

WARHAMMER
40,000



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THE COST OF COMMAND

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This wasn't the first time Lanthus had duelled in the arena; the Astral Knights were dour by temperament, even for heirs of Dorn, and guarded their honour jealously. Even the most trivial of disagreements could easily escalate to the point where the symbolic shedding of blood seemed the simplest way to determine who was in the right. But never before had he entered the ring as a sergeant, let alone one whose judgement had been called into question. Most of the faces of the spectators in the tiered seats were hostile, resentful, unwilling to give him the benefit of the doubt.

This didn't surprise him. Aldwyn, his antagonist, was liked and respected by many of the battle-brothers in the wider company, not just those of their own squad, while Lanthus had always preferred to hone his skills and piety without the distractions of companionship. In this matter of honour, he stood alone. The Chapter Master, gazing down from his crystal throne opposite the amphitheatre's entrance, had a neutral expression, more pensive than judgemental. Master Amhrad hardly ever attended an affair of honour in person, and Lanthus wondered why this relatively minor matter merited his attention: perhaps it was a good omen.

Even if it wasn't, his conscience was clear. The mission always came first. His decision had been the right one.

He stepped forward onto the carpet of tiny crystals, each smaller than a grain of sand, glittering crimson in the dull ember glow of their home world's sun. The only garment he wore was the duelling tunic tradition demanded, its plain white fabric dyed the colour of blood by the glowering Eye of Obsidia, forever nailed to the horizon by the planet's tidally locked rotation.

Aldwyn approached from the opposite side of the arena, his face twisting with anger as Lanthus nodded a formal greeting. Good. Angry men made mistakes.

Lanthus had killed enough of them to know that. The advantage was his.

‘Dorn and the Emperor watch over you both,’ Master Amhrad said levelly, the ritual phrase as old as the Chapter itself. ‘May they guide your hands and shards swiftly to the truth.’

‘By Dorn and the Emperor,’ Lanthus responded by rote, drawing his soul shard from its scabbard. Every Astral Knight carried one of the glittering blades, each as unique as its owner, and would as soon be parted from it as from his progenoid gland. The first time every initiate wore power armour was the day he went out alone, to scour the endless plains around the Obsidian Vaults until one of the millions of crystals littering the landscape called out to him; honed carefully into a razor-sharp blade, mounted in a hand-crafted hilt, the soul shard became permeated with the essence of the man who created and carried it.

‘By Dorn and the Emperor,’ Aldwyn said, beginning an instant later, and eliding the first word to finish the ritual phrase at the same time as Lanthus.

‘To the drawing of blood,’ Lanthus said, as he had done at the beginning of every previous duel, expecting the ritual acknowledgement he had always heard. But Aldwyn shook his head, his expression as venomous as an ork’s.

‘To the death,’ he said.

Although his face remained neutral, the Chapter Master seemed as surprised as Lanthus. Nevertheless, after a moment’s reflection, his head inclined in the briefest of nods. ‘Is this acceptable to you, Brother Lanthus?’ he asked.

‘It is.’ In truth, there was no other answer Lanthus could have given. To refuse would have smacked of cowardice, or a trace of doubt in the rightness of his cause. But he was shaken, nevertheless, by the depth of Aldwyn’s hatred. To take the life of a battle-brother was almost unimaginable, a duel to the death by mutual agreement the only way in which it could be done without incurring centuries of penitential exile. Even then, the survivor would bear an ineradicable stain on his honour for the rest of his life.

The Chapter Master nodded. ‘Then you may commence,’ he said levelly, taking refuge from any disquiet he might feel in the time-sanctified ritual.

Lanthus was cautious to begin with, holding back, waiting for his opponent to make the first move. Aldwyn, he knew, was impulsive, and the anger driving him on would exacerbate that.

There. A faint shifting of Aldwyn’s centre of mass betrayed his intention a fraction of a second before he moved, striking out with a speed and power no mortal man could have evaded or withstood. Lanthus was ready for him, though, and pivoted aside on his back foot, letting the blow glide smoothly past, striking

down with his elbow at the suddenly exposed base of Aldwyn's skull as he overextended himself.

For a moment he hoped he could put an end to it here and now, that Aldwyn would drop, stunned, to the ground at his feet and allow him to escape the taint of fratricide, but his opponent anticipated the blow. He ducked beneath it, robbing the strike of much of its power, bringing himself back on balance as he did so. Then Aldwyn drove suddenly forward, his reinforced cranium slamming into the sergeant's sternum. Lanthus barely had time to pull back, riding the blow intended to drive the air from his lungs, and blocking the follow up strike from Aldwyn's shard with a hard deflection, his forearm cutting down like the edge of a sword blade to impact heavily with Aldwyn's, pushing his arm aside with only a fraction of a second to spare.

The razor-edged chunk of obsidian in Aldwyn's hand flickered past his ribcage, missing by millimetres, and the two combatants drew apart, regaining both balance and breath, regarding one another warily.

Only the hand of the Emperor had saved Summerfall from complete annihilation. If Third Company's battle-barge hadn't passed close enough to the beleaguered system to pick up the babble of overlapping distress calls on their homeward pilgrimage from the Medusa Veil campaign, the ork migration would have overrun it long before the far-flung forces of the Imperium could have responded. But the Astral Knights had heard, and been blessed by a swiftly-flowing warp current through the local cluster, which the Chaplains agreed had been another unmistakable sign of divine favour.

So now Lanthus was prowling through the ruins of what had once been the primary industrial zone of Hive Bessemer, the rest of Squad Caromort hard on his heels. The greenskins had been quick to plunder the abandoned manufactories, and Captain Galad had decreed that the steady flow of machinery and raw materials to the orkish forges would cease today. Whatever it took.

'Wait,' Lanthus said, holding up a hand, although he knew his battle-brothers could see him clearly enough in their helmet displays. For that matter, even though he was on point, he knew precisely where all of them were in the wilderness of rubble behind him, their positions pinpointed by blue and gold icons, echoing the colours of their armour, in the tactical overlay. He swept through the full range of sensory enhancements, looking for heat sources, vibration, electrical activity. 'I'm reading movement.'

'The target?' That was Aldwyn, of course, Lanthus would have recognised the

edge of impatience in the speaker's voice even if his helmet spirits hadn't tagged the transmission with his battle-brother's identity code.

'Probably.' Lanthus moved on, cresting the broken wall of what had once been a dormitory block, heedless of the twelve metre drop at his feet. He was looking out across a wide carriageway, littered with burnt-out cargo haulers, but most of the wrecks were in the lanes lining the edges, leaving the centre ones unimpeded. Which could mean only one thing. 'The road's in regular use.'

'Can you confirm the contact?' Sergeant Caromort asked.

'Confirmed.' The icons resolved, still fuzzy with distance, the auspex returns erratic through the obscuring ruins and distorted by the plumes of wind-driven ash gusting around what remained of the streets. But they were enough for him to be certain. 'Multiple contacts, fast-moving, following the road. Numbers indeterminate.' He hardly needed the helmet display, the plume of dust and noxious exhausts typical of orkish vehicles already clear in the distance. 'We've got about seven minutes to set the ambush.'

'More than enough time,' Aldwyn opined, bounding forward to join him, his bolter raised. 'It's only a handful of gretchin scavengers.'

'We can't be sure of that yet,' Lanthus cautioned, but before he finished speaking, Aldwyn had already gone, leaping out into the void without hesitation, or the most cursory of glances towards the onrushing horde.

The rest of Combat Squad Two followed him without pause or hesitation, dashing past Lanthus like blue and gold comets, jumping lithely to the carriageway below. The knee joints of their armour flexed as they hit the ground, easily absorbing an impact which would have driven the leg bones of a mortal man up through their ribcage, and they continued running the moment they found a purchase on the cracked and shell-pocked rockcrete. In a handful of heartbeats all had taken cover on the far side of the road, within the gutted shells of the shattered foundries, or dug in behind one or other of the wrecked and rusting vehicles.

A moment later Combat Squad One, Lanthus' own subunit, appeared, under the command of Sergeant Caromort, and Lanthus raised a gauntlet in greeting.

'Lanthus, Beves, stay here.' The brother-sergeant's golden faceplate turned to the two Space Marines. 'Set up a firing position, and observe the enemy's approach.'

'By your command,' Lanthus and Beves responded in unison. Beves carried the squad's missile launcher, and was already hunkering down behind an outcrop of tumbled masonry, the heavy weapon unslung and seeking a target.

‘The rest with me,’ Caromort concluded, leading the way over the parapet.

Lanthus glanced down, just in time to see the rest of Combat Squad One vanish into places of concealment on this side of the road. Good. When the greenskins appeared, they’d be neatly caught in the crossfire.

‘Coming into optimum range,’ he told Beves, who acknowledged tersely, his attention still centred on the heavy weapon’s sights. This was to be Beves’ first taste of action with Caromort’s squad: from time immemorial, the newest recruit to an Astral Knights tactical unit had always been assigned as the heavy weapons specialist. It made the best use of their recent experience as a Devastator, and allowed them time to grow used to the more flexible role they’d inherited. It also felt less like they were stepping into the gap left by a fallen comrade. They usually were, of course, but every Astral Knight took it for granted that their service to the Emperor would only end in one way. Their entire progenitor Chapter had been lost millennia before, and were still mourned by those who carried their genetic legacy in their progenoid glands: the only thing about dying that mattered to an Astral Knight was to make his final moments a testament to his faith in the Emperor, and the means to a victory in His name.

By now, Lanthus could feel a tremor in the masonry beneath his feet, the vibration of dozens of vehicles travelling flat out – the only way the orks knew how to drive them. Had it not been for the audio filters in his helmet, he would already have been deafened by the noise of the badly tuned and barely maintained engines echoing from the surrounding rubble.

Beves’ gauntleted finger tightened almost imperceptibly on the trigger.

‘Wait,’ Lanthus cautioned. ‘Wait...’ Beves would be concentrating entirely on the picture through his sights, but Lanthus had a better view of the battlefield. This was why Caromort had left him up here, in a superior vantage point. His helmet spirits were casting the data they were gathering directly to his hidden battle-brothers, letting them pick targets before they even became visible from where they’d set up their firing positions. He switched to a general voxcast. ‘Trucks, mostly, a few outriders. They’re not expecting trouble.’ He paused for a moment. ‘No more than orks usually do, anyway.’ It might look like a soft target, but an unarmed ork was a contradiction in terms. The vile creatures were aggression personified and it wouldn’t take them long to rally once they realised they were under attack.

‘Take the lead truck,’ Caromort voxed to Beves, ‘then the last one. Box them in.’

‘Acknowledged.’ Beves triggered his missile launcher.

‘Wait,’ Lanthus said, an instant too late, as the auspex images in his helmet display finally resolved. A quick glance was enough to confirm the new tactical picture, his enhanced sight piercing the haze of dust and promethium fumes surrounding the onrushing cluster of vehicles. ‘That’s not a supply convoy—’

The rest of his words were drowned out by the explosion of Beves’ krak warhead against the side of the leading truck.

The shot was a good one: the ramshackle vehicle slewed across the road, rolled, and came to rest upside down, a trickle of smoke leaking from the bodywork. A heartbeat later it was barged aside in a shower of sparks by the monstrous bulk of a heavily armoured battlewagon.

In unison, the Astral Knights opened up from ambush, raking the still moving convoy with bolter fire. Greenskin drivers and gunners fell, trucks collided, but too many orks were scrambling from the wreckage, or retaliating with heavy weapons fire of their own.

‘Stop that battlewagon!’ Caromort commanded, and Beves sent a second rocket after it. The Emperor was clearly guiding his aim: the projectile must have struck an ammunition locker after penetrating the relatively weak top armour. A moment after it hit, the whole contraption exploded in a ball of greasy flame, the concussion jarring the rubble under Lanthus’ feet. A couple of trucks, following too closely, slammed into the burning wreckage and were instantly immolated in turn.

With the road now blocked, the whole convoy ground to a halt, engines revving. A few of the drivers tried to back up, ramming those behind, spreading the turmoil. True to type, several of them began brawling over the issue, heedless of the Astral Knights bolter shells hissing about their ears.

‘Pick your targets,’ Caromort voxed calmly.

Dozens of orks, over a hundred by Lanthus’ count, were pulling themselves clear of the wreckage, cohering into growing mobs, roaring with anger and bloodlust. Driven by rage, each group charged towards the Astral Knights, brandishing crudely fashioned axes and even more crudely fashioned guns. Instead of gretchin scavengers and a handful of orks to escort them, as the Astral Knights had expected, this was a warband on the move, racing to throw themselves into the fray against the Imperial warriors who were now pushing back what had, so recently, seemed an unstoppable advance across the war-ravaged continent. Which was fine with the Space Marines: so far as they were concerned, the greenskins might just as well die here instead.

‘Team Two, overlapping fire,’ Aldwyn voxed, punctuating his words with

bursts of bolter fire which scythed down the front rank of blood-maddened greenskins howling towards him. The Space Marines on the far side of the road complied, laying down supporting fire for one another, making the best use of the cover they'd found. The tactic was always a sound one against orks. The brutish greenskins were so desperate to get into close combat that they would charge headlong into the most withering fire heedless of the cost.

'Frag rounds,' Lanthus instructed Beves. 'Thin them out for our brothers on this side of the road.'

'I need help,' cut in Brother Prius, one of the Astral Knights who'd accompanied Caromort. Lanthus could see him from up here, backed against a crumbling wall, holding a horde of howling orks at bay with short, precise bolter bursts. The instant he paused to reload, they'd rush him, and in numbers too great even for a Space Marine to hold his own against. Lanthus estimated he had no more than seconds left before the fight below became a vicious hand-to-hand brawl, which could only have one end.

But Beves was already switching loads, slapping a magazine of fragmentation warheads into his launcher. The first round burst among the orks threatening Prius, reducing the closest to a mist of ichor and pulverised flesh, while a blizzard of shrapnel ripped its way through the others. Prius took advantage of the respite to reload, and disappeared into the wilderness of rubble, covering his retreat with carefully aimed shots at the handful of survivors too stupid or frenzied to back off. A moment later Lanthus caught sight of another flash of blue and gold in almost the same spot.

'Kurtin's with him,' Lanthus reported. He turned, looking for some sign of Sergeant Caromort in the direction his icon indicated, feeling a flicker of foreboding as he did so. The battlewagon's unexpected clearance of the first obstacle had carried the bulk of the convoy some way past the sergeant's position, leaving him completely encircled by greenskin warriors.

'Good.' Caromort's voice was grim, and it wasn't hard to see why. His position was even worse than Prius' had been, hemmed in by wrecked trucks and howling greenskins. His armour was pitted and seared by the relentless pounding of the ork guns, the sheer volume of impacting rounds ablating the thick ceramite that would normally have shrugged them off. The fact that many of their comrades were being felled by stray rounds and ricochets didn't seem to inhibit the ork gunners at all, or deter the axe-wielders from pressing the attack as hard as they could. Caromort's augmented blood was leaking from rents in his armour, hardening instantly as it met the air, and Lanthus felt a bitter chill; the

sergeant must already be grievously wounded.

Beves fired a frag round into the baying mob, then a second, but all it achieved was delaying the inevitable. Caromort had nowhere to go, and with his left leg already shattered would be unable to run even if there was. The tide of greenskins broke for a moment as the shrapnel scythed through them, then flowed back into the hole the explosions had punched in their ranks, their feet slipping in the viscera of the fallen, and the spreading pool of promethium gushing from the fuel tanks ruptured by the hail of razor-edged metal.

‘Team Two, assault formation,’ Aldwyn voxed. ‘We’re punching through to relieve the sergeant.’

‘Hold your position,’ Caromort snapped. ‘I can barely move. If you try it you’ll die too.’ Then his bolter fell silent, the last round gone from the magazine, and with a feral howl the mob of orks fell upon him. For a moment he disappeared, and Lanthus feared he’d seen the last of his commander; with carefully placed single shots he sniped at the struggling knot of greenskins in the centre of the maelstrom, hacking and slashing at the beleaguered warrior in an insensate frenzy, heedless of the wounds they were inflicting on one another in the process. Then Lanthus’ careful marksmanship thinned them out enough for Caromort to shrug the survivors off.

The end was near, that much was obvious. One arm hung limply at his side, but his other fist backhanded a charging ork with casual ease, crushing its bestial features to bloody ruin. ‘Dorn and the Emperor walk with you,’ he voxed, and opened his hand.

The grenade fell with what seemed to Lanthus to be agonising slowness, while Caromort struck out again and again with grim determination. He was an Astral Knight, and would die on his feet. Preoccupied with their efforts to bring him down, it was doubtful that any of the greenskins even noticed the danger.

Then the grenade detonated, and the haze of promethium vapour in the air ignited in a fireball which swept the length of the convoy. Lanthus staggered from the blast, even with the protection of his power armour. When he looked again, the whole right side of it was scorched back to bare ceramite, blackened with smoke.

Caromort’s icon was gone from the tactical display, and the road between the buildings was a billowing inferno as far as the eye could see.

Everyone had expected Aldwyn to take Caromort’s place, and no one had been more surprised than Lanthus when Captain Galad announced that he was to be

promoted to sergeant instead.

‘Do you doubt you can do it?’ the company commander asked bluntly, reading the momentary hesitation on Lanthus’ face before he accepted the honour of leadership.

‘With the help of Dorn and the Emperor,’ Lanthus said, before honesty compelled him to add, ‘but I thought you’d choose Aldwyn.’

‘Aldwyn wouldn’t have thought twice about accepting,’ Galad agreed. He paused for a moment. ‘Which is why I chose you instead. You think before you act.’

It was advice he’d taken to heart in the weeks that followed. The campaign against the orks remained a grim and murderous business, every metre of the world regained and paid for in pain and blood. Even the arrival of a couple of brigades of Imperial Guard, hastily shipped in from neighbouring systems, made little difference that Lanthus could see. Though the steady influx of Guardsmen gradually tilted the balance of the war in the Imperium’s favour through sheer force of numbers, there were still too many objectives the Astral Knights could hope to take in the face of the greenskins’ dogged resistance. The newly rechristened Squad Lanthus found itself facing an apparently inexhaustible supply of enemies.

Then, without warning, everything changed. The war reached a tipping point, and Lanthus found himself charged with bringing it to a swift and victorious conclusion.

The sun was westering, painting the sky over the shattered hive the colour of blood, when Lanthus got the orders which were to lead him ultimately to the duelling ground.

‘The greenskins are retreating,’ he told his squad, re-engaging the general vox circuit. For the last few minutes he’d been linked directly with Captain Galad and was still assessing the information he’d been given during the briefing. The captain’s words had been supplemented by a barrage of images and data files, which his helmet spirits had dutifully tagged and made ready for access. Even while he’d been assimilating this wider strategic picture, however, he’d continued to hold the tactical readouts in the periphery of his consciousness, aware of where every member of Squad Lanthus was.

They’d not been idle while his attention was diverted, continuing to drive the greenskins back from the hallowed ground of a ruined shrine to the Emperor with dogged, righteous fury. Fragments of the visage of Him on Earth could still

be seen gazing down from niches in the collapsed walls at the stone corpses of Emperor and saints alike, shattered on the unforgiving ground, or by the brutal spite of orkish weapons fire.

‘These ones aren’t.’ Aldwyn didn’t flinch as a volley of stubber rounds rattled from the pock-marked rockcrete around them, a few ricochets whining from his armour. He turned to face the incoming fire in a single fluid movement, sending a short burst from his bolter through a window from which the stained glass was long gone, reduced to prismatic shards littering the ground at their feet. ‘We can flank them with Combat Squad Two, if one lays down covering fire for us.’ He started forward as he spoke, already snapping a fresh magazine into his weapon.

‘Wait,’ Lanthus said. Part of him shared Aldwyn’s burning desire to shed orkish blood in vengeance for the blasphemous vandalism surrounding them, but engaging the greenskins among the rubble walls of the hab zone might let a few escape their deserved retribution, slinking away through the maze of devastation like the cowards they were. ‘Hold fire. They’ll think we’re out of ammunition, and move to close.’

‘Even orks can’t be that stupid,’ Beves said, readying his missile launcher. He’d integrated well into his new squad, Lanthus thought: he followed orders quickly, showing commendable initiative, and the older battle-brothers trusted his judgement. When they returned to Obsidia another recruit would be assigned to bring them up to full strength, and it would be time for him to relinquish the heavy weapon.

‘These ones are,’ Aldwyn replied, as a howling mob of greenskins erupted from the partially-collapsed building opposite, and began charging across the rubble-strewn carriageway towards the beleaguered shrine. ‘Good call, brother-sergeant.’

‘Let them get well into the killing ground,’ Lanthus said. It still felt strange to be addressed by his rank, especially by Aldwyn, with whom he’d served the longest. Certain that the entire mob was now out in the open, he gave the order. ‘Fire!’

Seven bolters opened up as one, tearing simultaneously into the left and right flanks of the onrushing horde. Those in the centre came on faster than ever, brandishing their ugly blades, and firing indiscriminately at the suddenly visible Astral Knights. Lanthus felt his index finger ache with the urge to trigger his own weapon, but suppressed the impulse, knowing he’d be better employed assessing the tactical picture.

‘Prius, to the left.’ He directed the fire with the skill and precision of an

orchestral conductor. ‘Beves, their centre.’ Frag charges burst in the middle of the mob, tearing the front rank to pieces.

Within seconds it was all over, the boulevard littered with dead and dying greenskins. Lanthus turned away from the carnage, the defeated enemy already dismissed from his mind.

‘Where are the greenskins retreating to?’ Aldwyn asked, resuming the conversation as though the orks had never interrupted.

‘They’re pulling back into the main hive,’ Lanthus told him. No potential threats appeared in his helmet display, and he lowered his bolter. ‘Fortifying the central spire to stand a siege.’

‘That’ll take some cleansing,’ Aldwyn said thoughtfully. ‘There must be thousands of greenskins in there by now.’

‘Tens of thousands,’ Lanthus agreed, ‘and a hundred of us. Captain Galad’s moving the whole company up for the final assault. Enough battle-brothers to sweep it from pinnacle to sublevels.’

‘If they can get in,’ Aldwyn said, studying the topographical files Lanthus was casting to everyone’s helmets. ‘Those gates would need a Titan to breach them.’

‘Our squad won’t be going in through the gates,’ Lanthus said, highlighting a small section at the foot of the outer curtain wall. ‘The Techmarines have found a route in through the manufactory waste ducts. Once we’re inside, we’re to open the gates then blow the control chapel to make sure they can’t be closed again.’

‘Won’t the greenskins be waiting for us?’ Aldwyn asked. ‘They might be stupid enough to charge down our guns, but it’s not like them to leave a potential infiltration route unsecured.’

‘The ducts are full of toxic sludge,’ Lanthus pointed out, ‘which would kill even an ork in seconds. We’ll be completely submerged in the stuff as we pass through the sump. It would never occur to them that a strike team could get in that way.’

‘Some of these substances are corrosive,’ Beves said, his helmet spirits highlighting a few of the compounds in the long list of pollutants appended to the briefing document. ‘They won’t have time to damage the ceramite plating of our armour much, but they’ll degrade the joints and seals in a matter of minutes.’

‘Then we’ll have to be quick,’ Lanthus said. ‘Once we’re through, we’ll be able to clean the worst of it off.’

‘In ork blood, with any luck,’ Aldwyn added.

This close to their objective, the central spire of Hive Capital seemed to blot out half the sky, a stark silhouette of greater darkness wiping the heavens clean of stars.

The colossal smear of shadow wasn't entirely dark, however: flickering sparks of orange flame were speckled across its face, as though its brutish inhabitants were trying to replace the purer lights of the heavens which their refuge now concealed, intermingled with the brighter pinpoint glare of luminators. Those would mark the guard posts, or areas where the hive's resources were being looted, but the reason for the fires Lanthus could only guess. Perhaps they were for warmth, or had simply been set to gratify the orkish lust for destruction.

A few metres ahead of the Astral Knights, the mouths of the outfall pipes gaped in the darkness, viscid liquid seeping from them like pus from an infected wound to pool in the sluiceways that were supposed to carry them away. Lanthus jumped over the low parapet, expecting a splash as he landed, to find his bootsoles impacting on a dry, crumbling surface instead; the rockcrete channels had been shattered by conflict and neglect.

A moment later Aldwyn vaulted down to join him, landing a few metres closer to the outfall with a liquescent smack. Wary of losing his footing in the slippery sludge pooling beneath the pipe, he placed his feet carefully, testing the solid surface beneath it before trusting it with his whole weight.

'I'll go first,' Lanthus said, striding past him through the puddle of filth to take up position at the head of the column. Aldwyn moved aside with a faint air of surprise, but Lanthus was determined to lead from the front. There would only be room inside the pipe for one man at a time, and he wanted to see whatever they ran into for himself, instead of relying on voxed reports and images.

At first, the going wasn't too bad, despite the ever-present risk of losing their footing in the gradually deepening sludge. Every so often the pipes constricted, or the Astral Knights were forced to worm their way around tight corners never intended to be navigated by anything larger than a monotask servitor, and at times Lanthus' armour scraped against the sides as he pushed his way forward. Nor was he the only one: the whole squad's way was marked by periodic bursts of sparks as ceramite met corroded metal. Each time a short-lived constellation flared and died, he braced himself, anticipating the sudden combustion of the gasses filling the tight metal tube, but the Emperor was with them, and no explosion came.

It took no more than the thirty minutes he'd estimated to reach the surge chamber marked on the plan he was following, and he stopped abruptly as soon

as the tunnel mouth opened out ahead. 'Wait,' he ordered.

There was no light at all this far from the open air, too little for the helmet spirits to intensify, and the cold, dank walls held no residual heat for them to use instead, but with no chance of the enemy being able to see them, he'd felt no qualms about kindling his luminator some time before. As the beam swept around the echoing rectangular space, he realised he'd stopped just in time: another step, and he would have tumbled headlong into the deep pool of sludge below.

'We're at the sump,' he said, staring at the scum-flecked tank. 'Auspex view, and keep close to the man in front.' A ripple of acknowledgements ran around the vox circuit.

Certain that his squad would be right behind him, Lanthus stepped off the lip of the tank, the foul semi-liquid closing instantly over his helmet. He could see nothing, feel nothing, except the sticky resistance of the sludge; then his feet touched the bottom, and he began to move forward, following the icon in his auspex display which marked the pipe leading deeper into the hive. Faint currents tugged at his awareness, although whether they were caused by convection, chemical reactions within the toxic soup, or by the passage of his battle-brothers forging through it in his wake, he couldn't tell. All he could be sure of was that, one by one, the rest of Squad Lanthus were plunging into the pool and plodding after him.

Nearing the far wall, he held out his hand, his gauntlets scraping across the rough surface of rockcrete pitted and scarred by the corrosive action of the waste. Mindful of the damage it would be doing to the seals of their armour, and the concomitant need for haste, he felt around for the mouth of the pipe feeding the sludge down from the heart of the manufactory. For a moment he failed to find it, then realised it had been sealed by a metal grille, which hadn't been marked on the plan they were following.

'Hold your positions,' he voxed, groping in the suffocating darkness for a handhold. Then he got a purchase and pulled, exerting all the superhuman strength conferred by the Emperor's blessing. Servos whined in his power armour, adding its strength to his, and, with a muffled grating sound, the lattice of rusted metal came slowly free. He shuffled aside as far as he dared, and dropped it, to settle slowly in the murk. 'Obstruction cleared,' he voxed. 'Move on.'

This pipe seemed narrower than the other, although whether it really was smaller, or had simply been constricted by centuries of coagulation, he couldn't

tell. When, at last, his head broke the surface again, it took him a moment to realise the fact. He stood, wiping as much of the muck from his visor as he could, and looked around.

‘We’re through,’ he said, as, one by one, the members of Squad Lanthus rose from the mire. He checked the tactical display, and swept his luminator beam around the wide metal space enclosing them. It was roughly spherical, stalactites of congealed filth clinging to the overhanging walls, and a metal ladder leading to an inspection hatch about halfway up one of the curving sides. He clambered to the top, not without difficulty, as the narrow rungs had been intended for users of normal stature rather than the superhuman frame of one of the Emperor’s blessed. ‘Douse the lights.’

As his squad complied, he tripped the latch, and pulled the door open. It resisted a moment, then came reluctantly in a shower of rust and detritus, and with a howl like a heretic being put to the question. He waited a moment, but no greenskins came running to investigate the noise, and he lowered his bolter as the rest of the squad followed him through the hatch. Wide service tunnels curved away in both directions, following the equator of the tank, their outer walls pierced by radial corridors every forty-five degrees. Dim luminators flickered in the ceilings every few metres, still functional, by the grace of the Emperor; they’d make better time by their light, but would be more visible to prowling orks too.

‘There are two routes to the gate controls from here,’ Lanthus said, transmitting the map to the other helmet displays as he spoke, both potential pathways clearly marked. ‘Aldwyn, take Combat Squad Two to the right. I’ll take One to the left.’

‘That should double our chances of getting through,’ Aldwyn agreed, and trotted away into the shadows, four battle-brothers at his heels.

‘I’m picking up movement,’ Prius said, from the mouth of the other tunnel.

‘Confirmed.’ Lanthus checked his own tactical readings. ‘Single heat source, large.’ Too big to be an ork. He wiped the encrusted filth from his bolter, reciting the litany of armaments. ‘Have you got a visual?’

‘Not yet,’ Prius said, ‘but it’s closing fast.’ The blip was almost at the first junction in the labyrinth of service tunnels. Prius would get a clear line of sight within seconds. ‘Ready to engage.’ He raised his bolter, sighting along it, waiting patiently for a target.

‘Fire at will,’ Lanthus said. He would have preferred to have moved a little closer to their objective before the shooting started, but at least if they attracted

the orks' attention it would give Aldwyn's team a clearer run.

'We can circle back and assist,' Aldwyn offered, having monitored the vox traffic.

'Keep going,' Lanthus instructed, barely waiting for Aldwyn's acknowledgement before turning his attention entirely to the matter at hand.

'I can see it,' Prius said, his voice taking on a hint of surprise. 'It's a beast of some kind.' He pulled the trigger of his bolter, eliciting nothing more deadly than a muffled click. Before he could clear the faulty round from the chamber, something huge and vaguely spherical came howling out of the darkness, barging him aside in a welter of claws and fangs.

Lanthus reacted instantly, sending a hail of explosive bolts towards the onrushing creature, distracting it from the prostrate form of Brother Prius. Most of the rounds missed the fast-moving target, but a couple impacted on its back, gouging bloody craters which should have felled a lesser creature. This monstrous beast only seemed enraged, however, turning and charging at Lanthus.

'Beves, krak rounds,' Lanthus ordered, leaping aside in the nick of time. The creature seemed to consist mostly of a gaping, razor-fanged maw, on two legs thicker than a Space Marine's waist. Thick scales armoured its bloated head and vestigial torso. He fired another burst, chewing bloody lumps out of the monster, but nothing vital had been hit, and it turned to charge again. 'Kurtin, see to Prius.'

'Krak,' Beves confirmed, already swapping magazines with precise, economical movements. Expecting to be facing orks, he'd preloaded the missile launcher with anti-personnel warheads instead of armour-piercing rounds. Kurtin, about to fire, lowered his own weapon, and hurried over to his fallen comrade.

Lanthus stood still for a moment, allowing the thing to get back on balance, and sent a couple of bolter-rounds ricocheting from the beast's thick armoured skull. Provoked beyond endurance, the creature roared a challenge, and charged straight towards him, thick strands of drool trailing from the corners of its mouth to mingle with the noxious ichor dripping from its wounds.

He timed it perfectly, pivoting aside at the last possible instant. The beast barrelled past him, its scaly hide abrading a layer of encrusted filth from his armour, and slammed into the wall, embedding itself in the hatch they'd so recently climbed through, bending and tearing the thick metal around the sill as it rammed itself home. Jagged edges ripped into its rounded flanks, releasing

more trickles of blood, but it thrashed wildly nonetheless, lacerating its own flesh in its determination to be free and renew the attack.

As Lanthus turned aside, Beves fired the missile launcher. The krak warhead penetrated the monster's armoured hide easily, detonating in a shower of bile and viscera.

'Good shoo-' Lanthus began, only to be interrupted by a massive fireball, which ripped through the chamber. The detonation had touched off the noxious fumes from the sump, now mixed with the oxygen in the air around them to create a lethally volatile mixture.

Lanthus felt himself lifted from his feet and hurled across the room, amid a shower of deadly shards from the ruptured tank. Huge chunks of masonry plummeted from the ceiling, bouncing and cracking against the floor. One of the largest pieces pulverised the rockrete where Prius had been lying only a moment before, an instant after Kurtin dragged him to the safety of the tunnel mouth. Through his ringing ears, Lanthus heard both battle-brothers thanking the primarch for their deliverance. Beves had made it to the refuge too, protecting his heavy weapon from the hail of smaller detritus with the bulk of his armoured back.

'What was that?' Aldwyn's voice echoed from the helmet vox. 'It sounded like an explosion.'

'It was,' Lanthus said, rising to his feet. The other members of his combat squad were standing too, he was relieved to see, although everyone's armour was pitted with impact marks, and Prius' left shoulder was moving awkwardly where the creature's first charge had damaged the joint. 'No casualties.' He looked around the chamber. The corridor down which Aldwyn and his group had disappeared was blocked by tonnes of rubble; neither combat squad would be able to come to the aid of the other now. 'Proceed to the objective. We'll rendezvous there.'

The route to the gate controls led through a labyrinth of corridors, tunnels and chambers, every one of which bore the scars of desecration by the greenskin invaders. The closer they got to their objective, the more of the foul creatures there seemed to be, swarming in uncountable numbers, the noise of their quarrelling frequently interrupted by brief bursts of violence. In and around the milling orks the gretchin scuttled, even more numerous than their bulkier cousins, forever bickering among themselves and evading the anger of their hulking masters.

Despite the burning desire he felt to visit the vengeance of the Emperor on every enemy they saw, Lanthus held his own feelings, and those of the men he led, firmly in check, conscious that every metre they gained before discovery would improve their chances of success. From half-forgotten gantries and service conduits he observed their enemies at a distance, avoiding detection by a hair's breadth over a score of times, only giving the order to shed blood when it could be done silently. The greenskins that died, marking their passage with a trail of cadavers, did so in ones and twos, falling victim to the razor-edged crystal shards of the Astral Knights rather than being reaped in droves by their bolters.

It came as no surprise to him that Aldwyn advanced with far less circumspection, carving his way up from the underhive in a hail of bolter shells. The distant echoes of his progress could be heard reverberating through the corridors and service shafts, and many of the orks Lanthus' combat squad encountered were hurrying in the direction of the noise, so intent on throwing themselves into the fray that they never even noticed the four Astral Knights crouching in ambush mere metres away. The larger groups Lanthus let go, only giving the order to attack when he and his men had the advantage of numbers as well as surprise on their side.

None of them liked these tactics, he could tell, but then neither did he. Only once did anyone venture to object, after a group of half a dozen greenskins had hurried by and disappeared into the darkness of the corridor ahead blithely unaware of how close they'd come to death.

'Surely we could have taken them,' Beves said, secure in the neophyte's privilege of asking for clarification of established procedures in the squad he'd just joined, although the statement had been phrased with only just enough of the inflection of a question to avoid an accusation of insubordination. Prius and Kurtin nodded, almost imperceptibly, making their own reservations known. 'One burst would have...'

'Brought the greenskins down on us as hard as they're harrying Aldwyn,' Lanthus said, making it clear the subject was closed. 'There'll be fighting enough when we reach the gates, I can promise you. But the mission comes first.'

'Of course, brother-sergeant,' Beves said, accepting the self-evident truth, but the reluctance with which he did so was all too clear.

After such slow and frustrating progress, the first sight of their objective almost

came as a surprise. Even more so, Lanthus thought grimly, than the fact that they'd made it this far without bringing an entire army of greenskins down on their necks. He held up a hand to stop the battle-brothers at his back.

'We're there,' he said, edging to the mouth of the service tunnel which had brought them so close. A thick grille closed it off from the wide piazza, almost a kilometre across, which, in happier times had been a place of commerce and leisure, affording the combat squad he led a measure of much-needed concealment. Traffic in and out of the central hive had once congregated here, just within the gates, attracting innumerable traders, cargo brokers, guns for hire and pickpockets. Now it swarmed with orks and gretchin, snarling and squealing at one another, and, inevitably, coming to blows or casual slaughter. Not all the weapons fire Lanthus could hear seemed directed over the walls at the besieging Astral Knights beyond, and he smiled grimly, content to let the bestial creatures thin one another out a little more before commencing the job himself.

In the distance, across the heaving mass of greenskin bodies, he could see two thick bronze doors, each twenty metres wide and twice that high, set in the far wall. Above them, the wide walkway was even more crowded with orks than the main concourse, fighting and struggling to reach a vantage point from where they could blaze away ineffectually at the rest of the company, which by now would be dug in just beyond the gates, eager to carry the fight to the invaders as soon as Squad Lanthus completed its mission. More than one greenskin failed in the attempt to gain the overcrowded ramparts, falling instead to a messy death, to the loudly evident amusement of the others.

'We can see the gates,' Lanthus voxed. 'Combat Squad Two, location and status?'

'Still two levels to go,' Aldwyn voxed back. 'Meeting heavy resistance.' His words were interrupted by a burst of bolter fire, probably his own. 'We've lost Spaets, but everyone else is still standing.' The sound of firing intensified. 'We'll be with you as soon as we can.'

'It won't be easy getting through that many,' Beves said speculatively, gazing out over the sea of orks, hefting his missile launcher as he spoke.

'We won't have to,' Lanthus said, indicating a nearby staircase. 'The control chapel's up there.' The lowest tread was barely a hundred metres from where they stood, but three or four score orks were milling around between them and it, passing the time in their usual fashion, with food and casual violence. The stairway had once been as elegant as its prominent position demanded, bannistered with marble filigree, incorporating finely-chiselled images of the

aquila and an assortment of local saints, but now much of the intricate carving had been shattered into fragments and dust.

‘Ready to move on your signal, brother-sergeant,’ Prius said, standing aside from the metal grille, and holding up a detonator. Strips of det tape now wound their way around the steel bars, and as soon as he pressed the activation rune, the resulting explosion would sever them simultaneously.

‘Wait,’ Lanthus said, his eyes on the greenskins. A visible change was creeping over them, one or two breaking off their argument to listening to something all but inaudible, and a couple of others were sniffing the air. Gradually, they began to cluster together, the sparks of aggression between them dying out, to be replaced by something else, harder and more focused.

‘Waaaaaaaaaagh!’

With a sudden bellow Lanthus could feel vibrating in his bones, the whole group suddenly began to move, charging away in what seemed to be a single mass of ork flesh.

‘Combat Squad Two, you’ve another mob heading your way,’ Lanthus voxed. How the greenskins had sensed the distant firefight he had no idea – perhaps they’d heard the bolter fire, or been drawn towards it by their innate affinity for conflict. But, in being impelled to respond, they had left the way clear for the party of Space Marines to reach their objective.

‘Acknowledged.’ Aldwyn’s voice held an uncharacteristic edge of tension. ‘But we’re hard pressed already. Klymer’s down too.’

‘Hold as long as you can,’ Lanthus said, and signalled to Prius to detonate the charges.

The explosion echoed hollowly along the service duct, but Prius had placed them well, and the heavy metal lattice fell out and away, crushing a couple of stray gretchin whose reflexes had been outstripped by the speed of the blast wave.

Even before the grille had come to rest, Lanthus was out of the duct, his bolter barking, confident that his companions would be hard on his heels. Stunned gretchin scattered, squealing, or exploded into mist as his bolter-rounds detonated, carving a bloody path through their obstructing bodies towards the all-important stairway. Prius and Kurtin were firing as well, driving the smaller greenskins back from their flanks, and after a moment Beves’ missile launcher coughed too. The rocket detonated ahead of them on the stairs, its frag charge hurling out a whirlwind of deadly flechettes, which cleared the lower flight of everything except cadavers and body parts.

Inevitably, the orks closest to the carnage began to notice the new threat as soon as the firing started, breaking off from their headlong charge towards Aldwyn's beleaguered combat squad, and turning back to face it. Crude stubber rounds began to rattle from the Astral Knights filth-encrusted armour, scoring bright slashes and pockmarks in the dried sludge, though many more missed their mark than hit it. In their eagerness to engage the Space Marines, the ork gunners cut down almost as many of the intervening gretchin as Lanthus and his men.

'Guards!' Beves warned, as a group of orks appeared at the top of the stairs and began to charge downwards, brandishing their heavy axes, trampling the gretchin trying to flee upwards as they came. Lanthus dropped them all with a single burst of bolter fire that blew apart their legs. Carried onward by momentum and gravity, they collapsed, bounced, and continued down the staircase in an avalanche of flesh. The Astral Knights hurdled the toppling, roaring bodies without breaking stride, and the luckless greenskins carried on to the bottom of the flight, skittling the first group of orks to have started upwards in pursuit.

'Secure the stairs,' Lanthus ordered, and the bolters of Kurtin and Prius began a continuous roaring, which all but drowned out the war cries of the enraged ork warriors below, sweeping the treads clear of the vanguard. Beves placed a couple of frag rounds further back, taking out a brace of other groups which had begun charging across the concourse to join the fight.

'We can't hold them for long,' Beves said, and Lanthus could see at once he was right. Despite the disruption the carefully placed warheads were causing, preventing them from coalescing into a single unified swarm, the greenskins were advancing inexorably, like the tide up a slipway, each wave reaching higher than the last before being swept clear by the disciplined bolter fire. If it hadn't been for the steadily growing pile of the dead and dying impeding their progress, the orks might well have been on them already.

'We won't have to,' Lanthus assured him, sprinting towards the control chapel at the end of the balcony. Once it had been glassed in, allowing the tech-priests who tended the mechanica it housed to observe the gates they controlled, and richly decorated with devotional icons of the Cult Mechanicus; now the glass was shattered, and the embossed cogwheels battered or ripped away. Crude modifications had been made to the control lecterns, no doubt intended to simplify them to the point where they made sense to the average orkish intellect, and Lanthus had no difficulty in deducing their operation. He slammed home the

heavy levers, muttering the benedictions provided for him by the company Techmarine, and breathed a silent, additional prayer to the Emperor.

For a moment, nothing seemed to happen, then a loud grinding echoed across the plaza, drowning out even the bellowing of the orks, and the roaring of the Astral Knights bolters.

‘Set the charges,’ Lanthus ordered, and Beves hurried to obey, attaching small packs of explosive to the control lecterns. ‘Detonate as soon as they’re fully open.’

As he re-emerged onto the balcony, he could already see movement by the opening gates, and magnified the image in his helm: Rhinos and Land Raiders were swarming through the widening gap, firing as they came, sweeping all before them in a blizzard of explosive and incendiary death. Behind them, the smaller figures of the Assault and Tactical squads were visible, dispersing smoothly to their assigned objectives, the greenskins falling back in the face of their well-disciplined advance.

‘They’re breaking,’ Prius reported from the top of the stairs, and Lanthus saw that it was true: most of the orks still clustered around the foot of the staircase were turning away, galvanised by this new and potent threat, charging to meet it with the beserker fury of their kind. The few too steeped in bloodlust to follow them, remaining determined to engage the small party of Space Marines above, fell almost instantly to the disciplined bolter fire of the Astral Knights, and for a few brief moments Lanthus found himself a mere spectator to the slaughter. Then the boom of the demolition charges echoed across the balcony, the sharp sound swallowed almost instantly by the clamour of the battle raging below, and a plume of smoke billowed from the shattered control chapel.

‘Objective secure,’ Lanthus voxed to Captain Galad, savouring a moment of pride in the fulfilment of his duty, then opened a command channel to Aldwyn. No doubt his hot-headed subordinate was as relieved at the success of their mission as he had been. ‘Combat Squad Two, status report.’

Nothing but the hiss of static answered him. After a moment, he tried Klymer, then all the others in turn, even Spaets, the first to fall. The same lack of response greeted him every time.

‘Could we have lost them all?’ Beves asked, clearly unwilling to believe it. Lanthus shook his head with an assurance he didn’t feel.

‘We’ll know when we find them,’ he replied, leading the way back to the head of the stairs. There could well be survivors, and even if there weren’t, their gene-seed would have to be recovered. Trying not to believe the worst, he led the way

back down the stairs, kicking the obstructing ork corpses aside as he went. But he'd made the right decision, he told himself. The mission always came first.

As the last greenskin cadaver rolled out of the way, he caught sight of something plodding towards them, a single figure, too far from the battle-brothers still pouring in through the wide-open gates to be one of them. An Astral Knight nonetheless, the blue and yellow of his armour almost invisible beneath its coating of filth and ork blood. His helmet was off, hanging from one hand, its visor smashed. Wearing it, the Space Marine would have been blind.

'Aldwyn.' Lanthus stepped forward to greet him with a surge of relief, then hesitated, reading the fury in his battle-brother's eyes. 'Where are the others?'

'They're dead.' The accusation was short and venomous. 'We were a diversion, weren't we? That's why you separated the combat squads.'

Lanthus' momentary silence was all the confirmation the enraged Space Marine needed. In truth, he hadn't been entirely certain that Aldwyn's combat squad would distract the orks from the objective for the crucial few seconds which had ensured his success, but, given their leader's impulsive character, he'd felt it more likely than not that they'd engage the enemy before reaching it. 'The mission comes first,' he said. 'And we succeeded. The losses were acceptable.'

'Not to me.' Aldwyn's face grew even darker, holding his rage close, nursing it into white heat. 'Now is not the time.' He turned, gunning down a wounded ork which had tried to raise its weapon, then swung back to face Lanthus anew. 'But there will be a reckoning, brother-sergeant.' He spat out the rank like an insult. 'This I swear.'

Lanthus felt the tide of the duel flowing inexorably in his direction. Strike after strike had failed to connect, and Aldwyn's frustration was blazing out of him, bright as a plasma flare. Soon, Lanthus knew, it would overwhelm him, impel him to some desperate act, and the fight would be over.

No sooner had the thought come, than the act followed. Lanthus feinted, opening his guard in a way a cooler opponent would surely have recognised as a ruse, but all Aldwyn saw was a chance to strike at his hated enemy. He took it, stabbing upward at the exposed nerve cluster beneath Lanthus' armpit, but Lanthus moved in towards him, trapping Aldwyn's elbow against his arm, keeping his opponent's shard too far behind him to cut. He brought up his knee, hard, into the pit of Aldwyn's stomach, and the Space Marine fell, winded, to the sand. An audible ripple of indrawn breath echoed around the arena from the tiered seats surrounding it, but Lanthus refused to be distracted.

Twisting the trapped arm, Lanthus prepared to strike down with his shard, but Aldwyn was too quick. Just as the razor-sharp crystal kissed his flesh, raising an amber welt across his ribcage which burst through the rent in his tunic, he grabbed Lanthus' leg and threw him. Lanthus crashed to the ground and rolled away, making distance from his opponent. Both men scrambled to their feet, their shards glittering in the diffuse glow from the stars above.

'You were wise not to accept first blood,' Lanthus taunted, then hurled himself back into the fray.

Goaded, Aldwyn charged again, all caution forgotten, intent only on bringing down his enemy. Lanthus evaded easily, feeling Emperor and primarch alike at his back, sure now that their judgement would be with him. He kicked out, shattering Aldwyn's nose, and sending him sprawling, then moved in for the *coup de grace*. His shard was in his hand, and he raised it, bringing it down in a short, terminal arc, burying it to the hilt in Aldwyn's throat.

This time, the collective gasp of his battle-brothers was louder; no enemies of the Emperor, or horrors of the warp, could dismay these hardened warriors, but the spectacle of fratricide struck at the heart of all they believed in. Numb disbelief overtook Lanthus, at the sight of a fellow Astral Knight's life blood pouring over his own fingers. Then pain flared as his kneecap shattered, and he fell heavily, the mortally wounded Aldwyn lashing out with the last of his ebbing strength. Before Lanthus could block it, Aldwyn stabbed his shard into the exposed nerve point he'd tried to attack before. White agony coruscated through Lanthus, paralysing his left side, and he fell heavily to the sand.

'The judgement of Emperor and primarch is clear,' the Chapter Master said, his voice carrying easily across the silent arena. 'Brother-sergeant Lanthus is exonerated.'

Feet crunched on the carpet of blood-flecked crystals. Lanthus turned his head, expecting to see the Apothecary approaching to tend him, but to his surprise he looked up into the shadowed eyes of Chapter Master Amhrad himself.

'My lord.' He tried to rise, but his shattered body refused to obey him. He looked round. Beves, Prius and Kurtin, the last survivors of the squad he'd inherited, were waiting on the fringes of the arena, though whether to tend to him or mourn Aldwyn, he couldn't tell. But no one would approach the fallen combatants while the Chapter Master wished to have words with the survivor.

'Your first taste of command has cost you much,' Amhrad said quietly. 'Half your squad. And the taint of fratricide can never be expunged.'

Lanthus was silent for a moment. 'We beat the greenskins,' he said at last.

‘Any sacrifice is acceptable if the stakes are high enough. Aldwyn should have realised that.’

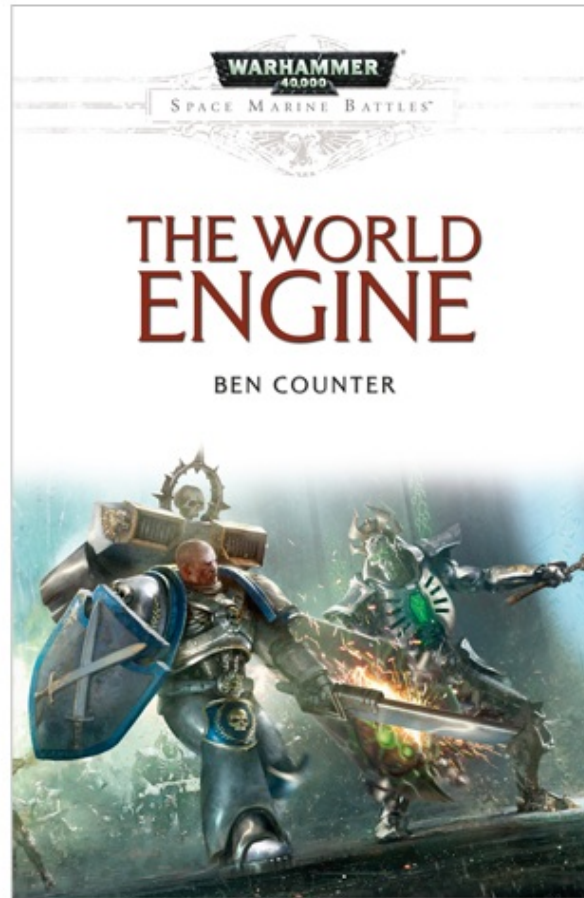
‘Indeed.’ For a moment the Chapter Master seemed lost in thought. ‘And your honour?’

Lanthus didn’t hesitate. ‘An acceptable loss,’ he replied.

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Sandy Mitchell is the author of a long-running series of Warhammer 40,000 novels about the hero of the Imperium, Commissar Ciaphas Cain. The most recent book in that series is *The Greater Good*, and there is also the audio drama *Dead In The Water*. He has written a plethora of short stories, including 'The Last Man' in the *Sabbat Worlds* anthology, along with several novels set in the Warhammer world. He lives and works in Cambridge.

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