



WARHAMMER

WARHAMMER
40,000



GATHERING STORM

RISE OF THE PRIMARCH



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RISE OF THE PRIMARCH

BOOK THREE OF THE GATHERING STORM

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AN AGE OF LEGENDS



It began as the full might of the 13th Black Crusade crashed against the Cadian Gate. Hammered from orbit, betrayed from within, the outlying worlds of the Cadian System fell. With every passing day hope dwindled, but the Imperial defenders held their ground. Under the leadership of Lord Castellan Creed, Cadia was standing firm as it always had, however the threat was greater than ever before.

As the conflict became increasingly desperate, heroes of the Imperium gathered on Cadia. Space Marines from multiple Chapters lent their strength to the defence, including the Black Templars of Marshal Amalrich, and the Imperial Fists of Captain Garadon, who brought the star fort *Phalanx* into the war. Saint Celestine swept down upon Cadia in its darkest hour, her miracles instilling faith in its ragged protectors. Inquisitor Greyfax, long a prisoner of Trazyn the Infinite, was released from captivity to lend her prodigious will and talents to the cause.

Yet the key to victory upon Cadia and beyond lay not in simple strength of arms, a truth recognised only by Archmagos Dominus Belisarius Cawl of the Adeptus Mechanicus. Urged on by the Harlequin Sylandri Veilwalker, this ancient Martian priest had unlocked the secrets of the black pylons that studded Cadia. Only now, at this final juncture, did Cawl see that Abaddon's Black Crusades had long been seeking out and destroying pylons across the galaxy. With each such victory, the Despoiler weakened the weave and weft of reality. Cawl had, in truth, been en route to honour an ancient pact made with the Lord of Ultramar, but on Cadia he saw a chance to reverse Abaddon's work and even close the Eye of Terror forever.

It was not to be. Though the Emperor's servants fought with dogged courage and determination, Cawl's works were undone, the pylons destroyed and Cadia dealt a grievous death blow. The few remaining Imperial defenders were forced to flee, and as they did so a great and terrible Warp rift yawned in their wake. Yet one chance at salvation remained open to them: Cawl's ancient pact, at the crux of which was the mysterious artefact that he transported within an armoured auto-reliquary. Declaring themselves the Celestinian Crusade in honour of the Living Saint who still lit their way through the darkness, the surviving warriors of the Imperium forged on, with the Despoiler hot on their heels.

At the same time, a cosmic upheaval rocked the very foundations of the Eldar race. A new deity had awoken in the aether, known as Ynnead, the God of the Dead. Upon the blood-soaked sands of the Dark City's Crucibael arena, a gladiatrix named Yvraine was chosen by this gestalt being to act as his prophet. Though beset by both her own people and the daemonic servants of Slaanesh, Yvraine, aided by the mysterious warrior known as the Visarch, successfully brought word of the Whispering God's awakening to Craftworld Biel-Tan. There, a great shattering occurred, the craftworld undergoing a swift and terrible cycle of death and rebirth that brought the Yncarne, avatar of Ynnead, into being. Some amongst the Eldar race embraced the Ynnari belief that the cycle of death and rebirth would be their salvation. Others rejected it as arrogant and dangerous in the extreme. Yvraine pressed on regardless, seeking out the time-lost artefacts known as the Cronewords and formulating a desperate plan to turn back the tides of Chaos.

It was this mission that brought Yvraine through the webway to the frozen moon of Klaisus, leading an army of the Aeldari. They emerged from the moon's webway gate just in time to rescue the Celestinian Crusade from their pursuers. Driving off the Black Legionnaires, the Ynnari negotiated common cause with the Celestinians, agreeing to aid them in reaching the realm of Ultramar. Thus, as Warp storms billowed and spread across the galaxy, the assembled pilgrims hastened through the webway, bearing a thin sliver of hope between them.





ULTRAMAR DEFIANT

CHAPTER ONE

'THEY SHALL BE PURE OF HEART AND STRONG OF BODY, UNTAINTED BY DOUBT AND UNSULLIED BY SELF-AGGRANDISEMENT. THEY WILL BE BRIGHT STARS UPON THE FIRMAMENT OF BATTLE, ANGELS OF DEATH WHOSE SHINING WINGS BRING SWIFT ANNIHILATION TO THE ENEMIES OF MAN. SO IT SHALL BE FOR A THOUSAND TIMES A THOUSAND YEARS, UNTO THE VERY END OF ETERNITY AND THE EXTINCTION OF MORTAL FLESH.'

- Roboute Guilliman, the Codex Astartes



A REALM AT WAR

High in the Atheron Mountains, unearthly energies stirred. They flowed in barely perceptible currents, whipping up dust and ash as they washed across a corpse-scattered plateau. Gradually they picked up pace, invisible forces tugging at the flames that licked from wrecked battle tanks, and causing billowing smoke to curl into sluggish vortices. A handful of living warriors remained on that arid mountaintop, Chaos Space Marines clad in the brutal armour of the Black Legion. They stood amidst the mounded dead of recent battle, a few of their own fallen scattered amongst heaps of Ultramar Defence Auxilia. The traitors checked handheld scrying devices and raised spiked boltguns, panning their weapons as they sought the source of the aetheric buildup. Harsh voices barked challenges through fanged vox grills, while sensors swept the cobalt-blue sky above and the hulking forms of mountains that rose beyond the plateau's edge. Still no enemy revealed themselves.

With sudden fury the building energies roared, hurling Heretic Astartes from their feet. The surging power was dragged inwards to a tight point, and there it coalesced into a towering structure. Tall and elegant, the curved edifice shimmered into view as though it had stood atop the mountain for a thousand years. The air swam around it, and from within spat a hail of firepower. Roars of anger and pain rose from the traitors as monomolecular discs cut through armour and shattered eye lenses. Blood sprayed dark across sun-bleached stone. Severed limbs encased in black armour clanged to the ground as ancient heretics were cut to pieces by the sudden firestorm.

As the Chaos Space Marines reeled, the Ynnari and Celestinians burst from the webway entrance. Yvraine and the Visarch led a force much reduced; deeming it unwise to appear suddenly in the bounds of Ultramar at the head of an entire warhost, many of their followers, guided by Eldrad Ulthran and the Autarch Meliniel, had departed on other crucial missions. The two remaining Eldar leaders sprinted across the plateau with breathtaking speed, empowered

by the deaths of their enemies and weaving like dancers around the bolt shells that roared in their direction. The Visarch skidded low, sliding under a thumping volley of fire to ram his blade through a traitor's breastplate. Yvraine, meanwhile, leapt nimbly over a hail of shots, planting one foot atop a Black Legionnaire's bolter and vaulting over his head. The prophet of Ynnead swept her blade in a flashing arc, and her victim's helm left his neck an instant before his form crumbled to glowing ash.

'SO TAINTED ARE THE ENEMIES OF THE EMPEROR, SO CORRUPT, THAT THEY SEE NOT THE HORROR AND THE MISERY OF THEIR OWN LIVES. TO SLAY SUCH DEBASED CREATURES MIGHT BE THOUGHT A MERCY, A BENEDICTION IN BLOOD. BUT IT MUST NOT BE VIEWED SO, FOR THE HERETIC, THE ALIEN AND THE TRAITOR DO NOT DESERVE SUCH BLESSINGS. DEDICATE THEIR DEATHS, INSTEAD, TO THE MASTER OF MANKIND, AND THINK NOT UPON THE FOES YOU SLAUGHTER, EXCEPT TO TREAT THEM AS SACRIFICES TO HIS ETERNAL GLORY.'

- Saint Celestine, Ruminations upon the Nature of Holy Vengeance

More warriors surged from thin air to join the Ynnari charge. Swift-footed Dire Avengers and klaw-wielding Incubi charged out alongside bellowing Black Templars Space Marines, their ingrained hatred for each other put aside. Marshal Amalrich and Inquisitor Greyfax stormed out of the webway side by side, blades lashing out to shed heretic blood once more. The winged figure of Saint Celestine soared above them, her Geminae Superia leaping at her side with bolt pistols blazing. The Sisters of Our Martyred Lady followed them into battle, guns flaring as they spat fire at the traitorous foe. Behind them all came Belisarius Cawl, skittering on his many mechanical legs as his precious auto-reliquary trundled along behind him. Skitarii and Battle Servitors advanced with him, and the ground shook at the tread of a pair of towering House Taranis Knights that brought up the rear.

The Black Legionnaires did not panic at this sudden assault, as lesser warriors might have. Their numbers were few, however, and their attackers had the advantage of complete surprise. Mass-reactive bolts blew a handful of Skitarii apart, and two of the Visarch's Incubi were beaten down and bludgeoned to death at close quarters. Yet between the flashing blades of the Celestinians and the Ynnari – who seemed to move with greater speed and skill by the moment – all but a few of the Black Legionnaires were swiftly cut down.

The last of the traitors fell back in good order, determined to bear word of what they had seen to their masters. It was not to be; none escaped the howling firestorm as the Knights braced their legs and let fly with gatling cannons and armour-piercing missiles. Fire billowed, shrapnel flew, and the fleeing traitor marines were reduced to bloody tatters.

As quickly as it had begun, the one-sided battle was over. The Celestinians and Ynnari were left standing amongst the freshly fallen dead with their weapons smoking in their hands. Terse orders were given, warriors jogging out to establish a bristling perimeter of guns around the webway portal. The Eldar and humans had fought together, yet they remained wary of one another, leaving tacit gaps between their formations as they deployed.

Thus shielded, the leaders of the Ynnari and the Celestinians gathered beneath the harsh blue sky. Questions needed to be asked, and facts established. The Imperial vox channels were found to be thick with clipped exchanges between Space Marine officers, Defence Auxilia regiments, starship captains and countless others. All were clearly engaged in fierce battle against Chaos forces, with dread names such as the Black Legion, the Alpha Legion, the Iron Warriors and the Emperor's Children ringing through the vox. Palls of smoke rose from horizon to horizon, while the skies above were crisscrossed with contrails. Ultramar, it appeared, was a realm plunged into a desperate war for survival.



*H*ot winds hissed across the barren plateau, bearing the distant rattle of gunfire and thump of explosions to Greyfax's ears.

'Macragge is invaded,' she said dourly. 'This is grave news.'

'You are labouring under a misapprehension,' said Cawl. 'According to my internal gyro-cartolog, we do not stand upon the surface of Macragge. We are located one hundred and sixty million miles spinward of our intended destination, allowing for variable positioning and empyric distort.'

'Then where are we?' demanded the Inquisitor, rounding upon the tall xenos priestess standing nearby. Yvraine turned to Greyfax with a cold, imperious look. The Ynnari leader lowered her blade with slow deliberation, her head cocked to one side as though listening to something only she could hear. When she spoke, her voice was cold as the grave, and Greyfax felt a shiver at the faint, insectile susurris that scratched behind the alien's words.

'Would you have been gladdened, mon-keigh, to find that my people kept a hidden way upon the surface of one of your most prized worlds? I think not.'

'No,' growled Marshal Amalrich, 'we would not.' The Black Templar had been more grim than ever since the battle on Klaisus. Greyfax knew that he had taken the fall of Cadia, and the subsequent alliance with the xenos, very badly.

'The Marshal is right,' said Saint Celestine. 'Such knowledge

would have unsettled us. But it would, perhaps, have eased our road. Where, then, do we stand? And how shall we proceed along our appointed path?'

All looked to Yvraine. The Daughter of Shades made a show of staring off to the far horizon, her Gyrinx winding around the train of her dress, rumbling a leonine growl.

'This is the world that your species calls Laphis, in the star system of Macragge,' she said, her voice drifting around them like cold mist. 'In order to proceed, we need only locate representatives of the Ultramarines present upon this world.'

'And what if they are disinclined to lend us their assistance?' prodded Eleanor, one of Celestine's Geminae Superia. 'We walk with xenos at our side, and come uninvited to their world. Are they not as like to shoot us as to offer welcome?'

'That is your concern, not ours,' replied Yvraine, her tone dismissive. 'These are your Emperor's finest warriors, are they not? Surely they have the mental discipline to discern friend from foe.'

'They have the mental discipline to remain wary of xenos trickery,' rumbled Amalrich. 'And to suspect those who traffic with such creatures.'

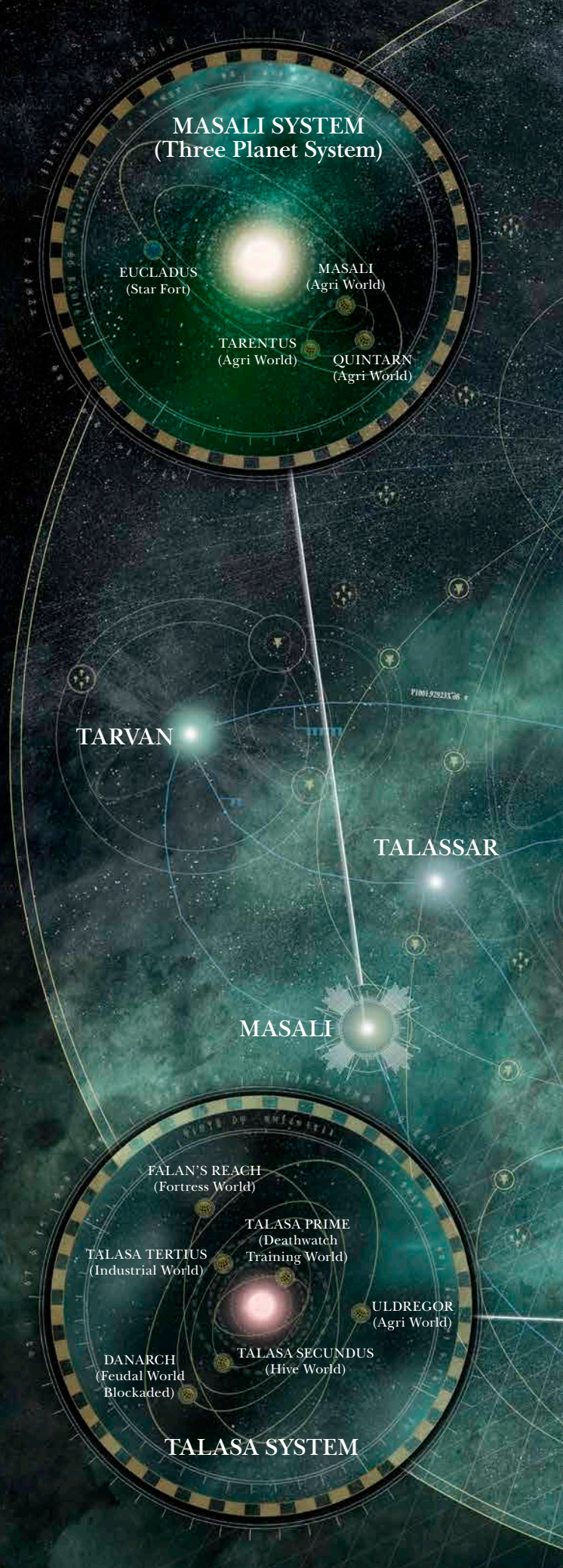
'We pilgrims will convince them that our cause is holy and just,' said Celestine forcefully, shooting a stern glance at the scowling Marshal. 'And that our alliance is an honest one. But not by standing here and arguing. We must move at once, for darkness draws close, and time grows short.'

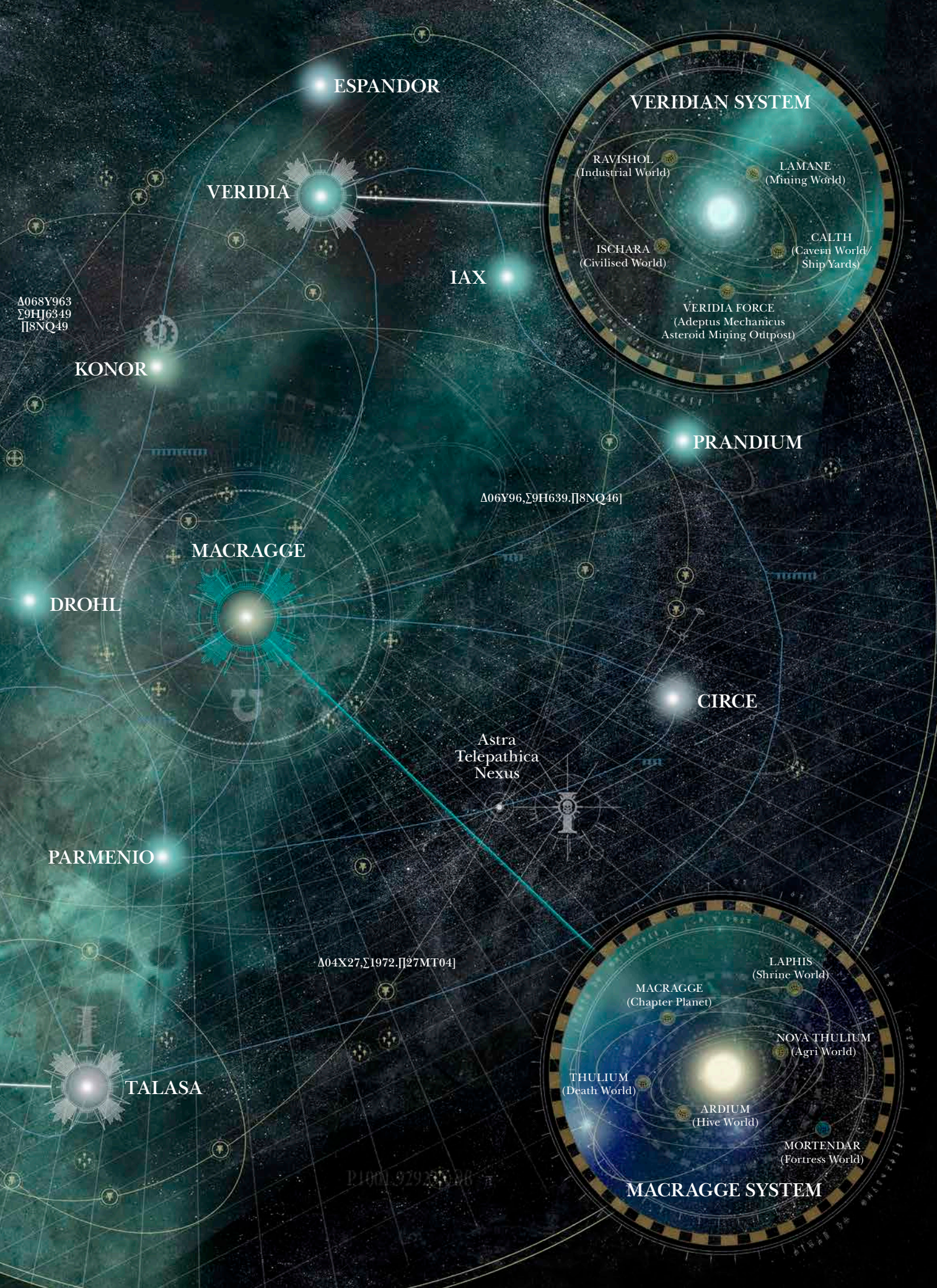
In the closing years of the 41st Millennium, the stellar realm of Ultramar came under sustained attack from myriad foes. Menacing shapes stirred in the intergalactic void, the Tyranids of Hive Fleet Leviathan drifting inexorably towards Guilliman's realm. The Arch-Arsonist of Charadon, one of the greatest Ork warlords in the galaxy, led a monstrous Waaagh! from his anarchic domain with the intent of overrunning the Ultramarines' eastern defences. Yet the greatest threat of them all was that posed by the dark servants of Chaos.

A vast horde of traitors, renegades, mutants and madmen fell upon Ultramar under the leadership of the foul Daemon Prince M'kar the Reborn. That invasion plunged dozens of worlds into bloody battle, war raging from Espandor and Tarentus to oceanic Talassar. Yet eventually, after long months of sorrow, bloodshed and loss, the Ultramarines prevailed. M'kar was defeated and his armies driven off, pursued to the stellar void beyond the bounds of Ultramar.

So began a period of rebuilding and consolidation across Ultramar, as Marneus Calgar and his Chapter led their peoples' efforts to shore up the battered defences of their realm. It was a period of repose and recovery that was to be all too swiftly ended.

Acting upon the prophetic revelations of the sorcerer Zaraphiston, Abaddon the Despoiler hurled a fresh coalition of Chaos warbands against the defences of Ultramar. Though the Despoiler himself was engaged in the ongoing fighting around the shattered Cadian Gate, his influence as arch-champion of the Dark Gods extended far. So it was that he was able to muster a sizeable force of warriors from the Black Legion, the Iron Warriors, the Night Lords and a number of other renegade factions, and hurl them against the worlds of Ultramar. While some warbands struck at the outer systems in an effort to tie up potential loyalist reinforcements, the main traitor horde rode the tempestuous currents of the Warp straight into the Macragge System itself. So began a desperate and bloody invasion...





THROUGH THE FLAMES

At Saint Celestine's urging, the crusade forces and their Ynnari allies moved off through the Atheron Mountains. Events were moving quickly now, accelerating like a river in full flood tide, and the pilgrims did not have the luxury of time. Cadia had fallen, but worse – judging from the ferocity with which he had pursued his broken foes, and his knowledge of their intended destination – the Despoiler knew something of their mission.

From the heights of the plateau, a broad, packed-earth roadway led down the mountainside. Wide enough for several Baneblades to pass side by side, the roadway angled steadily downward between taller mountain peaks, and its entire length was lined with ancient stone supports. Atop these stood sombre statues of robed figures with the unmistakably oversized features of Space Marines. Lit braziers in the statues' hands trailed streamers of incense, and the allies saw heaps of devotional offerings and prayer papers piled at the effigies' feet.

As they travelled, the Celestinians and Ynnari kept their weapons ready and their eyes fixed warily on the horizon. They threaded their way between occasional wrecked tanks and scattered corpses, both of Defence Auxilia and traitorous cultists. The bodies looked to have fallen a matter of hours earlier, their blood still congealing around them and local insects only just beginning to settle, but the pilgrims saw no sign of living beings along their road, whether friend or foe.

Archmagos Cawl assured his comrades that they were travelling in a favourable direction, their road carrying them towards a large urban centre and – if his vox-thieves and the local cartographia inloads were accurate – the Ultramarines fortification that watched over it. The extraordinary allies spoke little as they pressed on. They listened instead to the sighing of the wind through the high places, the crunch of their footfalls on dry earth, and the distant clangour of battle borne to them through the thin mountain air.

Those sounds grew suddenly louder as the road wound around the towering flank of a sun-scorched mountain. Ahead, less than a mile distant, a ferrocrete bastion loomed over the roadway, built into the mountainside itself. The stylised U of the Ultramarines was embossed proudly upon the structure's flank, and twin Icarus arrays swivelled back and forth atop its battlement, barrels pistoning as they hammered fire into the sky.

The barrage of shots was aimed at a brood of Helderake Daemon Engines. The draconic war machines swooped and circled, diving down to gout baleflame across the bastion's ramparts before soaring away again with soul-chilling roars.



One of the Helderakes broke off in the direction of the pilgrims. Marshal Amalrich was the first to react, yelling for everyone to spread out and run for the cover of the Imperial bastion.

The Knights of House Taranis swiftly overtook them all, their pilots spurring their mechanical steeds into a loping run. The massive war engines shook the ground as they advanced, guns swivelling skywards with ominous menace. One of the Knights bore an Icarus array atop its broad carapace, and as the Helderake swooped into range, the towering construct let fly. Gatling cannons and heavy stubbers joined the fusillade, filling the air with a storm of

projectiles that ripped the wing from the approaching Daemon Engine and sent it spinning down to detonate against the mountainside. Another of the roaring Helderakes was blown apart as it banked around to attack the pilgrims, while the third broke off its attack and jetted away into the hard blue skies, dwindling until it was nothing more than a speck.

The Knights stomped to a halt, weapons ticking as they cooled, and the rest of the pilgrims quickly caught up to them. Moments later, the armoured portal set into the bastion's feet hissed as its pressure-locks disengaged. The heavy door swung open and a trio of Ultramarines battle-brothers emerged, bolters raised. The Space Marines advanced, pacing carefully forward with their weapons trained on the Ynnari.

Voice amplified by his vox grill, one of their number barked a challenge to the newcomers, asking who they were, where they hailed from and why they travelled in the company of xenos.

The conversation that followed was tense, but measured discipline prevailed. Perhaps if the allies had come to a world of a less rational or temperate Chapter, matters might have escalated towards violence.

For the Ultramarines, the combined presence of an Inquisitor and the Living Saint – albeit appearing less than cordial towards one another – was enough to offset the presence of the Eldar at their side. Saint Celestine explained that their mission was a divine pilgrimage ordained by the Emperor himself, and that Archmagos Cawl and his auto-reliquary must reach the Lord of Ultramar with all haste.

The Living Saint smiled in an entirely unsurprised fashion when the Ultramarines revealed that a flight of Stormravens was even now en route to their bastion. The gunships had been requested to provide air interdiction against the packs of Helderakes harassing fortifications in this region. However, two gunships could be spared to transport the leaders of the Ynnari and Celestinians up to

the Strike Cruiser *Sword of Honour*, which in turn could bear them on to Macragge. The Ultramarines explained that the Lord of Ultramar had, indeed, returned to the Fortress of Hera just days earlier. They would see Cawl and his allies there safely.

While they awaited the inbound gunships, the pilgrims split their forces. All of the Ynnari, save Yvraine and the Visarch, would return to the webway portal, departing this world to spread the word of Ynnead amongst their people.

As a gesture of good will to their hosts, Celestine asked the Battle Sisters of Our Martyred Lady to remain on Laphis. Along with the Knights of House Taranis, they would place themselves at the disposal of the Ultramarines, and aid in the ongoing defence of the planet.

So it was that, as the Ultramarines Stormravens burned hard for orbit just minutes later, they bore a much-reduced company up to the waiting Strike Cruiser. From the Celestinians came Greyfax, Amalrich and a handful of Black Templars, Celestine and her Geminae Superia, and Cawl, accompanied by Kataphron servitors and Skitarii.

The gunships docked with their parent warship and, once they had been formally introduced to the cruiser's captain, the allies were ushered into confinement quarters under heavy guard. The Eldar bristled at this treatment, as did Marshal Amalrich and his men, but Saint Celestine pacified her comrades once more with firm words of faith and acceptance.

So began a grim and frustrating journey, trammelled in a spartan suite of brushed steel chambers and corridors, watched constantly by silent Chapter helots armed with heavy naval shotguns.

Hours ran slowly into days. The omnipresent rumble of the ship's engines, and the sluggish stirring of artificial gravity and recycled air, became simple facts of existence. The Visarch trained endlessly, even deigning to spar with Marshal Amalrich. Inquisitor Greyfax, meanwhile – with the aid

of Archmagos Cawl – was purged of the mindshackle scarabs that had enforced her captivity. This process was effected over several days, and wracked the Inquisitor with terrible agonies as the invasive cyber-parasites were strained from her blood stream.

Despite the pain that she endured, Greyfax's iron will never faltered, nor did she show any but the most minor outward signs of pain. Instead, she concentrated on keeping a wary eye on Saint Celestine. In private, Greyfax was beginning to suspect that Celestine's apparent divinity was more than a sham. She had seen the Living Saint battle against arch-heretics and twisted traitors; she had seen her predict events about which she could not have known in advance; she had seen how the light of Celestine's faith repelled the wicked and brought new strength to the righteous.

Yet Greyfax was an Inquisitor of the Ordo Hereticus, a witch finder whose first duty was to doubt and to suspect all that seemed fair in case it concealed foulness at its heart. In Greyfax's long experience, true miracles were few and far between, and that which seemed a gift from the Emperor was, more often than not, a tainted temptation laid by the Gods of Chaos. Thus, even as the seeds of hope grew in her heart that Celestine might be uncorrupted, and even through her own agonies, Katarinya Greyfax kept watch over the Living Saint, alert for the slightest hint of duplicity.

Amidst the enforced tedium, none noticed when Yvraine beckoned Cawl away into a recessed cargo bay in which his auto-reliquary had been stored. Beneath the mindless gaze of Cawl's Kataphron servitors, the Emissary of Ynnead spoke earnestly with the Archmagos Dominus.

The mysterious discussion waxed long, Yvraine labouring to convince the intractable Magos of certain unpalatable truths. Eventually, Cawl nodded his cowed head in agreement, a single, curt gesture that brought the clandestine meeting to an end. Satisfied, Yvraine swept away in a whirl of whispering skirts, leaving the looming Archmagos Dominus to contemplate the ramifications of their meeting.

>>>Message Fragment Commences.

'...repeat, this is station Dema, vox operator Naum Hestro transmitting over all channels. Our Astropaths are dead. Station Overseer Munce is dead. There's... so many dead... anyone hears this message, I beg you, carry it on to Segmentum Command. To Holy Terra herself. Throne, they have to be warned...'

*****Message corruption // background sounds of gunfire, screaming voices // breaks to static approx 73 seconds // Message fragment recommences, severe vocal stress detected.

'...oh two hundred seventeen sidereal, the Astropaths complained of empyric disturbance. Our instruments triangulated its source as quadrant eighty eight of the Ocularis Terribus. By zero two hundred forty six, Immaterium flux increased to magnitude crimson, and the Astropaths experienced waking visions of a black stone hammer shattering a castle gate. Overseer Munce ordered the Geller generatorums roused.

Emperor curse his soul, he waited too long.

The screams began at zero three hundred. So many voices. So much death. The Astropaths went into terminal seizure, hundreds of voices spilling from their mouths. We recorded what we could, then gave them the Emperor's mercy.

It was Cadia. Cadia is gone. Broken in the Despoiler's fist. Without it, the Eye of Terror is spilling forth, overflowing reality. I do not understand how, or why, but it is so. Our empyric augurs, the audio-retrieval from the Astropaths' death screams... they all confirm.

Again I beseech you, don't attempt rescue. We are lost. When the Astropaths died, something... else came through to... wear their skin. It is stalking us. Hunting. We don't have long, but none of that matters.

Only the warning matters. Please...'

THE SIEGE OF HERA

At last, after days of realspace transit, the *Sword of Honour* reached Macragge's orbital envelope. The Celestinians and their allies were hurried through the ship's corridors under armed escort. The Strike Cruiser shook around them, the unmistakable shudder of gun batteries discharging and void shields soaking up monumental kinetic impacts. As they boarded their Stormraven Gunships once more, the pilgrims saw through the embarkation deck's shimmering shields that their craft was under heavy attack. The Stormraven pilots reported that a sizeable Chaos armada was even now engaging the Ultramar Defence Fleet over Macragge, the two factions' lumbering battleships and blade-fast escorts filling the void with lance beams and torpedoes. The Chaos attack was focussed primarily upon the Fortress of Hera itself, the

titanic fortification covering much of Magna Macragge Civitas, capital of the Ultramarines Chapter planet. Regardless, the gunship pilots vowed to get their charges down safely, and deliver them for their audience with the Lord of Ultramar. Marneus Calgar had been alerted of their coming via heavily encrypted vox communiqué, and awaited their arrival with interest. This last comment was delivered in a flat tone which suggested that perhaps the Lord of Ultramar felt he had more pressing matters to attend to than their mysterious, holy mission.

Nonetheless, the Stormravens lifted off with a scream of powerful thrusters. With their passengers strapped in and Cawl's auto-reliquary firmly secured, the pugnacious gunships fired their ramjets and shot out into the fire lit void of space.

Macragge turned slowly below them, a vast orb of blue, white, green and grey. Closer, bedlam lit the blackness. Lance beams stabbed and seared. Broken wrecks of once-proud warships tumbled through the void, chunks of metal and globules of liquid spreading slowly away from their blazing carcasses. Entire wings of Stormhawk Interceptors hurtled through blizzards of flak fire to execute daring strafing runs upon lumbering Chaos Cruisers.

From what sigils the pilgrims could make out, it appeared that Abaddon's Black Legion were attacking Macragge in significant numbers. Nor were they alone. Spacecraft bearing the icons of the Iron Warriors, the Purge, the Night Lords and many more clove through the gloom above the planet. Glinting specks rained from their flanks,



swarms of Dreadclaw Drop Pods and armoured attack craft arcing down on invasion trajectories.

Accompanied by an escort squadron of Stormhawks, the Ultramarines gunships turned their noses downward and dived through the madness of battle. They hit Macragge's upper atmosphere travelling at immense speeds, and flame washed across their hulls as they shuddered and shook with the violence of re-entry.

Watching through external pict emitters, the Celestinians and Ynnari saw the flames flutter away. They were replaced by a dizzying vista of towering mountains that grew rapidly larger as the Stormravens hurtled downward. In the midst of the mountain peaks sprawled an immense, fortified cityscape, lit from end to end by the muzzle flare of flak batteries and missile silos all hurling their wrath up into the skies.

Heldrakes and traitor fighter craft swarmed thick above the Fortress of Hera, weaving at speed between towering statues and monolithic buildings to strafe the defenders, or dump tons of ordnance onto ground targets. Explosions brought down colonnaded templums and looming hab-stacks throughout Magna Macragge Civitas, while the Ultramarines' withering return fire saw dozens of Chaos attack craft blown apart with every suicidal pass they made. Even as they fell, heretics steered into the Ultramarines' defences, demolishing gun towers and massacring warriors.

The Stormravens sped downward, making for the immense fortifications that dominated the heart of the city. A wave of renegade Drop Pods thundered around them, speeding past like meteors and almost knocking one transport from the sky. Wings tucked tight to their metallic bodies, a pack of Heldrakes dropped behind

them, and the escorting Stormhawks peeled off to intercept as the metallic beasts tried to latch onto the diving gunships.

Surrounded by streams of cannon fire and tumbling comets of metal and flame, the Stormravens screamed onward. They plunged headlong through their comrades' curtain of anti-aircraft fire, only the superhuman reflexes and skill of the Ultramarine pilots preventing their craft from being torn apart by the countless threats through which they flew. The pilgrims clung onto their restraining straps for dear life as they were shaken violently back and forth while the gunships ran the gauntlet of aerial approach to the Fortress of Hera. Then, finally, the gunships decelerated, raising their noses and arcing gracefully into an armoured hangar set into the flanks of the edifice. At last, the Celestinians and the Ynnari had reached their destination.





The pilgrims emerged from their scorched, battered gunships into one of the fortress' many embarkation hangars. They found themselves surrounded by urgent bustle on every side. Around the hangar entrance, Chapter serfs crewed thumping anti-aircraft cannons that swivelled within gyroscopic cages as they chased their targets across the skies. Bulky servitors lumbered back and forth, hauling carriages of ammunition to keep the guns fed. Further back within the hangar, Stormtalon and Stormraven Gunships were refuelling, re-arming and undergoing swift binharic baptisms beneath the ministrations of Chapter Techmarines. Servo-arms whined. Welding braziers sparked and flared. The sound of rivet cannons buzzed and thumped through the cavernous chamber over the clipped voices of Defence Auxilia and robed serfs. Hundreds of men and women went about their business within the hangar, grim-faced and determined, and this was but one chamber within a fortress the size of a city.

Through the military bustle marched a band of Chapter serfs, led by a single Ultramarines battle-brother. The warrior's helm was white and gold, and his armour bore numerous oath papers and honour markings. The helots who followed him bore gilded autoguns and stern expressions – the uniform tabards of several were spattered with what looked like fresh blood, and it was clear to all that these soldiers had come directly from the defence of the fortress' walls.

Announcing himself as Veteran Sergeant Cassean, the Ultramarine welcomed the Celestinians to the Fortress of Hera. He took a moment to nod respectfully to Marshal Amalrich and his battle-brothers, then requested that Cawl and his companions follow. Cassean turned briskly without waiting for an answer and marched away across the hangar floor. Left with little choice, the allies followed the brusque sergeant as he ascended a long, granite ramp and led them into the corridors of the Ultramarines fortress. They marched along at a brisk pace, through grand chambers of marble statuary and gilt ornamentation, across railed walkways hung with magnificent Ultramarines banners, and across void-shielded

courtyards where battle-brothers blazed boltgun fire from the fire steps above. The din of battle was never far away. Thunderous explosions shook the walls around them from time to time, causing dust to fall like snow and electroshocks to flicker.

Making their way across an armaglass-shielded sky bridge, the pilgrims got their first clear look out across the fortress proper. Towering fortifications sprawled away in all directions, their guns pouring fire into the sky and spitting death at the foes that pressed close outside the walls or landed within the fortress' grounds. The pilgrims saw Ultramarines Terminators striding relentlessly along armoured battlements, driving back jump pack wearing traitors with storms of fire. They saw squadrons of anti-aircraft tanks drawn up amidst ornamental gardens, launching missiles skyward to blast plummeting Chaos assault craft from the air. In the distance, a monstrous traitor Titan was framed by the breach it had torn in the fortress' outer curtain wall. The war engine's guns blazed like poisoned stars, and its void shields flickered and burst as the phenomenal firepower of the Ultramarines hammered into them.

Hastened along by Sergeant Cassean, the Celestinians and Ynnari climbed a statue-lined stairway of marble and brushed steel, passing a squad of battle-scarred Ultramarines jogging the other way. At the stairway's head, the party emerged into a broad circular chamber with a frescoed floor, and walls and ceiling of void-shielded transparisteel. A massive bank of ornate consoles and holomaps dominated the chamber's centre, servitors wired into its inset thrones and chattering binharic cant back and forth to one another. Dozens of robed functionaries, quill servitors, serfs and strategos talked animatedly as they hurried around the central hololith, which projected a real-time map of the entire complex into the air. Runes and signifiers swarmed across it in such profusion that the Fortress of Hera appeared to be caught up in a cyclone of data.

Stood before the display, faces set in frowns of concentration, were Chapter Master Marneus Calgar, First Captain Agemman, Chief Librarian

Tigurius, and a Grey Knight whose scrollwork chest plate announced him as Grand Master Voldus. As Cassean led the pilgrims around the table, the hubbub died away, all eyes turning toward the extraordinary group.

Solemnly, the Chapter serfs moved aside and knelt with their heads bowed to the Lord of Ultramar, forming a corridor through which the pilgrims advanced. As they drew to a halt before Calgar and his assembled advisors, Marshal Amalrich too dropped to one knee with his sword held out before him, its point to the ground and his hands resting on its cross guard. His battle-brothers followed his example, showing their absolute respect for a hero of the Imperium. Inquisitor Greyfax bowed deeply, as did Celestine and her Geminae Superia. Only Cawl and the Ynnari remained standing, impassive despite the gravitas of the moment. Behind them, Cawl's auto-reliquary hissed and hummed, its mysterious contents still veiled by thick armour plates.

In a clear voice, Cassean announced the pilgrims one by one. As the sergeant finished speaking and stepped back, an expectant hush fell. Explosions blossomed in the sky outside. Gunships and Heldrakes raced past, the chatter of their guns muted by the thick insulation of the strategium. The huge strategium console continued to rattle and hum with flowing information. Finally, Calgar said that he had no notion of who Belisarius Cawl might be, nor had he ever made any sort of pact with any priest of Mars. On Saint Celestine's face there dawned a look of calm revelation, but the rest of the Celestinians turned their horrified expressions upon the Archmagos in their midst. Yet Cawl's next words caused greater consternation still, for he stated flatly that he had not come to see Marneus Calgar. Cawl had travelled across the galaxy to attend the Lord of Ultramar, and now demanded to be taken to him at once. The auto-reliquary, he stated, must be delivered to the Shrine of Roboute Guilliman.

THE HAND OF DRAIGO

Grand Master Voldus had only recently been promoted to leadership of the Grey Knights 3rd Brotherhood, a position that was rapidly becoming renowned as a dangerous – perhaps even cursed – appointment. After a daemonic incursion blighted the fortress world of Longhallow, the newly appointed Grand Master Dorian Narathem led a substantial portion of his 3rd Brotherhood to defend the planet. The mission was only his fourth as Grand Master, yet it was also to be his last. Launching a targeted strike onto the island fastness of Tolin's Rock, Grand Master Narathem and his battle-brothers attempted to save the precious relics locked within the vaults of the isle's cathedrum. They found themselves beset by hordes of Tzeentchian Daemons. As the fighting intensified, the vaults echoed to the fury of Grey Knights duelling with twisted, fire-spewing abominations from beyond the veil. Grand Master Narathem fought alongside his most psychically gifted brothers, chief amongst these Brother Aldrik Voldus. Drawn to the beacon of their considerable empyric power, the hideous Lord of Change M'kachen burst from the Warp to attack. Narathem threw himself valiantly against the Greater Daemon. Yet the fight was a trap; M'kachen had scried the strands of the future using an ancient ensorcelled orb, and now used his stolen wisdom to wear down and slay Narathem. Seeing his master fall, Brother Voldus unleashed a titanic psychic assault on the cackling Daemon.

So pure and powerful was Narathem's sacrifice and the psychic light of Voldus' mind in that moment that it guided Supreme Grand Master Kaldor Draigo from the realm of Chaos. Surging into battle, the legendary warrior fought alongside Brother Voldus to drive M'kachen back into the Warp, the two forging their powers into a banishment of unstoppable force. In the wake of the battle, Draigo himself appointed the humble Voldus to the rank of Grand Master, lauding his exceptional heroism and phenomenal psychic prowess. Even as Draigo faded back into the Warp once more, Voldus swore an oath to live up to this great honour – one of which the self-deprecating hero did not truly believe himself worthy. He strives towards this goal in every battle he fights, offering prayers to the Emperor of Mankind for strength and guidance.

The outcry that followed Cawl's demand was immediate and intense. Marneus Calgar's expression grew thunderous as his advisors and serfs cried out in shock. Auto-quills scratched a mad tattoo upon reams of parchment as hooded scribes frantically recorded every detail of this dramatic moment. The pilgrims exclaimed in anger and confusion, Greyfax turning upon Cawl and squaring up to the looming Magos as she barked a demand for immediate explanation. Only the Ynnari seemed unsurprised by this development, the Visarch standing statue still while Yvraine wore a faint smile upon her alabaster features, as though enjoying some private joke.

From amidst the tumult of voices, Captain Agemman's voice rose in a vox-amplified boom. The Ultramarines First Captain issued a demand for calm, urging those around him to remember where they stood and the conduct that was expected of them. As quiet was

restored, Agemman turned to Calgar and said in no uncertain terms that he did not trust these newcomers, nor the mysterious device they brought with them. The First Captain counselled that, with such immediate danger all around and a furious battle to win, there was only one viable solution at this time. The pilgrims should be put into confinement, and their mysterious package locked down in a stasis vault until its contents could be safely examined. As for the xenos, Agemman counselled that they be swiftly destroyed lest they pose a threat to the safety of the Chapter Master or the Fortress of Hera.

Saint Celestine spoke up then, attempting to explain the divine nature of her mission and the revelations she had received from the Emperor. She found herself staring into the muzzles of several Honour Guard boltguns – not to mention the condemnor stake launcher of Inquisitor Greyfax, whose puritan suspicions had been fired anew – a

clear indication that now was the time for the rulers of Ultramar to speak, and not their visitors.

All eyes rested upon Calgar as he looked to Chief Librarian Tigurius for further counsel. Though not even the vigilant warriors of the Honour Guard saw it, in that moment both Yvraine and the Visarch tensed themselves in preparation for battle, subtle muscle contractions and minuscule alterations in posture leaving the Ynnari poised to fight their way out should matters turn against them.

The Librarian remained silent for several long heartbeats, his weathered features contemplative. When he spoke, Tigurius' voice was deep and resonant, rich with power and wisdom. He reminded his Chapter Master that he had experienced troubling visions in the days leading up to the attack upon Macragge. Tigurius had seen a flight of iron birds take wing from a distant, crimson orb full of churning cogs. In

+++Astropathic Communiqué Received/
Interpreted+++

+++Origin: REDACTED+++

+++Conduit: REDACTED+++

+++Clearance Seal: Vermillion+++

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Lord Calgar,

My name is Aldrik Voldus, and it is my honour to stand accountable as the Grand Master of the 3rd Brotherhood of the Emperor's Grey Knights. I commend you on your recent victory against the invading armies of the Daemon M'kar; it is with deep regret, however, that I bring you warning of further incursions to come.

It is a blessing of my Chapter that our Prognosticar brothers are granted glimpses of the future, that they might better direct us in our perpetual war against the forces of the Dark Gods. As the Warp storms raging across the galaxy have grown in number, intensity and scale, so too have the visions of our

foretellers. One such divination has warned of a terrible threat to Ultramar.

The Prognosticars speak of a darkness drawing nigh to the light of your stellar realm, and a black blade, inscribed with the infernal star of the Chaos Gods, thrust at a heart enthroned. Even as one cavernous maw yawns wide, they say, another set of jaws closes upon Macragge and its sister worlds, ending their visions in a sea of blood.

I know that you will consider news of such a threat with the greatest seriousness, and I am sure that you will understand, also, why my order must look upon it with no less gravity. Ultramar is a vital bulwark amidst the greater ramparts of the Imperium itself, and if it falls, the rest of the Emperor's domain will not be far behind.

My brothers and I cannot absent ourselves from this battlefield, lest we prove derelict in our duty. I and the entirety of the 3rd Brotherhood are, accordingly, en route to Ultramar, where we will pledge ourselves to its defence. Though the Immaterium is much disturbed, and our passage has been fraught with hazards, the Navigators

assure me that we shall reach Macragge within days.

The threat that gathers around your empire is one that my brothers and I are uniquely equipped to combat, and our strength is yours to ally to your own. I would ask that you stand ready to receive us, and to factor our presence into the battle plans that you shall doubtless begin drawing up upon receiving this missive.

I am a simple warrior, Lord Calgar, elevated to a position of responsibility that I never had ambitions to achieve, but I believe that I already have some understanding of the burden of leadership you bear upon your own shoulders. I would have you share that weight, for our only hope of the Imperium surviving the new age into which it is being plunged is if all of its guardians stand united.

The Emperor protects,

Grand Master Aldrik Voldus,

3rd Grey Knights Brotherhood

the visions, those avian shapes had soared through fire and shadow that spilled from a ruptured castle gate of vast size. They had clutched a blazing sword in their jagged claws, and their wings had shone with holy light as they flew toward Ultramar. Through the ruptured gateway had been visible a staring, slit-pupilled eye, and as the birds neared Macragge, a giant maw full of blooded fangs had yawned wide around them, ready to bite down with crushing force.

The Chief Librarian had believed that his visions concerned the fall of Cadia and the subsequent attack by the Black Legion upon Ultramar. Certainly they had spurred the readying of the fortress' defences, and the sending of astropathic communiqués that had brought the Ultramar Defence Fleet back to the Chapter planet at the critical moment.

Now, though, Tigurius declared himself convinced that the visions pertained also to these travellers. The Chief Librarian said that he was willing to vouch for their presence, even that of the mysterious Eldar, and that he believed their arrival to be the Emperor's will made manifest.

Hushed whispers ran through the strategium at this pronouncement, and Calgar nodded solemnly. Without further comment, the Chapter Master bade the Celestinians speak, and explain their presence in their own words. Between them, Inquisitor Greyfax, Marshal Amalrich and Saint Celestine did as they were asked, relaying the bloody tale of Cadia's fall and their subsequent flight. Even Yvraine of the Ynnari deigned to speak a little, providing a few, scant details that went some way toward explaining the aliens' presence amongst the group. The only one who refused to divulge further information was Belisarius Cawl; despite Marneus Calgar's repeated questioning, the Archmagos would not elaborate upon what his auto-reliquary contained, or what he expected to occur within the shrine.

While the pilgrims spoke their piece, the war raged on. Information continued to stream in regarding troop deployments, attack and counter-attack patterns, enemy drop sites, ammunition counts, and endless

other articles of strategic intelligence. Marneus Calgar absorbed them all even as he listened to the pilgrims, issuing curt orders where required and keeping one eye always fixed upon the ever-shifting holomap that hung overhead. The Chapter Master wished to understand these strange visitors and the supposed pact they served, but he would not neglect the defence of his fortress while he did so.



Finally, Greyfax concluded their tale, adding that she was empowered to act as the Emperor's representative in this matter, and that she would gladly take responsibility for Cawl's summary execution should he prove false. Calgar raised a hand to forestall further comment, both from the pilgrims and from the frowning Captain Agemman. Then, in a sombre voice, Calgar pronounced his verdict.

The Chapter Master would permit the Celestinians to bring their auto-reliquary to the Shrine of Guilliman, though they would do so under heavy Ultramarines guard. Calgar said that while he understood and welcomed Agemman's prudent counsel, they lived in unusual days. The worshippers of Chaos had set foot upon the bedrock of Macragge once again, while the Warp churned to madness all around them. Calgar judged that the foe had been aided greatly by the supernatural beings they worshipped in this desperate endeavour. He would not turn his back upon the precognitive powers of his own Chief Librarian, or the

wisdom of the Living Saint, at such a time as this, even if he had been given precious little reason to trust Archmagos Cawl.

Had Agemman been a hot-tempered Space Wolf or relentlessly logical Iron Hand, he might have contested such a ruling. Instead, he accepted his lord's judgement with stoicism. Belisarius Cawl went to speak, but Calgar forestalled him. The Chapter Master gave his permission for the Ynnari to accompany their allies, for it seemed clear to him that great events were afoot that bore the hand of the Emperor upon them. The presence of the Ynnari could be no accident, and whatever the Emperor's will was in this matter, Marneus Calgar would not be the one to contravene it.

Wasting no time, the Lord of Macragge issued his orders. He charged Agemman to remain in the strategium, taking personal command of the defence of the Fortress of Hera. Tigurius and Voldus would accompany the pilgrims to the Shrine of Guilliman, as would a heavily armed complement of Honour Guard, 3rd Company battle-brothers and 1st Company Terminators. Should the Celestinians or xenos prove treacherous, they would not find themselves short of executioners.

Celestine spoke words of thanks to Marneus Calgar, praising his sagacity. By comparison, Yvraine's features were inscrutable, while Cawl merely seemed impatient, as though irritated by such petty wrangling and keen to be about his business. As the pilgrims set off once more, Inquisitor Greyfax and Marshal Amalrich exchanged a loaded glance, before moving to position themselves at the very rear of the motley procession with weapons ready. The Ultramarines would not be the only ones to turn guns upon Cawl and his questionable choice of allies if their intentions should prove false.

Outside, the battle raged on as Macragge's sun dipped slowly behind the Hera's Crown Mountains. Fire lit the twilight as wave upon wave of heretics plunged down from the firmament. As the pilgrims and their armed guards made for the Shrine of Guilliman, the traitors without redoubled their efforts, the outcome of the battle hanging in the balance.



REVELATION AND REBIRTH

Entering the resting place of Roboute Guilliman was like stepping into some doleful warrior's afterlife. The chamber itself was enormous, a vaulted sepulchre through which a Warlord Titan could have strode without hindrance. Marble columns held aloft a ceiling of stained armaglass and obsidian inlaid with theldrite moonsilver. Guilliman's greatest deeds were depicted in spectacular friezes and statuary, arranged around the chamber and lit artfully by flickering electrosconces to lend the images the greatest possible gravitas. Huge braziers of devotional incense burned throughout the shrine, lacing the air with subtle scents, while from cherub-visaged laud hailers spilled a steady background murmur of martial arias and reverent prayer.

Despite the grandeur of the shrine, the pilgrims' eyes were drawn to the splendid figure enthroned within a pool of stark white illumination at one end of the chamber. There, upon a throne of marble, gold and finely worked adamantium, sat Roboute Guilliman. Esoteric machineries loomed over the Primarch's throne, thrumming and whispering as they fed remarkable energies through ribbed cables to enfold him in a rippling stasis field. Guilliman sat as though in repose, his eyes closed and his blood glinting jewel-like in a delicate necklace about his throat. Guilliman wore his finely crafted battle armour, still marred by the damage it had sustained during his final duel with the Daemon Primarch Fulgrim. Across his knees was laid a grand blade of prodigious size, the sword of the Emperor himself. Though the Primarch sat peacefully upon his throne, the force of his presence was palpable.

The pilgrims approached the throne in reverent silence, their Ultramarines escort marching alongside them and Cawl's auto-reliquary at their rear. The group drew to a halt near the foot of the steps that led up to the Primarch, where countless Ultramarines had knelt in communion over the

millennia. Marneus Calgar moved forward to stand at the very base of the steps, bowing his head reverently to his Primarch for a moment before turning to face the assembled pilgrims. The sounds of furious battle were still audible, even in this sacred place, muffled and distant but inescapable.

Calgar drew a deep breath, and then asked once more for Belisarius Cawl to state his business here. The Chapter Master had indulged his visitors thus far, but with a desperate battle raging outside his fortress' walls, he could offer them no more time or patience.

Magos Cawl inclined his head, and told an incredible tale. Cawl explained that, in the years before Guilliman was mortally wounded, the Primarch had summoned him into his confidence. Cawl's memories of that meeting were eroded and incomplete, but he believed that Guilliman had seen in him the potential for great things. The Magos had been charged with a great labour by Roboute Guilliman, one for which he would be richly rewarded with information that only a Primarch could provide. Cawl stated that he was not at liberty to reveal the nature of his task, forestalling Calgar's angry response by explaining that his labours had been divided into two distinct parts, and that he was here to deliver on the first of those. He brought a magnificent new suit of armour fit for the Ultramarines Primarch, one whose ancillary systems possessed the power to heal Guilliman's grievous wounds. Stunned silence reigned at this announcement. To bring back a living, breathing Primarch, to restore one of the Emperor's greatest sons to the Imperium in its hour of need; such a notion filled the Imperial warriors with awed wonderment.

Yvraine spoke up, explaining her presence at this seminal moment. She was the Emissary of Ynned, the God of the Dead, and her powers would be vital to Guilliman's restoration. Reading the puzzlement on her

audience's features, Yvraine explained with sharp impatience that such a miracle could not be brought about without sacrifice. Cawl had laboured long and hard to fulfil the Primarch's request, but without Ynned's aid, the fruits of that labour would not be enough. In order for Roboute Guilliman to live once more, first he must die.

Where Cawl's words had been met by shocked silence, Yvraine's raised a storm. Calgar exclaimed his fury at such a notion, vowing that no xenos witch would ever lay hand upon the Primarch while he drew breath. Grand Master Voldus moved to stand alongside Calgar, his expression grim, and Greyfax and Marshal Amalrich followed his example. The surrounding Ultramarines raised their weapons, pointing them at Cawl, the Ynnari, even the hulking shape of the auto-reliquary itself. They awaited only their master's order to open fire.



Yet others raised their voices in support of this apparent insanity. Cawl blurted loudly that he was bound by the terms of his pact with Guilliman, and that he must bring it to completion. Saint Celestine too spoke up, imploring those around her to have faith, and asserting that this was, indeed, the will of the Emperor. Most unexpected of the proponents was Chief Librarian Tigurius, who strode, force staff ringing against the stone floor, to stand alongside Magos Cawl. Tigurius spoke in a calm voice that cut through the clamour, asking Lord Calgar to trust his counsel and saying once more that he had seen hints of this future in his visions. It was a scene of anger and confusion, but it was about to get worse.

ADDENDA INQUISITORIA ASTRAL MISSIVE (HARBINGER TRAGEDIUM)

<<Astropathic Intercept
// Blood Angels>>

Entry 1 – Sender:
Blood Angels
Librarian Asmasael.
Recipient: Unknown.

Dire omens and portents
abound [stop] Empyric
energies around Hub Beta-
Secundus excavation site
increasing exponentially
[stop] Amethal, all
of Diamor System in
jeopardy [stop] Request
advisory, reinforcement,
transmission of message
to <redacted> [end]

Entry 2 – Sender:
Unknown, origin point
Baal. Recipient:
Librarian Asmasael.

Report received [stop]
Tyrannid presence
increasing spinward
[stop] Demonstrable and
increasing threat to
Baal System confirmed
[stop] No further
reinforcement available
[stop] Message relayed to
<redacted> [end]

Entry 3 – Sender:
Blood Angels
Librarian Asmasael.
Recipient: Unknown.

Understood [stop] Malefic
manifestations spreading
across planets Amethal,
Tourmalid, Peridos [stop]
Metalican forces overrun,
current strength approx
27% [stop] The Cage
is breaking, brother.
Commend our souls to the
Angel [end]

Entry 4 – Sender:
Unknown, origin point
Baal. Recipient:
Librarian Asmasael.

Negative [stop] Splinter
Fleets encroaching
upon outer piquet
fleet elements [stop]
Successors still
gathering, interference
from shadow in the Warp
increasing [stop] You
are ordered to abandon
Amethal, salvage all
Imperial materiel, make
haste for Baal [end]

Entry 5 – Sender:
Unknown, origin point
Baal. Recipient:
Librarian Asmasael.

No response received to
previous message [stop]
Confirm receipt of new
orders [stop] Darkness
gathers, Brother. The
Angel has need of your
strength [end]

ROBOUTE GUILLIMAN

Before he began his conquest of the galaxy, the Emperor of Mankind created the Primarchs. Utilising incredible genetic sorcery, and the phenomenal power bound into his own form, he forged twenty demigod sons. These were superlative warriors, strategists and leaders, the finest qualities of Humanity refined in the crucible of science and magnified through the lens of divinity. The Emperor intended the Primarchs to stand at his side during the Great Crusade, each leading one of the twenty Space Marine Legions to glory beyond imagination.

Before that plan could come to pass, the Dark Gods of Chaos intervened. They snatched up the nascent Primarchs and scattered them through the Warp, so that each came to rest upon a different one of Humanity's far-flung worlds. Some say that it was at this time that the Ruinous Powers left their mark upon the Emperor's gene-sons, and that this is why fully half of the Primarchs betrayed their father and the Imperium during the Horus Heresy.

Whatever the case, Roboute Guilliman was not tainted in such a fashion. The being that would become the Primarch of the Ultramarines Legion came to rest upon the feudal world of Macragge. There he was discovered, and adopted, by a local warlord named Konor. Growing and developing at a superhuman rate, Konor's adoptive son soon surpassed all those around him, and came to be the greatest warrior, strategist and statesman upon Macragge. After Konor was slain by a treacherous ally, it was Guilliman who avenged his father, before taking upon himself the mantle of kingship. The entirety of Macragge was swiftly unified beneath the banner of Roboute Guilliman, becoming a world of peace, civilisation, wisdom and strength. Guilliman was a charismatic and gifted leader, beloved of his people and singularly capable of compartmentalising incredible quantities of information. He was an organiser, a logistician, one capable of turning the wildest theories into practical reality and rendering order from Chaos.

When the Emperor's crusading forces reached Macragge, the son was reunited with his true father. Guilliman was given charge of the Ultramarines Legion, and wasted no time in putting his stamp upon them. In the conquests that followed, the Ultramarines became renowned as exemplars of what it meant to be a Space Marine. Under Guilliman's leadership they became arguably the most strategically gifted and tactically balanced of all the Legions. Working on the basis of theoretical situations and practical solutions, the Ultramarines fought with exceptional efficiency. They drove the foes of Humanity before them, their armies fighting like intricate and perfectly tuned machines to swiftly and decisively outmanoeuvre every foe.

When the Horus Heresy set the galaxy ablaze, Roboute Guilliman fought with loyalty and determination for the Imperium that he believed in with all his heart. When he thought that the Emperor had fallen, the Primarch established a new seat of power on Macragge, planning to preserve the Emperor's secular purity within his own realm of Ultramar. When Guilliman later learned that Terra still stood, he did everything in his power to ensure that he and his loyal brothers could fight at their father's side in the final battle against Horus. Though his efforts benefitted many, Guilliman himself reached Terra too late, a fact that would torture him for decades to come.

In the wake of the Horus Heresy, it was the Ultramarines Primarch who wrote and instituted the Codex Astartes. It was he, too, who took up the Emperor's burning blade and became Lord Commander of the Imperium, serving amongst the High Lords of Terra. Finally, at the Battle of Thessala, Guilliman was laid low by his corrupt brother Fulgrim, who mortally wounded the Ultramarines Primarch with his poisoned blade. So it was that the dying Roboute Guilliman was placed into stasis in the Temple of Correction, enthroned through the millennia until such a time that one could come with the power to restore him to life once more.





SHATTERED SANCTITY

Amongst the storm of angry voices and brandished weapons, Marneus Calgar's vox chimed insistently in his ear. Angrily, the Chapter Master accepted the priority vox hail, but his words of rebuke died on his lips. Calgar's voice boomed over the commotion, his shout of warning coming a split-second before the stained armaglass of the shrine's ceiling exploded inward.

Shattered crystal filled the air, shards the size of storm shields embedding themselves in walls, floor and armoured bodies. A huge shape smashed through into the shrine, a plummeting mass of blue metal travelling at the speed of a runaway mag-train. Hurling down at an oblique angle, an Ultramarines Thunderhawk Gunship slammed into the shrine's floor and skidded out of control. The aircraft was badly damaged, flames pouring from rents in its hull, one wing ripped away. It slewed drunkenly across the shrine's floor, away from the pilgrims and their Ultramarines guards, ploughing through a marble column and bringing it down in a thunderous avalanche of precious stone. The Thunderhawk slammed into the shrine's far wall, demolishing a statue of Guilliman battling Alpharius, before listing onto its side with a deafening clang.

Even as the stricken vehicle was settling to a stop, its assault ramp burst open with a shriek of torn metal. Spilling from within came Chaos Space Marines in twisted armour of black and gold, spiked jump packs melded to their backs and deafening war cries ringing from their vox grills.

The Ultramarines responded with instant efficiency, bolters and assault cannons roaring to life. A hail of shots ripped into the Black Legion Raptors, puffs of blood bursting from their avian forms as they jerked and danced amidst the fusillade. Still the Ultramarines weren't quick enough to prevent catastrophe. Screaming their defiance, a trio of Raptors jetted through the rain of fire to slam spiked icons into the temple's floor. Tall spears of adamantium and

iron, the icons were festooned with macabre trophies and anointed in daemonic gore. Empyric energies whirled around them, and reality rent apart with the calamitous thunder of teleportation flares.

As the surviving Raptors leapt clear, a hulking wedge of Black Legion Terminators appeared, dozens of elite killers clad in spiked and tusked Tactical Dreadnought armour.

With exemplary discipline, the Ultramarines coolly shifted their aim. Bolts and blasts tore into the Black Legion Terminators, ringing from their armour with cacophonous fury. Yet these were chosen warriors imbued with the daemonic gifts of the Dark Gods. Though several of the massive Black Legionnaires stumbled or fell, the rest shrugged off the salvo and began a grinding advance, firing back as they came.

Marneus Calgar looked about himself aghast. The Shrine of Guilliman, the sacred heart of the Ultramarines Chapter, had been profaned by the minions of Chaos. Already a thunderous gunfight was erupting, Ultramarines hurling themselves into cover, returning fire at their attackers from behind columns and statuary. It was clear to all that the enemy were driving for the fallen Primarch, and Calgar was forcibly reminded of the vision-blade warned of in Voldus' astropathic communiqué. Calgar was still deeply suspicious of Cawl, the Ynnari and those who had accompanied them, yet here was a threat far clearer and more diabolical than them. With a stern demand that his visitors refrain from acting until he had the situation under control, the Chapter Master activated the energy fields around his power fists, known as the Gauntlets of Ultramar, and strode into the fight.

He was not alone. Turning from the shrine, Saint Celestine drew her Ardent Blade. With a hymn of battle upon her lips and her Geminæ Superia at her side, the Living Saint leapt toward the foe. Amalrich did the same, bellowing oaths of hate as he and his last few battle-brothers ran headlong at the Black Legionnaires.

Grand Master Voldus, too, moved to join the fight. He bit off orders into his vox bead as he advanced, loosing shots from his storm bolter even as he called in reinforcement from his Grey Knights battle-brothers. The Imperial counter-attack met the Black Legion assault in the middle of the shrine with a rending crash of metal on metal, and blood fell like rain as the two forces tore into one another.

All throughout the shrine, tales of heroism and sacrifice played out. Inquisitor Greyfax took a glancing shot to her ribs in the opening moments of the fight. The bolt shell dented her armour, driving the air from her lungs, but by the grace of the Emperor it didn't detonate. Greyfax, seeing black spots before her eyes, dropped hastily into the cover of a marble pew only a few dozen feet from the base of Guilliman's throne. Sucking down several deep breaths, Greyfax leant around the edge of the pew and fired off a tight burst of shells from her condemnor boltgun. The rounds roared across the shrine, punching into the faceplate of a Black Legion Raptor and blowing his helm apart in a bloody spray.

Greyfax's bionic eye switched rapidly through multiple scrying filters, collating tactical data and cogitating threat assessments at the speed of thought. To her fore, the Inquisitor saw Saint Celestine slicing her way through the Black Legion Terminators, spinning and leaping through the air as she clove the traitors apart with her blade. One of the Geminæ Superia was badly wounded, the armoured Seraphim sprawled in a slick of blood. The other was still fighting, emptying her bolt pistol into the foe. Greyfax still did not fully trust the Saint, but she could not fault the woman's selflessness or skill.

Nearby, Marneus Calgar and Grand Master Voldus fought side by side, weathering the thunderous blows of their hulking enemies as they smashed and impaled one traitor after another. As Greyfax watched, Voldus loosed a ruinous shock wave of psychic force from his outstretched gauntlet, hurling a Chaos Terminator through the air to demolish another

towering statue. Still the traitors pressed forward, and as they did so new warriors appeared to fill the gaps in their ranks. Teleport energies flared again, clearing to reveal a trio of Terminator-armoured Black Legion Sorcerers, flanked by monstrous warriors of fleshmetal and living weaponry. At the same time, Dreadclaw Drop Pods plunged through the shattered armaglass above, slamming into the ground behind the advancing Black Legionnaires. From within spilled more of Abaddon's chosen warriors, Heretic Astartes including bellowing Khorne Berzerkers charging forward to join the fray.

The Ultramarines stood their ground, despite being increasingly outnumbered. Veterans rattled volleys of fire into the advancing foe, ripping Black Legionnaires off their feet or blasting them into glowing ash with bolts of plasma. Blue-armoured Terminators duelled with their black-armoured counterparts, heavy flamers spewing fire across adamantium and ceramite as power fists delivered crushing blows. Marshal Amalrich and his brothers hurled themselves in alongside the Ultramarines, howling

chainswords and lashing lightning claws reaping a tally of traitor lives. One Black Templar fell to a chainfist's swipe, but still his brothers fought on.

Greyfax's psyoculum chimed a warning as Warp energies built amidst the battle. Following the device's quavering brass needle, the Inquisitor saw the trio of Black Legion Sorcerers with their staves raised, black fire boiling around them. Greyfax lined up her condemnor and launched a blessed silver stake at the nearest Sorcerer. She cursed as the holy projectile impaled her target but did not fell him, then she ducked down to reload as bolt shells blew craters in her cover. As she did so, Greyfax saw that not all of the pilgrims, nor indeed all of their hosts, had joined the fight.

The Inquisitor swore again as she saw Cawl hunched, spider-like, over the controls of his auto-reliquary. The Magos' metallic fingers danced across runic keys, his mechadendrites slithering from one socket-port to another while the Ynnari and Skitarii stood guard over him. Beside them stood the Ultramarines Chief

Librarian, Warp light glowing from his eyes and weaving around his skull-topped stave. As Greyfax watched, several frothing Berzerkers charged at Tigurius. The Librarian barked a string of syllables that caused the Khorne-worshippers to implode in a crumpled mass of flesh and metal. Greyfax's psyoculum burred confused readings as the life energies of the three Berzerkers left their bodies but did not vanish altogether. Ghost returns flickered around the two Ynnari, and Greyfax's suspicions of the Eldar deepened as she realised that they had – in some fashion that she did not yet comprehend – been empowered by the stolen animus.

Greyfax pushed herself to her feet again, intending to dash across the open ground and command Cawl to cease in the name of the Holy Ordos. At that moment, a stitching line of autocannon fire marched along the top of the pew. Explosions of fire and shrapnel burst around the Inquisitor, hurling her from her feet. Greyfax fired back at her attackers, lashing out with her telepathic powers as she did so, but she was – for the moment – pinned in place.

Marneus Calgar swung his right gauntlet in a punishing arc, hammering it up through his enemy's guard and catching a Chaos Terminator square under the jaw. His enemy's helm disappeared in a blizzard of metal and blood, his corpse slamming down onto its back with bone-breaking force. Before the traitor even hit the ground, Calgar was already turning on the spot, both gauntlets held out from his body and bolters thundering. The Chapter Master revolved in a half circle, blazing rounds into the Black Legionnaires on every side and eviscerating another of them with explosive shells. Blocking the return swipe of a crackling power mace, Calgar prepared to swing another titanic blow into his enemies. Then he caught sight of movement at the base of Guilliman's throne, and cold horror clenched in his chest.

Calgar saw the Martian priest step back from his auto-reliquary with the air of one completing a satisfying task. The dome-shaped device hummed forward, unfurling like the petals of some huge, carnivorous flower. The watching Chapter Master was at the wrong angle to see inside the machine, but he had a fleeting impression of glowing energies, unfurling mechadendrites, clamping pincer-limbs and whirring bone-drills that filled him with revulsion.

The auto-reliquary was rising and stretching out, enfolding the

Primarch's form in its metallic embrace. At the same moment, the xenos witch-priestess lunged with preternatural grace, evading whistling bolt shells as she raised her blade high.

'No!' bellowed Calgar, finding his voice. 'I command you to stop! In the Emperor's name, Brother Tigurius, stop them!'

The Chapter Master's dismay rose to new heights as Tigurius looked straight at him, and shook his head.

'Do it,' shouted the Chief Librarian, blazing psychic energies into the foe that pressed close all around. 'And may the Emperor condemn me if you have played me false, xenos.'

In desperation, Calgar raised his bolters and prepared to fire at the Eldar witch, but Yvraine's blade fell lightning fast, hacking through the cabling that fed power to Guilliman's stasis field. Energies flared, and from within the closing arms of the auto-reliquary, Calgar heard a rattling sigh that would haunt him until his dying day.

'What have you done?' he roared, despair and fury blazing through him like a firestorm. Fists clenched, Calgar turned upon the traitors that had forced this terrible tragedy to come to pass, and waded back into the fight with unstoppable fury.



The auto-reliquary engulfed Roboute Guilliman and his throne entirely, runic designators and auto-lumen flickering in mesmerising patterns across its surface. As though spurred by the sight, the Black Legionnaires redoubled the intensity of their attack.

Howling war cries, the Black Legion Terminators drove hard into their foes. Marneus Calgar was pushed back by his enemies, his battle plate cracked by the crunching blow of a power maul. Braving the Chapter Master's lashing gauntlets, a band of traitor Terminators surrounded him entirely so that their brethren could break away towards the auto-reliquary. Gunfire echoed thunderously around the shrine as the traitors let fly into Cawl's unfolded device. Bolts and shells alike exploded harmlessly as they struck hardened void shielding, unable to punch through the Archmagos' data-wards to damage the device behind.

The last of the Raptors formed into a single talon and bounded across the shrine. Their jump packs howled, and terrifying screams burst from their vox grills. They were met by a thin line of Ultramarines Veterans, the loyal marines abandoning cover to interpose themselves between the Chaos assault troops and Guilliman's throne with bolters blazing. Several Raptors fell, but the Ultramarines paid for their bravery as the enemy's Obliterators opened fire. Plasma blasts and lascannon beams smashed the Veterans from their feet, reducing chest cavities to blackened craters and helmeted heads to scatters of ash.

The Sorcerers leading the attack drew deep upon the energies of the Warp, risking damnation in their haste to break through. Two of the psychically empowered warriors unleashed a storm of crackling black lightning at Grand Master Voldus, driving the Grey Knight to one knee with their combined fury. The Grey Knight's eyes glowed and the runes on his armour shimmered with power as he roared counter-incantations. Meanwhile, the last of the Sorcerers stormed toward the Primarch's throne, arms raised above his head and voice booming from his vox grill. As the Sorcerer chanted, so the Temple of Correction began to

shudder and shake. Pillars split from bottom to top, chunks of marble the size of Drop Pods shearing off to crash down into the fight. Gaping rents yawned wide in the floor, swallowing warriors from both sides, and the frescoed ceiling became webbed with cracks.

Realising that the Sorcerer was attempting to bring one end of the shrine down upon Guilliman's throne, Tigurius brandished his staff and focussed his psychic energies to unmake the Chaos worshipper's incantation. Yet the Chief Librarian's concentration was shattered as a fresh wave of Khorne Berzerkers hurled themselves at him. Tigurius frantically parried one roaring chainaxe after another with his staff, cursing as he felt the powers of the empyrean draining away from his touch. The Ynnari were suddenly there beside him, fighting with blistering speed. Never had Tigurius seen living creatures move with such swiftness and grace, Yvraine and the Visarch blurring through the air and leaving greyed-out after-images in their wake as they ruthlessly laid the Berzerkers low.

All across the shaking temple, the dwindling forces of the Imperium fought like lions to hold back their foes. Celestine still hacked and cut, span and leapt, leaving a trail of slain Black Legionnaires in her wake. Archmagos Cawl sent blasts of searing energy ripping through the Chaos ranks while intoning binharic psalms to fortify his allies' weapons and wargear. Marshal Amalrich, accompanied now by just two remaining Sword Brethren, fought tirelessly atop a heap of Black Legion corpses. Teleport energies flared once more and a squad of Grey Knight Paladins flashed into being, bolstering their Grand Master's psychic defences with their own.

For a moment the battle hung in the balance. Then a second flight of Dreadclaw Drop Pods began their descent upon the shrine, fires billowing around their hulls as they fell. No scattered handful of reinforcements was this, but a pinpoint attack wave of ten armoured pods, held in reserve by the masters of the Chaos invasion and hurled in to strike the killing blow. Heldrakes dived alongside them, jaw cannons

chattering to tear a path through Ultramarines interceptors and gunships. More than one of the plummeting Daemon Engines hurled itself into flak fire, compelled to self-sacrifice in order to shield the Dreadclaws from harm. Thus protected, all ten pods flashed down through the sundered dome of the Shrine of Guilliman, touching down amidst billowing clouds of smoke and sulphurous flame.

As one, the Dreadclaws irised open to disgorge squad after squad of heretical killers. An entire traitor warband surged into battle, the Talons of the Despoiler deployed en masse to sweep away all resistance in the shrine. It was a force whose combined strength could subdue worlds, one hundred super-human murderers, fresh and ready for battle. The Black Legion reinforcements struck the Imperial defence like a battering ram.

Ultramarines Veterans and Honour Guard fell as they were riddled with overwhelming bolt fire. Courageous Terminators crumpled, even their potent armour unable to withstand the hammering volleys of bolter, melt and plasma fire that engulfed them. Marneus Calgar roared in defiance as he was borne to the ground by a surging mass of foes that swung, stabbed and stamped at him. Marshal Amalrich and his brothers charged down the mound of corpses rather than be caught in the open by the foe's massed firepower, determined to hack down as many of their tainted kin as they could before they were slain. Saint Celestine, too, swooped down upon the mass of foes. Her remaining sister had been smashed from the air by a plasma blast, and even the Saint herself was now fighting one handed, her left arm hanging broken at her side. Still she sang out a hymn to the Emperor, determined to meet death with words of purity and hope on her lips.

Everywhere the massed Chaos worshippers pressed forward, engulfing the shrinking islands of Imperial resistance, while sorcerous energies continued to tear at the shrine itself. Not a single defender took a step backward, but it was clear that their lives could now be measured in minutes at most.

ADDENDA INQUISITORIA ASTRAL MISSIVE (BESTIALIS AGGRESSOR)

<<cf:// Thraka,
Ghazghkull Mag Uruk>>

<<dt:// Sightings and
Falsehoods>>

My Lady Inquisitor,

I have compiled a chronicle of sightings and reports. I must stress to you once again that the full body of accounts rune-locked within this dataslate make for impossible reading. You of all people must surely be aware of the malefic dissonance plaguing communication. They say that the storms rage from Øberica to the Eastern Fringe, and with every convulsion of the Immaterium, messages will be interrupted, reports conflated, and errors made. It is simply impossible that the Beast of Armageddon could be sighted in so many localities at once!

To suggest that he has progressed so quickly from one Segmentum to the next? To claim that he leads a fleet in excess of five million warships, or that 'leering Ørkoid faces manifest in the void, avidly watching their progress'? Nonsense! It cannot have been the same Ørk that led the attack upon the Drakenfyr System, and overran the Chapter planet of the Knights Øbustinate. Those actions were divided, as best we can tell, by mere weeks! Valion's Tear? Red Reach? Modexia? To claim that one mindless brute was responsible for all of these Imperial defeats is, at best, deluded excuse-smithing.

Thus I urge you once more to discard this needless investigation and to concentrate your efforts upon those threats that we know to be real.

But of course, I do so only with the greatest respect, my Lady Inquisitor.

Your servant,

Arch-Scrivener First
Class and Etchmaster of
the Gilded Quill,

Allouicious Dunt

THE AVENGING SON

The foremost Black Legionnaires were mere yards away from the foot of Guilliman's throne when the rune-panels on Cawl's auto-reliquary flickered from red to green. A single chime sounded, a clear, pure note that cut through the clangour like a knife. The Archmagos himself, fighting back to back with the Ynnari and Chief Librarian Tigurius, emitted an uncharacteristic blurt of binharic triumph. The next moment, the outstretched armatures of the auto-reliquary folded back with a gaseous hiss to reveal a sight of breathtaking splendour.

Where before Roboute Guilliman had sat, a pale, stasis-locked revenant, now the Primarch stood awake, alert and very much alive. His presence was immense, dominant as a thunderhead suddenly filling the shrine with its crushing pressure. Guilliman was clad in a magnificent new suit of armour, an ornate masterwork that had travelled all the way from the forges of Mars within Cawl's auto-reliquary. In one hand the Ultramarines Primarch held the blade of the Emperor, lit now from hilt to tip with leaping flames, and in his eyes was a

look of such murderous intensity that even the loyalists within the shrine quailed to see it.

It was as though a spell had settled over the shrine. Though outside the din of war thundered on, within that echoing chamber friend and foe alike stared awestruck at the legendary figure reborn in their midst. An incoherent scream of rage shattered the silence, a single Khorne Berzerker charging headlong through the stunned combatants to launch himself in a flying leap at the Primarch. Guilliman moved with such blistering speed that the Ynnari themselves would have struggled to match it. His burning blade drew a pyrotechnic arc through the air as it swung, bisecting the Khorne Berzerker at the waist and hurling his severed halves to the ground.

As the Chaos worshipper's armoured corpse crashed to the floor, the spell was broken. With a great howl of hate, the Black Legion warriors surged towards Roboute Guilliman. Wordlessly, the noble demigod strode to meet them, and the carnage truly began.

First to die was the Sorcerer whose powers had shaken the temple to its foundations. Guilliman raised his mighty gauntlet, the Hand of Dominion, and a storm of armour-piercing fire erupted from beneath it to rip the tainted psyker to pieces.

Next to fall were the remaining Black Legion Berzerkers. Following their comrade's example, they flung themselves screaming at the reborn Primarch. Like their fellow, they were reduced to so much armoured meat, smashed from the air with terrifying speed. Guilliman was running now, storming forward through the hail of bolts and shells unleashed by the Black Legionnaires. Rounds exploded against the Primarch's armour, but none could pierce its inviolable plates.

As he crashed into the front ranks of Black Legionnaires, Guilliman let out a building roar of pure, undiluted fury. The Primarch's first blow threw a Black Legionnaire high into the air, blood streaming behind the corpse in a red trail. His second strike smashed a traitor Terminator into a bronze and marble column with enough force to drive the Chaos worshipper

*S*aint Celestine looked upon the towering form of the Primarch reborn, and knew the abiding satisfaction of her faith being borne out once more. A son of the God Emperor himself, a demigod of battle to lead the Imperium out of the darkness that, with each passing day, seemed more certain to engulf it entirely. In what greater endeavour could she have played a part? What single event could possibly be more important than the manifestation of this breathtaking miracle? Humbly, Celestine offered up her profound thanks to the Emperor for permitting her to be a part of such a wondrous thing.

Around her, the battle still raged, yet every aspect of the conflict had changed for Celestine in that singular moment of rebirth. The strewn corpses of Imperial warriors were no longer a tragic waste, but instead the fallen bodies of martyrs whose sacrifice would be immortalised forever. The traitorous killers filling the shrine were no longer hated despoilers, but instead merely the first of an endless tally of heretics that Guilliman would lay low. Her own hurts no longer mattered, whether the physical wounds to her own body or the spiritual rents opened by the deaths of her Geminae Superia.

'Thank you,' intoned Celestine, a single golden tear rolling down her cheek as she turned her face to the heavens. 'Thank you, my Emperor. He is a blessing we do not deserve.'

Snarling, a Black Legionnaire lunged at Celestine with a serrated blade in hand. Presumably he thought her distracted in her moment of sublime gratitude, but he could not have been more mistaken. With the fires of faith searing through her veins, Celestine turned the golden radiance of her gaze upon the heretic and smiled beatifically as she felt her broken arm heal itself anew. The Ardent Blade came up in a single, swift movement and ran the Heretic Astartes through.

Even as her assailant fell back with blood gushing from his mouth, the Saint launched herself skyward and soared across the shrine. She alighted beside Inquisitor Greyfax, who was stood atop a sarcophagus pouring bolter fire into the heretics massed on every side.

'I erred,' shouted Greyfax over the roar of her bolter. 'And I shall do penance. You truly are an instrument of the Emperor's will.'

'Vigilance is not a sin, Katarinya Greyfax,' replied Celestine, slashing her blade through the enemies before her. 'You serve Him as surely as I.'

'Indeed,' said Greyfax with a curt nod. 'Then let us serve him together, as true warriors of faith.' With that, she raised her blade and lunged into the foe, Celestine leaping at her side.

clean through it, and out the other side. A spiked power fist swung for Guilliman's chest, only to be lopped from its wielder's arm before the blow could land. Guilliman's return swing parted his attacker's head from his shoulders, cauterising the stump of the traitor's neck as the body crumpled to the floor. On it went, the Primarch moving with such speed that even the heretics' superhuman reactions couldn't save them. None could match Guilliman. None could even come close, and the few opponents that landed lucky blows found their weapons turned aside by the Primarch's masterwork armour.

As the Black Legion hurled themselves towards the towering warrior in their midst, so the pressure lessened upon the surviving loyalists in the shrine. Full of vengeance, inspired by the spectacle of the Primarch, the last of the Celestinians and their allies threw themselves back into the fight with renewed vigour.

As Guilliman cleared the foes from around the foot of his throne, Tigurius, Cawl and the Ynnari followed him into the gap. Yvraine blurred through the air, felling a Chaos Space Marine before cart wheeling between two more and leaving them as crumbling statues of dust and ash. A traitor raised his plasma gun to blast the whirling priestess, only for the Visarch's sword to lop his arms off at the elbows. The champion of Ynniad reversed his grip on his blade, ramming it through his victim's helm before basking in the escaping energies of the Chaos Marine's corrupted soul.

Tigurius released a thunderous barrage of psychic energies, thumping tectonic shock waves that hurled Heretic Astartes from their feet and shattered their armour like porcelain. The Chief Librarian felt Guilliman's gaze upon him then, for just a heartbeat. The Primarch's appraising stare seemed to strip Tigurius down to his soul. Then Guilliman stormed on through the enemy ranks.

With every blow, the Primarch of the Ultramarines sent mutated corpses tumbling through the air. His

expression was graven granite and frozen hate, a mask of vengeful anger that had endured millennia.

For Guilliman, his last memory was a desperate battle against a tainted brother, a fraternal contest of godlike strength and barbed, hateful taunts – then poison and pain beyond endurance. Now he found himself in strange surroundings, facing a twisted horde of creatures that were nightmarish parodies of the Adeptus Astartes ideal.



Not that his apparent allies struck Guilliman as much more familiar, but he could at least detect who in this vast sepulchre was tainted by Chaos and who was not. For now, that was enough. The Primarch compartmentalised his questions for later, and concentrated solely on the battle at hand.

The Black Legionnaires continued to hurl themselves at the reborn Lord of Ultramar, clearly willing to sustain any amount of casualties if it meant laying Guilliman low. Yet they were laughably outmatched in almost every regard. Sweeping the Emperor's sword in wide arcs, firing off hammering volleys from the Hand of Dominion, the Primarch reaped a bloody tally as he drove the traitors back. As they retreated, so the prone form of Marneus Calgar was revealed, his armour cracked and his face beaten bloody. Guilliman paused for a moment in his rampage, looking down upon this fallen son with an unreadable expression on his face.

Calgar stirred, one eye opening to look up at the Primarch reborn. Satisfied that his scion lived, Guilliman pressed on, leaving the fallen Chapter Master to stare in disbelief at his resurrected gene-sire.

Across the chamber, Grand Master Voldus and his Paladins were driving the surviving Chaos Sorcerers back. The heretics were powerful psykers both, but neither could hold a candle to Voldus' preeminent power. Surrounded by a crackling vortex of empyric energies, the Grand Master strode through the dark flames and molten lightnings conjured by his foes. Propelled as much by thought as by his steely sinews, Voldus' lightning-wreathed hammer swung in an unstoppable arc and slammed into the helm of the closest Sorcerer. Ceramite, flesh and bone exploded in a crackling spray, and the traitor toppled backwards as a headless corpse.

The last of the heretic leaders lost his nerve, barking orders at his underlings to cover his retreat from the shrine. The Sorcerer turned, lumbering in his Terminator armour, and found himself face to face with Roboute Guilliman. Screaming witch-light rushed in as the Sorcerer attempted to conjure a potent curse. Before he could even spit the jagged syllables to unleash his power, the Sorcerer was hoisted bodily off the ground, Guilliman's Hand of Dominion clamped firmly around the traitor's gorget. In a breathtaking display of strength, the Primarch lifted his foe high into the air, Guilliman's face a cold mask of disgust. The Sorcerer made a last, croaking attempt to speak before the Emperor's Sword slammed through the traitor's midriff, and ripped it swiftly upward. Ancient armour and corrupt flesh parted as easily as silk, and the Sorcerer's innards spilled out in a rush to splatter upon the flagstones.

Leaderless, reaped like corn by the seemingly unstoppable Primarch and his allies, the last of the Black Legionnaires turned and fled. Not a single one of them would escape the Fortress of Hera alive.





ENTHRONED ANEW

By the time reinforcements reached the Temple of Correction, the fighting was done. Every single Ultramarine who rushed into that vaulted space dropped to their knees in worshipful awe at the sight of their Primarch reborn.

Calm now, Roboute Guilliman took charge of his warriors. He asked no questions, save those of a purely strategic nature. He made no reference to the circumstances of his rebirth, his long repose, or the strangers that he found himself surrounded by, and none dared raise such matters with him. The Primarch would doubtless seek answers, but caught between wonder and a kind of overawed fear, the Ultramarines, the Celestinians, and even the Ynnari kept their own counsel. Besides, war still raged outside the shrine.

News of the Primarch's rise spread like wildfire through the Fortress of Hera. It was proclaimed from every vox speaker, shouted from every rampart, and broadcast from the vocal emitters of countless cybercherubim that fluttered through the cauldron of war. Guilliman ensured that it was so, for he understood well that his living presence would embolden his armies and cow his enemies. Ultramarines and Ultramar Defence Auxilia alike knew first bewilderment, then newfound strength as they processed this incredible news. The Chaos worshippers, by comparison, faltered in their attack. Even the most feared of their champions were eclipsed by the martial glory of a living, breathing Primarch, and ripples of unease spread through the heretic throng at the thought of facing him.

Guilliman made straight for the fortress' strategium, and – in a dramatically charged moment that would become enshrined in statuary – formally accepted command of the defence from First Captain Agemman. Lord Calgar stood at his Primarch's side during this exchange, sorely wounded and supported by two Honour Guards, yet determined to be present all the same. Guilliman showed his nobility by humbly requesting the

Chapter Master's leave to assume full command of the Ultramarines at that time. Calgar shrugged off his battle-brothers and, grimacing in pain, knelt before his gene-sire. He matched Guilliman's solemnity as he offered unending fealty to the Primarch, and bequeathed full control of the Chapter to him in perpetuity.

Like an impresario settling before his instrument, Guilliman spread his hands upon the strategium table and took a deep breath before beginning to command. With his every utterance, the invaders' plight became more apparent. The Primarch's strategic acumen, his tactical genius and miraculous mental acuity were unmatched. The leaders of the Ultramarines looked on in amazement as Guilliman marshalled the defenders like regicide pieces, drinking in reams of strategic data and issuing a steady stream of orders that turned one fight after another in the defenders' favour. Calgar and his lieutenants had executed a superhuman campaign of defiance against the invaders, but the Primarch was operating on a different mental plane.



At Guilliman's command, thunderous overlapping firestorms and interlaced webs of interceptor strikes cleared the airspace over the Fortress of Hera. No longer threatened from above, Ultramarines reserves and vast numbers of Defence Auxilia flowed into the fight in masterful deployment patterns. Feints, ambushes, false retreats and sudden, overwhelming counter-attacks ripped through the Chaos forces and drove them from within the fortress' grounds. Guilliman wielded hundreds of thousands of warriors at once,

predicting every move his enemies made and countering before they had even thought to act.

By the time the Primarch and his coterie strode out to lead the fight in person, the Chaos attackers were reeling in disarray. The attack led by Guilliman into the heart of their lines was like a final bolt round placed between the eyes of a wounded enemy. Black Legionnaires, Iron Warriors, Alpha Legion and Night Lords – all were hurled back from the walls. Traitor Titans toppled like vast, flaming trees to smash down in ruin. Just three hours after his resurrection, Roboute Guilliman concluded the wholesale purge of Chaos invaders from the Fortress of Hera, and confidently proclaimed the Ultramarines' stronghold secure.

There now came a time where breath could be drawn, and stock taken. Even as lumbering servitors and serf work gangs laboured to shore up the fortress' battered defences, Guilliman summoned a select company to attend him in the Chapter Master's sanctum. This had long been the domain and throne room of Marneus Calgar. Now it would become the sanctum of the Primarch himself, and it was here that he was formally invested as Lord of Ultramar and master of the Ultramarines once more. Calgar, Tigurius, Agemman and their closest lieutenants were present for Guilliman's elevation, as were representative brothers from every company of the Chapter. The Celestinians, too, attended Guilliman's formal coronation, the Saint herself ceremonially bestowing her blessings upon the Primarch. Even the Ynnari watched from the sidelines as this momentous event occurred; they lurked amongst the shadows, a silent and staunchly unremarked-upon presence whose expressions remained cold and watchful.

As the ceremony concluded, Guilliman rose and addressed the assembly. There was much to be done, and countless questions to which the Primarch required answers. Before he could act further, Roboute Guilliman needed to know everything that had occurred during his long absence.









WAR STORM

CHAPTER 2

*'EVEN GODS HAVE THEIR LIMITS.
MORTAL WEAPONS MAY FAIL TO
HARM THEM, THIS IS TRUE. BUT
PRIDE, ARROGANCE, AN EXCESS
OF DEVOTION TO THEIR MORTAL
SERVANTS – THESE ARE BARBS WITH
WHICH EVEN THE MOST DIVINE OF
BEINGS MAY BE BROUGHT LOW.'*

- Lorgar Aurelian





DARK REVELATIONS

The Warp is, in many ways, a mirror of reality. Like a dark and fathomless pool, its surface ripples with the impact of momentous events, or great outbursts of passion and emotion. The resurrection of Roboute Guilliman sent bow waves rolling outward through the Immaterium, racing tsunamis of turmoil that did not go unnoticed.

One by one, the champions of the Dark Gods of Chaos became aware of the returned Primarch. Reclining amidst an endless banquet of souls, Fulgrim pouted in displeasure as Daemon imps whispered the news into his ear. The Daemon Primarch of the Emperor's Children bestirred himself from his velvet throne, vowing to the deprived god Slaanesh that this time, he would ensure Guilliman's eternal fall from grace.

In hidden fanes and crystalline mazes, the greatest Daemons of Tzeentch watched as the weft and weave of fate rippled and changed with the implications of Guilliman's return. Reading their master's will in the shattered facets of the future, each set itself to the task of tainting, tempting or destroying the Ultramarines Primarch in a myriad of subtly varied fashions.

Deep within the noisome swamps of Nurgle's Garden, a conclave of Great Unclean Ones listened indulgently to the frantic babbling of messenger flies. They leered in delight, bile and maggots slopping down their festering chins. A Primarch! One untouched and untainted by any of Nurgle's brothers. Their pestilential master would no doubt value such a prize most highly. Perhaps, they chortled mockingly, they might even arrange a final reconciliation between the bitter Mortarion and his brother. Such an opportunity had not presented itself in thousands of years, and the Great Unclean Ones hummed a cheerful ditty as they began to concoct a sickness fit for a demigod.

Elsewhere in the galaxy, the Mendox Cataclysm was coming to its hideous conclusion. Along a war front that spanned entire star systems, the champions of Khorne burned eighty-

eight Imperial worlds at once. Amidst the rising flames of their genocide, champions of Khorne both mortal and daemonic witnessed visions of their furious deity, raging against Guilliman's return. His apoplectic bellows rang as thunder through the skies of the dying planets, and Warp storms shuddered into being through rents in reality as though the Blood God was hacking at the stars with his ruinous blade. The servants of the other Dark Gods might try to corrupt Guilliman, to mislead or despoil him. Yet Khorne's servants knew that their master had no patience for such things. Instead, they fell to battle amongst each other, warring for the right to hunt down the reborn Primarch and claim his skull.

Other dark lords, too, saw the glowing beacon of Guilliman's rebirth from afar and began to marshal their forces accordingly. Forewarned by the prophetic visions of Zaraphiston, Abaddon the Despoiler had fashioned a loose alliance of traitor warbands to strike Guilliman down before his resurrection could occur. It was this that had spurred the sudden, frenzied invasion of Ultramar, but – even with the aid of a sizeable force of Black Legionnaires – Abaddon's vassal warlords had failed in their initial gambit. Furious, Abaddon summoned and bound the Lord of Change Kairos Fateweaver, sending him winging his way across the galaxy to gather fresh forces against the Primarch.

Upon far-flung hell worlds, Magnus the Red and the Death Lord Mortarion received word of their brother's awakening. Their reactions were as different as fire and ice. Mortarion raged, a cold and virulent storm of anger whirling around him until its echoes in realspace seeded seven new and terrible plagues upon luckless Imperial worlds. Mired amid plans that were nearing fruition, the Daemon Primarch of the Death Guard could not yet act to strike at Guilliman. Instead, as he stared with glowing eyes across the mist-wreathed parade grounds of his Plague Planet, and the massed ranks of Death Guard there assembled, Mortarion vowed that he would render Guilliman and his empire to rot soon enough.

Magnus, by comparison, gave a booming laugh of utter delight. Like a fortune teller who flips their final tarot card and gains sudden insight, the Crimson King saw now before him paths of glorious fate, where before had been a wilderness of confusion. Magnus began to issue orders, his words bursting forth as swarms of crystalline insects. They flitted away to marshal the thrallbands of his once proud Legion, the Thousand Sons. Already, the cyclopean Daemon Primarch had revenged himself upon one hated foe of old, setting the Fenris System alight in the fires of retribution. Now, he saw a chance to punish another.

So the might of the Warp began to gather, coiling and writhing like a serpents' nest. Traitor warbands rode the dark tides of the empyrean



toward Ultramar, howling with naked bloodlust and swearing vows to strike Guilliman down in the name of the Ruinous Powers.

Swathes of the galaxy were already riven with Warp storms that had spilled through the Cadian Gate with all the ferocity of Old Night, or been unleashed by the shattering of Biel-Tan. Now those tempests spread further, as the Primordial Annihilator turned its full attentions upon realspace. Screaming maws burst open between the stars, horrifyingly immense, yawning gulfs ringed by mountainous fangs and coiling, ectoplasmic tentacles. Dozens of worlds were plunged into darkness and terror as time shattered apart around them, and the energies of the Immaterium burst their banks to flood into realspace.

Within the Warp, wars ended even as fresh ones began. Daemonic legions were pulled away from nightmarish battlefields and hurled through breaches in the veil of reality, charged with hunting down and putting an end to the reborn Primarch. Yet the servants of the Dark Gods are ever opportunists, and believed that this moment of distraction could be used to strike at their respective master's rivals amongst the Chaos pantheon.

Mounted upon a cogwork scorpion the size of a city, Khorne's blood legions drove headlong into the winding edges of the Crystal Labyrinth, swarms of flame-belching Tzeentchian Daemons pouring out to meet them like insects defending their kicked hive. At the same time, Slaanesh's cavalcade of hedonism hacked its way into the Garden of

Nurgle, even as the Plague God's infamous Sluggardhost came squirming through the brimstone caverns beneath Khorne's Ironfire Bastion. Soon enough, fresh wars raged throughout the domains of the Chaos Gods, their eternal rivalries stoked by the momentous events, yet still a portion of their attentions were focused upon the fate of Roboute Guilliman, and upon their worshipper's schemes to lay him low.

As for the Primarch himself, Guilliman was, as yet, unaware of the daemonic madness that his return had spurred. This was a mercy, for the Lord of Ultramar already had a crushing weight of questions and shock to deal with. Everything Guilliman knew was gone, replaced by the madness and horror of a future he had tried so desperately to prevent.

Roboute Guilliman settled heavily into his new throne. The Primarch had despatched all of his attendants and advisors, even sending his Honour Guard to wait outside the sanctum. At last he could allow a little of his sorrow, trauma and pain to show, and Guilliman let his mask drop with a sigh of relief. Whatever had been done to him to bring him back, it had left the Primarch with a constant, gnawing ache that radiated from deep within. He suspected that pain would never leave him.

Physical hurts were the least of Guilliman's troubles. One by one, the Primarch had spoken with each of the Celestinians, the lords of the Ultramarines, and even Yvraine of the Ynnari. Days had been spent in deep, earnest conversation, Guilliman using every iota of his statesman's guile to set his guests at ease, to tease from them as much information as he could, and to hide his reactions to their words. Guilliman had thanked each of his visitors for their insights and their service to the Imperium, inwardly assessing each of his guests and showing them whatever aspect of his personality was surest to render them sympathetic and voluble.

Though he had not shown it, each fresh revelation struck the Primarch like a cannon shell. He was exhausted from staving off bewilderment and horror, hollowed out by pain. Guilliman groaned and placed his head in his hands, his new suit of armour hissing and humming with the motion.

'Millennia have passed,' he murmured, unsure to whom he spoke. He knew only that he had to vocalise his situation before it drove him mad. Not for the first time since his return, Guilliman wished for one of his brothers to speak with. They, at least, might have understood.

'Thousands of years,' he said. 'And look what has become of them. Of us. Idolatry. Ignorance. Suffering and squalor, in the name of a god who never desired the title.'

Guilliman shook his head and stood, pacing across the Chapter Master's sanctum to stare up at the banners hanging on the western wall. Each was the height of an Imperial Knight, a cascade of masterfully woven cloth depicting the glories of the Ultramarines.

Slain alien beasts, executed heretic despots, worlds saved and worlds burned. The Chapter's proud iconography was much in evidence, but so was the aquila of the Imperium and there, presiding over several of the heraldic designs, a figure with throne and halo who must surely be the Emperor.

'We failed, father,' said Guilliman, his words tired and leaden with sorrow. 'You failed your sons, and we, in our turn, failed you. And now, to compound our arrogance and vainglory, we have failed all of them, too. Did Horus not say that you sought godhood? He built a rebellion upon that claim. How he would gloat, to see the Imperium now.'

Anger surged through the Lord of Ultramar, and he clenched his fists with the effort of self-restraint. He imagined destroying this chamber, tearing it apart and hurling its wreckage around like a wild beast. He dared not, lest these strangers in his Chapter's livery see through his facade. Though he wrestled with despair, the Primarch knew that he could not let his weakness show. Calgar, Tigurius, Agemman, all the others – they looked at him as though he were the Emperor himself. Guilliman was painfully aware of his symbolic quality, and of how desperate and dark the hour had become. He must show nothing but strength to his gene-sons, lest his despair taint their hearts, too.

'And yet, would it really matter,' he sighed, turning his back on the banners and pacing across the chamber to stare through a stained glass window. Out there, across the war-torn immensity of the Fortress of Hera, Guilliman saw the sweeping bulwark where his old chambers had once been. They had belonged to his father, even before him. He had laid his plans there, spoken to his brothers, laughed and raged and – on one occasion – almost died. Now they were gone, buried beneath ugly agglomerations of buttressing and gun batteries. It was apt, he thought bitterly.

Guilliman's anger spilled over, and he span on his heel, staring up at the woven Emperor with accusing eyes.

'Why do I still live,' he snarled. 'What more do you want from me? I gave everything I had to you, to them. Look what they've made of our dream. This

bloated, rotting carcass of an empire is driven not by reason and hope but by fear, hate and ignorance. Better that we had all burned in the fires of Horus' ambition than live to see this.'

Even as he said it, Guilliman heard the lie in his words. Amongst his brothers, none had been more idealistic than Roboute Guilliman. None had envisioned a brighter future, not just for Mankind but also for the warriors of the Legiones Astartes. That flame of hope had been a part of him for as long as he had lived. Even now, as it was smothered by darkness and woe, Guilliman realised that his flame endured.

'There's hope still,' he told himself, turning back to the window and placing one armoured palm against it. He stared out at the work gangs, labouring to repair the damage of war, and the Ultramarines stood proud and determined upon the ramparts. They had been born into this dark millennium, and had known nothing but the hardship, suffering and despair of unending conflict. Yet still they struggled on unbowed, despite the countless enemies ranged against them. Guilliman had seen a better age, one of hope and triumph. What right had he, a superhuman son of the Emperor himself, to show any less strength and courage than his followers born in darkness?

Guilliman had seen what Humanity could achieve. Moreover, he knew what fruits Cawl's labours had borne beneath the surface of Mars. He believed that a better future for the Imperium was still possible. But only if those who tormented Mankind were first defeated.

'All of this misery,' said Guilliman. 'All of this suffering and pain. It is not the doing of Humanity, but of those who have betrayed us. Too long have the pawns of Chaos dictated our species' fate. That must end.'

Guilliman felt new strength fill him. Inspired by it, the Primarch took his pain, and his desolation, and locked them away deep within his mind. But his rage he kept. That, he would have use for.

Later there would be time to mourn, to reason, to plan anew. Now was the time to fight, and to make his father's enemies pay for every horror they had inflicted upon the Imperium.

BATTLE FOR MACRAGGE

Four days and nights after his coronation, Roboute Guilliman emerged from seclusion. In his absence, Lord Calgar had continued to lead the fight, ignoring his injuries as he coordinated the Ultramarines war effort. Now, though, Calgar willingly ceded control of the campaign to his gensire. Recognising the vastly capable Chapter Master for the asset he was, Guilliman kept Calgar close at hand in the battles that followed, and asked his counsel constantly. Brother Librarian Tigurius, too, swiftly became a trusted advisor, the Primarch accepting that in this darker age, the trappings and powers of the Librarius had – by necessity – also become darker. In a move that surprised many, Guilliman also included Voldus, Cawl, Celestine and Inquisitor Greyfax amongst his coterie of lieutenants. The Primarch sought the insights of every arm of the Imperial war machine, recognising that in unity lay strength.

With his advisors at his side, and the unbowed might of the Ultramarines at his disposal, Guilliman began the reconquest of his homeworld. Wider galactic matters would have to wait; Macragge was still beset from every side, and if the Chapter planet fell, then even the resurrected Primarch would surely be dragged down by the tide of foes.

The war for Macragge lasted a little over a month, and its pace was blistering. Roboute Guilliman was a force of nature, an unstoppable avatar of the Emperor's will who drove his enemies before him like cattle. First came a series of lightning-fast offensives to clear the Valley of Laponis and the partially ruined city of Magna Civitas. Batteries of Iron Warriors siege guns were overrun. The semi-sentient artillery engines were blown apart by melta charges, their whip-fisted overseers executed with swift efficiency. Chanting masses of Chaos Cultists were surrounded inside gilded domes and soaring hab-blocks, before being systematically cut apart. Agemman, Celestine and Greyfax led pinpoint strikes to take back the city's primary

orbital batteries. Soon enough, ruby columns of light were spearing up into the heavens to drive the Chaos warships out of their geosynchronous orbits above the Ultramarines Fortress Monastery.

This was only the beginning. Led by the famed tank commander Antaro Chronus, roaring columns of Ultramarines armour swept the traitor battle groups from the Magletine Highlands, and drove their survivors into the storm-tossed Pharamis Ocean. Grand Master Voldus and his 3rd Brotherhood lent their might to the reconquest when they spearheaded the strike against the corrupted city of Collosae. Here the silver-armoured Daemon hunters fought a cat-and-mouse battle with cruel bands of Night Lords, who had veiled the city in an unnatural gloom. The traitors were eventually driven out, and a mysterious blood ritual halted before it could come to fruition, though the entire city had subsequently to be levelled from orbit for fear of its Chaos taint.

Guilliman led attacks against Valmari, Mount Tarphus and the snowy Gallinus Pass, emerging triumphant at every turn. The Ultramarines swept all before them, combining their exceptional skill and discipline with the visionary battle plans of their Primarch into an unstoppable whole. The Ultramar Defence Auxilia followed up each new conquest, digging in and fortifying in great number so that any attempts by the forces of Chaos to counter-attack were met by overwhelming resistance. Though the Heretic Astartes fought furiously, and inflicted sore losses upon the loyalists, they simply could not match the strategic acumen of Roboute Guilliman, and one Chaos warband after another was defeated. Even those who fled Macragge found no haven in the void, for their invasion craft had been surrounded and reduced to burning scrap by the Ultramar Defence Fleet.

Finally, after long weeks of vicious battle and a vast toll of the dead, the world of Macragge was liberated once more.

ADDENDA INQUISITORIA
ASTROPATHIC INTERCEPT
(MALEFICUS EXACTIS)

<<sub ref::: White Scars//
sub ref::: Red Corsairs//
sub ref::: Chogoris>>

Hear us, brother. The Great Hunt falters. The lair of the Khans is beset, and you are called home. Abandon your quarry, Kor'sarro Khan, for your people have need of your wisdom and strength.

The Maelstrom's wrath grows greater by the day. Like a storm cloud that races swiftly from the distant horizon to darken the skies above, the Warp rift has billowed and swollen until it seems it will blot out the stars. Chogoris writhes at its touch. Grasslands burn. Beasts run wild, or turn to monstrous, deformed things.

From the heart of that storm has the enemy come, turncoats and renegades marching beneath the banners of the Tyrant of Badab.

The tribes of the plains have suffered beneath their tainted claws. They have built mountains of the dead, ritual ziggurats of corpse flesh dedicated to their Dark Gods. We know not what goal they work toward, but they are surely close to its completion, and we who remain are too few to hunt them all.

Holding actions. Ambushes. Feigned flight and sudden strikes. The Great Khan would be proud of the fight that we have fought, brother. But we cannot prevail alone, that much now becomes clear. Thus do we cry for aid, from yourself and from those Khans whose hunts have born them far across the stars into the lairs of the myriad foe. No prey, nor matter of honour, is as important as this fight.

You must come, now, while there is still time, and slay them all in the name of the Great Khan. Their insults shall not go unpunished.

THE CROWN OF GLORIES

The first steps had been taken upon the road of reconquest. Macragge was free of Chaos taint. Guilliman wished to press on, consumed by his desire to drive the Ruinous Powers from Ultramar. However, those he led needed time to regroup and consolidate. Countless wounded required attention. Hundreds of war machines needed repair.

Guilliman was wise enough to give his followers the time they needed. Meanwhile, Imperial reinforcements gathered around Macragge. Braving the Warp storms raging through local space, Space Marine craft by the dozen assembled above the Ultramarines home world. Delegations from many Primogenitor Chapters had ploughed through the empyrean, risking terrible danger to see for themselves that the Primarch had returned. Novamarines, Sons of Orar, Genesis Chapter and countless

others joined the growing throng, kneeling before the Primarch and swearing allegiance to him.

While the armies of the Ultramar Reconquest were gathering, a further opportunity presented itself. It was the Arch-Consul of Magna Civitas – the closest Ultramar had to a conventional Governor – who suggested that a grand victory parade could be held, and its majesty recorded on pict casts to be sent far and wide through the Imperium. The Consul said that people needed the light of hope in this dark hour, a shining example of victory to renew their faith not just in the Emperor, but in Guilliman reborn.

The Primarch acceded to this demand, though it sat ill with his bleak inner mood. Guilliman saw the wisdom in it, but he accepted such aggrandisement only grudgingly.

Mere days after victory was declared, a grand triumph swept up from the Titan Gate to the very steps of the Fortress of Hera. Thousands of war engines and millions of warriors presented their colours and raised cheers and horn blasts to the skies. A seething sea of the city's residents packed the crater-pocked processional and plazas to watch the proceedings, and voices beyond count rang out as one to cry Guilliman's praise in a single deafening roar.

Stood upon a marble-columned platform with his closest lieutenants at his side, the Primarch dutifully presented the most magnificent spectacle he could for the assembled masses. The Arch-Consul himself presented Guilliman with a stunningly wrought laurel wreath crafted in gold, urging the Primarch to don the gilded crown at once. The moment Guilliman did so, he



found his mind filled with thoughts of future glories. This paltry triumph would be nothing compared to the breathtaking spectacle of his galactic conquest. The Primarch's armies would be beyond number, their adoration for their heroic lord so great that they would die for him gladly. Planets, systems, whole segmentums would be renamed in honour of he who had liberated them, and the whipped dogs of Chaos would flee before him like the curs they were. Statues would be raised to commemorate Guilliman's majesty, and eventually even the Golden Throne of Terra itself would be his to mount. The Emperor's most loyal son deserved no less an inheritance, and he would have his due.

It was this last thought that wrenched Guilliman from the wreath's insidious curse. With a gasp, he tore the gilded crown from his head and bellowed

a command for the Arch-Consul to be restrained. It was Grand Master Voldus who grabbed the robed dignitary, and as his blessed gauntlets touched the man's flesh it sizzled and crisped. The din of the triumph was colossal, an ocean swell of noise that hid the Arch-Consul's shrieks as the illusions that veiled him were unmade.

Guilliman and his lieutenants recoiled at the misshapen mutant thing that was revealed. Bulbous and deformed, the keening, fleshy abomination wore a glowing amulet about its neck on a thong of human skin. As Guilliman stared in disgust at this cursed fetish, he heard a susurrant hissing within his mind that he had not heard since that fateful encounter on Thessala. In mocking tones, Fulgrim welcomed Guilliman back to his beloved Imperium. The Daemon Primarch revealed that he had concealed a fragment of his own

animus in the amulet that his servant wore, and confessed disappointment that Guilliman had rejected his gift, the Crown of Glories. Many heroes great and pure had fallen to the trinket's blandishments, and Fulgrim had hoped that he could corrupt Guilliman in the same fashion. Yet the Slaaneshi Prince assured his brother that this was but the first of endless temptations that Guilliman would have to face. Laughing cruelly, he taunted that the Lord of Ultramar would never be able to trust any feeling of triumph or self-satisfaction again.

Disgusted, Guilliman drove his sword through the amulet and into the hideous creature that bore it, silencing the voice of the damned brother who had laid him low millennia past. Yet as the triumph rumbled on, Fulgrim's words continued to echo in Guilliman's mind. They would do so for many days to come.



WAR ZONE ULTRAMAR

As the armies of reconquest gathered upon Macragge, so ever more Imperial forces came seeking the Primarch. Some, like the Dark Angels and the Raven Guard, sent small delegations to determine the veracity of this miracle. Others came in hope and celebration, bands of Space Wolves, White Scars, Black Templars and others hastening to the Primarch's side. A glorious moment came to pass when the Black Templars made planetfall, for they were reunited with Marshal Amalrich, who alone of his brotherhood had survived the battle in Guilliman's shrine. Taking one look at the zealous light in Amalrich's eyes, the Black Templars Chaplains declared him touched by the hand of the Emperor. The Marshal was brought aboard the Strike Cruiser *Scourge of Heretics*, and girded with the armour and the Black Blade of the Emperor's Champion.

Others, too, came to Ultramar upon the insistence of their seers, Astropaths, soothsayers and lords. Battleships of the Imperial Navy, regal Barons of Imperial-aligned Knight worlds, fleets of warships from the Adeptus Mechanicus and their Titan Legions, processions from the Adeptus Administratum; all came to offer fealty to the Primarch.

A grotesque cyber-synod of the Adeptus Ministorum descended upon the Fortress of Hera and insisted upon first confirming, and then proclaiming, Guilliman's alleged divinity. The Primarch agreed to such beatification only after Celestine and Greyfax impressed upon him just how powerful the Ecclesiarchy were. Better to have them as a firebrand ally than an obstreperous foe.

Before his departure from the fortress, Guilliman had one more order of business. He decreed that now was an age of wrath and war, in which learning and lore must be set aside. The Primarch shocked his Chapter by ordering the great Library of Ptolemy barred to all comers on pain of death. Every last tome, every lingering, dangerous secret contained within that ancient repository was locked behind adamantium

bulkheads and servitor guns. At the same time a new war room was built. This was the Strategium Ultra, from where Guilliman's reconquest could be plotted, tracked and coordinated.

When finally the armies of reconquest were ready to set out, Roboute Guilliman led them into battle with something akin to relief. After the endless infighting and bureaucracy of this turgid new Imperium, the thought of a battlefield seemed almost welcoming.

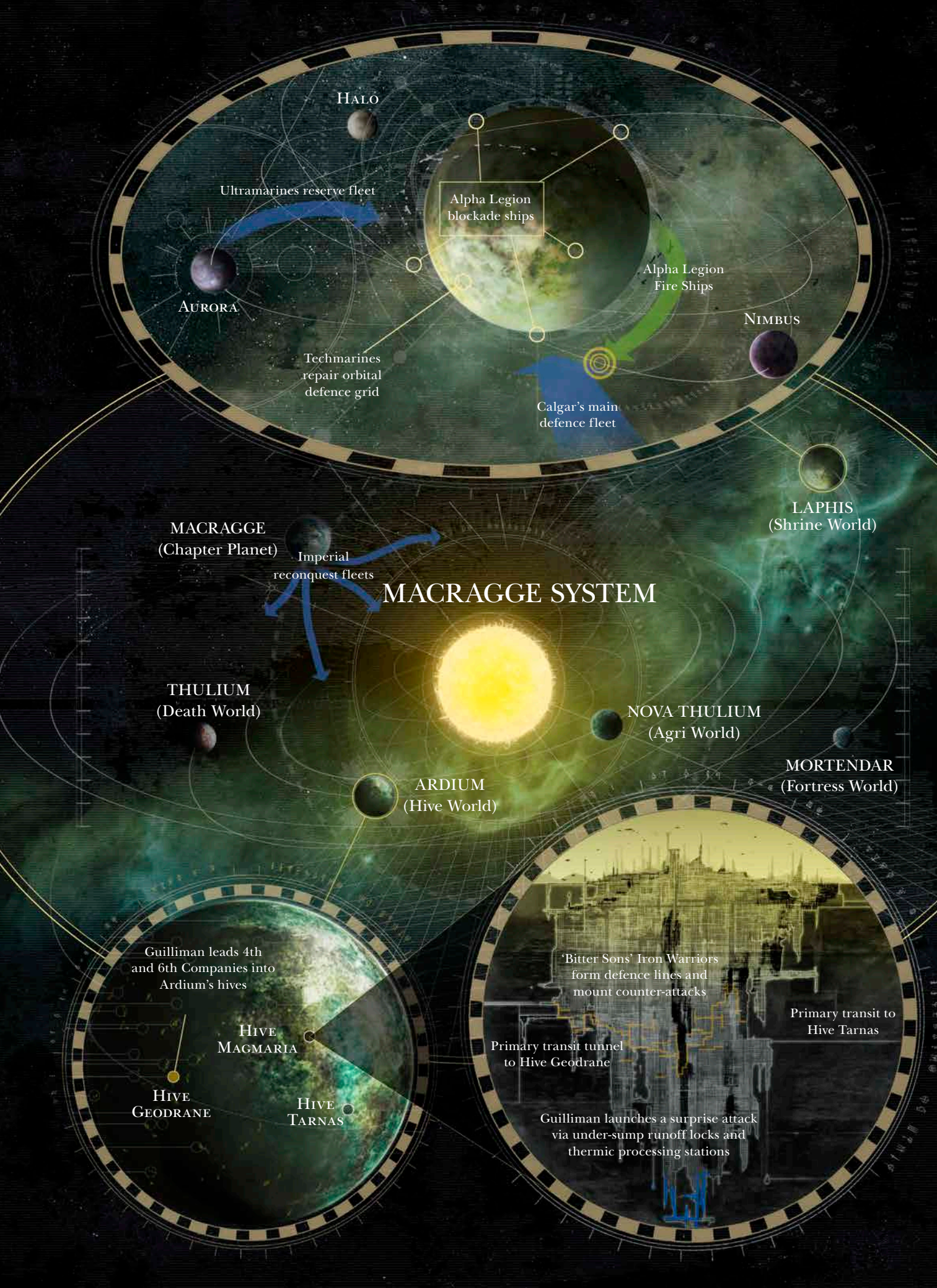
Guilliman began with the Macragge System itself, several of whose worlds were beset by the forces of Chaos. A warband of Iron Warriors known as the Bitter Sons had invaded the hive world of Aridium, conquering one of the planet's three subterranean hives and fortifying its winding tunnel networks. Linking up with the surviving Auxilia garrisons of hives Geodrane and Tarnis, Guilliman led elements of the Ultramarines 4th and 6th Companies through a subterranean hellscape to assault Hive Magmaria. The fighting was savage in the extreme, the outnumbered Iron Warriors clinging tenaciously to their defences until the last man. Corpses choked entire mag-tunnels, and blood filled the under-sump until it overflowed through the hive's drainage grilles. In the end, Guilliman and his gore-drenched followers emerged victorious.

The shrine world of Laphis became the site of the liberation's greatest naval engagement when the Ultramar Defence Fleet engaged the ships of the Alpha Legion blockading the planet. Marneus Calgar commanded the offensive, seated in the captain's throne aboard the ancient flagship *Macragge's Honour*. The Ultramarines vessels swept in through the void with their guns thundering, successfully driving back those Alpha Legion craft engaged in surface bombardment. Triumph turned to horror when a flotilla of fleeing Imperial bulk carriers were revealed to be crewed by Alpha Legion cultists. Packed with explosives, the lumbering haulers ploughed into the Ultramarines ships and crippled several. Lord Calgar had expected

treachery from his foes, however, and now revealed his own masterstroke as a second, reserve fleet of swift Strike Cruisers and frigates swept in from behind Laphis' third moon, Aurora. At the same time, elite strike units containing Ultramarines Techmarines dropped onto Laphis' surface and succeeded in awakening the world's battered orbital defence grid. Caught from three sides, the Alpha Legion warships were torn apart, left as a belt of drifting wreckage above the shrine world.

Through such heroic actions was the Macragge System made secure, allowing the armies of reconquest to sweep on towards the neighbouring systems that made up the realm of Ultramar. That stellar domain had once comprised five hundred worlds, before Lord Guilliman had granted many their own sovereignty. All such treatises the Primarch now declared null and void. In such grim and desperate times, he would see his personal empire forged anew, for in this, as in all things, Guilliman desired strength through unity.

Onward through shuddering Warp storms and traitor hosts swept the armies of Ultramar. Not once did they falter. Iron Hands fought alongside Praetors of Orpheus on Talasa Secundus. Dark Angels went to war beside Titans of the Legio Fulminari to liberate Ischara. The chanting processions of the Cult Mechanicus fought shoulder to shoulder with Novamarines and Battle Sisters of the Order of the Ebon Chalice against mutant hordes on the killing fields of Konor Prime. Unified and elevated by the leadership of Roboute Guilliman, their war efforts coordinated with clockwork precision from the Strategium Ultra on Macragge, the armies of reconquest overcame Warp storms, traitor armies, and even daemonic incursions in their battle to drive the ravagers of Chaos from ever more worlds. Yet still the fight ground on, weeks becoming months, for Ultramar is a vast realm and its numerous invaders, the fires of their old hatred stoked, were obstinate. The Long War raged, worlds burned, and blood stained the stars.



THE SORROW

It was during the seventh month of the campaign to reconquer Ultramar that the first cases of a mysterious new sickness were reported. Throughout the Drohl, Talassar and Parmenio Systems, Ultramar Defence Auxilia found themselves weeping uncontrollably. In the midst of battle, warriors were blinded by endless streams of viscous, stinking tears that gummed their eyes open and soon turned them red raw. Overcome by sorrow, sufferers wailed and wept for days on end. In the worst cases, the so called Weepers were permanently blinded as their infected eyeballs festered and rotted from their skulls.

The disease, soon named the Sorrow, or the Weeping Plague, spread with alarming rapidity. Its vector was believed to be an infestation of tiny, biting mites that were found amidst rations, squirming inside uniforms and ammunition packs, and even spilled from the pages of opened Imperial Primers. Nothing stopped the mites from multiplying, and no sanitary measure could long keep them out. The siege of Leotold's Keep collapsed thanks to the pernicious influence of the Sorrow, while the previously devastating Ravishol offensive ground to a halt as its human soldiery were reduced to blinded, wailing revenants.

Roboute Guilliman hastened to Talassar, leaving the war in the Prandium System to the command of Chief Librarian Tigurius and Inquisitor Greyfax. Guilliman knew that only mortal soldiery had been afflicted with the Weeping – no warrior of the Adeptus Astartes or tech-thrall of the Mechanicus had fallen prey to the sickness as yet. Furthermore, though they were not absolutely immune, only a very few cases had been reported amongst the ranks of the Adepta Sororitas. Some ascribed this to the presence of the Saint amongst the reconquest forces, but more believed that it was the enduring faith of the Battle Sisters that protected them from sickness.

Whatever the truth, Guilliman did not fear the terrible disease, but was instead far more concerned for the fate of his mortal soldiery. The

Primarch arrived upon Ravishol expecting nothing but sadness and horror. Guilliman's shock, therefore, was as great as anyone's when instead he brought a miracle.

Braving the hammering flak screens of the Iron Warriors encampments on the circuit-plains, Guilliman had his Thunderhawk deliver him to the fortified Imperial encampment in the Soldermask Valley. Over the thunder of the encampment's servitor guns – busy keeping the enemy Daemon Engines at bay – Guilliman ordered the camp's Ultramarine commander to lead him to the sick. There were several thousand of them in this encampment alone, tank crews, artillerymen and infantry soldiers trammelled for their own protection within huge prefab sheds. From outside, the muffled cacophony of the Weepers' lamentation was unsettling even for Roboute Guilliman, yet as the shed's armoured doors swung open, the sobbing slowly died away. One by one, the stricken Auxilia rose from their sick beds, blinking in amazement with eyes that could see once more. Even those who had lost their sight altogether subsided with sighs of relief, knowing their first true sleep in weeks. None could explain how, but Guilliman's presence had healed the Weepers.

The same thing occurred in three more encampments along the offensive's stalled front. Wherever Roboute Guilliman walked, the Sorrow was driven out and the mites that spread it died until they piled up in black drifts. The medicae and Apothecaries were at a loss, but the Ecclesiarchy were quick to declare the phenomenon miraculous. It was the Emperor's mercy, they bellowed, brandishing their aquilas, and it shone from His son as healing light.

So began long weeks of relentless pilgrimage for Guilliman, as he rushed from one site of sickness to another. The Primarch knew that while he was engaged in healing his followers, his attentions were drawn away from the wider war. Yet of all the Emperor's sons, Guilliman was perhaps the most human, and his compassion would not allow him to

ignore his followers' plight if he could heal them.

Days became weeks, during which the Weeping continued to spread and – worse still – recur at sites that the Primarch had already cleared. Without Guilliman's peerless genius the reconquest began to suffer, the Chaos forces overturning Imperial victories in the Veridian and Tarvan systems. All the while, the dreadful Warp storms that had riven Ultramar and its surroundings worsened further. Soon, whispered the Navigators, the empire of the Ultramarines might be cut off from the wider galaxy altogether.

It was Grand Master Voldus who finally confronted Guilliman. In a heated argument, during which the Grand Master dared the Primarch's wrath, he forced Guilliman to acknowledge that which he already knew. Weeks of labour had been for nought. Guilliman was not healing his subjects, for such was not his gift. In the Weeping Plague, Voldus recognised all the hallmarks of Nurgle. Most likely, the Plague God was simply withdrawing his dubious blessings from his victims upon Guilliman's arrival, then gleefully restoring them once the Primarch had moved on. The Lord of Ultramar was playing into the Plague God's hands, his desire to save his people perverted into a never-ending trap of entropy and despair.

Though furious, Guilliman accepted Voldus' wisdom. Further, he saw that Nurgle's desire had been to trap him within his own realm, and to keep him from the wider galactic stage. The Primarch realised then that his desire for completeness, for a neat solution and an unsullied Ultramar was, in itself, an echo of mistakes he had made long ago. Nurgle did not wish Guilliman to leave Ultramar because there, the Primarch could be contained like a wasp in a bottle. But this war did not belong to Ultramar alone – it was a war for the entire Imperium. Guilliman saw that he could waste no more time focussing solely upon his own empire. He must tend, instead, to his father's.

With a heavy heart, Roboute Guilliman stopped his efforts to end the Weeping Plague, instead charging his Apothecaries and Chaplains with finding a spiritual cure for what was clearly a spiritual affliction.

The Primarch announced his intention to set out upon a great journey. Once before, when the Dark Gods had threatened the Imperium of Mankind, the Primarch of the Ultramarines had reached Terra too late to do his duty. He would not make that mistake again. Guilliman intended to journey to Terra, to kneel at the foot of the Golden Throne and ask his father for guidance.

Conscious of the worsening Warp storms lashing the space lanes of Ultramar, Guilliman announced his intention to make for Terra as soon as a suitable force could be assembled. The Primarch would not travel alone; the galaxy had become a dark and dangerous place, while the attempts by Slaanesh and

Nurgle to tempt and trick him had shown Guilliman that his resurrection had drawn the eyes of the Ruinous Powers.

The war across Ultramar was still ongoing, however, and with Guilliman leaving, it would require strategically gifted warriors to keep pushing the forces of Chaos back. As such, Guilliman gathered a select force of battle-brothers from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Companies of the Ultramarines to accompany him to Terra, and gave the honour of their command to Captain Cato Sicarius. He further requested that Grand Master Voldus and the Grey Knights of the 3rd Brotherhood join their crusade. Others pledged their aid to the Primarch's cause, including the assembled strength of the Primogenitors, and Emperor's Champion Amalrich and his Black Templars brethren. The Saint, the Inquisitor and the Archmagos Dominus accompanied the Primarch also – whatever aid they or the military forces under

their command could provide the Primarch would be gladly given. Guilliman gratefully accepted all offers of aid before commanding Marneus Calgar, Chief Librarian Tigurius and Captain Agemman to remain and lead the reconquest of Ultramar.

The Ynnari, meanwhile, chose this moment to depart. The Eldar had their own wars to fight, and had already lingered overlong amidst human affairs. Though Cadia had fallen, worlds still remained upon which the black pylons stood strong. It was to these that the Ynnari would now attend, directing those of their race who would listen to defend them.

The Celestinian Crusade had come to its end. In its place, the Terran Crusade would begin. Mere days after Guilliman made known his intentions, the Imperial fleet set out, engines burning hot as they began the long journey to the cradle of Mankind.

The audience chamber was empty but for Yvraine, the Visarch, and Guilliman. In a matter of hours, the Terran Crusade would depart Macragge, yet the Primarch had found a few moments to speak to the Ynnari leaders alone. Even after weeks of mutually fruitful alliance, most warriors would have been cautious of standing alone in the presence of two such sinister and powerful xenos. Guilliman was not most warriors.

'It will be a long and dangerous journey,' said Yvraine. 'The galaxy grows darker by the day. Have a care, Primarch. You may have cheated death once, but you are not invincible.'

Guilliman nodded solemnly. 'Can I say nothing that will convince you to join us on our road? I have come to value the strength of you and your warriors greatly these past weeks.'

'You cannot,' Yvraine replied. 'Already we have given you the gift of rebirth, not to mention a number of our peoples' lives. Is that not enough?'

'It is a debt I'm sure won't be forgotten,' said the Primarch. 'Before you depart, tell me this. Cawl may have fashioned the armour that I wear, but it was not he alone who ensured my resurrection, was it?'

Yvraine smiled demurely. 'His technology would have healed your physical wounds, Roboute, but you and I know that the worst damage had been done to your soul. So no, Primarch; it is by the grace of Ynned that you stand once more amongst the living. If you wish to remain, however, I would caution you against removing your war-plate. Not that you could easily do so.'

A flicker passed across Guilliman's features at this, a faint ghost of pain well hidden, swiftly replaced by a stony mask of duty.

'I could press you for greater insights into the powers that brought me back, and assurances against any taint in their nature,' said Guilliman, noting how the Ynnari stiffened their postures

at this. 'But I suspect that our newfound understanding is of more value to my father's realm than my own satisfaction. And that those answers would not come easily.'

Yvraine inclined her head, while the Visarch silently eased his hand away from the hilt of his blade.

'Thus, instead, I shall simply wish you victory in your ongoing battles against our mutual foes.'

'May you walk with fortune, Roboute Guilliman,' said Yvraine. 'And know that we shall stand together in battle again, before whatever end befalls us.'

The Visarch offered an elaborate warrior's salute to Guilliman, who nodded curtly in return before the Eldar turned and swept gracefully from the chamber.

'No doubt we will,' murmured the Primarch thoughtfully, watching the enigmatic xenos withdraw. 'As long as it serves your needs...'

ACROSS THE VOID

The Warp churned. It roiled and raged. Temporal rip tides and squalls of insanity wrenched and battered at Guilliman's fleet. Whirlpools of arrogance; frenetic storms of anger and lust; becalming straits of misery circled by hungry daemonic entities; all had to be braved as the crusade pushed on.

On the pleas of their Navigators, the ships' captains dared only short jumps through the Warp. These quick and terrifying sprints ended – more often than not – in frantic crash-dives into realspace as the dangers became too great. Several craft were lost, and many captains beseeched Saint Celestine for her blessings to safeguard their passage. The *Pride of Hera* suffered a Geller field breach that saw the slouching Daemons of the Plague God spill like animate pus through its corridors. Inquisitor Greyfax rallied a force of Adepta Sororitas and Praetors of Orpheus Space Marines to fight back against the monstrous creatures. Cleansing flame and sanctified bolts were used to drive the daemonic infestation back deck by deck, forcing them away from the life support systems that they had sought to befoul with spores and infectious filth. Greyfax herself ended the incursion in a swift duel with the bloated plague Daemon that led the invasion, leaping from a gantry down onto the thing's Nurgling-borne throne and slaying the abomination with a single blow.

Despite many such horrors, and an ever increasing toll of lives lost, none in the Terran Crusade so much as spoke of turning back. They braved the Warp storms at the behest of a living Primarch, on a mission to holy Terra itself. Those who quailed in the face of such a momentous calling would surely be damned.

Guilliman travelled aboard his Chapter's ancient flagship, *Macragge's Honour*, a craft that – unlike so much around him – provided the Primarch with a welcome haven of familiarity. He had hoped that the Warp storms around Ultramar were sent to entrap him. As the crusade fleet travelled ever further from the his realm, and the storms continued to rage, the Primarch was disabused of this hopeful notion.

Every time the fleet dropped out of Warp space, Guilliman had his Astropaths comb the darkness of the void, seeking to ensnare every fragment of information he could about the state of the Imperium.

'THE WARP IS OUR GREATEST GIFT, AND ALSO OUR GREATEST THREAT. IT IS CURSE AND BOON, HOPE AND TERROR, A RAGING INFERNO THROUGH WHICH WE MUST PLUNGE, OR ELSE BE LOST.'

- Navigator D'Halmari

With the Immaterium in turmoil, those astropathic communiqués that made it through were jumbled, and nightmarish to interpret. What news the crusade fleet managed to gather was uniformly dire, and left all who heard them cold with dread.

Whole systems were being ravaged by unnatural phenomena, daemonic incursions and plagues of mutation. Psykers proliferated, bringing with them horrific manifestations and outbursts of terror and madness. Loyal populations rose up as howling mobs of mad-eyed cultists. Entire armies of xenos, saturated in the energies of the Warp, fought alongside Daemons to bring death to the worlds of the Imperium. Star forts cried out for help, their corridors prowled by unnatural Warp entities that preyed upon their garrisons. Imperial fleets and convoys flung distress calls into the empyrean as they were dragged light-years off course, or were beset by terrifying empyric predators.

Those who knew of such things could not help but draw parallels with the rumoured terrors of Old Night, and with the Age of Strife, but none – not even Guilliman – dared air such a thought aloud.

Despite the lethal roiling of the Warp, the Terran Crusade forged onward. For the soldiery aboard the ships, the weeks crawled past in an agony of

inactivity and agitation. A constant state of high alert was required fleet-wide, for at any moment they might come under sudden attack. Yet for all their constant training, drilling, patrolling and waiting, still nothing occurred. Even amongst the super-human warriors of the Adeptus Astartes, tempers frayed and inaction chafed. For the thousands of helots, naval armsmen and chapter serfs who crewed and garrisoned the vast warships, the constant state of readiness inevitably took its toll. The expectation of danger became the norm, to the point that laxness crept in and awareness slipped.

When at last the fleet was threatened, it came so suddenly that even the Adeptus Astartes and Cult Mechanicus were caught off guard. The Terran Crusade had reached the trailing edges of the Maelstrom, and had found it swollen with fearsome new power. The fleet's Navigators moaned and screamed, describing something akin to an endless, impossibly immense tornado thundering in the Warp. Where safe channels should have existed, the billowing fringes of the Maelstrom had consumed all. Even the light of the Astronomican became faltering and nigh impossible to see.

Fearing for the safety of their brutalised craft, the fleet's captains ordered immediate translation to realspace. One by one, the Imperial warships tore through the meniscus of reality, streamers of glowing ectoplasm trailing from their hulls as they plunged back into the cold darkness of the void. Yet the thunderous shuddering on board each craft continued, intensifying violently as impacts flared upon void shields and smashed through armoured hulls.

The Hawk Lords frigate *Wings of Glory* was ripped apart by a string of punishing explosions before its crew even knew who or what was attacking them. An Ultramarines Strike Cruiser, *Primarch's Wrath*, sustained crippling damage after colliding with the White Consuls Cruiser *Hope and Fire* as both ships attempted blind evasive manoeuvres.

Frantic orders filled the vox net and echoed through cavernous ships' bridges as furious captains attempted to establish the nature of the threat. Had the fleet dropped out of the Warp and straight into an asteroid field? Had they, by some horrible chance, emerged into the midst of a hostile foe?

As auspexes awoke and observation decks were unshrouded, the bleak truth became clear. The scattered ships of the Terran Crusade had indeed exited the Immaterium straight into the thundering guns of an enemy armada, but it looked as though this was no accident of chance.

Arrayed in perfect ambush formations were dozens of traitor warships bearing baroque and ancient markings upon their hulls. The loyalists realised that a vast fleet of the Thousand Sons surrounded them, deployed as though they had known precisely where and when the Imperial forces would emerge from the Warp.

At the heart of the enemy hung a strange craft of surpassing immensity. Only Guilliman truly understood its appearance, recognising a vast silver facsimile of the Great Pyramid of Tizca. That cyclopean crystal structure had once stood as the crowning glory in the Thousand Sons capital city, upon their homeworld of Prospero. Now it was resurrected in this monstrously magnified new form.

Vast as a planetoid, bristling with gun decks of baffling shape and function, and boasting an immense red crystal eye upon one flank, the insane structure was clearly both flagship and star fort for the enemy fleet. Guilliman knew his brothers well, and here, in this grandiose war engine, he saw all the hallmarks of the Daemon Primarch Magnus the Red.

To the loyalist fleet's rear loomed the squirming spiral arms of the Maelstrom, a towering wall of unnatural energies and whirling sorcery that promised madness and death. To their fore was the titanic pyramid of Magnus, its attendant warships already pummelling Guilliman's armada.

With little choice, the Imperials fought as best they could in their scattered dispersal. Torpedoes fired from launch tubes, streaking through the void to blast ragged holes in heretic warships. Fighter squadrons scrambled, jetting out into the darkness like swarming insects. Lance arrays spat ruby light, and gun decks thundered as the Imperial ships frantically attempted to fight free of their ambushing foes.

Yet the Imperial craft were taking a terrible hammering, void shields collapsing and ruptured decks venting screaming crewmen into space. Engines flared out and died under volley after volley of macro shells, while rune-inscribed torpedoes swept in to fill loyalist bridges and magazines with Warpflame.

Guilliman issued a steady stream of orders to his captains, doing everything in his power to gather his ships and fight back. Inwardly he raged, both at his fallen brother's deviousness and his own failure to foresee the ambush. By comparison, Magnus watched with amused satisfaction from the grand observation gallery aboard his pyramidal flagship.

He had fashioned the vast craft, named *Tizca's Revenge*, using the plundered resources of an Imperial world and the nameless energies of the Warp. Now he conjured those empyric powers again, for an altogether different purpose. A cabal of powerful Sorcerers stood around Magnus, chanting ominous words as he raised his arms high and cried out in stentorian tones.

The Crimson King called and the Warp answered, coiling tendrils of power coalescing to surround Guilliman's battered fleet. Magnus judged the damage done to be sufficient. He had no desire to kill his resurrected brother. Not yet, anyway. Thus, with a final booming incantation, Magnus completed his spell. The empyric tendrils clamped tight around the ships of the Terran Crusade and, with a vast convulsive wrench, dragged them deep into the raging heart of the Maelstrom.

>>>LOCALITUM BELLICOS:
ARMAGEDDON SECUNDUS

>>>AUTOMATED ALERT BEACON
DELTA-DELTA-RHO

>>>CLARION PEAL AWOKEN

>>>MALEFIC MANIFESTATION
DETECTED 011100010101100

- - - -

- - -

- -

-

Input> Empyric augurs
registering exponential
energy increase -
Armageddon southern
polar region

Observation> Warp
anomalies manifesting
through coordinates
124/33-863/22

Input> Greenskin
'Bloodjaw Offensive'
entering 7th day of
successive fighting in
this region

Query> Correlation?

Query> Previous
experiential data
available within
sacrosanct data-stacks?

Action> Interrogating...

Action> Interrogating...

Action> Interrogating...

Exception> [DATA
REDACTED]

Exception> EVERMILLION
CLEARANCE DEMANDED -
UNAVAILABLE

Action> Interrogation
abandoned

Action> Clarion Peal
repeating - vigilance
subroutines auto-
sanctified - missive
caution lodged with
Armageddon High Command

Observation> Malefic
manifestations
increasing - full Warp
breach imminent...

Observation> Malefic
manifestations
increasing - full Warp
breach imminent...

Observation> Malefic
manifestations
increasing - full Warp
breach imminent...

INTO THE MAELSTROM

Pandemonium seized the ships of the Terran Crusade. Crushing tendrils of empyric energy wound about the craft like the tentacles of some leviathan beast. Bulkheads crumpled. Shields blew out. Raging fires and punishing gravity fluctuations tore through decks. Powerless to resist, the warships were plucked from reality and dragged into the Warp. Desperate tech adepts stumbled over their rituals as they strove madly to raise their ships' Geller fields. Some succeeded, but other craft were inundated with howling masses of Daemons as they were dragged, unwarded, into the Warp. Madness and slaughter ran rife, and only the staunch determination of the Imperial armies aboard each ship prevented the Terran Crusade from being utterly annihilated.

By the time Magnus' spell ran its course, the ships of the Terran Crusade had been cast deep into the Maelstrom. Guilliman's fleet had, at least, been spat from the maw of the Warp once more, but the region they now found themselves in was a cursed one. Within the Maelstrom, reality and the Immaterium melted together

in a strange morass. The stars were lost behind drifting veils of unnatural energy, and twisted worlds hung amidst the shimmering gloom.

While Belisarius Cawl coordinated emergency repair crews to shore up mauled ships and save the worst damaged craft from destruction, Guilliman and his captains tallied the cost of the ambush. Their losses were sobering. From a vast fleet of one hundred and twelve Space Marine, Imperial Navy and Adeptus Mechanicus warships, barely half remained. Some had been lost during the Thousand Sons ambush, blown apart by blistering firepower. More had vanished during the subsequent mayhem, cast far adrift upon the tides of the Immaterium. Some, doubtless, would have made it to realspace, scattered distant from the main body of the fleet. Others were surely lost, or worse.

All of the fighter craft launched during the brief battle were gone, their crews doomed to a cold and lonely death in the void of space. Hundreds upon hundreds of Chapter serfs, human crewmen and servitors

were injured, insane or dead, and even the Space Marines had taken substantial casualties.

The Terran Crusade had been reduced to a shadow of its former military strength. Not one warship had survived the ambush unscathed, and many were sorely damaged. Crushing though the sudden losses were, they were still not Roboute Guilliman's greatest worry.

Meeting in his strategium with the assembled Imperial and Space Marine leaders, Guilliman expressed his belief that the Thousand Sons must have known, by some infernal means, where and when the crusade would break from the Warp. Guilliman's fleet had been surrounded. Why not strike the killing blow? The Primarch knew all too well that Magnus did nothing without a plan, so why had he allowed his erstwhile brother to survive? It was a question that returned to torture the leaders of the crusade again and again in the dark days that followed.



Stranded deep in the Maelstrom, with no sight of the Emperor's Astronomican to guide them, the surviving warriors of the Terran Crusade required some means by which they could determine their location, and find their way back into realspace. Seizing

upon the faint transmissions emanating from a nearby moon, the crusade made for the dark planetoid in the hope of either capturing a traitor who could act as their unwilling guide, or else gaining access to heretic astrogation instruments hardened against the roiling energies of the Warp.

Landing parties mounted gunships and Drop Pods, streaking down through thin, pale skies onto a dark and glassy world. The loyalists found vitrified continents, barren of life and tormented by powerful, screaming winds. An unnatural light glowed deep

within the world's glass heart, and left all who glimpsed it with an ominous sense of dread.

The crusade strike force located an armoured fortification amongst a range of mountains, clinging limpet-like amidst glinting peaks. Guilliman himself led the attack that breached the defences, finding to his disgust that a ragged band of renegade Space Marines garrisoned the fortress. Crosses daubed over these warriors' Chapter iconography identified them as Red Corsairs, and the Primarch vented his pent up anger and frustration upon the luckless traitors. The battle was brief, Guilliman and a trio of Voldus' Dreadknights slaughtering the renegades' leaders. However, when Guilliman successfully seized the last traitor alive in the fortress' vox array, a diabolical manifestation occurred. The air crackled and rime crawled across the metal walls of the chamber as a menacing daemonic presence spoke through the captive's mouth. In two mocking voices, the presence told Guilliman that, even now, Ultramar burned. The evil thing cackled that the Primarch had abandoned his people to wander the Maelstrom forever. Then, it twisted the head of the captive around with a sickening crack. Guilliman cursed as his only lead expired amidst the sizzle and bang of overloading vox banks. He vowed to locate the Daemon, and wring the truth from it no matter what he had to endure.



After their encounter on the glass moon, the crusade fleet wandered aimless. With no indication of the course that would take them to Terra, Guilliman picked a direction based upon his best guess, and instructed his captains to turn to that heading. For the moment, hoping to reach the Maelstrom's edge seemed the only available plan.

How long they journeyed, none could say, for time did not pass normally in that sanity-defying place. The Primarch was tormented by the words of the Daemon, and sought any opportunity to discover what might be occurring outside the Maelstrom. His opportunity came when scout ships reported heretic craft patrolling a twisted, fleshy planet that hung amidst a cloud of huge crystalline skulls. Ordering an immediate attack, Guilliman commanded that the gathering of intelligence should

be treated as priority. Maps, charts, cartographic hymnals, traitor Navigators or whatever passed for Astropaths in this hellish place, were all to be seized.

The fleet swept down upon the fleshworld, only for the planet to fight back. The renegade ships belonged to a warband of Emperor's Children, who began a thunderous empyric resonance that caused devastating sonic shock waves to burst from the mouths of the crystal skulls. At the same time, the planet itself unfurled augmetic tentacles, sutured onto its living surface. These monstrous appendages snatched several Mechanicus ships from the void and stuffed them into a continent-sized maw that unpuckered at the planet's northern pole.

Sustained torpedo bombardment finally severed the world's ironclad tentacles, while lance fire shattered dozens of the crystalline skulls and crippled several of the Emperor's Children warships. The remaining traitor craft turned tail, leaving their comrades to be boarded. Yet Guilliman's sense of triumph was once again short-lived. Though dozens of star charts and maps were recovered, all were blank save for the Daemon's mocking words to Guilliman in the Red Corsair fortress, repeated over and over again. Whatever this entity was, it clearly sought to torment the Primarch personally.

ADDENDA INQUISITORIA

ASTROPATHIC INTERCEPT

(PERDITUM EXTREMIS)

<<Origin: Unknown>>

<<Temporal
Reference: Unknown>>

<<Astrogation
Locality: Unknown>>

Course holding steady.
Captain. Empyric
disturbance still
increasing, but the
light of the Emperor
shall bring us home.
Soul traffick within
acceptable parameters.

Noting some malefic
buildup around abaft
the primary port side
batteries. Recommend the
Martian magi redouble
their prayers and attend
the Geller fields in that
sector, lest we risk
a breach.

There is... increased storm
activity on the currents
to port... I... what is that?
An eye opens... Are those...
mountains? No, fangs...

Hngh... my head...

Oh Throne...

Captain! Massive empyric
surge to port! Magnitude
unendurable! Ahh... it...
hurts... Captain VanDent,
you must perform crash
translation at once or we
are all lost! Alert the
fleet! This Warp surge
will devour us all!

The Emperor's light... oh
throne, its gone! The
Astronomican is gone!

Captain!

No, no, NO...

<Excerpt Ends>

ON DARKER PATHS

Amidst fluctuating time streams and reality-warping energy storms, the damaged ships of the crusade struggled on. Within the Maelstrom lurked countless foes, for this was a region that had long harboured the warring minions of Chaos.

More than once, the Imperial ships were forced to fight off opportunist raids by sleek hunting packs of traitor warships. Amidst a thousand-mile-wide cloud of corrosive spores, the crusade ships found themselves beset by swarms of vast plague flies as large as frigates. The monstrous insects took a savage toll upon the smaller ships of the Crusade, until Saint Celestine took to the Navigator's observation blister of the *Macragge's Honour*. Unleashing her holy light in a blazing shockwave, the Living Saint purged the hideous Daemon beasts from the void.

In another uncharted reach, the crusade craft found ghostly phantasms whirling around their hulls. Howling Warp ghosts screamed through the corridors of the Space Marine craft, swarming around the ancient relics and honoured banners of their Reclusiam shrines. The Adeptus Astartes realised, to their

horror, that these aetheric leeches were draining the holy energies from their treasured relics, dragging faint, screaming ghosts from the enshrined helms, blades and scrolls. In this fight, the Grey Knights came to the fore, Voldus swiftly splitting his brotherhood and deploying them by rapid teleport strike into his allies' shrines. Fighting alongside the outraged Chaplains who guarded the relics, the Daemon-hunting warriors drove the Warp leeches back and banished them to the void.

So it went on for an indeterminate and bewildering span of time that felt like impossible centuries. As the crusade fleet forged on, their supplies running low and their crews exhausted by constant battle, Roboute Guilliman became ever angrier and more distracted. Unbeknownst to all, the Primarch was bedevilled by horrific visions.

Guilliman saw the realm of Ultramar in flames, and the bastions of Mankind blowing away as ash upon the blood-wet winds of change. He was tormented by images of Mars, shattered into hundreds of pieces and raining down as flaming meteors upon the once-proud ruin of Terra. He saw the Golden Throne as a

sparkling, fire-wreathed wreck, the Emperor's blackened corpse burning within it.

Daemonic voices whispered into Guilliman's mind, day and night. If they had told him the scenes he saw had already come to pass, that would have been cruel enough. But this torment was more cunning yet, for instead the voices told Guilliman that the visions were flashes of foresight.

They were glimpses of a singularly dark fate that would transpire only should he escape the Maelstrom and complete his journey to Terra. Relent in his attempt to escape, accept his Warp-tainted prison for all eternity, give in to madness and despair, and he would spare the Imperium from coming to this terrible end.

Guilliman wrestled internally with each passing day, yet he showed no sign of his struggle to those who looked to him for leadership and hope. The Primarch maintained his veneer of strength and continued to pursue his goal of escape, determined that he would not believe the lies of any entity that inhabited that hellish place. Still, the Primarch's resolve eroded slowly, as a cliff washed away by the endless ocean waves.



Long had the crusade fleet sailed the Maelstrom's corrupted tides when they came to Bathamor. In the hours before they hove into orbit, the name of this cursed world leapt into the mind of every psyker in the fleet, repeating over and over in a malicious

whisper until those that heard them cried the planet's name aloud. Auspex scans revealed an infernal world of kaleidoscopic crystal jungles, laced through by glimmering rivers of fire. They also showed vox signatures and energy readouts commensurate with a sizeable renegade presence, and so Guilliman ordered the captains of the Terran Crusade fleet to prepare their forces for an immediate combat drop. Once more, intelligence gathering would be paramount – with their sanity and resolve weakening by the day, the crusade knew they must escape the Maelstrom soon or perish within this seemingly endless expanse of tainted space.

Sweeping down from on high, the Imperial armies slammed into the crystal jungles amidst explosions of jagged shards. Advancing upon the greatest concentration of energy signatures, the loyalist forces cursed in anger and bewilderment as their auspex readings winked out like will-o'-the-wisps. The next moment, Tzeentchian Daemons attacked from all sides.

Barrages of sorcerous flame and mutating energies clawed at the Ultramarines and their allies. Crystal trees detonated like huge fragmentation bombs, lacerating all who fought around them. In the midst of the madness, Roboute Guilliman found himself face to face with the architect of the devious ambush. A croaking, two-headed nightmare clad in shimmering robes and wielding a potent staff of temporal power, Kairos Fateweaver coalesced from amidst a glittering storm of crystal shards. Confronting Guilliman, one of the hideous Daemon's avian heads mocked the Primarch's continued efforts to escape, sneering that he had scried every possible strand of the future and every last one ended in his failure. Kairos' other head crowed that Guilliman had always been the most unremarkable of the Emperor's sons, and was as incapable of saving the Imperium now as he was when he fell to his superior brother. Guilliman bellowed in fury and drove Kairos back with swings of his burning blade, before leading his stricken forces in a fighting retreat. The crusade and its leader would not fall to the Oracle's manipulation so easily...



Anxious as to the fate of the wider Imperium, and with several ships now left scuttled in their wake due to accumulated battle damage, the crusade fleet came upon a world of black marble and bloody seas. They struck hard and fast against several Red

Corsairs strongholds, eliminating outlying enclaves before finally laying siege to a fortified palace upon a claw-shaped headland above booming, gory waves. While Archmagos Cawl coordinated the siege, Greyfax and Sicarius led a daring raiding party that threw open the palace's main gates and sealed the heretics' doom.

Guilliman knew that this victory offered a brief respite at best. The screaming of the bloody ocean was eroding his followers' sanity, and amongst the ashen skies overhead, huge, dark

shapes stirred with the promise of terrible danger. Yet the logistics of stripping the Corsairs' fortress would take time, even with the Primarch's meticulously efficient plans. Thus, as Mechanicus bulk haulers rumbled back and forth through the planet's atmosphere, Guilliman found himself wandering alone through the twisted citadel's corridors. It was as he entered a chamber of crystal statues that a shimmering mist rose before the Primarch's eyes. Amidst the swirling patterns of light and shadow, a slender figure flickered into being. Guilliman caught the suggestion of willowy limbs and billowing cloth, a curving alien helm and a long stave, before the figure spoke. Like its image, the manifestation's voice swam in and out of Guilliman's perception. Yet the Lord of Ultramar was able to decipher instructions from the figure's words.

Guilliman was wary of further trickery, suspicious and plagued by echoes of the daemonic whispers that Kairos Fateweaver had projected into his mind. Yet he sensed no taint of Chaos in this manifestation; the energies given off by the shimmering vision were more akin to those of the Eldar who had aided his resurrection. At last, after repeating its message several times, the figure vanished, leaving the Primarch with a new sense of purpose and, perhaps, even a sliver of hope. Here, at last, was a heading, and Guilliman meant to follow it.



THROUGH THE STORM

Upon leaving the world of black marble and blood, the remnants of the crusade fleet set out with new determination. The crusade now numbered a third of the ships that had departed Ultramar, but they were still led by Guilliman's flagship, *Macragge's Honour*, and they still stood ready for battle at any moment. They had a heading at last, albeit one derived from the omen-laden whispering of an unknown figure.

Drives lit with thundering flame, the warships of the Imperium clove through veils of frozen ichor and showers of meteors encrusted with staring eyes. They followed a distant, glimmering star of pure white, until it resolved itself into a massive flaming hole in reality. Turning to a new heading as this prophesied landmark was reached, the crusade swept next through a sprawling region of mauve gas clouds that formed into unrecognisable sigils and shimmered with the eldritch power of change.

Emerging from the far edge of the gas belt after many days, the crusade's auspexes detected a triad of planets, all whirling around one another in an endless dance. This, again, was just as the mystical interloper had told Guilliman it would be, and the Primarch's hope swelled within him at the promise of escape.

Following the stranger's directions, the fleet changed its heading once again, angling away from the spinning mass of planets and making for a distantly visible constellation of jade green glimmers. Soon, if the Eldar apparition was to be believed, the crusade would at last escape from the Maelstrom, but they would first have to brave what the figure had described as the resting place of hollow ghosts.

At first, the region appeared as a silvered speckling of space, stretching out in all directions ahead of the fleet. Gradually, those glimmering motes grew in size and definition until, at a distance of no more than a few thousand miles, they resolved themselves into a breathtaking and eerie sight. Thousands upon thousands of wrecked ships drifted

here, their hulls linked together by vast webs of brass chain. Lit by the jade stars that loomed in the middle distance, derelict craft of every sort trailed wreckage behind them as they hung silently in their cursed afterlife. Some were familiar: ancient marks of Imperial warship, splinter-boned Eldar wrecks, hollowed Kroot Warspheres, broken-backed Hrud Warrenships, and the empty remnants of Nicassar Dhows. Others were unidentifiable: black needles of glassy material, ravaged structures like space-born hives, vast, angular leviathans and tiny, ellipsoid ships little bigger than a Drop Pod. How they had all come to be abandoned here was an unsettling puzzle. The hazard that they – and their binding chains – presented was clear enough, however.

The first thought of Guilliman and his captains was to attempt to circumnavigate the starship graveyard. Yet the ships trailed away, seemingly into infinity above, below and to either side. If the crusade wished to pass this way – and it seemed that they must if they wanted their freedom – then they would have to push forward between the wrecks.

Guilliman gave the order. Spreading out with their Battle Barges to the fore, the crusade ships engaged their drives and raised their void shields before edging into the graveyard. Progress was painfully slow, for in places the wrecks were chained just a mile or so apart, tangled in vast chain webs like the prey of some cosmic arachnid. Tech-Magi and Chapter serfs flinched and sweated at each new scrape and groan from their crafts' hulls as the ships forged their slow and steady paths.

Despite exercising every caution, the larger ships could not completely avoid collision. Ice-cold chain links left vast gashes and dents as they skidded across reinforced exteriors. Ancient wreckage broke apart and scattered into the void as, here and there, a Battle Barge or Strike Cruiser nosed aside a drifting ship that blocked its path. Each fresh collision, each breathless near miss, left the crews' nerves frayed and passengers on edge as the hours crawled past.

Finally, after a torturous stretch of time, Archmagos Cawl announced that he was reading clear space ahead. They were nearing the edge of the debris field and, more relieving still, it appeared they were nearing the edge of the Maelstrom. Past the last chained wrecks, the Navigators, who had been near comatose for many days, could perceive a distant flicker. They awoke, muttering with increasing excitement that they could see once more the barest shred of the Astronomican's light, as though it shone through the gap in a partly-opened door.

Guilliman counselled caution, and ordered his crews to continue their careful, steady progress, yet he too grew more hopeful by the moment. At last, they would escape the hellish region into which his brother Magnus had hurled them. At last they could continue on their road.

It was as the *Macragge's Honour* thrust aside the ravaged hulk of an Iconoclast Destroyer, and an open path to the edge of the graveyard yawned before it, that the attack came. Cries of alarm rang through the flagship's bridge as power spikes flared amidst the derelicts on every side. Drifting Chaos warships lit their drives and unshrouded gun decks, as their internal power sources thundered to life.

It was an ambush!

The Red Corsairs had laid their trap with cunning and skill, guided by the precognitive powers of Kairos Fateweaver. They had inveigled their ships into the far edge of the starship graveyard, precisely where Kairos foresaw the loyalist fleet would pass through. With the careful application of cosmetic hull damage, and all internal systems shrouded to minimise output, they had mag-clamped severed links of chain to their hulls and posed as just another scattering of lost craft. Now, rumbling back to life all around the shocked loyalists, the Red Corsair ships launched an ambush of the enemy in their midst. Lance beams seared through adamantium hulls. Noble warriors who had survived countless

trials were obliterated by raging firestorms, or sucked helplessly out into the void.

Guilliman cursed at what must surely be further Tzeentchian machinations. Hemmed in and outflanked, his fleet was at a catastrophic disadvantage. Several Imperial warships attempted to break free of the starship graveyard; these craft were quickly targeted and, in the case of the Raven Guard frigate *Silent Blade*, shorn clean in two. The rest fought back, hammering fire into the void and tearing chunks from their attackers' ships at point-blank range.

Chaos firepower continued to rain down upon Guilliman's fleet in a veritable storm. The Primarch saw that the foe – secure in their numerical and positional superiority – were aiming to cripple his ships rather than destroy them. Weapons batteries, auspex arrays and enginariums were blasted one by one, leaving the crusade ships drifting and defenceless. Guilliman knew what must surely come next, and cursed aloud as he saw wave after wave of boarding torpedoes released from

the launch decks of the attacking craft. The Red Corsairs were, first and foremost, pirates. Now they sought to steal as many of the crusade's ships as they could, along with the arms and armour within. Barking orders for his warriors to prepare for boarders, Guilliman's mind whirled with counter-ambush strategies and breakout plans.

Defence batteries studded the mile-long flanks of the *Macragge's Honour*. As the enemy boarding craft streaked closer, those guns roared to life, filling the void with sawing streams of firepower. Guilliman watched the external pict feeds intently, reading the patterns of destroyed foes and near-misses, and determining where the enemy's forces would hit his ship the hardest. The Primarch narrowed his eyes as the vessel's primary auspex array took a direct hit, and the pict feeds drowned in static.

Turning away from the useless data-font, Guilliman issued a calm string of orders that were circulated fleet wide. For all those who could still hear him, the Primarch commended their remarkable courage and

strength. He gave the order that all ships deploy their forces to defend their bridges, primary magazines, shield generators and Warp engines, then – swallowing his own distaste at the religious connotations of the term – wished the Emperor's blessings upon all who were about to engage the foe. Those who repelled boarders were to break free, and rendezvous beyond the edge of the Maelstrom as best they could.

His orders issued and Captain Sicarius, Saint Celestine and Inquisitor Greyfax at his side, Guilliman donned his helm and joined the warriors he had deployed to defend the bridge. He listened intently as vox transmissions flew back and forth throughout the ship. Boarding torpedoes impacted by the dozen. The lower crew decks were overrun. Sergeant Apstrophis' Devastators held the bulkheads before the enginarium primus. Then came the news that a daemonic creature had manifested aboard, sweeping towards the bridge at the head of a Chaotic horde. Mere moments later the bridge bulkheads shuddered, then exploded inwards upon a bow wave of unnatural flame.

THE RED CORSAIRS

The Astral Claws Chapter had been stationed outside the terrifyingly dangerous Warp rift known as the Maelstrom for over three centuries when they defected to Chaos. Failing to submit their gene-seed tithes as was decreed by law, an Imperial fleet was despatched to investigate. As the fleet entered orbit around Badab, the Astral Claws Chapter planet, they were engulfed by a sudden and ferocious firestorm. Luftg Huron, the Chapter Master of the Astral Claws, had ordered the attack and ensured that not a single Imperial ship escaped his ambush.

Though it took time for news of the massacre to filter back to the Adeptus Terra, retribution was inevitable. The eventual backlash saw several Chapters of Space Marines diverted onto a punitive mission to slay the Tyrant of Badab and his Astral Claws. However, so inspirational was Huron's rhetoric that several nearby Chapters, including the Mantis Warriors, Executioners and Lamenters, had defected to his empire.

The war that followed was absolutely merciless; the loyalists fought with the fury and conviction of the betrayed, while Huron's followers were forced by their choices into fighting with absolute conviction.

After a succession of sieges that culminated with Huron's defeat at the Palace of Thorns, the Imperium was finally victorious. The Astral Claws and the most corrupt of their allies were forced to flee into the Maelstrom. There they were reborn as the piratical Red Corsairs, and, far from dying amidst the hellish tides, they prospered.

Now known as Huron Blackheart, the former Tyrant of Badab commands a vast number of traitors. Providing they swear allegiance to his banner, any turncoat Space Marines are welcomed into his piratical empire. Operating out of hidden bases concealed throughout the Maelstrom, surviving through conquest and pillaging, the Red Corsairs gladly turn their guns on those they once called brothers.







MACRAGGE'S HONOUR

The Chaos onslaught was swift and savage. It had to be, for though the Ultramarines were outnumbered, they held an incredibly defensible position against the enemy boarding parties. Guilliman's sons crouched behind consoles artfully designed to double as barricades in the event of a breach. More of their number occupied elevated positions on gantries and balconies overlooking the bulkhead, taking up positions amidst the looming grandeur of the bridge.

The first servants of Chaos to bound and cartwheel onto the bridge had absolutely no cover whatsoever. Pink Horrors of Tzeentch were engulfed in a storm of disciplined, expertly aimed fire that ripped them to pieces. Into the meat grinder poured more and more Daemons, while behind them squads of Red Corsairs lunged through the blasted bulkhead and dashed for any cover they could find.

Bolters roared, their massed echo and strobing muzzle flare rolling around the bridge like a raging thunderstorm. Daemons exploded in puffs of ectoplasm, smaller simulacra bursting from their corpses to be mowed down in turn. Traitor Space Marines clad in the defaced liveries of a dozen Chapters fell dead upon the killing ground, their armoured corpses continuing to twitch and jerk as more rounds struck them. Bolt shells, plasma blasts, las beams and missiles fell like hailstones, ripping the deck plates to blackened ruin and annihilating dozens of invaders.

Inevitably, though, the boarders began to gain ground. A jetting blast of purple fire leapt out to turn a gantry to slime, sending a squad of Red Corsairs Terminators tumbling a hundred feet into the vox pits below. A cluster of Krak grenades rained down upon a console-barricade, their detonations killing one Veteran and forcing two more to beat a hasty retreat. In the moments before he fell, a Red Corsair unloaded his plasma gun into another barricade, killing several Ultramarines before being killed by his own overheated weapon exploding in his hands. So it went on, the enemy eroding Guilliman's defences through reckless assaults.

Then came Kairos. The first warning the loyalists had of the Greater Daemon's onset was a thickening of the air as the empyrean stirred. Librarian Pollonius cried out in sudden agony, hands clamped to his skull and eyes bulging as the energies of his own mind were turned against him. Fast as lightning, Guilliman hurled himself aside, barging Captain Sicarius clear in the instant before Pollonius' body detonated in a wave of blue fire. Several Ultramarines were not so lucky, their armour dissolving and flesh turning to ash as the flames washed over them.

'YOU ARE A RELIC OF A BYGONE AGE, A FOOTNOTE TO YOUR FATHER'S FAILURES. YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN THE PAST WHERE YOU BELONGED, PRIMARCH, FOR YOU HAVE NO PLACE IN THIS FUTURE.'

- Kairos Fateweaver

As the commanders of the Ultramarines reeled, the next rain of firepower to fall upon the kill box was transmogrified. Instead of mass-reactive shells and whistling grenades, all that struck the attacking hordes was shimmering starlight and wisps of silver steam.

A fresh wave of leaping Flamers and cackling Horrors surged through the bulkhead and leapt to the attack. More Red Corsairs came with them, lumbering Chaos Terminators and fang-helmed warriors with bolters blazing. At their back, his ragged wings spread wide and his staff tapping before him, came Kairos Fateweaver himself.

Seeing the Lord of Change, Guilliman roared a battle cry and charged. Sicarius and his warriors followed close on their Primarch's heels, while Greyfax and Celestine hurled themselves into the foe to either side.

Guilliman stormed through Daemons and traitors alike, his flaming sword swiping in unstoppable arcs. Volleys of shells thundered from the Hand of Dominion, while the crushing

fist obliterated an enemy with every blow. Daemons exploded in sprays of unnatural ichor before Guilliman's fury, while those traitors foolish enough to stand in his path were smashed aside like rag dolls.

Following the trail of carnage wrought by their Primarch, Sicarius and his battle-brothers hacked and blasted those enemies who tried to encircle Guilliman. Sicarius himself was a blur, his Talassarian Tempest Blade drawing golden arcs through the air as it lopped horned helms from armoured shoulders, and split Daemons in two. At the same time, blinding light shone from Saint Celestine as she carved her way through the Warpspawn, and Inquisitor Greyfax sent one traitor after another crashing to their knees as she crushed their minds with her telepathic powers.

It did not take Kairos' matchless future-sight to foresee that his enemy would attempt to reach and slay him. The Lord of Change was no match for Guilliman in battle, but armed with his faultless precognition, he had long prepared for this moment. Now, as the Lord of Ultramar smashed his way closer, Kairos set his devious scheme in motion by unleashing a pulse of blue flame from his staff.

Nine Heralds of Tzeentch had worked their way through the press of battle, concealed behind shimmering spells of illusion. At Kairos' signal, the leering Daemons cast aside their sorcerous shrouds and began a babbling incantation. Bolt shells whipped in towards the Heralds the moment they appeared, but their Daemon minions leapt willingly into the path of the shots. Shielded by the shimmering flesh of their underlings, the Heralds continued their chant, nine voices rolling and twining with each other over the cacophony of battle. Raising the Staff of Tomorrow high above his heads, Kairos joined his croaking voices to the burgeoning spell.

Since Guilliman had first entered the Maelstrom and begun to hear Kairos whispering in his mind, the Greater Daemon had been planting

traps in the Primarch's subconscious. It had not been easy, for Guilliman's mind was a pristine fortress of order and rationality, and his mental defences were formidable. Yet slowly, carefully, the deed had been done. Kairos had teased forth Guilliman's guilt, his anger and disappointment at what remained of the Imperium, his fears for its future. The Daemon had intended to continue his work until the Primarch was quite mad before attempting this ritual, but the intervention of the interfering Eldar had forced Kairos' hand. His preparations would have to be enough, or else Guilliman would surely banish him back to the Warp and escape.

Swaying and gibbering, spinning and leaping, the Daemons worked their spell and dragged forth the incantations laced within Guilliman's mind. The Primarch stumbled, bellowing in pain as streamers of incandescent energy poured from his eyes and open mouth. Squirming tendrils of green guilt twined around serpentine streamers of disgust and surging red tendrils of anger. Engulfed by the whirling storm of

energies, Guilliman tried again to forge a path forward, but with a howl of pain he went down on one knee. Greyfax, bogged down in the morass of combat, could only watch helplessly, while Celestine's attempt to fly to the Primarch's aid was thwarted as several Daemons latched onto her wings.

Sicarius and his battle-brothers, crying out in impotent fury, tried to cut their way through the foe, hoping to stop the incantation in any way they could. The 2nd Company Captain ordered all fire concentrated upon the Daemons tormenting the Primarch. It did no good. Those shots aimed at Kairos puffed away as clouds of glittering dust, while the Heralds remained shielded behind squirming bulwarks of Daemon flesh.

Though the outnumbered Ultramarines fought furiously, they could not reach the daemonic sorcerers to stop their ritual. Roaring his anger, Guilliman surged to his feet once more, hammering off a volley of shells that struck Kairos Fateweaver and ripped bloody chunks from his gaunt torso.

Though the Daemon was wounded sorely by the explosive impacts, his chant did not stop. Instead, it redoubled in intensity, the Daemon's voices ringing out cruel and cold. Whirling and lashing, the coloured streamers of ectoplasmic energy surged from the Primarch's mind. All of Guilliman's negative emotions, all of the threads of madness and wrath and fear that Kairos had seeded into his mind, blossomed forth and wrapped themselves like vines around the Primarch. They thickened and twisted, pulsing with power as they hardened into heavy crystal chains.

Arms and legs bound tight, Guilliman crashed to his knees once more. This time, held firmly by Kairos' spell, he was unable to rise. The Oracle, projecting his voices to every warrior upon the bridge, commanded the Ultramarines, the Saint and the Inquisitor to lay down their arms at once. If they did not, the Primarch would be crushed and throttled to death before their eyes. One by one, the guns fell silent as the horrified Ultramarines complied. The battle was over, and Kairos Fateweaver stood gloating and victorious.

KAIROS FATEWEAVER

Lying at the heart of the Impossible Fortress, the Well of Eternity is said to be the place where space and time originate and end. To understand its secrets, one would have to enter its raging depths, but even the great god Tzeentch does not dare do so. Unable to resist the temptations of unravelling the riddle, but unwilling to risk himself, Tzeentch grabbed his vizier, a Lord of Change known as Kairos Fateweaver, and cast him into the roiling currents of the well.

To Tzeentch's pleasure, Kairos survived his ordeal, but only just. When Kairos resurfaced, his body was unnaturally aged and ragged, and his neck had split along its length to now support not one head, but two. After an eternity within the Well, these two heads can see things that remain hidden from even Tzeentch's gaze. Kairos' right head sees visions of all possible futures, while his left bears witness to the entirety of the past. These gifts were not bestowed upon Kairos without a price, for whilst his heads perceive everything that has happened, and everything that ever will, he is blind to the present. This curse makes Kairos vulnerable to physical attack, and so Tzeentch only ever sends him into battle to effect critical junctures in his ineffable plan. At

such times, Kairos uses his unique perspective and prescience to influence the course of the battle, ensuring that friends are advantaged and foes left helpless.

Kairos delights in pitting his foes against each other, subtly twisting the strands of fate so that one mortal dies when he should have lived, and vice-versa. Of late, however, the Oracle has been angry and unsettled. Roboute Guilliman's return vexed Kairos deeply; according to every omen, every foretelling and strand of fate visible to him, it should not have occurred. Yet it had, and the resurrected Primarch now loomed large over all of Kairos' schemes. The Lord of Change could not dare to wait and see how Guilliman might skew the paths of fate; the Primarch had to be dealt with, and swiftly.









RISE OF THE PRIMARCH

CHAPTER 3

*THEY SHALL BE MY SONS, AND IN
THEM WILL LIVE THE HOPES OF A
UNIFIED HUMANITY. THEIRS WILL
BE THE STRENGTH TO PREVAIL, NOT
ONLY WHEN VICTORY LIES WITHIN
EASY REACH, BUT EVEN WHEN IT
SEEMS UNATTAINABLE, WHEN DOOM
SETTLES LIKE A SHROUD ALL ABOUT.
IN THOSE TIMES OF DARKNESS,
MY NOBLE SONS WILL SHINE THE
BRIGHTEST OF ALL.'*

*- Attributed to the Emperor
of Mankind*





WARRING GODS

With Guilliman's capture, the battle of the starship graveyard was lost. Those Imperial warriors who did not surrender under threat of the Primarch's death were killed, or forced to capitulate. Champion Amalrich was amongst the latter, wrestled down and beaten unconscious by a mob of Red Corsairs as he single-handedly held the breach into his ship's engine room.

The loyalists and their stolen warships were taken under heavy guard to the nearest Red Corsairs stronghold. To their shock, this turned out to be one of the ancient Blackstone Fortresses. How such a mighty structure had found its way onto the tides of the Maelstrom, none of the Imperial warriors knew. Ultimately it mattered little. Stripped of their weapons and their honour, Guilliman and his surviving followers – a force that included hundreds of Space Marines, Grey Knights and Skitarii, along with their engines of war – were dragged into the depths of the traitor fortress and hurled into spell-shielded cells. The Adeptus Astartes were chained with adamantium links, while their leader still languished in the awful

bonds of crystallised guilt, anger, sorrow and madness that Kairos had forged from his psyche.

Led by the piratical Lord Verngar the Apostate, a huge warband of Red Corsairs garrisoned the Blackstone Fortress. Much of the structure slumbered, for the traitors lacked the knowledge to awaken the ancient construct or access the shrouded regions near its heart. Still, their fortifications were well built, their numbers huge and their fleet powerful. Kairos Fateweaver deemed that this would be as good a prison as any to leave Roboute Guilliman in to rot. Though the Lord of Change had been vehement in his efforts to remove Guilliman from the galactic stage, he did not wish the Primarch dead. A chained demigod was too rich a source of power to simply cast aside, and Kairos planned to keep his victim hidden away in the Maelstrom until certain future junctures were reached. Already, the Daemon could see several moments where unleashing a Primarch driven insane might produce most intriguing results. The Red Corsairs, for their part, would readily act as Guilliman's

gaolers in return for the boons of foresight that Kairos could grant, and so the Fateweaver felt confident that his captive would remain locked away.

Perhaps it was the mysterious influence of the fortress itself; perhaps Guilliman's anomalous presence within the strands of fate distorted them in ways that even the Fateweaver could not perceive. Whatever the case, as he made preparations to leave the Blackstone Fortress, the Daemon did not foresee the vast horde descending upon him.

From the depths of the Maelstrom came an enormous armada. Dozens upon dozens of ships thundered toward the Blackstone Fortress, their hulls encrusted with gore and skulls. The rune of Khorne was branded upon these spiked battleships, and daemoniac fires danced in their wake.

Before the fleet blazed a monstrous, blood-red comet wreathed in furious black flame. A fanged maw yawned wide upon that hurtling fireball, and eyes swimming with insane fury stared from its depths. So came Skarbrand to the Blackstone Fortress,



The six Blackstone Fortresses were discovered early in the Imperium's history, scattered across the void. Seemingly ancient even at that time, the dormant structures were cyclopean in scale and utterly mysterious. No sign could be found of those who constructed them. Despite exhaustive attempts at analysis, none could determine the nature of the super-hardened, onyx-like metals from which they were constructed.

The Imperium claimed the Blackstone Fortresses for its own. Even dormant, the enormous battle stations made

for exceptional deep-space naval bases. Towed into position by pilot craft, and encrusted with secondary Imperial structures, the Blackstone Fortresses became cornerstones of Imperial naval might.

It was during the horrors of the Gothic War – one of Abaddon the Despoiler's notorious Black Crusades – that the Blackstone Fortresses were awoken. None know how the Despoiler came by the fell lore required to bring the Blackstone Fortresses to life, but as the Gothic War ground on, it became clear that Abaddon's primary objective was to seize as many of these titanic weapons platforms as he could. By the end of that tumultuous naval conflict, several fortresses were in the hands of the Black Legion, and at least one more had been destroyed.

It was one of these legendary battle stations that was given as a gift by the Despoiler to Huron Blackheart in the wake of his rebellion against the Imperium. Such a kingly offering not only bought the loyalty of the Red Corsairs for Abaddon's great galactic endeavour, but also demonstrated the sheer incredible might of the Despoiler. After all, a warlord who could afford to give away even one such preeminent weapon must be supremely confident in their own power.



blazing through the void to crash with explosive force into the station's outer hull. Khornate warships sped in his wake, fanning out to hammer the battle station with firepower even as teeming swarms of landing craft spilled from their flanks.

The Red Corsairs, first surprised and then outraged at this sudden attack, rallied swiftly and fought back. Even as their fortifications were opened to the void and blasted to blazing scrap, the corsairs' gun batteries cycled up and filled the void with fire. Havoc squads sent volleys of shots lancing out to blast landing craft from the air, while Obliterators directed withering fire into the Khornate hordes already spilling across the fortress' outer hull. A furious battle raged in the silence of space, thumping explosions plucking Khorne Berzerkers from the fortress' night-black skin and sending them tumbling away into the void.



Within the Blackstone, flashes of pale green luminescence danced along darkened corridors, the ancient structure warning its denizens of danger. Red Corsairs deployed in disciplined firing lines, then filled entire passageways with crashing bolter fire as masses of Khornate warriors charged towards them. Chain axes carved through armour and flesh, while bolt-riddled corpses crashed to the ground aflame.

Through the mayhem stalked Kairos, screeching with dismay at this unforeseen turn of events. Conjuring forth masses of Tzeentchian Daemons, he hurled them into battle in an attempt to drive back the invaders. Yet bloody mists were gathering as the slaughter continued, and from their depths sprang red-scaled cohorts of Khornate Daemons that eagerly joined the carnage.

Meanwhile, deep within the Blackstone Fortress, Guilliman listened to the distant clangour, and gathered his strength in case a chance to escape should arise.



STRANGE ALLIANCES

Furious battle spread like wildfire through the outer corridors and Imperial structures of the Blackstone Fortress. Meanwhile, deep within the fortress' hidden core, eldritch energies flickered into life. Unseen by the warring armies, a band of figures slipped from a portal that had lain at the fortress' heart since the dawn of its existence. They moved swiftly and silently, a lithe procession of shadows accompanied by a larger, robed figure that moved with the stealth of a ghost.

Up through the darkened labyrinth the figures came, and the fortress' quiescent systems stirred to life at their approach. Iris-shaped portals that had stood closed for thousands of years opened, and the breath of ancient millennia gusted through. Dust stirred into drifting clouds at the figures' passing, but none amongst them left a single footprint.

Guilliman and his Ultramarines were shut inside cells that lined the circular walls of a huge, cylindrical chamber. These alcoves were closed off not by metal bars or locked doors, but by flickering sheets of sorcerous, mutagenic flame. A full squad of Red Corsairs stood guard over them, their guns trained unwaveringly upon the one functional doorway that led into this shadowy prison.

Unseen, another doorway slid open in the chamber's curving wall, directly behind the guards. In absolute silence, the Harlequins of the Laughing God rolled, tumbled and span from within, their movements a sinister dance to some unheard song of the dead. They drew closer to the renegade Space Marines with every graceful step, naked blades held ready for murder.

The first the Red Corsairs knew of their peril was a sudden, whirlwind attack from behind. Perfectly dispersed and lethally poised, the Eldar struck with murderous grace. Rapier blades punched out through chest plates in sprays of blood. Monofilament needles slithered through the chinks in their victims' power armour, liquefying organs in milliseconds. Point-blank hails of

shuriken and fusion energies hurled traitor corpses to the floor in mists of blood.

A single one of the traitors – unhelmed and horn-headed – roared in pain as a Harlequin drove her blade through one of his knee joints, then cart wheeled around him to kick his bolter from his hands. She completed her attack with an elegant back flip, one foot catching the traitor under the chin and smashing him onto his back.

The Harlequin sprang away, and the Red Corsair fumbled for his side arm. He froze as a robed figure in ornate power armour loomed over him. The traitor had never heard of Cypher, for the Fallen Angel was an enigma whose existence was hidden from most. He did, however, recognise the threat of the two heavy pistols now hovering before his face.

Wordlessly, Cypher stared down at the Red Corsair, his eyes glinting beneath his cowl. The traitor stared back, yellowed gaze burning with defiance and hate. Cypher gestured with one of his pistols towards the cells that lined the walls. The movement was minimal, but the meaning clear. Growling low in his throat, the corsair reached slowly into a pouch at his belt and drew forth a rune-inscribed amulet. The key to dispelling the magics that held the cells closed.

Cypher nodded his gratitude, then raised one booted foot and stamped down on the traitor's head. Bone smashed and blood sprayed, the corsair's body twitching then lying still. Holstering his bolt pistol, the Fallen Angel plucked the key from his victim's open gauntlet, and then straightened up. He found himself staring into the shifting mask of the Shadowseer, Sylandri Veilwalker. She who had contacted Guilliman as he wandered lost in the Maelstrom. She who had enlisted Cypher's aid, and instructed Belisarius Cawl to leave his forge on Mars. Veilwalker sketched a mocking bow to Cypher, then pointed her staff towards a distant cell. With a nod, Cypher turned and strode towards it.

Through dancing flames, Guilliman watched the robed figure approach. The Primarch did not recognise this cowed Space Marine, but he knew the Legion whose colours he wore.

'You are Roboute Guilliman,' said the mysterious Space Marine as he stopped outside the Primarch's cell.

'And you are one of the Lion's sons,' replied Guilliman. 'You keep questionable company, Dark Angel. Who are you, and why are you here?'

'I can free you,' replied the hooded figure, deigning not to answer the Primarch's questions.

Realising that no further explanation was forthcoming, Guilliman frowned. 'Can,' he rumbled. 'Not will. What do you want in return?'

'You will take me to Terra,' replied the Dark Angel. 'To the Throne.'

The malefic flames crackled and the distant sounds of battle rumbled on as Guilliman's silence stretched long. Even bound in sorcerous chains, the Primarch's presence was immense, his steady glare thunderous. Yet the Dark Angel stood unwavering, like a statue carved from granite. Guilliman strained once more against his bonds, and again found them unyielding.

'It seems that my choices are to rot here, or accede to your demand,' said the Primarch slowly. 'The former would be to fail in my duty, so I suppose it will have to be the latter. But understand this, Dark Angel. If you seek to trick or manipulate me, nothing in this galaxy will save you.'

One corner of the stranger's mouth lifted into a small, bitter smile. 'As you say,' he muttered, then brandished the runic stone held in his off hand. The flames of Guilliman's cell died away in response, followed by the fires of every other cell around the chamber's edge.

CYPHER

There is one whom the Masters of the Dark Angels seek above all others. He is a being wrapped in shadow, an entity whose every move is cloaked in mystery. His motives and methods are an enigma; even the title by which he is known seems to conceal something, though whether it is a metaphor or yet another conundrum is unknown. He is Cypher, and to the Dark Angels, he is their most hated foe.

The Dark Angels have been chasing Cypher since the catastrophic fall of Caliban, eluding capture for nearly ten thousand years. During that time, Cypher has appeared in each of the five segmentums, materialising as if from nowhere. Wherever he surfaces, he brings with him death and destruction, although whether he is the culprit or merely a herald of woe

is unclear. Cypher seldom instigates the violent acts that invariably occur when he is present; it is rather that he seems to act as a catalyst, fanning the hatred and mistrust of those around him into a raging fire. Cypher vanishes from the scene as abruptly as he arrives. Worlds burn in his wake.

Besides havoc and ruin, there is another trail that Cypher leaves behind; legend and rumour abound after the passage of the mysterious robed figure. The intrigue over his rapid departure is magnified by the inevitable wave of ensuing questions. Sometimes these interrogations are conducted by Inquisitors or their agents, while at others Chaos Space Marines seek more knowledge about the cryptic figure that weaves in and out of their strongholds. The Dark

Angels always turn up along the trail. Grim-faced and taciturn as to their purpose, they query any who were in contact or might have spoken with Cypher. Those who have some knowledge, or are even suspected of having some, are taken away by black-armoured Interrogator-Chaplains. Few return.

As to who or what Cypher truly is, none can say. Those who have witnessed him in action report that he wears simple ceremonial robes, much like those of the Dark Angels. Beneath his garment can be seen the thick plates of dark power armour. Stranger still by far, however, is that no matter where in the galaxy Cypher surfaces, it is only a matter of time before the Dark Angels or one of their successor Chapters follow.

Despite the constant search for Cypher, none have yet been successful in capturing or destroying him. Or so it would seem. The Dark Angels have believed Cypher neutralised on numerous occasions, yet he always returns. His loyalties and motivations remain impossible to guess at, for though he has fought by the side of both Imperial and Chaos forces over the millennia, he nearly always betrays his allies after a time. Some believe that Cypher follows some vast plan that no other can guess, save perhaps the Emperor himself. Others think his appearances and acts are random, the caprice of a being whose very existence should be an impossibility. Whatever the truth, none have ever captured the mysterious Space Marine for long enough to find out.



DAEMONWAR

As the fires flickered out, Sylandri Veilwalker stepped forward and began a weaving, elaborate dance. Guilliman's eyes widened as he recognised the figure who had appeared to him in his vision, and directed him towards freedom. Had the Eldar meant for him to escape the Maelstrom, or had she always intended the crusade fleet to be ambushed and brought here? Such questions would have to wait, realised the Primarch as the Shadowseer's magics went to work.

Shimmering lights coiled around the dancing Harlequin. Where the witch-light fell, the chains binding the loyalist Space Marines fell away as dust. Even the devious sorceries of Kairos Fateweaver were undone, and Guilliman smiled a dangerous smile as his crystal fetters shattered.

The freed Ultramarines still wore their armour, but were unarmed. Answering their questions before they could be asked, the Shadowseer revealed that the loyalists' weapons, their vehicles and their allies had been locked inside a string of stasis vaults some distance from their cells, but that she could lead them there. Guilliman gestured for his mysterious benefactor to lead on. The Primarch did not trust the Eldar, nor the shadowy Space Marine who had come with them, but while his brilliant mind worked out the angles of their involvement, he would allow them to lead him to the rest of his forces. After all, Guilliman would never abandon his father's sword within this den of snakes, nor the courageous allies who had accompanied him upon his quest.

Veilwalker and her Harlequins led the loyalists out of the doorway through which she had entered the prison. Several hundred battle-hungry Ultramarines followed her lead, with Guilliman, Sicarius, and Cypher at their head. It was a capable force, even without guns and blades, and they travelled at a run down shadowed corridors and stairwells. Haste was more important than stealth; even with the battle raging above, their escape would soon be noticed.

The first stasis chamber they broke open contained Saint Celestine and her Geminae Superia. The second brought a reunion with Archmagos Cawl and his Mechanicus forces. With Duncrawlers stalking at their backs and ranks of Skitarii and Battle Servitors lending their firepower, the loyalists swiftly overwhelmed the Red Corsairs standing guard over the final stasis chamber. Within, they found not only Voldus, his Grey Knight brothers and their Dreadknights, but all the other Space Marines of the crusade, as well as the dozens of tanks and Dreadnought brothers they had brought with them in their war ships.

Captain Sicarius now suggested that they cut a swift path through the battle to reclaim their ships. Veilwalker shook her head. Thousands of Heretic Astartes and Daemons battled across the fortress. Fighting around the docking spars was thick. Any attempt to recover the crusade's craft was doomed. The loyalists still might have attempted to recapture their fleet, until the Shadowseer told them that the human crews who had kept the ships operational were all dead, sacrificed alongside the crusade's Imperial Guardsmen and Battle Sisters. Worse, the fleet's Navigators had been spirited away in chains upon a fast ship, bound for Huron Blackheart's personal fortress.

Fortunately, Veilwalker knew another way to escape – the route Cypher and the Harlequins of the Veiled Path had used to reach Guilliman, and the route they would use to lead him on towards Terra. At the fortress' heart, trammelled by ancient technology and still operational after millennia, was a stabilised route into the webway. The pathways it led into were huge, arterial routes that even starships could navigate – they would accommodate the Imperial war machines with ease.

Bursting from the armoury, the Imperial army and their guides made for the lower tunnels. The awakening of the fortress' deeper chambers had not gone unnoticed, however. As they hastened further into the ancient structure, the loyalists encountered stiffening resistance from bands of

Red Corsairs and Daemons sent to cut them off.

Though Guilliman and his followers fought furiously, their advance slowed to a crawl. Pushing through a vast chamber of twisting bridges and black chasms, they found themselves surrounded on every side. Matters looked grim, but it was in that moment that spectral flames leapt amidst the foe. Auspex readings flickered wildly, and ghostly voices whispered and hissed through the vox networks as shadowy figures stepped from the inferno and opened fire. Clad in black and bone, wreathed in aetheric fire, the Legion of the Damned had arrived in the crusade's hour of need. Their thunderous volleys swept the Chaos forces from the bridges to Guilliman's fore, and, with Veilwalker whirling and leaping at his side, the Primarch led the advance once again.

Long, bloody minutes of battle followed, gunfire flashing back and forth in the gloom. Though both sides raced as fast as they could to beat the other to the prize, Guilliman and his army reached the heart of the Blackstone Fortress at the same time as their foes. The chamber itself was vast, easily a hundred miles across. Both its ceiling and its floor were lost in shadow. Entrancing patterns of shimmering lights crawled across the walls, and flickered up and down the titanic black column that rose at the chamber's heart. Out from that column, like the distorted branches of some dark arboreal deity, radiated hundreds of bridges, stairways, platforms and gantries, all shimmering with the same, vaguely bioluminescent lights that danced across the walls.

Countless dark doorways opened onto the Blackstone Fortress' heart, huge portals that seemed wrought for giants. From some spilled Daemons of Tzeentch, fires flaring amidst the darkness. Others vomited the Daemons of Khorne, loping in snarling packs across soaring bridges wide enough for Titans to cross.

Many of the massing Daemons were still distant, small figures rendered

insectile by the scale of the chamber, but great hosts of them would still intercept Guilliman's forces before they could reach the heart of the chamber. That was where they must go, however – Veilwalker indicated a distant platform set into the black column's flank. Upon it, Guilliman could see the faint shimmer of esoteric energies dancing, and knew that this was the webway entrance of which the Shadowseer spoke.

Guilliman ordered the advance. His forces flowed out across the nearest bridges, guided through the labyrinth of interconnected platforms and arc-bridges by the Troupes of the Veiled Path. Loping Dreadknights and roaring Space Marine tanks led the way, squads of Adeptus Astartes, Grey Knights and Skitarii advancing behind them.

The crossing became more dangerous as firepower whipped across the yawning gulfs to tear at the loyalists. Fights broke out as Red Corsairs let fly from higher walkways and Cannons of Khorne spat screaming skulls. Platforms as broad as parade grounds played host to crashing battles as packs of Daemon Engines clashed with squadrons of Ultramarine battle tanks. The loyalists fired as they moved, blasting paths through the massing foe. At the same time, the forces of Khorne and Tzeentch fell upon one another, Bloodletters hacking their way down ichor-slick stairways while Horrors scoured platforms clear with shimmering flame.

Far away across the chamber, Guilliman caught sight of Kairos Fateweaver, exhorting his followers into battle and hurling bolts of sorcery at the loyalists from afar. Yet the Lord of Change clearly did not care to face Guilliman's resurgent wrath, for he stayed far removed from the white heat of the battle.

Not so Skarbrand. Hacking his way through a gaping portal in the chamber's wall, the Bloodthirster blazed like a furious pyre. His bellows echoed through the cavernous space, primal roars of bloodlust that infected the minds of all who heard them.



Under Skarbrand's influence, Guilliman's battle-brothers became more reckless and aggressive by the moment. Contaminated by the Daemon's fury, Amalrich and the last of the Black Templars turned aside from their route and hurled themselves into an onrushing mass of Khornate Daemons. Blood sprayed as a savage melee broke out. For a moment the Primarch considered diverting his own forces to help Amalrich's, but with Skarbrand storming closer and Daemons swarming on every front, there was no time. With a heavy heart, Guilliman barked orders through the vox, steadying the Ultramarines and their Primogenitors with the sheer force of his will. Bellowing, Amalrich hurled himself into battle with mighty Skarbrand, his black blade clashing with the Bloodthirster's axes again and again.

With Voldus and his Dreadknights leading, and the relentless spectres of the Legion of the Damned fighting a silent rearguard, the crusade closed on the webway entrance. Cawl and his Skitarii mowed down rank after rank of Daemons. Novamarine Vindicators blasted a trio of bridges that the enemy were using in an attempt to outflank, sending flailing Horrors plunging into the void. Greyfax and Celestine fought side by side, hacking down a trio of Tzeentchian Heralds in as many minutes. The Harlequins were everywhere at once, sprinting along walkways, bounding between bridges, hacking and slashing with breathtaking skill as they wove a dance of battle around the loyalists.

That was when Skarbrand gave a deafening bellow of fury and took a running leap. The cursed Bloodthirster sailed across the gulf, trailing boiling ichor from a terrible wound in his chest. Guilliman's eyes widened as he saw Amalrich's black blade, driven into the Bloodthirster's breast. It was the only remaining sign of the Emperor's Champion, bloody atonement for his failings on Cadia.

Skarbrand landed with a tremendous crash, hooves striking sparks as he slammed down on the bridge amidst the Legion of the Damned. His axes, Slaughter and Carnage, swept left and right. Fire-wreathed spectres were smashed aside, their broken bodies

tumbling away like embers into the darkness below.

Already the rearmost warriors of Guilliman's force were turning back, tanks and battle-brothers alike lost to the Bloodthirster's madness. Realising control was about to slip from his grasp, Guilliman commanded all the remaining Imperials to make for the portal. A final bridge leapt out across the void to connect the platform on which Guilliman stood to the one where the portal flickered. The Primarch took position at the head of that bridge, standing firm with blade drawn as all who could still follow his orders did so. Infantry and vehicles streamed past him, following the Harlequins into the webway, until only Sicarius and Celestine remained, waiting by the portal's entrance.

Skarbrand stormed through the last of the Legion of the Damned and onto the platform. Guilliman felt the structure shudder and flex beneath the Bloodthirster's weight. Then the Daemon's burning eyes found Guilliman's, and the Primarch felt unreasoning fury surge through him. Skarbrand had come for Guilliman's skull, that he might honour Khorne with it, and the Daemon did not intend to allow his quarry to escape now.

In Guilliman's mind, hellish fires rose up on every side, full of the leering faces of his brothers who had fallen to Chaos. With every step that Skarbrand took towards him, Guilliman's ire grew, while at his back the bridge seemed to melt away as molten slag until there was nothing but the Primarch and the Bloodthirster, trapped together in an arena of roaring flame.

Unable to stop himself, the Primarch bellowed a war cry and leapt to meet Skarbrand's charge. The Emperor's blade met Slaughter with a dolorous clang, while Carnage whistled over the Primarch's head by a hair's breadth. Guilliman drove his shoulder guard into his opponent's midriff, then span on his heel and backfisted Skarbrand with the Hand of Dominion. The blow would have punched straight through a tank hull, yet the Bloodthirster merely rocked back on his heels before launching himself forward again. Hellforged

axes hacked and lashed in huge, haymaker arcs, Guilliman barely blocking or evading each blow.

The Primarch could feel his hate and rage building to new heights, eclipsing his strategic sense altogether. Dimly he realised that, soon, he would hurl himself at Skarbrand, hacking madly until his head was struck from his shoulders.

With a titanic effort of will, Roboute Guilliman forced down the supernatural rage that was drowning his rational mind. Gasping with effort, the Primarch trapped the furious fires in a ring of cold, mental steel. Even as he continued to fight his monstrous foe in reality, he fought a second battle in his mind. Step by step, he pushed back against his rage.

With a final scream of mental anguish, Guilliman forced down all his fury and hatred, and locked them away behind impenetrable fortifications. As he did so, the fires that he perceived around him died away, and the bridge to safety swam back into focus. Beyond it, Sicarius and Saint Celestine were exhorting him to move before it was too late.

Unwilling to let his enemy escape, Skarbrand hurled himself in a wild lunge with axes raised high. Guilliman coolly assessed the threat, raising the Hand of Dominion and blasting the Daemon backwards.

Skarbrand bellowed in anger as explosive shells tore into his cranium and blew fleshy gobbets across the platform. Step by step, the Daemon was driven back, yet still he did not fall. Gritting his teeth at the sight of the enemy drawing close, Guilliman fired the last shells from his magazine, aiming for Amalrich's black blade. A single bolt struck the weapon and blew the black sword apart in a storm of deadly shards. Skarbrand's torso was shredded, and he toppled backwards off the platform with a final, furious roar.

Immediately, Guilliman turned and sprinted across the bridge, hurling himself into the webway after Sicarius and the Living Saint. Behind him, the portal's warding runes sealed with a sharp crack, denying the surging tide of Daemons at the very last second.



THE HUNTER'S LABYRINTH

Space Marines, Grey Knights and the warriors of the Adeptus Mechanicus stood amidst the shimmering mists of the webway. They were gathered in a vague space, its dimensions vast and confusing. Lights glimmered around them, and a distant booming rolled through the air, akin to a titanic heartbeat, or the sound of waves washing upon a rocky shore.

Of the warriors who had escaped their cells, around two thirds remained alive. Voldus and his Grey Knights had taken only a handful of casualties, and the same was true of the Harlequins. Cypher, too, had survived the desperate running battle through the fortress, and stood now at the head of a band of dark-armoured Space Marines who had clearly awaited his return. As Guilliman's warriors regrouped, Sylandri Veilwalker came before the Primarch. She paused for a moment to share a long and loaded look with Archmagos Cawl before turning to Guilliman without a word of explanation.

She counselled that they could not tarry for long. She had laced this region of the webway with scout

parties of Skyweaver Jetbikes. Those scouts were now reporting back, warning of heavily armed intruders wearing ornate armour of blue and gold. The warriors had the stench of Chaos sorcery on them, and the unmistakable mark of Tzeentch.

Guilliman's mind raced, weaving fragments of fact and glimpses of information with his peerless strategist's intuition. It was Magnus, realised the Primarch. His manipulative brother – who must have somehow known precisely how matters would play out for Guilliman – had sent his cursed sons to intercept the Imperials.

Events began to fall into place in Guilliman's mind. Magnus had hurled Guilliman's crusade into the Maelstrom not to destroy it, but to weaken it. He had propelled the Lord of Ultramar onto a particular path of fate that Magnus had either hoped or known would lead him to his capture, incarceration within that very specific gaol, and eventual escape into this section of the webway. Guilliman could not know that the Crimson King had called upon his greatest

champion, Ahriman, to aid him with his stolen knowledge of the webway's paths, but otherwise the Primarch's conclusions were entirely correct.

Swiftly and earnestly, Guilliman sought the counsel of his closest lieutenants. They had to determine what Magnus planned, and quickly, before they stepped straight into the Daemon Primarch's trap. It was Voldus who – drawing upon his knowledge of Titan's ancient libraries – made the intuitive leap. There was a warded entrance to the webway within the Emperor's palace. Voldus believed it to be heavily defended, bound shut with the most potent abjurations that the Imperium could muster, but still it existed. Perhaps Magnus knew of that gate, and sought to follow them to it?

Guilliman's strategic mind leapt ahead again, tracing patterns within patterns and perceiving the truth. Magnus already knew where the gate lay, he realised. There had been whispers that the Crimson King had passed that way before, and in so doing unleashed the catastrophe that fell upon him and his Legion.

Magnus did not need them to lead him to the gate. He sought instead to follow them through it, clearly hoping that the gate's defences would be deactivated to allow for Guilliman's arrival. The Daemon Primarch wanted to strike at Terra, at the very



Golden Throne of the Emperor of Mankind, and he hoped to launch his attack as the gate was thrown open to permit the Ultramarines Primarch passage.

The crusade could not emerge at Terra, Guilliman realised with something like despair, not if it meant allowing Magnus to strike at the cradle of Humanity. Yet Sylandri Veilwalker had never intended for them to take that road. Instead, the Shadowseer revealed a secret that the Eldar had long guarded.

Lying dormant for millennia, hidden behind a veil of wards that even Humanity's greatest psykers could not pierce, a lonely spar of the webway stretched out upon the border between realspace and the Warp to connect to Luna, Terra's only natural moon. It was to that illusion-veiled gate that the Crusade must now make haste.

With their path chosen, the survivors of the Terran Crusade set out at once. Already they had crossed great gulfs of space, and fought their way through hellish environs, yet they began this new and arduous leg of their journey without complaint. All who had set forth from Ultramar had been prepared to give their lives for this cause, and to endure any hardship they must in order to see the reborn Roboute Guilliman safely to Terra. Nothing had changed.

Travelling fast, the Harlequins of the Veiled Path lead the way. They progressed now through territory that was theirs alone, moving with ever greater speed and confidence as a result. Bands of Harlequins split away into half-glimpsed side passages, or slipped through hollow archways graven from stone. Others returned in similar fashion, filtering in before or behind the massed Imperial tanks and foot troops. Harlequin Jetbikes sped overhead from time to time, hurtling down the wider passageways in polychromatic blurs. All the while, Guilliman and his followers kept up a relentless pace, their tanks moving in the vanguard while loping infantry and stalking Dunecrawlers brought up the rear.

The webway changed and shifted around them, from misty passages to dark and echoing tunnels, brightly lit expanses of polyhedral crystal to weirdly fleshy spirals that pulsed with peristaltic motion. The loyalists surely would have been lost within minutes, had they travelled alone, or else set upon by the predatory entities that haunted the Labyrinth Dimension. Yet with the Harlequins as both guides and escorts, the Imperial forces were able to proceed unchallenged.

'IT WAS A TALE THROUGH WHICH THE WEBWAY WOUND, LIKE SERPENTS ALL ENTWINED. BY CHANCE OR NECESSITY, THE HUMANS THOUGHT, IF THEY THOUGHT OF IT AT ALL. WE WHO SERVE THE LAUGHING GOD KNOW BETTER...'

- Shadowseer Sylandri Veilwalker

All that changed when frantic reports reached Sylandri Veilwalker of familiars that had espied the loyalists and eluded the pursuing Jetbikes. At the Shadowseer's urging, the punishing pace increased still further, until the slowest Servitors were abandoned altogether. As Guilliman and his warriors thundered across a hazy, crystal-studded cavern, sudden volleys of firepower scythed into them from the flanks.

Fifteen warriors fell to that first volley, punched off their feet by bolt shells wreathed in coruscating flame. Rhinos exploded amidst leaping blasts of sorcery, while Skitarii degenerated into howling mutant flesh as the fires of change washed over them.

Guilliman barked his orders and the loyalists fanned out as one, dropping into firing crouches amidst the crystal outcroppings. From all around, swimming into focus through the veiling mists, came the plodding automata of Thousand Sons Rubricae. The armoured golems played their bolters right and left as they advanced, laying down a steady hail of ensorcelled bolts. Hordes of

shrieking Tzaangors moved amongst them, brandishing silvered blades.

Guilliman's warriors fired back, sending many of their ambushers reeling as their armour was rent and the dust that animated it spilled onto the ground. Cypher span and dove through the mayhem, evading every shot fired his way and reaping a tally of the foe with his blazing pistols. Voldus, too, wrought havoc as he led a counter-attack against the Thousand Sons. His hammer swung in lightning fast arcs, battering Rubricae to the ground amid clouds of glittering dust.

Still more Rubricae closed in, their sorcerous masters upon their flying discs hurling their spells into the loyalist ranks. Guilliman realised that to stay here was to fight an impossible battle, and to be lost with his goal in sight. It infuriated the Primarch to run yet again, for it seemed to him that, since leaving Ultramar, he had done little else. Yet the greater goal was of more importance, and he knew that he would not aid his father's Imperium by dying here.

Blade raised high, Guilliman led the movement to break out of the Thousand Sons ambush. Not all of his battle-brothers could extract themselves from the fight safely, and more precious lives were lost – along with the gene-seed within them – as Space Marines were cut down by the enemy's fire. Yet with the winged Saint cutting a path at their head, the loyalists broke away from their attackers and fled deeper into the webway.

They found themselves beset at every turn, Rubricae and braying Tzaangors bursting from side passages or holding junctions against them. Still the loyalists pressed on, smashing headlong through every ambush and blockade with Guilliman, Voldus, Greyfax, Celestine and Cypher at their head. At last, the Imperials reached a rune-sealed portal, fixing helms and rebreather cowls in place. Then, led by the Shadowseer, they stepped from the webway and onto the surface of Luna.

AMIDST THE SEA OF STORMS

Guilliman stepped through the shimmering lights of the webway gate, enduring the unsettling doubling of reality that it created. He passed from soft illumination into harsh black shadow and searing glare, from air and gentle warmth into the frozen, airless lethality of near-vacuum. Gravity bled away around him, and with a single step, Guilliman launched himself away from the webway gate into the billowing moon dust beyond.

The crusade had emerged into a deep crater, much of which was immersed in inky blackness. Shafts of stark illumination fell from above, where the rays of Sol itself spilled over the lip of the deep pit. Conscious of the

foes following close on their heels, the loyalists climbed quickly up the pit's sides. Space Marines sprang upwards hand over fist in the low gravity.

Tanks threw up drifting fans of moon dust as they powered up the rocky slope. Skitarii marched relentlessly upward, ignoring their blackening and freezing organic components. These latter soldiers would not last long on the Luna surface, but they would endure long enough to serve the Omnissiah's needs.

Above them, Celestine soared upward into the dark skies – her Geminæ Superia had donned their helms, but the Living Saint had no need of such apparel.

Behind them, Veilwalker and her Harlequins lingered by the webway gate. The Shadowseer gathered her powers, levelling her staff towards the webway portal and beginning a whispering chant. The runes upon the structure's flanks glowed fiercely with a searing light.

Before Veilwalker could finish her ritual, the gate pulsed with dark energies. Blue fire billowed, its roar sounding as a dull rumble in the airless conditions. Veilwalker span clear at the last moment, but many of her followers were not so fortunate. Their lithe bodies were engulfed in flame and, as their dathedi suits burned away, so their bodies melted like wax or froze and died.

From near the lip of the crater, Guilliman looked back to see the corrupted webway gate glowing with dark fire. Streamers of energy leapt and coiled, dancing across the walls of the pit and blasting the Eldar corpses to ash. Out from that crackling storm stepped the first Rubric Marines, their footfalls muffled as they advanced across the crater floor. They raised their boltguns and opened fire, cursed shells roaring up from below to slam into the Imperials.

Armour ruptured and souls burned. Bulky bodies in the colours of the Novamarines and Mortifactors tumbled in slow motion down the slopes, clouds of chalky dust cascading around them. A Dreadknight toppled backwards, its pilot slain. The remaining loyalists kept moving, over the lip of the crater and out of the Thousand Sons' line of fire.

Here, the retreat stopped at last. Guilliman and his surviving followers stood upon the surface of Luna itself, near the heart of the Mare Tempestus. On every side loomed the rusted hulks of old and broken Imperial ships, a graveyard of junked and decommissioned craft left there to moulder. Overhead, the blackness of space was speckled with stars while closer to hand, huge orbital docks and defence platforms filled the sky. Gothic leviathans swarming with void craft and covered in glaring lights,



the grandeur of the Luna docks still faded against the breathtaking sight of Terra itself, hanging stark against the blackness above. There was the destination that Guilliman sought, the end of his journey at last.

Yet a deadly foe still chased at the Primarch's heels, and could not be allowed to work his malefic will within sight of the throneworld. Guilliman knew that the Warp phenomena currently erupting in the crater's depths must surely have triggered every alarm and emergency augur within a dozen terra-sols.

It would not be long before overwhelming Imperial forces raced to investigate, but there was no telling what irrevocable havoc Magnus could cause before they arrived. Guilliman saw again the visions Kairos had sent him, of a shattered world crashing down upon a fire-blackened Terra, and shuddered. He and his followers must hold the enemy here, driving the Thousand Sons back, or – at the least – keeping them suppressed until aid could arrive.

'THE HISTORY OF THE GALAXY IS A TAPESTRY WOVEN FROM TERROR AND BLOOD. YET AMONGST THE COUNTLESS THREADS OF DARKNESS, THERE GLEAM THIN STRANDS OF LIGHT, MOMENTS OF SELFLESS HEROISM AND BRAVERY THAT SHINE OUT ALL THE BRIGHTER FOR THE SHADOW THAT SURROUNDS THEM. THROUGH SUCH DESPERATE DEEDS IS THE FUTURE WROUGHT. THROUGH SUCH DESPERATE DEEDS DOES HOPE ENDURE.'

- Eldrad Ulthran, High Farseer of Ulthwe

The Thousand Sons were spilling from the webway gate in increasing numbers, Scarab Occult and Rubricae driven forward by Sorcerers on their flying discs. Their advance was steady but unstoppable, pushing up the crater walls with their guns blazing. Recognising that the crater itself offered the best chance of containing the foe, Guilliman spread his warriors, walkers and tanks around its lip and commanded them to pour fire down into the advancing Thousand Sons.

Space Marines, Skitarii, Dreadnoughts, Land Raiders, Vindicators, Dunecrawlers, Battle Servitors and more opened fire. Using the lip of the crater for cover, and making the most of the higher ground, the loyalists sent volley after volley ripping down into the Heretic Astartes. Striding automata were knocked back into the crater by devastating explosions. Glittering dust drifted from rents in ornate armour, floating free in the low gravity and leaving once-animate armour suits to crumple and collapse.



Sergeants barked orders through the vox, coordinating volleys of lascannon blasts and demolisher shells to rain down upon the Rubricae. Cypher and his shadowy companions rained fire down upon the Thousand Sons. Greyfax slammed silver stakes through one Rubricae after another. Voldus tore traitors apart with the powers of his mind.

Armoured corpses piled in heaps at the bottom of the crater, surrounding the webway gate with carrion remains. From cracks and rocky outcroppings around the crater's edge, the last of the Harlequins added their own fire to the fusillade, hails of monofilament discs cutting through power armour and the flesh of daemonic discs.

For a time, it appeared as though the Thousand Sons would be bottled up in the crater. Though their return fire caused slow attrition amongst the loyalists, the traitors were losing far more warriors than they slew.

Then a fresh pulse of dark power surged through the webway gate, its energies whirling faster and faster until they formed a flaming vortex. A wave of supernatural dread swept over the loyalist Space Marines as a huge, horn-headed figure stepped through onto the surface of Luna. Spreading his wings wide, Magnus the Red looked up at Guilliman with an evil smile.

****We scribe a tale of bloodshed and woe, my mentor. A tragedy is wrought.****

****What has befallen, Lladrea? What of the Ynnari?***

****The priestess and her warriors may yet bring us victory. A thousand grav-craft are still in the field. Were it only the spawn of the sea of sorrows that we fought, victory would be ours.****

****Another power intercedes, then? The skein is tangled?***

****The black pylons are not all that languishes upon Thenicali. The ghosts of the Necrontyr rise.****

****Such arrogance! Is their bitterness so great?***

****It was our hatred that fanned these flames. We landed in the valley of statues and swept the Daemons aside. We fought in the shadows of the pylons, with the Ynnari at our head. The foe could not prevail...****

****What, then, occurred? Where did we misstep?***

****The chasms lit with green fire. Perhaps the old foe sought common cause with us? They fired only upon the Daemons, until we fired upon them. Had we but offered a chance to stand at our side, as Yvraine urged... Autarch Kaerathael directed the Engines of Vaul to fire upon the Necron engines rising from the chasm. We are beset, now, upon two sides. The bodies pile higher. The ground cracks and heavens, and the pylons sing their last lament.****

****Remain strong, Lladrea. We draw close, my friend, with Asurmen himself at our side. Endure, and we shall prevail.****

****I fear otherwise, Cthelain. But we shall fight. Until the very end, we shall fight...****

GODS OF WAR

Drawing himself up to his full height, Magnus the Red raised his ensorcelled glaive and spoke dolorous words of power that rang out in defiance of all natural law. Purple flames leapt, forming shimmering shields and warding the Thousand

Sons from harm. Suddenly, the Rubricae and Scarab Occult could advance unharmed, striding upwards as their foes' shots exploded upon Magnus' shields. The Thousand Sons suffered no such obstruction, and dozens of loyalists were sent tumbling

back from the crater's lip, blood and shattered bone spraying.

Seeing the sudden shift in the situation, and knowing that they must hold out no matter the cost, Guilliman ordered his surviving warriors back. Moments later, the first ranks of Rubricae crested the lip of the crater and strode out with their gun muzzles flaring. More Thousand Sons marched behind them, and the surviving loyalists fell back to spaceship wrecks and rocky craters to gain cover while their tanks backed steadily away with their guns thundering.

Magnus rose from the crater. With a word, the Daemon Primarch unmade a trio of Dreadknights, burning out their wards and crushing their armour. With a gesture, he plucked an Ultramarines Land Raider from the ground and slammed it through ranks of Skitarii like a cannonball. Magnus brandished his staff and reality rent apart, a tide of cackling Daemons boiling from the Warp to join the battle.

Recognising that the Daemon Primarch would swiftly destroy his army if allowed free reign, Guilliman broke into a headlong charge. Giving vent to a booming war cry, the Primarch of the Ultramarines smashed a path through the Rubricae before him and launched himself into a heroic leap from the lip of the crater.

Guilliman soared, burning blade leaving a trail of flame behind him. Magnus saw his brother coming and began an incantation of pain, but before he could finish it the Lord of Ultramar struck. Magnus managed to parry his brother's arcing blade with his glaive, but the battering ram impact of Guilliman's leap carried the Crimson King backward, away from the fight. The two Primarchs tumbled across the Luna surface, dust billowing around them, and smashed into the rusted wreck of an Imperial frigate. Slabs of metal and corroded ironwork crashed down around them, burying the fighting brothers in an avalanche of wreckage. Meanwhile, the battle around the crater raged on, the last remnants of the Terran Crusade fighting furiously to survive.



Guilliman fought his way to freedom, hurling aside a slab of rusted metal and ignoring the alarms ringing within his helm. His armour was compromised, its air supply venting and the cold of the void leaking in. Were it not for his god-like constitution, and Cawl's life-sustaining technology, Guilliman would likely have been dead.

Instead, he raised his blade and kicked his way clear of the scattered wreckage.

'Magnus,' he shouted through his vox grill, searching around him. The Primarch knew his dubiously gifted brother could hear his words, even in the void of space. 'I know better than to think you dead. Face me!'

Deep laughter rolled around Guilliman, a sound redolent with ancient evil. As he watched, Magnus' ethereal form rose from the wreckage and drifted down to loom over him. The Daemon Primarch solidified once more, huge and menacing.

'Very well, Roboute,' laughed Magnus, and his words conjured crystalline showers that rained down upon the pale ground. 'Here I am, in the flesh. And – somehow – there you are.' Magnus cocked his head to one side and smirked. 'I don't remember you seeming so... insignificant.'

'Ten millennia have made you no less arrogant, then?' asked Guilliman, warily circling his towering foe. Inside his helm, a look of disgust twisted his patrician features as he regarded the monstrous form of the Crimson King. 'Certainly those years have done you no other kindness.'

Magnus sighed. 'How you can have such grand plans and yet such scant vision has always eluded me. This,' the Daemon Primarch said, empyric energies stirring as they gathered around his levelled glaive, 'is what true power looks like.'

'I see no power here,' said Guilliman, shaking his head in dismay. 'I see corruption, and enslavement to monsters that are worshipped as gods.'

'On that, Roboute,' Magnus laughed, sparing a glance at the loyalists fighting nearby, 'perhaps we can finally agree.'

The cyclopean sorcerer's smile turned into a sneer when he noticed his brother glance to the skies above. 'Hoping to keep my sons and I occupied until the remnants of this palsied Imperium come to save you? I may

not reach our father's throne room today, but I promise that you won't either. You will be dead long before help arrives. That alone will be worth all this trouble.'

With that, Magnus attacked. The giant moved far faster than Guilliman could have believed, his ensorcelled glaive lashing out to split the Lord of Ultramar in two.

Guilliman leapt backward, pulling his midriff in as he did so. Magnus' weapon drew sparks from his armour as it whistled past, and Guilliman landed atop the crumpled prow of a nearby frigate.

Before he could take stock, Magnus was hurling balls of blue flame at him. Guilliman threw himself out of their path, sliding down the prow's rusted flank and dropping into a crouch at its feet. He broke into a charge, bursting from the drifting cloud of dust raised by his landing and weaving skilfully around his brother's sorcerous projectiles.

The ammunition in the Hand of Dominion was spent, but it was still a phenomenally powerful weapon. Sidestepping a downward cut from Magnus' glaive, Guilliman slid inside his brother's guard and delivered a thunderous uppercut. The impact lifted Magnus from his feet and sent him tumbling upward into the inky blackness. Fiery blood drifted in strings from Magnus' shattered jaw, causing kaleidoscopic fungi to sprout from where it splattered on Luna's surface.

Roiling energy wrapped around Magnus, arresting his motion and righting him as he howled in anger. The Daemon Primarch stared hatefully down with his single eye, and Guilliman knew fresh sorrow as he realised how truly mad and lost his sibling had become.

'Arrogance,' shouted Guilliman. 'It was always your undoing, brother. You thought this would be an easy fight, that the gifts of your so-called gods would render me impotent. Perhaps those you serve are not all you believed them to be?'

Magnus' rage vanished in an eye-blink, and he laughed scornfully in response to Guilliman's jibe.

'You would like to believe that, wouldn't you? That the dutiful Roboute Guilliman was justified in his loyalty? That, now the ramifications of our choices have become clear, you can look down on me as you always did?'

With sudden violence, Magnus jabbed downward with his glaive. Multicoloured flames exploded from its blade, engulfing Guilliman and the bedrock upon which he stood. Moon dust exploded upwards in crackling clouds. Corpasant danced across scrap iron, and Roboute cried out as agony wracked his body.

Crackling with raw power, Magnus descended, still pouring Warp fire into his brother. Guilliman screamed again, dropping to one knee as his armour blazed with searing energy. Sparks burst from overloaded systems, and the smell of his own, cooking flesh filled his nostrils.

Desperate, Guilliman drove himself backwards in a graceless leap. He flew in an arc to smash down amidst a tumbled heap of enginarium debris, armour still flickering with flames.

Magnus landed, chuckling cruelly. Sprawled amidst the tangle of wreckage, Guilliman tried to push himself to his feet. The Primarch's body was a mass of pain, and his armour responded sluggishly, a number of its servomotors burned out.

'No, brother,' said Magnus. 'You stay where you are.'

The Daemon Primarch gestured, and spectral claws tore several hundred tons of machinery loose from a nearby wreck. Guilliman had time to brace himself before the ungainly mass impacted like a comet, burying him completely beneath an avalanche of crushing metal.

Guilliman was entombed. Alarms chimed in his ears, red warning signs flashing in his peripheral vision. The pain of lacerated organs and shattered bones dragged at him, and for a moment the Lord of Ultramar was tempted simply to give in. Then he thought again of his long-suffering sons, fighting so hard for the ideals of an Imperium they had never even known. He would not betray them. He would not let one of his degenerate brothers keep him from his responsibilities – not again.

Muscles tensing, strength surging, Guilliman ripped his way up through the tumbled mountain of wreckage. He roared as he hurled aside a capacitor unit the size of a Land Raider, and stepped, bloodied but unbroken, into the hard light of Luna. Magnus arched an eyebrow at the sight, and braced his glaive to hurl another spell.

It was then that the void lit with fire.





THE EMPEROR'S WRATH

Grand Master Voldus looked up and gave thanks as the Emperor's deliverance rained down upon the battlefield. The crusade forces had broken into small islands of resistance, some hunkered down amidst spacecraft wreckage, others crouching behind jutting Luna rocks. The Thousand Sons had surrounded them, relentlessly pouring fire into the loyalist positions while Tzeentchian Daemons hurtled overhead on golden discs to rain Warpflame upon them.

Now, though, help had arrived. Gilt-chased fighter craft screamed down over the Luna landscape. As they did so, rippling lines of fire exploded amidst Rubricae and Horrors alike. Las blasts and hails of explosive shells tore the Tzeentchian footsoldiers apart. Bombs fell amongst them, sundering armour and flesh.

At the same time, vast leviathans of adamantium and plasteel rumbled in overhead. Naval system monitors of the Terran Defence Fleet hove into low orbit, their enormous forms swamping the battlefield in shadow as they came. Aided by triangulatory targeting data transmitted by Archmagos Cawl, the ships rained pinpoint-accurate fire upon the foe.

Luna dust whirled in sudden vortices as teleport energies snatched it up. Bright light flared, and the golden giants of the Adeptus Custodes stepped from it with their guardian spears levelled. Hails of bolt fire ripped into the Rubricae. Cursing, the Sorcerers ordered their golem warriors to turn and address these new foes, but to no avail. Moving with breathtaking speed and skill, the Custodians hacked their way into the Heretic Astartes. Each fought like a hero born, their blades splitting power armour like firewood and sending empty helmets spinning lazily away across the Luna surface.

Rallying as aid appeared, the last enclaves of those warriors who set out from Macragge fought back with renewed fury. Voldus stepped out from the wreckage of a bulk carrier, leading his remaining Grey

Knights and Dreadknights in a valiant charge. His hammer smashed apart ceramite wherever it connected, and psychic lightning danced about him despite the Sorcerers' best efforts to banish it. Katarinya Greyfax fought alongside him, her iron will bringing Tzeentchian conjurers to their knees before she struck off their heads with her masterwork blade.

Seizing the moment, Saint Celestine swept through the enemy ranks, the Ardent Blade slashing left and right as her Geminae Superia raked the Daemons with bolt fire. Captain Sicarius followed in her wake, rallying Ultramarines and Primogenitors behind him as they cut a path towards the Adeptus Custodes.



The muffled boom of engines sounded overhead, heralding the arrival of further Imperial forces. Stark yellow Drop Pods slammed down, thrusters flaring. Their hatches opened and squads of Imperial Fists Space Marines emerged from within, bolters blazing at the enemy. Gunships rumbled overhead, yellow-hulled Stormravens and Stormtalons whose weapons tore through the Thousand Sons. Several were swatted by bolts of sorcery and hails of rotary cannon fire, flames belching from ruptured hulls as they span down to crash amidst the wreckage of starships.

Amongst these craft flew a trio of Valkyries with hulls of crimson and black, the sigil of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica emblazoned upon their flanks. Arcing through the explosions and mayhem above the battlefield, the gunships made for the point some way distant where Guilliman still battled his monstrous brother.

Purple fire speared upwards, ripping the wing from the leading craft and sending it rolling to a halt in a blazing fireball. The other two swept on towards their quarry, and as they came in low, their side doors slid open.

While their brave pilots blitzed fire at Magnus the Red, two squads of helmed Sisters of Silence dropped from the gunships. They landed near Guilliman in fighting crouches. Angrily, Magnus swept his clawed hand through the air, dragging one gunship sideways with telekine power and smashing it into the other. Both Valkyries exploded and tumbled downwards, but the Sisters of Silence leapt nimbly aside. Magnus glowered, jabbing with his glaive and sending tendrils of green and yellow flame spiralling in their direction. The sorcery sputtered and died before it reached them, undone by the empyric dead zone around the warrior nulls.

Seeing a strategic advantage at last, Guilliman leapt down from the mound of wreckage and landed amidst the Sisters of Silence. They would shield him from his brother's fell powers. Together, the Primarch and the sisters charged towards Magnus with their blades at the ready.

The Daemon Primarch hurled another volley of psychic destruction, growling in frustration as it flickered out like the first. Angrily, Magnus hefted his glaive and swooped forward to meet his enemies at close quarters. If he could not destroy them with the powers of the Warp, he would hack and crush their mortal bodies until nothing remained but meat.

Beneath the dark Luna sky, with Terra hanging, ancient and hallowed above them, the two Primarchs crashed together once again.

Veilwalker bounded into the air. She drove one foot into the side of a Rubricae's helm, ripping it free with the force of her kick. The Shadowseer pushed off from her first victim, spinning through the thin air to hurl a bewildering glamour into the face of a nearby Sorcerer. The Tzeentch worshipper howled in panic, clawing at his helm and ripping it free. His flesh froze in seconds, his eyes bursting as bloody puffs and gore squirting from his nose, mouth and ears. The Shadowseer trilled a mocking laugh as she landed, spinning her stave low to sweep the legs from two more Rubricae, before sketching an elaborate bow to their fellows.

Amidst a hail of ensorcelled bolts, Veilwalker sprang away, as her kin cartwheeled into the enemy's midst from another direction. In such low gravity conditions, the Harlequins could achieve feats of agility and grace beyond even their normal blinding skill, and Veilwalker laughed again as she saw the Rubricae rendered clumsy by comparison.

Bounding in a high pirouette over the battle, Veilwalker sought he who wore the Armour of Fate. There he was, amidst the wrecks of crude human spacecraft, battling his monstrous brother alongside a band of warriors. Even from here, the mere presence of the nulls made Sylandri shudder.

Guilliman and Magnus were trading hate-filled blows, their weapons crashing together with titanic force. The nulls were doing what they could to aid the fight, stabbing blades at the Daemon in their midst or pouring bolter fire into him. Already, several lay as broken corpses for their troubles, but the rest were doing an effective job of deadening Magnus' sorcerous powers.

Sylandri landed gracefully, ignoring a storm of magical flames that exploded away to her left. Daemons, befuddled by her domino field, cast their spells at where they believed her to be. With a thought, Sylandri activated the communications inlay in her helm, communing with her Death Jester, the Hollow Prince.

'The moment has arrived,' she said. 'Our drama has played out, and the brothers' enmity burns anew.'

'Now the final curtain, then?' whispered the voice of the Hollow Prince, rich with wicked mirth. 'Indignation. Outrage. Vendetta.'

'It must be thus,' agreed Veilwalker. 'I shall ready the gate, for truth this time. You deliver your lines, and let matters play out.'

Without waiting for an answer, Veilwalker cut her communications. She sprinted for the crater from which they had all emerged. She wove and sprang, dodged and tumbled through the raging battle, finally throwing herself into a feet-first slide over the crater's lip. Veilwalker arced gracefully down, moon dust falling about her like snow, and landed in a crouch amid the mounds of armoured corpses. Across the crater floor, the darkness was lit by the whirling storm of purple light that spat from the corrupted webway gate. Magnus had done that, cursing the portal to permit his unnatural passage. Veilwalker smirked coldly behind her mask; he would pay for that hubris.

Across the field of battle, she knew that the Hollow Prince would be communicating with Guilliman, explaining their plan to the Primarch. The Death Jester would be telling the Primarch

that Magnus could be destroyed only by casting his body into the corrupted webway gate. If Veilwalker's visions were correct, Guilliman would believe him.

Meanwhile, she had to prepare the gateway, which was currently guarded by a pair of Sorcerers. Ghosting closer through the bodies with illusions flickering about her, Veilwalker drew her shuriken pistol. A gentle squeeze of its trigger, a flick of her wrist, and several more gentle depressions; first one Sorcerer and then the other staggered as rounds struck them, perfectly placed to puncture their gorget seals and open their jugular arteries.

The two Sorcerers crumpled, and Veilwalker hurriedly began her incantations. The energies around the gateway pulsed and shuddered, the runes on its sides glowing brighter as a keening vibration shook the dark pit.

At that moment, battling demigods appeared upon the crater's edge. Guilliman and Magnus, both bleeding from the wounds they had dealt one another, still flanked by a last handful of the null warriors. Magnus bisected another of the women with a brutal swing of his glaive, which lashed around to hack a chunk from Guilliman's breastplate.

In return, the Lord of Ultramar drove Magnus back with hammer blows from the Emperor's blade, then slammed his shoulder into his brother's chest and sent the Crimson King crashing down the steep slope.

Guilliman leapt after him, not giving Magnus a chance to recover. The Primarch's onslaught was punishing, the wounded Guilliman visibly pouring everything he had into this last storm of blows. Veilwalker melted away into the shadows as the warring brothers neared the webway gate, still muttering her incantations and weaving her staff back and forth.

Magnus conjured a deadly sphere of Warp energies and hurled it at his brother with all his might. Guilliman's iron halo absorbed the worst of the blast, but still he was sent staggering back. With his back to the gate, the Primarch of the Thousand Sons conjured a wave of telekinetic fury and used it to fling a mass of Space Marine corpses – loyalist and traitor – at the last few nulls. They vanished from Sylandri's sight, their contra-empyric drag blinking out as they were buried beneath a macabre heap of the dead.

The Shadowseer started forward, fearing for the fate of the Final Act. Then, with a roar of hate and rage, Guilliman struck. The Lord of Ultramar lunged at his brother. The burning blade drove in, under the Daemon Primarch's guard, and sank deep into his chest. Golden flames leapt, and Magnus howled in agony as they chewed hungrily at his flesh. He unleashed his powers in an uncontrolled sorcerous blast, its shock wave racing out across the crater and throwing Sylandri from her feet.

The burst of power hurled Guilliman onto his back, blade in hand, and sent Magnus staggering free, back through the pulsating webway gate. Sylandri had one chance, a single moment in which to alter fate. With a final word, she shattered the runestone that glowed hot in her palm, and severed the webway gate forever. Power surged, Magnus roared his fury, and then was cut off from Luna, his warriors and his brother, banished to the depths of the Labyrinth Dimension.





DUST TO DUST

Guilliman staggered to his feet, limping and wounded underneath his smouldering and blackened armour. The webway gate rose before him, and no trace of his brother remained. Had Magnus been destroyed? Guilliman hoped so, but he did not believe it. The Harlequins' sudden plan for victory had been too convenient, the disappearance of Magnus too abrupt. The Primarch cast about for Sylandri Veilwalker, but found that she too had disappeared. A swiftly voxed question to his warriors revealed that the remainder of the Veiled Path had vanished with her, though none could say how. If it had all been a trick, Guilliman could not fathom its intent, but for now at least, Magnus was gone.

Listening to the voxed reports of his lieutenants, Guilliman realised that the battle was as good as won. Even while fighting his brother, Guilliman had kept a portion of his mind upon the wider strategic picture. It took him only moments to piece together the battle's events.

Bolstered by the sudden arrival of the Adeptus Custodes and the Imperial Fists, the crusade had driven the Thousand Sons back. Tzeentchian automata lay scattered across this region of the Mare Tempestus, little more than vacant suits of ornate armour tangled amidst the wreckage. The Daemons that Magnus had summoned were gone also, banished along with their master.

With orbital barrages and hurtling fighter craft annihilating any traitors who attempted to break for freedom, the last of the Sorcerers had gathered their Rubricae and their Scarab Occults, and were driving – steady and relentless – for the crater's edge. They had sensed the banishment of their lord, but they did not know that the webway gate had been severed. The last of the traitors were making a bid to escape, and Guilliman stood directly in their path.

Wearily, the Primarch squared his shoulders and shrugged off his hurts. Walking with a limp, armour sparking and dented, Roboute Guilliman made for the crater's edge. His auspex showed him the route of the

incoming traitors, and the Imperial forces harassing their flanks. Though badly mauled, the Thousand Sons still had numbers, and had broken through the last, faltering ranks of Cawl's Skitarii.

Guilliman strode up the crater wall to meet them, and as he did so the mountain of corpses behind him stirred and shifted. Heaving themselves to freedom, three tenacious Sisters of Silence escaped their gruesome cairn and hastened to stand at Guilliman's side.

'THE BATTLE IS NOT OVER WHEN YOUR ENEMY IS BEATEN. HE MUST BE CRUSHED UTTERLY, AND EVERY TRACE OF HIS WORKS AND DEEDS EXPUNGED. HIS SPIRIT, AND THAT OF HIS PEOPLE, MUST BE BROKEN BEYOND REPAIR. ONLY WHEN YOUR ENEMY HAS BEEN ERADICATED ALTOGETHER, AND BURNED FROM THE PAGES OF HISTORY, IS THE WAR AT ITS END.'

- Roboute Guilliman, the Codex Astartes

The remaining Thousand Sons were several hundred yards from the crater's edge, marching relentlessly in Guilliman's direction. They travelled in a loosely circular formation, the Rubricae facing outward in a ceramite ring and moving in eerily perfect lockstep. Loyalist forces surrounded them, squads of infantry and scorched battle tanks pouring fire into the retreating traitors. More Rubricae fell by the moment, but with their Sorcerers safe at the heart of the formation, the Thousand Sons' momentum was hard to stop.

They would come no further, resolved Guilliman. Voxing orders to every Imperial warrior, the Primarch instructed his followers to charge the Thousand Sons from every side, and all remaining vehicles to provide supporting fire, Guilliman brandished his flaming blade and swept into battle. The last of the Sisters of Silence ran at his side, their bolters thumping.

The Imperial forces closed upon the traitors like a clenching fist. The muffled thunder of gunfire carried across the Mare Tempestus as a devastating storm of shots engulfed the Thousand Sons. At the same time, Voldus, Cypher, Greyfax, Cawl and Celestine charged into the enemy's midst with their guns blazing and warriors at their backs.

Thunder hammers swung, connecting with tectonic force. Power swords slid through armour like knives through silk. Sorcery transformed noble warriors to crystal statues, or collapsing heaps of mutated flesh. Through the mayhem waded Roboute Guilliman, hacking and bludgeoning his way towards the Sorcerers at the heart of the enemy formation. Enough loyal blood had been shed. Enough brave warriors had been slain, and more besides, to bring Guilliman within striking distance of the throneworld. The losses ended now, and Ultramarines Primarch would be the one to end them.

The first Sorcerer he met was backhanded from his disc, tumbling away like a ragdoll. The next two fell to lethal sword thrusts, their blood puffing out in slow clouds. Three more turned their powers upon the Primarch, only to find hexes faltering and hellfires flickering to nothing as the Sisters of Silence joined the fray.

One Sorcerer succeeded in driving his sword through Guilliman's pauldron and drawing the Primarch's blood. Another cracked one eye lens of his helm with a desperate thrust of his stave. No other harm did the Sorcerers cause to the Lord of Ultramar, who passed through them like a storm of death and left all as drifting corpses.

At last the battle was done. The final Rubricae, leaderless and without direction, were cut swiftly to pieces. The whirling storm of moon dust settled as the battle's fury abated. With his loyal warriors kneeling around him and his foes destroyed, Guilliman allowed himself to lean for a moment upon his blade, and to feel the pain of both body and soul.

A full-page illustration of a Sister of Silence, a member of the Imperial Guard. She is depicted from the waist up, wearing ornate, golden-brown power armor. The armor features a high collar, a breastplate with two large circular emblems, and gauntlets. She has a white wig and a blue ponytail. In her right hand, she holds a large, detailed bolter. Her left hand is clenched into a fist. The background is a bright, hazy sky with a large, dark, curved object, possibly a planet or a large structure, visible on the right. The overall tone is dramatic and heroic.

The powers of psykers and sorcerers are snuffed like candle flames in the presence of the Sisters of Silence. Rendered mute by their vows, they are nonetheless skilled warriors who communicate with a complex system of hand signals, and are master marksmen and blade fighters.

In addition to their martial skills, the Sisters of Silence are nulls. Possessing a rare mutation known as the Pariah gene, nulls exist in the Warp only as black holes. They are effectively soulless, and their mere presence is enough to unsettle and nauseate those around them. Worse by far is the effect of nulls upon psykers, who are sent into paroxysms of agony and revulsion whenever they draw too near.

Once, long ago, the Sisters of Silence were the militant arm of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica. Though officially disbanded after the Age of Apostasy, many enclaves still fight for the Imperial cause, albeit in a more secretive and specialist capacity than before.

THRONEWORLD

After the battle of Luna, matters moved swiftly. Fresh waves of craft descended to scour away the traitor corpses that littered the region. Inquisitorial agents and teams of Magos Xenotechnologis swarmed the battlefield, the former seeing to matters of containment and secrecy while the latter fell upon the deactivated webway gate like vultures. Guilliman ignored them all. He allowed the senior Apothecary amongst the Imperial Fists to tend to his most immediate hurts, and then insisted that he and his companions be allowed to press on. None was foolish enough to gainsay a living Primarch – indeed, few save the Custodes could stop staring in wonderment long enough to communicate with him – and so Guilliman's demands were soon met.

Down from on high came an enormous lander of remarkable design. Glimmering gold in the harsh light of Sol, the craft resembled the two-headed Imperial aquila writ large. Gouts of flame leapt from its wings, slowing its descent, and it landed on heavy, taloned struts just beyond the field of battle. More warriors of the Adeptus Custodes strode down the ship's boarding ramp, joining with their battle-scarred comrades and lining the route on board. Guilliman and his surviving warriors passed between them with their heads held high, Space Marines, Grey Knights, and the once-leaders of the Celestinian Crusade marching into the capacious hold of the aquila craft.

Only once the ramp had whined shut behind them, and oxygen flowed back into the chamber, did the Custodes remove their helms and bow low to Guilliman. As the craft shuddered and lifted off, the Shield-Captain who led them introduced himself as Ty Adronitus, and explained that Guilliman and his warriors would be borne to Terra with all haste. They were to put down at the Eternity Wall spaceport, and from there would travel as part of a triumphant parade to the Emperor's Palace. The High Lords had anticipated the Primarch's desire to stand before the Golden Throne, explained Shield-Captain Adronitus. They would do everything

they could to facilitate it, and to fete the living Primarch's return to the throneworld.

Guilliman approved the arrangements that had been made for him. Though they would have fought on stubbornly until their dying breaths if the situation had demanded it, Guilliman and his warriors were wearied by the constant hardships they had endured since setting out from Macragge. Thus, as the aquila craft swept up from Luna's surface and away towards Terra, Guilliman and his comrades settled back in flight thrones and simply watched the external picters. Many reflected upon the astronomical losses the Terran Crusade had taken to get the Primarch here, but none could be altogether distracted from the breathtaking sights that slid past.

As the ship rose up away from Luna, the orbital docks and shipyards of the moon spread out in all their industrial grandeur. Hundreds of ships, thousands of forges, weapons platforms, grav habs and docking spindles sprawled through the void above the moon's chalky white surface, while swathes of the moon itself were carpeted in macrohives and sprawling junk yards like the one the crusade had so recently fought amidst.

Further out, the void teemed with craft and defences of every sort. Dense minefields filled hundreds of miles of space, every charge crafted to resemble a brushed steel skull. Vast battle stations and deep space weapons platforms hung menacingly, each one a gun-studded cathedrum the size of a city. Immense spacecraft of the Ministorum plied the darkness, penitence arks and solar reliquaries dozens of miles long; within those cold, dark halls, the faithful wailed prayers and self-flagellated for the Emperor's glory. System monitors prowled the heavens in vast numbers, swarming like stinging insects around their hive. All were eclipsed in size by the immense, mobile star fort that hung halfway between Terra and Luna, engulfed in repair cradles and servo-armatures. The Imperial Fists' mobile base of operations, the star fort *Phalanx*, had returned from the Cadian System to watch over

the throneworld like an eagle over its nest.

Far distant, further out towards the Sol System's edge, could be seen the angry red glint of Mars and its attendant orbital platforms. Closer to Terra, Guilliman was disquieted to see the drifting wrecks of warships both Imperial and traitor being picked over by heavy Adeptus Mechanicus dredgers and scavenger-factorums. The war, it seemed, had reached Humanity's system of origin before them, and would surely only become worse in the days to come.

As they began their final descent, Terra swelled in the picters. It was a bloated giant, its natural resources expended, oceans long boiled away and landmasses covered entirely in never-ending cityscapes. Lights beyond count burned all across the planet's surface, while macrostructures and super-statues pierced the throneworld's pollution-choked atmosphere. Spaceport spires rose into the darkness amidst swarming masses of cherub-satellites, electro-sermon beacons, servitor defence platforms and millions of Administratum transport ships.

Their craft swung down through the organised bedlam, its route given the highest priority clearance, and descended into a haze of chem-smog and glaring, artificial light. Towering structures of grey, gold and brass rose on every side, encrusted with grime-streaked gothic architecture and studded with cold electrical lights. Servo-skulls and cyber cherubs, gunships and bulk haulers, transporters and prison barges, patrol ships of the Arbites and bell-skiffs of the Ministorum, all whirled around the aquila craft in a storm. Downward it flew, until the towering, gargoyle-topped spires that rose on every side completely obscured the fading darkness of space.

Finally, Guilliman's transport swung in to dock on a dedicated platform set into the flanks of the Eternity Wall spaceport. It put down upon a dais of age-worn marble, surrounded on all sides by verdigrised and heavily weaponised statues, from which hung





burning braziers of incense. Robed figures were gathered on every side to witness and honour the Primarch's arrival. Servo-choirs sung out hymns to the Emperor while autoscribes scribbled with eagle-feather quills in iron tomes borne by chained slaves. Dignitaries of the Administratum and the Adeptus Terra flocked close, mingling with bombastic priests of the Ministorum and nobles garbed in outrageous finery. All bowed to Guilliman as he emerged from the transport, forming the sign of the aquila with their hands and vying to cry out their devotion the loudest.

The Primarch did his best to smile, and to acknowledge the clamouring masses with dignity and respect. His mind was a whirl – the last time Guilliman had seen Terra was many

thousands of years before, and where once there had been industrious glory, now all was buried in grotesque layers of gothic over-construction, industrial sprawl and macabre religious ornamentation.

The Primarch's sense of dislocation and sorrow only increased as he and his followers were led through the masses, and descended in mag-lifts to what passed for ground level. They passed through a cavernous space of gloomy Administratum offices, where queues of petitioners stretched away into the hazy middle distance. Men and women, young and old, called out their devotion and wept for joy to see the Primarch pass, yet even his presence could not draw them from their places in queues that their ancestors had first joined, and that

their progeny one day aspired to reach the front of.

Guilliman and his warriors, still accompanied by their Custodes guards, emerged from that impossibly vast structure to find themselves in a plaza packed out with droning, shuffling, downtrodden crowds. On every side rose mile-high stained glass windows, each depicting a different Primarch. Guilliman saw Sanguinius, wings spread atop a mountain of mutant corpses. He saw the Khan, riding upon a skull-faced comet that sped between the stars. There was brave Vulkan, grasping an impossibly huge hammer as he used a world for his anvil. And there, Guilliman stared up at a distorted image of himself, haloed in light with his Codex Astartes in one hand and the



severed head of a horned Daemon in the other. He was depicted as a giant amongst worshipping crowds of angelic figures, and for a moment Fulgrim's words to him at the parade on Macragge echoed in Guilliman's mind. All of Humanity would worship him as a living god. Guilliman must never come to believe it himself.

Mounting up in ornate, super-heavy transporters, Guilliman and his companions were borne through endless streets and transitways, boulevards and processions. They passed tribes of itinerant petitioners and clans of indigenous priests, faceless masses of Administratum drones and ragged shanties in which the poor and the maimed crawled like maggots in a wound. Billions watched the procession's progress as they

passed through the dark heart of the Emperor's realm. The mountainous structures of the Imperial Palace loomed ever larger upon the horizon, a vast structure from which could be seen the cloud-piercing light of the Astronomican itself. For two days, Guilliman and his followers travelled through endless crowds and places of grandeur and grim horror.

They passed beneath an arch-city hung with pain-frames, and beneath the gaze of a dozen statues of Imperial Saints, each as large as an Emperor Titan.

They crossed a vast bridge that spanned for fifty miles over a smog-laden trench, whose walls were formed from manufacturums and smelteries beyond count.

They travelled beneath the titanic guns of orbital defence silos that dwarfed any weapon even Guilliman had ever seen.

At last they passed into the palace proper, by way of a dizzyingly tall gate graven with warring angels and Daemons. There they dismounted their lumbering transports, and Guilliman was glad to proceed on foot through the precincts of the inner palace. More gates and splendour flowed past, so much that it all blurred into an impossible assault upon the senses. At last, feeling more exhausted by his homecoming than he ever had by any battle, Guilliman came before the final gate. Beyond that expansive arch lay the Emperor's throne room, and there, the Golden Throne of the Master of Mankind.

BEFORE THE GOLDEN THRONE

There were many routes to the Emperor's throne room. This gilded doorway stood at the end of a towering cathedrum processional. Its worn flagstones thronged with millions of desperate petitioners and pilgrims. Golden light filtered through immense stained glass windows that depicted the Emperor's greatest deeds. Innumerable candles burned in that cavernous space, filling the air with greasy smoke, and hymnals rang from the mouths of hunched cyber-cherubim. Incense billowed and bells tolled, while Ministorum Priests delivered wrathful sermons from servo-pulpits. Throngs of Tech-Priests muttered and swayed in shadowed corners. Officers of the Imperial Navy and Astra Militarum spoke earnestly together, gesturing to dataslates held up by robed menials. Penitent nobles dangled in golden pain-cages, whimpering blandishments to the Custodian Guards who walked their patrol routes below.

The doorway itself was beautifully worked in gold, bronze and precious stones, though it had the look of ancient, faded grandeur. It stood fifty feet high within an arch of black marble, atop a flight of stone steps into which deep grooves had been worn by the passage of countless feet. The edges of each step were piled with petitioners' bones. Atop the steps stood twenty of the Adeptus Custodes. They were accompanied by a Martian priest, and led by a regal warrior in a high-plumed helm, golden armour and an ermine-trimmed cloak.

Roboute Guilliman strode up the processional, through masses of pilgrims and petitioners who reached out quivering hands to touch his armour as he passed. With him walked Captain Sicarius, Grand Master Voldus, Shield-Captain Adronitus, and the mysterious Cypher and his battle-brothers, along with Belisarius Cawl, Katarinya Greyfax and Saint Celestine. This last figure was scarcely less adored by the crowds than Guilliman himself, and she turned aside before the steps to offer her blessings to all. Behind them marched the last battle-

brothers of the Terran Crusade, footfalls crashing and weapons held at parade ground readiness. Despite all they had endured, the Space Marines and Grey Knights made for a magnificent sight.

Guilliman halted at the foot of the stairs, and looked up into the steely eyes of the Custodians. Their leader stepped forward, rapping his ornate spear thrice against the top step and announcing himself as Aquila Commander Kalim Varanor. In formal high gothic, Varanor asked who came before the throne room of the Emperor of Mankind.

Equally formal, Shield-Captain Adronitus announced the leaders of the Terran Crusade, one by one. Further words were exchanged, ancient forms repeated by rote, but lent gravitas by the arrival of a living Primarch. Guilliman's purpose was demanded and given: to gain an audience with his father, the Emperor. The air thickened with tension, millions of onlookers holding their collective breaths as the Aquila Commander held the gaze of the returned Primarch. Would Kalim Varanor suspect some treachery? Would he decry Guilliman as false, or demand further proof of his identity?

The Aquila Commander looked to the Martian priest hunched at Guilliman's side. The robed figure inclined its head in assent, and Varanor announced his verdict. The Primarch would be permitted to pass, alone, into the throne room. All others would wait outside.

At this, Cypher stiffened, his hands straying towards his holstered pistols. Guilliman had expected this moment, and had planned for it accordingly. The hooded Dark Angel and his men had upheld their end of the bargain, granting Guilliman his freedom on the Blackstone Fortress. Yet the Primarch was not fool enough to trust such an ominous figure blindly. He might not have recognised Cypher, but he knew the blade on the Dark Angel's back. The sight of it made him shudder with dread. He would not permit such a thing into his father's presence.

Stepping aside, Guilliman commanded the Custodian Guards to apprehend Cypher and his warriors. Their presence was a riddle, one that could be solved once more pressing matters had been attended to.

Cypher responded with the first show of emotion any there had seen from him. He snarled in anger, ripping his pistols from their holsters before hesitating for one crucial moment, visibly torn between attempting escape and making a doomed lunge for the doorway above. In that second, the Custodians closed in with their guardian spears levelled. Cypher and his followers found themselves surrounded in a ring of crackling blades. Slowly, his half-seen expression grim, Cypher holstered his weapons, and he and his brothers knelt in submission before their captors.

Wrists bound with electrocuffs, they were led away by stern Custodians and locked away within a warded prison block that, for thousands of years, not a single inmate had escaped. In just a few short hours, however, Cypher would do just that, and in doing so leave no trace of his passing. For the moment, though, Guilliman knew only that the sinister figures were dealt with, and more pressing matters could be attended to. Face solemn, blade sheathed and helm tucked under one arm, the Primarch ascended to his father's throne room.

At the top of the steps, the Custodian Guards parted to allow the Primarch passage. The Tech-Priest stepped forward, however, emitting a blurt of binharic cant and bowing before Guilliman. With skittering haste, Archmagos Cawl swayed up the steps behind the Primarch and came to his side. Guilliman waited, impatient, as the two Martian priests exchanged encoded binharic blurts, then Cawl turned to him and spoke cryptic words. Only the Custodes heard what was said, of secret pacts on Mars, and long works drawing at last to their conclusions, but – as with so many dark secrets exchanged over the millennia upon these very steps – they affected deafness and ignorance.



For ten thousand years and more, the Adeptus Custodes have stood watch over the Emperor. Before the Horus Heresy, these resplendant warriors guarded the Emperor wherever he went and swore to give their lives to protect his. After his incarceration in the Golden Throne, they watched over their recumbent master and patrolled the precincts of the Imperial Palace, ever vigilant for threats.

Every Custodian is a hero in his own right. Stronger and faster than even the Adeptus Astartes, these champions wear magnificent artificer armour, and are allowed to equip themselves with whichever weapons they so choose. Fighting with whirling guardian spears, the Custodes can best many times their own number of foes.

No one knows for sure how many hidden coups, secret rebellions and misguided attempts at assassination the Adeptus Custodes have foiled. That their martial skills remain so sharp after ten thousand years, however, is evidence that they have not stood an idle vigil.

Their exchange concluded, Cawl turned without comment and swept down the steps, his acolyte in tow. The priests vanished through the crowd and thence from Terra entirely, for they had matters of significant import to attend to upon the red planet.

Guilliman was left standing alone before the ornate doorway, dwarfed by its immensity. A single, booming chime rang through the cathedrum processional, and a collective sigh of wonder and fear escaped the pilgrims gathered there as the doorway cracked open. Slowly, silently, the tall doors swung inwards to reveal only darkness and drifting mists beyond. The vapours twined about Guilliman's limbs like serpents, and spilled down the steps behind him amidst the faint echo of sorrowful, ghostly voices. Noble features set in an implacable mask, Guilliman took a slow, deep breath and stepped into the Emperor's throne room.

As silently as they had opened, the doors swept closed behind him, and Roboute Guilliman was lost to sight.

Hours passed, during which the warriors of the Terran Crusade stood silently to attention before the throne room doors. Awed murmuring amongst the crowds turned to fervent prayer, and more than one petitioner ventured forward to present Captain Sicarius, Grand Master Voldus and their brothers with meagre devotional offerings and words of thanks. Saint Celestine and Inquisitor Greyfax chose this moment to depart, the former to spread her blessings, and the latter to report to her Ordo Hereticus superiors.

The Emperor's palace had no natural cycles of night and day, the sky long lost amidst a miasma of artificial light and swirling pollutant clouds. Instead, the electroscones and lumen-chandeliers dimmed low at the tap of lamp-servitors' wands. The petitioners huddled around parchment fires, still intoning prayers for the Primarch as they forced down the bowls of nutrient gruel brought to them by Ministorum Servitors. Many lay down upon piles of threadbare surplices to sleep, while the Ultramarines kept their tireless vigil at the base of the steps as they waited for their gene-sire to return to them.

Only when the day cycle dawned again with soaring hymns and a swelling glare of lumen-light did the doors finally swing open. Glowing mist spilled from within, silver now like the cold shimmer of moonlight on bones, and from the cold radiance stepped Roboute Guilliman.

The Primarch's expression was unreadable as he strode down the steps to rejoin his warriors. The crowds cried out in awe and dread, begging the Primarch for enlightenment. Instead, Guilliman gathered his soldiers around him, and bade Aquila Commander Varanor to attend him also. Guilliman demanded an immediate assembly of the High Lords of Terra, stating that he intended to resume his seat upon that august council. Roboute Guilliman would become the Lord Commander of the Imperium of Mankind once more. Of his meeting with the Emperor, Guilliman would say only that he had received all the enlightenment that he required.

There was much now to be done, for the threat of Chaos grew greater by the hour. But Guilliman knew what must be done, and he would not shy from doing it.

In the days that followed, the Primarch became the centre of a whirlwind of activity. He addressed the High Lords, claiming the Emperor's personal mandate as he forcibly removed several of them from office and replaced them with individuals of his own choosing. Guilliman warned the High Lords of an encroaching darkness, a terrible Warp phenomenon that was even now manifesting itself across the galaxy from end to end. The war against the Dark Gods was entering a new phase, more desperate and doom-laden than ever before. The Great Rift was opening.

The ever-growing flood of astropathic distress calls reaching Terra supported the Primarch's warnings. Cadia had been only the beginning. From the ravaged Fenris Sector and Ork-infested Armageddon, to the systems of Attila and Balor – all felt the grasping claws of Chaos. New Warp rifts were splitting the void in terrifying number, while existing phenomena roiled outwards like the pyroclastic clouds of volcanic

eruptions. Witch-lights swam between the stars, and monstrous things moved behind the veil of reality, all gnashing fangs and glaring eyes.

Whole sectors of the Imperium were going dark, while others reported the onslaught of rabid greenskin hordes, aggressive Tau fleets or deathless Necron hosts, seemingly driven to conquest in the face of the expanding storm fronts. Heretic cults and rogue psykers rose up in their billions, and every Imperial world seemed set to burn in the fires of galactic war.

For all these disturbing omens and disastrous losses, Guilliman urged Humanity's leaders not to give up hope. The Emperor of the Imperium was not blind to their plight, and neither was its Lord Commander.

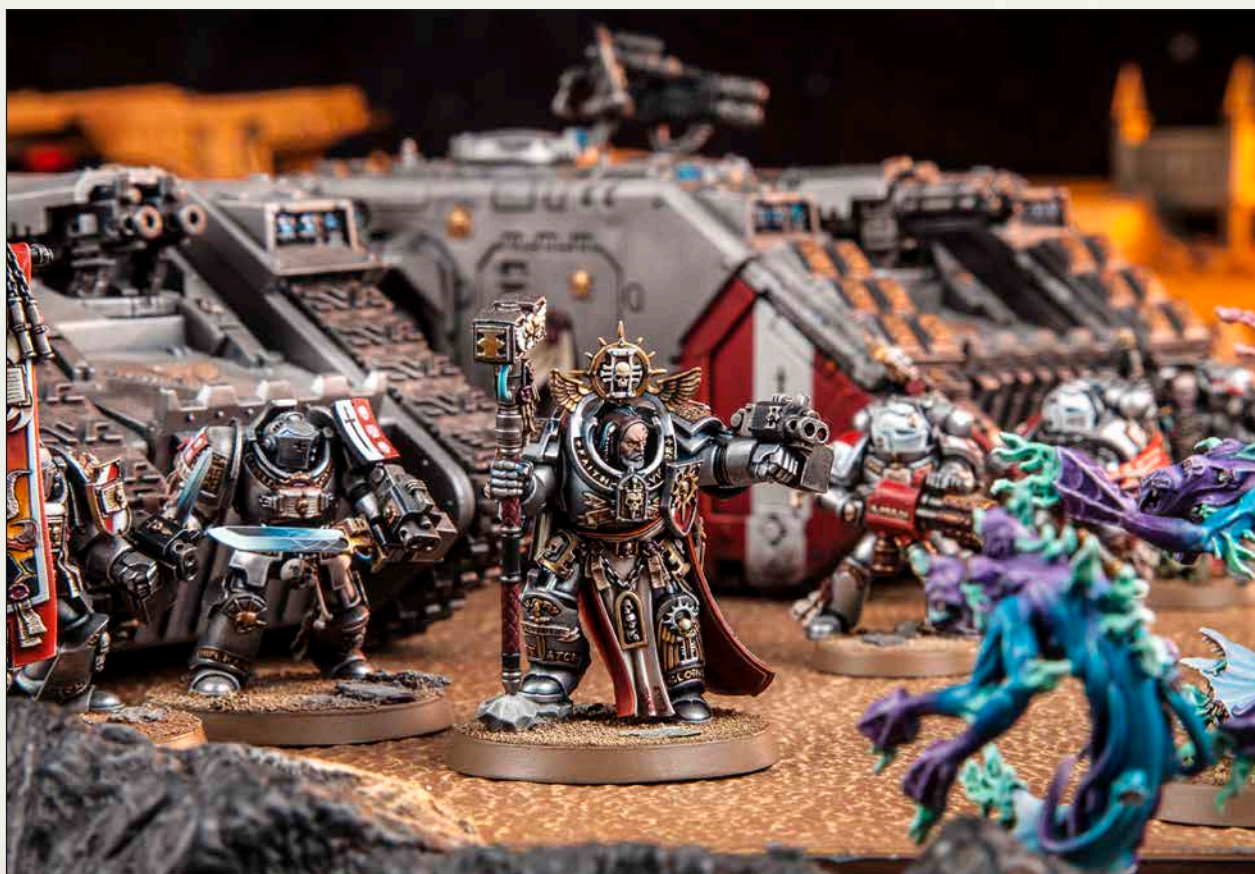
New armies would be raised, in breathtaking numbers. From Belisarius Cawl's forges on Mars, Guilliman planned to bring forth new and terrible weapons whose fury even the worshippers of the Chaos Gods would be unable to withstand. Fresh fleets would be built, grand war engines consecrated in the Emperor's holy name. The manufacturums would labour like never before, and every single servant of the Emperor would do their part. The Imperium faced total war on a galactic scale; with Warp storms spreading and intensifying, no world was safe. Yet Humanity would not drown in this tide of warfare, but instead would ride upon the crest of a bloody wave to triumph against the darkness.

Roboute Guilliman vowed that he would not cower behind Terra's walls and wait for Mankind's oppressors to bring death to his door. He would stride out amongst the stars and meet the enemy in the Emperor's name, as he always had. The Imperium would unite as one in the face of mutual annihilation, and take the battle to the mutant, the traitor, the alien and the heretic. So commanded Roboute Guilliman and thus, even as the Warp storms raged and the Astronomican itself strove to pierce their ever-blackening clouds, vast armies and armadas were raised in numbers not seen since the Great Crusade. A dark new age called from amidst the fires of endless war, and the Imperium would answer.





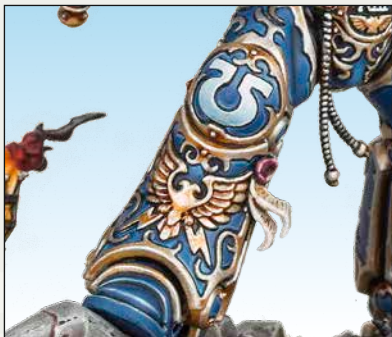
Cypher ghosts through the shadows amidst his fellow Fallen.



Voldus and his heroic brothers turn back the daemonic tide.



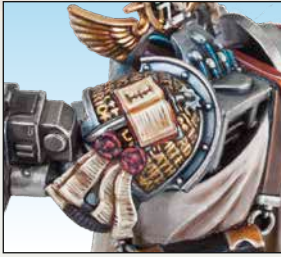
HEAVY METAL



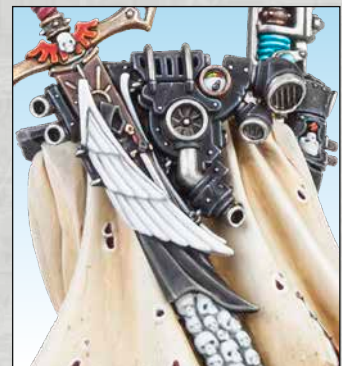
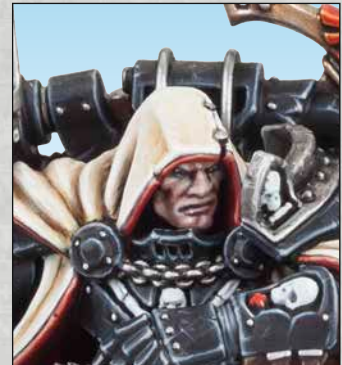
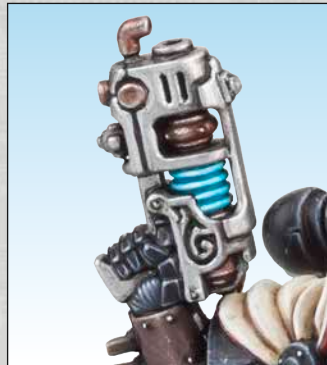
Roboute Guilliman, the Lord of Ultramar



Guilliman leads his noble scions to war.

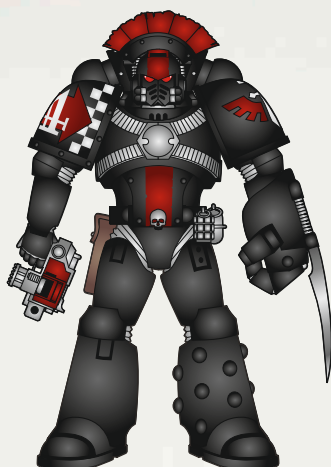


Grand Master Voldus of the Grey Knights 3rd Brotherhood



Cypher, the mysterious Lord of the Fallen

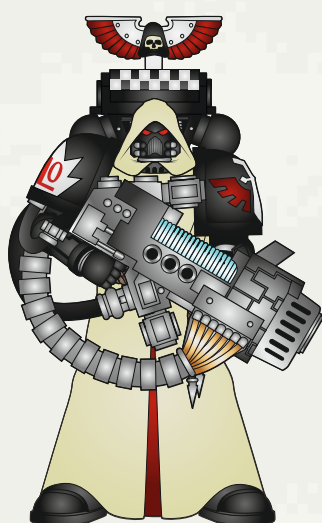
FALLEN ANGELS



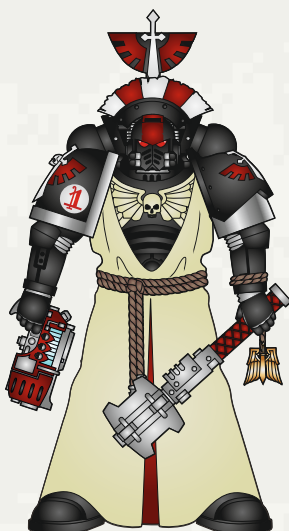
Brother Korlael, a champion of the Fallen, known as the Seeker of Redemption.



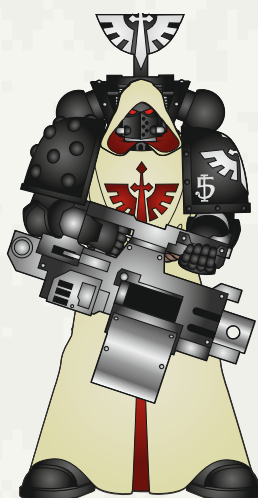
This Fallen Champion, Daskhorael the Sinister, has subjugated a dozen Imperial worlds.



This Fallen Angel is known only as the Scouring Light, and never speaks.



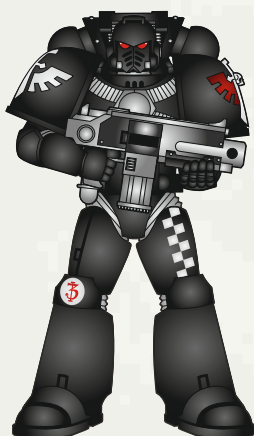
Azkhar the Tainted, a Fallen brother who teeters on the brink of damnation.



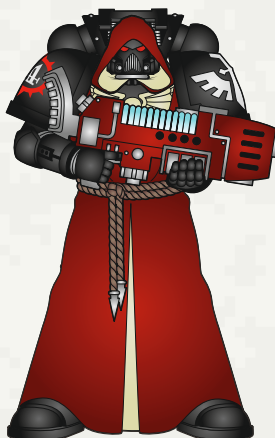
This Fallen Angel hides scarred marks of contrition beneath his robes.



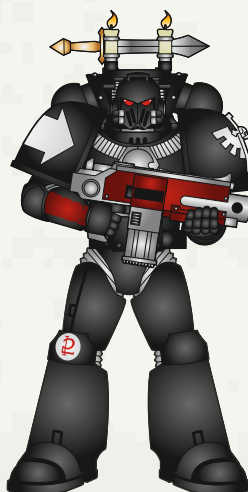
Aphkal the Reaper's true allegiance remains a dark and guarded secret.



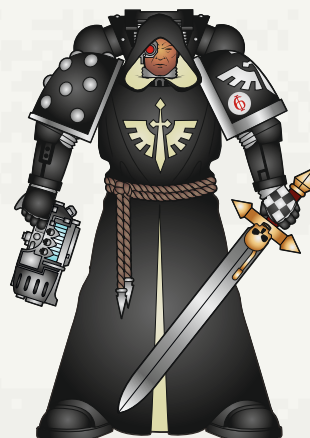
Some whisper that nothing living remains within Brother Zhorn's armour.



The Red Whisper seeks to slay the greatest beasts he can in the Lion's name.



Some say Brother Khael's enshrined blade represents his enduring loyalty.



Zarial the Grim acknowledges no master and knows only hate.



The iconography used by the Fallen Angels varies depending upon the temperament and loyalties of the warrior in question. Those who still consider themselves repentant loyalists tend towards borrowed elements of pre- or post-heresy Dark Angel designs and numerals. Others obfuscate their identity altogether, or even revel in the use of proto-chaotic symbology.



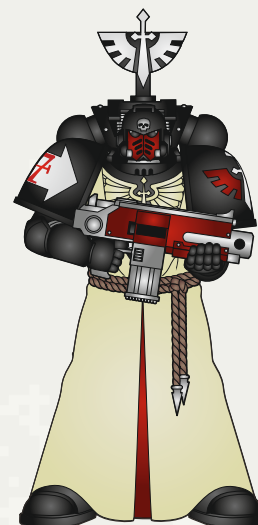
This nameless Fallen Angel seeks mighty Imperial champions to slay.



Brother Namaer forever recites the names of those who fell on Caliban.



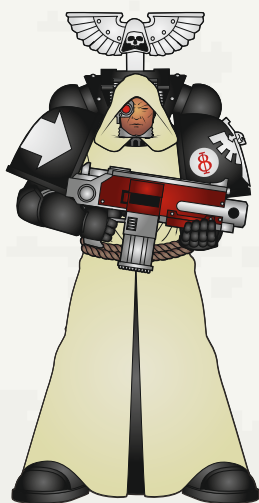
This Fallen Brother calls himself the Knight of Ancient Vengeance.



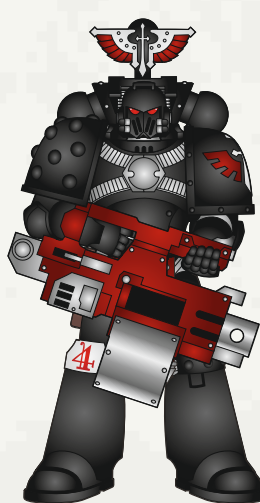
Zakharriel the Contrite is, in truth, anything but, and revels in his corruption.



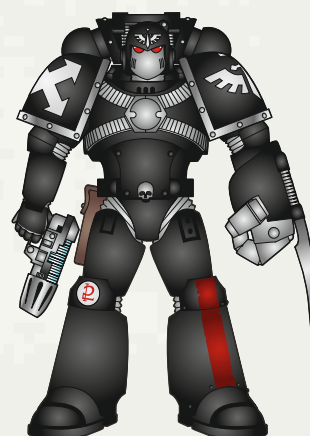
Brother Karliel seeks to burn away his guilt in the flames of battle.



Brother Athor renews his oaths to Luther with every new dawn.



Brother Khaphas delights in slaughtering loyalists with heavy firepower.



Rakhar the Blade has eviscerated many great Imperial heroes.

