“Corpsman, on my call you get us the hell outta here,” Sergeant-Master Dennis Charnellor yelled, his voice carrying above the screams of the invading Orman army and the cries of the wounded and dying aboard the beleaguered exploratory vessel *Forgestriker.*

“But Sergeant...”

Before the corpsman ended the sentence, Charnellor yelled back to the helm station, “Give me all you got left and get us outta this shitty mess-if we don’t get off now, the Orman fleet will be here before we get airborne and we’ll be dead on the ground.”

“What about your hand? It’s jammed in the air lock and if we take off...”

“Son, I’m way ahead of ya. Do as I say and leave my hand to me; the only thing I ask is that you rush me to the emergency ward once we are airborne.”

“Are you sure about this?”

Charnellor grimaced through his pain and replied, “Hell, no! I ain’t been sure of a damn thing since we landed, other than we got sent to another shit hole to bust our guts and get our asses handed to us, again. Remember, on my call give this little gal all we have and don’t stop ‘til’-we get clear of the hills.” There was a short gap as he braced himself for the next action and he yelled, “Go!”

Engines strained at their limits as the ship started to lift and a corpsman called back, “We can’t gain the height, something is holding us down.”

The corpsman’s face turned white with horror as he saw what he had hoped Charnelleor was not going to do-Charnellor gave a yell and cried out, “Here’s what you want!” and with a sickening blow he brought his power axe down on his arm, severing the wrist and leaving blood gushing across the bloodied floor panel; Charnellor turned to the pilot and said, “Now, get us the hell off this planet.”

Charnellor wobbled a few steps forward, whether from the sudden jolt from the ship or his injury nobody could tell, and collapsed next to his friends Mike Fuller and Timmy Johns.

The once proud lady slowly rose in the skies of Gameroon and turned her nose to Baal and what her remaining crew hoped would be a well earned R&R.

Days and nights slipped through the darkness of space and Charnellor remained at death’s door. His selfless action had saved his men, but at what personal cost?

The crew had been left with only the minimum of able-bodied men and those who remained needed to work short shifts and more than they had been accustomed to doing, but with nearly all of the men aboard either injured or near-to-death, what else remained for them to do?

Forgestiker was an exploratory vessel and not equipped for battle. She had the ability to outrun many vessels her size, but when matters came to firepower-her armaments had been stripped to the minimum to allow her to travel greater distances, and for this she now paid the price. Far from home and low on fuel and supplies, the officer in command called a council of those able to stand.

Gardatrousier Malcolm Hendricks had been through battles more times than he cared to recall, but had never come to this point before. He stood on the balcony above the half-empty hulk wondering what he would say-*“No use in delaying,”* he thought, “Men, I stand here as your commanding officer and I have the ominous task of informing you...”

The silence in the room was palpable as the men waited for the bad news. His pause wasn’t for effect, but the gap created a sense of foreboding that moved like a tank across a swamp. The silence was broken by a lone voice from the ranks, “With all due respect, Sir, cut the crap and get on with what you’re saying. We’ve had our asses kicked again, and many of us should be in sick bay, so spit it out, unless you wish me to do your job, Sir.”

Hendricks looked down from the balcony to see a soldier in a torn and bloodied uniform, leaning on the side of the gangway, “No, thank you for the offer, Captain Moore, but this is my duty, and I shall fulfil my duty to the best of my ability. Men, it has been my honour to be your officer...” he started, but Joe Moore, who was close to collapsing on the floor-had no time for formalities and cut in.

Joe staggered through the wounded and dying. Looking around at his men, he climbed the first few stairs to the balcony-more through bloody-minded guts; than anything else, and said, “Excusing the officer’s rank, here is the way I view things. Men, we got our asses kicked and many of us are dying of wounds received; our supplies are running out and we have little hope of either rescue or seeing home again; our only hope is to go into deep hibernation, and putting the ship on autopilot, then pray we get back before we die out here. Am I right, Sir?” Turning to his officer, Joe saw Hendricks nod his agreement.

Hendricks gripped the rail in front of him so hard his knuckles turned white-“I’m afraid, what the Captain said so brutally honestly is the bottom line. There is little hope for rescue and our only hope lies in the ship and her system getting us back. Those of us who are able to walk can make certain the system is set correct, the rest of you can go back to sick bay and prepare for deep space hibernation-I’m sorry our journey ended this way.” Hendricks ended his speech, saluted the men under him and went to the helm for a final check on their position and course, *“Brave men to the last,”* he thought as he walked the empty halls of *Forgestriker.*

The halls that once rang with the joyous revelry of famous victories now echoed the silent hopes of the dying remnants of the 7th Baalite Guard. This famous battalion had fought itself to a halt on many a battlefield and come back again, but looking at what remained of his troops and realising the hopelessness of the situation, Hendricks sighed, *“Is this how it ends for the 7th?* No famous battle to death with honour but fighting a rearguard on a planetoid raid that was doomed from the start and left men dying far from home.” As he walked the halls to the control room, he muttered, *“They won’t die for nothing, somebody WILL pay for this slaughter; as I stand on the corridors of my dying ship and with my dying breath, I promise you brave men, somebody is going to pay for your sacrifice.”* There was nobody to hear the words, but he took an oath on his honour and that was all he needed.

Hendricks walked slowly along the empty passageway, he didn’t want to do what he was going to do but he knew there was no option left to him.Battered and shot up *Forgestriker* would be at the mercy of every band of outlaws in space. His ship had become his home and she was dying around him-this lady was the closest Hendricks had ever come to a lover.

He gently patted her layered skins; for many years she had trawled back and forth across the endless blankness of space until the Baal radar trackers guided her home. This time it would be different- he realised the end of the regiment might be at hand and he knelt to pray, “Lord Savian of Baal, please guide us home-this day; we’re tired and beaten with many who gave service to you and will not see our planet again. I beseech you to guide their souls to your care, and for those who are able to stay alive a little longer, give us hope to live for, Amen,” Hendricks rose from the kneeling position and laid a hand on the side of his ship, *“I’m sorry for the pain we caused you and for asking you to do duties which were beyond your remit, but I thank you for always bringing us safe to Baal-if we don’t get back this time-may we all die in peace.”*

He left the hallway and headed forward. Listening to the engines, he began to realise she was straining to move and soon might stop, but his duty had to be done whether they got back or not – an officer is duty bound.

The failing systems left pools of darkness among the dimly lit walkways that once held proud men, men who waged a brave fight against an enemy they needed to conquer. As he stooped under a hole the size of a man, he called out, “Shit, who am I kidding! We got sent to another shithole, got our asses kicked again, and now we look set to drift in space, alone for eternity. Where the fuck is the honour and glory?”

Stumbling forward as the ship lurched, he kicked at an empty canister of Baltier blade rippers, shells designed to tear a man to pieces and leave poisons in his blood system. The canister rolled across the emptiness around him for minutes, as if trying to decide whether to stay on the balcony in silence or drop to the floor below with a heavy CLUNK, but in the end it didn’t matter-Hendricks lost his patience and bending down, he picked the can up before hurling the thing along the corridor, where it came to rest against the helm control door, *“Shit, this ain’t my lucky day!* T*he bloody tin is in my way again,”* as he headed to the helm to perform what might be his last command decision, certainly on *Forgestriker-*if not his career.

He had decided on a plan of action and nothing other than death, or being stranded out in deep space was going to stop him. Consequences would be many and ructions would be caused, but he had lost faith in the ranking echelon above him and somebody had to pay for the men who lay dead and dying in the wards aft.

The doors that once opened to a touchpad had become jammed, and it took him a good few minutes to pry them apart far enough to get into the helm area. He stood viewing what remained of the section around him, he was stunned by how much the ship had endured and had yet kept moving. She was a resolute old lady, and she didn’t want to die out here, alone, lost and forgotten any more than he did. The area that used to be a viewing platform was reduced to a mass of tangled metal with loose wiring hanging everywhere. *As low on power as Forgestriker had become, touch a cable and a man would get such a shock he would die.*

Hendricks entered the helm and seeing the soldier rise to salute an officer he said, “Between you, me, and what remains of *Forgestriker, Soldier.* I doubt we’ll see our home.”

The helmsman looked at Hendricks and said, “Do you think even the men who are not too badly injured will die out here, Sir?”

Hendricks took what remained of his tattered uniform off and walked to the helm. As he got closer to the man, he said, “To be honest, Soldier, what Captain Moore said was not entirely true.”

A smile passed the man’s dried lips as he said, “Does that mean we may get rescued?”

“I’m sorry to destroy your hopes, but *Forgestriker* has a far greater chance of ending up out in dead space.” He ended the talk and pointed out of the cracked window at the blackness outside.

“Do you think anybody will find us, Sir?”

“No chance, Soldier, we are out of power and drifting into goodness knows where, days from the homing beacon at Kellows Point. If-- and this is a big if-if we did get to Kellows, we might have a remote hope of rescue but don’t get too hopeful. Okay, I’m relieving you at the helm-you can go and prepare for the deep hibernation-I need to set the system up for deep hibernation and do some final course adjustments. Then I’ll shut the systems down and we can pray to our Lord for a miracle.

“Aye Sir, the helm is yours, and may Lord Savian guide us home.”

Hendricks moved to the helm. After a short time it was obvious to him-the controls were dead. Even with what remained of his strength, moving the column was impossible, which meant he had no hopes of turning in the direction he thought Baal might be, *“Shit, another fucking mess we’re landed in. Will our troubles ever stop?”* he muttered as the ship’s engine slowed to a minimum drive to conserve fuel.

*“Okay, here goes,”* he said to vocilator at the helm station, “this is the Explorator vessel *Forgestriker* from the planet Baal. We are out of fuel and supplies and have left the Gameroon system heading home. To the people who may receive this message, I wish to say a farewell to my fallen comrades of the 7th Baalite Guard and to tell you, we died fighting. Although our glorious leaders may call this a victory, it was a disaster from start to finish. I am Gardatrousier Malcolm Hendricks signing off.” He ended the speech and forwarded control of Forgestriker to his room and closed the helm on his way out.

*“One last call of honour and a few questions to answer and I’ll shut us down*,” Hendricks muttered as the helm door started to close but jammed half open. The halls rang to the sound of his boots as he walked wearily down the ship to the hospital, lying on the blood-stained floor were the remnants of the 7th-*“A braver group of men I never met, nor will I meet. Don’t worry, your sacrifice will be recorded,”* he thought as he walked to the bed occupied by Dennis Charnellor. The soldier drifted in and out of consciousness, lucid for a second then raging with fever. During one of the lucid periods Hendricks said, “Your sacrifice took more Goddamn balls than I have, Dennis.”

“Sir,” Charnellor started, but before he was allowed to speak further, Hendricks stopped him.

“Dennis, you can cut the red tape-from here on I’m rank and file like the rest of you brave men.”

The surgeon who was operating glanced up in shock and started to speak, but remained lost for words.

“Allow me,” Hendricks continued-“I’m tired of the bullshit we keep getting dealt and when or if we get back, I am handing in my resignation and becoming a soldier which is what I joined for; I’m sick and tired of politics and saying a horrendous defeat is a tactical withdrawal. Doc, is there any hope you can save his arm?”

The doctor glanced down at the severe lacerations and torn muscles and replied, “We can try an Orgamanian transplant. The operation has only been done twice before and in a sanitised ward and in both cases the transplant was only a hand, here we are talking about an arm from the elbow. The patient died both times. The cause was blood poisoning caused by the blood from the Orgaman appendage attacking the usual cells.”

Hendricks didn’t think when he replied, “If you can do the operation, I think Dennis deserves the chance-no matter how remote. I’ll leave the ward with the last of the air supply. When I close the door, and go to my room she is on autopilot and I have no idea if she can turn for home-you are the last man standing; all the others are in deep hibernation, I hope some of us get back to tell of the horror we went through.”

“Thank you. We won’t need much more time. Once the operation has started, we only have a few minutes before the cells get attacked; after that we need to rely on blood transfusions.”

“Use what you think you’ll need, Doc. I don’t think anybody will mind. He gave his life for us and now it’s our turn to return the favour.”

Hendricks left the ward and made his way back to what remained of his room. With a kick he flung the door open and walked in. He sat on his bed and turned the vocilator on, to dictate his last message as an officer:-

“This is the final message from former Gardatrousier Malcolm Hendricks of the Explorator vessel *Forgestriker*. The men are dead or dying and the ship is down to minimal power usage with only the ward using oxygen. The men with the greater chance of survival are in deep hibernation as we are in deep space, returning from Gameroon to Baal. We have no idea which sector we are in after running battles with many rogue vessels. If anybody receives this message, you can tell the great and wonderful Emperor his empire is as full of shit as he can imagine. My men died for his foolish beliefs, as of this moment I hand my resignation in-I don’t think it matters as I doubt we will get home-Hendricks out.”

As his last command, Hendricks said, “All controls off and divert oxygen to the ward until commanded by Surgeon Willisher that he does not need any more.”

In the ward, Surgeon Willisher tried valiantly to combat the alien blood. He soon realised the situation had become a losing battle, but he was determined not to let a braver man than he, die without going the extra mile. He fought the alien cells with blood capsules, and was about to implant one when he collapsed on the floor. Getting up, he realised his dire situation and made the call, “This is Surgeon Willisher-I am handing control of Forgestriker over to the ship. The patient undergoing Orgamanian transplant requires a capsule of blood every six hours to combat the alien cells. My oxygen is almost out, and I will be here in the emergency tent should we get rescued; Willisher over and out.”

Willisher crawled to the tent and pulled the zipper closed as he heard the ship change to autopilot and stop pumping the air. The only thing that remained was the hope somebody out in the vast darkness of space ahead had received Hendricks’ message and was close enough to come to their aid.

On the desk in his office, Hendricks had laid out a formal report of the mission to Gameroon and why it had failed so badly in its aims. The report read:-

# The mission was doomed from the start. We were sent to the planet of Gameroon in the Explorator vessel *Forgestriker*. She may be fast and well suited for the task of exploring, but we encountered alien attacks as soon as we came out of time dilation. We found ourselves not only out matched in armaments, but the vessels that attacked us were far superior in tactical operations. This led to *Forgestriker* suffering damage, which left the air tight bulkheads struggling to contain our atmosphere and forcing us down to the ground. We landed in the middle of a battle between two psychic warlords. One harnessed the powers of a nearby volcano and used the energy to shoot fireballs and the other created a firebird that burned the air as it passed overhead. Where the bird touched burned to cinders. This once proud and noble planet had become a battleground for the warriors of the mind and any people on the planet have been forced to leave their homes and head for the battle-ravaged cities on the far side of the planet. The cities we surveyed showed the population living on the fringes of a poisoned desert. If we are to reclaim the planet, I would suggest a task force made up from any remaining members of this crew because we gained vital planet experience and built a small resistance to the toxins in the atmosphere.

# On landing the troops came under fire from the Orgman Armed Guard and had to fight a rearguard action from the beginning. This was not a noble retreat; this was an out-and-out massacre. Many good men died on Gameroon and many more will die before this report is seen. Sargeant-Master Charnellor gave his right arm to save the men; for some reason beyond me, he held onto the alien until he cut his arm off; if he lives I will ask him why he didn’t release his grip on the alien rather than lose his arm? Although I think it might have something to do with the sword the alien had in his hand.

# *Forgestrike*r made her quiet way through space, the only sound being the gentle throbbing of her ailing engines running on minimum energy, even though this greatly extended her time in space and lessened the chances of the men being saved. Then, suddenly, all went quiet as her engines failed her and she became adrift in dead space –alone and far from home–, her only hope being to be found by a vessel on another mission--which is a hope, but not one with a high chance of success considering her location is beyond known space and her mission did not officially exist.

# In dead space time ceases to have meaning, they don’t call the area dead space for nothing; no beacons to guide you and no signs of life save for Forgestriker endlessly struggling her way, somewhere, her destination unknown as there are no charts, that had been one of the main reasons for this trip, the other being to enable a relay station to be set up in the quadrant to guide ships home.

# Their mission had been to chart this area, avoid conflict and report back-how do you avoid conflict when you get attacked and forced into a battle between two psychic powers plus three platoons of Orgman guards backed with artillery?

# The gentle hum of the engines and the dimmed lighting were the only things which signified she had not become a space hulk, left to rot in space for no reason other than she became too expensive to run; this lady had seen her glory days and deserved a far better memorial than to be forgotten until some space “scrappy” – a being who buys and sells scrapped ships – came across her and stripped her for a few sections of Perolinium and a ride to the next hulk. The silence would have been deafening, if anybody had been around to notice the lack of noise but even the ship laboured to keep moving with no fuel cells and limited reserves on board, then as if the silence wasn’t bad enough; all the systems shut down and the power was cut as the lady began her free drift, the only momentum being her former speed which had been minimal to preserve fuel for as long as possible.

# The ensuing darkness crept along the passageways, lurking in the corners and shooting from area to area as if scared a light beam may escape and find it; the only thing which could be heard in the dark was a mysterious rattling as if something had been trying to get in *Forgestriker* but had no idea of her superstructure and had to locate a hole large enough to enter.

# Without motive power, she drew to a halt and drifted; pushed this way and that by the stellar forces on her hull, lost to all and alone in space. There was no sign of contact for so many eons her memory banks lost track of directions of her route and then something weird happened.

# On the edge of a radar screen far below her, on the station of Deheranian 2; a monitor clicked into action after eons asleep, D2 sent a signal to *Forgestriker* and the her systems slowly came back on line with the energy charge sent from D2.

# The beams from the derelict station traced the outlines of her hull onto the sky plan, in an attempt to bring *Forgestriker* to her docking port, a pointless exercise; nobody had used the station in memory, but remote systems do what you tell them.

# High above the station, *Forgestriker* prepared to dock in her designated bay at landing bay 5. Life systems turned on and air started to circulate as the battered and beleaguered men of the 7th Baalite Guard came back from deep hibernation, first to rise was Timmy Johns, looking out at the black wilderness sprinkled with the glowing lights of the aroused station, he said, “Where are we? This isn’t how I remember home.”

# The silence around *Forgestriker* echoed as the station replied, “Welcome to D2, we hope your stay is pleasant.”

# He was about to swear an oath, when he heard a moan from the bed next to him, “Uuuuuuuhhh, are we home, Timmy?” Frank Charles, the head of the heavy mortar team asked.

# “Sorry, Frank, this isn’t home; this is D2.”

# “Listen, as much as I love your wicked sense of humour this isn’t the time, Timmy. We’re beaten to fuck and barely alive down here, so please can the corny jokes. Where are we?”

# Timmy gained his balance once again and stumbled to the windows, “I ain’t riling ya, man, look for yourself.”

# Frank raised himself up; using his rifle for a crutch he went to join Timmy at the window, “How the fuck did we end up at this godforsaken hell hole, Timmy? Nobody is sure the station is here, the last reports were from scientists over forty years ago, and they closed it down, saying it was too dangerous to run.”

# Timmy viewed the remains of D2 and with a sense of dismay he said, “The last news I got told; was the cockpit of Forgestriker had been almost destroyed and a hole had been smashed through her structure; the skipper said the controls had been jammed and he couldn’t free them.”

# The circulating air had the effect of bringing more soldiers out of hibernation, sooner than they had expected; disorientated and battle-weary they struggled to the windows to find out where they where, the general comment was, “Where the hell are we? This sure to hell ain’t Baal.”

# Frank glanced at Timmy and Timmy looked at the gathering soldiers, all lost and alone in dead space and Frank said, “Are you gonna tell ‘em’ Timmy?”

# A shout from the back rang out, “Tell us what? What is wrong and where are we?”

# Silence followed as Timmy and Frank chatted silently to each other, the hushed tones making the ominous news even more fearful, as Timmy turned to speak, a voice called from the balcony above, “Holy shit! Please don’t tell me this is where I think it is.”

# Soldiers turned to see Group-Maeir Dennis Jacks looking in horror out of the window nearest him.

# Frank replied, “That depends on where you think this is, Dennis.”

# Not taking his eyes from the window, he said, “The worst place in dead space, the thing nightmares are made from; D2, *‘The Dead Station.’*

# A young recruit standing close to him turned to Dennis and asked, “Why did you call D2 *‘The Dead Station*? Is it because nobody has heard about the station for years?”

# Before Dennis could reply, Hendricks appeared from his room at the rear of the balcony and asked for silence; the men not realising what had happened prior to the ship closing down fell silent for the man they recognised as an officer, after a short pause he spoke, “I’ll get to the point; two days ago I sent my resignation in, so I’m not your officer-in-charge any more, I’m a foot soldier like the rest of you. To quell any more rumours, yes, this is D2 and I had no intention of ending up here, reputation or not, this place scares me; a disused system suddenly comes to life after 40 years, if that isn’t scary, I can’t say what is. Our only hope lies in salvaging what parts are here and jerry-rigging Forgestriker to try and get power for her.”

# A soldier turned to Timmy and said, “The question remains; why did Dennis call this *‘The Dead Station?”*

# Dennis glanced at Mal Hendricks and said, “Shall I let him in on our secret or will you?”

# The recruit was getting nervous about all the talk of D2 and now the mention of secrets, so he said, “For cryin’ out loud! Tell us, so we know the fuck is happening here, Dennis.”

# Dennis staggered across from the window and braced himself on the rail as he prepared to reveal to the soldiers what he learned about D2’s history, “I won’t lie to you, men, we’ve been through hell on Gameroom and been forced to rely on each other. I wish I had good news to tell you but this isn’t a good place to end up and we’ll have to try to start the station from dead, it’s been a long time since the station was running and even then records show the last people here left in a rush and until we find out why, we are at their mercy.”

# The silence became total as the men listened and Dennis waited for the question he expected would be asked and had no answer to. Even on low power, the engines of Forgestriker remained deafening above the silence of the few who rose from their beds and waited for the next report from their friends, nowhere is silence deadlier than on an a silent station run by computers.

# The men shifted restlessly, each wanting to ask the question but afraid of the answer, fighting enemies you can see is one thing but D2 had gained a reputation beyond that and nobody had been given reasons for this, some said this was for their protection – what you don’t know, you don’t worry about – and others said the officers had been ordered to bury any information so deep nobody would find out what happened and besides, nobody is likely to go to D2 again, but here stood the remaining men of the 7th Baalite; only a few hundred feet from entering the station everybody wished never existed.

# The silence was broken by a voice from one of the bed-ridden soldiers, “Okay, we all want to ask the question,” he said between gasping for breath and coughing blood on his torn fatigues, “what the hell do you mean, their mercy?”

# Dennis turned to face the brave soldier and replied, “The last reports from the station said the station was under attack from beings which could move through the doors and air locks as if they didn’t cause a problem. There is no proof these creatures exist, many of the personnel left here when the station closed down had been under stress for months; reports claimed some personnel were seen outside the safe areas, wandering the corridors and vanished off the radar searches.”

# A voice from the far end of the corridor made Dennis turn as the man said, “What do you mean; safe areas?”

# Malcolm stepped into answer the question, being an officer at the time, he had a little more access to information, “The crew of D2 needed to cordon off areas because the creatures tore the outer hull and left gaping holes; in order to maintain atmospheric pressure and life support D2 had almost a fifth of the decks closed down as unsafe.”

# “Thanks, Malcolm, for being honest but what did he mean about vanishing off the radar? We were told D2 has the best radar in the sector and can track things as yet unnoticed.”

# “You’re correct, D2 has the ability to detect far away objects, which is why the disappearances not only spooked the ship but had to be kept from the notice of the rest of the Empire; D2 was to be launched as a new frontier post...”

# Before he got a chance to continue, a voice from the ward called out, “Now, it’s a bloody ghost town and our fucking luck to turn up here, in the middle of nowhere and with no supplies; God bless the empire.”

# Another man rose from his bed to ask, “If there is no proof of these creatures, what made the holes and why did they leave suddenly?”

# Desperate to find answers to the questions he had been asked, Malcolm found himself getting lost in a maze of possibilities, “The holes could be from meteor strikes and although no official records show activity in the area...”

# Malcolm’s hesitation caused a large amount of worried faces among the men and one called out, “Cut the official line of BS and bottom line things, Malcolm!”

# Dennis noticed Malcolm flinch as he gripped the rail, before his former officer as able to say more he replied, “Malcolm and I were on the Broadsword, returning from a secret mission beyond Gameroom when the Radio-Master picked up a garbled message from D2. The only thing we heard before the white noise was gunfire and screaming, after the screams died down the only noise became something closing the station down. When we got to Baal and reported what happened, we were ordered not to mention the recordings. Take it from me, I want to be off this station as soon as Forgestriker can move but we need to get her ready to fly which will take some time after the battering she endured.”

# The men who were able to get off their dirty beds rose and staggered to the ward windows, their faces told a story no words could explain; desolate and alone in space they had ended up at a station nobody knew was running after all these years; could things get worse? Lonely souls and tortured bodies which ached for rest crawled and hobbled to windows to view their new home, at least until the ship could leave but nobody had the answer to the question-when were they leaving?

# Malcolm Hendricks stood before his friends and said, “I know none of us want to be here and there are stories about what happened-or may have happened- but for now, we need to rely on ourselves and anything we can find out. We’ll need to scout the ship and find out if anything is salvageable and remember even a small part may be helpful to us, guys.”

# Dennis Jacks called above the sounds of the ailing systems, “We don’t know who or what we are up against here, so, I want three-man fire teams; I would like bigger groups but we are down to the bare minimum and even this is stretching resources, lads. Timmy, you take three two men and cover the section from levels 3 to 6, Frank, your group can cover lower level 1 to 4 and I’ll take a group up to level 7 and cover the top levels; if anybody gets in trouble, try to get back here. We don’t have the men or fire power for a battle on the station.”

# Timmy led his troops down the dark corridor to the right of the entrance to the station, “Eyes and ears open, guys, this is enemy territory,” he whispered in the vocilator, “we don’t want to rouse them.”

# Frank’s group took the left corridor and headed to their designated sections, hoping to stay out of a fire-fight and get back safe, but something had them on edge, “Do you smell that?” he asked as they crossed an open area of balcony and stopped to view their surroundings.

# Si Thompson, former mortar crew man replied, “Yer, like sea water.”

# Rifleman Todd Marsh called to them, “Out here in nowhere, and you get the odour of fish, something ain’t going good, guys.”

# DJ was leading his group up a shattered stairwell and looking at the shell holes, “Guys, whoever was here had been packing heavy artillery, these walls are made from Terronium and designed to take the impact of a meteor storm but look how the shell went through as if the wall didn’t exist.”

# Bob Holmes, the former recon specialist and hard man of the section said, “DJ, these guys are not only packing heavy, they’re heavy armoured too, see these marks on the wall where they broke in, the shell has been torn off by hand.”

# Young foot soldier Jeff Killord asked timidly, “Who do you think is here?”

# DJ turned to the newbie and commented, “I don’t know, but we’re up against some heavy guns and the advantage of territory is theirs, so keep ‘em’ peeled, we’re going hunting.”

# On Forgestriker, Malcolm and Surgeon Willisher were deep in conversation, Malcolm said, “How many of the men are able to walk, Doc?”

# Willisher replied, “At the moment, about five or six, the others need the rest as they’re too seriously wounded to contemplate moving.”

# Walking around the ward and viewing his friends lying in their blood, Malcolm said, “We need two men with comms experience because our fire-teams need to be able to connect to me at the hub, so I can find out what is going on, can you release Brian Davies and Fortry Morris?”

# The surgeon glanced at the bed plan and replied with sadness, “I can release Brian, but Morris died; the shell fragment pierced his lung and he drowned, I realise this isn’t a consolation but I couldn’t save him; even if we were home and in a hospital.”

# Malcolm sighed deep and said, “Thanks Doc, Brian you’re with me.”

# Brian Davies rose from the bed and dragged his body out of the ward, his eyes kept moving from side to side and up and down as he fidgeted nervously behind Hendricks, “Malcolm; is it true? Are we at D2?”

# “I am sure you heard the chatter going on, yes we are, but our men need your skills to survive on the station, we have three teams searching the station and no way for them to contact either me or each other as the white noise is jamming the signals.”

# Malcolm and Brian walked along the empty passages leading to the hub, the silence became deafening as though you were being stalked by an unseen but all-seeing foe, able to move as though the walls were water and their element. They arrived at the hub to vie the core of the station for the first time, “Holy crap, Malcolm, there must have been a hell of a struggle here; look at the corpses.”

# In front of the door lay a pile of skeletons ravaged by time until all that remained was parched bones and torn uniforms.

# Malcolm stopped and viewed the bodies, and said, “Yes, a rear guard action to defend their most vital point and to what end? They got over-whelmed by numbers in the final fight and had to evacuate in a hurry.”

# “If they had the fight going on outside, why didn’t the load the self-destruct programme as they left?”

# Malcolm rolled a body over and noted the rank insignia, “Here is your answer, Brian, the sequence needed three keys and at least one of the officers is on this side of the door.”

# Malcolm and Brian stepped across the bodies and tried to open the door but the fight had blown the circuits and fried the controls. Not going to be beaten by an old battle, Brian said, “If you can give me a helping hand, I may get through the broken window and be able to free the door from inside.”

# Malcolm gave his friend a gentle push as he climbed through the broken window frame, “Shit man!” he called out as he rolled and stood up.

# “What do you see, Brian?” Malcolm asked as he tried to get a glance through the broken frame.

# “The fighting may have been on your side of the door but there is a hell of a lot of blood on this side; I’m not sure what went down but the fight was nasty judging from the body parts lying around, Malcolm.”

# Pushing the bodies aside, Malcolm called across, “Can you get to the door release catch, so we can try to get a radio link with the fire-teams?”

# Brian called back, “I can get to the panel and I’ll try to find what works, ‘cos’ believe me, this is one hell of a mess and I think we’ll be lucky to get anything without a major fix up job.”

# Malcolm shrugged his shoulders and sighed, “We need to do what we can, I don’t like our guys walking around blind and something tells me, we’re not alone.”

# “I copy that, are you getting the tingles too?”

# “Since we opened the hatches on our arrival, I find something creepy about a dead station calling to you.”

# On level 5, the search party had arrived at a cross junction but they were forced to halt their progress as the doors had been sealed and whoever wanted them shut had blown the panel, so the door couldn’t be opened, “Okay, let’s double back to the next junction and work our way across the section,” Timmy said with a sigh, “I wish for once, we could go somewhere were we didn’t need to watch our backs.”

# The group turned to walk back the twenty yards to the corridor and as they did, something smashed into the other side of the door, “What the fuck is that?” Matt Kenyon yelled, “And how the hell is it surviving out there?”

# A scared Rick Coolfer said, “I don’t intend to stay long enough to find out; I ain’t staying to fight the creature.”

# From the other side of the door they heard a grating sound like iron fillings on a steel plate, “Okay, if we get back to the corridor behind us we can go around here,” Timmy said, trying to keep the calm in the group.

# “You didn’t answer the question, Timmy,” Rick replied.

# “I can’t tell you what I don’t know, Rick,” Timmy commented.

# Matt was becoming trigger-happy and said, “I thought you said you had been here before, Timmy. If you don’t remember what the creature is, let’s blow the thing to hell and get all this over with.”

# Timmy realised Matt was losing control and shouted to him, “A lousy call, we shoot this one and who can say how many will learn of our presence; remember this is their land and they can move around with ease.”

# A shocked Matt replied, “I’m sorry, Timmy, getting our asses kicked on Gameroom and then the wait in deep space for the wait to be found, only to end up in hell. I lost my mind.”

# Timmy patted his friend on the shoulder and said, “Matt, do you think I feel any different, when I found out we had arrived at this station I almost cried. Now, let’s try to find a way around.”

# In the lower level, Frank, Si and Todd where searching the ruined corridors for some sign of life, all they met was a deathly silence and a foul odour, “Do you smell that?” Frank whispered into the vocilator.

# “Yeah, the odour of fish and the stink of rotting flesh, enough to turn ya stomach,” Si replied.

# Todd had taken the rear position and was keeping his eyes sharp, suddenly he let off five rounds at something but nothing hit the target.

# Frank turned to Todd and said, “What did you see?”

# A shaken Todd could only stammer, “Shh shh shadows on the wall, no shapes but shadows.”

# Frank whispered, “We’re on level 2, let’s find a way around this area and try to get to level 3 to link with the others, stay sharp, if they are here and I don’t doubt they are; all the advantages are on their side.”

# Si glanced across at him and said, “Frank, we have the fire power advantage surely, don’t we?”

# Frank heaved his heavy Balrood rifle across his shoulder and replied, “We can’t shoot what we can’t see, Si, and even if we did, we’ve no idea how much their bodies can take. Let’s keep moving, I got a feeling they’re watching and I don’t like not knowing what I’m fighting.”

# Todd kept watching the shadows with a finger twitching to fire his gun at the slightest excuse, his nerves were starting to tingle at the lack of action despite knowing something was out there watching and waiting for them, “I say we take the show to them, Frank, hit them with our fire power and get them watching their butts.”

# Frank realising Todd’s trigger happy attitude would more likely bring their doom than salvation replied, “What will a fire-fight get us, Todd, a lot of angry creatures on our backs, and nowhere to run; bad call, man?”

# Todd sensed he was losing the battle but he couldn’t back down, “I don’t give a crap, Frank, this place gives me the creeps and I want to do something and not keep walking in circles, waiting for them to strike.”

# Anger seethed through Frank as he said, “I don’t like our situation any more than you, but until we can get something working we are stuck with it and you going gun-crazy will end up with us dead. For now, we should concentrate on finding a way out of here and then perhaps plan an attack, how does that sound, Todd?”

# Todd wiped the sweat from his brow and said, “I’m sorry guys, I guess the silence is getting to me after the fight on Gameroom, I agree we need to plan the attacks.”

# Out of contact with the rest of the groups, DJ, Bob and Jeff had reached level 10 when they were halted in their tracks by the debris of what appeared to be a huge battle, “Shoot, DJ, this appeared to be the point of entry-look at the damage to the roof and wall, what did that?” Bob said as he looked at the space above and viewed the gaping void.

# DJ viewed the area Bob pointed out and replied, “You got me, Bob, I ain’t seen a shell big enough to gauge a hole that size and can you see what happened after entry? The shell split and caused massive structural damage.”

# The men took a step back to take in the damage done. Below them only the emptiness of space loomed. Whatever hit the station tore through the metal work like a knife through paper and all that remained were fragments of broken metal corridors, “Do you think there is a way around this station, after the wreckage, DJ?” Jeff asked.

# “I sure hope so, Jeff, or we’re gonna find ourselves fighting a skirmish war with no links to the others,” Bob added, “I wonder if they’re having any luck with the lights, DJ, this dark is not helping our struggle.”

# DJ took a look at the area around them and replied, “I am with you, but at the same time I have the feeling we may need the dark to move in, Bob.”

# In the hub, Brian and Malcolm were busy trying to get some power to the station, if only to link the groups on the various levels and gain some knowledge of the defunct stations systems. The task was hard enough without the battle damage, but Brian was finding his job of repairing the system almost impossible with all the damage, “I could do with another pair of hands in here, Mal, but with all the wreckage, there is nowhere to stand or sit.”

# Malcolm peered into the gloom of the hub, lit only be the low green light of Brian’s flashlight, all he could see was a faint figure attempting to tie cables together to make some connection, “Our main objectives are keeping the groups in contact and getting support for the Doc in *Forgestriker*; more than that will be a bonus, Brian.”

# Brian shrugged and replied, “I can do what I can do, Mal; I’m making no promises. I can say, if I get anything from this mess it will be a miracle, whoever trashed the circuits knew what to hit and they severed most of the linkage points and those which survived have been melted by a thermal blast.”

# Brian toiled as his friend kept guard, looking into the dark voids of D2 and wondering where the enemy hid, at times he doubted the existence of an enemy, but then he heard the grating on the hull-or did he?

# Stories had been told about D2 and its ghostly reputation, were these stories playing on Mal’s mind as he stood guard at the hub?

# The dark can hide strange things from you, but sooner or later, the darkness becomes your enemy too and you imagine seeing images and hearing sounds which may not exist outside of your mind.

# Timmy viewed the remains of D2 and with a sense of dismay he said, “The last news I got told about was the cockpit of Forgestriker had been almost destroyed and hole had been smashed through her structure; the skipper said the controls had been jammed and he couldn’t free them.”

# The circulating air had the effect of bringing more soldiers out of hibernation, sooner than they had expected; disorientated and battle-weary they struggled to the windows to find out where they where, the general comment was, “Where the hell are we? This sure to hell ain’t Baal.”

# Frank glanced at Timmy and Timmy looked at the gathering soldiers, all lost and alone in dead space and Frank said, “Are you gonna tell ‘em’ Timmy?”

# A shout from the back rang out, “Tell us what? What is wrong and where are we?”

# Silence followed as Timmy and Frank chatted silently to each other, the hushed tones making the ominous news even more fearful, as Timmy turned to speak, a voice called from the balcony above, “Holy shit! Please don’t tell me this is where I think it is.”

# Soldiers turned to see Group-Maeir Dennis Jacks looking in horror out of the window nearest him.

# Frank replied, “That depends on where you think this is, Dennis.”

# Not taking his eyes from the window, he said, “The worst place in dead space, the thing nightmares are made from; D2, *‘The Dead Station.’*

# A young recruit standing close to him turned to Dennis and asked, “Why did you call D2 *‘The Dead Station*? Is it because nobody has heard about the station for years?”

# Before Dennis could reply, Hendricks appeared from his room at the rear of the balcony and asked for silence; the men not realising what had happened prior to the ship closing down fell silent for the man they recognised as an officer, after a short pause he spoke, “I’ll get to the point; two days ago I sent my resignation in, so I’m not your officer-in-charge any more, I’m a foot soldier like the rest of you. To quell any more rumours, yes, this is D2 and I had no intention of ending up here, reputation or not, this place scares me; a disused system suddenly comes to life after 40 years, if that isn’t scary, I can’t say what is. Our only hope lies in salvaging what parts are here and jerry-rigging Forgestriker to try and get power for her.”

# A soldier turned to Timmy and said, “The question remains; why did Dennis call this *‘The Dead Station?”*

# Dennis glanced at Mal Hendricks and said, “Shall I let him in on our secret or will you?”

# The recruit was getting nervous about all the talk of D2 and now the mention of secrets, so he said, “For cryin’ out loud! Tell us, so we know the fuck is happening here, Dennis.”

# Dennis staggered across from the window and braced himself on the rail as he prepared to reveal to the soldiers what he learned about D2’s history, “I won’t lie to you, men, we’ve been through hell on Gameroom and been forced to rely on each other. I wish I had good news to tell you but this isn’t a good place to end up and we’ll have to try to start the station from dead, it’s been a long time since the station was running and even then records show the last people here left in a rush and until we find out why, we are at their mercy.”

# The silence became total as the men listened and Dennis waited for the question he expected would be asked and had no answer to. Even on low power, the engines of Forgestriker remained deafening above the silence of the few who rose from their beds and waited for the next report from their friends, nowhere is silence deadlier than on an a silent station run by computers.

# The men shifted restlessly, each wanting to ask the question but afraid of the answer, fighting enemies you can see is one thing but D2 had gained a reputation beyond that and nobody had been given reasons for this, some said this was for their protection – what you don’t know, you don’t worry about – and others said the officers had been ordered to bury any information so deep nobody would find out what happened and besides, nobody is likely to go to D2 again, but here stood the remaining men of the 7th Baalite; only a few hundred feet from entering the station everybody wished never existed.

# The silence was broken by a voice from one of the bed-ridden soldiers, “Okay, we all want to ask the question,” he said between gasping for breath and coughing blood on his torn fatigues, “what the hell do you mean, their mercy?”

# Dennis turned to face the brave soldier and replied, “The last reports from the station said the station was under attack from beings which could move through the doors and air locks as if they didn’t cause a problem. There is no proof these creatures exist, many of the personnel left here when the station closed down had been under stress for months; reports claimed some personnel were seen outside the safe areas, wandering the corridors and vanished off the radar searches.”

# A voice from the far end of the corridor made Dennis turn as the man said, “What do you mean; safe areas?”

# Malcolm stepped into answer the question, being an officer at the time, he had a little more access to information, “The crew of D2 needed to cordon off areas because the creatures tore the outer hull and left gaping holes; in order to maintain atmospheric pressure and life support D2 had almost a fifth of the decks closed down as unsafe.”

# “Thanks, Malcolm, for being honest but what did he mean about vanishing off the radar? We were told D2 has the best radar in the sector and can track things as yet unnoticed.”

# “You’re correct, D2 has the ability to detect far away objects, which is why the disappearances not only spooked the ship but had to be kept from the notice of the rest of the Empire; D2 was to be launched as a new frontier post...”

# Before he got a chance to continue, a voice from the ward called out, “Now, it’s a bloody ghost town and our fucking luck to turn up here, in the middle of nowhere and with no supplies; God bless the empire.”

# Another man rose from his bed to ask, “If there is no proof of these creatures, what made the holes and why did they leave suddenly?”

# Desperate to find answers to the questions he had been asked, Malcolm found himself getting lost in a maze of possibilities, “The holes could be from meteor strikes and although no official records show activity in the area...”

# Malcolm’s hesitation caused a large amount of worried faces among the men and one called out, “Cut the official line of BS and bottom line things, Malcolm!”

# Dennis noticed Malcolm flinch as he gripped the rail, before his former officer as able to say more he replied, “Malcolm and I were on the Broadsword, returning from a secret mission beyond Gameroom when the Radio-Master picked up a garbled message from D2. The only thing we heard before the white noise was gunfire and screaming, after the screams died down the only noise became something closing the station down. When we got to Baal and reported what happened, we were ordered not to mention the recordings. Take it from me, I want to be off this station as soon as Forgestriker can move but we need to get her ready to fly which will take some time after the battering she endured.”

# The men who were able to get off their dirty beds rose and staggered to the ward windows, their faces told a story no words could explain; desolate and alone in space they had ended up at a station nobody knew was running after all these years; could things get worse? Lonely souls and tortured bodies which ached for rest crawled and hobbled to windows to view their new home, at least until the ship could leave but nobody had the answer to the question-when were they leaving?

# Malcolm Hendricks stood before his friends and said, “I know none of us want to be here and there are stories about what happened-or may have happened- but for now, we need to rely on ourselves and anything we can find out. We’ll need to scout the ship and find out if anything is salvageable and remember even a small part may be helpful to us, guys.”

# Dennis Jacks called above the sounds of the ailing systems, “We don’t know who or what we are up against here, so, I want three-man fire teams; I would like bigger groups but we are down to the bare minimum and even this is stretching resources, lads. Timmy, you take three two men and cover the section from levels 3 to 6, Frank, your group can cover lower level 1 to 4 and I’ll take a group up to level 7 and cover the top levels; if anybody gets in trouble, try to get back here. We don’t have the men or fire power for a battle on the station.”

# Timmy led his troops down the dark corridor to the right of the entrance to the station, “Eyes and ears open, guys, this is enemy territory,” he whispered in the vocilator, “we don’t want to rouse them.”

# Frank’s group took the left corridor and headed to their designated sections, hoping to stay out of a fire-fight and get back safe, but something had them on edge, “Do you smell that?” he asked as they crossed an open area of balcony and stopped to view their surroundings.

# Si Thompson, former mortar crew man replied, “Yer, like sea water.”

# Rifleman Todd Marsh called to them, “Out here in nowhere, and you get the odour of fish; something ain’t going good, guys.”

# DJ was leading his group up a shattered stairwell and looking at the shell holes, “Guys, whoever was here had been packing heavy artillery, these walls are made from Terronium and designed to take the impact of a meteor storm but look how the shell went through as if the wall didn’t exist.”

# Bob Holmes, the former recon specialist and hard man of the section said, “DJ, these guys are not only packing heavy, they’re heavy armoured too, see these marks on the wall where they broke in, the shell has been torn off by hand.”

# Young foot soldier Jeff Killord asked timidly, “Who do you think is here?”

# DJ turned to the newbie and commented, “I don’t know, but we’re up against some heavy guns and the the advantage of territory is theirs, so keep ‘em’ peeled, we’re going hunting.”

# On Forgestriker, Malcolm and Surgeon Willisher were deep in conversation, Malcolm said, “How many of the men are able to walk, Doc?”

# Willisher replied, “At the moment, about five or six, the others need the rest as they’re too seriously wounded to contemplate moving.”

# Walking around the ward and viewing his friends lying in their blood, Malcolm said, “We need two men with comms experience because our fire-teams need to be able to connect to me at the hub, so I can find out what is going on, can you release Brian Davies and Fortry Morris?”

# The surgeon glanced at the bed plan and replied with sadness, “I can release Brian, but Morris died; the shell fragment pierced his lung and he drowned, I realise this isn’t a consolation but I couldn’t save him; even if we were home and in a hospital.”

# Malcolm sighed deep and said, “Thanks Doc, Brian you’re with me.”

# Brian Davies rose from the bed and dragged his body out of the ward, his eyes kept moving from side to side and up and down as he fidgeted nervously behind Hendricks, “Malcolm; is it true? Are we at D2?”

# “I am sure you heard the chatter going on, yes we are, but our men need your skills to survive on the station, we have three teams searching the station and no way for them to contact either me or each other as the white noise is jamming the signals.”

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# In front of the door lay a pile of skeletons ravaged by time until all that remained was parched bones and torn uniforms.

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# “If they had the fight going on outside, why didn’t the load the self-destruct programme as they left?”

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# “What do you see, Brian?” Malcolm asked as he tried to get a glance through the broken frame.

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# “I copy that, are you getting the tingles too?”

# “Since we opened the hatches on our arrival, I find something creepy about a dead station calling to you.”

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# The group turned to walk back the twenty yards to the corridor and as they did, something smashed into the other side of the door, “What the fuck is that?” Matt Kenyon yelled, “And how the hell is it surviving out there?”

# A scared Rick Coolfer said, “I don’t intend to stay long enough to find out; I ain’t staying to fight the creature.”

# From the other side of the door they heard a grating sound like iron fillings on a steel plate, “Okay, if we get back to the corridor behind us we can go around here,” Timmy said, trying to keep the calm in the group.

# “You didn’t answer the question, Timmy,” Rick replied.

# “I can’t tell you what I don’t know, Rick,” Timmy commented.

# Matt was becoming trigger-happy and said, “I thought you said you had been here before, Timmy. If you don’t remember what the creature is, let’s blow the thing to hell and get all this over with.”

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# A shocked Matt replied, “I’m sorry, Timmy, getting our asses kicked on Gameroom and then the wait in deep space for the wait to be found, only to end up in hell. I lost my mind.”

# Timmy patted his friend on the shoulder and said, “Matt, do you think I feel any different, when I found out we had arrived at this station I almost cried. Now, let’s try to find a way around.”

# In the lower level, Frank, Si and Todd where searching the ruined corridors for some sign of life, all they met was a deathly silence and a foul odour, “Do you smell that?” Frank whispered into the vocilator.

# “Yeah, the odour of fish and the stink of rotting flesh, enough to turn ya stomach,” Si replied.

# Todd had taken the rear position and was keeping his eyes sharp, suddenly he let off five rounds at something but nothing hit the target.

# Frank turned to Todd and said, “What did you see?”

# A shaken Todd could only stammer, “Shh shh shadows on the wall, no shapes but shadows.”

# Frank whispered, “We’re on level 2, let’s find a way around this area and try to get to level 3 to link with the others, stay sharp, if they are here and I don’t doubt they are; all the advantages are on their side.”

Todd stood still. His mind didn’t want to accept what his eyes told him was on the station. “Hey, Frank. Do ya reckon we gonna make off this shell?”

Frank, who until now had little doubt they would survive the battle. Turned to him and said, “I’m out of ideas, Todd. Nobody has a clue what we’re against here. My only guess is they took this station to pieces and moved in. Whether there was a fight or the station went down quick is yet to be defined.” Their conversation was shortened by the buzz and click of Si’s rifle charging. “Keep a cool head, Si, the last thing we need is a fire fight on their terms.”

Cynical as ever and speaking from his heart, Si came back. “Sure, Frank, wait to be taken down one at a time, and when they feel like killing us.”

Desperate to keep the calm in the group, Frank replied. “I’m with you. Do you think I like being cooped up in this dark shit hole, any more than you do? The problem is we don’t know how many we’re up against or where they are? Until we get some intel, staying level-headed is our best ploy. I don’t want you to go on one of your shit kicking fire fights. After the last one; or all of the creatures will be on our asses.”

The tension between the two men was broken by a timid voice saying, “What is that?”

The men stopped the argument to look where Todd pointed. “Holy crap!” they said as one voice. Si went on, “What the mother fuck beast is that? I’ve never seen jaws like those before. The creature chews metal like gum.”

The men stood in awe of the fierce creature’s power. It wasn’t until one of its eyes blinked and focussed on their image they realised the danger they were in. “Shit! Si, did you see the image in its eye?” Todd whispered.

Si nodded and replied, “If you mean the hollow emptiness at the back of the eye and the view of space, then yes.”

Frank moved around the floor and gazed out at the blank beyond the creature, “Hey guys. I suggest we haul ass and soon. Mama called her kids from the nursery.”

Todd and Si glanced at where Frank had fixed his gaze. Si reacted soonest, “You two make a run for the control. This is my battle!”

Frank yelled back, “Don’t be a wise ass, Si. You’ll never take one never mind all of them!”

Si slung his gun over his shoulder, belts of ammo running down his back and clicked the latch open. “I ain’t taking this sitting down Frank, you and Todd haul ass and I’ll cover for you as best I can.”

Frank called over the radio, “Mal, anyone, we’re on level two and came across the mother load of creeps. Si, is going stir crazy and is going after them.”

The voice of their former commander came back as Mal yelled, “Fuck the fire fight. Get your asses back here. This is their home and they have the advantage. I’m saying this as a friend; we need all the able-bodied we can get, if you want to get off here.”

Frank took a quick glance and called to Si, “Can you hit those drums on the other side? The explosion should blind them for a short time and give us our chance to get back.”

Si glanced across the void and replied, “I can try; a long shout but here goes!”

With a quick whoosh of shells from the cannon, Si laid down a field of fire and hit two of the four drums. He turned and yelled “Run for control, we won’t get another chance!”

The men dashed for the control as the ammo drums exploded sending shells in all directions. Many shells hitting the rising creatures but not doing much harm.

Over the vocilator calls were coming in as the teams were moving around D2. Above the sounds of the shells they listened as Timmy called in. “Hey Mal, what’s going on? We’ve got sounds coming from outside and no light.”

Mal replied, “We can’t patch the wiring, Tim. Whoever ripped the controls out did a good job of frying the circuits. Brian is working as fast as he can but we’re in such a mess I have no idea what might be saved.”

Tim shrugged his shoulders. He looked around at the shattered remains and replied, “Okay. I guess this means we go blind until you sort some light out.”

Brian glanced at the wires in front of him and with a worried voice asked the question Mal didn’t want to hear. “Mal, I am no engineer. From what I’m finding there is no way a signal could be sent. So, how did they send it? And why?”

Mal took a short breath and replied. “I’ve been pondering the question too, Brian, since we set foot on here. For some reason we were brought to D2. I don’t think it was an automatic beacon calling us, or a proximity siren sensing our ship approaching.”

Brian gave a shudder as the realisation hit him, “Do you mean, we have been summoned?”

Mal took a peek out of the wrecked hub. The corridor to each section had been closed off in such a way. Anybody entering is forced to walk in a set pattern. “Yes. The reasons for us being here I don’t wish to think about, Brian. All I can say is we need to get out and the sooner, the better.”

A voice cut through their thoughts as Timmy said. “How are you doing with the lights, Brian?”

Brought from thoughts to reality, Brian said, “I won’t be long, Timmy, and then you can see what you are fighting.”

Brian was busy and didn’t notice Mal leave the control hub. Mal was growing more concerned about what may be on the station than he would admit to himself. He realised he had to control his fears, or the rest of the 7th might not get off the station. He knew this was easier to think about than do.

He started to walk back towards the hospital to check on the wounded, when he was blinded by the lights coming on, then deafened by Timmy’s voice as he shouted. “What the fuck! Brian, we’re almost blinded by the reflections now.”

Brian replied, “I’m sorry but it’s all or nothing, Tim.”

Timmy answered, “Okay, kill the lights in this section and we’ll use the night goggles. I guess we’re fighting on their terms, Shit!”

Timmy glanced at his team and gave the order, “We are on green light. Remember to acquire the target before firing, ammo is in short supply. Most of all, remember this is their ground and we’re being pushed around to fit their plan.”

Matt took a glance at his power pack and said, “I am almost out of power, Tim. I think we’d better consider a retreat to the control rather than going ahead. You did say this is their fight, we have no idea what is ahead.”

Rick checked his pack and said, “My pack is dead. I have one shot left and I don’t want to go hand to hand with something. Especially if these creatures know the station and move in the shadows, Tim.”

Tim didn’t need to check his pack, he realised their situation and said. “Okay, fall back and watch yourselves, we don’t know where they are.”

The group started to walk back, all the time aware of movement in the shadows and strange scraping noises from every direction. Each time they looked in the direction of the sounds, all they saw was a shadow on a wall. Tim was leading his group down the darkened corridors when they were halted by the sound of gunfire from above.

Mal’s voice called out, “Si, I told you to haul ass and not go on a fire fight!”

Si replied, “It ain’t me, Mal. We’re hauling ass as fast as we can. There are some pissed off creatures not far behind us and we need fire support!”

The next call spooked everybody, as DJ called in. “Mal, we got nothing else to do. We’re trapped on level 8 and they’ve surrounded us. Jeff and I are trying to cover Bob. He was on point when the floor collapsed and threw him down a level and hard against a wall.”

Si called back, “DJ we’re not far from a stairwell; if I send a flare up will you see it?”

DJ replied, “Si, we can’t see anything up here. When the lights come on we got attacked and the blood from our wounds has blurred our vision. Unless you have some heavy artillery, I would suggest staying away.”

Mal’s voice cut in, “DJ, I saw an armoury on the plans. Frank, how close are you to panel 777 on level 4?”

Frank halted for a second, glanced at the corridor markings and replied, “We’re about three hundred feet, but we’ll have to backtrack, Mal.”

“Shit!” Mal said in resignation.

Frank glanced at his team and asked, “Are you up for the job?”

Si spoke first, “DJ and the guys with him saved my ass more than once. I say we go.”

Frank and Si looked to Todd who was still shaky after the last encounter, “Count me in. I’d rather die fighting than running and watching my back.”

Frank called to Mal, “We’re heading back. DJ, what’s your sit rep?”

DJ sighed and replied, “We’re almost out of ammo, they have us cornered between sections 5 and 7 on level 8 and Bob is seriously injured.”

Frank caught a glimpse of desperation on the faces of his friends as he said, “Okay. Here we go. We need to get those weapons.”