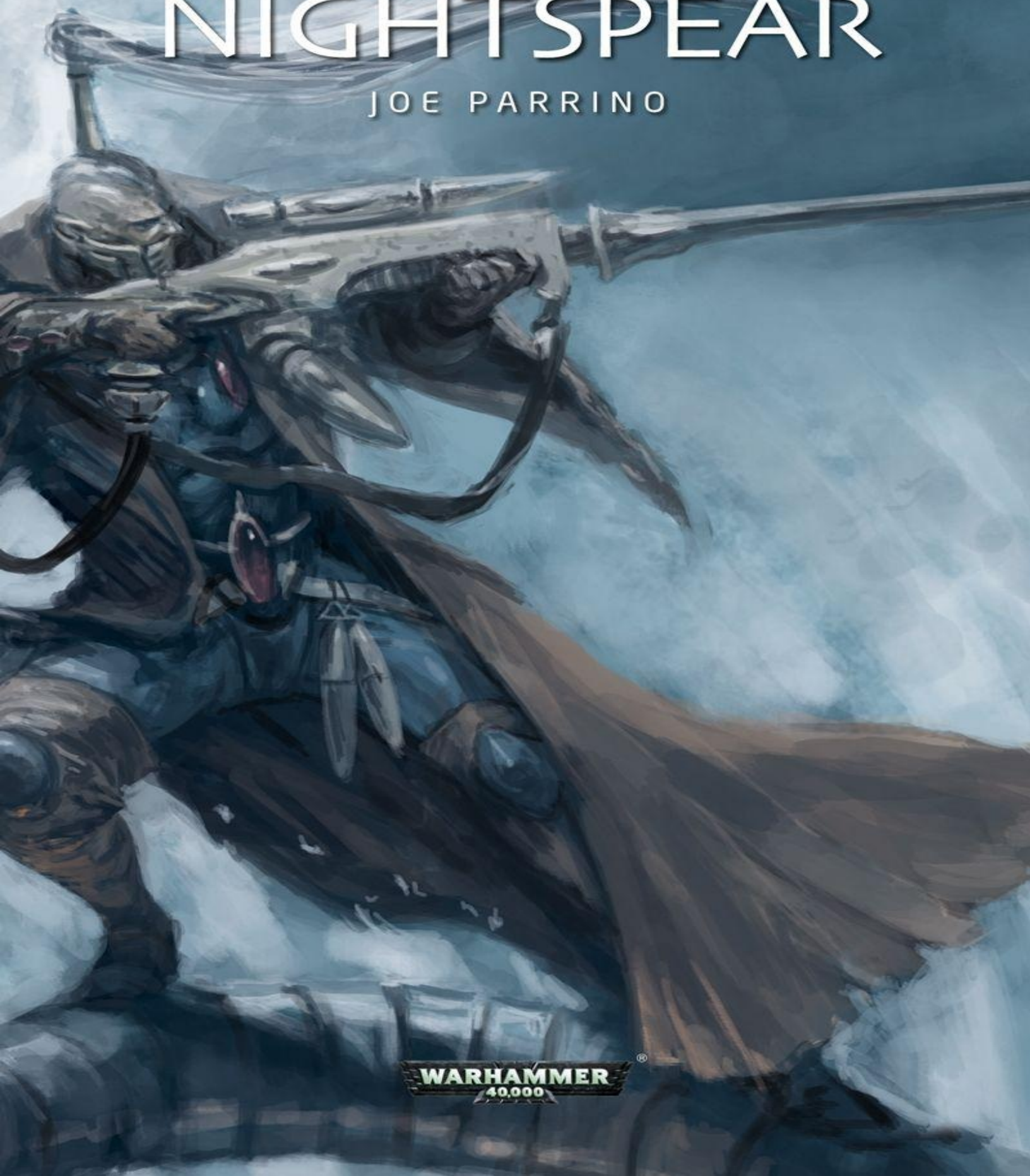


THE CARNAC CAMPAIGN

# NIGHTSPEAR

JOE PARRINO



**WARHAMMER**  
40,000

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# THE CARNAC CAMPAIGN: EPISODE ONE

## NIGHTSPEAR

Joe Parrino

They waited for three days and three nights. They waited while the snow fell, while the darkness consumed, while the moon pierced the clouds and the sky. Cold light illuminated cold ground, set shadows to dancing, roiling and writhing. Geometric stones rose and fell all around them, the evidence of past geological upheaval. The stones were silent now, carved deep with the warding superstitions of exodite clans. The world spirit's song was silent in this place, cowed by the taint of death that hung metal-heavy on the air.

Those gathered, hidden, interspersed among snowdrifts, overhangs, clawed into ambush points, rifles pointing, hidden in the whisperquiet.

One hundred eldar, sons and daughters of the craftworlds, clan-blooded exodites of Carnac, gathered, waited, and prepared for death. Nigh invisible, they hid as the snow crawled around them, as the moonlight caressed the rocks.

Prophecy called the eldar to war. The ringing words of Eldorath Starbane, farseer of Alaitoc, wisewitch, deathfriend, bonecaster, led them to this place. The ancient foe, the deathless ones, the souldark, waited in slumber to march out from the nightblack depths.

Illic, called the Nightspear, took it upon himself to halt this. This was his doom, his destiny. He was the voice that cried to his people, that warned of ancient foes. He was the messenger of the past. He would deny the necrons their vengeance.

He nestled deep between the crags. His rifle, *Voidbringer*, rested lightly in his long-fingered hands. The snow felt cold against his cheek, pale skin blending with pale snow, with pale rock. The discomfort was momentary. He had endured it for three days. He would have endured it for three months more were it necessary.

It was not.

The souldark were fated to descend on this night, fated to gather, fated to blight the maiden world of Carnac.

Starbane, eyes red in mourning, stained with the ashes of Somonor, blazing with revenge, had spoken. This war had become an obsession for the farseer. The anger of Khaine burned bright in his heart. Vengeance; deep, throbbing, emotions steeped far from those offered by any Path save that of the Bloody-Handed One. The exodites and their plight were merely another tool to be used in the war against the souldark.

Illic accepted this, for this drove him too. He knew, perhaps better than any other eldar alive, the threat posed by the souldark to his people. The mon-keigh, the Lost Kin, She-Who-Thirsts, all these foes paled before the soulless evil of the necrons.

He walked the Hidden Paths, sought the ancient truths. He spoke with ancient voices, the warnings of eldar long since passed to dust, long since passed out of the memory of his long-lived race. Illic, those few who followed him, and scattered others among the craftworlds knew the threat posed by the souldark. They knew and they raged against it. They sought the places once claimed by the souldark, pushed the lesser races towards conflict, towards their own destruction of the necrons.

Nothing else mattered.

Illic came to Carnac to serve his once-home, to answer the call of Eldorath Starbane the Onehanded. To answer the call of Alaitoc. With him he brought his followers, outcast sons and daughters of the craftworlds, peerless rangers and pathfinders in his service.

This night would see the souldark gather, descending to tear this jewel from the crown of the eldar. Illic, decisive, swift, gathered his rangers and pathfinders and struck for the north.

The clan-blooded exodites of Carnac, joined them on the path, their barbaric faces scarred and painted, tattooed and menacing. Illic greeted them as friends, knowing well their worth.

Now they waited, sons and daughters of the craftworld, of the exodites. The souldark would die, decapitated by the swift vengeance of the eldar.

Illic Nightspear let slip a breath, snow melting before him, cameleoline cloaked against the chill, against sight. His eyes, the arctic blue of glacial melt, glanced

to his right, to the nearest eldar. It took his eyes no time to see her. She was hidden, this was true, against the prying eyes of lesser races. To Illic's practiced gaze she was as obvious as a mon-keigh. She was no expert at this craft, no wanderer on the Path of the Outcast.

Catritheyn, farseer, adept of Eldorath Starbane, was draped in the same cameleoline Illic was, camouflaged against casual observance. Her breath steamed in the chill night air, her eyes crackled with witchlight as she read the skein. Orange and purple, the skein bled from her eyes. Words, the hissed and hunched words of the skein itself, boiled from her mouth. A smile played along her lips.

The witchlights faded. She nodded towards Illic.

'The souldark come,' she whispered over the gentle hiss of falling snow.

A subtle ripple passed along the gorge as eldar shifted, readied, focused. There was no telltale glint, no glimpse of flesh, tattooed or otherwise, no other marker or signifier to hint that the strike force was there. There was merely the drifting snow and the deep, dark night of the gorge.

Seconds later Illic's eyes registered a difference within the blackness. Green, unhealthy, alien, bright and unearthly light squirmed up from the depths.

The souldark. He had seen the colours before, the evidence of their passage, on Cano'var, on Gellyk, on other worlds and other places. He remembered it all too well. He almost wished for the mon-keigh to stand beside him once more. Illic fingered the tribal fetish gifted to him by the human Space Marine.

There was no noise. There was no sound of the souldark, no sight, merely the neon green. The light flickered, grew, deepened.

Cold unease crawled down Illic's spine. Where were the sounds? Where were the souldark themselves? There was only the glow to meet his eyes.

The green light flashed. The darkness illuminated with eldritch symbols, flaring painfully bright.

Skeletal shapes scrawled across the walls, shadows leaping, marching. The eldritch glow grew, revealing horror.

Rank after rank of souldark, deathless, ancient foes of the eldar race, silver bones tarnished by the passage of aeons, emerged from the darkness.

They marched in silence. They marched in ranks. Illic felt the old hatred flare in his breast, felt it burn.

Souldark. Necrons, The ancient foe.

At the heart of the souldark legions, at the centre, stood three figures. They

alone did not march. They alone did not move. One stood hunched, cyclopean, lurking with staff clutched in clawed hands. Burnished blades rose from the head of another, axe-keen over a crested skeletal visage.

Illic Nightspear, knew this one's name. 'Anrakyrr,' he whispered. An ancient overlord of the souldark. The word was a curse from the pathfinder's thin lips, red with murder, black with anger. His finger tightened on the trigger of *Voidbringer*. Uldanoreth whispered into his mind, the warrior-smith's spirit claiming assurances, vengeance, hatred.

Emotions and memories roiled within Illic's breast. '*Justice*,' Uldanoreth whispered to Illic. '*Justice for all those killed by the souldark. Justice for me. For the eldar. Kill it. Kill it!*'

The other pathfinders, the other exodites, waited on his shot.

Imperious at the heart of their legion, the souldark were unaware of the doom that would claim them.

Suddenly the cyclopean one jerked its head up, its single eye glaring straight at Illic. It blinked. The necrons, legion and leaders, vanished.

Illic fired a split second too late. *Voidbringer* screamed, the shot punching through reality, punching through the veil, tearing open a hole into the other, into the immaterium. Non-colours spilled out, non-sounds, non-voices, non-reality. The non-void called to their souls. All the eldar averted their gaze, not wishing to tempt She Who Thirsts. The hole in reality's fabric lasted for less than a second before it snapped closed with a lightning crack and the screaming of the damned.

There was a high pitched whine, a sound that lanced deep into the keen ears of the assembled eldar. Illic felt a tug at his cloak. He turned and saw a shadow standing over him.

Lightning stabbed out from the blackness, out from the depths, cracking into stone, spearing in every direction. The gorge shuddered, great columns of rock falling into the depths. Shards of stone broke away, flash-burning through snow, and whickered like shrapnel, carving deep furrows into Illic's face. The pain was blinding, staggering. Blood wept freely from his split features. What was more was the rage that accompanied it. The shame of exposure, of wounding by the necrons, wept freely from the wounds upon his face.

More lightning, bright and green and blinding, lanced out from nowhere. Eldar cried out in pain. They fell, slumping to knees, falling away into the depths. Illic nearly blacked out, but clung on to consciousness with sheer willpower.

The shadow stared down with dispassionate eyes, hidden beneath swathes of

dark-patterned cloth. 'We should leave.' The words were soft, whispersoft, hissed in the cadences of old Alaitoc, almost deadpan. Ruterias, dubbed the Shadow by the other Outcasts, was among Illic's first disciples, those first few who followed the Alaitocii pathfinder in search of the hidden knowledge of empire and ancient secrets.

The whine deepened, thrummed, keened, howled. Catritheyn, eyes shining with the skein, turned to Illic in alarm.

'The skein is changed. The souldark... They no longer wander its paths,' Catritheyn whispered frantically.

Illic snarled, cameleoline cloak swirling about him. The shadow-swathed eldar followed like a pet raven.

The whine changed, transformed, rising into a crackling carrying over the snow.

The green glow in the depths of the gorge intensified, flickering, climbing. The eldar pulled back in alarm, still stealthy, still hidden, but now frantic.

'We are undone,' Illic snarled, voice fierce and low-pitched.

A knot of eldar, sons and daughters of the craftworlds, clan-blooded exodites of Carnac, gathered around the Nightspear.

They turned first from the Nightspear to the farseer by his side. She offered no answer. Her face was a scowl, angry.

Teryen Telerath, his face broad for an Alaitocii, tanned ruddy by the light of countless suns, hair a riot of greens and reds and blues, old friend of Illic Nightspear, spoke first. 'Starbane was wrong. Where are the souldark?'

The crackling ceased.

A scarred exodite, an eldar known as the Fachan, one-eyed, tattooed with loops and whirls and exodite sigils spat, 'We must leave this place. The Dead Ones are not here.'

The exodite spoke too soon. Inrithiel, sweethearted, wanderer of Alaitoc, cried out. A green sigil floated above her head, haloing it in ghostly green. A question formed on her lips.

Illic's eyes grew wide. He knew the mark. He knew what it meant. He had seen it before.

Unbidden his advice, issued centuries earlier, rose to the fore of his mind. He had told the mon-keigh, in rare words of friendship between their two races, 'Once you are marked, there can be no escape.' Now the souldark issued their marks once more. The sigil was one of death, a halo echoing in the chill night air.

Inrithiel, sweethearted, wanderer of Alaitoc, crumpled into the snow with barely a cry, blood and pink matter leaking from her nose. There was a whipcrack of sound, a crackle of energy. It echoed through the gorge.

More marks flickered. More eldar painted for death by hidden souldark.

The eldar did not panic. They reacted swiftly, with discipline, with stealth. Illic issued a single order.

‘Flee,’ he said. ‘We must warn Starbane that the souldark twist the Skein of Fate.’

The pathfinders, the Outcasts, the rangers, the exodites understood. In moments the heights were emptied as the eldar fled, swift, sure-footed. They fled singly, in groups, in pairs. Each one would seek a different path from this place, from this knot of canyons, stone and snow, back to the webway, back to the Alaitocii host.

Afallech Maladruen turned west. A side canyon, grey stone rising through the swirling snow, offered a promising route. He took it, steps sure and swift. Three other rangers, Outcasts all, followed Afallech.

There was no chatter between them. Their faces were grim and set. There was no fear. They were Outcasts, rangers, men and women who had left the safety of the craftworlds behind, to stride the old paths between the stars, to visit the hidden places of their old empire, to see sights that few remembered, that few dared.

They were a hundred metres into the canyon when the first green lights began to flicker. Afallech Maladruen, outcast son of Alaitoc had no time to react to the green mark.

Where once they were alone in the canyon, now there were skeletal souldark, hunched, vile, dead but moving. Energy crackled in the long rifles they clutched in bony fingers. Afallech and the three rangers had no time to react before the souldark opened fire.

They fell to their knees. Fluid erupted from their eyes, their noses, their ears, their mouths, staining the snow and the dark stone red with their lifeblood.

Amonther Numeriel, lost son of Iyanden, was a coward. His thoughts told him this again and again. Flight. Running. These were the themes of his long life. Darkness, darkness that hungered, vile and alien.

He clutched the soulstones to his chest, five winking brightly in the moonlight. They were all that remained of kin, friends, those lost to the teeth and claws of

the Doom of Iyanden.

His tanned face, stippled with acid scars, bruised by doubt, by self-judgement, stood out against the grey rock. He ran. His footsteps left no mark. He was a true student of Illic, driven to follow the Path of the Outcast by his shame.

The grey walls surrounded him. Alone, save for the soulstones he carried, Amonther Numeriel fled deep into the canyons and gorges, seeking safety in the webway, just as he had before.

The Nightspear struck due south. Instinct and experience guided him. He knew the patterns of the necrons, perhaps better than any other eldar alive. Catritheyn, Teryen, Ruterias the Shadow, craftworlder and exodite alike, fled with Illic. Twenty eldar. Their group was large, but not unwieldy. They were eldar, sons and daughters of Kurnous, dead god of the hunt.

Their gods may have been dead, but the skills they passed on to their children in the Long Ago were still remembered.

They ran for minutes, through the falling snow, through the darkness, between looming pillars of rock. They ran without sight of the souldark, without sight of other eldar.

Illic's mind raced, following the paths of his feet. He sought ideas, solutions, survival. He carried the warning, the hope, the burden, clawed and taken upon himself. Survival, the thought echoed, pulled at his mind, warring with anger, shame and grief.

The paths they took were twisting, winding. Beneath a knot of trees, Catritheyn begged they stop. Ruterias, swathed and cloaked in shadows and cloth, grunted a denial.

'The skein,' she said. 'I will find us a path through the skein.'

The scattered exodites spat and made warding gestures, scrawling intricate non-verbal hand sigils into the air. The craftworld eldar ignored their superstitions. Illic respected them. Gestures had power. He had learned this in the long years of his search.

Illic gave Catritheyn a nod. Permission was granted. The shifting paths of the future might provide succour, solution and survival. She did not respond. Runes floated out from a pouch near her waist, swirling about her. Witchlight burned in her eye sockets. Her eyes closed. She saw nothing.

Her eyes opened. She saw everything.

*She sees the skein.*

*A young man, coloured in the muted garb of the... Angry, she feels anger*

*bleeding from him, dissatisfaction. These are the flavours on the skein. He stands before a portal. He stands before the future. He walks through and leaves the craftworld behind.*

*A book. It is full of the ancient legends, the darkest times. War in Heaven. War between two races that never should have... Illic is reading it. He is reading and he is thinking. He comes to a decision.*

*A swirling wrongness in the skies. The planet is blank. No, not blank. There are ruins. Illic's footsteps leave no prints. He is searching. He finds...*

*Another world. The sky is normal. It is orange. The air feels ancient. It feels... familiar. There is a rifle in Illic's hand. A soul lives inside. It whispers...*

*Darkness. Utter black. Soul destroying. Soul dark. The walls are not black. They are worse. They hunger. A lone eldar wanders between them. His eyes are glacial blue. His cloak swirls behind him. His eyes are wide. He sees what has not been seen for aeons. Ambition burns in his breast. He is...*

*He is arguing. A troupe of Harlequins, masks blank, eyes merry. Behind this eldar, behind the Harlequin wait a group of other Outcasts, hidden. Mon-keigh war in the background. Illic argues with the Harlequins. They bar his passage. Illic will not allow them to do so. His resolve is a terrible thing. A living thing. The Harlequins dance. The Outcasts open...*

*Souldark. They shamble, cloaked in the flesh of the freshdead. Their eyes are hungry. Illic does not see them. He stands lost in thought. They approach. She wants to yell. She wants to scream. The souldark reach for Illic Nightspear...*

*A world fallen. The world burns in green flame. There are bodies, blue with blood everywhere. Death. Death. Death. Illic stands with one of the mon-keigh. The human's armour is white and yellow and red. The beast is cloaked in fur. His face is brutal, tattooed and scarred in the manner of his upstart race. He is fierce of aspect. Illic is fiercer. Souldark approach them. They are trapped. They cannot escape. They...*

*A souldark stares. It is cyclopean, vile. It stares at her. There is no sign of Illic. It stares...*

*Carnac. The depths. They wait. Eldar, sons and daughters of the craftworld, clan-blooded Exodites. They are waiting. They wait for the souldark. She hears something. Something on the wind. It...whispers. There is a green glow. Illic sights through his rifle. The voice inside whispers. Illic's finger tightens on the trigger. The souldark vanish. Green flickers above eldar heads...*

*They are running between steep walls of canyon rock. The way lies before them. They are nearly free. A memory, a route, burns in her mind. She sees*

*souldark waiting, hidden from normal sight, hidden behind a veil. The necrons know where they are. They will kill...They die.*

*Shadows throbbing with green veins. Shadows mar the skein. Each future, each path, each flickers with green. The souldark march through each path, through each thread. She watches them wink out one by one by one as the future becomes more certain. She sees eldar dead. She sees Alaitoc dead.*

*She sees Illic Nightspear, the Walker of the Hidden Path. She sees the Doom that rides him. She sees the Hope that shadows him.*

*There is one path. One future. It is shadows, hazy, indistinct. It is death. It is safe.*

*She knows. She knows. She knows...*

She knew a route through the canyons. A route that they would take in the future, brought back to guide them in the now. The memory burned. It felt false, tampered with. The skein shifted. Catritheyn turned to Illic, witchlight fading from her eyes.

He returned her gaze with disgust.

‘We find our own path,’ the Nightspear said.

Ruterias and the others nodded. Only Illic met Catritheyn’s eyes as they left the trees. His eyes, glacial blue, stared without blinking. It was worse than the avoidance of the others.

The Crobh Derg tried to keep her identity fixed foremost in her mind. She was exodite, living promise of future glory. Her arms, tattooed red into claws, were corded with lithe muscle. Her hair, auburn red and rich with life, was stirred by the wind and the falling water that echoed through the caves.

She was exodite. She said this again and again.

None of the exodites believed her, something indefinable in her psychic presence betraying her. They tolerated her presence nonetheless. Biel-tan sang to her soul. She had arrived on Carnac centuries before, stepping forth from the webway much in the same way Illic and his band had done. Her purpose was different. She was no ranger. She followed the careful plans of her own craftworld.

Her presence heralded nothing less than the promise of a renewed eldar empire.

The Alaitocii farseer, skeinwitch, fatereader, knew. The Crobh Derg had seen it in her eyes. Some glimpse of the skein showed her the machinations at play. But the farseer was away, gone with the Nightspear, the Traveller who stood

between the eldar and the Rhana Dandra.

She walked with the Mawr, great chief of the Carnac exodites. He was large for an eldar, tattooed with sigils of protection, sigils of the dead gods. The Bloody-Handed stretched his hand over the Mawr, but it was tempered with age, with thought and with foresight. He saw the doom the souldark presented. He listened to the councils of the Crobh Derg, to her whispered promises of glory reborn.

They walked through the caves, the silent places beneath the canyons.

The exodites rarely came to this place, naming it a place of fear, of aversion. This was where their underworld merged with reality. Where the dreaded dead slumbered and dreamed of the end of all things. The walls were marked with their runes, ritually split here and there by exodite markings.

Water dripped, dropped, fell among them, echoing memories of the snowfall in the world above. Darkness enshrouded them. Silence folded over them. Their feet made no sound as they moved, swift and sure, through the cave systems.

The smooth black walls swallowed the light, swallowed the sound. Green cracks split through the black walls, marring formations of natural stone. The exodites whispered warding rituals, scrawled runes in the air.

The Crobh Derg could feel the emotions of the other exodites around her bleeding, blending. She could feel the anger that wound tight through their hearts, the shame. They were running, pulling away from the souldark when they wanted to turn and face them with the harsh words of war on their lips. They listened to the Nightspear, marking well his words. So through the caves they fled, surrounded by dark rock, by dark air, by dark thoughts.

Distant rockfalls, distant rumbling reached their ears. The Mawr ordered them stop.

They stood in a knot, clan deference determining their stance, their pose. The Crobh Derg had her place. Fionn, the Mawr's son, had his own near his father.

She could see the anger in his eyes, the slighted honour, the murderlust clouding his orange irises. She saw his eyes widen as the cave illuminated, flaring with bright light.

There was a mechanical buzzing, a thrumming deep in their ears. It spoke to their souls, bringing fear to the fore.

Fionn was marked. The souldark had found them. More marks flickered. More marks haloed clan-blooded exodites.

The Mawr's face turned stony. His son, his heir, was marked for death.

The exodites grasped their weapons. Swords, knives, spears, rifles. Each was

prepared to face the souldark, to embrace the Bloody-Handed One.

Fionn, true son of the Mawr, true son of Carnac, turned to his father. 'Run!' he yelled.

The Mawr nodded once. There were no tears in his eyes, but the Crobh Derg could feel his sadness.

Fionn and the other marked ran back the way they had come, hoping to draw the necrons away, hoping to die with souldark threads cut.

Ruterias led them. He left no mark in the passing snow, no footprints against the powder white. He was true to his title. The dark rocks enfolded him, swallowed him. He ranged ahead, along with other Outcasts, seeking the path, seeking safety.

Illic followed him without hesitation. The trust of millennia bound the pair. Catritheyn walked by his side. She felt alone. She could not see the Nightspear, only felt that he was near, so great was his skill at passing unseen. She caught sight of the others, even Ruterias once or twice, but never Illic. He walked Kurnous's own path with Kurnous's own skill.

Ruterias led them down random paths, only ever moving south, away from the gorge, towards the waiting Alaitocii host. They followed no logical paths, moving at odds with expected behaviour. They would move at random. Unexpected turns, unexpected twists. They played the skein, seeking to twist the paths through random actions, through erratic choices.

The rocks mumbled, the canyons split with cries of frustration as eldar souls died.

Catritheyn could feel Illic's anger, for she felt it too. It was terrifying, deeper than any ocean, tempered with a resolve stronger than wraithbone. Eldar were dying. Even individuals who discarded the Paths, those who left the regimented life of the craftworld, were still losses the dwindling race could ill afford.

She could feel Illic's thoughts, his anger, his rage that the souldark had tricked him, outmanoeuvred him, hunted him. He was the Walker of the Hidden Path, the Keeper of the Subtle Gift, and he was *hunted*, forced to flee.

Catritheyn felt the skein tugging at her thoughts, tugging at her mind. She rode its paths, just for a moment. She felt no necron interference.

She smiled at what she saw.

'Not for long,' she whispered. 'Not for long.'

Adobhnan and Edarnan Huvrineyn had not strode the Path of the Outcast for

long. They were young, idealistic, following Illic as they had followed their exarch, as their exarch followed her Phoenix Lord. Khaine's sibilant whispers still caressed their souls. His voice spoke with each beat of their hearts.

They were fresh from the Aspects, fresh from the service to Khaine, god of war, blood, murder, of the darkness that lurked in eldar souls. Khaine, in his aspect as the Shadow Spectre, had once called to their souls, bringing them down the Path of the Warrior. Their choler still rose easily, emotions freed by the Path of the Outcast. Their war-masks floated near the surface now, brought by stress, attracted by death.

The Fachan joined them, separated from the other Seeth. The exodite was a silent, dour companion to the twins. His features were puckered, scarred, hardened by a lifetime on Carnac. His tattoos writhed. The cold bothered him little, if at all.

The rock walls rose around them, towering into the black night. They could hear the cracking of stone, the hiss of snow, the screaming deaths of eldar.

Adobhnan felt his war-mask pulse in time to each death. The soulstone on his chest flared with sympathy, with each heartbeat. He moved with stealth, as did his twin, as did the exodite.

Freedom beckoned. It sang in his blood with the voice of murder.

He could hear a whining in his ears. The Fachan vanished.

'Coward,' Edarnan hissed with the voice of the Bloody-Handed.

Adobhnan agreed. 'Coward,' he said.

The whining rose, becoming a howl, a screech, alien and vile.

Green light flickered. Edarnan, marked, met his brother's eyes. The pair ran. They fled the souldark. Dark walls flew by on either side. They ran from shadow to shadow, darkness to darkness, chased by the green. For five minutes they ran, outpacing the mark. For five minutes they escaped the fate spun by Morai-Heg in the Long Ago.

There was a crack, the sound of atoms screaming, atoms violated. Edarnan fell without a sound, blood standing out against his pale features.

Adobhnan howled. He screamed to the heavens. The Bloody-Handed spoke through his mouth. The war-mask consumed the ranger. One of the last remaining gods of the eldar gave voice to mourning, gave voice to anger, gave voice to rage, gave voice to blood.

The deathmarks stepped from the darkness, their skeletal faces impassive. The eldar who was once Adobhnan Huvrineyn, twinsouled brother to Edarnan, opened fire.

Tight beams of laser fire lanced into the souldark. Two were split apart by pinpoint fire, limbs dismembered by clean shots.

Adobhnan continued to fire, continued to kill the souldark when a mark flickered into being above his head, twin to the one that still played about his brother's.

The souldark, implacable, returned fire.

Adobhnan fell beside his twin.

The world spirit's song filled the night air, filled the darkness. It keened in mourning for the loss of dead eldar, for the violation of the necrons. It brought meaning to the snow, to the night. It brought vengeance to the hearts of all those who heard it.

Illic passed between standing stones, ancient menhirs carved of the same dark grey stone, marked in the ancient symbols of the dead eldar gods. Illic cared little for the dead gods, for they offered no succour to their living children.

Illic heard Teryen cursing, a string of invectives both psychic, physical and vocal. Illic's thin lips curled with the hint of a smile, a brief memory surfacing. It lasted for the tiniest moment before dissipating.

They had entered a dead end, a bowl carved into the rock by the hands of ancient eldar. There was only one entrance, one exit.

The world spirit's voice became a howl.

Ruterias, hands swathed, pointed towards the cliffs. 'We climb,' he urged.

Runes floated about the farseer's head, orbiting her, whirling in the snow. Her eyes were bright with witchlight. The world spirit screamed through the wind.

'No,' the farseer denied. 'We kill.'

Illic rounded on her, the other rangers bristling at their leader's anger.

'Explain,' the Nightspear demanded.

The look on her face was sad, her lips downturned, eyes downcast. She pointed at Teryen Telerath. The Outcasts stared in horror. The mark, green, threatening, flickered about his head. More marks appeared.

Teryen met Illic's gaze. There was no sadness in the Outcast's eyes, only resolve. Teryen Telerath, his face broad for an Alaitocii, tanned ruddy by the light of countless suns, hair a riot of greens and reds and blues, marched to the centre of the standing stones. He crouched and waited, prepared to embrace death. The mark about his head called to the souldark, bringing them out from their pocket dimensions, bringing them into the waiting guns of the Outcasts and the exodites.

There was a ripping sound, a cracking, a tearing. Green lightning flashed. The eldar's keen ears could hear metal clacking against stone, crunching against snow.

The eldar, emotions roiling, stepped aside, melting away into the snow and the dark. Teryen stood alone, his face grim. The mark twinkled above his head, full of threat, full of the promise of death. He stood in the middle of the standing stones, his hands loosely clutching the long rifle. He waited. The soulstone on his breast flared with each beat of the Outcast's heart, with each flicker of the brand above his head.

Illic watched. Illic breathed slow, measured, while inside his thoughts leapt. 'Sacrifice,' Uldanoreth whispered from within *Voidbringer*. 'Kill the souldark. Kill them. Kill them. Kill them.' The warrior-smith's words were inciting, urging, calling. Illic's long fingers tightened along the gun, caressed the barrel. He stared through the scope, eyes locked on the entrance to the circle of stone.

Illic could see Ruterias near to him, a shadow within the shadows.

The clacking grew louder, a march of metal, a *tick tick tick*, snicking against the stones.

The deathmarks entered cautiously, green lightning playing about around their limbs. They raised their rifles sighting down at Teryen. *Voidbringer*, speaking with the rage and the loyalty of Illic Nightspear, tore one apart. Reality screamed. The world spirit howled.

The eldar reacted with feral intensity. The prey became the hunter as the cornered eldar unleashed their ambush. Desperation drove their movements. Each shot, each attack, was an act of defiance, an act of survival.

Filthy light flared as the immaterium was called through. Grasping hands slithered from the hole in reality. Others clawed at the rent in reality, trying to keep it open, trying to make it wider. Voices screamed through the aethyr as the gate snapped closed.

Illic was already sighting again, already firing. The next rent tore open into utter darkness, sentient, hungry. The wailing of damned souls from countless races accompanied it. Illic could hear a voice, familiar, insistent. Uldanoreth's fingers on his consciousness tore away the whispering voice.

The other eldar added their own fire. The deathmarks fell apart, sliced by laser fire, ripped into by pale crystals, carved by shurikens. Their mouthparts clacked opened and closed. The eldar ended their cursed half-lives, cast them into whatever darkness awaited the souldark.

Green haloes appeared as deathmarks painted eldar targets. One Outcast,

scaled halfway up the cliff, longrifle clutched in long-fingered hands, fell. Blood streamed from his nose, eyes, and ears. The body hit the ground with a sickening crunch of broken bone.

Another Outcast, hidden beneath the cold weight of a snow drift, calmly sighted a deathmark through the scope of her longrifle. The souldark, cyclopean eye glaring green, scanned back and forth, searching for eldar. She sighted, sighed and fired. Its head snapped back, pierced by laser fire. It clattered to its knees, metal ringing. She rose from the snow and moved to another snow bank to repeat the process.

One of the necrons, one of the deathmarks, staggered backwards as it was caught by splinters of crystal launched by howling exodites. The metal that made up the deathmark's body cracked, crumpled, broke. Splinters of green and purple crystal stabbed into it, embedding themselves in the necron's body. It kept trying to lock on to the exodites, searching to fire, searching to paint its mark. The exodites proved too fleet of foot. The Carnac eldar fired, ran, adjusted, and melted into the snow and the dark before firing again.

Two of the exodites were caught in the open, caught between reaping their vengeance. The green mark had scarcely appeared above their heads before they fell in the act of running. Arms pinwheeling, all forward momentum stopped as they staggered into the snow, staggered to their knees. Blood dappled the snow. The standing stones flared with each eldar death as the world spirit absorbed their souls.

Reality screamed. Reality bawled, bellowed, squealed as Illic fired *Voidbringer*. Each shot tore the fabric of the veil, opened Carnac to the vile attentions of the warp. Each shot culled souldark, carved them from existence.

Illic's fury, Illic's incandescent emotions, blurred the skein. His emotions were mercurial, bleeding, jumping, shifting, unfettered by the regimented life of the eldar. The Nightspear, the Walker on the Hidden Path, was an avatar of death. He fired *Voidbringer* and moved, shadowfast, to a new position before firing again. Each shot was judged with precision. Each shot was perfectly accurate, perfectly deadly.

One shot caught a deathmark in the chest, opening a hole, opening a breach. Tongues licked out, wrapping around the souldark's limbs, pulling the struggling necron into the hole, into the warp, into damnation. Laughter echoed out of the breach, the laughter of thirsting gods. The voices, the twisted joy lasted only briefly before the hole snapped closed.

It was the last deathmark to die in the ambush. Silence reigned in the bowl, in

the depression. It was the silence of the dead. The Outcasts, the exodites, Catritheyn and Illic gathered between the standing stones. Their numbers were diminished. They could feel the gaps where comrades once stood.

Ten of the twenty eldar were dead, killed by souldark. The marks still played faintly around their heads.

One of the dead, Teryen Telerath, his face broad for an Alaitocii, tanned ruddy by the light of countless suns, hair a riot of greens and reds and blues, lay slumped between the stones, blood and brain leaking from his nose.

Illic howled his grief to the skies. He crouched by his fallen friend. The Nightspear stared, tears streaming down his face. He took Teryen's blood and marked his face with the sigils of Khaine and Kurnous. He grabbed the soulstone winking on Teryen Telerath's chest.

Ruterias stood near Illic saying nothing, his eyes downcast.

Catritheyn stood near, but apart. More distant even than the exodites.

She spoke hesitantly, daring to break the silence. Her question was addressed to Illic. 'Where do we go next?'

The Nightspear met her eyes, his face an aspect of dread and death, blood still drying on the sigils. His eyes were dead, brutal things, carved of ice.

'We climb,' he said.

Amonther Numeriel, lost son of Iyanden, ran. His feet slipped against the snow, breath streaming from his lips, writhing before him like the ghosts of lost kin. It was tinged with green. His whole vision was tinged with green.

Panic gripped his soul. Panic and resignation. Death stalked him.

He could hear the souldark coming. He could hear their clanking steps. He could hear their laughter, buzzing back and forth. *He could hear the tyrannids that followed them, feel their claws, feel their acid across his face.*

The soulstones, last remnants of lost kin, lost friends, lost souls of Iyanden, jangled across his chest, the light within accusing. He almost sobbed. He had failed. He had failed Iyanden. He had failed his family and his friends. He had failed the Nightspear.

Now he would die, unredeemed, unremembered, unlamented.

He stumbled in the snow. The normally sure-footed pathfinder, boot caught on some grasping rock, stumbled to one knee.

His skills were failing him. The shadowcraft, learned from Illic, had kept him alive. Now the memories slipped from his mind, memories of life on Iyanden, memories of horror and terror.

The green filled his vision. *The slavering silence of the tyrannids filled his ears, filled his mind, unleashed by fear. He could feel the Shadow in the Warp pressing at his mind.*

He shook and shivered, crawled forward on hands and knees.

The webway.

He needed to find the webway. He needed to flee, to run. To abandon.

Amonther Numeriel, lost son of Iyanden, memories clawing at him, stumbled to his feet, filled with sudden resolve. The shadowcraft returned with his surety.

Thoughts still dogged by accusation, with memories of death in the dark, the pathfinder fled deeper into the canyons, towards the safety offered by the webway. All the while the green mark danced about his head, stealing the shadows.

The sudden transition from darkness to half-light was almost blinding to the keen-eyed eldar. The Mawr, stony-faced, clan-chief of the Carnac exodites, stared in wide-eyed wonder at the skies above. The darkness of the caverns was forgotten. The sacrifice of the Mawr's son, of the other clan-blooded exodites, was forgotten in the wake of the vista that met them.

The clouds, still dropping snow, were illuminated green and red and blue. Aircraft danced in the heavens. They moved almost too fast for the eyes to follow. A fierce whine lanced into sensitive eldar ears, painfully loud, deafening.

Snow swirled around them, the clouds whipped to and fro, driven by air pressure created in the wake of duelling aircraft.

They clashed with a sound like rolling thunder. Lightning spat from souldark machines, curious crescent shapes of brushed silver metal, tarnished and jagged.

Eldar craft, hulls Alaitoc-blue, sweeping, noble, jinked and fired. Aircraft exploded, showering sparks, metal and flame over the night-shrouded landscape.

The Crobh Derg stood by the Mawr's side. She hissed words. 'We must keep moving,' she urged.

The Mawr grunted his assent. The exodites, what few remained, clambered down from their perch and re-entered the canyons, fleeing back into the night.

Illic Nightspear stood at the top of the cliffs, Teryen's soulstone clutched in his hand. He stared down, deep into the bowl. The landscape flickered around him. Lit by green and yellow and red.

Deep booms split the night, tore apart the silence. The scream of tortured metal, the howl of the world spirit, the chattering fire of Nightwing interceptors

and Phoenix fighters, the reality tearing sound of souldark tesla weaponry. More green lights split the canyons, illuminating the shadows. There were no screams. Here and there, Illic could see the telltale glimmer of a longrifle firing, evidence that some of his band yet lived. He lingered for a moment, keen eyes picking out the body of his fallen friend. He swore vengeance. One more grievance against the souldark. One more act cast at their feet.

Idly his left hand traced the runes he had marked in blood across his face.

Catritheyn stood by his left side, Ruterias his right.

Ruterias only spoke two words. Two words to split Illic's reverie. 'The webway,' the shadow-swathed pathfinder reminded.

Illic nodded.

The ground shook. Stone screeched as canyon walls collapsed, tortured by awakening souldark technology. Carnac itself shuddered, violated by the presence of the necrons.

The eldar, sons and daughters of the craftworld, clan-blooded exodites of Carnac, fled across the tops of the canyons, feet moving shadowfast. They left little mark of their passage. No souldark marred their flight.

They were alone with the night for the moment.

Alone while the snow fell. Alone while eldar and souldark duelled in the heavens above.

Amonther Numeriel, vision filled with green, had almost made it out of the canyons. He was close. Close to freedom. Close to survival.

He would not make it.

The souldark emerged with no warning.

One second Numeriel was alone, fleeing down through rocky canyon walls, flitting from shadow to shadow. The next he was surrounded by a knot of necrons.

The air crackled as they stepped from nowhere, green eyes flaring. They stared at him.

Amonther Numeriel, lost son of Iyanden, met their implacable gaze. The fear left his heart, replaced by shame, replaced by dishonour. The soulstones. Last remnants of dead kin, dead friends, dead eldar. They would be trapped here in the darkness of the canyons, lost on Carnac, denied final unity in the infinity circuit of Iyanden.

This was his doom. This was the moment of his death. His heart beat faster. Thumping away in his chest.

The soulstones, clustered across his chest, mirrored his heart.

He stared over the necrons' shoulders, stared past the burnished metal, through the flickering green, and into the darkness beyond. One eye glimmered out there.

Amonther Numeriel met the one-eye's gaze. Please, he thought, begged, pleaded. The pathfinder from Iyanden nodded once. The shame fell away and hope dawned.

One of the necrons, one of the damned souldark, raised its long-barrelled weapon.

There was a flash.

Then blood and oblivion.

The Fachan watched as the craftworld pathfinder died, watched as blood spattered the snow, as the body slumped to the ground, thudding wetly into the rock.

He waited with the patience of a hunter. He ignored the ache in his bones, ignored the thudding of his heart. He waited with the souldark, standing forgotten vigil over a forgotten son.

The Fachan felt fury. The Fachan felt anger.

He was no young man hungry for glory, however. He would not act on this, not cast away his life in some foolish display. He knew the significance of the glowing stones.

The Fachan waited, crouched in the snow, silent, still, hidden.

He waited for the necrons to step back into the Otherworld from which they came, to leave this benighted place, to leave this death and search out others. Subconsciously, the exodite traced warding gestures in the air, taking care to move slowly. They were appeals to Kurnous, dead god of the hunt. There was no answer.

Minutes trickled by. Time crawled as the snow fell.

The necrons stood, green lightning flickering along their limbs. They made no move.

They emerged from the canyons, grassland stretching before them. The sky burned over their heads, snow vaporising into rain, cascading down in fat sheets. The air filled with the stink of wet grass, wet leather and burned metal. The eldar were losing the aerial war for the skies as souldark machines emerged from the depths. The ground was a sodden mess.

The Mawr was tired, no longer a young man. Running by his side was the

Crobh Derg, a solid presence. Her mind whispered reassurances to the exodite, redolent with a strange accent.

The clan-blooded exodites, tribal scouts of Carnac, were nearly to the webway, nearly to freedom. The warning they carried burned bright in their minds, while sadness and grief pulled at their souls.

They could all feel the world spirit fuelling their flight, hastening their limbs. Images flashed through their minds; warnings and glimpses of the future provided by the world spirit, rumblings of possible futures. All present except the Crobh Derg saw them.

*Carnac dies in green fire.*

*The exodites evacuated onto spacefaring craft, taken to the craftworlds, taken from freedom in the name of survival.*

*Skeletons, skeletons carved from burnished metal.*

*Pain, flashing through the molten heart of Carnac.*

*Illic Nightspear dead, deathmark still flickering about his bloodied head.*

*The Mawr stands by Illic's side, the webway blaring open behind them. The exodites sacrificing themselves to see them safe, brought into the bosom of the eldar.*

Resolve burning in their breasts; survival, of family, of clan, of their world rested on their shoulders, rested on the survival of Illic Nightspear.

They stepped sure and fast through the mud, through blades of grass, through rain and darkness.

The exodites, clan-blooded scouts of Carnac, raced for the webway, splinter rifles, shuriken catapults, spears, swords clutched between scarred and tattooed knuckles.

Catritheyn ran alongside Illic, tasting his anger. Runes floated about her, keeping pace, orbiting her head. She could not resist riding the skein. It had been ingrained in her over the centuries. Sight the future. Follow its paths. Use it to guide the now. This was the way of the farseers, the way of the eldar. Tradition could not be denied. Habits could not be discarded. She could not abandon her Path, even in the face of catastrophe.

Her eyes were open. They saw nothing.

She closed them and saw everything.

She saw the skein.

*Death.*

*It is everywhere, all along the skein. She searches for Illic's thread, trusting in*

*his fate. She cannot find it. It is lost in the shadows. She sees others.*

*Ailill Allithuel runs. She is swift-footed. She is running, fleeing, hiding. She is clever. She has doubled back and waits. Her patience will keep her safe. It does not. There are beings more patient than she. They watch. They wait. She runs. A green flash. She dies.*

*Keladry Ragefyre's mind is made up. Sacrifice. Sadness, but exultation. These are the flavours of his thread. She can taste his death. Taste it on the wind. His death, moments, heartbeats away, screams for him. Khaine's mask hides in his mind, driving his thoughts, driving his actions. Sacrifice. He is a Crimson Hunter, at one with the skies, floating like a leaf on the breeze. She watches him soar through the night and the snow. His guns spit. Souldark die. Lightning fills his vision. A Doom Scythe rushes for him, lightning crackling... Keladry Ragefyre meets it...*

*A one-eyed exodite waits, metres away from waiting deathmarks. He waits. She can taste his thoughts, taste the duty imparted onto him. She sees the necrons leave, stepping away into some other place, some other pocket. The exodite moves furtively forward, hands outstretched towards a body, reaching towards bright souls. He reaches...*

*She finds Illic.*

*Illic's fury is terrifying. Vast, deep, it surges in his mind like an ocean. Grief, deep, appalling. The aching loss of an old friend. The aching loss of an old... failure. It haunts him, pulls at him like the wind tearing at his topknot. Resolve burns in his breast, cradled in the ocean of grief, cradled in the ocean of hatred. There is an eldar running alongside him, eyes crackling with witchlight, distracted. She sees herself.*

*She moves forward along his thread but loses it amid the deaths of others.*

*There is a light. Bright, pure. Six souls wait at the bottom of a gorge. There was a seventh but it is lost. Maireth Voidwalker jinks and dives, souldark Doom Scythes following her path. She leads them away. Distraction, misdirection. Draw the necrons away. Keep the Alaitocii host safe. The voice of Khaine rumbles loud in her ears, it sounds like blood pumping through her heart. The ground rushes up to meet her. Missile pods fire. There is a massive explosion of light, fire. It consumes, cleanses. Maireth Voidwalker dies with a smile on her face.*

*The skein blurs. She draws back, driven into the sky. She sees so much. She sees what happens elsewhere on Carnac, what will happen.*

*They are nearly out of the canyons. Nearly safe. The horizon is no longer dark.*

*It is green, bright, unwholesome. She tastes death on the wind. It burns. It devours. Souls wink out. Some are drawn into the world spirit, others are caught by She Who Thirsts, torn apart by waiting Neverborn. Distractions. Misdirection.*

*Illic. The Nightspear. There is an ambush. There are deathmarks. He is marked...*

*Paths branch, moving from this moment.*

*Death.*

*Illic dies, flopping lifeless, hand reaching towards the webway gate. The future, his future, his hope. The Alaitoc host dies in a climactic battle after, Starbane's rage leading to the loss of priceless eldar lives, of priceless eldar souls.*

*Alaitoc falling, trampled beneath the metal feet of necron vengeance. The mon-keigh corpse-kingdom burning, the upstart race rendered extinct by dynastic struggles.*

*Nothing stands between the corrupt legions of the Eye, the Neverborn, the great evils lurking within the immaterium and reality.*

*The Rhana Dandra begins.*

*The last hope of the eldar race dies with Illic Nightspear, lost on Carnac.*

*Another path stretches from this moment.*

*Illic dies, slaughtered in the webway by the Lost Kin as he races to warn Eldorath Starbane. They stand over his body, over her body. Laughing in cruel voices, armoured in cruel spikes, black and purple and green. They take the bodies with them, melting away back to their dark city. She follows this path to its end.*

*The Rhana Dandra begins.*

*In another the Harlequins bar their egress, trapping them on Carnac. They do not laugh. They do not move. Illic and his Outcasts die dashing themselves against the bulwark of the Laughing God's followers.*

*Almost every path leads to death, both for Illic, for the eldar. Almost every path leads to disaster, to catastrophe, to apocalypse. Almost every path save one.*

*Illic lives. The path is shadowed, obscured, coated with death. There is apocalypse at its end, but she sees survival too. It starts with a scream. A scream with her voice.*

*She opens her eyes. She voices a warning.*

She screamed a warning, voice high. Illic snarled at her, eyes blank, devoid of

compassion or feeling.

There was a flash, a massive crashing sound. Explosive, loud, booming, carried on a shock wave of air from deep within the canyons. The eldar are blinded for a moment, sensitive eyes overwhelmed by night turning into day. The sky screamed. The world spirit bellowed in pain, in rage. Aftershocks shook the ground, diminishing, unsteady. An electric buzzing suffused the air as souldark technology awoke.

Sight returned.

The moonlight was no longer pure, no longer natural. The whole landscape was covered in the hellish neon green of necron light. The shadows in the canyons dissipated, shrank, receded, disappeared.

The canyons ended before them, descending down to grassland coated in snow. The moon rode high in the sky, impassive.

She was too late. Green haloed Illic's head, marking him for death.

The Fachan reached forward, furtive. He already had five of the soulstones and was reaching for the last.

A whining stole into the exodite's ears. He was already turning, already running.

He was too late. Green blinded him, neon bright.

He could hear the muffled stomping of deathmarks, could hear the buzzing crackle of their movements. He could smell the death they brought, metal-heavy on the air. Their tomb stink was obnoxious, foul, ancient.

Blinded, the Fachan crashed into a metallic chest. He gasped as cold metal slid through his stomach, breaking the soulstone on its cord, cutting through the leather and scales armouring him.

The soulstones tumbled from his scarred hands.

The exodite twitched, once, twice. Then was still.

He screamed in his head, pain burning.

Then there was laughter, deep, roaring, ancient.

The Neverborn tore his soul apart.

Illic, marked and coloured by the necrons, ran. The webway beckoned, safety, warning, hope. He moved faster than he had ever done, faster than he had fled the cage of Cano'var.

He would not die on Carnac. In his heart, buried beneath hatred and grief, lay a greater destiny for the Nightspear.

Ruterias ran by his side, the shadow-swathed eldar making no sound. Green lightning licked towards the running eldar, lancing through the snow and the dark.

Running Outcasts, driven towards their path by inherent selfishness, interposed themselves between the souldark pursuers and their pathfinder lord. They died with Illic's name on their lips, with sacrifice in their hearts. His survival was paramount; their own lives given meaning through their sacrifice.

Lightning stabbed towards Illic, missing, confounded by his skill.

The webway shone before them, a glittering tear in reality held between slender pillars of wraithbone. Outcasts and pathfinders had taken up position around it, firing into the dark, culling the souldark.

The green filled Illic's eyes, turning the blood-red runes black in the light. His face was a chilling thing, a mask, impassive, deadly.

He was one hundred metres from the webway when waiting necron deathmarks stepped from their pockets of nowhere. They stood, hunched, vapour flowing from their shoulders, lightning crackling along their joints. As one they raised their weapons and sighted at the rushing eldar.

Illic flung himself to the ground.

Others, reactions timed poorly, were caught in the fusillade, minds disintegrated by the pernicious technology of the necrons.

Illic sighted down *Voidbringer* and ignored Uldanoreth's voice in his mind.

They came out of the darkness, ululating war cries streaming from lips, weapons steaming, firing, killing. Their words were shrill, carrying over the pounding rain, carrying over the buzzing of the souldark.

Their crested hair was a sodden mess, flopping about. Eyes burned with fury in their faces, mouths wide. Shuriken fire, laser fire streamed from clutched weapons and sliced through deathmarks.

Green marks flickered at them. Exodites, clan-blooded warriors and scouts of Carnac, died, brains melted by necron guns. They came on anyway, swords and spears flashing in the moonlight, flashing beneath the lit sky.

Bright, fast, they struck. The Outcasts joined the attack, their own weapons firing into clumsily moving souldark.

Sparks flew as impacts rained upon the metal bones of the necrons. Sparks flew as limbs were cleaved from the slow-moving machines. Reality howled as Illic fired *Voidbringer*, the cold of the void seeped over the battlefield as holes were punched into space, drawing pieces of deathmark away. Illic's voice was a

howl on the wind, a scream, a promise of bloody vengeance. Deathmarks felt the kiss of *Voidbringer*, the pain of the void, of the warp as their metallic forms were blasted into other places.

The Mawr, spittle streaming from his lips, hair lank and matted with rain, spun and swirled: graceful eldar sword licking out to carve clutching souldark limbs. Each stroke, each cleave, was an act of grief, an act of vengeance, for his fallen son, for his fallen world, for the loss of his way of life. The Crobh Derg was a blur beside him, slender claws of red wraithbone glittered on her hands, sparking into deathmarks. Every attack of hers was both offensive and defensive, aimed at preserving the reckless exodite clan chieftain. Her face was grim as she killed.

Catritheyn rode the skein in quick jumps, plucking at its strands, peering down its paths with all the skill of the virtuoso she was. She pushed events, prodded, stepping forth in each path, ensuring Illic survived, ensuring that his hope remained undimmed. Witchlight bled from her eyes, bled from the sword in her hand. Even as she followed the twisting paths of the skein she killed, ending necrons.

The webway beckoned, its welcoming light bleeding into the Carnac night. The eldar, sons and daughters of the craftworld, clan-blooded exodites of Carnac, desperately shoved and killed their way through the necrons standing between them and safety. Shots strobed through the night. Green lightning, green marks, flickered towards eldar, spelling death.

Some fell, caught by the clumsy swings of the deathmarks, clubbed into the mud, battered, bloody. Others were marked, marked and shot. The rifles of the deathmarks destroyed their minds, destroyed their brains, left them pouring from noses, eyes, ears.

But the necron numbers were thinning, as souldark died beneath the fury of caged eldar. They could not bring their fearsome weapons to bear in such close quarters, could not move fast enough to counter the swiftness of the eldar.

The only thing they could do was die, crushed into the mud and the grass.

Suddenly the way was clear. Ruterias dragged Illic towards the webway. The other eldar joined, running, jumping towards safety.

Behind them the canyons erupted in fire, lurid and green.

Illic Nightspear burst through, stepping from the bloody mud of Carnac, away from the grasping hands of the souldark. He wasted no time, made no pause. Vengeance drove him forward. He had a message to impart to Eldorath Starbane, a warning. His followers, both Outcast and exodite, swept up in his wake.

The eldar, sons and daughters of the craftworlds, clan-blooded exodites of

Carnac, united by survival, numbers dimmed, souls missing, followed Illic Nightspear as he walked the Hidden Paths, as he brought warning and words of doom and hope to his people.

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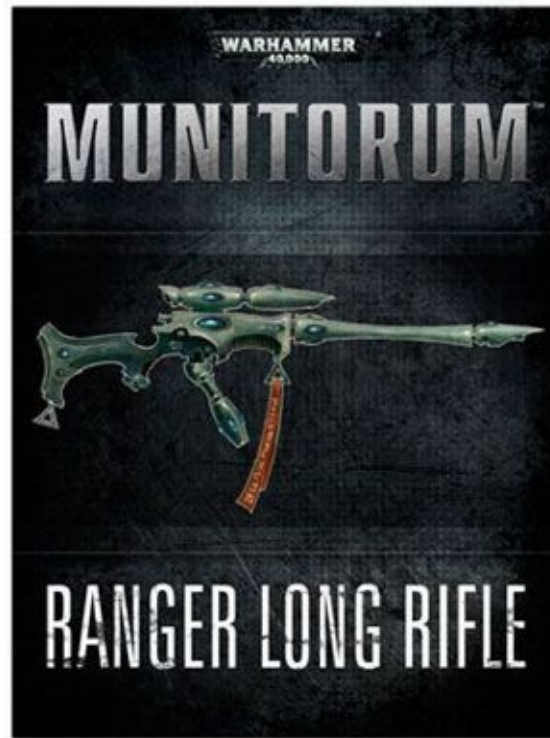
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A lifelong reader and unabashed fan of the Black Library, JOE PARRINO is an American writer currently adrift within the United Kingdom. Still mired in the realm of higher education, when he's not writing papers he's writing stories and working his fingers and brain into mush. Awed and eager in equal measures, he's leapt into the realm of writing with gusto. In his off hours, he reads, writes and wanders about the gothic splendour of Edinburgh.

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