

A Dark Angels Space Marine in a dark, industrial setting, holding a key. The Marine is wearing blue and green armor and a white hood. The background is dark and smoky, with a large, glowing yellow and orange light source on the right. The text "WARHAMMER 40,000" is at the top, "HOLDER OF THE KEYS" is in the middle, "GAV THORPE" is below it, and "A DARK ANGELS AUDIO DRAMA" is at the bottom.

WARHAMMER
40,000

HOLDER OF THE KEYS

GAV THORPE

A DARK ANGELS AUDIO DRAMA

HOLDER OF THE KEYS

(sounds of a battle, torrents of bolter fire, nearby explosions)

I did what I had to do. I did what I'd been trained to do, what I'd been created to do. I killed them. I fought as hard as I could against my enemies. I focused my lethal attention on them to the exclusion of all other concerns until they were destroyed.

(distant screams)

They came at us in armor chipped and cracked by countless previous battles. Veterans of war, their anger and hatred honed to a razor's edge. The sky burned and the ground buckled beneath their rage as they tried to wipe us out. No price was too high to pay for our deaths. They wore our blood as a trophy. It glistened on their black armor and slicked their bared silver blades. With eyes of red they gazed upon us and thought nothing of the slaughter. Heartless, merciless, deadly. They hungered for the kill, for our lives. Nothing would stop them.

(laser beams)

The thunder of their bombardment continued and the fury of lasers and tracers lit the night sky as bright as day. Such a war tumult I have never known, not even during the misguided wrath of the Great Crusade was a world so wracked by such vigorous.

(vessel flying overhead)

Beyond the red and blue and green beams that crisscrossed the sky the stars themselves paled at the sight of detonations of the continuing battle. The hulls of star ships fell as comets. Fragments of armor descended in fiery hail, hissing and burning. Where they landed, the ancient forests around our cities blazed.

(people screaming and coughing from smoke)

None could be spared to quell the spreading flames. The arcologies were wreathed in the smoke, those within choked by the fumes. Hundreds of thousands suffocated, lungs seared by hot smog. There could be no evacuation.

Outside was as lethal as within. Thousands more died in the panic stampedes. We watched our homes reduced to ashes. Such were the blessings of Terra in that unnoted age.

(males and females screaming from pain and terror)

The vox channels were a howl with the cries of the dying and the wounded. Even those of us hardened by centuries of battle could make no sense of the anarchy. Nobody was in command.

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(almost silence, water dripping from the wall)

A face from nightmare loomed out of the darkness. It was a skull sheathed in flowing blood, sparks of golden fire for eyes. When it spoke the sparks became intense flames, searing his soul. The voice echoed inside his head coming from within.

Ezekiel: "How did you kill them? The attack... Remember the attack. I am the key to the prison of your guilt. Repent of your crimes and know peace".

Memories fluttered to the surface and he could not resist the urge to speak, to give voice as witness to the terrible events.

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(vessels flying overhead, distant explosions)

Amongst the plasma and torpedoes fell drop-pods filled with warriors thirsting for blood. The outer brocks and ravelins had been silenced, reduced to slag. The capital still stood proud and tall amongst the ruins of our lands. The Gorgon-

forged aegis ward was still operational.

(laser beams and gunshots)

As our foe's anger fell upon it, the sound was as of a myriad of roaring dragons. Two gunships, shadows against the darkness, they saw us, our thermic signatures stopped their artificial eyes. We sought shelter amongst the broken keeps and shattered curtain walls.

(laser beams, explosions, Space Marine screaming)

Flare of their missiles cut the darkness. Nemethiel died then, torn in half by the strike. Dalderion lost the leg and we had to abandon him. He insisted and we had no choice but to comply. His bolter rang out in defiance until another missile struck.

(missile flying, explosion, screams of pain)

We sought shelter within an aureole at the bronze gate. Once we had paraded on the training grounds, east of that immense bastion. Now the open mustering field had become a cratered, plasma scorched wasteland. The 5000 banners that had lined the field had been toppled. The mighty stands where 30000 cheering brothers had watched the jousts and jewels were charred splinters and puddles of molten steel.

(laser beams, huge explosion)

It was a temporary respite. The gunships knocked their battle-cannon shells, an insistent request for entry. The bronze gate was sterner yet to their attacks with deep foundations and thick walls.

In time they disgorged their bloodthirsty cargo, who set to the tower portals with las-cutters and melta-charges. We welcomed them with las-cannon and bolter, the crackle of Hereth's Tempest lance illuminated our hunters with an azure flare before shuttering the armor of the first to the breach. Such a storm was our defiance that the assault relented and the enemy withdrew.

And then the horror was unleashed.

(several missiles striking the ground, explosions)

As the gunships pounded our position with phosphex shells, the deadly purple fire lapped at the gate tower and streamed through the breach. It was drawn to us, filled with the disturbing hate of its own. We fell back again, but it followed, spreading, cooling, searching for us, filling every room with a fire that gave off no smoke. If I had doubted it before I did not doubt it then, that our enemies were truly vile. They were possessed of no emotion at all, showed no compunction in the deployment of such hideous death. But for the grace of the universe we would have died, a terrible death, agonizing, lingering, as the hungry flames ate through our armor and devoured our flesh. Who could ever say we not right to defend ourselves against such horror?

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(near silence, Space Marine roaring)

The face loomed larger, shifting, growing flesh over the bone. A monstrous wolf's head it became, snarling, breath as hot as the crawling phosphex. Its jaws dripping fire like saliva. Its golden eyes reflected the prisoner's bloodied scarred face. Yet in that reflection he was twisted, eyes missing, flesh torn even more, weeping. It was not a mirror of what was, but a reflection of what was to come.

Ezekiel: "A lie... Justice was meted out. A fate you deserve. What happened before the gunships? What had you done to deserve such retribution? We will unlock the truth, you and I".

Fallen: "Nothing..."

He became aware of a pain, a dull ache. It nagged at him like a rat gnawing at the base of his skull.

Ezekiel: "Do not avoid the question. Admit your crimes. Tell the truth and be set free".

The gnawing became more and more insistent. To distract himself he stared at the apparition floating just in front of his face. The eyes of the wolf were growing larger, engulfing him, mesmerizing. The desire to confess was strong,

the panting of the wolf revealed itself as his breaths, coming sharp from bloodied lips. Vapor in the chill air. He shuddered.

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(explosions, vessels flying, laser beams)

They had chased us from orbit. There they had spat their hate upon us spewing fighters from burning flight-decks, like a storm of swords they fell upon our station. We mounded the defense batteries, macro-cannons and mass fusillade laser barrages, a wall of fire, a barrier of lightning and plasma and missiles to fend off the rage of a demigod.

(missile flying, explosion)

Somehow they made it through. Torpedo bombers targeted us, destroying the cannon galleries and upper platforms. Assault pods crushed into the lower decks. We stayed at the guns as long as possible. We had orders and followed them. Make the traitors pay, slay them, teach them that we would never again be slaves.

(laser beam torrents, explosion)

We fired until the power cells melted. We fired until the barrels of the rotary cannons glowed. We fired even as bulkhead after bulkhead was breached and the foes swarmed towards us. When the enemy was at the door we stopped firing and took up our bolt pistols and power-swords for close work. Landevort had Volkite carbine he had kept since the 231st expedition, took it from the dead hands of an Ultramarine. For the battle to end all battles he used to say when he polished it and gloated at the newer recruits. And that battle was upon us, we knew.

(sounds of close combat, gunshots)

Voices: “Charge! Incoming!”

We opened the doors and charged. Bolt pistols barked, swords hissed and Landevort's carbine spat archaic fire. They had not been expecting an counterattack. Up we fought, up through seven decks of death and hell and the clamor of close battle. Six of us made it to the savior points and not before we had accounted for twenty of the foe. The station was lost. We knew it would be. Fight hard, withdraw quickly, form the line again. That was the strategy. We would kick back the rage of a whole empire as long as one of us lived to fight.

(chainsword roaring)

Even as we sought to leave, a fresh onslaught fell upon us. Hadrius was the best of us, master of blades and he'd leapt to our defense, while others of the garrison departed in the savior points. His chain-say was to held the door for fully three minutes. There was a lull and we called for him to come back. We would not desert him.

But then we saw who led the foe and knew that Hadrius had left it too late. Archtraitor, once the noblest of us, who should have stood at our lord's right hand. Caliban's glorious son, now lickspittle to the filth of Terra. Paladin, Pure Blade, Hound Lord... Dread Corswain ... In beast's mantle he approached, a great sword in his grasp, its edge spilling white fire. Where such a sword came from, what debts he owed for its gifting, who would dare say? Hadrius knew better than to wait for the attack.

Hadrius: "For Caliban!"

He threw himself at the Pure Blade and his guard. Corswain was there in a moment. His sword rose and met Hadrius's descending blades. The ring of their clash echoed back to us and we knew that Hadrius had swung his last strike.

(Hadrius screaming from pain)

Corswain moved in the way I have never seen any warrior move. Even encumbered by his armor he was past Hadrius in an instant. His sword parted our companion from gut to nape in one blow. It was always part of the plan to leave the station, but I admit freely that we saw Corswain look upon us in that moment and we fled, for to remain was to die.

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(silence, water dripping)

Ezekiel: "Your cowardice needs no confirmation. We have a list of those that held true and those that fell. Your treachery is all the proof we need of your low moral courage".

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(bird twitting, some beast breathing hard)

He found himself in those dark forests on Caliban that he had called home. Darker even than he remembered. The trees crowded close together leaving nothing but slanted shadows in the moonlight. Hot breath steamed in the still. Eyes of golden fire gleamed in the night.

(beast breathing hard, running footsteps)

He started to run. The panting grew louder and his hearts hammered with effort. He could feel hot breath at his back. He blurted a confession hoping it would allay the pursuing beast.

Fallen: "It was dishonorable to destroy the station. Scorched earth, that was the command. Leave no pursuing foe. The reactor was set to overload from the moment the battle started. It was not an honorable blow, but we were desperate".

(beast roaring)

The wolf's growl was so close, right behind him. He made the mistake of looking back. No wolf now, the apparition had become a monster outright. Its flesh was scaled, body sinuous, claws and fangs burning with golden flame. A beast of Caliban lost, like he used to hunt as a Knight of the Order.

(beast roaring)

The monster's roar was inside his head, a pain that threatened to split his skull apart.

Ezekiel: "Lies! You are damned if you do not confess all! Not the victim, the brave defender. Murderer! Coldblooded slayer of brothers, admit your sins and be free!"

(beast roaring, Fallen groaning)

The monster sank its talons onto him and the pain released a memory torn from the depths of his mind.

Ezekiel: "Starfire, the word echoes in your thoughts. You hope that you will never hear it. A single word dripping with so much meaning. But for all your regrets you do not hesitate. That one word sets you into action. Lured close by your fake protestations of surrender a strike-cruiser approaches your station. The others look to you - their leader. Even now with so much at stake you have a chance. Obey the order or stand down. They trust you... Starfire... You choose to listen to the lies of your lord rather than the oaths you have sworn to the Lion. Open fire, you tell them. Full barrage, let these fallen from oath know that Caliban will die free".

(laser beams)

Ezekiel: "And the cannons open fire and the shields of the strike-cruiser burst into red blossoms. Blasts from other platforms overload the shield generators and the target starts to turn away. But you are not satisfied with driving them off. There will be no mercy. The bombardment continues. The strike-cruiser cracks, its armor pierced. The welter of ammo blows upon it from laser and shell. Too much to bear. No relent, you cry. What of the verge of that great motto of our gene-father! No relent! And your brothers die in their hundreds by your treacherous hand".

(Fallen Angel screaming)

The pain was all consuming. He was engulfed by it. He could stand no more and realized that the shriek of the splintering warship was the scream from his lips.

A robed figure looked at him, one eye glittering with gold, the other – biomechanical replacement. It was his last vision as sanity faded and skull-faced armored giants entered to drag him away.

(Fallen Angel moaning)