

WARHAMMER
40,000



**WAR ZONE
DAMOCLES**

MONT'KA





MONT'KA





WAR ZONE DAMOCLES

When the Tau Empire's Third Sphere Expansion crossed the Damocles Gulf, they entered the sovereign territory of the largest single domain within the galaxy – the Imperium of Mankind. There could eventually only be a single outcome from such a collision: War!

Here was a clash not just between armies but also between ideologies. The Tau were forward thinking and logical, they believed in integration and technological advancement. The Imperium was stagnant, resistant to the future as they clung to a past that had

long ago slipped from knowledge into superstition. The battles that followed were waged in the depths of space, upon barren moons, and over densely populated planets. Over the years, hundreds of conflicts raged across the Damocles Gulf region, with each side hailing triumphs and tasting bitter defeat.

The Tau Empire pitted their high-tech marvels and tactical prowess against the massed might and grinding determination of



the Astra Militarum. For shock attacks, the Tau Empire employed the pinnacle of their war engineering, a range of highly armoured battlesuits. Yet to their amazement, the Tau found the firepower and mobility of their battlesuit cadres was at least equalled by the rapid-strike assaults of Mankind's own elite warriors, the much vaunted Imperial Space Marines.

The Tau did not hold ground, while the Imperium did not willingly relinquish it. When they lost the initiative, the Tau retreated, returning to battle only when the situation favoured such manoeuvre. Imperial armies, however, were expected to achieve victory or die in the attempt. The hit-and-run attacks of the Tau were met with grim resolve by the Imperium, whose grinding assaults often found their quarry had fled. Move was met by countermove, and the latest Tau

Empire aggression had drawn forth the largest Imperial response to date. On the battlefield, bolter was pitted against pulse rifle, as the Greater Good clashed headlong against the Emperor's Will. Entire planets were devastated by war as the savage clash of empires engulfed the Eastern Fringe.

Retaliation. Escalation. A crescendo of violence grew. This was not just a battle for a few star systems, it was something more fundamental, holding the future of the whole region in the balance.

Both sides were certain of their inevitable victory, but the fate of the Eastern Fringe would only be decided through the fires of bloody conflict.

Drifting in the depths of space was a highly sophisticated piece of Tau technology. It was a sentry relay station designated number 7221:499. The device spun slowly, holding its position with periodic bursts from its stabilizer-jets. At precise intervals, hidden doors opened and automated sensory arrays protruded out. Once the scans were completed, the devices retracted, lens-panels once again iris-ing shut.

Mu'gulath Bay was so distant that it was but another speck of light, but this station was one of hundreds that encircled the newest Tau sept world, the seventh line of defence that ringed the region. For this was territory only recently seized, the frontier of the Tau Empire. Anything that moved – be it spacecraft, asteroid or deep space creature – was scanned and analysed. That information was passed at near light speed, as ringstations relayed it to the Mu'gulath command nexus. Neither space hulk nor drifting cloud of gas moved without Earth caste scientists studying and tracking it.

Then the blackness of space split open. Out came leviathan cathedral-topped warships – an entire Imperial armada in all its might and grandeur. Probe-station 7221:499 whirled, all its instruments working at maximum function. The probe scanned the fleet – a colossal feat, for the flagship-pattern craft alone offered

a wealth of data and it was but one ship of hundreds, and not even the largest. The scanner-probes identified massive battleships, smaller escort craft and truly vast transport vessels filling the empty void that had been empty just moments before. Sensor arrays collected speed calculations and armament projections, while internal scans identified the exact number of teeming life forms aboard, even distinguishing war engines, hulking Knight suits and other weapons of warfare. 7221:499 picked up and recorded the frenzy of vox-hails that emanated from the colossal flagship. The readouts were already encrypted and sent towards Mu'gulath Bay when space split once again.

The enemy armada passed into another shimmering rift, disappearing as the hole closed behind them amidst a flash of light and roiling, incomprehensible energies. Like some huge, predatory fish, the Imperial fleet had surfaced briefly, checked its target, then slid once more into the depths, an incomprehensibly large menace that left nothing but a gentle swell in its wake.

Travelling through the Warp, an armada carrying enough Imperial troops to conquer Mu'gulath Bay five times over stood every chance of arriving at the newest Tau sept long before the relayed message ever would.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



TAU EMPIRE

- Commander Farsight
Renegade Commander
- Longstrike
Master gunship pilot
- Darkstrider
Sub-commander
- Starshroud
Pathfinder shas'ui



ASTRA MILITARUM

- Lord General Troskzer
Supreme Commander
- Colonel Starkzahn
Commander of the Western Spearhead
- Knight Commander Pask
Tank Commander



ADEPTUS MECHANICUS

- Arcotholitis
Tech-Priest Dominus

WAR ALONG THE DAMOCLES FRONT

The Damocles Gulf had long served as a border between the Imperium of Mankind and the Tau Empire. When the Tau breached that barrier, the two forces came into inevitable conflict, beginning a series of pivotal wars. As the two sides became more aware of each other, those battles escalated in scale and ferocity, each side striving for domination.

The Damocles Gulf is a roiling and anarchic zone in the galactic east. For the Tau, it had long been an unnavigable space phenomenon that blocked their progress. The strange interstellar clouds wreaked havoc upon navigation apparatus and had long thwarted the Tau Empire's expansionist plans, yet they had found that perseverance, technology and determination could overcome anything.

During their Second Sphere Expansion, the Tau finally crossed the Damocles Gulf, finding hidden labyrinthine space lanes cutting through it. This breakthrough cost many lives, but once beyond the barrier, the Tau discovered everything they desired – mineral rich worlds and inhabitable planets that could be subsumed into their Empire. They also found war awaiting them.

By crossing the Damocles Gulf, the Tau Empire began to encroach upon the star systems under the domain of the Imperium of Mankind. In the beginning, the Tau easily subsumed these worlds, for they were lost or dissident human colonies, cut off from the established rule of their race. What Tau diplomacy could not win over, the armies of the Fire caste eliminated. Eventually, however, the Tau began to conquer

worlds within the Imperium's fold. Unwittingly, the Tau had roused the ire of this galactic colossus, and the bitter and destructive wars that followed were unlike anything they had previously experienced.

Where the Tau Empire brought civilisation and enlightenment, the Imperium wallowed in ritual and dark superstitions. Where the Tau embraced technology and the promise of the future, the Imperium feared both, clinging instead to repressive brutality and the relics of a glorious past. The collision between the ambitious new Empire and the entrenched rulers of the galaxy was inevitable.

In retaliation for the Tau expanding into their territory, the xenophobic Imperium launched the Damocles Crusade. It was a broad attack to reclaim the planets colonised by the Tau and the Imperium drove the xenos back across the Damocles Gulf all the way to their sept world of Dal'yth. Mankind's onslaught was only brought to an end when the Imperium's forces were called back to deal with other galactic threats. Yet even that first taste of defeat did not quell the Tau's ambition; they rebuilt and soon began the preparations for an even greater attempt.



The Third Sphere Expansion was the largest Tau military effort to date. Under the dynamic leadership of Supreme Commander Shadowsun, the Tau Empire once more crossed the Damocles Gulf, recapturing much territory. In their most audacious attack yet, the Tau conquered the Imperial hive world of Agrellan, renaming it Mu'gulath Bay. Transforming the ruinous human planet into their newest sept world, the Tau intended Mu'gulath Bay to be the lynchpin of their new expansions, the launching pad from which new star systems would be subsumed into the Empire. It was an ideal gateway planet, for its orbit safeguarded the Dovar System beyond it – a cluster of mineral rich planets of vital strategic import.

Imperial presence was still strong in surrounding sectors, as the Tau discovered to their chagrin. A mission to the planet Voltoris was intended to finish off those who had escaped Agrellan, but the Tau met heavy resistance. It is not the Tau way of war to batter such obstacles headlong. Instead, they would flow like water around well defended planets, conquering all else until those few worlds were lone islands, cut off and worn down by blockades. This was the command given by Ethereal Supreme Aun'Va, the spiritual leader of the Tau Empire. Tau expansionists took battle to the planets of Doth, Belfurnace, Delinquency and 9-Jodran, establishing new colonies and making inroads into former Imperial territory.

The next major clash between the Tau Empire and the Imperium occurred on Prefectia, a fortress world that had been largely abandoned by Mankind. The Tau overcame what remained of the Imperium's defences, and had just begun to set up their own installations when the Imperium struck again. Elements of several Space Marine Chapters, foremost amongst them the Raven Guard and White Scars, executed a series of simultaneous planetstrikes, initiating a seek and destroy mission to swiftly eliminate the Tau Empire's leadership. Kor'sarro Khan, Captain of the White Scars 3rd Company, personally vowed to decapitate Commander Shadowsun, for she had first outmatched him on Agrellan and then escaped his blade again on Voltoris.

Using herself as bait, Commander Shadowsun took advantage of the Imperium's fixation on slaying her in order to spring a masterful trap. Many casualties were inflicted upon the Space Marines, including the Raven Guard Chapter Master, Corvin Severax, who was slain by Shadowsun herself. Not even a large contingent of Imperial Knights from Voltoris could turn aside the devastating Tau counter-attacks. Only through heroic actions were any Imperial forces able to retreat off-planet. Their foe defeated, the Tau believed their expansion in the Dovar System and beyond could now continue unopposed while the Imperium nursed their wounds. In this prediction, the Tau proved to be profoundly mistaken...



THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Following the great victory upon Prefectia, Ethereal Supreme Aun'Va gave an impassioned speech. It was an awe-inspiring sight, the Ethereal hovering over the crater-ridden battlefield, the burnt-out frame of a fallen Imperial Knight as his backdrop. It was a broadcast viewed by every member of the Tau race, even those too young to walk.

In his victory speech, Aun'Va announced another Tau triumph. He praised the leadership of Commander Shadowsun, and acknowledged the mastery of the Fire caste. The Ethereal Supreme spoke of how the Tau race stood now on the precipice of greatness. Before them lay endless possibilities – they had but to seize them. Once, the Damocles Gulf had thwarted their expansion, as had the rule of the Imperium of Mankind. The Tau had now overcome these obstacles to stand once again victorious.

Aun'Va announced that the Third Sphere Expansion was only just beginning, and called upon each sept world by name to give more of themselves to the Greater Good. Just as the frontline soldiers of the Fire caste were asked to give everything in defence of the Tau'va, so too must each citizen of the Tau Empire; production must double, new technology must be developed and every part of society must be made more efficient.

'WE ARE FIVE CASTES, ONE PEOPLE. WE STAND UNITED, DEDICATED WHOLLY TO THE GREATER GOOD. AS WE PROGRESS, WE WILL ENCOUNTER FURTHER BARRIERS. WE WILL OVERCOME THEM. OUR FUTURE IS NOW, BELIEVE IN OUR DESTINY.'

Ethereal Supreme Aun'Va

It was a staggering statement, for the Tau Empire was already on a war footing – production was running at maximum capacity simply to supply the enormous amounts of materiel needed to fund the Third Sphere Expansion. Yet Aun'Va was asking for more. To this request, the Tau responded with earnest devotion. If the great leader of their people asked, it would be done. There would be no questions and no qualms about the cost, only ardent efforts to increase production by any means necessary.

With the foe gone from Prefectia, Aun'Va began to plan the next phase of the expansion. Half of the Fire caste forces on Prefectia were sent to aid in the exploitation of the Dovar System – suppressing or eradicating native populations, protecting Earth caste installations and safeguarding Water caste diplomatic actions. The remaining forces were to return to Mu'gulath Bay. There, they could briefly refit and train while the war council laid plans for the next wave of planetary invasions. It was generally accepted that the Imperial hold upon the region had been broken, and it would be a long time before their forces returned in great numbers. The Imperium had suffered a series of losses that would have set the Tau Empire back generations, including the latest blow – losing the King of the Space Marines. It would take them some time to recover from such shattering setbacks.





In their understanding of the Imperium and its ways, the Tau could not have been more wrong.

Even before Agrellan was attacked, the aggressive infiltration of the Tau Water caste had been marked. Astropathic choirs broadcast warnings and armies were already mobilised before the Tau's lightning fast invasion was complete. The Tau success only increased the magnitude of the Imperial response. That many of the region's lesser holdings had previously given into Tau bribes and manipulations had only increased the Imperium's desire for retribution. Perhaps the only thing the Imperium was less tolerant of than xenos invasion was betrayal or corruption. The seditious, those who would lure Mankind to their doom, were loathed above all.

Forces were mustered, congregating in numbers beyond the scope of what the Tau believed possible. The vast armadas and armies of the Imperium were slow to gather momentum and had to span distances the Tau could not fathom, but once Task Force Retribution was finally launched into the Warp, there was no stopping its single-minded mission to reclaim the territory once ruled in the Emperor's name. The warriors of the Astra Militarum would not halt until they had raised the glorious banner of the Imperial Aquila where it rightfully belonged. And so, when the task force emerged from the Warp with klaxons blaring, it was as close to Agrellan's orbit as they dared, to maximise the advantage of surprise.

Soon all wrongs would be revenged a hundredfold.

Awaiting the summons to war council, O'Shaserra, better known as Commander Shadowsun, looked out from the tower-dome's viewshield. The skies above were clear and blue, but dark, toxic clouds lurked on the distant horizon. Mu'gulath Bay was the site of her greatest triumph, but O'Shaserra could not find anything she liked about the planet. To her, it was still a battlefield – not a sept world like her beloved T'au. Outside of the few zones cleared by the Earth caste, the world was nothing but a ruined wasteland covered by the desolation of war, the very air caustic.

'You do like our newest sept world?' asked Aun'Va as he moved up to stand beside his chosen Supreme Commander, the highest Fire caste rank in the Empire.

'It will take... time for the enviro-engines to work,' she said, her eyes drawn to the raging rad-storm to the north.

Aun'Va's laugh was dry. 'O'Shaserra, you will never be mistaken for one of the Water caste. Your true thoughts are too easily discerned. But that is as it should be. A warrior is for fighting, not negotiating.' Aun'Va was about to say something else when the warning sirens sounded – the staccato din of their alert declaring a Level 1 planetary threat. Multiple alarms pinged for attention, and O'Shaserra had already activated her comms, a dozen different reports flooding in.

The skies above burned impossibly bright as cataclysmic events unfolded in space. The Imperium had returned...



CHAPTER 1

RETRIBUTION UNBOUND



THE HAMMER OF IMPERIAL JUSTICE FALLS

There was but a single purpose behind the launching of Task Force Retribution – the cleansing of Agrellan of any and all xenos life forms. The forces mustered were excessive in size and power for a mission to sweep clear a single planet, no matter its size. Such was the intent, for it was time for the upstart Tau to be taught a lesson.

The naval portion of Task Force Retribution was led by 478th Battlefleet Ultima, commanded by the highly efficient Lord Admiral Hawke. In the admiral's experience, the initial period of an invasion was the most critical. Every moment saved reaching the target was worth millions of lives. Thus the fleet entered real space at top speed, the vast armada of ships ripping into reality and barrelling towards the newly declared sept world.

The *kor'vattr*, the Tau navy, found themselves in a difficult position. Most of the Tau's starfaring ships were scattered across the Dovar System, meaning the naval garrison that protected Mu'gulath Bay was hopelessly outnumbered. The Imperial fleet possessed more lance batteries than the Tau had ships. Lacking Warp travel, it would take some time for the *kor'vattr* to gather in sufficient strength to offer any real challenge to the invading armada. In the meantime, the *kor'vattr* made an attempt to blunt the Imperial onset, although it was more bluff than last stand, a manoeuvre intended only to buy time for the planetary defence. Even so, just stalling the foe cost the Tau a dozen starships. Forced to choose between retreat or total annihilation, the *kor'vattr* fled before the oncoming wall of Imperial battleships. They used Mu'gulath Bay's gravity to slingshot

themselves away, withdrawing into deep space. In doing so, the Tau hoped to lure their foes into pursuing them, drawing off some of the weight of the impending hammer blow. This is exactly what happened, as much of the Imperial fleet either gave chase or took up defensive positions, forming an encircling blockade of starships.

Even without a screen of Tau battleships, Mu'gulath Bay was still well protected. Orbital stations – called *kir'norsla* by the Tau – bore dozens of powerful shield generators along with massed gun batteries. Each *kir'norsla* was the hub of a networked system of defensive satellites. Those orbital constructs enshrouded the planet beneath a lattice grid of firepower patterns, a deadly gauntlet that would destroy any enemy craft that dared to enter high orbit. Until these defences were offline, Lord Admiral Hawke would not risk ferrying troops to the ground. It was time to call upon the Space Marines, the vaunted elite of Mankind's armies.

Thunderhawk Gunships and boarding torpedoes delivered strike teams to the orbital stations. In the low gravity battles that followed, the Space Marines were forced to contend with



gun turrets, protective Drones and garrisons of Fire caste warriors in void suits. Speed was necessary, for the longer it took to disable the defensive stations, the longer the defences upon Mu'gulath Bay's surface had to prepare.

The Adeptus Astartes deployed jump pack-equipped Assault Squads. These warriors launched themselves from strafing Thunderhawk Gunships and, using controlled blasts from their jump packs, guided themselves onto the Tau superstructures, clamping on with activated magboots. Then, leapfrogging from gun turret to gun turret, they used melta bombs to disable them. Eventually, the Space Marines blasted their way inside the complex, fighting through the defending Fire caste soldiery. With their heavy shields and large ion cannons, the kir'norsla would have proven costly obstacles for the vast Imperial battleships to engage. The Space Marines, however, showed the extent of what a small group of the Emperor's Finest could do.

Of all the Adeptus Astartes, none fought with more determination than the Raven Guard. They fumed over the loss of their Chapter Master to Shadowsun on Prefectia. Each time their bolters blasted down a foe, the sons of Corvus Corax felt vindication. It was Kayvaan Shrike, their new Chapter Master, who led the assault on the largest orbital station. He clawed his way through the hull, carving through bulkheads and defenders alike, to place timed plasma charges at its core. Upon detonation, they set off a chain reaction that tore the station apart. For days afterwards, it was as if the planet had a second sun.

Kor'sarro Khan swung *Moonfang*, the ancient power sword glowing with a nimbus of sparking energy. So savage was the blow that it cut two Fire Warriors in half, the blade burying itself deep into the arched bulkhead behind. Snarling in rage, the White Scars Captain attempted to wrest the deeply embedded blade free. The Tau took advantage of the brief respite. Pulse carbine shots streaked, several finding their mark, but all failing to penetrate Kor'sarro's ceramite power armour. The Khan spun away from his sword and charged headlong, shouting his battle cry. His gauntleted fist cracked through a helmet, breaking the skull within, while his other hand drew forth his bolt pistol, blasting rounds into his nearest foes. When the remaining Tau fled down the corridor, it was the Khan's natural instinct to follow, yet he could not leave his sword behind. Turning to retrieve the blade, the Khan felt something akin to panic – for it was not where he had left it. Then he espied it, leaning against the wall further down the corridor. Kor'sarro scowled. None could be allowed to touch such a hallowed relic of his Chapter. But then the warrior emitted a short barking laugh. 'Come out old friend, I know you must be there.'

From behind a large support bulkhead stepped Kayvaan Shrike. 'Well met again, Kor'sarro. The charges are set. Let us gather our squads; it is time to leave. This is the last of the orbital stations.' Seeing the bloodthirsty look in his comrade's eyes, Shrike added, 'There will be plenty more planetside.'

'Aye,' nodded the Khan as he reclaimed his blade, 'And I still have a head to claim.'



WAR ON ALL FRONTS

The Imperial landings upon Agrellan were marked by a storm of violence as the Tau attempted to exact a high toll upon their invaders. It was a price the Imperium, with their overwhelming superiority in numbers, were willing to pay. They knew that once clear landing zones were established, they could bring the full weight of their armies down for vengeance.

The Tau had not been unprepared. Mu'gulath Bay was far from the heart of the Tau Empire, but the colony was as fully prepared and well equipped to repel invaders as any sept world. Yet despite the constant state of alert and a wide ring of sensors that Commander Shadowsun had personally approved, massive Imperial forces had appeared upon Mu'gulath Bay's doorstep with almost no warning. The Tau were simply stunned by the magnitude and closing speed of the impending Imperial assault. The sheer size of the invasion was beyond anything the Tau had trained for, or that they could even have imagined.

As the Space Marines took the orbital stations offline, ending their ability to engage spacecraft, the next stage of the planetary invasion had already begun. Ancient, cathedral-topped battlecruisers entered high orbit over Mu'gulath Bay in a line formation, opening fire with their innumerable lance batteries. Their first objective was to finish off the crippled space stations. Shorn of their protective shields by the Space Marines, it was not long before each orbital weapons platform was flaring as bright as a supernova. Only then did the Imperial battleships begin their long-ranged duel with the Tau surface batteries.

Under the orders of Commander Shadowsun, many of the Tau surface guns opened fire. Some, however, remained silent so as to stay hidden, their high tech stealth suites ensuring that no Imperial scanners could detect them. Those that did return fire proved to the Imperium once again why it was so dangerous to engage a Tau sept world.

Several of the Imperial ships sustained massive damage, with the Lunar-class cruiser *Herald of Terra* being forced to leave orbit after suffering repeated ion cannon blasts. This was nothing compared to the fate of the Dauntless-class ship *Will of Iron*. Taking a hyper railcannon shot through its reactor, the cruiser suffered catastrophic damage as a series of internal explosions left the hulking craft listing lifelessly to port and nearly split in half. It began an inevitable death spiral, slowly being drawn down by the planet's gravity. There was nothing Lord Admiral Hawke and 478th Battlefleet Ultima could do to save the *Will of Iron*, yet watching her slow, inevitable death only served to drive the rest of the fleet onwards with renewed vigour. The planet shook with the reverberation of the bombardment that followed, with many of the newly emplaced Tau installations razed to the ground.





After days of pounding strikes, the majority of the Tau guns were silenced. A few were so well protected by shield generators that they would require a more direct approach. Under the command of Kayvaan Shrike, the Space Marines used Drop Pod assaults to destroy the last few batteries that dared to engage the Imperial fleet. Only then did the first wave of atmospheric fighters and bombers enter Mu'gulath Bay's atmosphere, hitting preselected targets. Space Marine Scouts were the first forces of the Imperium to hit the ground. Upon their signals, the vast transports and landing craft began the long process of ferrying billions of soldiers along with supporting materiel.

With the same perfect timing that marked all of her operations, Commander Shadowsun unleashed her counter measures. Formations of Air caste fighters, previously screened from Imperial detection, suddenly appeared, seeking to intercept the incoming transports. Gun batteries hidden behind stealth fields now opened fire, turning several transports into balls of flame. From deep space, several strike forces of Tau battleships seized the opportunity to run the Imperial blockade, launching their own attack runs on the heavily troop-laden transports. The Imperium, however, had been forewarned. On Prefectia, Kayvaan Shrike had seen enough of Commander Shadowsun to know she would strike when her enemy was most vulnerable. Like clusters of angry insects, Imperial atmospheric fighters swarmed out to engage their enemy. Further Space Marine Drop Pods streaked downwards, targeting the recently revealed Tau gun batteries. The skies filled with Task Force Retribution's transports and lander craft as the planetary invasion began in earnest.

In the glowing lights of the command nexus dome, Shadowsun pored over holographic maps, her gaze drawn to the surrounding fleet of enemy vessels. 'Star-admiral O'Kor'sha'nos, can you estimate when the kor'vattra can be gathered in strength enough to drive off the invaders?' asked Shadowsun, running her own calculations.

For a moment, the willowy Air caste commander waved his slender fingers over icons, opening and closing sub-maps with a deftness that belied his many years. 'No sooner than 77 cycles, O'Shaserra,' he replied, pausing to complete more calculations. 'And no later than 103 cycles,' he added at last.

'If I am to delay superior forces for 80 cycles,' said Shadowsun, no longer addressing O'Kor'sha'nos, 'I dare not fully contest the landings, as I will need to conserve troop strength. If we cannot get the Ethereal Supreme off-planet safely, my first priority must be to safeguard him.'

There was a sigh from the darkness behind and, for the first time, Commander Shadowsun heard Aun'Va sound weary. 'We are trapped. The fate of myself and perhaps the future of the Tau Empire now depends upon you,' said Aun'Va. Commander Shadowsun turned, not sure how to address her next point, but the Ethereal Supreme did it for her. 'And now you wish to tell me to stay hidden, but you do not wish to anger me,' said Aun'Va. 'I chose my Supreme Commander well; I would be foolish not to heed her advice even when it rankles. I shall retire to the hidden bunker and use only my broadcasts to inspire our warriors,' said Aun'Va.

IMPERIAL LANDINGS UPON MU'GULATH BAY

At the time of the Imperial assault, the sept world of Mu'gulath Bay was in transition. Much terraforming was required to turn the planet into a proper staging world for the burgeoning Tau Empire.

Before the Tau conquest, Mu'gulath Bay was deeply polluted by the crude industries of its previous rulers. The Tau's scans revealed high levels of toxins saturating the entire surface. The planet's scarred wastelands were subjected to flesh-stripping rad-storms and the few remaining native creatures suffered unnatural mutation. Towering over all were the abandoned hive-cities of the Imperium. The Earth caste had been busy, however, and in the darkness of that smog-filled world were the bright lights of prefabricated hab-domes,

research stations and massive enviro-engines that would soon cleanse the atmosphere. Hundreds of newly developed sites dotted the enormous planet's surface, the largest of which was Lo'vasht'au, a name that promised future greatness. Situated beneath the rusted ruins of the former capital hive, Agrellan Prime, the Tau intended this to be the centre of the new sept world, which might one day rival mighty T'au in size and power.

MOUNTAINS OF
ABSALOM

ACACIAN BASIN

DEAD PLAINS

THE BLACK RUINS

RUINS OF
PREDOMINUS HIVE

Imperial Western
Spearhead

IRONBACK
MOUNTAINS





TEMPESTUS
PEAK

RUINS OF
STORMSPIRE HIVE

RUINS OF
AGRELLAN PRIME

Imperial Eastern
Spearhead

Imperial Central
Spearhead

Wave after wave of Imperial troops were brought down to Agrellan. The majority of the ground forces were under the command of Lord General Troskzer of Cadia. Beneath the Lord General were eighteen infantry regiments of the Astra Militarum, six armoured regiments, and two artillery regiments. Additional assets included eight platoons of Tempestus Scions, several dozen companies of abhuman auxiliaries and three companies of Rough Riders.

Within hours of leaving the Warp, Lord General Troskzer was visited aboard his flagship *Indomitable* by Chapter Master Kayvaan Shrike. Listening to Troskzer's battle plans, the grim Raven Guard leader gave advice and warnings, for he had fought Commander Shadowsun enough to have earned a healthy respect for the Tau's fighting prowess and canny tactics. The overwhelming numbers and war of attrition proposed by Troskzer would free Shrike to lead pinpoint assaults against vital Tau targets. The elements of several Space Marine Chapters were fighting as part of Task Force Retribution, including the vengeance-seeking Raven Guard and the war-hungry White Scars. As the ranking Space Marine officer, it fell to Shrike to direct his fellow Adeptus Astartes, who were not great in number, but could turn the tide of any battle nonetheless. Shrike already had a meticulous plan for seeking out hidden Tau gun emplacements while aiding the main ground offensive.

Further swelling the already vast numerical advantage held by the forces of the Imperium were many Imperial Knights, including a large contingent from House Terryn, along with an

eclectic mix of Freeblades. Most mysterious of all was the small fleet of Adeptus Mechanicus starcraft carrying many Tech-Priests and several cohorts of Skitarii. Their leader was Magos Arcotholitis, although he never attended war councils, preferring instead to stay aboard his own flagship the *Archaeotrove*.

Although Lord General Troskzer had requested further regiments from the Departamento Munitorum, in particular a Titan Legion, other wars precluded that possibility. It was made known to Troskzer, however, that additional assets would be made available should his ground attack stall, but the delivery of that statement made the Lord General's hackles rise; he knew it would be better if he never had need to call upon those ominous additional resources.

In Troskzer's attack plan, there were a dozen drop sites scattered across the planet, but three main ones. These were situated upon Agrellan's super-continent. Each of these assault fronts – the eastern, central and western spearheads – was to grind their way forward, seeking out and destroying any and all Tau they encountered. Ultimately, the three spearheads would converge upon the largest Tau installation, located in the shadow of the old hive-capital, Agrellan Prime. There, Troskzer reasoned, they would combine forces to eradicate the xenos forces.

In truth, Lord General Troskzer was well beyond the days when he would lead the fighting personally. He was a veteran of so many wars he had forgotten more battles than he remembered, and during that time, he had learned well to





mark outstanding officers, allowing him to put his trust in the decisions made by his regimental leaders. Troskzer himself would remain aboard the *Indomitable*; the commander on the ground would be the dynamic leader of the Cadian 625th, Colonel Starkzahn.

In his long military career, Supreme Commander Troskzer had known many of his fellow Cadians that were as fierce, determined and aggressive as Colonel Starkzahn. None of the others, however, had lived long enough to rise past the rank of captain. Sooner or later, the self-sacrifices and 'lead from the front' mentality took their toll on an officer – it was simply the way it was. Yet with every relentless drive to victory, Colonel Starkzahn had evaded that fate. He was the saviour of Darristen, the leader who crushed the Hellicom Rebellion, who had led his men deep behind enemy lines during the campaign that broke the hundred-year deadlock on Boxian. Colonel Starkzahn's officers would take a las-shot for him, and the soldiers of the 625th would put down their weapons and charge traitor Space Marines or hulking Orks if their colonel told them to do so.

Colonel Starkzahn was in the first transport wave planetside, as was his style, and he was the first to descend the exit ramp of his lander. Upon his orders, the heavily battle-scarred Sergeant Lokski planted the regimental standard into the thick, sandy grit that covered the wastelands. It was this sight – their leader beneath their colours – that the 625th Regiment saw as they debarked and formed up. All knew battle waited, and the men of the Astra Militarum were ready for it.

'Sir,' said vox-operator Konev, 'Captain Czensk reports only light Tau presence in the landing zone, and they appear to be falling back.'

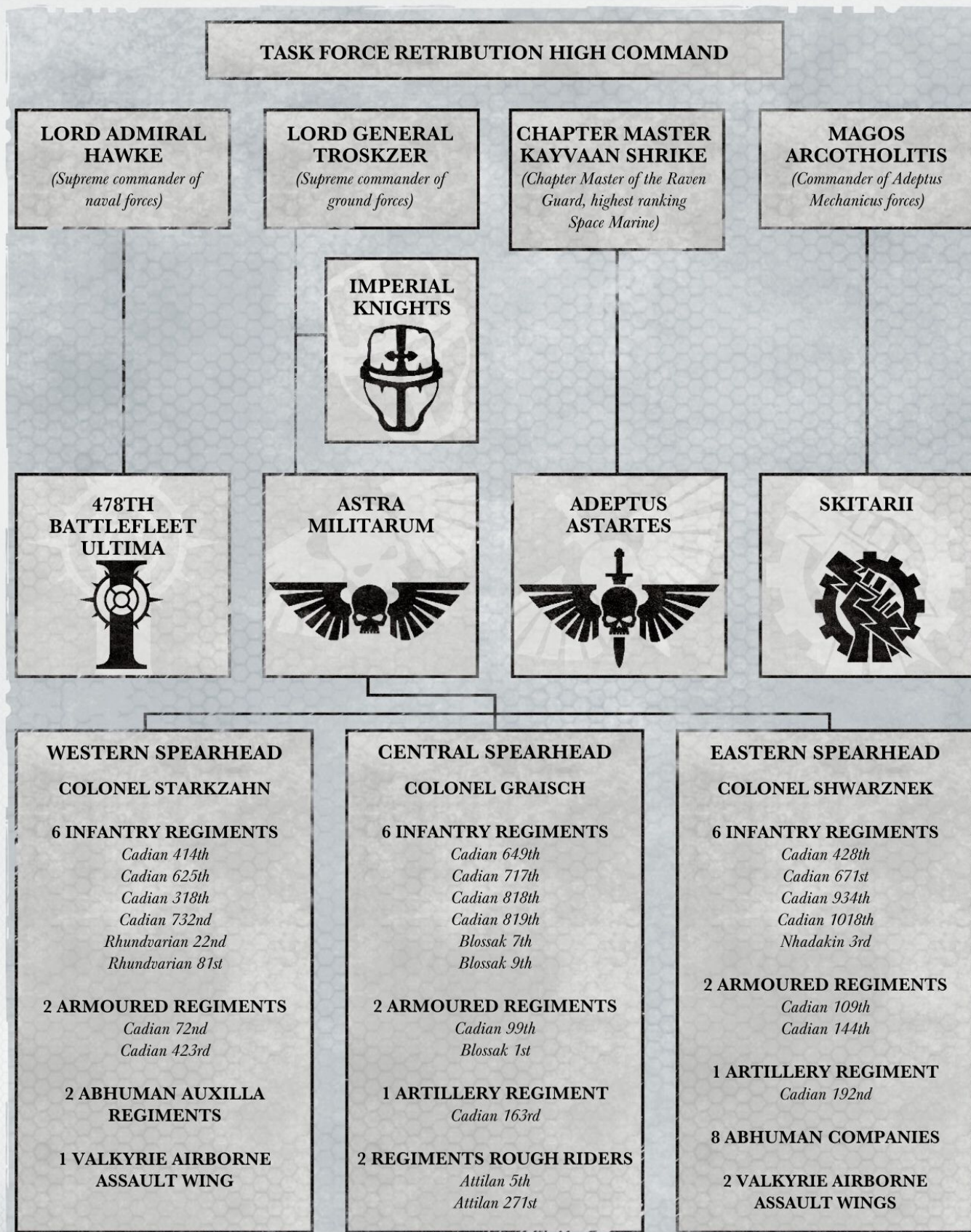
Colonel Starkzahn nodded. Despite his concentration, the grim-faced colonel sensed what was going on behind him. He quickly turned to Sergeant Lokski, glaring at the smile upon his regimental standard bearer's scarred face. He knew his men too well. 'Out with it, Sergeant,' the Colonel snapped.

The smile disappeared instantly, yet Sergeant Lokski's eyes still beamed. 'We knew that those xenos scum were cowards, sir. We knew they'd run.'

Colonel Starkzahn shook his head. He hated long Warp travel. No matter how many drills he ran his men through, they still found time for rumour-mongering. 'No,' the colonel said in a stern, measured tone. 'No, the Tau will run, but they are not cowards. We will see them soon enough, but they will not fight on our terms. Do not underestimate them. Save your smiles until we raise the Aquila over Agrellan Prime.' Turning swiftly, the colonel rattled off a series of orders to various aides and officers before calling for his Chimera. 'Captain Malinovsky can finish troop dispersion, it is time we got to the front,' he said. Starkzahn was worried, however. All his officers had been briefed to expect Tau ambushes, but it was difficult to overcome ingrained beliefs. On Cadia, the mantra had long been 'not one step back' and retreating was seen as an admission of defeat. The Tau ambushes, Starkzahn thought, were going to quickly debase those old notions.

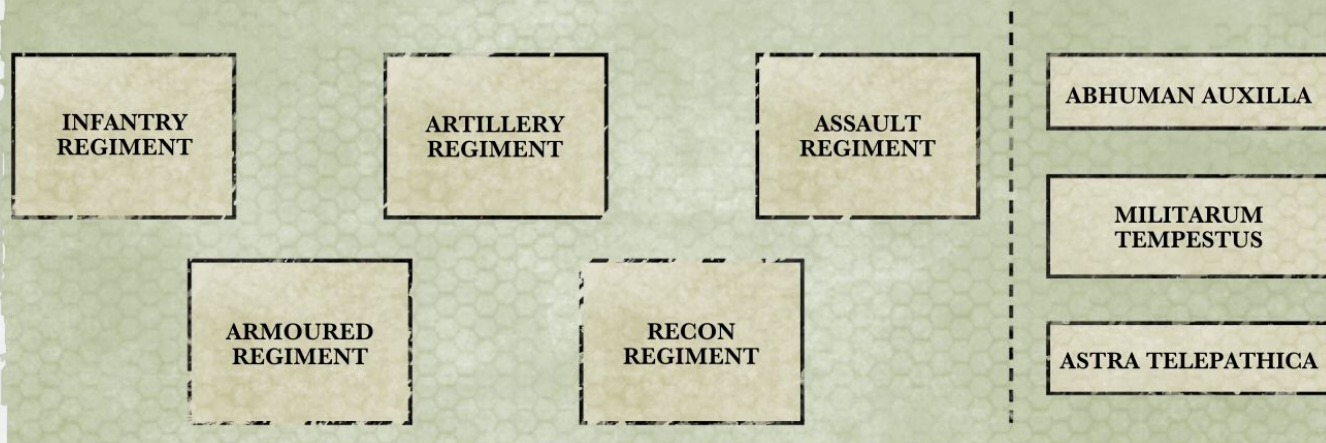
TASK FORCE RETRIBUTION ORGANISATION

Compiler's Note: Due to the scope of the disparate Astra Militarum regiments and war fleets that were assembled as part of Task Force Retribution, the following diagram is not a comprehensive list of forces, but rather the leadership structure to which those Imperial troops answered.



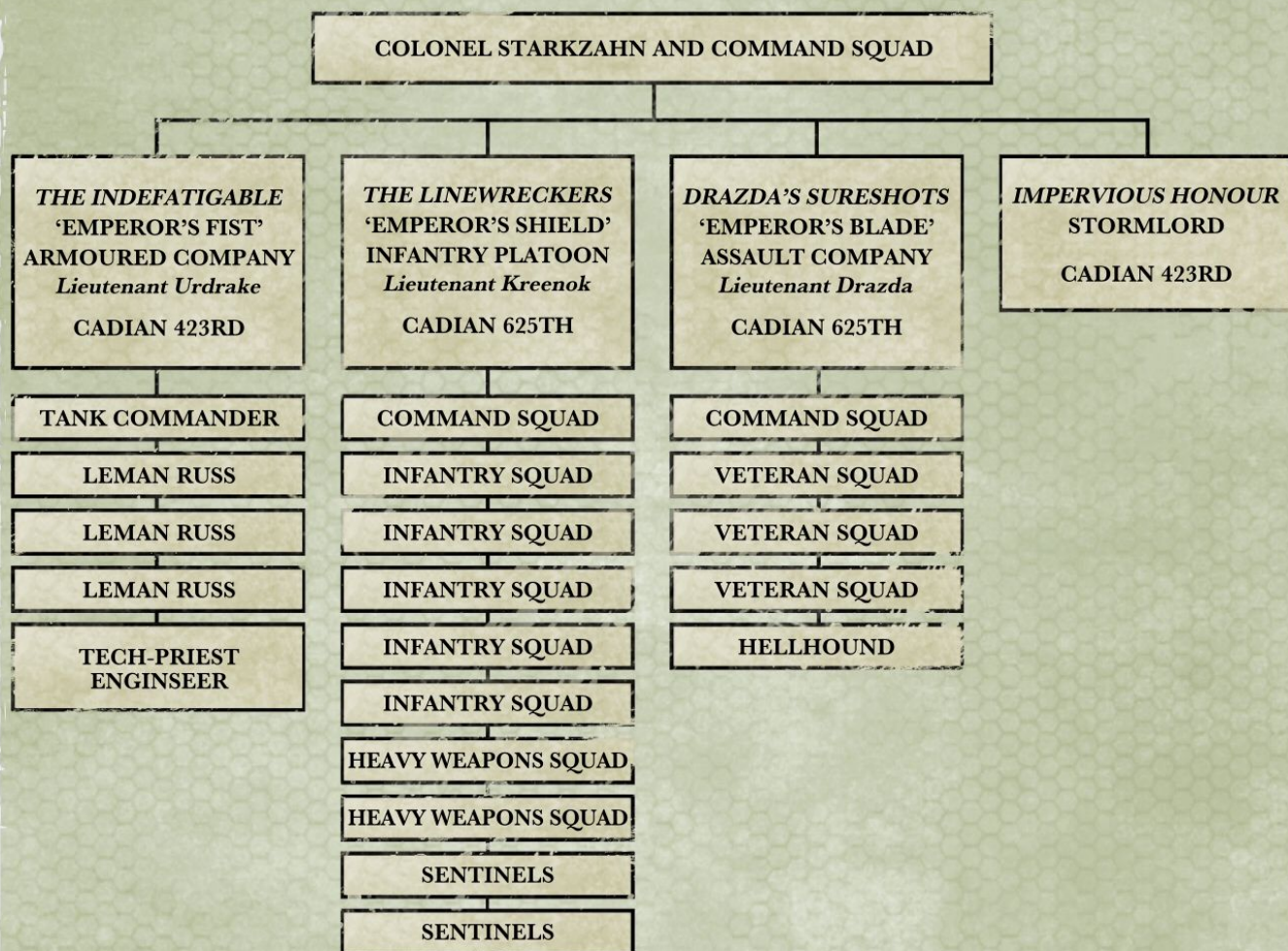
CADIAN BATTLE GROUPS

The monolithic regiments of the Astra Militarum seldom fight apart. Instead, companies will be detached from each of the regiments on campaign – typically under the command of a senior officer. These assets may be further bolstered by one or more platoons of specialists, such as abhumans or Militarum Tempestus Scions. Those Battle Groups led by the pride of Cadia's officer schools are known for their peerless discipline and courage under fire.



BATTLE GROUP THUNDER

Battle Group Thunder, personally commanded by Colonel Starkzahn as part of the Western Spearhead to reclaim Agrellan, was drawn from elements of the Cadian 625th Infantry Regiment and 423rd Armoured Regiment.



COLONEL STARKZAHN

It was none other than Colonel Starkzahn himself that led the western spearhead. In addition to the Cadian 625th, the spearhead boasted some of the best support Task Force Retribution could deploy. It was Starkzahn's plan to reach the muster point first, for he wished to prove Lord General Troskzer correct in appointing him commander.

Led by Colonel Starkzahn and the Cadian 625th, the western spearhead was the quickest to assemble and move out from their landing zone. While the commanders of the other drop sites were still amassing their regiments or digging in to establish a defensive perimeter that they could fall back to, Colonel Starkzahn was pressing ahead. Despite the enormous size of the troop landers, and the fact that they filled the sky in their non-stop ferrying, it would be a great many days, or even weeks, before the full might of the invasion force was assembled. That was time he could use to begin pushing towards his objective. To this end, Starkzahn barked orders all along the front, urging each newly assembled battle group to advance.

While none of the landings were fully contested, each was intermittently tested by Tau attacks. Sleek Air caste fighters would break through the air cordon around a landing site, strafing the rallying points or shooting down packed transports. Expertly hidden Pathfinder squads would use their marker lights to call down missile strikes, escaping retaliation due to the sudden appearance of XV25 Stealth suits that would rake fire upon the Guardsmen as a diversion before themselves disappearing.

All knew that Agrellan was a grim place, but upon reaching their landing zones, many of the Imperial Guard had their worst fears confirmed. Starkzahn's men had landed in the Dead Plains – a lifeless, toxic desert. In all directions, the Cadian 625th found their horizon limited, as the planetary bombardment had kicked up vast quantities of sulphurous ash, adding to the prodigious sandstorms that regularly swept across Agrellan. The men were issued with rebreathers, which would allow them to endure the worst of the storms, but a long term campaign would surely spell doom for each man too long exposed to Agrellan's toxins. For Starkzahn, this was just another reason to finish the offensive as quickly as possible.

Some commanders might be content to lead forces from the rear, but Colonel Starkzahn was not one of them. Aggressive as always, he was quick to form his own battle group and push out from the landing zone, soon disappearing into the towering clouds of irradiated dust. Starkzahn knew Tau ambushes would be waiting, and such thoughts gave him no pause. In fact, he was eager to pit his tactical prowess and the might of the Astra Militarum against these xenos.



NEVER DEFEATED

Noted for his aggressive attack style and his unbroken string of victories, Colonel Starkzahn was the commander of the Cadian 625th Regiment.

HONOURED LEADER

For his personal bravery during the Hellicom Rebellion, Colonel Starkzahn was awarded the Honorifica Imperialis by Lord Castellan Ursarkar Creed himself.

GLORY IMPERIALIS

Upon leading the 625th to unexpected victory upon the planet of Darristen, Colonel Starkzahn was presented with the power sword Glory Imperialis – an heirloom that had long served Cadia.

AUTO-RELIQUARY

As befits any great officer, Colonel Starkzahn was appointed an auto-reliquary of a former Cadian officer of excellent repute. This device bore the memory engrams of Lord General Krastervox.



BATTLE GROUP THUNDER



Assembled from the first wave of landings and led by Colonel Starkzahn himself, this formation was swiftly named Battle Group Thunder due to the ground-rumbling advance of the super-heavy Stormlord *Imperious Honour*.

Part of the 423rd Armoured Regiment, *Imperious Honour* was earmarked to join the armoured spearheads. It had last fought upon Cyphus IV, where its Vulcan mega-bolter had single-handedly torn apart an Ork offensive. Wave after wave of greenskins had swarmed towards the Imperial lines, but the multi-barrelled weapon spewed out a solid wall of shot, ripping apart the front ranks more quickly than the Orks could charge. It was the first super-heavy tank to arrive at the landing zone, and the moment Colonel Starkzahn saw *Imperious Honour* churn down the landing platform, he commandeered the vehicle, assigning it to his own battle group. Starkzahn valued not only the tank's thick armour plating and matchless anti-infantry weaponry, but also its capacity to transport infantry.

Advancing alongside the super-heavy tank came the core of Starkzahn's assembly, the Emperor's Shield Infantry Platoon under the leadership of Lieutenant Kreenok. As bold in battle as the Colonel himself, Kreenok was a highly regarded young officer, known for his zeal in combat and his unflinching

resolve. Since their heroics during the Hellicom Rebellion, Kreenok's platoon had been known to the rest of the 625th as the Linewreckers. It was they that had led the street-by-street fighting that at last captured the final hab-block, the infamous 'Butcher Block'. Many platoons had met bloody failure attempting to secure that area, each wiped out in turn by the block's defenders. Eager for his own chance at glory, Kreenok drew his chainsword and led from the front. Those few soldiers that survived the gore-filled assault became Sergeants, and were given command of the new troops that were drawn up to replace the lost men. It was these platoons that boarded the ships of Task Force Retribution. Alongside Kreenok's command squad, the Linewreckers were composed of five infantry squads, two squads of Sentinels, and two Heavy Weapons Squads. The Sentinels were typically used upon the flanks to provide speedy reconnaissance, although they also excelled as a quick mobile reserve to add firepower where the infantry most needed it. The Heavy Weapons Teams were used to supply covering fire while the main infantry squads advanced. The heavy bolter teams were known to their comrades as 'The Chuggers', a name derived from the distinctive sound of their weapons, while the lascannon teams were known as the 'Tank-Killers' for it was their lot in battle to engage and destroy enemy armour.



Filling out the battle group's infantry was an Emperor's Blade Assault Company, led by battle-scarred Lieutenant Drazda. The three veteran squads were known as Drazda's Sureshots, for they claimed to be the top marksmen in the whole of the 625th. They had served beneath Starkzahn since his promotion, and the Colonel valued Drazda's aggressive tactics as well as the deadly accuracy and grizzled presence of his elite squads. On Darristen the Sureshots had raced into position aboard their Chimeras, dismounting to form a gun line just in time to repel the surging Cultists. Yet the foe was not composed solely of robed fanatics, for at the enemies' heart came armoured fiends, the hated Chaos Space Marines. That the Sureshots lived to tell the tale against such formidable opposition was a testament to not just their aim, but also their iron-hard ability to hold the line. During that battle, the Sureshots' support Hellhound earned its own nickname. Dubbed the *Fury of Cadia*, its fiery blast swept the streets clear, leaving behind only bubbling stains where once enemies stood.

The final squad Colonel Starkzahn assigned to the battle group was an Emperor's Fist Armoured Company. Drawn from the 423rd, the company known as the Indefatigable were under the leadership of Tank Commander Urdrake. They would provide armoured support for Battle Group

Thunder, a role they had also assumed in their most recent battle during the defence of Cyphus IV. The task had not proven too large for them, and each roar of their battle cannons blasted ramshackle Ork tanks into rolling fireballs. So fierce was that firefight that the Indefatigable's Tech-Priest, Vincitius, had spent the entire journey since joining Task Force Retribution repairing the multiple blast marks that scored each of the tanks of the company. It had ultimately been the lascannons of *Impervious Honour* that had ended that tank battle, as the Stormlord tore off the superstructure of an Ork megatank before continuing to mow swathes through the supporting Ork infantry.

The last warrior to join Battle Group Thunder was Commissar Fremantle, a stern officer who did his black-clad office proud. Ever eager to increase his prospects for promotion, Fremantle had sought out Colonel Starkzahn's command group, for he knew that they were sure to go straight into the heart of battle. It was there that the Commissar's bountiful willpower might do the most to further the Imperium's cause. He would not be disappointed, for Colonel Starkzahn's plan was to push Battle Group Thunder forward as quickly as possible, spearheading the long drive towards Agrellan Prime.



Following Colonel Starkzahn's plan, the western spearhead was a flood of battle groups working towards a common goal. In addition to Starkzahn's own Cadian 625th, troops came from the Cadian 168th, and the Rhundvarian 22nd, along with elements from the Cadian 423rd and 72nd Armoured regiments. Where possible, Colonel Starkzahn attempted to keep regiments cohesive, but this was a difficult task thanks to the inevitable landing zone mayhem and the pressure to get underway as quickly as possible. In general, the battle groups were constructed with a mix of armour and infantry. The only notable element that was missing was artillery. The artillery brigades were scheduled as the last to land, so the infantry regiments had only their own few supporting pieces, but Starkzahn did not imagine this would come back to haunt him. He anticipated a mobile front where air power would prove more useful than slow-moving artillery trains.

The cracked wastelands over which the western spearhead travelled were bleak, and the region was prone to sudden rad-storms that covered the horizon in thick dust. The Dead Plains were flat land, occasionally broken by rocky outcroppings. The only signs of life were the ruined industrial zones that dotted the desert. Every terrain feature seemed to be an ideal location to hide one of the hit-and-run counter-attacks or feints for which the Tau were infamous. At irregular intervals along that

relentless march, firefights would break out, or missiles would streak from beyond sight to crash into the Imperial ranks. The men of the Astra Militarum bore hardships such as the raging hot sun, or the cloying grit that swept through, with typical stoicism. The xenos attacks, however, were a stinging irritation, a constant harassment. There was not a soldier – be it lasgun-toting infantry grunt or ranking officer – who did not long for a proper battle. Colonel Starkzahn had expected, as their multiple attack fronts advanced, that sooner or later the Tau forces would stand and fight, allowing his battle groups to amass towards the battle.

Reports flooded through the vox as each battle group pushing across the desert updated their status. Each told a slight variant of the same tale – assaults that rose out of nowhere but faded away before the Imperial Guard could mount anything like a proper response. Such attacks came suddenly, with no warning. They swiftly learned to hate the whooshing sound of the strafing aircraft that sped overhead or the whistle of missiles soaring past from beyond the horizon. There was one thing, however, that the Guardsmen learned to fear above all others: the dreaded railguns mounted atop the Tau's Hammerhead Gunships. These hover vehicles would skim forward into range, or boost up above dunes, then unleash a volley or two and retire. The whip-crack



sound meant death as the magnetically-driven, hyper-sonic railgun rounds sliced through Imperial armour. Sometimes the Hammerheads were supported by infantry, their long-ranged pulse rifles stabbing out pulse bursts to claim lives. During such times, it seemed there was nowhere to hide, especially for the tanks, as the barren desert was devoid of useful cover. Should the Guardsmen, through perseverance or flanking manoeuvre, close the distance to their foes, the Tau infantry would board their Devilfish transports and withdraw rapidly into the noxious, choking air.

With the great majority of the Imperial Navy's Thunderbolts, and the Astra Militarum's own Valkyries and Vultures, tasked with protecting the vulnerable regions surrounding the drop zones, the Imperial ground forces found it impossible to pin down or destroy the quick-to-retreat Tau. In a few localised cases, Chapter Master Shrike organised lightning Adeptus Astartes retaliations, with fast moving Thunderhawks bringing down superior firepower. There were, however, only a handful of such operations set against what was thousands of small-scale ambush attacks. The aftermath of the Space Marine assaults – burnt out Tau vehicles smoking in the desert – did much to increase morale as the long lines of Astra Militarum infantry and tanks passed by.

Peering out from the craggy overlook, Shas'ui Tra'erro scanned the shimmering horizon. Columns of raised dust gave away the location of the oncoming gue'la – only heavy, tracked vehicles kicked up so much debris. Besides his own, three other Pathfinder teams were spread across this sector. The Shas'ui punched coordinates into his wrist-mounted comm-suite, his sensor vane relaying the information to the other teams. They had triangulated well, and marked out and prioritised each enemy unit, from the marching infantry to the lumbering steel-clad tanks that rumbled behind them. Far behind the Pathfinders was a series of dunes. Hidden amongst those raised hillocks were the Armoured Interdiction Cadres. Each gunship commander received the information from the Pathfinders, their holo-maps tracking the approaching foes. The Pathfinders watched and waited, the columns of dust turning into dark shapes and finally individuals as they neared. Shas'ui Tra'erro knew his team; there was no need to tell them to wait, for their discipline was unquestionable. Closer, and closer still, Tra'erro let the foes close. He could make out the heavily stubbled and dust-lined faces of the gue'la now, their eyes sweeping right over his well-camouflaged position. On his keyed in signal, the team aimed their markerlights – painting their targets with invisible beams. Far away, flares lit the dunes as the Sky Ray Gunships unleashed their deadly salvos...

AMBUSH AT THE BLACK RUINS

The Tau were stunned by the size of the Imperial armada and the suddenness with which it was upon them. Commander Shadowsun knew she could not confront such numbers at the enemy landing sites, for her forces would wilt beneath orbital bombardments and massed firepower. The tenets of Kauyon stated that it was the patient hunter that got the kill.

Captain Shaposhnik raised his magnoculars to scan the horizon, although doing so proved useless. The poisoned air was so thick with floating dust that he could see little outside of heavy bolter range. In that distance, nothing moved beneath the shadowy ruins that loomed out of the dust. None of the glasses' varied functions seemed to be working either, even after he banged the device hard against his palm in the hopes of stirring its machine spirit. It did nothing to improve the situation. The toxic dust also played havoc with vox-hails, periodically distorting them or rendering the comm-net completely silent for a time. Still, the Captain did not like the fact that the forward Sentinel squadron and the infantry recon platoon had disappeared, both failing to report. It could be that a heavy squall was silencing their vox-hails, but every officer had been warned of possible ambushes. Colonel Starkzahn insisted that ambushes by the Tau were certain – a matter of when, not if, they would strike.

Faced with the choice of heading straight into an enemy ambush or holding back, deciding his next course of action was not difficult for Shaposhnik. He did not wish to feel his colonel's wrath for taking too cautious a pace, and so he

ordered his vox-operator to signal the troops into a trio of battle lines. When this manoeuvre was complete, he then gave the order for the first line to advance with care. It was his reasoning that an unknown xenos threat could be nowhere near as ferocious as his own colonel.

As the Imperial Guard battle lines advanced, they were watched intently, followed via superior blacksun optics as well as half a dozen different tracking devices. Heat sensors monitored the pollution-spewing engines of the tanks, but could adjust their focus to see an individual's heartbeat. Density scans pinpointed weak points in armour, while advanced sonic equipment recorded communications and even breathing patterns. Data was shared from each of the surveillance points and nodes, while a small amount of information was even garnered from what remained of the geosynchronous orbital satellites.

Cadre Fireblade Shas'nel Rhu'var tapped a few icons on his wrist-comm, relaying the coded battle plan. Thus, without a word having been spoken, the message was spread across the ruins, each hidden squad in the cadre understanding the mission and its timings perfectly.





The ambush at the Black Ruins was sprung quickly.

Pathfinder teams, well secreted within the rubble, used their markerlights to target each vehicle in the leading Leman Russ squadron. Streaking faster than the eye could follow, volleys of seeker missiles locked on, striking the vehicles in the rear where their armour was thinnest. The Imperial tanks buckled and exploded, sending deadly shrapnel whirling into the packed infantry that advanced in their wake. Before the Guardsmen could react – either to drop down into cover or to return fire – the longshot pulse rifles of Sniper Drones began picking off their preselected targets. At once, sergeants, lieutenants, Commissars, and especially soldiers that carried heavy weaponry, all twisted or jerked violently as well-aimed plasma pulses tore through each of their bodies.

Captain Shaposhnik and the remaining Imperial Guard officers attempted to quell the panic beginning to take hold of their soldiers while Tau Hunter Cadres joined the attack. From behind the ruins, Devilfish transports raced, their rapid acceleration kicking up clouds of blackened dust. At preselected positions, the vehicles came to a sudden halt, disgorging a stream of Fire Warriors who quickly assembled into optimised firing formations. The xenos line rippled with blue muzzle blasts as volleys of glowing plasma filled the air, quickly followed by the screams of the wounded. As he turned to his vox-operator to order the second battle line forward in support, Captain Shaposhnik was startled to find his comms-man headless. He watched helpless as the corpse crumpled, spurting red arcs as the lifeless body twitched out its last.

Lesser regiments would have broken and run from the sudden and bloody efficiency of the ambush, but these were Cadian Shock Troopers, warriors of the 625th. They came to fight. Already, the survivors were hunkering down, forming their own gun lines and returning fire. The bright energy beams lanced out, piercing through the gloom. Some of the Cadians scrambled to recover the heavy weapons dropped by their fallen comrades, but one by one, plasma pulses from the distant Drones punched through armour and flesh alike, slaying all who dared venture out of cover.

Shouting commands, Captain Shaposhnik ordered a defensive formation, pulling his remaining squads closer together. They formed around the remaining mortar teams, whose crew were hurriedly working to lob shells outward towards the last known position of their attackers. With the situation stabilised, Captain Shaposhnik called for a vox-operator, and directed the second battle line to shore up his position. Soon, another squadron of Leman Russ tanks was there, their battle cannons thundering to provide covering fire, even though they could see little more than flashes of light shrouded in the murky distance. More infantry rushed up, strengthening the line. Next, Shaposhnik transmitted his coordinates, first seeking whatever air support he might be able to request, and secondly, calling for aid from nearby battle groups.

It was only after that broadcast had been sent that Shas'nel Rhu'var ordered his cadre's portable signal jammer to be switched on, shutting down all further communications. The bait had been set; the true ambush was still to come.

LONGSTRIKE'S ARMoured INTERDICTION CADRE



Armoured Interdiction Cadres were designed to be mobile and hard-hitting, yet none had ever proven as deadly accurate as the one led by master gunship pilot Shas'la T'au Sha'ng, better known as Longstrike.

When the Tau first conquered Mu'gulath Bay, seizing it from Imperial hands in a single day, there were no heroes that emerged out of that battle more famous than Longstrike. Armoured Interdiction Cadres are taught to fight not as individual gunships, but as a single entity. In the beginning of that lightning campaign, his formation was deployed as the tip of the spear – the armoured wedge that was to engage Imperial tanks and destroy their heavily fortified positions. That day, Longstrike wielded his formation with unerring perfection.

Pushing their gravitic engines, Longstrike's gunships entered the combat zone at speed. They faced an onrushing company of Leman Russ battle tanks as well as heavy weapons fire coming from a staggered line of well-fortified bunkers. First, the Sky Ray Gunship used its networked markerlights, pinpointing and prioritising targets for the cadre. Its own turret-mounted seeker missiles were held in reserve for long-ranged shots or especially difficult enemies.

Aided by the markerlights, the Hammerhead Gunships engaged. Two of their number bore the flat-barrelled and highly feared railgun. As Longstrike's cadre was outnumbered, every shot counted, and they did not miss. Despite the thick armour plating of their opposition, each railgun shot penetrated its mark – the internal explosions that followed sent billowing clouds of oily black smoke upwards to the sky. The third Hammerhead Gunship bore a turret mounted ion cannon. When overcharged with energies, the blazing blue blast that it emitted blossomed wide, vaporising the Imperial Guardsmen inside their ferroconcrete bunkers.

Longstrike never let his formation stop, but kept them moving all the time. Weaving through the wreckage of their kills, the cadre advanced. With a sudden whoosh, the Sky Ray unleashed its seeker missiles, blasting apart enemy vehicles that sought to outflank the Tau gunships to target their more vulnerable side armour. Enemy tanks were not the Armoured Interdiction Cadre's only worry, however. Infantry armed with heavy weapons lurked amongst trench lines and took shelter amidst the blackened hulls of destroyed tanks. Even as they trained their sights upon the sleek Tau vehicles, the cadre's secondary weapons came into play. Burst cannons opened up to shred the foe, and missile pods sent forth screeching salvos.



When the infantry ducked to take cover, or pulled back to hide, smart missiles followed, their AI guidance sending them looping around objects or streaking down trench lines.

By day's end, Longstrike had personally destroyed so many enemy targets – from tanks to an enormous walker – that he had firmly established himself as the Third Sphere Expansion's most heralded tank ace. Yet the master pilot insisted it was the teamwork of his cadre working together that made the formation so deadly. For felling so many Imperial foes, his entire Armoured Interdiction Cadre earned special praise from Commander Shadowsun herself – an honour second only to receiving commendations from Ethereal Supreme Aun'Va.

Whether in attack or defence, Longstrike has reinforced the same basic doctrines since returning to Mu'gulath Bay: stay mobile, work together, prioritise targets. Commander Shadowsun's orders for engaging the Imperial forces seeking to reclaim the planet were simple – erode the enemy's strength through hit-and-run attacks. Such tactics were well known to all Armoured Interdiction Cadres, and Longstrike and his comrades intended to do their duty, striking fast and hitting hard before pulling back.

LONGSTRIKE

Due to his unerring aim, master gunship pilot Longstrike was chosen to trial the XV02 pilot battlesuit. With its upgraded interface, Longstrike became not only better integrated with his gunship, but also with his entire cadre. The suit perfectly interacts with the AI functions of the pilot's Hammerhead, enabling him to better lock onto targets, fire at speed and support his comrades. Despite the unparalleled views and holomaps provided by the XV02, Longstrike still prefers to rise to the cupola position to view each battle directly. To those who question his actions, Longstrike repeats an ancient saying on T'au – 'Vrass al'shon kwn'sha', which translates roughly as 'some traditions refuse to die'. This is typical of Longstrike, for he is a traditionalist, repeating over and over the maxims taught by the pilot training academies. He believes firmly in drills and repeats manoeuvres with his cadre over and over until each of them know his battle tactics and preferred targeting matrixes as well as he knows theirs. When Longstrike's new cadre proposed to undertake the ta'lissera bonding ritual with the exacting veteran, however, they were refused. After his first bondmates were slain by the armies of Mankind upon T'ros, Longstrike vowed to never again perform that ritual. Cold and detached, Longstrike is bonded to duty and battle alone.

SQUADRON BATALICA



Squadron Batalica was confident that there was no foe they could not blast apart and then grind over with the tracks of their Leman Russ battle tanks.

Squadron Batalica was the first squadron of the 3rd Company of the 423rd Armoured Regiment from Cadia. The squadron had been hand chosen by the company's commander, each tank crewed with the most skilled or experienced drivers and gunners. The company commander had a shrewd eye for picking the most talented from among his fellow tankers, for he was Knight Commander Pask, the best known of all Imperial tank aces.

In battle, Leman Russ tanks had ever been the hammer of the Imperial Guard, the hard-striking wall of armour sent to breakthrough enemy lines or add steel to a defensive battle line. None could claim to perform such tasks better than Knight Commander Pask. He had more confirmed kills than any living tank commander in Cadian records, and those men in his company, and especially those assigned to his personal squadron, simply tried to keep pace with their illustrious leader.

In the relentless tide of war assailing the Imperium, the 423rd Armoured Regiment had been sent across the galaxy, joining

task force after task force. Always, no matter where they deployed, Squadron Batalica won the most commendations. On Haytor's Hole, Pask led them to halt the advancing waves of Eldar grav-tanks, leaving only wreckage in their wake. During the Seven Moons campaign, Squadron Batalica duelled rebel armour, defeating not only other Leman Russ tanks, but also spike-ridden Chaos Space Marine vehicles.

Knight Commander Pask's secret was straightforward – he was unmatched in skill as a tank destroyer. His strategy was simple – shoot first and don't miss – and it was advice he never failed to give to the constant stream of new tankers that joined his company. For most engagements, Pask preferred to situate his tank amidst his personal squadron, using his long-barrelled vanquisher cannon to destroy whichever foe he deemed to be the most dangerous opposition to his tank. His squadron was ordered to do the same, their battle cannons thundering while they protected their leader's flanks during the advance.

Imperial Guard tank training was as brutal and straightforward as the steel-clad Leman Russ battle tanks themselves. Tankers were taught to trust in the thick armour to their fore and to keep their guns blazing. The best defence was to destroy the enemy before they could fire back. This thinking



was very much how Knight Commander Pask employed his squadron on Agrellan, sending them forward relentlessly, even callously. If the enemy proved to be particularly well equipped with anti-tank weaponry, Pask himself might hold back, sending in other squadrons to draw fire while he blasted apart each threat as quickly as his loader could re-arm his vanquisher cannon. If his other squadrons were destroyed, Squadron Batalica was next in line.

Regardless of such cavalier treatment, all the men of the 423rd were devoted to the living legend who was their commander. While waiting for orders to reveal which Tau position they were to attack next, the men occupied themselves by recounting their commander's heroic deeds – listing in vivid detail the many examples of Pask's deadeye shooting or the tales of how his nerves were so steady that he didn't know how to flinch. Yet their favourite tales revolved around how, by many a battle's end, Knight Commander Pask always lost his vehicle.

It was true. Pask rarely finished a campaign in command of the same armoured vehicle as he had started. Once, an Ork Battle Fortress crushed his Leman Russ; on another occasion an Eldar Fire Prism sliced Pask's tank in half. On Trogos

IV, Pask's vanquisher cannon took down a rampaging Chaos Titan, but the toppling machine fell directly on top of the victorious tank. At first, it seemed like Pask might escape that calamity, for the savvy commander had reversed out quickly enough to avoid the smashing collision, but he was not fast enough to clear the wide radius of the ensuing explosion as the fallen traitor Titan triggered some terrific meltdown of its power core.

In the end, it was of no matter. Whether emerging from flame-blackened wreckage, or squeezing through some savage shell-hole torn into the steel hide of his tank, Pask crawled free from the ruins each time. His uniform might be burnt, his flesh scarred and his blood flowing, but he lived. When issued with a new tank, Pask always chose the same name – *Hand of Steel*. His veterans would recite those stories over and over again, repeating them until even replacement troops could tell tales of engagements that took place years before they joined the regiment.

Thus far on Agrellan, the xenos had mostly fled before the oncoming might of his Leman Russ battle tanks. Knight Commander Pask had the feeling that a large-scale attack was coming soon, and his instincts were never wrong.

CLASH OF ARMOUR

As columns of Imperial armour rushed to counter the Tau ambushes, they were being stalked in turn. Commander Shadowsun had unleashed her Armoured Interdiction Cadres en masse, hoping to inflict a crippling blow before pulling back. Thus began an epic clash of tank versus tank...

Knight Commander Pask could tell something was wrong. His comms rig picked up multiple calls for help, each situation seeming eerily similar. Strong Tau ambushes had crippled the advance, and the lead elements had just enough time to signal for reinforcements before their vox-casts were cut off. Pask's own vox-caster soon went dead, as if a zone of silence was spreading outwards. Only a buzzing hiss could be raised across the spectrum of channels. The last message Pask heard was a report stating that many battle groups were angling towards the stricken front. Each had been warned about the Tau penchant to use ambush teams to attack reinforcements and had signalled they were advancing cautiously. Pask, however, had a different idea.

Instead of racing towards the latest coordinates, Knight Commander Pask chose a longer route that looped around the last known location. Popping out of his hatch, Pask used hand signals to direct Squadron Batalica, and the other two squadrons that made up his company, to follow his lead. It would take longer, but Pask feared an ambush on a far larger scale. Ahead, he noticed that the low-hanging, unnatural skies were worsening. They were heading straight into a growing storm.

Hunkered down behind a shattered Chimera hull, Captain Shaposhnik had come to realise that his company was nothing more than bait in a far larger engagement. The same grim truth was dawning on many dozens of other Imperial officers across a front that stretched two hundred miles. Beneath the lowering skies, men and tanks had poured onto the ruin-filled wastelands seeking to aid their comrades. They found the Tau guns awaiting them.

The men of the Imperial Guard had learned to fear the long, sinister weapon atop the Tau Hammerhead, hating that whip-crack sound. First to arrive were the speedy Emperor's Talon Sentinel companies, but the bipedal walkers were torn apart – seeker missiles, ion cannons and railguns making quick work of their light armour. Next, the Emperor's Fist Armoured Companies began to roll in, each composed a dozen armoured tanks. So began an escalating clash of armour, as more and more elements of the Cadian 423rd and 72nd Armoured Regiments joined the tank support vehicles from the infantry regiments. Little did they suspect that they were charging headlong into the targeting grids of Shadowsun's massed Hunter and Armoured Interdiction Cadres.





The Tau had chosen their battlefield well. The vast cinderplains were wide open, save for clusters of ruins poking out of the dusty grit. It was flat land, broken occasionally by hillocks covered in wind-swept detritus so they appeared like sand dunes in a forsaken desert. The hovering Tau gunships took maximum advantage of such cover, lowering themselves so only their turrets could be seen. With lightning storms arcing through the thick clouds above, there was little chance of air support for either side.

Within hours, the plains were littered with smoking wrecks. Advancing by squadron, the Imperial tanks found themselves overmatched – they were outranged and trying to traverse open ground. In the midst of the duelling armour, a different kind of war began to play out amongst the graveyards of shattered hulls. The broken remnants of previous Imperial Guard companies tried to work forward. Heavy weapons teams scurried from wreck to wreck, the still-burning hulks giving off the only light in the gathering gloom. Lone Sentinels stalked closer, seeking to pick off the death-dealing Hammerheads and Sky Rays. They were met, in turn, by Strike Teams and Pathfinders, all fighting a deadly war within the larger battle.

For Longstrike, the battle was little more than target practice. He was so quick and accurate with his railgun fire that he dispatched whole squadrons of tanks, the first of the trio still rolling forward, crippled by internal explosions, even as the last tank's hull was penetrated, its fiery detonation sending its crude steel turret winging through the air. Each of Longstrike's auto-impulse triggers sent forth a deadly shot, and while his mind

pored over the moving digital display, thanks to his XV02 pilot battlesuit, he still found time to recommend shot angles and manoeuvre patterns to the pair of Hammerheads and the Sky Ray under his command. Longstrike did not count the enemy kills, although later study of vid-capture from that stage of the battle tallied over forty armoured vehicles destroyed by his cadre alone. However, not everything about the battle was going to Longstrike's satisfaction.

The holo-map had shown Longstrike several disturbing things. First, the electrical storm that raged overhead was supposed to keep flyers away from the battle zone, yet the tank ace had marked several large craft skirting through the northern reaches. They did not register as any known enemy atmospheric fighter, and that troubled him, as the unknown was never an ally. Secondly, the sheer amount of Imperial armour was staggering. They were massing in greater numbers than anticipated. If they all moved forward at once, the Tau cadres would quite quickly be overwhelmed. Thirdly, a new spearhead appeared on the westernmost edge of Longstrike's display – a group of enemy tanks that were threatening to outflank Tau forces.

Feeling they had already stayed longer than was prudent, Longstrike sent out the order to fall back. One by one, the hovering Tau gunships began reversing, pulling back even as they continued to rain death upon their Imperial foes. Longstrike watched his shoal of gunships skimming low and fast over the ruined landscape; they had struck hard, but now needed to move out quickly, lest they themselves be caught in the vice-grip of the closing enemy formations.

THE PRIDE OF CADIA



Company IV of the 78th Cadian Armoured Regiment was a three-strong 'Emperor's Fury' Super-heavy Company, its deployment reserved only for the most fiercely contested battle zones in the galaxy. Known as the 'Pride of Cadia', the company was comprised of a Baneblade, *Foebreaker*, along with a city-wrecking Banesword, *Blessing of Obliteration*, and a Hellhammer, *Emperor's Decree*. All three of the super-heavy battle tanks came from the forge world prime, Mars itself, and had served Cadia with great distinction for thousands of years. Each of the tanks was a colossal mobile fortress, a moving wall of the thickest armour bedecked with cannons of prodigious size.

The leader of Company IV was battle-scarred tank veteran Commander Vroskni. From the cupola of his command tank, *Foebreaker*, he had led the Pride of Cadia to many battlefield successes. Although the company boasted enough firepower to level opposing armies, Vroskni had learned that the secret to victory after victory was to get the most out of each of the super-heavy tanks under his command. Most recently, the company was called to join the assault groups fighting on Thraxdon. For ten years, Imperial forces had besieged the rebellious fortress world, but they had been unable to break through the traitors' formidable defence lines.

Within a day of arriving on the planet, Vroskni was leading his super-heavy company at the centre of the latest assault. The Pride of Cadia lumbered forward, shrugging off incoming fire while unleashing their own thunderous salvos. In the centre, *Foebreaker* used its main gun to abolish distant enemy gun turrets, while the hull-mounted demolisher cannon smashed apart bunkers and reduced ferrocrete walls to rubble so the tracked vehicles could grind over them.

On Vroskni's right was the Banesword, *Blessing of Obliteration*; its quake cannon pounding shot after shot against the gun-laden central citadel. Each hit gouged a blast mark deep into the gun-laden central citadel, the massive reverberations sending cracks and fissures running throughout the previously impregnable structure. At last, unable to absorb any more punishment, the great tower collapsed, sending cheers down the Imperial lines.

The heretics, however, were far from defeated. The trench lines swarmed with heavy-weapon armed cultists, eager to exact revenge upon those who dared penetrate the first five layers of their hitherto invincible fortress. The secondary gun turrets of the Baneblade and Banesword barely made a dent into such a blood-maddened throng, and not even the thick armour plates



of the super-heavy tanks could long withstand so much massed lascannon fire. Yet Commander Vroskni had anticipated such dangers, calling forward the last tank of his company, *Emperor's Decree*. The Hellhammer truly came into its own in such close quarters fighting. Side sponsons jetted out flame arcs to sweep clear the tank's immediate vicinity, while the high calibre ordnance fired from its Hellhammer cannon destroyed not just the foes that clustered behind the barricades, but the defences themselves. Walls and trench lines that had sheltered countless enemies were quickly reduced to blackened craters, nothing moving amongst the smoking ruin.

At that point, Commander Vroskni ordered the Hellhammer forward, with his own Baneblade and the Banesword holding ground in order to provide a wall of covering fire. *Emperor's Decree* churned a path more deeply into the inner levels of the fortress defences, its way paved by demolisher and quake cannon blasts. The heretics could not halt such an inexorable onslaught.

Within the hour, Imperial troops had broken through all defences, a victory made possible by the prodigious might of Company IV, the Pride of Cadia. There was little time to rest, however, for as soon as the Enginseer teams re-blessed

the venerable machines, the super-heavy company was loaded onto transports to be taken aboard another fleet; war zones across the Imperium were clamouring for reinforcements. Such precious assets as a super-heavy company, however, were carefully regulated. In this way, Company IV only helped stem the most calamitous of Ork invasions, only broke the most vital of deadlocks and crushed only the most egregious rebellions beneath their massive treads. Over many triumphal campaigns, Commander Vroskni had learned that, as long as all three tanks in the Pride of Cadia supported each other, then nothing short of an enemy super-heavy asset could withstand their firepower for long.

Although Company IV had never encountered Tau before being assigned to Task Force Retribution, Commander Vroskni had been fully briefed on the xenos and their advanced technology. As he and his company were attached to Colonel Starkzahn's spearhead, Vroskni was also told of the colonel's bold plan. Instead of deploying the super-heavy company into the relatively secure landing zone, Starkzahn proposed to air-lift the Pride of Cadia straight into battle, most likely dropping them on the very edge of enemy territory. It was a risky manoeuvre, but would provide considerable shock to the Imperial assault.

THE FURY OF THE EMPEROR

The plan for the Armoured Interdiction Cadres was to pull back before becoming locked in a major battle, yet that plan quickly deteriorated amid rapidly changing battlefield conditions. With the unexpected arrival of a super-heavy tank company, the Tau were soon trapped in a fighting retreat, with both sides hurling reinforcements into the escalating fray.

The retreating Armoured Interdiction Cadres found their route unexpectedly blocked by the most massive of Imperial tanks. As they attempted to skirt around them, Knight Commander Pask and his three squadrons arrived, battle cannons thundering. The tank battle that erupted was a savage affair, with hellish carnage inflicted upon both sides. Everywhere, the blackened hulls of exploded armoured vehicles burnt like torches. While tanks wove in and out of the mechanical detritus, lascannon beams and the distinctive contrails left by railguns crisscrossed the battlefield. The massive artillery shells of the Baneblade, *Foebreaker*, crashed down, the detonations blasting the ground so that it soon looked like a barren moonscape.

When the Hammerhead Gunships held their foe at range, the main battle tank of the Tau held several advantages – the hover tank was more manoeuvrable, and its railgun better able to penetrate enemy armour than its Imperial counterparts. In the close-ranged maelstrom of the ensuing battle, however, the outnumbered Tau struggled to maintain any edge. The best Tau pilots kept calm, using their craft's speed and tight turning radius to keep obstacles between themselves and the

Leman Russ squadrons, snapping off shots as they moved. Those pilots who halted, or took too long to aim, were soon met by the hull-crumpling fire of massed battle cannons. Most devastating of all was the quake cannon of the Banesword, *Blessing of Obliteration*; even when its massive ordnance missed its mark, the heavy shells sent up such a torrent of concussive force that they could flip over nearby hover tanks. After a shoal of Sky Rays went up in a blossoming fireblast, the Tau quickly adopted spread formations.

In such a target-rich environment, Knight Commander Pask was truly in his element. Oblivious to all else, his mind was bent on his next killing shot. Again and again he ordered his gunner to fire, and each time, a muzzle-blast of flame scorched from the vanquisher cannon, sending grav-tanks crashing and spinning into the thick dust with every shot. Black smoke made the skies darker still while the battle raged all around. With an immense number of armoured vehicles travelling in all directions, there was little time to think or reform – it was only hunt or be hunted. Always, the Tau vehicles sought to disengage, to fire on the move while trying to escape the Imperial cordon that was closing in all around them.



For Longstrike, the controlled retreat had turned into a nightmare. The enemy were around him, behind him, closing in from every quarter. He called out threats and targets constantly, shifting directions and banking hard with his Hammerhead.

Despite his best efforts, Sha'ng had lost members of his cadre. One by one, his comrades' gunships had been destroyed, until only Longstrike and a single other Hammerhead remained. Yet there was no time to dwell on his failure, for shellbursts blossomed all around his tank and his holomap showed more enemy tanks moving up from the south-east. Even as Longstrike flicked off the alarms that were alerting him to minor hull damage and that his decoy launchers had exhausted their supply, he noted that the thruster array of Shul'mur's Hammerhead was malfunctioning. To stall for long was to die, and a quick glance at the map showed multiple icons closing fast.

'Shas'la Shul'mur,' Longstrike said,
'Shut down all power to your left thruster

array. Let it recycle before reboosting. But don't stop now. It will be easier for you to steer left. There are dunes ahead you can keep between you and the incoming gue'la.'

The vid-feed image of the young pilot showed a warrior on the edge of panic, and monitors indicated that his heart rate was unusually high. Even as Longstrike spoke, he adjusted his railgun and sent three shots streaking towards the closest enemy tanks. It was only seconds before two were billowing black smoke, flames leaping out as the crew attempted to open hatches and escape. The third tank had veered enough so that the projectile glanced harmlessly off the turret, its own long-barrelled battle cannon blazing away in answer.

Longstrike had generally learned from experience to disregard the return shots of a Leman Russ when the enemy was firing on the move at maximum range. Such shots were typically wildly inaccurate, yet this one was different. Blaring signals gave Longstrike an instant of warning, and his

last tilt ensured the sloping armour of his Hammerhead did not take a direct blast. Still, the resounding clang of impact shook everything. Even the suppressor field from his XV02 pilot battlesuit did not shield him entirely, and Longstrike's head felt cloudy and thick, his eyesight momentarily blurred. Instinctively, Longstrike jiggled his craft, moving it rapidly sideways while swivelling his railgun. He needed to keep the enemy's eyes upon himself, buying more time for Shas'la Shul'mur to reach the safe cover of the dunes. Yet despite his efforts, it was not to be.

In one of the luckiest or most impressive displays of gue'la accuracy that Longstrike had ever encountered, the long-barrelled tank had again opened fire, its shell ripping apart Shul'mur's Hammerhead in an exploding fireball that sent wreckage high into the air.

Calmly, Longstrike changed course, accelerating away with all possible speed. The holomap showed he still had quite a gauntlet to navigate ahead.





CHAPTER 2

IMPERIAL SPEARHEAD



MOVE AND COUNTER MOVE

The allied commanders of the Imperium agreed that once they began putting pressure upon their xenos foe, they must not relent. All recognised the Tau way of war. At all costs, the Imperium must prevent the Tau from disengaging to plan another series of ambushes on their terms. Without delay, they took the fight directly to the Tau strongholds.

After the long running battle with enemy armour – including a company of monstrous super-heavy tanks – those Tau that returned to the relative safety of the cleared zones breathed deep sighs of relief. Once within the perimeter of the Earth caste's enviro-engines, the skies cleared to a radiant blue, as opposed to the overcast toxic smog that permeated the majority of Mu'gulath Bay. With the exception of the towering hive city of Agrellan Prime dominating the background like a looming mountain range, the rest of the landscape had been cleared of the remnants of the planet's decrepit Imperial past.

The Imperial forces were not far behind, however, and as the leading elements of the broken Armoured Interdiction Cadres approached the first of the Tau's defensive perimeters, Commander Shadowsun began to mobilise their reinforcements. She sent her well-guarded reserves – a mix of Hunter Cadres and Rapid Insertion Forces, along with entire shoals of Sun Shark Bombers – in to cover the retreat. The plan was for them to deliver a hard counter-strike and then, while the enemy regrouped, the incoming Tau forces could get within the defensive lines. In a thousand battles upon a hundred planets, such tactics had served the Tau well, and none employed them with greater mastery than did Commander Shadowsun. And, at first, it worked.

Incoming Leman Russ tanks were quickly dispatched as they entered the cleared zone and were met by a crossfire of railguns. As the Imperial forces began to muster in force, Crisis Teams struck from the skies, their jet packs allowing them to combat drop out of fast-moving Orca transports high above. Even before they landed, they fired masses of missiles, carpeting foes with a layer of explosions. At close range, their fusion blasters made short work of the Imperial armour, turning steel into molten piles of slag in seconds. Firing up their jump jets again, the Crisis Teams bounded away before their targets could retaliate.

The Imperial Guard were disoriented, their momentum blunted. The Tau had gained the reprieve they so desperately sought, and they would soon retire behind their first line of defence. But then, with the sound of thunder, the skies were ripped asunder.

Moving too rapidly to be intercepted by fighters, the Drop Pods of the Adeptus Astartes plummeted downwards at impossible velocities. The sky was streaked with contrails and filled with the screams of retro-thrusters. The Imperium had countered Commander Shadowsun's rapid strike assaults with one of their own. Within seconds, the Tau retreat was once again blocked as the Drop Pods opened and Space Marines exited, their boltguns blazing.

Kor'sarro Khan exalted in the fresh air, letting it fill his lungs as he charged ahead. This was more like it, he thought, swinging a two-handed blow with Moonfang to sever a battlesuit's leg. In the following spinning motion, the Captain of the 3rd Company of the White Scars reversed his grip on the blade and drove it down through the toppled battlesuit's chest. With a quick twist, he ensured that the Tau inside the suit was halved before jerking his blade free, a spray of blood confirming the kill. Mantras and rituals only helped so much in the confined space of a Drop Pod – the only true way to clear away the memory of that helpless interment was this – the heady rush of battle and the sweet taste of his enemies' defeat.

Although the Khan had grown to respect the battle prowess of the Tau and the tactical acumen of their leader, Commander Shadowsun, he found their ambushes and fighting at maximum distance dishonourable. That they too were masters of the hit-and-run attack only made the Khan hate the xenos more.

In fact, everything about the Tau made the Khan's blood sing. It was a familiar feeling – for only when he was on the hunt did the Khan feel fully alive. It was a good feeling to be on the same world as his declared prey. He had hunted Commander Shadowsun for some time – this was the fourth campaign in which he had sought her. Indeed, it was on this planet that the Khan first made his vow to claim the Tau Commander's head.

Now, Kor'sarro Khan had tracked his foe to her lair. He doubted she would appear on the battlefield just yet – she did not always lead her troops from the front as he did. She was trapped on this world though – a satisfying thought, for he relished this quest. After this mission, the Khan and his 3rd Company had free license to return to the defence of Chogoris, and that drove him on. She must not escape his blade this time.

With a leap, the Khan was over the barrier wall and amongst the Fire Warriors. He was a lion amongst the sheep, a hive-eagle amongst rat-doves. Over and over, he

honoured the blessed blade of his Chapter, bathing it in xenos blood. None could stay his rampage, and severed limbs and arcs of gore sprayed upwards in the wake of his onslaught. Behind him, the Khan could hear his brothers' roaring bolt pistols and whirring chainswords as they fought to keep up with their Khan. Let them try. Kor'sarro knew there were none yet to challenge his command, but he respected the very thought of it, for anything that made the Sons of Jaghatai stronger was to be embraced.

The killing was soon over, for it was little more than a one-sided slaughter. A lone vid-Drone rose from the massacre and darted off. Beside Kor'sarro Khan, Brother Subetei raised his bolter to shoot it down, but the Khan slapped the weapon wide, the shells thumping into the dusty ground with muffled 'whumps'.

'Let it go,' the Khan commanded, snarling up at the Drone. 'I want them to see us. I want her to see me and know that I am coming.'



THE SOLDIERS OF THE MACHINE GOD

With the aid of the Adeptus Astartes, the Imperial thrust into Tau territory was fully underway. It was at this time that a new army arrived to join the ever-growing battle outside of Agrellan Prime. At the command of the Tech-Priests, the ordered ranks of a Skitarii War Cohort stood ready to begin their assault upon the Tau constructs.

In the mountainous shadow of the former capital hive of Agrellan, the Tau had built their largest installations – hab-domes, a Fire caste training complex, and all the foundations for a new sept world, perhaps the largest of them all. Now this vista was the site of a battle that the Tau had never seen coming.

At the defensive walls guarding the sprawling Tau complex, Commander Shadowsun had planned to make the gue'la pay dearly, before retiring behind the defences. A Space Marine Drop Pod assault had foiled both aspects of that plan. More and more of her carefully husbanded reserves were sent to extract armies that were pinned down, drawing more and more Tau forces into the raging combat.

While the Space Marines stormed the first line of defences, Colonel Starkzahn arrived at the front. The commander of this spearhead assault found a new army assembled upon the desert-like plains, forming up alongside his companies from the Cadian 625th and 423rd Armoured Regiment. How or when the Skitarii War Cohort had left *Archaetrove*, their orbiting Macroclasm class Tech-Cruiser, was unknown. Judging by the thick dust coating

their red robes and covering their strange engines of war, it appeared as if they had already marched some distance. Yet there they stood, forming into battle lines in time to join the larger assault, while ahead, explosions blossomed as the Space Marines breached the first of the Tau fortifications.

This was not the first time Colonel Starkzahn had fought alongside the Skitarii Legions, and he knew from experience that it was not his place to question these allies or their doings. The heavily cowed Magos Arcotholitis had mysteriously turned up for the hasty war council claiming that his War Cohort would advance alongside the Imperial Guard, safeguarding the right flank. That was good enough for Colonel Starkzahn, as to his mind, allies willing to fight as aggressively as the Skitarii did were the only ones worth having. He gave the order to advance to his troops. Simultaneously, from high in orbit above Agrellan, the Tech-Priest masters sent down their signals, the Skitarii giving the slightest of twitches as the doctrina imperatives activated their mechanised bodies in preparation for war. So, side by side, the Astra Militarum and Skitarii began their march across the wide eastern plain in the shadow of Agrellan Prime.





The first segment of the Tau defensive line was already in shambles – the Space Marines had seen to that. The second and third lines, however, were now all firing at full power. The air cracked as the hyper-velocity railgun rounds from the distant Tau gun emplacements began to hit the advancing armour. Several Leman Russ tanks exploded, great geysers of smoke and fire blossoming across the wide, flat area. The strange, crab-like walkers of the Skitarii, however, continued apace. Flashes glared and energy fields flickered, but still the Onager Duncrawlers scuttled onwards, their guns remaining silent and, as yet, offering no response.

Forward the forces of the Imperium marched. The Imperial Guard line became staggered as they advanced, for explosions tore holes in their ranks, pulse rounds dropped soldiers, entire squads grouped behind the relative protection of the hulking tanks, and platoons dropped into firing positions to begin pouring fire into the line of Tau fortifications ahead. This was not the case upon the right flank.

Relentlessly, the Skitarii plodded on, neither increasing nor decreasing speed. Some warriors were punched off their feet by incoming pulse rounds, but a number of those merely got up again, assuming a new place in the formation as it continued onwards. Once in range, they began to fire – the thump and crackle of their galvanic weaponry contrasting with the roar of battle cannons and clatter of heavy bolters. Glowing rad-beams stretched out to blast the Fire Warriors lining the barricades, and the eradication beamers of the crab-legged Duncrawlers began atomising all before them in wide

swathes. With an inhuman burst of speed, the metal-limbed Ruststalkers bounded to close the distance, vaulting easily over the low walls to attack the Tau beyond. The shriek of their transonic blades was a hideous keening, pierced regularly by the panicked cries of the hopelessly beset Fire caste. Crisis Teams attempted to intervene, using their jump jets to land close enough to bring their formidable arsenal of weaponry into play; however, they were met by the charging Sydonian Dragoons, taser lances sending forth showers of sparks as they split open battlesuits, skewering the Tau pilots mercilessly. Stalking through the carnage, the bipedal machines methodically crushed the wounded before loping off to catch up with the already advancing Skitarii.

The Tau fortifications proved much more difficult for the Imperial Guard to overcome. Casualties mounted as the Cadian Shock Troopers slogged forward, taking cover behind the burning remains of shattered vehicles. Slowly, with massed lasgun fire, concentrated mortar rounds and a surge of tanks from the armoured regiment, a section of the second Tau line was breached, but by then, the right flank of the Imperial advance was far ahead, the Skitarii and Space Marines already besieging the next line of defences.

In a hidden command nexus some distance away from the war fronts, Commander Shadowsun watched her many video feeds and holo-maps. A half smile creased her thin lips as she saw an opportunity and watched it grow. Her plans remained the same – to maximise enemy casualties while minimising her own. Yet she hesitated...



IMPERIAL BESIEGERS

There were more Tau defences than the Imperial forces had expected. Where once had been plain desert, there now stood Tidewall barricades and gun turrets. They seemed to rise like mirages out of the very sand – either by disruption field trickery or clever engineering.

The turret-mounted railguns of Tidewall Gunrigs fired shot after shot, sending geysers of rocks and splattered body parts down the line. Yet on came the Astra Militarum, leaving corpses littering the sand behind them. Fusillades of lasgun shots streaked out, a saturation of fire that forced the Tau Strike Teams to duck behind their walls, not even daring to return the shots. With a screeching of turbines, the Assault Squads of the Space Marines used their jump packs to bound up and over the defensive structures. Some landed amongst the foe, bolt pistols and chainswords wreaking bloody havoc. Others were met in turn, countered in mid-air by leaping battlesuits. While the Skitarii could not match the numbers of their Imperial Guard allies, their prodigious firepower blasted away gun towers and swept battlements clear with irradiated rays of purest death.

The Tau were not content to just sit behind their walls. Periodically, they darted out to counter-attack – shoals of Devlfish bringing Strike Teams into perfect enfilading positions or dropping Breacher Teams where they could punch holes in the front lines of the oncoming foes. Stealth and Crisis Teams struck out in bounding leaps, wreaking a terrible toll.

Under the burning yellow sun, the slaughter went on and on.





ONE FINAL PUSH....

As the desert clash unfolded, each leader looked for openings, seeking any opportunity to land a telling blow upon their enemy. Both Commander Shadowsun and Colonel Starkzahn knew that fortune favoured the bold, and that victory was seldom given, but instead must be seized. So the battle ebbed and flowed...

Tenaciously, the Skitarii pressed the attack. Their red-robed troops absorbed punishing incoming fire, their bionically enhanced bodies shrugged off what should have been mortal wounds. Even so, such was the firepower arrayed against them that the Skitarii left behind a gruesome trail – crumpled corpses and shattered gear-driven automata lay in heaps. So hard-wired was their programming that many did not even realise when they were dead – pieces of half-destroyed things still attempted to lurch forward, and the desert floor crawled with such gruesome sights as one-armed torsos pulling themselves through the sand or lumpen masses twitching forward while dragging ropes of innards and cables behind them.

The Imperial Guard and Space Marine forces attacked the Tau defence lines one by one, destroying each gun turret and stronghold in methodical order. The Skitarii, however, advanced in a straight line towards the larger installations – they cared not if their forces were subjected to enfilading fire, and they gave no concern to the multiple threats that they left behind for their allies to battle. With single-minded purpose, the maniples advanced, slew their foe, and advanced again. They slowed for nothing.

As Mu'gulath Bay had only recently been captured, it did not yet feel like a Tau world, despite the work carried out by the Earth caste engineers. Within the outer defensive walls was a sprawling desert, now purified after great effort had been expended to remove its toxins. Clusters of newly built buildings broke this empty space. Designed with future expansion in mind, the new sept world required years of development before it could rival its predecessors. Now, however, the Tau merely wished to survive long enough for reinforcements to arrive. The great leader of their people, Ethereal Supreme Aun'Va, was trapped on this planet, and his protection surmounted all other concerns.

Bypassing the Fire caste training domes, the remainder of the Skitarii War Cohort made directly for the enviro-engines. These structures were guarded by encircling banks of Gun Drones that opened fire with their underslung pulse carbines, felling many soldiers of the Machine God. It was the Sicarian Infiltrators that finally cleared the defenders from the base of the engines, the scrambling pulse waves that emanated from them crippled the artificial intelligence of the Drones and left them ripe to be shot down or hacked apart. As the Skitarii formed a perimeter around the looming engines, the air rippled



ominously. Teleporting from low orbit, a Holy Requisitioner, the most avaricious office of all the Cult Mechanicus, had arrived. Surrounded by Kataphron Breachers, the red-robed priest touched the engines, cables darting out like snakes from his powerpack. He directed the Breachers to dismantle the device, and they set about cutting away coveted pieces with their powered claws. When reactor drives, ion cylinders and other precious tech had all been removed, the air shimmered once again, and just like that, the Tech-Priest and his War Cohort were gone.

On her holo-maps, Commander Shadowsun saw the large gaps growing in the enemy assault. She had intended to pull her troops further back, but she could not resist such a clear opportunity to make the enemy pay. In an unusual moment of indecision, Shadowsun almost sent in the sum of her reserves – almost joined the fray herself. Naggling doubt held her back, for this time, her goal was not to win the battle, but to safeguard Aun'Va. It was a rare lapse in judgement from Shadowsun, for she decided to commit more, but not all, of her reserve troops; it would not be enough to sustain the critical mass needed to break the foe.

Skimming low over the flat desert, Piranha Firestream Wings scythed through the advancing Cadians. Overhead, shoals of Sun Shark Bombers timed their attacks perfectly, their

pulse bomb generators sending down fizzling energy spheres that cracked and exploded. On their right, where once had been an army of Skitarii, the Cadians instead saw their flanks compromised by Fire Warriors debarking from Devilfish and pouring fire into Imperial ranks.

Had Shadowsun sent in her carefully marshalled battlesuit teams, she might have truly staggered the Imperial forces, but her half-measures were too easily countered. Colonel Starkzahn barked into his vox-caster, sending his own reserves into battle. The Valkyrie Airborne Assault Wing launched an immediate attack. Air support, armoured regiments, abhuman auxilla – he called upon it all and sent in everything to push the Tau back.

Space Marines might be tireless, but the Astra Militarum were only men – even Cadian regiments eventually succumb to fatigue and the ceaseless pressure of war. Not this day – the 625th, like its grim-faced colonel, simply refused to back down. The sight of Valkyries roaring in, supporting their grav-chute dropped troops, gave the Cadians heart, and they surged forward. More infantry regiments were moving in, and word was that a super-heavy tank company was already en route. When Colonel Starkzahn and the regimental standard bearer arrived to lead the final charge, it was becoming a rout and Imperial victory was all but assured. But then the skies turned red...







THE FURY OF THE ALMIGHTY MONT'KA

The midday sun over the primary Tau command nexus on Mu'gulath Bay burned bright and hot while battle raged below. Shafts of light cut through even the thick clouds of airborne toxins, and then, for an instant, those rays flared bright, casting stark shadows upon the battlefield below. The flash blinded all with its intensity, even as it morphed, the yellow sun suddenly taking on a blood red hue. And in that moment, they came from on high....

It was as if they came from the sun itself.

Wave after wave of red-armoured Crisis battlesuits dropped through the atmosphere. Hundreds of streaking, curling contrails filled the skies as masses of missile pods streamed out salvo after salvo. Through those twisting smoke trails cut a rain of blue streaks, plasma bolts that scythed down Imperial Guardsman and Space Marine alike. Whirring at high cycle, burst cannons stitched lines of death across the advancing Cadians below, mowing down ranks at a time. Scintillating balls of blazing lightning exploded as nova-charged ion blasts landed amidst the Imperial Guard, the XV104 Riptides making their awesome presence felt.

At the last moment, the crimson battlesuits slowed their rapid descent, their jump jets hissing in protest. They landed amongst the front lines – the broken, body-filled barriers that were the final obstacle standing between the Imperial forces and the Tau installations.

To the Imperial Guard, this death from the skies was just another, albeit furious, ambush. To them, the red armour of their foes signified only more xenos armed with advanced weaponry. To the Tau, this sudden onslaught was altogether more meaningful. The beleaguered Fire caste warriors looked to the skies in wonder. Far away, viewing on drone-captured video, Commander Shadowsun and Aun'Va shared an incredulous look. To the Tau, the red-armoured warriors meant only a single thing: Commander Farsight, the prodigal champion turned outcast, had returned.



FARSIGHT ENCLAVE ORGANISATION

When he disobeyed the directives of the Ethereals, Commander O'Shovah set up his own colonies beyond the Damocles Gulf. Known as the Farsight Enclaves, this domain expanded greatly under its dynamic leader.

A military genius, Farsight remains a dedicated disciple of the legendary Commander Puretide. Although politically separated from the Tau Empire, Farsight has continued many of the teachings of his former homelands, such as the rituals and training of the Fire caste. The armies of the Farsight Enclaves have been called upon many times to defend their worlds from invaders, cleanse new planets to colonise, and even, occasionally, participate in missions to aid their former rulers, the Tau Empire.

The armies deployed by the Farsight Enclaves are usually, but not always, centred around teams of XV8 Crisis Battlesuits, and prioritise rapid insertion formations. Indeed, the battle prowess of the red-armoured battlesuits is well known and feared throughout many sectors of the Eastern Fringe. Regardless of the exact composition of the cadres in any given Farsight Enclaves force, its warriors will place a premium upon aggressive tactics, for such is the directive of Commander Farsight himself.



DAWN BLADE CONTINGENT

The armies of the Farsight Enclaves are organised according to the philosophies of their dynamic commander, and most favour a combination of the following formations:

HUNTER CADRE

RANGED SUPPORT
CADRE

RETALIATION CADRE

PIRANHA FIRESTREAM
WING

COUNTERSTRIKE
CADRE

FIREBASE
SUPPORT CADRE

AIR SUPERIORITY
CADRE

RAPID INSERTION
FORCE

SKYSWEEP MISSILE
DEFENCE

ALLIED ADVANCE
CADRE

THE EIGHT

Commander Farsight

Commander Bravestorm

Commander Brightsword

Shas'o Sha'vastos

Shas'o Arra'kon

Sub-Commander Torchstar

Shas've Ob'lotai 9-0

O'vesa

FARSIGHT'S RED SUN ASSAULT



COALITION COMMAND

Masters of the Mont'ka
Commander Farsight (O'Shovah)
The Eight



TRANSPORT TASK FORCE

Unable to match the Imperial Fleet in battle, Farsight employed prototype Shi'oni class cloaked ships to enter the contested atmosphere.

INTERSTELLAR CRAFT

2 Custodian class carriers
3 Protector class warships
4 Emissary class envoy ships
2 Kroot Warspheres

ORBITAL WING

12 Manta Heavy Dropships
24 Orca orbital transports
3 Shi'oni Transports

AIR PROTECTION SQUADRONS

3 Barracuda squadrons
2 Tiger Shark squadrons
6 Razorshark squadrons
6 Sun Shark Bomber squadrons

COMMUNE

Commander Farsight leads all, but beneath him in the chain of command are Commander Brightsword and Commander Torchstar.

INSERTION CONTINGENTS

Crisis Dropstrike
Rapid Insertion Force
Riptide Wings
Firststrike

ENCOUNTER CONTINGENTS

Armour Execution
Forward Stealth
Armoured Interdiction

BREAKTHROUGH CONTINGENTS

Piranha Firestream
Wings
Ghostkeel Wings
Riptide Rapidstrike

FORWARD SECURITY CONTINGENTS

Skysweep Missile
Defence
Drone-Net VX1-0
Pulse Engine

DENSE ENVIRONMENT CONTINGENTS

Optimised Stealth
Stingwing Hive
Kroot Warpack

COMMANDER FARSIGHT'S DAWN BLADE CONTINGENTS

Commander Farsight divided his cadres into attacking and defensive contingents. They air-dropped immediately following the launching of a solar-flare nova missile, using the cover of its disruptive flare to gain shock advantage against the Imperial forces.

INSERTION CONTINGENT

Contingent Headquarters
Hunter Cadres
Retaliation Cadres
Rapid Insertion Forces
Counterstrike Cadres
Air Superiority Cadres
Allied Advance Cadres
Drone-net VX1-0

ENCOUNTER CONTINGENT

Contingent Headquarters
Hunter Cadres
Retaliation Cadres
Rapid Insertion Forces
Counterstrike Cadres
Ranged Support Cadres
Skysweep Missile Defence
Firebase Support Cadres
Allied Advance Cadres

DIPLOMATIC CORPS

Unlike most Tau Expeditionary Forces, the Farsight Enclaves brought with them virtually no Water caste diplomats. A small team of Translation Executives were included for dealings with the gue'la, and a single Diplomatic Arrangement Council could be called in from orbit, but was deemed unlikely to be needed.

EXTRACTION WORKGROUP

Unable to maintain orbit, the Tau fleet was forced to flee. This team was brought in to create the long-term extraction plan.

3 Engineering Corps
1 Relay Comms Team

SPECIAL EXTRACTION TEAMS

This group was included specifically to extract the Empire's Ethereals if needed.

3 Optimised Stealth Teams
2 Engineering Support
1 Camouflage Engine

FARSIGHT ENCLAVES RED SUN ASSAULT



When Commander Farsight leads his Enclaves to war, he does so in swift, dynamic fashion. He is the master of the Mont'ka, the art of identifying a target of opportunity and striking it with maximum force. Translated from the Tau language, the words roughly equate to 'the killing blow'.

Commander Farsight leads the assault, typically deploying from an overhead Manta Missile Destroyer. Using his jump jets, Farsight descends to his carefully selected target – for it is vital that the sudden shock and ferocity of the attack put the enemy in immediate peril. Firing his plasma rifle and crushing enemies beneath the feet of his battlesuit, Commander Farsight lands in a flurry of swift violence. He swings wide arcs with his sword, the Dawn Blade, an energy-wreathed weapon that it so potent it severs ferroconcrete as easily as if slicing through water. Before the last severed bit of his target has toppled, Farsight is already in motion; whirling, spinning and chopping until all foes within reach are dead. Activating his jump jets, he leaps into the air, plasma rifle spitting bursts of blue bolts that never miss their mark.

Not far behind Commander Farsight come the rest of the Eight, the fabled formation of battlesuit-clad elite warriors that served both as Farsight's bodyguard and war council. Each of them is

a whirlwind of devastation, dealing death in their own unique fashion, fighting as a team despite their individual modes of battle – each warrior complementing the style and weaponry of the others. All blend together into a harmony of destruction.

Sub-Commander Torchstar sends sheets of fire out even before her battlesuit touches the ground. Brightsword's twin fusion guns melt away the metal hull of battle tanks as if they are candle wax. Bravestorm's plasma rifle punches his selected targets off their feet while he closes on a suitable victim for his formidable Onager Gauntlet. Further from the front, Shas'vere Ob'lotai sends forth steady barrages from his high-yield missile pod, his AI enabling him to simultaneously blast multiple targets even if the victims are across the battlefield from each other. Such long ranged tactics are not for O'Arra'kon, whose battlesuit is bedecked with anti-infantry weapons. With each bounding leap, Arra'kon leaves behind another heap of bodies, the dead falling so thick before his onslaught that they often obscure the ground. Of all the Eight, O'Vesa cuts perhaps the largest swathe of death, his towering XV104 Riptide Battlesuit unleashing prodigious blasts of super-charged energy from its ion accelerator. Between the volleys of his plasma rifles, Shas'o Sha'vastos relays the enemies' fall back patterns, because he knows that, in a



Mont'ka assault, should the pace of destruction slow down, the attackers might lose their momentum, and with it the opportunity to destroy their foe utterly.

As devastating as they are, the Eight are but the tip of the spear of a Farsight Enclave assault. In their bloody wake come the massed crimson-armoured Crisis Teams. As they streak groundwards, their array of weapons adds to the carnage. Fire Warrior teams – often aided by the mobility of Devilfish transports – add their sheer volume of pulse weapon fire to the fray. A Pathfinder team, supported by a Recon Drone, often plays a central role. They use marker lights to guide critical shots precisely, and if needed, the Pathfinders lay down their own formidable firepower with a mix of pulse carbines and ion rifles.

Using such devastating shock assaults, Commander Farsight has led his Enclaves to many triumphs. When a living tide of greenskins swept over the world of Nepshoon, the Farsight Enclaves did not attempt to fight a long war of attrition with the superior numbers of their barbaric foe. Instead, Farsight planned and performed a perfectly executed Mont'ka style attack. Deployed via high altitude transport, the battlesuits descended straight upon Ork Warlord Gnashjaw and his iron-

clad bodyguard. The Eight cut down the mega-armoured Orks with terrifying ease, the action punctuated when Farsight beheaded the Warlord with a single swipe of the Dawn Blade. The Tau infantry arrived on a flank, laying down a curtain of pulse fire to ensure that none of the Ork bosses escaped back to their massed armies. Suddenly bereft of all their strongest-willed leaders, the remaining Ork hordes predictably upon each other, and were easily routed by a series of successive strikes.

In the many centuries since Commander Farsight led his expedition to break away from the Tau Empire, the ancient warrior has only further perfected his battle craft. With the passing of his mentor, the revered Commander Puretide, there are none now living who can match his Fire caste academy tactical scores or his vast experience of executing the swift killing strike.

Although Commander Farsight was exiled from the Tau Empire, and reviled by the many who considered him a traitor to the Greater Good, he still led his Enclaves to the succour of the Tau upon Mu'gulath Bay in their time of need. In a flash of crimson, Commander Farsight launched one of the greatest of all his trademark assaults.

THE EIGHT

The greatest living legends of the Farsight Enclaves are the Eight. Led by O'Shovah himself, the Eight are warriors beyond compare, the greatest battlesuit pilots, true masters of the art of war. Farsight could not ask for a more loyal bodyguard.



COMMANDER FARSIGHT

The renegade Fire caste Commander is Shas'o Vior'la Shovah Kais Mont'yr, often shortened to O'Shovah, and even better known as Commander Farsight. Over his unnaturally long life span, Farsight has been known by many other names as well, for he was the most exalted of all the protégés of the legendary Commander Puretide. He was also the 'Hero of Vior'la,' and 'The Bane of Greenskins,' and after he left the Empire, he became known as the 'Great Traitor' or 'He who Renounced the Greater Good'. To the Tau of the Farsight Enclaves, he is their one true leader, a warrior who will take his people to their great destiny.

COMMANDER BRAVESTORM

Commander Bravestorm was entombed in life support systems after sustaining critical injuries during the battle at Blackthunder Mesa on Dal'yth. Since that fateful day, the scorched and twisted Tau has been confined to a battlesuit, although his core support cocoon has been reinstalled into an XV8-02 Crisis 'Iridium' mantle. Despite his hardships, Bravestorm has lost neither his fervour for the Greater Good, nor his lightning quick mind. He fights with a battle prowess and bravado that few can equal, for he has passed beyond fear and courted death itself.





COMMANDER BRIGHTSWORD

Few deliver a deathblow with such deadly efficiency as Commander Brightsword. With his pair of fusion blasters, Brightsword leads his Rapid Insertion Force from the front, and his war exploits have proven more than worthy. Many famous warriors have previously borne the same name, and its current bearer is mindful of the heritage that accompanies the honoured title. In battle, he always chooses the most powerful enemy target to annihilate first, and thus far, none have escaped his fusion blasts. He has destroyed the most hulking of war engines and monsters, and his aggressive attack style has been modelled upon the tactics of O'Shovah himself.



SHAS'O SHA'VASTOS

Commander Sha'vastos was the first Fire caste warrior to receive a Puretide neurochip. Something went amiss, however, and the prototype chip suffered rapid degeneration. Rather than allow the loyal warrior to suffer a lobotomy, Farsight had him spirited away and placed in stasis until some cure could be discovered. Many decades later, O'Vesa was able to recalibrate the neurochip, and Shas'o Sha'vastos was reawakened. A tactical genius, Commander Sha'vastos leads his cadres to victory after victory, for he always seems to know the enemy's battle plans even before setting foot on the battlefield.

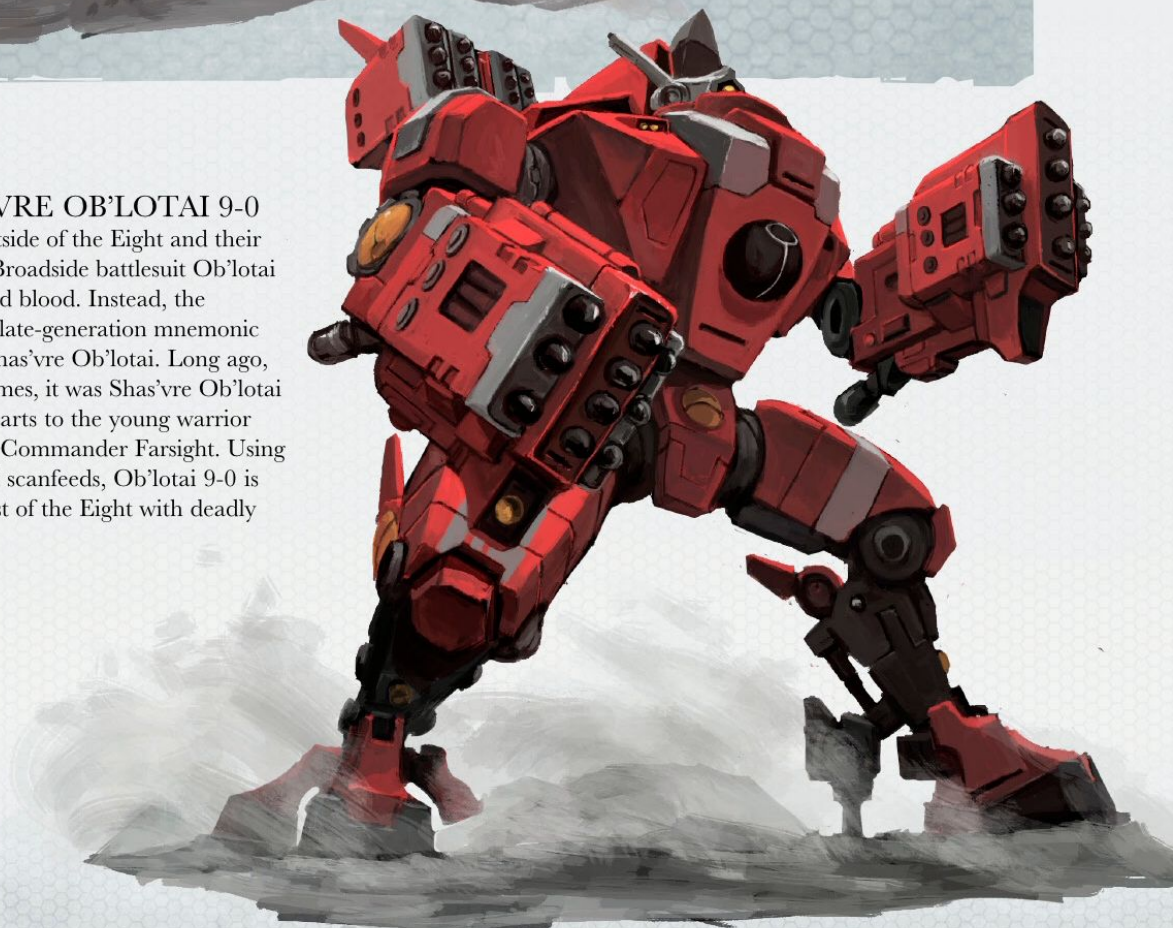


SHAS'O ARRA'KON

Equipped with an XV8-05 Crisis 'Enforcer' battlesuit, and mounting an extensive suite of anti-infantry weapons, Commander Arra'kon can leave even the largest formations of enemy troops in ruins in an instant. Willingly leaving the larger targets to Commander Brightsword, Arra'kon instead seeks out masses of enemy foot soldiers. An analytical warrior, Arra'kon encourages the Eight to review and critique all of their past battles on holo-vid – for it is his constant goal to further hone his battle arts.

BROADSIDE SHAS'VRE OB'LOTAI 9-0

Although it is not known outside of the Eight and their Earth caste attendants, the Broadside battlesuit Ob'lotai 9-0 is not piloted by flesh and blood. Instead, the Broadside is controlled by a late-generation mnemonic AI engram of the original Shas'vere Ob'lotai. Long ago, at the Fire caste training domes, it was Shas'vere Ob'lotai who first taught the piloting arts to the young warrior who would one day become Commander Farsight. Using multi-trackers and advanced scanfeeds, Ob'lotai 9-0 is a master at supplying the rest of the Eight with deadly accurate supporting fire.



SUB-COMMANDER TORCHSTAR

A defector from the Tau Empire, Sub-Commander Torchstar is the youngest and most impetuous of the Eight. Bearing twin flamers, the Vior'tlan borders on reckless as she bounds headlong into battle.



O'VESA

The final member of the Eight is O'Vesa. He is, in fact, not a shas'vre at all, being an old Earth caste colleague of Farsight, kept alive by microdrones of his own invention. Given that Commander Farsight is a die-hard Fire caste traditionalist, it speaks to the bond between the two that he allows any other caste the great honour of piloting a battlesuit, much less a powerful XV104 Riptide. Many AI suites that O'Vesa invented are integrated into the Riptide's piloting array – his technological genius offering him great aid in targeting and compensating for his lack of a lifetime's worth of intense training and experience in battle.





BATTLE OF BLACKFOSSIL RIDGE

Desperate measures were called upon if the Imperium was to counter the fierce attack by the newly arrived crimson-armoured Tau. Under the cover of an orbital bombardment, Colonel Starkzahn pulled his forces back, reforming them along an ancient ridge. There, strengthened by waves of incoming reinforcements, the Imperial Guard intended to make their stand.

The sudden shock attack of the battlesuits had been perfectly timed, quickly throwing the Imperial offensive into total disarray. Colonel Starkzahn sensed that any chance of victory had been snatched from his grasp. Worse still, the counter-attack was so fierce that he feared the imminent collapse of his whole army. With no further reserves to hand that could stabilise his crumbling battle lines, Colonel Starkzahn called in a massive orbital bombardment. The skies burned and the world shook.

Warned at the last moment by sensor arrays, many Tau battlesuits bounded away in an attempt to avoid what was coming. For long moments the world was gone, obscured by fiery explosions. So much sand erupted into the air that the sky was eclipsed. Heavy clouds of dust and sand hovered over everything, including the massive craters that had previously been a hotly contested battlefield.

Even before the orbital barrage shook the battlefield, the Space Marines had performed a Thunderhawk extraction. They had known their scattered forces were not prepared to fight the vast influx of battlesuits that had taken the field with the

arrival of the Farsight Enclaves. Despite the intense fire, the Space Marines executed the manoeuvre flawlessly, and within moments, all the Adeptus Astartes – save the White Scars – had exited the field of battle.

Refusing to give ground so near to his prey, Kor'sarro Khan and his 3rd Company joined the battered remnants of a Sentinel formation to perform rearguard duty. It was an act that, perhaps, would have been a hopeless one were it not for the orbital bombardment. The incoming lance strikes stabbed down repeatedly into the heart of the combat, the blast waves killing many thousands. It had been a risky call by Colonel Starkzahn, yet the commander had reckoned that although he would lose many troops to his own bombardment, the remaining forces would be able to pull back and regroup. As the incoming rounds continued to rain down, a barrier of explosions formed between those who survived. At the periphery of the blast, Colonel Starkzahn was already up and in motion. His order to make for the ridge was soon echoed down the Imperial line, even those whose hearing was blasted away could follow the pointing gestures. Many reserve troops were massing along that rocky

*I*nside his XV08 Crisis Battlesuit, O'Shovah shook his head. Even with his shield generator blanketing him in a suppression field, the blast had rattled Farsight, blowing him backwards off his feet and burying him beneath volumes of sand. He felt the sting as auto-stimulants were injected into his body, a brief burn as the chemicals surged through his bloodstream. Instantly, his foggy head began to clear.

As his vision focussed and he could hear something besides that infernal ringing, Farsight began to address each of the warning signs and incoming messages that filled his internal hologram display. While doing so, he simultaneously worked his way through the signals of the rest of the Eight, checking the vitals of each. They had all cleared enough of the impact zone to have survived, although many registered damage, from compromised armour points to destroyed Drones. Next, Farsight checked the cadres and finally, he quickly reviewed the progress of the other seven strikes across Mu'gulath Bay. While he did so, he signalled his bodyguard to form up around him, and then checked the orbital map.

There was a small window of time as one Imperial battleship drifted out of position and another one took its place. The Tau had four minutes, maybe five, to move out. Now was the time to press the attack or to fall back and regroup – to stay still in the open was to die for nothing.

Quickly analysing what data he had, Farsight activated his jump jets, blasting himself out of the covering debris and landing upright. The world was a sandstorm, yet his sensor array swept the field. These gue'la, it seemed, were exceptionally well led. Farsight knew he had broken them, only moments ago they had been panicked and ripe for slaughter before his blade. Yet now, the icons falling back were not racing chaotically and were clearly no longer fleeing, but rather marching at speed. Already, a new battle line was forming up on a distant ridge – it seemed that was where they intended to stand. This was good order from the foe, and Farsight respected that control. This was a worthy adversary and the brief reprieve had served them well. The line they were forming was already being reinforced, with great waves of armour coming in behind them.

Three minutes. Time was running short.

'Honoured leader,' said Commander Brightsword, appearing by his side. Turning to face his protégé, Farsight saw that the young warrior had retrieved the Dawn Blade and was now holding it reverentially. Even in the gritstorm, the weapon glittered with strange energies. As Farsight bowed and reclaimed his weapon, the Commander had made his decision. Boosting his comms relay to maximum broadcast range while purposefully removing all encryption, Farsight addressed his many cadres – and any other Tau who were listening.

'Reform. Dawn Blade Contingents upon my lead. Counterstrike Cadres upon O'Shundra. Air Cadres one through five on sweep, six through ten on air superiority. We attack in one minute upon these coordinates,' said Farsight, forwarding attack formations and coordinates. 'Clear this area immediately, enemy artillery incoming.' With a jet-accentuated bound, Farsight leapt to the muster point, his bodyguard alongside him. Behind them, once again, the world shook beneath massive bombardments.

elevation, and to the men staggering on the plains below, that bristling gun line looked like salvation.

Never more than five steps away from his team of vox-operators, Colonel Starkzahn stalked along the battle line formed atop the ridge. It was only a slight rise, but against the flat plains of the region, the rocky bluff seemed mountainous. In the distance, all could hear the latest round of orbital bombardments striking down upon the recently vacated battlefield. Starkzahn was under no illusion that his foe had been wiped out by the strikes.

Although Blackfossil Ridge typically commanded superior views, all visibility was limited this day. The hot, shifting winds were carrying the massive dust cloud raised by the orbital strikes. Also, the damage done to the main bank of Tau enviro-engines was allowing the toxic storm that enveloped much of Mu'gulath Bay to creep in around the previously cleared perimeter. It appeared as if shapes were moving within the swirling sands below, and up and down the Imperial battle line, brief outbursts of gunfire could be heard. No enemies emerged out of the shadow, however. Starkzahn knew that with each passing moment, his own forces grew stronger – companies and entire regiments were still working up from the landing zones. Just as the Colonel began to hope his foe had actually fallen back to regroup, the assault came.

Once again, the massed battlesuits led the Tau attack. In bounding leaps, the Crisis teams surged out of the sandstorm, their jump jets kicking up more sand behind them. Despite the

visual impairments, the Tau shooting was still deadly accurate. Every plasma burst or stream of cannon fire seemed to find its mark. In two bounds, the first wave of red-armoured battlesuits was crashing into the Imperial Guard lines.

Behind the first wave came larger, more hulking varieties of battlesuit. Where the XV104 Riptide strode, it attracted immense amounts of firepower from the Imperial Guard, for they had learned of the massively destructive power of that towering battlesuit's main weapon. Anticipating this, the Riptides came forth out of the swirling sands with the full power of their nova reactors directed into their shields. Lascannon streaks and battle cannon blasts alike struck those invisible barriers, causing showers of sparks to fly while the defensive shields rippled. Only a few shots got through. The same could not be said when the Riptides levelled their own weapons. Heavy burst cannons mowed up and down the Imperial line, the large calibre pulses not just killing their targets but blasting them asunder. The damage wrought by those Riptides equipped with ion accelerators was even more horrific.

Seeing that the centre of his firing line was already being caved in by the fierce battlesuit attack, Colonel Starkzahn ordered in his countermeasures. Up from the reserve lines lumbered the squads of Ogryns, eager to at last be called into battle. Colonel Starkzahn had noted that the Tau could outshoot his armies and outmanoeuvre them, but it was his reasoning that the xenos sophisticates would not fare so well against a heavy dose of brutish and unreasoning violence.



The battle atop the ridge was proceeding as Farsight had planned – intense plasma rifle and missile pod fire was clearing a landing space along the ridge. Sheets of flame washed the zone as more and more red-armoured battlesuits bounded up to join the first wave. Heavy bolter shells hit them, clanging again and again off their armour, but seldom finding purchase. Into that maelstrom came hulking abhumans. Bullgryns hefted huge slabmetal shields before them, while Ogryns carried large calibre ripper guns – all made a straight path towards the Crisis teams.

The Ogryns were pierced through many times by plasma shots and engulfed by sheets of flame, but nothing could drop the thickly muscled abhumans. They simply waded through the enemy firepower until, at point blank range, they opened fire with their own weapons. When that close to their targets, even the Ogryns found it hard to miss, and the heavy shells chugged out by their ripper guns cracked Crisis suits and blasted away limbs. But the hulking creatures had not stormed forward for a firefight, and they did not halt their charge. The bulky Ogryns dropped their armoured shoulders or hefted high their slabshields and kept coming. Some battlesuits leapt out of range, but others, either too surprised or hopeful that their final volleys would fell the beasts, stood their ground. The impact of the ensuing collision resounded over the battlefield. The Ogryns did not stop there, however, but smashed and stomped in a flurry of fierce attacks. Behind the line of hulking abhumans came more Guardsmen, the fire of their lasguns sending forth a lattice of laser beams.

For a moment, the Tau momentum stalled behind their besieged battlesuit spearhead. Against the massed Imperial Guard firepower, such a situation could quickly prove disastrous. Yet Farsight, at the head of the Eight, made the jump up to the bluff. He had fought too many Orks to be cowed by mere atavistic savagery. Brightsword's fusion blasters single-shotted the brutes, O'Vesa lowered his powerful ion accelerator and blew apart both slabshields and the Ogryns behind it. And none could match the fury of Farsight, who spun and hacked with his Dawn Blade, cutting a swathe through the abhumans and driving straight into the infantry regiments beyond.

Perfectly timed with Farsight's entry into battle came the Piranha Firestream Wings and the Razorshark strafing runs. Within seconds, the Cadians' centre was split open, and both flanks were forced to retreat. Once again, the Tau pressed their advantage and closed quickly. With signal jammers activated at full power, there could be no more transmissions sent to the orbiting fleet.

Cursing the red-armoured foe that had beaten him twice in rapid succession, Colonel Starkzahn prepared to make a last stand with his command group when he heard a familiar sound and felt a welcome sensation beneath his boots. The unmistakable growl, rattle and clank of Leman Russ battle tanks moving at speed came to him on the desert winds. Emerging out of the toxic cloudbanks to the south were the massed tank wedges of the Cadian 423rd and 78th, Knight Commander Pask at their head.



Knigh Commander Pask knew he should be communicating with his squadron leaders and coordinating the attack, but in the distance he spied a worthy target. In the swirling melee atop the ridge stood a colossal battlesuit. Although not titan-sized, it was the largest Pask had yet seen on Agrellan, and he longed to kill it and add it to his score.

Although the ground was flat, Pask was not yet fully accustomed to this latest incarnation of the Hand of Steel. The last tank had met its end when a missile had struck it as Pask and his tank companies had pursued the Tau Hammerheads. One of the tracks on the right side of this vehicle was badly bent, causing friction as it clanked around. Even so miniscule a thing was enough to throw the tank off course. Pask held fire, squinted, judged, checked for wind, and held some more. All the while, he sped forward, the tip of a great wedge of Leman Russ battle tanks churning in his wake.

Although his gun sights claimed the target was out of range, Pask ignored them. His comm-link buzzed. He ignored that too. Only the shot mattered. The enormous battlesuit moved with unexpected speed, but he tracked it. With a single command, the vanquisher battle cannon roared, its muzzle blazing fire. Pask watched, the scene obscured by dust and explosions. He kept his eye fixed on his target and saw his shot take the head structure clean off the foe, tearing with it a huge chunk of chest armour. Like a puppet shorn of its strings, the battlesuit collapsed backwards into the sand. Pask was already scanning for another worthy victim.



FOR THE GREATER GOOD

Squadron after squadron of Leman Russ battle tanks opened fire, and the sound was like thunder rolling down a valley. This was the Emperor's Might made manifest.

Made of a lightweight yet incredibly strong nanocrystalline alloy, the Tau battlesuits provided excellent impact resistance. Their well-designed shapes and angles helped deflect solid shells, sending them ricocheting harmlessly away. The armour's reflective liquid metal coating could defeat even beam technology. Shield Drones hovered near the battlesuits too, blanketing their charges with invisible barriers capable of stopping a direct hit from a lascannon. Yet against all the incoming firepower of the Imperial Guard, the red-armoured battlesuits were blasted apart by the dozen. The momentum of the battle had shifted.

As the majority of the Farsight Enclaves' long-ranged firepower – the Riptide Wings and Armoured Interdiction Cadres – were only beginning to enter effective range, they offered little assistance to the battlesuits. The Imperial Guard infantry, no

longer the main focus of Farsight's fury, were able to regroup. With mass lasgun and heavy weapon fire, they too took a measure of revenge upon the Tau battlesuits that had broken them twice already.

Farsight was aware his people were sustaining casualties. Even as he leapt atop a Leman Russ and thrust the Dawn Blade through its hull, the Tau Commander was checking his holo-screen. Activating jump jets, Farsight was airborne before the internal explosion ripped the tank apart. And then he saw what he had hoped for – his holo-screens alive with movement.

Battlesuits plummeted down around them while Devillish sped from the flanks, and above, the air was filled with shoals of strafing Razorsharks. Farsight saw with relief that these troops wore the white sept markings of T'au, the orange lines of Sa'cea, and the red demarcations of his own home sept, Vior'la; Commander Shadowsun had arrived at the head of the forces of the Tau Empire.





GROWING CONFLAGRATION

The battle was raging. It was a spreading inferno blazing across the desertscape, and it drew in further troops from both sides. Soon, it had become the largest conflict yet fought upon Mu'gulath Bay, and neither side could back away. The fate of the planet, and therefore the star system, hung upon the outcome.

As the combined Tau forces drove deep into the Imperial armies, the skies above grew murkier. Great clouds of dust moved in on the hot winds, the sun's glare turning them into a shrouding haze. The zone of purified air had been collapsing since integral parts were taken from the largest of the networked enviro-engines. Toxic clouds of dust closed over the battle taking place upon Blackfossil Ridge.

Commander Shadowsun led the battlesuit dropstrike while shoals of Devilfish and Hammerheads surged in along the Imperial flanks, but there was another addition to the Tau forces. High above, at the edge of space, three streaking Mantas each sent forth a gravitic column. Within seconds, the beams were gone, and their cargo was delivered. It was a dangerous risk with such precious war assets.

The magnetic shafts pierced the roiling clouds, grounding themselves to the planet's core. Something large moved within those crackling shafts of light. With recoil jets and suppression fields, the hurtling object within each beam slowed its descent velocity at the last possible moment, but each still struck Mu'gulath's desert surface like a thunderbolt. Rising from out

of the craters and striding forth through swirling dustclouds came three hulking KV128 Stormsurge ballistic suits. They began their slow, churning pace towards the battle, the twin pilots within each mighty artifice already scanning to obtain targeting information. Several shoals of Devilfish came out of the clouds to travel alongside the heavy-footed giants.

The presence of the largest of the Tau weapons of war was yet to be felt upon battlefield, but that did not mean that their arrival had gone unnoticed elsewhere. High above Mu'gulath Bay, the scanning equipment aboard the orbiting Macroclasm class Tech-Cruiser *Archetrove* came alive. An alert sounded with the clanging of a dolorous toll. Telescopic eyes swivelled out, and Tech-Priests scuttled to monitor blue-green viewscreens. For a while, there was only the sound of adjusting dials and turning cranks, marked by the steady hiss and exhale of mechanical rebreathers. The Tech-Priests had heard rumour of these large scale Tau weapons, but they had not yet been able to observe them. And what the Tech-Priests could see, they coveted. Now that they saw the KV128 Stormsurge, they wanted it for their own, to dissect and study. Within seconds, the Skitarii were activated and despatched.





Meanwhile, Colonel Starkzahn's troops – those that still lived – were being pushed steadily back from the edge of the ridge. The Colonel had hoped to form a solid battle line before the oncoming Armoured Companies, but the onset of another skyborne battlesuit assault and the thickening sandstorm had conspired against his strategy. Now the battle was disjointed, broken down into a hundred smaller conflicts amidst the clouds of cloying grit.

To Colonel Starkzahn's left, a squadron of Leman Russ tanks rumbled by, infantry advancing in their armoured lee – all firing upon the darting shapes of Tau Piranhas. To his right, a few units of White Scars Space Marines stood alongside a Cadian Heavy Weapons Platoon, fending off battlesuit assaults that attempted to silence the massed lascannons. Amidst such chaos, Starkzahn could affect little in the way of operational control. Transmissions were jammed; there was nothing else he could do but fight. The colonel had the regimental standard planted in the ground, drew forth his own power sword and arrayed his Command Squad to hold their position.

By this time, the KV128 Stormsurges were in range of the nearest of their Imperial foes. Their towering masses were obscured by the thick, billowing fog of sand and toxins, but the advanced blacksun filter and tracking suites within each hulking ballistic suit showed the Stormsurge pilots a map literally lit up with targets.

The Imperial Guard remained unaware of the encroaching new menace. The first clue that some other new weapon was being loosed upon them was the series of strobing bright

flashes from deep within the swirling mists. Moving at speeds the naked eye could not follow, hundreds of missiles streaked outwards, each leaving a snaking contrail in its wake. By the time the whoosh of their launching was heard, the missile storm had already sped by the first lines of Imperial Guard to crash into the forces sheltering beyond. The barrage sent up a wall of fiery explosions. Then pulse rounds – larger than any seen previously – burst out of the cloudbanks. The Guardsmen did not know where to aim their weapons, as at any moment, from any angle, a team of Crisis battlesuits could bound out of nowhere, delivering volleys of deadly firepower before leaping away once more.

Into this whirlwind of battle there marched a new army – the Legions of the Ommissiah, the Skitarii, had returned. From whence they came, none could say – but these troops seemed to have been buried deep in the sand, or else long-travelled through many such storms. Their eyes glowed with a incandescent light that could be seen like will-o'-the-wisps through the dust haze. To their Imperial allies, they gave no heed or greeting, instead tramping past them in mechanical lockstep. They had another calling.

Whether by plan or happenstance, the pollution storm covered the Skitarii War Cohort, their rad-signature registering as just another blot of pollution on the Tau's advanced scanners. Neither the Stormsurges, nor the Fire Warriors that formed ranks around them, had notice of the red-robed warriors until they advanced out of the swirling storm. Bursts of electricity arced outwards, and a new phase of the battle erupted.



From orbit came the binharic cant, the signals picked up by the Skitarii's antennae. Their target must be brought down. So said the encoded commands from on high, and those orders had come from holy Mars itself. To serve the Ommissiah was everything to the warriors of the Cult Mechanicus.

Backed by the enormous Stormsurges, the Tau poured forth an immense amount of firepower. Fire Warriors, and the Drones

that hovered alongside them, sent forth a furious fusillade, while battlesuits vaulted close with their jump jets to deliver withering blasts of sustained shots of pulse fire from burst cannons.

Still the Skitarii came forward, marching over their fallen, never slowing their advance. Driving over the dead came scuttle-legged Onager Duncrawlers, their multiple appendages enabling them to climb over the piled bodies with ease. At that range, their eradication beamers were deadly only to infantry, so they



continued to crawl forward upon their mechanised crab-legs. Closer. They must get closer still. Skitarii Rangers unleashed their own electrical storm, with the Vanguard stalking closer to bring the foe within range of their radium carbines.

In the contaminated haze, the two forces clashed. One army – the upstart Tau race – believed technology was the way forward, its use the key to progress, the best means to every end. The

other – the Skitarii of the Adeptus Mechanicus – worshipped technology not for its promise of progress, but rather for its own sake. They coveted it, superstitiously finding their god hidden within its mechanical secrets.

Thus, two ideologies clashed, pitting their firepower against each other.



AND NONE SHALL STAY HIS WRATH...

In the growing storm, the battle began to break down. No longer were major army fronts colliding, but rather individuals, squadrons and small formations clashing. In this fog of battle, Farsight pushed his attack, hurtling towards the oncoming waves of tank squadrons that were arriving to reinforce the Cadians' precarious position atop Blackfossil Ridge.

Those of Knight Commander Pask's regiment that had survived many battles with their illustrious tank leader had learned a harsh truth: Pask was an indifferent, even uncaring leader.

As a tank ace, Knight Commander Pask was unmatched. In the thick of combat, he moved and fired his tank like it was an extension of his own body. As if by instinct, Pask knew when to reverse tracks and reposition, when to halt and take rapid-fire shots, and when to push full throttle to avoid incoming shells. Pask could manoeuvre the *Hand of Steel* from cover to cover like no one else, dodging incoming missiles with an adroitness that none could imitate. Although his soldiers never spoke it aloud, they knew that sometimes the objects Pask used for cover were their own tanks or those within the company. Even when he could find no cover at all, Pask knew how to keep his thickest armour towards the foe, or how to pitch his tank perfectly so that enemy shells or energy blasts ricocheted off the hull rather than pierce its steel hide. And for all his defensive tricks, he knew it was best to aim well and shoot first. When he fired, Pask was so sure of his aim that he did not just target enemy tanks, but instead could set his crosshairs upon vulnerable joints between armour plates, or along seams where the shot would find purchase and penetrate rather than clang

away. All of these skills were so instinctual to him that Pask could not find the words to explain these experiences or share his battle wisdom with the rest of his regiment. Nor did it ever occur to him to try. Although he had steadily risen through the ranks because of his unmatched kill record, the finer details of regimental command had never been his true calling.

Those who had served longest under Knight Commander Pask had learned to follow his lead. If he sped up, they did too. If he halted and his turret scanned for targets, they copied. Such mimicry had carried them over rebel lines and through Ork Blitz Brigade attacks. Yet it was not a foolproof method, for Pask's eyes constantly scanned the horizon, seeking the next target or potential incoming fire. None could duplicate his split second decisions, or equal his uncanny marksmanship or tactical manoeuvre.

In the sprawling, sandstorm-riven battle with the Tau, Knight Commander Pask was a killing machine. For a time, he called out targets so quickly his loader could not keep up. With each shot he fired, Pask added to his already impressive kill tally. The armour of Hammerheads and Devilfish was pierced by the shaped high explosive shells that tore through their vitals,



and seconds later the enemy vehicles buckled outwards as internal detonations ripped them apart. When an XV8 Crisis Battlesuit landed before Pask, timing its leap perfectly to catch the Leman Russ when its long vanquisher battle cannon was turned in the opposite direction, the tank commander did not panic. Even as the Tau warrior's fusion blaster glowed with energy, Pask riddled the battlesuit at close range with his tank's hull-mounted heavy bolter. The Crisis Battlesuit was knocked off its feet, yet the exoskeleton armour was only cracked. The pilot lived still, as was evidenced by his attempt to raise his deadly weapon. Seeing the threat, Pask steered his tank directly over the Crisis suit, producing much snapping and a short-lived scream that was barely audible over the din of battle.

Most of Pask's 423rd Armoured Regiment was scattered across the battlefield, however, two full squadrons had managed to keep their tank ace commander in view. It was these tanks that were first beset by Farsight.

After boosting high above the swirling melee, Farsight took a moment to survey the carnage below. Even through the sandstorm, his blacksun filter and holo-map suite showed an accurate picture. It was not difficult to ascertain the largest threat – a tank spearhead that was thrusting through the Enclaves and Tau Empire forces alike. Cutting all power to his thrusters, Commander Farsight dropped from the skies, the Dawn Blade shimmering with barely contained power.

Firing his retro-burners, Farsight slowed his descent to a glide, swinging his blade as he landed. The Dawn Blade sliced straight through the turret of the nearest tank, carving down into its metal hull and slicing through the driver. Yet Farsight's attention was already elsewhere. With his plasma rifle, he loosed twin bolts at the rear of another Leman Russ before activating his jump jets and soaring airborne once more. Both shots penetrated the exhaust, thick black smoke pouring out, but by then Farsight was gone. The third tank of the squadron swivelled its turret, trying to draw a bead upon Farsight, when they were rammed astern by the out-of-control tank whose driver had been cut in half. There was little for them to do but exit their wrecked vehicle and begin the long, treacherous trek back towards friendly lines.

The remaining squadron attempted to keep their eyes ahead on Knight Commander Pask while searching for the battlesuit that had destroyed their comrades. Their squadron leader was the first to see the red blur coming through the thick swirls of grit that wafted across the desert floor. Landing atop the turret with a resounding clang, Farsight drove the Dawn Blade down with all his augmented strength, burying his sword to the hilt within the tank's steel hide. He freed the blade by activating his jump jets, blasting skywards upon his thrusters.

Before the other tanks in the Squadron Batalica could react, Farsight's bodyguard arrived out of the skies. Commander

Brightsword's twin fusion blasters melted a hole into one tank's hull even before his Crisis Battlesuit had landed. Commander Bravestorm, however, was forced to dodge a Hydra's furious salvo and hit the desert floor too far from his target. This allowed the last tank a clear shot, and its battle cannon roared. The explosion of its shell created a fireball around Commander Bravestorm, but the battlesuit emerged, still wreathed in flames, shield generator lifted high. With a leaping bound, Bravestorm covered the distance, drawing back his fist to create maximum drive for his upcoming blow. Timing the attack perfectly, he activated his Onager Gauntlet, the punch slamming through the Leman Russ' hull and sending up a storm of metal fragments that shredded its crew.

With their ability to make vaulting leaps and to hover for short periods of time, the Eight

wreaked havoc amongst the oncoming Leman Russ squadrons. Soon, the desert was filled with blackened hulks, their melted and ruptured hulls spewing columns of smoke. And still Farsight's furious assault was not slowed, for he led the Eight towards an onrushing infantry company. None knew better than Commander Farsight that to be successful, the Mont'ka must deliver maximum casualties.

Oblivious to the slaughter behind him, Knight Commander Pask pressed on. He was wary of outstripping his infantry support, but the *Hand of Steel* was still periodically passing small groupings of Cadians, hunkered down in defensive positions. For a time, the tank commander had felt it was safer going forward than halting, but soon, he could no longer recognise any shapes in the sandstorm. Popping out of his hatch for a better look, Pask squinted into the stinging sand, realising that conditions were growing steadily worse. Lightning was lancing down from the swirling maelstrom, once arcing so close that it almost hit his tank and he was forced to duck back inside. So it was that he never noticed the trio of Hammerhead Gunships gliding along from the north.

At maximum range, master gunship pilot Shas'la T'au Sha'ng, better known as Longstrike, arranged the two other gunships in his Interdiction Cadre into a line abreast formation. Using their scanner arrays and blacksun filters, the Hammerheads had been making their way carefully towards a large concentration of enemy forces. Although experienced gunship pilots, they were new replacements in Longstrike's cadre and he wanted to observe how well they worked as a team. When a lone blip – most likely a gue'la tank given its tremendous outpouring of pollution, heat, and noise – appeared on their screens, Longstrike let his new comrades set up their attack run. All three railgun shots hit their mark, tearing apart the *Hand of Steel* entirely. It was a good start.





FROM OUT OF THE RISING STORM

Colonel Starkzahn's Imperial Guard attempted to hunker down while their reinforcements worked their way towards the battle. The Tau forces, meanwhile, sought to inflict as many casualties as they could upon their pinned foe. Commander Shadowsun aimed to maximise the casualties inflicted but to pull back before the Imperial forces grew too strong.

As Imperial reinforcements continued to arrive from the south, the battle spread across a wider front. Each side sought to outflank the other, and all grew leery of entering the maelstrom of fighting that had overtaken the centre. As the storm increased, it sent flying grit in whirlwinds, but as some combatants grew to trust the dense cover, the winds gusted and all would be clear until the next squall.

Even with the Tau Empire and Farsight Enclaves forces combined, the Tau were still badly outnumbered. Yet in the swirling sandstorm, their superior scanners and comms equipment gave them an advantage. The Tau forces, particularly the mobile battlesuit formations, used their speed to track enemy positions. They always sought advantages where they could concentrate their firepower upon a target and then move off into the storm before major retaliations could find them. The Tau battlesuit pilots were masters of this technique, for they could bound skyward with their jump jets, disappearing into cloud cover.

Had Colonel Starkzahn been able to organise his battle lines into the accustomed Astra Militarum combined arms approach,

it is probable that he could have fended off these hit-and-run attacks. But as it was, the Colonel was pinned down. In the strange storm, vox communications were either malfunctioning or, Starkzahn had a rising suspicion, were being blocked somehow by their technologically advanced xenos foe.

With the Tau enviro-engines still offline, the entire middle-continental region was once again subjected to the fury of the polluted sandstorms and, allowed to rage unabated, the growing weather cell had drawn in airs from the contaminated upper atmospheres. The storm grew in strength, with electrical squalls building up and rad-storms increasing. All of this hellish weather was not unlike the superstorms that raged over the northern hemisphere in what was called the *Mont'shidar* by the Tau – the deathwind – and the Contaminated Zone by the Imperium.

Commander Shadowsun, always a meticulous strategist, had staggered teams of Pathfinders between the battle site and the southern approaches. She desired comprehensive feedback on the approaching enemy troops. It was known that major Imperial forces were en route, but she wished to continue hammering the army that was pinned down now before



overwhelming numbers of new enemies could arrive. But as Commander Shadowsun led her bodyguard to destroy another circle of Guardsmen, the message she had feared flashed over her internal display. They were coming in greater numbers; whole new regiments were closing in.

Even as she fired super-heated energy bolts from each fusion blaster, Commander Shadowsun was calculating the amount of time remaining before the reinforcements arrived in critical mass. It was not long, but she knew that every second she had to take a toll upon the foes' numbers would pay dividends later. While her accompanying Shield Drone absorbed incoming heavy weapons fire, Shadowsun annihilated the nearest foes, her shots melting flesh, bones, armour and weapons alike. Before the remaining Guardsmen could turn to flee, Shadowsun's Command-link Drone fed improved firing coordinates to her Stealth Team, whose burst cannons did not miss. Checking all was in readiness, she gave the order to the enviro-engineers and weather satellite operators. It was time to fuel the storm, and she rattled off the calculations for the energy increase as she led her troops to their next targets.

Further south, new regiments were on the move. Infantry, armour, artillery and Imperial Knights were closing with the growing sandstorm. Their lead elements were just passing the hidden Tau pickets when the weather grew rapidly worse, the most violent squalls making even standing upright difficult.

Perhaps it was a trick of the rising storm, but amongst the holo-map icons flickered a distinct signal – a sign those Tau who had fought previously upon Mu'gulath Bay and Prefectia instantly recognised. The unique signature that briefly appeared was that of the Obsidian Knight, a walking nightmare that fought against the children of the Greater Good with extreme prejudice. Something about that towering engine of destruction sent ripples of fear through the Tau who marked the flickering appearance of that icon before it went out. The Tau were not superstitious, however, and they had seen the Freeblade Knight topple to certain doom upon Prefectia. There was clearly some glitch in the sensor suite, for it defied logic that the Obsidian Knight could have returned. On the Imperial side, Lord Tybalt of House Terryn had received similar reports, and he was not so sceptical; this would not be the first time that the Obsidian Knight had appeared on a battlefield where his presence could not be explained.

With the Imperium's strength growing, Shadowsun felt it was too dangerous to continue the assault, so she broadcast the fall back plan to all Tau – those of the Empire and of the Farsight Enclaves. Within moments, the Tau armies had retreated to set coordinates to meet incoming transports, soon fading away into the blinding sands. Additionally, Shadowsun had special coordinates broadcast upon channels not used since Puretide's time. She deemed it was time to bring together those who had been long separated.

Aun'Va looked imperiously at Commander Farsight as he walked into the command room. A long and uncomfortable time passed, as neither offered the other even the slightest sign of acknowledgment. Realising that any veneration, or even the proper formal greeting required when entering the presence of the Ethereal Supreme, was never going to be forthcoming, Aun'Va opened. Using all his control, he spoke in clipped, severe tones – a reproachful father speaking to his wayward child. 'Welcome, Shas'o Vior'la Shovah Kais Mont'yr.' His head inclination was subtle, but gracious.

Always observant, Aun'Va noted that many in the control room followed his lead, nodding to the red-cloaked Commander. Some, however, bowed too low, showing too much respect for Aun'Va's liking. It was important that all knew who was in charge. Aun'Va immediately adjusted the tone of his voice, this time addressing all in the room. 'Respected warriors of the high command, high advisors, this is Commander Farsight. Once a great pupil of Puretide, now he is my greatest disappointment.' This must

not be his moment, thought Aun'Va. Do not let him make it so.

The former Fire caste officer was impossibly old, yet still lithe and still more than capable of commanding a room. Farsight let his eye leave the Ethereal Supreme. His gaze swept the command chamber and, at last, his head bowed. This gesture was directed to the room, however, and pointedly not towards the lone figure that stood atop the dais. 'As you were mine, Aun'Va. I have not come to bandy words, nor to accept the thanks that are my rightful due. I came for war council, and for war council alone,' said Farsight.

Aun'Va opened his mouth to chastise the rebel, but was immediately cut off in a savage and infuriating breach of protocol that had not happened since his rise to Ethereal Supreme.

'Enough!' said Commander Farsight, his voice rising. 'Save your manipulations, Aun'Va. I am not here for debate. My forces have, for the moment, saved those Tau trapped upon this planet. But the shock of my initial attack is gone, and the enemy is not. If we want to leave this world alive,

then we must now work together... for the Greater Good.'

Into the resounding silence, Commander Farsight added, 'Their next wave is already massing. They will soon be coming. In this direction.'

For a moment, the briefest of instances, the Ethereal Supreme stood, staring. He realised too late that his mouth had remained open. Pure rage flashed red and Aun'Va's mind screamed, yet with a single deep breath, he once again regained composure. He must find a way to regain the initiative in this crucial encounter.

And then Commander Shadowsun spoke. Aun'Va noticed, with pride, that her voice was colder than usual, but contained its usual authority. 'O'Shovah, the enemy will likely approach on this axis.' She pointed along the holo-map. 'Initial reports suggest they do not know we are directing the weather. If we time the operation correctly, we can lure them into attacking into a storm that we control.' Farsight studied the map, recognising a plan worthy of his own tactical prowess.

THE HOUR OF THE EXECUTIONER

In their original assault, the Tau had seized Agrellan in a single day. By comparison, Lord General Troskzer's attempts to wrest that world back for the Emperor had ground on for weeks with no end in sight. The main Task Force Retribution forces had had their chance. Now, other agencies were taking matters into their own hands.

Agrellan burned.

From space, the conflict wracking the world looked strangely beautiful. Continental firestorms and vast battles appeared as swirling patterns of light and shadow. The contested world flickered like a coal in a brazier. High above, in the darkness of space some distance from the most far-flung Imperial picket ships, an Adept sat in his command throne on the bridge of a small, sleek frigate. Around him, the bridge was swathed in shadow, its columned expanse busy with the quiet industry of the crew. Coloured runes winked upon ivory consoles, while brass gauges and bone horologes twitched and ticked amongst them. Everywhere, acolytes moved between banks of controls, robes whispering with every step.

The Adept turned his attention from the pict-screen to the great onyx timepiece mounted upon the bulkhead next to it. His augmetic eyes clicked and whirred as he watched its final seconds tick down, the bone hands drawing inexorably together at midnight. A bell tolled within the deathclock, a single, solemn note ringing out across the bridge and causing the crew to glance at one another from beneath their cowls.

Lord General Troskzer had been permitted a generous amount of time to purge Agrellan. He had failed. Now it fell to them to correct those mistakes.

With the slow deliberation of ritual, the Adept removed his skull-inlaid signet ring. He opened a hinged panel in the arm of his throne, and inserted the ring into the carved bone recess there revealed. Intoning a brief and sinister prayer, the Adept twisted the ring anti-clockwise. Instantly, a dread signal flashed down through miles of wiring and cable, triggering a process of arcane revivification. Deep within the bowels of the Adept's frigate, the agents of the Officio Assassinorum stirred slowly towards wakefulness.

In solemn procession, chanting acolytes clad in black robes and bone masks made their way into four armoured cells. Some of the robed men bore censers from which billowed clouds of acrid incense. Others beat a slow, funereal rhythm upon great black drums.



The rest carried sacred articles of wargear; masterfully crafted firearms whose worth was greater than worlds were borne alongside esoteric blades and macabre battle helms.

The acolytes took their places around the sepulchral cryo-crypts in which the Assassins lay. As the chanting rose in pitch, the ice-rimed armaglass lids of the crypts glowed from within, their shadow-blurred occupants writhing and twitching as consciousness returned. Cables drooled nutrient slush and coughed acrid gas as they detached and fell away from the crypts' flanks. Finally – as the drums boomed and the chanting voices reached a crescendo – the lids of three of the four crypts hinged slowly open, and their occupants stepped forth. Callidus, Culexus and Vindicare, each moving

with the lithe and deadly grace of a true predator. No words were needed, for the details of their mission had been inloaded directly to their enhanced cortexes during transit. Silently, the Assassins took their weapons from the quivering acolytes then padded away, making for the embarkation deck where their drop craft waited.

Only the fourth crypt, that of the Eversor, remained sealed. This stasis-chamber had held the berserk Assassin like a fly in amber since the culmination of his last mission. Accompanied by chanting acolytes, hulking Ogryn servitors lifted the Eversor's ominous casket and bore it away toward the Drop Pod that would carry him into the heart of battle.

Monitoring his instruments from the command throne, the Adept nodded his satisfaction as he registered the first three small energy signatures dropping away from his ship and making towards Agrellan. The first of the Execution Force were away, and the last would soon follow. With no further duties to discharge he settled back into his throne, sure in the knowledge that the xenos would pay and that the Emperor's Will would be done.

On the pict-screen, Agrellan continued to burn.



EXECUTION FORCE



The operatives of the Officio Assassinorum are never deployed lightly. Indeed, it requires a two-thirds majority vote by the High Lords of Terra simply to sanction the deployment of a single operative. The decision to deploy an Execution Force – four Assassins, one from each of the largest temples of the Officio Assassinorum – is the ultimate death sanction, a condition saved for only the direst of situations.

Only the Officio Assassinorum knew the name identifiers and past histories of each of the Assassins that made up this particular team. Three of the members – the Callidus, the Vindicare and the Culexus Assassins had taken part in a previous mission, the infiltration and execution of the nine Twisted Viziers that led the Disciples of Blue Flame cult. The mission was a success, however, the Eversor Assassin assigned to the operation died while destroying the last Twisted Vizier.

The Vindicare was a master of long-ranged pinpoint accuracy. Equipped with his exitus rifle the Vindicare had served the Emperor well, racking up thousands of kill shots during his long, successful career. With a single perfectly placed shot, he had ended rebellions, slain despotic warlords, and brought heretics the Emperor's Judgement. His far-reaching ability had been a perfect match against the

Twisted Viziers of the Disciples of the Blue Flame, and his rifle had claimed the lives of four of the targets, including, spectacularly, two with a single shot that passed through both their skulls. His preferred method of killing was to snipe from a distance, working his way stealthily into position to rain death upon his assigned target.

The hallmarks of the Callidus Assassin were much different. She worked in close, using stealth and deception. She used a specialised drug called polymorphine to alter her appearance. Given time, she would replace members of the target's inner circle, sowing discord and terror amongst her foe. Using such mimicry, she had replaced and discredited demagogues, ensuring that her work did not make martyrs but ended dissension against the Imperium. When it came to killing, she was an expert with poisoned blades, and her chosen method was to infiltrate next to her mark, taking the form of a trusted comrade or advisor. Only when she morphed back to her true shape – typically during her victim's death convulsions – did she arouse any suspicion. She had impersonated traitors, smugglers, and all manner of humanoid xenos. For slaying at a distance – when necessary – she used her neural shredder, a vicious and shockingly effective weapon against living targets. Though short ranged, the weapon projected a



cone of psionic disruption that tore apart its victims' neural pathways. Armour was no protection against it, and a Chaos Lord in Terminator Armour had once dropped before her, his liquidised brain oozing out of his helmet.

The Culexus was an altogether different kind of killer. All Culexus Assassins carry the Pariah gene, a terrible mutation that renders them psychic nulls. Others instinctively shun and fear such individuals, picking up the unnatural vibrations they emit. To psykers, however, the mere presence of a Culexus is agonisingly horrific, every moment a waking nightmare of colossal proportions. Their battle-helm, the animus speculum, can either muffle or focus the Culexus' powers as required, enabling them to seem invisible to others nearby, or allowing the full horror of their psychic nullness to billow out in mind-ripping waves. Rogue Psykers, Warp-charged Weirdboyz, and Chaos Sorcerers were this Culexus' favoured marks – although no few corrupt planetary governors or rebel agitators had died screaming at the mind-terror he had unleashed.

Compared to the other Assassins in the Execution Force, the Eversor was not a precise scalpel honed to kill in a certain manner – he was a maniacal mass murderer, a sledgehammer

of destruction and bloodshed. Stimm-charges surged through his augmented body, allowing him to fight in a frenzy beyond even superhuman. Armed with a power sword, a raking neuro-gauntlet and a close-ranged executioner pistol, the Eversor was a close-ranged killer that did not bother to choose a single target. Instead, he would violently plough through every living thing between him and his mark, caring nothing for the attention he drew. Like every disciple of his temple, the Eversor was a living weapon in more ways than one, for should he be lain low by a mortal blow, a cocktail of chemicals within his body would mix together to create a biological bomb of prodigious power.

For this mission, the Execution Team's brief was simple. Even if the planet of Agrellan could not be purged of xenos, it was essential that the greatest war leaders of the Tau must be slain. Thus, each member of the Execution Force had been assigned a prey to hunt. These xenos would be taught that the Emperor's vengeance was inescapable. Shorn of their greatest commanders, the Tau war effort around the Damocles Gulf would be left rudderless, their empire foundering until the next Imperial task force could be assembled in order to completely annihilate them. It would only be a matter of time.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

As the climactic battle loomed, both sides made plans to seize this chance to control the planet. The masterminds of the Imperial forces believed they had the numbers to crush the last resistance of their xenos foes. The leaders of the Tau, however, saw a great, if risky, opportunity...

Many battles had been fought upon Agrellan, but the greatest yet was now imminent.

Since the major clash fought over Blackfossil Ridge, there had been only probing engagements. The forces of the Imperium had used the reprieve to regroup and rearm. The remains of the three continental spearheads had now mustered, each having driven through much opposition and delays. Now, however, all was in preparation for the final offensive.

For the most part, the Tau had continued to fight a hit-and-run war, their armies retreating before the plodding Imperial forces. The Space Marines had conducted dozens of sorties – from disabling gun batteries to destroying vital comm-links. These missions had been largely successful – the only notable failures the repeated attempts to destroy the Tau leadership. Commander Shadowsun had eluded them, and despite many reports of the Ethereal Supreme Aun'Va at various locations, he could not be found.

In the end, despite the Tau winning every major battle across the whole of Mu'gulath Bay, they had only a single strongpoint left. The assault of this bastion, Lord General Troskzer had insisted, was to be the final battle.

Their destination was the newly installed Tau city that stood in the plains to the east of the former capital, the man-made

mountain of the hive city, Agrellan Prime. Although Colonel Starkzahn's initial attack, along with forces of the Adeptus Mechanicus, had done considerable damage to the outer defences and some of the air-scrubbing machineries, they had not destroyed the shield generators. Heavy shields still held an invisible dome over the air space above, preventing the site from being reduced to ruins by an orbital barrage.

It was Colonel Starkzahn's idea to time their attack with the coming of a large storm. Since damaging the Tau enviro-engines, the area had been all but consumed by the driving sand squalls and rad-storms. It was an odd request, as it was Colonel Starkzahn's original spearhead that had suffered the greatest losses beneath those storms, but that, he argued, had been because his forces had been caught on the run, without a coherent plan. This time, even without vox communications, the officers would be fully briefed on the exact battle plan. The Tau sensors and tracking equipment were superior – but in the midst of those hellish storms, their long-ranged weapons would suffer. And Starkzahn wanted to get in close.

The endless infantry and armoured companies of the Imperial Guard were buoyed by abhuman regiments, Imperial Knights, and the super-heavy tank company that had served Starkzahn so well earlier in the campaign. Soon, all was in readiness.

All they needed was the storm.

Commander Shadowsun turned from the holo-map and addressed Aun'Va solemnly. 'Before the storm is set in motion, I ask you once again, Ethereal Supreme, will you not consent to be secreted off world?' she said. 'There are risks, but that option yields the highest percentage of success. I think only of your continued safety.'

Aun'Va stiffened, rising from the digital display to stand at his full height. 'No, O'Shaserra. I will stay upon Mu'gulath Bay. This will be our greatest triumph yet. This is the front of our war and my presence here will help drive the followers of the Greater Good.'

'If you are concerned with my presence,' interrupted Commander Farsight, 'then be at ease. After we destroy the foe, I shall depart to Vior'los. I do not contend for mastery over the Tau Empire, if that is what you fear.'

Aun'Va turned, looking down upon the figure that once offered such promise. 'I do not fear it, O'Shovoh. Although you have lost your way, I know your word is true. Only when you remember that it is the Fire Warrior's right to serve, not to rule, only then may you return.'

Farsight, his face an expressionless mask, turned from his multi-screens of deployed troops and vid-captures and met Aun'Va's gaze. Shadowsun feared her former comrade would rise to the bait, his infamous temper and the old recriminations of the Ethereal Supreme getting the better of him. She spoke suddenly, her voice cold. 'There must be unity to defeat our common foe – their numbers are too great. May I continue? Time is growing short.'

Shadowsun took the silence as assent, her fingers dancing over control panels, signalling the Earth caste engineers to unleash the storm. Moments later, all three watched vid-screens of darkening skies, the polluted upper atmosphere inversion beginning. 'The operation is underway. Begin synchronized countdown... now,' she said.

'I leave to take my position', said Commander Farsight. He halted at the command centre's shielded door, looking back. 'Commander Puretide believed in balance. If he were here to see my Kaupon and your Mont'ka, O'Shaserra, it would make the old warrior proud.' With those parting words, Commander Farsight bowed curtly to each and exited the command centre. Battle awaited.





CHAPTER 3

ULTIMATE RETRIBUTION



KAUYON, THE PATIENT HUNTER

The Tau Commanders respected the formidable war machine that was the Astra Militarum – however, there was one Imperial force that caused them great consternation. The Space Marines were the shock attack force of Mankind's armies, and they moved with unmatched speed and ferocity. From the Tau point of view, they were the most worthy of foes. Indeed, they fought in a manner that was not unlike the Fire caste. On Mu'gulath Bay, although the Space Marines had been relatively few in number, they had still perform any number of tactical operations.

Shadowsun and her top military minds all felt assured the Space Marines would coordinate their own strike missions during the looming enemy offensive. Likely future targets included the shield generators that protected the last Tau stronghold of the Lo'vasht'au area as well as continuing to search for Shadowsun

herself and the Tau Command Centre. It was Commander Farsight who suggested himself and his own dropstrike force as a likely target for the vaunted enemy elites. Just like the Tau would do, Farsight had reasoned, the Imperial army would be looking to eliminate, or at the worst, pin down, their enemies' most dangerous and tactically mobile counter-attack force. Commander Farsight and his many cadres of battlesuited warriors would offer themselves up as the bait. It would be an easy trap to set.

While waiting to see if the lure would be taken, Farsight stood watching the unnatural storm form across the desert basin. When the outlying curtains of sand were overhead, it happened – the first contrails of Drop Pods could be seen, tearing through the thickening cloud.





THE COILED SPRING

A master of the Kauyon can be noted by the timing with which they spring their traps: too soon, and the target will shy away or better prepare a proper defence, too late and the bait will be already be snatched. The victim should only feel the jaws of the trap enclosing them when it is too late to back out.

During the weeks since the Battle of Blackfossil Ridge, a running battle between Space Marine Scouts and Pathfinders had continued around no man's land – each side probing the other. Commander Shadowsun had worked hard to ensure the Space Marine Scouts eventually won their way through to observe where the Farsight Enclaves and their great mass of battlesuits were stationed. Amidst old Imperial ruins, new Tau barracks had been installed, protected by a ring of Tidewall Gunrigs.

Commander Farsight had been correct when he predicted the Space Marines would arrive to battle by ways the Tau could not foresee. As the storm covered Lo'vasht'au – the foundations of the future Tau city – the Drop Pods hurtled down, and Thunderhawk Gunships performed daring runs through the Tau anti-air batteries. Low altitude airdrops sent strings of Assault Marines soaring down. A spearhead of White Scars arrived via Rhino transport, accompanied by an entire company on fast-moving bikes. A strong force of Raven Guard emerged out of long forgotten subterranean tunnels, and even more Sons of Corax turned up within the Farsight Enclaves base camp perimeter, although the Tau never found their method of entrance.

The attacks were well timed and perfectly coordinated. The Fire caste, as professional soldiers whose lives revolved around military manoeuvre and warfare, could appreciate that their foes were also consummate warriors. Even though the Space Marines were launching themselves into a prepared trap, it was going to be a difficult battle.

On a signal from Commander Farsight, the holographic images of unarmed Fire caste warriors engaging in training exercises shimmered and were gone. Even as the Space Marine strikes landed, guided missiles and rockets crashed into the Tau's decoy gun emplacements and exploded. Moments later, the actual gun emplacements rose up on lifts, their cannons already firing. Bunker doors opened and the prepared Tau counter-attack was underway.

Crisis battlesuits jetted off in blasts of sand, streaking upwards to meet the descending Assault Marines. Thus began a battle that lit the clouds with gunfire. From high above, armoured figures plummeted like comets. The wounded and dead crashed to the ground, while the living landed atop the old Imperial ruins and began a running battle over the broken spires and rooftops.





Skimming low over the ruins came a tightly packed Piranha Firestream Wing. Like a school of predatory fish, they manoeuvred as one, spearing outwards to counter the incoming company of bike-mounted White Scars. Led by Kor'sarro Khan himself, the bikes of the Stormlance Battle Demi-Companies held their course, spraying bolter fire until, at the last second, the two groups broke, skidding across the sand, or swerving away on some prearranged path. For miles across the desert plains, the combatants gave chase and attempted to strafe each other in a high-speed duel through the rising sandstorm. Various factions broke off in all directions, zooming through and over lanes in the rubble, each weaving in and out of teetering archways in pursuit of another kill.

With their high-tech scanners and automated flight paths, the Piranhas attempted to shake off their pursuers, while their AI-driven Drones auto-fired at available targets, or detached to set up cunning ambushes on their own. Meanwhile, with nothing but their superhuman reflexes to guide them, the White Scars bikers more than held their own. One biker lobbed a krak grenade to send a Piranha into a spiralling deathspin; another used a chainsword to smash down a Gun Drone before leaping off his bike to climb onto a passing Piranha. Once on board, he beheaded both pilots, then executed a tumbling leap off the careening hovercraft before it ploughed into the sand and exploded. He had barely made it back to his bike when he was cut down by pulse fire. It was deadly for speeding combatants from either side to focus too intently upon their quarry, for in the swirling melee, many realised only too late that they were being hunted in turn.

Through the growing storm, Devilfish raced out, Strike Teams disembarking to set up deadly crossfiring gun lines. Those Space Marines that arrived by Drop Pod quickly found themselves facing superior firepower. Thunderhawk-deployed Rhinos and armoured support attempted to break through to aid their beleaguered brethren, but the Tau had cleverly concealed Broadside battlesuits atop the upper storeys of the shattered ruins, with dug-in Pathfinders guiding their fire with targeted markerlights. Soon, hyper-accelerated railgun fire saw an entire company's worth of Rhino armoured personnel carriers abandoned and belching smoke. Disembarking Space Marines were met by furious hails of fire, both from the Broadside and from hidden teams of Sniper Drones. Boosting high up into the swirling clouds, the Sniper Drones were visible only when the winds periodically opened up to reveal a rare patch of blue sky.

Chapter Master Kayvaan Shrike led two companies of Raven Guard up from the depths of long lost access tunnels. With cries of 'Victorus Aut Mortis' and 'For Severax!' the vengeful Space Marines burst onto the battlefield. As this attack was completely unforeseen by the Tau, it was by far the most successful. Assembled Fire Warriors stood at their assigned jumping-off point, awaiting the signal to join the carefully choreographed counter-attack. They were not expecting to be suddenly assailed by Space Marines. At close range, the Adeptus Astartes were unstoppable, and the wisest of the shas'ui ordered their troops to re-embark into their Devilfish and flee. Many did not make it, brought down mercilessly by the dark-armoured Sons of Corvus Corax.

THE GRAND ASSAULT

The hour had come. The forces of the Imperium launched their largest attack yet on Agrellan. This assault was meant to be the final sledgehammer blow that would destroy the xenos, but the Tau defenders waited in ambush. As Aun'Va said, this was where the tide of battle would be turned and remembered forever in the legends of the Greater Good.

The Imperial Guard's artillery began to fire barrage after barrage. They had timed their salvos to coincide with the Space Marine assaults. Indeed, the Adeptus Astartes Drop Pods were in their meteoric descent through Agrellan's upper atmosphere when the rolling barrage began. The intense shelling laid down a moving carpet of explosions, the firepower clearing a path for the oncoming ground forces.

Beneath the lowering skies, deep lines of infantry and steel walls of tanks began to move. This was the hammer of the Astra Militarum – overwhelming mass in a steady, inexorable surge forward. Due to the whipping sand and the air thick with cloying pollutants, the troops could not see the massive explosions from the artillery fire that continued to pass over them, but they could hear the deafening thunder and feel the ground shake beneath that almighty fury. Despite all their losses and the hard campaigns fought merely to reach this final assault, the Imperial forces were staggering in size. To be one amongst such millions, to feel the marching footfall of all that followed on behind you, was to be part of something larger than most men could ever imagine.

From the start, the battle for Agrellan had been about punishing the xenos. No thought or effort had been given to freeing the former Imperial citizens trapped in labour domes on the planet or shipped to far off mining colonies. There were to be no efforts to recolonise the planet or to harness its resources or runaway toxic pollution. This was a punitive action to smite the Tau, to show the upstart xenos what it meant to assail the Imperium. In this battle, intended to be the last major action upon Agrellan, Colonel Starkzahn unleashed everything he had. He did not seek to beat the Tau armies, but to cleanse the planet of their presence.

Because of the storm – and the high chance that communications would be limited or non-existent beneath its fury – Colonel Starkzahn had implemented a strict plan and schedule. Once launched, the Imperial war machine would churn across the desert, a noose tightening around Agrellan Prime, working its way inward to crush the Tau city that was being developed in the eastern shadows of the former Imperial capital. It was a vast expanse, but Starkzahn had millions of Guardsmen. There were still enough to crush the Tau many times over.



Working his way higher into the shattered ruins, Chapter Master Kayvaan Shrike paused to look behind him. Down below, the desert floor was like an ocean, the gusting winds sending sand waves crashing into teetering foundations. Despite the debris-filled air, Shrike could pick out Devilfish with Tau warriors in their lee working through the ruins. They were hunting him. Once more, Shrike attempted to contact someone, anyone – Colonel Starkzahn, their orbiting Strike Cruiser Shadowblack, or Captain Solaq of the 5th Company. Nothing. Only telepathic communications had been able to get through – and their lone Librarian, Brother Zorticae, had taken a pulse round through his helmet early in the engagement. Shrike's mind was awchirl. Even after the harsh lessons of Prefectia, it seemed they were still underestimating the prowess of the Tau. The Space Marines had clearly been baited into another trap. And, thought Shrike, it stood to reason that the Imperial Guard were just as likely walking into another. Yet try as he might, Shrike could raise nothing on his comms. There was no time for planning now, however, as the long barrel of a rail rifle drifted by the broken arch ahead. A Sniper Drone had locked onto Shrike's comrades and was lining up a killshot. Without hesitation, Shrike launched his jump pack at maximum thrust. Too late, the Drone sought to evade, and Shrike drove into the disc, his claws shredding it as their momentum carried them far forward and through the wall of a neighbouring ruin. Rising from the rubble, Shrike signalled for his men to continue onwards. The troops below would have seen the commotion, meaning that the chase was on again.

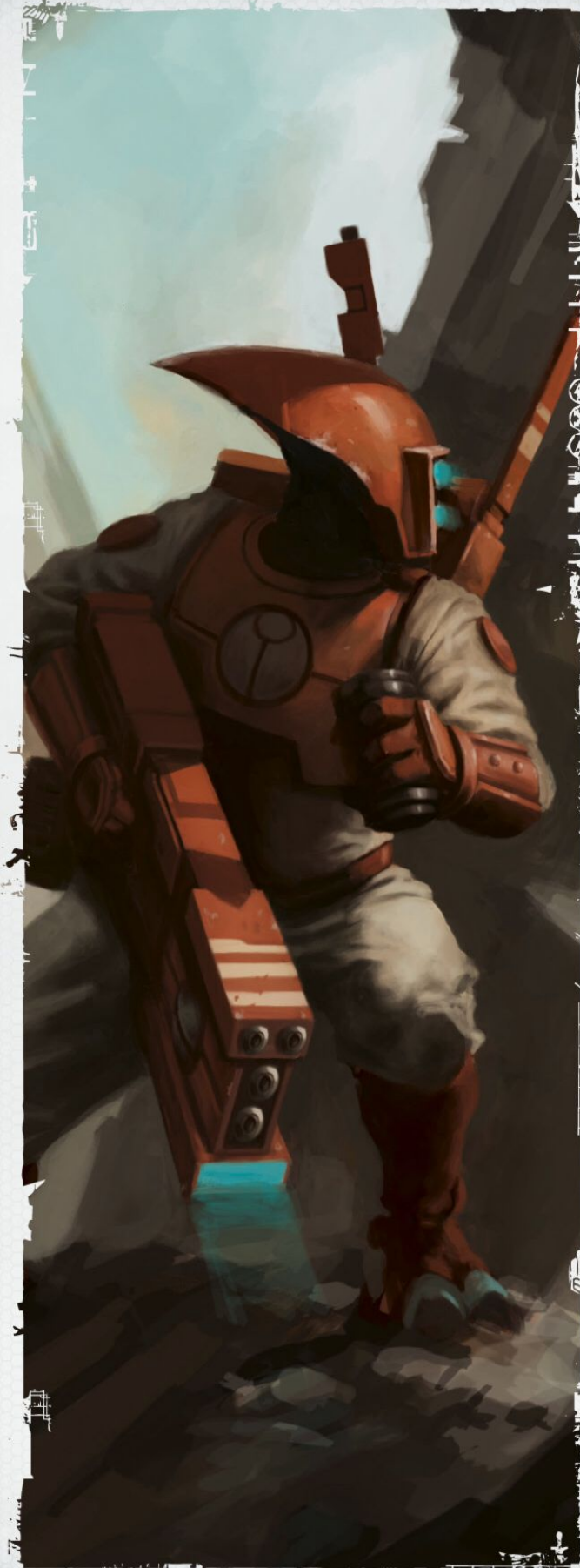
The last remaining Tau zone on Agrellan was protected by powerful force shields, thus precluding orbital bombardment support. It was possible for low atmospheric fighters and bombers to penetrate the shield-dome, but early probes had confirmed that the Tau sector was heavily lined with emplaced gun turrets. Reconnaissance had also learned that the xenos had conserved much of their airpower – formidable fighter and ground support craft. For these reasons, Starkzahn's plan to await a covering storm seemed like a wise course. At long range, and in short-lived ambush attacks, the Tau armies had proven especially deadly. However, in a conflict that was an extended, close range grind, the leaders of the Imperium's forces knew there could be only a single outcome.

Colonel Starkzahn set up his operational headquarters on the edge of some desiccated woodland, its ancient groves blackened and petrified. There, he watched waves of infantry formations disappear into the fog ahead. Company and regimental banners whipped in the stinging winds, each gust painful to bare skin, as it carried not only flying dust and grit but also poisonous toxins. Blaring fanfares and ancient battle calls from their vox-hailers, Imperial Knights strode by, those of House Terryn offering salute to Colonel Starkzahn as they passed. Hour after hour went by, without any halt to the procession making its way into the storm.

As predicted by the Imperial scans, the storm system above them only seemed to be growing in intensity. Most of the Imperial commanders believed that it would take days of marching before their forces reached anything more than scattered pickets. The first real defensive barriers, where battles had previously taken place, were several days away, even if the forces could move at a regular speed through the rising storm.

The first signs that there might be any trouble came many hours later. A distant roar could be heard, a low rumble that was barely audible over the sharp hiss made by the moving sand. The ground was already shaking, from the thousands of clanking tank tracks, but now some faraway explosion reverberated. With vox-hails only working in a very limited perimeter, there was nothing Starkzahn could do but motion more troops towards the front. He knew the flames of war must be fed and the price would be high.

From high above Mu'gulath Bay, the various Imperial Navy officers gathered upon the bridge-deck aboard Lord Admiral Hawke's flagship. They watched in horror as the unnatural clouds continued their cyclonic whirl around the outer rim of the battle site, with a large calm eye developing over Agrellan Prime. It seemed the xenos had somehow tamed the hive world's storms. Bright flashes rippled across the continent where clouds had once drifted – sure signs of large-scale explosions, and the unleashing of Titan-class weaponry. Doubtlessly, the Imperial forces on the ground were getting pounded by Tau atmospheric bombers. Waves of fighters were scrambled, sent out in thick swarms from the orbiting battleships. Regardless of xenos perfidy, the attack must succeed.





WHEN GODS OF WAR CLASH

Suddenly, the thick clouds disappeared and the biting winds lulled. The Guardsmen would have cheered for the abrupt reprieve except the light of Agrellan's sun was painfully, blindingly bright. And then the world exploded.

In many sectors, overloaded Earth caste reactors had been remotely detonated, sending huge mushroom-shaped clouds towering upwards. In other regions, swarms of missiles so thick they blotted out the sun came down, the explosions hot enough

to turn the sand below to blackened glass for miles around the epicentres of the blasts. Flesh was evaporated, steel twisted and melted beyond recognition. Yet not everything was destroyed in the maelstrom.

Lumbering across blackened and flame-scorched sands came the Imperial Guard's most impervious vehicles, the hulking super-heavy tanks. They churned forward, each a mobile fortress, as indomitable as the Imperium itself.



Turrets bearing enormous cannons swivelling in search of retribution. Behind them strode Imperial Knights, their ion shields flickering.

Shadowsun's counter-attack had kept its distance from the blast zone, and was only now racing towards the front. However, there were Tau assets already in place. Bulwarks of armour and shields, the KV128 ballistic suits had stood silent sentry

while the desert exploded. Now they came alive, swivelling at the waist to align shoulder-mounted weapons, locking onto the tanks moving across the burning sands.

Like clashing gods of war, the super-heavies unleashed their prodigious arsenals – cutting loose with firepower whose single shots could shatter mountains.

SO FALLS THE KILLING BLOW

The troops of the Astra Militarum believed they were marching into the storm to deliver the final blow to the xenos that had dared to take over the hive world of Agrellan. Imperial forces were rightfully confident, for they had the Tau surrounded and badly outnumbered. The Tau, however, had their foes right where they wanted them...

Giants duelled across the desert. The air crackled as beams of immense power streaked by, and rockets filled the skies. Flares burst like supernovae as titanic weaponry smote energy fields with ground-shaking force. The ion shields of the Imperial Knights shimmered, struggling to disperse the incoming fire of the awaiting KV128 Stormsurges.

With its own shields shrugging off the combined firepower of an entire company of super-heavy battle tanks, the nearest Stormsurge fired its pulse driver cannon, the recoil kicking up a new cloud of dust. The shot – a blaze of incandescent fury – could core through the thickest adamantium fortress or topple a Titan. This was the Earth caste's largest mobile weapon to date, carrying a calibre of pulse weapon previously found exclusively upon starships.

The Baneblade *Foebreaker* had served the Imperium of Mankind for over 10,000 years. It had been in battles that were now legend, fighting alongside Space Marine Primarchs when they still strode the stars. There was not a piece of its revered armour that had not been repaired or replaced. Always, *Foebreaker* had taken the enemy's best shot and lived to tell the tale. But not this day...

Unshielded, the Baneblade stood no chance. The blue bolt of plasma fired by the Stormsurge was of such super-heated intensity, and at such a high velocity, that it melted the armour, searing a hole and rupturing *Foebreaker's* power plant with cataclysmic results. Not a single scrap of plasteel survived the ensuing explosive meltdown.

Elsewhere, Imperial Knights of House Terryn were being obliterated at a rate hitherto unseen. A trio in an Avenger Lance formation was struck, one after the other. One pair of legs kept walking after its upper torso had been blasted away. Another received a blow through its chest and toppled to the sands. Only blackened scorchmarks remained where once the third Imperial Knight had stood. In response, High King Tybalt roared, but his rage was as ineffective as his gatling cannon – the shells bursting harmlessly off the Tau ballistic suits.

As shoals of Hammerheads skimmed into range the whip-crack of railguns could be heard. Dropping from the skies came XV104 Riptides, each emitting a high-pitched hum as they pushed their reactors, super-charging their weapons in order to better join the clashing colossi.



The battle was one-sided, but the Imperial forces exacted a toll. The Hellhammer *Emperor's Decree* blew the leg off a KV128 Stormsurge and downed a trio of Hammerheads before its crew were forced to abandon their mobile steel fortress as its hull was pierced multiple times, internal explosions seeing to the tank's destruction. The nobles of Voltoris, the famed Knights of House Terryn, charged into a great shoal of Hammerheads, their reaper chainswords and thunderstrike gauntlets flashing, but they did so at great cost. Not since the dark days of the Heresy had so many of the house's nobles fallen in a single battle. King Tybalt himself would have been destroyed, were it not for a darksome apparition from beyond the grave.

As Tybalt's ion shield faded, and his Kingsword went down upon one knee, a black Knight suit emblazoned with skulls emerged from the storm. The Obsidian Knight had returned, and it seemed to burn with vengeance, wreathed as it was by an eerie phantom light. With its battle cannon pounding out a staccato doom, the dark walker arrived in time to safeguard its downed comrades, energy blasts fizzling and sparking off its impenetrable ion shield. Never had Tybalt witnessed such a duel, as the battle-scarred behemoth fended off enemy shots, wading through a storm of firepower as it closed, until eventually its reaper blade rent armour and sent mechanical limbs flying, each strike a thunderbolt of revenge.

As the swirling sandstorm picked up, the Obsidian Knight was obscured, becoming a black blur before disappearing altogether. His heroics allowed House Terryn to regroup, but with his force halved, even Lord Tybalt knew that retreat was the only way to ensure the survival of his house. Shorn of his ion shield and bearing a cracked carapace, King Tybalt led his limping contingent back.

Except where the Obsidian Knight stalked, Shadowsun's plan to meet the opposition as they stepped from the wall of sand was proving highly successful. In well-rehearsed Mont'ka manoeuvres, Pathfinders also infiltrated the storm, setting ambushes. Amassed Stealth Drones kept Ghostkeel Wings hidden, so that Imperial troops walked into crossfiring cyclic ion rakers, or death zones where multiple fusion colliders atomised anything that moved. Those formations that emerged out of the storm were met by a wall of firepower – Cadre Fireblades directing the Strike Teams' volleys, with particularly large or formidable foes drawing special attention from Crisis Battlesuits or Hammerhead shoals. The Earth caste enviro-engines, coupled with their weather satellites, allowed them to invert the toxic upper atmosphere with pinpoint precision. One could stand beneath blue skies and breathe clean air while a stone's throw away a toxic hurricane of sand reduced visibility to a few feet. No matter how many the Tau slew, though, more and more Guardsmen kept coming.



HUNTING THE HUNTER



Despite his long life, patience was not a virtue that Commander Farsight had mastered. He longed to complete his mission and to join the main battle against the encircling Imperial Guard. This delay was not unanticipated, however, as it was known that the Space Marines would be worthy adversaries. Despite losing half of their number in the initial Tau ambushes, the remaining Space Marines were proving difficult to eliminate. Having seen first-hand the disruption the superhuman warriors could cause, Commander Farsight knew that it was wise to keep them far away from the main battle. Shadowsun's carefully constructed plan to attack the Astra Militarum forces could unravel should the Space Marines escape Farsight and regroup in strength. Their quick-strike mobility could allow the Imperial Guard to break out of the deathtrap they were marching into. So Farsight continued to lead his forces, searching for and destroying the pockets of Space Marines in the ruins of the old refinery sites, unaware that he himself was now being hunted.

A Vindicare Assassin had been deployed, his mission to kill the Tau leader known as Commander Farsight. After his lander had put down, it had taken days to work his way inside the sprawling Tau compound. Along his route, the Vindicare had used all his impressive stealth and infiltration skills,

but where such tactics caused undue delay, the Assassin had resorted to his more deadly talents, leaving behind him a pile of corpses.

One Tau Pathfinder team had picked up strange scanner readings, forcing the Vindicare's hand. Each of the xenos had died with a single shot through the aperture of their helmets' optics. Next to fall was a pair of Broadside battlesuits that guarded a rubble-filled street the Assassin needed to cross. Fire Warriors, Stealth Teams and even a Hammerhead gunship had fallen victim to the Vindicare's exitus rifle.

Having reached his destination, the Vindicare sought a firing site – a place with wide sweeping vistas. Spider-like, he climbed the ruins, leaping from rooftops to spires – a dark shade slipping amongst the shadows. At last, he chose a perch in the upper storeys of a teetering building. There the Vindicare crouched silently. His form-fitting suit was designed with cameleoline-laced materials so that he blended in – just another rubble pile or broken gargoyle from the tumbledown gothic structures. Yet this statue was watching, waiting, his finger on the trigger of his long rifle. He was forced to change position once. A Drone passed overhead, then returned, hovering in place, sweeping its sensors. Somehow, the Tau technology was picking something up. With blinding speed, the Vindicare left his hunter's crouch, drop-rolled and came up firing. The single shot pierced the Drone's AI core, causing the device to cease functioning, crashing to the desert floor. Although he was sure his act had gone undetected, the Vindicare moved location. There was no margin for error.



The Vindicare knew his target was close. While Tau technology had ensured their foes' comms signals were scrambled, there was no impediment to the Vindicare's equipment. Through his spymask, the lone sniper received translated Tau communications. He listened to reports, gauging when his quarry might draw near. The Vindicare knew Commander Farsight had made arrangements for himself and his cadres to embark upon Orca dropships, and this perch looked over the site where he would board. It could only be a matter of time...

Several miles away, but closing steadily, trackers were on the Vindicare's trail. Sub-Commander El'Myamoto – more commonly known as Darkstrider – motioned for his Pathfinders to follow. A few days previously, something had flashed up on the periphery of his prototype structural analyser, something altogether disquieting. On a hunch, Darkstrider had followed the trail, tracking the unique signature. Doubts that he and his Pathfinders were chasing phantoms were put to rest when they came across the first victims – another team of Pathfinders, all slain with fully charged pulse carbines. They had not fired a single shot as they were slain. More dead marked the trail. This foe had penetrated the Tau defence lines with ease and displayed marksmanship beyond that which the Tau could achieve even with their superlative AI targeting assistance. That the path had led him straight towards the Farsight Enclaves made Darkstrider suspicious. Was this enemy an Imperial agent, or could it be a Tau from amongst the traitorous exiles who had abandoned the Greater Good?

Darkstrider and his Pathfinder team wove through the ruins of the old refinery. Twice, they ran afoul of the ongoing battles, once using their markerlights to aid Crisis Teams in destroying a squad of White Scars on roaring bikes. Now, the ghost signal was close, but the structural analyser could not pinpoint the exact position. Sweeping the ruins with his gaze, Darkstrider marked the tallest structure. That was where he would position himself. With hand signals, he set his team in motion.

Even from his perch far up in the ruins, the Vindicare felt the air rush of the landing Orca dropship. Within moments, the red-armoured battlesuits began appearing. When his mission target was sighted, the Vindicare fired two swift shots. The first was with shieldbreaker ammunition – a shot that passed through Farsight's force field and destroyed his shield generator, the device imploding with a flash. Without that protection, the second shot would penetrate the Tau Commander's armour, exploding his head.

THE BATTLE OF GARGOYLE SPIRE

Since a bodyguard had intercepted his second shot on his mission target, the master sniper had been under siege. With uplifted shield generator, Commander Bravestorm had covered Farsight, while the rest of the Eight formed a crimson wall before their esteemed leader. The remaining Tau returned fire upon the sniper. Calmly, the Vindicare Assassin loosed killing shot after killing shot into the red-armoured Tau swarming below. A Strike Team of Fire Warriors attempted to run to cover, each dropping dead so quickly it looked like some macabre chain reaction. Next, an XV8 Crisis Team were shot as they blasted upwards, the full thrust jump jets sending the dead careening wildly. While incoming fire cracked around him, the Vindicare squeezed the trigger, shifted aim, and squeezed again. A Riptide fell to its knees and did not move again. As soon as the Vindicare calculated that he would not get another shot on his true target, he was running. He leapt, tumbling in a diving roll upon another rooftop. His mid-jump volley caused both pilots of a swooping Piranha to slump, their hovercraft spinning to a fiery death below.

Seeing an escape path, the Vindicare moved over rooftops, killing as he went. Darkstrider's ambush was fast – his perfectly positioned Pathfinders sent out a hail of pulse fire. With AI guidance, the shot patterns anticipated the lightning-quick Vindicare. Struck multiple times, the Assassin's long rifle was blasted out of his hands. It wasn't the wounds that disoriented the Vindicare, but Darkstrider's perfectly timed photon grenade. The multi-spectrum light explosion erupted as the Vindicare drew and fired his exitus pistol. Six Pathfinders dropped, but Darkstrider was only wounded. Firing his own pulse carbine from the hip, the Tau seared holes in his foe, advancing until he was blasting away at point blank range. He didn't stop shooting for a long time.





THE LIVING HORROR

Through the deliberate slaughter of non-combatants, the Eversor Assassin hoped to draw in their sworn protector, Commander Farsight. There was nothing the skull-faced killer would not do to complete his mission, but he would have to get through a devout bodyguard and accompanying Crisis battlesuit cadres to reach his mark.

The Eversor's pod crashed through the nanocrystalline dome enclosing the Earth caste science centre. Alarms wailed, teams of Fire Warriors rushing toward the site where the projectile had fallen, running faster as the sound of gunfire and frantic screaming reached them. Having smashed his way from the wreck of his pod, the Eversor set about his assailants with savage fervour. He was a black-clad blur, his needler spitting death. Fire Warriors were hurled to smash against walls with bone-breaking force, or riddled with explosive bolts. Earth caste engineers hefted experimental weapons and blazed away, only to be eviscerated without scoring a hit. Panic spread like wildfire, and within minutes, distress calls were winging their way out to the wider war.

There was one who could not overlook such desperate pleas for aid, and who was in close proximity. Just as the Assassinorum Adept had intended, the distress calls reached Commander Farsight and were not ignored.

Although his shield generator had been damaged in the failed assassination attempt, Commander Farsight was eager to reach the main battle. From reports, Shadowsun's forces were hard pressed to maintain her attack. It was vital to keep the overwhelming Imperial forces wrong-footed, for they must not escape out of the storm zone. There were no half measures with the Killing Blow. Thus, it had been Farsight's plan to leave half his force to hunt the remnants of the Space Marine assault, while he took the remaining cadres to the aid of the Tau Empire forces. Farsight insisted that repairs be made en route, and was aboard an Orca dropship when the distress

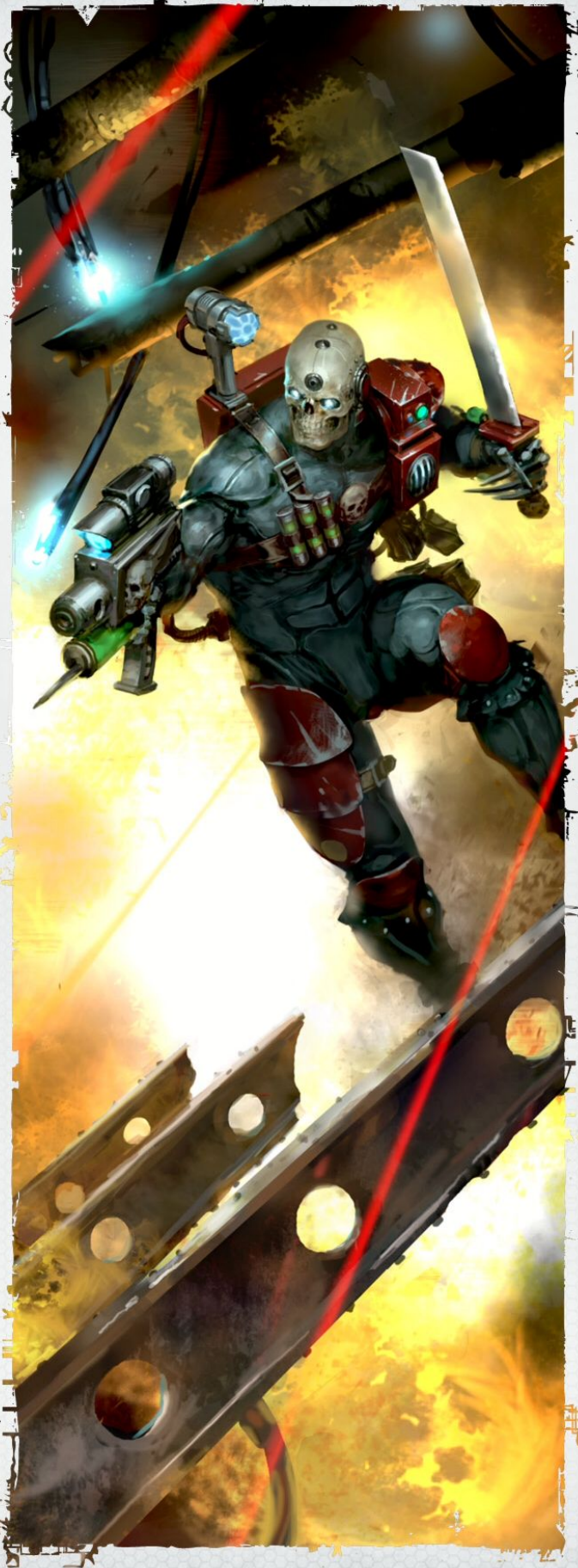


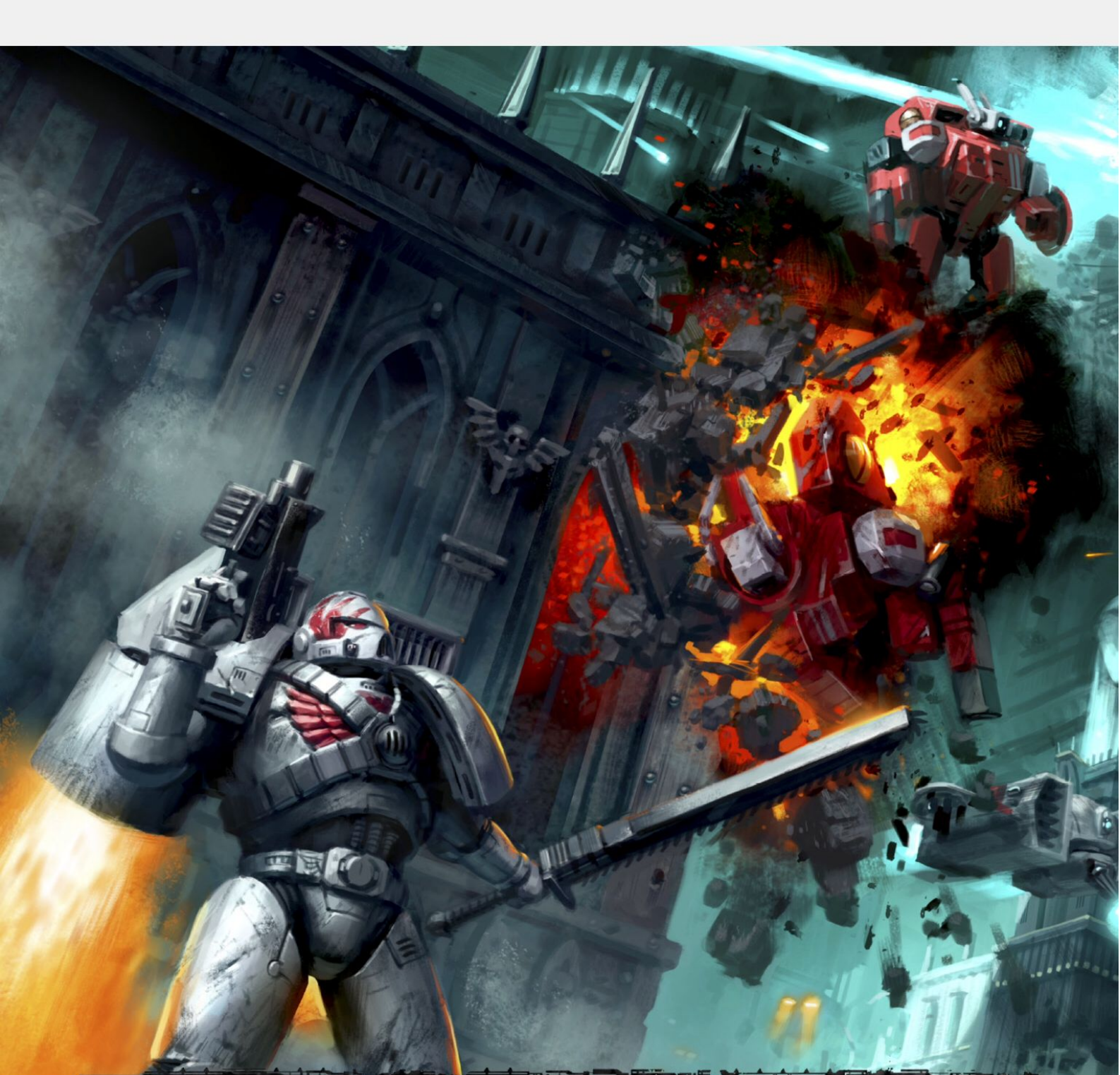
signals came in. The largest of the Earth caste science domes was under attack. As Shadowsun had taken the vast majority of the Fire caste on her perimeter attack, there were few troops within the central compound of Lo'vasht'au to respond.

Without hesitation, O'Shovah ordered the Orca to plot a new course. Deploying via airdrop, Farsight and his Retaliation Cadres entered the great dome through the massive hole torn by the Assassin's drop pod. The first to land within the complex was Farsight himself. Despite having seen many horrors in the savage stars beyond the Tau Empire, Commander Farsight was appalled. The Eversor Assassin had run amok. It had not been much more than fifteen minutes since his drop pod crashed, yet the Earth caste laboratories looked as if they were a bombed out abattoir. Blood and body parts were everywhere, for the Eversor did not just kill his foes; he rent them, scattering pieces in gory arcs. Whether the enemy stayed and fought, or ran, it mattered not. Intoxicated with volatile chemicals, the augmented Assassin moved with a speed and power far beyond normal human ability. The Eversor was not just a weapon; he was an instrument of terror, a true monster. Above all, the Eversor showed Mankind's foes just how far the Imperium would go to achieve victory.

Aware that his mission target had arrived, the Eversor turned from his slaughter and sprinted back, more chemicals boosting him in preparation. Even as the sensor suites of the Tau battlesuits sounded proximity alarms, the Eversor was amongst them. He had burst through a wall, and leapt atop the nearest XV8 Crisis Battlesuit, twisting to avoid plasma bursts. Using his power sword, he effortlessly cut away the nanocrystalline alloy armour, yanking out the exposed pilot and flinging him away. Injected with a range of toxins from the Assassin's neuro-gauntlet, what hit the ground was wet and already bursting from within. By then, the skull-faced killer had moved onto his next victims. With a whirling spin he took off a battlesuit's leg with his power sword while his executioner pistol sent a flurry of explosive shells to drop another XV8. Using the falling Tau as a springboard, the Eversor leapt up to intercept more Crisis suits mid-air, performing acrobatic feats as he lopped off limbs. With a backflip the Eversor landed atop a Shield Drone, momentarily steering it with body shifts.

The Tau began to lose discipline. Attempting to gun down their swift moving foe, one Crisis suit stitched a line of burst cannon fire across his own team, while a wild fusion blast struck an Earth caste plasma tower. Thick coils of living energy snaked out, adding to the carnage. Stepping between Farsight and the Assassin was the heavy-footed Ob'lotai 9-0. The Broadside battlesuit fired a fusillade of missiles, but to no avail, as the Assassin dodged. In return, Ob'lotai received a neuro-gauntleted fist punching apart his optics. Had there been a living person within that suit, his fate would have been sealed. As it was, the AI chip was fried by feedback. Only then did the Tau land a shot, as Farsight's plasma rifle struck the Eversor, slowing him so that the remaining Eight were able to blast ragged holes in the drug-fuelled body. It fell, twitching, in a bloody heap.





DUEL WITH DEATH ITSELF

Riddled with plasma bursts, the Eversor was down. Still stunned by the sudden and berserk violence of the black-clad Assassin, Farsight, his bodyguard and supporting Crisis Teams looked on at the smoking ruin of its body. Before the Riptide O'Vesa could say that his sensors were still picking up not just a heartbeat, but multiple ones, the Eversor lurched back into action, punching its neuro-gauntlet through an armour joint of the nearest Crisis suit. As its pilot died in convulsive agony, the Eversor spun around the battlesuit's flamer arm, ensuring that the dying Tau's last act was to scorch his comrades.

The Eversor's synthetic adren-gland was in overdrive, pumping a cocktail of combat drugs through his veins. With a tumbling roll, the killer retrieved his power sword and unleashed a flurry of blows. After carving a bloody path, the

Eversor reached its target and launched a furious assault upon Commander Farsight. Sending out sparks as they rang, the Dawn Blade and the Assassin's power sword met again and again before the Tau Commander unloaded his plasma rifle point blank, the shot and muzzle flash blossoming together into a searing blast. Propelled backwards, the Eversor struck the engineer's plasma coil, caught for a moment in excruciating currents before rebounding back at incredible speed. Farsight was prepared.

Timing his swing perfectly, Farsight swept the Dawn Blade across, cutting the vile creature in two. The Tau looked on with disbelief as the upper torso crawled towards its target, apparently laughing. At its death, the Eversor's biochemistry detonated. The ensuing explosion toppled the dome.



DOOM IN DISGUISE

To those few who know of the Assassinorum and its temples, the Callidus is often the most feared of Imperial Assassins. The shape-shifters could be anywhere or anyone, and by the time the killer is revealed, it is too late. In the form of a member of the most trusted caste, the Callidus Assassin on Agrellan made straight for her assigned target.

A day previous, the Callidus landed on the outskirts of Lo'vasht'au. In the course of three gruelling hours, the shape-shifting Assassin impersonated first a Pathfinder whose team she massacred, then a shas'ui assigned to a sensor base in the east. Finally, through guile and poisoned blades, the Callidus slew the one whose face she truly wished to wear. When he strode to his personal Devilfish transport minutes later and demanded to be taken to O'Shaserra, the noble Aun'Kar was not at all himself.

In the meantime, the main assault had begun. In many ways, it was less of a battle and more of a *shas'ohdra* – a Fire caste drill where gun line formations faced extended target practice. From her mobile command post, Shadowsun kept a keen eye upon the storm and the continual attack waves of Counterstrike Cadres she sent into that wall of sand and toxins. Her attention was everywhere at once, on comms reports, vid-relays, Command-link Drones and messengers.

The Tau were amazed to see the Imperial Guard continue in the face of such staggering casualties, as wave after wave of men and machines kept coming. The Tau attacks would

advance, killing targets and sending men into disarray before themselves falling back in good order to rest and refit, clearing the way for the next assault cadres. The continual need to send fresh attacks to reap their bloody toll was taxing, yet the Tau dared not slacken their pace, for the Astra Militarum were relentless. With regularity, some captain, lieutenant or inspired sergeant would attempt to break the Tau trap. Some tried entrenching themselves in the sand; others launched furious assaults of their own, endeavouring to escape the belt of storms and Tau gun lines that encircled their troops. All failed.

Shadowsun's mobile command centre was little more than a collection of vehicles situated upon a dune. A ring of Pathfinders was positioned in a perimeter and Earth caste engineers scurried about, ensuring the shield generators and Stealth Drones that offered the group protection were in working order. An Orca dropship hovered overhead, prepared to land if sudden extraction was required. When a Devilfish arrived bearing the noble Aun'Kar, an Ethereal who sat upon Aun'Va's High Council, he was motioned through. The arrival of such a dignitary so near the front lines meant a high priority message. As the Ethereal and his guard approached,





Shadowsun left her holo-screens to greet him. At the last moment, however, something struck Shadowsun as odd. The mimicry of the Ethereal's tone was perfect, but she was well accustomed to the commanding presence and distinct scent of the ruling caste. Shadowsun paused. This slight hesitation saved her life. In the act of bowing, Aun'Kar's features rippled, and his gesturing hand suddenly sprouted a sword. The blade seemed to blink, shifting straight through Shadowsun's XV22 armour as if it were water, piercing her side. Had Shadowsun not already been moving backwards, the thrust would have penetrated her heart. Activating her jump jets, Commander Shadowsun pulled herself off the phase sword painfully, blasting backwards, tumbling awkwardly.

Where Aun'Kar had stood moments ago there was now a female human clad in a skin-tight bodysuit. The shape-shifting Callidus Assassin had revealed herself. Never before had she missed her mark. The Callidus had killed so often that she instantly knew her blade had bitten deep, but missed its true target. Drawing forth and firing the wide beam of her neural shredder, the Assassin sent out waves of electromagnetic energy, dropping the nearby Tau – their brains and nerve receptors critically overloaded. The Callidus moved in for the kill, leaping over the convulsing warriors, her sword shimmering with fell light.

Although wounded, Shadowsun was a fierce warrior – only Farsight had beaten her Academy combat training scores – yet even her fastest attacks could not compete with the blurring speed of the Assassin. The Callidus vaulted over or stabbed through all opposition, dodging shots from Shadowsun's fusion

blasters en route. With her final leap, the Callidus intended her blade to find Shadowsun's heart, but it was a leap the Assassin did not make.

The Pathfinders that surrounded the command centre had heard the commotion and rushed to aid Shadowsun. Two ion rifles shot wide of their mark, but the Pathfinders' leader, Shas'ui Kalas Starshroud, sprayed plasma bursts with his pulse carbine, hitting the Callidus with such force it slammed her back into the holo-map projectors. She sprang up quickly, her sword arcing again towards Shadowsun, but this time the Tau Commander blocked the Callidus' chopping blade arm away with a fusion blaster, while foiling the kick to her midriff with a twist and raised knee. But she had no counter for the Callidus' other hand – into which had sprung a long, needle-sharp blade. Starshroud was by Shadowsun's side now, struggling with both hands to halt the downward descent of that blade, for the Assassin possessed a maniacal strength that belied her lithe form. In a desperate twisting motion, the Assassin pulled back, slashing again at her target, but it was too late, for Shadowsun had activated her remaining fusion blaster.

Little was left of the Assassin, who had taken the blast at point blank range. Even her bones were melted. Bleeding profusely, Shadowsun turned to thank her saviour, but Kalas Starshroud had dropped to one knee – his recon armour had been no match for the poisoned blade that had stabbed him. The shas'ui paid a high cost for his heroics. Choking as deadly toxins burned through him, he gasped out his final words.

'For the Greater Good...'

FEAR COMES CREEPING



With his animus speculum masking his soulless aura, no Drone or sensor could detect his presence. Although they looked straight at the ghoul in their midst, not one of the bewildered Fire Warriors sent to investigate the landing craft could see him. Yet as the Strike Team mounted their transport to return to base, none could shake the creeping fear that had settled upon them. That sensation would have turned swiftly to terror had any of them been able to see the silent, skull-helmed horror that had joined them inside their vehicle, and which even now pressed itself into a corner of the Devilfish's transport compartment, biding its time as it began the quest to reach its ultimate prey.

In the great battle that was taking place around Lo'vasht'au, Commander Shadowsun's massive counter-attacks were bleeding the enemy forces white, steadily draining their once seemingly inexhaustible might. As a race, the Tau did not make much of irony, or else they might have noted that it was the humans' own polluted taint on the planet that was now being turned against them, channelled by Earth caste engineers. The Tau just needed to hold out longer. The kor'vattra, the Tau navy, was still a month or more away from arriving in sufficient force to drive off the powerful armada of Imperial battleships that encircled Mu'gulath Bay. It was essential that they do so, for the burgeoning sept world was to be the new jewel in the Tau Empire's crown – a symbol of progress and invincibility for the Tau people and an expansion hub on the far side of the Damocles Gulf that would bring further glory to the Tau. It was their right to conquer, for the Tau brought the Greater Good to all.

Entrapped on Mu'gulath Bay was Aun'Va himself. As the Ethereal Supreme, Aun'Va was the face of leadership to not just the Tau, but to the countless alien races they had subsumed into their growing empire. Aun'Va was the oldest and wisest of the leading caste, the most senior of his kind. It was he that had launched the Third Sphere Expansion, and he that shepherded his people towards the Greater Good. There were no lengths to which the Tau would not go to save the most honoured of the Ethereals. To this end, Aun'Va's location upon Mu'gulath Bay was secret to all but a few. He was not in the city of Lo'vasht'au, although there were several holo-clones emplaced there. Instead, the Earth caste engineers had fashioned a complete Tau command module, replete with living quarters, hidden deep within the man-made cesspit that was once called Agrellan Prime.

The ruins of the old hive city towered into the upper atmosphere and spread across hundreds of miles. The citizens and parasitic vermin that once packed the hive's dense hab-blocks were either dead or repopulated to service worlds where they could help the Tau Empire prosper through their labour. One day, Agrellan Prime would be demolished, for the Tau deemed that naught could be salvaged from such crude work. In the meantime, the filth-ridden warrens made an effective hiding place.

In addition to being buried beneath the massive sprawl of the hive city, the location was further masked by a shield dome and protected by many cadres of Fire warriors.

There, in those depths, Aun'Va had kept abreast of the battles, watching the holo-maps while pacing upon his hover disc, his honour guards stoically matching his every turn. Hiding had been difficult for the Ethereal Supreme, and despite the air purifying engines, the place still smelled of gue'la and barbarism. Aun'Va had kept busy by preparing victory speeches to be broadcast to the Tau Empire. The Ethereal Supreme was still torn between leaving out all mention of Commander Farsight, or spinning the tale of a wayward disciple that had returned to a forgiving master. He was revising his plans aloud when the lights flickered and went out, leaving the command centre lit only by the dim glow of emergency lighting. Back-up systems and secondary generators kicked in, and within seconds the command centre had returned to full power.

The room of advisors and Ethereals looked upon one another, asking questions. Tau technology did not fail. Already teams of engineers could be seen scurrying down the compound's hallways, their fleets of worker Drones hovering quickly behind. It was probably some minor fault caused by something shifting in the haphazard foundations of the city. But a growing disquiet crept over all those in the command centre. Uneasiness grew until the nervous energy in the room was palpable.

And there was good reason to fear.

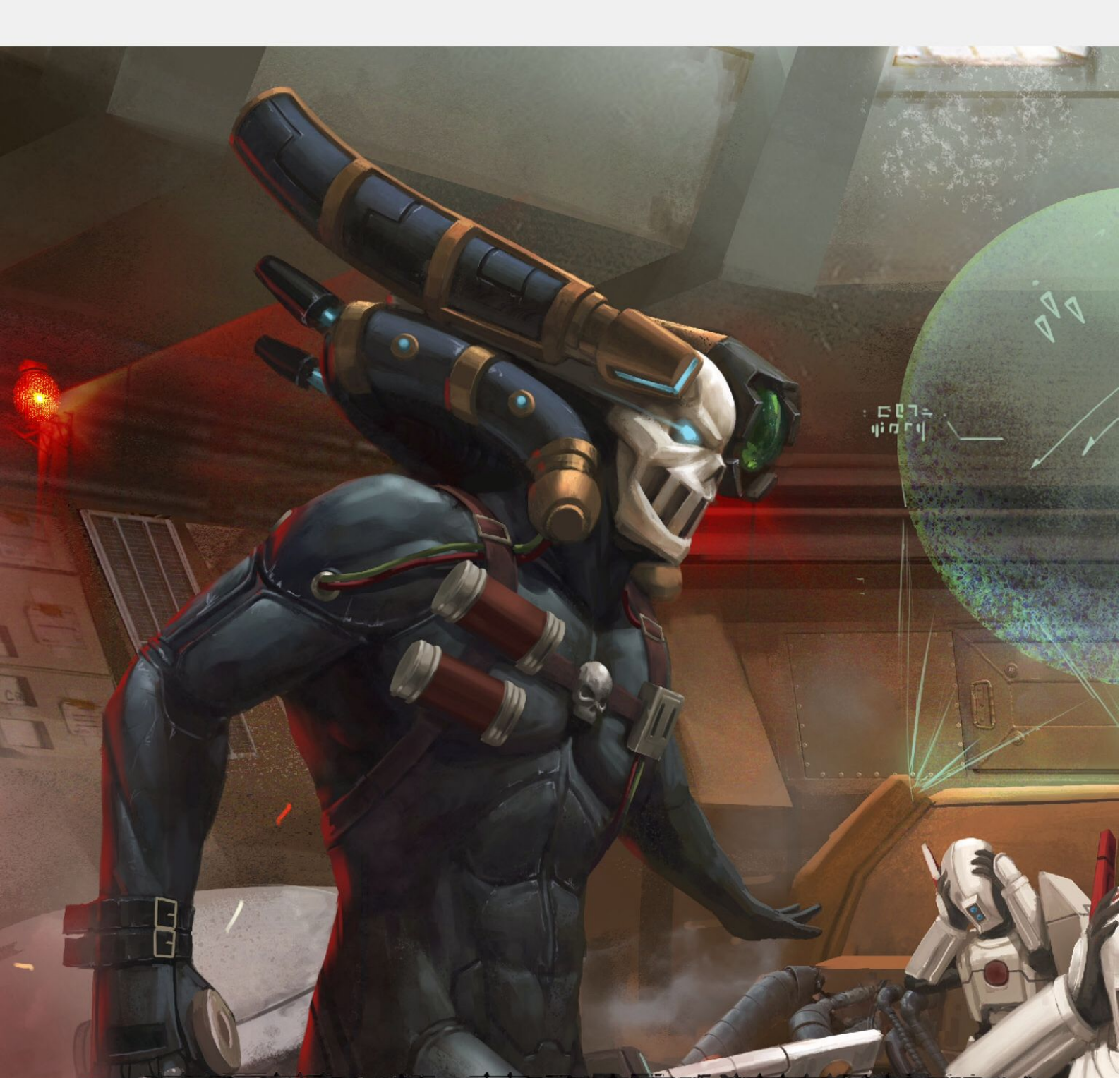
Passing through the empty streets and ruins of Agrellan Prime was a true horror. It passed undetected, save only for an unsettling feeling that washed out in bow waves before its sinister presence. Spider-like it crept, scuttling down access shafts, picking its way through narrow tunnels, searching for its target. Resplendent and clean-lined amidst the ancient ruins, the Tau compound glowed, its very newness shining in the darksome hole of the old hive city. The crawling thing from the blackness pried open a vent, pulling itself inside. The Culexus Assassin had come, and it aimed to kill Aun'Va.

Slipping into and out of reality, the Culexus was a blur to the Tau and their myriad sensors. Fear ran before him, causing all nearby to shudder, and slowing or even freezing AI functions. This living horror was a soulless anomaly, a shifting spectre of inhumanity replete with the terrors of the Warp. It scurried across the ceiling over unnerved engineers, dropping down to walk after their passing. Its skull-faced head turned this way and that as it peered through walls in search of its target.

A burst from its opened animus speculum felled two guards, their armour worthless against the lethal mind blasts. A pair of Gun Drones, unable to focus on a foe, were ripped from the air and smashed. Deeper and deeper the black-clad creature stalked into the command compound, leaving a trail of dead behind. Fire Warrior Strike Teams, alerted to an intruder, shot wildly down the corridors, but in the end were blasted by negative psychic streams or torn apart at close range.

The Culexus neared its target.





SPECTRE OF DEATH

It began as a growing unease and blossomed into pure dread. The Culexus Assassin burst into the command centre in an orgy of swift destruction. The Fire Warriors guarding the room crumpled, their last breath used to scream in horror. The Culexus seemed to solidify and fade as it unleashed the full power of its animus speculum.

Aun'Va was wounded, his mind aflame. His Honour Guard, knowing they would die, willingly stepped between the flickering ghoul and their master, absorbing that onslaught. Only by such noble sacrifice did Aun'Va escape, his hover drone banging off pristine corridor walls as he fled, peering behind him for fear of pursuit.

The hallways were filled with bodies, their twisted expressions

contorted in final terror. Assuming none were left to defend him, Aun'Va knew he must flee. The triple-shielded doors opened upon his command, and the Ethereal Supreme entered the abandoned hive. Terror followed at his heels – the certainty that the black-clad nightmare was calmly pursuing him drove Aun'Va onwards. His throbbing mind saw images of a leering deathmask. When the hover drone malfunctioned, damaged from flight or battle, Aun'Va left it, the robed figure moving as quickly as his ancient limbs allowed. He turned corridors, stumbled down empty streets and climbed timeworn steps leading to a vast arched structure. The gargoyle-studded building was ancient, grotesque, its purpose long forgotten. In short, it was all that Aun'Va loathed of Humanity. There, beneath its arches, the Culexus Assassin finally caught its prey.

The end was neither swift nor merciful.



IMPERIAL WITHDRAWAL

Task Force Retribution was to scour the xenos race known as the Tau from Agrellan, as those who had dared to confront the Imperium must learn of the consequences. That mission had been deemed a failure, and other elements within the task force now took precedence, and the evacuations of the Astra Militarum forces began.

The Space Marines that escaped Farsight's ambush had fought their way to evacuation points and returned to their orbiting spacecraft. They were in the process of rearming and coordinating their redeployment when they heard. A new Lord General had replaced Lord Troskzer, and his first act had been to issue an order calling for the Astra Militarum's immediate withdrawal from Agrellan. All Chapters looked to Kayvaan Shrike, for the Adeptus Astartes were under no authority but their own, and they wished to see what their highest ranking officer would do. Shrike announced that the Raven Guard would depart within the hour. So the Adeptus Astartes quickly embarked for other destinations, as there were more distress calls than Imperial forces to answer. Theirs was the way of war, and the concerns of one campaign or planet mattered little to them. Kor'sarro Khan, however, was enraged.

Once again the Khan was denied, once again he had failed to bring back the head of Commander Shadowsun. He was stubborn-minded enough to disregard what others were doing and continue with his own dwindling company, but an additional command came. This one originated from the White Scars Chapter Master Jubal Khan. The remnants of the

3rd Company and its support were needed urgently back at Chogoris – there could be no delays. The Khan was needed to help fight the Red Corsairs.

Colonel Starkzahn was still sending fresh companies into the storm when he received word. A withdrawal was not an easy manoeuvre, and it was especially dangerous in the face of an aggressive enemy and under deadly weather conditions. Had Agrellan been a pacified planet, a withdrawal would have taken fifteen to twenty days. Colonel Starkzahn had less than three.

Within hours of their retreat from the battle front, the storm subsided, confirming the Imperium's growing suspicions. Within a few hours more, the first Tau hit-and-run attacks began to dart around the flanks of the retreating columns. Colonel Starkzahn himself organised the rearguard action, fighting off several thrusting attacks made by the more mobile Tau forces and preventing the evacuation from becoming a rout. It was clear that not all forces would reach a safe destination, even after Lord Admiral Hawke added many additional transport sites, allowing more Imperial troops to escape.





Either not content with their triumph, or not wholly convinced of their foe's retreat, the Tau Empire counter-attacked often and without mercy. Ambushes slowed the Imperial forces or drew off their strength in hopeless pursuit. Yet worst of all were the air strikes. Imperial atmospheric flyers were concentrated around the landing zones, leaving the retreating masses on the ground open to the Tau Air caste's endless strafing attacks and bombing runs. Beaten, bedraggled and showing the signs of early-stage rad-sickness, the foot soldiers of the Astra Militarum dragged themselves onwards beneath the blazing sun.

In the end, many high-ranking officers were winnowed out from the massed retreat and ferried to the landing zones aboard Valkyries. Those taken were the most highly decorated of their kind, such as the wounded but recovering Knight Commander Pask. Special operations airlifted out High King Tybalt and his remaining Knights, who returned to Voltoris for much-needed repairs. Of the Obsidian Knight, no sign was found, but King Tybalt felt sure that the sinister Freeblade would turn up again to haunt the Tau. It was a lone thought of comfort to him.

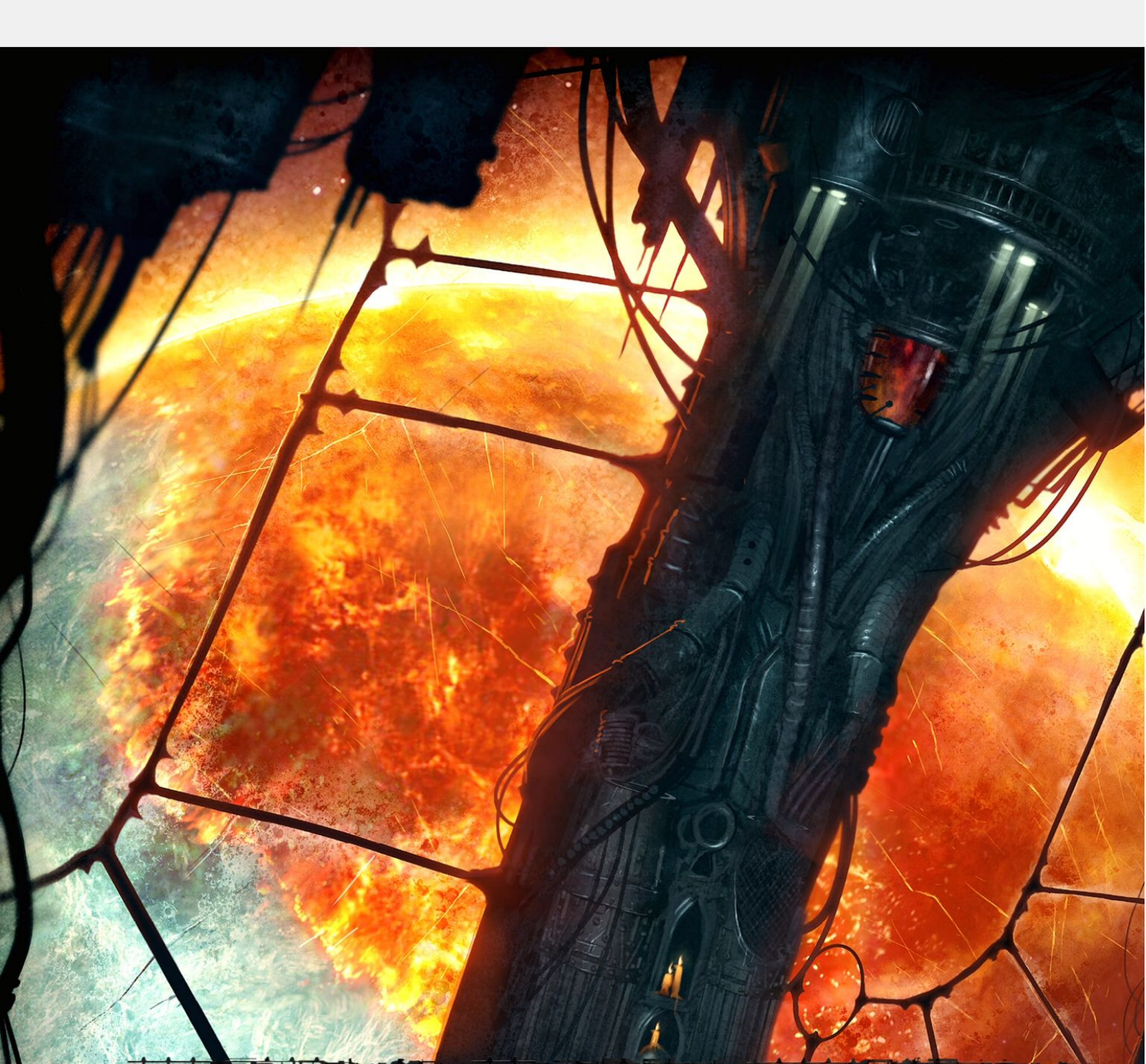
In addition to key officers, heavy equipment was given priority. Far away, members of the Departmento Munitorum had rightfully reasoned that it was those items that were far harder to replace than the many millions of men that would soon be abandoned. Had Colonel Starkzahn been asked, he would have refused to leave his men. But he did not have to make such a decision, for no special evacuations ever came for him.

Lord Admiral Hawke watched the officers file onto the bridge. He was pleased that they were professional enough not to question who was missing from the council. He had been through such things so many times that it was no longer awkward, but it was easier to work with those who understood the price of failure. Clearing his throat, the admiral began.

'As you know, the evacuation orders have been nearly completed. We are slightly behind the stated departure times already and as such will be able to make only a token effort to retrieve all ground forces,' said Lord Admiral Hawke gravely. 'I have made as many additional allowances as have been prudent.' Here the admiral stopped and looked around the gathered officers, as if reminding himself of who was present. 'In fact, I have been less than prudent, for I have sent down every transport we have. Even so, we estimate that within the hour we will have close to fifty percent of the surviving Astra Militarum force aboard our fleet.'

Here Lord Admiral Hawke halted, for all knew that such an act was condemning the soldiers remaining on Agrellan to die. He had expected some of the more junior officers to protest, but none did so. 'Finally,' said Hawke, 'before we go our separate ways, I am to formally disband Task Force Retribution. Good luck men, may the Emperor protect you.' He gave the Imperial Navy salute as regulations required. As the men returned the salute and began to leave, the lone Tech-Priest from the Archetrove remained. Never a good sign, thought Hawke.

'Admiral Hawke,' it rasped, 'I have a final request from Mars.'



Lord Admiral Hawke, commander of the 478th Battlefleet Ultima, waited impatiently. The shuffling Tech-Priest was hunched, his breath the wheezing of valves, his gait the driving of pistons. He churned forward slowly, heading towards the entourage ahead, which was waving smoking braziers and chanting. They bore a sarcophagus.

The cowled Tech-Priest bowed to Supreme Admiral Hawke and, adjusting several knobs on his chestplate, began to speak. His voice sounded tinny, his syntax mechanical.

'Lord Admiral, this is the gift of Voxodecimus Nyle 96th of Mars. He sends to you the gift of the world-flame. The warhead mounts upon a torpedo. My lord bids you discharge it as a parting gift, targeting the nebulae storms in the northern hemisphere of Agrellan. Nemo mea poena effugit.' After this, it laughed, a truly awful sound. The Tech-Priest continued, 'They who have sown the stormclouds shall now reap its whirlwind. Our ship, the Archaetrove, shall soon bless the entire Damocles Gulf.'

The creature laughed again before switching off its chestplate dials. It sketched a final bow, and its hand signals offered the blessings of the Ommissiah to end the meeting. The red-robed entourage began the long shuffle back to their waiting shuttle.

In his long and storied career, Lord Admiral Hawke had twice seen Exterminatus performed and he knew that this was not that ritual. He did not know what it was that he fired upon Agrellan, but he was glad to have it off his ship.

From his bridge command, he saw what the warhead did to Agrellan – setting a sea of flames raging across the world, changing it from grey to luminous and unnatural orange.

It was not long before the Archaetrove delivered upon its dark promise, setting alight the nebulae.

The Damocles Gulf erupted in light.



THE DAWNING OF A NEW ERA

The world that had once represented the hopes and aspirations of the expanding Tau Empire was now a different kind of symbol. The Tau had never before tasted so deeply from the bitter cup of defeat. The great losses they sustained marked the end of an era and a grim entry into a bloody new age of war.

Mu'gulath Bay burned.

Before they left orbit, the Imperial forces had somehow ignited the strange fusion of gasses that swirled around the giant planet's northern hemisphere. The chain reaction sent unnatural firestorms sweeping over the lands. This was beyond the enviro-engines' ability to halt or control. Anything not beneath a protective shield dome was doomed. And only a single shield dome remained – the massive one that spread over Lo'vasht'au. Many millions of Tau died, as did those soldiers left behind by the foe.

When the kor'vattra arrived they did not recognise the planet. The news they brought was worse still. Fires did not burn upon Mu'gulath Bay alone; the strange phenomenon known as the Damocles Gulf had become a roiling inferno. Those labyrinthine passageways that it had taken the Tau so long to discover were untenable once again. For many days, those trapped beyond the vast barrier were faced with the unsettling truth that they might never travel back to the sept worlds, that they were cut off forever from the Tau Empire. Communications could pass through the barrier, but starships could not.

Earth caste engineers, however, were working ceaselessly to perfect a shield that would protect starcraft from the highly corrosive gasses. Early tests were positive, as some ships survived the passage across the Damocles Gulf, but the failure rate was high.

Commander Shadowsun had recovered from her wounds, although she still grew weak quickly. As Supreme Commander of the Empire's Fire caste, she spent long sessions with the Ethereal High Council, for there was much to plan and discuss. Terrible rumours swirled around the Tau Empire, but all fears and doubts were silenced by the announcement that, in a matter of days, Ethereal Supreme Aun'Va would broadcast a speech, his new statement to be beamed across the sept worlds and beyond. It was to be a message of hope and courage, a message to be seen by all children of the Greater Good.

Commander Farsight was gone from Mu'gulath Bay, returning to exile in his Enclaves. His exit was sudden and without notice, for he left before the Ethereal High Council reached the inevitable conclusion that he must be captured and tried for treason to the Tau Empire.





With a flick of a control, Commander Farsight boosted the energy to his Dawn Blade. With an incandescent sizzle, the alien ichor that had drenched the blade was burnt to a wisp of drifting smoke. His sensor suite showed the next wave of Tyranid attackers would crest the ridge shortly. If Commander Brightsword did not arrive with reinforcements soon, Farsight and his remaining cadres would be overrun.

Farsight had fought these creatures before – the Tau called them the ever-devouring Yhe in their own language. He had seen firsthand the destruction they wrought, consuming entire planets, leaving behind only a ruined core devoid of all life. To find them here, upon the fertile world of T'lasla, so close to his Enclaves, was a dire situation. The infestation must be cleansed. Yet despite the scythe-armed alien menace closing upon him, Commander Farsight felt his thoughts drifting. It had not been long since he had departed the fiery hell of Mu'gulath Bay. Still, he replayed the final moments of his time upon that planet over and over again in his mind.

Farsight had been watching the ceremonial preparations for the holographic Aun'Va's speech when Commander Shadowsun arrived. He had asked her what she thought of holographs being used to convince the people of the Tau Empire that the Ethereal Supreme still lived, but she had cut him off, saying, 'The Ethereal High Council will soon order me to capture you. You are to face a Trial of Judgement.'

Of course, he already had that information, but he did not know why his one-time comrade would reveal such a thing to him. Were Aun'Va alive, he would have recognised this as a ploy leading to some greater manipulation. But as he was not, Farsight assumed Shadowsun had decided to disseminate this information herself. A bold move.

Into the silence, Shadowsun had spoken. 'I think you returning here to aid the Empire was a noble act, a deed worthy of the Greater Good. It deserves to be met in kind.' Here, Shadowsun had paused, as if carefully weighting each word of her answer. 'I suggest you leave now.'

'And what will you do if I do not?' he had asked her.

'I follow orders,' was her only reply.

Farsight left behind the roiling flames of Mu'gulath Bay even as the hologram of the dead Ethereal began its broadcast. While his warriors began their dangerous journey home, they listened to Aun'Va's speech. He spoke of the Empire's tragic losses, of how they would make them stronger. He spoke of how, more than ever, enlightenment must conquer savage barbarism. Aun'Va's image spoke of never underestimating their foe again.

It was only near T'lasla – a planet earmarked for future colonisation – that the Enclaves fleet had received the distress call. The time for meandering thought was over, however, for over the ridge came a living tide – the hordes of Leviathan had arrived. Pulse fire rose up to greet them. With no sign of Commander Brightsword, Farsight sent out a new plan even as his jump jets lifted him rocketing into the air, his plasma rifle blazing down at the oncoming foes.



CHAPTER 4

THE COLOURS OF REBELLION

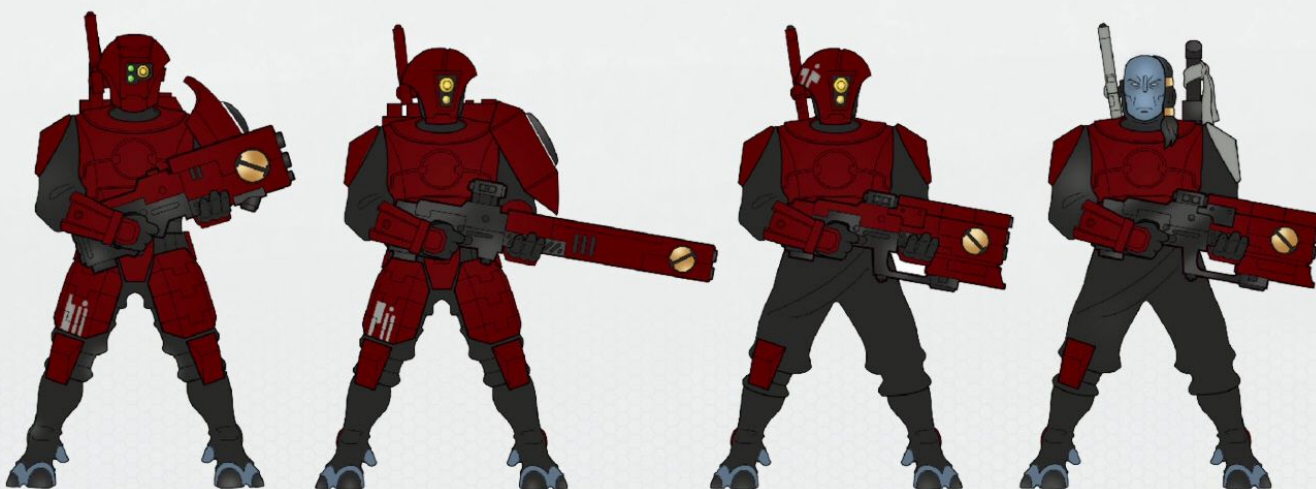


BONDED IN UNITY AND GLORY

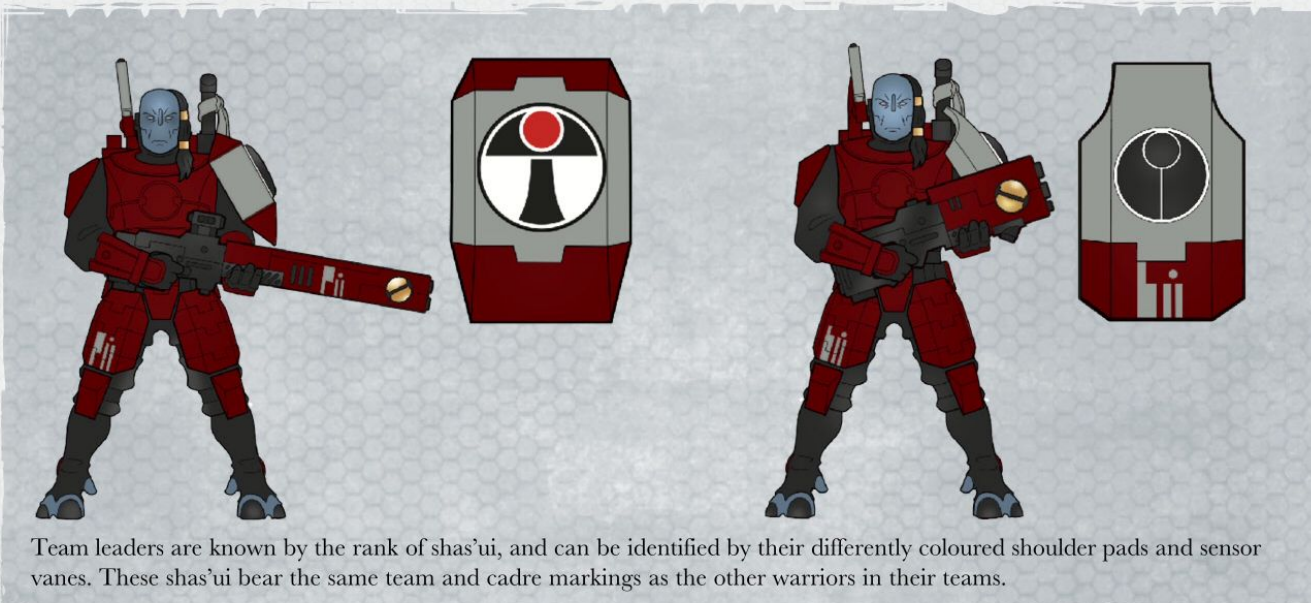
Since declaring his independence from the Tau Empire, O'Shovah wears deep red armour. This is in memory of his forsaken homeworld of Vior'la, and also honours the blood spilt by the heroes of Arkunasha. Many of the warriors of the Farsight Enclaves follow this tradition in their colour schemes and sept markings, though many, like O'Shovah, still bear the symbol of the Fire caste.



Cadre Fireblades of the Farsight Enclaves. The shoulder pad colour reflects their rank, and some bear the personal sigil that Farsight has adopted since the battles of Arthas Moloch.



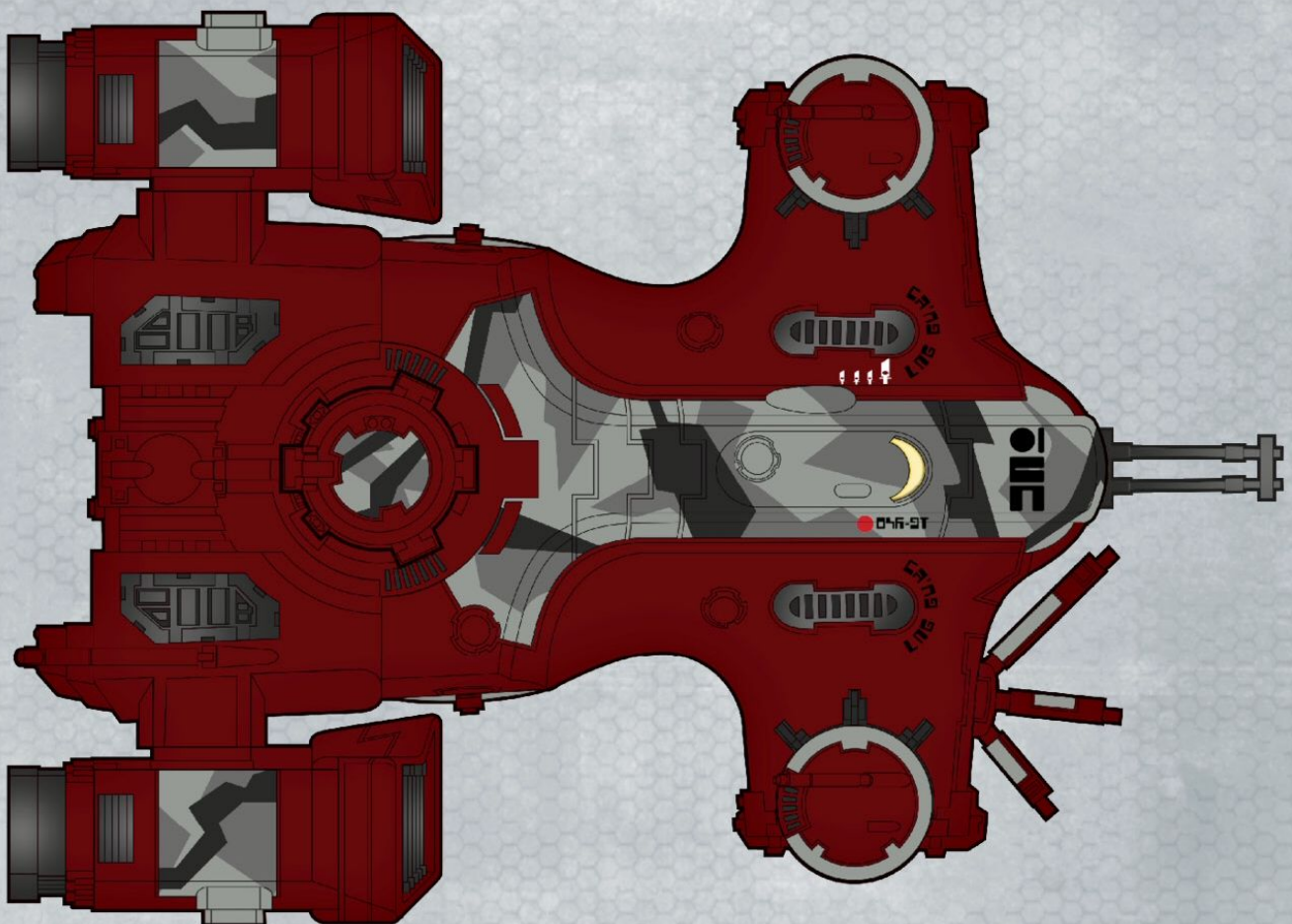
Strike Teams, Breacher Teams and Pathfinders make up a large proportion of the Fire caste warriors that serve the Farsight Enclaves. They bear the bold red of Farsight with great pride, with their markings overlaid in grey.



Team leaders are known by the rank of shas'ui, and can be identified by their differently coloured shoulder pads and sensor vanes. These shas'ui bear the same team and cadre markings as the other warriors in their teams.

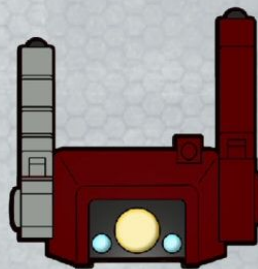
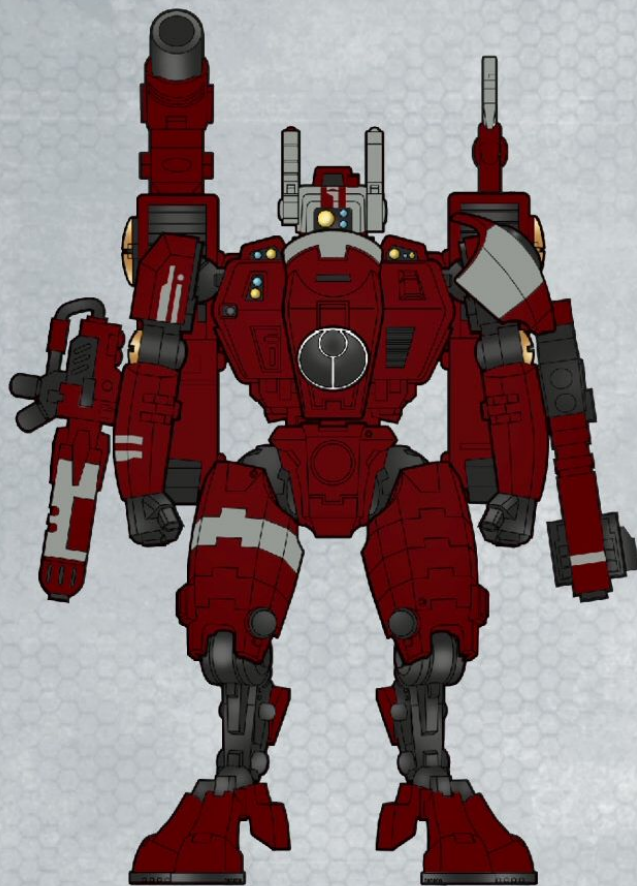


The TY7 Devilfish adds great mobility to the infantry cadres. The transport's abilities to hover, provide supporting fire from a nose-mounted burst cannon, and to detach Gun Drones, make it a vital asset to the Farsight Enclaves.

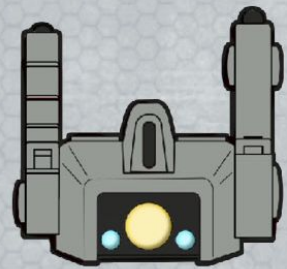


A top-down view of the TY7 Devilfish. This shows the front mounted sensor spines and vectored jet propulsion engines. It is rare, but not unheard of for vehicles from the Enclaves to adopt camouflage markings such as the urban pattern seen here.

BONDED IN UNITY AND GLORY



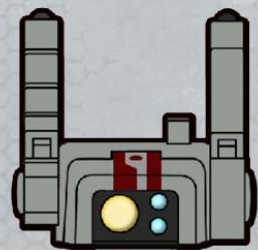
Shas'ui



Shas'vre

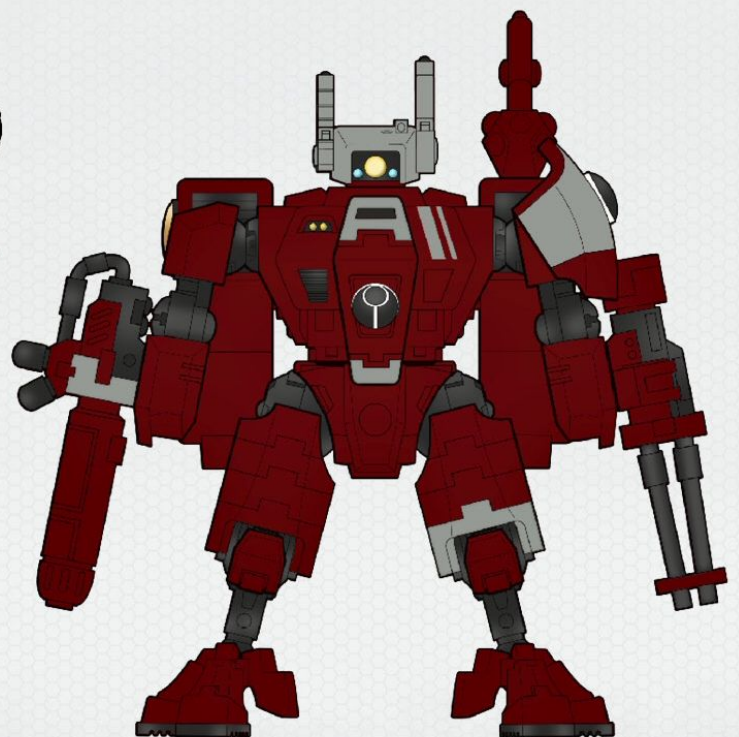
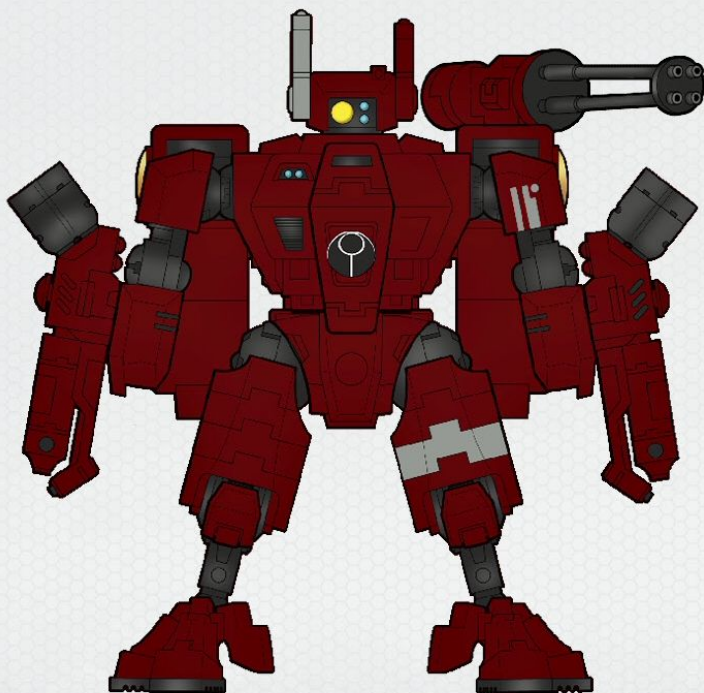


Shas'el

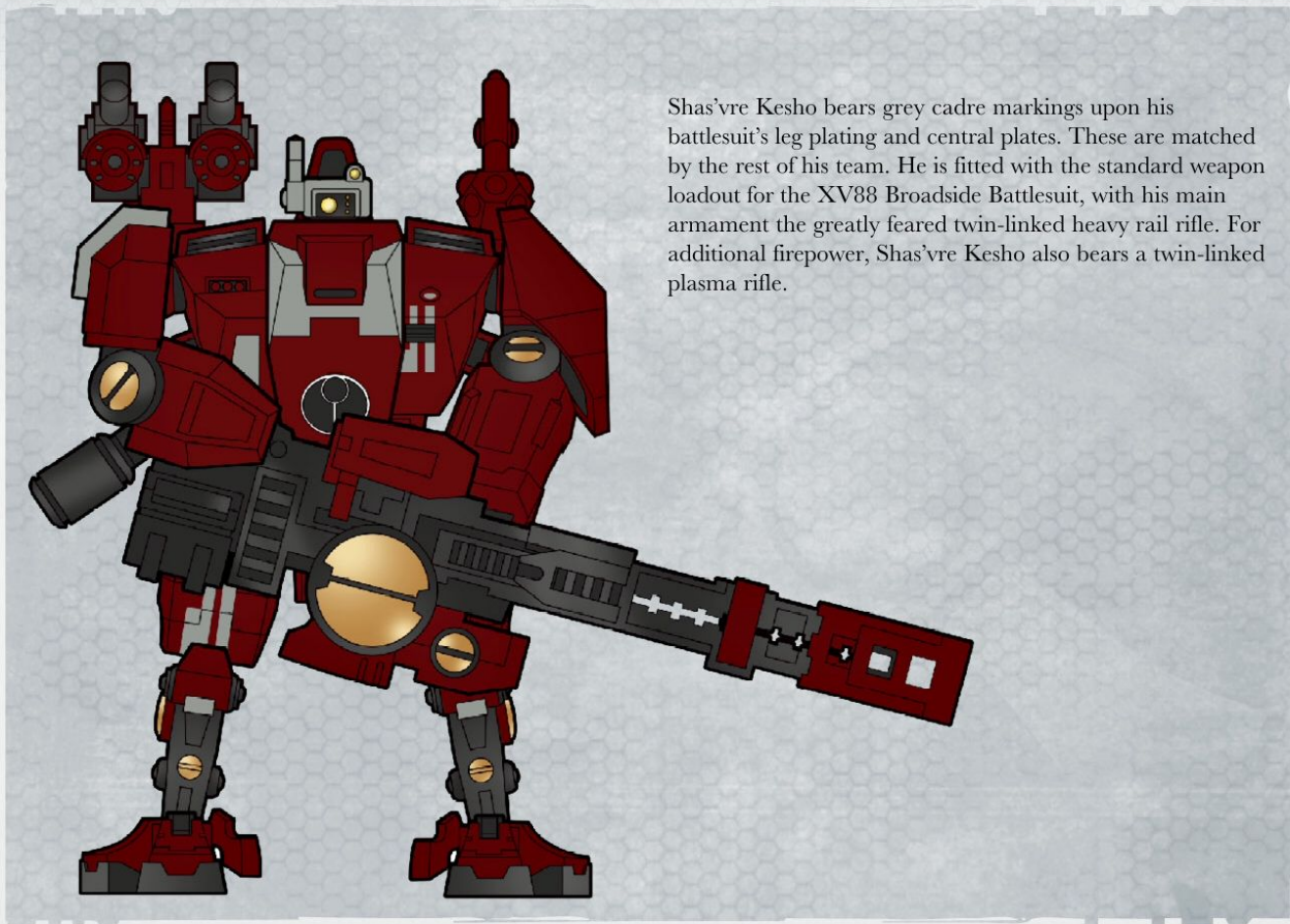


Shas'o

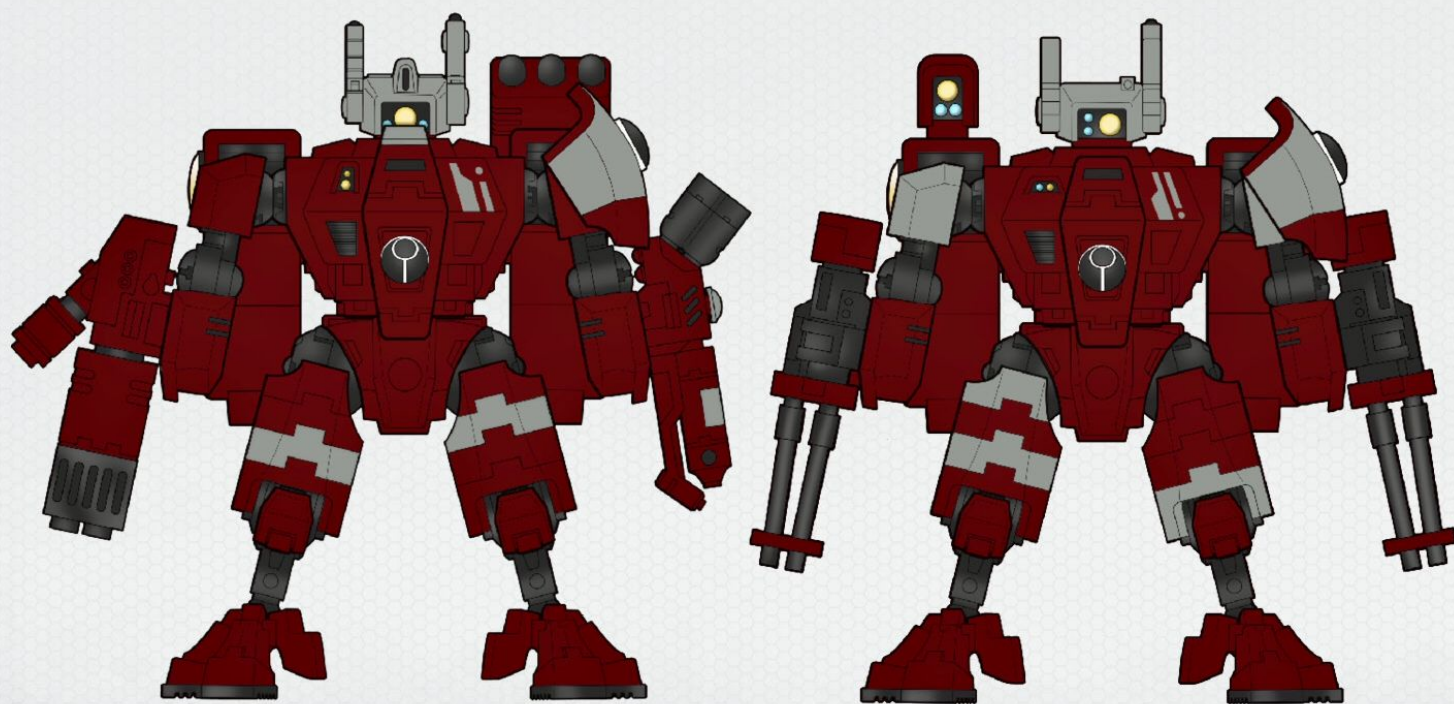
The rank of a battlesuit pilot can be distinguished by the helmet markings. Note the use of the Enclaves sept colour, grey, on the helmet and sensor vanes in the above examples.



On the left Shas'ui Kanjii bears two flamers and a burst cannon, while on the right, Shas'vre Tasso bears a plasma rifle and burst cannon. It is common practice for teams that have undergone the ta'llissera to bear grey swaths upon the same panels.



Shas'vre Kesho bears grey cadre markings upon his battlesuit's leg plating and central plates. These are matched by the rest of his team. He is fitted with the standard weapon loadout for the XV88 Broadside Battlesuit, with his main armament the greatly feared twin-linked heavy rail rifle. For additional firepower, Shas'vre Kesho also bears a twin-linked plasma rifle.



Both Shas'vre Llhana (left) and Shas'vre Turr'o (right) are of the same rank, as indicated by the battlesuit helm markings. Their battlefield roles are different, however, with Llhana serving as a bodyguard and Turr'o leading an XV8 Crisis Team.



CHAPTER 5

MISSIONS



ECHOES OF WAR MISSIONS

This section includes several Warhammer 40,000 missions inspired by the pivotal battles that took place on Mu'gulath Bay. These missions provide players with new ways to use their armies and a wealth of new tactical options to master – you can even play them sequentially as part of a campaign using the rules at the end of this section.

There are two main ways in which you can use the missions in *War Zone Damocles: Mont'ka* – the most straightforward is to simply choose a mission you want to play. Alternatively, you can fight a campaign by playing the missions in order using the rules found at the end of this section. If you do so, then players should stick to the same side for each mission. Keep a note of the players' victories and defeats – the winner is the player with most victories once all of the missions have been played. In the case of a draw, the player that wins the final battle wins the campaign!

There's nothing to stop you from playing the missions using different armies from those in the story of *War Zone Damocles: Mont'ka*. With a little imagination and some minor changes, you can easily fight similar battles with any combination of miniatures and terrain you have in your collection.

PLAYING ECHOES OF WAR MISSIONS

However you use these missions, it only requires a handful of changes to the Preparing for Battle rules in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*, which are detailed below.

THE ARMIES

Each mission recommends which armies and units should be used if you want to fight the battle according to the story. If players are using different armies, then it is up to them to choose sides.

UNIQUE CHARACTERS

Models noted as being Unique in their Army List Entry represent legendary characters of the 41st Millennium. If you want to play a mission according to the story, then these characters should only be used if they are listed in The Armies section of that mission – they were either at the battle, or they were not!



THE BATTLEFIELD AND DEPLOYMENT

The deployment map, zones and instructions for an Echoes of War mission are included with the mission itself; don't use those in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

VICTORY CONDITIONS AND MISSION SPECIAL RULES

Some mission special rules and victory conditions only apply to specific units. If that unit isn't present at your version of the battle, then the associated special rule or victory condition is simply ignored.



DESIGNER'S NOTE

The Echoes of War missions presented in War Zone Damocles: Mont'ka help you recreate the pivotal fights that took place in the war for Mu'gulath Bay, but they are far from the only battles that were waged during this gruelling campaign. The missions presented in War Zone Damocles: Kauyon are an ideal way to explore the period leading up to the events of this book, and by playing both campaigns in sequence you can tell a broader story. Of course, there are many other ways you could play games of Warhammer 40,000 to showcase the wider war. You could recreate the Imperium's mass landings on Mu'gulath Bay in games of Planetstrike, or refight the battles raging in Agrellan Prime and across the Tau hab-domes using Cities of Death missions. A game of Apocalypse is perfect if you wish to play even bigger games of Warhammer 40,000, with numerous Leman Russ squadrons duelling against entire cadres of Hammerhead Gunships and darting Piranhas. Eternal War, Maelstrom of War and Altar of War missions are all other excellent ways of waging battle on Mu'gulath Bay, and they can easily be incorporated into a larger campaign.



ECHOES OF WAR: DEATH IN THE VOID

The Imperial campaign to recapture Mu'gulath Bay began in space above the planet. The Tau had built a network of defence satellites that would spell doom for Imperial forces attempting planetfall. Raven Guard and White Scars strike forces were despatched to destroy the networks before the invasion began.

THE ARMIES

Choose armies as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

One player is the Space Marines player, and his opponent is the Tau player. All units in the Space Marines player's army must have the Space Marines Faction and be drawn from the Raven Guard or White Scars Chapters.

All units in the Tau player's army must have the Tau Empire Faction. The army must include a Tidewall Shieldline and two Tidewall Gunrigs if they are available, though these models do not cost any points.

THE BATTLEFIELD

First of all, the Tau player places his Tidewall Shieldline and Tidewall Gunrigs in his deployment zone. Players then set up terrain as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

OBJECTIVE MARKERS

The Tau player must set up three Objective Markers in his deployment zone. One must be placed on the Tidewall Shieldline and one on each Tidewall Gunrig (if they have been used), and will move with them.

DEPLOYMENT

The Tau player deploys first. He must deploy all Troops units and up to two other units of his choice in his deployment zone. All other units must be held in Reserve. The Space Marines player deploys second, in his deployment zone.

FIRST TURN

The Space Marines player has the first turn unless the Tau player can Seize the Initiative as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

GAME LENGTH

The mission uses Variable Game Length as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

At the end of the game, the player who has scored the most Victory Points is the winner. If both players have the same number of Victory Points, the game is a draw.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

At the end of the game, each Objective Marker on a Tidewall Gunrig is worth three Victory Points to the player that controls it – the Objective Marker on the Tidewall Shieldline is instead worth 6 Victory Points.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

Slay the Warlord.

MISSION SPECIAL RULES

Reserves.

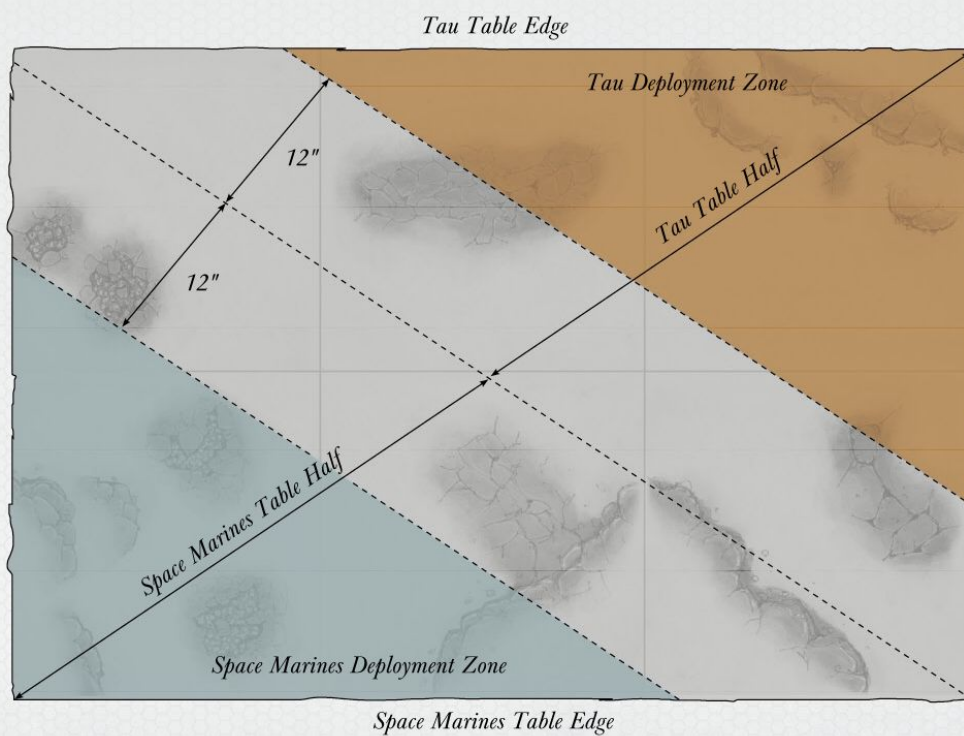
Asteroid Strikes: At the start of each Shooting phase, the player whose turn is taking place rolls a D6. On a roll of 1-4 the Shooting phase takes place normally. On a roll of 5, the player may make a shooting attack using the Small Asteroid profile. On a roll of 6, the player may make a shooting attack using the Large Asteroid profile. The attack is conducted as if it were being fired indirectly (see the Barrage special rule in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*).

	Range	S	AP	Type
Small Asteroid	Unlimited	8	3	Heavy 1, Barrage, Blast
Large Asteroid	Unlimited	9	2	Heavy 1, Barrage, Large Blast

Hard Vacuum: An attack that would normally only inflict a cut or graze can rupture the integrity of an opponent's vac-suit, leading to a painful death as they struggle desperately for air, while any hit that penetrates a vehicle's hull can lead to the crew suffering a similar fate. All attacks have the Rending special rule.

Low Gravity: All Infantry models can move 12" in the Movement phase and can move over other models and terrain freely. However, if an Infantry model begins or ends its move in difficult terrain, it must take a Dangerous Terrain test.

Void War: The battle takes place in the dark depths of space. To represent this, the Night Fighting mission special rule is in effect for the duration of the battle (see *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*).



ECHOES OF WAR: ARMoured ONSLAUGHT

Knight Commander Pask was amongst the first to land on Mu'gulath Bay. Quickly organising the armoured forces under his command, he led a fast moving tank column against the Tau's Armoured Interdiction Cadres. Caught badly off guard, the Tau attempted to fall back, but found themselves under attack from all sides.

THE ARMIES

Choose armies as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*. Only models with the Vehicle unit type which are not Walkers or Flyers can be used in this battle.

One player is the Astra Militarum player, and his opponent is the Tau player. All units in the Astra Militarum player's army must have the Astra Militarum Faction. The army must include Knight Commander Pask if his model is available. All units in the Tau player's army must have the Tau Empire Faction.

THE BATTLEFIELD

Set up terrain as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

DEPLOYMENT

The Tau player deploys first, in his deployment zone; he cannot voluntarily place units in Reserve. The Astra Militarum player deploys second, placing up to half of his units in his deployment zone. All other units must be held in Reserve. If his army includes Knight Commander Pask, he must be held in Reserve.

FIRST TURN

The Astra Militarum player has the first turn unless the Tau player can Seize the Initiative as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

GAME LENGTH

The mission uses Variable Game Length as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

At the end of the game, the player who has scored the most Victory Points is the winner. If both players have the same number of Victory Points, the game is a draw.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

At the end of the game, each player earns a number of Victory Points equal to the Hull Points characteristic of each enemy Vehicle that has been completely destroyed.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

Slay the Warlord.

MISSION SPECIAL RULES

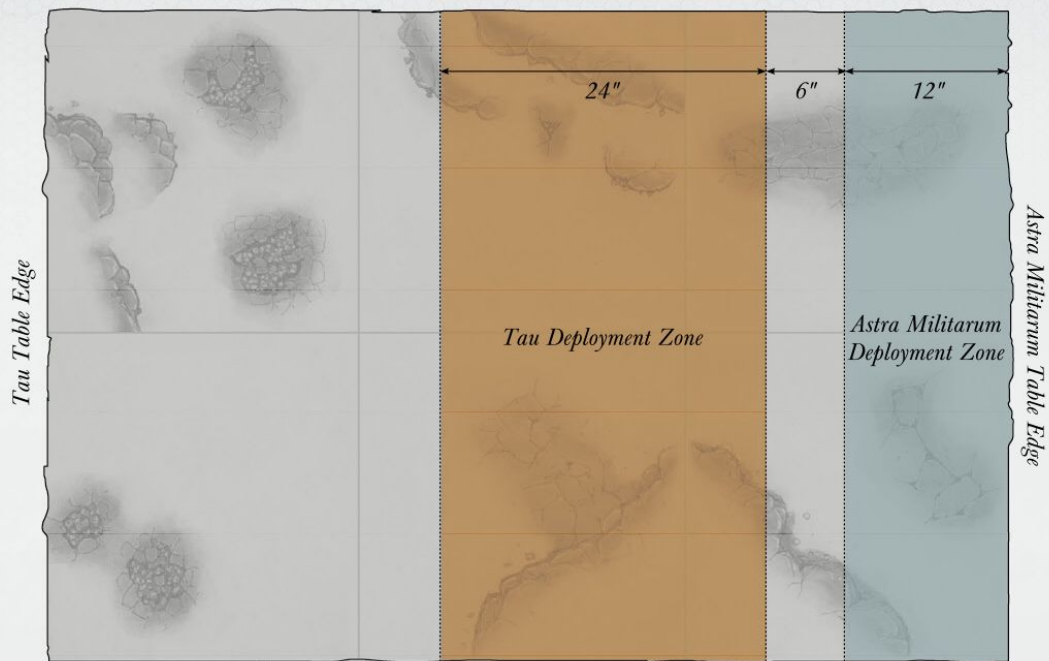
Attacked From All Sides: Astra Militarum units in Reserve enter from either long table edge. The Astra Militarum player can choose which for each unit.

Off Guard: Units in the Tau army are only allowed to make Snap Shots at units that arrived in the previous turn.

Tank Aces: Before the game begins, each player picks up to D3 vehicles in their army. Roll once on the following table for each vehicle, and apply the result.

2D6 RESULT

- 2 **Ace Killed in Action:** No benefit is received for this roll.
- 3 **Old Ironsides:** The Ace manoeuvres so that shots glance off or cannot hit squarely. All shooting Armour Penetration rolls against this vehicle suffer a -1 penalty.
- 4 **Expert Rammer:** Tanks add D3 to their armour penetration total for any hit they inflict in a ram. Other vehicles can ram.
- 5 **Flat Out and More:** The Ace can make his vehicle move an extra 6" when it goes Flat Out.
- 6 **Ambush Expert:** After deployment and the roll to Seize the Initiative, you may reposition the Ace (and the rest of his unit if he is part of a squadron) anywhere in his deployment zone.
- 7 **Expert Gunner:** This Ace is a true believer in rigorous gunnery practice. Add 1 to the Ballistic Skill of the Ace's vehicle.
- 8 **Expert Driver:** The Ace's vehicle can move an additional D6" in the Movement phase. This extra movement does not effect the number of guns the Ace's vehicle can fire.
- 9 **Hull Down:** The Ace makes maximum use of cover. He has the Stealth special rule.
- 10 **Doublefire:** In the Shooting phase, a single weapon on the Ace's vehicle can fire twice.
- 11 **Uncanny Anticipation:** Any weapon that is shooting at a range of more than 18" at the Ace's vehicle must re-roll successful To Hit rolls.
- 12 **Versatile Tactics:** Pick the result of your choice.



ECHOES OF WAR: CONFLICTING AGENDAS

As the Imperium's invasion progressed, Astra Militarum formations attacking Tau defence installations were joined by detachments from the Adeptus Mechanicus. However, the Martian Priesthood were primarily interested in retrieving Tau technology, even if this meant that their Imperial Guard allies suffered heavy casualties.

THE ARMIES

This mission is intended for three players. One player commands a Tau army, while the other two players command a combined army, with one player taking an Astra Militarum force and the other an Adeptus Mechanicus force.

Choose armies as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*. The combined army receives the same number of points as the Tau army, with each of the players receiving half of the points that are available for their combined force.

All units in the Astra Militarum player's force must have the Astra Militarum Faction, and all units in the Adeptus Mechanicus player's force must have the Cult Mechanicus and/or Skitarii Faction. Each player is allowed to pick a Warlord for their force (see the Combined Forces special rule below).

All units in the Tau army must have the Tau Empire Faction.

THE BATTLEFIELD

Set up terrain as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

OBJECTIVE MARKERS

The Tau player must set up three Objective Markers in his deployment zone, using the rules for Placing Objective Markers in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*. After they have been placed, randomly select one of the three Objective Markers – this is the Technocache that the Adeptus Mechanicus player needs to capture.

DEPLOYMENT

The Tau player deploys first, in his deployment zone. The Imperial players deploy second in their deployment zone.

FIRST TURN

The combined Imperial army has the first turn unless the Tau player can Seize the Initiative as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

GAME LENGTH

The mission uses Variable Game Length as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

At the end of the game, the player who has scored the most Victory Points is the winner. If all two or three players are tied with the most Victory Points, the game is a draw.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

At the end of the game, the Astra Militarum and Tau players score 3 Victory Points for each Objective Marker they control.

The Adeptus Mechanicus player scores 4 Victory Points if he controls the Technocache Objective Marker.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES (ADEPTUS MECHANICUS ONLY)

The Adeptus Mechanicus are interested in examining Tau technology. The Adeptus Mechanicus player receives 1 Victory Point for each wrecked Tau vehicle that they control, up to a maximum of 3 Victory Points for controlling three wrecks. Tau vehicle wrecks are controlled in the same way as an Objective Marker.

MISSION SPECIAL RULES

Night Fighting, Reserves.

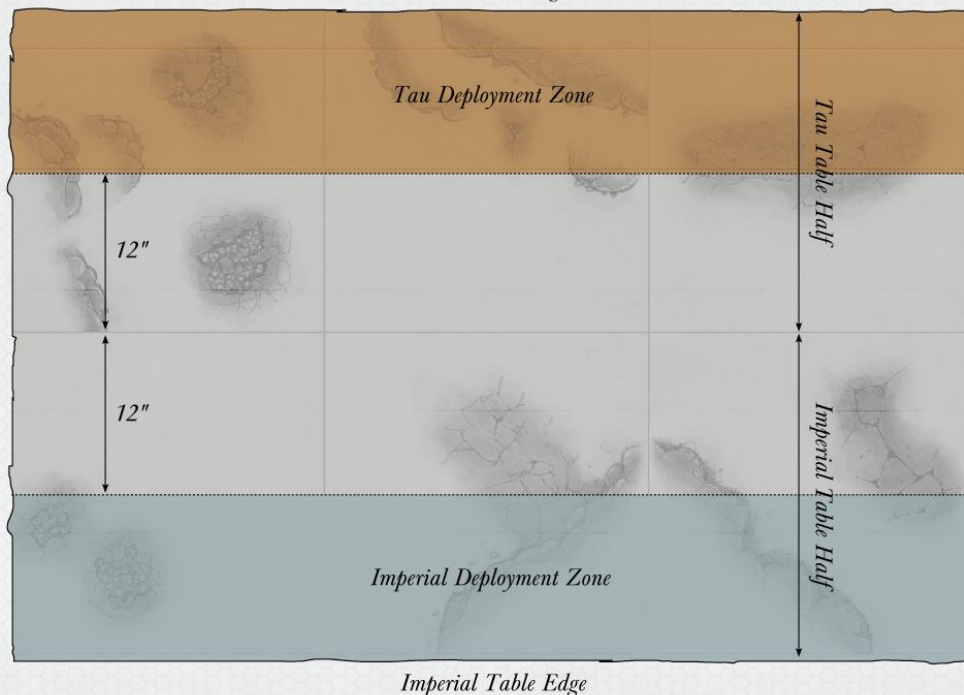
Combined Forces: In this battle the forces controlled by the Astra Militarum player and the forces controlled by the Adeptus Mechanicus player are treated as a single army. However, each force can have a Warlord. The two forces are treated as Allies of Convenience, as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*, rather than Battle Brothers.

Astra Militarum units and Adeptus Mechanicus units cannot both control the same Objective Marker. Should this happen, the Objective Marker is contested and neither player controls it.

Friendly Fire Incident: The Adeptus Mechanicus player and the Astra Militarum player are allowed to pick one of their ally's units as the target for one of their own unit's shooting attacks if they wish to do so. Each player is only allowed to do this once per battle, and they must subtract 1 from their Victory Points total if they do so.



Tau Table Edge



ECHOES OF WAR: THE UNFORESEEN STRIKE

Things were going from bad to worse for the beleaguered Tau forces, who had been trapped in a few heavily fortified positions. Then, like a bolt from the blue, Commander Farsight arrived at the head of the Eight. Carving through the surprised Imperial defenders, the Eight struck at the Cadian army's command HQ.

THE ARMIES

Points are not used for this battle. Instead one player commands the Eight Formation, and the other player takes a Cadian Battle Group Detachment consisting of 1 Core choice, 1 Command choice and 3 Auxiliary choices.

If a player is not able to field their army in full, they should simply take as many units from the army as they have available. These units still count as being part of their respective Formations and/or Detachments, and receive the associated benefits for them.

EXPANDED GAME

If the players agree, they can expand this game by adding one or more Retaliation Cadres to the Tau army. The Cadian Battle Group can include an extra Auxiliary choice for each Retaliation Cadre that is added to the Tau army.

THE BATTLEFIELD

Set up terrain as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

DEPLOYMENT

The Cadian player deploys first, anywhere on the battlefield that is more than 12" from a table edge. The Tau player does not deploy any units at the start of the battle – they arrive on the first turn as described below. Neither side can place units in Reserve.

FIRST TURN

The Tau player has the first turn, and must deploy his entire army at the start of the turn. Tau units can either be deployed within 3" of a table edge, or can enter play using the Deep Strike rule on the first turn. Models may deploy alongside different table edges if desired.

GAME LENGTH

The mission uses Variable Game Length as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

The Tau player wins immediately if all models in the Cadian Battle Group Command choice are destroyed or have Fallen Back off the battlefield. The Cadian player wins if the battle ends before this has happened.

MISSION SPECIAL RULES

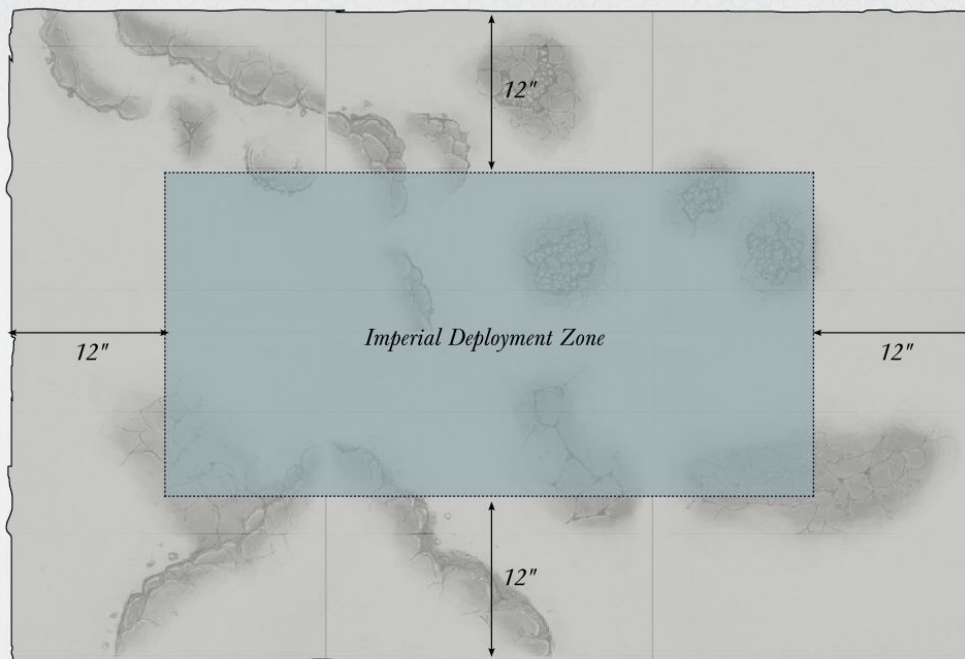
Surprise Attack: In the first game turn, units in the Cadian army cannot Run or charge, and are only allowed to make Snap Shots. In the second game turn, they can only charge if they first pass a Leadership test, and must subtract 1 from their Ballistic Skill.

Man the Tanks: In addition to the above, at the start of the battle the crews of all Cadian vehicles are outside their vehicles. To represent this, keep track of the number of hits scored on each vehicle by Tau attacks in the first Tau turn, whether they damage the vehicle or not. At end of the Tau turn, roll 2D6 for each unwrecked vehicle and compare the result to the number of hits that were scored on it – if the roll is less than or equal to the number of hits, the crew have been killed as they try to get in, and the vehicle is wrecked.

Target Locked: Tau units cannot choose units from the Cadian Battle Group's Command choice as the target for a shooting attack unless they are the closest target within line of sight or have at least one markerlight counter.

Lines of Retreat: Any units that Fall Back do so towards the nearest table edge.





ECHOES OF WAR: THE EYE OF THE STORM

Knight Commander Pask and the tanks he led had caused terrible damage to the Tau defenders. Farsight knew he must neutralise the threat posed by the Imperium's armoured forces, so he launched a devastating surprise attack on Pask's squadrons as they strove through an electrical dust storm.

THE ARMIES

Choose armies as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

One player is the Astra Militarum player, and his opponent is the Tau player. All units in the Astra Militarum player's army must have the Astra Militarum Faction. The army must include Knight Commander Pask if a model is available for him.

All units in the Tau player's army must have the Tau Empire Faction. The army must include Commander Farsight if a model is available for him.

THE BATTLEFIELD

Set up terrain as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*, with the exception that no scenery can be set up in the Astra Militarum deployment zone.

DEPLOYMENT

The Astra Militarum player deploys first, in his deployment zone. No units apart from Flyers can be placed in Reserve. The Tau player deploys second, in his deployment zone.

FIRST TURN

The Tau player has the first turn unless the Astra Militarum player can Seize the Initiative as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

GAME LENGTH

The mission uses Variable Game Length as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

At the end of the game, the players count up Victory Points to determine the winner. **The Tau player wins if he has at least twice as many Victory Points as the Astra Militarum player. The battle is a draw if the Tau player has more Victory Points but not twice as many. The Astra Militarum player wins if the scores are tied or if he has more Victory Points.**

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

Each player receives 1 Victory Point for each enemy unit that has been completely destroyed or that is Falling Back at the end of the game (including any units or models destroyed by the electrical dust storm – see below). Independent Characters and Dedicated Transports are individual units and award Victory Points if destroyed.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

Slay the Warlord, First Blood, Linebreaker.

MISSION SPECIAL RULES

Night Fighting, Reserves.

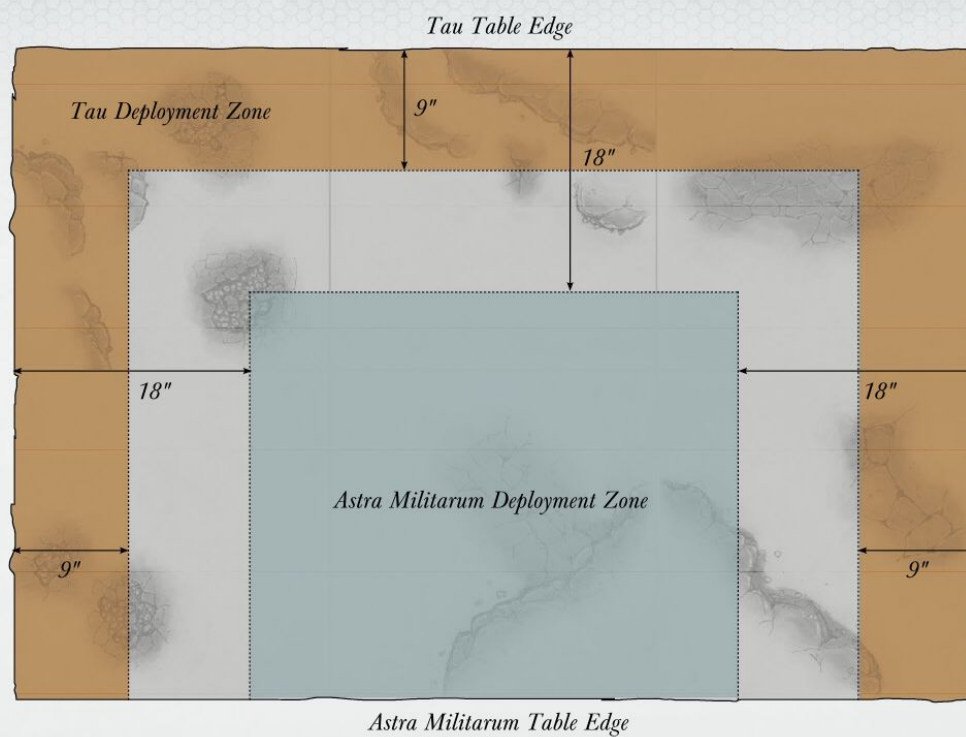
Elite Armoured Formation: The Astra Militarum player can roll once on the Tank Ace table from Echoes of War: Armoured Onslaught, and apply the result to an Astra Militarum vehicle in their army. If Pask is not included in their army, then the Astra Militarum player can roll twice on the table and apply the results to two different vehicles in their army.

Electrical Dust Storm: The electrical dust storm under which Pask advanced shrouded his forces from view, but numerous units were damaged by lightning strikes.

To represent this, roll on the following table for each unit in the Astra Militarum army after deployment is complete but before the first turn. The Astra Militarum player does not have to take Morale checks for units that suffer casualties as a result of lightning strikes.

D6 RESULT

- 1-2 Charmed Life:** The unit avoids any damage from the storm.
- 3 Clipped:** The unit is caught on the edge of a lightning strike. A random model in the unit suffers a Strength 5 AP4 hit.
- 4-5 Lightning Blast:** A lightning bolt strikes the ground right by the unit. The unit suffers D6 Strength 5 AP4 hits which are Randomly Allocated.
- 6 Direct Hit:** One model in the unit is hit by a lightning strike. A randomly selected model from the unit suffers a Strength 9 AP2 hit. In addition, the unit suffers the effects of a Lightning Blast (see result 4-5 above).



ECHOES OF WAR: THE KILLING BLOW

Predicting that the Space Marines would enact a swift and sudden strike, Farsight made plans to use holographic decoys to lure them into an elaborate trap before dealing his final blow. But the White Scars and Raven Guard are themselves masters of battlefield tactics, and would not so easily succumb to the Tau's deceptive ploys.

THE ARMIES

Choose armies as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

One player is the Space Marines player, and his opponent is the Tau player. All units in the Space Marines player's army must have the Space Marines Faction and be drawn from the White Scars or Raven Guard Chapters.

All units in the Tau player's army must have the Tau Empire Faction. The army must include Commander Farsight if his model is available, and all models in the army must be equipped with battlesuits.

THE BATTLEFIELD

Set up terrain as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

DEPLOYMENT

The Tau player deploys first, in his deployment zone. The Space Marines player deploys second, in his deployment zone. Only Space Marine units can be held in Reserve; the Tau player cannot voluntarily place units in Reserve.

FIRST TURN

The Space Marines player has the first turn.

GAME LENGTH

The mission uses Variable Game Length as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

At the end of the game, the player who has scored the most Victory Points is the winner. If both players have the same number of Victory Points, the game is a draw.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

Each player receives 1 Victory Point for each enemy unit that has been completely destroyed or that is Falling Back at the end of the game. Independent Characters and Dedicated Transports are individual units and award Victory Points if they are destroyed.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

Slay the Warlord, First Blood, Linebreaker.

MISSION SPECIAL RULES

Reserves.

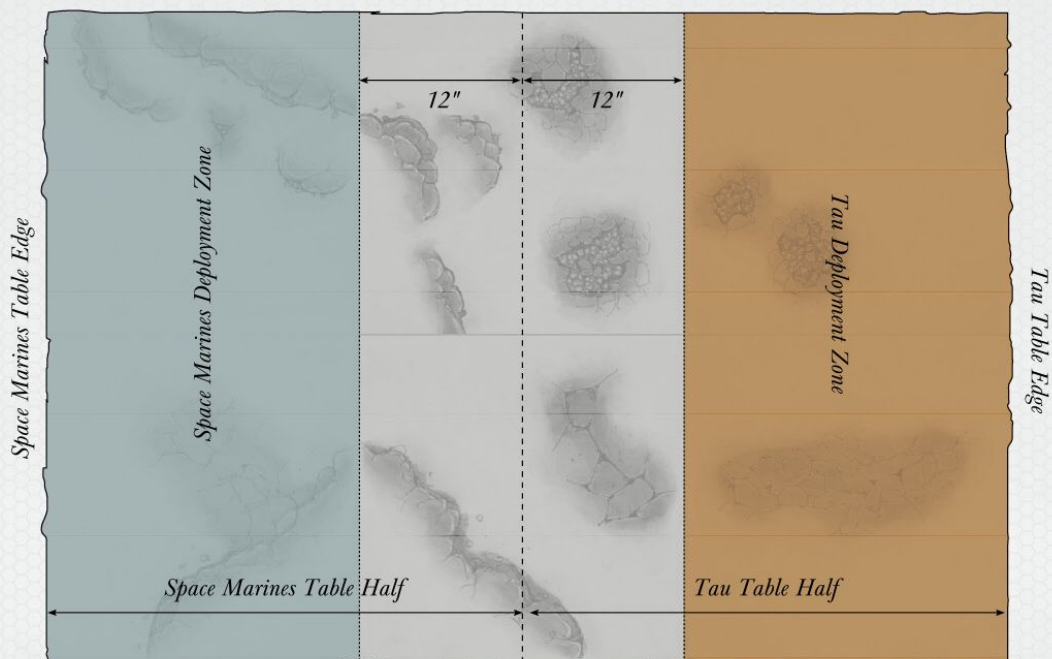
Conclave of Heroes: The Space Marines player can have up to two Warlords in this battle, rather than only one. One of the Warlords must be from the White Scars Chapter, and the other must be from the Raven Guard Chapter. Any of the Warlords' Traits that affect friendly units will only affect units which are from the same Chapter as the Warlord.

Low Altitude Airdrops: All of the Space Marines player's forces from the White Scars Chapter that are placed in Deep Strike Reserve automatically arrive during the first turn. You can also re-roll the scatter dice when these units arrive by Deep Strike.

Subterranean Tunnels: All of the Space Marines player's forces from the Raven Guard Chapter that are placed in Reserve can Outflank if they are Infantry, and all units that do so automatically arrive at the start of the first turn. Units that can already Outflank can move onto any table edge, including the enemy's (there is no need to roll to determine which edge they arrive from).

Holographic Decoys: At the end of the Space Marines player's first Movement phase, the Tau player can select up to six of his units that are on the battlefield. These units can immediately be redeployed anywhere on the battlefield that is more than 3" from any enemy model.

The Better Part of Valour: Starting from game turn 3, units in the Tau army are allowed to retreat from the battle if they start their Movement phase within 6" of a table edge in their deployment zone. Remove any units that retreat from the battlefield. They do not count as destroyed for Victory Points purposes.



ECHOES OF WAR: RETURN OF THE OBSIDIAN KNIGHT

The Tau had believed the Obsidian Knight destroyed during the war for Prefectia, but the revered Freeblade returned as if from the grave to seek his revenge on Mu'gulath Bay. Supported by a company of Super-heavy Imperial tanks, the black-armoured Knight once again met the Tau Empire forces in furious battle.

THE ARMIES

Choose armies as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

One player is the Imperial player, and his opponent is the Tau player. All units in the Imperial player's army must have either the Astra Militarum or the Imperial Knights Faction. In addition, all units in the army must be Super-heavy Vehicles and/or Super-heavy Walkers.

All units in the Tau player's army must have the Tau Empire Faction. In addition, all units in the army must be Monstrous and/or Gargantuan Creatures.

THE BATTLEFIELD

Set up terrain as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

DEPLOYMENT

Deploy using the Standard Deployment Method from *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*. If the Imperial player takes the Obsidian Knight (see the special rules section below), it must start the battle held in Reserve.

FIRST TURN

The player that set up first can choose to take the first or second turn. If they decide to take the first turn, their opponent can attempt to Seize the Initiative as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

GAME LENGTH

The mission uses Variable Game Length as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

At the end of the game, the player who has scored the most Victory Points is the winner. If both players have the same number of Victory Points, the game is a draw.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

At the end of the game, each player earns a number of Victory Points equal to the Hull Points or Wounds characteristic of each enemy model that has been completely destroyed.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

Slay the Warlord, First Blood, Linebreaker.

MISSION SPECIAL RULES

Reserves.

The Obsidian Knight: The Imperial player can choose one Knight Paladin in his army to be the Obsidian Knight. It has the Vehicle (Super-heavy Walker, Character) unit type and the Hatred (Tau Empire) and Preferred Enemy (Tau Empire) special rules. In addition, add 1 to this model's Weapon Skill and Ballistic Skill, and add 1 to any invulnerable saving throw this model makes for its ion shield.

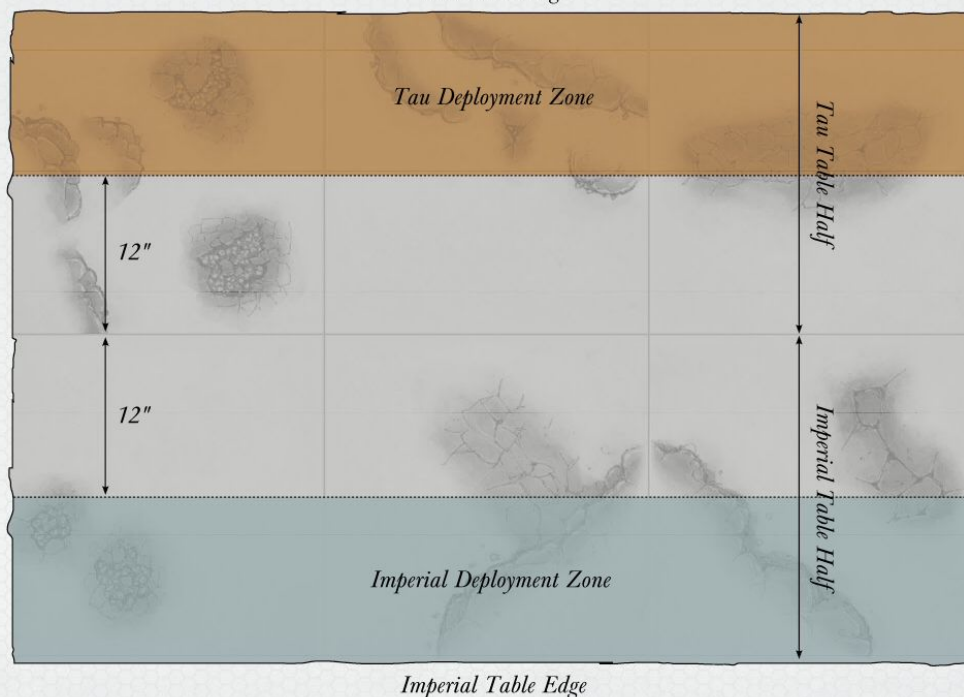
Battlelord: At the start of deployment, the Tau player rolls once on the following table, and then picks a model for the result to apply to. If the Imperial army does not include the Obsidian Knight, then the Imperial player is also allowed to roll on the table.

D6 RESULT

- 1 Master of Manoeuvres:** The model adds D3 to its Movement value each turn and gains the Outflank special rule.
- 2 Slayer of Giants:** The model gains the Tank Hunters and Monster Hunter special rules.
- 3 Heavy Class:** A Super-heavy unit with this trait gains +D3 Hull Points. A Monstrous or Gargantuan Creature gains +D3 Wounds.
- 4 Present Maximum Armour:** One use only. In any of the player's turns, they can declare that the model is using this trait. A Super-heavy unit gains +1 to all of its Armour Values until its next turn. A Monstrous or Gargantuan Creature gains +1 Toughness and can re-roll failed armour saves until its next turn.
- 5 Weaponmaster:** The model gains +D3 to its Weapon Skill (if it has one on its profile) and +1 to its Ballistic Skill (if it has one on its profile).
- 6 Indomitable:** The model gains the It Will Not Die special rule. If it already had this special rule, it can re-roll It Will Not Die rolls of 1.



Tau Table Edge



ECHOES OF WAR: THE ASSASSINS STRIKE

Thwarted by the skilled commanders of the Tau army, the Imperium deployed one of its feared Assassinorum Execution Forces, ordering them to remove the Tau leadership using any means necessary. It was quickly apparent, however, that the xenos leaders would not be easy targets, even for the Imperium's deadliest killers.

THE ARMIES

Points are not used for this battle. One player commands a Tau army consisting of one HQ choice with the Tau Empire Faction, protected by a single Tau Empire or Farsight Enclaves Formation.

The other player commands an army consisting of an Imperial Assassin with the Officio Assassinorum Faction, supported by a single Astra Militarum or Space Marine Formation. Any Space Marines must be drawn from the Raven Guard or White Scars Chapters.

Flyers, Super-heavy units and Monstrous or Gargantuan Creatures cannot be used by either side. If a player is not able to field a Formation in full, they should simply take as many units from the Formation as they have available. These units still count as being part of their Formation, and receive the benefits for it.

THE BATTLEFIELD

Set up terrain as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

DEPLOYMENT

The Tau player deploys first, anywhere on the battlefield that is wholly within 12" of the centre of the battlefield. The Imperial player does not deploy any units at the start of the battle – they arrive on the first turn as described below. Neither side can place units in Reserve.

FIRST TURN

The Imperial player has the first turn, and must deploy his entire army at the start of the turn. Imperial models move on from any table edge. They can move and fight normally on the turn that they are deployed.

GAME LENGTH

The mission uses Variable Game Length as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

At the end of the game, the player who has scored the most Victory Points is the winner. If both players have the same number of Victory Points, the game is a draw.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

At the end of the game, each player receives a number of Victory Points equal to the number of Wounds and Hull Points of damage they have inflicted upon the enemy army. Each Wound inflicted on the Tau HQ choice or the Imperial Assassin is worth 10 Victory Points rather than 1.

MISSION SPECIAL RULES

Lines of Retreat: Any units that Fall Back do so towards the nearest table edge.

Variable Battlefield Conditions: The Tau player rolls a D6 at the start of the battle, before the Imperial player takes their first turn. Refer to the table below and apply the result rolled for the duration of the battle.

D6 RESULT

- Night Attack:** The Night Fighting mission special rule is in effect for the duration of the mission.
- Chance Encounter:** For the first game turn neither side can Run or charge, and both sides can only make Snap Shots.
- Mysterious Objects:** Place D6 Objective Markers on the battlefield, as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*. These Objective Markers are not worth any Victory Points, but the Mysterious Objectives rule applies to them.
- Stray Shells:** The battlefield lies in an area occasionally struck by artillery fire. At the start of each Shooting phase, the player whose turn is taking place rolls a D6. On a roll of 6, the player may make an indirect shooting attack using the following profile (see the Barrage special rule in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*).

Range	S	AP	Type
Unlimited	8	4	Heavy 1, Barrage, Blast

- Additional Objectives:** Set up six Objective Markers. Each player generates 3 Tactical Objectives at the start of his first turn. If at the start of any of their future turns the player has fewer than 3 Active Tactical Objectives, they must generate more until they have 3.
- Perfect Conditions:** Starting with the Tau player, each player chooses a result from this table. The same result cannot be chosen by both players.



CAMPAIGN CHART

The Echoes of War missions presented earlier recreate the pivotal battles of the war for Mu'gulath Bay. You can play through these missions in sequence to fight a thrilling campaign. If you do so, the victor of each mission will receive a bonus in the next mission of the campaign, as detailed on these pages. If a game is a draw, neither player receives a bonus in the next mission.

1 DEATH IN THE VOID

Tau Victory: Do not use the Off Guard mission special rule in Armoured Onslaught.

Space Marines Victory: In Armoured Onslaught, the Astra Militarum player can re-roll one failed Reserves roll each turn.

2 ARMOURED ONSLAUGHT

Tau Victory: The Tau player has the first turn in Conflicting Agendas, unless the Astra Militarum player is able to Seize the Initiative.

Astra Militarum Victory: In Conflicting Agendas, the Tau player cannot attempt to Seize the Initiative, and must subtract 1 from all Reserve Rolls.

3 CONFLICTING AGENDAS

Designer's Note: *The players taking part in the campaign will need to ask a friend who has a Cult Mechanicus and/or Skitarii army to join them and play the role of the commander of the Adeptus Mechanicus army in this mission.*

Tau Victory: In The Unforeseen Strike, the Cadian player can take 2 Auxiliary choices rather than 3 Auxiliary choices.

Astra Militarum Victory: In The Unforeseen Strike, the Cadian player can take 4 Auxiliary choices rather than 3 Auxiliary choices.

Adeptus Mechanicus Victory: No changes are made to The Unforeseen Strike.

4 THE UNFORESEEN STRIKE

Tau Victory: Do not use the Elite Armoured Formations rule in The Eye of the Storm mission.

Cadian Victory: In The Eye of the Storm, the Astra Militarum player can roll twice on the Tack Ace table (see the Elite Armoured Formations rule), or three times if Pask is not taken.

5 THE EYE OF THE STORM

Tau Victory: In The Killing Blow, the Tau player can use the Better Part of Valour rule starting from the second turn rather than the third turn.

Astra Militarum Victory: In The Killing Blow, the Tau player can only select up to 3 units to use the Holographic Decoys rule, instead of up to 6.

If you wish, you can combine the campaigns from *War Zone Damocles: Mont'ka* and *War Zone Damocles: Kauyon* into one massive campaign! If you do so, the winner of the Kauyon campaign is allowed to add 100 points to their force in Echoes of War: Death in the Void. In addition, add together the number of missions won in both campaigns when working out the winner's rating at the conclusion of the Mont'ka campaign.

6 THE KILLING BLOW

Tau Victory: In Return of the Obsidian Knight, the Tau player can roll twice on the Battlelord table. The results must be applied to two different units in his army.

Space Marines Victory: In Return of the Obsidian Knight, the Imperial player can roll once on the Battlelord table. He can roll twice if his army does not include the Obsidian Knight. The results must be applied to two different units in his army.

7 THE ASSASSINS STRIKE

Please note that the outcome of the Return of the Obsidian Knight mission has no effect on The Assassins Strike. As a finale to the campaign, play The Assassins Strike not once, but four times. A different Imperial Assassin, a different HQ choice, and different Formations must be used in each of the games.

8 CONCLUSION

Once all of the games have been finished, each player adds up the number of victories they have achieved in all of the games played. **Whoever achieved the higher score is the winner of the campaign.** If the scores are tied, then the campaign is a draw. The winner can look up the number of victories they achieved on the table below to see how well they have done:

Victories	Rating
Up to 6	Respected Unit Leader
7	Honoured Formation Commander
8	Heroic Detachment Commander
9	Revered Army Commander
10+	Legendary Warlord



CHAPTER 6

ARMIES OF THE IMPERIUM



FORCES OF THE ASTRA MILITARUM

This chapter presents rules for a number of Super-heavy Tanks fielded by the Imperial Guard, and also includes Formations and Tactical Objectives that represent some of the myriad ways the soldiers of the Astra Militarum go to war. In addition, this chapter has rules for fielding an army from Cadia, the Gatehouse of the Imperium itself.

This chapter of the book contains the following sections, which present additional rules that can be used alongside the rules in *Codex: Astra Militarum*.

SUPER-HEAVY VEHICLE DATASHEETS

The Astra Militarum is not a subtle instrument, and nowhere is this more apparent than in their colossal machines of war. This section contains datasheets for eight Super-heavy Tanks, with additional rules for the mighty weapons they bear. Each of these vehicles is a Lord of War unit with the Astra Militarum Faction, and can be added to your army in the same way as any other unit, as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

FORMATIONS

This section details a number of Formations that are fielded by the Astra Militarum's commanders. As a fighting force that relies on massed ranks of infantry and vehicles, the Imperial Guard is greater than the sum of its parts, and as such each of

these Formations grants the units within it powerful bonuses which enhance their effectiveness on the battlefield. You may include these Formations in your army as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

TACTICAL OBJECTIVES

Each army has its own distinctive fighting style, and the Astra Militarum is no different. The Tactical Objectives let you play missions with a bespoke set of Tactical Objectives that suit the way the Astra Militarum makes war.

FORCES OF CADIA

Later in this chapter you will find rules for a Cadian Battle Group Detachment, enabling you to field an entire army of Cadian Shock Troops. Also included are descriptions of and rules for several Heirlooms of Cadia; each is a precious relic of that planet, entrusted only to the foremost defenders of the Imperium.



DATASHEETS

The following section lists a number of datasheets. These detail either Army List Entries or Formations, providing all the rules information that you will need to use your models in your games of Warhammer 40,000.

ARMY LIST ENTRIES

Each Army List Entry contains the following information:

- 1 **Faction:** The unit's Faction is shown here by a symbol. All units that have this symbol, which includes all the units in the following section, have the Astra Militarum Faction.
- 2 **Battlefield Role:** The unit's Battlefield Role is shown here by a symbol. All of the following units have the Lords of War Battlefield Role, and will have this symbol.
- 3 **Unit Name:** Here you will find the name of the unit.
- 4 **Unit Description:** This section provides a background description of the unit, detailing their particular strengths and weaknesses along with the tactics and methods they employ to wage war in the grim darkness of the 41st Millennium.
- 5 **Points Cost:** This is the points cost of the unit without any upgrades, used if you are choosing an army to a points value.
- 6 **Unit Profile:** This section will show the profiles of any models the unit can include.
- 7 **Unit Type:** This refers to the unit type rules in Warhammer 40,000: The Rules. For example, a unit may be classed as Infantry, Cavalry or Vehicle, which will subject it to a number of rules regarding movement, shooting, assaults, etc. All of the units in the following pages are Super-heavy Vehicles.
- 8 **Unit Composition:** This section shows the number and type of models that form the basic unit, before any upgrades are taken.
- 9 **Wargear:** This section details the weapons and equipment the models in the unit are armed with, many of which are described in more detail on page 164. The cost for all the unit's basic equipment is included in its points cost.
- 10 **Special Rules:** Any special rules that apply to models in the unit are listed here. Special rules that are unique to models in that unit are described in full here, whilst others are detailed in the Special Rules section of Warhammer 40,000: The Rules.
- 11 **Options:** This section lists all of the upgrades you may add to the unit if you wish to do so, alongside the associated points cost for each. Where an option states that you may exchange one weapon 'and/or' another, you may replace either or both, provided you pay the points cost for each. The abbreviation 'pts' stands for 'points' and 'pts/model' stands for 'points per model'.



FORMATIONS

Formation datasheets are identified by this symbol. The rules for Formations can be found in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*. A Formation datasheet will list the Army List Entries which make up the Formation, any restrictions upon what it may include, and any special rules the Formation's units gain.





BANEBLADE

525
POINTS



The roar of the Baneblade's engines rolls like thunder across the battlefield, bearing with it the promise of certain death. Mighty tracks grind over the shuddering ground as the tank advances, crunching flesh and bone, rubble and wreckage with equal ease. Enemies flee before this embodiment of Imperial supremacy, their fire pattering uselessly from the Baneblade's armoured hull. In return, the tank's arsenal swings to bear, turrets and sponson guns loosing a cacophonous volley of death into the midst of the foe. Lascannon beams and massive artillery shells plough through armoured targets, tearing them apart in fierce explosions. Gales of heavy bolter fire and blasts of flame mow down enemy infantry without mercy. None can stand against the Baneblade, and those that try do not live to regret their mistake.

	⌈ Armour ⌋		
	BS F S R HP	Unit Type	Unit Composition
Baneblade	3 14 13 12 9	Vehicle (Super-heavy Vehicle)	1 Baneblade

WARGEAR:

- Autocannon
- Baneblade cannon
- Demolisher cannon
- Twin-linked heavy bolter
- Searchlight
- Smoke launchers

OPTIONS:

- May take one of each of the following:
 - Hunter-killer missile 10 pts
 - Storm bolter or heavy stubber 5 pts
- May add up to two pairs of side sponsons, each with one lascannon and one twin-linked heavy bolter 50 pts/pair



BANEHAMMER

410
POINTS



The sheer concussion of the Banehammer's cannon opening fire is enough to burst eardrums and crack armaglass. Yet this wall of sound is nothing compared to the fury unleashed when the tank's shell hits home. A raging thermobaric shockwave roars out from the point of impact, bursting organs, immolating flesh and melting armour with equal ease. At the same time, savage tremors race through the ground. Warriors are flung from their feet with bone-breaking force, vehicles spin out of control, and luckless foes scream their last as they plunge down hungry fissures that yawn beneath them. By the time the Banehammer's complement of infantry disembarks into the fight, there is little for them to do but mop up the shellshocked survivors of the monstrous tank's wrath.

[Armour]						Unit Type	Unit Composition
BS	F	S	R	HP			
Banehammer	3	14	13	12	9	Vehicle (Super-heavy Vehicle, Transport)	1 Banehammer

WARGEAR:

- Tremor cannon
- Twin-linked heavy bolter
- Searchlight
- Smoke launchers

TRANSPORT:

- **Transport Capacity:**
Twenty-five models.
- **Fire Points:**
Ten models can fire from the troop bay.
- **Access Points:**
A Banehammer has one Access Point at the rear.

OPTIONS:

- May take one each of the following:
 - Hunter-killer missile 10 pts
 - Storm bolter or heavy stubber 5 pts
- May add up to two pairs of side sponsons, each with one lascannon and one twin-linked heavy bolter 50 pts/pair
- May replace any of its sponsons' twin-linked heavy bolters with twin-linked heavy flamers free



No fortification is proof against the destructive power of the Banesword’s quake cannon. Be it spike-studded traitor bastion, scrap iron greenskin fortress or towering xenos fastness, a single killing shot from the Banesword will see it blown apart in a shower of flaming wreckage. Enemies cower in horror before such unstoppable destructive force, the Banesword rolling relentlessly over the ruin of supposedly impenetrable defence lines. Around its flanks come masses of Astra Militarum soldiery, storming through the remains of enemy strongpoints beneath whose walls they had – just hours before – been dying by the hundred. Supported by the hammering guns of the Banesword, the men of the Imperial Guard show no mercy to their persecutors, slaughtering with relish those defenders still left standing.

	[Armour]					Unit Type	Unit Composition
	BS	F	S	R	HP		
Banesword	3	14	13	12	9	Vehicle (Super-heavy Vehicle)	1 Banesword

WARGEAR:

- Quake cannon
- Twin-linked heavy bolter
- Searchlight
- Smoke launchers

OPTIONS:

- May take one of each of the following:
 - Hunter-killer missile 10 pts
 - Storm bolter or heavy stubber 5 pts
- May add up to two pairs of side sponsons, each with one lascannon and one twin-linked heavy bolter 50 pts/pair
- May replace any of its sponsons’ twin-linked heavy bolters with twin-linked heavy flamers free



DOOMHAMMER

420
POINTS



A superlative linebreaker, the Doomhammer is equal parts close-range Titan killer and massive, rolling fortress. Typically it is held back until the perfect moment, and then the Doomhammer advances unstoppably. Explosions blossom across its hull, and flames wash over the armoured plates without ever harming the soldiers riding within or slowing the giant tank in the slightest. In return, heavy bolters and sponson guns howl their fury, blasting apart tanks and cutting down infantry with equal ease. Yet it is when the Doomhammer's magma cannon opens fire that true devastation is unleashed. A single shot from this apocalyptic weapon is capable of blowing an Ork Stompa sky high, or smashing the leg from a traitor Titan to send it crashing to the ground in flames.

	[Armour]					Unit Type	Unit Composition
	BS	F	S	R	HP		
Doomhammer	3	14	13	12	9	Vehicle (Super-heavy Vehicle, Transport)	1 Doomhammer

WARGEAR:

- Magma cannon
- Twin-linked heavy bolter
- Searchlight
- Smoke launchers

TRANSPORT:

- **Transport Capacity:**
Twenty-five models.
- **Fire Points:**
Ten models can fire from the troop bay.
- **Access Points:**
A Doomhammer has one Access Point at the rear.

OPTIONS:

- May take one each of the following:
 - Hunter-killer missile10 pts
 - Storm bolter or heavy stubber5 pts
- May add up to two pairs of side sponsons, each with one lascannon and one twin-linked heavy bolter50 pts/pair
- May replace any of its sponsons' twin-linked heavy bolters with twin-linked heavy flamersfree



Advancing into the tight confines of an urban war zone is many a warrior’s worst nightmare. Any shadowed doorway or window may harbour a lurking foe, while every intersection and open space is a howling storm of crossfire waiting to happen. The Hellhammer is designed to make a mockery of such terrifying arenas, its fearsome armaments optimised for close range fire fights. Grinding forward through the hell of ruined cityscapes and tangled fortifications, the huge tank plays its fire across dug-in foes, flushing them out with gouts of flame or bringing the very buildings that conceal them crashing down on their heads. Meanwhile, the Hellhammer’s main cannon, though short ranged, packs an enormous punch and is capable of taking out even the greatest enemy war engines with one decisive shot.

	[Armour]					Unit Type	Unit Composition
	BS	F	S	R	HP		
Hellhammer	3	14	13	12	9	Vehicle (Super-heavy Vehicle)	1 Hellhammer

WARGEAR:

- Autocannon
- Hellhammer cannon
- Demolisher cannon
- Twin-linked heavy bolter
- Searchlight
- Smoke launchers

OPTIONS:

- May take one of each of the following:
 - Hunter-killer missile10 pts
 - Storm bolter or heavy stubber5 pts
- May add up to two pairs of side sponsons, each with one lascannon and one twin-linked heavy bolter50 pts/pair
- May replace any of its sponsons’ twin-linked heavy bolters with twin-linked heavy flamersfree



SHADOWSWORD

455
POINTS



One moment, a colossal enemy war engine tears its way across the battlefield, the Astra Militarum dying in droves beneath its guns. The next, a deafening shriek cuts the air as a ruby beam of light strikes the towering foe with incredible force. Bio-titans and Wraithknights alike crash to the ground with glowing tunnels blasted clean through their bodies. Enemy Titans explode with spectacular force, the flames of their demise lighting the battlefield for miles around. Even as the foe cries out in horror, the architect of this destruction is already powering up its engines and preparing to relocate. Rumbling from amid the ruins that concealed it, the Shadowsword sets out in search of its next target, its veteran crewmen adding another kill to their noble tank's tally even as their previous victim smoulders in their wake.

	[Armour]		
	BS F S R HP	Unit Type	Unit Composition
Shadowsword	3 14 13 12 9	Vehicle (Super-heavy Vehicle)	1 Shadowsword

WARGEAR:

- Volcano cannon
- Searchlight
- Smoke launchers

OPTIONS:

- May take one of each of the following:
 - Hunter-killer missile 10 pts
 - Storm bolter or heavy stubber 5 pts
- May add up to two pairs of side sponsons, each with one lascannon and one twin-linked heavy bolter 50 pts/pair
- May replace any of its sponsons' twin-linked heavy bolters with twin-linked heavy flamers free
- May take an additional twin-linked heavy bolter or heavy flamer 10 pts
- May replace two of the lascannons on its side sponsons with targeters (+1 BS) free



Autoloaders clatter and ammo feeds whine as the Stormlord prepares to open fire. Barrels spin up to speed, the enemy given a split second to scream in terror as they realise their death is upon them. Then, with an unbelievable roar of fury, the Stormlord opens fire and sweeps all before it into red mist. Thousands of rounds per second tear infantry apart, hammer light tanks into perforated, sparking wreckage and mangle even the mightiest monstrous beasts. Adding to this hurricane of shot comes the fire of the Stormlord’s occupants, a whole platoon of Astra Militarum soldiery blazing away with lasguns and heavy weapons in support of their mobile fortress. Against this pounding fusillade, the foe can do little but fall back or die, ceding the field to the Stormlord and its victorious garrison.

	[Armour]					Unit Type	Unit Composition
	BS	F	S	R	HP		
Stormlord	3	14	13	12	9	Vehicle (Super-heavy Vehicle, Transport)	1 Stormlord

WARGEAR:

- **Vulcan mega-bolter**
- **Two heavy stubbers**
- **Twin-linked heavy bolter**
- **Searchlight**
- **Smoke launchers**

SPECIAL RULES:

All Power to Weapons! If the Stormlord does not move, it may fire its Vulcan mega-bolter twice in the following Shooting phase (at the same target or at different ones).

TRANSPORT:

- **Transport Capacity:** Forty models.
- **Fire Points:** Twenty models can fire from the troop bay.
- **Access Points:** The Stormlord is treated as Open-topped for embarking and disembarking purposes. The +1 damage modifier for Open-topped vehicles does not apply to a Stormlord.

OPTIONS:

- May take one of each of the following:
 - Hunter-killer missile *10 pts*
 - Storm bolter or heavy stubber *5 pts*
- May add up to two pairs of side sponsons, each with one lascannon and one twin-linked heavy bolter *50 pts/pair*
- May replace any of its sponsons’ twin-linked heavy bolters with twin-linked heavy flamers *free*



STORMSWORD

485
POINTS



Whether anchoring an Imperial defence line or rolling forward to sunder the fortifications and fell the war engines of the foe, the Stormsword is equally deadly. Armed with a Stormsword siege cannon – originally a retro-fit stopgap to bring wrecked Shadowswords back into the fight during the bloody siege of Coldarkh Hive – this tank has achieved massive popularity with Imperial commanders. Though relatively short ranged, the destruction the Stormsword inflicts is sufficient to blast apart the mightiest enemy vehicles, or annihilate whole swathes of infantry even as they crouch behind the walls of their defensive bastions. Stormsword crews are especially proud of their hybrid tanks, likening them to the good, honest soldier who takes whatever weapons he is given and uses them to smite the foes of mankind.

	[Armour]	Unit Type	Unit Composition
Stormsword	BS F S R HP 3 14 13 12 9	Vehicle (Super-heavy Vehicle)	1 Stormsword

WARGEAR:

- Stormsword siege cannon
- Twin-linked heavy bolter
- Searchlight
- Smoke launchers

OPTIONS:

- May take one of each of the following:
 - Hunter-killer missile10 pts
 - Storm bolter or heavy stubber5 pts
- May add up to two pairs of side sponsons, each with one lascannon and one twin-linked heavy flamer50 pts/pair
- May replace any of its sponsons' twin-linked heavy flamers with twin-linked heavy boltersfree

‘EMPEROR’S SHIELD’ INFANTRY PLATOON



Led into battle by the long-legged forms of reconnaissance Sentinels, the soldiers of the Emperor's Shield Infantry Platoon push relentlessly into the enemy lines, laying down a constant hail of fire as they go. Best deployed into the tangled terrain of urban or arboreal war zones, the Emperor's Shield does not rely upon armoured transportation. Instead, the warriors of the Astra Militarum press forward on foot, guided swiftly across no-man's land by their attached Sentinels. Meanwhile, their officers bark out orders in a steady stream, keeping the platoon firing and advancing without pause. In this way, the Emperor's Shield Platoon keeps up their advance into the very heart of the foe, scything down rank upon rank of enemies with a constant hail of las and heavy weapons fire that few targets can long endure.

FORMATION:

- 1 Infantry Platoon
- 1-3 units chosen in any combination from the following list:
 - Scout Sentinel Squadron
 - Armoured Sentinel Squadron

RESTRICTIONS:

The Infantry Platoon must include at least five Infantry Squads. Units taken as part of the Infantry Platoon may not take Dedicated Transports.

SPECIAL RULES:

Forward Recon: Units from this Formation's Infantry Platoon have the Move Through Cover special rule whilst they are within 9" of a Scout Sentinel or Armoured Sentinel from this Formation.

Marching Drill: The Platoon Commander can issue the 'Fire and Advance!' order to one unit from its Infantry Platoon, in addition to any other orders it issues.

'Fire and Advance!'

The Guardsmen unleash a steady fusillade on the march, las-bolts flying in time with their well-drilled footfalls.

The ordered unit must make a shooting attack. The unit counts as being stationary, even if it moved in the preceding Movement phase.



'EMPEROR'S SHIELD' INFANTRY COMPANY



Emperor's Shield Infantry Companies epitomise the firepower and numerical superiority for which the Astra Militarum are famed. Whether packing out the fire points and dugouts of a defence line, or charging forward en masse into the thundering guns of the foe, the Emperor's Shield masses together sufficient devout and determined warriors that horrific casualties can be sustained without compromising the company's effectiveness. At the same time, the Astra Militarum troopers loose off one punishing volley after another with clockwork efficiency, and obey the vox-amplified orders of their officers no matter the horrors they face. Great sheets of lasfire engulf the enemy, and regardless of how many Imperial Guardsmen fall, their fire does not slacken until every one of the foe lies dead.

FORMATION:

- 1 Company Command Squad
- 3 Emperor's Shield Infantry Platoons

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Punishing Fusillade: The Company Commander can choose to issue the 'First Rank, Fire! Second Rank, Fire!' order to any number of units from the Infantry Company at the same time. This counts as issuing a single order. If he does so, make a single Leadership test, using the highest Leadership among the ordered units. If the test is passed, all ordered units must shoot at the same target.

'EMPEROR'S TALON' RECON COMPANY



Loping into battle with guns blazing, the Sentinels of the Emperor's Talon run down their quarry without mercy. They are led by a grizzled veteran pilot whose mastery of reconnaissance tactics and light walker combat doctrine transforms his company from a band of warriors into a deadly hunting pack. Following their commander's lead, the squadrons of Sentinels sweep around the flanks of the battle, isolating and blasting apart targets of opportunity or attacking in force from an unexpected quarter. Often they are tasked with the elimination of a priority target, using their swift walkers to encircle and ambush their prey. On the attack, the Sentinel pilots draw upon the intelligence from their pre-hunt briefing, aiming for their victim's weak spots in order to bring down even the largest and most dangerous foes.

FORMATION:

- 2-4 units chosen in any combination from the following list:
 - Scout Sentinel Squadron
 - Armoured Sentinel Squadron

RESTRICTIONS:

Each unit must consist of 3 models.

SPECIAL RULES:

• Outflank

Company Command: One Scout Sentinel or Armoured Sentinel in this Formation must be designated the Command Sentinel. That model gains the Character unit type, and can issue the 'Take Aim!', 'Forwards, for the Emperor!' or 'Move! Move! Move!' order to a unit in its Formation as though it were an officer. Units from this Formation count as having a Leadership characteristic of 8 for the purposes of the test to see if the order has been understood.

Dedicated Hunters: At the start of your first turn, pick a unit in the enemy army. All models in this Recon Company have the Preferred Enemy special rule against that unit for the remainder of the game.



'EMPEROR'S BLADE' ASSAULT COMPANY



The Emperor's Blade Assault Company is aptly named, for a wise commander will thrust this formation into the very heart of the foe. Designed to quickly seize key strategic locations, the core of the Emperor's Blade Assault Company comprises squads of hardened veteran troopers aboard fast-moving armoured transports. Rolling up in support of these grim warriors come squadrons of Hellhound, Devil Dog and Bane Wolf tanks, scouring enemy defences and playing great gouts of promethium or corrosive gasses across them as they advance. Driven screaming from behind their defences, the beleaguered foe attempts to retreat, only to be cut to pieces by the Veterans' pinpoint lasgun fire. Soon enough, the Imperial Aquila flies proudly over whatever site the foe were attempting to defend.

FORMATION:

- 1 Company Command Squad
- 3 units of Veterans
- 1-3 Hellhound Squadrons

RESTRICTIONS:

The Company Command Squad and each of the units of Veterans must either take a Chimera or a Taurox as a Dedicated Transport.

SPECIAL RULES:

Clear the Area: Units from an Assault Company have the Preferred Enemy special rule against enemy units within 6" of an Objective Marker.

Objective Secured: Infantry units from an Assault Company have the Objective Secured special rule. A unit with this special rule controls Objective Markers even if an enemy scoring unit is within range of the Objective Marker, unless the enemy unit also has this special rule.

‘EMPEROR’S WRATH’ ARTILLERY COMPANY



The world fills with fire and thunder as the shells of the Emperor's Wrath Artillery Company strike home. Great showers of explosive warheads scream like damned souls as they plunge down upon the foe, each blast tearing craters in the ground and hurling spumes of soil, wreckage, fire and bodies high into the air. Reacting to coordinates voxed in from forward spotters, the sweating crews of each artillery piece continue to load and fire, load and fire, filling the air with a constant rain of high explosives that pound the foe into bloody mulch. Such bombardments can last for hours, days, even weeks, steadily transforming the battlefield into blasted wreckage and torn red ruin. By the time the guns fall silent, Imperial victory is beyond any doubt.

FORMATION:

- 1 Company Command Squad
- 2 units chosen in any combination from the following list:
 - Basilisk Battery
 - Hydra Battery
 - Wyvern Battery
- 1 unit chosen from the following list:
 - Manticore
 - Deathstrike
- 1-3 Engineeers

RESTRICTIONS:

The Company Command Squad must take a Chimera or Taurox as a Dedicated Transport.

SPECIAL RULES:

Artillery Command: The Company Commander from this Formation can issue the 'Smite at Will!', 'Suppressive Fire!' and 'Fire on my Target!' orders to units of vehicles from this Formation. Units of vehicles from this Formation count as having a Leadership characteristic of 8 for the purposes of seeing whether the order has been understood.

Target Sighted: Once per turn, in your Shooting phase, one friendly model equipped with a vox-caster can call in target coordinates. Choose an enemy unit within 18" and in line of sight of that model. Until the end of the phase, models from this Formation count their weapons as Twin-linked when firing at that enemy unit.



'EMPEROR'S FIST' ARMoured COMPANY



Intended to smash the enemy battle lines asunder, the massed might of the Emperor's Fist Armoured Company is a terrifying sight. Squadron after squadron of Leman Russ roars across the battlefield, guns pounding out a constant drumbeat of war. Through drifting smoke and roaring firestorms they advance, pounding the foe mercilessly with every weapon at their disposal. The impetus of their charge is such that they are able to physically smash aside all impediments, routing infantry and overturning enemy tanks with their sheer belligerence and bulk. Striding behind the tanks come Tech-Priest Engineeers, chanting datapsalms and logic-liturgies as they stalk through the wreckage left in the charge's wake. Should any Leman Russ suffer damage, these priests are swiftly on hand to hasten it back into the fight.

FORMATION:

- 1 Tank Commander
- 3 Leman Russ Squadrons
- 1-3 Engineeers

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Battlefield Doctrines: If a vehicle from this Formation that is within 6" of an Engineeer from this Formation suffers a penetrating hit, your opponent must roll two dice on the Vehicle Damage table and discard the highest.

Formation Leader: Any Leman Russ from this Formation within 12" of the Tank Commander from this Formation has a Ballistic Skill of 4.

Steel Phalanx: If a unit is Tank Shocked or Rammed by more than one vehicle from this Formation in the same turn, subtract 1 from its Leadership for the Tank Shock test or add 1 to the Strength of the Ram for each vehicle after the first.

OGRYN AUXILLA



Occasionally, a situation will arise in battle that only the judicious application of brute force and bravery can resolve. At such times, the Ogryn Auxilla come into their own. Whether storming the breach in an enemy fortification, counter-charging an overwhelming attack by the foe's elite infantry, or striking the final, crushing blow of the battle, these hulking abhumans are perfect for such brutal tasks. The Ogryns' loyalty makes them all but unbreakable no matter the odds, while their strength and resilience means they are nigh unstoppable once they've built up a head of steam. With ripper guns hammering and grenadier gauntlets thumping, the Ogryn Auxilla storm into their foes, laying about themselves with gun butts, mauls and massive, gnarled fists until not a single opponent remains standing.

FORMATION:

- 1 Commissar
- 2 units of Ogryns
- 2 units of Bullgryns

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

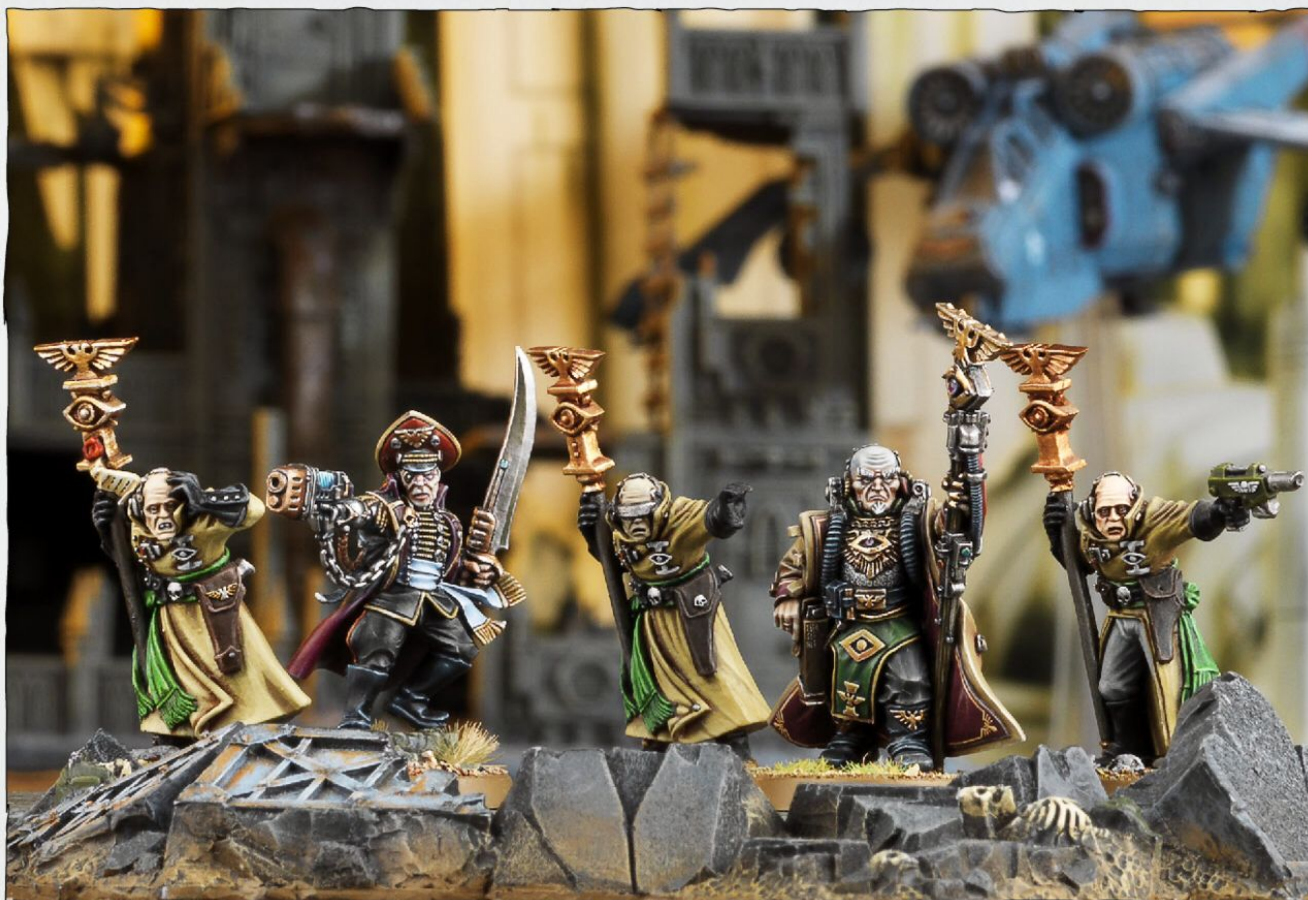
SPECIAL RULES:

Groundshaking Charge: If a unit of Ogryns or Bullgryns from this Formation charges an enemy unit that has already been charged by a unit of Ogryns or Bullgryns from this Formation in the same Assault phase, their Hammer of Wrath hits are resolved at Strength 7.

Unquestioning Loyalty: Units of Ogryns and Bullgryns from this Formation that are within 12" of the Commissar from this Formation have the Fearless special rule.



PSYKANA DIVISION



The air thickens like grease and spectral fire crawls across every surface as the Psykana Division focus their powers. Rubble and wreckage floats slowly into their air around them, leaving flickering afterimages daubed across reality as the Psykers drone out a hymnal of pain. The Primaris Psyker leads the chant, his eyes glowing as he reaches out to join the minds of his agonised brethren to his own. Second by second the energies build and the hymn grows louder until, with a howl that echoes into realms beyond sight, the psykers unleash their destructive might. Enemy tanks are plucked up and crushed like ration tins. Infantry scream as dancing lightning plays across them, dissolving their flesh and burning away their souls. The fury of the Warp itself is set loose upon the foes of Mankind, and annihilates them utterly.

FORMATION:

- 1 Primaris Psyker
- 3 units of Wyrdvane Psykers
- 1-3 Commissars

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Empyric Link: The Primaris Psyker knows any Psychic Powers known by units of Wyrdvane Psykers from the same Division while they are within 12". In addition, add 1 to the Primaris Psyker's Mastery Level until the end of the Psychic phase for every 5 Wyrdvane Psykers from the same Division that are within 12" at the start of the phase. Note that this does not cause him to generate any additional powers.

Encouraging Presence: While a unit of Wyrdvane Psykers from this Formation is joined by a Commissar from this Formation, it successfully harnesses Warp Charge points on a roll of 2+ rather than 4+. However, if it attempts to manifest a Psychic Power and fails its psychic test, one randomly determined Wyrdvane Psyker from the unit is removed as a casualty. Furthermore, if it suffers Perils of the Warp, one randomly determined Wyrdvane Psyker from the unit is removed as a casualty and no roll is made on the Perils of the Warp table.

'EMPEROR'S FURY' SUPER-HEAVY COMPANY



No foe can stand against the combined might of the Emperor's Fury Super-Heavy Company. Each vehicle in the company is an ancient and potent relic of war, for whose monstrous destructive potential whole campaigns have been fought. When such might is magnified by three, the company becomes a military asset capable of annihilating armies and conquering worlds. An awe-inspiring show of force and an exemplar of the tank formations of the Astra Militarum, not for nothing is this monumental aggregation of armour known as the Emperor's Fury; as the ground shakes beneath the tanks' grinding tracks, and the air fills with the thunder of their guns and the chanting of their attendant Enginseer, it truly seems as though the personal ire of the Master of Mankind has fallen upon the foe.

FORMATION:

- 3 units chosen in any combination from the following list:
 - Baneblade
 - Banehammer
 - Banesword
 - Doomhammer
 - Hellhammer
 - Shadowsword
 - Stormlord
 - Stormsword
- 1 Enginseer

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Dedicated Servant: When the Enginseer from this Formation uses the Blessings of the Omnissiah rule to repair a vehicle from this Formation, add 2 to the result of the roll.

Devastating Bombardment: If an enemy unit is hit by 3 or more Primary weapons from this Formation, it must take a Morale check on 4D6 unless it has Gone to Ground.

The Ground Shakes: Enemy units within 12" of at least two vehicles from this Formation move as though they are in difficult terrain.



'EMPEROR'S SPEAR' AERIAL COMPANY



Diving down from the clouds with engines screaming, the gunships of the Emperor's Spear Aerial Company strike with sudden fury. Flying in tight formation, wings of Valkyries and Vendettas sight their targets and open fire, engulfing the foe in searing volleys of lascannon beams and scudding clouds of missiles. Enemy aircraft are blown apart, their wreckage plunging to the ground like blazing comets, while infantry and tanks caught amid the gunships' fire are torn to pieces in short order. Swooping low, the courageous pilots jink between ruined buildings and skim over blazing forests to drop their passengers into the very heart of battle. With their human cargo away, the pilots climb steeply into the air battle raging above, or else engage their hover-jets and lay down withering cover fire for their comrades on the ground.

FORMATION:

- 3 units chosen in any combination from the following list:
 - Valkyrie Squadron
 - Vendetta Squadron

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Formation Flight: If a Reserves Roll for a unit from this Formation is successful, you can choose to automatically pass any remaining Reserves Rolls for units from this Aerial Company in the same turn.

Low Altitude Drop: At the start of your Movement phase, you can declare that a unit from this Formation will enact a low altitude drop. If it does so it must take a difficult terrain test each time it moves over terrain that is more than 3" tall during this phase, and cannot Jink until your next Movement phase. However, until the end of the phase, units that disembark from models making a low altitude drop using the Grav Chute Insertion special rule do not scatter.

SUPER-HEAVY ARMOURY

This section lists the devastating guns of the Imperium's Super-heavy Tanks. Any wargear not listed here can be found either in *Codex: Astra Militarum* or *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

BANEBLADE CANNON

The Baneblade cannon fires three-foot-long, adamantium-tipped, rocket-propelled anti-tank shells packed with high explosives. These terrifying rounds punch through even the thickest armour with ease, producing explosions that are as vast as they are deadly.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Baneblade cannon	72"	9	2	Primary Weapon 1, Apocalyptic Blast

DEMOLISHER CANNON

A short ranged, direct fire artillery piece, this wide bore canon hurls a massive shell whose weight alone is enough to crush a light tank. The destructive force of each blast will atomise the most heavily armoured foes in a heartbeat, leaving nothing but a blazing crater to show where the Emperor's foes once stood.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Demolisher cannon	24"	10	2	Ordnance 1, Large Blast

HELLHAMMER CANNON

The Hellhammer cannon fires high calibre shells, each containing an unstable sub-atomic core. Where these deadly rounds hit home, everything is engulfed by a blindingly bright blast. Split seconds later, a deafening roar and buffeting shockwave roll out from the blast zone. Of the foe caught within the blast zone, little remains.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Hellhammer cannon	36"	10	1	Primary Weapon 1, Ignores Cover, Massive Blast

MAGMA CANNON

The magma cannon is named for the white-hot blasts of energy its thermochemical 'sunhammer' warheads create upon impact. This weapon is more than capable of reducing a Stompa or bio-titan to blackened wreckage with a single direct hit.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Magma cannon	60"	10	1	Primary Weapon 1, Large Blast

QUAKE CANNON

Firing high yield concussion shells over vast distances, the quake cannon is a ferociously effective siege-gun. Though disadvantaged at short range by its fuselocked ordnance, the weapon's reach and ferocious stopping power more than make up for this shortcoming.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Quake cannon	24-180"	9	3	Primary Weapon 1, Apocalyptic Blast

STORMSWORD SIEGE CANNON

The Stormsword siege cannon fires enormous, rocket-propelled shells that detonate with vast concussive force. Stormsword gunners are trained to lob their shots low, punching through the ground floors of defensive buildings to bring them tumbling down or carving vast craters beneath foes and pitching them to their doom.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Stormsword siege cannon	36"	10	1	Primary Weapon 1, Apocalyptic Blast, Ignores Cover

TREMOR CANNON

Firing hefty proximity-shells filled with super-dense tectorium ore, the tremor cannon gouges huge craters out of the battlefield with every shot. Even as a lethal wave of blazing overpressure rolls out from the blast, the tectorium's primary reaction shudders out through the ground, shaking the battlefield to its bedrock and flinging the enemy off their feet in screaming confusion.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Tremor cannon	60"	8	3	Primary Weapon 1, Earthshock, Massive Blast

Earthshock: All models under the tremor cannon's massive blast marker that were not removed from play as a result of that shooting attack must take a Dangerous Terrain test once the hit has been resolved.

VOLCANO CANNON

The volcano cannon's sheer power is the stuff of legend. Shields collapse beneath its searing beam, armour sloughs away into molten slag or simply vaporises altogether. A single shot from such a weapon can reach out across a battlefield to effortlessly slay the mightiest monster or super-heavy tank, while infantry caught in its blast will be ash before they realise they have been hit.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Volcano cannon	120"	D	2	Primary Weapon 1, Large Blast

VULCAN MEGA-BOLTER

The vulcan mega-bolter screams as it spits out swathes of mass-reactive shells. Wherever the mega-bolter's fire rakes across the foe, they disintegrate, blasted into puffs of blood and piles of wreckage in seconds. Warriors fighting beneath the barrels of these chattering weapons must wade knee-deep through spent shell casings, struggling to reach their foes through drifts of smoking brass.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Vulcan mega-bolter	60"	6	3	Heavy 15

ASTRA MILITARUM TACTICAL OBJECTIVES

Presented below are six Tactical Objectives to use in your games of Warhammer 40,000 that are exclusive to Astra Militarum players. They reflect the hammerblow tactics used by the forces of the Imperial Guard.

If your Warlord has the Astra Militarum Faction, these Tactical Objectives replace the Capture & Control Tactical Objectives (numbers 11-16) described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

If a Warhammer 40,000 mission has the Tactical Objectives special rule, players use the normal rules for using Tactical Objectives with the following exception: when an Astra Militarum player using these Tactical Objectives generates a Capture & Control objective (numbers 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 or 16), the Astra Militarum player instead generates the corresponding Astra Militarum Tactical Objective, as shown in the table to the right. Other Tactical Objectives (numbers 21-66) are generated normally.

D66 RESULT

11	Armoured Assault
12	Fix Bayonets!
13	Strength in Unity
14	Hold Your Ground
15	Overwhelming Numbers
16	Storm of Fire

11 ARMOURED ASSAULT

TYPE: ASTRA MILITARUM

The Astra Militarum are the unsubtle hammer of the Imperium's forces, their massed tank brigades putting the armoured companies of their enemies to shame.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn if at least one enemy unit was completely destroyed during your turn by a unit with the Tank unit type.

12 FIX BAYONETS!

TYPE: ASTRA MILITARUM

Countless battles have been won by the timely charge of a platoon of Astra Militarum infantry, bayonets fitted to their lasguns and battle cries in their throats.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn if one or more Astra Militarum units made a successful charge during your turn.

13 STRENGTH IN UNITY

TYPE: ASTRA MILITARUM

Each warrior in the Astra Militarum is but a cog in a greater machine, useful only while he carries out his assigned task.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn if you successfully issued at least three orders. If you successfully issued six or more orders, score D3 Victory Points instead.

14 HOLD YOUR GROUND

TYPE: ASTRA MILITARUM

Static gun lines and emplacements are key to many of the strategies composed by Imperial tacticians. The Astra Militarum are expected to hold their ground, no matter the cost.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn if at least half of the units you have on the battlefield (rounding up) are within your deployment zone.

15 OVERWHELMING NUMBERS

TYPE: ASTRA MILITARUM

One of the Astra Militarum's greatest strengths is its endless supply of recruits. Common doctrine involves swamping enemy positions with bodies, living or dead.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn if you control more Objective Markers than your opponent. If you control at least three more Objective Markers than your opponent, score D3 Victory Points instead.

16 STORM OF FIRE

TYPE: ASTRA MILITARUM

The lasgun may pale in comparison to the weapons of the Imperium's enemies, but a hundred can bring down any foe.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn if at least one enemy unit was completely destroyed during your Shooting phase. Score D3 Victory Points instead if at least 3 enemy units were completely destroyed, or D3+3 if 6 or more enemy units were completely destroyed.

DESIGNER'S NOTE – TACTICAL OBJECTIVES CARD DECK

If you own a deck of Astra Militarum Tactical Objective Cards, you can generate your Tactical Objectives by shuffling the deck and drawing the top card instead of rolling a D66. These should be kept face up, so your opponent can see which Tactical Objectives you have generated, unless the mission you are playing instructs you otherwise.

FORCES OF CADIA

These pages feature rules for fielding Cadian Detachments as part of your army. You will find Warlord Traits that exemplify the personalities of Cadia's most decorated heroes, and unique items of wargear so iconic that even the lowliest Whiteshield would recognise them.

CADIAN DETACHMENT SPECIAL RULES

Detachments in your army that are chosen from *Codex: Astra Militarum*, and that do not contain any unique characters other than Lord Castellan Creed, Colour Sergeant Kell and/or Knight Commander Pask, can be Cadian Detachments. Any Cadian Detachments in your army use the following special rule in addition to those presented in their codex.

HEIRLOOMS OF CADIA

Units in a Cadian Detachment that can normally take items from the Heirlooms of Conquest list in *Codex: Astra Militarum* can choose to take items from the Heirlooms of Cadia list at the points cost shown instead. You can take items from both lists in the Detachment. A single Tank Commander in a Cadian Detachment may be equipped with Kabe's Herald.

WARLORD TRAITS

When generating his Warlord Traits, a Cadian Warlord may choose to roll on the table to the right instead of those found in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules* or *Codex: Astra Militarum*.



WARLORD TRAITS TABLE

D6 WARLORD TRAIT

- 1 Master Orator:** *Your Warlord has a way with words honed by many years of giving rousing battlefield speeches, and his men would gladly follow him to the gates of hell itself.*
Your Warlord has the Zealot special rule.
- 2 Dead-eye Shot:** *Your Warlord held his first lasgun before he could walk, and has drilled his men to be almost as proficient with their weapons as he is.*
Add 2 to your Warlord's Ballistic Skill, and 1 to the Ballistic Skill of models in his unit.
- 3 Artillery Veteran:** *Your Warlord knows the strength of a long-range bombardment, and always has the contacts to coordinate one at just the right time.*
Once per game, your Warlord can make an Artillery Bombardment as though he were a Master of Ordnance.
- 4 Unflappable Stoicism:** *Your Warlord has lived through more fire fights than the common soldier has eaten cold rations, a fact of which he is keen to remind his men at every opportunity.*
Friendly units that are part of a Cadian Detachment do not take Morale tests for suffering 25% or more casualties while they are within 12" of your Warlord.
- 5 Above the Thundering Guns:** *Your Warlord employs skilled vox-operators and all manner of vocal techniques to ensure that his orders are heard correctly the first time, even during the fiercest battles.*
Your Warlord has the Voice of Command special rule. If your Warlord already has the Voice of Command special rule, he can issue one additional order each turn.
- 6 Staunch Traditionalist:** *Your Warlord leads his officers in upholding Cadia's fine martial traditions, and encourages them to never back down from a fight.*
Friendly Characters that are part of Cadian Detachments must issue and accept challenges wherever possible. If there is more than one friendly model with a rule that has this effect in a challenge, you may select which model issues or accepts the challenge. When fighting in challenges, friendly Characters that are part of Cadian Detachments can re-roll failed To Hit and To Wound rolls.

HEIRLOOMS OF CADIA

Each of the items below is a precious piece of Cadia's history as well as an artefact of war, handed down through the years to those seen fit to bear them into battle. Only one of each of the following items may be chosen per army.

CELERITAS

10 POINTS

Celeritas was given as a gift by Ultramarines Chapter Master Admeus to Castellan Grift after his Cadian 57th relieved the Ultramarines at the siege of Ygdravere. The perfectly balanced chainsword was crafted by the artisans of Talassar, and is amongst the finest examples of its type in the whole Imperium. Armed with this marvellous chainblade, Cadian officers have cut down Chaos Space Marines and Eldar Exarchs alike, all without sustaining a scratch.

Range	S	AP	Type
-	User	-	Melee, Deadly Riposte, Master-crafted

Deadly Riposte: When fighting in a challenge, a model wielding Celeritas has an invulnerable save of 4+. For each successful save made by the model during a challenge, it can immediately make an attack with Celeritas that hits automatically and has the Rending special rule, even if the model is slain as the result of failing other saves at the same time.

KABE'S HERALD20 POINTS
Knight Commander Kabe's strident tones boomed through his crew's vox arrays with absolute authority and always saw them sweep to victory over their foes. The Knight Commander was eventually slain when a renegade Warhound Titan stamped his Leman Russ flat. However, his upgraded high-gain vox herald was recovered from the wreckage. In battle, the old Knight Commander's voice still washes in and out through the vox static, transmitting orders in support of his living successor and helping to sweep the tanks of Cadia to victory once again.

A Tank Commander in your army may be equipped with Kabe's Herald. When a model equipped with Kabe's Herald uses its Tank Orders special rule, you can pick any other Leman Russ squadrons within 12"; each of those squadrons is also affected by the Tank Order, as though it was part of the Tank Commander's unit. If the Tank Commander chose the 'Gunners, Kill on Sight' order, any other squadrons that are affected gain the Split Fire special rule for the duration of the phase.

THE IRON LEFT25 POINTS
Originally crafted as a bionic arm for the heroic Cadian Lieutenant and noted pugilist Grigor 'Bomber' Hass, this one-of-a-kind bionic incorporates a neurolinked power sword that locks directly into its fist. The limb possesses enormous hydraulic strength, each blade-swing and savage left hook delivered with enough force to slice an armoured Space Marine in two.

Range	S	AP	Type
-	+2	3	Melee

STANDARD OF THE LOST 113TH

30 POINTS

During the horrors of the twelfth Black Crusade, the valiant 113th Cadian Infantry stood against overwhelming foes during the defence of forge world Gamanede. Despite the regiment's supposed curse, they fought with distinction and honour, holding out for twelve days against a tide of traitors and only falling on the thirteenth. Their standard was recovered and has been borne with pride ever since, as a sign of Cadian indomitability regardless of the odds.

One Veteran in the army that can carry a regimental standard can instead carry the Standard of the Lost 113th. This follows the same rules as a regimental standard. At the start of your Movement phase you can declare that the bearer will plant the standard and fight to the last. The bearer's unit cannot move, run or charge for the rest of the game, but it and any friendly Cadian units within 18" are Fearless.

VOLKOV'S CANE

10 POINTS

A distinctively crafted swagger stick with a shockfield generator concealed in its head, this cane's greatest value is as an inspirational tool to bolster morale. Every Cadian knows the tale of Castellan Volkov who, during the evacuation of Dortengrav, stood alone against the monstrous Ork Warboss Spinechewa armed with nothing but his cane. Adopting a classical fencer's stance, Volkov fought for several long and desperate minutes against the immense greenskin while the last of the refugees was rushed to safety. Though inevitably the Castellan was slain by his furious foe, his heroism has gone down in Cadian legend, and any officer judged worthy to bear the cane inspires the absolute respect and obedience of all around him.

Company Commander only. When a model carrying Volkov's Cane issues an order to a unit within 6", the Leadership test will only fail on a roll of a double 6.

Range	S	AP	Type
-	User	4	Melee, Concussive

WRATH OF CADIA

5 POINTS

Though this remarkable firearm resembles a finely crafted laspistol, it incorporates arcane technological secrets that make its beam-output closer to that of a miniaturised lance. In its time it has felled some truly monstrous foes, most notably a rampaging Tyrannid bio-titan.

Range	S	AP	Type
12"	3	-	Pistol, Punitive

Punitive: A weapon with this special rule always wounds on a roll of 4+. In addition, when making armour saves against attacks made by a weapon with this special rule, a roll of 3 or less will always fail, even if the target's Save characteristic is 3+ or better.

HAMMER OF THE EMPEROR

The battle-hardened populace of Cadia produces warriors without equal, and the Cadian Shock Troops are held as some of the Imperium's staunchest defenders. Using the rules on the following pages you can field an Astra Militarum force drawn from this proud people, or even represent an entire Cadian Battle Group on the battlefield.

CHOOSING AN ARMY

When choosing an army to play a game of Warhammer 40,000, there are two main ways of organising your collection. These are the Unbound method, which means taking whichever units you like, and the Battle-forged method, which is more rigid but has extra benefits. Both are described fully in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

If you are using the Unbound method, simply use the datasheets that correspond to the models in your collection. If you are using the Battle-forged method, you will instead need to organise the models in your collection into Detachments. This is a fun process in its own right. The most common of these are the Combined Arms and Allied Detachments. Note that you can also include any of the Formations presented in this section as part of a Battle-forged army.

The Cadian Battle Group is a special type of Detachment that can be included in any Battle-forged army. Unlike the Detachments shown in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*, it has a Force Organisation Chart whose slots are a combination of specific Formations and Army List Entries instead of Battlefield Roles. However, it still has compulsory and optional elements, as well as Restrictions and Command Benefits, just like any other Detachment.

Although units cannot normally belong to more than one Detachment, units from a Formation that is part of a Cadian Battle Group are an exception. They count as part of both their Formation and the Detachment, and have all associated Command Benefits and special rules. If your Warlord is part of a Formation or an Army List Entry that makes up part of a Cadian Battle Group, that entire Cadian Battle Group is your Primary Detachment.

RESTRICTIONS:

This Detachment must include at least one Command choice. For each Command choice, it may include up to three Core choices. For each Core choice, it may include up to three Auxiliary choices. Only the datasheets listed here can be included in this Detachment. No unique models other than those listed here may be taken as part of this Detachment.

The Cadian Battle Group is a Cadian Detachment.

COMMAND BENEFITS:

High Command: A Company Commander that is part of a Battle Group Command can issue up to three orders each turn, rather than two, and can issue them to units from this Detachment that are within 24" rather than 12".

Battle Group Vox-net: When an officer from this Detachment issues an order to a unit from this Detachment, roll an additional dice for the Leadership test and discard the highest roll.

Sharpshooters: Models from this Detachment can re-roll To Hit rolls of 1 when firing lasguns or hot-shot lasguns.



Command
1+



Core
0-3 per Command



Auxiliary
0-3 per Core



BATTLE GROUP COMMAND

- 1 Company Command Squad ¹ or Tank Commander ²
- 0-1 Lord Commissar

¹ A Company Command Squad may include Lord Castellan Creed in place of its Company Commander and Colour Sergeant Kell in place of one Veteran.

² Knight Commander Pask may be taken in place of a Tank Commander.



'EMPEROR'S SHIELD' INFANTRY COMPANY

- 1 Company Command Squad
- 3 Emperor's Shield Infantry Platoons



'EMPEROR'S FIST' ARMOURED COMPANY

- 1 Tank Commander
- 3 Leman Russ Squadrons
- 1-3 Engineers



'EMPEROR'S SHIELD' INFANTRY PLATOON

- 1 Infantry Platoon
- 1-3 units from the following in any combination:
 - Scout Sentinel Squadron
 - Armoured Sentinel Squadron

CADIAN BATTLE GROUP

The Cadian Battle Group allows you to field an indomitable force of Cadian Shock Troops on the Warhammer 40,000 battlefield. Whether you wish to assemble a force of several hundred infantrymen, a mighty column of battle tanks or anything in between, the Detachment shown below offers several options with some powerful benefits.

For example, Joel's Cadian collection consists of two Company Command Squads, an Enginseer, a Militarum Tempestus Command Squad, a Tank Commander in a Leman Russ Executioner, three Veteran Squads, a unit of Militarum Tempestus Scions, two Leman Russ Battle Tanks, a Leman Russ Punisher, a Leman Russ Demolisher, a Chimera, three Tauroxes and a Hellhound.

If Joel wishes to organise his collection using the Battle-forged method – as described in Warhammer 40,000: The Rules – all of his units need to be part of a Detachment or a Formation. He achieves this by choosing a single Cadian Battle Group Detachment.

The Cadian Battle Group in Joel's army consists of one Command choice, one Core choice and two Auxiliary choices. Specifically, it

consists of a Battle Group Command (one Company Command Squad), an 'Emperor's Fist' Armoured Company (his Tank Commander, his two Leman Russ Battle Tanks, his Leman Russ Punisher, his Leman Russ Demolisher and his Enginseer), an 'Emperor's Blade' Assault Company (the other Company Command Squad in the Chimera, all of his Veterans embarked in the three Tauroxes and his Hellhound) and a Militarum Tempestus Platoon (his Militarum Tempestus Command Squad and unit of Militarum Tempestus Scions).

As all of Joel's units belong to the Cadian Battle Group, the army is Battle-forged and all of his units have the Command Benefits listed below. Joel chooses the Company Commander in his Battle Group Command to be his Warlord, meaning that the entire Cadian Battle Group is his Primary Detachment.



INFANTRY PLATOON

See Codex: Astra Militarum



SUPER-HEAVY SUPPORT ELEMENT

- 1 unit or Formation chosen from the following:

- Baneblade	- Shadowword
- Banehammer	- Stormlord
- Banesword	- Stormsword
- Doomhammer	- 'Emperor's Fury'
- Hellhammer	- Super-heavy Company



'EMPEROR'S BLADE' ASSAULT COMPANY

- 1 Company Command Squad
- 3 units of Veterans
- 1-3 Hellhound Squadrons



'EMPEROR'S SPEAR' AERIAL COMPANY

- 3 Valkyrie Squadrons and/or Vendetta Squadrons in any combination



OGRYN AUXILLA

- 1 Commissar
- 2 units of Ogryns
- 2 units of Bullgryns



'EMPEROR'S WRATH' ARTILLERY COMPANY

- 1 Company Command Squad
- 2 units chosen from the following:
 - Basilisk Battery
 - Hydra Battery
 - Wyvern Battery
- 1 unit chosen from the following:
 - Manticore
 - Deathstrike
- 1-3 Enginseers



'EMPEROR'S TALON' RECON COMPANY

- 2-4 Scout Sentinel Squadrons and/or Armoured Sentinel Squadrons in any combination



PSYKANA DIVISION

- 1 Primaris Psyker
- 3 units of Wyrdvane Psykers
- 1-3 Commissars



MILITARUM TEMPESTUS PLATOON

See Codex: Astra Militarum

FORCES OF THE OFFICIO ASSASSINORUM

This section includes full background and rules for the deadly agents of the Officio Assassinorum. It includes a datasheet for each of these sinister figures, descriptions of their esoteric wargear, a unique Detachment making it easy to add these agents to your army, and a Formation representing the Assassinorum's ultimate sanction: the Execution Force.

FACTION AND ALLIES

The units on the following pages (Vindicare Assassin, Callidus Assassin, Eversor Assassin and Culexus Assassin) have the Officio Assassinorum Faction, shown by the icon below. They are part of the Armies of the Imperium and ally as such, as described in the Allies section of *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.



OFFICIO ASSASSINORUM DETACHMENT



COMPULSORY
1 Elites

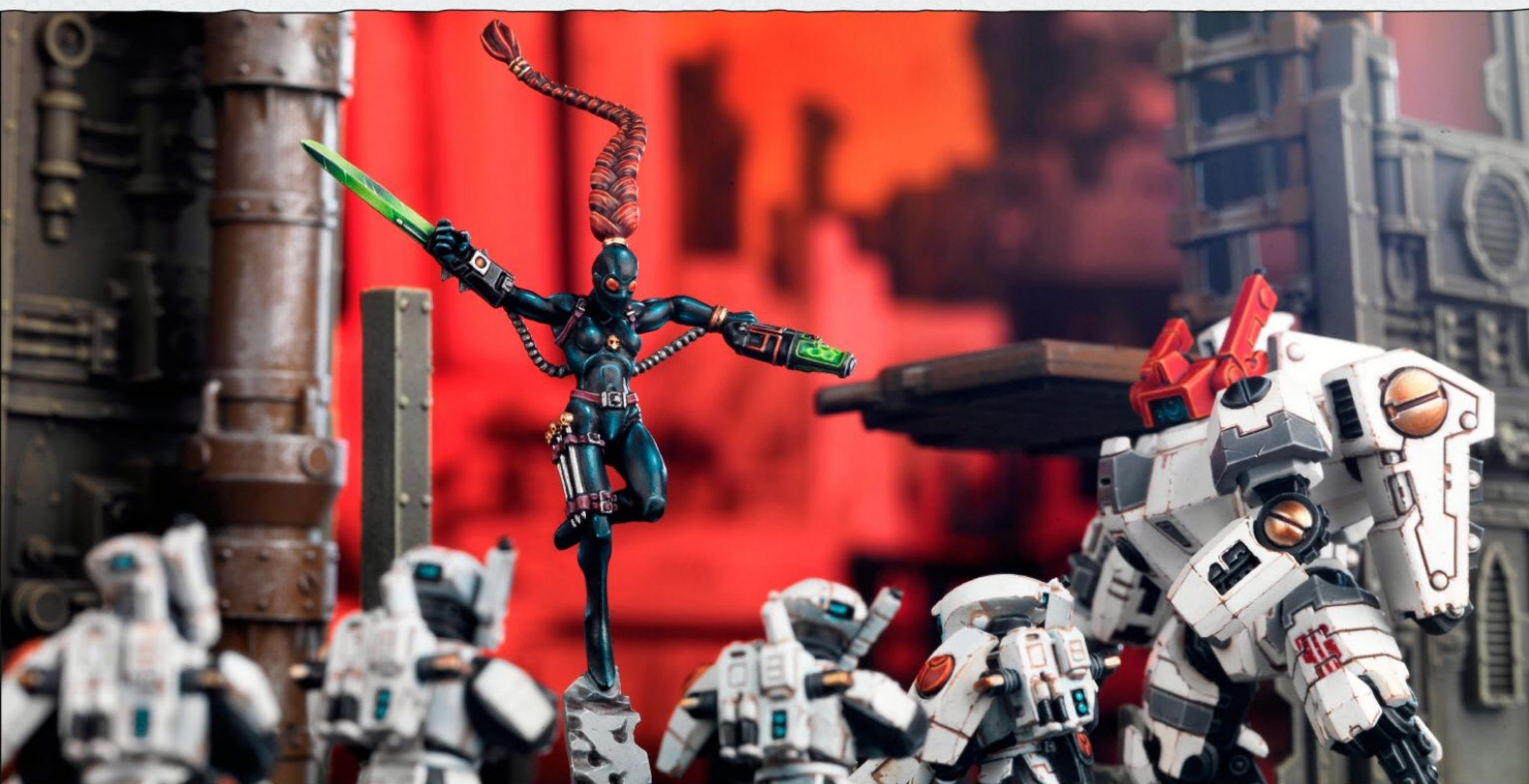
OPTIONAL
None

RESTRICTIONS:

The unit chosen in this Detachment must have the Officio Assassinorum Faction.

COMMAND BENEFITS:

Operation Assassinate: If the mission you are playing uses Victory Points, you receive one bonus Victory Point at the end of the game if the enemy's Warlord was removed as a casualty as a result of a Wound inflicted by a model with this special rule.



VINDICARE ASSASSIN

150
POINTS



Against the Vindicare Assassin there is no desperate battle for survival, no frantic flight or war of wits. There is only the muffled crack of the exitus rifle, the violent spray of pulped brain matter and spinning fragments of skull, then the graceless tumble of a puppet suddenly shorn of its strings. These lethal marksmen spend days, weeks, sometimes months working their way into the perfect position from which to achieve their killing shot, and once their prey rests in their sights it stands no chance at all. But this is not to say that the Vindicare's only skill is killing lone targets. Faced by large numbers of battlefield foes, this lethal killer can swiftly rack up a body count that would make a platoon of soldiers proud, snapping off one perfect shot after another until nothing remains but twitching corpses.

	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Sv	Unit Type	Unit Composition
Vindicare Assassin	8	8	4	4	3	7	4	10	-	Infantry (Character)	1 Vindicare Assassin

WARGEAR:

- Exitus pistol
- Exitus rifle
- Close combat weapon
- Blind grenades
(see defensive grenades)
- Spy mask

SPECIAL RULES:

- Fearless
- Independent Operative
- Infiltrate
- Lightning Reflexes
- Move Through Cover
- No Escape
- Stealth

Deadshot: All successful To Hit rolls made by a Vindicare Assassin, excluding Snap Shots, are Precision Shots. Wounds from Precision Shots are allocated against a model (or models) of your choice in the target unit, as long as it is in range and line of sight of the firer, rather than following the normal rules for Wound allocation. A character that has a Precision Shot Wound allocated to it can still make a Look Out, Sir roll.

Note that Snap Shots and shots from weapons that scatter, or do not roll To Hit, can never be Precision Shots.



CALLIDUS ASSASSIN

145
POINTS



The Callidus Assassin is an architect of anarchy, mayhem and misdirection, who uses polymorphine drugs and sub-dermal implants to shift her shape and fool her foe. She combines subtle, shadowed killing with expertly sown misinformation to cripple enemy command structures and bring whole battle lines to a grinding halt. Yet all this is a cover for her true mission, for first and foremost the Callidus is still an Imperial Assassin. Only once the enemy are in utter disarray, their comms choked with contradictory orders and their warriors chasing ghosts and rumours, does the Callidus strike. With a single blast of her neural shredder, this agile murderess reduces the minds of her victims to a bubbling soup, while those who fight back are cut to pieces with the flickering blade of her phase sword.

	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Sv	Unit Type	Unit Composition
Callidus Assassin	8	8	4	4	3	7	4	10	-	Infantry (Character)	1 Callidus Assassin

WARGEAR:

- Neural shredder
- Phase sword
- Poison blades

SPECIAL RULES:

- Fearless
- Fleet
- Hit & Run
- Independent Operative
- Infiltrate
- Lightning Reflexes
- Move Through Cover
- No Escape
- Precision Strikes

Polymorphine: When a Callidus Assassin is deployed using her Infiltrate special rule, she can be set up anywhere on the table that is more than 1" from any enemy unit, whether deployed enemy units can draw a line of sight to her or not. If a Callidus Assassin starts the game in Reserves, she can choose to move on from the enemy board edge when she arrives. In either case, during the first game turn, or during the game turn in which the Callidus Assassin arrives from Reserves, enemy units can only fire Snap Shots when targeting her.

Reign of Confusion: If your army includes a Callidus Assassin, you can re-roll the dice when attempting to Seize the Initiative. In addition, your opponent suffers -3 to the first Reserve Roll he makes during the game.



EVERSOR ASSASSIN

135
POINTS



Between his engineered physique and the combat stimulants that saturate his system, the Eversor can run as fast as a speeding skimmer. He can punch a bunker door from its hinges with a single blow, and tear a Chaos Marine in half with his bare hands. High Lord Roarch once claimed the only difference between a cyclonic warhead and an Eversor Assassin was that the warhead was kinder, an assertion proved true every time one of these frenzon-fuelled berserkers is deployed. Sent in via drop pod, the Eversor is briefed on his target by subliminal inloads, then set loose to cause utter, bloody mayhem until the victim – and all those around them – are torn to bloody shreds. Even should the Eversor be slain, the foe will not live to enjoy their victory, for the assassin's biochemistry explodes with the force of a plasma bomb.

	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Sv	Unit Type	Unit Composition
Eversor Assassin	8	8	4	4	3	7	4	10	-	Infantry (Character)	1 Eversor Assassin

WARGEAR:

- Executioner pistol
- Neuro-gauntlet
- Power sword
- Melta bombs
- Frenzon
- Sentinel array

SPECIAL RULES:

- Fearless
- Feel No Pain
- Furious Charge
- Independent Operative
- Infiltrate
- Lightning Reflexes
- Move Through Cover
- No Escape

Bio-meltdown: If an Eversor Assassin is ever reduced to zero Wounds, before removing the model as a casualty, each nearby unit (friend or foe) suffers a Strength 5 AP- hit for each model it has within D6" of the Eversor Assassin. After resolving any additional damage, remove the Eversor Assassin from play as a casualty.

Fast Shot: Whenever an Eversor Assassin fires his executioner pistol, he does so 4 times. All of these shots must be at the same target, but can be any mixture of bolt pistol and needle pistol shots.



Panic spreads before the Culexus Assassin like a plague. Rendered literally soulless by his pariah gene, this assassin projects an aura of absolute fear that can be masked or amplified by his arcane wargear. Thus, in one moment the Culexus may seem all but invisible, nothing but a flicker of movement in the corner of the enemy's eye. The next he shudders into sudden being, a skull-faced apparition that radiates terror as he stalks ever closer. Psykers are the worst affected by this ghoulish being, wracked with unspeakable agony merely from standing in his presence, and it is these dangerous individuals that the Culexus is sent to slay. Between the soul-searing blasts of his animus speculum and the deadly effects of his psyk-out grenades, no witch can long survive the deadly attentions of the Culexus.

	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Sv	Unit Type	Unit Composition
Culexus Assassin	8	8	4	4	3	7	4	10	-	Infantry (Character)	1 Culexus Assassin

WARGEAR:

- Animus speculum
- Etherium
- Psyk-out grenades

SPECIAL RULES:

- Fear
- Fearless
- Independent Operative
- Infiltrate
- Lightning Reflexes
- Move Through Cover
- No Escape
- Preferred Enemy (Psykers)

Life Drain: Armour saves cannot be taken against Wounds inflicted by a Culexus Assassin's close combat attacks. Any close combat attack inflicted by a Culexus Assassin that rolls a 6 To Wound has the Instant Death special rule. Any close combat attack inflicted by a Culexus Assassin that is allocated to a Psyker has the Instant Death special rule.

Psychic Abomination: Psykers, friend or foe, within 12" of a Culexus Assassin have -3 Leadership, do not generate any Warp Charge (i.e. they do not add dice

to their owning player's Warp Charge Pool in the Psychic phase) and only harness Warp Charge points on a 6. A Culexus Assassin can never be targeted or affected by psychic powers – other units in the Culexus Assassin's vicinity that are hit by **beam** or **nova** powers, or by **witchfire** powers that use templates, are hit/affected normally. Any **blessing** or **malediction** psychic powers affecting a unit immediately cease to be in effect if the unit moves within 12" of a Culexus Assassin or vice versa.

EXECUTION FORCE



The assassins of the Execution Force are death incarnate. They are among the greatest weapons of the Imperium, their deployment comparable to unleashing a Titan Legion or the world-ending horror of Exterminatus. No foe can stand against them and live, be it amid the winding corridors of some mighty fortress or the blazing, smoke-wreathed hell of the battlefield. Those not torn to pieces by the frenzied assault of the Eversor have their souls burned away by the chilling horror of the Culexus. Those not impaled upon the poisoned blades of the Callidus are gunned down where they stand by the eagle-eyed Vindicare. Nothing is allowed to obstruct the Execution Force in their mission, and whole armies have died at the hands of such a band while trying to defend their prey.

FORMATION:

- 1 Vindicare Assassin
- 1 Callidus Assassin
- 1 Eversor Assassin
- 1 Culexus Assassin

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

- Preferred Enemy (Warlord)

Operation Assassinate: If the mission you are playing uses Victory Points, you receive one bonus Victory Point at the end of the game if the enemy's Warlord was removed as a casualty as a result of a Wound inflicted by a model with this special rule.



RULES AND WARGEAR

This section presents the army special rules unique to the forces of the Officio Assassinorum. You will also find rules for the Assassins' esoteric weaponry and wargear.

SPECIAL RULES

INDEPENDENT OPERATIVE

Each Imperial Assassin is an army of one, a living weapon with their own singular methods of murder. Even when deployed as an Execution Force, such warriors pursue their own deadly agenda with no interest in wider strategic concerns.

A model with this special rule can never be joined by another character. If a model with this special rule is your army's Warlord, it never has a Warlord Trait.

LIGHTNING REFLEXES

Years of training and neuro-synaptic augmentation have bestowed upon each assassin the sort of reactions that would give an Eldar Harlequin pause. They flip, tumble and flow around blade thrusts and hails of shot with contemptuous ease, evading attacks that would lay the mightiest hero low.

A model with this special rule has a 4+ invulnerable save. In addition, they do not suffer the penalty to their Initiative for charging enemies through difficult terrain.

NO ESCAPE

Even a legion of bodyguards cannot long protect an Imperial Assassin's victim. The black-clad killers strike with near-supernatural speed and skill, effortlessly plucking their target from beneath the noses of their gaping protectors.

Enemy characters suffer a -2 penalty to their Look Out, Sir tests against any Wounds inflicted by a model with this special rule.

TOOLS OF DEATH

Rules for the following wargear can be found in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

Blind grenades* Close combat weapon
Melta bombs Power sword

* See defensive grenades



Power sword

WARGEAR OF THE VINDICARE TEMPLE

EXITUS WEAPONS

Exitus weapons are marvels of Imperial technology, and their ammunition perhaps even more so. They carry shield-breaker rounds with disruptive flux cores that scramble even the most sophisticated force fields; turbo-penetrator rounds capable of punching through the hull of a spaceship; and hellfire rounds so toxic that not even extragalactic creatures can survive their searing kiss.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Exitus pistol	12"	X	2	Pistol, Sniper, Exitus Ammo
Exitus rifle	72"	X	2	Heavy 1, Sniper, Exitus Ammo

Exitus Ammo: Each time a Vindicare Assassin fires a weapon with this special rule, choose one of the three following types of ammunition and apply the chosen ammunition's rules to that shot:

- **Shield-breaker:** Invulnerable saves cannot be taken against Wounds, glancing hits, or penetrating hits from a shield-breaker round.
- **Turbo-penetrator:** Against vehicles, shots from a turbo-penetrator round count as Strength 10. Against all other targets, shots from a turbo-penetrator round inflict D3 Wounds, rather than just 1.
- **Hellfire:** Shots from a hellfire round always wound on a 2+.

SPY MASK

The Vindicare's distinctive mask contains nutrient cartridges that allow him to hunt for months at a time without need to resupply, as well as a comms-thief sensor and a wide-spectrum auspex visor that can pick out the assassin's victims at incredible distances.

All successful To Hit rolls made by a Vindicare Assassin, excluding Snap Shots, have the Ignores Cover special rule.



Exitus rifle and ammo

WARGEAR OF THE CALLIDUS TEMPLE

NEURAL SHREDDER

The neural shredder is an exotic and extremely rare weapon originally used by the Adeptus Astra Telepathica. It fires a burst of energy that destroys the minds of those caught in its sights, leaving the assassin's victims no more than brainless, drooling meat.

Range	S	AP	Type
Template	1	2	Pistol, Neural Shock

Neural Shock: Hits caused by this weapon always wound on a 4+. This special rule has no effects on vehicles or buildings.

PHASE SWORD

The phase sword is thought to utilise alien technology, though the Callidus Temple keeps its nature a close secret. Worn as a long blade attached to the forearm, this weapon is able to phase in and out of realspace by molecular realignment, bypassing not only physical armour but also its metaphysical equivalents.

Range	S	AP	Type
-	User	2	Melee, Phasing Hits

Phasing Hits: Each successful To Wound roll of a 6 made by a phase sword results in a Phasing Wound. Invulnerable saves cannot be taken against Phasing Wounds.

POISON BLADES

The needle-like poison blades a Callidus keeps about her person enable the operative to make her kill even when appearing defenceless. Each Callidus trains in the art of driving these blades through weak spots in armour, scaly hide, or the eye sockets of protective helmets.

Range	S	AP	Type
-	User	-	Melee, Poisoned (3+), Rending

WARGEAR OF THE EVERSOR TEMPLE

EXECUTIONER PISTOL

The executioner pistol is a menacing hybrid of needle and bolt pistol. It is able to change modes at the twitch of a finger, firing hypertoxin darts one second and mass-reactive shells the next. Many of the Eversor's victims are treated to both, just to make doubly sure of a messy death.

	Range	S	AP	Type
Needle pistol	12"	1	-	Pistol, Poisoned
Bolt pistol	12"	4	5	Pistol

NEURO-GAUNTLET

This killing apparatus, worn as an exoskeletal hyper-alloy glove, has neurotoxin injectors fitted in place of fingernails. Even the faintest scratch triggers the delivery of a fatal dose.

Range	S	AP	Type
-	User	-	Melee, Fleshbane, Shred

FRENZON

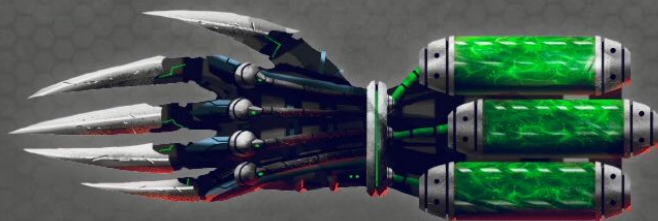
The cocktail of distilled combat stimulants that pump through the Eversor's circulatory system is so potent it would burst a normal man's heart. In the heat of battle, these drugs can drive an Eversor operative into such a berserk state he becomes a whirlwind of violence.

An Eversor Assassin rolls 3D6 when determining his charge range, adding the results together. In addition, an Eversor Assassin receives 3 bonus Attacks in a turn in which he charged, rather than just 1.

SENTINEL ARRAY

The sentinel array worn by all Eversor Assassins processes targeting information at giddy speed, enabling its wielder to efficiently engage targets even when he is at risk of becoming overwhelmed.

An Eversor Assassin fires Overwatch using his full Ballistic Skill.



Neuro-gauntlet



Executioner pistol

WARGEAR OF THE CULEXUS TEMPLE

ANIMUS SPECULUM

The animus speculum is an elaborate helm that can absorb and fire focussed blasts of negative Warp energy. Primarily used to dampen the vile aura of the Culexus en route to his target, its polarity can be reversed in order to magnify the soul-draining horror of its wearer to lethal levels.

An animus speculum is a ranged weapon that is fired in the Psychic phase instead of the Shooting phase. Firing the animus speculum does not prevent the Culexus Assassin from Running or shooting another weapon at the same or a different target in the Shooting phase. The animus speculum can fire Snap Shots but cannot be used to make Overwatch attacks.

Range	S	AP	Type
18"	5	1	Assault X, Absorbed Warp Charge

Absorbed Warp Charge: When firing an animus speculum, first add up the combined mastery levels of all Psyker units, friend or foe, that are within 12" of the Culexus Assassin, and pick up that many dice. You can then add up to 3 more dice to this hand by removing them from your own Warp Charge pool. The total number of dice in your hand is the number of shots the animus speculum now fires.



Animus speculum

ETHERIUM

The etherium is a highly advanced nodal layer built into the Culexus' synskin that shifts the wearer's body out of phase with realspace. This makes his physical form ghost-like and absent from the physical world, all but invisible to mortal eyes, just as his mind is absent from the spiritual plane.

Whenever enemy units target a Culexus Assassin with shooting or close combat attacks, the shots/attacks are always resolved as if the attacking unit had Ballistic Skill and Weapon Skill 1.

PSYK-OUT GRENADES

Psyk-out grenades are produced using an extremely rare substance thought to be a by-product of the esoteric processes that sustain the Astronomican. Upon detonation, each grenade scatters a dense cloud of psi-refractive particles across the target area.

SHOOTING

Range	S	AP	Type
8"	2	-	Assault 1, Blast, Psi-shock

Psi-shock: If a unit containing at least one Psyker (i.e. a model with the Psyker, Brotherhood of Psykers/Sorcerers or Psychic Pilot special rule) is hit by a weapon with the Psi-shock special rule, one randomly determined Psyker model in that unit suffers Perils of the Warp in addition to any other damage.

ASSAULT

Models that are Psykers do not gain bonus Attacks when charging a Culexus Assassin. However, if the Culexus Assassin is already locked in combat from a previous turn, or has gone to ground, its grenades have no effect and the attackers gain bonus Attacks as normal.



Psyk-out grenades



CHAPTER 7

TAU EMPIRE



FORCES OF THE TAU EMPIRE

This chapter describes several new Formations that enable you to field your Tau miniatures in specific combinations on the battlefield, reflecting the diverse makeup of Tau cadres. In addition, it presents a new Detachment, wargear and rules that can be used to reflect the organisation and fighting practices of Tau armies from the Farsight Enclaves.

This chapter of the book contains the following sections which present additional rules that can be used alongside the rules in *Codex: Tau Empire*.

FORMATIONS

This book includes background and rules for a number of new Formations that can be used by any Tau army. Each Formation grants powerful bonuses to the units within it, which can really enhance their effectiveness on the battlefield. You may include these in your army as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.



FARSIGHT ENCLAVES ARMIES

The teachings of Commander Farsight are seen almost as holy writ by his sub-commanders. To reflect Farsight's individual leadership qualities and training methods, this chapter includes a unique set of Warlord Traits for the Warlord of a Farsight Enclaves army.

You will also find details of the specialised Signature Systems borne into battle by Farsight's followers, each an example of the advanced technologies perfected by the Earth caste scientists of the Farsight Enclaves.

The Dawn Blade Contingent Detachment presented in this chapter enables players to field an army based upon those used by Tau Commanders raised and trained in the Farsight Enclaves. This Detachment follows all the Detachment rules presented in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

Farsight's forces often seek strategic objectives in battle that would be unrecognisable to Tau from outside the Enclaves. This chapter therefore presents six new Tactical Objectives that represent the imperatives and mission parameters of Farsight Enclaves armies.



DATASHEETS

In the following section, you will find a number of datasheets for new Formations. You may include any of these in your army as described in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

Each datasheet contains the following information:

- 1 Faction:** *The Formation's Faction is shown here by a symbol.*
- 2 Formation Symbol:** *Formation datasheets are identified by this symbol.*
- 3 Formation Name:** *Here you will find the name of the Formation.*
- 4 Formation Description:** *This section provides a background description of the Formation, detailing its particular strengths along with the tactics and methods it employs to wage war in the grim darkness of the 41st Millennium.*
- 5 Formation Composition:** *This section shows the number and type of units that make up the Formation.*
- 6 Formation Restrictions:** *This section details specific unit sizes, equipment, transport options and any further restrictions that you may be required to adhere to in order to include the Formation in your army.*
- 7 Formation Special Rules:** *Every Formation includes one or more special rules associated with the units that make up that Formation. The special rules for a Formation only apply to the units that make it up (even if there are other units of the same type in your army). Special rules that are unique to the Formation are described in full here, whilst others are detailed in the Special Rules section of Warhammer 40,000: The Rules.*



COUNTERSTRIKE CADRE



It is a common Tau tactic to maintain a fast-hitting formation able to respond quickly to enemy ploys. An aggressive Commander will hurtle these troops forwards to overwhelm the enemy in a storm of retributive firepower, while a leader with a more cautious, 'patient hunter' approach might hold this formation back from the front line, waiting to commit them until their arrival might tip the balance of battle. Either way, when they get their orders to move out, a Counterstrike Cadre surges forwards, rushing in to grab territory the foe thought secure, or manoeuvring into position in order to blunt an enemy advance. Maximising the use of the sensor suites and their advanced comm systems, the cadre's Fire Warriors lock onto their targets and level deadly volleys of fire from their pulse weapons.

FORMATION:

- 1 Pathfinder Team
- 3 Strike or Breacher Teams in any combination

RESTRICTIONS:

Each unit in the Formation must take a TY7 Devilfish as a Dedicated Transport.

SPECIAL RULES:

Precision Guidance: All units in this Formation that are shooting at enemies that are within 3" of an Objective Marker can re-roll failed To Hit rolls.

Tactical Surge: In their first turn, or the turn when they arrive from Reserve, all vehicles in this Formation are Fast vehicles.



RAPID INSERTION FORCE



A Rapid Insertion Force is the Tau formation that most often delivers the Mont'ka, or killing blow, to the foe. An XV25 Stealth Team infiltrates the battlefield, selecting critical targets before triggering their homing beacon. Above, the Tau air fleet swoop low, allowing Crisis Teams to airdrop from altitude, using their jet packs to quickly zone in on the Stealth Team's coordinates. Markerlights from the streaking air fleet light up targets below even as multiple XV8 Crisis Teams descend from the skies – their impressive arsenal of weapons already blazing away in unison at the enemy's greatest threat. An XV104 Riptide is usually assigned to the Rapid Insertion Force, adding its own tremendous firepower to the sudden battlesuit onslaught.

FORMATION:

- 1 unit of XV25 Stealth Battlesuits
- 3 units of XV8 Crisis Battlesuits
- 1 unit of XV104 Riptide Battlesuits

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Locked Coordinates: The Stealth Battlesuits in the Rapid Insertion Force must begin the game deployed on the battlefield. The rest of the forces in the Formation must be held in Reserve and arrive by Deep Strike. Any Crisis Battlesuits or Riptides from the Formation that choose to Deep Strike within 6" of this unit of Stealth Battlesuits do not scatter, and count all their weapons as Twin-linked in the ensuing Shooting phase.

RANGED SUPPORT CADRE



Advancing across no-man's land, the enemy has no idea that they are already under careful observation. Markerlight beams reach out from well-hidden Pathfinder Teams, painting their unwitting targets with invisible holo-beacons and streaming targeting data back to the hulking Broadside Battlesuits that make up the other half of the Ranged Support Cadre. One moment the foe is pressing forward into the fight, the next their vehicles explode in balls of flame and their warriors are plucked off their feet by hyper-velocity rail rifle fire. Panic and confusion consume the ranks as the onslaught intensifies and should the targets attempt to deal with their Pathfinder tormentors, they swiftly find themselves picked off by covering fire from the Broadside units, who do everything they can to protect their brave comrades.

FORMATION:

- 3 Pathfinder Teams
- 3 units of XV88 Broadside Battlesuits

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Dedicated Spotting Teams: Double the value of any markerlight counters placed by any of this Formation's Pathfinders if the counter is used by any of the Formation's Broadside units.

Hidden Observers: All Pathfinder Teams in this Formation have the Infiltrate and Shrouded special rules. The Shrouded special rule is lost immediately by any unit that moves from its starting location (for any reason), and by any unit that makes an attack with anything other than its markerlights.

Dedicated Support Units: The Broadside units in this Formation can provide Supporting Fire for the Pathfinder Teams in this Formation at any range, as long as it does not exceed their weapon's maximum range.



PIRANHA FIRESTREAM WING



Hurting to war in a great swarm, the light attack craft of the Piranha Firestream Wing skim low and fast over the wreckage of the battlefield. In their midst speeds a specially designated Target Acquisition Team, a lone Piranha whose crew are trained to optimise the firepower of their comrades' craft by spotting vulnerable prey for elimination. Like a shoal of aquatic predators the Piranhas dart and weave, strike and fade through the midst of the foe, leaving blazing wreckage and blasted corpses wherever they turn their guns. Often, this lethal assault is enough to utterly shatter lone enemy formations and eliminate scouting forces wholesale. However, during extended combat operations, the Piranha crews can withdraw, undergoing swift repairs and taking on fresh Drones before plunging back into the fight.

FORMATION:

- 4 units of TX4 Piranhas

RESTRICTIONS:

One unit must only include a single Piranha – this is the Target Acquisition Team (see right).

SPECIAL RULES:

Target Acquisition Team: At the start of your Shooting phase, you can pick an enemy unit that is within 36" of the Target Acquisition Team and in their line of sight. All Piranhas from this Formation (including the Target Acquisition Team) add 1 to their Ballistic Skill if they shoot at that unit in the Shooting phase, and also have the Tank Hunters special rule if the target unit is a vehicle.

Rearm and Refuel: If all of the surviving models from a unit in this Formation are within 6" of a table edge at the end of their Movement phase, the unit can enter Ongoing Reserves. When it returns to play, it does so at full strength with any damage repaired and Drones and seeker missiles replaced.

GHOSTKEEL WING



Like the shadows of undersea leviathans, the battlesuits of the Ghostkeel Wing slip across no-man's land, seeking the perfect moment to strike. Even as the stalking pilots exchange clipped comms bursts, their Stealth Drones swap silent data-blurbs of their own, syncing their stealth fields to protect not only the Ghostkeel suits but also any nearby Tau forces. When the Ghostkeel pilots sight their prey, they and their battlesuit AIs perfectly coordinate the attack. Technology and training combine to ensure every flashing volley of fire is more accurate and devastating than the last. Should the Ghostkeel pilots need to move in and finish their enemies at close range, their holophoton countermeasures combine to project phantom data and facsimile images of massed, charging Tau to confuse and disorient the foe.

FORMATION:

- 3 units of XV95 Ghostkeel Battlesuits

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Coordinated Attacks: In the Shooting phase, add 1 to the Ballistic Skill of a Ghostkeel from this Formation if it shoots at a unit that has already been shot at this phase by any other Ghostkeel from this Formation.

Networked Stealth Field: Any friendly unit with the Tau Empire Faction that is within 12" of two or more units from this Formation has the Stealth special rule. If the unit already has Stealth, it receives the Shrouded special rule. If it already has Stealth and Shrouded, it receives no additional benefit.

Phantom Charge: Enemy units cannot make Overwatch attacks against a unit from this Formation that is within 6" of another unit from this Formation when the Overwatch attack would be made.



SKYSWEEP MISSILE DEFENCE



Enemy aircraft entering the engagement zone of the Skysweep Missile Defence barely have the time to realise their error. Collision alarms howl, lock warnings ping madly, and the air fills with hurtling missiles. Even the best fighter aces cannot survive this sudden maelstrom of destruction, wrenching at their controls in a doomed attempt to escape. Coordinated by the skyweb uplink of their Devilfish command tank, the Sky Rays loose missile after missile into the sky, filling the air with fire and bringing swift annihilation to the foe. Even those enemy pilots who choose to go down fighting can only scream in frustration as the formation's early warning overrides track trajectories and coordinate evasive manoeuvres, ensuring the Sky Rays weave easily aside from missiles and bombs that should have sealed their fate.

FORMATION:

- 1 TY7 Devilfish
- 3 units of TX78 Sky Ray Gunships

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Command Override: Sky Ray Gunships within 12" of the Formation's Devilfish in the Shooting phase can fire any number of their remaining seeker missiles.

Early Warning: As long as the Devilfish is not destroyed, all units in the Skysweep Missile Defence formation receive a 5+ cover save against shooting attacks made by enemy Flyers, Super-heavy Flyers, Flying Monstrous Creatures and Flying Gargantuan Creatures.

ETHEREAL COUNCIL



Even a single Ethereal inspires selfless courage and total determination in the Tau around them, so the Ethereal Councils that preside over most coalitions cause an almost desperate fanatical fervour to take hold of their followers. Truly, to fight before the Ethereal Council is to make war in the presence of the Tau'va personified. Beneath the gaze of so august a gathering, the warriors of the Fire caste fight like never before, utterly sure of their race's supremacy and the impossibility of defeat. Fatal wounds are shrugged off as mere annoyances. Fire rates climb and climb, Tau Warriors aiming, firing and reloading with phenomenal efficiency and speed. Battlesuits soar like the wind over the heads of their foe to strike at the enemy's very heart, while no matter the horrors they face, the Tau fight on with confidence and courage.

FORMATION:

- 3-7 Ethereals ¹

¹ Aun'Va and/or Aun'Shi may be taken in place of Ethereals in the council.

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

- Fearless

United Council: The members of the Ethereal Council form a single unit, and are treated as Characters rather than Independent Characters as long as at least two members of the council remain alive.

Fanatical Fervour: The range of the Failure is Not An Option special rule is increased from 12" to 24" for all of the models in the Ethereal Council that have the rule.

Collective Elemental Power: As long as the Ethereal Council has at least two members, it invokes all four elemental powers each turn instead of only one power per member. The Ethereal Council, and all friendly non-vehicle units that have the Tau Empire Faction within 12" of it, benefit from the effects of all four elemental powers until the start of the Council's next Movement phase.



DRONE-NET VX1-0



At first sight, foes often mistake the Drone-net VX1-0 for a Tau probe cluster or other nonthreatening target. It is an error for which they pay in blood. At an unspoken signal the Drones dart suddenly into battle, pulse carbines spitting a hail of searing blasts at the surprised foe. Marker Drones light up the Gun Drones' targets in quick succession, the networked AIs working with chilling efficiency to reduce enemy warriors to energy-scorched corpses. Return fire is useless; those rounds not dodged just explode harmlessly against the energy envelope projected by lurking Shield Drones. Triangulating and transmitting targeting data at phenomenal speeds, the Drones systematically gun down every designated hostile, before resuming their scouting formation and moving on in search of another threat to neutralise.

FORMATION:

- 4 or more units of Drones

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Collective Targeting Data: In the Shooting phase, add 1 to the Ballistic Skill of all Drones (including Drones that are not part of the Formation) as long as at least two units from this Formation are on the battlefield.

Enhanced Tactical Responses: All Drones in this Formation have the Interceptor, Jink, Outflank, Precision Shots and Split Fire special rules.

RIPTIDE WING



Few sights hold as much terror for the enemies of the Tau as does an XV104 Riptide bearing down upon them. Yet this mortal fear is magnified still further in the face of the Riptide Wing. With their reactor frequencies and battlesuit AI modules harmonised, the pilot of each Riptide is able to make use of the targeting data and failsafe protocols of its fellows. Thus, the Riptide Wing deploys its massive firearms with ferocious accuracy, while seeing a vastly improved – and significantly safer – energy yield from its nova reactors. Furthermore, should the perfect opportunity present itself or some all-but-insurmountable threat approach, the pilots can hand partial fire control to their networked AIs, increasing targeting and fire rate until a virtual monsoon of lethal energy is unleashed.

FORMATION:

- 3 units of XV104 Riptide Battlesuits

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Coordinated Attacks: In the Shooting phase, add 1 to the Ballistic Skill of a Riptide from this Formation if it shoots at a unit that has already been shot at this phase by any other Riptide from this Formation.

Networked Reactors: Each Riptide from this Formation that is within 6" of another Riptide from the Formation can re-roll failed Nova Reactor attempts.

Riptide Hailfire: Once per battle, this Formation can make a Riptide Hailfire attack. If it does so, any units from this Formation that did not move in their Movement phase can shoot twice in their Shooting phase, making each attack at a different target if desired. Carry out the shooting attacks separately, one after the other. The unit cannot move in the Assault phase of the same turn. If a model uses Ripple Fire in the turn in which it makes a Riptide Hailfire attack, it can fire the relevant weapon four times rather than twice.



AIR SUPERIORITY CADRE



Few races in the 41st Millennium understand the need for air superiority better than the Tau. The attack craft of the Air Superiority Cadre are one of the Tau's primary assets, a trio of deadly strike fighters who plunge into the fray at the first sign of enemy threats. Comprehensive networks of holo-targeters and predictive trajectory suites aid the pilots of the strike fighters as they dogfight furiously with the foe, correcting their aim so that almost every burst of fire sees another enemy plunge to the ground trailing flames and debris. With the skies kept clear, secondary Tau support flyers and spy Drones are able to hold position above the battlefield with greater ease, picking out targets for the troops on the ground.

FORMATION:

- 3 AX3 Razorshark Strike Fighters

RESTRICTIONS:

None.

SPECIAL RULES:

Air Superiority: In the Shooting phase, add 1 to the Ballistic Skill of all models from this Formation shooting at enemy Flyers, Super-heavy Flyers, Jetbikes, Skimmers, Flying Monstrous Creatures or Flying Gargantuan Creatures.

Hyperlinked Drone Network: As long as at least one model from the Formation is on the battlefield, then at the start of the Tau Shooting phase, the Tau player gains D3 markerlight counters that can be placed on any enemy units on the battlefield.

Skywatch: Units from this Formation automatically enter play from Reserves without a dice roll being made if there are any enemy Flyers, Super-heavy Flyers, Jetbikes, Skimmers, Flying Monstrous Creatures or Flying Gargantuan Creatures anywhere on the battlefield.

THE EIGHT



The Eight take to the battlefield as one, a band of heroic warriors piloting some of the most powerful battlesuits the Tau have ever created. Dynamic and deadly, the Eight fight in perfect concert with a skill that only decades as comrades in arms can forge. At the fore comes Farsight himself, the Dawn Blade flashing in the firelight of battle as he cuts through his foes. Bravestorm smashes aside tanks and monsters with his thrumming Onager Gauntlet even as Brightsword annihilates one victim after another with searing fusion energy. So it continues: Sha'vastos, making war with the wisdom of Puretide himself; O'Vesa, the ancient Earth caste scientist fighting from within the armoured cocoon of a mighty Riptide; the AI engram of master marksman Ob'lotai 9-0 stitching blasts across his enemies with every volley, while Shas'o Arra'kon and Torchstar annihilate swathes of foes with thunderous airbursts of shrapnel and roaring gouts of flame. Despite their rebel status, the Eight are an inspirational embodiment of the Tau warrior spirit, for whom no foe is too great, and no fight too desperate for victory. They are as devoted as any to the supremacy of the Tau race and it is this conviction that carries Farsight's elite to heroic victory over every foe that stands against them.

SPECIAL RULES:

- Independent Character
- Fearless
- Preferred Enemy

Unbreakable Bonds of Comradeship: Models from this Formation can provide Supporting Fire to a unit containing any models from this Formation if they are within 24" of each other, rather than 6".

Inspiring Leaders: As long as at least one model from this Formation is still alive and on the battlefield, all friendly units with the Tau Empire Faction have the Stubborn special rule.

'Faith is a powerful force indeed, it is true. We have our own faith – not in one of our number raised to godhood, but in a mutual destiny that cannot be denied.'

- Commander Farsight



FORMATION:

- **Commander Farsight**
- **Bravestorm:** Commander with XV8-02 Crisis 'Iridium' battlesuit, plasma rifle, flamer, stimulant injector, shield generator, 2 Gun Drones, Onager Gauntlet.
- **Brightsword:** Commander with twin-linked fusion blasters, advanced targeting system, stimulant injector, Shield Drone, Fusion Blades, Warscaper Drone.
- **Sha'vastos:** Commander with plasma rifle, flamer, shield generator, vectored retro-thrusters, 2 Gun Drones, Puretide Engram Neurochip.
- **O'Vesa:** Riptide Shas'vre with ion accelerator, twin-linked fusion blaster, Riptide shield generator, early warning override, stimulant injector, 2 Shielded Missile Drones, Earth Caste Pilot Array.
- **Ob'lotai 9-0:** Broadside Shas'vre with twin-linked high-yield missile pod, twin-linked smart missile system, velocity tracker, 2 Missile Drones, seeker missile, bonding knife ritual.
- **Shas'o Arra'kon:** Commander with plasma rifle, cyclic ion blaster, airbursting fragmentation projector, counterfire defence system, 2 Gun Drones, Repulsor Impact Field.
- **Torchstar:** Commander with two flamers, target lock, drone controller, 2 Marker Drones, Multi-spectrum Sensor Suite, Neuroweb System Jammer.

FORCES OF THE ENCLAVES

On these pages you will find special rules unique to armies from the Farsight Enclaves that reflect their tactics on the battlefield. You will also find new Warlord Traits, wargear and Tactical Objectives that you can use when fielding your Farsight Enclaves army in games of Warhammer 40,000.

FARSIGHT ENCLAVES SPECIAL RULES

Armies drawn from the Farsight Enclaves are slightly different to those found elsewhere in the Tau Empire. If you wish, you can say that any Tau Detachment or Formation in your army is from the Farsight Enclaves.

Formations and Detachments from the Farsight Enclaves use the Warlord Traits and Tactical Objectives from these pages instead of those in *Codex: Tau Empire*, and also have the special rules below.

BATTLESUIT SPEARHEAD

In a Farsight Enclaves Detachment or Formation, XV8 Crisis Battlesuits are Troops choices instead of Elites choices.

ORK HUNTERS

Units in a Farsight Enclaves Detachment or Formation have the Preferred Enemy (Orks) special rule when making close combat attacks.

TA'LISSERA BOND

Units in a Farsight Enclaves Detachment or Formation that have the option to take the Bonding Knife Ritual special rule must do so.

SIGNATURE SYSTEMS

Any character in a Farsight Enclaves Detachment or Formation that may select Signature Systems uses the Signature Systems of the Farsight Enclaves (opposite), at the points costs shown, instead of the Signature Systems from *Codex: Tau Empire*.

WARLORD TRAITS

When generating his Warlord Traits, a Warlord from a Farsight Enclaves Detachment or Formation may either roll on the Warlord Traits table in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules* or on the table to the right.



WARLORD TRAITS TABLE

D6 WARLORD TRAIT

1 The Way of the Short Blade: *The hero has made it his life's work to study the Way of the Short Blade, Farsight's groundbreaking treatise on close quarters battlesuit combat.* The Warlord has Weapon Skill 5. If your Warlord is not equipped with a battlesuit, re-roll this result.

2 Echoes of the Grand Master: *Through the teachings of Farsight, a portion of Commander Puretide's genius will sometimes blossom in the most gifted students.* The Warlord has one of the following special rules (choose which one as soon as this Warlord Trait is rolled): Counter-attack, Furious Charge, Monster Hunter, Stubborn or Tank Hunters.

3 The Way of the Broken Sword: *Commander Farsight teaches that a foe whose cohesion has been broken apart is already half beaten.* One use only. Declare your Warlord is using this ability at the start of one of your opponent's turns. Your opponent has a -1 modifier to Reserve Rolls he makes this turn.

4 The Fire Unquenchable: *The spark of flame in every Fire Warrior's heart is fanned to a blaze in the presence of this legendary hero.* The Warlord has the Fearless special rule. All friendly units with the Tau Empire Faction within 6" of the Warlord have the Stubborn special rule.

5 Countercrisis: *Farsight knows well when to strike without hesitation, and he teaches his Commanders the same.* Units of XV8 Crisis Battlesuits have a +1 modifier to their Reserve Rolls.

6 Through Surety, Destruction: *The Commander has optimised a specific firing solution, drilling his unit in a set piece kill that exemplifies Farsight's favoured Mont'ka philosophy.* One use only. Declare your Warlord is using this ability at the start of one of your Shooting phases. For the duration of the phase, the Warlord and his unit have the Shred special rule.

FARSIGHT ENCLAVES SIGNATURE SYSTEMS

The Signature Systems used in the Farsight Enclaves are, if anything, even rarer than their equivalents in the Tau Empire at large. Only one of each Signature System may be taken per army.

THE MIRRORCODEX.....50 POINTS

*After the Damocles Crusade, Farsight applied his genius to unravelling the Imperium's war doctrine, codifying the main tenets of both the *Tactica Imperialis* and the *Codex Astartes*. Farsight attempts the same with every alien species he encounters, incorporating what he learns into his *Da'thle'vral*, or 'Mirrorcodex'.*

If a model in your army has the Mirrorcodex, you can add 1 to your dice roll when Seizing the Initiative. Furthermore, if a model in your army is bearing the Mirrorcodex, roll a D6 at the beginning of each of your turns and consult the table below. The effects listed affect the bearer and all friendly units within 6", and last until the end of the turn.

D6 EFFECT

- 1-3 None
- 4 Preferred Enemy (Space Marines)
- 5 Preferred Enemy (Space Marines and Astra Militarum)
- 6 Preferred Enemy

SEISMIC FIBRILLATOR NODE.....45 POINTS

On his adopted home planet of Vior'los, O'Shovah bested the Ork Warlord Grog by turning the elements against him. Instrumental in these victories was the Seismic Fibrillator Node, an invention of Earth caste scientist O'Vesa. This disc-like device emits resonant frequencies of such power that they cause localised earth tremors. When used correctly, these tremors can be greatly magnified.

One use only. A model with the Seismic Fibrillator Node may use it at the beginning of any turn. Roll a D6. On the roll of a 1, there is no effect. On a 2+, all open ground within 36" is treated as difficult terrain, and all difficult terrain within 36" is treated as dangerous terrain. Roll a D6 at the end of each turn in which the Node's effects are in play. On a 1-4, the Node's effects cease. On a 5+, the Node's effects continue for the duration of the next turn.

WARSCAPER DRONE.....35 POINTS

Farsight never passes up an opportunity to use a world's topography and climate against the enemy. To achieve this, he sends out Warscaper Drones of his own invention before each engagement. The Drone's intelligence will augment the owner's own systems with detailed scans of the local environment, allowing him to draw the enemy into dangerous locations, without putting himself in harm's way.

Nominate a Drone purchased by the character from the Drones list – this is a Warscaper Drone in addition to its usual type. All models in the same unit as the Warscaper Drone have the Move Through Cover, Outflank and Acute Senses special rules. Furthermore, any enemy unit that is both outside of its deployment zone and within 12" of a Warscaper Drone treats difficult terrain as dangerous terrain.

FUSION BLADES

30 POINTS

This peculiar but deadly innovation was created at the request of the third Commander Brightsword. They are, in appearance, heavily modified fusion blasters, but in truth, they are miracles of science. When the firing impulse is sustained, each weapon can fire a constant stream of energy that blazes from the muzzle of the gun like a blade of pure light. They consume an incredible amount of energy, however, and are prone to shorting out in the midst of battle.

Commander with twin-linked fusion blaster only. Replace one twin-linked fusion blaster's profile with the following:

	Range	S	AP	Type
Shooting	18"	8	1	Assault 1, Melta, Twin-linked
Melee	-	8	1	Melee, Armourbane, Blind, Power Outage

Power Outage: Roll a D6 at the end of every Assault phase in which the Fusion Blades used their Melee profile. On the roll of a 1, neither the Shooting nor Melee profile may be used for the rest of the game.

EARTH CASTE PILOT ARRAY.....30 POINTS

The squat, muscular physiology of the Earth caste makes them ill-fitting pilots for their famous battlesuits. In the Farsight Enclaves, however, it is not unheard of for a battlesuit to be built to accommodate an Earth caste pilot. The honour of donning the Hero's Mantle has been granted to very few such individuals, but an Earth caste pilot can judge a battlesuit's accuracy and energy tolerances far better than his Fire caste equivalent, even if his skill at close quarters battle leaves much to be desired.

Models with battlesuits only. The model re-rolls all rolls of 1 To Hit in the Shooting phase, and may re-roll the dice when using a Nova Reactor. However, their Weapon Skill is 1.

TALISMAN OF

ARTHAS MOLOCH.....25 POINTS

The artefact world of Arthas Moloch was little more than a devastated wasteland when the Farsight Expedition arrived. Yet they recovered a number of strange artefacts there, this hexagrammatic talisman among them. Farsight has seen first hand that the talisman protects the wearer and those around him from baleful energies, though neither he nor his advisors have the faintest idea of how it works.

The Talisman of Arthas Moloch confers a 5+ invulnerable save. In addition, the bearer and all friendly units within 12" add 2 to their Deny the Witch rolls.

ARMY OF THE FARSIGHT ENCLAVES

Dawn Blade Contingents are used exclusively by Tau forces from the Farsight Enclaves. The rules below will allow you to organise the models in your collection of Tau miniatures to represent a Dawn Blade Contingent in your games of Warhammer 40,000.

CHOOSING AN ARMY

When choosing an army to play a game of Warhammer 40,000, there are two main ways of organising your collection. These are the Unbound method, which means taking whichever units you like, and the Battle-forged method, which is more rigid but has extra benefits. Both are described fully in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*.

If you are using the Unbound method, simply use the datasheets that correspond to the models in your collection. If you are using the Battle-forged method, you will instead need to organise the Tau models in your collection into Detachments. This is a fun process in its own right. The most common of these are the Combined Arms and Allied Detachments. Note that you can also include any of the Formations presented in this section as part of a Battle-forged army.

The Dawn Blade Contingent you can see below can be included in any Tau Battle-forged army. Unlike the

Detachments shown in *Warhammer 40,000: The Rules*, it has a Force Organisation Chart whose slots are a combination of Formations and Army List Entries instead of Battlefield Roles. However, it still has compulsory and optional elements, as well as Restrictions and Command Benefits, just like any other Detachment.

Although units cannot normally belong to more than one Detachment, units from a Formation that is part of a Dawn Blade Contingent are an exception. They count as part of both their Formation and the Detachment, and have all associated Command Benefits and special rules. If your Warlord is part of a Formation or an Army List Entry that makes up part of a Dawn Blade Contingent, that entire Dawn Blade Contingent is your Primary Detachment.

Some of the Formations below refer to *Codex: Tau Empire* (2015). These Formations can also be found in *War Zone Damocles: Kauyon*. If you have either of these books you will have the rules for the relevant Formation.

RESTRICTIONS:

This Detachment must include at least one Core choice. For each Core choice you must include between 1 and 10 Auxiliary choices (in any combination) and up to one Command choice. Only the datasheets listed here may be included in this Detachment.

The Dawn Blade Contingent is a Farsight Enclaves Detachment.

COMMAND BENEFITS:

Ideal Mission Commander: If this Detachment is chosen as your Primary Detachment, you can choose to re-roll the result on the Warlord Traits table.

Killing Blow: At the start of each enemy turn, secretly record the identity of one enemy unit. At the start of your turn, reveal which unit it was that you picked. You can re-roll failed To Wound and Armour Penetration rolls against that unit for the rest of your turn.



Command
0-1 per Core



Core
1+



Auxiliary
1-10 per Core



HUNTER CADRE
See Codex: Tau Empire



RETALIATION CADRE
See Codex: Tau Empire



CONTINGENT HEADQUARTERS

- 1 Commander or Commander Farsight
- 1 unit of XV8 Crisis Bodyguards



THE EIGHT

DAWN BLADE CONTINGENT

The Dawn Blade Contingent allows you to field the distinctive armies of the Farsight Enclaves on the Warhammer 40,000 battlefield. Whether you wish to represent a Commander expanding the domain of the Farsight Enclaves, or defending them against alien attacks, the choices below offer a great way to pick your army.

For example, Sophie's Tau Empire collection consists of Commander Farsight, a Commander, two Cadre Fireblades, one XV8 Crisis Bodyguard Team, a unit of XV8 Crisis Battlesuits, three Strike Teams, two Kroot Carnivore squads, two Pathfinder Teams, an XV104 Riptide, an XV88 Broadside Team and three AX3 Razorshark Strike Fighters.

If Sophie wishes to organise her collection using the Battle-forged method, all of her units need to be part of a Detachment or a Formation. Sophie achieves this by choosing a Dawn Blade Contingent and a Combined Arms Detachment from Warhammer 40,000: The Rules.

The Dawn Blade Contingent in Sophie's army consists of one Core choice, one Command choice and one Auxiliary choice. Specifically, it consists of a Hunter Cadre (a Commander, a Cadre Fireblade,

her XV8 Crisis Team, all of her Strike and Pathfinder Teams, her Riptide and her Broadside Team), a Contingent Headquarters (Commander Farsight and a Crisis Bodyguard Team), and an Air Superiority Cadre (all of her Razorshark Strike Fighters).

Sophie's other Cadre Fireblade (HQ) doesn't fit in the Hunter Cadre, but when she combines it with her two units of Kroot Carnivores (Troops), she can form a Combined Arms Detachment.

As all of her units belong to a Detachment or a Formation, Sophie's army is a Battle-forged army. The units that are part of the Dawn Blade Contingent therefore have the Killing Blow Command Benefit, whilst those that are part of the Combined Arms Detachment have the Objective Secured Command Benefit. Finally, Sophie chooses Commander Farsight to be her Warlord – the Dawn Blade Contingent is therefore her Primary Detachment.



COUNTERSTRIKE CADRE

- 1 Pathfinder Team
- 3 Strike or Breacher Teams in any combination



PIRANHA FIRESTREAM WING

- 4 units of TX4 Piranhas



AIR SUPERIORITY CADRE

- 3 AX3 Razorshark Strike Fighters



RAPID INSERTION FORCE

- 1 unit of XV25 Stealth Battlesuits
- 3 units of XV8 Crisis Battlesuits
- 1 unit of XV104 Riptide Battlesuits



FIREBASE SUPPORT CADRE

See Codex: Tau Empire



DRONE-NET VX1-0

- 4 or more units of Drones



RANGED SUPPORT CADRE

- 3 Pathfinder Teams
- 3 units of XV88 Broadside Battlesuits



ASSIGNED AIR CASTE ASSET

- 1 AX39 Sun Shark Bomber or 1 AX3 Razorshark Strike Fighter



ALLIED ADVANCE CADRE

See Codex: Tau Empire

FARSIGHT ENCLAVES TACTICAL OBJECTIVES

Presented below are six Tactical Objectives to use in your games of Warhammer 40,000 that are exclusive to Farsight Enclave armies, and which reflect Farsight's unique methods of waging war.

If your Warlord belongs to a Farsight Enclaves Detachment or Formation, the following Tactical Objectives replace the Tactical Objectives (numbers 11-16) in *Codex: Tau Empire*.

If a Warhammer 40,000 mission has the Tactical Objectives special rule, players use the normal rules for using Tactical Objectives with the following exception: when a Farsight Enclaves player generates a Capture & Control objective (numbers 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 or 16), use the corresponding Farsight Enclaves Tactical Objective instead, as shown in the table to the right. Other Tactical Objectives (numbers 21-66) are generated normally.

D66	RESULT
11	Targets of Opportunity
12	Rapid Strike
13	Decisive Blow
14	Concentration of Fire
15	Application of Force
16	Avoid the Killing Strike

11 TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY

TYPE: FARSIGHT ENCLAVES

It is important to identify targets of opportunity, destroying them swiftly with massed firepower.

Declare that you are going to attempt to achieve this objective at the start of any of your turns, and then pick up to 3 enemy units. Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn for each unit you picked, but only if all of them have been completely destroyed.

12 RAPID STRIKE

TYPE: FARSIGHT ENCLAVES

A sure way to achieve victory is to use your most mobile forces to rain a rapid series of attacks upon the foe.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn if at least one enemy unit was completely destroyed by a unit that arrived from Reserves during the same turn.

13 DECISIVE BLOW

TYPE: FARSIGHT ENCLAVES

Landing a swift and decisive blow by seizing as many objectives as possible will win you the initiative.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of the turn if you control at least twice as many Objective Markers as your enemy (or at least two Objectives Markers if the enemy does not control any).

14 CONCENTRATION OF FIRE

TYPE: FARSIGHT ENCLAVES

Concentrate your firepower to ensure victory!

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn if the first enemy unit attacked in your Shooting phase is completely destroyed in the Shooting phase. Score D3 Victory Points instead if the first two enemy units attacked are completely destroyed, and D3+3 Victory Points if the first three enemy units are completely destroyed.

15 APPLICATION OF FORCE

TYPE: FARSIGHT ENCLAVES

Attacking the right foe at the right time with an overwhelming application of force can break the enemy's will to fight.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your turn if two or more of your units charge a single enemy unit. Score D3 Victory Points instead if the enemy unit is completely destroyed by the end of your Assault phase.

16 AVOID THE KILLING STRIKE

TYPE: FARSIGHT ENCLAVES

Do not get ensnared in a war of attrition – withdraw and prepare another strike.

Score 1 Victory Point at the end of your second or subsequent turn if no units in your army were completely destroyed in your turn or the preceding enemy turn.

DESIGNER'S NOTE – TACTICAL OBJECTIVES CARD DECK

If you own a deck of Farsight Enclaves Tactical Objective Cards, you can generate your Tactical Objectives by shuffling the deck and drawing the top card instead of rolling a D66. These should be kept face up, so your opponent can see which Tactical Objectives you have generated, unless the mission you are playing instructs you otherwise.

WHAT'S NEXT

YOUR COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO THE FORCES OF THE TAU EMPIRE - FULL RULES FOR EVERY UNIT AND DETAILED BACKGROUND ON THE WARRIORS OF THIS YOUNG AND DYNAMIC RACE.



CREDITS

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