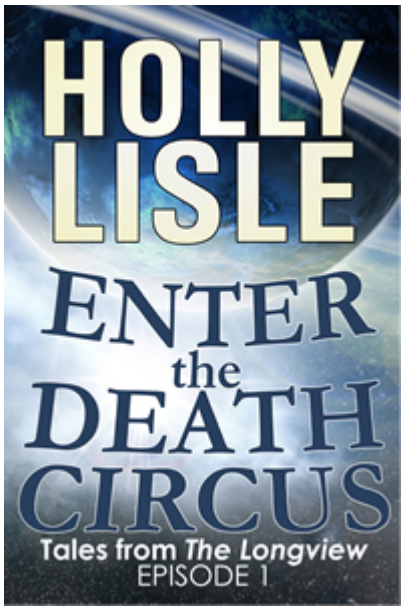
Enter The Death Circus: Tales from THE LONGVIEW, Episode 1

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In Tales From The Longview, travel to the far reaches of Settled Space, where slavery is franchised, where people are required to volunteer for their own death sentences, and where powerful governments license out the right to kill to the highest bidders.

Enter a crew of determined survivors from the worlds that tried to destroy them, guided by a mysterious recluse bent on turning the system against itself and freeing the worlds his spaceship encounters.

Set in the Settled Space universe, this series fits between the end of WARPAINT and the beginning of THE WISHBONE CONSPIRACY.

THE FREEBIES

- The LONGVIEW Bonus Downloads: http://howtothinksideways.com/2776433/the-longview-bonus-downloads/
- The CADENCE DRAKE Bonus Downloads: http://howtothinksideways.com/classrooms/fun-with-teeth-read-dangerously/cadence-drake-intro-and-extras/cadence-

drake-minecraft-spaceship-collection/

- And…Chapter One.

Enter The Death Circus — CHAPTER 1

This Criminal

DOWN THE DARKNESS, down the line of standing cells, three words rippled urgently and under breath. "Death Circus here!" In the dark, this criminal had waited long and longer for death to come. This criminal could not lie down, could not sit down—its captors had made certain its cell, and the cells of the others like it, permitted only standing.

With its bandaged knees pressed into one corner, its spine jammed into the other, this criminal drifted in that lightless place, never certain whether it was waking or dreaming. When it ate, it ate maggots. When it dreamed of eating, it dreamed of maggots. When it pissed or shit, it pissed or shit down its legs. When it dreamed, it dreamed of the same.

In one thing only this criminal knew a dream was a dream, and that was when it touched We-42K again, or saw its wondrous smile.

That could only be a dream, for We-Above had taken this criminal out of its cell to watch beautiful We-42K volunteer its death and the death of the unlicensed-but-born that We-42K and this criminal had made. We-42K had stood above the flames of Return to Citizenship with the born in its arms, and had turned to smile at this criminal. It looked thin and starved and filthy standing there, and the born looked dead, and as if it had been dead for a while.

The born had been beautiful when this criminal had first seen it, when this criminal and We-42K had hidden in the hills and held each other at night, had accidentally made the born, had

brought it into the world together. The born had the bright red hair of We-42k, and eyes that looked at this criminal with strange knowing—and this criminal had thought for a little while that life could hold more than work and duty.

That ended, and after the end, the capture, the sentencing, the imprisonment, this criminal watched the flames and knew that the We are right to say Only Death Forgives.

This criminal has no right of judgement, but this criminal will never forgive.

The We asked this criminal if it would volunteer for redemption as We-42K had done. This criminal spit in the face of We. It refused forgiveness and Return to Citizenship—though it cannot say why—and thus it has been judged Willful, and sentenced to Death Without Citizenship, Redemption, or Merit.

And now that death has come.

"Death Circus here!" this criminal whispers down the line. The metal doors bang open, and light trickles down the corridor. This criminal hears the first cells at the front opening, and the thwack of the prod on naked flesh, a sound this criminal knows well, a touch it feels often.

"We offer last chance to volunteer for Return to Citizenship. Will the nameless willful thing repent?"

"It will not," the Willful at the head of the corridor rasps. This criminal thinks it recognizes that voice, unheard above a whisper before now, and it is encouraged. It puts a face to the voice and sees another like itself, another that once thought life might be made better. That Willful held strong. This criminal will be able to hold strong too, will be able to face the unknown death rather than accept the known one.

Both We say, "Then it goes to the Death Circus now."

This criminal cannot say why the Death Circus seems better than the Return to Citizenship, with its quick leap into the lake of fire.
But an unknown, unvolunteered death is a better death. This criminal has had little more to think about than that question since the immolation of We-42K and the born.

The cells open and close, the Willful, the Blasphemers, and the Infidels make their choices to volunteer death or to take death by force, and at last this criminal's cell opens, and the We stand there and drag it out into the corridor and say, "We offer last chance to volunteer for Return to Citizenship. Will the nameless willful thing repent?"

This criminal spits into the face of the guard that asks, and takes its beating, and is surprised that the beating is so light.
Then it remembers that the Death Circus buys its creatures, and that it once heard whispers of guards sentenced for Willfulness for damaging criminals so badly the Death Circus refused to pay the Tithe to the We to acquire them.

Inside, this criminal laughs just a little, and tries to work up enough fluid to spit into the face of the other guard.

Kagen

KAGEN, SITTING IN THE Verimeter desk beneath the flapping cloth of the red-and-black Death Circus tent, muttered, "I hate this filthy little moon."

Burke looked over at him and raised an eyebrow. Burke would be doing disease screening—testing blood and saliva—on every criminal offered to the Death Circus, which meant he had to get within arm's reach of the strange mixture of people sentenced to death by the owners of Fair Bluff. The town was regional center for the half-dozen settlements on The

People's Home of Truth and Fairness 14-B, so it was the contact point for all Death Circuses.

"Why do you hate this moon? It looks normal enough to me." Burke was new. Provisional Crew Three. If he could get through this screening without going to pieces, he would be permitted to take the final portion of the Provisional Crew Three entrance exam and he'd earn a paid place at the bottom rung of the Longview's crew, as Three Green.

Kagen had been Crew Three for just under four years, and in that time had pushed through four promotions to reach Crew Three Gold. He held the record for fastest time and most grades skipped to reach Three Gold.

He'd already taken his Crew Two entry levels. Had already achieved all of his promotion points to reach Crew Two. He had his future planned, his goal set.

He hadn't received word that he'd passed the exam, yet, but if he had—and if he could rise to Crew Two, it meant more than just the possibility of a bigger, quieter room away from the engine noise to him. It meant better pay—he'd save every extra rucet, just as he'd saved everything he'd made in the last few years.

And it meant keeping The Dream alive. There were no accelerated promotions in Crew Two, but he was sure he could still make an impression. He had to make an impression.

There were rumors of a promotion at the top. Unsubstantiated, but plausible.

Had been for weeks, which was what had pushed him to take the Crew Two entry levels. He wanted to be ready when opportunity arose.

Burke, Kagen thought, looked to be a slow riser. The man had only cursory interest in what he was doing. To Kagen he

seemed flat and bland and far too slow. Kagen suspected Burke hadn't hurt enough to see the opportunity provided by the Longview, that he wasn't hungry enough to ever rise past the automatic promotions in Crew Three.
Kagen, though, had been hungry all his life.

"If there is such a thing as pure evil, it lives here," Kagen muttered.

Burke said, "How is this worse than any other Pact world?"

Kagen looked around the still-empty tent and said, "This is a PHTF franchise. If you have thirty million rucets and want to be a god, you too can own a People's Home of Truth and Fairness settlement on your own little moon. There are a couple hundred of them now, I think, and they all run on the same rules. I come from PHTF-36. I still have nightmares." And he laughed.

To show that he was over it.

Burke glanced over at him with an expression Kagen saw as bovine curiosity. "How did you get out?"

"The We sentenced me to exile in the Needle, with the reminder that I could jump at any time and be forgiven for my crime."

"You were a Mule?"

Kagen forced a grin. "Indeed. I kissed a girl, and gave her a nickname. My Sentence was Willful and Blasphemer, but I hadn't done quite enough for the Speakers for We to put me in prison. Being a Mule exiled in the Needle is supposed to be the same outcome as if you're sentenced to death… but because of the Longview, you know how that is." Kagen tipped his head up to the invisible point of the Needle, where the Longview was currently docked. "Since I didn't end up dying for my crime, it was worth it."

Burke nodded. “The secret rooms.”

The rooms in the Needles were only secret to those who despised the technology that created them and the men they’d had to hire to build them. All Needles required someone to work in the top, to greet the spaceships making their rounds through their routes, to accept or reject docking.

The PHTF worlds chose to send lone criminals into exile in the Needles. Those they didn’t deem valuable enough to sell to the visiting Death Circuses, anyway.

Which was what brought Kagen to this world he despised so much. Kagen, Burke, and the rest of the ground team from the Longview were set up to start screening candidates for purchase by the Death Circus.
The We were supposed to have had their criminals in front of the tent an hour ago, but as usual they’d managed to get a string of last-minute conversions from the ranks of the criminals sentenced to death, and the We of the People’s Home of Truth and Fairness 14-B were busy burning them—or rather, having the criminals burn themselves—out back of the tent in their nasty little lake of fire.

Every PHTF world had a lake of fire, and they all looked the same. Kagen suspected it was part of the franchise.

Kagen could hear the announcement of the crimes of the volunteers: Willfulness, Blasphemy, Infidelity, over and over. Could hear the screams as the sentenced threw themselves into the flames rather than meet their fate with the Death Circus. Charlie, who was not a member of the crew but a mandatory passenger, was doing her duty in her role as official Pact Covenant observer. She was out in back testing all the volunteers to make sure none had been drugged, and that none were forced to jump into the lake.

Because she had gone renegade, Charlie would also watch for, and enforce removal of, anyone who gave any sign whatsoever

of having second thoughts.

Nineteen out of every twenty prisoners on a PHTF world would fling themselves into the lake of fire and die in agony rather than allow themselves to be purchased by a Death Circus.

So the smell of burning human flesh was strong in the tent, and the intermittent sounds of screaming were loud. Equally horrible was the cheering of the throng of observers pulled from their work and made to chant, "You're forgiven! Welcome home!" as each volunteer stopped screaming.

For an instant, Kagen was back among them. Pressed up against the fence, feeling the stares of the Speakers for We focused on him and the others with him, he cheered and screamed with the rest as the pretty young woman, sentenced for the crimes of Property of Beauty and Apart of Love, threw herself into the fire. Kagen had not been the only boy who had kept his face forward so the guards could not see the tears streaming down his cheeks as he watched her die.

Not cheering was a sign of being Apart. Everyone cheered, because Speakers for We would note those who did not, and would investigate them for other crimes.

Each did what All did, or Each found itself locked away beneath the earth, or burning in the lake of Return to Citizenship.
He shuddered and was back in the the red-and-black tent, back in someone else's horrible little world.

At last the We ran out of volunteers, and the sound of marching feet approached the tent flap of the Death Circus. Those prisoners ineligible for volunteering to repent—the murderers, rapists, pedophiles, and thieves—would come in first. They were Pact World Class A prisoners, meaning their sentencing and treatment fell within the Pact World Convention guidelines. They would be clean, well fed, well

rested, and clothed, because if they weren't, The People's Home of Truth and Fairness 14-B would lose its charter, and with it the steady infusion of licensed charter world grant money from the Pact Worlds Equalization of Opportunity Committee that kept it alive. Once the Class A prisoners had been tested for diseases, Verilized, and categorized by health to determine the price the Death Circus had to pay for them, they would present their paperwork to the Death Circus judge, who would decide whether they were guilty or innocent—and would then determine whether they would be taken aboard the Longview, or left behind.

The Longview had to accept and purchase at least 33% Class A prisoners from those prisoners presented by the worlds it serviced in order to keep its Death Circus license.

Class B prisoners were sentenced under local jurisdiction, for anything considered a crime on that world, but not necessarily held to be a crime elsewhere. Because they were still covered by the Pact World Covenants, which ruled that no member world could carry out a death sentence, they could not be executed.

But the Pact World Covenants charter for Death Circuses was that any prisoner taken aboard a Death Circus ship must have a death sentence carried out, but only outside the Pact World borders.

It was up to the discretion of ship owners and ship captains on how these sentences would be carried out, but they had to be carried out, because each world that handed over a prisoner to the Death Circus had a written guarantee that the prisoner would die in a timely and appropriate fashion.

Class B prisoners were almost always criminals of a political or religious nature. And they always arrived at the Death Circus barely breathing: starved, caked in their own excrement, covered in sores. The only rules for Pact World

members regarding Class B prisoners was that they could not be allowed to die while imprisoned, and that they had to be able to walk to and through the Death Circus under their own power.

The Longview crew had additional rules. The owner of the Longview insisted that each Class B must be showered until clean and dressed in fresh, dry, disposable clothing before entering the Death Circus tent. Nor were the PHTF guards permitted to do the washing. Members of the Death Circus crew were to do it, gently and with good soap and soft towels.

Kagen suspected the owner, whom he had never met or even been permitted to discuss, had once been a Class B prisoner on a PHTF world—one who had escaped, and who had then vowed to somehow help those still trapped.

It was a romantic notion, and considering the vast expenses of running a Death Circus, and the equally vast profits to be made for running one well, it was probably a silly one.

Nevertheless, he held that possibility as his truth until proven wrong, and occasionally assigned himself to prisoner cleanup duty. It was good for his unit's morale to see him do so, and it reminded him that, though he had escaped his PHTF home, many still remained.

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