

## Two Minutes to ED



*"Has he lost his mind?*

*Can he see or is he blind?*

*Can he walk at all?*

*Or if he moves will he fall?"*

### **--Excerpt from Black Sabbath's Iron Man**



The soft light of dusk filtered through the window of his room, as Edd entered it after a long day. A very long day... He sat down in his chair and rolled out the plans he'd been carrying onto his desk. Unwillingly, as he looked the plans over, his eyes traced to the file in his bookshelf, containing all the paper copies of the adventures they had as Outlaws. The originals were actually ones and nils in his computer, and he'd given a copy of them to McKenzie. Edd had met with McKenzie often before he began thinking of his grades more than his psychics. The Master Lexicanum had taught a way to retain his powers, and it had worked surprisingly well. Edd was as powerful now as when he'd donned the powered armour of a Space Outlaw. That was now nearly three years ago. Back then, Edd and his two friends had been in the age of twelve. Now they all aged 15, and high school was looming in the horizon. Things had, startlingly quickly, gone back to normal. Rolf seemed to endure well the memories of the legendary Commissar-general. There were, however, parts of the memories he never talked about, and McKenzie had told Edd why... Oh, the pain that Rolf's doppelganger had gone through... Still, Rolf was a common aim for their scams, but his attitude towards the Eds had warmed. Much to Kevin's fury. At times, Kevin reminded Edd of the Dark Lord they'd fought and defeated.

'So happy Kevin ain't a Marine...' Edd thought to himself as he went back to the plans. Although Rolf shrugged their scams off with a hearty laugh, the other kids didn't. They had the same attitude towards the Eds, and the bad luck of Eddy's ideas hadn't changed. Edd was just so happy Eddy's bad luck hadn't been around as an Outlaw... Well, it had, Edd reminded himself. Eddy had nearly been crushed by Kharn, as his leg-servo locked itself. He'd just been lucky Rolf was awake. Rolf Yarrick, Edd reminded himself again.

Their latest scam had been named Crazy Ed's Home Made Bike. They'd just managed to escape from Kevin, as the whole darned thing had fallen apart under Kevin's "molesting" of it. That word suited fine. Kevin always pushed it too far, and as the Eds got chased away, Eddy put it upon Edd to root out any flaws in the construction. They'd been doing it for three times now, if they counted in the new amendments Edd was going to do tonight.

Edd found himself thinking why they even bothered to try to pull scams anymore. They were for the Sacred God-Emperor of Mankind 15 years old! And the kids had learned how to see through even their cleverest of scams. Edd settled for the fact that it was a bit of a tradition now. Something to hark back to the past with. To a time of innocence, before the entire thing with the Imperium and company. The scams didn't want to let go, just as the memories they had from their adventures. There were times, when the Eds and Rolf were alone, when they would discuss whatever they could've done better. How they could've stopped Kharn from the beginning, on Armageddon and in the Tower of Doom...

The sound hadn't been loud, just so loud that Edd more sensed something was out there, and then heard it. His sixth sense, being as evolved as it was with his psychics, could pick up sound waves. So he'd learned from McKenzie. That and more. He could now blind an enemy. Heck, if it was needed, he could even banish lesser deamons back to the Warp they came from. But, as it was an ordinary day, on their summer holidays, Edd decided it couldn't be anything as harmful as a daemon. He was a bit saddened by the thought, in fact.

"Wonderful, most probably it is Ed sleepwalking again." Edd said sourly to himself as he went down the stairs and to his backdoor. "I'd better guide him home before he tries to eat Jim again."

As Edd fumbled with the lock to the backdoor, he threw a glance out the back window. He didn't see the nearly 1m90 tall klutz that was his life-long friend. It was something entirely else. The sight froze Edd in his tracks.

It wasn't Ed, obviously, it was taller, maybe around 2 metres. Its skin was of a glittering surface, given away by the moonlight. Metal skin, it seemed, so it was a shocking conclusion that passed through Edd's mind: Robot! The gleaming red eyeslits of it made it look hostile, even without the big gun it was wielding.

"This isn't happening..." Edd whispered under his breath. He threw a glance at his wristwatch. 21.55! Had he been up that long? It didn't matter; he had to get to warn the others. The robot hadn't seen him; it seemed, so as quietly as he could, Edd moved towards the front door. He pulled on his shoes and snuck out, careful not to make a sound. Then he stormed across the street towards Eddy's house, cursing his heart for making such noise as he knocked Eddy's door.

Luckily, Eddy hadn't gone to sleep yet. The lights were turned off, but the lava lamp threw a luminous, almost ghostly light in the room. He hoped to the sweet, dear God of Mankind that the robot wouldn't hear his knocking on Eddy's door. Suddenly, startling Edd in the process, a light came on inside. There was a shuffling of tired feet across the floor and Eddy opened the door and glared out at his slender friend. Eddy had, just as Edd, changed a whole lot these three years. Ed had gotten taller and grown a brain. Edd had gotten taller too, nearly 1m80, but remained slightly built. Eddy hadn't grown so much, he merely measured 1m70, but his stocky build had begun to show itself containing a brute muscular strength, nearly rivalling Ed's. Eddy was also unshaven as he gave Edd a scrutinizing stare.

"Double D, what on Earth are you up to? Do you know what time it is?" Eddy asked harshly, trying to suppress a yawn.

"Never mind what time it is!" Edd wavered off the questions with a shrug. "There's a robot in my backyard."

It was said now. Edd waited for the other shoe to drop, as Eddy seemed to be processing this.

"What, did one of Ed's toys get loose again?" Eddy said after a moment of silence.

Edd grabbed Eddy by his arm and dragged him along. "No, not a toy robot. A real, man-sized robot. C'mon!"

Eddy told Edd to calm down a bit and went in and put on his clothes and shoes. When Eddy was dressed, he followed Edd to his backyard. They stopped by the side of Edd's house and looked round the corner. The robot was still there. It seemed to be patrolling, or looking for something as it went to and fro in the backyard. It didn't seem to have noticed the two young men watching it though.

"What is that thing?" Eddy whispered, not letting his sight go from the robot.

"I haven't got a clue, but it's definitely not friendly." Edd whispered back.

"So, genius, what do we do?" Eddy snapped, realizing that something bad was brewing. Again.

"You get Ed, I'll get Rolf. Then, we can start thinking of a plan." Edd whispered and snuck backwards. Eddy followed.

Eddy saw how nimbly Edd crossed the street, not making himself visible from his backyard a nanosecond. In fact, Eddy didn't want to admit it, but Edd's psychics were beginning to scare him a bit. Shrugging off the feeling, he made way towards Ed's house. "This is going to be one long night," he thought as he slid down through Ed's open window.

As Eddy got down into Ed's room, Edd got right beneath Rolf's window. It was the one closest to his house. Carefully, as if afraid to disturb the rest of the serenity of the cul-de-sac, Edd gently tapped Rolf's window. No lights went on as in Eddy's case. Rolf just came over and opened the window, slowly. Edd rose and saw that Rolf had been lying on the floor. He decided not to ask why. That could wait. He also saw the Yarrickian sword resting in its sheath in a

sword case. Edd was startled to see it resting where it was. Whenever he'd seen it, it had been passing through the enemies of Humanity and other hostilities. Now it almost seemed...sleeping, awaiting the next call to battle. It was indeed a mighty blade; forged before the Imperium was founded, thus making it older than the pyramids of Giza.

Rolf was wearing his white singlet and blue jeans, as he usually wore when not with friends. He'd gotten taller as well, taller than Ed, and was also getting muscles. But he was still lean and still had that dialect of his, although his voice had gotten deeper.

"Brainy Ed-boy? Why are you tapping on Rolf's window this late into the day?" Rolf said, cocking an eyebrow.

"Rolf, there's a robot in my backyard, a real one. I have a feeling it came from..." Edd started, but Rolf cut him off.

"From the Imperium?" The older boy almost sighed at the fact. "Will this madness ever end? But, where are the other Ed-boys?"

"Eddy's getting Ed as we speak, but I have no idea on what good that'll do. We don't have our armour or weapons any more."

"Ed-boy, no need to get worried. Rolf still is the Holder of the Sword! Remember that!"

This was no idle threat. Edd knew it full well. Rolf had managed to make his parents cut down on his chores, and let him take sword-fighting lessons. Three years had passed since he started, and Rolf had proved to be a quick learner. In a way, Edd almost felt the skill of Rolf's fighting as he spoke those words. Edd sometimes thought that Rolf had to be Yarrickian in some way. The sword was said only to be welded by the first-born son of a first-born son, and it hadn't withered or anything in Rolf's hand.

"Rolf, I know you have the sword, but that numbers our arsenal of weapons to one legendary blade and nothing more. And we're not letting you fight a 2 metres tall mechanoid on your own." Edd said seriously. Edd also felt as Eddy and Ed came running up behind them. Ed was still bleary eyed from being so suddenly woken. Eddy had landed on his stomach.

"Old gang is assembled." Eddy said flatly. "What do we do now?"

"We can't risk fighting it in the cul-de-sac. It could injure the others, and we'll be put through a horrible line of questions afterwards." Edd seemed to think out aloud, but not too loudly. "My suggestion is to lure it to the dump, it's not far away from my house. No innocent bystanders, no witnesses and most importantly, we'll have cover!"

As Edd finished that, Rolf joined them on the outside. He had for, reasons unknown, donned the greatcoat, cap and boots of the Commissar-general and slung the sword sheath over his shoulder, so it rested on his back in the leather strap. He stopped close to the Eds, and Eddy could've sworn he saw the look of the Commissar-general as he looked up at Rolf. The cap, the braid, the sword, they all had made Rolf Yarrick whom he was, and now, they had transmuted Rolf, their neighbour, into something very similar. Eddy snapped to reality.

"I don't suppose anyone's figured out we're going to fight this thing without gear?" he asked. Eddy in fact felt sad that he didn't wear the chunky and protective Terminator armour. He missed the lightning claws and the feeling of complete power in his hands.

Rolf suddenly made way towards Edd's backyard. Looking over his shoulder, the tall, tanned young man said: "Do not worry Ed-boy. We will simply have to compromise!"

The Eds followed him, of course. They had no choice.

"Compromise?" Ed said with a quizzical look.

"I think our Rolf means improvise, Ed." Edd replied.



Although Rolf was first, he wasn't first to act. That was going to be Ed. He remembered the way he'd been playing living bait as an Outlaw, and this was no exception for him. To take risks

was everyday life for him. As he snuck up towards the robot by the side of Edd's house, he carefully picked up an empty can from the ground. They'd had a party not long ago here, and Edd, having gone less pedantic lately, hadn't been too careful in picking up garbage. Ed weighed the can in his hand a moment, until he silently rose and threw the can.

It spanged off the robot's metallic shoulder, and the thing spun round and glared at Ed with its inhuman eyes. The robot looked over Ed, and Ed looked over the robot. Across its chest, a heavy necklace hung. Its reason, Ed had no idea. The face of the robot looked like a human skull and the long weapon in its hand seemed to be made of a combination of metal and crystal parts. Ed decided not to stay and find out what such a weapon did with a man, so he turned and ran for the dumpster. If Ed had been clocked, one would've clocked him for new World Record on the distance 100m. The robot set after, not moving as fast, but at a very quick stride. Its mechanical legs gave, surprisingly, no sound as it moved. It was far from the clumsy mechanoids of the B-movies Ed watched. And it was with a stroke of terror that Ed realized this. Even if Ed was running for a new world record, the robot was closing in on him as he reached the dump. It levelled the gun it was carrying, the blade under the 'barrel' glittering in the stark moonlight. The robot was aiming on impaling Ed on the far end of the bayonet.

It never got to do so. The robot lost its balance a few seconds as it received a blow from the side. Rolf had struck hard and the sacred sword had passed through the robot's side in a flurry of sparks and loose metal parts. Rolf made a new attack against the robot, joined quickly by Ed and Eddy, wielding crowbars they'd found amongst the trash. They struck at the robot, but the thing had only been caught off guard, and as it regained its senses, it started to fight back. It pulled out a wickedly curved blade seemingly out of nowhere and begun hacking at the boys. The two Eds and Rolf held their ground for a moment, but were then herded backwards under a flurry of blows. It was with fear that they realized the robot was backing them up towards a wall. At this point, the robot put down the blade, and aimed the strange gun towards the boys. The crystal of it started to glow with a greenish light and having nowhere to run to, the three young men awaited what undoubtedly had to come. They closed their eyes...

And opened them again as a most inhuman shriek of agony was heard. Rolf looked over the shoulder of the robot, and saw that Edd was standing there; arm stretched out and hand trailing blue smoke. The robot was now fixing Edd with its unblinking stare. A mistake of unknown bounds when up against a psyker of Edd's magnitude. As the robot turned to face this new threat, giving Ed, Eddy and Rolf to duck for cover, something brightly white and round began to form in Edd's hand. Two seconds later, a saucer shaped psibolt flew from Edd's hand and struck the robot full in the face, blinding it. Edd knew it wouldn't be blinded for long. McKenzie had told him that most bionic eyes contained a layer that filtered out powerful and irritating lights. That had too be the case of robots as well.

"Now what, Einstein?" Eddy asked as the others joined Edd.

"I have a crazy idea." Edd mumbled. "Hold the thing of for another moment!" With that, Edd ran away.

"Roger Wilco, Lexicanum!" Ed said and made a salute, almost striking himself with the crowbar in his right hand.

"Shut up, Ed." Eddy hissed as he looked back at the robot. The thing had already recovered from the flash. It made its way towards the three boys, anger glowing in its alien eyes. It drew out the blade again, and the close combat resumed. Rolf had a drill, and he stuck to it, but for Ed and Eddy it was harder. They didn't have Rolf's training, neither did they have swords. So more than once, they found themselves shuffled away from combat.

"I'm getting tired, Eddy." Ed said under one of these occasions.

"Me too," Eddy replied. "And I don't think we are doing any real damage to it."

Rolf, having heard what the Eds had said, growled in a strained voice: "Don't loose faith Ed-boys. Faith is our best shield against these aliens!"

Eddy was about to reply with a rude remark to Rolf and his sayings, undoubtedly spawned from the Commissariat, when he realized they'd been driven backwards again, this time the other way. Further into the dump. In an unguarded moment, the robot threw the three boys off itself and raised the blade in a two-handed grip over its head, to make a final cut against the

Eds and Rolf.

The downswing never came. The robot and its arms were held in place by an unseen force. Looking up, the Eds and Rolf saw that the force was that of a lifter-magnet, attached to a crane. In the cab, Edd was sitting, and they could almost feel the force of the magnet being turned up as Edd drew a level a bit further down. The air had a ticklish smell to it, the electro-magnetic field tangible in the night-air. The robot got stuck up on the magnet with a bang. Guiding the crane to hover above the crusher machine they'd seen the first day that the Eds ever encountered the phrase Space Outlaw, Edd cut the power to the magnet and the robot fell into the crushing-machine. Eddy dived for the crusher's controls and activated the crusher before the robot could climb out. The robot had managed to get its upper body above the crusher, but that didn't help. With a sickening crunch, the legs of the robot were turned into scrap. The crusher opened its steel maw again and the robot's upper body fell in as well. Once more, the crusher closed, completing its task. With that, Eddy turned the crusher off, and Edd hit on the power to the magnet again. A small cube of metal floated out of the crusher, almost lazily. Edd directed the crane to land the cube on the ground and then turned it off. He climbed out of the cab and joined his friends. Under silence, they buried the cube of metal in a far off part of the dump. More metal garbage would soon be collected there, so no one would ever find it. However, it was no easy task getting the cube there, as the robot originally had weighed nearly three hundred kilos, and that mass had only been compressed.

When this was done, the four boys went back to the cul-de-sac. Fatigue was total. It had been late, and they hadn't been prepared. The robot had proved one hard nut to crack, despite it being outnumbered.

"Rolf needs to find his bed." Rolf silently concluded, removing the peaked cap and running his fingers through his blue hair. As he pulled out his hand, it was wet with sweat.

"I second that one," was all that Eddy managed.

Edd, however, couldn't really relax yet. "Yes, it's been a long day, and I have a feeling this isn't over, quite yet..."

"I hate it when you say stuff like that!" Eddy snapped and looked darkly at Edd.

"Why so, Eddy?" Ed asked, stumped.

"Because he's usually right..." Eddy sighed.

"Indeed, we fared well tonight, but if more of those things show up, we may not be so fortunate. We're going to have to bring McGranth, McKenzie and Charleston in on this." Edd sighed, playing with the thought of removing his hat and do what Rolf had done. He dismissed the thought immediately.

"One slight problem there, sock-head," Eddy snapped. He hadn't lost his attitude. "We don't have any idea where they are!"

"Maybe not," Edd simply replied. "There might be one way to contact them. Excuse me, I have a lot of 'thinking' to do." With that Edd veered off from the group and aimed for home. He left his friends in a puzzled mood. Rolf, who wanted to get home and get to bed and out of the uniform, left Ed and Eddy.

"What was he talking about, Eddy?" Ed asked. He might have grown a brain, but he was no man on solving mysteries.

"Search me," was Eddy's reply. With that, the two steered home too, hoping Edd's prophecies would prove wrong for just once.



Edd was once again in his room. The blueprints still lay on his desk, but they were since long forgotten. Instead, Edd had pulled out a strip of paper from somewhere. The strip held an address:

**Edward R. McKenzie**

## 45 Howard Street

It was followed by the postal code and the city he lived in. It was the city that made Peach Creek a suburb. Edd sat on his bed, his legs folded and eyes closed. He calmed down, shutting out the adrenaline kick from the recent battle, forcing his heartbeat down. He cleared his mind from any disturbances: homework, tests, wars and more.

'Hope this works.' Edd thought and begun murmuring a litany under his breath. It was a prayer McKenzie had taught him. It helped in focusing the mind when searching for other psykers, or making a 'scan' as McKenzie had put it. As the murmured prayer became a something that he didn't need to focus on anymore, Edd let go of his mind and felt his mind leave his body. It flew out of his house, from the cul-de-sac and followed the road to the highway to the city. It passed through the industrial zones, the market zones and finally came to the habitual zones of the city. It found a special street, a special house. His mind flexed and took in all nearby human psyches. Most of them were faint like candle lights, other bright like beacons.

'Latent psykers...' Edd gave an involuntary, contemptuous thought. They had no idea what risks they took if deamons would find a way to Earth; deamons lived of the souls of unprotected humans, and they favoured psykers! A trained psyker could repel them, but an untrained one...

Amongst the few bright ones, Edd found one soul-flare that shone brightly, but with a moderate light. It was tempered, so to say. He shot away towards that soul.



In his apartment, Master Lexicanum Edward McKenzie was sitting in a similar position to Edd's. But he wasn't trying to scan. He was merely meditating. Flexing his mind to keep it at peak efficiency. He did it every evening. Charleston and McGranth went before him to the local bar, and after a few minutes, McKenzie followed, finished with his mind flexing. Charleston and McGranth lived in their own apartments, but in the same house. McKenzie knew how Terrans would react if they had all lived together. They would all have gotten arrested by the local Arbites. Policemen, McKenzie reminded himself that their name was.

McKenzie was just to stop his meditating, when he felt something tugging at him. He quickly recognized the pattern of a scan and realized someone was trying to communicate with him. The scanner wanted to tell him something; that was clear. Back in the Imperium, McKenzie often held contact with the most powerful psykers, and knew their patterns from heart, but this pattern was new. McKenzie, for once, didn't know who was trying to communicate with him.

He let the stranger in, intrigued, and almost had a shock when he felt that the psi-pattern of the other psyker was similar to his, he realized that it had to be the cul-de-sac boy called Double D. He let the youngster completely in on his mind, and the relief that reached him actually made him worried. McKenzie felt a rush in his mind as Edd's recent memories reach him psychically. McKenzie saw what Edd had seen; it rolled out before him as a sort of movie. But this was highly real. McKenzie didn't just see pictures and heard sounds; he felt Edd's feeling and heard his thoughts as well.

He saw how Edd discovered the robot, his dash to Eddy and the sudden jolt of adrenaline that came then. He saw the gathering of the foursome, and almost felled a tear at seeing the Yarrickian Sword again. It was a relic for all of the Imperium. It symbolised freedom, just as the Emperor had. McKenzie also felt the next jolt of adrenaline when Edd gave the robot the feel of the power of psychics. McKenzie also saw the quiet burial of the robot. With the 'movie' finished, Edd left McKenzie's mind. This made McKenzie jerk back to reality. The slender Marine remained sitting for a while, thinking of what he'd seen. He remembered Armageddon, twelve years before the fall. Sebastian and Charleston had, as McGranth put it, frekked up, and gone wandering in the huge, seemingly impenetrable pyramid in the Equatorial Jungle. They had encountered robots in there. An anti-matter bomb had taken out both the whole pyramid and the nearby Khornate monolith. McKenzie had though returned, and in the few ruins that remained, he'd found a picture of the robots that had resided in the pyramid. Charleston and Sebastian had given their explanations of them, so had Herman von Strab, before he was executed. They had all given similar explanations and of what McKenzie could tell, these were the same robots.

"So, there are more of them?" McKenzie thought darkly to himself. The droid from Edd's backyard hadn't been exactly the same, but it was clear they had been based on the same technology. "Heck," McKenzie said quietly. "Even robots evolve, if a few thousand years pass by."

McKenzie got up and picked up keys to his BMW motorbike, put on his leather jacket and grabbed his helmet. He ran down the stairs and into the garage shared by most people in the house. McGranth's and Charleston's bikes were gone, but McKenzie's still stood there. To his disgust, he found some gutter-kids trying to steal it. Instead of driving them off, he focused on the ignition key and made a psi one by the bike and ran it into the ignition set, turned it and the bike flared into life. The kids jumped away from it by surprise.

"Wot da F is goin' on?" McKenzie heard one of them shout. McKenzie smiled to himself as he unlocked the chain keeping the bike where it was. Moving it by sheer force of will, McKenzie revved the engine for measure. This scared the kids even more. They ran away. McKenzie put on his helmet and strode up to his bike and put in the first gear and drove off into the night. He put in the second gear, the third as he sped the bike faster and faster towards the bar his friends had gone to. They wanted to try something new, so went to one in the far end of the city. The plush part, so to say, in big difference to the 'slums' in which they resided. McKenzie just hoped no police officers would stop him. If they tried, they'd end up with erased memories of the last few minutes. McKenzie threw a glance down at the speed-meter as he drove down a straight. 90 kph.

The traffic light before him changed from red to green at McKenzie's command and he took a curve at alarming speed. A move like that would not have been possible in daylight. It still took McKenzie twenty minutes to reach the bar where Charleston and McGranth was.

He parked the bike outside, locking it psychically instead of manually and rushed into the bar, throwing off his helmet.

"Thought you'd never come, Edward." was McGranth's comment when McKenzie stormed into the bar. McGranth threw a second glance at his friend and saw something wasn't right.

"Hey, Edd, what's wrong?" McGranth said and looked puzzled. Charleston looked up from his beer too. McKenzie calmed down and was about to tell the other two about what had happened in the cul-de-sac and what they were to await, when three green beams of light stabbed through the window of the bar and destroyed the mirror behind the bar-keeper. The barkeeper and the few guests except the Marine commanders threw themselves down unto the floor. The Marines flung round and watched as three robots of humanoid size and shape entered through the destroyed window.

"What are those?" McGranth asked and raised his fists. Right now he wanted his storm bolter and power axe.

"What I was about to tell you about!" McKenzie shouted back. The screams from the people in the bar were getting to him. The people on the outside, well, the few ones, were also screaming in terror of the droids. "The cul-de-sac kids killed one barely an hour ago! I went here to tell you there could be more!" McKenzie raised his fists and made a psychic barrier around them. "Frekk, I hate to be right!"

"Still haven't answered my question, Master Lexicanum!" McGranth shouted. The robots were close now.

"Necrons!" Charleston shouted and dove towards one. McGranth just gave a shrug and attack the one closest to him, and so did McKenzie with his. McGranth and Charleston were both left with fighting the droids with their bare fists; McKenzie used his psyker powers to deal some extra damage with each punch. Still though, both Charleston and McGranth were stronger than the lanky Lexicanum. McGranth attacked his droid with legs spread, in a kickboxing style stance. His punches were always followed by a powerful kick. Although the robot in front of him did no attempts to duck the punches thrown at it, Eddie's kicks made it reel backwards. One such powerful kick crushed the giant necklace's gemstone. Following the confused seconds for the droid, McGranth struck it hard on its jaw with his palm, sending the robot flying through the air and landing outside. McGranth was pleased to see smoke billowing from its broken form. He was not so pleased to see the tiny insecticides crawling over the

broken necklace and the deformed jaw of the Necron, leaving repaired injuries. In a matter of minutes, the robot was up on its feet again, striding towards the Death Angel's Commander.

Charleston was faring ill as well. His opponent wasn't wielding the hefty guns as the other two robots. It was carrying a tall glaive, able to keep the tall Marine at a distance. At the end of the glaive, there were both an emitter for the ray gun and a curved blade, utterly alien in design. Charleston, being a simple man, grabbed the staff like weapon and began tugging it. The robot held firm. They both started pulling the glaive, but in the end Charleston's immense strength prevailed over artificial muscles. He pulled the glaive out of the Necron's hands and threw it away, so it stuck with the blade into a nearby wall. Charleston then attacked the robot with pure fury, head butting the thing so seriously he caused a hole in the forehead of the robot. The Necron, temporarily stunned, couldn't do anything to prevent the Marine from ramming his massive fists into the hole and parting the robot's head in two. Charleston's hands were soaked in oil as he let go and saw the Necron fall to the ground. A pleased smile crossed his lips as the thing fizzled and threw electrical sparks around it, but it soon vanished as he saw the same small insecticide robots that his commander had seen, came creeping out of the bowels of the Necron and started to repair it. The split face was rebuilt and the Necron stood up soundlessly. The only thing Charleston had gained from his head butt had been one heck of a bump in his forehead and a coming headache...

McKenzie was having a hard time too, despite his powers. He'd downed the robot once, but then tiny robot insects had repaired it. He saw no end to the fight, until one of his psychic-augmented punches revealed a piece of the Necron's "brain" as it struck against the thing's head. Inside, McKenzie saw what would've been described as a computer chip, had it not been twice the size of a normal such, and made out of something completely else than silicon. The material glowed in the light that McKenzie's psychics generated and looked completely smooth on the surface. No leads or connection links ran to it. It was suspended in some sort of magnetic field. McKenzie came to the realisation it had to be a super conducting material and made a powerful back swing with his right arm and crushed the skull of the Necron into tiny pieces. He felt a cold tingling in his hand and arm as he smashed the controller chip of the robot. The thing fell limply to the ground, like a doll with its strings cut. No insects ran out of its body to repair it either. McKenzie smiled. He'd found a way to destroy the Necrons!

"Ed, Eddie, destroy the controller chip in their heads, and the Necrons seize to work!" he shouted over the battling sounds in the bar. He didn't bother to wait for a response. Charleston and McGranth had given up that habit, to respond. They only did as McKenzie told them when he'd found a solution. McKenzie started to drag the dead Necron out to the back of the bar. Out in the alleys, he picked it apart, and put different pieces in many different trashcans. The only thing he saved was the wrecked controller chip. Without that, the Necron would never work again.

On the inside, Charleston and McGranth were both trying to destroy the heads of the mechanoids. Charleston had tried to squash the skull of his with his bare hands, while McGranth aimed high kicks against the head, hoping to wreck something on the inside. It wasn't proving successful. After one incredibly powerful kick, McGranth found his droid on the ground again. He threw a glance at Charleston and saw that he two had grounded his Necron. Charleston looked at McGranth. Making a silent decision between each other, they grabbed the legs of their opponents and swung them round with great force. At the exact time, having timing only centuries of fighting together could achieve, the two Marines let go off the legs of their opponents and saw the two Necrons fly heads first straight towards each other. The two heads collided with a force that should've knocked a hole in a German WW2 "Tiger"-tank's front armour. Now, the two, mechanoid heads didn't have the durability of 15 centimetres of armoured plating and both skulls were more or less disintegrated into tiny fragments. The bodies of the droids landed on the floor of the bar with a thud. Charleston and McGranth didn't rest for that. They grabbed a Necron each and dragged it out to the back where McKenzie was waiting. The psyker picked them too into tiny pieces and saved the controller chips, or what was left of them. With that, the threesome returned to the bar.

The bartender was covering behind the counter, but looked up at the three Marines as they came back in.

"What in the name of God was that?" he asked wide-eyed. "And what are you?" This second remark was aimed towards all three Marines.

"Nothing of importance, right Edd?" McGrath said with a nudge.

"Right." McKenzie's simple answer came, as he let fly a psychic wave, which erased the memories of all the recent happenings in the minds of all the normal humans that had seen the happening. This was a great move, McKenzie knew, and it could in fact attract deamons, if he wasn't careful.

The bartender got a blank look on his face. McKenzie flexed his mind some more and planted "better" memories into the mind of the man. While McKenzie was doing this, Charleston and McGrath were both paying up. The bartender accepted the money and paid no attention it seemed to the demolished window. The three Marines then left, sat astride on their bikes and rode home. They both knew what they were going to have to do tomorrow. It seemed they only had gotten a few years of peace, before it was time for them to suit up again. It would prove one long summer.

They had no idea how right they would prove...



The morning after the battle at the garbage dump, the Eds met up with Rolf in Eddy's room. They discussed what to do next. Rolf had meditated a little before he went to sleep, trying to recall some of the worst of Rolf Yarrick's memories. He even explained why. His body had subconsciously suppressed them, and to get them back, he needed to meditate. Edd wondered if Rolf was a probable psyker. At this, Rolf gave a sneer.

"Why do you ask such blasphemies, Ed-boy?" Rolf asked. Eddy rolled his eyes and sighed. Rolf's personality had become even less understandable since the commissar came into him. If Eddy hadn't known better, he would say Rolf now had a shrine or something in his house where he prayed every morning and evening in praise to the Emperor.

"Because I've sensed another psyker mind in the cul-de-sac lately. And it's becoming stronger for every day. It wasn't there a year ago..." Edd's voice trailed off.

"To get back on subject:" Eddy intervened, "There's no doubt there'll be more of these... things out there... in space."

"Yes," Edd answered, "and it goes without saying that these robots cannot be allowed to come to Earth."

"The cost would be far to high," Rolf finished off.

"Then there's only one choice, and that's the good old way of taking the fight to them." Edd said with a half-hearted smile. "We'll have to go back to the Imperium, or whatever's left of it..."

"But how do we do that Double D?" Ed asked, taking his eyes from the big poster of the very casually dressed girl in Eddy's room. "We don't have anything to make a travel hole in the Warp with."

"That is taken care of Ed," Edd replied simply. "Last night, I managed to contact McKenzie."

This comment gave Edd confused looks from his two life-long friends. Ed was sitting with a gaping mouth, looking like a fish, and Eddy just stared. Rolf, on the other hand, simply nodded as if he had expected to hear this. There wasn't much nowadays that startled Rolf. Yet again, that could be blamed on his split soul. As a matter of fact, he'd managed to become school president the year before he left for High School. And in High School, it had taken him two weeks to get a grand majority in the next School President election. He was on his second year, and would probably hold it his entire High School time. Eddy put it down to charisma, that he in some odd way knew, all commissars possessed. All great leaders for that part. He'd fared to understand so as they'd read history. Every one of the great leaders had seemed to possess charisma in spades: Napoleon, Churchill, Montgomery, Eisenhower, Hitler, Stalin, and Lenin... The list could be made endlessly long. Personally, Eddy knew he possessed himself some vague resemblance to charisma, but not the true thing. It was the one thing he didn't want to have in spades, although, it would help up his cons somewhat gravely in success.

Eddy laughed dryly to himself. But he was torn from thoughts by Edd's voice. How long had he been talking?

"The details aren't important, but McKenzie and his two friends are aware of what happened last night." Edd said and stood up. This was no good sign concerning Edd. It meant a speech or the like, but Eddy was to be wrong. "I can only assume they're making their way here as soon as possible."

"That still doesn't solve our main problem: How to fight them?" Eddy said with an open-handed gesture. "How does four teenagers and three 'retired' Space Marines battle who knows how many robot soldiers, when all the gear we have is theirs and the Legendary Yarrickian Sword."

Eddy paused before going on. "Don't get me wrong, I've no doubt in that McGranth, McKenzie and Charleston are still living fighting machines, and I know the potency of that sword; I've seen it kill a Deamon Lord! But, it still leaves three of us with our bare hands and Double D's psychic powers. And that is not with mentioning the fact that there are probably hundreds of thousands of the robots."

Eddy fell backwards in his bed and gave a small sigh. "I hate to say this, but I'm not sure the seven of us can pull this off, even with the sword, and as it only scared the living daylights out of demons..."

"I must agree and disagree with that at the same time Eddy," Edd said with a thoughtful look upon his face. "We have done most of our fighting with comrades at our sides. Those comrades are since long gone, however they still do exist, in a matter of speaking."

Ed made the fish-face again, Eddy stared again and even Rolf gave a look of confusedness now. No one seemed to understand what Edd was talking about. The wiry young man gave a sigh.

"Those people we've fought alongside, or at least alternate versions of them still exist, right before your eyes, here in the cul-de-sac."

Still the confused looks. But the looks slowly changed into a range of different feelings. But they all led to a final one: disbelief.

"Are you nuts?" Eddy simply blurted out.

"I understand your meaning, brainy Ed-boy," Rolf said giving a sorrowful look, "but our dear friends in the cul-de-sac have no combat training, neither do they have our experience."

"On that with dear, I couldn't differ more..." Eddy muttered sourly, remembering how Kevin still picked on them. If he only knew...

"Neither did we at first, but we managed." Edd said, completely ignoring Eddy's comment.

"But," Eddy shot in, "We had armour, and psi crystals to give us experience directly, get me? And Rolf here had a living legend's experience to back up on."

"I know we have none of our gear now, but McKenzie might know where to get some stuff. And, speaking frankly, I believe that we right now need all the help we can get."

"This might sound stupid," Ed of all people shot in, "but the other kids don't know a fig about this, so what makes you think they'll believe it? I know my sister, she only believes what she can see with her two eyes and touch with her fingers." Ed had been about to add nail-clawed fingers instead, but decided not to.

"Then we'll have to give them rock solid proof, then." Edd said with a simple gesture.

"All right," Eddy said with scepticism in his voice, "if we somehow manage to convince them, and if they agree to go with us, then what?"

Then we wait for McGranth, McKenzie and Charleston and hope..." Edd said and shrugged. He wasn't going to tell them he had no idea what to do next, but it had to wait.

"Okay, I guess we don't have much of a choice, do we?" Eddy sighed and sat up again.

"Uh, Eddy..." Edd said and hesitated a second. "It's not quite as simple as that..."

"Whaddya mean?" Eddy asked and gave Edd a stern look.

"Well, when I say we need all the help we can get, I really do mean ALL the help we can get..." Edd let his voice trail off and waited for the next cog to fall into place in the machinery. "So, unfortunately, we'll have to..."

Eddy's facial expression said what his pained soul wanted to say for ten long seconds. Eddy was in no way slow-witted, in fact the contrary. He was in fact extremely quick witted, when it got to saving his own skin and soul.

"Don't say it..." Eddy hissed.

"Afraid I have to, Eddy," Edd said with an overcome look, "I'm afraid we'll have to ask Kevin as well as the Kankers for help."

"Can't believe you said that..." Eddy muttered.

"But weren't the versions of Kevin and the Kankers in the Imperium bad guys?" Ed asked.

"Bad guy is a fuzzy word combination," Edd said and looked down onto the floor for while before looking up. "But they started out on the 'good' side."

"Besides, our Kevin and our Kankers aren't influenced by Chaos or infested by the Hive Mind." Edd continued.

"That's a matter of opinion..." Eddy muttered sourly, but Edd had heard him.

"Eddy, I know how you feel about Kevin," Edd said kindly, "And none of us really is keen on the Kankers, but you must admit, that they all are fairly tough."

Eddy's reply was a grumble.

"I do not see as we have any choice," Rolf put in. "My only concern is how we'll convince them that all this is true..."

"That, Rolf, will certainly not be easy." Edd sighed. "We can show them the sword, of course, and tell them about the robot we fought in the garbage dump yesterday. Anyway, I still think we'll have to wait for McGranth, McKenzie and Charleston to arrive. Even with them at our side, it might still not be enough to convince our neighbours."

"This is going to be one long day..." Eddy sighed and fell backwards onto his bed again. "So, how do we convince them, then?"

"My thought is that we gather them all in one place and tell them there and then, in that way, we only need to tell the story once." Edd replied.

"That, Ed-boy, would be difficult, concerning the fact that we all are rarely in the same place at the same time." Rolf said and looked worried.

"Yes, we'll have to gather them in some way, perhaps send them all some kind of invitation."

Ed, who'd been sitting quiet for a good while now, made a sign that he wanted to say something: "I think I know how to do it."

Rolf, Edd and Eddy gathered beside Ed and they all huddled together, like a football team discussing what to do next. Ed's little explanation took a few minutes. But when they were done, they split up from the huddled position.

"Good idea, Ed." Edd complimented his friend. "Odd I didn't come to think of that?"

"Easy solutions often escape even the biggest geniuses." Rolf said simply as he opened the door to Eddy's room.

"Right." Eddy said with a forced happy tone in his voice. "See you tonight. And Ed, this better work..."

Before long, a number of notes were delivered to all the cul-de-sac kids' houses, even the

Kanker's trailer. The notes weren't handwritten, they were printed from a computer, with a strange sigil at the bottom: a twin-headed eagle with its wings spread. Most kids were puzzled by the sigil, except Jonny, who thought it looked nice and Plank wanted him to save it.

The message on the notes was short: "Important Meeting" it read. "Come to the campsite in the woods tonight. Way to it marked with torches." To make sure everybody showed up, Edd had added: "Free S'mores" to Eddy's frustration.



Edd's extra add-on paid off. All kids arrived that night at the former campsite of the Urban Rangers. Even the Kankers showed up. The Eds had arranged a kind of set for it all. Rolf had helped of course. He wanted the camp to be restored to its starting state easily. As the camp was far into the forest, all the kids had brought sleeping bags. They knew there was no going home in the middle of the night. They all sat down on various places before the set, using jackets and cushions not to get cold as they sat on the ground. The Eds and Rolf could feel the cul-de-sac kids' curious eyes watching them from the darkness. There was a long pause before something happened. Kevin happened.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" he said in an irritated voice. "Get on with it!"

Being the good friend he was, Eddy shoved Edd forward a bit. Edd felt the blush heading for his face. It started at his bellybutton and headed north.

"Oh my..." he whimpered silently before starting to talk in a clear voice. "Well, thank you all for heeding our call and coming."

"I said get on with it." Kevin sourly shot in. Rolf shot his friend a mighty dark look, but Kevin didn't notice. Edd felt the blush was at his chest now.

"Right, right," Edd said as he tried to calm down and stop the blush. "Well, you're all here because we must ask for your help."

As Edd had said this, he managed to calm down, find his nerve and stop the onrushing blush. His explanation became a speech. He explained everything: From the discovery of the probe and their first meeting with the Imperium of Man more than three years ago. Their first battle and kills on the ice planet Volrath, the massive assault against the Hive world Armageddon. Their encounters with Kevlinn and later, even the Deamon Kharn. He told them of the many dangers they'd encountered; from treacherous Eldar to zombie robots. Some of his description might have been a little to evocative, cause he thought he heard Jimmy whimper in the crowd, as he described his own show-down with the mighty A'mon C'hak'ai, and how Rolf killed the Deamon Lord Kharn.

Two and a half hour later, Edd came to the tail end of his speech: "When we had defeated Kharn, we returned home. That was about two years ago."

Edd made a little pause to let it all sink in, before he began describing the true nature of their new problems: "It's been a few years, yes, and we all thought our adventures had come to an end. Until last night, that is. Somehow, some kind of killer robot managed to make its way here, to our own cul-de-sac. There can be only one solution to how it came here. The warp-signature of the probe must still be able to be picked up, and that is why we assume it came from what once was the Imperium of Man. There are most certainly more of these murderous machines. We have encountered deamons, yes, and we once allowed two deamon lords to tread Mother Earth's ground, but we can never allow any alien abhorrence to do that again. So this time, we have no other choice than to go to the Imperium again, and stop the problem in its cradle."

"Alas, we no longer have our weapons and equipment that we had then, and even though we still have a sword of aeons old, we are not at our best right now." Edd continued. "So that is why we have decided that our only option is to come to you for help."

The following silence was a tense moment. As a certain Mr. Terry Pratchett has said once "silence is not the lack of sound, it's a sort of sound itself" and that described very well the kind of sound that met Edd for two whole minutes.

"You expect us to believe that?" Lee Kanker said with obvious distrust in her voice.

"Well, we do have some proof to offer for you." Edd replied scratching his head. Without shooting anybody a glance or anything, Rolf silently moved out of sight, backstage. No one paid heed to the blue haired foreigner either.

"You did hear the commotion at the garbage dump last night, didn't you? At least some of you did, I hope?" Edd asked, looking concerned for the first time this night. He'd looked nervous, yes, but not concerned."

"Yeah, so?" came Marie Kanker's snapping answer.

"That was the four of us, attempting to stop the robot." Edd answered. "We managed to destroy it, but sadly, I doubt that it was the only one..."

"Then where's the robot now?" Sarah asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Well, we buried it, to keep anyone else from finding the remains. Uninvited people, that is..."

"So, we can't see it?" May Kanker said, drawing a simple conclusion in her mind.

"I'm afraid that would prove to be a bit difficult..." Edd replied with a sheepish smile.

"So, you can't actually prove to us that it exists, dorks!" Kevin snapped, getting impatient with this highly probable scam.

"We don't need to show you the robot, as we have other evidence." Edd replied calmly. "Rolf!"

On cue, Rolf came back on stage. This time however, he was wearing the commissar's uniform over his ordinary clothing. The peaked cap was put squarely on his head and the leather strap that held the sword sheath on his back was slung easily over his right shoulder. In his right hand, he held the silver gleaming Yarrickian Sword, its golden parrying bar glittering in the gloomy light from the torches nearby. Although it wasn't in its true owner's hand, it still had an aura of power around it. The black jackboots on Rolf's feet were polished immaculately, they too shining in the light from the warm torches. Even the all too often muddy greatcoat was spotless.

"Nice outfit." Nazz giggled with a smile. She'd become quite a beautiful young woman in the three years that had passed, she and Kevin and Rolf all coming to the age of 17 soon.

"This is no mere outfit," Rolf replied steely, "this is the uniform of a Commissar-General, and this sword is many thousands of years old."

"Oh, come on Rolf," Kevin groaned. "We all know that you've been taking sword-fighting lessons."

"Yes, Kevin, I have been training, preparing myself in case the need should arise for us to fight again, and sadly, now it has."

"I don't know about this..." Johnny said hesitating. He stood up, and made to leave. He didn't care if it was late, he wanted home.

"Wait, please, we still have three pieces of evidence to show you, but they haven't arrived yet..." Edd fell silent for a moment, and looked like he just seemed to have come to a realization. It was only on his face for a few seconds, before it was gone and he talked again. "Ah, and here they are now!"

A few seconds later, the sound of three big motorcycles could be heard. The rumbling closed in and the three big bikes came into the campsite. Upon each bike sat a man. They all gave away an aura of power. The shortest one, riding a Harley Davidson, was around 1m80. The tallest one measured around 2m50.

The bikes stopped ten metres from the cul-de-sac kids, and the riders stepped off their steeds. Removing their helmets, they showed off faces that were alarmingly alike the Eds. The one looking like Ed had the big exception of no zits and no freckles. The one that looked like

Edd didn't wear the mandatory cap and had an orange tattoo at his left temple. Eddy's copy had a thin, black moustache on his upper lip and the remnants of an old scar over his left eye. McKenzie had, being the apt psyker he was, used Edd's psychic signature to lead himself and his friends to the campsite.

The kids looked at the three tall men with different faces, their looks going from fear, through distrust to awe.

Edd broke the silence: "May I present, our alternate selves from the Imperium of Mankind: Lieutenant Commander Ed Charleston, Master Lexicanum Edward McKenzie and Grand Commander Eddie McGranth!"

"Ah, no way..." Kevin silently said to himself. He was genuinely impressed.

"Double D," McKenzie said, looking the kids over. "Who are all of them, and what are they doing here?" McKenzie soon recognized the faces of the kids, and realized whom they represented from their worlds. He got a stern look on his face as he called the Eds to him.

"May I have a word with you? Just for a minute?"

The Marine commanders, the three young Eds and Rolf all went out of earshot from the others.

"What is this?" McKenzie asked flatly as the seven gathered away from the others.

"We're sorry for this, but let's face it; we need all the help we can get!" Eddy said with a shrug of his shoulders.

"But what can they possibly do?" McGranth asked concerned. "They don't have any battle experience. And what the frekk is HE doing here!?"

"I assume you mean Kevin." Edd replied simply. "I know how you must feel, but he's not Kevlinn, no more than I'm McKenzie. This is a completely different person. Besides, imagine how we must've felt when we had to fight against people we counted as neighbours and friends, not sworn enemies."

"Believe me, I don't like it anymore than you do, but I suppose it had to be better to have him with us, than against us, right?" Eddy said and looked up at the others.

"And we thought that you guys could find some armour for them, just like you did for us, right?" Ed finished off.

McKenzie rubbed his brow, as if he had a headache. He was quiet for a while, until he spoke. "We don't even have the bleakest ray of hope that we can in fact get back to the Imperium, and let alone find armour at all. As for their battle-experience, they'll have to learn it the hard way. The data-file I had on how to create psi-crystals is gone. Must've lost it somewhere..."

Rolf put a hand on McKenzie's lean shoulder. "I know that this will not be easy, but we believe that this is our best chance, if not the only."

McKenzie nodded slowly. He seemed to get an idea.

"You go tell the others, that those who wish to join our crusade should tell us. I don't want anyone drawn into this who doesn't want to be coming along. Weak minded people, or non-willing, could get us attacked by deamons, or betray us. Maybe even worse." McKenzie made a pause. "I think I have an idea on how to be able to get back to the Imperium..."

With that, he walked off towards his bike. There, he picked out a 2m10 tall, and several centimetres thick package. How it had been able to fit onto the bike, no one asked or knew. McKenzie began picking out several other items from a box on his bike, but the Eds never got to see what it was. Charleston and McGranth herded them back to the stage, where they made their announcement.

After that, all the kids crept down into their sleeping rolls and bags, except Charleston and McGranth, who kept watch over the fire. McKenzie had disappeared into the woods nearby.

Eddy, being one of the last to fall asleep, lay contemplating what had happened. It was

much, he concluded.

"I knew it was going to be one long day..." he yawned before he went to sleep.



When Edd awoke the next morning, around 9 am, he saw that Charleston and McGranth had been back home apparently and gotten the Marines' gear. He'd known so when he saw McGranth moving round in his bulky Terminator armour, his Storm Bolter dangling from a leather strap around his shoulder and his massive power axe hanging from his waist in a magnetic chain. Charleston had been sitting by the burnt-out fire and cleaned his plasma pistol. Edd had seen that he'd broken off specks of dust, or whatever it was, from the pistol's venting holes.

Edd hadn't found McKenzie until about lunch, and then he'd taken with him a basket full of sandwiches. The Master Lexicanum had been sitting on a dirt mound in a meadow further into the forest, clad in his intricately decorated suit of power armour. He was holding a 2m10 tall stick in his hands. The stick was obviously made from fine mahogany tree and McKenzie was carving sigils and holes into it with a very sharp knife. All the while, he was muttering something in a tongue Edd couldn't begin to understand, but, being the fan he was of books, he thought it sounded a bit like Tolkien's eldar language; Quenya.

"Antataura sairon sina lelyarta Menel, teplë ecco et elen so calan." was what Edd heard McKenzie mutter before the tall Marine looked up at him, sensing his proximity. Edd now saw the other things that McKenzie had brought. By his side lay some other carving tools and several gemstones of varying size. Some were small, able to fit into a hand. The largest one Edd believed he couldn't even close his hands entirely around. It was carved in a beautiful brilliant carving. The blue colour of it gave it away for being a sapphire. Along with the gems and tools, was a pot of what looked like silver paint, though it glistened in a way silver never would be able to glisten. McKenzie noticed the young man's interest for his tools and smiled.

"They're gifts from the Eldar to me, when they worked with us together against the Evil One." the tall and slender Marine said simply. "The gems are from Eldar worlds, the tools of Wraithbone and the paint is liquid ithilmar, star silver."

Edd now noticed the thin, silver lines on the staff. He saw how they were written into a language he couldn't possibly read. Eldar, he concluded, as the words McKenzie had been speaking. Edd stood there for a long while. McKenzie grabbed a new tool and started to carve on a new place, a big, intricate pattern, and taking up were he left on the beautiful Eldar song/chant. Edd would never know if the other psyker raised his voice deliberately so that Edd could hear the beautiful words, but he would remember the song till his dying day. It was beautiful, but yet, the seriousness of their duty hung over it. This thought snapped him back to reality as McKenzie picked up the brush and started to paint out yet another unintelligible sentence.

"Care for some lunch, McKenzie?" Edd asked and raised his arm to show McKenzie the basket.

"Ah, salvation!" McKenzie said and put down the brush as he took the basket from Edd. "I've been working on this thing since before dawn, and I kind of slipped breakfast." McKenzie started sorting through it, his face halfway into the basket.

This made Edd smirk. For a powerful Master Lexicanum, McKenzie's behaviour could be unbelievable at times. Here he was, digging through a basket of food, with all the finesse and manners of a six-year-old. Edd also noticed the gemstones didn't lie in any special order. They were just strewn about. Edd didn't want to think what McKenzie's workshop had looked like. Sadly though, the Master Lexicanum heard his thoughts. He was obviously not so oblivious to the world as he seemed.

"You don't like messes, do you?" McKenzie asked without looking up.

"I'm only asking, what did your workshop on your home world look like?" Edd asked cautiously.

"A mess."

"Then, if I may ask, how were you able to find anything there then?"

McKenzie looked up at final. He chewed a while on the sandwich he was working on and swallowed. "Fringe benefit from being a psyker. I just think of what I need, and it comes to my hand." To state an example, he reached out his hand and aimed it at a small stick lying about 15 metres away from him. A few seconds later, it was in his hand. McKenzie tossed the stick away.

"I don't believe you at times. You, a trained soldier, and you can't even keep your workshop clean!" Edd sighed.

"Hah! You think you can imagine that? You should see my current apartment!" McKenzie said and grinned. His Terran counterpart was obviously a pedantic fellow.

"Nonsense!" Edd said as he walked off, rolling his eyes. It was obvious he and his Imperial counter didn't have more in common than looks.

"A little nonsense, now and then/relished by the wisest men!" McKenzie mockingly said in a singsong voice to Edd as the boy walked off.

"Wait a second, Edd!" McKenzie suddenly called, his voice having a stern note to it. Edd turned and looked at the tall man. McKenzie had put down his tools and was looking straight at Edd, all of his mind focused on the boy before him.

"I want to talk to you about a few things. Come over here." McKenzie said and gestured towards a stump beside him. Edd walked over to him and sat down on the offered seat. He could swear it hadn't been there a moment ago.

"You of course want to see Terra become a part of the Imperium, right?" McKenzie asked. He didn't leave Edd with his gaze for a second.

"What do you mean?" Edd asked, feeling spooked by the look he was given. "Isn't Earth a free standing world in space? You're the aliens..."

"DON'T use that word!" McKenzie exploded. "No, we're not 'aliens', we're also humans. It's a long story, but let's just say that Terra, I mean; Earth, once was part of the Imperium. In fact, if you ever make contact with the Human Galactic Empire, to give its correct name, you will have to rewrite all of your recorded history, more or less."

"What do you mean?" Edd asked. The air in the meadow felt suddenly cold.

"I mean that Terra was seeded with human life." McKenzie let this sink in, and it apparently scared the young man before him. "I know, sounds unbelievable, but it's true. Terra was an experiment to see if Humanity would get anywhere, without influence from other human worlds, and from the Emperor. But, seeing how your history has developed, I'm afraid it'll be many hundreds, maybe thousands of years before we will see that happen..."

"You mean..." Edd began, but McKenzie finished the sentence for him.

"Yes, I mean that I've read your history quite thoroughly. I managed to become a librarian in the city where I live, and, well, I've studied your history intently the last two years. All the parts that were written in the Codex: Terra, I already knew the truth about, but it was good to see the Terran view on it all. And the things that terrify me so, is how Terran humans have killed and murdered each other over the millennia. Of course, we had criminals and rebellions and revolutions in the Imperium, but nothing of the magnitude of your Second World War, as you call it! 60 million human lives is a great waste, and you couldn't even catch the culprit! Okay, so you had the Nuremberg trials, but you didn't nail the mastermind, did ya? I tell you, we never suffered from systematic genocide in the Imperium. Terran humanity has degraded, and it's sad..."

Edd looked shocked at the Master Lexicanum. The chilly feel in the air was gone and replaced with the warm summer's breeze that blew before. The Imperial servant had a point, though. War was a horrible thing; Edd had always thought so. He'd thought his times in power armour as necessary to retain the peace amongst the stars. To fight, to kill other beings; he hadn't liked it. Was he seeing that replicated in his Imperial counterpart? Edward McKenzie,

Master Lexicanum of the Death Angels. A psyker of almost incomprehensible power. Did he too despise the killing so, even if it was the abhorrent deamons, the cruel Dark Eldar or the bestial Hive Fleet minions? Edd wasn't sure. He at least was sure that McKenzie hated unnecessary violence and killing, especially between humans, and who didn't? Yes, Terran humans had degraded, that couldn't be denied. All Imperial citizens could rally behind one single leader, the Emperor, despite differing culture and traditions. Despite coming from different planets! Edd silently concluded that Terran humans couldn't say the same in unity.

"So, my other thing." McKenzie said and looked up from his contemplations. This tore Edd almost hearingly from his thoughts.

"What?"

"I've felt this... pulse, lately. Haven't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"The psychic pulse. You have to have felt it! It wasn't there six months ago. I mean, there are lots of untrained psykers here," McKenzie spat at the ground at this point. "But none of them have been of the power I've felt lately. They could at a height bend a spoon with their powers, if they trained their blunt minds, but this force... it's a danger to all of us."

Now Edd realized what McKenzie was talking about. "Now I know! I've also felt it, yes. It comes from our cul-de-sac..."

"I think I know from where." McKenzie said silently. "See, I fear this person has powers far greater than you and me put together..."

"What?"

"Yes, and if not trained, he will certainly attract a daemon, a very powerful such. Or maybe even attract a Hive Fleet or the robots we're currently considering a major threat."

"What do you mean 'he'? How can you be so sure it's a he?"

"Yesterday, I felt a strong force, a really strong force, when I stood there on the stage. You must've felt it too. It's coming from that boy with a plank by his side..."

"Jonny 2X4!" Edd said, his blood chilling at the thought that Jonny could become potential prey for a daemon.

"It's quite obvious, when you think about it." McKenzie said with a wry smile.

"Yes, he's always been talking about that Plank as it was a person." Edd replied with a thoughtful look.

"Then he's more talented than we think. He's probably psychically attuned the plank, so he considers it a person. Sadly though, it's probably inheriting a daemon, if we're unlucky. If lucky, it might contain the spirit of some long dead Eldarain hero."

"What do you mean 'psychically attune'?" Edd asked, feeling a bit ignorant for the first time in long.

"It means that you make an inanimate object capable of receiving psychic signals, like this piece of mahogany wood here." McKenzie held forth the tall staff. It looked more like a staff than a stick now. "This is however going to be a huge receptor for psychic energy, like the daemon staff you used two years ago."

"Oh, now I get it. So Jonny has attuned his subconsciously then?"

"Most probably. He wanted a friend so badly, I believe, that his power awoke and he created this Plank for himself."

Edd got up and decided not to stay for too long. He was getting hungry too. "Let's hope for Eldar Hero..." he muttered.

"Yes, we should." McKenzie replied quietly to himself. "Tell the others I'll be done by nightfall,

and where they can find me. Those who wish to join our quest shall come here then. Tell them that too."

Edd nodded silently and walked back to the campsite. McKenzie picked up one of the fine Wraithbone tools and carved a new line in the fine wood and started to sing silently in the Eldar tongue once again.



By nightfall, as McKenzie had predicted, the staff was finished, and the other two Marine commanders, the Eds and Rolf gathered by the meadow. None of the other kids had yet showed up, and, speaking frankly, the Eds weren't surprised. Ed caught a glimpse of the big staff McKenzie had created.

"Looks cool!" Ed exclaimed simply.

"Thank you, Ed." McKenzie replied politely.

"So, how are you supposed to power the thing then, even less use it?" McGrath asked, looking a bit concerned. "To me, it looks a whole lot of Eldarain, and last time I checked, Eldar weren't really trustworthy blokes..."

"No probs Eddie," McKenzie replied smiling. "I did it myself and I can use it quite efficiently, thank you. Besides, it's not Eldarain, well, not entirely. It is mostly daemon in its nature."

"WHAT?" McGrath said sounding shocked. To take help from daemons was the last thing he'd expected from McKenzie.

"I didn't have much of a choice. It's the only way to travel through the Warp without me needing to create a new warp-gate, and the Gate included material they don't have here." McKenzie made a pause and stroked the staff kindly. "Besides, I have found this!"

McKenzie pulled off the covering of moss from where he'd been sitting most of the day and revealed the same kind of socket that Edd had 'found' on Secundus. However, the runes weren't as unintelligible as the ones Edd had encountered. These seemed more human in nature. Like the Egyptian hieroglyphs. These were also written with the same kind of paint McKenzie had used for the staff: ithilmar. And, strangely, the socket for the crystal at the bottom of McKenzie's staff, seemed to fit it exactly. McGrath knew there was psychic-witchery to it all, but he didn't comment on it.

Charleston suddenly turned round and trained his plasma pistol at the sound he'd heard. This was a reflex, innate after over five hundred years of constant warfare. But he lowered his threatening aim as he saw that the sound had come from a boy, a boy that had been present yesterday.

"Hi guys!" Jonny said, as he got closer to them. He carried Plank with him, of course.

"Jonny, you mean you actually believe us?" Edd exclaimed, surprised at the joyful sound in his voice.

"Well, I still don't know, but Plank said it might be fun." Jonny said and joined the other seven.

"If I can ask, who's Plank?" Charleston asked, cocking an eyebrow and holstering his plasma pistol.

"He's my best friend." Jonny said and held up Plank for all to see. McGrath, McKenzie and Charleston just stared.

"I told you so..." Edd thought to McKenzie.

"Yes, I feel the presence now..." McKenzie replied by psychic means. "Jonny is truly psychic, and that can mean problems for us. That the Plank wants to go good be both good and bad, if you see what I mean?"

"Okay then Jonny, you're in on our quest." McKenzie said to Jonny. He restrained from doing psychically, it could've shocked the boy.

"Is your baby-sister coming, sergeant?" McGranth asked Ed, using the young man's rank.

"Nope, she and Jimmy left this morning. Anyway, it's going to be too dangerous for her and Jimmy, and I think they'd only get in the way." Ed replied.

"Can I insert something here?" McKenzie asked politely, raising a finger.

"Shoot, Master Lexicanum..." McGranth replied simply.

"I think it's time to rethink our Outlaw friends' ranks. They have more than well earned themselves higher ranks, and well..."

"They're Outlaws, McKenzie. That's not our concern. Besides, do you think we'll ever find armour for them, and the others?"

McKenzie fell silent upon this remark. Charleston seemed to ponder on something however. "But, aren't we all Outlaws? I mean, there's no longer an

Imperium where we going, at least no Space Marine Legions..."

"Hopefully, Ed, there will be an Imperium!" McGranth snapped off his junior officer.

"But no Marines." Rolf said silently. "I made sure of that, last time we were there."

"Great!" McGranth said and sighed. He looked at McKenzie. "So what did you have in mind, Edward?"

"Well, I was thinking something like this, if we encounter human pockets of resistance, cause I doubt the Imperium has risen again," McKenzie made a pause, thinking on how to formulate himself. He sent down one hand into his pocket, and pulled it up again. "For the Terminator captain, Eddy, I have thought of granting the prestigious rank Commander of the 1st company. It's more or less only a brevet rank, but..." McKenzie fell silent. Eddy only nodded that he understood. That he was now formal commander of the Death Angel 1st company meant that he was no longer an Outlaw.

"Here, Commander Eddy, I grant you also the mark of the Order of the Deathwatch, the Inquisition's militant arm of Space Marines." McKenzie handed Eddy one of the small tokens he'd had in his hand. It was a small silver skull, with crossed bones and an 'I' behind it. He stuck it on his shirt.

(Author's Note: The Inquisitorial I looks somewhat like this: =I=, to make it simple for you)

"To young Edward," McKenzie said and held out a similar token to Edd, with the exception that the crossed bones had been replaced with two stylised lightning bolts. "I grant you the sign of the Order of the Deathwatch, but I also promote you to Epistolary Librarian. That makes you second in psyker rank to me. I also grant you the sub-name Keeper of the Keys, which is, as your friends rank, just brevet."

Edd bowed before the tall man in thanks. He was now as well as Eddy, a member of the Death Angel Legion. McKenzie turned to Ed. First he handed Ed the Deathwatch mark, the same as Eddy's. He also told him the same he'd told Edd and Eddy about the Deathwatch.

"I also grant you the rank of Lieutenant Commander of 8th Company, due to your non-selfish acting during times of great need." McKenzie said. He knew the stare he was receiving from Charleston as he uttered Ed's new rank. But McGranth seemed to catch what it all was about now.

"Well," McGranth said simply, turning to Charleston. "That means you're Commander of the 8th. Congrats Ed! Time to paint on another stripe on your arm!"

"I guess I have to!" Charleston said and smiled broadly.

"It was about bloody time anyway..." McGranth muttered. He'd been about to promote Charleston to Commander when Kharn invaded, and since then, it had slipped his mind, always. But now it was out of the world. In fact, McGranth had wanted to promote Charleston to commander of the 8th after the Ork/Berzerker invasion on Armageddon, but Sebastian had been adamant that he deserved the Mark of Armagon the better. To give you a comparison on

how brilliant this mark is, it's comparable with the Lenin Order of the former Soviet Union, an order that mostly was dealt post-humously.

Ed bowed as Edd had done before McKenzie and put the tiny mark on his shirt, just as Edd and Eddy had done.

"Your ranks will have to wait." McKenzie said over his shoulder towards the coming Kanker sisters.

"You heard us?" Lee asked startled.

"Something like that..." McKenzie muttered.

"So, you're coming too?" McGranth said flatly.

"Why not?" Lee said and shrugged. "We've got nothing better to do this summer."

"Besides, we couldn't let our boyfriends go off without us." Marie said and smiled. Edd swallowed. Ed started sweating. McGranth, McKenzie and Charleston stared at the three young boys. Eddy just glared at the Kankers. Although he didn't want to admit it, the last three years had been to the better for the Kankers. They'd all become more attractive, and it made Eddy feel odd. He knocked away the feeling.

"Not a word." Eddy grumbled forth to the three tall Marines.

"You address these three boys as your boyfriends." McKenzie suddenly said, his voice having a stern note to it. The Kankers nodded. "Then I hope you won't let your feelings guide you on this mission! This is no Sunday-trip!" The Kankers looked a bit beaten down, and Edd thought that McKenzie maybe was a bit hard on them.

A few minutes later, Nazz and Kevin came along as well. Eddy was thoroughly surprised. He hid it well though. He hadn't thought Kevin would come, even if it so concerned his life. Well, it did, more or less.

"Hi guys, wait for two more crusaders." Nazz said and smiled. To hear the word 'crusaders' over Nazz' lips felt odd. Maybe there was more to Nazz than giggles and good looks?

"I can't believe I'm doing this..." Kevin muttered.

"Ah, come on Kevin, it'll be fun." Nazz said and looked lovingly on Kevin. "Besides, you've always wanted to travel."

"Kevin," Edd said and smiled he too. "I can't believe you actually agreed to come."

"Get this straight, Double Dork, the only reason I'm here is to see the looks on your faces, when this... thingamabob malfunctions, or whatever."

McKenzie glared at Kevin, and gave Edd a psychic message. "Pleasant little so, and so, isn't he?"

Edd had a hard time to stop himself from smirking.

McKenzie turned to Nazz. "Young lady, I wouldn't use the word fun to describe our mission, cause what we're up against is the very master piece of a race that once created us humans."

"What do you mean?" Nazz asked. She didn't like the turn this was taking.

"Long story..." McKenzie said silently. He looked Nazz straight in the face. "You remind me so of Canoness Nazerine Almita of the Order of the Bloodied Rose..."

"What?"

McKenzie shook off his daydream. "Anyone else coming?"

"Nope." was Kevin's curt reply. McKenzie prayed that the boy's attitude didn't hamper their mission too much. There was too much of Brother Lieutenant Commander Poole about him. Far

too much.

McKenzie wavered all off from the socket in the ground. He needed working room. "Okay people, stand back. What I'm going to release are immense psychic powers. If anyone who can't protect their mind gets too close, you'll find your brain all over the place."

This comment left McKenzie with a ten metres wide berth. He smiled. Grabbing the staff with both hands and closing his eyes, he began a chant in the Imperial Nobility's tongue: High Gothic.

"What's he doing?" Kevin asked astonished, his voice a whisper. He hung on to every word that the tall, thin man was uttering.

"Praying." was McGranth's simple reply.

Kevin, Jonny, Nazz and the Kankers stared at him, and then on McKenzie, and then back at McGranth.

"What, it's common where we come from." McGranth said and looked surprised that the children did not know the delicate procedure of psychics.

At the socket, or pedestal, McKenzie opened his eyes, a blue light shining from them. He raised the staff high into the air, the psychic energies loaded into it jumping and sparkling of its surface, barely contained by McKenzie's iron will. The big, sapphire at the bottom of the staff glowed nearly white of barely contained energies. With a few sweeping gestures and a sentence of a completely alien tongue, McKenzie slammed home the staff into the socket and turned it half a turn.

Eddy suddenly felt that his lips were moist. He licked them and felt the taste of metal. Taking a few steps backwards, he wiped away the blood that had come from his nose. He knew he'd been standing too close. He didn't want to think what could've happened if he'd stood even closer. He once again focused his thoughts on McKenzie. He'd seen this before. Eddy had done it on Secundus, but with a staff that had been crafted by a demon, and that still had had some of the demon's power in it.

The white light had subsided from McKenzie's eyes. Instead, the white light was now travelling ever upwards in the staff. The Master Lexicanum let go off the staff and backed off he too. At the top of the staff, a beautiful, golden, twin-headed Imperial Eagle was situated. As the light spread to the Eagle, the gold seemed to burst. White streaks of light shone through cracks that originally hadn't been more than visible for a microscope. Suddenly, with a roar, the energies broke loose from the staff and roared up, through the canopy of the surrounding trees in the meadow. What followed was an unearthly silence. No birds sung, nothing. It was as if the world had stopped.

"Yeah, right, like it was going to work." Kevin said and smiled. Eddy knew better. "I told you dorks..."

Kevin was cut short as the roaring sound returned. The white beam of psychic power had apparently taken a turn somewhere up in the sky and came crashing down into the staff again. Blast and shockwave threw them all to the ground, except McGranth, who stood steadily on the ground in his nearly 300 kilos heavy armour. There was dust in the air, and no one could really see what had happened immediately. Rolf took his time in trying to find his peaked cap. As he put it back on, back brim first, he turned to look at where the staff had stood. He recognized the bowel-turning colours of the Warp at once. McKenzie had done it. Of the staff, however, there was no trace. It had obviously been atomised by the sheer force striking down at it.

McKenzie got up and dusted himself down. "Everybody get through the hole, now! It's not open for very long!"

McGranth took the initiative, followed by Rolf, Charleston, and the Eds, Jonny, the girls and lastly McKenzie. The hole closed behind them with a sucking sound. The only thing that marked that there once had been a Warp Portal there was the burnt out crater of the socket and the shattered remains of a golden Imperial Eagle statuette.

Kevin would, after this adventure was done, never more want to Warp travel like this. He

thought it had felt as he had fallen as soon as he'd stepped into the strange hole. The falling feeling had been replaced by the feeling of being stretched out and suddenly and painfully slammed into a wall. Still, he'd been able to walk out at their destination. McKenzie never told the others, but he'd used the warp signature of Kharn monolith on Armageddon as guidance. Place was no problem, but time was, so he'd made a hefty guess.



As the twelve humans were thrown through the Warp, two shadowy figures watched them. They were both winged, and they both were muscular. Two pairs of burning red eyes watched the dozen as they made their way through one thousand light-years of normal space. Then, suddenly, the two shadows disappeared into darkness, as only shadows can.

The humans hadn't given up yet, that was for sure. And the new non-biological threat, well, it was just as much a threat as these twelve humans...