

Chapter 1

Cassandra-075 M25L recovery station 2552

An explosion shook the very foundation of the recovery station, it was as if the very bones of the station were cracking and splitting apart. The sheer violence of it was more than enough to wake Cassandra from her light slumber. The sound shook the entire station once more, a glass on the table next to her bed fell off and shattered. She could tell that it was still night, The clock read 0320 in a red glow, the lights were off except for the light at the end of the hallway. It cast a long shadow into her window. It was flickering, it's power failing. As it flashed violently, there was a crimson hand streak on the floor, fresh blood coated the walls with a smooth glaze. 10 years of combat training took over her body. She bolted upright, her feet already out of bed. She moved fast, too fast for her new skin. It felt like she was being ripped apart, it was pink, baby pink. She had entered phase Stage IV rehabilitation only a week ago, and her skin was still new and fresh. Any sudden movements nearly ripped it off by the seams. It was the equivalent of 3rd degree burns.

She couldn't focus, the sleeping sedative administered to

help with the painful effects of Phase IV had not yet released its grip from her mind and body. Cursing under her breath and her mind shrouded in fog, she searched her "recovery" room for something to defend herself. Whatever was going on outside, she didn't want to go out unarmed. The Covenant had been getting closer and closer to the station. Grasping her side where the skin was most sensitive, she grabbed the combat knife John had given her from within a hidden drawer in the small bookshelf in the corner. It was 6 inches long and She edged closer to the door leading to the hallway, wishing she was better prepared. The smell of smoke was becoming more prominent and was slightly visible. The sound of gun-fire reverberated down the long twisting hallways of the recovery station, Ma5Bs by the sound of them, a frag grenade detonated somewhere in the distance. The smell of the fire was prominent, along with one underlying and barely detectable, the smell of charred flesh. The primary power was out too she noted, the only light came from the revolving emergency light that spewed an amber glow throughout the long, twisting hall. Moving quick as a tiger and as quiet as a shadow, she stopped at the end of the hall. She was a born soldier, but she was out of practice. Her body was not obeying her mind. When she moved, it was as if acid was being dumped on her, like someone was stabbing her left side. She twisted to see each side of the hallway, a mistake she should have accounted for. Her hands instinctively clutched the side and the combat knife

tumbled to the ground. It hit hard with a loud CLANG. Any enemies nearby would have heard it, she cursed to herself. Her vision blurred and tears formed around her eyes.

The sound of screaming brought her back to the situation at hand. The hallway forked left and right, they were definitely coming from the left side. She had never seen the Covenant first-hand but had watched countless footage of it over the years. She watched as they destroyed planets from above, ripped civilians apart, murdered children. She watched as Reach fell, she watched her fellow Spartans be killed, one by one by one. She learned from them, knew how they worked, their tactics. She'd been watching for more than 10 years since augmentation. But with the new threat of the Flood and the Halos, the Universe was under attack on all fronts.

She forced her body to the ground, blending perfectly in the shadows. Her messy raven black hair a natural camouflage. The screaming drew closer and the pitch higher. The footsteps that had began as dull thuds steadily became stomps as they drew closer.

The beast was large, impossibly large. It was roughly humanoid, with long ape-like arms. It towered over any elites Cassandra had ever heard of. It's features and limbs enormous. It's face was primitive and apelike, its

eyes' a glaring red, fueled with hatred. There were 4 of these beasts, with 6 grunts speckled between the apes. The 3 grunts in the middle were carrying something, or rather someone over their backs. It was Gretchen Braums, one of the many caring nurses on the station. Her voice was cracked and broken, her leg bleeding from an unknown wound. Gretchen had always been kind and loving, like a mother.

As silent as the night, she shot from her hiding place. She ran parallel with the last brute. Her side bursting in pain, she jumped towards the wall of the narrow hallway. Her bare feet made contact with the cold wall and she jumped off, nearly completely sideways. She landed on the beast with enough momentum to knock the beast over on its back. She naturally slid off the beast as it fell, as fast as lightning her knife met the softness of its neck. Before the rest of the patrol could process what had happened, the knife was lodged in the back of the 2nd beast's head. She rolled off of the 2nd beast but it was too much for her skin, she convulsed in pain, fresh tears in her eyes. She forced herself up, but she wasn't fast enough. The nearest one looked back and saw his fallen brethren, thrust all of his force into a throw. Cassandra flew backward, the knife flew from her hand, and landed down the hall. Her long, ungroomed black hair swaying in the air. She landed 15 feet down the hall against a wall. The last of the air left her lungs, she gasped for air but found none. The last emergency light died, and they were alone in the dark. Nothing was broken, if she hadn't been

augmented, her spine would have snapped. She struggled to get up but her body refused to obey. The 3rd beast kneeled in front of her. It's breath the smell of death, his eyes full of rage and hatred. It raised its hand, grabbed her by the neck, and lifted her a foot off the ground. From the corner of her eyes, she saw the last brute stomping it's huge, heavy foot through Gretchen. So hard and so strong that she could see the tile through the hole. Gretchen's eyes stared at Cassandra, her mouth a perfect O of surprise. Cassandra kicked but it was useless.

“This is the part where you die infidel, your kind have insulted the gods for the last time” it's voice was scratchy and masculine. It spoke rough English which was barely comprehensible. His grip tightened on her throat. She gasped for air but it was useless. She hastily looked around one more time, looking for anything to help her. The one thing she did see, was the reflection of a golden visor behind the brute.