

reading
ing up broadcasts
maybe even clean vox,' Loken said. 'Do something.'

The officer shrugged and adjusted several dials. 'I can try purging the signal. I can wash it through the signal buffers. Maybe that will tidy up the channels...'

In Loken's ears, there was a sudden, seething rush of static, and then things became quieter suddenly. 'Better,' he said. Then he paused. Now the hiss was gone, he could hear the voice. It was tiny, distant, impossibly quiet, but it was speaking proper words. '...only name you'll hear...'

'What is that?' Loken asked. He strained to hear. The voice was so very far away, like a rustle of silk.

The flight officer craned his neck, listening to his own headphones. He made minute adjustments to his dials. 'I might be able to...' he began. A touch of his hand had suddenly cleaned the signal to audibility.

'What in the name of Terra is that?' he asked.

Loken listened. The voice, like a gust of dry, desert wind, said, 'Samus. That's the only name you'll hear. Samus. It means the end and the death. Samus. I am Samus. Samus is all around you. Samus is the man beside you. Samus will gnaw upon your bones. Look out! Samus is here.'

The voice faded. The channel went dead and quiet, except for the occasional echo pop.

The flight officer took off his headset and looked at Loken. His face was wide-eyed and fearful. Loken recoiled slightly. He wasn't made to deal with fear. The concept disgusted him.

into the b... cold mountain...
The area had been securely occupied by
troopers and war machines. The party st...
light, all of them giddy and breathless...
tude. Keeler was calibrating her picter...
glare, trying to slow her desperate bre...
annoyed. They'd set down in a safe zo... long way
back from the actual fighting area. There was nothing
to see. They were being handled.

The town was a bleak outcrop of longhouses in a lower gorge below the peaks. It looked like it hadn't changed much in centuries. There were opportunities for shots of rustic dwellings or parked army war machines, but nothing significant. The glaring light had a pure quality, though. There was a thin rain in it. Some of the servitors had been instructed to carry the remembrancers' bags, but the rest were fighting to keep parasol canopies upright over the heads of the party in the crosswind. Keeler felt they all looked like some idle gang of aristos on a grand tour, exposing themselves not to risk but to some vague, stage-managed version of danger.

'Where are the Astartes?' she asked. 'When do we approach the war zone?'

'Never mind that,' Flora interrupted. 'Who is Samus?'

'Samus?' Sindermann asked, puzzled. He had walked a short distance away from the group beside the lander into a scrubby stretch of white grass and sand, from where he could overlook the misty depth of the rainswept gorge. He looked small, as if he was about to address the canyon as an audience.

'I keep hearing it,' Flora insisted, following him. He was having trouble catching a breath. Flora wore an earplug so he could listen in to the military's vox traffic.

'I heard it too,' said one of the protection squad

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Keeler nod
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DAN ABNETT

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Who is Samus?
He had walked
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out

soldiers from behind his fogged rebreather.
'The vox has been playing up,' said another.
'All the way down to the surface,' said the officer in
charge. 'Ignore it. Interference.'
'I've been told it's been happening for days here,' Van
Kraaten said.

'It's nothing,' said Sindermann. He looked pale
and fragile, as if he might be about to faint from the
airlessness.

'The captain says it's scare tactics,' said one of the
troopers.

'The captain is surely right,' said Sindermann. He took
out his data-slate, and connected it to the fleet archive
base. As an afterthought, he uncoupled his rebreather
mask and set it to his face, sucking in oxygen from the
compact tank strapped to his hip.

After a few moments' consultation, he said, 'Oh,
that's interesting.'

'What is?' asked Keeler.

'Nothing. It's nothing. The captain is right. Spread
yourselves out, please, and look around. The soldiers
here will be happy to answer any questions. Feel free
to inspect the war machines.'

The remembrancers glanced at one another and began
to disperse. Each one was followed by an obedient ser-
vitor with a parasol and a couple of grumpy soldiers.

'We might as well not have come,' Keeler said.

'The mountains are splendid,' Sark said.

'Bugger the mountains. Other worlds have moun-
tains. Listen.'

They li... ing rolled down