

New World ED



"Underneath this sleeping city
Red eyes filled with rage, not pity
Stalk our dreams with tooth and claw
And crave for human flesh to gnaw"
--From Sabbat's Blood for a Blood God



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. . . . //File Call 4.1, Sub-clause: imp.Gua.//  
//File GuardOrg1.1//  
// Enter authorization code: . . .  
* * * * * // Validating//  
//Thank you, Lord Inquisitor//  
//Downloading Data//  
//Decryption under way, Please Wait//  
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The Imperium of Mankind has many lines of defence. In the first one, you find the Adeptus Astartes and their legions of super humans. Right next to them, are the elite trained Sister Sororitas. Both of these two forces are all armed with the finest weaponry and armour the Imperium can offer. However, they are relatively few in number and, as stated, elite forces. They are called to arms against the most vicious of enemies, enemies the likes of the Berzerkers, Eldar and the Hive Mind warriors. These forces always perform at peak efficiency and can be relied on to take out daemons. The Adeptus Astartes and Adeptus Sororitas are used as a delicate scalpel against the enemies of Man, applied exactly as much as needed to break the foe.

They have an utter opposite: the Imperial Guard.

The vast bulk of the Imperial Armed Forces are made up of ordinary men and women. It goes one thousand Imperial Guardsmen on one Sister Sororita and ten thousand Guardsmen on one Space Marine. The Imperial Guard is not elite. They are ground-pounders, dog-soldiers and various other names applied to common infantry. They are not used as a scalpel, but as a sledgehammer. They are the Imperium's true first, last and only line of defence against the alien menace.

The Imperial Guard can come as anything, ranging from Light Infantry to Armoured regiments consistant of nothing but tanks. The Imperial Guard can come as mounted cavalry, light scouts, snipers, tank companies, artillery regiments, heavy infantry and mechanised infantry, to mention some of its guises. The standing Imperial army of Guardsmen numbers over ten billion. Being at such numbers, it is impossible to supply such vast numbers with the same level of weaponry and armour as the Sisters of Battle and the Space Marines. Instead of bolters, the Imperial Guard is supplied with the sturdy and reliable lasgun. Instead of powered armour, they are dressed in flak or carapace armour. Instead of tanks like the Rhinoceros APC, the Predator tank and the dreaded Land Raiders, the Imperial Guard makes do with the Chimera APC and the Lemman Russ MBT, not without mentioning the innumerable variants of these two hulls.

The Chimera APC has given birth to several other tanks, amongst them the Hellhound flame tank and the Basilisk mobile artillery piece. There are also almost innumerable Lemman Russ variants. Some worth to mention are the Demolisher, the Exterminator, the Vanquisher and the

Conqueror. These tanks are all optimised for special field roles. However, they have one thing in common: they're all rugged and reliable constructions, needing little field maintenance.

Something else that marks out the Imperial Guard is that they are the only ones to employ the so-called super-heavy tanks, like the Baneblades and the Stormhammers. The walking giants of the Adeptus Mechanicus, the Titans, can only rival these huge metal beasts in firepower. These are, however, not part of the Imperial Guard, and thus we leave that matter here.

Super-heavy tanks are only ever employed in armies that can trace their heritage to a forge or hive world, like Armageddon or Ronan. These armies might have the resources for such metal beasts, whilst a regiment from Callidus or Bennis aren't very likely to field one in their colours.

To be able to field such vast armies of Guardsmen and tanks, the Imperial Guard has a very rigidly set command system.

To make things easy, we'll start at the top of the chain of a regiment.

Each regiment has a commanding officer, a colonel. It's very rare to find a major in command of a regiment. The colonel and the major of a regiment might split it up between themselves, to simplify command in battle, but it's the colonel who is commander in chief.

Next up are the captains. Each captain has command of a company. Each company is split up in a number of platoons, ranging from three to ten, depending on the size of the regiment. There is, however, no upper limit for the number of companies in a regiment, but ten is a common number.

Each platoon is lead by a lieutenant. The lieutenant has command over three to ten squads of Imperial Guard. In some regiments, like the Icharian, lieutenants are instead called first sergeants, but their positions are the same.

After the lieutenants come the sergeants. Each sergeant is in command of a squad of ten to twenty Imperial Guardsmen. Once again, the numbers vary depending on regimental heritage. The Callidussian Light Infantry regiments, for example, use twenty man squads, whilst the Steel Legions of Armageddon utilize the ten-man system instead, as a Chimera APC only takes twelve men. The sergeant might be accompanied by a corporal in those cases the unit numbers twenty. In some cases, a corporal instead of a sergeant might lead the ten man squads, but this is a rare happening.

Concerning ranks higher than colonel, there are brigadier, general (of various grades) and warmaster. However, these powerful individuals are often in command of regiments from other planets than those they were raised on and warmasters and so-called lord generals are often brought up in the Imperial aristocratic families.

The men and women that make out the absolute top of the Imperial Guard are some of the most powerful individuals in the entire Imperium. But they are also the most vigorously inspected. Should a warmaster fail in his duties, he'll most likely be demoted on the spot, if not executed. By fail, it means that the officer in question allows a large proportion of his army to be destroyed or, even worse, shows heretical behaviour.

The ones to perform these duties are the ever-present Imperial Commissars. The political officers of the Imperium will never consider any warmaster, no matter how talented, more than a potential failure in the most crucial of moments. It is a common saying in the Commissariat that the heat of battle always shows what men and women really are made of. A statement that has been proved on more than one occasion.

This ideology hasn't stopped the Imperium from giving several commissars through history military command over units that they have served with. The result has been trouble in the political wing of the Imperial Guard, as the primary duty for a commissar is to keep track of the unit's commander. The solution has often been to attach supplementary commissars to the regiment or regiments in question.

However, there are times when even the fearful presence of a commissar isn't enough to make Imperial Guardsmen turn to fight the enemy. They are rare, but they do happen. Such a

time was when Lord Kevlinn first attacked the Imperium, another when he, in the guise of Kharn, invaded Armageddon together with Ghazghkull Thraka, Ork Warlord.

The most recent of these rare happenings though, was when the Necrons made their first blitz attack upon the Imperium and Metallix went rampant upon humanity. Although, the humans rallied after a while, it had cost them, and it still would cost them. And with most of the Adepta Sororitas gone and the Adeptus Astartes dissolved, the Imperial Guard stood more or less alone...



The day after the punishing Necrontyr attack on Callidus, where the newly arrived Terrans had for the first time encountered the psi-weaponry of the Necrons, Vindaree was already putting itself together again. The meagre population that still inhabited Vindaree had gotten out of their bomb-shelters and were now slowly piecing their home back together again. They had done it before, and would do it again and again and again, until the Necrontyr were either destroyed, or the humans annihilated.

There was one crucial difference between this recent attack, and the other raids. There was no longer anything left of the PDF to be spoken off. Instead, three full regiments of Imperial Guard and two companies of Sisters of Battle had set up camp just outside the badly mauled agri-cultural metropolis.

In the large Administratum building, which was under heavy reconstruction, but still was standing and whole in its basic structure, Commissar General Tanya Yarrick was fruitlessly trying to convince her son Bastion Yarrick about a very crucial, tactical point in Vindaree's and Callidus' defence.

"Bastion, don't you see? These attacks and their results are why I want to station Guardsmen here. The PDF is on its last legs!"

Bastion stopped and looked at his mother. "Mother, we've discussed this I don't know how many times before; the High Council wouldn't allow Imperial Guardsmen to roam the streets. Vindaree is supposed to be a place of peace. It's there to symbolise the Imperium can survive without war"

"Try to convince an ork about THAT philosophy..." Tanya muttered.

"Mom! I mean it would be very difficult to maintain the image of a peaceful haven with heavily armed guardsmen walking the streets."

"I am not trying to declare a marshal law," Tanya complained, "I just want to post a company or so of guards. To protect the civilians."

"I have said it before, and I'm saying it again; it's no use, mother. The High Council has banned the use, or the carrying, of firearms inside the city-state limits. Not even I can change such a thing without support!"

Tanya glared at her son. "Bastion, I am armed. No one has tried to disarm me since we entered. Is this your idea of safe?"

"They know whom you are, that's why," Bastion replied coolly. "We do check people who enter Vindaree, but your face is so well known, they give a frekk in you, to be blunt."

"What if I was a potential traitor?"

"But you ain't. There's no idea in arguing with me, mother. I said that this is something the High Council has decided."

Tanya sighed heavily as the two started walking again. "Blasted beaurocrats! In the glorious days when the God-Emperor was still around, these things would never have been contemplated. It would never have happened. It would've been ordered out and considered the Emperor's words."

"Mother, you know, as I know, that ever since the Emperor was wounded by the Deamon King, he was more or less bound to that Golden Throne of his. The Imperium was effectively

ruled by the High Lords. Our High Council is very similar to the old Imperial rule, right? Just... more democratic."

Tanya sighed again. The two walked in silence for a while, and then Tanya broke it.

"It's just so difficult for me, as a mother, to know that there's nothing I can do to protect you, Bastion."

"I don't think you should worry yourself about that," Bastion said flippantly and produced a short-barrelled las pistol from inside of his coat. "I am more than capable of taking care of myself in a situation."

Tanya idly contemplated the fact that a las pistol wouldn't even scratch the surface of a Necron, but bit back the urge to say this to Bastion. Instead, she smiled wryly and said, "I seem to remember someone saying that weapons weren't allowed inside the city-state limits."

"I am a special circumstance. Being one of the leaders of the council, it makes me quite a target, and I must ensure my own safety, no?" Bastion asked as he put the pistol back inside his coat. "Besides," he added, "what the council doesn't know, won't hurt it."

"Perhaps so..." Tanya said and let her mind wander. She thought of how complicated things had gotten with this 'High Council'. She, as all the other commissars, were used to strict, rapid discipline. She just couldn't take the slow progress of beaurocracy. No commissar could, despite being trained to be political officers. Okay, so she was a political officer, but this wasn't her politics and her way.

"Politics..." Tanya said after a silent moment. "I don't know how you can conduct yourself in them and still keep a trace of dignity... or sanity."

Bastion didn't even glance at her at this remark. "We all have our crosses to bear, mother," he replied flatly.

The two had just passed the door out to a balcony when they heard a loud, crashing noise. Tanya recognised the sound of twisting and splintering concrete after years of city fights. She headed back towards the balcony.

"Speaking of which," she said to Bastion over her shoulder. The young man followed her outside. Tanya stood at the marble railing of the balcony and looked down at the scene below her.

On the building opposite of the large Administratum building, a crew of twenty or so construction workers had been putting a new support column into place with the help of a crane. Thing was, the large concrete column had been too heavy for the crane, and the seven metres high construction machine had toppled over, destroying the column and the crane. Commissar Masterson, who Tanya guessed just had passed by, was taking this opportunity to chew out the foreman and blow some steam.

"Are you people trying to kill someone? And who the frekk put you in charge anyway, you idiot!" Masterson growled. "Anyone can see that that crane is not for this kind of-"

"Masterson!"

"Huh?" The burly commissar looked after the voice that had so rudely cut him off. He saw that it came from Bastion Yarrick, standing together with his mother on a balcony ten metres above his head.

"We've discussed this before," Bastion said clearly, so Masterson wouldn't miss a word, and neither the workers. "I don't appreciate you abusing civilians. You can do whatever Imperial Law permits with soldiers, but hands off the civvies! They're not part of your service area anyway."

Masterson bit back an urge to yell at the youth, glared at Bastion, then the workers and stormed off with a low growl. Up on the balcony, Tanya sighed again. She was getting good at sighing. She done it very often lately, she noticed. Practice makes perfect, she thought darkly.

"I have to get him to take some R and R," she said, meaning Masterson. She was broken

from further thoughts by the trilling sound of her communicator.

"This is Commissar General Yarrick, over," she replied.

"Ma'am, the scouts have returned," a voice replied over the vox-link. "Your presence is required."

"I'm on my way," Tanya replied and turned to leave the building. Bastion followed her to the main doors.

"Speaking of R and R," Bastion said and tried to cover a smile.

"Don't start," Tanya warned. "Besides, the senior Imperial Guard officer can't just take time off whenever she pleases, eh?"

"I know, mother, I know," Bastion replied with a soft smile. The smile reminded Tanya about Bastion's father so much. She shrugged off the memory. No time to get romantic now!

At the doors, Tanya raised her hand and made a sign with her fingers, calling the attention of her personal driver. As the staff car drove up to the pair, Bastion looked his mother in the eyes. Tanya thought he'd say something very important, but instead he just smiled again and turned.

"Well, I'd better see to the cleanup," Bastion said as he strolled away.

Tanya looked after him till he'd disappeared upstairs. Then she got into the staff car, which drove her to the Imperial Guard encampment outside the city. She was there in just under half an hour.



As she arrived at the encampment, she saw the Terrans dismounting from a Chimera APC. She didn't take much notice of them, until they'd all gathered in a large meeting tent. She counted the Terran faces over, but realised that McKenzie and the two boys named Edd and Johnny were absent.

"McGranth," Tanya said and turned to the massive form of the Grand Commander, "where's McKenzie?"

"He, Double D and Johnny took a Thunderhawk up to Admiral Ourmnoff's ship some time ago. McKenzie said he needed to perform some kind of private research. At least that's what it said in the message he left to me. I stopped asking what he does a long time ago."

Tanya nodded thoughtfully. "Alright." She turned to the assembled men and women.

"Less than an hour ago, a report came in, telling us that there are still Necron elements active after the battle. Why they haven't phased out, is a mystery. Perhaps that function is offline, I don't know. Anyway, they have managed to enter an older part of the Vindaree subway-system, parts built during the first Imperial Age, perhaps in the times of the 'Safi Yarikk'. However, from these parts, they have access to much newer parts, and thus pose a serious threat. When I got this report, I voxed Bastion Yarrick and ordered him to shut down the subway for the time being, until this taint has been purged.

"Commissar Demontfurt and I have to assist in the reconstruction of Vindaree, as there are Imperial Guard elements active as reconstruction teams. Do you think you can deal with the situation?"

"I'd love to," McGranth said and smiled warmly. "It'll be far better than lounging around here all day. And I believe I talk for all of us, when I say that." A chorus of "Ayes!" was the other Terrans' reply.

"Excellent," Tanya said. "Masterson will accompany you as a guide, so you don't get lost, and Masterson," Tanya said and turned to look Masterson squarely in the eyes, "I want to make it clear that McGranth will be in charge."

"Of course," Masterson replied with a slight nod. He wasn't so stupid he wouldn't defer to a Grand Commander of the Adeptus Astartes.

The collection of Terrans, Charleston, McGranth and Masterson got up to leave. Rolf was the last one out, but Tanya grabbed him by the arm.

"Oh, Rolf," Tanya said and looked Rolf straight in the eyes, "would you please come with me."

Tanya had tried to make it sound more like an order, but this passed Rolf by. "But I am needed in the subways," he said and he shrugged her hand off him.

"McGranth and the others will manage. There is just something I need to discuss with you."

"If you wish," Rolf replied and followed Tanya back to the black staff car and rode with her and Demontfurt back to Vindaree.



In the mean time, Masterson, McGranth, Charleston and the Terrans had taken a pair of Chimera APCs to take them to one of the subway entrances. The entrance was all that remained of the old station; a pitch black hole with concrete stairs and iron railing for those that needed to steady themselves. Masterson handed out flashlights to each one. Eddy, Ed, Charleston, McGranth and Kevin mounted the flashlights on their left forearms, Star Trek style, giving them free hands. Masterson and the four girls mounted their flashlights under the barrel of their weapons, except May, who had to mount it by the side of her flamer, to avoid melting the flashlight when using the flamer.

"This is it," Masterson said flatly as he lead the group down the stairs. "We'll be going into some of the older tunnels, in the outskirts of the city state of Vindaree. There is still electricity down here, but many lamps most surely have died, so that's why we're bringing flashlights. Also, these tunnels might not be in the best overall condition, so watch your step."

Masterson led them down on to the mono-rail track and made way towards where Vindaree should've been, had they not been underground. The tunnels the monorail trains had used were quite wide, so they could walk four in width, Masterson taking the lead. The commissar had been right about the tunnels. There were still lamps hanging a little here and there, but many weren't functioning, or maybe just sizzling with electricity. Parts of the walls had fallen in and earth covered the monorail track in those sections.

Charleston strolled up to one of the walls during their walk and shone his light on it. Different kinds of greenery were growing on the old concrete walls. Charleston idly wondered how they could survive without sunlight. He let his lamp play along the wall as he walked and discovered that the greenery covered inscriptions on the wall. He rubbed some of the slimy, fungus like plants away from one spot and saw what he'd heard Terran street children call a 'tag'. Seems Callidus had had the same problem with children spray-painting walls once. Charleston decided not to worry about the walls any more. If walls wanted to tell a story other than 'Kilroy was here', he doubted it would be these walls.

After about an hour of walking, they came to the next station. As the group got up onto the platform, they saw why they hadn't accessed this station from the ground. The stairs up to the surface had collapsed under the weight of earth that fallen down from above. Most probably the result of Necrontyr shelling. Masterson led them to another track, after having checked a map and counter-checking with his data-slate. They followed the new track for about half an hour and came to a crossing. Excluding the tunnel they just had come out of, there were three tunnels leading from the crossing.

Masterson scratched his chin in thought as he reviewed the data-slate. "Oh, right," he said after a moment. "This is the old construction terminal. The tracks were used for sub-way cars that transported workers, when they were upgrading the underground power network that ran alongside the subway."

"Alright, listen up," McGranth called the others attention. "We'll have to split into groups. Commissar Masterson, Commander Charleston and Lieutenant Commander Ed, you take the right tunnel. Canoness Nazz, you and the three Kanker sisters take the left one. Standard chain of command, you lot, got it? And you two, you're with me."

This last comment was directed to Eddy and Kevin.

"Okay, let's move out," McGranth said and clapped his hand. "And don't forget to cover your backs, right?"

With that, the group split up and headed into the tunnels.



Back in the city, Tanya Yarrick, Imperial Commissar General, sat on a bench on one of the many balconies of the Administratum building, enjoying the view of Vindaree. She loved it. Vindaree was, as far as she was concerned, perfect to rest the eyes on. The colours weren't boring nor were they to glaring. They were just... mild. Comforting for the eye. It was a sight she far to seldom got to enjoy due to her position. She closed her eyes and took in the sweet scents from the trithwood flowers that were blossoming in their pots on the balconies. It was spring now, here on Callidus. She'd been fighting so much lately that she'd forgotten that time had passed. Well, she hadn't really. She'd seen her son grow into a young man during these hard years, and Bastion had been her only measure of time at some passages.

Behind her, Rolf strolled out on the balcony. He marvelled over the sheer scale of the city, but one part of him said he'd seen it before, even more grand. He shrugged the feeling off and walked up next to Tanya.

"You wished to see me, yes?" Rolf asked as he got Tanya's attention.

"Ah, yes," Tanya replied, smiling warmly. "Rolf, please join me." Tanya patted invitingly on the bench.

Rolf sat down. The two sat in silence for a long moment, both enjoying the smells of the trithwood and the sounds from the streets below. Vindaree was slowly recovering, it seemed.

Tanya broke the silence. "Rolf, have you given any thought as to what you'll do when this is all over?"

Rolf started. The trithwood had awoken memories inside of him. Strange memories. "When what is over," he asked, dumbfounded.

"The war with the Necrons, of course," Tanya sighed. "What will you do, when it's over?"

"Ah, Rolf understands," he said and relaxed. "You wish me to remain here, yes? With the Imperium in this state, there will be much work to do."

Tanya silently shook her head.

"No, Rolf," she said after a moment of silence. "You're the one who doesn't understand. I don't want you to remain here. I want you to return to Terra with the others of your kind. The other Terrans."

"Now Rolf truly doesn't understand," Rolf said and knitted his brows.

"My place is here, in the Imperium," Tanya said slowly, as if explaining to a child. "However, your place is back on Terra, with your family and loved ones." Tanya saw the change in Rolf's eyes. She was afraid of this, afraid that it would happen. She didn't want the past back...

"But," Rolf said, and Tanya heard the unmistakable Invas County dialect. The Terran youth had had a funny dialect, but not like the Invas County dialect. Not at all. "But, surely a veteran officer as myself would-" Rolf began.

That was it. Tanya cut him off.

"You are not a veteran officer, Rolf. You are a young man, barely in his twenties!"

"I carry the same uniform as you, Tanya. The uniform of the Imperial Commissariat."

"The uniform you're wearing doesn't belong to you. It belongs to Rolf Yarrick, Imperial Hero. A man long since dead!"

Rolf looked Tanya straight in the eyes. "Rolf Yarrick isn't dead. Far from. He lives on in me."

Tanya got up and stood herself before Rolf, placing her hands on his shoulders and looked him straight and squarely in his emerald green eyes.

"Rolf Yarrick does not live on in you. You may possess his memories, but you do not possess his soul. That joined the Emperor long ago. You go into battles with far less experience than you believe yourself to have! This is very dangerous, Rolf! You have been lucky, this far, but some day your lack of experience will catch up on you, and the result will be very tragic."

Rolf got up and shrugged Tanya off himself with ease. He fixed her with a steady, steely gaze. Tanya didn't know quite what to draw from that look. She'd seen it once before, in the eyes of Commissar Masterson. It was calculating, brooding. It had measured her every centimetre. Rolf was doing the same. Measuring her, calculating her. Making sure about something she couldn't put her finger on.

Suddenly, Rolf broke their eye contact. "Enough of this," he said angrily. "I will not listen to this foolishness any longer! You speak of experience and lack thereof? Will I not gain experience after hand, no? Now, there's much for me to prepare for battles to come."

With those words, the young Terran stormed off.

"You put far too much on your own shoulders, Rolf!" Tanya called after him. She believed he hadn't heard. Hadn't wanted to hear. Tanya sighed sadly and sat down on the bench again. She hadn't, however, seen how Commissar Demontfurt had watched them both and watched Rolf as the young Terran had stormed down the hall. The commissar set after Rolf, with a very angry look on his face.

Demontfurt followed Rolf to another, larger balcony. It was large enough to support a group of at least twenty people, with a marble railing and the roof of an adjoining building just to the left of it. Demontfurt walked up behind the youth, who was obviously studying the city very intently. Demontfurt lowered his head a little, so that his peaked cap hooded his eyes when he spoke.

"Are you truly such a fool that you can't see what's happening?"

Rolf turned to face the colonel-commissar, his face contorted by fury. Demontfurt noticed a strange sheen of green in Rolf's eyes.

"How dare you talk to a veteran Imperial Officer in that way?" Rolf snarled.

"No, you are a little a boy," Demontfurt replied, looking straight back into Rolf's eyes. "A little boy who relies on the skills and abilities of a veteran Imperial Officer, a true Imperial Hero, because he doesn't trust in his own ability."

Rolf was just about to make a searing reply when Demontfurt cut him off.

"That's why you haven't been able to fully let go of Commissar General Rolf Yarrick, right? You believe that you need him. You believe you aren't good enough without him!"

Rolf's eyes narrowed. His dark green eyes had turned emerald, Demontfurt noticed. "You dare speak in such a manner to me," Rolf growled.

"And what will you do? It is truly a pitiful creature that must rely on others to fight his battles for him. It reminds me a bit about the Etherdarkers."

Rolf lips parted as he gritted his teeth in fury. Demontfurt noticed how peculiarly long the youth's canines were, but he didn't aim it any longer contemplation.

"Enough of this," Rolf growled. "You don't believe that I have skill? Then I'll show you..."

With one fluid motion, the Yarrickian sword was out of its scabbard and pointed at Demontfurt. Demontfurt swiftly drew the pair of swords he'd been using for a long time back and that he knew well.

"You wish to talk of skill?" Demontfurt mockingly asked as the two circled each other. "I have real skill. I've been training intently in the art of the blade for more than twenty years. I've been utilizing those skills to great success on the field of battle. That is real skill! Perhaps you'll

understand better if I give a slight demonstration?"

Rolf didn't wait for the attack that he knew would come. He stabbed in quickly with his sword, but Demontfurt dodged to the left. Bringing his sword round quickly to bring Demontfurt further off-balance, Rolf drove the colonel-commissar backwards step by step. The ring of metal striking metal echoed between the buildings.

Rolf managed to back Demontfurt up against the marble railing and made a horizontal slash against Demontfurt's belly. In one swift motion, taking good use of Rolf's wild swing, Demontfurt jumped backwards and up on the marble-railing and then used it as a base to somersault over Rolf's head.

Demontfurt landed behind the youth, spun round, and brought his left sword against Rolf.

Rolf dodged the sword easily, but he'd forgot about the second one. In a desperate attempt to avoid it, Rolf made an elegant back flip, rolled backwards when he landed and stood up on the far side of the balcony. He faced Demontfurt.

There was a pause and then Rolf brought up his hand to his left cheek. And he wiped away with his hand, he saw the faint red of blood on his black leather gloves. Demontfurt had managed a small cut in his face.

Demontfurt smirked. "So, the legendary warrior is mortal after all. Now do you begin to understand?"

Rolf smirked back. "Fate may smile upon anyone... once."

"Fate?" Demontfurt said and cocked an eyebrow. "Hah! There's no such thing as fate! There's only experience, something that I have and you have not."

Rolf managed a vicious grin. Once again, Demontfurt saw the peculiarly long canines. "I will show you experience, colonel-commissar."

With that, Rolf flew on Demontfurt again. Metal striking metal.

Neither of them could get a clear advantage. Rolf knew now not to underestimate his foe and the same was clear for Demontfurt. However, Rolf had size and reach on his side, not to mention momentum, and drove Demontfurt against the marble railing again. This time, when Demontfurt jumped up on the railing, Rolf was quickly there too, to avoid getting struck at from behind. He'd never do the same mistake twice.

Both of them moved their feet slowly, the slight arch of the railing making it hard to keep one's balance whilst dishing out slashes and parrying the other's blows.

The balcony and its railing was as old as the Administratum building, and one section of the railing suddenly gave way, declaring that it had had enough of this. The two combatants came tumbling down, Demontfurt landing heavily on his feet and Rolf rolling around to avoid hurting himself.

The two picked themselves up quickly and continued with their duel. Demontfurt was pleased to see the seed of frustration on Rolf's face. Rolf was striking as fast as he could, but due to Demontfurt's two swords, the older man always managed to dodge him.

"Rolf doesn't understand why your swords hasn't broken, or even gotten notched, by this sword?" Rolf managed to say during a slight break of blows.

"That's because adamantium swords don't break so easily," Demontfurt replied and lunged at Rolf. He was repelled instantly. Not that he'd counted on that to work.

"Adamantium?" Rolf said silently. That was the same material that his was made of. "Where did you get them?"

"Made them myself actually," Demontfurt said with a pleased smile. "I learned early on to respect the sword. I have dedicated the better part of my life to the study of what is easily the finest of all hand weapons. As part of my mastery of the sword, I learned how to craft them."

Rolf felt perplexed. "But how? Such a thing must've taken decades!"

"Oh, yes," Demontfurt replied. "I trained long to achieve my current skill level. I am currently the best swordsman in the Imperium."

Rolf jumped at Demontfurt again, lunging with his sword. Halfway through, Rolf felt that this wasn't going to work. He saw as in slow motion how Demontfurt parried his sword with his left-hand weapon and slashed at him with his right-hand weapon. Rolf forced himself into ducking back hard and fast; so he wouldn't lose his head, lost his footing instead and nearly fell.

"Tell me then," Demontfurt asked archly, "if you're a veteran Imperial Officer, how does it come that you are held off so easily?"

Something inside of Rolf raged against this blatant insult. He merely managed a bestial snarl and charged Demontfurt head on, forgetting all about skill and grace. Rolf brought round the Yarrickian sword two-handed. Demontfurt blocked it easily with his left and brought his right fist, wrapped around the hilt of the right sword, and punched Rolf straight in the face.

Rolf was knocked to the ground.

"You see?" Demontfurt said as he stood over the prone Rolf. "You can't depend on the skills of another. You must earn your own skills."

Rolf didn't reply, but slowly got to his feet. His eyes were lowered; the peak of the cap covering them, but Demontfurt saw the look of shame on Rolf's face. As Rolf spoke, Demontfurt also saw that the canines seemed more natural now.

"Rolf has been a fool," the young man sighed. "He couldn't see what was happening."

Demontfurt put a hand on Rolf's shoulder. The young man looked up and Demontfurt saw that tears were growing in the corners of Rolf's eyes. Tears of shame. Demontfurt put on a comforting and understanding smile.

"It's alright, Rolf. You're a good fighter none-the-less. You just need a little bit more experience, that's all. Come, I believe we both could use a good rest."

As the two turned to walk off the roof, they heard a weak, cracking noise. The section of marble railing that had given away hadn't fallen down yet and was hanging in front of them, four metres up in the air, slowly losing itself from its hold. The two men looked in shock-blended horror as the large chunk of marble came loose and fell down on the roof, taking a large section of the roof with it down.

Unluckily, part of the roof that fell in was the place where Demontfurt and Rolf were standing.

The two fell down and landed hard with the back on a large table. The hunk of marble landed on the floor and caved it in, sending up dust and debris in the air.

The two were picking themselves up, slowly, when Tanya and a cadre of Administratum clerks and a few other commissars and officers came running in to see what had caused that racket.

"What the frekk?" Tanya cursed. "What are you doing, Alex?"

"Oh," Demontfurt said meekly, "Rolf and I were just having a bit of a discussion."

Tanya looked up at the hole in the ceiling and then on the large hunk of marble and the caved in floor.

"Discussion on what? House demolition? No wait, I'd rather not know, Alex. I'll just assume that you both need medical attention."

Tanya left to get some medics whilst the other men and women went to get a clean-up troop.

On the table, Demontfurt lay back on the table and looked up at the hole.

"I'm getting too old for this..." he muttered sourly. "You alive still, Rolf?"

"Ouch," was all the answer Alexander Demontfurt got.



Back down in the subway tunnels, McGranth, followed by Eddy and Kevin, was walking down in a corridor. It had been quiet, the grand commander thought, if it hadn't been for Kevin's incessant complaints.

"Y'know what I don't get?" Kevin said to the world in general. "We're supposed to be Imperial Heroes, right? So why do we get this kind of service? Checking old, unused tunnels for Necrons that might not even exist! A waste of resources and not very hero-like, if you ask me!"

McGranth had had enough. He spun round and stared at Kevin with his dark brown eyes. The youngster didn't flinch.

"Enough is frekking enough, you little piece of bethas-turd! You don't have any idea of what a frekk of a chance you've got, right? It's an Emperor-damned HONOUR to wear the power armour of the Death Angels Legion! Hear me? An honour! More so there are a lot of people in the Imperium who've died because they didn't check their backs for 'non-existent' Necrons, see? Here, it's better to be on your guard than being lax in your vigilance against the enemy! Know that!"

McGranth made a short pause for breath and Kevin jumped at his only chance before a new salvo.

"Aight, back off, muscle-monster! I just said that I wanted something else than these cosy tunnels, right? Anything is better than this! It's just not the kind of work I expected an 'Imperial Hero' to perform!"

McGranth had heard the insult and the inverted commas over Imperial Hero. He decided to exercise his superior rank.

Kevin went to the floor with a crash. As Kevin was picking himself up, he saw the faint red glow from McGranth's power axe.

"Emperor knows how I could trust the Terrans that you'd be any different from the Dark Lord," McGranth muttered. The grand commander raised his power axe over his head. It fell towards Kevin's head-

But was deflected by a clash of electrical sparks as Eddy had intercepted the blow with his lightning claw. McGranth glared at him.

"Out of the way, commander," McGranth growled.

"McGranth," Eddy said, cocking an eyebrow. "What the heck do you think you're doing?"

McGranth paused. Yes, what the heck was he doing? The youth on the ground, pale with fear now, looked back at him.

"He's not Kevlinn, despite their physical likeness, you know," Eddy said softly.

McGranth was about to answer when a scream pierced through the dank air of the tunnels. All thoughts on their little skirmish forgotten, the three men set off towards the side tunnel from where the scream had come. The tunnel sloped downwards and they struggled to remain upright and not trip and fall as they ran down it.

As the three came out of the tunnel, they saw Nazz and the Kankers up against a smaller force of Necrontyr Warriors. The leader of the group appeared to be a more human looking Necron. It carried the same kind of war-scythe that the Necron Lords used, but it wasn't a Necron Lord. It was taller, broader.

And there was a terrible presence surrounding it, that McGranth couldn't put his finger on.

The Kankers and Nazz had been engaged in close combat with the Necrons, so McGranth, Eddy and Kevin hurried to assist them. McGranth instinctively took in the surroundings. The chamber was large, probably some old track-switching station. Stalactites were hanging from the roof far above them. On the far end of the room, there was a large, sealed door, probably of adamantium crafting; with the word DANGER in large, stencilled letters in faded red paint on it.

Emerging from another tunnel, McGrath saw the silver-gleaming braids of Commissar Masterson's peaked cap flash slightly in the corner of his eye. The short commissar, having trouble in keeping up with the tall Ed and Charleston, was carried to the scene of battle by Charleston. As soon as they entered the chamber though, Charleston put Masterson down. The group of six now charged into the fray to assist Nazz and the Kankers. Nazz was holding off one with her silver-white sword whilst the hissing of power swords filled the air as the Kankers slashed freely at their enemies. There was no pattern in the Kankers' attacks, and McGrath guessed it to be because these Kankers weren't at home with swords. But they'd learn soon enough.

McGrath squared up against the leader-Necron. Masterson had yelled something about "Pariah" or something. There'd also been something about "phase sword". It didn't matter to McGrath, though. Whatever instructions the commissar had yelled, McGrath had only caught those three words.

McGrath charged it and forced it backwards with the momentum of his massive armoured suit. The Pariah backed against a wall and McGrath sent the power axe through its chest. He was to dish out another blow when another Necron rammed its gun-blade into him.

McGrath turned round and knocked the head of the Necron with a deft backhand blow of his fist.

Kevin saw how McGrath dropped the Necron warrior, pulverized the head of the Necron he was facing himself and began moving towards McGrath. He pulled out his mono-mol short sword.

"McGrath!" he shouted at the top of his voice. He needed the grand commander's attention for this.

McGrath turned, just as Kevin wanted him to. "I knew it!" he hissed. "You lousy little-"

Grand Commander Eddie McGrath never got to finish the insult.

Kevin's sword flew through the air...

And missed McGrath's shoulder pad by a centimetre, only to bury itself in the face of the Pariah, that had come to its feet behind McGrath. As McGrath turned, he saw that the hole he'd caused in the chest was gone. Nimbly, for one wearing Tactical Dreadnought Armour, McGrath brought up his power axe and knocked the Pariah's head from its shoulders, making sure to finish the job by firing his storm bolter at the flying head, blowing it into pieces. Then, he turned to Kevin.

"Kevin, I-" McGrath began.

"Yeah, yeah," Kevin interrupted. "Save the mushy stuff for later, will you? You trust me already, right?"

McGrath smiled softly. It was an expression he used too seldom.

"I hate to break up such a touching moment," Masterson broke in. "Could you two, for the sake of the Emperor, try to focus on the task at hand?"

Somehow, Ed had got his bolt gun ready and he was now busy taking pot shots at a couple of Necrons in front of the large door. One of the bolts went wild and punched straight through the door.

A few seconds later, a loud screeching sound was heard from somewhere. Everyone, human and Necron alike, stopped whatever they were doing and turned their attention towards the door. The screech was followed by a low but powerful growl that shook the room and its inhabitants.

"Ed," Eddy said, trying to hide the terror that shook him, "please tell me that was your stomach."

Ed never replied. He never got the time to.

The door flew out of the crevice it was fixed in. The Kankers dodged quickly out of the way of the flying door, though two Necron warriors weren't as lucky. From inside the doorway, or the cavern, two gleaming red eyes revealed themselves. The eyes were dead, emotionless. Mechanoid.

The heavy tread of metal feet followed as the abomination crawled out of its cavern. Large, well over thirty metres from nose to the tip of its long whipping tail, with long talons on its four-digit feet. Its head was long and reptilian, with long spikes growing out of the back of its head. Silver glittering teeth thirty centimetres long lined the edges of its mouth. To its sides, large bat-like wings with the wingspan of a Boeing B-29 "Superfortress" rested retracted as to not be in the way in the cramped cavern.

Despite its size, the thing was slim, snake-like. But there was no mistaking what kind of mythological creature it resembled: the fire-breathing dragon.

The Necrons got out of their temporary stupor and re-aimed their Gauss guns at the new, much more evident threat. They had sent out a long signal of call signs to see if the dragon would respond to Necrontyr orders.

It hadn't.

The dragon screeched again, stunning the present people and machines with a hypersonic weapon. Whilst the Necrons were still stunned, the dragon opened its maw wide-open and focused energy into a ball of green lightning. Seconds later, it launched the large ball of swirling energy as a beam of greenish lightning. The beam engulfed the Necrons and the metal-men simply dissolved into dust.

With the Necron threat gone, the dragon turned its attention to the humans.

"Uh, Masterson," Eddy whispered, tugging the commissar's sleeve. "Commissars don't flee from an enemy of the Imperium, right?"

"No," Masterson replied, unable to hide the abject fear in his voice, "but we do fall back, at times, to a more strategic position."

Just as Masterson was finishing the sentence, Ed grabbed him and jumped with him out of the way as one of the dragon's large feet came crashing down, as the thing attempted to crush them. It appeared it needed time to recharge from its electrical blast.

Meanwhile, Eddy found himself taking cover behind the same boulder as McGranth.

"Grand Commander," Eddy said with anxiety in his voice, "we could use one of your famous battle-plans right about now."

"Give me a minute, okay?" McGranth replied tartly. "I don't really have the experience of fighting big metal lizards."

Charleston was suddenly beside them. He'd overheard their comments. "It uses similar technology as the Necrontyr, so I think it should be classed big, metal lizard Necron," he said.

Eddy and McGranth stared at him.

"What?" Charleston asked.

Their attention was brought elsewhere, suddenly and very frighteningly to the far end of the cavern as Nazz screamed.

"Kevin! NO!"

Kevin had climbed up an outcropping on one end of the room, using his power fist to get a grip where there was none. He took a slight run up and jumped off the outcrop.

He landed on the back of the dragon's neck, right behind its head.

The dragon, infuriated over this flea, turned itself round and round, firing short bursts of its maw-weapon in its desperate attempts to get Kevin off. It was no use. It couldn't reach him.

Finally, out of pure frustration, the dragon charged out of the room and crashed headfirst through a rock wall. This brought down several stalactites from the roof. The others ducked for cover and evaded the falling stalactites to avoid getting impaled on them as they came crashing down.

All they could do was watch helplessly as the dragon disappeared through the tunnels, Kevin clinging on to the dragon's neck for dear life. They were soon out of sight.

Through the tunnels, the dragon ducked and weaved. It took several turns that Kevin thought couldn't possibly take it back to the outskirts of the city. He guessed it was going back towards Vindaree itself.

He was right.

The dragon burst into the air, shooting rubble and rocks about it as it came out from a caved in station entry. It jumped into the air and spread its wings. As it flew over the city, it caught the attention of thousands of people. Those thousands included Tanya, Demontfurt and Rolf, of which the two latter were both sporting several bandages. They had run out of the Administratum building and turned their eyes to the sky as the dragon had let out a screech again.

The dragon did several rolls in the air and Kevin felt he was getting a bit airsick. He pulled himself up, fixing himself firmly to the dragon's neck with his power armoured legs and knees and drew his short sword. Summoning as much power as he could, he rammed the sword as far as its blade would go, straight into the back of the dragon's head. He broke off the hilt in the process, effectively destroying the short sword, but it had served its purpose.

The dragon let out one last, loud screech and started to descend. Kevin hung on for dear life as the silver projectile plummeted towards the ground. This would hurt a bit, he concluded.

The dragon smacked into the ground of Vindaree Central Park. There wasn't much park about it anymore, but the ground was soft enough to make the impact weaker. Nonetheless, Kevin flew off the dragon and hit the ground several metres away, rolling over and over as he hit the ground.

He stopped rolling thanks to a sturdy tree-trunk.

Kevin managed to open his eyes and see Tanya, Rolf and Demontfurt coming towards him.

"Kevin," Rolf asked, "what is this?"

Kevin tried to reply, but his reply was cut off. He'd stopped it himself, because behind the three commissars, he saw how the dragon got back up on its feet and glared at him, a low growl coming from it. Tanya, Demontfurt and Rolf turned and involuntarily took a step backwards, but a sudden jolt of electricity burst out of the dragon's neck. The red glow from its eyes faded and left its eyes and the dragon finally fell to the ground with a crash.

Kevin stared at the dragon for a minute, trying to sit up.

"I gotta be insane," he chuckled lightly to himself, and passed out.



"My regards to you and your crew, Captain," McKenzie said as he ended the communication between his Thunderhawk and the Sword-class escort Ivanov.

"May the Emperor protect you, Master Lexicanum," Captain Britanova's voice crackled back over the link just seconds before the vox-link was cut. The radio gave nothing but static, so he turned it off.

McKenzie knew why there was static. The answer was literally staring at him.

As he looked out the narrow observation port of the Thunderhawk, he more than well saw the Warp-gate. It was actually quite a disgusting thing, he concluded. A swirling torrent of colours, some of which in normal space never met and blended, which hurt the eyes except of the most trained psyker. McKenzie was one. He could watch one for hours. Ordinary men would get a

nosebleed. Sensitive people, that was weak-willed psykers, would get headaches. Perhaps even worse.

The Warp-gate, designated Secundus Prime Gate because of its size, was a huge, swollen, eye-hurting rainbow of colours... and worse.

As McKenzie closed his eyes, he saw other things, snapping at the borders of the gate, eager for souls, eager for blood and mortal flesh.

Deamons. Ready to pounce, should he lose concentration. Should his faith waver but a second.

"Are you two ready?" McKenzie asked over his shoulder as he steered the Thunderhawk on a course so they'd be on a safe course, just outside the Warp-gate's border. Just outside the reaches of the deamons.

"Ready as can be, McKenzie," Edd replied. McKenzie took one last glance at the baleful eye of the Warp-gate and joined the two Terrans.

"I take it none of you two have ever performed an auto-seance," McKenzie said as he plucked up a small bag held together by a leather string. He saw the questioning looks on the youngsters' faces. "As I thought. It's not much different from telepathy, and not much different from an ordinary scan. It's just that now we have to tap directly into the Warp to gain access to what we're looking for. Also, we're scanning on an area much larger than this entire sector. A sector full of latent psyker, undoubtedly, but also full of Astropaths... and deamons. You both need to be fully concentrated so I can gain backup from you when I need to, okay?"

The two Terrans nodded slowly. Edd glanced at the leather bag McKenzie was opening and gave the Marine a very dark look. The runes were all too familiar to him.

McKenzie felt this. He stopped what he was doing and turned to Johnny. "Johnny, would you go back in the ship and check the gun-servitors?"

Johnny did what he was told without complaint or question. He'd been forced a bit by McKenzie's will too, so there was no use arguing. Edd waited till Johnny was out of earshot, but he whispered anyway.

"I know the Dark Runes when I see them, McKenzie," he hissed. "What the heck do you think you're doing? This is an auto-seance, not a daemon summoning!"

"We need the artefact to ward our souls, Edward, not for anything else," McKenzie replied calmly.

"Really? Give me one good reason not to smear your brains out on the wall behind you! This is heresy of the highest degree!"

McKenzie fixed Edd with a direct stare with his green eyes. Edd didn't flinch. He felt the full force of McKenzie mind and will at him, forcing him to agree to the use of the dark artefact. But Edd resisted.

In the end, McKenzie gave in. "The Eye of Tzeentch is a Sorcerer's artefact; I'm prepared to agree to that. However, Edd, it is a good way to remain alive in the Warp. At least keep your soul unharassed, as you can see things before they happen. Perhaps it's just unfathomable for you to see that you can use the dark artefacts against the Dark?"

"No, it's not," Edd replied. "But they are tainted. You can become tainted too. I don't want you as my adversary, McKenzie, that's all." Edd had to admit it, but if McKenzie hadn't let him go, he would've given in to McKenzie's will just a second later.

"I've been using them for more than three centuries, Edward. That's about the time I've spent as Master Lexicanum of my Legio. I can resist them. The Eye of Tzeentch is a relatively weak artefact and, consider this, it's the strongest one I use."

"Right then," Edd said. "I think we can call back Johnny now, don't you?"

"I'm just glad this intermezzo was solved without bloodshed. If you'd been somebody else, I don't know what the reaction might've been."

"You would've persuaded them into something, I believe," Edd replied with a wry smile. He felt McKenzie's psychic call for Johnny.

Soon enough, the three were sitting together again and McKenzie took out the Eye of Tzeentch from its resting place in the leather bag.

It wasn't impressive. It was an egg-shaped, green jewel, with a black slit in the middle. The black slit-line gave the jewel the look of a green, cat's eye. McKenzie carefully placed it on the table, in the absolute centre of it.

Then he grabbed each other's hands, and McKenzie led them through the auto-seance. He'd told them what warding litany to chant, and Johnny followed Edd as McKenzie began in a language much darker. Edd ignored any thoughts he might've had. He knew he had to remain concentrated to the maximum for this to succeed.

McKenzie suddenly altered the litany he was chanting, and his voice went over in the softer tongue of the Eldar. Edd instantly knew why, but he didn't stop his own chanting for that.

McKenzie had found a trace!



In the Ronan system, the dark sphere of the Necrontyr moon rotated around the now derelict hive world.

Deep inside it, in what could be called an astrometrics laboratory, one lone figure was watching the secondary arm of the Galaxy, projected in the air. The room was totally dark, except for the tiny dots that were the stars of the galaxy.

The figure was tall and lanky, almost skeletal. Large, bat-like wings protruded from his back, like a metallic mockery of an angel.

The figure raised a long, thin arm and gestured with a hand with long, skinny fingers that ended in sharp, mono-molecular edged scalpels. The scalpels circled around a peculiarly large and bloated red giant star and zoomed in. Three purple blips appeared just close to the red giant, which changed into a smaller yellow star, just like its neighbour.

The figure narrowed its blood red eyes. It was eyes which long since had lost their soul and now were used only to study and observe the world with.

The bulky shape of Metallix moved up behind the false angel like an avenging shadow.

The false angel turned its head towards Metallix, and in the light from Metallix' bionic eye revealing a face criss-crossed by scars. The original flesh-tone was lost underneath a tight carpet of red scar tissue. Any Terran would've said there was a bit Freddy Krueger from Nightmare on Elm Street over him. But this wasn't Freddy Krueger. This was a creature that was far worse than Freddy Krueger.

He preferred to be called "Damion, Arch-technologist and Biomancer of the C'tan", though few ever got further than "Damion, Ar-" where the last part was lost in intelligible screams. To most races, he was simply known as Damion.

A smiled cleft Damion's mutilated features.

"It worked, my friend," he purred. "The little trick I played on the Eldar warlock's mind worked. There they are. Ready to pluck. In fact, I expected more. Fairly stupid, these mortal species."

Metallix tried to smile back, but half of his face staunchly refused to. "Congratulations, brother," he said softly. "I take it you want to pluck them yourself."

"I only want the boy..." Damion droned dreamily. "Prepare a Harvester ship and give me a squad of Pariahs. They will make it easy enough. They are after all quite powerful, all of them."



McKenzie threw open his eyes and broke the auto-seance. The glow from the Eye of Tzeentch

died away immediately.

"Yes, that's it," he said hurriedly as he tucked down the Eye. "We have to get back."

McKenzie had barely sealed the bag before a blast rocked the entire ship. Over at the tactical helm, a bright red light shone up, showing that the port side was severely damaged.

"What on Earth is that?" Edd yelled, beside himself.

"Rather what unearthly was that?" McKenzie said with a side-glance. He saw the crescent moon blotting out most of the Warp-gate ahead of them. "Necrons!" he hissed.

The Harvester ship came closer and soon enough the Thunderhawk was encircled in the crescent of the Necrontyr ship. A new warning light lit up as a tractor beam locked itself to them. At least McKenzie thought it was a tractor beam until the shields were knocked out.

At the back of the ship, a blue haze became visible and soon enough, the contours of the tall and broad Pariahs were visible. They immediately lowered their war-scythes and fired a fusillade of Gauss beams. McKenzie had presence of mind enough to erect a psychic barrier around himself and the Terrans. The Gauss beams dissipated against the powerful psychics.

McKenzie got up and tried to repel the Pariahs with psychics. He sent out a psychic bolt of electrical energy...

Only to see it disappear just decimetres from the Necrons.

The realisation struck him like a sledgehammer.

They were untouchables!

Edd had understood this too and drew his plasma pistol. Putting it on semi-auto, he fired twice and made two direct hits in two Pariahs' faces. The Necrons collapsed into immobile heaps.

As the plasma pistol was recharging, Edd caught sight of Damion, standing behind the Pariahs, head and shoulders taller than the Necrontyr.

"Who invited Freddy Krueger?" Edd said astonished.

Damion cared not for this comment. He touched the device in his hand. Speaking in Necron, he gave the Pariahs order to advance and so they did. Damion touched the device again, keying a new sequence. The device glowed even more intently than it had before.

The three psykers felt it like they'd been turned inside out and blown dry in the process.

Edd nearly fainted. Fighting the feeling of being hit by an oil tanker, he tried to get his plasma pistol ready for a new shot. A Pariah calmly walked over and smashed him unconscious with the side of its war-scythe.

Johnny recalled from the shock of the psychic implosion and jumped to Edd's defence. Another Pariah had moved up to assist the first one. This second Pariah made a swift backhand with its war-scythe. The butt-end of the blade caught Johnny and sent him flying into a wall, smacking him unconscious. Blood was running from his left shoulder and colouring his robes with a dark stain. His Eldarain rune-armour had offered no protection.

The two Pariahs grabbed Johnny firmly and carried him back to where Damion was standing.

Trying to get rid of the nauseating feeling he had, McKenzie drew his force sword, for what good it would do against an untouchable creature, and charged straight at the psychic abominations.

He swung round the sword in a deadly arc, cleaving one Pariah's head in two, before four more overwhelmed him. They drove him back. McKenzie lost his footing and was wide open. One of the Pariahs smashed its war-scythe into McKenzie's chest plate, lifted him into the air and sent him flying across the control-room.

McKenzie knocked his head in a control panel and one hand touched, by true dumb luck, the activation button for the distress beacon. He slowly sagged down on the floor, unconscious.

Before the Pariahs teleported back, Damion picked up the funny leather bag that McKenzie had been holding in. He would have much fun in finding out what it contained and what it did.