

**SCYLLA
AND
CHARYBDIS**

I can still remember the terror that reigned in the colony. It emanated from each settler, to such an extent that it was almost palpable. The refugees from other villages had arrived at the spaceport refugee camp in the night, and their recountings about the march of the swarm were each more terrifying than the next and increased the feeling of insecurity that was already too strong. All eyes were turned up towards the sky, waiting for salvation from the Dominion, a salvation that would never come. We had been abandoned. We were doomed!

Yet, Doctor Hanson held on. She didn't let go. When she saw there was no answer from the Dominion, she started sending out distress messages on all the frequency bands and sub frequency bands she could; relentlessly, continuously. She took care of the front of the camp organisation and of the injured, who were evermore numerous. She had always thought we were going to get through it.

At the end of the fifth day, our number kept increasing, and there was no help in sight. The local militia couldn't even slow down the march of the Zergs. Sitting at the instrument panel of my Banshee, I was on patrol in the surroundings of the camp, and I could see the smoke from other camps that had been destroyed by the swarm that would soon turn up on us. The makeshift barricades, which we had set up here, were not going to be of any use. At best, they would buy us some time. But what good would it do?

That's when hope returned. James Raynor the pirate, the terrorist, the revolutionary, had answered our distress call. To us, those terms had soon lost all their meaning. He was our savior, and we were not going to complain. All that stuff about the Dominion and the Raynor's rebels was nothing but bullshit. When the Hyperion came, tearing the atmosphere with a noise that reminded one of the end of the world, making its way through the Mutalisks that infested the sky, it was a relief for all of us and a spectacular sight.

The flames, which came from the friction of the air due to the atmospheric re-entry, were licking the hull of the spaceship, overheating it until it was blood red. The destroyer was belching out flames from each piece of its artillery. It illuminated the sky with murderous beams, and a trail of flames would appear for each killed alien. It looked like a meteorite announcing the end of the world, followed by its wreckage.

After this moment of hope, it was rough going back to reality. We couldn't just stay there, watching Raynor's war dogs do all the work. We had to evacuate. With my Banshee, I did my best to clean all the Zerg scum off the road to the spaceport. That way, the road would be a little bit safer for the transportation trucks. An isolated Mutalisk bolted towards me. I maneuvered to avoid it, but since the damn Dominion engineers hadn't put any anti-aircraft weapons on this aircraft, it was vain. The Mutalisk managed to lock me on and sent a spray of bioplasma on the cockpit. The substance began to erode the steel and the plastic it was made of, making drops of smoking acid drip down on the panel board.

The red warning lights started flashing from all sides, and the aircraft alarm rang out, as if I hadn't yet noticed what was going on. As I tried to master my Banshee's descent, I managed to crash in a field, close to the refugee camp.

With much difficulty, I freed myself from the smoking carcass of the ship, grabbed my C-14 in my stock of weaponry, and started to flee towards the camp. I could hear the screaming Zergs close behind me. I shot a burst at random without turning around, and I felt the satisfaction of hearing the spikes pierce the flesh of the beast that was chasing me. As I

stopped shortly under a cover of trees to catch back my breath, I witnessed the arrival of Hyperion's Firebats. Twice as big as any Terran and at least three times as wide, they were very impressive in their red armors. When they started belching out flames, it was as if Hell were breaking over this damn Zerg scum. As he saw me walking towards him through the burnt fields, the medic who was with them had me undergo a quick scan, to make sure everything was alright. He ordered me to get back to the camp as soon as possible. I gladly let them deal with the Zerg scum.

I arrived just in time to get onto the last evacuation truck. It was a close one. A few minutes more and I would have been abandoned on this planet. The doctor was also among the last settlers to leave. Perhaps she wanted to be sure that no one had been forgotten, and that all her patients had been transferred towards the spaceport.

The road was like Hell despite the efforts of the Marines to drive the Zergs back. The horde filled our field of view entirely, and when we went by with the carrier, the forest ablaze was swarming with Zergs that were running, jumping, tearing flesh and metal in a cacophony of inhuman noises. This sight would haunt me forever.

A Hydralisk came so close to the transporter that I could see the yellow tints in its eyes, before it went up into smoke. I could experience nothing but hatred.

On the spaceport, an atmosphere of madness ruled; everyone was running off in all directions. We had parted with the doctor who had left to join Raynor: they would both supervise the evacuation, and all the settlers who were in the same carrier truck as I ended up in the battlecruiser Baldur.

We had settled in the hold of the spaceship, and all we could do was wait. The engines went on, and the hull screeched from all quarters in a chilling sound. People were holding on to what they could. We were submerged by a new fear: to be shot down. Violent bioplasma shots hit the energy shield, and added to the vibrations of the engines, which made the spaceship even more unstable. Nobody spoke; each of us was walled in their world of silence, praying to the Gods that they would let them out of this massacre. The engaging of the hyperreactors struck like a gust of freedom, taking us far from this devastated colony, forever. But things were far from over.

During the escape, the hyperreactors had suffered some damage, and our exit point was deflected and turned out to be light-years ahead from our initial destination. We were alive, but no where near Terran territory.

We had been drifting for one week, without knowing our position. Blindly, we were going forth, looking for a constellation we might know. But there was nothing around, not the least sign of human civilisation 300 parsecs around. The relief we felt at the beginning soon waned: the refugees were now gloomy. Another two weeks passed by before the first incidents happened. Despite the fact that we found minerals and vespene gas to provide for our needs, we clearly felt the lack of room in the crowded spaceship. To avoid a mutiny aboard, Commandant Langström decided to get the passengers to work, and thus occupy their bodies and minds.

Indeed, there were many things to do to keep one busy. Most of the refugees were miners: they were asked to take care of the SCVs: they repaired them, conditioned them so

they could be used in deep space, and piloted them. Other settlers were asked to share out the food supplies; others were asked to lay out their own quarter to prevent the sanitary conditions from getting worse. The engineers of the colony were assigned the task of listing all the equipment available in the aircraft, and see how it would be used to improve the air recycling system, but also to repair the reactors and seal the cracks in the hull. As for me, I was in charge of maintenance of the vikings.

I used to be a pilot for civilian banshee. It's hard to see the others fly when you are stuck on the deck. Captain Ceviss, who was the leader of the viking squadron, must have noticed I seemed envious. She took into her head to take me under her wing and train me.

She made an official request to the Commandant to know if I could join the viking pilot team. She had a personality you couldn't say no to. That's how I began my apprenticeship. I would observe the pilots during their trainings and their outdoor missions. I would analyze their maneuvers, their flight formation, in order to repeat them myself in the simulator. Nothing was spared to me: the slightest mistake was followed by a blunt remark. Captain Ceviss often threatened to dismiss me, saying she shouldn't have accepted me among the pilots. But every morning, she would pull me out of bed to pursue my training.

During that time, the Baldur was still drifting from system to system, looking for a landmark that would show the way to the Terran territory. All the astronomers had joined together in this work. They were our guides, and relied on their knowledge of stars. We only hoped for one thing: that we were not moving away towards another unknown portion of space.

Two months after I had started my apprenticeship, we finally picked up a radio signal. It was very low and barely understandable, but at least, it was something compared to the silence of these last months. The announcement of the Commandant was like a breath of fresh air, and it revived the hope of the refugees, which had faded out into the routine of their life on the spaceship. The whole crew was excited when they found this out: it had been the first sign of any civilisation since we had fled the colony. This accelerated the repairing of the hyperreactors, which would soon be finished. At least for what could be done. It was now time to do the final test: the jump.

The announcement was made, and everyone got prepared. Each piece of equipment was checked up three times. All the crates of supplies were tightly fastened to the different deck. Each member of the crew was at their post and verified each ounce of data that passed on their screens. The countdown began. The monotonous voice of the operator echoed in the hull of the Baldur. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 ... jump.

Distortion is really not an agreeable experience. It causes vertigo, and it feels as if you were reduced to some atom mush. But this time, it bore the promise of our return back home.

The cruiser emerged from hyperspace and everything became still. All the inhabitants of the vessel were waiting for news to come from the main deck. And it wasn't long before it did. The signal was identified as belonging to an farming colony of the Dominion. Joy burst out on all the decks of the spaceship. At last, we had entered Terran territory. We would soon be able to walk on solid ground and breathe air that hadn't been recycled in the ventilation shafts of the Baldur.

We had been wandering through space for nearly four months now, and we all were looking forward to having a walk on this farming planet, but the Commandant preferred to stay on the safe side. He calmed everyone down and decided to send a Raven for scouting as the Baldur would orbit over the planet. The latter left that very day, carrying all the hopes of the crew in him. Five hours later, he came back and announced that nothing abnormal had been noticed. They had found the position of an emerging town that wasn't very far from the equator. The control center ordered that we head towards the planet, and land near the city that had been spotted.

Everyone was impatient to arrive, and to leave the Baldur, even though it had become our new home. But something wasn't right. As we went down, all communication attempt failed. It was all the more strange as the entire communication installation seemed to be working. The communication control center said it was due to interferences that had been created during the atmospheric re-entry. Yet, this technical problem had been solved decades ago; still, maybe the cruiser had undergone severe damage, and maybe our systems had been weakened by the fights, and the re-entry has made things even worse.

Once we had landed, everyone was allowed to get out, and breathe the fresh air we had missed so much. In the ship, only the staff members assigned to communication and radar surveillance were left. There was still no news of the town the Raven had noticed. The air in the Baldur was also renewed, letting a white vaporous cloud out into the atmosphere. All was peaceful as the light grew dimmer. Not a sound, not a whisper could be heard in the forest near the landing-place.

Two marines were sent in a medivac to scout the town and find out where the inhabitants had gone. Night began to fall.

It was already night when the scouts sent out a distress message. Apparently, they had been attacked by humanoid creature that had come out of the ground. They managed to barricade themselves in the communication control center before communication was lost. Captain Ceviss sent me to rescue our marines before it was too late.

As I flew over the town with my viking, I discovered in horror that it was swarming with monsters, which looked like grotesque crosses between humans and Zergs and I could see the wreck of the medivac near the communication control center. These creatures kept running towards the building, and even though many of them fell to the ground, they didn't give up, nor did they change their tactic. I could see both our marines taking turns to protect the barricaded doors from the swarm that was coming forth.

I changed to assault mode when I came over those horrible creatures, and I used them to break the fall, and I squashed about ten of them with my steel heels. I made my way through them by giving great circular blows with my mechanical arms. I wanted to reach the building that had been attacked. Once I had arrived in front of the entrance door, I turned around: there I was, standing face to face with the horde, which was growing more and more and I made my machine-guns spit fire and bullets to secure the entrance zone while the marines went out, taking aim with their assault rifles.

As I saw they had climbed on the cockpit of the viking, and the horde was coming dangerously near, I changed back to fighter mode and bolted towards the Baldur. I had to

warn the others that these abominations existed, and that we had to leave this planet immediately.

Once we were two miles away from the spaceship, we saw a blazing explosion. It was the Baldur. The carnage was complete. Those things were crawling all over the burst wreck of the spaceship. There was no survivor to be seen. That's when the sun rose, and the weak point of the creatures was revealed: they were sensitive to sunlight. They hurriedly withdrew back to their lair, wherever it was. Not a single sound could be heard. It was hard to imagine that a carnage had just taken place a few minutes earlier.

There was nothing left in the remains of the Baldur: no sign of any survivor nor of the aggressor. We were alone with no resource on this doomed planet. We got back to the town to build a shelter out of the communication control center where we decided to pass the night. There were only twelve hours left until nightfall.