



VEIL OF DARKNESS

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SCENE ONE - EXT. DAMNOS

ATMOS: THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE

THE UNDYING: I am the Undying, I am
doom incarnate...

He towered over me, this monster of living metal. He wore a crown with a red gemstone, torcs banded his mechanised arms and an azure pectoral hung around his neck. These were royal trappings. Here I fought a king of the dead, a robotic anachronism of an old and conceited cultured, full of darkest anima.

Necrons they were called. His regal status only spurred me on.

SICARIUS: We are the slayers of
kings!

I spat the words in anger at the gilded monster before me.

FX - A SWORD BEING DRAWN. THE CRACKLING OF ENERGY

He and I, we fought alone. None interfered. I had drawn only my sword, and would engage it thusly. For my victory to have any meaning, this was how it had to be. Even terms, his crackling war-scythe matched against my venerable Tempest Blade. But in the end, it was not my sword that was found wanting...

After a savage duel, he cut me deeply. No foe had ever done that before. And with blood filling my mouth, I fell. I, Cato Sicarius, Master of the Watch, Knight Champion of Macragge, Grand Duke of Talassar and High Suzerain of Ultramar, fell.

And as the veil of darkness wrapped around me like a funerary shroud, I heard the monster's words again...

THE UNDYING: I am doom.

**SCENE TWO - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA
APOTHECARION**

**ATMOS: BEEPING OF INSTRUMENTS AND THE
WHOOSH OF PUMPS**

FX - COUGHS, A ROAR AND BANGING ON GLASS

I came around coughing up amniotic fluid, spraying the inside of the revivification casket. I roared, thundering my fist against the glass, my muscles and nerves suddenly aflame.

SICARIUS: (half-choking) Release me!

**FX - CLAMPS DISENGAGING, RELEASE OF
PRESSURE**

Locking clamps around the casket disengaged, admitting me back to the world of the living. I did so breathing hard, sat in a half-capsule of briny, viscous liquid and murderously staring down at my Apothecary.

VENATIO: Welcome back, brother-captain.

Lathered in gelatinous filth, I scowled.

SICARIUS: Venatio.

My Apothecary had the good grace to nod. He was wearing his full armour-plate, white to identify his vocation as a medic rather than the Ultramarines blue ubiquitous to our Chapter, but went without a helmet. An ageing veteran of my command squad, Venatio's hair was fair, closely cropped, and he had dark green eyes that had seen too much of death.

It was dark in the apothecarion, shadows suggesting the various machines and devices the Chapter medics employed in the service of preserving life. The air reeked of counterseptic and a fine mist clouded the floor. It was clean, cold; a desolate place. How many had come through these halls bloody and broken? How many had arrived and never left? Always too many.

I made to rise, but Venatio lifted a gauntleted hand to stop me.

SICARIUS: Don't presume you can keep me from climbing out of this casket.

The hand gesture became placatory.

VENATIO: Let me at least run a full bio-scan first.

FX - BEEPING AND WHIRRING OF BIO-SCANNER

Venatio had the device in his other hand and was already conducting his test, so I endured the amniotic filth a little longer.

When he was done, I refused his proffered hand and extricated myself without his help. My side ached. Once I was out of the casket and standing on the tiled floor, I looked down and saw why. An angry scar puckered my flesh from where the Undying's war-scythe had cleaved me.

VENATIO: It's remarkable that you are even alive, let alone walking, brother-captain.

He consulted more biometric data from his scanner.

SICARIUS: I'll do more than that.

It was a vengeful promise, but I realised that I had no knowledge of what happened after I had collapsed.

SICARIUS: What of Damnos? Were the Second victorious?

Venatio's already severe expression darkened, pinching together the age lines of the Apothecary's face.

VENATIO: After your defeat, Agrippen and Lord Tigurius rallied the men. But we had badly underestimated the enemy and were forced to evacuate. Damnos is lost.

He lowered his voice.

VENATIO: So too Venerable Agrippen.

**FX - KNUCKLES CRACKING; FLESH IMPACTING
ON GLASS**

I clenched my fist so hard, the knuckles cracked. It was a sparse chamber we occupied; much of the apothecarion's equipment was situated at its periphery with only my amniotic casket within striking distance. I hit it hard, and put a fissure in the glass. Had I my Tempest Blade to hand, I might have cut it apart. Galling was not the word.

I was about to ask Venatio to tell me more when another voice from the shadows, a presence I hadn't noticed in my recently revived state, interrupted.

AGEMMAN: I had to see it for myself...

A son of Ultramar - *the* son of Ultramar, if some amongst the Chapter were to be believed - stepped into the light. He too was fully clad, his plumed helmet sat in the crook of his left arm, a ceremonial gladius strapped to his left leg. Gilt-edged shoulder guards and breastplate shone in the lambent lume-strip above us, and his war-plate was festooned with the laurels of his many years of vaunted service.

SICARIUS: Severus.

I bowed my head out of respect for the veteran but his stern expression, hardened further by his scars and the

platinum studs embedded in his bald forehead, suggested he came here with ill news.

AGEMMAN: Cato.

I hated the fact he used my given name, as I knew he hated me doing so first. We were rivals, he and I. Severus Agemman was my predecessor as Captain of 2nd. He in turn succeeded Saul Invictus after the great hero fell at Macragge. Now he stood as Calgar's right hand, and I beneath him.

We were rivals because our war philosophy was very different. Agemman was a blunt but effective adherent to the Codex Astartes, whereas I interpreted our primarch's teachings and was less predictable. Some have said reckless. Only Agemman has ever said so to my face.

He smiled, but it was a cold, pitiless gesture.

Out with it then.

AGEMMAN (cont): I wish I could report that I was here merely to see the dead brought back to life...

Agemman gestured to the formidable scar raking my side. The smile faded to the thin, hard line of his mouth.

AGEMMAN (cont): But I cannot. You are to stand before Lord Calgar. The Chapter Master would have knowledge

of what happened on Damnos and why we returned to the Empire in ignominious defeat.

My eyes narrowed, but I held my temper. An argument here, now, with Venatio looking on, would serve no good purpose.

SICARIUS: And am I to be held responsible for this defeat? I know whilst I yet stood, the warriors of the Second were not routed.

Agemman refused to be baited. He was rigid, and a pain in the arse for that.

AGEMMAN: You have six hours to prepare your testimony.

SICARIUS: My testimony? Am I to be judged, then?

My rival betrayed no emotion, though I refuse to believe he did not take some petty pleasure in all of this.

AGEMMAN: The events on Damnos were disastrous. Questions must be asked.

I began to walk towards the chamber door, still dripping.

SICARIUS: Then let us go now. I have nothing to hide and don't need six hours to realise that either.

Agemman put his armoured bulk in my path.

AGEMMAN: Cease this wanton disregard for orders, Sicarius! Your reckless behaviour is what has brought you to this point.

He calmed down, though it took some effort to reassert the mask of control he had been wearing ever since addressing me from the shadows.

AGEMMAN (cont): It seems you have yet to learn that.

SICARIUS: Don't speak to me like I am a neophyte, Agemman.

My voice held a warning.

SICARIUS (cont): As they have on countless occasions, my swift actions prevented an earlier defeat. I prefer to win hard battles, not to reap the hollow glory of easy campaigns. Next time you behold my banner on the field, look at the victories upon it and then look to your own.

I goaded him out of a desire to return the disrespect he had just afforded me. I vaunted the First, and their captain. They were some of the bravest and most capable warriors in the Chapter, but that didn't mean I had to like them.

Agemman had every right to strike me. To my irritation, he resisted, but as he spoke through clenched teeth I knew he'd come close.

AGEMMAN: Six hours.

Agemman left the apothecarion without another word. He'd be saving them for my trial, no doubt.

To his credit, Venatio said nothing. He merely gave his professional report.

VENATIO: You are fit to resume your duties, brother-captain.

At a command from the Apothecary, a serf entered the room from a side chamber and began scraping the remaining amniotic gel from my skin.

I nodded to Venatio, still seething after Agemman's exit.

SICARIUS: Tell me, Brother-Apothecary. Where are my armour and weapons?

VENATIO: The Techmarines have been repairing them. I understand there was much damage to the war-plate, in particular. You'll find them in the armourium. East wing.

Dismissing the serf, I grunted a word of gratitude to Venatio and left for the weapon workshops. Something in the penumbra around the apothecarion had set me on edge and I desired the return of my war trappings as soon as possible.

**SCENE THREE - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA
ARMOURIUM**

**ATMOS: THE ROAR OF MACHINES; WEAPONS AND
ARMOUR BEING WORKED ON ANVILS; CHANTING**

The Fortress of Hera is a vast and near-impregnable bastion. It is the noble seat of Macragge, the slab-sided barrack house of the Ultramarines Chapter, and has always been so. Its armouria, battle-cages and shrines are many. We all worship at them in our own way, these temples of violence and honour. I found Techmarine Vantor's easily enough.

Like the apothecarion, it was dark, but far from cold. The armourium radiated heat. It prickled the air, raked my nostrils. There was smoke and flame, ash and the taste of metal. Great engines tended by serf-engineers and cyborganic servitors pummelled iron and steel.

Here, the artefacts of war were repaired and manufactured.

On a metal dais, a Rhino armoured transport lay gutted, whilst incense was burned and canticles of function were invoked. At a great anvil, blades were tempered and honed by hammer-armed servitors. Workshops were arrayed in multitudes with their rows of dark iron benches and churning machineries.

All of this fell into insignificance, however. For nearest to me was a servo-armed Techmarine, stooped over a suit of magnificent power armour.

It was good to see it again. It would feel even better to don it.

SICARIUS: Brother...

I announced my presence at the armourium's door, which had slid open to admit me into the expansive workshop.

Vantor turned at the sound of my voice, his bionics grinding noisily as he moved. He bowed slightly.

VANTOR: Captain Sicarius, I have almost finished my ministrations to your armour.

Spoken through the vox-grille covering his mouth, the Techmarine's voice was as mechanised as his right arm and leg.

VANTOR (cont): I'm sure you'll be pleased to learn that like you, it yet lives.

I always found it curious, the way the adherents of the Cult Mechanicus regarded inanimate adamantium and ceramite. Vantor had not only been repairing my armour - he had been soothing its machine-spirit too. As a Techmarine, Vantor wore not the blue of the Ultramarines but the red of the Martian world where he had received his clandestine training. Only his shoulder pad remained the blue of Ultramar as concession to his dual fealty.

SICARIUS: Indeed I am, brother. I long to wear it again, and to feel the grip of my Tempest Blade in my-

I stopped abruptly, my eye drawn to a work-team of servitors labouring at the back of the chamber. I could not disguise my anger.

SICARIUS: What in Terra's name is that?

Beyond the honest industry of the armourium, beyond the slow beaten battle-plate and forged blades, beyond the tanks and engines, was an abomination. Vantor turned, incredulous.

VANTOR: Frag, shrapnel. They are what remnants of the enemy we managed to salvage before the evacuation.

Ranked up, steadily being logged and categorised, examined and tested, were pieces of the necron. Heads, fingers, limbs, even broken portions of their

weaponry were under heavy scrutiny by the Techmarine's lobotomised serfs. I counted over twenty different benches of the material.

The urge to grasp my sword deepened.

SICARIUS: They are inactive, I take it?

Vantor nodded.

VANTOR: Of course, but by studying even the inert pieces of necron technology we can develop our knowledge of them.

The fact the Techmarine could neither see nor appreciate the danger in bringing this flotsam into our fortress-monastery only served to show the gulf between us in sharper relief.

I walked through the workshop, Vantor following, and approached one of the work benches where a servitor was toiling over an array of limbs, heads, even torso sections. I reached out to one of the silver skulls, its rictus grin mocking me even in destruction, but fell just short of touching it.

SICARIUS: How are they even here? I am no expert on the necron, but aren't they supposed to disappear when destroyed?

Vantor came to stand beside me. A blurt of binaric dismissed the servitor and set it to another task.

VANTOR: Apparently the Damnosian natives found a way to retard that ability through magnetism.

I frowned at Vantor.

SICARIUS: Really? A human colony with rudimentary engineering ability achieves what the Mechanicus could not using only electro-magnets and a theory?

VANTOR: I was similarly unconvinced, and yet...

He gestured to the workshop full of deactivated components.

SICARIUS: I would not have sanctioned this research.

My gaze lingered on one skull in particular. There was something strangely familiar about it.

The Techmarine blinked, his very human eyes like flashes of burnt umber.

VANTOR: Lord Calgar agrees that our knowledge of this enemy is of paramount importance if we are to fight it effectively.

SICARIUS (absently): We fought effectively enough.

I drew closer to the skull. Like a siren it seemed to call to me, beckoning, reminding...

FX - SOUNDS FADE AWAY

I felt the darkness close, the veil around me tightening and suffocating. Vantor's next words were lost in this fog, as was my response. All I could see was the skull, the eyes aglow, its rictus grin. I reached for my blade, but grasped air and neither hilt nor scabbard. Legs buckling, unable to hold my weight, I fell to my knees and gasped.

The air would not come. I was drowning with no ocean for miles, save the one of oil and blackness devouring me. Everything surrendered to the dark. Vantor, the armourium, the serfs, my armour - all was consumed. Only I remained, staring down at the lidless orbs of that gilded, grinning skull.

THE UNDYING: I am doom...

FX - BOOTS CRUNCHING ON ICE. A COLD WIND AND A RUMBLE

The last of my breath ghosted the air as an icy chill over came me. I felt ice underfoot, though I was still inside the fortress-monastery, and a low rumbling tremor in its frigid depths...

FX - ATMOS SOUNDS RETURN

I breathed and the darkness crowding my vision bled away at once like ink dispersed in water. The ice melted. I resurfaced from the vision. The necron skull was in my hands, grasped tight. Its eyes were lifeless, dead in their

sockets, a rusty patina weathering cheeks, pate and temples of gunmetal grey. Not gold. Not the king. Not here.

Vantor was gone - only the servitors were left - and I assumed he had let me stay here to peruse the battlefield relics as if I alone could unlock some secret by merely looking at them. He hadn't realised I had become lost in a dream, and nor had I.

The wound in my side flared anew and I grimaced to keep the pain at bay.

My armour was waiting for me, a gift from Vantor. I took it, eager to leave the armourium and the unquiet resonance it had stirred within. I needed to ease my mind. It had been never so pure and focused as when in combat. I headed at once for the battle-cages.

**SCENE FOUR: INT. FORTRESS OF HERA
BATTLE-CAGES**

**ATMOS: WARRIOR SPARRING AGAINST
AUTOMATED OPPONENT**

I found an old comrade in the lonely cages.

Daceus was the only warrior sparring that night and I crossed a gloomy threshold of empty cages, their servitors dormant and inactive within, to reach him.

SICARIUS: Brother-sergeant.

I called up to him, having to raise my voice above the punishing din of his sword blade striking the vital kill-points of the combat servitor he had chosen to pit himself against. It was a grossly uneven contest, of course. Daceus could have wrecked the machine

many times over but was here to practise his form and test his stamina, not incur the wrath of the Techmarines by needlessly dismantling servitors.

DACEUS: Pause routine.

His voice was breathless as he looked down at me, his face mildly beaded with sweat. Daceus saluted, sword in front of his body.

DACEUS (cont): Brother-captain, I am glad to see you returned to us.

SICARIUS: I hoped to bless the reunion with honest combat.

Ever the martial exemplar, Daceus stepped aside and hammered the icon which opened the cage door with his fist.

DACEUS: Then let us see what benedictions you might offer.

Already, he was measuring my combat efficacy, observing, strategising. My brother-sergeant wanted to know how sharp my fighting edge was. So did I.

Using the Tempest Blade in the battle-cage would dishonour the weapon and put me at an unfair advantage, so I selected a training gladius from the rack to match the one wielded by my opponent. The balance was good, the blade straight and sharp despite the many hours of practice bouts it must have endured. It was no master-crafted weapon, but it was a worthy one.

DACEUS (cont): Helmets on or off, brother?

Here in the cages, once blades were drawn, rank ceased to have meaning.

SICARIUS: Off. I want to be able to breathe and use my senses without hindrance.

DACEUS: Agreed. No strikes above the neck then. First to three hits?

I nodded, taking up a fighting stance in my power armour. Vantor would be annoyed if I scratched it so soon, but I believed war-plate needed scars before going into battle proper.

SICARIUS: Begin.

FX - WARRIORS SPARRING. BLADES ON ARMOUR OR CLASHING AS APPROPRIATE

Daceus's first thrust was quick and aimed at my torso. I barely parried it before a second lunge caught me off guard and took a chip out of my plastron. We paused and returned to our initial engagement positions.

SICARIUS (cont): First hit is yours, brother.

I tried, and failed, to hide my annoyance.

SICARIUS (cont): Again.

Daceus chopped downwards, high to low, and I managed a hasty block in response. I stepped back, inviting him

to advance, which he did with a swift back-to-forehand slash. I used a hilt guard to protect myself and forged a jab of my own, but Daceus deflected it easily and used the kinetic momentum to rotate his blade into a half circling up-and-over slash that smashed against my clavicle and put me down on one knee.

I was sweating, but Daceus returned to the initial engagement position and did not dishonour me by offering a hand up.

DACEUS: That's two.

He said it with the barest hint of a smile.

Now I was burning with shameful anger. Returning to position, I adopted a ready stance.

SICARIUS: Again.

This time I swept in low, beneath the crossways slash crafted by my opponent, and went in under Daceus's guard. He stabbed downwards, a makeshift block, and our blades clashed. But the force pushed his sword hand outwards and I used the weakness to hammer my shoulder into his solar plexus.

Daceus reeled, staggering back to regain footing, but I pressed my attack, first using an overhead slash to break open his flailing guard and then delivering a diagonal uppercut that put a groove in his plastron and my opponent on the ground.

We went again, this time exchanging a flurry of blows, feints and blocks. Our blades became a blur of clashing steel and I began to feel like my old self again. After a brutal riposte, I swapped hands mid-sword flourish and smacked the flat of my gladius against Daceus's gorget.

He gasped as the blade came close to his neck and a foul stroke. I ignored his slight shock, and returned to position.

SICARIUS (cont): Evens, two hits apiece. Again.

FX - A DRUMBEAT IN TIME WITH TWIN HEARTBEATS

As I moved through the blade disciplines, the finely crafted sword strokes, I felt a background pulse directly behind my eyes. It was like an intense headache, a drum inside my skull, pounding in time with my heartbeats.

FX - SOUNDS FADE AWAY

Shadows flooded the arena that housed the battle-cages. It had been this way since I had entered, but now the darkness began to coalesce and I felt it close around me like a slowly clenching fist. A silent predator lying in wait, it crouched at the edge of my vision and from somewhere distant I felt a chill enter my bones.

It was snowing, the battle-cage far away and forgotten as an arctic tundra

overwhelmed it in my senses. At the edge of a frost-encrusted ruin, the veil of darkness persisted. Through the black fog, an enemy emerged.

THE UNDYING: I am doom...

Beneath my feet, the ice trembled like the beating of some immense heart. The king had returned, in all his gilded and terrible majesty.

We clashed, I with the Tempest Blade crackling in my gauntleted fist, the primarch's name on my lips like an unsheathed sword.

FX - THE CRACKLING OF ENERGY AND THE CLASH OF BLADES

The king swung his war-scythe around, the great reaping edge like a crescent moon cut from the bleakest night and fashioned into a weapon. Our blades struck together in a cascade of sparks and we broke apart. I took a moment's respite, but the necron king needed none, his anima fuelled by some ancient will and driven by the machine he had surrendered his mortal flesh to become. Massive, overpowering, he loomed over me in seconds.

SICARIUS (roaring): Not again! I am a Lion of Macragge. I am Master of the Watch, a slayer of kings!

With fury born of desperation and hate, I hurled myself at the necron. His scythe haft shattered, sheared in two

by my blade and I battered his weary defence as he threw up his arms in surrender.

SICARIUS: No mercy for you.

I made the vow, raining down blows until my shoulder ached and my lungs were fit to burst.

Breath did not come. I was drowning again and the veil of darkness crept into my field of vision, smothering and denying me my prey.

SICARIUS: No! I will not be cheated of my victory. Not again, not-

As I collapsed, retching what I thought was fluid from my chest, but bringing up only air, I saw Daceus. His gladius was broken, split along the blade. His vambraces were hacked apart. His face was awash with shock and anger.

SICARIUS: My brother...

I struggled to gasp, falling. Daceus, despite my wounding of him, rose up to catch me.

FX - THE CLANG OF ARMOUR ON ARMOUR

At the doleful clang of our power armour meeting, I resurfaced from the dream and the pool of dark imaginings in which I was choking.

DACEUS: Brother-captain...

He sounded panicked. I waved his concern away, and stood up unaided.

SICARIUS: I am all right. And you?

I gestured to his battered war-plate.

DACEUS: A scratch.

It was a lie. He frowned.

DACEUS (cont): What happened?

I saw no sense in hiding the truth, so I told him of what I had seen, of my slayer reborn, of the duel I thought I was fighting against him.

SICARIUS: I could have killed you, Daceus.

DACEUS: But you did not.

But I could have. I almost did. A remnant from Damnos, some revenant I had brought with me, lingered. I felt the chill of it in the air around me and the dull pain in my side. I saw it in the shadows, the veil of darkness which harboured monsters of cold steel and viridian fire.

Something in the gloom around us caught my attention and I seized the Tempest Blade, throwing a fresh sword from the rack to Daceus at the same time.

DACEUS: What is it?

The sergeant caught the blade easily and swung around, trying to follow my gaze.

SICARIUS (whispered): Are we alone?

Daceus nodded slowly and I eased open the door to the cage.

SICARIUS (cont): Not any more...

Together, we crept from the battle-cage and then spread out. My eyes never left the exact spot where I had seen movement, and I battle-signed the enclosing manoeuvre to the sergeant.

As well as the battle-cages themselves, the arena had a servitor rack. It was an automated station where deactivated combat-servitors yet to be invested with sparring protocols would wait until called upon. Some sixty of the automata were currently in the rack in three rows of twenty, one surmounting the other.

More machines. More cold steel. In the dingy arena hall, they did not look so dissimilar from the necrons displaced around the east wing armourium.

Daceus and I closed on the servitors' dormant forms. One in particular had drawn my eye. On Damnos we had seen necrons that clothed themselves in the rancid flesh of the dead, using their skins as a crude and scarcely effective form of camouflage.

I could almost swear the eye sockets of this one were aglow...

Not waiting for Daceus, I thrust with my blade, releasing an actinic blur of fused steel and energised brutality. Impaled on my sword, I wrenched the interloper from the servitor rack and

with a grunt threw it down for us to finish off.

Daceus stopped me.

DACEUS: Brother-captain...

He sounded concerned, but was looking at me and not our enemy.

DACEUS (cont): It is just a servitor. Not even active.

SICARIUS (breathed): Strength of Guilliman...

I let the Tempest Blade sag down by my side. He was right. It was just an automaton. Nothing more. No assassin clothed in flesh.

SICARIUS: Perhaps I left the care of Brother Venatio too soon.

To his credit, Daceus tried to reassure me.

DACEUS: You were in suspended animation coma, brother-captain. Some... side-effects are to be expected.

I grunted, the equivalent of a vocal shrug, and heard the chime of choral bells echo throughout the arena.

SICARIUS: Has it been that long?

Daceus's eyes narrowed in confusion.

DACEUS: Long for what?

SICARIUS: I am to stand before Lord Calgar and be judged for my command on

Damnós. I had thought I had longer to prepare.

DACEUS: It would be my honour to accompany you to the Hall of Ultramar, sir.

SICARIUS: Aye. Agreed.

I clapped Daceus on the shoulder. He was as good and loyal a soldier as any captain had a right to have in his service.

SICARIUS (cont): Gratitude, brother.

We left for the Hall of Ultramar and an audience with its regent and most august lord.

**SCENE FIVE - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA, THE
HALL OF ULTRAMAR**

ATMOS: THRONE ROOM SOLEMNITY

The Lord of Macragge was seated upon a throne like a battle king of old. Replete in his war panoply, my heart both swelled with pride and trembled with awe at the sight of Marneus Calgar. He wore his formal battle-plate, a ceremonial suit festooned with laurels and awards. A pair of hefty power gloves clothed his hands, which he rested regally on the throne arms. His hair was white as hoarfrost and he glowered through one organic eye at the officers in his midst. The other was a bionic, and even less welcoming.

CALGAR: Brother-captain. Come forward.

Here in the Hall of Ultramar, the great and noble were personified in statue form

and shadowed me as I walked the long processional to a place before my lord. I saw Invictus, Helveticus, Galatan and Titus, all measuring my worth with the weight of their marble stares. I would not be found wanting.

Daceus had come with me as far as the great bronze doors, and there I had bid him stay, despite his offer to the contrary. I didn't want him caught up in this. Any judgement would be mine to bear alone.

FX - SLOW BOOTSTEPS ON STONE

As I walked, I passed under great looming archways and saw again the shadows within the chamber's lofty vaults. I tried to avert my gaze, turning my mind to the matter at hand, but when my eyes alighted on Lord Calgar I saw a strange halo encircle his head. At first I continued with the slightest break in step, aware of not only Calgar's eyes upon me, but Severus Agemann's too and those of the Honour Guard of Macragge.

Then, as I drew closer, what I believed to be a trick of the light was revealed to be an actual glow. No, not merely a glow, a mark. It was viridian green, and I realised a fraction too late what it portended.

SICARIUS: Get down!

**FX - BOOTSTEPS BECOME FAST, URGENT.
WEAPONS BEING DRAWN**

Agemann reacted first to my warning, putting himself between me, as I ran down the processional, and Calgar, who was at the other end of it. He thought I had lost all sense and was preparing to knock some back into me. I had drawn my pistol, prompting the Honour Guard to draw arms also. Five bolt weapons were trained on my chest in an instant. My gaze went to the eaves above us, the shadows in the vaulted roof, and I pointed to get my brothers' attention and stop them from executing me.

SICARIUS (cont): Up there!

Agemann saw it too, crouched like an iron gargoye, the darkness as its cloak. A single eye betrayed its position, but we would be far too late to prevent it achieving its goal. In truth, the optic was a targeting matrix and Lord Calgar was in its crosshairs.

A long, slim rifle slid into its grasp. I watched it shoulder the weapon, aim it. Reality slowed, as if the assassin were chronologically a few seconds ahead of us and functioning in a different time stream.

FX - A SNIPER RIFLE FIRES ONCE, FOLLOWED BY CONTINUOUS PLASMA PISTOL AND BOLTGUN FIRE

A plume of viridian gas expelled from the rifle's vents like a breath. There was no recoil, only the expulsion of a missile that raked through the air. I

followed the missile's trajectory in my peripheral vision, triggering my pistol in the same moment and setting the vaults alight with a pulse of energised plasma. The others had seen the danger now and were discharging their own weapons into the time-shifted assassin above us.

**FX - THE CLATTER OF AN ARMoured BODY
FALLING TO THE STONE FLOOR**

Calgar grunted, the sound someone makes when they're gut-punched and the air is blasted from their lungs. Having got to his feet when the interloper had been discovered, he fell back and clattered into and out of his throne, half rolling down the steps that led up to his seat.

**FX - WEAPONS FIRE CONTINUES AND RUBBLE
FALLS TO THE GROUND**

We destroyed the archway where the assassin had made his nest, ripping up the shadows with streaks of blinding muzzle flash and plasma and bringing down a cascade of debris. This was the Hall of Ultramar and we had wrecked it like a band of careless thieves.

FX - WEAPONS FIRE STOPS

Time resumed, our weapons fell silent again, but the quarry was gone, slipped back into whatever darkness had spawned him. He hadn't merely escaped, he simply wasn't there anymore, phased out like

the necrons too badly damaged to self-repair. Only we hadn't destroyed him. Not even close.

With the immediate danger passed for now, Agemann was at Lord Calgar's side. The Honour Guard closed around them protectively like an armoured cocoon.

SICARIUS: Stay with the Chapter Master...

FX - BOOTSTEPS RUNNING ON STONE

I was running back down the processional, the vaunted marble heroes urging my every step. Every footfall I took was punctuated by a glance above me, back into the shadowed roof and searching for my enemy.

SCENE SIX - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA

ATMOS: ARMOURED BOOTS RUNNING ON STONE FLOOR.

FX - BRONZE DOORS BURST OPEN

Bursting through the bronze doors, I met Daceus. The brother-sergeant was armed, having clearly heard the gunfire from within.

DACEUS: What's happened?

I didn't linger, but kept on down the corridor intent on reaching the east wing armourium where I knew an answer would be waiting. Daceus kept step.

SICARIUS: Our enemy is in the Fortress of Hera. They have just tried to assassinate Lord Calgar.

DACEUS: Blood of Guilliman! Is he...?

I spared the brother-sergeant a stern glance.

SICARIUS: He lives. He will live.

Daceus would chastise himself for his doubt later; now we had to reach the armourium.

FX - SIRENS SHRIEK

I was about to raise Vantor on the vox to get a warning to the Techmarine when the shrieking alert sirens told me I was too late. Light from the lumens and glow-globes shrank to an amber wash that overlaid the halls of the fortress-monastery in sickly monochrome.

I activated the vox in my gorget.

SICARIUS: Agemman.

His reply was a few seconds late in coming.

AGEMMAN: <<We're headed for the apothecarion. Brother Venatio awaits us.>>

SICARIUS: The alert?

AGEMMAN: <<Is coming from the armourium in the east wing.>>

All my fears suddenly crystallised. The memory of the necron 'corpses' returned, those that were too badly damaged to self-repair but unable to phase out. Only they weren't damaged. It was a ruse and in our ignorance we had invited them into our bastion, our home.

I wanted to hit something, but instead I bit back my anger and answered Agemann.

SICARIUS: Sergeant Daceus and I are on our way there now.

I cut the link. The First Captain had enough to deal with.

SCENE SEVEN - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA EAST WING

ATMOS: ALERT SIRENS

As we entered the east wing, the corridors strangely abandoned, I saw the veil of darkness. Something writhed within it, something of cold steel with viridian eyes like balefires.

SICARIUS: Am I imagining that?

Shaking his head, Daceus racked his bolter slide and took aim at the mechanised horrors emerging from the shadows.

FX - AN ENERGISED BLADE SLICING THROUGH METAL

The Tempest Blade is a relic of Talassar, and I a descendent of that world's noblest household. I honoured my ancestors by bringing its fury to

my enemies. Necron exoskeleton is formidable but it is no match for a power sword such as this. They were warrior-caste, the foot soldiery of their darkling empire.

**FX - PLASMA BLASTS & ENERGISED BLADE.
NECRONS PHASING OUT**

The first I vaporised with a ball of incandescent plasma, the second I beheaded. My armour was impervious to their beam weapons and I was barely slowed as I hacked the arm off a third and then bifurcated its torso. Three necrons phased out in a cascade of howling energy.

FX - BOLTER SHOTS

Daceus neutralised three more with precise burst-fire from his bolter. Even when one of the mechanoids was a handspan from his face, the sergeant was unflinching and maintained strict fire discipline. He tore the thing apart at almost point blank range and let the frag pepper his armoured form.

When we were done, the necrons vanquished, we waded into the darkness looking for more, but the veil was thinning by then and in a few more seconds it disappeared entirely.

Daceus scowled.

DACEUS: How many of these things are we dealing with?

SICARIUS: Judging by what I saw dissected in Vantor's workshop, dozens.

DACEUS: Could they gain a foothold here, a means of bringing greater forces directly into the Fortress of Hera?

I clapped my sergeant's shoulder guard to reassure him.

SICARIUS: We won't let that happen, brother.

**SCENE SEVEN - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA
ARMOURIUM**

ATMOS: ALERT SIRENS

Ahead of us, the east wing armourium beckoned. Its entry gate was open and a flickering light from within threw syncopated flashes into the gloom.

Inside, the armourium was a charnel house. Blood streaked the walls and machineries. It mingled with oil from the drones. Every serf, servitor and enginseer was dead. Their bodies lay strewn about the workshop, eviscerated and impaled.

The luminator rig above had been damaged during the commotion and threw sporadic light across the grisly scene. Every flash revealed a fresh horror: faces frozen in terror and death. But there was no sign of the necron, none at all.

The limbs, torsos, skulls and weaponry were all gone.

Then I saw Vantor, and my grief redoubled.

The Techmarine was dead, split from groin to neck by an energised blade. It had cut through his artificer armour like tin. Biological entrails entwined with cables and wires as all that comprised Euclidese Vantor was vented out and strewn like offal. It was no way for my brother to meet his end. His murderers had robbed him of glory.

I placed my gauntleted hand upon his face to close his still-staring eyes. Even the dishonoured dead should be allowed eternal sleep. Such was the damage done, even his gene-seed could not be recovered.

For a moment I shut my eyes, marshalling my anger, turning it into something useful. The sensation of drowning came back, and the darkness in my mind's eye returned with it. I fought it down, clenched a fist to stay focused. Whatever trauma I was experiencing would have to wait. I was determined to master it.

I addressed Daceus.

SICARIUS: A deadly enemy is at large in these halls, brother. It has already laid low our Chapter Master and now it seeks to end us into the bargain.

I gritted my teeth.

SICARIUS (cont): We will not yield to it. We must rouse our battle-brothers, hunt this menace down and exterminate it.

Daceus nodded grimly and we left the armourium as we had found it. No time to mourn or bury the dead. More caskets would line the Fortress of Hera's funerary chambers if we did not act.

DACEUS: Brother-captain!

FX - POWER SWORD CRACKLING TO LIFE

Daceus stabbed out a finger, and was already raising up his bolter as the veil of darkness returned. Real this time, and not the shadow creeping across my subconscious. I fed a surge of energy down the Tempest Blade and it crackled into an azure beacon.

It was the assassin, his cyclopean eye aglow.

SICARIUS: By Guilliman's blood, I will have that bastard's head...

FX - HEAVY METAL FEET ON STONE

But he wasn't alone, as three bulky warriors stomped up alongside him bearing twin-barrelled cannons. A trio of muzzle flares roared into being.

**FX - PLASMA SHOT FOLLOWED BY EXPLOSION.
GAUSS WEAPONS FIRING**

I got off a single shot and took the one-eyed assassin directly in his

glowing orb. Unprepared to engage his chronometric defences, his head exploded in a pulse of scorching plasma. As the corridor lit up with the flare of a necron cannonade, I had the satisfaction of seeing Calgar's shooter crumple and phase out.

Resurrect from *that*.

SICARIUS: Move!

I grabbed Daceus and we dove back inside the armourium as the corridor where we'd been standing was stitched with viridian beams. Hunkered down, our backs against the wall as our enemy advanced down the corridor spewing fire, Daceus handed me a charge.

DACEUS: Here...

I glanced at him quizzically.

DACEUS (cont): You can never be too prepared.

SICARIUS: Even in the fortress-monastery?

FX - PLASMA SHOT. METAL BODY IMPACTS ON WALL

He shrugged. In my hand, I held a krak grenade. I leaned out into the corridor, squeezing off a snap-shot and clipping one of the bulky cannon-wielders. The necron was heavily armoured, but the plasma bolt tore off its right shoulder and most of its arm. Unable to heft its weapon, it stumbled and collapsed

against the corridor wall. But it was far from finished, as its self-repair protocols activated.

Behind the first wave, three more immortal warriors lumbered into view.

SICARIUS: There are too many.

FX - ALTERNATING BOLTER AND PLASMA SHOTS

Daceus fired off a bolter burst one-handed, the two of us alternating our snap-fire in an attempt to slow down our enemy. It wasn't working.

DACEUS: Agreed.

A plan formed. I thumbed the krak grenade's detonator and primed it for a six second timer.

SICARIUS: Give me some covering fire.

FX - BOLTER FIRE AND GRENADE CLAMPED TO WELL

Daceus triggered a three-round burst as I leaned out with him a fraction later and clamped the krak grenade to the wall.

SICARIUS (cont): Back, now!

FX - MASSIVE EXPLOSION. CEILING FALLS

We ducked back inside the armourium as a firestorm ripped through the corridor, bringing most of the ceiling down and sealing it off.

FX - DEBRIS FALLING, WIRES SPARKING

Daceus and I were back on our feet a moment later. Outside the armourium, the dust was still settling. Chunks of debris fell from the ceiling and where internal circuitry was exposed, wires spat and fizzed.

Our enemies were trapped, but already the veil of darkness was beginning to coalesce again. Daceus raised his bolter but I seized his arm and urged him away from the rubble.

SICARIUS: Come on. We need to gather reinforcements.

We scarcely made it a few steps before the vox crackled again.

FX - COMBAT SOUNDS OVER VOX

AGEMMAN: <<Sicarius...>>

It was Agemman. His voice was strained and I heard the distinctive sounds of combat in the background.

AGEMMAN (cont): <<We are under attack. The necrons have laid siege to the apothecarion. Lord Calgar is in danger. I don't know how much longer we can->>

FX - STATIC

The link was severed in a blurt of hostile static. Agemman was gone and no amount of attempts was going to raise him again.

Like smoke on the wind, the darkness

abated. It was headed elsewhere, possessed of a singular purpose. Grim-faced, Daceus and I set off for the apothecarion. I hoped to Guilliman we would not be too late.

SCENE EIGHT - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA

ATMOS - ALERT SIRENS

Despite the wailing alert sirens, the warning strobes and its call to arms, the Fortress of Hera was eerily empty. It had unnerved Daceus.

DACEUS: Where are our battle-brothers?

I shook my head, hurrying down the ghost-like hallways as my vox hails were met with forbidding silence.

SICARIUS: Engaged against the necrons.

DACEUS: With no word, no warning or attempt to coordinate defence?

Daceus was unconvinced.

So was I.

SICARIUS: There is no other explanation, brother-sergeant.

That too was a lie. I could think of one, so could Daceus, but neither of us would speak it.

No further encounters with the necrons held us up before we reached the apothecarion. Standing at the end of the short hallway to the chamber's entrance, I realised why.

There was no entrance. It had been entirely consumed by the veil of darkness.

FX - ETHEREAL WIND

As if sentient and reacting to our sudden presence, the tendrils of night began to whip and eddy as if borne by an ethereal breeze. Twisting and uncoiling, unfurling like a ragged black cloak, the darkness came for us.

Within its depths were the necrons.

Three armoured warriors stomped towards us, coffin-shaped shields locked together in the manner of some ancient empire. Unlike the other necrons we had faced, these carried energised khopesh blades and were emblazoned with dynastic symbols. I knew a warrior elite when I saw it. I also knew who they were protecting.

A one-eyed necron, not an assassin but more a vizier, cowered behind this trio

of formidable guardians. Stone like lapis lazuli accented his mechanised body in long strips and a gilded beard clasp protruded from his chin. In one metal-fingered hand he carried a staff; the other clutched the tethers of the veil. Here was the architect of darkness. And it was through him we would have to go if we were to reach our stricken Chapter Master.

As his guardians marched towards us, the vizier extended a talon in our direction. His voice echoed with the resonance of ages.

VIZIER: Defilers. Infidels. You are an inferior species, lesser in every way to the necrontyr. Behold what your arrogance has wrought. You will have all eternity to regret it.

I glanced to Daceus. His bolter was aimed and ready.

SICARIUS: Bold words. Sounds like a challenge.

My brother-sergeant snarled.

DACEUS: Which I gladly answer.

**FX - BOLTER FIRE, THUNK OF EMPTY
MAGAZINE**

Daceus unleashed an unceasing storm of fire from his bolter. The heavy shells hammered the necron shield wall, battering the guardians back and breaking their defence. It ended with

the hard thunk of the bolter's empty magazine.

FX - SWORD BEING DRAWN FROM SCABBARD

Daceus dropped it, unholstering his sidearm in one hand and drawing his gladius with the other.

I saluted our opponents with the Tempest Blade, hilt raised up to my eyes.

SICARIUS: In the name of Ultramar, you will not stand between us and our Chapter Master.

Two of the vizier's guardians yet lived. I brought my sword down preparing to engage them, when Daceus stopped me.

DACEUS: No, brother-captain. Kill that thing.

He nodded towards the vizier.

DACEUS (cont): Save Lord Calgar.

After a moment's hesitation and knowing the fate my sergeant had condemned himself to, I ran down the corridor.

One of the guardians stepped into my path but I parried its khopesh blade and thundered a kick into its lowered shield, smashing the necron aside. Hearing Daceus engage them both, and not stopping to see how he fared, I leapt at the vizier.

The ancient necron recoiled, brandishing his staff defensively as vortices of shadow swirled around him. I watched the

darkness retreat, like mist before the sun, carrying the vizier with it, who clung on like some infernal passenger. I vaulted into the air, the sword of Talassar held aloft in a two-handed grip. As the blade descended, the vizier was already fading.

FX - LAUGHTER AND CLANG OF METAL

Cruel laughter echoed around me as I scythed through nothing, embedding my sword in the deck-plate underfoot with a resounding clang.

But I would not be denied, and gave chase into the apothecarion. Behind me, Daceus was fighting for his life. I could not stop, or his sacrifice would mean nothing.

The scent of my fleeing enemy still clinging to me, I hurried through the gaping doorway.

**SCENE NINE - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA
APOTHECARION**

ATMOS: ALERT SIRENS AND BATTLE

The vizier had not run far, for inside the apothecarion the veil of darkness howled like a captured thunderhead. It bleached all vitality from the room and its occupants as if their very life force was being surrendered to sustain it.

At the eye of this storm, I saw Agemann and the survivors of Calgar's Honour Guard. Two were dead already, slumped against the medi-slab where the Lord of Ultramar lay supine and unconscious.

Venatio was nearest to him, but far from ministering to our wounded Chapter Master, he was fighting hard against a score of necrons. Like the creatures we had fought on Damnos, they wore

the skins of the dead like mantles or trophies, and carried no weapons as such, except for their dagger-length talons. The Damnosians had taken to calling them flayed ones.

One turned as I entered the apothecarion, alerted to my presence by the vizier who was skulking in the background, half-smothered by shadow.

It sprang at me, this flesh-draped horror.

I weaved aside from its reaching claws and cut its midriff, parting abdomen and torso through its spinal column. I didn't wait to see it dissipate, more were coming.

FX - PLASMA FIRE

I shot one with my swiftly drawn plasma pistol. The burst took it in the chest, arresting its mad leap and blasting it into ether. I aimed at a second but one of the flayed ones slashed my forearm, tearing up the vambrace and disarming me. Sweeping the Tempest Blade, I decapitated it. A third I impaled through the chest, staggering a fourth with a heavy punch. It was dazed, or rather I had forced a system reboot and it took a few seconds to adjust.

Long enough for me to cleave it open diagonally from shoulder to hip. It phased out in a flurry of sparks.

My efforts had got me as far as the

medi-slab. Calgar's recumbent form looked frighteningly still and I tried to tell myself he yet drew breath.

Some eighteen necrons had been struck down around us. Several had phased out, but the rest were currently self-repairing. In the encroaching veil of darkness, I saw more viridian balefires flicker into life as the vizier summoned yet more warriors.

I aimed my sword for Agemman's benefit at the vizier.

SICARIUS: We need to end that thing.

The other defenders' bolters had run dry of ammunition long before and the First Captain had taken up one of the fallen warriors' relic blades in preference to his ceremonial gladius. The remaining Honour Guard wielded power axes, whilst Apothecary Venatio had his chainsword.

AGEMMAN: How do you propose we do that?

Agemman gestured to the necron horde that had just redoubled. A ring of steel stood between us and the vizier. There was but a few seconds respite to form a strategy before the flayed ones would be on us again.

SICARIUS: With courage and honour, Severus. He won't escape this time. Make me a breach with your warriors, and I'll pierce whatever passes for a heart in this thing.

AGEMMAN: What of Lord Calgar?

Venatio spoke up.

VENATIO: I'll stay by the Chapter Master's side.

Agemman glanced back at me.

AGEMMAN: If this fails, you'll be overwhelmed.

I nodded.

SICARIUS: Aye, but you always said I was reckless.

He summoned the Honour Guard and prepared to open the gap I needed.

FX - METAL JAWS CLACKING

Self-repairing, several of the necrons jerked back to their feet. Their jaws clacked as if laughing, and sliced their talons against one another in anticipation of the kill. For machines they displayed an unnerving awareness of malice.

I lowered my sword, looking down the blade as I adopted a ready stance.

SICARIUS: Cut deep...

Leading the Honour Guard, Agemman charged the necrons. The sudden attack briefly stunned the horde and for a few seconds they reeled against the First Captain's fury. Agemman used his bulk and strength to break the flayed ones apart, ignoring the claws that raked his armour.

He roared, cutting a necron down with every sweep of his borrowed relic blade.

AGEMMAN: Courage and honour!

Through the flurry of power axes, I saw mechanised limbs fall in a metal rain. Torsos were hacked apart, heads cleaved. Like their captain, the Honour Guard were brutal. Relentless. My warrior's heart thundered with pride to witness such unstinting determination and bravery.

Like a spear tip they had driven deep into the flayed ones, forcing a channel that thrust all the way to vizier. Embattled on every side, Agemman cried out and with one last effort made the breach I needed.

AGEMMAN: Do it, Sicarius... Now!

The distance was short, my passage blocked only by broken necrons underfoot. I fixed the singular orb of the vizier with a glare that promised retribution.

SICARIUS: For Ultramar!

My fury was unstoppable.

SICARIUS (cont): Here you die!

As I reached my enemy, I sprang into a shallow leap, using it to gain loft and additional momentum. With nothing held back, I struck down one-handed, putting every iota of strength I possessed into the blow. My Tempest Blade cut the

staff in half and carried on without pause into the vizier's skull. I split him down the middle, bifurcating his cyclopean eye and did not stop until I had sheared him clean through. Both halves collapsed in a frenzy of flashing sparks and thrashing wires. The vizier phased out before they even hit the ground.

Triumphant, I turned to Agemman. The darkness was receding, my plan had succeed-

Agemman was down, parted from his relic blade. The three Honour Guard were strewn around him, slain. Venatio lay sprawled on his back. The Apothecary was unmoving.

Calgar was alone, unconscious and undefended on the medi-slab.

As I saw the thing that loomed above him, I realised it would be his mortuary slab instead. My sword felt loose and heavy in my grasp. I scarcely had breath to speak.

SICARIUS: No...

An old enemy turned to regard me and in his fathomless gaze I saw the fall of empires and the terrible entropy of ages.

He had returned. The gilded king, my nemesis, the Undying of Damnos.

THE UNDYING: I am doom.

FX - SOUNDS FADE AWAY

As the darkness closed in around me and I drowned again, I saw his war-scythe held over Calgar in an executioner's grip. There was no pity in his eyes, no mercy, not even malice, just a deep abiding ennui that presaged an end to all things.

FX - DRUMBEAT OF HEARTS

The ice came back, crusting the ground and shawling my body in a sudden snowfall. Beneath it, I heard the beating hearts, they quaked the very earth.

I gasped, but breath wouldn't come. Black spots flecked my sight, converging at the edge of my vision. I raged, but knew that I was dying. My gauntleted fingers slipped from the sword's hilt and heard it clatter uselessly to the ground.

I fell to one knee, then all fours.

Crawling, still defiant, I felt the scrape of talons pinning me as the flayed ones swarmed. Swallowed by a sea of cold metal, something seized my face and then a hand was clamped around my neck. A blade pierced my shoulder, another in my back and I was steadily transfixed.

Powerless, I could only watch as the war-scythe descended...

As the veil of darkness claimed me, I

heard far away voices but dismissed them as nostalgic memory. I had died on Damnos and come back, but there was no returning from this.

A dense ball of white heat flared in my side prompting a gout of hot fluid to erupt from my throat, spewing up over my lips in a coppery wash. I spat it out, retching up the blood-

**SCENE TEN - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA
APOTHECARION**

**ATMOS: BEEPING OF INSTRUMENTS AND THE
WHOOSH OF PUMPS**

No... It wasn't blood. It was the briny, amniotic soup of the revivification casket I could taste in my mouth.

I opened my eyes and found I was cocooned by a viscous recuperating gel.

Had I survived? Were the voices I heard real after all? Did Daceus yet live? Had he mustered reinforcements?

My mind overloaded with uncertainty, and with my senses restored I hammered a fist against the inside of the casket. My rebreather had come loose and I was drowning in this filth.

The locking mechanism disengaged and I fell forwards onto the apothecarion floor

as the revivification casket opened with a blurted warning chime.

On my knees, coughing up the amniotic brine that had saved my life and kept it tethered to the world, I looked up into the eyes of my Apothecary. I could scarcely believe what they were telling me.

SICARIUS: Venatio?

He nodded respectfully, fashioning a warm smile.

VENATIO: Brother-captain. Welcome back to the world of the-

SICARIUS: You're alive...

Staggering, I got to my feet. I was sweating with the intense biological rigours my body had just undertaken, and a little unsteady. Venatio went to assist me, but my outstretched palm held him back.

VENATIO: And so are you, Sicarius. You were badly injured and have only just-

I interrupted for a second time.

SICARIUS: Injured where? Here, in the fortress-monastery?

Something wasn't right. An odd sense of recollection, a very mortal experience described as *deja vu*, that which is 'seen already', was affecting me. I remembered the chronometric device

utilised by the assassin, how it had blurred time and I wondered if I was somehow trapped in it.

VENATIO: Damnos.

FX - BIO-SCANNER

Venatio's eyes narrowed. He was already consulting his bio-scanner, as if their readers could provide some clue to my sudden distemper.

VENATIO: You were struck down on Damnos, several weeks ago in fact. You have just this moment come back to consciousness.

I gazed around the apothecarion, at the shadows at its periphery but saw no veil of darkness, no hidden foes this time.

SICARIUS: I was drowning...

Venatio bowed his head, abruptly contrite.

VENATIO: Apologies, brother-captain. Your rebreather came loose towards the end of suspended animation. You appeared to be experiencing some form of nightmare. It's not uncommon. So close to revival, I couldn't interrupt the process to wake you or replace the rebreather. It was inactive for but a few seconds.

I was shaking my head.

SICARIUS: But this is... It's impossible.

The Apothecary showed his hands in a placatory gesture.

VENATIO: You are here. You are back with us. What is your name?

I frowned, incredulous.

SICARIUS: My name?

VENATIO: Yes. What is it?

SICARIUS: Cato Sicarius. I am master of my senses, Venatio.

AGEMMAN: You do not seem it.

Agemman stepped from the shadows, just as he had before.

SICARIUS: Severus...

Another apparition.

SICARIUS (cont): I saw you fall.

The First Captain opened his arms as physical testament to his tangibility.

AGEMMAN: I am standing before you now, Cato.

He disengaged the locking clamps on his battle-helm and removed it, placing it in the crook of his arm.

AGEMMAN (cont): Brother...

He came over and put his hand on my shoulder. This scarred veteran of the Tyrannic Wars, hair shorn close to his scalp, service studs gleaming in his brow, was trying to reassure me as one battle-brother to another.

I began to realise the truth and it stirred an even greater concern within me.

SICARIUS: You are here to summon me before Lord Calgar, are you not?

Nonplussed, Agemman let go of my shoulder.

AGEMMAN: I am, yes. How did you know?

I didn't answer and turned to Venatio instead.

SICARIUS: Apothecary, tell me - did we bring anything back from Damnos, anything from the necron?

Venatio nodded slowly.

VENATIO: Yes, but-

SICARIUS: And is it under Techmarine Vantor's custody in the east wing armourium?

Agemman answered.

AGEMMAN: It is. What is this about Sicarius?

I met his questioning gaze with one of certainty and urgency.

SICARIUS: Do you have a sidearm you can lend me?

Agemman nodded, not understanding but beginning to trust what my instincts were telling me. He unholstered his bolt pistol and handed it over.

Appreciating the grip of the weapon, I regarded them both.

SICARIUS: We have to get there at once. The Fortress of Hera has been breached.

SCENE ELEVEN - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA

ATMOS - BOOTS ON STONE

Daceus had been on his way to the apothecarion when we met in the corridor. I quickly explained the situation and together the four of us made all haste to the armourium in the east wing of the fortress monastery.

Both Agemman and Daceus had their bolters, whilst Venatio and I held pistols. I hoped it would be enough for whatever awaited us in Vantor's workshop.

DACEUS: Should we invoke a fortress-wide alarm?

Agemman shook his head.

AGEMMAN: Let's see what's in there first.

He had donned his battle-helm again, so I couldn't see his face but I knew he doubted my assertion that the fortress was in danger and I suspect he didn't want to create needless panic. I saw him exchange a glance with Venatio. The Apothecary hid his concern poorly, but I took no heed. We had arrived at the armourium.

We had not voxed ahead. I was insistent on this. Whatever awareness the dormant necrons in the workshop possessed, I didn't want to risk my warning activating them prematurely.

ATMOS: THE ROAR OF MACHINES; WEAPONS AND ARMOUR BEING WORKED ON ANVILS; CHANTING

I hammered the icon for the door release and stepped first into the armourium. It was much as I remembered it, a hive of industry and labour, serfs and engineers hurrying back and forth, servitors engaged in their menial tasks, arms and armour in various conditions of repair and restoration. And there, at the back of the expansive workshop, tended by a small army of menials, was the salvage from Damnos.

Vantor turned as I entered. He was just finishing working up my armour-plate. I saw the Tempest Blade and my plasma pistol on a separate rack nearby.

VANTOR: Brother-captain, your timing is impeccable.

SICARIUS: I do hope so.

The Techmarine's expression changed from warm greeting to slight confusion as Agemman, Daceus and Venatio filed in after me.

VANTOR: Is there a problem I am unaware of, brothers?

My gaze was fixed on the back of the workshop.

SICARIUS: Evacuate your labourers.

Vantor looked to Agemman for confirmation.

AGEMMAN: Do as he asks, brother.

ATMOS: WORKERS FILING OUT, GOES TO SILENCE

Like ants returning to the nest, the horde of serfs, engineers and servitors removed themselves from the armourium. None questioned their orders, but some looked worryingly askance at the Ultramarines in their midst as they departed.

SICARIUS: With me.

I advanced into the workshop, indicating a perimeter around the necron salvage where I then came to a halt.

Vantor joined the others as they fell in beside me.

VANTOR: This is illogical, Captain Sicarius. What are you trying to-

Dozens of viridian eyes flaring into life in the gloomy armourium arrested the Techmarine's question and had him instinctively reaching for his plasma carbine instead.

VANTOR (cont): They are self-repairing...

I raised Agemman's bolt pistol. My battle-brothers readied their weapons in unison with me. I scowled as the entire necron host began to reassemble itself.

SICARIUS: Not for long.

FX - LOTS OF WEAPONS FIRE

Roaring muzzle flare and a hail of fire broke the tension as the five of us unleashed our weapons, engulfing the back of the workshop in explosive annihilation and destroying everything in it. Only when we had emptied our clips did we stop firing. Even Vantor exhausted the power cell in his plasma carbine.

When it was over, the back of the workshop was a scorched, half-destroyed ruin. It was as if a battle had just ended. In truth it had. We won. Agemman slammed a fresh clip into his bolter, ever the prepared soldier.

AGEMMAN: Whatever's left, incinerate it.

Daceus and I were sifting through the wreckage, making sure we had cleansed

the room thoroughly. I lowered my borrowed bolt pistol, and signalled to my sergeant to stand down.

SICARIUS: There's nothing left.
Threat's been neutralised.

Across the workshop, Venatio caught my eye. He gestured to the carnage around us.

VENATIO: How did you know?

I had no good answer for him, so I told the Apothecary the only thing that made any sense.

SICARIUS: I saw a darkness in my dreams and vowed I would not see it come to pass.

Agemman was more pragmatic.

AGEMMAN: Whatever the cause of your prescience, I for one am glad of it.

He bowed his head.

AGEMMAN (cont): Gratitude, Sicarius.
But Lord Calgar yet awaits.

**SCENE TWELVE - INT. FORTRESS OF HERA,
HALL OF ULTRAMAR**

ATMOS - THRONE ROOM SOLEMNITY

Agemman insisted I be cleaned and wearing my armour before my audience with the Lord Calgar. As I had seen in my half-remembered dream, I walked the processional of the Hall of Ultramar with the statues of heroes measuring my every step.

And as before, I knew I would not be found wanting under their gaze.

Lord Calgar waited me, seated upon a throne, his banners describing a legacy of war and glory behind him. Agemman was by his side. I stopped at a respectful distance and saluted.

With a huge, power-gloved hand, Calgar beckoned me to approach.

CALGAR: Come forth, Cato.

I obeyed, masking any surprise at such informality, and took a knee before the Lord of Ultramar. I bowed my head solemnly.

SICARIUS: I stand in judgement.

CALGAR: Rise. You are not being judged this day, though I had reviewed the engagement on Damnos.

My eyes narrowed in confusion as I came to my feet.

SICARIUS: My lord?

Agemman maintained his studied silence as Calgar explained.

CALGAR: Damnos wounded us all, but you and the Second suffered it more grievously than most.

SICARIUS: It is a stain upon my honour.

CALGAR: One I would see removed, Cato. I will not have this go unchallenged.

I frowned again, not quite grasping Calgar's meaning.

SICARIUS: Permission to speak freely, my lord.

CALGAR: Granted.

SICARIUS: What exactly are you saying?

Calgar's eyes were like chips of steel.

CALGAR: In your unconscious visions, you saw the ice? You heard the beating of its heart?

My voice almost caught in my throat at this revelation.

SICARIUS: Yes.

CALGAR: It is the necron, mocking us. I feel it in my bones, Cato. Whether it be one year or fifty, we are not done with Damnos, and it is not done with us.

A nerve tremor in my cheek didn't quite manifest into a smile. And it would not, ever, until the stain against my honour was removed and Damnos re-conquered.

SICARIUS: I shall count the days until our return, my lord. This isn't over.

A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION

First published as an audio drama in 2013.

This edition published in Great Britain in 2013 by
Black Library,
Games Workshop Ltd.,
Willow Road, Nottingham,
NG7 2WS, UK.

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