

# IMPERIAL ARMOUR

## THE DOOM OF MYMEARA



**WARHAMMER**  
40,000  
EXPANSION







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# THE DOOM OF MYMEARA

**PRODUCED BY THE FORGE WORLD STUDIO**

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TRANSMISSION PROGRESS: 98% COMPLETE...  
FILE REDACTION: REMOVED - AUTHORISED BY [CLASSIFIED]...  
FILE ACCESS: ADDITIONAL DATA EXTRACTION PROCESSES COMPLETE  
TRANSMISSION PROGRESS: 100% COMPLETE  
FILE WILL REMAIN ACCESSIBLE UNTIL REVOKED UNDER ORDO XENOS MANDATE 35497/XII...

INQUISITORIAL REPORT:  
BETALIS SYSTEM CONFLICT





BE  
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<3%

BE  
(STRIPPED MAGN

THERMIAG: CORONA BOUNDARY

CORONA BOUNDARY  
500,000,000 RHEMS

HIGHLY IR  
250,000

- FORBIDDEN -  
[CLASSIFIED]

TALIS TRINARY DWARF PLANETOIDS  
INHABITABLE - GRAVITY +/- 68-90% ABOVE)  
- ORBITING GRAVITATIONAL FLUX TERMINUS>



BETALIS II  
(GAS GIANT) BINARY RING FORMATION -  
REMNANTS OF RESOURCE [CLASSIFIED]  
PRODUCTION RATE 32%

BETALIS IV  
(INDUSTRIAL WORLD/  
DEPARTAMENTO MUNITORIUM  
STAGING POINT 372/45)



TALIS-I  
(ATMOSPHERE, IRRADIATED)



BETALIS III  
(POPULATION +/- 65,001,872  
RADIATION LEVEL - 1562 RHEMS)  
PRODUCTION RATE 65%



REMNANTS OF  
DIVINE UNIFICATION MINE FIELD



REMNANTS OF  
DIVINE UNIFICATION MINE FIELD

LEVIS BOVIE  
(MACRO-COMET - ORBIT DECAYING 72KM<sup>2</sup>)  
PRODUCTION RATE +/- 3%



BETALIS SYSTEM  
HYDROGEN DOMINANT CLASS  
2.8 STELLAR MASS  
FOUR PLANETS: TWO HABITABLE  
FRINGES OF KARINA NEBULA

IRRADIATED  
1,000 RHEMS

MINIMUM TOLERANCE ZONE  
+/- 175,000,000 RHEMS

LIFE ZONE  
+/- 79,000,000 RHEMS  
18% ABOVE HUMAN TOLERANCE

BETALIS SYSTEM SURVEY:

SEGMENTUM: SOLAR

SECTOR: TALIS MUNUS

SUB-SECTOR: CAERULUS-PRIMARIS

BETALIS SYSTEM: 3 DWARF-PLANETS. 4 PLANETS  
- 2 INHABITABLE (BETALIS III AND IV)

BINARY STAR SYSTEM: THE PRIMARY STAR IS A CENTRAL MASSIVE BLUE GIANT, (LUMINOUS BLUE VARIABLE) AT LEAST 20 TIMES LARGER THAN SOL AND A MILLION TIMES MORE LUMINOUS. MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF SOLAR MATERIAL ARE EXPELLED BY THE HUGE SUN, SCOURING MOST PLANETS IN THE SYSTEM OF THEIR MAGNOSPHERES AND ATMOSPHERES, AND CREATING A MINIATURE LOCAL NEBULA - SEE THE BETALIS DUST CLOUD.



BETALIS III PLANETARY SURVEY:

POPULATION: 62,000,000 APPROX (HUMAN ONLY)

THERE IS NO MAJOR POPULATION CENTRE. INHABITANTS ARE SPREAD ACROSS THE ENTIRE SURFACE AT MINE BASES, WATER PROCESSING FACILITIES, HERDER STATIONS, HYDROPONICS WORKS, CHEMICAL WORKS, POWER PLANTS, AIRBASES AND ORBITAL LANDING FIELDS AND MANY OTHER INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES. MUCH OF THESE WORKINGS ARE SUBTERRANEAN.

CLIMATIC PHENOMENON: MAGNETIC SOLAR FLARING: THE PLANET'S UNUSUALLY POWERFUL MAGNETOSPHERE PROTECTS IT FROM THE VAST AMOUNT OF SOLAR RADIATION THROWN OUT BY THE HUGE BLUE SUN.

PLANETARY GOVERNOR:

JAMUEL ESCAVA.

ECONOMY:

PRINCIPLE EXPORTS: HIGH QUALITY IRON-ORE (LARGE MAGNETITE, HEMATITE, GOETHITE AND SIDERITE CONCENTRATIONS PRESENT).

OTHER USEFUL CHEMICALS EXTRACTED:

- CYANOGEN EXTRACTION AND REFINING, FOR USE IN CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS ON AGRI-WORLDS. PRINCIPAL EXPORT TO LEVILNOR SYSTEM. WARNING: TOXIC GAS IS COLOURLESS BUT GIVES OFF A PUNGENT ODOUR.
- HYDROGEN SULPHATE. NATURAL GAS EXTRACTION FOR FUEL.
- AMMONIA EXTRACTION REFINED INTO AMMONIA COMPOUNDS. AMMONIA-BASED FUEL, WATER PURIFICATION, SOLVENTS, TEXTILE PRODUCTION.

NOTE: AMMONIA-BASED ICE IS HIGHLY UNSTABLE. AT TEMPERATURES OVER  $-78^{\circ}\text{C}$  IT RAPIDLY BECOMES LIQUID. AT TEMPERATURES OVER  $-33^{\circ}\text{C}$  IT TURNS INTO GAS. ON BETALIS III IT IS NOT UNUSUAL TO FIND AMMONIA IN ALL THREE STATES DURING THE COURSE OF A DAY/NIGHT CYCLE.

PRINCIPAL IMPORTS: MANPOWER, FOODSTUFFS, TECHNOLOGY (SANCTIONED) AND MINING EQUIPMENT.

PRINCIPAL LOCATIONS:

- MILITARY BASES - PORT RYIRA. THE CENTRE OF BETALIS III'S DEFENCE IS KNOWN AS PORT RYIRA. ORIGINALLY A TEMPORARY BASE, IT HAS GROWN INTO A SPRAWLING FORTIFIED BARRACKS, AIRFIELD, SUPPLY CENTRE AND TRAINING FACILITY. WELL DEFENDED BY ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS, RAZORWIRE, MINEFIELDS AND VOID SHIELD GENERATORS.

## HISTORY OF BETALIS III

BETALIS III WAS DISCOVERED IN THE LATTER YEARS OF THE OMNIEL CRUSADE AS THE CRUSADE FLEET RETURNED VICTORIOUS FROM THE WARS AGAINST RENEGADE WORLDS IN THE SAINT ALTUS CONSTELLATION. WHILST PERFORMING A LONG RANGE SCAN OF THE SYSTEM, AN EXPLORATOR TEAM FROM THE CRUSADE VESSEL, THE DIVINE UNIFICATION, DISCOVERED AN ANCIENT ALIEN CRAFT. UNTIL XENO-SURVEY TEAMS COULD BE DISPATCHED TO INVESTIGATE, THE BETALIS SYSTEM WAS DEEMED OFF LIMITS TO ALL OTHER IMPERIAL VESSELS BY INQUISITORIAL SANCTION AND AN AREA EXTENDING THOUSANDS OF KILOMETRES OUT FROM THE SYSTEM WAS SEEDED WITH MINES. CONFIRMED TO BE OF ELДАР ORIGIN BY THE ORDO XENOS SURVEY TEAM SENT TO INVESTIGATE, THE CRAFT WAS RECOVERED FROM THE PLANET FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS WHILST THE BETALIS SYSTEM WAS METICULOUSLY SCoured BY HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF SERVITORS. DECADES PASSED AS THE SERVITORS PERFORMED THEIR SCANS, BUT NO FURTHER ELДАР PRESENCE COULD BE FOUND. CONCLUDING THAT THE CRAFT HAD BEEN ABANDONED AND ITS CREW HAD LEFT BY OTHER MEANS, THE ORDO XENOS CONTINGENT DEPARTED, LEAVING THE ICE BLUE BETALIS STAR TO ONCE MORE DRIFT ALONE IN THE DEPTHS OF SPACE.

SO IT WOULD HAVE REMAINED HAD NOT OTHERS OF THE IMPERIUM'S GREAT INSTITUTIONS CAST THEIR GAZE UPON IT IN THEIR NEVER-ENDING QUEST FOR RESOURCES. ALTHOUGH UNINHABITABLE FOR THE MOST PART, THE SYSTEM WAS DEEMED TO BE RICH IN ORE AND OTHER MATERIALS: RARE ELEMENTS FROM THE STELLAR MATTER OF ITS PALE BLUE SUN, HEAVY METALS FROM THE INNER PLANETS, AND GAS AND ORE FROM THE OUTER WORLDS. THE MAJORITY OF THE SYSTEM WAS TOO TOXIC TO SUPPORT LIFE BUT THE TWO OUTERMOST PLANETS - BETALIS III AND BETALIS IV - WERE CLASSIFIED FIT FOR HUMAN HABITATION.

BETALIS IV WAS DESIGNATED AN INDUSTRIAL WORLD AND OVER THE SPAN OF A CENTURY ITS SURFACE WAS COMPLETELY COVERED, BOTH LAND AND OCEAN, WITH THOUSANDS OF FORGES, REFINERIES AND MANUFACTORUMS; ITS LOCATION AT THE EDGE OF THE SYSTEM SAW IT ALSO BECOME A STAGING AREA FOR TROOPS BEING TRANSPORTED TO AND FROM THE NUMEROUS WAR ZONES IN THE SUB-SECTOR AND BEYOND.

THE COLONISATION OF BETALIS III TOOK LESS THAN FOUR DECADES TO COMPLETE. FIFTY-SEVEN MILLION IMPERIAL CITIZENS WERE SHIPPED EN-MASSÉ FROM AN OVER-CROWDED HIVE WORLD, ITS NAME AND LOCATION NOW LOST IN THE CONTINENT-SPANNING HALLS OF SECTOR RECORDS THAT EXIST WITHIN THE IMPERIUM'S VAST BUREAUCRATIC DIVISIONS. AS THE COLONISTS ARRIVED, THEY LOOKED ON IN WONDER AS THEIR TRANSPORTS SOARED OVER HUNDREDS OF KILOMETRES OF UNPOPULATED LANDSCAPE; AN ENVIRONMENT THE ANTITHESIS OF THE HUMAN-INFESTED HIVE COMPLEXES THEY HAD LEFT BEHIND.

BUT ANY WHO DARED TO VENTURE OUT ONTO BETALIS III'S SURFACE SOON SUCCUMBED TO ITS TREACHEROUS SUB-ZERO CONDITIONS OR WERE DRIVEN MAD BY AGORAPHOBIA, THE WIDE OPEN VISTAS ANATHEMA TO THE CRAMPED CONFINES HUNDREDS OF GENERATIONS OF THEIR FAMILIES HAD EVOLVED IN. THE WORKERS ALSO SOON DISCOVERED THAT THE SO CALLED 'BRAVE NEW LIVES' THEY HAD BEEN PROMISED CAME AT A HEFTY PRICE, ONE THEY WOULD HAVE TO REPAY FIRST THROUGH GENERATIONS OF SERVITUDE, TOILING AWAY IN THE MANY MINES ALREADY BEING DUG DEEP INTO THE ROCK OF THE PLANET OR IN THE NEAR SUFFOCATING HEAT AND FUMES OF RECENTLY BUILT MASSIVE SMELTING PLANTS.

SOME TWELVE GENERATIONS LATER, THEIR DESCENDANTS ARE STILL RESTRICTED TO THE PLANET BY ADMINISTRATUM MANDATE UNTIL THEIR FOREFATHERS' MASSIVE DEBT HAS BEEN PAID OFF; THE ONLY LEGITIMATE MEANS OF ESCAPING THIS FAMILIAL TOLL BEING TO SIGN UP TO ONE OF THE IMPERIAL GUARD REGIMENTS THAT FORM THE WORLD'S DEPARTMENTO MUNITORUM HUMAN TITHE.

EXTRACT FROM EXOPLANETORIUM- ANALYSIS AND HISTORY OF TALIS MUNYS SECTOR



DATE: 023894.M41/234  
FACILITY: TERRUM IV REFINERY  
LOCATION: 378.610.689  
CASUALTIES: 52 INJURED, 9 DEAD  
STATUS: SUB PIPE 323B; JUNCTION 7 AT 75% FLOW RATE FOR TWO HOURS - NOW REPAIRED  
CONCLUSION: CHEMICAL LEAK DUE TO DEGRADED VALVE

DATE: 023894.M41/239  
FACILITY: ALPHAS SULPHUR QUARRY  
LOCATION: 399.485.421  
CASUALTIES: 78 SERVITOR-TECHS CURRENTLY INACTIVE  
STATUS: TOXIC DISPERSION RATE - 73%, REPAIRS PROCEEDING - 45%  
CONCLUSION: CORROSION TO EXPOSED SYSTEMS FROM SULPHURIC FUME-FOG

DATE: 023894.M41/365  
FACILITY: ALNITAC REFINERY (GAMMA V ARC)  
LOCATION: 683.750.122  
CASUALTIES: 1,410 CONFIRMED CASES OF CRUD POX  
STATUS: EPIDEMIC CONTAINED  
CONCLUSION: IMMOLATION OF HAB-BLOCK 12 HAS ERADICATED OUTBREAK

DATE: 023894.M41/435  
FACILITY: ARESTA IV MINE-FORGE COMPLEX - NETWORK TUNNEL ALPHA THREE  
LOCATION: 789.692.089  
CASUALTIES: 42 DEAD - NON-RECOVERABLE  
STATUS: FACILITY OPERATIONS UNAFFECTED  
CONCLUSION: IGNITION OF PYRMEAN ORE VEIN DURING DRILLING OF TEST SHAFT

DATE: 023894.M41/436  
FACILITY: ADMINISTRATUM STORAGE FACILITY - BLOCKS 4789/4799  
LOCATION: 099.851.053  
CASUALTIES: 29 MINOR INJURIES; 16 FATALITIES; 182 ARRESTED  
STATUS: RIOTERS DISPERSED WITH USE OF EXTREME FORCE BY LOCAL DEFENCE UNITS.  
CONCLUSION: 201.5 PAIRS OF STANDARD ISSUE FOOTWEAR AMONGST ITEMS REPORTED MISSING FOLLOWING MASS LOOTING BY GENERAL POPULACE

DATE: 023894.M41/441  
FACILITY: MOLIER GLACIER WELLHEAD  
LOCATION: 218.858.372  
CASUALTIES: 58 FATALITIES  
STATUS: 38,323 BOLTSMANN2 PER HOUR  
CONCLUSION: OVERFLOW DISCHARGED INTO SURROUNDING SUMP PITS - CURRENTLY 68% CAPACITY.

[\*] CONFIRMED THE ICONOGRAPHY ON THE HULL OF THE VESSEL MATCHES THAT OF THE MYMEARA CRAFTWORLD [\*CLASSIFIED - THETA III ACCESS REQUIRED].

<23/439.M41> [MICRO FRACTURES CAUSED BY THE DORSAL MACRO CANNON OF THE ADEPTUS MECHANICUS RESEARCH VESSEL VERBRUGGEN'S FULCRUM WEAKENED OUTER ARMOUR OF THE XENOS-CRAFT ENOUGH FOR DEUTERIUM CHARGES TO RUPTURE AN OPENING SUFFICIENT FOR A TYPE VII EXPLORATOR-SERVITOR TO ENTER] [MINIMAL DAMAGE TO XENOS-CRAFT SAVE SURFACE CHARRING] [ARCAS FIELD IMMEDIATELY RAISED AROUND VESSEL TO SLOW DETONATION INITIATED BY CRAFT'S INTERNAL DEFENCE MECHANISMS] [4% OF VESSEL IN PROCESS OF EXPLODING]

<25/439.M41> [ASSESSMENT OF CRAFT HAMPERED BY CONTINUING DEGRADATION OF ARCAS FIELD] [18% OF VESSEL NOW IN PROCESS OF DETONATING] [AFT DEBRIS FIELD HAS EXTENDED 0.012M BEYOND VESSEL] [TEMPERATURE WITHIN OBSERVATION-LAB 67 HAS RISEN BY 72 DEGREES BEYOND HUMAN TOLERANCE] [EXPLORATOR-SERVITOR DATA NOW PENETRATING ARCAS FIELD - TRANSMITTING AT <322 MICRO BYTES/HOUR] [NO XENOS PRESENCE WITHIN VESSEL DETECTED] [ESTIMATED AGE OF CRAFT - >5,000+] [INTERNAL SYSTEMS CONSISTENT WITH ELДАР TECHNOLOGY] [DETECTION OF BIO-PLASTIC MATERIALS CONFIRMED]

<26/439.M41> [68% OF VESSEL NOW IN PROCESS OF DETONATION] [TOTAL DEBRIS FIELD EXTENDS 12M BEYOND VESSEL] [TEMPERATURE WITHIN OBSERVATION-LAB 455 DEGREES BEYOND HUMAN TOLERANCE] [CREW EVACUATED] [EXPLORATOR-SERVITOR DATA COMPILED - SERVITOR DESTROYED FOUR HOURS BEFORE FINAL TRANSMISSION RECEIVED] [IMAGE 12C - PANEL 1 - DRIVE SYSTEMS IDENTIFIED] [IMAGE 12D - PANEL 2 - NAVIGATION SYSTEMS IDENTIFIED] [IMAGE 12E - 30% RECEIVED - UNABLE TO IDENTIFY] [DATA FORWARDED TO MARS DATA POINT FOR ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS AS PER TREATY 552]

PAGE 24/56



SOURCE: VEGA RESEARCH STATION, DAMOCLES SECTOR  
TRANSMISSION PATH: 0103110∞  
21012001∞40010201001  
TRANSMISSION UNIT:  
TECH-PRIEST MYDEAUS  
INSTRUCTION: REDEPLOYMENT TO  
BETALIS SYSTEM  
INITIAL ENTITY:  
INQUISITOR-LORD DANZK  
AUTHORITY: OFFICES OF THE  
ORDO XENOS

<ORIGINAL MESSAGE - DANZK>  
CEASE CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND  
REPORT TO 327.238.123.234.

<TRANSMISSION UNIT - MYDEAUS>  
CONFIRMED. REDIRECTING TO  
BETALIS SYSTEM. ESTIMATED  
ARRIVAL 12 TERRAN DAYS.

<END>



CHAPTER ONE  
**GHOSTS  
IN THE  
SHADOWS**



The countless wars fought in the name of the God-Emperor and the galaxy-spanning Imperium of Mankind rarely begin with the deafening roar of a massed Imperial Guard artillery barrage or the earth-shaking footfalls of world-striding Titans. Most are simply heralded by the sound of a single shot or a desperate cry for help in the darkness of an uncaring galaxy.

The war for Betalis III began with silence.

## OPENING MOVES

### 024894.M41

Located deep within the glacial fields of Betalis III's eastern continent, Relay Station NX87-04 formed part of the global surveillance network that kept permanent watch over the ice world's vast uninhabitable wastelands. That it had functioned without issue for centuries in such harsh conditions was a testament to the consummate skills of the Adeptus Mechanicus Tech-Priests who had seeded the planet with scores of such installations during its transformation into an Imperium mining colony. On the eve of its four hundred and fifth year of perfect operation, the relay station abruptly ceased transmitting.

The logis-adept monitoring the relay station thousands of kilometres away at the planet's spaceport, Port Ryira, instantly went into cerebral shock and let out a soul-piercing scream; the sudden loss of data collapsing its higher brain functions which had been exclusively devoted to processing NX87-04's constant stream of tech-scripts and binary ciphers its entire life. Its death cry sent a shock wave through the living, breathing bio-processor it was physically and mentally connected to, rendering five other adepts catatonic and leaving vast tracts of the planet's eastern-most continent unmonitored until repairs could be affected and the damaged bio-components replaced.

On a world where temperatures had been sub-zero for millennia and lethal ice storms whipped up with little warning, the malfunction of NX87-04 was initially blamed on local conditions, and it was left to the trans-mechanic specialists of the Adeptus Mechanicus on-site to resolve the issue and revive the relay station's machine spirit. It was only when a Sentinel patrol from a nearby garrison was ordered to investigate the still silent facility two days later that the isolated relay station was found to have been attacked and destroyed; the frozen bodies of its massacred trans-mechanics were lain scattered throughout the station's charred remains, their horrific injuries consistent with those caused by monofilament projectile weapons. A report of the patrol's grisly discovery was immediately dispatched to Port Ryira and as alarms blared throughout the facility, the planet's defence forces steeled themselves for further attacks.

Over the weeks that followed, the ice world's global surveillance network was targeted by more raids; each facility being attacked under the cover of darkness and with little, if any, warning. The motive for the attacks completely eluded Betalis III's Planetary Governor, Jamuel Escava, and the representatives of the noble mining

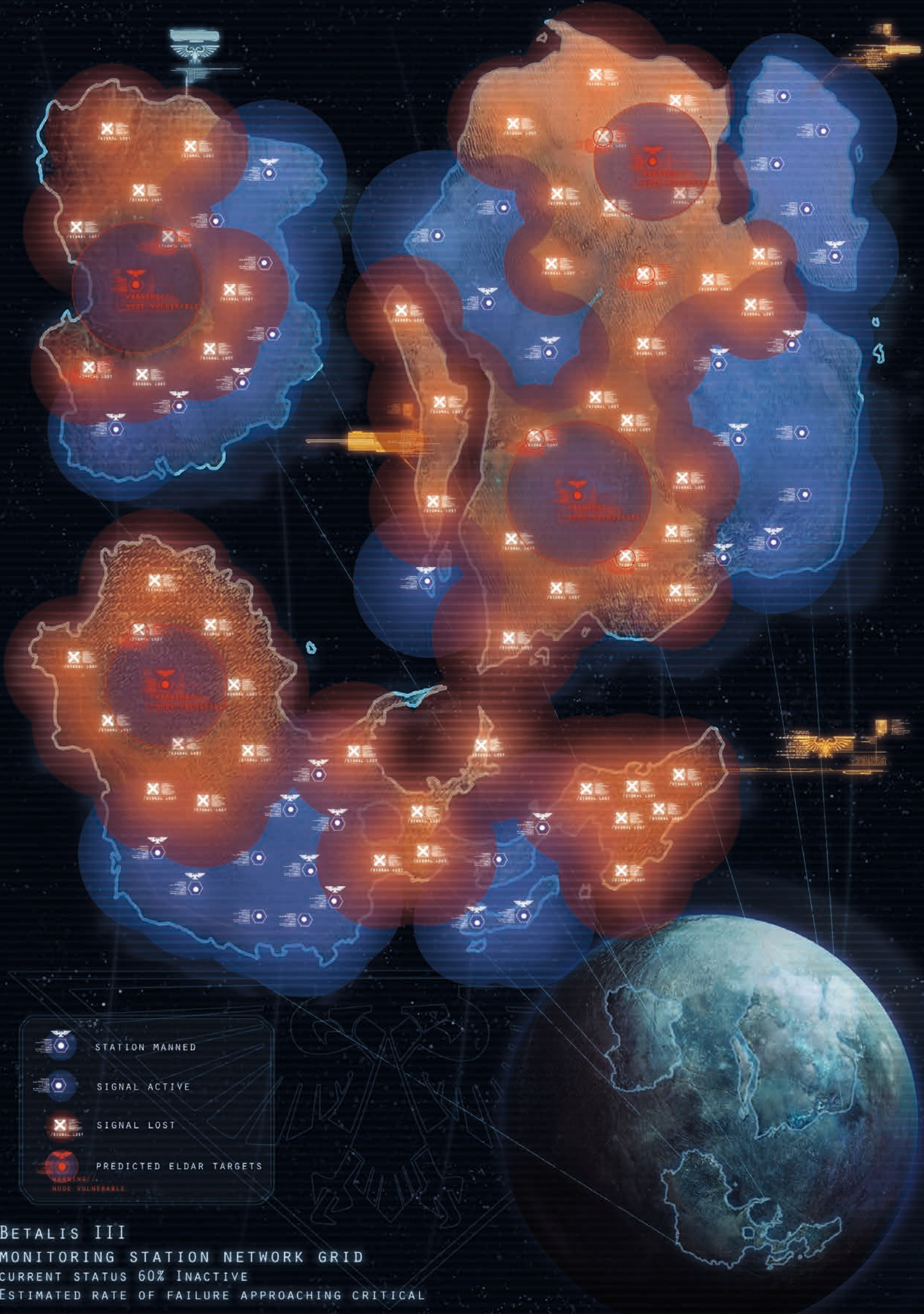
families who oversaw production on the ice world; the planet was of little strategic importance and of only minor economic worth to the sub-sector.

Aside from the sixty-two million citizen-workers and their families living in settlements clustered around the planet's ore mines and refineries, and the fifteen thousand Administratum support staff based at Port Ryira, the planet was a desolate wasteland devoid of life. One of only two planets fit for habitation in the system, it was a stark contrast to the neighbouring industrial world of Betalis IV. Even the aristocratic families granted mining charters on Betalis III generations before by the Administratum rarely visited their distant dominion. Instead their will was imposed by hundreds of petty bureaucrats, prefects and stewards charged with meeting the planet's annual Administratum tithes and ensuring that every last bit of profit possible after that was ground from the planet's bedrock and the unfortunate souls who lived upon it.

The escalating raids were quickly attributed to the Eldar Corsairs that the system's Imperial Navy fleet had previously encountered in the Betalis system's outer asteroid belt and the Karina Nebula beyond it. The Corsairs, identified as being aligned to the Void Dragons cadre, had posed a serious threat in the past to the colonists of Betalis III, launching attacks upon isolated communities whenever the opportunity had presented itself. Regular patrols by the system's fleet had kept them in check in recent years, but it was now obvious from the increasing sightings reported by the crews of cargo transports travelling to and from the system that those circumstances had changed.

Meanwhile, on Betalis III, as the profile of the raids on the ice world differed little from the Corsairs' modus operandi, Planetary Governor Escava dispatched his forces as he had done previously. Now, though, these were joined by men from the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment, elements of which had been recently transferred to the planet to undergo hostile environment training. With their skills and experience, Planetary Governor Escava desperately hoped that maybe the fighting men of Cadia would put an end to this persistent problem once and for all.

Even with the aid of the vastly more experienced Cadian squads, hunting down the raiders was not as simple a matter as Planetary Governor Escava thought. As soon as a report of a raid was received, the Guardsmen were dispatched in squadrons of Arvus Lighters across the frozen landscape. Of the raiding party though there would be no sign, only the destruction it had wrought upon yet another relay station or isolated outpost an indication of its passing. On the rare occasion, there were survivors, they rarely provided intelligence of any use. Those who lived long enough to speak of their ordeal were terrified beyond rational sense, babbling incoherently about '*lights in the darkness*' before mercifully succumbing to their wounds.



	STATION MANNED
	SIGNAL ACTIVE
	SIGNAL LOST
	PREDICTED ELДАР TARGETS
	WARNING... NODE VULNERABLE

BETALIS III  
 MONITORING STATION NETWORK GRID  
 CURRENT STATUS 60% INACTIVE  
 ESTIMATED RATE OF FAILURE APPROACHING CRITICAL

### **THE CADIAN 6<sup>TH</sup> ARMoured REGIMENT**

Betalis III's defence forces during the Eldar incursion were centred around the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment. It comprised good quality Guardsmen, both battle hardened and well trained, drawn from the strong martial traditions of its home world.

Prior to its transfer to the Betalis system, the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> had been a part of Army Group Pious, created to halt the predations of Waaagh! Ugblitz. The Ork warlord and its five-year rampage through the Saras sector was finally defeated in a battle lasting nearly two years. It saw millions of Guardsmen valiantly sacrificing their lives against the massive Ork horde that had been drawn to the war zone by the notorious warlord's previous victories. The Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> itself had been reduced to less than a half of its original strength during the conflict; a loss it was still recovering from when redeployed to Betalis III.

This horrific game of cat and mouse was to go on for weeks; the planet's overseers and stewards voicing their concerns ever louder with each attack, fearful that the situation would soon hamper their ability to meet the mining cartels' Administratum obligations. And so it might have continued had not greater military minds been watching events unfold on Betalis III from afar.

### **THE RETURN OF A WARRIOR**

#### **032894.M41**

A month after the attack on Relay Station NX87-04, a shuttlecraft set down on the primary landing strip at Port Ryira. Onboard was General Myndoras Odon, commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cadian Armoured Regiment and a decorated veteran of over thirty campaigns fought in the name of the Emperor. Recovering from injuries he'd received whilst commanding the regiment in its successful defence of the agri-world, Saras VII, the general had abruptly cut short his rehabilitation, giving only two hours notice of his impending arrival to the now nervously waiting Planetary Governor Escava.

Striding past the fawning diplomats from the mining cartels who had hastily gathered to greet him, the general's first action was to reassume command of all divisions of the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> garrisoned on the planet. Bowing to the general's superior military expertise, some might suggest almost too eagerly, Planetary Governor Escava put the planet's defence forces at the Imperial Guard commander's disposal.

Only a few hours behind the general's ship but already filling long-range pict-screens at Port Ryira was an armada of vessels, onboard which was the remainder of the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment. Their headquarters had been temporarily based on the system's primary planet, Betalis IV, and the general had issued orders whilst en-route that they were to redeploy to Betalis III; his assessment of the situation was that events unfolding on the planet were serious enough to warrant their immediate relocation.

General Odon's long years of tactical training and battlefield experience had led him to conclude that the seemingly indiscriminate attacks were neither random nor the actions of opportunists taking advantage of what the general saw as a woefully defended system; an abomination he would be taking up with the commanders of its Imperial Navy fleet forthwith. Each attack had been planned by minds infinitely greater than those they had been toying with and were undoubtedly, in his opinion, part of a much wider initiative. Although none of the facilities attacked were directly connected, by plotting the raids and then projecting where the next one would most likely occur, General Odon had realised that a tipping point would soon be reached where Betalis III's entire global surveillance network would be rendered inoperative with the removal of just four more relay stations thousands of kilometres apart from each other. With the planet unmonitored, and units from the 6<sup>th</sup> Cadian Armoured Regiment and planetary defence forces spread too thin across its surface chasing ghosts, the world would be utterly unprepared for the much larger invasion General Odon believed the attacks were a prelude to. Betalis III's custodians had been foolishly dancing to someone else's tune and General Odon had arrived to put a stop to it.

Knowing that time was a precious commodity he could now ill afford to waste and with not enough men or armament to protect the entire planet, General Odon ordered that all Imperial Guard and planetary defence forces be recalled from the less populated southern and western continents with immediate effect. This raised a heated storm of protests from the cartels' representatives who feared what would happen if they lost the total control they currently exerted over the belligerent population, still bitter over what they saw as the 'twisted' promises made to their ancestors centuries before. If the workers were not kept in check it was feared that riots would soon break out, affecting production rates and preventing the cartels from meeting the planet's stringent Administratum tithe.

But during times of war rarely do the priorities of the common man, their Imperial overseers and the might of the military concur, and whilst the cartels petitioned furiously for him to rescind his order, the general had far greater concerns. He believed that what they would all soon face was far worse than a barely restrained militant population or the Administratum's vast chapters of auditors and bureaucrats. General Odon suspected that whoever was behind the raids was already massing their forces in the unmonitored glacial wastelands, and should they gain a foothold on Betalis III, then the infinitely more valuable industrial world and staging point of Betalis IV would be their next target. Betalis III was nothing more than a stepping stone, in his eyes, to the indispensable strategic gem that hung in its heavens.

### **THE DIE IS CAST**

#### **040894.M41**

The decision to recall the Imperial Guard squads from the southern and western continents achieved far more than a storm of protests from the planet's prefects, it also

provoked the enemy into action, something General Odon had been counting on.

As the last Guardsmen were shuttled back to Port Ryira, a cargo vessel flying supplies between the mining facilities on the southern ice plains of the continent was attacked and destroyed. Before his ship disappeared from Port Ryira's screens, the pilot relayed back a single pict-image of his pursuers. It showed two sleek craft clearly of Eldar origin, each with their weapons illuminated with an unearthly glow as they powered up to blast the cargo ship from the skies.

The message from the planet's assailants was loud and clear. The war for Betalis III had begun.

### **THE SEARCH FOR ARMS AND ARMOUR**

Even with thousands of Astra Militarum regiments in a constant state of readiness, the wheels of bureaucracy within the Departmento Munitorum grind monumentally slowly. The order for the Hammer of the Emperor to strike may not be issued for weeks, months or even years once a request for aid is first received as it makes its way through the seemingly endless chain of command. Those seeking assistance are therefore wise to look to their own defence in case they do not receive reinforcements in time or at all. Therefore, invoking his full powers as Consul Militant of the Betalis system, a position granted to him upon his return to active service, General Odon first issued a system wide decree that all resources, both military and otherwise, were now part of the building war effort. Attached to this decree was notice that anyone who dared to object would be swiftly transferred to the ranks of the Arbites penal battalion, charged as traitors for supporting the Eldar cause.

As the superior military force on the planet, the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment would form the core of the army, but what the

regiment delivered in terms of experience and ability, it lacked in equipment. It was sorely in need of tanks and had only half of its usual complement available. The remainder had not yet been replaced after they were destroyed in the war against the Orks on Saras VII.

The Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment's officers first scoured Betalis III for anything with tracks and armour they could use. All of Betalis III's heavy armour, what little there was of it, was immediately stripped from the planetary defence force and added to that of the Cadian regiment, along with its squadrons of Malcador 'Infernus' flamer tanks and Crassus armoured assault transports.

General Odon's next action was to gain consensus from the system's Imperial Navy commander that all non-essential flights be grounded on the planet to protect what little air support he would have to call upon during the conflict. The Imperial Navy's small defensive air fleet comprised little more than a squadron of Marauder Destroyers and another of Thunderbolts, with the majority of its 'civilian' craft being Arvus cargo shuttles and bulk transports. General Odon knew that the Eldar would first and foremost seek superiority in the skies before committing any ground troops. With little to match their craft in terms of speed or manoeuvrability, this would be a hard battle for the Betalis system fleet, but one it would participate in regardless.

Then the general's staff turned their attention to the colonists of the ice world. The planetary governor had been in the process of building up and training recruits to meet the planet's Departmento Munitorum manpower tithes. The recruits, men and women mostly drawn from the planetary defence force and workers militia, had been given the temporary title of the 28<sup>th</sup> Betalis Rifles. They had virtually no equipment or heavy weapons, but had already undergone training with the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> and were



considered battle ready. General Odon gave the order for their reassignment. These near-raw recruits had little experience but he needed the manpower. If nothing else, they would free up more experienced Guardsmen from garrison and security duties. Their commander, Colonel Empteda, was a capable and loyal officer who had achieved good results in training the conscripts, and General Odon saw no need to replace him.

The search for more troops also led directly to the cells of the Adeptus Arbites. The life of the common man of the Imperium is rarely an easy one. War and disease take all too many from the Emperor's Light too soon and those who survive will likely endure such hardships that each day is a constant struggle with little reward or comfort other than what they can take, whether willingly or otherwise, from another.

On Betalis III, the descendants of the original colonists survived their grim existence with their ancestors' bitter hatred for their overseers bred deep into their psyche. With absolute control over their lives, the cartels' enforcers made sure there was little time between work shifts for them to dwell upon their discontentment. Still though, tempers regularly ran high and even minor scuffles or disagreements frequently escalated into riots among the general populace, and the swift, harsh penalties dealt out for even the smallest infraction meant there was rarely a cell empty in the many Arbites compounds on the world. It was to these that the general's staff turned next, and each prisoner, regardless of his or her crime or sentence, was armed and given the chance to redeem themselves.

The final addition to the burgeoning defence force was the primary mining cartel family's personal guard. The absent cartel family's representative on the planet, Lord-steward Vlaar, was a practical man, who recognised that the sooner the Eldar threat was removed from Betalis III, the quicker normal operations would resume. The cartel's personal guard consisted of a thousand troops granted for ceremonial duties and protection should the members of the noble mining family who owned the Administratum mandate ever visit. The guard looked smart on the parade ground and had their own squadrons of Leman Russ and Chimeras, but like the Betalis 28<sup>th</sup> had never seen any combat action. The general's staff took them anyway. In return, Lord-steward Vlaar lobbied for and, to the surprise of many of the rival cartel families' representatives, was given the rank of colonel.

Having exhausted what little Betalis III could offer, the general's staff then turned to other sources of manpower. Neighbouring Betalis IV, also now on high alert, was currently the staging point of the Vaust 14<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment. The Vaustian commander was ordered to turn control of the regiment over to the Cadians; theirs was the senior force and the needs of the Betalis system overrode his previous orders. The regiment comprised men conscripted from Vaust's hive gangs and workers, and although they lacked the Cadians' tradition of service and sacrifice, the regiment

was well-equipped with Chimeras and Leman Russ. It also had a heavy tank company of ageing but fully-functional Macharius battle tanks. These would be essential, especially as the Cadians had little in the way of truly heavy armament, just a few surviving battle-worn squadrons of Baneblades, Stormblades and Shadowswords.

A flotilla of vessels used by the mining cartels had already been prepared for the regiment's immediate transfer when its young colonel, in command of the regiment through nothing but sheer fluke of birthright, sent his response. Although he sympathised with the predicament that General Odon faced, he would not deviate from his original orders until sector command sent new instructions. The Vaust 14<sup>th</sup> would stay on Betalis IV. A skirmish on some backwater planet was not part of the Vaustian colonel's current concerns.

## THE INTERVENTION

### 048894.M41

The defiance of the Vaust 14<sup>th</sup>'s commander ended with the arrival of Inquisitor-lord Hestaphus Dankz at Port Ryira. The Inquisitor-lord, an agent of the great institution of the Ordo Xenos, swept into General Odon's command room unannounced and unchallenged. Accompanying the Inquisitor-lord was his retinue: three Cadian Guardsmen, an Adeptus Mechanicus Tech-Priest upon whose arm perched a huge black bird, cables from the implants upon its skull linking it with its creator, and two Ogryns. Dragged between the two megalithic thugs was the pitiful sight of the disgraced young Vaustian colonel, all evidence of his former rank ripped unceremoniously from his soiled uniform.

Ordered by his superiors to investigate the growing reports of Eldar in the system, Inquisitor-lord Dankz had been enroute to Betalis III when he had intercepted the young colonel's complaints to his commanders regarding General Odon's orders. Diverting to Betalis IV, Dankz had arrested the colonel and his entire command staff, and sentenced them to serve in the newly formed Arbites penal battalion until the end of the war.

The Vaust 14<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment was immediately redeployed to Betalis III and within days their Leman Russ, Chimeras, Macharius and Ogryn Auxilia Company were reassigned to reinforce the Cadian squads. Some of the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment's officers were also distributed throughout the new regiment's ranks, replacing the inexperienced officers drawn from the hive world's ruling families with much more experienced Cadian sergeants and veterans. Commissars were also posted amongst the platoons to quash any dissent with their customary finality.

As well as providing a solution to the army's lack of ground troops, the Inquisitor-lord had also called upon other resources, some even the new Consul Militant did not have access to. Also in the vicinity of the Betalis system was a convoy destined for the Yarant system, containing a Titan transport of the Legio Gryphoncus – the War Griffons.

*Daetalus Astara, first son of the 321<sup>st</sup> House of Vaust and Colonel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Vaust Armoured Regiment, looked down disapprovingly from the balcony of his temporary headquarters as his regiment lined itself up on the make-shift landing strip parade ground. Already amongst them he could make out his new 'advisors' poking around. Recently posted to the regiment, they had done nothing but criticise and lecture him since their arrival, babbling on about the need to better train his men and follow the tenets of the *Tactica Imperialis*. He had considered their comments to be both insulting to one of such noble birth as he and also a complete waste of his time. No, he would not listen to these 'advisors', nor would he listen to that old fool who had just begged him to bring his army to Betalis III. Colonel Daetalus had decided to follow his original orders. They sounded more interesting than fighting against some race called the Eldar he'd never heard of.*

*It was then he saw that damned mangy bird again. The evil-looking creature had been flying around the regiment's temporary barracks all morning, and he was beginning to feel like it was following him. It reminded him of the spire-vultures back on his home world of Vaust. Black as night and a nuisance to all and sundry, he had attended many hunts to rid his family's territories of their disgusting presence. Now here was some degenerate blood-cousin of theirs picking and fidgeting at something in its feathers at the far end of the balcony, but keeping one beady, bright green eye fixed on him, although Daetalus could have just sworn that it momentarily switched to black as it blinked. Suddenly, the bird stretched out its massive wings and flew straight at him.*

*In a blur its talons slashed and clawed at his face and it was all he could do to protect himself. Dashing for the door, Daetalus slammed it behind him. The nightmare though was far from over. Against the far wall of the room knelt his command staff, hands on their heads and gazes focussed intently on anywhere but the lasguns trained on them by men Astara did not recognise as his own. Across the office stood an old man intently studying*

*the Betalis system map that hung on the wall there, pointing out features upon it to another, hunched and half his height and dressed in a rough, brown cloak and robe. Daetalus Astara, first son of the 321<sup>st</sup> House of Vaust and Colonel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Vaust Armoured Regiment, had seen enough.*

*"Who in the name of the Sk..." Astara began, the unmistakable sound of lasguns preparing to fire on either side of him instantly silencing him. Astara paused and risked turning his head first one way and then the other, finding himself staring down the wrong end of a lasgun on either side. A subtle flick of the second gun barrel indicated he should return his gaze forwards.*

*The man, an ancient figure with skin the colour of grox-leather, was staring straight at him. As he dismissed his companion, who scurried out the far door, it suddenly dawned on Astara who the old man was and more importantly what he represented. He wore a floor length robe unmistakably decorated with symbols that Astara had only seen in the highly classified briefings on the Tyrannic Wars his regiment were due to be shipped off to. The man was of the Ordo Xenos; he was an Inquisitor-lord.*

*It was his eyes though that then gained Astara's full attention as the venerable man strode towards him. They were not the rheumy eyes of the old, instead they were a metallic silver and like the bird's, his irises were a brilliant green which flicked to black and back again when he blinked. Only once he was standing directly before Daetalus, did the Inquisitor-lord finally speak.*

*'Daetalus Astara. First son of the 321<sup>st</sup> House of Vaust and Colonel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Vaust Armoured Regiment, I am Lord Hestaphus Danzk, Inquisitor of the Ordo Xenos.*

*You are charged with disobeying the direct orders of a senior officer and purposefully withholding a regiment of the Emperor. I have found you guilty on all counts. You will now atone for your sins.'*

General Odon forwarded an astropathic request to the War Griffons' home world requesting its temporary reassignment. The request was approved and, in addition, a strike force of Elysian Drop Troops accompanying the convoy was also diverted. The Elysians, under the command of a Captain Isarta, would provide their own airborne transports and form a mobile reserve for the defence force. Enroute to the system, Inquisitor-lord Danzk had also petitioned the Space Wolves Chapter for aid. There had been reports of their presence in a neighbouring system, and if the Space Marines heeded the call for reinforcements, then their added might would see a formidable force assembled for the defence of the planet.

With all available options exhausted and the Eldar Corsairs now openly mounting daylight raids on the other two continents, their populations left to fend for themselves by the order of the general, the Betalis III defence force was split into three battle groups.

Colonel Empteda would take command of the first. His battle group was ordered to immediately head to the Bregan Glacier. The glacier loomed over the entrance to the Tarundor Peninsula, and if it were to fall into enemy hands then movement on and off the peninsula, where the Imperium's forces were based, would be severely restricted. It was essential that it was in Imperial hands before the war began.

Meanwhile, the two other battle groups would remain on alert at Port Ryira. Only when the full scale of the enemy's forces and its intentions were absolutely clear would the largest battle group, led by General Myndoras Odon, deploy. The last of the three battle groups, commanded by Colonel Vlaar, would remain at the space port unless the deployment of its reserve forces was deemed absolutely necessary.

Until that time, the defenders of the ice world of Betalis III prepared for war.



Ryza Pattern Leman Russ Battle Tank. This vehicle is typical of the Imperial Guard armoured support units attached to Company Retribution during their deployment to the Tormus Delta.



Modified Ryza Pattern Leman Russ Exterminator of the Vaust 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment. The Exterminators' primary autocannon armament proved particularly effective against fast-moving Eldar skimmers.



Minotaur Super-heavy Artillery Tank. Several ancient vehicles of this type were stored within the Betalis System's defence armories and diverted to the use of the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment for the duration of the conflict.

ORDO XENOS DEPARTMENTO ANALYTICUS RECORD

RESTRICTED

ARCHIVE

File: 99874322/x3 - EPN31953

Date: 475748.M41

Author: Adept Fortunas, 3rd rank Xenos-cartographer

Jurisdiction: Pious system

Title: The Karina Nebula - Fable, Folly and Foolishness



The Karina Nebula has presented a perplexing mystery to those of our Order since its discovery. It is a celestial anomaly, one that few scholars would dare risk their reputations on and for which only one theory for its existence has ever been officially submitted. Unfortunately, very little of the Logistician-general Alberas Karina's work has survived and we are unable to validate his hypothesis due to his untimely demise, brought about by agents of the Ecclesiarchy.

Once a celebrated Logistician-general of the Galactica Collegae, Karina's previous work on nebulae had brought eminent prestige to the institution. However, when he began his analysis of the Betalis Dust Cloud, the scholar developed a near-fanatical obsession with the folklore of its surrounding civilisations. This affected his mind so greatly that he retreated within his study cell and appeared so rarely that some of his peers began to consider him dead. When he finally did reappear, the scholar declared that he had solved the mystery of the Betalis Dust Cloud, proclaiming to all who would listen that within it was a colossal alien craft drawing forth the star's celestial matter to shroud and mask its location and identity.

When challenged by his horrified colleagues, concerned that he was risking not just his reputation but also perhaps his life and theirs having already drawn the Ecclesiarchy's attention with his wild claims, Alberas explained that the answer laid in the region's mythologies. Some, he had found, mentioned a time when the constellations had disappeared one after the other from their heavens, only for them to return again days later as if something immense had passed in front of them. They were not alone and there were many similar tales amongst other civilisations in planetary systems for light years around them. But it was the apocalyptic mythology he stumbled upon in a series of ancient Imperium trader logs regarding five civilisations in the same solar system which had confirmed his suspicions. Their populations feared that one day what they referred to as the 'City of the Sky Gods' would return; a heaven-borne vessel so large it had blocked out their sun and caused massive earthquakes which had threatened to wipe out their primitive societies.

Believing that the texts he had found described the voyage of a massive xenos star-vessel, Alberas plotted its segmentum-long route and found that it led to the exact centre of the Betalis Dust Cloud. On the verge of potentially one of the greatest discoveries of his career, it was then that Alberas made his fatal error. Presenting his theory to the Collegae's faculty, the logistician-general compared the technological achievement of the alien race to the miracles performed by the greatest saints of the Imperium and even the Emperor himself. Enraged at what they considered absolute blasphemy, Ecclesiarchal representatives present at the meeting seized Alberas and charged the entire Galactica Collegae faculty with sedition for harbouring a heretic.

Determining that only the Emperor's holy fire would cleanse the Collegae of its crimes, they burned its hundreds of buildings to the ground. Twelve days later when the last embers from the fire storm had died, of its hallowed halls and wise scholars only ash remained with Alberas Karina just one amongst the missing hundreds of thousands.

Without his research, we are therefore unable to verify whether Karina's claims were those of a genius or a madman. The few explorer teams who have attempted to explore the nebula have been unable to penetrate far within its hazy layers, most being forced to retreat due to their vessels experiencing systems failures once within the toxic cloud. Others have simply never returned at all.

DATE.....

SIGNATURE.....

SUMMARY: See also File ref 3847923495/xdx - Interrogation of Heretic Karina. Intercepted mid-transmission.  
Artemus Relay Facility, Martyrs Drift.



# CHAPTER TWO

## The Silence Ends

### 053894.M41

The colossal blue star of the Betalis system was an ancient traveller. It had passed across the western spiral arms of the galaxy for billions of years trailed by a ghostly shroud, and had figured in the myths and legends of the region in many guises. To the worlds of the Pashek Consortium, it was the all-seeing eye of a terrifying cyclopean god that constantly watched and judged their every move. But to the Bad Moon Ork Warlord Gobteef Fangmaw, it had been a huge sparkling jewel dropped by the Ork god Gork (or possibly Mork) himself. Driven by his insatiable greed to possess the star-sized gem, the Ork warlord had swept across the sector at the head of a gargantuan Waaagh! millions of Orks strong; his murderous rampage only being halted when he was slain by a rival Goff Ork warlord.

To the Imperium, the Betalis star was none of these things. What they found instead when their survey ships examined and catalogued it was just another seething ball of plasma and radiation like so many others within the Emperor's domain. The star was nothing more than a minor sun that had been spewing its stellar matter out into the voids of

space for millennia before it converged together again in a vast cloud of star dust nearly a light year away.

Known as the Karina Nebula, the Betalis Dust Cloud or simply EPN31953 by Imperial xeno-cartographers, to the Eldar the hazy expanse was the Maiden's Veil. Nothing more than an insignificant smudge on the star charts of the Imperial Navy, to the fathomless minds of the Eldar it was a place avoided by those few who lived upon the Craftworlds who were privy to its terrible secret. But for the young Eldar who sought a life free of the restrictions and constraints of the Eldar star palaces, it held no such fear. Instead for millennia it drew them like moths to a flame to join other such outcasts of their slowly dying race within its gossamer veil, and where now a massive Corsair fleet was massing in preparation for its assault upon the Betalis system.

### EYES WIDE IN THE WILDERNESS

The destruction of Betalis III's global surveillance network by the Eldar Corsairs put General Odon's forces at a serious disadvantage. Without it, vast stretches of the



eastern continent could not be monitored, nor could they rely on assistance from the orbiting Imperial Navy defence platforms. The platforms' sensors had been designed to penetrate the highly reflective stellar matter that poured through the system from the Betalis sun. It would require many days of delicate recalibration by tech-adepts before they could be refocused on the planet, let alone provide images of sufficient quality for the battle groups' commanders to use.

Again Inquisitor-lord Danzk provided the solution. Amongst his retinue was an Adeptus Mechanicus Tech-Priest, Mydeaus, whom the Inquisitor-lord had rescued over thirty years before from a Chaos cultist uprising on the hive world of Hemisphere. With the relay stations and power systems of the surveillance network damaged too far beyond even the Tech-Priest's ability to repair by the Eldar raids, he set to work on an alternative. Working without rest for two days and nights, the Tech-Priest put the now redundant monitoring system at Port Ryira to a new purpose. From its bio-mechanical components he created

scores of surveillance servitors, mostly static devices but some even capable of low level flight. These were then distributed to key locations across the eastern continent by the Inquisitor's retinue; the three Cadians and Tech-Priest facing the very real risk of discovery at any moment by the increasing patrols mounted by Eldar jetbike squadrons.

Within hours of the last of the devices being activated, the full scale of the Eldar incursion was realised. Monitoring the feeds from the servitors on the banks of pict-screens in his command Chimera, Inquisitor-lord Danzk informed General Odon that the defenders of Betalis III faced not one but two massive Eldar battle hosts.

### THE BATTLE FOR THE BETALIS SYSTEM

The early warning systems on the *Watchful Saviour*, Betalis III's primary orbiting defence platform, burst into life as the Corsair armada crossed into the system's outer reaches. As one, the dour robed figures of its choir rose up from their ornately carved wooden stalls and began to chant the *Canticle of the Observant Son* – the low droning call to



arms a sombre contrast to the shrieking sirens that had also been triggered by the approach of the enemy ships.

Far above them in the *Watchful Saviour's* towering spires, its gun crews prepared for battle. Scores of Imperial Navy indentured workers heaved the platform's massive macro cannon and lance weapons forward into their firing positions; the bundles of chains they hauled them along with cutting deep into their hands and shoulders as they strained with the mammoth effort required of their task.

Many levels below, deep in the core of the platform, Adeptus Mechanicus adepts blessed the workings of the station's plasma generator, the long black filaments of their electro-brushes smearing holy oils and unguents thickly upon its age-stained cogs and arcane gears. Then, only when they were satisfied they had bestowed upon them sufficient blessings and anointments, did the worshippers of the Ommissiah each take hold of one of the generator's primary valves and, with a softly whispered prayer, awaken the dormant machine spirit within.

Two hours after its sensors had detected the approaching Corsair ships, the gun crews of the *Watchful Saviour* opened fire at maximum range, their blinding beams of light slicing deep into the flight path of the oncoming fleet. Their efforts went unrewarded though as the beams harmlessly dissipated beyond the swarming ships. Again and again the crews fired but to little effect, the defence lasers glowing red hot as their crews laboured to track and hit the elusive targets whose holo-fields redirected and dispersed the shots with ease.

Then, from behind the second moon of the ice world, the system's Imperial Naval fleet joined the battle – dozens of Fury interceptors, defence monitors and system ships, their numbers pitifully few in comparison to the massed Eldar craft. The Fury interceptors accelerated once they were clear of the moon, the fastest in the small fleet their orders were to lure the Eldar off their current course and onto the guns of the slower but better armed and armoured system ships. In response, the first wave of Corsairs immediately engaged them.

Twisting and spiralling through space, the Eldar craft flew directly at the oncoming formation, paying scant regard to the barrage of lascannon shots and missiles the Imperium's interceptors fired as they closed the range. Then, each turning their sleek vessels through near impossible angles, they arced back round upon the flanks of their prey; the xenos pilots obliterating most of the Imperial Navy squadrons in a synchronous attack that was as perfect in its coordinated execution as it was deadly. With the first wave devoted to destroying the remnants of the Fury squadrons, the second Corsair wave of Darkstars and squadrons of Aconite and Hellebore frigates advanced to engage the Imperium's system ships and defence monitors; the long elegant xenos escort ships studded with pulsar lances and torpedo launchers.

The *Holy Retribution*, one of the few system ships assigned to the Betalis fleet, was the first to suffer their attentions. Weapons battery after weapons battery was fired by the *Holy Retribution's* gun crews; the ratings and indentured workers inside the ship preparing the next volley the instant their weapons were discharged. Then, as the ship's trajectory curved past the moon, the long range lance fire of the *Watchful Saviour* joined its salvos. Caught within the firestorm, dozens of Corsair craft were laid to waste; their blasted remains soon drifting amongst those of the Fury interceptors that had been destroyed minutes before.

For almost an hour, the battle raged. First, the Corsairs edged ever closer towards the ship and in return would be caught up in its intense gunfire or trapped within the lancing beams of the *Watchful Saviour*. But as time wore on, the Eldar's weapons fire took its toll upon the *Holy Retribution*. With insufficient Fury squadrons to protect it, the agile and powerful Eldar Darkstar fighters inflicted enough damage to overload its shield generators, and dove in to strafe its gun decks and command spire the moment they failed.

With external bulkheads compromised and the fractured metres-thick panels of armour-glas surrounding the command deck threatening to breach any moment, the *Holy Retribution's* commander, Flag-Captain Mevuen, gave the order for his dying vessel to be turned towards the one area of the system's outer reaches that all Imperial vessels had so far given a wide berth. Entering the region with the Corsairs still strafing his vessel, Flag-Captain Mevuen opened up the ship wide vox-network and started to recite the *Common Prayer of the Fleet*, the sound of the centuries old ship tearing apart clearly audible around him. The venerable flag-captain had not gotten far through his sombre liturgy when an Eldar Darkstar fighter, its alien identity not recognised by the remnants of the minefield seeded in the Betalis system centuries before by the *Divine Unification*, triggered one of the abandoned mines. As the power generation crystals on the Eldar craft shattered and its hull fragmented, its debris field set off further mines, critically damaging the *Holy Retribution* and scores of other Corsair vessels that had swarmed around the dying ship.

The explosions tore through the *Holy Retribution*, causing its shields to fail and its bulkheads to be ripped apart, sending thousands of Imperial Navy crewmen into the cold vacuum of space. In the few areas of the vast ship where the crew were not immediately ejected into the void, the men fought amongst themselves for places in the few undamaged salvation pods. Those fortunate to escape were either immediately targeted and destroyed by Eldar Corsair vessels or slowly drifted through the system where either death or salvation found them.

Whilst the destruction of the *Holy Retribution* played out across the edge of the Betalis system, the rest of the Corsair fleet maintained its course towards the *Watchful Saviour* and the last few remaining Fury squadrons and system ships that now stood guard over it.

Virtually unopposed, the first wave of Darkstars scored multiple direct hits, their shots punching through its shields and critically damaging the platform's gravitic-stabilisers. With a sickening motion, the massive platform began to list, and anything not securely fixed down began to roll and slide across the decks, crushing all in its way as the *Watchful Saviour* tilted and began to drift out of its geostationary orbit.

The effects were devastating. Gun crews and ratings were drowned as the huge vats of chemicals that hung over the defence lasers, their toxic contents used to prevent the weapons from overheating, broke free from their mountings, engulfing the frantically fleeing men in an acidic tidal wave. In its apothecarium, the *Watchful Saviour's* surgeon-master was near-fatally maimed when shelves storing surgical implements tipped over him mid-operation, their razor-sharp blades slicing him from head to toe with scores of incisions. A worse fate though was to befall the crews who worked in the bays permanently exposed to the outer void. As soon as the *Watchful Saviour* had begun to list, the bulkhead doors leading to the open sections of the platform automatically sealed shut. With their escape routes cut off, hundreds died when the protective energy field between the crew and space fluctuated for a few seconds, exposing them to the intense radiation of the Betalis System's star.

Volley from a third Corsair wave finished off the stricken platform, its return fire slackening as pyres raged within it and its compartments flooded with toxic smoke. With defeat imminent and his guns falling silent one by one, Flag-Captain Basas, the *Watchful Saviour's* commander, ordered the platform's evacuation. Salvation pods were frantically loaded with the wounded and the lucky few unscathed survivors and then ejected towards the planet below.

The few Imperial Navy ships that had survived the first assaults then retreated into the outer regions of the Betalis star, its radiation shielding them from the sensors of the Corsair fleet that now dominated the Betalis System.

Having won the battle for the skies above Betalis III, the Eldar immediately turned their attention to the planet below.

"O Eternal God Emperor; who alone spreadest out the heavens and rulest the raging of the Warp;  
Who hast compassed the void with bounds until day and night come to an end;  
Be pleased to receive in Thy Almighty and most gracious..."

**Last transmission of the Holy Retribution  
All eight thousand and thirty-two souls  
consigned to the Emperor's grace  
at the Battle for the Betalis System**

## **THE BATTLE AT ALNITAC PRIME 055894.M41**

The first major land offensive of the Betalis III war took place at Alnitac Prime, a vast facility that refined chemicals used in the production of promethium, and that stretched for over fifty kilometres across and through the Bregan Glacier. Flowing down from the Escarta mountain range at the infinitesimal speed of less than half a metre a century, the glacier, its ice marbled with the dark grey ash that constantly fell like snow from the refinery's forest of chimneys and cooling towers, loomed ominously over the eastern edge of the Alacian Plains.

The plains were little more than an icy wilderness but across them lay the entrance to the Isthmus of Tarundor, the land bridge which connected the north-eastern peninsula, and ultimately Port Ryira, to the rest of the eastern continent. The two Eldar forces, that of Alaitoc in the south of the continent and the other from Mymeara speeding eastwards from its portal near the western coast, were expected to converge on the Alacian Plains. General Odon was preparing his battle group to oppose them there, and whoever controlled the glacier would hold an advantage in the battle to come.

Dispatched in a fast moving convoy of Leman Russ, Malcador, Praetors and Crassus armoured assault transports, and taking advantage of the road networks that fed the facility's insatiable appetite for Betalis III's raw materials, Battle Group Empteda deployed on the glacier on the evening of the third day of its departure from Port Ryira. As Colonel Empteda watched over the battle group's preparations, already thousands of workers and their families had left their hab blocks behind and set out on the perilous trek to seek shelter elsewhere, heading either for the northern and eastern highway tunnels or the networks of canyons and caves in the surrounding mountains. Each man, woman and child knew the enemy was coming; the only question was when would it arrive?

True to form, the Eldar did not keep the defenders waiting long. In the pre-dawn hours of the fourth day, as the battle group's Sentinel forward reconnaissance squads patrolled the southern-most regions of the glacier, they came under fire from squadrons of Eldar Grav-tanks and Vyper Jetbikes that had flown ahead of the main Mymeara force, skimming low across the Alacian Plains and up over the leading edge of the ice wall. Near-invisible in the darkness, they registered as little more than faint smudges on the Sentinels' sensors as one by one the walker squadrons were annihilated; Eldar Rangers already concealed in the surrounding ice canyons expertly guiding their air-borne brethren in.

Joining the Mymeara craft shortly after, the first wave of Corsair vessels began their attack run on the facility. The battle group was ready and waiting for them though. As the Nightwings, Phoenix and Vampires soared down, they were met with a tremendous firestorm of las shot and artillery shell from what little heavy armour Odon's command staff could muster, but he had not sent the

young colonel into battle empty handed. Prior to leaving their base on the neighbouring industrial world, the officers of the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> had ordered their men to completely strip its resupply depots of all the guns, ordnance and ammunition they could lay their hands on. Little remained by the time the final Cadian squad left for the ice world. Each ship in the fleet had been stacked to the gunnels with enough armament to defend the planet for months, and amongst this huge arsenal had been a consignment of defence platforms due to be distributed to wars elsewhere in the sector. Now, a large stretch of the glacier bristled with the barrels of those guns as they unleashed salvo upon salvo into the oncoming Eldar attack formation.

The thunder of Battle Group Empteda's heavy weapons shook the surrounding mountain ranges to their core, triggering avalanches and rock falls that roared down their slopes, burying hundreds of refugees who had gambled that safety lay in the cave systems rather than heading east to risk the long walk across the sub-zero tundra. Undeterred by the firestorm they had flown into, the Eldar flyers soared over the facility and once their attack run was complete, raced upwards into the heavens. With barely





enough time to reload, the Guardsmen soon spotted scores of white contrails on the horizon which augured the approach of a second Corsair wave.

The Guardsmen manning the defence platforms unleashed another booming volley as the enemy came within range. Shell after shot swept the sky as the crews swung their heavy weapons round to follow the flight paths of the sleek, darting ships before they too rose up above the facility at break-neck speed and out of range. The second attack had lasted no longer than the first and although both enemy forces had given their all, neither had inflicted a death blow upon the other.

As silence descended once more upon Alnitac Prime, the gun crews reloaded and scanned the horizon, waiting for the tell-tale signs of contrails to appear once again. The next attack came swiftly, although not from the air but instead from the surrounding mountains as sniper fire ripped through the heavy weapons platforms. The Corsairs had been little more than a diversion, a feint to buy time for the Eldar Rangers to move up so that their guns were within range of the battle group. Those Guardsmen who



BATTLE GROUP EMPTEDA - ALNITAC PRIME FACILITY/BREGAN GLACIER  
XENOS FORCE DEPLOYMENT - SOUTHWARD APPROACH  
EMPTEDA FORWARD PATROLS DESTROYED - SECTOR 332; 0505 HRS  
XENOS SNIPER SQUADS INFILTRATED VIA OUTWASH PLAIN AND GLACIAL TERMINUS -  
SECTORS 422-75; 0716 HRS  
ESTIMATED CASUALTY RATIO: VERIFYING...

-  SITE OF AMBUSH
-  ELДАР ADVANCES
-  IMPERIAL ADVANCES
-  IMPERIAL BATTLEGROUP

survived the opening volley were immediately pinned down, using what little cover their weapons platforms provided or lying motionless amongst the bodies of their fallen comrades as sniper fire ricocheted along the platforms' metalwork.

Watching the battle back at Alnitac Prime, Colonel Empteda initiated the next part of his plan. On his command the heavily armoured Leman Russ, Chimera and Praetor armoured assault launcher squadrons waiting there sprang into action, their exhausts belching black oily fumes into the freezing cold air as they accelerated towards the besieged lines of heavy weapon platforms. With no chance of locating the Eldar hidden amongst the vast network of ravines surrounding them, Colonel Empteda had turned to one of the few weapons in the Imperial Guard arsenal he had in abundance – overwhelming firepower. The tanks' gunners sent round after round into the mountains, the shells setting off a lethal hailstorm of shrapnel as rocks and ice exploded with deadly effect.

As the tanks prowled the battlefield and the sniper fire ceased, the survivors from the Vaust 14<sup>th</sup> and Betalis 28<sup>th</sup> regiments on the platforms began to celebrate, believing the Eldar had been destroyed. They had done it. They had seen off two attacks and lived. The more experienced Cadians amongst them remained grimly silent. They knew the Eldar were not so easily beaten and would soon be back. This was something Colonel Empteda was more than ready to face, and in the few minutes when the pace of the battle briefly paused, he gave the order for the next part of his plan to commence.

Speeding down the glacier from Alnitac Prime came the last of the vehicles Empteda had at his disposal. As they raced along, their tracks rumbled over the facility's massive air vents that were interspersed along the glacier. Only a day before, these vital lifelines had supplied precious clean air to dilute the toxic fumes that spewed from the furnaces in the facility below, preventing the suffocation of the thousands who toiled at them day and night. Hastily abandoned by the workers, those furnaces still burned fiercely and where once men and women had laboured, something else now moved in their place, transported to the glacier within the holds of the Crassus.

The two waves of Imperial vehicles soon joined together and reformed into three huge blocks as they picked up speed, creating a new front line a kilometre down the glacier. Now at the rear, the static heavy weapons platforms then took on the role of artillery. Once more the Corsair pilots swooped down, and in return the tank crews opened fire as the heavily armoured blocks rumbled forwards. Shuriken cannon and star cannon traded shots with heavy bolters and autocannon as the graceful craft strafed the battleline and the range was so close between the two sides that holo-fields and armour mattered little. In the furious fire fight, the tight Imperial formation and its near constant bombardment evened the odds.

Teams of Jetbike riders skimmed across the surface of the glacier behind the Corsairs, following up on the attacks of the larger craft. The slow lumbering Imperial force continued to roll stubbornly forwards; each driver trusting his safety to his armoured vehicle and its guns, and remaining within the formation. Fight together and live, stand alone and die. The choice was simple. However, gaps were starting to appear and even originally fully loaded, the ammunition supplies were running low through the near-constant rate of fire.

At Alnitac Prime, Colonel Empteda watched on solemnly as the brave Guardsmen under his command fought on. Had they been given more time and resources they might have succeeded but the young colonel knew such hope for the folly it was. It was clear that the Eldar's air superiority and increasing numbers would have eventually swept away the battle group regardless. His men had done well to last this long. Already he'd had word from Odon's command staff that the main forces of the Mymeara host were deploying onto the Alacian Plains. If he didn't act now, then the Eldar would gain the higher ground and Battle Group Odon wouldn't stand a chance.

Whispering a brief prayer for the Emperor's forgiveness, Colonel Empteda turned to the men behind him who controlled the Cyclops demolition vehicles now positioned throughout the depths of the facility, and with one word ended the Battle at Alnitac Prime.

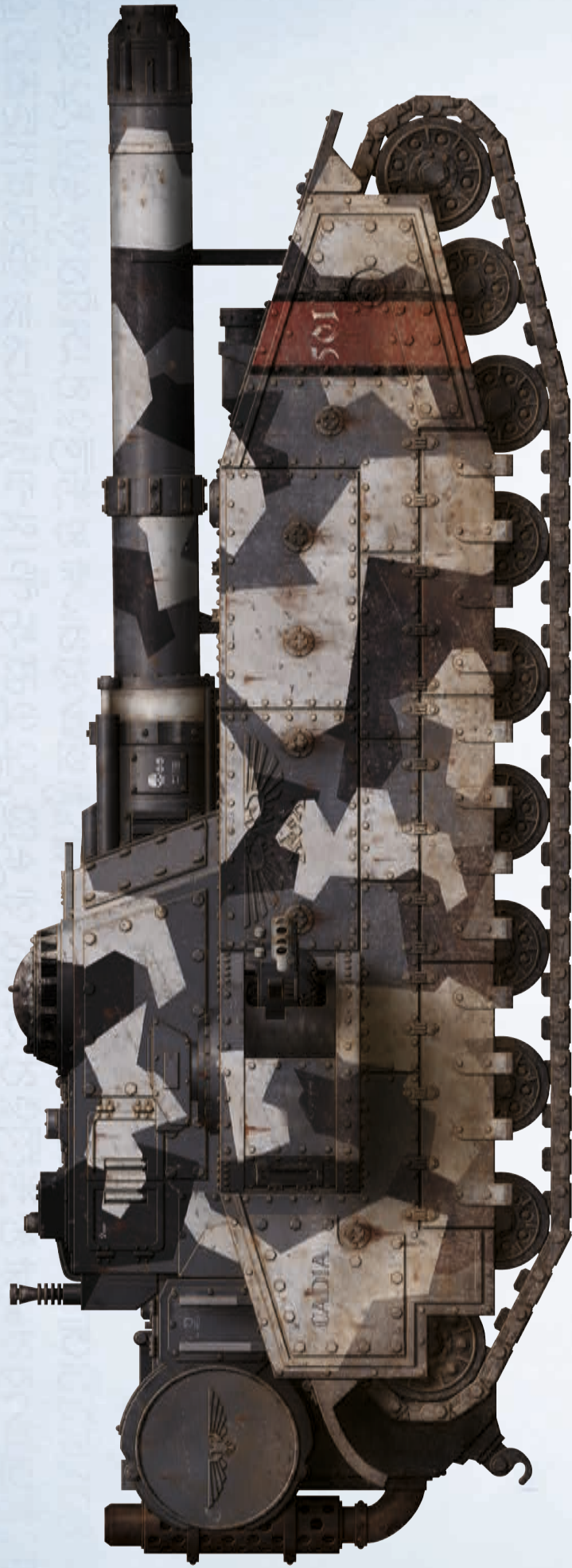
*'Detonate.'*

#### **A PRAYER FOR THE FALLEN**

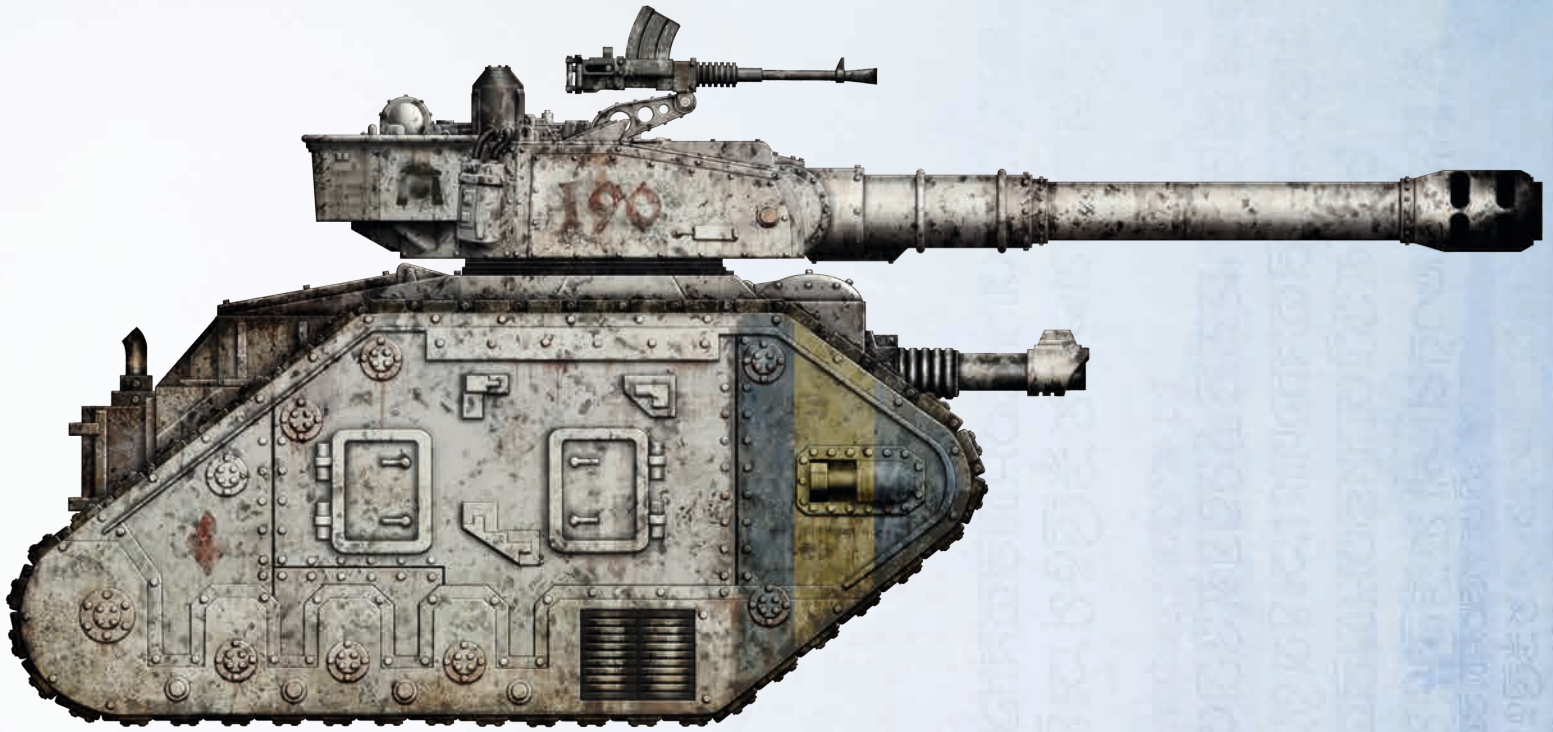
Kilometres away from the glacier, Inquisitor-lord Dankz recited the *Prayer for the Fallen* as he watched the destruction of Battle Group Empteda and its attackers through the eyes of a hovering servitor. The detonation of the Cyclops demolition vehicles deployed through the facility during the battle had set off a catastrophic chain reaction amongst its furnaces and huge chemical storage vats. The blast that immediately followed liquefied the ice field above it, launching the battle group and billions of tonnes of melted ice and molten rock straight up into the vast flock of Eldar craft circling above.

Battle Group Empteda could never have held the glacier or facility against the arrayed might of the Eldar, and its young colonel had known that as soon as he'd received his orders. But despite that, Colonel Empteda had performed his duty without question and through his selfless sacrifice and that of his men, he had succeeded in denying the Eldar the advantage of the higher ground and bought Battle Group Odon the time it so desperately needed.

His sombre liturgy complete, Inquisitor-lord Dankz severed his connection with the servitor and looked out with his own eyes upon the impressive sight of the massed ranks of Battle Group Odon arrayed across the westward entrance to the Tarundor Isthmus below him.



Shadowword Super-heavy Tank Destroyer. Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment.  
Suffered critical damage in the battles of the Alacian Plains.



Leman Russ Vanquisher tank. The Vanquisher is fitted with a high velocity cannon for anti-armour use. However, owing to the speed of the Eldar skimmers they faced on Betalis III, this proved relatively ineffective against the foe.



Armageddon Pattern Basilisk, Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment. The Basilisk is the most commonplace Imperial Guard field support unit and was a mainstay of the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup>.



This is Dire Avenger Aspect Warrior Alshyra of the Shrine of Asurmen's Heart, Alaitoc Craftworld. He was wounded and taken as a prisoner of war during the assault upon the Tarundor Gate.

## DIRE AVENGER

### 1. Aspect Armour

This suit is constructed using the same techniques as those used on all Eldar personal armour. It is a lightweight synthetic bodysuit, reinforced with plates of psycho-sensitive bio-plastics that will instantly harden to resist impacts. As well as absorbing blows, these plates can morph their shape in accordance with the wearer's movements, meaning the armour does not encumber the wearer in the slightest, affording good protection with excellent mobility.

The reinforced breastplate of the Aspect Warrior's armour bears his waystone, a precious item for all Eldar. This psycho-receptive gem is attuned to the individual so that when, at the moment of death, the Eldar's psychic spirit is released, it is captured within the stone – otherwise, it is believed, it would be released into the Warp where the Chaos god Slaanesh awaits to consume it. These stones are the most precious items the Eldar possess, literally encapsulating the consciousness, identity and memories of a departed warrior, and securing it for transportation back to their Craftworld.

Contrary to some reports, the small domes and blisters on the armour are not extra gems. Most are small compartments that contain the suit's technical systems.

The Dire Avenger's tabard is a common addition to Aspect armour. Its runic inscriptions name the shrine for which the Aspect Warrior is fighting and identifies the shrine's allegiance to its Craftworld, in this case Alaitoc. Regardless of a shrine's location, the Aspect's colour scheme is always blue and white.

Before donning his armour, the Aspect Warrior will have been through a rigorous ritual of purification and meditation. Overseen by the shrine's Exarchs, each warrior must prepare himself for the ordeal ahead, achieving the correct psychological state to become a Dire Avenger.

### 2. Aspect Helmet

Each Aspect has its own distinctive helmet, and within each shrine the helmets may vary in form slightly, with correspondingly more elaborate versions for the shrine's Exarchs. As a standard Dire Avenger, this warrior's helmet is distinctively tall with a long top crest of exotic animal hair, often dyed to match the parent Craftworld's colours. By custom, it is this helmet that marks the Aspect Warriors as the protectors and avengers of their Craftworld, and in this case it bears the Aspect's rune, the mark of Asurmen, traced upon its forehead.

### 3. Shuriken Catapult, 'Avenger' pattern

To all Eldar, the mastering of the shuriken catapult is regarded as an art form and most Eldar will, at least for a period of their life, learn the art, even if only to serve with the Guardian bands. The Dire Avengers are regarded as the weapon's supreme masters.

The shuriken catapult is a weapon that has become synonymous with the Eldar race. Many variants of the standard weapon have been encountered but this longer version, designated as the 'Avenger' pattern, is unique to the Dire Avenger shrines. It has a greater effective range and more sophisticated targeting systems, as befits high status troops.



The shuriken catapult is an all-purpose assault weapon. Its main body is a high-powered linear gravitic accelerator, which rapidly 'fires' a series of flat, razor-sharp, monomolecular spinning shuriken disks. The disk can have different shapes, barbs and serrations, with different forms being adopted by different shrines.

The ammunition is stored as a solid core, allowing for the high-velocity ammunition feed required. Each disk is sliced from the core by the gravitic energy stream as it is projected down the barrel.

The accelerator and ammunition feeds allow for a very high rate of fire of up to 1,500 rounds per minute – though a Dire Avenger's training conditions them never to waste their precious ammunition, instead using their potentially overwhelming firepower with accuracy and precision. Commonly, the weapon is used for aimed semi-automatic fire but in the heat of an assault or a close range firefight, the weapon's full automatic function can empty its magazine in just four seconds.

Like most Eldar technology the weapon is psychically activated, its resonant wraithbone construction being sensitive to the Eldar's innate psychic mind. A Dire Avenger's shuriken catapult is linked to its targeter via the handle.

### 4. Targeter/Rangefinder

In battle, each Dire Avenger is assisted by an advanced targeting device. Worn over the shoulder and plugged into the weapon via the armoured suit, this pan-spectral targeter operates independently of the user, finding and tracking multiple targets and feeding target information directly to the helmet display. It is likely that it can also differentiate between enemy and ally. Other functions are unknown.

### 5. Other Equipment

In general, Aspect Warriors carry no extra equipment, although this Dire Avenger does carry a ceremonial knife from his shrine. Whilst no doubt employed as a hand-to-hand combat weapon of last resort, its primary purpose will be for use during the shrine's pre- and post-battle ceremonies. Although not their primary function, hand-to-hand fighting techniques are studied by the Dire Avengers, but only by accepting their calling to become an Exarch can such skills become the warrior's main focus.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Dark Times

### 055894.M41

The full might of Battle Group Odon dominated the approach to the Tarundor Isthmus. Tanks, armoured vehicles, heavy artillery and Guardsmen stood arrayed on the Alacian Plains ready to meet the Eldar assault head-on. As dense black smoke billowed up from the Bregan Glacier, the wreckage from the explosion there still burning fiercely, reports were received that the host of Mymeara had swept on to the western Alacian Plains and begun its approach. Heralding their arrival, and first to come within range of the massed guns of the Imperial Guard, were their Corsair allies, an armada of Phoenix, Hornets and Nightwings that dived down through the gathering storm clouds at break-neck speed.

As at Alnitac, the Imperial Guardsmen met the attack with a barrage of devastating firepower, Chimeras, Praetors, Baneblades, Stormblades, Shadowswords, Macharius and Leman Russ lending their fury to the heavy artillery onslaught. The Corsair ships soared in undeterred, their agile pilots weaving and threading their craft through the air, their shuriken cannon and missile launchers returning fire as all around them shells and missiles exploded.

First blood went to Betalis III's defenders as a Void Dragon Nightwing, its swept-wing hull adorned with the symbol of its cadre, was ripped from the sky; its destroyer was a Hydra Flak tank, one of the precious few deployed with the battle group. With its systems trained on the horizon, the Hydra's logic-spirit had swung the tank's autocannon into



*Guardsman Ayra sat half-dazed in the rumbling, pitching hold of the Ore transport; the stench and sounds of vomiting of those around him with less of a stomach for the violently rocking motion of the vessel doing little to stave off the fatigue caused by hours of waiting on a freezing airstrip to embark. The commandeered transports moving Battle Group Odon to its deployment zone were never designed to hold human cargo, but now there were thousands of Guardsmen travelling in them in a massive flotilla heading south-west from Port Ryira to the Tarundor Isthmus, their Chimeras and Crassus armoured assault transports either slung under the ships or transported by other more expedient means. Once deployed, the battle group would move out on to the Alacian Plains and finally face the xenos foe that had invaded this Emperor-forsaken world. Meanwhile, as the Imperium's ships made their slow, ponderous approach across the isthmus, the Eldar were closing in from two directions, one war host from the west of the continent and the other from the south-east.*

*Seconds, perhaps minutes, later, Ayra was jolted awake as the unmistakable sound of heavy weapons fire hit the side of the transport and a loud boom reverberated through the hold. Another explosion swiftly followed and then another, the vessel shuddering violently each time. The young Guardsman realised with mounting horror that the Eldar were attacking the convoy.*

*Then... all hell broke loose.*

*A massive explosion thundered through the air. Guardsman Ayra, stunned near-senseless by the deafening boom, instinctively crossed his arms and tucked his head into his chest just as a shockwave punched into the transport. The front of the vessel began to suddenly rise upwards as pressure waves slammed across it and the webbing straps holding Ayra and the other Guardsmen in place on hastily installed benches gripped*

*them painfully tight against the hold's walls. The engines of the transport screamed in protest as somewhere up front the pilot wrestled with the ship's controls, desperately trying to level it out and prevent it from crashing, but the terrifying moment passed quickly and to the relief of all inside the hold, the transport settled down again.*

*As soon as the transport's hatch was opened at the landing zone, any Guardsman still able ran out at full pelt, grateful to be back on solid ground. Guardsman Ayra was one of the last of his squad to leave, hauling his badly concussed sergeant, struck across the head by equipment flung around the compartment, between himself and the squad's commissar. The horror which greeted the young Guardsman in the early dawn light nearly stopped him dead in his tracks. Only the commissar shouting at him to keep moving prevented Ayra from being barrellled into by the stream of Guardsmen tearing off the transport behind him.*

*Ablaze on the horizon barely two kilometres away was the Bregan Glacier, or what was left of it, the centuries of pollution that had seeped into it from the Alnitac Prime chemical facility fuelling fiercely burning pyres in its blasted remains. Littered around the glacier's former location, reaching even as far as Battle Group Odon's makeshift deployment zone kilometres away, were the remains of Battle Group Empteda and its Eldar attackers.*

*Anything that had not been immediately atomised in the blast lay strewn around the ice field. Most of the debris was nothing but charred, twisted metal, but some sections of the more heavily armoured Imperial tanks were still partly intact, the thick armoured hull sections of the Crassus and Praetors recognisable but beyond use, having smashed apart upon impact. Nothing else had survived, and of the hundreds of Guardsmen from Battle Group Empteda and the Eldar they had been fighting, nothing remained.*

action as soon as it had detected movement, tearing through one of the Nightwing's curved wings and sending it spiralling into a terminal dive that not even the superior skills of its Eldar pilot could recover from.

The Nightwing's destruction lifted the morale of the Guardsmen more than any rousing speech the Ministorum priests could deliver. In that one moment they were raised up from the depths of despair they had fallen into upon seeing the destruction of Battle Group Empteda. The rate of attrition intensified as more Corsairs came within range of the heavy guns, weapons fire from both sides causing death and unparalleled carnage at such close quarters. Amidst the furious assault, Leman Russ were hit and damaged as the Corsairs found their marks, and in return the xenos ships were blasted from the skies, straying too close to the battle group's many guns. Soon though, even the most battle-thirsty Corsair pilots saw that to continue would ultimately mean their death so they broke off, speeding up through the gathering storm clouds and beyond to regroup and tend to their wounds.

The opening moves of the battle had been played out and the Alacian Plains were littered with its casualties.

With the forces of Mymeara on the plains and reports coming in of the host of Craftworld Alaitoc now approaching from the south, General Odon gave the order for the battle group to separate into two companies. It was a bold move, and one those Imperial Guard commanders who religiously followed the doctrines of the *Tactica Imperialis* would have considered foolhardy and reckless. However, as each Eldar Craftworld's force outnumbered the battle group many times over, if it remained in a single block it would be quickly overwhelmed and destroyed.

The first company, Vengeance, comprised the tank squadrons: Leman Russ, Hydras and Chimeras. The second company, designated Retribution, was mainly infantry, deployed in Crassus armoured assault transports with what little General Odon could spare in terms of Leman Russ and Praetors acting as an escort. Company Vengeance had orders to head west. It was to lure in as many Eldar craft as it could and take the inevitable first hit. This would give Company Retribution the chance to intercept the approaching Alaitoc land forces in the south. Joining Retribution and Vengeance on the Alacian Plains would be the Titans of the Legio Gryphonius – four Reavers and four Warhounds – which had just reached the war zone from Port Ryira.

The original plan had been for the Legio Gryphonicus Titans to lend their much needed support to Vengeance's tank squadrons. Now they had a different objective. The surveillance network set up by Inquisitor-lord Danzk's retinue around the eastern continent had relayed back images of at least eight Eldar Titans emerging from the Mymeara portal. Amongst them and now somewhere on the northern edge of the Alacian Plains were two massive Eldar Phantom Titans, and the princeps of the colossal war machines of the Imperium had orders to destroy them.

### THE ASSAULT ON VENGEANCE

Deployed directly in the path of the Mymeara host, Company Vengeance, with General Odon leading from the fore, clashed with the Eldar force as the last rays of the system's cold blue sun were smothered by snow clouds pouring in from the north. Skimming ahead of Mymeara's infantry was a vast armada, hundreds of squadrons of Jetbikes, Hornets and Vypers. In stark contrast to their Corsair brethren, Mymeara's pilots demonstrated no desire to dive down upon their Imperial foe and satisfy a barely checked thirst for battle. Instead they came in low, in tight surgical formations, forcing the rear ranks of Vengeance to hold fast their fire lest their shells impact among their own front lines. The change in tactics served the Eldar well.

The wake of that devastating first sortie was strewn with the hulls of over seventy Leman Russ and Chimera, their thick armour plating scored by shuriken fire or the crew killed as pulse laser and prism cannon fire penetrated their tank's armour. But such losses were expected. Against the more chaotic attacks of the Corsair pilots, standard tank tactics had sufficed, but to maintain such tight formations when faced with the main body of the Eldar assault would have proved suicidal – their more disciplined pilots would simply have stayed out of range of Vengeance's guns and attacked from afar. Once the battle was underway, Vengeance's numbers would be too few to repeat that manoeuvre. Instead, they would engage the aircraft in smaller groups, the experienced tank crews of the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> fighting the battle on their own terms.

The plan worked, but not as effectively as Odon had hoped. Having recently fought the Ork horde on Saras VII, a force barely kept in check at the best of times by its Blood Axe warlord, the Cadian officers reverted to the tactics which had worked there. These had to be quickly countermanded and replaced with more effective manoeuvres to use against the disciplined Eldar army. As if the attack from the air wasn't enough for the Imperial forces to contend with, the first of the Eldar land forces arrived.

Deploying swiftly from the Mymeara portal far off in the west, squadrons of Wasps, the Eldar's long-legged assault walkers, launched themselves into the heart of the battle, their pilots using a combination of the Wasps' speed and the manoeuvrability afforded by their jump jets to land amongst Company Vengeance's squadrons. The tactic soon found some of the less experienced sponson gunners from the Vaust 14<sup>th</sup> blasting away at tanks from their own side as they became fixated on the target in their sights,

oblivious to anything else that crossed their path. Then, as the Jetbikes, Hornets and Vypers came round again for a second attack run, the Eldar Wasps would propel themselves swiftly out of range as the Eldar craft nimbly cut yet another swathe of destruction through Vengeance's lines, adding to the steadily growing numbers of burning tanks littering the battlefield.

With the benefit of General Odon's years of experience though, the Imperial Guard force was nothing if not adaptable. The veteran tank commander ordered the Cadian crews to split up their squadrons; one tank from each was to separate off, presenting itself as the vulnerable target the Eldar pilots were prowling the battlefield for. Once it had secured their attentions, it was to speed off as fast as it could, luring the xenos flyers straight onto the waiting guns of the rest of its squadron. It was not a precise or reliable tactic and casualties were high, but when it did work, it was devastatingly effective.

### THE GODS OF WAR

Out on the ice plains, the Reaver and Warhound Titans of the Legio Gryphonicus were closing upon Sector 45-3, where the last sighting of the Eldar Phantom Titans had been reported. To search the vast wasteland more efficiently, they had split into two. The first group, the demi-maniple *Invictus*, was moving across the north of the Alacian Plains, a single Reaver Battle Titan flanked by a pair of Warhounds. The larger of the two, the Exaro maniple, was sweeping up from the south and comprised three Reaver Titans and a pair of Warhounds. Both groups were shadowed by the heavy armour of Battle Group Odon, the few squadrons of Baneblades, Shadowwords and Stormblades that the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment's command staff could secure in the short time they'd had to assemble the response force.

As the Eldar Wasp squadrons launched their assault on Vengeance, the Reaver Battle Titan *Invictus Nova* and the Warhound Titans *Tempus Prima* and *Magna Canis* strode onto the frozen landscape of the northern Alacian Plains, the footfalls of the mechanical behemoths sinking metres deep into the permafrost as they searched for their foe. Without warning, five pulsar blasts slammed into the right flank of the *Magna Canis* from the mountains that edged the north of the Alacian Plains. The Warhound Titan staggered under the assault, waves of actinic energy flickering and sparking across its overloading void shields.

With a command born of instinct rather than conscious thought, the princeps of the *Nova* and *Tempus* instantly returned fire. With their target hidden, both saturated the mountains with lancing plasma bolts, setting off avalanches that roared down their sides. The *Magna Canis*, damaged but still functioning, quickly recovered and added its own awesome might to the bombardment; its plasma blastgun had been disabled and so the *Canis*' princeps ordered his moderatii to switch to its turbo-laser.

An explosion from the super-heavy vehicle squadron buffeted the demi-maniple. A Shadowword had flipped

over, smoke and flames pouring out of its ruptured hull. Not waiting to suffer the same fate, the rest of its squadron split apart as another fusillade flashed between them, knocking out the tracks of one super-heavy and barely missing another. With inhuman speed, the machine spirit of the *Invictus Nova* calculated the fusillade's origin point and located their attacker, although the Eldar giant was barely visible, so effective were its holo-fields. It was one of the Eldar Phantom Titans, and before the demi-maniple had time to react, it unleashed another savage volley, the energy bolts from its pulsar stitching along the ice only metres behind another swerving Baneblade.

In thunderous concert, the three Titans of the Legio Gryphonicus opened fire, but only the *Nova's* five apocalypse missiles had the range to reach their mark and they slammed into the Eldar Phantom's left shoulder, its holo-fields shimmering and flickering as they temporarily failed. Before the Imperium's Titans could follow up with a second barrage, a high-pitched shriek emanated from the mountains behind them. With an almighty scream, the first Eldar Phantom's distortion cannon discharged a seething bolt of black warp energy into the heart of the demi-maniple. It hit the *Magna Canis*, passing cleanly through its void shields and wreathing its torso in a shroud of impenetrable darkness.

The princes of the other two Titans watched in absolute horror as sections of the massive war machine momentarily vanished into the rift between realspace and the Immaterium and then reappeared moments later as nothing more than a twisted mass of darkly glowing metal. Unable to cope with the massive stress placed upon its systems, the *Canis's* plasma reactor detonated. The blast shook the northern Alacian Plains, its deafening boom heard as far away as the Tormus Delta in the south where the first Guardsmen of Company Retribution were preparing to deploy.

Still kilometres south of the battle, the princes of Titan Group Exaro desperately tried to make contact with the demi-maniple, but their repeated hails met with silence. Too far away to immediately come to their aid, the Exaro maniple could only pray that when they arrived, the other two Legio Gryphonicus Titans had somehow survived.

### THE DARKEST HOURS

With no Imperial Navy support to provide air cover and Vengeance's heavy armour already fully engaged in the north, the Guardsmen of Company Retribution faced near impossible odds in their race to engage the Alaitoc host. But Retribution had two crucial factors in its favour – time and the unforgiving landscape of the ice world. The Alaitoc





Reaver Battle Titans and elements of  
Battle Group Odon, western Alacian Plains

portal was significantly further away from the Alacian Plains than that of the Mymeara Craftworld's by thousands of kilometres, and directly in the path of its land forces lay the Tormus Delta.

Stretching across the entire southern edge of the Alacian Plains, the Tormus Delta was the result of millions of years of water erosion, a massive labyrinth of narrow canyons and gorges created at the confluence of two rivers that had frozen over millennia before. For Retribution to stand any chance against the Alaitoc host, it had to reach the Tormus Delta before the Eldar Craftworld's airborne armada crested its northern edge. General Odon planned to use Tormus to shield Retribution from the worst that Alaitoc's pilots could unleash upon it, but this move was not without its consequences. For Vengeance this almost certainly meant it would soon be fighting on a second front as Alaitoc's pilots turned northwards in search of more accessible targets.

*Princeps Ephraim's first concern upon regaining consciousness was that his connection to the Reaver Titan Invictus Nova's systems had not been damaged. Nothing else mattered. He tentatively reached behind his head to check that the mind-link cables were still attached to his own augments and was reassured all was in order. Only then did he look around to check on the rest of the Titan's crew.*

*The weapons moderatii, Nathaniel, was undoubtedly dead, his head bent at an unnatural angle. Moderatii Tarvas had fared better and was already performing a status check on his console. As to the third member of their party, Magos Riemann, he had not yet made contact from his chamber at the Titan's apex but the princeps could sense his presence darting through the Reaver's systems, checking for damage caused by the explosion of the Magnus Canis' plasma reactor.*

*As for the Invictus Nova itself, Ephraim could feel very little. Its failsafes had automatically powered down its systems to shield them from the blast. They were all that had saved the Titan but now they could prove to be its undoing, because somewhere, probably close by, there was at least one Eldar Phantom Titan that had been out of range of the massive explosion.*

*The thought sparked something within the dormant Titan and its systems flickered back into life, scrolling with data which quickly confirmed visually what Ephraim was already receiving through his mind-impulse link. The landscape outside the Nova had completely changed. Gone was the open vista of the ice field; now he could see nothing but a dense bank of smoke. The Titan's sensors were affected too, an impenetrable wall of radiation making them next to useless, the same probably having prevented the Phantom Titan from locating the Nova sooner. However, all that was about to change. The Nova's systems were registering a strong wind coursing down from the north that was already dissipating their protective shroud, finally unveiling the devastation that surrounded the Titan.*

*Before Ephraim could fully take in the nightmarish sight of the charred and mangled metal that had once been the Magnus Canis, bright flashes lit up the retreating smoky haze. Striding backwards out of the murk came the Warhound Titan Tempus Prima, its blast gun and turbo-laser blazing with each step it took. Its target followed it*

Company Retribution's headlong charge to reach Tormus unopposed nearly succeeded, but just as the lead vehicles of its transport convoy were less than a kilometre away, the first of Alaitoc's Hornets, Falcons and Vypers, sleek and deadly craft emblazoned with its emblem of the sword of Khaine bisecting a red moon, shot over the northern edge of the Delta. The moment they were spotted, the order to accelerate whip-lashed through Retribution's convoy. Unlike at Alnitac, there was no time to organise a rolling defence and all the men of Retribution could do was hold tight and pray for the Emperor's protection.

Alaitoc's shuriken weapons and pulse lasers strafed the Imperium's convoy, but to little effect. The heavily plated hulls of the Crassus armoured assault transports ably protected the Guardsmen inside, with only a few vehicles being damaged by shots hitting their exposed tracks. The Guardsmen though could not stay within them forever

*out of the dissolving mist – it was the Phantom Titan, the same behemoth the Nova had hit earlier with its apocalypse missile strike. The Eldar Titan's left arm now hung lifelessly by its side. Its right weapon arm, however, was functioning perfectly. Ephraim could already see the energy haze beginning to form again around the tip of its weapon, and the low pitched howl of the building force within the xenos weapon made for a ferocious war cry.*

*Princeps Ephraim immediately ordered the Nova to fire. Its guns, however, remained frustratingly silent. Ephraim frantically searched its logis-banks for the problem but Magos Riemann was one step ahead of him. The weapons tracking systems had been damaged and still hadn't re-engaged. Until Magos Riemann could restore them, there was little the Invictus Nova could do to assist the Warhound and its crew.*

*The Phantom Titan's pulsar punched heavily into the Tempus Prima, which had to take a step back to brace itself. Then, with one last blast from the Phantom's weapon, the Warhound's void shields flickered and failed. The Invictus Nova's princeps raged with frustration as the weapons systems of the Nova remained dark and unresponsive. Already, the haze of energy was building again around the Phantom Titan's weapon as it prepared to fire once more.*

*Suddenly, streams of smoke and fire shot past either side of the Invictus Nova at supersonic speed. Thinking for a moment that the other Phantom had rejoined the fight, Princeps Ephraim's spirit soared as he realised it was a barrage of apocalypse missiles. The Exaro Titan maniple had arrived.*

*Little could have survived such an onslaught, but the Eldar war god defiantly stood its ground as it was impacted repeatedly by the missiles. At that same moment, the weapons systems of the Invictus Nova finally powered up, the green flashing icons on Ephraim's console a welcome addition to the ident symbols of the second Legio Gryphonicus maniple it was now displaying. Not waiting for the other Gryphonicus Titans to catch up, the Reaver Battle Titan Invictus Nova and the badly damaged but still functioning Warhound Titan, Tempus Prima, set off for the mountains after the now rapidly retreating Phantom Titan.*

and when they reached the Delta, their deployment was more of a mad dash for the shelter of its icy canyons than a carefully orchestrated manoeuvre. As Alaitoc's pilots banked round again for another aerial attack, the first Imperial Guard squads to reach the Tormus Delta barrelled out of their vehicles as fast as they could, quickly followed by thousands more Guardsmen following close on their heels.

Soon, a sea of deserted vehicles began to stretch back across the Alacian Plains until those travelling at the rear of the convoy were forced either to ditch their own transports there and make their way through the labyrinth of abandoned Crassus on foot, or break away and enter it via one of its many other entrances further to the east or west. By the time the last troops had entered the interior of Tormus, the landscape around it was littered with smouldering wreckage and hundreds of dead and wounded Guardsmen. In contrast, Alaitoc's pilots had survived the assault virtually unscathed, and as General Odon predicted, they immediately turned north to add their firepower to that of their Mymearan brethren.

#### DEATH WITHIN

Company Retribution advanced warily into the Tormus Delta, its squads scattered amongst the tangled pathways. With medium to long range vox-transmissions absorbed by the high walls of ice and rock, it was impossible to locate, let alone coordinate all the disparate bands of Guardsmen dispersed within the Delta's midst. Barely having escaped the airborne assault and with no way to contact anyone not within line of sight, their officers followed the last order they had received – locate and destroy the enemy.

The Eldar had taken full advantage of their earlier airborne attack to disperse their forces within the Delta. Alaitoc's Rangers, dropped in by the Eldar Falcons now making their way north towards Company Vengeance, had already

advanced into the ice labyrinth, tearing through its winding passages with unnatural speed before agilely scaling sheer-sided ice walls, seeking any advantage they could gain against the oncoming Imperial force. Hidden under their long, flowing cameleoline cloaks, scores of Rangers were now positioned throughout the Delta, coordinating Alaitoc's advance with lethal precision.

They had been joined by hundreds of Eldar Corsair troops who mounted hit and run attacks upon the Imperial Guard squads as they worked their way further into the Delta. Using the element of surprise to their advantage, the bands of Corsairs stealthily worked their way along the tops of the canyon walls, then either fired directly down into the squads below them or dropped down and wreaked carnage in their midst. Unable to alert each other to the threat of ambush from above, dozens of Retribution's squads were completely wiped out by the vicious assaults of the Eldar outcasts. As Alaitoc's warriors joined in with the battle, the atrocities escalated. The most horrific fighting occurred in the north-west of the canyons. Eight squads of Guardsmen moving together were pinned down by sniper fire the moment they entered a large gorge. Firing at them from the overhanging cliffs, the Rangers forced the squads to seek what little shelter there was, their accurate shots hitting anyone who dared to break cover to fire at them. Hunkered down, there was little the Guardsmen could do but pray that their frantic requests for assistance over the static-filled vox-net would be answered. What came though did not wear the uniform of the Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> or any of the other hastily assembled regiments from the system; instead, one of the most terrifying facets of the Eldar army unleashed itself upon them.

The Guardsmen watched with disbelieving eyes as tendrils of bright white energy clawed into realspace, quickly coalescing into pools of retina-blinding light. Before the

*The defence of Betalis III flickered on the banks of pict-screens within Inquisitor-lord Danzk's command Chimera, his augmented eyes flashing with inhuman speed from one image to the next. In the north-west of the Alacian Plains, the Leman Russ and Chimera squadrons of Company Vengeance were holding their ground against Mymeara's armada, the battlefield strewn with the wrecked hulls of Imperial tanks and burning Eldar craft. But with Alaitoc's squadrons almost upon them, Vengeance faced odds it was unlikely to survive, and in the south, at the Tormus Delta, the battle was just as equally brutal where the thousands of Guardsmen of Company Retribution faced the wrath of Craftworld Alaitoc's troops.*

*To Inquisitor-lord Danzk these matters though were of little concern. Millions died each day defending the Imperium in such battles; that was the price the citizens of the Imperium paid in return for the protection the Emperor bestowed upon their worlds and their families. What courted his attention instead were the events unfolding in the east, just beyond the*

*Alacian Plains. A new wave of craft from the Mymeara portal had been picked up by one of his servitors, and instead of joining the battle against Vengeance, they had taken great pains to circumvent it. Now they were headed directly eastwards and moving across the Tarundor Isthmus. This was exactly what Inquisitor-lord Danzk had been waiting for, the moment when the Eldar finally showed their true intentions on Betalis III.*

*Given the resources they had deployed upon it, something on this world was clearly considered of such high importance, that they were willing to risk outright war with the Imperium to acquire it. The break-away force he was watching on his pict-screen now confirmed what he had suspected all along; the battles being fought by Vengeance and Retribution were nothing more than a distraction.*

*The Inquisitor-lord ordered for a vox link to be opened to Colonel Vlaar at Port Ryira. Whatever the Eldar's plans were, now was the time for him to act.*

COMPANY VENGEANCE FORCE DEPLOYMENT  
DEPARTMENTO MUNITORUM SANCTIONED  
ORIGINATION: CADIA ARCHIVE RECORDS - 6TH ARMoured REGIMENT, BETALIS  
SYSTEM GARRISON  
DATE ACCESSED: 895.M41+++  
FILE: BETALIS III - ALACIAN PLAINS  
SECTOR 027/4 - NORTH-EASTERN QUADRANT; ENGAGEMENT +2.46 HRS  
AUTHOR: CAPTAIN MOKVAR  
CREDITATION: THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT HAS BEEN VERIFIED AND SANCTIONED  
BY THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES.  
ACCOUNT: [894.M41] ELEMENTS OF THE XENOS FORCE [ORIGINATION - MYMEARA  
CRAFTWORLD] BROKE THROUGH OUR FLANKS BY MOVING WEST THROUGH THE SAINT  
BACTUS FRESH WATER DRILLING FIELDS. OUR TANKS ENGAGED THEM WITHIN THE  
DRILLING FIELDS, DESTROYING TWO ENEMY WALKER SQUADRONS AND ROUTING A  
THIRD. IT IS BELIEVED THAT THEIR TARGET WAS GENERAL ODon'S COMMAND  
SQUADRON WHICH WAS BASED A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY.



Guardsmen could react, a lethal cloud of monomolecular wire spewed from each portal. The razor-sharp threads scattered through the gorge, effortlessly penetrating any environment suit they came into contact with. Within seconds the canyon was echoing with hideous screams as the victims of the lethal strands were eviscerated, the only evidence of the carnage wrought within their bodies a spray of blood splattered across the snow as the filaments retracted.

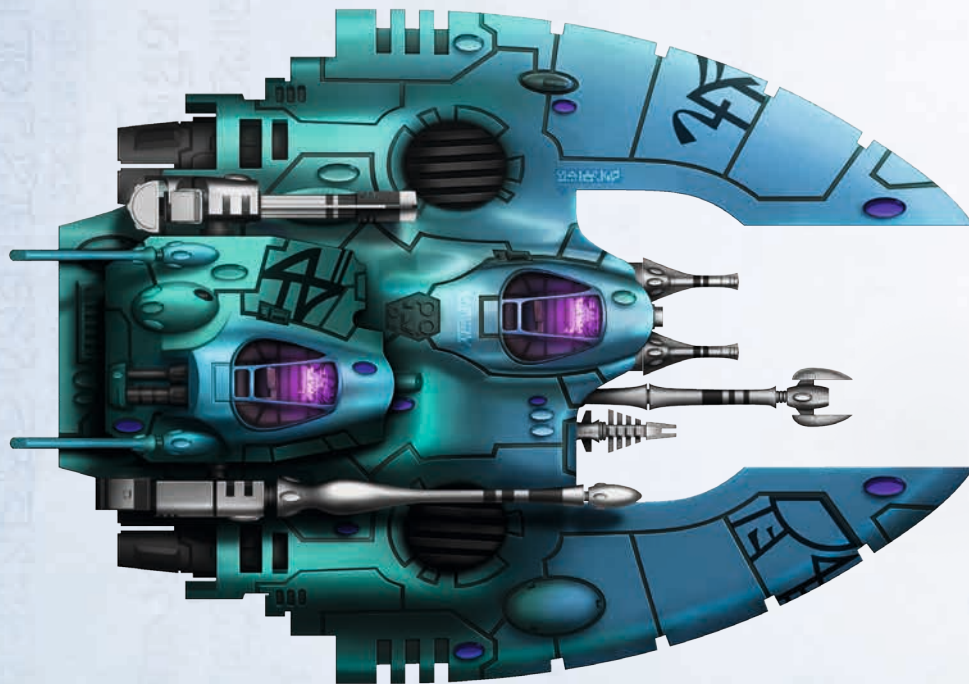
As each of the coruscating warp-lights faded, the Warp Spiders that had manifested within them leapt into action, wielding their powerblades in great sweeping arcs which sliced cleanly through torsos, severing limbs and heads from bodies with consummate skill. Then, with their first strike complete, the Aspect Warriors faded back into the Warp, the afterglow of their departure dazzling all whose eyes were hypnotically drawn to it, etching their sight with chaotic, leering faces that gazed hungrily at their souls from the Immaterium.

The gorge soon became little more than a charnel house as the massacre was repeated, despite the fierce resistance put up by those Guardsmen who had recovered the wit to do so. The Warp Spiders expertly traversed between realspace and warp space until their objective was achieved, then vanished completely. It had taken them less than three minutes to kill over eighty Guardsmen and there was no evidence that the Aspect Warriors had suffered any injury in return.

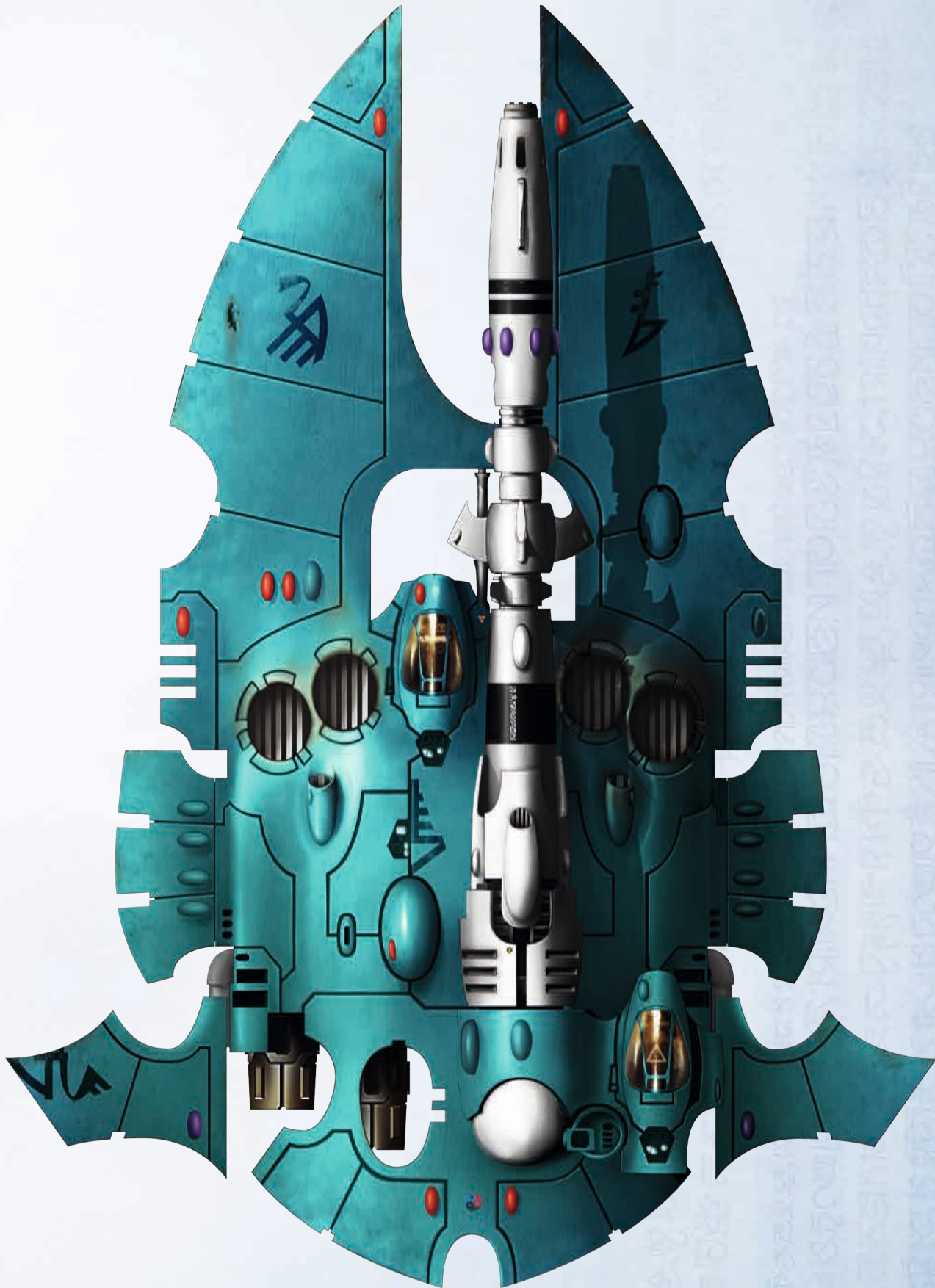
With battle joined, the forces of Alaitoc and Retribution clashed throughout the Tormus Delta, thousands on both sides fighting for their lives within its icy labyrinth. Guardians, having already seeded crossing points between the canyons with heavy weapons platforms, fired at any Guardsman who passed within their sights. The troopers mounted their own ambushes in return, risking the slippery ascent up the canyon walls to stake out the upper pathways. From there they threw frag grenades down into the paths of war walkers who had been restricted to single file in the tighter confines of the Delta. Then, as the Eldar war walkers returned fire, the squads melted away, taking advantage of their lofty positions to leap out of danger and into the adjoining canyons. Death stalked the Tormus Delta, and who would win and who would survive would be determined over the next few murderous hours.

### FRACTURE

The earlier defeat of the Phantom Titan was a victory the forces of Battle Group Odon desperately needed. In the west the battle was quickly turning against Vengeance and a new wave of Eldar craft had been reported appearing from the direction of the Mymearan portal. All who watched expected this second wave to reinforce the Mymeara attack, but instead they carried on heading west directly towards the Tarundor Isthmus. The actions of this breakaway Eldar force were a complete mystery to the veteran general, but with Battle Group Odon's infantry and vehicles wholly committed on the Alacian Plains and in the Tormus Delta, there was little he could do to prevent its advance.



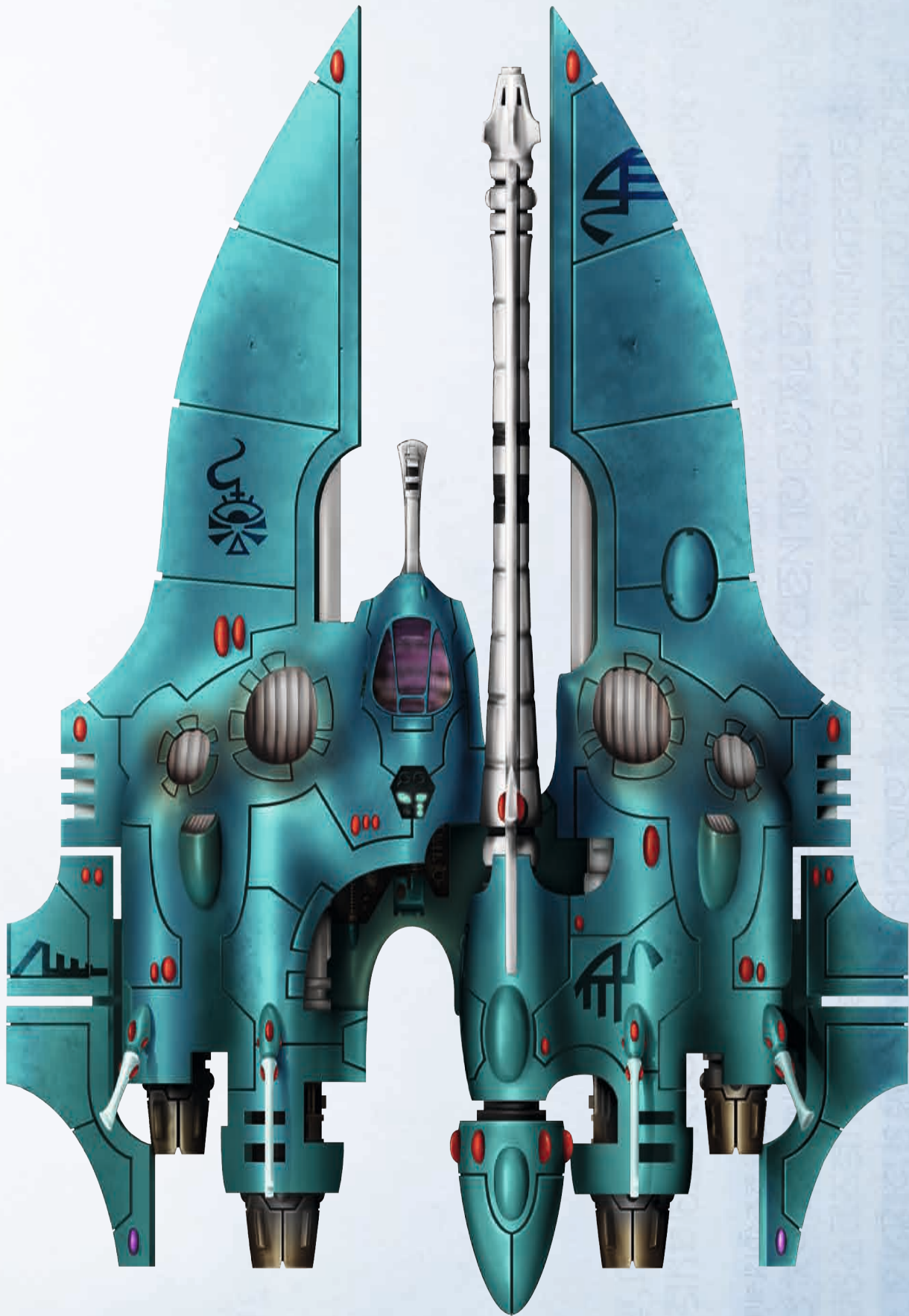
Eldar 'Falcon' type Grav-tank. One of the most common Eldar armoured units, this example is shown with the panoply of the Mymeara Craftworld.



Eldar 'Cobra' Super-heavy Tank. This large skimmer tank possesses a deadly warp distortion-based weapon classified as a high-level threat to all Imperial armoured units and Titans. This example is one of several identified in the service of the Mymearan Craftworld.



Eldar Phantom Titan. Several of these rare war machines, equivalent in power to an Imperial Battle Titan, were engaged in combat by the Legio Gryphonicus during the Betalis Campaign.



Eldar 'Lynx' Heavy Grav-tank. Rarely encountered compared to other Eldar heavy units, this Mymearan Lynx is configured with a sonic lance armament. The recovery of battle wreckage of this type was deemed a high priority by the Adeptus Mechanicus.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## The Tide Turns

War raged upon Betalis III, and in the heavens above it the few remaining Imperial Navy vessels in the Betalis system had retreated to the one place even the Corsairs would not dare venture – the corona of the crystal-blue Betalis star. Amongst its gaseous outer regions, the flotilla of Imperial Navy ships was almost invisible to the keen-sighted outcast pilots and their sensors, but there was a high price to pay for the star's protection. Already its radiation was leeching through the outer hulls of the smaller craft and reports of fatalities were increasing by the hour. The risks of remaining near to the star though were far outweighed by those they'd face from what waited for them beyond it. The Corsair fleet of the Void Dragons now roamed the voids between the Betalis System's worlds unchallenged, easily picking off the few Imperial Navy vessels that had been unable to reach the safety of the star's corona in time. The Eldar stranglehold on the Betalis System though was to prove short-lived.

The first indication those fighting for survival on Betalis III had that reinforcements were on their way was when the Corsair armada that had joined in the assault on Company Vengeance turned their vessels starwards and deserted their Craftworld brethren. With billions of men and machines of war at its disposal, all that the galaxy-spanning Imperium of Mankind had needed was time, and General Odon's request for reinforcements had been answered in

full by the planets and Imperial Navy bases of neighbouring systems. Thousands of the Emperor's own were enroute to relieve the besieged defenders, and at the very point of the spear tip were the strike cruisers of the Space Wolves Great Company of Bran Redmaw.

The Space Wolves' battlefleet was first to appear at the system's outer boundaries, and tore a path straight through the Corsairs' Aconites, Nightshades and Hemlocks. Without stopping it continued towards Betalis III, the Eldar fleet soon realising why it had not turned to follow up on its initial strike. A second wave of Imperial ships had appeared in-system closely behind the Space Marines, and the Corsairs were soon outflanked as the massive Imperial Navy armada rounded on them.

The Eldar outcasts at first held the advantage in terms of speed and agility, and wove a deadly path through the squadrons of Imperial fighter craft as they launched. Soon though, the Void Dragons were faced with overwhelming odds and for each of the Emperor's vessels they destroyed, the Corsairs found themselves evading the guns of two more.

As well as coming to the aid of Betalis III, sector command had determined that its system was to finally be scourged of the Eldar pirates that had plagued it for centuries.



As the Imperial Navy engaged with the Void Dragons, Bran Redmaw's fleet continued towards Betalis III in a furious blaze of destruction. In all that time only once did it break its own counsel and contact those fighting on the planet below. The short message was broadcast by its Wolf Lord, Bran Redmaw himself, and was sent directly to Inquisitor-lord Danzk's command Chimera, the bitter hatred the Space Wolves Chapter reserved for the Inquisition still burning from their clash over the massacre at Armageddon centuries before.

*"We fight for the Allfather, Inquisitor. Do not cross our path."*

### **CARNAGE WITHIN THE DELTA**

The Space Wolves wasted little time in deploying onto Betalis III. The skies above the Tormus Delta, where the men and women of Retribution were fighting a furious defence against Craftworld Alaitoc's forces, were slashed with over a score of fiery contrails as the Chapter's drop pods plummeted from the heavens, the Claws of Russ digging deep into the ice world as close to two hundred Space Wolves made planetfall. The instant the disembarkation ramps unfolded, each drop pod unleashed its deadly cargo, and with fire in their hearts and bolters at the ready, the Space Wolves stormed towards the icy labyrinth.

Company Retribution had already begun to re-establish communications even before the Space Wolves' drop pods had landed. As the Eldar Rangers and Corsairs had done before them, teams of vox operators had climbed above the transmission-deadening icy passageways and were now able to relay orders between the scattered forces. Sniper fire from the Eldar Rangers was taking a tremendous toll on their numbers, but enough were able to evade them for Retribution to finally start fighting as one coordinated force. The effects of this were soon felt by the Eldar. Where once the support platforms manned by pairs of Eldar Guardians had cut a swathe through the frozen passageways and dominated large sections of the Tormus Delta, Retribution's squads now set to work in a two-pronged assault. Moving through adjacent canyons, strike teams would fire mortars over the canyon walls or fix

explosive charges to the thin barriers of ice and rock between them, discharging a lethal hail of shrapnel into the Guardians' positions as squads of Guardsmen, waiting just out of harm's way, stormed through the settling dust and eradicated any Eldar who had survived.

In the south-west of the Delta, where both sides had seen some of their fiercest encounters, Retribution's officers moved in their most experienced troops. Following a barrage of heavy weapons fire guided in by vox teams and Guardsmen acting as spotters, veteran Cadian squads stormed the Eldar battle lines en masse. In response to Retribution's new offensive, Alaitoc's Farseers moved in squads of Dire Avengers and their lightning fast assault soon cut into the Guardsmen's gains. The men and women of Retribution died in droves, whole squads being cut down by shuriken catapult fire or upon the blades wielded by the expert Eldar swordsmen. This, though, was where the Sons of Russ came into their own.

The Space Wolves of Bran Redmaw's Company charged through the network of canyons and gorges, obliterating any resistance they met. Packs of Grey Hunters prowled the maze and the canyons echoed with the shriek and roar of shuriken fire and bolter rounds as they unleashed their wrath upon the Eldar. Then, bloodied, their ceramite armour scored in numerous places, they would emerge triumphant and move on implacably to their next objective.

Of all the bloody conflicts the Space Wolves were involved in within the Tormus Delta, the most daring were initiated by Space Wolves Swiftclaw packs. Able to move at speed through the narrow, twisting passageways, the biker squads sowed havoc and confusion. The first an Eldar squad would know of their approach would be the roar of attack bike engines, followed by the thunder of bolter fire as they tore through their ranks, leaving nothing but carnage and death in their wake. The impatience of youth though usually comes with a lesson to learn, and in the heat of battle this rarely ends well for even those as powerful as the super-human warriors of Mankind. Bolstered by their victories, it did not take long for the headstrong Swiftclaw packs to attempt to outdo each

*Bran Redmaw breathed slowly and deeply, his lungs filling with the crisp, sharp air of Betalis III. It was a simple act, but one which would have suffocated an ordinary human as the lining of his lungs froze and alveoli burst in the sub-zero conditions. The Wolf Lord's gene-enhanced respiratory system could easily cope with atmospheres far colder than this, and as the breath flowed through him, his neuroglottis set to work filtering out the scents of battle that hung upon it.*

*Standing on a snow-capped tor, three black-maned wolves prowling around him, Wolf Lord Bran Redmaw watched his battle-brothers head off into the Tormus Delta. In the hundreds of battles he had fought as commander of the Great Company, he had always been accompanied by a squad of the most venerable of his wolf brothers, but not this time; instead, the honour of leading them now fell to the Great Company's second-in-command, Wolf Guard Skallagrim. It was not an easy decision for Bran*

*Redmaw to make. Ever since Logan Grimnar had ordered him to bring his Company to the defence of this world, his mind had been plagued with visions of his body and soul finally succumbing to the curse of the Wulfen, transformed into a ferocious wild animal, more beast than man, that would stop at nothing to tear its prey apart and feast upon their bloody entrails.*

*Bran Redmaw had believed these visions to be long-buried memories from the time when he had drunk from the Cup of the Wulfen many centuries before as part of his initiation into the ranks of the Space Wolves. He had also thought the icy realm he had prowled upon to have been Fenris during his long and dangerous trek back to the Citadel of the Fang. But now, standing here, looking out upon the ice world of Betalis III, he knew different. This was the world he had seen and it would be where he would have to defeat the curse that haunted him or be lost to it forever.*



other's achievements, boasting over their vox comms of how far they had moved behind enemy lines and the tally of their kills.

For one Swiftclaw pack, their bravado was to prove their undoing. Speeding through the south-east of the Tormus Delta chasing a small squadron of Eldar war walkers, the pack blindly drove into an ambush. Luring them into a large gorge, the war walkers quickly accelerated into the canyons beyond, leaving the slower Swiftclaws in their wake. The Space Wolves were not alone though, for standing like tall marble statues within the gorge were five Eldar Wraithguard, led by their Wraithseer, and as one the eerie wraithbone constructs opened fire.

Like the much larger versions wielded by Mymeara's Phantom Titans, their wraithcannon created rifts between the Warp and realspace in the path of the bikers, instantly tearing apart one of the Space Wolves pack and throwing their Wolf Guard leader from his speeding vehicle as tendrils of the dark energy lashed out at it. Dazed but still conscious, the pack's Wolf Guard leader voxed an immediate request for reinforcements, knowing that his pack would not last long against such a foe. All Space Wolves in the vicinity not already engaged in combat would immediately come to their assistance, but in the meantime the Swiftclaws would have to deal with the implacable advance of the Wraithguard and Wraithseer on their own.

Those still mounted on their bikes roared towards the ethereal warriors, blasting bolter round after bolter round into them. Guided by the spirit stones of long dead Eldar, the towering Wraithguard showed no fear as they weathered the fire storm and fired once more upon the bikes, killing another Swiftclaw as the Space Wolves jinked and weaved to avoid them. Lying injured beneath his bike and unable to move, the Wolf Guard pack leader ordered his battle-brothers to reform and concentrate their fire upon the leader of the Wraithguard, its Wraithseer.

Once an Eldar warlock who had died long ago, its spirit now once again directed the actions of its kin. Rather than trying to take out all the Wraithguard, if the Space Wolves could injure or kill it, they stood a greater chance of surviving their encounter with these ancient Eldar warriors. Snarling their rage, the Swiftclaws gunned their engines to full speed and circled round the wide gorge to attack the Wraithseer, the Wraithguard raising their wraithcannon to fire again. It was then that the Wolf Guard pack leader noticed that the Swiftclaws had made a tactical error. They had naturally closed formation as they had circled round. Given their proximity to each other, one hit on target by their enemy would see them all torn apart.

Their deaths were prevented by the arrival of one of the Great Company's few Dreadnoughts. A steady stream of bolter casings tumbled to the ground as it fired into the gorge from the passage it had arrived from. The Dreadnought's rounds tore into the Wraithguards' position, critically damaging one of the five, its spirit stones and armour shattering like ice. In response to this new threat, the Wraithseer turned into one swift motion and, with an unnatural strength, threw its wraithblade at the Dreadnought.

The faintly glowing blade dove deep into the sarcophagus containing the warrior within. The Wolf Guard raged as he witnessed the death of the Dreadnought's occupant. Powerless to help, he howled out his fury.

The Wolf Guard's battle call did not go unanswered.

### **FIRE FROM THE HILLS**

Watched intently on the pict-screens of Port Ryira, the wave of over two hundred Mymeara Jetbikes, Vypers and Falcons that had earlier bypassed the battle against Company Vengeance flew on to the Tarundor Peninsula. The armada did not turn immediately north to Port Ryira as expected but continued directly eastwards towards the large mining complex of Aresta IV. The facility was home to

*H*earing the cries of one of his pack, the snarling Redmaw raised his head and replied with a terrifying howl that echoed deep into the snow clouds above. In the last few hours, the Wolf Lord had been transformed, succumbing at last to the Curse of the Wulfen as each battle he had fought fed the bestial rage within him. There was little left of the Space Marine and what remained human after that; now he was a snarling creature consumed by rage and fury.

*The Redmaw raced through the maze of passageways, the last of the surviving black-maned wolves following close on his heels, his wolf-brothers having died in the earlier battles against the Eldar. They tore into the canyon where the Swiftclaws fought. The Redmaw no longer recognised the men he had commanded, just their scents. To him they were simply part of his pack, and as alpha male he was driven by the urge to kill what threatened them. Without pause, the Redmaw charged and pounced upon what his instincts told him was his rival for this territory.*

*Fighting against the instinct to reel at the touch of its unnaturally cold skin and lack of scent, the Redmaw opened his jaw wide, briefly tasting the now steadily falling snow, and bit down hard upon the back of its neck. There was no flesh for him to rip apart there though. Instead there was just a feeling he knew too well, that of death. The Redmaw increased his efforts, determined to taste its blood upon his lips, but his prey showed no sign of feeling pain or fear. Instead it reached round over its head and seized him by the scruff of his neck. The Redmaw roared with agony as the creature in one swift motion smashed his body down upon a nearby boulder. Immediately charging to the defence of its pack leader, the black-maned wolf leapt at his assailant, only to be caught in a flash of light that dazzled the Redmaw as he hazily watched its efforts. Another of the strange pack of creatures had come to the aid of its leader, but his wolf-brother's sacrifice had given the Redmaw the time his body needed to recover. As he tensed his muscles to attack his prey again, he sensed the presence of something new, up on the walls that towered high above them.*

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*Raising his staff towards the sky, the Space Wolves rune priest, Finnbjörn Runeforger, called the full fury of the growing blizzard*

*down upon the guardian of the ghostly warriors. Focussing its attentions on the beast before it, the Wraithseer was unprepared to rebuff the sudden, deadly assault. Its wraithbone body was bombarded by a storm of razor sharp ice shards that struck it from the swirling clouds above. Unable to defend itself against such a deadly force, the Wraithseer's surface began to pit and fracture as the shards drove cracks into it. Drawing deep upon his physical and mental reserves, Finnbjörn increased the icy barrage, splitting the Wraithseer's body into a thousand pieces.*

*The destruction of the Wraithseer immediately broke the Wraithguards' focus upon the mortal realm. As their minds drifted once more back to the spiritual plane from which they had been called, the Eldar wraithbone constructs they had briefly existed in slowed and stilled, now nothing more than monolithic statues standing watch over the devastation they had wrought upon the Swiftclaw pack.*

*The creature that Bran Redmaw had become howled in fury that his prey had been taken by another, his piercing red eyes focussing on the new challenger to his status. The Redmaw's instincts urged him to attack and as his senses swiftly worked upon a way to reach it, something from deep within made him pause. His wolf-spirit had sensed something familiar in the eyes of this new creature, something that had stilled his fury for the briefest of moments. The desire to rip its throat out quickly faded and hearing the sounds of the enemy off in the distance, the Redmaw bolted off in search of new prey.*

*Finnbjörn watched the creature he knew to be his battle-brother leave. The Wolf Lord was limping from his injuries but already his gene-enhanced body was beginning to heal him, the Larraman cells clotting his blood and sealing his many wounds. In the brief moment the Rune Priest had looked directly into the eyes of the creature the Great Wolf had become, Finnbjörn had seen the merest hint of the warrior-brother he had fought alongside in battle many times.*

*Once he had overseen the recovery of the injured and dead Swiftclaws from the gorge below him, Finnbjörn would report what he had seen back to Brother Ulrik, the High Wolf Priest of the Space Wolves Chapter, the oldest and most respected of their kind. The Wolf Lord had won his battle against the beast that raged within him and would soon return again to the great halls of Fenris.*

over nine hundred workers and their families, and as air raid sirens blared through the hab block shanty town that stretched across its eastern side, the workers' militia were already charging into position, manning the bunker-sited heavy weapons that were the core of Aresta IV's defences. Joining them were the few elements of Battle Group Odon not fighting out on the Alacian Plains, mainly support staff and the first of the injured Guardsmen that had been brought back behind the battle lines.

Regardless of injury or rank, all who were capable of fighting picked up a lasgun and prepared to defend themselves as the Eldar strike force launched itself upon the mining complex, Jetbikes and Vypers breaking formation and diving down upon the defenders in a hail of shuriken discs and starcannon fire. In return, shots from

the heavy weapons bunkers and weapons batteries on the upper platforms of the complex pounded the skies. The assault from the air was swiftly followed by sniper fire from the hillsides where Mymeara's Guardian squads and Rangers had moved into position during the opening attack. The Eldar, it seemed, were intent on removing whatever threat those at Aresta IV posed to them.

Had they believed the facility to be poorly defended, then the commanders of the Eldar strike force were sorely mistaken. Ordered to move immediately into the path of this new Eldar force by the Ordo Xenos Inquisitor-lord Danzk, Elysian Drop Troop squads had already deployed in the hills above Aresta IV. Laying low, the Elysians, near-invisible in their camouflaged uniforms, ambushed the unsuspecting Guardian squads as they passed by.

The presence of the Elysians on the hillsides slowed the Eldar attack but it could do little to stop it. Pouring through the most vulnerable point of the facility, the hab block shanty town, Aspect Warrior squads descended upon the militia. Howling Banshees haunted the area where the bunkers had been set up, their psycho-sonic battle screams paralysing all who opposed them so that there was little resistance from the Guardsmen and workers militia as they were cut down by the graceful warriors.

But it was at the entrance to the mines that the worst atrocities were committed by the Eldar. Massive mining vehicles had been driven in front of the entrance to protect the workers who sought shelter within. The vehicles and the militia behind them lasted seconds as the vehicles were melted into little more than slag by the fusion guns of Mymeara Fire Dragons squads, leaving those sheltering within undefended as the Eldar advanced.

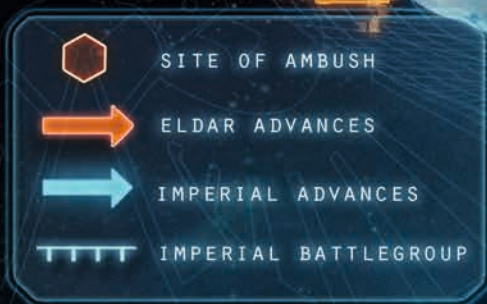
The nightmare unfolding at the Aresta IV facility would be short-lived though. As the Eldar flyers made for another pass at the heavy weapons teams in the bunkers, Imperial Navy Fury interceptors from the now-orbiting fleet dived down through the clearing storm clouds, just as the troop transports of Battle Group Vlaar appeared on the horizon. Perhaps realising that the odds were soon to turn against them, the survivors at Aresta IV watched the Eldar flee.

## WRATH OF TITANS

As the Imperium's waves of reinforcements began to spread out across the besieged eastern continent of Betalis III, the Legio Gryphonicus had already engaged once more with the Titans of the Mymearan Craftworld. Still following their original orders, given to them by Inquisitor-lord Danzk earlier that day, the princeps of the Titan maniples had tracked one of their foe to a region just north of where the battle between the Eldar and Company Vengeance was being fought on the Alacian Plains. Enroute the Phantom Titan had also been joined by three Mymearan Revenant Titans. The second Phantom Titan, damaged earlier by the demi-maniple, had been observed by the Inquisitor-lord's servitors entering the coastal region of the Mymearan portal to the west, and was believed to have either journeyed back through it to the Craftworld or was now standing watch over the portal itself.

Knowing that the presence of the remaining Eldar Titans could tip the balance against Company Vengeance, the princeps of the *Invictus Nova* had ordered his fellow Titan princeps to engage with the Eldar war striders before they got any nearer. Facing an enemy half its number but significantly superior in terms of armament and speed, the Imperial Titan princeps knew that the odds were against them as they stepped into battle once more.

TORMUS DELTA - SECTOR 752 / +032 HRS  
SPACE WOLVES CHAPTER, BRAN REDMAW GREAT COMPANY  
DESTROYED JOINT CRAFTWORLD ALAITOC AND ALLIED  
FORCES ATTEMPTING TO MOVE TOWARDS SECTOR 849.  
FLANKING ELДАР VYPER SQUADRON ENGAGED BY THE  
GUNS OF 8TH SQUAD, BETALIS 28TH RIFLES.




The Legio Gryphonicus Titans split again into their two original groups. The demi-maniple Nova, now a Titan down after the destruction of the Warhound *Magnus Canis*, first attacked the Eldar Titans and then drew away eastwards into the heart of an ice storm. Their plan worked and the lead Eldar steersman led his Titan host in pursuit after them. In a series of bitterly fought skirmishes and assaults that ran over almost half of the length of the continent, the two groups of Titans fought. Moving through terrain much more in their favour than the rocky battlefield further west, the demi-maniple worked its way north-east via a two kilometre section of the highway that wound through and over the mountains. Meanwhile, the Exaro maniple headed west and then north again across another part of the highway. As the Eldar Titans followed demi-maniple Nova out on to the ice fields beyond, the Exaro maniple charged in behind them to cut off their exit point.

Over the next hour, the gods of war of both races fought a furious battle. With little shelter save for the vision obscuring blizzard, the Imperium's princeps resorted to a pattern of feints and strikes to protect themselves from the Eldar's distortion cannons and pulsars. First the demi-maniple Nova would close within range of the Eldar and fire upon them. Then, as soon as the *Nova's* shots were away, the Exaro maniple would attack, striding forwards to harry the Eldar Titans, attempting to prevent them from returning fire upon the *Nova* and its Warhound escort.

The battle was not without further casualties. The first was suffered by the Eldar. One of its Revenant Titans was destroyed as it attempted to break away and circle back around onto the flanks of the Exaro maniple. Spotting its ruse, the maniple's princeps ordered his three Reaver Titans and two Warhounds to fire upon its position. Their combined might overloaded the Revenant Titan's holofields and severed the power mechanisms within its leg casings. Unable to move, and with its lone crewman probably severely injured or dead already, the Eldar Titan self-detonated, denying certain elements of the Imperium the rare opportunity to later study such advanced xenos technology first-hand. The Legio Gryphonicus did not escape unscathed either, its Warhound Titans suffering the worst attentions of their foes. Two from the Exaro maniple received direct hits from the twin pulse lasers of the Revenants, one being critically damaged and forced to retreat from the battlefield.

The Phantom Titan was to wreak the most devastation with its distortion cannon. At the height of the battle, it came close to destroying the *Exaro* itself when a shot from its arcane weapon glanced off the shields of the Battle Titan. Had the remaining Imperial Titans not come to its aid whilst the Titan and its crew recovered from the power surge that had temporarily crippled it, then it may have then been destroyed completely.



TORMUS DELTA – SECTOR 302 / +056 HRS  
SPACE WOLVES CHAPTER, BRAN REDMAW GREAT COMPANY  
COMPANY RETRIBUTION FRONTLINES BREACHED BY XENOS  
ASSAULT. ENEMIES OF THE EMPEROR DESTROYED BY  
ADVANCING SPACE WOLVES LONG FANGS AND GREY  
HUNTERS PACKS.

*For what must have been the hundredth time, Princeps Ephraim checked the two dials on his console. The first dial had just reached zero as he looked down again, meaning that the next part of his plan was in position. Immediately, Ephraim ordered the Exaro maniple to open fire. He needed to be sure that the Eldar Titans took the bait and did not attempt to circle round him as they had tried to earlier. From out of the west, just as the hurricane-force winds that blew across the open ice field dropped slightly, came a new storm, one of holy wrath as las fire and hard rounds streamed past the Nova, a sudden blossom of light off in the distance indicating they had hit at least one of the following Eldar Revenant Titans.*

*There was no time to celebrate the skills of the Exaro maniple's weapons moderatiū though. The needle on the second gauge was rapidly approaching zero. He needed to move now and move fast. Pushing deep into his link with the Invictus, he searched its already punished systems for any remaining untapped power, the lights in the crew compartment dimming as he took it from anywhere he could. There were barely metres to go before the second countdown reached zero and failing to reach the coordinates was not an option. The Invictus Nova closed the last few dozen metres with barely seconds to spare on the gauge. Princeps Ephraim watched the final numbers count down and prayed that time was on their side.*

*Four... The air cleared quickly as the fury of the blizzard that had earlier engulfed the region was finally spent, revealing two of Invictus' pursuers only five hundred metres away and closing fast.*

*Three... Just a few hundred metres behind the two Revenants, the Phantom Titan emerged. A faint dark haze was already wreathing its distortion cannon, just as it had before the Phantom had blasted the Magnus Canis into oblivion.*

*Two... Ephraim pushed the Invictus Nova harder than he had ever done before.*

*One... The Invictus Nova reached the designated coordinates just as Ephraim received a message from the captain of the Legio Gryphonicus ship, The Lithore's Vengeance, now orbiting thousands of kilometres directly above him.*

*"Orbital strike initiated." Seven massive torpedoes descended like blazing comets from the heavens and impacted with the Eldar Titans' position.*

*When the thunderous explosions had ceased, a thick bank of smoke hung in the air. Ephraim waited as it gradually faded away, ready to move if he caught even the faintest glimpse of an Eldar Titan heading out of it towards the Nova. But instead the dissipating smoke revealed that the landscape seaward had been altered completely. Gone were the kilometres of ice that had stretched out before the Reaver Titan and instead there was now a wide gulf which dropped straight into the deep waters below. Beyond it on the horizon, Ephraim could just about see the Phantom Titan retreating west back towards the Mymearan portal. Its annihilation had eluded the princeps once again but he doubted it would play any further part in the war. The two Revenants of its cadre though would make one more appearance, listed in the great honour rolls of the Legio Gryphonicus as missing, presumed destroyed upon the rocks below.*

Although most of the Imperium's Titans suffered from serious battle damage in the engagement, they were to emerge victorious. With the threat of the Mymearan Craftworld Titans removed from Betalis III, the Legio Gryphonicus for the final hours of the war joined with mobile elements of Bran Redmaw's Company that had been set down by Thunderhawk gunships to assist Company Vengeance. The small force of Space Wolves Land Raiders and other vehicles, plus the Legio Gryphonicus Titans, then outflanked part of Alaitoc's armada, blunting its fury and preventing it from fully engaging with Company Vengeance.

### **THE TIDE TURNS**

With the hillsides around Aresta IV reinforced by the Elysian Drop Troops and forward sections of Battle Group Vlaar, the Imperial Navy squadrons turned west towards Company Vengeance. As the pilots approached the combat zone, they were met with an apocalyptic scene of devastation. Gone were the military-precise squadron formations, and instead remained a few tight pockets of resistance focused upon nothing but the utter annihilation of their foe. Out of the hundreds of Imperial tanks and other heavy armour deployed there, less than a third was left.

The joint Mymeara-Alaitoc war host had also taken a severe battering. Proving once again his reputation as an expert tank commander, General Odon had organised Vengeance into mobile blocks of tanks that bristled with guns, and for every Lemman Russ or Chimera destroyed, four Eldar craft took serious damage or were blown out of the skies. It was the general's tactical experience that had enabled Vengeance to hold out for so long and as the advancing Imperial Navy battle wing began to move within range, the Eldar craft broke formation and turned back in the direction of the portal that had gained them access to the Emperor's world.

At that same moment in the Tormus Delta, Retribution's vox-network was flooded with reports that Alaitoc's land forces had also broken from battle. Minutes before their war cries had echoed through the canyons, but now the icy maze was near-silent. Hundreds of kilometres above the Delta, the pict-screens of the Imperial Navy fleet confirmed what all below already knew, the Eldar were retreating.

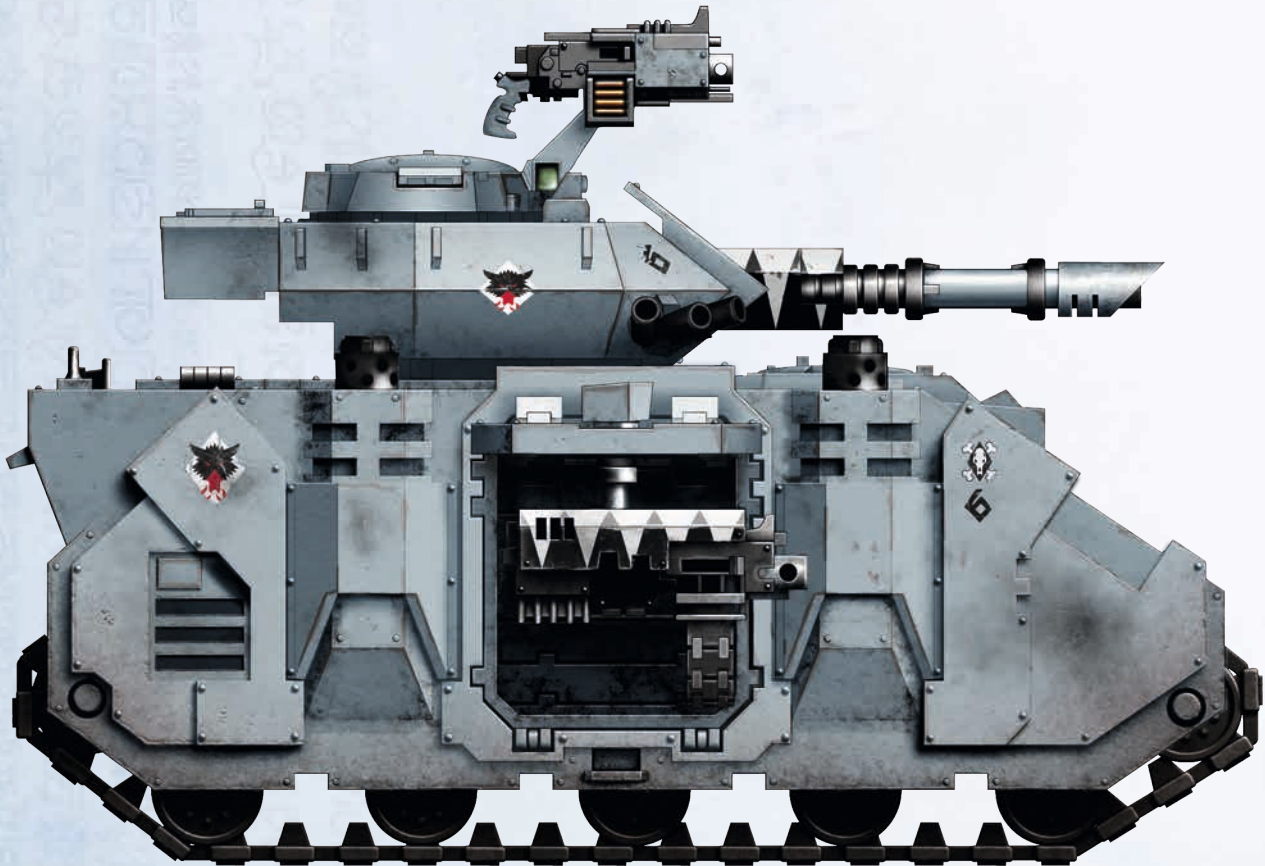
The forces of the great Imperium of Mankind had won the Battle for Betalis III.



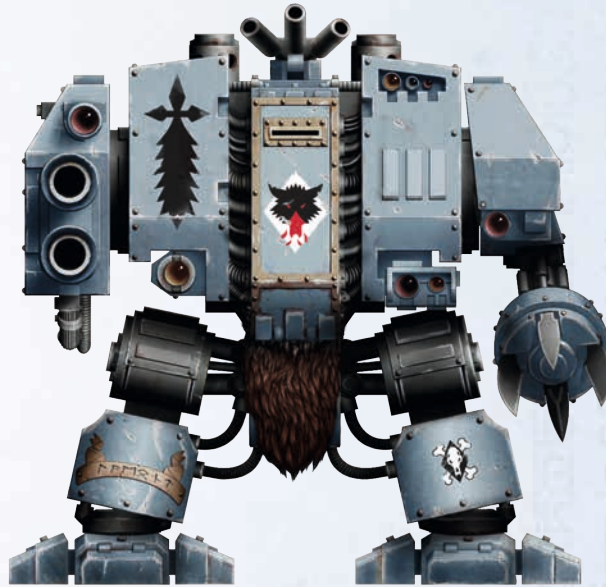
Craftworld Mymeara's forces move out across Betalis III.



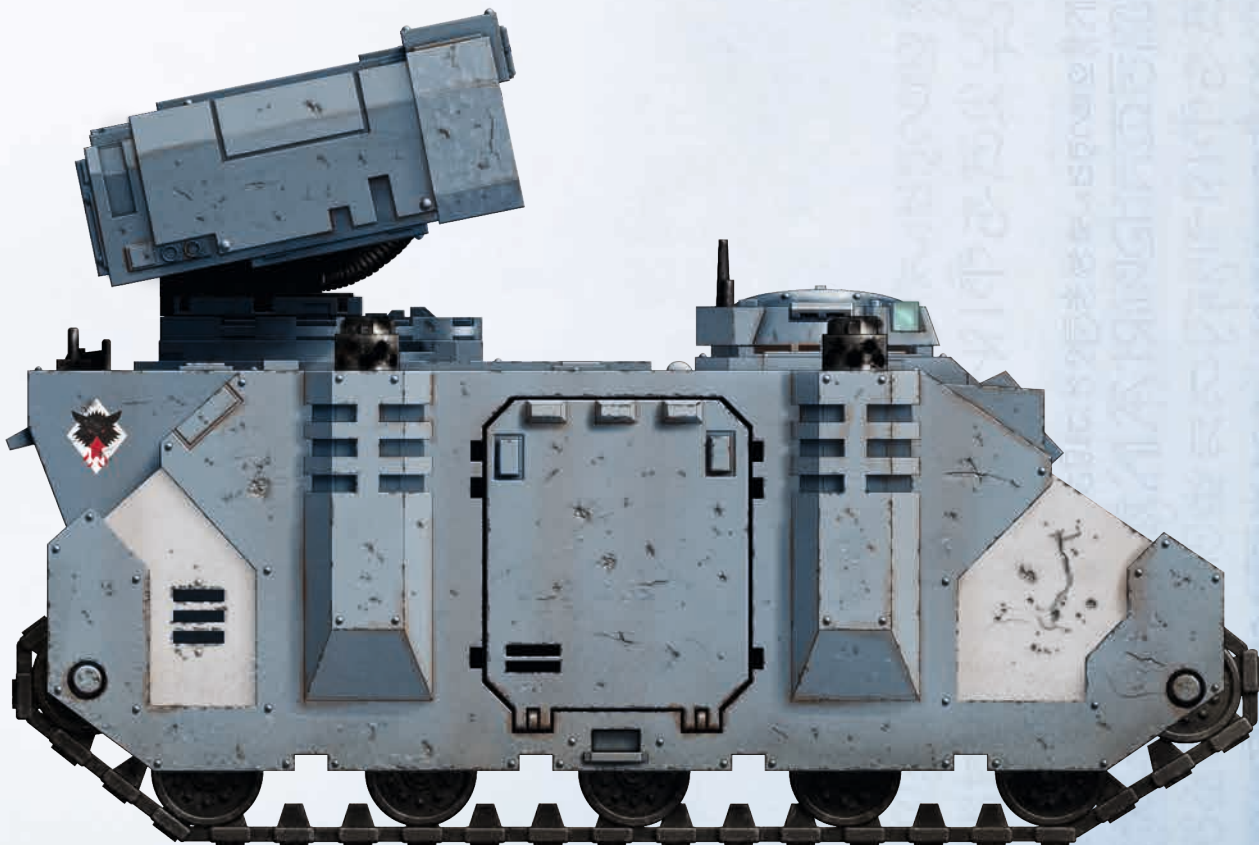
Space Wolves Chapter, Blood Claws Rhino Transport.  
Bran Redmaw's Great Company.



Space Wolves Chapter, Predator Tank (Annihilator  
configuration). Bran Redmaw's Great Company.



Ancient Skarrag. Interred in Mk V Dreadnought in fealty to the Redmaw. Fell in glory on Betalis III.



Space Wolves Whirlwind Launcher. Note that the vehicle shown here was of relatively new manufacture by the forges of Fenris, and lacked further designation or graven sagas.



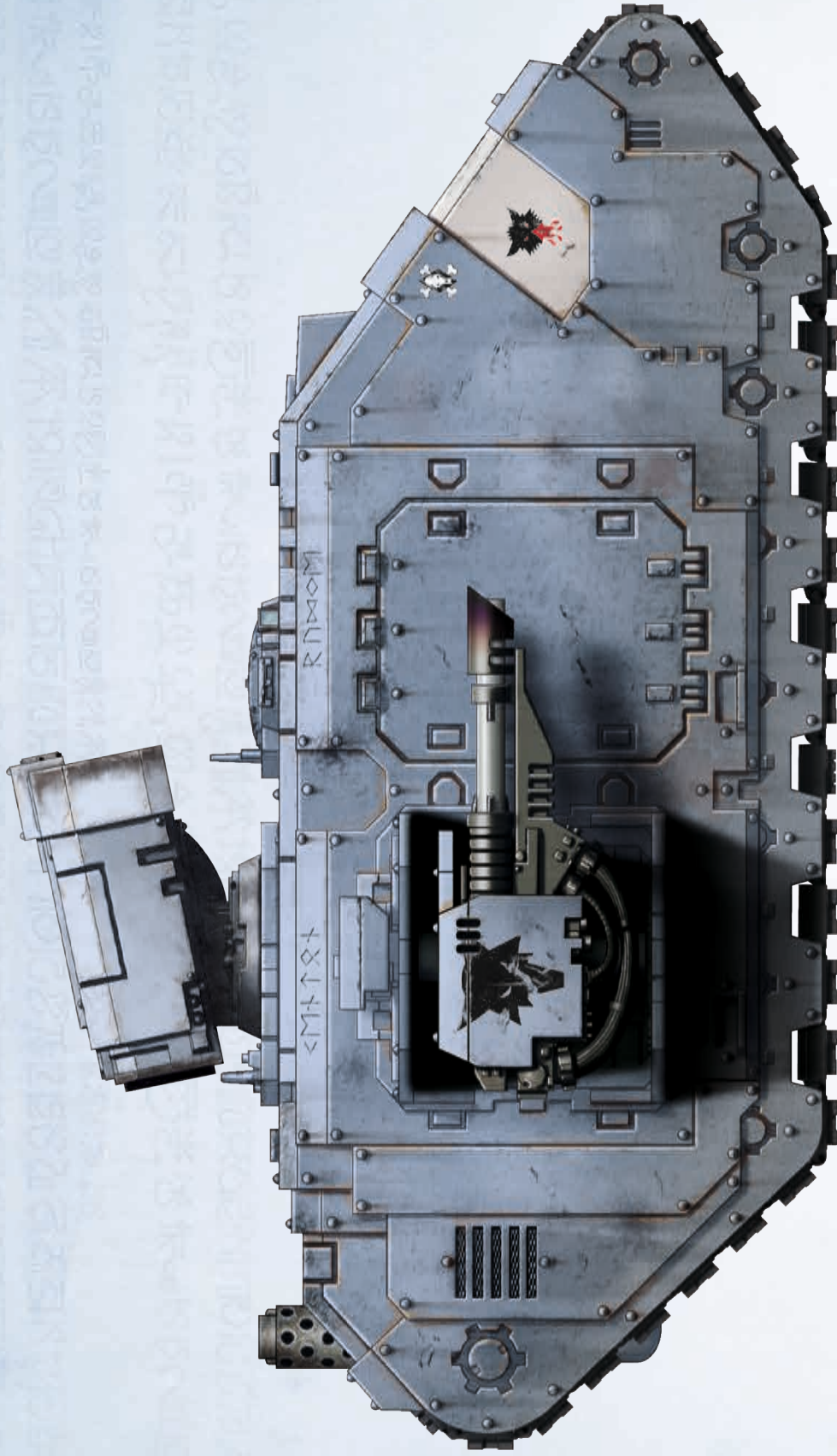
The '*Tempus Prima*'  
Legio Gryphonicus Warhound Titan,  
Invictus Nova Battle Maniple, the Incursion of Betalis III.



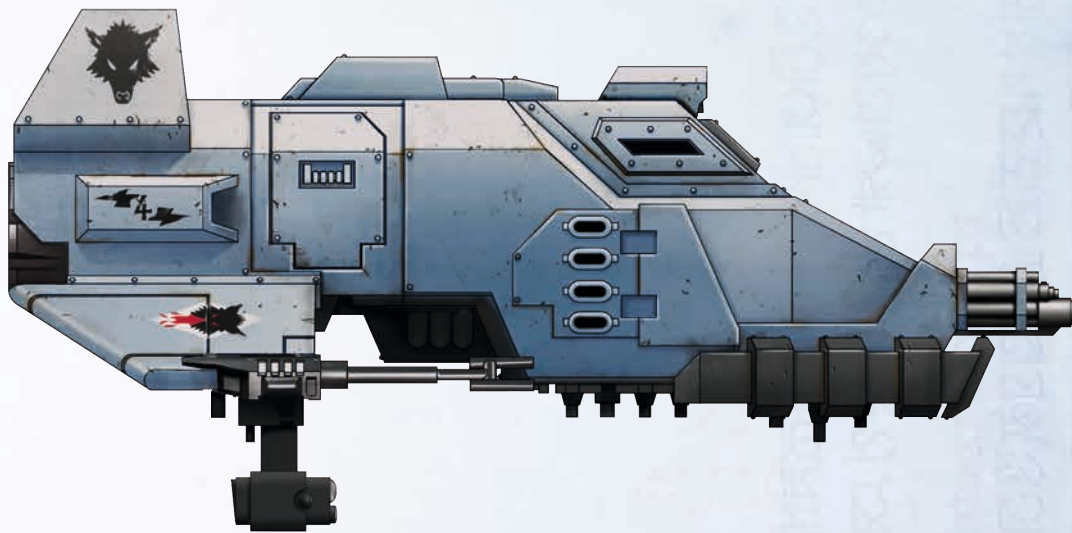
Leman Russ Exterminator '*Kasr's Sabre*' – 9<sup>th</sup> vehicle, special detachment, 6<sup>th</sup> Cadian Armoured Regiment. This unit distinguished itself in the Betalis Campaign, with five confirmed kills against enemy skimmers. Later awarded the Iron Laurel commendation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class.



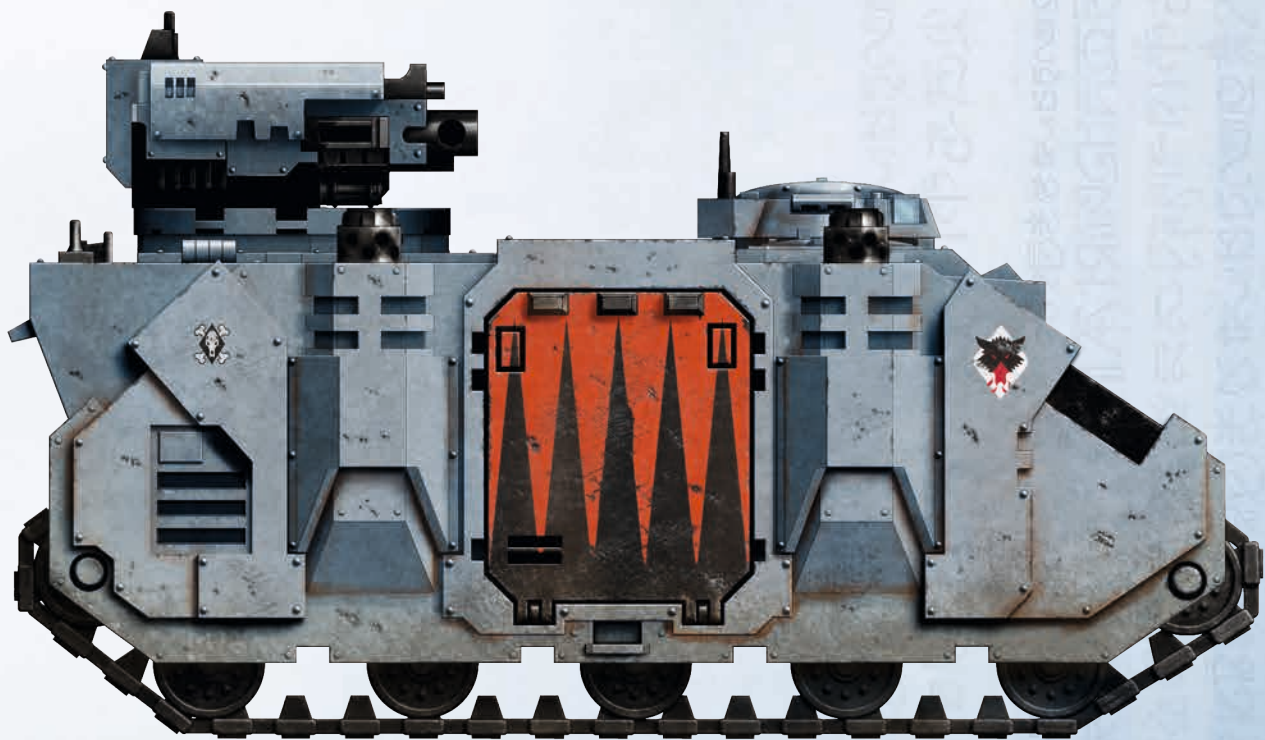
Macharius Heavy Tank. Cadian 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment, 2<sup>nd</sup> Company Command Vehicle '*Traitor's Bane*'. Vehicle immobilised during the retreat from Sector IV-D, but fought on until destroyed, its crew posthumously entered onto the regiment's Roll of Martyrdom.



Space Wolves Land Raider Helios 'Widowmaker'. A relic of the Chapter, this Land Raider had been part of Redmaw's Great Company since 940.M41.



Space Wolves Chapter Land Speeder Tempest. The Tempest is a low level attack craft and interceptor used to support the Great Company's attacks.



Space Wolves Chapter Razorback. The Razorback offers increased firepower over the Rhino, at the cost of troop capacity.

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# NECROCOGNITION CORTICAL TRANSCRIPT

SAMPLE NUMBER 77.832.0912/x

G58X 456T  
OH:78:08Z

PART .....

[Classification – Ordo Xenos Extremis]

[Account of subject 77.832.0912/x – Inquisitor-lord Hestaphus Danzk]

[Betalis III. Sector 936]

[Transcript – Servitor Remptor – Biologos resource alpha-m2]

Inquisitor-lord Danzk sat in the darkened confines of his command Chimera studying the dozens of images on his pict-screens, his augmented eyes flicking rapidly from one to the next. Some he barely paid notice to, such as those showing the celebrating miners and Imperial Guardsmen of Battle Group Odon outside the Aresta VI mining complex, each face being automatically scanned, measured, assessed and compared against Ordo Xenos files for any sign of heretical xenos deviancy. If he did consider them at all, it was only to acknowledge that they had completed their part in the battle for this world, and Danzk would not begrudge them this brief moment of triumph. Life was short and brutal for them. Soon they would board Imperial Navy transport ships and head off to another war zone and celebrations such as these were necessary for maintaining morale.

A bright flash on the top bank of images attracted his gaze briefly. Considering the land war on Betalis III over with the retreat of the Eldar war hosts of Alaitoc and Mymeara, the Space Wolves were taking the battle to those in the skies above. There had been unconfirmed reports of larger Eldar vessels skulking in its system's outer reaches and in the Karina Nebula beyond. Inquisitor-lord Danzk would join in their hunt soon enough, but his part in the land war was not yet over. There were too many unanswered questions, too many loose ends to tie up, and he had just found the key to unlock them all.

It was a minuscule event in the grand scheme of things, an incident that had happened long before the first shots had been fired by either side, but was now the key to everything. Danzk flicked a switch on his console and patched a link into the vox network. The final battle for Betalis III was about to begin.

[Servitor Remptor ...File on screen - Odon 86759874/kl section 12.7...]

Having moved deep within the mining facility and now located within a vast forge chamber, Inquisitor-lord Danzk barely glanced at the reports from his retinue and the lieutenant he'd put in charge of the two hundred Guardsmen and militia men from the Aresta IV facility that were now under his command. The men had spent the past hour scouting out the immense hall where Danzk had determined they would make their stand. The reports told him what he already knew – it was clear of their foe. The Inquisitor-lord had expected nothing different. The Eldar would be in the tunnels below, probably not a large group but of a size sufficient to complete its task and also small enough to elude the search parties that had earlier been scouring the mines for any Eldar who had got past their defences during the earlier battle. Having had at least five hours undisturbed in the tunnels that led off from the hall, they would have the advantage, and he was not about to step blindly into their lair. Here was where the Imperium would make its stand – on its own ground and on its own terms.

With a boom that shook the whole chamber, the colossal blast doors leading back up to the surface slammed shut. Then twenty bolts, the size of massive tree trunks, slid into position within them, and with a sinister primal hiss the forge chamber was sealed off from the rest of the planet. The door was designed to withstand the force of the thirty-storey high forge machine exploding and should the Imperial defence force be defeated, this was the final barrier



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NECRO-COGNITION SAVANT Malko [Hexical j5]  
AUTO-TRANSCRIPTOR SAVANT Remptor [alpha-m2]

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the Eldar would have to break through to get back up to the planet's surface. Inquisitor-lord Danzk, never a man to go into battle without a back-up plan, reinforced the door further. Now deep within the forge's structure, swaddled amongst its countless valves and pipes, and the dozens of shrines to its machine spirit, was Tech-Priest Mydeaus, connected directly into the mechanical leviathan's systems. From there he had sole control of the door, Danzk having ordered his men to destroy any of the other access points to it. They were locked in: Inquisitor-lord Danzk, his retinue, the Guardsmen and the militia. But, more importantly, so too were the Eldar.

Once connected, Mydeaus had begun to put the resources of the forge to a new purpose. Attached to a huge rail system on top of it were four massive cranes, normally used to feed the five storey-high smelting crucibles with the ore dug from the mines below. The Tech-Priest was using them to lift tonnes of metal rails and heavy equipment into position as barricades in front of the mine network entrance. So totally connected was Mydeaus with the forge machine's systems that rail and vehicle alike were placed exactly where directed by the Guardsmen, barely disturbing the ash that fell like black snow from the monstrous bubbling crucibles above.

As for everyone else, they were crawling through the winding maze of walkways and gantries, picking out their own positions from where to play their part in the battle to come. The forge chamber was not where most of them would have chosen to be at that moment. The militia men in the ad hoc defence force were accustomed to the almost unbearable heat and choking fumes, but within minutes of being locked off from the outside world, the Guardsmen and his retinue were suffering the effects of the temperature. Despite this, no one though removed their environment suits.

Satisfied that his plan was progressing as instructed, Danzk turned his attention once again to the images on his pict-screens showing the progress of the swarm of servitors he had sent into the tunnels. These were more of the Tech-Priest's tinkering - nightmarish bio-mechanical constructs with metal bodies and multiple pairs of legs, and like a spider sitting at the centre of its web, Danzk's dozens of pairs of eyes now watched the whole of the north-west cave system below.

The Inquisitor-lord methodically scrolled through the images from each servitor in turn, every single one showing an almost identical view of the dusty rock walls, floor or ceiling of the tunnels as they scrambled their way forwards. The hunt didn't last long though, nor had he expected it to. The Eldar were ready and waiting to deal with such prying eyes and one of the servitors had just paused, its sensors picking up something in the darkness. Danzk checked its location. It was one of those closest to where the mining accident had been. He focused on its connection to the console in front of him, blinked and watched events unfold through its eyes.

[Servitor Pious7-x53] The servitor paused and scanned the tunnel ahead. Its sensors had picked up movement, but Danzk could see nothing in the artificial glow its enhanced visual feeds were sending back to him. In a blur of movement, the servitor suddenly shifted its ocular ports to look up at a point to its left, half-way up the rock wall, and Danzk finally saw what had caught its attention. On the tunnel's surface a few metres away was a faint patch of light moving swiftly towards the servitor. Without warning, the image suddenly brightened and the feed cut out.

Danzk found himself looking once again at the pict screens in his command Chimera, a stabbing pain just behind his eyes from the optic shock he'd just received. He quickly checked the rest of the pict-screens. The images from four more servitors at different points in the same tunnel had also gone blank. That could mean only one thing - the Eldar knew they were being hunted again, but where exactly were they?



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He got his answer soon enough. Spotting a change in the feed from another of the servitors, he blinked again.

[Servitor - Artus352-n] The area the servitor was moving through was rubble-strewn rather than the clear boulder-free approach of the transit tunnels. Unlike its now lifeless companions, it had managed to slip past whatever was guarding the tunnels and had made it to the coordinates of the cave-in which had killed over forty miners at the facility several weeks before. There was no evidence of a cave-in here now though. Instead the servitor was passing through the entrance to a massive cavern, the huge fallen rocks at its entrance having been cleared by the Eldar. As it moved, the servitor articulated its multiple pairs of legs quickly over and around objects scattered on the cavern floor.

Danzk paused the feed to get a better look. Littered around the servitor were masses of bones, a fine layer of corpse-dust upon them disturbed by the passing of the servitor where skin and flesh had once been. The bodies, and not one of them looked human, must have been lying unburied in the cavern for hundreds if not thousands of years judging by the lack of flesh upon them. Danzk's normally cold analytical mind raced at the possibilities - this must have been the site of a massive battle once, and judging by the state of the remains, it had been fought centuries before the colonisation of Betalis III.

Even now the systems in his Chimera were churning through the images, cataloguing and attempting to cross reference them with the billions of records held within its data core. They had already confirmed Eldar bones lying amongst the mass grave and a lot of their decomposed remains had injuries consistent with the effects of brutally intense hand-to-hand combat. Score marks criss-crossed where blades had cut through skin to slash at the bone below. Other bones were cracked and shattered, particularly skulls, where heavier weapons had impacted, perhaps hammers or mauls judging by the damage.

As for the Eldar host's foe, each bone analysed was accompanied by the same frustrating response, 'Unidentified'. Whatever race it was, there was nothing to match it in his extensive records. Their injuries were consistent with those caused by Eldar weapons though. The cuts to the limb bones were cleaner than those caused by their own weapons, and skulls had been penetrated by neat holes consistent with the plasma weapons Eldar Aspect Warriors favoured. There was also no mistaking the tell-tale lattice marks scored deep into many of the bones, the result of becoming entangled in the more exotic weapons used by the Eldar's warrior elite.



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Inquisitor-lord Danzk could have spent years just looking over that one image but now was not the time. He reconnected back to the live feed from the servitor. It had travelled further into the cavern and located the Eldar contingent, and was now positioned on a ledge slightly back from them but still with a clear enough view for Danzk to observe what was going on.

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[Servitor - Artus352-n] There were five Eldar clearly in view and behind them hovered flickering pale lights the same as those the servitors had encountered earlier in the tunnels.

This time though, within each of the lights Danzk could clearly see the faint spectral form of an Eldar warrior, of a type he had never come across before. They appeared to be standing as guards for the group of five Eldar in front: a Farseer, what he took to be three Eldar priests of high rank judging from their attire, and a single Eldar warrior who was the sole focus of the ritual they were performing.

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# NECROCOGNITION CORTICAL TRANSCRIPT

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SAMPLE NUMBER 77.832.0912/x

PART .....

[Servitor Remptor – Biologos resource alpha-m2 ...Speculation of identity of xenos group by Inquisitor-lord Danzk unconfirmed. Data forwarded to Inquisitor Samaeal Kayvus for further analysis...]

The warrior was stood in the centre of the group. On the floor next to him was the body of another Eldar warrior. It must have been dead for thousands of years, but unlike the others who had fought within the chamber, its remains were still preserved to some degree, as if it had held on to life far longer than anyone else had managed to. Two of the Eldar priests were removing pieces of ornately decorated armour from its mummified remains and placing each one in turn upon the living Eldar warrior.

'Was this what the Eldar had come to Betalis III for?' he thought, 'Had thousands on both sides died for this?' Danzk commanded the servitor to focus in on the armour.

The Inquisitor-lord was amazed at the intricacy of its decoration – the craftsmanship on it was far superior to anything he had seen in his decades of study of Eldar war panoply. In the many files written about the Eldar race he had studied, there were accounts of them launching raids against planets which possessed artefacts considered important to them. But to start a war on such a scale meant that this must be something truly precious to them.

[Servitor Remptor – Biologos resource alpha-m2 ...Analysis of prior Xenos-Eldar behaviour indicates 89% probability that retrieval of the artefact was the objective of the Eldar invasion of Betalis III...]

Their task complete, the Eldar priests stepped back, positioning themselves on either side and behind their charge. Then the Farseer stepped forward and raised his staff into the air, holding it above the warrior with both hands. The Farseer then released it and the staff floated up until it was hovering a short distance vertically above the warrior's helm. The instant it was in place, the cavern was filled with a bright actinic light as what must have been a tremendous amount of psychic energy surged upwards from the outstretched arms of the Farseer and the priests and channelled itself down through the staff and across the warrior's armour – who was soon surrounded with a rapidly growing aura of ice-white light.

Within a few seconds Danzk could no longer see the warrior; the corona of light had completely engulfed him and was rapidly expanding outwards. An unearthly wind blew from the eye of the psychic storm, whipping around the robes of the Farseer and priests, and blowing the shroud of corpse-dust from the field of bones that lay beyond the ritual. Tendrils of light suddenly leapt out from the psychic inferno. First they randomly skittered along the cavern floor, but as the circle of light grew, harmlessly enveloping the Farseer and his cadre, Danzk realized the tendrils were leaping from bone to skull to bone, as if they were feasting hungrily upon whatever echoes of life were still contained within them. As they moved on to another bone they left nothing behind but crumbling dust, but Danzk didn't have time to dwell on his escalating horror at the destruction as one of tendrils latched directly on to the servitor.

The Inquisitor-lord screamed out in agony as the same brilliant light that bathed the cavern tore through his optic nerves, and slumped unconscious onto his console.

Some time later Danzk woke to the unmistakable sounds of battle outside his Chimera's now near-pitch black observation compartment. What he had taken first to be nightmares of slaughter and destruction as he was awakening had been images feeding directly into his mind from his retinue as they had failed to hold back the Eldar onslaught.



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AUTO-TRANSCRIPTOR SAVANT Remptor [alpha-m2]

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G58X 456T  
OH:78:08Z

SAMPLE NUMBER 77.832.0912/x

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His body felt as if a great hand had picked him up and thrown him about, and as he moved to sit up, the Inquisitor-lord almost passed out again with the pain. His left leg wasn't broken, but it had taken a severe battering, and reaching up he could feel the unwelcome presence of a large lump on the side of his head where it had come in contact with what he could only assume was the console. Danzk disconnected himself from what few feeds his implants were still plugged into and painfully dragged his body upright. It was then he hazily realized that the Chimera was now lying on its side.

Reaching outwards, the stench of smouldering flesh assaulted his senses as he struggled to push the heavy outer hatch open, its unbalanced weight sapping his failing strength as he wrestled with it. As he took a few moments to recover, Danzk took in the sight of the bodies of dozens of the defence force scattered around the entrance to the tunnels. It was as if a hurricane had torn straight through the forge chamber, picked the men up and then dropped them back down again without a care. The motley collection of rails and heavy equipment used as barricades in front of the tunnels had been tossed aside like children's toys; the blast holes that punctured them displayed the unmistakable signs of Eldar weaponry, their edges still glowing faintly orange from the intense heat. The defence force had been hit hard and fast with little chance to retaliate, judging by the lack of Eldar bodies amongst the dead and wounded.

Danzk dragged himself from the vehicle and fell more than climbed down its side, his numb leg useless in his descent. He lay against the upturned underside of the Chimera, catching his breath, a tightness in his chest suggesting he'd suffered some internal injuries when the vehicle had rolled. Once the sound of pounding drums in his head ceased, he used his augmented senses to begin to analyse the storm of battle raging above and around him. Focusing hard, Inquisitor-lord Danzk picked out the staccato bursts of two pistols firing from amongst the maze of pipes and cables, distinct from the steady sounds of the Cadian Guardsmen's lasguns. Taron, the Cadian sniper, was still alive, but if he was using his pistols rather than his favoured rifle, then whatever part of the battle he was a part of was not going well for him. Danzk blinked, praying that the blow to his head had not caused him to lose connection with at least one of his retinue.

[Taron Metgar - Subject 287. Critica VII] The moment the Inquisitor-lord connected with the Cadian, he could tell that the man was absolutely terrified, something the normally calm, and, some of the others in the retinue would say, emotionally bereft sniper had never been in the time Danzk had known him.



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Taron's eyes were wide open with fear. He looked left then right and then left again. The sniper was frantically trying to watch two directions at the same time and when that failed suddenly began to fire wildly with his pistols, first one way then another and then straight out into the open air ahead. His weapons were soon emptied and Taron risked a glance down to reload them again, his hands slick with sweat as he frantically fumbled with the ammunition clips attached to his webbing. Then, with the pistols finally loaded, Taron looked up ahead again and swore. Hovering directly in front of him, ten levels up, was one of the 'ghosts' he had been tracking, the same spectral Eldar warrior Danzk had seen guarding the group in the bone chamber.

At the first sound of the Eldar's screaming weapon being discharged, Taron dived over the back of the gantry onto a metal platform a short distance below. He had avoided being hit twice so far but now his luck had run out. Designed for taking out heavy armour rather than being fired at such close quarters, the blast of energy rippled through the gantry, collapsing sections of it upon Taron and crushing him under a pile of heavy smouldering metal.

NECRO-COGNITION SAVANT Malko [Hexical j5]  
AUTO-TRANSCRIPTOR SAVANT Remptor [alpha-m2]

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Chimera Armoured Personal Carrier. Inquisitorial detachment,  
Betalis III conflict. Autocannon turret variant armament.

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The mind-link was instantly severed at the moment of Taron's death and Danzk found himself once more looking around the forge chamber through his own eyes. He was no longer alone though. Like a faithful hound returning to its master, he had been rejoined by one of the servitors he'd sent off earlier into the tunnels, one of its legs twitching redundantly where its lower section had been sheared off by Eldar weapons fire. Programmed to return to the Chimera if damaged, the servitor was now awaiting repair or its next instruction. Danzk reconnected with it and via his own augment-link sent it limping off to where the fighting sounded fiercest. Unable to move his own legs now, the servitor would have to act as his eyes and ears within the forge chamber.

[Servitor 1-x-3757] The feed from the servitor was erratic as it scurried along the floor, flickering occasionally with grainy static. The sound of weapons fire was coming from both sides of the hall now as the few remaining Guardsmen and militia fought desperately for their survival. The servitor raised its head as a burst of las fire arced over the side of a platform four levels up. In response, Danzk heard eerie screams erupting nearby. Five Guardsmen firing from the gantry were launched through the air from the force of the Eldar weapons, landing in a tangle of crumpled metal and broken bodies on the ground of the forge chamber below. Where the shots had come from, the spectral Eldar warriors appeared. They strode brazenly through the hall, their weapons unleashing another devastating volley upon a terrified group of militia men scattering in all directions from them before once more fading from view into the pale flickering lights that Danzk had witnessed earlier.

Through the eyes of the servitor, Danzk watched as the Eldar worked their way up through the hall, striking in surgical fashion. First there would be nothing, perhaps just a shimmering aura, and anyone firing at the dancing motes of ethereal light would find their shots bouncing off the pipes and conduits behind them, deflected by a holo-field that bent a las shot's trajectory as easily as it did light. Then, with eye watering shifts in reality, their enemy would slip back into the visual spectrum and show themselves once again in their true terrifying form.

At the head of the Eldar force was a ghostly figure who moved with an air of authority over all who followed him. He advanced fearlessly amongst the hail of bullets and las shots, wearing the same ornate armour Danzk had seen worn by the Eldar warrior in the cavern earlier. But if this was the same Eldar then he had been completely transformed. There was only one thing Danzk could think of to compare it to and two words slipped unconsciously from his lips: "Phoenix Lord".



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[Servitor Remptor - Biologus resource alpha-m2 ... References by subject regarding designation "Phoenix Lord" pending validation...]

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The servitor focused in on the Phoenix Lord's weapon, streams of data being relayed directly to Danzk as the machine analysed it. It was a long thin lance that blurred the air as it moved through it. Following immediately behind and above it was the cadre of the spectral Eldar, wearing the same long flowing, gossamer robes as their ethereal leader. Phasing in and out of reality at speed, they were a sight from the nightmares of madmen. With reactions faster than any man's, they unleashed their screaming weapons then faded away before reappearing to let loose another ear-drum piercing volley, taking out more of the hastily built defences and the men taking cover behind them, before withdrawing into the flame-lit darkness once again.

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The Phoenix Lord appeared before a group of twelve heavy-set militia men wielding the huge hammers and picks they used to break up ore before feeding it to the ever-hungry forge-machine. They had been joined by Gorn and Throge, the cyber-augmented Ogryns that Tech-Priest Mydeaus had 'adapted' when they had become part of the Inquisitor-lord's retinue.

Malko [Hexical j5]  
NECRO-COGNITION SAVANT  
Remptor [alpha-m2]  
AUTO-TRANSCRIPTOR SAVANT

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Normally they would stick close to the Tech-Priest, but now that he was encased within the narrow confines below the forge where they could not go, they had joined the group of militia men, probably feeling some kind of connection to them because of their similar build.

With lightning speed the ethereal spectre whirled around them, dancing and feinting in elegant motion as the thug-militia and Ogryns clumsily swung their weapons at nothing but thin air. Twirling its long blade round, the Phoenix Lord lunged straight at one opponent and then another, indiscriminately killing them as the molecule-thin edge of the blade sliced through into their flesh. As quickly as the carnage had begun, it was over. The Phoenix Lord's parting gesture before fading away once more was to look straight at the servitor Danzk was watching it through. Then, raising its lance, it shot a bolt of pure energy at it that completely obliterated Danzk's means of observation.

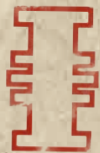
The echoing sound of weapons fire coming from a nearby tunnel caught Danzk's attention before he'd had a chance to recover from the violent break in his connection with the servitor. Two more of his retinue, Hastu and his ever present compatriot-in-arms Plecidus, sped out of one of the side tunnels near Danzk's downed Chimera, their Tauros Venator driven at full speed as they tried desperately to gain some distance from their pursuers. Hastu was driving whilst Plecidus was behind him, clinging to the now backwards facing multi-laser as he fired at more of the spectral Eldar warriors closing in behind them. Danzk focused on Plecidus and blinked.

[Plecidus - classified Novus Tarnam/Daidalus Minor] The flickering lights and heat of the forge chamber were once again replaced by gloom as the Tauros sped back into the tunnels. It was only the Venator's speed and Hastu's skill at its controls that had kept them alive so far. Again Hastu abruptly weaved the vehicle, feinting for the left tunnel at an approaching junction and then immediately swerving at the final moment into the right hand one. There was an explosion in the other tunnel behind them as the Eldar fired their weapons in anticipation, thinking they would turn left. Plecidus jeered mockingly at their Eldar pursuers, using a gesture not found in any copy of the *Tactica Imperialis*, but universally understood.

A burst of chatter broke through on the vox network. Hastu was talking again to Mydeaus the Tech-Priest. They had been arguing about something for the last few minutes. It sounded as if they were hatching a plan. The conversation ended abruptly with Hastu swinging the Venator round wildly to face it in the opposite direction, the tunnel barely wide enough to accommodate the near-suicidal manoeuvre. Plecidus hung on for dear life, his whitened knuckles gripping the multi-laser tightly.

The Venator jinked left and started to curve round a much wider tunnel as it climbed up through the complex. Occasionally, Plecidus glimpsed through access points in the rock face of the forge chamber on the other side as the Tauros drove endlessly round and upwards; Hastu all the time shouting at Mydeaus through his vox-bead. There appeared to be some disagreement about a plan, but the time to discuss it had run out. After launching another volley of las fire at the still pursuing Eldar behind them, Plecidus risked a look back over his shoulder; the wide gaping maw of an entrance leading back into forge chamber was rapidly approaching.

Like a shot from a cannon, Hastu launched the speeding Venator out of the tunnel. Danzk, watching through Plecidus' eyes, felt a gut-twisting sense of falling as it soared through the air on a trajectory high above the forge machine, the ground far below them. Visible once more as they prepared to fire, the Eldar spectres shot out of the tunnel and orientated their bodies downwards to follow the rapidly descending vehicle. Plecidus flinched instinctively as a huge dark shadow passed directly over him. He looked up again just as the long arm of one of the cranes on top of the forge swung over him. The two Eldar didn't stand a chance as they



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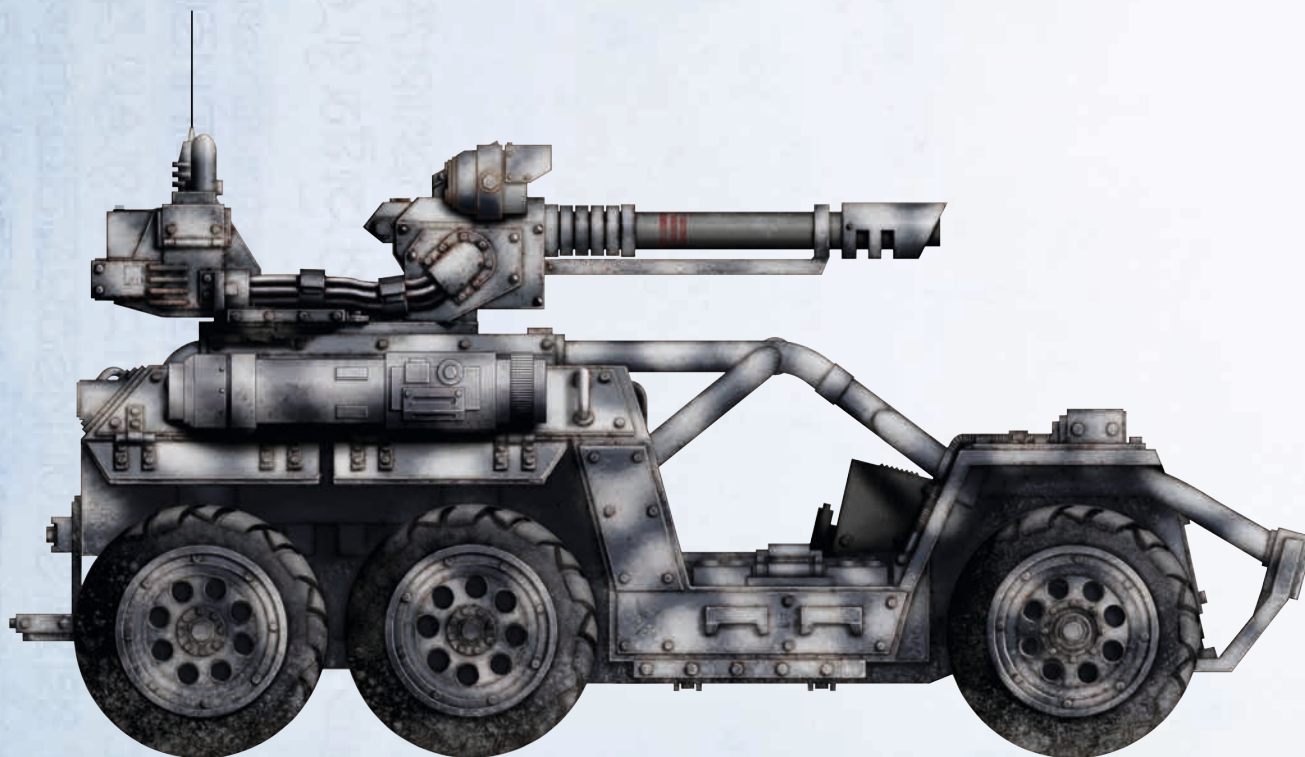
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Elysian Tauros Rapid Assault Vehicle in standard configuration. Vehicles such as this saw extensive use by the Elysian 226<sup>th</sup> Drop Troop Regiment during their operations on Betalis III, seeing action in the Tormus Delta. The spear and sunburst iconography of Elysia is featured on this vehicle's armour plating.



Elysian Tauros 'Venator'. This variant is equipped with lascannon and hunter-killer missiles as a dedicated tank destroyer.

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impacted straight into the solid metal wall of the crane arm, their shattered bodies rebounding against the rock face before dropping like rag dolls lifeless to the ground.

Plecidus began to cheer and then abruptly stopped when he remembered again where he was. The Venator was still soaring through the air, its momentum carrying it over the roof of the forge below, the engine being gunned by Hastu who himself was screaming at the top of his lungs. The driver sounded as if he was enjoying the ride of his life. There was a sudden jolt and the Venator landed upon what looked like a hastily erected metal platform with a massive clang. Hastu hit the brakes and swerved to prevent the vehicle going off the rapidly approaching edge of the platform. Plecidus screwed his eyes shut as Hastu wrestled the sliding Venator to a halt, the two Guardsmen cheering and congratulating each other on their survival as they clambered out of the stationary vehicle, relieved to somehow still be alive.

The haunting scream of the Spectres' weaponry sliced through their all too premature celebrations, the make-shift platform exploding apart in a blast of brilliant light. The last thing Inquisitor-lord Dankz saw through Plecidus' eyes was the Eldar Phoenix Lord rising gracefully above the lip of the roof's edge, firing shot after shot after shot at them, obliterating all traces of the platform and the Venator, the wreckage tumbling over the roof before dropping off the other side.

Danzk blinked, the connection with Plecidus entirely lost. Only Mydeaus was left now, still buried deep within the forge machine's core. Dankz immediately linked with him. Mydeaus was now all that stood between the Eldar and their way out of the sealed chamber. As the link formed, his mind was instantly flooded by datascript and images from the hundreds of individual sensors located throughout the forge machine. The Inquisitor-lord had to fight with all his failing strength not to lose himself amongst the almost overwhelming flood of data, but it was too much for him and all he could do to not go insane was allow his consciousness to merge with that of Mydeaus'. For the briefest of moments in the background of Mydeaus' mind was the presence of another, the machine spirit of the forge, and Dankz could feel them both seething with fury at the deaths of Hastu and Plecidus.

The colossal forge machine erupted into life. Its four cranes swung themselves at the Phoenix Lord, who instantly returned fire, flying swiftly backwards out of reach of the gigantic claws and hooks which lashed out at it. The Eldar warrior flipped over in one graceful motion and sped head-long down the side of the forge. Mydeaus was not about to let it escape though. Machinery and equipment exploded into its path as the Phoenix Lord spun round and soared through the forge's open sides, firing into the innards of the Mydeaus-possessed behemoth. In return the Tech-Priest created weapons of his own and the forge's power cables uncoupled from their connections and spat sparks at suddenly ruptured gas pipes, sending searing walls of fire into the Phoenix Lord's path.

Danzk was astounded at the abilities of the Tech-Priest. Using his own augments Dankz could only keep track of one or maybe two feeds at a time but here was Mydeaus effortlessly controlling hundreds of the forge's systems as the Phoenix Lord, now joined by its brethren, darted and dived amongst the forge machine's metal viscera. The chase continued through the structure, the Eldar flying through the open platforms and dodging avalanches of metal before shooting out the side, arcing over the top and disappearing back in through the other side again.

Danzk suddenly realised what they were doing: they were searching for the dozens of men they believed were controlling the actions of the goliath. But what they did not know was that there was only one man in there. More machine than flesh, he was connected to the heart of the forge's systems, intent on delivering their destruction.



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The Inquisitor-lord then sensed, rather than felt, a slight movement near his own body. Mustering his strength, he regained some semblance of mental control and severed the link with Mydeaus.

Above him stood the Craftworld Mymeara Farseer; it was looking down at him. Although its face was hidden behind the emotionless mask of its helm, Danzk knew he was being studied intently. Then, before he could even think of stopping it, the leader of the Eldar war host reached down and placed a hand upon the side of his head. The old man's already battered body involuntarily spasmed and arched as the Farseer connected psychically with him and images of the last few weeks began to flash through Danzk's mind.

First he saw himself sitting in his quarters reading the briefing on events in the Betalis system prior to his arrival there. Then he saw again the destruction of Battle Group Empteda as the armies clashed on the Alacian Plains below the burning Bregan Glacier. The Farseer searched through all his recent memories so fast that Danzk screamed out in agony as he felt his mind begin to burn. But then his memories of the last few days and weeks were joined with others, memories that were completely alien to him and decades, perhaps even centuries old. Whether they were intentionally exchanged or unavoidably transferred as the two minds merged, the Eldar Farseer's own memories flowed and swirled with Danzk's own so seamlessly that the Inquisitor-lord soon grew unsure of where his mind ended and the Farseer's began.

As he was swept along upon the Farseer's rapidly flowing consciousness, he caught the briefest fragment of a memory. He was looking, or rather the Farseer was, down onto a vast, ornately decorated hall. Within its bounds marched an Eldar host of massive proportions headed for the warp portal at its far end, all arrayed in Mymeara's panoply of war. The Inquisitor-lord felt for an instant the same sense of thrill and anticipation he himself had experienced at the start of his service to the Emperor. This must have been an early event in the Farseer's life, perhaps even his first battle as a warrior, long before he became the Eldar Craftworld's leader.

The next fragment of memory was a scene of complete contrast. The young Eldar warrior was firing from the top of a ridge, the barrel of his shuriken catapult rapidly discharging minuscule razor-thin discs, barely visible even to the Eldar warrior's keen eyesight. They were shredding the flesh of a mob of snarling Orks that were charging headlong at him. The memory was so intense that the Inquisitor-lord felt the same gut-wrenching disgust the young warrior had at its attackers, their stench and the sight of the spittle drooling from fanged maws turning his stomach. With this memory though the sense of anticipation he had felt before was replaced by a feeling of such intensity that the Inquisitor-lord struggled to make sense of it. It felt as if the young Farseer was barely in control of himself, as if some inner conflict were raging within him which, if he could not bring it under control, he would lose himself to completely.

The scenes of devastation were replaced by a much more terrifying aspect. The warrior was now staring in awe at a massive daemon-like Eldar that was standing victorious over the corpse of the Ork horde's huge warlord. Its body was wreathed in flame as if its blood vessels flowed with red-hot magma and its flesh was made from molten iron. The young Farseer had watched as it had raised its arms in triumph and Danzk heard its soul-piercing victory cry as the remnants of the Ork horde fled before it. The Inquisitor-lord sensed great pride in that moment but also undeniable sadness. The victory had been hard won by the Eldar of the Mymeara Craftworld and paid for dearly with the lives of so many of the young warrior's kin.

The Farseer's memories came thick and fast, as if some barrier which had been holding them back had been dropped. Danzk was overwhelmed as the Farseer's life became little more than a blur of the many battles the warrior had fought in and things he had seen and experienced.



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Overlapping them all consistently was that same growing sensation of sadness regardless of whether the battles were won or lost. Each defeat and each victory meant the loss of yet more of the Farseer's Craftworld kin and Danzk began to feel the grief gnawing away at him too until it threatened to break his mind completely.

With each decade the Farseer aged, the halls of the Craftworld had grown quieter as fewer warriors returned from war alive or others simply grew too old and died. The stream of thoughts then shifted slightly, and Danzk realised that he was seeing more recent events from the Farseer's perspective.

First there was what the Inquisitor-lord could only think of as hope. The young warrior, now the ancient Eldar Farseer, was standing within a chamber on his Craftworld. On an altar at its heart was a large gem that was glowing faintly, something Danzk sensed had not happened for a long while during the Farseer's lifetime. Then he realised he was watching the Mymearan host preparing for the battle on Betalis III. The vast hall he had seen before filled with Eldar warriors now contained an army only one tenth of what it had been and soon it was replaced with a constant stream of troops and vessels returning back through the portal carrying their dead and wounded as the Farseer watched from where he had first stood so many centuries before.

Then the Farseer was looking down from inside an Eldar Falcon, watching as it soared across the Alacian Plains and past the fighting at the entrance to the Aresta IV mines, the battle there and across the rest of the eastern continent merely a diversion to allow the Farseer and his cadre to reach the mines and recover the remains of the Phoenix Lord. The Inquisitor-lord gasped desperately for breath; he could barely make sense any more of what he was seeing.

He felt the pressure increase upon his mind and there was a sudden flash of light as he saw, through the Farseer's eyes, the young Eldar warrior transform into the Phoenix Lord and, joined by its entourage of Shadow Spectres, they flew out of the cavern and into the darkness of the mines. There Danzk knew they would destroy everyone - the militia men, the Guardsmen and even his own retinue. He would have to watch all of them die again. Taron in his fall from the ledge, the Ogryns Gorn and Throge in their battle against the Phoenix Lord, Hastu and Plecidus on top of the great forge itself and even, Danzk felt the tiniest of mental pushes, Mydeaus still hidden deep within the heart of the colossal forge. But the Tech-Priest was not dead yet. Danzk's mind railed and he desperately tried to bury that thought but knew it was too late. The Farseer had tricked him into revealing what it had been searching for.



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The flashing stream of memories abruptly stopped and Danzk felt the presence of the Eldar Farseer retreat from his mind, but not before he sensed it touch upon another, the Phoenix Lord's. The final thought he'd provided was that of Mydeaus cocooned deep within the core of the forge machine. The Farseer had found what the Phoenix Lord was pulling the forge apart one piece at a time for.

[Servitor Remptor - Biologus resource alpha-m2 ...Evidence of unsanctioned heretical psychic link between subject and xenos...]

Now free of the Farseer's mental assault, Danzk tried to reconnect with Mydeaus in an attempt to warn him of the impending danger he was in. Whether Mydeaus was too focused on destroying the Phoenix Lord or the mental link had been damaged by the Farseer, Danzk could no longer transmit anything to the Tech-Priest. It was now purely one way and all Danzk could do was watch Mydeaus' destruction.

NECRO-COGNITION SAVANT Malko [Hexical j5]  
AUTO-TRANSCRIPTOR SAVANT Remptor [alpha-m2]

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The Phoenix Lord and his followers had already vacated the internal areas of the massive superstructure and were up on its roof, systematically destroying the forge-creature's main means of attack, its cranes. First one fell then another, Mydeaus screaming as he shared each moment of the great mechanical leviathan's pain. Severed from their moorings by the devastating weapons of what Danzk now came to think of as Shadow Spectres, the massive twisted metal arms crashed to the floor.

The roof now clear of the flailing limbs, four of the Shadow Spectres swooped upwards into the heavens of the chamber. As they hovered directly above the centre of the forge, the Phoenix Lord joined his cadre and was the first to fire its unearthly weapon down towards the heart of the machine-giant. The bright white energy of the Phoenix Lord's lance broke through the metal detritus scattered on the roof and punched a hole down into the next levels. The energy then dissipated along the structure, decreasing in intensity as it earthed along the metal spars.

Undaunted, the Phoenix Lord continued firing. Then the first of the Shadow Spectres fired at exactly the same point, the beam flowing into that of its twin. Another Shadow Spectre joined in and then another; each time the coruscating beam extending downwards a few more levels towards the Tech-Priest's position. The last Shadow Spectre joined his weapon's power with the rest of the cadre's, and the balance was tipped. The beam of blinding white light sliced through the rest of the forge and straight down into the heart of its core.

Massive explosions ripped through the forge as its key systems were terminally damaged. Throughout the chamber, one by one, the dozens of enormous crucibles of boiling ore crashed down as the claws holding them in place unlocked, the power controlling them failing. Their contents cascaded through the chamber, drowning everything in their path in a tidal wave of red-hot molten metal before flowing down into the bowels of the forge below.

The connection severed abruptly. Mydeaus was undoubtedly dead. The seething molten ore and discharge from the Eldar's energy weapons reaching him simultaneously. As the last moments of Danzk's life faded away too, off in the distance he heard the unmistakable hiss as the doors sealing off the forge from the rest of Betalis III began to open. The Eldar of the Mymeara Craftworld had won.



PRODUCT OF  
ORDO XENOS

Testimony of Inquisitor-lord Hestaphus Emperor Danzk – extracted post mortem via augmetic visual implants. Estimated 78% accuracy due to injuries sustained.

The subject has been judged guilty of 172 crimes against the Emperor and his blessed citizens, including failure to retain xenos artefacts for further examination.

STRICTLY  
ORDO XENOS  
EYES ONLY

Ref file Ev-189c/134.bn. The mortal remains of the heretic have been sentenced to 2,533 consecutive years' service in the Archival Crema Servitor Corps – restricted to level B3 enhancement only.

May the Emperor have mercy on his soul.

IT IS FORBIDDEN  
TO VIEW OR ALLOW  
TO BE VIEWED  
THIS RECORD BY  
NON-AUTHORISED  
PERSONNEL  
ON PAIN OF  
EXTINCTION

NECRO-COGNITION SAVANT  
AUTO-TRANSCRIPTOR SAVANT

Malko [Hexical j5]  
Remptor [alpha-m2]

DATE: .....

SIGNATURE: .....



