

MORNING CALL

Vui'nee looked at the sun cresting the horizon. It's brother was still out of sight, below the ridge that contained his field of view. He switched his grip on the hatch handle as the Devilfish increased speed. He had trouble keeping his eyes open at that speed, as he wasn't wearing the body armor helmet that devilfish commanders usually don. They were speeding toward Kaeloth's second defense line, abandoned since almost two weeks now. The tyrannids had not attacked past it yet and reconnaissance flights failed to detect any of the invading bugs occupying the positions that the defense cadre had vacated after the failed tyrannids breakthrough. He had been surprised at the order to leave the defense line but the shas'o was right. The line had been heavily damaged by the tyrannids assault and there was no need to sacrifice the fire caste at the trenches against the seemingly limitless numbers of the tyrannids. The third line was behind and from it they would buy enough time to complete Kaeloth's evacuation. He brought his binoculars to bear and spotted far ahead the demolished shape of the bunker that had fallen on him two weeks ago. A quick thought activated his comm. link as his shield drone increased somewhat its speed to place itself between the potential battle zone and himself.

- Target is to our left, range 34000. Shas'ui GeVle, you have the green light. We're on your tail

Just as the devilfish veered hard to put itself on its approach course, Vui'nee looked at the Mureana gunship carrying the pathfinders speeding toward the recon target. The gunship was flying fast and very low, its chin-mounted Ion cannon almost touching the ground. Vui'nee had been told that very morning that this was the Mureana's first operational deployment. A gunship built expressly for the pathfinders, it was more cramped than a devilfish, but more heavily armed and much faster. It could even be dropped from orbit with the right ablative shielding. As the low-slung gunship sped toward the bunker's ruins, Vui'nee turned back and looked at his column. A hammerhead heavy gunship with a mighty turret-mounted railgun was escorting the two. This was recon in force. As long as they didn't fall on one of the larger species of tyrannids this force would be more than enough to tackle the opposition that could be hiding near the ruins.

- Mole B here, commencing approach. Slowing down to combat speed and commencing scans.
- Understood, Mole B. We're ready to respond if you need support.

Just as the commlink went offline, his devilfish flared and landed, as did the other 'fish. Only the hammerhead kept hovering slightly above ground, his long barreled rail gun sweeping from right to left. They were on standby and waiting for something to happen. The idea was to keep the probe as subtle as possible. That was why only the pathfinders were actually sent to the site. Vui'nee was feeling the tension of the fire warrior squad getting its weapons ready, a few feet under him. Another reason for the careful proceeding were the belief that the line, even if not full of genestealers and godrogaunts, were probably at least infested with lictors and the pathfinders were the best when it

came to finding out the beasts and getting rid of it by guiding one of the seeker missiles that were slung under his devilfish.

He was having a little trouble to keep the Mureana on course at that speed. The prototype still had a few glitches at the positional thruster level at least. But shas'la tenav was not one of the planetary defense cadre best and craziest pilot for nothing. And they had not given him that prototype for nothing either. The shape of the fallen bunkers and crumbled trenches were coming closer and closer. With a flip of a switch, he armed the massive Ion cannon that pas passing a mere 6 inches under his feet and made the length of the craft. A high pitched whine made itself audible as the gun powered up and starting ionizing his Velenium reserves. The troops in the back took the hint and got ready to exit the back door of the craft.

- Area is clear. No sign of tyrannids creatures. No movement detected at prime landing zone. Commencing high-resolution bio scan. The gunship's AI voice still sounded synthetic, despite all the refinement that had been put into it. The bioscan would tell them if there was any lictor close. If not, He would open the door and the team would rush out. If there was indeed a lictor close, it was up to him to blast the abomination to a disparate stew of atoms with the ion cannon.
- High resolution bio scan completion is 85% ... 89%... 93%... Anomaly detected. Resolving anomaly's identification...

Tenav flipped the fire control switch and brought the gunship to bear.

- Aun'n! This is Mole B We got company! We need support!

The urgency in the voice was obvious. Just as was the white-hot blast of the Ion cannon seen in the distance. The devilfish rose in a cloud of dust just as Vui'nee clamped the hatch shut.

Hell was about to break loose.