

Madness

Introduction

Aboard the Vision, Chaffbeard is nowhere to be found. The comms officer looks around worriedly; the captain has been acting eccentric since the past week, muttering incoherent words under his breath and roaming the ship, carving strange symbols in rooms and corridors across the ship. He remembers that the Lieutenant had also mentioned something about investigating the Captain's behavior, thinking that it is not natural but caused by something. Glancing at the door cautiously, he decides to take up responsibility and respond to some of the urgent messages for the captain, so the rest of the crew would not be caught unawares.

"This is uhhh, communications officer Gulfbalse speaking on behalf of the Captain. Our orders are to burn towards the shipyard at FLANK speed. We will be doing our best to reach you and try to help you out there, hopefully on time."

Part 1. Spark of Madness

Chaffbeard barges into the CIC and shouts for his officers. The Captain seems rugged, his usually uniform dirty and his beard growing wildly out of control. He speaks like a wild animal, his words guttural and a maniacal expression fixed to his face.

"Bring me the captain of that cruiser. NOW."

Before long, the Kol Captain is brought before him by his crew, arms and legs tied.

"Captain, this is Joseph Ferguson of the Kol Cartel. We've interrogated him a bit, and..."

Before he can finish, Chaffbeard drives the tip of his rapier into the Kol captain's heart. Crimson blood spills from the wound onto the rapier, and the gem on the rapier begins to glow...as if it had a heartbeat.

Joseph stares at the blade in his chest with disbelief, eyes wide and consciousness fading. He thought he was going offered a deal, or threatened, or interrogated, but not like this...no...not like....

Chaffbeard slowly draws his blade away from the body and caresses the rapier, running his fingers along the ridge of the blade. He then sheathes the blade and turns to leave the room. The crew stood silent and shocked by the Captain's sudden action. At the door, Chaffbeard turns to look back at the room, half his face concealed in the shadow.

"The rest of the prisoners? Two hundred and thirteen, if I remember correctly."

"Y...ye...yes, Captain. There are exactly 213 prisoners in our cells, c..captured from the light cruiser."

"Kill them all."

"Yes Capt...what? K..kill...kill them ALL?"

Chaffbears glances at the officer who just spoke, then left the room without another word, leaving the officers shocked and speechless

After several minutes, one of the officers finally breaks the silence

"The Captain...do you think that he..."

"I...I don't know...I think he might really be mad..."

The voices turn into murmurs and whispers as the officers finally begin to disperse.

Part 2. Taste of Blood

Standing in front of the captives, lined up and blindfolded, Gulfballse looks at his colleague.

"Are you sure we should do this? It seems to be a bit...excessive?"

"Well...I don't know. But these are the Captain's orders after all, and we all know what became of the last bunch who decided to not listen..."

Gulfballes feels a chill creeping down his spine. The last batch of people, the so-called deserters. All the bodies mutilated beyond recognition, torn and shredded

"I'll...I'll be outside in the corridor. I need to breathe some fresh air...just...be quick about it. I'll be waiting outside."

Gulfballse exits the room. With a sigh, he closes his eyes and leans back on the wall and slides down into a sitting position. With trembling hands, he takes out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and pulls one out with his teeth. Reaching back into his pockets, he takes out a lighter, nearly fumbling and dropping it in the process. After several attempts, he finally lights the cigarette. Gulfballes leans back his head against the wall and takes a deep draw, trying to ignore the screams coming from within the room and the metallic smell of blood drifting into his nose.

After waiting for what seems like an eternity, the other officer finally opens the door, several crewmen behind him. Their uniforms are covered in blood and their eyes stare blankly at the ground. Getting to his feet, Gulfballes notices their legs trembling under the uniform

Without exchanging words, he hands the other officer a cigarette and pats his shoulders. No words were spoken as they returned to their quarters.

In the room behind them piles of corpses are unceremoniously stacked on the floor, eyes wide open and blank, blood running down their still warm bodies, flooding the floor. The drains are barely able to keep up, sending blood guttering down the pipelines, through the ship. If someone listened close enough, they could perhaps hear the ship lightly groan in satisfaction.

Part 3. Glimpse of Truth

Gulfballes startles from his sleep, shirt drenched in sweat, gasping for air. The Kol Captain, what was his name? Joseph. Joseph Ferguson. His face, his eyes bulging from its sockets and wide with disbelief. His hands writhing against the cuffs, struggling to break free. His

blood, crimson against the white floorboards of the deck, being coughed up when the rapier pierced his heart. His mouth, lips red with blood, whispering.

“Join...us...”

Gulfballes shakes his head, trying to throw the memory out of his head. Getting up from the bed, he presses a hand against the wall, searching for the light switch. Running his fingers along the slick and warm contours of the wall, pulsating gently under his fingertips...what? Heart pounding heavily against his chest and breathing heavily, he jerks his hand away from the wall and recoils, tripping and collapsing back onto his bed.

*“Damn me...” *He muttered under his breath* “I must be still dreaming...”*

Cautiously, he reaches back out to touch the wall. Relieved to find the familiar tingling of cold metal under his fingers, he quickly switches on the light, basking the room in light. White ceiling, white walls, white floor. Everything was just as it was. Just another bad dream.

*After splashing a bit of cold water on his face at the sink, Gulfballes was feeling better. It was just the recent events stressing him out, after all. Wherever **is** the captain off to, anyways? Perhaps he'll have a talk with the Lieutenant later today, perhaps he will know what the Captain has been doing.*

Gulfballes fills his cup with some water from the fridge, moving to sit down at the small table at the corner of the room, rubbing his eyes.

“Join...us...”

He freezes with the cup halfway to his lips, eyes snapping open. He had heard the whispers again. Was he still dreaming? He heard his own heart pounding in his chest again. But no...why is it so loud? Could a heart beat so loudly? The pulses grow in volume, and Gulfballes crumples to his knees, hands grabbing his head. The cup shatters on the ground beside him. Thud-Thud. Thud-Thud. The sound is unbearable, reverberating inside his skull. He falls to his side, curled up and trying to cover his ears. Thud-Thud. Thud-Thud. His vision wavers, his world fading to black. And through the din of the deafening heartbeats, he barely hears the sound of someone whispering in his ear.

“Join.....us.....”

Part 4. Herald of Doom

Officer Gulfballes wakes up on the ground, sporting a massive headache and a sore neck. He can't quite remember how he got here; a nightmare, maybe. Trying to shake off the discomfort, he reaches for his cup, only to find it in pieces on the floor beside him. Frowning, he grabs a new one from the shelf. After donning his uniform, he glances at his watch. 0740. Still in time for some food on the mess deck. He leaves his room, heading for the mess deck, knocking on his friend's door on the way. There was no response. 'Perhaps he woke up early with nightmares too', Gulfballes thought.

Upon reaching the mess deck, Gulfballes found the usually noisy deck subdued and quiet. with the men whispering and murmuring with each other. Confused by the scene, he slips into a seat near his friends after grabbing some food.

"What happened? Is something wrong?"

They start, then turn to look at him warily.

"Henry is gone. Took off to the maintenance decks yesterday, said he was hearing something from inside, wanted to check it. Never came back."

"WHAT?"

"We thought you'd maybe know something about it. You were with him yesterday fulfilling the Captain's orders, were you not?"

His words send shivers down Gulfballse's spine. He suddenly remembered his dream, the heartbeats and the whispers. Could it have been...no. There was no way that it could have been real.

Suddenly realising something, he jumps to his feet, nearly knocking down his friend in the process, and runs towards the lower decks. He sprints through corridors that all look the same, roughly shoving aside some crew that got in his way. He needed to check the room.

The room where the executions took place. The room filled with blood. The room that still held the bodies...but where were the bodies?

Gulfballes stares blankly at the interior of the room. White ceiling, white walls, white floor. No sign of the massacre that took place. No, not even a whiff of the scent of blood. It was impossible. But a blink and he sees the truth: the room was drowned in blood, strange patterns carved into the floor and wall. The bodies were gone, but the blood continued to fill, spewing forth from the ventilation pipes and converging at the centre of the room, where a Altar stood submerged in blood, a black sheathe resting on the surface. The blade, however, was nowhere to be seen.

*He reels, backing out from the room, arm behind him flailing for something to steady himself. Stumbling, he finds himself on the ground in the corridor. This is when he caught sight of something he will never forget: The captain, standing in the darkness of the corridor, blood running down his face along lines carved with a blade, his beard stained blood red. The gem on his rapier glowing like an ember in the darkness of the corridor, and ****blinks****, swiveling in its socket to look at Gulfballse. Behind him was an army of shambling figures bathed in blood. He hears it again. The heartbeat. The whispers. They grow louder as more figures converge behind the Captain.*

"Join...us..."

Gulfballes screams and begins to flee, mind blank and unable to think. Running away from the terrors. Slipping on the blood on the floor. Tripping on pulsing protrusions he had never seen before. Slamming his shoulder on a closed door only to have it rupture and cover him with blood. When he came back to his senses, he stood before the security door of the bridge. White ceiling, white walls, white floor. But the blood on his uniform showed that it was not an illusion. He must warn the others.

Barging into the bridge, he begins shouting at the top of his lungs

"EVACUATE! EVACUATE! THERE ARE MONSTERS ON THE SHIP, THE DAMN CAPTAIN HAS GONE MAD AND WE ARE ALL GOING TO FUCKING DIE!!!"

He wrestles the rifle out of the surprised guard's hands and bolts for the door, and before the other officers could say a word he was out, sprinting for the lifepods.

Part 5. Guidance of Fate

After Gullfballes leaves the bridge, its occupants look at each other with visible confusion.

"What the Fuck was that?"

"No idea sir, although I've been hearing rumors of people hearing whispers and seeing shit."

"Bullshit, what are you, children? Believing in old space stories? Back to your stations, now."

"Yes sir!"

The crew return to their stations to continue their navigation, whispering amongst themselves, visibly disturbed by what just happened. But a call on the intercom put a stop to all of that.

"Sir, it's Engineering."

"Put it on the screen."

The sergeant flipped the switch, and suddenly the bridge was drowned in screams. On the screen, the old chief engineer stood covered in his own blood, gun in one hand.

"BRIDGE, THEY'RE KILLING US DOWN HERE, IT'S THOUSANDS OF THEM. EVACUATE THE SHI...."

The old man was pounced by a shadowy figure and vanished from the screen, his screams echoing through the monitors.

The screen is quickly obscured by blood splattering onto the camera and the signal cut, the bridge crew in shock from what they had seen.

"Sir... we are getting alarms from multiple decks, life signatures are vanishing on the lower decks but the movement sensors are picking up more and more, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?"

The sergeant is still staring at the blacked-out screen, but the crew are beginning to panic.

"Sir! SIR! WHAT SHOULD WE DO?"

"Abandon ship."

"WHAT?"

"ABANDON SHIP, NOW, EVERYONE TO THE LIFEPODS, MAKE THE ANNOUNCEMENT QUICK."

The lights of the ship begin to flicker, darkness blotting out the corridors and rooms. As some of the bridge crew start to run out of it, they hear screams down the main corridor and stop dead in their tracks.

In the dimness of the corridor, lit by its few remaining lights, they see one of the crew fall limp to the ground, revealing a strange humanoid figure behind him. Soon, more creatures silhouetted by the darkness converge, moving towards the bridge..

"Everyone get back on the bridge. Get back in AND SHUT THE DOOR, NOW."

The crew sealed the bridge door, the officers type frantically at the consoles, trying to control the ship. But the ship would not listen.

"Sir, the mayday won't transmit, the antennas report failure."

"The navigation controls don't respond either sir, we have no control of the ship."

"Sir, intercom is down, all we heard were screams, but now it's gone completely silent."

"Sir we must go out there and at least try to fix the antenna, let the rest of the fleet know."

The officer snaps, grabs the man by the collar and screams in his face.

"ARE YOU MAD? WHO IS GOING TO GO OUT THERE? YOU? We are safe here, they can't breach these doors. They can't."

He pushes the man back, breathing heavily.

"We will wait here, the fleet receives broadcasts every 4 hours, they will eventually realize something is wrong...."

Everyone freezes. The familiar sound of hard leather boots walking on the steel floor reaches their ears.

"The Captain??"

The officer rushes to the monitor to open up the surveillance camera, but all he can see is darkness. He hits a few buttons to turn on the camera's lighting as the footsteps start getting louder and louder, closer and closer.

What he sees glues him to the monitor. The captain slowly comes into view, his face carved with ancient glyphs, clothes drenched in blood. He stops before the door, reaching towards the console.

"CAPTAIN, STOP!"

Chaffbeard ignores him and starts pressing buttons on the console interface.

"CAPTAIN DO NOT OPEN THAT DOOR!"

Chaffbeard pauses, then slowly tilts his head to look at the camera.

"I am the Captain of this ship, am I not? Do I not have the permission to step on my own bridge?"

As he speaks, the officer starts noticing things in the faint light, figures moving near the edge of the camera, grotesque in nature, like marionettes, the white of their blank eyes flashing in the camera.

"WHAT ABOUT THOSE?, WHAT ABOUT THOSE THINGS SIR? DON'T LET THEM IN ON US SI..."

Chaffbeard turns back to the console, humming nonchalantly, nodding his head.

"It's fine, it's fine, they're with me."

He inputs the final digits of the code.

—EMERGENCY OVERRIDE ACTIVATED—

—OPENING DOOR—

"They're with me, with us, now."

As soon as he realized what was happening, the officer turned around and started to run towards the escape shaft. It led to the lifepods near the middle decks, but he had no other choice now. Behind him he could hear the door open, and the sound of a thousand bodies rushing through. As he ran he could hear behind him the rhythmic fire of rifles, the yelling and screaming of the crew. He had reached the escape hatch, he put his entire body against the lever, but the thing wouldn't budge. The rifles were stifled one by one, the screams faded to silence. He takes out his side arm and turns around, but before he could fire, he found himself face to face with someone familiar, and he felt a sharp pain in his gut. Looking down, he saw a hand pass through his abdomen and looking up, he saw the last face he would ever see, a familiar face, a face he saw but two days ago, the face of a one eyed Kol pirate he executed in the cargo holds. A face that was now looking at him with blank eyes. The last thing the officer sees is a smile. A terrifying, maniacal smile.

Part 6. Futility of Hope

As the remaining crew ran down the twisting corridors of the cursed ship, a chorus of a million throats sang out a symphony of discord.

"Join us...Join us...Join us..."

As they reach the end of the corridor, they turn the corner to find themselves in the medical bay.

"What? we should be at the lifepods? What the fuck is going on?"

"We have been running in circles all this time?"

"What is this, the ship's plans say we should be at the lifepods, we have done this route so many times. We have monthly drills, how could we possibly be lost on our own ship?"

A grizzled veteran speaks out, rifle held close to his chest, prepared to fire.

"The damn ship is changing, can't you see? It's flesh and bone, pulsating under our feet"

He gazes at the ceiling

"It's alive...it won't let us leave."

"Are you mad? It's just metal. Nothing is 'alive'. Come back to your senses, let's get moving."

As they turned to leave they froze in place. The glint of eyes in the dark light up in the corridor like stars in the sky, and the last thing the survivors hear is the beckoning of a thousand voices.

"Join...us..."

Part 7. First Contact

—To Yggy Otanes—

Your radar officers inform you that you picked up a single lifepod on the sensor, its vector indicating that it's coming towards your fleet. It has not responded to hails, possibly due to

power shortages. From what your long range sensors tell you, this lifepod belongs to the Roughnecks fleet.

–Yggy Otnes Responded–

Aboard the Hukr Greyhound the crew anxiously sits, trying to hail the life pod

Comms Officer: "Still no response, we sire."

Count Yggy Otnes look warily at the display screen showing the life pod on a intercept course with his fleet

Otnes: "Hail them again."

"Once again this is Count Yggy Otnes of Hukar, Roughnecks life pod we have been hailing your fleet for a while with no responses, quickly come to us so we may aid you."

–Response to Yggy Otnes–

Your hails receive no response. The lifepod slowly moves towards the Hukari Flagship.

Part 8. The Captain's Parting Gift

Gulfballes wipes the blood off his face with his torn uniform. He takes a breath and continues to run down the corridors.

"Right, lifepods lifepods lifepods, gotta get to the lifepo..."

He runs into one of the ensigns, sending both men to the floor

"Hey, watch it!"

"-pods, get to the lifepods NOW!"

The PA starts blaring

–ABANDON SHIP this is not a drill, ABANDON SHIP–

–ALL HANDS TO THE LIFEPODS, ABANDON SHIP–

As abruptly as the announcement came, it was gone. The lights of the ships flickered and died, some of the red emergency lights kicked in, illuminating the corridors with a dim glow

Gulfballse is already on his heels, gun in one hand and dragging the ensign along with the other.

"We gotta get out of here NOW, follow me."

As they start running down the hallways, the ship begins to twist and turn, the hull groaning as it begins to move.

They reach a corridor junction, where they meet several armed security guards running towards them.

"HEY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING, WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE."

"Follow us, quick."

But the guards passed by them and kept running away from them, down the wrong direction. The ensign turns and asks Gullfballes in bewilderment.

"Didn't they hear us? Didn't they see us?"

"No time for that now, we've got to go."

The two men continued to run, and at a crossroad, Gullfballse turns to the left. The ensign stops behind him.

"Wrong way, the sign says the lifepods are on the right."

"I know this ship like the back of my hand, the lifepods are this way, don't trust your eyes, come with me, we don't have time."

The ensign begrudgingly follows behind him, down corridors he had never seen before, down the labyrinth of chaos that the ship had become. But he continued to follow Gullfballse, because there was a strange determination in his motion, a feeling he was on the right path.

Turning left, they run into the starboard midship lifepods, but their relief was cut short by the sound of footsteps behind them.

Gullfballse spins around, pointing his rifle towards the noise.

"WHO GOES THERE, NAME AND RANK NOW"

"Sergeant Higgs, galley department, we are unarmed."

Gullfballse lowers his rifle

"Come quick, we must leave this place."

As the rest of the survivors run towards the lifepods from the dark hallway, Gullfballse catches something strange at the corner of his eye, as the crew drew closer, he sees something peculiar. Something unnatural in their movement. The men acted like they were marionettes on strings, flailing towards him. He immediately snaps his rifle up and aims it.

"STOP!"

The figures pay no heed to his words

"STOP NOW!"

They continue to approach

"STOP NOW OR I WILL SHOOT!"

The ensign grabs the barrel of his rifle, pulling it to the side.

"What the fuck are you doing?"

"DON'T YOU SEE, THEY ARE NOT HUMAN! THEY WILL KILL US!"

Gullfballes wrestles the rifle out of the ensign's hand and turns back towards the figures, only to find 3 frightened galley crew.

"What is wrong with you Gullfballse, are you mad? You wanted us all killed?"

Dazed and confused, Gullfballes shakes his head and looks around, trying to understand what was happening.

"Eugh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Must have been too stressed. C'mon, we gotta go. Board the pods, now!"

"What about the rest of them? We need to wait for the rest of the crew, we have to do a headcount before we go, we can't just leave them here!"

Gullfballse snaps out of his confusion.

"We NEED TO GO NOW. It's everyone for himself now, we have no time!"

"Sir, with all respect, we must follow the proced—"

Suddenly, there was the sound of the air being cut, then a splutter of blood. The ensign's head left his shoulders, and the glow of a blood red gem filled the room behind the ensign's still standing body.

IT WAS THE CAPTAIN

Gullfballse fired frantically towards the direction of the glow, his bullets passing through the ensign's body as it crumpled to the ground.

"GET IN THE PODS!"

The galley crew jumped in as Gullfballse sprayed the room with bullets.

click

"DETACH NOW!"

The ground shook as the lifepod jettisoned from the ship, sending the passengers to the floor. Gullfballse grabbed the handrails and got to his feet and looked out the observation window, watching as the blood red glow faded away.

Part 9. A Warm Welcome

—Yggy—

Otaner: "Men ready yourself to receive that life pod, I want 2 Hukari hunting groups and medical staff to be ready in the lower decks hangar bay."

The life pod was received and connected to the lower hangar bay, Otaner went with security officer Gartam and some guards to greet whoever was in it.

The lifepod door opens, then dehisces and crashes to the ground. Four men in VAC suits step out, nearly tripping over the door. Staggering, they stumble towards the Count and his men.

Otaner steps forward, with Gartam and his guards on his flanks.

"Easy gentlemen, the medical teams are ready to receive you, if you are injured."

The hukari hunters who are present in the hangar keep their eyes on the 4 men stumbling out of the life pod.

The visor of the leading man pops open, revealing a pale face covered in blood, ancient symbols carved on it. Before the Count can react, the creature screams and pulls a long knife from his suit, driving it into the Count's abdomen.

"JOIN US, YGGY OTANER, CHAFFBEARD DEMANDS YOUR PRESENCE"

The rest of the creatures let out a ghastly scream at the top of their lungs and rip off their helmets and suits, extending their arms towards the room as if asking for an embrace.

“JOIN US”

The three creatures bloat up and explode, sending blood and flesh across the room. The bone fragments bury themselves in the bodies of the guards, the blood begins to sizzle and corrode the ground, and the flesh convulses and writhes, trying to form back together. The Count, still in shock from the blow, sees the tip of a sharp bone protruding from the creature’s chest, mere inches from his own heart. The last thing the count does before his senses fail him, is to push the corpse away.

Hearing the explosions, Fotis runs into the room, guards in tow. Upon entering he finds his count lying on the floor with a knife in his gut, a mutilated corpse beside him and the room covered in blood.

“I need a medic here NOW!”

The medic checks the corpses, and they find security officer Gartam under a dead guard barely alive. As the unconscious Count and the few survivors get picked up by the medics and rushed to the med bay, Fotis inspects the other corpse, pierced by countless bones. After turning him over and looking at his face he reels back in shock

“I know this man, we served together on the Kol Star. What the hell is going on here?”

Part 10. Aftermath

–Yggy–

Aboard the Hurk greyhound, alarms go off. Security teams rushing towards the hangar bay, seeing all the guts and gore from the 3 corpses, the Count being dragged away by medical teams, some of the crew start getting on their knees and praying to Gorievaruk for deliverance, whatever they witnessed, it made even the stoutest hunter feel fear.

A few days later, a weak transmission is directed to Count Yggy Otones, seemingly from a lifepod.

*“This...**cough** this is officer Gulfballes. We are bound for Jack’s station, **his voice trembles** our power is degraded, please help us relay the message.”*

In the background, the sound of several men gagging, coughing, and vomiting can be heard.

Video Link

[The Tale of Chaffbeard the Devourer](#)

Part of the ship... part of the crew.....

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