

Chapter Summaries (The Dregs of Empire)

Spoilers ahead, proceed with caution.

This novella is expected to be read after [Ashes of Man](#), and as such, the summaries below also spoil that book.

Chapter 1: The Prison Planet

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Fortress Prison > Lorian's Cell

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- Tollak (prison guard)
- Prem (prison guard)

Plot Summary

Four guards beat [Lorian Aristedes](#) in a white-walled room of the hightower above [Belusha](#), breaking Lorian's ribs. Reeling from the pain, Lorian recalls his sentencing on the part of [William Caesar](#) for high treason for helping [Hadrian Marlowe](#) escape from the brig aboard the [Tempest](#) with the help of [Bassander Lin](#) and the Prince of Jadd [Kaim du Otranto](#).

““How do you answer these charges?” Caesar himself had asked the question, seated on the camp stool they had set out for his makeshift throne. Lorian had answered with his customary lip. “Unrepentantly, Honorable Caesar.” That had sealed his fate.

On a floating chair passing from medica to his cell, Lorian looks out on the planet Belusha more than a mile below. The frigid surface of the planet is dotted by oil rig towers in a frozen plain with ice-crowned mountains in the middle distance. In the sky, a lattice work of mirrors reflect the light from a sun onto the surface of Belusha, where he could barley make out the prison camp of Downwell, his final destination.

Chapter 2: The Duke

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Fortress Prison > Lorian's Cell

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Fortress Prison > The Yard

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Fortress Prison > The Motor Pool

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Duke](#)
- [Bhaskar](#)

Plot Summary

Duke jabs at Lorian's broken ribs, jolting him awake the next morning, then helps Lorian get up. Duke informs Lorian that he is his boss, referred to on Belusha as a "poddy." Lorian shares his history as Hadrian Marlowe's commander, but Duke doesn't recognize the name.

“Call me Lorian,” he said. “I was a commander in the [Imperial Red Company](#), under Hadrian Marlowe himself.”
Duke only blinked at him.
“The Hero of [Aptucca](#)?”
The other man shook his head. “We don’t get word from outside.”
“The [Halfmortal](#)?”
Nothing.

Lorian asks what year it is only to learn that prisoners are never told the year, although Duke confirms that [William Caesar XXIII of the House of Avent](#) is still emperor. Duke teaches Lorian how to use the rebreather system of their prison suits, and explains his prison assignment in the motor pool.

As they exit the locker room onto the surface of the planet, into the average low temperatures of -16 centigrade, Lorian remarks again on the mirrors redirecting sunlight to the surface. His gaze then turns on the orbital lift tower stretching from the surface into the upper atmosphere, and he dreams of climbing its nanocarbon cables hand-over-hand to escape.

In the motor pool, Duke introduces Lorian to Bhaskar. Bhaskar asks Lorian why he is on Belusha, perking up the heads and ears of three others in the motor pool. Lorian tells him "High treason," which elicits laughter from Bhaskar and the rest of the motor pool. Lorian says he was the tactical officer aboard the [Tamerlane](#) under [Captain Otavia Corvo](#) and [Commandant Lord Hadrian Marlowe](#), whom the motor pool mechanics call a myth and propoganda. A klaxon wails signaling a shift change, and Bhaskar and his pod leave for meal time.

Chapter 3: A Man's World

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Fortress Prison > The Motor Pool

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Gowan](#)
- [Hari](#)
- [Urgo](#)
- [Duke](#)
- [Daud](#)

Plot Summary

Duke tells Lorian a story of a group of prisoners who found weapons on their salvage run, and staged an insurrection of Perigee camp, only to be carpet bombed by the guards. Lorian started a conversation about the possibility of escape to which all the motor pool workers scoff.

Gowan and Hari, two of the motor pool workers, strike up a conversation about Outborn, prisoners who had left the camps to live in wilds of Belusha. Hari asks if the others heard about an attack on Farside that killed more than 30 Martians and took all the women from the camp. Gowan said the story isn't real, but Hari turns to Lorian for his opinion. Lorian says he'd never seen them.

Tensions rise among the crew and insults began to fly. Hari thorws a spanner that misses Lorian's head, and Hari refers to Valka as an extrasolarian machine-witch. Lorian corrected him that she was Tavrosi, which sent Hari

into another disparaging insult about Valka. Lorian throws a spanner of his own hitting Hari in the face. Hari said he'll kill Lorian just before Duke steps in to end the fight.

The next day, Lorian volunteers to take Hari's turn to clean-up the shop, which smoothed things over. On a later shift, Daud, a rig crew member, requests Lorian repair his crawler by the next day, a timeline Duke says is too ambitious. Duke rallies the team for double-time repairs and told them to organize who is getting food for the long night ahead.

Chapter 4: The ParaCoita

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Fortress Prison > The Motor Pool > On Board a Crawler in Need of Repair

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Duke](#)
- [Gowan](#)
- Callum
- [Tamara](#)

Plot Summary

Lorian and his crew identify the problem with the crawler as a broken fan and cracked radiators that needed replacement. Damp air made its way into the air ducts and formed into ice, and now the vents require welding on the inside, a job only the dwarf, Lorian, could do.

Crawling through the air ducts, Lorian drops into one of the crew dormitory chambers. He hears a banging noise. Following it to a locker room, and using the arc torch he brought to weld the vents, he cuts off the padlock sealing one of the lockers. Inside, he found a 15-year-old girl, who was bound at the wrists and feet with tape covering her mouth. Lorian immediately knows she had been raped repeatedly and brutally.

Lorian cuts off the binding around her ankles, but the girl kicks him then falls to the floor while running away. Lorian removes her gag, and learns that her name is Tamara. She tells him her mother sold her to the crew and that even the Martian guards were complicit in her captivity. He tells Tamara he will go find help, but by the time he returns with Duke and Gowan, she was dead in the crawler where he had left her.

Chapter 5: The Way of Things

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Fortress Prison > The Motor Pool > On Board a Crawler in Need of Repair

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Fortress Prison > The Motor Pool

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- Daud
- Duke
- Gowan
- Urgo
- Hari

Plot Summary

The overseers took Tamara's body away and told the motor pool to get back to work. Daud's crew didn't even get a slap on the wrist, which Lorian sees as an injustice. Daud asks Duke about the progress, and Duke says the girl set them back. Inside the crawler, Lorian finishes his modification of the plasma cutter while muttering a prayer.

“I invoke the universal sound and the One Pure. Grant me courage and clarity, that I might know right conduct. Unite my deeds with Wisdom. I offer this prayer to the Knight Galahad. I invoke . . .”

Daud says Lorian wasn't supposed to go in the crawler and that he'll kill him. From the top of the ramp on the crawler, holding the plasma cutter, Lorian provokes Daud to come closer to him. Once in range, Lorian points the plasma cutter at Daud and pulls the trigger, cutting Daud's legs out from under him. Lorian steps forward, raises the plasma cutter to Daud's head, and fires a final time to kill him. Duke, Gowan, Urgo, Hari and the rest of the motorpool are stunned. Duke asks him why he did it and Lorian said it was for Tamara. Daud's men are enraged, but before any of them could take action, a klaxon blares and guards flood into the motor pool telling Lorian to drop his weapon. Lorian obliges and they haul him away.

Chapter 6: The Traitors

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Courthouse > Courtroom

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Vaclav Carter](#)
- [Lorcan Breathnach](#)
- Sab

Plot Summary

Vaclav Carter asks Lorian if he denies the charge of murder for killing Daud. Lorian says it was justice and does not deny it. One of the jurors calls for him to be killed, but in examining Lorian's file, Vaclav learns that Lorian may not be executed or flogged for his crimes, and the rest of his file is redacted. Vaclav probes Lorian about his past, and while responding, one of the jurors, revealed to be [Lorcan Breathnach](#) calls Lorian a traitor. Lorian explains Hadrian Marlowe did not commit regicide, and Lorian and Lorcan spar verbally.

Vaclav asks Lorian if he believes Hadrian is "the One Reborn," to which Lorian said, "No." Lorian continues to antagonize Vaclav while also explaining Hadrian's miracle on Perfugium in which he shattered the glass behind a Cielcin prince on a holograph, which ultimately killed the Pale creature (described in the climax of [Ashes of Man](#)). Lorcan tells Lorian that Hadrian has been found in Jadd and that he was "living the good life" with wine and women. This plunges Lorian into a sense of despair that his sacrifice to save Hadrian was for naught. Lorcan calls for Lorian to be placed in one of the other camps, either Snowhead or Farside, and Vaclav agrees.

Chapter 7: Farside

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > On a Derelict Legion Cruiser

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > Aboard the Vulture Crew's Crawler

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Daru](#)
- [Nago](#)
- [Fives](#)
- Rand
- [Jeff](#)

Plot Summary

Seven years later, Lorian reflects on his two years spent at Snowhead where he sorted scrap before he was shuttled to Farside where he became a scavenger, sourcing circuit boards and precious metals from ships purposely crashed onto the planet's surface by the Martians in orbit. The thought that Hadrian had given up the fight as Lorcan said, wears on his psyche.

Standing upon one of the ship wrecks during a salvage run, Lorian removes his mask and breathes in the Belushan air until he feels hypoxia then puts it back on. Daru calls for him to assist Jeff, his latest poddy, with salvaging some parts from inside the ship because the entryway was too large for any of the other men. While doing so, Lorian discovers a plasma burner with a broken fan, and stows it in his coveralls. He can't shake the feeling that this discovery was some sort of divine providence.

Lorian takes his dinner outside on top of the crawler where he once again removes his mask to breath in the air. Jeff strikes up a conversation about the Outborn, and confirms the attack mentioend by Hari years ago. Jeff said the raiders only took women during the last attack and that Rand, another member of their scavenging crew, believes the Outborn are trying to grow their numbers to fight back against the Martians.

Chapter 8: Outborn and Misborn

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > On a Derelict Shuttle

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > Aboard the Vulture Crew's Crawler

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > On a Derelict Legion Cruiser

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Fives](#)
- Kellan
- [Jeff](#)
- [Daru](#)
- Gared

Plot Summary

Out on another scavenging run, Fives complains about loosening a seized bolt, and yells at Kellan, a newer member of the pool, for a plasma cutter. Another of the new members tells him that the plasma cutter was back on the crawler. Fives threw a wrench at that crewmember, prompting Jeff to send him out on a walk. Jeff tells Lorian to go get the plasma cutter, and Daru says he'll go with him. While gathering the cutter, they hear gunshots.

Lorian and Daru abandon the plasma cutter, and run toward a nearby ship that sloped up like a hill overlooking the salvage area. Together they watch as men in patchwork cloaks jumped off a skiff and round up the salvage crew. Jeff tells the Outborn captain that the whole whole crew is present and the captain shoots him. Kellen runs at the Outborn to defend his leader, and is shot twice and killed.

The Outborn captain and his retinue line up the remaining members of the crew, and Lorian notices that Fives had still not yet returned. The Outborn captain asked Gared if there were any women in the crew, and Gared tells him no. The captain orders older members of the salvage crew shot, and Lorian wishes he had repaired the plasma burner. The Outborn chain up the salvage crew, hoard them onto the skiff and leave. Lorian and Daru take cover in the ship that had been their outpost until the Martians find them.

Chapter 9: A Friend

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > On a Derelict Legion Cruiser

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Farside > Fortress Prison > The Motor Pool

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Daru](#)
- [Fives](#)

Plot Summary

Lorian could not get out of his head the deaths of Jeff, Kellen and the others over the months that followed the attack. Worse was how Fives blamed him for it. After retraining to Farside, the camp's commandant questioned them about the events, and the three were split up on different teams: Fives to a salvage crew, Daru to the kitchens, and Lorian to the motor pool. Lorian would often stay after hours to find a way to repair the plasma burner, but he continued to lose sleep thinking about Jeff, who lied about the size of the crew and ultimately kept Lorian, Daru and Fives alive. Lorian's inner rage toward Hadrian for not continuing to fight and finding pleasure on Jadd also haunts him and his mind as it had during all the years since his brush with [Lorcan Breathnach](#) at his trial after killing Daud.

Some time later, Daru tips off Lorian to a plot to kill him while Lorian was building a still. Lorian brushes it off as yet another rumor, but Daru insists that Fives, Cal and Vasu, three bruisers on Farside, would do so by finding him in the motor pool after hours. Unconcerned, Lorian reveals to Daru that in 12 more shifts, the Martians planned to reassign every prisoner. Lorian's ambivalence, bordering on nihilism, continued, and only intensified Daru's frustration with him.

“I’m not alone,” Lorian said, returning to his work on the machine. “I have you.”
Daru howled, clapped hands to his forehead in exasperation. “You’re just not getting it! Fives wants to kill you. And it’s not just him. It’s Cal. It’s Vasu. It’s probably half the bruisers on base.”

Lorian takes Daru's warning to heart and stops staying after hours at the motor pool, and 12 shifts later, as expected reassignments came through. Lorian, Daru and Fives are all assigned to Salvage Pod-17, news that burned with a fury between Fives' eyes as Lorian's gaze caught his from across the yard in the Belushan tundra.

Belusha Prisoner Serial Numbers

- NO-11589: Lorian Aristedes
- GN-34957: Daru
- LN-55555: Fives
- GN-24805: Unknown
- NH-86333: Unknown
- GK-19927: Unknown
- LN-43248: Unknown
- LK-56352: Unknown

Chapter 10: Of Vultures

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Farside > Fortress Prison > The Motor Pool

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > Aboard the Vulture Crew's Sledge

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Dadan](#)
- Orem
- [Fives](#)
- Ram
- Aldo
- Yash

- [Daru](#)

Plot Summary

Three weeks after the new prisoner assignments were drawn, Lorian's latest poddy, Dadan, orders the crew to speed up their salvage work to get to a fresh Legion salvage site in the Lynga Province. While sorting salvage on the sledge headed to that new scrap site, Lorian's self worth plunges once more as he continues to feel smaller and smaller every day. While sorting, he finds some ytterbium crystal, and explains to Ram, Dadan's boytoy, that it is a time crystal used for long-term data storage.

Focused on sorting and not realizing Ram had left, he looks up to find Fives holding a metal pipe and behind him Aldo and Yash, bearing weapons of their own. They claim that Lorian is an Outborn and as they approach to begin their assault, Lorian pulls out the plasma burner, a bluff. They ask him if the Outborn have a way off Belusha as Lorian makes a lunge for the door, but his ankle rolled and snapped out of joint.

Face down in the snow, the gun falls from his hand, which Fives picks up and tries to fire at Lorian, but it simply clicked. Fives resorts to kicking him in the ribs, breaking two of them yet again, and wallops Lorian in the head with the pipe. As the world spins in Lorian's vision, a blur of red with a long spearlike weapon bolts toward Fives. Lorian hears the cries and bellows of the three assailants as his body goes into shock and he struggles to breathe. As his vision clears, he recognizes Daru had killed all three of them and saved his life. Daru says Dadan and the others tried to kill him, but he escaped.

“ Surprise and a better weapon. Most times that was all it took, even against superior numbers.

Lorian tells Daru they'll need to take the sledge out into the wilds. If the Martians find them and the dead crew members, they likely will be reprimanded and killed, but if they can find any Outborn and pay them with the salvage onboard, they may have a chance at new life. Lorian gets in the passenger seat and tells Daru to drive.

Chapter 11: The Cold

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > Aboard the Vulture Crew's Sledge

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Daru](#)

Plot Summary

Lost in the frozen wasteland, Daru continues to drive the sledge west. Lorian had destroyed the transponder so the Martians could not track them, and the two discuss how long their food and battery life would keep them alive. Once the battery of the sledge dies, Lorian says they could use their suits, which were charging in the sledge. Faced with this mortality, Daru asks Lorian about Hadrian coming back to life after being decapitated, and Lorian explains all he knows, including his perspective of the battle at Senuesa where Hadrian had killed 100 Cielcin warriors on his own. He also recounts how Hadrian killed Cielcin General Attavaisa with his mind through a holograph on Perfugium (described in the climax of [Ashes of Man](#)).

The conversation turns to religion and the afterlife, which Lorian says he has seen. Daru remains doubtful of that and asks Lorian why he was on Belusha. Lorian explains that he saved Hadrian's life, which ultimately meant he traded places with Hadrian, who would otherwise be on Belusah.

Some time later, Lorian awakes from sleep to the beeping of the sledge alerting him and Daru to only 5% of the fuel cell remaining. Daru, after Lorian wakes him, suggests they use a flare to alert the Outborn to their presenece, but Lorian shuts it down saying it would also alert the Martians. Eight hours later, Lorian struggles to sleep and looks at Daru next to him, welling in affection knowing that he may be his only friend in the entire universe. He grabs the flare gun, opens the door and fires it at the sky. The battery says they had 138 hours and 52 minutes before they lost power, and the two makes themselves as comfortable as they can on the sledge.

Chapter 12: Princess of Thieves

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > Aboard the Vulture Crew's Sledge

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Salvage Fields Outside of Farside > Aboard an *Outborn* Skiff

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Daru](#)
- [Sarala](#) "Ralla"
- [Bevan](#)

Plot Summary

When Lorian next wakes, only 7 hours remain on the battery. Then he hears tapping on the hull of the sledge. Lorian initially thinks it is a trap, then realizes it must be Outborn. Daru, at Lorian's insistence, opens the hatches on the sledge to reveal the spoils they had brought from the latest salvage. The two raise their hands in the compartment as a face comes into view in Daru's window. Moments later, another comes into view in Lorian's window.

“ “We surrender!” Lorian said, “We want to enlist!”

The reaver, armed with a firearm, on Lorian's side of the sledge wears a mask with slits and with an amplifier orders Lorian to get out. He tells Daru to stay inside, then Lorian gets out himself to begin negotiations with the Outborn, noticing then a third reaver was on the bed of the sledge. During the conversation, Lorian learns the one holding the gun is named Ralla, clearly a born and bred Outborn, and the one on the bed of the sledge is Bevan. He also notes there were four more Outborn at the perimeter of the meeting.

Lorian asks for the leader, whom the Outborn called Sachin. They tell him Sachin is at Deepstone, and Lorian requests sanctuary in exchange for the treasures they had brought on the sledge. He also offers his knowledge of the Belushan camps and his legacy as a commander, which they could use to fight back against the Martians. After more negotiations and the reveal that Ralla was a woman named Sarala, the Outborn relent to taking Lorian and Daru to Sachin, who would ultimately decide their fate.

Daru comes out of the sledge swinging a prybar, but Lorian calms him down after the initial tussle. They bind Daru's wrists behind his back and gesture for Lorian to move with a gun aimed at his back. Once on the Outborn skiff, Sarala removes her mask and Lorian's breath catches seeing her piercing blue eyes. He tells her he's the best thing the Outborn have salvaged, and she asks why that is.

“ “Because for however long your people have been a *menace* to the Martians,” Lorian said.
“I can make you a *threat*.”

Chapter 13: The Subterrane

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Deepstone > Aboard an *Outborn* Skiff

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Deepstone > Hangar-Cavern

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Deepstone > Sachin's Study

Characters

- [Lorian Aristedes](#)
- [Daru](#)

- [Sarala](#) "Ralla"
- [Bevan](#)

Plot Summary

Upon asking where they are going, Lorian tells Daru the Outborn are taking them to their camp. Daru questions what will come of them, and Lorina suggests they will become slaves. Lorian starts to recognize he may be coming down with a respiratory illness due to his shallow and ragged breathing. The two fall asleep and are awoken later by Sarala who tells Lorian that Sachin wants to see him. Daru stays behind in the sledge.

Lorian is surprised by the size of the hangar-cavern, which has room for eight skiffs and numerous Outborn. As Sarala walks Lorian to his meeting with Sachin, she shares her skepticism that Lorian's gambit is a Martian trick. Deeper into the cavern, the spaces open up to reveal a full and bustling city, larger than anything Lorian had expected to see, and Sarala tells him there are in fact more than one city in the Belushan wilds.

Inside the audience chamber, Lorian meets

Chapter 14: Strategy and Tactics

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Tundra Outside of Downwell > Rocky Escarpment Overlooking a Crashed Shuttle

Plot Summary

Chapter 15: The Dregs of Empire

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Deepstone > Hangar-Cavern

Plot Summary

Chapter 16: Knocking on Heaven's Door

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Low Hills Outside of Downwell > Aboard an *Outborn* Skiff

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > Courtyard Beneath the Tower

Plot Summary

Chapter 17: Tower of the Gods

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > The Tower > Cargo Hangar

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > The Tower > Lift Carriage Locker Room

Chapter 18: To Crack the Sky

Locations

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > The Tower Orbital Station > Lift Carriage Locker Room

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > The Tower Orbital Station > Crew Quarters

Unknown > [Belusha](#) > Downwell > The Tower Orbital Station > The Dockyards