



## RUST SQUAD by Jeff Gwillim

Sergeant Hayes checked his six, troopers Mcbriar and Armond along with heavy weapons trooper Griggs gave him the ready sign. Without hesitation the Sargent overrode the door to the colony's hydroponics wing, revealing a vast grow lab bathed in red emergency lighting. Rust squad fanned out in two groups sweeping the lab. Sensors were clear but that was never a guarantee. Wheat grew tall in two rows of hydro trays, swaying back and forth in the gentle breeze provided by air recyclers. It's hypnotic movement and crimson light lending the room a sinister feel. Reaching the back of the lab, Rust squad regrouped around a flickering terminal. Mcbriar and Armond covered the rear entrance with Griggs turning his humming Plasma Projector back the way they had come.

Sargent Hayes smiled behind his vizor, admiring the discipline of his squad, but his smile quickly vanished as he began looking over the terminal. Communications between the Grow lab and Colony Command listed various maintenance projects needing immediate attention due to increased seismic activity. This was all that the Sargent needed to see to confirm his worst fears, The Legion was here. "Eyes up Rust, we are not alone." The sergeant said into his comms as he calculated their next move.

"Damn it, I knew this patrol was going too well." Mcbriar spat, anxiety creeping into his gruff voice.

"Stow it Mcbriar, the U.N.E. isn't paying us to take a vacation." Sargent Hayes responded curtly. "We get back to the ship and get the news to top brass. They can figure out what to do next."

Just then a low rumble began to fill the room as the ground beneath Rust Squad began to shudder. The tremor made the wheat shake more violently causing shadows to play across the room in sweeping patterns. Trooper Armond checked his scanner watching while the screen became obstructed with fuzz produced by the seismic event. As the ground began to calm four blips around the grow lab shined bright on the scanner screen, before fading with the rest of the static. "Possible contact but I think it was just interference." Armond informed the squad.

"Not likely greenhorn." Mcbriar said the anxiety now plain in his voice. "We walked right into machine central and..."

"I said stow it Trooper!" Sargent Hayes interrupted, signaling his squad to move back toward the entrance in diamond formation. They moved with practiced precision blasters at the ready. Movement to the right caught the Sargent's attention, and as he turned his gaze the wheat blew to one side revealing the menacing smile of a Nightmare. "Target 3 o'clock." he shouted pointing his blaster at the leering machine and opening fire. The plasma bolt lit the room with blue light as it crackled towards its target. The Nightmare took the bolt square in the chest falling to the ground broken, but its smile was undaunted.

"Nine o'clock" Mcbriar called as his Blaster loosed bolts, spraying two Nightmares springing over the hydro trays. The machines wore the same mocking smile as they opened up with Deadbolt Launchers firing collapsed steel rounds. The infernal projectiles sailed just over Rust squad as Mcbriar downed one of the attackers.

Griggs backed up Mcbriar with his Plasma Projector, but his first shot went wide melting the wall of the Grow Lab. Armond struggled for a shot around Mcbriar leaving Sargent Hayes as the only one covering the squads right flank. The Sargent watched as the floor beneath the hydro-trays began to buckle. "Heads up Rust..." the rest of his warning drowned out by the sound of metal rending and tearing as something massive emerged from the floor. An Assault Fiend rose up three meters tall, as wide as two commandos, with a metallic reptilian head and razor-sharp teeth twisted in a snarl. In one hand it brandished a trident wreathed in lightning, the other arm ended in the blackened barrel of a Napalm X Launcher.

The Fiend wasted no time spewing fire at Sargent Hayes while charging the squad. The Sargent sidestepped the flames drawing a bead on the robotic colossus, jamming the trigger of his blaster. The rest of the squad had taken care of the Nightmares but were caught off guard by the Fiends assault. Mcbriar and Briggs leapt clear but Armond took the full force of the trident, the weapon easily cleaving the troopers armor. The Fiend followed through the blow lifting Armond off his feet and slamming him into ceiling above impaling the rookie to it.

One of Sargent Hayes plasma bolts struck the Fiend knocking it off balance as Mcbriar and Griggs recovered. Griggs leveled her Plasma Projector and fired; her aim true. The mechanical beast howled as the weapon did it's job/ Plasma dripped from the Mark 1

as it fell to the ground convulsing. Mcbriar tossed a K-Grenade down the hole the Fiend had ripped in the floor hoping to stem the tide of machines. Sargent Hayes ran to Armond who hung lifeless, electricity playing across his armour. The damage was catastrophic and had likely killed the trooper instantly.

"He's gone." Sargent Hayes said solemnly removing the rookies ID plate. Mcbriar and Griggs stood somber over their fallen squad mate weapons still at the ready. "Form up, and move out," the Sargent ordered taking point "let's make sure this was not in vain." What was left of Rust Squad fell in and marched on, the wheat still waving in the air current and the sounds of advancing machines not far behind.

