

Mike MacDee

THE SHORES OF HELL

A horror novella based on id software's DOOM

4th Edition

Special thanks to Steven Johnson, for inspiring me to keep improving.

This PDA is the property of Senior Science Officer Valerie Jackson. If found, please notify Deimos Administration right away.

The contents of this PDA are classified. Unauthorized access, download, modification, or removal of these files is forbidden under Mars Patrol Code 143, and may result in immediate termination.

Oct. 14th 2599

4:15pm

A power surge swept through the facility yesterday around 2pm and sent every piece of equipment off the proverbial deep end. Fortunately it did not affect the oxygen vents or the gravity engine and no one has been injured, but a few of our higher-strung employees overreacted slightly to the incident. Captain Stern has placed two hysterical workers in detention to simmer down (Richardson and McCabe, I believe). It worries me that so many important machines require emergency maintenance, including our primary database. Dennis has no idea what caused the surge.

Sadly my own PDA was counted among the casualties. I'm grateful to Dennis and his people as always, but he tells me the poor thing required total reformatting, which means I've lost months and months of personal data only two days before my next report to Mars Control. I have naturally backed up all my files, but I seem to have misplaced my jump drives again. No hurry, of course. It won't be the first time I've called in late, and I have quite enough to worry about already with the mainframes running on Safe Mode.

The technicians are working around the clock to get Deimos up and running again. We need to call Mars Control to inform them of our mishap as soon as possible, but we can't do that until the comm systems are operable again. All they're picking up is wave after wave of red static lines.

Curious.

I wonder if Hall and the Phobos crew are having the same issues.

Oct. 15th 2599

12:02am

The slipgate's circuitry was severely damaged by the surge, and it will take hours if not days to replace it all. Constant delays and budget cuts, two test subjects driven to self-mutilation, and now this. Deimos's morale is hanging by a thread, and all of these technical problems will surely slow progress to a crawl. It may be another month before we're ready for the next probe experiment.

I would kill for a cup of coffee.

Oct. 17th 2599

1:28pm

The comm. systems are working again, but it makes no difference now. Mars Control can't help us solve a problem we ourselves do not understand. Everyone is on the verge of total nervous breakdown. No one has any answers for me and it's very frustrating. No one can tell me how the slipgate could activate entirely on its own, nor how it could operate at all without its power source.

Keller and Donovan were reconfiguring the motherboards in the control platform when it happened. The capacitors screeched to life suddenly. Donovan panicked, lost his footing and tumbled down the steps. Keller was less fortunate, still within arm's reach of the platform's nova-arch when it sparked and tore open that familiar swirling black void. Keller staggered on the steps, his hands bubbling and peeling from the heat of the portal's birth. He didn't even notice. His eyes were fixed elsewhere, like the rest of us.

My subconscious will only surrender a few concrete details. No one made a sound as the shape stepped partway out of the void. I remember teeth — large, dog-like teeth. I remember an arm like that of a gorilla seizing Keller by the collar of his jumpsuit. He didn't scream. He just stared in wide-eyed horror at that hideous form. It pulled him through, and the gateway closed. The capacitors shut off all by themselves.

We stood staring for a long time, not saying a word. I almost don't remember evacuating the Anomaly at all, apart from the panicked shouts of Deimos Security still ringing in my ears. The scene plays over and over in a jumbled montage and the details are foggy like the memory of a

dreadful dream. All that remains crisp and clear in my mind is Keller's eyes. Huge and white and helpless. A child's eyes. Three glasses of whiskey and still they're as crisp as daylight in my memory.

Deimos Security has sealed the Anomaly until further notice and posted an armed guard at the entrance. Captain Stern reported the incident to Mars Control, but he saw what happened on the security cameras shortly before they stopped working altogether, so he was far from coherent and I'm not sure the administrators took him very seriously.

Deimos Anomaly is completely abandoned. We evacuated everyone. Yet it sounds as though a great number of bodies are scrambling around inside like during routine maintenance. I hear other things amidst the hustle and bustle — animal sounds, grunting and heavy breathing — that have kept me from a good night's sleep for the last forty-eight hours. These sounds easily reach the ventilation ducts and carry throughout the entire facility for all to hear, every hour of the day. They never stop.

I'm afraid for our safety. Captain Stern exhibits bipolar behavior now, swinging unexpectedly into violent outbursts. He almost shot one of his men an hour ago for questioning his orders. He grows worse all the time and the rest of Deimos Security may quickly follow. I've sent Mars Control a formal request for additional support until this problem can be rectified. I still await their reply.

Everyone is looking to me for answers, but I haven't any. No one has slept in a long time. With any luck Mars Control will resp

It's quiet now. Deimos Security reopened the Anomaly and found nothing. Every piece of equipment lay exactly where we left it. Unfortunately they still found no trace of Keller.

The silence is not as comforting as I'd hoped. Our sleep is restless.

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Oct. 18th 2599

What has happened? What has happened to the sky? What has happened to the stars? Blood red stretching to eternity! It blankets Deimos like infernal fog! Where are we? Where is mars? Where is earth? The air stinks of death!

The sounds are back, sweeping through the facility. They tell me Stern shot himself. They tell me there are things in the Anomaly. I don't understand their babbling.

I can see people on the moon's surface. They

All is lost. All is lost. All is lost. All is lost. All is l

I can't sleep. The dream was worse than ever this time, and if I don't get it out right now I might lose my head. I can't afford to lose my head in this place.

Part of what makes the dream so horrible is the vivid detail. I still can't make any sense of it, but the images were so crisp and real this time that it curdled my blood. It always starts in a rocky valley with a misty crimson sky. The ground is alive: it churns and moves, and winces as razor rock spires stab through from beneath.

An ash-black fortification sits in the center of the scene, probably stretching a mile across. It looks unfinished, maybe abandoned in mid-construction, and it doesn't seem to protect anything except an empty plot of land. The longer I stare at it the more the walls appear to move like they're covered in legions of angry black ants, and I swear I hear a voice calling to me, but I can never pinpoint the source and it's so faint I can't make out the words. I'm not sure if it's a man or woman speaking.

I see crude mechanical parts knitting themselves together with twitching tendons and strips of bleeding flesh. Flesh and machine coexisting like something from a Giger painting, except rawer and without unity, the two forced together against their will. I stare into a huge, screaming mouth, the teeth and tongue red with blood. It screams and screams, but I hear nothing.

I see Ellen. I see her lying on her back, her clothes gone and her hair snaking every which way in tangled brown strands. I'm suspended above her as if we're making love, but something is wrong. Her face and shoulders are scratched and bloody, her bulging eyes filled with terror. She's crying and screaming, and so am I when the dream finally lets me go.

I haven't stopped thinking about her since. I wish I was with her on Phobos. I wonder if she has any idea what's happened here.

I really need her right now. I'm falling apart.

Dr. Jackson, I hope you'll forgive me for commandeering your PDA, and I hope you'll understand my reasons for doing so. I lost mine during the chaos and I have no idea what's become of it. I promise to return your property as soon as I find you.

Dr. Jackson,

Because my efforts to locate you have so far been unsuccessful, I'm going to keep a record of what's been going on in Deimos Base since everything went quiet. That way (hopefully) when I return this PDA to you, you'll have a full report of my discoveries.

I hope you find my writings satisfactory. Ellen is the writer, not me. It's only because of her that I can write legibly at all.

For the past two days I've been hiding in storage cell 201 in the south block of Deimos Labs. I escaped to that room during the initial invasion, and frankly it's a miracle I made it that far. I was assisting Dennis and two others with comm system repairs in the eastern block's infirmary when it all started.

One minute everything was as dull and tedious as always; the next, the screens and speakers were alive with howling nightmares. I'd just looked up when it happened and didn't get a good view of the image on the screen before it returned to static. If that screeching voice was any indication — or the expression on Dennis's face, as he'd been looking directly into the screen at the time — then I was better off not seeing it.

Dennis screamed bloody murder for five minutes, cussing and spitting and shoving us away when we tried to calm him down. He swore to god "it" could see him. We didn't know what the hell he meant, and he never explained because he was far from articulate at that point. Dennis was the most laid back techie on Deimos, even after the incident in the Anomaly that permanently left everyone on the verge of total panic; to watch him go completely unhinged in an instant rattled our nerves.

When Dennis stopped shouting we realized the noises from the Anomaly had started up again, this time right outside the door, in the hallway leading to Central Labs. Huffing and snarling and the thud-clack, thud-clack of clawed feet hammering onto the floor panels. We heard gunshots and shouting and what sounded like bottle rockets bursting.

Patterson shot past the infirmary door from Central's direction, sobbing and whimpering. Her left sleeve was missing, her arm chewed up and oozing like it'd been stuck down the garbage disposal.

A fleshy blur charged past a moment later. Its breath came in deep canine pants and it left a trail of blood and spit on the floor behind it. Patterson's sobs rose to shrill, unbearable wailing.

We scattered. We scattered and left Dennis on the infirmary floor, apologizing to god for his sins. The panting sounds filled the room just as I darted out the back exit and into a hallway stinking of shit and sulfur.

At the three-way intersection to my right stood Captain Stern and a dozen fully-armed Deimos Security men, all of them staring down the hall at the maelstrom Patterson had tried to escape. People screamed and howled. Creatures slobbered and hissed. Bones cracked. Captain Stern's face turned a sickly gray. Without hesitating, and without taking his eyes off the approaching horror, he drew his pistol and put a bullet through his head.

The other officers lost it: half of them opened fire and let loose with one curse after another; some of them went stiff and couldn't move at all; two of them turned tail and ran. I followed

their example and crawled into the maintenance tunnels beneath the floor. Something grabbed my ankles and tried to pull me back out, but by some miracle I managed to slip away.

As I crawled, I watched from the maintenance tunnels as our security men, possessed by malignant spirits, gleefully shot in the back the people they were sworn to protect. I watched golden-brown demon simians bombard my coworkers with volleys of fiery missiles. I have no idea where they kept them — it seemed like they just lit up in their palms at will — but they threw them like major league pitchers, then pounced on their prey while they writhed in burning agony.

I watched these monsters do a lot of terrible things, but I'm sure you did, too. Things worse than killing. Things that I wouldn't wish upon the vilest human being who ever lived. You'll understand if I refrain from sharing them all here.

I heard Fairchild and a couple others shouting for everyone to seek shelter in the chapel, but I couldn't reach any of them to join in. I made it to the storage cell and had to seal the door from the inside before a demon could force its slobbering head through -- a pink abomination with jaws like a giant bulldog. There I hid for two days between crates of thermal paper, wishing I'd taken Dennis with me. Wishing I hadn't been a coward like the others.

I thought the noises would go on forever, but they only lasted a couple hours. It was pretty quiet from then on, except when once in a while something came pounding at the storage cell door for a few minutes. Two more power surges hit the base, and the lights still haven't recovered. Most of them flicker and pulse randomly or don't work at all.

Following the last surge, Deimos Labs went dead quiet and I decided to brave the halls. I've done a perimeter sweep of the south block and stocked up on supplies: a medical kit, a Deimos Security radio, some rations, a 9mm pistol and three spare mags. So far no one has responded to my calls, but I'll keep the radio nearby just in case.

Many of the halls and rooms are spattered with blood and entrails, but I've found no bodies. I'm going to get more supplies before I move on to the rest of the facility. I feel like I'm in survival training all over again. Maybe I shouldn't have quit the army after all.

The stories I've read about war veterans suffering from survivor guilt never made sense to me until now. It's hit me hard. I can't figure out how a sniveling coward like me could make it to safety while greater, braver men were torn to pieces right outside the door, right where I could hear their screams and sobs. Stupid, self-destructive asshole lives while everybody else dies. It's not right. Father Mathis would call it a chance for redemption, but he's not here to comfort me now. I dread to find out what's happened to him.

Dr. Jackson,

It turns out I wasn't the only one sneaking around this place. I've just been chased through the

containment area by a trigger-happy maniac in a techie jumpsuit. The man came out of nowhere and opened up on me with a shotgun.

I ducked around a corner as his last two shots whizzed past my head, and when I heard his weapon click empty I stepped back out, took aim at his heart and squeezed off three shots. Triple bullseye just like in boot camp. He died screaming an angry string of nonsense words.

I had to wait a half hour for my hands to stop shaking before I could write about it. Until today I'd never killed anything bigger than a prairie dog.

He must be a newbie because I don't recognize him, and I couldn't find any ID on him (or extra ammo). Caucasian, about thirty-four, brown hair, short goatee on his chin. His eyes are missing just like the security men that were possessed during the invasion, but the green flames have gone out. His face is bloody around the mouth like he's been eating raw meat — maybe munching on the scraps lying around the base. Lord, there's a nice thought.

I have a shotgun now, so hopefully I'll be prepared if I run into more of them.

It's possible this zombie was following me: for the last half hour I've been unable to shake this odd sense of a presence in the base. It's lulled somewhat, but it's definitely there. The security cameras are all offline, yet I feel like someone is watching me. Occasionally I hear a thump in the air vents that makes my hair stand on end.

Now I'm beginning to hope I *am* the only one left on Deimos. I guess I'll know for sure after I've checked the other sectors. Heading to the chapel first, in the hope that you, Mathis, and the others made it there in one piece.

Dr. Jackson,

The radio began to pick up some unsettling sounds, so I tossed it. You would've responded to my calls by now, anyway, if you had your own radio handy. And I'm fairly certain you would respond in English or some other human language, and not the godawful nightmare babbling I got instead.

Deimos Base was so quiet I've decided to spend the entire day exploring it, searching for survivors, supplies, and a way to contact Mars. In the residential sector I was lucky enough to procure a UAC envirosuit, without which I couldn't have searched the toxin refinery so thoroughly.

Here is what I've discovered so far:

1. Deimos Labs, the refinery, the residential sector and the hangar are completely deserted. The walls are covered with bullet scratches, spattered blood, and a few other things I'd rather not mention. Most of the furniture has been upturned or broken, and a few computer monitors have

been smashed in. Apart from these details, it's like nobody had set foot in here since the day it was built. Haven't yet checked the command center or the nuclear plant, and I hope to find you holed up in one of the two. I can't be the only one left.

I have yet to even find another PDA — it's like somebody went around and collected them all after the attack. All the useful supplies are gone: weapons, ammunition, stimpacks, electronic equipment, you name it. Nothing left but nutri-bars, unopened crates of uniforms, and a pocketful of security cards that I don't need because I can hack any door in this place (I fix them, after all). I hope the lockers at Security HQ aren't as bare.

2. The slipgate is gone — nova-arch, capacitors, control platform and all. There is now a gaping pit in the center of the lab floor where it used to be, and the bolts that secured it are scattered all over the floor. Evidence shows the whole thing has been removed proper-like, but how or why anyone would remove it from the Anomaly is beyond me. Is this your doing?

3. Deimos no longer orbits Mars, and god only knows where we are now. If that isn't noteworthy enough, every sector seems to have at least one area where parts of the hull have been torn away, leaving massive portals to the moon's surface. The refinery is missing several sections of its ceiling: when I stepped through the entrance I looked straight up into the starless crimson sky and found to my amazement that I could still breathe. That explains how people could walk on the moon's surface as you described (I have yet to see these visitors, myself).

4. In at least two sectors the coolant tanks have ruptured, turning a number of rooms into noxious lakes. I've sealed these areas until further notice.

5. Deimos may be unstable: three small tremors have hit the facility in the last hour.

6. The comm. systems are all kaput, right down to the modem: I can't even email your office, let alone Mars Base. This shouldn't come as a surprise because the wifi satellite must be all the way across the cosmos from here, which kills what little confidence I had in the command center's radio. In short, we have no way of contacting anyone anywhere — we are completely cut off from the rest of humanity.

I've been brooding on discovery number six for a long time. Once again I would like to formally protest Deimos Base's "no liquor" policy.

I'm in the hangar security checkpoint now, on my way to the command center via the containment area. With a little luck

There goes another tremor. If this rock starts to break apart I don't know what we'll do.

I saw something outside. I know I did. I saw it while searching the lounge in the southwest block of Deimos Labs, the one with the two adjacent windows looking out on that field of scattered craters.

It looked like a single torch standing maybe half a football field's distance from the base. After watching it for a minute it appeared to be moving slowly as if someone were carrying it at head level. I thought maybe it was a survivor signaling for help and rushed to the window, hoping to spot whoever was carrying the light source, but I didn't see anybody. For a brief moment I thought I saw a glowering face in the flame. Just when this idea began to sink in the whole thing suddenly whisked away, and then it was gone.

I've been staring out this window for a long time. There's nobody out there.

Dr. Jackson,

The facility is a conscious entity, I'm sure of it! The visions from my dreams are attacking me while I'm wide awake! The flesh-and-machine imagery has begun to take less abstract shapes: writhing, skinless horrors mounted on steel crucifixes, their crude metallic bones and organs jutting out of their bodies as if trying to escape. The wall is growing into a black fortress of some kind — I watch the ants build it up from nothing. Do you see it all, too? Do you hear the voice gibbering? Or am I just losing my head altogether?

I can't be going crazy. I've got to calm down.

Ellen appears in brief, jarring glimpses as she's clawed and bitten and violated again and again, and all I can do is watch like some twisted voyeur. I try to think of our better times together — our wedding, our first trip to Mars — but the presence won't let me. It tarnishes every happy memory I pull out of the box.

Calm down, goddammit.

My throat is swollen. I haven't touched the bottle in so long. The presence is trying to dig that up, too.

It's just occurred to me that despite countless hull breaches the gravity is normal. It's too light to be the gravity engine's doing, but it's also definitely not Deimos's flimsy gravitational pull. I stepped outside and took a little stroll along the north side of the facility and found I could walk around just fine.

Not surprisingly there are fields of debris around the open sections of the hull: glass and metal slivers, expended ammunition casings, occasionally fragments of broken furniture or a trickling creek of demon blood mixed with industrial waste. Nothing very useful. No signs of life out there, human or otherwise. And no torches like the one I saw before.

The sky in this place is unnerving — it is identical to the sky in my dream, right down to the blood red haze creeping down to the moon's surface (but the ground is thankfully not alive). I'm beginning to think we've been sucked into the belly of a gaseous planet.

The outer environment is as still as a graveyard. No climate except an unforgiving dry heat — odd, considering the fog — and of course the tremors I mentioned before. I experienced only one while I was out there, but I noticed a consistent rhythm to the quakes that made me nervous and I decided to go back inside. It reminded me of the dinosaur films that frightened me as a kid: the thud-thud of the T-rex's feet as it approached from off-camera.

Once I reached the northeast corner of the base I could see the nuclear plant. The corridor connecting it to the rest of the base has been utterly annihilated. It's now a brisk walk across that hellish landscape to the entrance, and I'm not comfortable enough with the environment to walk around in the open. I'll check it out later.

Dr. Jackson,

There is an alien temple in the middle of the containment area.

I don't know what to make of it. In the middle of the millions of crates and dull sepia metal walls is the big iron doorway leading to the entrance to the processing area. It should be a big, octagonal room with x-ray scanners and pushcarts and annoyed workers insulting each other's mothers. All of that is just *gone*.

In its place is a massive hypostyle of green soapstone: a long, green hall leading into a circular chamber of towering green pillars and flickering candelabras.

I stood in the doorway, staring for a long time, trying to wrap my head around it. Meanwhile an eerie hum rode the air, emanating from somewhere deep inside the alien castle. It goaded me to enter. I debated whether to take a peek or turn tail and run. What if it slipped back into its own dimension with me inside?

I decided to go no further than the pillar room, do a quick scan, then get the hell out. I swallowed hard and took a deep breath. I stepped over the threshold.

There was no sign of life except the shadows dancing on the walls, making the soapstone appear to writhe and pulsate like the skin of a colossal organism. I crept as far as the middle of the room, hearing nothing but the ominous hum, glancing upward once I cleared the entrance hallway -- the ceiling went up forever, vanishing into pitch darkness at twenty feet. The pillars were carved from end to end with grotesque murals of blood orgies, the sort of art you'd find in a museum in Hell.

From there the layout of the base was unrecognizable: green hallways twisting endlessly in every direction, decorated with animal skin tapestries. Alien terrain was somehow bleeding into Deimos from another dimension. And it stank like the marriage of a crypt and a zoo.

Somewhere deep within the demonic compound I heard a long, low howl that made me consider

turning back, and maybe running until my legs broke. As if hearing this thought, the room erupted in an ear-shattering chorus of screeches.

They swarmed down the pillars like cockroaches -- a dozen shit-brown imps, gnashing their chainsaw teeth together and murmuring like monstrous infants who hadn't been fed in days. As soon as the first one touched ground, it leapt for me like a jumping spider, face-first into the barrel of my shotgun. Its head vaporized in a cloud of blood and gray matter. The second lost an arm at the shoulder.

Lost my orientation turning and shooting one imp after another -- that damn room was so symmetrical. In my attempt to fall back I didn't realize I was backing toward the wrong hallway, one that led further into the compound, until I felt the hot breath of a bulldog on the back of my neck.

Only luck saved me: I dove face-first against the wall to get clear of its beartrap jaws just as the imps let off a volley of fireballs at my last known position. Hot air scorched my face as one whizzed past my head, missing by a matter of inches. The rest hit the bulldog square in the face and chest and left its raw pink flesh blackened and smoldering. With a furious snarl it forgot all about me and pounced on one of the culprits, pinning it to the marble floor and ripping its face off with its teeth. Two other imps joined in, either to save their comrade or share in the feast. The rest seemed confused by the sudden infighting, and couldn't decide whether to watch the brawl or keep after me.

Panic overwhelmed me. I ran blindly into the demon compound, praying for the first time in my life.

I don't know how I got out in one piece, save for the fact that these demons are easily confused. The place was like an ant colony: dozens of demonic workers either busied themselves with tasks I didn't stop long enough to analyze before I shot them, or scrambled hopelessly around their lair to find where the shooting was coming from.

I only stopped to catch my breath once, when I stumbled into a cluster of technicians who had been strung up like meat at a butcher shop -- I think one of them was Dennis, but he was so badly maimed I couldn't be sure. There was a pair of former engineers there, removing the dead men's body parts with chainsaws and feeding them into the conveyor belt scanners: they'd converted them into some kind of meat processing machine.

They smiled when they saw me. I shot them both.

By the time I found my way back to the storage area, there must have been a hundred of the things looking for me -- I'd shaken up their ant farm and left them to clean up the mess. None of them knew where I'd gone, or else the entire legion would've followed me. They'd have caught me by now.

My ammo is low, and I jump at the slightest sound. I'm praying again that I'll find you and the others at the chapel. My hands shake worse than ever. If I run into more of them, I'll be too

useless to shoot straight.

Definitely not letting my curiosity get the better of me again.

Dr. Jackson,

Couldn't access the chapel from the main junction, so I moonwalked around the outer hull to the chapel garden. Walking outside, you feel even more isolated: the endless sea of bloody mist and nothingness seems to stare back at me when I gaze across the rocky landscape at it. The quiet and desolation are unnatural, as if Deimos Base is all that remains of the universe.

It's forever out there.

The garden dome had been smashed, the plant life perverted into some kind of hellish red mulch that flinched when I walked on it. I'm not sure if Ellen would be saddened, fascinated, or horrified. I was the third, my panic agitated by the zombie-like chorus of chants oozing into the garden from further inside. When the lichens started pawing my ankles, I didn't waste another second scrambling into the building. I had to hack the door to get inside, and sealed it behind me just in case something followed me from Containment.

The chanting was emanating from the walls, courtesy of a sound system. It wasn't comforting. The voices sounded ancient, bleakly channeling the vengeful god of the Old Testament, or maybe another, even older god long since forgotten.

As fellow atheists, I don't think either of us ever set foot in the chapel sector before. The interior surprised me: a Roman Catholic cathedral designed by Ridley Scott. The ceilings are staggeringly high and the wall panels have been stylized to resemble brick and mortar, maybe to remind worshipers of home. It would be more convincing without the life support pipes and computer guts peeking out at me every so often.

The oratory is huge and C-shaped, wrapping inwardly around a sort of observation booth with an elevated view of the entire chapel. The garden connects directly to the latter, through a giant cross-shaped doorway. The booth control panels included the sound system controlling the unnerving chants droning endlessly throughout the sector. Through the window directly ahead I could see the pews and altar on the floor below, a giant crucifix mounted on the back wall. The statue of Jesus is ten feet tall and limply hangs his head to show off the crown of thorns jutting from his scalp. When I arrived there were a dozen bodies scattered among the pews, wearing the uniforms of every caste of Deimos Base: techies, security, etc. Fairchild stood at the altar, delivering a sermon, looking tall and powerful like a warrior priest in his Security armor.

Another handful of survivors was scattered around the oratory, sitting by themselves and looking catatonic or inconsolable. A couple of space marines were making rounds, going from one to the next, dragging them to their feet and shoving them toward the pews. They went without resistance, except for the admin weeping to himself in the corner. A big gorilla of a space marine

picked him up like a doll, shook him, slapped him a few times, then dragged him to the pews, ignoring his pitiful wails. The whole thing looked like a kind of depressing space bible camp, where missing prayer was against the rules.

A couple of oddities caught my attention. Through the right window, I could see the oratory floor panels had collapsed to reveal a large, flowing river of thick, oily, blood-red putrescence, likely the source of the sickly smell tickling my nose like the stink of rotten fruit. The survivors had constructed a makeshift bridge in order to freely cross to the maglock doors ten paces away on the other side; otherwise they couldn't leave the chapel except through the garden. The doors were sealed, presumably set to open with a passkey.

Out the left window was a makeshift altar of some kind, made from a triangular red card table; a tall, metal pole pierced it through the center. A man was (and still is, last I checked) tied to the pole like a prisoner awaiting a firing squad. He sits there with his legs crossed and his head hanging like the statue of Christ. He doesn't look at anyone; and anyone who comes near him seems to hurry past, making sure not to look at him. Kerrigan, the new kid from the Marine Corps, was guarding him when I first saw him.

The prisoner weakly lifted his head, somehow knowing I was watching him. Even through his badly bruised face I could tell it was Jerry McCabe from Engineering.

Nearly leapt out of my suit when the shotgun barrel pressed into my spine. "Drop it, fucker."

I dropped my piece. "If I weren't human, I'da shot you."

She sighed with relief. "You'da tried. Turn your ass around."

I turned and was greeted with the smiling face of Brody from Security, whose face always looked too pretty and damsel-like for a soldier. She crushed me in a hug and returned my shotgun to me, then took me downstairs to the oratory.

We passed a long line of still forms covered with white, bloodstained tarps, a rosary laid on each -- nine bodies in all, polluting that corner of the chapel with the stench of death. Brody didn't pay any mind to them.

I started beaming when I saw old Father Mathis, alive and well. He hugged me with a sad laugh and said, "Took an invasion from Hell to get you to come to church. Better late than never."

I jokingly said, "No atheists in foxholes."

Brody angrily shushed us, taking offense to my chattering during the sermon. I would've argued if she wasn't cradling that twelve-gauge in her arms. That's when I noticed the other Security grunts were armed with the same, looking ready for a firefight. Some of them were eyeing me like they wanted to crush me beneath their boots. At "Amen" the sermon was over, and Fairchild wearily collected his shotgun from beside the altar and approached me and Mathis.

You know how the relationship between tech and security is like a regression to the old high school war of nerds vs jocks. Fairchild was always nice to me in spite of that, and always barked at any of the grunts who tried to push me around -- maybe because of my army training. The only time he ever got on my nerves was when he encouraged me to visit the chapel and "reconsider" my misguided view of the universe in a friendly but condescending way. Apart from that, he was always the cool boy who could make anyone feel good about themselves. Seeing him alive and well, grinning his boyish grin at me, was an immense comfort. For a while I forgot all about the eerie chanting and how parched I was for whiskey.

He grabbed one of my hands and roughly patted my shoulder. "God's sure looking out for this one, isn't he, Mathis?"

Mathis laughed nervously.

"You make it here all by yourself?"

"The base seems abandoned. Traded shots with a few ghoulies on my way over here." I described the former humans I killed in the containment area, but Fairchild sucked his teeth and shook his head.

"Doesn't sound like any of ours," he said. He added solemnly, "And we lost plenty. We've been praying for their souls today. They sacrificed a lot for us."

I glanced back toward the makeshift graveyard in the back of the chapel. "What happened?"

"Xander took twelve volunteers to procure arms and equipment. There's enough food and water in the pantry to last us a few months, but we're badly under-armed." Fairchild stared off into a memory that chilled him to his core. "Only Xander made it back alive. There wasn't much left of him. Got the gist of what happened from his babbling and then put him out of his misery."

"I counted only nine in the cemetery."

Fairchild shuddered, still lost in his thousand-yard stare. "I couldn't bring 'em back."

"The chapel is a fortress. Why bother with more guns?"

"I wanted to gear everyone up for a raid on the Anomaly: shut down the gateway and maybe send the Devil's army back where it came from."

I chuckled, mostly to relieve stress and calm my shaking nerves. Fairchild gave me a very tiny frown, almost imperceptible.

"You think I'm being metaphorical," he said. "Don't you realize what's going on?"

"I wish *somebody* did," I said.

Fairchild held his shotgun barrel-first like a cane, tapping the butt against the floor panels. "Judgment Day, Hacker. Basically God's fed up with mankind's shit: neighbor constantly warring with neighbor, man worshiping money and celebrity before God, man celebrating his basest vices and throwing spirituality to the wind. We've grown too big for the petri dish: human society is an amoeba that remains united and harmonious for ten minutes before splitting off into endless sub-sects that all want to eat each other, our only priority the satisfaction of our most primal urges."

He gestured to the altar, and the giant crucifix which seemed to be looking down on us with pity. I somehow felt the pity was directed at me, specifically.

"God's punishing us now like a stern father to his disobedient brood. We've tried fighting against the things, but Satan's legions are endless. There's no point." With a shaky sigh he gazed past me, toward the graveyard of fallen soldiers. "We've already seen that. The networks are down, and there's no contact with Mars *or* Phobos. So now we pray and ask for his mercy. Hold out for a rescue shuttle in the meantime."

"Isn't it a little early to write this off as a biblical plague?" I said dismissively. I glanced at Mathis to gauge whether he agreed with anything Fairchild said.

He was looking at me intensely, his eyes bursting with alarm. It clashed so much with his otherwise docile old face that I lost my voice.

Fairchild looked no different than before, despite the apparent alarm in Mathis. "You're welcome to stay with us as long as you don't rock the boat. These people are very delicate, and it's my duty to protect them. I do that by keeping order. When you're awake, you attend the sermons. We need all the souls we can get."

I nodded, humoring him. He ordered one of the space marines to get me something to eat from the pantry, and my stomach growled in agreement. I sat with Fairchild and Mathis in the priest's quarters and explained my findings while I stuffed my face, including the disappearance of the slipgate. Fairchild listened attentively, nodding now and then. He smiled at the end, apparently his old self again, and slapped me on the shoulder.

"Glad to have you with us, Hacker. Dennis always said you were irreplaceable."

I was reunited with several of my shift buddies: Cartwright and Dansen, Fast Eddie, and Lola, who had to be kicked awake to welcome me. Post-sermon, Brody finally loosened up a bit, and so did Kerrigan. Kerry seems nice enough for a jarhead, if a little thick. Wallace is the gorilla I saw thumping on the weeping admin, about as friendly as a poorly-raised rottweiler. Brody and I are both from the same small Indiana town, so we made fast friends discussing the old stomping grounds -- it did wonders to relieve the stress of our situation. Even so, part of her still seemed distant, like she was afraid to make new friends.

She's a breath of fresh air in any case: all anyone else talks about is the religious aspect of what's happened to Deimos. I try to talk shop with Eddie and the others to ease their minds, but they

keep going back to the topic of whether the creatures are hellspawn or aliens, or whether we're being punished by God. Most of them lean toward Fairchild's view: that Hell has come to Deimos, cut us off from the rest of the solar system. Anything to the contrary seems to leave them uncertain, even uncomfortable. Eddie is the only one willing to listen to reason, but no more willing than the others to discuss alternatives within earshot of the ever-present guards.

"Don't make Fairchild angry," said Eddie. Wallace dragged him to the pews for routine prayer before he could elaborate.

The others I don't know very well. I recognize a few faces and names. The only admin down here is a jittery file clerk named Benson, the guy Wallace was picking on, who spends most of his time jumping at the slightest sound or blubbering like an infant. Wherever I go, whoever I talk to, Security watches me like teachers on playground duty. Brody is the most social of them, though like I said, she's not the opinionated jock-girl I knew her to be before the invasion.

All-in-all there are twenty-five people holed up here, eight of them armed Security grunts under Fairchild's command. He has someone praying in the pews at all times, dragging people out of bed when he has to, and denying them food if they resist.

Fairchild did a fine job securing the place. Deimos Chapel was designed as an emergency shelter in case of life support or other critical failures: it has its own power and air supply, its own food and water cache, and several cozy bunkhouses. As long as the doors hold, it's impregnable.

Yet everyone here still seems afraid.

Dr. Jackson,

Kerrigan nearly shot me for trying to talk to Jerry, like I was trespassing on a secret air base. It took Brody, Mathis, and Fairchild to stop him from making it happen.

Jerry had been exiled from the chapel for mutiny, along with Fred Harrison and several others. Jerry had returned days later, and in an attempt to get back inside, he had inadvertently brought the demons to their doorstep. Two space marines died trying to seal the door again. Brody, Kerry, and Wallace were the reason he was so beaten up, having gotten a little too excited during his arrest. I guess they needed an outlet after watching their shift buddies get peeled like oranges.

Trying to make light of it, I said, "What're you gonna do, put him in front of a firing squad?"

Fairchild smiled and chuckled, but didn't answer.

Jerry keeps watching me hopefully. I also catch Brody looking his way now and then with her basset hound eyes. I tried to talk to her, but Fairchild pulled me aside, grinning boyishly, and shared his whiskey flask with me. We were instantly the best of friends, weak-willed asshole that I am.

All of the people serving under him were from Stern's shift, not his, so apart from Mathis I'm the closest thing he has to a friend here. We reminisced on the staff basketball games, and the time we worked together to fix the fire sprinklers when they went off by accident and wouldn't shut off for an hour. That must've been the first time I ever saw you angry.

Like the others, he found a way to get back to his favorite topic. He laughed bitterly as he capped his flask and said, "I'd give anything for a nice, fat goat."

"Tired of the preserves already?"

He turned his half-smile to me and said with utter sincerity, "For sacrifice."

I blinked. He laughed as if I were the strange one.

"C'mon, man, you've at least *read* the bible, right? Animal sacrifice was a common thing back in the day. It's all over the Old Testament."

"Thought that was a pagan thing."

"Nah, man. The animal was a stand-in for the sinner: it would die in the sinner's place to cleanse him of his transgressions. Eventually mankind was so filthy with sin that it took Jesus Christ as the ultimate sacrifice to cleanse our souls, dying on *everyone's* behalf. Since then, we haven't had to sacrifice goats and lambs 'cos all our sins were covered." He could still see I wasn't buying it, and looked sheepishly at the floor. "I dunno. I dunno how else to make Him listen."

I asked why his flock was so scared, pointed out that the oppressiveness of his tiny army seemed to be the cause. "They'd be more scared without us," he said.

Later Brody tried to talk to Jerry, but was reprimanded by Fairchild. In his typical friendly-but-concerned manner, he asked her if she'd rather stand guard on the other side of the chapel door. She went sheet white and stammered, "No, Sir," in a quiet voice.

The space marines guard us even while we sleep in the bunkhouse. I tried to sleep, but every time I closed my eyes, Ellen's suffering continued -- it left me feeling restless, so I feigned sleep whenever Wallace lumbered past my bunk. If I have to sit through another goddamned sermon I'll feed *myself* to the monsters.

When he changed shift, I was relieved to see Brody patrolling in his place. The other grunts are friendly (for the most part), but distant -- they stay cordial with everyone outside of their clique, when they aren't thumping them around for skipping the hourly sermon. I'd like to have a friend among them, and I think Brody is the best bet. She's the only one I've been acquainted with, and the others seem too loyal -- or too afraid -- to defy orders.

I made sure my neighbors were sleeping soundly before gesturing her over to my bed. I quietly asked what she wanted to talk to Jerry about.

She stared at me as if trying to decide whether or not to beat me back to sleep. I asked if she had wanted to apologize; it softened her, and shame filled her eyes like shot glasses. She said she didn't mean to beat him so badly, but for a few minutes she had been nothing but rage. The demons he'd let into the chapel had sent her into shell-shock: during the initial invasion she had watched her fiancée Ben quartered like a Christmas duck. Watching it happen again just sent her over the edge.

She strained to hold back the tears as she talked.

"You know the slipgate is our only chance of going home," I said. "It's the key to this whole thing. I'm trying to find out what happened to it. If Fred and Dr. Jackson are alive, we can get it up and running again. You can help."

"How?" she said guardedly.

I asked her to talk to Fairchild and the other troops -- convince them to form a small recon team for a quick sweep of the facility. Even with four guns, we could hold off that horde I narrowly escaped from. The idea put Brody back on her guard, and she shook her head. "You do what you think you gotta do, but you do it on your own."

She's been ignoring me ever since. At least she's sparing me from the depressing sermons.

Dr. Jackson,

The Church of Fairchild is a concentration camp. I'm not sure who's worse: the demons, or us.

I was awoken by shotgun fire -- a single shot, as far as I could tell. Thinking the worst, I sprung out of bed and drew my sidearm, shaking the sleep from my brain as I ran out to the oratory, where the bark of the shotgun still reverberated off the phony brick wall panels.

Lola was sobbing just outside the bunkhouse, sitting on her knees beside the splayed body of Fast Eddie, his head a bloody smear on the floor, his limbs twitching. Fairchild stood over him with a smoking shotgun, addressing the dumbfounded congregation behind him. Wallace and the others were in position to drive them back, in case they decided to rush him -- the sheep-like terror in their eyes told me the idea was furthest from their minds.

"No more arguments," he said with unnatural calm. "It's my duty to protect you all. If you'd rather take your chances with those things out there, I will put a bullet in your head and save them the trouble. It'll be a helluva lot *quicker* than what *they'll* do to you."

Fairchild then turned his eyes to me, seemed surprised to find me standing there with my gun in both hands, pointed at the floor. His eyes fell to my weapon, then came back to me.

"Where you going with that piece, Hacker?" he said curiously.

I glanced around me at the other space marines and found them watching me intensely. Wallace seemed eager for me to try something. Brody was shaking her head urgently at me.

I put the piece back in its holster. "I thought there was trouble."

Fairchild sighed sadly. "There was. It's over now."

Dr. Jackson,

Normally Mathis would have to drag my ass to the pews for a prayer, but the troops were occupied elsewhere, and I hadn't been able to talk to anyone without a guard breathing down my neck. They watch us like we're cattle, and even when Lola or Dansen is eager to chat with me, their smiles are nervous and hopeless.

"Fairchild's flipped his lid," I said while we hung our heads in prayer.

"He's had to make a lot of tough decisions since we holed up here. These people are out of their minds with fear and need guidance. They need some kind of order to keep them from anarchy."

"Fairchild is no better. He's a scared little boy who has no idea what he's doing. He'll become more dangerous the longer he stays in charge."

"He means well," Mathis said with little confidence.

"So did Hitler."

Mathis shook his head. "His nerves were already badly strained when we first got here. Did a fine job rescuing as many as he could in spite of it. Hasn't been the same since Xander's excursion. I agree that we must look to God for answers, but we can't just sit here on our asses. That's just what everyone else is content to do, and I'm too old to do anything otherwise."

"Why did Fred and Jerry want to leave the chapel?"

"They wanted to do something with the command center modem. Fairchild wouldn't hear it -- insisted that only God and the Devil could hear us now -- so they tried to steal his passkey and some of the weapons. Fairchild considered it mutiny. He gave Fred and all of his friends the option of facing either a firing squad, or exile from the chapel with no supplies. He actually called it 'excommunication'. They took their chances outside. I don't know how or why Jerry came back, but they wouldn't listen to him. Beat him and tied him to that pole."

Mathis crossed himself. "He hates himself for doing it, and for letting Xander go. Says he should've shot them all and spared their suffering. Won't stop talking to me about the Old

Testament: vengeful God, animal sacrifices, plagues, sin and penance..."

"What's he gonna do to Jerry?"

"I don't know. Worry about what he'll do to *you*."

"So my only option is to stay here and die quietly with the rest of you?"

"I'm sorry."

I hissed under my breath. The slipgate is our ticket home. I have to find it, and I have to find you. If Jerry survived, and I survived, you must've survived, too.

That's the hope I'm clinging to, until I find you again. If nothing else, I owe it to you as my mentor to confirm whether you're alive or dead.

Dr. Jackson,

I guess it's true you should be careful what you wish for.

The chance was worth taking. I led Fairchild into the priest's quarters to separate him from the others, then, since only a few sectors that I knew of had been searched, proposed a small excursion with several goals: obtain the camera feeds from Security HQ to determine what became of the slipgate, and search for you and other survivors. He surprised me by not outright refusing, maybe because of our military kinship; instead he took me to the chapel entrance and showed me his evidence of the apocalypse. It's getting harder to argue with him.

With a swipe of the passkey, the door whined open...into a demonic mockery of an ancient German castle.

The ceiling was fifty feet high, and brass braziers with skullish faces stared back at us from the walls, their bowls crackling with greenish fire. Light from the chapel spilled into the room; shadows hung like thick drapes on every wall and in every corner -- a portal into another dimension, just like the containment area. Fairchild grinned at my reaction, especially when I spotted the signs of demonic decor around the threshold on the chapel's side: the phony brick wall panels were slowly corrupting into hideous green hell-brick.

I absorbed these details in only a few moments before spotting the beady yellow eyes staring from the shadows, glowing faintly like distant stars. Their owner sniffed the air like a dog, then emitted a low growl; out came a slobbering pink gorilla with bull horns and a face made almost entirely of teeth.

It charged two steps forward, then Fairchild perforated it with buckshot. He sealed the door again, looking pleased with himself.

"It gets a little closer every day," said Fairchild, gesturing to the demonic brick around the door frame on our side. "The corruption. You see what I mean? Without God's protection, this evil infects everything. It even infects people, like the ones you shot the other day. Anybody goes out that door, doesn't come back in."

I reminded him that I did fine on my own, and would only need a couple of guns for backup while I searched the remaining sectors. I emphasized that the slipgate is the key to this whole disaster, and that we need you or Fred to get it running again. I emphasized Mathis's point that it's useless to sit still and keep our fingers crossed. Lola vocally shared the sentiment, along with a few others who had been eavesdropping, though they shrank at Fairchild's glare.

The rest, like Cartwright and Dansen, were quiet. Mathis was giving me a pleading look, but didn't say anything.

Fairchild smiled. "You don't know what's out there, Hacker. There's worse things than the walking dead, the spawn of hell, the corruption that spreads like a cancer. Worse than the dream visions that torment us at night."

"Worse than all that, huh?"

"I've seen for myself. Hell, some of em you can't see at all 'til they're on top of you. Go out there and you won't be coming back."

"Jerry came back," I reminded him.

"And brought Legion with him. Discussion's over. Keep pressing the issue and you'll have to join poor Eddie."

Talking to him like one of his subjects wasn't going to get me anywhere, so I got palsy with him. Sure, Eddie wouldn't have lasted five minutes, but we were all army guys. I could take a couple of his shooters on a quick tour of the base, avoid the demon-infested areas, and be back in a couple of hours no worse for wear. Meanwhile he could stay in his castle and be our spiritual cheerleader.

Wallace stepped forward like he was going to bash my skull in, but a gesture from the chuckling Fairchild made him fall back.

"I like you, Hacker, you know that. But going against God's plan is a mistake. The best thing to do is repent and ask for His mercy."

"Well, until he shows up, you don't mind if I try to save our lives myself, do you?"

If I had been anyone else, I might've found out how true Fairchild was to his word -- feeding me a bullet rather than tossing me to the demonic hordes. The memories we'd discussed over rye seemed to soften him a little, and he smiled at me. "Tell you what, Hacker: you convince any of

my grunts to back you up, you got a deal."

I agreed, insisting I'd only need a couple. Fairchild turned to the survivors. "Okay. Any volunteers?"

The Security grunts stood like obedient statues -- apart from Brody, they didn't even make eye contact with me. The civilians tried to find something else to look at. Mathis crossed himself.

Fairchild looked back at me with a grin dripping smugness, and shrugged.

Brody suddenly spoke up. "Fuck it," she said, walking to the door. "I'll go. Let's do this, Hacker."

Fairchild stared at her for a moment, an unspoken order lingering on his tongue. She stared back, boldly waiting for him to reprimand her. He changed his mind, nodded his head. He handed me his shotgun and ammo belt, then presented his passkey, cocking it over the card reader. "Need anything else before you go?" he said.

I didn't say anything. The door whined open, and Brody and I plunged into the depths of Hell.

"I hope to God you know what the hell you're doing," Brody whispered.

I finally got to see the rest of the base -- the areas that aren't locked down, anyway. The entire facility is now a hodgepodge of UAC technology, ancient stonework, organic tissues, and other substances that I can't make heads or tails of. It's tearing down and rebuilding itself, but can't decide what it wants to be.

Only one area in Central Labs still has its original green tile walls and normal (though inoperable) computer stations; the rest of the sector (including the Anomaly) is a fortress of giant stone blocks, ash-black like the wall in my dream. Most of the computer panels have been replaced with green marble bas-reliefs of sneering, goat-like figures. I'm sure you've seen them by now -- they're all over the facility.

Half the circuitry has been replaced with ugly clusters of pus-colored metal tubes carrying boiling demon blood throughout the walls of the base. I don't even want to imagine what this new system fuels. Some of the floor panels have collapsed to reveal foul rivers of the stuff oozing through Central's maintenance tunnels. I can't stand the smell of it, but the only way to pass these moats is to leap over them with a running start.

Blackish-green vines snake up the walls of several areas. I reached out to touch one, but thought better of it when it twitched. I should save a sample for the Phobos botany lab so Ellen can play with it.

Brody and I have talked little since we set out. We're hiding out in an apartment in the residential sector, eating nutri-bars and deciding where to go next. The base is unnervingly quiet -- it's like the demon horde I encountered before was just a figment of my imagination.

The tremors are getting more frequent lately. I hope they're just murmurs in the disgusting new blood-pumping system.

Dr. Jackson,

Security HQ is a nest of bulldog demons. We didn't see them, but the air was thick with snorts and snarls -- probably a hundred of them napping in there. We're avoiding it for now, but will have to get in there somehow sooner or later to download the camera feeds. Can't connect remotely because the network is down and there's no internet signal.

We're going to check the other sectors for survivors, then come back later and try the maintenance tunnels. We should be able to reach the mainframe from there and jack in directly.

Dr. Jackson,

The command center is horrendous, and it gets worse the further in we go. The outermost blocks are concrete and titanium like they're supposed to be, though sprinkled with blood and bullet scratches and a few maimed Deimos Security men suspended from the ceiling like bloody chandeliers. Brody hadn't seen the strung-up bodies before; she was sick and shaken for awhile, but she recovered with admirable speed.

Once you get past the checkpoints and into the inner sanctum you're suddenly standing in a gothic castle of bile-green marble, with all the computer stations replaced by giant stone bas-reliefs like the ones I mentioned before, or satanic altars lined with freshly skinned human bones. These areas are absolutely cluttered with severed heads and twitching bodies skewered on bloody metal poles. They're propped up everywhere like trophies and arranged in odd symmetrical patterns. Brody and I recognized many of the victims -- we lost our will to continue for a while.

And my God, the heart of the sector is the worst. We stepped through a security door and into the stinking, spasming gullet of a giant worm — corridors of raw, living flesh that flinch to the touch! And the air is thick with a visceral stench like having my head forced inside the gutted carcass of a dead cow! I couldn't stand being in there for more than a few seconds, so the details I absorbed are scant. Here and there, patches of these fleshy walls have been peeled away in bloody strips to reveal those ugly pipe clusters underneath. All the computers and machines are gone; in their place I found fresh, gleaming hides stretched and nailed onto the walls with runic symbols carved into them.

I really hope that this motley mesh of environments is as distorted as Deimos Base is going to get; that we won't have to spend my remaining days exploring the guts of a gigantic, putrid organism.

The computer center is one of the least affected areas, thank God, but hacking the door is proving

a little tricky — I've been at it for the last twenty minutes. It appears to have been welded shut from the inside. Judging by the dents and scratch-marks on my side, it effectively kept the invaders out. It's also kept *us* out, so we have to find another way in.

"I think Jerry said he and Freddie holed up in this sector," said Brody.

I stared longingly at the keypad of the ruined door. "Fred might still be in there. Or at least whatever he and Jerry were working on. Either way, we oughta get inside. We'll be better off with them than with the Church of Fairchild."

Brody spat. "Trade one sanctimonious prick leader for another, huh?"

More tremors. And we've been jumpy ever since we heard a loud bang coming from the air vents. Feels like we're being watched.

I'm in a bit of a spot because I don't know who to write to now. Something I saw in the hall of flesh nagged at the back of my mind for an hour and a half and compelled me to go back, against Brody's protests. Now I wish I hadn't.

I remember the early slipgate test when the portal left you with those distinct burn scars on your arms and face which became the emblem of your resilient character. I suppose you never tried to hide them because they reminded everyone to take every possible precaution with the project from then on.

One of the many hides decorating the hall of flesh wears those same telltale scars. I want to believe it's just coincidence, and that Deimos Base's hard-headed master is alive and well somewhere, maybe cooking up a brilliant solution to this clusterfuck. It pains me to think that I might be the last human being to read these notes.

Brody's angry with me, and with herself for coming along. She hasn't said much since we left the chapel.

I'm glad she's here, but she's jumpier than I am. I'm not sure how she'll hold up if we see combat.

Ellen,

It's been a long, long day and I miss you a lot. What I wouldn't give to hold you in my arms for two minutes. Every day I spend in this hell introduces a new horror beyond my comprehension.

The short version is, Brody saved my life today.

Unable to access the computer station or the nuclear plant, we doubled back and tried the

maintenance tunnel under Security HQ. The tunnel was ten feet wide and branched in endless veins throughout the underbelly of the sector, the ceiling less than ten feet high and opened up to expose the sector's guts. Webs of pipes and cables dangled everywhere, some as far as the floor. Most of the floor lamps had been damaged in a firefight -- even those walls weren't spared the usual bullet-scarring and blood-spattering -- so their flickering threw twisted shadows across every surface, which danced eerily as the dangling sector innards swayed to and fro. We were two flies making our way through the lair of a robotic trapdoor spider.

We had just come through a narrow junction and taken four steps into a long stretch of tunnel when Brody grabbed my shoulder to stop me. She was squinting and her teeth were clenched -- I could see her jaw muscles twitching from the strain.

She was peering into the darkness ahead, but all I saw were cables and flickering shadows.

Her fingers were white, digging into my envirosuit's shoulder.

"What?" I said.

She didn't respond, but when I tried to move forward again, she yanked me to a halt, then slowly guided me to stand behind her, never once taking her eyes off the tunnel ahead of us.

I was about to ask what the hell was wrong when the thing shifted in place. I almost missed it: a patch of darkness hugging one side of the tunnel ten feet ahead of us. It looked like any of the myriad shadows bathing the corridor...except when it moved, so did the cables dangling above it, as if something the size of a man had brushed them aside.

It moved again, and Brody opened fire. The pellets shredded cables and pipes, and stopped dead in the air where the shadow had moved, spattering red on the wall panels. Something snarled in agony and fell, taking some of the "shadows" with it.

The muzzle flash had revealed its eyes to us only for a blink: a pair of amber spheres glaring at us like a wolf in the darkness of the forest. It was the brief glimpse of another three pairs moving rapidly toward us that convinced us to run.

Brody ordered me through the junction first as she fired wildly at the things. All at once the tunnels filled with snarls and slobbering and rapid, heavy footsteps. Brody put her faith in my memory of the tunnels to take us back to safety while she occasionally spun around to fire salvos of buckshot into our pursuers.

I made the mistake of risking a glance behind us. I never did it again.

I couldn't make out what they were, or how many: they were transparent and blended with the shadows like jellyfish in water. I knew they were big, and numerous, and filling the tunnel behind us like a subway train.

I started screaming, tearing cables out of their sockets when they got in my way, wishing I had a

machete to clear a path. We kept getting our arms and heads caught in the damn things, having to waste precious seconds untangling ourselves, sometimes smelling the things' rancid breath before we finally got free and continued running. A curious imp was blocking the tunnel entrance when we finally reached it; he stepped aside after I punched a twelve-gauge hole through his chest, but when more screeched behind him, I dragged Brody up a side-tunnel and took a detour up a maintenance ladder to the roof airlock. I didn't have the access code and had to hack it while Brody kicked the snapping faces of the invisible horrors boiling up the chute toward our legs.

I made it out first and grabbed Brody's wrists as the things began to drag her back under. She started sobbing, kicking frantically as she was dragged deeper and deeper down the chute's slobbering gullet, but I managed to secure a firm grip on her arms and finally hoisted her outside. We sent several wads of lead down the chute before we continued running.

The tremors started up again -- as if they were giving chase, too -- as we ran across the roof to Deimos Labs, making our way to the chapel garden. Imps swarmed up the side of the base to cut us off, so we dove into the first opening in the hull we came to, the low gravity softening our fall as we landed. As soon as we made it back to the chapel entrance I started kicking the door and shouting for Fairchild to let us in. I kept at it for a full minute -- the only thing that changed was the snarls, which had gotten closer. I could hear Fairchild's album of chanting blaring on the speakers inside, and, faintly in the background, another heartfelt sermon -- the bastard was drowning us out!

I broke out my toolkit and cracked open the card reader. I average about thirty seconds hacking a door when I'm not under duress. The constant barking of Brody's shotgun didn't help. Neither did the sudden screeching of an imp dropping on us from the ceiling.

It managed to scratch the back of my scalp pretty good before Brody smashed its head in with her shotgun stock. She kept hitting it after it fell, pounding its head into quivering jelly. "Get the fuckin' door open!" she screamed.

With a few more tweaks the light turned from red to yellow. I couldn't get it to open faster than my rusty-ass garage door back on earth. When it had raised about three feet off the floor I yelled for Brody to duck and roll. The chorus of snarls was right behind us -- I didn't look to see how many there were.

We were greeted with Fairchild's entire security force, armed and ready to shoot, training their barrels on us as we rolled into the chapel. I didn't wait for Fairchild: I immediately leapt to my feet and hit the "close" switch on our side.

Wallace was grabbing me as I did so. "You're *ghostin'* us, you stupid motherfucker! Bringin' em right *to* us!"

He might've bashed my face in if Mathis hadn't shoved his way between us, forcing Wallace back and begging him to calm down. Brody had to restrain the thug to keep him from pasting the old priest's head against the door.

Something grabbed Mathis's ankles and pulled him to the floor -- something almost completely camouflaged by the darkness. It dragged him screaming and flailing through the narrow opening, out into the ocean of snarls. The door sealed with a magnetic thud.

I panicked and leapt for the card reader, but Fairchild put himself between me and it, leveling his sidearm at my face. "Hacker, don't. I'll drop you right here."

I stood there huffing furiously, sobbing, not sure what I was going to do. We all stood silently listening to the sounds outside -- of the beasts clawing at the door, of Mathis screaming in pitiful agony. Eventually Brody stepped between us and pulled me away, led me over to the pews, where I burst into tears.

Fairchild had us taken to the priest's quarters. After giving a short sermon to calm his followers, he came to apologize for getting rough with me.

I glared at him and said, "Not sorry for locking us out, huh?"

"I told you that door is a floodgate to the damned. You saw first-hand what I'm protecting these people from."

"Two seconds to let us in. Two to seal the door again. You had plenty of time, unless you were just hoping we'd die and prove you right. Keep your fuckin' flock in line."

He made with this ashamed little boy routine, looking at his feet, as he said, "You gotta understand, these peoples' lives are in my hands. If I--"

Brody spat on him.

At that point he didn't bother with explanations, and confined us to the priest's quarters. He leaves a guard on us at all times. I'm not sure what he's going to do with us.

I try to sleep, but that damn voice keeps laughing. I keep seeing your anguished face.

Ellen,

Brody shook me awake, said something was going down in the oratory. There was quiet panic in her voice. When the grogginess cleared from my head, I heard voices shouting. Then we were running out of the room.

Wallace blocked the doorway and corralled us back inside. "Where you think you goin'?"

"Wallace, let us through," growled Brody.

I didn't waste my breath: I made my hand into a blade and thrust it up into Wallace's throat.

While he staggered there, choking, I brought his face down into my knee with a wooden crack. Took his sidearm and tucked it in the back of my toolbelt, leaving him unconscious or dead on the floor. Didn't bother to check which.

Everyone was standing at the pews, with the armed security grunts positioned all around them. They'd moved Jerry from his pole: Benson and a large engineer were each holding an arm, pinning him on his knees before the heavy wooden altar, keeping his head bowed down. Their faces told me they were reluctant to help, but saw no other recourse, or were maybe too scared to disobey. Jerry was naked, and recently bathed -- he was so clean he sparkled in the lamplight.

Fairchild was giving a sermon, marching up and down the aisle between the pews, shotgun in hand. He was quoting John 1:29 when he noticed me approaching. He smiled.

"I know you hate the sermons, Hacker, so I figured you'd rather sleep."

I shrugged as if I were only mildly curious, hands behind my back where they could easily grab and draw the pistol in my belt. "What's going on, 'Child?"

"He's fuckin' crazy is what's goin' on!" sputtered Jerry. "They're all fuckin' crazy!"

"Go back to bed, Hacker," said Fairchild.

He was holding his shotgun passively, not aiming at anything. We were just two buddies having a chat.

"Why's Jerry on the altar, 'Child?" I said, taking a few steps closer. The grunts couldn't see the gun yet.

"He's gonna sacrifice me!" blubbered Jerry. "*Do something!*"

I wasn't sure I'd heard him correctly, and it took me a minute to decide whether I believed it or not. Fairchild just smiled sheepishly.

"Is he serious?" I finally said.

Jerry sputtered, "Fred can reboot the system and contact earth! Just take me back to the comp center!"

"We're past technology now, Jerry," said Fairchild. "It had its chance, and it failed. The way we see it, this whole disaster is the result of mankind sinking deep into spiritual debt again. A return to the old ways is in order. We talked about this, remember?"

"Jerry's not a goat, 'Child," I said.

"Desperate times call for desperate measures. God isn't listening to our prayers because they're not enough." He pointed back at Jerry with the shotgun. "He'll hear *this*. As it says in Hebrews

9:22, 'Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness'."

As if punctuating this, the tremors returned. Congregation members began to murmur.

"And if you murder Jerry, and the monsters *don't* go away? Then what?"

Fairchild smiled and pointed at me and Brody with his weapon. "Then we'll do it in *pairs*."

"Two at a time 'til everyone is dead, huh? Or maybe all these frightened and confused people get it in their heads to sacrifice the crazy asshole who's imprisoned 'em here."

Fairchild laughed. He drew his combat knife and turned back toward the struggling Jerry.

When I was inside twenty-five yards I drew the pistol and aimed at his spine. "Take another step and you're dead, 'Child. This's gone far enough."

He glanced back at me, one eyebrow cocked. He glanced around him at the other six space marines. "You gonna take us all, Cowboy?"

"Just you," I said, struggling to keep my aim steady as the tremors worsened. "Doubt you'll much care what happens after that."

As the chapel quaked, everyone just stood staring at everyone else for a full minute, nobody knowing what to do. Jerry resumed begging Fairchild to let him go and help Fred. The guys on the altar assured me it had to be done. I said it didn't. Some of the congregation agreed, but only with their frantic eyes. Most of them remained silent, and I wasn't sure which way they leaned, except it must've been toward Fairchild's crazy sacrifice idea because they didn't try to mob him. The space marines all had their guns trained on me, ready to blast me to ribbons.

Fairchild seemed about to tempt fate and bring his knife closer to the altar, and my finger was tightening on the trigger, when the tremors suddenly stopped.

The chapel shook again, more violently than ever, in the wake of a tyrannosaurus roar blaring from outside.

Then everything went white for a minute as the wall behind the crucifix exploded. Benson and the engineer were pulped by shrapnel where they stood; Jerry, protected by the altar, tumbled headfirst into the aisle and immediately began scurrying away on all fours while the congregation flew into a total panic. All of the space marines were turning toward the massive, smoking hole.

The chapel filled with gunfire and screaming as a platoon of former humans came pouring through the hole. The space marines fought poorly and were cut down one by one. The civilians scattered in every direction, squealing in terror; hell's soldiers gleefully shot them in their backs, some pouncing on their fallen quarry and biting into their flesh before they were dead. I saw Lola on her knees, screaming in mindless terror until a stray shotgun blast perforated her chest and

knocked her limp like a ragdoll.

Fairchild didn't seem to know the invasion force was there: he was firing wildly into the congregation, blasting baseball-sized holes through the pews, trying to hit Jerry as he scrambled on all fours toward me and Brody. Fairchild's face was a gargoyle of holy retribution.

I squeezed off two shots and hit him in the shooting arm. It threw off his next shot, which missed Jerry by a hair and hit Kerrigan instead, tearing off his leg at the shin. Fairchild roared in fury, but wouldn't take his eyes off of naked, helpless Jerry. He casually switched hands, took aim again, and was minced from behind by a hurricane of shotgun fire. He was already in pieces when the former humans started feasting on him. Then Brody was pulling me toward the observation booth stairs, Jerry leading the way.

I gave her the sidearm so my hands would be free to hack the garden door. We were on the moon's surface in seconds, high-tailing it for the computer center, leaving the chorus of screams behind us.

"Oh, Christ," said Brody, stopping after only a few dozen yards. "What the fuck is *that*?"

She was staring out across the landscape at the bloody mist on the horizon. The sight was enough to stop me, too.

The floating torch was back, fluttering back and forth in the mist, and it brought its extended family. We only stared for a few seconds, watching as the will o' wisps multiplied like the stars coming out at night. We lost count at fifty before Jerry realized we weren't following, ran back to us, grabbed Brody's arm and yanked her forward.

"Don't look at them!" he screamed. "Don't stop! Move!"

They took off without me. A frantic breath later I tore ass after them, realizing that the will o' wisps were actually moving toward us like an oncoming storm.

We ran for several minutes, stopping only to trip over rocks or stumble into shallow craters. My lungs were on fire, begging me to stop. As we got closer to the airlock on the north side of the computer station, the distant gunshots were replaced with a strange animal-like singing: it couldn't decide if it wanted to be bird or whale, but came in a gleeful, hyena-like rhythm. The closer the dancing torches came to the base, the louder the song became.

In our panic, nobody could remember the code to the airlock door, so I went to work on the keypad. I got the outer door open in just under a minute; we were too hasty getting inside and dogpiled onto the floor. I wasted several precious seconds collecting my tools -- with every breath that unearthly melody grew louder and louder, tittering like a herd of malicious whales.

Tools in hand, I threw myself onto the inner panel and ripped it open, shutting out Jerry's and Brody's frantic screaming that I hurry the fuck up. Thirty seconds of work and the door was whining back into the closed position, far too slowly for my liking. The hideous sounds were

deafening by then, and despite fighting the urge with all my strength, I took a look outside. It doesn't pay to look at anything on this god-forsaken moon.

I locked eyes with the nearest will o' wisp, big as a basketball, less than ten feet away and diving straight for me. I got an eyeful of its horrible grinning face, eyes blazing with evil green fire. The door sealed before it reached me.

A good stretch of my memory is blank from that point. Brody says I'd spent the next ten minutes catatonic with terror, until Jerry finally brought me around.

The moon's awful presence seemed impressed by our escape. It rewarded us with visions of what happened to the survivors. None of us can sleep tonight.

Ellen,

I'm doing well, all things considered, and I hope you aren't too worried about me. Right now I'm resting in the Deimos computer mainframe cell with three other survivors: Fred Harrison, Jerry McCabe, and Brody, whose first name is Lisa, it turns out. Fred's been holed up in here ever since Fairchild "excommunicated" him and Jerry, trying to get the database and comm. systems back online. When they needed something from outside they would crawl in and out through the maintenance tunnels in the ceiling. I do the crawling these days. More on that later.

For the past several days we've worked, eaten, and slept together like a family, and our hellspawn encounters have been minimal. Jerry got a new envirosuit so we don't have to look at his naked ass anymore. He doesn't talk a whole lot -- not since his initial blabberfest about how grateful he was that we saved him. During our breaks he just sits in the corner and silently fiddles with his tools. I think he knew something bad was going on before anyone else did — something made him crack on the day of that first power surge, maybe a vision like the ones I'm still suffering from now and then. He'd been fixing the command center radio when the invasion started and got to watch the whole thing on the security monitors.

Fred, the reluctant leader, is the chattiest, and by that I mean he's the only one whose trauma hasn't reduced him to a mute quite yet. I expected Brody to be the one in charge of the group, but she's content to follow orders like a good soldier. Her report of Fairchild's death had a catatonic effect on Fred. The two have slowly warmed up to each other -- they don't bicker as much as they did before the invasion.

Fred tells me there were originally eight people in the group, but their numbers dwindled pretty quickly thanks to this realm's main inhabitants, which he calls "death heads": the skull-faced wisps that had chased us into the airlock. He says they swim aimlessly through the air like lost souls searching for a new body, possessing human beings and using their bodies to do all manner of despicable things.

"The death heads got three of us," Fred told me. "Eric and Tina were possessed on the first day

and killed Garrett. Then Tim was possessed one morning, and he probably would've killed the rest of us in our sleep if his seizing hadn't woke Mark up.

"They aren't like ghosts exactly. I saw Mark kill one in the hangar when we went to check the radio a week ago. It drifted about like it was on the hunt for us, flicking its fiery tail this way and that and making with all sorts of horrible moaning.

"It jerked to the right all of a sudden when we tried to sneak past, started right for us. Mark raised his gun and shot it between the eyes and it burst in a cloud of fire and smoke. Left us choking and gagging for a while, but it was gone. He killed another three before we got back. They used to be everywhere. When they cleared out, Jerry tried to meet up with the others at the chapel to get more help, but you know how that went. Fairchild basically ran a prison bible camp, wouldn't let anybody leave, unless they made him mad enough to throw them to the beasts."

He'd sent his remaining errand boy, Mark, to the containment area several days ago to pick up a prototype weapon the S.O.'s stored there -- presumably the same weapon Fairchild sent Xander to retrieve -- and that's the last he saw of him. I asked what he looked like and got a dead-on description of the poor guy whose shotgun I borrowed way back in the containment area. Now I get to run and fetch whatever supplies we need in his stead. That's how I've been spending the majority of my time, while Brody acts as security at home.

The weapon in question is the EMA-300 Dense Plasma Focus Cannon, from now on referred to as the "plasma gun" because fuck the UAC eggheads and their mile-long names for everything. I heard about the plasma gun when the UAC first shipped it up here for testing: essentially a plasma torch with a range of fifty meters, designed to fire in short, rapid bursts so it won't melt in the user's hands. Anyway that's how Fred described it; what I found looks like a new-wave vacuum cleaner. It couldn't have taken the UAC engineers ten minutes to build, yet it's supposedly the most powerful infantry weapon in two worlds next to the BFG-9000. I'll believe that when I see it. I'm stuck carrying it anyway.

The group has been doing hardcore maintenance on Deimos Base's mainframe ever since they sealed themselves in here. The whole computer system is on the fritz and we can't access much of anything except error messages and blue screens of death; it won't even reboot when we tell it. Fred's desperate to fix the problem because he believes it might get the modem working again, and then we can contact Mars Base.

I'm less optimistic. Just how the hell can we connect with a UAC satellite from another dimension? We don't know if we're even in our own galaxy anymore. It could take weeks for any email we send to reach Mars Base! I'm still of the mind the slipgate is our only ticket home. Fred and I have worked intimately with that machine: our time would be better spent finding it and getting it back online, and then we go to Phobos Base and tell the people what's happened here.

I didn't say anything, though. At the moment everyone's hanging by a thread and the last thing I want is to start an argument. We need the networks one way or the other: even if the modem is a long shot, the security videos might at least tell me what happened to the slipgate, and this way

I'll be able to safely access them from anywhere on Deimos.

The voice mocks us in a foreign language. I'm beginning to think the others can't hear it. I'm not going to ask, either.

Ellen,

Today it has become clearer than ever to me: we are fucked. Trapped in a goddamn nightmare. There are only three of us now, and our nerves are in utter shambles.

The others refused to believe me when I told them what happened. Brody couldn't handle it. She went absolutely batshit. She threw things around the room and screamed and cursed at the UAC and at whatever awful place we've been sucked into. She cursed at me and called me a sniveling goddamn coward, and I battered her pretty good for it. She gave as good as she got, and Jerry had to split us up. I guess we both needed an outlet. She won't make eye contact with me anymore. And Jerry has become unreachable: he's locked himself in an invisible box and stares at his hands all day.

There was nothing wrong at all with Fred's plan. It made perfect sense: shut down the nuclear reactor, then kick-start the backup generator. The mainframe gets a hard reboot and clears the database's cobwebs, hopefully curing whatever the hell is wrong with it. No guarantee it'd work, and it might just as soon roast the mainframe as fix it. But it was worth a shot, and we had nothing better to do.

It was about this time that I told them about the slipgate's abduction from the Anomaly — missing but intact, so far as anyone knows — which got startled looks from everybody. Mark had reported the machine destroyed, maybe after a hasty search of the Anomaly (and I can't blame him, knowing what horrors had spilled out of there); now that I'd cleared up that misunderstanding I didn't even have to suggest a search.

"If this works," Fred said to me, "you and I will figure out what's become of the slipgate. Brody and Jerry can handle the modem without us."

Jerry was set on staying put to watch the system's reaction. Brody has been worried about his mental health for the last two days and didn't want to leave him alone (she's talking sweetly to him now as I write, trying to get him to eat something -- he's long since forgiven her for assisting with his beatdown in the chapel).

I took up the plasma gun and went with Fred as backup. We squeezed out the maintenance tunnels and walked for fifteen minutes to the east side of the refinery, where we came to the ruined doorway looking out across that field of debris to the nuclear plant entrance. Not a trace of death heads for miles in any direction.

Fred assured me he would be okay once he made it to the plant, and urged me to get back to the

others in case they needed me. I told him I would stay until I saw him reach the other side. The ground quaked a bit, but Fred ignored it and shook my hand with a nervous smile; then he was jogging across the scrap field to that lonely concrete building in the distance.

I should've grabbed him. I should've held him back as soon as the tremors started up.

The time it takes to walk to that door is probably one minute. I kept my finger on the trigger, praying that I wouldn't have to find out the hard way if the plasma gun worked or not. I should've tested it by now, but plasma is ultra bright and I was afraid of attracting death heads.

He was about thirty seconds out when he stopped abruptly, his head turned to the right. I thought of an elk in the woods, how its head flicks up at the sound of a snapping twig. The tremors became stronger — not enough to throw either of us off balance, but we definitely noticed.

He kept perfectly still for almost another minute with his eyes fixed somewhere to his right, and I wanted to step out there with him and do the same but all my muscles had seized up and wouldn't cooperate.

The quakes kept coming, too much like those dinosaurs from my childhood. Tremble, stillness. Tremble, stillness. I was just about to call Fred back when he started moving again, and at first I figured he'd read my mind.

He wasn't moving toward me or toward the plant. He wasn't jogging, either. He pivoted ninety degrees and broke into a dead run in the opposite direction from where he'd been looking so intently.

I shouted to him; he didn't stop or even look in my direction.

In the next instant, the ground exploded around his feet. The sound barrier crackled and rang my ears like church bells. My sense of balance failed me and I fell against the wall, never taking my eyes off the spot where Fred had seemed to vanish in a violent cloud of moon dust. I was moments away from leaping out of the doorway and running to his side when the source of the tremors and my friend's terror finally stepped into view, bringing all the horrid imagery of my nightmares with it.

Thousands of pounds of flesh, bone, and steel sculpted into a twenty-foot monument to horror. Not a patch of skin on its entire body save what little was stretched and grafted over the head; everywhere else, just powerful tendons gripping titanium bone, here and there reinforced with sleek metal plates.

The snarling lips seemed human, but those steel teeth were more canine than anything, and the overall skull structure was bull or bison. Two great black horns arched out from the sides of its head and jutted forward, blocking my view of the eyes.

A hulking torso carried the head like the prow on a warship, the exposed abdomen bulging with clusters of synthetic tubes and cables carrying god knows what throughout its system. Two

muscular and very human-like arms were mounted on the shoulders, the right arm baring a set of steel talons that could have easily carried off a full-grown cow.

The left arm's weapon was even worse: a heavy artillery piece surgically attached to the elbow in place of the wrist and hand. It resembled the revolver-chambered rocket launchers I'd seen rigged on the backs of army jeeps during the war. Clinging to the cannon's belly was a six-barreled minigun puking a long, thick trail of smoke.

It walked on tyrannosaurus legs made entirely of metal from the knees down, ending in steel hooves the size of truck tires that shook the moon with every stride they took towards where Fred lay.

He was still moving. His legs were shot up, but he was alive and trying desperately to drag himself out of the cyber-demon's path. It moved so swiftly for its size and mass I don't think he could ever have hoped to outrun it. It was on top of him in seconds, rearing back its head with a furious howl, then crushing him beneath its hoof. It ground him into the moon's surface until there was nothing left.

The "presence" spoke inside my head. The monster, somehow hearing it, looked up suddenly and I saw the eyes for the first time: bright yellow balls of fire and hate burning on either side of its gaping snout. I turned and ran.

Two seconds later the air behind me hissed, and a shockwave threw me forward ten feet and battered my head on the floor. Hot metal fragments and chips of glass rained down on me and burned my hands and face.

The second explosion came from outside the hull to my left and pushed the wall inward a foot and a half. A tiny metal sliver shot past my head and sliced my left cheek just below the eye. The whole block started shaking like a fishing boat in a hurricane, and when I realized it was from the cyber-demon's approaching footsteps, I leapt to my feet and ran all the way to the other end of the facility, where I finally collapsed and threw up.

I was afraid to move anywhere for over an hour. With all these damned holes in the hull that monstrosity has easy access to more than half the base. It's a miracle it didn't catch me days ago while I was exploring the facility in blissful ignorance. All it had to do was reach in and snatch me up.

I feel it tromping around outside. It'll be on the hunt for some time, and it's probably none-too-pleased that I gave it the slip. Oh God, Ellen, what do we do now? Isn't it enough that I've been isolated from you and the rest of my species?

Ellen,

That abomination outside never sleeps! Its footsteps have shaken Deimos nonstop for fourteen

hours!

We're all very tired and our morale is low. What's worse, I swear I heard sounds in the facility's air ducts just like the day that thing came out of the gateway. I think something is moving around in the base. I'm too scared to investigate, but we're running out of provisions, so I'll have to find out sooner or later.

Brody propositioned me not long ago. She's an emotional wreck, missing her fiancée and scared out of her wits. I know how she feels -- and after seeing her in action during our spectre chase, it's hard not to find her desirable -- but I couldn't accommodate her because every time she touched me those jarring visions burst into my head. I saw you crying in my arms, scratched and bleeding from head to toe, your wrists bound tight with barbed cables that cut straight to the bone. It made me want to scream and I shoved Brody away. She didn't understand and returned to her cot, crying silently.

As if I don't have enough keeping me awake, the presence is still speaking to me. It talks in nightmarish babbling — like Mark did when he died — but the thoughts it transmits into my head make sense enough that I understand what it's trying to tell me. And I don't like it.

The source of the presence isn't in the base — it's somewhere distant, observing us. Maybe it's the realm, itself. It tells me that the monstrosity patrolling outside the base is “the origin” or “the first” or something like that. I think it means a prototype. After everything useful in Deimos Base was taken away, the cyber-demon was sent to hunt and kill all remaining survivors as a sort of demo.

Its unnatural birth has left it in a constant state of pain and aggression, so its only desire is to relieve the discomfort of its existence by maiming anything and everything it comes across. It's a living weapon in every sense of the term: it doesn't eat, it doesn't sleep, it doesn't die. It'll be out there, waiting, until the end of time. Until our last inch of hope is worn away and we step outside and beg it for the sweet release of death.

The presence laughs as I write this. I have no clever retort for it. I'm too tired. I want to say I wish you were here, but I'm grateful to have you as far across the cosmos from this horrible place as possible.

Ellen,

It's quiet outside, at long last. For the first time since the beginning of this mess I had a pleasant dream about you. I dreamt it was early morning in the Santa Monica hotel where we spent that special Fourth of July weekend together the first year we were married. The balcony door was open so the breeze fondled the curtains and the sound and scent of the beach drifted in and crawled between the sheets with us. You were still in bed, watching me while I slept. When I opened my eyes you gave me your silky smile and asked me if I wanted coffee. Before I could answer I found myself wide awake on an army cot, alone.

It was far from significant in itself: one of those little moments married couples take for granted. But it's occurred to me that you and I haven't slept together in almost a year. When was the last time? I know it was during leave — seems like the only time the company gives us anymore — but I can't remember how long ago.

Ellen,

Progress on the modem has been good, and it's lifted our spirits considerably. The others are looking better today. Jerry's found his voice again. Brody apologized for the fight and I told her it wasn't her fault. They're both sleeping now as I write this. I want a drink so badly it's driving me out of my mind.

While stockpiling food and water I found a bag of nice Colombian coffee for our percolator in the containment area. We sat around the mainframe cell talking for hours about our families over hot, steaming cups and it helped calm our spirits significantly. That is, Jerry mostly listened while Brody and I chatted, though he did mention a little brother he used to go fishing with in Missouri.

Brody's fiancée, Ben, took her moon-walking every weekend. They'd hike across Deimos, find a comfortable crater to lie back in and watch the stars for a few hours. She says they first met on the beaches of Mexico when some of her friends dragged her out of her cave (her garage) to go surfing. She and Ben hated each other in the beginning, but their friends loved hearing them argue so much that they took every opportunity to get them in the same room together.

It's a near-perfect parallel to how we met, isn't it? I told her about how you used to get so angry talking to me your face actually flushed red, then your tongue tied up and you'd try to complete your sentences with those ridiculous hand-gestures, and finally you stopped admitting I was there altogether. I told her all about our nature walks, our skiing trips in Telluride, and all those hilarious and embarrassing anecdotes that you never want me to tell people about. You should've seen Jerry when he heard the "wet underwear" story: we thought he was going to shit himself.

Some things I kept under the rug, so you don't need to worry. I didn't tell them about the first time you saw me cutting myself. I didn't tell them how I had to convince you that it wasn't because of anything you said or did. I didn't say anything about my alcoholism, about the drunken arguments, about rehab, about all the crying. I did tell them you were a saint who always stood up for me, and that I never deserved you.

They said we sounded like a wonderful pair, so when I told them how long it's been since I last saw you, they were naturally shocked. I should've been shocked when I said it. Brody remarked that fourteen months is a long time for a happy husband and wife to be apart, and she's right. You used to be more to me than a bag of intangible memories.

The worst part is knowing you can't read what I'm writing here, no matter how much I pretend

otherwise, and that you can't respond to me. I've been wondering what your replies would be; if you would be more honest with me while we're not face-to-face.

Ellen,

We restored our optimism today with a new plan that has been in development since last night.

The nuclear plant and the refinery are connected by underground waste repository tunnels, which Dennis used to call the "snot pipes". Employees enter via an air-tight pair of access doors with a decontamination room sandwiched between them (both sectors have north and south access points). Beyond that is a knee-deep river of hot, shimmering green sludge that forms a disgusting rust-colored foam where it touches the walls and could probably dissolve flesh in a matter of seconds. With three envirosuits and my knack with electronic doors, we can use the tunnels to reach the nuclear plant safely.

Of course, we have to make it to the refinery without rousing the cyber-demon's interest. I set out alone to mark every hull breach on our automap so we can plot the safest route later. It only took me a few hours, but my nerve has never been so thoroughly tested. The walls trembled from the beast's patrols and a number of times I had to scramble out of sight as it trudged past, sometimes dodging it by a matter of seconds.

I think remnants of the horde that ravaged this place have returned to Deimos, probably lured back by the scent of fresh meat. Back are the sounds of skittering and snorting and heavy breathing that tortured us all for two days at the beginning of this whole mess; they frequently put me on full alert and forced me to stop working, though the base always appeared as deserted as ever.

We set course for the waste tunnels today. The path has been laid out, but in light of the base's demonic soundtrack our arsenal feels inadequate: three pistols, maybe a hundred rounds, and the plasma gun which I still haven't tested. All other weapons and ammunition are missing from Security HQ, as I feared.

Wish us luck. Hope to get in contact with you soon.

Ellen,

I decided to write to you because otherwise I would just sit here thinking about how I may never see you again. A lot has happened since my last entry, none of it good. I've had too many close calls. Rest assured that I'm still in one piece and will be as good as new once I recuperate. Me and Pain are old friends, remember.

We made it as far as the refinery without incident. Our confidence was at a record high, in part

due to the silence and the stillness: nothing had disturbed Deimos or us for many hours and we, the fools we were, took it as a good sign.

Things got rough right after we'd passed the refinery security desk. A colony of imps flooded through the open ceiling like cockroaches and stampeded right for us, screeching and howling and flailing their arms in simian fury. We sprinted through the room, trying to keep on our designated path, with Brody leading and me taking up the rear.

Once I was in the doorway I turned one-eighty degrees and squeezed off what I thought was going to be a three-round burst, forgetting I wasn't carrying a conventional weapon until the room suddenly lit up like daylight. The plasma gun's screech drowned out the horde as a white hot beam of plasma cut through their ranks like a blowtorch through butter, blasting thirteen demons into charred smears of protoplasm.

When I cut loose with three more bursts they'd already scattered in terror, the survivors fleeing into the air ducts or back through the ceiling. I took advantage of the lull in their attack and sealed the door behind us. It wasn't the last we saw of the things. They tracked us and intercepted us all the way to the waste tunnel entrance before they finally gave up and left us alone. The skirmish exhausted one of our only two plasma gun batteries — turns out the damn thing is more ammo-hungry than a flamethrower.

But the sight of melting, screaming demons was worth it.

We secured our envirosuit helmets and embarked on the long, stomach-churning walk through the snot pipes. I'd procured us radio headsets from Security HQ, but we didn't have anything to say to each other. We were too scared to make any sound at all: the ceiling trembled over our heads as the cyber-demon resumed its patrol.

"Does it know we're down here?" Brody said. "It can't possibly know, can it?"

It wasn't my first visit to the waste tunnels, and Jerry seemed equally familiar with the dingy atmosphere. Deimos technicians are basically temp agents who get loaned out to whatever department needs them at any given time; I was dragged down there on three separate occasions to rewire something. But you never get used to the place. Being in the snot pipes for any length of time wears on your nerves even when the lights are actually working. Because of the surges Jerry, Brody, and I had to rely on our head-lamps to light the way, and their beams only had a twelve-foot reach in one direction. Blackness swallowed everything else. We could've been walking in the sewers of a long forgotten city in the middle of the night.

The reactor core's waste purging process slowed us down because every five minutes the snot river would rise to waist-level and the current would try to sweep us away unless we planted our feet and braced ourselves. After a varied amount of time — once as long as ten minutes — the current would relax and the river would shrink back down to our shins. Jerry noted aloud that the core was definitely on the fritz if it produced so much excess waste on such a regular basis: normally the tunnels only see a purge a few times a day. No wonder the base is leaking this shit everywhere.

Our path was a straight line all the way to South Access: we came to a three-way junction every block, but the third path always led either to North Access, which was farther from the reactor than South according to the map, or right back to the refinery. But when we finally got to our destination, battered and exhausted from fighting sludge waves, we hit another obstacle.

That door may as well be a wall, because it'll never move again. It's four inches of steel, titanium, and fiberglass, yet something had smashed it inward from our side, and chipped and singed it for good measure.

"The only way to open it now," Jerry said, "is with an acetylene torch." Brody sighed and kicked the door in agreement. We doubled back and took the first right that led to North Access, just in time for another three-minute rush of slime.

Brody noticed something weird shortly after it subsided: a circular alcove in the ceiling, six feet deep and six in diameter. Tunnel shaft, insulation, concrete reinforcement, adjacent circuitry — all had just been melted away to form a useless hole right over our heads. It didn't tunnel up to the surface where demons could get us, so I didn't give it much thought and insisted that we keep moving.

We waded and stopped, waded and stopped for another half hour and came across more alcoves just like the first: eleven was the last count I remember, and every one exactly in the center of the ceiling. Jerry was just fascinated by them to the point where he kept falling behind and had to run to catch up with me and Brody before the next purge.

Something bumped the door just now. I think it's gone.

Jerry stopped us with an urgent call, ignoring us when we urged him to hurry the hell up. "There's something in this one!" he said.

Ignoring the painful creaking in my knee-joints I sloshed back to where Jerry stood staring up at one of the alcoves. Something was nested in it all right, but even with both our head-lamps shining on it we couldn't tell exactly what: a bulb of bruise-colored cauliflower so large that there was only an inch of space between it and the alcove walls on all sides. Brody, sounding tired and frightened, ordered us to get a move on, and the memory of the crushed access door was enough to break whatever interest I had in the thing. The current began to pick up again; I told Jerry we should get going.

It all happened so quickly my mind couldn't absorb it, like water against a rock.

The bulky sphere rotated in place, split into the disembodied jaws of a great white shark, and dropped down right on top of Jerry, clamping over his head and shoulders. His ribcage crackled and popped, bleeding as an orange does when crushed in a man's fist; the thing dragged him soundlessly into the alcove and hovered there, chewing and snorting, staring directly at me with a single green road-flare eye. It seemed to smile horribly at me as Jerry's twitching legs slowly disappeared into its gullet.

Brody heard the terror on my breath and asked what was wrong. I answered with a hysterical wail and gave the alcove a baptism of hot plasma.

The floodgates rumbled and the ensuing sludge rush would have knocked me over if Brody hadn't grabbed and steadied me. We watched the current drag Jerry's half-digested remains into the darkness. The moment the river began to subside again I turned and shoved Brody in the direction of the next junction, and we ran until we thought our legs would break.

Brody was so exhausted when we reached the junction she collapsed in the middle of the intersection. The purge came unexpectedly: she couldn't get back on her feet in time and the current hit her smack in the face and carried her down the refinery-bound shaft to the left. Only clinging to the left corner of the junction saved me from tumbling after her. Her flailing limbs vanished into the darkness and she became only a panicked voice on my headset.

"No! No! Oh God — !"

The current quickly died and then all was silent. In the blackness where she'd disappeared I saw green lights moving in a frenzied dance, one which suddenly rose up to the ceiling and vanished. The others grew steadily larger as they drifted slowly in my direction. My head-lamp's beam reflected off a crooked zipper-line of teeth below the nearest eye. Floating cyclopean sneers were coming to eat me.

God have mercy, Ellen, if only you could have seen them, lurching forward like fleshy asteroids. I opened fire and burst the nearest one in a putrid mess, but my shots lit the tunnel for four blocks and revealed a hundred more right behind it, each one with its horrible eye fixed on me!

My survival instincts took full control and I turned about face and ran so hard even the crashing waves of slime couldn't push me back. I didn't give a single thought to whether I would find the North Access door in the same useless condition as South.

It was unscathed, thankfully, but the security keypad was inoperable because of the goddamn system malfunction. I looked up and down the tunnel and found no trace of the sneering demons' eyes.

While the next snot-wave approached I broke out my screwdriver and removed the keypad's panel to operate the door manually, but so many things hindered what should've been swift and easy work. The slimy current battered me against the doorframe and tried to knock my tools out of my hands. My throat burned so badly I couldn't stop coughing. Tears blinded me and I couldn't remove my helmet to wipe them away.

Most of all, terror and exhaustion threatened me with unconsciousness. I sniveled and sobbed and struggled with the urge to vomit. I couldn't keep my eyes on my work half the time from throwing anxious looks over my shoulder every two seconds. If only those things weren't so quiet! They didn't make any sound at all! At any moment one of them could have been hovering right above my head with its jaws wide open!

The door finally responded; I leapt into the decontamination chamber, pounced on the control panel and dissected it in seconds. Wires crossed; the door sealed shut; the cleaning spouts smothered me with neutralizing foam and a dry-rinse solution. My limbs turned to rubber and have remained that way ever since. I retracted my helmet and promptly fainted.

The bump again. There's no way they can smell me through that door. There's no way.

Can't go on. Need to rest. Will continue later.

Ellen,

I tried to sleep but the banging woke me. They've smashed the door just like at South Access. They're gone now, but if they try it again it could give way. My limbs are in too much pain to move an inch.

You came to me in a dream again. They'd cut your hair from your bleeding scalp. They'd taken away your arms and your legs and hooked you to a cold steel crucifix. I heard others — countless others — weeping all around you while your breath came in short, frenzied gasps. Tears gushed from your bulging eyes. There was no Ellen behind them anymore.

The chill, the tortured voices, it all seemed so real. I stood in that very room and watched your pitiful stumps tremble in the cold. I moved closer — like the cameraman on the set of some sick horror film — until our faces were inches apart. Your eyes shot towards me suddenly and filled my blood with ice. I woke up in this tiny cleansing chamber, drenched and shivering, to a vicious banging that flexed the door in its frame. They could be right outside at this very moment, they're so unnaturally quiet.

I can't go on. I can't stop thinking about that awful face, Jerry's legs dangling from its mouth. I can't stop hearing Brody's panicked cries in my ears. I'm too scared to move at all.

A long shard of metal has added to the scars on my left wrist twice in the last few minutes. The pain shot up my arm and anchored me just when I'd begun drifting off to madness. That's what you never understood. It grounds me in reality. It turns my focus from my thirst for booze, and now my irrational fear, toward a different outlet. Attention has nothing to do with it. You even said so for a long time. When did you change your mind, Baby? Was it your mom who converted you? Your brother? Was it your friends or mine?

You wouldn't come with me to Deimos. You didn't just put a wall between us; you put a whole world between us, and I know why. I know you want to give up on me. To give up on us. Maybe you gave up a long time ago, despite how far I've come. This is the first time I've cut myself in three years. I've been sober for two. Too little, too late, I guess.

Well I'll show you, Ellen. I'm not giving up on you. I'm walking through Hell for you. That's

something no other man could ever do. I'm walking through Hell for you because your endless encouragement kept me going for so long. I'll be your Orpheus, Baby.

Will write to you again soon. Have to keep moving.

Journal of Unidentified Deimos Scientist

1

First book all used up. Stopped recording the date because I'm not sure earth time is reliable in this realm.

Hell Patrol was standing over a dead man near North Access today, recently slain. I've seen countless terrible things during my "tour of duty" in the hellish legions, but something about this event still haunts me.

Dead man looked as if he'd walked into a helicopter rotor, remains of his face frozen in a portrait of horror and anguish. His minced corpse was being cradled by a cyborg specimen I've seen and heard many times in the god-forsaken labs of Babel. It used to be a woman. Ghastly metallic appendages. Eyes and hair removed since last I saw her. Something terribly familiar about her voice. She sat on her knees with the technician in her metallic "arms", emitting a long, pitiful moan like a dying dog, rocking awkwardly back and forth as if playing mommy to a broken doll. Got violent when Hell Patrol tried to separate her from her "baby"; they had to subdue her with a stun gun before they could pull the corpse away and strip it of its gear.

Noted the victim's eyes were perfectly human just before they hauled him off to the meat locker. Guards noticed my staring and almost got suspicious. Had to move along. They didn't follow. Mustn't forget to look busy when in the open. Goggles hurt my face from wearing them so much. Badly want to wash this gore off.

Survived for nearly two weeks. Seems miraculous. Perhaps the invasion's mastermind knows I'm not one of its drafted soldiers and wants to see how long I last for amusement's sake.

The dead man had the EMA-300 in his hands and a PDA on his belt. Made note of which storeroom they were taken to. The weapon will give me more security than this shotgun come my day of judgment. The PDA may reveal the victim's identity. Something familiar about his face.

2

The Mastermind summoned us again. She has no further use for the Deimos reactor and everything is to be cleared out on the next trip to Babel. Her sudden telepathic messages still catch me off-guard (I'm now without a doubt it is a "she", for only a woman could be as cruel and domineering as this creature, if my mother and ex-wife are anything to go by).

Have not seen her despicable goat-faced minion for many days. I fear the worst for Phobos.

They've opened the gateway to Babel. We leave soon. I'll have to get those things from the storeroom before we go. Deimos belongs to the cyber-demon now.

3

Bizarre experience walking through this place. Reminiscent of a Nazi castle trapped in a time rift. Winding brick corridors, mostly unlit; intersections padded with scratched wooden panels and stone pillars. When stepping into the labs the walls become gray and metal, covered in oily green stains. Control panels and machines are stolen from Deimos Base or crudely imitated with hellish materials. Electric cables spill out from behind and snake all over the floor.

Didn't go to the slipgate chamber today, though I'm sure there's nothing new to record in that lab. They never use the device anymore. Demon technicians come in, take it apart, study it, reassemble it, scamper off — so set in their tasks that they never notice me. I can observe them blatantly without fear of blowing my cover, unlike with the ever-watchful security demons.

Have recently noticed an increase in their fanatical devotion to the perfection of their own crude portal-spawning devices. I've only seen one operational set: that which allows us to travel between Deimos and Babel. I dread what use they have in store for the others.

The fiends haven't touched their amplifier since removing it from the slipgate a week ago. Might be capable of returning Deimos to its father planet just as it had snatched it away, but I haven't the time or the labor force to carry it and the slipgate back to the facility.

Need to use it soon before provisions run out. Don't care to take up dining on human flesh. Committed too many sins already just to blend in.

Slept the day away in my usual closet behind a new pile of empty UAC crates. Finally grown accustomed to the screams and howls on the lower floors.

4

Food supply in southern storage cell exhausted. Eastern cell has all that's left.

Intercepted by Hell Patrol on my way to get it. My brother-in-law, Barry. Hard to look at him now, after having watched his gruesome possession on the first day. Screamed demon-gibberish at me as he entered the cybernetics labs. Glared at me expectantly like he wanted me to follow.

One cyber-demon's birth had cost numberless failures, and the human ward contains the worst of them. Mastermind must see through my ruse if her pawns summon me to that carnival of

unnatural cruelty so often. More half-finished experiments littered the floor, indiscernible from the abortions. Three staggered about unnoticed — jittering, drooling, moaning horribly. One of them pawed my face with its remaining organic hand and sobbed. Took all my fortitude to keep from shivering and weeping.

Barry led me between rows of steel racks displaying disfigured bodies half-flesh and half-machine. Demon scientists struggled to subdue the unhappy specimen who had killed the technician yesterday. The source of her fit seemed to be an awful mechanism being installed in her abdomen.

Scientists ordered Barry and I to hold her still while they finished. She moaned and howled weakly, tossed her head back and forth like a broken wind-up toy. Kept repeating a name, but couldn't articulate as she had no tongue. The name is all she's ever said since she killed that technician. I don't recognize it.

5

Accessed the contents of the dead man's PDA, but haven't the time to read it all yet. Surprised to find it belongs to the late Dr. Jackson and not the man who died two days ago. To lay eyes on her writing again filled me with a sad nostalgia.

The reformatting of her hard drive is unfortunate. Without Phobos's coordinates I'm trapped here forever and my records are useless. Provisions won't last more than two weeks at best.

No way around it: I must return to Deimos soon. Dr. Jackson's jump drives are the key. Check her office and her locker.

6

I've taken the time to read the technician's records in detail from start to finish. To think there were so many survivors on Deimos after such carnage! So many potential allies! I could have finally abandoned this disgusting costume! The very thought brings me to tears.

Harrison and McCabe I'd known for a long time. It tortured me to imagine them toiling so much over desperate questions to which I already knew the answers. You poor men, if only you'd known how hopeless your situation really was. The evidence was beneath our feet: Deimos is forever anchored at the shores of Hell.

I've stepped out onto the ledge and seen it myself. The most demented of artists couldn't produce such an image: the great black tower of Babel rising out of the squirming, writhing landscape below — the awful bridge between our pathetic little rock and the realm of terror.

The author seemed so hopeful at times. I would gladly trade my soul for that man's ignorance. He wrote of horror with no comprehension of its meaning. Horror is hiding among the damned as one of their own. Horror is sharing in their gristly rituals — executing one's own wounded comrades, butchering the remains as sustenance for their murderers — to keep the fiends' suspicion at bay a while longer.

He never knew true horror until the very end. I wish that poor fool had never known how true his dream visions were -- that he never saw what they did to her. A brilliant mind in botany and in literature, ground away to nothing like corn beneath the grindstone. I knew Ellen well enough that I should have recognized her voice in that inhuman laboratory, and what remained of her lovely Greek face. I should have recognized her husband's name all the times she wailed it.

I had wondered why the Mastermind was so elated when the technician died, her psychic laugh filled with savage mirth. It turns my stomach to think back on it.

Ellen is reunited with her husband at long last. I shot her twice in the head so they both could escape this terrible place together. If only my own journey were so easy.

7

Gateway to Deimos had not been moved, to my relief. Managed to open it and step through without drawing the guards' attention. Deimos Base reactor core was left running, but it may not last another week without staff to maintain it. Don't plan to be here that long anyway.

Closed the portal behind me to deter anything from following. The entire moon is mine to explore.

Apprehensions about the cyber-demon were extinguished soon after stepping outside: the beast's massive body lay sprawled on its back two hundred feet from the building, arms retracted at the elbows, jaws yawning in rage. Face and chest were speckled with bullet holes, and a thin pillar of gray smoke rose from a charred abdominal wound — cause appeared to be explosive ordnance judging by three fractured lower ribs. Wasn't brave enough to step within arm's reach of the corpse, despite my natural scientist's curiosity. Entered Deimos Base via hull breach in refinery sector.

Changes to the facility are most peculiar. They've become greatly exaggerated since last I visited these sectors. I've never seen the green marble bas-reliefs before, which are indeed all over the facility as the log suggested. The majority of them display a goat-like face that I recognize all too well.

One large bas-relief in the green marble region of the command center depicts a large, round head wearing a strikingly menacing beady-eyed scowl. Facial structure difficult to describe: as far from the concept of "human" as the goat-god face, but perhaps Hell's own equivalent to it. May be a portrait of the Mastermind, herself.

8

The blood rivers have overflowed in two areas. Found the moat where Charles was boiled alive. His left arm had clung dearly to the floor panels like a grotesque Halloween decoration, and remained there for days. Current seems to have finally carried it off.

Body count on the rise. Nine charred imp carcasses in the refinery chocked up to my friend the author (the stench was unbelievable). More throughout the facility, probably a total of fifty in the sectors I've visited — many shot while prone, execution style. Three or four slain bull demons among them. Shotgun and bullet casings scattered everywhere, many of them still warm.

Slain UAC personnel that were once on gruesome display have been taken down, laid respectfully on the floor in rows, covered in sheets with arms crossed over their hearts. Has someone been through here other than my friend the author? Perhaps someone from Phobos? I suppose without the Deimos slipgate to receive the signal, the Phobos slipgate would drop the traveler at its last known location.

Search of the residential block fruitless. Dr. Jackson often left her jump drives in her locker absentmindedly. If not there, then on her office bookshelf in the labs.

Thought I heard something just now.

Moving on to Deimos Labs, and whatever horrid memories await me there.

9

Someone new has been here all right. Found a spilled satchel on the floor of the command center lobby. Contents as follows: two medical kits, four stimpacks, UAC night-vision visor, half a bottle of painkillers, a handful of 9mm rounds, two cans of military rations.

RPG-7 leaned against lobby chair, with three fully assembled rockets arranged on the cushion. Half-eaten can of rations discarded on the floor, several days stale. Mystery guest seems to have long since abandoned this place, albeit in quite a hurry. He may come back, but I don't intend to wait for him.

10

Laboratory now resembles the dungeon of a titanium-reinforced gothic keep. Fluorescent lamps, flickering control panels and UAC security doors seem anachronistic here.

Recovered two UAC jump drives in Dr. Jackson's office and have been sifting through their contents for the last two hours. She did not let me down: the entire project is stored on these little things! Every progress report, every malfunction, every test successful and disastrous, every email correspondence — all have been obsessively filed and organized. She even filed Dr. Hall's project proposal from two years ago!

Found the coordinates for Phobos and Deimos and can consider expedition a success. Desperate for food and rest. I'll return to Babel later. Could use a few hours' peace and quiet.

11

Can barely write, in so much pain. A whole day lost! Should be back in the demon labs, conducting my escape; instead I'm bedridden in the east infirmary.

Saw two glowing yellow marbles watching me from behind a ventilation grate in the refinery checkpoint, likely one of the disgusting brown imps that are the placenta of all creation in this world. It crawled out of view before I could sight in on it. Fired through the grate anyway, hoping to scare it off, and the whole block came alive with sounds of movement and pig-like snorting as though I'd awoken a nest of monstrous wild boar.

Lost my composure and panicked. The only light source in that area was a nine-foot-wide hole in the ceiling. The shadows were black and thick and tinted red.

Something exploded against the center of my back, and suddenly I was facedown on the floor with an imp screeching in my ear. I gave it a good shot to the chin with my elbow that must have dazed it. Lost its balance and fell back, banging its head against a wall. I beat its skull in with the plasma gun's stock.

A naval starburst soared right past my head from my flank and exploded against the wall nearby. It towed a rush of scalding air behind it that hit me dead in the face. My eyes welled up and closed by themselves; opened them again just in time to watch an advancing imp wing another starburst into my shoulder. Sprayed plasma fire in the monster's general direction and its head and left arm vaporized.

The heat in the air squeezed my throat shut. My chest and back felt like they'd been raked with millions of tiny needles. The reek of burning flesh filled my nostrils. Deimos shook and rattled. I blacked out.

Woke up in a bad dream. A great, skinless arm with steel claws probed the room, smashing the security desk window and upturning file cabinets. It snatched up the brained demon carcass that lay right next to me and retreated through the hole in the roof. I lost my mind with terror and dragged myself away before it came back. Must have dragged myself for miles without stopping. Pain exhausted my limbs and I blacked out again.

Everything was replaced with bitter cold. Clothes gone, sharp pain biting at my wrists and ankles. Spread eagle position on a metal table. Empty eye sockets gazed down at me and glimmered with those unholy green specks of light that I've seen in the faces of so many possessed Deimos personnel. I felt their fingers cruelly probing around inside me and I'd only begun to realize that they were dissecting me when I woke up on an infirmary bed with no idea how I got there.

Burns on my chest are bad, second-degree. Would be dead if not for the envirosuit. Treated them as best I could on my own: I'm fortunate that most of the infirmary's supplies were still accounted for. Can't hardly move. The pain makes my head swim. No alcohol in the cabinets to numb it. Why didn't I grab the mystery visitor's pills when I had the opportunity?

It's the very same infirmary where Dennis died, according to the log. Comm. deck ten feet away to my left is disassembled, tools scattered on the floor next to it. Blood absolutely everywhere. Of the two exits the one to my right must be where the author saw Patterson for the last time. I hear her whimpering as plain as day. Perhaps it's a ghost.

The cyber-demon is alive and well. I feel its endless vigil through the walls.

May die here.

12

Sleep overcame me. Don't know how long. Awoke in a state of confusion, thinking myself back in Babel due to nightmarish moans in the air. When it dawned on me that I was still in the infirmary I fell out of the bed and laid as still as a corpse on the floor behind it. Could not determine the direction of the voice or if its outbursts were mournful, angry, or joyous. It sounded human, and yet...

I remembered the abandoned satchel. Thoughts of losing another potential ally distressed me so much that before I'd realized it I was walking out the infirmary door, clutching the plasma rifle close to me. Made a thorough search of the entire block and found nothing whatever despite the close proximity of the voice.

Grabbed those painkillers while I was out, and the rations. Feeling better physically.

13

My neighbor isn't human. I've finally met the death heads my deceased friend wrote about. One roamed the infirmary halls, sniffing me out. I couldn't hit it -- like trying to shoot a fly out of the air. Sealed myself in the clean room before it could reach me.

It's still at the window, staring at me. Bumps the glass occasionally, searching for a way inside. Don't know how long I can st

14

Must write but no time. Do not forget to recount details on return to Babel. May join you yet, you poor dead fools.

They are coming!

15

My victory on Deimos was extraordinary, and perhaps due entirely to luck. But my celebrations are limited to resting long enough to write this. Victory is only the beginning, as they say.

Cyber-demon had torn away two large sections of the hull to get at me, and nearly succeeded too many times. Its footsteps alone threatened to shake the roof down upon my head. Knew my only path to survival was to kill that accursed thing, and immediately set to work.

My elusiveness had put the beast in such a vocal state of rage that its location was easy enough to pinpoint while I scouted the outskirts of the base, searching for a landmark I'd seen previously. Found it on the refinery's west side, only twenty meters from the building: a crater-turned-lake of bubbling industrial waste due to major leaks in several vital sections of the hull. Crater was thirty feet wide and ten feet deep.

Together the refinery and command center arced around this lake in a reversed L-shape. Several windows overlooked the lake, but the small, shattered window of a corner office on the command center's first floor -- sixty meters south of the lake's edge and nearly at ground-level with it -- also had a good view of the refinery's broad side, all the way to the far north corner. This view suited my intentions, so that is where I stashed the launcher and the three rockets.

Next, went topside and scouted the roof for hull breaches in close proximity to the office. Found three and mapped out the quickest path to it from each. Realm's light gravity rendered harmless what would have been a crippling fall on earth. Returning topside with the EMA-300 in hand, I began my hunt for the beast and found it prowling along the east side of the labs, heading south — and I needed it to go north.

Kept parallel with it on the roof and just a little behind to avoid detection, until adequate cover presented itself in the form of the Deimos Labs solar panels several yards to my right. I got the monster's attention with a burst of plasma fire to the back of the head and darted for the nearest panel.

Didn't make it there because retaliation was quicker than I expected: beast deployed six small drunken missiles two at a time from god-knows-where (metallic portion of its back was indeed lined with circular ports), which swarmed like wasps in my general direction. They soared just over my head and tore apart the solar panel I'd chosen as my shield, raining razor shards of aluminum and silicon down onto the roof. Gatling gun fire pinned me down for awhile. Had to crawl a block away — through the painful remains of the solar panel, cutting myself to ribbons in the process — before I could stand up without fear of having my head shot off. Didn't dare show myself again, but as I sprinted north those thundering hooves followed. The chase was on.

And it lasted only another two minutes. Got careless running atop the access tunnel connecting Deimos Labs to the command center. Should have ducked inside rather than leave myself such an obvious target. A rocket removed the tunnel from beneath my feet with one swift sledgehammer blow. I clung to the lip of the roof, gashing my chin open on the edge as I caught it; my weapon joined the falling debris. The wreath of smoke left by the blast gave me only a few seconds' cover to hoist myself to safety just before a rimshot of bullets hit the side of the building where my legs had dangled. Managed to drag myself through a hole in the roof and stumble my way to the corner office.

I saw the RPG-7 in action during the war and knew how to load and operate it. By the time the beast lumbered around the northwest corner of the refinery my first shot was loaded. Tucked myself into the shadows and put the beast's face in my crosshair, counting down the meters as it drew closer to me. It trotted eagerly along the outer wall, peering in through the windows and the openings in the hull. Brought my finger to the trigger as it began to stomp past the acidic lake.

It stopped suddenly — three meters from the crater — and looked directly at me. Terror seized my limbs, but didn't reach my hands before I squeezed the trigger and sent a hissing white serpent of war out the office window.

It was headed for the cyber-demon's heart. I cursed, realizing I'd missed what I had aimed for. By a stroke of luck the thing raised its artillery piece to shield itself from the attack — the blast tore the creature's left arm off at the elbow, perfectly disarming it!

While it bellowed and flailed, I reloaded, took aim a few degrees lower and fired my second rocket. This one bit into the knee-joint of the cyber-demon's right leg. A living weapon built so tough that a high explosive blast scarcely caused it to stumble; but its left leg was shattered, blown completely away.

The beast teetered for several moments like a building on the verge of collapse...and finally toppled face-first into the crater with a thick, oily splash.

Dragged myself topside again to get a better view from the roof. The crater's noxious contents had set to work instantly: the beast's tough flesh had shrugged off bullets and plasma, but dissolved in the reactor core's toxic byproducts like tissue paper in water. With two limbs gone it was unable to stand up and remained submerged in the horrid stuff, wallowing helplessly and howling in agony.

I'm not a sadist. I took little pleasure in the thing's death. I watched because I realized it was a microcosm: that abomination embodied all the horrors taking place in the laboratories of Babel, and all the evils committed by the denizens of this realm, and whatever wretched purpose it all serves — to watch it curl up and die was somehow spiritually liberating. This wretched collective of primal creatures wants to become something more by building laboratories and slipgates and walking death-machines.

My own goals have been so introverted; my aspirations so narrow in scope. I've joined in these monsters' firing squads, stood by as my brethren were tortured, all just to remain undiscovered. Running away with a handful of documents isn't enough to make up for it.

Far-off voices howled in reply to the cyber-demon, exactly like what I heard in Deimos Labs the previous day. Torch-lights began dotting the landscape, moving slowly through the mist like drunken fireflies. I finished the sorry beast with my final rocket and returned to the infirmary to hastily patch myself up.

Embarking on my new quest to throw a wrench in the Mastermind's rotten machine. Must work fast, for I took the last of my painkillers two hours ago.

16

Haven't been at my best performance due to the pain. Most of the creatures haven't noticed, but Barry seemed sharper than the others. He noticed when my knees threatened to buckle; pretending not to hear him snarl at me didn't help matters. He began to follow me.

Perhaps not as sharp as I'd thought. Tested him by weaving in and out of laboratories and turning down corridors at random; sure enough, he was always there, slowly gaining but tailing me stupidly like a dog. Lured him into a secluded area before letting him get within arm's reach, then shot him four times in the solar plexus. Won't matter if his body is found. Shouldn't have ditched my shotgun when I picked up the EMA-300. I'm not much of a marksman with a pistol except up close.

Having to stop and rest too often. Burns are hindering me, but at least I don't have a tail.

Got the welding tools I need. Five more minutes and

17

It's done. Only have time for a few notes.

Slipgate lab attended by three shotgun guards, and five demon technicians in the process of disassembling the device again. Walked up behind the two guards closest together and shot them

in the head at point blank, one-two. Ensuing firefight was brief: slowed down the third with a salvo of bullets, took up his friend's shotgun and finished him.

Workers exhibited no signs that they were even aware of the shots, and didn't seem to care when I murdered them. Firefight summoned a lone guard from the north corridor, but I sent him back the way he came with a lead handshake: buckshot wad planted in the side of his throat, nearly took his head off.

Only two doors leading out of this lab. Sealed one and welded it shut in under five minutes. No one else came in to check on things, so I did the same to the other door and went to work reassembling the sliggate from memory.

They started pounding on the doors shortly after I'd reattached the amplifier. Doors are rattling in their frames now, flexing inward from one tremendous blow after another. Perhaps creatures like what my late friends confronted in the Deimos waste tunnels. Do not want to ever lay eyes on such nightmares before I die.

Modified sliggate is warming up. Capacitors generating an abnormally large amount of energy. Resulting gateway, if I'm not mistaken, will regurgitate Babel into our world at Deimos's last known coordinates. This tower of blasphemies to science will soon be promoted to the newest moon of Mars, and everything inside will die in the vacuum of space. Control panels smashed, can't be stopped. Pain so great my eyes and nose are running.

Less than a minute to go. Grappling cable and helmet both secured. UAC salvage team will find my body and these records if successful. They'll be through those doors in ten seconds. Only seven shells left, but I'll stall them long enough.

Farewell, Deimos! They're here!

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