

BROKEN DOVE



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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BY DANI FRANCIS

Silver Elite

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NEW YORK

Del Rey
An imprint of Random House
A division of Penguin Random House LLC
1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019
randomhousebooks.com
penguinrandomhouse.com

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Hardcover ISBN 9780593875490
Ebook ISBN 9780593875506

BOOK TEAM: Production editor: Robert Siek • Managing editor: Paul Gilbert • Production manager: Erin Korenko • Copy editor: Laura Jorstad • Proofreaders: Robin Slutzky, Nicole Ramirez, and Karina Jha

Book design by Caroline Cunningham, adapted for ebook
Book art by Lizard/Adobe Stock (title and part title background), Bappaditya Roy (wolf silhouette), moxumbie/Adobe Stock (computer tablet), totallyout/Adobe Stock (death certificate badge)

Map by Chloe Bolland

Cover design: Amy Musgrave

Cover illustrations: Adobe Stock

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68, Ireland.

<https://eu-contact.penguin.ie>

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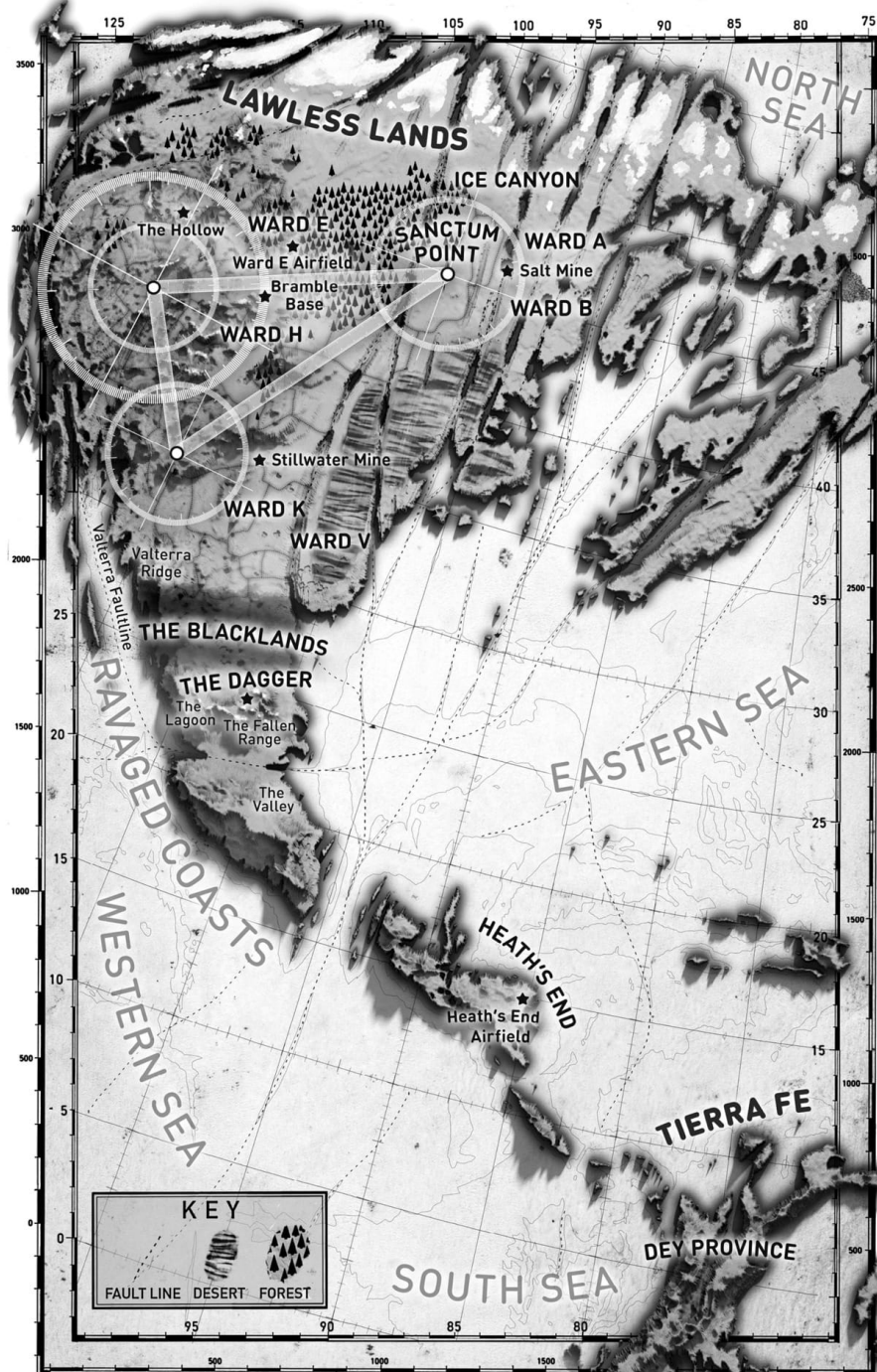
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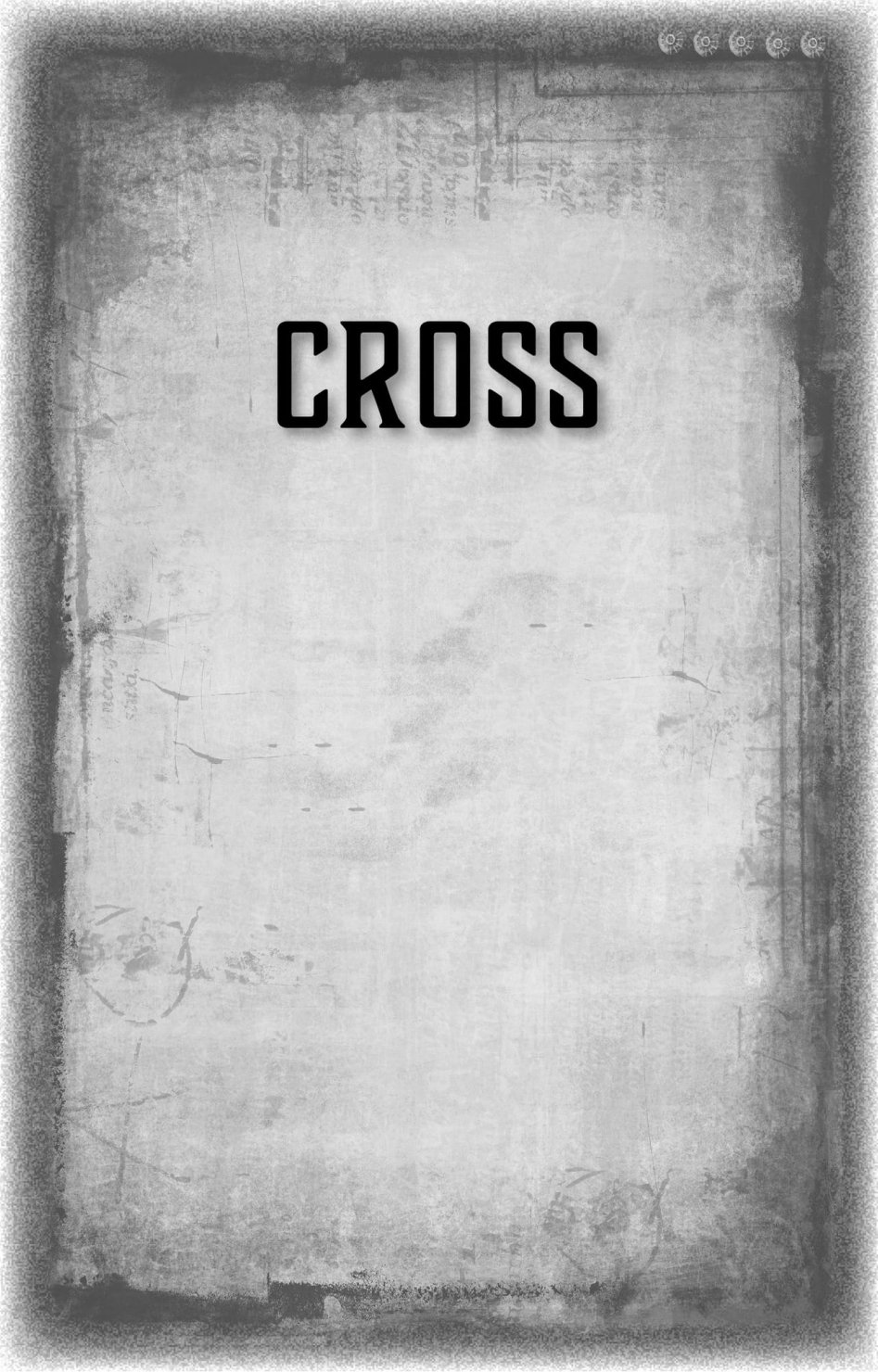
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For my family

THE CONTINENT





CROSS

PROLOGUE



Everything in this cell is exactly as I requested it.

Fluorescent bulbs running in strips along the ceiling, buzzing and flickering every couple of minutes.

The rusted pipe in the corner, with a deliberate leak that provides a constant *drip drip drip* in the background.

Air that's cold enough to pierce you to the bone.

Old bloodstains on the concrete floor that serve as a reminder: Nobody before you had a pleasant experience in this room, and neither will you. So you might as well start talking.

As the captain of Silver Block, I know how easy it is to break someone. That the most effective interrogation tool is repetition. Do something enough times and it'll drive a person insane. Soon that barely audible *drip drip drip* becomes a deafening scream in your head. The flickering lights make you want to rip your own eyes out. The chill makes it impossible to collect your thoughts.

It might take a few hours, a few days, maybe weeks, but eventually, as time stretches into an excruciating crawl, those relentless, methodical irritants begin to erode your sanity and make you question your own reality.

On one hand, I'm gratified to see that the torture chamber designed to hold Command prisoners is precisely what I asked for, down to the last

detail.

On the other hand? *I'm* the prisoner, and this fucking grates.

My hands are shackled.

Those assholes actually shackled me.

Aggravation tightens my throat as I test the strength of the iron chains I'm hanging from and discover that it doesn't matter how hard I jolt and jerk my bound wrists—I'm not going anywhere. The chains clink with every move I make, pulling my arms taut. My shoulders are fucking killing me.

I have no idea how long my brothers intend to keep me in here. My older brother is pragmatic. No matter how pissed off he is at me, Travis knows I'm far more useful to him in the field than a cell. But Roe is only eighteen and has a chip on his shoulder the size of a damn mountain. The kid has authority issues and superiority hang-ups. Give him even an ounce of power, and he gets off on the high.

I can't even imagine the power trip he's on right now. For years, he was kept in check by his pathological need to win our father's approval. Roe was desperate for it, grasping at any crumbs of attention the General would throw his way.

But now our father is gone. His enemies corrupted his mind, turning the once formidable Merrick Redden into a living, breathing vegetable. And now that Travis has been appointed the new General of the Continent, Roe finally has his opportunity to step out from our father's shadow and prove he's not just a spoiled little shit who's tragically jealous of his big brothers.

I'm tugging on my chains again when a sharp beep sounds from the steel door. It slides open, and my little brother enters.

Roe's lips curl in a pleased smile as he takes in the sight of me dangling from the ceiling like a carcass in a slaughterhouse.

"Good morning, brother," he drawls. "How'd you sleep?"

He strides toward me, his long legs quickly closing the distance. Like me and Travis, he's taller than average, but he's not as broad as us. He's young, though. That lanky frame might still fill out.

When I don't respond, Roe's dark, piercing eyes narrow in displeasure. His resemblance to our father has always set me on edge. Every time I see his sharp features, I instinctively want to distance myself from him.

"Really? You're giving me the silent treatment?" he mocks. "Aww, is someone sulking because he screwed up?"

I raise a brow. "What are you hoping to achieve here, *brother*? Are you expecting an apology? Waiting for me to beg for my life? Because we both know that isn't gonna happen."

His fists clench at his sides. He hates it when I speak to him like that. Slow, deliberate. Like I'm humoring a small child. I might be less of a dick to him if he weren't an immature brat who's spent his entire life alternating between hating me and wanting to be me.

"No, the all-mighty Cross Redden would never beg," Roe spits back. "The Golden Son. Mr. Fucking Perfect. He who never makes any mistakes, right? Why would *he* ever take accountability for his actions?"

His childish griping makes me laugh, which only riles him up further. He wants me to lash out. To defend myself. It infuriates him that I'm able to remain composed in any situation. Always have been. Roe's biggest weakness is that he can never keep his composure. That's why I didn't want him in Silver Block. I only approved his entry in the training program because our father didn't give me a choice in the matter.

"Well, guess what, Mr. Perfect," he continues when I remain silent, "you *did* make a mistake." He's grinning at me now. Satisfied and self-righteous. "You stuck your dick in a 'fect, and she and her Aberrant friends blew up your precious Command base."

I keep my expression blank. Inside, I'm seething. If I weren't chained up right now, I'd be ripping his throat out with my bare hands for disparaging Wren like that. My girl's not defective. Never has been, never will be.

"And I'm the one who caught the bitch," he boasts. "That's why *you're* in here and I'm the one with a promotion."

"That's nice," I say politely. "And what have we been promoted to, little brother?"

He crosses his arms over his lean chest. Proud of himself. “First lieutenant.”

I don’t acknowledge that, and I know it rips him apart inside.

Roe moves closer but keeps a safe distance. Kid’s not stupid. He knows if he gets close enough to me, I could easily get my legs around him and snap his scrawny neck in half. I don’t need my hands to do damage.

“Everyone sees you for who you are now. The invincible, infallible Captain Cross, knocked down to size. You let a woman do that to you. Not just any woman, either, but a godfucking silverblood.”

I don’t voice a denial. I’d already decided before they detained me that I’m going to own up to some things. Denying wrongdoing altogether will only annoy my older brother. Travis needs to feel like he’s won, at least partially.

“Darlington fooled me,” I concede. “Happens to everyone.”

“Never happened to me,” Roe brags, dispelling any notions that he’s matured in any way since yesterday.

“Wow. Someone should promote you.”

His eyes flash.

I can’t stop another chuckle. “What is it you want from me, Roe? To name you the greatest soldier in the world? Declare you some sort of super silverblood detector?”

Because your detection skills are shit, I want to say, fighting another laugh. I’ve possessed the power of telepathy since I was eight years old. Granted, it helps that my veins don’t expose me—other Mods can’t use their gifts without their veins appearing to surge with liquid silver—but Roe has never even suspected I might be one of them. Nobody has.

“You’re un-fucking-believable, Cross.” He shakes his head in disbelief, because someone whose will is as weak as Roe’s can’t fathom how someone in my position would not be begging for mercy. “Even now, you think you’re in control. Think you’re calling the shots. But you’re not. Travis is the General now. The Company is under *his* control, and he’s not going to bend to you the way Dad did. Dad allowed you to be too lenient on the Aberrant.

You dropped your guard and let the enemy join our ranks.” He grumbles angrily under his breath. “You gave her a slot in Silver Elite.”

Ah, so that’s what the bug up his ass is about.

A smirk lifts the corners of my mouth.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” he mutters.

“Hate to break it to you, but even if Darlington weren’t in the Program, that Elite slot still wouldn’t have gone to you. You were never even on my list.”

He flinches as if I’ve struck him, his entire body vibrating with rage. That’s the problem with Roe. His perceived inadequacies always cloud his judgment, cause him to lash out and make mistakes in his eternal quest to prove himself.

I roll my shoulders to stretch them out, ignoring the resulting jolt of discomfort. I’ve been hanging from these chains for almost a full day now.

“You’re completely out of your depth here, Roe,” I say roughly. “Travis can promote you all the way to colonel for all I care, but that won’t change the fact that you don’t have the training or the experience to run ops in the wards.”

His answering tone is dismissive. “Doesn’t take much experience to round up all the Aberrant and throw their asses in a labor camp.” He pauses for a second. “Although that’s where our brother and I disagree. I don’t give a shit if they’re slaves or loyalists—the only course of action is to line them up in front of the firing squad.” Roe gives me a snide smile. “Starting with your girlfriend.”

I shrug, and another twinge of pain ripples through my shoulders. “She’s not my girlfriend.”

She’s just my reason for being.

No big deal.

“She isn’t, huh?” His smile widens. “Then why did you help her escape?”

I keep my face blank. Wren’s escape is the reason for my detainment, though I know Travis isn’t entirely convinced that I betrayed the Company.

Roe, on the other hand, was quick to make the accusation. Relished it, in fact.

“I had nothing to do with that,” I say. “Xavier went rogue.”

“We both know Ford can’t even jerk his own dick without asking your permission. He wouldn’t have deserted for that bitch. Not unless you asked him to.”

I meet my brother’s gaze, hiding my irritation. “How long does Travis intend to keep me in here?”

Roe has never looked happier as he says, “For as long as we deem necessary.”

We. I try not to laugh, mostly because I’m starting to feel bad for the kid and don’t want to keep laughing at him. But fuck off. Travis isn’t an imbecile. He’s not letting Roe make any decisions. Consequential ones, anyway.

“I think a week, maybe two, should be enough for you to get your head on straight,” Roe says, still smiling as he heads back to the door. “Remind you where your loyalties lie.”

The door closes and locks behind him, once again condemning me to the sporadic lights and *drip drip drip* from the pipe.

I don’t know how much time passes, but my upper back is almost entirely numb when I feel a familiar tug on the back of my neck.

Wren.

Relief washes over me. I immediately accept the telepathic link.

“Are you okay?” I ask her.

“Yes. We made it.”

Her voice fills my ears, unleashing a flood of emotion inside me that would have me keeling over if I weren’t strung up from the ceiling.

They made it through the Blacklands. But I didn’t doubt it for a second. Xavier knew what would happen if he allowed any harm to come to her.

For a second, I consider telling her I’m locked in the stockade with my arms above my head, but she has enough shit to deal with right now.

Knowing Wren, she'd abandon her plan to join the Uprising and tear into Sanctum Point like a hellfucking hurricane to rescue me.

I don't need rescuing. My brothers aren't going to kill me. They need me too much. Besides, they do care about me, in their own fucked-up ways. Travis, certainly. Roe...I suppose it depends on how much jealousy he's harboring on any particular day.

"I can't talk," she continues, "but I just wanted to say..." There's a beat. "...to say I love you."

At those three words, my heart expands three sizes.

She has no idea what that does to me. The raw, bone-deep emotion that closes around my throat at the knowledge that this woman loves me.

Goddamn fitting, right? I spent years running from anyone who even came close to voicing that sentiment. The moment I thought a woman might be developing deeper feelings for me, I was out. Gone. Wouldn't indulge it, because I knew loving them back wasn't even in the realm of possibility. Not when my heart already belonged to someone else.

It's one of the reasons I wasn't against hooking up with Wren before I knew who she really was, at least after I got over the fact that she was my subordinate. She was so closed off, so emotionally unavailable to me—to anyone, really—I didn't fear for one second that she might fall in love with me.

It threw me for a loop, how deep under my skin she burrowed, how much it bothered me that she wouldn't let me in. It made me determined to crack her shell, and in retrospect, I suspect a part of me must've sensed, on some subconscious level, that she was Daisy, the girl I'd been telepathically linked with my whole life.

"I love you, too, Dove," I tell her, and nearly laugh because it's such a fucking understatement.

Those simple, humble words don't even come close to describing the depth of my feelings for her. What I feel for her is a force of nature. It makes it hard to breathe and impossible to stay in control.