

Inferno

Captain Jack Steele stood in front of the swirling, pulsing violet and pink wall of light known as the *Gateway*. The *Gateway* vibrated the air around it with a hum and filled Jacks' nostrils with the smell of ozone. Blood trickled down his forehead from the claw gash he had received in the battle. The blood trekked its way down his cheek, mixing with the gore splattered across his body. Of his squad of twenty only three remained. Lawson had survived the carnage practically unscathed but Kosenar lay helplessly on the floor moaning from pain while Rouke retrieved all the ammunition he could form his fallen comrades. Lawson removed Kosenars' body armor, tending to his wounds as best as he could with a stim pack, but the Marine needed hospitalization desperately. Jack looked out across the bodies that littered the toxic refinery plants floor. Some had once been his men, but the majority on the splattered piles of flesh and organs had not been human. Moving down the ramp toward Lawson and the others Jack ran it all through his mind again, trying to make some sense of it all.

Jack had been in his office at Union Areospace Corporation Headquarters on Mars when the distress call from Deimos had come in. Normally the transmission from either of Mars' moons was like someone was talking to you from a vid-phone in the next room, but the video was all but gone, a swirl of unphased composite colors. The face that was hidden among them Steele knew, a UAC engineer, his brother Patrick. While the expression of fear on his brothers face was lost in soup of static, the terror in his voice had not been.

"Mars base, this is UAC Engineer Patrick Steele, UAC installation Deimos! We require immediate military support! Something is coming out of the *Gateways*! Computer systems have gone berserk and-" The transmission filled with electronic buzz, and the sound of a crouped, animal like hiss and then it was gone all together.

At that instance the Deimos base had totally disappeared from all scopes, gone off the face of the moon along with a large portion of the rock beneath the base itself. At first everyone thought it was a tracking error caused by interference, but the military security satellites over the

base showed that there was nothing left but a crater where the base had been. There were no signs of seismic activity or explosion, it was simply gone. The brass had scrambled around, trying to figure out what to do, trying to raise the Phobos base to see if anything was happening at the other end of the gate. No one responded.

Mars military force went on full alert, and the brass had dispatched a squad to investigate the Deimos site, but no one seemed to realize the obvious, at least no one be Steele. That's when he had scrambled his squad and ran for the shuttle bay. The only way to find out what had happened on Deimos was the Gateway on Phobos.

Steele's knowledge of the *Gateways* came from his brother who had helped design them, and even though they were classified, it had been dinner discussion between brothers several times. The *Gateways* were part of the UAC's experimental inter-dimensional space-travel research. The idea was shove something in one on Phobos and it came out on Deimos, and they worked, so long as you did throw a *someone* in them instead of a *something*. Steele had been there and seen what had happened to the first two military "volunteers" to go through the gate. The marines had come out the other side babbling vulgarities, and bludgeoning anything that breathed, fear written all over their faces. The Corps and UAC locked them up and studied them, tried to find out what happened on the other side, but the men were gone, insane, bantering on about Hell and demons. It hadn't been pretty, and shortly after the project was submerged into total "Class A" secrecy, which basically became need to know personnel only.

That had not stopped Patrick from telling his brother that the gates were becoming unstable, showing strange readings, and expressing that he wasn't sure transporting toxic waste through the gates was safe anymore. He also told him how the brass wouldn't listen or how they ignored the strange damage that had occurred to some of the containers in transit. They had looked like they had been clawed and bitten in places, almost all the way through in spots, exposing dangerous waste materials. Jack thought that maybe his brother had been over reacting, but now he knew that was not the case at all.

It had taken Jack's squad four hours to reach the moon by shuttle and by the time they had arrived it had been too late. As soon as they had entered the base they had found the torn, half eaten, bodies of the engineers. Some had their hearts and skulls ripped from their bodies, some their entrails sprawled across the floor, and one whose entire lower body was gone from his rib cage down. The mans lungs and organs lay shredded, his face locked in a scream of terror, his spine jutting out of him like an elephants tusk, grotesquely bent backward. Several of the troops vomited at the sight of the blood and gore covered floors. Jack himself choked back the rising urge in his stomach. In all his years in the Corps Jack had never seen anything like it, but that would not be the last first time discover of the day.

In only moments the first of the creatures had appeared. The beast rounded the corner leading toward the operations room. It stood at seven feet, its muscular humanoid shaped body covered in a brown leathery skin. Huge spike of bone jutting from its shoulders and its eyes glowed like hot embers. It hissed a crouped hiss as it raised its clawed hands. They all just stood there, overwhelmed with disbelief and shock as the creature loomed closer. It was Jack who reacted first, raising his plasma rifle he clamped down on the trigger. He hot electric blue balls of plasma streaked across the room in rapid succession, burning into the creatures body. It spent its last breath screaming out in agony as it fell backward to the floor. Jack released the trigger, his hands trembling with adrenaline and fear, an then they heard the rumble coming up the hall. The scream of the dying creature had drawn the attention of others. They poured into the room from the two hallways on the far side of the shuttle receiving area. They came in droves like rampaging rabid wolves. The room went a blaze with plasma fire from his troops and himself. It had been a battle all the way to the *Gateway*, hundreds of the creatures had been killed in the carnage, and so had sixteen heavily armed Colonial Space Marines.

Jack knelt down beside Kosenar, inspecting the gashed in the mans chest from where one of the creatures had clawed him. The wound was deep and had torn into the muscle.

“How you doin’ soldier?”

“Not so good, Cap.” The mans voice trembled from pain, sounding like he was straining as he spoke.

“Hang in there, help is on the way.”

Jack stood back up, knowing it would be at least another three hours before a second squad would arrive in response to their distress beacon, and that was assuming the signal had gotten through. Rouke ran up carrying a satchel of clips, power packs, shot gun shells and rocket launchers. His dark skin was smeared with blood, and his arm was burned from a toxic waste barrel that had blown up when a stray plasma bolt had hit it. Lawson finished bandaging Kosenars’ wounds and stood up to hear the news.

“What ‘d we got, Rouke?”

“Cap, I got at least a hundred shotgun shells, twelve packs for the plasma rifles, and maybe four hundred 9mm rounds. I managed to salvage Jonsey’s chain gun and I found Apone’s shotgun but that’s it.”

“What about the BFG-9000?” Lawson asked hopefully.

“No way. When that barrel of shit went up it took Adovnik and the plasma cannon with it. If I had been any closer-”

“So what your saying is we have enough stuff to arm one man to the teeth but not enough for all three of us.” Jack interrupted.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then I’m going in alone.” Jack said reaching for the munitions bag.

Rouke pulled it away from his hand as he reached for it.

“Are you crazy?! There were twenty of us when we walked in here! What the hell are you going to do by yourself if you run into more of those things?” Rouke’s voice cracking.

“He’s right, Cap. You’re pretty beat up as it is. Let’s wait for some backup.” Lawson chimed in.

“Look, the *Gateway* is getting unstable and were running out of time. We can’t afford to leave this thing open much longer, we’re gonna have to shut it down. There were four hundred people on Deimos and someone’s got to get them out of there if they-”

“You think there still alive?! Sir, look around you, they’re gone!” Rouke interrupted again.

“We can’t be sure of that damnit! Now give me that bag and those weapons, that’s an order Marine!”

Rouke handed Jack the bag with a hiss of disgust. Jack began reloading his plasma rifle. Rouke had already reloaded the shotgun and the chain gun, but Jack checked them anyway. Removing six of the power cells from the satchel he handed three to each Marine.

“Okay, listen up. Anything comes through that Gateway that isn’t human you frag it with extreme prejudice, you got it?” The two men nodded in response. “Lawson, I want you to rig that high voltage power distribution box over there with explosive gel. If those bastards start pouring through that gate you blow that thing and it will shut down the *Gateway*, understood?”

“Cap, if I shut it down you won’t be able to get back!”

“If they make it trough that gate, they’ll have gone through me to get there.”

“This is a bad idea, Sir. What if the *Gateway* doesn’t lead to Deimos anymore?”

Rouke said, unslinging his rifle angrily to replace the power cell with a fresh one.

“Then whoever sent these things through that gate is about to have a really bad fuckin’ day.” Jack exclimated his point by pumping the shotgun.

Jack made his way back up the ramp that lead to the *Gateway*, remembering the two men who had tried inter-dimensional space travel. He stopped inches from the milky swirl of amethyst colored light wall. Patrick’s desperate “mayday” ran though his mind, raging against his reason an self preservation.

“You gotta die some time.” He mumbled to himself.

Closing his eyes he stepped into the *Gateway*. His skin raged with sharp needle like tingling. The sensations of heat and sever cold raged back an forth through his body. He felt like he was falling forward, his orientation gone. Then suddenly it all stopped as he felt his boot touch solid ground. The sound of high pitch arcing of electricity surrounded him and then it was gone. Opening his eyes the dim light of the room filtered in, it was the Deimos side of the *Gateway*.

A woman's scream filled his ears and he started moving forward, his heart thundering in his chest. The scene was much as it had been on Phobos except the gore littering the large warehouse floor was all human. On the far end of the two humans hid behind a forklift that had been fallen back against a corner of the room as five of the leather skinned creatures tried desperately to get to them. One of them humans was Patrick. Between Jack and the forklift was an overturned pallet of toxic waste containers. They were unbroken, laying on their sides.

“Hey, over here you ugly fucks!” Jack called out.

The creatures turned, hissing as they saw him. They forgot their trapped human prey and started moving confidently toward Jack. Raising the plasma rifle he took aim and waited.

“Pat, get down!” He screamed again, watching as they crossed the floor like a pride of lions on the hunt.

“Jack? Get out of here! Run!” Patrick screamed back.

“Just get down!”

Come on, just a little further, he thought. The lead monster stepped over the fallen barrel of waste and Jack snapped off the safety.

“Si-yo-nar-ah, assholes!”

Jack clamped down on the trigger, sending a barrage of plasma as the barrel in the middle of the pack. The barrel exploded, causing the others around it to follow suit. Metal shrapnel and fire ripped the five beasts to shreds as Jack covered his face with his arm. The shock wave caused him to brace himself slightly, but the debris fell short of him. Running across the room he headed for the forklift as Patrick and his female companion crawled out from their

hiding space. The girl had deep cased in her forearm and Patrick ripped the sleeve off his shirt to act as a bandage for her. Hot tears streaked down her dirt streaked cheeks as she sobbed with fear. Jack ran over and sealed the three closest entrances to the warehouse, realizing more of the creatures probably had heard the explosion and were on the way. There were still two other entrances on the other side of the warehouse that lay beyond the maze of stacked crates and pallets. The maze would keep the creatures away for a while but he had seen them in action on Phobos, they would find their way through soon enough. The creatures were fierce killers and predators, but they were stupid. They didn't seem to learn from their comrades mistakes. In stead they relied on brute ferociousness, and that was Jack's advantage.

"Man am I glad to see you." Patrick said, working vigorously at bandaging the woman's arm as she tried to regain her composure..

"I'll bet. I brought some noise makers with me, I hope you don't mind." Jack jested nervously as he scanned the room again.

"Not at all. Jack this is Lisa, Lisa this is my brother Jack." The woman only began to cry harder, the terror taking her again. "You always were good with the ladies, Jack."

"What the Hell's going on here, Pat?" Jack asked, ignoring the pun and helped the bandaged woman to her feet, guiding her toward the *Gateway*.

"The *Gateway* started drawing a huge amount of power. We tried to shut it down but it started to phase the whole south side of the warehouse. We ran, and that's when those *things* started appearing. The base was becoming part of their dimension and I think they were causing it, Jack."

"What are you talking about?!" Jack said as they made their way up the ramp toward the *Gateway*.

"Remember I said the gate was becoming unstable. I think they figured out a way to control it. See we opened a door to their existence and started moving stuff through it and back out again. They got curious and one of them figured it out. Realized their was a way to cross

over to our universe. Remember the two guys who went through?" Patrick said stopping a few feet from the Gateway and turning to face Jack.

"Yeah."

"They came here, to this dimension. The difference is that the base wasn't here, they passed over the terrain that's under this base now."

"Can we just get out of here?" Jack said turning back toward the *Gateway*.

"Jack, wait!"

Jack stopped and turned to face his brother again.

"When the Gateway went about sixty of us managed to make it to the emergency shelter and lock ourselves in. When we saw what was outside the window we decided we had to try to shut down the *Gateway*. We realized we couldn't let these things get through. Lisa and I are the only two left."

"Fine, we'll blow the gate from the other side, now come on before any more of those thing makes it in here.

"Jack, you don't understand." Patrick made his way to the control monitor beside the *Gateway*. Flicking the switches the external security cameras came to life, showing the world outside the base. "Look!"

Jack moved over to the monitor, checking his watch nervously and looking back across the warehouse for any sign of movement. Nothing. He turned his attention to the monitor.

"Holy shit." The words came out long and slow.

The monitor showed the red skied world outside and the black mountains. Hanging in mid air over the tallest mountain was an upside down pentagram, burning with fire. The world was covered in a ash colored sand and blood. The landscape lay scattered with bodies of creatures of at least a hundred different species, impaled on long wooden javelins for as far as the eye could see. Some of the creatures were still alive, many of them humans from the Deimos base. Skeleton like creatures walked among them, slicing their bodies with long bone fingers, spilling their entrails as their victims screamed. The brown Imp creatures feasted on a

woman who had been chained to a stone slab as she screamed and struggled. There were flaming horned skull like creatures picking at human flesh like birds at seed, shrieking as they dove through the air and then climbed quickly away again, their victims moaning, near dead. Then there were the cybernetic spider like creatures. They looked like huge brains attached to mechanical spider like legs. The organic and mechanical devices were joined in this veins and tubes, one ending where the other began.

Patrick zoomed toward the town of the large mountain and Jack felt his breath freeze in his chest. A top of the black mountain was temple of obsidian and onyx. It looked like giant clawed fingers jutting out of the landscape. The camera zoomed even closer, and it revealed what it was that Patrick had intended. The creature that stood before the temple was at least twenty feet tall. It's skin was blood red, its face fanged, it's eyes were black stilts on florescent green fires. Two huge black horns jutted from both sides of its head. Its right leg was made of metal and yellow puss oozed from where it became flesh. The other leg was hoofed, its lower body covered in shaggy brown hair. It's left forearm looked much the same, its hand had been replaced with what looked like a rocket launcher. It looked out over the suffering and the gore, mastering it all.

"We're in downtown Hell, Jack, and I mean Hell as in the Bible. We've opened a doorway and they know how to use it.

"Were getting out of here now! We'll blow the Gateway once we get through." Jack said, turning back toward the *Gateway*.

"No! It has to be destroyed on this side. The Phobos gate only acts as a target gate. This is the one that projects the dimensional shift. If we don't destroy the gate on this side, they'll still be able to open a doorway. Can you imagine what would happen if a gate opened on Mars colony or Earth?"

The images of the monitor helped visualize the possibility.

"I can roll some of those barrels over her and put my rifle on overload. The explosions will take out half of this room and the gate with it." Jack suggested.

“It won’t work, the safety mechanism will sense the power build up in your rifle and activate the dampening fields. I have to stay behind a shut it down.” Patrick said.

“No, I’ll do it. You get Lisa out of here and tell them what happened. I’ll figure out a way to shut it down and get back.”

“There’s no way to do it, Jack. I designed this damn thing! I’m responsible! I have to-”

Jack grabbed Patrick’s shoulders and brought his knee up into his brothers groin. Patrick gasped with pain, as Jack pushed him into the gate. His brothers body disappeared into the purple swirl with a electric green arcs. Lisa stood shocked looking at him.

“Go on, get out of here!” Jack yelled at her. She turned quickly and started walking toward the gate. “Tell him--Tell him, I love him.” She looked over at him and shook her head understanding. Her body followed Patrick’s’.

Jack put the ammunition satchel on the floor next to the gate projectors and removed one of his flares. He made his way to the control panel and looked at the screen next to the exterior surveillance monitor. It showed the topography of Hell from an aerial view. Using the joystick he moved it to where the temple stood and pressed the button.

“New target selected. Warning, Phobos link will be closed in t-minus ten seconds.”

Jack stabbed the “override” button, removing the fail safes. On the far side of the warehouse he saw more of the Imps appeared from behind a crate. They moved toward him slowly and predator like the ones before them.

“Si-yo-nar-ah, assholes!”

“...six-five-four...”

Jack lit the flare and dropped it into the satchel as he dove into the gateway. He heard the ammunition explode, destroying the lower projectors, causing the upper ones to begin phasing the floor.

The base and everything with it dissolved into air and then began reforming within the temple. The molecules of the two objects corrupted each others integrity, breaking down their nuclear structure.

The explosion ripped across Hell's surface devastating untold miles. Jack rolled on to the ramp on Phobos, a ball of fire right behind him.

‘Lawson, blow it!’

The Marine jammed down the detonator, turning the power conduit into a molten metal, collapsing the gate. Looking back to where the gate should have been Jack raised his singed face. There was only the plastacreet wall and the silent projectors.

I wonder where all the bad people will go when they die now? Was the first thing that came to his mind.

3720 words

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