



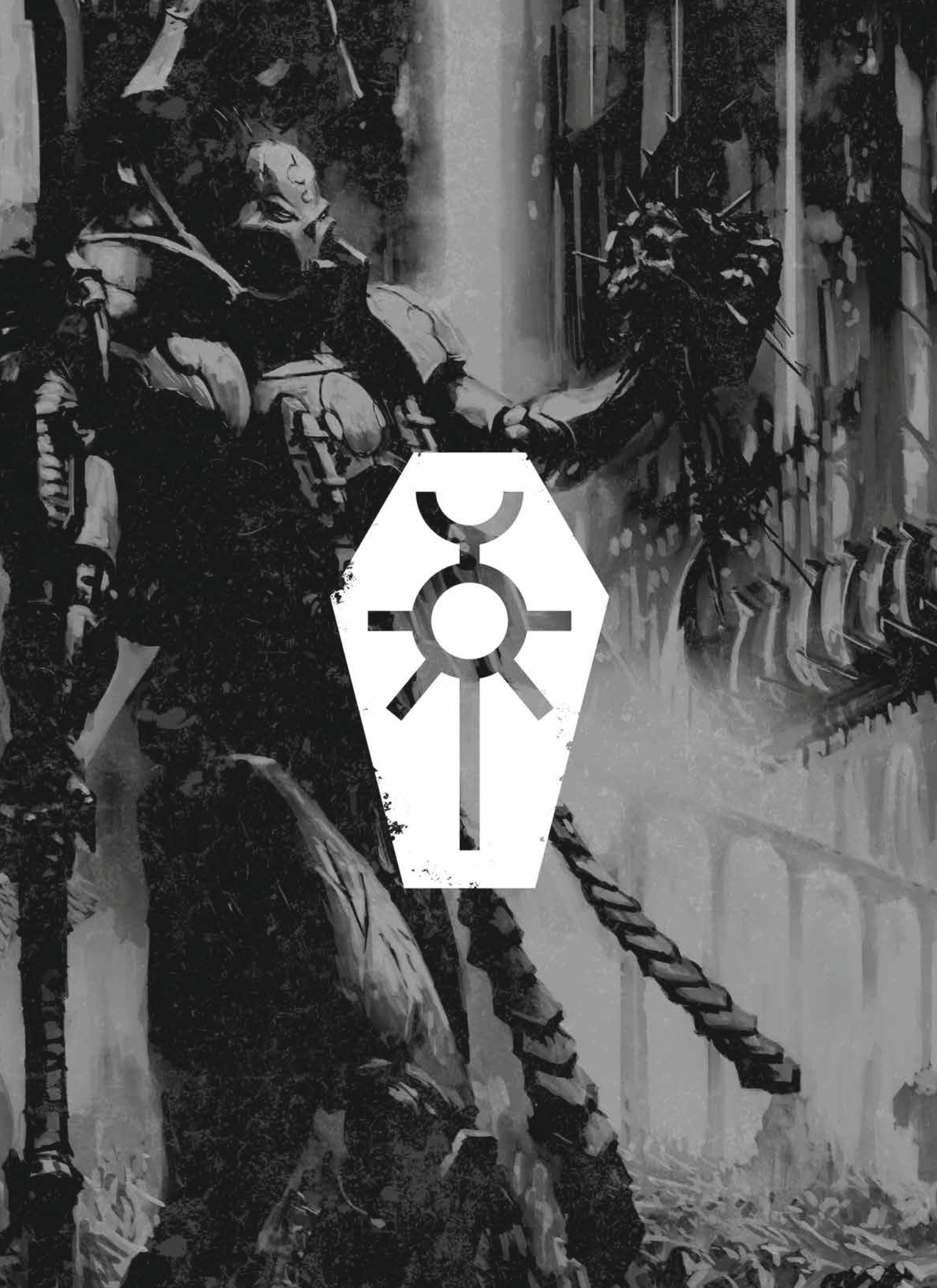
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WARHAMMER 40,000

CAMPAIGN SUPPLEMENT



EXTERMINATUS



The Warhammer Vault exists to preserve the rich lore and background of Warhammer 40,000 and Warhammer Age of Sigmar. As such, outdated game scenarios and unit rules have been removed from this publication.

EXTERMINATUS



THE CONCLUSION OF THE SHIELD OF BAAL SERIES

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THE RISING LEVIATHAN



THE SHIELDWORLDS

The Cryptus System was a bastion of the Imperium, and its worlds were ramparts that faced the void with bristling guns and high walls. Each of its four principal planets – Asphodex, Lysios, Aeros and Tartortos – toiled for the glory of the Emperor under the twin suns of their system, known as the Eyes of Cryptus. The Imperial citizens were secure in the power of their sprawling defences and brave soldiers; for millennia these worlds had stood inviolate against the darkness, bathed in the baleful red light of their suns, a shield against the enemies of Mankind.

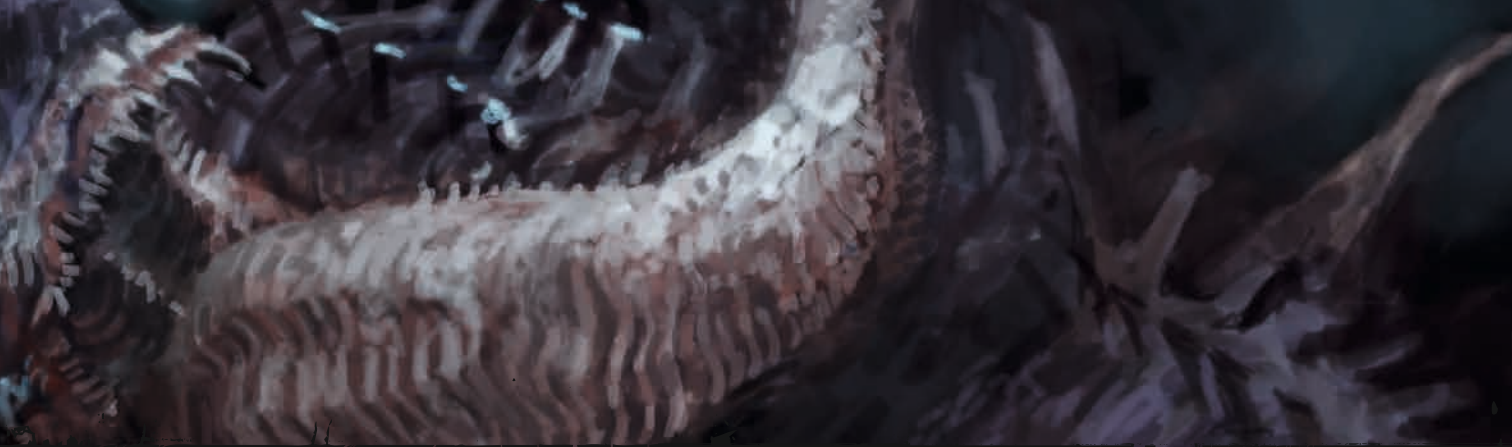
When the first sub-tendrils of Hive Fleet Leviathan reached out toward the twin suns of Cryptus, the Imperium remained confident that the system's heavily defended worlds, vast planetary defence forces and powerful battle fleet would hold the xenos back. Even so, Astra Militarum regiments were rushed to reinforce the system, and the veteran Cadian General Dhrost took command of the defence. The Imperial Guard dug in on the city world of Asphodex, garrisoned the void domes of Tartortos, sent air wings to the gas giant Aeros and deployed armoured formations to the toxic moon of Ixoi. Upon the ruined world of Lysios, Canoness Magda Grace's Adepta Sororitas set to defending the nomadic tribes.

However, these planetbound defences were merely a precaution in the eyes of the Imperium, as the system's greatest barrier was out among the stars. Beyond the Cryptus battlefleet and its vast armada of void-ships, an asteroid field ringed the twin stars. Known as the Castellan Belt, this ancient field of mined-out asteroids was now a gun line of fortified planetoids, millions of turrets and macro-cannon pointing out into the darkness of space. And yet this was not the greatest of the system's defences. One more barrier lurked on the very edge of the open void: the Aegis Diamando. This was a wall of unnatural cold that was anathema to all life. It was believed that the Tyranids could not hope to cross the Aegis and survive.

THE NIGHTMARE BEGINS

As has oft happened in the Imperium's long and bloody history, it had underestimated its foes. The hive fleet sailed straight through the Aegis, encasing itself in vile secretions that quickly froze into diamond-hard armour. This shield not only protected the Tyranids from the unnatural cold but was also proof against the Imperial battlefleet's massed guns. Numbering millions of bio-ships and lesser organisms, the alien tendrils divided as it sailed in-system, heading to each of the inhabited worlds. The Imperial ships were brushed aside, overwhelmed by an enemy that





outnumbered them many times over. The battle among the stars was lost in a span of hours, the rest of the system's defenders forced to watch, powerless, from their planetary fortifications as the Tyranids consumed the Imperial fleet and moved in for the kill.

Then the invasion began in earnest and every planet of Cryptus felt the talons of the Devourer.

On Asphodex General Dhrost led an inspired defence that denied the Tyranids the skies while channelling them into kill-zones on the ground. On Lysios Canoness Magda Grace rallied the nomadic tribes and their caravans into a great corral as the first xenos swarms fell upon them. In the swirling blue skies of Aeros, Astra Militarum Valkyrie wings patrolled the upper atmosphere, fighting off the worst the Tyranids could throw at them. Meanwhile, on the moon of Ixoi, the Vostroyan tank regiments fought a bitter battle in the poison mists against hordes of xenos invaders, and on Tartoros Imperial Guardsmen struggled to defend the void domes from the hulking monsters sent against them.

Everywhere battle raged unchecked, and on every planet the skies were filled with falling spores and screaming alien horrors. At first it seemed like the Imperium might emerge victorious, and great victories were reported on both Asphodex and Lysios as the Astra Militarum and Adepta Sororitas took a heavy toll upon the invaders. The ruins of Phodia, Asphodex's principal city, and the plains of Lysios were both thick with alien dead, but these successes were bought with the lives of countless brave Imperial defenders.

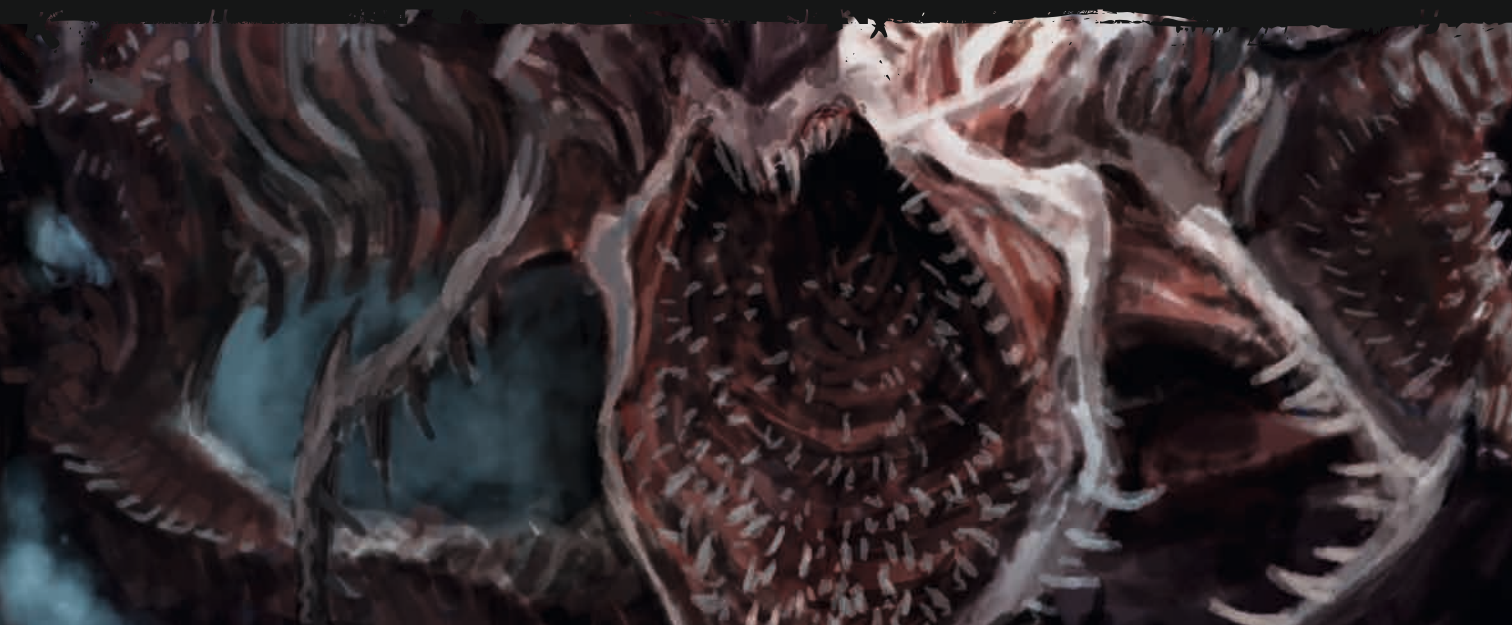
IN THE JAWS OF THE BEAST

These early victories were to provide only false hope. Only after the first bloody day of fighting did the true size of the Tyranid invasion fleet become clear, as wave after wave of bio-creatures rained down from the skies to take the place of the millions already slain. Worse still, the Hive Mind was adapting at a terrifying rate, and for every tried and tested tactic the Imperium had discovered to defeat the Tyranids the Hive Mind had developed a defence. What little hope there had been died at the sight of the stars blotted out by hive ships, and the worlds of the Cryptus System seething with xenos invaders.

On Asphodex the great city burned out of control and General Dhrost's defences were overrun. Attacked from within and without, his armies crumbled, and soon the Imperial Guard's carefully laid lines of defence had become isolated pockets of resistance that were devoured one by one. In the chaos of battle Dhrost disappeared, and all organised resistance began to break down.

On Lysios Magda Grace's inspired defence became a desperate last stand. The Canoness held her army together until she was eventually slain by a Lictor in the final moments of the evacuation. Though many of her sisters escaped, many more perished in the final retreat. Aeros, Tartoros and Ixoi all suffered similar defeats, their defenders broken and scattered before the alien swarms.

As the second day drew to a close, the Shieldworlds had been all but broken, and the Cryptus System completely overrun by the hive fleet. Only a faint cry for help escaped out into the Warp to be heard beyond the Aegis Diamando.







BLADE OF SANGUINIUS

Commander Dante had suspected from the first that the Cryptan Shield would fall. As a result, he had a sizeable force assembled and ready when the distress call from Cryptus was received. Within days, a spearhead of Blood Angels and Flesh Tearers reached the Cryptus System, determined to wrest the Emperor's worlds from the grip of the Hive Mind.

CRYPTUS BURNS

The *Blade of Vengeance* shuddered as it slipped back into realspace, leaving the turbulence of the Warp behind. In the wake of the massive Blood Angels Battle Barge, scores of smaller craft materialised in bursts of swirling crimson fire, as they too were disgorged along the extreme edges of the Cryptus System. Upon the command deck of the *Blade* Commander Dante stood, a golden god in shining, sculpted ceramite. The journey through the Warp had been nightmarish. Throughout the Space Marine fleet Navigators and Astropaths lay dying in their dozens. It was a steep price to breach the psychic miasma thrown up by the Tyranid hive fleet, but one Dante was willing to pay if there was a chance Cryptus or its peoples could be saved.



A reedy astropathic wail still lingered in the Immaterium. It was this haunting cry for help that the fleet had followed to reach the besieged system. Yet the message gave no clue as to disposition of those still fighting – if, indeed, any still fought at all. As the Blood Angels and Flesh Tearers fleets assembled, their escorts and scout ships ranged ahead, pict-thieves and vox-echoes scrounging the void for data. According to system-wide augur-capture, the tendrils of Hive Fleet Leviathan had breached the outer system only five days ago, and made planetfall upon all major worlds twenty-four standard hours later. From this information Dante had hoped to find Imperial resistance still strong and resilient. What greeted his long range scans was just the opposite.

Descending to the massive hololith projector, central to the *Blade's* tactica-arcanium, Dante considered the ghostly images taking shape within its swirling lens. At his side were Captain Karlaen of the Archangels, and Chief Librarian Mephiston. The two Chapter heroes gave counsel, pointing out variations in the ebb and flow of data-shadows. The worlds of Cryptus drifted above the hololith, circling the baleful crimson orbs of the system's twin stars. Tartoros hung closest to the stars, then Asphodex, followed by Lysios with its massive moon, Ixoi, and then the gas giant Aeros, until around the edges of the system a vast tumbling asteroid belt hung. Beyond this was an indistinct world and another solar barrier, this one

glittering softly in the dark. But it was not to the edges of the system that Dante's gaze drifted. His attention was fixed upon the four innermost worlds and the putrid stain upon the stars that enveloped them. It was a hive fleet of almost unimaginable size, easily over a million void-faring organisms and who knew how many trillion weapon-beasts already spewed forth onto the Cryptan planets. However, of more concern than the size of the Tyranid armada, or that it choked the skies above every world, was the complete lack of vox traffic. Even with the disturbing interference caused by such a large concentration of the Hive Mind, Dante would have expected to detect at least some vox signals from the defenders. Could the system have fallen completely in just three days? Certainly, the proximity of the largest bio-ships to the planets seemed to suggest the Leviathan had already begun to feed, gorging itself upon the vast wealth of biomatter the Cryptus System offered.

Then another icon flickered into being on the hololith and Dante observed a ragged line of ships making for the far side of the system: an evacuation fleet. Judging from its size, however, it could hold no more than a tenth of the population of Cryptus. As he watched, he could see the tendrils of the Tyranid swarm following them out. Doubtless most of the vessels lacked Warp drives – those that did had probably abandoned their comrades long ago – and so the evacuees were making for open space, though the commander could not see what good it would do them and without aid there was little hope they would make it.



Any lesser general of the Imperium would have looked upon the doom of the Cryptus System unfolding before them and regretfully turned their fleet back to the void, confident that there was nothing they could do to change its fate. For Dante though, this thought never crossed his mind. Around the edges of the ghostly image of the Cryptus System hovered hundreds of star systems, and among these one in particular drew Dante's eye: Baal. The glimmering red jewel was a sister system to Cryptus, its closest neighbour and directly in the path of the Cryptoid Tendril. When the beast had devoured the worlds here, the Baal System would be next, and with it, the Blood Angels' home world. This Commander Dante would not allow.

COMMANDER DANTE

For over a thousand years, Commander Dante has been Chapter Master of the Blood Angels. Amongst the greatest of Adeptus Astartes lords, he has overseen centuries of war across the length and breadth of the Imperium. Always clad in ancient gold artificer armour, he wears the Death Mask of Sanguinius, which bears the likeness of his Primarch. To the Emperor's armies Dante is a golden god and the doom of the enemies of Mankind, while to the Blood Angels he is revered and respected like no other since the days of Sanguinius. Dante's deeds are legend across the Imperium, from slaying the Bloodthirster Skarbrand before the gates of Pandemonium to vanquishing the Eldar pirates of Ruden III; from freeing the Tau bond-world of Vetric from its deceitful overlords, to winning victory during the Second War for Armageddon against the Ork hordes of Warboss Ghazghkull.

And yet for all his triumphs a shadow hangs over Dante. The Chapter Master feels the weight of years of war heavy upon him. He has been forced to witness the slow degeneration of his battle-brothers as they succumb to their genetic curse. Like Sanguinary High Priest Corbulo, Dante hopes for a cure to the blood madness that afflicts his kin. Yet with every passing year that hope dwindles a little more. Only one thing keeps Dante from giving in completely to these doubts, a prophecy recorded in the oldest of the Chapter's records. Penned by the Primarch himself, it speaks of a golden warrior standing in defence of the Emperor's throne during the final battle for Mankind. Dante believes that he is the one the scroll speaks of, and so he fights on, awaiting the day when he will be needed to hold back the darkness one last time.



THE CRYPTUS SYSTEM

TARTOROS

Class: Death World
Xenos Resistance: Minimis
Imperial Resistance: Expunged
Strategic Grade: Tertiarius
Adeptus Astartes Deployment: None

CASTELLAN BELT

Class: Asteroid Belt (subcategory Mining World)
Xenos Resistance: Minimis
Imperial Resistance: Expunged
Strategic Grade: None
Adeptus Astartes Deployment: None

ASPHODEX

Class: Civilised World
Xenos Resistance: Extremis Maximis
Imperial Resistance: Diminished
Strategic Grade: Primus
Adeptus Astartes Deployment: Blood Angels 1st and 2nd Company Demi-companies

Magnovitrium Lens Array

Xenos Infestation
Hive Fleet Leviathan

Magnovitrium Relay Station

CRYPTAN EVACUATION FLEET

Survivor Fleet, Approx. 7.023% system population

AEGIS DIAMANDO

Class: Asteroid Belt (Quarantined)
Strategic Grade: Provisional cf. 'Thermal Tunnels'

BLOOD ANGELS FLEET

Command: Commander Dante

FLESH TEARERS FLEET

Command: Chapter Master Gabriel Seth

Thermal Tunnels through the Aegis

THE EYES OF CRYPTUS

Class: Binary Stars

Class: Binary Stars

IXOI

Class: Lunar Planetoid

Xenos Resistance: Extremis

Imperial Resistance: Expunged

Strategic Grade: None

Adeptus Astartes Deployment: None

Xenos Infestation
Hive Fleet Leviathan

LYSIOS

Class: Civilised World

Xenos Resistance: Extremis

Imperial Resistance: Diminished

Strategic Grade: Primus

Adeptus Astartes Deployment: Flesh
Tearers Vanguard Strike Force

Magnovitrium
Relay Station

Xenos Infestation
Hive Fleet Leviathan

BLOOD ANGELS FLEET

Command: Captain Aphael &
Brother Corbulo

AEROS

Class: Civilised World (subcategory
Mining World)

Xenos Resistance: Maximis

Imperial Resistance: Unknown

Strategic Grade: Secundus

Adeptus Astartes Deployment: Blood
Angels 2nd Company Demi-company

PERDITA

Class: Dead World (Quarantined)

Xenos Resistance: Unknown

Imperial Resistance: Unknown

Strategic Grade: None

Adeptus Astartes Deployment: None

THE CRIMSON SPEAR

Lit by the guttering lumin-sconces of the tactica-arcantium, Commander Dante gathered his Captains and advisors to formulate a plan of attack. The Chapter Master assessed that the greatest strength of the hive fleet had fallen upon Asphodex and Lysios. As such, it was to these worlds that the bulk of the Space Marine fleet were despatched. The world of Tartoros now appeared to hold little value: its unique solar array had, via relay satellites, provided power for the entire system. Now, however, long range scans showed its surface devoid of human life. Wreathed in killing fog, Ixoi would also be ignored. Aeros, however, still showed weak traces of resistance, and so a smaller contingent would be sent there.

The Blood Angels 1st Company, known as the Archangels and comprised largely of Terminators, would be for the most part held in reserve. The exception was a small task force of battle-brothers who, under the leadership of First Captain Karlaen, would teleport onto Asphodex as the tip of the spear. They had a mission of their own to complete, given them by Corbulo himself.

In their wake a demi-company of the Blooded, the Blood Angels 2nd Company, would make their landing and link up with any surviving Imperial units. Meanwhile, in orbit,

the *Blade of Vengeance* and half of the Blood Angels fleet would support them. This was the war zone that Dante would take charge of personally. With billions of citizens, it held the greatest concentration of biomass in the entire system, and had attracted a commensurately vast swarm.

Aeros would be assigned to the rest of the 2nd Company, commanded by Captain Aphael and supported by the bulk of the remaining Blood Angels vessels. Their job would be to locate any survivors from among the drifting mining platforms and clear the atmosphere of the gas giant for any evacuation attempts. Corbulo would accompany Aphael upon his assault. The Sanguinary High Priest had received intelligence that suggested that the system's last stockpiles of the satryx elixir lay somewhere below Aeros' swirling clouds. Corbulo meant to claim that prize, if he could.

The liberation of Lysios would fall to the Flesh Tearers and their fleet. Dante charged their Chapter Master, Gabriel Seth, with clearing a landing zone and looking for survivors. Seth offered his assurances that Lysios would be taken, and the Blood Angels Chapter Master had faith that the Flesh Tearers would complete their mission, despite the Chapter's dire reputation. Though there was a savagery to the Flesh Tearers, there was a nobility also. They were, after all, still the scions of Sanguinius.



Contemplating the ghostly icons lurking on the far side of the system, Dante despatched a handful of Strike Cruisers to rescue any survivors from the Cryptus evacuation fleet. This perilous mission would fall to Captain Phaeton, and would require slipping through the swarm-choked void. However, if there was a chance to save the lives of those on board the fleeing ships, then Dante would take it. These dispositions decided, the Blood Angels' Chapter Master divided his supporting armour as he saw fit. This amounted to a significant force of tanks and Dreadnoughts. Thus, each prong of the Blood Angels' attack upon the Cryptus System would be well-supported by versatile heavy armour.

Like the glowing points of a flaming trident, the Space Marine fleet thrust into the system, the glittering edges of the Aegis Diamando reaching out to meet it. The fleet had been repelled by the psychic force of the Hive Mind, as the Shadow in the Warp enveloped the Cryptus System like a vast dark stain upon the Immaterium. Even the sacrifice of many of their Navigators had not been enough to bring them close enough to the stars to bypass the barrier. Now they were forced to sail through it.

However, where the Tyranids had relied on their strange biology to survive the killing field, the Blood Angels had other means. Ancient star charts showed thermal tunnels

through the Aegis. It was to these routes that Dante directed his helmsmen, the fleet aiming for invisible corridors through the void. Even so, the tunnels were still impossibly cold, and Dante ordered all hands to retire to their stasis-sarcophagi and void-vaults.

Many Chapter serfs perished in the crossing, the cold stretching invisible fingers into their void-vaults and stealing away their lives. Yet enough survived to ensure the Blood Angels' fleet would remain at combat efficiency. Within their gleaming golden coffins, the Blood Angels and Flesh Tearers felt nothing of the killing cold. Those Tyranid bio-ships close to the system's edge watched the Space Marine armada approach, myriad insectile eyes swivelling to track the newcomers. Strange spines and probosci waved, probing for signs of life. They detected none within the cold metal shapes that fell toward them through the void. Sensing no immediate threat, the monsters turned their attention back to the feast of worlds.

The three arms of the Space Marine fleet drifted in-system toward the core worlds. As they neared their destinations, shipboard systems flickered to life, and hundreds of coffins quietly hissed open. As one the Blood Angels and Flesh Tearers rose from their slumber, and went to war.



FIRE AND BLOOD

Commander Dante and Chief Librarian Mephiston led the assault upon Asphodex. In the sprawling ruins of Phodia, a single spaceport remained in Imperial hands, the rest of the world-covering city given over almost completely to the Tyranids. Like the spear of Sanguinius, the Blood Angels descended upon the port and plunged into the heart of the alien horde.

PROMETHIUM DAWN

The hanger deck of the *Blade of Vengeance* rang to the sound of hundreds of ceramite boots as the Blood Angels prepared to descend upon Phodia, the principal city of Asphodex. Resplendent in his golden armour, and flanked by a majestic phalanx of Sanguinary Guard, Commander Dante surveyed his companies preparing for war. Squads of battle-brothers clad in crimson power armour were strapping themselves into drops pods, while others thundered up the ramps of their Thunderhawk and Stormraven assault craft. On one side of the vast hanger, lines of Blood Angels knelt in prayer before a Chaplain, their armour painted black to acknowledge their place within the Death Company. Predators, Rhinos and Land Raiders were being loaded onto huge orbital drop ships, while Techmarines and clutches of servitors blessed their machine spirits.

Beyond the massing Space Marine strike force the graceful glowing arc of Asphodex loomed large through the shimmering void shields of the battle barge. Its darkened clouds were stained a vile purple by Tyranid spores, and even from this extreme range Dante could see shoals of bio-creatures as they swam through its murky upper atmosphere.

Taking his place aboard the Stormraven *Spear of Baal*, the Chapter Master gave the order for the attack to commence. Like a bolt of crimson lightning the Blood Angels crashed down through the upper atmosphere of Asphodex. All around them the void and sky burned as the guns of the Space Marine fleet cleared the way. Gargantuan lance turrets cast bolts of searing light across the vacuum, each beam vaporising thousands of Tyranid bio-beasts and bursting apart bloated living vessels. Salvos of meltamissiles and frag-bombs streaked down ahead of the Space Marines, erupting amongst the ruined city below in showers of twisted steel and mangled alien flesh.

As the *Spear of Baal* broke through the upper clouds it was pelted with frigid rain and tiny spores that writhed and slithered across the Stormraven's canopy. Dante cast his gaze across the night-cloaked city below, glimpsing

fires raging out of control through its ruined streets and the flashes of explosions as the orbital barrage cleared a landing zone. Free of the xenos-shrouded ionosphere, vox transmissions began to filter in, static-garbled pleas for help or cries of despair drifting up from the city's defenders. Gesturing to his pilot, Dante directed the Stormraven toward the strongest of these signals.

Rising up over the horizon, Port Helos came into view, the largest of Phodia's many spaceports and the last one still in Imperial hands. As the *Spear of Baal* roared over the city Dante saw why the port had held out for so long. The defenders had built a ring of barricades between the port and city and then flooded the streets between them with millions of gallons of promethium. The wall of flame from this moat of liquid fuel rose almost a hundred yards into the sky. For a moment Dante wondered why the defenders had not made their own escape, but as his transport banked sharply over the port he could see its landing pads stood empty. The last shuttles must have fled into orbit long ago.

Despite the formidable barrier erected by the Phodians, the alien swarm was massing on all sides, and as the Commander watched he could see places where the flames burned lower than others. It would only be a matter of time before a breach was made and then Port Helos would fall.

Dante stepped onto the edge of the Stormraven's assault ramp, his Sanguinary Guard wordlessly forming up behind him. As the seals broke and the portal yawned open, rain and smoke washed into the transport, accompanied by the sharp smell of burning promethium and the vile alien stench of the Tyranids. Without another word, Dante took two long strides and hurled himself out into space. At his back a wing of golden armoured Blood Angels followed, and scores more leapt from the Thunderhawks and Stormravens holding tight formation behind the *Spear of Baal*. Far below, the feeder-beasts and weapon-creatures of the swarm craned their heads upwards, alien eyes reflecting the angelic host as it descended on glowing jump packs. As they watched, the Blood Angels' shining armour caught the first rays of the weak Phodian dawn.



PHODIA IN FLAMES

Phodia is the continent-spanning city of Asphodex. It comprises thousands of districts and prefectures, together covering tens of thousands of miles of towering cathedrals, squat hab-blocks and sprawling manufactorums. Before the coming of Hive Fleet Leviathan, Phodia was home to billions of citizens who toiled endlessly under its polluted clouds, fearful of the retribution of both powerful crime lords and their heathen god. When the shadow of the Great Devourer fell upon Phodia the city was transformed into a fortress to repel the invaders: Cadian forces under the command of General Dhrost sealed off streets and fashioned defence emplacements. It was not to be enough. Within two days of fighting the city was devastated and the Cadian lines broken, the few survivors sealing themselves behind plasteel bulkheads or deep underground as they waited for the end.

Now Phodia is a nightmare of ruins and alien bio-architecture. The hive fleet has begun the consumption of Asphodex, feeding upon the masses of biomatter now littering its war-torn streets. Spore chimneys and digestion pools dot the landscape, while from high above hive ships descent to feed from capillary towers. If the Tyranids are not defeated, Asphodex will soon be stripped clean, even its once thick atmosphere consumed by the hive fleet, leaving only ruins to mark that the world ever belonged to Mankind.







DANTE'S AVENGING HOST

When the Blood Angels descended upon Asphodex, Port Helos stood alone against the Tyranid swarm. At the head of his Avenging Host of Sanguinary Guard and the bulk of the 2nd Company, Commander Dante set upon the xenos with the righteous fury of the Emperor.

A DANTE'S GOLDEN BLADE
During the fighting for Port Helos, Dante was accompanied into battle by a cadre of elite Sanguinary Guard. They were known as the Golden Blade, and everywhere they struck the foe fell back, retreating from ground littered with the dismembered remains of alien monsters.

B MEPHISTON & MARTELOS
Mephiston stood at Dante's side throughout the battle for the port, his potent psychic gifts key to the destruction of the alien psyker-beasts. Supporting the Chief Librarian was Epistolary Martellos, one of the 1st Company's most powerful psykers. Together, these warrior-mystics lent their might to the Blood Angels' attack.



C DANTE'S DEMI-COMPANY

The backbone of Dante's force during the defence of Port Helos was a demi-company from the Blooded. Tactical, Assault and Devastator squads, making up the bulk of the demi-company, were amongst the first to land after the arrival of their commander, and suffered the brunt of the Tyranids' initial counter-attack.

D CRIMSON HAMMER

Part of the Blood Angels battle plan before the gates of Port Helos involved creating a formidable gun line to sweep the edges of the ruined city. Devastator Squad Karos, dubbed the Crimson Hammer by the defenders, provided ranged superiority, their heavy guns accounting for dozens of leader-beasts and hulking alien monsters.

E THE SANGUINE SHADOW

Dozens of Stormravens bore the Blood Angels into battle upon Asphodex, and once their cargo had been safely delivered into the fray, they scoured the skies of enemies. Among these was the *Sanguine Shadow*, its pilot weaving through the damaged buildings as he hunted down xenos targets, reaping a bloody toll among the Tyranid swarm.

HEROES OF ASPHODEX

The battle for Port Helos was the Blood Angels' first taste of the war for Asphodex, a swift and brutal fight that left the Sons of Sanguinius in no doubt as to the desperate nature of the war they now waged. The Blood Angels secured victory in this first battle, largely thanks to the undaunted heroism of every single battle-brother who took to the field.

COMMANDER DANTE

The Lord of the Blood Angels descended upon the burning world of Asphodex like the golden blade of the Emperor incarnate. A master of countless battles, Dante struck the teeming swarms of Tyranid horrors fast and hard from the skies, carried to the blood-soaked earth upon wings of fire. In the shadow of Port Helos it was the tactical acumen of Dante that shored up the failing Imperial defence and delivered the survivors within from the jaws of the Hive Mind. During the battles for the Fabricae District and the Mechanicus spires, it was his towering form that led the Blood Angels into the fray time after time, his glittering armour glimpsed through the press of purple chitin and pale alien flesh. For the battle-brothers fighting in his shadow, there could be no doubt that they fought in the presence of a just and true paragon of the Imperium.





CHIEF LIBRARIAN MEPHISTON

Mephiston is a legendary figure within the Blood Angels, a hero with a dark and fearsome past. His deeds upon the world of Asphodex would only add to his reputation, as he pitted his psychic might against that of the Hive Mind. As a peerless psyker and veteran of the Chapter, Mephiston would provide counsel to Dante on the nature of the threat they faced, the ancient Librarian's esoteric senses able to divine the intent of his enemies in a way beyond that of mortal men. However, far from being a mere advisor, Mephiston was often at Dante's side in battle. Moving like a bolt of crimson lightning among the press of weapon-beasts, his force sword Vitarus was a blur of motion as its razor's edge tore through dark carapace and alien flesh in vivid spray of gore and ichor.

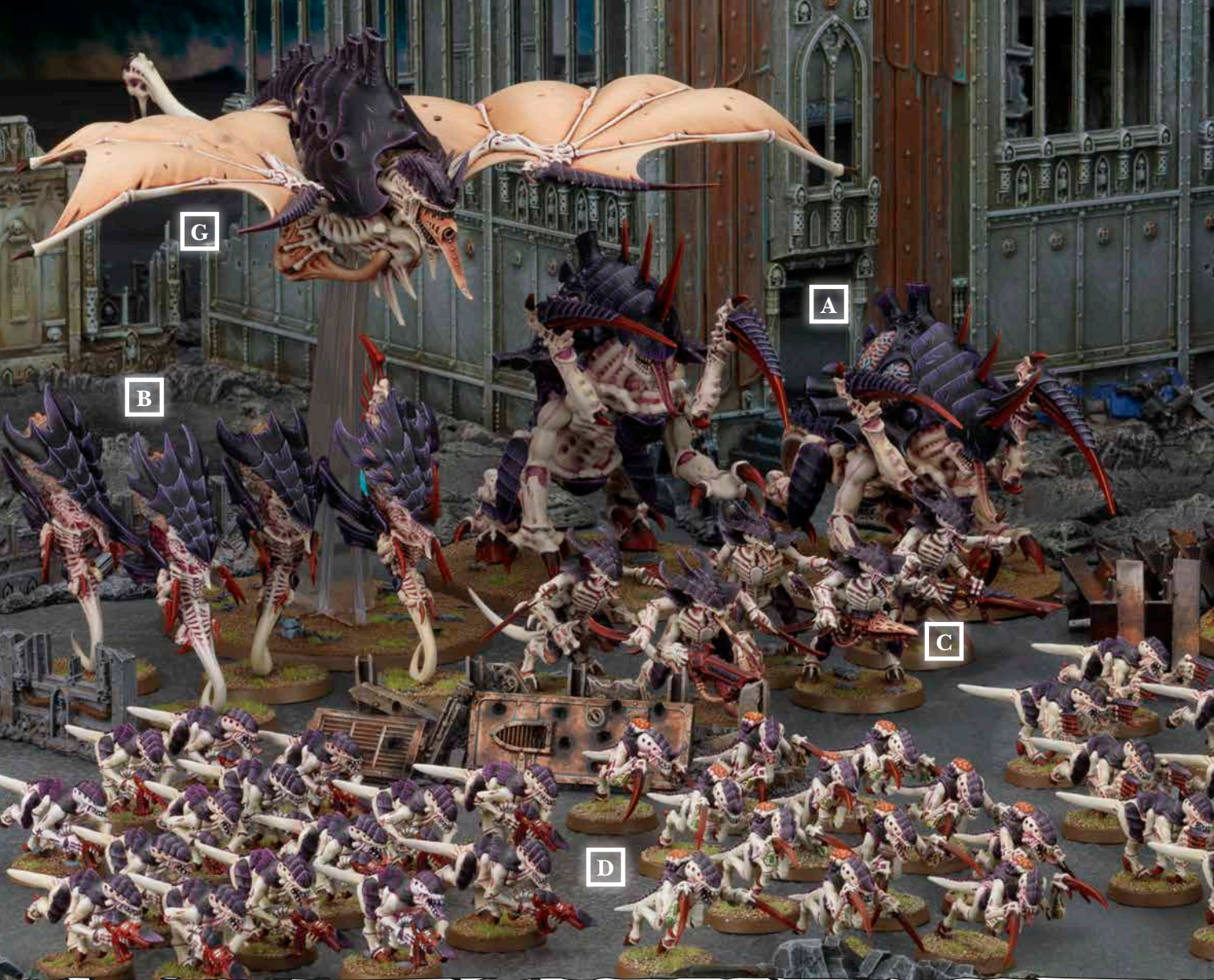


BROTHER DONTORIEL

Dontoriel has been a Blood Angel for five centuries, and a Sanguinary Guard for the last two. His many heroic deeds are

listed upon his scroll of record in the Reclusiam on Baal. The most glorious among them was Dontoriel's slaying of the Butcher of Borghan. In a battle that lasted for a day, he hacked apart the Daemon Prince and ended the Monsoon of Blood that had gripped the world of Viscydra for a decade. It was this deed that would earn him the Aureate Honour – the icon of a golden blade he would wear upon his armour with pride. Despite this recognition, Dontoriel remains humble, seeking only to win glory for the Chapter that he serves. On Asphodex he would have ample chance.





PORT HELOS ANNIHILATION SWARM

By the time the Blood Angels reached Asphodex, much of the planet had fallen. The Hive Mind's attention was now focussed upon consumption of biomatter, be it the human dead or Leviathan's own self-sacrificing organisms. Yet still vast swarms of warrior-beasts remained, more than sufficient to hunt down the surviving enclaves of Imperial defenders.

A THE MIND-DEATH

The terrifyingly powerful Maleceptors known as the Mind-Death directed the swarm that attacked Port Helos. This trio of psychic horrors had been instrumental in the breaking of the Cadian defence only days before, and presented perhaps the greatest danger to the Imperial efforts on Phodia.

B HERALDS OF MADNESS

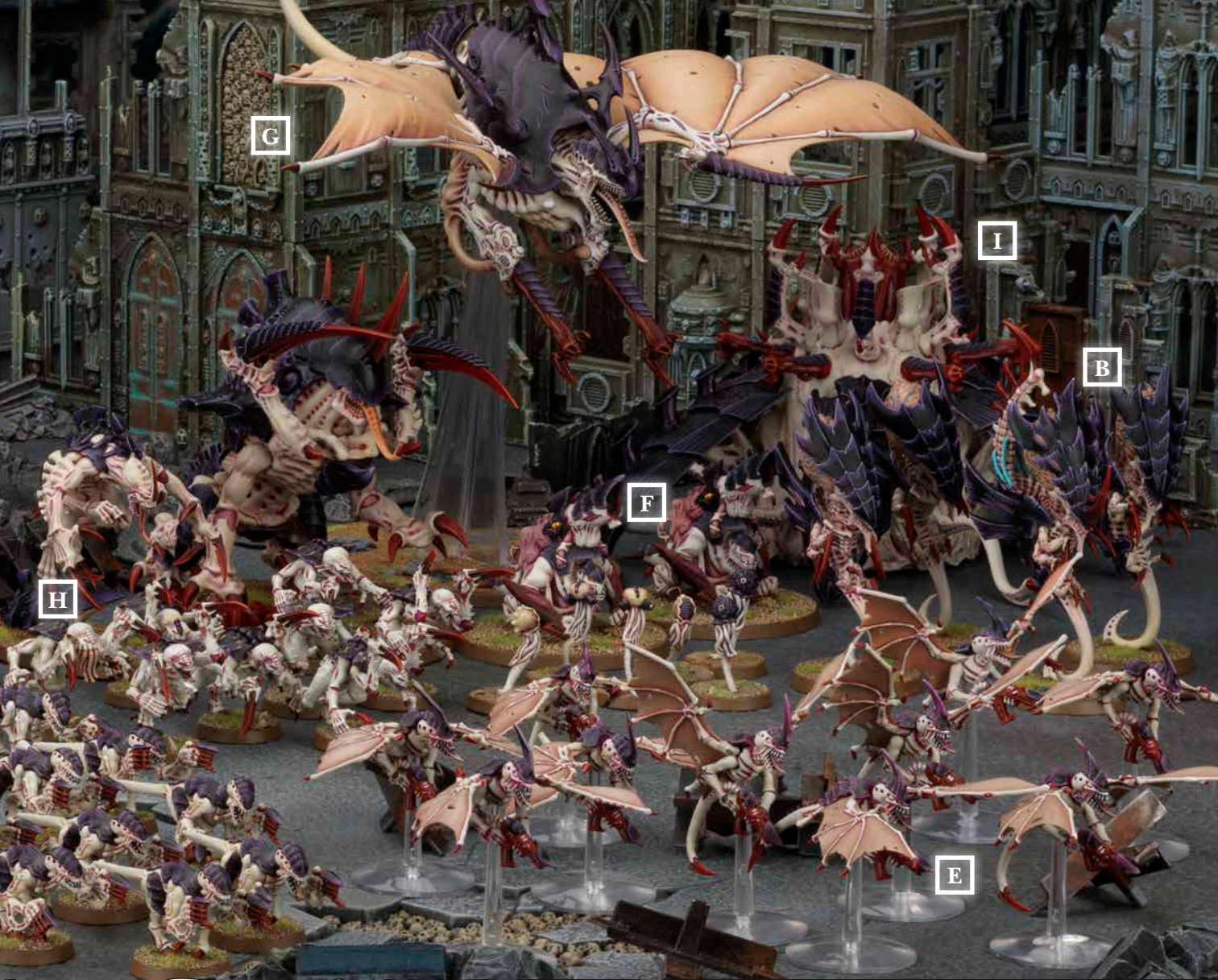
While the promethium fires had kept much of the Tyranid threat at bay, it was no barrier against psychic attack. The people sheltering within the port soon came to know the floating Zoanthropes that filled their dreams as the Heralds of Madness, and their constant psychic assault shattered the minds and wills of many defenders.

C SCARTALON OVERSEERS

Much of the swarm that assailed the port were survivors of the initial battle against the Cadians and still bore the scars of their previous engagements. To the survivors cowering in the port, these Tyranids became known as the Scartalon, and the chitin-covered Tyranid Warriors that directed them, the Scartalon Overseers.

D SCARTALON BROODS

Tyranids are immensely resilient creatures, able to survive horrific injury and still keep fighting. Thus the seething tide of Termagants and Hormagaunts that made up the Scartalon Broods had weathered the worst the Imperial defenders had to throw at them. Despite their myriad wounds, these warrior beasts still advanced.



E SKY-CARRION

While the bulk of the swarm coiled and flowed around the flaming moat, yet more of its number filled the skies. The defenders knew these Gargoyles as the Sky-carrion. These man-sized winged beasts would pick on the weak or the isolated, swooping down to carry off any defenders who tarried too long in the open.

F SPORESTORM

Throughout the assault on Port Helos the swarm bombarded the defenders with spores. Artillery-beasts hurled an almost constant barrage of mucus-covered bio-shells into the port and its surrounds until drifting shoals of living mines hung above buildings and streets, awaiting the approach of enemies before exploding.



G SKY-FIENDS

Among the carrion-beasts of the swarm came larger flying horrors. The Phodians dubbed these huge creatures the Sky-fiends, and the sight of even one would send a wave of terror through the defenders. During the battle for the port, dozens of these creatures assailed the Blood Angels assault, filling the sky with their blood chilling screams.

H CHILDREN OF CRYPTUS

Despite the best efforts of the defenders, Genestealers had infiltrated Port Helos and preyed upon the citizens taking shelter there. The Children of Cryptus, as they were known, skulked among the ruins, hunting the Blood Angels host and confounding the efforts of the surviving defenders to support Dante's attack.

I THE THORN GARDEN

Port Helos was ringed with a barrier of Sporocysts, placed by the Hive Mind to hold the survivors in place and deny them any chance of escape through the city's ruins. This Thorn Garden extended through rubble choked streets and fallen buildings, bulbous armoured domes bristling with terrible weapons.

SWARMS OF PHODIA

The city of Phodia crawled with hostile alien life. Monsters of every stripe infested its streets, boiled through its skies, and feasted upon the corpses of the fallen. Amongst these were many terrible beasts that either supported their lesser kin as living weapons, or else directed the swarms into battle as conduits of the Hive Mind itself.

MALECEPTOR

The Maleceptors that haunted the streets of Phodia were the same horrors that had made such short work of Uther Abraxes' Tempestus Scions. Their gestalt Warp presence hung across Phodia like a shroud. Meanwhile, those few defenders that stood against them were swiftly reduced to headless corpses, the spattered slurry of their burst brains painting the ground for yards around them. Still the Maleceptors lumbered on, beacons of the Hive Mind's gargantuan will.



ZOANTHROPE

The Cryptoid Tendril had displayed a terrifying ability to adapt and respond to Imperial tactics. Indeed, in the few short days that the Cryptus System had been engulfed in war, Leviathan's tactics and living weapons had utterly outpaced the Imperial defence measures. Thus, when Governor Flax had loosed a private army of psykers upon the streets of his capital, the Hive Mind had countered with myriad psyker-beasts of its own. Many of these terrible creatures were still at large upon the Phodian streets, drifting in malevolent shoals towards any signs of human life and annihilating them with horrible efficiency.



TYRANID WARRIOR

Tyrannid Warriors are amongst the most prolific leader-beasts of the Tyranid swarms. They are numerous and expendable enough to be sent into battles where the Hive Mind might balk at risking its more valuable organisms. Hive Fleet Leviathan had made widespread use of these creatures to coordinate the early stages of its invasion, hundreds perishing in the Cadian kill-zones. Consequently, Tyrannid Warriors were thin on the ground in Phodia when the Blood Angels launched their attack.



A BLOODY SWATHE



Lit by the blaze of the promethium moat and the early dawn, the Blood Angels charged into battle. Dante was first upon the ground, his headlong assault taking him into the heart of the swarm that milled before the mighty, firelit gates of Port Helos. Though Hormagaunts and Termagants pressed in from all sides, the Sanguinary Guard carved a path deep into the Tyranid lines, Dante at their tip.

Seeing the size and ferocity of the Tyranid swarms now pouring from the ruined city, Dante abandoned his initial plan to link up with the defenders inside the port. Instead he directed his battle-brothers to defend the spaceport's southern gates, where the Tyranid swarms were thickest and the flames were burning low.

At the base of the vast fuel-slucice that ran down from the port into the moat, the forward elements of Dante's demi-company came crashing down. Drop Pods hammered into the earth, crimson armoured warriors pouring out to secure a landing zone for those that came after. Meanwhile the air howled and screamed as squadrons of Space Marine aircraft engaged swooping broods of winged beasts.

Almost at once the Hive Mind responded to the Blood Angels assault, and the swarm, which had moments before been focused upon the port, shifted to assail the Space Marines. Leaping, scrambling lines of aliens converged upon the Blood Angels, larger weapon-beasts and Tyranid Warriors hurling living rounds from afar as smaller bio-horrors charged across the broken ground.

Adding to the mayhem, spores began to rain down from the sky. These burst above and among the Blood Angels, covering them caustic fluids and chitinous shrapnel. In response, the lord of the Blood Angels called in his own fire support, and Devastators sent salvoes of fire crashing into the alien lines.

Dante waded through the broods before him. The Axe Mortalis became ever more fouled with alien gore as the Chapter Master sought out those bio-forms he knew to be leader-beasts. Following his movements, the Sanguinary Guard covered his flanks, their glaives crackling with

energy as they carved through carapace and talon. Stepping under the sweep of a pair of bone-like blades, Dante hewed the head from a Tyranid Warrior before turning in a single motion to hack the legs out from under another. Dozens of smaller beasts snapped and clawed at the Chapter Master, but his armour turned their blows. Whenever a larger creature loomed close the commander raised his inferno pistol, blasting it back in a gout of superheated ichor. Gradually, the swarm was breaking upon his host of golden warriors, and they began to clear a perimeter before the gates of the port.

One by one, the Blood Angels were thinning out the ranks of the Tyranid leadership, and with them the power of the Hive Mind waned upon the battlefield. Disordered knots of gaunts, without a powerful consciousness to guide them, were easily led into the Blood Angels' kill zones or driven back into the city.

The sergeants of the Blooded ordered their squads to advance upon the weakened alien army. Patterns of interlocking bolter fire pulverised the nearest foes, mass-reactive shells bursting the xenos apart in great blooms of gore. As the Tactical Squads cleared the line between port and city, they came under fire from dug-in Tyranid organisms which seemed more like fortifications than life forms. At first the heavy bio-weapons of the Sporocysts slowed the Space Marine advance, crystalline shells and writhing barbed bombs bursting among their lines. Then Dante ordered forward his Assault Squads, the Space Marines bounding over the alien defences on jump packs to plant Krak grenades amongst spore-breathing vents. With a series of wet thumps, several of the spores came apart, spilling out a tide of vile liquid and torn, misshapen flesh. In moments the Blood Angels were pushing through the Tyranid defensive lines, flamers and meltaguns burning away any alien survivors.

In the space of less than an hour, Dante's host had driven off the swarms around the port and secured its gates and fuel-conveyors. Now the Blood Angels could begin to ferry down support personnel and heavy armour, while looking to the evacuation of whatever Imperial refugees remained.

MEPHISTON, THE LORD OF DEATH

The Blood Angel's Chief Librarian is an enigmatic and terrifying figure. Once brother Calistarius, Mephiston was remade upon the battlefields of Armageddon when the Black Rage took him. Incredibly, the Librarian was able to master the madness of the Flaw, transcending the spiritual curse bound within his gene-seed. So far the only known member of his Chapter to have overcome the Black Rage, he is held in awe by his battle-brothers. Mephiston is still a Blood Angel, yet he has

become something greater and more terrible. Since his ascension, the Chief Librarian stands alone, even from the other members of the Chapter's Librarius.

Mephiston is a figure of suspicion and fear to many outside his Chapter, yet none can deny his psychic might. The Lord of Death ranks high amongst the most powerful psykers in the Imperium, his mind a weapon of incredible lethality.

PSYCHIC STORM

After the success of the Blood Angels' initial assault, even Dante was surprised at the speed with which the Hive Mind struck back. In the span of but a few minutes, the swarm was regrouping within the ruins, and a new and terrible psychic presence stalked among them. Mephiston was the first to feel it, his keen esoteric senses detecting the approaching shadow within the background storm of alien whispers. Acknowledging his warning, Dante pulled the Blood Angels back towards the port's fortified southern gate, ordering them to dig in and make ready.

Moments later, a hulking trio of Maleceptors lumbered out of the ruins, surrounded by shoals of floating psyker-beasts. The air around these Tyranids hummed and shimmered, and no battle-brother that looked upon them could deny the terrible presence of the Hive Mind walked among

them. In the wake of the alien psykers came fresh waves of scuttling creatures, reinvigorated and spurred on by the iron will of the psyker-beasts.

Dante ordered all fire concentrated upon the hulking psychic horrors, and a storm of shells, bolts and blasts rained down upon the creatures. However, almost every round fell short, exploding in flashes of psychic energy upon an invisible shield projected by the beasts. Then the Blood Angels were forced to shift their aim to the more immediate threat, as a rolling tide of fanged creatures bore down upon them. The air was filled with the hiss of alien beasts and the roar of chainswords as both sides met.

This time, however, the power of the alien psykers tipped the odds in the Tyranids' favour. Gaunts fought on with mindless fury, clawing over their broodmates to get at the



Blood Angels. Coils of dark energy lanced out from the leader-beasts to send Space Marines to their knees, blood leaking from rents in their helmets. When Dante led a charge against the creatures they turned their attentions to him, lancing tendrils of power at his mind. Only centuries of psycho-conditioning held the Tyranids' mental assault at bay. Even so, the Chapter Master faltered, slowed as if running underwater as he tried desperately to get close enough to the creatures to strike.

From across the battlefield Mephiston saw the beasts turn upon Dante, and moved to aid his lord. Supported by Epistolary Martellos, Mephiston turned his formidable mind to tearing apart the Maleceptors' psychic domination. As the battle raged outside the fire-ringed port, an epic battle of wills unfolded between Mephiston and the trio of Tyranid psykers.

Bolts of ruby light warred with twisting tendrils of shadow as the two enemies clashed. At first the Chief Librarian seemed to be besting the beasts, spears of bloody fire and waves of crimson force crashing into the Tyranids. Several of the closest floating psyker-beasts screamed and perished as Mephiston's power touched them, and by degrees the Warp field around the creatures weakened. And then the full attention of the Mind-Death turned upon Mephiston, and the monstrous alien trio combined their powers.

Every Blood Angel upon the field felt the psychic shriek which rolled out from the beasts, even though it was directed squarely at the Chief Librarian. Battle-brothers clenched their teeth in agony or let out incoherent yells as their minds were ravaged. Still, their pain was but the barest fraction of what Mephiston felt as the psychic blast crashed into him.





The Chief Librarian's mind filled with a cacophony of monstrous alien thoughts. Any Blood Angel but Mephiston would have perished under the onslaught, their consciousness burnt away like cobwebs before a flame. Only the Chief Librarian's indomitable will kept him alive, the same control that had seen him master the Black Rage allowing him to cling to his sanity. Though Mephiston did not fall, his power was broken. As powerful as the Chief Librarian was, his abilities were like a candle held against the fires of a star when compared with the enormous power of the Hive Mind.

However, Mephiston's battle with the Mind-Death gave Dante the chance he needed. While the Maleceptors focused their attentions on the Chief Librarian, the Chapter Master and his guard charged into the nearest beast. Up close, the Axe Mortalis did its work, and Dante drove his weapon deep into the pulsing cranium of a psyker-beast. With its death, a baleful scream echoed across the battlefield and the remaining psychic creatures retreated into the ruins, the swarm rushing in to hold back their enemies.

This was not the turning point Dante had hoped for, however. As the Blood Angels surged forward to crush the Tyranid leadership, the teeming alien broods shifted around them, recovering and attacking once more. Yard by yard, the Space Marines found themselves being pushed back toward the port gates. Though the surviving creatures of the Mind-Death had retreated into cover, shoals of lesser leader-beasts herded the chitinous hordes forward.

Dante looked across the carnage before him, a sea of mangled alien bodies stretching for hundreds of yards in all directions. Here and there a crimson or golden armoured form lay among the xenos; Sanguinary Priests moved amongst the dead, ministering to these fallen heroes. As he beheld the vision of death, the Commander could feel the weight of centuries upon him, memories of other times and other battles. However, nothing compared to this. Today, Dante had witnessed Tyranid threats beyond even his experience. Creatures he had never encountered. Evidence of survival instincts among the alien leadership. Rarely did Tyranids retreat, nor did they quit a battle until their entire strength had been expended.

The trio of psyker-beasts were indeed something new. The Sanguinary Priests assured Dante that Mephiston would recover from his psychic duel with the Hive Mind. However, it was a chilling foreshadowing of what might await the Chapter on Baal should Leviathan's rampant development be allowed to continue. Indeed, what horrors might the Tyranids spawn if they consumed the Cryptus System, adding not just trillions of tonnes of biomass to their fleet, but also the collective combat experience of untold billion weapon-beasts?

Dante was drawn from his thoughts by the sound of marching footsteps. Looking up, he saw a delegation of Astra Militarum

Soon the ruined avenues were piled with alien corpses and slick with steaming xenos blood, drifts and mounds of multi-limbed bodies thick beneath the Space Marines' feet. Yet still the creatures came. Slowly at first, but with gathering momentum, the Tyranids pushed the invaders back toward the flaming moat. Dante's brothers rallied around the company standard, the Blood Angels focusing their defence in its shadow. However, in all his years Dante had rarely seen a foe so determined, and so vicious, and he knew that without support his bridgehead on Aspodex would soon be overrun.

However, just as the Commander was about to summon his 1st Company reserves, the thunder of Basilisk fire joined the din of battle, and a rolling barrage crashed among the aliens. Deafening explosions crept toward the line of ruins and great geysers of debris and mangled xenos bodies were hurled into their air. The defenders of Port Helos were finally making themselves known.

Dante was quick to capitalise on this sudden advantage, and before the Tyranids could close the holes in their formation the Blood Angels counter-attacked hard. Isolated broods and beasts were torn apart, and the Sanguinary Guard hacked their way through the wounded alien assault, further sundering it. The Basilisk gunners kept up their supporting barrage, great shells hammering into knots of scuttling beasts, and soon the alien tide dwindled to a trickle. The Tyranids had been driven back for now, yet this reprieve could not last long.

officers descending from the port gates, two Cadians supporting a limping figure between them. As they drew near, the wounded man offered Dante a weak salute, shrugging off his helpers with apparent irritation.

'General Dhrost, Cadian 185th,' the man said, his voice a wounded and weary croak.

Dante considered the general for a moment, taking in the torn and bloodstained uniform, the grey, deeply lined skin and horribly bloodshot eyes. This officer had been through something truly terrible, yet still he had held Port Helos for days, and against all the odds. Whatever had happened to him, Dante recognised Dhrost as a hero, a warrior that the commander could respect.

'How many survivors remain on Asphodex, General?' Dante asked, turning his head to the ruined battlefield once more.

Dhrost swayed for a moment, one of his men reaching out a concerned hand to support him. The General's response, when it came, hinted at a bottomless well of exhaustion and despair, held in check through willpower alone. 'Just us, my lord... we are the last ones.'





DARK TIDE

The nomadic populace of Lysios had never imagined horrors like those they now faced. The last of their crawler caravans still strove to stay ahead of the monstrous tidal wave that cursed their world, while struggling to stave off the Tyranid threat. It was into this desperate battle that the Flesh Tearers plunged, like the angels of the Emperor himself.

Gabriel Seth had not hesitated when Commander Dante requested his aid in the defence of Baal. In the valorous company of the Blood Angels, Seth hoped to find salvation for his Flesh Tearers. For too many years, his Chapter had suffered disgrace and suspicion from their allies. That many of the worst atrocities laid at the Flesh Tearers' door were true did little to quell the Chapter Master's anger. Seth knew first hand the ruinous effect the Red Thirst and Black Rage could have upon his otherwise noble battle-brothers. It was a madness that ran like poison through the very veins of his companies, and only by the spilling of blood could it be sated for a time.



These were the thoughts that haunted Seth as he ordered his fleet to Lysios and the relief of the defenders there. As the flotilla of crimson warships raced across the void toward the dirty green world, augurs glimpsed the broken outlines of once great cities beneath swirling storm clouds and the swarm of bio-ships clustering close to its upper atmosphere. Even from this height they could see the great wave that washed endlessly across the world, drawn in the gravitational wake of the moon Ixoi. Seth had been briefed on the wave and the populace that raced ahead of its crushing might.

From orbit the Flesh Tearers could also clearly see the Lysios solar relay, the planet's lifeline to the power of the Magnovitrium, which the Tyranids had so far ignored. The relay had a secondary importance to Dante's plans to recapture the system, as it had to remain intact if the planets were to be restored once the Tyranids had been defeated. With these orders in mind, several Flesh Tearers vessels broke away from their main fleet to establish a defensive perimeter around the massive orbital structure.

Vox capture confirmed that a handful of defenders had escaped into low orbit aboard the last transports left on Lysios, while others had managed to break away from the melee and return to the immense nomad landships, escaping out of the ruined cities. In their wake the immense tidal wave had scoured the battlefield consuming all in its path. For a time, at least, the defenders believed the battle over and gave thanks to their gods for vanquishing these vile invaders from the void. However, their relief was to be short-lived. Of the swarms caught up in the wave, most had survived, their alien physiology proof against drowning and the crushing weight of water. As the

tsunami moved on across the surface of Lysios, the swarms emerged from the waters scattered and depleted, but still very much a threat.

Now the surviving nomads were once again racing ahead of the wave. Those that had thought to escape into the void had found their retreat blocked by the orbiting xenos ships, and been forced to rejoin their land-bound fellows. This time, though, the defenders were not running from the Tyranids, but towards them. The creatures disgorged by the passing of the wave massed across the nomad trails encircling Lysios' northern hemisphere, trapping the Imperials between the wave behind and the beasts ahead.

Seth called up pict-captures of the world below, looking for a place to bring the foe to battle. The wave was moving too fast, the defenders were too few, the ground ahead of them too open. Considering the speed of their progress, the Chapter Master gauged it would be only a few short hours before the defenders' convoy reached the xenos hordes.

The window of attack would be small, and the risks significant – however, this was exactly the kind of warfare that Space Marines excelled at. Quickly considering his tactical data, Gabriel Seth decided upon a mobile insertion with a fast-moving strike force. He would come down right on top of the survivors, matching their speed and forming an armoured cordon around them moments before they met the oncoming Tyranid swarms.

The Flesh Tearers' fleet thundered into orbit, smashing a ragged hole through the cloud of hanging bio-ships. Within moments, waves of attack craft fell away from their hulls. Screaming down through the spore-choked atmosphere, the Flesh Tearers spread out to shadow the nomads' convoy. From the vista-domes of their crawlers the Lysites stared as the crimson armoured squadrons descended. The surviving Sisters of Battle, opening their tanks' top hatches, looked upon the Space Marines and offered up prayers of thanks to the God-Emperor.

From the underside of Thunderhawk transporters, Rhino and Predator tanks came crashing down onto the algae-slick surface. Their tracks churned through the muck as they accelerated hard, swiftly matching speed with the convoy. Overhead the ramps of Stormravens yawned open and Assault Marines leapt out to soar through the air above the survivors. Within the space of minutes an escort of Flesh Tearers tanks, flyers and airborne infantry had surrounded the ragged Imperial caravan.

Up ahead, shadows crawled within the briny ruins, and thousands of eyes turned toward the approaching convoy.



THE LIVING WALL

The ruins shook with the thunder of hundreds of roaring engines. Scores of massive nomad crawlers formed the centre of the convoy, the last survivors of the Lysite populace. At their heart rumbled the Solarium, a huge vehicle layered in arcane technology that provided the nomads with their only terrestrial link to the Magnovitrium relay in orbit. Once there had been five such vehicles, each considered sacred. Now only one remained, a precious relic that the Lysites could not afford to lose.

In the crawlers' shadow, dozens of Adepta Sororitas transports roared down brine-slick streets; these were the battered remains of the contingent of the Order of the Sacred Rose. Around them, the Flesh Tearers tanks tore through the ruins of the Lysios cityscape. Overhead, squadrons of Stormravens shadowed the vehicles, their pilots relaying augur-echoes of the alien horde massing upon the horizon.

Aboard the Stormraven *Death Blow*, Gabriel Seth assessed the enemy and traded vox-communiques with the rest of the convoy. Nomad elders mumbled and cursed from their crawlers, while Sister Superior Amity, Canoness Magda Grace's successor, gave a cold assessment of their situation. If the convoy were to have any hope, they would need to punch clean through the swarm that barred their path. Only then, with the enemy temporarily scattered, could evacuation be considered. Even so, reckoned Seth with a scowl, time and enemy numbers would be against them. This was going to be tight.

GABRIEL SETH

Gabriel Seth has been the Chapter Master of the Flesh Tearers for over a century. When Seth took the mantle of Chapter Master, he inherited a Chapter on the verge of collapse. The flaws the Flesh Tearers shared with the Blood Angels – the Red Thirst and Black Rage – ran rampant through the Chapter. Soon, it seemed, the numbers of those succumbing to the Black Rage would overtake those brothers still in command of their minds. Adding to Seth's burden was the dark reputation borne by the Flesh Tearers. Rumours of wild butchery haunted their every campaign. Certainly, the devastation left by these troubled scions of Sanguinius was often worse than that inflicted by their enemies.

These were both curses that Gabriel Seth sought to purge from his Chapter. He reasoned that if the Flesh Tearers could not escape their nature then they would embrace it – but in doing so, vent their full fury upon the enemies of the Imperium. If the Chapter were doomed to vanish into the blood-soaked annals of Imperial history, it would be remembered for its great deeds and glorious triumphs, and not as bloodthirsty butchers.

Seth's efforts have borne bitter fruit, and his Chapter's reputation has improved since his ascension. Yet the Chapter Master is more than just a talented leader – he is also a warrior of skill and frightening ferocity. Seth hurls himself into every battle with a barely restrained wildness. His massive chainsword, Blood Reaver, whirls in great roaring arcs, while Seth kicks, punches and headbutts his foes with crunching force. To lead his troubled brothers, Seth must keep pace with them, and thus he fights as an engine of destruction with an impact greater than any of his warriors.



Battle-brother Vangalis soared out above the convoy, his jump pack leaving a flickering trail of flame as he leapt from the open assault ramp of the Stormraven. Below, he could see the ruined cityscape of Lysios stretching out for miles, its decaying grandeur still faintly visible under centuries of seawater and slime. Below him, hundreds of vehicles ground through the muck, following a nomad trail, a cleared section between the ruins that stretched off in both directions as far as Vangalis could see.

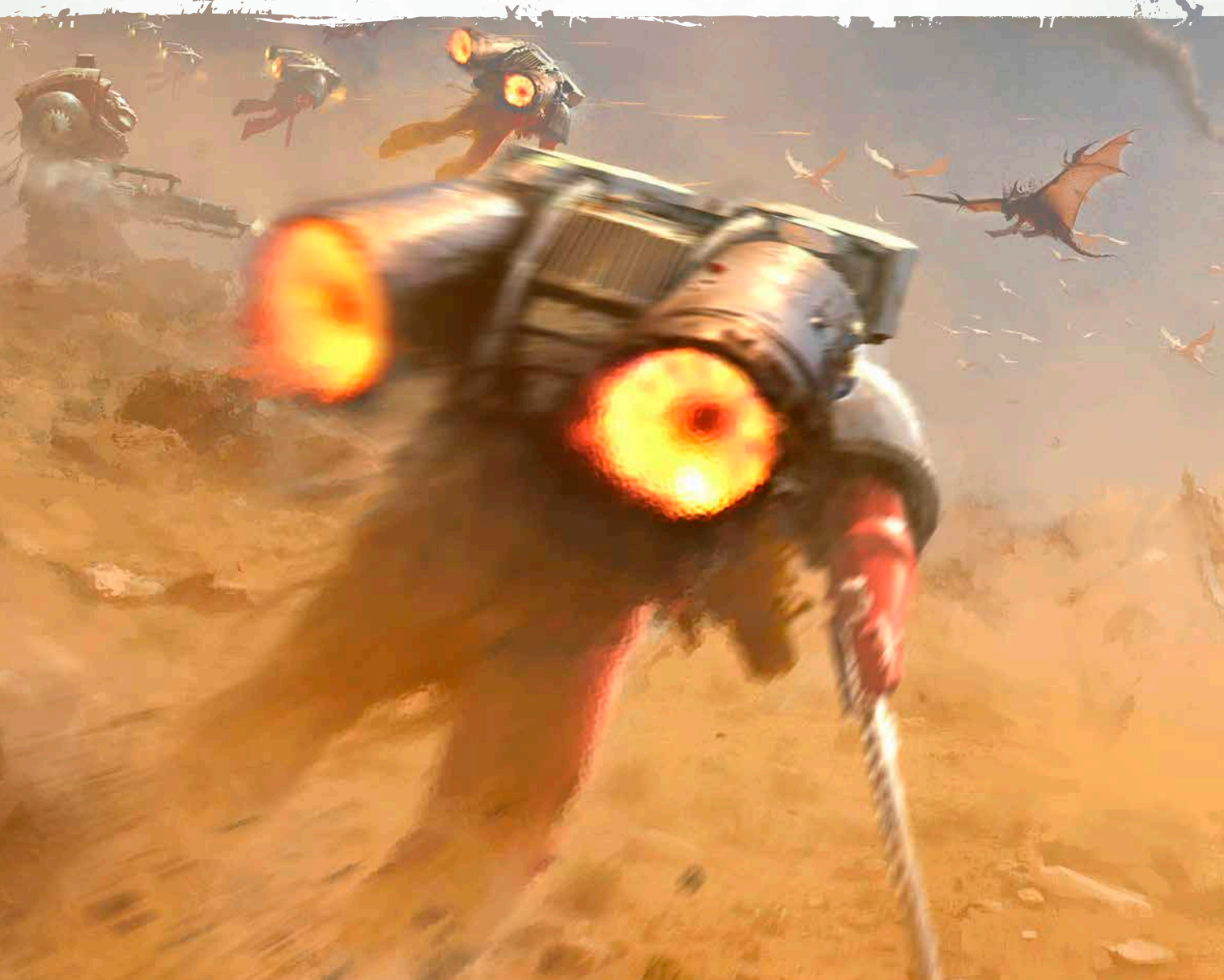
Up ahead, the battle-brother could make out the edges of the alien swarm. Vangalis felt the familiar stirrings of rage within his chest at the sight of the foe. It seemed he was not alone in anticipating the imminent battle, the warcries and vocal scorn of his battle-brothers ringing across the vox. At the forefront of the convoy a spearhead of Flesh Tearers tanks and aircraft had assumed a wedge formation. Above them, Vangalis touched down on the crumbling roof of a ruin, taking four running steps before blasting skyward once more, keeping pace with the convoy.

As the two sides closed the distance, the thunder of guns filled the air. Rockets, shells and las-blasts streaked out to punish the onrushing xenos. Hundreds of yards away, the closest

weapon-beasts were blasted into splattered chunks of smoking meat. Vangalis grinned as he saw a hulking leader-beast take a stormstrike missile to the face, the beast vanishing in a cloud of torn chitin and gore.

Then the swarm returned fire. Horrific living shells and caustic bombs rained down upon the convoy. Spores burst among the tanks, spraying out razor-sharp spines and coiling poisonous fog. Within their armoured shells the defenders weathered the storm of alien fire, though here and there Vangalis could see a track blown free or a transport pierced, the resulting crashes and explosions leaving wrecks in the caravan's wake.

The brief exchange of fire lasted only moments, during which Vangalis' squad slammed down upon the roof of a Lysite crawler, sprinted along it, and then roared away again. Before either side could bring more firepower to bear, the wedge of Flesh Tearers tanks plunged into the swarm. At that moment, Vangalis lost sight of the convoy. It was as if the Imperials had driven into an ocean of bio-horrors, the living, writhing waves closing over their vehicles. However, the battle-brother had no time to dwell upon the fate of those below as the skies were filled with a tornado

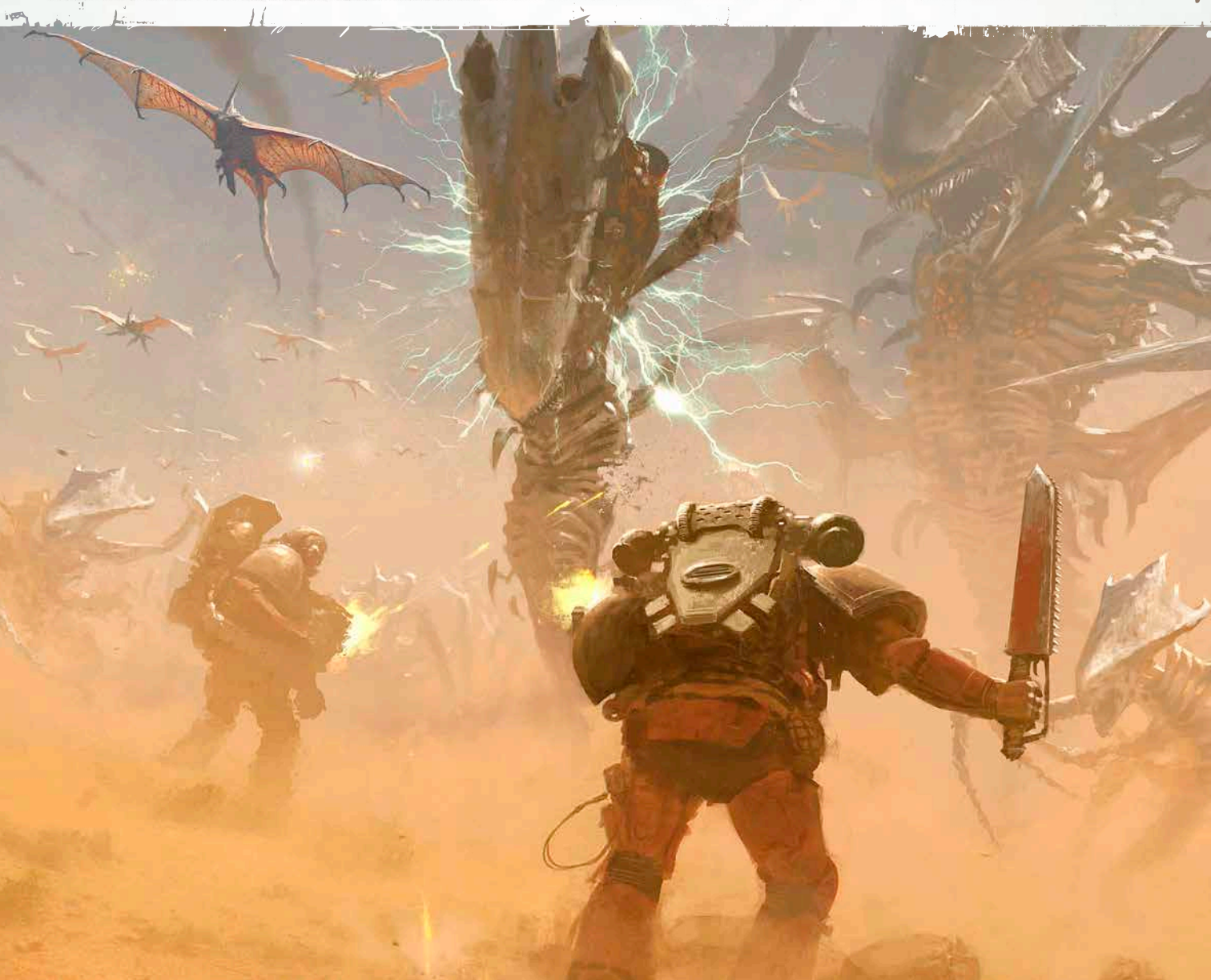


of beating wings and snapping jaws. The foe came at him from every direction, creatures large and small trying to snatch him from the air with their talons. Vangalis fired point-blank with his bolt pistol, and hissing wing-beasts exploded in showers of viscera. From the corner of his vision Vangalis saw a vast airborne shape swoop down upon a Stormraven. The beast wrapped its massive wings around the craft and tore at the hull, seemingly impervious to the hammering guns that tried to bring it down. Turbines screaming in protest, the Stormraven tried to climb out of the sky-swarm. With a burst of flame and smoke its engines failed and the craft pitched down into the melee below.

For long bloody minutes Vangalis fought his way through the Tyranid onslaught, his ire building to a fever pitch within his chest. He leapt from one crawler to another, soaring in great flaming arcs through the foe. Suddenly, Vangalis felt a tugging on his back, and glanced over his shoulder to see two winged creatures tearing at his jump pack. Bringing around his bolt pistol, he turned one into a spray of purple mist, but the other sank its fangs into his harness. Suddenly Vangalis felt his jump pack lurch away, ripping free and spinning off into the swarm. Then he was falling toward the track-churned madness below.

Vangalis screamed in rage as he fell, filled with fury that he should suffer such an inglorious death. Then, with a clang of ceramite upon plasteel, he crashed down upon the roof of a Lysite crawler. Everywhere fanged horrors were trying to prize their way into the gargantuan vehicle, while armoured turrets swung back and forth, their drumming fire tearing at the swarm. Letting the Red Thirst course through him, Vangalis hurled himself into the foe. His chainsword howled and gurgled in bloody arcs as it bit through xenos meat and bone, while he emptied his bolt pistol into anything that moved. Vangalis was senseless to anything but the slaughter of his enemies. He paid no heed to the barking turrets or their gunners, who watched his rampage in mute terror from behind armaglass firing ports.

Vangalis was still butchering anything within reach when the crawler burst free of the swarm. Though dozens of vehicles and two of the massive nomad landships had been lost in the crossing, Vangalis could see the convoy remained mostly intact. Turning to face the receding tide, the Flesh Tearer watched as broods of winged beasts and swift-limbed attack creatures broke off to give chase. His squad-brothers were dead to a man, yet there was no time to mourn, for the battle was far from over.



THE DEAD SEA



Having punched a hole through the Tyranids, the Flesh Tearers, the Adepta Sororitas and the Lysite nomads found themselves in a running battle with those creatures swift enough to keep up with their vehicles. Seth commanded the battle from his Stormraven: though he had hoped to secure sufficient breathing space to effect an evacuation, the Chapter Master knew that to stop now would be to die.

Bounding broods of gaunts and snake-tailed Ravens raced alongside the convoy, leaping and snapping at the Flesh Tearers and their allies. From the cupolas of their tanks, stern-faced Sisters and snarling Space Marines stitched lines of fire through the xenos, rounds bursting among the beasts in sprays of gore or kicking up gouts of slime where they hit the ground. From above the vehicles, Gargoyles soared down, spitting gobbets of acid or salvos of fleshborers that splattered and burst against armoured hulls. The surviving Stormravens did their best to keep these flying horrors at bay, their blazing guns tearing into leathery wings and chitinous hides. Yet for every beast that died, dozens more spilled out of the ruins.

Then the landscape began to change. Ruined streets gave way to sunken wasteland. Here and there the broken remains of buildings flashed past the thundering convoy; up ahead a cliff edge lay in the path of the Imperial road train. In the open ground, the Tyranids spread out around the Flesh Tearers, trading fire with the tanks or hurling themselves against their hulls. Leaning out of hatches, the Flesh Tearers fired point-blank into the assault-beasts, culling those that tried to rip their way inside.

With a spray of rotting algae, the first tanks roared over the edge of the cliff and down into the vast remains of the Lysios seabed below. When catastrophe had turned the waters of the world into a single terrible tsunami, it had stripped the oceans dry. Now these sunken valleys stretched for hundreds of miles between the remains of Lysios' continents, the nomad trails cutting across them like black ribbons upon their sandy surface. However, the seemingly empty seabed held a new peril, one that the Flesh Tearers and Adepta Sororitas were soon to discover.

Weaving in and out of the pursuing weapon-beast swarms, the Flesh Tearers tanks fought to keep the nomad landships protected. Seth was so consumed with the breakneck battle that he did not hear the hasty warnings of the Lysite elders as they crackled over the vox. Suddenly an Adepta Sororitas Rhino vanished in a spray of sand and slime as the seabed swallowed it. It was then the Chapter Master realised the trail upon which they fought was littered with algae pits

and sinkholes. The landships, with their wide tracks and massive hulls, were immune to the peril, but not so the far smaller Imperial tanks. Now the battle took on a different tone, as the Flesh Tearers and Sisters of Battle dodged in and out of not just Tyranid broods but also sucking pitfalls.

The convoy was soon strung out along almost a mile of track-churned trail. The hundreds of vehicles drew thousands of bio-creatures behind them like a terrible living cloak of fangs and claws. Just as the tanks tried to keep the swarm away from the Lysite landships, so too did the brood-beasts try to scatter the Imperial formation. Huge, winged horrors swept down from the sky, bio-weapons spitting death, to slam into the sides of tanks. Rocked on their tracks, the vehicles would turn turrets and pintle-mounted guns against their attackers. Sometimes their desperate fire would kill or drive the creatures back, but more often the vehicle would be torn open or driven into a sinkhole in a spray of thick black slime.

Casting around for a way out, Seth was dismayed to see a line of dark shapes clustered along the horizon. Unable to catch the convoy, the Hive Mind had turned its efforts to blocking its path. Massive, glistening Tyrannocytes drifted across the dry seabed, completely covering the nomad trail. Dripping bio-cannons and twitching tentacles worked to ensnare the Imperials. In their shadow, spine-covered spore mines drifted closer to the ground, each one with the power to tear open an armoured hull. Worse still, the spores were drooling a rain of acid down onto the surface below, turning the seabed into a toxic quicksand.

Seth knew a moment of total frustration, for it seemed there was no escape. Then his vox came alive with the clipped tones of Sister Superior Amity. There was another way, she revealed. When her Order had first come to Lysios, they had operated out of a fortified cathedrum deployed from orbit. The site had been abandoned by the Sisters of Battle within a year, their strength divided instead into mobile missions which could move with the Lysite caravans. However, to Amity's knowledge the cathedrum was still there, standing atop a mighty stone plateau not ten miles distant. While evacuation had been the plan, she had not mentioned the old stronghold, for who knew whether its guns and void shield generators were still operational? Now, however, the cathedrum might be their only chance. Seth, determined not to break his oath to Commander Dante, agreed without hesitation. Amid a bellow of engines and a thunder of guns, the armoured convoy swerved off the trail and made for the coordinates Sister Amity had provided, hoping to find shelter in the abandoned bastion of faith.







CURSED CITY

At first the nomad elders refused to turn their crawler hulks toward the isle of Shelse, wailing over the vox about the terrible curse that dwelt there. Yet Seth would brook no argument, nor would he allow the Lysites to be consumed by the Hive Mind. In the end it took the threat of Flesh Tearer retribution, coupled with Sister Amity's promises of the Emperor's protection, to chivvy the nomads on.

From his Stormraven, Seth watched the ruined isle rear up over the horizon like a crumbling fist of stone thrust up from the seabed. As the tanks and landships crawled up the sides of the plateau, the swarm receded behind them, and Seth was left wondering if perhaps this had been the Tyranids' plan all along. However, there was no time to turn back, and soon the defenders were roaring through crumbled ruins toward the hunched fortifications of the cathedrum. Once a mighty fortress of faith, the complex of buildings and bunkers had been worn down by neglect and the pounding passage of the Wrath of Shelse. Yet enough remained of the complex that its ruins were defensible; the Flesh Tearers and Sisters of Battle spilled out of their transports, taking up firing positions within the salt-worn buildings. Amity's Sisters checked their bolters and flammers, snapping fresh magazines and promethium canisters into place, while the Flesh Tearers strode like crimson giants among them. The nomads, meanwhile, guided their crawlers deeper into the compound, pulling them to a halt amid the ruined buildings. Amongst them came the Solarium, grinding to a halt in the shadow of the cathedrum's fortified spire. Flesh Tearers Techmarines hurried past the vehicle's mighty tracks, disappearing into the depths of the compound alongside a small band of Battle Sisters. To them fell the duty of locating the void shield generators and, if possible, coaxing their machine spirits back to life before the tidal wave or the Tyranids reached them.

Having organised the defence, Gabriel Seth had little to do but wait. For the void shield generators to spark into life. For the Tyranids to attack. For the tidal wave to hit and sweep them all away. As with almost everything on this Emperor-forsaken planet, it was out of his hands. Powerlessness was not a sensation that Seth was familiar with, nor one he took to well. Jaw clenched, face set in a scowl, the Flesh Tearers Chapter Master stood atop a mound of rubble and stared westward, back toward the pursuing swarms, and the devastating wave that surely chased upon their heels.

THE CATHEDRAL OF SHELSE

In times of old the sea goddess Shelse was worshipped upon Lysios by millions of devout citizens. Central to their faith was the grand Cathedral of Shelse, a towering edifice that rose above the great frozen Lysite Ocean. Then the wrath of Cryptus seared the world with solar fire; the ice seas melted and the moon of Ixoi loomed large within its skies. The wave that was birthed in the wake of the solar flare scoured the planet and tore its cities apart. The survivors of that first devastating tsunami saw Shelse as the architect of their despair and blamed her priests for their misfortune. Those priests that had survived were gathered up by the Lysites and put to death amid the ruins of their cathedral. The ruin was deemed a cursed place, and ever since the nomads have given it a wide berth. However, when the Ministorum came to Lysios it was clear where their first stronghold should be built. Slab-sided structures were brought down from orbit and erected atop the towering stone plateaux. They ground beneath them the ruins of Shelse's ancient shrine, the armour-clad cathedrum of the Imperial faith obliterating the last remnants of its old, heathen predecessor.







STRIKE FORCE RAZORWIND

Gabriel Seth was forced to muster a mobile battle group of aircraft and armour to keep pace with the fleeing survivors on Lysios. These rapid reinforcements joined forces with the remnants of Canoness Magda Grace's Sisters of Battle to defend the nomad convoys as they tried desperately to stay ahead of both the approaching wave and the alien horde.

A GABRIEL SETH, FLESH TEARERS CHAPTER MASTER

Seth personally led his force to the aid of the survivors on Lysios. From within the hull of his command vehicle he directed the battle and guided its people to safety. It would be the fierce, determined leadership shown by Seth that saw the convoy to higher ground so that it might stand a chance of survival in the face of the invaders.

B SANGUINE FURY

The Flesh Tearers deployed columns of armour to protect the convoy from the Tyranids and to punch through the swarm. *Sanguine Fury*, with its autocannon and heavy bolters, would smash a ragged hole through the enemy until its guns glowed and its tracks were clogged with ichor.

C RAZOR'S EDGE

The Stormraven *Razor's Edge* flew as air support during the convoy's flight on Lysios. Its heavy weapons proved vital in keeping the larger bio-creatures at bay, its searing beams of melta fire and salvos of stormstrike missiles knocking Harpies, Hive Tyrants and other massive monsters flailing from the sky.

D INCENDIA

The Baal Predator *Incendia* was part of the armoured spearhead deployed by the Flesh Tearers. It was well chosen for its devastating close support weapons: its heavy flamers and flamestorm cannon continually washed the thick hulls of the nomad crawlers, clearing them of clawing and climbing weapon-beasts.



E SQUAD HERAELOS

Along with airborne forces and armoured vehicles, Seth deployed numerous Rhino-mounted Tactical Squads. Squad Heraelos was one of these, its battle-brothers firing their weapons from the open hatch of their transport as it jinked and weaved among the rolling combat.

F SISTER SUPERIOR AMITY HOPE

When Canoness Magda Grace was killed, she left behind a force scattered by battle and shattered by ceaseless alien assault. Sister Superior Amity Hope was left to take command of the survivors on Lysios. Devout in her duty and still of the belief that the invaders could be destroyed, she gathered her Sisters to defend the nomads.

G WINGS OF THE SAINT

Amity's Sisters Seraphim, dubbed the Wings of the Saint by the nomads – a reference to the late Magda Grace – flew in bounds above the column as it fled. Like the blood-spattered Assault Marines that fought alongside them, the Seraphim tried valiantly to keep the skies clear of bio-creatures, though few of these Sisters would survive to reach the sanctuary of the cathedrum.

H FIRES OF PERDITION

The Order's Immolators had proven themselves time and again during the fighting on Lysios, and continued to do so during the long fight across the empty sea bed. The *Fires of Perdition* was especially blessed, as it had saved Sister Superior Amity herself, incinerating a Mawloc that had threatened to devour her Rhino.

I THE STEEL ROSE

Those Sisters of Battle that could not find a place in one of the order's off-world transports had to escape aboard Rhinos when the wave consumed the alien tide and the defenders fled before it. Now these survivors were dubbed the Steel Rose, the armoured flower of the order, keeping its sacred duty alive as they shepherded the citizens of Lysios away from harm.



HEROES OF LYSIOS

The Flesh Tearers suffer worse than most from the effects of their genetic Flaw. Yet their heroism is perhaps all the greater because of this. The wider Imperium is quick to judge every misstep the Flesh Tearers make, but this only drives them on to strive for ever more mighty deeds. So it was on Lysios, Seth's warriors determined to be seen as saviours, not savages.

GABRIEL SETH

The Chapter Master of the Flesh Tearers is equal parts iron-willed leader and wrathful warrior, but during the opening stages of the war on Lysios he was forced to stand apart from the fighting, commanding his warriors from the air. As the situation became ever more desperate, Seth had felt a familiar rage building within him, that same curse that all of his battle-brothers suffered from. He had forced the sensation down, his iron will keeping the rage in check as always. Now, with no option remaining but to stand and fight, Gabriel Seth welcomed the killing rage like an old friend, and prepared to turn it upon the hated xenos foe.



BROTHER PALANEOS

A vital member of Tactical Squad Lucien, Palaneos is known throughout the Chapter for his mastery of fire as a weapon. There are those who claim that the battle-brother has an almost savant-like understanding of his flamer, *Anger's Voice*. Certainly warrior and weapon work in perfect synchronicity – Palaneos punishes his foes with blazing jets of fire, playing the pyrotechnic wrath of his weapon around with the skill of a master. *Anger's Voice*, for its part, has never failed its wielder, belching forth mighty clouds of flame regardless of damage or adverse conditions.



Incendrus Honor worn by Brother Palaneos on his ceramite bracer to denote his proven mastery of flame and melta weaponry

BROTHER GALLIAN

The first promotion a Flesh Tearers Scout will receive is to the ranks of the Assault Squads. More ferocious than their counterparts in any other Space Marine Chapter, the Flesh Tearers Assault Marines are terrifying foes to face. Brother Gallian is a perfect example of this, a hot-blooded killer whose battle-rage is terrifying to behold. Some of Gallian's brothers fear that his sanity is not what it should be, and that the Black Rage lurks in his very near future. However, though a wild and deadly killer, Brother Gallian has not fallen yet, and so he fights on with courage and dedication in the name of his Chapter and the Primarch.



Campaign badge of Lysios depicting the world and wave overlaid with the Chapter's symbol



BONES OF CRETACIA

Most Space Marine Chapters venerate their Rhinos as relics of a lost age, technological marvels whose machine spirits are to be greatly respected. The maddened offensives of the Flesh Tearers do not lend themselves to caution, however, and many of their Rhinos have been lost in battle over the millennia. Those that remain often have machine spirits as hot-headed and aggressive as their passengers. *Bones of Cretacia* is such an engine, forever striving to plunge headlong into the thick of the foe. The vehicle's aggression has led it into danger more than once, but it has helped it to fight its way out, too.



Armoured campaign badge of Lysios, the black silhouette representing the shield that defends the Chapter



SISTERS OF THE SAINT

Canoness Magda Grace had given her life in battle, martyred while protecting Lysite refugees from a stalking xenos hunter-beast. Those Battle Sisters who survived her benefitted from this legacy – the native nomads had proclaimed the Canoness to be a saint, and those of her order to be divine saviours whose commands must be followed as gospel.

SISTER SUPERIOR AMITY HOPE

The death of Magda Grace left a power vacuum, one that had to be filled quickly if any of her surviving sisters were to remain alive for long. Sister Superior Amity Hope stepped into that gap with commendable surety, taking up the reins of command and fashioning her Order's surviving warriors into an efficient and deadly weapon. Still, the weight of these new responsibilities was heavy upon Sister Hope's shoulders – not only must she strive to keep her Battle Sisters alive, but also the countless Lysite refugees still under her care.



*Lysite army icon worn
by many of the Adepta
Sororitas to serve on the
world of Lysios*



SISTER SERAPHIM ELEANOR VERITY

A grim-faced and efficient killer, Sister Verity has fought on countless battlefields in the name of her faith. Though she would never admit it to any, save in her prayers to the Emperor himself, Sister Verity embraces battle with a rapturous joy. With every blast of her weapons, she sees the golden light of the Emperor. In every dying scream her enemies voice, she hears his words, elevating her to an ecstasy of righteous wrath. Thus, Sister Verity does not fear battle with the Tyranid menace. Rather, she welcomes the chance to be closer to her Emperor.

FIRES OF PERDITION

All Adepta Sororitas war engines are considered blessed by the Emperor, but *Fires of Perdition* has an especially impressive battle record, and is honoured accordingly. The tank's hull displays no fewer than five honour markings, for such diverse deeds as the slaying of the Sorcerer of Gau-Ix, bearing the Governor of Abramis VII to safety, and the rescue of Sister Superior Amity Hope herself.



Badge of Purification denoting the purging of multiple xenos swarms in the God-Emperor's name



HYMN OF HATE

Throughout the rolling battle against the Lysite ground swarm, *Hymn of Hate* had punished the foul xenos foe with every volley it fired. The tank's missiles had torn monstrous beasts from the skies and blasted hissing swarms of snakelike horrors from the column's path. Now, dug in amid the ruins of the Order's cathedrum, the Exorcist waited patiently for a chance to add to its tally of death.



Blessed kill mark awarded to the Hymn of Hate for the destruction of Tyranid tyrant-beasts





THE LYSITE LIVING WALL

By the time the Flesh Tearers arrived upon Lysios it was already overrun by Tyranids. Many of those creatures that had been enveloped by the wave during the first battle had survived, and now pursued the fleeing convoy. These were broods that had the speed to keep pace with the Imperium's vehicles and fight the running battle that transpired.

A LORD OF BLOOD WAVE AND DARK WIND

The superstitious nomadic people of Lysios gave the Tyranids all manner of fanciful names during the war for Cryptus. Among these was the winged Hive Tyrant that became known as the Lord of Blood Wave and Dark Wind. Whether or not this creature was a single beast or many, it was considered by the nomads to be a messenger of the alien gods, and its presence always foretold doom.

B DRYSEA WYRMS

The Drysea had ever been a source of many tales for the nomads, and when it became infested with Mawlocs these quickly took on the mantle of the Drysea Wyrms. Legends told of how when the seas of Lysios were washed away only the greediest sea beasts survived, burrowing in the sand and feeding on their kin. It was a myth that suited the Mawlocs well.



C THE LIVING WIND

So numerous were the flying aliens that beset Lysios that they could blot out the light of the suns or even create gales with their beating wings. These broods of Gargoyles were known as the Living Wind, and long before the sky darkened with their presence the air would shudder with the sound of their million hissing voices.

D DRYSEA SNAKES

Thought to be related to the Mawlocs, the smaller burrowing bio-beasts became known as the Drysea Snakes. These broods of Raveners lacked the horrific maws that characterised the larger beasts, but were no less feared, as their speed and bio-weapons made them deadly foes.

E SILT DEVILS

The Hormagant genus was one of the few ground-based Tyranid species capable of keeping up with the convoy, their powerful legs allowing them to race alongside the Imperial vehicles. The nomads dubbed these creatures Silt Devils, a reference to the sprays of muddy filth they threw up as they made bounding leaps across the seabed, eager to get to grips with their prey.

F HUNTER'S SHADOW

Among the swarms of smaller flying creatures larger beasts banked and wheeled upon the wind. One of these was the Harpy known as Hunter's Shadow, thought to be a vassal of the Lord of Blood Wave and Dark Wind. Often the last thing a nomad gunner would see was a sudden darkness followed by the flash of its wicked curved talons.



XENOSTORM



Beneath the storm-wracked atmosphere of Aeros, the Hive Mind feasted upon the gaseous heart of the world. Into this maelstrom of lashing winds and skyborne beasts, the Blood Angels descended. Brother Corbulo, the Sanguinary High Priest, was among them for he was convinced that the prize he sought was hidden beneath Aeros' blue clouds.

Aeros hung in the void like a milky blue eye, its surface crawling with the insectoid shapes of alien bio-ships. From the command deck of the *Wings of Baal*, Sanguinary High Priest Corbulo regarded the vast gas giant. At his side, Captain Aphael of the 2nd Company offered counsel, still sceptical that the elixir Corbulo sought was hidden beneath the swirling azure clouds. Yet Corbulo was convinced. Data recovered at great cost upon Satys indicated that there were vast stores of the drug kept in floating warehouses and refinery platforms as part of the airborne mining operations on Aeros. If even one of these stores remained intact it would be a great prize for the Blood Angels, and perhaps provide Corbulo with the raw materials he needed to find the cure for his Chapter's curse.

With nothing in the way of solid ground upon which to wage their war, the Blood Angels would have to muster a wholly airborne force for the conquest of Aeros. Given the Chapter's natural affinity for flight, this would not present the problem it might otherwise have done. As the *Wings of Baal* and her sister Strike Cruisers ran the Tyranid blockade, Corbulo and Aphael led a flight of Thunderhawks and Stormravens down toward the planet. Almost at once they came under assault from waves of skyborne weapon-beasts. The upper cloud layers of Aeros flickered and flashed as ordnance carved through the thin atmosphere, leaving trails of fire. Blood Angels attack craft jinked and tumbled through oncoming waves of attackers, their guns hammering into the swarms of winged horrors.

In the lead Stormraven, Corbulo scrolled through augur sweeps of the lower atmosphere looking for signs of Imperial resistance, even while his craft shuddered and jolted as its armour was subjected to a hail of living rounds. Then the Sanguinary Priest saw what he was looking for – the primary refinery platform. Weak vox transmissions were drifting up from the besieged mining station, the augur array identifying them as Cadian battle-ciphers. Communicating this intelligence to Captain Aphael, the Blood Angels attack force angled down towards the heart of Aeros and dived into its storm-wracked cloud layer.

As Corbulo and his brothers fell toward the centre of the gas giant, winged creatures of all sizes swooped and snapped at them. A huge Hive Crone swept out of the clouds to vomit acid over a Stormraven while Gargoyles clustered across the hulls of the Blood Angels craft, trying to burn through their armour or foul their engines.

From these attack craft, crimson armoured Assault Marines leapt out into the void. With skill that would amaze

even fellow Adeptus Astartes, the Blood Angels exited their transports and plunged through the foe with guns blazing, only to jink back through the open doors of their Stormravens once again. This they did time and again, their perfectly synchronised aerial manoeuvres holding the smaller bio-beasts at bay while the Stormravens' guns blazed away at the larger horrors. Even so, some of these creatures plunged through the Blood Angels formations in a blur of fangs and claws to snatch Space Marines from the air, before vanishing into the clouds below.

As the Blood Angels descended at breakneck speed, the ghostly shapes of burning mining platforms flashed past in the blue mist. Populated only by corpses and feeding Tyranids, they had become grotesque abattoirs of slaughter. Many of these great platforms were already listing toward the planet's core, their suspensor arrays and aero-turbines damaged or destroyed during the fighting. What had once been a thriving community of gas-miners was now reduced to a drifting constellation of debris.

Then the Blood Angels burst out of the stormlayer, the crimson aircraft punching through the roiling clouds, dragging the swarm in their wake. This close to the core, a vast open space stretched out as far as the eye could see. Above, the lightning-torn clouds flashed and boiled, while miles below, separated by currents of extreme pressure, the rich mineral core of Aeros swirled like a sea of azure mist.

Hanging in the centre of this null zone was the Aerosian Primary Refinery Platform; this massive disc anchored the base of the vapour-conveyor that shunted refined gases up from the planet's core. The top side of the disc was covered in densely packed buildings, a veritable city in the clouds, while the underside was a tangle of stalactite-like mining conduits that trailed hundreds of miles down into the bright mist below.

From his vantage point Corbulo could see the city was largely in ruins, its streets crawling with Tyranids. However, here and there weapons fire flashed from fortified buildings. The centre of the city was dominated by a huge Imperial cathedral, and it was around this structure that the fighting seemed the strongest. If he was to find more information on the Aerosian elixir stores, Corbulo reasoned he would find it there.

Following Corbulo's directions, the Blood Angels aircraft banked over the city and made for the Imperial lines. Far below them, the survivors gave a ragged cheer as the first Space Marine craft screamed down from the sky.



CORBULO'S QUEST

The Blood Angels do not have Apothecaries in the same manner as other Space Marine Chapters. Instead they maintain an order of Sanguinary Priests, whose responsibilities extend beyond the healing of flesh and bone, and the safeguarding of the Chapter's gene-seed, to include guarding the very purity of their blood. Corbulo is the head of the Blood Angels Sanguinary Priesthood, and considers it his sacred duty to preserve the fading genetic ancestry of the Chapter. To this end, he has devoted his life to the search for a cure to those flaws that assail his brothers: the Black Rage and the Red Thirst.

Many times, Corbulo has thought himself close to finding the answers he seeks, but on each occasion fate has intervened and ultimate success has been denied him. However, the Sanguinary High Priest remains true to his cause and continues to scour the galaxy for hints that may lead him to a cure.

Recently, rumours led Corbulo to Satys in search of a potion unique to the system. Known as the satryx elixir, it not only prolongs the lives of those living under the violent radiation storms of their twin red stars, but is also rumoured to quiet other kinds of mutation in the blood. Unfortunately for Corbulo, by the time he reached the Satys System it was in the grip of Hive Fleet Leviathan. He was able to gather some samples, but not the pure ones he sought. This, in turn, has brought him to Cryptus, sister system to Satys and principal recipient of its elixirs. However, the proximity of Cryptus to Satys means that the Tyranids have also struck here, and once again Corbulo finds himself facing ever more untenable circumstances in his efforts to secure this potential miracle-cure for his Chapter.

CATHEDRAL IN THE CLOUDS

From a garrison of almost five thousand, fewer than five hundred Cadians remained defending the refinery platform. When Dhrost had despatched his regiments to protect Aeros, most of the soldiers had been deployed on the upper mining rigs, hoping, with the support of extensive Valkyrie squadrons, to hold the line against the invaders. Only a strategic reserve had been sent to the refinery; Cadian high command had believed it unlikely the war would reach this far.

As in the other theatres of the Cryptus War, the Tyranids had adapted to their foes' plans with shocking speed, overwhelming the Cadians in short order. For the first days the garrison could only watch the swirling storm clouds above their heads and listen to the increasingly desperate orders filtering down across the vox-net. Then they had seen the Valkyries falling from the sky. Burning wrecks

tumbled end over end, winged beasts tearing at them as they fell. These had vanished into the crushing heart of the gas giant below, never to return.

Finally the swarm had come, a storm of beating leathery wings and hissing jaws that descended from overhead like the shadow of death. The refinery was bombarded by alien spores and living artillery, its buildings broken and melted until the survivors fought among the ruins. Without air support or contact with the Cadian high command, the defence soon devolved into street-to-street battles. Small groups of Imperial Guardsmen fortified buildings and held out as long as they could, while all that were able withdrew to the central cathedral to make a final stand.

When the Blood Angels appeared, it was as if the hand of the God-Emperor himself had come down to save the Cadians from annihilation.





STRIKE FORCE ANGELFALL

Aphael, Captain of 2nd Company, was given the task of securing the survivors of Aeros and clearing its skies of xenos creatures. It would be a battle fought among the clouds, the Blood Angels borne aloft by their jump packs and aircraft to take the fight to an agile and vicious foe.

A 2ND COMPANY CAPTAIN APHAEL

Captain Aphael is one of the Chapter's most experienced Captains, and soon adapted to the unique battlefield Aeros offered. He would quickly prove himself worthy of his reputation as he shifted his offensive seamlessly from sky to floating platform and back again to counter the changing tactics of the Hive Mind.

B SANGUINARY HIGH PRIEST CORBULO

Corbulo came to Cryptus both at the behest of his Chapter Master and on a personal quest of his own. It would be among the shifting clouds of Aeros that he sought out his ultimate goal: stocks of the satryx elixir which he hoped to be hidden among the floating debris of the destroyed mining platforms.

C BLADES OF THE BLOODIED

Aphael's Command Squad were personally chosen by the Captain from amongst his veterans, each one having fought at his side in countless campaigns. These Blades of the Bloodied, as they were known, would follow Aphael into battle throughout the war for Aeros, supporting their Captain with their many combined centuries of experience and skill.



D ASSAULT SQUAD
DAENTO

As Strike Force Angelfall descended upon the Areosian core refinery, Assault Squad Daento leapt from their transports to rip through the Tyranids assailing the defenders. In the ruins of the refinery the Space Marines' jump packs allowed them to bound from building to building, hunting down their quarry among the azure clouds.

E BLOODWIND

Much of the Blood Angels strike force was carried to battle in Stormravens, and the heavily armed aircraft would play a vital role in the Space Marines' assault. *Bloodwind* was Corbulo's Stormraven and bore the Sanguinary High Priest in battle time and again. The redoubtable craft would inflict an impressive tally of kills upon the airborne Tyranid swarms, never failing its noble master.

F TACTICAL SQUAD
METEROS

Alongside the airborne elements of Strike Force Angelfall were squads of Tactical Marines deployed upon the ruined mining platforms within Aeros itself. Squad Meteros was among those assigned to retake the core refinery, its battle-brothers ordered to relieve the beleaguered defenders and hold their ground against any opposition even after their air support departed.

THE ANGELIC HOST

Aeros was a roiling gas giant, a vaporous mass of gas clouds and whirling storm systems. These perilous conditions put the combatants of both sides in constant and terrible danger, while also necessitating entirely airborne forces be committed to the fight. Fortunately for the Blood Angels, this was a war they were well-equipped to wage.



SANGUINARY HIGH PRIEST CORBULO

Brother Corbulo has always been driven and determined, yet recently his surety of purpose has become something more akin to obsession. All other considerations seem to have become secondary to the Sanguinary High Priest's quest to cure the Flaw. Thus, when Corbulo learned of the satryx elixir he devoted all of his energies to its recovery and study. On Aeros, Corbulo believes he has one last chance to gather samples for his great work, and he is not about to let that opportunity slip away.



First Rank Aerosian Marksman honour, awarded to a battle-brother for a hundred airborne kills



Aerosian Carnifex kill badge: awarded for bringing down one of the mighty siege-beasts of the Aerosian swarm



Aerosian campaign badge depicting Corbulo's grail, worn by Blood Angels fighting under the High Priest's command



BLOODWIND

A venerable war machine with over one hundred heavy armour kills to its name, *Bloodwind* has seen battle on many worlds. The gunship's hull is decorated with several honour markings, such as the campaign badge from the Blacksmoke Purge and the Order Sanguinatum. *Bloodwind's* crew are seasoned veterans, whose excellence as both pilots and marksmen is beyond any doubt. Even so, it was their great honour to bear Brother Corbulo into battle upon Aeros, and *Bloodwind's* crew were utterly determined to excel in the eyes of their distinguished passenger.



The Order Sanguinatum, a sacred icon marking the crew of this Stormraven as a shield of the Blooded



Aerosian Sky Beast kill badge; this honour was for bringing down the largest winged Tyranids



BROTHER GAIALLO

A support specialist within Tactical Squad Meteros, Brother Gaiallo is armed with a well-used flamer. Flamers have a reputation as indiscriminate weapons, as deadly in the hands of the Astra Militarum as in those of the Adeptus Asartes, but Gaiallo has proven his artistry with his chosen weapon time and again. With short, controlled bursts, Brother Gaiallo can douse a foe in burning promethium, using just enough to ensure its death. Where an untrained soldier might waste his weapon's tanks in pyrotechnic displays, Gaiallo makes every precious drop of fuel count.



STORMLAYER SKYSWARM

The Hive Mind had tailored its broods to the gaseous skies of Aeris, and almost every bio-beast that screeched and hissed among the mists was held aloft on leathery wings. These flocks of creatures were especially thick among the gas giant's stormlayers, where they clustered around the drifting remains of the Imperial mining platforms.

A SKYSWARM CLOUD LORDS

Huge winged Hive Tyrants directed the Stormlayer Skyswarm in battle; these flying monsters smashed men and machines from the air with terrifying ease. However, these beasts often kept their distance from the Space Marines, instead using their psychic weaponry and synaptic control over the swarm to attack, while keen-eyed gunners tried to catch glimpses of their wings and spines among the fog.

B SPORE DRAKES

During the fighting upon the platforms, large winged beasts seeded the fighting below with showers of spore mines. Often the creatures would pass overhead too quickly for the soldiers below to track them with fire, the beasts quickly lost among the clouds in a flash of wings and fangs. In their wake, a rain of lethal spores would fall among the Imperial lines before filling the air with dozens of wet explosions.

C STINGER SWARM-BEAST

The Stinger Swarm-beasts were among the greatest threat to the Blood Angels' aircraft, and the sight of even one of these Hive Crones would trigger a swift and brutal response. Even so, more than one craft was sent tumbling from the sky as a Hive Crone ripped open a Stormraven's hull with its wickedly barbed tail or loosed living missiles that would short out machine spirits with a surge of bio-electricity.



D **THE LIVING FOG**
Supporting the larger Tyranid creatures were thousands of Gargoyle broods. These smaller beasts formed living clouds that twisted and writhed as they flew across the sky. Often these beasts would be hidden in the azure mists of Aeros, and they became known as the Living Fog. Only when the Gargoyles were almost upon their prey would they reveal themselves, the clouds themselves suddenly coming alive in a flurry of beating wings.

E **ANNIHILATION BROODS**
Not every Tyranid on Aeros flew through the air, and after the first mining platforms had fallen, spores were hurled down from orbit filled with Annihilation Broods. These Gaunts and Carnifexes hunted down any survivors still cowering in the ruins and battered their way into any remaining fortifications. Alongside the massive spores, they would account for much of the carnage on Aeros.

F **SKY SENTINELS**
Throughout the stormlayers of Aeros drifted clusters of massive betentacled spores. These served multiple purposes: from conduits through which the Hive Mind amplified its directives, to nests for its weapon beasts, to massive minefields. Many were also festooned with bio-cannons, each one a mindless killer that would harass and attack the Blood Angels whenever they appeared out of the mists.

Guardsman Krass fired another volley of lasgun fire into the rolling sea of chitin coming down the street. For over forty hours Krass and his comrades had been holding the blood-soaked sandbag emplacement, as wave after wave of the invaders had borne down upon them. Only duty and training kept Krass fighting. Years of drill instructors screaming in his face, and hours of standing watch on rain-soaked nights, had moulded him into one of the most disciplined soldiers in the Astra Militarum. Even so, Krass could feel himself breaking. As his lasgun clicked empty he ejected the clip and reached into his belt for another. Empty. Without taking his eyes from the foe he quickly knelt and felt around in the corpses at his feet. Even if his training had not forced him never to take his eyes off his enemies, he wouldn't have wanted to look down into the dead faces of his comrades. Then his bloody fingers felt the distinctive sealed cap of a fresh clip. Snapping it into place he continued firing into the advancing aliens. He knew, though, that it was too little, too late. In moments the first aliens would be over the barricade, and this time he would have to fight them off alone.

Even as Krass prepared to die, the whine of engines cut through the crack of lasgun fire and the din of alien screams. Out of nowhere, a red armoured giant came crashing down between Krass and the lead brood, falling to one knee to absorb the impact

of his descent. With a smooth motion the warrior rose up and strode toward the charging aliens. The first one to reach him was torn in two by a vicious chainsword stroke. The head of the next exploded as it swallowed a point-blank bolt shell, then the one after that was kicked to the ground, its throat turned to mush under the warrior's massive red boot. In the space of seconds, half a dozen mangled alien bodies were piled at the armoured giant's feet, and yet he had only begun to fight.

Krass watched in awe, his numb finger still pumping the trigger of his empty lasgun, as the giant ripped apart the attackers. It was then that Krass realised that he was not alone. All along the line, red armoured forms pushed back the aliens. A hulking siege-beast that had been clawing its way up the steps of the cathedral was brought down in a flare of melta fire, while large warrior-organisms were torn apart by corkscrewing missiles, and smaller weapon-beasts caved under brutal close combat assaults. In the skies overhead, attack craft duelled with winged horrors, and purple-black blood fell like rain.

However, Krass' astonishment lasted only a few moments, and then the same training that had kept him fighting for almost two full days kicked in. Snatching up a fresh clip, Krass gritted his teeth and got back in the fight.



THE SLEEPER AWAKES



Several billion miles from Asphodex, beyond the fury of the wars raging on Lysios and Aeros, the world of Perdita was stirring in its sleep. The prison barges General Dhrost had sent to the far-flung planet had drawn the attention of not just a hungering tendril of Hive Fleet Leviathan, but also a far more ancient enemy. After scuttling their vessels, the Phodian prison wardens had made their escape back in-system, towards the Castellan Belt, leaving their charges to crash-land amid the frozen wastes of Perdita.

From the wreckage of these rusting barges, a flood of convicts crawled out into the snow and ice, cursing the Flaxian Dynasty and the wishing the alien invaders good luck feasting upon the bloated corpse of Governor Flax. Filling the snowfield around the wreckage of their former prisons, the manacled inmates fought amongst themselves and watched the wind-scarred skies for signs of their doom. None had any doubt that if the cold did not claim them, then the Great Devourer would. However, they could hardly anticipate that when their deaths came, it would not be from the stars or the icy wind, but from beneath their feet.

At first the lights in the blizzard went unnoticed. Then, out of the swirling snow, skeletal figures marched toward the prisoners. The closest convicts mistook these for rescuers and ran out to meet them. Only when beams of brilliant energy lanced out from the darkness did the terrible reality come crashing down upon the convicts. Some tried to run, others to hide or even fight back, but it was less a battle than a massacre. Against the legions of metallic warriors and their arcane war machines, the prisoners were helpless. Many thousands fled screaming into the endless tundra. Thousands more perished among the ruins of their vessels.

After the last human corpse had tumbled smoking into the snow, the aliens' towering overlord strode across the battlefield to inspect the remains. From the ground littered with dead, its glowing gaze drifted up toward the stars. Eyes far sharper than those of flesh and blood looked deep into space. They noted the distant specks of biological craft drifting through the void toward Perdita. Whatever this oncoming threat was, it would be resisted. The time for sleeping was done. Now, the legions would awake.



ALLIANCE ON ASPHODEX



War raged in the ruined cities of Asphodex, upon the sea-scoured plains of Lysios and in the clouds of Aeros. What had begun as a mission of mercy had become a series of desperate battles Blood Angels and Flesh Tearers set about denying the Great Devourer its prize. Into this maelstrom a new foe emerged, woken from its slumber by the fires of war.

THE TRAVELLER ARRIVES

Unknown to the people of Cryptus, another race had long ago laid claim to the binary system. Millions of years before the first human colony ships had crossed the Aegis Diamando and settled the radiation-scarred inner worlds, the system was part of a thriving interstellar alien empire. A triumph of the great Necrontyr civilisation, Cryptus was a solar energy array that channelled confluence radiation pulses to dozens of nearby star systems. The Necrontyr had used an arrangement of gravimetric anchors to draw the distant Cryptan stars together and farm the violent flare-zone it created.

Then the War in Heaven tore the Necrontyr empire apart, and biotransference into living metal bodies washed away forever what they had been. When the Necrons, as they were now known, retired to their tombs to sleep away the millennia, those on the worlds that would become the Cryptus System chose the furthest planet from the twin suns. Leaving only their orbiting solar-refractor networks behind, the Necrons sealed themselves away beneath the ground and waited for the galaxy to forget them.

The coming of Hive Fleet Leviathan triggered a premature awakening for the Necrons of Cryptus, as a sub-tendrill of the hive fleet twisted toward Perdita, a coreworld of the Mephrit Dynasty. Ancient alarms flickered through the dusty depths of the tomb planet, and the first Necrons pulled themselves shakily from their slumber. Most importantly though, as the tomb world awoke it sent a phase-pulse message out into the void. Its eldritch science was unhindered by the Shadow in the Warp, and the missive flashed through subspace until it was intercepted by the fleet of Anrakyr the Traveller.

The ancient Necron Overlord noted Perdita's waking alarms and considered the shadow of Hive Fleet Leviathan as it bore down upon the doomed system. Anrakyr had encountered the Tyranids before, and found them abhorrent on every level. They followed no code, possessed no greater purpose than to feed and replicate. Of all the

lesser races, these creatures truly were vermin that must be eradicated if Necron dominion were to be restored. Still, the Traveller knew these beasts to be dangerous. Now that the Tyranids' attention had been drawn to Perdita, the swarms would descend. The planet's tomb complex would awaken to war, yet it would be a battle against numbers they could not defeat. The Tyranids would doubtless destroy the Necron defenders, if only so that they might be left to devour the planet's resources in peace, and thus another Necron world would be lost before it could be drawn back into the fold. No, Anrakyr decided, he would not stand aside while this tragedy played out. Perdita, and the solar power grid over which it stood watch, would be saved.

Turning his fleet toward the glinting crimson orbs of Cryptus, Anrakyr engaged his inertialess drive, his vast Necron armada streaking off into the void. Unlike the ships of the Imperium, those of the Necrons did not travel through the Warp, and so the great psychic barrier cast out by the Hive Mind was no impediment to their fleet. Likewise, the Aegis Diamando, so deadly to life, registered only as a minor spatial anomaly to Anrakyr's Crypteks. With ice still flaking from their vessels, the Necrons descended upon Perdita. There they found that the first Necrons had already awoken, and had scattered a human landing force. Anrakyr himself went down onto the snow-covered planet to meet its masters and assess the situation.

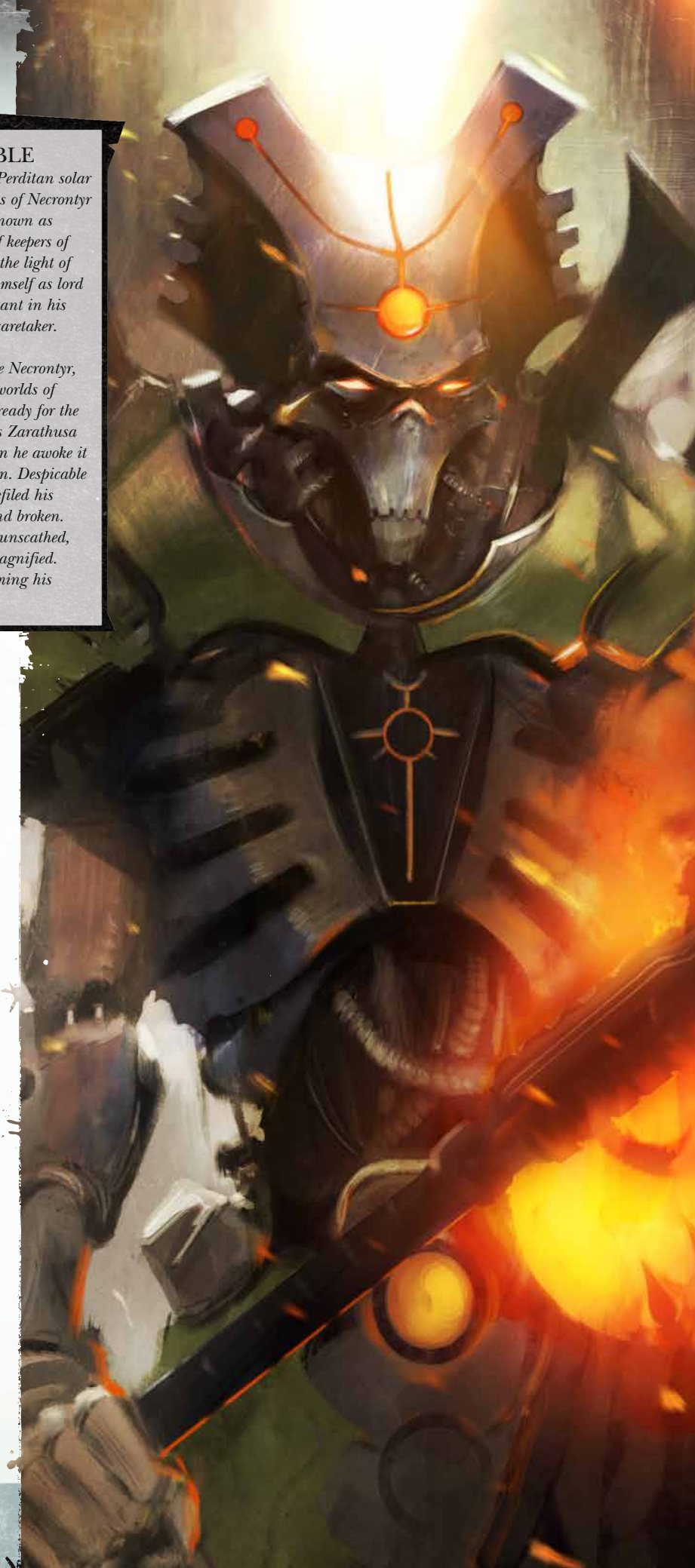
On a plain of ice, Anrakyr met Overlord Zarathusa of the Mephrit Dynasty, and the two deathless warlords exchanged long-winded greetings while their retinues watched on in silence. Zarathusa recognised mighty Anrakyr from his deeds of old, and knew what the coming of the Traveller meant for his world. For his part, Anrakyr searched the glowing eyes of Perdita's Overlord for any signs that madness might have crept into the other's mind during the long sleep.

After terms had been met, and promises made, Anrakyr gathered together his armies and began devising a plan by which he would save Perdita from destruction.

ZARATHUSA THE INEFFABLE

Once, the Mephrit dynasty had greatly prized the Perditan solar relay, a star-factory that provided energy for dozens of Necrontyr systems and worlds. The ruler of the system was known as Zarathusa the Firesworn, the last in a long line of keepers of the Starflame, the vast solar mirror that captured the light of the system's twin suns. Though Zarathusa saw himself as lord of the stars, and his role as one of the most important in his dynasty, his peers considered him something of a caretaker.

When the War in Heaven threatened to destroy the Necrontyr, Zarathusa and his citizens abandoned the inner worlds of their system, leaving only the solar mirror intact, ready for the time when they would return. For millions of years Zarathusa slumbered, until the coming of the Tyranids. When he awoke it was to a galaxy changed almost beyond recognition. Despicable primitives had overrun his precious system and defiled his solar mirror, while his own people were divided and broken. Zarathusa himself had not escaped the long sleep unscathed, and his own delusions of grandeur had become magnified. Taking the title 'the Ineffable', he set about reclaiming his system from savages and aliens alike.





AN ALLIANCE OF CONVENIENCE

Even as the Necrons made their plans on the fringes of the Cryptus System, bloody war raged on around Port Helos. With the Blood Angels holding the walls, each assault had been repulsed but it was a situation that could not last.

Commander Dante was considering General Dhrost's tattered map of the Port Helos environs when one of his Techmarines strode into the command bunker with a message. Through the wall of static enveloping Asphodex, a technomagnetic shadow had been detected among the shifting sea of bioforms. Something was arcing across the system toward Phodia at phenomenal speed. It was clear that this new entity could be nothing of the Imperium.

Even the Hive Mind seemed to pause at this arrival; the swarm that had been hurling itself across the reeking remains of the promethium moat suddenly withdrew into the ruined city, great spores closing the line behind them.

Dante monitored the approaching shadows via his hololith. Siphoning data from the orbiting Blood Angels vessels he was able to get a better look at what was approaching; crescent-shaped craft, black against the void as they blotted out the stars. Even this merest hint was enough for Dante, with his centuries of experience, and he recognised the craft the moment he saw them – these were Necrons.

However, even Dante could not predict what this meant for Cryptus. The Necron fleet sailed past Lysios, apparently ignoring the planet, before slowing as they slid into high orbit above Asphodex. The bio-ships that moved instinctively to engage them were torn asunder in a blaze of particle beams or struck by twisting lightning bolts. Then slab-sided craft separated from the fleet to descend through the spore-choked cloud upon trails of fire.

Dante stood atop the walls of Port Helos as the first of these landers drifted down into the field of dead Tyranids that covered the open ground between port and city. A pyramid of living black steel, the Monolith hung yards above the ground as others like it rained down across Phodia. As Dante watched, his grip tightening upon the *Axe Mortalis*, light flared from the nearest craft, a glowing gateway opening up on its side. Out of the rippling surface of the gate strode the towering metal form of Anrakyr, an arcing glaive held at his side. In response a hundred battle-brothers levelled their bolters, but Dante ordered them to hold their fire with an upraised fist.

The Chapter Master had seen such behaviour from these ancient aliens once before, upon another world menaced by the Tyranids. He knew that, if the Necrons had planned to attack, they would have done so by now. No, thought Dante, intrigued. This was something else.

When Anrakyr and his retinue stood only a dozen yards from the wall, he held out an open hand toward Dante and, in accented High Gothic asked for an audience with the lord of the humans. Inclining his head ever so slightly, Dante ordered his brothers to open the gates. Without so much as sparing a glance for the lines of guns still levelled in his direction, Anrakyr entered Port Helos.

General Dhrost ran a calloused hand over his chin, noting with vague distaste the stubble that scratched at his skin. Every part of him ached. The years, long held off by rejuvenat treatments, were now writ large upon his grey, deeply lined face. Worse by far than his physical appearance, however, was the malaise within his soul. There was a ragged wound upon his mind, the result of his encounter with the quadraped psyker-beasts, and its frayed edges were slowly unravelling. Dhrost was a ghost of the man he had once been, a fact of which he was all too painfully aware.

Standing in the middle of the port's central landing pad, Dhrost struggled with these thoughts, pulling his mind reluctantly from its reverie and back into the strange events of the present.

Commander Dante and his golden guard towered over the Cadian delegation, their burnished power armour shining dully in the half-light of the Phodian day. Opposite these heroes of the Imperium stood the Necrons. The very sight of these terrible aliens sent a chill through Dhrost's bones. Surely it was no accident they chose the form of living metal skeletons, each one a mechanical reflection of Mankind's deep-rooted fear of death.

For minutes now the lord of the Blood Angels and the Necron king has been exchanging greetings, in carefully measured High Gothic. Behind the formalities Dhrost could feel the tension in the air. These two beings were gods of war made manifest who would normally be bent on sealing each other's doom. Yet today, expediency took precedence over hate. Dhrost listened to Dante's questioning of their unexpected guests, the Chapter Master navigating to the heart of the matter with far more tact than Dhrost could have summoned. Why would the Necrons wish to aid the Imperium?

Anraky'r's response was delivered with haughty self-assurance. The Tyranids were intergalactic vermin, an infestation that no true Overlord could ignore. The Necrons were offering Commander Dante massive reinforcements, warriors and war engines sufficient to turn the tide of this conflict. At this, Dante nodded slowly. It was clear that the Necrons had motives of their own, yet the situation was desperate. He would accept an alliance with the Necrons. For now, at least.

And then the meeting was over. As quickly as they had come, the Necrons marched out through the gates and back to their flickering emerald gateways. Once the aliens were gone Dante turned to Dhrost, the general seeing his own tired face reflected in the Space Marine's golden mask.

'My Lord, I bow to your wisdom, but are you sure... can these things even be trusted?'

'I have led my Chapter for centuries, General Dhrost, and I know an unwinnable war when I see one. That was what we faced. Now we do not. Do I trust the Necrons? No, not in the slightest, but it seems that for now we have common cause. They will be watched carefully, but for now we must give them our cooperation. Let us defeat the swarms of the Leviathan first, and then concern ourselves with what comes after.'





THE MEPHRIT DYNASTY

Whole regions of the galaxy were once controlled by the sprawling domains of the Necrons, their dynasties controlling thousands of worlds and hundreds of star systems. The Mephrut Dynasty was known for its greed, even among that resource-hungry empire, and many of its Overlords were custodians of celestial mines and solar harvesting grounds. With this wealth of energy at their disposal, the Mephrut became masters of manipulating the power of the stars. During the War in Heaven, the dynasty's Crypteks were eminent siege masters and esoteric engineers, turning the nuclear power of suns against their peoples in cataclysmic conflagrations of destruction.

After the fall of the C'tan, the dynasty entered the Great Sleep like all of their kind – leaving many of their murderous stellar weaponry to drift among the stars. When they awoke millennia later, it was to a changed galaxy. The star systems the Mephrut had once ruled were now ruined, or infested with lesser races. Of their great works, some had been destroyed – tumbling into the hearts of suns or drifting out into the endless void between galaxies – but others remained intact, patiently awaiting their masters' return. Among the newly woken worlds of the Atun Dynasty were counted many creations of the Mephrut. The technocratic Ogdobekh Dynasty also safeguarded its share of solar war machines across the eons – these ancient gifts a legacy of the War in Heaven.

However, the Mephrut had kept their most diabolical creations for themselves, and as their Overlords returned to consciousness, they sought out these lost celestial artifacts. Sadly, many of the Mephrut tombs arose plagued with madness, or filled with despair at the changes time had wrought upon the galaxy. Insane Overlords obliterated themselves and their tomb worlds in flares of solar fire, or were crushed to nothingness as they triggered system-spanning singularities. Unaware that these were in fact the ancient weapons of the Mephrut at work, the Imperium and other young races saw only celestial phenomena at work.

Despite these losses, the Mephrut Dynasty had fared relatively well during its long slumber, having shielded itself with unimaginable acts of stellar vandalism. On the tomb world of Djagos the Jade Overlord had destroyed every star and planet for a dozen light years in all directions – scouring the void clean and leaving nothing that could threaten his hibernation. In the scarred rifts of the Aetheric Divide the Mephrut created a gravity bubble so strong, ships transitioning from the Warp in its shadow were hurled billions of miles across space.

Worse still were the celestial booby-traps left for those that would trespass upon the domains of the Mephrut. Null fields resonated around some tomb worlds, plucking vessels from the sky like dying starflies, while oxitechnomantic engines sucked the very air from the lungs of those foolish enough to enter the Mephrut's war-crypts. The Great Sleep lasted for millions of years, however, and in that time many tomb worlds fell into ruin.

In the Cryptus System, Zarathusa the Ineffable had destroyed the Mephrut's vast solar harvesting network, leaving only its core – a single great lens orbiting close to the young binary stars. Before he entered his crypt, he set traps for the unwary, and awaited the time when he might return and reclaim the glory of his people. Machines built to last for thousands of years were forced to endure millions, and one by one Zarathusa's defences decayed. By the time the Overlord awoke, the twin stars of Cryptus had grown old and swollen, their rotten atomic cores pumping out endless streams of hard radiation. More worryingly, the worlds Zarathusa had so carefully scoured clean of life, and laced with traps, were now overrun with humans. When he gazed through the great oculus of Perdita, it was upon the filthy, crowded cities of the Imperium that his mechanical eye fell. To add insult to injury, Mankind had subverted Zarathusa's prized solar mirror. Like simple-minded savages they crawled across its surface and poked at its superlative inner workings, unaware of its true and glorious purpose.

Filled with a cold rage and fathomless disdain for humanity, Zarathusa was determined to recover the mirror, and to reclaim the stars for his Dynasty.

THE MAGNOVITRIUM

When Imperial forces first settled the Cryptus System they discovered a vast alien structure orbiting its innermost planet. The object was miles across and for years defied the understanding of the Adeptus Mechanicus or Ordo Xenos. Only when the twin stars underwent a furious period of solar storms was the Magnovitrium's true purpose divined. It was observed that the object trapped a portion of the power radiating from the suns and channelled it into the void. It was not long before the Imperium had harnessed this solar energy and devised a means of conveying it to each of the Cryptus System's planets.

When the Tyranid tendrils coiled around the system, many centuries later, the Magnovitrium had become the first link in a network of orbital relays that caught and reflected the captured solar bounty of the binary stars. The Magnovitrium hung above irradiated Tartoros, where an equally ancient alien device governed its orbit and angle to the suns. On distant Asphodex, Mechanicus cogitator spires directed the network of solar relays across the system. Unknown to the Imperium, the Magnovitrium was far more ancient than even they suspected, a relic of the fallen Necrontyr Empire, and capable of feats undreamt of by Mankind.





EXTERMINATUS

Anrakyr had come before Dante with a simple proposal, and a plan. Anrakyr knew, as did Dante, that even combined the Blood Angels and Necron fleets could not destroy the Tyranids; the void was thick with millions of bio-ships. Nor could a victory upon the ground be secured, for every planet swarmed with countless beasts. A glance across the shattered skyline of Phodia was enough for the Overlord to make his point; its spires and hab-blocks were already infected with billions of feeding xenos organisms.

Then Anrakyr revealed his solution, a terrible weapon capable of shattering the power of the hive fleet. Known to the Imperium as the Magnovitrium, and to the Necrons as the Starflame, it was the solar mirror that orbited Tartoros and caught the immense power of the system's twin stars. For centuries, the people of the Cryptus had used the Magnovitrium to relay energy to their worlds, unaware of its ancient origins. Anrakyr told Dante the mirror could be used not just to harvest energy but also to focus it. In short, it could be weaponised to deadly effect.

The Necrons would use the Magnovitrium to ignite the core of the gas giant Aeros, creating an explosion that would scour the stars of Tyranid ships. Meanwhile, the defenders' fleets would shelter behind the system's surviving worlds. Dante was not so foolish as to believe that the destruction of Aeros would completely exterminate the Tyranid infestation. Yet it would cause massive damage to the Cryptoid Tendril, enough that Baal would be able to survive its onset. Meanwhile, for his part, Anrakyr cared only that the fleet descending upon Perdita would be scoured from the skies, and the coreworld saved.

This plan would be no easy task to enact, and even with Dante's armies and Anrakyr's legions combined it would be a bitter and close-fought thing. The movement of the planets and the great distance between the Magnovitrium and its target meant that they would have to use the solar-mirror's own relay system to send the beam to Aeros. This would mean taking control of the Magnovitrium on Tartoros, the cogitator spires on Asphodex that regulated its beam, and also the Solariam on Lysios. Finally, to send the flare into the heart of Aeros they would need to control the vapour-conveyor that was mining the planet's core, opening its vents to the void.

Anrakyr would send one of his Crypteks with an honour guard of warriors to take control of the Magnovitrium on Tartoros, using the ancient control plinths still buried in its burning plains. On Asphodex, where the wealth of the Tyranids thronged, Anrakyr and Dante would fight their way to the cogitator spires within the Phodian Fabricae District so that they could regulate the output of the great mirror. Meanwhile the Flesh Tearers would secure the relay on Lysios, while on Aeros the Blood Angels and Zarathusa's legions would secure the vapour-conveyor.

As Anrakyr and Zarathusa gathered their forces, Dante gave his orders to his commanders, relayed to Seth and Captain Aphael via the *Blade of Vengeance*. Swiftly, the war leaders were appraised of their new mission. He also sent one final astropathic message, though he knew it might well be years before it was heard. It invoked his right as a Chapter Master of the Adeptus Astartes to order the destruction of whole worlds. It was an order of Exterminatus.



BLOOD ANGELS STORM COMPANY

After gaining the unexpected aid of Anrakyr's armies, Dante assembled a company to break through the Tyranid defences and reach the cogitator spires. It was to be a brutal and bloody battle, but one in which the Blood Angels would excel.

A DANTE'S SPEARTIP
Once more Commander Dante was at the forefront of the fighting, with his golden bodyguard at his side. During the battle for the cogitator spires, the Blood Angels Chapter Master would lead repeated charges into the fray, his example inspiring his men and even earning him the respect of Anrakyr the Traveller.

B ANCIENT ZORAEI
To break through the dense alien lines spawned by the Tyranids, Dante deployed the Furioso Dreadnought known as Ancient Zorael. In the tight environs of the Fabricae District, Zorael's heavy armour and frag cannon punched a hole through the alien defences.

C TERMINATOR SQUAD OTTAVOS
Led by brother-sergeant Ottavos, this Terminator Squad was summoned by Dante to break through the Tyranid living fortress, and the sergeant and his veterans distinguished themselves as line-breakers. Their crackling power fists would prove especially useful in clearing a path to the cogitator spires.

D ASSAULT SQUAD FORIAN
With the streets below clogged with Tyranid weapon-beasts and living barriers, Assault Squad Forian were key to the success of Dante's attack. Bounding across the ruined rooftops of Phodia, they would strike at the swarm's flanks as the main assault thrust into its heart.



E **TACTICAL SQUAD VORLOIS**
For the assault on the Fabricae District, the 2nd Company's Space Marines equipped themselves for close quarters actions. Squad Vorlois used flamers, meltaguns and extra frag grenades extensively. Theirs would be the bloody work of clearing out the buildings surrounding the cogitator spires, often room by room.

F **HAMMER OF ANGELS**
Such was the ravaged state of Phodia's streets that it was almost impossible to deploy any kind of armoured formations effectively. In those places where tanks could make a path, Land Raiders like the *Hammer of Angels* bulled their way forward. The tank's heavy armour would prove to be proof against almost all of the xenos attacks, while few beasts could survive long against its lascannons.

G **DEVASTATOR SQUAD KAROS**
As the Blood Angels advanced, their Devastator Squads were close behind providing heavy fire support. Squad Karos, armed with heavy bolters and plasma cannons, covered the left flank of the 2nd Company's advance. Time and again the Devastators held rubble-choked streets alone, their weapons fired relentlessly into their hated foes.

H **ANVIL OF BAAL**
Among the reserve troops used by Dante were Land Raider Crusaders filled with Assault Terminators. The *Anvil of Baal* kept pace with the Predators as they forged a path toward the cogitator spires. Supported by the lighter tanks' firepower, the Anvil would then crash on ahead, guns rapidly clearing a path for the Terminators to charge out and tear into the foe.

THE ANGELS RESURGENT

Since making planetfall on Asphodex, the Blood Angels had been on the defensive. Such a state of affairs was highly frustrating for the Sons of Sanguinius – however, the sheer numbers of the enemy had forced back every advance. With the Necrons' aid, the Blood Angels could finally take the offensive, venting their fury upon the foe.

ANCIENT ZORAEI

Zorael was once a Vanguard Veteran within the Blood Angels 1st Company. For over four centuries, this daring and heroic warrior carved a path across the stars in the name of Sanguinius and the Chapter. It was said that no foe could best him, but eventually he was run through by Warmaster Abaddon himself on the frozen world of Kymanir. Sheer determination saw Zorael cling to life long enough to be interred into a Dreadnought, from within which he fights on to this day.



Asphodexian campaign badge; the upraised wings indicate that the bearer was part of Commander Dante's personal command

BROTHER GLORIAN

The ranks of Terminator Squad Ottavos are entirely comprised of heroes. Battle-brother Glorian is no exception to this trend, having fought amongst the Archangels for over two centuries. In that time he has participated in the cleansing of Space Hulks, the slaying of traitor governors and rebel warlords, and the defeat of xenos despots beyond count. Most famously, it was Glorian who slew the Haemonculus torturer Gyloch Xuld, hurling the fiend's broken carcass into the caldera of a bubbling volcano to ensure he could never be resurrected.



SANGUINE STORM

Several Baal Predators were deployed by the Blood Angels during the fighting on Phodia, for they were ideal assault vehicles for the terrain to hand. In amongst the tangled urban warscape, these tanks' prodigious firepower was a boon to the Imperial forces. *Sanguine Storm* was the most prolific of these vehicles, its flamestorm cannons scouring hissing swarms of lesser weapon-beasts from cover with every blast. The tank was at the forefront of Dante's offensive toward the Phodian cogitator spires, its fiery wrath turned upon the Tyranids that barred the Blood Angels' path.

BROTHER MADRIGANOS

Tactical Squad Vorlois are renowned for going into battle armed to the teeth, even by the standards of the Adeptus Astartes. Brother Madriganos has learned the teachings of his Sergeant well, and never takes to the field without additional krak grenades and his long-serving meltagun. Madriganos' armour is proudly adorned with scrolls and oath-papers which detail the many monsters and heretical war engines that he has laid low. These include the Gorkanaut Krushfoot, the traitor Land Raider *Beast of Antraxides*, and a full team of three heavily armed Tau battlesuits, slain during the battle for Foldane's Landing.



Storm Company Assault honour, worn by battle-brothers charged with breaching the living fortress and purging the Fabricae District





ANRAKYR'S IMMORTAL HOST

Anrakyr joined with the Blood Angels to deal a telling blow to the Hive Mind upon Asphodex. Alongside legions of Necron Warriors and vast Monolith formations the Traveller would, during the course of the battle, unleash his most powerful weapon: a C'tan Shard of Nyadra'zatha, the Burning One.

A ANRAKYR THE TRAVELLER
More than merely a masterful tactician and leader, Anrakyr is a formidable warrior who favours leading from the front. During the war on Asphodex he would lead the borrowed forces of the Mephrit Dynasty into one battle after another. He was always in the thick of the fighting, his crackling warscythe hewing apart the bodies of his foes.

B PERDITAN IMMORTALS
When Anrakyr came to the aid of the Mephrit Dynasty's crownworld it was at a price. This was to be paid by the planet's Overlord, Zarathusa, in the form of a portion of his newly awakened warriors. Among these were the Perditan Immortals, veteran troops that Zarathusa only relinquished grudgingly.

C THE LEGIONS OF PERDITA
Alongside the ranks of Immortals that Zarathusa was forced to cede to Anrakyr came legions of Necron Warriors. These represented the lion's share of those that had awakened, and in the fighting on Asphodex, Anrakyr would use these Legions mercilessly, throwing them into one battle after another in his bid to secure victory.

D SHADOW OF CYROS
Of Zarathusa's war engines, the Ghost Ark *Shadow of Cyrus* was among the first to be restored to function. Zarathusa had only sent the machine to Asphodex in the hope that it might protect the warriors Anrakyr had demanded from him. As it transpired, the Ark's abilities would indeed lend his soldiers a degree of much-needed longevity in the battle to come.



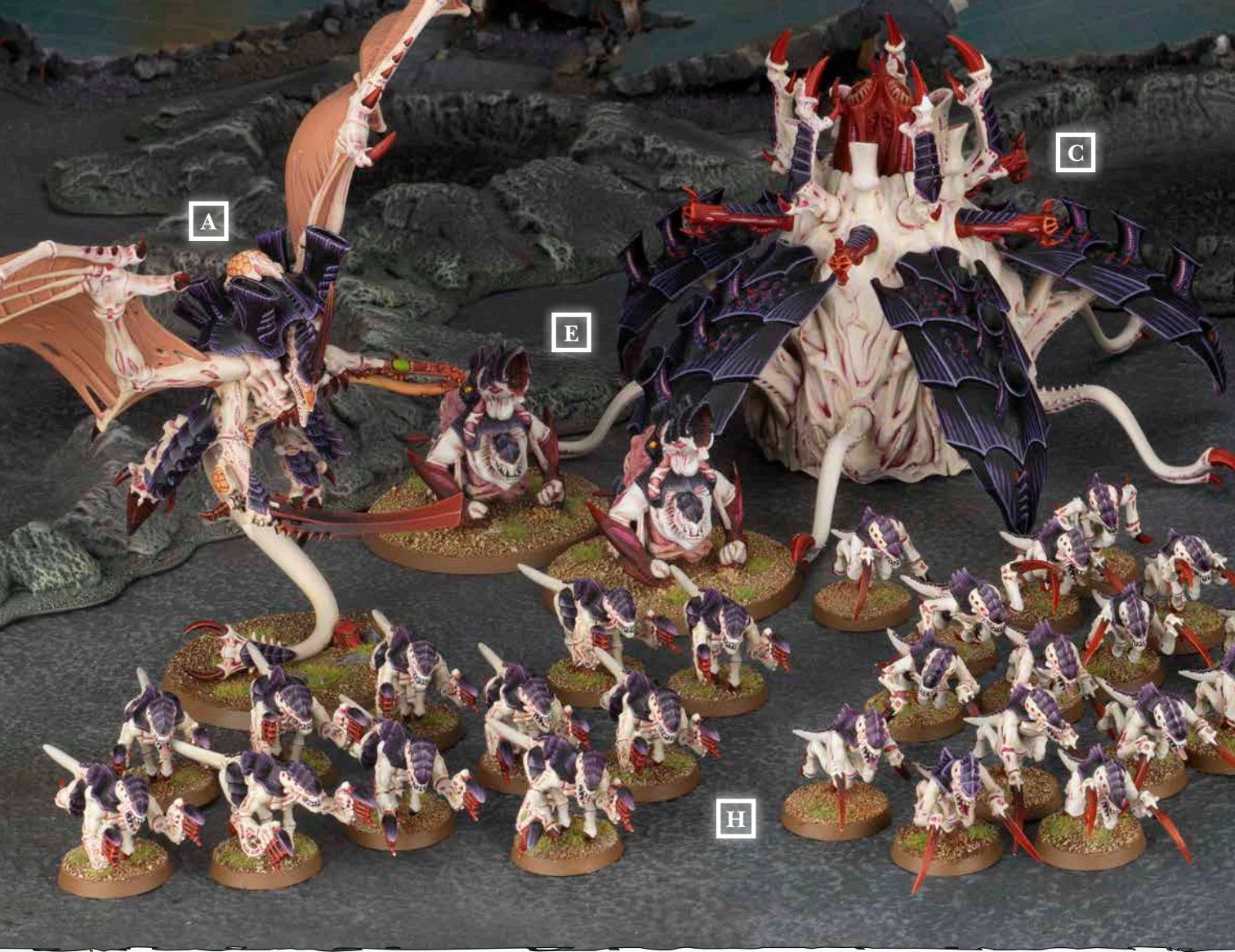
E **SILENT BLADE OF THE MEPHRIT**
 Though Anrakyr did not favour their use, Zarathusa sent some of his Deathmarks to Asphodex to support his forces. These silent assassins had orders both to target the Tyranid leadership and also keep an eye on Zarathusa's new allies. Should things go awry, these deadly marksmen would be ready to strike at the Blood Angels.

F **NYADRA'ZATHA, THE BURNING ONE**
 C'tan Shards are amongst the most potent and dangerous weapons the Necrons possess. One fragment of a living god, held trapped within an ancient technoprison, a C'tan Shard can literally bend reality to its will. Anrakyr was careful only to unleash Nyadra'zatha when the creature's power was absolutely needed to secure victory.

G **THE SKY REAPER**
 The war for the skies over Phodia was a furious contest between monster and machine. From the depths of the Mephrit war-crypts Anrakyr sent forth squadrons of Doom Scythes to carve a path through the Tyranids, the aircraft blasting apart their flying beasts and opening the way for the Necron legions that would follow.

The Sky Reaper was in the vanguard of this assault, tumbling through hissing swarms of Gargoyles and agilely outmanoeuvring Harpies and Hive Crones. During the final battles on Phodia, when the allies punched a ragged hole into the defences around the living fortress, it would be the Sky Reaper, and aircraft like it, that led the way.





THE PHODIAN CAPILLARY NEST

In the ruins of Phodia's Fabricae District the Hive Mind created a city-sized feeding lake. Around its spore-choked shores clustered acid-mawed bio-creatures and guard-beasts, their massive living cannons protecting tangles of capillary towers that reached up to the bellies of orbiting bio-ships, hidden by the swirling storm clouds.

A **LORDS OF THE LIVING FORTRESS**
Over the boiling matter of the digestion lake and the surrounding ruins swooped broods of winged Hive Tyrants. These horrific monsters would soar down to repel breakthroughs and drive the swarm at weak points in the enemy line. They were unpredictable foes, often ripping Space Marines or Necrons from their feet in a blur of wings before banking away into the clouds, vanishing only to strike again from an unexpected angle.

B **HIVE GUARDIANS**
All along the edges and crossing points of the Fabricae District, Hive Guard watched over spore chimneys, digestion pools and flesh canals. These creatures fiercely protected their territory, and the blasts from their massive living weaponry were easily capable of ripping apart a Space Marine or Necron, and even armoured vehicles.

C **COILS OF THE LEVIATHAN**
The living defences of the Hive Mind were all across the Fabricae District. Sporocysts clad in bio-armour and bristling with drooling cannon barrels burrowed into the ground, while coils of thorny flesh-vines that thrashed and constricted choked the streets. Spore mines also drifted among these fortifications, sometimes so thick they filled whole avenues or buildings, creating living minefields.

D **THUNDER-FIEND**
To protect the capillary towers, the Hive Mind kept huge cannon-beasts stalking around the base of the digestion lake. These were Tyrannofexes, and bore weapons that could smash a Stormraven from the sky or pulverise a battle tank. The largest of these was known as Thunderfiend; armed with a massive rupture cannon, it would fire on anything that tried to cross the edges of the district.



E **THE FABRICAЕ ARTILLERY SWARM**
Supporting the larger weapon-beasts and rows of living defences were numerous broods of Biovores. Nesting in the roofs of the manufactorum complex, they rained down a constant barrage of spore mines as the Blood Angels and Necrons advanced.

F **BEAST OF GATE 213**
The Exocrine known as the Beast of Gate 213 was to become a thorn in the side of the allied armies. Its bio-plasmic cannon made short work of those heavily armoured attackers it struck. As it was shielded by the half-open gateway to manufactorum 213, and protected by its thick hide, the Space Marines lost several combat squads in head-on assaults across the open factory ramp-way before Anrakyr's bodyguard brought it to battle.

G **BILE-BEASTS**
In the close confines of the Fabricae District, flame weapons proved especially effective, a fact that was not lost upon the Hive Mind. During the fighting, Pyrovores would stalk among the ruins vomiting streams of flaming fluid upon their attackers. Known as Bile-beasts, they lurked behind barricades and gateways, ready to drench the first warriors that tried to push their way forward.

H **THE FABRICAЕ INFESTATION SWARM**
The ruined manufactorums and broken buildings of the Fabricae District were infested with gaunts. These beasts had been drawn out of the city in the early stages of the Blood Angels attacks, swarms of the creatures streaming into the area around the cogitator spires as they heeded the Hive Mind's call to protect its capillary towers.

MONSTERS OF PHODIA

In a matter of days the Tyranids had transformed the Phodian Fabricae District into a nightmare of living ordnance, digestion lakes and soaring capillary towers. This ruined section of the city crawled with countless creatures of all sizes, each one tasked with a specific job by the Hive Mind, and all swift to tear apart any that strayed into their alien domain.

WINGED HIVE TYRANT

With a wingspan measured in yards, the flying Hive Tyrant that patrolled the skies above the Fabricae District was among the most powerful creatures spawned by the Hive Mind to protect its Phodian bio-plunder. It was a true horror to behold, with chipped chitin and ichor-dripping weapons, as well as a gaze that seemed to bore into its prey. However, perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the Winged Hive Tyrant was its uncanny intelligence, which it displayed during its coordination of the defence against the Blood Angels and again in single combat against their leader, Commander Dante.





EXOCRINE

Both Space Marines and Necrons learned to be wary of the lumbering Exocrines of the Fabricae District. Neither ceramite power armour nor living metal were proof against their bio-plasmic cannons. The most dangerous of these hulking monsters would become known as the Beast of Gate 213 for its stubborn defence of the main concourse into the Fabricae District. By the time the creature was finally destroyed – brought low by concentrated fire from Blood Angels Devastators – its hide would be cratered by countless bolt shells and seared by melta blasts.



PYROVORE

The Bile-beasts of the Fabricae District were broods of Pyrovores, loosed by the Hive Mind to hunt through the ruins for prey. Their dorsal bio-cannons dripped with flammable acids that hissed and burned where they struck the ground, while their fanged maws were equally deadly, drooling caustic fluids as they snarled at their foes. However, perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the Pyrovore was their volatile innards, something the Blood Angels learned to their cost when slaying the beasts in close quarters combat.



SPOROCYSTS

The streets and ruins surrounding the Fabricae District were overrun with Tyranid organisms, among them hundreds of ground-hugging Sporocysts. Bulbous growths of chitin and flesh, they hid among the rubble and detritus of war until their enemies strayed close, before unleashing a storm of punishing bio-weaponry. Clad in thick slabs of chitin and well protected by layers of pulsing pale skin, small arms fire had little effect upon them. The Blood Angels were forced to resort to melta bombs, krak grenades and heavy firepower to kill them.

THE LIVING FORTRESS

Phodia was a ruin, seething with vile alien growths and ravenous beasts. Yet the cogitator spires still rose from amid the quagmire, each a towering edifice of brass and plasteel that spouted vast nests of cables, antennae and relay dishes. It was these looming techno-shrines that the allies must now capture, if they were to implement Anrakyr's audacious plan.

The hive fleet had moved with frightening speed in its consumption of Asphodex. Even as the last pockets of Imperial resistance were fighting for survival, feeder organisms were being seeded throughout the ruins. By the time the Blood Angels descended from the heavens, Phodia was a city transformed. The skyline that had once been dominated by proud cathedral spires, icons of the Imperium and towering arcologies was now a ragged line of ruins jutting into the sky like the broken teeth of a corpse. Among these crumbling structures, obscene tentacles now reached into the clouds. Each of these capillary towers was surrounded by shoals of flying bio-horrors, one end fixed to a bio-ship hanging in low orbit, the other drinking deep from one of the Tyranids' vast digestion pools. However, it was only when one looked beneath the rubble and ruin of the city streets that the true horror of the Hive Mind's consumption was made clear. Sewers and canals, once Phodia's arteries, were now clogged with the rotting remains of the city's defenders. Miles of flesh-filled rivers fed into the central digestion pools and up into the hive fleet above.

As it transpired, the site of the cogitator spires that the allies sought now rose from one of these vast digestion pools as though from a moat of bile. Located in the centre of the Fabricae District, it was a part of the city firmly in the grip of the Tyranids. Previously, the site had been too well defended for the Space Marines to risk attacking. Now, with the strength of the Necrons supplementing their own, matters had changed. The Blood Angels targeted their attack against the massive Fabricators' Gate, while the Necrons moved through the undercity to burn out the beast from within. Yet the Hive Mind was well prepared for their coming, swarms of creatures infesting the district to protect both the bounty of biomass and the feeding ships.

Dante began his assault on two fronts. Led by Ancient Zoraël, a spearhead of Furioso Dreadnoughts, Baal Predators and the Archangels Terminators – called in from reserve for this most important of missions – attempted to scour a path to the Fabricators' Gate. Meanwhile, the Commander and his skyborne battle-brothers soared over the rooftops to outflank the Tyranid swarm that surrounded

the towers. On the ground, the streets became brutal killing grounds as the heavily armoured Space Marines and Dreadnoughts waded slowly forward through their foes. Sporocysts and heavy weapon-beasts opened fire from within the ruins, while smaller creatures darted out from blind alleys and sewer entrances to snap and claw.

In the air, clouds of hissing Gargoyles spat venom and clawed at the Space Marines, assailing Dante and his host in seemingly endless numbers. From beyond the Fabricators' Gate the Space Marines drew fire from unseen enemies. Massive creatures with heavy bio-cannons fired from the edges of the digestion lake, their living shells bursting among the Blood Angels Assault Squads. Even so, Dante pressed on towards the gate, leaping from one rooftop to another, his battle-brothers close at his side.


Meanwhile, below the ground, Anrakyr's legions marched through the darkness of the undercity, lit only by the umber glow of their own weapons. Here too the Hive Mind's defences were well entrenched, and soon the Necrons were fighting back swarms of gaunts and Rippers that surged out of the darkness. Wave after wave of creatures flung themselves at the Necrons, fangs and claws tearing through metal bodies amid showers of sparks. Relentlessly Anrakyr pushed his legions on, the darkness strobing with particle beams and arcs of eldritch lightning. Genestealers scrambled along the walls and ceilings, their talons tearing off Necron heads and ripping open android bodies. Yet Anrakyr strode contemptuously through these foes, his warscythe a blur of movement that left only ribbons of purple gore in its wake. With the Traveller at their head, the Necrons continued their dogged advance.

Slowly the Necrons fought their way up through the lower levels of the Fabricae District, purging one nest after another. However, despite the trail of torn and ruined creatures Anrakyr left behind, thousands more surged forward to take their place. When the Necrons finally blasted their way out into the heart of the district they emerged not into a vulnerable spot behind the Tyranid lines, but surrounded by a living sea of chitin and fangs.









Anrakyr urged the legions he had tithed from Perdita up out of the broken sewer-locks. It was like fighting upriver through a chitinous flood-tide. Soon the ramps were clogged with the twitching forms of fallen Necrons and slick with xenos blood. With irritation Anrakyr noticed that fresh broods of Genestealers were swarming up out of the sewer, cutting off his retreat. In moments, the Overlord's legions had become a metallic island surrounded by an ocean of purple carapace and red claws.

Up above, Dante's forces stormed the Fabricators' Gate. Red armoured Terminators strode past the acid-eaten remains of Imperial battle tanks, trading fire with weapon-beasts, while the surviving Dreadnoughts tore apart massive spores with their hydraulic fists. Dante himself landed atop the gate, snapping off a shot from his pistol that turned a Gargoyle into pink mist even as he hacked the head from another with a sweep of his axe. Then a massive shadow passed overhead, buffeting the Commander with the beating of giant wings. Turning his golden mask toward the sky, Dante found a Hive Tyrant as it banked around. In the instant he saw the beast it locked eyes upon him, and he felt its psychic presence clawing at his mind. Dante hurled himself into the air, thundering up towards the beast on a plume of fire while his brothers peeled off to join the fighting below. This was their lord's fight –they would not intervene.

The two leaders duelled over the burning gateway, Chapter Master against hive lord. Dante's axe rang out again and again as it traded blows with the Tyrant's bonesword. The Blood Angel ducked and dived to avoid the creature's ripping claws and grasping talons, feet slamming against stonework before pushing him skyward once more. Each time Dante tried to bring up his inferno pistol for a clean shot, the beast would wheel away into the clouds, or drive him back down with a powerful snap of its wings. Despite its size the beast was agile and swift, and it took all of Dante's considerable skill to stay beyond its vicious embrace.

Yet Commander Dante was an expert combatant, and knew that there were many ways to best a foe. Hurling himself from the gate, the Blood Angel plunged down towards the ground, and the beast tucked in its wings and dived down after him. Like a golden meteor, Dante fell towards the Fabricae District, glimpsing tiny crimson shapes fighting through a maze of chitin and rubble far below. As he fell, Dante twisted around on his back and levelled his pistol at the Tyrant. The creature was now descending at breakneck speed to keep up with its prey, its wings wrapped around its body and fanged head thrust forward. Second by second, the beast was slowly closing the gap between them.

Just before the Chapter Master plunged into the ruins he fired. The Tyrant tried to jink out of the way, its wings bursting out to arrest its descent, but it was too late. Dante didn't see if the shot struck home, triggering his jump pack at the last moment to send himself hurtling horizontally through the ruins. Somewhere behind him there was a sickening crash as the creature smashed into the ground, then Dante was struggling to control his flight. Though he had slowed his descent he was still too close to the ground and dangerously out of control. After tumbling through the broken manufactory the Chapter Master was thrown out over the digestion lake, splashing down into its sea of half digested corpses and liquid meat. He pulled himself to shore, his golden armour slathered in a viscous gruel of living tissue, and took in his surroundings. From beyond the ruins the sounds of war raged on, and vox reports were coming in that the Fabricators' Gate had been breached. Then a sound from out beyond the lake drew Dante's attention. Something was moving in the ruins. Something big.

Brother-sergeant Ottavos strode out onto the rubble-choked street, letting off controlled bursts of storm bolter fire. He could barely see a hundred yards through the smoke filled air, the dull crimson shapes of his battle-brothers mingling with the carapace-edged shadows of the enemy. Ottavos had faced Tyranids many times before, on worlds across the Segmentum Ultima – barren planets where they had fought the xenos in the silence of space for control of precious habitat domes, or death worlds, teeming with life, where the beasts stalked unseen among the trees. By far the brother-sergeant's most frequent encounters with the Hive Mind had been in the cramped confines of hulks and void-ships. With the ironclad bulk of his Terminator armour filling ancient corridors, he had led his brothers deep into the heart of such vessels, expecting attack at every turn, or from every shadow.

But these experiences were nothing like the war on Asphodex. In less than a day, Ottavos had laid eyes upon creatures he had never seen before and witnessed the Hive Mind changing its tactics time and again. As he advanced up the street, his Terminator Squad at his side, Ottavos saw another of the new creatures loom up out of the haze. A living dome of flesh and chitin, the thing bulged up from the ground like some obscene armoured buboe. Tendrils lashed out at anything that strayed too close while the bio-cannons crowning its top spat death in every direction.

The brother-sergeant signalled the advance and the Terminators strode forward, their weapons thundering into the ruins. From the broken buildings, broods of weapon-beasts spilled out to block their path, tearing at their armour or showering them in living rounds. The Terminators shrugged off all but the most vicious of these attacks, and kept pressing forward.

Then a larger beast hauled itself out of the ruins close to Ottavos. The sergeant looked up just in time to see it spew a torrent of acidic bile across his brothers from its dorsal-mounted bio-cannon. Where the noxious fluid touched armour it sizzled and burned, but only a single Terminator fell as his helmet seals were violated and he cooked from within.

Yelling out in rage, Brother Baleos hammered his power fist into the beast, but almost at once he realised his mistake. The creature burst in a shower of gore and superheated acid which sprayed across the squad. For a moment Ottavos was blind, his helmet

augurs seared away. He was also struggling to breathe as his armour ventilators were clogged with alien blood. Cursing, the sergeant keyed open his helmet lock and hurled the smouldering piece of ceramite to the street. All at once the rancid smell of the xenos assaulted his senses and he blinked away the smoke in his eyes. From the ruins he saw three more of the acid-beasts creeping closer, their dripping bio-cannons ready to fire. Painfully aware of his missing helmet, Ottavos ordered his warriors to turn their weapons upon the new threat, hoping the Space Marines could drive them back before they got close enough to use their cannons.

Then the acid-beasts were engulfed in flame, a cloud of fire rolling out of the ruins to consume them. Over the smoking remains of the Tyranids, a tank rumbled onto the street, its flamestorm cannon already turning toward the armoured spore.

Ottavos and his brothers formed up behind the Predator as it advanced down the street. The brother-sergeant kept up a steady stream of fire, driving back anything that tried to get too close to the tank, while the vehicle unleashed a storm of flame upon the Sporocyst. Soon both Terminators and tank were advancing through the gory wreckage of the Tyranid fortifications. Through the smoke, Ottavos could see the armoured bridge that arced out over the digestion lake to the base of the cogitator spires. As he snapped glances into the ruins on either side, he saw a line of red armoured warriors steadily advancing into the district. The sergeant knew a moment's satisfaction that, here at least, the xenos' line had been broken.

Then they were out into the rows of ruined manufactorums, whose crumbling foundations overhung the acidic lake. Ottavos took a moment to gather his battle-brothers, preparing for the final advance across the massive bridge, toward the Mechanicus cogitator spires. Then he felt the ground shake beneath his feet. For a second he thought nothing of it – both sides were exchanging artillery barrages and Imperial ordnance was still tearing the city apart from orbit. But the tremors continued – this was something different, and Ottavos' eyes were drawn away, toward the ruined heart of the district.

A vast shape was rising over the tumbled buildings, rubble falling off its carapace as it emerged from the ruins of a factorum. Then, with a speed grotesquely at odds with its size, the bio-titan scuttled into battle.



BLEEDING THE BEAST

Anrakyr's forces had become penned in beneath the vast gates connecting the undercity and sewer to the Fabricae District. Unable to advance or retreat, the Necrons had formed a fortress of living metal, upon which the Tyranids were throwing themselves in ever-increasing numbers. Living artillery rained down, bursting with wet thumps.

Then Anrakyr called upon his reserves, and from folds in-between reality scores of Monoliths and wings of Doom Scythes appeared in the sky over Phodia. Their weapons spoke in anger, punching ragged holes in the Tyranid lines. Strafing mercilessly by the Necron reinforcements, the Tyranids were pushed back toward the flesh-thick lake.

It was then that the bio-titan made its presence known. As Anrakyr's legions marched into the ruins of the manufacturums, the gigantic beast tore apart the vanguard of the Blood Angels assault. Waves of red armoured warriors were pouring into the ruins around the lake, while others rode upon wings of fire to strike at the bio-titan. Anrakyr ordered his Monoliths to turn their guns upon the Hierophant, but most of the crackling particle whips either flashed off its heavy carapace or were turned away by some kind of psychic shield. Then a Doom Scythe crashed to the ground nearby, cartwheeling end over end in a ball of flame. Tearing his eyes from the crippled craft, Anrakyr was forced to concentrate his army on the smaller bio-horrors streaming out of the ruins toward his living metal legions.

Dante's force was pinned down by the bio-titan; unable to match its firepower, they had taken up a defensive position on the edge of the lake only a few hundred yards from the cogitator spires. The Chapter Master had his Devastators mass their weapons fire against the beast, but so far missiles, las-blasts and blazing bolts of plasma had failed to slow the creature. From the direction of the Fabricators' Gate Dreadnoughts and Predators rumbled forward, the Blood Angels' armoured might coming to their Chapter Master's aid, and the Blood Angels prepared to make an attack once more.

TOWER OF THE MECHANICUS



On the other side of the district, Anrakyr's forces were also struggling to push past the bio-titan. The Immortals were pouring tesla fire into the beast as it squatted over the digestion lake, its guns swivelling back and forth to hurl fleshy shells and torrents of caustic fluid into both Blood Angels and Necrons. In the air, Anrakyr's forces were slowly winning the war against the winged beasts and artillery-organisms. Doom Scythes screamed through the air, weaving between chitinous projectiles as their fire seared smoking holes through membranous wings and slime-covered chitin. Gun-beasts hunkering in ruined rooftops exploded into showers of gore, while flying creatures tumbled screeching from the sky, to be trampled underfoot by the steady advance of the ranks of Necron Warriors below.

And yet, for all the Necrons' victories, the bio-titan dominated the battle; the deafening crack of its bio-cannons sounded each time the allies tried to push toward the cogitator spires, heavy fire forcing them back once more. It was then that Anrakyr unleashed his secret weapon. Time was of the essence, and he would wait no longer for the Hive Mind to muster fresh forces to throw against him, or his allies.

Those Blood Angels closest to the digestion lake thought Dante must have ordered an orbital strike when they saw the fire descending from the sky. As it neared, though, it was not a missile they beheld, but the shape of a flame-wreathed god. Nyadra'zatha, the Burning One, fell from the sky like a meteor. When the C'tan Shard struck the ruins it sent a plume of molten rock hundreds of yards into the air, and a wave of fire rolled out through the ruins incinerating everything in its path. Hundreds of weapon-beasts were blasted into ashen shadows in that single instant.

The bio-titan turned its beady eyes upon the newcomer and launched a withering salvo of bio-shells. The C'tan barely seemed to react as the ordnance burst

and burned upon its coruscating halo of fire. Dante ordered his men to hold their positions as the two nightmare creatures fought. The commander had limited faith in his Necron allies, but had none in the creation of flame that he now beheld.

Flesh and fire rampaged across the ruins, the staggering strength of the bio-titan pitted against the reality-bending will of the C'tan. Even as the two giants fought to the death, the battle continued to rage around them. Dante's Blood Angels – now in control of the Fabricators' Gate and the bridge to the cogitator spires – held their ground against waves of weapon-beasts and bio-ordnance. On the far side of the lake, the Necrons were equally pressed, and Anrakyr stood atop a pile of dismembered alien corpses, his crackling warscythe gripped in two skeletal fists.

Then, with a final mournful hiss the Hierophant pitched forward into the rubble. As it tried to rise, the C'tan thrust a burning hand into its cracked and dripping carapace. Steam began to pour from the creature's wounds as the star god cooked it from within – then it exploded in a shower of smoking ichor.

In moments the battle had turned back in the allies' favour. With the bio-titan down, the Blood Angels surged forward into the Tyranids' inner defences, while the Necrons turned their firepower on the surviving weapon-beasts. The C'tan Shard, meanwhile, ascended into the nest of capillary towers on a pillar of fire, tearing into them with burning fists.

Under the brutal combined assault of Blood Angels and Necrons the first capillary tower was severed, spewing half-digested bio-matter hundreds of yards in all directions. Then, writhing and twisting, it fell from the sky, crashing down across miles of the city below. Even as the other towers fell, Anrakyr and Dante entered the maze-like lower levels of the cogitator spires, both endeavouring to be the first to reach the Magnovitrium relay controls.





Anrakyr opened the Adeptus Mechanicus spire with a contemptuous wave of his hand. Compared to the complex structures of his mind, the workings of these primitive machines were as nothing. The Overlord strode into the ruined corridors of the spire, Mephrit warriors close upon his heels. The crude interior of the spire was a maze of twisting corridors and claustrophobic chambers, choked with the remains of dead humans. From among the dead, feeding beasts turned to hiss at Anrakyr, pulling gore-stained maws from dripping chest cavities. Those creatures that tried to slow the Overlord's progress were met with the keen edge of his warscythe.

As Anrakyr neared the top of the spire, larger beasts lumbered to bar his way. These huge multi-limbed monsters snarled with bile-dripping mouths and carried pulsing bio-cannons. The shambling warriors raised from Perdita dutifully shielded their temporary master from these attacks, their living metal bodies absorbing hard chitin spines and curved talons, yet for every few soldiers that fell convulsing to the ground to be teleported away, a Tyranid creature broke through to face Anrakyr's warscythe. Not for the first time, Anrakyr wished he fought amongst his loyal Pyrrhian Eternals, but he had been compelled to leave his veteran bodyguard to watch over his ship, and his stasis crypt. Even so, the Necrons were able to advance chamber by chamber over the dismembered bodies of their foes, until at last Anrakyr emerged into the apex of the spire and the nexus of the Magnovitrium relay control.

A winged Hive Tyrant dominated the chamber, its ragged, torn wings hanging down its back like a cloak of flesh and bone. The thing had obviously been wounded in the fighting, its back a heat-

seared mess of blackened flesh. Yet as it rose up on curving talons, unfurling a whip of living muscle and a sword of bone, Anrakyr could see it was far from defeated. Even though it towered over the Necron lord, he charged forward without hesitation, his warscythe flashing through the air with a crackle of energy. The beast moved with terrifying speed, its whip lashing out in an attempt to ensnare Anrakyr, while its bone blade swept in low. The Overlord reversed his weapon in a single smooth motion, turning aside the sword blow and twisting out of the way of the whip, then turned his scythe in a blur to land a vicious blow upon the monster.

The Hive Tyrant hissed in rage and snapped at Anrakyr, its jaws closing on the Necron's shoulder plate and tearing away a ragged fragment. The warriors of Mephrit moved forward to protect their assigned Overlord, but Anrakyr waved them back: this was a battle he would win alone. Now that he had a measure of the creature's speed, the Traveller used its size to his advantage. Attacking the Tyrant once more, Anrakyr traded blows as he lured it into the edges of the spire chamber. Here the low ceiling slowed the creature, and its ruined wings caught upon the jagged walls. For minutes more the two traded blows, until with a flash of his scythe, Anrakyr slipped past the creature's guard and sliced open its thorax, acidic offal splattering to the floor.

The Overlord allowed himself a moment of pleasure at his victory, as the beast slid to the ground. Then, with a thought and a gesture, he exerted his will upon the controls around him. Humming quietly, the nexus stirred to life, ready to regulate the power of the Magnovitrium.



FOG OF DEATH

The Flesh Tearers and their allies made a stand within the ruins of the Adepta Sororitas cathedrum. Theirs would be a battle not just for survival but for time, as Seth protected the Magnovitrium uplink long enough for the great solar mirror to be turned upon Aeros and set the world alight.

Scant hours had passed since the convoy had reached the Adepta Sororitas cathedrum, the long-abandoned compound where the Emperor's faith had first been brought to Lysios. Within their crawlers, the nomads muttered darkly about the doom of their people, while outside the Flesh Tearers and Sisters of Battle prepared for the next xenos assault. Gabriel Seth and Amity Hope gathered their troops, the bright suns of Cryptus glinting off dark crimson and white armoured forms. Weapons were checked and prayers drifted upon the wind, while the click of shells being loaded echoed among the broken buildings.

Everyone knew that the wave should have hit by now, yet there was no sign of it. Somehow, the inexplicable absence

of that towering wall of water was more unsettling to many than its arrival would have been. Still, whatever had occurred it was a blessing, for as yet the cathedrum's void shields remained inoperable.

From orbit Flesh Tearers reinforcements came crashing down, leaving burning trails across the sky. As these new arrivals landed amid the ruins, they formed up alongside their brothers. Terminator battle-brothers with crackling lightning claws appeared in bursts of otherworldly light, ready to repel the Tyranid assault. Behind them, slab-armoured Dreadnoughts crashed through the reeking, salt-stained rubble, equally eager to get at the foe, giving the lines of crimson infantry some heavy support.

THE LYSIOS UPLINK

All the worlds of the Cryptus System relied upon the Magnovitrium for power, and Lysios was no exception. However, where the other planets had massive fortified relays which conveyed energy to their manufactorums and city districts, Lysios harvested the energy only for its nomadic caravans. Among the oldest ground crawlers there rumbled sacred vehicles – Solariums – built to transport towering solar-masts. Each was an uplink to the relay array in orbit and the Magnovitrium. Thanks to the devastation wrought by the Tyranids, only one now remained.

When Dante sent word to Seth outlining the plan to destroy Aeros, he asked the Chapter Master to align the Lysite relay. This would mean defending the convoy's Solarium while its cogitator made the exacting calculations required to redirect the power of Cryptus' suns. Dante impressed upon Seth the importance of this mission: it could not fail. Even should the citizens of Lysios perish, the Solarium must survive. If it was destroyed the beam would never reach the distant gas giant, and ultimately it would be Baal, the Blood Angels' homeworld that would pay the price.



Beyond the lines of dark red armoured giants and stern-faced Sisters, all sound ebbed away, as if the world itself was holding its breath. The defenders turned their eyes to the horizon and watched as a shadow fell across the dry sea; a shadow that soon became a huge, rolling cloud. The foremost Flesh Tearers units followed its progress, anticipating the carnage to come, many tightening their grips on well-worn chainblade hilts.

Augurs and auspexes probed the cloud as it drew closer. Seth's scowl deepened as he watched it approach. Something was very wrong. Did the approaching fog conceal the Tyranid swarm? Or had the foe somehow vapourised the long-overdue tidal wave? If so, to what end? Once again he considered the wisdom of making a stand, but knew that there was to be no more running.

Yet, unbeknownst to Seth or Amity, the world beyond their ruined island had been all but stripped. Ruins and cities had been scoured clean of sea creatures and clinging algae, while even the salt from the stained ground had been devoured. Greatest by far among the victims of consumption was Lysios' world-scouring wave. After it had washed over the invasion swarm, tendrils of the hive fleet

had drunk deep of its brine-soaked bounty; within less than a day, the tidal wave that had ravaged the world for centuries was no more.

Even as the wave was devoured, the swarms that had conquered Ixoi were absorbed by their parent ships before being spat back out upon the surface of Lysios. These poisonous beasts joined the feeding frenzy upon the planet below. As the clouds that had covered Ixoi were consumed in the wake of their departure, a graveyard of rusting, desiccated armour was revealed; not even the skeletons of the dead were left behind to mark the thousands of men that had fought and died there.

It was the poison cloud conjured by the swarms of Toxicrenes and Venomthropes that the defenders now saw bearing down upon them. Hidden in this toxic haze were hundreds of smaller swarms, the boiling greenish clouds racing out ahead of them to cover the dry sea in darkness. The defenders tried to pierce the poison fog with their augurs, but it was as if the world ended at its edge. Tiny organisms drifted amongst the mists, their microscopic spines transmitting a wall of electro-magnetic noise, proof against the probing technology.



However, as the rolling wall of poison fog bore down upon the cathedrum, the Space Marines and Sisters of Battle started to make out shadows in its depths. Spine-covered ghosts and scythe-armed spectres swam into view, a promise of the monsters now closing in on the Imperial line. At that moment, Seth and many of his brothers caught the foul scent of the cloud, their enhanced senses revealing to them its deadly nature. With a series of quick orders, the defenders clamped down helmets and double-checked armour seals, while the terrified nomads retreated to the safety of their crawlers.



Like a phantom wave, the cloud rushed through the ruined buildings and engulfed the Flesh Tearers and their allies. The toxic wind seared the surface of the defenders' power armour as the battlefield became poisonous to all non-Tyranid life, but they stood firm, trusting to the protection of their wargear. Seth and his brothers watched the shifting fog for enemies, their visibility, so clear moments before, now reduced to only a handful of yards. The sound of the approaching broods reached the ears of the defenders, slowly building into a dry hiss. Guns were levelled into the mist, each warrior straining their senses to find a target.

Suddenly, the ground beneath a squad of Sisters imploded. One moment they stood upon the churned rubble of the ruins, the next a yawning void opened under them. Fangs the length of chainswords flashed up out of the rift and in a spray of gore half a dozen Sisters of Battle died. A huge, wyrm-like beast hauled its carcass from the ravaged earth, jaws gaping impossibly wide as it roared at the survivors.

At that same instant the fog came alive with bounding, scuttling shapes, and a thundering rain of bio-ordnance arced out of the darkness. A dozen more Sisters fell, clutching burning rents in their armour or broken helmet seals; a handful of Flesh Tearers soon joined them as crystalline shells began to burst among their lines.

The Space Marines' response was both swift and brutal. Even before the first weapon-beasts could close the dozen or so yards that separated them from the defenders, the flashes of sustained bolter fire lit up the fog. Explosive rounds tore from the compound's edge, blasting chunks from xenos and plasteel walls with ease. Flame weapons cast eerie shadows as they incinerated screaming creatures, and heavy bolters added their rhythmic hammering to the orchestra of death.

Broods of Hormagaunts and Termagants spilled out of the mist; hidden amongst this scrambling horde, Genestealers ducked away from enemy fire, using their smaller kin for cover. As the xenos beasts hit the Flesh Tearers lines, the Assault Marines and Dreadnoughts stepped forward to contain them. A talon-beast tried to leap over the defenders, only to be gutted in a sticky purple spray by the blade of a battle-brother. A Genestealer that darted forward to strike a wounded warrior was crushed in the crackling claws of a Dreadnought, its bulbous head bursting across the walker's armour in a spurt of ichor.

Everywhere battle raged unchecked as the Hive Mind brought its might to bear against the Space Marines and Sisters of Battle. The low, broken walls of the cathedrum soon became choked with the dead, and the cries of the dying were punctuated with the thump of bolter fire and metallic rain of spent shells hitting rubble. Adepta Sororitas Retributors held the right flank of the wall, supported by the remnants of their battle-scarred tanks. As gaunts and towering Tyranid Warriors thundered toward them, heavy flamers and multi-melta beams carved a burning path through the fog, turning the beasts into incandescent pillars of flame. Yet still the xenos came – Genestealers covered in burning promethium crawling over the charred corpses of their brood to get at the defenders.



Seth stood at the centre of the line, his brothers on either side of him, hacking apart any beast that came within reach. And yet the foes seemed endless; more and more creatures materialised to fall upon the defenders. Through his rising battle rage Seth could see the Sisters dying, their weakened squads being overwhelmed and torn apart in the melee. Worse, with the foe all around and their battle-lust upon them, many of his warriors were surrendering to the Red Thirst. In the mist ahead of him, crimson shapes charged forwards, howling for xenos blood. The Flesh Tearers were no longer holding the line – they had taken the fight to the Tyranids.



Sister Superior Amity ripped her chainsword from the alien's torso in a spray of smoking ichor. The beast's dying shrieks were muted through her enclosed helmet, and barely registering over the sound of her own ragged breathing. Out of her helm's gore-streaked vision slit, Amity could barely see more than a few yards, but everywhere she looked the ruins were crawling with chitinous shapes. A towering leader-beast suddenly loomed into view, the thing swinging its dripping bio-cannon toward her. However, before it could fire Amity's plasma pistol blazed through the fog and the beast's face vanished in a hiss of superheated fluid. Even before the creature's body had fallen she was turning, seeking out new foes.

To her dismay, precious few of her Sisters remained alive, the vile xenos slipping from the poisonous fog in a seemingly never-ending torrent of ripping jaws and tearing claws. Yet there was still hope within Amity's heart – the Flesh Tearers fighting furiously at the compound's edge made her believe victory was still within their grasp. As she watched, one of them tore the head from a writhing snake-beast, while another jammed his boltgun into the mouth of a hissing dragon-like creature, squeezing the trigger and blowing apart its bulbous head in a shower of viscous fluid and bone. Where the armoured giants held their ground, the aliens faltered and died in their hundreds. The Space Marines killed with an efficiency that was both wondrous and terrible to behold. Then a wave of fresh foes charged from out of the mist, and the Sister Superior could once again focus only on her own survival.

Whispering a prayer to her God-Emperor, Amity cleaved open the head of a bounding weapon-beast as it rushed her. The adamantium teeth of her chainsword chewed hungrily into its skull and hosed her in fragments of dripping chitin. Sweat stung Amity's eyes and she wished she could pull off her helmet, but she had already seen those poor Sisters whose armour had been pierced, and that was no way for a servant of the God-Emperor to die. Ignoring the heat of her armour and the ache within her muscles, she held the line against the xenos, her chainsword becoming clogged with ruined flesh and her plasma pistol glowing hot within her hand.

It was then she noticed the Flesh Tearers breaking ranks. In ones and twos, and then whole squads, the Space Marines were vaulting over the makeshift Imperial defences and charging into the fog. For a second, Amity thought perhaps the swarm was breaking and keyed her vox for confirmation, but all she could hear were incoherent screams of rage. As the crimson warriors vanished into the mist the aliens closed in, and in moments beasts were pouring through the holes in the Imperial line.

Amity stepped up onto a broken wall, ready to rally her Order, the inspirational words of Magda Grace coming to her mind. However, her throat closed around the words as she saw the few desperate Sisters still fighting to hold the compound's edge. They were outnumbered, on the verge of collapse, and the monsters were closing in for the kill.



BATTLE OF THE DAMNED



The Flesh Tearers' fury looked as though it would be their undoing. Unwilling merely to hold the line against the tide of xenos, the Space Marines were forging forward in a brutal counter-attack. Yet as they did so their squads were becoming separated, individual battle-brothers breaking formation to charge after half-seen foes. As the spore-thick fog swirled around them in clotted clouds, Flesh Tearers appeared and disappeared mid-swing or -strike. They were vengeful ghosts, swimming through a sea of death. Everywhere the shattered buildings were alive with movement as shining, dripping shapes skittered into view.

The Dreadnought Skoraen crashed into a brood of leader-beasts, their bone blades and razor claws ripping sparking furrows in his armoured hide. Skoraen plunged a blood talon through one of the Tyranid Warriors while firing his meltagun into another, fog and flesh parting before the scalding beam. Nearby, hidden in the mist, squads of Flesh Tearers were pushing into the swarm, chainblades, bolt rounds and ceramite boots crushing carapaces and bursting alien bodies. Seth fought beside them, trying to keep his company together, but feeling the Red Thirst rising. His massive chainsword hacked apart those beasts that reared up before him, its diamond-hard teeth sending up fountains of purple ichor as they ripped off limbs and cut open chest cavities. However, despite the fury of the Flesh Tearers and the great tally of death piling at their feet, Seth could see the Imperial defences were crumbling.

Abandoned by their allies, the Sisters of Battle were being overrun, black and white armoured shapes littering the rubble-strewn streets or crumpled behind makeshift barricades where they had fallen. And it was not just the Adepta Sororitas that were suffering; squads of battle-brothers were vanishing into the mist, never to return. Overcome with the Red Thirst, groups of Flesh Tearers charged deep into the ruins, leaving the Imperial defences and the covering fire of the nomad guns far behind. These warriors left a path of carnage in their wake, but alone and unsupported they too were overcome by the ever-increasing numbers of Tyranids.

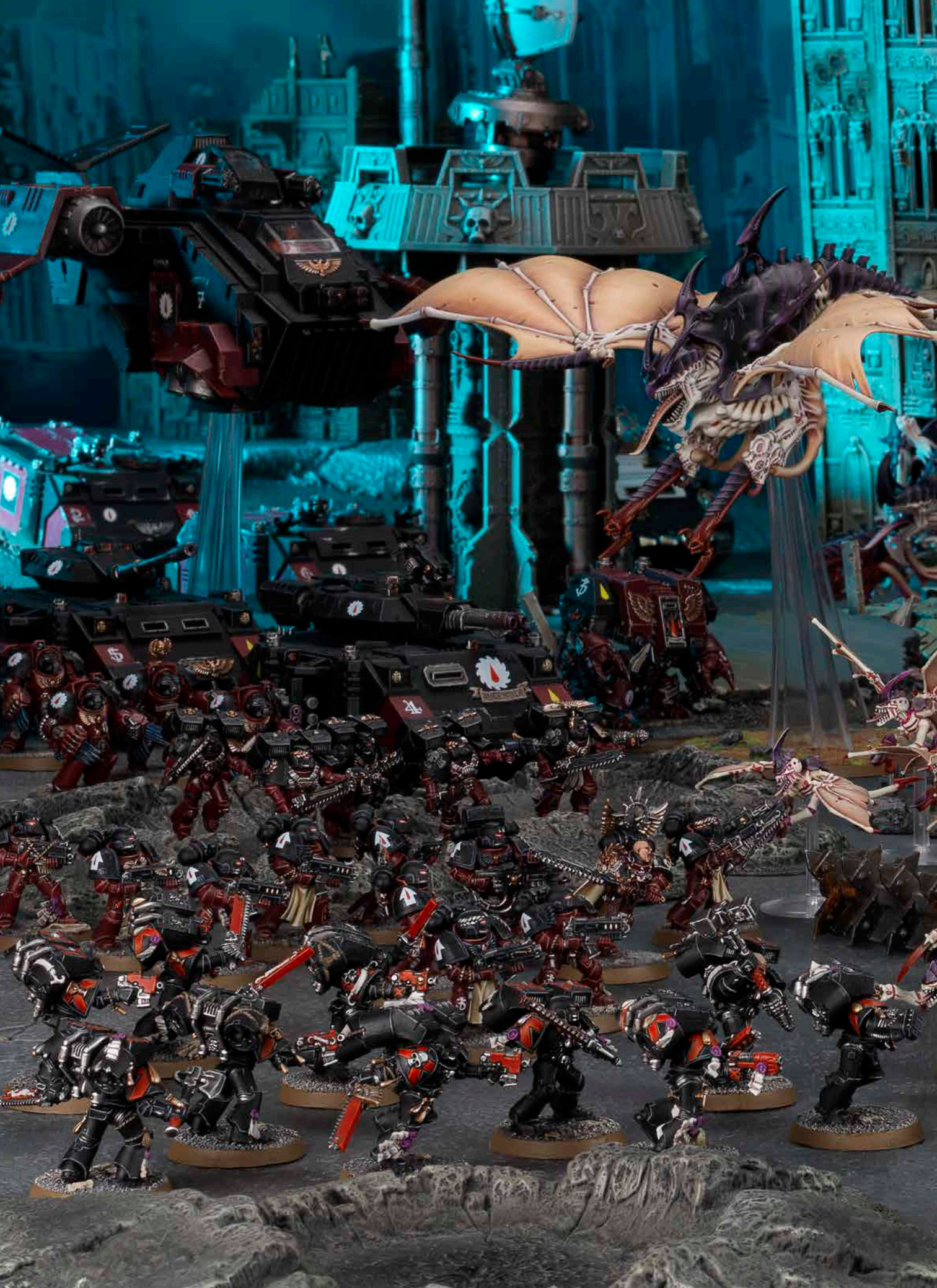
Then the Toxicrenes entered the fray. They were the source of the poisonous cloudbank; the fog grew thicker as they approached, and even the power armour of the Imperial defenders was not enough to keep them safe. Amity's order, which had been so hard pressed, suffered terribly. Purity seals boiled away and armour cracked open under the poisonous assault. Within their helmets, sisters vomited bloody strands of phlegm and let out gurgling screams as their eyeballs turned to fluid. The Sister Superior led the few remaining Sisters of Battle back toward their vehicles, seeking sanctuary nearer the heart of the compound.

The Flesh Tearers fared better, their enhanced bodies fighting back the poisons even as they fought the aliens themselves. Yet still they died. With the coming of the Toxicrenes the tactics of the swarm shifted, and creatures that moments before had sought out killing blows now tried to tear open their foes' power armour. Genestealers darted in to snip open helmet seals, and snapping lash whips wrapped around ceramite plates, tearing them free.

Seth reached Skoraen's side in time to see the Dreadnought charge into a Toxicrene, the lumbering walker crashing into the beast's chitin-covered hide hard enough to stagger it. Seth tried to join the assault on the creature, hopeful that perhaps this was the key to dispersing the cloud. However, this close to the beast the poison was unendurable. Coughing and choking he was forced back, the taste of blood thick in his mouth. At first Skoraen matched the Toxicrene, pistons screaming as they struggled against alien muscle. Then the creature's tentacles wrapped around Skoraen's hull, and where they touched the armoured plates the Dreadnought's ceramite hull hissed. Yet the Toxicrene did not stop at this – the questing tips of its tentacles pushed through the rents eaten into Skoraen's hull. Then, with a sudden wrench, the beast tore the front of the Dreadnought's sarcophagus clean off.

The ruined meat of his body exposed to the toxic gas, Skoraen fought back. Ancient flesh bubbling, he plunged his taloned fists into the Toxicrene, driving the blades deep into the beast's heaving flank. With a sickening wet roar, the massive poison-beast exploded, showering Skoraen in an acidic soup of steaming gore. For scant moments the warrior stood there as his armour boiled away, still trying to strike out with limbs that were little but mechanical slurry. Then his remains spilled out onto the ground in a puddle of flesh. With Skoraen's death, the beleaguered Imperial lines broke, and Seth was forced to retreat back to the crawlers and the precious Solarium. As he fought his way back, far too few of his brothers followed him. Some were lost to the Red Thirst and could not heed his commands over their own rage; others had advanced too far, until the swarm closed around them.

Seth reached the crawlers to find them beset on all sides by Tyranids. Clawed horrors tore at their armour or blasted their sides with living shells. One crawler had been tipped upon its side, the huge Mawloc that had devoured so many Battle Sisters tearing at its underside. True to his mission, Seth gathered his brothers around the Magnovitrium uplink, bolters blazing into the murk, and vowed he would hold until Dante fired the Magnovitrium. Around him, the cloud thickened as another Toxicrene approached, and parts of the uplink mast started to hiss and burn.







DEFENDERS OF LYSIOS

Among the ruins of the Adepta Sororitas cathedrum the Flesh Tearers and their allies made a stand against the Lysios invasion swarm. As events elsewhere in the system developed, the battle would become one of more than mere survival – its result would be vital to Dante's plan to destroy Aeros.

A **THE BLOODY VANGUARD**
During the fighting around the cathedrum, Gabriel Seth gathered around him many of his Chapter's veterans. In the opening stages of the battle these seasoned warriors would hold the line against the xenos; later, when the Red Thirst robbed Seth of many of his squads, they would be among those who fell back to defend the uplink.

B **THE CRIMSON LINE**
The bulk of Seth's battle-brothers at the cathedrum were drawn from the Flesh Tearers Tactical Squads. Squad Lucien would hold the line alongside squads Heraelos, Saeros and Orscari. These Space Marines would become the Crimson Line, the anvil upon which the swarms would be smashed to pieces... or so Gabriel Seth and his allies hoped.

C **SKORAEN THE BLOODIED**
Several Flesh Tearers Dreadnoughts fought within Seth's strike force at Lysios, including Skoraen the Bloodied. Having fought for nearly four centuries, the Dreadnought was a veteran of several of the Chapter's clashes with the Tyranids, and he maintained a burning hatred for the beasts that was reflected in his fury in battle.

D **SQUAD DANATAEL**
To shore up his defences, Seth called down Terminator Assault Squads from his fleet. Squad Danatael excelled in the toe-to-claw fight for the ruins, their heavy armour shielding them from the worst of the toxic fog as they wielded their lightning claws to deadly effect.



E **THE DAMNED OF LYSIOS**
 The black-armoured Death Company hacked a bloody wound in the side of the Tyranid wave when battle was joined. Though they would ultimately die to a man, their reckless charge through the ruins bought Seth valuable time, and the maddened giants would become known as the Damned of Lysios by the surviving Lysites.

F **MAGDA'S LAST HOPE**
 Amity and her Celestians would keep the word of Magda Grace alive, and by their presence preserve the fading hopes of the Lysite citizens. Though Amity fought mostly to save the remains of her contingent, it would be her example that would live on, long after the battlefields of Lysios had fallen silent.

G **RETRIBUTION OF GRACE**
 In response to their limited numbers, the Sisters of Battle massed their heavy weapons to repel the Tyranid swarm. Those bearing them were dubbed the Retribution of Grace; they dedicated each of their kills to the fallen Canoness, every blast of searing flame or burst of heavy bolt shells a prayer to her memory.

H **CONCLAVE OF THE LAST**
 By the end of the fighting of Lysios there were so few Sisters of Battle left that Amity was forced to group them together into improvised squads and demi-formations, mixing those of different orders to make full units. These were the Conclave of the Last, the remaining Adepta Sororitas gathered together against the coming darkness.

SETH'S CHAMPIONS

The Flesh Tearers fought a stubborn defence in the shadow of the cathedrum, Gabriel Seth calling in his reserve forces to repel the inevitable Tyranid assault. Among these defenders were veterans of the Flesh Tearers 1st Company, the ancient Dreadnought Skoraen, and dozens of the Death Company, all prepared to give their lives for victory.

SKORAEN THE BLOODIED

The ancient Dreadnought Skoraen the Bloodied was a relic of a time when the Flesh Tearers had been at the height of their glory. As a Space Marine, Skoraen had been part of the Bloodiron Charge at Vetix IV that broke the back of the World Eaters Bonescar Warband, and personally held the line against the heretics of the Taunhaus Rebellion. These deeds, and the many that had come after, would be recorded upon the hull of his Dreadnought in icons and symbols, the meaning of many of which was known only to Skoraen himself.





BROTHER HELORIUS

The Flesh Tearers' genetic flaw leads to a high proportion of their battle-brothers falling to the spiritual sickness of the Black Rage. On Lysios dozens of brothers like Helorius would succumb when the madness of battle finally unhinged them, robbing them of their reason. When Helorius was taken by the Black Rage his armour was painted black and symbols were daubed upon his shoulder pads and weapons in an ancient and sacred ritual. This was to show Helorius' new status as one of the damned, so that others might bear witness to his sacrifice.



Campaign badge of Lysios; those icons worn by the Death Company quickly became scratched and scarred in the furious battles against the Tyranids around the broken walls of the cathedrum



BROTHER RAELOEN

Armed with paired lightning claws, Brother Raeloen is a warrior of the Flesh Tearers Terminator Assault Squad Danatael. Well protected by his heavy armour, Raeloen was able to wade into the Tyranid swarm, ripping apart his foes in sprays of ichor. Having served in Squad Danatael for almost a century, Raeloen had fought on countless worlds before setting foot on Lysios. Each time he had emerged from battle covered in dripping gore, his Red Thirst sated for a while by the relentless butchery.



THE POISON WAVE

With the Imperium's defeat upon Ixoi, the toxic swarm had descended to the planet below. These poisonous creatures formed the core of the Hive Mind's renewed assault upon Lysios, bringing with them a choking fog as deadly as any beast spawned by the hive fleets.

A THE VIRULENT OVERLORDS

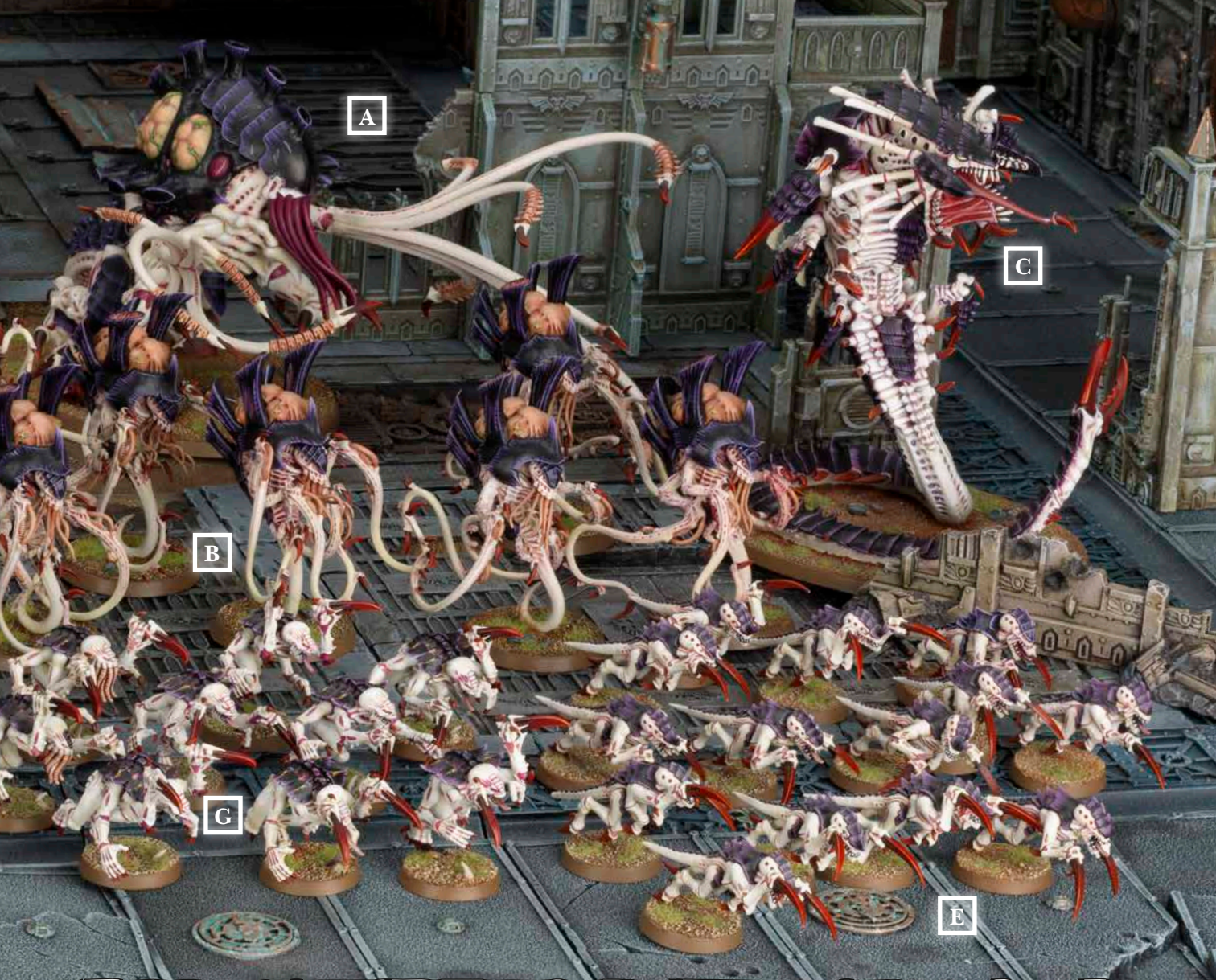
In the centre of the fog of death lumbered bulky Toxicrenes, known to the Lysite citizens as the Virulent Overlords after the poisonous sea gods of old. Where these creatures walked, the mist grew thicker and not even power armour or the hulls of the nomad crawlers were completely proof against it.

B CORRUPTED COURTIER

One legend of the Virulent Overlords concerned the bearers of their poisoned chalices. The names of these courtiers were given to the Venomthropes that clustered close to the hulking Toxicrenes and mingled their foul excretions together into a killing fog. Those few warriors that survived the clouds of poison coiling around these beasts would instead fall prey to their tendrils, dragged into a net of burning, constricting tentacles.

C JAWS OF SHELSE

A single massive Mawloc plagued the defenders of the cathedrum, believed by the locals to have risen from the great rift to bring the vengeance of the water goddess upon those who had entered her cursed city. Many Imperial defenders and several vehicles fell prey to the burrowing Jaws of Shelse, including one of the nomads' vast land crawlers.



D DROWNED CROWN-BEASTS

The citizens of Lysios viewed the creatures that had survived the wave with even more fear than the rest of the aliens. These were the ‘drowned’ that had survived the wrath of the goddess Shelse and emerged to deliver her vengeance. Leading these creatures were brine-stained Tyranid Warriors known to the nomads as Crown-beasts.

E DROWNED LEAPERS

Dripping with water and covered in slime, the Drowned Leapers were at the forefront of the horde that had survived from the earlier attacks. Such was the speed of these Hormagaunts that a defender would often only catch a glimpse of a leaper before it was upon them, the fog parting to reveal bared fangs and wickedly curved talons.

F DROWNED SKITTERERS AND DEEP MOTHERS

By far the most numerous creatures to survive the wave were the Termagants and their attendant Tervigons. The larger creatures had spawned the lesser ones in ceaseless waves during the initial landings. The nomads called the Tervigons Deep Mothers, likening them to the handmaidens of Shelse and their offspring to her million seaborne children.

G BLOOD GHOSTS OF LYSIOS

Hidden among the creatures of the main assault were broods of Genestealers that used the attack as a cover to infiltrate the Imperial lines. The nomads saw these as the Blood Ghosts of Lysios, another aspect of the goddess’ revenge for having her cursed city defiled so, and in the final hours of the battle many of these beasts would find their way into the nomad crawlers, wreaking horrific casualties among those cowering there.

THE TOXIC TIDE

The Hive Mind gathered a massive living tide to crush the defenders of Lysios, drawing thousands of weapon-beasts from the toxic moon of Ixoi. The high proportion of Toxicrenes and Venomthropes in the living tide created a cloud of poisonous gas that spread out to envelop the defenders, and hid the teeming swarms of aliens until they could strike.



VENOMTHROPES

Though not as dangerous as the larger Toxicrenes, the Venomthropes were still fearsome opponents, their toxic touch able to corrupt flesh and kill a man in seconds. During the battle of Lysios these willowy, floating horrors would lurk close to their larger cousins, pumping out continuous streams of toxins. Such were the cloying clouds that clung to the beasts that it was often almost impossible to see them, and the defenders would be forced to fire blind into the fog, listening for the telltale sound of bolt rounds exploding in alien flesh.



TYRANID WARRIORS

Scattered throughout the living tide, the Tyrannid Warriors on Lysios were the captains that held the swarms together and drove them relentlessly into the Flesh Tearers. Armed with a variety of potent bio-weaponry, they also provided the swarm with heavy-hitting shock troops. Often they would be at the forefront of a charge into the ranks of the defenders, breaking apart the Flesh Tearers' lines. These monsters would claim many victims, spitting living rounds from glistening fleshy cannons or hacking apart their foes with dripping bone blades.

TERMAGANTS

The Cryptoid Tendril unleashed billions of weapon-beasts upon the planets of the Cryptus System, among them countless swarms of Termagants. On Lysios, teeming fields of these beasts would survive the wave and the confrontation with Magda Grace to ultimately assault the Flesh Tearers as they made their stand in the shadow of the cathedrum. So numerous were the creatures that it was as if the dead seas of Lysios had come back to life and were rising up from the wastes once again to wash away everything in their path.





TOXICRENE

Wreathed in coils of poisonous vapour, the Toxicrenes of Lysios loomed out of the acidic fog like ancient sea monsters rising from the deep. Their lashing tentacles constantly dripped and oozed toxins, the touch of which were deadly to all non-Tyranid life. The Toxicrenes on Lysios had also developed acidic blood, perhaps a result of the fighting on Ixoi against the tanks of the Astra Militarum. This was something the defenders discovered to their cost when slaying the creatures in close quarters.



HOPE FROM DESPAIR

Aeros' primary refinery platform, a veritable city floating in the clouds, belonged to the Blood Angels under Captain Aphael and Brother Corbulo. However, although they had succeeded in rescuing the last battered remnants of the platform's Cadian garrison, victory was far from theirs.

The Blood Angels' attack upon Aeros' primary platform was swift and devastating. The strike force's Stormravens had made short work of the aerial beasts circling the platform, blowing them out of the sky with missiles and lascannon blasts. Meanwhile, Assault Squads had spilled from the flanks of the speeding gunships, jump packs flaring as they plunged into the fighting below.

The Tyranids that thronged the platform's streets had died in their hundreds, blown apart by bolt shells or shredded by frag grenade blasts. When Captain Aphael lopped the head from the Hive Tyrant at the swarm's heart, the influence of the Hive Mind had guttered out across the platform. The slaughter that followed was brief and bloody – those Tyranids not torn apart in the crossfire had fled mindlessly off the platform's edges, tumbling away into heart of the gas giant with diminishing, feral shrieks.

Throughout the battle, Brother Corbulo had been like a man possessed, his eyes alight with the fires of hope. The whirling edge of his chainblade, Heaven's Teeth, made short work of every hissing horror that flung itself in his path. His voice echoed out, exhorting his brothers to victory. The Sanguinary High Priest believed that his prize was close at hand, and with it perhaps a chance to avert his beloved Chapter's descent into madness. No xenospawn was going to come between him and that hope, and so he hacked and hewed until his muscles burned and his armour dripped with alien gore.

Only when the last of the infestation had been purged, and the battered Cadian survivors had emerged from behind their barricades, did the awful truth come to light. There had indeed been stockpiles of satryx on the primary platform, until just over six hours ago. Hollow-eyed with exhaustion, Cadian Lieutenant Dormund told how the men of the second and seventh platoons had held to the very last under Captain Coldren, defending the warehouses in which the elixir had been stored.

Men had fought with lasguns, knives, even their bare hands, understanding the irreplaceable nature of the prize they defended. It had not been enough. Finally, his men butchered and his prize untenable, Coldren had sent one last vox, a grim command for Dormund and his men to hold the perimeter for as long as they could. Then, the captain had set off the demo charges that ringed the warehouses. The roaring chain of explosions that followed obliterated Coldren and his last few men, along with the attacking Tyranids and, of course, the satryx. All that remained of the site was a ragged wound in the platform's superstructure, a yawning absence that stood as mute testament to Cadian selflessness in the face of defeat.

His tale told, Lieutenant Dormund had flinched back from the look on Corbulo's face, fearing for a moment that the golden-haired giant might strike him. Yet the High Priest had turned away instead, slamming one shaking fist into a nearby bulkhead, hard enough to dent the metal. Hope had been stolen by simple poor fortune, and the frailties of mortal men. He could not be angry at the Cadians, for they had done everything they could. Instead, he would reserve his killing fury for the foe.

While the priest had been learning the terrible truth, Captain Aphael had managed to force a vox channel through the stormlayer and up to his orbiting ships. The link was choppy, the vox-serf's voice fading in and out like that of a ghost, yet the link held long enough for Aphael to get an appraisal of the situation. He grasped the altered nature of his mission, face grim as he realised he would no longer be this world's saviour, but its executioner. His task was now to hold the primary platform, and the vapour-conveyor that it housed, until the Magnovitrium could be fired through it and into Aeros' heart. On the edge of the ionosphere, the conveyor's upper platform was to be held by some allied force that had lately entered the fray. The static-laden vox spat a name for this force, but Aphael discounted it, putting the obvious miscommunication down to malicious dataghosts. It was of no matter. His orders were to hold until the last moment, evacuating only when Exterminatus was guaranteed. Resolved to this challenging task, Captain Aphael broke the link and began to re-order his battle lines.

The conveyor hub sat at the heart of the platform, a factory-like structure surrounded by battle-ruined buildings. The armoured mass of the vapour-conveyor rose from the hub, stabbing up into the storm-wracked skies like some vast spear shaft until it vanished from view. Aphael, Corbulo and Dormund dispersed their forces through the ruins in its shadow. Meanwhile the Blood Angels Stormravens settled into defensive flight patterns overhead.

Clips clacked into boltguns, lasgun packs were checked and prayers to machine spirits were intoned. A single, much-battered Leman Russ battle tank rumbled into place behind the Cadians' position, turret tracking right and left as its gunnery seneschal ran his pre-combat checks. As the last confirmations filtered over the vox, Captain Aphael nodded in satisfaction. Everything was in readiness. The foe would not capture the conveyor hub while even one warrior of the Imperium remained to deny them. And with that thought, Aphael made out the great swarm of dark specks tumbling down from the stormlayer towards the platform. The enemy were on their way. Now was the time to fight and, if the Emperor was with them, to win.



THE VAPOUR-CONVEYOR

Aeros is a rich source of promethium gas; once refined, this is a vital resource for the Imperium. For centuries airborne mining platforms and gas-barges have feasted upon the chemical bounty of Aeros, drawing in great blue clouds from its atmosphere and extracting the precious chemicals to make refined promethium fuel. However, the thickest concentrations of these gases lie in the heart of the world, deep within the crushing azure core. To harvest these rare chemical currents, the Imperium built the vapour-conveyor, a vast pipeline that stretched from the planet's core to low orbit. It terminated in the primary platform, which hung just miles above the planet's core and was covered in refineries and other grand buildings. From the underside of the disc, mechanical mining tendrils hung down into the mist below, drawing up precious airborne minerals through chem-filters and

gas-nets. The refined promethium was then sent up the pipeline to the fuel hub hanging in low orbit. From this hub vessels would fill their tanks and carry the fuel to the worlds of Cryptus.

It was part of Anrakyr's plan to use this human device to help him destroy Aeros. The planet's stormlayer protected its volatile core against the worst solar activities of the twin suns, but the conveyor provided a conduit past this defence. When the Magnovitrium was turned upon Aeros, the Necrons would take control of the fuel hub and open its valves to the void. Meanwhile, below, the Blood Angels would reverse the mag-coils on the pipeline, pumping promethium back down into the core. Once the hub ignited, it would send the fires of Cryptus shooting down the conveyor and into the core, or so the allies hoped.



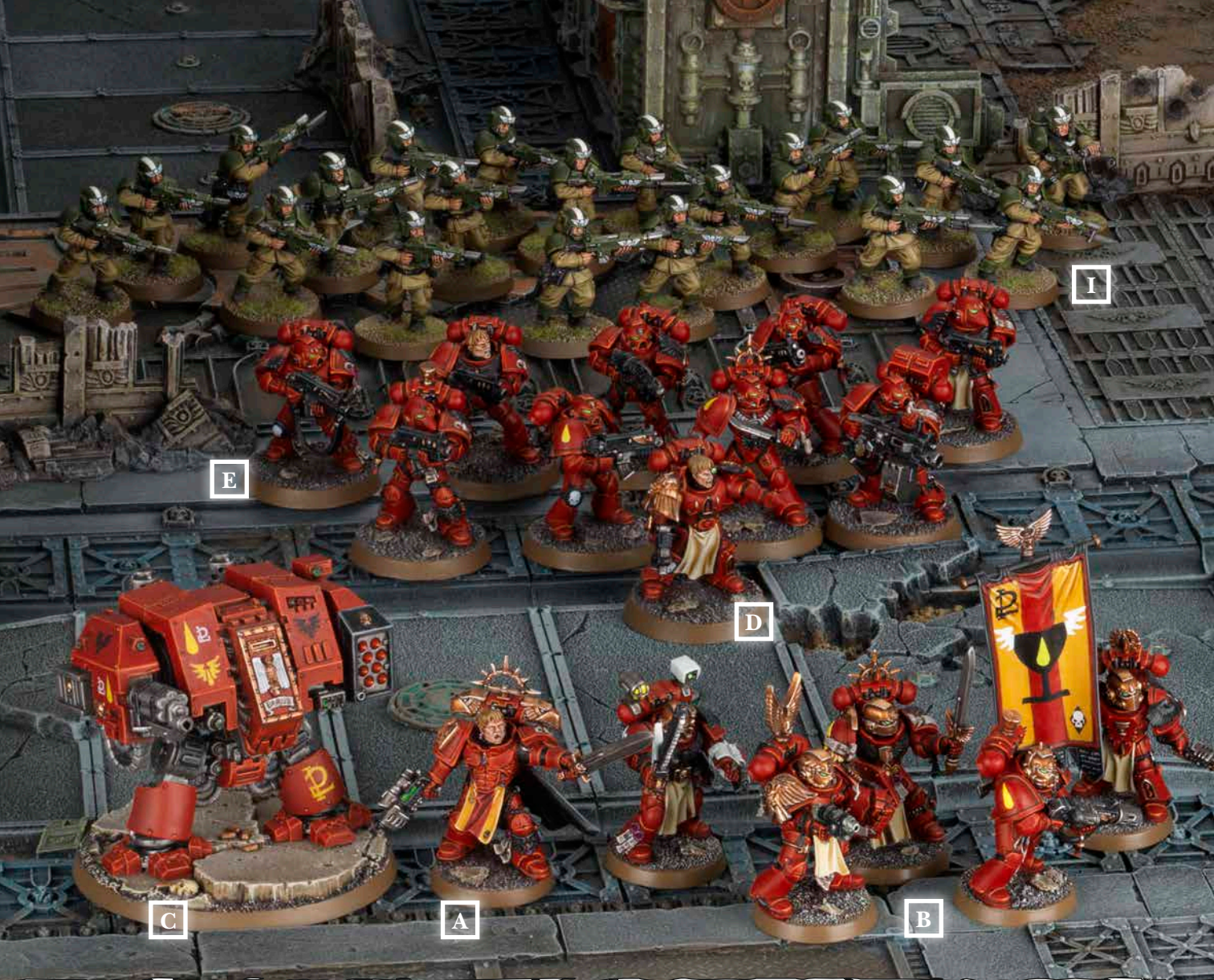
Zarathusa the Ineffable directed his warriors from the throne of his Tomb Ship, gazing through the eyes of his skyborne attack force while his mind made millions of tactical calculations a second. His vision shifted through several of his warriors until he settled on the pilot of a Night Scythe. The fighter soared among the blue clouds of Aeros, flanked by a squadron of Tomb Blades, their particle weapons flashing out to annihilate anything that strayed too close to their formation. Out of the mist Zarathusa could see a sea of bulbous alien spores taking shape. The hateful things repelled him with their shape alone, the dripping organic appendages and ichor-slick surfaces stirring some almost forgotten animal response deep within his mind. With a clipped series of orders he directed a wing of crescent-shaped Doom Scythes to strike, and was gratified to see several of the closest spores burst in vivid showers of gore as the Necron fighters streaked past them, weapons strobing.

Yet it was not just the vile beasts that disturbed Zarathusa, but the red armoured savages Anrakyrr had instructed him to aid. Only necessity had forced Zarathusa to accept the Traveller's bargain, and the grim reality that without help his coreworld would surely be destroyed. Yet to be told he must make alliance with these interlopers was too much; Zarathusa shuddered at the thought of what his court would say, or perhaps were even now saying, behind his back.

Seething, Zarathusa turned his ire upon the Tyranids. Some of the smaller wing-beasts were slipping through his cordon of Tomb Blades, the little horrors too numerous for his warriors to stop completely. The Overlord ordered his Night Scythes to turn their weapons upon those that strayed too close. Nearby, one of the massive floating spores flowered open, revealing a crown of bio-cannons. A sudden flurry of living shells hammered into Zarathusa's formation and several of his Tomb Blades were torn apart. Yet the Necrons forged on.

Now the human structure was coming into view – an ugly, graceless thing used to plunder the core of Aeros. The Tyranids clustered all around the pipeline, as if the unreasoning beasts actually knew what Anrakyrr had planned. That could not be, surely? How could such base animals anticipate the brilliance of the Traveller's plan? As he had been instructed, the Overlord released a data-burst down through the stormlayer toward the human army, mildly curious as to how the savages would respond. At the same moment, he angled his own force towards where the pipe reached the upper atmosphere.

For long minutes, Zarathusa's host forged a path towards the fuel-hub. Night Scythes screamed through the void, guns blowing Tyranid wing-beasts apart in sprays of ichor. Meanwhile, his bridge crew reported that the humans, while confused, had acknowledged their role in the battle. Zarathusa dismissed their repeated requests for identity clarification with cold amusement. Let them wonder at the nature of the gods who fought above their heads. Such savages could never understand the Ineffable, Zarathusa mused as he prepared to sweep away the vermin and seize his objective. For the first time since he had awoken, the Overlord felt his mood improve. His warriors would escape into the void well before Aeros exploded, while the human armies, along with the Tyranids, would certainly perish. Yes, this would be a good day indeed.



LAST MEN OF AEROS

If Dante and Anrakyr's plan was to be achieved, the defence of the vapour-conveyor upon Aeros was paramount – and it would fall to Captain Aphael to hold it. Leaving his airborne elements to scour the skies, the 2nd Company's Captain marshalled his forces upon the refinery platform alongside the tattered remains of the Cadian defenders. Together these warriors were tasked with holding out against the ever-increasing swarms of Tyranids at the vapour-conveyor's base.

A CAPTAIN APHAEL

Aphael was in command of the 2nd Company and its allies during the defence of the vapour-conveyor. An experienced tactician and able warrior, Aphael accepted his duty without complaint, knowing that even if he and his warriors succeeded in holding off the swarm and completing their objective, they would still likely perish.

B COMMAND SQUAD APHAEL

Aphael surrounded himself with his finest veterans, battle-brothers with centuries of collective experience in war. This squad of heroes would make the difference in the close quarters madness of the battle for the disc-city, where only instinct would keep a warrior alive.

C RAELYN THE UNBOWED

The Dreadnought Raelyn the Unbowed became one of the focus points of the defence of the refinery platform. Armed with an assault cannon and a missile launcher, Raelyn's punishing firepower would account for dozens of hulking beasts and hundreds of smaller ones.

D SERGEANT CAEMUS

Caemus would act as Aphael's second during the battle for the refinery, directing the Assault Squads as they leapt over the melee below. Caemus would also direct the Blood Angels' counter-attacks, increasing their effectiveness with his own speed and fury.



E SQUAD LUDVAIUS

Aphael deployed Tactical Squad Ludvaius to defend the base of the vapour-conveyor. Theirs was the heavy task of keeping the Tyranid assault organisms from overrunning the pipeline. In the end they would be among the last to withdraw, leaving a field of xenos dead in their wake.

F LIEUTENANT DORMUND

By the time the Blood Angels arrived on Aeros the Cadian leadership was severely depleted. Lieutenant Dormund was the sole surviving officer on Aeros, and despite having been passed over for promotion numerous times, Dormund rose to the challenge and held his command together.

G BROKEN HAMMER

The *Emperor's Hammer*, or the *Broken Hammer* as it became known due to its damaged appearance, was the Cadians' single remaining Leman Russ Battle Tank. Wrecked and restored a dozen times, its machine spirit refused to die and its heavy guns continued to take a heavy toll upon the aliens.

H DORMUND'S DIEHARDS

Every formation has its ill-favoured units, and for the Cadian defenders this was the fifteenth platoon. Dormund's Diehards, as they became known, were always where the fighting was at its thickest, and if ever a surprise attack or flanking force came from the enemy, the odds were that they would be the ones that suffered it.

I STORMSLAIN CONSCRIPTS

In the final hours of the battle for the stormlayer mining platforms, scores of citizens and pilots had managed to reach the lower refinery. With little training in combat Dormund organised them into conscript squads, their members calling themselves the Stormslain as they had already been chewed up and spat out by the beast.



APHAEL'S BLOODED

Captain Aphael had been tasked by Dante to rescue the survivors of Aeros and break the Tyranids' hold upon the gas giant. Now his mission of liberation became one of destruction, as he was forced to hold the planet's primary refinery platform in a bitter battle in which not even victory would guarantee survival.



CAPTAIN APHAEL

Captain Donatos Aphael leads the Blood Angels 2nd Company, known as the Blooded. Clad in sculped armour, an honoured relic of his Chapter, Aphael wears the symbols of his rank upon his tabard and shoulder pads, the former bearing the revered icon of the 2nd Company. None who look upon Aphael can be in any doubt of his authority, and he carries with him an undeniable aura of command that demands instant obedience from his brothers. With his ancient blade and ornate plasma pistol, Aphael is every inch a captain of the Blood Angels Chapter.

BROTHER MAEPHOUS

Battle-brother Maephous was part of Squad Inortros, a key part of Aphael's defence of the vapour-conveyor. Armed with the squad's multi-melta, Maephous' marksmanship and bravery would account for dozens of heavily armoured beasts. It is a great honour for a battle-brother to be chosen to carry such a weapon of ancient and terrifying destruction, and only those that have proven themselves may do so. Possessed of incredible nerve, Maephous would close with his lumbering targets and wait until the last possible moment before pulling the trigger. At such ranges the multi-melta could turn even a charging Carnifex into superheated mist.



BROTHER ARTOROS

The 2nd Company was divided when Dante began his invasion of the Cryptus System, creating two demi-companies. Brother Artoros, and Assault Squad Daento, were assigned to follow Aphael to Aeros. A warrior of one of the 2nd Company's two Assault Squads, Artoros wears a yellow helmet in accordance with the traditional organisational markings of the Blood Angels. Artoros would fight with distinction on Aeros, where his jump pack gave him a vital edge over his leathery-winged foes.



SKY LEGION OF ZARATHUSA THE INEFFABLE

The Mephrit Dynasty had become scattered across the stars, waking up in fits and starts, much of its power dimmed by time. However, Zarathusa the Ineffable had not had his wits or ambition addled by the passing millennia, and as his armies rose from the snows of Perdita they did so ready to bring ruin to his foes and restore the glory of his crownworld.

A **ZARATHUSA THE INEFFABLE**
Like all Necron Overlords, Zarathusa had his consciousness downloaded into a towering living metal frame with which to intimidate his underlings and overpower his foes. Supremely confident in his own greatness, Zarathusa leads his army into battle, armed with the Edge of Eternity and the Orb of the Undying.

B **MEPHRIT ROYAL GUARD**
Though Zarathusa was forced to second many of his Immortals to Anraky's assault on the world of Asphodex, he retained his most favoured warriors from among those that had awoken. These were the Mephrit Royal Guard. Utterly loyal to their master, they wordlessly gave their lives to defend Zarathusa during the war.

C **SILENT DOOM**
Anraky had disdained the use of Deathmarks, seeing their ways as less than honourable. Zarathusa had no such qualms, and he used the talented assassins to hunt down Tyranid leader-beasts. In the ruins of the fuel-hub, the Silent Doom, as Zarathusa called them, stalked among the shadows seeking out the presence of creatures channelling the Hive Mind.

D **SKYSWORD OF TWINSUNS**
In the shifting clouds of Aeros flying craft were of significant tactical value to all sides. Zarathusa employed Ghost Arcs to carry his warriors between the ruined mining platforms, the silent machines shadowing his armies as they scoured the upper reaches of the vapour-conveyor.



E **HERALD OF THE MEPHRIT**
 Zarathusa deployed Doom Scythe strike craft ahead of his legions to herald their coming. These heavily armed fighters were a perfect counter to the Tyranids' control of the skies, darting among the clouds and ruined structures to tear the foe apart with their strobing tesla weapons.

F **STEEL SPECTRES**
 During the fighting in the ruins of the fuel-hub Zarathusa sent in his Canoptek Wraiths to flush out the beasts lurking in the darkened corners of the disc-city. These mechanical creatures proved well suited to their task, as they were able to phase through the broken landscape, striking the Tyranids from unexpected quarters and luring them into the Necrons' traps.

G **LEGIONS OF THE FROZEN VOID**
 While the lion's share of Zarathusa's Necron Warriors fought upon Asphodex at the behest of Anrakyr, the Overlord could still muster several phalanxes. These swept out before Zarathusa's advance, their complex overlapping fire patterns ensuring that anything that charged their lines perished in a storm of flickering green fire.

H **SCIONS OF THE SILENT KING**
 Neither Anrakyr nor Zarathusa questioned the involvement of the Triarch Praetorians, accepting their aid in the war against the Hive Mind. Zarathusa, however, could see the influence of another in the actions of the Praetorians and had his own suspicions as to why they wanted the Tyranids destroyed.

I **WILL OF THE SILENT KING**
 Supporting the Praetorians during the battle for the fuel-hub was a formidable Triarch Stalker. This eldritch engine of destruction picked its way across the battlefield, targeting the larger Tyranid bio-beasts with its particle shredder as ranks of lesser warriors marched beneath its scuttling legs.



ZARATHUSA'S INFINITE HOST

The hosts of Zarathusa the Ineffable descended from the void to capture the upper levels of the Aerosian vapour-conveyor. Among the ranks of the Necron Overlord's army were thousands of newly awoken warriors from the war-crypts of Perdita, all fighting – under Zarathusa's direction – to enact the desperate plan provided by Anrakyrr the Traveller.

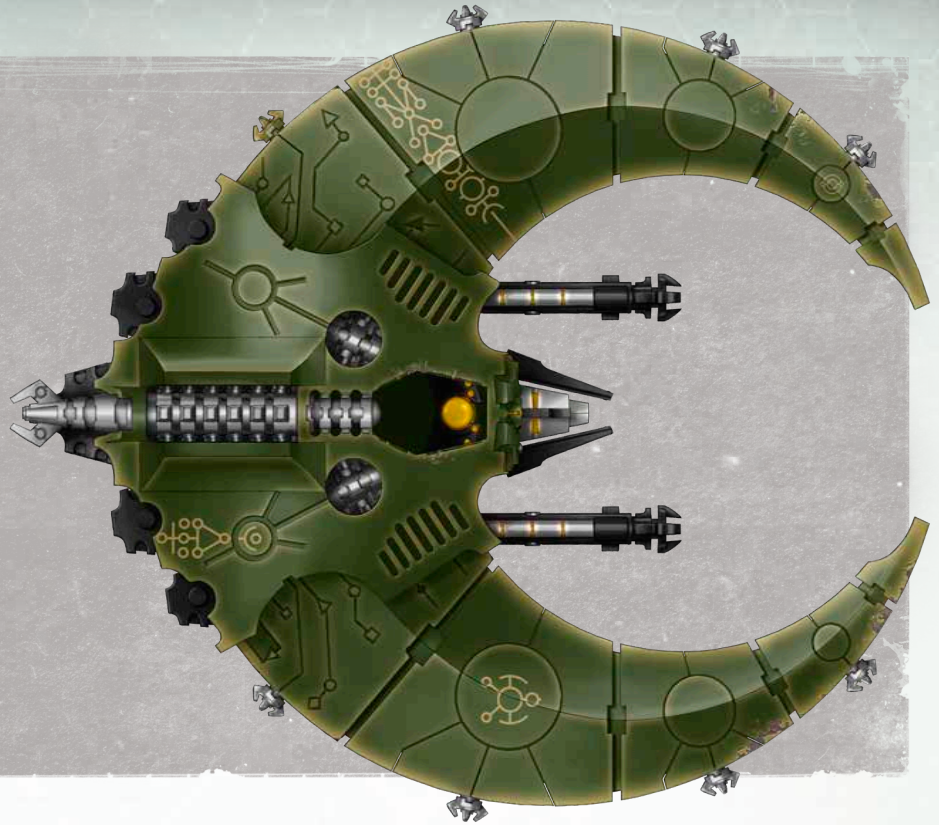


ZARATHUSA THE INEFFABLE

Resplendent in the green and white of the Mephrit Dynasty, Zarathusa's form was specially crafted to house the essence of the Overlord. A suitably impressive body, befitting a creature of Zarathusa's position, it bears the circuit-like iconography of his dynasty. Completing the image of the Overlord of Perdita are his resurrection orb and warscythe, as much badges of office as they are weapons of war. Zarathusa's warscythe, the Edge of Eternity, is especially important to the Overlord, as it has ever been carried by the master of the Cryptus System.

DOOM SCYTHER

Among the formations roused to war at Anrakyr's coming were the Doom Scythe squadrons of Perdita. These swift fighter craft gave Zarathusa and his armies a rapid moving attack force for his Aerosian campaign. Each Doom Scythe was able to deliver withering firepower anywhere the Overlord chose. The intricate markings on each Doom Scythe denote their position within the Necron hierarchy, as well as the role they have been assigned in battle.



CANOPTEK WRAITHS

The keepers of the Perditan war-crypts, the Canoptek Wraiths of the Mephrit Dynasty had watched over Zarathusa and his armies for millennia uncounted. When the Tomb World was roused to war, the Canoptek Wraiths were pressed into service for their Overlord. In the zero gravity of the orbital vapour-conveyor hub, the Wraiths proved especially effective. Their machine minds and phasing abilities allowed them to move through the void at will with terrifying speed, turning into blurs of spindly bodies and flashing talons.



AEROSIAN STORMBORN SWARM

When the armies of Zarathusa the Ineffable attacked the fuel hub, the Hive Mind surged into the upper atmosphere to destroy them. Rising up from the stormlayer, this stormborne swarm was to oppose the Necrons' assault, the spore sea itself emerging from the clouds to surround and destroy the invaders. Against this roiling swarm, Zarathusa would need to hold out until Anrakyr's plan could come to fruition.

A SWORD OF THE STORMBORN
Dozens of winged Hive Tyrants directed the Tyranid swarms upon Aeros, though there was one that would make itself known in the battle for the fuel-hub. It was designated the Sword of the Stormborn, armed as it was with a living blade that could leech both life and energy from its victims.

B THE MIND SHADOW
Among the roiling swarms of Tyranids, broods of Zoanthropes drifted eerily through the air. Their iron will would keep the lesser creatures focused upon the destruction of the Necrons, while their potent Warp blasts could rip apart any of the Necron attack craft and send them plunging into the clouds below.

C UMBRAL WIND
Gargoyles were everywhere upon Aeros, infesting the very air with their leathery wings and hissing maws. In the thin air of the outer atmosphere they became a deeper darkness against the midnight void of space. This shadow would swoop down suddenly upon the attackers, undetected until a storm of wings enveloped them.



D LIVING SKYWALL

Scores of Tyrannocytes rose out of the clouds to ring the fuel-hub, their heavy guns hammering the disc-city with streams of living ordnance. These bio-sentinels formed nexus points for the Tyranid attacks, massing in the sky above the ground broods and lending their considerable firepower to the assault.

E AEROSIAN WRECKER BEAST

Broods of Carnifexes were unleashed upon the Aerosian mining platforms, their prodigious strength used to rip the structures apart in the Hive Mind's unending hunger for biomass. Still following their instinctive imperatives, these creatures would often smash into structures in which enemies sheltered, tearing down walls and barricades to fall upon those using them for cover.

F SHADOW ON THE STARS

Large bio-beasts plagued the upper cloud layers of Aeros, and earned fanciful names from the Imperium's defenders such as Coward's Bane and the White Dragon. One of these creatures, the Shadow on the Stars, was a Harpy that sailed across the edge of space, preying upon craft entering and leaving the atmosphere of Aeros when they thought themselves safe from the swarms below.

G THE CHITTERING HORDE

By the time the Necrons came to the aid of the Blood Angels on Aeros, the Hive Mind was already consuming the planet. Rippers infested the ruined remains of every mining platform. Where there was solid ground to stand upon, they would squeeze themselves into every crevasse and crack of the battlefield seeking out valuable biomass.



WAR UPON THE WIND

On the Aerosian primary platform, consternation had greeted the crackling databurst that had issued from every vox-grille and speaker. An alliance with Necrons, verified with Dante's personal ciphers? It seemed impossible, yet the proof was there for all to see. Still, there was no time to debate the wisdom of Commander Dante's decision. The swarms were descending, and the sky all around the platform seethed with monsters.

Blood Angels and Cadians raised their guns and filled the air with a storm of gunfire as the first attack waves swooped low overhead. Massive shadows raced across the ruins, the silhouettes of Gargoyles and vast Hive Crones stark against the lightning of the storm belt overhead. Some of the winged monsters were torn from the skies, bodies tumbling and rolling to a stop amid the ruins in sprays of ichor. Others were more fortunate, diving through the storm of fire with taut snaps of their wings before strafing the defenders with caustic bio-fire. Cadians were torn apart as seething nests of stranglethorn tendrils engulfed them. Space Marines stumbled to their knees, armour bubbling and melting where acid had sprayed across it.

As the winged monsters wheeled for another attack, Captain Aphael barked swift orders and the sky lit up with explosions. The strike force's Stormravens screamed in over the platform, hurtling between ruined buildings as they unloaded punishing fire into the Harpies and Hive Crones. More huge wing-beasts fell from the air, crashing down upon the platform or dropping out of sight into the void below. For long minutes, the Stormravens held the skies. Red-hulled attack craft pursued screeching beasts, their fire chasing the jinking, rolling monsters as ruined buildings flashed by to either side.

Though valorous and skilled, the Blood Angels flight crews were also horribly outnumbered. The defenders' cheers faltered as fresh waves of winged beasts descended, their numbers dwarfing the first attack. Hive Crones swooped down into the fight, tentacles tearing away from their wings with wet ripping sounds. Trailing writhing tendrils, the living missiles swam through the air and latched onto those gunships too slow to evade. Massive bio-electric pulses rent the air above the primary platform as the weapon-beasts did their work. Captain Aphael watched in dismay as first one, then another Stormraven dropped from the sky, smoke boiling from ruined systems. Their mission might be a desperate one, but Aphael would be damned if he was condemning his followers to death with no chance of evacuation. Hurriedly, he ordered his remaining gunships to withdraw, commanding them to keep their distance and to be prepared to effect a fighting evacuation at a moment's notice.

Now, with the Blood Angels' air cover driven off, the Tyranids fell upon the platform like a living blizzard. Boiling clouds of Gargoyles descended, spitting armoured grubs and goutts of blinding acid at the defenders. Tyrannocytes drifted down around the platform's edges, disgorging great swarms of bounding Hormagaunts and bellowing, armour-clad Carnifexes. With winged Hive Tyrants swooping overhead, these fresh swarms surged through the platform's ruined streets, and fell upon the defenders like an avalanche.

Lieutenant Dormund's men fired from behind their barricades, exhaustion doing nothing to diminish the effectiveness of their tight volleys of fire. The battle cannon of their remaining tank boomed again and again, its shells blasting spumes of flesh and chitin into the air with every shot. Blood Angels fired into the horde, hosing the Tyranids with bolt shells and goutts of flamer wash. On the eastern flank, a mass of Hormagaunts spilled over the barricades, stabbing and biting. They buried several battle-brothers of squad Ludvaius beneath their mass, before fire from the Dreadnought, Raelyn, blew them to pieces.

Almost at the same time, the western flank started to buckle, the Stormslain Conscripts breaking as a trio of Carnifexes thundering into their ranks, hurling aside the ragged bodies of any soldier brave enough to stand in their way. Across the steps of the cathedral Corbulo saw the flank faltering and led a squad of Blood Angels into the fray. Holding aloft the Red Grail, Corbulo let out a mighty battle cry and pointed his chainsword Heaven's Teeth toward the lumbering horrors. Then, as one, the Blood Angels charged, and inspired by the presence of the grail they fought without fear or mercy, driving back the hulking beasts in a storm of adamantium teeth and explosive bolts.

While Corbulo secured the crumbling western flank Aphael held the centre. The Captain and his Command Squad fought with cold, steady detachment. Where the skyborne beasts tried to strafe the defenders' ranks Aphael directed streams of hammering bolter fire to drive them back. Meanwhile, any weapon-beast bold enough to scale the mounds of corpses and rubble piled before the Space Marines was blasted into bloody ruin. The Blood Angels knew their duty, and did it well. Yet the clock was ticking, and the foe grew ever more numerous. Aphael knew that, if Dante did not act soon, he and his men would be lost.







INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH



Battle raged unchecked upon the worlds of Asphodex, Lysios and Aeros, as the Blood Angels and their allies held back the swarming Tyranids long enough for the Magnovitrium to be aligned. Meanwhile, upon the blasted planet of Tartoros, the Necrons moved to secure the great solar mirror and bring Anrakyr's plans to destroy Aeros to terrible fruition.

As Dante and Anrakyr's armies defended the cogitator spires on Asphodex, Seth and his alliance of Flesh Tearers and Adepta Sororitas fought to hold the Solarium uplink on the Lysios. At the same time, the combined forces of Zarathusa the Ineffable and Captain Aphael captured the vapour-conveyor on Aeros. However, on Tartoros disaster threatened to upset the plan. Sensor scans and augur sweeps had revealed Cryptus' innermost planet to have been entirely overrun by the Tyranids, its void domes shattered and its defenders wiped out. Anrakyr had hoped that the Hive Mind would therefore already have reclaimed its monsters from that world, leaving it undefended. Even so he dispatched a force of Necron Warriors to protect the Cryptek, Zykor, while he restored the Magnovitrium.

Using the ancient dolmen gates that linked Perdita and Tartoros, Zykor and a hundred warriors crossed the gulf of space in seconds. As they appeared on the planet, they found not the dead world they had anticipated, but one in the throes of annihilation. Broods of Carnifexes and even larger siege-beasts roamed the molten landscape, their scarred carapaces shimmering through the heat haze as they smashed apart what remained of the Imperium's centuries of colonisation. The destruction of the void domes – and the ancient structures they concealed – had badly interrupted the power flow of the Magnovitrium, and as the mirror sailed through the skies of Tartoros it was clear that its surface had dulled and its orbit was decaying.

Zykor was conscious that his place as Anrakyr's chief Cryptek was dependant upon success here. Thus, despite the dire situation, he refused to request assistance, instead attempting to reach the Magnovitrium's controls. These were hidden within the torn remains of the largest of the Imperium's void domes, where an ancient Necron command plinth was linked via arcane tethers to the solar mirror high above. However, for every mile the Necron army advanced it suffered horrific casualties. Warriors were sent plummeting into flaming fissures as the ground broke under their feet, or were torn into chunks as huge Tyranid beasts fell upon them. Zykor's powers gave his warriors an edge, wreathing them in shields of living lightning or consuming the Tyranid monsters in jets of flame. Yet even so, only a handful of his bodyguard remained by the time they reached the ridge above the ruined dome. As the Cryptek scanned the rubble below, he could see it was alive with Tyranid monsters.

Still Zykor, arrogant and paranoid beyond words, refused to admit defeat. The Cyptek stood surrounded by the remains of his army as the lumbering bio-beasts crashed up the dusty ridge, leaving clouds of ash and embers in their wake. Zykor and his minions gunned down several of

the charging monsters, yet as the first Carnifex crested the lip of the cliff the Necron formation caved before it. Zykor could only watch as the monsters tore their way toward him through his warriors; as metallic limbs and skulls rained down around him, the Cryptek finally allowed that he might have miscalculated somewhat. As the roaring horrors closed in from all sides, Zykor sent a resigned burst of data through the void. He warned Anrakyr of his failure, and of the rapidly deteriorating situation on Tartoros. Seconds later, he was torn limb from finely crafted limb.

As Anrakyr received the missive, he would have scowled had his face still been capable of such expressions. Without control of the Magnovitrium the Overlord's plan was for nought, and the temporary victories against the Hive Mind would soon be reversed. Worse, with the Magnovitrium's power supply failing, it could only be so long before the star mirror fell out of the sky altogether. Anrakyr considered his options in the blink of an eye. The bulk of his army still fought to hold the cogitator spires, and could not be spared. Perdita's only wakeful warriors had been squandered for the sake of Zykor's pride – it would be some time before they, or the Cryptek, were of any use in battle. For a moment, the Traveller froze in place as he realised that he did not possess sufficient warriors to avert the impending disaster.

However, unbeknownst to the Necron Overlord, his allies had been making their own contingency plans. Commander Dante had not underestimated the Hive Mind's hold upon the molten planet, nor had he placed his complete faith in the Necrons' ability to capture the Magnovitrium. Before the attack on the Fabricae District, the Chapter Master had committed those of his company that had succumbed to the Black Rage to a Strike Cruiser. That cruiser now hung in orbit above Tartoros. Even as Zykor was torn apart, the first Death Company Drop Pods and Stormravens were plummeting through the world's upper atmosphere, their armoured hulls fire-edged black shadows stark against the void.

Now the fate of the system, and perhaps even of Baal itself, would fall to these doomed warriors. Anrakyr, monitoring the vox-transmissions of his primitive allies, was forced to concede that the battle on Tartoros was now in their hands. However, while he could not send warriors to claim the Magnovitrium controls, he could certainly do something about rescuing the device itself. With a flicker of thought he commanded his C'tan Shard. The Burning One rose from the smouldering ruins of the Fabricae District, a flaming corona flickering around its outstretched limbs. Then, in a burst of fire, the C'tan leapt into the atmosphere above Phodia and sailed off across the stars.





The first members of the Death Company entered the thin atmosphere of Tartoros, hurling themselves from the assault ramps of Stormravens miles above the ruined Magnovitrium control dome. Their jump packs silent, the black-armoured warriors hurtled down through the sky, helmet lenses reflecting the molten landscape as it rushed up to meet them. Moments before they crashed into the ground the Space Marines fired their turbines, arresting their terminal plummet in plumes of flame and smoke. As soon as their boots hit the ground they threw themselves into the Tyranid swarm-beasts, bolt pistols and chainblades ripping apart thick chitinous hides.

The second wave of the Death Company came across the burning plain, having made their landing beyond the edges of the monstrous horde, out in the fire-cursed wilds of Tartoros. Black Rhinos kicked up clouds of smoking soil as they charged, their drivers eager to deliver their frenzied cargo into the fray. In the lead Rhino, Brother-Chaplain Arophan guided his brothers toward the prey, his mind divided between his duty to his fallen brothers and the singular mission his Chapter Master had entrusted to him: he was to trigger the Magnovitrium.



The broods of Carnifexes that had been fixated with ripping apart the remains of the void dome turned to face the furious assault, hissing their rage at the invaders. Space Marines and bio-monsters crashed together in sprays of blood and ichor. A thunder hammer burst apart the chest of a Tyrannofex, while nearby a chainsword was buried in the gullet of a Carnifex in a spray of purple gore. However, for every mighty beast the Death Company felled, some of their own warriors were sent crashing to the ground in great gouts of blood. A set of four long, curved talons impaled a Space Marine, lifting him into the air. The warrior cursed and fought on until the talons suddenly pulled apart, sending crimson chunks in all directions. An Exocrine lumbered out of the rubble, spraying bio-plasma into the squad before it. The caustic fluid burned away ceramite and flesh, several Space Marines falling to die in agony on the ground as their legs melted out from under them, but many more of the Death Company fought on, even those missing limbs or faces.

High above the battle, the C'tan Shard streaked across the void faster than any Imperial vessel. Then, with the fury of an orbital strike, the Burning One thundered down into Tartoros, hitting the ground and sending out a shockwave of fire and death. Broods of bio-horrors caught in the Shard's arrival were either turned to super-heated mist or scattered in billowing clouds of ash. Sweeping across the plain, the star god joined the fight for the shattered

void dome, while in its shadow Arophan guided the Death Company in their violent assault, marshalling them away from the fiery giant now striding in their midst.

Together they wreaked a terrible toll on their foes, but the Burning One's aid was to be short-lived. It was Anraky's will that the C'tan blunt the Tyranid reinforcements streaming in from the wastes, and this it did, thinning out the chitinous tide and buying precious time for the Death Company. Then, as suddenly as it had arrived, the C'tan streaked off into the void towards the star-mirror that floated far above.

The huge solar reflector was clogged with layers of alien spores, and cradled in a network of Imperial machinery that was sparking and dying without power to sustain it. The Burning One reached out searing fingers, each one filled with the heat of a star, and poured itself into the Magnovitrium. As the C'tan's essence filled the ancient device it burned away both Tyranid and human adornments. Spore clusters popped and turned to boiling mist, while complex man-made gantry networks buckled and tumbled away into the void. Within minutes the solar mirror was as the Necrons had created it, a thing of simple and terrible power.



Meanwhile on the ground, for all their fury, the Death Company were being destroyed. From orbit, augur-lenses followed the battle, sending pict-captures back to Dante via relays on the Blade of Vengeance. These images showed the Death Company fighting in an ever-shrinking knot of warriors, as the shadows of their enemies continued to increase in number. From all across the burning landscape of Tartoros, dust trails could be seen as alien beasts converged upon the void dome. In the centre of the ruin Arophan and a score of his brothers fought on. Most of their Rhinos had been reduced to smoking piles of wreckage, the thick black smoke mixing with the sulphurous clouds coiling up from the broken landscape. Baked by radiation and still bearing the scars of the first battle of Tartoros, the monstrous swarm was a terrible sight to behold. Hissing and roaring, the bio-beasts were practically impossible to put down, rising again and again to impale Space Marines, drench them in acidic bile or pulverise them with massive living shells.

The Chaplain had entered the battle with the hope of destroying the xenos, but now he could see that was not to be. Accepting his fate, he guided his brothers toward the centre of the ruins and directed them to hold back the swarm. Meanwhile, he set about completing his mission and sought out the Magnovitrium's triggering device.





STRIKE FORCE MORTALIS

The mission to Tartoros was one of extreme peril, the burning world overrun by broods of massive Tyranid monsters and the landscape itself hostile to all life. For this deadly war zone Dante formed his surviving Death Company into Strike Force Mortalis, and charged its Chaplain with the activation of the Magnovitrium. Theirs would be a deperate endeavour, and in the midst of the blood and chaos of the attack, aid would come from an unexpected quarter.

A **BROTHER-CHAPLAIN AROPHAN**
Arophan was chosen by Dante to lead the Death Company to Tartoros, the Chaplain one of the commander's most trusted warriors. Arophan knew it was unlikely he would return from the molten planet, but took his vows before the Chapter Master that he would complete his mission no matter the cost.

B **AROPHAN'S LAMENT**
Among the Death Company of Strike Force Mortalis were the doomed brothers of Arophan's Lament. These lost brethren would form a ceramite shadow around the Chaplain during the attack – and though they would ultimately perish to a man, their sacrifice would be in the name of their Primarch, and to the glory of their Chapter.

C **WINGS OF MORTALIS**
The primary Death Company assault came from above, scores of black-armoured warriors descending upon trails of fire as they made a jump pack assault. These warriors struck like a storm of ceramite into the centre of the void dome ruins. Arophan formed them into a single brutal spear thrust, aimed to cripple and destroy their foes.

D **IRON FIST OF MORTALIS**
The Death Company assault on Tartoros was also directed across the burning plains. Mounted in Rhinos, the ground-based Death Company Marines used the speed and armour of their vehicles to punch a hole in the alien defences, the tanks then acting as support platforms as the black-armoured warriors charged into the fray.



E RAVEN MORTALIS

The airborne squads of the Death Company were carried into battle aboard Stormravens, having descended from the edge of the atmosphere. The craft dubbed the *Raven Mortalis* would remain in close support of their ground forces, using its heavy weapons to thin the herds of bio-beasts as they closed in upon the Death Company.

F PURGERIUS THE FORGOTTEN

It is a tragedy when a battle-brother falls to the Black Rage, even more so when a Dreadnought does so. Purgerius was an ancient hero of the Chapter, interred into his sarcophagus centuries ago. When he was awoken for the defence of Cryptus he was changed, and Dante had no choice but to assign him to the Death Company.

G HELSTERN, BROTHER OF BLOOD

The Dreadnought Helstern was well known to his brothers, having been sealed within his war machine only a few decades before the battles for Cryptus. During the fighting on Tartoros, Helstern fought with great fury, using his machine-given strength to rip apart his foes.

H THE SANGUINOR

A mythic icon of the Chapter, the Sanguinor is a being shrouded in mystery. Stories say that the Sanguinor only appears in the Blood Angels' hour of need, changing the course of battle for reasons known only to the golden warrior. So it was on Tartoros, when he descended from the skies to aid the Death Company before vanishing just as abruptly as he had appeared.

THE DOOMED OF TARTOROS

Strike Force Mortalis was formed from the gathered Death Company of the Blood Angels' 1st and 2nd Companies. Dante despatched the doomed warriors to the burning world of Tartoros to trigger the Magnovitrium. It would be a desperate battle in a world overrun by lumbering Tyranid monstrosities, but one that the Blood Angels could not afford to lose.



The Weeping Skull marked out those that had survived the battles on Asphodex and were yet to find death.



Though Arophan would not carry his back banner to Tartoros, it would bear a record of his deeds there.

CHAPLAIN AROPHAN

Among a company of madmen, the Chaplain Arophan was a beacon of sanity. It fell to Arophan to guide the Death Company of Strike Force Mortalis, his litanies and prayers the thin thread that would direct the doomed warriors toward their foes. As befits his rank, Arophan carries the crozius arcanum and wears the skull mask common to the Chaplains of the Adeptus Astartes. The only aspect of Arophan's armour that shows his allegiance to his Chapter is his shoulder pad, his sombre black armour fitting for his role as the final guide for his lost brothers.

BROTHER EPHALOS

Ephalos had struggled for decades with the Black Rage, feeling a piece of his soul being flayed away in every battle by the mayhem of war. When he lost his left eye to the Ork Warboss Ripgutz, slaying the beast even as it clawed at his face, the shadows over his mind began to darken. By the time Ephalos was called upon to defend the Cryptus System the Black Rage had taken hold of him. He now fought a different foe, born in the recesses of his mind. When Ephalos landed on Tartoros it was not the spawn of the Hive Mind he saw, but instead traitor war engines of old.



Tartoros campaign badge depicting the twin Cryptan Suns blazing beside the sacred blood drop



BROTHER RAFARRI

Brother Rafarri was a Tactical Marine of the 2nd Company, and though he has blackened his armour he retains the weapons and wargear of his previous life. However, dozens of details signify the hold the Black Rage has upon his mind; blood drops and crimson saltires cover his armour, while even his boltgun bears the iconography of the Death Company. Purity seals are commonly seen on battle-brothers fallen to the Black Rage – even more so than on normal Space Marines – and Brother Rafarri adorned his armour with many of these sacred honours.



BEASTS OF THE BURNING PLAINS

The Hive Mind spawned its largest and most destructive beasts to smash through the defences on Tartoros. These hulking brutes proved more than a match for the Imperium's defenders and within a day the void domes of Tartoros lay in ruins. When Strike Force Mortalis made planetfall the shimmering plains of the burning planet were alive with massive creatures, each one a veritable war machine of muscle and chitin.

A BEASTLORD OF THE BURNING PLAIN

The Tyranids on Tartoros were led by an ancient horror of the hive fleets known only to the defenders as the Beastlord of the Burning Plain. An alpha beast among the herds of hulking Tyranid bio-creatures, it proved to be practically unkillable, suffering under the heavy guns of the Blood Angels only to return time and again.

B SHREDDER BEASTS

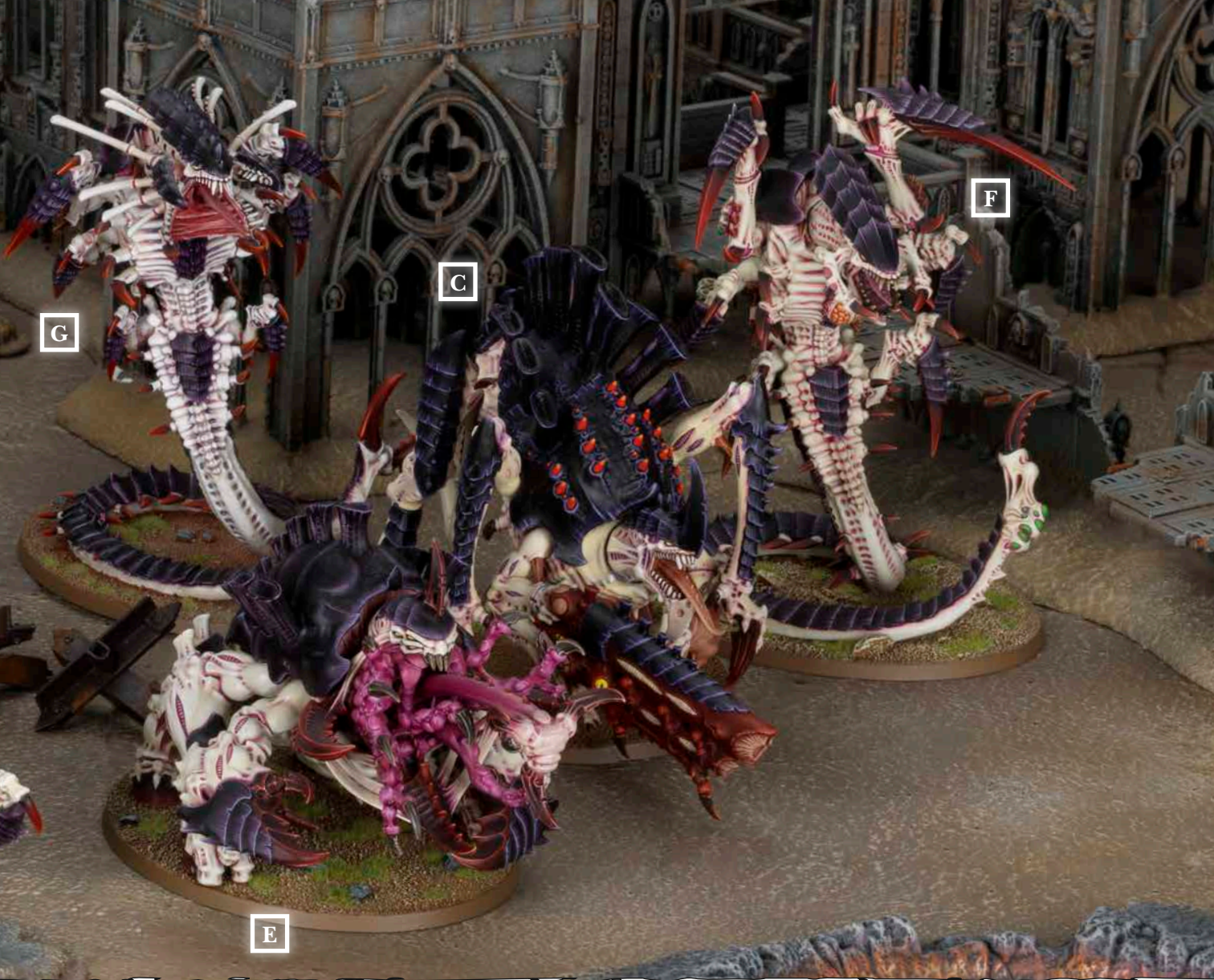
The Death Company made little or no distinction between the swarms of Tartoros, identifying them in more lucid moments only by the weapons they carried. Most numerous of these were the 'Shredder Beasts' which carried huge stranglegorn cannons.

C RUPTURE FIENDS

Though the Death Company had few vehicles, the Rupture Fiend Tyrannofexes had no shortage of targets. Their heavy weapons would blow holes in the ruins, allowing new avenues of attack for the Carnifexes, while those Space Marines unfortunate enough to be hit by their rupture cannons would implode instantly and messily.

D CAUSTIC COLOSSI

The Exocrines were especially deadly to the Death Company, their bio-plasmic discharge able to burn through ceramite in seconds and turn a battle-brother into little more than disintegrating bone and blood.



E JAWS OF THE VOID

Death Company battle-brothers are extraordinarily difficult to kill, such is the superhuman stamina their rage gives them. However, the Haruspex with its vast fanged maw was able to devour its foes whole, and more than one Space Marine was dragged to his doom still struggling against the Jaws of the Void.

F FYREWORMS

Dozens of Trygons slithered across the flaming ground of Tartoros, towering over their prey with snapping jaws and razor-sharp talons. Their chitin scarred and burnt by exposure to the caustic Tartoros atmosphere, the very touch of these beasts seared away armour and flesh.

G MAW-HORRORS

Like massive rift-sharks stalking their prey, these Mawlocs swam through the earth beneath the burning plains as they hunted. The beasts on the surface would drive their foes onto open ground, where the Mawlocs would erupt to consume them.

HORRORS OF THE HIVE MIND

Tartoros was a scarred world even before the coming of Hive Fleet Leviathan. After the Imperium's garrison had been destroyed and devoured, the planet was quickly overrun by swarms of massive Tyranid monstrosities which roamed across the burning plains, seeking out survivors and anything foolish enough to try to descend from space.

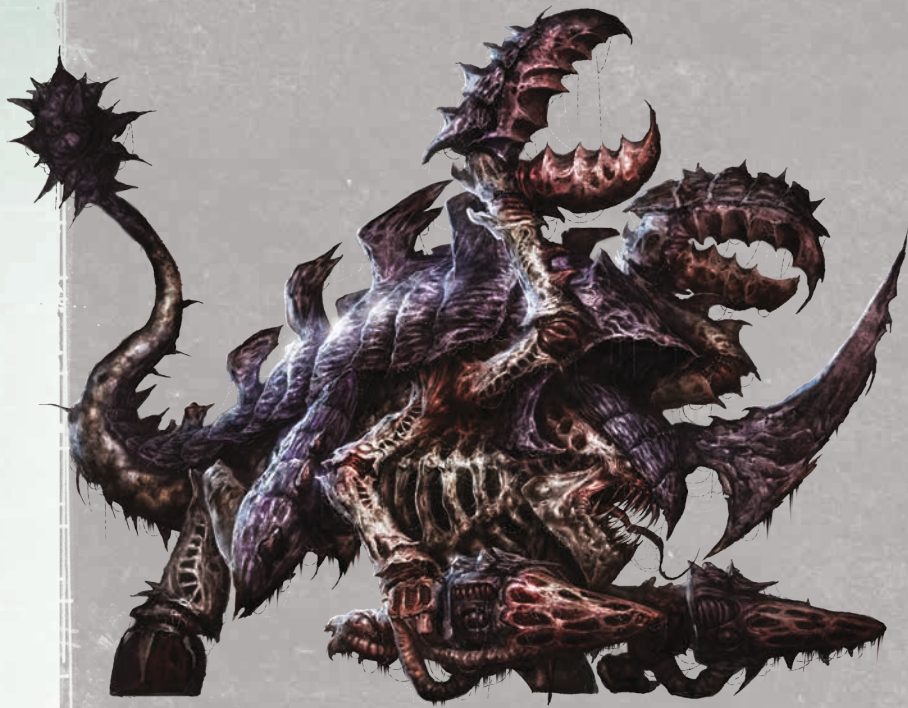


TYRANNOFEX

Likened to the much larger bio-titans, Tyrannofexes are massive and powerful creatures that carry weapons capable of knocking out almost any tank fielded by the Imperium. Dozens of these horrors clustered around the ruins of the void shielded settlements on Tartoros, their rupture cannons sweeping the horizon for signs of prey. In time their carapaces would be burned by the harsh radiation of the twin Cryptan suns, and their pale flesh bleached. However, Tyrannofexes are immensely resilient creatures and suffered no lasting harm from the deadly environment.

HARUSPEX

Broods of Haruspexes gored themselves upon the shattered remains of the void domes and their defenders. In their hunger to strip the world clean of biomass, these horrific feeder beasts ripped through walls and chambers, scattering the machinery of the Adeptus Mechanicus as they probed the rubble for the scorched corpses of Astra Militarum soldiers and still-twitching Servitors. When Strike Force Mortalis came screaming down from the burning skies these hulking brutes were among the first to bare their fangs, crawling out of the broken defences with their mouthparts spread wide.



CARNIFEX

Hundreds of Carnifexes infested the scorched surface of Tartoros, the beasts thundering across the burnt wastes and hissing at the boiling skies. These creatures came in a wide variety of forms, displaying biomorphs like bladed tails, razor sharp tusks for impaling their foes and venom cysts that pumped caustic liquids onto their talons. The Carnifexes also carried a myriad of bio-weaponry, from heavy venom cannons and stranglenthorn cannons to massive crushing claws, each one easily capable of ripping open the side of a Land Raider or Rhino.



THE DARKEST RAGE



Outside the ruins of the primary void dome, the Death Company were losing the battle for Tartoros. The shock of the Blood Angels' assault was over, and though it had torn a ragged hole in the siege-beast swarm, the Tyranids were far from broken. For every massive bioform that had fallen, scores more seemed to be materialising out of the wastes, drawn from the other ruined domes by the sounds of fighting and the scent of blood.

Behind a barricade of rubble and black-armoured bodies, the surviving Death Company battle-brothers fought on. Among them, the fallen brother once known as Sergeant Vetus stood defiant, his bolter hammering into the enemy in short, brutal bursts. In his eyes, the sergeant fought not against the bio-beasts of the Hive Mind but an army of traitor war machines. Memories that were not his own overlaid the ruins of the void dome with the broken battlefields of Terra, and Vetus knew he fought not only for himself but the very fate of the Imperium.

His battle-brothers fought with maniac ferocity, striving on even with limbs torn away and bones crushed to powder. Yet they were dying one by one. For every hulking foe that was torn apart by Krak grenades or crackling power fists, another battle-brother or two were pulverised, dismembered or dissolved. The enemy numbers seemed to be growing by the moment, but Vetus and his brothers were Blood Angels, the Sons of Sanguinius, and they feared only the shame of defeat or the sin of duty unfinished.

While the Death Company held the line, Brother-Chaplain Arophan had fallen back in search of the Magnovitrium controls. Yet among the rubble their location had become lost, the maps of the Tartoros void domes next to useless in the face of the brutal damage done by the monstrous Tyranid swarm. Arophan's duty was clear, however, and he would complete it even should it mean his demise. High overhead, the C'tan Shard waited within the Magnovitrium's gleaming mirrors. Its power crackled across the surfaces of the device, its necrodermis melded with the reflective planes. The Burning One had corrected the Magnovitrium's decaying orbit, and augmented the mighty device with a portion of its own godly power. Yet the C'tan Shard was but a single sliver of a once-great mind. It could follow its master's orders, could even pour its own might into the Magnovitrium's blast once it was triggered. It could not, however, subvert the device's failsafes or override its firing protocols – such improvisation was simply beyond the god-shard's ability to conceive. And so it hung in space, poised on the cusp of victory, yet unable to seize it.

Amid the ruins of the void dome, Chaplain Arophan sought methodically for the Magnovitrium control plinth. The weight of countless lives bore down upon his shoulders,

but centuries of psycho-conditioning and boundless faith held panic at bay. The Chaplain would complete his mission, no matter what it took. Meanwhile, Vetus and his comrades made their last stand. The sergeant's bolter spent, he used the weapon as a club, brutally crushing anything that came within reach. Vetus didn't see the claw that opened up his side, only the warm wash of blood alerting him to his mortal wound. Even as his strength began to ebb away the sergeant fought on, cursing the traitors that had turned their backs upon the Emperor.

Then the unimaginable happened. A beam of light thrust down from the scoured skies of Tartoros, pure and constant in its glory. From within the beam a golden shape appeared, a winged warrior descending from the heavens like an angel of legend. Vetus looked upon this blessed warrior and believed that the Primarch himself had come to his aid, for no other could embody the grace and power of the Blood Angels so. With a wild cry, the fallen brother praised the Emperor for his salvation and held back the cold embrace of death for a few moments more.

Yet the golden angel was not the Primarch reborn, but the Sanguinor. A figure of legend, the Sanguinor was said to intervene only in the Blood Angels' darkest days. Now the Sanguinor fell upon the Tyranids in all his resplendent glory, a vengeful angel come to aid his ailing brothers.

White wings spread wide, the Sanguinor swept through the Tyranids' midst. His flickering glaive lashed out, a quickfire flurry of perfect blows that lopped sickle limbs from armoured bodies, and stove in bone-ridged skulls. With a snap of his wings and an elegant twist, the Sanguinor spiralled clear of the monstrous claws that swept out for him. With the eyes of the Death Company upon him, the Sanguinor beat his wings several times, rising once more above the monstrous swarm. Then he dived again, both hands on the hilt of his downward-pointed blade. He crashed down upon a Tyrannofex, the impact of his armoured feet cracking the thing's carapace even as his sword slammed clean through the top of its head and out through its slaving jaw. Ichor sprayed as the beast crashed forward. The Sanguinor leapt clear, executing a perfect forward roll and coming up with his blade swinging. Another Carnifex fell, its thorax hacked almost in two, before the Sanguinor leapt away again, untouched.

And so on it went. With a howl, the last few Death Company brothers hurled themselves upon the foe anew, inspired by the example of this shining angel and reaping a bloody tally of the xenos. The Tyranids charged mindlessly forward, the void dome forgotten as they attempted to ensnare this deadly new prey. Meanwhile, within the ruins, Arophan had finally located his objective.



Arophan climbed over the rubble, a chaotic tangle of twisted metal and corpses. Somewhere nearby was the Magnovitrium trigger device, hidden under this mess of debris. Glancing over his shoulder, the Chaplain saw another battle-brother torn apart by massive crab-like claws, the two halves of the Death Company were mounting with terrible inevitability, but Arophan knew his charges, and trusted them to hold back the swarm for just a little longer. Turning his back, he pressed on into the shattered void dome.

Then he saw it, the strange black metal plinth, so obviously not of the Imperium that it stood out against the remains of the structure around it. Raising his bolt pistol, Arophan pushed toward the device, eyes scanning the shadows for enemies. He had not gone more than three paces when the massive beast appeared. It was the largest Carnifex Arophan had ever seen. More disturbing than its size, or the latticework of scars upon its carapace, was the cold purpose the Chaplain could see glinting in its eyes. Something told Arophan that it was no accident the beast was here. It had been waiting for him.

Without fear Arophan charged forward, firing his pistol as he ran. The mass-reactive bolts burst in showers of chitin upon the beast's hide, but it seemed not to notice them at all. With a dull growl the creature lurched forward, lifting its long talons and opening a maw ringed with razor sharp teeth. Arophan was still yards away, his crozius raised high, when the beast fired its bio-cannon, the lashing shell striking him in the chest. Thrown from his feet and blinded by pain, the Chaplain lost his grip upon his pistol as he hit the ground.

His vision swimming before his eyes, Arophan tried to rise, but the gobbet of ammunition embedded in his chest spread out lashing, barbed tendrils. As he stared down at the pod, a writhing tendril coiled around each of his gauntlets, and another coiled up to encircle his neck. Then the beast loomed over him, its talons raised to run him through. Arophan prepared for death.

Suddenly, a light like nothing he had ever seen filled the ruined chamber. Arophan forgot his pain, forgot the beast, even forgot his mission in the moment that brilliant beam of light fell upon him. Though the glare, the Chaplain saw a winged shape descend from above, and wondered if it was his Primarch come to claim his soul. In his daze, though, the alien stench of the writhing seed pod remained all too real. As the angelic shape landed, Arophan knew it was not his Primarch he looked upon, but the Sanguinor.

The creature turned to face the new threat, and the Sanguinor's silver blade flashed through the shadows to parry the Carnifex's brutal assault. As beast and legend fought in a blur of steel and brutal talon strikes, Arophan hauled himself across the broken ground. Each yard was agony, but he endured. As he neared the plinth he glanced back to see the Sanguinor now fighting off three Carnifexes, the mythical warrior moving fluidly between their assaults to carve great bloody furrows in their flesh. With the last of his strength Arophan reached out to the plinth and placed his hand upon its rune of activation.

Out in the void, the Magnovitrium erupted in a blaze of light.





The ground rocked under Captain Aphael's feet as another of the massive spore mines tore a chunk from the street. Staggering back from the cloud of dust and debris, he could see the ground before him turning to slag. With a drawn-out groan it vanished into the void below and another screaming hole appeared in the surface of the mining platform. This had become the Hive Mind's latest tactic, and it seemed the alien swarm was set upon the destruction of the flying city and all on it.

Behind the Captain's position his company's Techmarines were droning prayers over the great vapour-conveyor's machine spirit, coaxing it to life, even as the Tyranids tore at it from every angle. Aphael could not tell if the aliens knew what the Blood Angels were planning, or if this was merely part of their wholesale destruction of Aeros. Either way, it would only be a matter of time before the giant pipeline was ruptured.

Out of the smoke and debris a fresh wave of bio-horrors charged the Blood Angels lines. Aphael swore and levelled his plasma pistol at the nearest gaunt, a flash of blazing light turning it into a thing more gaseous than solid. To his left and right his brothers fired into the xenos with precision bolter drill, the rhythmic hammering of their guns accompanied by the metallic rain of spent casings at their feet. It was a measure of the Space Marines' discipline that not a single creature came closer than a dozen yards to their line, each one pulled apart by bursts of bolt shells, their mangled remains falling broken to the ground.



Empty magazines were ejected from smoking guns, and new ones snapped into place, ready for the next assault. Aphael scanned the skies, expecting more spore mine strikes or a return of the large flying horrors. However, before this new wave appeared, the platform suddenly shuddered beneath the Blood Angel's feet. Aphael looked up the length of the conveyor, his gaze following the impossibly long pipeline into the writhing clouds miles overhead. As the shuddering subsided the Captain saw the clouds begin to glow.

'All squads, pull back to your transports!' Aphael called over the vox, having to shout to avoid his words becoming lost in the growing roar high above.

The Blood Angels fought as they retreated, hurling grenades and firing their guns blind as they ran across the broken mining platform toward their waiting Stormravens. Rounds streaking past his head, Aphael sent vivid blasts of plasma into the rising tide of Tyranids that strived to drown his brothers before they could escape. The Captain was among the last to reach the extraction point, by which time the glow in the sky had grown too bright to look at. As he hit the assault ramp of his aircraft Aphael saw a Guardsman cowering among the ruins, and for a moment the two locked eyes: Aphael's cold and hard as ice, the Guardsman filled with terror and wonder to be so close to one of the blessed Adeptus Astartes.

Without thought Aphael ran over to the man, heaving him up to his feet and hurling him in the direction of the Stormraven. As he turned a Hormagaunt crested the ruined wall, its claws and fangs reaching for the Captain. Reflexively, Aphael punched it in the face, sending the beast tumbling back out of sight. Then he was back on the assault ramp, the Guardsman scrambling up into the hold behind him. As the Stormraven rose into the air, swarms of gaunts flooded across the ground where it had been a second before, dozens of them leaping up to try and get at the Captain. He braced himself with one arm in the open ramp-way, and kicked back those that found purchase, or blew their heads to purple mist with precise blasts of his pistol.

As the Stormraven climbed it turned and Aphael, from his vantage point on the assault ramp, could see the fire burn its way down through the clouds towards the refinery. The pipeline was consumed as the promethium inside ignited, and like a funnel of flame it raced down past the retreating Stormravens. As it passed, Aphael could see the Tyranids that had been clinging to the conveyor burning and tumbling into the void, their hisses lost in the roaring wind and sound of burning fuel.

Then the fires hit the refinery platform and the world came apart. It took Aphael's helmet photolenses a second to recover and just as the world turned from white to grey his Stormraven was hurled across the sky by the shockwave. Only Aphael's superhuman strength stopped him from being ripped out into space. Below the craft the sky was burning and a terrible chain reaction had begun in the heart of Aeros. The life of the gas giant could now be measured in seconds.

Triggering the assault ramp seals, Aphael ordered his pilot to break for high orbit, and in moments the only sounds were the roar of the Stormraven's turbines, and hidden beneath it the barely discernible screams of the Guardsman Aphael had saved.

DEATH OF WORLDS



When the Magnovitrium destroyed Aeros it signalled the doom of the Cryptus System. While the Hive Mind had destroyed its cities and killed its people, the destruction of the gas giant was a catastrophe on an epic scale. The celestial landscape of an entire star system and the surrounding void would be changed forever.

The solar beam from the Magnovitrium shot out across the system like a spear of fire, incinerating everything in its path. Bio-ships caught in its searing flames shrivelled and scattered like ash upon the wind, while smaller beasts simply ceased to be. Channelled by the planetary relays, the beam thrust into Aeros, lighting up its clouds in a conflagration of light, and triggering a chain reaction of titanic proportions. When the gas giant exploded it sent out a shockwave hammering across the system.

The carnage it caused was almost unimaginable. The Blood Angels and their allies sheltered from its fury wherever they could, hiding their ships behind planets, or taking refuge in the ruins of the Cryptan cities, their faces turned from the sky. Even so, there were losses, and many battle-brothers, Sisters of Battle and Astra Militarum were lost, especially among those fighting on Aeros, who had next to no opportunity to flee. However, for every man and woman the shockwave killed, thousands of Tyranids were destroyed. Bio-ships were torn apart and scattered like toys in the void while entire swarms perished under punishing meteor showers and in the geological upheavals triggered by the destruction of the gas giant.

Only the Necrons weathered the cataclysm unscathed. On Asphodex, moments before the wave struck, Anrakyr's armies phased out – returning to the war-crypts of Perdita. To the Tyranids and Blood Angels it was as if the Necrons had been blown away upon the celestial winds, their forms becoming ghostly outlines before vanishing altogether. Zarathusa's host also escaped the destruction of Aeros, phasing back to their fleet of harvest ships before engaging their inertialess drives and outrunning the shockwave in a flare of relativistic energy. Safe beneath a mile of snow and ice on their tomb world, the Necron Overlords watched with satisfaction as the Tyranid tendril headed for the planet was swept away like so much dust. Across the system, when the wave reached the Magnovitrium, its mirrors shattered into a billion fragments and the Burning One soared free to feed upon the solar winds.

No sooner had the wave subsided than Dante ordered his companies to fall back. Though billions of Tyranids had been killed, billions more remained. Dante knew that it would only be a matter of time before the Hive Mind recovered and descended upon the Blood Angels. There could be no further victory here for the Adeptus Astartes.

As swiftly as they had arrived, the Blood Angels withdrew into orbit. Even so, they were forced to fight dozens of bloody rearguard actions. In the ruins of Port Helos the 2nd Company manned the battle-scarred walls against a steadily rising tide of fanged horrors as General Dhrost and the other survivors boarded transports. The old Cadian commander took one last look at Asphodex as he climbed the Stormraven's assault ramp, his tired eyes seeing not a ruined city but a graveyard where millions of his men had met their end. Dante was the last to leave, abandoning the scorched battlefields of the Fabricae District once he was sure his brothers and the bodies of the Blood Angels fallen were safely on their way into orbit. As a parting gift for the xenos the Chapter Master ordered his fleet to empty their magazines into Phodia. Macro cannon shells, lance fire and torpedoes rained down upon the city, completing the work the wave had begun. What was left of the Imperium's grand structures became unrecognizable under the onslaught of orbital fire, and the inferno that rolled out across the ruins killed anything that remained. By the time Dante's Stormraven reached the *Blade of Vengeance* most of Phodia had been reduced to an ocean of twisted plasteel and fractured ferrocrete.

After the final bombs had fallen, the deafening roar of destruction became a dull crackle of burning buildings and bodies. As the seething skies calmed, something stirred within the ruin. Then, one by one, Tyranids began to emerge from the rubble, their chitin scorched and scarred but the hunger in their eyes undimmed by the fury of the Blood Angels' parting salvo. Among them a Hive Tyrant, its wings ragged and torn, climbed to the top of a fallen statue to the God-Emperor and let out a long hiss at the sky.





On Lysios the arrival of the shockwave was almost the doom of the Flesh Tearers and their allies. The surviving Space Marines and Sisters of Battle fought in an ever-shrinking circle around the crumbling steps of the cathedrum. All around them the poison fog rolled in, filled with fanged and clawed bio-horrors. Then the edge of celestial wave struck the world and Seth and Amity watched as the clouds parted and a wall of rubble rolled down upon them. However, it never reached the cathedrum. Moments before the wave would have crushed the Flesh Tearers and Sisters of Battle to nothing, the cathedrum's ancient void shields crackled to life, triggered by their long-dormant salvation protocols.

Seth watched as the alien swarm was pulverised against the shield by the torn surface of Lysios. Nearby, Amity and her sisters fell to their knees, offering up prayers to the God-Emperor for their survival. The old void shields lasted only minutes before their decaying generators finally failed, but it had been enough, and as the shimmering field fell the defenders beheld a landscape scoured clean of Tyranids.

Over the next hours the Blood Angels and Flesh Tearers fleets gathered above the ruins of Asphodex. The 6th Company, having saved those citizens and ships they could from the evacuation fleet, rejoined Dante and Seth. Resistance was still light, and the few isolated bio-ships that swam out of the void to attack the Space Marines were swiftly obliterated by precise macro cannon salvos and hellfire torpedoes. Less than half of the Adeptus Astartes that had come to the Cryptus System remained, and the merest fraction of the thousands of Astra Militarum had been saved. Yet it was still a victory of a kind, as there was little left for those Tyranids that survived to feast upon.


The Blood Angels had done their duty for the Imperium and the Emperor, and perhaps done enough that Baal's defences might hold where the Shieldworlds' had failed. Turning his fleet from Asphodex, Dante charted a course across the Aegis Diamando and back to his home world, his mind already moving on to the battle to come.

For days the torn and broken limbs of the Tyranid tendril crawled back together. In the ashes of the Cryptan worlds Rippers fed upon the dead and dying, picking the meat from the ruins like a starving man scraping the bottom of his bowl. In the void, crippled bio-ships latched onto their dead counterparts or thrust probing tentacles deep into the gutted hulls of Imperial cruisers, seeking out the frozen remains of their crew.

Toxic air and poisoned soil were scoured clean of biomass, until nothing remained but radiation-washed wastelands and the silent ruins of once great cities. In less than a week, Hive Fleet Leviathan had destroyed a star system of the Imperium that had endured for millennia, its billions of citizens and ancient societies swept away like so much dust.

With a psychic signal from the Hive Mind, the remains of the Cryptoid Tendril set off into the darkness, their chitinous prows pointed toward a flickering red star.





Dante stood on the deck of the *Blade of Vengeance* and watched the world die. Beyond the void shield that divided the Battle Barge's massive hanger bay from the void, *Asphodex* was little more than a blackened husk crawling with shadows. Dante tried to find a sense of victory in what felt like an unquestionable defeat. Billions of Tyranids had been destroyed, but at the cost of an entire star system.

The price to the Chapter had also been dangerously high, and as the Commander looked away from the corpse of the planet he had tried to save it was to behold the battered remains of the 2nd Company, still disembarking from their transports, carrying the wounded and the dead down the ramps of *Stormravens* scarred by bio-weapons and scorched by the hard burn back into orbit.

However, even after surviving the hellish meat-grinder of *Asphodex* and its ruined cityscape, the Blood Angels showed no signs of the shadow that hung over their retreat. Heads held high and eyes bright with purpose, their faith in their Chapter Master remained undiminished. Dante had no doubt that if he were to order them back into the fray they would not hesitate.

The commander looked at their faces as they marched across the hanger, and could not help but wonder how many would live to reach Baal, or even whether those Space Marines that remained to the Chapter would be enough. What cost to save his Chapter's home world? And what if, in the saving of Baal, the Blood Angels were destroyed? Had the damage done to the Tyranids been enough? These were the thoughts that chased each other through Dante's mind as he watched his brothers return from the world below.


Then a cold wind rushed across the deck and light flared from nothing. For a split second Dante thought it was the Hive Mind launching a final attack and his hand instinctively dropped to his holstered pistol. Yet as the light faded it was replaced by a winged figure. For the first time in many years Dante beheld the Sanguinor, resplendent in sculpted golden armour, the mysterious warrior's face hidden behind a burnished mask that mirrored Dante's own. At once all activity on the deck stopped, and to a battle-brother the Blood Angels fell to one knee, their heads bowed. Only Dante remained standing, transfixed by the Sanguinor's sudden appearance, and for the first time in centuries he was unsure of what this meant – had the ancient warrior come to condemn him for his defeat or was this a sign that these events were the will of the Primarch at work?

With slow, deliberate steps the Sanguinor approached the Chapter Master, wings brushing the bowed heads of the Blood Angels as he passed them. At last the two legends stood face to face, the silence heavy in the air. Without speaking Dante drew back his mask, showing the Sanguinor alone his face, and looked upon the blessed warrior with eyes unhindered by lenses or filters. Finally the question he knew he must ask came to Dante's lips, though it was but a whisper meant only for the ears of the Sanguinor.

'Was it enough – can Baal still be saved?'

For long moments there was only silence, and Dante felt sure there could be no answer. Then, for the first time in the annals of the Blood Angels, the Sanguinor spoke.

'There is yet hope.'







A terrible dragon shall come,
coiling from the void below,
through deadly cold and
through stone it shall pass
and yet live.
across the heavens it shall uncoil,
there it shall battle the giant,
under light of blood-hued stars,
it shall devour
=all=

