

# No Guts, No ED



"They came to take our land and lifes  
To terminate our race  
All across the galaxy  
They leave a deadly trace"

**--Excerpt of Iron Savior's Predators**



*(NOTE: There are two character names in here, which aren't my own (except the Yarricks), and these are Colonel-commissar Ibram Gaunt and Commissar General Delane Oktar. These are the (c) Copyright of Dan Abnett and GW Publishing Ltd. Other names that are (c) copyright of Games Workshop Ltd are; the Berzerkers, the Thousand Sons, the Plague Marines, the Noise Marines, the Night Lords, the Word Bearers, the Alpha Legion and the Black Legion)*

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On the planet Secundus (to be more exact, it's a giant moon around a gas-planet), the heart of the Galactic Imperium of Mankind is situated. Secundus surface is more or less completely given over to institutions, libraries and the like. Examples to be given are the Adeptus Ministorum, or the Ecclesiarch as it's commonly known, the Departamento Munitorum, the Imperial Palace itself and, one of its more well-known and both feared and revered institutions: The Commissarius Imperia (the Imperial Commissariat). This institution is relatively young, compared to the others, and it has strong links with the Ecclesiarch and the Munitorum, as well as the Imperial high politics too.

Now, its history of creation is a quite interesting one, a fairytale almost. It might seem odd, that an institution as influential and important as the Commissariat begun its being in a revolution. Strange? Perhaps. It depends on how you see it. All Imperial Commissars are known to be fiercely loyal to the Imperial Cause, devout followers of the Imperial Cult and good politicians and warriors to boot. A commissar leads from the front, using his charisma and fiery zeal to urge his fellow soldiers onwards, to defeat the enemies of Mankind. If a commissar isn't at the front, you can most surely find him attending duties such as making sure of the soldiers' well being, the purity of their faith, deal punishment to those who break the Law etc. A commissar rarely attends to staff-work, if he can avoid it. However, there are those few who enjoy an easy life along with good living in abundance. And it was this type of indulgent humans that born the opposite: the zealous political officers that are with the Guardsmen at the front.

It happened on the desolate industrial world of Moskva, a planet renowned for its fine steel-craftsmanship, oil findings and liquor. However, the system that governed Moskva was corrupt, to the core. By this time, which was around 235.000 Imperial Years (about 500.000 years ago, our counting), the Imperium had so-called political commissars situated on each planet, but they were far from the modern-day Imperium's zealous warriors. On Moskva, these "polkoms", as they got known by the local people, lived in abundance and luxury, while the people was

starving. And they seemed oblivious to the fact, the local politicians and governors backing them up. They could easily hide any proof from the High Lords, and they thought themselves invulnerable were they sat. However, they had slight problems with increasing crime. One of the polkoms suggested the introducing of what he called "narodny komissars": People's Commissars. His idea was that you took the hardest working man from each district, trained him in politics and Law, gave him a slight raise, a mark to show his new status and inserted him to work together with the local Arbiters. He would also make sure the workers in his district followed the Imperial and Moskvanian Laws. A brilliant idea all else thought in the council. Little did they know, that two hundred years after they'd clubbed through this plan, it would spell the doom of the High Polkom Council, and mark the start of a new era, both for Moskva and for the Imperium. And it would come in the shape of one man: Narkom Michailovitch Mischkin.

There are, both on Moskva and the Imperial Commissariat on Secundus, statues of Mischkin that depicts him as a tall man, well over two metres, of a strong and athletic build, with the distinct heavy nose of his people. What the statues can't depict is that he had emerald, piercing eyes and red-blond hair. There are few surviving records of Mischkin's past, but a few, tattered pergaments state that he was a common worker who'd proven himself worthy of narkom training. He'd passed the training and received the coat and cap and the insignia. But, what they don't state is that he never thought himself as more than a worker. Mischkin came to see the rifts in the society with the clearness like the light that a sun emits. He soon gathered the narkoms of the surrounding districts, and they formed into smaller councils themselves, consulting what to do, to prevent crime in their districts at first, but later, and to plan the revolution. Now, the Moskvanian word for council was "soviet", but the narkoms didn't call themselves soviets. They instead stripped off the "narodny" from their ranks, simply calling themselves Commissars.

The interest in Mischkin's council grew, as the news spread around Moskva, from industry district to district. Mischkin and his closest friends had to work undercover for many years, until the final result of their efforts came to day. And it truly came. Mischkin had welded together an army from nothing, his connections throughout Moskva making it possible to initiate a general strike all over Moskva. The hours that passed as the High Council tried to figure out the reasons to the strike was all Mischkin needed. His ragtag force of workers and Commissars stormed the seat of the High Council, the Winter Palace. It is said Mischkin led the attack himself, leading from the front, laying down a legacy that would carry throughout the years. It is also said that it was here that the insignia of the Imperial Commissariat was made, although there are no proof of it. The legend goes that Mischkin had struck down a PDF soldier, and had picked off the man's silver mark on his forage cap. Mischkin had stuck the winged skull upon his peaked cap, and continued his attack. His comrades had soon followed his example.

As the army breached the Outer Walls, it was easy to get to the centre of it all. Mischkin, with a company of seven friends of his, stormed the main council hall. Needless to say, Mischkin and his friends took no prisoners. The polkoms had managed to send out a distress signal, but when the Imperial forces arrived, months later, they found that it was no idea. Mischkin and his friends now controlled Moskva, and they did it good. In a few years, Moskva was changed to the better for all. The Imperial High Lords, having heard of the efficiency of the Commissars of Moskva, voiced their interest in founding the Imperial Commissariat. They didn't mention the fact that the dangerously increasing treason of Imperial Guard demanded something like this to be done, but Mischkin understood the point. Together with his three closest friends: Vassily Timoschenko, Ivanovitch Lorganov and Pytor Vonov, he made up the founding principles of the Imperial Commissariat. They also picked out a uniform to use, sticking with the coats and caps they knew. Little did Mischkin know what awaited him the week after the message was sent.

Mischkin never would live to see his work come to fruition, i.e. he never saw the Imperial Commissariat born. He fell suddenly ill after the message to the Imperium had been sent, and the diagnostic was clear: malign cancer in his heart-muscles, incurable in the Imperium but also very rare. The powerful man that Mischkin had been withered away in a matter of months. He became a tall, gaunt skeleton, his eyes sunken and weary. This was only a bi-effect of his weakened state. His weakening heart meant that he couldn't walk in the end, lame on both legs and one arm. He became completely bed-bound. His dear friend Timoschenko was the last one to see the legendary man alive. Timoschenko himself was a short, stocky man with brown hair and a build that suggested a massive physical strength and a natural rotundity. He wrote in his memoirs that he'd admired Mischkin very much, and was very pained to see him die as slowly as he did.

It was Timoschenko who reported that Mischkin was dead. He'd died while Timoschenko had gone out to get a message that had arrived, and to bring his dying friend something to drink. Timoschenko wrote in his book that: "Nothing has pained me so, as to step into that room, seeing a life-long friend dead. And I, a coming Commissar General of the Imperium, could do nothing but watch. And it pained me even more, when I understood what it was that was in the data-slate I'd received. Mischkin had known. He'd willed himself to live long enough to make sure I got the message... It's my belief he'd thought so. His Will also declared that he wanted me to take over. I remember at that time, that I'd wanted Lorganov to have fetched the message, instead of me..."

And Timoschenko had fulfilled his friend's will. He made the final fixing and twirking with the Commissariat. He'd settled for a uniform: black greatcoat and peaked cap with red trimmings and silver winged skull insignia adorning the peaked cap. He'd also, with help from the original hundred commissars, completed the huge volume that contains the Edicts and Dogmas of an Imperial Commissar. It had been mastodont work, but in the end, Timoschenko had pulled it off. He'd personally trained the first batch of commissars, and the Imperial High Lords had made him Commissar General. The Imperial Commissars weren't intended to have actual command of the forces they served with, but the High Lords thought it fitting that a select few could attain military rank. And so it was. Timoschenko's stocky shape can be found as a statue in the innermost sanctum of the Imperial Commissariat, standing together with his tall friend: Michail Mischkin.

This brings up to date with what a Commissar stands for. Mischkin wanted it clear that a Commissar led by example and from the front. "Don't ever tell soldiers what to do, unless you would do it yourself," is one of the first things a Cadet Commissar learns. He also learns many other things: to pull off a great, pompous phrase, guide those faltering in faith and much, much more. To make it simple: An Imperial Commissar is faith, courage and power impersonated. None is above his scrutiny. A commissar rarely thinks of humans as beings, but as tools in the Emperor's Service. This may earn them the enmity of many soldiers and officers, but it is needed, because unlike military officers, a commissar always acts with the Imperium's interests in mind, not the safety of the men he's commanding. With Commissar Generals, this is different, of course.

A Commissar has one more thing with him: Fear. Unruly soldiers and, indeed, officers, have many times faced the wrath of a Commissar. Soldiers can be put back in line with a simple punch, but officers are a different matter. More often than not, summary execution might be the only solution for a Commissar. Therefore, Imperial Guardsmen have learned just to fear and respect the very uniform of a Commissar. Summary executions are a rarity, but as soon as a colonel, captain or even a general wants to leave the battle behind and flee, the ever-present Commissar steps up and delivers the Emperor's Wrath.

Violence, however, is rarely a Commissar's first choice of action. If he/she can, the Commissar will use his/her pull and final say in a question. If that doesn't work, they switch on the charisma and lure them to act, as the Imperium wants. Female Commissars have an extra hand on this point. The last way is always summary execution.

Commissars are almost always the son or daughter of a deceased Imperial Official, i.e. a Imperial Guard officer, Administratum clerk, Planetary Governor's offspring etc. These orphans are sent to the spiritual school called the Schola Progenum, where they get trained in the Imperial Creed, Religion and the use of weapons. They also learn history and many other things, some of their own choice. They are trained by so-called Drill Abbots. The vast majority of the boys might become Navy Officers, Clerks, Preachers or Drill Abbots themselves. Relatively few chose to become Commissars, knowing what kind of life awaits them. As for the girls, a great many become Sisters of Battle. Only a handful of girls, on about fifty boys, chose to become Commissar. I.e. if fifty boys become Commissars, a maximum of five girls become it as well, and the training is years long and hard. On the contrary to what one might think, female Commissars are often more popular than their male counterparts, they succeed better in the Guard, and 96% of the girls who are picked out as Cadets finish their training (they don't get killed or fail in any other way), on the contrary to 54% amongst the boys. Imperial Statistics are still confused over why this is...

The Roll of Honour for the Commissars is long, very long. Over a billion names adorns the pages in the Book of Fallen Comrades in the Commissariat. This book is currently four volumes big, and it grows for every day, as ten names are added each day, at a minimum. Some of the greatest Commissars get statues erected after them. Notable Commissars, that should be

common knowledge to many Imperial Commissars, are: Commissar Michail Mischkin (counted as one as he founded the Commissariat), Commissar General Vassily Timoschenko, Commissar General Karl Reichard, Commissar Hans Wiedelmann, Commissar Elisabeth Hawkins, Colonel-commissar Ibram Gaunt, Commissar General Delane Oktar, Commissar Jean Bournemouth, Commissar Kiima Halonen, Commissar General Amadeus Chomaki, Commissar General Rolf Yarrick and his grand-son Commissar Sebastian Yarrick. These twelve Commissars all stand as statues in the Main Hallway of the Commissariat on Secundus.

The two lastly mentioned bring us to our heroes, who now are stranded on Secundus, in a not too pleasant situation.



The collection of twelve men, boys and girls looked at the Guardsmen and women before them. McKenzie was still staring down the barrel of the hellpistol the commissar cadet was wielding. McGranath and Charleston seemed to study the surrounding men and women, obviously judging their chances to escape from them, if it called for it. The odds came out hopelessly low...

From the distance, the distinct and pleasurable rumbling of a four-stroke, two cylinder motor could be heard. It came closer and closer. The black and red trimmed motorbike pulled up a few metres from the group. A man in a black greatcoat was sitting upon it. He seemed oblivious to the twelve warriors by the demolated Thunderhawk. The cadet commissar stepped away from McKenzie, lowering the hellpistol, but not holstering it.

"What the frekk is this?" the man growled. The Guardsmen and women turned to him and stood into attention. The cadet commissar ripped off a salute. The man on the bike got off and steadied it on the ground. As he walked up, the Eds saw immediately that he was a commissar. Black greatcoats were common, but the peaked caps with the silver winged skull weren't. The man wasn't big, just around 1m60, but he was well built. He wasn't fat, just too muscly for such a small body. He seemed to be in his mid-forties. He had dark hair, heavy features and piercing dark green eyes. He had an overall look that gave the impression he'd been forced to wear the commissars' uniform.

"Here I take you down to this valley, Cadet Jorun, for training exercises. Then I leave you for just an hour to report where you'll be training, and when I come back I find that you've taken off from the training site and-" The commissar turned to look at McKenzie, who'd coughed politely. "What in the name of the Emperor?"

Now the commissar finally noticed the Eds and company, the destroyed Thunderhawk transport and a lot of mud. It was a both tragic and insane scene. How had this happened? The commissar looked at the people before the upside-down Thunderhawk; two Terminator armoured Marines (which looked very much alike each other), two Marines in power armour and wearing jump packs (they also looked very much alike), three Marines in ordinary power armour, of which two looked alike and both wore the insignia of the Adeptus Astartes Librarium. There were also four girls in the power armour of the Sisters of Battle and a young boy wearing the shimmering and sickening alien armour of an Eldar psyker-witch. The only thing missing is a commissar, he thought darkly to himself.

The commissar was silent for a long while until he spoke, and it was with shock-blended fascination. "What in the blazes is all this? And who are you people?"

McGranath stepped forward, pushing back McKenzie gently. "Excuse me. I'm Grand Commander Eddie McGranath of the Death Angel Legio Astartes and these are..."

The short commissar cut him off. "You're a legendary Space Marine commander, who disappeared hundreds of years ago? Right, and I am Ghazghkull Thraka. You're most probably a bunch of renegades!" The short man pulled out a bolt pistol and aimed it at McGranath. "Give me one good reason not to deal you the Emperor's Grace."

Now McKenzie and Charleston stepped forward as well, to back their commander up. McKenzie's force sword glowed slightly as he touched it.

"Excuse me?" McGranath said and cocked an eyebrow as he looked down the bolt pistol's barrel.

"What is all this?" a familiar voice said from behind. Everybody present turned to look at the tall, lean shape of Rolf standing at the entrance of the Thunderhawk. Rolf's greatcoat had gotten caught in between the chairs inside, and he'd stayed behind to free himself properly. He'd heard the commotion outside, and had come out of the ship with his sword drawn. At least he had tried to pull it out, but the ancient blade had gotten stuck in its sheath and as Rolf pulled and tugged at it, he forgot that the 'Hawk was upside-down. When the sword finally came free, Rolf stepped out in mid-air, made a somersault and landed on his back on the ground. The sword dug itself into the ground beside his head.

"Rolf is not having a good day..." Rolf said weakly to himself as he lay on the ground.

The burly commissar saw Rolf in the commissar's uniform and was taken off guard. The coat was camouflaged, but there was no mistaking with the cap insignia. A golden Imperial Eagle, the modified insignia that had been used by the commissars serving in the armies from Callidus and Ichar.

"What the... Who is..." the short commissar stuttered forth. He turned suddenly silent when he saw the glittering adamantium sword with the golden parrying bar shaped like an Imperial Eagle sticking out of the ground next to Rolf.

"What in the name of the Emperor of Mankind?" the short commissar whispered. He turned and eyed over the soldiers before talking to the cadet commissar. "Take them to their transports. We're going back to base camp." Then he turned to the thirteen by the Thunderhawk.

"You lot, follow them to the Chimeras." he said and motioned to the armoured personnel carriers nearby. With that, he walked back to his motorbike and with the aid of two guardsmen they moved it into one of the Chimera APCs.

Meanwhile, the Eds helped Rolf up. Eddy looked at the short commissar with contempt in his eyes. "Well," he said simply. "The commissars are as charming as ever."

Rolf glared at Eddy, but didn't speak.

Putting on, what he hoped, was a charming smile, Eddy replied, "No offence, Rolfie-boy."

As they got to the Chimera APC, the commissar got his motorbike loaded up and walked in, his eyes glaring at the thirteen Terrans. Inside, he sat down in a corner, by himself. Charleston, McGranth and McKenzie and the girls went into the same Chimera as him. The Eds, Rolf, Kevin and Johnny moved into a second Chimera, along with the nervous looking cadet commissar and five guardsmen. As the six Terrans moved up to the Chimera, Edd and Eddy got in and seated. Ed, on the other hand, didn't want to go into the cramped, dark APC.

"It's dark in there," Ed stated simply.

Rolf lost his temper. "Ed, get inside, or you'll hurt... much!"

Ed scrambled inside, followed by Rolf, Johnny, Kevin, the cadet commissar named Jorun and the five guardsmen. Inside, Edd gave Eddy a look that said that all was not well with Rolf.

The drivers of the Chimeras received order to leave via vox-link with their commanding commissar. They ignited the enormous diesel engines of the APCs, the roaring of them deafened a bit by the armour plating on the tanks, and turning round, churning mud, the total of five Chimera transports turned and headed due east.



The ride back to what the short commissar referred to as 'base camp', was long and bumpy. McKenzie estimated it had took them 2 hours to travel, and he thought himself never to be able to sit properly again. As the Terrans got out of the Chimeras, they found themselves at a large compound. It was a huge base. It contained barracks, motor pool, machine shops and even a start and landing platform for interstellar ships. Everywhere there was Imperial Guardsmen milling around, but also many clerks in their stiff robes and red-robed members of the Adeptus Mechanicus. There was a few Sisters of Battle wandering around too, but they wandered in groups of their own and didn't mingle with the others.

The short commissar directed some guardsmen to get his bike off the Chimera and roll it off to a machine shop. After that, he gestured to the cadet commissar and spoke to him silently for a while. After that, the younger man left at a jog towards one of the barracks. McGranth had

had about enough of this now. He wanted answers and he wanted them now!

He grabbed the short commissar by the arm and spun him round abruptly. The short man glared contemptuously up at McGranth, as if the Marine just would dare to handle him like that!

"Look here Mac, who the frekk are you?" McGranth asked.

The short commissar shook himself free from McGranth's grip. "Commissar Colonel Tomas Masterson, that's who."

"Commissar colonel?"

"Is there a problem with that? I'm in charge of this planet's security." Masterson paused a moment. "And you just don't drop a Thunderhawk like that unto Secundus' surface without me knowing, right?"

"Right..." McGranth sighed. This was not good. He'd had his fair share of commissars' stubbornness in the past, Yarrick being a good example.

"Tomas, what is all this? What's going on?" Another commissar had joined them. He was taller, just under 1m80, with blond hair, hooded blue eyes, a powerful jaw and equally powerful build. There was something aristocratic about him, something that oozed out from him telling everyone else that he was a commissar and proud of it. It could've been charisma, if it hadn't been a tad repelling. He seemed to be in his late thirties.

"These people just crash-landed a Thunderhawk by the training site. Y'know, the thing we thought was an asteroid?" Masterson said to his comrade.

"Yes, I remember now. So?" The new commissar was silent for a while, then he spoke again. "Maybe I should present myself: I am Commissar Colonel Alexander Demontfurt. I'm second ranking of this here planet's Commissariat. Judging by the looks of your faces, I shall explain; the Imperium is not its glorious self, therefore the Commissariat is divided into groups, due to the constant deterioration of our com-nets." Here, Demontfurt threw a glance at Masterson. Masterson threw an acidic glance back. Then the shorter commissar left, attending to other duties.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I think it best you were dealt with by the Commissar General, don't you think so too?"

Demontfurt gestured the Terrans to follow him.

They entered one of the larger buildings in the compound. Its gate was adorned by a gilt, double-headed aquila, and Demontfurt opened the doors inwards, leading the way for the thirteen Terrans. A pair of Guardsmen in carapace armour closed the doors behind them.

Once inside, one couldn't believe that the Imperium of Man was deteriorating. There were marble pillars and floors, small, crystal plants and shrubs in pots. McKenzie was the first to notice the pictures: Fine oil paintings, depicting nothing less than the Liberation of Armageddon, the destruction of Juijaeg, the Gathalamor Uprising and even the Fall of Kharn. They passed a huge bronze statue of the Emperor too. Everywhere, there was political officers and ordinary Guard officers. There were also a few Canonesses from the Adepta Sororita and, McKenzie thought, even a lone Inquisitor, though he wasn't entirely sure.

The thirteen, along with Demontfurt, walked up two flights of stairs before the colonel-commissar stopped them. They were now in some sort of meeting chamber. There were oil paintings of famous Guard officers on the walls. The rest of the room was largely dominated by a mahogany table and a hololithic map projector.

"Wait here," Demontfurt told them before sneaking out through a door at the end of the room. The thirteen looked around, awed.

"One wouldn't believe the Imperium was falling apart, y'know." Charleston whispered.

McKenzie walked over to the projector. "In very fine condition. Maybe the Tech-adepts have learned something in the last two hundred years?"

"Like not relying in chants and such voodoo?" Charleston replied caustically.

McKenzie was just to reply with a very rude remark, when Demontfurt came back. But this time he wasn't alone.

"May I present," Demontfurt said and gestured to the accompanying figure. "Commissar General Yarrick."

Everyone stared at Demontfurt first, and then at the smaller figure by his side. A look of disbelief entered the face of every Terran. The commissar general was a woman, but still carrying the black, red-trimmed commissar's uniform with dignity. She was smaller than Demontfurt, just above 1m70, in her mid-forties, but still with a youthful looking face under the black, peaked cap. Her hair was bluish-black, just as Rolf's, and her eyes were an emerald green colour. But still, everyone present had problems with the fact that she was a woman.

"That'll be all, Alex. Excuse us." she said gently to Demontfurt, her voice having a tiny tint of Rolf's lilt dialect.

"Yes, sir," Demontfurt replied without thinking.

"Ma'am, Alex." the commissar general corrected.

"Yes, ma'am." And with that, Demontfurt left.

After Demontfurt had left, the female commissar general sadly shook her head. "He just can't get used to the fact that the Commissar General is a woman." She looked at the fish-faced group of Terrans. "And I see he's not the only one. Alex only introduced me formally, but most people around here know me either as Ma'am Yarrick, the Commissar General, or more familiarly: Tanya Yarrick."

A shocked silence followed, which was broken by McGranth. "What the fr..." He reminded himself he was in female company. "What is going on around here? I demand an explanation!"

"You'll get your explanation soon enough. You're Grand Commander McGranth, no? As you see, I know my history." Tanya looked at the sword sheathed on Rolf's back. "And that is-"

"Yes," Rolf interrupted. "The Yarrickian Family Sword, the Deamonlayer Sword." He knew the mantra.

"I almost didn't believe it when Tomas voxed me. Our precious family heirloom, intact and back in the Imperium. But, who might all you people be? I only know you three." Tanya gestured to McGranth, McKenzie and Charleston.

"Bit of a long story," Rolf sighed.

"I have time." Tanya replied with a charming smile. So Rolf, with the help of the others, told Tanya the entire story of how they got there. There was also a smaller introduction, with Tanya getting to know them all. She seemed a bit reluctant with Johnny, but she put up a good face none-the-less. They all had sat down by the mahogany conference table and talked for how long they didn't know. Tanya had ordered in something to drink and to eat. When they finished, the sun had already set on Secundus.

"So," Tanya said, putting down her glass of water. "The legend is true after all. The three Space Marine Commanders did survive Kharn's assault upon Secundus and escape through the Warp. It is wonderful to hear you've gathered more Heroes, and this will be a day to be long remembered, but I'm afraid you may have come too late."

"What do you mean?" McGranth asked, sounding worried, not very usual for him.

"I will explain." Tanya said. She picked out a tiny laser-disc from her pocket and put it in the data-reader of the hololithic projector. A golden aquila hovered in the air above the projector as Tanya pressed in her authorisation code. She took a remote and pressed a few buttons on it.

A picture of Guardsmen battling Deemons of Khorne came up. She showed it to them while she spoke. "After the defeat of Kharn, the Imperium settled into a relatively peaceful time. Many communication links and Warp-jump points had been severed, but we still remained somewhat intact. Of course, we were still harassed by stray warbands of Deemons," Tanya changed a picture to that of a charging horde of Hormagaunts. "And the Hive Mind occasionally. But all in all, it was a quiet time."

Tanya didn't change to a battle scene now; it was a sad picture showing a Space Marine without his gear, holding a small boy in his massive arms. Not quite what the group had expected. "Now, in an attempt to make sure no more renegades as powerful as Kevlinn would ever come back, the Imperial Government made the big mistake of disbanding the Space Marine Legions. Most Marines accepted their fates, and some settled back quietly as farmers.

Ichar's Death Angels were those that went most quietly. They accepted without question, but this almost killed Ichar as a planet. Without the Marines, Ichar was nothing. And this wasn't the only problem." Tanya showed a picture of an extremely spiky Marine, carrying the eight-pointed star of Chaos on its left shoulder pad. Its armour was dark blue with brass trimmings. "There were many Marines that turned from the Imperium entirely. Too many. The Imperial Government hadn't thought of this, being newly formed and untrained in this sort of politics. The only disbanded (mark that), Legions that remained loyal was the Death Angels, the Salamanders, the Iron hands and the Imperial Fists. All others turned renegade. They enslaved their home-planets and a few even took surrounding systems. These new Chaos Legions joined up along with the original four; the Berzerkers (leaderless), the Thousand Sons, the Plague Marines and the Noise Marines. Some of the renegade Legions took new names like the Night Lords, the Word Bearers, the Alpha Legion and the Black Legion. The Inquisition, or what can be called the Neo-Inquisition perhaps, carried out rapid punishment and bombed the planets with anti-matter bombs. However, there are still stray warbands of these renegades out in the space of this once glorious Imperium. That explains Tomas' reaction upon you, my power armoured friends."

Tanya changed picture again. The hol-projector showed Thunderhawks landing in the bays of a battleship.

"That's when refugees started to swarm in from the rim worlds like Fraonn, Moskva, Niiwar and Alantie. They first fled to the central systems, carrying tales of monstrous robotic men, mechanoids that thought, that were destructively well organised, almost like Hive Fleets. They assaulted worlds, killing or abducting entire populations. Nothing living stood in their way. The Magos Xenos dubbed them the Necrons, after an old text he'd found. It was in fact a report from Commander Charleston here."

Tanya changed picture to a huge footage of the Necrontyr. "Judging by your story, you've encountered the Necrons already, and know what the refugees had faced. And as time passed, more and more refugees poured in from the rim worlds, and later even from central systems like Sabal, Cathay and Amaith. When the new threat of Iron Men reached Ronan and former Space Marine home-world Nocturne, a huge fleet was gathered, along with million Guardsmen and two whole Orders of Sisters of Battle. They were to intercept this new threat and stop it. At least that was the plan."

Tanya now showed a battlefield footage taken at a scene of battle between Necrontyr and Imperial forces. "This crusade force found something far worse than we could ever have expected. The Necrontyr, as we got verified their designation was, had captured the entire northern border, and was on good way with the southern. They left charred, lifeless rock behind themselves, reminding us in a horrible way of the Hive Fleets, who used much the same method. Though, judging by the footage we have of some of the Necrontyr mechanoids, not even the Hive Fleet proved a problem to them. Anyway, the entire crusade force intercepted this new threat on the Hive World Ronan.

"The Necrontyr fell upon them as ravenous deamons, but this was deamons of steel. At first, the huge Imperial force was able to hold off its assailants, despite horrendous casualties. That's when the Necrons started to deploy a strange sort of high-energy laser-weapon, a sort of cannon that cut straight through our strongest adamantine plates. Baneblade super-heavy tanks were incinerated by a single beam!"

Tanya sighed, and changed picture again. This time it was a roll of casualties. "Within a matter of weeks since the deployment of that new weapon, eighty per cent of the Imperial Guard, and sixty per cent of the Sister Sororitas in that task force had been wiped out. The Inquisitors that had accompanied it had been captured or killed. Commissar-colonel Tomas Masterson was one of the survivors in the Imperial Guard force, so I hope that explains his grumpy behaviour somewhat.

"Refugees come in by the millions, day by day... those that make it, that is. Many say they've been attacked by the renegade Legions as well. Most of the Imperium's population is stationed out to the west and east. We try to clear a path for the Necrons, hope they'll just pass straight through, but it appears they seek us out. Minarth, Babel and Arborkar are huge refugee camps now, sixty percent of the remaining Imperial Guard stationed there. We've even recalled a few squads of Space Marines, but not too many, should they be tempted to side with their renegade brethren. So, most of the Imperium's population is located to the Galactic West and South now. Our food and supplies runs shorter every day. You've seen Armageddon; deserted

and arid. But that was long before the Necrons. The Deamons did that."

Tanya turned of the hololithic projector and sat down on a chair and rested her head in her hands. She was so tired of this. Rolf, who was sitting beside her, leant forward and patted her on the shoulder. He was a bit surprised when she leaned over to him, resting her head against his shoulder instead.

McGranth looked bewildered. "But, judging by this place, it doesn't seem like supplies are running short."

Tanya looked up. "This used to be the original Imperial Commissariat. We have dug it out of the dust. This was once one of the higher spires of it, so you can imagine how much dust has accumulated. Everything was incredibly well-preserved."

McKenzie looked thoughtful. A building five hundred metres tall wasn't that easily covered in dust. Didn't make sense. "How could it be covered in dust in just four hundred years?" he asked. "I mean, such violent dust-storms or what?"

"Yes," Tanya replied. "The mere fact that an entity as Kharn was present here was enough to shake the eco-system a bit, see?"

McKenzie nodded.

"Does the Necron's have any leader?" Charleston asked.

"We have had several reports of a huge mechanoid leading the Necrons on their assaults. We've given him the name Metallix for simplicity." Tanya saw their faces. "Don't blame me, I didn't name him. However, he is a frightening opponent. Standing well over six metres tall, he is quite capable of tearing a Leman Russ apart with his bare hands. Here, I'll show you."

Tanya pulled out a data-slate from somewhere, tapped a few keys and handed it round. Each and every Terran got a shocked look in their faces, including McKenzie, Charleston and McGranth. The picture showed General Metallix in his whole glory, charging straight at the unit containing the pict-taker. The stern, emotionless, half-metallic face made the picture so much worse. Metallix had a jump-pack like device mounted on his back. His arms were powerful, and literally corded with muscle, bionic muscles. His hands were three digit and his forearms encased in powerful gauntlet-like armour. On each arm a weapon was mounted. On the left a hefty gatling-like cannon, on the right a twin-barrelled beam-gun, the kind that ordinary Necrons used. His feet were digit ones with three "toes", and his legs looked like a bi-pedal dinosaur's. They also saw the tiny flash from the pistol size laser weapon mounted by the side of his metallic, right face-half.

"That is the only footage we have of him. He left the pict-taker for dead, God-Emperor be blessed. See, the human outpost was there to stave off an assault by Ork Warlord Thraka, I believe the three of you are familiar with him," Tanya said and gestured to McGranth and his two friends. "Here's another strange thing. When the Imperial relief force came, nothing was left of the Orks: nothing. There were no Warp-traces from Orkoid ships either. Our simple conclusion was that Metallix slew one of the mightiest Ork Warlord without greater effort."

Charleston let out a low whistle. "I battled against him on Armageddon just before the fall. Dirt-bag survived, then? Anyway, it was him or Seb."

"Seb?" Tanya queried.

"Sebastian Yarrick."

"The Saviour of Hades Hive? You knew the Saviour of Hades Hive?"

"Personally," Charleston replied with a smile. "We all did, ain't that so, Eddie? Edward?"

The other two nodded. Tanya looked impressed.

"Tanya, you said this was the former Imperial Commissariat, no? Have you dug out the... hm... basements?" Rolf asked.

"Yes, of course. The Book of Fallen Comrades is back in our hands. No worries."

McKenzie looked thoughtful. "Can we see the sub-levels, please? I never got time to visit the Commissariat and I've heard that it was quite something."

"Of course!" Tanya smiled. "This way ladies and gentlemen." Tanya led them out and towards

an elevator. Rolf walked up beside Eddy.

"You were right Ed-boy, the commissars are as charming as ever." Rolf said and smiled. Eddy just rolled his eyes.

"After this," Tanya said as they went with the elevator down. "I think it would be a good idea for you to find somewhere to sleep, no?"

As to mark her words, Ed yawned. "Bed... How good that word sounds." he mumbled.

Everyone present laughed at this remark.