

# Number of the ED – Full Scale War



*"And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon"*

## **--Book of Revelations Ch. XVI v16**

<<<Hades Hive, 2 weeks after Ugulhard's death>>>

When Charleston came into the hospital room, Sebastian was sitting up, regarding the plugs in his stump. Seb had been unconscious for three days after he'd lost his arm. When he'd woken up, Charleston had asked what Seb wanted to do with Ugulhard's battle-claw. Charleston had been shocked to hear that Seb wanted it fabricated into a prosthetic limb he could use instead of a normal bionic arm. The bio-meds had done as they'd been told and after a week of surgery, Seb was now implemented with the bionics needed to use the battle-claw as a weapon in battle. Seb was obviously not going to use his chain-sword again.

"How's the arm?" Charleston asked and sat down on a chair beside Sebastian's bed.

Sebastian looked up sharp from his daydreams. When he saw it was Charleston, he relaxed.

"It feels like it still is there, Ed." Sebastian replied and went back to studying his plugs. The scar tissue was raw and fresh and in places Seb still had stitches left, from where the surgeon had patched his arm, or what was left of it, back together.

"Doc said you'll be rid of the stitches in a few days. As for the phantom feeling, I dunno."

Sebastian suddenly laughed silently, and humourlessly, to himself.

"What?" Charleston asked.

"Isn't it just dumb luck that I'm left handed, Ed?" Sebastian said and looked at the marine. Charleston saw the twinkle in Seb's weary eyes, and understood.

"Yeah, or maybe it's fate." Charleston added.

"What have you got there, Ed?" Sebastian said and indicated the data-slates Charleston was carrying.

"Morning mail, commissar." Charleston replied with a smile as he handed Seb the first. He had opened it so Seb didn't have to meddle with that.

"The satellite surveillance system still works, even though we're in the middle of the Season of Shadows. We were able to pick up some few pictures, mainly over Helsreach and its surroundings, as there's no volcanic activity there, yet, should be added."

Sebastian hummed a reply as he looked at the photos in the pict-slate. Something approaching to Helsreach, something big...

"Ed, what is that big...blot, moving towards Helsreach Hive?"

Charleston said nothing, he just leaned forward, and touched a few zooming runes, and Seb now saw what the big blot was. Orks, hundreds of thousands of Orks.

"Ghazghkull..." Seb said quietly.

"Bingo. We don't know if there is Berzerkers coming the other way, or maybe even moving towards us, cause Mount Erestus blew a few days ago. Most of the northern part of Armageddon Secundus is covered in smoke. Nothing gets through."

"Have you sent signal to Helsreach about this?"

"Did it two days ago. I've got 100 men stationed there under the command of Captain Mikos. I ordered him to begin shuttle runs to evacuate the hive."

"Where are you sending the refugees?"

"Tartarus and Acheron. Hades is not going to be left alone after Ugulhard was beaten."

Charleston handed Sebastian the next data-slate. It was an ordinary text-slate, containing a roll of losses to the Berzerker/Orks combine. Sebastian felt very disheartened when he read through the list. So many lost? There was so many civilians, but also too many soldiers.

"When this is over Ed, remind me to shoot von Strab." Sebastian hissed. "1 million Guard, 74 Space Marine scouts, 316 Space Marines and an entire

Titan Legion. Some billions of civilians. He's got enough blood on his hands to fill an ocean."

"Don't you think I'm aware of our losses? I would gladly go to Acheron and shoot von Strab myself, but it could very much demoralize the entire of Armageddon's population. I may be big, but I'm not stupid."

"On the contrary to our planetary governor." Sebastian muttered and snapped the data-slate shut. "What's in the third?"

"The numbers of the new hive defenders. It also contains some info on good officers. Officers and officers. Some have been bosses in the industry or even gang leaders. The gang leaders are very good fighters and most have a very good tactical knowledge. They'll be great!"

"I believe so." Sebastian said absentmindedly as he read it through. "What about Colonel Archer? Is he up to it?"

"He's almost recovered now, though he needed a pair of bionic hands, as his biological are gone. He's fine now. He volunteered to command some hive militia. He said he 'wanted to act under competent command'."

"I'm flattered." Sebastian said and got out of the bed.

"Where do you think you're going, mister?" Charleston said. "Doc's orders are 'Stay in bed'."

"The new militia has to see who's commanding them, and I wanted to share some of my knowledge with them before their first drill with lasguns."

"You should still stay in bed. You need rest."

"Maybe, but sooner or later, I'll rest anyway. Forever."

Charleston recognized the macabre in the comment and swallowed hard. Seb didn't think he was going to survive this war. Ed was brought from his thoughts by a tunic hitting him in his face. As he pulled it off his face, Charleston saw it was Seb's black dress jacket. Seb was standing before him, dressed in breeches and undershirt. The jackboots were standing by the chair where Sebastian's greatcoat and cap was slung, together with his holster and Ordo Imperialis.

"Please help me with it, it's impossible with only one arm." Sebastian said and turned round and stretched out his arms, making him look as a man crucified, without a cross. Charleston pulled on Seb his tunic and helped the old man button it. He then, under Sebastian's instructions, tied the Ordo Imperialis around Sebastian's waist, after putting on the holster. The greatcoat was a bit tricky, with an empty sleeve being pulled into another but they managed. Seb left the greatcoat unbuttoned and pulled on his cap while Charleston put on his jackboots as carefully as he could. Eventually, Seb was dressed and ready to go. Charleston followed him to the training grounds, but there he left the commissar, as Charleston had other things to attend to.



After making a quick check in the tech-shop, to see if his new 'arm' was coming along, Sebastian proceeded to a part of the Middle hive that was currently being used as training grounds and bivouac for the scratch companies. Many 'soldiers' looked up as Sebastian passed by. Some whispered things and pointed towards his empty sleeve. A few, most probably ex-guardsmen stood up and saluted him. Sebastian answered every salute he received. When he got to the end of the line of tents he'd passed, he stopped, and turned round and faced what had been appointed Scratch Company Morpheus Alfa.

"Men and women of Hades Hive Defence Militia, Morpheus Alfa!" Sebastian shouted out with astoundingly clear voice, considering his age. Everyone in Morpheus Alfa turned his or her attention to the commissar now. "I am here to supervise your first firing drill personally! Get lasguns and power packs and I'll see you at the rifle range in five minutes! I expect you all to be there!"

The nearly three hundred men and women of Morpheus Alfa started milling around to get their gear and Sebastian walked off towards the rifle range. As he walked, a man came running up to him. It was Colonel Archer. Archer was tall, around two metres, but built slimly, just like Sebastian and most people of Armageddon who weren't of the noble houses. Sebastian immediately felt that Archer wasn't some officer given his rank because his father was a general. No, there was an air around Archer saying that the fifty year old or so man had grown up amongst ordinary Hivers. He'd worked hard for his rank, Sebastian understood. Archer was still wearing his uniform from the Steel Legion, though the regimental badge and the rank pins had been removed. Archer's hands had been cut off, there were still marks of blood on the sleeves of his greatcoat, and he wasn't wearing any gauntlets like most officers of the Steel Legions did. He wasn't even wearing the helmet or the gas mask.

"Been degraded, Charlie?" Sebastian said to ease the tension that was in the air.

"What? No, it's just that there's nothing left of my regiment to be spoken of. I think I'm the only survivor." Archer replied, disheartened. "We should have listened to you, Commissar. We should all have listened to you from the beginning."

"It's easy to be wise in retrospect." Sebastian replied coldly, remembering the tactical 'council' he'd been invited to and then ignored.

"I mean it, Yarrick!" Archer cried out, a tad of panic in his voice. Or was it fear, Sebastian wasn't sure. "We didn't understand the knowledge you hold. If you'd been your grandfather, we'd all listened. No one would question his authority. But you, you're just..."

"I'm just a Commissar!" Sebastian snapped Archer off. "Listen here, colonel! I don't want any half-hearted excuses. You all ignored me because you feared von Strab. You feared contradicting the orders of an imbecile! That's what you feared, not the enemy, right?"

Although Archer was far stronger than Yarrick, he felt something inside him, lingering like a cancer. It was the fear of losing his life.

"And all this stuff about my grandfather!" Yarrick went on. "Forget him!! He's dead and buried! I'm the one carrying our legacy now! I promised him to remember everything I'd learned about Berzerkers and their tactics, and when it's finally needed, you ignore me, because I'm not 'like my grandfather!'"

Sebastian grabbed Archer by the collar and brought the colonel down eye to eye with him. Archer couldn't afterwards remember if what he'd seen was true. He'd thought he'd seen tears in the corners of Sebastian Yarrick's eyes. And still, the old man seemed boiling with anger.

"I represent the Imperial Commissariat on Armageddon, and I'll be damned if I can't represent the Yarrick family also!" Sebastian growled at Archer. "I saved this Hive a few weeks ago. Hell, I saved it when I arrived here. The smartest decision von Strab has done throughout this war has been sending me here. So don't come with excuses of me not being there or you not listening, colonel. They don't do anything now, anyways. Right?"

With that, Sebastian left Archer and walked off to the rifle range. Sebastian had built up a good deal of steam to blow over the last months, as he'd grown more and more agitated about the officers in charge of Armageddon's forces. Sebastian nearly hated them for not lifting a finger against von Strab's insane decisions. And what the frekk did Holt think he was doing? Nothing, Sebastian concluded to himself. The bastard was doing nothing to stop von Strab's actions. Holt was for Saint Armagon's sake a commissar, why wasn't he acting?

Seb found himself at the rifle range when he came back from his thoughts. Much was happening right now, but he had to concentrate on the task at hand: To teach some habbers who hadn't even held in a lasgun before how to fire it as accurately as any Guard veteran. Sebastian had a few days to this on.

The rifle range was a big, open space on about 100,000 square metres. There was enough room here for seven hundred men and women to have a firing drill at the same time. One very long row of firing-stands and about 200 metres away from the stands were the target plates. The target plates had, in Sebastian's own opinion, got a very unlucky placement. He'd wanted to change places between the stands and the targets, but it had come out that one of the noble houses of Hades Hive had apparently used it as a warehouse for goods, like food stuffs and clothing, and with so many 'Underhivers' there, they weren't sure if their precious ownings and wares would still be there after the firing-drill. Sebastian had said he'd understood but in his thoughts he'd cursed the nobles for their greed. The reason the targets were badly placed was because that along certain parts of the warehouse wall, electrical cords ran, some were even of the high voltage kind. This created electromagnetic fields at places, which made it impossible to scan the building, which Seb thought was the original intention, but it also had a dangerous effect when laser hit it. Some of these electromagnetic fields ran right behind some targets, which meant that if someone missed the target, which they undoubtedly would do, they would get a nasty ricochet singing towards them. Lasguns never got ricochets, unless the shot hit an electromagnetic field.

When the five minutes had passed, Seb looked to see if everyone had arrived. They all had and this in fact impressed Sebastian. Not even well drilled Guardsmen always made it on the time the sergeants and commissars ordered them to perform their orders, but the habbers seemed to have some inner force driving them. Sebastian knew what it was. They fought for their homes and lives and loved ones, not just the Emperor. They had so much more to win on this than the Guard had. Sebastian decided to appraise them before they started.

"My fellow hivers, you'd undoubtedly already had a run-through on how a lasgun works and how to clean it. Today, warriors of Morpheus Alfa, you'll have your first firing drill with the weapon used by Guardsmen, and women for that part, every day across the Imperium. It's versatile and rugged. Simple yet complex. It can be used as anything ranging from a sniper rifle to a machine gun. It can, depending on the power setting, be used as either a stun gun or as a weapon killing with each shot. But still, this would all be nothing if you can't use it properly. In the hands of a competent marksman, this weapon could rival the Exitus Rifles of the Vindicare Assassins. In the hands of a brave Guardsman, with a good training, it can be as deadly as a bolt gun. This, my friends, is why you're here today. You'll learn how to fire a lasgun, at different power settings, at different fire rates. Still, there's one thing I want you to have clear for yourselves. You're not Space Marines. You're no super humans. If you fire badly compared to a Space Marine, remember, their eyes are ten times better than yours. But for that we're not worthless. The Marines of the Adeptus Astartes Legio Mortes Angelicus, the Death Angels in Low-gothic, puts a great trust in the inhabitants of Hades Hive. Their commander, Lieutenant Commander Charleston has told me that without the help from the Hadesians, they'd be lost. Let that serve as proof that we are more important than the Marines of the Adeptus Astartes, you are more worth than the nobles not lifting a finger to help you in these dire times!"

This last remark caused cheers and applause in the crowd. Sebastian was aware how important it was to keep the morale up amongst people, especially civilians, in wars. It was true though. Most noble houses hadn't done a thing to help in the defence of Hades Hive. House Artis was one possible exception, but otherwise it had been the minor houses and the merchant families who's helped the most. And of course the habbers themselves. Sebastian hoped they knew how proud he was of them. Men, and women, taking up arms to protect their homes. It brought some hope to him that the most were prepared to sell their lives dearly. Losses would be big, big indeed.

"One last thing, before you start out on full-power, single-shot." Sebastian said, raising his hand. "I would rather have had the targets here, and you over there where the targets are. But there are high voltage cords running along the wall behind the targets. This, my friends, causes an electromagnetic field to form. Now, las shots are quite nasty when they hit electromagnetic fields, as they ricochet, without dropping speed or power. I know las shots aren't supposed to ricochet, but I know this of old. Begin!"

The static feel and the uncanny cracking of lasgun fire filled the air. Sebastian started to walk down the line of three hundred slowly, stopping at some people, giving them some advice or correcting their aim. At some, he just stopped and stared as they got bull's eye on bull's eye. There were at least five very skilled snipers in Morpheus Alpha, and many more who could rival

the Guard snipers. Sebastian had almost walked down the entire line when he heard a curse. Sebastian turned quickly, fearing the worst, and felt something hot burn across his left eye.

Dropping to his knees, holding his good hand over his left eye, Sebastian understood far too well what had happened. A ricochet had hit him. The soldier who'd uttered the curse hadn't been hit, he'd known he'd missed and Sebastian had turned in time to receive the las shot in his left eye.

"Sir, I'm so sorry," the soldier said as he sat down beside Sebastian. "It was a mistake, I promise. Medic! ...Commissar Yarrick?"

Sebastian removed his hand from his face and looked at the trooper with his one good eye. There was a long moment of silence before Sebastian broke it.

"I understand it was a mistake," Sebastian said softly. "Another commissar might not have, but I do. How does it look?"

"Bad." the soldier replied simply. Sebastian saw in the man's eyes how bad he regretted this. Sebastian didn't want to believe it himself. Las wounds were tricky, Sebastian knew. There was just a split second of stinging pain, the wounds fusing together skin and there was almost always no blood. But Yarrick understood what bad meant. It meant there was blood, and Sebastian could in fact feel it running down his face. There was no pain right now, but it would come. Yarrick knew it. Instead of waiting on the medic, Sebastian got up and walked away towards the hospital where he'd spent the last two weeks. No one tried to stop him as he walked there. No one dared to stop the old commissar whose left eye was just a bloody mess.

In his mind, Sebastian knew with what he would replace his eye with. A special bionic implant. The Orks already feared him, Ed had told him that, so Seb knew how to terrify them even more. He was, after all, considered an expert on the Ork mind. The Orks, when seeing Warlord Ugulhard killed by an old human with one arm, said that he couldn't be killed. That he was death to any Ork. And that in two weeks. It would be fun to see their reactions at his new eye.

Sebastian savoured his thoughts of this until he was sedated so that the tech-medics could build in the bionic eye into his cranium. A bionic eye which projected a pulse of laser-light at mental command.



<<<Helsreach Hive, 3 weeks after Ugulhard's death>>>

Helsreach had plenty of time to evacuate. Still millions of habbers decided to stay. How they regretted that, probably, when the Orkish psyker attack came. That was five days ago. Most people had died when it came. They had either been killed by the psychic storm created by the hundreds of Orkoid psykers, or driven insane by the visions that came afterwards or the sights of their dead friends and family. On some, the heads exploded. Crane-drivers in the harbour of Helsreach welded themselves into the huge cranes they used to drive. There, they made a last stand against the savage Ork horde led by Warlord Ghazghkull Thraka. A last stand, which would go into the history of Armageddon as one of the most heroic feats ever. The Roll of Honour of the many martyrs of Helsreach would be long.

Commissar Ishmael Grisham knew that it was inevitable that he would end up on that roll, but he would make an exit that would make deep boot prints in the history of Armageddon. For the last five days, Ishmael and a tiny group of Helsreachians, about fifty men and women, had conducted guerrilla warfare against the Orks. The Orks were constantly searching for survivors, those capable enough were used as slaves, those who weren't, were killed. Ishmael didn't like this. Food and water was scarce. He had himself not drunken anything for 12 hours, and he was beginning to feel the strain. As soon as his group found a scrap of food or some water, he gave it to the civilians. They were looking up to him now; they saw him as their protector. He was a commissar, Emperor damn it, and he wasn't going to let these people down.

That had been his thoughts four hours ago. One hour ago, his group had been discovered by Ork so-called Kommandos, Orks who were very good at infiltration and guerrilla warfare. In half an hour, 30 of Ishmael's group had been killed. That had been those unarmed and unarmoured. Ishmael and the 20 remaining put up a stalwart defence. Ten minutes ago, though it seemed

like an eternity, the group had been reduced to ten men, including IG.

The Ork Kommandos were crumbling away. 'Maybe there's a chance that we'll survive until tomorrow.' Ishmael thought to himself as he put a perfect shot with his laspistol between the eyes of an Ork.



Ghazghkull Thraka, Ork warlord, jumped out of his war truck, a 7 metres long, red-painted, open-topped truck. Beside the driver in the front, an Orkish try at a plasma cannon was mounted, manned by a gunner. The platform at the back was big enough to fit in both huge Ghazghkull and his bodyguard of mega-armoured Orks. As Ghazghkull jumped out of the truck, his bodyguard and truck-crew held on for dear life as the truck wobbled when the nearly one and a half-tonne heavy Ork jumped out.

Landing hard on the ground, making half a metre deep boot prints in the asphalt, Ghazghkull walked off towards where Big Boss Uzbex was waiting. Uzbex had called the warlord concerning some puny humans putting up hard resistance. They didn't want to get caught and made slaves. For some odd reason, humans didn't want to be slaves as easily as gretchin, or grots as Orks called them. Ghazghkull couldn't believe Uzbex couldn't even take care of some stray humans. "How da zog did Uzbex make Big boss?" Ghazghkull thought to himself as he approached the other Ork commander.

"Good dat yoo could cum boss," Uzbex said and made a clumsy salute. Uzbex was only armoured in pieces of plasteel he'd torn of Land Speeders and fashioned into armour. Under that, he wore simple combat fatigues (for Orks) and a commissar's greatcoat. The sleeves had been torn off so Uzbex could put it on, but otherwise it was largely intact. On his head, he had one of the many peaked caps he'd collected over the years. On Uzbex' feet was the powerful boots all Orks used and knew how to make. Uzbex happened to be made of Squiggoth-skin.

"Wot's yer problem Uzbex?" Ghazghkull growled. He'd had fun executing the stout humans that ruled this metal-city when Uzbex informed him. Executing, Ghazghkull saw it more as target practice.

"Dere's a skwad of Oomies down dere wot won't give up!" Uzbex said and pointed towards a part of the giant plaza. Ghazghkull heard shouts and screams, both human and Orkish. Under all the screaming, Ghazghkull make out something else. It was what the humans called a battle-psalm. Only one type of human sung those songs; commissars.

"Dey've got a commissurr amongst dem," Ghazghkull said simply as he and Uzbex walked towards the part of the plaza the fighting was taking place in. They stopped behind a massive pillar and looked at the bloodbath before them. Seven human soldiers and a commissar, fighting like possessed against the Orks. Under the disciplined command of a commissar, humans didn't give up, Ghazghkull had learned. He also knew the effect of taking away the leaders of the enemy force. As Ghazghkull thought on this, one Ork warrior got to close to the commissar. With a backhand punch of his left hand, the commissar smashed the skull of the Ork to pulp. This was repeated on three other Orks. Still, the man seemed old, his hair white and his body shrunken of age. Uzbex stood twice as tall as the commissar, Ghazghkull realized. Still such courage, such stamina! Ghazghkull almost admired the old man fighting for his cause. An impossible cause, though. Something in Ghazghkull's mind flickered, a memory. He couldn't put his green, massive finger on what, but the human seemed familiar. Where had he seen the human before? As the commissar jumped down and moved carefully, as if careful not to break anything, Ghazghkull finally put two and two together. The bionic arm, the broken back, the very looks of the man! It was the commissar from back on Gideon! So, the human was still alive?

"Pull back da soljers, Uzbex." Ghazghkull snapped.

"Wot?"

"Get dem away from da Oomies!" Ghazghkull roared.

Uzbex ordered the Orks to fall back and regroup where he and Ghazghkull were standing. As the Orks ran from the humans, some were shot down by the las-fire of the humans. As the Ork warriors regrouped at fifty metres distance of the humans, the human fire seized. Ghazghkull

smiled. Soon, the indoctrinated commissar would emerge to lead a charge, and play right into his hands.

"Uzbex," Ghazghkull said as softly as he could. "Would ya like a new hat to yer collektion?"

Uzbex nodded his reply. He understood the plan. Ghazghkull sauntered off towards his truck; he had other business to attend to. Some more target practice.

Back at the corner of the plaza, Uzbex kneeled down and aimed his big shoota steadily and waited. The big sub-machine gun had been heavy for any ordinary Ork, but Uzbex was a Big Boss, a leader and thus bigger than most Orks.



"Do you think they've gone, commissar?" a soldier asked IG. The man couldn't have been more than twenty-five.

"No, they haven't," IG replied curtly. "They may be Orks, but they're not stupid." Ishmael thought about the big mega-armoured warrior he'd seen. There was no mistaking it was the same Ork that he'd encountered on Gideon. The same Ork that had broken his back ten years ago. Maybe he was going to get revenge for that now? Ishmael wasn't going to act stupidly now. The Orks most probably thought that they were going to make a counter-attack, but IG knew that it was pure suicide. They had to attract the Orks attention in some way, but how?

Pulling off his dog tags and handing them to the nearest trooper, Ishmael got ready to leap up.

"Give these to Commissar Yarrick, if you get out of here. He'll understand." IG said and fixed his peaked cap into place.

"Sir, don't tell me that you're going to..." the soldier said with a dismal tone in his voice.

"I'm an old man, boy. I most surely won't survive anyway. You run from here as fast as you can, find a shuttle and get out of here!"

"What are you going to do?" the soldier asked as he and the others got ready to leave.

"Me? I'll distract them long enough for you to run, what else?" Ishmael said with a shrug.

The soldier nodded simply. "May Saint Armagon be with you, Commissar Grisham."

"You too." IG responded and leapt over the lip of the crater they'd been crouching in.

As IG got over the top and over on the other side, he screamed at the top of his voice "For the Emperor of Humanity, in all Eternity!"

This move was so sudden that the Orks on instinct ran forward. IG saw to his dismay that the Ork Warlord had gone. As the Ork warriors attacked him, he felled them with well-placed shot from his laspistol or he broke their neck with deft swings and chops of his bionic arm. He felt like a god, not even being touched, until one Ork came up from behind and gave IG a powerful punch in the back. High on adrenaline, Ishmael could shut out most of the pain as he heard a horrible crack on the inside. Spinning round, ignoring the immense pain and going on adrenaline alone, Ishmael punched a fist-sized hole in the forehead of the Ork behind him. Seeing that the Orks had been beaten, Ishmael sagged down onto his knees, the pain of his broken back reaching to him like an avalanche. Tears streaked his wrinkled face as he tried to shut out the pain as a thick darkness was beginning to surround him. He barely realized the red laser-point searching its way up from his abdomen up to his chest. He did, however, see the big Ork dressed in a commissar's uniform, or what was left of it. The beast was smiling and it uttered something IG couldn't make out what it was. The smile went over into a deep, growling and despicably evil laughter. IG understood. He understood perfectly what was going to happen.

"Bastard," Ishmael mumbled with his last powers. "May you burn in hell." A split second later, the huge gun in the Ork's hands erupted into explosive life and, though barely conscious, Ishmael Grisham, Imperial Commissar, felt how his chest was blown open and his back broken on yet another place. Two seconds later, he was dead. He never saw how the Ork picked off his

cap and added it to a collection of other commissar caps, dangling like trophies from the Ork's belt. He also never saw the monument raised in the plaza of Helsreach over his sacrifice and all the other men and women who gave their lives in defence of Helsreach. The plaza, should be noted, was renamed Grisham's Plaza and each street going from it, around 47 streets, were named after the men and women who died here in service of the Emperor on this day.



<<<Hades Hive, one day after Helsreach's fall>>>

"Commissar Grisham wanted you to have these," the soldier said and handed Sebastian the dog tags. "He said you'd understand."

"Yes," Sebastian replied in a voice full of sorrow. "Yes, I understand. And now Helsreach has fallen."

"Yes, what I know, we were some of the few to survive, sir. We took one of the last shuttles."

The soldier saw how Commissar Yarrick's bionic eye blazed with inner fire. The old man was still looking at the dog tags in his left hand. Yarrick had no right underarm any more. At final, after a long moment of silence, Sebastian looked up at the soldier.

"Do me a favour young man. Go to Hive-monitor Artis and tell him to issue one hour of silence in memory to Helsreach's loss and billions of lives in it."

"Yes, sir!" the soldier said, saluted and walked off.

Sebastian was at Level Top 60 of Hades Hive. There was an old Imperial Chapel not far from where he was. Deciding to go there, Sebastian put the dog tags into his coat pocket. He needed some time to himself. Charleston was supervising the defence turrets, so he wouldn't bother him.

When Sebastian came into the chapel, he ordered the preacher and the missionaries out of the chapel.

"Isn't it anything that we can do for you, commissar?" the paunchy preacher had asked. "A low song of lament, anything?"

"Just leave me alone!" Sebastian had roared, his voice broken with sorrow. The preacher had then left the chapel, he and his missionaries closing the huge oak door behind them. As they closed the door, some of the missionaries said he'd be drawing fresh inspiration from the God-Emperor. The preacher knew better. He knew Yarrick was just one man, an old man. Things can get too much even for a veteran like him.

And the preacher was right. As Sebastian was left alone, he sagged down before the altar of the Emperor, clutching the dog tags of his old friend in his hand.

"It can't be true, please, God-Emperor, don't let it be." he mumbled under his breath. But Sebastian knew it was. Tears began streaking his old, lined and wrinkled face. Tears of both pain, sorrow and shame. The pain Sebastian had gone through the last few weeks should have killed a normal man, his sorrow would have driven anyone else mad. And his shame... He was ashamed that he couldn't live up to the demands put on him, as a commissar. He had failed in his service to the Emperor, his loyalty to his best friend and his promise to his grandfather. Sebastian raised his head to look up into the roof and screamed out his sorrow and pain. As he lowered his head, he mumbled to himself "What sort of commissar am I? I can't even help my best friend when he needs me, I can't even keep a promise!" Sebastian's right face-half was wet with tears now. He didn't cry any more with his left. He couldn't. But what did that matter now? With Helsreach gone, the water supplies would in the end run out. And the Season of Storms was approaching. What could he, Sebastian Yarrick, do? He was just one man...just one man...

A hollow sound behind him, made him start up and look around. Sebastian knocked the feeling away. It was the delusions of an old man. Just delusions. When he heard the sound the second time, Sebastian stood up and scanned the chamber with his bionic eye's heat-scan. No readings.

"You can't see me on that." a hollow voice said behind him. Sebastian spun round and stared into the face of his grandfather. Or the face of the ghost of his grandfather. Screaming, Sebastian fell backwards, forgetting the staired altar and landed on his back on the floor. Crawling backwards, Sebastian tried to distance himself from the apparition. He had never been so scared. His grandfather had finally come to exact his vengeance on Seb for his folly. For his cowardice.

"Sebastian," the apparition called. "Don't be afraid, I'm not here to harm you."

Sebastian calmed down, a little. The apparition looked at him for a long moment until it said something new.

"What has happened with you? You look like you've been through hell and back."

Sebastian smiled sadly to himself. It had to be his grandfather, all right. A ghost, maybe, but still his grandfather. Same sick sort of humour.

"Really lame, gramps!" Sebastian said and sat up. "Or what are you really? You can't be a ghost, they only haunt the places they died on."

"That's right. I'm a memory, you can say." the apparition said and drifted closer. It looked exactly as Commissar-general Rolf Yarrick, just semi-transparent and grey, but still dressed in the uniform.

"Why now, why here?" Sebastian said silently, his voice still having streak of sorrow in it.

"I don't think the Emperor had time..." the apparition said with a smile. "You've lost hope, Sebastian."

Sebastian looked up, straight into the dead eyes of the ghost. "That's true. I've lost hope. My best friend is dead! Of Armageddon's eight major Hives, five belong to the enemy now! All is lost..."

A chilling feeling passed through Sebastian's body. It had felt as going through an ice-cold waterfall. It took Sebastian some time to realize that the apparition had tried to slap him, but instead passed right through his face with its hand.

"First fault as a commissar, Sebastian!" the ghost shouted in its hollow voice. Rolf Yarrick's usually comical dialect didn't sound funny at all. "Never lose hope. To lose hope is to blaspheme against the Emperor! It's another step on the path of damnation!"

"But we are cornered, what can I do?" Sebastian asked and stood up again. "What can I possibly do?"

The apparition drifted closer and put its hands on Sebastian's cheeks. The chilly feeling was gone. This touch was gentle and warm and Sebastian looked up into the eyes of his grandfather.

"Remember when you asked about how commissars came to be?" he said softly, the voice sounding less hollow.

"Yes, they were the police-officers of the planet Moskva." Sebastian replied automatically.

"Remember their leader, Mikhail Mischkjin? He took care of ten families of common workers. He organized all the People Commissars into a force that one day assaulted the Government Council and executed each and every member of the Political Commissar order, as they'd become as corrupt as the other politicians. Most politicians of that council were executed. Mischkjin created a new council, and the council was always watched at its meetings by a People's Commissar, or simply Commissars, as they became known. He established our creeds and working orders which we follow today."

"And when the desertions of Imperial Guard increased, the Committerea Imperius was established and Commissars trained for use in the Imperium. I know that." Sebastian said quietly. "But what happened to Mischkjin?"

"Mischkjin died of a rare cancer disease in his heart at barely 55 years of age, he never got

to see how the Imperial Commissariat was born. But we celebrate him none-the-less as our founder."

"And the morale is..." Sebastian queried.

"Mischkjin never lost hope, not even when he faced off against five gangsters alone. He never gave up, never lost hope. And that has become one of the corner stones for a commissar. Never give up in the face of the enemy, it's a blasphemy. Never lose hope, as long as there's life, there's hope. Haven't you proved that already? You defeated Ugulhard single-handedly. What did you use as driving force?"

This was a question, Sebastian heard it well.

"My faith in the Emperor. My promise to you. And my iron will in victory." Seb replied.

"And that iron will comes from...?"

"A hope. A hope in life." Sebastian complemented perfectly. There was no longer any doubt in his mind. He would save Hades Hive from the Orks, if it so killed him! He wouldn't let it fall into the hands of his most hated enemy, Kharn!

Sebastian picked up his peaked cap by the altar and moved to walk out of the chapel. The hour of mourning had almost passed. He would walk out and show Kharn once and for all that he had bitten off way more than the Chaos Lord could chew. As he got to the port, the apparition called him a final time.

"For the Emperor, Sebastian, in deed and mind..."

"I don't need that anymore, gramps." Sebastian replied, a small smile forming on his lips. "My new motto is going to be 'Iron Will, Iron Fist!'"

"Why, Sebastian?"

"I have a small surprise for the Orks." Sebastian said and smiled as he rubbed his right arm stump. With that, Sebastian left the chapel. A historical note should be made here. Commissar Sebastian Yarrick never revealed what had happened in Chapel 03/ac of Top Level60. It was a secret he was going to have with himself to the grave. Only one other person ever found out. Master Lexicanum McKenzie, but that was all that Sebastian told him of the Armageddon War.



<<<Hades Hive, 2 weeks after fall of Helsreach>>>

Days passed, weeks passed. Ghazghkull threw everything he could at Hades Hive after he'd conquered Helsreach. Each and everyday had it's new battle. Ghazghkull soon gave up in trying to conquer the hive by sheer force, and went over in trying every sneaky tactic the Gork and Mork (the Orkish gods) had taught him. He tried to infiltrate the hive with Ork Kommandos, he built huge battering ram Gargants, but Yarrick and the Hadesians staved them all off. Against the Gargants, Sebastian ordered each and every weapon more powerful than a missile launcher to fire at the huge war machines, and against the Kommandos, Seb found men who knew the ventilation system like their own pockets and sent them out into the system, stripped nearly naked and armed with bolt pistol and power sword to combat the Orks. Not a single Kommando emerged alive. But these tactics were only few amongst many Ghazghkull tried, and still, none of the two commanders had truly met. Ghazghkull only knew he was fighting one tough nut of a human, while Sebastian didn't know the true size of Ghazghkull (physically). He wasn't sure that he was facing the Ork Warlord of Gideon.

After one fierce attack by the Orks, which ended in a retreat across River Euminides for the Orks, Yarrick and Charleston decided to take a look outside, to see what the landscape looked like. And to get a few hours off from their Hive life.



Sebastian threw off the gasmask as soon as they'd gotten out of range of the ash wastes. There was breathable air on Armageddon, but it certainly wasn't in the ash wastes. There was one such place just a few hundred kilometres from Hades, and that was where he and

Charleston was right now. Charleston had almost been driving Sebastian nuts the last two hours by singing 'Walking Across River Euminide' by Fred Hartmann, but it was also nice be able to breathe air that wasn't filtered. They'd though on finding any stray Orks out there, but there had been nothing in the wastes.

Ed was still humming!

"Ed!" Sebastian growled. "For saint Armagon's sake, shut up!"

"Sorry, Sebastian, just can't get that song outta my head." Charleston replied meekly.

"Just be quiet, I'm trying to think." Seb fell quiet for a while. "Hey, what actually happened to Hartmann? He just disappeared from show biz."

"What I heard, he was killed by three sisters for insulting their family."

*(Author's Note: The Euminides were the three sisters of Revenge in Greek mythology.)*

"I've had enough of the wastes, let's go home..." Sebastian said and started to walk, without looking where he was setting down his foot. He disappeared in a cloud of dust and he fell headlong to the ground. Charleston just stood were he was, just as surprised as Sebastian had been.

Sebastian coughed and dusted of his greatcoat best he could. After a moment of coughing and violently cursing, Yarrick stood up and looked at Ed. Charleston simply looked back at the old man.

"I've never heard so many curses. Had no idea there were so many in the Low Gothic language, Seb." Charleston said and chuckled.

"I know, that's why I threw in a few on High Gothic, Callidussian and Armageddon slang tongue." Seb said as he got out of the hole.

"That is a weird place to place a hole in. In the middle of the road...or whatever you can call this." Sebastian said with a gesture.

Charleston didn't reply immediately. Instead he was quiet for a long moment, studying the hole.

"That isn't a hole, Sebastian."

"Then what is it?"

"A boot print...a frekking big boot prints."

"A boot print?" Sebastian echoed and looked at Charleston and then at the 'hole'. "But somebody, or something with that large feet must be at least five metres tall..." Seb's voice trailed off. He looked down at the boot print again. "And at least weigh like a Dreadnought walker..." he silently added.

"Ghazghkull." Charleston said simply. "It has to be him."

There was a long pause of silence. The only thing heard was the howling wind, as it blew up sand to a storm in the far horizon. Charleston broke the silence. "There are prints beside Ghazghkull's."

"And whom do you think they belong to, my dear Charleston?" Sebastian said and cocked an eyebrow.

"Kharn." the big Space Marine replied.

Sebastian jaw dropped, nearly. Kharn had been here, but how did Charleston know?

"How come you're so sure it's Kharn?" Sebastian asked quietly. He'd been so taken aback by the fact that Kharn had been so close, that most of the air had gone out of him.

"Dunno, but I don't think Orks have Marine boots."

"Most probably so..." Sebastian said and looked around. They were standing in the middle of a crater, blown out by a meteorite the probably struck all those months ago at the Day of the Feast. Something didn't seem right though. Those rocks over there were a bit too even to be rocks.

Seb realized to his horror they weren't rocks!

"Ed, we'd better get our butts out of here, quick!" Sebastian said and made a sign to move out to the Steel Legionnaires that had followed them.

"Why so?" Charleston replied. Seb thought it impossible that this man had just acted detective, and now he missed some very crucial details.

"ED!" Sebastian hissed. "We're standing in the middle of the nest of a sand-cob..." Seb didn't get any further until the ground rumbled alarmingly and a 50 metres long sand-cobra shot out of the ground. The huge serpent, most probably a female because of its small neck shield, was hissing dangerously at the two men that had gotten too close to her eggs. The cobra dived down with speed like a lightning bolt, but Seb and Charleston ducked away just in time. They both hid behind a huge rock that wasn't an egg and caught their breaths. Charleston saw that Sebastian was white in his face with fear. He couldn't blame the old man for being scared. Ed had encountered sand-cobras two-times before, but none of this size. Something went up to him. Eddie had claimed to have killed a sand-cobra at 30 metres once, he even had the skull. If he, Ed, could manage to kill this beast, he'd prove himself a better warrior than the grand commander himself. Charleston drew his power sword.

"Ed, you're not seriously considering going one-on-one with that monster, are you?" Sebastian said, his voice shaky of fear. If there was one thing faith in the Emperor couldn't save him from it was the teeth of a sand-cobra. And this sucker's teeth were about the size of Sebastian. At least the fangs.

"I'm gonna kill it and take it's head as a trophy, that's what I'm gonna do!" Charleston said and turned on his jump pack and flew off.

"ED!! NOOO!" Sebastian screamed after the lieutenant commander, but it was no use. Charleston had made up his mind. "That nut has to be nuts!" Sebastian mumbled to himself.

Up in the air, Charleston ducked for the sand-cobra's attacks. Even though the serpent was huge, it was quick, unnaturally quick. But Ed was quicker as the suit of power armour he was wearing heightened his reflexes. Sebastian watched in horror as Charleston was nearly missed by the whip-like tail. One punch from that tail would break anyone's back, Seb was certain. A crackling in his ear, woke him from his daily nightmare. It had been the lieutenant of the Steel Legionnaires calling him over the short-range vox-system. The officer had wondered if they should engage the giant wyrm.

"Are you crazy?" Sebastian had spat back. "That thing could swallow a man whole! No, let Charleston finish this himself, which I hope he can."



The tail barely missed again, and Charleston had felt the wind rushing through his close-cut hair. It had been close, too frekking close! He had to get out of the way of the damned tail. A few quick manoeuvres and dodges and he were face to face with the snake. The creature reacted instantly and attacked Charleston full on with its maw. Charleston dodged it nimbly. But it was once again very close.

"Strike one!" Charleston shouted.

The snake struck at him with its tail once again. The horn-barbed tail scratched at Charleston's leg armour, leaving three, inch deep scars in the right leg's armour. He had to get the tail out of the way!

"Strike two!" Charleston said and dodged away to the face of the wyrm.

The snake didn't attack like before, instead it tested a new manoeuvre. It stopped almost in front of Charleston and sent out its snapping tongue at him. The tongue took a big chunk of

ceramite with it as it loosened itself from Charleston's chest plate. After retaining it's tongue, it made yet another fly on attack.

"Strike three! You're OUT!" Charleston screamed as he went up at the right side of the serpent's face. Charleston very seldom fought according to the Codex: Adeptus Astartes, although he should. But on one point he and the Codex agreed; when facing an Armageddon sand-cobra, armed with only one sword, you can only do one thing and you only get one chance, so time it PERFECTLY!

"I said: You're OUT! O-W-T! OUT! You frekking son of a..." Charleston cursed as he loaded up for the thrust. He had to time it perfectly, only one chance. If he missed, he probably would lose his power sword too. Two, three, four dodging manoeuvres, and then the opportunity were given.

"Die evil wurm of Hell!!!" Charleston shouted at the top of his lungs as he ran the gleaming blue sword through the right eye of the cobra. His goal was to pierce the brain of the creature, but it had a brain the size of a football and a cranium the size of Charleston, so it would all be hanging on luck now. Charleston flew away a few hundred metres, as not to be in the way of the thing, unarmed, if he'd missed.

With a mighty crash, the 48 tonne serpent went into the sand dunes of Armageddon, dead. Its tiny brain pierced by a power sword. From where

Sebastian stood, he felt the ground shake violently as the snake went down. He soon joined the soldiers' shouts of victory and congratulation hoots.

Charleston landed, a proud, but sweaty look on his face. Sebastian joined him quite quickly.

"Charleston, that was either the most stupid or most brave thing you've ever done!" Sebastian said, his voice showing clear traces of the man's excitement. "So, what are you going to do now, eh?"

"Bring ropes." Charleston said simply. "I'm taking its head with me." With that, Charleston pulled out the sword from the skull of the snake and aimed at its neck, raised it, hesitated. Charleston lowered his sword, moved a few metres to the left, raised the sword again and this time completed the swing by cutting off the head of the serpent, below the neck-shield. By now, one of the Chimera transport-tanks had come down to them and eight guardsmen were trying to lift the head onto the tank so they could take it home to Hades. They didn't succeed in lifting it until Charleston helped in. He lifted the many hundreds of kilos of bone and sinew easily and threw it onto the tank. Then the soldiers could secure the trophy onto the tank with the ropes they'd found. With that, the small column left the nest.



The Imperials had never seen the Berzerker overlooking the scene. He'd been standing behind a boulder, watching. With interest. Kharn, Lord of Berzerkers, but actually named Kevlinn, smiled behind his facemask.

"Too bad the cobra didn't get you, Charleston." the dark lord muttered to himself. "It would make things so much easier."

Kharn slowly walked away, towards the waiting Rhino-class transports. They would take him to the surroundings of Acheron Hive. As he approached his bodyguard, Kharn thought: "I hope this war makes the Imperials think I've gone desperate. They might just think I'm a spent force. If so, they're playing right into my century long plans..."

<<<Acheron Hive, 24 days later>>>

Kharn surveyed the massive force arranged before him. Thousands of green-skinned Orks and hundreds of his own proud Berzerkers. It almost brought tears to Kharn's eyes. He'd waited so long for his revenge. The Imperial fools didn't know that they were wrong. There was no glory for a Space Marine in a galaxy of peace. Kharn wanted to prevent that at all costs. If universal peace were acquired, what would become of the thousands of Space Marines? He'd tried to warn all, but only the most devout ones had joined him. His recent alliance with the Orks was highly temporary. If Armageddon was won, he'd call the rest of his army and vanquish the Orks. Kharn knew he'd promised Ghazghkull part of Armageddon, but why keep such a

promise to a savage who didn't know the word for peace in his own language? Kharn doubted there was one such word in the Orkish vocabulary. Recently, though, Kharn had gotten Ghazghkull out of his hair by giving the huge Ork Warlord the mission on breaking the defence at Hades. The Berzerker Lord knew full well who'd mobilized the defending force; Commissar Sebastian Yarrick. At first, Kharn had been surprised at hearing the human was still alive. But what had it mattered when the government of Armageddon was corrupt, rotten to the core?

"My, my," Kharn muttered to himself as he walked down to meet with the Ork Warboss who commanded this part of the Orkish army. "I will never cease to be amazed at how the Imperium slowly suffocates itself." Kharn smiled at the fact his spy network had done well. The many Khornate cultists in the Underhives, and the many Genestealer covens. Magus Grimjaw was an invaluable ally. If Kharn was to order Grimjaw to... No, it would be too easy. Besides, Yarrick was Kharn's personal enemy. Slowly, to himself, Kharn admitted a flaw. He was greedy concerning his personal vendettas and enemies. He wanted them all by himself. He also knew he had to change. It had gone ill because of it in the past.



Planetary Governor Herman von Strab looked out the great observation window of the highest point of Acheron Hive: Spire Lv 700. He'd broken contact with Holt a few days ago. The man had gotten what he wanted from the governor. Herman knew he was in deep trouble if the Imperials would arrive now. The Warp-storm had seized a few days ago, and most surely, the Imperium had now found out, no matter if Yarrick was behind it or not. Rubbing his temples to ease the throbbing pain in his head, Herman von Strab decided to give one last speech to the billions of citizens of Acheron Hive.

"Citizens of Acheron Hive! You must by now know that 70% of Armageddon's industry is in the hands of the enemy. They have taken every single hive, except Hades, which is under siege, Tartarus and Acheron, your homes. At this very moment, the barbaric horde led by the grim Lord Kharn stand at the edge of Acheron, joined by the Orks. I cannot promise any salvation of any kind. All I can do is hope for a miracle to happen, a sign of the Emperor. But I promise you this: We will fight to the bitter end if necessary, and if we do, we will prevail. Evil such as that of the Fell Gods cannot be tolerated and they shall be vanquished by the Holy Sword of the Emperor! Herman von Strab, Planetary Overlord of Armageddon, out!"

As von Strab ended that speech, a short one, the screaming jets of Thunderhawks pierced the sky. Herman flew out of his chair and looked out. A look of shock and horror was upon his face; he knew what awaited him if they found out what he'd done. He'd end up in Court Martial and...

He saw the colours of the Thunderhawks, he knew the Legions: Death Angels, Black Templars and Salamanders. He saw the hundreds and hundreds of ships go down, strafing the horde at the horizon with bolter and battle cannon fire before disgorging their cargo, Space Marine warriors numbering thousands, upon the enemy. He could almost see the green-tide reel backwards.

The thump coming from nearby woke Herman from his thoughts. He knew what had landed, a Thunderhawk, and it had landed on the pad on Spire Lv 645. Not too far down, but he had to get out of here. He made a quick call on the intern-phone, and then got his overcoat and rushed to the turbo-lift. If he just got away, he'd be safe.



Twenty minutes later, three figures clad in power armour step into the room. The fourth is wearing Terminator armour. Two of them are wearing the red armour of the Legio Angelicus Mortes, another is wearing black and white armour with a white robe over and the last one is wearing dragon-green armour. The black armoured one speaks first, his voice having a distinct German accent. "He's gone. We were too slow."

"I knew he has been here. I felt him." the taller one of the red armoured said.

"I don't like your witchery, Master Lexicanum, but I certainly hope it can be of help." The one with the German accent speaks again.

The green armoured man walks forward to the desk and checks the agenda of the planetary

governor. He eyes it through, slowly.

"Seems von Strab had much planned." he finally says after a moments silence. "Did he actually think he could win this war without help from the Adeptus Astartes?"

"He was mad, Chapter Master Tu'shan." Master Lexicanum Edward McKenzie said and looked away from the window he'd been standing by.

"I believe we all understood that when you told us about the Titan Legion, Master Lexicanum." Grand Commander Eddie McGranth shot in. "So, what shall we do now?"

"Save the planet of Armageddon, of course." McKenzie replied coldly.

"I didn't mean like that." McGranth said and walked up to his old friend. "I mean that what are we going to do about the war-criminal von Strab? You said he was going to be here...but he ain't!" McGranth did a livid gesture with his arms. "Only thing I'm wondering over is who'll command the forces of Armageddon?"

"Can't that Yarrick do it?" the German said again.

"I don't think that's an option, High Marshal Helbrecht." McKenzie replied, just as coldly as before. "I heard he was engaged in the defence of Hades Hive."

"Stop it, both of you." McGranth cut in. "I didn't mean the Guard only, I meant the entire of the forces. Supreme Commander?"

Tu'shan seemed ponderous for a while. Then he spoke. "I'd put my vote on you, Grand Commander."

After a few minutes of silence, Helbrecht said he'd agreed on that. "You're the one with the most battle-experience of all of us."

McGranth was taken aback by this sudden act. Thirty minutes on Armageddon and already Supreme Commander? Couldn't believe it. He had to make all the bigger decisions. He'd acted under other Marine Commanders before, but he'd never been Supreme Commander on a planetary operation like this. McGranth made his first decision four minutes into his new commanding position.

"Tu'shan, take your Salamanders and reinforce or at least try to stop the Orks at Hades. I've got a company there, 8th, but I fear there not much left of it."

Tu'shan saluted and walked out. Grand Commander McGranth turned to Helbrecht.

"You take command of the forces at Acheron together with me. Our mission will be to push the Orks and Berzerkers away from Acheron and push them out of each bloody hive." Helbrecht understood the underlying order and nodded. He then too walked off.

McGranth turned to McKenzie. "You don't like Helbrecht, do you?"

"Eddie, his Legion has condemned psykers of any kind. There's no love lost between him and me."

McGranth simply nodded at the answer and fell silent for a while. He felt a creeping feeling inside him. Could this be?

"Is this just another misgiving attack from Kharn, Edward?" he asked at final.

"I'm sad to say it might be. If it is, it has cost the Imperium vast military resources and civilian lives by the billions have been wasted. All because of a corrupt command."

"Can anything be done about this?"

"You can put a new family in reign, Eddie. You've got the authority. But that's not your real concern is it?"

McGranth sighed at McKenzie's ability to read him like a book, quite literally.

"No, my real concern is Sebastian. Is he still alive?" McGranth asked and looked at McKenzie

with weary eyes.

"He's alive alright. I'm not sure if he's going to be that for so many more days. When we see him again, I have a feeling he's changed a lot."



<<<Hades Hive, 3 days later>>>

"Artis, I tell you to go! Take your family with you and flee!" Sebastian shouted to the Hive Monitor. He didn't want to admit it, but he'd almost choked on the last word. As a commissar, it was against his principles to run away from battle, but Artis needed to get away safely. He was too kind a person to be wasted.

"Commissar, why don't you come with us?" Artis said as he stopped in his tracks and turned round at Sebastian. "Why fight for a hopeless cause?"

"It's not hopeless!" Sebastian screamed, completely losing it. "The Orks may have breached the outer skirts of Hades, but the main Hive is still in our hands. I'm not leaving."

"Then I'll stay with you," Artis said calmly. "It was an unwritten rule in the Navy for the Captain to go down with his ship. I am the Hive Monitor. I'll die with Hades..."

"Michael, I'm not telling you any more. I'm ordering you take your family and go!" Sebastian said and looked away from the noble.

Artis walked closer to Sebastian. "Seb, you know I won't..."

In under a second, Sebastian had pulled out his laspistol and aimed the laser-sight between Artis eyes. There were anger but also sorrow in the old man's eyes, Michael could see.

"Hive Monitor Michael Artis, you're being told to leave Hive Hades one final time by a man with a gun. Go!" Sebastian said, his voice shaky from the act he had to perform. If Michael didn't turn round and walk into the Thunderhawk, Sebastian knew he had to pull the trigger. He hoped in his heart that Michael knew that the threat was real. Sebastian almost sighed in relief to see the bulky man turn round and walk into the Thunderhawk transport, reluctantly at first, throwing glances over his shoulder at Sebastian, who stood at the aircraft platforms of the space harbour. Artis shuttle was one of the last to leave.

When the last shuttle had disappeared, Sebastian walked back from the docking port. Cerberus followed him in his tracks. His bandage had been removed since long back. Lately, the wolfhound had been at an orphanage to cheer children up. The big, old dog had enjoyed it, though some children had been afraid of him in the beginning. Cerberus was part Chaos hound, a crossbreed, and had clear marks of this. His mane, his very build shouted out that his grandfather had been a Chaos hound. But as the weeks had passed a turned into months, more and more children had arrived at the orphanage. Seb had himself made sure that the children got it as good they could on food rationing. At first, when Artis came with the plan he'd gotten from the noble house council over how rationing should be planned, Sebastian had become raving. He had stridden into the council and demanded an explanation. The one he'd gotten had only made his temper worse. It had ended with that rationing for all was the same and that those children without homes and mother and father would be taken care of in special orphanages. These had been created from unused warehouses and the like, and most orphanages had been placed in the main Hive Spire. When Sebastian thought back on it now, it had been a wise choice to place them there. The further the children were from the Orks, the better.

Sebastian walked down the many stairs to Upper Hive Lv 45 and went out to the plaza with the Crystal Oak. He couldn't believe it was so many months ago since he'd first seen it. It was impressive. Down here, on the same level as the Oak, he saw how large it really was. Sebastian whistled lowly to himself. It had to be at least a few hundred metres high, he guessed. As Sebastian stood there daydreaming, he felt something tug in his greatcoat. At first he ignored it, as he thought it was Cerberus wanting his attention. The weak little voice startled him.

"Mister, I can't find mom..." a little girl, maybe not more than six years old, said. Sebastian looked down at her. She was black-haired as most people of Armageddon, and it was in a page-haircut. She had bright, blue eyes and was wearing worn and dirty clothing. As the little girl

realized she'd been tugging Commissar Yarrick's coat, she shied away a bit from him. But when she saw Cerberus, her tension eased a bit. She'd heard about the big, red wolf that took care of children. Rumours spread quickly in Hives like Hades.

Sebastian hunched down to get in eye-level with the little girl. "Don't be shy," Sebastian said softly. "You know I won't harm you."

The girl walked slowly closer, afraid that the Imperial Hero would harm her. At least it seemed so in Sebastian's eyes, he couldn't know if the girl had any sins on her mind. At final she got so close that she could hug Cerberus firmly. Sebastian was surprised at this, but masked it. Cerberus just seemed to enjoy it and sat down and let the girl embrace him as long as she wanted. After a few minutes, she let go of the wolfhound and looked at Sebastian. Seb saw the speck of disbelief in the girl's eyes as it came. He knew how to react as well.

"I know, I don't look as an Imperial Hero, do I?"

"No," the little girl answered, cautiously. "They say yo're two metres tall 'n stuff. 'N that yo've got a metal claw for an arm 'n yo're full o' muscle. 'N that yo're eye can shoot layser." Her Underhive accent was very strong. Sebastian somehow felt misplaced talking flawless Low Gothic, High Gothic and Armageddon Main Tongue.

"Did you imagine me as such?" Sebastian asked after a short pause. The girl shook her head. "You see for yourself that it wasn't true, right. But some of it is true."

"What?" the girl asked, walking closer to Sebastian. Sebastian sat himself properly on the lip of the fountain surrounding the Oak. The hunched position wasn't good for his old back and legs. The girl sat down beside him.

"Well, my bionic eye can in fact shoot laser, and I do have a metal claw." Sebastian said and smiled. He sent his good hand into his pocket and reached for something in it.

"Still, yo don' look like ta Saviour o' Hades Hive." the girl said and looked thoughtful. Sebastian looked curiously at the girl.

"What did you call me?" he asked.

"Ta Saviour o' Hades Hive. People in ta Underhive call yo that since ta thing with that Ork."

Sebastian was still surprised, but then he remembered. "Here you go." he said and handed over a piece of his rationing card. "I take it that as your parents are gone, they've joined the Emperor at the Throne."

The girl took the little piece of paper that was offered to her. "What do yo do with this?" she asked.

Sebastian got up and made a sign to her to also get up. "I'll show you, if you follow me to Upper Hive Lv 45's orphanage."

"My parents are dead, right?" the girl said with sorrow in her voice, as she looked up at Sebastian with tearful eyes. Sebastian met them for a few seconds, then broke it. He couldn't stand such eyes. Lately, he'd learned to ignore them, but this girl seemed to become too much.

"Yes," Sebastian sighed, sorrow almost breaking through in his voice too as he thought of all the dead. "I believe they are."

"I thought so." the little girl said and felled silent tears.



Yet another Orkish bombardment shell tore out a hole in the wall of the huge chapel. Sebastian didn't throw a double glance at those who'd been killed by the blast. Anyways, there wasn't much to see. He'd seen the sight countless times before the last days. He hadn't slept properly for a week now, and his weariness was beginning to shine through in his awareness. He'd merely avoided being killed by an Orkish chain-axe a few hours earlier. Sebastian jumped over debris and rubble and bodies. The brave men and women of the company at his command followed him without question. They moved out at the back of the chapel, Sebastian leaving

lastly. He gave the toppled over statue of the Emperor a last glance and went out, mumbling a battle-psalm under his breath. Sebastian knew that they were slowly being surrounded by the Orks here in the Underhive. He was happy that Cerberus wasn't here. He'd put the dog on watching over one of the orphanages, he instilled some sort of inspiration amongst the children, the same effect that Sebastian, and hundreds of others of commissars for that matter, had on soldiers.

"Sir! Ambush!" a soldier called and Sebastian spun round. He saw how the warning soldier was torn to pieces by a crude Ork sword. The beast chuckled darkly as it approached the old commissar. 'Poor fool,' Sebastian thought. The Ork lunged at Sebastian but didn't complete its leap, at least not in one part. The Ork, known amongst his friends as Gutzog, got the odd feeling that his torso fell on one side of the old human and his legs on the other. In his own crude tongue, Gutzog prayed to Gork and Mork that the Painboyz wouldn't get to him...

The sudden Ork attack was the last Sebastian wanted. He watched in horror at the scene before him. Once again he felt the enfeeblement he'd felt that day in the Military Council and the day more than fifty years ago. He felt himself frozen on the spot, unable to do anything, while his company got slaughtered. He saw how Lieutenant Fretner was split in two by an Ork's chain-axe. Sebastian would remember the man's scream of pain till his dying day, every night. Suddenly, something inside of Sebastian stirred. He would never know what it had been, but it had been his family's genes giving him a notice of who he was, and what was expected of him. So did his commissar part; it screamed for him to do something, at least say good-bye! Sebastian pulled himself together and jumped up on the remnants of a statue.

"Warriors of Armageddon!" he shouted. "The green tide of Orkdom is upon us and we are alone. There can be no mercy. No surrender. If we survive this day it'll be a miracle!" Sebastian pulped the skull of an attacking Ork easily with his claw. He hated interruptions. "But for the Emperor's sake, we won't go down without a fight. We'll defend our honour and our homes no matter the cost! We'll make the Orkish scum pay for every inch of Hades Hive!!"

With a loud, raucous roar, three hundred men and women, aged from 18 to nearly 60, jumped on the Orks with renewed vigour. They would give their lives to the Emperor with glee, knowing that Commissar Yarrick would be able to avenge their deaths. They wouldn't know the situation four hours after the last man had fallen of Deadalus Scratch Regiment 4th Company, when Commissar Yarrick was dead on his feet with fatigue and scarred and wounded somewhat terribly.

"Come on! I am not afraid!" Sebastian screamed, his strident voice echoing far in the hollows of Hades Underhive. He was standing atop a pile of Ork bodies, swinging his big Orkish claw around. He was so tired, his body so wracked with pain that he didn't think he was able to fight one more Ork, how easy it even would be.

One Ork warrior, brave, or stupid enough, charged at Yarrick. Sebastian heard how his comrades screamed in the Orkish tongue to don't do it. It was the Bale Eye, The 'Oomie wot could kill wiv a glance'. As the Ork came close to him, Yarrick grinned as the Ork foolishly ran his sword right into Seb's claw. Sebastian snipped off the sword and then closed the claw's blades around the Ork's neck. He didn't close them completely, just so that the Ork was held in a choking grip. Bringing the Ork's stinking features close to his own lean, lined face, Sebastian hissed in the tongue of the Orks:

"Yoo should 'ave listund ta yer friends. Dey don' call me da Bale Eye fer nofing!"

The bionic device that now was Sebastian's left eye blazed with a blinding light. Sebastian let go of the dead Ork's limp body, a smoking hole between its eyes. Smoking was also Sebastian's bionic eye. He saw though the haze of smoke how the other Orks backed off from him. The one he'd shot was apparently some sort of leader. Sebastian noticed something else. In the beginning he heard it more than saw it; the sound of bolt gun fire. A few seconds later, he saw the hazy forms of green armoured Space Marines. The Orks below him turned to face the huge super humans and blazed away. Knowing that the Orks didn't care anymore of him, Sebastian passed out from fatigue.



Space Marine Trooper Set'ar of the Salamander's 3rd Company made a quick sweep of a

blown out chapel with his auspex. The tracking device gave no showings of life readings. No motions, no body heat. It was just as well, he thought grimly to himself. Nothing could have survived in there.

The entire roof had fallen in. Set'ar didn't want to admit it, but the broken statues of the Emperor and his Saints; Armagon, Icharian, Volrath, Le'man, and Noktorno amongst them, made him feel sick. The big Space Marine walked round the razed chapel. As he did so, he did the sign of the Emperor across his chest plate. Unlike most of his brethren of the Salamanders, Set'ar was more true to the Emperor than the Primarch their legion had come from. But like his brethren, Set'ar was nearly two and a half metres high, very brawny and dark skinned. Their home-planet, Nocturne, had a higher gravity than most inhabited planets in the Imperium, and that was saying something.

As Set'ar made it to a clearing, he saw a sight that made him dumbstruck. He'd seen much in his service as Space Marine, but nothing as this. Before him was a ten metres high pile of Ork bodies. Set'ar realized after a few seconds there were human corpses amongst the Orks. He took up his auspex and made a check of the pile. Someone could be alive.

Nothing. No readings at all. Set'ar felt his heart sink. He'd been told from Chapter Master Tu'shan that the Death Angels' had had a company stationed here when the war broke out. The Lieutenant Commander of the company, a Charleston he remembered, had told them the casualties of civilians as well as military. All the commanders present at the meeting had been horrified at the bloodbath. So had Set'ar when he'd been told. Though he didn't understand why Great Tu'shan had accepted Grand Commander McGranth's order that Salamanders were to protect all convoys of refugees and other non-honourable work. Tu'shan had said there was more honour in this than battle, but Set'ar didn't agree. At least they'd gotten this mission to liberate Hades Hive, together with the Black Templars. But when the Templars had done their part, they flew off to another mission, leaving the Salamanders and the Steel Legions to clear Hades of Orks. More haughty Space Marines than the Black Templars, one had to search for, Set'ar thought.

The auspex gave to a beep! Set'ar looked down shocked at it. He reached up and took off his helmet. His vision-slits could be screwing up again; they'd done it before. No, the auspex was still beeping, weakly, but there was someone alive in the mound. Or was it atop it? Set'ar put the auspex on the back of his left forearm and pulled out his bolt pistol. It could as well be an Ork who was alive. Nimbly for his size, Set'ar climbed up the mound of bodies. As he climbed he signalled via the vox-link in his ear to Apothecarion Te'thran.

"Apothecarion Tethran, this is Marine Set'ar of 4th squad. Could you come to the square of Underhive Lv 23, name c-45/th? I've found a live one."

Set'ar's voice was full of a melodious dialect, as was the Apothecarion's as he replied.

"Acknowledged, trooper. I'm sending one of my orderlies though, 2nd and 3rd squad have found a pocket of surviving Orks." Te'thran's voice crackled back.

"Set'ar out!" Set'ar replied and went over the lip of the hill. As he did so he prepared to meet a half dead Ork, but what he met was nothing of that. He stared into Sebastian Yarrick's relaxed, almost dead face. Set'ar noticed that the chest barely moved up and down, meant slow breathing. He also saw the numerous wounds on the old man's body. The commissar was in dire need of medical care.

"Set'ar to HQ!" he signalled in his vox-link. "I've found Commissar Yarrick and he's not in good shape. I advise you to respond immediately. HQ? Respond!"