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BRETHREN

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(multiple bolter rounds, laser beams, sounds of a battle)

The planet of Vespetin was hot, punishingly so and since the Ultramarines' 8th Company had descended to raze it to ash, it had grown all the hotter. Sergeant Numitor's jump-pack flared.

(Numitor crying almost incomprehensively and smashing one Tau)

He shoulder barged through the curving pane of a Tau view screen and landed on the other side, backhanding a Tau sniper from his nest into a plaza below.

Numitor (laughing): "Got him! Quadrant clear!"

Numitor would never tire of demolishing Tau architecture. To him it was an act as joyous as it was symbolic. For all its vaunted technology the Tau cityscape crumbled easily enough, just like the xenos that created it. Just like everyone else.

In the plaza below them Tai citizens were filing towards evacuation stations in a quick and efficient manner. It was nothing like the panic that Lord Executioner Athius' planet strikes usually inspired. For a moment Numitor was reminded of the order of his homeworld Macragge. He could not help but raise an eyebrow at the thought.

Numitor: "These Tau... They consider themselves highly civilized".

Sicarius: "Huh!"

Sergeant Sicarius' scorn was almost palpable as he boosted alongside Numitor.

Numitor: "Did you ever consider that they might be right?"

Sicarius: "They are prey, nothing more. And watch your mouth, Numitor. Such notions are unbecoming of an Ultramarine".

(Sicarius killing another Tau)

Sicarius' plasma pistol roared as he put a shot through the neck of a Tau soldier running below. As the alien burned from the inside Numitor saw a shimmer in the air nearby.

(numerous energy bolts)

A hail of energy bolts spat up at them, one hitting Sicarius' knee plate and burning it away, a puff of smoke and blood. Numitor cut off his jets riding his momentum down hard to slam feet first into the source of the attack.

(Numitor smashing another Tau)

The Tau stealthy chameleonic battle-suite buckled and sprawled under the crunching impact, suddenly visible.

(Numitor groaning)

Numitor put a bolt pistol round in the wrecked suite's head unit before boosting up once more, his squad close behind him.

Numitor: "True, but interesting prey at least. That much you must admit".

Sicarius: "Meh, perhaps".

Sicarius was unable to hide the begrudging smile in his tone.

(several energy beams)

The Sergeant boosted forwards, his power sword decapitating a Tau warrior that had fired at them from the top of balcony.

Sicarius: "The roll of Tydra has its own appeal".

Numitor: "How so?"

Sicarius: "These upstart Tau must learn their place, not trespassing in the Imperium, but in the grave".

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(explosions, gunshots, vessels flying)

A Thunderhawk gunship carved overhead, more assault Marines boosting out from its yearning maw to ride their jump-packs into the maelstrom below. Explosions thumped as the gunship's battle cannon added its voice to the cacophony of war.

Numitor: "The armies here will burn soon enough, but if what the Lord Executioner says is true, it will take years to rid Vespetin of the xenos ideology".

Sicarius: "Fear, Numitor... Fear cuts through a thousand promises".

Numitor: "We fight that which we do not understand, Cato. This planet heals easily enough, but there could be a dozen such worlds so infected".

Sicarius: "Sergeant Numitor, do not speak of doubt. You are 8th Company, so start thinking like it or we shall match blade against fist".

(explosion, two Space Marines screaming)

Numitor's reply was lost as a pair of Tau missiles hurtled in and exploded sending the two Sergeants and their squads tumbling into the ruined metropolis.

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(numerous bolter rounds, laser beams)

Shas'vere Tahoros eye flicked a priority reload into his Crisis suit's targeting system. His double shot had scattered the skyborne invaders, but still not scored a kill. Their heavy armor, blue as the onset of night, was proving all but

impenetrable. Shas'oo Moonfire had said these Gue'ron'sha were worthy foes. In reality they were terrifying.

(laser beams, one of Tau screaming)

Tahoros eye flicked an attack path for his fellow Crisis suits. As one they emerged from cover, burst cannons whirring as they stitched the dust clouds with yellow white lozenges of energy. Each would have melted through an unarmored foe front to back in a sizzle of meat. Against the Space Marine battle-suits of the Imperium they barely scorched the paintwork.

(landing noise)

Shas'ui Deluan landed beside him.

Deluan: "Impressive durability, these humans".

Tahoros: "For savages, yes".

Tahoros blink-clicked a target designator.

Tahoros: "Concentrate missiles on my mark".

(beeping sound, numerous missiles erupting, Ultramarines crying)

Force-leaked projectiles streaked out from the Crisis suits. This time the Space Marine target flew back into a curving wall section and slumped.

Tahoros: "Fatal range, Shas'ui".

Deluan: "Fire and retreat, let this envelopers marked".

(Tau screaming)

A blast of blazing sun fuel shot out as the Crisis suits boosted slowly backwards, a conflagration that consumed the Imperial warriors completely. Tahoros dared to hope just for a moment that flame was their weakness.

Several screams: "For the Emperor!"

Two Space Marines burst from the inferno, their silhouettes black against fiery orange. One wore a huge electrified gauntlet that crackled with a need to wreak ruin. It barreled straight into Deluan and an oversized fist slammed through the suit's plexus hatch and buried itself in the pilot. The other Space Marine came straight at Tahoros, its lightning-wreathed blade carving through the smoke.

(sounds of a fight)

Tahoros threw himself backwards and kicked out hard, the toe of his battle-suit connecting with the Space Marine's chest. The warrior rose high with the impact, flipping over with astonishing agility before boosting forward once more on jets of flame. A pointblank missile shot rebounded from the thing's curving pauldron. The crackling sword slashed carving away Tahoros' plexus hatch just as his second missile split its helmet.

(Sicarius groaning)

The Space Marine ripped its helm free, eyes boring through the opened hatch into Tahoros' own.

Tahoros: "You cannot kill the Greater Good".

Tahoros reached for his bonding knife.

Sicarius: "Your alien tongue is foul. Let me cut it out".

(Tau and a Space Marine clashing, Tau screaming)

The two warriors lunged, but the Space Marine was faster, his energized blade impaled Tahoros through the chest, thin traces of lightning blazing from the Tau's wide eyes.

(Sicarius hardly catching a breath)

Breathing hard Sicarius scowled at his fallen foe. The Tau's expression of pain and shock was surprisingly human.

Numitor: "Sicarius, time to move on. This war has only just begun".