

The Guardians of EDkind



"Forces united - forces arise
Legions of iron descent from the skies
Dark knight - you'll never defeat
The immortal spirit of freedom"

--Bridge in Iron Savior's Forces of Rage



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Callidus is the third habitable world of the Secundus system. It is the one closest to Betelgeuse and thus the one with the most humid climate. This climate is nigh on perfect for agri-culture, and that is what Callidus is entirely given over to. Being the agri-cultural world that supplies both Ichar and Secundus, Callidus has a central role in Imperial history. Immense resources have through time been given over to protect this one world, for should Callidus fall, the food supplies to the Imperium's heart is severed.

Despite this, Callidus is an agri-cultural world that can look after itself. It has rather meagre populace of roughly 40 million (the Imperium is rigorous to keep this number as Callidus can't house more people), but Callidus has a powerful PDF as well as that they have supplied the Imperial Guard with some of the best and most hardy soldiers ever. However, not even 500,000 people are engaged with the Callidussian army, and thus the vast majority of Callidus' population are farmers.

As the majority are farmers, Callidus can't be governed like, say Armageddon with all its guilds and nobles, right? No, Callidus is split up in roughly 30 counties, city-states, of which the most prolific are County Vindaree, County Herkan, County Invas and County Kernas. These four all have different reasons for their fame.

County Vindaree is where the capital lies and it is the leading county. This is the seat for the Imperial Commander of Callidus. It is also the place for Callidus' only spaceport.

County Herkan is notable, for the fact that it is the largest county and that it is entirely made up of islands and archipelagos. It is also from here that it is believed that Commissar General Chomaki had his heritage. It is known that he was Callidussian, but it will never be known as to where on Callidus he came from, as he never told anyone.

County Invas lies by the equator and is famous for that it is the place where the Yarrick family has settled down. From its earliest days, that family chose Callidus and Invas to live in. Why, is a total mystery.

County Kernas lies far to the north and is renowned for two reasons. Firstly that its inhabitants still hold on to the ancient Callidussian tradition of ritual scarring of its warriors. Secondly, it was here that one of the Imperium's oldest legends was born.

Something that has to be mentioned about Callidus is its wildlife. There are many strange animals on Callidus. The most common are the cattle. These are reminding of Terran cattle, but that is where the resemblance stops. Callidussian cattle, bethas in Callidussian, are nigh on two meters high and weigh over a thousand kilos. The males are the only ones with antlers and these can become nearly half a meter long. Bethas skin is very tough and works good as clothes that are to be put through much. As most bethas are either black or white, which depends on northern or southern breed, clothes in bethas skin are either black or white. However, although bethas are fairly easy-going and kind animals, stampedes are not fun to get caught in when they happen. Despite the bethas weight, they can reach speeds of over fifty kilometres per hour.

Another animal that is native to Callidus is the Callidussian eagle or the chomaki. It is a huge bird of prey, with a wingspan on two metres or more. Its beak is capable of cutting off a man's finger with nigh on no effort. It has generally a dark brown hue on feathers as well as legs and a golden brown beak. There have been white-headed examples of chomaki, but they are very rare. The main prey for chomaki is mostly a kind of salmon or squirrels, which carry the names laki and korri respectively. Rumour has that the Adeptus Mechanicus used chomaki to create the living breed of double-headed eagles, or taochomaki, as they are known on Callidus.

The third animal of notice is an animal that only lives in County Invas: the kaleen. Kaleen are small, cat-like creatures. They are very insidious and clever creatures and live mostly of eggs from chickens and rodents. However, they are not afraid of humans and if many enough, they can attack and kill humans. This is a very rare thing to happen, but it has happened. Kaleen come in nearly all colours imaginable for fur. They go from black to white, from brown to yellow. They have large, pointed ears and long whiskers. Their eyes are mostly glass green, with horizontal slits for pupils. The bushy tail of the kaleen is nearly as long as the animal itself. But the thing that is most noticeable with the kaleen is their inhuman intelligence, which is not well liked amongst farmers. There is a saying on Callidus that has been spawned from just the shiftiness of the kaleen:

"He is kaleen," which means that you shouldn't trust a person, as he is deceitful.

The fourth creature is the Callidussian wolfhound. These beasts are uniformly grey in their fur and they live, just like Terran wolves, in packs. Callidussian wolves grow very big, more than a metre tall at the neck. They usually weigh around seventy kilos and their full length, nose to tail, is usually over three metres. One can say they are roughly the size of a Terran Siberian tiger. Amongst Callidussians, it is widely believed that the teeth of an old (and dead) wolfhound bring luck, especially the fangs. But the most notable with the wolfhounds are their curiously long lives. It is not uncommon for a wolfhound to live more than forty years, though wolfhounds in service with humans have been known to live more than sixty years.

The Callidussian world for their wolves is yarikk and the reason behind this is found in the Imperium's oldest legend:

The Legend of the Eagle, the Wolf and the Hound of Chaos.

This legend, of which part has been retold elsewhere, is in fact a collection of books. Each book is roughly four hundred pages long and there are five books. The books tell about the life and doings of Saint Le'man, or Hrodwulf Le'man Yarrick, to give him his full name. However, the Emperor and the Deamon King are also central characters in this epic story, though it is mostly about Saint Le'man, which has made many Imperial scholars draw the concluding theory that it was Hrodwulf himself who wrote it. Though this is doubtful.

As said earlier on, the Yarricks have lived on Callidus since the Imperium was born, and the reason is not entirely known. One can only draw one's own conclusions when reading the legend. Most inquisitors speak that it was on Callidus that the Yarricks received their tight bond with the wolfhounds. It is a well-known fact in Imperial society that the Deamon slayer family has a very special bond with the great wolves of Callidus, and there is a special reason that wolf in Callidussian is yarikk.

To fully understand why, you have to read the legend. For convenience's sake, this part (Volume 2: Chapter 6) has been included. The text takes place on Callidus, in what nowadays is known as County Herkan. This certain part tells how Le'man first encountered the Emperor outside the Deamon King's reach. Callidus was even more feral back then than it is now, as well

as it was in the middle of an ice age. The deamons shunned the planet, but Warp-matter still leaked into the world from open portals. It is not known how Le'man got to Callidus, but it is speculated that he used a Warp-gate. And it is just a few days after his arrival to Callidus northern ice wastes, that chapter 6 of volume 2 takes place. Below follows an excerpt:

"Cold did the gales blow when Hrodwulf came to Kalyduss **[NOTE: Ancient Gothic spelling of Callidus, current spelling in Callidussian]**. He was still yet a smith in heart and knew but that he wanted to slay the evil King of Blood. The Deamon King had put Hrodwulf through hideous ordeals and Hrodwulf felt the flame of hatred burn inside of him. It warmed him greatly in the cold weather, for despite that Hrodwulf was well dressed for his quest, the weather on Kalyduss was most foul indeed. Why could Sorn'henai **[=I= NOTE: Eldar word use, use Imperial 'Eagleye'. Correct ASAP. Inq. Rovannion.]** choose such a barren world to meet on? Hrodwulf questioned himself.

For days did he walk upon the frozen ground of Kalyduss, snow falling unto his head and melting into his blue hair and freezing again, making it seem as ice. Hrodwulf's only companion was the sword he had made for himself, the sword that he had hardened in the fires of hatred and sharpened with the rays of the sun. As he drew it from its sheath, it shone with an inner light, pure and white, piercing the night like moonlight. It was a sword meant to slay the dark ones, the etherworlders... the deamons. It had been created for one sole duty and Hrodwulf would make it do its duty. A sword was to him created to be used.

But Hrodwulf wasn't alone. His tracks and warm breath brought him the attention of burning eyes of beasts born from Chaos. It was on the second fortnight that they attacked. Fighting for his life and soul, Hrodwulf held his own against the hounds of Chaos. But they were so many. The battle did not turn until Hrodwulf lodged his finely crafted sword through the heart of the greatest of the Chaos beasts. Only then did the foul ones retreat, the howl of death of their pack leader still ringing in their ears. So cold was the night, that the dark blood that fell from the Chaos hounds froze to crystals as it hit the ground. Though Hrodwulf didn't care. He carried on in his quest, towards the south.

Four days and four nights after Hrodwulf's encounter with the Chaos hounds, did he come upon a lone wolf cub. The cub was not distorted by the Warp as the Chaos hounds and Hrodwulf saw that it was all good with this hound. However, it had gotten lost from its pack, and Hrodwulf couldn't bear to see it starve. He took it upon himself to find the cub's pack, no thought of doubt entering his mind that he'd ever find it.

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Nigh on two moon cycles after Hrodwulf's arrival to the world of Kalyduss, he found that the little cub he'd taken care of had left him. It happened late one night and Hrodwulf felt sorrow in his heart upon losing his little companion. However, the howls of wolves on the wind reassured him that it might have found its family. This warmed his heart better than his hatred towards the Deamon King, but it would not last.

The night after the cub went from him, Hrodwulf found himself cunningly ambushed by the Chaos hound pack. The foul beasts had followed him.

With a howl born from Warp-burned throats, the hounds of Chaos leapt at Hrodwulf. Yelling oaths of destruction and damnation at the beasts, Hrodwulf pulled his blade. Its sacred sheen did not frighten the beasts, which came ever onwards. He brought his blade round, severing the head of many beasts.

Now first did he get a glimpse of what the Warp had spawned for madness. They seemed much like the wolves of Kalyduss, but much leaner and their fur was blood red instead of grey. They had great black manes covering their necks and most of the skin and sinew seemed scraped from their skulls.

One particularly large beast charged at Hrodwulf and bit deeply into Hrodwulf's arm.

Howling in pain, much as the Chaos hound pack leader, Hrodwulf went down on his knees. Just as he thought that his final hour had come, Hrodwulf saw that there were grey shapes amongst the Warp beasts. Then Hrodwulf realized it was the pup's pack and they had come to

repay their debt to him. The Kalydussian wolves were many more than the leaderless hounds of Chaos and the beasts soon fled.

But even in this moment of triumph, Hrodwulf felt only cold. The wound in his arm was bad and he knew that he was going to die.

As Hrodwulf lay on the snowy ground, the pack of wolves closed round him. The leader sniffed on the human and then slowly started to lick away the blood from the foul wound that the Chaos hound had caused. Thus Hrodwulf's wound was cleaned. He knew though that he could not go on that night and tried to huddle up and get some sleep, but how he did, he was always cold. The pack of Kalyduss wolves then gathered around him and using their many fur-covered bodies, kept the human alive.

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A few nights later, Eagleye showed up to Hrodwulf. The white armour of the mighty Paladin was almost invisible to the snowy background, but Hrodwulf recognised his own work. When Eagleye approached the pack of wolves that still protected Hrodwulf, the pack gathered a ring around the human and bared their teeth against Eagleye. Hrodwulf ushered the wolves to calm down and bade Eagleye to approach. As the mighty Paladin approached the former smith, he got a strange look upon his face.

'Thou has changed, Hrodwulf Le'man,' Eagleye spake and looked at Hrodwulf with great interest.

Hrodwulf looked back at the Paladin. 'Yes, I have, Lord. But only towards the better...'

It took Eagleye some time to notice how peculiarly long Hrodwulf's canine teeth had gotten. He also noticed the strange grey sheen in the man's hair as well as the horrid scar on Hrodwulf's forearm.

'Now come, Hrodwulf Le'man, the Slayer of Deamons,' the Paladin spake, 'we shalt free our people from their fetters. But we shalt require the help from the ancient Eldar for this, as their folk is too fettered.'

'Why do you call me the Deamon Slayer, when I have yet to prove my skill, Lord?' Hrodwulf suddenly asked.

'Your future has been foreseen by the Eldar and by me, Hrodwulf, and amongst the elder kin, you are already known as the Year'eich.' "



That is how that chapter ends. Chapter 7 details how Hrodwulf and the Emperor got away from Callidus to find the Eldar. But what chapter 6 tells is the essential.

Imperial scholars and inquisitors have debated back and forth this single chapter in the Legend, but none can give a true answer to why the family that has Hrodwulf's blood flowing in their veins show up a strange physionomy.

Common for all Yarrick family members is the bluish-black hair, which when they turn old, go to a grey-blue alike that of the wolfhounds. Also, they show up the same green eyes as the wolfhounds... not to mention that their canines are slightly longer than on an ordinary human.

Ordinary Imperial citizens know close to nothing about the Yarricks' strange bound to the Callidussian wolfhounds, even less about the curse that Hrodwulf Le'man carried on to his family. But most ranking inquisitors know. And they accept it.

The curse that Hrodwulf brought down on his family has, according to many theories put forth by inquisitors like Rovannion and Schonwald, its basis in that Hrodwulf was cut in the arm by a Chaos hound which put the raw stuff of the Warp in his veins. Then, the theory goes, when the pack leader licked the wound clean, the Warp stuff transmuted Hrodwulf into something not quite all human any more.

Hrodwulf himself was unaware of what had happened to him. It is never stated elsewhere in the Legend about this event or any change in him. However, Hrodwulf felt odd when he

realized he didn't age as normal men.

Now, the curse is a strange one. Due to its apparent heritage in the Warp, it has some idea of time and happens once every one thousand years and it always occur in a male member of the Yarrick family. In the Yarrick family, this curse is known as the Wolf's Curse or the Wolf's Child. The cursed child is not aware of his destined future, nor is his parents. The curse becomes first visible in the child's late puberty, when his nail grow long and pointed and his canines grow to a peculiar length, even for Yarricks. Next, the rest of his human teeth are exchanged for carnivore teeth and he start to grow greyish fur all over his body. The transmutation happens over a matter of months and there is no known way to stop it.

Few are those that have suffered the Wolf's Curse and stayed sane. Most have become lunatics, losing their sense and turning from man to beast. Their main goal is always to kill their family members, as they know most of this transmutation. In most of the cases though, the cursed child runs away from home barely days before the mutations begin. The thing that bothers perhaps the most, is that the Inquisition allows these regular mutations in the Yarrick family. Most surely it is because they are regular and not as irregular as the mutation ravaged McKenzie family of Ichar.

The latest child to have carried the curse lived between the years 701,895 IY and 701,921 IY and was killed by his brother, Imperial Commissar Caspar Yarrick, the grand-cousin of Commissar General Rolf Yarrick.



Callidus was in chaos. Acres upon acres of crops were burning as the horrid abominations known as Necrons ploughed their way forth and killed every living thing. Civilians tried to escape the never-ending onslaught of the Necrontyr, but were easily cut down by their fearsome Gauss weapons. Imperial Guard of the Callidussian PDF and Sisters of Battle from the Order of Our Martyred Lady tried to hold back the Necrons, but to no avail. The Iron Men came marching ever onwards, silent and deadly like a plague. The battle line of the Guardsmen and the Sisters were undeniably pushed backwards, towards Vindaree's outskirts.

The canoness in charge of the Sisters on Callidus, Alyssia Demontfurt, tried to make some kind of organised fall back, but the civilians were too many and too scared to keep calm in any way. This caught over to the Guardsmen as well and many turned to flee. Canoness Alyssia was uncertain how many of the brave men and women fell to the enemy as to the Imperial Commissars. She felt herself a tad bit sick when she remembered that her brother was one of the zealous and rather repelling men in the black greatcoats. But she felt a tang of longing for her brother's composure and superior tactical cunning. Alyssia herself was in the main a nun put in a suit of armour, that she had to conclude to herself.

"Try to hold the line!" she shouted in her vox-link. "We cannot allow them into Vindaree. Never! Ever!"

Alyssia looked up into the sky, looking for a sign from the God-Emperor. But not as much as she was wishing her brother to be with her.

"Where are you, brother?" she muttered quietly and lowered her gaze. Her white armour was splattered with blood and oil and her red tabards would need a good and thorough wash after this. She raised her ancient plasma pistol and put a shot through the face of an onrushing Necron. It was clad in the still wet flesh of some poor victim and its fingers had been replaced with rapier-like claws instead. Some witty person, probably dead now, had coined the designation Flayed Ones to this type of Necron. It mattered little as Alyssia's shot struck home and reduced the Flayed One to a puddle of bubbling flesh and metal.



High above the surface of Callidus, the Imperial ships of Battle fleet Moskva arrived. Performing a manoeuvre that he'd named 'Dragon Maw', Admiral Ourmnoff and his few ships quickly encircled the Necrontyr vessels. McKenzie got a look of them before he had to mount into the Thunderhawk that was to carry him down to Callidus. The Necrontyr ships were nigh on flat creations it seemed to him, with a single pyramid-like construction, that apparently was the

command structure of the ships. The shape of these flat ships was the same: they all looked like crescent moons. McKenzie got to see this peculiar shape when one of the ships tilted and exploded seconds later.

Barely half an hour after the Imperial ships had arrived, the Necron raider fleet was destroyed and the larger ships of the Imperial vessels let go of their cargo of Thunderhawk gunship transports. Several other transport ships were ejected as well, but these almost solely contained the machines of war that the Imperial Guard utilized, along with their crew.

In one of the first Thunderhawks that had been released, Tanya, Bastion and the Terrans were strapped up. The Navy pilot took a look on his radar screen. McKenzie was studying the murmuring astropath and shied away from him a bit.

"Large accumulation of Necrontyr about two kilometres south of Vindaree," the pilot reported.

"Dammit, how did they get so close, so quickly?" Bastion cursed.

Demontfurt leant over to the pilot and asked for the vox. "Colonel-commissar Demontfurt to all flights," he said as he got the vox-mike, "The Necrontyr are right outside Vindaree. New heading 196, due south. I repeat, one-nine-six, heading south. Acknowledge!"

The answers from the one hundred flights frizzled back over the communicator. The astropath replied that every single flight had acknowledged.

"Thunderhawk gunships, ready canons," Demontfurt ordered, "let's try to knock out their most dangerous units. Aim for Monoliths, Destroyers and Heavy Destroyers. Demontfurt out!"

Tanya turned to the anxious looking Terrans. "Don't worry. We have the finest pilots and gunners in the Imperium."

"If that's going to make me feel better, it's not working," Eddy grumbled.



Down on the ground, Canoness Alyssia looked up as she heard the screaming sounds of jet-fans. It didn't take long before she saw the plumes of fire eject from various parts of the Necrontyr horde and the dull sound of 80 mil canons filled the air.

The dark blue Thunderhawks swept over the Imperial defence force and a cheer went through the lines. Canoness Alyssia found herself shouting in joy as well, but soon re-caught her composure and flicked her personal vox-link open.

"Thank the God-Emperor," she sighed. "To all artillery units, concentrate fire on Necrontyr flak units and cover those 'Hawks!" Tanya switched over to the Navy's channel with a simple tap by her right ear.

"Canoness Demontfurt to Colonel-commissar Demontfurt," she called, "It's about time you showed up!"

"At least we arrived before the crescents, sis!" Commissar Demontfurt replied with a laugh.

Ten minutes later, the PDF and Sisters of Battle were reinforced with the Imperial Guard from Secundus. Tanya quickly directed her troops as the transports settled down. The tanks took up a battle line behind the infantry and new soldiers were sent forth to replace tired and wounded soldiers. Not to mention the dead ones.

McGranth personally led the Terrans to the front line. This was something he'd been looking forward to since Armageddon's little skirmish. He drew his power axe and ignited the force field that covered the head of it, took out his storm bolter and professionally racked it and turned to the Terrans.

"Well, boys and girls. This is it. Ready or not, this is where your real education begins."

With that, McGranth picked out a squad consistent of Eddy, Kevin, Rolf and Nazz. Charleston took the Kankers and Ed whilst McKenzie took with him the two psykers: Johnny and Edd. The squads fanned out and joined in with the PDF and Imperial Guard.

The amount of fire that was laid down was terrifying, but still the mechanical Necrontyr came ever onwards. The warriors didn't bother McGranth, it as the so-called Flayed Ones, the ones that dressed up in skin torn from their victims. Those chums and the Immortals and Destroyers bothered him the most of all. It goes without mentioning that the Necrontyr leaders were quite frightening too, but McGranth considered them minor in comparison with the terrifying Gauss weapons of the Destroyers.

"Well, well, looks like we'll have to do this the hard way, then." McGranth murmured to himself the Flayed Ones broke from their long stride and went over into a sprint.

Charleston and McKenzie tried fruitlessly to keep the Eds separated from each other as hand-to-hand ensued. McKenzie gave up in his attempts to make them fight were they would count for and decided to keep Johnny close. McGranth and Charleston formed an unbeatable couple and Rolf and Kevin decided to stay close to Nazz.

The Eds found themselves swarmed by Flayed Ones, finding out that the Necrons were about as tough as the powered armour they wore. Eddy sent his lightning claw through the head of one whilst Ed performed a figure of eight with his power sword and destroyed four Flayed Ones with that move. Edd gave a good half-dozen Immortals a good doze of plasma beam after destroying a couple of Flayed Ones by ramming his force sword through their heads. Eddy, seeing that Edd was heaping up glory, readied his grenade launcher and fired a krak grenade at an approaching Destroyer. The large hover-machine caught the grenade head on, literally, and went up in a bright explosion.

The Kankers were busy heaping bolter shells into Necron warriors and didn't notice the Necron Lord that passed through the line. Lee, however, caught sight of it and aimed her bolter and fired. The shots harmlessly pinged off the thing's metal skin. The Lord approached even closer, raising the phase weapon in its hands and prepared to decapitate Lee.

Before the Necron Lord could reach her, Lee had drawn her long rapier like power sword and laid in with a neat slash the totally outdid the Necron's slow, mechanical movements. The power sword passed through the super-conducting materials of its brain and the Lord fell limply to the ground with a thud.

"Hands of the merchandise," Lee muttered to herself.

McGranth, pulling up his axe from the body of an Immortal, looked around and checked their positions. They were holding the damned iron men off, but they weren't breaking ground. The numbers of the Necrons seemed innumerable. More and more swarmed into the fray. The large Destroyers were sending human's flying with simple sweeps of their unarmed metal fists. And when they fired their Gauss canons... McGranth didn't dare to think of it. He had seen many despicable weapons put to use in his time, but none of them matched the horrible effect of the Necrons' Gauss weapons.

When the powered beam struck a target, it peeled the atoms off, layer by layer. The result was that when they struck a human, they peeled off the skin firstly, then the muscle and lastly the bone was atomised.

McGranth swept his axe around and crushed the head of another Necron, coming round just in time to see a Destroyer's gun hitting a Battle Sister in the chest. McGranth quickly turned away, to avoid seeing what the weapon would do to the poor girl, because the victim was but a young and handsome woman.

"For the Emperor!" McGranth bellowed and raised his axe high into the air. He brought his storm bolter up and fired off a long salvo into the Necrontyr ranks. But still they came ever onwards.

"For the Glory of the Throne!" another voice bellowed close by. McGranth turned and saw Commissar Masterson coming up, leading a twenty strong unit of motorbike mounted Guardsmen. Masterson had managed to over voice the roar of the mighty engines of the motorbikes and the force of motorbikes sped past the Imperial force and rammed head on into the Necrontyr, encircling them and filling them with bolts. The bike mounted Guardsmen were all armed with chain weapons whilst Masterson welded a power axe.

The bikers rode in circles around the Necrontyr, dodging the metal men's clumsy blows and

retaliating with power blows of their own, sending heads and severed metal limbs flying.

Three so-called attack bikes accompanied the ordinary bikes. In the sidecar, there was a heavy bolter mounted on each attack bike. Two more bikes of this kind roared up, sporting the powerful anti-tank weapon the multimelta. The heavy bolters fired into the Necrontyr and exploded several in sprays of metal shards. One of the melta-bikes caught a Gauss beam head-on and was vaporised, but the other one managed to fire on an incoming Heavy Destroyer. The heat of a star's core melted the large, hovering Necron away and only a bubbling pool of metal was left behind.

On his bike, Masterson seemed to wait for something. "Come on, Demontfurt, come on," he muttered to himself as he rammed his axe through the head of a Necron.

There was a wailing sound in the air and then the heavy crump of artillery as the shells exploded in the Necrontyr lines. Demontfurt had lined up the Leman Russ MBTs at final and the mighty tanks now lay in a devastating barrage. He was holding the two swords of his, one in each hand, his laspistols holstered at his waist. With the swords, he directed a twenty-man strong mortar team.

"Forty degrees to the west; wait for my command, FIRE!" Demontfurt directed and ordered.

As the grenades of the mortar teams thumped away, the tanks fired yet another salvo. Yet again large holes were blasted in the Necrontyr ranks.

On his bike, Masterson keyed his com-link and reported, "About frekking time, Demontfurt. Keep it coming now! We've got the metal ass-holes now!"

With the new reinforcement of Imperial Armour, the line was quickly stabilised and the Necrontyr driven off.

Tanya Yarrick, who was commanding a unit of Storm Troopers along with Cadet Jorun, noticed this change in the battle's flow.

"We should be able to retaliate now. Men and women of the Emperor! For His glory, CHARGE!"

And with that, the Imperials charged, enflamed by righteous zeal and courage. However, on his flank, Johnny suddenly stopped. He stiffened and seemed to listen to something.

"What was that?" he asked himself.

"What was what?" McGranth asked as he came up beside them.

Johnny just looked towards the horizon. "Something's coming. Something dark..." he muttered. McKenzie and Edd looked first at Johnny, then at the horizon.

Large, hovering machines, unmistakably Necrontyr, came into view at the far end of the Necron force.

"Frekk, what's this now?" Masterson cursed.

"I was just wondering the same, commissar," McGranth said silently.



They seemed to be based upon the Destroyer-class body of the Necrons, but it didn't have a large torso attached to it. Instead, it seemed to have some kind of armoured sarcophagus wired directly into what looked like a Necrontyr controller droid of whatever it was. At the front, a large beam gun was attached. It showed much similarity to the heavy Gauss canon of the Destroyers, but it seemed more massive. The energy in the weapons crackled over the surface of the crystals.

There were at least ten of them, all in all...

"That's the weapon I was talking about before," Tanya said, turning to the Terrans. She turned to her vox-officer, "Send a message to Commissar-colonel Demontfurt. Tell him to open fire upon them with immediate execution."

"But," Johnny interrupted, "don't you want to help the people inside the sarcophagi first?"

Everyone stared aghast at the young Terran. Johnny turned round to look at McKenzie. "The people in the hovercraft, McKenzie, can't you hear them too? You're like me, aren't you?"

McKenzie bit his lip. He had a spooky feeling he knew what Johnny was talking about. Despite this, he focused his mind upon the approaching hovercraft. Johnny was right. McKenzie felt minds, psykers' minds, from the inside of the sarcophagi. And there weren't only human minds; there was at least one Eldar amongst them. But something was wrong, off... The psykers didn't seem to be in control of their own powers.

McKenzie felt a flash of pain stab into his head and he dropped to the ground. He hadn't shielded himself from it enough. What kind of dark machination was this?

Charleston saw what was happening. When McKenzie acted like that, something was wrong. He turned his gaze out and over the battlefield. He saw the weapons of the new Destroyers charging up. One of them turned round and brought its gun towards them.

"Hit the deck!" Charleston shouted and brought down Masterson and Tanya Yarrick with him without thinking twice, shielding them with his massive, power armoured bulk.

The gun of the approaching Psyker Destroyer fired its gun and the stream of green, crackling energy passed right over where the Terrans and the others had been standing. The other Psyker destroyers had fired too, but many Guardsmen and Battle Sisters weren't quick enough to duck away. As the beam struck them, it passed through them and continued on its path until it struck something like a tank or a Destroyer wreck. However, the people that were struck by it, were nailed to the spot where they were standing, writhing in agony, without any change of getting free until their bodies had boiled away because of the heat generated.

Now McKenzie knew what the pain had been caused by. He had gotten a little taste of the pain to come and had he not retreated as he did, his brain would've been cooked. Literally. He had often seen psyker-weaponry, but they were always employed with the psyker's consent. This was just sick. The Necrons had obviously enslaved psykers' minds to these machines, using them as power batteries to tap the powers of the Warp. He didn't dare to think what happened with them when a psyker's life force had been used up.

McKenzie looked at Johnny. "Remember in your basic training? You can manipulate your surrounding with your will. Now, help me, and focus your mind together with me, Johnny."

Combining their efforts, Johnny and McKenzie reached out into one of the Psyker Destroyers as it was resting the main barrel from the stress. They let their minds wander down the super-conducting circuitry, trying to find a way to release the psyker's will. McKenzie silently gasped, because a new force was palpable. Another psyker mind, perhaps? He wasn't entirely sure. He knew it wasn't Edd's. Not the same signature.

It pointed something out for him and McKenzie took the chance. He overloaded the particular circuit and blocked out another one with Johnny's help. There was a psychic sigh from the trapped mind. McKenzie knew that the psyker's mind was free from its fetters, though its mortal body was bound. He felt a build up of power inside the trapped psyker's mind and drew himself back, together with Johnny.

McKenzie knew what the trapped psyker was trying to cause: an electric overload. It would have the same effect as sending too much power through a television-set. McKenzie was not disappointed. The Psyker Destroyer in question exploded in a flash of psychic energy in all the colours of the rainbow.

Having found how to release the minds and save ammunition in the process, Johnny and McKenzie continued to focus on new targets and free more psykers. As this had to be done in the interval between the shots, casualties couldn't be avoided. Johnny, and the other Terrans, felt a bit bad over this, but Masterson simply replied that they would save millions of lives. The Terrans were a little shocked over the way that Masterson had put it: very flatly and without compassion. It dawned on them, that in the Imperium, or what had once been the Imperium, the phrase 'acceptable losses' really meant what it said.

It mattered little later, to all of them. McKenzie and Johnny had destroyed the last of the

Psyker Destroyers and the Necrontyr started to fall back. The Imperials chased them down and destroyed every last one of them.



As the Imperial force was victorious and not a single Necron had escaped, Tanya remarked it was all very peculiar, and Masterson agreed.

"Why so?" McGranth asked.

"The Necrontyr usually 'phase out' before all of their numbers are destroyed," Masterson replied, "but it seems the admiral did a good job up there, destroying all ships they could escape with."

They walked through the swarms of milling soldiers and got up in a truck that Tanya said would take them to the city Vindaree. She claimed they had to see it, so that all was fine. Masterson got back to his bike and rode it to Vindaree, whilst Demontfurt and, to everyone's surprise, Bastion, rode with the Terrans in the back of the large truck. Tanya said that the wounded would be the first ones to see Vindaree after them as Vindaree had high quality health facilities, and she wanted to assess the damage of the city.

Fortunately, Vindaree had escaped the attack relatively unharmed. Bastion told them that they should go to the High Council's meeting hall. When they got there, an Administratum Clerk handed Bastion a docket and he looked it through.

"Seems I'll have to oversee the repairs of this place..." Bastion muttered to himself.

"This place is a mess," Eddy remarked politely.

"It would have been even worse, if it hadn't been for you," Bastion said and turned to look at the Terrans and smiled, "Thank you all." He turned to McKenzie and Johnny. "I'm not sure what you did out there, but this is the first solid victory we've ever had over the Necrontyr. Maybe this marks the turn of the tide for us humans."

Demontfurt saw Masterson approach the group. "Masterson and I will organise the incoming troops." Demontfurt saluted and left together with Commissar Masterson.

As Bastion saw the two commissars leave, he turned to the other again. "You will have to excuse me. I must prepare for a meeting of the High Council later today." Bastion snapped his fingers and two young men, servants, ran up next to him. "You will be shown to your temporary quarters, where you will live the time you are here."

The group of Terrans followed the two servants whilst Bastion departed together with his mother to prepare the meeting.



Later that day, whilst the meeting of the High Council was under way in the large Administratum building where it was housed, McKenzie, Edd and Johnny were having a private talk elsewhere in the city, in the building where their living quarters were housed. The room they were sitting in had once belonged to a high-ranking official of the Imperial Guard, but he was long dead now and the large study served now as dormitory for the male parts of the Terran entourage.

The three psykers were all alone. Charleston and Ed had gone out to see if they could find any pict-slates with films of their tastes, Kevin and Rolf had decided to ease out in a warm-water pool somewhere in the building and McGranth and Eddy had, strangely enough, found a book each to read.

"So," Edd said thoughtfully as he polished his sword, "there's no doubt? There really were people in those hovercraft?"

"Yes," McKenzie replied, "psykers. However, they seemed to be enslaved somehow. Not only physically, but psychically as well. They were obviously used as a power source for these weapons. I knew since before that the Necrontyr were merciless, but this is just monstrous!"

"Don't they have psykers of their own, then?" Edd asked.

"Apparently not," McKenzie snorted. "They're machines. If they had psychic powers, they would be taking the same risks as we do when we use the powers of the Warp. Now, it seems, not a single one of them has psychic power and that is why they enslave mortals. I believe they recently found out the potentials of psychics as a weapon..." McKenzie turned silent a while. "They must've fought Eldar to realize the potential of psychonic weaponry. They must've."

"But, isn't there any way we can help the people enslaved," Johnny asked. "Without killing them in the process, I mean," he quickly added.

McKenzie gave Johnny a strange look. "You're brave and righteous in your mind, Johnny, but naive," McKenzie sighed. "I can't see any way we can free those poor souls. We were barely able to free them psychically, weren't we? I am afraid there's little hope to free them physically as well."

"Well, something has to be done," Edd said and got up. "The Necrons have to be stopped, now more than ever. And, McKenzie, you of all people should know that all battles aren't won from brute display of physical power, right?"

"You mean we should put to use the powers that Fate has bestowed us with, epistolary?" McKenzie said with a wry smile.

"What else?" Edd replied indignantly. "If we don't hurry, the Necrontyr might find some way to breed psychic humans. Humans, who've never tasted freedom, who won't even have a name of it. They won't want to be freed, as they would've had an entire life in imprisonment! They'd work against us. Now, they're using enslaved minds, but in a few years, they might be using humans, and Eldar, bred for this single purpose. We must find a way to stop it from happening!"

McKenzie nodded silently. He was silent for a long while. "Gather your gear, I have an idea."

The two Terrans did as they were told and followed McKenzie. They went down to the entrance and followed the road to the Vindaree Star Port. They took a Thunderhawk up to Mishkin's Pride and McKenzie requested to talk with Admiral Ourmnoff.

As the powerful Moskvanian admiral saw who had come to visit him, he seemed confused rather than happy.

"What brings the famous Master Lexicanum here, eh?" Ourmnoff asked as he got up to the three psykers.

"Admiral," McKenzie said, "I require the use of a Thunderhawk gunship."

"Why so, sir?"

"For the safety of the Imperium of Man," McKenzie simply replied.

"Might I ask, where you are going, Master Lexicanum?"

"To the bordering space of the nearest Warp-gate."

The admiral looked doubtful. "That is outside the operating distance of a Thunderhawk."

"In that case, I require the help of an escort ship to get me there," McKenzie replied flatly.

Admiral Ourmnoff was not convinced, it seemed. "I cannot risk that. Battle fleet Moskva is already diminished in force."

"Admiral," McKenzie said, interrupting the high ranking officer's thoughts, "Let me put it like this: If you grant me what I want, Battle fleet Moskva might survive this bitter war with the iron men, and grow in force once again."

The admiral nodded. "Well, then. I grant you the use of a fully armed Thunderhawk gunship. However, I want it back. You will board the Sword-class escort Ivanov under the command of Captain Britanova."

"Britanova?" McKenzie said silently. "A female captain?"

"You find something wrong in that, Master Lexicanum?"

"No, not at all." McKenzie was silent a while and then saluted. "Off we go to now to find the roots of Eldar, Humans and Necrons alike!"

With that, McKenzie, Edd and Johnny left for the Thunderhawk to get them to Ivanov. They left Admiral Ourmnoff in deep thought over the meaning of McKenzie's statement.