so many different doors, trailing down the corridor. And no bots in sight.

"The third on the left, isn't it?" Owen inquired.

Captain stared at him.

"Good man, Owen. Let's head." Owen had watched over the official back at the police station, as he disabled the cameras. They halted outside the door, as Captain paused. He reached for the door handle, and yanked it down. They barged into the room, as gunfire erupted.

## Outsider

It seemed a load of bots had just crammed themselves into this tiny bedroom, as there were at least five, if not more, firing at them. Tyler rushed at the nearest, as it turned its barrel towards him. Not fast enough. Tyler came in fast with his staff, sweeping up and out, soon knocking the bot to the ground. He ducked a chunky metal fist, and booted the bot in the leg.

As it crumbled, he whacked it in the head, taking out another. Tyler looked around as loud noises stopped, all bots done. His eyes suddenly fell on the 'package'. Zoe Lalland, infamous actor and charity worker, stared at them wide-eyed. Her long brown hair fell down her face, and her bright blue eyes looked at each of them in turn before she opened her mouth.

"About time you came!"

## 9

Tyler admired her fiery attitude. Still, the squad were having none of it.

"We're here now. And you're alright, so stop complaining. We need to move." Captain peered out the window quickly.

She hopped to her feet and began packing.

"Seriously, mate?"

Owen looked at her incredulously.

## Outsider

"We can't wait around while you pack your favourite dresses."

She gave him a withering stare, before going into her shelf and grabbing something. "OK. I'm ready."

Captain was over by the window, staring down. "We're not. We are not ready for this."

Tyler went over and saw the problem. A whole sea of bots was heading towards the palace, and not slowly either.

They all seemed to sprint, moving as one incredibly fast. "We need to get the hell out of here. Now!" Tyler rushed out the door with Captain, as they searched for a possible escape route.

The bots were sure to have the place surrounded now. Captain burst through the opposite door, which led to another bedroom. Without another word, he ran towards the window and threw himself at it.

The glass shattered on impact and Captain disappeared below.

"I'm not good with heights." Lalland said queasily.

"You don't have much of a choice." Owen replied, before grabbing her, and hurtling himself through the window. Tyler heard gunfire behind him, and delayed no longer. With a yell, he leaped out the window. He hurtled through

## Outsider

the smashed glass and landed on his ass hard. He found himself on the roof, which gradually sloped downwards.

Tyler began to rapidly slide down the roof, barely having time to think. Adrenaline now coursing through his veins, he was propelled off the roof, and he took a deep breath, preparing for impact.

He landed, albeit unsteadily, on his feet and wobbled, before the gunfire began again. He grimaced, before heading towards the squad, who were all laying in the grass, returning fire.

"Do you know any shortcuts they don't know?" yelled Captain towards Zoe, as she lay on the ground, hands over her ears.

She looked up, her face scrunched in concentration. Eventually, her face brightened.

"Yes! The hedge over there, there's a pathway that leads out of the city towards the Grasslands. It's pretty sheltered." Captain shot his handgun at the bots who now fully enveloped the mansion. "Lead the way."

As she headed towards the hedge, Tyler followed suit, his staff in a defensive position, ready for any bots to appear. As they entered the hedge one by one, and as Tyler was about to enter, he heard a scream.

He saw a bot, flanked by several more, drag Zoe out of the pathway. Tyler rushed in, towards the bot, and

## Outsider

grabbed it. He lunged his staff into its chest, and shot a needle at the bot behind.

The grip now dropped from Lalland's leg and she jumped up towards the exit. "Thank you." She exclaimed, looking on Tyler. But, they were closing in on both of them, crowds of bots all with their guns pointed right in both their faces.

They continued to advance threateningly, as Tyler and Zoe backed off. "Don't you have a way to get out of this?" Zoe whispered urgently to Tyler. Tyler had no such plan. Tyler figured the game was up, they were finished.

But, suddenly, a bot head came flying out from behind them and landed in the grass in front of them. The bots stared at it as in a trance, and Tyler turned to see Owen at the hedge. "The fuck are you standing around for?"

Owen then pressed a button on a controller. Realising what he was doing, Tyler nudged Zoe through the opening, and without another word, Tyler dived in himself. He heard the explosion rocked the grass, and as Tyler glanced back, he saw nothing but cogs and wires lying on the grass.

The tread on the dirt pathway was relatively quiet. By quiet, Tyler solely meant there were no more attacks or ambushes. There was plenty of talking, however.

## Outsider

Zoe Lalland was a woman who liked to talk, however, and she blindsided Captain with questions at every opportunity.

Tyler felt sorry for him.

"Why are there only three of you? Aren't Marauder squads bigger? How does the government plan to deal with the invasion now? Where is your ship, exactly? Not in the forests, is it?"

"Three man squads are the most efficient." Captain sighed, exasperated. "I can't or won't answer those other questions because it's not our mission. We're almost at the ship, now calm down." Tyler began to tune them out, as his mind wandered to Sioma Prime. Going to the planet had begun to worry him. What if they didn't accept him officially as a Marauder?

He'd have to return back to Blitz and go back to his shit life. He wondered how his father was doing. He wasn't overly concerned, but with Lisk and his goons hanging around you could never be sure. Paying them was going to be great fun.

Tyler looked over at Owen, who was fiddling with his staff again. "Thanks for that. That rigged bot head saved our asses." Owen glanced up quickly at him, his chestnut brown eyes glinting. "It was nothing. Once you know what you're doing, you can make bombs out of anything." Owen nodded to his jet-black staff. "Like the design of it. The

## Outsider

black suits you." Owen then leaned to him, showing him his staff. "It took me a good month to build this thing. The tinted blue adamantium was hard to find. Pretty fucking rare. We were stuck in a cave once, taking heavy fire from all sides. I think it was on Zolko. Captain never let me hear the end of it, but I had to pocket the stuff. I knew the Board wouldn't mind anyway."

Tyler examined the staff closely, the sky-blue glinting in the sunlight. He heard the stories of how Marauders built their staffs. Tyler just used whatever metals he could find to craft his. He went to touch it, but Owen yanked away. "No touching, Phoenix. Only I touch my staff."

Tyler shrugged his shoulders and went back to thinking. His conversations with Owen only seemed to be getting stranger. Still, he was starting to like Owen. Despite him being headstrong and abrasive, he could see they had a lot in common behind it all.

They reached the ship with little trouble. As they boarded the ship, some of the Gond'ai tribesmen gathered to watch, to wave off. Tyler watched the awe and shock on their faces, how the 'metal bird', as they called it, worked.

## Outsider

Reflecting on his many recent conflicts, perhaps a life without technology would benefit the universe. Ignorance truly is bliss.

"So, we head to Sioma Prime and deliver you."

Captain announced in the hangar, gesturing to her. "Then we sort Tyler out, on Prime and Blitz. Then, hopefully we can return."

Tyler nodded his head, not saying anything. He was lost in his head, in his problems. The dream haunted him too. Will he get another one if he falls asleep? "You look like you have a lot on your mind." It was Zoe, now looking at him curiously, her blue eyes analysing him.

"I do." Tyler replied simply. He just couldn't do small talk at the moment. Not that he ever was good at it. Still, he noticed the object that Zoe was carrying. A heavy set camera, with a huge lens. She had the strap around her neck, and fiddled with it from time to time. Tyler took a mental note of it.

The ship shook and rattled, as it took off. He felt a hand on his shoulder, and looked up to see Captain.

"Don't worry. We'll get you in. The Board can't say no to you." The assurance relieved Tyler slightly. "Thanks."

## Outsider

Tyler sat in the cockpit alongside Owen. There wasn't much conversation between them, but Tyler preferred that.

Looking out at the vast space in silence was relaxing.

Facing Zoe and her questions was unnerving him. They had arrived at Sioma Prime, and Tyler could see why it was the Capital Planet of the Universe (CPU).

It was a vast concrete jungle, covered in buildings, ships flying around and railways covering the city. As they entered orbit, Tyler saw it in its full glory, loud, vibrant and constant.

He had never seen so many buildings, and people in one area in his life. There was so much to take in, it was almost painful, yet amazing. Skyscrapers of all different shapes, colours and sizes all raised from the concrete jungle, and ships raced around the town in a frenzy.

Owen guided the ship towards a platform, where he gracefully touched down. As Tyler exited the ship, he found the platform led to a building that had a logo slapped on the front.

There was a white wolf, and sword directly behind it, with the motto 'Honour and Bravery' emblazed directly below. The Marauder Headquarters.

"The HQ links directly to the Republic Government building." Owen mentioned, as he exited the ship. Tyler

## Outsider

noticed men in black uniforms approach him. Republic soldiers.

"Welcome back, sir." One saluted Captain. "Glad you got Ms Lalland back. The Prime Minister wants to see Ms Lalland immediately."

Captain gestured for her to go, while he turned to me. "We better go see the Board of Generals. Owen, you stick with her."

"The Board is full of Generals, all good soldiers and leaders." Captain explained, as they walked through the long corridors.

"But there is only three you need to worry about."

As Captain talked, Tyler looked around at his surroundings, taking it all in. The building was seemed immense, as they had been walking for nearly fifteen minutes now. The walls and doors were blue and white, the Marauder logo emblazoned on many a wall.

There were all kinds of Marauders in the corridors, from Lieutenants, to Commanders, even Generals, all having various coloured jackets and callsigns. There was an ordered busyness to the place, everyone discussing missions and briefs.

"The three important generals." Captain elaborated.

## Outsider

"General Koji Kushida. Human, descendant of an Old Earth subculture, called Japan. Phenomenal swordsman, in terms of pure combat, there's few better. Can be hard nosed, and traditional.

Second is General Sebastian Creed. One hell of a soldier." Captain's eyes gleamed momentarily, almost lost in another world. "I served under him. He's another phenomenal warrior, the only man alive to match Kushida in combat. He is extremely efficient and street smart, and is quiet."

Captain glanced at Tyler. "Kind of like you." Tyler said nothing, nerves still on edge.

"Lastly, the big dog. The Grand General. He runs the Marauders, and is one of the wisest men in the whole universe. No one is as tactically and strategically intelligent as he is. You'll know each one when you see them."

Captain halted outside a large double door, and turned to Tyler, who was now even more worried. These guys were on another level, what could they possibly see in him? "Let's do this, lad." Captain opened the door.

## Outsider

Tyler entered the large room with Captain, and was instantly greeted by a table full of people, with about twelve different seats. There were many different species, all kinds of men and women.

Each of them turned towards the intrusion, their eyes landing on Tyler. Many eyed him uncertainly, a fresh face, an unknown. Tyler instantly recognized the three 'key' Generals Captain pointed out.

General Kushida was sitting on the top left, a Japanese man with short black hair and light brown skin.

He was wearing a red hooded top, with what looked to be some sort of combat trousers also. His eyes were a dark brown, and were boring through Tyler. He had his hand around his samurai sword, underneath the desk, and seemed to murmur something to a General beside him.

To the far right, sat General Creed. He was a white man, with a brown hair, a crewcut and stubble.

He had a thick, square jawline, and was wearing what looked to be a grey suit, a blue tie poking out of a white shirt. He had blue eyes, which similarly seemed to analyse and absorb Tyler.

At the top of the table, sat a silver man. Tyler could tell straight away he was the Grand General, his skin a distinctive silver. His blonde hair contrasted with his silver body, sticking out.

## Outsider

His clothes were plain blue, and he wore sunglasses, and kept his head down. Tyler realised he was blind. As they all looked at him, there was an eery silence. Captain saluted stiffly, and Tyler followed suit. The Grand General spoke up.

"Welcome."

His voice was a deep boom, that reverberated around the room.

"Who have you brought before us, Captain Hart?" Captain quickly jumped in.

"I've told you all about Tyler here. He's young, only twenty, and the natural talent and skill he has is something else. I fought alongside him for our previous mission, and he more than proved his worth.

He's reliable and innovative. I believe, sirs, that if he joins our squad, with enough experience, he could become a huge asset."

There was a silence, that all the Generals took in.

"Such qualities have advantages and disadvantages." Kushida spoke up in accented English. "They are dangerous, especially in someone not trained like this boy. He's untrained and unpredictable. "

Creed then responded, his eyes never leaving Tyler. "In these times, we may have no choice. Marauders are

## Outsider

scarce. Still, I'm not trusting a random scavenger to be a Marauder. He might be a good fighter, but he's not a good soldier."

Creed turned to Captain, a look in his eye.

"Trust me, General, he's worth the hassle." Captain stated.

Tyler met both their eyes, refusing to look away. He had to show he wanted this. The Grand General stayed silent, looking at the ground. He then raised his head, before announcing:

"We will discuss this and the Board will have a vote. Dismissed, soldiers."

Tyler paced back and forth outside the room.

They didn't like him, that much was clear. Well, Creed and Kushida didn't anyway.

He wasn't sure about the Grand General and Tyler hadn't focused on the others. He knew he had to earn their trust, he was just relying on a leap of faith.

Captain stayed in the room, to lobby for him some more he thought. Suddenly, Captain poked his head out the door.

"C'mon." He urged, and Tyler entered the room hastily.

## Outsider

He was met once again by the staring faces, and the Grand General spoke. "You have won the vote seven to five."

Kushida then elaborated. "You will start from the lowest rank, Lieutenant, and be treated no different than any other graduate from the Academy. You take orders from Captain Hart, and also, in some circumstances, Commander Owen Sallow, that you obey. No matter what.

You will move into Marauders quarters here in the far east wing." Kushida stopped and narrowed his eyes.

"This is an uncalculated risk for us. Don't make us regret it." Creed, similarly, didn't look happy with the result.

He made eye contact with Captain and Tyler noticed, only the slightest shake of the head.

"Thank you. You won't regret this." Tyler remarked, before saluting. As soon as he left the room, he breathed a sigh of relief.

The worry seeped out of his body all replaced with excitement, and Captain extended his fist in congratulations. Tyler duly bumped it.

"Knew they'd come around. You're finally an official Marauder." Captain grinned from ear to ear. Tyler shook his head, in disbelief. He still couldn't imagine it.

## Outsider

"C'mon. We better find Owen." Captain exclaimed. "And, you need to get your jacket."

They found Owen outside the Parliament building. He seemed frustrated and confused.

"Politics, man." He instantly began when he saw them.

"Can't stand all the fuckin' talking." Owen turned to him, and gave a quick nod.

"Congratulations." Tyler appreciated it.

He had ordained his new Marauders jacket. It was a dark blue with the Marauder logo on the back. The logo was white, the wolf and sword sticking out on the royal blue. Tyler liked it, it suited him.

Captain gestured towards the door.

"What does the President say? Is he going to let us go back to Atlantis?" Owen shook his head.

"He's having none of it. Says there is no need for military intervention now she's safe. Thinks more negotiations are needed." He snorted.

"Bloody idiot Dodum is."

## Outsider

Captain headed to the door. "Well, let's head back in. No way are we just gonna sit on our asses here doing nothing."

So, they headed into the room. They were instantly greeted by a huge room. There was tables and chairs everywhere, each table representing an individual planet.

President Dodum was sitting in the centre, an orange creature, a Nojo, having tentacles instead of a mouth and two slits for a nose. His eyes were bright pink, as he looked around the room at the politicians talking. As far as Tyler knew, they were naturally water creatures, but could breath on the surface.

*How the hell do you find anyone in here?* Tyler thought, scanning the endless room.

He spotted Zoe sitting at a table beside a black-haired man, listening intently to the debate. They treaded over to the table, to be greeted quietly by Zoe.

"There you are! Sit down, you can testify how bad it is."

They sat at the black table, as the black haired man turned to them. He had a growing black beard, and very dark grey eyes.

His eyes were friendly, yet analytical, as he took them each in individually. He extended his had to each.

## Outsider

"Nice to meet all of you. I'm Victor Shaw, Minister for Atlantis. I've got to thank you all for saving Zoe here. You have no idea how important she is for the morale of our people."

Tyler had already zoned out the debating, as he listened to Shaw. His voice was deep and soothing, good for a politician, Tyler thinks.

"Dodum is a fool. He doesn't understand that military action is the only action. There's no way C2 can be negotiated with at this stage."

Tyler turned his attention to the President, who was now talking in increasing volume.

"We can't risk taking military action! Control of the planet is not an unreasonable request, if regulated enough."

Shaw stood then.

"You don't understand the gravity of the situation, President. C2 have taken the planet and its people hostage, and will reap it of its natural resources! They'll leave the planet a wasteland if you give them what they want! We can't just allow that to happen."

Dodum shook his head. "We must. We must step aside, and let them. We cannot afford to intervene, with the Republic being at such a vulnerable military position at

## Outsider

the moment. There is no other choice, for the wellbeing of the whole universe."

Tyler thought of the people he saw on Atlantis, the terror they lived in. That wasn't fucking 'wellbeing' for anyone. He nearly stood up himself, but Zoe did instead.

"Leaders are supposed to do what's best for their people. What kind of leader backs down and lets a planet get terrorised and live in oppression? I was there, I witnessed what C2 was doing to my home planet of Atlantis.

These three men, who risked their asses saving me, can reiterate how terrible it is down there. No leader could let that happen. You are not a leader, you're a coward."

Zoe finished the outburst, and there was dead silence in the room. Tyler looked at her with a mixture of shock and amazement, and saw his squad mates do the same.

Dodum was spluttering, looking flustered. Sweat began to drip down his orange head.

"How dare you! You are not even a member of the Parl-"

However, Shaw was nodded vicariously.

"Zoe has spoken what many are afraid to say. You are a coward, President Dodum. And because of this, I vote for the impeachment of President Dodum, under no confidence."

## Outsider

A murmur then filled the room, various opinions floating around. "I second this vote." A voice called from another planet table.

"Me also." Called another. Soon, planets were all yelling their assent to the impeachment of Dodum. Dodum was baffled, all protests were drowned out by the Parliament almost erupting.

Owen nudged Tyler, shaking his head. "Girls got balls. Serious balls." Captain had departed the room, and Tyler soon followed. "This changes everything." Captain muttered, lost in thought.

"Looks like Dodum will be impeached." Tyler couldn't follow any of this.

"So, are we going back to Atlantis?" Captain began walking. "Well, when something like this happens, usually the Grand General makes the decisions." Captain turned his head, looking satisfied.

"And he's the one that was going to send us on an extraction mission, to capture Baastian. The President overruled him, but now that doesn't count for anything. Not only that, but a load of Ministers wanted to send A Republic battalion to liberate the planet. It's gonna be a full-blown battle.

We better start packing; we've gotta a lot of shit to do."

"Hold on."

## Outsider

A feminine voice came from behind them. Tyler turned to see Zoe.

"I'm coming with you." Captain laughed, shaking his head. "Sorry, sunshine. We appreciate your intervention, but we can't take civvies on this mission. No way."

Her face scrunched into a scowl, crossing her arms. *She looks even better pissed off* Tyler thought.

"I'm not taking no for an answer." Captain rubbed his brow, exasperated. "Fine, but you stay on the ship. I've got to go sort all this out with the Board. We still have to pay off Tylers bloody debt as well.

Owen, Tyler, start getting all the equip on board the ship. We've got a big mission ahead of us."

## Second Dream

*A familiar smoky darkness clouded Tylers vision. He felt disorientated, confused, before realising where he was.*

*He quickly brushed away the smoke, and searched the room for the dark figures. He noticed them in the*

## Outsider

*distance in front of him, and rushed over. The two figures looked identical and were in identical positions: Never, kneeling, blue and black face bowed down, and The Leader, standing over him, still enveloped in complete blackness.*

*He focused on them as hard as he could, determined to catch all the conversation.*

*"...locate, Leader. They are on Prime. Once they leave, they will be eliminated."*

*The head of Leaders figure moved slightly, as Never also raised his head.*

*"It is strange they are returning to Blitz. Instead of going straight to Atlantis. This only proves to benefit us. That fool Baastian better do his job." The distorted voice crackled, before continuing.*

*"Make sure to kill them quick, Never. The path to glory will be clear after it is done."*

*Never stood, as Tyler saw his full bulk and height. Then, the image fizzled, and Tyler knew he would brought once again to the real world.*

## 11

Tyler woke with a start. He jumped off the bed, which was layered in sweat. His mind was still processing everything he had heard.

## Outsider

*Never is coming.* He sprinted out of the small room then, into the ship hangar. They had packed up and left as quick as they could, and Captain said the whole squad should get rest. Tyler just felt worse now.

There sat Captain in the hangar, around the circular table, playing a card game with Owen.

"About time you fucking woke up." Captain called to him. He grabbed a bag sitting beside him and tossed it to him.

"There's the whole 50,000 credits. I sorted a rendezvous point to meet Lisk at. We pay, the we leave, no time to wait about."

"Never!" Tyler blurted, as he dropped the bag and went to the cockpit. "What? The bloody hell are you on about?" Captain exclaimed.

But Tyler had already ascended to the cockpit. The ship was on auto pilot, Tyler poked a button. Sure enough, a sleek black space motorbike was following them. And Tyler had no doubt who was in it.

"Calm down, you dope." Owen waved at him, as Tyler was getting restless.

"I had a dream." Tyler tried to explain, as quick as he can.

"About the Fallen. They're after us, and Never is a Shadow Hand." Owen scratched his hair, before standing also.

## Outsider

"The Fallen are gone, wiped out. You're just having the nightmares, it's common with fresh meat."

Captain, however, looked concerned.

"The Fallen? This-" He was cut off by a loud bang, and the ship jerking sideways. Owen rushed to pilot, and check the damage.

"Shit! We've got a tango on our tail, and it sure as hell isn't a bot!"

The ship was jarred again, this time even worse.

"Our engines damaged! We're going down!" Owen yelled.

Captain grabbed a hold of the table, cursing.

"We're in orbit, Owen. Just don't kill us on the landing!" Tyler was thrown to the ground, with the next rumble.

"What the hell is happening?" Tyler heard a female voice. It was Zoe, wide awake and alert.

"Brace for impact-" Captain yelled, before being cut off. They were moving at an impossible speed.

Tyler managed to turn his head to look out the front window, where he saw the familiar rusty orange landscape of Blitz, except hurtling towards him at an incredible speed.

## Outsider

Suddenly, there was a thunderous impact, Tyler flying a few feet into the air, before coming down hard on his stomach. Groaning, Tyler sat up, ensuring his chest hadn't been caved in. "Fuck! He's here!" Owen shouted from the cockpit. Captain rushed up to the cockpit, and Tyler looked out the window. Never had dismounted from his bike, and removed his helmet.

He then began casually walking towards the ship, taking his time. Suddenly, he whipped out a sword. But, this sword was jet black, and there seemed to be shadows hovering and circling the sword, giving the weapon an ominous feel. "He's got a fuckin' Shadow Sword too." Tyler heard Captain yell.

"Preparing to fire." Owen announced, and then he began firing the machine guns on the ship. Never broke into a run then, twirling his blade around to deflect the bullets. Tyler watched the hooded assassin reach the ship, and in a fast and agile motion, bring his sword upwards in an arc, slicing the ships head.

"He's gonna fucking dice the ship up with us in it!" Owen yelled. "Awaiting orders, Captain!"

Captain then hopped out of the cockpit, before heading to the door.

"I'll hold him off. I might be able to apprehend him."

## Outsider

Tyler wasn't sure, and thought about protesting. Luckily, Owen shared the same sentiment. "You can't go out there on your own, Captain! We'll come, provide back-"

"No!" Captain barked. The ship shook again, as a scraping noise was heard. "You two need to watch Lalland, and wait for Lisk to come. Stay in the ship, that's an order! I'll deal with this Never."

Then, without another word, Captain opened the door, before pressing a button and leapt out. Tyler watched as Captain walked towards Never, who now turned to face Captain with a dark smile on his face. Instantly, Owen rushed to the door and Tyler followed suit.

"He's manually overridden the bloody door." Owen uttered. "It's fucking stuck!"

Tyler went towards the window, maybe his staff could shatter it.

"They're reinforced." Owen explained. "We're fuckin stuck here."

Owen kicked the table angrily, before turning to the window. Tyler looked out the window, hoping for the best. Never had launched himself at Captain, swinging his sword. Captain deftly avoided the blows, ducking and weaving, looking for an opening.

But, he kept pressing, relentlessly swinging and jabbing. Captain then blocked a blow, with what seemed to be his

## Outsider

hunting knife. Captain tried to slice with his knife, but Never ducked and caught Captain with a punch to the cheek. Captain staggered, but recovered enough to avoid another swing from the deadly black sword.

Captain managed an uppercut of his own. Nevers head snapped back, but instantly lowered, a smirk on his face. Tylers observance of the fight was interrupted by a noise in the distance. Tyler looked off, seeing a smudge in the distance.

As it approached, he realised it was a group of people: Lisk and his crew. "It's them! Shit!" Tyler cursed himself.

Owen glanced over, before his eyes locked on to the fight. "Captain better hurry up and kill this guy then."

But, as Owen said that, it was clear Never was overwhelming him. Suddenly, Never sidestepped Captains elbow and sliced Captain right in the neck. Captain fell to the ground then, with a yell.

Never simply stared down at Captain, gloating as he was about to raise his sword to finish the job.

Owen had rushed over to the door, and was throwing himself at it, in a desperate attempt to get it open. But, before Never could strike Captain down, his head snapped towards the mob, who were advancing at a quick rate. Never looked away, and his eyes found Tylers. Tyler stared back, as Nevers cold, black eyes pierced him, only

## Outsider

for a few moments, but it felt a lot longer. Tyler felt the colour drain from his face, as he felt a tinge of fear.

Looking frustrated at the arrival of the mob, he broke the stare, he hopped on the motorbike, and sped off; leaving Captain to bleed on the rocks. Owen had finally broken the door down, and they both rushed towards Captain, who was grunting in pain. Owen knelt down to examine the wound.

"It's deep, but it's a flesh wound." Owen stated, as he moved Captains hand away. "You'll be fine, sir. Just control the bleeding."

Tyler stood there, feeling like a spare tire. He knew this was coming, but couldn't tell them. He was also aware that Never would be back.

Captain sat up, looking groggy. "Don't worry about me."

He muttered, pointing behind them. There, at the ship, stood the mob, with dozens of men standing behind them and Lisk was buzzing right in front.

## 12

The best way to describe Lisk was a giant wasp, even though Tyler preferred a giant pain in the ass. The gang leader was essentially a wasp that could talk, with six bulbous black eyes, a pair of wings constantly flapping and six spindly legs.

## Outsider

Tyler hated seeing the slimy bastard again, but he figured the quicker he paid, the quicker they could leave and head to Atlantis.

"So good to see you again, kid." Lisk preened. "Of course, you didn't think you could get away without paying your debt, did you?"

Captain stood up then, clutching his neck. "Where's the bag?" he muttered to Tyler. Fortunately, Zoe emerged from the ship, throwing the bag to Tyler.

Tyler forgot about her for a moment. "Here. 50,000." Tyler tossed it at Lisk's feet, and one of the henchmen picked it up, peering inside.

He took out the metal cards, examining a few. "Looks like 50,000, boss." He announced. Captain was already inching towards the ship.

"Hold on." Lisk commanded. He turned his attention to Tyler again, those big eyes fixed on him. "The big Marauder here, boys. Surely, you and your new friends have more than 50,000? Marauders have connections."

Owen stepped towards them, withdrawing his staff. Instantly, all the weapons were fixed on him. "You greedy fuck!"

"Leave it." Captain urged. Lisk laughed, an unpleasant sound. "Either you give us another 100 gs, or we imprison

## Outsider

you. I hear C2 are very interested in you, maybe they can offer a good price for your heads."

Tyler was thinking fast, a way out. He should've seen this coming, Lisk always pulled sneaky shit like this. An idea suddenly occurred to Tyler. "Hold on, I have a proposition." Tyler announced. Lisk snorted at that, as his crew sniggered.

"Oh, really? This should be good."

Tyler continued. "The Arena is on today. Enter me into the Arena, and I will face your best gladiator. If I win, you let us go, and leave my father alone. If I lose, you will get 200,000 credits from the Republic."

Tyler could almost see the lights flash on in Lisk's eyes. "You have a deal. That is, if you think you beat Galo."

Tyler didn't flinch. "Easy." Though even he could hear a waver in his voice.

Lisk laughed again, a buzzing sound.

"I will get on to Lee. He can enter you, and you will walk to your own death. Let's move!"

As the gang began to hoard them, Captain jabbed a finger at him.

"I hope you know what you're doing here. And, don't think I've forgotten about your dreams. You've got some explaining to do, lad."

## Outsider

Tyler just nodded, though even he was having his doubts. The Arena was deadly.

### 13

They were transported to the Arena in a dirt truck, a journey that didn't take too long. Tyler would often come here to see the action, and wonder what it would be like to participate.

Now, he gets to experience it. The Arena is a free for all battle, many contestants enter into a death battle, with the last man alive winning.

Tyler wasn't sure how it was legal, but he's sure Milo Lee, the crime boss who essentially ran Blitz, had something to do with that. And that's who Lisk is taking them to.

Tyler noticed on the whole journey Owens angry glares. While the ice may have been defrosted, it seems serious heat has replaced that.

He blames Tyler for Captain nearly dying out there. Tyler already held himself responsible for that.

The Arena was a massive coliseum. It was a direct tribute to the old Roman Earth times, where they held similar events. The crowd was packed with people, tens of thousands coming to see their monthly share of bloody action.

## Outsider

They walked through the VIP entrance to the crowd, and headed up to the skybox, Lisk buzzing away in front.

Tyler tried to think of something to say to both Owen and Captain, to admit responsibility.

He couldn't think of the words. Zoe was still questioning what was going on, why there were so interested in him.

"I'll tell you later."

He answered, even though he had no intention of doing so.

He didn't like people, especially women, knowing too much about him. They walked through the wooden door to see the skybox with roughly a dozen people, and Tyler's eyes lay on Lee.

He sat in the seat in the centre, murmuring to someone beside him and staring out the window. He did not look like a ruthless gang boss, but looked like a college lecturer or teacher.

Tyler found the resemblance uncanny. He was a human that wore a black suit, accompanied by short black hair and a goatee.

He wore no tie, and the top of his white shirt was unbuttoned. His eyes were a dark royal blue, covered by a pair of glasses, looking out the window.

He barely glanced at Lisk as they entered.

"What do you want now, Lisk?" he sighed, sounding just like an annoyed teacher.

## Outsider

"Well, Mr Lee, we have a late entrant in. He wants to enter, and face Galo. He's a Marauder."

Lee looked up then, a look of boredom and slight interest on his face.

"You're Tyler Phoenix, the smuggler." He observed, before looking at Owen and Captain.

"And, of course, the two most famous Marauders in the universe." He nodded at them, almost a sign of respect.

His eyes lingered on Zoe for a moment, but he said nothing to her but a greeting.

"You can enter. You better hurry up, too, we're starting in a few minutes."

"Thank you, sir." Lisk preened. Tyler thought he was going to bend his wasp ass over for Milo Lee any second. Henchmen escorted them out, as they walked downstairs.

They arrived downstairs, which Tyler was promptly pushed into. Captain looked at him briefly, before offering some words of encouragement. "Use your bloody brain, Tyler. We can't back you up out there. Use your brain, and think outside the box."

Both were then dragged away by the henchmen, leaving Tyler alone in the cage. "Let the chaos begin!"

Tyler heard a voice boom across the arena. Suddenly, the doors of the cages fell down. Then, the once empty Arena

## Outsider

was now filled with competitors, psychopaths and prisoners, all swarming the arena.

Tyler stepped out of the cage slowly, looking around at the brutality. There were some men on dirtbikes, revving around the Arena taking peoples heads off with machetes.

Tyler could see Galo in the distance, the eight foot giant warrior that represented Lisk. He was bald and covered in tattoos, of various weapons and women. His skin was a sickly grey, veins bursting through it.

He had won five Arena events. He was not a big fan of Tyler, and currently was swinging some poor guy at other competitors, bashing his head off anything he could see. Tyler took a breath, and began to run in Galos direction.

But, Tyler was nearly knocked over by a dirtbike driving beside him. He saw a man on the bike, wearing a mask resembling a straitjacket. Another dirtbike flew at Tyler, which he just barely avoided.

This one was wearing a different kind of mask, an actual face that looked peeled off. He could hear their demented laughs, as they circled him on their bikes. "Fresh meat." He heard one yell, amidst the laughter.

Tyler began to withdraw his staff, head darting around. "His face looks nice." The maniac with the face mask screeched. "I'd like to wear it."

## Outsider

Tyler swung his staff at one, catching him and thrusting him off the bike.

As he got to his feet, Tyler jabbed the staff at his mask, knocking him out. He got on the bike, but before he could figure it out, the other maniac crashed into him. Tyler was jarred.

He revved the handlebars, the bike again roaring to life. He punched the maniac in the face, but the maniac clamped onto his hand, through his mask, biting. Tyler yelled in pain, as his other hand desperately tried to control the bike. Then, bringing his head forwards, he headbutted the maniac, who lost his balance and fell off his bike.

Quickly regaining control of his bike, he sped towards the other side of the arena, to Galo. Another maniac jumped on the front of his bike, a bloody smile on his face.

Tyler brought his foot around, giving him a kick to the head. The maniac was slowly losing his grip, as Tyler kept kicking.

As the maniac fell off the bike and Tyler could see once again in front of him, and nearly crashed headfirst into Galo. And he could also see what Galo had now acquired: a massive minigun. Before he could swerve away, Galo mowed down the bike, the tyre flying off.

## Outsider

Tyler leaped off the bike, as it fell and exploded loudly. He landed face first in the dirt, feeling pain all over his body.

Tyler rose to his feet unsteadily, as Galo laughed.

"Tyler Phoenix. I thought you tucked your tail and ran off the planet."

His face turned into a nasty scowl.

"You must be suicidal coming back here." He opened fire with the minigun, as Tyler desperately tried to avoid it.

Tyler had no idea how to take down the behemoth, as he mowed down everyone in sight. Getting rid of that gun would be a start.

*Fuck it.* Tyler thought, and began sprinting towards Galo. Galo swung his gun towards Tyler, but Tyler was too fast. He reached Galo and jammed his staff in the gun barrel. Galo tried to fire, but all that happened was a *click* sound, often repeated.

Tyler saw the momentary confusion and shock on the giant's face, and took advantage. He kicked the gun out of his hands and attacked his leg with his staff. Tyler swung his staff again at Galo's leg, who howled in pain and swatted him away.

Tyler again felt he had just been in a ship crash as he slowly got to his feet. Just in time to see Galo barrelling

## Outsider

towards him. Tyler hopped out of the way, and Galo passed by. Again, Tyler saw his opportunity now that Galo's back was turned.

He thrust his staff at the same leg, repeatedly hitting with all his power. Galo was struggling now, limping around and trying to hit Tyler. Tyler ducked the blows and continued to strategically target the leg.

Finally, he heard a snap in the leg and Galo's pain filled shrieks.

The giant toppled onto his stomach, hitting the ground with a thud. Tyler jabbed his staff into the back of his neck, as dead silence filled the arena.

Then, slowly, boos trickled in. But, then, Tyler could hear a few cheers. The cheers overwhelmed the boos, as the arena showered him in adulation for beating the goliath.

Tyler couldn't believe it; the support took him aback.

He smiled, raising a fist in the air, as his eyes found Lisk in the skybox. He similarly had shocked looked on his face, his bug eyes wide with disbelief. Even Milo Lee was clapping his performance.

Tyler strolled out of the Arena, confidently, as the crowd supported his performance. He headed up to the skybox to see Captain and Owen greet him.

"You pulled it off, lad." Captain shook his head.

## Outsider

"Well done." Lisk was not as impressed.

"That is bullshit." He exploded. "That staff should be illegal, this isn't fair."

Milo Lee turned around, his expression cold.

"Lisk, shut up. You made a bargain, and you lost. Let the Marauders go." Lisk was buzzing around frantically.

"But, Mr Lee-" Lee stood then.

"I wasn't asking." He said, quietly. "Do you want to suffer the consequences?"

Lisk visibly looked scared then, backing down. "I'm sorry, Mr Lee. Of course, I'll let them go."

Tyler had a grin that nearly split his face. Lisk turned to them, resentment on his face.

"Take off their shackles." He muttered, as Owen, Captain and Zoe were freed. Lisk turned away then, buzzing to himself in anger.

"Our ship is fucked." Owen stated, as he rubbed his wrist. Captain was already on his way to the exit. "Let's go fix it then."

## 14

"Why didn't you tell us then?" Owen asked, agitated.

## Outsider

He was in the process of welding the metal of the ship together, after Nevers attack. Tyler stood there sheepishly. The journey back to the ship had been quiet, and not much was said.

Owen and Captain were still angry, especially Owen.

"Sorry." Tyler managed. "I shouldn't have kept it from you. I just didn't know what to make of them, these dreams came out of nowhere." Owen grimaced. "If we don't trust each other, how are we meant to work together as a unit? Keep each other alive? There needs to be trust, right, sir?"

"Yeah. Of course." Tyler heard Captains voice. Captains head popped around from the back of the ship. His face looked a bit pale, but overall he recovered nicely from the fight. The cut had turned a long red scab on his neck, stretching across his whole right side.

"You know, it's bloody strange. The Fallen have come back, but why do you get these dreams? Clearly, the Fallen are connected to C2 and the invasion. But how? This just fucks up our whole operation."

Captain shook his head, as he banged the ship with a hammer. He stopped, looking at Tyler. "Come here a second." Tyler was certain he would get scolded some more.

## Outsider

But, as he approached Captain, he suddenly realised how old he looked. His face was wrinkled, his brown hair and beard had more flecks of grey, and he looked genuinely worried. It hit Tyler that he wasn't the only one affected by these dreams. He grabbed Tyler by the shoulder.

"These dreams are fucking with your head. Its rough on you. Just know, you're one of us now. That's why you got to tell us about this stuff. We can help."

The rare moment of compassion by Captain honestly took him aback. He nodded his head. "Thanks." Captain waved him off. "Right, enough of this sappy shit. I've got to fix this ship."

Tyler decided to ask a risky question.

"Could I quickly go visit my father? I'll be in and out within an hour." Captain looked at him, long and hard. "An hour. We'll be heading for Atlantis soon."

Tyler nodded, and was about to depart when he heard a voice. "I'll come with you." Tyler turned to see Zoe come out of the ship, in a fresh shirt and jeans, camera around her neck.

Tyler instantly began thinking of excuses. "Well, you can, but-

"Great!" she replied cheerfully. Owen coughed a few times, extremely loud.

## Outsider

Tyler shot him a glare, before responding. "C'mon, it's a long walk to the town."

"So, how did you build up all that debt?" Zoe asked him, as they walked among the people in the small town. The dusty, sandy town was quite busy today, in the aftermath of the Arena. People were bustling around, buying things from stalls.

Tyler shrugged, thinking of as little information he could tell her.

"Y'know, just gambling, stuff like that."

Tyler decided to careen the conversation away from him, quickly. They walked past some dodgy guys behind a stall, before Tyler began talking.

"When did you get the passion of photography?" he asked, as they walked in the square.

Zoe took a quick picture of the square, the little market full of various scrap and food stores.

"I think it's amazing. I mean, acting is fun, but I have no real passion for it. Being behind the camera, being the one to capture different moments in nature and life, that's something special."

He looked at her then. The enthusiasm on her face, taking pictures of the town. The town was really a

## Outsider

shithole, just a bunch of houses, shops and bars, yet it was something novel to Zoe.

Her blue eyes often brightened when she saw something new to take pictures of, and Tyler pointed some of the landmarks of the Wastelands out to her.

There wasn't a lot of landmarks. *She really is something else* he pondered, as they reached a row of small sand bungalows.

Tyler strolled to the one in the middle, with the black door. The Republic soldiers were still their standing guard. Tyler nodded to them as he approached the house.

Tyler stared at the door for a moment, before turning his head slightly.

"You should probably stay out here. My dad.... Doesn't like strangers."

Zoe looked disappointed. "Oh, Ok."

That was a lie. In reality, Tyler just didn't want her seeing his father. He opened the door quietly, before shutting it. He entered the living room, the bare room with just a TV and a couch there.

And beside the couch, was Tylers father. He sat there in a wheelchair, silently watching the TV. Tyler knew he didn't even notice him coming in.

## Outsider

"Dad." Tyler announced his presence. His father glanced at him.

"Gods sake, Tyler. I hope you don't have anything to do with those bloody Republic thugs outside." He swigged out of a flask, before continuing. "You should be at school, what the hell are you doing?"

Tyler sighed. "Dad, I'm 20. I finished school years ago, remember?"

Tyler approached his father, sitting on the couch.

"I've got something to tell you. You won't like it, but I'm a Marauder now. I can't stay here my whole life with you. I can go on missions, explore the universe. Live my life. I've finally found somewhere I belong.

You're in good care here with the Republic, you'll be fine."

Tyler waited silently, as his father stared into nothing. He was waiting to hear more ramblings, but he instead got his father surprisingly lucid.

"I know we haven't always understood each other, son." He croaked. "But remember this. War will define you. Don't let it change your true colours."

Tyler was shocked, by his father words of wisdom. He stored them away, knowing they were important.

## Outsider

"What are you doing here?" his father barked suddenly. "I told you to go back to school, and make friends, for Gods Sake."

Tyler rubbed his brow. Back to the nonsense. At least, Tyler felt he had closure with his father now.

But, as he turned to leave, he saw Zoes head peering in, a shocked look on her face.

### 15

"You weren't supposed to see that." Tyler angrily muttered, storming out of the house. He was furious: this was his private life, none of her damn business.

Zoe trailed behind him, apologising profusely.

"I'm sorry, Tyler. I was just too curious, I know that wasn't for my eyes." Zoe looked at him then, before daring to ask a question. "What's wrong with him?"

Tyler sighed, quenching his anger.

"Dementia. It's been a problem for a long time."

He didn't tell her why, and she didn't ask. Tyler began to pick up the pace.

"We should get back to the ship. The repairs are probably finished, and Atlantis is gonna be in a state."

## Outsider

The walk was quiet, Tyler not in the mood for talk after the incident. He forgave her pretty quickly, but he wasn't going to tell her that. He kept his true feelings masked, as usual.

Sure enough, as they arrived at the ship, it looked good as new; the metal on the nose was fully welded back together, and the stab marks that were all over the ship were now non-existent. Captain and Owen were sitting on the entrance steps, talking before they spotted it him.

"Right. I'll give you an updated brief on the ship." Captain nodded at him, and was heading inside.

"Wait." Zoe called at them, and Tyler stopped in his tracks.

"We can't 'wait', your planet is going to get fuckin wrecked." Captain said impatiently. Zoe grabbed her camera from around her neck.

"I was just thinking I could get a quick picture. Of the three of you, the whole team."

Tyler looked at Captain, letting him make the decision. Captain waved her forward after a moments hesitation. Soon, all three were positioned awkwardly in front of the ship, as Zoe darted around, trying to find the right angle.

## Outsider

"Hope she gets my good side." Owen remarked, pretending to brush his hair.

Tyler snorted, as he stared at the camera. He was never a big picture guy, and it didn't seem like the others were too. She finally snapped the picture, and waited as it came out the slot.

She waved it back and forth lightly, before Captain took a look. "Yeah, beautiful. Bloody models, we are."

He smiled to himself, before getting on the ship.

Tyler soon found the picture in his hands, as Zoe smiled at him. "A memoir."

Tyler took it, looking at the photo. It was slightly grainy, and showed Captain pull a grin in the middle. Owen was pointing at the lens, other hand resting on his staff.

And Tyler stood to the left, a surprised smile on his face, his hair sticking in all directions, his eyes looking in a completely different direction. Zoe had scribbled something on the bottom. As he peered closer, it read 'Semper Fi'. It solidified it for him in his mind, he was a permanent part of the team. He was a Marauder. Tyler put the photo in his pocket, before entering the ship.

16

Tyler heard the familiar sound of the ship engine roaring to life, as Captain operated the holo table. He pushed a few buttons, before an image of Atlantis leaped to life on the table, of the main city.

"There's a full blown battle going on. The Government have sent a legion of Republic soldiers, to battle the C2 machines. But, we have a mission of our own. Capturing Baastian."

An image popped to life, of a huge building. It had four marble pillars running down the front, with a flat stone roof.

"This is the Atlantis Court. I've got reliable info that Baastian is hiding in there, with his own little army. Probably on the top floor, as far away from action as he can. Once we get him, *alive*, we need to extract some information. Lads, we need him alive. We'd all love to top the wanker, but we need this information."

## Outsider

Another image popped up on the holodesk, of the massive C2 mothership, looking more menacing by the minute, the two huge guns pointed directly at the planet.

"We need to blow the ship up. There's a never-ending amount of bots coming from that thing, and if we don't find a way to disable it, the Republic forces will get overwhelmed. We need to find a weakness, or a way to disable it."

Captain the leaned over the table, his face becoming more concerned. "We can't forget about the most recent development: Never. We have to apprehend him, dead or alive. He is a serious threat to the mission."

Captain stood then, looking at all of us in turn. "Zoe, stay on the ship. We don't need you getting caught up in all this. Just pilot the ship to a safe location and wait us out.

"Lads, this is the big one. Let's not fuck it up, a whole planet is at stake." Captain began to ascend to the cockpit.

"Sleep when you can. You have roughly 0300 hours." Tyler stared at the hologram of the mothership, the images of Never looking at him still lingering. He couldn't shake him. Those black eyes looked too cold, soulless. Uncaring. How the hell was he supposed to beat him?

Tyler decided to get some rest, walking by Zoe. He felt her eyes on him, but he was too jumped up to talk.

## Outsider

Still, he stopped when she said: "I've seen what you're capable of, Tyler. Why do I still see doubt in your eyes?" Tyler looked at her silently. *Because I'm afraid.* But, there was no way he was telling her that. He walked away. He just hoped he wouldn't get any dreams tonight.

### Another Dream

*As Tyler stood in the darkness, there was nothing blocking sight. He found he saw things clearer than ever before, focusing his sight instantly on the two familiar figures of Never and the Leader, both in their respective stances. He also heard the speech far clearer than ever before, there was no muffled or crackling in the talking.*

*"It was foolish, Never." The Leaders distorted voice boomed around the empty space. "You could have easily eliminated them, but you failed."*

*Never raised his head, his hood partly concealing his face. Still, Tyler could make out the frustration on his face. He even saw a hint of fear. "You are right, Leader. I failed. I got careless, but they were fortunate to escape with their lives."*

## Outsider

*His deep voice was filled with anger at the mention of us, and Tyler watched his face distorted in detestment, those black eyes staring down. "You are too confident in your abilities. You need to learn to control this. Do not fail on Atlantis."*

*Leaders voice rang out.*

*"That is your downfall. Also, I asked you to discover another problem." Never lifted his head, curious.*

*"Leader?"*

*Leaders head turned sideways, almost looking through Tyler.*

*"Our guest here has overstayed his welcome. It is time we remove him."*

*Tyler suddenly realised that Leader was not looking through him, but at him. Nevers head snapped around, suddenly the black eyes staring right at him. Tyler took a step back, willing himself to wake up.*

*Then, Leader lifted a shrouded hand towards Tyler, and Tyler felt an intense pain in his head. He yelled in agony, gripping his head, as the pain only got sharper and more intense. And, suddenly, it ended.*

## 17

*Tyler heard a voice, someone shaking him. "Tyler! Bloody hell mate, you looked like you were having a seizure!" It*

## Outsider

was Captain, looking at him concerned. Owen was standing close behind, holding a bag in his hand. Tyler sat up, shaking it off.

"I'm fine. Just another...." "Another bloody dream?" Captain shook his head.

"We'll deal with it later, we're at Atlantis. We're jumping in a few minutes."

Owen tossed him the bag, which Tyler quickly realised was a parachute. Tyler went to the hangar, where the door was wide open. Tyler got a good look out, while the ship was flying by. The planet had turned into a massive battlefield.

The once green grass was now brown and muddy, holes everywhere. He saw the hundreds of Republic soldiers, all clad in black, clustered to the left, firing at the bots. The bots were swarming from the city, seemingly endless. They seemed to be pushing the Republic forces backwards, towards a massive cliff edge.

They looked severely outnumbered, as there seemed to be twice the amount of C2 bots than Republic soldiers. However, he saw green people alongside the Republic, firing arrows and spears at the bots.

He realised that the Gonda'i natives had stepped up and banded with the soldiers, against the threat of the machines. Tyler respected their fighting spirit.

## Outsider

But, he also saw another black figure in battle. Never. He was cutting down Republic soldiers with ease, his shadow sword glinting in the light.

"We have to jump here!" he heard Captain yell, as he fastened the bag around himself. "Any closer to the Court and we'll be blown to bits!"

Tyler stared down, they were right in the middle of the grassy plains, centre of the loud battle. He saw Captain plummet downwards, and Owen follow suit. Tyler put the bag on, and took a deep breath. Can't be that hard, just jumping.

Without another thought, he stepped out of the ship. The air hit his face immediately, as he dropped shockingly down, faster than he ever expected. He enjoyed it for a few moments, the wind in his face, looking at the surroundings.

Realising how close he was to the ground, he yanked the chute hard, and he was pulled upwards, his head snapping back with the force.

He floated down slowly for a few moments, as he looked down at the chaos of battle. Then, a few bots directly above him turned their guns towards him.

Tyler tried to veer to the left, towards the soldiers, but to no avail. The gunfire flew past his ears, as Tyler ducked his head down, cursing.

## Outsider

Suddenly, the floating stopped, and he fell, hitting the ground hard. He tore the bag off his back, noticing the chute riddled with bullet holes, and found himself beside a few Republic soldiers.

The gunfire whizzed around him, and it was deafening loud. There were yells, and robotic commands often heard, as bodies fell all around him. The full impact of war hit him hard in those few moments. He scanned for any signs of his squad, before noticing Captain to his far right, hunkered down, firing at the bots.

He managed to run over, as Captain shot down a few bots. A Republic soldier ran to them.

"Sir!" he yelled to them. "They have heavy duty tanks! We can't get into the city without-"

He was cut off suddenly by an explosion, and his body fell limp to the ground, as Tyler shielded his eyes. It was sickening sight.

"C'mon!" Captain yelled in his ears. "We need to find Owen!"

Tyler scanned the masses of soldiers, looking for the signature blue jacket. But, it occurred to him: Owen would be in the middle of it all. He looked over to the opposition, where he spotted him.

## Outsider

He was standing amidst the bots several feet in front of them, defiantly striking them down with his staff, as they all tumbled down around him.

Tyler pointed him out to Captain, and they rushed over.

Tyler whipped his staff out, and as a bot rushed to him, swung it around, catching the bot on the head. Owen was slowly getting overwhelmed: he was a great fighter, but there were too many bots.

Tyler managed to get beside him, as he sliced a bot behind Owen. For a while, the three of them managed to take down multiple bots, Tyler and Owen beating them down with their staves, and Captain gunning them down close behind.

"We can't do this forever!" Captain shouted to them. "We need to get to the Court!"

Owen gritted his teeth in concentration, as he nudged Tyler.

"Captains right! We need to retreat, there's too many!" Tyler stared at the bots. In all honesty, he was having a great time, destroying the metal bastards.

But, he knew the odds were bad. He slowly backed off, as the bots began to pile up, guns at the ready.

## Outsider

But, suddenly, one fell. Then, another. They all began falling at a rapid rate, and Tyler was confused. He didn't hear any gunfire.

But, as he turned around, he saw a sole Gond'ai standing there, bow in hand, rapidly unloading arrows into the bots, until little were left on the frontlines. He recognized the distinguishable blue stripe going down the face and body, and realised it was Chief Borsa.

He nodded to them, gesturing to them. He walked over to them silently. He went over and held his fist out, which Tyler and he others bumped.

Captain fired a few more rounds at more approaching bots, before asking.

"The Court. Big stone house. Is the way clear?" Captain gestured with his hands. Borsa seemed to understand, before shaking his head.

He seemed to sign 'big gun' with his hands, along with a few clicks in his native tongue. He pointed off to the horizon, and Tyler followed his finger. Then, he saw the tank.

It was a big metal red hunk, with a huge cannon on the top. There was a green bot sitting at the gun, who looked to be controlling it, jerking it slowly forwards, and firing the cannon at a regular rate.

## Outsider

It sat right in front of the Atlantis Court, ensuring no intruders entered. The constant explosions now made sense.

"There's no way to get by that thing, we need to blow it!" Captain stated.

"Any bazookas around?" Owen asked, a look of relish on his face. He really wanted to blow something up. But, Tyler was already forming a plan in his head. They didn't need to blow it up, they just needed to take out the driver. And all they needed to do that was a distraction.

"Captain, I can take it out." Tyler stated. Captain waved him on. "Go on then! We'll support you."

Tyler worked his way through the bots, bashing them down. He needed a disabled bot, it was the only way this would work. He picked up a downed bot, shielding himself and charged his way through, heading straight towards the tank.

Then, as soon as he got within shooting range, he threw the bot right at the tank. The big cannon instantly moved to shoot the projectile, and Tyler sprinted at the tank, the momentary distraction working. It was his chance.

He leaped on the tank, landing on the metal hard. He climbed his way up the red metal to where the driver sat. He hoped he could pull this off.

## Outsider

As the driver noticed him, and attempted to clamber out of its seat, Tyler stabbed it through the chest quickly. It slumped, deactivated, and the tank stayed motionless.

Tyler relaxed. It was stupid, but it worked. Tyler clambered down from the tank, as he was met by Captain and Owen.

Both looked at him, impressed.

"Good job, mate." They turned to the door of the Court, the massive wooden door sitting behind the four stone pillars.

"Baastian has to be in here."

Owen placed explosive charges, pulling them from his pocket, on the door. Tyler stood at the door, ready to pounce. Owen blew the charges, and they rushed in, Captain firing off shots.

They were in a narrow hallway, with lots of doors. Tyler looked off to see almost a dozen bots at the end of the hall, firing at them mechanically.

Tyler sprinted towards them, following Owens lead. He slammed his staff into one bot, kicking the bot backwards.

As the bot fell onto another bot, Tyler whacked them both in the head, before ducking a punch by another. He

## Outsider

swung his staff quickly at bots, taking out two consecutively.

This was almost getting too easy. The three of them had soon cleared the hallway, and Captain was already standing beside a door at the opposite side of the hall, near an entrance.

Captain had his ear pressed to the door, a look of frustration creasing his face.

"I hear human voices. He's in there. Plenty of tangos with him." Owen remarked, standing beside the door.

"That's not the problem. I think there's someone else with him." Tyler instantly thought of Never, and almost got cold feet. Captain reared back, without another word, and kicked the door down. As Tyler entered, staff held defensively in front of them, he saw it.

His blood boiled in anger, when he noticed who Baastian had. They were in a large court room, filled with bots. They all stood at the back, shielding Baastian.

Baastian stood behind the judges' desk, and he had his arm wrapped around Zoes neck, a gun held to her head.

"Move, and she dies." He yelled.

## Outsider

Tyler froze, as anger flooded him immediately. He gripped his staff and tensed, ready to take Baastians head off.

Captain didn't move an inch, gun directly pointed at Baastian, and similarly Owen didn't let his guard down. "Don't move." Captain muttered to him, as Tyler stared up at him.

Zoe had worry in her blue eyes, as she gripped at Baastians arm frantically and screamed at them.

Baastian stood there, a desperate look on his face, his once pristine blonde hair now a mess. His eyes had almost a crazed look, as he jammed the gun into her head. Tyler could see the sweat dripping off his face, as he gripped onto her. "You are going to hand over your weapons." He wore a fake smile on his face. Tyler could see he was scared. Coward. "And surrender. Now!"

Tyler thought about dropping his weapons, as the bots moved towards them. What else could they do? It was her, or Baastian at this point. But, Owen and Captain stayed stock still, Captains gun still pointed directly at Baastian. "You won't shoot me." He said, shaking his head at Captain.

"I'm no good to you dead. Face it, you've lost. Now, drop your weapons!" Captain looked directly back. "Why don't you shoot her then?" Tyler looked over at Captain. What the hell was he doing? He can't take this risk!

## Outsider

Baastian, however, didn't answer. He began to sweat even more profusely.

Captain shook his head. "You don't have the balls."

Baastian then moved, his hand slipping slightly.

Then, Captain fired. Tyler closed his eyes, waiting to hear everything go wrong. But, he instead heard a yell of pain, and repeated gunfire. Tyler opened his eyes, to see Baastian clutch his hand, a red hole in the middle of it.

Zoe reacted quickly, elbowing him hard in the face, sending him reeling backwards. He whimpered in pain, as the bots began an attack.

Captain began to shoot at the bots, while Owen rushed to help. Zoe was unharmed. Tyler saw the opportunity, and threw his staff at a bot approaching Zoe, piercing it right through the chest.

He sprinted over to his staff, dodging attacks from bots. He yanked the staff out of its chest, and swung it at a bot, crashing it into its head as it fell. Owen stamped on the downed bot, finishing it.

Tyler swerved around, to see all the bots were clear from the room.

Tyler looked at Zoe, who seemed relatively unharmed.

"You good?" Zoe nodded, rubbing her neck. "I'm fine."

Tyler wanted to say something else, but couldn't think of anything suitable in this situation.

## Outsider

She turned to Captain. "Sorry I left the ship. But, I couldn't just sit around doing nothing. I had to help somehow!"

Captain looked angry, but he brushed her off. "Its fine. Your alive, that's what matters. "

Owen had grabbed Baastian, and roughly slapped a pair of handcuffs on him. "My hand..." he whimpered silently.

"Shut up." Owen snarled, as he tripped Baastian, causing him to fall face first on the ground. Captain hunkered down, and Owen kicked Baastian roughly onto his back. "Disable the mothership."

Baastian looked at him, his nose broken and bloodied, and began to laugh. "You'll all die. When Never finds you, he'll kill all of you. The Leader-" Owen kicked him hard in the face. "Answer the question." Baastian shook his head.

"You're all fucking stupid. You think I can remotely disable the ship? The only way is manual shut down, from the ship itself. There's no way you can stop it. My robots will just keep coming and coming..." Captain stood up, frustrated. "Fuck!"

A thought occurred to Tyler. "We can't manually shut it down, but we can blow it up."

Owen looked up. "We don't have any ships with the firepower. We haven't even analyse any weaknesses in the

## Outsider

ship, we don't have time to find one." Captains face lit up then.

"Hit the heating system. If you blow it, the ship will overheat and explode almost instantly. All ships having heating systems."

Tyler could see wheels turn in Captains head, as he figured out a plan. "We all can't go up. A couple of us has to stay down and take down Never."

Captain turned to Owen, a grin on his face. Owen, however, wasn't liking it. "No, sir. I can deal with Never, I have more combat experience than Tyler does. I can help-"

Captain shook his head. "You're the best pilot out of all of us, Owen. Only you could fly up to that big bastard of a ship and blow it to bits " Owen still didn't look satisfied, but Tyler knew he wouldn't disobey an order from Captain.

"Where's the ship?" he asked Zoe, reluctantly. Zoe pointed to her right. "Behind the Court."

Owen nodded, and turned back. "You sure you can fight him again, Captain?" Captain had a confident look on his face, he looked ready. "I'm taking back up this time. We can handle this." Owen stared at Tyler then long and hard. His eyes pierced him again, like they did on their first encounter. He nodded to him.

## Outsider

"Yeah, both of you can." He held his fist out to Tyler. Tyler looked at it for a moment, before reciprocating it.

Owen finally accepted him. Owen began to walk away. "I'm Oscar Mike." Captain tapped his earpiece, muttering for reinforcements. At that moment, Republic soldiers swarmed the court room, guns raised. Captain grabbed Baastian and shove him over.

"Get him to a secure location. And, keep her safe too."

Baastian cursed and whined, as a couple of soldiers dragged him off. Zoe did not complain, as she went quietly with the soldiers.

Tyler met her eyes, for only an instant, before she was whisked away. Soon, it was just Tyler and Captain left in the room. Tyler dispelled thoughts of Zoe from his mind, he needed to be fully focused on the job at hand. Captain begin to leave.

"Let's find this fucker."

As they left the room, Tyler alongside Captain headed to the exit. But, Tyler stopped in his tracks when he looked at the doorway. Five Republic soldiers lay dead at the doorway, blood splattered all over the door.

And, standing amidst the bodies, was a hooded figure that could only be Never. Holding his Shadow Sword to the side, he took down his hood, revealing his face in full.

## Outsider

Tyler could now see his blue and black striped face was more elaborate, jagged lines and designs running down his face.

His black mohawk had a blue streak running through it, and with his free hand, he took a second Shadow Sword out of his belt. He spun them around, a sickening look on his face. His cold black eyes now had a hatred in them, that slowly spread from his eyes to his face.

Tyler withdrew his staff. He wasn't afraid anymore.

He saw Captain had taken out his knife. Tyler took a deep breath, and rushed at his adversary with a shout, staff raised high.

## 19

Owen burst out the back door of the Court, staff drawn. It was not hard spotting the ship, it was literally parked right at the fuckin back door. "Hope to God she didn't scratch it." He exclaimed, as opened the stairway.

He wanted to face Never, he knew he could handle the Shadow Hand. But, at the same time, he was probably the only person that could pull this suicide mission off. So, at least he could do that.

A squad of bots appeared from the building, firing at him. Owen expertly deflected all the shots, slowly backing

## Outsider

into the ship. They ricocheted off the armour of the ship, as they bounced off his blue staff.

He rushed up to the cockpit, pressing all the buttons and pulling the levers to start it up. Owen yanked hard on the thruster, causing the ship to slowly raise. He opened fire on the bots, the machine guns tearing them to shreds.

"Artificial intelligence my ass." Owen steadily guided the ship to orbit, flying above the raging battle happening below. The battle seemed less harsh from the ship, just black dots colliding in a small green area. That's probably how Baastian viewed this all.

"It's only a ship." Owen muttered to himself. "You've worked with thousands of them. How hard can it be to blow it?"

Add in the fact Owen had to get out of the mothership before it was blown to shreds. He pulled his blue leather jacket back, revealing his tattoo.

He looked at the knife piercing the shield, and it gave him further inspiration. In the past, the symbol was printed on his body to connect him with someone. But now, it had become a personal source of motivation for him.

When Owen entered space, and gained sight of the mothership, he saw the problem. The two guns on the front of the ship were not guns per say; they didn't fire missiles. Instead, they fired out bots, shooting dozens

## Outsider

out every second, ending them hurtling towards the planet at an extremely rapid rate.

Owen also saw they were all in some sort of escape pod: to prevent their metal melting while plummeting down to the surface. Baastian may be a rat, but he was a smart one, Owen had to give him that. An unending army.

Owen headed closer to the ship, looking for any obvious weaknesses. However, suddenly, two fighter ships appeared before him, firing right at him. "A couple of tangoes." He announced to himself.

He spun out of their range as they shot past him. He's planned for the mothership having defensive fighters, probably way more than two, as well. Air battles were his speciality. Owen steered sharply to the left, circling back around behind the ships.

He grabbed the levers for the machine guns, and mowed them down, blowing the ships to bits. *Surely you can do better than that.* Owen grinned. This was going to be fun. He started flying directly above the ship, looking for any hatches or holes, that he could enter through.

If he managed to get in, he could figure out the layout of the mothership and find the heating system. Suddenly, a couple of turrets sitting on the roof of the ship swung towards him, and began shooting out torpedoes. Heat seeking ones too.

## Outsider

Owen swerved downwards, causing one of the missiles to follow, and collide with the ships armour. He sent off a missile of his own, blowing one of the turrets. He straightened the ship up, scanning for any signs of an entry. Then, he saw it: a hatch.

It was small, two sliding doors closed together, but Owen recognized the design. It let fighter ships out. He just had to wait for a fighter ship to come out. Like that, an enemy fighter swooped out, and was promptly shot down. Owen rushed, full speed, right towards the hatch, as it began to rapidly close.

"Get there!" he yelled, and he just about flew into the small gap, the doors only slightly catching the tail. The ship shook slightly, as the doors momentarily clamped onto the back, before releasing.

Owen found himself in a hangar of some sort: there were plenty of vacant ships standing side by side, and as he looked up, saw hatches plastered all over the ceiling. He also noticed plenty of bots bustling about, preparing to enter ships and escape pods. Being herded like mindless sheep.

Owen quickly shot missiles all over the hangar, not letting up. Soon, the hangar was reduced to rubble, and Owen grinned. He heard an alarm blare: it's not gonna stay this easy. There were gonna be some tough defence systems. He better hurry it up. He spotted a door in the back, and

## Outsider

sent a missile careening towards it, blowing it off its hinges. He swooped through the door, finding himself in the inner mechanics of the ship.

There were wires covering the room, of all different assortments of colours, and a few fuel tanks, filled with a bright blue liquid. There were cameras plastered on the roof also, observing everything was in order. Owen was certain the ship would get tangled in the vast entanglement of wires, so he decided to shoot at them.

After mowing various wires down, the alarm only got louder, a screeching blare that radiated around the whole ship. The cameras stared right at him, flashing a bright red. He knew it wasn't going to be a stealth mission anyway.

Owen glanced in the rear-view mirror, hearing the distinctive noises of ships approaching. There they were, two fighter ships, heading directly towards him. He increased his speed, blasting through the wires and speeding through.

"Might as well have some insurance." He grinned, sending a few missiles towards the fuel tanks. It shattered the tanks on impact, the blue liquid combusting on impact. The two ships kept methodical fire up, shooting at intervals. It was getting frustrating, Owen needed to get rid of them before they cut him off.

## Outsider

He weaved to the left, avoiding a fighter from nearly gunning into him. Owen quickly weaved to the far right immediately afterwards, causing the two ships to go opposite directions and crash into each other.

*Easy work.* Owen found himself at a dead end, reaching the end of the corridor. It branched off into two passage ways, one on the right full of more wires, and the left full of fuel tanks.

"The fuck is this heating system?" he mumbled, quickly going down the left passage way. He could cause way more damage to the ship by hitting the fuel systems.

It was the best alternative if he couldn't find this heating system. He continued to zoom down the passage. He was led into a large room, full of thick piped, covering the whole circumference of the room. They all directly led to a large brown tank. That was handy.

Owen approached it, circling it. "Boom." He barraged it with missiles, giving it everything he had. Almost immediately, he turned back around and sped away, before the explosion engulfed it.

"C'mon!" he yelled, blasting his way through the debris that was starting to fall. The mothership was completely falling apart, the sounds of loud bangs and frequent rumbles cutting off the blaring alarm. There were no escape hatches or doors, there was no other option.

## Outsider

Cursing, he crashed his way through the wall, rattling the ship. He boosted away, looking in the mirror as the ship was blown to bits, bots hurtled through space with the force.

"Hoo-ah!" he yelled, pumping his fist in the air. He held his tattooed wrist up triumphantly, celebrating the paramount victory. There will be no reinforcements for C2.

He drifted quietly back towards Atlantis, leaning back in his chair slightly. Now, it was up to Captain and Tyler to finish the job.

## 20

"Hold!" he heard Captain shout, but it was too late. Tyler's staff collided with one of the swords, and Never kicked him hard in the chest. Tyler stumbled back, winded, crashing right into Captain.

## Outsider

"Shit!" he gasped, before ducking just in time as Never swung both swords at their heads. Captain pushed him to the left, and Tyler rolled in that direction.

He stood to his feet, seeing Captain on the right. Captain lunged at Never, slashing his knife at his throat. But, Never sidestepped him and hit him in the back with the hilt of his sword.

His sword cut through the air, but Captain dodged, leaning back as the sword passed by him. Tyler, watching cautiously and gathering momentum, leaped at Never, his staff colliding once again with Nevers sword. But, the force of the blow caused Never to take a step back.

Captain then assaulted, and Tyler aided, both men jabbing their weapons at the assassin. Still, he deflected them with his swords, taking a few more steps backwards. They now found themselves outside the gates of the Court, back in the battle.

Tyler tried a low lunge, but Never was far too quick. He ducked down, preventing the blow with his sword, as well as holding off Captain. He swung up suddenly, hitting Tyler hard in the jaw. Tylers head snapped back, a sharp pain suddenly emerging.

Tyler grimaced, looking up. He saw Captain on his knees, a big welt on his forehead. And, Never was gone, replaced by a squad of bots. "Where'd he go?" Tyler yelled, confused as he attacked the bots.

## Outsider

How the hell could he just disappear? Tyler bashed their heads in quickly, as Captain beat them down with only his knife. Soon, there was a pile of metal junk lying on the floor, and no sign of Never.

"He's a trained Shadow Hand." Captain muttered. "We need to expect these tricks. Stay on your guard." Captain began walking, crouched down, and Tyler cautiously followed. They walked quietly around the battle, avoiding any conflicts.

They had to focus on the task at hand. They quickly reached the cliff edge at the end of the grassy plain, with no sign of Never. Tyler stood up, dropping his staff to his side and relaxing. He wasn't here now, it gave them a breather at least.

"What the fuck are you doing?" he heard Captain whisper urgently, among the noises of battle. Tyler began to explain himself, but he heard a faint whoosh noise behind him. Tyler turned his head slightly to the side, seeing a blade rapidly approaching him.

He quickly instinctively ducked, as the blade passed over his head, clipping a few hairs. His heart racing, he leaped to his feet, as Never snarled at him. Tyler raised his staff over his chest with both hands, just about blocking a furious assault with both swords.

Captain had rushed over to help, but Never had jammed the hilt of his sword into Captains stomach. He then

## Outsider

elbowed Captain in the face, right in the slowly healing gash. It began seeping blood once again, as Captain was sent sprawling to the ground. Tyler gritted his teeth; he had to hold him off alone. Never was impossibly quick, relentlessly assaulting Tyler.

Tyler was completely on the defensive now, barely managing to block each of Nevers attack. Tyler had never been in a harder fight in his life. Each time Never aggressively brought his sword down on Tylers, he was slowly being driven towards the cliff.

Tyler glanced back, and reeled in shock when he saw he was mere inches from the cliff edge. But, in the corner of his eyes, he saw Captain standing to his feet. Never glanced over, and Tyler saw an opening. In a desperate move, he kicked at Never when he swung his sword, sending him backwards. Captain jumped into the fray, hitting Never square in the face.

Tyler managed to regain his footing, gaining his composure back. He looked up to see Captain brawling with Never. He jabbed his knife at Never again, but Never swiped it away with his sword. Tyler darted in, swinging low with his sword. Never managed to swing his torso around and block the blow with his other sword.

Tyler could see that they were slowly overwhelming him. He hoped it stayed that way. Tyler and Captain both simultaneously swung their weapons, ready to catch

## Outsider

Never. But, Never once again pulled off an impossible feat, leaping high in the air, flipping around and landing behind them.

Tyler twisted around, but not quick enough. He just about lifted his staff when Never swung both swords at him, jarring him. As Tyler tried to recover, Never roughly hit him with both hilts of the swords right in the forehead. Tyler collapsed instantly, as his vision momentarily went black. When his vision returned, it was blurred, as he saw the translucent figures of Captain and Never struggling.

The severe nagging pain in his head wasn't helping matters. His vision began to drift in and out of focus, and he groaned, the pain not deteriorating. He fumbled around blindly for his staff in desperation in the grass, his palm eventually making contact with the hard metal.

He gripped to it, and watched in pain as Captain was holding Never off. He tried to get to his feet, but the pain was too much. His head felt like it was being prised open. Never had disarmed Captain, his sword hitting the knife with so much force, it went flying out of his hand and down the chasm of the cliff. Captain wore a defiant look on his face, refusing to give up.

Captain swung an elbow at Never, but Never lunged and stabbed Captain in the chest.

Tyler sat up suddenly, the pain becoming a distant feeling. He looked into Captains eyes, as they suddenly

## Outsider

and harshly blinked out. He felt a far worse pain than his head.

"No!" he yelled desperately, as his mentor slumped over, dead. Never turned around to him, a disgusting smile on his face.

Suddenly, adrenaline coursed through Tylers veins, and an unbridled anger was awakened within him. He would make this fucker pay. He lunged at Never in blind fury, swinging his staff ruthlessly at the assassin.

Never was completely taken by surprised by the aggressive attack, holding his swords up defensively. Tyler was purely driven by anger now, technique out the window. Tyler wanted nothing more than to murder Never.

He relentlessly bashed at Nevers defence, repeatedly hitting him. It wasn't enough. As Tyler raised his staff to hit him again, Never kicked him in the face, sending him sprawling backwards.

Another kick to the back of the head sent Tyler crumpling to the floor. He felt the staff slip out of his hand, and with it, hope of winning the fight. Still, he rolled onto his back, grasping for his staff. But, his forearm was roughly stepped on, and Tyler bellowed in agony.

## Outsider

Never grinned mockingly at him, putting more weight on his foot, increasing the pain. Tyler looked into those black eyes angrily, refusing to accept defeat. He couldn't reject the dire situation, as Never continued to taunt him, twisting his swords around. That sickening smirk would not leave his face.

Never was wasting too much time, there must be something he could do. He couldn't get his staff, what? *Fuck, c'mon.* Something occurred to him.

He grasped for his waistband, finding the handgun given to him by Captain so long ago. *You never know when you might need it.* Never was still revelling in his defeat, but now was lifting his swords, ready to finish the job.

Tyler gripped to the gun, and whipped it out, shooting it quickly. Nevers arm swung back, and Tyler realised he only hit him in the shoulder. Never was no longer smirking, urgency replacing it and he raised his other hand.

But, Tyler aimed properly this time and quickly pulled the trigger, shooting Never right in the head.

Never was propelled on his back, motionless. Tyler lay on the grass for a moment, calming himself down.

He felt momentarily relieved that he did it. It's over, Never is dead. But then he remembered Captain.

## Outsider

He rushed over to him, pointlessly hoping he had survived.  
*There was still a chance. There must be?*

But, as he reached the bloody, limp form of his commander, his dreads had been affirmed.

Captains once sparkling blue eyes were now empty, and Tyler knelt down, shaking his head in disbelief. There were two bloody holes in his chest, and he was now pale as a ghost, head slumped forwards. It seemed unreal, he expected Captain to get up and start giving orders again. Give him advice. But, he lay there, no longer a great soldier, just a cold corpse.

The anger had evaporated from his body, now he felt it be replaced by sadness, and most of all, guilt.

He was lying right on the grass when it happened, if he just got up quicker.....

His thoughts were interrupted by a voice.

"Nice one. You ki-" He looked up to see Owen, who's sentence was cut off once looked in their direction. He was standing in front of the Republic and Gond'ai forces, who seemed to be celebrating a victory.

Owens face fell when he saw who Tyler was hunkered over. Owen ran over, yanking the dead body from Tyler.

## Outsider

"C'mon, Captain. You'll be alright, sir, you can't die..."Owen frantically reached for his pulse, and Tyler backed off, giving him space.

Owens hands dropped from his neck, and he looked down, his eyes clouding over. The silence that filled the air was deafening.

"Fuck!" he suddenly yelled, standing and punching the air. The outburst shocked Tyler, but he kept silent. "Fucking Fallen, fucking bullshit, fuck it! You can't fucking die!"

Tyler felt the burden on him again, he should've saved him. He also felt his headache come crashing back down, the adrenaline fully wearing off. He massaged his temple, to ease the pain.

They succeeded, it was a victory. But, it felt empty now.

He turned back to see Owens head bowed over Captains body, and Tyler went over and sat beside him. Tyler didn't say or do a thing, he just sat there.

## 21

The rain pounded down on the ground, the pattering sounds hitting off the coffin. Tyler had phased out the official giving his eulogy, staring down at Captains dead body silently.

## Outsider

Owen stood beside him, his face stony. There were Marauders gathered around the ceremony, heads bowed in silence while the coffin was dangling over the grave.

This was the Marauders burial ground on Sioma Prime, where all the dead and missing fighters were buried and remembered. Tyler had looked around the graveyard on the ceremony, and found that many of the bodies had not been recovered at all.

Soon after Nevers death, the remaining bots were cleared out and Atlantis was liberated. As far as Tyler knew, Baastian was imprisoned in an undisclosed location.

His hand moved up to the Medal around his neck, his hands feeling the cold, wet metal. Both he and Owen had been awarded Medals of Valour, for the successful mission.

Though he considered it a great honour, he couldn't help but feel Captains death soured the whole ordeal. Tyler was starting to get drenched, and he glanced over at Owen, whose blue jacket was now glistening with rain.

Owen has seemed to come to terms with Captains death; while the pain was still present in his eyes, he knew he had to step up and assume a role of responsibility. The coffin began to lower slowly into the grave, the wires slowly unravelling. Tyler reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out the photo Zoe gave him.

## Outsider

He looked at it, staring at all three of them standing there. Captain standing in the middle, a wide smile on his face. Tyler has finally found a place he belongs, somewhere where he finally has a purpose.

He owed that to Captain. Captain was the reason he could join the Marauders, and how did Tyler repay him? By lying there and watching as he died. Tyler clenched his fist in frustration, he fucked it up. He felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned his head to see Owen.

"Don't beat yourself up. It's not worth it."

Tyler clenched his jaw, his eyes on the coffin again. "I could've saved him."

Owen shook his head. "No, you couldn't. You didn't kill him, Never did. The last thing Captain would want is you blaming yourself for his death."

Tyler absorbed that information, as he watched the Guard of Honour assemble. A row of republic soldiers, decorated in their black uniform, all stood in a perfect line, and fired off a series of shots with their rifles, booming in the air. Tyler looked at the three key Generals standing at the top of the coffin.

General Kushida was clutching his samurai sword to his chest, eyes closed, and seemed to be uttering a prayer of some sort. The Grand General was clad in full military uniform, and he was standing stock still, his eyes gazing

## Outsider

into space. But, General Creed was the one that unnerved Tyler. He stood there, in his grey suit, his hands clasped.

He had turned to stare straight at Tyler, his bright blue eyes regarding him with barely concealed hostility. Tyler looked back silently, and he could even swear he saw a tear in Creeds hardened eyes. Tyler turned away, the glare too much. He could tell Creed blamed him.

The coffin hit the grave with a thud, and soon the gravediggers began digging. Many began dispersing, as Tyler slowly turned to Owen. Owen wiped rain droplets off his face, glancing over at the Generals.

"I've been in your position before. Mate, it's gonna happen a lot as a Marauder. You have to learn to let go, for your own good."

They began a slow stroll through the rain, in no hurry to head back to HQ. Tyler reflected on the moment it happened. The look on Captains face had haunted him. There was shock, but the acceptance is what unnerved Tyler. Maybe Owen was right.

"I've been promoted." Owen continued. "Actually, we both have. I'm a Captain now and you're Commander. The Generals were impressed with us."

The news of being a commander lifted his spirits, and it led to a whole new host of questions. "So are we going to have to recruit a third?"

## Outsider

Owen snorted. "Na. We're not doing that shit. We're a two-man unit now, all we need is two men. The two man dream team."

Owen stopped in the rain then, and held out his hand.

"We're not going to blame ourselves for the past. We're going to look to the future. We're gonna take down the Fallen. Like Captain would've wanted. What do ya say?"

Tyler looked at the hand, and thought of Captains death. He would always remember what Captain did for him. But, he wouldn't do this to himself anymore.

Tyler decided to let go.

He grasped Owens hand, grinning. "Let's fuckin do it."

## Epilogue

Kushida stood at the window, staring out at the dark night sky. In his office, it was deathly quiet. There was a Republic soldier standing at the door, and Creed was standing beside him, also silently staring out the window.

Kushida was worried. He was certain the Fallen had been eliminated a long time ago, yet the sight of this Never proved the long-standing theory wrong. "I think the *Grand General* suspected this for a while."

Creed stirred, his head turned slightly. "Why didn't he warn us?"

Kushida didn't know. Why didn't he? The *Grand General* was one of the wisest men in the universe. "He has his reasons, Seb. He always does."

Kushida thought of Never. He hadn't seen such evil in decades, under his *Marauder* service. "This Never was only the *Shadow Hand*. Could you imagine the damage this Leader could do to us? To the universe?"

Creed was quiet for a moment, his usual stoic and silent demeanour. "I'm sure he's very powerful."

Kushida had no doubts in his ability as a warrior, as a bushido samurai. He was undefeated, only matched by Creed. But, this Leader could be something else entirely.

## Outsider

Kushida sighed, rubbing his brow. "At least the Shadow Hand is eliminated."

"Yeah, it's good he's dead." Creed exclaimed. "Because the Leader has a new one now." Kushida was puzzled. A new Shadow Hand? "Wh-"

Suddenly, he felt a searing sharp pain in the back of his head, and collapsed to the floor, his eyes momentarily flashing white. He grunted, turning slowly on his back, to see Creed standing over him with his black baseball bat in hand, a malevolent look on his face.

"Freeze, sir!" he heard the Republic soldier cry at the top of the room, but it was futile. Creed had strolled over to him, dodging the bullets, and jabbed him in the stomach with his bat. He then whacked him in the back with the bat.

As the soldier toppled on the ground, Creed brought the bat down right on his skull, and Kushida watched, helpless, as his brains scattered on the floor. Kushida tried to block out the pain, and reach for his katana, which had fell on the ground.

But, Creed was over to him in a flash, and had kicked it away. He whacked Kushida right in the chest, sending him crashing back onto his back. Kushida was angry, but shocked. He had never expected Creed to be a traitor. "Why?"

## Outsider

Creed hunkered over, a grievous smile on his face. "You don't need to know why. You have no idea how powerful we are." Creed stood up then, taking out a cloth out of his shirt pocket and wiping down his bat, soaked with blood.

"Since we've been through a lot, I'll let you live this time. Next time I see you, Koji, I'll fuckin kill you." Without another word, Creed strode briskly out of the office, leaving Kushida lying on the floor, bloody and beaten.