

## *Achilles' Tendon*

Cold sweat padded the brow of the Zeltron Battlemaster. He was hunched over the washbasin of his personal quarters, resting on his forearms and sighing heavily. Today was the anniversary of an event Fenn cared not to remember.

It had been another life; one that he scarcely could imagine had been his. After failing out of the Imperial Academy on Carida, Fenn had used his natural abilities to rise rapidly in a mercenary company, finally reaching his goal of obtaining a captaincy. The naturally proud and vain Zeltron reviled in the adoration of his men and fed into it with his pheromones every chance he could get. Yet, earning adoration and respect was far different from deserving it.

Flush with the laurels of his newfound position, Fenn took an assignment to clear a Killik hive off of some forgotten rock, paid by the colonists to eradicate the misunderstood species. It was supposed to be easy. It was supposed to be clean. Fenn glanced in the mirror and tried not to see the haggard yet beautiful face staring back at him.

His vanity and hubris got the best of Fenn that day, and it ended in the deaths of many fine soldiers who had looked up to him. He remembered standing near the landing ramp of the lead troop transport as his men cleared the landing zone, encumbered with heavy weaponry for the dirty task of clearing a hive. Indeed, he thought, how hard would it be to eradicate a population of insectoid creatures armed with claws and sticks?

Fenn had the good sense that day to build a makeshift palisade around the drop zone where the transports were mustered. He knew the terrain was too low and flat, perfect for launching the transports, but very poorly set up as a defensible bastion. He posted the watch, to be sure, but did not order fighting pits and crew served weapons placed by the crews. He knew an over-watch transport should have been airborne as an early warning system. Yet, again, these creatures were primitive.

When the attack came, Fenn was dining in the modular command center with his junior officers who were not off seeking the Killik. The alarms began to blare, and errant blaster fire rang out. Some of his men rose from their meals and grabbed their sidearm, but Fenn settled them with a wave of his hand and ordered the sentries to lock the doors. Surely, the raiding party would run through and be burned out.

What Battlemaster Fenn was not aware of was that this was no raiding party, but a concerted attack by the Killiks. Fenn's main force was chasing shadows in the caverns, being driven further and further away from the base as the Killiks secretly pulled parties to Fenn's location. When the attack came, it was efficient. Everyone caught outside and not able to immediately get to the transports was hacked to pieces. By the end of the carnage, Fenn and his officers could hear the cries and the scratching of the dying at the walls of the command center.

And on this anniversary, Fenn finally looked himself in the eyes and confronted his greatest weakness. The face smiled back at him. Yet, the smirk hid

the anguish and pain of a man living but with half of his being stranded along with the dead.