

## Out of the Silent ED



"Dawn shines a light on pain untold  
Scarred from the millennia  
The heart that beats inside my chest is cold"  
--Excerpt from Iced Earth's Im-Ho-Tep (Pharaoh's Curse)



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*"Precious little is known of the demi-god race of the C'tan. What are known are tiny excerpts from Imperial Chronicles from the pre-Imperial times and the small scraps of information Inquisitors have been able to gather from alien Eldar captives.*

*But what they tell is uniform.*

*The C'tan are the creators of humans and Eldar alike. They are a race of such power that they traverse the stars in blinks of an eye and deamons tremble in their shadows. They are not of a single shape, as most records tell that they are a race of pure energy. They can, however, assume mortal shape, and when they do this, their powers dwindle, but they remain nonetheless formidable. In mortal shape, they appear most often as crested and androgynous lizards, but they can assume the shape of man or Eldar as well.*

*The records say that the C'tan had been around for what the Eldar call twenty aeons, when their first-born were created: the Eldarain.*

*An aeon is, by human measures, about ten million years. That means that the C'tan had been in existence for two hundred million years when the Eldar were created.*

*The Eldarain were taught speech and culture by the demi-god C'tan, and the Eldar soon developed something typically mortal: religion.*

*They started to refer to the C'tan as Phoenix Lords and soon gave names to the C'tan who frequented the Eldar the most. They became Asuryan, Isha, Khaine and Kurnous amongst others.*

*But, with religion came beliefs of their own. The Eldar started to look to the stars and, with C'tan technology to help them, they soon flew between them.*

*Eldar records are here quite uncertain of what happened, but it is all clear that the Eldar, with their Phoenix Lords, fled from the other C'tan and founded the Eldar Empire.*

*This was roughly seventy million years ago.*

*The C'tan didn't let go of their sons and daughters so easily and a bloody war erupted. The Eldar soon enough came up with a weapon that could kill the C'tan, and broke free. Together with their Phoenix Lords, they built an empire.*

*It was not an empire to last, but that is another story.*

*The C'tan regrouped and created a new species: man. Man was less long-lived than the Eldar:*

*barely a fraction of an Eldar lifespan. He was shorter and less graceful as well as less psychic, as the Eldar psychic ability had proved quite hard controlled.*

*But man multiplied quicker and was, if such a word could be used, more durable.*

*The C'tan, wise from the damage caused, refrained from appearing early to man. Some old chronicles states that the C'tan took Eldar blood and mixed with the Galaxy's only true race, the Orks, but this is probably nothing but insane ravings. To claim that man is part Ork, part Eldar is ludicrous.*

However, the humans quickly developed a language and a culture without the C'tan, though they proved more prone to violence than the Eldar had. The C'tan showed themselves to the humans and as with the Eldar, they were soon worshipped as gods.

*But, just as with the Eldar, as soon as the humans had developed spacial flight, they fled. This time, the C'tan left well enough alone and let the humans, together with a handful C'tan, by humans called Paladins, go for their own future.*

*The rest is Imperial History.*

*Little is known what happened to the C'tan after that. They were still weak from the Eldar war. No one truly knows.*

*But the Imperial scientists have found numerous pyramids in various places that display a certain likeness in artisanship to the Eldar constructions.*

*Still, though, the question remains if the C'tan are extinct or if our former masters only are biding their time until they come back and claim us as theirs."*

*--Excerpt from 'An overview of Imperial pre-history' by the Heretic Felix Rovannion, burned at the stake for his heresy by Inquisitor Lesch Sparda.*



McKenzie opened his eyes and looked around. He was stripped of his armour, naked except for a loincloth. All around him, a vast wasteland spread out. It was completely devoid of features. Just flat, brown ground.

And the worst was, he was all alone.

"Where is this?" McKenzie thought silently to himself.

The sky was dark. McKenzie called out, but received no answer. Not even an echo.

He looked around again and saw a figure in the distance. As there was no sun, he couldn't even guess what direction it was. McKenzie started to walk towards the figure. As he got closer, he saw that its outline resembled Johnny a lot.

By the God-emperor! It was Johnny!

"Johnny!" McKenzie called out. "Are you okay? Where's Edd?"

Perhaps Johnny hadn't heard him, because the figure made no attempt to show it had noticed him. Most surely he hadn't noticed McKenzie, so McKenzie started running towards him instead, the soft ground meeting his bare feet gently, with no hint of giving him a surprise.

"Johnny," McKenzie called again, "what's wrong?"

When McKenzie was a few metres from Johnny, the boy turned round and looked straight at the Space Marine. McKenzie stopped dead. Johnny's face was distorted, his nose and mouth growing into what could resemble a beak and his skin pulsed with all the colours of the rainbow.

"Johnny," McKenzie breathed, "w-what?" This couldn't be!

Johnny started to walk towards McKenzie and for every step Johnny's face became more and more beak-like. His hair turned to multicoloured feathers and the feathers sprouted elsewhere on his body too. Two vestigial, feathery wings were starting to grow from Johnny's back.

And during this mutation, the eyes remained human.

McKenzie backed up, trying to keep the distance from the creature that was Johnny and still not. There was a lot of the greater deamon of Tzeentch over Johnny now.

"What's going on?" McKenzie silently asked himself. The Johnny-thing had heard him.

"Isn't it obvious, McKenzie?" the thing hissed, its snake-tongue slithering around the word in Low Gothic, as if unused to speak it. They voice had been low, but very loud at the same time. McKenzie thought he felt blood running from his ears.

"Johnny, what are you doing?" McKenzie asked. He felt panic crawling in him now.

"Don't you see, McKenzie?" the Johnny-thing hissed. "This is how I was supposed to be, before you blunted me. I can feel the raw power of the Warp growing inside of me every second. It's just so wonderful, don't you think?"

"Johnny, stop!" McKenzie shouted, unable to hide the horror in his voice.

The Johnny-thing just laughed, deeply and coldly. No, it wasn't laughter... The thing was giggling with glee, not laughing.

"No, McKenzie," it said after its fit of glee. "You can't stop this. You can't protect me, not anymore than you could protect George McKenzie."

McKenzie stumbled and fell on his back. The Johnny thing was truly a Lord of Change now, standing well over three metres.

"Johnny?" McKenzie silently whispered.

The thing had gotten a sorcerer's staff from somewhere and raised it high into the air. It spoke again, but McKenzie knew it wasn't Low Gothic anymore. This was the deamon-tongue. And damn him, he understood all. What had he done?

The Johnny-thing focused power into the sorcerer's staff and a ball of lightning was forming at its top now.

"You'll never protect anyone again," it said slowly in its cursed tongue. McKenzie didn't want to hear more. This was how the Emperor punished him for his treason and heresy to study the Dark Arts.

The Johnny-thing turned round its staff and directed it at McKenzie. The lightning gathered and a bolt of pure energy shot at him.

No!



McKenzie sat bolt upright and gasped. He fought hard not to scream. Damn him! He was a Space Marine! They knew no fear! They knew no fear!

He looked around. He was in the medical bay of a spaceship: that much he understood from the interior and the view port that showed the glitter of distant stars.

He sat in a medical cot, sweating and panting. It took him a minute to realise that he wasn't alone. McGranth sat next to his bed on a stool, stripped of his armour. McKenzie stared at his commander. McGranth just smiled back.

"About frekking time you woke up, pal," McGranth said softly.

McKenzie took another look around. He was definitely in the medical bay of a star ship, probably a battle cruiser. He looked back at McGranth.

"What?"

"We picked up a distress signal from somewhere around that Warp-gate you visited and found the Thunderhawk you'd borrowed drifting around by itself in space. That was two days ago."

"Two days?" McKenzie said in shock.

McGranth nodded thoughtfully. "What the frekk happened out there anyway?"

"We located the Necrontyr Mothership, or whatever you could call it, but we were ambushed." McKenzie was silent for a while. "They took Johnny with them."

"I figured that much," McGranth said softly and nodded. "How many were they?"

"It didn't matter, Eddie. They were Untouchables. And their leader used some sort of anti-psyker weapon. Knocked us out in a flash."

"Big scary monstrosities with strange scythes?" McGranth asked.

"Yes."

"That would be Pariahs then. Encountered one on Callidus after you left."

"What?"

"Long story and it doesn't matter," McGranth said with a dismissive wave of his hand. He leant forward and sighed heavily. "Great. Now we have to rescue Johnny too. As if we didn't have enough to do already." He sighed again.

There was a pause.

"Eddie, what has happened in the last two days?" McKenzie asked.

"Well, after picking you up, Tanya was nigh on hysterical. The Necrons had never dared something like that so early after a failed raid. So we all came up with this plan to gather sixty per cent of the remaining Imperial forces for one last big blow. You'll get the details later, okay?"

McKenzie nodded his assent. "Is Edd okay?"

"What? Double D? He's fine. Came to earlier than you, anyway."

McGranth got up. "So, as soon as you feel that you're all here, Edward, hurry up and get ready. I need your report of what happened, officially, because we have a lot of work to do."

With that, McGranth left his friend alone on the medical bay.



A few days later, when all information available had been gathered, the highest-ranking officers in the Imperial force gathered aboard Mishkin's Pride. The briefing was held in one of the transport bays as there was so many present. Canoness Alyssia Demontfurt alone represented the highest will of the Adepta Sororitas, though several Sister Superiors accompanied her.

Commissar Cadet Jorun was there as well, on Masterson's instruction.

Tanya Yarrick stood before a hololithic display of the sector they were passing through and used her finger to show the places she referred to.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she began. "Master Lexicanum McKenzie of the Death Angels Space Marines Legion has declined to go into specifics, but he has discovered the current location of the Necrontyr Mothership. Due to its shape, we've coined the call sign Sphere on it.

"We have strong belief that the Sphere is the core of the Necron's strength. If it is taken out, then we surely will be able to destroy the Necron forces for good, with little or no opposition."

Tanya touched a few runes on the hololithic projector and the picture zoomed in on a lone planet. It was situated at the fringe of the Imperium. A lone, green planet.

"This is Arborkar, once a Jungle World made training site for the Space Marines. No longer in use, the people of it has abandoned it since long. However, it is the perfect place to have a base, as nobody would look in an abandoned system, right?"

There was some laughter from the assembled.

"Jokes aside," Tanya hushed them. "This will be a three-pronged assault. For those of you who don't speak the language known as Army, that means a simultaneous attack on three fronts. I scarcely believe even the inhuman Necrons can handle something as that.

"Now," Tanya said and showed a picture of the Sphere, "Admiral Ourmnoff, under the scrutiny of Colonel-commissar Demontfurt, will lead an assault that will combat the Sphere and its protecting Harvester-ships. Keep your ships in one piece, Admiral. We'll need them later on."

The holo-display changed back to Arborkar.

"The Necrons also have a very sizeable force on the ground as well. The idea is to lure them to send at least eighty percent of their forces to Arborkar's surface, where Colonel-commissar Masterson and Canoness Alyssia will meet them with las and bolters. May the Emperor protect you in your work.

"However, these two massive assaults are only there to distract the Necrons from the true... incision." Tanya shifted the screen back to the Sphere. "Grand Commander McGranth will, together with me, lead an assault team to infiltrate and destroy, or disable, the Sphere from the inside."

"Excuse me, ma'am," Jorun said and raised a hand, but lowered it when he saw Tanya's urging look. "How are you going to get inside the ship?"

Tanya smiled softly. "This is how."

She touched another rune and a Necrontyr pyramid, on Arborkar's surface, came into view.

"This appears to be a Necron structure and this is but one of four on Arborkar's surface. They are small but we have strong reasons to believe they contain phase technology that we can use for teleportation. The plan is to secure one such structure and use the Necron's technology against them.

"The Terrans and the officers of the Adeptus Astartes stay here, you others are dismissed."

The large group of men and women walked out and left Tanya alone with the Terrans. She turned off the holo-display and then turned to the Terrans.

"The High Council doesn't support this mission, as usual, so it is entirely voluntary. If you don't want to go, then do so, but nobody will think less of you for that."

None of the Terrans moved a muscle.

Tanya smiled wryly. "As I thought. Very well, we leave in two hours for ground-fall, so get as ready as you can. You all seem to want to go, so if you're not aboard a transport within two hours, that's your problem."

The Terrans fell out and left Tanya alone to talk some matters over with McKenzie, McGranth and Charleston.

The young Terrans walked together to the transport bay, Eddy walked up beside Nazz. Her tight-fitting power-armour only served to make her the more beautiful. Sadly, for Eddy, Nazz wasn't one bit interested in him.

"So, Nazz," Eddy said and applied a soft smile, "are you coming with us to the Commissar General's ship?"

"Actually," Nazz replied and looked Eddy straight in the eyes, "the Kankers and I will be fighting on the ground, together with Commissar Masterson and Canoness Demontfurt."

"Why's that, Nazz?" Kevin asked, coming up beside her, much to Eddy's chagrin.

It turned even worse for him as Lee Kanker moved up next to him, so that he had Nazz on his right and Lee on his left.

"What? Are you nuts?" Lee asked caustically. "No way we're gonna let some machine pull us apart, piece by piece, and send us shooting into space. We'll be just fine on the ground, thank you."

"What is this?" Eddy asked with a wry smile. "Are you actually afraid, Lee Kanker? Hmmm?"

"Heck no!" Lee replied, sounding hurt. "I just wouldn't want to ruin my good looks for you, dreamboat."

"Touché!" Kevin smiled and he and Nazz chuckled together over Lee's deft reply. Eddy just blushed and rolled his eyes.

"Oh, brother..." he muttered and moved away from the other three to find his two true friends.



Two hours later, the Imperial Battlefleet Moskva engaged the Necrontyr ships defending the Sphere. This was enough distraction for the transport ships to get close enough to send off their cargo of drop ships. If one had been standing on Arborkar's surface and looked up, one would've seen the sky darken with Imperial drop ships, carrying nearly one million Imperial Guard, one Demi-order of Sisters of Battle and two squads of Space Marines that had been called together for this last stand of Humanity.

Strapped up in the drop ship, Tanya spoke to the volunteers for the incisive mission over the inter-com of the rebreathers that they had to wear during the decent.

The Volunteer group consisted of McGranth, McKenzie, Charleston, the Eds, Rolf and Kevin.

"Right," Tanya said, addressing them all, "Once we get inside the Sphere, there will be three main objectives:

"One: Fine, and rescue Johnny, and any other prisoners that the Necron might still have. Also, destroy or neutralize this new weapon of theirs. Hold on; make that 'psychic prisoners'. The others might be too many. Remember this well! This is a last stand for Humanity, not some liberty front for slaves! There just isn't the time for everybody. So, only the psykers, because they are the greatest threat to us.

"Two: Find the Sphere's engines, or similar and attach melta bombs to them. These can be detonated as we leave.

"Three: Find whatever it is that this Metallix uses to control his hordes and destroy it. Don't neutralize, but destroy it!"

Tanya looked around as to see that everybody had understood. They all nodded their assentation.

"Master Lexicanum McKenzie and Epistolary Edd will handle the locate and rescue mission, Eagle One. Commander Charleston and Lieutenant Commander Ed will deal with the engines. Thus, that leaves the seek and destroy mission for Grand Commander McGranth, Commander Eddy, Captain Kevin, Commissar Rolf and myself."

"That'll be all for now. Keep radio silence until we've hit the ground, which will come with a blast, so keep you eyes on the altitude meter and brace yourselves when it goes down to zero. All right? May the Emperor protect us all."



He hadn't been able to move for days. And all he remembered before being strapped to this cold, metal gurney was a bright stabbing lance of pain in his head.

Johnny Two-by-four looked around. He couldn't move a single centimetre but his head was free to turn. He saw Plank lying by one of his sides. There was no use trying to grab him, Johnny knew that much. He turned his head to the other side and got a look of abject horror on his face.

He saw two huge figures: one broad and powerful, the other one slim and lithe. Both were almost thoroughly made of metal.

Johnny knew all too well whom both were. They spoke to each other in a language Johnny couldn't understand, but it scared him infinitely more than the daemon's voice he'd heard on Secundus.

"How soon will it be ready?" Metallix asked his kinsman.

"In short," Damion replied. "Just a few more connections to make. You must understand this is delicate work!"

"Of course. Is it going to work, though?"

"Surely," Damion replied with confidence. "The Boy has reserves of psychic energies that I've never seen before. This will be like trying to empty an ocean with a spoon. He's the perfect power source."

Metallix glanced over at Johnny and grinned. The biological part of his face contorted into something malicious and Johnny immediately looked away.

"Soon," Metallix purred, "very soon I will rule them all, as it was destined to be."

Metallix suddenly extended a finger and plugged himself into the Sphere's senses. Before his eyes, he saw how the Imperial Fleet came out of the Warp in a rainbow of colour. As the Warp-glare died away, he saw the scale of the attack. He ordered his Harvesters to engage and dispatched a good two million Necrontyr to the surface. Thanks to the phase mechanics, they'd be ready for those foolish humans. That they never learned that they were created to obey and not to lead?

"So," Metallix said to himself, ignoring Damion's presence, "they choose to fight. I knew they would. That's how they function. It doesn't matter, they will only die that much sooner. They're after all only mortals."

Metallix disconnected and turned to Damion. "Contact me the moment it's online."

With that, Metallix stormed off to his 'chambers'. From there he'd watch the slaughter of the last vestiges of human defence and stubbornness.

As he strode through the corridors, a soft smile cleft his biological face-half. "This is what I was meant to do," he said to himself. "This is my destiny!"



As Battle Fleet Moskva engaged the Harvesters, the drop pods were ejected and begun their screaming descent to the surface. Like flaming balls of death, the drop ships slammed into Arborkar's surface, opening and disgorging hundreds of thousands of Imperial Guardsmen and a good two hundred Sisters of Battle. Now or never, the human's were prepared to sell their lives dearly.

Tanya and McGranth led their group to the pyramid after wishing Masterson, Canoness Demontfurt, Nazz and the Kankers good luck over the vox-link. The sheer force of firepower they rained down on the Necrons as they approached the pyramid was frightening for coming from ten people. They avoided close combat with the many more Necrons and relied on blowing their head's to bits, effectively making it impossible for the iron men to self-repair.

After fifteen minutes they reached the pyramid and gained access.

"Finally," McKenzie sighed. "So, how do we do this?"

McKenzie looked around. "I have a bad feeling about this..."

McKenzie's hunch proved right. A large, peculiar Necron appeared from inside the pyramid. It's fingers were long, sharp claws and it's lower half was that of a giant robot serpent.

Charleston raised his plasma pistol and fired. Nanoseconds before the shot would've hit, the Necron went out of phase and shifted itself out of harm's reach.

"What the frekk..." Charleston mumbled silently. He never got chance for a new shot as the wraith-Necron knocked him flat with its tail.

"Deal with it!" McKenzie shouted as he dove for what he took for Necrontyr controls. He needed to get the data-wires ready and the Emperor-damned data-slate to be able to do anything.

Edd was quick to respond to McKenzie's order and drew his force sword. He saw McGranth attack the Necron-wraith with his power axe, only to see it shift and knock McGranth over the head. It toyed likewise with Kevin, Ed and Eddy. By then, Edd had placed himself between the Wraith and Tanya. He registered a tiny tingling feeling as the Wraith shifted and knew what to look for now, or rather what to feel for.

Edd squared up with it and charged the force sword with psychic energy, but instead of releasing it in one big blast, he restrained it and spun round just as the Wraith shifted.

The psychically charged sword connected with the Wraith's head in a spray of sparks and metal shards.

The beheaded body of the Wraith fell to the ground with a heavy thud.

McKenzie hadn't even looked up from his work during this. He keyed in a short sequence and looked up.

"I think I've got it. Put your helmets or rebreathers on."

They all did as they'd been told, but as Kevin locked his beak-like helmet in place, he suddenly asked, "Wait! Whaddya mean you 'think you've got it'?"

McKenzie never replied as a greenish light engulfed them and swept them away from Arborkar's surface.



The green light reappeared on the Sphere, close to another teleportation site.

"Dude," Kevin said weakly, "We have to stop doing things like that." There was a slight green colour to his face.

McGranth gave him a quick glance, but otherwise made no notice of Kevin's comment.

McKenzie seemed puzzled by something and reached up and removed his helmet. "There's a stable atmosphere here. Nitrogen-oxygen. Highly breathable, but a bit thin and stale." The rest of the group followed McKenzie's example and removed their helmets and rebreathers.

"Let's get on with it, before we're detected." McGranth said to the assembled people. "You all know your objectives, so get to it. We'll meet back here once the objectives are achieved, not sooner. Try to stay in vox-contact. Use channel Epsilon-Delta-Sigma."

With that, McKenzie and Edd headed off in one direction, Charleston and Ed took another, whilst McGranth, Tanya, Rolf, Eddy and Kevin headed a third way.



Ed and Charleston made double-time down a corridor, trying to lose the Necrons they'd just engaged in a close-quarter firefight. Charleston was getting very worried over the way he had to treat his plasma pistol. More Necrons and it would perhaps overheat. He flicked it back to single-shot mode from semi-auto.

They came to a ledge that ended in nothing but a seemingly bottomless pit. They dodged to one side each as the Necrons caught up with them.

The two Necrons that had been following them failed to notice this evident lack of surface under feet and fell through the empty void beyond. Some two hundred metres down, they collided with a metal ridge that snaked along the wall on the other side. It resembled a road, but much too vertical to be one.

Barely a metre from the ridge, the Necron went into electrical spasms, shuddered and went limp. Their eyes dulled and their bodies fell ever downwards.

"Well," Charleston said lightly, "now we know at least how many Volts course through those ridges."

"How many?" Ed asked eagerly.

"At least 10,000 Volts. The Necrons didn't even touch the ridges, so..."

The two power armoured warriors looked around. They saw a gigantic tunnel of sorts; metal ridges interconnected and ran all around them into space. The ridges led downwards and upwards around them in a seemingly endless black abyss.

"Great," Charleston sighed. "I just bet the engine room is somewhere down there." He pointed downwards. "Well, if that's where they are, that's where we're going! Ready to fly, Lieutenant Commander?"

"Yes sir!"

The two activated their jump packs and began to descend, carefully avoiding the ridges that snaked downwards.

As they'd descended for about two hundred metres, a group of Destroyer Necrons appeared just below them. However, instead of using a hover system to suspend them in mid-air, their lower bodies seemed to have been modified to allow them to follow the magnetic traction of the ridges of metal, riding on the electrical current, without touching the ridges even.

The group of Mag-destroyers approached the two power armoured warriors.

Charleston and Ed didn't hesitate. Ed drew his bolter and Charleston his plasma pistol. The fired a volley down at the approaching Destroyers and took out a few of them, but more came to reinforce their comrades immediately from below. Charleston and Ed sped up their descent, continuing to fire at their enemies. They synchronized themselves. Charleston fired when Ed reloaded and Ed fired whilst Charleston waited for his plasma pistol to recharge.

Charleston threw a quick glance to one side as he descended and saw several ridges that veered away from the others, probably to the engine room and came up with a rather interesting idea.

Charleston accelerated and landed himself on one of the Destroyers. He pulled his power

sword and slashed off its upper torso. He grabbed the falling torso by one arm and flung it against another Destroyer. The second destroyer was knocked off balance, its gyrocompass disturbed and tumbled into contact with the electrical railing. The two went in a bloom of purple fire.

Ed landed on the lower part of the Destroyer's body just behind Charleston to see the big Marine start to fiddle with the wiring. Charleston connected one of the loose wires to his left wrist armour, through a minimal socket in the armour.

"Bingo," Charleston muttered.

"Huh?"

"I tapped into the sucker's gyro-compass computer, or whatever, and it seems to know where the engines are, so it's gonna take us there."

"How?"

"I drive this with octadecimal equations. Easy. I drive, you shoot!"

Charleston holstered his plasma pistol. He was kneeling over the place where the Destroyer's torso had been, looking like a gothic, cyberpunk version of a skateboarder, whilst Ed stood, albeit a bit unsteadily, right behind him. Charleston fiddled with the wires a bit more and glanced at Ed.

"Hang on."

"To what?" Ed asked with what sounded like incredulity.

"Anything," Charleston replied, not moved by this.

Ed hung on for dear life to Charleston free arm as the Destroyer body moved forward at an alarming speed. It raced along the ridges, sometimes going up, sometimes down, making rapid turns at places so that Ed lost his orientation completely.

From behind, more Mag-destroyers were coming up against them. Ed unloaded his bolter in their heads, dropping several. But a few of them were getting a bit too close.

One managed to grab Charleston's arm, the one that was connected to the Necron's body. Charleston rewarded it with the back of his fist.

The head of the Mag-destroyer came off and bounced on a neighbouring ridge, sparking. Its body soon followed.

Ed had pulled out his power sword and was alternating with firing at the Destroyers one-handed with his bolter and using the crackling power sword on the close ones.

They finally reached a horizontal corridor, still followed by several Necrons. The Mag-destroyers fired their heavy Gauss canons constantly at the two power armoured Heroes of the Imperium. Charleston deftly dodged the salvos.

"Hah!" Charleston shouted at the iron men. "Nobody outmanoeuvres me!"

The end of the corridor approached them at an alarming speed and a large portal on a ledge came into view.

Suddenly, a swarm of Necrons appeared through the portal in front of them. Charleston dared a glance backwards to see that their pursuers had gained numbers as well.

They were getting boxed in.

"Ed," Charleston said calmly, "get the bag out of my pack by my waist."

Ed removed a large bag from Charleston's waist, opened it and found that it contained a melta bomb. It looked like an oversized krak grenade with a handle.

"Oi! Ed!" Charleston said to call the young man's attention again. "Ever seen a ten car pile up?"

Ed just shook his head.

Charleston fiddled with the wires, made himself loose the, grabbing hold of Ed, jumped off.

The destroyer-body they'd rode with continued its surge forward and rammed into the line of Mag-destroyers ahead of it. The rear line didn't react fast enough and rammed straight into the

front line as well.

The two groups of Mag-destroyers smashed into a ball of metal, lost control as their gyrocompasses temporarily went offline and one or two touched the metal ridge.

Electricity surged through them all, destabilized their Gauss weaponry and they went up in a greenish bloom of fire.

Having forgotten his jump pack, Charleston came tumbling down, grabbed the ledge with one hand, and caught Ed with the other, who in turn held the melta bomb in its handle with his free hand.

"Well," Charleston smiled, "that was a fifty car pile up. Emperor, I love this job!"

Charleston hefted up Ed onto the ledge and then climbed up himself.



Down on Arborkar's surface, the battle between Man and Machine raged. The Sphere hung like a cataracted grey eye above them all. Every man and woman knew that they were fighting for the survival of Humanity as a free race. Gauss beams hit flesh and atomised it, whilst bolts hit metal skulls and exploded them like overripe fruit.

Nazz, Lee, May and Marie kept close together. Nazz had her brightly silver-glittering sword out, battling it out against a Flayed One.

One Necron Warrior charged straight at May, but she caught him. She held on, and they got caught in a shoving match. It ended abruptly as May raised her flamer to the Necron's head one-handed, pointed it at its skull and pulled the trigger.

The metal skull melted and trickled down on the ground where it scorched the grass.

Marie was busy covering them all with well-placed shots from her bolt pistol.

Lee pulled out her rapier-like power sword, facing off against an Immortal. Lee was getting frustrated, and she guessed it was the same for the iron man. Neither of them seemed to get anywhere.

Finally, Lee had had enough.

"Oh, for crying out loud!" she shouted and reared back her right hand, bundling it to a fist. She socked the Necron with everything she got fly in the face.

When she pulled her arm back, the face of the Immortal was almost completely caved in. Lee, using the adrenaline kick the punch had given her, picked the heavy droid up and heaved it towards a group of Necrons that had been charging in to assist it, knocking them flat.

She felt a faint throb in her knuckles, but the most of her armoured gauntlet had taken the blow quite well.



Several hundred metres away, amongst the Imperial Guard, Commissar Cadet Jorun went down a Gauss gunshot atomised half of his gut. Masterson was by his side in a flash.

"Jorun!" Masterson panted and tried to grab hold of the youth, but Jorun fought against him. "You'll be fine, boy, I promise you'll be!"

Jorun shook his head. "No! If it's the Emperor's Will that I am to die here and now, so be it, sir."

Masterson looked down on him. Jorun's eyes were already fading.

"Emperor bless you, Jorun," Masterson said softly as Jorun drew his last rasping breath through crisped lungs. Masterson threw a quick salute to the dead boy, took off his dog tags and hung them around his own neck, as a lucky charm.

He pulled out his power axe and, bellowing an Imperial Hymn, Masterson charged straight into the midst of iron men.

Many Imperial Guardsmen rallied around the raging commissar and joined him in his charge and proclamation of Faith.



Back up on the Sphere, McKenzie and Edd were running down another corridor, though not with a Necron in sight. The surroundings slowly went over from fairly well lit corridors to dark, menacing ones. McKenzie made a quick scan of his surroundings and registered a psychic signal. It was powerful, very powerful, and alien.

He took to the right in a crossing, followed by Edd, and came into a corridor lined with cells. McKenzie felt that the cells had no need of bars or force fields when they generated psychic null-zones instead.

They passed several empty cells. McKenzie stopped before the one cell that was occupied. He made a quick scan for other psychic signatures, but none.

There was an aged figure in tattered dark brown robes sitting on the floor. McKenzie peered closer at the frail figure and a look of shock crossed his face. It was partly from the psychic force he registered, even through the null-zone, partly from that the creature was an eldar.

How in the name of the Throne had the Necrons gotten hold of an eldar? A farseer lord, most surely too.

McKenzie didn't know and didn't care.

He'd soon enough managed to crack the code lock to the cell-field. McKenzie walked into the cell and knelt beside the eldar. The creature stirred and looked up, revealing an aged face, so very thin and wrinkled. His thin, white hair was as well very long. But there was a certain twinkle in his dark eyes that said the mind was still very able to do its stuff.

"Oh," the eldar said as it saw McKenzie's features, "hello there, mon-keigh."

"Excuse my rudeness, lord farseer," McKenzie said and bowed his head, "but who are you, and how did you come to be here?"

"My name," the eldar said and straightened himself, "is Farseer Lord Uryanaar of Craftworld Vurupano. And I was on Vurupano until those machines came along, that is. They killed many of my kin, but for some reason, they kept me alive. As their minds are unreadable even for me, I have not the faintest idea why this is."

Edd, who'd been keeping watch, broke in suddenly, "Lord Farseer, can you stand? I have a feeling we should get out of here."

"Of course," Uryanaar replied in his fine flowing Low Gothic. "I should be able to manage."

Slowly, and stiffly, Uryanaar got to his feet and began to walk forward. The two humans were amazed at his actual height. Nigh on two metres fifty, rivalling Charleston. Under his dark brown robes, McKenzie saw the intricate weave of rune armour. The Necrons hadn't even bothered to remove it then? Fool on them, McKenzie thought grimly.

As they made their way down the corridor, McKenzie felt a tingling sensation and drew his bolt pistol. Edd followed lead and pulled his plasma pistol.

"Come," McKenzie said and lead the way, "I can feel we're not far away from Johnny."

"Who?" Uryanaar asked.

"A friend," Edd explained, "he needs our help."

They soon came across a large, circular room. A gigantic device was set up in the middle of it. The device sported things that made Edd give an involuntary shiver. All around there was metal tables, like those slabs found in a morgue. People were strapped to several of them, odd needles, like spikes, inserted into the backs of their necks.

"Cosy," Edd mumbled, "if you're Hannibal Lecter."

Then he, and McKenzie and Uryanaar, saw who was lying on the slab right in front of the horrible dissection device. Plank was on his right side, and Niire on the left.

"Johnny!" Edd shouted and was about to move forwards when McKenzie's arm stopped him.

"I'll get him," McKenzie said to answer Edd's questioning look. "Try to release the others."

As McKenzie moved towards Johnny, he saw that the boy had a gag over his mouth for some reason. Johnny, awoken by the presence of three alpha-plus level psykers, started and began to

mumble at McKenzie through the gag. He seemed very agitated over something. The slight oppressive feeling McKenzie had felt at his mind, but knocked aside, made itself known again. Something was blocking him, but what?

"Johnny, calm down," McKenzie said as he leant down to make Johnny free. "What are you trying to tell me?"

There was a crash just next to him as Edd flew into the wall, back first. Edd slid down on the ground with a thud.

McKenzie wheeled around and drew his force sword instinctively.

Damion stood just inside the entrance, five Pariah bodyguards right behind him. He spoke in a menacing alien tongue that McKenzie couldn't understand for two credits, but the sadistic look on his face told the Master Lexicanum all he needed to know.

"Oh," McKenzie sighed, "that."

