



Revenant

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The buzz of servo motors vibrated through the floor while docking clamps established a seal on the airlock. A slight crackle in his ear told him his ship was now linked with the computer on the floating hulk, century old protections being no match for modern counter-measures. Core systems diagnostic information appeared in his visor, confirming that communications, navigation, engines, and environmental controls were all offline. Thankfully structural integrity remained at 100 per cent despite the extensive battle damage marring the dreadnought's hull. He ignored the remainder of the data and ordered a search through the derelict ship's crew manifest. The results appeared instantly, listing over one hundred crew, with one name, Doctor Cassandra Evans, flashing red in his display.

His heart raced. Finally, after a decade of searching, he'd found one of them.

"It's just a name on a list, Ryan, don't go nuts," he said. "There's still plenty that can go wrong." Perhaps talking to oneself really was a sign of madness, you'd have to be crazy to do what he did.

Still, finding the doctor was huge step forward, and if he could get her off this ship humanity might actually be able to get Earth back.

He set his excitement aside and reviewed the ship's log. The *Francis Drake* was a sleeper ship, one of nineteen such ships, launched one hundred and seven years ago with the dream of taking humanity to

the stars. Designed to function autonomously, the ships set out from Earth to the Gilese system, with enough equipment and supplies to start a new life for their cryogenically preserved cargo.

Unfortunately, the dream became a nightmare.

Just like the other ships, the *Francis Drake* turned back toward Earth when the computer detected genetic anomalies in several of the colonists. What began as a bold step toward colonising another world, resulted in the loss of Earth, and the near extinction of the human race.

The lights above the airlock showed green, his ship was now firmly attached to the dreadnought's side.

Implants embedded in his brain allowed him to control ship systems with a thought, and now that the link was in place, that control also extended to the derelict. At least it would once he restarted the reactor, until then, he'd have to do things the old fashioned way. Schematics appeared on his visor; the *Drake's* engineering section was about fifty metres away, and getting there was his first priority.

Preliminary scans indicated that, apart from the cryogenic storage units in the ship's hold, there were no other life signs aboard, but he'd been on sleeper ships before.

It wasn't the living he needed to worry about.

Ryan braced his weapon against his shoulder and initiated the command to open the airlock. His finger hovered over the trigger; these first few seconds could be deadly.

A slight change in pressure told him the doors were open, and he fired immediately, the barrel of his rifle flaring as the husks attacked.

The first one fell, its legs vaporised by the superheated plasma. Well-placed shots to the head and chest dropped the second one a heartbeat later, while a third closed quickly.

“Damn, these bastards are fast.”

He stepped to the side and let his attacker’s momentum carry it past him, then finished it quickly with a tight burst into the husk’s back. Without pause, he flung the rifle away and spun around, releasing the monofilament blade built into his gauntlet. His arm whipped around, neatly decapitating the fourth as it loomed over him.

As quickly as it began, the fight was over.

Four of the *Drake’s* once human crew had been stilled. It was important for him to avoid thinking he’d killed them for, in truth, these unfortunates were dead the moment the infection took them.

He recovered his rifle, and tagged each of the bodies, comparing their corrupted DNA against the crew manifest he downloaded earlier. He had to make sure that the Doctor was not among them, this ship would be useless if she’d been turned.

She wasn't.

Then, with his weapon once more held to his shoulder, he took his first step onto the ship.

With the artificial gravity switched off, he relied on magnets built into his shoes to secure him to the floor, and walking with them on was never easy. He carefully picked his way forward, ever vigilant, as he negotiated several sealed bulkheads to reach the engineering section at the rear of the ship.