

“Disposable Hero” Comic Script

Basic script for a short Warhammer 40000 comic, Özgür Özol, 2009

This script for a comic is derived from a Warhammer 40000 campaign and is intended for an artist who is familiar to both the setting and the story. Therefore no detailed background information is supplied here. The script assumes that the artist is already well informed about what is going on in the story (and the reader about the setting). The plot progression grants much freedom to the artist to improvise and the part descriptions are guidelines rather than specifications. Key points on background exposition are provided but they also are left for the artist to smear into dialogues and scenes as he desires. The story is intended for a 30-35 pages comic book. If the plot guidelines are followed, exposition points made clear in dialogues and page goals are not stretched too much; it should provide a comprehensible, dramatically structured and fluent story.

Log Line

A humane Blood Angels veteran sergeant, despite all distractions of the ongoing war, rescues the human slaves from the hands of the evil Necrons.

Story Synopsis

The war for planet Jadus-3 is in full swing. Blood Angels are struggling to wrest control of the planet, its inhabitants and rich crystal deposits from the hands of the Tau Empire. The Tau, although unaware, are being supported by hidden Necron forces, who have their own agenda. Ancient Necron tombs are scattered all along the crust of the planet and the precious “Xeber-Cett” crystals that the imperium and Tau are warring over are in fact, the only things that keep the Necrons from awakening planet wide. As the crystals are mined and transported off-planet, the Necron threat rises and rapidly overwhelms both human and Tau, flinging the planet into disarray. This is the story of one space marine in this war, who struggles between a cold sense of duty and his pressing humanity.

Characters

Sergeant Mahan

A Blood Angels veteran of many battles, Mahan is the typical Blood Angel sergeant without a helmet. Long, dark haired and pale, he is a great warrior, looking greater in his ancient power armor, wielding a mighty power fist and a master crafted bolt pistol. He has been leading a tactical squad of space marines for thirty years. His tactical grasp and courage is renowned and he is well respected amongst all his brother marines. Although his hesitating manners on treating civilians as expendable in dire situations roused some suspicion, Mahan is generally viewed as a trustworthy and responsible squad leader.

Captain Michael

Michael is a bald space marine, with a chest extremely large even without his power armor. His single eye looks sharp enough to make anyone comply instantly so his other eye being bionic does not really matter. Michael has been a Blood Angel for nearly three hundred years now and he has been trusted by an entire company of space marines for decades. His iron rule and strict sense of duty is legendary as his unapproval of disobedience.

Lord Benu

Lord Benu is an ancient metallic monster who slightly resembles a human skeleton made of gold. An entity confined in the resemblance of his former self -his immortal body- he has been dormant for sixty million years. As the crystals that held him that way were mined and the psychic wards grew thin, he began to shudder. For the last hundred years he had been somewhat sleepy but as he awakens, his century-spanning plans are set in motion. Being a digital ego hardwired into a skeleton made of living metal, he shows no emotion whatsoever, knows neither fear nor desperation and clearly has no conscience. He is an ingeniously built, cold, emotionless, immortal entity who thinks he is perfect. And probably he is right.

Til

An unruly she-warrior, athletic, somewhat attractive. Moody and gloomy, she is usually dressed and camouflaged suitable for the red desert. She uses the shotgun to good effect and is an explosives expert. Til had been with the resistance from the start. For the last two years, she successfully led a small band of scouts around Bishenburg, harassing the Tau forces constantly. After the coming of the Blood Angels, she is one of the few human scouts that had stayed in duty. She tries to stay out of the way and concentrates on helping the humans those are ignored and considered “disposable” by the marines.

Techpriest Flick Baustein

More machine than man, this techpriest from Mars looks like a mechanical joke from a distance. His one arm is replaced by multipurpose utility servos and there are two adamantium claws instead of his feet. When he does not wear the hood of his priestly robe, the metal plating covering half of his head and face shines as if newly polished. Being a strange and distant man, he knows many hymns to compel to the spirits of machines than many of his colleagues. If he were to have friends at all, they would probably define Techpriest Baustein as a man “cold as iron”.

Brother Charum

The heavy weapons adept of Mahan’s squad and his oldest friend, Charum is fairly the average space marine. As stubborn looking as his ancient heavy bolter, he is known for bickering to the old battle wound crossing his crippled eye when firing at something. His close friendship with Mahan is renowned and he is the only space marine that has no doubts on the sergeant’s hesitations about the expendable civilians recently.

Part 1: The Briefing (1 page)

Rhino interior, en route to mission

Sergeant Mahan is briefing his squad. They are deployed north of Bishenburg to investigate an unexpected distress signal received from an Ultramarines ship. Hostile Tau forces are expected to be around.

They pass by a ruined Ultramarines rhino. The damage does not seem to be from Tau weaponry but cannot be identified. Also, the meddling to their signals as they approach the site is much stronger than Tau jamming.

Exposition

1. There is an ongoing war between Blood Angels and Tau for the control of the planet. Human scouts of the resistance often help them against the Tau because Blood Angels scouts cannot keep up to all demands.
2. Ultramarines cruiser “Glorificus” has sent brief distress signals and communication was severed instantly. The mission is to secure the crash landing site off the Tau.
3. Scout reports indicate large chunks of Xeber-Cett crystals in the vicinity, so frag grenades should be used with caution.
4. An example of Brother Charum’s role as sidekick is revealed.

Part 2: Carnage (2 pages)

Glorificus landing site, littered Xeber-Cett chunks, Dusk

Mahan's squad is battling Tau pathfinders under the grand shadow of the Glorificus. After some exchange of shots, as the marines launch an assault under the fire support of their rhino, a devilfish gathers the Tau and cuts tail promptly. The marines are greeted by the human scouts of Til. One of her scouts is heavily wounded and a marine has just taken a flesh wound from Tau fire. Mahan reports to base and rushes to the aid of the wounded human, instead of his marine brother. The man dies as they struggle to aid. Mahan has fought alongside Til before, so after a brief greeting and thanking, the marines dissolve into combat squads and enter the cruiser. No resistance is met in the ship. They encounter many Ultramarines corpses, slaughtered ruthlessly, but the ship is unharmed. While pondering about the situation the auspex of Charum receives a faint signal followed by a gunshot. They pursue it off the ship and see that Til had taken a shot at an unidentified intruder. It seems to have escaped and got lost in the desert shadows. Although Til is sure that "the flying robot thing" has been hit and even fallen down, there is no blood.

Exposition

1. This engagement is one of the many that they have had in the past months. They are used to battling Tau.
2. Til and Mahan know and respect each other.
3. The captain (via commlink) is not really happy with Mahan's choice. Aiding the mortally wounded human before his scratched brother is not the first time, it seems.
4. The ship is not damaged. This is not a crash-landing. The ship's machine spirit would not respond and no records can be accessed. Obviously, the Tau did not do this to the ship.

Part 3: Techslaves (3 pages)

Patrol mission, outer slums of Bishenburg, mild sandstorm

Mahan and his squad are spread, exploring the ruined slums with Til's men. Sounds of battle echo from some places across the city (versus Tau). Til has found the body of two children (half crude machine - half human, starved to death) near an abandoned manufactory and she is contemplating with Mahan.

Suddenly Eldar appear out of nowhere. The farseer readily explains that they mean no harm and they are here to gather some crystals stuffed inside. After fierce insistence of Mahan, the farseer flouts that the Xeber-Cett crystals are the only thing that is keeping a large number of Necrons asleep under the planet's surface. If the crystals were to be removed, unimaginable numbers of killer robots would overwhelm the planet. The mining operations of the ignorant Tau should be delayed and the secret base of the Necrons in the Crimson Haunts should be destroyed before it is too late.

By the help of Til's scouts, Mahan's squad assaults the facility, only to find out that the place had been abandoned except Tau drones all of which fight much more efficiently and aggressively than any they have ever seen before. The marines discover that the human serfs left behind by Tau are being transformed into servitors and that all of this operation has been led by a human techpriest. Although the farseer demands that they assault the storerooms, they are outmatched and decide to hold back. Despite orders from the captain to demolish the place, Mahan insists on rescuing the slaves. They manage to rescue the pitiful humans and human-machines before disengaging against overwhelming odds (war-drones). The operations cannot be halted and the techpriest evades the marines. The farseer rants somewhat and the Eldar mysteriously disappear.

Exposition

1. They have found this place by tracking similar jamming reports they had received.
2. Til knows many of the captured humans.
3. Charum supports Mahan when he refuses to blow up the place.

Part 4: The Edge (2 pages)

Blood Angels Headquarters, Bishenburg, Night

Mahan's men and a squad of assault marines are preparing for a night assault against the manufactorum. The mission is to enter the ruined complex and Rescue & Terminate. The assault squad is undermanned, their veteran is injured in a recent scuffle against a krootox and they are not happy about removing their jump packs either. Brother Charum tries to ensure them about the tactical expertise of Mahan.

Mahan and Cpt. Michael are briefing and arguing. The captain is angry about the wounded marine incident and would rather send some other squad, not Mahan again. But the Tau has been pressing hard and now with the Glorificus also on his hands, all the veteran sergeants are engaged across the sector. Alas, he can only afford one undermanned assault squad as backup. He would rather wait for dawn and deploy more squads (especially scout squads instead of those punks, by the Emperor) but he also knows that Mahan is right about being hasty. (This makes him angrier though given that they could have blown the place then and there)

A rhino and a razorback set out into the dark, ruined cityscape.

Exposition

1. There have been some minor conflicts between the Blood Angels and Eldar in the past weeks.
2. The Tau has abandoned so many places like this after the arrival of the marines, including some crystal mines.
3. The Dark Angels cruiser "Redemption" orbiting the planet is of no use to anyone but itself.
4. The techmarines had explored Glorificus and are confused. The ship seems unharmed but despite all their rituals, the machine spirit would still not respond. Half of the registered marines' bodies could not be found and the other half seems to be killed by the ship's automated defenses.
5. The Xeber-Cett crystals had always been the focus of this war. Now that the Eldar also claim them, the crystals' significance rises.

Part 5: Spook House (3 pages)

They arrive at the manufactory to find an Eldar raiding party battling the drones and pressing in. The rhino crashes down a wall and the marines join the fray. After some fighting in the halls and corridors, Mahan notices drones killing the imprisoned human slaves. He orders the assault squad to engage and rescue while his squad presses deeper with the help of Til's men to the lower levels.

When they reach some kind of laboratory, another battle ensues against human war-servitors backed up by some Necron warriors. The laboratory is filled with containers encapsulating disgusting human bodies and there are many experimental cyborgs shivering on workbenches. Bolter and Gauss fire makes a mess of the laboratory and as the victorious marines press in, it begins to look more like a spook house.

After only a brief salvaging and examining period, self destruction takes in. They merely get out ahead of the flames, only to see the techpriest fly towards the Crimson Haunts riding a weird anti-grav vehicle. Mahan orders the assault marines to take the rescued hostages back to HQ and send support to the desert. His rhino makes after the techpriest, followed by an angry Til's riff raff multi-purpose half track scouting mad max vehicle.

Exposition

1. Mahan is annoyed and detested from what he sees in the laboratory more than any other space marine. Til vomits when she sees her ex-fiancée in some gruesome state.
2. Cybernetics is part of the imperial culture, both despised as a deformity but also frequently utilized simultaneously.

Part 6: Crimson Haunts (6 pages)

Rhino, rocky red desert, day

As they traverse the rocks, they had been listening to a captured skull servitor’s records. The journal entry detailing the hopes of Baustein to create the perfect body for the perfect human mind (flesh is cursed) is interrupted by a comm-message. Unexpected Dark Angels forces insist that they should halt and turn back before entering their territory. Some arguing ensues and the warning shot of a land speeder immobilizes the rhino. Furious, Mahan curses the Dark Angels, considers the possibility to embark on the piece of junk that Til has been driving and decides to continue on foot.

Caves complex inside the rocky cliffs

The squad follows some faint signals emerging from Dark Angels transmitters for some time and reaches great caves. Reaching deeper, they spread out to many tunnels. (The Part may begin somewhere at this point, exposing the previous information briefly) One of the combat squads reports a weird finding – an ancient bolter- and is immediately ambushed by Necrons. (Flayed ones) By the time the other squad reaches them, two marines are down and the Necrons retreat. Nothing can be done for the killed marines but the fighting had caved in a part of the rocky walls and a secret way is revealed. Til arrives and reports that both of his men are missing, forcing Mahan to make a decision. He drags the fallen marines out, leaves an auto-transmitter for the support forces to find them and rushes after the retreating Necrons to rescue the captured men.

Necron slave pens

The caves rapidly expand into an underground base. Shots and screaming humans can be heard ahead and the marines wade their way fighting Necron warriors (improvise the fight). As they reach a great hall, the multi-levelled hall is in turmoil. Many human slaves can be seen trying to make their escape, some cowering in fear, some captured and some slaughtered by the Necrons. Mahan notices a squad of victorious Dark Angels marines on a platform below, pulling away from the Necrons and dragging Til’s two captured men but no one else with them. They do not wait for Mahan’s squad, make no explanations, but only warn them about another imminent attack and then retreat from another exit below. Mahan’s remaining men and Til are left in the firefight and cannot follow (improvise the firefight keeping in mind the loose slaves – Charum should get wounded covering Mahan).

Winning the fight, the Blood Angels tend to Charum’s wounds while Til and Mahan discuss the situation. Although she insists on following the Dark Angels, Mahan has faith on the marines and instead considers pressing on deeper. He takes the chance and makes comm contact with the captain. When he reports, he is scolded thoroughly for leaving the fallen marines behind and is ordered to stay there and wait for support.

Exposition

1. The Dark Angels are notorious for minding their own business while others suffer.
2. One of the captured men is Til’s brother.
3. Fallen space marine bodies are not to be left behind before their gene-seeds are removed.

Part 7: The Traitor (3 pages)

Necron slave pens

Mahan watches in desperation as the loose slaves are herded back together and transported far below. His squad had faked a retreat and the Necrons are not aware of their presence. Til grumbles for some time but when she notices the furtive techpriest overseeing the slave transport, she can hold no more. She slips away and makes her approach towards the unready man. She reveals herself leaping at the techpriest only to find out her strength is puny against his cybernetics. Mahan watches in dread as she is plunged to a corner and the Necrons start to make for her. His indecision is rubbed off by Charum. The marine appears on the catwalk with his heavy bolter and lays down a supporting fire, encouraging Mahan to leap in simultaneously.

The Necrons who wish to react to his assault are struck down by the fire of the squad while Mahan wrestles the techpriest (improvise the scuffle if necessary) As the squad blows apart the last of the present Necrons, Til is saved and the techpriest captured.

Baustein is interrogated briefly but he would not give away much information except: The pitiful Eldar could not manage and The One Who Sleeps has awakened. With his new ship, his salvation is inevitable. Mankind's pursuit of greatness is coming to an end, only if they would acknowledge that their flesh is cursed. Someday mankind will thank him for his selfless efforts, when this bigoted system amends.

About the bolter labeled to "Xeber" he laughs and states that they have no idea what they have gotten into. He does not reply to questions about the marking on the hilt stating that the bolter was forged in Caliban nor the resemblance of this marine's name with the renowned crystals that make this planet significant.

Commlink from the support troops interrupt the interrogation. Help has arrived.

Exposition

1. Techpriests are a secretive and occult organization whose loyalties lie to Mars before Terra.
2. The Dark Angels are a secretive and mysterious chapter. The inscription on the bolter is impossible, unless the weapon were forged at their home world that had been destroyed ten millennia ago.
3. The conversation should end (come to an abrupt end, that is) while the subject is "flesh is cursed", not the bolter.

Part 8: Lord of the Machines (4 pages)

Necron slave pens

Reinforcements have arrived at the pens and evacuation of the slaves is to begin when another Necron assault begins. Captain Michael is scolding to Mahan and Charum as reports of ambushes from all over the caves start piling in. The slave pens burst into turmoil once more as shooting and screaming starts. As the captain orders gradual retreat, a wall bursts open and an Ultramarines dreadnaught joins the fray. In the chaos of the cave-in, the techpriest manages to escape. The marines are shocked by the friendly assault and many are killed before they know what hit them. A vicious fight versus the giant walker ensues. While the captain tries to communicate with the armored behemoth, Necron forces hold back, as if amused of the situation. The dreadnaught fights furiously, his s'peakers begging for the mercy of the emperor for killing fellow brother marines at the same time. The only exit for the slaves and some marines that are in the pens are cut out.

Til notices the Necron Lord atop a catwalk across the hall first. The dreadnaught seems to bend to the will of the mighty Necron, mimicking the movements of his metallic body. Suddenly the marines realize what is happening. And what had happened to the Glorificus.

The captain calls in for Techmarine Hamaliel but the the techmarine reports that he is locked in combat. Frustrated, the captain watches the walker's flamer to scorch some slaves and orders retreat of the marines. As he murmurs of "no hope", Mahan starts out. Ignoring the captain's orders about not harming the venerable relic of a fellow chapter, he reaches the dreadnaught and destroys it with a melta bomb. (Improvise the details of the struggle)

The Necron Lord bellows in anger and his warriors start the advance. But the marines manage to rescue much of the slaves and fall back in order.

Exposition

1. Mahan and Charum have done this before, during the Maandale Crusade.
2. A dreadnaught is the ultimate combination of man and machine available in human technology.

Part 9: Bionic Eye of the Tiger (3 pages)

Peaks of the crimson haunts, dawn

The Glorificus lands somewhere in the Crimson Haunts at dawn without crew. The Necrons are preparing for extraction but are aware that the enemy would not give up without an attempt of stopping them. Lord Benu is watching hordes of Xeber-Cett crystals boarding the ship meanwhile defensive troops take positions in the valley below, next to the monoliths. He answers some of the many questions of Flick Baustein, who is standing at a respectful distance and calling him "exalted master". The conversation reveals: Lord Benu's plan was leaving this planet all along. They are waiting for the last horde of crystals gathered from the now abandoned Tau depots to arrive. He will be using the crystals himself later. Glorificus is ready to take off and will be sufficient to carry all of his forces to safety. He is angry at the Tau for leaving a little earlier than he had expected but they had unknowingly served him so well that they are not to be punished as a reward. His only remaining concern is the Blood Angels, who are sure to arrive and pitifully try to make a stand.

Thunderhawk interior

Captain Michael is briefing the squad leaders en route. They have a single goal: Glorificus is to be destroyed. As the squads are assigned to specific tasks, it is clear that Mahan is punished and is held as reserve. After the tasks are assigned, space marines take positions in rhinos and drop pods. After some close up belt-buckling, knife sheathing scenes and unnecessary cartridge clanking backed up by any necessary conversation, they begin to sing hymns of victory in the name of the emperor.

Exposition

1. Some weeks had passed after Mahan's return. His squad never deployed during this time.
2. The Tau had been defeated and their fleet is leaving day by day, many harassed and some destroyed by the orbiting Dark Angels cruiser, Redemption.
3. The Dark Angels gave only so much help against the Tau and they have retreated into orbit. After the captain's fierce argument with their commanding officer about the warning shot incident and their abandoning of his men, relations have been aloof. Now, the Dark Angels claim to have suffered overwhelming casualties and the only support they are offering is to try to prevent the Glorificus from taking off. Even this help came with the price of handing the ancient bolter to them.
4. The Eldar had made contact and stated that the importance of impeding the cruiser's take off is "beyond the comprehension of human mind".

Part 10: The Battle (3 pages)

Upland Crimson Haunts, dawn

The battle is joined and in full swing. Mahan and his squad are watching the battlefield from behind the front lines. Flux arcs of the Necron monoliths light the valley as the Blood Angels' assault gain momentum. On the upper rocks, the silhouette of the Glorificus and the Eldar grav tanks trying to damage her can be seen. Occasionally, when the rumbling of guns temporarily gets silent, the screams of crowds inside the cliffs can be heard.

After battling for almost half an hour (improvise if length is necessary), the assault of the marines eases. As the last Eldar grav tank is shot down, the mighty engines of the Glorificus start to roar. Captain Michael calls in for reserves and the remaining two rhinos rumble onto the field of battle. Their mission is clearly stated from the commlink: They are to ignore any enemy or casualties and head directly towards the ship.

On the way, the rhinos launch their hunter-killers and hit the cruiser to no visible effect. While passing the rocky cliff where hundreds of slaves are stuck behind bars, their yelling and begging for salvation from the coming explosion becomes impossible to ignore. Both squads are fully aware that there is no way for them to reach the cruiser in time. But the captain would not listen to the comments of neither sergeant and repeats that the Necrons have been retreating en masse to the cruiser and they have little time left.

As he gets more and more nervous, Mahan notices a familiar sight at the cliffs. The riff raff vehicle of Til, struggling to traverse the rough surface towards the slave crowd.

After a short moment of hesitation, Mahan and Charum both disembark off the still speeding rhino. They climb the cliff under the fire of some retreating Necron destroyers. They meet Til in front of the giant bars that are holding the slaves. The crowd is yelling in panic about an imminent explosion. The Space Marines manage to move the bars and Mahan's power fist merely lifts it. The slaves pour out, scurrying towards the desert. Mahan orders Til and Charum to take them to safety. After a brief arguing, Charum obeys his unobedient friend's order and leads them into the narrow caves which the destroyers cannot follow. As the Glorificus takes off, Mahan notices that the rhinos are still very far away from reaching it, and smiles. He manages to let the last slave escape before the trap detonates but he is torn apart with all the rocks around him by the fire of gauss cannons.

Charum and Til turn back, only to see the cliff explode into a great avalanche.

Part 11: Disposable Hero (2 pages - Optional)

Ruined central square of Bishenburg, Day

A crowd has gathered amongst the ruins of Bishenburg for the funeral ceremony of one space marine. They have been told repeatedly that the funerals of fallen space marines are to be held in the chapter but they would not listen.

As the Captain and Brother Charum watch, the crowd led by Til brings out a riff raff monument and raise it at the centre of the ruined square. The monument reads "for all the disposable heroes of this war".