

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns surrounds the text.

# ***A Worthy Pain***

*Death Korps of Krieg -  
1.50*

**Richard Marsden**

## A Worthy Pain

By Richard Marsden

Achim Jagg heard the building crackle of electricity before feeling pain lance across his spine. It didnt count, it was only a test strike, to see if the whip was functioning. Punishment had not yet begun.

"One!" cried out the voice of the Commissar behind Jagg, his tone laden with triumph.

Again, Jagg heard the electric buzz of the whip, felt its singeing heat a moment before it struck, and then pain went spiderwebbing across his flesh. Jaggs teeth gritted and his eyes welled with tears, but he did not cry out. Not yet, he told himself. Oh, how it hurt! Even after the whips caress left him it still burned, but it was a good pain. A worthy pain. Only nineteen more to go.

Jagg rested his head against the metal pole and clenched his hands. He pulled slightly, feeling the canvas straps go taut about his secured arms, spread as they were upon the poles crossbeam.

"Two!" came the Commissars cry and with it the snapping buzz of the whip. As the burning agony tore across Jaggs back he pondered how exactly it was he ended up on the Repenting Rack.

Jagg tucked close to a low wall of some nameless town on the grassy world of Jendra IV. It was not his world and the planet was alien to him as alien as the Orks he was fighting. First off, unlike Krieg, Jendra IV had a bright sun. Where Jagg was born, and lived most of his early life, the only light he knew was that of the ever-glowing artificial ones kept in the ceilings of Kriegs subterranean hives. Their white rays were cold and ceaseless, unlike Jendra IV's sun which not only provided warmth but also gave way to something else Kriegs underhives did not have; night.

The town was in a state of total disrepair brought on by the Orks that had inhabited it. The low structures all bore marks of fire damage as well as war wounds from small arms and explosives. Before Jagg's Regiment had reached the town the Imperial Navy had been kind enough to bombard it from above, and their fine work was evident. Orks however, as Jagg had learned, were stubborn creatures. They were not fearless, they would run, but not from something as impersonal as a few fyceline bombs dropped by Navy Mauraunders.

The orders were simple enough, simple enough for any soldier of the Death Korps. They were to sweep the town and kill the enemy to the last.

Sergeant Taubover peered over the wall and adjusted his gray shell shaped helmet. Trained eyes scanned the debris-littered street and the broken buildings along it. Seeing nothing the veteran Sergeant cautiously stood and began to plod, in a hunchbacked manner, along the street, close to the safety of a shattered hab.

Jagg looked at the rest of their Section. Normally it would have ten men, each with an important task, to ensure the Section fought at optimum strength. Little chance of that. Jagg had been assigned to the Section along with his companions Callum and Kellen Raous just after completing the Call. Eight weeks of brutal training had made him ready to be a man of Krieg, to earn redemption for their world, or so he thought. Jagg knew he should have known better when he and his friends brought Taubover's squad to a paltry eight. A clear sign that the Call couldn't truly prepare one for the rigors of war.

Since Jagg had joined Sergeant Taubover's squad he had learned the joys of space travel, poor rations, summer heat, and death. Orks had come to the agricultural world of Jendra IV and had laid siege to its only major city of Kynder. The

Death Korps had stopped them, but losses were high and Taubovers already depleted squad was down yet another man. It was time for payback now, a break out from the besieged city, but Jagg felt their battered Regiment was hardly up to the task.

Grieg, the Section voxman left cover and scurried to keep up with the sergeant. For a man whose job was to talk and listen, he had hardly said a word to Jagg and his companions. It was the way of things, Jagg noted. The elder soldiers seemed hostile to the younger, almost fearful to learn anything more than their surnames.

Lufsen the stopgap went next. A medicus of a sort, Jagg found the man to be quite morose. He had plucked shrapnel out of Jaggs face and arm during an intense battle with the alien menace then made a solemn prediction that he would die from his wounds. Jagg did not find that exactly good bedside manners.

As Lufsen made it to the side of the street, Jagg ran next. He moved swiftly, for he wore only a charcoal hued tunic with the sleeves rolled up, breaches, and boots. He wore no stormcoat, no chem-proof gloves, no rebreather. Not here on this world. Typical Guard behavior Jagg thought, as he clutched his lasgun and made his way to fall in line behind Lufsen. Prepare men for toxic hell and then send them to an agricultural paradise. Dimly Jagg had an amusing thought of somewhere in the galaxy, Catachan jungle warriors being deposited upon a frozen death world.

Jagg glanced behind him and saw Callum make his way across the street. Of all the members of fourth Section, he was the slowest to cross. Fair enough, he had the task of hauling ammo. Inglorious and vitally important. Cans of heavy stubber rounds were worn about his body and he strained with the effort, kicking a shard of rockcrete as he fell in line.

Callum had a blunt nose, and from what Jagg had learned from their time during the Call, he had lived in the less than savory levels of Krieg. For someone born in such squalor, he had as of late a holy, self-righteous attitude, and a desire to inflict his morality upon others. Callum had chosen the "divine" route, much to Jaggs annoyance.

Jagg much preferred Kellen Raous attitude. Kellen Raous was the only man of Krieg Jagg knew that insisted on giving and being called by his given name, something that on Jaggs world was for close friends alone to use. During the Call and the early war on Jendra IV his attitude had remained upbeat, be it good news or ill, he never frowned. Jagg had asked him once how he did it and the young man had confided in Jagg by saying, "I like it here. Id choose this over staring at a logic-engine for the rest of my life!" To which Jagg meant Raous was insane, but it was an easy insanity to deal with.

Sheer the heavy stubber operator made his way across the street, another veteran who only a few weeks prior had Callums job of tending to the needs of the heavy weapon. He had been withdrawn as of late, and Jagg did not fault him for it. The bond between Sheer and the man whose job he inherited had been a close one.

Raous was the last to leave cover, and only a moment after Sheer did. Better to cross quickly and together rather than slowly one by one. To do that would just make any hiding snipers life that much easier. While Orks were not known for their snipers, Jendra IV bore more threats than just the green variety, and it paid to be cautious.

They formed a line and began to move forward. Elsewhere in the village, infantry elements of first and second Platoon were doing the same.

"Three!" shouted the Commissar and Jaggs mind reeled from the torment.

None of this would have happened if they had just bypassed the village. Alas, Orks in the flanks had a tendency to multiply. Jagg doubted the Imperial craft in orbit would lend their massive firepower to vaporizing the small community, thus saving him and his companions the trouble of clearing it.

"Four!"

It hurt. Hurt in a way Jagg thought not possible. Jagg did not cry out though, he held it back. The Commissar wanted him to cry out, to scream, to wail, but such satisfaction the bast\*ard would have to wait for.

"Five!"

"God Emperor" Jagg hissed through his clenched teeth and found himself already slumping in the arm restraints of the Repenting Rack. If only the Imperial Navy had been sporting enough to lend their awesome destruction to wipe away the nameless town Jagg thought. Just a single blast would have done it.

"Smells like Orks, children." Taubover offered a wry smile to them before pressing on, picking his way along the street edge, eyeing each hole, each window.

Children. He called Jagg, Callum and Raous that. Not in a paternal way either. Having fought alongside the Section, some amongst the surviving veterans had stopped using that term but not the sallow faced Sergeant.

Jagg smelt burnt wood, tasted ash on the air, and could indeed smell Ork. A musky scent; like dried meat or old sweat. Orks were not ones to hide though, so either they had left the village, or more likely, the Death Korps footsloggers had successfully snuck up upon them.

Swallowing, Jagg wiped his hand across his face, smearing grime upon his pale features. Each step the Section took was far too noisy. They weren't masters of stealth, just "gun bunnies" according to Taubover, who had yet to reveal what type of vicious animal a bunny was.

"Were going through the building, this way. Tight quarters, fix." The Sergeant whispered then affixed his black razor sharp bayonet to the lug beneath the lasguns muzzle. It threw off aim, but up close aiming didn't matter.

Jagg and the rest did the same, save the burdened Callum and the Heavy Stubber operator Sheer. Even the clicks of the blades fixing in place seemed as loud as artillery in Jagg's ear. With care, they stepped into the open door of a hab and slipped into a world of shadow. With no electricity, none of the hab's lighting worked, and only daylight from the doorway and holes in the roof gave Jagg any clear idea of where they were.

Taubover and the veterans could see well enough. They had served the Death Korps for a decade and had seen a hundred different suns. Not so for Jagg. Kreigs underhive was always lit by a false light, and he was still adjusting to the myriad of light intensities of a planet with a true sun.

Taubover ducked through a doorway and knelt by a hole blasted through the hab's wall. He surveyed the area quickly before looking back to the Section and making hand gestures.

The men all nodded and Taubover went first, Jagg next crawled through and rolled to the right, leveling his lasgun on a small side street. Finding his arc of cover free of obvious foes Jagg whispered, "Clear", just as the Sergeant did the same.

The rest of the section made their way through, both Callum and Sheer struggling. Callum was unused to carrying the weight of the heavy stubbers "food" and Sheers weapon was deadly, but ungainly and long.

"Not bad. Looks like we are doing this right." Taubover nodded and then winced as he had tempted fate, and fate sure enough obliged.

Gunfire rippled from down the street and distantly Jagg could see tracer rounds spit out from a store and into a hab. Someone in first Platoon had not been successful in remaining stealthy.

"Should we go help them Sergeant?" Callum asked and indicated the growing firefight only a hundred meters away.

"No. Not our job. Theyll handle it, or they wont. Keep moving. We clear whats in front of us, till told otherwise." To emphasize his order Taubover jogged across the narrow street and pressed himself flat against a brick wall, then peered down an alleyway and beckoned.

The rest of the Section darted across the street, their sparse kit jingling as they ran, their boots slapping the pavement. Jagg saw Callum wistfully look across to the firefight where men of Krieg faced alien ferocity.

"Come on!" Sheer said as he carted the heavy stubber across the small side street.

"Six!"

Somehow the whips snapping end, dragged along Jaggs back rather than just striking it. Jaggs threw his head back and he felt his neck muscles bulging, but the feral cry almost loosed from his lips was stilled.

"Seven!"

Jagg opened his eyes and looked up, seeing blue sky, a few white clouds. They were nice clouds, much prettier than the acidic green fog of Kriegs Rad. Strange, Jagg thought, to think about the sky at a time like-

"Eight!"

Jagg felt hot tears free themselves from his eyes, and he quickly shut them. Once more Jagg rested his sweating forehead against the cool metal of the Repenting Rack. The Sergeant should have taken Callum up on his suggestion and assisted whoever it was that stumbled across the Orks.

Orks, Jagg knew, were drawn to violence. The more violence the more Orks. Down the narrow alley, Jagg peered over the shoulders of Sergeant Taubover and his voxman, Grieg. Lufsen lingered back, and as the Sections stopgap medicus, was expected to stay somewhat out of danger. Past the bobbing gray helms, Jagg saw the shapes of beasts pass by, heading towards the noise. Meanwhile behind him he heard and felt the hot nervous breaths of the rest of the Section.

Taubover increased his speed, not wanting to be caught fighting the Orks in such a narrow space, but luck did not hold out. While many Orks bypassed the alley, one abruptly turned down it.

The creature was enormous, with green leathery skin, and clothing that consisted of bits of metal quite literally bolted onto its body. Additionally, flaps of dirty fabric fluttered from the things bulging limbs and broad torso. Its red, glittering eyes widened in surprise as it found enemies quicker than it expected. The beast bellowed, revealing an oversized mouth laden with tusks and teeth. The Ork managed to raise up a rusted cleaver in one hand and a ramshackle slug thrower in the other, sending off a series of heavy slugs as it did so.

Sergeant Taubover threw himself prone instantly. Grieg knelt and fired his lasgun over Taubovers head sending glittering darts of light into the Ork.

There was no missing at this range and in such a small space. Jagg brought his lasgun to bear and snapped off a few rounds, lending his fire to the fray. The Ork staggered back as smoking holes were torn into its broad chest and it seemed about to fall,, when in true Ork-like fashion the alien flung itself forward in a final surge of hate and power.

Alley bricks sundered and the Ork swept with its cleaver and fired off a flurry of slugs from its crude weapon. Ear rattling sounds and dust filled the alley from the attack and debris from shattered masonry forced Jagg to turn away.

The dust settled and Jagg looked behind him. The rest of the Section was huddled low with nervous expressions on their faces. Jagg looked ahead and gasped. The Ork was lying face down, its body wedged in the alley. The aliens cleaver was buried in the pavement, just a breath away from the prone Sergeants head.

Grieg adjusted his helmet and voxpack and looked around, "Emperor protects! Did it miss us?!"

"Anyone hit?" Taubover shouted, his words louder than they needed to be due the deafening firefight.

"No, Sergeant," came the uneven and surprised responses from the members of Section Four.

"Alright then. Lucky. We need to get out of here. Keep mov-" Taubover stood up and his order was cut short as another Ork turned down the alley. Behind it, Jagg could see several more of the lumbering creatures. They had been drawn to the sound of weapons fire.

The Orks let loose with a particular warcry they all seemed to roar before charging headlong into battle.

Jagg had learned to hate the sound, in his few dealings with Orks.

"Back! Back! Back!" Taubover snapped off two quick bursts of lasgun fire that lit up the alley. Grieg stumbled into Jagg firing at the Orks in a panic.

Jagg was unable to see anything past Grieg's voxpack and head, and filled with a rising dread that they were about to be brought down by Ork slugs and axes he made a split-second decision. "Handgrenadten!"

"No!" the whole Section screamed out but it was too late, the stick bomb was already in the air.

"Nine!" the Commissar called out as the lash struck with a cracking fury.

Jagg spasmed from the blow and clenched his hands so tightly he could feel blood welling in his palms.

"Ten! Halfway there, trooper Achim Jagg. Not even a little plea? Insolence doesn't suit you. Eleven!"

No pleas. No begging. Jagg gave the Commissar nothing, though it took every ounce of inner will not to break down and beg for leniency. Pride had its uses, Jagg grimly noted in-between the lances of fiery pain slashing his back open. But it was pride that put him up on the rack.

They ran out of the alley, falling on top of each other to escape of all things, Jaggs grenade.

Jagg had thrown the stick bomb far and high, and the screams from his own Section had even given the Orks pause as they looked up at the spiraling explosive.

Sergeant Taubover was the last out of the alley - he was blasted out as the grenade exploded. Bricks vaporized and bits of metal spat out, bouncing off walls, and glancing off pavement. A cloud of dust coughed forth from the alleyway entrance and onto the street the Section tumbled, coughing and sputtering.

Jaggs senses were reeling. He was alive, but his ears were ringing and he felt pain along his face and chest. He patted himself down and plucked out bits of rock from his arms and legs. With blurry vision, Jagg looked at the rest of the Section.

Taubover was reaching to put his helmet back on. Grieg was lying on the street gripping his wounded leg. The rest seemed to have avoided the blast thanks to others absorbing it for them.

Sergeant Taubover secured his helmet, but left the strap undone. Letting the strap stay attached could cause the thing to throttle you in rare cases - such as when a fellow tossed a grenade in close quarters. The dust-coated man looked down the alley and then walked over to Jagg.

Jagg rose to his feet, but the force of Taubovers punch knocked him right back down again.

"Why we arent dead is beyond me! You idiot. Anyone hit this time?"

"Why you are still here is beyond me Sergeant. Where are you going?" said a new voice from behind them.

Striding out of the hole in the hab they had so recently emerged from was a sinister figure clad in a heavy black stormcoat, despite the summer heat. A man hated as much as he was feared, Commissar Razin was everything people

expected a Commissar to be: a bast\*ard.

Sergeant Taubover shook his head then glared at Jagg before returning his gray eyes to the Commissar. Taubover was a veteran soldier, he knew how best to answer a Commissar. "Why, forward Commissar Sir. We are going forward."

"I believe forward is that way." The political agent casually drew a sleek laspistol and gestured back down the alleyway.

"Yes, Commissar sir. Must have gotten turned about Commissar sir. Jagg, take lead, get to the other side of that alley. Have fun up front." Taubover said with a dry smile.

Jagg was still trying to get his senses about him and he stood and nodded wearily before gazing at the alley from which dust still emerged. "We should just go around."

"What?" came the Commissars voice behind Jagg.

Jagg was not an old soldier, but he learned quick, he cast a look Razins way and called out with as much false bravado as he could muster, "For the Emperor!" and flung himself down the alley.

Jaggs booted feet pounded broken pavement, and he nearly tripped over a half pulverized brick. There were Ork bodies stuffed in the alley and Jagg leapt to land atop one of the dead creatures. He fired a quick shot into the things head just to make sure and pressed on, scaling over other Orks, firing into their skulls as he went. The aliens had a tendency not to die even after seemingly fatal wounds. Head shots usually kept an Ork dead. Usually.

Jagg moved down the alley with nervous steps. His skin still burned with shame. He had nearly gotten them all killed. Of all the people he did not want to fail, it was his fellow soldiers. They - and they alone - were the only family he or any man of Krieg had. The only ones he could ever trust, and he had nearly killed them with an act of panic. Even the Sections most distant members were men whose trust he needed if he were to survive. Without their trust, Jagg knew his life was in jeopardy. How could he count on them to guard over his back, to cover his advance, to watch him in his sleep, if he in turn could not do the same?

Jagg ran over the shredded bodies and into an open street which looked no different than the one he had just been in. To his left Jagg saw the backs of distant Orks swarming towards the sounds of gunfire. Jagg looked right, while his heart beat faster and faster. It looked like an Ork encampment.

Tauber leapt through the alley, hands clenched about his lasgun. He shook his head at Jagg and said, "You're stupid. And your helmet has gone missing."

The others exited one by one and a tight ring of soldiers formed around the broken mouth of the alley. Most were glaring at Jagg.

"Which way?" Jagg asked and averted his eyes.

"We go right. Too many to the left, and so long as we aren't here when the Commissar comes through the alley, we're fine. After you trooper." Tauber indicated to Jagg then pointed towards the encampment.

"Twelve!" The crack echoed out, "Thirteen."

Sweat bathed Jagg and made his back sting even between the strokes of the electrified whip. He could no longer keep his teeth clenched and instead his mouth hung open and a line of spit fell from him.

"Fourteen!"

Jagg arched and choked off what was almost a cry, almost a whimpering plea for the pain to stop. Almost, but not quite.

"Should. Taken. Orks." He smirked to himself as drool dribbled down his sweaty pale chest.

Jagg staggered ahead, still disorientated from the stick-bomb. He moved forth and blinked his eyes rapidly, trying to clear away the dust. Ahead was a camp, and of Ork make. Walls of debris had been hastily constructed, crude tents set up and fastened to the towns buildings. The street was coated in items Orks disregarded for one reason or another. Bent tools, burnt wood, cracked stone, strips of fabric, dung. Lots of dung.

Jagg knelt by a piece of masonry which had fallen from a store and swept his lasgun right to left. He saw no movement besides a few bits of paper floating past. Jagg looked back and waved the Section ahead.

Rapidly they moved into cover, spreading out to not make an easy target for something like a grenade. Sergeant Taubover made a quick scan then darted forwards into the encampment. He paused and looked back, "If we find something, kill it quiet. Otherwise, the other end of the street is going to come back here. They like noise."

Jagg nodded and he noted that though the orders were for everyone Taubover was looking directly at him. Together they moved, from cover to cover, passing into the Ork camp.

Every breeze set Jagg on edge and he licked his dusty lips while placing a fingertip squarely on the trigger of his weapon. Remembering the Sergeants orders, he relaxed his digit. He couldnt afford to fail them again by shooting a stray sheet of paper.

The sounds of battle echoed in the distance. It felt odd not rushing towards the sound of battle, but Sergeant Taubover was correct. Rushing into a swarm of Orks was inadvisable. "Pick your fights right." The sergeant often said.

"Over here! Sergeant! I have something. By the Throne!" came Callums voice.

Jagg looked over and saw that Callum was standing in front of one of the tents, his body stock still.

Taubover rose cautiously, and seeing that no Orks were about, gestured for the rest of the Section to follow. When they reached the tent, Taubover peered in and winced. "Lufsen, time to play doctor."

Jagg smelled urine, fecal matter, and blood. An unpleasant mix to say the least, and when he peered in, he was struck by an even stronger stench of decay. The tent was dim but within he could see horror.

The Orks had set up a pen made from hunks of metal and wood. Inside the cage thin dirt-caked humans squatted. Some were men, some women, some children, and all bore signs of abuse. The bottom of their cage was a mire of human waste, and dead bodies had been pushed unceremoniously to the far corners of the pen to rot.

"What is this?" Jagg asked aloud and grasped his weapon while Lufsen ducked into the tent.

"Slaves. The Orks use people as slaves. Dont feed them. Just use them up. They must have been here for weeks." Taubover slung his weapon over his shoulder and moved to open up the pen. The people within shied back, dirty bodies shuddering, eyes wide with fear.

Callum shook his head in disbelief, "What did they eat? Drink? How did they live?" he moved forward and raised his hands, "We are here to help. Youll be fine. We are Imperial Guard. Men of Krieg come to liberate you." Callum spoke as if talking to small children, and the people within responded by nodding slowly.

"Probably were eating each other. Drinking water they found pooling in the ground from when it rained." Taubover said and pointed to the holes in the tent and then worked the metal door open.

Lufsen produced his medi-bag and seemed hesitant to enter the cage of filth, but then steeled himself and stepped in, kneeling slowly. "Your worst wounded, bring them here." He said.

They did not talk, but they came forth, ushering shivering children towards Lufsen, who looked back to the rest of the assembled Section. "I dont think I-"

"Tend to them Lufsen." Taubover ordered, not letting Lufsens usual pessimism shine through. However even the most optimistic medicus would consider most of them a lost cause.

Callum gasped and stepped towards Jagg, "I've never seen something like this. I've seen dead. You know Jagg. But not something like this."

Jagg had not either. He had seen civilians die, and seen them dead, but never reduced to animals. He saw a mother, all bones, cradling her comatose child before Lufsens tending hands.

Jagg saw a man, someone who might have been his age. Perhaps he was once strong but now was nothing but a bent shell of a person. The mans face was a weeping sore, his body laden with festering cuts. The sight of it seemed to touch Callums heart in Jaggs mind. Jagg did not feel pity. Jagg felt something else: hate..

Jagg turned his gaze to Sergeant Taubover, "The camp has good cover at its entrance Sergeant. Lets set up and draw the Orks to us. Lets kill them."

Taubover pursed his lips and looked to the men of his Section. He then sighed, "Advice from you? Hmmm..fine Lufsen, Raous stay here with the people. Sheer, Callum..." Taubover reached a hand out and shook the bleary-eyed soldier, and called out, "Callum! Go help Sheer. I want to make the road unfriendly. Grieg and I will take right flank, Jagg you hold left. Alone. Try not to shoot the Commissar if he peeks his head through that alley. No more friendly fire eh?"

"Yes, Sergeant." They responded in unison.

"Fifteen!" SNAP "Quite the mess your back is. Quite the mess. Must think yourself a real hero? Worth it?"

Jagg was thinking it was not. He was having serious, deep regrets, and yet still did not shout out. He panted and thought back.

The Section moved smoothly. Jagg tucked himself behind the same bit of masonry he had hidden behind when he had come upon the camp. In the distance he could see Orks moving towards the distant sounds of combat.

Sheer and Callum tore down hunks of the camp's fence and dragged it to the center of the road. Sheer propped the long black heavy stubber atop the debris pile and went prone, exposing little more than his helmeted head. Callum knelt by his gunner's side, opening up crates of ammo, and feeding a belt into the receiver of Sheer's weapon.

Sergeant Taubover and his voxman Grieg took up positions on the opposite side of the street, crouching inside a blasted building.

Normally Jagg felt fear before battle, a fear that he fought to control from the beginning to the end of the fight, at which point exhaustion set in. Not this time; this time he felt a good and strong hate. He could handle killing, that was war, but the images of naked shaking humanity stuffed in filthy cages was too much for him. It was humanity's fate should they take a step back, should they give way before the alien. Not only that, Jagg still felt a self-loathing for his earlier failure.

"Let's get some attention. Keep in cover. Fire!" Taubover bellowed out and sent off the first sizzling rounds across the open street and into the backs of the distant Orks.

Jagg heard the satisfying sound of tearing fabric, which was the noise the heavy stubber made as it sent out bursts of slugs. Not wild sweeping shots, but concentrated bursts, so that each Ork hit, felt it.

Jagg smiled and tucked his weapon tight against his shoulder. He leveled the front to the back sight and held a breath. He saw the backs of Orks turning to face him; their mouths open in their typical barbaric warcry, their pistols and cleavers raised. Jagg aimed for the nearest, sighting just below the Ork's chin. Jagg squeezed the trigger, using just the tip of his finger.

The Ork staggered as a burst of blood sprouted from its lower lip. What Jagg started Sheer finished and puffs of smoke riddled the Ork's body as the heavy

stubber gave forth a noisy burst. The Ork fell dead and more charged over it.

"Die!" Jagg screamed. It wasn't an original cry, not hardly, but he could think of nothing else.

He fired off steady single shots. For each Ork that staggered, Sheers Heavy Stubber finished it off. That was how the Death Korps infantry Section worked. The troopers kept the enemy busy while the heavy stubber did the killing.

An Ork's face twisted from impacts and the creature collapsed. Another charged forwards, blazing away with an oversized sidearm while whirling a chain over its head. Lancing shots to the right of Jagg dashed into the Ork's legs and sent it tumbling. Jagg took a breath, aimed for the head and fired, he was satisfied to see the thing go still.

The alien monsters were fifty yards away and their weapons were sending out a reply to the undermanned Section's fire. Slugs whistled past Jagg and he crouched behind the masonry, gritting his teeth as chunks of stone were blown off.

Jagg fired twice more, missing with both hurried shots, then fell completely behind cover to remove the spent power cell and produce another from his dirty tunic.

When Jagg reloaded he leaned around the cover to provide as small a target as possible. Many Orks were lying in the street in pools of blood; many more were still coming at the Section. Jagg heard the steady short buzzsaw of Sheers heavy stubber and smiled lightly as he saw Orks flung back from the shower of heavy stubber shells. Jagg added to the fire, switching his weapon to full auto.

Spears of red light leapt from the muzzle of his weapon and crashed into the mass of green. Some Orks fell, others hardly noticed, and then the worst thing for an Imperial Guardsman occurred. Hand-to-hand combat.

"Ready boys! Be ready!" the sergeant managed to cry out, but by then the Orks were atop them in what the old veterans called, Chop Range.

"I'm well trained at this sort of thing trooper. I know that right about now you should be screaming. Inside your head I know you are, but I'd like to hear it. Correction. The men need to hear it. I don't whip you per se. I'm whipping your actions. It's the deed I'm punishing, not so much the man. So! For the sake of morale would you mind? Sixteen!"

Jagg almost obliged him. The strike sent him reeling into the metal pole hard enough that he bit his tongue. Blood mixed with the drool running from his mouth.

Through pain-blinded eyes Jagg could see both his wrists were bloody and raw from his jerking. He imagined that somehow the pain would have become manageable by now. He told himself that he had taken plenty of blows before; what were a few more? However as Jagg heard the whip being drawn back and picking up speed he let out a silent hiss of fear. The whip did not strike, but instead swirled, faster and faster, and gave Jagg plenty of time to think.

Three Orks were bearing down on him. One was more than a match for a human in the brutality of melee. Jagg thus normally did his very best to avoid a nose-to-nose fight. But as the creatures neared Jagg suddenly sprung out towards them.

The nearest Ork had clutched a hand axe and reared it back to deliver a stroke that would surely cleave Jagg in two. Jagg flung himself backwards onto the hard street and jerked the trigger of his lasgun. Cracking shots hammered into the Ork as Jagg emptied most of a power cell into it. The lumbering green creature sank to its armored knees and before it could fall the second Ork had leapt over it with a single club held in both of its hands.

Jagg was on his back, heart racing and eyes wide. Hate had fueled him thus far, but his old friend fear was back. With a grunt, he rolled to the side and the street next to his face exploded from the force of the clubs impact. Jagg lifted his lasgun but a heavy booted foot kicked it wide. With a guttural roar, the Ork raised its club and then shuddered.

Sheers heavy stubber peppered the Ork in a quick burst, buying Jagg time before the stubber moved on to other targets. Not wishing to waste a moment, Jagg rolled to his knees and thrust out his weapon. The blade of the bayonet bit through hide and into flesh. Not enough to kill the Ork and so Jagg screamed and pulled the trigger of his weapon. The recoil of the shots sent Jagg back on the ground again, and in a gout of Ork blood, his bayonet was worked free.

Jagg didnt have time to see the alien fall for the third had reached him and with what Jagg almost took for a grin on its face, the thing leapt. The creature brought to bear its giant cobbled together pistol and Jaggs eyes widened, but true to Ork form it tried to use its pistol as club rather than a firearm. Blood burst from Jaggs nose as the Ork bashed him. His vision returned to see the Ork straddled atop him, bellowing in pure delight. The Ork raised its pistol to smash Jaggs head into pulp. No shots from Sheer came this time.

Jagg saw his lasgun at his side; he must have dropped it when the Ork landed atop him. He reached a dirty hand over to it and brought it up by the barrel, swinging it with all his might into the Orks head.

The Ork dropped its pistol and grabbed Jaggs lasgun and tossed it aside. The

blood enraged creature locked its fists together and drew back to smash the puny human beneath it.

In desperation Jagg reached out and grasped the Orks discarded weapon. Jagg hefted the unwieldy Ork pistol in his hand and fired. The kick snapped his wrist back, spraining it, and the slug passed through the Orks head and out the other side. Blood vomited forth from the beast and its red eyes went dull before it landed fully atop Jagg, pinning him. The sounds of gunfire ceased and the battle ended.

Jagg struggled without much luck to get out from under the dead mass of green, and it took help from Callum and Sergeant Taubover to haul himself free.

Jaggs wrist burned and he rubbed it before picking up his discarded lasgun. Green bodies twitched in the street and Grieg delivered shots to their skulls. Sheer was keeping his weapon trained on the road, just in case, but as far as Jagg could tell they had won, and suffered little for it.

"The Emperor protects." He said to himself. Thrice that day they should have all died, and thrice they had been spared.

When Commissar Razin emerged, laspistol in hand, Jagg stood to attention.

"Ah, thats more like it Sergeant. Cleared out their camp I see." The Commissar said.

The Sergeant was an old soldier for sure and replied, "Yes Commissar sir. Drove them from their own nest and shot them dead. We have rescued civilians sir, in that tent."

"Hmmm..." was the Commissars only reply, followed by, "Show me."

"Seventeen!" Razin cried and the whips buzzing strike nearly sent Jagg unconscious.

Things would have gone much easier if it had and Jagg dimly noticed he was not standing at all, but instead hanging limply from the blood-drenched bonds about his wrists. As before, the Commissar took his time, winding his whip back, letting Jagg contemplate the origins of his misery.

Into the stench-filled tent Taubover and the rest led the Commissar. The tall man sneered at what his eyes took in and he dusted his stormcoat off, as if the mere presence of the quaking people were somehow unclean.

Razin shook his head then looked squarely at Sergeant Taubover, "Traitors. Agents of the Orks. Sympathizers. Baggage. Stop wasting our medical care on them. Sergeant we have a war to win and it cant be won with collaborators in our midst. These people should have died for their Emperor. Instead they aided the enemy. I want them shot. Then you and your section press on. Understood?"

The Sergeant paused and swallowed but he was an old soldier, "Understood." He licked his lips and added, "Commissar sir."

"Good." Razin said and with another look of disgust, the Commissar departed.

"Ill do it. Get out of here, all of you." Taubover said and lowered the brim of his helmet to shield his eyes and glanced at the people who cowered in their cages.

"No! You cant Sergeant!" Callum stepped forth and put himself between the people and the rest of the Section.

"Throne's sake, no way Sergeant!" Sheer interjected.

"Sergeant?" Lufsen asked incredulous.

"Think I like it? But that Commissar is outside. We dont do it, he will." Taubover growled and jerked his head, "This isn't the first time I've had an order I'm not fond of. Won't be the last either. Go!"

"Sergeant! This is wrong. Let them go. Just, let them go." Callum pleaded.

"Its my hide if I do that. And I quite like it. Callum, get out of here. All of you. Now."

"Wait." Jagg said. He saw a chance to redeem himself and added, "Ill do it Sergeant."

"Youre sick Jagg. Nearly killing us not enough? Need more blood?" the Sergeant

said and shook his head.

"No. I mean itll be my hide. Ill let them go. Ill take the blame for this. They escaped on my watch. Go distract the Commissar and Ill do it."

Taubover pondered a few tense moments then shook his head as if already regretting his choice and said, "Its your back. Do it."

The Section stared at Jagg then one by one they departed the tent, a few offering him nods of silent approval.

Jagg waited until the Section left before smiling at the people who whimpered in their cell. "Actually, Im doing this because I slipped up with a grenade. Could have killed us all. But they dont need to know that. You win, I win. Out through the bottom of the tent you go. Hide. Now." He fired in the air a few times to get them scurrying and then went outside to report his failure to his Sergeant, who in turn had to tell Razin. The Commissar was less than pleased.

"Eighteen!"

It was beyond pain.

"Nineteen! Does your failure to properly carry out an order deserve a little shout? A little cry?" the Commissar taunted.

"Im sorry! Im sorry!" Jagg broke down. He was sorry he nearly got his own men and himself killed. The pain hurt, but was worth it. It was a worthy pain for an act that could have ended them all. But they didnt need to know that.

Jagg was fast becoming an old soldier. Let them all think him a savior and let his penance be a private one. Let them never know that he really was a hard bast\*ard, and let the Commissar think he was repentant for his failure to shoot the civillians.

"Apology accepted. Twenty!"