

Homecoming

The world around him slowly faded away, disappearing like a slur of watered colors down the drain. The warmth faded as everything grew cold. The sounds of voices died and disappeared into the darkness that was now devouring him.

Drake gasped and shivered as consciousness found him suddenly, rudely, ripping him from the deep of sleep like a baby from a mother's womb. His eyes wandered over the shadows before him, the dark room offering no detail. Supported only by his own, slightly atrophied legs, gravity soon found him. He ungracefully fell forward, finding the cold metal floor to be a harsh mistress.

He winced at the momentary pain. He clamored clumsily over knees and elbows to try and find a foot hold on the cold metal floor beneath him. Moving hurt. In fact, everything hurt at the moment. He was stiff, not having moved for an untold number of months. He eventually found the wall in front of him, and managed to prop himself up, staring back at a row of glass and metal tubes, looming high from floor to ceiling. His was the only tube that was occupied at all.

The wall was cold. The floor was colder. As his vision slowly returned to him, blurry and out of focus from lack of use, it became apparent with increasing clarity that he was with a certain lack of clothing. He was cold. He started shivering as all his senses slowly came back to him. The room was dark except for the readouts and displays on his stasis tube, now flat lining and due to a lack of input, mainly Drake. He smelled nothing. The room was rather sterile, remembering now that he was somewhere in the medical bay of the U.N.S.F Myrmidon, a capital class battleship belonging to the combined interstellar fleets of the United Nations.

He heard nothing; yet, he heard everything.

He could feel the gentle buzz of the implants in the back of his head. He could mentally skim through a cacaphony of noise bouncing around in his head like a radio tuner. Fleet communications, he could hear them all. He could hear the ship systems reporting thier status to one another. He could monitor the ship to ship comms of the fleet as they tried to maintain a coherent battle group. He could hear the signal bounce of the shortwave radios from the hand helds the knuckle draggers used below decks. He could even hear the surface thoughts of the ones closer to him, his implant reaching out to everyone within range. He even felt the movements of those closest by.

He felt them coming before they opened the door.

The lights came on, a blinding flourescent white light screaming into his eyes like a pissed off T.I. It hurt a lot. He squeezed his eyes shut, but it did little to ease the pain, the light piercing even then, his eyes hypersensitive having not been used in years.

Years?

How long had the journey back taken?

He could feel gloved hands grabbing him, hands and shoulders. He was slowly brought to his feet. He couldn't see them, the light was too painful to bring his eyes to bear, but he could feel them. He could hear their surface thoughts. They weren't from the Myrmidon.

They all sounded different, acted different. They also sounded confused, and they were all scared.

Why were they scared?

They slowly, quietly, escorted him out and down the corridor. They took a left. He guessed they were taking him to the medical officer to be checked and tested. He kept his eyes closed, the pain from the stabbing white light swiftly developing into a throbbing headache. The floor was warmer here, and smooth like glass. Though he could not see them, he could feel them just as well. There were five men escorting him. His own mind moved back and forth as it bounced between their thoughts, thoughts of family, thoughts of loved ones, thoughts of food. He could hear, feel, one eyeball a female officer as she passed them in the corridor. The one behind him was worried about what to get his wife for their anniversary. The man to his left had a gun, and was planning to shoot Drake in the head.

That last thought was very unpleasant, and Drake's body tensed at the sudden perceived threat.

The men around him must have felt the sudden shift in demeanor, their grip tightening around his arms. It was a useless effort, and they likely all knew it. In one lithe movement he freed himself from all gripping hands, sending one man over his shoulder and into the wall across the corridor. Drake could hear the round charging in the gun as it was aimed in his direction. He moved with a preternatural speed as all his other implants kicked in.

A Delta-4 was a dangerous opponent in hand to hand combat. They all either already knew it, or were about to become rudely aware.

More hands came in grasping, but they were soon broken, and those in possession were soon sent sprawling down the corridor. Drake dropped quickly to the ground with a cat like grace as a weapon fired, missing his head, but he could smell the burning of flesh as it was ionized from the impact of the round. He heard a body fall to the ground with the sickening thud of a lifeless rag doll. He kicked backwards, finding his mark as bones snapped, a kneecap pushed backwards much farther than it was ever intended to. A scream told a tale of pain as yet another body fell to the floor.

Drake rolled forward to his feet, his only thought now was to get away.

He could hear the radio traffic bouncing around violently in his head as the local comms burst into a frenzy of activity. Security forces would be here soon. He tried to open his eyes, the pain dulled slightly by the adrenaline now coursing through his body. Blurry shapes of people were scattering to either side of the corridor, disappearing behind whatever bulkheads and open hatches they could find. His bare feet found the floor on shaky terms, and he began a dead sprint down the corridor.

He had no idea where he was going.

That familiar sound preceding sleep whistled through the air. The dart found its mark squarely between Drake's shoulder blades. He whipped around, but not before the drugs took their hold. Shadows of sleep started to flood the world around him, but not before his eyes fell upon an all too familiar face.

"Admiral." He managed to utter in a mumbling of slurred syllables. He smiled slightly before his mind and body returned once again to the comforts of sleep, collapsing to the

floor yet a second time today.

I am home. This thought echoed through his mind till it drifted away amongst a drugged induced state of images and words.

The Admiral watched Drake for a moment with fatherly eyes as a new set of orderlies nervously carried him away. He nodded with approval. He minded the security for a moment as they dragged away the man with the gun, who was screaming incoherently from his leg, nearly severed in half at the knee. His screaming faded as he disappeared down the corridor, probably to be airlocked. His thoughts returned to Drake.

"Welcome Home Lieutenant." He watched Drake until he too disappeared from view, being taken for examination and debriefing. The Admiral sighed quietly to himself before returning himself to his other duties.

The ship never sleeps.