

CHAPTER 1

Not everyone becomes a hero, only the ones who try. Not everyone becomes a hero, only the ones who try. Repeating this mantra, almost treating it as a prayer had been the activists only support through his slow and painful crawl through the dark, humid tunnel - away from his luxurious apartment and towards the mysterious land of the hold. Dark thoughts had taken a hold of him - maybe he was doing the wrong thing? Maybe the stories about the downtrodden in the hold hadn't been exaggerated? Maybe the dangers outlined were real? Brushing aside the thoughts, weaving like tendrils through his mind, the repeating of his sacred mantra was brought to an abrupt halt as light assaulted his now-sensitive eyes, the mouth - the glorious end - of the tunnel quickly sliding open in front of him.

Barely able to take in the smoky scene, accompanying it a rotting, acrid smell, the activist was unceremoniously shoved from behind, sprawling out onto a cold-metal rumbling machine. Panicking and turning around, he watched as the tunnel closed and disappeared cleanly into the wall, the opening fading and not leaving any lines to indicate where it once was. The machine rumbled underneath him, then dropped downwards, making the activists stomach lurch and pitch much like a plane in turbulence, leaving him scattering across the top towards the edge. Grabbing onto the corner with white knuckles, he managed to hold on, taking in the scene in front of him.

Through the thick black smoke a red glow was creating a backdrop for him to see silhouettes - black monsters swinging glinting cleavers into shapes laying on tabletops. With it was a moaning, a rumbling hum giving a morbid backdrop to the sickening music of the room. The rotting smell was stronger now, and as the activist watched, the men with the cleavers threw parts of the black shapes outside of the room, where grunting and growling was coming from. Gulping, and immediately regretting his decision, the activist desperately crawled back over to the wall behind the machine, feeling for a crack that might be the entrance to the tunnel.

As he raised his second arm to attempt a second hand-hold, the machine shifted again, leaning dramatically and, with a yelp, throwing the activist off and onto the cold metal floor. His head cracked against the floor, leaving his vision to shift and swirl. Attempting to recover, he waved his hands back and forth in front of his eyes, leading his vision to shift and coalesced as his bio-implants took effect.

Scampering up off the floor, the activist pushed himself up against the wall behind him. He felt something wet and turned around - the wall was grimy and had dark-red patches, which had rubbed against the shoulder of his jacket. The "39 Leavers" had been covered both in dirt and whatever the dark-red substance was, and the activist felt a pang of indignation as he realised his clothes likely wouldn't be cleaned in a while. Swinging around again, the smoke burned and made his eyes water as he tried to make out the scene in front of him. The shapes were still shifting through the smoke, as he decided to attempt to make it to the door that looked like the exit, where the shapes were being thrown. 'I'll head to somewhere where it looks like there's

leadership' he thought to himself, now more self-confident in his abilities and the cover of smoke.

Activating one of his bio-implants, he started to sneak around the walls of the room, avoiding the shifting shapes in the black smoke. Feeling like a secret agent, he was making good progress when he felt a strong hand grip his shoulder. The activist was not a short man himself, but as he shakily turned his head, he had to slightly look up at the man that was holding him. Through his watering and stinging eyes, he was immediately terrified as what he saw was a dark black fumigation mask, attached to a muscular body under a once-white apron; now it was covered with dark-red substance and grime. The chillingly-blue eyes under the mask were wide and manic, the expression etched upon the man's face giving the activist a chill down his spine.

'SHTO?' the man yelled at the top of his voice, drawing the cleaver from his side.

Panicking once again, the activist pressed the button in his mind required to activate another bio-implant. The man staggered back, being jolted by electricity running through his system, and the activist was away. Pounding on the metal floor, the roar of the shapes surrounding him got louder as the men realised there was an intruder in their midst. As the activist ran through the room toward the door, he glimpsed flashing images of a pile of legs and arms, roughly jumbled together in a pile on the floor, a man, reaching out for help as a cleaver was stuck in his side, blood squirting into a bucket on the floor, and a grotesque image of the torso of a man, with his legs stiched in the place of his pecs, mouth hanging open and blood filling the whites of his eyes. The dark-red substance of the floor, that he now realised was dried blood made it hard to run, the rubber of his fitted shoes struggling to find purchase, and ripping up the dried layers of filth.

Reaching the door before any of the shapes, the activist yelled 'PLEASE, I'M TRYING TO HELP!' in a panic-induced tone. Not waiting for a response, the activist ran into the next room, almost being overcome by the smell of shit and fear. Lines and lines of cages ran on either side of the room, with hundreds of people, young, old and adult in various states of clothing and health imprisoned in the cages. Some of them attempted to yell or reach out as the activist ran past, but all he could do was think about his escape. Spotting a doorway at the end of the hall, he gave one last burst of speed as he reached the doorway, smashing through with his shoulder.

And right into the arms of a couple of stinking, burly men in deteriorating suits. A light was shone into his eyes, as questions in Russian were hurled at him. His translating implant produced the garbled questions as he was interrogated.

'WHERE ARE YOU FROM?'

'WHAT IS THIS IN YOUR ARM?'

'WHO ARE YOU WORKING FOR?'

The activist attempted to answer the questions, but as he screamed and pleaded the men slowly took him back towards the room he left. As he yelled and begged for forgiveness, the door shut on the room with the tunnel, and his screaming was cut off and silenced.