



**THE WAIT OF  
WATER**

Copyrighted Material

Colin Ryan

**THE WAIT OF  
WATER**

Colin Ryan

[www.colinryanwrites.com](http://www.colinryanwrites.com)

© Colin Ryan

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of

Colin Ryan, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to Colin Ryan, addressed “Attention: Permissions Coordinator,” at [colin@colinryanwrites.com](mailto:colin@colinryanwrites.com)

Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Names, characters, and places are products of the author’s imagination.

Cover design by Colin Ryan

First draft, March 2023.

Colin Ryan Writes

*The sea takes what it wants. It always gets  
what it wants.*

In forty-nine minutes, Kai Taufu knew the steel hull of the compartment he was trapped in would buckle under the tremendous pressure of the ocean on top of it. When that happened, salty Caribbean water would rush in and he would drown. For forty-nine minutes, though, Kai worked. In the forward section of the MV Cerberus was a grouping of compartments segregated from the rear of the ship by a transverse bulkhead that ensured it was water-tight. Among those spaces was the forward boatswain's hole, a space filled with line and other gear used by the vessel's deck department. As the ship's third mate and head of the deck department, this was Kai's space. It was rare that any other crew members choose to trek through nearly one thousand feet of stacked

containers on deck to check on the area. Similarly, when Kai went forward to work, he would typically stay there most of the day. He'd even set up a cot inside the compartment for quick mid-day snoozes.

It was on the cot that Kai woke in pitch darkness. He reached down and started the timer on his watch, observing the first seconds tick away in the watchface's pale glow. *Okay*, he thought, *forty-eight minutes*.

Kai stood, even with the compartment being sealed, a couple of centimeters of water coated the deck and splashed as he stepped into it. He reached up and clicked on the emergency lantern mounted on the overhead in the corner of the compartment and the space filled with its dull yellow incandescent light. Paint splatters of red and yellow marked the bulkheads accenting the industrial grey that was company standard. Thick mooring lines, coiled like snakes lined the far edge opposite a locked parts cage.'

To the best Kai had been able to determine when the Cerberus sank, the ship had to have snapped at some point near its middle. The forward most part of the ship, the section which Kai was in, had settled upright on the ocean floor. For that, at least, he considered himself lucky. He had no knowledge of what happened to the aft

portion of the ship, the section where the other seventeen crew mates of his would have been. The 3/16" steel bulkheads separating Kai from the vast waters just on the other side sweated with condensation. The colder the steel became, the more it flexed a creaked. Loud pops of metal buckling in other sections of the ship rippled through the hull and echoed from the dark.

Kai moved about the space as though on a track, sidestepping obstacles and following a route he'd learned through repetition. He gathered the cage key, threw on some heavy weather gear to stay warm, grabbed a long breaker bar, then found one of the three hatches leading out of the boatswain's hole. Kai rapped on the door, listening for the sound it made on the other side. It was hollow and echoey, as he'd hoped. As an extra precaution, he bent down and unscrewed the cap of the small air-test tube next to the door. A rush of air indicated that the space on the other side of the door wasn't flooded, but was over-pressured. He slid the breaker bar over the hatches lever and cranked up on it, listening to the latching-dogs on the other side creak against his mechanical leverage.

The hatch shot open, swinging violently on its hinges. Kai had anticipated this, but at the last moment he lost his footing in the shallow water and the hatch's

metal frame smacked into the side of his body and face like a big-league slugger. Inertia took a spinning Kai face first into a metal framing beam. He heard the bones in his nose and around his orbital socket snap and his vision went blank for a moment.

"Fuck me." He said.

*Next time watch your footing, idiot*, he thought. He added it to the long list of mistakes he'd made and tried to keep track of.

Kai pulled himself up and into a seated position against the bulkhead. Warm blood streamed from his nose, down his chin and dripped into the pool of water surrounding him. The now open hatchway faced him, a black void. He knew if he could get up, and energize the lamp inside it, that it was just an auxiliary machinery space, but peering into it from across the boatswain's hole, it's absolute darkness, like a portal, he thought he could hear the language of the ocean speaking to him. More of a feeling than auditory. Both ancient and undefined. It was timeless and without haste, unbound by seconds and minutes. Kai couldn't sense what it wanted from him, but simply, that it wanted. It waited.

Kai looked at his watch. "Fuck me." Between staring into the abyss and knocking himself out, he'd



blown nearly all of his time. His watch clicked passed forty-eight minutes. The metal above him creaked, popped, then cracked, the way it always did just before it gave out. A final snap and the rupture opened across the metal overhead. Water hit the deck and whipped around, dragging Kai with it, tossing him like a sock in a washing machine. His back slammed against either a bulkhead or the deck, he lost track of which direction was up. The impact forced him to expel large burbling bubbles of air from his lungs. He grabbed at them. Clawed at them. Reached for them as though they were something he could retrieve.

They passed around his fingers and disappeared into the dark.

*Not again. Please not again,* he pleaded. Panic set in, and he felt his body's demand to take a new breath override his conscious mind's plea against it. He winced, and his body drew in a burning lungful of water. The pain was immediate; the sensation to cough and heave delivered him no relief. Grating salt tore at the back of his throat. His eyes bulged under the pressure. He grabbed at his own neck. He cried, but underwater tears meant nothing. Then black.

#

**Copyrighted Material**  
**Colin Ryan**

End of Preview

Please contact [colin@colinryanwrites.com](mailto:colin@colinryanwrites.com) for additional information and access to *The Wait of Water*.