

WILL WIGHT

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR



HOW ABOUT ANOTHER SNEAK PREVIEW OF

THE KNIGHT

THE LAST HORIZON

BOOK THREE



THE
KNIGHT

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THE KNIGHT

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Book and cover design by Patrick Foster

Cover painting by Simon Carr/scarrindustries.com

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ISBN 978-1-959001-52-2 (print edition)

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE INDUSTRIAL SPACE colony Pekler-76 was a broad, vast, uninviting place. It wasn't meant for holding civilian population but for supporting factory equipment, so it was made of cold steel and painted with shades of white and gray.

In total, it was as large as a small city, but most of its internal volume was taken up by vast machines and a network of steel walkways.

In the best of times, it was a quiet place, its metallic silence interrupted only by the clank of steel, the hiss of steam, the distant hum of engines, and—every once in a while—the echoing footsteps of an employee going from one task to another.

For weeks now, the footsteps had been silent. The machinery continued, but the only sounds were panicked breaths, tense and whispered cries for help, and the occasional scream of terror.

All the surviving crew aboard Pekler-76 had learned that silence meant survival.

"My name is Raion Raithe, Knight of *The Last Horizon!*" Raion cried. "I'm here to help!"

Holographic fireworks burst behind him.

The pair of humans, a woman and a young girl, squirmed deeper

into the corner of the vents where they'd hidden. It looked like they'd been hiding there for a while, Raion judged, based on their tattered clothes, the piles of discarded food packages, and the stench of unwashed bodies.

The girl whimpered while trying to cover her own mouth while the woman gestured desperately to Raion. "*Quiet,*" she whispered. "You have to be *quiet.*"

"No need! You're safe now!"

If the humans could have run somewhere, he suspected they would have run from him. They didn't trust him yet, so they didn't believe him when he said their days of horror were over.

He supposed it didn't support his argument when a panel clanged open overhead and a predatory alien leaped out of the ceiling, jaws extended to feast on Raion's flesh.

Raion leaned aside, letting the creature crash to the floor so he could get a good look at it. It resembled a standard canine covered in a blue-black exoskeleton, like an insect. It had a pair of glistening compound eyes and jaws filled with slavering fangs, and its reverse-jointed legs were poised to leap on him again.

"Bugs really are the worst," Raion declared.

The alien made a hacking cough, and its throat bulged unnaturally wide. Only a second later, it spat a glob of luminous green liquid at him. He was about to dodge again when he considered what a fist-sized bubble of acid might do to the colony if it ended up melting through the hull.

Thinking quickly, he tore off a metal panel from the wall and used it to block the acid. The metal was corroded immediately, forcing him to toss it aside, but fortunately the acid wasn't as strong as he'd feared. It only dissolved the metal, but it didn't seem like it would eat through the entire colony.

Although the alien was hacking up another glob, so Raion put a stop to that with a quick slash of his force-blade. Bluish blood sprayed over the rest of the hall.

"Good thing their blood isn't acidic," Raion mused. "Can you imagine?"

"It *is!*" the woman shouted.

An instant later, the entire hallway began smoking.

"Ah. In that case, we should run."

Raion scooped up both of the humans and began sprinting down the metal catwalk. As his footsteps echoed in the hallway, he concentrated on his third eye and looked up into the ceiling.

As he'd expected, he saw blurry glows of reddish-gold hurrying toward him from all over this part of the station. More aliens, drawn toward the sounds.

"Don't worry, you're safe with me!" Raion called to the humans tucked under his arms. "So don't be alarmed as I fight, and try your best to avoid the acid."

The girl squirmed in his arm, trying to escape.

An alien poked its head out of a panel near the floor and got a blast of crimson energy in the face. That worked better than slicing it in half would have; there wasn't as much blood.

Raion kicked through the steel wall a moment later, crushing one, but of course that got acid on his boot and he had to toss it off. Which made running on the steel catwalk less comfortable.

After a few more experimental kills, Raion settled on what he found to be the best method of killing the aliens without letting them spit acid or getting their blood everywhere. He had to either burn them with his Combat Art or crush them *just* enough to cause internal damage but not so much that the exoskeleton cracked.

That would have been much easier if he had free hands. While executing a whirling kick in midair to send a lash of flame at a group of aliens *was* exciting, it would have been far more practical to use a hand. Not to mention how much easier it would have been to grab an alien in two hands and crush it, rather than pinning it with his foot against the ground and killing it that way.

But he knew from experience that humans had a low tolerance for being tossed around, and being carried while Raion leaped, dodged, kicked, and burned aliens was probably their tolerance level.

If he temporarily threw them into the air so he could use his hands for a moment, they'd probably vomit when he caught them

again. And they had obviously been malnourished for a while; they couldn't spare the nutrition.

As Raion fought, another concern dawned on him. The aliens' numbers weren't dwindling as he killed them. If anything, more and more of them were pouring out of the walls and ceiling at every moment.

He focused his vision, staring more deeply into the rest of the station, and saw that it was crawling with almost as many threats as an Iron Hive. He was already starting to feel the exertion—none of what he was doing was difficult on its own, but moving carefully enough to avoid disturbing the humans was tricky. His Combat Art also consumed far more energy when he used it so inefficiently.

At this rate, he might falter, and the innocents would be in danger.

It would have been easy for him to burn all the predatory aliens out of the outpost by destroying the colony itself. He could do it without even summoning his Divine Titan, and—while that would be a powerful feat of his Combat Art—it would be easier than fighting this way.

But there were other humans hiding elsewhere in the colony. Until he confirmed that they were dead or safe, he couldn't do anything that would destabilize Pekler-76 itself.

"This is tricky," Raion said to his charges as he leaped over a ball of acid, kicked an alien into a wall, and stomped fire into a second target's face. "I have a friend that would know exactly what to do in this scenario. I wish Sola were here."

The humans didn't respond to him—they were busy screaming in terror—but a blue light shone next to him.

He didn't have time to stop and wait, but his spirit brightened. The Aether, or more likely Horizon, had heard his wish.

A second later, the blue light resolved into a hooded figure a bit shorter than Raion. The symbols on the edges of his wizard's mantle shone silver that matched his eyes, and he swept a hand at the oncoming aliens and shoved them back.

A glob of acid hit the air a few feet away from him and shim-

mered on the edge of an invisible protective field, sliding across it as though down curved glass.

“Did you call for help?” Varic asked.

“Actually, I called for Sola,” Raion said. “But you would have been my second choice!”

Raion would have expected the innocents he’d rescued to have been relieved upon seeing a fellow human, but they were still crying. Varic gestured to them and Raion felt their slight weight lifting from his arms.

“Why don’t I take these two?” Varic suggested.

Raion sighed in relief. “Thank you! This will be much easier with my hands.”

Then his stomach lurched as the catwalk beneath their feet collapsed.

He’d been leaping from bridge to bridge as he fought, trying to spread out the acid damage, but they’d stayed in one place too long. The catwalk couldn’t take it, and it fell to the floor beneath.

Raion, however, only fell a few inches. Varic had caught all four of them with his levitation ring, so they hovered safely far above the wreckage. Raion could have flown on his own, but he appreciated the support anyway.

The acid was starting to pile up, though. It was getting hard to see the rest of the room through the layer of shining green sludge that covered Varic’s shield.

He turned to the woman, who seemed more relieved to be drifting in midair than she had been to be carried by Raion. “Where did these things come from?” Varic asked.

“Th-the company made them,” she said bitterly. “Supposed to be the *perfect weapons*, if you can believe it. All they do is hunt, eat, and lay their eggs.”

Varic took a deep breath as though bracing himself to dive into an icy river. “What company?”

“Cablewright Genetics,” she said, and Varic let out a breath of relief. “A subsidiary of the Vallenar Corporation,” she went on, and Varic’s relief turned into a groan.

“Well, you can rest now. We’ll take care of this.”

Raion punched his left hand and turned to face the aliens he could now barely see through the haze of acid. “Bring it on, monsters!”

Varic muttered an incantation and then tossed a golden magic circle over to Raion. It sank into Raion’s head, and suddenly he could see gold lights in six places all around this section of the colony.

“That will take you close to any survivors,” Varic said. “It won’t give you the situation in the room, so look before you leap.”

Raion looked back, having already leaped over to the remaining section of the catwalk. “Leave it to me!” he cried.

Without the humans to carry, Raion steadied himself before igniting his energy and blasting through the crowd of aliens at full speed. It was much easier than fighting with only his feet, but still not as simple as blasting the colony apart would have been.

Raion took this as training. Exercise was good for the soul!

As he flew, he reflected on how grateful he was to have crew he could trust. Even on the Titan Force, while he trusted his fellow Knights with his life, he had been the most capable member. Now, he was part of a team where each member could cover for the weaknesses of the other.

More than ever, Raion was thankful to have friends.

How great was that?

You can get the whole book on June 11, 2024!



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