

TERROR IN THE NIGHT (flashes from a night ambush)

The silence was heavy. All lights were out but the dull green glow of the battle lanterns. The air inside the troop area of the devilfish was thick with tension.... And fear.

The Sash'el was mad. He had to be. Shas'la Teyef could not get rid of the thought. Not that he failed to try... He had to thrust his shas'el. He had to be a perfect element of his greater plan, a smooth gear turning in unison with the rest of the hunter cadre. Or the plan would turn sour and they would die, or retreat and leave the population of that small hamlet die, overrun by the tyrannids. They were Fio'la, not warriors. They would'nt stand a chance.

The soft humming of the grav drives stopped with a shudder. They had landed. He could feel the low whirl of the flywheels, though. The pilot was keeping them online, to be able to power-up the apc in a lightning fast way, when it would be time to - in a few minutes.

He checked his gear for the umpteenth time. His pulse carbine was okay. The photon flash grenade launcher, snuggled underside was already online, a photon grenade loaded and primed. He had only to send the neural command to unlock the security and push the trigger. His vision augmentation was working fine also. With a thought, he brought the system status in its retinal projector and all checked okay. Although they didn't have the more powerful black sun filters of the Crisis suit or the similar systems hardwired into their shas'ui 's brain and optic nerves, they could see well enough outside. Hopefully.

Because their Shas'el was mad. That thought again. He had to chase it. To focus on the task at hand. But the fact remained. Shas'el Ty'Kaeth was crazy. Laying ambush for the tyrannids in the middle of the night, in the outlying village – a tight place with limited maneuver space for their hover tanks and short line of sights. The bugs would be on them almost as soon as they would see them. He started to shiver, feeling the visceral fear gripping him in its guts and making way slowly, but surely to every last part of his being. He didn't want to die tonight. Not to the claws of some barbed extra-galactic monstrosity. And he couldn't care less about that Aun' stuff regarding the greater good. This was pure folly...

- Any news from the shas'el, Shas'ui?
- No Teyef, answered his platoon commander, visibly nervous as well. But fear not, shas'la: he will be there in time to lead this ambush. He is a great warrior. He managed to hold the bugs long enough so that warning could be given. Thrust him.

The Shas'ui was visibly trying to believe very hard what he was saying. Shas'ui Megeik had combat experience. Serious combat experience. He had faced the Guela's legion before. He had even destroyed one of their great clunking war machines with a EMP grenade after his devilfish had been disabled. But he was clearly shaken now. Teyef waited in silence, trying to control his fears, as nobody spoke. Then, suddenly, the green glow turned out to red and their comm. link rang in their ears

- Delta Bravo Gear up! The bugs are coming. Stand ready for maneuver.
- Where is the Shas'el !? Teyef had almost screamed without thinking . It was it. It was happening!
- Get a hold of yourself Shas'la! The Shas'el is getting here at full speed. His Crisis squad will hit their flank. Now GET THAT HARNESS LOCKED!

Teyef locked his restrain harness to the wall and kept silent, as much out of shock as out of fear. It was indeed happening. Get a hold of yourself Teyef! But he couldn't. He was just there, against the hull of the 'fish, frozen. The sound of the rail gun took him back to reality. It was unmistakable, even the 'fish, still hidden and landed shuddered under the shockwave. The Hammerhead was nearby, not even 10 meters from their position.

The devilfish rose suddenly, its burst cannon firing. The copilot screamed something about a missile and he felt the apc lurch lightly as the seeker missile left the underside of the 'fish. As their vehicle swerved hard to the left, he caught a glimpse of the tyrannid horde, the densely packed chitin hides and claws briefly illuminated by a barrage of photon grenades from a nearby gun drone squadron...

The landscape was looking strangely synthetic through the black sun vision system. The computer was matching his multi-spectral data with imaging banks as well as with texture sensors, but the result still left much to be desired at the speed at which him and his squad were traveling.

Their Crisis suits were launching themselves forward at more than 200 mph, a scant fifteen inches from the broken ground, swerving and lurching to avoid trees, rocks and the occasional artificial obstacle. They were too far from the fight. He had pushed his recon run much too far from the ambush site, and Tas'hie was right – it was not the shas'el job's to recon the enemy forces nor the terrain. But he had wanted to see himself what they were about to face. And got stranded instead, while the tyrannids moved into the ambush zone almost undetected! He applied more thrust for half a second to skip over a large boulder and watched each mile go by on the Navcomputer retinal display, as he was trying to catch the radio traffic of the battle. Sha'vre Ker'Dun was in charge there. He would manage. At least until he got there. If only he could go faster...

- Sha'Vre! They are coming into range!
- Unmask X-Ray Alpha & Beta. Engage the Zoanthropes!
- X-Ray Beta! Sha'Vre, we don't see the targets! The voice was strained, already losing its cool.
- Keep Searching Beta! Galleon Team, ENGAGE ZOANTHROPEs NOW!
- Zoanthropes not in sight yet Lead, We're keeping the Railguns hot for them. Shas'Vre Ga'laih was in still in control, for one.

He Had to take out those Zoanthropes now. This was the first thing to do: they were the

only serious threat to his armored forces. He peeked into the night, the blacksun filter straining to make out the monstrous shapes of the tyrannids. Already, the sounds of the battle were coming to his audio sensors, and patched through his audio nerves as if he was actually hearing them outside his crisis suit. That was horrible. The screams and un-Tauly noise of teeth and chitin were making him cringe.

Why was the Sa'Shel away !? His team had been given the task of taking out the carnifex that was reported to be with the tyrannids. He had outfitted their Crisis suits for the task – The powerful humanoid figures were bristling with high-power plasma rifles and fusion blasters. He had no time to direct the battle... Simply assaulting that 'Fex was going to be the fight of his life...

A series of searing white flashes in the distance told him that the gun drones had engaged the Rear of the tyrannids column, as the battle plan called for. From the gun drones telemetry images, though, the photon flashes were failing to stun and immobilize the Godrogaunts that they were targeting.

And then the whole dark night erupted in lightning flashes from the sides and into a stirring black mass of claws and teeth, barely visible against the backdrop of light and explosions. Both devilfishes had risen well above the hills hiding them and started firing at the bugs with their burst cannons, unloading thousands of pulse rounds a minutes into the monsters. A series of super-hot blinding white flashes marked X-Ray Alpha's Ion Main gun as it wrecked devastation and felled one of the mighty tyrant guards, the huge creature being the only thing illuminated in the midst of the night for a brief moment, the successive ion blasts ravaging its body in a orgy of searing destruction.

- Lead, Ghost Leader here. Your target is inbound. Clearing the path to engage Genestealers. Good Hunt Sha'vere.

Ghost team was only a few dozen meters ahead, with their 2 SX8C Stealth gun drones. They were to pick targets of opportunity and cover the 2 broadsides - Galleon Team. The XV15 stealth suits were invisible even to the darksun filter from here. And to the 'Fex. But they had seen it and it was getting close.

This was the time. A quick neural command recalibrated his blacksun filter to match closely the vital sign of the 'Fex and sure enough, he saw it straight ahead, Bathed in the violet glow of the Blacksun UV-scanner.

He would need all his concentration. A quick look at the TacScan showed the hive tyrant – still invisible in the night – Taking off and landing closer to the BroadSides. *TAKING OFF !?* That thing was flying !? He had no time now. The 'Fex was getting close...

- Galleon Team, X-Ray Team engage the tyrant now! Forget about the Zoanthropes! Down that bug now! Ghost team, screen them. Don't let the gaunts or stealers close on Galleon!
- Everybody else, FIRE AT WILL!
- Team, This 'Fex is ours. Ta'jwe, Flank him on its right and cover ji'kee. Ji'kee, Move

- in close and melt that critter down! I'm engaging from front.
- Engagin now Sha've. Their voices rang in unison on the neural net.

This was it. He leveled the barrel of the plasma rifle at the shape of the 'Fex, now clearly visible in the violet glow, and pressed the trigger.

- OK Ghosts, change of plan, you heard the sha've. Cover those broadsides, we're engaging the stealers at 012N.

The acknowledgement came in from both stealth drones and from his 2 teammates. Not a word. Just a brief neural impulse, noting reception and acceptance of the directives. The stealth team mentality was a thing that got through your skin deep into you after a few runs. They hadn't chosen their call sign – it was how the other sha' were calling them at the base. It was disconcerting at first, though, how even the drones AI were changing their comportment once active members of the team. He gunned up his Grav Jet to close the distance between the genestealers and his team. The battle suit lifted effortlessly and more importantly, completely silently and without any discernable energy signature. Even his black sun filter was having trouble to detect the two nearby other stealth suits, as their non-reflective energy absorbing bodies were flying near him toward the tyrannids hordes. He landed softly at the base of the hill flanking the two broadsides battle suits, just as the closest one opened fire on the hulking tyrant guard in front of the hive tyrant. The towering brute, really a monstrous assemblage of bones and sinews tried vainly to protect itself from the mighty rail gun by hiding behind its thick bone shield but the lines of fire left by the hypersonic slugs, imprinting so clearly in the moonless night went right through the shield, and through the torso of the beast. It shuddered, hesitated and fell.

- Ghost 2 to Ghost Lead, The 'stealers are within firing range, sha've. They'll see us in 15 seconds if they keep coming toward us at that pace.

And then they will be right on us, thought Te'Shevas. He triggered the neural comm.:

- Ghosts, engage on my mark. He waited for a few more seconds and then, just as he saw something huge and scaly taking off at the distance:
- Ghost Team, fire at will!

The four barrels buried inside the XV15 forearm started to spin, spitting pulse rounds at dizzying rates. He saw the muzzle flashes of the two other ghosts and of the two gun drones. Now they see us he thought smugly, as the shrieks of the dying stealers were heard over the audio pick-ups above the high pitch of the burst cannons.

It felt the fear and pain like if it existed in a distant part of it. It suppressed it. It did not understand though. It screamed in the warp, listening for reverberations. None. The aggressors that were slaughtering the genestealers were nowhere to be found. And its

normal sight did not find them either. There! Flashes. Their deadly spines were coming from that hill. But themselves were invisible. The conscience of the stealers was screaming for flight, for survival. Remnants of their original nature maybe. The grasps on its own being strengthened suddenly and made it forget that thought. It purged its mind from everything but the will to shred those beings to pieces and its aggressivity. The genestealers had to die to occupy the shadow spine throwers for him to see them and kill them. For that they had to keep firing and stealers to keep dying. He crushed the survival instincts of the stealers and sent the impulse for a nearby brood of stealers to change their course. They were not to attack the armored predators that were killing its brood guards but they were to go getting killed to keep the shadow ones showing their positions. The new brood, receiving its directions, screamed its protest for a split second before it suppressed its instincts as well. It then sent the attack impulse so eagerly awaited by the hordes of gaunts that had sneaked close to the armored things. No further direction was needed there and his acute vision discerned effortlessly the horde of hormogaunts and godrogaunts warriors dashing and jumping toward the two tall figures that had killed its brood. It then extended its great wings, hissed and took off.

Just as it started its descents, another flash of distant pain flashed through him. The great jaw had been destroyed. The three big armored flyers had destroyed the carnifex. That was bad. The hive needed the great jaw to tear apart the crusts the creatures had built around their organic stockpiles. And those armored warriors needed to be destroyed before they could do more harm to the swarm...

The great hive tyrant altered its flight path and dived toward the three tau battlesuits.

This was pure nonsense. The stealers, instead of taking cover or fleeing, were coming right at them. And dying by the dozen. The burst cannons were firing continuously now, mowing the creatures mercilessly. The cooling system of the suits were straining to keep the superconductors cool and the ammo supply were dwindling rapidly...

- Ghost lead here, we need must fall back. Ammunition situation dangerous. I repeat, Ghost is falling back.
- Ghost Team, fall back on my mark...

But then he saw them. Behind the stealers was a horde of gaunts dashing for Galleon team. The broadsides were hardened but not to the point where they could survive the assault of three dozens hormogaunts! Only a thin line of stealers now... they had to get Galleon out of that predicament!

- Ghost lead here, Ghost team, cancel that order. We got to get the gaunts behind the stealers troops! Fire at will! MOW DOWN THOSE BEATS, GHOSTS!
- This is Shas'el Ty'Kaeth. Cancel that order Ghost leader. Your ammo situation is critical you can't accomplish those orders. Fall back immediately.
- Lead, if we do that, Galleon is toasted.
- I am sorry, Ghost, I won't lose your Team in addition to Galleon. Galleon is out of

action notwithstanding of your actions. I am sorry but I need your team to protect that village! Now fall back immediately! That's an order Sha'Vre!

- Screw you Shas'el. I'm getting Galleon out of that shit or die trying. Over. Te'Shevas terminated the communication.
- Ghosts, You heard the comm.. You can fall back if you want. But do it now, or keep on the heat, because we're getting Galleon out of there!

Sure enough, the only feedback he got was the silent neural impulses signifying acknowledgement... and acceptance of orders. Ghost team was in it with him. Half a dozen pulse rounds from his burst cannon exploded a 'stealer ribcage as he nervously glanced at his ammunition display.

Ty'Kaeth cursed as its Crisis suit started to drop speed to avoid a huge rock in front of him. The crisis suits were still moving fast, hugging the broken ground, closing the distance with the battleground. That Sha'vere was completely nuts. He had to follow his order! His team was so low on ammunitions and too far at the front, he was going to get stranded and defenseless! Damn those stealth team members! Somehow, the mavericks of the fire warriors, the independent, strong-willed tau warriors were always finding their ways into those teams! That was a nightmare. He was about to lose the broadside team AND Ghost team! If only he hadn't been away! The initial orders from Sha'vere Ker'Dun had been all wrong! The Zoanthropes were blind by this dark night, and they were too slow to get within range fast! The danger were the hordes of hormogaunts and genestealers! And Galleon Team's smart missiles were the perfect weapons to take those out in the moonless night! Still 20 seconds to contact range – the distance necessary to get the necessary bandwidth to control his forces through the heavy jamming that was caused by the strong Ion currents of maelstrom's northern reaches... Only the XV15 had a communication system advanced enough to punch through the electronic blanket at the range he was now. 10 more seconds... He waved to Ta'shie to advance her position up to his left flank, to get a better coverage of their attack vector.

- Troops, This is Shas'el Ty'Kaeth. I am resuming command of this force. Delta Alpha, dismount and engage the genestealers using pulse weapons. Delta Bravo, proceed to Gator56, and get ready to engage the zoanthropes as required.
- Received Shas'el. Delta Alpha on the way
- Bravo moving to gator, Shas'el
- SpiderCrab here, Welcome back shasel – glad to hear from you! The voice of Sha'Vre Ker'Dun seems strained. Tykaeth glanced at the tac display and soon found out why – the Sha'vere's Crisi team was dancing a deadly valse with the monstrous carnifex...

Ty'Kaeth glanced at his screen and made a fast calculation. Still 12 minutes before getting within weapon range. He turned the control of his Crisis suit to the suit's AI and concentrated on the Tac display.

Shas'la Teyef Jumped out of the hovering 'fish more than he ran. He nosedived

behind the large concrete block and checked his pulse carbine. A quick neural signal unlocked the armament mechanism and the grenade launcher. The high-density tungsten flywheel started spinning in the carbine, loading energy for the pulse chamber. He got back on his knees, his heart pounding as he cleared a smudge from his helmet's optic port. He let out a muffled scream, which his comm. AI filtered out, recognizing it as fear or surprise – not articulated words needing to be transmitted. This smudge was blood! Black ichor oozing from the corpse of a great hulk lying nearby... he frantically cleared his optic while trying to encompass the huge inanimated body while his squadmates were kneeling behind the cinderblocks, leveling their pulse rifles and preparing to fire at the nearby zoanthropes. A Tyrant guard! That husk was a tyrant guard, dismembered by what should have been railgun slugs. He felt a nausea come up, quickly resorbins as it's suit automed detected it and gave him a shot to fight it. A comm. flash brought him back to his senses

- Sha'la Teyef! Get in position! We open fire in three seconds! Squad, ready your weapons, On my mark... Fire!

Machinally, his stupor and fear held in check a moment by his training; he knelt beside another armored figure wielding a pulse rifle and trained his carbine on the Zoanthrope. The beast was otherworldly. He gasped as its optic piece readjusted to the low light conditions, bringing a complete image of the monster to his eyes. Floating effortlessly, obvious to them like if they didn't exist, a huge bony carapace surmounting the tiny, bestial and horrible head, with tiny claws retracted against its body mass, the Zoanthrope turned toward the devilfish. Then the air in front of the creature lit up and a torrent of blue and purple flames raged toward the devilfish, engulfing it in fire and heat. Then, for a second, everything was still but the fire around the apc. The devilfish then increased power and sideswiped to its left, seemingly unarmed, and brought its burst cannon to bear. It did not fire, though, as the burst cannon was completely melted and obviously destroyed. The Tau battle line opened fire as one, unleashing a dense rain of bright lances toward the monster.

The great beast had collapsed. It just finished dying as Ker'dun pumped a high-intensity microwave burst into its brain, making the huge head explode in a small deflagration. He allowed himself to relax a few seconds and looked at his tac display. His whole team was unscathed. They had danced around the beast, firing their jump packs as it got close, baiting him from one to the other, throwing an incredible amount of heavy firepower in it, and finally, after bursts and bursts of plasma rifles and fusion blasters, it had collapsed. They had made it. Just as he was bringing up the comm. display to report its situation, its black sun filter went... dark. A huge shape was coming down on his team from the sky, bigger than a hover tank, with claws, razor fangs, scythes and a pair of leathery wings... The Tyrant! He gunned his jet pack to avoid the hulking creature and, using his grav maneuver units, turned around, brining his two fusion blasters to bear, his target lock system already finding the vital spots in the back of the monster

- Team, form on me. Ta'jwe, you are taking his right flank. Engage on my mark...

And then the huge creature, turned slowly around, towering above Ker'Dun. At the end of each of his two superiors limbs were mighty scythes, each at least as tall as his Crisis suit. And each one of the scythes was going right through a limp Crisis suit, with electric arcs dancing around the bony scythes and oily fluids dripping from the lifeless armored figures.

This... This was his ta'lissera. This thing had killed his brothers... his bonded brothers... Ker'dun was in utter shock for what seemed an eternity. Then, as if acting on a cue, He frowned, gritted its teeth and ramped up the fusion blasters power to the overload mark and gunned up its jump pack, Just as the tyrant hissed, got rid of the two crisis suits impaled by its bone scythes, and, meeting the unspoken challenge, started toward him. The last thing the tau felt in the split second before his crisis suit and body were ripped apart, was deep, pure, un-tau-like, hatred.

It was no use. They had mowed down all the stealers and were starting on the hormogaunts, moving steadily toward the swirling sea of claws, but they had not made it. Galleon Team had disappeared under the mass of talons and bouncing monstrosity a moment before. And the parts of scrap metals being teared off the broadsides left nothing to be guessed as to the fate of the pilots. The 'gaunts paused a brief moment, as if they all had received a signal. Then they turned around and charged his Team.

- Ghosts, Fall back. Galleon is KIA. Fall back now.

He received the silent acknowledgment. But the 'gaunts were closing fast. A quick burst from his multi-barrel cannon left three of them dismembered on the ground, only to be ripped apart by the talons of the following ones as they climbed on the remnants to get closer to the stealth team. One jumped straight for him, only to be blocked by one of the gun drone which interposed itself between the Tau and the hormogaunt. He kept falling back as the 'gaunt teared the drone apart. He trained his burst cannon on the 'gaunt which was now getting up on its hind legs, preparing to jump again at him and pressed the trigger... for no effect. Panicked, he glanced at his XV15 status and found, as he was fearing, that under the suit's forearm, the ammo drum was spinning, empty. Visibly the same was true for Ghost 2 and 3 as well as their burst cannons fell silents within a few seconds of his. Damn! They had to get out of there and fast!

- Ghosts, run for it! Fall back to toward Delta Alpha! Now!

But it was already too late. The second drone was struggling to get free of two 'gaunts holding it and trying vainly to destroy it with their jaws and Ghost 2 was fighting hand to hand with a 'gaunt and ghost 3 was down and being ripped to shreds by the swirling mass. Using his burst cannon as a heavy club, he crushed the skull of one of the nearby gaunts and fended off another one jumping for his head. Then he felt a sharp pain at his back and as he fell, saw the 'gaunt standing behind them. He spent the last of his strength and brought up the neural comm link:

- Ghost Team is gone. Get those rats for us, Shas'el...

And then, died as two 'gaunts working in concert managed to rip his helmet , with his head still partly inside.

His Crisis suit landed so hard that he heard the memory alloy actuators groan under the load of the impact. A cloud of dust, violet looking through the darksun filter shot up in the air around him, ste'kvarr and Ta'shie. The gaunts were turning to face them, startled, their reptilian face hissing and scowling. As they moved aside, Ty'Kaeth could make out the dismembered forms that were ghost team two minutes ago. He was going to order to open fire as Ta'shie – always the hot-blooded one- Screamed over the comm. link and unleashed a torrent of missiles at the gaunts. Ste'Kavrr, only a fraction of second later, opened up with his two gatling cannons and his missile launcher. The gaunts were decimated and their line literally imploded under the assaults of the pulse rounds coming from his twin burst cannon. Ty'kaeth himself mowed down their left flank, hot plasma lances mixing with pulse rounds from his own burst cannons. They kept on firing and firing, avenging their fallen comrades. Then he realized that he was losing the trend of the battle. He lapsed out of his destructive fury as his ta'lissera mates continued pumping fire in the scarred mass that was now a pile of lifeless hormogaunts and godrogaunts. A quick glance at his tac display told the story. While their losses were horrendous, they were nothing compared to the bug's. All that was left from the tyrannids force was the hive tyrant and two zoanthropes. One was being engaged by X-ray and the last one was already under fire from delta bravo. He had to get the tyrant.

- Tash'ie, Ste'kavrr, snap out of it! We have to bounce the mother bug before it makes its escape! We'll get into position on in the ruins on its left and then we kill it. On my mark, Move!
- Ta'shie here Shas'el. I'll stop at mid point and cover your movement.
- Acknowledged. Don't stay behind though.
- Never Shas'el! I got a volley with this critter name's on it!

He Moved the throttle to full power and the crisis suit started toward the runis at a dizzying speed, its maneuver jets using Ty'kaeth's neural impulse from his equilibrium center to keep the suit stable and on course. Soon later, a volley of armor-piercing missiles went over him and struck the back of the monstrous form that was now turning around. It lost his balance a fraction of a second, just as a second volley impacted its torso, sending shards of bones as far as on Ty'kaeth's crisis suit. He landed a second behind ste'kavrr, who was already opening fire with his burst cannons, the shells bouncing harmlessly off the monster's carapace. Ty'Kaeth took a second to stabilize its crisis and, carefully sighted the diminutive head at the top of the creature, encased by fangs and spikes. The tyrant was reeling from the fire of the two other crisis suits. He punched the trigger and a white-hot lance of super-heated plasma struck the right side of the head, leaving a gaping hole in what should have been the brain of the thing. It fell back with a long scream, Only to twist on the ground at a speed unbelievable for something the size of a small house, and took off. The dust kicked up by the mighty wings of the creature obscured the view of it for a second. Just long enough for it to land

behind a nearby house.

- Squad! Pursue!

Ty'Kaeth cursed. He needed to destroy that creature. It was the most important target of the whole tyrannids force! He dashed past the house. A few more meters and he should see it...

This was madness! The shas'ui had commanded the fire warriors to actually charge the monster! And so, Sha'Teyef was now ducking claws and trying to batter the 8 meter-tall zoanthrope with the butt of his pulse carbine. The zoanthrope, for all his frail and agile-looking body, was neither agile nor frail. It was soaking pulse rounds by the dozens as the Tau around it were ducking its clumsy blows. Then, Teyef had an opening: The big boned lizard had struck low in a vain attempt to rip away the shas'hui's leg. The shas'ui had thrown himself on the ground at his left and the monster was keeping low to try another bite. Teyef, his heart pounding and breath literally stopped, dashed at the side of the beast, armed a photon hand grenade and smashed it in the eye of the zoanthrope. A neural impulse closed his helmet's optic sensor a split second before the detonation and his armour's computer reported the right hand servo-assistance as inoperative as the electrical burst that started the photon ignition fried the hand electronics. The huge beast then screamed and fell on the ground, animated by brutal spasms, only the head staying almost immobile. As most of his squad mates were also dazed by the photon burst, he took his carbine and unloaded his magazine into the wide open eye of the creature...

It was having difficulty to comprehend. It had just destroyed the bony things that had destroyed the great jaw, and then some more were coming it's way... He didn't understand why there was no trace of their life in the tangles of the nearby warp. The Hive mind didn't know they were there. It felt the pain and the fear of the gaunts. It was a faint, distant pain, at the edge of its consciousness. It tried to suppress it to no avail. The pain was too far away. And it stopped as the last godrogaunt warrior died. It then saw the new bony things. It hated them. It was going to crush them just as he had done with the ones that killed the great jaw. It flexed its leg muscles and its wings, preparing to take off to meet them in mid-stride when he was hit across the torso and fell back, staggering. It was hurt, but didn't care about the pain. It turned around to face the nearest bony thing, that was trying without success to harm it with its tiny needles. He made a move toward it and a bright light blinded him, with an horrible pain. It fell back again, kicking and screaming, overcome by the pain and the will to destroy those bony things. More explosions were rocking its great body, but its heavy carapace was preventing further harm as he started to get up, hissing and preparing to strike the nearest humanoid form. Then its hunger and rage were pushed out of his brain. It was greater now. That body was only a small part of it, insignificant but still important now. This body, this *node* had to survive and move toward the organic stockpile so it could act as a beacon and guide some of its larger bodies down to it. It had to flee and stay hidden. It

commanded this significant, wounded, yet so important body to flee, to hide behind the nearby structure. It was the last of the body it had sent to that place, all the others having been extinguished. But this one would make it. It knew.

(4 hours later, in the village)

Ty'Kaeth was looking at the last Fio trailers leaving the area. Evacuation had been swift and they left none behind, bar the few warriors whose bodies they had been unable to find. The village was still mostly intact. Although they had thought about destroying the food processor and the nearby infrastructure, it had been deemed counter-productive as the tyrannids obviously would not have any use of it, and destroying it would mean that it would have to be rebuilt after they pushed the beasts off-world. If they could. A Large Fio'Vre came toward the Shas'el.

- Shas'el Ty'Kaeth! The town is clear, shas'el. Not a single Fio behind. We didn't see that hive tyrant that escaped you. Maybe he chose not to attack alone. After all, with your whole cadre here guarding us...
- Maybe You are right Fio'Vre. I still believe he is nearby. Not that it matters now. We're evacuating. Get moving people!

There would be other occasions to kill that tyrant. Ty'Kaeth was certain of it. It was only too bad that he had missed the last one...

The time was ripe. The others had departed it was alone now. All the spiny and bony things were gone, escorting other smaller beings, workers probably. And they had left the organic stockpile behind them. Now was the time to send the pulse through the hive...