

All That Is Left

I stared out at the lake, watching the Sects rush towards us. They had finished with the 104th brigade, which left us. We were the last then. Earth was gone, so were the bases on Mars and Venus. Most of Proxima was just smoke now, the colony settlements burned to the ground four light years from Sol. That's where we were, the last bastion of humanity left in the universe.

When the Sects came into our space, we fought them. Threw our armies at them until they chewed us up and spat us out. But that was just the beginning. There were just too many of them, they bred a thousand times faster than we did. They'd have an army within days with a Queen.

After we lost Earth, we conscripted every man and woman in the base to fight. It was the survival of species and we lost. Miserably. The children were all that remained. I turned and looked back at them. Three hundred of them stood there in Command, their helmets far too big for their heads and the chest armor that would protect them from some of the effects of the Sect's lasers settled down to their knees.

It would have been comical if it hadn't been so tragic. They were all that remained. And I could do nothing to protect them. Hiding hadn't worked, we had heard of entire bases on obscure moons that were discovered and annihilated.

These were the children of the parents in the 104th brigade that I had sent to their deaths a day before. I guess you can say that at that point, while I was staring down at their soft innocent faces I went mad. They wanted to fight. And I let them. They had no idea what war was like. I had had six months of watching men and women die. Six months since the first encounter with the Sects.

I should have just put them into a big cargo bay and gassed them. It would have been so much better than what I and they were forced to endure. But I was mad and so I agreed to hold this base until our deaths.

Such stupidity.

The base was large, but in Command we could lock down most of the base and fortify the rest. The Sects didn't have any type of heavy weaponry. They relied on sheer

numbers to overwhelm us. They had no compulsion against suicide and that is how we lost our entire fleet of starships. Every ship was rammed by a thousand of the larger Sects, destroying them. Above us in orbit were the dead remains of the 5th Fleet, the ones who had retreated here to inform us about the demise of our home world.

We were it. The last of humanity.

The Sects were massing outside on the lake, their living Queen ships releasing their swarms of spawns out into the air. I ordered the lock down of the base and the computer began the process.

Major Smithson gripped my arm. He was the only other adult that remained on the base.

“This is madness. Better to kill them ourselves.”

“They wish to fight, to avenge their parents.” I said it calmly, knowing I was mad but could do nothing about it. I wondered if this was how the Grand Marshall felt as Earth was slaughtered around him.

The children had watched the satellite feed of the battle for Proxima on and over the continent. They saw their loved ones die in their ships or shot down on the land below.

“We could escape! The computer says a slipship is still in the launch bay.”

“Its engine is down. I already checked it out. Anyway, they would suicide us before we could even make orbit. The children want closure. Look at them,” I gestured to the children. Two of the oldest were handing out pulse rifles. One was arming them; the second was showing them how to fire it. All were intent on watching, absorbing what they could. The boy popped the power cartridge free and slid in another one, slamming it home. Two hundred shots. A hundred in each cartridge. If they survived long enough to empty them.

“Command! Activate the automated defenses,” I snapped.

The computer complied and I watched the cannons on the outer arrays snap into play. The first of the Sects roared in. The Autoguns would deter them for a while, until the guns overheated as they always did and shut down. They never missed, but when there was an infinite supply of the enemy, it didn't matter.

The Autoguns began to fire, and the pace of them picked up until they were firing at their maximum. The swarm began. The Sects swirled in a frenzy as the deaths of their kind prompted them into a furious rage. Within seconds the surface of the lake was littered with their broken corpses.

I turned away from the sight, having seen it too many times before. The children stared past me at the monitors. "It's begun," I told them. "Prepare yourselves." The children rushed out into the hallway, running down the length towards the open launch bay. It was the only opening we couldn't block, it was our exposed Achilles heel. It was here that we would stand firm.

Smithson handed me my pulse rifle and I charged it. He tossed me a satchel of charges and I followed him out.

Smithson directed the children against the wall, lining up several dozen in front behind blast shields that were meant to protect the mechanics of the launching gear. A second group I held in reserve, many of them angling out from around the corners.

"Fire at whatever moves! They will show no mercy!" I looked around me; seeing that their expressions held none of the bravado they had minutes before. They were scared. Frightened. Tearful. Several of them covered their faces with their hands.

The roar of the Autoguns ceased and a hissing filled the air. A black swarm rushed toward the launch bay from across the water. I tossed my satchel behind the blast doors and hunkered down, aiming towards the wide opening before me. Crying filled my ears.

They rushed in like a wave. Smithson opened up and the frontlines let loose a volley. The Sects returned fire, and I saw several of the children fall. Screams licked at my consciousness and I pulled the trigger over and over. I didn't dare take my eyes off the entrance, I might miss one. God knows I didn't want to see them all die.

Fire, fire, fire, fire.

Death was all around me. I felt wetness on my legs. Feeling something fall by my feet. I never gave it a thought. I couldn't. I knew it would paralyze me. I felt the sting of a laser burn into my armor. I reloaded, firing as the Sects advanced down the long open bay. Their corpses were piled up beyond the blast shield where Smithson and his boys continued to fire.

And then it ended. The Sects drew back.

I pulled behind the blast door and reloaded. The pulse rifle was hot, steaming in the wet air. I nudged the boy beside me, telling him to reload. When I looked at him, I saw that his face had been cooked by a Sect laser. I nearly hurled, seeing the blood oozing out from around the worst of the burn.

It was then that I noticed the screams. There were children lying everywhere, their little bodies mangled and burning. The smell of cooked flesh filled the air. I went a little bit madder. I looked down the launch bay, seeing more horror than I ever believed I could. It was a nightmare. I should have killed them all. I heard calls for mommy and daddy. I heard the soft sobs of a child who was taking its last breath.

It was brutal.

Smithson rushed up to me, gripping my shirt. His eyes were wild and crazed. His ear was gone and his left hand was a charred mess. “We have to clear a field of fire before they regroup! Bring in the reserves. We can’t hold!”

“No,” I protested. I should have killed them all. Quickly. Painlessly. My eyes fell to a child across the hall. His eyes were wide; blood was on his hands as he held another child. I recognized him. Michael DuBois. He held his younger sister in his arms, a huge smoking hole in her chest. He was rocking her very slowly and gently.

Smithson released me and limped over to the launch controls. He shouted into the command intercom. “Command! Clear launch bay one! Emergency!”

I heard the rumbles of machinery as the computer activated the dozers. In case of a bad or destructive launch, the wrecked fighter could be pushed out into the lake, thus freeing the bay for additional launches and saving the base from additional destruction. The dozers pulled out of the wall began pushing the corpses of the fallen children towards the end of the bay. It was then that I realized that none but Smithson had survived in the launch bay.

The pile of dead grew as the three dozers pushed everything ahead of them. I could hold back no longer. I expelled the contents of my stomach.

I should have killed them all myself.

The few children that hadn’t yet taken part in the battle stood aghast against the blast door. A pulse rifle clattered onto the floor. Smithson was shouting at them. They

didn't move, rooted to the spot. I heard the hissing sound grow louder and I knew that the Sects were beginning their second assault. I charged the weapon in my hand and turned to face the rushing enemy. Smithson joined me, firing away as he dashed across the bay to the opposite side.

Michael DuBois appeared, his ten-year-old fingers pulling the trigger as fast as he could. The Sects poured into the bay, flying down through with their wide wings beating at the air, with their bulbous weapons in their mandibles. Each shot took one down, sometime though it took two or three to keep it there. Other children joined our last stand. And still they came.

They closed with us as my rifle ran dry. The desire for flight kicked in.

"Retreat into Command!" I screamed as I reloaded. We had to flee. There was nothing else to do. Smithson died, trying to cross the bay to get back to us. Three boys and a girl died trying to save his corpse. I couldn't get them to stop sacrificing themselves for him. The horror of it all.

I shoved Michael DuBois through the blast door and cycled it closed. I heard the thumps as the Sects fired on the sealing door. It grew hot and I pushed the dozen children that had escaped the killing bay. All were wounded in some way or another. All were screaming. I couldn't think. I couldn't save them. I couldn't! There was no way. I fell onto my back, scurrying away from the door.

"Forgive me," I heard a voice say. I turned, seeing Michael behind the other children. He was pressed against the far wall of Command. His face was passive but his eyes were sorrowful. He quickly shot each of the eleven in the back, killing them where they huddled. Their little bodies slumped quietly onto the floor. "It needed to be done," he said with finality, sounding far older than his years. He looked up at me and pointed the rifle at me. I shook my head, saying no, not to do it.

Lowering the weapon, he cocked his head to the side, not understanding. His eyes were filled with confusion. Then he placed the red-hot barrel beneath his chin and pulled the trigger.

He did what I could not.

I heard the sound of twisting metal behind me but I could not take my eyes off of his falling corpse. Felt their mandibles upon me, the hissing filling my ears.

I was the last. An aging fifty two year old colonel in the dead 104th brigade of the Army of the United Federation. The Sects did what I did not expect. They let me live. Which was worse than death. The memories of what occurred on Proxima haunts me still. I could have been at peace. I could have gone on like the others. But I refused the gift of death from a little boy.

End