

I could not help but sigh as I held up the gleaming sliver of burnished silver, the low yellow light of my workbench causing the object to glow as if on fire. Carefully I packed it into the dough-like ball of homemade plastique explosive amongst the hundreds of others. Picking up the shears I cut another slim needle of metal from the small polished silver serving tray, then carefully worked the soft metal with file and burnishing tools, until it held a razor sharp edge. My thick, gnarled fingers make working with such delicate objects difficult, but Khardullis gives me patience. As I worked I slowly spoke the words of atonement, the ritual prayers of repentance.

I had failed my Lord, yet I could still feel His hand upon me even as I prayed for forgiveness. Khardullis has not abandoned me, and I will not fail him again. I gazed down at the tray I was using as raw materials for the flechettes, with the United Terran Federation logo engraved in the middle. It had been stolen from the occupying General's mess by one of the locals pressed into domestic duty by the invaders, and though the silver would be too soft to cut through body armor, the blast itself would do the damage. Still, the razor edged shards would slice through exposed flesh with ease, should any of the soldiers be fool enough to remove their protective gear as they work. I had noticed that the soldiers were wearing their armor less and less, a sign that their complacency had gotten the better of them and the time was right for this attack. Besides, it was the symbolism that counted.

Satisfied that my work was complete, I packed the pincushion-looking ball of explosives into the innocuous looking chunk of fake granite, similar to the real stone used for the Rockhomes of this world. Carefully I slipped into the aged suit of personal camouflage I have held onto as a souvenir from my time in the infantry. I have put on weight since my youth, and the suit closed with some effort. With that I ventured out into the night. The streets were abandoned with only spotty security patrols, which was good because I was out of practice at stealthy approaches. Still my muscles remembered their old training and after a bit I felt my movements once more become smooth and fluid.

I approached my target slowly and observed only minimal security. I had gotten word from sources inside the Terran Legion that they would move their renewal efforts to this part of the city starting tomorrow, in hopes of showing immediate results. The advanced guard watching the site consisted of only a pair of sleepy soldiers, as this part of the city was largely unoccupied. I said a prayer to Khardullis, asking for his Hand to guide me, and felt the rush of euphoria as I was Touched by my Lord. My senses snapped into focus, and I made my move through the shadows and around the guards. Often known for our bulk, the Malvernians' innate agility is often overlooked, and I avoided the security pair with little trouble.

I quickly searched the rubble until I spotted a suitable location. Carefully I slid the bomb into place, checking to see that it blended with the other surrounding rubble, and then disappeared

back into the shadows.

I returned to the site the next day. I noticed others gathering around the site, most I did not know, but a few whom I recognized as members of the resistance. The sharp eye contact was all the communication that passed between us and I could see that they were slyly keeping the onlookers back behind the line of my carefully calculated blast zone. I wore the jet black Crook of onyx around my neck which had been given to me by my old unit's Inquisitor. I remember the feeling of pride and awe that an Inquisitor would gift something so precious to as lowly a being as I. As I had not yet learned to read lips, the Inquisitor had written me a note, explaining that the symbol was a gift to celebrate my atonement and the occasion that Khardullis had granted his touch to one of his wayward children. Even the most hardened Inquisitor would rejoice at such an occasion, and it was only proper to acknowledge me as one of Khardullis' chosen ones. I still keep that note as a reminder of that glorious day, but until this moment, I had not fully understood what the Inquisitor had meant.

I knelt on the ground, ignoring the shards of glass and debris which tore and gashed my knees, coloring my garments with dark blood. Not really shouting, but not whispering, I began to speak the words of the ritual of atonement. The crowd started to quiet, trying to catch the words which I spoke. As they recognized the prayers they slowly gathered around me, one or two at first, then several more, until soon two dozen Khardullists knelt before the site praying the ritual with me.

Their reasons differed I'm sure. Some prayed for themselves, that Khardullis would deliver them from this suffering. Some were praying that Khardullis would have mercy on the soldiers who had delivered such wanton destruction upon a people who had raised no weapon against them, for Khardullis indeed taught that all beings have value in the eyes of the Lord. I however have no such illusions about Khardullis' mercy upon these infidels. They had attacked without quarter, without remorse. Even as they rebuilt in an effort to assuage their own guilt, they did so in such a manner meant to impose their way of life upon the Malvernians. They were here to destroy the Empire, the Church, and the Faith. The Empire and the Faith were one, it was the very heart of the Malvernian way of life, and these invaders were a threat to that way of life. I prayed for myself, for my Faith, for the Empire, for all the citizens of this planet who had allowed the invaders to desecrate this world which belonged only to Khardullis. We all had much to atone for, but killing those who sought the destruction of Khardullis would not be among the list of transgressions which would require our repentance.

The urge to look up, to watch the bomb go off was nearly overwhelming. I would not give into my desire to see my own handy work, to give in to my ego yet again might tip them to our trap and once again I would be responsible for failing my Lord. Though I concentrated hard on the ritual of atonement, my heart was racing in my anticipation as the time of Khardullis' vengeance drew near. I could imagine the human's smug smile as he reached for another stone, a piece of what had once been our homes, to toss it aside with no disregard for

the meaning it held to us. This was no pile of rubble, this was a holy site consecrated to Khardullis just as all our worlds were. I could almost see the look of surprise on his face as he lifted the hidden stone, a look that would last but a moment before the burnished silver shards would tear through his unprotected body.

Being deaf, when the blast went off I saw only a flash of light, though the sound made the rest of the crowd jump and fall back. The air swirled me and I felt the fine powder settle about me, my face and scalp stinging as bits of fine gravel blew past. I never stopped praying, never looked up to see the devastation my bomb had caused. There was no need, for I felt the euphoric surge course through my very being and I heard the voice of Khardullis cry out in triumph. I knew without looking, without hearing, that Khardullis' will had been done.