

Chapter One

Death Rains

Sixty Thousand Feet

“Listen up ladies, we’re approaching drop airspace. So shut up, suit up, get a friend to shove a cork up your ass so you don’t shit yourself, and prepare for an arctic drop,” blared over the speaker in the bombers retrofitted bomb bay. The quarters were very cramped; the space was intended for dropping bombs, not soldiers. Yet, here they were, the forty men and women of the Jekotian 9th Arctic Warfare Division, scattered throughout the bomb bays of four high altitude stealth bombers.

The soldiers worked together, helping each other into their oversized and burly arctic drop suits. They would jump with nothing but these suits and the integrated parachute packs, retrieving their personal equipment and belongings from the crate drop. They finished and waited for what felt like hours as the pending tension reached its peak.

“Flight to cargo, we are over your dropzone. Grab a railing and prepare to drop,” crackled over the speaker, this time the pilot. After giving the soldiers a few seconds to grab an overhead railing, the bomb bay doors slid open under their feet, revealing clouds and the night sky. One by one they released their hold on the railing and plummeted into the night, falling through layers of cloud cover and praying recon drones didn’t pick them up.

The last to release was Sergeant Fitz Sidhimer, as some troublesome news reached his ears through his personal COM. “Sidhimer to platoon, one of the bombers released its cargo early. Watch where you land or you’re gonna’ break something, and I doubt it will be a crate.”

As he fell feet first towards the planet, he eased his body into a normal freefall position, ready to release his chute. IFF tags streamed over his goggles integrated HUD, pinpointing every man and woman in his platoon, but quickly vanished from sight as his goggles iced over. He cursed under his breath, and a few seconds later, a heating element within the goggles frame activated and melted the obstruction.

Without his normal mobility, which the arctic drop suits compromised, the only control he had over his FCOM system was his personal radio. Once he hit the ground, he would disable remote access to the unit. Until then, anything he wanted on his HUD, he had to make a radio call for. “Sidhimer to Control, give me the IR beacons on the cargo, same for the rest of the platoon.” Dozens of black points lit up on the planet below him as his goggles activated its IR sensor. Each dot was a crate loaded with supplies for the coming operation. He glanced at the altimeter in his HUD; two-hundred twenty-three feet. Moments later, his field of vision was flooded with white canopies as at two hundred feet, the platoon pulled their chute releases.

Sidhimer continued for a few more seconds to accelerate ahead so he could hit the ground first and establish a rally point. At one-hundred eighty feet he released his main chute, spraying ice everywhere as the small ejection charge broke apart the ice that had formed during the drop. Moments later over his COM a recruit started to panic.

“Shit I can’t open my chute!”

“Calm down rook, give it a tug and tell me if the charge goes off.”

“Nothing, oh god, SOMEBODY HELP ME!”

“Calm down and yank the line for your reserve chute! You're running out of altitude!”

"No it's not working! OH GOD IT'S FROZEN!

"Keep your head together-

"I'M GONNA DIE, I'M GONNA FUCKING DIE!"

"Control, cut his fucking channel, we don't need to hear this!"

"OH GOD, OH GOD, HELP, SOMEONE HEL-"