

Disposal

I hate the winters most...

Durell breathed out, the temperature in the air low enough to nearly freeze his breath before it left his mouth. He tapped the side of his helmet as the HQ line went active.

“Inbound track on grid four, just south of Inverness,” The clipped tones of Major Janbers came through the speaker near his ear, “I’ve got two more on their way to your position, but you’re going to have to cut the training mission a bit short.”

“Understood,” Durell nodded, as much to himself as anyone, “We’re on the way.”

He adjusted the output on the engine on his back, too much and he’d have no steam left to do what needed to be done when he got there.

Too little and he wouldn’t get there in time.

He soared into the air with the first jump, the engine injecting enough steam to the rocket boots to allow him to soar into the air whilst keeping him stable in mid air. He landed hard, the impact winding both clockwork dynamos on the sides of his knees, helping to take the impact whilst putting power back in the Tesla coils on the thermal lance on his right arm.

“Don’t try and take the impact with your knee’s” Durell switched his radio frequency to that of his new bootman so that HQ wouldn’t listen in

“What do you mean...?” Dalton’s strong spanish inflection a tacit reminder that not all the cadets were from the Empire these days.

Durell remained silent for a second.

Good to remind them of the proper protocols once in a while.

“Forgive me Captain Durell, I forgot the Sir on the end of that sentence, Sir.” Dalton even managed to sound like he meant it.

“First time on the job?” Durell asked as they soared upwards again

“Yes Sir,” Dalton came down again with his knee’s bending nearly all the way

“Stop for a second,” Durell landed and walked to a halt as the servos in the armour whined slightly.

Dalton landed nearby and staggered to a halt as Durell leaned down next to him and adjusted the two ratchet winding devices on the side of both of Dalton’s knees.

“When you keep the ratchets active, they take some of the impact and help charge up your lance so that you don’t have to use any power from your engine,” Durell raised his lance to indicate, “Added to which you’ll still have knee’s.”

“I’ve got good knee’s,” Dalton sounded almost affronted, “Sir...”

“If you still wanting them to be strong ten years from now.” Durell peeled back the mouthguard from his face plate, “You’ll start protecting them today.”

“Yes...Sir...” Dalton didn’t sound convinced.

He’ll learn

A dull boom echoed from just over the hill and the ground shook beneath them both.

“Is that it?” Dalton turned to look at the hill

“Sounded like it,” Durell turned with him, “Come on, you’ll also learn speed is of the essence.”

Durell soared skywards, looking down at the crater formed at the base of the hill where the shell had landed, he landed close, closing up his face plate again as he felt the intense cold radiating from the surface of the metal. Dalton landed behind him and staggered to a halt, both of them standing with a few metres of the massive shell.

“So let’s get this defused,” Dalton fired up his lance and took a step forwards.

“Wait...” Durell raised his hand and turned to look at the shell as something started moving inside the metal wall.

“Think it’s a bomb?” Dalton lowered the lance.

“No...” Durell placed his hand on the cold metal, “Bomb’s don’t tick, and bombs certainly don’t talk.”

“So what....?”

“It’s April, right?”

“Last I checked.”

Durell looked up to the sky as a number of other shells streaked overhead, he turned his comms to HQ frequency to hear nothing but static coming back in at him. His face paled as he looked over at Dalton and fired up his lance.

“You start on that side,” He pointed to the opposite side of the shell, “When it starts to open, put as much solder as you can on the inside and then get a good grip on the side of it.”

“We’re not going to try and open it?” Dalton looked incredulous

“We bloody well are not...” Durell snapped as the top of the shell twisted slightly, “Now get soldering, use your entire pack on it...”

Dalton stomped around to the other side as the top continued to turn, placing the lance inside the widening gap and firing a short burst to seal the solder line inside the shell and starting to run around the edge. On the other side, Dalton

followed him around, the thickness of the solder increasing with every pass until the inside of the protruding bolt as thick with glowing metal. Durell paused and hooked the grapple line on to the side of the shell, motioning on the other side for Dalton to do the same. He changed the direction of the power flowing from his generator and engaged his boots, the movement pulling him around in a circle as the sudden burst of rocket power pulled the shell top back around slightly.

He glanced over to see Dalton looking at him as if he'd gone mad

“Don't bloody ask,” Durell pointed at the other side of the shell, “Get your bloody hand on the side of that and pull like your life depends on it...”

“Why?”

“Because your life does bloody depend on it...” Durell engaged his boot jets again, the shell closing a little more. On the other side of the shell, Dalton locked his grapple in place and mirrored Durell's movement, the shell closing a little more. Three more bursts and the shell was all but back down to where it was originally, the solder now setting solid as the icy cold set in from all directions. Durell paused as the noises from within the shell got louder, and a noise could be heard from within, not metal but that of flesh banging against the top of the shell.

“What is it?” Dalton looked at the top of the shell as it stopped moving

“Durell to HQ, come in HQ” Durell ignored the question and looked upwards as the radio came back on line, “I say again Durell to HQ, come in HQ.”

“HQ Here, report?”

“Single cylinder,” Durell pointed skywards as flares of light could be high in the sky, “One passenger by the sound of it, sealed now but we'd do well to get a full containment crew down here before they break out.”

“What is it?” Dalton looked up at him

“Looks like our Red friends thought to get the jump on us this year...” Durell dropped down to the ground, “They normally wait till August when the weathers a little more to their liking.”

“So that's...” Dalton took an involuntary step back from the shell, now recognising it to be not so much a shell but a cylinder.

Durell nodded, “But at least we know they're coming now.”

“So what do we do?”

“We watch the skies,” Durell pointed upwards again as another projectile streaked over them.

“And we try to be there before they get out.”