

**WARHAMMER**  
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**GEORGE  
MANN**

**OLD  
SCARS**

**A BRAZEN MINOTAURS STORY**

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Old Scars - George Mann

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# **OLD SCARS**

**George Mann**

**07.13 HRS**

'Tell me of Karos, Pradeus. I understand you have walked upon its surface once before.' Daed's voice echoed around the chapel, deep and booming, like the low rumble of an oncoming storm.

Pradeus thought his own voice seemed thin and inadequate by comparison. He sucked his teeth – a nervous habit he'd developed in childhood and been unable to shake. 'A long time ago, when the twin suns still burned, bright and bloody red in the sky. It was a lush planet, covered in vast savannahs and soaring Imperial cities. Now it is a dead world, captain. Little can survive its harsh climate. What human population there is ekes out a paltry existence in vast thermal hives, a warren of tunnels and sunken conurbations deep below ground.'

'Why?' asked Daed. He placed his gleaming bronze vambrace upon the table beside its twin, flexing his shoulders. A thick, ropey scar described a snake across his back, its head upon his right shoulder, its body curling down across his spine so that the thin tip of its tail rested just above his left hip. The flesh was purple and puckered where it had healed imperfectly, the damaged halves of the wound reforming in an uneasy truce.

Pradeus was glad the captain could not see the expression of awe on his face. The weapon that had inflicted such a grave wound must have been terrible indeed; the weapon's bearer even more so. 'Why?' he echoed.

'Yes. I want to understand. Why do the humans continue to inhabit such a blighted world?'

Pradeus nodded, although the gesture was redundant; Daed continued to remove his armour, his back to the Chapter serf. 'The planet is nothing but a shadow of what it was, but once it was glorious. Rich mines seamed with

precious metals and ores, spired cities stretching as far as the eye could see, all presided over by the Ecclesiarchy, high in their fortress-monastery. Now the people, I believe, cling to that former greatness, refusing to give up.'

'I admire their tenacity,' said Daed, flexing his shoulders. His thick, braided hair hung down between his shoulders. 'So the surface is utterly inhospitable?'

'Karos's suns have grown pale and thin, with only the merest hint of warmth ever shining upon the surface. The entire world is now encased in a wintry glove of ammonia ice, which shrouds the ruins of the old cities. The people have been driven below ground, making what they can of the ancient mining tunnels that riddle the rocky crust beneath the ice.' Pradeus glanced over his shoulder, looking to the door, where he had sensed movement. He saw nothing.

'And now the greenskins have arrived,' said Daed, darkly.

'Yes, captain, although for what purpose, I do not know.'

'Murder, pillaging, the sating of their foul appetites... They are not so difficult to understand,' said Daed.

'You have fought them before?' ventured Pradeus.

Daed laughed. 'I have spilled their stinking blood on a hundred worlds, Pradeus, and will do so on a hundred more.' He stooped to remove a leg brace and the scar on his back twisted and flushed.

'And they have spilled yours, captain, lest you forget.' The newcomer's voice echoed from the doorway, close to where Pradeus had sensed movement just a few moments before. He turned to see Theseon, the Chief Librarian of the Brazen Minotaurs, standing in the open archway, resplendent in his azure armour. He glanced back at Daed, waiting to see his reaction.

Daed turned towards his battle-brother. 'And I still bear the scars to prove it,' he said, levelly.

'Old scars,' said Theseon, walking into the room. 'And yet they still trouble you.'

Daed removed his second leg brace, but kept his eyes fixed firmly on the Librarian. 'Karos is an Imperial world. The Guard cannot weather the climate, and so the greenskins, impervious to the cold, run riot upon its surface. What would you have me do, Theseon?'

Theseon placed a gauntleted hand upon Daed's shoulder. 'Nothing but your duty, captain,' he said, and Pradeus could sense the statement was loaded with a meaning he could not understand.

Daed nodded. 'Then we deploy within the hour. We shall liberate Karos from the xenos scum that have infected it.'

Theseon nodded but did not speak. He lowered his hand.

'Pradeus?'

'Yes, captain?' said Pradeus, stepping around the bulk of the Librarian so that his master could see him.

'My armour is still ingrained with the blood of traitors. See that it is cleaned and prepared for battle.'

Pradeus's heart sank. *Within the hour?* 'Yes, captain,' he said, trying to keep the apprehension from his voice.

'And Pradeus?'

Pradeus nodded.

'I want it to gleam as I fell the foul brutes with my axe. I want them to know the Brazen Minotaurs have arrived.' He turned and stalked from the room, dressed only in his parchment-coloured loincloth.

Theseon turned to look at Pradeus, his face impassive behind the faceplate of his helm. 'You'd better get started,' he said, without a hint of irony.

## **08.09 HRS**

The battle-barge *Pride of Tauron* disgorged its payload of Thunderhawks, Storm Eagles and Stormtalons into the upper atmosphere of Karos in muted silence, as if the orks below, so intent on subjugating the human population and seizing control of the underground hives, had not even considered looking to the skies above. If they were aware of the Space Marines' presence, they did not show it. There was no bark of surface-to-air fire, no evidence of ork vessels hurriedly scrambling to launch. This, Daed considered, spoke of either their ignorance or their sheer, animalistic arrogance. Both would prove useful in their undoing.

From the viewing port of the command ship, the barge hung in space like a vast whale, attended by a school of tiny fish. As Daed watched, the flotilla of landing vessels banked and fanned out in unison, swimming down towards the planet, their engines burning. These, however, were the deadliest of fish: they harboured teeth and claws. The orks would be destroyed, and the planet cleansed – no matter the inhospitable nature of the climate or the ferocity of the xenos. There were, as Theseon had intimated, old scores to settle.

The Thunderhawk banked, sliding easily through the thin air. Daed reached for the stabilising bar above his head, holding firm as the vessel accelerated towards the planet.

He could hear nothing but the sharp whine of the engines, as if the sound itself filled his head, drowning out everything, muffling his very thoughts. He focused

on the fact that soon he would once again be in the thick of battle, bloodying his axe on the fresh corpses of his enemy.

He glanced at Theseon, who sat immobile in webbing close by, his head bowed, his gauntleted hands folded upon his lap. Something was troubling the Librarian, and it was more than simple concern over Daed's order to deploy to the planet below. Daed decided he would speak with Theseon upon planetfall.

The Thunderhawk bucked suddenly and banked to the left, the engines stuttering as the pilot fought to maintain control. Daed maintained his grip on the stabilising bar as the vessel went into freefall, spiralling around as it dove nose-first towards the frozen planet, like water circling a drain.

He opened a vox-channel, shouting over the noise of the screeching engines. 'Report!'

'We're under fire!' came the immediate reply from Caedus, the pilot. 'We took a direct hit to the primary engine.'

'Get this vessel under control, Caedus,' replied Daed, firmly. He released his left hand from the bar, holding on with the right, and allowed himself to fall against the side of the ship, his power armour clanging loudly against the plasteel. He peered out of the viewing port, fighting the momentum as the Thunderhawk continued to spin. Bright tracer fire scratched at the sky, indiscriminately showering Daed's small flotilla as they emerged from the cover of the clouds. As he watched, one of the Stormtalons detonated in a shower of burning shards, while a second Thunderhawk streamed out of the heavens on a wild trajectory, trailing black, oily smoke.

So, the orks had woken up. Daed couldn't suppress a grin. They were going to have a fight on their hands.

The metal footplates buckled slightly beneath his feet, the plasteel screaming with the stress, and he wondered for a moment whether the vessel would maintain its integrity as they spun towards the ground. Then Daed felt the nose coming up once again, the ship levelling off. A quick glance out of the window told him they were only a few hundred metres from the ground: a pallid landscape punctuated with eccentric hulking shapes – the remains of an ancient city, now entirely encased in ice.

'We need to set down.' Caedus's voice burred over the vox. 'We're losing altitude.'

'Then get us as close to the rendezvous point as you can,' replied Daed. Through the viewing port, he watched as his brothers broke through the clouds, dropping beneath the cover of the ruined city, picking their way through the

valleys and channels formed by the ice. Around them, burning rain scattered across the white expanse, showering down in glittering fragments: the remains of the fallen, taken out by the ork batteries.

'Now we all have something to avenge,' said Theseon, quietly, from behind him.

### **10.34 HRS**

The rendezvous point was, it transpired, a ramshackle structure erected by the Guard in an attempt to raise a defensible position on the ice. It was on the outskirts of the frozen city, and Daed, Theseon, Caedus, Aramus and Throle had been forced to cover the last five kilometres on foot, running through the frozen streets, their helms fogging with crystallised moisture from the air. There was little evidence of the xenos here, other than the heaped remains of dead humans, dragged from their warrens and left to the vagaries of the extreme weather. Judging by the expressions on their frigid faces, many of them had still been alive when the ice and thin air had done its work.

The Guard's stronghold had been spliced together from plasteel sheeting and chunks of masonry excavated from the ruins. As Daed drew closer he could make out the remains of at least two Baneblade tanks, too, shoring up the barricade. Steam curled from small venting pillars that had been sunk into the ice, and he could feel the vibrating whirr of machinery deep beneath his boots. There was no sign of any actual Guardsmen, leaving Daed to conclude that the bulk of the human forces were either dead, or cowering beneath the surface, drawing what heat and sustenance they still could from the planet's core.

He was relieved to find some evidence of industry, however; the small Brazen Minotaurs contingent was out on the ice, working to strengthen the perimeter, unloading the transport vessels and unlashng the tanks and ground vehicles.

Daed thumbed his vox. 'Sharus?'

'Captain? It's about time...' came the response. 'Much longer and there wouldn't have been any greenskins left for you.'

Daed laughed for the first time that day. 'Have you located the commander of the human forces?'

'Yes, captain,' said Sharus. 'In the sinkhole, over by the venting pillars. Lieutenant Ariseth is his name. He claims there are very few of them left, that the greenskins have slowly eroded their forces over recent months.'

'I do not doubt it,' said Daed. 'The conditions favour the thick-skinned xenos. The humans are too weak to withstand the ice and the thin air of this dying

world.'

'And yet we are here to protect them, all the same,' said Theseon.

'We will do what they cannot, in the name of the Emperor,' said Daed, firmly. 'We will scorch these foul greenskins from the face of this world.'

'The auspex readings suggest the xenos are many in number, captain,' said Throle.

'Then it will be necessary to hit them hardest where the most damage will be done,' replied Daed. 'To strike when they least expect it. In this I must take counsel from Lieutenant Ariseth, who knows the movements and proclivities of the enemy.'

### **11.42 HRS**

The underground warren was comprised of nothing but the lined tunnels of an old mine, filled with coiled cables and dim electric lumen-strips, which were strung up at intervals along the low ceiling. They cast a sickly, yellow pall upon proceedings as Daed was led purposefully deeper into the structure, towards the command centre where Lieutenant Ariseth awaited him. The walls and ceilings ran with melting ice as the thermal cables fought a constant battle with the encroaching planetary winter, corrosive ammonia gas seeping out into the stale atmosphere. He'd noticed on the way down that the humans hid their faces behind gas masks in order to survive.

Daed glanced from side to side as he walked, taking it all in. If this was representative of the manner in which the human population now lived, the invasion was barely worth the orks' trouble. Small chambers, many of them formed from passages that had been widened or simply collapsed together, branched off like satellites from the main tunnels, and in these Guardsmen trained, rested or simply sat around waiting to be given orders.

Ariseth was waiting in one such chamber, hunched over a hand-drawn map as if attempting to divine a new stratagem simply by staring at the contours of the ice fields. He looked up when Daed entered the room, and immediately got to his feet. 'Most welcome, Captain Daed,' he said, unable to suppress the nervousness in his voice.

Daed stared down at him, weighing him up. The man looked grizzled and worn down by his experiences. His face was mostly hidden behind a respirator, and the flesh around it was black and peeling from too much exposure to the cold. He was wrapped in bundled animal furs and wore a fur hat pulled down low over his brow. One of his eyes had been replaced by a mechanical equivalent, and it

turned and whirred as it attempted to focus on the Brazen Minotaur now.

'Lieutenant,' said Daed, his voice echoing and hollow-sounding in the small room. 'The Brazen Minotaurs are here to assist in the removal of the xenos infestation from Karos.'

Ariseth raised an eyebrow. 'You make it sound as if we haven't been trying to do that for months,' he said, a modicum of bitterness creeping into his tone.

Daed allowed him that. 'You must tell me everything you know of the greenskins' motives and strategies if we are to prove successful.'

'Gladly,' said Ariseth. 'It's as if the damn things are able to predict our every move, our every counterstrike. Whatever we do they are ready for us, and ready to hit back, hard, when we're overextended and least prepared. We are few now, captain. Many thousands of us have been lost.'

Daed nodded. 'And their goal?'

Ariseth shrugged. 'Mayhem, destruction, cold-blooded murder... They seem only to relish the slaughter. They seize our vehicles and modify them, sending them back into battle, firing upon us with our own ammunition. They storm the hives, cutting the power to the thermal generators so that the populations freeze. They seem to find such things amusing. What's more, they seem impervious to the damn cold.'

'Have they established a base, a stronghold?' said Daed. He'd seen readouts on the *Pride of Tauron* that suggested the ork army had been massing in one particular location, but Daed knew the knowledge of the men on the ground counted for ten of any such readouts.

'They have,' said Ariseth, with a reluctant sigh. 'If you'll return to the surface, it's best if I show you.'

## 12.16 HRS

In the distance he could make out a series of dark shapes, jutting out of the tundra like black spurs.

'Venting towers,' said Ariseth, trembling with the cold, despite the thick layers of fur that rendered him almost unidentifiable.

Daed peered more closely at the distant structures, and could just make out faint trails of steam billowing from the crests of the towers. 'Siphoning off the excess heat from the thermal hives?'

'Yes. They form a chain over three hundred kilometres long, puncturing the ice at regular intervals,' replied Ariseth.

'Highly defensible,' mused Daed, scanning the horizons. The towering shapes

loomed away into the distance.

'I'm afraid the orks have already established that,' said Ariseth, reluctantly. 'They're using the towers as staging posts, defending them like watchtowers or bastions. That one,' he pointed with a gloved hand to one of the towers immediately opposite them, around thirty kilometres distant, 'is their command post. That's where their warlord has established his base.'

'Then that should be our target,' said Daed, bristling. His hand closed unconsciously on the haft of his axe.

'There are hundreds of the beasts between us and that tower, captain, if not more. We don't have the men or the artillery to take it.'

Daed grinned. 'We have the will of the Emperor. That will be enough.'

'I hope so, captain. For all our sakes,' said Ariseth, although it was clear from his tone that he thought it would not.

'Do you know what the greenskins call their warlord?' asked Daed.

'I believe it is known amongst its kin as Grakka,' came the response.

Daed's grip tightened on the haft of his axe.

'Grakka?' he echoed. He felt the beating of his hearts quicken, the surge of unwanted memories from Praxis, of lying face down in the mud, his spine damaged, the flesh and muscle of his back carved into ribbons by the beast's blade. And of the yellow-tusked, black-eyed face of the creature looming over him, its rancid breath foul and warm on his face.

'Yes, sir,' said Ariseth. 'Have you heard the name before?'

'I have,' growled Daed, quietly. 'I have.'

## **15.27 HRS**

'The towers are enormous vents,' said Daed, 'slowly siphoning off the excess heat from the underground hives.'

'And the greenskins are using them as defensive positions?' asked Aramus.

'Indeed. One of them represents their command post. That's where Grakka is skulking,' said Daed, gritting his teeth. Even now he could visualise the moment when he might see that greenskin's face again, how he might cleave its head from its shoulders with a sweep of his axe. The five of them – his veteran squad – stood outside on the ice in the waning light, surveying the horizon.

'You wish to mount a head-on attack on this command post?' said Caedus, incredulous. 'Even for you, captain, that's an audacious move.'

'I see no other way,' said Daed resolutely. 'According to the data provided by Lieutenant Ariseth, the greenskins outnumber us fifty to one. The Guard are half

frozen and will be of no use to us on the open field of battle. Even with the Dreadnoughts and the Land Raiders we are badly outnumbered, and the greenskins have had months to learn the lay of the land and mount their defences. We would not be well served by meeting them on the tundra, as hungry as my axe is to cleave their brutish skulls.'

'But surely, captain, we risk as much by mounting an assault on their stronghold?' said Throle. 'The command position will be heavily defended, and it will prove difficult to lay siege to such an edifice when there are thousands of greenskins between us and the base of the tower.'

'An aerial assault. Ariseth argues that the xenos believe the venting towers to be a series of abandoned bastions. They are not aware of the true function of the structures. A well-placed attack could collapse the vents, causing the pressure to build up very quickly,' said Daed, glancing at Theseon, who was standing to one side of the small group, staring out across the icy plain.

'And the ensuing explosion would topple the tower, killing all of the greenskins within,' concluded Caedus. 'It might work.'

Daed nodded. 'More than that, the build up of pressure could cause a chain reaction, causing the neighbouring towers to blow in concert, taking out the entire xenos force.'

'It's too dangerous,' said Aramus. 'We've little chance of being able to strike with such accuracy, particularly if we are harried by the enemy as we close in. We know they have surface-to-air capabilities at the very least.'

'It's our only option,' replied Daed, as if that were the end of the matter.

'What of the enemy's ability to predict the movements of the Guard? Do they have a spy amongst the humans?' said Caedus.

Daed shook his head. 'Mere superstition. There is nothing to it. It is simply that Grakka understands the strategies of the Imperial Guard, as he has encountered them so many times before. These humans rely solely on their training. They cannot flex. They have forgotten how to surprise the enemy.'

'Forgive me, captain, but we are all aware of what happened on Praxis. I cannot blame you for seeking to have your revenge upon the beast that bested you there – indeed, I would gladly join you in such a quest – but can you be sure that you are not allowing the matter to colour your judgement?' Throle looked to the others for support. 'I fear Aramus is correct. Our chances of victory are slim.'

Daed fixed Throle with a firm stare. 'I will take those odds, Throle, and we will do our duty. Grakka has burned entire worlds – *Imperial* worlds – and we do the Emperor's bidding when we set out to destroy him. We do this to avenge the

dead, and to prevent the spread of his foul greenskins any further. My experience of Grakka has taught me one thing: that he must be stopped. If I seek vengeance, it is for the many who have tasted his axe and not survived, as well as for myself. For our fallen brothers.'

Throle nodded. 'As you command, captain.'

'For Tauron!' bellowed Caedus.

'For Tauron!' echoed the others, save for Theseon, who remained silent, studying Daed from afar.

### 17.32 HRS

'You are distracted, Theseon. Something troubles you.'

Theseon raised his head to look up at Daed, who towered over him, resplendent in his bronze armour, power axe clutched tightly in his fist, the pelt of a black Tauronic lion draped over his shoulders.

'I am tired, captain. I sense... another mind. A confused mind. It is watchful. It saps my strength.'

'Another psyker?' asked Daed, his voice low.

Theseon nodded. 'A xenos.'

'The truth of the matter becomes clear to me, Theseon. If Grakka is aided by a psyker, then it explains how he has so far been able to predict the movements of the Guard. We must strike soon, before he has chance to gather his forces in preparation for our attack.'

'I advise caution, captain. You must not allow your judgement to become clouded by thoughts of personal vendetta,' said Theseon. 'We are not here simply to settle a score, but to liberate an Imperial world.'

'I know that, Librarian,' spat Daed, turning to glance at Throle, who had entered the small underground chamber while Theseon had been talking.

'Theseon speaks sense, captain. If the greenskins are able to anticipate our strategies, then we might look to uncover new ways to surprise them. Perhaps the assault on the venting tower has already been compromised.'

'No,' said Daed. 'The attack must go ahead as planned. It is our best chance to neutralise the threat. If we can take out their command post, we might yet ignite a chain reaction that will envelop their entire force. I see no alternative.'

'But captain—' began Throle.

'The captain is right, Throle,' interrupted Theseon. 'The assault on the tower must go ahead as planned.'

'And the psyker?' asked Throle, clearly restraining himself.

'I shall see to the psyker,' said Theseon.

'Very well,' said Daed. 'I shall instruct the others to prepare for the attack.' He turned and strode from the room, ducking his head beneath the low lintel.

Theseon turned to Throle, holding up a hand until the sound of the captain's footsteps had died away down the passage. 'Here is what we must do...' he said, quietly.

## 19.46 HRS

The tension in the repaired Thunderhawk was palpable as it roared above the ice-shrouded ruins. The five Brazen Minotaurs sat in silence, lashed to their webbing. The Thunderhawk was flanked by two Storm Eagles and a battery of Stormtalons, which would work to draw fire away from the command ship as they approached the venting tower, engaging the greenskins whilst Daed set about taking out the vents themselves.

They had left the ground vehicles and a second Thunderhawk posted to the ramshackle base of the Guardsmen. If the mission was successful, they would be needed to help mop up any remaining xenos; if the mission failed... Well, they would be needed to protect the remaining humans from the tide of alien beasts that would soon follow. Daed was aware of the risks.

'Five kilometres and counting,' said Caedus from the pilot's pit. 'And here comes the first response.'

The Thunderhawk took a sudden evasive manoeuvre, dipping low to avoid artillery fire from below. The orks, it seemed, were ready for them.

'Return fire,' ordered Daed, and Throle set the battlecannons ablaze, churning up the ice in long furrows ahead of them. Through the viewing port, Daed could see the Storm Eagles doing the same, unleashing a barrage on the massed ranks of orks far below.

Daed consulted his auspex. 'Something is wrong. The orks are pulling back. They have amassed around the command tower.'

He was interrupted by the bark of heavy surface-to-air fire and the sound of a nearby Stormtalon detonating. Caedus banked sharply, and then levelled again, attempting to avoid becoming the weapon's next target.

'Librarian!' Daed growled. 'You said you would see to the alien psyker. But now this,' he turned the display of his auspex to present the screen to Theseon, who sat opposite him, silently regarding his captain. 'The xenos are aware of our attack. They have formed a defensive perimeter around the tower. There must be thousands of them...' He trailed off, accusation in his tone.

'Two kilometres,' came the report from Caedus.

'We'll never get through such a barrier,' said Daed, angrily. 'We'll have to turn back, remount our attack.'

'Now, Caedus!' called Theseon, and in response the Thunderhawk dipped and turned sharply to the left. Daed, glancing out of the viewing port, saw that the other vessels were following suit, pulling away from the target.

'What in the name of the Emperor?'

'Trust me, captain,' said Theseon. 'This is how I will see to the psyker.'

The chatter of the ork weapons stuttered and died as the Thunderhawk shot away at speed. 'I do not know what game you are playing, Librarian, but I expect answers,' said Daed, a warning note in his voice.

'Everything will become clear in a moment, captain,' replied Theseon, distracted, as he leaned forward, straining in his webbing in order to see out of the forward viewing ports. 'There!' he said, triumphantly. 'The second tower. That is our target, Throle. Collapse those vents.'

The battlecannons burst to life once again, chewing holes in the plasteel flank of the tower as Caedus brought the Thunderhawk around in a wide arc. Daed watched as the venting shafts shattered and collapsed in upon themselves in a cloud of steam, dust and debris.

The Thunderhawk banked again, pulling up higher and away from the tower.

'It should take only a few moments... ' said Theseon.

The first sign of the coming eruption came in the form of a deep rumble that grew slowly until it reached fever pitch. As Daed watched, the ice around the tower began to fracture, opening large rents in the bedrock beneath. Steam hissed from the tectonic wounds, gushing forth as the pressure attempted to find a way out and was instead forced along through the underground channels of the old thermal hive, once inhabited by humans, and now the domain of the orks.

Caedus followed the fracturing landmass as it raced across the landscape, tracking it towards the gathered mob of unsuspecting xenos. By now the Thunderhawk was too high to be able to see clearly how the greenskins were reacting, but Daed knew they would be attempting to scatter.

And then, the mounting pressure finally found its outlet – the second venting tower. The command post of the ork warlord, Grakka.

The tower detonated in a blossom of steam and light, erupting like a thunderclap. Debris billowed into the air as the very ground around the orks began to subside, the foundations of the tower collapsing, dragging the gathered xenos down into the depths of the fractured hive, cooking them alive in the

gushing steam or crushing them beneath the shattered bedrock.

'It is done,' said Theseon, as the Thunderhawk swept over the ruins of the ork invasion force. 'Return us to the base, Caedus.'

Daed stared angrily out of the viewing port as the Thunderhawk came about, offering him his last view of the ruination they had caused below.

## 21.06 HRS

Almost as soon as they disembarked from the Thunderhawk, Daed turned on Theseon. 'You disobeyed a direct order,' he barked. 'Explain yourself, Librarian.'

Theseon nodded calmly, and laid a hand upon the captain's pauldron. 'Your plan was sound, captain. I knew that destroying the venting tower would work, and the chain reaction was likely. Yet the greenskin psyker... Your anger was like a beacon to him, drawing him in. Your mind was open to him. Grakka knew you were here, and that you would come for him. His forces massed in defence around his command post as a consequence, waiting for our attack.'

'It was your duty to tell me,' said Daed. His hands were bunched into fists as he attempted to contain his anger.

Theseon shook his head. 'It was imperative that I did not. Doing so would have telegraphed our intentions to the enemy. You had to continue to believe that our goal was the command tower. It was the only way for the misdirection to work. We drew them away from the second tower, safe in the knowledge that the eruption caused by our attack would be enough to destroy the command post too.'

'I do not approve of your subterfuge,' said Daed, levelly. 'Although I grant you, Theseon – your audacity matches only my own. The beast is dead, and Karos is liberated.'

'And old scars are finally healed,' said Theseon.

Daed was silent for a moment. 'You did what was necessary, in the name of the Emperor. We shall speak no more of the matter.'

Theseon nodded. 'I see the ground troops are already deployed, mopping up the last of the enemy. Will you join them?'

Daed grinned. 'My axe hungers for xenos blood,' he said.

'Then lend them your strength, captain,' said Theseon. 'When you return from the field of battle, we must speak. There is a storm gathering in the Sargassian Reach, close to this system. Traitors mass.'

'Very well,' said Daed, gravely. 'It seems there may yet be even older scores to settle.'

'Indeed,' replied Theseon, but Daed had already turned away, hefting his axe high above his head.

'For Tauron!' called Theseon.

'For Tauron!' echoed Daed, disappearing into the maelstrom of churned ice and fog.

Theseon looked to the skies: a clear, dark blanket, peppered with scattered diamonds. 'Soon, Gideous Krall. Soon I shall come for you.'

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**George Mann** is an author and editor based in the East Midlands. For Black Library, he is best-known for his stories featuring the Raven Guard, which include the anthology *Sons of Corax*, the audio dramas *Helion Rain* and *Labyrinth of Sorrows*, the novella *The Unkindness of Ravens*, plus a number of short stories.



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