

Lake Phallonyuraz

The going was treacherous. The plain was a sheet of glass, ice so thick the weight of the Ulti-Max and the ATV together did not mar its surface. The ice was covered in a layer of snow but often it would shift or slide on the ice and one or the other of the power armour would flail about wildly and almost fall. R.C. flew overhead nearly laughing his ass off as the two land bound suckers wobbled and hobbled their way along. A strong gust of wind soon reminded him though that he was not entirely immune to the elements. He corrected his course and continued on.

Master Sergeant Pentax was on the radio with Max. "Sir, we've spotted the enemy. As suggested there are three of the Little Skulls and one of the full-sized Walkers. Proceed as planned, I am relaying the coordinates now sir."

"Roger M.S. Good work. Move to position B and stand by." replied Max. He switched channels and turned on an extra layer of scrambling. "Neodore. Confirmation from scout team received. We are nearing position. Commence your radar sweep and attack as soon as the Recon team turns theirs on. I am proceeding on ahead to get in range."

"I read you sir."

Max moved forward and Chris brought the ATV

to a halt. He skidded nearly three sixty degrees before getting control again. R.C. circled overhead for a moment and then took off to his own position. Rad came and stood off to the right and slightly in front of the ATV. They were told to expect some interference from flyers. Rad was carrying a large weapon, some sort of rifle in a strange design. It had what looked like rags and netting sticking out of it in places. He held it with one hand and propped it against his hip. Chris asked quietly over the radio, "What is that?"

"It's some sort of techno-wizard weapon that Nim sent over for just this kind of job. Said something about a swirling ball of blue crackling energy... Okay, Max says the signal is coming, get ready."

G'lishi's primary job was to keep an eye out for attack from Samas, Sky Cycles, or War Birds. Also as needed he was to take out ground troops and if possible riddle one of the Little Skulls with bombs. One of the recon squad, a man named Riley was to be his point man and point out targets. Riley was on the ground in a NG Samson suit. G'lishi met him along with the others a while back. The man was a total Nim wannabe, right down to having orange hair but he had an orange goatee beard instead of a moustache. G'lishi circled over the others but the wait wasn't long.

A War Bird rocket cycle appeared at extreme distance moving at a fast pace. It was heading diagonally

to the ground team's position but it suddenly veered off and headed straight for G'lishi. G'lishi radioed it in. The War Bird covered the distance quickly as G'lishi took evasive manoeuvres. He dodged a burst of railgun fire and then another. The Bird veered off giving G'lishi a chance to retaliate.

G'lishi disgorged a tempest of fire at the War Bird. The War Bird's left side burned for a moment as it pulled away to circle back. G'lishi didn't wait for it to start its next strafe. As soon as it straightened out he teleported right in front of it. The pilot had no chance to avoid the collision. G'lishi and the flying machine began to plummet.

G'lishi scrambled onto the top of the Warbird, his size almost too much for the vehicle. He was mindful of the top wing that might jab him when they crashed to earth. He snaked his head in between his front legs. The pilot had a pistol in his hand and raised it to shoot. G'lishi blasted the weapon with a burst of flame and it dropped from the pilot's smoking fingerless hand. He couldn't see it but the ground was rapidly approaching. G'lishi lunged forward and scraped his teeth over the pilot's body armour trying to find purchase for a proper bite. He crunched into the suit as the Warbird hit the ground. The Warbird did not stop though. It continued through the ground and into freezing water below. G'lishi and the Warbird sank into the lake that both sides of the battle thought was a simple ice and snow coated

plain.

On the surface there was a loud rumble like thunder and the ice began to crack. Chris in Max's Big Boss ATV wrestled the gearshift into reverse and tromped on the gas pedal. Snow flew out in front of the vehicle. Rad, standing at the side of the ATV, reached for one of the ladder bars but missed as he was lifted into the air and thrown backward by a rising sheet of ice. He hit the plane of ice and tried to grab anything to stop the slide toward the bottom but couldn't. He reached the end of the rising plate of ice and plunged into the water. Reflex was useless without a clue of what to do. He sank for a moment feeling the water rush into his open armour. Above him he could see only ice and water.

G'lishi heard a sudden burst of noise over his radio. He had the gist of it before the translator started to work. Max's wheeled vehicle was sinking and Rad was in the water and needed help. The air was somewhere above him. All around him was water, a place he had never been before. He was sinking quickly as was the Warbird.

Under the water was the muffled sound of explosions and the water vibrated with them. Coalition robots were locked in vicious combat with Water Elementals that they could barely see on their sensors let alone in the twilight expanse of the water under the ice. An Abolisher was torn apart by something very solid and unlike an elemental even as its massive cannons temporarily disincorporated one of the watery beings. A

final stray shot went straight up and hit the ice and exploded turning the nearby huge plates of ice into nothing more than ice cubes. Other smaller robots that had managed to cling to the floating islands of ice plunged into the water and sank like rocks.

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His parents never taught him how to swim while he was still in his egg. Thinking for a moment, G'lishi realised the obvious: swimming is just like flying, only slower! He started flapping his wings to fly through the water.

Oddly, flying underwater seemed to be quite a bit different from flying in the air. G'lishi had a tough time understanding this. He could move himself about, but he couldn't seem to go in a straight line. He stopped his efforts, and started to concentrate on magic. He teleported a mile straight up. Reorienting himself he swooped down toward Max's sinking Big Boss. Chris shouted at him, "This thing is going down, but slow. Rad is somewhere below in the water. I don't think he can swim. Help him G'lishi."

"Swim?" G'lishi asked Chris. A moment later the translator told him. "Oh, I can't swim either! How about I

rescue this, and you rescue Rad?" From where he hovered in the air, G'lishi started looking about for signs of the juicer.

Chris thought about it a moment. G'lishi spotted Rad and told Chris that he did. Chris said, "Okay, I can do that. First break that ice that's formed over the hole. When you've pulled out the vehicle don't go too far with it, in fact turn it so the back end is facing the hole in the ice. Oh, open the back of the vehicle when it's sitting safe."

He waited for G'lishi to make sense of the instructions then standing next to the freshly opened hole he began to cast a spell. The first spell completed created a ring of fire upon the ice and snow. It was open in the front so that Chris could reach the open hole. He had faced it away from the general direction of the wind.

That done Chris took off his gas mask and set it on the snowy ice. He began to strip off his clothes. When he was down to just the short pants under his normal pants he slipped his robe back on and slipped off the short pants too. He began to chant. For twice as long as it took to make the flames that burned around him he chanted and made mystical motions in the air. Nearing the end, G'lishi could feel the magic forming up to do something, Chris threw back the robe. It fluttered to the ground immediately behind him. He stood totally naked and spoke the final word of the spell.

At once he expanded and shrank at the same time.

His chest thickened, his neck ballooned, his head twisted. His arms shrank and widened close to his body. His legs twisted together his feet formed together at the heel. It took only a couple seconds and then it was done. He balanced awkwardly on the ice. To G'lishi his body, legs, and head even had become one piece. His feet were little solid wings but without a joint to flap. His arms were nubby little wings too. He was grey all over and his hairless skin was smooth. In the new form he fell over. With a couple wriggles he reached the edge of the water and slipped in.

G'lishi set about extricating the vehicle from the ice. He did as Chris had told him, though he nearly forgot to open the back of it. Meanwhile Chris swam down to where Rad was still sinking fast. The juicer's eyes were closed tightly and his mouth was wide open. He was drowned or nearly so. Chris got underneath of him and pushed him up to the surface.

G'lishi was waiting for them. Chris pushed him up and onto the ice. Rad was lying on his side. Chris began to speak to G'lishi but it was a chattering with clicks and whistles. G'lishi didn't know what to do but then the translator spoke. "Put stomach. Head me."

G'lishi puzzled out the idea. He turned Rad onto his stomach with his head turned toward Chris. Another string of the strange language. "Crush little." said the translator.

That G'lishi could not fathom. Chris in the strange

animal form put his short thin muzzle to the ice at the edge of the hole and slowly pushed down on it. G'lishi gently pushed on Rad's chest. Water ran out of his mouth. Chris chattered the next instruction. The translator said, "Mage back."

Chris turned toward the ATV where it was setting safely on some thick ice. He repeated the instruction. G'lishi, hovered over the hole and carefully scooped Chris out of the water. He flew to the ATV and set Chris inside. Chris chattered, "Close cave."

G'lishi closed the ATV and settled to the ground. After a couple of seconds Chris said in American in his own voice once more, "Get my clothes and gear please. Quickly!"

G'lishi did. Chris opened the back of the ATV. He was wrapped in a heavy blanket from the camp equipment. He took his clothes and closed the ATV again. When he was dressed he came out. He ran right to Rad. Rad was lying still on the ice. Chris turned him over. The juicer was ashen and his lips were tinged with blue. Chris put his ear to Rad's mouth and heard nothing. Chris sat back on his haunches and thought for a moment. He cast a quick spell touching Rad's head at the end of it.

Nothing happened, Rad laid still. He told G'lishi, "I cast on him the spell to get air without breathing. He should be all right for a short while, but there's more he needs to do than breathing. <He stopped to think.> I got

it! <He got out his radio and turned the dial.> This is Second Lieutenant Chris Walker calling Master Sergeant Csryfed Pentax. Your aid is immediately needed. Please respond."

Chris waited. The radio came on, "Master Sergeant to Second Lieutenant. I read you. I have your position, what do you need?"

"Captain Rad has drowned and needs immediate medical attention."

"The juicer?"

"Yes, which is why there's still a chance."

"On my way, Second Lieutenant."

"Private 1st Class G'lishi will get you for added speed."

"No need sir, I am above your position now."

Chris looked up. The Master Sergeant was above them, glowing wings with iridescent feathers sprouting from his back. He circled a moment then settled down to the ground. Settled firmly on the ice he dissipated the wings. "Your timing is good Second Lieutenant, I was near to my limit in the air."

In person his voice was quite high pitched but it was not feminine. The Master Sergeant was a dark purple colour. He had a lateral football head with an anteatr style nose but an elephant-like mouth. The back of his long thick robe was pushed out strangely in the back like his legs were backward or something. He set about looking at Rad right away. The first thing he hid was

give Rad a good solid slap to the face. Rad did not respond. He then shook the man again to no response. Getting wise he pushed on the front of Rad's armour as hard as he could. Grunting he strained to put pressure on the suit. He gave up and said, "Always start with the magic."

Chris told him, "He should be breathing without air. I thought that would help."

"Interesting application of the spell. I will hit him with a lifeblast and see if he responds."

The Master Sergeant began to cast the spell. There was a flash of light a short flood of warmth in the air. Rad lay still. The Master Sergeant smacked him again. Rad began coughing immediately.

The Master Sergeant rolled him over to the side so he could bring up more water. He tried to speak but the Master Sergeant shushed him. G'lishi's radio came on. It was Private 1st Class Anthony Riley--his spotter for the day. "If the emergency's over with there's still Coalie boys running around that are in need of a good smacking. Oh drek, I got a Jack on my hiney!"

Chris told G'lishi, "Thanks for the help but the battle's not done yet. Go do as Riley says."

"Shocking Jack take that," said the radio. "I got some co-ordinates for you G'lishi. Little skull for you."

Riley gave the co-ordinates and G'lishi took off to go to them. He spotted the thing ambling around a hole in the ice occasionally peering into it. As G'lishi came closer

it spotted him as well. A puff of smoke issued from the cheeks of the skull that was the spider's main body. Four mini-missiles jetted straight for G'lishi. G'lishi dodged them. The robot fired off another volley and circled the hole in the ice quickly. The missiles collided with G'lishi doing extensive harm upon the dragon.

G'lishi lobbed one of the fusion bombs he had at the ready at the Little Skull. It tried to side step the bomb but it collided with the side of the skull and exploded rocking the vehicle and shattering the left eye. Even as he readied to throw the next bomb the railgun on his side roared to life. G'lishi moved to dodge as the bullets raked across his flank most of them bouncing off harmlessly. The gun roared again, G'lishi got out of the way. The vehicle turned toward him and both railguns fired before G'lishi could move. Though it was a direct hit most of the flying metal lacked the power to penetrate G'lishi's thick hide.

G'lishi dropped the bomb in his hand. The Little Skull stepped out of the way easily. The bomb hit the ice and exploded. The shockwave shattered the ice in all directions around the hole disintegrated from the ice. The Little Skull leapt from the disintegrating ice just an instant before it would have fallen through the ice. G'lishi tossed another bomb even as the Little Skull was in the air. It exploded against the side of the skull leaving it a charred, mangled mess on that side, the railgun there was gone. The Little Skull landed heavily on the ice with

its legs in the air. It rolled over immediately and stood in one fluid motion.

G'lishi chucked another fusion bomb at the badly damaged robot. The Little Skull leapt out of the way. Still in mid-air it fired off a volley of mini-missiles. G'lishi tried to evade them but they slammed into his side exploding brightly this time with orange-red light. From out of nowhere a single mini-missile flew past the Little Skull. The robot jerked as if startled. The railgun shot intended for G'lishi went wide. G'lishi threw his bomb. It landed right on top of the Little Skull. The bomb exploded. A second explosion, this one inside of the robot obliterated most of the machine. Pieces of legs and chunks of metal and ceramic floated on top of the choppy ice clogged water.

Riley was on the radio, "Oh man, are you alright? You look like something that the rhino-buffalo dragged in."

"Nooo, hurtsss." G'lishi glided to a stable section of the ice and lay down to rest. He didn't notice the odd phrase; he just focused on speeding the healing process up. "Hurts bad, never this much before."

He said, "I'd have distracted it earlier but those shocking Jacks won't leave me be. Hey, we seem to be the last one's on the field of battle, at least above the ice. I don't do underwater."

"I did underwater for a bit, very strange. Did you know I can't fly underwater?"

Riley said, "No, I'd never have guessed," managing not to sound sarcastic in the least; perhaps out of deference for what he was talking to. He changed tack, "Say, do you need help or something?"

G'lishi shook his head. "No, I'll be okay, so long as no more robots shoot at me for a while."

"No, there won't be any more robots." he said softly.

Max sought out G'lishi who had had enough to heal up all of the injuries from the battle. "The Tolkeen reclamation team was nice enough to share in the wealth. I have some more fusion bombs for you. Seven heavy duties, three lighter models. Good work out there G'lishi. Oh, and thank you for saving my ATV."

Mention of the bombs made G'lishi happy. The pain just a memory now, though one he wouldn't soon forget, G'lishi was back to his usual self. "Yup, I saved the ATV, and Rad too. Well, I saw him, Chris saved him. But I helped. Open cave!" G'lishi laughed at his imitation of Chris. "Fish talk so funny! Hey, did you know I can't fly underwater?"

"No I didn't," said Max.

"It's so weird, I flapped my wings and go forward, but then I just stopped right away, and the backflap pulled me back to where I started. Over and over. Forward, backward, up, down. It was weird. I had to teleport out of the water." Turning his attention to Max, G'lishi asks, "How do you swim?"

Max stood on one leg and kicked in a circular motion with the other while swinging both arms in a breaststroke. "Like this, but with both legs going. My arms are skinny so when I uh, backflap, I don't go backward much. Sadly it will be months, some months, not one or two, before I can teach you.

G'lishi watched Max, then copied him. He managed to balance on one foot okay, his tail waving around erratically, and he waved both his arms and wings in mimic of Max's actions. He was about to ask why the wait for teaching when Max continued speaking.

"You and Chris saved Rad but he is very sick now. The water was too cold. Rad is too cold now. Chris is too cold as well. The dolphin he transformed into was used to some cold but not this much. Chris went to the ley line to cure himself, but Rad can't do that. He has to get better slow."

"I could warm him..." G'lishi stopped, muttering, "No, that would make him too hot." Then G'lishi started chuckling. "I get it, a joke! Rad doesn't do anything slow." After Max cleared that up, G'lishi asked another question. "Machine spiders don't like water because it's too cold too? What about other machines? And people in armour, still too cold?"

G'lishi kept asking until he got a good idea about what can and what cannot handle being tossed into water.