

## The Beginning of the ED



"So glorious we'll fly  
Like the Eagle in the sky  
And I know it's gonna be  
Victory!"  
-- The bridge of Gamma Ray's Solid

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// Enter authorization code: . . .  
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//Downloading Data//  
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Ichar, first and grandest of all Hive planets and once home to the mighty Space Marine Legion carrying the name Angelicus Mortis, or Death's Angels, seemed calm for being what it was. The reason was simple; there were nearly no humans on it. The Fortress Monastery of the Death Angels had been its reason for existence. Ichar was, along with Callidus and Secundus, the only habitable planets in the Secundus system, Secundus being a huge moon to a gas-planet. Callidus was the one closest to the sun of it; the star Betelgeuse. Due to the numerous interstellar Warp-passages surrounding Betelgeuse, it appears to our scientists that Betelgeuse is only 500 light years away from us, when it's actually closer to 1,000 light years away. The Warp-passages also causes the colour to dull and make Betelgeuse seem like a swollen gas-giant. Out Sun looks the same to the Imperial citizens like Betelgeuse to us. For you non-astronomy fans: Betelgeuse lies in the lower part of Orion; get a stellar chart. Next came Ichar. Ichar was, as mentioned, a Hive world, but, unlike Armageddon, its reason for existence is almost solely the Space Marine Legion stationed there. Next in rank come the huge amounts of factories built by the Cult Mechanicus. This makes the Death Angels one of the most mechanised of all Space Marine Legions. But the Machine Shops also supply the nearby Callidussian Imperial Guard regiments with armour and weapons.

The Fortress Monastery of the Death Angels, or the Adeptus Astartes Legio Angelicus Mortes, to give it its full name, was situated at the north pole more or less of the planet. Surrounded by chilly oceans, it is impossible to make one's way to the Monastery by other means than flight. The Monastery is a masterpiece of the Gothic architecture, having achieved what the Gothic architects wanted to achieve with Notre Dame but failed. The main reason that the Imperials made it and not the medieval French is that the Imperials had access to things such as rockrete and huge building machines. But despite this, the Monastery looks like it's been carved from the rock of the mountainous island it rests upon. There are no shores; kilometre high walls of rock make it impossible to reach it from the sea, though there are numerous caves underneath the mountain.

In a way, the Monastery looks a bit like a Hive, but much smaller. Still, it housed ten full companies of the Emperor's finest, which are a few thousand warriors in the Imperial service. Rarely, more than a few companies were out on duty at the same time. At least once, nowadays there are barely any Space Marines left, and most have resorted to the Dark and Corruptive Forces. The Monastery had training grounds, rifle ranges, an armoury, a library, an Apothecarion and landing fields, and it was on one of these landing fields that we find our motley collection of heroes:



"It's no use," Charleston said with an indication towards the Nighthawk. "That one ain't going to fly any farther without any more fuel."

"Just great," Eddy sighed and sat down on a moulded old crate. "Now what do we do?"

"Guys," McKenzie calmed them down, "this is the Death Angel Monastery, and there will undoubtedly be fuel around here. This is a landing port for the Emperor's sake!"

"What do you mean 'Monastery'?" Ed asked confused.

"This is headquarters and home to the Death Angels. We lived here, trained here, slept here. And the key of the last sentence is that it's all in past tense..." McGranth said with an unhappy look upon his face.

McKenzie sighed as he looked at his friend. He knew McGranth felt bad and he knew why: Once, McGranth had commanded one of the most lethal and most feared of the Imperium's forces; a full Legion of Space Marines. He didn't want to accept the fact that most Space Marines now were gone. A Space Marine is always male, always born in a certain family and always leads a life of strict celibacy. No kids. That's what kept the families going; as the one who became Space Marine trod down his path, the others of it could live happily knowing their relative were conducting his duty to the Emperor, and thus their names would also be listed. McKenzie didn't understand it so well, as he weren't from a true Space Marine family. He was a mutant, just like Rolf Yarrick was a half-breed. The Inquisition had spared them from absolution on different bases; McKenzie due to that he was Space Marine and Yarrick because of his faith and zeal.

McGranth was confounded over the fact that he was now in charge of his two friends and colleagues, three Outlaws, one young man sharing body with the soul of his blood-brother: Commissar General Rolf Yarrick and a bunch of novices. He didn't like it at all. Besides, he wasn't truly sure that he outranked the Commissar General. McGranth sighed.

"Come, let's get inside. No use standing here in the cold." McGranth said and led the way. His armour held him warm, but he wasn't sure for the kids. That Nazz girl seemed a little blue in the shade of her lips. McGranth didn't blame her. It was a lousy spot for a Monastery, when one thought about it. Why couldn't it be situated at the equator, on an island there? Nope, it had to be the North Pole... Sigh.

McGranth led them through the gates that led into the huge Monastery. When they got inside, the cul-de-sac kids, including the Eds (bar Rolf) gaped at the scene striking them. They were walking on what looked like a road, much like the rail-lined steel gantries of Hades Hive, but with the major difference these were made out of solid rockrete. The gantry was at least five or six metres wide, with stairways placed a little here and there, leading to a lower or higher level. There were doors leading to other rooms or halls, each door intricately carved to either represent an Imperial Saint, the double-headed Eagle of the Emperor or the very Death Angel Legion mark. In the middle there was a gaping hole, an abyss several hundred metres deep. Kevin walked close to the edge, grabbed hold of the railing and looked down. He quickly pulled back his head, vertigo gripping his brain. He joined the others. McGranth led them down many a flight of stairs. Kevin had no idea of how many hours passed as he walked down with the others. He checked his wristwatch. What good did it do when he had no idea what local time it was and when they'd arrived? He took a hefty guess at two hours. He looked up again. The Kankers, Nazz, the Eds, Johnny and himself included, were all looking awe-struck a little now and then at their surroundings. The huge pillars and cataracts that held the place up seemed carved from the stone itself. The many gargoyles and thin-faced Saints looking down on them. Kevin read the name of one as he passed a statue:

"Saint Renaro Icharius," it read in Low Gothic, "Martyred at the claws of a Bloodthirster daemon, first Grand Commander of the Blood Angels Space Marine Legion." Blood Angel? Hadn't McKenzie said that they were members of the Death Angels? Then, what was with the Blood Angel Grand Commander? Icharius had been holding a mighty broadsword in his perfectly sculpted hands, angel's wings spreading out behind him. The next statue the group passed was of Saint Ardel Choison. He was also an angel winged warrior, but his face was hidden by a cowl and his body by robes, unlike Icharius' who'd been standing in a suit of

archaic battle armour, his rippling muscles clearly visible. Choison's hands held a single edged power sword in them, but it was obviously not meant for twin-handed holding. Choison had been martyred at the hands of a Deamon Lord named Fostoriaxx and he'd been the first of the Dark Angel Grand Commanders. Two different Legions? This was confusing Kevin... McKenzie had a lot to explain, and Kevin wasn't sure he wanted to hear it all.

As they reached the lowest level, Kevin saw one last statue; the one depicting Grand Commander Dante. Dante was clad in a massive Terminator suit and at his hands were a pair of Lightning Claw gauntlets. On the back of each gauntlet a grenade launcher was mounted. Dante was no giant of a man, but he was burly none the less. Powerfully built with broad shoulders and big, strong muscles, he more than well made up for his lack of height, if you can call 1m85 for lack of stature that is... His face wasn't ugly either; a strong jaw but otherwise a look that would classify him as the next James Bond, Kevin thought. He saw Nazz throw an extra glance at the former Grand Commander (Dante) and felt a bit of anger inside of him.

Kevin looked at his company. The Marines, and Rolf strangely enough, were stern faced. They seemed embittered to be walking here. McGranth walked up to the statue of Dante and made a dignified bow at it. He then turned, looked at Charleston, who nodded, and the two strongest of the bunch pulled open the doors to the Main Hall, where an entire Legion of Space Marines could be at once. Being as empty as it was, it seemed horrible to be standing in it as the thirteen were when they walked into it. Like the rest of the entire Monastery, there were cobwebs all over the place. McKenzie shot the chandeliers a look and the huge, gilt constructions flickered into life. None of them took notice of the tiny creature watching them from the entrance to the hall. It was short, maybe just over 1m50, and had green skin, eyes with red iris, yellowed teeth and long elven ears. No hair on its scalp and ragged clothing adorned its body. The body looked a little like a simian's, with the exception it was made for upright walking and running. It dashed off, as fast as its short legs could carry it.

Inside the hall, Charleston ran a finger across a dusty chair. "I used to sit here," he simply proclaimed. "And that's where you used to sit, Eddie." Charleston meant McGranth and pointed towards McGranth's chair at the far end of the hall. There were ten great tables present in the hall, each representing a company of Space Marines. At the farthest end, one long table was situated, and it was meant for the Grand Commander's personal staff and the members of the Librarius, such as McKenzie.

McGranth looked around. It felt great to be treading this ground again... He felt it obliged that he said something, so he did:

"Charleston, take Ed and go look for fuel. There has to be some in the other ports. Fly if you have to." Charleston set off with Ed in tow. The whooshing sound of a jump pack proclaimed that Charleston had made a jump, probably with Ed in his arms.

"The others of you; try to find some food supplies that aren't rotten, anything edible. Personally I'm starving and I think you are too. And don't just stop at food supplies; anything that can be of use. Anything!"

The others started filing out, but McKenzie grabbed Kevin by the collar. He was going to receive his orders from McGranth last, and he wanted Kevin with him. McGranth turned to his Master Lexicanum and smiled. The psyker knew what he was going to get for orders, but stayed anyway.

"And you McKenzie, I give you the privileged task of going down to the Armoury and try to find some battle-suits that could be of use to us."

"Glad to be of use, my Grand Commander!" McKenzie said, saluted and dragged Kevin with him outside. As they got without earshot of McGranth, McKenzie told Kevin to follow him into the depths of the Monastery, down to the Armoury.

"Kevin, I want you to come with me, because there's something I want to show you." McKenzie said without slowing down as the twosome strode down the stairs.

"Yeah, sure." Kevin replied, unable to resist as he was more or less dragged along by McKenzie's force of will.

When they got down to the Armoury, McKenzie walked over to a data-terminal, removed a

glove and placed his big hand unto a plate in the wall, beside the gate that lead into the Armoury. The plate glowed luminously green for a while, the machines hummed and cogs clicked as the huge gate prepared to open itself. Upon the gate the skull and cog sign of the Adeptus Mechanicus was inscribed. The cog behind the skull turned a few times, settled and the gate opened itself. The skull, set in silver, split itself in the middle as the gate swung open and revealed a huge hall behind it. At first, Kevin saw naught, but after a few seconds, the old electronics awoke and the Armoury hall was flooded in light. It is impossible to even begin describe what Kevin saw, but the roof arched itself in its gothic structure more than a hundred metres above him. There were no windows, so it had to be under ground level. In the roof, huge tanks were held in place by stainless steel/adamantium chains. There were Rhinoceros and Razorback transports, the powerful Predator MBTs and Whirlwind Artillery tanks and of course the most dreaded of all Imperial Tanks; the 60 tonnes monstrosities called Land Raiders and a few variants on the original armament. The original armament of a Land Raider is four lascannons and two heavy bolters. Imagine this stuff augmented, for, say, anti-personnel? Kevin couldn't believe his eyes. He felt a chill go through his veins as he thought a camera on one of the elder looking 'Raiders followed their walk. McKenzie felt his unease.

"Don't be alarmed," he said calmly. "It's just Old Julius checking who's entering." McKenzie turned and looked up at the battered old tank, and raised a hand and waved. The camera zoomed with its focusing rings, remained silent for a moment, and then swung away from McKenzie and Kevin, obviously not interested any more.

"You trying to tell me that thing has a soul?" Kevin whimpered.

"Yes." McKenzie said, thought a while and then added, "A machine soul."

Kevin gave a shrug and looked up into the roof again. The tanks weren't alone. Amongst them hung seriously battered Land Speeder hovercrafts. They must've been here for repair when the final hour came. They also came in different variants. Kevin took his eyes down from the roof and looked around himself. Lined up at their sides as they'd entered, a small column of five metre tall war-walkers had been standing. They had been bulky constructions, not looking all too agile. McKenzie turned and looked at Kevin as the youth looked back at the mobile suits at the entrance.

"Dreadnought class armoured walkers." McKenzie explained. "Tombs for the Space Marine heroes crippled beyond medical care. If a Marine officer is so seriously injured that he can no longer lend his experience to his brothers in the fields in a normal suit of armour, he may chose to be incarcerated in a sarcophagus, which can be hooked up into a Dreadnought hull. He can thus fight for his Legion for aeons more." After this McKenzie sighed. He remembered who they'd used every available sarcophagus and Dreadnought at the Siege of the Emperor's Palace, and still they'd had suits left over. They kept on walking.

Next they passed rows upon rows of empty Space Marine power armour suits. Each suit stood upright, plugged into the wall behind it, its helmet resting at its feet and the backpack hanging from a contraption on the wall beside it. Each and every suit had the colours that McKenzie had on his armour and the Death Angel insignia upon the left shoulder pad. The shoulder pads had black trims, just like McKenzie's. There were of course personal variations for each suit, but they were seldom more than a different rank or company marking. Some helmets had beak like face masks, others had a more gas mask like look to them. Some suits had kneepads, some didn't. They also passed some suits painted white and some in a darker red colour. McKenzie said they belonged to Apothecaries and Tech Marines. They passed a row of black painted suits, and McKenzie simply said they were to be given to Chaplains in the Death Angel Legion. After another row of Death Angel red suits, they came to a dozen or so suits painted blue. Each and every blue suit had intricately carved insignia on their legs or arms. McKenzie explained them to belong to the Librarians, the Space Marine psyker caste. Kevin wondered why McKenzie then didn't wear the blue armour of his caste?

"Because of the same reason Rolf Yarrick refused to use the black and red trimmed uniform of the Commissariat; it would give me away in battle. I like to have surprise on my side." was McKenzie reply on this question.

The twosome left the Librarians' suits behind them and got to the last of the suits in the rows; one lone Terminator suit. It was equipped with a single Lightning Claw. McKenzie remembered he'd taken the other in replacement for the one Eddy had lost. He'd mounted an

ordinary arm instead. Cursing himself for this, McKenzie turned to the computer terminal before him. There was a screen covering most of the wall. Kevin looked upon it with interest. It looked like one of those new plasma TVs.

McKenzie pulled out a cord with a socket in each end from somewhere, picked up a data-slate from the floor, dusted it off. He plugged in the cord in both the data-slate and the computer before him. He opened the data-slate and as he did so, the big screen flashed into life. Tapping in his security clearance, McKenzie tapped in some search-information as he talked to Kevin: "You might have noticed that battle-brother McGranth seems uncomfortable around you. I've brought you here to help you understand why this is so..."

Pressing the activation key for the search, McKenzie started a search through the Monastery's old data banks. At first, the twin-headed eagle symbol flashed up with a text reading. Search in Progress. A chime sounded from somewhere and the Inquisition's mark (=I=) was seen on the screen. On the logo, written in green letters, stood: Enter Access Code. If one had one's eyes with oneself, one could see the tiny note in the lower-left corner that read: "Attempts at hacking through this level is punishable with immediate termination".

McKenzie silently entered the code that he'd learned so many years ago. It had been childishly simple to break it, he'd remembered. He had done it as a young epistolary. Tapping the confirmation key, the screen flashed again and now the service record of Kevin Poole appeared. It was a long listing. Reports, DNA structure, fingerprints; everything a sane person would want to know and more. Kevin just stared at the photo of the young man that was obviously Kevin Poole. It was like looking into a mirror. He tore his eyes from the photo and looked at the information flashing by on the screen. Of what Kevin could make out, there were his days as a Space Marine Scout, through his steady stream of promotions, all the way to Poole being ranked Lieutenant Commander and placed in charge of the 8th Assault and Reserve Company. Kevin let a low whistle go from his lips.

"You must've been a hero... " He said very silently to the picture, so that McKenzie wouldn't hear. He didn't.

"Your counterpart; Kevin Poole." McKenzie said with a gesture towards the screen. "He was a great warrior in the Emperor's service in his day. Slew many of the vile aliens that attack us. Favoured by great Dante like a son, and to be the next Death Angel grand commander after Dante. Then, something happened to change all that."

McKenzie tapped lightly a button on the data-slate. The screen flickered a while, before it settled. What now rolled up before Kevin was the report that Dante had filed on Poole's attack on McGranth that day many years ago, how Dante had declared Poole and the entire of his Space Marine Company Outlaw from the Death Angels. But Dante's report stopped there. It said nothing of how Poole was to regain his title amongst the proudest of Imperial Warriors. Instead, it was McGranth who began filing reports. He told of the vile betrayal of the 8th outlawed company of the Death Angels on Armageddon, how they'd turned from the Emperor's guiding light on the very day that they should celebrate the Emperor's divinity: The Day of the Feast of the Emperor's Ascension. The report also told on how the once noble Marines had turned to Khorne, Chaos God of Blood and Slaughter and renamed themselves the Berzerkers. It also told how Kevin Poole, once Lieutenant Commander in the Legio Angelicus Mortis had become the Dark Lord of Blood; Kevlinn, King of Berzerkers. It also told the tale of his lightning raid against Iyanden, stealing their C'tan artefact; the mighty battle-axe that was to be known to man as the Axe of Khorne.

Kevin was torn from his awed thoughts by McKenzie's soft voice: "Kevin Poole betrayed us all. He became a monster; he killed countless people, just because he claimed it was the insane will of his daemon God: Khorne." McKenzie seemed to choke on the name of the Dark God.

He continued: "This huge catastrophe," McKenzie gestured around himself, meaning the entire Imperium. "He deserves the sole blame for it all. He caused it all, Kevin: his ego, his animosity and his sense that his honour had been dragged in the dirt. His ego because of the fact that he was to be the next leader, not McGranth, his sense of honour because that he had been foiled of his promised position of power and his animosity towards McGranth because of this. Although, he always had that animosity towards McGranth, ever since we started out as Scouts." McKenzie lowered his eyes towards the floor. "It wasn't made better that McGranth became chosen to Terminator service early in his service. Poole never would've succeeded in

doing what Eddie did. Eddie became a veteran sergeant in his scout training, Poole not until he was a full-fledged Marine with many years under his belt." The tall, lean Marine sighed heavily. An uneasy silence settled down as Kevin kept reading parts of the information rolled up before him.

"I don't get it," Kevin said, pulling his eyes from the screen to look at McKenzie. "What does all this have to do with me?"

McKenzie looked up sharp and fixed Kevin with a deep stare of his dark eyes. "Kevin, I've seen the way you treat Eddy and his two friends. Your animosity towards him is very similar to the animosity that Kevin Poole had against McGrath."

Kevin wasn't staggered at all at this. McKenzie was impressed. Any other human would've backed away from his stare, but this young man looked back. There was true grit inside of him. Maybe he wasn't as Kevlinn after all?

"Oh yeah," Kevin said and shrugged, looking round at random stuff in the armoury, "I admit I may seem harsh on them sometimes, and they do get on my nerves, but I don't hate them."

"So, you can control your attitude towards them?" McKenzie asked, looking thoughtful.

"Yeah, I can." Kevin replied smartly, prepared to show this super-human he could do whatever he was asked to do.

McKenzie smiled softly. "I'm surprised Kevin, I didn't expect you to be so reasonable."

"Well..." Kevin said, scratching his chin, "What we're doing now is important. I guess there are bigger things right now, then how I feel towards the do... I mean the Eds. I guess I can lighten up a bit, for something this big."

"Thank you Kevin," McKenzie said, placing his hand on Kevin's shoulder and smiling his gap-toothed smile towards the youth. "Now, how about we tell the others about the fact that the Armoury is intact?"

"Just a minute," Kevin said, holding up a finger as to stop McKenzie. "I wonder; what role did the other of my friends play? I mean, I know what role I played; traitor, and the Eds are you, but what about Rolf, Nazz, the Kankers and Johnny?"

"Well, Rolf you know was a famous commissar general. One of the greatest ever, in fact: a warrior without match. Except in Kevlinn. He fought the Dark Lord with the sole ambition to destroy him. The reason, as I see your questioning look, is that Lord Kevlinn killed all Yarricks, except Rolf Yarrick, and he swore in blood that he wouldn't rest until Kevlinn was laid to rest. The tool used to draw the blood for the oath was no other than the Yarrickian sword. You know, the silver blade that Rolf now has?"

"Yeah, seen it many times, in its sheath. But what about the others?"

"It is as follows: Nazz counter part was in fact an Imperial Saint: Canoness Nazerine Almita of the Order of the Bloodied Rose. She was a great warrior as well as a beautiful woman. Age didn't foul her appearance. She didn't die the martyr's death, though. She died in her sleep, of age, which I find very nice in such a war-ravaged life as she lived. Her armour is held forever pure in a stasis field, her cloak being a thing that it said that not even power swords could cut through. Before the Siege of the Emperor's Palace, I had the armour moved here, because the safest place in the Imperium is the Armoury of a Space Marine Fortress Monastery, with the exception of the Apothecarion, where our gene-seed is held. Any way, Canoness Almita was a great tactician and solely devoted to the Emperor. It was rumoured she'd met the Dark Lord once, but hopefully it is only hearsay.

The Kankers undoubtedly are counter parted by the Canoness sisters Kanker, that were taken by the Hive Fleet named Canker by the Magos Biologis. They later altered the spelling to represent the once-human sisters new status as Hive Queens. The Omega Squadron Outlaws, your Eds, defeated them and they became devout sisters again, but forever kept under the Inquisition's never-flinching gaze. Before they were returned to the True Path though, they spread much carnage and mayhem with their minions. I prayed to the Emperor every morning after they'd been turned back that my brother would do the same..."

This last sentence McKenzie spoke like a whisper. He didn't want to be entangled in a long and sentimental story of his life and his brother: George McKenzie, or Hive Magus Grimjaw as he'd called himself. He was dead now, Grimjaw, and McKenzie was both happy and sad over this at the same time. He pulled himself together and started again.

"Now, Johnny, he's a special case. His counterpart wasn't even human. Johnny's counterpart was a powerful Eldar Farseer entitled Johnnaiskei I Laryetille, Guardian of the Mon-Keigh, the Humans. He watched us humans for hundreds of years, until just after the Outlaws left. We'll never know why the Craftworld named Vurupano in their tongue, or roughly Plankian in Gothic. I know, it sounds weird; therefore I prefer the Eldar word for it. Anyway, Johnnaiskei was an extremely powerful psyker, outmatching me with ease. He was capable of crushing Deamons to pulp with one word, awake a thunderstorm that could wipe out cities with a single hand movement. Oh, I envied him, I did. But we were good friends the time I knew him. He let me in on many Eldar secrets." McKenzie made a pause and sighed. "What I heard, he died of age fifty years before the Imperium fell to the claws of Chaos. He must've been very old, as Eldar can turn millennia old. Dear God-Emperor, there are times when I feel that we are closer to the Eldar than we might think..."

"So, Kevin, there you have it; the roles the others played in this great game of chess. A game that we Imperial humans already have been more or less checked in."

"I see." Kevin replied, reflecting on what McKenzie had said. "Alright, I think I get this now. I doubted you before, but seeing how things are, black on white, I can't deny what we're facing..."

"Very good Kevin," McKenzie beamed. "Oh, and do me a favour."

"What's that?"

"Don't ever let your anger control your actions, it can lead you down a very dark path."

"I won't McKenzie, I won't" Kevin smiled and ripped of a salute.

McKenzie chuckled at this. "Good. Now, what do you say about that we find the others and tell them that the Armoury has been untouched and that they can get new gear here?"

"No sweat, but, what if, any one, you know..." Kevin's voice trailed off.

"Any one would come in here? Please Kevin, there hasn't been anyone here for many hundreds of years. Besides, Old Julius and the others can keep an eye on things as we're gone, can't they?"

"Guess so..." Kevin said as the two walked out to join the others. The living machines scared the living daylights out of him. Machine soul? It was getting scary. The Imperial humans had obviously trod down a track of evolution the Terrans hadn't.



Up in the Main hall, the others had managed to find some food that wasn't mould. Charleston had found most of it, and truly took his fair share of it. They dusted off most of the dust from a table and sat down by it and dined. It wasn't much of an affair. After they'd finished, McKenzie told them that the Armoury had been untouched. So the thirteen went down to the Armoury. The Land Raider tank Old Julius got a bit confused over seeing two each of the Eds, but McKenzie told him in some way that he should not worry. He led them down the lines of armour, picked out suits he thought seemed good, and showed them to the Eds and Kevin. The others were amazed there were no cobwebs in the armoury, and when Ed asked why it was so, McKenzie replied with a smile.

"This place has been hermetically sealed for nearly four hundred years. No one would get in here!" McKenzie said as strolled away to get some weaponry.

The Eds slipped into the battle suits given unto them. Ed donned the armour of a member of the 8th Assault and reserve Company, getting helped by Charleston to paint on the rank stripes of a Lieutenant Commander. After helping Ed, Charleston added a stripe to his rank. Ed looked over his armour: On his chest, a double-headed golden eagle was spread. On his left shoulder

pad was the black emblem of the Death Angels: a blood drop between a pair of angel's wings. On his right shoulder pad was the grey skull of the 8th Assault Company. He settled back in the alcove the suit of power armour had stood in and fitted the jump pack to the plug on his back. He felt the click and the rush of heat as the powered armour heated up. He needed no reactor to move, like the Terminator suits, but the jump pack, just like ordinary back packs, had the power needed to make the power armour truly powered. The belts keeping the jump pack surely in place shot out and looked themselves upon his chest.

Edd had gotten into the blue armour of an Epistolary Librarian. His chest was not adorned by and eagle like Ed's. Instead, he had what looked like a winged lightning bolt. His left shoulder pad carried the emblem of the Death Angels, set on a red background, and the right shoulder pad was intricately decorated with what looked like a book. The paper markers of the book looked like lightning bolts. The whole thing was carved from rockcrete. Edd did as Ed had done; he settled back in the alcove that had belonged to the armour and felt how the backpack was put in place with a click.

Eddy had gotten dressed in the lone Terminator suit. He had his Death Angel emblem on the right shoulder pad and a black Imperial Eagle on his left. Like his old armour, he had no kneepads, unlike his two friends. He flexed the lone Lightning Claw on his left hand side. He had wanted to have two, but McKenzie had said something about spare parts. Still, he was capable of punching a hole through a tank.

"Man, it's good to be back into the armour again!" Eddy said and slammed his unarmed fist into the Lightning Claw's.

"I must admit," Edd said and turned in his armour and flexed his arms, "that even I am glad that I'm wearing it again."

McGranth and Charleston showed Kevin how to get into his gear. It took a little longer than with the somewhat experienced Eds. Kevin was tall, about 1m80, but of a more powerful build than Rolf. His shoulders were broad and his body muscly. He had begun working out a bit, but not too much. He knew it wasn't good when one was growing. His armour had the double-headed eagle symbol as well as Ed's, but as he backed into his armour's alcove, an ordinary backpack fitted into place. On his left hand was a mighty power fist. He flexed it. It felt like being able to rip asunder a world. Such power! He glanced himself over. No kneepads, a grey skull on his right shoulder. He belonged to the same company as Ed and Charleston then.

"Awesome..." Kevin whispered silently as he swung a few times with the power fist.

By now, McKenzie came back, and he had his hands full of different weaponry. He dropped them down on a nearby table and started sorting them out. To Ed, he handed a bolter and several magazines of ammunition as well as a new power sword. Ed hung the bolter over his shoulder in its strap and fastened the power sword with its sheath in a mag-lock in his belt.

To Edd, he gave a bluish-white Force Sword. As Edd touched it, the sword began glowing lightly, reacting to the touch of a psyker. McKenzie also handed him a sheath for the Force Sword and a holstered plasma pistol. Edd placed both at his belt with mag-locks.

To Eddy, McKenzie gave a single bolter. But the bolter had a grenade launcher fastened to it, underneath its ordinary barrel. McKenzie gave him several magazines of bolter ammo and a belt of grenades. Lastly, McKenzie turned to Kevin.

"So, Kevin, I see you've found your place amongst us. The armour of the captain of the 8th Assault Company fits you."

"Hey, you pointed it out to me..." Kevin said meekly.

"Never mind..." McKenzie knocked the correction aside easily. "You are now Captain of the 8th Company. I present you with a combibolter-flamer." McKenzie handed Kevin the bolt gun he'd been carrying. It looked like an ordinary bolter, just that underneath the barrel, just like Eddy's, it had another weapon. A flamethrower. McKenzie also gave Kevin several bolter magazines and a few extra petroleum flasks for the flamer.

"Every flask is good for about three or four shots, depending on how long you pull the trigger. You change weapon-mode there." McKenzie showed Kevin how to use the bolter-flamer. He also

showed Eddy how to launch grenades with his weapon.

McKenzie then turned to Kevin again. "Nearly forgot; here." McKenzie handed a long silver dagger to Kevin. It glittered slightly as Kevin turned it in his hand. McKenzie touched a button on it for him. It started to give away a quiet whisper.

"That is a mono-molecular edged short sword. It is the kind that was used by the Space Marine scouts. It's quite capable of cutting through most stuff." McKenzie said simply and turned his back upon Kevin and turned to Rolf.

McKenzie pulled out a holstered bolt pistol out of nowhere it seemed and handed the weapon to Rolf. "Here you go, Rolf. I couldn't find any kind of lasgun, which I know you favour highly. I mean, that Yarrick favoured highly. So, I give you instead a bolt pistol of the finest craftsmanship. Take it!"

Rolf took the holstered weapon from the lean Marine and tied the leather strap of the holster around his waist.

The Kankers lost their precious little patience now.

"That's it!" Lee said. "What about us? When do we get snazzy stuff like you?"

The boys and men turned to the four girls. They all had looks of disbelief on their faces. McKenzie couldn't blame them.

"I... I'm afraid we really don't have any armour designed for the female form here, because, well... " McGranth was lost for words for just a second. "Because there never were any female Space Marines, 'cause the bio-implants don't react with female hormones! There, it's said!"

Marie looked at the Grand Commander. "So, you mean we won't get any armour then?"

"Sorta... " McGranth replied, feeling very uncomfortable.

"Wait a second, Eddie!" McKenzie exclaimed with joy. "I do think we have some Sisters armour here!" McKenzie gestured them to follow. "Come, I'll show you!"

The four girls followed in tow with McKenzie, leaving the other boys alone. Charleston started to show them around a bit. McKenzie showed the girls to a section of the Armoury that was very off from the rest. He tapped in a code in a lock and a door hissed open in the wall before them. Striking on the lights, four suits of Sister's of Battle armour in alcoves became visible. Each suit was painted black with red trims. An emblem, which would've been known as the French Lily on Terra, was embedded on each of the suits lower left leg armour. These lilies were in silver. There was cloth on the suits, in the form of coverings for the upper arms and as loincloths. They were coloured white with red borders, and on the borders of the loincloths, an Imperial verse of Faith was embroidered with gold wire. McKenzie showed them each a suit, and as the girls got themselves into the suits, which were a bit easier to get into than the Eds', and also lighter, McKenzie went to fetch some weaponry. This effectively removed him from their presence as they got suited up.

When McKenzie came back, with a handful of weapons, all of them were in their armour.

"This stuff is heavy." Nazz said flatly as she shifted in her suit. A jump pack of the more ornate and lighter design was situated on her back. The Kankers wore the ordinary Sister back pack. Under Nazz's jump pack, a long cloak was fastened and it spread out behind her, only just not touching the floor.

"Get used to it," McKenzie said as he tried to get some reason to the weapons in his arms. "And believe me, you'll be better off wearing it, than not, there are dangerous times ahead."

With that, he strolled out of the small room and closed the door with an elbow as the girls got out of there. After that, they went back to the boys. As they got there, McKenzie handed out the weaponry to the girls. To Lee, he gave a bolt pistol, bolt clips and a long, thin, rapier-like power sword. Lee took them and hung them around her waist, the power sword resting in its sheath.

To Marie, McKenzie gave similar equipment, with the difference of that her power sword was

shorter. She did the same with her weapons; she hung them around her waist.

To May, he gave a flamethrower, of a lighter construction, but still as deadly, and a bolt pistol with clips. He also gave her some flasks to the flamer, which were obviously much bigger than those that Kevin had gotten.

McKenzie turned to Nazz, got something longing in his eyes, and finally handed her weapons. It was one hefty bolter, the kind that Ed had gotten, with clips and a sheathed sword. When Nazz had hung the bolter over her shoulder in its strap, she pulled out the sword. She saw her own reflection in the finely polished steel. Or was it some sort of silver? She couldn't decide. McKenzie handed Nazz one final thing, and it was a tiny little necklace. It looked like a twin-headed, golden eagle, with a red gemstone set in the middle. In the gemstone, a tiny sliver of something was situated.

McKenzie explained: "That, is a Rosarius. It contains a sliver of the Emperor's own armour. As it protected him against Karzhan, it will protect you against the Necrons."

"Okay, if that sums your show-off up, McKenzie..." McGranth said, clapping his hands together. "I'm only going to say this once, these are tools, not toys, and you're not really trained on how to use them to the maximum. So don't use them, unless you really have to!"

May was fidgeting with something on her flamer. "Hey, what does this thing do?" She examined it a little closer, and pressed.

"Oh, that's a..." McKenzie began, but was cut short by a spurt of fire from the flamer in May's hands. Everyone dived to the floor as the flames licked their backs.

"...Flamer." McKenzie finished, looking up. May had accidentally pressed the button that cleared away unwanted dirt from the nozzle of a flamer.

"May," Lee said sourly "Stop fooling around!"

"Sorry." May replied sheepishly.

McKenzie just smiled. There was some strange humour to it all. Suddenly, he felt something tugging at him. He looked down at Johnny.

"Hey, what about me?" Johnny asked.

"I've got something special in mind for you, Johnny. Follow me." McKenzie replied with a grin.

As Johnny and McKenzie left the Armoury, the others followed. The thirteen left the huge chamber behind and McKenzie sealed it once again. The other walked to the main hall, but McKenzie took Johnny with him to his old workshop. It was a couple of rooms. One was devoid of furniture, just a strange icon painted onto the floor. The others, bar the one where McKenzie's bed was situated, were in a mess, to say the least.

"These used to be my quarters." McKenzie said as he made his way to his desk. "Amazing, everything seems untouched." He started going through some old pergaments. To sort the stuff out would take ages, so McKenzie decided just to find what he was looking for.

Johnny stood dumbstruck at the entrance. "Untouched?" he gasped. "It looks like a tornado hit this place. My room isn't even this bad."

McKenzie looked up with an apologizing smile on his lips. "Eh, heheh, that's not important right now..." He looked around the room. He took away strange looking mechanisms from stools and mouldy looking unnameables from other places. "Where did I put it? A thing that big... A ha!"

From underneath a big pile of rusty old steel things and dust, McKenzie drew out a large trunk. He blew most of the dust off, got the mandatory cough-attack and looked down on the finely carved symbols. Both human and alien symbols adorned the trunk.

"This was given to me by some very special friends of mine, a long time ago. And I like to give it to you now." McKenzie said as he opened the trunk and took away some silk covers. "I was given it to study, but you, could probably use it to its full power..." He muttered as he

pulled out the first thing. It was a black and bone-white suit of Eldar so-called rune-armour. It hung together in one piece, each centimetre adorned by an alien rune of some kind. McKenzie put it cautiously down on the floor beside him.

"What is that?" Johnny asked astonished. He reached down and touched it lightly. He felt a sudden tingling feeling inside his body. To Johnny, and only unto him, Plank whispered his thoughts...

"It's Eldar rune-armour," McKenzie said flatly. "Try it on. Let's see if it fits."

And so they did. Johnny first got into the trousers, then the strange boots. He put on the armoured 'shirt' and slid into the chest plate. McKenzie offered him gloves, but Johnny simply put them in the belt. McKenzie also took out a black and bone-white robe from the chest. He helped Johnny put it on, took a step back, looked the youngster over, and smiled. "So alike... so alike..." McKenzie muttered to himself, so Johnny wouldn't hear.

"Well, what do you think?" McKenzie said to Johnny.

"Wow..." Johnny said silently. "This is the coolest thing I've ever seen. It feels as if it weighs nothing at all..."

"Glad you like it, Johnny." McKenzie said and sat down on a stool after removing all things from it. "Now listen, there's something I need to ask you."

"What is it?" Johnny asked and sat down opposite to McKenzie.

"I don't know quite how to put this, so I'll just say it; do you believe in psychic abilities?" McKenzie asked clasping his hands in front of him.

"Psychic? You mean, like mind power?" Johnny asked astonished?

"Yes, Johnny, mind power," McKenzie replied, running a hand through his hair. He felt a bit unnerved. "You see; I am a psyker."

"Really?" Johnny took the fact with calmness. He didn't know the dangers a psyker put himself to by even breathing in the Imperium.

'Here goes.' McKenzie thought to himself as he gathered air for what was coming next. "Yes, Johnny, and I believe you also have psychic powers."

Johnny looked shocked. "What?"

"Yes, you heard me. Johnny, I've felt your power. I can feel it even as we speak. You're an enormous psychic potential." McKenzie refrained from saying that he was happy he found Johnny before his puberty had begun seriously. Fledgling psykers attracted deamons in spades.

Johnny moved a bit uneasy on his stool. "You're kidding, right?"

"No, Johnny, I'm quite serious." McKenzie replied, his voice not higher than a whisper, but it carried clearly through the air. The tone was gravely serious. "I think your psychic powers could become incredibly useful, and powerful, if you'd be trained properly. Therefore, I ask you of your permission to let me teach you to control these powers."

"Well, I don't know..." Johnny said, tracing his fingers over Plank. McKenzie held his breath; this was no good sign! Had the deamons taken him already? "I guess it wouldn't hurt to try."

McKenzie exhaled. "Good, wonderful that you accepted. By the way, Johnny, to use an old cliché: There is no try, either you do, or you don't." Johnny chuckled, but there was a nervous tone to it. McKenzie got up and turned his back upon Johnny. "I'd like to give you a thing, see."

McKenzie took down a long, wooden box from a shelf. He put it cautiously down unto the floor, after clearing away some things, and opened it. Before McKenzie opened it, Johnny saw some strange runes upon it. He couldn't know, but the runes were Eldar and read: **Kuruni hyanda ta nallam ilsanienaite**. (*That means: Witch blade that cries silver tears.*) McKenzie pulled out the sword resting in the case and held it up. It was a long, elegantly shaped and had runes on it as well. The runes meant Silver Tear Blade or, in Eldar: **Ilsa Niire Hyandar**. The parrying bar was of a smooth and fine design, far from the rugged and gothic-looking design of

the Yarrickian sword's eagle. The witchblade, which will be referred to as **Niire** from now on, had a small gemstone just above the grip, set into the Wraithbone that made the parrying bar. McKenzie held it out before him. He looked at it for a moment, and then it started to glow slightly. He put it down tip first on the floor and let go of the grip. The sword remained upright! It didn't fall or anything. It remained still and upright. Johnny looked at the blade, astonished. If he had needed any further proof that this blade was manufactured by an alien race, he didn't any more. It had perfect balance, and that was just the beginning. McKenzie spoke.

"This, Johnny, is an Eldar Witchblade. It is used by Eldar Warlocks and Farseers, and to great efficiency. It works in a similar way to our force weapons, with the big exception that this weapon is made out of a material we humans can't copy, and that it has, as you see, perfect balance. Only one other human manufactured blade has perfect balance, and that is the sword that Rolf is carrying."

McKenzie paused to let this sink in. "Now Johnny, a long time ago, I had contact with an Eldar world. They were kind, in the strange way that Eldar are. You see, Eldar don't think as narrow-mindedly as we humans, they have broader visions. Sometimes so broad that they are misunderstood for deceit and evil by us humans." Silently, to himself so Johnny wouldn't hear, McKenzie added: "Like the famous commissar-general did... "

McKenzie turned to Johnny again. "Anyway, I got this from an Eldar Farseer of the Iyanden Craftworld. His name was Indyo e Pereldar: a mighty psyker indeed. Back then, just as now, I was a Master Lexicanum. That's my title Johnny; remember it. He gave the sword to me, as a gift. I'd helped his people with many hard-ships. They thought me trustworthy perhaps, or maybe they just foresaw this, I don't know. It just, that, now I want you to have it, because you'll have more use of it than me. I have my Force Sword. It's a dear companion of mine, and I wouldn't change it for anything. So I think you should have Niire."

With a slightly shaking hand, Johnny grabbed the sword after a moment of silence. He held the sword in his hand, turned it a few times.

"It doesn't weigh anything... " He mumbled. By now, McKenzie had picked out a sheath for the witchblade and was fastening it around Johnny's body, so he would carry it much like Rolf did. McKenzie noted the slight shimmering from Niire, a note that it was held in the hands of a psyker, though an untrained one. Johnny put the sword in its sheath as McKenzie had fastened it.

"Cool, this is great... " Johnny went silent for a while. At least he knew why he'd felt so odd lately. "Oh, McKenzie, can I ask you something?"

"What is it?"

"Hmm, do you think you could find some armour for Plank?" Johnny held up the board so that McKenzie could see.

"Uh..." McKenzie hesitated, searching for words. "I don't think we have anything that would fit him." The slim Marine added a smile as he finished.

"Oh, okay..." Johnny fell silent for a while as McKenzie picked away the chest and the box. "I'm gonna show the others my armour." Johnny said and stepped out of McKenzie's workshop and quarters. He ran off, towards the main hall.

"You do that Johnny." McKenzie said as he stepped out and closed the door firmly. As he followed the sprinting youngster, McKenzie rolled his eyes and sighed. "Oy vey... "



The two soon joined the others. McKenzie wanted to start Johnny's training right away, just to make sure that he would be able to resist the temptations from demons, which they probably would encounter. The training consisted of mind focus mostly, i.e. to be able to hold things in mid air, stop flying objects etc. The others watched with interest as McKenzie taught Johnny step by step how to tap into the Warp, use its power and, most importantly, control it. Johnny was a quick study, to McKenzie's relief. It was easy to make Johnny focus, to teach him to control the powerful Warp magics and to make him hold objects in mid-air. Johnny trained with a candlestick out of brass, which McKenzie thought was good enough. As Johnny learned to lift

the candlestick, McKenzie picked it out of the air with his fist, gave it Johnny and told him to throw it at him.

"But, I'll hit you!" Johnny protested.

"Just throw the candlestick, Johnny!" McKenzie ordered and stood himself a bit away from Johnny. Johnny hefted the candlestick in his hand, for weight measure, before he threw it straight towards McKenzie. The candlestick slowed down and stopped a few inches from McKenzie's face. He picked it out of the air and told Johnny what to do.

"Everything is relative, including speed and mass. Imagine it to be a none moving feather, and you will be able to stop it Johnny." McKenzie said and thre the candlestick towards Johnny. The poor lad tried to imagine that the heavy thing was a light feather, almost succeeded and had to throw himself clear of a candlestick that moved slightly slower than before. McGranth caught it behind Johnny. The Grand Commander threw the candlestick back to McKenzie.

"Johnny, we'll go this over and over, until you get it right, see?" McKenzie said and threw it again. Five times later, Johnny could brake the speed of the candlestick enough so that he could pick it out of the air. As he took the candlestick, McKenzie walked over to him.

"Just one final thing," the Master Lexicanum said, "I want you to bend the arms of the candlestick, so that they point downwards. Alright?"

Johnny looked up at McKenzie. "I mean it. It's not so hard. Use your mind Johnny." McKenzie urged.

By now, Edd stepped up. "It's actually quite easy Johnny. Remember when we saw 'The Matrix'? To quote: 'There is no spoon'." Edd blinked towards Johnny. "You bend yourself, not the candlestick. Believe me, it's how it works." Johnny nodded his approval and focused on the candlestick.

"There is no spoon..." He mumbled under his breath. This made Edd smirk. And wouldn't you know it? A few moments later, the candlestick arms hung like rubber. McKenzie gave Johnny a hearty slap on the back, a slap that made Johnny drop the candlestick. The arms of it clanged against the stone floor, still in the bent position, as hard as ever.



A bit away from the others, Rolf was standing all alone, watching the fledgling psyker train. He was happy for Johnny's part, but one part of him despised what Johnny was; a psyker, a witch! He knew what part. It was the part that once had belonged to an Imperial Hero: Commissar-general Rolf Yarrick. The man had been a good friend of McKenzie, but he'd despised all other psykers. Hypocrisy, maybe, but he couldn't stop the feeling of chill inside him as he watched Johnny bend the candlestick arms. He didn't notice when Nazz walked up to him.

"What is Rolf?" she asked softly.

Rolf turned his face to look at her, his green eyes meeting her blue. "You wouldn't understand," he replied sadly. Nazz put her hand on his arm, leaning closer to him.

"You can tell me," she urged. Rolf got out of her grip.

"I said you wouldn't understand, and that is final."

"It's Johnny, right?" Nazz said, crossing her arms over her bosom and cocking her head, as she looked the tall and sinewy young man that Rolf was.

Rolf sighed. He might just as well tell her. "Yes, it is. I'm glad that he has a hidden talent. But, I am sickened over the fact that it had to be psychics." Seeing Nazz's quizzical look, he decided to explain. "I share a soul with another man, Nazz. And this man was trained to destroy untrained psykers and other mutants and humanity's enemies. It was his duty, his work. It turns my gut to see that Johnny might even outclass such a powerful psyker as McKenzie, and he's still at the tender age of 14!"

"Oh my." Nazz gasped lightly. "Why? Why do you despise psychics so, Rolf, they haven't you, have they?"

"Oh, they have. For a start, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for psychics, none of us would. Secondly, what do you think deamons are? They are nightmares given form, and they come from the place that psykers take their power from, the place known as the Warp. So psykers can easily be attacked by deamons, and deamons want to destroy everything mortal. Understand now, Nazz?"

Nazz nodded slowly. "I believe I understand..." With that, she left Rolf alone to join the others. They started to gather madrasses so they had something to sleep on. One by one, they all went to sleep. Not before Johnny had gone to bed and was fast asleep, did Rolf get out of the coat and go to sleep he to, but it was wretchedly he slept.



McKenzie awoke. He simply threw his eyes open, his mind scanning the surroundings. It was in the middle of the night. McKenzie threw an eye towards one of the many windows around him. The moon was in the first window. Just after midnight then. He got up and walked softly out of the main hall. He felt that someone was missing, but couldn't really pinpoint whom, yet. It was someone in deep contemplation though. He followed the trace of the mind, a non-psychic obviously, and found himself walking higher and higher in the circular construction that was the Death Angel Fortress Monastery. He came out on one of the fine marble balconies, one of the few still alive. The climbing-trees that hadn't been tended for had grown just as wildly as the Hadesian crystal oak. They had grown so much that one could sit on branches far out in the air, if one felt for it and weighed just beneath 60 kilos. McKenzie guessed one could reach the ground with one of those now. He'd used them for climbing when he'd been a neophyte, but often got punished for it.

Out on a stone-bench, Rolf was sitting all alone, resting his head in his hands, and looking at the stars in the far horizon. He seemed oblivious to McKenzie's presence. McKenzie walked forward, his armoured boots clanging melodiously and quietly towards the marble floor.

"I admit the stars of Ichar's night-sky are beautiful, but shouldn't you try to get some rest?" McKenzie said softly, his voice not more than a whisper, but still carrying clear. He was startled that Rolf didn't move at his sudden coming. The young man had removed the sword from his back, as well as the peaked cap, and let the cool night breeze blow through his blue hair, the camouflaged greatcoat buttoned up to his chin. It was a bit cold, McKenzie had to admit. Rolf just turned his eyes to McKenzie, and smiled as he spoke.

"Ah, McKenzie, come sit with me." McKenzie did as he was told. He couldn't really relax as Rolf had, because of his backpack, but he tried.

There were a few moments of silence. McKenzie now too felt the chilly breeze in his hair. Rolf looked around a few times before he turned to McKenzie again. There was sorrow in the lad's eyes.

"I am troubled, my friend." Rolf said as he leant forward once again, this time dropping his hands between his legs.

"How so?" McKenzie asked.

"Over the past few years," Rolf spoke softly, which actually unnerved McKenzie, "I have noticed a change in myself, not only the changes that come with puberty and growing up, but changes that disturb me a lot.

"You have said that Rolf Yarrick is gone from me now, except some of his memories. That's what you said a few years ago, but I believe there's more left of him than I want. I have found myself behaving and reacting like would've. Sometimes, I wake up early in the morning, convinced I am still on Callidus. And that's only the beginning. I have tried to remember the village I was born in and spent my early childhood in, but I can't. Even now, as I try hard, I can only remember the Callidussian village that Rolf Yarrick was raised and lived in until..." Rolf's voice trailed off. He started on a new track. "Anyway, I feel that I am losing myself, McKenzie. As time goes by, there is more the Imperial Hero Commissar Rolf Yarrick, and less of Rolf, me.

"I am afraid, McKenzie. So afraid... That I might lose myself altogether."

McKenzie didn't reply immediately. He'd listened intently, and was trying to find an answer,

that wouldn't scare the boy too much.

"You did absorb his spirit when the Spirit Ball malfunctioned and broke down. It took you, cause you were his doppelganger. There are many reasons as to why you change. One is that there is a struggle in you, and only one soul can inherit a body, and it seems Yarrick's is prevailing. The other reason I can think of is that Yarrick never was done with this world. He died with many things undone. He didn't want to rest. And now, he's been given a second chance in you, and has taken it. It's my mistake, perhaps. I should've let him die there on Callidus..."

McKenzie went silent and then spoke again. "The simplest solution is to give in Rolf, how little you like it. Let Yarrick take over, and when you die, so does his soul, with you. You'll never know, maybe you can become an officer in the Army, eh?"

"I don't know," Rolf replied, shifting uneasily.

"Either that, or you'll remain slightly schizo the rest of your life. I don't know really Rolf, I'll have to study this..."

McKenzie snapped his head up sharp. He'd heard something.

"What's wrong?" Rolf asked, genuinely confused.

"Quiet, there's something in the tree." McKenzie hissed. "Stay here."

Rolf watched McKenzie move. The psyker blended with the shadows in a way that shouldn't be possible with his bright red armour. Rolf concluded to himself that McKenzie simply had wrapped the shadows around himself. He barely saw him, and the movements were ginger and feline. Suddenly, it seemed, McKenzie had leapt at something in the tree before him.

Rolf heard a heart-piercing shriek and flew to his feet. McKenzie unravelled the shadows around himself, and walked towards Rolf, holding a creature by the collar of its shirt at arms length from him. It was small and wiry, around 1m60, with a disproportionately large head. It had elongated ear, black eyes and green skin; a Gretchin. The little Gretchin, or grot as they were called for short, Rolf suddenly remembered through Yarrick, was shouting something with its strident voice, something in Orkish that Rolf didn't understand at all. And it was probably best so, because whatever it was, it sounded very rude and very obscene. McKenzie put the Grot down and Rolf instinctively pulled his newfound friend, the bolt pistol. He hadn't that one away. The Grot understood this very obviously and remained very silent, and very still, until McKenzie had gone back to get McGranth and Charleston. McKenzie told Rolf to get to bed, and at least TRY to sleep. Rolf resisted a while, but McKenzie was adamant, and Rolf finally gave in to pure exhaustion.

As Rolf had left, the three Marines loomed over the poor Grot. The look on its face said that it wanted to be somewhere else, like another planet for example. But it was also halfway through being indignant at the same time as it wanted to run for its own miserable life. McGranth bent down, his armour whirring as he moved and got so close to the Grot's face so that he almost could brush the creature with his moustache.

"What do you want?" McGranth asked as threatening as a knife.

The Grot gathered himself together and took all his courage to him that he could. It wasn't much. He tried to stand upright, but it was impossible due to one part of him was scared white, or at least a pale hue of green. He opted for the mode, which would be described to us as 'South State Afro-American Slave'.

"Please surr, I not bovvver anyun, I is jus' skout. Dere a report uv oomans in big bilding, dere be no humans on Eekar for long time now. So, I come ta see if it true."

"Where's your, whaddy call it, Waaagh? Is it near here?" McGranth asked. His voice had lost a tad of its threatening edge.

The Gretchin snorted. "I, Wizznag, is not membrur of Waaagh anymore, I is membrur of da Gretchin Revulutionaree Committee."

McKenzie looked ponderous at this. "Gretchin revolution. Sounds like Sebastian to me. He

always had his ideas about Orks... "

Wizznag looked up at the tall, slim Marine. "I've no idea 'oo dis Sebbastiun is, but I've do know dat da founder uv da GRC was named Mosgit, an' Mosgit claimed to 'ave served da Bale Eye, before 'e was killed by da big demun."

Charleston looked puzzled. "Bale Eye. Where have I heard it before?"

"It was a nickname the Orks gave Sebastian after he lost his eyes and had that implant, remember?" McKenzie freshened Charleston up. "But, GRC, was Sebastian Yarrick behind that?"

"Ah, now I know wot you mean. Yarrick, why not youse say so? Yes sur, 'e helped us Grots create the GRC. We Grots was tired uv bein' treatud like animals. So, we escape, unner Mosgit's lead, and we work togevva for Gretchin rights!"

"That still doesn't explain why you're here!" Charleston growled as his right hand traced down to his holstered plasma pistol.

"I was brought as slave, sur," Wizznag whimpered. He knew what a plasma pistol could do. "Two Waaaghs come; Waaagh Nazdreg and Waaagh Ghazghkull, after da humies left, dey both claim wurd and fite over it."

"I thought you said there weren't any Waaaghs here." McGranth said, looking suspicious.

"Dere isn't sur, not anymore. Strange metal men come, Orks fite, but metal men fiit bevvar, losta Orks die. Den, dis huge metal man come, 'e must be boss uv metal men, calls his self Metallix. Anyways, he comes, want ta fite with warbosses Nazdreg an' Ghazghkull. Dey both fite very good, but metal boss fite bevver. 'E kills 'em, metal men den kill all Orks. Some uv us Grots escape, hide. The Gretchin Revolutionaree Committee come, find us. Dey says we free now."

Charleston had a dark look on his face. "Necrons... how dare they set foot on Ichar!"

McGranth, on the other hand, looked puzzled. "You said the humans left, Wizznag. Where did they go?"

"Dey run away sur, away from metal men. I hear some uv dem say, dat dey go to place called Call-ee-dus. Dey think dey'd be safe dere, some humans disagree, stay and fite. But metal men kill dem sur. Not all was killed though, metal men take some alive, maybe make slaves uv 'em."

Wizznag looked up at McKenzie, who'd been quiet for a long while now. Something seemed to go up for him.

"Youse odd-boy, am I not rite, Bluddy boy?" Wizznag asked, having lost some of his innate politeness. He fumbled his pockets for something.

McKenzie looked down on the creature. "Yes, I'm a psyker, why are you wondering?"

The Grot finally found what he was looking for and pulled out a slightly dusty and rusty Imperial data-slate and handed it up to McKenzie.

"See, a long time ago, Mosgit got dis from da Bale Eye. Bale Eye wanted Mosgit to hand it to da tall, thin odd-boy wiv a tatoos over 'is eye. Dat's you, no? Now, Mosgit, never got to that, so he passed da slate on, and now it wos in me hand, so I've wos jus' lucky ta meet you." Finishing that, Wizznag grinned. He'd been a good Grot, fulfilling his duty to the GRC's founder.

McKenzie had flipped open the old data-slate. The information was still readable, only a few letters missing. The battery wasn't low, it hadn't been opened by any curious grot or anything, it seemed. He read it through. He read it through again. It seemed to be the lyrics for a song. Charleston was suddenly at McKenzie's side, reading over his shoulder.

"Looks like the lyrics for Number of the Beast to me... " Charleston muttered. He'd heard McKenzie play that particular song many times. "Half of it is the same any way."

"We already have encountered genetical copies of ourselves Ed, so why not songs?" McKenzie said as he snapped the data-slate shut. "It's a great, big universe, and we're really

puny."

McGranth looked down on Wizznag. "You, get out of here, and tell this Gretchin Revolutionary Committee of your, that this place is off limits. In clear text: Don't ever come here again. Other ways, I'll blow your green arse into the next world myself, capisco?"

"Yes sur, I tell 'em!" Wizznag replied, saluted clumsily and jumped up into the tree by the balcony. You could hear his shuffling as he made his way back down. There was a chattering far down, indicating that he hadn't been alone and the sound of running feet. Then there was silence.

McKenzie broke it. "So, they were going to Callidus. It makes sense. The Necrons must've started their attack on the fringe to the north, thus forcing people to flee further south into the Imperium, herding them together like sheep." McKenzie made a short pause. "Secondus is where we should go next..."

"Why not Callidus?" McGranth asked.

"I have this itch..."

"I don't know, McKenzie..." Charleston said and scratched his rugged chin. "I and the lieutenant commander didn't find too much fuel. So, I'm not sure we have enough to make it too Secondus... unless we want an ungraceful landing."

"We'll have to try, Commander." McGranth said and patted his big friend on his shoulder. After that, he yawned. "Urgh! Let's go back to bed."

The next day, they all made ready early to leave. McGranth explained the situation to them. After this, he sent Charleston to herd them back to the Night Hawk and strap them in, while McKenzie and McGranth went through most of the Monastery. They locked every single door they could find. McKenzie even flooded the underground tunnels, which actually were home to many Orks who still lived, but no one would notice their passing. As that was done, McKenzie and McGranth bid one last farewell to the place that once had been their home and went up the many stairs to join the others in the Night Hawk.

The Night Hawk lifted from the platform and left Ichar's surface behind it. As it was a quite long way to Secondus, even with the Imperium's superior technology, it took several hours for the trip to pass. This trip would with our simple technology taken a year, but none-the-less it became boring for the thirteen Imperial Warriors. Each and every one tried to find a way to distract themselves. McKenzie toyed with an Imperial Galaxy chart, Kevin counted stars, Rolf tried to suppress Yarrick's memories as they became too unpleasant and the Kankers played some guessing game. Charleston was preoccupied with guiding the Night Hawk. It travelled at a speed of nearly 175 000 kph, and thrusters blazing. As they approached Secondus, Charleston struck the retros. Too steep dive and they'd be incinerated. The passing through the atmosphere was harmless, due to Charleston's skill, but as he turned on the inter-atmospheric drive, a lamp started to blink on the control panel and a buzzing sound was heard.

The buzzing sound woke Eddy, who'd been dozing off. "Now what?" he asked curtly.

"We're low on fuel," Charleston replied incredibly calmly. "I'll be able to land us, now we're through the atmosphere, but we have no brakes whatsoever, so it's going to be a bumpy landing!"

McGranth planted his feet firmly on the deck plate. "Brace yourselves!"

Charleston threw a glance out the vision slit. He was shocked to see that it was engulfed with flames. He'd forgotten a crucial detail: Secondus atmosphere was thicker than Ichar's, due to the fact it was closer to the star Betelgeuse. As they hit the upper layers of the inner biosphere, they cold air superheated around them, causing 'dents' in the air. The Night Hawk skipped and rocked violently, so violently Charleston was thrown out of his chair. He soon got back into it though, throwing a glance backwards, seeing that everyone was bouncing around, bar himself, McGranth and Eddy, the other two due to the weight of their armoured suits.

Kevin smacked his back into the roof and landed on the floor with a thud. As he regained his

breath he cursed and spat at Charleston: "Haven't you people ever heard of seatbelts?"

Charleston turned to look at the young man. "Look, this is not the time... huh?" This last remark was aimed towards what Charleston saw through the flame licked vision slit. Both Kevin and Charleston gaped at what they saw through it, then, they screamed. They were heading straight towards the very solid side of a mountain! Charleston grabbed hold of the control stick and yanked it towards himself, sending prayer to the Emperor and all his Saints that their speed was enough to make the flaps work. It did. The ship slowly rose, higher than the mountain, but it wasn't enough. The tail of it smacked against a ridge, destroying one flap, half a wing and two engines. The ship careened towards the ground, turning over end.

After a minute of free, uncontrolled crash-diving, the Night Hawk finally hit the ground in a spray of dirt, rocks and various parts of it. It flipped over end again one, two, three times. It finally came to rest three kilometres from the first crash site, skidding to a halt. The Night Hawk was caked in dirt, wings missing, missiles gone, every centimetre of it burnt and blackened.

Inside, the group was picking themselves up and together. McKenzie got up and made a quick count of people. He turned to Charleston.

"I'll say this my friend; you're a great pilot, but you really need to work on your landings."

Charleston glared at his friend, but McKenzie just responded with a big, gap-toothed grin. "Oh, like you could do better?" Charleston snorted.

"Cut it, you two." McGrath cut them off. "Is everyone alright?"

"I'll live..." Kevin groaned as he got up. His back was sore after the bouncing around. He thought the armour was meant to protect, but he'd felt every bounce.

"May, get off me!" Marie said as she tried to wriggle out underneath he sister.

"Aw, quite whining!" was May's curt reply as she got up and recollected her flamer.

Edd motioned to Ed that they'd had to help Eddy up. In the crazy dive, Eddy had fallen off his feet and was having trouble getting upright. He felt like a turtle on its back. Charleston saw what was happening, went over, and lifted Eddy easily to his feet.

Edd looked around, concerned. "Where's Johnny?"

Suddenly, as if on que, a door to a small compartment came open, smacking Kevin in his head in the process, and Johnny rolled out of it, Plank in tow. "Woohoo! That was fun!" Johnny exclaimed happily. "Can we do it again?"

Everyone else just stared at him.

"What?" Johnny asked sounding genuinely confused.

McGrath was first to recall from this. "Come on," he said and gestured towards the exit door. Charleston and he meddled with it for a moment until they fianlly got it open. It opened the wrong way, it seemed on them, which confirmed their thoughts on that they were upside-down. McGrath jumped out first, followed by McKenzie, Charleston, the Eds, the girls and Johnny. Rolf was nowhere to be seen, but no one seemed to bother.

"I'm starting to feel grateful for this armour." Nazz said silently as she stroke the Rosarius on her chest.

"Okay," McGrath said, rubbing his hands together. "We need to find people."

"I don't think that should be a problem..." McKenzie said sheepishly as he gazed down the barrel of a hell pistol. The hell pistol was in the hands of a young man in a black uniform with blue trims on coat and peaked cap.

The others looked around as well. A collection of roughly thirty men and women in Imperial Guard issue uniforms was surrounding them. They were obviously led by the commissar cadet who was pointing his gun at McKenzie's face. The men and women were all holding lasguns or autoguns, the muzzle of each weapon aiming towards the Marines and company.

"And here, I thought hospitality was dead," Eddy remarked politely.