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# The war for Maelstrom

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## The Meat Grinder

The Hammerhead's engines swiveled to horizontal position. Full power was applied to the grav turbines and the hover tank zoomed over the broken terrain just fast enough to avoid most of a series of venomous acid blobs headed it's way. The last projectile splattered harmlessly near the Gunner's view port. The long barrel of its main rail gun swiftly rotated to it's right and aligned itself toward the moving sea of genestealers & hormogaunts. The hypersonic beehive round shot forward, the air being literally lit into thousands of thin lines of fire across the battlefield, the hyper heated shockwaves visible on the advanced IR sensors of Ty'Kaeth's Crisis suit. The results were devastating. The middle of the tyranid advance had been reduced to a gooey pulp within a thousand of a second, the hypersonic flechettes ripping through the tyranid flesh at fifty times the speed of sound. It was like two images, without a transition. The crawling, hustling monsters and then, bloody desolation. A dozen or so tyranids creatures had been literally dismembered and shattered. Ty'Kaeth Shuddered and turned it's attention to other spots of the battlefield.

He was hovering high over the outpost, to get a better view of the field. His talisse'ra was along, their crisis suits floating a few feet beside him. They were eager to get into the fray, to help their comrades, but he knew that he was more useful here than down there. For now. He gave the command to the gun drones to advance and hit the right wing of the tyranid advance. The drone network-based AI replied by giving it's estimated ETA and predicted effectiveness. The 8 little discs gained rapidly altitude and went above a big rocky feature and starting high speed shooting passes, The blue light of their burst carbines and the incredibly intense white flash of their photon grenades launchers visible on the sensors. He saw from the Crisis network status that Tashi'e lost her fire control a fraction of a second because of the intensity of the flashes. He looked at the two heavy battle suits, towering above its battle line below. A neural command sent them the request for acknowledgement and report.

- *Command, Bravo-Alpha. Engaging enemy command.*
- *Bravo-Bravo. Engaging enemy command.*

The Broadside opened up on the tyrant guards, The powerful figures planting solidly their feet on the ground and the twin line of fire of their twin-linked rail guns going toward the monstrous creature. Ty'Kaeth cursed. Both had missed their mark. The tyrant has cunningly disappeared behind a large house set behind the tyranid's line and the hypersonic shells had passed through the house, but not through their target.

He looked at the left wing of the bugs advance. There was no doubt. He bit his tongue, and shook his head, the neural network of the crisis misinterpreting its movement tried to focus the vision on a spot of the field just beside the distorted head of a hormogaunt, possibly a mutant. He brought back the focus on its right wing. They were engaging the gaunts now. Killing a few, but not enough. Soon,

they were on them. He saw them deploying their photon grenades to no avail. They were getting slaughtered...

- *Bravo-Alpha, Bravo-Bravo, Command here. Change target. Repeat, change targets. Engage the genestealers.*

He had to destroy them before they could follow on the gaunts advance... already the fire warriors in combat were being slaughtered by the beasts...

- *Roger command. Engaging now Lock and load, Bravo!*
- *Roger Shas'el. Smart missiles on-line. Firing now.*
- *Shash'el! We got to help them! Screamed tash'ie on the crisis network comm.*

He felt his heart sink. It was too late. He knew it. The whole left flank was being overrun. The smart missiles went high and then back to the ground, felling many genestealers. The drone AI was completing the destruction of the tyranid center... but too many bugs were coming in from the endless horde disembarking from their landing spores... A fresh gang of stealers charged into the fray into his already failing right wing... He was needed her. To control the battle. Much was at stake. He hardened himself.

- *Negative sha'vre. We are holding station.*
- *Fire Bravo, Target the right wing. Disengage Fire Alpha NOW!*

He had just sacrificed them. But they were all already dead. He had to buy time. While they would hold the bugs' left wing he would use the Tau superior mobility and shift his forces weight into the tyranids right wing, punching through and flanking their main force. It could work.

- *Fire Delta, Get your devilfish at 12k3-Foxtrot.*
- *Command, request authorization to disembark and support fire Bravo! KRAAAK! Ksss!*
- *Fire Delta, What is your situation?*
- *Kssss.... Online command, Venom cannon took out the burst cannon and two missiles. Still request the autho...*
- *Negative Delta. You take your devilfish to 12k3 and stay put.*

Another burst from the hive tyrant hit the Hammerhead straight at the driver station, bouncing harmlessly off the titanium carbide monoplating. The Hammerhead crew seemed badly shaken though and disengaged to fall back to their alternative fire position. But he needed the hover tank up the hill to support Fire Delta.

- *Hammer Echo, Report situation*
- *We're taking fire command! Retreating to 1112 Foxtrot Falling back fall.*

The voice coming over the commlink was nervous. Afraid. But he needed that tank over the hill now or he wouldn't be able to have the devilfish and it's squad breakthrough to flank the tyand advance and put their whole attack off balance. He had to make that succeed...

- *Negative Hammer Echo, Get a hold of yourself, Shas'ui! Move into Primary fire position and support Fire Delta. THIS IS AN ORDER. BY THE AU'N EXECUTE NOW!*
- *Ro... Roger command. Moving to primary. Engaging Genestealers with Beehive.*

That was better. They might yet be able to hold the chitinous tide for a while. Down below, he saw Fire Bravo disgorging an enormous amount of fire from their pulse weapons, Literally shattering the genestealers around Alpha. Their fire discipline was perfect. One warrior after the other, engaging the critters systematically. Soon, there were no stealers but the ones engaged in close combat with Alpha, rending through the sturdy Tau amours like if it was mere cloth. He silently saluted their courage as he saw the warriors of fire Bravo get up and charge the genestealers in a effort to disengage their dying comrades. But they were too slow. He watched, unable to help, the lightning fast genestealer ducking under the clumsy blows or close range burst from the pulse carbines and tearing the valiant warriors to shreds.

Just then, the hammerhead, apparently hit by the hive tyrant, Broke in two. It's armored back slowly cracking and then the whole tank fell on the ground, inert.

- *Hammer Echo, respond*
- *Hammer Echo, what is your situation?*

No answers came. The wreck remained desperately immobile and silent, against the background of advancing genetealers, a horrid sea of claws, teeth and chitin. Echo was dead. And so were their chances of making the breakthrough. More Tau were dying in the melee and the stealers that were supposed to be engaged by Echo were closing on the left flank. The counter on the left side of his cockpit was still ticking down: 19 more minutes. Things were grim. It was a massacre. That was enough. He had to intervene directly.

- *Tashi'e, Ste'kavr, we're going in my friends. Drop zone is ZuluC32. We're taking down the tyrant.*
- *Roger that, Shas'el.*

The voices, ringing in his neural comm. at unison were cool. Cool with fury and with the need to avenge their comrades. To make up for the time they were up and watching them getting decimated while their plasma rifles, burst cannons and Missile launchers stayed desperately idle and silent.

- *Bravo-Alpha, Bravo-Bravo, this is command. Override all targeting. Lock on the tyrant. Take him down Shas'uis!*

That was a harsh order. Broadside Bravo was standing in the open, caught in mid-stride between its primary fire position and it's first backup. If he were to stop and fire now, the stealers would overrun him in less than 5 minutes. But the only way they could buy more time for the engineering tem now was to take the hive mind focal point in the battle. That meant the tyrant. And his guards. The tall monsters, barded with thick chitin plates that could stop a pulse round dead in its track without problems were made from ores'guela DNA. And the showed it. They were almost indestructible, engineered as living shields to protect what was now their target. The gun drone

platoon was fleeing the battlefield; it's networked AI deciding that there was no added value to its destruction, the said destruction at the claws of the stealers being too rapid to gain any significant amount of time... Damn it! They needed those drone's firepower!

- *Bravo-Bravo here. Understood sir they are going down; engaging now. It had been an honor serving with you shas'el.*

He had to gain time for the broadsides though. And that meant disembarking his fire team that was standing for a breakthrough that would never come.

- *Fire Delta, Cancel order. Disembark and give all fire support to Bravo-Alpha and Bravo-Bravo. Cover these suits with all your might, shas'la, the fate of this world could hinge on it!*  
- *Understood Command. We're on it*

The battle was raging below. The Tau fire warriors were scrambling out of the devilfish APC and getting to fire positions, Their photon grenades and pulse carbines opening fire as the last two survivors of fire bravo escaped the stealers and ran toward the comm. compound.

“One down!” Screamed the voice of the doomed broadside pilot as one of the mighty creatures protecting the tyrant guard interposed itself between the heavy battle suit's mighty twin rail guns and the tyrant. The Guard was broken in three parts, with both HV rounds hitting it squarely at each upper shoulder, and the shockwave of the impacts cleanly dismembered the thing.

As Ty'Kaeth was lowering the jet pack output to a minimum to be able to get in position as fast as possible, he spared a quick look at Bravo-Bravo. That told the end of the story: The broadside was being ripped to part by the stealers. It's mighty armor still holding for now, but it was evident that this was evident that it would not last. It had kept its firing stance through the stealer assault and was paying with his life for it.

Another HV slug ripped through the second guard just as Ty'Kaeth's team was touching down, but the monstrous beast seemed unfazed by the fact that half its torso was now missing. And moved swiftly to interpose itself between the Tyrant and the arriving Crisis squad.

They had landed behind the main advance of the tyranids and they had a clear view of the tyrant and it's remaining guard. The beasties were theirs. As soon as the crisis suits touched ground, their highly efficient motion control computer completely absorbing the impact, Ty'Kaeth send the neural command and it's hardwired target lock singled out the tyrand from behind its guard. On the Crisis video system he saw the four plumes of Tas'hie missiles and the fiery bolts of Ste'kavr's twin pulse cannons ripping through the wounded colossus that was guarding the tyrant. The beast stumbled, bleeding black ichors through the endless wounds it was suffering but it's thick chitin armor visibly kept the vital areas mostly intact because it kept rising up and stumbling, struggling to protect the tyrant. Ty'Kaeth took the opportunity and swiftly moved to the left using it's jet pack. The target lock system was straining to find an opening pas the struggling tyrant guard and the crisis suit was shaken by the impact from two corrosive shots from the Tyrant's Venom cannon. Then the familiar sound of the achieved lock ringed through his neurons, and he had his chance. The tyrant was in the open.

He opened fire with both the plasma gun and the burst cannon, his hardwired multi tracker showing him the path of each projectile and compensating for the suit's movements. The tyrant tried vainly to avoid the shells, each one finding its mark, with the plasma lance hitting the monster squarely on the side of the head, and the multiple burst cannons rounds strafing it's imposing hulk remorselessly. The beast collapsed. The whole tyranid army came to a halt. A fraction of a second. Another. And then, with a mighty growl, the tyrant rose again. Half of his head was charred. But it didn't seem to notice. All the burst cannons shells had either failed to harm him seriously or they had harmlessly bounced off the thing incredible armor. Ty'Kaeth looked at the time: almost 11 minutes left. They were not going to make it. They had to take this brute down.

A Mighty roar came from the whole tyranid army as Ty'Kaeth' squad started to fall back slowly, opening fire with all their weapons on the tyrant guard, who had resumed it's living shield position. The Tyranids started to alter their advance and their left wing turned around to start running toward the crisis squad.

Then his comm. link came alive:

- *Command, this is engineering. The message has been sent, Shas'el, We're evacuating the compound. Repeat, Message sent. You can disengage now, Shas'el!*

Ty'Kaeth looked at the time: more than 9 minutes left! Those Fio'la had saved the day! Now was time to save the remnants of his cadre.

- *To All units, disengage. Repeat, Message sent, disengage. Meeting point is Echo-Echo-X-Ray 3444.*
- *Sha'vres, We're staying here. We've got to cover the retreat. The bugs won't run after Fire Delta if we keep the pressure on their queen. Let's take it down.*
- *Understood, Shas'el It is going down..*
- *for the greater good.*

Ty'kaeth could almost hear the sweet irony that defined tash'ie's character. She was happy. As he was now. All they had to do was to kill that queen bug and be off. They had made it. They had to keep focused; he though just as a shell from the venom cannon missed him narrowly.

- *Bravo-Alpha here, Shas'el, I'm covering you. I can't make it anyways; they are too fast for my broadside. Get away shas'el; the Au'n still needs you!*

And just as the communication rang through his neurons, a hypervelocity shell ripped through the center of the tyrant guard, splitting it in two wriggling halves on the ground. Their fire kept bouncing harmlessly on the tyrant plates, although a missile from tash'ie found its mark and exploded under the breast plating of the tyrant, wounding it but by no mean disabling the monster.

He thought rapidly and came to the conclusion that Bravo alpha was right. He couldn't make it and his squad would be more useful meeting with Fire delta and doing hit and runs attacks on the tyranids advance. It was a hard choice, but being shas'el meant that the good of the Tau was resting

on his shoulders. His sacrifice would be useless. A victory for the tyrannids. The greater good was the only thing that mattered. He made his choice.

- *Shavre's, we are disengaging now. Engage jet packs to full power, we're going to rendezvous point. No discussion. NOW!*
- *Bravo-Alpha, Good luck shas'ui. May the Au'n cherish your name for endless days.*

A quick look at the situation let him see Fire delta's damaged devilfish speeding away from the battlefield at high speed - the bugs couldn't hope catching it. And as he was speeding from the battlefield, he saw the last standing broadside keeping the tyrant in cover with his fire, and the horde of godrogaunts charging it. He changed the video display and murmured a quick prayer for the pilot.

He steeled himself. There would be many more losses. The battle for Maelstrom had just begun.