



# SHADOWSPEAR

## DARK UPRISING

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Screams echoed through the corridors of the Forge Infernus. Not the familiar moans of mech-thralls, nor the static machine-growls of bound Daemon Engines, but the deafening, vox-amplified blare of the forge's living alarm system – scores of mutant serfs neurally wired into pict scanners and vox arrays around the complex.

'Intruders,' growled Warpsmith Haxul, the mechadendrite tendrils of his power armour hissing and snapping in irritation as he made his way along the iron gangway leading to the melding pits. 'Loyalists, perhaps?'

Vorak Nar lumbered at the Warpsmith's side, but gave no answer beyond a guttural rumble. The Obliterator never did. It was one of the reasons that Haxul prized its company, aside from the terrible carnage it unleashed upon his foes. Acidic drool spilled from the massive arcano-cyborg's grilled mouth, hissing as it dripped down the monster's hulking fleshmetal exoskeleton.

'No,' said Haxul, continuing as if his companion had responded. 'None of the Corpse-Emperor's lackeys are left alive on Nemendghast. This is something else.'

They clattered down a spiral stairway and entered the melding pits. Within this cavernous chamber, enormous shells of hellforged metal were raised upon chains of scrimshawed bone. Each of the carapaces was suspended over a cable-lined womb-cauldron filled with molten soul-stuff – the raging essence of daemonkind, dragged from the warp by Haxul's own hand. For days the stuff had been rendered and processed by the tools of

dark industry, and now it was almost ready to be poured into an iron shell, transformed into a cybernetic killing machine that would reave and slay for Abaddon the Despoiler.



Though the air was thick with oily smoke, Warpsmith Haxul could taste the copper tang of fresh gore. Scores of motionless shapes were sprawled across the floor, flashing red in the strobing glare of hazard-lumens. Most of the corpses were little more than ruptured piles of meat, the remains of mutant cyber-thralls and slaves who had worked their miserable lives away in the Forge Infernus to feed the Despoiler's war machine. Their deaths were less than nothing. There were always more mortals to come by.

More ominously, Haxul saw islands of black power armour amidst the sea of ruptured bodies; Chaos Space Marines in various states of ruin, their throats had been torn open and their innards pulled out. Smoking bolt-casings littered the floor. The Warpsmith shook his head, confused by what he was seeing. Clearly, the slaves had died trying to overwhelm the Black Legion sentinels.

'But no mere chattel could do this,' he muttered, rolling over one of the dead warriors with his boot. Some form of jagged blade had carved through the dead man's helmet and the skull beneath.

Vorak Nar's wordless growls became louder and more insistent, as its sunken eyes stared out across the smoke-wreathed hall. The Obliterator's torso peeled back with a sickening tearing sound, and a red-hot plasma cannon emerged, its fleshmetal surface wet with gory slime.

Haxul turned, bolt pistol raised.

He heard the patter of bare feet on the ground and the guttural screams of maddened beasts. From the coiling wisps of smoke at the far end of the hall charged scores of thin, emaciated wretches – mecha-thralls and mutant beastmen. Some of them dragged themselves along the ground on crooked limbs, unable to run because of the spiked manacles buried into their flesh. Most of them clutched pitiful weapons, lengths of iron and barbed chains. Others were entirely unarmed, but for their yellowed nails and teeth.

‘Defiance is met with excruciation,’ the Warpsmith bellowed. ‘You shall all boil in molten iron for this.’

Those words should have seen even the most defiant slave cower in terror, for it was a threat that the Warpsmith had carried out many times. On this day, his words had no effect at all. The slaves charged. Their eyes blazed in the darkness, and their mouths stretched inhumanly wide as they howled like tortured beasts. Something else answered their cry; something distant, but coming ever closer. An ugly glow radiated from the rear of the chamber, growing in intensity with every passing moment.

Cursing, Haxul raised his pistol and fired. One of the onrushing humans burst apart, showering its fellows with gore. Vorak Nar opened up with a chaingun that protruded from the glistening meat of its forearm, and the Obliterator’s plasma cannon spat a flaring ball of orange energy that incinerated a half-dozen thralls.

Still the tide of bodies ran on, uncaring, and behind them the melding hall was illuminated by sickening, lurid colours. A formless wave of screaming spirits flooded across the roof of the chamber, winding around columns and spilling through the exhaust shafts lining the walls.

Warpsmith Haxul knew now what had caused the alarms to blare and the sanity to be blasted from his mecha-thralls; somehow, his wards had been breached. Daemonic spirits were seeping into reality unchecked. Looming faces leered down at him, and gibbering mouths filled the hall with mocking laughter.



‘How?’ he growled. He had been over every inch of the Forge Infernus, calculating and recalculating every conceivable hexagrammatic pattern, every profane etching and technomantic ritual. His workings were perfect. Yet somehow, undeniably, they had failed.

Vorak Nar ignored the pathetic mortals who swarmed around it, and raised its mecha-organic cannons to fire at the swirling mass of warp-stuff. Plasma fire and autocannon rounds lit up the chamber, shredding rockcrete walls and toppling gantries of rusted steel. But it was like shooting at water. The disembodied host swept down upon the Obliterator, encircling it in a whirlwind of roiling energy. Vorak Nar was smashed to the ground, landing with force enough to shake the entire hall. The Obliterator rocked and convulsed, still firing its weapons madly even as the incorporeal storm tore it apart.

‘No!’ roared Haxul, enraged at the loss of such a valuable asset.

The malformed mob rushed forwards and leapt upon the Warpsmith. Blinded with rage, he killed them by the score, methodically smashing and tearing them apart with his gauntlets, hewing others to death with his axe. But the Forge Infernus housed a million slaves, and no matter how many he butchered, still they came on. He was aware of their claws scraping across his helm, fingers and nails breaking on impervious ceramite.

Haxul closed his fist around the skull of one of his tormentors, and squeezed until he felt the bone crunch and splinter. The world was a blur of gore and madness.

A bloated form scuttled out of the darkness. Haxul had the brief impression of an oversized, metallic arachnid, its segmented body slick

with gore and oil. The thing slammed into Haxul with the force of a thunder hammer and bore him to the ground. He found himself staring into a hideous insectoid face, many-eyed and terrible. As he struggled and cursed beneath its weight, blade-like limbs stabbed down, piercing his chest and gouging great rents in his armour. He felt a spear of agony shoot through his left elbow. Haxul looked, and saw that the arm ended in a bloody stump. His severed limb lay twitching on the floor, power axe still grasped in its gauntleted fist.

‘Enough,’ boomed a voice, and immediately the hideous thing retreated, scuttling away into the shadows. So too did the maddened thralls fall to their knees, gibbering uselessly. Haxul lay on his back, wheezing through punctured lungs that were swiftly filling with blood.

Striding out of the swirling fumes came a cloaked figure. The air boiled and shimmered as the stranger came closer, and the disembodied warp-spirits of the forge coalesced about him like a cloak of lurid colours. He wore long robes of crimson and a ram-horned skull helm, and burning braziers sat atop his pauldrons. In one hand he carried a great staff topped with a daemonic skull. Though his robes were blood-red, the Eye of Horus sat proudly upon his pauldron.



Warpsmith Haxul recognised the occult splendour of a Master of Possession. A sorcerer, and consorter with daemonkind. Hatred filled his throat like bile, choking him. He despised nothing as much as these duplicitous conjurers.

The malformed throng prostrated themselves before the newcomer, as if he were a saviour come to deliver them from their worthless lives. They parted, bowing and wailing, as he passed them by, and made his way before the Warpsmith. Haxul tried to raise his bolt pistol, but the horned warrior placed a boot upon his wrist.

‘Traitor,’ hissed Haxul. ‘Fool. Do you know what you have done? The Warmaster himself granted me command of the Forge Infernus. Do you think he will forgive this? When the forge fires dim and production grinds to a halt, he will discover what you have done here. What do you think he will do to you then, sorcerer?’ He spat the last word as an insult.

‘The fires will not go out,’ said the Master of Possession, kneeling before Haxul. ‘They will burn fiercer than ever. You put your faith in metal, Warpsmith, but such simple, crude matter cannot hope to contain the raw potentiality of the empyrean. This is why I have come. Why I have liberated this place from your wasteful ignorance.’

Malevolent things danced triumphantly above Haxul, their half-formed faces leering and mouths drooling as they revelled in their freedom.

‘You will burn for this,’ Haxul growled.

‘Perhaps. But not today, I think. Fear not, Warpsmith. This may not be your end, either. You will serve the Octed faithfully, if you survive.’

Haxul spat blood in his tormentor’s face. The figure did not flinch as the acidic gore splattered across his helm.

‘A worthy vessel indeed,’ the sorcerer said, lowering the tip of his staff towards Haxul’s torn chest. ‘Your reward shall be immortality, of a kind. Accept the blessing of enlightenment.’

As the death’s-head totem touched his flesh, it flared with unholy light. Agony and horror filled his mind as he felt something clawing its way out of him, not just through his living flesh, but through his very soul. He fought, matching his boundless rage against the intrusion, pouring every ounce of his will into the battle.

It was not enough. What remained of Haxul was devoured, and into the hollow cell of his flesh poured something ancient and nameless and filled with terrible delight. When at last his tortured, twisted body opened its eyes, it was not the Warpsmith that peered out from them.

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