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ATTACK OF THE

NECRON

CAVAN SCOTT

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WARHAMMER™
ADVENTURES
STORIES FROM THE FAR FUTURE

WARPED GALAXIES

ATTACK OF THE

NECRON

CAVAN SCOTT

For James.

WARHAMMER ADVENTURES

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The Imperium of the Far Future

Life in the 41st millennium is hard. Ruled by the Emperor of Mankind from his Golden Throne on Terra, humans have spread across the galaxy, inhabiting millions of planets. They have achieved so much, from space travel to robotics, and yet billions live in fear. The universe seems a dangerous place, teeming with alien horrors and dark powers. But it is also a place bristling with adventure and wonder, where battles are won and heroes are forged.

CHAPTER ONE

Intruders

Zelia Lor awoke to the sound of buzzing in her cabin. She groaned. What time was it? Her bunk creaked as she turned over, pulling her thick woollen blanket with her. Surely that couldn't be the alarm already? The shrill drone continued, flitting to and fro near the ceiling. Zelia pulled the blanket over her head, but the noise persisted. Throwing back the covers, she peered up into the gloom.

That was no alarm. There was something up there, darting back and forth.

'Hello?' Zelia called out, her voice

croaking from lack of sleep. She'd been up late last night, helping her mum catalogue artefacts in the ship's cargo bay.

A series of high-pitched chirps and whistles came from somewhere near the ceiling. Zelia reached out, feeling for the luminator switch next to her bunk. Glow-globes flickered into life, the tiny invader squealing in surprise as it was bathed in sudden light.

Zelia frowned as her eyes focused on her flighty visitor. It was a servo-sprite, one of the small winged robots that her mother used on board their planet-hopper, the *Scriptor*. The whimsical little things had been created by her mother's assistant, Mekki. They had tiny bronze bodies and spindly limbs, with probes and data-connectors for fingers and toes. Their heads were long, with wide optical-beads for eyes that gave the little automata a constant look of surprise. Mesh wings whirred on the robot's back, producing the strident

buzz that had woken Zelia.

‘What are you doing up there?’ Zelia asked, rubbing sleep from her eyes.

The servo-sprite chattered nervously at itself. If Zelia didn’t know better she would have thought the thing was agitated, but like all the robots her mother used on their expeditions servo-sprites were just machines. Elise Lor was an explorer, a scholar who travelled the length and breadth of the Imperium excavating technology from years gone by, and who often dreamed of digging up artefacts from the Dark Age of Technology, that period thousands of years ago when machines thought for themselves. Those days were long gone. Like so many things in the 41st millennium, artificial intelligence was a heresy, prohibited by order of the Eternal Emperor himself. While Mekki’s creations sometimes acted as if they were alive, they were just following their programming. They were tools, nothing more. However, something must

have spooked the little automaton for it to squeeze through the gap beneath her cabin door. Gooseflesh crawled over Zelia's skin. Why would a servo-sprite hide? Something was wrong.

Swinging her legs off the bunk, Zelia gasped as her bare feet touched the cold metal deck. The floors of the *Scriptor* were supposed to be heated, but like most of the systems on the ramshackle spaceship, the heating hadn't worked properly for months. The planet-hopper was old – very old – and its systems often failed faster than Mekki could fix them. But for all its glitches, the *Scriptor* had been Zelia's home since she was born. She knew every creak of the hull, every bleep of the central cogitator. The low thrum of the engines lulled her to sleep every night. They were a comfort, especially during long journeys across the Imperium, rocketing from one dig to another. It was an odd, topsy-turvy life, helping her mum uncover crashed

spaceships or ancient machines on distant worlds all across the galaxy, but Zelia wouldn't have it any other way.

But now, the *Scriptor* didn't feel comforting. It felt uneasy, and Zelia had no idea why. Pulling on her jacket and bandolier, Zelia tapped the vox stitched into her sleeve. The communicator beeped, opening a channel to the flight deck.

'Mum? Are you there?'

There was no reply, neither from mum, nor Lexmechanic Erasmus, her mother's archaeological partner and an expert in galactic languages, both ancient and alien. There was no point trying to contact Mekki. Her mum's young assistant was a whizz with technology, but hardly ever spoke to Zelia, even though they were around the same age. At twelve, she was a full year older than Mekki was, but they were largely strangers, the Martian boy preferring the company of his machines.

Zelia didn't mind. If she was honest, Mekki made her a little uncomfortable. He was so intense, with his pale skin and cold grey eyes.

Still, he would know what to do with a flustered servo-sprite.

The robot bumbled around her head as she opened the cabin door. She swatted it away, but it stayed close as she stepped out into the corridor. The passageway was quiet, electro-candles spluttering along the creaky walls.

The door to her mum's cabin was ajar, and Zelia could see it was empty. For a woman who spent her life cataloguing artefacts, Elise Lor was incredibly untidy. Curios from her travels were crammed into nooks and crannies, while towers of textbooks and battered data-slates teetered on every available surface. Elise's library was spread throughout the ship, piled high along the narrow gantries. How mum ever found anything was a mystery, and yet she always seemed to be able to put

her finger on any text at a moment's notice.

But where was she now? Zelia crept down the corridor, checking Erasmus's cabin, but the elderly scholar was nowhere to be seen. He wasn't in his room or on the mess deck where the *Scriptor's* crew gathered to eat. Zelia checked the chrono-display on her vox. It was early, barely sunrise. Had mum and Erasmus gone to the dig already?

Zelia jumped at a noise from the back of the ship. Something heavy had been dropped, the deep clang echoing around the planet-hopper. That had to have come from the cargo bay, where Elise stored their most valuable discoveries. They had been on this planet, a remote hive world called Targian, for three months now, and the hold was brimming with ancient tech. Of course, the noise could just have been Mekki, checking through the previous day's finds, but somehow, she knew it wasn't. Mekki was a lot of things, but clumsy

wasn't one of them. He would never drop something if he could help it. As the servo-sprite fussed around her head, Zelia picked up a heavy-looking ladle that Elise had used to slop grox stew into their bowls the night before. It wasn't much of a defence, but it would have to do.

Zelia inched towards the cargo bay, praying that she'd find Mekki on the other side of the hold's heavy doors. She paused, listening through the thick metal. There was a flurry of movement on the other side of the door, the scrape of leather against deck-plates, and then silence. Trying to ignore the increasingly frantic buzzing of the servo-sprite, Zelia stepped forwards and the doors wheezed open.

'Hello? Mekki, are you in here?'

There was no answer. The cargo bay was silent, the lights kept permanently low to protect the more valuable artefacts. She crept through the collection, tall cabinets on either side.

Something moved ahead. Her grip tightened on the ladle.

‘Mekki? Seriously, this isn’t funny.’

A boot crunched behind her. Zelia whirled around, swinging the ladle.

‘You need to be careful,’ a gruff voice said. ‘You could hurt someone with that!’

Zelia cried out as thick fingers caught her wrist. They squeezed, and the metal spoon clattered to the floor.

‘That’s better.’

A stranger loomed over her, muscles bunched beneath a scruffy vest festooned with brightly coloured patches. His hair was styled into a lurid green mohawk, a tattoo of a large red cat leaping over his left ear. It was a Runak – a ferocious scavenger native to Targian with jagged scales instead of fur. Zelia had only seen the creatures out on the plains, but imagined they smelled better than the thug who was threatening her in her own home.

‘Let go of me,’ Zelia cried out, trying to pull away.

‘I don’t think so, ladle-girl,’ the tattooed thug leered, before calling over his shoulder. ‘You can come out. It’s only a little brat.’

Brat? The thug must only have been a year or two older than Zelia. He was strong though. There was no way of breaking his grip. More strangers slipped out of the shadow – two boys, and a girl with spiked purple hair and a glowing eye-implant. They all wore similar patches on their jackets, obviously members of the same gang.

‘What do you want?’ Zelia squeaked, and her captor smiled, showing uneven, stained teeth.

‘That’s a good question.’ The thug glanced around, his small, cruel eyes scanning the rusting relics on the shelves. ‘We thought this place would be full of treasure, didn’t we, Talen?’

The ganger behind him nodded. This one wasn’t as big, but still looked like he could handle himself in a fight. His blond hair was cropped short at the

sides and a small scar ran through one of his thick, dark eyebrows. He held no weapons in his gloved hands, but Zelia couldn't help but notice the snub-nosed beamer hanging next to the leather pouch on his belt.

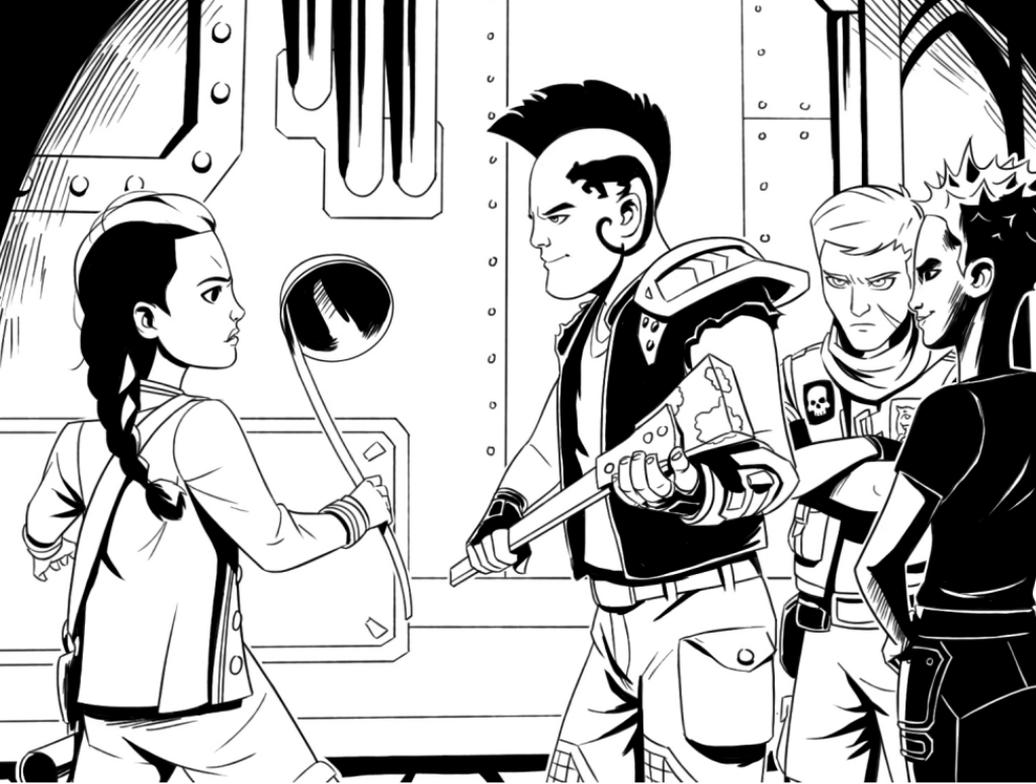
'That's what you told us, Rizz, but it looks like a load of old junk to me.'

'Yeah, old junk,' Rizz parroted, pulling Zelia closer. 'Where's the real booty? Where've you stashed it?'

'This is all we have,' Zelia told him, glancing down at the hefty weapon Rizz held in his free hand. The ganger had fashioned a mace out of a long girder topped with a blunt slab of corroded metal.

'You like my spud-jacker?' Rizz said, brandishing the makeshift weapon. 'I call her Splitter. Do you want to know why?'

'I think I can guess,' Zelia replied.



“Cos, I split skulls with her,’ he said anyway, as if she were the idiot, not him. ‘Ain’t that right, Talen?”

The blond-haired juve shifted uncomfortably, glancing nervously at the cargo bay doors. ‘We should go, Rizz. There’s nothing here.’

Rizz glared at the younger kid. ‘Oi. I give the orders. Not you.’

‘Then order us to get out of here. We’re wasting our time.’

Rizz swung around, nearly pulling Zelia off her feet.

‘I’ll waste you in a minute,’ he growled, brandishing Splitter menacingly.

Zelia saw her chance and took it. She lashed out with her foot, kicking Rizz’s shin.

‘Ow!’ he yelped, spinning her around so she crashed into the nearest cabinet, cogs and gears tumbling all around her. Zelia snatched a length of metal piping from the floor, but a swipe of the spud-jacker sent it flying across the cargo bay.

‘Nice try,’ Rizz sneered above her. ‘But I’m not going to ask you again. Where’s the valuable stuff? Where are you hiding it?’

‘I told you,’ she shouted back, gripping her aching fingers. ‘This is all there is.’

‘Liar,’ Rizz bellowed, raising the spud-jacker high above his head.

‘Splitter hates liars, and so do I.’

With a feral roar, he brought the

mace crashing down.

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