



|---| Chapter 12 |---|

The Seeker Comes

by The Wildcat

The stink of rot and burnt flesh filled the air. Pockets of gas belched rhythmically. The meat glistened and twitched convulsively. Poorly illuminated by a mysterious incandescence, the chamber was a festering cesspool.

As snakes, dozens of tentacles struck and jabbed at Dark Shadow. He leapt away from a fierce thrust and retaliated with another blast of concentrated dark energy. Rolling, he clipped another meandering fiber with a precision kick.

He had driven three chambers deep into the overgrowth of muscle and tendons. Each room had been a frantic battle with the serpentine appendages. Snapping and tearing the strands from their foundations, Dark Shadow had gutted each office with care.

Suddenly, an overzealous tentacle lunged at the guard. He snagged the strand and jerked it away from its base spewing dark crimson blood in a slender trail. Summoning another charge, Dark Shadow assaulted the wound. The resulting burst of stringy meat created an aerosol of juices.

The only distraction from his rampage was the burning sensation on the back of his neck. It felt as though a flame was burrowing through his spine. At first, it had been a small bite, but the pain was growing. It seemed to spread, slowly ripping at his flesh from the inside.

On the outside, a grizzly shower of sinew and blood had started to cake his uniform. With each room, a new host of slinking tentacles attacked. Each previous chamber had been

sealed by the flesh. His only recourse was to slam his way through each wall.

Breathless, the guard searched for his next adversary, but found none. Wary of the unexpected stillness, he flicked two orbs of concentrated power into the mass of tissue. The splatter of fibers and ligaments provided the only dissent.

Dark Shadow moved gradually, studying his carnage. The scorched and broken entry point remained hollow. Conversely, he found no sealed exit. At first glance, the room was a dead-end.

Suspensions drove him forward. He traced the grain of the meat along each wall until he found a knot of tensely clinched muscle.

"That's it! Time for an enema," the guard barked at his torment.

He summoned a globe of intense energy and rammed it home. Tender, the wall of flesh ruptured sousing the guard. Screaming with new found frustration, Dark Shadow sprang into the cavity.

There he stood mesmerized by the cavernous room. The ceiling had been torn open to reveal the rocky, earthen walls outside. Fragments of interior walls continued to stand, holding the chamber open. As a fungus, the meat seemed to overgrow the remaining structures.

In the center of the room, a single bulbous column of flesh stretched from floor to ceiling. Dilapidated and skeletal, the remains of human faces glowered at the guard. A few sparse limbs jutted into the room and wriggled aimlessly.

"...welcome... ..dahark one..." It was not one voice, but many. They spoke in a unison whisper.

Dark Shadow flashed his gaze about the room, but found nothing. He then focused on the emaciated faces.

“...whe are mhany...” The voices were hollow. They seemed to speak while inhaling each breath. But the faces never moved.

Angered, Dark Shadow raised his hand for a blistering strike. But as quickly, his hand became numb. Suddenly, he felt a fresh stab of pain in his spine.

“...jhoi ussss... ..yhou belong to ussss...”

Dark Shadow cursed wildly, but realized that he had produced no sound. He looked at the gore that stood before him. Then he forced himself to raise his hand one last time. The meat-like growth had engulfed his void skin and coated his body.

Perhaps his pride was injured worse than any portion of his body. He was simultaneously enraged and forlorn. The realization of defeat at the whims of a meat fungus crushed his spirit.

With all of his focus, he managed to force a coarse whisper of his own. “Never.”

“...whe are mhany... ..yhou belong to ussss...”

Without light, the office buildings were dark blocks that concealed portions of the horizon. Only from the top-most floor could the machine observe the prospect.

He could feel the concentration of dark energy. He had felt the wasted bursts disperse into the atmosphere. He understood that the sudden weakening was a sign of conquest.

“-Assault unit zero one four, activation orders. Report to Chamberlain Research Institute. Secure the target.”

Somewhere in the city, a room filled with metal soldiers buzzed to life. With perfect precision, the unit filtered into the street and began marching toward CRI. By the cover of darkness, they would pass relatively unnoticed.

Staring towards the wilderness, he could see a lone pair of headlights approaching the city. Otherwise, the streets were calm. Rescue crews were busily rummaging through the rubble of the fallen apartment building. It was a moot gesture at best, but the humans were an impotent species. Fruitless labors were a way of life for them.

They did not deserve the cities they claimed. They were fools, the lot of them. Only by developing technologies had any human served a true purpose. But that purpose had been fulfilled.

The reign of his second supremacy was at hand. Even as the machine observed the flickering of flash-lights in neighboring buildings, his soldiers were marching into Black Mesa.

He could sense every machine as though he were a part of them. His demolition units guarded the crater's edge. Two assault units awaited the order to proceed. A single scout unit was already inside, searching for a feasible route to the bunker christened Lambda.

“-Assault unit zero one two proceed. Zero one three provide support.”

The crater was filled with burning debris. Human tissue lay strewn haphazardly. Charred ruins dotted the rim, while blackened rubble dominated the interior.

The demolition units had returned to a sleep-like state, hidden amidst the wreckage until another force dared approach.

The first assault unit filed into a waiting tunnel. The discovery of the half-open blast door had proven bountiful. With a few strategically placed charges, the frame had been demolished allowing the seven-foot machines full access.

Close behind, the second assault unit took defensive positions. Given a signal to advance, they replaced the first squad in the tunnel. Though the heavily armored machines were elite soldiers, the machine had learned caution from past mistakes.

A stream of data entered the machine's mind. He had intercepted and decrypted a number of 'top secret' communique's, but the latest carried the most valuable data. He permitted the information sink-in before making a decision. Deep within his metal body, a gnarled grin formed.

Operation Cumulonimbus had been approved. A larger military task-force would endeavor for Black Mesa within the day.

Many opportunities lay within the intercepted facts. Death and destruction would be his guide toward the secret technology of Lambda. He would gain both power and freedom. And he knew of the military's planned counteroffensive.

Without warning he was drawn from deep meditation. Pleasantly surprised, he felt the surge. It was the sensation of force. He savored the growing sensation.

The demon had been dispatched, and his shrine in the city landfill was collapsing as it was drawn invariably back to the hellish border world. The hydras were writhing in torture as their bodies were disassembled in a blaze of fire.

The machine could taste the release of energy. The seeker was ready.

In the cool light of the chamber, Kain appeared harmless. A docile puppy sleeping quietly. His face was expressionless. He moved only for small, sharp gasps.

Doctor Fields stood before the metal and glass cylinder in somber contemplation. Several minutes of reflection passed without action.

“Is she intact?” he asked quietly.

“Yes sir,” a young research associate replied. “Physically, she’s fine. Her mental state is another story. She keeps insisting that we conduct a blood test. She thinks she’s pregnant.”

“Nonsense. She underwent the same sterilization and augmentation as the rest of us.”

“Yes sir,” the young man paused in search of a different but relevant subject. “A security team is pursuing the last droid through the other warehouses. Still no sign of Target Delta.”

Doctor Fields sighed and shook his head. “Consider Target Delta a complete loss as well. Damn it!”

“We knew it was a possibility.”

“I know, I know. But I would have liked to at least retrieve some tissue cultures.”

“Should I call the clean-up team to sterilize the rubble?”

“Heavens no Lewis! Not until we gain something from this fiasco.”

“What did you have in mind doctor?”

A gleam of youthful exuberance flashed across the aging scientist’s eyes. “When we revive Kain, I’ll tell him that

the ERCU attacked us and send him after the controller machine. What is it called? Commander? Make a note of it.”

Doctor Fields brushed past his assistant and entered an empty hallway. Lewis followed closely. The overly sterile passage was void of furniture. Florescent lights bathed the walls. Chromed doors shielded open elevator shafts at the end of the hall.

Tapping the lift-call button, the scientist turned to his colleague with genuine concern. “Any word from the satellite laboratory?”

“No sir. Would you like a security team dispatched?”

“No. If something went wrong the experiment is to be considered terminated. We simply don’t have the resources to devote to it. We must finish the preparations on our end by this evening.”

The metal doors creaked open, revealing a dimly lit interior. Drab fabric draped over the walls. Simple wooden handrails sprouted from beneath the cloth. The box-like service car dipped violently as the scientists boarded.

With a soft rumble, the doors sealed and the car began to ascend. Both men, hushed by the tremors of the elevator, waited for the chime that signaled their floor. The doors again squealed open. Yet, the hallway was drastically more impressive.

Ornate benches and decorative paintings lined either wall. Pine molding trimmed the plaster. Decorative and energy efficient halogen lamps highlighted the corridor’s ceiling.

Doctor Fields entered his office and strolled up to the nearest window. Lewis approached quietly and peered into the poorly lit courtyard. Together, the two scientists remained patiently beside the window.

For a few minutes, they solemnly observed the warehouse complex. Hints of smoke billowed from the debris. Occasionally, the only surviving droid would appear amidst the rubble and then duck away.

Strangely, the interior lights began to shimmer. A rumble passed through the concrete floor. Startled, the scientists turned to find brilliant beams of light streaming through every seam in a locked storage cabinet. The metal began to glow with heat, igniting the surrounding walls. The top of the cabinet finally crumbled inward and the glistening, ornate statuette exploded through the roof.

Both men stood beneath the opening in the ceiling. High above, the summoning artifact was a gleam of light. "It works!" Fields cried. "It finally charged! This could prove invaluable to our plans... if this truly IS an ancient teleport."

Brilliant and intense, a bolt of white light stabbed the artifact. A second struck from the opposite direction. Finally, a third streak slammed into the floor of the office toppling the two scientists.

As they crawled away, a tremendous ball of light pulverized the remaining ceiling and bashed through the floor. There, amidst twisted steel rebar and piles of concrete dust, the ball dissolved into darkness.

Fire alarms wailed into the night. Sparks popped from newly exposed power cables. Weak flames licked the walls. The storage room below the office disappeared, completely devoid of light.

Carefully, Doctor Fields crept toward the edge of the floor. Lewis kept his distance, overcome with astonishment. "Look at the power!" he gloated. "We'll be rewarded for this"

Emerging from the darkness and into the dim moonlight, the figure took shape. It stood six feet and five inches in

height. Bulky and menacing, it was covered in molded plates of bone. Its ribs extruded around the torso. A large and ornate emblem was carved into one of its breastplates. Its skull was a composite of bony fragments that capped a skeletal face.

In its right hand, it clutched an apparent spine. The backbone was chiseled into a gruesome sword.

Astounded, both men stared at the newcomer. It returned their gaze with dominating strength through vacant eye sockets. Finally, Doctor Fields forced his cracking voice to produce one memorized quote. "...from the sunken city of R'lyeh, the seeker travels."

It was a blur of motion. The seeker landed six inches from Lewis, forcing the man to crane his neck upward and stagger to his feet.

He never actually felt the pain of his death. In less than a second, he had been lifted and his collar impaled on a gnarled rebar in the ceiling.

All the young man could do was panic and try fruitlessly to pry himself free. With his blood pulsing from the wound, his body stilled and dangled loosely above the pit in the floor.

Doctor Fields rolled to his feet and sprinted into the corridor. There he plowed into a pair of security guards and two fire technicians. "Quickly! We must capture this specimen!"

"Hold it sir! What happened?" one guard inquired.

The spinal blade pierced through the guard's temple and pinned his body to the wall. The seeker lumbered into the corridor and focused its attention on Fields.

The second security guard began backing away and firing his assault rifle wildly. Chips of bone flaked into the floor.

The seeker nabbed the new distraction and swatted the rifle away. With considerable ease, it lifted the guard and mashed his skull.

Aghast, Doctor Fields wheeled toward the hallway. He scurried into an open office and slammed the door. A high-pitched scream of death crept down the hallway and found the doctor's ears.

He recklessly raced around the room. An oak framed sofa and a steal cabinet provided some security when pressed against the door. Still, the scientist knew that his pursuer would arrive shortly.

Fields dropped to his knees behind the oak desk and pressed a button on a black speaker console. "This is Doctor Fields. Authorization one-six-one-c. Dispatch a containment team."

"-We have the target on video display. Containment is dispatched."

The door cracked under the first impact.

"Have the team report to the main garage. I want this subject captured. I'll lead it too you."

Bony fists pierced the door and cart wheeled the metal cabinet into the opposing wall.

"-Understood."

As the seeker tore the door apart, Doctor Fields turned his attention to the nearest window. He snatched the closest chair and plunged it through the glass. Regardless of the fractured shards, he allowed himself to tumble out.

The scientist dragged himself to his feet, ignoring the small cuts and punctures that peppered his body. Beyond the nearest building, he could see the main garage. He ran

erratically around the main laboratory and across the courtyard.

He rushed into the garage to find a single white Ford Explorer awaiting him. Past the main entrance, the city skyline filled the horizon. An empty guard's booth protected the view. Reinforced concrete walls surrounded the available parking spaces.

The containment team streamed into the garage from the entrance and formed a single file line of six people clad in black body armor, helmets, and gas-masks.

Two of the team, a man and woman, stormed passed the scientist to the rear exit. Two men guarded the main entrance. And the remaining pair ducked behind the Ford Explorer.

"Sir, get in the guard booth."

Doctor Fields reacted immediately. He rushed into the cubicle and waited. Windows in each wall allowed him to observe from relative safety.

Shrieks of pain echoed through the building. Beside the rear exit, the first victim slumped to the floor, having been speared by a steal rod.

His partner reacted thoughtlessly, leaning through the door to open fire. The woman was snatched from her feet and out of sight. Her screams cut short with a resonant crack.

Minutes passed as the scientist and containment team waited for the seeker to emerge. Doctor Fields focused on the doorway. He pressed against the guard booth wall until he had fogged the glass with his breath.

A shadow drew his attention from the exit. One of the entrance guards lay in a pool of his own blood. The slit in his throat sputtered with each attempted breath.

The other guard careened off the booth and landed lifeless before his surviving comrades.

“Sir, get out’a there!”

Fragments of glass sprinkled onto the doctor’s head. Dull snapping shook him as the sword tore through his breast. He collapsed when the blade retreated. Straining, he watched as the two remaining containment men opened fire.

The seeker absorbed bullet after bullet while splinters of bone powdered the ground at its feet. Unfazed, it hurled the sword through one man, splitting his face.

His partner attempted retreat, but barely gained a step. As Doctor Field’s vision became hazy and he drew his last breath, he watched as the guard was force-fed his own weapon. *λ*

