



— *Angels of Death* —

# RECLAMATION

L J GOULDING



## Reclamation – L.J. Goulding

The crates were old, heavy-duty ammunition cases, their edges worn and battered by months of indelicate handling by cargo servitors, their security tabs drilled through. They both bore serial numbers and the forge worlds of origin for their original shipments, though the stencilled, yellow letters were now almost completely illegible. Like almost everything on board the Heart of Cronus, the cases had been salvaged. Repurposed.

Fresh from the decontamination vestibules, Bokari led three of his neophyte brethren through the hatchway and into the sweltering forge. The young Space Marines carried their burden with a weary reverence - like pilgrims who had grown too used to the same, oft-trodden path.

Sebastion turned from the vibro-lathe, allowing his serf menials to continue in their work, the air ringing with the sounds of hammering and heavy machinery. He swallowed hard, and cleared his throat a few times before speaking. He was still unused to conversing verbally in his daily duties.

‘Novice Bokari. What have you brought me?’

Bokari grunted as he and Medon set their crate upon the deck, and then rubbed his sore palms together. ‘Such spoils, forge master!’ he exclaimed wryly, pulling back the lid with a flourish. ‘Have you ever seen treasures like these?’

Without humour, Sebastion peered down into the crate. His bulky ocular array clicked and refocused.

‘Actually, there was precious little worth saving,’ Bokari muttered, ‘and certainly nothing from your list.’ He knelt, sifting through the contents and holding out a few items for closer inspection. ‘Some choice pieces, though. At least one complete Corvus helm, by my reckoning - although you might need to machine out the... uhh...’

The forge master took the pitted dome of the helmet from him, pairing it with

an appropriate faceplate. The crest sensor ridge, Novice Bokari. Unique in the Imperial Mark VI power armour variant, in that it is off-centre towards the shield arm.’ He ran a finger down the length of the crest. ‘Do you know why that is?’

Bokari hung his head. ‘I do not, my lord.’

Sebastion tossed the two unattached pieces back into the crate and retrieved an equally battered vambrace-and-cannon assembly. Then there is still much for you to learn. Our honoured battleplate is a wonder of Martian ingenuity. The component parts can be combined in virtually any battlefield configuration, regardless of variant design or origin, and with a few minor adjustments it can be made to run as efficiently as a suit fresh from the forges.’

He held the vambrace up to the light. It had once been painted a dull green, though the ceramite outer layer had been so extensively burned away - at the cuff, almost down to the structural shell beneath - that it had a mottled, vaguely organic appearance.

This, however, is useless to me.’

Sebastion squeezed the plates, and the corroded metal buckled and fractured in his grip like nothing more than flawed husk-iron. Bokari watched the fragments tumble to the floor.

‘But what about the rest, my lord?’ he asked. ‘Some of this looks like fine salvage. Fit for spares, at least?’

Flexing his shoulders, Sebastion brought the two uppermost limbs of his servo-harness forwards to pick through the rest of the crate. This is tyrannid reclamation pool detritus, is it not?’

Bokari looked to Medon, who nodded. ‘Aye, forge master. The Forty-Ninth Salvation Team just returned from an insertion into hive ship #78114 Rocola. They have the full salvage documents from the quarantine officials, though - it’s all been cleared.’

Sebastion drew a survey module from his belt, pressing it against the surface of a high-rimmed pauldron. The shoulder pad was a grubby red, its surface scored by xenos bio-acid, and bore the symbol of a lion rampant. The forge master regarded it with a craftsman’s eye.

‘I don’t have time for restoration projects, novice. We are at war. The environmental seals on all of these plates are gone, and I doubt that the remaining fibre-bundles will carry a charge. All of the servos will need replacing, too, and we’re not going to pull spares from the reserve stores’ He handed the pauldron to Bokari. ‘Melt down the plates that are at less than fifty per cent frame-integrity, and take the rest to your workstation. If you can put together a suit worthy of blessing, then I’ll gladly recommend you for apprenticeship to the forge.’

Bokari smiled broadly and bowed. Thank you, forge master.’

Sebastion made to return to his work, but Bokari pointed to the second crate.

‘Forgive me, my lord, but I have brought you something else. Something you will definitely want to see.’

The other two neophytes drew back the lid and the forge master’s eye widened.

Bulky and supine, the upper torso and right arm of a suit of heavy Indomitus-pattern Terminator armour lay in the crate, as though it might be a burial casket for some martyred hero. Though the metal was stripped almost bare, it had clearly once borne a dark blue Chapter livery.

At the sight, the nearest serf menials halted in their tasks and made the sign of the aquila over their hearts, awe written openly upon their faces.

Sebastion could hardly speak. ‘Where... Where did you find this?’

Medon stepped forwards. ‘In an outer blister, my lord. There was no gravity - no blood, either. He was just sort of drifting there.’

‘He?’

The former occupant. He’d been dead a long time, I think, but we took what was left of him to the Apothecaries. With dignity, my lord. They’ll see to him properly.’

The forge master raised up the incomplete arm of the suit, noting every mark and blemish upon its surface, and measuring the strained interface spacings with

a pair of callipers. A single tear ran down his cheek.

Bokari placed a hand upon the tarnished eagle across the breastplate.

‘It’s not perfect, I know - the gauntlet has no fingers, but the weapon mounts are intact. I thought it would certainly be worthy of restoration, until we can find more. A fourth suit of Terminator armour still wouldn’t be enough to assemble a full Codex squad formation, but I imagine it’d go a long way to restoring some morale in the fleet.’

Sebastion did not look up. ‘Aye. To the Scythes of the Emperor, this is a treasure indeed, Bokari. Worth more than all the rest put together, and more than the life of any single Space Marine. The Forty-Ninth team should be commended and honoured for this.’

The forge master issued a signal-command to a loading servitor to bear the suit away to his workshop sanctum. Activity in the forge resumed, but Sebastion looked pensive.

‘Do you know what some of our battle-brothers say, Novice Bokari? They say that we dishonour the memory of these fallen warriors and their Chapters by cannibalising the remains of their wargear for our own needs.’

Bokari frowned. These fallen warriors have no need of it anymore. If I were to fall in battle, I would want everything I owned to be gathered up and thrown back at the bastard xenos.’

Sebastion’s ocular array whirred as he looked the neophyte in the eye. His machine-gaze was suitably cold and detached, but tinged with a hint of regret.

‘One way or another, Bokari, it will be.’