

Brink of Extinction Chapter Three

by Christopher Lee Buckner

CHAPTER THREE

Major Alex Vale was knelt over the shoulder of the communications officer as he listened carefully to the channels, searching for signs of survivors left within the New York area. It was his job to bring soldiers home, and he and his team, Valkyrie Six had found and rescued hundreds of survivors who otherwise would have perished. At this moment, flying thirty thousand feet, his team was the last searching.

The operation was over — the battle lost. Those that could be saved were found and brought home, and for the past twelve hours the surface had been quiet. The order for all units to pull out had already been given. Command had made their decision and in an hour, what was left was going to be reduced to ash, which was pointless Alex felt. The nuclear fire would kill thousands, maybe millions of Daemons, but in the end, it would accomplish nothing when the enemy numbered in the tens of billions. The measure was done out of desperation to claim some tiny measure of victory and to save face when the federation council began to demand answers.

He wasn't about to give up, however, not when his brother was still somewhere within the ruins of New York City.

A part of Vale felt foolish. How one lone survivor could be left among the skeletal remains of New York? More than likely he was already dead. Vale knew he wasn't among the survivors pulled out over the past two days. But he had to stay in the area for as long as he could. His gut told him to hold onto his faith that Thomas was alive.

Suddenly his ears perked as they noticed what sounded like a radio burst.

“Wait, there — channel 233.1.”

“It is faint sir, and ill frequent. It could just be background static,” the comm-officer replied a moment later.

“No. It has to be a survivor. Order the pilot to change course.” Vale was already heading back into the cargo bay, putting his helmet onto his head, sealing it shut.

“Are you certain it is worth the risk, Major?” But Vale did not answer. His mind was made up. Even if it wasn't his brother, someone might still be down there alive. As to his squad's namesake, he would bring the soldier(s) home if possible. He just hoped it wasn't already too late.

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Running as fast as he could, which was hard with the thick burning air and a pack of hungry Feral Hounds trailing him, Anderson weaved in and out between the thousands of cars that jammed the unused city streets. He could hear, even without having to look behind him that the Hounds were coming, running along the sides of the buildings, or leaping from one car to the next.

One of the Feral Hounds landed before him, standing on the hood of a parked car. Anderson reacted quickly, firing a burst from his weapon. A dozen rounds easily hit the big predator, but it only served to push the hound back, as it leaped into the air once more and out of range.

A pack of hounds tried the same trick as they landed a few feet in front him once again, but as he fired, they leaped out of range, forcing Anderson to turn the corner. It was then that he had the feeling that the hounds were corralling him. He didn't think them to be that smart, and besides, it would be easier to kill him and get it over with than to play games, yet he could not shake the feeling.

He quickly loaded the last of his grenades into the breach under his weapon and then stopped, aiming at a group of twelve hounds. As he fired, five of them managed to dash out of the way, but the rest were caught in the ensuing blast once the small, but powerful

explosive blew. Most of the Feral Hounds were dead, but a few with missing limbs and large gaping holes in their bodies continued forward, never losing stride as they chased after Anderson with renewed determination.

He fired a few more times, emptying his weapons' clip. The rounds, while powerful, *powerful* enough to blow a man in half wasn't enough to slow the Hounds' advance. He soon found himself running down a long street, and at the end he saw a large building standing before him. He recognized it. He had always been interested in pre-Daemon history. The building had been called the Empire State, and while two centuries old and scarred from the *fall* in the mid-twenty-first century, it still stood. Unfortunately it also prevented him from running anywhere else as a dozen more Feral Hounds blocked his path.

"This isn't good," Anderson muttered between heavy breaths before he fired a sustain burst.

Anderson shifted his aim at a hound running along the side of the street, coming towards him. It leaped into the air, clawed feet held out, ready to tear his head off, but he fired everything he had left into its soft underbelly.

It impacted upside the face of a large eighteen-wheeled truck. Anderson watched as the Hound, still alive was on the ground, screaming out as it convulsed violently as its guts had spilled out from its stomach. A few seconds later, its high pitched screams died altogether.

He raised his weapon and pulled the trigger as he took aim at a single Hound that was coming towards him slowly, its head held low as it moved in a careful stalking posture. However, his weapon did not fire as the computer mounted display on the top of the submachine gun indicated that he had zero rounds.

Anderson threw his weapon down and pulled out from behind his back a short knife; a blade called a Ka-Bar, the only weapon he had left. It had been in his family since the Second World War where his grandfather, five generations ago had been a US Marine Raider, fighting in the Pacific in a war that seemed a million years ago.

“If you sons of bitches want me, you're going to have to come and get me,” Anderson cried at the top of his lungs as he held the knife up, trying to sound as mean as he could.

The hounds circled him, at least a hundred of them total. They snarled and growled at one another, seemly determining which amongst them was going to taste his blood. He knew his little knife would probably break on contact with the Hound's hard skin. However, the Feral Hounds stopped as their attention was turned behind them.

Anderson's eyes widened as he saw a big eight-foot creature step through the pack, which moved aside and made a path for the new arrival; their heads held low in a submissively.

He had only seen this breed of Daemon that the federation files had come to call *Kongs*, because of its supposed resemblance to some big ape from a movie long before his time, on holo-videos. They were extremely powerful, far more so than even the Feral Hounds. They moved upright on two legs but could if needed run on all four. They were highly agile, able to leap, not as high or far as the hounds, but still considerably.

The Kongs had four glowing red eyes, no ears and no mouth, or so it seemed. Their build was powerful and very muscular. They had four large clawed fingers, which were retractable, and their body, like most of the Daemons was covered by a thick exoskeleton of armored plates. Most dangerous was that the Kongs were supposed to be extremely intelligent — somewhere along the line of sub-human, or dolphins from the pre-invasion of Earth. Regardless of how smart they may have been, they certainly were a dominating and frightening presence, even amongst the Feral Hounds.

The Kong stared at Anderson, seemly not interested in killing him, but perhaps had something else in mind that was far worse. It was a known fact to every soldier that the Daemon didn't always kill their prey, or eat them. No, sometimes they took them somewhere else, to a fate far worse than death. And if that was what this Kong had in mind, he wasn't about to allow that to happen.

Anderson raised his knife to his throat and held the blade tightly against his skin, drawing blood.

“Don't you move another inch, you ugly bastard. I won't let you take me, not like you have the others,” Anderson threatened as his gazed remained fixed.

He swallowed as the Kong's eyes focused on him with renewed intensity, followed by a sudden extension of its powerful claws. Apparently it was about to call Anderson's bluff as it took a step forward.

Sweat beaded down his brow in buckets as his hands shook, as the handle of his knife was firmly clutched between his fingers. Other soldiers in his platoon had talked about what they would do if they were faced with a similar choice — would they take their own life or face an uncertain end? Anderson had always proclaimed he would kill himself if push came to shove. However, right now, he decided otherwise.

“Fuck it!” he exclaimed loudly as he released the tension of his knife to his throat and flipped the blade around, holding it properly. He was going to charge the Kong. He knew he stood no chance of killing the creature.

The Kong flinched as its eyes opened slightly, clearly surprised. Anderson charged.

