

Arc 1 - Intermission 2 - A Major's Perspective I

- PoV: Ukuar Rurix -

Breathing a heavy sigh of relief, Ukuar stepped through the doorway, bathed in harsh, blinding light.

It had been nearly two weeks since the incident that had shaken the entire UHF to its very core: A sudden and deadly invasion of Void Daemons on several ships, including those involved in the ongoing quarterly assessment.

Since then, Ukuar, along with other Majors, had been tirelessly working, sleeplessly searching for any signs of the infiltrating daemons.

The biggest problem that came with them, was that they weren't simple beasts, as most Marines would like to believe. On the contrary, Void Daemons were often highly intelligent, at least when it came to stalking their prey and not getting caught.

This made the search and eradication efforts even more arduous.

The Sovereign's scanners, usually ever-reliable, were unable to detect the presence of these daemons, rendering the technology useless in this task. Consequently, Ukuar and the other Majors had been leading manual search teams, combing through the ship deck by deck, section by section—a dull, daunting and yet similarly dangerous task.

The operation had been far from smooth either.

While they had managed to prevent any permanent fatalities among the Marines, thanks to quick defensive actions preventing the daemons from consuming their victims' Souls, the encounters had not been without significant casualties.

The toll on just his own team was heavy, with casualties well into double digits—an ominous count that weighed heavily on Ukuar, despite his best efforts to chalk it up as lucky outcomes, considering the alternative.

But the gravest news had come just days before, delivered by Captain Cross during a confidential briefing with the Majors: The Monarch, a sister ship of the Sovereign itself, had been completely lost with no survivors; likely ripped apart by the forces of the Void.

Further details on the incident were scant, and there was no solid intelligence on what *exactly* had happened to the Monarch or its Marines. The loss of an entire recruitment ship highlighted the devastating impact of the incident and weighed heavily on everyone involved.

Ukuar had a personal connection to the Monarch too, having served on it for many years in the past. He had formed numerous acquaintances and even forged a few friendships with some of the crew members, making the ship's disappearance particularly distressing for him; making it harder for him to simply accept that this was all that he was going to learn about it's disappearance for the time being.

Walking down a long corridor lined with rooms reminiscent of karaoke booths, he couldn't help but ponder the fate of the ship. These rooms, designated for viewing and spectating within the DDS, were used by higher-ranked officers for both educational and entertainment purposes during the quarterly assessments.

"I can't imagine Captain Diaz would've just surrendered her ship without a truly apocalyptic fight... Just what the fuck could have possibly happened...? A Void Daemon overpowering a Captain like Diaz?" he muttered to himself, scepticism lacing his tone.

He knew of only about a dozen entities within the Void that posed a genuine existential threat to a UHF Navy Captain total, and he hadn't personally encountered any of them—if he had, he probably wouldn't be here to question all of these things in the first place.

Ukuar continued to muse as he walked, "I wonder if Command is keeping more information from us, or if even they are just as in the dark about what really happened as we are..."

The loss was simply too significant to dismiss as just another hazard of Void travel, and it haunted him, prompting his relentless search for answers amidst the bureaucracy and secrets of the UHF.

The losses in the Void were typically modest—few Marines per extensive deployment, a byproduct of the unpredictable nature of Void breaches and the sporadic appearance of Void Daemons among other variables.

However, the recent catastrophe was unprecedented: Nearly a hundred thousand Marines lost, including all Majors aboard, a Navy Captain, and the vessel itself without any obvious clues of enemy involvement—an event completely without precedent in the entire history of the UHF.

Ukuar wasn't alone in his confusion and distress.

Over recent weeks, he'd engaged in endless discussions with his subordinates and fellow Majors, yet no one could offer a coherent explanation for the calamity.

The inability to understand or even describe what had occurred to their own ship—and, by extension, to the Monarch—had everyone on edge.

With no actual enemy to fight; with no idea if this was an isolated incident or not and whether there was something that had actually triggered it to occur; they were all running blind, with the ever-present spectre of complete and utter annihilation hanging over them like an enemy warship ready to unleash its orbital beam at any moment with a faulty SADD as their only means of protection.

Trying to momentarily push aside these daunting thoughts in a bid for some semblance of calm, Ukuar completed his walk to the area reserved for Major-ranked officers.

He hoped for a brief respite, a chance to finally unwind after two brutally exhaustive, long and relentless weeks.

He peered into the spectating booths, his heart sinking as he was met with scenes of utter desolation—much as he had braced himself for.

"Seems we weren't the only ones run ragged by this chaos..." he murmured to himself, the weary chuckle that followed more of a sigh than a sound of amusement.

Upon recognizing the existential threat to their DDS servers, the other ship's Captains had undoubtedly initiated the same emergency protocols as the Sovereign and Captain Cross had: An immediate evacuation of all Majors to confront the imminent threat, followed by a thorough sweep of their respective vessels.

Turning around, he headed back towards some of the lower-ranked viewing rooms and randomly chose the first one he came across that had a decent number of people inside.

As he entered, several Lieutenants started to salute, a reflexive mark of respect, but they quickly remembered the informal nature of the space and relaxed their postures.

The viewing areas, distinctly designed to sideline rank except for access restrictions due to potentially sensitive information being discussed inside, served as communal hubs for sharing the experience of monitoring the ongoing quarterly assessments of the new Recruits and aspiring Privates.

Acknowledging the informal setting, Ukuar responded with respectful nods to the Lieutenants and army Captains inside as he settled into a seat beside a group of Lieutenants who were engaged in a lively discussion about recent developments within the assessment.

This was precisely the kind of distraction Ukuar was seeking: A casual environment brimming with engaging tales and a break from the stern formalities of military hierarchy and the frightening thoughts of potential annihilation looming over all of their heads at any moment.

As Ukuar settled into the conversation, he listened to the varied perspectives of the three Lieutenants discussing the ongoing assessment.

The first Lieutenant, full of enthusiasm, gestured broadly as he spoke. "It's really quite a turnaround they've managed!" he exclaimed. "At the start, it looked bleak, almost a mirror of the actual Nova Tertius battlegrounds. But then, Legate Kuan stepped in with some decisive orders that completely shifted the momentum!"

The second Lieutenant, more sceptical and critical, interjected with a furrowed brow. "Legate Kuan? Really? I'd argue he had very little to do with the strategic successes of the early assault. It was Staff-Sergeant Venn on the eastern front who really turned the tides. He secured our position in the forest and led those crucial infiltrations at the Wall and into Nova Tertius. Legate Kuan just handled the high-level commands. Venn is the true linchpin of the eastern operations, no question."

Meanwhile, the third Lieutenant, dismissive and a bit cynical, leaned back and waved off the previous comments. "Arguing over who gets third and fourth place credit is pointless. The eastern front's been a mess from the start—just scraping by," he scoffed. He then activated a

holographic display that floated between them, showing a tactical overview of the entire assessment area.

"Look here," he pointed, zooming into the western front. "The real game-changers were on the *western* front, not the eastern one. Staff-Sergeants Nyra and Comfire, *they've* been outstanding. They crushed their opposition and even took control of the control stations inside the city easily, and without their successes, we'd have been toast after the eastern front dropped the ball hard on that entire part of the mission."

Ukuar watched as tempers flared among the Lieutenants, each passionately defending their perspective on the assessment's operations.

The first Lieutenant's face flushed with frustration as he locked eyes with his challenger.

"Listen, that Ace showing up at the first control station was a game-changer, Quill! A Zeta-rank Psyker against Tier 1 Marines?! It's *completely* unrealistic to expect them to handle that kind of threat! Had that Psyker been on the western flank, your vaunted Staff-Sergeants would have been just as overwhelmed, I fucking guarantee it!"

"Yeah, and let's not forget the two powerful Tier 1 Psykers they encountered as well," the second Lieutenant added, supporting his comrade. "Do you really think the western front could have managed better under the same conditions?"

Quill, unfazed, shrugged dismissively. "Sounds like a skill issue to me, honestly. A competent commander would hedge their bets. On the western front, they divided their forces to hit multiple targets simultaneously. That way, even if one group encountered overwhelming opposition like an Ace, the mission could still succeed elsewhere. The eastern strategy was too risky, putting all their hopes on one target. They were lucky to achieve even that; barely."

Sensing the conversation was veering into uncomfortable territory, especially for a casual setting, Ukuar cleared his throat to draw attention. The Lieutenants turned towards him, their expressions cooling as they realised they had been overstepping in their debate.

"There's value in each of your insights," Ukuar intervened, his tone firm yet calming. "However, let's keep our discussions civil, especially here in the viewing area."

Chastened, the three Lieutenants nodded, their demeanour shifting to one of embarrassment. They mumbled their apologies, which Ukuar waved off with a gentle hand.

"No need for apologies. This space is for relaxation and thoughtful exchange. Just maintain a more civil tone throughout it, alright?"

Earning himself warm smiles and a few sighs of relief from the Lieutenants, Ukuar decided to seize the moment. "Since I've been out of the loop dealing with the Void Daemon crisis on the Sovereign, I could really use an update. Could you guys recommend some highlights for me to catch up on? I'm especially interested in any notable performances by Marines from my ship, but I'm keen on hearing about any major events. What's been happening while I was away?"

Quill, reclining in his chair and half-focused on his datapad, gestured to another Lieutenant.

"You're up, Zarael. You've been keeping tabs on 'em and gushing our ears off about that Sovereign Squad since the first week. Fill in the Major about their nonsense," he said, a touch of amusement in his tone.

Their exchanged, much-telling glances sent a slight chill through Ukuar.

'What the fuck did they do now...?' he wondered with growing apprehension.

"Absolutely, Major! I'd be glad to," Zarael replied with an eager nod, manoeuvring over the seats to get closer to Ukuar. He swiped on the datapad that was docked in front of him, bringing up the relevant files. "Let's dive right into it with a big highlight: The initial assault on the Wall on the eastern front, just a few days after that whole mess started..."

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Watching the unfolding assault was somewhat surreal for Ukuar.

It brought back memories of countless operations he had been part of during his earlier years in the UHF—days that now seemed beyond distant. Yet, this assault bore innovations and strategic nuances that had not been present during his time on the front lines.

The recent decades had evidently brought significant advancements in military tactics, particularly in how the UHF deployed its Armoured Division.

The use of armoured vehicles to navigate previously impassable terrains was striking.

Massive underground tunnels and extensive trenches were constructed swiftly by specialised squads, providing crucial cover for the infantry, which formed the backbone of the UHF's offensive might.

These enhancements in strategy and execution had Ukuar utterly captivated.

While they did exist to some degree during his time, the difference in scale, timing and professionalism displayed for this assault was unlike anything he had ever dreamt possible during his days.

He couldn't do anything but watch intensely, his eyes tracking every movement of the Marines and every projectile exchanged with the forces of the Stellar Republic.

It was only when the initial chaos of the assault settled into a steady exchange of gunfire—now with the trenches established and the infantry entrenched—that Ukuar's attention slightly waned.

But this lull, too, was short-lived.

Soon, a pressing issue became apparent, one that the ground commanders had also noticed quite quickly after he had: The Stellar Republic's anti-armour cannons were devastating the UHF's armoured divisions, quickly depleting their limited number of heavily armoured vehicles on all sections of the battlefield.

Recognizing the problem, Ukuar watched intently for the UHF's response.

Squads of heavy units systematically targeted and destroyed the anti-armour cannons, utilising stealth and unpredictable movements to minimise their exposure as much as possible.

This tactic, while effective, proceeded slowly and was not without significant loss of life for each and every cannon taken out.

As the UHF units worked to neutralise these critical threats, the defenders on the Wall quickly reorganised their forces as well, focusing on locating and eliminating the squads responsible for the cannon attacks with concentrated firepower of the automatic defences, coupled with entire squads of enemy snipers.

This exchange—of attack, counterattack, and adaptation—was a classic representation of the strategic dynamics that had shaped battlefields throughout human history, unfolding before Ukuar's eyes.

It was a grim yet truly fascinating ballet of war, showcasing the relentless push and pull between opposing forces that he couldn't help but admire.

Ukuar, never having commanded such a complex battlefield himself and unlikely ever to do so, was struck by the sophistication and rapid decision-making required at this level.

Watching the action unfold from a command-like perspective offered him a new appreciation for the strategic acumen required, that was so very different from his own.

He struggled to track even a couple of the heavy units while maintaining an overview of the broader battlefield dynamics.

Meanwhile, the actual commanders, without the benefit of hindsight or the ability to slow down and rewind the action like he did, coordinated over two dozen such squads at the same time. They managed this alongside ensuring continuous tunnel construction, keeping the armoured divisions informed, and maintaining clear objectives for the infantry as well.

'That's impressive, no matter how you look at it...' Ukuar acknowledged internally as he scanned the list of commanders responsible for managing the eastern front.

His gaze paused at a familiar name that had also been mentioned earlier in the Lieutenant's discussions.

'I guess that's why Staff-Sergeant Venn was so highly praised earlier. Not to mention Colonel Thalia's insistence on him requiring all the assets he can get; he really knows how to work 'em,' Ukuar mused to himself, impressed with the tactical acumen.

His name wasn't the only one highlighted of course; no single commander could handle the overwhelming flood of data generated by such a large-scale assault. Yet, being listed among the top indicated that he was crucial in making the pivotal decisions that shaped the course of the battlefield.

As he perused the list of commanding officers, Ukuar suddenly realised that the video feed had stopped unexpectedly—without any input from him. Surprised, he lifted his gaze from the datapad to see Lieutenant Zrael's eyes, which conveyed a mix of excitement and apology.

A single raised eyebrow from Ukuar prompted the Lieutenant to quickly justify his interruption, "Sorry about that, Major, but trust me, you'll want to give your full attention to this next segment. It's the part where the assault takes a different turn from the original assault on Nova Tertius—a very *significant* divergence."

Intrigued by Zrael's assertion and curious about what could warrant such a deviation, Ukuar set aside the list of names and refocused on the datapad. He gestured for Zrael to resume the recording, his interest clearly piqued by the promise of an unprecedented turn in the operation.

Ukuar, having been deeply involved in the committee that had decided the assessment scenario for this year's drive, was intimately familiar with the original Battle for Nova Serene and the subsequent skirmishes on Nova Tertius.

As such, his interest in the supposedly significant divergence was not just marked, but downright fervent as his eyes were glued to the datapad. He continued to watch the battle unfold from the overhead command perspective, trying to find whatever divergence Zrael had mentioned for a number of minutes; without success.

Despite noticing several tactical adjustments, such as the heavy squads more risky strategies and plays in targeting the anti-armour cannons—a move he immediately attributed to Staff-Sergeant Venn's penchant for aggressiveness, especially in assessments—nothing struck him as radically different.

Just as he was getting antsy, figuring that the Lieutenant had simply overhyped something that he, himself, hadn't quite understood as only a minor divergence, a giant streak of plasma suddenly appeared coming from slightly behind the UHF's main infantry line, just as the anti-armour cannon it connected with exploded in a catastrophic, cascading failure that ripped parts of the Wall out and crashed to the ground.

Ukuar leaned forward, his previous scepticism immediately forgotten, as he simply exclaimed, "*What?!*"

From the corner of his eye, he caught Lieutenant Zrael watching him intently, clearly anticipating his reaction with a broad grin plastered across his face—like someone eagerly waiting for a friend to reach the climax of a favourite movie.

Chagrined, Ukuar noticed that immediately after the railgun fired, the area from which the shot originated became the target of intense retaliatory fire. Artillery shells and sniper rounds pummeled the location, kicking up a storm of dust and debris while scorching the earth around the hidden emplacement.

Curious to pinpoint the source of such a powerful strike, Ukuar rewound the footage several seconds and zoomed in on the origin point. His eyes widened as he identified a massive railgun barrel protruding from a hastily constructed foxhole.

"A single *railgun* did that? And at this range...?" he murmured to himself, incredulous at the sheer power of the weapon.

The anti-armour cannons of the Stellar Republic were known for their formidable fortification, reinforced with multiple layers of solid T1 Material—supposedly impervious to anything short of the most powerful ordnance typically reserved for the largest of the UHF's artillery or armoured units.

Yet here it was, a lone railgun on a T1 Battlefield achieving what should have been impossible, breaking through defences designed to withstand severe punishment.

Ukuar replayed the footage, fixated as the projectile carved a blazing trail through the air, briefly illuminating the battlefield around it before the overwhelming counterattack obscured its point of origin once more.

The successful strike on the anti-armour cannon, while a notable divergence from the original battle, seemed minor in the broader context of the assault to Ukuar.

'Impressive, yet still just one down, with like half a dozen more to go in this sector,' he mused internally, reaching to retrieve his datapad for further information about the person behind the shot.

"Major, wait. Keep watching," Lieutenant Zrael interjected, noticing Ukuar's shifting attention.

Raising an eyebrow, Ukuar refocused on the footage.

As the barrage of retaliatory fire gradually ceased, the dust settled revealing no trace of the shooter. What remained was what appeared to be a bunker door sealing off the foxhole.

"Huh...? You're telling me they're still alive...?" Ukuar murmured, intrigued by the shooter's survival against such a brutal counteroffensive.

For a tense minute, the screen showed no movement, testing Ukuar's patience.

Opting for expediency, he fast-forwarded the recording.

Soon, the bunker door began to shift, laboriously unearthing itself from the mound of earth piled atop by the barrage, a testament to the resilience of its construction.

As the door settled back into place, Ukuar half-expected the railgun to reemerge.

Instead, the scene remained static; some gunfire from the Stellar Republic's side returning to pelt the shield.

Confused, he enhanced the zoom and shifted the camera's angle to peer behind the shield.

His eyes widened in surprise.

Inside the foxhole, he spotted two Marines—a defensive heavy bracing the shield against the continued onslaught and a sniper, not preparing another shot but instead furiously digging to expand their cramped hideout.

Ukuar leaned closer to the datapad, his brow furrowed in concentration as he tried to decipher the Marines' actions.

“What the fuck are they doing...?” he muttered under his breath, peering intently as if proximity might offer clarity into the Marine’s mind.

Then, it clicked, and a burst of laughter escaped him involuntarily.

“Are they seriously adjusting the angle of the foxhole to fix the shield alignment, so they won't get buried by the next wave of fire?” he chuckled to himself, shaking his head in amused disbelief.

Lieutenant Zrael, overhearing the remark, turned with a look of surprise mingled with respect. “I’m impressed you caught that, Major,” he admitted, his tone laced with admiration. “It took me several replays to figure out what exactly that Marine was planning. Your experience really shows here, that’s for sure.”

Ukuar’s interest peaked, entertained by the Marine's strategic foresight, “Quite the planner, aren’t they? Preparing for a long haul rather than just the next assault. Let’s see where this leads.”

He watched intently as the footage resumed.

The Marine dug out the far side of the foxhole, angling the shield to better deflect incoming fire and reduce the risk of direct hits; just as Ukuar had expected.

Once the adjustments were made, the familiar silhouette of the railgun reappeared, its barrel cautiously extending.

Ukuar held his breath, his eyes wide with anticipation.

The pause before action stretched, filled with the growing intensity of enemy fire zeroing in on their location, aware now that their initial attempts had failed to neutralise the threat.

Suddenly, the railgun fired, unleashing a dazzling burst of light that streaked across the battlefield and struck another anti-armour cannon, annihilating it spectacularly. The armour, supposedly impenetrable, offered no resistance against the ferocity of the blast at all.

Before Ukuar could fully process this unlikely second success, yet another explosion erupted further along the Wall—a third cannon obliterated in a similar fashion.

“WHAT?!” Ukuar exclaimed, his voice a mix of shock and awe, which only caused Lieutenant Zrael to laugh even louder, delighted by the Major’s reaction to the unfolding events.

As Ukuar frantically rewound the footage, his eyes were locked on the sniper and heavy.

Just as he had expected but still struggled to fully accept, it was indeed their enormous railgun that had fired the second devastating shot.

Quickly, the sniper and the heavy ducked back into the foxhole, securing the solid T1 cover shield above them just as a fierce barrage from the Stellar Republic's forces descended upon their position.

Completely absorbed by the scene unfolding on the screen, Ukuar leaned in closer once again, his focus intense, almost as if by sheer will he could affect the outcome and ensure the survival of the brave UHF Marines caught in the maelstrom of enemy fire.

The retaliatory bombardment on their foxhole only grew fiercer, however, the screen filled with the relentless fury of the Stellar Republic's arsenal.

Each passing second seemed to diminish the likelihood of the Marines' survival, the intensity of the gunfire threatening to overwhelm their defences.

"Do they make it?!" Ukuar blurted out, his voice tinged with urgency. Realizing he might not want the suspense spoiled, he quickly added in Lieutenant Zarael's direction, "Don't you dare fucking tell me!"

His gaze returned to the datapad, eyes tracing every movement within the beleaguered foxhole. He clung to a sliver of hope, silently urging a breakthrough or some miraculous twist that would snatch the Marines from the jaws of death.

Despite the sturdy construction of the cover shield and the strategic positioning the Marines had employed, the unyielding barrage was a formidable adversary. Ukuar knew all too well the limits of even the most robust military equipment against sustained heavy fire.

As Ukuar's hope for the Marines' survival began to rapidly wane, the relentless barrage of gunfire unexpectedly started to diminish.

Zooming out on the datapad, he observed several offensive heavy squads diverting from their assigned tasks of neutralising the anti-armour cannons.

Instead, they were launching a counter-barrage at the sources of retaliatory fire targeting the isolated foxhole.

"Yes! Whoever ordered that, good fucking job! That's what I call quick adjustments!" Ukuar exclaimed under his breath, his praise mingling with the faint giggles of Lieutenant Zarael beside him, who seemed amused by his fervent reactions.

Not only were the offensive squads pivotal, but Ukuar also noticed a team of defensive heavies breaking from the main UHF lines. They manoeuvred towards the embattled foxhole, clearly intent on rescuing the imperilled Marines.

He watched intently, eyes dry from lack of blinking, as the rescue operation unfolded.

Relief washed over him as the two Marines were successfully extracted from what had seemed an inescapable death trap by the protective heavies.

Exhaling deeply, Ukuar turned to share his thoughts with Lieutenant Zrael, but the lieutenant's knowing smile halted him.

His attention snapped back to the screen just as the atmosphere grew ominously dark.

The skies above were suddenly blotted out by a dense barrage of artillery shells arcing from behind the Wall.

"No..." he whispered, aghast.

The defensive heavies, encased in their robust armour, were likely to survive the shrapnel unless directly hit, but the sniper, still clutching the massive railgun, was in dire peril. His heart sank as he realised they stood little chance of reaching the safety of the trenches before the artillery shells found their mark.

His realisation rapidly morphed into pure, unadulterated terror as the first shells unexpectedly detonated a hundred metres above the squad of Marines, setting the entire world ablaze.

"Ignium Shells?! On the eastern front?!" Ukuar erupted, his voice slicing through the chatter in the observation room, too stunned to worry about his outburst. "What in the Emperor's muscular golden asscheeks is this fucking bullshit?!"

Helpless, he could only bear witness as a blanket of all-consuming fire descended upon the squad. Their desperate struggle for survival only led to more tragedy, with defensive heavies succumbing one after another to Stellar Republic sniper fire, explosions, or the rare opening in their armour found by the IgT-Compound.

Amidst the chaos and death, the sniper miraculously remained unscathed, however.

Ukuar struggled to find words to describe the scene unfolding before him.

The Marines' coordination, sacrifice, and improvisational skills of the Marines far surpassed anything he had encountered or imagined possible in a T1 Battlefield.

As the relentless bombardment continued, and the world was engulfed in fiery destruction, Ukuar held his breath once more as the squad edged closer to the relative safety of the trenches.

Though he had anticipated their demise multiple times by now, his experience insisted there was virtually no chance of survival. Yet, against all odds, they had persevered time and time again.

He dared to hope.

Despite his instincts warning otherwise, he hoped fervently for the sniper and the heavies to survive, yearning for their safety with every fibre of his being. He almost wished the

Sovereign would alter the footage to grant them a different fate than the one he knew was most likely, but he refrained.

The Marines' ordeal was their truth, and altering it would betray their sacrifice.

Just as Ukuar had begun to believe in their improbable survival, as they were only mere moments away from the trenches, a massive fireball descended upon them.

The exploding chassis of a shot-down UHF ship crashed onto their position, obliterating the squad in its entirety.

Ukuar collapsed back into his chair, deflating like a balloon, the intensity of the moment leaving him as quickly as it had gripped him. His breath was short, his heart raced—he had been on the edge of his seat, literally standing as the scene unfolded.

"No... not like this," he breathed out, his voice barely above a whisper, weighted with disbelief and a sudden grief as if he had been there, witnessing the tragedy firsthand.

The air felt thick around him, heavy with an unspoken sorrow.

"I can't believe they all died, just before they got there..." he muttered, his gaze lifting to meet Lieutenant Zrael's. Once again, however, he saw that glint in Zrael's eye—the look that hinted the story wasn't quite finished.

With a surge of urgency, hope rekindled in his heart, Ukuar rewound the recording to the moments before the catastrophic crash. His fingers moved with precision, fueled by a mix of hope and desperation, zooming in and navigating the camera angles feverishly.

Then, amidst the chaos of the scene, he caught it—a moment of sheer, desperate bravery.

Just as the ship began its fatal descent, the defensive heavy, who had been at the snipers side since the very beginning, made a last-second decision. In a display of incredible strength, quick thinking and camaraderie, he threw the sniper towards the trenches—a throw meant to save a life at the cost of his own.

"They lived?!" Ukuar exclaimed, his voice a mix of shock and relief. "They... actually fucking lived through all of that?!"

"They did," Zrael confirmed, his voice steady and sure. "The sniper and one other defensive heavy from the reinforcements made it. The sniper lost their railgun, though."

"That was... incredible," Ukuar acknowledged quietly, his respect evident as he nodded towards Zrael, grateful for the lieutenant's insistence on watching the sequence through to the end. "Fantastic recommendation, though now I *really* need to know what the fuck even happened here. And just what kind of monstrous gun was that, anyway?"

Curiosity now piqued beyond the ordeal, Ukuar picked up his datapad and began pulling up information on the Marines involved. As he read the first name on the list, he froze, his expression morphing into one of realisation and exasperation.

The only words that left him as he read the first name on the list were, “Fuck me. Of course it just *had* to be her...”