

# The Iron Father and The Angel

*In the grim darkness of the 41st millennium, there is only war. The armies of the Imperium of Man are besieged, and stand as humanity's bulwark against the terror, protecting mankind from the xeno, the mutant, and the heretic.*

The clouds above Allos IV were a sickly shade of gray, as they rained ash onto the landscape of the long devastated world. Iron Father Haalor walked through the polluted streets in silence. The once civilized world's abandoned industrial sector sprawled, a corpse pile of industry—manufactorums rising like tombstones, their smokestacks cold, their forges dark. He carried in his bionic hands a two handed power halberd, the Gorgon's Maw, the relic weapon's cog toothed blade crackling with electricity.

Three servitors, corrupted by the Immaterium, spotted his large frame and charged at him, servo claws and welding torches brandished. His augmetic eye pierced through smog to identify his targets, then the mechanical appendage arm attached to the right of his power pack rose from its folded position. With a thought, Haalor set the power level of the lascannon mounted at the end of the appendage to 30%. The weapon then fired three bursts of pure red photons, ten shots per burst, the high fire rate a benefit of the low power setting. Each burst hit its mark, cutting the corrupted servitors to pieces..

Haalor continued walking, before coming across his objective. Manufactorum Sigma-Seven, where the Warp anomaly had been detected. The vox-transmission from the local tech-priests had been brief, desperate, and then silent. The appendage mounted to the right of his power pack, a servo arm, raised itself, and tore off of the door to the manufactorum. The metal rippled as it was grasped before being tossed to the side.

Haalor's bionic legs rang against the metal floor as he entered the manufactorum. As Haalor walked through, the interior stretched before him like the ribcage of a vast beast—catwalks suspended over pools of glowing chemical waste, massive pistons frozen mid-stroke, conveyor belts carrying nothing but dust. Haalor felt a surge of anger, seeing a shrine to the omnissiah's glory frozen and decaying. He crushed that anger with the knowledge that Mechanicus was assembling the necessary materials to reclaim and repair the industrial complex.

His scanner chirped, signaling that the Warp signature was below, deep in the manufactorum's heart. Haalor descended through maintenance shafts and service corridors, his servo arm tearing apart any door that stood in his way. The corruption

grew stronger with each meter—reality itself seemed to shiver at the left edges of his vision, his organic left eye showing its weakness. Then he heard it, a clang of metal on metal.

Haalor quickened his pace, and he emerged into the vast chamber that had once housed the manufactorum's primary plasma reactor, which was now cold. Now it housed something far more dangerous. The Warp rift hung in the air like a wound in space itself. It pulsed with sickly light—purple and green and colors that had no name in the material universe.

The rift closed, and Haalor looked towards the source of the sound, the figure that the warp rift spewed out. For a moment, the figure lay still, and Haalor's targeting systems locked onto her form. Small. Humanoid. Feminine. Extensively augmented, but not in any pattern he recognized. Her body was a masterwork of cybernetics, sleek and purposeful, but utterly alien to Imperial design. No sacred oils blessed her joints. No purity seals adorned her frame. No hymns of the Mechanicus were etched into her plating.

Heretek. The word formed in his mind like a curse.

The figure stirred. Pushed herself up. And looked directly at him.

Her eyes were human—at the first glance. A deeper analysis showed that they were also bionic, simply appearing as organic components. They held a confusion so profound it transcended language. She spoke, words tumbling out in a language Haalor's auto-translators struggled to parse. Not low or high Gothic. Not any dialect of *linguica technis* in his extensive database. But the tone was universal.

"Identify yourself, Name and designation," Haalor commanded, his growling voice amplified to fill the chamber. The figure flinched at his voice, her body dropping into an unknown combat stance with fluid grace. Her hands came up, and Haalor's sensors detected power building in her bionic arms—plasma-based, highly concentrated, completely unknown in design.

"You will not be asked again," he said, taking a step forward. "You have emerged from a rift of the Immaterium. Cease your hostilities, or be destroyed."

Her response was to attack.

She moved like a bolt of lightning given form. One moment she was ten meters away; the next she was inside his guard, her fist driving toward his chest with enough force to crack ceramite. Haalor's iron halo absorbed the impact. Haalor struck back with his axe, which was disaged, only for the figure to be grabbed by his servo arm and tossed aside.

The figure rolled with the impact, coming up in a crouch. Her eyes, which were placed above twin chrome markings, were wide, taking in his massive form with something between awe and horror.

"What are you?" she breathed, and this time his translators caught the words. The language was ancient, pre-Imperial, but recognizable.

"I am Iron Father Haalor of the Haarmek, fifth clan company of the Iron Hands," he declared. "You will cease your hostilities, or you will be terminated."

She shook her head, backing away. "I don't understand. Where am I? What is this place? I was fighting... there was an explosion... and then..."

Her confusion seemed genuine. Haalor's tactical assessment and subroutines processed this, a kinesic analysis backing up the initial assessment. Warp spin did not show such confusion. Heretics did not question their location. Her augmetics, while heretical in their unmarked nature, showed no signs of Chaos corruption. No mutations. No daemoniac possession. Just... technology, unblessed, but uncorrupted.

"You emerged from a rift in the Immaterium," Haalor coldly stated, his tone marginally less hostile. "Yet you bear no marks of Chaos. Explain."

"Immaterium? Chaos?" she said, the confusion clear. "I don't know what that is"

Haalor filed away the data, before continuing his questions. "Your augmetics are unknown to me. Not of mechanicus manufacture, nor of any xenos or heretek pattern in my database. What are you?"

She met his gaze, and he saw steel in those too-human eyes. "My name is Alita. I'm... I was in the Scrapyard. Fighting, then everything went white, and I was falling, and..." She looked around the chamber, at the industrial nightmare surrounding them. "This isn't Kansas anymore."

"Kansas?" The word meant nothing to him.

"Never mind." She straightened, her combat stance relaxing slightly. "You're not going to attack me again?"

"My hostility depends on your actions." Haalor lowered the Gorgon's Maw but kept the power field active. "You claim ignorance of the Warp. Of Chaos. Either you are a skilled liar, or you are something I have no classification for."

"I'm telling the truth." Her voice carried conviction. "I don't know what either of those things are. I don't know where I am. But I know I'm not your enemy, at least I don't think I am."

Haalor's analytical mind worked through the possibilities. Warp rifts could tear through space and time. "What was the year where you previously were?"

"2533 AD" She said, "so, where, or I guess when, am I now?"

"the 41st millennium, the year is 997 AD" Haalor stated, "The most probable explanation for your presence is that the rift transported you 38,479 years forward in time. The Immaterium is known to have such properties"

The figure stood silent for a second, processing the information. Haalor allowed this, he needed the time to evaluate the current situation, anyway. She was a relic from an age long gone, the cult mechanicus had not existed in her time, the omnissiah had yet to be understood, the explanation was clear. She was no heretek, she was a blessed relic from an age long past

The girl made to speak, likely to ask another question, but she did not get the chance. From the depths of the manufactorum came a sound that Haalor knew too well: the grinding of corrupted machinery, the screaming of tortured metal, the binary cant of machine spirits driven mad.

"The questions will cease," he growled.

Alita's head snapped toward the sound. "What are those?"

"Servitors, techno-organic semi-autonomous machinery, constructed from humanoids" Haalor answered, preparing himself for the fight to come.

He saw her confusion at his answer, and pointed with his skeletal, bionic hand to one of the destroyed servitors in the chamber. From the appearance, it was clear that the servitor was of the vat grown variety, rather than a criminal or debtor who had been servitorized. The tech priests of the planet, in their wisdom, only utilized servitors whose biological makeup and development they completely controlled.

The servitor Haalor had pointed to had been nearly entirely replaced with machinery, no doubt in order to mitigate the negative effects of the reactor's radiation. Its arms bore large, load bearing claws, and its jaw had been replaced by a set of mechanical tools.

The girl's expression shifted to horror, "That's messed up."

"It is efficient." Haalor coldly stated, turned toward the approaching sounds. "Other units have been corrupted by the warp, they must be terminated"

The first servitor emerged from a side passage, too far for a normal human to see, but Haalor's augmented eye allowed him to see everything in perfect detail. It had once been human—the torso still showed remnants of flesh, pale and stretched over metal ribs. Its arms had been replaced with industrial tools, now warped into bladed appendages. Its face was a mask of agony, starkly different from the cold, lobotomized indifference that a properly made servitor would wear. Behind it came more. Dozens. A tide of corrupted flesh and metal.

"Stay behind me" Haalor commanded, raising his axe, his shoulder mounted lascannon raising itself in preparation.

"Fine, but don't think I'm just going to hide," Alita said, and her arms began to glow with plasma energy.

The servitors charged, and Haalor's lasgun fired burst upon burst of bolts, cutting down many of the corrupted servitors. Some managed to dodge, the warp corruption granting them an agility they should not have possessed otherwise.

Those Servitors that got past the storm were met head on by the Gorgon's Maw, Haalor swinging his halberd in wide sweeps, reducing corrupted servitors to component parts. The few that his halberd missed had their skulls crushed by Haalor's servo arm. Even after being severed, some of the corrupted servitors still attempted to impede his efforts, only being stopped after Haalor's foot crushed their severed heads in entirety.

The horde adapted, with some servitors moving to the left and right instead of charging head on, whilst most continued their charge, keeping Haalor occupied. Those that moved around were met with las fire, but there were two directions, and Haalor possessed only one lascannon. Fortunately, Alita was proving just how useful an asset she was.

She moved through the servitors with what some would describe as a dancer's grace. Her plasma-charged fists punched through corrupted metal with surgical precision. She flipped over grasping claws, slid under sweeping blades, dodged welding torches and plasma cutters. Every one of her movements was economical and deadly. Where Haalor was a hammer, she was a scalpel.

A servitor lunged at her from behind. Haalor's sensor systems screamed a warning, and his lascannon swiveled on its mount, putting fifteen bolts straight through the servitors cranium. Haalor and Alita continued to fight the horde of corrupted servitors, the two

augmented combatants adapting to each other without the need for words or discussion. Any servitor that attempted to diver its course around Haalor was either cut to pieces by las-fire or met its end at the hands of Alita.

"How many more are there?" Alita asked, as she vaulted over a servitor's charge, her elbow strike caving in its skull as she passed. Before Haalor could answer, both were informed of a new presence by the sound of loud, stomping feet. A Kastalen robot, a blessed battle automata of the Adeptus Mechanicus, It had clearly sustained minor damage, but was still operable, and corrupted. Its frame took up the near entirety of the hallway.

Haalor looked towards Alita, who was continuing to pick off the minor servitors, "cover me" he ordered, and Alita looked confused, but nodded. Haalor made one more wide sweep, using the opening to point the tip of the Gorgon's Maw directly at the Kasteln robot. Unlike the standard omnissiahian halberd, Haalor's weapon did not possess a spearpoint.

Instead, the barrel of the relic axe's built in graviton weapon glowed, firing a beam of neon green energy that pierced through the air of the hallway, moving upward. It avoided the heads of the charging servitors, and struck straight in the chest of the kastelan robot. The effect was immediate, as the crimson metal of the Kastelns outer shell rumbled inwards. The corrupted automaton fired its carapace mounted heavy phosphor blaster.

The white fiery bursts met the light blue field of Haalor's iron halo force field, as the graviton beam continued firing. Meanwhile, Alita continued to cover Haalor, kicking, punching and chopping through corrupted servitors. Whilst Haalor's axe sweeps were missed, the swarm of corrupted servitors had thinned to the point where alita, alongside the continued fire of Haalor's lascannon, were capable of holding the swarm at bay.

But the crumpling metal of the kastelan robots' torso had, as Haalor had calculated, finally reached its internal cogitators. With one last crush, the robot collapsed on to the ferrocrete ground like a puppet with its strings cut, crushing any corrupted servitor in the way, the phosphor blaster ceasing its onslaught. Then, the robot erupted in a bright white explosion as Haalor's lascannon fired a single, high powered bolt directly into the power core.

The effect was immediate, any corrupted servitors nearby were incinerated, the hallway collapsed, sealing the only way in or out of the reactor chamber. Any remaining servitors were swiftly dispatched by Alita's fists and Haalor's lascannon.

"Is it over?" Alita asked, shaking the blood and grease off of her bionic hands.

"Affirmative." Haalor's sensors swept the chamber. "The hallway is sealed. No more will be able to enter. The Omnissiah has granted us victory."

Alita slumped against a wall, Haalor could see that her augmetic legs had suffered minor structural damage, enough to detrimentally affect the internal servos. "What now? There doesn't look to be another entrance?"

Haalor turned to look at her. In the dim light of the factorum, she seemed impossibly small, impossibly fragile. But he had seen her fight. Had seen her stand against horrors she didn't understand, he had seen her strength.

"There is not," Haalor stated, resting his axe against his shoulder.

"So then how do we leave?" Alita responded, her worry was poorly hidden.

Haalor pressed a button on his wrist mounted device, opening a vox channel with the strike cruiser crimson hammer.

"Kaaltok, the rift has dissipated, I require extraction" Haalor stated

"Affirmative" The librarian replied. Only a second later, another rift appeared. It was similar, in some ways, to the previous warp rift, expertly the entirety of it shined a cool, icy blue, and it swirled in a circular, orderly manner.

"That is our exit" Haalor stated, before walking over to Alita and picking her body up with his servo arm. She let out a squeak of surprise as the two metallic mandibles, which had only previously crushed the semi metallic skulls of their foes with ease, grabbed her at the waist and lifted her body with a surprising gentleness. Haalor walked towards the rift, ignoring Alita's protests. He entered the rift, the glowing blue light swirling and consuming him.

He appeared in the bridge of the crimson hammer. Tech priests and adepts scurried about, the banner of Clan Haarmek was mounted on the entrance, and a large window provided a view of the cosmos, and the planet that Haalor had just been on. There was another black and silver clad space marine, though his armor did not possess the servo arms of Haalor's. The marine did not wield a two handed axe, instead, he clutched a force stave, its steel and bronze construction briefly shimmering in the afterlight of the rift.

"Kaaltok" Haalor acknowledged, as the librarian's outstretched hand was retracted, the glowing blue rift dissipating. "The warp rift was minor, and is no more, your abilities were not required. The Mechanicus can proceed with their reclamation"

Kaaltok looked towards Alita, the questioning look in his eye leaving no need for words. Haalor sent the relevant data to Kaaltok's neural augmetics, a silent transfer of battlefield data. In only a handful of microseconds, Kaaltok had analyzed the data, and nodded in affirmation. Haalor held out his servo arm, which still held Alita in his grasp. The girl was still stunned, which proved convenient.

"She requires repairs," Haalor stated, and Kaaltok nodded. The librarian extended his bionic arm outward with an open palm, focusing his energy. In the span of minutes, Alita's legs stopped spewing sparks, as they knitted themselves back together, metal bending, wires coiling, until they were as good as new. Such was the ability of the Iron Hands' best technomancer, even unknown machines could be healed.

Alita herself was stunned silent, as Haalor walked to his own quarters in the strike cruiser. As befitting an Iron Father, the quarters were larger than what was afforded to a normal Astartes, in order to make space for a workshop, which consisted of a metal table with various tools and parts. A bed was folded to the side of the wall, having never been used.

Haalor unfolded the bed, and placed Alita on the cold steel, finally releasing her from the grip of the servo arm. She sat and looked up at him.

"So I'm stuck here." It wasn't a question.

"Affirmative" Haalor stated, looking at her.

"You fought well," he said. "You stood your ground against corruption and served as an effective combat auxiliary."

"I fight," Alita said. "That's what I do, it's what I'm good at, but what do I do now?"

"You will accompany me on my missions, you serve as a combat auxiliary, you will bring about the Omnissiah's wrath to the deserving, and serve as an instrument of destruction, to be fielded against those who would threaten mankind, just as I am" Haalor stated, his tone brokering no argument.

Alita nodded, knowing there wasn't much else she could do, before crossing her arms and looking up at her new partner, "so when do I start."