



# THE WEAPON

By

*Aidan Alberts*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...*

*Aidan Alberts', "The Weapon," is a great example of what one can do with emotional depth in sci-fi. This is a tale of warrior brotherhood, familial love and loss, violence, sacrifice, and the ineptness and insignificance that soldiers have always faced in poetic inhumanity.*

*Alberts has done a lot of things well, but I'll touch on a few.*

*There is one hell of a beautifully ugly pace at work here that keeps you reading – almost like Halo or Gears of War decided to hang out with the Borg. That pace flows throughout the entire piece, and problem that faces our main characters requires a bit of the ol' ultra violence, they have to move fast, your eyes have to move fast, and you definitely want to keep reading.*

*The style that holds the story together is also notable because of the way that it blends mediums. There is a gruffness in the fiction, there is a siren's call of a poetics that lurks in between the lines, and there are emotional layers that come from a variety of genres and tropes that get played around with here really well.*

*"The Weapon," reminds me of all the thrilling, mind-warping, world-creating science fiction that is there to stimulate all parts of the imagination: from melting faces to dismembered space bodies covered in future armor, from the crushing anxiety of death so far away from home to the hope that comes from knowing that your planet may or may not have been blown up and then losing that hope, or just from the cool names you can give to planets and people, Aidan Alberts made a story worth checking out.*

*[Insert Space Pun].*

*Bleep. Borp.*

*Enjoy.*

**QUALITY QUOTABLE** *(for the love of language...)* Gray and brown debris blasted the area as energy arcs spread out from the direct hit on the foxhole. Though sitting in the railgun's pilot



seat, Wolffe groaned as blood dripped down his face. He had not yet been able to seal the glass canopy of the weapon's cockpit. A spinning state of semi-consciousness flooded his mind. Through the waves of nausea and despair, something unfamiliar communicated to him in a medium of thought that was neither sound nor telepathy.

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*We acknowledge the kind permission to reproduce the painting 'The Weapon' by Lilly Brady, the author's grandmother.*

A quivering baby bird lay half-submerged in a puddle at Sergeant Wolffe's feet. Glancing down, he strapped his rifle to his back and bent over to scoop it up with his dirty cupped hands. Its dark brown eyes bulged as it squirmed in his grasp. Placing the bird on a sheltered sunny ledge he turned to Keeli and said, "This bird is just as young and ugly as you are."

"Whatever old man," replied Private Keeli.

Grinning, Wolffe continued to walk towards the turret positions at Delta Outpost. He remembered meeting Keeli when he was a teenager living on the streets of planet Sedna's capital. Wolffe recalled how he inducted him into the Tertullian military. They had faced off during boot camp in a hand-to-hand combat simulation. Bouncing on his toes and fists ready, Keeli had taken an aggressive fighting stance. He wore the cocky smile of a young man taking on someone he thinks is past his prime. Wolffe was not going to let him have that satisfaction.

"Bring it," said Wolffe.

Keeli swung fast and hard. Wolffe ducked and kept his arms up to shield his head. A few of Keeli's swings connected. However, his mentor's dodges eluded most of the undisciplined moves. Enraged, Keeli grabbed Wolffe by the wrists and thrust a powerful knee into his abdomen. Wolffe groaned and fell hard onto his back. Keeli pounced on his fallen mentor, ready to land his final punch but Wolffe freed himself. With a twisting motion, he slashed up with his fist. His strike smashed into Keeli's thyroid cartilage. Keeli's simulated body fell limp next to him as the virtual training became pixelated and then shut off.

Wolffe removed his neuron chip and said, "You have much to learn newbie."

Keeli cheeks flushed red as he cracked a slight smirk. Having lost the bet, Keeli was going to be stuck with latrine duty for a week. "You and your geezer tactics got lucky this time."

Standing by the turrets, Wolffe was amazed by how much Keeli had changed since those days.

“Get down!” yelled Captain Navara.

Bright streaks of turquoise light whipped the orange sky above the burning city. Seconds after the radiant flash of new bombardments, shock waves spread out, rippling the clouds, and slamming Sergeant Wolffe to his knees. Simultaneously, everything darkened as a massive shadow from a spacecraft blanketed Delta Outpost. With his palms pressed to his ears, he twisted away from the tragic sight of the Tertullian capital, New Formosa, and observed the space-bound ship.

General Griggs must have green-lighted the civilian transport to make its escape.

In silence, he watched the ship’s long metallic boosters trail behind magenta plumes of smoke. His face grew pale as he prayed for those on board. Fleeing towards the hazy horizon, the

Hammerhead-class civilian transport was illuminated by a blood-red glow of sunlight in its waning hours.

Wolffe gazed across the discworld’s central void to the distant parts of his planet. Nothing was left of the Mimirian mountain range that once contained ice-covered peaks. Whole oceans that had surrounded the range were vaporized and the hardened rocky guts of the world were exposed. Charred debris sprawled into the void as continent-sized fires raged across the planet.

Their home came under siege without warning. The religious zealots known as the Vogrom were bathing the planet Tertullia in hell fire. This was not the first time Wolffe and his family had left everything behind.

A decade before they had fled the rainforest planet, Sedna, because of the Vogrom’s holocaust of flame. He had left his family in the safety of their house so he could join the fight. He would never forget the moment when he returned home and embraced his wife, Véra. She had told him about what the soldiers had done when they came and the awful reality of their five-year-old son’s death. Everything after Tom’s passing became a shadowy farce of Wolffe’s prior life.

The nights after Tom’s murder were restless until early morning when Wolffe would slip into the realm of sleep. He would meet Tom in the same recurring dream, a gray world where he walked down a gravelly path surrounded by a green lawn. On the horizon, he would stare at a red star staining the sky with a raw flesh color. His footsteps were confined to the unforgiving trail, with a ghostly force pulling him towards the distant Sun glowing like a crimson eye. Always in the nearby grass, his boy wandered around aimlessly. Wolffe would watch him stagger and spin around. Every urge in his body screamed to go hold him, but he was restrained. Squinting in the dimming light, he could see that everything above his boy’s mouth was mutilated. A child with no face. Always far enough away from the pathway to be out of reach; haunting his daily nightmares, mangled and alone.

Wolffe was hardened by grief. He was a trained special ops soldier fed by vengeance. As he watched Tertullia’s twin setting suns slip below the skyline, gold and blue blended into a pale emerald. Saluting the launching of the Hammerhead transport, he raised his fist high along with

Captain Navara, Corporal Medeiros, and Private Keeli. These four were all that was left of Gauntlet Team—Tertullia’s finest combat force.

Remnants of their world rained down on them in the form of pulverized ash. Private Keeli placed a hand on Wolffe’s back.

“There is always hope brother,” said Keeli. They gazed upwards together.

Backdrops of galaxies painted the night sky as the suns dipped well below the horizon. The rising civilian transport was armored with interlocking plasma plates wrought out of the core of a star. Each segment of plating shifted fluidly to the belly of the ship to protect against incoming fire from anti-aircraft batteries below. The name *Onward Into Dusk*, stretched along its hulking side in silver lettering, shining in the evening’s pink glow.

The Hammerhead climbed upwards to achieve escape velocity. Medeiros and Keeli began to cheer as the starship careened through the outer atmosphere.

“They might just make it,” whispered Navara.

*Onward Into Dusk* thrust forward with its blazing ion boosters. Véra and Wolffe’s surviving son Isaac were on that ship. He averted his gaze as the rest of the squad stared at the beautiful sight.

“Our blood will live to fight another day, boys,” said Navara.

Wolffe’s knuckles whitened as he gripped his rifle. Right outside of the disc’s protective force field shell, a growing sphere of red light came into terrible focus. A crimson laser ripped downwards through the atmosphere. The superheated death ray imploded *Onward Into Dusk* from within. The bow of the ship separated from the stern as contorted debris came crashing down.

The men became silent as the remains of the cruiser rained down on the ocean and billowed smoke. Jagged hunks of metal crashed into the white froth and disappeared into the depths. Not a single escape pod ejected from the transport. The cloaking mechanism of the Vogrom’s orbital laser had prevented the Tertullians from detecting the impending danger.

Private Keeli disrupted the group’s silence.

“What the hell was that?”

Everyone turned to look at each other for an explanation of what just happened. Wolffe stood silent.

“Orbital laser discharged by the Vogrom——” Captain Navara’s voice broke off, “I—I think it’s best that we bug out of here now.” Captain Navara knew that there was nothing else he could say to Wolffe that would lessen the pain.

“Medeiros. Get the comms relay online so that we can let the General know that we will need immediate evac after mission completion.”

Corporal Medeiros nodded and began scanning the comms channels for a secure connection to the General at Command Post Alpha.

“Sergeant Wolffe...I need you to focus. Keeli—come join us in getting the railgun up and running. We have a job to do.”

Navara and Keeli let Wolffe collect himself while they went away to prepare Delta Outpost’s most important ordnance—an artillery piece with a ten-meter-wide barrel. This cannon could unleash speed-of-light plasma superheated to the temperature of a star. The one drawback was that it took days to fuel, so the operator only had one chance at hitting his target.

Keeli disengaged the railgun’s camouflage. The cloaking mechanism had to be turned off before firing. He turned to Navara and said, “If we save the railgun’s bolt charge for clearing a path, the next civilian transport might stand a fighting chan——”

A loud bang stopped Private Keeli in mid-sentence.

Concentrated radiation had mangled a hole through the discworld’s atmospheric defense shield. A Vogrom Dreadnought warship corkscrewed into the airspace. A blue skyscraper-sized hologram of a gold-crowned prophet projected from the ship. His sneer revealed serrated teeth. In a booming voice that echoed across the ridges and the flatlands, the prophet announced the death sentence of their world.

**“The Great Awakening has begun. Only those who walk the blessed path shall tread upon heavenly soil. The weight of your heresy shackles your feet, and you will all be left behind.”**

A column of light descended from the base of the mountain-sized ship. Navara watched as the Vogrom traveled down the illuminated elevator. The troops assembled their attack formation in the Melmothian Fields bordering New Formosa.

Navara grudgingly approved of how the Vogrom organized their invading army. He saw thousands of their plasma hover-tanks armed with scattershot beams that could neutralize the entire Tertullian fleet of kamikaze drones. Navara saw hover-tank projection arrays targeting threats all around his position on Mount Analog. Vogrom troops in their iron-gray armor jumped off troop transports. These men were the ground force tasked with eliminating civilians.

In retaliation, glowing rounds fired from within the city arced through the air and headed straight for the invading army. A welcome gift from the Tertullians. The Vogrom’s protective shield sparked and flexed from the storm of mortar fire. Navara knew that soon, despite their efforts, New Formosa would be razed until only embers and ash remained. He turned to his technical specialist.

“Medeiros, if we hail General Griggs can our coordinates be tracked?”

“Unsure Captain. I wouldn’t risk the Vogrom tracing the signal though. Navara nodded. At one point in his life, he would have been shell-shocked by the booming sounds of artillery echoing in the distance. Now he had long become conditioned to the repetitive noise of warfare.

When the explosions stopped, he turned and watched the Vogrom’s forces. Something was wrong. The cannons of their artillery rotated and raised upward. The Dreadnought revolved around and sighted its lasers back toward where it had broken through the defense shield.

Bursting through the hole came an Interceptor-class Vogrom ship. It was about half the size of the Dreadnought. Navara shielded his eyes as plasma beams whipped skyward toward the approaching ship.

*The Vogrom ground forces are now firing at one of their own?*

Bolts of plasma bludgeoned the unwelcome Vogrom ship and sent it on a steep downward trajectory. The Interceptor crashed into the base of the valley, crushing hundreds of hover-tanks as it filled the area with a blinding explosion.

As Medeiros started to pack up the communication gear, an unexpected crackling sound projected from each squad member’s comms. The gruff voice of General Griggs broadcasted.

“Hailing Gauntlet Team at rally point Delta. Acknowledge.”

“Copy that General, Captain Navara here.”

“The tide has turned, Vogrom forces are pushing our position on Mount Analog.” There was irritation in his voice. “Even worse, a hijacked Vogrom Interceptor has brought Slavemind upon us. We are initiating a managed retreat of civilians. I need your team to lock down rally point Delta and secure the airspace. We cannot afford to lose all our research. The survival of Project Phoenix depends on you.”

“Understood sir. What is the evac plan?”

“There is none. I expect your team to hold the outpost, no matter the cost.”

Navara’s body got tense and his face flushed red. “With all due respect, where the hell does that leave us?”

“Stand down soldier. You will stay and fight.”

Navara glanced at his men, “So, this is it then.”

The comms went quiet for a brief time, then the General spoke with all the rigidity absent from his voice.

“I wish things could be different, but we have gone down this road too far to be able to turn back. There is no way out that I can offer you.”

General Griggs rose from his seat and started to pace with an uneasy heaviness in his communications bay. He had to get Project Phoenix off Tertullia because it was humanity’s last chance for survival. The Slavemind was ravaging the universe, but it still pained him to send these men to their deaths.

Turning back to his comms relay, Griggs said, “The next Hammerhead transport needs a small window of time to break through the Vogrom’s blockade. I think you know what must be done.”

“Yes sir. You’ll have your window.”

The comms went off with a faint rustling sound. Navara turned to his wide-eyed men and disengaged the safety of his battle rifle.

He gathered Wolffe, Keeli and Medeiros together.

“Brothers, take your defensive positions,” he gestured for them to move with haste. “It’s been an honor serving with you all.”

Navara and Medeiros sprinted for the foxhole downhill of the railgun where the anti-personnel Graveling gun was located. Keeli got into an armored battlesuit, the sleek inside sliding against his skin as it tailored itself to fit his body’s shape. Wolffe watched his comrades as he climbed each rung of the ladder to the railgun’s pilot seat. Reaching the top, Wolffe clambered into the cockpit and looked to see if Keeli had finished setting up his battlesuit.

A hellish whistle screeched above followed by a deafening thud.

Gray and brown debris blasted the area as energy arcs spread out from the direct hit on the foxhole. Though sitting in the railgun’s pilot seat, Wolffe groaned as blood dripped down his face. He had not yet been able to seal the glass canopy of the weapon’s cockpit. A spinning state of semi-consciousness flooded his mind. Through the waves of nausea and despair, something unfamiliar communicated to him in a medium of thought that was neither sound nor telepathy.

**[Death in the mausoleum**

**bleeds and hides, corrodes but provides/**

**alone, you cannot halt the Vogrom/**

**together we will rip out their insides]**

Wolffe tried to speak but could not force the words to come out. He found that his thinking did the talking for him.



—*What are you?*

**[I am what you call the/**

**Slavemind]**

A sharp shock of terror overcame his body. If the Vogrom failed to obliterate all life on Tertullia, the Slavemind surely would. It would kill everything with its army of infected corpses. The Tertullians called these resurrected parasites the Contaminate, as the fungal plague they carried was extremely infectious.

—*What do you want?*

**[The Vogrom must be erased by dirt and time**

**but you cannot fight the darkness alone/**

**you will fail if you take this fight unaided]**

The words lingered until Wolffe's mind cleared. He looked underneath him through the glass canopy. Below the railgun, he noticed the trained movements of a soldier fighting to survive. Silver combat pods had crashed into Delta Outpost, out of which came Vogrom fighters. Keeli fought alone and killed in the way of a possessed berserker. But there was no sign of Navara and Medeiros.

The shields of Keeli's armor shone like a beacon of cyan fire. Where Keeli's arms struck, high energy bursts combusted Vogrom warriors. Incinerated flesh littered the air and the bodies of his enemies crumpled to the ground.

A plasma mortar round struck the base of the railgun, rocking Wolffe and making him lose sight of Keeli for a moment.

A suspended dust cloud obscured the impact site. Then he saw Keeli march out of the gloom. His armor was covered with dirt and coagulated blood, but his rage continued with his gravity shotgun now leveling all enemies within range. Wolffe desperately wanted to help Keeli but he was restrained by the mental chains of the Slavemind.

—*Let me fight! Let go of my mind!*

A soldier ambushed Keeli from behind. Swiveling around, the shotgun delivered a blast that tore apart the man's face. The soldier's teeth and skull sprayed away from the blast like pearls off a broken necklace. Now attacked from the side, the shotgun was kicked out of his grasp as Keeli tried to defend against a new foe. This soldier wrapped his arms around Keeli's neck and crashed with him to the floor. Keeli slashed up with his hand—metal scalpels protruding on his fist—and sliced off his enemy's right ear. But it was too late. Keeli was pinned down. The Vogrom warrior had his arm raised high with a gleaming energy knife. The blade plunged

through Keeli's armor and sunk deep into his chest. Wolffe watched as Keeli's body went still until the obscurity of the dust shifted and blocked his view.

*—Damn you! Damn you to hell!*

**[Patience/**

**there is much talk/**

**and I have listened/**

**through creation and destruction/**

**and now you shall listen]**

This time the vision that Wolffe saw was not directly in front of him but instead in the fields along the border of New Formosa. The Slavemind had full control of Wolffe's thoughts.

He saw Vogrom cruisers and smaller Tertullian attack ships dogfighting as they traded volleys of flame. The nonstop barrages of fire scored the atmosphere with trails of red plasma. Tertullian ships dropped out of the air and smacked into the planet's surface which created giant mushroom clouds. A constant flow of Vogrom reinforcements entered through the punctured defense. They were vastly outnumbered.

On the ground, elaborate defensive Vogrom fortifications had been set up. Thousands of Vogrom crouched and went prone in their designated positions with their Judgment Blasters in hand. Anti-artillery shields, manned rapid-fire turrets and hover-tanks protected the invading army from the capabilities of the Tertullian military.

Or so they thought.

There had been no accounting for the might of the Slavemind. Wolffe saw in his thoughts the thing's skin shift and flex. Harvested human faces revealed themselves and then disappeared into the folds and the contours of the beast. Splintered bones were joined together in what one could call its mouth as it spoke in a gravelly voice.

**[Warriors will howl in the storm of rage/**

**torrents of blood will flow into the abyss/**

**corpses will pile high, the start of a new age/**

**the Father of War commands this]**

The vision tapped Wolffe into the Vogrom communication lines. All he could hear was panicked shouting and chaos. Orders were barked and then the rapid-fire turrets and hover-tanks

launched thousands of hypersonic missiles. Each projectile disappeared harmlessly into the Slavemind.

Silence fell over the lines of communication.

An orbital laser appeared directly above the huge accumulation of the Slavemind's Contaminate. The orbital weapon rained down showers of supercharged bolts. All the energy was absorbed by the shifting body, which unnervingly seemed unscathed.

New last-ditch orders were shrieked across the communication channels. The Vogrom soldiers with their blasters in hand sprinted out of their positions towards the beast. A tentacle of dark red flesh extended from the thing's orifice and swallowed countless bodies of Vogrom soldiers. Its mass flashed in ways that the most advanced military would not be able to predict. One second it had crushed hundreds of hover-tanks. The next it had tossed flailing victims thousands of feet in the air which would burst upon returning to solid ground. Each movement of the Slavemind resulted in the destruction of life. Body parts were separated with graceful violence. Wolffe winced as the screams of absolute terror and intense pain blared in his mind. The deep voice returned.

**[Do not despair, do not run**

**united we fight**

**not as foes, but as one**

**banishing their souls to the land of night]**

The vision *shifted*. Wolffe found himself below the railgun in the obliterated foxhole, with the Slavemind's massacre still audible in the distance. The dismembered bodies of Navara and Medeiros began to show signs of movement. There were reddish muscle sinews braiding under the influence of the Contaminate. Flesh burrowed out their empty sockets and formed what could be called limbs. Their carcasses began to writhe into something that had been brought back to life, joined together in a mass of parasitic humanoid fungus.

The frame of intertwined cords rose to its feet. In the place of a face protruded branches of arteries that resembled a mosquito's proboscis. This abomination of life and death consumed Wolffe's entire perception as its body swarmed over him. The corrupted remains of Navara and Medeiros spoke.

**[Time to cut the thread of the fates/**

**become the soldier of destiny/**

**deliver your enemy to the fiery gates/**

**with the weapon as your key]**

The curtains of this world tore apart as Wolfe's vision disintegrated into a swirling nebula of blood and bone. The colors settled into mirror-like stillness. He felt as if he were floating on the surface of a lukewarm lake that contained the cosmos within its depths. Appearing before him was a giant arboreal system of branches and a single enormous trunk. The roots of the tree seemed to configure themselves into a pulsating heart. As this tree rotated on its axis, it got closer to Wolfe. Distinct figures came into view. Hanging off each rotting branch were corpses. Millions of them. Horrible, corrupted fruit with faces frozen in screams of agony. The tree continued to spin and display to him its terrible ornaments.

As his vision ascended to the top of the tree, he realized that a young veiny limb had connected to his arm. The Slavemind had crowned the tree with his living body. Casting his gaze downwards, he realized that he was levitating over this gigantic plant-like structure. Next to him was a severed branch and a body floating away from the main trunk. The child-sized figure began to spin around.

It was his son, Tom.

His pale boy drifted towards him in faceless horror. Wolfe pulled him close for the first time since he had left to fight on planet Sedna. Examining every gash and wound, he was too stunned to scream. The Slavemind spoke and shattered the crystalline quality of the vision.

**[Only I, the creator of every sun**

**can bring back the forlorn/**

**swear your fealty to me, upon the one you mourn/**

**the one you love, your dead son]**

What was left of Tom's lower lip quivered and released words that tore strands of love off his dad's soul. "Say yes, Daddy."

Tom clutched the same cotton blanket that he had been holding when the murder occurred. He hugged it close. It was no longer white but rather stained by tiny rivers of blood. Wolfe's grip on Tom loosened.

*—I will swear my loyalty. I will do whatever you want if you bring Tom back to me.*

This nether world of dreams began to recede.

"Bring back my family and I will swear my obedience to the Slavemind."

Silence.

"Answer me!" screamed Wolfe.

The weight of reality collapsed back onto Wolffe like a rushing waterfall. Flattened against his railgun seat, the Sergeant gasped for the air that had been sucked out of his lungs. His fingernails dug into the leather armrests as oxygen flowed back into his body. He knew he had to fight for the Slavemind. His only fear was that death would bring him back to that awful dream reincarnated.

Adrenaline coursed through him as he touched his chest and found shards of metal poking out. Watching the Vogrom crowd around below him, the soldier with one ear began to climb the ladder. Wolffe thought about the impossibility of facing them all with only his rifle.

A revolting shriek echoed across the mountain ridge. Through the tree line, a wave of bodies flooded into the Outpost. The soldier without an ear closest to the cockpit began descending the ladder as the rest of his comrades pivoted to face the new enemy. A deformed monster only recognizable as Keeli by the bits of armor suit stuck to its body, began its rage on the battlefield of death. It swung its tangles of flesh full of razor-sharp armor fragments. The one-eared man fell as did all the other soldiers that had encircled Keeli's horrific resurrection.

Barrages of energy bolts erupted everywhere. Wolffe winced as a stray shot flew up into the sky next to where he was sitting. The Vogrom's attention was now completely fixated on handling the forces of the Slavemind. The comms relay on his wrist came to life.

"This is Hammerhead *Endless Spirit*. We have lift off. I repeat, we have lift off."

A ship flew overhead, its ion engines flaring. Defense turrets on its hull revolved around as it shot down flak fired from the ground. But there was one threat that the Hammerhead could not defend against alone.

Hovering in the sky, the main cannon of the Vogrom's Dreadnought warship glowed a murderous red. Wolffe's right hand remained steady on his aiming lever. The railgun inched towards the target—the death machine that was about to annihilate *Endless Spirit*. In the precision sighting screen, Wolffe had lined up the Vogrom's ultimate weapon within the crosshairs of his railgun.

*Please God, let my people's deaths not be in vain.*

Wolffe hit the firing button and a thick strand of plasma lanced through the atmosphere as if a golden arrow had been shot from a god's vengeful bow. A massive hole formed in the side of the Dreadnought and the ship began to contort and twist. The fleeing transport dodged as flak continued to pummel its underside, but no fire came from the Dreadnought. Wolffe could not help but cry when the ship slipped out of view.

He refocused his attention on the excruciating pain in his body. Wolffe pressed his hands on his poorly clotted wounds while blood flowed through the spaces between his fingers. Feeling dizzy and weary, he took one last look at the discworld that he had called home. Thousands of miles away sapphire oceans swirled, and rainforest continents burned.

All Wolffe had left were moments, and in those precious seconds, he thought of his family. He wanted nothing more than to have one last night with Tom to tuck him into bed... One more time to read adventure stories together, turn off the light and send his boy into dreams of spaceships and faraway journeys...

*Please one more hug with Véra and Isaac—*

His eyesight wavered and darkened as blood poured out of his wounds. The last moments of consciousness were filled with scattering flocks of birds as fighter jets screamed overhead. As Wolffe was being pulled into darkness, the relay on his wrist spoke without being heard. It was General Griggs.

“Hammerhead *Endless Spirit* has broken through. I repeat, we have broken through. Gauntlet Team you saved a lot of lives today, and your sacrifice will never be forgotten.”

The glass canopy popped off. A tendril of flesh coiled around Wolffe’s limp body, lifting him out of the railgun and retracting him downwards.

**[This will not be your end]**

#

Wolffe awakened on the cold metal floor of the Slavemind’s Interceptor ship. The voice returned to his mind. It was a guttural chant that reminded Wolffe of monk prayers.

**[Soon the ecstasy of the grave**

**shall be known to all men/**

**for I am the void**

**which binds the slave]**

Rising to a kneeling position, he noticed that the ship was pursuing something. Wolffe looked at one of the ship’s monitors and there, straight ahead, was the fleeing blip of what could only be Hammerhead *Endless Spirit*.

*I need to find a way to stop this thing and still bring my family back to life.*

Bowing his head, Wolffe knew why the Slavemind was chasing the Hammerhead. It was after Project Phoenix which had been stashed onboard. The Slavemind must have discovered that the project’s organoid intelligence had the potential of eliminating the Contaminate.

Something leathery and bristling with sharp hair lifted his chin. Gazing upwards, he stared into a colossal eye that looked like a cursed red opal. A revelation not felt for hundreds of thousands



of years overcame his senses. The same power that filled the consciousness of the human who first discovered fire had been born in Wolffe.

**[Look upon me and behold/**

**a lake of fire blazing with mad heat/**

**stars exploding in great bursts of gold/**

**witness the avatar of death complete]**

The End

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Whether in outer space or on Earth, dangerous ideologies threaten our continued existence. The Weapon touched on this ultimate struggle, exposing the frailty of life and how quickly it can vanish. In order for humanity to survive, the Tertullians must destroy those who are blindly faithful to cults of death.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Aidan Alberts' short stories have appeared in Fiction on the Web, Teleport Magazine, The Chamber, and Interpretations. His story "Promise the Girl," is scheduled to appear in Bewildering Stories. The Karl Lamb short story prize was awarded to him for his story "Hymn." You can read more of his work at his website.

<https://abalbert8.wixsite.com/abafiction>

