

...And then there was ED



"Spectral forces of Mankind

We're all trapped inside the core of the Machine

Our time has come to find a way back home"

--From HammerFall's Riders of the Storm



McGranth led his force down the hallway. It was lit up by strange bluish torches. Hadn't Seb and Charleston described something similar on Armageddon? Didn't matter. They were getting close to the control room now. McGranth could feel it like a tingling sensation down his spine. He wasn't a psyker, but years of warfare had taught him when the end got near, the enemy's resistance became more and more frustrated.

And the Necron's defence was truly frustrated now, if such a word could be used.

The Necron warriors that stormed at them were tossed through the air like rag-dolls. McGranth made very certain that their power-armoured friends protected Tanya and Rolf.

"Just how many of these things are there?" Kevin said as he pulped the head of a Necron warrior with his power fist. He quickly swung round and smashed the head of another one, then turned and crushed the skull of a third. God, he was beginning to like this!

"Too many," Rolf grunted as he was staggered backwards by the bulk of a lone Immortal. He quickly retaliated with a deft slash of his sword that cleft the Necron Immortal's head in twain.

"Keep going," Tanya urged as she pushed past Rolf. McGranth soon came up behind her, protecting her vulnerable flank with the bulk of his Terminator armour.

They past many chambers and smaller rooms, but kept going. McGranth led them solely by his gut feeling for where their goal was. And the feeling that had proved him right the past five hundred years didn't fail him.

They had entered the room where the Grand Controller resided. The massive crystal pulsed as with an inner life, but there wasn't that sickly shade to it that it would've had, if it had been daemon possessed. No, this was a mechanical monster. A supercomputer of sorts, no doubt.

"That's gotta be it," Eddy said matter-of-factly.

"Then we destroy it," Rolf replied flatly.

Rolf approached the crystalline computer with determination shining in his eyes. When he was a few metres from it, the opposite wall slid away into the ceiling, and revealed Metallix flanked by a small horde of Immortals. McGranth's first head count got them to be around twenty.

"Easier said than done, Rolfie-boy," Eddy said with a wry smile. Rolf glared back at him.

"Are you a coward, Ed-boy?"

"At heart, well, yes, perhaps," Eddy replied with a shrug. "So what are you gonna do? Shoot me?"

"Don't tempt me, Ed-boy," Rolf muttered back. "Don't tempt me."

"Go for the crystal," Tanya shouted to Eddy and Kevin. "We'll hold them off!" She pulled her sword and charged in at Metallix, Rolf coming from behind to protect her. The Immortals effortlessly dispersed between the two and headed straight for the other three. These two were for their Lord. As if he couldn't deal with a couple of flesh-beings?

Tanya and Rolf flew at Metallix from two different angles. Sparks flew threw the air as Metallix easily blocked their blows with his massive forearms. It made swings at them, trying to catch their heads and either knock them out or squash them to a mushy pulp.

Somehow, Tanya and Rolf managed to drive Metallix backwards, forcing it into the room it'd appeared from. The wall shut itself behind them, leaving McGranth, Kevin and Eddy alone to

face Immortals alone.

With a roar of anger, the threesome ploughed into the iron men.



Charleston and Ed had now entered the engine room. It was far from anything Ed had ever seen before. The walls were covered in strange hieroglyphs, gilt and soft to the touch, pleasing to the eye. This was perhaps as far from Chaos one could get. It was, in lack of other words, perfection. Ed silently reflected it was good that Edd wasn't here. He would've flipped at the sight of all the machinery. He would've forgotten their true mission.

Charleston walked forward to the core of the huge fusion reactor. He studied it and smiled.

"Not really your average tokamak, eh?" he said over his shoulder. Ed turned to look at the Commander.

"What?"

"Know what this is?" Charleston said and thumbed at the reactor shielding.

Ed shook his head.

"These metal bastards have found a way to extract energy from a singularity. Know what that means?"

Ed shook his head again.

"They've got a pet black hole. Hand me those melta bombs now, will ya? We're here to destabilise it."

Ed put down the pack and started to pull out the melta bombs from it. They'd already used one to get into the engine room. He handed them to Charleston one at a time. Charleston primed them and slammed them into place along the ridges of the reactor. All in all, ten bombs are placed on the reactor shell.

With each bomb, Charleston punches in a code and awaits confirmation from the little melta bomb CPU. When finished, he pulls out a remote control and puts it on the same frequency as the bombs: 45 THz.

He punches in the activation code and awaits confirmation from each of the ten bombs. When the last beep is heard, Charleston punches in another code, the code to throw off the safety of the melta bombs.

"There, that's it." Charleston says and put the remote on his left forearm for easy access when he's to blow the engines.

"What was that?" Ed asked.

"All those bombs are now tied to the remote. They can't be removed unless I say so and can't blow up unless I say so. I press in the detonation code, and the fireworks begin. Let's just hope we destabilise the black hole and not just set it free, eh?" Charleston smiled a reassuring smile, and Ed laughed nervously. "Come on, let's get back to the others."

They left the room, ignited the fusion reactors of their jump packs and flew off.



McKenzie was staring at the abomination in front of himself. He'd seen it before. Called itself Damion. What its name was didn't matter to McKenzie. To him, it was the vilest thing this end of the Warp. What scared him weren't Damion's looks.

No, what frightened McKenzie was its total lack of psychic signature.

Behind McKenzie, Edd was slowly getting to his feet. Uryanaar had managed to duck out of the way, despite his old bones. He was now busy untying all the other psykers, because they were all, in fact, psykers. As he reached the end of the row, he was facing a dark green skinned thing that looked like a lizard. A human mutant of all things. The mutant looked up into Uryanaar's eyes.

"Please, set me free, Lord Farseer! Master McKenzie is in need of help!"

Despite himself, Uryanaar freed the creature from its bonds.

Without leaving his gaze from Damion, McKenzie called over his shoulder.

"Edd, you alright?"

"I'll live..." Edd muttered sourly.

With a hiss, Damion threw itself at McKenzie. Its long, silvery talons slashed through the air, missing McKenzie with a hair's breadth as the Master Lexicanum ducked out of the way. McKenzie raised his force sword and retaliated with it, only to miss Damion, who flew out of the way with a deft turn and flap of his wings.

Landing a few metres from McKenzie, Damion contracted its wings, only to unfurl them in a flash, sending thousands of small needles hissing through the air. McKenzie erected a psychic shield to protect him from the tiny shurikens, though a few of the psykers were less lucky. They fell to the floor after being hit in the head by the monomolecular edged discs. Though the majority made it through, Uryanaar's hastily erected shield could not protect those who were too close to the untouchable Pariahs.

Edd powered up a psi blast and sent it towards Damion, who had lowered its untouchable shield for a split second to fire the shurikens. The psi blast hit Damion in the side. Screeching in pain, Damion regained his senses and dove against Edd. The silver talons were out again. Edd swiftly ducked and Damion missed him clearly.

Meanwhile, Uryanaar helped the last of the psykers to the far side of the room. On his way, he drew the witch blade Niire from Johnny's left side, to at least have something to fight with. As the Pariah's were untouchable, he couldn't use his enormous psychic powers to beat them. So a monomolecular edged, perfectly balanced blade would have to do. Despite his old bones, Uryanaar was still an able swordsman. He had a lifetime of avoiding death behind himself. These deathless machines didn't know the meaning of the word fear, and that made them weak and prone to mistakes. To Uryanaar, they were impure just to the fact that they couldn't learn to avoid death. But he had lived with the shadow of death hanging over him since he began to wander the path of the Seer.

He deftly beheaded each and every one of the Pariahs. They didn't even get a stab at the old Eldarain.

Damion dived at McKenzie again. Through a few simple moves, McKenzie suddenly was on the back of the cybernetic C'tan. He threw his arms around Damion's neck. Damion flew around chaotically, trying to buck McKenzie off.

During all this, Edd takes the chance to remove the gag from Johnny's mouth.

"You all right, Johnny?" Edd asked.

"Double D!" Johnny exclaimed. "Boy, am I glad to see you guys!"

"Hang on half a mo, I'll get you loose." Edd said and started to work with the bandings. He was interrupted in his work by McKenzie, who landed on top of him after having lost his grip.

"Thanks for breaking my fall, Epistolary," McKenzie grunted.

"My pleasure, Master Lexicanum," Edd growled back.

Edd and McKenzie got to their feet and turned to face Damion. They concentrated energy into focused balls of psychic power and fired several shots against Damion, who simply shifted its anti-psychic field around to ward them off. During one brief lapse of psychic hellfire, Damion lowered its field and fired a volley of shurikens against the two Marines, forcing them to erect psychic wards.

Damion took its chance and dove in against them, aiming its silvery talons against the chest plates of the two, intent on ripping out their hearts. Edd and McKenzie ducked out of the way milliseconds before being hit and Damion smacked into the device that Johnny was connected to with a wet sound. It turned; shifting its untouchable ward around to dissipate the psychic attacks against it and fired another round of shurikens at the Marines.

As Damion dove against McKenzie and Edd once more, Johnny suddenly turned his head to Plank's side.

"Huh, what was that? Plank, are you nuts?" Johnny asked his lifelong friend. "Yes, I know how serious that is, but that's no reason to do something like that. And don't you raise your voice like that!"

Edd shot McKenzie a meaningful glance as they overheard this peculiar monologue, at least it seemed so to them. They both started to wonder what the heck Johnny was talking about, when Damion reminded them that it was far from done with any of them.

"Plank, I don't know about this," Johnny said hesitantly, "isn't there some other way? Alright, I know, but I still don't like this."

Johnny concentrated on the wooden plank. Plank slowly rose through the air. Uryanaar let go of Niire as the sword wanted to make itself loose from his hand. Niire swept over to Plank. Niire touched Plank, and the piece of wood settled around the grip of the sword. The two swept through the air together, as if fused to one by some unfathomable will.

McKenzie and Edd had understood their duty early on. They had to lie in even harder on Damion to keep its attention away from the small plank of wood and the Eldarain witch blade floating through the air.

After a few pressing moments, Niire and Plank suddenly flew forward. Niire embedded itself deeply into Damion's back, almost all the way up to the haft. A shrill shriek pierced the air. Damion hopelessly grabbed and fumbled for the sword, but had obvious problems reaching it.

McKenzie and Edd took their chance. With Damion's attention elsewhere, it had no time to raise his anti-psyhic shield. They combined their power into one big blast at let it fly.

The psychic blast hit Damion fly in the face, knocking it off its feet. Damion flew into the strange energy device in the centre of the room. It went through the outer layer of glass and the energy inside the tube started to surge through its body, overloading it. Damion started to twitch wildly, as the electrical surges swept through its body short circuiting it. If Damion had been mortal, it would've been explained as a seizure.

After a few silent moments, the device exploded, taking Damion with it. Edd and McKenzie dove for cover and table with Johnny strapped to it was knocked over by the blast. As the debris settled, McKenzie and Edd picked themselves up and went to unstrap Johnny.

"Come," McKenzie said as they struggled with the straps, "we've done our job. Let's help the psykers to the teleport site."

"Right," Edd replied. "Come on, Johnny. Johnny?"

The moment Johnny was free of his straps he jumped off the gurney and walked over to the middle of the chamber. He started to dig through the remains of the large device that had electrocuted Damion.

"Plank?" Johnny called. "Where are you? Come on, buddy, shout out!"

Johnny soon found Niire, but not Plank. He started to dig again, this time using the witch blade to cleave the larger chunks of debris.

"Come on, come on... oh, no."

Johnny bent down and reached his hand into a hole in amongst the debris. McKenzie and Edd looked on, silently.

"Plank?" Johnny asked, with a slight tremor in his voice. Slowly, Johnny pulled Plank out the hole. Or what was left of the board of wood.

It'd been ripped in half, the lower part attached by a very small margin of sinewy wood-tendons. McKenzie walked over to the boy and put a reassuring hand on his shoulder. Johnny's lower lip was quivering.

"Easy there, Johnny," McKenzie said softly. "He's not done yet. We'll get him back, fix him and he'll be as good as new, you'll see."

"You...you think you can help him?"

"Sure we can," McKenzie said and grinned. "Easy thing! You'll just have to wait and see. Now, come on. We've got to go."

As the trio walked over to join the other psykers, Uryanaar and Skuli, something stirred behind them.

Rising, half its face missing, Damion rose like a rag doll from hell, the nanobots in his body slowly repairing his damaged body. Yet it didn't help the fact that half of its face was clearly

missing. With a scream, high and whining, like the screech of distorted metal, Damion threw itself towards the threesome.

Leaping from Uryanaar's side, eager to assist his master, Skuli threw himself against Damion, to intervene the metal-deamon's path. Although Skuli was small, he still managed to knock Damion off its feet as he crashed into it. Damion's still repairing senses weren't in no way prepared for this.

With a crash, Damion and Skuli landed in a heap. McKenzie was about to move in and assist Skuli, when Uryanaar stopped him with a calm hand on his shoulder. It took McKenzie a few seconds to notice the tang of metal in the air.

"Get out! Get out of here now!!" he screamed as he realised the telltale signs of a psychic over-load. He they exited the chamber, McKenzie threw one last glance towards Skuli and Damion, but had to avert his eyes because of the glaring psych-storm that was building up. He closed the hatch-door to the chamber with a smack to the control panel.

As the hatch-door sealed shut hermetically, McKenzie saw the first strands of raw warp energy entering the real world. Deemons began to sneak out and their chilling laughter echoed in his head for a few seconds. Two of the weaker psykers fainted, the others sported nosebleeds. McKenzie moved his gauntlet up to his face and wiped off his upper lip. There was red blood smeared on it too.

And then, there was silence. Total silence. Not only around them, but also in their minds. The warp had suddenly fallen very silent in their region. McKenzie knew very well why. He turned to the others.

"Let's go," he said simply and started to walk off in the direction of the rendezvous point. The others followed him obediently, making sure to gather up the two fainted psykers before they left.

As they made it back to the meeting point, McKenzie and Edd were prepared to face hordes of Necrons, but to their surprise, they met none. They made it back to the teleport point, unharrassed, and found Charleston and Ed waiting there.

"McKenzie, where've you been?" Charleston asked and smiled.

"Long story," McKenzie replied with a sigh. "Where are the others?"

"Not back yet, but the bombs are all set. Ready to set off some serious fireworks. And believe me, there will be. They've got a singularity drive."

"Cute," McKenzie replied tartly. "It's not good they're not back yet. Johnny, I want you and Uryanaar to go down to the surface."

"What?" Johnny asked, his jaw dropping open.

"Plank needs you, Johnny, now go."

"Okay," Johnny said reluctantly and stepped up to the teleporter. "Be careful guys."

"We will," McKenzie replied and pushed a few buttons on the decoder for the teleporter. The shimmering surface activated and Johnny, Uryanaar and the other psykers stepped through it. As they'd entered, McKenzie waited a few seconds and then closed it.

"Come on," he said simply to get the others to follow him.

And so, McKenzie, Charleston, Ed and Edd charged down the corridor the McGranth and the others had gone down. As they came into the main chamber, they saw a mayhem of silvery, metal bodies and three lone, red-armoured figures. It was quite obvious that McGranth, Eddie and Kevin were having serious trouble.

McGranth was hacking left and right with his power axe, desperate to keep the iron monstrosities called Immortals at bay. Suddenly, one Immortal in front of him developed a hole through its chest, with Charleston's massive fist sticking through it. Charleston lifted his arm up and ripped the Immortal in half.

"About time," McGranth said with a smirk. "What took you?"

"We were preoccupied," McKenzie replied as he deftly swung round his force sword, pleased to see it did some damage.

And so, the four newcomers join the fray, and the battle tide starts to turn in Imperial favour.



In the chamber behind the wall, Metallix was battling with Rolf and Tanya. The large mechanoid C'tan was daring the humans to come close, its far superior reach making it hard for them to get more than quick stabs at him. As soon as they got too close, Metallix lashed out with his powerful arms, swiping through the air, leaving a hissing trail of discharged electricity in their wake.

Rolf spun round and used his acrobatic skills to their very edge, yet nothing seemed to fool this demi-god.

Metallix turned and parried their feeble blows easily. Were these inept warriors really the finest Sorn'henai could produce? Ridiculous! Metallix had been right when it'd doubted Sorn'henai's words all those years ago, that the humans were the most able of species in the Galaxy. Hah! Sorn'henai's own children had killed it, eradicated its mortal presence! Yet still, they fought. They fought for Sorn'henai, in its name, despite that they knew they had lost. Why? Metallix could not understand. Why wouldn't they give up? It'd been proven that the Necrontyr were superior to the Mon-keigh. So why did they keep on fighting? Why didn't they accept their fate of eradication by a superior race? Why?

With a snarl of annoyance, Metallix shot up in the air and landed closer to the great view-port of its chambers. Arborkar's lush green surface could be seen filling out the entire view-port. It was beautiful, yet none in the room had time to stop and stare at the beauty of the green jungles and blue seas.

Metallix lowered its rifles on its forearms, charged them and strafed the chamber with Gauss beams. Rolf and Tanya ducked for cover behind a massive adamantium pillar.

"This is getting us nowhere," Rolf growled impatiently. He was bruised in several places and his hair had a slight frazzle from an electric shock that got a little too close.

"We're not finished yet," Tanya replied. She sported several small cuts on her arms and a small head wound. Blood was running down her lean cheek, and just like Rolf, she'd early lost her peaked officer's cap.

"If only I could get close enough to get a proper swing with my sword at him..." Rolf muttered sourly and held the Yarrickian sword close to his eyes. There wasn't even a speck of oil on it.

"I doubt he's going to stand still and let you," Tanya said with a sarcastic smile. Tanya lapsed into silence for a few moments and then shone up.

"Rolf, I have an idea!" she exclaimed and leant closer to him and whispered her plan. Rolf took a quick glance round the pillar and nodded as he looked back at Tanya. He pulled out his bolt pistol and handed it to Tanya, who drew hers as well.

"Be careful," Rolf said.

"Right," Tanya replied, not quite listening. "One... two... three!"

The two dashed from cover. Rolf charged straight at Metallix, dodging the Gauss beams for dear life. One caught one of his coattails and atomised it. Rolf came up close with Metallix and started to hack at him with his sword, forcing the C'tan on the defensive.

Tanya charged towards the great glass view-port and started to fire the two bolt pistols in her hands. She pulled the triggers twice, three times, four, five, six... She didn't stop firing until the clips were spent and twenty-four bolt rounds had landed into the glass view-port. The view-port started to crack open.

"Rolf, duck and cover!" she screamed and went for cover behind a pillar.

Rolf heard her cry and ducked out of combat, coming in safety just before the view-port gave away and splintered.

Tanya and Rolf regrouped behind the same pillar. As the air was swiftly being sucked out, the snapped on their rebreathers. The roar of the rushing air was horrible, but thanks to the vox-link built into the rebreathers, Tanya and Rolf could communicate despite it all.

They both dared a look round the bend of the smooth pillar. Rolf gasped when he saw that Metallix was hanging on to the bottom ledge of the room. Its strong, bionic arms held it firm

from being sucked out into the vacuum of space.

To his terror, Rolf saw how the mechanic monstrosity was slowly crawling back in. He felt Tanya grip his right arm, as if she was steadying herself. But instead, she wrung the Yarrickian sword from his hand and jumped round the corner, allowing herself to be sucked towards Metallix.

Metallix looked up as Tanya came flying towards it. It raised its left arm to protect itself from the inevitable swing that would come.

It offered no protection at all. The essence of the Wolf ran strong in Tanya's blood. The Deamon Slayer sword easily cut through the left arm of the mechanic deamon. The C'tan lost its grip with the other arm out of pure shock. With a wordless cry, Metallix tumbled into space.

Tanya clung onto the ledge now. She'd dropped the Yarrickian sword to save herself from the same fate as Metallix. Yet that seemed impossible to avoid. There was only one way of stopping this nightmare. She looked down. There were shutters. But, she reasoned, they wouldn't close if something was in the way, would they? Otherwise they would already have engaged themselves. Wouldn't they?

She looked up, straight at Rolf. She smiled sadly.

"Rolf," she said softly, "I want you to know, it has been an honour. And tell my son, I love him."

With that, Tanya let go of the ledge and allowed herself to be sucked out into the black vacuum of space.

"TANYA!" Rolf screamed, regaining his senses just in time to not run out from behind the safety of the pillar.

The shutters began to close. They shut without a sound and a hissing sound was heard in the room as a gas mix of seventy-five per cent nitrogen and twenty-five per cent oxygen filled the room.

Rolf came out from behind his cover and ran up to the shutters. Metallix' severed left arm lay on the floor. It had dug itself into the metal with its fingers in some sort of self-preservation mechanism. It mattered not to Rolf. He banged his fists against the shutters, in vain. They would never open again.

Rolf sagged to his knees, his palms flat against the surface of the shutters.

"Tanya," he whispered.



Yet, on the other side of the wall, the battle between flesh and steel was far from over. Everybody was fighting for dear life, yet there seemed to be an endless stream of Necrontyr. It suddenly went up for McGranth what this war was all about. It wasn't about fighting for Humanity's freedom. It wasn't about Good, not even Evil. The Necrons had no perception of Evil or Good or Freedom. This fight they were fighting was about one thing, and one thing alone:

The lives of every mortal soul in the entire Galaxy. A Holocaust of all biological life forms.

If they lost now, they would seal the fate of all biological creatures alive, Human, Ork and Eldar alike.

They couldn't be allowed to fail.

But the odds were mounting against them.

Kevin and Eddy kept close to each other. They were making way, albeit slowly, towards the Grand Controller CPU.

"We can't keep up this forever!" Kevin growled and cracked the head of an Immortal.

Eddy glanced at the Grand Controller. "Maybe we don't have to," he said. Kevin looked Eddy squarely in the eyes. He understood what Eddy meant.

"No way," he said slowly.

"What other way is there, Kevin?" Eddy said and cocked an eyebrow.

"But, why me?"

"'Cause you're the jock," Eddy said with a smirk.

"Oh, man," Kevin sighed and put his helmet on. "Alright, set it up."

After clearing a circle around himself and getting into position, Eddy got down on one knee and cupped his hands in front of him. Kevin came running up to him, planted one of his boots into Eddy's hands. Eddy pulled up his hands with all the force his Terminator armour could muster and Kevin went flying, somersaulting through the air. In the end, it became a neat, if painful, head butt, shattering the armoured glass tube surrounding the crystal CPU of the Grand Controller.

Cooling fluids were everywhere as they escaped the broken glass. The huge crystal was swept out together with the escaping fluids and rolled across the floor. It stopped at McGranth's feet. He looked down at it.

"Well, well, well..." he muttered. "It's you who've caused such trouble, eh?"

He raised his power axe above his head and sent it down into the crystal with force enough to cleave a Leman Russ Battle Tank in two. The crystal split in two and the eerie glow died away from it.

All the Necrons suddenly stiffened and froze dead in their motions. All the mortals in the room looked around and held their breaths. Still, the Iron Men didn't move.

From behind where the glass tube had been, Kevin slowly got up, rubbing his head. His helmet was on the ground, shattered.

"Man," he muttered. "Next time, I'll take tails instead."



Back down of the surface of Arborkar, the Necrons stopped moving just as they had up on the Sphere. Guardsmen and Battle Sisters alike stared at the metal men, dumbfounded. Why in the name of the Emperor would an enemy just stop moving, be it a machine or daemon?

The Kankers and Nazz stood around a group of Immortals and scratched their heads.

"Hey," Nazz said and pushed a Necron testingly, "What happened?"

"Hi girls!" Johnny said as he came up to them from behind. He had stopped to leave off the psykers at a medi-station and had taken the chance to fix up Plank with a little wood glue, and a bandage. It was whole again, much to Johnny's relief.

"Johnny!" Nazz said, shocked. "Where did you come from?"

"Well," Johnny said slowly. "I'm not really sure, because my parents won't tell me."

There was a moment of deadpan silence, and then Lee picked Johnny up and held him to her face.

"Where are our boyfriends?"

"Oh, the Eds," Johnny said and seemed to understand after a moments thought. "Everybody else is up on the Sphere. Boy, what happened out here, anyway? It looks like a battlefield!"



Up on the Sphere, the wall opened as Rolf slowly walked out of Metallix' chamber. He was dragging Metallix' severed arm behind himself.

"Hey, Rolf," Charleston said as he spotted young man. "There you are. Uh, where's Tanya?"

Rolf just sadly shook his head. He dropped the arm, collapsed on the floor and started to sob into his hands. Everyone watched him, but no one uttered a single word. It was easy enough to guess what had happened.

McGranth closed his eyes and bit his tongue. The war for biological life was won, but at what cost. Tanya's fate was one of millions, nay billions. He was the one to break the silence.

"Come on, let's get out of here," he said curtly and motioned for the group to move out. Kevin and Eddy hoisted Rolf up and led him as the party slowly made their way back to the teleporter site.

"All set?" McGranth asked as they got to the site. McKenzie connected himself with the alien electronics.

"Ready."

"Charleston?"

Charleston produced the remote for the bombs.

"Got it," he said and showed it to McGranth, unnecessarily.

McKenzie began working the controls of the teleporter from his data slate whilst Charleston keyed in the final sequence on the remote control. Then he tossed the remote away.

The teleporter activated and the group stepped into it. Just as McGranth, who was the last one in, put his right leg into the teleporter, explosions from deep within the Sphere shook the entire structure of it.

The infiltration party came back to the material world in the belly of Mishkin's Pride. They all looked like true heroes returning home from a victorious battle, except for Kevin, who clutched his hands over his stomach and looked like he needed a bucket, quick.

"How I hate that..." he choked silently.

The sharp eyes amongst the Tech-Priests noticed that they were fewer than they had been when they'd left. But being as they were, they made no attempt to remark upon this. However, Admiral Ourmnoff remarked on this, and with a loud voice to boot.

"She what?" he shouted, unable to grasp the idea of Tanya's death. "She can't be. God-Emperor of Mankind, she can't!"

"She is," Rolf grunted back. His voice was choked with sorrow. "I saw it with my own eyes! She gave her life to make sure we all could live on. She is to be remembered as a true Heroine of Mankind!" Rolf turned his head away. "She managed to be what I couldn't..." he added silently. Only Demontfurt understood the meaning of these last words to the full.

"I know you all are very down-hearted over this," Demontfurt began, "but we have another problem to worry about. How are we going to get the people on the ground up here?"

McKenzie sat down hard. "Teleports?" Demontfurt shook his head. "What about the transports?"

"One way only, I'm afraid," Demontfurt replied.

"Oh, frekk..." McKenzie said silently and rested his head in his hands. "This gets better and better," he said silently with a voice full of sarcasm.

"What do you mean, Master Lexicanum?" Ourmnoff asked, wearing a look that said he knew what was to come.

McKenzie waved a tired hand at Charleston, who started to explain about the singularity drive.

"Frekk..." McGranth swore silently when Charleston finished.

"You don't need to be a tech-magos to understand one thing," Ourmnoff said softly. "When the Sphere hits Arborkar's atmosphere, the atmosphere will evaporate almost instantaneously." He paused for a second. "Burning everything on the ground beyond recognition..."

Demontfurt lost his commissarial cool completely. "We have to get them off the planet! Somehow! We have to!"

McKenzie looked up at the colonel-commissar. "And how would we do that, commissar? In less than two hours, the Sphere will hit Arborkar's atmosphere. We need that time to get out of the way from the blast wave. No doubt, Ourmnoff has already signalled the fleet to disengage from the gravity pool around Arborkar."

"So..." Kevin said silently, McKenzie's words finally dawning on him. "We have to abandon the folks on the ground?"

McKenzie nodded.

"Are you nuts!" Kevin screamed. McKenzie visibly reeled from this outburst. "What about our friends down there? Are they just to die? They've contributed just as much as we have to this mission!"

McKenzie remained silent, so Kevin turned to Ourmnoff.

"Turn us back to Arborkar, Admiral! We have to save them, we have to-"

"Save Nazz?" McKenzie said in a low voice. Kevin snapped round.

"What did you say?"

"You heard me," McKenzie replied with a smirk. "It's all about Nazz. I read you. But listen to me. You can't save her like that. You'll only manage in getting yourself killed. And this will all be in vain. Consider this: if we survive, the people who die on the ground can still live on in our memories. They won't if we go back. They'll be lost forever. So, anyone who wants to vouch against getting out of here, speak now."

No one spoke. Only a cold silence filled the air. Was this the price they had to pay for victory?



On the ground of Arborkar, the Imperials were slowly regrouping and accounting the numbers that remained of them. It was a dismal figure.

Masterson was looking a data-slate over when somebody screamed, the young girl named May he guessed.

"It's coming down!"

Masterson turned his head upwards and stared at the crashing Sphere. The bloody thing was coming straight towards Arborkar!

"This was expected," he said to the soldiers around him. "They won't leave us... behind..." Just as he spoke, Commissar Tomas Masterson saw how tiny blips up amongst the stars flickered and became smaller. He knew that Battlefleet Moskva had disengaged.

"This is not good," he heard Canoness Demontfurt mumble next to him.

"That will be remembered as the worst understatement in Imperial History, Canoness," Masterson replied to her with a wry smile.

"Only if we get off world," Alyssia Demontfurt replied.

"We're finished!" May wailed behind them. Alyssia and Masterson turned round and glared at her. Lee was more vocal.

"May, shut up!"

"That's right," Marie agreed. "We'll have to think our way out of this. Right, ma'am?" Alyssia nodded.

May was silent for a few moments.

"We're finished!" she wailed again.

"May, shut up!" Lee shouted back.

"You're demoralising the troops," Masterson grumbled. "As if we didn't have enough as it is..."

"Okay, look," May said, trying to ward off Marie, who'd been prepared to silence May with a fist. "I'm better now. Can I only say one more thing?"

"Sure, go ahead," Lee muttered.

"We're finished!"

There was a thumping noise and May went to the ground, knocked cold.

"That takes care of that," Marie said and looked pleased. Alyssia smirked. She liked the style of these sisters. A bit rough, perhaps, but pragmatic. Sure, any sister of the Adepta Sororitas should be devout and just, but they shouldn't be too idealistic. Too bad they were going to end it here. Like this.

"Any idea cropped up yet, commissar?" she asked Masterson.

Masterson bit his lip in thought and then said "I can only see one way out of here. You want to hear the long version, or the short one?"

"We don't have much time, make it short."

"We're finished."

Pandemonium.

"Lee, want me to knock him too?" Marie asked, sounding too hopeful.

Nazz, meanwhile, had been talking to Johnny and the old farseer, Uryanaar. The old Eldar had been talking about a Craftworld and anti-grav points and lots more that Nazz didn't understand. Part of her suddenly regretted not having seen 2001: A Space Odyssey. Perhaps Uryanaar's talk had made more sense then. She told him to follow her to Commissar Masterson and Canoness Demontfurt. Perhaps they'd understand better.

"Canoness," Nazz said as she approached from behind. "The Lord Farseer here has a suggestion on how we can get off-world."

Demontfurt stopped Masterson from making a snide remark just in time. She nodded her head towards the farseer.

"Please, Lord Farseer, share your thoughts with us."

"As you please, Canoness Alyssia Demontfurt," Uryanaar replied in his flawless Low Gothic. "I have recently felt this strange sensation in the Warp flux. I barely felt it whilst aboard that Sphere, but now, once free of the Pariahs' horrible presence, my senses are whole and I can see with my sixth sense again. What I sense is a strong... how can I put it... humming through the Warp. It exists on only one wavelength and there's only one thing that sends out such a hum: wraithbone."

Silence followed. Uryanaar felt slightly irritated over the Mon-Keighs' ignorance.

"Wraithbone is what makes up the main structure of an Eldarain Craftworld," he explained. "And each Craftworld 'transmits' on its own wavelength. This one happens to belong to Craftworld Vurupano, my home world."

"And how is this information going to help us?" Masterson sneered.

Uryanaar smiled softly at the brutish human. "It means we have a way of getting off-world. If I can hear the Craftworld, it can't be far away. Not more than a few days travel with your technology."

Masterson raised an eyebrow in mock query. "A few days? We have minutes!"

"I know," Uryanaar replied. "But I didn't say that Vurupano was to come here. I meant that we were to go to Vurupano."

"Huh?"

"Of course," Alyssia whispered. "They'll teleport us out of here. I've heard of wraithbone, but I've never truly believed in it."

"What exactly is wraithbone?" Lee asked.

"A super-conductor for psychic power," Alyssia said. "Or so the rumours go."

Uryanaar nodded. "I believe that Canoness Alyssia is getting the idea, as you Mon-Keigh say. Now excuse me, I'll need to inform Vurupano of our situation and our requirements."

"Hang on a second," Masterson muttered. "Is that alien witch saying that his people is going to help us off-world? With Warp-sorcery?"

Alyssia nodded.

"Never!" Masterson shouted. "I would rather die here, than to depend on the fickle benevolence of an alien! And a witch, add to that! They're going to teleport us off world with Warp-magicks? I have little trust to machines, but even less to witches, the Warp and the hellish spawn of the same. No, I'd rather die here!"

Alyssia turned round. "Would you?" she asked sharply.

Masterson looked stumped. The look in Alyssia's eyes spoke volumes. Here they had an Eldar

who was willing to help them. Should they throw that away? The enmity between the Eldar and Humans was deep and old and had to do with different cultures and views on the Galaxy. To Alyssia, Commissar Tomas Masterson was at the moment personifying all of the contemptible, racist sides of humanity. True, the Eldar could be incredibly arrogant at times, but they didn't hate the Human race.

"Would you rather stay here, Tomas Masterson?" Alyssia asked again.

Masterson looked down and shook his head.

"As I thought."

A few moments later, Uryanaar strode back to the Human 'headquarter'.

"Vurupano is only willing to oblige. There has, over the course of the millennia, been several times when our races haven't been able to fully agree on certain points. But those times are past. See this as the first gesture from my race that we Eldarain are prepared to help you Mon-Keigh, cost whatever it might. Sooner or later, even the most conservative Eldar must understand that you Mon-Keigh, or should I say Humans, are the new race to rule the galaxy."

"I thank you for your kindness, Lord Farseer," Alyssia said and bowed her head. Uryanaar made a gesture to her not to.

"No, I should thank you. If it hadn't been for your brave warriors, I'd still be a captive up there." Uryanaar pointed towards the Sphere. Its edges were glowing red now.

"Speaking of which," Masterson injected. "When can we expect to be off this dirt ball?"

"Any moment now," Uryanaar smiled.

Masterson was to reply when a rainbowish shimmer swept itself around him. The world seemed to slow down and each colour got grossly exaggerated before it faded away into a greyish nothing. Then the world faded away into blackness, only to explode into a cascade of colours and shapes. He knew all too well what this was.

He was seeing the Warp.

They were being transported.



Aboard Mishkin's Pride, McKenzie was silently reciting the Catechism of Solitude in an attempt to calm his galloping sense of guilt. How could he have been so blind? How could he have missed something so crucial? This was the worst kind of sacrifice: an utterly pointless one. This wouldn't have to happen.

But it was.

Yet, McKenzie reflected, the Imperium had always been liberal in its usage of human life. So why would it be different now? What did the individual matter? It was the Imperium that had to survive, right?

Something crossed McKenzie's mind. He'd read all history books he could find in the library when he'd come to Terra, just to acquaint himself with its history, and he recognised the reason of the Imperium now. It was just... the Terrans shunned this thinking. On Terra, every individual was important. Everyone mattered. Anyone who died an unnatural death was a death in vain to them. Yes, war happened, was frequent even, but it had become less bloody.

Because generals and field marshals had learned that all their men mattered. They all had families.

"The time on Terra made me soft," McKenzie muttered sourly. "The Seed of the Imperium is the Blood of Martyrs." He was silent for a while. "Yet, why does that sound wrong to me? In my heart of hearts, it feels revolting!"

McKenzie raised his head in disbelief and disgust as he recognised the reasoning at final. It was the reason of a fascist, of a national socialist: a nazi! And of all criminals McKenzie had read of in those history books, the Nazis were the worst.

McKenzie suddenly saw the parallels. Witches- no, psykers, and mutants were the Jews of the

Imperium. They were. The Imperium had extermination camps for the mutants and psykers.

"God-Emperor," McKenzie muttered. "I think I'm going to be sick..."

Then something flashed through his mind. A bright arc of lightning that seared his psychic eye.

Edd came running into the small chapel where McKenzie had sat all alone.

"McKenzie!" Edd shouted. "Did you feel that? That lightning, just now!"

"I certainly did," McKenzie replied grimly and got up. "Come, we need to get to Admiral Ourmnoff. I have a few coordinates for him to adjust our course to."



There was a bright flash of light and Masterson found himself on solid ground again. He sagged down and hugged the ground. Uryanaar leaned down next to him and held out his hand, palm up. There was something white and sugary in it.

"Salt?" the old Eldar asked with a kindly smile.

"Why?" was all Masterson got out. He felt sick.

"To equalise the balance of salt in your body. That's why you feel sick right now. I should've told you, perhaps."

Masterson got into a sitting position and held out his hand. He took the sodium chloride gratefully and licked it all up. He felt better after a few minutes and looked around. They were in the vast belly of Craftworld Vurupano now, no doubt. At least the hundreds of Eldar in light brown robes milling about, helping the humans, told him as much.

"We frekking made it," Masterson muttered. "Unbe-frekking-lievable."

"I said I'd make up for my race, and I'm an Eldar of my word," Uryanaar said and got up. He slowly walked away to join with his kind, and no one tried to stop him.

"Lord Farseer!" Master shouted after him after a moment's thought. "How long until Battlefleet Moskva gets here?"

"A few days, at least, commissar," Uryanaar replied in a normal voice-level. "Don't worry, we'll stay put here and treat you as well as we can."

"Oh-kay," Masterson said to himself and tried to get up. The effects of abating adrenaline was coming to him now, so his legs just curled up underneath him. He couldn't stand for a moment's worth. So he decided he'd lean back and have some rest.

Lee and Marie picked up the sleeping commissar an hour later, when the Eldar had managed to get some place for the thousands of Mon-Keigh to sleep.



A few days later, Masterson found himself being woken by a sound by his bed, opened his eyes and looked into Alexander Demontfurt's blue eyes. Masterson understood that Admiral Ourmnoff's fleet had caught up with them now.

"Alex?" Masterson said softly and sat up. "Did we do it?"

Demontfurt nodded slowly. Masterson saw the look in Demontfurt's eyes.

"What is it, Alex? Out with it!" Masterson did not like the eerie feeling he was getting.

"Tanya died." Demontfurt replied silently. Masterson nodded. Nothing more needed to be said. The two commissars didn't say anything for a long while.



The day came when the Imperials had to leave Craftworld Vurupano. The loading of soldiers had taken several days, and the farewell was quickly approaching. For Tomas Masterson, the day didn't come too early. He stretched himself to his full height, which wasn't a very impressive thing to do, and took a deep breath. He'd looked forward to getting off the craftworld ever since they'd got there. True, he had warmed towards the alien Eldar a bit, but

he was still cold towards them. Yet, there was but one question he felt like putting, before they left. He just had to.

He found McKenzie, Charleston, McGranth and the Terrans gathered together to say farewell to Uryanaar and his farseer colleagues. He walked up to them and heard McKenzie speaking in the weird tongue of the Eldar.

Alien gibberish, Masterson thought to himself.

McKenzie stopped talking and Lord Uryanaar replied, in the same tongue. After a while, Uryanaar slipped over to Gothic instead.

"So, please, accept our heartfelt thanks. You have managed to rid the Galaxy of something we could not. Let this day mark the beginning of warmer relations between our kin."

"I hope so too, Lord Farseer," McKenzie replied in High Gothic. "I'll work for the integration of the Eldar in the Pax Imperia, as long as you don't show hostility towards the Mon-Keigh."

"Well, my dear Master Lexicanum, I can vouch for Craftworld Vurupano, but I can't speak of the other Craftworlds. Sorry. They have their own agendas."

"I understand completely, Lord Farseer."

McKenzie bowed and the Terrans, McGranth and Charleston followed suite. After that, they left for the transport to take them to Mishkin's Pride. Masterson, However, remained behind.

Uryanaar turned towards him.

"And what is on your mind, Colonel-commissar Tomas Masterson?"

"I have this question, Lord Farseer," Masterson began slowly.

"Go on. Questions can't harm anyone."

"You Eldar have existed far longer than the Human race. So you must've gotten quite a few answers to some very important questions through time. My question is; what is the meaning of Life, the Universe and Everything?"

Lord Uryanaar looked up, thoughtful, for a short while. Then he turned his gaze back to the stocky human and smiled.

"The answer to that question is forty-two."

"42?" Masterson asked, nonplussed.

"Yes. I think you should join your friends now, or else you might have to stay here."

Masterson bowed deeply, still a bit confused over the answer and hurried to join the other humans about to leave Craftworld Vurupano.



Several hours later, when Mishkin's Pride and the other ships of Battlefleet Moskva had left, one of the farseers that had accompanied Uryanaar when Masterson had spoken to them, approached Uryanaar in his chambers. He walked up to the old lord farseer, bowed deeply in reverence and asked Uryanaar directly.

"Lord Uryanaar? Is that really the answer to the Mon-Keigh's question?"

"No, Farseer Irawn, it isn't. But I must say Terran Mon-Keigh authors have a fertile imagination."