

## The Tale of the Armigrad

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Author: Eric Tramel

### Episode Two

The marines lined up single file at the entrance of the maintenance shaft. Mench peered over the edge and looked down.

“Hey, Sharpton, come here.” he said, just above a whisper.

Sharpton, ducking from the low ceiling, walked through the ranks at the rear and crouched down beside Mench.

“Well?” he asked.

“It looks like a long climb for our guys, with all their equipment.” Mench replied.

“Hmm, is there another way down from this support structure?” asked Sharpton, mostly to himself, as he took out his personal hand held computer, on which was stored the blueprints of the Armigrad. A few seconds later, Sharpton answered his own question.

“There is an entrance to the service elevator just up the shaft.”

Mench looked up. The maintenance shaft had no internal light, and he couldn't see much farther than his own hand. He took out a pair of night vision goggles from his backpack. Putting them to his face, he stared into the darkness above him, which now had an odd green hue. He saw that the explosion caused by the two pods, and Navac's carelessness, had caused rubble and other debris to fall across the shaft, leaning against the elevator entrance.

“No Sharpton, the entrance to the elevator is blocked off, is there any other way?” Mench questioned, hoping for a yes.

“No sir, it looks like the only way out is down.”

“Shit, that's not what I wanted to hear.”

“You can't always get what you want.”

“Like hell I won't.” Mench said heartily, a slight smirk on his face. Mench spat down the shaft. The globule of saliva disappeared into the darkness below.

“Well it looks like a long....”

There was a noise emanating from the bottom of the shaft. Mench reached for his goggles at his side, but Sharpton was quick to the draw, and already had them to his face. Sharpton looked for a second, his eyes adjusting to the green hue, he looked around for a bit until his eyes caught onto movement, in midsentence.

“Awww, bloody hell, were hearing...my god! It's a squad of Shivans, coming up!” Sharpton stated, calming down to a barely audible whisper at the end, forcing Mench to ask Sharpton to repeat himself, which Sharpton did shakily. Sharpton's palms were getting sweaty as his fingers trembled and his face contorted in both fear and repulsion at the Shivans making their way up the ladder. Mench grabbed Sharpton by the collar of his armor, the goggles leaving Sharpton's slippery wet hands- falling down the shaft.

There was a screech as the goggles hit the lead Shivan squarely in the head. The Shivan took hold of the intruder and threw it over his shoulder- perhaps it was a piece of debris.

“Everyone, back to the bay! Now!” yelled Mench as he threw Sharpton through the airlock

door, and into the maintenance bay. The rest of the men hurried in.

“Get me two guards on that door!” he ordered.

Two lower ranking soldiers hurried over to the sides of the airlock door, muzzles of their rifles barely extending from the jam...waiting for a Shivan to cross the lip of the shaft.

Sharpton got to his feet and mockingly wiped dust from his armor.

“Rather ugly lot, wouldn’t you say?” a slight quiver in his voice, as if he were trying to mask some inner emotion.

“Heh. Hey, you guys see anything yet?” Mench replied to his companion’s question with a slight grunt, then ignoring the subject completely to the matters at hand, killing this “ugly lot”.

“Not yet, sir!” the guard answered in a low voice.

“Well, keep watching!”

“Yes, sir!”

Mench thought to himself, I shouldn’t take my frustration over our situation on my men, I should keep this in mind in the future.

Navac was standing next to pod one, a little on edge, which everyone was, aiming his pistol at the airlock door, knowing still that the guards posted there could handle the situation. Yet, holding the gun gave him a sense of security, much needed at a time like this, and, well, where else was he gonna point the thing?

Just then, something caught his attention, in the corner of two walls and the ceiling. It was a vid camera.

“Sir!” yelled Navac.

Mench came around to the other side of the pod where Navac was standing. As he turned the corner, he noticed Navac’s sidearm pointing at his chest.

“Wha-!” Mench said in alarm.

“Oh! Sorry!” Navac dropped the gun, it clattered on the ground.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?!” Mench yelled at the technician.

Some of the soldiers turned around to see what was going on.

“Oh, that well..” Navac began hesitantly. “God! There are video cameras in here!” Navac finished quickly, and loudly.

“I swear, what am I going to do with you Navac?”

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When Hoonan awoke, he was cold, and alone. The Shivans had left him in the security room. He sat there numbly, mainly because any will had been beaten out of him by the Shivan device in his head. But, he had seen humans on that vid screen, which was now pitch black, just like the room around him.

Yes, he thought, I’ll just stay here and die, yes, that’s what I’ll do. Hoonan laid back and crossed his hands over his chest. He closed his eyes, thinking, knowing his time had come. The eyes closed for the final time, that is, the eyes as Hoonan knew them.

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“Okay, I’m not gonna blow that thing up, right?” asked Mench, wondering what Navac was talking about.

“No sir,” Navac replied looking down at his palm computer. “It looks like if we did, it would alert the entire ship, at least, those who don’t know we’re here already.”

“So, what are you proposing?” questioned Mench.

The guards had opened fire, fusion cannon fire streaked from the hallway and hit the hulls of the unprotected pods, both catching on fire.

“Shit! Get me a grenade in there!” yelled Mench.

One of the guards pulled back from the door and reached for the grenade on his belt. He pressed the detonator switch, activating the timer, and threw it down the hall. A loud explosion sounded and a limb of a Shivan flew into the bay, spinning, then swirling to a stop. The mangled limb left a distinct trail of green blood.

“Get me heavy fire in that hall to keep ‘em low!” ordered Mench from beside Navac.

A number of heavily armed soldiers ran up to the door and laid down fire, lighting up the interior of the ship with tracers and the small explosions of the bullets.

“Assault team one go!”

Seven moderately armed men in armor that allowed them better movement than the heavy weapons men rushed through the entrance and took up positions in the hall.

“Nothing up here!” shouted AT1’s leader.

“Good! Check the shaft!”

“Yes sir!”

Assault Team 1 moved forward to the entrance of the shaft. There was an explosion and one of the men was flung backwards into the hall. AT1’s leader called for a grenade, which was handed to him quickly. AT1 lead pulled the activation switch and threw it down the shaft. Another explosion was heard and AT1 gave the all clear.

“I want a scout team to go down there and report to me everything that you see” ordered Mench. Three lightly armored men hustled to the shaft and started to take in the situation before descending.

“Sir,” Navac was trying to get Mench’s attention. “Sir, as I was saying, I could use the camera to patch into the ship’s main security system.”

“Sound’s like a good idea, do it now.”

One of the scout’s came to Mench.

“We need one more man for this job, sir” said the scout.

Mench looked around for a possible candidate. His eyes fell on Sharpton. Sharpton gave Mench an almost quizzical look before saying, “Oh, no. No, I won’t do it.” Sharpton managed to get out.

“Sharpton, your men need you.” Replied Mench, almost coldly.

“Always with the damn heroics, isn’t it? Look, if I do this, you owe me big time, and it’s your fault if I get killed. I won’t talk to you anymore if I die.”

“Sure Sharpton. Just get down there.”

Sharpton mumbled something inaudible under his breath, then followed the scout leader, realigning his helmet as he went.

Navac was on his computer, a line hanging from the security camera above him to a terminal on the computer. He was sitting on the floor with the computer in his lap, typing furiously. He was having problems because the Shivans had installed new software into the ship's computers, which was in the Shivan language or whatever they used for programming. Suddenly, the camera above him went limp.

"Yes! Sir, I'm into the system." Yelled Navac with almost boyish excitement.

"I want you to track Sharpton and the scout's progress through the ship." said Mench.

"Um, sir? Can you radio them and tell them to turn on their beacons please?"

"What the hell, they'd be..."

"Sir, I'm in control of what the Shivans see or don't see right now."

"Oh yeah." Mench felt pretty stupid.

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"Mench just told us to turn on our beacons" Sharpton told the other scouts.

"Why the hell would he say that?" asked the scout squad's leader Maxim Fortunato.

"Well, whatever it is, it's for a good reason." answered Sharpton, from about 10 rungs above Maxim.

Sharpton tapped a button on his armor, a small light lit, acknowledging that his beacon was transmitting. They were halfway down the shaft at the moment, Sharpton looked down, he raised his head quickly and looked up. Still no sign of the ground. I HATE heights, thought Sharpton.

There was a loud thud, and the scouts were almost jarred off the ladder. Maxim was holding on with one hand, trying to get a foot hold on a rung. Another scout ended up holding onto the ladder by his foot.

"Holy shit!" yelled scout 2, John "Stalker" Beatty, from his now upside down position.

"Mench, what the hell was that?" Sharpton yelled into his radio. Static was all he heard from the other end.

\* \* \*

Mench was blown off of his feet by the sudden movement. He was face down on the ground, a small trickle of blood coming from his mouth. Mench quickly wiped it away.

"Navac!" he yelled. "What the hell was that?"

"The Shivans are trying to cut power to the gravity generator. Obviously a glitch in the system accidentally rerouted the power to the engines, giving that boom that knocked you down."

"I thought you said you were in control?!"

"I said I was in control of the security systems!" replied Navac angrily, responding to Mench's sudden outburst.

The other soldiers were getting to their feet at the moment.

"Hey!" yelled one of them. "The entrance to the shaft is closed!"

"What the hell?" said Mench, he ran to the hallway. Sure enough, the entrance door to the

shaft was shut. There was no handle, and it was sealed tightly, which Mench discovered after he tried to open it.

Navac had gotten up and was walking towards Mench.

“Sir,” he said. Then whispered so the others wouldn’t panic. “One of the compartments has lost pressure. The ship is sealing everything off. And it won’t be long till the Shivans correct the glitch and cut the gravity. Sir, you know how they move in zero G!”

“I know, I know,” Mench said over his shoulder. “But what can we do?”

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Hoonan awoke. He ached all over. Hoonan gave a little groan before opening his eyes. Everything was black. Suddenly he heard a voice in the back of his head.

“Starting visionary subroutines.”

Suddenly his eyes were flooded with light. He let out another groan.

“Establishing light filter.”

He could see better now, he sat up.

“Analyzing velocity factor, 00012.64.”

Everything was blurry around him.

“Increasing resolution”

Now he could make out some objects.

“Increasing resolution by factor 6.1264.”

Suddenly, everything came into view with crystal clarity.

“Adding image to memory file, ‘Medical’.”

Hoonan was in an operating room of some sorts. There was a bright light above him, that was so bright through his filter. There were about 5 Shivans surrounding him. The Shivans were outlined in green brackets. He looked at one.

“Species: Shivan. Male. Occupation: Surgeon. Name: SM-S01-MAC-0126748.”

Another one, lighter in stature and skin color read:

“Species: Shivan. Female. Occupation: Med Assist. Name :SF-SA164-BIN-346723.”

“Welcome, Terran, to our reality”