

2274, Panprydel 21

I still recall the glorious days of my youth when I was a soldier in the service of the Empire, a defender of the Church. In the original Galaxy War I had answered the Grand Inquisitor's call, fighting as a foot soldier against the Rach on Spica. It was there that I had lost my hearing, my aural receptors shattered by a blow from the butt of a Rach rifle. Though my hearing had been taken, Khardullis had blessed me with a greater gift. Until that moment, I had been one of the few Malvernians who had never felt the Touch of our God's hand.

There in the hospital I had begged Khardullis for an answer to the reason I should be so afflicted. Had I not done all that my Lord had asked of me? The answer to my anger was a soothing touch, a feeling of euphoria, the caress of an unseen hand upon my bloodstained brow. In that moment I understood the joy, the ecstasy which my fellows had known all their days. I had sacrificed my hearing to atone for whatever failings had created a barrier between my Lord and I, and Khardullis had accepted that atonement. Small sacrifice to pay for the ability to commune with one's God.

Now, after all these years, I have put those gifts in jeopardy. Driven by a selfish desire to see the final victory of the Empire's forces and perhaps recapture a bit of that lost glory of my youth, I had decided to skip the evening rituals. In my selfishness, I had ventured to the foothills of the mountains where reports said the 153rd Targulla was engaging the Terran invaders in a decisive battle. When the battle turned against the 153rd, they retreated into the city and I watched in disbelief as the Terran forces followed. This was no fighting retreat, the 153rd had been completely routed. They had fled into the city, no doubt with hope that the winding streets they knew so well would slow the Terran pursuit and give them time to regroup. Understandably, the Malvernian commander would never have believed that a civilized people would press their attack on a routed enemy in such a densely populated area, yet that is exactly what the Terrans did. As if suddenly possessed by some Rach war-god, the Terrans continued to fire on the 153rd as they retreated, giving no regard to the amount collateral damage they inflicted. I watched helplessly as the city crumbled under the withering Terran assault.

I stumbled back to my rockhome, my head buzzing with the aftermath of the battle. I found my home, the home I shared with the members of my commgarth, utterly in ruins. I found the bodies of all the other members of the commgarth in the shattered ruins of the rockhome's chapel. They had gathered to attend the evening rituals, the same rituals which I in my selfishness had spurned in order to see the Malvernian victory. As they prayed, the chapel had taken a direct hit from a Terran air strike, and as they prayed all had perished.

I held the broken body of the Khardullan chaplain, Jorachth, and cried out in sorrow, pain and regret. It was a suffering plea for forgiveness. Suddenly the world spun around me, colors danced, the floor became the ceiling, and my vision turned black. I felt a Fist tighten about my throat and electricity surge through my entire body. I knew to whom the Fist belonged and tried to fall to my knees before the Lord Khardullis, though there was no longer a floor.

"You would join them in death, but I yet have need of you on this world." The voice echoed through my head, the first words I had heard in decades. "Look around, see how they have slaughtered my children. YOU shall be my messenger upon this world. Deliver not my love, but my wrath. Deliver my vengeance."

How I will deliver that vengeance I do not yet know, but I will not fail. I should have died there, praying with my family in Khardullis, yet I was spared. The Lord has given me one final chance for atonement, and I will not squander His gifts again.