

## Ghosts

They paced and shuffled, like the dead men they were. The cluttered halls drowned out the noise of their useless debates, arguments with no purpose other than to pass the time to their own, imminent demise. Deep in the building's labyrinth they fought to maintain a semblance of normality, sanity, and control. Three things which either they'd already lost or were quickly slipping from their collective grasps.

Their state had no power. Not anymore. For all the seals and titles, paperwork and constitutions, it was all empty. The vengeful enemy would wipe away their life's work. Not even only their own, but their forefather's and that of their father's. All come to naught through a series of fatal mistakes. They were left closeted away in the halls of an old hotel, hidden away by their generals in the futile hope of victory, or at the very least a favorable peace.

Now most of the generals were dead. Their armies in tatters. The navy's ships twirling away in infinite oblivion far above their heads, dead warships torn asunder by the enemy's precision, now floating lonely in the depths of space. Commanded by the corpses of former admirals, still resplendent in their perfectly trim uniforms, braid and buttons reflecting the light of the local star, across their empty eyes. There was never hope of favorable peace, and certainly not of victory, their mistakes gave them no room for quarter.

So now they waited. Occasionally a courier, or a signal would get through to them, so they could monitor their progress towards destruction. What was left of the forces left defending the Capital had largely surrendered. The remnants of a few brigades still held out in the Cultural District. Their greatest holding the Ministry of Culture's complex. This, like everything else in the lives of the officials, was useless, they could not order or get commands to those souls still fighting on. It would be up to them to die on their own terms.

The officials had little sense of time, and ate at odd schedules whenever they were not debating some new topic. How to deal with reconstruction? How to deal with captured soldiers? They were tense. The longer they argued, the closer would come their defeat. There was no light. All the building's windows had been fortified, and save for the potted plants and pools there was nothing natural within the hotel. In such an environment, shadows only moved when their masters commanded so. Silhouettes against drab walls slipping from one meeting to the next.

Then, through the central doors came the Empire's warriors.

The shadows on the walls vanished. The exotic potted plants died for lack of care. The pools exploded in algae. Papers were left strewn across the desks, to wilt and crumple. Chairs remained overturned, discarded and empty, cloth coverings molding away. The shutters rattled and fell during storms. Small furry creatures made their home in the walls, under desks, and throughout the bar. The sun finally shown through the broken windows, and created new shadows upon the memory of the old.

The Cultural Complex was re-built. Towards its center a memorial now stood, for

both those who assaulted and those who made their final stand. The new buildings were open and airy, with long curved glass walls, fragile. A new maglev line linked it to the countryside. For all the re-building, if one looked hard enough in the tall grass underneath the great cement columns holding up the maglev track the rusted detritus of the war could be found, discarded laser-rifles, charge packs and the occasional torn uniform or bayonet inhabiting the fields. But the people lived their lives.

In the Capital a new central building stood, the council chambers of the new government, now in its twentieth year of rule. The roads were re-paved. A new museum was to be opened. While the people celebrated the old navy's ships still twirled away in infinite oblivion far above their heads, dead warships torn asunder by the enemy's precision, now floating lonely in the depths of space. Commanded by the corpses of former admirals, still resplendent in their perfectly trim uniforms, braid and buttons reflecting the light of the local star, across their empty eyes.