

# WELCOME TO THE BLACK LIBRARY SAMPLER

## WHAT IS BLACK LIBRARY?

Black Library produces adrenaline-fuelled fiction set in the worlds of Warhammer 40,000, Warhammer Age of Sigmar and The Horus Heresy.

Based on tabletop strategy games that have been entertaining people for more than thirty years, these diverse and detailed universes are a unique take on fantasy and science fiction that blends high-octane action with strong character drama and a twist of bleak nihilism and dark humour that creates something that appeals to millions of people worldwide.

## WHAT DOES BLACK LIBRARY DO?

Black Library tells stories set in these wide-ranging universes, in both prose and audio formats. Across novels, novellas, short stories, audiobooks and audio dramas, there are a vast range of stories available, covering every aspect of life in a war-torn cosmos, from the adventures of inquisitors – lone agents working to hold back the tide of darkness within a crumbling empire – to tales of galactic war and sacrifice on a grand scale.

Whatever type of story you're looking for, there's something for everyone within the Black Library, available across digital and physical formats, and for sale through Black Library directly, as well as on Amazon and iBooks.

## WHAT'S IN THIS SAMPLER?

Within this sampler, you'll find extracts from four Black Library novels, each of them the first book in a series and a great starting point for new readers. Each extract will also have a brief introduction about the series and what you can expect from it.


You'll also find a complete short story from the New York Times-bestselling Horus Heresy series – just one of the more than five hundred short stories that Black Library currently produces as eBooks, with more released every week.

Prepare to take your first steps into the worlds of Warhammer – it's going to be quite a ride.





# WHAT ARE THE SETTINGS?



For untold aeons, the Mortal Realms have suffered under the lash of Chaos. Seven magical lands have been conquered by the followers of the Dark Gods, leaving the free peoples scattered and broken. But now the gates to the eighth realm have opened and the celestial armies of the God-King Sigmar have emerged to take back the Mortal Realms. The Stormcast Eternals have come.

The Age of Sigmar has begun.

## THE HORUS HERESY™

It is the 31st millennium. Under the benevolent leadership of the Immortal Emperor, the Imperium of Man has stretched out across the galaxy. It is a golden age of discovery and conquest. Set 10,000 years before the timeline of Warhammer 40,000, the Horus Heresy series tells of the galaxy-spanning civil war that threatens to bring about the extinction of humanity as the traitorous Warmaster Horus turns his forces against his father, the Emperor. As the flames of war spread across the galaxy, mankind's champions will be put to the ultimate test, as brother faces brother and the universe trembles to the beat of war.



In the grim darkness of the far future, mankind battles for survival in a galaxy torn asunder by bloodshed and destruction. Humanity teeters on the brink of extinction, assailed on all sides by aliens, traitors and daemons, and only the superhuman strength of the Space Marines and the uncountable soldiers of the Imperial Guard stand between the slaving alien hordes and total annihilation.





# THE BEAST ARISES

## THE BEAST ARISES: I AM SLAUGHTER

*It is the thirty-second millennium and the Imperium is at peace. The Traitor Legions of Chaos are but a distant memory and the many alien races that have long plagued mankind are held in check by the Space Marines. When a mission to exterminate one such xenos breed on the world of Ardamantua draws in more of their forces, the Imperial Fists abandon the walls of Terra for the first time in more than a thousand years. And when another, greater, foe strikes, even the heroic sons of Rogal Dorn may be powerless against it. The Beast Arises... and it is mighty.*

The Beast Arises was a bold experiment in serial storytelling undertaken by Black Library in 2016. The idea was to tell a single story across 12 novels, with one released each month over a year. Inspired by comic book event series, The Beast Arises took a similar approach, with a different author for each novel, adding character and depth to a storyline sketched out by the editorial team.

The story is set 9,000 years before the “present day” of Warhammer 40,000, allowing the authors to change the setting in unexpected ways and deliver twists and turns that no one will see coming. It charts a massive invasion by brutal aliens who have evolved into a much larger and more organised threat than mankind’s Imperium could have imagined. The Beast Arises also has a strong political element, with the twelve High Lords of Terra – the de facto rulers of the Imperium of Man – fighting amongst themselves for power even as Earth itself is threatened...

For the first book in the series, superstar author Dan Abnett – himself no stranger to writing comic book event series – stepped up and delivered a story that’s by turns action-packed, terrifying and tragic. Right out the gate, he shows the massive stakes that define the series and delivers action set pieces on a dizzying scale, as well as completely redefining a well known Space Marine Chapter in a way that’s imaginative, but fits perfectly with their history.

But don’t take our word for it: read on and see for yourself...







# I AM SLAUGHTER

DAN ABNETT

## EXTRACT

The Chromes were relatively easy to kill, but they came in ferocious numbers.

Eight walls of Imperial Fists boxed one of their primary family groups into a scrub-sided valley east of the blisternest, and reduced them to burned shells and spattered meat.

Smoke rose off the hill of dead. It was a yellowish air-stain composed of atomised organic particulates and the backwash of fyceline smoke. According to the magos biologists sent to assist the undertaking, sustained bolter and las-fire, together with the chronic impact trauma of blade and close-combat weapons, had effectively aerosolised about seven per cent of the enemy's collective biomass. The yellow smoke, a cloud twenty kilometres wide and sixty long, drained down the valley like a dawn fog.

The magos biologists told Koorland this as if the fact had some practical application. Koorland, second captain of Daylight Wall Company, shrugged. It was a non-fact to him, like someone saying the shape of a pool of spilled blood resembled a map of Arcturus or Great-Uncle Janier's profile. Koorland had been sent to Throne-forsaken Ardamantua to kill Chromes. He was used to killing things. He was good at it, like all his company brothers and like every brother of the shield-corps. He was also used to the fact that when things were killed in colossal numbers, it left a mess. Sometimes the mess was smoke, sometimes it was liquid, sometimes it was grease, sometimes it was embers. He didn't need some Terra-spire expert telling him that he and his brothers had pounded the Chromes so hard and so explosively that they had vaporised part of them.

The magos biologists had a retinue of three hundred acolytes and servitors. They were hooded and diligent, and had decorated the hillside with portable detection equipment and analysis engines. Tubes sniffed the air (this, Koorland understood, was how the magos biologists had arrived at his seven per cent revelation). Picting and imaging devices recorded the anatomies of dead and living Chrome specimens alike. Dissections were underway.

'The Chromes are not a high-factor hostile species,' the magos told Koorland.

'Really?' Koorland replied through his visor speakers, obliged to listen to the report.

'Not at all,' the human said, shaking his head, apparently under the impression that Koorland's obligation was in fact interest. 'See for yourself,' he said, gesturing to a half-flayed specimen spread-eagled on a dissection stand. 'They are armoured, of course, around the head, neck and back, and their forelimbs are well formed into digital blades—'

'Or "claws",' said Koorland.

'Just so,' the magos went on, 'especially in sub-adult and adult males. They are not harmless, but they are not a naturally aggressive species.'



Koorland thought about that. The Chromes – so called because of the silvery metallic finish of their chitin armour – were xenosbreed, human-sized bugs with long forelimbs and impressive speed. He thought about the eighteen million of them that had swarmed the valley that afternoon, the sea of silver gleaming in the sunlight, the swish of their bladed limbs, the *tek-tek-tek* noise they made with their mouthparts, like broken cogitators. He thought of the three brothers he'd lost from his wall during the initial overwhelm, the four taken from Hemispheric Wall, the three from Anterior Six Gate Wall.

Go tell them *not naturally aggressive*.

The Chromes had numbers, vast numbers. The more they had killed, the more there were to kill. Sustained slaughter was the only operational tactic: keep killing them until they were all dead. The rate at which the Imperial Fists had been required to hit them, the duration, the frenzy – no damn wonder they aerosolised seven per cent of their biomass.

'Chromes have been encountered on sixty-six other worlds in this sector alone,' said the magos biologis. 'Twenty-four of those encounters took place during compliance expeditions at the time of the Great Crusade, the rest since. Chromes have been encountered in large numbers, and have often defended themselves. They have never been known to behave with such proactive hostility before.'

The magos thought about this.

'They remind me of rats,' he said. 'Rad-rats. I remember there was a terrible plague of them down in the basements and sub-basements under the archive block of the Biologis Sanctum at Numis. They were destroying valuable specimens and records, but they were not, individually, in any way harmful or dangerous. We sent in environmental purge teams with flame guns and toxin sprays. We began to exterminate them. They swarmed. Fear, I suppose. They came flooding out of the place and we lost three men and a dozen servitors in the deluge. Unstoppable. Like the sub-hive rats, the Chromes have never behaved this way before.'

'And they won't again,' said Koorland, 'because when we're finished here they'll all be dead.'

'This is just one of a possible nineteen primary family groups,' said the magos biologis. He paused. Koorland knew that the magos intended to address him by name, but, like so many humans, he found it difficult to differentiate between the giant, transhuman warriors in their yellow armour. He had to rely on rank pins, insignia and the unit markings on shoulderplates, and that information always took a moment to process.

The magos biologis nodded slightly, as if to apologise for the hesitation.

'–Captain Koorland of the Second Daylight Wall–'

'I'm second captain of the Daylight Wall Company,' Koorland corrected.

'Ah, of course.'

'Forget about rank, just try to remember us by our wall-names.'

'Your what?'

Koorland sighed. This man knew more than seemed healthy about xenosbreeds, but he knew nothing about the warriors built to guard against them.

'Our wall-names,' he said. 'When we are inducted, we forget our given names, our pre-breed names. Our brothers bestow upon each of us a name that suits our bearing or character: a wall-name.'

The magos nodded, politely interested.

Koorland gestured to a Space Marine trudging past them.

'That's Firefight,' he said. 'That brother over there? He's Dolorous. Him there? Killshot.'

'I see,' said the magos biologis. 'These are earned names, names within the brotherhood.'

Koorland nodded. He knew that, at some point, he'd been told the magos biologis' name. He hadn't forgotten because it was complicated, he just hadn't cared enough about the human to remember it.

'What is your name, captain?' the magos asked brightly. 'Your wall-name?'

'My name?' Koorland replied. 'I am Slaughter.'





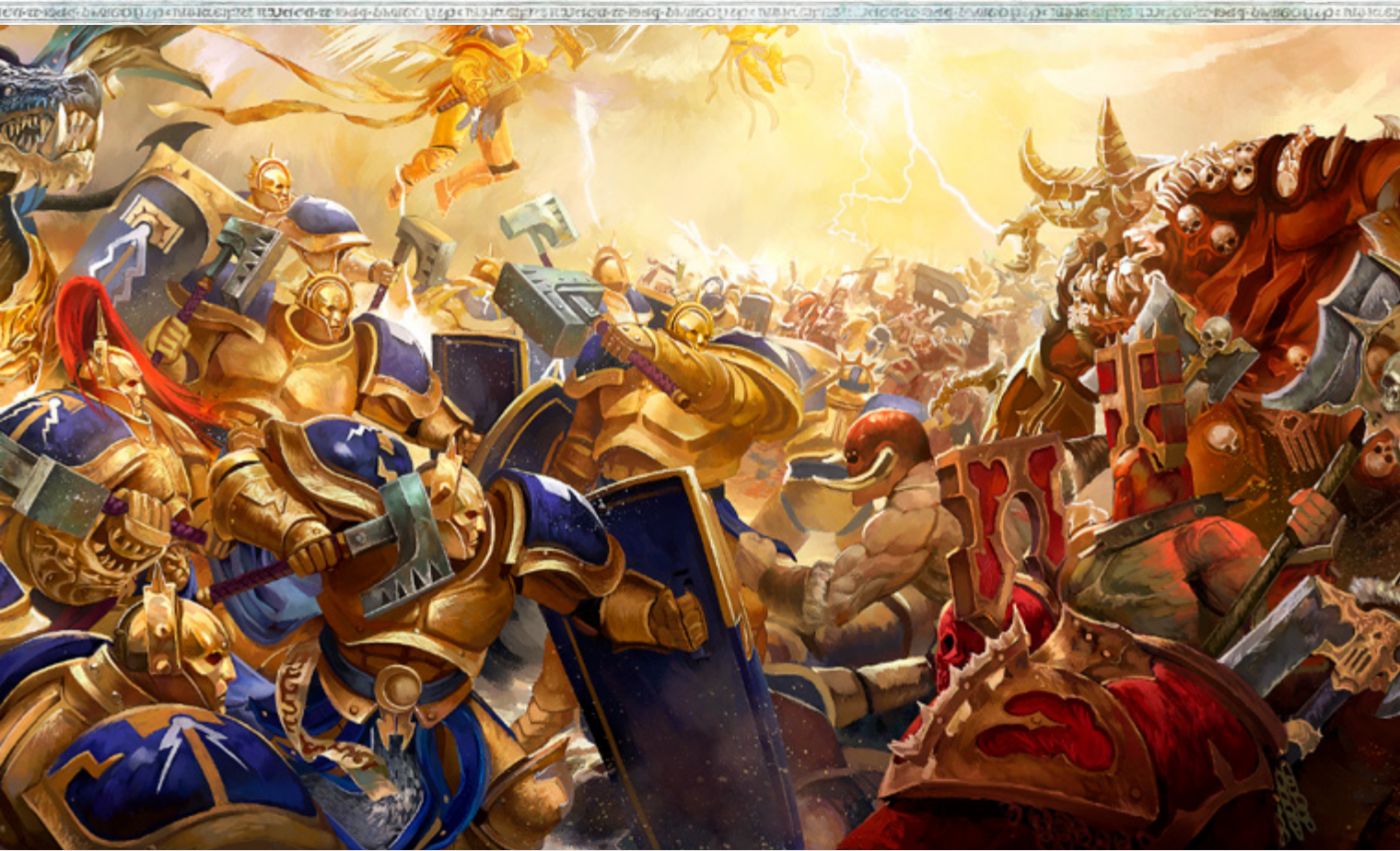
# THE REALMGATE WARS

*Across the Mortal Realms, a storm rages. Sigmar announces his return as his Stormcast Eternals strike a vengeful blow against the hordes of Chaos. Lord-Celestant Vandus Hammerhand has claimed one of the Gates of Azyr and he now makes for the dreaded Gate of Wrath in the fire-blackened Brimstone Peninsula of Aqshy, and a reckoning with the Chaos Lord Korghos Khul. His fellow Lord-Celestants fight just as hard to break the dominion of Chaos; the Stormhosts' grand crusade brings war to the Ghyrtract Fen, where Gardus of the Hallowed Knights strives to take back the Gates of Dawn. Meanwhile, in the mystical Hanging Valleys of Anvrok, Thostos Bladestorm leads his men against a towering fortress which conceals a prize beyond measure.*

Warhammer Age of Sigmar is a relatively new setting, a continuation of the story from Warhammer Fantasy Battles after the literal end of the world. It takes familiar characters and elements from "the world that was" and presents them in new ways, against a

tapestry of near-infinite Mortal Realms, lands infused with raw magic where literally anything can happen. After centuries of subjugation by the servants of dark gods, light has returned, as the God-King Sigmar has sent nigh-immortal soldiers – the Stormcast Eternals – to liberate the realms.

War Storm consists of three stories, by three of Black Library's top fantasy writers, showing initial clashes between the Stormcasts and their Chaos-warped enemies and exploring the wild and weird nature of three of the eight Mortal Realms. It's the perfect introduction to the Warhammer Age of Sigmar setting, and to the factions that are battling to control it. The extract you're about to read focuses on the war for the Realm of Fire and the Stormcasts of the Hammers of Sigmar, led by Vandus Hammerhand, who is already locked in a deadly rivalry with Korghos Khul, mighty lord of Khorne. Read on to see what happens...







## THE REALMGATE WARS

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# WAR STORM

### BORNE BY THE STORM - EXTRACT

The bolt struck Vandus Hammerhand like a spear flung from the heavens. First there was light, a searing luminescence so bright it eclipsed all sense of being and self. Then pain brought him back with white daggers of pure agony. Heat, fury, and the drumbeat of immortal vigour rushing through his veins reached a crescendo so loud it turned into deafening silence.

Then peace, a feeling of true solace and quietude.

Vandus would come to learn it was always this way. This is what it meant to be born of the storm and borne *by* the storm.

Reforged, wrought anew. Brought back. This is what it was to be eternal. But as with all such godlike deeds, this apotheosis did not come without a price.

*Before...*

After defeating Korghos Khul, the Hammerhands went north.

Though the Goretide were scattered, their ranks would swell again. The war against the dominion of Chaos was far from over, but Sigmar's Stormcasts had won a great victory at the Gate of Azyr. Now that momentum had to be seized upon were it to mean anything.

And so the Hammerhands went northward.

Thousands clad in unalloyed sigmarite crossed the Igneous Delta. Liberators bloodstained and begrimed by war marched with grandhammers slung across the burnished plate of their shoulder guards. Dour Retributors strode in grim silence, their massive lightning hammers held firm across their chests. Above the infantry, retinues of unearthly Prosecutors had taken wing and soared across the blighted sky. At the clarion sound of the warrior-heralds' war horns, their masked brethren below would close ranks and raise shields, knowing an enemy horde approached.

There had been many enemies, for the Igneous Delta and its surrounding lands were overrun by those bound in blood to Khorne.

It would fall to other Stormcast Eternals to hold the realmgate they had opened to Azyr. At least now they had a foothold at the Brimstone Peninsula, something to defend. But the vanguard could not rest. They had to forge on, despite the lead in their limbs.

Only when night had fallen and they reached the crags did they stop to make camp on a sheltered plateau of rock. Here the army had mustered, whilst a few of its leaders had walked up the shallow incline to a second smaller plateau from which they might gauge the best route onwards.

'This is a strange land,' murmured Dacanthos as he regarded the rime of frost around the fingers of his gauntlet. He clenched it in a mailed fist, shattering the ice that had formed.

'Agreed,' said Sagus, leaning on the head of his lightning hammer as the caustic wind of the delta tried to sear his armour. The air was rank with the stench of blood and cinder. It carried a foul cawing, like the mockery of crows, only



deeper, as if uttered from the throat of a larger beast. Several carrion-creatures had already been seen.

The Hammers of Sigmar had left the scorched desert behind them. Here, on the rugged crags and low hills, a deep winter prevailed.

Snow hid some of the land's deformity, its hillocks like the petrified claws of some ancient leviathan, a golem trapped forever in its final moments of agony. Eight stunted crests rose up from the smothering tundra like horns, and there were hollow cavities where eyes might once have been.

'It is a grim place, enslaved to darkness,' uttered Vandus, his voice deep, his distaste unmasked. From the edge of a rocky promontory, he looked out across the Igneous Delta and beyond. Swaths of forest colonised much of the eastern lands, but the trees looked unnatural, bent and tortured, their limbs petrified.

The Lord-Celestant's eyes narrowed. He could have sworn he saw something stir within the dark heart of the forest. His gaze went skyward to an even greater and larger mountain fastness than the one his warriors had camped on. Clad in ice, it appeared more like a glacier. Oily mists crept from its footings, lathering the earth below in a foul tar.

Further north, Vandus discerned the forbidding silhouette of an immense tower, obscured behind scads of pyroclastic cloud. It was one of eight brass towers that surrounded Khul's domain. Here then was their god-given mission, though he knew his own destiny lay elsewhere.

'Rank indeed,' snarled Vandus as he turned away to speak to his men. 'But there is worse below...' He gestured for Dacanthos and Sagus to join him at the cliff edge, certain those below them would not notice three figures watching from on high.

Sagus's gauntlets cracked loudly as he clenched the haft of his hammer, and when the Retributor spoke it was with barely restrained anger.

'Wretched filth... I would see them seared from this land, scraped away like dirt from a boot.'

Dacanthos had no words. He merely stared through the lifeless eyes of his mask, his body trembling with righteous anger.

Far below in a smoke-choked basin of tar-black rock, shawled by drifts of ash and snow, were mortal followers of Khorne known as the Bloodbound.

Hordes of the warriors had gathered to rest, after a long march. A great fire burned, spilling a column of smoke that almost reached the promontory where the Stormcasts were watching. Garbed in spiked leather and furs matted with dried blood, the tribesmen left their arms and torsos exposed. These Vandus and his men had come to know as bloodreavers. The lesser of the vast and mighty Goretide, they were nonetheless brawny and muscular fighters. What they lacked in skill, they made up for in aggression and devotion to Khorne.

Bellowing and fighting, they revelled around the fire. Long shadows cast by their bodies contorted in the fell light, transformed into an echo of what they might become should they live long and worship with enough devotion. A bloodreaver's altar was the battlefield, his offerings slaughter and death.

They were a rabble, but a dangerous one. Their blades were thick and sharp, notched by battle and stained black with the blood of innocents. But of late they had grown arrogant and complacent.

'When do we bring the storm's wrath, my Lord-Celestant?' Dacanthos said at last.

'Soon,' said Vandus, half-turning as he felt the presence of eyes upon them. 'After I have consulted with our Lord-Relictor.'

All three warriors turned as one to face Ionus Cryptborn. The Lord-Relictor emerged from the shadows, as if he were a part of them and they him. Morbidity clung to Ionus like a curse, and his skull-helmed visage gave him a grim aspect that was entirely in keeping with his demeanour.

Ionus gave a shallow bow, disturbing the oath scrolls attached to his golden war-plate. He rasped, his voice like the last stirrings of a disquiet spirit.

'I crave your ear, Lord Hammerhand.'

Hanging his tempestos hammer, Heldensen, on his belt, Vandus nodded at the other two warriors, who departed with muttered reverence to the relic-keeper.

Only once they were gone, back down to the plateau where the army mustered, did Vandus speak further.

'I shall not be dissuaded, Ionus,' he warned.

'You have spoken to me of the Red Pyramid of skulls, and I now understand that is not something you can ignore,'



said Ionus, slowly taking off his helm to reveal a gaunt, sinister-looking face. 'I only wish our paths were conjoined. That you, like I, were headed to the brass towers as Sigmar has ordered.'

There was rebuke in Ionus's tone, regret that they would be parted for the battles to come. It sat ill with him, but his Lord-Celestant had fixed his gaze on thwarting Korghos Khul and destroying the dread Gate of Wrath.

'But I know your purpose is unwavering, my friend,' Ionus concluded.

Vandus nodded. He was smiling as he turned towards Ionus and removed his war-helm, holding it in the crook of his arm. In sharp contrast to the Lord-Relictor, Vandus had a noble face and the clean, chiselled features often represented in the statues of heroes. Those monuments to old glories, to an age torn down, were gone but Vandus would see them rise again. He extended a hand to Ionus.

'Fate shall see us together again, brother.'

The corners of the Lord-Relictor's mouth only curved up a little, but he clasped his Lord-Celestant's forearm in the manner of warriors.

'Aye. The tower shall fall and I'll make for your brotherhood. United, we shall triumph against any fell beings who claim lordship over these lands. The domination of Chaos is at an end.'

Vandus's good humour faded, as he was reminded of what he had seen and the desperate battle they had fought and won at the Gate of Azyr.

'It is possible he survived?' Vandus asked.

'Khul?'

'Who else?'

'He lives.'

Vandus raised an eyebrow. 'You sound certain, brother.'

'It is a feeling. Nothing more.'

Vandus caught an inkling that it was *much* more, but kept his silence for now. The ways of the Relictor were veiled to him, and perhaps that was for the best. But if Khul did yet live, as Ionus professed, then that meant the vision could still be proven true.

*Vandus's head, cut off and brandished aloft by Khul, exulting as he capped his dread pyramid.*

'I saw my own demise, Ionus,' said Vandus, after a moment.

'The vision we spoke of, the one that is leading you to the Red Pyramid?'

Vandus nodded.

'And you would still step into Khul's domain, knowing it means your death?'

'I would.'

Ionus frowned. 'But why? Unless you believe you can defy prophecy.'

'Have you not said before that we are architects of our own destiny?'

Ionus gave a curt laugh. 'I say a great many things, but not all are intended to be heeded on face value alone.'

'I follow this path because I must, my friend. If I do not stop Khul then who else will?'

'And if you challenge him, you may end up fulfilling his prophecy for him.'

'Then that is a chance I have to take.'

Ionus regarded the Lord-Celestant for a moment, and not for the first time was reminded why Sigmar chose Vandus to be the vanguard of his storm.

'Yes, I believe it is. Still, I hope he does not kill you, Vandus.'

It was meant in humour, but Vandus grew serious.

'Are we *truly* immortal? If fated to die, can we?'

'We are as immortal as Sigmar's will, but even the God-King does not always get his way.' Ionus gestured to the Blood-bound they had come to vanquish, then to the land beyond and all its perfidy both seen and unseen.

They stared at the revelling hordes below, and after a brief silence had passed Ionus said, 'They think they are the death of these lands. They think they have already won.'

Vandus laughed. 'They are not death, brother. *We* are death.'

He slammed his helm back on, demonstrably belligerent, and turned at last to the Lord-Relictor. 'And it's past time that we dealt our gift to those heathens beneath us.'



He raised Heldensen aloft, so the warriors amassing on the plateau would see it, and cried out in a clarion voice. 'Stormcasts, to arms! This night, we mete out death and Sigmar's judgement!'

A great cheer rose up from the golden throng, loud enough that the hordes below heard it. Some of the wretched tribesmen began to look up at the Stormcasts who now emerged above them, others scrambled for blades, a few even began barking orders.

'Vermin,' snarled Vandus, as he felt the armoured tread of an entire chamber of Hammers of Sigmar gather at his back. Ionus was at his side, skull-faced once more. It would be their last battle together for a while. If Sigmar willed it, their paths would cross again.

'Scurry all you like, it will avail you nothing.'

Heldensen flashed like a golden flame against the darkness. This time, more than a thousand hammers joined it in salute.

Ionus roared, unable to hold his righteous fury at bay a moment longer.

'Smite them and cleanse this land!'

And the storm descended on burnished wings and in a crushing tide of gold.





# EISENHORN

## EISENHORN: XENOS

*The Inquisition moves amongst mankind like an avenging shadow, striking down the enemies of humanity with uncompromising ruthlessness. When he finally corners an old foe, Inquisitor Gregor Eisenhorn is drawn into a sinister conspiracy. As events unfold and he gathers allies - and enemies - Eisenhorn faces a vast interstellar cabal and the dark power of daemons, all racing to recover an arcane text of abominable power: an ancient tome known as the Necroteuch.*

While the tag line of Warhammer 40,000 says that in the grim darkness of the far future there is only war, that's not entirely accurate. War is ever-present, but there's more going on in the shadows than open battle. In a universe of literal gods and monsters, where at any time, an open mind could be seized by dark powers and turned into a conduit for daemons, it is necessary to have those who watch out for dangers and stop them before they threaten all out war.

Inquisitors are just such agents, men and women of power and influence, who investigate the infernal and can call upon whatever resources they see fit to deal with anything they deem a threat to mankind.

*Xenos* is the first of a truly classic trilogy, widely acclaimed as among the very best of Black Library's fiction. It fuses hard-boiled detective fiction – complete with first-person narration that grounds the reader in the universe with the protagonist, Gregor Eisenhorn – with high-concept science-fantasy and wraps it all in a compelling mystery set in a little corner of the Warhammer 40,000 universe populated with well-rounded and memorable character. It's with good reason that *Xenos* is often the first book Black Library fans give to friends who want to see why Warhammer fiction is so compelling – because it's not just a great Warhammer 40,000 novel, but a truly brilliant novel in its own right.





# III XENOS III

BY ORDER OF HIS MOST HOLY MAJESTY  
THE GOD-EMPEROR OF TERRA

SEQUESTERED INQUISITORIAL DOSSIERS  
AUTHORISED PERSONS ONLY

CASE FILE 112:67B:AA6:Xad

Please enter your authority code > .....

Validating...

Thank you, Inquisitor.

You may proceed.



**VERBAL TRANSCRIPT  
OF PICT-RECORDED DOCUMENT**

**LOCATION: MAGINOR  
DATE: 239. M41**

**RECOVERED FROM SERVITOR RECORDING MODULE**

**TRANSCRIBED BY SAVANT ELEDIX,  
ORDO HERETICUS INQUISITORIAL DATA-LIBRARY FACULTY, FIBOS SECUNDUS, 240. M41**

[Pict-record white noise segues to] Darkness. Sounds of distant human pain. A flash of light [poss. las-fire?]. Sounds of running.

Pict-source moves, tracking, vibrating. Some stone walls, in close focus. Another flash, brighter, closer. Squeal of pain [source unknown]. An extremely bright flash [loss of picture].

[Image indistinct for 2 minutes 38 seconds; some background noise.]

A man [subject (i)] in long robes, calls out as he strides past close to the pict-source [speech unrecoverable]. Surroundings, dark stone [poss. tunnel? tomb?]. (i)'s identity unknown [partial face view only]. Pict-source moves in close behind (i), observing as (i) draws a force hammer from a thigh loop under his robe. Close up on (i)'s hands as he grips haft. Inquisitorial signet ring in plain view. (i) turns [face obscured by shadow]. (i) speaks.

VOICE (i): *Move in! Move in, in the name of all that's holy! Come on and* [words obliterated by sound-flash] *bastard monster to death!*

Further flashes of light, now clearly close las-impacts. Pict-source filters fail to block glare [white out].

[Image white out for 0 minutes 14 seconds; resolution slowly returning.]

Passing in through the high stone entrance of some considerable chamber. Grey stone, rough hewn. Pict-source pans. Bodies in doorway, and also slumped down interior steps. Massive injuries, mangled. Stones wet with blood.

VOICE OFF [(i)?]: *Where are you? Where are you? Show yourself!*

Pict-source moves in. Two human shapes move past it to left, blurred [image-stall reveals one [subject (ii)] to be male, approx 40 years, heavy-set, wearing Imperial Guard-issue body plate [no insignia or idents], significant facial scarring [old], wielding belt-fed heavy stubber; other [subject (iii)] is female, approx 25 years, svelte, skin dyed blue, tattoos and body-glove armour of a Morituri Death Cultist initiate, wielding force blade [approx 45cm length].

Blurred shapes (ii) and (iii) move beyond pict-source. Pict-source pans round, establishing sidelong view of



(ii) and (iii) engaged in rapid hand-to-hand warfare with adversaries on lower steps. Adversaries are heterogeneous mix: six humans with surgical/bionic implants, two mutants, three offensive servitors [see attached file record for stall-frame details]. (ii) fires heavy stubber [sound track distorts].

Two human adversaries pulped [backwash smoke haze renders image partially indistinct]. (iii) severs head of mutant, vaults backwards [transcriptional assumption – pict-source too slow to follow] and impales human adversary. Pict-source moves down [image jerky].

VOICE OFF: *Maneesha! To the left! To the l-*

Pict-source makes partial capture as (iii) is hit repeatedly by energy fire. (iii) convulses, explodes. Pict-source hit by blood mist [image fogs]. [Image wiped clear.] (ii) is yelling, moving ahead out of view, firing heavy stubber. Sudden crossfire laser effect [las-flare blinds pict-source optics].

[Various noise sources, indistinct voices, some screaming.]

[Image returns.] (i) is just ahead of pict-source, charging into wide, flat chamber lit by green chemical lamps [face illuminated by light for 0.3 seconds]. Subject (i) positively identified as Inquisitor Hetris Lugenbrau.

LUGENBRAU:*Quixos! Quixos! I put it all to the sword and the cleansing flame! Now you, monster! Now you, bastard!*

VOICE [unidentified]: *I am here, Lugenbrau. Kharnagar awaits.*

Lugenbrau (i) moves off-image. Pict-source pans. Image jerky. Body parts scattered on chamber floor [composite identifies subject (ii) as one of nine corpses]. Major detonation(s) nearby. Image shakes, pict-source falls sidelong.

[Image blank for 1 minute 7 seconds. Significant background noise.]

[Image returns.] Lugenbrau partly visible off frame left, engaged in combat. Afterglow-residue of force hammer blows remain burned on image for several seconds [image indistinct].

Pict-source turns to focus on Lugenbrau. Lugenbrau engaged in hand-to-hand combat with unknown foe. Movements too fast for pict-source to capture. Blur. Human figures [identity unknown, poss. adversary troops] move in from right frame. Heads of human figures explode. Figures topple.

[White out. Pict-source blanked. Duration unknown.]

[Image returns, imperfect.] Jerky shots of ground and wall. Refocus blurring. Pict-source reacquires Lugenbrau and adversary in combat [smoke fumes haze view]. Combat as before too rapid for pict-source to capture. Extensive background noise. Glowing line [believed to be blade weapon] impales Lugenbrau. Image shakes [some picture loss]. Lugenbrau immolates [image burns out].

[Pause/pict-blank of unknown duration.]

[Image returns.] Close up of face looking into pict-source. Identity unknown [subject (iv)]. (iv) is handsome, sculptural, smiling, eyes blank.



VOICE (iv): *Hello, little thing. I am Cherubael.*

Light flash.

Scream [believed to originate from pict-source].

[Image out. Recording ends.]



## ONE

**A cold coming  
Death in the dormant vaults  
Some puritanical reflections**

Hunting the recidivist Murdin Eyclone, I came to Hubris in the Dormant of 240.M41, as the Imperial sidereal calendar has it.

Dormant lasted eleven months of Hubris's twenty-nine month lunar year, and the only signs of life were the custodians with their lighted poles and heat-gowns, patrolling the precincts of the hibernation tombs.

Within those sulking basalt and ceramite vaults, the grandees of Hubris slept, dreaming in crypts of aching ice, awaiting Thaw, the middle season between Dormant and Vital.

Even the air was frigid. Frost encrusted the tombs, and a thick cake of ice covered the featureless land. Above, star patterns twinkled in the curious, permanent night. One of them was Hubris's sun, so far away now. Come Thaw, Hubris would spin into the warm embrace of its star again.

Then it would become a blazing globe. Now it was just a fuzz of light.

As my gun-cutter set down on the landing cross at Tomb Point, I had pulled on an internally heated bodyskin and swathes of sturdy, insulated foul weather gear, but still the perilous cold cut through me now. My eyes watered, and the tears froze on my lashes and cheeks. I remembered the details of the cultural brief my savant had prepared, and quickly lowered my frost visor, trembling as warm air began to circulate under the plastic mask.

Custodians, alerted to my arrival by astropathic hails, stood waiting for me at the base of the landing cross. Their lighted poles dipped in obeisance in the frozen night and the air steamed with the heat that bled from their cloaks. I nodded to them, showing their leader my badge of office. An ice-car awaited: a rust-coloured arrowhead twenty metres long, mounted on ski-blade runners and spiked tracks.

It carried me away from the landing cross and I left the winking signal lights and the serrated dagger-shape of my



gun-cutter behind in the perpetual winter night.

The spiked tracks kicked up blizzards of rime behind us. Ahead, despite the lamps, the landscape was black and impenetrable. I rode with Lores Vibben and three custodians in a cabin lit only by the amber glow of the craft's control panel. Heating vents recessed in the leather seats breathed out warm, stale air.

A custodian handed back a data-slate to Vibben. She looked at it cursorily and passed it on to me. I realised my frost visor was still down. I raised it and began to search my pockets for my eye glasses.

With a smile, Vibben produced them from within her own swaddled, insulated garb. I nodded thanks, put them on my nose and began to read.

I was just calling up the last plates of text when the ice-car halted.

'Processional Two-Twelve,' announced one of the custodians.

We dismounted, sliding our visors down into place.

Jewels of frost-flakes fluttered in the blackness about us, sparkling as they crossed through the ice-car's lamp beams. I've heard of bitter cold. Emperor grace me I never feel it again. Biting, crippling, actually bitter to taste on the tongue. Every joint in my frame protested and creaked.

My hands and my mind were numb.

That was not good.

Processional Two-Twelve was a hibernation tomb at the west end of the great Imperial Avenue. It housed twelve thousand, one hundred and forty-two members of the Hubris ruling elite.

We approached the great monument, crunching up the black, frost-coated steps.

I halted. 'Where are the tomb's custodians?'

'Making their rounds,' I was told.

I glanced at Vibben and shook my head. She slid her hand into her fur-edged robes.

'Knowing we approach?' I urged, addressing the custodian again. 'Knowing we expect to meet them?'

'I will check,' said the custodian, the one who had circulated the slate. He pushed on up the steps, the phosphor light on his pole bobbing.

The other two seemed ill at ease.

I beckoned to Vibben, so she would follow me up after the leader.

We found him on a lower terrace, gazing at the strewn bodies of four custodians, their light poles fizzling out around them.

'H-how?' he stammered.

'Stay back,' Vibben told him and drew her weapon. Its tiny amber Armed rune glowed in the darkness.

I took out my blade, igniting it. It hummed.

The south entry of the tombs was open. Shafts of golden light shone out. All my fears were rapidly being confirmed.

We entered, Vibben sweeping the place from side to side with her handgun. The hall was narrow and high, lit by chemical glow-globes. Intruding frost was beginning to mark the polished basalt walls.

A few metres inside, another custodian lay dead in a stiffening mirror of blood. We stepped over him. To each side, hallways opened up, admitting us to the hibernation stacks. In every direction, rows and rows of ice-berths ranged down the smoothed basalt chambers.

It was like walking into the Imperium's grandest morgue.

Vibben swept soundlessly to the right and I went left.

I admit I was excited by now, eager to close and conclude a business that had lasted six years. Eyclone had evaded me for six whole years! I studied his methods every day and dreamed of him every night.

Now I could smell him.

I raised my visor.

Water was pattering from the roof. Thaw water. It was growing warmer in here. In their ice-berths, some of the dim figures were stirring.

Too early! Far too early!

Eyclone's first man came at me from the west as I crossed a trunk-junction corridor. I spun, the power sword in my hand, and cut through his neck before his ice-axe could land.



The second came from the south, the third from the east. And then more. More.

A blur.

As I fought, I heard furious shooting from the vaults away to my right. Vibben was in trouble.

I could hear her over the vox-link in our hoods: 'Eisenhorn! Eisenhorn!'

I wheeled and cut. My opponents were all dressed in heat-gowns, and carried ice-tools that made proficient weapons. Their eyes were dark and unforthcoming. Though they were fast, there was something in them that suggested they were doing this mindlessly, by order.

The power sword, an antique and graceful weapon, blessed by the Provost of Inx himself, spun in my hand. With five abrupt moves I made corpses out of them and left their blood vapour drifting in the air.

'Eisenhorn!'

I turned and ran. I splashed heavily down a corridor sluiced with melt water. More shots from ahead. A sucking cry.

I found Vibben face down across a freezer tube, frozen blood gluing her to the sub-zero plastic. Eight of Eyclone's servants lay sprawled around her. Her weapon lay just out of reach of her clawing hand, the spent cell ejected from the grip.

I am forty-two standard years old, in my prime by Imperial standards, young by those of the Inquisition. All my life, I have had a reputation for being cold, unfeeling. Some have called me heartless, ruthless, even cruel. I am not. I am not beyond emotional response or compassion. But I possess – and my masters count this as perhaps my paramount virtue – a singular force of will. Throughout my career it has served me well to draw on this facility and steel myself, unflinching, at all that this wretched galaxy can throw at me. To feel pain or fear or grief is to allow myself a luxury I cannot afford.

Lores Vibben had served with me for five and a half years. In that period she had saved my life twice. She saw herself as my aide and my bodyguard, yet in truth she was more a companion and a fellow warrior. When I recruited her from the clan-slums of Tornish, it was for her combat skills and brutal vigour. But I came to value her just as much for her sharp mind, soft wit and clear head.

I stared down at her body for a moment. I believe I may have uttered her name.

I extinguished my power sword and, sliding it into its scabbard, moved back into the shadows on the far side of the hibernation gallery. I could hear nothing except the increasingly persistent thaw-drip. Freeing my sidearm from its leather rig under my left armpit, I checked its load and opened a vox link. Eyclone was undoubtedly monitoring all traffic in and out of Processional Two-Twelve, so I used Glossia, an informal verbal cipher known only to myself and my immediate colleagues. Most inquisitors develop their own private languages for confidential communication, some more sophisticated than others. Glossia, the basics of which I had designed ten years before, was reasonably complex and had evolved, organically, with use.

'Thorn wishes aegis, rapturous beasts below.'

'Aegis, arising, the colours of space,' Betancore responded immediately and correctly.

'Rose thorn, abundant, by flame light crescent.'

A pause. 'By flame light crescent? Confirm.'

'Confirm.'

'Razor delphus pathway! Pattern ivory!'

'Pattern denied. Pattern crucible.'

'Aegis, arising.'

The link broke. He was on his way. He had taken the news of Vibben's death as hard as I expected. I trusted that would not affect his performance. Midas Betancore was a hot-blooded, impetuous man, which was partly why I liked him. And used him.

I moved out of the shadows again, my sidearm raised. A Scipio-pattern naval pistol, finished in dull chrome with inlaid ivory grips, it felt reassuringly heavy in my gloved hand. Ten rounds, every one a fat, blunt man-stopper, were spring-loaded into the slide inside the grip. I had four more armed slides just like it in my hip pocket.

I forget where I acquired the Scipio. It had been mine for a few years. One night, three years before, Vibben had prised off the ceramite grip plates with their touch-worn, machined-stamped engravings of the Imperial aquila and the Navy

motto, and replaced them with ivory grips she had etched herself. A common practice on Tornish, she informed me, handing the weapon back the next day. The new grips were like crude scrimshaw, showing on each side a poorly executed human skull through which a thorny rose entwined, emerging through an eye socket, shedding cartoon droplets of blood. She'd inlaid carmine gems into the droplets to emphasise their nature. Below the skull, my name was scratched in a clumsy scroll.

I had laughed. There had been times when I'd almost been too embarrassed to draw the gang-marked weapon in a fight.

Now, now she was dead, I realise what an honour had been paid to me through that devoted work.

I made a promise to myself: I would kill Eyclone with this gun.

As a devoted member of his high majesty the God-Emperor's Inquisition, I find my philosophy bends towards that of the Amalathians. To the outside galaxy, members of our orders appear much alike: an inquisitor is an inquisitor, a being of fear and persecution. It surprises many that internally, we are riven with clashing ideologies.

I know it surprised Vibben. I spent one long afternoon trying to explain the differences. I failed.

To express it in simple terms, some inquisitors are puritans and some are radicals. Puritans believe in and enforce the traditional station of the Inquisition, working to purge our galactic community of any criminal or malevolent element: the triumvirate of evil – alien, mutant and daemon. Anything that clashes with the pure rule of mankind, the preachings of the Ministorum and the letter of Imperial Law is subject to a puritan inquisitor's attention. Hard-line, traditional, merciless... that is the puritan way.

Radicals believe that any methods are allowable if they accomplish the Inquisitorial task. Some, as I understand it, actually embrace and use forbidden resources, such as the Warp itself, as weapons against the enemies of mankind.

I have heard the arguments often enough. They appal me. Radical belief is heretical.

I am a puritan by calling and an Amalathian by choice. The ferociously strict ways of the monodominant philosophy oft-times entices me, but there is precious little subtlety in their ways and thus it is not for me.

Amalathians take our name from the conclave at Mount Amalath. Our endeavour is to maintain the status quo of the Imperium, and we work to identify and destroy any persons or agencies that might destabilise the power of the Imperium from without or within. We believe in strength through unity. Change is the greatest enemy. We believe the God-Emperor has a divine plan, and we work to sustain the Imperium in stability until that plan is made known. We deplore factions and in-fighting... Indeed, it is sometimes a painful irony that our beliefs mark us as a faction within the political helix of the Inquisition.

We are the steadfast spine of the Imperium, its antibodies, fighting disease, insanity, injury, invasion.

I can think of no better way to serve, no better way to be an inquisitor.

So you have me then, pictured. Gregor Eisenhorn, inquisitor, puritan, Amalathian, forty-two years old standard, an inquisitor for the past eighteen years. I am tall and broad at the shoulders, strong, resolute. I have already told you of my force of will, and you will have noted my prowess with a blade.

What else is there? Am I clean-shaven? Yes! My eyes are dark, my hair darker and thick. These things matter little.

Come and let me show you how I killed Eyclone.



# THE HORUS HERESY™

## PRIMARCHS

### ROBOUTE GUILLIMAN: LORD OF ULTRAMAR

*Long before the coming of the Imperium, the realm of Ultramar was ruled by Roboute Guilliman, the last Battle King of Macragge. Even after learning of his true heritage as a primarch son of the Emperor of Mankind, he strove to expand his domain as efficiently and benevolently as possible, with the XIII Legion Ultramarines as his alone to command. Now, facing a rival empire on the ork-held world of Thoas, Guilliman must choose his weapons carefully – otherwise his dream of a brighter future could be lost forever.*

The Horus Heresy series is the founding myth of the Imperium of Warhammer 40,000, a war between brothers, pitting those who built mankind's empire against each other as half of them try to tear it down. The brothers in question are the eighteen Primarchs, crafted by the god-like Emperor to be his generals and statesmen, exceptional warriors and leaders who will usher in a new dawn for humanity.

The Primarchs series focuses on these mighty heroes, each one the subject of his own novel. The first to get this treatment was Roboute Guilliman, Primarch of the XIII Space Marine Legion, the Ultramarines. Anyone with a passing familiarity with Warhammer 40,000 will recognise these blue- and gold-clad warriors as the iconic heroes of box and book covers, and this novel shows in part why they can claim that status. Guilliman was perhaps the best of the Primarchs, the most well rounded and the one who had the greatest potential for making the Imperium into a truly great and noble empire.

*Lord of Ultramar* shows him at his height, leading his sons in defence of the empire he has created, long before the treachery of Horus brought his dreams crashing down. It's a novel quite unlike anything else, tinged with hope for a better future, rather than the darkness and dystopia of later days. It's a story of true heroes and great deeds, a myth for the ages.









THE HORUS HERESY™  
PRIMARCHS

ROBOUTE  
GUILLIMAN  
LORD OF ULTRAMAR

EXTRACT

THOAS • RECLAMATION • SYMBOLISM

One empire came to Thoas to crush another.

The empire of order and light arrived in the form of an armada. If the eyes of the other empire had turned to the void, perhaps they would have witnessed the final approach. They would have seen a swarm of blades. Each blade was a ship thousands of yards long. The greatest of them spanned fifteen miles from stem to stern. It was both sword and mountain chain. From the surface of Thoas, it would have appeared as an elongated star, moving with unalterable purpose with its smaller brothers. A constellation of war filling the night sky.

But in the second empire, there were no eyes to look upwards, or none to understand what they saw. This was not an empire worthy of the name. Yet it had held a dozen systems. One by one, they had been ripped from its grasping claws. Now the empire unworthy of the name was reduced to its core. Its seat of strength. Its source of contagion.

It did not see its doom arrive. If it saw, it did not understand. If it understood, it did not care. Such was its nature. That reason alone was enough to warrant its extermination.

*Remark 73.44.liv: The visibility of the leader at significant moments of a campaign carries its own signification. It reinforces his interest not just in the goal, but in those sworn to carry it out. The leader who lacks these interests invites and deserves defeat.*

Roboute Guilliman stood at the lectern of the bridge of the *Macragge's Honour*. Below him, in a tiered space the size of an arena, the level of activity had risen in urgency, but proceeded with no loss of calm. Officers performed their tasks with the same efficiency as the servitors. The bridge hummed with the sound of human machinery, gears meshing smoothly, readying for war.

Guilliman had been at his station five hours already, ever since the translation to the system. He was here to witness and to be witnessed, as was proper. *Addendum to 73.44.liv*, he thought. *Interest cannot be feigned*. He would insert the correction to the manuscript later.

He had watched Thoas grow large in the forward bridge windows. He had seen its details resolve themselves as the layers of augur scans built up the composite picture of the target. The forward elements of the fleet were now at low anchor, awaiting his command for the next stage of reconnaissance.

‘Another message from Captain Sirras,’ said Marius Gage.

‘Reconfirming that his Scouts are ready?’ Guilliman said.

The Chapter Master Primus of the XIII Legion grinned. ‘That would be correct.’

‘He’s contacting you directly now?’

‘We were together on Septus Twelve in the Osiris Cluster.’

‘In the hive?’

‘Yes,’ said Gage. ‘We both made it to the surface in time to see the flares of the fleet burning when the Psybrid ships sprung the ambush.’

‘So he presumes this gives him leave to bypass the chain of command?’ Guilliman asked.

‘The Twenty-second is still without a Chapter Master,’ Gage reminded him.

‘I haven’t forgotten.’ The orks of the Thoas Empire had taken Machon’s head in the final stages of the campaign to purge them from the Aletho system. ‘There will be a new Chapter Master before we land on Thoas. The current lack does not justify Sirras trying to make an improvisational end run around my timing decisions.’

‘An official reprimand?’ Gage asked.

‘No. But inform him that if he contacts you again, the next voice he hears will be mine.’

The old warrior nodded. His features were worn by his centuries of campaigning, and had been weathered into wry, intelligent cragginess. He walked a few steps away to vox the captain of the 223rd Company.

‘Wait,’ Guilliman said. *Remark 73.42.xv: It is the duty of the soldier to accept an order without a rationale being provided, but the absence of a rationale should never be the default condition.* ‘Let him know the scans are still being collated. He isn’t waiting on a whim. He’s waiting for a worthwhile target.’

In the bridge window, another layer of topographical detail was added. The image of Thoas sharpened. Coastlines changed from fractal abstractions to specific geological characterisations. The world was becoming a real place. It was tidally locked by its blue star. Half of the planet burned forever while the other half froze. The Ultramarines fleet was anchored over the region of the terminator, where twilight and dawn would never end.

Guilliman examined the sphere. He frowned. ‘Magnification of the northern tropic,’ he said.

The image grew.

‘Increase magnification.’

*There.*

A cordillera ran along a north-to-south-west diagonal down the western region of the largest continental mass. To the east, the land was wrinkled with mountains, canyons and plateaus for close to five hundred miles. To the west was a vast plain that reached almost to the coast before it ran up against a narrower, lower chain of peaks. In the western flank of the cordillera, Guilliman saw lines that were too regular. There were structures there, almost as big as the mountains in which they nestled.

‘Biomass readings in this sector?’ Guilliman asked.

‘A very high concentration of orks, lord,’ the Augur Master reported.

Given the inviting geography of the plain and the easier slopes of the foothills, that was to be expected. ‘Compared to the other principal land masses?’

‘Higher,’ the officer confirmed.

‘Are you seeing this?’ Guilliman said to Gage.

‘I am. Are those human?’

‘Records about Thoas are fragmentary in the extreme. To date I have found only two references to any form of human colonisation.’

‘Those are big,’ said Gage. ‘This was more than a colony.’

Guilliman nodded. ‘It was a civilisation.’ The prospect was pleasing. If there had been human colonies in the other systems reclaimed from the orks, all traces had long since vanished. That such signs would appear on this world, where the final battle against the greenskin empire would take place, was a gift of inestimable value. *If the ruins were human.* ‘Tell Sirras we have a target for him.’

‘Evido Banzor has Scouts ready for a low orbit drop too,’ Gage said. ‘Part of the 166th, under Captain Iasus.’

‘Good. Send them both down. I want their eyes on the ork dispositions with particular respect to those structures. The



Thoas campaign begins there.'

"*When presented with a choice of beginnings, choose the one with meaning,*" Gage quoted.

'Remark 45.xxx,' said Guilliman. 'Flatterer.'

'Merely a manifest truth,' Gage said, his eyes on the traces of immense ruins.

'Our captain honours us with his presence,' said Meton. His voice was a whisper, inaudible except over the vox. The orks were a long way beyond earshot. The visible ones, at least. Meton was observing proper discipline, taking no chances as the squads made their way up towards the ridge.

'Theoretical – our captain is merely eager to get his hands dirty with greenskin gore,' Sergeant Phocion said.

'Practical – your captain would like you both to shut up,' said Eleon Iasus. They were both partly correct. There was no compelling necessity for him to have left the *Praetorian Trust* to accompany the Scouts on their reconnaissance. There was no dereliction of duty either, though. As a sergeant, he had held Phocion's position for decades. And he had cleared his venture with Chapter Master Banzor. Yes, he wanted the feel of Thoas' surface under his boots as soon as possible. There was more, though. *Theoretical: there is no such thing as superfluous advance knowledge of the battlefield. Practical: where possible, add first-hand experience to intelligence gathered from a distance.* He wanted to see the ruins. He wanted to know what would be the epicentre of the campaign.

The Scouts of the 166th prowled along the western spines of the cordillera to the south of the ruins. They maintained vox contact with the squads from the 223rd coming in from the north. Both had come down by Thunderhawk, deposited on ledges a short way down the east-facing slopes. There had been no contact with the enemy. There was nothing to attract the orks here. The mountainsides were sheer, the valleys narrow and barren. There was nothing to fight over, and no room to fight either. The tectonic upheavals in this region had been so violent, so sudden, and involved so much compression that the chains of the cordillera were as narrow and sharp as rows of fangs.

Footing was treacherous. Iasus and the Scouts climbed, working their way up the nearly vertical mountain face. The sharp folds of the granite caught and held shadows. Both of Thoas' moons were full, but the mountains had draped themselves in a dark more profound than night. Even with his enhanced sight and the night-vision lenses, Iasus was blind when his climb took him deep into the vertical crevasses. He climbed by feel, reaching up, digging his gauntleted fingers into the cracks, holding onto jagged protrusions with certainty they would not crumble beneath his weight. Long before he reached the top, the drop below, a fall from dark into dark, would have been far enough to kill him.

He was glad he had come. Each foot of the climb instilled a greater sense of Thoas in him. The theoretical knowledge transforming into the practical experience.

The ridge was as sharp and narrow as he had imagined it would be. He stood on the edge of an immense, rocky saw-blade. It was difficult to stand.

'Theoretical,' said Meton. 'If we drive the orks into these mountains, we'll smash them.'

'We'll smash them regardless,' Iasus said. The Scout was correct, though – an army that retreated into the mountains would be devoured by their teeth. And if by some chance the orks survived, if they went any further east, they would reach sunrise, and be cremated.

Iasus looked down. The orks were all to the west, the clans gathered in their hundreds of thousands on the plain near the base of the foothills and on the gradual slopes of the start of the mountains.

And they infested the ruins.

Phocion's squad had advanced to a point several thousand yards from the nearest structure. The edges of the ork horde were directly below. The growls and snarls of the brutes rose to the heights like the roar of a violent surf. There were orks on the plain too, but the bulk of their numbers were sticking to the high ground. There was no reason to think these greenskins were intelligent enough to understand what force was coming for them, but they were readying for battle. As the Ultramarines had taken apart their empire, they had left no survivors in their wake. The beasts lacked anything but the most rudimentary technology. They had nothing resembling interplanetary vox communication. Yet somehow, they knew. Some collective instinct of the species told the greenskins to prepare.

Iasus turned his attention from the orks to the ruins. He raised magnoculars to his helm lenses. The structures snapped into clearer focus. They were badly damaged. The upper levels had collapsed. Apertures gaped, open to the winds and storms of Thoas. The roofs were gone from the buildings he could see. They were still colossal. They were constructed of

huge blocks carved from the mountains. Iasus estimated that each brick was larger than a Thunderhawk. He saw pillars as high as Warhound Titans. They too were monoliths.

So much had fallen that the original shape of the ruins was difficult to discern. What Iasus could make out looked like terraced pyramids, each the size of a small city. The terraces were narrow in proportion to the levels' soaring height. The effect was less of broad, squat structures, more of towering massiveness. The architecture was aggressive and brutal even in its decay. But it was not alien. Colossal as the scale was, the shape of the vaulted apertures was recognisable. There were smaller doorways in the walls, openings where orks had to bend down to pass through.

'The greenskins did a thorough job,' Phocion said.

'So will we.' Iasus lowered the magnoculars. 'This was a human world once. It will be again.'

Guilliman met with his Chapter Masters in his compartment. Twelve Chapters had come to rout the orks from Thoas. Eleven Masters stood in a precise arc before Guilliman's desk. With them were two captains – Hierax, the senior captain of the leaderless 22nd, and Iasus, who had earned his place at the audience with the knowledge he had brought back from Thoas.

That, Guilliman knew, was what was widely assumed to be the reason for the honour granted to Iasus. For the time being, he did nothing to correct that perception.

Behind the primarch, the crystallex walls showed the orb of Thoas below the *Macragge's Honour*. The flagship was at low anchor, in geosynchronous orbit above the great plain at the foot of the cordillera. The ruins were not visible at this altitude. Even so, if Guilliman turned around, his gaze would zero in on their location in the mountains.

He gestured to the data-slates on his desk. 'The reports from the Scouts are conclusive,' he said. 'Humans once called Thoas home. They built great cities. That civilisation has fallen, but humans will lay claim to this world once more, and towers will rise again. There is more. Thermographic imaging and geologic auguries have revealed the presence of an extensive network of caves beneath the ruins.'

'Do we know how deep they run?' Atreus, Chapter Master of the Sixth, asked.

'No,' said Guilliman. 'There are significant radiation blooms in the area too. They made imaging difficult. We know the tunnels are there. Beyond that, we're indulging in conjecture. An unhelpful application of the theoretical.'

He stopped speaking. He observed the two captains. Their stances were perfectly formal, perfectly motionless. The Chapter Masters were more relaxed in their bearing. They understood that this compartment was a space for inquiry and debate, and the free exchange of views. Here was where theoreticals were worked over and modified, demolished and reconfigured. Absolute deference to his authority here was counterproductive. It undermined what he hoped to accomplish.

Though Iasus and Hierax might as well have been statues, Guilliman could still detect minor variations in their bearings. Iasus was content to wait until he was called upon. His stance was one of simple patience. Hierax, on the other hand, was on the verge of an explosion. He was leaning forwards slightly. Awareness of rank and the nature of his position held his tongue. The reason for his presence urged him to speak.

Guilliman relieved him of the dilemma. 'You have a recommendation, Captain Hierax?' he said. *Surprise me*, he thought. *Say something other than what I'm expecting.*

'The ork infestation on Thoas is the worst we've seen in this campaign.'

'This is the heart of their empire,' Guilliman pointed out.

'Exactly,' said Hierax. 'We should rip it out at a stroke. There are no humans in those ruins. There haven't been for a long time. There is no reason to hold back.'

'No holding back,' Guilliman echoed, keeping his tone neutral.

'The Second Destroyers will purge the orks from Thoas within the day.'

'Along with all other life.'

'Primarch–' Hierax began.

'Captain,' Guilliman interrupted him, 'how expedient were you planning to make this invasion? I assume you imagined keeping Thoas intact, so that eliminates cyclonic torpedoes. Virus bombs, then? Would you go that far?'

Hierax said nothing at first. His face was closed, so carefully neutral it lacked any expression at all. Like Gage, Hierax joined the XIII Legion on Terra. His rough features bore layers of scars. His face had a geologic history, as if roughened



by successive lava flows. The nobility of the Ultramarines shone in his armour. Hierax himself embodied the harshness of war. The Destroyers were the necessary violence of the Ultramarines. They represented the moments when the heart was hardened, and the terrible act undertaken. They lived their name. They were the blood spilled by the blades of the Great Crusade. The Destroyers were not its hope, its promise and its creation. When Hierax spoke again, his voice was strong but cold. He already knew that Guilliman would refuse his recommendation.

*Just as I know what it will be,* Guilliman thought. *I'm disappointed. It would have been nice to be proven wrong.*

Hierax took a breath. 'If necessary, yes,' he said. 'Our mission...' He stopped, realising he had overstepped. The mission was not his to define.

'Go on,' Guilliman urged. 'Speak freely, captain. If we cannot do that in this space, half of its utility vanishes.'

Hierax nodded his thanks. 'Theoretical – our mission here is one of extermination. Practical – the most efficient way of ending the enemy while minimising our expenditure of lives is through the weaponry of the First and Second Destroyer companies.'

'You see no other value to the world?'

'Mining will still be possible after the worst of the radiation subsides. Its agricultural possibilities are poor. What Thoas offers will survive the worst we can do on the surface.'

'I see.'

The Chapter Masters remained silent. *You know me well,* Guilliman thought. They knew the debate was about more than a tactical decision.

'Captain Iasus,' Guilliman said. 'You were on the surface. What are your views?'

'I respectfully disagree with my brother's evaluation.' The captain of the 166th was younger than Hierax, and a native of Macragge. His features were far less worn than Hierax's. The long, livid scar that ran from his right temple down the length of his jaw made his profile seem even more aquiline. 'The value of Thoas is more than industrial. There was an important culture there. Its memory should be preserved.'

'That culture failed,' said Hierax.

'It did,' Guilliman agreed. 'Does that mean it should be expunged from our collective memory? Do we have nothing to learn from it? Does that mean its stand against the orks does not deserve to be commemorated? That there were no battles worthy of song?'

'It does not,' Hierax admitted.

'No, it doesn't.' Guilliman placed his hand on a stack of bound vellum manuscripts on the side of his desk. 'There is no tactical value to the remembrancers on our vessels. They contribute nothing to the battlefields of the Great Crusade. What they contribute in between the battlefields is inestimable. The records of the pacifications. The celebrations of victories. The memorialisation of the fallen. The analyses of the recovered cultures. This is the living tissue of the Imperium's culture, Hierax. Even the dead civilisations are part of the human story. They have a life beyond the dust of their citizens.'

He turned to look at Thoas. Most of the planet was a dark brown, but it was far from dead. Its atmosphere was turbulent with the flashing energy of storms. The coasts were green with vegetation. Thoas was alive. Even with the cancer of the orks upon it, it was alive. He would not kill it. And he would not kill its history.

'The orks took Thoas from humanity,' he said. 'We will take it back. We will not lose its heritage in the process.'

'The radiation levels...' Hierax began.

Guilliman raised a hand. 'I know,' he said. 'They are high in the region of the ruins. Will we make them higher yet? We come to reclaim and to build. We will take Thoas back, and we will build a new civilisation here. Of course it will surpass what was there before, but it will also honour this world's history.'

He smiled at Hierax. 'Do you understand, captain?'

'I do.' The Destroyer's tone was flat.

*I wonder if you do,* Guilliman thought, even more disappointed. Hierax was a good officer, but he was limited. He also symbolised a larger problem Guilliman had seen growing in the Legion, one the time had come to deal with.

'The Nemesis Chapter stands ready to deploy when and as ordered,' Hierax said.

'I'm sure the Twenty-second does.' Guilliman's use of the numeral designation sounded like a rebuke. 'And deploy it will.'

'All of it?' Hierax asked.

Guilliman raised an eyebrow at the shade of anger in the question. More evidence of the necessity of what he was about to do. He was glad he had asked Hierax to be here. Listening to the captain had confirmed him in his resolution.

'No,' he said. 'Not all of it. There are some actions that will not be necessary.'

Hierax's lips thinned.

'The time and the place must be the correct ones,' Guilliman said. 'These ones are not.'

Hierax bowed his head. He said nothing.

To the Chapter Masters, Guilliman said, 'You have seen the intelligence gathered by the Scouts of the 166th and 223rd Companies.' He emphasised the credit. He had just informed Hierax he would, once again, not be seeing action. He wished the captain to know, also, that the contribution of his Chapter had value.

'We land in the plain?' Banzor asked.

Guilliman nodded. 'Your thoughts?'

'A good staging area. The orks have the high ground, but our presence will draw them down.'

'Their high ground is a dead end,' said Atreus. 'If we force them back there, that is where they die.'

'And they will be a diminished enemy in retreat,' Klord Empion of the Ninth mused.

'That practical depends on the theoretical of the orks abandoning the ruins,' Banzor said.

'When have greenskins ever resisted the bait of a fight?' said Gage.

'Good point,' Banzor admitted.

'We see no chance the ruins are so important to them that they might hold their ground?' said Vared of the 11th.

'Highly unlikely,' Guilliman said. 'It would be unprecedented.'

"*The unprecedented,*" said Iasus, quoting *Axioms 17.vi*, "*is the catalyst for adaptability. Do not hope to expect every eventuality. Meet it instead.*"

Hierax frowned at the other captain's temerity. Gage raised an eyebrow, amused.

'The very words,' Guilliman said, grinning.

He ended the briefing a few minutes later. The target was clear. So was the strategy. This wasn't an attack that called for finesse. It would have bored Lion El'Jonson or Fulgrim senseless. Angron might have appreciated the straightforward application of overwhelming force, though he would have been baffled by the decision to capture and preserve the ruins. This was the strategy the enemy and the goal called for, though, so it was the strategy that would be employed. *The difference between doctrine and dogma is the gulf between triumph and defeat.*

'Evido,' Guilliman called to Banzor as the Chapter Masters and the captains filed out of the compartment. 'A brief word, if you would.'

Banzor walked back to the front of the desk. Gage remained where he was, off to the side and between the desk and the crystalflex walls. Guilliman had told him some of what he had planned, but not all. He was visibly startled by the fact Guilliman had asked the Chapter Master of the 16th to stay. Banzor merely looked puzzled.

When the doors had closed behind the others, Guilliman said, 'What is your evaluation of Captain Iasus?'

'In what sense?'

'In general. And in his ability to command, in specific.'

'A fine warrior. An excellent captain.'

'He inspires loyalty?'

'He does. He doesn't just lead from the front. He's fought at one point or another with just about every squad in the company. They know he knows what they do and what they need to do it.'

'So his mission with the squads was typical rather than unusual.'

'Exactly.'

'Adaptable, then.'

'Very.'

'And his overall command of the company? I appreciate his fine knowledge of the workings of the squad, but a captain needs to be more than a very flexible sergeant.'

'You need have no reservations on that score, primarch. The 166th has been exemplary under his leadership.'

'I'm glad to hear it. Thank you, Evido.'



Banzor left, still puzzled. He had questions, but he did not ask them. Guilliman did not offer him answers. He had not made a final decision yet. Until he did, there were no answers for Banzor's questions.

Guilliman moved to his seat behind the desk. He looked at Gage. The Chapter Master Primus looked less puzzled. *He's guessed*, Guilliman thought. Even so, he would not open this particular discussion with Marius. He wanted the quiet of his own counsel first.

Gage understood. Gage knew him well. So Gage spoke of something else. 'Thoas,' he said. 'Are the ruins that important?' 'You think I should let Hierax off his leash.'

Gage shrugged. 'The Destroyers haven't been planetside at all on this campaign.'

'Their tactics and their weapons have not been called for. We are not fighting that kind of war.'

Gage hesitated. 'Will we ever?'

'For those companies as they are presently constituted, I hope not.'

'As they are presently constituted?'' Gage asked.

Guilliman waved off the question. 'Later,' he said. 'To answer your first question – yes. The ruins are that important.' 'Why?'

'Their symbolism. Thoas is a culmination. We will crush the ork empire here. We will reclaim a world that we *know* was once a human one. Another piece of what is and must be inherent to the Imperium will be restored.'

'All that would be true regardless of the state of the planet.'

Guilliman gave the old veteran a sideways look. 'Since when are you such an advocate for the Destroyers' way of war?'

'I just don't think we should reject Hierax's approach out of hand.'

'I haven't. I said the symbolism of the ruins is important. It is for two reasons. We are not destroyers, Marius. That isn't why my Father created us. It can't be. It won't be. So preserving a city, even a dead one, is important. Especially now.'

'Because of the one we destroyed,' Gage said after a moment.

'Yes,' said Guilliman. 'Because of the one we destroyed.'

Monarchia. Lorgar's pride. The city raised to glorify the Emperor. The city razed because it had deified the Emperor. A place of architectural wonder. A beautiful city. The XIII Legion had come to the jewel of Khur. The Ultramarines had taken possession of the city. They had rounded up the population. They had reduced the empty city to ash and glass.

The people of Monarchia had committed no crime. They were loyal to the Emperor. *Loyal to a fault*, Guilliman thought. They were guilty only of believing the lie taught them by Lorgar, a lie Lorgar had believed himself. The memory of the grief on Lorgar's face during his confrontation with the Emperor haunted Guilliman. It had been the terrible agony of a son punished for doing what he had thought would be pleasing to his father.

The Ultramarines had destroyed a city and the spirit of its populace to chastise Lorgar. To humble his pride.

To make a point.

*Symbolism.*

'I keep wondering,' Gage said, 'why us?'

'Because my Father could trust us to perform the task as it needed to be done. Would you have wished it on any of the others?'

Gage shook his head.

'And Angron might have enjoyed himself,' Guilliman added. 'We did what we had to. We were deliberate. We were dispassionate. My Father's chastisement was measured.'

With a sigh, Gage said, 'I did not feel measured when we flattened Monarchia.'

'None of us did.' The destruction had taken its toll on the Word Bearers. That had been its purpose. There had been a cost for the XIII Legion too. 'We suffered a blow because of what we did there. We took that blow because it was necessary and because we could stand it. Do you see what Thoas can be for us?' *Symbolism.* He tapped a data-slate, summoning the pictasus and the Scouts of the 166th had captured. 'There is majesty there. Majesty worth preserving, and worth building upon. We will take back this city, and in time we will see a new civilisation rise here.'

'We'll be creators again,' Gage said.

'Thoas will wash the bitterness of Monarchia from our mouths.'

As he spoke, Guilliman turned his seat to look out through the crystallex at the planet below. He saw the plain where

his legions would land. His eyes locked onto the spot where he knew the ruins stood. He thought of absent cities. He tried to make himself think of cities yet to be, not of cities unmade. He failed. He thought of both.

He thought of the force of symbolism, and of the choice he knew he had already made.

*Though there are circumstances where elevation may be inevitable, it must never be perceived as such. The alternative is disastrous: the foregone conclusion bypasses the necessity of the theoretical. What is preordained can never be questioned. Thus, ossified tradition rules without the benefit of reason. In the worst cases, the errors it leads to are so far from identified and corrected that reality itself is misread, misrepresented and denied. Elevation must therefore always have a clear reason. Its justice must be undeniable. Inevitability must only be perceived in retrospect.*

*No principle is beyond the perception of envy. Consul Gallan demonstrated this. His ambition led him to see my elevation as manifesting the wrong sort of inevitability. He could only see with the eyes of a member of the old order on Macragge. His misunderstanding was thus itself inevitable. This perception is the spawning ground of schism and betrayal. Key, then, is the creation of a military culture where such perception is unthinkable. Such a culture goes beyond its warriors being able to see that elevation is based on merit. Rather, they take this fact as an unquestioned truth, as self-evident as the truth of the Imperium itself.*

– Guilliman,

*Essay on the Principles of Command*, 8.17.xxiii



# THE HORUS HERESY™

## THE LAST REMEMBRANCER

*In a secret fortress on the dark side of Titan, Rogal Dorn and Iacton Qruze meet with a prisoner. That prisoner has a tale to tell, of heroes and monsters, of honour and treachery, of life and death. He has stood at the side of the Warmaster himself, and he has a message for the Imperial Fists primarch. But can he be trusted? And can he be allowed to live? Rogal Dorn must decide the fate of the last remembrancer.*

This short story, taken from the New York Times bestselling Horus Heresy anthology *Age of Darkness*, might be considered unusual by connoisseurs of Black Library's fiction. There is nary a battle to be found, instead focusing on a conversation between the man tasked with defending Terra from his own brother's treachery, and someone who escaped from the traitors and may be an innocent victim, or the greatest living threat to mankind. However, it contains everything that marks out a truly great Horus Heresy – or Warhammer 40,000 – story.

It's dark, to the point of nihilistic, with a bleak tone established at the start that persists throughout. It puts characters who are essentially good people in a difficult situation and tests them, seeing how far they are willing to bend their morals in order to safeguard their future. And it crafts a compelling story of how easy it is to be seduced by the darkness that lurks in every corner of the Imperium, and how even the best of people can fall into treachery.

It's also just one story of nine in *Age of Darkness*, each of them dealing with the idea of treachery and deceit in different ways, from the staunch Roboute Guilliman's practical problem-solving to a very different kind of interrogation performed by a blood-crazed madman. Set in that context, 'The Last Remembrancer' is one fascinating facet of the wider war that engulfs humanity – a war fought not just with bolters and swords, but with deceit and words.



# THE LAST REMEMBRANCER

*John French*



*'In an age of darkness, the truth must die.'*

– words of a forgotten scholar of ancient Terra

They murdered the intruder ship on the edge of the Solar System. It spun through space, a kilometre-long barb of crenellated metal, trailing the burning vapours of its death like the tatters of a shroud. Like lions running down a crippled prey two golden-hulled strike vessels bracketed the dying ship. Each was a blunt slab of burnished armour thrust through space on cones of star-hot fire. They carried weapons that could level cities and held companies of the finest warriors. Their purpose was to kill any enemy who dared to enter the realm they guarded.

This star system was the seat of the Emperor of Mankind, the heart of an Imperium betrayed by its brightest son. There could be no mercy in this place. The ship had appeared without warning and without the correct identification signals. Its only future was to die in sight of the sun that had lit the birth of humanity.

Explosions flared across the intruder ship's hull, its skin splitting with ragged wounds that spilled dying crew and molten metal into the void. The two hunters silenced their guns and spat boarding torpedoes into the intruder's flanks. The first armoured dart punctured the ship's command decks, its assault ramps exploding open and disgorging amber-yellow armoured warriors in a roar of fire.

Each boarding torpedo carried twenty Imperial Fists of the Legiones Astartes: genetically enhanced warriors clad in powered armour who knew no fear or pity. Their enemy bore marks of loyalty to Horus, the Emperor's son who had turned on his father and thrust the Imperium into civil war. Red eyes with slit pupils, snarling beast heads and jagged eight pointed stars covered the hull of the ship and the flesh of its crew. The air had a greasy quality, a meat stink that penetrated the Imperial Fists' sealed armour as they shot and hacked deeper into the ship. Blood dripped from their amber-yellow armour and tatters of flesh hung from their chainblades. There were thousands of crew on the ship: dreg ratings, servitors, command crew, technicians and armsmen. There were only a hundred Imperial Fists facing them but there would be no survivors.

Twenty-two minutes after boarding the ship the Imperial Fists found the sealed doors. They were over three times the height of a man and as wide as a battle tank. They did not know what was inside but that did not matter. Anything kept so safe must have been of great value to the enemy. Four melta charges later, a glowing hole had been bored through two metres of metal. The breach still glowing cherry red, the first Imperial Fist moved through, bolt pistol raised, tracking for targets.



The space beyond was a bare chamber, tall and wide enough to take half a dozen Land Raiders side by side. The air was still, untouched by the rank haze that filled the rest of the ship, as if it had been kept separate and isolated. There were no jagged stars scratched into the metal of the floor, no red eyes set into the walls. At first it seemed empty, and then they saw the figure at the centre of the room. They advanced, red target runes in their helmet displays pulsing over the hunched man in grey. He sat on the floor, the discarded remains of food and crumpled parchment scattered around him. Thick chains led from bolts in the deck to shackles around his thin ankles. On his lap was a pile of yellow parchment. His hand held a crude quill made from a spar of metal; its tip was black.

The sergeant of the Imperial Fist boarding squad walked to within a blade swing of the man. More warriors spread out into the echoing chamber, weapons pointing in at him.

‘Who are you?’ asked the sergeant, his voice growling from his helmet’s speaker grille.

‘I am the last remembrancer,’ said the man.

The nameless fortress hid from the sun on the dark side of Titan, as if turning its face from the light. A kilometre-wide disk of stone and armour, it hung in the void above the yellow moon. Reflected light from the bloated sphere of Saturn caught in the tops of its weapon towers, spilling jagged shadows across its surface. It had been a defence station, part of the network that protected the approaches to Terra. Now the treachery of Horus had given it a new purpose. Here in isolated cells suspected traitors and turncoats were kept and bled of their secrets. Thousands of gaolers kept its inmates alive until they were of no further use: until the questioners were finished with them. There were countless questions that demanded an answer and its cells were never empty.

Rogal Dorn would be the first primarch to set foot in the nameless fortress. It was not an honour he relished.

‘Vile,’ said Dorn, watching as the void fortress grew nearer on a viewscreen. He sat on a metal flight bench, the knuckles of his armoured gauntlet beneath his chin. The inside compartment of the Stormbird attack craft was dark, the light from the viewscreen casting the primarch’s face in corpse-cold light. Dark eyes set above sharp cheekbones, a nose that cut down in line with the slope of the forehead, a down-turned mouth framed by a strong jaw. It was a face of perfection set in anger and carved from stone.

‘It is unpleasant, but it is necessary, my lord,’ said a voice from the darkness behind Dorn. It was a low, deep voice, weighted with age. The primarch did not turn to look at the person who spoke, a grey presence standing on the edge of the light. There were just the two of them alone in the crew compartment. Rogal Dorn commanded the defence of Terra and millions of troops but came to this place with only one companion.

‘Necessity. I have heard that often recently,’ growled Dorn, not looking away from the waiting fortress.

Behind Dorn the shadowed figure shifted forwards. Cold electric light fell across a face crossed by lines of age and scars of time. Like the primarch, the figure wore armour, light catching its edges but hiding its colours in shadow.

‘The enemy is inside us, lord. It does not only march against us on the battlefield, it walks amongst us,’ said the old warrior.

‘Trust is to be feared in this war then, captain?’ asked Dorn, his voice like the growl of distant thunder.

‘I speak the truth as I see it,’ said the old warrior.

‘Tell me, if it had not been my Imperial Fists that found him would I have known that Solomon Voss had been brought here?’ He turned away from the screen and looked at the old warrior with eyes that had vanished into pits of shadow. ‘What would have happened to him?’

The flickering blue light of the viewscreen spilled over the old warrior. Grey armour, without mark or rank, the hilt of a double handed sword visible from where it projected above his shoulders. The light glittered across the ghost of a sigil on the grey of his shoulder guard.

‘The same as must happen now: the truth must be found and after that whatever the truth demands must be done,’ said the old warrior. He could feel the primarch’s emotions radiating out from him, the violence chained behind a facade of stone.

‘I have seen my brothers burn worlds we created together, sent my sons against my brothers’ sons. I have unmade the heart of my father’s empire and clad it in iron. You think I wish to avoid the realities that face us?’

The old warrior waited a heartbeat before replying. ‘Yet you come here, my lord. You come to see a man who, in all likelihood, has been corrupted by Horus and the powers that cradle him.’ Rogal Dorn did not move but the old warrior

could feel the danger in that stillness like a lion poised for the kill.

'Have a care,' said Dorn, in a whisper like a sword sliding from a scabbard.

'Trust is a weakness in our armour, lord,' said the warrior, looking directly at the primarch. Dorn stepped forwards, his eyes deliberately tracing the bare grey surfaces of armour that should have displayed Legion heraldry.

'A strange sentiment from you, Iacton Qruze,' said Dorn.

The old warrior nodded slowly, remembering the ideals and broken oaths that had brought him to this point in time. He had once been a captain in the Luna Wolves Legion, the Legion of Horus. He was almost the last of his kind, and he had nothing left but his oath to serve the Emperor, and the Emperor alone.

'I have seen the price of blind trust, my lord. Trust must be proved.'

'And because of that we must throw the ideals of the Imperium to the flames?' said Dorn, leaning close to Qruze. Such focus from a primarch would have forced most mortals to their knees. Qruze held Dorn's gaze without faltering. He knew his role in this. He had made an oath of moment that he would stand watch over Rogal Dorn's judgement. His duty was to balance that judgement with questions.

'You have intervened, and so the judgement on this man is yours. He lives at your word,' said Qruze.

'What if he is innocent?' snapped Dorn. Qruze gave a weary smile.

'That proves nothing, my lord. If he is a threat he must be destroyed.'

'Is that what you are here to do?' said Dorn, nodding at the hilt of the sword on Qruze's back. 'To play judge, jury and executioner?'

'I am here to help you in your judgement. I do this for the Sigillite. This is his domain and I am his hand in this.'

An expression that might have been distaste ghosted across Dorn's face as he turned his back on Qruze.

On the viewscreen the side of the nameless fortress filled the screen; a toothed set of doors opening to greet them like a waiting mouth. Qruze could see a vast loading bay beyond lit by bright light. Hundreds of troops in gloss-red armour and silver-visored helmets waited in ranks, filling the docking bay floor. These were the gaolers of the nameless fortress. They never showed their faces and had no names, each was simply a number. Amongst them the hunched figures of the questioners stood in loose clusters, their faces hidden by hoods, fingers augmented with needles and blades protruding from the sleeves of their red robes.

The Stormbird settled on the deck with a purr of an antigravity field. Ice beaded its sleek body and wings as the warm air met void-cold metal. With a pneumatic hiss the ramp opened beneath the Stormbird's nose and Rogal Dorn walked into the stark light. He shone, the light reflecting from the burnished gold of his armour, glittering from rubies clutched in the claws of silver eagles. A black cloak lined in red and edged in ivory fell from his shoulders. As one every person in the docking bay knelt, the deck ringing with the impact of a thousand knees. Rogal Dorn strode through the kneeling ranks without a glance. Behind him Iacton Qruze followed in his ghost-grey armour, like a shadow in the sun's wake.

At the end of the ranks of crimson guards, three figures knelt and waited. Each wore armour the same gloss-red as the kneeling guards, their bowed heads encased by masks of tarnished silver. These were the key keepers of the nameless fortress. Qruze was one of the few people to have ever seen their faces.

'*Ave Praetorian*,' called one of the bowed figures in a booming electronic voice. With one voice every kneeling human echoed the call. The primarch spoke over the fading echoes.

'Take me to the remembrancer Solomon Voss.'

The man was writing when the cell door opened. The light from the glow-globe above him created a murky yellow halo that cast all but the makeshift desk and the man into shadow. Thin shoulders hunched over a sheet of parchment, a quill in a thin hand scratching out black words. He did not look up.

Rogal Dorn stepped into the cell. He had removed his armour and wore a black tabard held around the waist with a belt of gold braid. Even without his battle-plate he seemed to strain the dark metal walls of the cell with his presence. Qruze followed, still in his grey armour.

'Solomon Voss,' said Dorn in a soft tone.

The man looked up at them. He had a flat, handsome face, the skin smooth and lined only around the eyes. His steel-grey hair was pulled back into a ponytail that hung over the rough fabric covering his back. In the presence of a primarch many people would struggle to speak. The man nodded and gave a tired smile.



'Hello, old friend,' said Voss. 'I knew someone would come.' His eyes flicked to Qruze. 'Not alone though, I see.' Qruze felt the disdain in the words but held his face impassive. Voss starred at him. 'I know your face from somewhere.'

Qruze did not reply. He knew who the man was, of course. Solomon Voss: author of *The Edge of Illumination*, witness to the first conquests of the Great Crusade, according to many the finest wordsmith of the age. Qruze had met Voss once, long ago in a different age. So much had left its mark on Qruze since then that he was surprised his old face triggered even the weakest memory in this man.

Voss nodded at the bare grey of Qruze's armour. 'The colours and markings of a Legion were always a mark of pride. So what does unmarked grey imply? Shame, perhaps?' Qruze kept his face emotionless. Such a remark would once have angered him. Now there was no false pride for it to cut. He had passed far beyond his lost life as a Son of Horus or Luna Wolf.

Dorn looked at Qruze, his face unreadable but his voice firm.

'He is here to observe, that is all.'

'The silent hand of judgement,' said Voss, nodding and turning back to the sheet of parchment. The quill began to scratch again. Dorn pulled a metal-framed chair close to the desk and sat, the chair creaking under his weight.

'I am your judge, remembrancer,' said Dorn in a low voice tinged with a tone that Qruze could not place.

Voss did not reply but completed a line of lettering. He made a low half-whistling noise as he paused over a word. Qruze thought he could see feelings play over the remembrancer's face, a twinge of apprehension and defiance. Then, with a flourish, the quill completed a line and Voss placed it on the desk. He nodded at the drying words and smiled.

'Done. In all honesty I think it is my best work. I flatter myself that you would not find its equal amongst the works of the ancients.' He turned to look at Dorn. 'Of course, no one will ever read it.'

Dorn gave a half-smile as if he had not heard the last remark and nodded at the pile of parchment on the desk.

'They let you have parchment and quill, then?

'Yes,' sighed Voss. 'I wish I could say it was kind of them, but I rather think that they hope to scour it for secrets afterwards. They can't quite believe I am telling the truth, you see, but they also can't stop hoping that I am. The information on your brother, you see. I can feel their hunger for it.' Qruze saw the slightest tightening in Dorn's face at the mention of his brother.

'You have been questioned?' asked Dorn.

'Yes. But the heavy stuff has not started. Not yet.' Voss gave a humourless laugh. 'But I have a feeling that it was not far off. Until they stopped asking questions and just left me here.' Voss raised an eyebrow. 'That was your doing?'

'I was not going to let the great Solomon Voss disappear into an interrogation cell,' said Dorn.

'I am flattered, but there are many more prisoners here, thousands I think.' Voss was looking around at the metal walls of his cell as if he could see through them. 'I can hear the screams sometimes. I think they want us to hear them. They probably think it makes us easier to question.' Voss's voice trailed away.

This man is broken, thought Qruze, something within him has died and left only a half life.

Dorn leaned towards Voss.

'You were more than a remembrancer,' said Dorn. 'Remember?'

'I was something once,' he nodded still staring into the darkness. 'Once. Back before Ullanor, when there were no remembrancers, when they were just an idea.' Voss shook his head and looked down at the parchment in front of him. 'It was quite an idea.'

Dorn nodded and Qruze saw the ghost of a smile on the primarch's normally grim face.

'Your idea, Solomon. A thousand artists sent out to reflect the truth of the Great Crusade. An idea worthy of the Imperium.'

Voss gave a weak smile. 'Flattery again, Rogal Dorn. Not *completely* my idea, as you must remember.' Dorn nodded and Qruze heard a note of passion in Voss's voice. 'I was just a wordsmith tolerated amongst the powerful because I could turn their deeds into words that could spread like fire.' Voss's eyes shone as if reflecting the light of bright memories. 'Not like the iterators, not like Sindermann and the rest of his manipulating ilk. The Imperial truth did not need manipulation. It needed reflecting out into the Imperium through words, and images and sounds.' He broke off and looked at the black ink stains on his thin fingers. 'At least, I thought so then.'

'You were right,' said Dorn and Qruze saw the conviction flow into the primarch's face. 'I remember the manuscripts

you presented to the Emperor at Zuritz. Written by you and illuminated by Askarid Sha. They were beautiful and true.' Dorn was nodding slowly, as if trying to tease a response from Voss who was still looking at his hands. 'The petition to create an order of artists "to witness, record and reflect the light of truth spread by the Great Crusade". An order of people to be the Imperium's memory of its foundation – that was what you argued was needed. And you were right.'

Voss nodded slowly, then he looked up and there was a hollow look in his eyes. It was the look of someone thinking about what they had lost, thought Qruze. He knew. He had worn it himself in many dark hours in recent years.

'Yes, fine times,' said Voss. 'When the Council of Terra ratified the creation of the Order of Remembrancers, for a moment I thought I knew what you and your brothers must have felt, seeing your sons bringing illumination to the galaxy.' He gave a dismissive snort. 'But you are not here to flatter, Rogal Dorn, you are here to judge.'

'You vanished,' said Dorn in the same soft tone he had begun with. 'In the moments after the betrayal you vanished. Where have you been?' Voss did not answer for a second.

'I have been telling the truth since your sons took me from that ship,' he said, and looked at Qruze. 'I am sure it is in their mission accounts.'

Qruze stayed silent. He knew what Voss had said to the Imperial Fists that found him, what he had been saying to his interrogators ever since. He knew, and Rogal Dorn would know, but the primarch said nothing. The silence waited until Voss looked at Dorn and said what the primarch had been waiting for.

'I have been with the Warmaster.'

Iacton Qruze kept his distance as the primarch watched the stars turn above him. They were in an observation cupola, a blister of crystal glass on the upper surface of the nameless fortress. Above them Saturn hung, its bands of muddy colour reminding Qruze of fat running through meat. Dorn had cut short the questioning of Solomon Voss, saying that he would return soon. He had said to Qruze that he needed to think. So they had come here to think beneath the light of the stars and the eye of Saturn. Qruze thought that Dorn had hoped that Voss would deny his earlier claim, that he would find a reason to set him free.

'He is as I remember him,' said Dorn suddenly, still gazing out at the scatter of stars. 'Older, worn, but still the same. No sign of corruption to my eyes.'

*I must do my duty, thought Qruze. Even though it is like stabbing a blade into an unhealed wound.* He took a deep breath before speaking.

'No, my lord. But perhaps you see what you want to see.' The primarch did not move but Qruze sensed the shift in atmosphere, a charge of danger in the cold air.

'You presume much, Iacton Qruze,' said the primarch in a low growl.

Qruze took a careful step closer to Dorn and spoke in a level voice. 'I presume nothing. I have nothing but one unbroken oath. That oath means I must say these things.' The primarch turned and straightened so that Qruze had to look up into his face. 'Even to you, lord.'

'You have more to say?' growled Dorn.

'Yes. I must remind you that the enemy is subtle and has many weapons. We can protect against them only with suspicion. Solomon Voss might be as you remember him. Perhaps he is the same man. Perhaps.' Qruze let the word hang in the air. 'But perhaps is not enough.'

'Do you believe his claim? That he was with Horus all this time?'

'I believe the facts. Voss has been amongst the enemy, whether willingly or as a captive. He was on a ship enslaved to Horus that bore the marks of the enemy. The rest could be...'

'A story.' Dorn was nodding, a grim expression on his face. 'He was the greatest teller of stories that I have ever known. There are billions in the Imperium that only know of our deeds by the words he wrote. You think that he is spinning a tale now?'

Qruze shook his head. 'I do not know, lord. I am not here to judge, I am here to question.'

'Then do your duty and question.'

Qruze took a breath and began to count off points, raising a finger for each one. 'Why did he go to Horus if he is not a traitor? Horus slaughtered the rest of the remembrancers when he purged the Legions. Why would he keep one of them alive?' When Dorn did not interrupt Qruze continued. 'And an enemy ship, with a single man held safe within it, does



not drift into the Solar System alone.' He paused for a second, thinking of the thing that worried him most. Dorn was still looking at him, silently absorbing Qruze's words. 'It was not accident. He was returned to us.'

Dorn nodded, forming Qruze's worry into a question. 'And if he was, why?'

'Why did you go to Horus?' asked Rogal Dorn.

They were back in the cell. Solomon Voss sat by his desk with Rogal Dorn opposite him and Qruze standing by the door. Voss took a sip of spiced tea from a battered metal cup. He had asked for it and Dorn had assented. The remembrancer swallowed slowly and licked his lips before beginning.

'I was on Hattusa, with the 817th fleet, when I heard that Horus had rebelled against the Emperor. I could not believe it at first. I tried to think of reasons why, to put it into some form of context, to make some sense of it. I could not. But when I realised that I could not make sense of it I knew what I needed to do. I needed to see the truth with my own eyes. I would witness it and I would make sense of what I saw. Then I would put it into words so that others could share my understanding.'

Dorn frowned. 'You doubted that Horus was a traitor?'

'No. But I was a remembrancer, the greatest remembrancer. It was our duty to make sense of great events in art. I knew that others would doubt or would not believe that the brightest son of the Imperium could turn against it. If it was true I wanted that truth shouted from the works of as many remembrancers as possible.'

Qruze saw the passion and fire flash through Voss's face. For a moment the tiredness was gone and the man's conviction shone from him.

'You take much on yourself. To make sense of something that is senseless,' said Dorn.

'Remembrancers made what happened in the Great Crusade real. Without us who would remember any of it?'

Dorn shook his head gently. 'A war between the Legions is not a place for artists.'

'And the other types of wars we had been recording, were they more suitable? When all that had been built by you, by us, had been plunged into doubt, where else should I have been? I was a remembrancer; it was my duty to witness this war.' Voss put his cup of spiced tea down on his desk.

'I had started to make plans to get to Isstvan Five by calling in favours and contacts.' Voss's mouth twisted as if chewing bitter words. 'Then the Edict of Dissolution came through. The remembrancers were no more, by the order of the Council of Terra. We were to be removed and dissolved back into mundane society. Those already amongst the war fleets were no longer to be allowed to record events.'

Qruze could feel the bitterness in the man's words. In the wake of the news of Horus's betrayal many things had changed in the Imperium. One of these changes had been the removal of official backing for the remembrancers. With a stroke of a pen the remembrancers had been no more.

Better that than what could have become of them, thought Qruze. The image of men and woman dying under the guns of his former brothers flicked across his mind. An age ago, but no time at all, he thought. He blinked and the cell snapped back into sharp reality.

'But you did not obey,' said Dorn.

'I was angry,' spat Voss. 'I was the father of the Order of Remembrancers. I had witnessed all the years of the Great Crusade since it began on Terra. I had looked on demigods and the scattering of blood amongst the stars that has been the birth of the Imperium.' He raised his hand as if gesturing to stars and planets above them. 'I made those events real to minds that will never see them. I bound them in words so that those wars will echo into the future. In millennia to come there will be children who listen, or read, and will feel the weight of these times in my words.' He snorted. 'We remembrancers served illumination and truth, not the whim of a council of bureaucrats.' Voss shook his head, his lip curled for a moment and then he blinked.

'Askarid was with me,' he said quietly. 'She said that it was an impossible idea, dangerous and driven by ego. A pilgrimage of hubris, she called it.' He smiled and closed his eyes for a moment, floating in lost happiness.

Qruze knew the name Askarid Sha, illuminator and calligraphist. She had lettered Voss's work into scrolls and tomes as beautiful as his words.

'Your collaborator?' asked Qruze, the question slipping out of his lips. Dorn shot him a hard look.

'Yes, she was my collaborator, in every sense.' Voss sighed and looked at the dregs of tea in his cup. 'We argued, for

days,' he said quietly. 'We argued until it was clear that I was not going to change my mind. I knew it was possible to get to Isstvan Five. I had contacts throughout the fleets, on both sides of the war. I knew I could do it.'

Voss paused, staring into space as if someone stood there looking back at him from a lost past. Dorn said nothing, but waited. After a few moments Voss spoke, a catch in his voice.

'Askarid came with me, even though I think she feared how it would end.'

'And how did it end?' asked Dorn. Voss looked back at the primarch, his eyes still wide with memory.

'Isn't that what you are here to decide, Rogal Dorn?'

'He was right, about the Edict of Dissolution,' said Dorn. Voss had asked to sleep and Dorn had permitted it. He and Qruze had returned to the dome of crystal beneath the starfield. Qruze could feel the leaden mood of the primarch as he stood looking at the stars.

'The end of the remembrancers?' said Qruze, raising an eyebrow and looking up at Dorn. 'You think that they should be allowed to wander through this war? Recording our shame in paintings and songs?' There was a pause. Qruze expected another growl of rebuke but Dorn showed no emotion other than in the slow breath exhaling from his nose.

'I had my doubts when the Council ratified the edict,' said Dorn. 'The position as presented at the time was perfectly logical. We are at war with ourselves – we do not know how far the treachery of my brother spreads. This is not a time to allow a menagerie of artists to walk freely amongst our forces. This is not a war to be reflected in poetry. I understand that...'

'But beyond logic, you had doubts,' said Qruze. He felt that he suddenly understood why Rogal Dorn, Praetorian of Terra, had come to see an old remembrancer in a prison cell.

'Not doubts, sorrow.' Dorn turned, pointing out at the stars beyond the crystal glass. 'We went out into those stars to wage war for a future of enlightenment. We took the best artists with us so that they could reflect that truth. Now our battles go unremembered and unrecorded. What does that tell us?' Dorn let his hand fall.

'It is a practicality of the situation we face. The survival of the truth that we fought for makes demands that must be met,' said Qruze.

'Demands that must be wrapped in silence and shadow? Deeds done that must remain unremembered and unjudged?' Dorn began to walk away from the glass, his steps raising dust from the floor.

'Survival or obliteration – that will be history's judgement on us,' said the grey warrior.

Dorn turned to stare at Qruze, the ghost of anger on his face. 'And the only way is for the Imperium to become a cruel machine of iron, and blood?' said the primarch in a hard-edged whisper.

'The future will have a price,' said Qruze, not moving from the viewport. Dorn was silent. For an instant Qruze thought he saw a flicker of despair in the primarch's eyes. Behind him the planets of the Solar System glittered as cold points of light beyond the towers of the nameless fortress.

'What will we become, Iacton Qruze? What will the future allow us to be?' said Dorn, and walked away without looking back.

'When we reached Isstvan Five the massacre was complete,' continued Voss. 'I never got the chance to see the surface, but the void around it sparkled with debris. I watched it drift past the viewport of my stateroom, fragments still cooling, fires feeding on oxygen trapped in wrecks.'

Dorn nodded, his face unreadable as he listened to the remembrancer's story. Something had changed in the primarch after they returned from the observation deck. It was as if he had begun to wall something up inside him. It reminded Qruze of the gates of a citadel grinding shut before the advance of an enemy. If Voss noticed he did not show it.

'They came for us, the Sons of Horus. It was not until I saw them that I began to think that I had misunderstood this civil war.' Voss glanced at Qruze and the old warrior felt an ice-cold touch in his guts. 'Metal, sea-green metal, edged with bronze and covered with red slit eyes. Some had dried blood flaking from their armour. There were heads hanging on chains and by bunches of hair. They reeked of iron and blood. They said to come with them. Only one person asked why. I wish I could remember her name, but at the time I just wanted her to be quiet. One of them walked over to her and pulled her arms from her body, and left her screaming on the floor. We went with them after that.' Voss paused, his eyes unfocused as if seeing the woman die again in her own blood.



Qruze found his hands had clenched, angry questions surging through his mind. Which one had it been? Which one of his former brothers had done that deed? One that he knew? One he had liked? He thought of the moment when he had learnt the truth about the men he had called brothers. The past can still wound us, he thought. He let out a quiet breath, releasing the pain. He must listen. For now, that was what he was here to do.

‘There were many remembrancers with you?’ asked Dorn.

‘Yes,’ said Voss with a shiver. ‘I had persuaded a number of others to come with me. Other remembrancers who agreed we had a duty to show the truth of this darkening age. Twenty-one came with me. There were others too, taken from the ships of the Legions who had only just showed their allegiance.’ Voss licked his lips, his eyes wandering again.

‘What happened to them?’ said Dorn.

‘We were taken to the audience chamber on the *Vengeful Spirit*. I had seen it once before, a long time before.’ Voss made a small shake of his head. ‘It was not the same place. The viewport still looked out on the stars like a vast eye and the walls still tapered to darkness above. But things hung from the ceiling on chains, dried mutilated things, that I did not want to look at. Ragged banners, splattered with dark stains, covered the metal walls. It was hot, like the inside of a cave beside a fire pit. The air stank of hot metal and raw meat. I could see the Sons of Horus standing at the edge of the room, still, waiting. And at the centre of it all was Horus.

‘I think I still thought I would see the pearl-white armour, the ivory cloak and the face of a friend. I looked at him and he was looking at me, right at me. I wanted to run, but I could not, I could not move to breathe. I could only stare back at that face framed by armour the colour of an ocean storm. He pointed at me, and said “All but that one.” His sons did the rest.

‘Three seconds of thunder and blood. When it was quiet I was on the deck on my hands and knees. Blood was pooling around my fingers. There was just blood and pulped meat all around me. The only thing I could think of was that Askarid had been stood beside me. I felt her hand around mine just before the shooting started.’ Voss closed his eyes, his hands held together in his lap.

Qruze found that he could not look away from those ink-stained hands, the skin wrinkled, the fingers gripped together as if clutching a memory.

‘But he kept you alive,’ said Dorn, his voice as flat and hard as a hammer falling on stone.

Voss looked up, his eyes meeting the primarch’s. ‘Oh yes. Horus spared me. He walked to stand above me – I could feel his presence, that chained ferocity, like a furnace’s heat. “Look at me,” he said, and I did. He smiled. “I remember you, Solomon Voss,” he said. “I have cleansed my fleets of your kind – all but you. You I will keep. No one will harm you. You will see everything.” He laughed. “You will be a remembrancer,” he said.’

‘And what did you do?’ asked Dorn.

‘I did the only thing I could. I was a remembrancer. I watched every bloody moment, heard the words of hate, smelled the stink of death and folly. I think for a time I went mad,’ Voss chuckled. ‘But then I realised what the truth of this age is. I found the truth I had come to see.’

‘What truth is that, remembrancer?’ said Dorn, and Qruze could hear the danger in the words like an edge on a blade.

Voss gave a small laugh, as if at a child’s foolish question. ‘That the future is dead, Rogal Dorn. It is ashes running through our hands.’

Dorn was on his feet before Qruze could blink. Rage radiated from him like the heat of a fire. Qruze had to steady himself as Dorn’s emotion filled the room like an expanding thundercloud.

‘You lie,’ roared the primarch in a voice that had cowed armies.

Qruze waited for the blow to land, for the remembrancer to be nothing more than bloody flesh on the floor. No blow came. Voss shook his head. Qruze wondered at what the man must have seen to make this primarch’s rage blow over him as if it were a gust of wind.

‘I have seen what your brother has become,’ said Voss, carefully measuring his words. ‘I have looked your enemy in the eye. I know what must happen.’

‘Horus will be defeated,’ spat Dorn.

‘Yes. Yes, perhaps he will, but I still speak the truth. It is not Horus that will destroy the future of the Imperium. It is you, Rogal Dorn. You and those that stand with you.’ Voss nodded to Qruze.

Dorn leant down so that he was looking the man in the eye.

'We will rebuild the Imperium when this war is done.'

'From what, Rogal Dorn? From what?' sneered Voss, and Qruze saw the words hit Dorn like a blow. 'The weapons of this new age of darkness are silence and secrets. The enlightenment of Imperial truth, those were the ideals you fought for. But you cannot trust any more, and without trust those ideals will die, old friend.'

'Why do you say this?' hissed Dorn.

'I say it because I am a remembrancer. I reflect the truth of the times. The truth is not something this new age wants to hear.'

'I do not fear the truth.'

'Then let my words,' Voss tapped his parchment, 'be heard by all. I have written it here, everything I saw, every dark and bloody moment.'

Qruze thought of the words of Solomon Voss spreading through the Imperium, carried by the authority of their author and the power of their message. It would be like poison spreading through the soul of those resisting Horus.

'You lie,' said Dorn carefully, as if the words were a shield.

'We sit in a secret fortress built on suspicion, with a sword over my head, and you say I lie?' Voss gave a humourless laugh.

Dorn let out a long breath and turned away from the remembrancer. 'I say that you have condemned yourself.' Dorn moved towards the door.

Qruze made to follow but Voss spoke from behind them.

'I think I understand now. Why your brother kept me and then let me fall into your hands.' Dorn turned from the open cell door. Voss looked back at him, a weary smile on his face. 'He knew that his brother would want to save me as a relic of the past. And he knew that I would never be allowed free after what I had seen.' Voss nodded, the smile gone from his face. 'He wanted you to feel the ideals of the past dying in your hands. He wanted you to look it in the eye as you killed it. He wanted you to realise that you two are much alike, still, Rogal Dorn.'

'Bring me my armour,' said Rogal Dorn, and red-robed serfs scuttled from the darkness. Each bore a section of gold battle-plate. Some pieces were so large and heavy that several had to carry them.

Dorn and Qruze stood once more in the observation dome. The only light in the wide, circular chamber was from the starfield above. Rogal Dorn had not spoken since he had left Voss in his cell, and Qruze had for once not dared to speak. Voss's words had shaken him. No mad ranting or proclamation of Horus's greatness. No, this was worse. The remembrancer's words had spread through him like ice forming in water.

Qruze had fought it, contained it within the walls of his will, but it still clawed at his mind. What if Voss had spoken the truth? He wondered if it was a poison strong enough to burn the mind of a primarch.

Dorn had stood looking out at the stars for over an hour before he had spoken. The serfs would normally have armoured the primarch, cladding him in his battleplate piece by piece. This time he armoured himself, pulling a hard skin of adamantium over his flesh, framing his stone-set face in gold: a war god rebuilding himself with his own hands. Qruze thought that the primarch looked like a man preparing for his last battle.

'He has been twisted, my lord,' said Qruze softly and the primarch paused, his bare right hand about to slot into a gauntlet worked in silver with eagle feathers. 'Horus sent him here to wound and weaken you. He said as much himself. He speaks lies.'

'Lies?' said the primarch.

Qruze steeled himself and asked the question he had feared to ask since they had left Voss's cell. 'You fear that he is right? That the ideals of truth and illumination are dead?' said Qruze, an edge of urgency to his voice.

As soon as he spoke he did not want to know the answer. Dorn put his hand into the gauntlet, the seals snapping shut around the wrist. He flexed his metal-sheathed hand and looked at Qruze. There was a coldness in his eyes that made Qruze remember moonlight glinting from wolves' eyes in the darkness of lost winter nights.

'No, Iacton Qruze,' said Dorn. 'I fear that they never existed at all.'

The door to the cell opened, spilling the shadows of Rogal Dorn and Iacton Qruze across the floor. Solomon Voss sat at his desk facing the door as if waiting for them, his last manuscript on the desk at his side. Rogal Dorn stepped in, the



low light catching the edges of his armour. He looked, thought Qruze, like a walking statue of burnished metal. There were no sounds other than the steps of the primarch and the hum of the glow-globes.

Qruze pulled the door shut behind them and moved to the side. Reaching behind his shoulder he gripped the hilt of the sword sheathed at his back. The blade slid out of its scabbard with a whisper sound of steel. Forged by the finest war-smiths at the command of Malcador the Sigillite, Regent of Terra, its double-edged blade was as tall as a mortal man. Its silvered surface was etched with screaming faces wreathed by serpents and weeping blood. It bore the name *Tisiphone*, in memory of a forgotten force of vengeance. Qruze rested the blade point down, his hands gripping the hilt level with his face.

Voss looked up at the armoured figure of Rogal Dorn and nodded.

‘I am ready,’ said Voss and stood up, straightening his robe over his thin body, running a hand over his grey hair. He looked at Qruze. ‘Is this your moment, grey watcher? That sword has waited for me.’

‘No,’ came the voice of Dorn. ‘I will be your executioner.’ He turned to Qruze and held out his hand. ‘Your sword, Iacton Qruze.’

Qruze looked into the face of the primarch. There was pain in Dorn’s eyes, unendurable pain locked behind walls of stone and iron, glimpsed for an instant through a crack.

Qruze bowed his head so that he did not need to look at Dorn’s face, and held the sword out hilt first. Dorn took it with one hand, its size and weight seeming to shrink as he did. He brought it up between him and Solomon Voss. The sword’s power field activated with a crackle of bound lightning. The twitching glow of the blade cast the faces of both man and primarch in death-pale light and folds of shadow.

‘Good luck, old friend,’ said Solomon Voss, and did not look away as the blade fell.

Rogal Dorn stood for a moment, the blood pooling at his feet, the cell silent and still around him. He stepped towards the man’s makeshift desk where the heap of parchment lay neatly stacked. With a flick, the power wreathing the blade vanished. Slowly, as if goading a poisonous serpent, Dorn turned the page with the tip of the deactivated blade. He scanned one line of text.

*I have seen the future and it is dead*, it read.

He let the blade drop to the floor with a clang and walked to the cell door. As it opened he looked back at Qruze and pointed at the parchment and at the corpse on the floor.

‘Burn it,’ said Rogal Dorn. ‘Burn it all.’



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