

Number of the ED – The Beast and the Saviour



<<<Imperial HQ; Acheron Hive, 2 months later>>>

Sebastian slowly opened his right eye. He quickly regretted the move, as his eyes were stung by a burning white light. As nothing seemed to happen, he slowly raised his arms and rubbed his temples. It took him a good five minutes to realize that he was rubbing himself with both hands. Sebastian tried to open his eyes again. This time it went well. He was still too dazed to understand where he was, but he did understand that his right arm was in one piece.

"Then it was just a dream then..." he mumbled silently to himself. As he said that, his left hand touched something metallic. He let it travel there for a while until he understood it was the plug for the cord to his bionic eye. Several things came into realization now for Seb. Firstly, that he hadn't been dreaming, and for that fact, he nearly sighed in relief. Secondly, he was lying in a hospital bunk. He glanced to his left and saw the thin tubes from the infusion running down and into his arm. He also saw the numerous scars from stitched wounds. Sebastian slowly remembered what had happened before he passed out. And still, his right arm was there. It wasn't off at the elbow...

Sebastian dared a look at it. He saw the hand, it looked like his own, and a part of the forearm. But halfway down the forearm, the skin-tissue ended and the metallic skeleton of a bionic implant was revealed. Sebastian also saw the connection joint into his elbow stump, his horrid scarred stump of an arm.

He screamed.

McKenzie, who'd been snoozing on a chair in a corner, woke with a start. So did Cerberus, who was lying at his feet. The two metres thirty tall Marine got over to Sebastian and tried to calm him down. It wasn't easy. The old man was hyperventilating because of his sudden shock.

"Sebastian, calm down," McKenzie urged. "It's over. The nightmare is over... The Orks and Berzerkers are being destroyed as we speak."

Sebastian looked at McKenzie with his tired eyes. To see the tall Marine was relieving. McKenzie had a close bond with Sebastian, as he'd had with grandfather. Sebastian felt something big and warm poke him on his left arm. To see Cerberus's wet nose and fuzzy head made Seb feel happier. At least he hadn't lost another one of his friends. As if McKenzie had been reading his thoughts, he said; "I'm sorry about Ishmael."

"It wasn't your fault..." Sebastian said. He couldn't believe how feeble and weak his voice sounded. "Besides, he gave his life in the Emperor's duty, as any commissar should..."

McKenzie still looked a bit troubled though. Sebastian wasn't sure if it was because of the war or something else. The old man couldn't really remember if he'd ever seen McKenzie this troubled. His eyes were lined, and if McKenzie been an ordinary human, Sebastian could have sworn the big Marine now felt as old as he actually were. Something was troubling him, Sebastian was sure of it now. He'd seen that look once before in his life, and Seb knew exactly what it meant.

"McKenzie what is it?" Sebastian said and tried to sit up. The new arm was a bit irritating, as Sebastian had grown used to having none. McKenzie sat down on the hospital bunk and Cerberus jumped up in it as well. The big dog nimbly walked over so that he could lie down on Sebastian, without harming the old man.

"I am not really allowed to tell you Sebastian, but the last 300 years are beginning to make sense to me." McKenzie replied in a whispering tone.

"What do you mean?" Sebastian asked. Cerberus had put his head so that it rested on Seb's chest.

"It's classified Sebastian." McKenzie said with a suddenly stern voice. "Not even the Inquisition should know what I know. Only Ed and Eddie know, and that's because I've known them for over 500 years." The Marine gave Sebastian a hard look. Sebastian understood he

should ask any more in this matter, he wouldn't get any responses anyway. Instead, a new question formed in his head.

"What is this bionic arm for?" he asked, and McKenzie's ease over this was obvious.

"A prototype of a new arm I'm working on. It has everything a natural arm has, including neural cords and skin, though the skin isn't really fully-grown on your implant."

"Spare me the technical crap, Edward." Sebastian spat. "I just want to know why, I've already got a new limb-replacement."

"You mean the battle-claw? It's on repair, and having a normal hand and arm doesn't hurt."

"Maybe not." Sebastian said and absently scratched Cerberus with his new right hand. Cerberus gave him a big wet dogs-kiss as a thank-you.

There was a long pause of silence. McKenzie wasn't sure if he was to ask Sebastian the questions he had on his mind. The old commissar seemed so happy of being rejoined with his pet. Sebastian broke the long silence though.

"I'm not going to retire, if you think so." Sebastian said and looked on McKenzie with a look full of the iron will of his family.

"Strange," McKenzie replied and crossed his arms over his chest. "I heard Ed say you were going to retire before the war."

"That was before the war, yes. This is now."

"You should at least rest until your wounds have healed properly, before that, I recommend you stay here in Acheron." McKenzie smiled. He seemed much more familiar with out his armour. Sebastian preferred him that way.

Something seemed to search it's way to Sebastian from the depth of his memory. Something suppressed by pain, fatigue and unconsciousness.

"The Artis family! Are they okay?" Seb asked with a sudden look of fear in his face.

"Okay as can be. They had a somewhat bumpy ride, but when they got to Acheron, Lord Artis informed us directly of the situation in Hades."

McKenzie was quiet for a minute or two until he talked again. He'd decided something, which was obvious.

"Sebastian, I want to hear, in detail, why a distress signal wasn't sent out earlier. I received one personally from Astropath Zebulon, but by then Prime had already fallen, right?"

Sebastian knew what McKenzie was referring to. Sebastian told him the whole story.

"I'll tell you McKenzie, I wasn't informed until Volcanus and Death Mire had fallen. By then it was too late. And von Strab's ignorance and arrogance didn't make it easier."

"You mean Herman von Strab, the planetary Overlord? He, to whom your the tactical advisor?" McKenzie said, sounding not too surprised.

"Was tactical advisor." Sebastian corrected him. "I got 'fired'."

"He didn't listen to you, did he?" McKenzie said understandingly.

"No, just like his father Luthor ten years ago and my grand-father nearly sixty years ago." Sebastian sighed heavily.

"Do you think it would have made any difference if Luthor and Rolf had listened to you, Sebbie?" McKenzie said and tilted his head in a strange way. It looked like he was listening to something.

"No." Sebastian replied quietly. "Death would have taken them sooner or later anyhow."

"Precisely!" McKenzie exclaimed and looked triumphant. "But, von Strab is not dead!"

"Frekk it! I had hoped that ass-hole had died!" Sebastian shouted so suddenly Cerberus started and gave away a weak yelp. He wasn't used in seeing his master like this.

"He's theoretically dead, Sebbie." McKenzie said, still with a smile on his lips. Upon seeing Sebastian's questioning look, he answered. "He escaped in a Land Speeder, but it was found two days later in the middle of the Equatorial jungle. We're meeting hard resistance from Ork in that sector. Prime is as good as taken back. It's only here on Secundus that the Berzerkers are still at large. We have our suspicions that Kharn is still on this planet, because of the fighting will of the Berzerkers."

"But theoretically doesn't exist in my world, McKenzie. Either you are dead, or not." Sebastian said and looked sourly on the Marine. Why did he twist words so much?

"Sebastian, he wouldn't survive too long out with all the wild animals, and the Orks." McKenzie said and patted Sebastian's shoulder. "Besides, he's an Armageddon Noble. He doesn't know too much about surviving in the wild. Now, if he'd been well trained like a Marine, or a commissar, he'd have a sporting chance."

"Speaking of commissars..." Sebastian mumbled. "Who's taking charge of the commissarial duties now? I was most high-ranking commissar here, being one in the Imperium's service, not Armageddon's."

"Commissar-general Richter is commanding most things, though Holt from the Armageddon Commissariat has almost got more control over it all." McKenzie said and scratched his chin in thought. "Never seen a man with such a thin face. Could almost think he'd been in a labour camp for years."

Sebastian barely took notice of McKenzie's last comment, as his brain was concentrating on putting two and two and three together. Sebastian and Ishmael had always been friends, though Ishmael had been more social. Sebastian had as compensation a gift for detective work, which he was unmatched in. No other commissar could even begin thinking in the way Sebastian usually thought when trying to find a pattern in a chaos of clues and hints. Right now he was putting the finishing touches to a mystery ten years old. McKenzie noticed this.

"What is it Seb?"

"A lot of things is and isn't..." Sebastian mumbled silently. "When I first met Holt, he was paunchy, a sign of really good living. Every time I've met him these ten years since he became chief commissar of Armageddon, we've eaten dinner together and discussed things. Each and every time he's ordered food that should keep him on his weight. Answer me this McKenzie, why hasn't he grown fat on it? He's a got a still job, and should because of such living, but instead he's grown thinner and thinner."

"A curse?" McKenzie suggested. Sebastian gave him a look that said he should stop listening to Charleston's talk of monster movies.

"Don't think so. Anyway, ten years ago, I took the mission on solving the mysterious deaths of Luthor von Strab and his sons. It became more and more apparent as research progressed that Herman was behind it, but when I handed it over to Holt, who said it was a matter of the Armageddon Commissariat, he deemed Herman von Strab unguilty and freed the man from any suspicions. Recently, I heard Holt talk about that the matters with Herman's brothers and father wasn't closed. Why pull that up? The case was closed, Holt made sure it was so himself. And why has von Strab begun listening so much to Holt's advise lately?"

"I'm not the one to judge it Seb, but Holt could be bribed. He's no more than human." McKenzie said and got up. He straightened his shirt a bit.

"Weird, Artis said the same when I discussed it with him. But a commissar shouldn't take bribes; it is against all his ideals to accept money from someone else!"

"Sebastian, not all people are as honest and fair as you are. You'll have to learn that some day." McKenzie said and looked at Sebastian with a tired look.

"But he's a commissar!" Sebastian protested.

"But he's not more than human, Sebastian. You can't ask of perfection from him." McKenzie sighed. Rolf had been easier to convince, that was sure.

"I think I'll pay Holt a visit when I'm ready to go outside the hospital." Sebastian mumbled sourly to himself.

"Do so." McKenzie said and gave Sebastian a data-slate. "In the meantime, write down a report on what happened in Hades. That's routine for all refugees from that Hive. And get some rest."

"Yes, mom." Sebastian mumbled absently as McKenzie left. As soon as McKenzie had left though, Seb slid out of his bunk and got dressed. Cerberus seemed to understand what was happening. He pulled away one of Sebastian's jackboots and the old man reached for it. Sebastian sighed.

"Cerberus, hand it over! I don't have time for these games."

Cerberus didn't obey. As much as the dog hated it, he couldn't make his master break orders that were for his own good. He watched in silence as his master put on his tunic and removed the bionic arm. His master didn't like it, it seemed. After a bit of trouble with the loose arm and his coat, Sebastian bowed down to take the boot from Cerberus. This time, however, Cerberus let him have it. Maybe it was better for his master to do whatever he was going to break orders for. Last time it had been visiting a powerful psyker and helping people.

"That's a good boy!" Sebastian said and patted Cerberus in the side as he got his boot back. Seb put it on and looked at Cerberus's hopeful eyes.

"I'm sorry old boy, but I'll have to do this alone." Sebastian said and got up. He took something from the table by the bunk and pressed it into his bionic eye's socket. It was a tiny battery that supplied the eye with enough power to see, but it couldn't fire the laser beams. There wasn't enough power in it for that.

"Stay here Cerberus." Sebastian said and sneaked out, intent on finding Holt and getting an explanation to it all.



Slowly, very slowly, as if to slow down the pain with the movement, James Holt pulled the syringe out of his left underarm. It didn't matter if he'd pulled it out with a jerk, it still hurt somewhat and he winced at the pain. The only thing that the slow movement had helped was that the flow of blood wasn't so great. He'd learned that quickly, Holt was no fool. He put the empty syringe with the bloody cannula on his desk and picked up a plaster and put over the tiny pinch wound in his arm and pulled down the sleeve of his uniform jacket. Holt picked up the syringe again and played a bit with it as he looked around in his office. It was not really big, but not small either. Somewhere in between. His desk stood before a big view-port which overlooked the inner parts of Acheron Hive. At the moment it was full of communiqués from different regimental commissars in the PDF and the Steel Legions, but a few books were also laid on it. Amongst them were two worth notice: a fiction novel titled *The Great Betrayer*, halfly finished, and a huge tome, leather-bound and ancient looking, with its title written in 24 carat gold-paint: *Codex: Terra*. Under it was another book, not as big, but just as ancient looking and it also with its title written in gold: *Committerea Imperius*.

Holt let his eyes travel from his desk to the other parts of the room. On the walls to his left and right, bookshelf upon bookshelf was lined, only breaking for a portrait or a bust of a famous man or woman in the service of the Imperial Commissariat. There were obvious breaks in the lines of books in the shelves, holes where books should be. Most of them maybe borrowed by a comrade-in-arms. Others by some other institute. Holt studied the portraits for a while. On his right from where he was sitting, he knew he had Commissar-general Chomaki, Commissaress Hawkins (a beautiful woman, Holt thought), Commissar Timosjenko and Commissar Mischkjin, founder of the entire commissar rank. On his left Holt knew these by heart: Commissar-general Reichard, Commissar Wiedelmann and one more, one that made Holt feel a bit insecure, Commissar-general Yarrick. The last one had liberated Armageddon, but his grand-son was now a big problem for Holt. As Holt swung around in his office-chair to look out the great window, he heard the automatic doors open and close with a hiss behind him.

"Speaking of the devil," Holt said halfly to himself, halfly to Sebastian who'd just entered. He didn't care that he was still toying with the syringe, Yarrick had found out, otherwise he wouldn't be here. Holt was, as said, no fool.

"So, what brings the Saviour of Hades Hive here?" Holt said and swung round to face Sebastian. Now Sebastian finally saw what Ishmael had meant with that Holt had gone gaunt-faced. Holt had indeed lost weight; he looked hollow-eyed and hollow-cheeked. Thin, thinner than the Lord Astropath Yarrick had met in Infernus.

"You," was Sebastian's curt but true answer. "James, may I ask for an explanation to all this?" Sebastian said with a gesture. Holt knew he meant the reason to the syringe, the von Strab murders and all the rest.

"Why, most certainly I'll give it to you Sebastian!" Holt said and smiled viciously. The smile didn't reach the weary, bloodshot eyes. "I'll begin with the reason for this!" Holt held up the syringe with the blood-dripping cannula so Sebastian could see and then threw it into his wastebasket.

"I'm a morphine addict," Holt said and settled back in his chair. "I've been so for nearly ten years, with steadily increasing dosages. The reason is that this is a stressful job, and I needed something to clam my nerves with. In the beginning the dosages were so small, that it didn't tear too much on my credit-account. But as the dosages increased, so did the prize and I began running out of money for it. As you knew me way back then Sebastian, you know I was overweight. Nearly one hundred and fifty kilos was my top notation. Now, morphine has that bi-effect that you lose weight from it. A good thing, I thought back then. Now, it's barely as good. Can you guess what I weigh today, Yarrick, can you?"

Holt arose from the chair, and now Sebastian saw how thin he was. He was barely skin and bones. No wonder he looked gaunt.

"I...I...don't know James." Sebastian stammered forth. He was so shocked over how thin the man was. And still standing two meters tall.

"I weigh just as much as you do, or did back then; 65 kilos. The morphine bi-effect became a curse. Hell, I can't even have women!"

Holt breathed in and out heavily a few times and then sat down in his chair again, resting his head in his palms. He began talking again.

"You see Sebastian, at that time, something wonderful happened. Wonderful in a macabre way. The von Strab family was picked off, one by one. Anton was killed by a bomb, Otto by a hit-and-run driver and Villhelm was shot. You were put on the case as it concerned the family of an Imperial Planetary Commander. You were also a good friend of Luthor von Strab, you'd known the man a long time."

"I'd known him since I came to Armageddon as a young man, James." Sebastian interrupted.

"Right," Holt said and picked up the thread again. "You were on the case as a hungry wolf on a deer's tracks, excuse the relation there, but the Adeptus Arbites were nagging you right? They said the case was a matter of their office, but you wouldn't listen. So wouldn't Luthor I believe, when he ate that fugu-fish. That poisonous fish. The obituary said it had been fugu-poison, but we both knew it wasn't. It had been cyanide, enough to wipe out a regiment. That left Herman as lone member of the von Strab family. It also gave you six months to nail the murderer, cause we both knew it was Herman. Everything pointed towards him, right? After the six months had passed, he'd be Armageddon's new Overlord. It was now I started to play sneaky on you, Sebastian.

"I made a deal with you that you could leave it to me, and you could take some well-earned holidays on some garden-world. We both trusted each other. Boy, that was your first mistake my friend. I might have been fat, but I wasn't stupid. I knew exactly what to do when you were gone. I made another deal, with Herman this time. I showed him our evidence, and said it would all come to daylight, if he didn't put one million credits a month on my cred-account. He had to agree. And since then I've used those evidence as a sort of blackmail, whenever von Strab has displeased me in some way. It has worked fine. Until now. von Strab is gone. So is my monthly income of money. That syringe had contained the last morphine shot ever for me."

With a sigh, Holt let his head rest on the Codex: Terra. "I was a fool, and it was all because of this position I have. I was thirty-three years old, already as decorated as a veteran Guard colonel. The Imperial Commissariat made the big mistake of choosing me to command Armageddon's Commissariat. First thing I did was put on weight..." Another sigh.

There was a long, horrible silence after Holt finished his confession. Sebastian slowly melted what he'd just heard. It was now obvious. The thing he'd heard at the golf-course hadn't just been imagination then. *'Milord Governor, should I remind you that the cases on the murders of your father and brothers still aren't closed?'* Sebastian remembered Holt's words clearly from that day. Now they had a meaning. So did the entire story, to Seb. That's why Holt wanted Charleston out of his hair as well. The big klutz of a Marine had the habit of finding out things he shouldn't know about, a habit that wasn't intended at all. Sebastian chose every word carefully as he took to words.

"James, I won't punish you for this," he began. This made Holt look up on him. It was not so clear, but it seemed tears of shame had begun rolling down the thin man's face. "I see you're startled to hear that, Jim, but why should I? You're not more than human, are you not?" Holt nodded slowly, not knowing if this was a trick or not.

"I see you've been reading the Codex: Terra. Interesting book, isn't it?" Sebastian asked with a friendly voice.

"Yes, it is," Holt answered, struggling to avoid his voice from breaking. "Sadly though, it ends at 1265 AD, according to their time system."

"I know," Sebastian replied. "Codex: Terra, the compilation book over Project: Terra, a project in which they tried to see how humans adapted to their surroundings without the Emperor to guide them. They did quite well. Around 7000 B.C as they call it in the book, some technology was given to a certain people on Terra. I don't know why, but they gave the Imperial visitors names like Ra, Osiris, Anubis etcetera. They thought they were gods. But that civilisation died out, because of what, no one knows. But the Imperial records in the Codex say that the...Egyptians I think they were called, had slaves of a people called the Hebrews. The Hebrew were later freed and wandered north. They settled down in what the Codex calls the Holy Land. Such blasphemy, Holt, we both know what the real Holy Land is, right?"

"The land of the Emperor, the Imperial Palace." Holt said monotone.

"Good. Now, the Egyptians slowly declined in power, and were exchanged for a people called Romans. They called their leaders for Emperors, so the Imperial monitors decided to teach them the secrets of High Gothic. They called it Latin though. Odd name for High Gothic, and I've heard a few. Now, the Hebrews were once again chased after. Their religion, the Judaism, wasn't popular to the Romans, who had gods with names like Jupiter, Mars, Volcanus...now there's a funny thing." Sebastian fell silent. "The Romans, and the Greeks, had gods and places named like Hives on Armageddon. Heh."

Sebastian carried on his litany. "I mean, Hades, Tartarus, Acheron, Styx, Minos, Morpheus, Euminides, Phlegeton, Chaeron..." Another pause. "Just so odd. Anyway, the Jews believed in that a saviour would come to help them. He came, in a man named Jesus Christ. The Imperial visitors speculated in that he could have been a Paladin, like the Emperor. A future leader for mankind on Terra. But no, the Romans caught him and crucified him."

"I know that," Holt finally said after being silent a long time. "I find that certain part very sad."

"Indeed, " Sebastian agreed. "Actually, the Romans weren't the reason to that Jesus got crucified. Nope, the Jews were, cause they condemned him to his death sentence. And since then Jews have been chased and killed for that they killed the Saviour of Mankind. Many people, including the Romans ironically, created a new religion, based on the Jewish but with Jesus Christ as the Saviour who died for them, or something like that. They call it Christianity, I believe. But the Jews weren't only the ones who gave Jesus his sentence..." Sebastian moved away from Holt now and picked up a little purse of leather from a pocket. By the chime of it, Holt could tell there were coins in it.

"A man named Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus closest friends, betrayed him for thirty silver sickles. That shows how cheap he was..." Sebastian said dryly. The last sentence wasn't meant

as a joke. "Judas gave away Jesus' identity with a kiss. The Romans arrested him, and you know the rest."

Sebastian opened the leather purse and poured out its innings on Holt's desk. A bunch of silver coins chimed and clinked as they fell down on the desk. Holt stared at them. Yarrick was playing him a trick. He had to be. This wasn't true. He knew he'd be punished, but not like that!

"Here, I leave you now with your own conscience, comrade. Congratulate yourself; you almost managed to kill the Saviour of Hades Hive! Thirty Imperial Credits in one-credit silver-coins. History only repeats itself, Commissar James Judas Holt!" In Sebastian's voice, nothing was left but spite and anger, not a trace of the kind tone he'd had a few minutes ago. With that, Yarrick made all about face and marched out of the room. Holt was still sitting staring at the coins when two hours had passed since Sebastian had left. He would be sitting for another two at least. Then he stood up, gathered the coins back into their purse and put on his cap and greatcoat. After that he walked out, to buy himself a rope.

Historical note: *The body of James Judas Holt was found on his office one day after that Commissar Yarrick had visited him. On a data-slate, the well-known and loved commissar confessed several sins and crimes, amongst them accepting bribes. Commissar Holt had obviously hung himself with a powerful rope, well tied to break his neck and not to strangle him. In the message he left behind him, he also left the completed report on the von Strab-family murders conducted ten years earlier. As by common belief, Herman von Strab, former planetary governor of Armageddon, was behind them all. Holt also credited Commissar Sebastian Yarrick for most of the work. There was one last reference in the message to the Codex: Terra and a short quote: "**History only repeats itself, but I won't.**" There were also references to a book known as the Book of Revelations, a book highly connected with the reference in Codex: Terra. Amongst the verses were verse 18 chapter 13 and verse 16 chapter 16.*



<<<Infernus Hive, Spire, Berzerkers cornered as well as orks, 1 week later>>>

"Ed, didn't I tell you to cover the west wings of the factory?" Sebastian asked the big Marine as he came diving down beside him with a thump. Charleston looked up with a confused look on his face. He was still wearing the darned warboss's helmet from Tempestora. "What west wing?" he asked after clearing away most of the dirt from his face. Sebastian sighed. This had seemed as such a good idea. Orks as well as Berzerkers in the same Hive, their leaders' HQ, cornering them, taking them out in one swift assault. Easy, in theory. Damned hard in reality. Sebastian cursed silently. He'd brought with him a full company of Steel Legion, leaving their Chimera transports behind cause they weren't needed in the Hive. Steel Legion, Armageddon's finest. Of that company of 400 men, maybe 200 were left. The Orks were taking a heavy toll on them. So was the Berzerkers with their terror attacks, a strategy not entirely their own, Sebastian could understand, but the twisted armour of the Raptor's gave away a horrible, spine-chilling banshee-howl when they dived, so they were quite suited for this sort of attacks. Luckily for Sebastian, Charleston had gotten with him 15 jump-pack equipped Honour Guard. Two were dead. They were 13 now.

"12," Sebastian corrected himself as a lucky shot from an Ork shoota took an Honour Guard in the eye.

"What are those?" Charleston said and pointed towards the Orks in the other end of the factory. It was incredible, but there was a factory complex this high into the spire. Sebastian couldn't believe when he first heard it from his scouts. He looked at what Ed had meant. The Orks, dressed up in chunky mega-armour, laughed raucously as the las-shots and bolter shots bounced off their armour. They weren't getting anywhere like this. Seb pulled back his head quickly and checked his storm bolter. There were five shots left in the clip. He looked at Ed again.

"Seven to the right, four to the left." Seb said simply, leaned over the edge of the wall where he was crouching. There wasn't much left of it after the Orks had fired their guns. He fired of a burst into the Orks, the armour-piercing Kraken rounds going through the armour of the beasts with ease. Seb's aim was perfect, the explosive shots bursting the skulls of the Orks like overripe fruit. He heard the scream or attempted such as the Orks fell to the ground. Seb threw

a new glance around the edge, making a fast count.

"Five to the right, one to the left and they're gathering in the middle." Seb said as he took his head back and reloaded his storm bolter.

"I'm gonna ask again Seb, what are those?" Charleston said. He aimed his plasma pistol very carefully and blew off a shot against the lone Ork to the left. It missed the beast with a few decimetres. Charleston cursed.

"Ork nobles, no doubt about it." Seb said as he slammed home the clip and clicked two rounds into place with a thumping.

"Nobles?" Charleston asked confused. "They've got nobles?"

"Ork society isn't without honour, Ed. They may be animals in your eyes, but they have a Codex of Honour, just as you do."

"What are we going to do then? We're pinned here. Berzerker Raptors behind us and Ork...Nobs before us."

"And the Orks are forming an attack." Seb added. "Ed, I want you and your soldiers to lay down a curtain of fire, cause I've got one wacky idea."

"Huh?" Charleston saw that Sebastian was looking at something up in the gloom. Only the old man's bionic eye could see it, apparently. Ed decided not to disagree and ordered the Marines and Guardsmen to pin the Orks down with fire on his mark. There were a few seconds of uneasy silence before Charleston gave the order as he saw that Seb was powering up his Bale Eye. The rattle of gunfire filled the blown-out factory and Ed barely recognised the distinctive crack from Seb's laser-shooting eye. He did, however see the fifty tonnes heavy Lemman Russ battle tank fall down from the roof and squash the Orks beneath its heavy weight. There was a shocked silence the following moments.

"Move on." Sebastian ordered from Charleston's side. The Bale Eye left a tiny, smoking trail as the old man moved.

"Nice trick, but a bit messy." Charleston commented as he moved up beside the commissar.

"I saw it hanging up in the roof, couldn't resist the temptation." Sebastian said flatly. The small force passed the corpses of Orks, the men of the Steel Legion looking away from the mess. Sebastian didn't. One of the green skinned soldiers moved slightly and the old man put a bolt round its head. "They may be our enemies, but they do know what pain is, Ed." Sebastian answered to Charleston's shocked expression. "The best we can do is spare them of it."

"Oh, a well-rehearsed lie, commissar." Charleston said caustically as they moved on.

"Watch your tongue, lieutenant commander..." Sebastian said silently.



Infernus' Opera house, how many months was it since he'd lastly been here? Sebastian didn't aim the thought to much contemplation. He was in the middle of a firefight with Berzerkers. Berzerkers and Orks, he corrected himself. Seb knew his grandfather's murderer and archenemy was close, he felt it in his blood and soul. His heart was beating fast with anticipation for the coming confrontation with the Dark Lord.

"Is it only me, or are the Orks getting bigger?" Charleston shouted over the roar of gunfire. Charleston put a stab of plasma-light into the chest of a charging Berzerker, exploding the renegade's torso. Another Berzerker, standing to Charleston's shoulders, got close with the huge man. Charleston avoided the Berzerker's chain-sword swings and cut the warrior's head off with a deft swipe of his ancient power-blade. He didn't see the Berzerker attacking from behind... Sebastian didn't even shout a warning, he just aimed his bionic eye towards the Berzerker warrior's head and shot. Charleston, too engaged in combat, didn't notice when the blood-red warrior's head exploded behind him. Sebastian allowed himself a smile at Ed's complete concentration, a concentration that nearly had killed him.

Something snorted behind Sebastian's back, and he turned and looked up into the face of a 3

metres tall Ork. Charleston was right; the Orks were getting bigger. These weren't ordinary Boyz, Ork warriors. No these were the absolute elite of Ghazghkull's bodyguard. It took Sebastian half a second to raise his battle-claw and cut the head of the Ork. It was the easiest way to stop them from fighting, Sebastian knew. To cut an Ork's arm or leg off didn't stop them. Jumping over some debris and taking cover behind a largely intact pillar, Sebastian checked himself. They were getting close now. Really close. The Space Marine Honour Guard was all but down to naught; it was Charleston, Captain Mikos Sergeant Teller and two brother-warriors, left. Not much. Seb's Steel Legionnaires had fared not so well they either. Only thirty or so were left, and they were dropping fast now, their lasguns unable to penetrate the Orks' and Berzerkers' thick armour. Sebastian cursed silently. He couldn't, wouldn't fail now, he was so close! He raised his storm bolter and blew the living daylights out of an Ork, which was trying to attack some Guardsmen. As the creature fell to the ground, the soldiers began beating on it with their bayonets. The sergeant saluted Sebastian as thanks.

All of a sudden, the room went silent. There were no Orks or Berzerkers left. Charleston came up to Sebastian. He hadn't lost the stupid helmet yet, Sebastian noticed. The big marine also seemed tired. Seb guessed it was because of the losses.

"We're clear, but Eddie's gonna kill me! Eleven Honour Guard dead! Have you got any idea what he'll do with me?" Charleston complained.

"It's not my fault Ed," Sebastian replied simply. "Kharn and Ghazghkull aren't stupid. They haven't become leaders for two of the most violent 'races' known by being stupid."

"Could guess so..." Charleston's voice trailed off. "It's quiet, too darned quiet!"

"I know," Sebastian said and looked around. "It smells trap long way..."

The small force moved on. As they got into the main concert hall of the opera house, Sebastian gasped slightly at what he saw. Desecration, in its worst sense, was what he saw. The huge Eagle chandelier had been torn down. Instead, the light was coming from what looked like a chandelier, but modelled after something heretical or alien, Seb was sure.

"Chaos rune," Captain Mikos said flatly. "I've seen it everywhere. What does it mean?"

"I don't know," Charleston said and recalibrated his auspex a bit. "But I know one who can answer..."

"Battle-brother McKenzie?" Mikos asked, as if already knowing the answer.

"Bingo..." Charleston said and took a picture of the chandelier. He frowned a bit, touched the zoom-runes of his photo-auspex and got a look of disgust on his face. "That frekking thing is made of human bones... And pieces of Space Marine armour..."

"Desecration..." Sergeant Teller sighed and walked off. "These renegades holds nothing in honour, do they?"

Sebastian was about to warn Teller about going away from the crowd. He'd left his soldiers outside, to guard. Instead it had been to avoid them from seeing Chaos-madness, like this. Sebastian's warning never left his lips. He, as the other two, just stared at how Sergeant Teller suddenly jerked, as if having a spasm of some kind. Charleston was the only one to see how the man's eyes went dead. Kharn walked out of the shadows, still holding Teller's body at the end of his battle-axe. The big, gore-coloured warrior walked calmly out to meet the others. He shook Teller's body off his axe and looked the other's over. "We do hold things in honour, my friends. Martial prowess. Gach'tla!"

Seb knew those words. It was orkish and it meant roughly; "do it!". There was a bang behind them, as the huge entry door to the opera house was slammed shut. The Steel Legionnaires were trapped on the wrong side, all due to Sebastian's orders. Seb cursed, Kharn had known his protocols. Seb had, as he thought of his stupidity, seen the two other Marines of the Honour Guard. They were both ripped asunder by one mighty power-claw.

"Ghazghkull Thraka!" was Sebastian Yarrick's first thought. The second one was: "I knew this was a trap! I knew it!".

"Now, it's only us..." Kharn began but suddenly stopped. "Brother Mikos, you've done good."

Kharn turned to the young Marine. "I knew I could trust you and that you'd succeed."

"It was in the Lord's will, master Kharn." Mikos replied softly. "You wanted the Imperial lackeys, I could give them to you." Charleston was shocked. Mikos, a renegade? He didn't want to believe it was true. His ears were broken! That he had trusted the man so, made him his personal adjutant and all. And the little brat turns renegade!

"You treasonous dog!" Charleston shouted. Kharn, Ghazghkull and Mikos looked at him. "I taught you everything I knew, and this is my reward?"

"Charleston, don't be upset now, I've been doing this for many years now." Kharn said softly.

"Shut the frekk up, renegade!!" Charleston said and drew his power sword. "Prepare to be redeemed, as they say in the Inquisition!"

"I'll take him master!" Mikos said, pulling out his own power sword. Kharn sighed. It was always the same story. Youngbloods, always wanting to show off before him. It cost them their lives more often than not. So was the case of Mikos. The young Marine couldn't possibly match Charleston's skill and strength. Charleston had fought for nearly half a millennia and learned a lot in those years. He was also the strongest Marine every to have lived. Mikos tried to outwit Charleston with nifty and nimble manoeuvres and sword-tricks. Charleston parried them all. After a minute, the commander got tired of the fight and cut Mikos head off in a deft sweep. The beheaded corpse fell to the ground with a thud.

"Idiot..." Charleston breathed. "May your soul rot for all eternity." Then he spat at the fallen warrior. "Your turn Kharn!"

"Don't think so," Kharn said as a smile crossed his lips. "Ghazghkull, take him out, I'll take the Yarrick!"

Seb saw how the huge Ork loomed over Charleston. More he didn't get to see, because Kharn grabbed him by his good arm and pulled him with him... up, towards the ceiling. The Dark Lord wore a jump-pack! Sebastian felt his heart race; he had no chance in bringing a so agile opponent down!

"Don't be frightened Yarrick," Kharn said softly, almost tenderly. "I'm just taking us away from the battle below, and any chance of you being saved. I want to settle this matter with you, one-on-one, man-to-man, and uninterrupted. Besides, to have you running up the stairs, that wouldn't be good for your health, would it? You're an old man after all." Kharn chuckled darkly to himself. Half a minute later, Kharn dropped Sebastian down on the roof of the opera house. The Berzerker Lord then landed himself, not far from Yarrick.

"Sebastian, I wanted to say one thing. I'm not here to kill you. My hatred towards you is abysmal indeed, but to kill you, I won't."

"Why?" Sebastian said through clenched teeth. The battle-claw that was his lower right arm was opening itself and closing itself with clicks. Sebastian was full of adrenaline and he wanted to use it.

"You might think of me as a beast, a murderer, but I'm much more than that. I want to tell you why I do this, why I'm a Berzerker. The reason? I know you'll listen."

"Never in my life!" Sebastian shouted and attacked Kharn with sheer fury and anger. Sebastian no longer fought with his honour and skill; he fought with pure hatred. Hatred and hatred alone was fuelling the Imperial Commissar...



Charleston dodged Ghazghkull's mighty power claw and the huge limb-weapon smashed into a marble pillar. In less than a second, Ghazghkull was free again, to strike at the Marine with renewed anger. Charleston knew what he had to do, facing a monster such as Ghazghkull. His estimations were that Ghazghkull had to weigh at least a tonne with that armour, and that he couldn't possibly outmatch the Ork in close combat. Instead, Ed had to use his intelligence to outwit the Ork. He knew this very well, and wasn't happy for it. Orks lived for war, that Charleston had learned from Yarrick, so Ghazghkull had to be skilled, or was he...?

Using his jump-pack to outmanoeuvre and outflank the humongous Ork, Charleston got close enough to take a stab at Ghazghkull with his power sword. A split second before Charleston hit the Ork, Ghazghkull's gun-arm was there and gave Charleston a whack at the head. Charleston dropped to the ground, stunned. He regained his senses just in time to see Ghazghkull raise his power claw to smash the head of the Marine like an overripe fruit. Charleston rolled out of the way, and the claw just took a chink out of his jump-pack armour. Getting to his feet, Charleston swung his power sword in an arc at Ghazghkull's back. The blade bit into the armour of the beast, but failed to do any damage. Ed didn't even mind to curse at this as he pulled the sword free and jumped backwards in a jump-pack powered somersault to avoid being smashed against the wall by the gun-arm.

The Ork glared at him, anger in its inhuman eyes. Charleston now saw the half-metal skull of the creature. Adamantium, he guessed. Same material used to create the Terminator suits. Virtually impossible to destroy.

"You really choose the wrong planet to frekk with, alien scum!" Charleston hissed. He felt something odd inside of him, a craving for blood to be spilt, Ghazghkull's blood, right here, right now. Charleston hadn't felt this before. He'd heard of the gene-flaw, but never thought it would affect him like it affected Poole and the others of the Assault Company. Now he knew he wasn't immune to the blood curse.

"Yooze da wun 'ose wrong, 'Umie!" Ghazghkull growled. "Dis da end uv da wurld fer 'Umies. All 'Umies die, it'z a WAAAGH!"

Charleston barely saw the dim, blue light that formed around Ghazghkull's body, but it didn't matter. This alien was as good as dead. Charleston was a Space Marine of the Death Angels Legion, the Emperor's finest and would not die at the hands of a green beast like Ghazghkull.

"WAAAGH! on yourself!" Charleston roared back at Ghazghkull. In a flash, Charleston had pulled out his plasma pistol. Firing in blind rage as he was, the shots weren't the usual sloppy ones that Charleston usually fired. The first shot melted the barrel of Ghazghkull's huge, Orky gun, the second blasted apart the power claw and the third blew away the big, metal "jaw" that served as protection for Ghazghkull's lower face-half. Making a diving charge at the beast, jump-pack blazing and power sword afloat, Charleston slammed into the huge Ork with a force that should've knocked a Leman Russ battle tank off it's tracks. Ghazghkull didn't even move an inch at the blow. Jumping backwards to avoid Ghazghkull's swinging stump, Charleston took a stab at the Ork's flank as it revealed itself. Later, Charleston could've sworn on that the sword bit through the armour, but it glanced off the skin of Ghazghkull. Before Charleston could figure out why, Ghazghkull had made his choice and Ed had to jump out of the way. The upper part of the power claw was still intact, and the two claw-blades still powered by the reactor at Ghazghkull's back. This gave Charleston an idea. Before he barely had landed, Charleston was up in the air again and was flying towards the power cable that connected the power claw with the reactor. His sword easily cut off the cable and Ed took some delight in hearing the frazzling sound from the claw when it went dead. Ghazghkull's left arm was now useless. Charleston sent his prayer to the Emperor that the Ork wasn't strong enough to lift the claw without the aid of servos.

Charleston was now at the front of the Orkoid Warlord again. The Ork glared at him. It growled something unintelligible, alien gibberish it seemed to Charleston. Charleston didn't respond. Not with words. Instead, charging the huge beast head first, Charleston had a blood-curdling roar on his lips. If he had looked up, he would have seen what would have been fear in Ghazghkull's eyes, but Orks aren't human, thus they can't have human feelings.

As Charleston reached the beast, he flung his head up to meet with the Ork's massive jaw. Ceramite steel met tough bone and a sickening crack was heard as Ghazghkull's neck snapped and gave away. His jaw had held, but the neck supporting it, hadn't. There also was a more fabricated crack, from when Charleston's looted helmet burst open in the scalp section, but it was almost lost to the loud crack from Ghazghkull's neck. Charleston jumped nimbly out of the way as the one and a half tonne heavy Ork fell to the ground with a resounding thud. Charleston stood panting a long while to regain his breath. He didn't want to admit it, but two times, the Ork had been close to smashing his head to pulp. Almost too close in his taste. He dared throw a glance at the fallen greenskin. That had been the Ork that Ishmael had talked about, the Dreadnought sized one. The Beast of the Gideon system.

"I'd rather wanna call him the Beast of Armageddon..." Charleston thought to himself. He threw a look at the entry doors. Behind them, the Steel Legionnaires were caught. Ed raised his plasma pistol and pulled the trigger. His shot blew a big hole in the door, big enough for a man to poke his head through it. He then looked up. How was Seb doing? Charleston decided for a horrible answer and flew upwards, despite his fatigue; prepared to send Kharn to the fallen god he worshipped...



While Charleston had battled Ghazghkull, Seb had tried to decapitate Kharn at least ten times with his claw, all tries result less. Seb fought with pure hatred, forgetting all he'd learned about honour and righteousness. In a way, he was fighting more evilly than the Dark Lord before him. He wanted revenge, he wanted blood, he wanted Kharn's neck between his claw-blades. Kharn knew all this very well, and Sebastian was playing him straight into his hands.

"I'm telling you once again, Yarrick, I won't fight you." Kharn said as he ducked away from the claw again. Sebastian's reply was a snarl. He'd lost his cap fifteen minutes ago, and his senses twenty minutes ago. He wanted to have his revenge; to repay the blood of his family spilt more than half a century before. Kharn had killed an Imperial Hero; the punishment of such was death. These were thoughts that appeared in Sebastian's raging mind as he fought. They weren't his thoughts; he didn't know where they'd come from, but he welcomed them, embraced them. They fuelled his old body with even more adrenaline. He would have Kharn's head. He knew he would. He jumped at the red-armoured Marine, but Kharn dodged the clumsy attack. But what Kharn hadn't counted on was the bionic eye. All of a sudden, the metallic sense flashed, and Kharn was saved from a killing shot by his Marine reflexes. But the laser beam hit something else; the lock that held Kharn's horned helmet in place. The lock was burned away, but Kharn did not notice this. Instead, he turned to face Yarrick once again.

"What I've told you is true. I didn't become a Berzerker because I'm 'evil', such a horrible word. I did it cause I've seen what will happen with the Marines when the Imperium acquires universal peace. We'll be disbanded, forever! I do this to maintain my own race, understand me? Wouldn't you do the same in my boots?"

"You're a traitor and a renegade, Kharn!" Sebastian snarled back. "In the Imperium, we have no room for the ones like you! You are trying to brainwash me, to believe in your insane ramblings! I will never give up my belief in the Emperor! Hear me? Never!"

"So be it... But you are already giving over to Chaos! Your grandfather would never have fought with hatred, like you! No! He fought with honour, just like I do! But you, Sebastian Yarrick, you are weak, cause you let your feelings guide you! All the time! Don't you think I've watched your progress? Don't you think I knew how you would act? And that Herman von Strab was the Imperial Commander of this site, made it so much easier to make you flaws visible! You grandfather, may he rest long, never showed his flaws as openly as you! He was a much more complicated opponent, as he never let his feelings guide his actions! But you and that big oaf Charleston, you've played me into my hands all along!"

"You are losing, Armageddon for you is a lost cause Kharn." Sebastian panted forth. In his mind, the voice was playing once again with his feelings. What was happening with him?

"Am I?" Kharn said, a slight tone of amusement in his voice. "This might not be the One, y'know!"

Sebastian launched himself at Kharn again, the voice in his mind edging him forward, to engage, to destroy, to spill blood.

Yarrick's battle claw got grip around one of Kharn's decorative hair-plumes, and the helmet came off and fell to the ground with a clatter. Kharn stared at Yarrick, and Yarrick stared back. The old man had expected a face distorted by hundreds of year's exposure to Chaos. This was the far opposite. Kharn's skin was pale, his eyes piercing black and his hair was red and long, shoulder length and unruly because of the lack of care. On his left cheek a black skull-rune of Khorne was tattooed. The skeletal structure of his face looked a bit like McKenzie's; same powerful jaw and high cheekbones.

"Bad move, Yarrick!" Kharn hissed. "Prepare to feel the wrath of the man that killed your

grandfather!!"

Now firstly, Sebastian realized his mistake. He now knew what had been whispering in his mind; Deamon! The word came to him like a shock. He'd listened to a deamon, and thus used up his power. All he could do now was pray that he could evade the huge Marine. He couldn't...

Kharn threw himself at the impudent commissar. No one in two hundred years had dared pull his helmet off and show his features to the world. Kharn had removed it when he was alone, not otherwise. He smiled savagely as his axe bit deeply into Yarrick's battle claw. An electric shock rippled through Sebastian's old body as the claw was short-circuited. Kharn pulled out the axe and gave the claw two, three more beats with his mighty axe. The old commissar sagged down to his knees, overcome by fatigue. This left Kharn with time to pick up his helmet, put it on and walk back to the fallen commissar. He bent down, looked curiously at the cord running from Sebastian's left temple and then pulled it out with a powerful jerk. This sent a new jolt of electric energy through Sebastian's body. But he was too tired to scream. The adrenaline had left his body and his body right now felt like a dried up husk.

Kharn grabbed Sebastian firmly around the neck and hoisted the old man up into the air. Sebastian was held in a choke, he could feel Kharn's fingers close tighter around his frail, old neck.

"I said earlier I wouldn't kill you Yarrick. Well, I've just had a change of mind!" Kharn hissed. His left arm was unarmoured, and it was with that he held Sebastian, but the old man couldn't hurt him now. He moved the old man closer to the edge of the roof, and over it. Sebastian was now dangling with his feet three hundred metres above the ground, or the level closest to him.

"Make one move Kharn and I'll blow your frekking head off!" Charleston said as he aimed his plasma pistol at the renegade's head.

"Oh, Charleston, put the pea-shooter away, I've already predicted this." Kharn said, a slight tone of boredom in his voice. "I'll give you an ultimatum, as you're in no condition to bargain: Let me go and I'll spare Yarrick's neck here. Or you could follow and fight me, but the commissar would end up as a greasy stain on the lower level. 'S your choice!"

Before Charleston could answer, Kharn dropped Sebastian and that old man fell down. Shouting a colourful and evocative curse in the genre of his Grand Commander, Charleston dived after Sebastian with jump-pack at full blast. He knew Kharn would be gone when he came back up, but he had no choice!

After four seconds of free fall, Charleston caught the old man and sped upwards. Of what he could tell, Sebastian had taken a bit of a beating. As Charleston landed, he looked around. Kharn was gone without a trace, as usual.

"Damn you Kharn!" Charleston thought darkly to himself. "You've cost me a friend, an aide and nearly my life! One day, you'll have to pay back, and that with high interest rate."

The big Marine looked at the small, aged commissar cradled in his arms, mercifully embraced by the arms of unconsciousness. Now he realized his own fatigue. Picking up Sebastian's peaked cap and putting it on the man's head, Charleston walked down to the entrance hall of the opera house, or what was left of it. The remaining Steel Legion would wait for him down there, he knew.

As he got down to the entry hall, he noticed Ghagzhkull's body gone. Charleston cursed once again. He thought he'd killed the Ork. He'd ask Seb why this was with Orks, but that was later. All the Lieutenant Commander Edmund Charleston now needed was sleep, well deserved sleep. He would report the mission as successful, but even if it was victory he didn't like it. This would be a victory indeed, but a hollow one...

<<<Equatorial Jungle, six months later, Armageddon liberated>>>

"I tell you Eddie, there has been no recoverings of Berzerker corpses!" McKenzie said, as he and his companions looked out at what seemed like a huge field, and in the middle a totem pole. "This confirms my theories of that Kharn has dabbled with Necromancy!"

McGranth turned to his friend and gave him a stern look. He was more worried about the five hundred metres tall obelisk in the middle of the Equatorial Jungle, than of McKenzie's idea of zombie-Marines. "You've spent too much time in that Library, y'know! Even Ed here wouldn't come with such a ridiculous idea."

"Still," Sebastian shot in, scratching his head, "You can't deny the fact that there has been no reports of bodies from Berzerkers whatsoever. Only Orks. And that, my friend, scares me!"

"Eddie, we know that Magus Grimjaw is helping out Kharn," Charleston said, lowering the magnoculars he'd been looking through. The big obelisk out in the field gave him the creeps. "And he's a master-mind on gene-splicing, so why not Necromancy? I mean, he's psyker."

"Not as powerful and trained as me!" McKenzie exclaimed.

"No, but he has the Hive Mind to back him up, doesn't he?" Charleston said with a sly look. A low "True..." was McKenzie's reply.

"My dear brothers," McGranth tried break the smaller fight up. "Let's focus on the problem at hand, shall we?"

The others nodded in reply. McGranth looked pleased and turned his bulky frame towards the field again. His Terminator armour had behaved oddly lately, but he guessed it was because of the new left leg he'd gotten a few years earlier. The obelisk bothered him. No man, and that included Space Marines, could get any closer than a kilometre to that thing, without being engrossed in what McKenzie so colourfully called it; a Berzerker's Bloodlust. They would have to destroy it from afar, with plasma bombs. Problem was that there was no chance of getting a Basilisk mobile gun battery able to fire plasma grenades. The things would have to be dropped from orbit, but that meant that the jungle could get damaged, and according to Sebastian, damaging the Jungle was taboo. It was what made Armageddon hospitable. Silently, he pulled off a long, and very harsh line of curses.

"The taint must be exterminated, Grand Commander!" McKenzie suddenly said at his side.

"Words brother, but how?" McGranth snapped back. If McKenzie had better ideas of how to do it, he was welcome to tell.

"Long range shelling with ordinary explosives, has that ever entered your mind?"

"It has but Sebastian said there was no way that would harm it, if he knew Kharn rightly..." McGranth fell silent. "Speaking of which, where is the fella? And where's Ed?"

"I have no idea Eddie, they were here a minute ago!" McKenzie said and looked around. He made a sweep of the surroundings to feel where they were. "Eddie, they're walking towards that pyramid we discovered not far away from here."

"Oh, then don't mind. Whatever can that do for harm?" McGranth realized that cliché in his sentence too late. "Oh no, I didn't say that did I?"

"Famous last words..." McKenzie replied. "But don't bother, we can only do it worse, if my predictions are right."

"Will you stop looking into the future and focus at the present, Edward?" Eddie snapped and made a gesture towards the monolith.



Sebastian found Charleston walking around the foot of the huge, black pyramid. He seemed to be looking for something. If it was the entrance, Seb hoped Ed wouldn't find one. The old commissar hoped he could relax when he saw that the walls seemed to be made of solid stone.

"Ed, tell me, why are you so interested in this thing?" Sebastian asked and walked up to the Marine.

"It holds a secret, I know it. And I don't need to be psyker for that!" Charleston said and pressed at a place on the solid wall at random. Nothing.

"Well, your instincts are telling you wrong..." Sebastian said and leaned against the wall with his left arm. The wall went in slightly and behind Seb a huge hole opened itself. The two men looked at it stunned for a second, before Charleston took command and went inside. Sebastian hurried after.

The huge shutter-door closed with a bang behind them.

"Y'know Ed, this just isn't happening. This pyramid has stood here for five millennia, without anyone finding out how to get inside." Sebastian said in the pitch-darkness. "Gee, what are the odds!" Charleston said and clapped his hands together for emphasis. Torches along the wall of the corridor they were in lit up. But the flames weren't natural. They threw a blue, synthetic light instead of the warm, orange of usual flames. The torches weren't alone on the walls. Strange hieroglyphs lined them as well.

"How come there are droids on them? And what are those things with crests?" Charleston asked, as he looked one wall. He turned on the lights in his battle suit, cause the torches in some way scared him.

"I have no idea..." Sebastian's voice trailed off. Something on the floor had caught his eye. "Ed, the dust has been recently moved. We're not alone in this great big pyramid. Auspex on!"

Charleston did as he was told and pulled out the life-sign/motion tracker combine tool. He turned it on and the two antennas at the top of it extended themselves and the machine went online. The screen lit up with a greenish light and the buttons on it, for magnifying and various other things, lit up as well. With a low 'dut-dut-dut' the auspex scanned the nearest 100 metres. Then he put the auspex on the back of his lower left arm, as his lights were mounted on the back of the lower right arm, and this also left his hands free for his weapons. Sebastian used his bionic eye for seeing, he didn't need any flashlight. The heat and night vision in his eye did their job well. The only thing was that the darkness for his natural eye made it a bit strange in seeing one eye and not the other.

Sebastian took the lead now. This smelled fishy to him. Fugu-fishy! He had left his storm bolter at the camp, but his las pistol was still at his side, and he held it high in his left hand. His right hand was no more, and he stubbornly refused to use McKenzie's implant. He only used it when he absolutely had to, not other ways. Right now, his lower right arm was the hefty battle-claw he'd taken as a trophy from Ugulhard. He went round a corner and scanned the room with both bionic eye and las pistol. This room wasn't lit up as the last one. The heat scanner took the room on the sweep to the right and the night vision on the back sweep to the left. Nothing. The room was empty, except for the entrance on the far side of it. It was maybe a good two hundred metres away from them. The walls were clean. Too clean for Yarrick's taste. He took up the scrap of metal he'd had inside of his coat since the whole darned war began, and threw it into the room. It hit something invisible and was incinerated in a flash. Sebastian smiled to himself. A nice trap indeed.

"Ed, put on your helmet and switch the infra-reds on. Laser." Sebastian said curtly and switched mode in his bionic eye. Now he saw the crosshatch of laser beams, each one capable of crippling a foot and sending him crashing down on the floor, thus being perforated by a dozen other laser shots.

"Tricky," Charleston said, his voice distorted by the helmet. "Hey, Seb, your coat is quite long. I'll carry you over." Before Sebastian could protest, Charleston had lifted him up in his arms and was carrying him over the laser-trap. Charleston missed a few times and got a blast at his feet, but his ceramite steel uniform protected him. As he reached the other end of the room, he put Sebastian safely down. Unwittingly, Sebastian gave Ed a

"Thank you." as he looked at the floor. The prints in the dust were still here. Whoever had passed the trap, knew the trap had been there, all right.

"Let's keep on moving Ed." Sebastian said and walked into the doorway...

...And stepped into a vast chamber, lined by huge marble pillars. He guessed the roof had to be at least a hundred meters above him. This chamber was also lit up by the strange torches. He made a scan of the room, but found naught. He stepped into the chamber and looked around, awed by the sheer enormity of the place. Each and every pillar was marked with the same strange hieroglyphs as the walls from the first corridor. Seb turned round to Charleston.

"Any readings?"

"Nothing." Charleston replied, taking a look at the auspex. He flicked it over to motion tracker. "Still nothing." Charleston pulled off the helmet.

"What exactly are we looking for Seb?"

"I don't know. You wanted to go inside." Sebastian snapped back.

"Yeah, I did, but how do you know where to go to?"

"The prints in the dust, of course. And we'll follow them till this creeping feeling of mine goes away."

Charleston gave a shrug and the twosome covered the room sprinting. The lieutenant commander threw regular glances at his auspex, but the only thing that stirred was he and Sebastian.

The next room was a crossroad. The way split up in five new corridors from here. They spread out like a star around them. Sebastian once again looked down onto the floor. Charleston followed his eyes and saw the steps in the dust still were here. They went to the northwest corridor. Without a word between themselves, Charleston and Yarrick walked towards that corridor. Here, the torches were also already lit. They walked through the corridor and got into a new room, unlit. Sebastian looked around with his night vision while Charleston made a scan with the motion tracker. Sebastian saw the big Marine shake his head in disbelief. He also heard the click from behind. Ears trained by years of fighting in the Imperial Guard had taught him what the safety-lock of a bolt pistol sounded like. Yarrick spun round, coat flying out around his waist as a ballerina's dress when doing a pirouette, but Sebastian's reason was not aesthetic. The bionic eye flashed and so did his laspistol, which he'd aimed at the only thing in the darkness that didn't show up on his heat vision. The bionic eye's shot, however, hit flesh, and a man's scream was heard. There also was a clatter from when the bolt pistol hit the ground. Luckily though, the shot didn't go off. It took Sebastian half a second to be upon the man. He struck once, twice at him with his good hand. The human seemed to have gone unconscious by the second blow and Sebastian stopped. He felt the sticky blood coming out from the man's right triceps. Now Charleston was beside him. The big Marine aimed his flashlight at the face of the attacker.

"By the Throne, Seb!" Charleston gasped.

"I know," Sebastian replied calmly. "Herman von Strab, in person."



Von Strab slowly opened his eyes. He could remember a flash, no two flashes of light, almost simultaneously, and he remembered that he'd felt a pain in his right arm. The pain was still there, throbbing. Von Strab grunted as he pulled himself upright into a sitting position.

"As the ex-lord governor is now awake, I believe we can go on with our trial," a slightly strident, tenor voice said close to him. Herman knew the voice. And he wasn't happy to hear it. Although he'd been on the run for months now without meeting a living man, though a whole lot of dead ones, he knew what awaited him if he got caught. The Imperium of Mankind would consider his acts as high treason, and the man before him would consider it a matter of honour. The latter was far worse. Sebastian Yarrick, Imperial Commissar and veteran of many wars, held honour over anything, von Strab knew full well, and he had dishonoured Yarrick somewhat gravely. The old man wouldn't take him before a war criminal tribunal; Yarrick would carry out the sentence summarily.

"Herman von Strab, you are charged for high treason, bribery, murder and genocide." Sebastian began and aimed a flashlight into the face of von Strab, making the powerful man wince slightly. Herman was still powerful, though the months out in the free had made him a bit famined.

"Bribery?" Herman asked.

"Of Commissar Holt, who else?" Sebastian replied softly.

"He blackmailed me! He said that if I didn't pay him a certain amount of money each month, he'd tell the Imperium's leaders that..." Herman suddenly fell silent.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave," Sebastian said mockingly. "I already know why he blackmailed you, Herman. That's why I have murder on the list of accusations."

"I see..."

"Now, the others might need some explanation; you ignored my warnings, frekk, you even ignored the warnings made by the Emperor himself! Treason, not only towards the Imperium, but also towards the people you are meant to protect! Which leads to the accusation of genocide; many billions of civilians and soldiers have died because of you! We've had a Titan Legion wiped out and half a Space Marine company wiped out because of you! And it doesn't stop there; the final accusation, murder!" Sebastian got a dark look on his face now, as if the last hadn't been enough.

"You murdered your father and brothers, just so you could seize power over Armageddon. Only two creatures come to mind that can do something as underhanded as that: Humans and Deemons. Are you a heretic, Herman von Strab, or just a traitor?"

"Just go on with it old man!" Herman spat at Yarrick. If he was going to die, he didn't want it prolonged.

No one of the two men paid attention to Ed any more. He wandered off to the far end of the chamber. There was something horrid with this place. Inhuman, alien in all its ways. The hieroglyphs, the traps. No human was supposed to be able to get through those. For that you'd to have a skin of metal. Charleston stopped. He looked around and was startled at the many alcoves around here, built into the walls. Each alcove was the resting place of a man-sized robot. They made no sign, their mechanical eyes dead. Some of them had cobwebs on them. None were rusty, none were without a weapon. They all held in strangely designed guns, an emerald crystal seeming to be the emitter of whatever unholy beam the weapons fired. 'Cause they seemed to be beam-weapons, most likely. Charleston let his wrist-mounted flashlights travel over the inanimate metal warriors. He noticed some were more heavily built than the others and carried bigger guns. After a few minutes, his ray of light fell upon a robot that didn't carry a gun. Instead, it held in a nearly three metres tall staff, lavishly decorated with gold and platinum, finished off at the top by a ruby. The leader robot, because it obviously was a leader robot, also wore a headdress, made out of gold, strange symbols etched into its ancient surface. As Ed walked closer to have a better look at the leader robot, he aimed his flashlight at the ruby set into the robot's forehead. A high-pitched whine was heard from inside of the mechanical thing and it threw open its eyes. A green, inhuman light came from the eyes.

Charleston started backwards as the thing stepped out of its alcove. Ed looked worriedly over his shoulder as he heard the same whining sound from around him as the other droids went online. Twenty pairs of green, robotic eyes glared at him from the darkness, the light from their neighbour highlighting their metal hides. Charleston looked back at the leader.

"We are the Necrontyr." it said in a distorted voice. It had no moving jaw or vocal cords, so it had to be synthetic, Ed guessed. "We were created by the C'tan to inherit this world when our time came. Thou has risen us, thou shall feel the wrath of C'tan!"

Acting on instinct, Ed raised his plasma pistol and blew the head of the leader robot. The thing toppled and fell to the ground with a metallic thud. Turning, Charleston saw that the other Necrons were raising their guns, power crystals glowing. He also heard a strange sound. It was a low, shuffling, scraping sound, like the sound made of hundreds of centipedes or beetles. Throwing a quick glance upwards, Charleston stared at what seemed like hundreds of green eyes. Not wanting to stay to find out what the things up in the roof were, Charleston ran back towards Sebastian and Herman.

Behind him, four, five, six of the little, insecticide droids fell down from the roof and scuttled after on their mechanical insect's legs. After them came more of the beetles and the Necron warriors moved out of their alcoves and marched after the running Charleston.



Sebastian raised his laspistol and put the muzzle to Herman's forehead. "And thus, as the Emperor dictates, I condemn you to..." His voice trailed off. Sebastian heard a heavy, but even thumping behind him. He hadn't turned but saw Herman's surprised gaze as the ex-governor looked over his shoulder. Then they heard Charleston's deep voice shout.

"The robots are coming, the robots are coming!" For being a two metres fifty tall man, Charleston was incredibly fast. He ran past the commissar and the Armageddon noble with an almost impossible speed for his bulk. What whooshed past the two men was a red blur it appeared.

"What the frekk did the Marine mean with that?" von Strab asked with a puzzled look on his face. Sebastian, having forgotten about the summary execution, saw what Ed had meant. The hundreds of green eyes that glared out of the dark. Inhuman, unfeeling and utterly mechanical. Robots!

"I suggest we make a run for it as well, von Strab. Ed meant those!" Sebastian said, indicating the eyes with his one good hand. Seconds later, von Strab and Yarrick were running as well, and indeed catching in on Charleston. The Marine was handicapped by his armour, but neither von Strab or Yarrick were. Sebastian maybe because of his age, but that hadn't occurred to him, it seemed. He ran nimbly past Charleston and took the lead. This made Charleston a bit confounded.

"I thought commissars led from the front?" he asked.

Sebastian shot the big Marine a quick glance and then replied: "I am leading from the front right now, am I not?"

"Yeah but I thought..." Charleston was cut off by a crackling beam of energy that whipped past him. Apparently, the robots had gotten within firing range. This was not good.

"ED! We can't get past the laser-room!" Sebastian came to a hideous conclusion. He'd forgotten all about it. That was not good.

"I know another way!" von Strab shouted suddenly. He was running alongside Charleston, no trouble in keeping up with the other two. It startled Seb that Herman wanted to help, despite what Sebastian had been about to do with him.

"Then show us, Herman von Strab!" Sebastian shouted. More shots were hissing towards them, but at the great range, they went wide. They were now back in the big chamber with the huge marble pillars. But, instead of running out the way they'd come from, Herman took to the right and ran behind one of the pillars. Yarrick and Charleston followed. The ex-governor pressed something on the wall and a secret door swung open. As they got inside, Herman closed the door behind them.

"You owe me one now, Commissar Yarrick." the bulky man panted forth and gave the commissar a sly look.

"Believe I do..." Sebastian mumbled quietly to himself. Now he understood how Holt had succumbed. Herman might not be a genius in tactics, but he possessed a low cunning that would make a daemon jealous, Sebastian concluded. He looked around the room they now were in. It looked odd, the far end of the chamber was round, as if it was supposed to let through something very big and round. He looked behind him and saw that the corridor they'd come out from was just a hole between two ramps. All was made out of stone blocks, and covered in hieroglyphs. He threw a new look towards the far end of the chamber. His augmented vision on his left eye zoomed in a bit and what he'd thought was confirmed. The long, tubular chamber ended in daylight, and an exit that was opening. He made a gesture for the others to follow.

"Let's get out of here, don't you agree?" he said and walked out of the corridor between the ramps. Charleston and von Strab followed. As they walked, Sebastian heard a tiny click. Instinctively, he looked down at his boots. He removed his left foot from where he'd put it down. The tiny button he'd pressed down with his weight, clicked up again, and a huge rumbling noise was heard. The threesome turned to see a massive stone ball coming loose from its holdings up in the roof far above them and start rolling towards them with constantly accelerating speed. Seb judged the thing to weigh at least a couple of tonnes. He was so shocked by the huge

thing, that he didn't even hear himself scream to the others to run.

Sebastian Yarrick realized this time that he was an old man, and couldn't run as fast as Charleston and von Strab. His knees gave away and he fell to the ground. Shocked, he looked at the onrushing stone ball. It was going to crush his old body. Turn it into watery mush. He closed his single eye...

Sebastian suddenly got the feeling of flying. Opening his eye, he saw that he was once again in the comfort of Charleston's powerful arms. The Space Marine had turned round and, unbelievably deftly, flown with his jump pack and caught Sebastian from the ground seconds before he would've been crushed. Now they were rushing ahead of the stone with an incredible speed. Sebastian saw von Strab running before them and held out his battle-claw. He could catch von Strab with it, without cutting the man in half, he hoped. After all, it was so deadly because of the pneumatics, not the sharp edges of the blades. Two seconds later, Sebastian had caught Herman around the waist and told Ed to give all he got. Slowly, Sebastian closed the claw blades around von Strab so he wouldn't fall out of his grip. Seb also urged back the feeling of wanting to close the claw blades entirely. He felt the punch from the thrusters of the jump pack as Ed put it on full blast. Too long on this gear, and the reactor overheated, Seb knew it full well. But Charleston would have to have it in that gear till they were clear of the stone. *'Not much further now,' Seb thought. 'Hang in there Ed, you can do it!'*

With the ear-splitting sound of the molested engines of the jump pack coming to him finally, the bundle of men flew out of the hole in the wall of the pyramid. Sebastian sighed in relief as he saw the stone ball get stuck in the hole, which was too narrow for it. Sebastian heard Ed sigh as well. The stress he'd put on the engines could have killed him. But it hadn't. Charleston settled down and was immediately surrounded by troops: Guardsmen as well as Marines. Charleston let go of Seb, but Sebastian didn't let go of Herman. The man struggled of course.

"You owe me one, Yarrick!" Herman hissed at the old man. Sebastian looked softly back at the man in his pneumatic grip.

"I beg to differ, my dear gentleman. By catching you and saving your arse in there," Sebastian gestured at the pyramid. "I made us even. We're quits. Just you be happy that a war criminal tribunal will take care of you now." Sebastian looked around and raised his voice:

"Commissar McLaren!!" A tall, wiry man in his thirties came running towards them, dressed in the black uniform of the Imperial Commissariat. He saluted Yarrick. When he saw von Strab, he was about to spit on him, but the older commissar stopped him.

"There will be plenty of time for that later, my comrade," Sebastian said and let go of von Strab. As if on cue, the unlocking click of security locks of a dozen bolters and lasguns was heard. Von Strab finally gave up and held up his arms in the air. He was led away by a squad of Guardsmen. Before McLaren disappeared with the Guard, Sebastian grabbed the young man by the arm.

"Make sure he gets the punishment he deserves," Sebastian said to the tall man.

"Of course, Commissar Yarrick." McLaren replied and smiled savagely.

"He's a war criminal..." Sebastian said thoughtfully. He dismissed the thought he'd had been concerning. "Life okay with you otherwise, John?"

"Yes sir! It was an honour to be trained by a man such as you. You're a living legend now. The Saviour of Hades Hive." McLaren replied happily.

"That warmed an old man's heart, boy. Now, take care of the ex-governor."

Sebastian looked at young man as he ran after the Guardsmen watching von Strab. McLaren had been one of Sebastian's best cadets that he'd trained over the years. Though, since McLaren, Sebastian hadn't trained any more cadets. Sebastian had been sixty-four when McLaren was fully fledged as a commissar, and the Commissariat had considered him too old for such any more.

"What a rush!" Charleston said at his side, suddenly. Sebastian looked up at the man.

"Indeed. Ed, concern this war now officially over!" Sebastian said with a sweeping gesture.

"Not quite." a voice said behind them. They turned and saw McKenzie standing there, arms crossed over his chest. "How the frekk do we deal with that monolith, commissar?"

"You haven't thought up a way in all these many hours?" Sebastian asked surprised and raised an eyebrow.

"No, cause I've been worried sick because of you two."

"McKenzie, stop complaining. You sound as if you were my mother."

"How should you know how a mother sounds?" McKenzie said caustically, without thinking on what he was doing. Charleston stopped Sebastian from ramming his battle-claw into McKenzie's chest and gave his fellow Marine a dark look. They both knew how a sensitive subject Sebastian's family was. McKenzie, agitated, as he'd become, had used it as a provocative against Sebastian, and it had worked.

"Edward is right," McGranth said as he approached, Terminator armour humming. "We still haven't figured out a way to get rid of the monolith."

"Well, at least we know why it took the Dark One such time to reach Armageddon Secundus." Sebastian said with a shrug. "He was constructing this, and gives us another conclusion." The others looked quizzically on the old man. "No Berzerker could have erected that; Khorne shuns the use of psychic witchery, excuse me Edward, so he must have had the use of psykers. There's no other explanation to it all."

The Marines looked at each other. It made sense, it frekking made sense! Sebastian's knack of seeing order in chaos had helped yet again.

"So what do we do with the monolith then?" McGranth asked cautiously.

"Nuke it." Sebastian said simply. "The pyramid is a nest of alien creatures as well. That's the only way." He looked at the huge black pyramid towering behind McGranth's shoulder.

"There were robots in it." Charleston shot in. "They said they'd been created by the C'tan and that they were going to inherit this world. I don't like it..."

"But what about the forest, the jungle? It will be made inhospitable by the atomics!" McKenzie protested. "There must be some other way! And the robots then? They might hold the answer to why even the Emperor was created! C'tan is a by-word for Paladin in the ancient tongues!"

"That might well be McKenzie, but they were in no way friendly." Sebastian said and looked the wiry Marine in the eye. "But yes, we can use something else than atomics."

"What might that be? It's the most powerful weapon known to mankind." McGranth queried.

"Ever heard of anti-matter?" Sebastian asked softly. "I heard recently that the Adeptus Mechanicus has developed a way of using anti-matter as a bomb. Not much is needed, and it leaves no radiation of what I know."

"How come I haven't found out about it?" McKenzie looked stumped.

"In a way, it makes planetary assaults by Space Marine obsolete. You're still needed of course, but when an 'unimportant' planet is taken, we can send in a fleet armed with anti-matter bombs instead of a Space Marine Legion. Armageddon is such an important planet, that anti-matter bombing was out of the question. That's why you were summoned, mainly."

"How did you know then Seb?" McKenzie asked curiously.

"A Mechanicus adept told me so when I got my battle-claw repaired after the meeting with Kharn. Didn't think of it until now...though."

"You're incredible Seb..." McKenzie murmured silently to himself. He turned to the others: "As said, the taint must be exterminated!" With that, he strode off.

"McGranth," Sebastian asked. "Have you ever heard of the Codex: Terra?"

"Yeah. It's that book about that planet far away which was left monitored but not controlled by the Emperor, right?"

"Sort of. Have you read it?"

"McKenzie has." McGranth thumbed towards his comrade who was now talking with some men clad in the dark red robes of the Adeptus Mechanicus. Charleston had disappeared, probably to tend his poor jump pack. McGranth waited till McKenzie had finished talking with the adepts and whistled him to come over.

"What is it, Commander?" he asked as he came over.

"The commissar wants to ask you something." With that, McGranth left McKenzie and Yarrick alone.

"Edward, you've read the Codex: Terra, right?"

"Many times, Sebastian, many times. I find it...entrancing."

"Right, have you read that appendix named the Bible?"

"Yes...I think so, though it's claiming to be the Book of Books, which is in my eyes heretical."

"Mine too. Now, I've conducted some simple maths, and I find it highly peculiar that this here war lasted for exactly 666 days, counting this as the last day." An uneasy silence followed Sebastian's words.

"You can't be serious Sebastian..." McKenzie mumbled. Sebastian just gave him a look that said he was serious. "I mean, the number of the Beast?"

"You've read the Book of Revelations at least." Sebastian chuckled.

"I find its prophecies intriguing." Another pause of silence. "That means that, the Book of Revelations meant here, not the Project!"

"Exactly!" Sebastian exclaimed. "I quote: 'And they gathered in the place named in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.' End quote."

"It's a strange world we live in..."

"Yes it is my friend, yes it is..."



<<<Volcanus Hive, nearly two years after the Space Hulk landed and started the Battle for Armageddon>>>

Sebastian was standing in the plaza where the statue of his grandfather stood. It had incredibly enough managed unscathed through the war. The tall Callidussian Commissar General still stood in his victorious pose, sword raised high, pointing towards the north and the ruins of the Tower of Doom. At the foot of the statue the cracked helmets of Berzerkers lay stacked. Despite the hundreds of years it had stood here, it wasn't eroded. The features of the famous hero were still as clear as the day the statue had been erected. Sebastian knew he had his grandfather's high-cheeked face and the green eyes. Sebastian walked closer to the huge marble statue, Cerberus following at his heels. The last time the big wolfhound had been here, his master had been young, and so had he. Now both he and his master were old. Cerberus remembered what had happened last time. It hadn't been funny. Now, however, his master had confidence in his steps. He'd just won a war.

Sebastian stopped a metre from the statue and looked up at the face of his grandfather. It took a while for the words to form for Sebastian, but after a minute, he started to talk with the statue.

"Y'know gramps, I've always been feeling inferior to you. You were the great war-hero. My father had also given his life in the Emperor's service, so had my uncle. I had so much to live up to. I really wanted to prove myself. Things sort of went out of hand when I was fifteen, didn't they? I mean, it wasn't so that I was afraid of the Chaos beasts; I just had this horrible premonition. McKenzie has thought it's psychic. I don't. You had that knack too didn't you? To be

able to see order in chaos? But not that day.

"I've cursed myself ever since. I kicked myself through the Schola Progenum, IG helping me to keep going. Now he's also gone. Just like you. He was all I could ask for, and more. Then I have Cerberus, the puppy that was a gift. A faithful companion indeed, but he's old, just as me. You were different there, weren't you, gramps? You didn't age as normal men. Okay, you were grey-haired, but not old, in the word's true meaning. Hell, you even had a nickname. I mean, you weren't only regarded as any Commissar General. People considered you an incarnation of the Wolf, Hrodwulf Le'man, didn't they? But to the entire of the Imperium, you were known as the Liberator of Armageddon.

"Now, I've also made me a nickname. Grandfather, I am your grandson; Sebastian Yarrick, Imperial Commissar and Saviour of Hades Hive!"

With that, Sebastian closed his eyes and smiled. He'd made peace with his past ghosts at last...



<<<Earth, present time. McKenzie and Charleston talking in the bar>>>

"And that, brother, is the story of the Battle for Armageddon." Charleston said as he ended the story. He looked at McKenzie at his right.

"Good to know what happened." McKenzie said and returned to his beer. There was a long pause of silence.

"Edd, what was the Project: Terra actually?" Charleston said after a moment.

"What it was? It was a test in seeing if humanity could make do without the influence of the Emperor. If it worked, the Imperium would have been able to expand throughout the entire galaxy. Sadly though, the coming of Deamon Lord Juijaeg, the 12th deamon lord, interrupted the project. He also caused the Great Merge between the two legions of which ours were formed." McKenzie had been on the verge of saying 'is', but reminded himself of the destruction of the Imperium and his beloved legion.

"And after that, there was no time for such an experiment again. But we do know that Terra, or Earth has managed fine."

"Urth?" Charleston asked confounded.

"Earth, Ed. E-a-r-t-h. Earth. That's what native humans call it."

"What about the Codex: Terra?" Charleston asked.

"It's actually a twenty volumes collection of books containing material from 10.000 BC to 1200 AD, Terra standard time. But, I believe the Imperium in some way knew of Juijaeg's coming. See, they stored away information about travelling the stars here on Terra." McKenzie's voice dropped to a whisper. "See, when humanity here is ready, they'll find the information on how to make contact with the Imperium again."

"How? Do tell."

"STC's. Standard Template Constructs. They contain all the data needed to create what the humans of Terra need to travel the stars."

"Do you know where they are?" Charleston asked and looked concerned.

"Yes, I do in fact." McKenzie took a look around to see if no one was listening on them. "There are four in this system, named Sol 1 by these humans; one on Terra itself, in a pyramid called the Cheops pyramid. It contains data for how to terraform a planet to make it habitable. One on the moon of this planet, which tells how to build a warp-engine. It on the far side of it, so it's secure for now. There are two on Mars; one for how to build one of the Galaxy class cruisers. Y'know, the big ones. The other is how to make a Warlord Titan."

"Okay." Charleston didn't know that McKenzie had left out two things for him. That Saturn's moon Triton held the STC's on how to alter the genes of a human to make him Space Marine. All

info for Space Marine creation was on Triton; gene coding, implants, armour and even the trusty bolt guns used by the Adeptus Astartes. It was best to keep that away from him.

McKenzie got up and walked towards the door. The bartender stopped him.

"Buddy, you haven't paid!" the bartender, a stocky man in his forties called him from the counter. He received Ed's money as he talked.

"I've already paid." McKenzie said and made a lithe move with his right hand.

"Never mind," the bartender said suddenly. "Forgot you've already had paid."

As Charleston joined McKenzie he gave his friend a very dark look indeed.

"Got that from a movie." McKenzie simply replied. Charleston decided not to argue.

"Hey Edward, do you think there are Yarricks in Terra?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, Terra was probably uninhabited when man came here, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and it was populated with humans from the Imperial worlds."

"Thought so. That means there must be psykers here, and Yarricks." Charleston remembered the boy from the cul-de-sac that had been so much alike Rolf Yarrick. Even name ways.

"Could be, Ed, could be..."

The two Marines left the street where the bar lay. They didn't pay attention to the old man sitting by the window, talking with an old friend. The old man's hair was steely grey, with a shade of blue in it. Just like the Yarrick family's legacy.



The ED!

CREDITS/Disclaimer for Number of the ED:



This story is based upon an old board game called Battle for Armageddon, released in the beginning of the 90s by Games Workshop. Several characters in this story are also taken screaming (;)) from the WH40K universe, these being Ghazghkull Thraka, Commissar Yarrick, Herman von Strab, Princeps Mannheim, Tu'shan, High Marshal Helbrecht and the entire planet of Armageddon.

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On the other hand are Holt, Zebulon, Ishamel Grisham, Cerberus and Captain Mikos my own creations, along with a whole host of minor characters. The animals native to Armageddon, such as sand-cobras (with exception for gyrixes) are also my own creation. These are in other words © Copyright of Maria Olsson.

The Holy Bible has also proved much helpful and so has the history books I have.

A big thanks to anyone who has stood out with the waiting of this story to conclude. Your truly good friends.

