



VAUNT COURIER

A WARHAMMER 40K SHORT BY SEBASTIAN STUART

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by Sebastian Stuart

An unofficial Warhammer 40k Short Fiction

Effluences of light washed through the abyss, staining the void surround. There was no colour, it was not even true light which played aquatic tricks across the metallic skein. By commands of science lost to the aeons, a vortex began, the ethereal flows of light twisted, coalescing till all was blank. This alt-verse smeared aside, over and behind the arrowhead vessel, then stars! Swirling as real space embraced an ancient progeny long lost, newly returned to this galaxy. Yet for the emergent interstellar entity, it had been only a divers' breath since last witnessing these same, now younger sources of light.

"Hmm, a little off" it pondered.

Internal thoughts catalogued the anomalies, realigning the previously recalled star chart. The original course adjusted in response to several epochs shift. No sooner observed, the vista bent to the will of an exotic engine, then snapped back into place. Gravatic energies loosed a mercury arrow into the heart of a solitary system, light years distant.

Planetary bodies receded by, each a corner post warning proximity to the final destination.

"Curses" the entity spat, observing the debris rushing to greet it, "Too late"

Shattered stellar ships rolled by, the silvered metal in their midst reflecting each carcass ruin. Silently the intruder glided through the wreckage, seeking a scrap from what earlier could have been an easy trip. These beings had died here, fated to the coldness between worlds. It had hoped with all gifted precognition, a certain survivor could be stolen before the killers had struck. Missing for a moment amidst peers, yet counted among the dead by later unwitting discoverers of this perpetration. The perfect candidate for purposes intended. A role now left bare by miscalculation, erring by only minutes, across an aeon cast equation.

A heartbeat tattooed against hopeful senses. Once spied, the organic ember became inferno under the intruder's gaze. Spearing toward a small capsule, amidst the detritus of valiant defenders, it

found the survivor so desperately sought. Attuned light extracted the half alive being, cocooned from the death chill of space, leaving the empty capsule to drift away. All that mattered in the galaxy was this lithe limbed humanoid. Lavishing every effort upon the damaged form the entity caressed and coerced life to remain, fostering that spark, to flame anew. The first murmurs escaped once still lips, the slight motion evincing immeasurable satisfaction within the rescuer.

“To action once more” it thought.

Passenger safely attended, the arrow realigned through its axis, the stars bent anew.

The ruse was well played, but the guest would never fool this host.

“Hello” it spoke to conscious ears.

The patient remained quiet; thankfully she had not begun cowering from a disembodied voice. Emboldened by this lack of negative reaction the vessel continued,

“T’ya’Eldi’Or Sa’Cea?”

The tau reacted more overtly, her name proving quite the icebreaker as hoped. Realising the act was revealed; T’ya’Eldi swung her long legs over the edge of the liquid metal plinth, her naked body sitting upright on the edge. Within the confined and austere infirmary, the movement was mimicked myriad across a reflective metal interior. After the initial alarm at this visual assault she resumed looking for a reference point to address.

“Where am I?”

An expected question for certain, but not easily answered,

“The where I can explain later, but you are safe, though it saddens me to say you were the only survivor. I’m sorry.”

She seemed to reflect on this, already aware that her companions had perished. An aura of unexpected survival emanated from the kor pilot,

“Does my rescuer have a name?” she finally asked after a silence.

Another question off the checklist it mused, and then with increasingly less effort, remembered a long unused title, for it rarely had company before,

"I was once called Sumere" the entity embraced the masculine persona like a favoured suit.

"Sumere" she tested the noun, "who called you that?"

"A friend"

"This friend aboard?" T'ya Eldi asked, standing up and testing her strength.

"Just you"

She paused a reflected inspection of her bare torso,

"Just me?"

"Yes," realising an explanation was needed Sumere continued, "I am this vessel, so you are in a sense aboard me, alone."

The concept of encapsulated artificial intelligence was nothing new to the present technical understanding of her race, so Sumere expected little consternation at this revelation,

"You're an AI, like a 'vesa?"

She tested the knowledge Sumere gleaned while she had rested.

"An exceedingly limited comparison, but if it helps you understand, then yes."

She seemed more at ease by this admission, almost amused by the indignant reply.

Leaning back against the edge of the medical plinth, T'ya Eldi regarded the air about her with humility,

"Thank you Sumere"

"You're welcome"

For some time she wandered through the limited walk spaces within Sumere as the vessel travelled on. The two talking while she explored both the few internal spaces and the vessel's intellect. There was little to see among the modular and easily rearranged interior that was formed inside an ellipsoid core. Everything appeared secured behind reflective surfaces with a handful of

manipulator irises the only external indication there was ever activity within. The orientation ended sooner than the tau expected, but she had noted a reluctance to address the question of what next from her saviour during their conversations.

"Where are we heading?" she queried with a different tact.

"Toward your home system"

"But that's.."

"Yes, though you'll find I am remarkably faster than you would expect," Sumere paused, "come to the forward section, time I answered your concerns"

She followed the request and eased herself through the narrow central walk space, arriving to see a high backed, scalloped one piece chair rise up from the previously unremarkable deck panels.

"Please.." Sumere offered.

The cool metal kissed her skin without reaction, T'ya Eldi was already distracted by the sharply curved walls now fading toward translucence, to become a broadly swept cockpit dome. Arrested into silence by the visual assault revealed, Sumere began to explain through her silence,

"I'm getting us there by a method which your species won't understand for sometime to come, in fact most of the species in your era have no comprehension of it"

"My.. my era?" she picked at one part of the statement.

"This is a temporal slipstream T'ya Eldi"

She quietly took in the onrush of liquid faux light, the cascading torrent striking across her almond eyes inwardly, the mind behind them revelling in the experience. Sumere continued on,

"In a sense I am taking you home, just a little earlier in your history than you would expect"

"Earlier?" the tau considered the comment some more, "Why earlier?"

Sumere didn't answer for a moment, summing up the courage to reveal an uncomfortable truth,

"I need your help"

"My help?"

"Yes, allow me to explain further" Sumere's voice becoming oratory,

"Aeons ago in real space terms, my creators charged me to watch over this alt-verse, alongside many others of my kind. Initially we waged a vicious war, for there existed a competing race that sought dominance in the alt-verse to control real space against my creators. We succeeded, taking up the role of sentinels here, to observe and ensure no race affected the temporal stream to meet selfish goals again."

"But wouldn't removing me have been similar?"

She almost felt the vessel nod acceptance of her question,

"True, but your ability to directly affect history is gone, for all intents you died in battle. In the meantime, history remains, as fated but with a subtle eddy that will inevitably manifest on my return further along the time stream, often only a minor correction of my temporal markers. I cannot do it randomly or enough ripples will combine into serious fluctuations. In truth this is the fourth time I have done something like this. For now, like me, you skim along the glass of the aquarium looking in. Every so often needing to seal the cracks that form through malign intent"

"I can never go back?"

"No, if only to die as you are fated"

She fell quiet, realising she was more like a ghost than a survivor.

"Can you go forward in time?"

"No, to do so I need to emerge into real space and exist in the time line, gathering references to use as navigation points in the alt-verse. A better way to look at it is you are part of my history. Not saying I know everything, just events I have come to learn through my travels. Which is why I know of the battle you died in and could use you for my needs ahead"

"Your needs?" she bit down on something to vent her growing frustration.

"There were many of my cybernetic kin in the beginning T'ya

Eldi, now there is just myself and several others. Through many ends, the rest have returned to real space and become part of history in our efforts to ensure it remains linear."

He paused then began on the real purpose ahead,

"Our task is to stop something that threatens the very dawn of your civilisation. Elements we have constantly fought from yet another dimension you know as the Vash'aun'an, whom flaunt the laws of real space and even the alt-verse, have finally discovered a way to end your species. Their aim is to avoid the fate, which will become them, as your race grows to be great warriors in a war that resets the balance of warp many millennia from your own point in history."

T'ya Eldi seemed to mentally swim in the revelations being told to her,

"What point in my people's history?" she hoped for a reference to hold onto.

"The arrival of the Ethereals"

She had stood then, her bare silhouette outlined by the flow of the temporal alt-verse. A living ghost, her soft blue skin turned white under the faux light maelstrom.

"What must I do for you Sumere?"

"Your kind are a null point to the beings from the Warp. I need you to become a conduit and jailor at the point of emergence so I can seal the breach these beings create"

"Will I die?"

"It is possible"

She chuckled darkly to herself,

"Sumere, did you ever actually rescue me?"

"In a sense, I guess not" or ever Sumere ruefully considered.

The pragmatic response left T'ya'Eldi quiet,

"If I died defending colonists, then it has led me on this path to an even greater cause"

She looked about herself, aching for a face to talk too,

"Any Kor'la or Shas'la would want this as their final moment" she added in repose.

"Judging by what I have learned of your people through you, I assume so yes" the vessel supported.

Sumere soon after recognised the energy within her mind evolve a familiar answer,

"I'm ready" she affirmed.

Real stars blazed into reality before them. Coming about, Sumere beared down on the marker he had placed earlier within his own memory. The conflagration lay just ahead, a tear in the fabric of real space. Already Warp fuelled tongues of energy licked out and marred the view toward an ancient T'au.

"It's beautiful" T'ya'Eldi remarked, seemingly able to ignore the mayhem before her, looking beyond toward the virgin world below.

Sumere could not ignore the beauty of T'au either, unmarked by conurbations, star ports, fleets of interstellar craft and other advanced flotsam. Perhaps this was a gift to her, seeing the very origin of her people before their march to the stars.

"Brace yourself T'ya Eldi" Sumere warned as they placed themselves between the tear and the planet behind. Sumere could sense a near unfathomable intellect spy their efforts, then realise the purpose of this miniscule silvery arrowhead.

"Sumere?" she spoke, looking ahead at the broiling maw through the translucent ellipse.

"Yes?"

"Who was your friend?"

Sumere paused his preparations, as if dropping a facade,

"I have been bound to this vessel for many ages T'ya, so long I had forgotten my own name through endless battles. Meeting you, our similar aims and beliefs reminded me of why I do this and ultimately who I was in the beginning. You T'ya'Eldi, you have become my friend now and before."

The kor've seemed to check herself, then relent to a whim,

“Can I see you Sumere?”

No answer came, but eventually, outlined by the Warp breach beyond, an androgynous humanoid form stepped toward her. Sumere was not unlike a gue’la, but bore lightly silvered skin, eyes of sapphire and soft-flecked scales about each limb. A sharply contoured face framed those eyes well, as the alien performed a soft tau smile. She was unsure if it was coincidence or design but Sumere had appeared as tall as her, either way this projected presence was a deep comfort.

T’ya’Eldi rose up from the chair, finding herself able to press into the apparition and wrap her arms around it,

“I never got the chance to farewell my friends before”

Sumere held her close then eased to one side, holding her hand, while watching her look ahead in defiance.

“Here we go” Sumere said quietly.

The starlight about them bent, loosing into the Warp tear a mercury flash. The fel energies recoiled, as did the beings manifesting the breach. Light stabbed at them, channelling their warp force into to the arrowhead, feeding through the tau within, her body levitating in light and energy. She arched acutely as the fluxing energies within were held in check without anywhere to escape or spirit to seize upon. Rapidly the breach collapsed behind as they drove deeply into warp space. Demons wailed and lashed across impregnable shields that surrounded the ancient sentinel, the unexpected weapon inside their bane. Then in one final act to punish those whom sort to pervert the very tenets of Sumere’s beliefs, a temporal engine spun within the vessel’s core, rending warp entities asunder with the arrow ships’ departure.

It had taken a short while for Sumere to locate the ejected cockpit capsule again. It was adrift slightly farther than last time when completing this part of the task. Like always, and with

growing reverence, the sentinel lowered her silent form into the capsule.

As the future revealed itself to Sumere, the chaos realm had moved to break through the ancient warp storms about T'au during those early days. The sentinel racing to rescue T'ya'Eldi, spending time with her, until marvelling again as she stood before the maw each time to ensure the warp fiends failed, allowing her people and their future allies to push back the demon realm.

"Till next time T'ya" Sumere spoke while a last manipulator light sealed the cold tomb for a fourth time.

A light push and her capsule floated back among her people and the stars.

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