

Fleet. Emperor Hsian felt that the Empire's continued existence depended on free access to the resources of the Terran League. Unless the League was part of the Empire, the Emperor felt that there was a possibility that the Terrans would close their borders to the Empire.

The Emperor did not wish to launch a full-scale invasion, however. "The Empire," he said, "is a benevolent one." The Empire was also desperately trying to stop the Second Dreknor Invasion, as it was called. The Empire's generals suggested a raid, perhaps on one of the Terran border worlds, to demonstrate the Emperor's displeasure at the Terrans' answer. The Emperor liked the idea, but he thought that the Terrans should be witness to a larger demonstration of Imperial might than a raid on a border world. The Emperor selected Terra to be the target for the proposed raid. A company of Imperial Marines was tasked with conducting the raid. A month was spent studying what data was available on the Sol system. Preparations complete, the marines boarded a scoutship and began the dangerous journey to Terra.

Four tense weeks later, the Imperial scoutship *Surveyor* arrived at the Sol system after making a series of jumps to uninhabited star systems. Immediately upon arrival, the *Surveyor* activated its force-screens, making it invisible to the Terrans' detection apparatus. After refueling from Sol's gas giant, the *Surveyor* dispatched her three shuttlecraft carrying the marines to Terra.

Utilizing sophisticated jamming equipment installed for this mission, the shuttlecraft made an undetected approach. Landing in remote areas, the shuttlecraft debarked their troops and proceeded to hide at the bottom of one of Terra's oceans.

So it was that Kryor found himself on a planet that, in his opinion, had too much water on its surface and in its atmosphere. Kryor's homeworld was more desert and rock than anything else. Only ten percent of its surface was water. Enough day-dreaming, he thought. Back to the mission.

He looked to his left and saw that Yres was finishing the equipment check. "I'll just have barely enough time to complete my own. Kryor told his suit's mini-computer to run a systems check while he began a manual check, just to be sure. After an incident that occurred on the Dreknor front a year and a half ago, Kryor always performed a manual check. In that incident,

a marine relied solely on his computer to do a systems check before going into battle and paid for it. A faulty logic circuit reported all systems green when in reality his power pack was running low. In the midst of battle, his suit ran out of power and froze. Before the marine even had a chance to try and force his way out manually, a Dreknor Shock-Trooper ripped his suit open and killed him.

Kryor's armour was standard-issue Imperial Battle Armour. Two meters tall and one and a half times as wide as the average human, the PAB-V3 was the latest in battlefield technology. Powered by a small, highly efficient energy pack, this humanoid shaped armour was capable of three hundred hours of continuous operations in any environment. The soldier inside was protected by several centimeters of dual-layer armour. The first layer was semi-reflective and was designed to partially deflect incoming fire from energy weapons, as well as to absorb some of the kinetic energy from these weapons. The second layer was designed to stop projectile weapons and to act as a backup for the first layer, even though it was not reflective.

The front torso came equipped with magnetic mounts to secure the soldier's personal weapon when the terrain required both hands to be free, as well as numerous places for a variety of things from extra power packs for the soldier's pulse rifle to medical supplies or rations.

The helmet had a visor made of hyper-polarized transparent armour. This allowed the soldier to observe his surroundings visually as well as by sensors, and protected him from the intensity of laser-light. The inside of the helmet was padded to absorb shock and was equipped with neural sensors. These sensors were tied directly to the mini-computer and allowed the armour to function as if it were part of the soldier's body; all the soldier had to do was to move a muscle, and the armour would respond the same way a human body would. Another feature of the helmet was that it projected a Heads-Up Display on the visor.

An anti-gravity thruster pack was mounted in the center of the rear torso. The thruster pack allowed the armour to "float" one foot above the ground. It drew power from its own power pack, and was capable of attaining a cruising speed of 20 km/h for three hundred hours, and a maximum speed of 40 km/h for half as long. In extreme emergencies, it could attain a top speed of 60 km/h, but this had the result of burning out the field generators



in one to two hours, rendering the thruster pack useless.

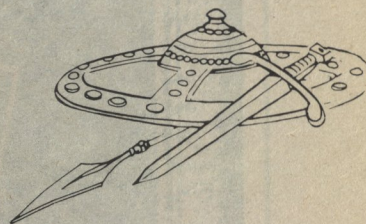
"Check complete, sir," Yres said. "Everything's fine."

"Okay, Sergeant. Let's move out, column of twos. First squad'll take point, second squad'll bring up the rear, heavy

weapons section in the middle, third squad on the flanks."

"Right, sir. Alright people you heard the man, move it!" Under Yres' not too gentle urging, the platoon deployed in record time. No one wanted to incur the sergeant's wrath.

When they had finished deploying, Kryor signalled them forward. The marines, visible only as black hulks in the darkness, floated silently north across the field towards their target, one hundred kilometers away.



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