

WARHAMMER
40,000

SANCTUS REACH

PENUMBRAL SPIKE



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Time stretched into the distant future above, banded in the streaked black stone of Obstiria, reaching through another ten thousand years of war to the end of everything. There the Emperor waited, flanked by the billions of warriors who had fallen in His name, to vanquish the Great Enemy in the culmination of all battles.

Below, the past rolled out into the darkness, falling down to Obstiria's core through millennia of past glories and tragedies. Through the Altigenos Purges and the Black Crusades of the Arch-Traitor, the Age of Apostasy and the hellish vistas of the Scouring. There lay the Great Crusade and the Great Heresy, the crumbling obscurity of times that lay before the coming of the Emperor. The Age of Strife boiled like a river of black blood at the nadir of time, rushing over the forgotten horrors of the Dark Age of Technology.

Mighty heroes stood astride the burning worlds of myth. First amongst them was the Emperor Himself, the beginning and the end of all history, His face hidden by the glare of His divinity. His son, the Primarch Guilliman, bearing the weight of the Imperium on his shoulders. Fulminos, the greatest Obsidian Glaive who had ever walked the galaxy, echoed the image of Guilliman as he struck down alien, daemon and heretic with his blade of black glass.

Brother Molkis saw from the beginning to the end. The Obsidian Glaives were not just an army, not even just a Space Marine Chapter. They were a pillar of the history of mankind, forged by the will of the Emperor to bear up the shield that staved off the extinction of the human race. All their glories, past and present, spun around Molkis at a thousand years a moment.

He could see it all, from the Great Crusade and the Heresy to the Age of Imperium and the founding of the Obsidian Glaives Chapter, through the endless wars to defend humanity and on to the future. Those myths that had their origins

in the prehistory of the Imperium ran on through the present, that arbitrary point where Molkis himself stood, and on until the end. It was a comfort to Molkis, who had fought in those wars, to know the victories that he had bled for would roll on until the end of time.

Then he saw his hands. The hand that had held his chainsword and his bolter were gone. They were ugly masses of metal, painted black and pitted with old battle scars. One was a cylindrical power fist, four fingers radiating out, powered by pistons to seize and crush. The other ended in a pair of lascannon barrels. Not hands at all, but the weapons of a war machine.

His body was not his body, but the massive body of that machine. A power plant thudded its slow rhythm behind him. His eyes were not eyes but the lenses of picters mounted on the front of his hull, transmitting flickering images through his optic nerves.

And around him was not the endless vista of his Chapter's history but dark and dismal cloisters, with a vaulted ceiling overhead and implements of incarceration and punishment on the walls. Manacles hung alongside thumbscrews and paring blades. On the ceiling was mounted a full-length body harness of spiked iron bands, a testament to endless suffering.

Someone was speaking. Molkis looked down and felt his whole body tilt, a tank-sized sarcophagus clad in ceramite. He saw his massive steel feet against the cracked flagstones of the cloisters, and the enormous shadow he cast in the light of the torches burning on the pillars.

A Space Marine Scout stood beside Molkis – an Obsidian Glaive, his demi-armor in the black and bone of the Chapter. He was young, midway through his transformation into a full Space Marine, the surgical scars still pink against the skin of his face and scalp.

'Molkis!' repeated the Scout. 'Brother Molkis, come back to us! The time has come to fight!'

Molkis felt connections sparking in the back of his mind, accessing the data-medium stored in his sarcophagus. The name 'Desaan' was projected onto his consciousness. This Scout was named Desaan. Brother Desaan of the Tenth Company.

'Are you with us, Brother Molkis?' continued Desaan. 'We need you now. Of all times, of all battles, we need you now.'

Molkis's picters scanned around. The data-medium told him he was in the Penumbral Spike, in the Cloisters of the Bold, where the cold of the earth met the heat of Obstiria's core. Below were the generatoria and forges, and above

were the sparring halls and cell blocks. He had once walked these halls, marching alongside his brothers. Now this machine walked in his place – this Dreadnought, this war machine in which he was the pilot.

‘I am with you,’ said Brother Molkis.

‘Do you remember?’ asked Desaan.

‘Remember?’

‘You are Brother Molkis of the Fourth Company,’ said Desaan. ‘You fell to the Kraken at Devilin Reach. You were wounded but the Apothecaries stayed your death, and you were mounted in this Dreadnought. Do you remember?’

Flickers of pain burst at the back of Molkis’s memory. He remembered a tide of monstrous flesh, and the chill of a bony blade spearing through him. He remembered the cold of the blood draining from his body.

‘Yes,’ said Molkis. ‘I remember.’

‘Good,’ said Desaan, with obvious relief. Molkis realised that Desaan had gone through this same conversation many times. ‘War has come, my brother. We need you at the front line, on the battlements.’

‘But we are at Penumbral Spike,’ said Molkis, ‘on Obstiria. We are not at war. This is our fortress-monastery, where we are inviolable. Or do I remember wrongly, Brother Desaan?’

‘You remember right,’ said Desaan. ‘Obstiria is invaded. The Penumbral Spike is besieged. The greenskins are here.’

The Penumbral Spike shuddered, slabs of black stone tumbling down its vertical sides. The irradiated rocky valleys around it shuddered too, momentarily as fluid as water. The lesser peaks around the Spike shed their caps of caked grey ash and new raw gashes opened up in the ground.

One of the peaks was punctured by a dozen explosions, throwing black plumes of pulverised rock into the sky. The mountain collapsed, millions of tonnes of rock plummeting into the mountain’s roots. Rockslides flooded the valleys with rushing waves of stone. Another peak went down a moment later, closer this time, the deep thud of the explosions shaking the Penumbral Spike as if by a giant hand. In a few moments the craze of valleys and crevasses had changed, the map around the Obsidian Glaives fortress-monastery rewritten.

Augmented eyes were just able to make out the ramshackle halftracks and warbikes tossed end over end by the landslide, the tanks swallowed by the dark earth, the greenskins fleeing before the collapse.

On the battlements halfway up the Spike, beside one of the fortress’s

turbolaser emplacements, a cadre of Space Marines looked down at the changing landscape. Chapter Master Midnias was one, his black armour edged in gold, with a purple cloak over one shoulder and the spiked silver crown of Obstiria on his brow. He was the lord of this planet, though only the Obsidian Glaives lived there. It was his planet being mutilated below. The captains of the Fourth, Sixth, Ninth and Tenth companies stood alongside him. The Captain of the Tenth, Terundel, the Master of Novices, wore an ornate version of the Scout armour worn by the recruits who fought beneath him. Also with the group was Techmarine Javan, his armour in red, his face half steel and one eye replaced with a set of overlapping crimson lenses.

‘Mount Scalen did not fall,’ said Midnias.

‘The charges were laid more than a thousand years ago,’ replied Javan. ‘Truth be told, I am surprised any of them fired.’

‘Then you have done well, Brother Javan,’ said Midnias. ‘That will slow them down.’

‘Not by much,’ said Captain Elhalil of the Sixth. ‘Days, my lord. Not months.’

‘Then we will take the days we are given,’ said Midnias. ‘Do not be so quick to see defeat, captain. Not every turn of the tide is to be greeted with such ill humour. Greenskins lie dead. Rejoice in that.’

Terundel stood up on the battlement and lifted a magnocular to his eye. The dust below still billowed but the deepest of it was clearing from the valleys outlying the destruction.

‘Their vanguard has tested us enough,’ said the Scout-captain. ‘Their patience has been used up. They attack in force. See?’

Midnias took the magnocular and followed Terundel’s outstretched finger. Through one valley streamed an armoured wedge of tanks, a collection of treaded and wheeled vehicles with no uniformity of order. Some were bolted together apparently from junk, with crude and violent symbology daubed on their armour plates. Others had been Imperial tanks, refitted, upgunned and driven recklessly into battle. Midnias counted two hundred of them with the first glance, half as many again with a second at another valley winding between the low peaks that formed the Nineteen Sisters. Hordes of orks on foot ran alongside them, trying to keep up with the bikes and halftracks that raced ahead.

‘The opening moves are concluded,’ said Midnias. ‘Now the battle can begin. Give thanks for this test, my brothers. Give thanks for the punishment.’

‘More new punishments with every moment,’ said Keshuma, Captain of the Ninth. A veteran of the Devastator heavy weapons formations, Keshuma carried

a heavy bolter on his shoulders like it was a holy burden to bear. He nodded up at the Obstiria's pale, blue-streaked sky. There a flock of black flecks rounded one of the peaks, leaving trails of filthy black smoke as they flew. 'They come at us from the air. Everything this greenskin lord has, he throws at the Spike.'

'Thus do the greenskins fight,' said Midnias, handing the magnocular back to Terundel. 'These have shown more patience than most in sending their outriders to test us. No doubt their leader counts as a master strategist among their kind. Now it reverts to the alien's type and runs at us as animals. And we will be here to meet them. To your duties, my brothers. Prepare the defence. This punishment too we shall endure.'

'This too we shall endure,' echoed the assembled Space Marines as one. In the valleys below, the orkish artillery began to bellow.

Fulminos would have cried out a chant of war, and the brothers around him would have taken up the cry. He would have surged forward like a living tide of steel and beaten back all who stood before him. So Brother Molkis did the same.

'Who will follow me?' he blared from the vox-casters mounted on his hull. 'Shall I wade alone through this sea of xenos blood?'

The Cathedral of Victory spun in front of him as his pict-lenses cycled, bringing him a full picture of the battlefield. The rear wall, with its statue of Guilliman, had fallen to the ork artillery that had crashed against the side of the Spike. Now it was a drift of torn stone with greenskins swarming over it. They were elites by ork standards, with yellow and blue painted on their armour, their fangs tipped with gold, and each with a banner or totem strapped to his back. They carried guns as long as they were tall and fired them off as if competing to have the most barrels or the loudest report. Some had massive cleaver-blades, notched with kill-marks, hung with bones.

Gunfire rattled against Molkis's hull. The ceramite was thickest on the front of the sarcophagus and the armour held. The offending ork stood on top of Guilliman's fallen statue, which had previously depicted the primarch poring over the Codex Astartes. Molkis willed his lascannon to fire, as if a mental finger was squeezing around the trigger. Twin bolts of crimson flashed, lighting the dark reaches of the cathedral, and sheared the ork clean in two.

Space Marines of the Fourth Company ran into the fray alongside Molkis, bolter fire streaking across the cathedral. Ork bodies shredded and burst. Captain Seharra led them, holding his power sword high as a beacon for them to follow.

The two sides clashed in the centre of the cathedral, the orks surging through

the breach and the Obsidian Glaives rushing to meet them. The fire cut down orks in their dozens but they continued seething from the fallen wall like blood pouring from a wound. Steel smacked into flesh as they crashed into the Space Marines, cleavers rising and falling, guns blazing at point-black range.

Each Obsidian Glaive was worth ten orks, but it seemed there were a hundred orks in that melee for every Space Marine. In the close confines they could swarm the Space Marines and drag them down, and Obsidian Glaives were being swamped under waves of green flesh. Seharra cut a great bloody swathe around himself with wide swings of his two-handed power blade, like an eye in the centre of the orkish storm.

The greenskins swarmed around Molkis's legs. One of them carried a crude flamethrower and grunted with laughter as it adjusted a valve so the nozzle spat a cutting lance of blue-white fire. The ork's skin was scorched black and its yellow fangs were bared with delight beneath a pair of scarred welding goggles. It must have rejoiced in the idea of cutting open Molkis's sarcophagus and ripping out the crippled flesh inside.

Molkis grabbed the ork in his power fist. Neural feedback from the arm's actuators gave him the sensation that his own arm, long since atrophied, was moving. He lifted the ork in the air so that its fellow greenskins could see it, and crushed it in his power fist. Molkis felt the reports of the ork's bones cracking like a volley of gunshots and threw the mangled body to the cathedral floor.

Molkis's twin lascannon were fine weapons for punching through tanks and armour, but against a swarm of enemies it could shoot down only one or two at a time. In this scrum Molkis relied instead on his power fist, and on his massive feet and the armoured weight they bore. His torso pivoted on its waist bearing with a speed the orks had not expected and he bowled over a clutch of them trying to clamber onto his back. He stepped over them and stamped down, flesh and bone turning to jelly beneath the weight of a Dreadnought.

Molkis felt the orks' warm blood spraying over him. He drew his blade and sliced off a head, an arm, a hand, as he had done as the greenskins breached the pass at Malikan Gate. One tried to get behind him but he threw it over his shoulder and pressed it to the ground, forcing his bolter barrel up under its jaw and blowing away the upper half of its skull.

'Good kill, my brother!' cried Chapter Master Tekelon, who saluted from across the battlefield with his power spear. 'Thus does Molkis shame us all with the tally of the dead he reaps! I shall not wager the day's kill against you again!'

'I will offer you fine odds, Chapter Master,' replied Molkis as he blasted a

wide wet hole in another ork scrambling through the corpses at him. ‘If you will take them!’

Molkis felt a tugging at his arm, small like a persistent insect. He glanced down and saw Scout Desaan, face wide with concern.

‘Brother Molkis, focus! See what is around you. The greenskins are massing again!’

No, thought Molkis. He was not fighting the orks with combat knife and bolter, as he had done centuries ago. He was entombed in this Dreadnought. And Chapter Master Tekelon was not there. He had died soon after Molkis’s entombing, and Midnias was master of the Obsidian Glaives now.

How easy it was to forget.

The first wave of orks had been beaten back from the cathedral. The floor was slick and gleaming with their blood. The Obsidian Glaives were hauling their fallen back from the front line as a few scattered shots from the orks pinged against the pillars. Some of the fallen were wounded, being helped to their feet by their brothers – others were unconscious and limp. Some were clearly dead, torn open or beheaded.

The ork dead numbered in the hundreds. They were draped over the stone benches and heaped against the walls. But there were more of them still to join the fight, chanting their war cries beyond the breach, ready to storm it again and buy a few more Space Marine dead with dozens of their own.

‘Hold the doors!’ ordered Captain Seharra. ‘Give them ground so they pay for it in blood!’

The Obsidian Glaives were forming up around the archways leading into the cathedral, hauling broken benches into barricades and kneeling in gun lines like an execution detail.

‘Come, brother, take your place,’ said Desaan. The Scout was still holding on to Molkis’s lascannon arm. Molkis allowed himself be led to a gap in the line where an archway pillar had fallen to ork gunfire.

‘How fares Brother Molkis?’ asked Seharra to Desaan.

‘Ready for the fight,’ replied Desaan.

Seharra looked at Molkis, something uncertain in his face. ‘We need you with us, Brother Molkis. Here and now. See the enemy before you and the battle-brothers beside you.’

‘I can,’ said Molkis. His synthesised voice was low and grating, like stone grinding against stone, and it shocked him to hear it instead of the voice with which he had spoken to Captain Tekelon.

That had been more than three hundred years ago, Molkis reminded himself. Tekelon was dead, and Molkis was no longer that man.

‘We shall be with you, captain,’ said Desaan.

‘The brothers of my company look to you both,’ said Seharra. ‘There is no need to fight enemies who are not there. We have plenty already who are.’

A great war cry rose from beyond the breach, a mingling of hundreds of ork voices. One among them led the chanting, guttural and loud as a vox-hailer. The other greenskins echoed the leader’s cries and the chant sped up. The shape of a single ork appeared in the breach – it was enormous, taller by half from its fellow greenskins, wearing a ragged mismatch of wargear. On its head was jammed an Imperial admiral’s hat with a feather still stuck in the band. Its shoulder pads were battered steel and hundreds of Imperial Guardsmen’s dogtags hung from them like brocade from an officer’s epaulettes. The greenskin’s mouth was crammed with gold-capped tusks and it wore a patch over a mass of scar tissue covering one eye socket. In one hand was a naval cutlass, presumably stolen from an officer of the sector battlefleet. In the other was a huge, crude flamethrower bulky enough to have been cobbled together from spaceship parts.

The greenskin’s abdomen had been torn out, perhaps by injury, perhaps by choice. In place of the missing organs was a round furnace, spurting flame, connected to the flamethrower by a thick ribbed tube. A heap of fuel burned behind a barred door on the ork’s belly. The ork’s lips peeled back in a grin and flame flickered behind its gilded fangs.

Molkis’s hearts leapt as the targeter built into his sarcophagus ringed the greenskin in red, and he raised his lascannon to fire. But the orkish pirate bellowed and dozens more swarmed in around it, obscuring the shot. The Obsidian Glaives opened fire at the same time Molkis did, without Seharra having to give the order. These orks were elites, heavily armed and armoured, and they weathered the first volley of bolter fire with only a dozen or so fallen. They bellowed as they vaulted the stone benches and closed with the Obsidian Glaives.

‘They shall not force this breach!’ yelled Seharra into the vox-net. ‘They shall find no foothold on sacred ground!’

An ork in a full suit of mechanical armour stomped towards Molkis’s position. Its armour was a mockery of a Space Marine’s: crude and massive, spurting hydraulic fluid as it absorbed chains of bolter fire against the bullet-scarred plates. Only the upper part of the ork’s face was exposed, the lower half covered with a massive steel jaw plate cut into jagged teeth.

Molkis strode forward from the cover of his archway. An enemy like this was not to be received on his own terms, by waiting back and allowing him to strike with all momentum. Thus the Codex Astartes read. Molkis followed it to the letter as he crashed into the armoured ork, knocking it to the ground with the weight of his sarcophagus and ramming his power fist down into its body.

The ork caught the Dreadnought's fist as it descended. The xenos was strong enough to halt the fist as Molkis powered it downwards. The ork's eyes narrowed into red slits as Molkis pushed harder, besting the ork by a fraction to grind the weapon down.

The greenskin leader was laughing. Molkis flicked a lens up to the breach where it still stood, surrounding by the seething mass of orks pouring through the breach. Among them were several orks less armoured than the others, carrying not guns or blades but bundles of crude stick explosives with lit fuses hissing. These orks were covered in weeping scars, as if they came from a whipped and tormented caste marked out for a suicide mission.

'Perfidy!' cried out a voice over the vox-net. 'They will bring this place down!'

More of the explosive-carrying orks were making it onto the cathedral floor. Molkis paused his crushing of the armoured ork long enough to draw a bead on one of them, whose face was half stripped down to the bone and who carried a hopper of burning explosives on its back. Molkis fired twin lances of crimson light from his lascannon and the ork vanished in an eruption of flame and debris. The shock wave of the blast hammered against Molkis and shards of stone rattled against him.

'Shoot them down!' ordered Seharra. 'Do not let them...'

His voice was lost in a trio of explosions that ripped through the cathedral. Pillars collapsed. Black torrents of stone poured from the shattered ceiling. Molkis tipped to one side as the floor shifted underneath him.

In the tumult Molkis saw Scout Desaan yelling, but the noise was so vast he could not make out his words. Desaan was falling away – no, it was Molkis who was falling, pitching onto his side. The floor was sinking into the crypts below. Obsidian Glaives and orks tumbled past him. The armoured ork was gone, crushed beneath Molkis or pitched into the catacombs.

Darkness closed in. Falling stone hammered against Molkis. He could hear now – the roar of the collapsing cathedral mingled with the laughing of the orkish warlord at the destruction he had created.

Another explosion shuddered the cathedral. A pillar fell, trailing pulverised

rock. One of the hands of Guilliman's statue tumbled past Molkis into the crypts.

'...back! Fall back!' Seharra was ordering. The vox-net was full of static and Molkis could barely make out the words. Gunfire streaked back and forth above as Molkis tried to shift his weight and get upright again.

The ceiling above bowed down and split. Rock rained down. Men and orks were yelling as they were crushed. The torrent slammed down onto Molkis so hard another, more profound darkness fell behind his eyes.

The Penumbral Spike was riddled with chambers, some of them enormous assembly grounds and sparring arenas, others tiny cells or shrines to heroes whose inscriptions were all that remained of them in the Chapter's memory. Natural volcanic tunnels had been enlarged to form the interior of the fortress, each constructed with a mind towards defending against an invader – dead ends, switchbacks, false gateways leading to killing zones. But no fortress was completely impregnable. Room by room, doorway by doorway, Penumbral Spike was falling.

'Bring us the devastation, Lord Guilliman,' said Chapter Master Midnias as he knelt before the Vaevictis Monument. The monument chamber had been enlarged many times to contain the stasis chambers in which were displayed arms and armour captured from fallen enemies. One contained a slender crystalline rifle of elder design, another the crested skull of an enormous war-beast fielded by the tau. Some held fragments of armour carefully suspended in psychic wards, taken from warp-corrupted foes.

'Give us the wisdom to bring it down on our enemies. Bring us the hatred, Lord Guilliman. Give us the discipline to wield it as a weapon. Bring us the deliverance, Lord Guilliman, from the end of days.'

Scout Desaan waited until the prayer was finished. Only when he finally entered the chamber did he see the other Obsidian Glaives standing in the gloom, among them Scout-Captain Terundel of Desaan's own Tenth Company.

'Scout,' said Midnias. 'You have come to tell me that Brother Molkis has fallen.'

'He has,' replied Desaan. 'The greenskins collapsed the cathedral. Molkis was buried. Captain Seharra was taken to the apothecarion, they say...'

'I know of Seharra,' said Midnias. 'I needed to hear of our Dreadnought's loss from one who had seen it with his own eyes. I am aware of Molkis's recent waywardness. Had he been separated he might not have returned to us without one to guide him, as you have. Now I am certain.'

‘A choice must be made,’ said Captain Elhalil of the Sixth Company.

‘And it is only I who can make it,’ said Midnias.

‘You know my mind, Chapter Master,’ said Elhalil. ‘To me, this point was reached the moment the first greenskin set foot on Obstiria. We should have...’

‘There is no should or should not,’ snapped Midnias. ‘There is the word of the Codex Astartes and the certainty a lifetime of battle has given me.’ Midnias looked towards the shadows and Desaan saw another Space Marine there, in glossy red armour instead of the black of an Obsidian Glaive. ‘Can it be done?’

‘It can,’ replied Techmarine Javan. ‘Though with all my heart I beg you not to ask it of me.’

‘What does your heart say about defending this ground from the alien?’ demanded Elhalil. ‘What can be more important than that?’

‘The survival of our Chapter’s soul!’ replied Javan. ‘The thousands of years that will be lost! Some of the neural couplings are almost completely degraded. With the radiation readings from the last year, there is no saying how long...’

‘I will tell you how long!’ shouted Elhalil. ‘As long as it takes the greenskins to force their way through the lower levels and into the vaults! Can you not hear them? They tunnel through the Spike as we speak. This Warlord Flamegut has ten thousand lives to spare and it will pour them all through the catacombs to fill this Spike to the brim with greenskin flesh. If, of course, the orks who took the fighter hangars do not get there first. That is how long the soul of this Chapter has before it is extinguished!’

‘Enough, my brothers,’ said Midnias. He did not need to raise his voice to quell the argument. ‘Obstiria is a cruel world, and the words of the Codex have bound us to a path that has done much harm to those who are most precious to our Chapter. But Elhalil is right. Though it cost us everything, we must make this stand. Not because our pride demands we repel the invaders, but because the orks who are halted here will not join the warfleets pouring into the sector. More lives than our own, even of our greatest heroes, depend on us. There is only one choice I can make.’

Desaan looked across the faces of the Obsidian Glaives. Though Javan tried to hide it, he was heartbroken. Desaan had never seen such sorrow in a Space Marine, let alone in a Techmarine who was supposed to become in outlook like the machines he tended. Elhalil, for all his bluster, seemed to bow under the weight of Midnias’s decision.

‘Go to the vault, Brother Javan,’ said Midnias. ‘Take with you everyone you need. Wake them. Wake them all. May Guilliman guide our hand.’

Desaan had never seen the inside of the vault. Very few ever did except the highest-ranked of the Chapter and the Techmarines who maintained it. Scout-Captain Terundel had beckoned Desaan follow as Javan took a detail of Obsidian Glaives to the vault, and Desaan had known immediately what his purpose was to be.

The vault was clad in cold steel, the only chamber in the Spike not to be walled with the living rock of the mountain. Rivulets of condensation had frozen into beads of ice around the cryo-towers standing like the pillars of the cathedral. They exuded an aura of such deep cold that the air Desaan breathed felt brittle, as if it might shatter in his throat.

Twelve enormous pedestals stood, each one topped by a cradle of archaic machinery and wreathed in cold vapour. In eleven such cradles stood a Dreadnought, the black armour of each covered in heraldry and battle-honours spanning thousands of years of the Obsidian Glaives' history. The twelfth pedestal was empty, for it was assigned to Brother Molkis.

Several servitors marched from the corners of the room as Javan walked between the pedestals. He gave them orders in rapid machine-cant and they scurried off to attend to the Dreadnoughts. Each servitor was based on the body of a human, its mind wiped and reprogrammed and its limbs replaced with heavy manipulators or data-probes.

'Brother Desaan,' said Javan. 'Your task of ascendance was assisting Ancient Molkis in his guardianship, is that correct?'

'It was,' said Desaan. 'I saw him fall.'

'Our elder brothers will need assistance too,' said Javan. 'I do not know if you have been informed of Obstiria's curse.'

'Its curse?'

Javan activated a control stud on the side of the nearest pedestal. Hydraulics hissed as the Dreadnought atop it shifted its weight onto its huge metal feet. Cables disengaged and spilled coolant fluid. 'The radiation,' he said.

'Of course,' said Desaan. 'Obstiria cannot be settled by ordinary citizens. But our augmentations protect us from the radiation.'

'As does the physiology of the ork,' said Javan. 'But I gather there is something about our world you have not yet been told. No wonder. It is not easy to hear.'

The servitors were completing the same procedures at the other pedestals. The room shuddered as eleven Dreadnought power plants rumbled into action. Hull lights flickered on. The Dreadnought on Javan's pedestal lurched forward a step,

pulling out the remaining cables and wires. Its pict-lenses whirred as they focused.

‘Reclusiarch Vengis,’ came a grating, steely voice from the Dreadnought’s sarcophagus. ‘I was broken in body, but I stand alongside my brothers once more.’

‘Brother Karulak,’ said Javan, ‘I fear you are mistaken. I am not Reclusiarch Vengis. He has been dead these last four hundred years. I am Techmarine Javan. Chapter Master Midnias commands us now. Do you remember, brother?’

‘What is this?’ came the metallic reply, tinged with anger. ‘Vengis dragged me from the fires of Kephalon Vale. I owe him my life. Who has killed him? How can I seek my revenge?’

Javan activated another panel on the pedestal console. Karulak sagged down on his hydraulics and Desaan recognised the effects of psychological stabilisers released into the pilot’s bloodstream. ‘Focus on what lies around you, brother,’ said Javan. ‘Time has clouded your mind. Do not let it wander. Your Chapter has need of you.’

‘What is the curse?’ asked Desaan.

‘Space Marine flesh is proof against Obstiria’s radiation,’ replied Javan as he continued working the controls. ‘But the same cannot be said about all our technology. The connection between the sarcophagus of a Dreadnought and its pilot uses technology that cannot be replicated. But those connections degrade with exposure to this planet’s radiation, and with them the faculties of the pilot’s mind. The Codex Astartes demands that one of our Chapter’s Dreadnoughts stand guard over our fortress but each hour of such exposure shortens a Dreadnought’s life. In here, asleep, they are protected. When active on Obstiria, the degradation continues, and as it worsens the speed of decay accelerates.’

‘They are dying?’ asked Desaan.

‘Slowly,’ said Javan. ‘But yes, they are dying.’

‘How long do they have?’

Javan glanced at a series of marks on Karulak’s sarcophagus. They were unobtrusive against the heraldry and kill-marks painted on the armour plating. Desaan recalled similar markings on Brother Molkis, but had never thought to wonder what they meant. High Gothic numerals counted out a date.

‘Karulak has four years,’ said Javan. ‘That ticks down as we speak. Some have more, most have less.’

‘And Molkis?’

‘Longer. The Dreadnoughts are rotated out of honour guard duty as they

degrade and his duty was to last a year or more. After that he would be sent back to this vault to wait his rotation again. Each time would be shorter as his connections were corroded away, but the Codex demands it of us and the word of Guilliman must be honoured.'

Karulak lunged forwards, stomping down and off the pedestal. The servitors scattered as the Dreadnought's assault cannon swung around.

'Brother!' cried Desaan. 'Ancient brother! Listen to my voice and do not let the shadows of the past overcome you! You lie now in the sarcophagus of a Dreadnought, for you were wounded unto death and brought back from the brink. Years have passed and new battle-brothers wear the colours of the Obsidian Knights, but our purpose and our foes remain the same.'

Karulak paused and turned towards Desaan. 'Scout-brother,' came Karulak's voice. 'Can this be true?'

'Look down, ancient one,' said Desaan. 'You bear not the bolter and chainsword, but the fist and cannon of the war machine. Yet you are still one of us, an Obsidian Glaive, a son of Guilliman and sworn warrior of the Emperor. Nothing that truly matters has changed.'

'Yes,' said Karulak. 'I see now. I remember. I fell, and slumbered, but now I wake. Has a crusade been called? Am I to go to war?'

'Alas, there is war, but no crusade. The enemy has come to us. Penumbra Spike is besieged by the ork!'

A great crash rolled through the vault. A servitor tumbled from the furthest pedestal and sprawled broken on the floor. Machinery rained down. A coolant unit was torn from the ceiling as one of the Dreadnoughts, its tarnished armour inlaid with gilded eagle's wings and hung with spiked chains, crashed from its sleeping place into the centre of the vault. Its power fist had been modified to carry a hugely oversized power sword and its gun arm carried a heavy plasma weapon. From one shoulder hung a banner with the heraldry of twin blades crossed with a lightning bolt.

'What heresy is this?' bellowed the Dreadnought. 'The ork defiles Penumbra Spike? Obstiria weeps under the tread of the alien? And yet here we stand like idiot prey! I shall leave nothing but gore and misery of the xenos horde, and when I am finished, every ork will shriek in dismay at the very mention of the Obsidian Glaives!'

The Dreadnought bore the same markings as Karulak and Molkis. Its time was short. Hours. Maybe less.

'Thus is the fate of the xenos!' the Dreadnought yelled. 'Thus shall fall the

rage of Fulminos!’

When he fell, it was a world of pain, a great ocean of agony into which he was immersed.

He had been here before. He had suffered. He had been broken down in body more than once. The memories of that pain lanced up at him, needling through his mind like the fire searing through his limbs.

But he had risen again. He had not died. The pain had been overcome. Brother Molkis seized on to that fact and held it tight, using it as an anchor point to drag himself up. The pain resolved into concrete memories now, the shapes and sounds that had been there when he was last struck down this low.

He remembered the Kraken. The tyranids darkened the sky with their numbers above the peninsula of Devilin Reach. Hundreds of thousands of warrior-organisms had descended from the whale-like carrier beasts in low orbit. Among them, along with the bat-winged swarm organisms, were enormous cysts of chitin and bone. Where these impacted against the rock of the peninsula, massive war-organisms tore their way out, living siege engines bristling with symbiotic weapons. Molkis’s squad found themselves in the shadow of one such beast, a quadruped with massive shovel-like tusks that could have flipped over a tank and a pair of enormous scythes attached to its forelimbs. A swarm of acidic spores belched from the quivering sacs around its throat and bony tubes along its ridged back fired clusters of spines like mortars.

Molkis had ordered the charge. He was a sergeant, a veteran, and the Obsidian Glaives around him would follow him through the warp itself if he led the way. The beast roared as bolter fire ripped into it, ichor spurting from a hundred wounds. Molkis closed to drive the point of his chainblade into its eye as it lurched under the volley fire.

But it had been faster than him. Too fast for anything of that size. Its claw had scythed at him and even as he threw himself to the ground it punched through the ceramite of his abdomen and the intense chill of its edge slithered through his torso...

No. Molkis forced the memory down. That had not been what brought him here. That had been before, the last time he fell. The Kraken had laid him low, but he had survived and fought on.

The greenskin had tried to do the same as the Kraken. And like the tyranid war-organism, the orks had failed. They had buried him in a black pit of pain and left him there to die, but they did not know what he was. He was Molkis, a blade

in the Emperor's hand, a son of Guilliman and guardian of Obstiria. He had suffered more by the hand of his own battle-brothers during his initiations than the malice of the orks could ever match. He could not die. He could not be broken. He was Molkis.

The darkness shifted. Molkis took the pain and balled it up into the hollow inside his chest, between his two hearts. He pushed against it as his feet pushed against the stones beneath him. Fragments of rubble trickled down past his face. The enormous weight above him shifted again and he took it on his shoulders, wrestling it further off him.

A crack of light opened up above him. He remembered where he was. Obstiria, his Chapter's home world. Penumbral Spike. The orks had breached the fortress and the Cathedral of Victory had fallen.

But Molkis had not fallen. The Obsidian Glaives had not. While one of them lived, the orks would have a war to fight for every rock and flagstone.

Molkis roared. He heaved in a mighty breath, pushing aside the constricting rock. The slab on top of him slid away and he was free to reach up out of the pit. He found a handhold and dragged himself up through the shattered layers of the catacombs. Old bones and grave wrappings tumbled past. He hauled himself up out of the catacombs and into what remained of the cathedral.

Molkis almost wept. The cathedral had collapsed. Where the ceiling had been was now the raw rock of the Penumbral Spike. Only a few pieces of decorative carving and the crowns of a few false columns remained. The statue of Guilliman was gone, buried by the fallen stone that filled the chamber. At the end of the cathedral, where the statue had stood, a massive breach led to the exterior of the fortress and the cold wind whistled through.

The place stank of greenskins. The outstretched hand of an ork still poked between two fallen slabs of the ceiling. Molkis's sorrow was overtaken by disgust. Greenskin filth had broken into the Penumbral Spike through the cathedral. Even now they were rampaging through the Spike, seeking to kill his brothers and defile the heritage of his Chapter.

But at least one Obsidian Glaive lived. No matter what they had wrought already, the orks had not succeeded yet.

The pain still ran through Brother Molkis. He felt ungainly and ill-coordinated, as if many times his weight and controlling his body from afar. But that would not stop him from fighting. In one hand he held his bolter, for though he had been buried and left for dead an Obsidian Glaive was never unarmed. His other hand he would use empty if need be, to strike down and crush any greenskin

who stood in his way.

He heard gunfire from above. His hearts leapt and he forgot the pain, for he was not alone. Other battle-brothers yet lived. And then a light descended from above, like a scene from a stained glass window depicting the prophecies of the end of time. Molkis heard the singing of a thousand choirs and caught the scent of heavy incense among the dust and smoke.

‘The Time of Ending has come!’ Molkis cried. ‘The greenskins were the herald of the enemy. Obstiria shall be the battleground of eternity. And I am here to fight alongside you, my Emperor! Brother Molkis is here!’

As if in reply a voice bellowed from the heart of the Penumbra Spike, a voice that Molkis had never heard but seemed like that of his oldest friend.

‘Thus shall fall the rage of Fulminos!’

In the night, the lower generatorium fell. Flamegut’s ork pirates stormed the plasma generator chambers in their thousands. Keshuma’s Ninth Company halted their advance with massive volleys of heavy weapons fire, but at the cost of the plasma generators themselves. Coolant ducts and containment vessels were ruptured by stray gunfire and the lower levels of the Spike, the dungeons and catacombs in the mountain’s root, were flooded with liquid plasma. Thousands of orks were incinerated, but the automated defences that covered the upper slopes fell silent.

Flamegut’s aerial corps emerged in locust-like waves from behind the mountains around the Spike. Ramshackle fighter-bombers dropped clusters of bombs on the battlements, blasting open cannon emplacements and gatehouses. Thousands more orks were dropped from carrier craft – for every one that found a foothold on the upper slopes another tumbled down to the valleys at the base of the Spike, but still an army of greenskins found purchase among the shattered defences. The airborne orks that had already taken the Obsidian Glaives’ aircraft hangars joined with this new force to lay siege to the uppermost entrances. Among the eyries of the Penumbra Spike the Obsidian Glaives rallied around Chapter Master Midnias to lead the defence.

And Midnias brought with him the final weapon to be deployed from the Chapter’s arsenal – the ancients of the vault, the Dreadnoughts, eleven of them storming onto the battlements in a tide of ruthless steel.

Brother Molkis passed through the path of chaos the orks had left. They had torn down the tapestries from the Quartermaster’s Cloisters, which had depicted the

fall of the Beast of Vengor to the Obsidian Glaives. They had ripped down the sculpted panels from the duelling hall that had shown scenes from the life of Roboute Guilliman. Chapter Master Erberan's greatsword had been cast down from its place on the altar of the Shrine of Ancestors. The ork had an instinctive sense of what was beautiful and sacred, even to another species, and an equally strong urge to destroy it.

Molkis felt the hatred stoked in his hearts. The sight of a fallen Obsidian Glaive made the fires leap. The battle-brother had been dragged down and butchered with cleaver blades. It must have taken the strength of dozens of greenskins to break open his ceramite armour. Another body lay at the foot of the staircase leading to the Dawn Bastion, this one riddled with gunfire. Dead orks lay littered around, too, but not nearly enough to avenge the death of the warrior.

The sounds of war came from above. The Dawn Bastion housed one of the anti-aircraft batteries and led to the battlements around the upper slopes. If the orks gained a foothold there, the Obsidian Glaives would be fighting them from above and below. Molkis hurried up the stairs – he was still feeling the effect of his earlier ordeals, for he felt unbalanced as if he was in danger of toppling over with each step. Even his shadow, cast by a burning tapestry on the wall, seemed huge and misshapen.

Molkis reached the bastion. The cold irradiated winds of Obstiria whipped along the sheer black wall of the Penumbra Spike. The narrow battlement was spattered with greenskin blood. The wreck of an ork fighter craft was embedded a short distance down the battlement, belching smoke, surrounded with charred corpses. Hundreds of metres below the orks swarmed in their thousands, battering away at the impenetrable gateways into the lower levels or seething towards the breach points that had opened up in the siege.

Molkis picked out the sound of a chainblade through flesh. He rounded a corner and found a sight to counter the anger burning in his chest.

'Brother!' cried Lord Fulminos as he decapitated another ork pirate with a swing of his black glass sword. 'I fear we have slain the cream of the orkish filth already! But perhaps they can still spare you some sport!'

Molkis could not help but smile. 'Thank Guilliman I gave you a head start,' he said, 'for I fear you cannot keep up with this Glaive's tally!'

The heroes of the Chapter had returned.

Lord Fulminos led them, as was right, for he was the greatest warrior who had ever worn the glossy black colours of Obstiria. Fulminos was a master duellist

who had sought out and faced in single combat every enemy champion who had ever stood opposite him on a battlefield. He was magnificent, his armour encrusted with ornamentation earned with hundreds of notable kills, his glassy sword a relic of the ages before the Heresy. Fulminos was handsome where a Space Marine was usually battle-scarred and ugly, with an aquiline nose, bright blue eyes and flowing hair. If a sculptor had created an icon for a fellow Space Marine to follow in battle, it would have looked like Lord Fulminos.

Brother Karulak, hero of Axian Ridge, hammered volleys from his thrice-blessed storm bolter into the orks trying to scramble over the battlements beside him. Captain Hurlikan, who had suffered the torments of eldar pirates and escaped with the rest of the Chapter to burn their flagship, swept his broadsword through a gaggle of attacking orks and sliced three of them in two with a single blow.

A grimacing ork's face appeared over the battlement beside Molkis. He grabbed it with his free hand, and such was the fury in him that the skull cracked under his fingers. Molkis threw the body aside and blasted a volley of gunfire into another ork trying to get around Hurlikan with a demolition charge in hand. The ork was punched right through by the shot, body incinerated, the charred fragments carried away by the knifing wind.

Hurlikan saluted Molkis. Though the two had never met and their service as Obsidian Glaives were separated by two thousand years, they were battle-brothers by instinct.

Lord Vorkias, the Chapter Master crippled on board the space hulk *Icon of Debauchery*, speared a giant armoured ork through its chestplate with a thrust of his sword. Lukanas the Penitent, who had turned himself into a mass of scar tissue and scabs with self-inflicted punishments for every imagined sin, lay all about him with a barbed power-scourge. Molkis found himself back to back with Drekal the Martyr – Molkis himself, as a Scout newly elevated from the torments of selection, had witnessed Drekal fall single-handedly holding a mountain pass against a tribe of savage kroot. Now they fought together again.

Drekal's chainblade sawed through an ork at waist height. Molkis followed up with a crushing backhand blow that knocked a second ork over the parapet. His bolter blasted another apart as Drekal kicked away a ladder the greenskins were using to scale the battlements.

'Have you learned to fight yet, Molkis?' said Drekal in false mockery. 'Or are you still just a boy?'

Molkis saw the wounds of Drekal's fall were still on him, arrows and spears

still stuck through the tears in his armour.

‘Have you returned to your prime,’ retorted Molkis with a laugh, ‘or are you still just an old man?’

Across the battlement, Fulminos was already standing on a mound of the dead. Mangled orks were crushed beneath his feet as he thrust his sword to the sky. ‘Blessed are we,’ he cried, ‘that we witness the Time of Ending! Rejoice, for the prophecies have been fulfilled! Pity those who doubted, scorn those who fled! Now is the time to seize the joy of battle!’

The legends of the Obsidian Knights cheered. Drekal flicked the blood off his chainblade and across the fortress wall. ‘May this battle never end,’ he said with a blood-flecked grin.

Overhead, the roar of engines drowned out the sounds of combat. An enormous orkish vehicle, a carrier craft held aloft by an asymmetrical patchwork of blazing engines, flew above the battlements and crash-landed on the upper slopes. The ship’s bow crumpled, spilling wreckage and flame. Hooked chains were thrown out to arrest its slide down the mountain and from a dozen ports along its sides leapt ork pirates. Molkis recognised their kind from the battle in the cathedral – they were the piratical warlord’s own troops, deployed to turn a battle the greenskins knew they were losing.

The heroes of the Obsidian Glaives had retaken enough of the battlements for their battle-brothers to follow them out onto the slopes. Dozens of Obsidian Glaives in the livery of the Fourth, Sixth and Seventh Companies flooded out to meet the new ork attack. They looked on their Chapter’s returned heroes as if in awe.

A great war cry went up among the greenskins swarming from their landing craft. Among them was Flamegut, the warlord Molkis had seen in the cathedral below. The orks rallied around him, for to them he was as potent a talisman to the orks as Fulminos and the other ancestors were to the Obsidian Glaives. Hundreds of orks had already amassed around the unstable upper slopes and were charging down at the Obsidian Glaives forming up on the battlements.

‘Break them on the rock that is our Chapter!’ yelled Fulminos.

‘Every moment of mankind’s suffering,’ yelled Lukanas the Penitent, ‘we now repay!’

Brother Gidnaron, his gilded armour surrounded in a blazing halo, unfurled the Standard of Obstiria for all to see. It was embroidered with threads taken from tapestries in the Imperial Palace burned during the Siege of Terra, and depicted Roboute Guilliman granting the lordship of Obstiria to the first Obsidian

Glaives. Among the throng Molkis also picked out Reclusiarch Morvern the Grim, Assault-Captain Bayelor and the towering form of Dagguron the Brute, the tallest and broadest of all the Obsidian Glaives, whose oversized armour was displayed in the Chapter armoury long after his fall at Urakan. Even Silius the Cunning was there, who though laid low by a lung-destroying disease had continued to create battle plans of unprecedented complexity for decades. Silius was returned to the glory of his youth, handsome and proud, in the polished silver and black of a Chapter champion.

Eleven great heroes, all returned. Did Molkis dare count himself the twelfth?

The orkish line hurtled towards the Obsidian Glaives. The Space Marines levelled bolters and opened fire. The front rank of orks were shredded, but the density of flesh and bone protected those behind them. The battle lines clashed, and the sound was as if thunder crashed around Penumbra Spike. Molkis followed Fulminos into the fray, and with every blow he crushed a skull, broke a spine or threw another foul greenskin off the battlements. But the weight of the ork assault forced the Obsidian Glaives back and the line bowed, threatening to break.

Gidnaron held the Standard of Obstiria high and a section of the Obsidian Glaives followed in its wake. Assault-Captain Bayelor led them. They hacked with chainsword and combat blade deep into the ork mass. Molkis saw where they were headed – for Flamegut himself.

If he fell, the orks would know the dismay that Molkis had felt to see Penumbra Spike invaded. They would feel more, for a Space Marine could cage such dire emotion and turn it into anger with which to crush his enemies. The orks would break.

Flamegut's elites formed up around him and battered back the Obsidian Glaives' attack. Bayelor vanished somewhere beneath the swarm of greenskin bodies. The Standard of Obstiria almost fell, but was snatched up by the other Obsidian Glaives. One, young and bold, broke free of the ork line and ran right at Warlord Flamegut.

Fulminos roared and redoubled his efforts in the heart of the battle. The battleline heaved back and forth as the orks surged and were pushed away. Molkis reaped a tally with his fist where he could not bring his gun to bear and, where there was room to fire, every shot blasted an ork apart as if his humble bolter were infused with his rage. Where an Obsidian Glaive fell, his battle-brothers avenged him tenfold.

The Glaive battling with Flamegut ducked a slice from the ork and kicked out

at the warlord's leg. Flamegut slumped to one knee and the furnace in his belly flared. A second later the ork vomited a belch of flame at the Glaive, who rolled to the side and sliced out with his power sword.

When Flamegut drew his arm back to land a kill-stroke, it stared dumbly at the stump of its wrist. Its severed hand twitched on the rocks beneath it, still holding its cutlass.

The Obsidian Glaive followed up with a thrust to the throat. His power sword punched through muscle and spine, burning away the tough scarred flesh of the ork. The Glaive twisted the blade and the head flopped to one side, held onto the charred ruin of its neck by a strand of skin. The Glaive kicked the ork onto its back and finished the kill with a downward stab through the chest that shredded the ork's organs with the flash of the discharging power field.

A terrible cry of anguish rose up from the orks. Molkis saw the anger drain from them replaced with horror.

'Press on!' yelled Molkis. 'Drive them off this mountain!'

The Obsidian Glaives surged on, led by their returned heroes. The orks broke and fled but there was nowhere to go. They sought shelter in the smoking wreck of their landing ship as Fulminos led the charge right through their crumbling formation, butchering the greenskins in their hundreds. Molkis followed and crunched them underfoot as they scrambled to escape from him, as if they were smashed beneath the treads of a tank. Molkis's hearts swelled at the rising stink of orkish blood and the sight of corpses tumbling down the mountain past him.

The Obsidian Glaives advanced up the slope, firing as they went, dispatching the wounded orks with combat blade and chainsword. Fulminos paused by the Glaive who had killed Flamegut, and who was still kneeling exhausted beside the warlord's corpse.

'Good kill, young brother,' said Fulminos. 'What is your name?'

'Midnias,' came the reply.

Over the peak of the Penumbral Spike a new sun rose, a glare of white light that edged the mountain's hard rocks in silver. Through its light Molkis could make out a distant field, an endless plain with an infinite army arrayed for battle. They were armoured in gold and carried the standards of a thousand Space Marine Chapters. At their head stood the titanic gilded form of the Emperor, his face obscured by the intensity of the light, ready to lead the charge that would win the final battle.

'Who will follow me?' called out Fulminos. The other returned heroes had joined him on the upper slope, on the threshold of the light. 'Brother Molkis!

You have earned your place. Come, brother. He promises us a war that will never end. Will you answer his call?’

‘Can I refuse,’ replied Molkis with a smile, ‘when there is a tally to be taken and brothers to humble?’

Molkis walked towards the eternal battlefield. Behind him, barely audible over the trumpets and war cries of the Emperor’s host a single voice struggled to be heard.

‘Remember!’ it shouted. ‘Remember!’

But it was just the last moment of doubt, the final test. Molkis walked off the Penumbra Spike and onto the battlefield at the end of time, to fight the battle that would end all battles.

Scout Desaan picked his way across the carnage of the battlefield. Orks lay dead in heaps, piled up against the battlements and gun housings where they had tumbled in the slaughter. With Flamegut’s death they had broken and run, and the Obsidian Glaives had killed them with the efficiency and swiftness of Space Marines.

Desaan passed Brother Karulak’s sarcophagus. It lay surrounded by crushed ork bodies, its armour plating covered in blood. The lifesign readings read critical – Desaan did not know enough about reading them to tell at a glance if the ancient Space Marine inside was alive or dead.

Twelve Dreadnoughts lay among the ork dead. Fulminos had made it almost to the peak ascent, before toppling at the furthest extent of the Obsidian Glaives’ charge. The other Dreadnoughts had stood as living bastions in the battle until they too had fallen, each having reaped a massive tally of ork dead.

Desaan reached a knot of ork bodies where Chapter Master Midnias stood beside the fallen sarcophagus of Brother Molkis.

‘I am sorry, my lord,’ said Desaan. ‘I tried to bring him back, but he did not listen. He did not remember.’

‘None of them did,’ said Midnias. ‘Fulminos spoke to me as if I were a new recruit. Out here, without even the walls of the Spike to protect them, the degradation was faster than we expected.’

‘Does Molkis live?’ asked Desaan.

‘Barely,’ said Midnias. ‘Techmarine Javan can tell us whether he will ever fight again. We must take him back inside. Gather a detail of brothers to move him to the vault. Accompany him.’

‘Yes, my lord,’ said Desaan.

As the Obsidian Glaives began the process of salvaging the fallen Dreadnoughts, Captains Keshuma and Elhalil approached. Their companies had borne the brunt of the fighting on the battlements.

‘Lord Midnias,’ said Elhalil. ‘Your orders?’

Midnias looked across the black mountains towards the horizon.

‘This was a testing of our defences,’ said Midnias. ‘Flamegut was a lesser lord of these greenskins. Their true commander sacrificed him to learn how we fight. They will attack in their full force next. Your orders are to prepare for more.’

The captains followed Midnias’s gaze. There they saw a greater darkness gathering among the shadowed valleys. It fell from the sky and spread across the surface of Obstiria like a disease.

There would always be more orks. There would always be another battle.

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