

Release

By Dirk Wehner

Maerica Threxx pulled the lever of the Generatorum Interdictio. A fell red light flooded the foundry deep beneath the crust of Ordex-Thaag. She closed her eyes and relished the power that washed over her. True, she was not much better than the lowliest of tech thralls, but in this moment power – true power – was in her grasp.

Release me, the voice whispered.

'Please repeat, Priest Threxx,' the hooded overseer requested, breaking into her thoughts.

Maerica shook her head and looked up, realising she had been staring at the Generatorum Interdictio from across the room for quite some time now.

'I did not say anything, overseer,' the young Tech-Priest said. Her lower mechadendrites twitched nervously before she brought them back under control with a focused thought.

The overseer's array of optic sensors were aligned in the form of an eight-pointed star beneath his threadbare hood. They made a humming noise as they readjusted. After a moment of measured silence, he nodded. 'Affirmative. An error of my auditory sensors. Return to the work process, Priest Threxx.'

'Yes, overseer,' Maerica answered. She released a breath she had not realised she had been holding. She looked at the Generatorum Interdictio again. The machine was an enormous boiler fashioned from dark brass. It was laced with gauges and displays ticking away eagerly, and dark warding seals had been etched into its surface. A massive glass hatch drew Maerica's gaze, as it had done so often during the last week. Something was in there, something powerful, toying with emotions she had thought long excised. A dark red light throbbed behind the hatch, and as Maerica stared, the light filled her until it drowned out every sight, every sound, every thought...

Release me, the voice whispered.

'Error. Priest Threxx, I repeat, return to your duties.' Maerica averted her eyes, startled, as the overseer appeared at her station. Despite his emotionless voice, his words managed to sound threatening. Maerica would not be the first of the Dark Mechanicum priests of Ordex-Thaag dragged away into the darkness to *feel the sand underneath her bare feet, sore and bloodied, as she dragged her ravaged mass onwards and-*

The Tech-Priest swallowed hard, looking around the furnace chamber. 'Y-yes, overseer, affirmative,' she said, looking back at her shrine-anvil, where a half-built mechanical tendril was waiting.

The overseer leaned down to her, optic sensors whirring softly. 'The Generatorum Interdictio is none of your concern, priest. Know your place. You shall strive for nothing but to be of service.'

'Yes, overseer,' she responded dutifully. 'I am nothing. I will be of service.'

The overseer snapped into an upright position and strode away. Maerica closed her eyes and tried to calm her heartbeat. It had been years since she last felt so agitated, so... human. She fought down the urge to look at the Generatorum Interdictio again and tried to concentrate on her task. Her mechadendrites rose from her black robe to continue her delicate work. Sparks flew as she etched runes into another segment of the metal tendril. She didn't even know what the dark words she was writing meant, she only knew *pain, unbelievable pain as she looked at her hands. The sharp grain of the desert, drifting on powerful storm gusts, had peeled away the skin. The flesh underneath, open to the toxic waste of Ordex-Thaag, was infected, oozing dark and thick pus down her arms. She felt the heavy weight of the generatorum on her mind as she realised she was staring at the machine again.*

Release me.

The overseer's claw closed like a hydraulic clamp around her shoulder. She felt the cold metallic touch through her robes, painful on her feverishly warm skin. 'Warning, Priest Threxx,' the overseer said. 'I repeat, the Generatorum Interdictio is none of your concern. Further non-compliance will be punished. Resume your work process immediately.'

Maerica nodded hastily. 'I will be obedient, overseer.'

The overseer's claw turned her, forcing her to face him. The many lenses beneath his hood looked at her unsympathetically. He seemed to assess her worth. Then he let go of her and turned away.

Maerica watched as the overseer made his way through the foundry, her eyes *caked with scab and many-limbed mites, almost blinded by the punishing work in the foundry. The work in the foundry, she told herself. Focus. Once more her mechadendrites*

hung from her cloddish form uselessly as she swayed on. The mechanical extremities drew wavering lines in the sand, leaking brackish oils as they tangled with a dangling loop of her entrails bulging from her ruptured belly. She truly was nothing. Nothing but a wretched mount for the massive machinery that had merged with her as she stood up and walked towards the Generatorum Interdictio.

Release me, the voice whispered, urging, pressing, throbbing. Release me. Release me. Release me.

The overseer barred her way and clenched her arms with his mechanical claws. Two servo-arms rose from his back and clutched her shoulders, while lithe mehadendrites crawled from the depths of his robes to entangle her further. 'Priest Threxx, you have been warned,' he exclaimed. His mehadendrites wound around her. The pressure was crushing. 'Deconstruction is now imminent.' Slowly he picked her up, raising her from the floor.

Release me, the voice urged. Release me. Release me. Release me release me release me RELEASE ME.

Her head snapped around as she stared into the overseer's face directly. 'Release me,' she growled.

It was her voice, but there was another, barely audible, giving her the power she now knew she had long craved. Had the overseer been capable of surprise, he would surely have expressed it as Maerica forced her way out of his grip with inhuman strength.

'Release me,' the voice screamed as Maerica scurried over the collapsed overseer, rushing towards the pulsating light of the Generatorum Interdictio. 'Release me,' the thing called as she evaded guard servitors trying to intercept her. 'Release me,' it shouted greedily as she grabbed the lever. Time stood still for a second as sudden memory flooded her mind. She remembered the rough brass handle beneath her grip, the crimson glow, the thing behind the glass, a throbbing light staring deep into her soul, making her human, making her more...

'Release me,' the voice screamed once more, and now she recognised it for what it truly was. And as she saw herself pulling the lever, slowly, unavoidably, Maerica Threxx screamed too.

'Release me,' the creature bleated from its lopsided jaws, spewing dark strings of bloody saliva as it

dragged itself through the desert on Ordex-Thaag's surface, harried by one excruciating memory that repeated itself over and over again. 'Release me,' it cried out to dark clouds illuminated by the sick green of boiling warp storms. The creature crawled through the hot and toxic sand, its skinned knees and hands festering. On its back, melded to its flesh, was a huge brass boiler. A thick glass hatch radiated a crimson glow, brighter with each passing day its host suffered. 'Release me,' the monstrosity wailed. There weren't any tears left to fill its filth-encrusted eyes.

'The melding of Specimen 209-Theta was successful, master', croaked the diminutive Idolator without daring to look up at his liege. 'Reports indicate that the creature has escaped into the deserts around the spire after destroying the foundry. Casualty rate is acceptable. The specimen is now fuelled by the host, becoming stronger each day while still being contained.'

'Excellent.' The figure on the throne was barely visible in the shadowy hall, its voice quiet yet strong-willed. An undeniable authority made the voice clearly discernible from the rumble of heavy machinery and the clangour of barbed chains hanging from the ceiling. 'What a nuisance it is that it has escaped though. I swear those damned priests do this on purpose just to anger me.'

'Yes, master,' the Idolator hastily agreed. 'Should I arrange the capture of the creature?'

'No,' the figure on the throne decided after a brief pause. 'Let the thing suffer some more. It must become strong before we can install it into the machine. Let it have its way with the host for a few more days before we catch it.'

'Yes, master. We shall observe the creature until you think it is... ripe.' The Idolator bowed stiffly and then skulked into the shadows of the cavernous hall.

Magnate Waersk leant forward and rested his head on his fist while he watched the Idolator slink away. The features of the Fallen Noble were lined with dark anticipation. Not long until his plans would come to fruition now. Not long until this wretched planet would serve its purpose and aid House Lucaris to take its rightful vengeance upon the galaxy.



