Lone Wolf

"I've suffered near-mortal wounds, I've lost my family, my friends, but nothing, I say NOTHING, has hurt as much as when James, my son, ordered me to shoot him..."

--Commissar General Rolf Yarrick

The clash of steel against steel rang through the air. Thirteen-year-old James Yarrick watched in horror as his father, the famous Commissar-general Rolf Yarrick fought against the worst of Mankind's enemies: Lord Kharn, Prince of Blood and War. Rolf Yarrick, tall and wiry, imposing in his Imperial Commissar's uniform and with a strange blue-tinged hair, wielded his silvery blade with skill and determination against his opponent.

James had to conclude that he barely could look at the Dark Lord. He was large, impossibly large, clad from head to toe in dark red power armour with brass trims. In his right hand he held a black, twisted blade that reeked of noxious green fumes. James knew that it couldn't possibly be made by mortal hand.

"James!" Rolf Yarrick bellowed as he distanced himself enough from Kharn. "Go home! Find help! Now!" With that, Yarrick returned his fierce one-on-one fight with Kharn.

James nodded slightly and turned round and ran back home, to his mother, his sister and his three-year-old little-brother.

"You care far too much for them, Yarrick!" Kharn spat as he riposted one of Yarrick's attacks. "It only shows how weak you are!"

"WRONG!" Yarrick screamed. "My love, my concern for others is what has kept me, and the rest of humanity, alive! Your inability to see that is what makes you damned!"

Kharn roared and lashed out with his wicked deamon-blade again. It didn't carry the weight of his trusty old axe, but that was lost on Armageddon now. He would have Yarrick pay back every milligramme of pain he'd caused him, with interest.

Yarrick easily parried, never letting his emotions get the overhand. He forced down his hatred, knowing that the blade Kharn was wielding was looking for such emotions so that it could strike more effciently.

He whirled round, using his superior agility and speed to surprise Kharn as best he could, praying to the God-Emperor that James found help.

Kharn parried. It felt like hitting a brick wall. Yarrick felt pain throb in his arm as he backed off a few steps. Kharn was on him in an instant.

This was not going as planned.

For all the pain Rolf had felt in his life, this was nothing. He knew well enough that physical pain was but a splinter compared to the pain of lost loved ones. His mother, his father, Uncle Caspar, Commissar-general Chomaki, Commissar Irwin, his wives Fiona and Irina, his daughters and sons; their passings had pained him so much. In some wicked way he saw why Kharn called him weak. Kharn wasn't anchored by fear of losing his loved ones. He lived but for the thrill of battle.

But Rolf Yarrick never had. And he never would, if he'd have his say. Pain anchored him to his humanity, kept him sane, strange enough.

He was over two hundred years old now, and emotional pain was the only thing that reminded him of that he was human still.

Yarrick sourly reflected that Inquisitor Rovannion had been burned at the stake a few years earlier for writing a highly dubious book on the origins of the human race.

Yarrick had read it, as Rovannion had been haunting him his entire life. If one word in that book was actually true, Yarrick was prepared to believe it was that the human bloodlust was of orkoid origin. He'd never voice it to anyone, not even his current wife, Rebecca Silberstein, but there was no real denying it when faced with an opponent as grim as Lord Kharn.

Kharn charged at him, and Yarrick easily doged him, swinging in with his blade. The Yarrick sword sliced off a good chunk from Kharn's right shoulder guard.

Kharn roared and lashed out with his blade. Yarrick made an elegant backwards somersault and landed on his feet, striking a parrying pose just before the Dark Lord hit him like a sledgehammer.

Yarrick did in fact stagger backwards, but he didn't lose his footing. He altered his grip on his sword so that he held it like a dagger and made a quick swipe at Kharn's exposed left shoulder, making a clean cut flesh wound across Kharn's left bicep.

Kharn growled and made a swing that would take Yarrick's head off.

Yarrick slid down and rolled to the left, away from Kharn's reach.

It took him a while to understand he no longer held his blade in his right hand. In fact, his right hand was off at the wrist. Bright red blood squirted out of his stump.

With an angry cry, Commissar-general Rolf Yarrick slumped down on his knees.

Chuckling to himself, Kharn moved closer to his blood-sworn enemy.
"You had skill, Yarrick," he mused, with a content and utterly malicious smile behind his death's mask. "But not even half as much as you need to defeat me."
Trying to push back the tears and clutching his bloody stump, Rolf Yarrick knew the deamon was right.

James had heard the cry of pain and anger. He knew it hadn't been the deamon's voice. And he knew that if he didn't make it, there would be no father to save anymore.
Pushing his young body to the limit, James Yarrick ran the fastest he ever would do the last kilometre home.

"Any last words, Yarrick," Kharn said softly. "I owe you as much."
Yarrick glanced his blade just behind Kharn. An idea lit up. "Go to Helsreach, you frekk!" he spat and dove after the sword with his left hand.
Kharn spun round to slam his blade down in Yarrick's back.
Instead, he found himself hitting soft soil and got a wet feeling along his left arm.
Kharn slowly turned his head to see the Yarrickian sword sticking out of his shoulder. Holding it was a grim-looking Rolf Yarrick. The puny mortal had stabbed him through his left shoulder.
Yarrick wrenched the sword free, almost ripping Kharn's left arm off in the process. He stumbled backwards and slumped down on his knees again.
The Dark Lord howled in pain, wordless and inhuman. He raised his sword in sheer rage, to deal the pesky mortal the final blow.
Now or never!
A bright bolt of red-hot energy exploded the blade of Kharn's sword. Kharn turned his head and saw the last person he'd ever wanted to see.
"McKenzie!" he hissed.
"Stay right were you are, deamon!" McKenzie said as he aimed the plasma pistol at Kharn's face.
Behind his mask, Kharn's lips flickered to a smile and then he ducked into a Warp-portal that had seemingly appeared out of nowhere. The thing closed before McKenzie could react.
"At least that confirms my theories on Kharn having sorcerers," McKenzie muttered sourly as he holstered the plasma gun. He walked over to Yarrick, who seemed very pale.
"Did James..." Yarrick whispered.
McKenzie shook his head. "No, I felt this myself. James and your wife will be coming along soon though, with an ambulance VTOL-jet. Just stay with me, Rolf."
Yarrick nodded slightly. He was far gone with pain and fatigue, so far gone he didn't feel that McKenzie applied a psychic torniquet to his bleeding stump. Before Rebecca, James and the medics had arrived though, Rolf Yarrick had passed out from pain and blood loss.

A week later, at the main hospital of Vindaree, Rolf Yarrick was awake for the first time since he'd passed out at his ownings. He was sitting upright in his hospital bunk, propped up with pillows and studied his newly implanted bionic right hand. It looked pretty much like an ordinary hand, just that it was made of metal and plastic and not of flesh and bone. The cyber-physicians had spoken of so-called skin-baths, to completely cover the fact that you were using a bionic. But such vanity was beyond Rolf Yarrick. He did not like the bionic, but he knew he needed one to continue in service. However, he'd never try to be so vain as to try to cover it up. There was a slight cowardice over such a thought. If he would need to cover it up, he'd do it wearing a pair of gloves.
Yarrick looked around. It had been a while since he'd been in a civilian hospital, now that he thought about it. He was, after all, a commissar general. A civilian, and a normal life, add to that, was forever beyond his reach. His lot in life was to hunt the tainted and perverse, to uproot evil wherever it might lurk. That was his simple duty. In black and white.
Though, of late, Yarrick had realised that there were things that mattered more than the duty.
Throughout his life, his family had always gotten in the way when his duty called him to his work. He bitterly remembered a time when he'd wished nothing but a wife and children to love, and who would love back.
What a fool he'd been!
They only got in the way, as said. They fretted to much over his safety and could never accept that his chosen path was that of a warrior. He couldn't perform his duties well enough if they couldn't leave him alone. Why wouldn't they understand that?
"Because they love you," a voice said softly. Yarrick looked up and saw McKenzie standing in the doorway, stripped of his armour. He was wearing the ceremonial robes of a Master Lexicanum and a worried look.
"You know what I think of you reading my mind, McKenzie," Yarrick growled silently.
McKenzie nodded tiredly. "I do, but I couldn't resist. You worry about their safety too, don't you, Rolf? That's why you fret over them. Why you can't lose yourself in battle like you could before. Am I not right?"
Yarrick nodded. He remembered the times during the Armageddon wars. He'd completely lost himself in battle. Everything had turned a white blur, where there was no time for thought, only action. But now... He sourly reflected

over that Kharn could've been right after all. McKenzie must've sensed this too.

"Kharn's wrong, you know." McKenzie said and met Yarrick's stare without flinching. "He's the one who's weak, because he can't see the reason why he should avoid death. He has no fear of it. But you, Rolf, you've so much to lose you'll cling on to life forever, until you're done with this world. Kharn can't do that because he's been taught to know no fear. That's the curse of all Space Marines. In being taught to lose our fear for death, we, in a way, lose our individuality and humanity. Being human means not only to have a free choice of what to do with your life, but also to be afraid of that thing which we know we cannot escape, but still try to avoid: Death."

"You're saying I'm a better warrior than Kharn, eh?" Yarrick said and raised his bionic hand. "I doubt that, McKenzie."

"I'm not saying that," McKenzie said and looked softly at Yarrick. "I'm saying you can become a better warrior than him in time, as he has a roof for his ability. A roof set by Death and the fear of the same. He can't cross it, as his fear is non-existant. He has nothing to cling on to, Rolf. He'll let go of life much easier as he doesn't fear death. But not you. You have an iron will."

"Quite a solilouqy..." Yarrick muttered.

"Perhaps," McKenzie said and lowered his head. "Love is the thing that makes us human, Rolf. Without it, we would be nothing. Take me for my word when I say I haven't encountered love in the same way we humans define it in any race I've met. The Eldar, who claim to be so superior of us, have little, if no grasp of the idea at all. And you know, Rolf, that it is impossible to build a society on fear and hatred. That is why the Imperium will always triumph over the other forces out there. The Emperor loves his subjects, you know that. But the Chaos gods do not love their subjects. They only see them as means to an end.

"Remember that, Rolf. Your family loves you; your colleagues love you; Charleston, McGranth and I, we all love you like a brother. And you love us back. You look after your friends and family. You make sure that they come out alive and healthy through everything they go through. You're the most honourable man I've ever met, know that. Your ideas of life are firm and unshakable. Just as your faith. Your faith and love for the God-Emperor of Mankind.

"So, believe me when I say that Kharn hates your guts for nothing else than that you have everything and he essentially has nothing, and he knows it. He is but a slave to darkness."

Yarrick nodded thoughtfully. "True, when you put it that way. You are of course right about love. Most commissars know that they will have a lifetime of hatred aimed at them, but that most soldiers will appreciate that they've been lectured by a political officer, at least once in their lives. But, know this McKenzie, being a commissar is actually one hell of a lonely job."

"No doubt..." McKenzie's voice trailed off. "Look, Rolf, there's a reason I came here. I came directly after I found out from the Master Apothecarion of my Legio."

"What are you talking about?"

"I took a blood sample of your blood after you'd lost your hand and the testing we took on that DNA confirms my worst fears..."

"Go to, McKenzie. I want to know!"

McKenzie looked back at Yarrick, his eyes glittering slightly from restrained tears. "That part of your DNA that prevented your aging has been wiped out. I don't know exactly how, but I guess it had to do with the deamonblade Kharn was wielding. There's no trace of it anywhere. I asked the physicians here to perform a search for the DNA-code carrying the... uh... mutation of yours; they found nothing. They took tissue samples, muscle samples; nothing. You're going to age. You're going to become the age you truly are. This will take time, of course. You'll age the way normal men do. Starting from, where? Around about your early thirties. You have another fifty or sixty years to live, maximum. But I wouldn't give you more than forty."

Yarrick looked down and nodded. He looked as if he restrained a very strong emotion.

"I'm sorry, Rolf," McKenzie said and left.

As the lanky Marine had left, Yarrick began to sob, silently, unable to hold back the sorrow he felt inside.

"Forty years..." he mumbled silently. "That's not even nearly enough the time I need..."

"Now, take it easy, Rolf," Rebecca Yarrick scolded her husband as he stumbled drunkenly out to the parking lot. "The automobile is that way, honey!" she said and pointed off in the direction of the parked vehicle.

"I see it," Yarrick slurred. "Now the tricky part, to get there." He started to shamble off towards it, having obvious problems not veering off to the sides. Rebecca merely sighed and shook her head. Rolf had been a lot like this since he'd lost his right hand two years ago. He'd never truly acclimatized himself to his bionic hand, and he got drunk a lot easier these days. She couldn't fathom why.

Yarrick leant heavily on the bonnet of the car as he came up to it, turned his head and grinned sheepishly towards Rebecca. She was a sight, his wife. Tall and well-muscled for a woman, with black hair and pale skin, she was a model Armageddonian. Rebecca Silberstein, now Yarrick. He'd found her in a wharf in Acheron Hive. Love had struck him the same way she'd struck bolts into the hulls of battleships.

Rebecca unlocked the car and got in, as did Yarrick, after some fumbling with the lock. It was obvious that Rebecca was to drive. She hadn't drunk anything else than water the whole evening.

"Don't forget the seatbelt, dear," she said softly and helped Rolf out. Yarrick realised something.
"It has rained," he slurred.
Rebecca looked up and out. "Indeed it has. And this chilly air is going to make the roads frekking slippery. I'll have to be careful then, won't I?"
Yarrick nodded.
Rebecca started the engine and the car rolled out of the parking lot. The last thing seen of the black car was the yellow positioning lamps situated at the back of it, as it sped away into the dark, moonless night.

They'd been driving for some time when Rolf fell asleep. Due to the drink, he snored slightly. Rebecca glanced at him and smiled. As her eyes came back to the road, they widened in surprise. In the middle of the road, cast in stark light by the headlamps, something the size and shape of a bethas bull was standing, oblivious of the coming car.
Rebecca punched the brakes to the floor in panic, only succeeding in locking them. The car slammed into over a tonne of flesh and bone with a speed of nearly 70 kilometres per hour.
The car continued to roll. It went off the road and came to a stop far out on a field. The engine died with a feeble gurgle.
Then there was a deathly silence.

Rolf Yarrick awoke to the sound of a strange buzzing noise. He slowly opened his eyes and looked out of the front window, or what was left of it. He gasped slightly as he saw the mangled heap of a bethas on the bonnet. He became aware of voices, human voices, around him, talking in an urgent way. He looked to his left. One of the men on the outside noticed him and walked over to him.
"Don't move, sir," the man said. "Your legs are stuck and we're cutting you lose."
Well, Yarrick thought, that explained the buzzing noise. "I see. What about Rebecca, what about my wife? Is she okay?"
The man didn't answer. He just looked past Yarrick, at something behind his right shoulder. There was an incredible sadness in his eye.
Yarrick slowly turned his head round to look at the driver's seat on the right. He prayed and hoped to the God-Emperor of Mankind that things weren't as he feared.
Rebecca was still sitting in the driver's seat, but she was no longer alive. She was impaled on the long antlers of the bethas. Her face was a mask of shock and surprise. Yarrick tried to hold back the tears. He'd been through this before, hadn't he? Losing his wife, his loved ones. He could take it, couldn't he?
No. Every time, it hurt just as much.
Commissar General Rolf Yarrick wept like a child, pinned in place by the deformed metal of the car.

It was nearly twenty years since the death of his wife. The memory of her still sent needles through his heart. Rolf Yarrick knew he would never truly get over her. He never did. Each new wife he had fallen in love with had been different from the last. That was what made it bearable. But now he had made his mind up. No more pain. His place was in battle. Nowhere else.
He had had three children with Rebecca. The oldest, Janet, was twenty-five when her mother died. She'd already moved out and was living her own life. She'd taken the loss much better than Yarrick. He wasn't surprised really. Women seemed to be able to cope with loss much better than men. Why, he couldn't fathom.
The youngest, Frederick, had been a mere five years old. Yarrick had, rather callously, sent him to the Schola Progenum to be trained as a commissar. He knew he couldn't take care of the boy himself. Yet, he had visited his son as often as he could.
The oldest son, James, had been fifteen at the death of his mother. Yarrick had taken care of him for a few years. When James had turned eighteen, he had asked his father if he could become a soldier in the Imperial Guard. Yarrick couldn't say no to his favourite child. James had signed up and been singled out as officer material. Now, at the age of 34, he was a captain in the Callidussian 27th. Although constantly worried over his safety, Yarrick was proud of his son's achievements.

"Father, what are you thinking about?" James Yarrick asked as he walked up to his father and military superior, Commissar General Rolf Yarrick. The old warrior turned to look at his son and smiled warmly. They were standing in the massive view port bay of the Cardinal Boras, in orbit around Sayna. James didn't know his father had just heard wonderful news from James' wife, Cecil.
"That this is a stupid place for you to be, after all," Yarrick replied. James laughed.
"You always worry about me, father. But here I am, whole as whole, never better and all that. I've been trained to avoid bullets after all."
"Still," Rolf Yarrick sighed. "It's only natural for a parent to worry. You're my future, James. The family's future. And you wouldn't want to widow that nice wife of yours, no?"

James nodded. "I better get to my troops," he said suddenly and made off before Yarrick could protest.
"Emperor protect you, son," Yarrick said quietly. It would have to wait for later, then.

Sayna, civilised industrial world in the central south of the Imperium. Producer of laser glass for lasguns and lascannons and well as laser sights. A world under Chaos incursion. The cultists, proclaiming no certain allegiance to any particular god, were not many and not as well organised as the Kinthas or Children of the Light Fantastic, but they still proved a threat to Imperial production. So the High Lords had dispatched the 25th and 27th Callidussian with support from the 14th Armageddon Steel Legion to quell the rebellion. Commander in chief was the legendary Liberator of Armageddon, the Wolf of Callidus; Commissar Rolf Yarrick.
Personally, Yarrick thought it was overkill to send three fully armed Imperial Guard regiments to quell a minor rebellion like this. It did not take many weeks before they had the cultists surrounded in the capital of Sayna. Yarrick moved his forces in for the final blow, ready to exterminate the enemy. He was just to give the order to take no prisoners when word reached him that the planetary governor was still alive and held captive by the cultists. The Administratum's orders were clear: if the governor was still loyal, he was to be taken back alive. Yarrick had sighed at it all. That meant a gruelling city fight.
The orders were changed. They were going in low and slow.

Jumping into cover, just being missed by two fierce bolts of las, Yarrick cursed the Administratum. If he could have chosen, they would have bombed the city flat with artillery and have done with. He caught himself and banged his forehead with the heel of his palm. There he went again, letting his emotions run ahead of him. There were still loyal civilians in the city. Maybe the city fight could not have been avoided? The difference between this and the original plan was only that this way was taking much more time into question as they had to search each and every building.
The cultists were not stupid. The planetary governor had been moved from his villa into the city itself. Where, only the Emperor knew. And it was turning out to be quite tricky in finding him again. Yarrick cursed again.
The las from his enemies spat against the rockcrete of his cover a few more times. He counted the shots. There! Empty!
Yarrick jumped up, armed with a lasgun from a fallen soldier and fired off a salvo on full auto at his opponents. As he did so, he ran forward, keeping their heads down long enough for him to find new cover further forward.
As they had reloaded, they fired again. Again, Yarrick counted shots. When they ran dry this time, however, he pulled out a frag grenade and tossed into their cover. The terrified shriek just before the blast told him all he needed to know and Yarrick went for other prey.
Further down the street, he joined up with a squad of Armageddon Steel Legionnaires. They were busy clearing out what looked like a bunker of sorts. Yarrick was amazed at their efficiency. Using their special "Stielgranaten", which due to their design could be thrown further, they forced the cultists down into the bunker. After that, they sent forth two flame thrower armed troopers who flushed the bunker with fire. After that, they picked out two more Stielgranaten, threw them into the bunker and, not waiting for the blasts, moved on. What were they doing? They were here to rescue someone!
He walked up to the squad sergeant.
"Sergeant, why the rush?" Yarrick asked.
The sergeant turned and saluted. "Sir! That is how we work in the Steel Legion. Work fast, work hard!"
"I see, but we are here to rescue a planetary governor. Not maim him."
The sergeant first locked shocked and them looked away, ashamed over having forgotten such elementary orders in the heat of battle. "I'm sorry, sir."
"Continue, but I want you to check places like that. Now, it's too late for this bunker, but keep it in mind. I've heard Armageddon Commissars aren't as forgiving as I am for disobedience."
The sergeant clicked his heels together in Armageddon salute, a salute inherited from Charvia, and said he would send three troopers to check.
With that, Yarrick moved on down the street.

Twenty minutes later, he found hismelf in a particularly vicious fight for the main cathedral in the city. The fight involved an entire company of the Callidussian 27th, Yarrick noticed. It took him a while to realise it was James Yarrick's company.
Yarrick made a desperate attempt to try and locate his son. He cut through the Chaos cultists that attacked him with ease, but his spirit was not in it. His mind was elsewhere. Something within him told him he had to find James, it was very important that he found James.
Yarrick finally located one of the company's lieutenants and ran towards him.
"Sir!" the lieutenant saluted as Yarrick approached him. "I'm glad you made it here. I think we've found the cultist head quarters."
"Is that so?" Yarrick mused. "Where's your captain? Where's James Yarrick?"
The lieutenant looked a bit apprehensive before he replied. He new the family connection between the two Yarricks.

Then he slowly raised his arm and pointed towards the cathedral. "In there sir. The cultists captured him a few blocks down as he lead a spearhead when we tried to break them. We assaulted them because we saw the cultists were moving the Planetary Governor. Captain Yarrick recognised him from briefing picts."

Rolf Yarrick couldn't believe his ears. Not now. Not his beloved son.

Yarrick called a comms operator up to him and sent a message down the line. He wanted a squad of Armageddon Storm Troopers, fully armed, to get down to the main cathedral, this instant!

It took the Storm Troopers ten minutes to get to the main cathedral. Yarrick outlined the situation, not mentioning that his son was captive, but that the planetary governor of Sayna was held inside the cathedral. Orders where simple: They were to gain access to the cathedral and flush out the cultists. No prisoners where to be taken.

A minor barrage was laid down by elements from the 25th Callidussian tank regiment and several smoke greandes fired as cover as Commissar Yarrick advanced into the cathedral with the Storm Troopers.

In the ensuing confusion in the enemy lines, they easily outmanouvered and destroyed any resistance. The Storm Troopers used their hellguns with great precision and Yarrick eschewed the lasgun over Chomaki's bolt pistol. He still carried it, after all these years. It served as a reminder of what he'd gone through to become who he was. It kept him humble.

But nothing of that was in Yarrick's mind at the moment. His thoughts were focused on one thing alone: his son.

A carefully placed krak grenade blew the cathedral gate off its hinges and the Storm Troopers rushed into the holy place. Yarrick got an uncanny pang of recognition when he saw the defaced Imperial iconography. It had been in a similar place that Chomaki had died. Yarrick shook the foreboding feeling off and concentrated on fighting.

His sword slashed through the dark robes of the cultists easily and as he advanced, he saw his son up at the altar. He was bound by hands and feet and was lying on the floor, next to the planetary governor, who had been treated in a similar manner.

Above them stood the last thing Yarrick had wanted to see: the blood red armoured monstrosity that is a Berzerker. It was armed with a chain axe and a bolt pistol. Yarrick knew it was a lesser champion but it still sent cold dread down his spine and hot rage to his soul to know that Kharn was in some way involved with this.

"Finally," the Berzerker called, "the Wolf dignifies us with an entrance! And he brings a party! Rejoice in the bloodshed that is to take place. Rejoice I say!"

With that, more than thirty cultists armed with chain weaponry and nothing else exploded from behind the altar. The Berzerker's personal body guard, Yarrick guessed. As he trained his bolt pistol on the advancing cultists, he heard the Storm Trooper sergeant, a man named Hubert Krebs, shout the order "Feuer frei!", "Fire freely" in High Armageddonian. A virtual wall of hellgun las slammed into the advancing cultists, now clearly identifiable as Khornate. The lack of iconography earlier had offset Yarrick to believe they were facing undivided cultists, but this obvious display of allegiance showed that the Cult Leader, the Berzerker Champion, was choicy in his selection of personal bodyguard. And understandably so.

Yarrick's sights were still locked on the altar and the blood red giant. As his bolt pistol clicked dry, he quickly holstered it and threw himself into close combat. The cultists, although armed with chain weaponry, stood no chance against Yarrick's burning fury and his legendary sword. He slowly cut himself a bloody swathe through the cultists and finally faced the Berzerker.

The Berzerker smirked and put a shot right through the head of the planetary governor, smearing the poor man's brain over the sacred altar.

"One more step, Yarrick, one more movement, and your son gets it next," it taunted. Yarrick froze. How could the monster know? How?

"It's all too obvious you are father and son," the Berzerker said, as if reading Yarrick's thoughts. The cacophony of the surrounding battle seemed to die away. Yarrick dared a fast glance. It looked as if the grey uniformed Armageddonians where getting the upper hand. Was this a deseprate last measure on behalf of the Chaos? Testing his true mettle?

Yarrick heard a slight scrape behind himself and spun round automatically, beheading the cultist that had creeped up on him with a swift stroke. The whirring chainsword hit the ground with a clang. As Yarrick turned back to the Berzerker; he knew what was going to happen.

"Told you not to move," the Berzerker said and sent a bullet through James Yarrick's stomach.

Rolf Yarrick did not do anything, could not do anything, but watch. His body froze in fear for the second time in his life. For the first time since he had faced Lord Kevlinn himself. This could not be! Not James! How could he tell Cecil Yarrick this? In her delicate state? That he'd watched her husband and his son bleed to death, unable to do anything?

The Berzerker started to walk up to the stupefied Rolf Yarrick, revving up his chain axe to take the head of the Imperial Hero and offer his blood to the Throne of Skulls.

The Chaos Marine never got that far. A bolt pistol shot exploded in his chest piece and sent him reeling backwards. At first, the traitor thought it was Yarrick that had fired, but the commissar still stood frozen in shock. But behind him, a man in dark grey uniform and black carapace armour ran up. Sergeant Hubert Krebs fired another shot at the monster in front of him, making another dent into the chest piece and sending the monster reeling again. He knew that the bolts were a far cry from penetrating the power armour of a Chaos minion, but he knew something that could.

As the Berzerker righted himself, he felt the Storm Trooper sergeant land on him and mash something into one of the holes in his chest armour. The pathetic fool! The Berzerker rammed his left gauntlet through the stomach of the puny human and lifted him off and away from himself. Only then did he see the strap and safety from the Stielgranate's shaft that was poking out from his chest wrapped around the sergeant's wrist. The fuse had been activated as he'd pulled the man off him.

Sergeant Krebs looked at the red monstrosity with fading eyes.

"Gott-Kaiser mit uns," he whispered, reciting the motto of the Armageddon Steel Legions.

The Berzerker exploded in a cloud of bone and blood.

The explosion seemed to be what brought Yarrick back to reality. The Chaos cultists had been defeated, their leader dead and yet still he felt no joy, only an infinite sadness.

Yarrick walked over to his dying son and knelt by him, cradling his head in his lap.

"It's going to be alright, son," Yarrick said soothingly. He knew he was lying, but still... it was his son.

James coughed bloody flegm and looked up at his father. "You're an awful liar, father. There's no chance I can survive this. It hurts too much. End me. Please."

Yarrick looked shocked at his son. What he asked for was out of the question.

"I can't, James. How can I look your widow in the eyes then? I can I hold your child in my arms when I know what I've done?"

"Cecil's...?"

"Yes. I meant to tell you earlier, but the time never presented itself. I'm so sorry, James. I thought it could wait until the victory celebrations, to make the times even merrier for you. And now it becomes this horrible tragedy instead."

"Father, I'm happy. So very happy. So please, grant me my final wish. End me. Let me die thinking of Cecil and our child."

Yarrick hestitated. His own bolt pistol was spent. He could not, would not reload it for this alone. As if sensing his father's predicament, James spoke again.

"Use my laspistol, father. It's still in its holster. They never even removed it. Please. Dad?"

Slowly, reluctantly, Yarrick pulled out the sleek pistol from its holster. After some thought, he switched off the safety and aimed it at James' head.

"Rest easy, my son," Yarrick said softly, his voice not quite managing without breaking.

With that, Rolf Yarrick pulled the trigger. James' body slumped in his lap.

Yarrick dropped the laspistol onto the floor and hugged his dead son tightly. Raising his head up, he howled out a wordless scream of pain and anguish, making it echo in the vast space of the Imperial Cathedral of Sayna Capital.

Staring out the vast vistas of the Imperial Commissariat head quarters on Secondus, Yarrick tried to come to terms with what he was about to do. His mind still could not quite accept it. He tried to rationalise his acting. What he was about to do was for the better of the Imperium. Not only his own state of mind.

Lord Commissar Buric had asked him to wait outside his office a few minutes so he could sort a few things out. Buric was a powerful man, Yarrick concluded. So powerful he could make a Living Legend wait for him to finish some paper work. The thought amused him. It was not often Rolf Yarrick was asked to wait. Even Planetary Governors made time to see him immediately.

It was humbling, and good, to be treated like just another commissar general, or even commissar for that matter, when he went to see one of the most powerful men in the Imperium.

The door to Buric's office opened and the lord commissar motioned Yarrick inside. Theodore Buric was a tall man, around 1m90, and broad-shouldered. His physique spoke of a man used to the hardships of a battle field though, like most staff serving commissars, he had rounded out lately. Yarrick felt a pang of sadness swish through his mind as he thought of Hendrik Irwin. He had been his mentor just as much as Chomaki had been.

"Please, Yarrick," Buric said and motioned to a generously upholstered chair. "Make yourself comfortable."

"No, thank you, lord," Yarrick replied rather coolly. "I would rather stand. I shan't be long." His High Gothic was much better now.

Buric gave him an odd look and then shrugged. As he sat down, he asked, "And what is on your mind, then?"

Yarrick decided to take the bethas by the horns. "I am going to resign, lord."

Buric gave an involuntary cough. "You're not serious!"

"With all due respect, lord commissar, I am no longer fit to carry out the duties of a commissar and a general," Yarrick continued, just as coolly.

"'No longer fit...' What about the Sayna liberation last month? That was carried out with a text book precision, Yarrick."

"It is because of Sayna I want to retire, lord. On the planet, during that mission, something terrible happened."

"Yarrick, if this is about your son, I am deeply sorry. But it's still no reason to resign. You have lost family members before, haven't you?"

"I have, lord. Though not in this manner."
"What do you mean?"
"James Yarrick, my son..." Yarrick felt a clot for in his throat and he swallowed hard to make it go away. "I shot him, lord. He was mortally wounded and asked me to shoot him. And I did."
"A mercy killing, Yarrick. If he was suffering, it was the least you could do for him."
"I know... even so!" Yarrick's voice was barely a whisper now. He bit his lip as the emotions came back. Emotions he had fought hard to supress the last month. He knew he had to grieve, but this wasn't the place nor the time.
"Take a month or two off then, Yarrick. Greieve your loss properly. The Imperium needs you. You're something people look up to, a genuine hero figure. The Imperium haven't got many of those currently."
Yarick gave a sardonic smile. Some hero he was.
"For the God-Emperor's sake," Buric continued, "I read about your successes in the Schola! You were a hero already then. You were a hero by the age of thirty! Long before my grand-father was born!"
"Exactly, Lord Commissar Buric; I am a walking piece of history. That's how you all view me. You don't understand, you can never understand, what it feels like outliving your own grand-children. After a while, it numbs your senses. It makes you less human. But then again, I'm not really human to begin with."
Buric looked startled. "What do you mean?"
Yarrick ignored the question. He took off his cap and placed it on the lord commissar's desk. It was the symbolic way a commissar resigned himself of his duties. The cap badge was also a badge of office.
"I am unfit as a commissar as I have started to put my own interests, such as family, ahead of the better of the Imperium, my lord."
Buric gaped for a moment and finally found words. "'Betterment of the Imperium'? You resigning is not for the better of the Imperium, Yarrick. This is ridiculous! Now put your cap back on!"
Yarrick simply turned on his heel and walked out.
"Yarrick! Come back here!" Buric shouted after him, though he knew it was no use. It would seem the old man had made up his mind.

As Yarrick walked down the corridor, he passed a young man, also a commissar. He was tall and handsome, with a tint of blue in his cropped hair.
"Father?" Frederick Yarrick asked as Rolf Yarrick walked past him. "What are you doing here?" Then he noticed the conspicious lack of a cap. He knew the ritual too.
Yarrick turned and faced his youngest. "Fred. Just the man I wanted to see." There was a tad sarcasm in the voice, but Frederick ignored it.
"Why have you resigned? Is it because of James?"
"More than so. Fred, I'm going to ask you of a favour. Look after Cecil and her child... when it comes."
"I'm a commissar, father. I can't just leave this place. I have duties."
"Tell Buric I told you to do so. He still respects me, otherwise he wouldn't have let me out of his office without the cap."
With that, Rolf Yarrick left his son alone with his thoughts and questions.
He also left the Imperial annals for several years, disappearing from view. No one knew where he went.

It was fall here. The days had grown shorter and the golden yellow ears of wheat beckoned to be harvested. As dusk settled across County Invas of Callidus, Rolf Yarrick reflected over how strange his homeland soil felt; like he did not belong here after all. He could not place why this was. He had travelled the Imperium incognito for the last five years, although it had not been easy. From what he had heard, the Inquisition had been quite busy after his sudden resignation. During these five years, Yarrick had tried to seek some sort of enlightenment as to what and who he really was. So far, he had turned up empty handed.
And now he had returned to Callidus, the planet that had given birth to him. He was practically back at the very same place where his long journey once had begun.
He had of course been back here before. He had even had a tomb built on the very spot of the original Yarrick ownings. There, he had moved Uncle Caspar's body, as well as his entire family. There, he had buried three wives and seven children. He hoped he would be the next one to be laid to rest in there because every time he buried someone close to him, Yarrick felt a part of himself go cold and die.
Yarrick stood in front of the fairly large building. It was created in an austere, sober manner, its architecture underpinning the building's purpose as a final resting place. Yarrick had commissioned the Callidussian architect Yesoch himself for this purpose. The man was long dead, his legacy and profession carried on by his daughters and grand-children, but his original work lived on in buildings like these.
Yarrick opened the door and walked inside, closing it behind himself and walking down the aisle towards the statue of Hrodwulf Le'man. The granite statue was slightly larger than life, its hands clasped in front of the body, resting atop the hilt of the Yarrick sword. Rolf Yarrick had left it there five years ago. He had had the statue erected on McKenzie's

advice, in this very stance.

Yarrick stopped in front of the statue and looked at the sword. He had wielded it for so long, it had almost hurt a bit to leave it behind. Part of him longed to hold it again, but another part asked why he should? He was no longer a commissar. He had willingly retired.

"You can take the commissar out of duty, but you can't take the duty out of a commissar," a voice said from the shadows. Yarrick turned around and looked at a large figure sitting on one of the pews. His eyes needed a few seconds to accustom themselves to the gloom, but he soon recognised McKenzie's outline. He wasn't wearing his armour: he was wearing long, blood red robes and a black cloak.

"What brings you here, McKenzie?" Yarrick asked softly. Life and this man in particular held no more surprises to him.

"I was just about to ask the same," McKenzie said and stood up. "You caused quite a ruckus a few years back. You could've harmed the Imperium seriously with that act. Luckily, the Commissariat are very good at propaganda and managed to cover your arse. Did you know the Inquisition inquired the entire Commissariat command on Secondus after your departure?"

"I could've guessed as much," Yarrick replied. McKenzie raised an eyebrow quizzically as he heard this reply.

"I have had enough, McKenzie," Yarrick said after a moment of silence. "I came here to remind myself of why I resigned. That's the most straight answer I can give. Instead, I find myself strangely tempted to pick up the sword again, although I put it to rest here for a reason."

"Do you know why you feel tempted?" McKenzie asked. Yarrick shook his head slowly.

Yarrick walked over to a tomb. "This is where my dear, lovely Fiona rests. A warm, compassionate woman. A perfect mother. Always smiling. She smiled even as she died holding my hand. In the end she could barely remember her own name, but she remembered my face. And she smiled every time she saw me."

Yarrick walked over to another tomb. "Here lies Irina, my Ice Princess of Moskva. Just like her homeworld, she had a cold, harsh outside, but a warmer inside. And just like ice melts in spring, she withered away from me in cancer. I could do nothing but watch."

He walked over to a third tomb, that looked fairly new. "And here rests Rebecca, the Armageddonian valkyrie. She had a temper as hot as a blow torch but with a playful side to it. Very independent and strong willed. She was taken in an accident not far away from here."

Yarrick looked up at McKenzie. "My wives are the reason I resigned, McKenzie. I don't want my family to suffer because of my profession."

"Your family, or yourself?" McKenzie replied with an uncharacteristic harshness. Yarrick looked stumped.

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean," McKenzie said and folded his arms across his chest. "What I mean is that this behaviour does not befit an Imperial Hero. This is not the Rolf Yarrick I knew. This despicable thing that stands before me cannot possibly be the Liberator of Armageddon, the razor-sharp war-artisan that earned himself the monicker the Wolf of Callidus."

A nerve twitched in Yarrick's left eye corner. "Are you saying I'm a heretic, McKenzie?"

"No," McKenzie replied, "but I mean to say that this wallowing in self-pity has gone far enough. Maybe I should have refrained from telling you what would happen to you when you lost your right hand? It would seem you've forgotten the blood oath you took as the scar of it was no longer part of your body."

Yarrick looked down at the mechanical implant that now served as his right hand. He didn't even consider it anymore. It was a part of him.

Yet McKenzie was right. The scar he had worn since his very first encounter with Lord Kevlinn was gone. With it no longer around to remind him of why he did not give up all those years ago, he had succumbed to the temptation of self-pity and self-reproach. It was as if a veil had been raised from his eyes. Yarrick realised he had been incredibly selfish and arrogant these last years. A behaviour that did not befit an Imperial Commissar and Hero. Behaviour that in itself should be alien to him. How could it have gone so far?

McKenzie seemed to realise what was taking place inside Yarrick's head. "I think it was the fight with Kharn, when you lost your hand, that started it," he said. Yarrick looked up sharp, pure curiosity in his eyes, McKenzie was relieved to see.

"I believe that in that battle, you had to draw the conclusion that you were a far cry from being the Dark Lord's match. If I don't misremember, that was what your original blood oath had been about? But when you realised, perhaps subconsciously, that you didn't live up to that demand, you started to hate yourself."

Yarrick nodded. "Yes, it makes sense. I also remember feeling I had lost my original edge. I couldn't-"

"'loose myself in battle like I used to.' That's more or less exactly your words from back then, in that hospital in Vindaree. I remember. And I said that your love for your family could make you stronger than the Dark Lord, because he was incapable of the most human emotion of all. So what I want to know, is where do you think you went wrong?"

Yarrick scratched his bearded chin as he thought about that. He had not shaved in a goodly while. He could not be bothered these days. Maybe that was the problem? That he had not bothered to find a deeper meaning and maybe even an answer in McKenzie's statement? He had just continued to worry over his family. They had become a burden to him in battle and he had started to loathe them at the same time that he loved them and Yarrick had started to hate himself

for these feelings. McKenzie had meant him to use his love for his family as an asset in his fighting. The Dark Lord did not fear death, because he had nothing to lose. So what did Yarrick have that Kharn did not?

The realisation struck him like a slegdehammer.

"I do not fear death, for I have something to protect. Something that means more to me than life itself."

"You finally figured it out," McKenzie said with a warm smile. "And although you may die physically-"

"My memory will live on in my loved ones."

"Indeed," McKenzie said and nodded as Yarrick looked at him, astonished at this new found look on life. "Your memory, or rather, the memory of your actions became firmly rooted in the entire Imperial conscious when you earned yourself the title Liberator of Armageddon. If the Dark Lord dies, so does his reign of terror, but if you die, you will live forever in the minds of Imperial citizens. Now do you realise what you have that he doesn't?"

Yarrick nodded slowly. "Yes. And my fault was to ignore the obvious." With that, Yarrick turned around and pulled out the Yarrick sword from the clasp of his ancenstor Hrodwulf Le'man. It felt as if the sword had never left his hand. With a swift movement, Yarrick had sheathed it. He had carried the empty sheath with himself as a reminder of what he no longer was, but that time was past now.

He walked towards the door of the Yarrick family tomb.

"Where are you going, Rolf?" McKenzie called after him.

"I have no more duties as a commissar," Yarrick replied. "But I do have duties as a father... and a grand-father. I have no intention of seeking out the Dark Lord, but if he wishes another go at me, I won't be found wanting. Let him come. This time I'll be ready for him."

As Yarrick left and closed the door after himself, McKenzie sighed in the gathering darkness.

"That was too close..." he mumbled silently. "May the Emperor protect you, Rolf."

Yarrick had made his way towards Frederick's house the last few days. McKenzie's words were still crisp in his ears. He would carry them with himself and teach them to his family as well, if they wanted to listen.

As Yarrick turned and started to walk up the drive way to the house, he saw that the front door was open.

"What in the name of the Throne?" Yarrick muttered to himself. He started to spped up his stride, sensing something was awry. As a shot rang through the air, followed by a scream and a crash, Yarrick broke into a sprint.

Not now! Not here! Not again!