



MORTARION'S HEART

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**SCENE 1: EXT. KORNOVIN PLAINS -
DAY**

**[ATMOS: Draigo fighting zombies and
daemons hundreds-to-one, with sword,
bolter and psychic powers]**

Upon the blighted plains of Kornovin,
a single warrior stood against all the
foul hordes of Chaos.

He fought hard. He fought with the
strength and fury of one freed from
the trappings of ceremony, and without
thought for any other. Many kilometres
away, around the bastion enclaves, the
Brotherhoods would be commencing their
counterattacks upon the encroaching
daemonic forces, but Kaldor Draigo fought
alone. Quickened by his Librarians'
battle-meditations, he was like the
legendary champions of old as he carved
a path through the enemy ranks.

They came at him in droves, with withered flesh and rotten fangs, broken blades and ragged claws. Draigo beat them back again and again, his sword fairly singing in his grip.

[ATMOS: distant artillery sounds join the din]

As he fought, he felt the maggot-ridden multitude falter around him. The skyline was lit anew by the flash of Imperial guns, and he saw the Chapter's liveried gunships sweeping low in the distance. Caught between a fresh wave of Master Kai's Terminators and Purgation squads, and this upstart new lord of the Grey Knights tearing through their rearguard, Draigo supposed that it might be enough to make even the Death Lord himself take notice.

He did not know if it was destiny or merely chance, but he sensed that his quarry was close at hand.

[SFX: fighting against Chaos Marines with scythes and bolters]

Breaking out from the throng, the daemon prince's surviving champions barred his path; bred for battle and whittled down by millennia of endless attrition, the implacable Deathshroud were singular foes. Draigo unleashed a psychic barrage from his gauntlets, rending their corrupted flesh and shattering their ancient war-plate - yet still they came, their eyes blazing with unremitting fury

as they struck back at him.

[SFX: bolter fires until empty]

Draigo fired until his storm bolter was dry, then hewed left and right with his blade. He hacked open the corroded breastplate of one warrior, then thrust clean through the skull of-

[SFX: psychic awareness]

There. Behind him.

[SFX: Draigo dives aside as HUGE Mortarion crashes down, using wings]

The flash of precognition saved Draigo. He hurled himself aside just as the monstrous form of the Death Lord crashed down to earth on ragged wings, the force of his landing scattering the lesser rabble and carving furrows in the mud with his clawed, armoured feet.

[ATMOS: daemons and zombies hang back; insects buzz; battle still rages in distance, with artillery]

Draigo spun to face him, his sword already up.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): Hold, daemon.
Come no closer.

[SFX: Mortarion rises, heaving]

The daemon prince rose slowly from his crouch, flexing his grip around the pitted haft of his war-scythe. Though his gaunt features seemed perpetually lost in shadow, an elaborate and archaic

rebreather mask protruded from the lower half of his hood, spouting plumes of noxious vapour with every hissing, rasping breath. He stared down at the bloodied and battered Grey Knight before him. When the Death Lord spoke, his voice was like cracking bones.

MORTARION: \\I have nothing to fear from you, little witch. You are...
not the one.//

[SFX: little daemons cackle]

The closest daemons gibbered in a twisted parody of laughter, edging closer to their master and his chosen prey. Draigo did not move.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): I may not be "the one" you speak of, but I shall open the way for him to follow.

MORTARION: \\[snort] Divine prophecy, or wishful thinking?//

The Death Lord inclined his head, as though considering the difference between the two.

MORTARION: \\You seek to confront me, to bind me to the mortal plane. Seven times seven. Let us be about it, then. Speak your hollow rituals and empty words of power.//

Behind his visor, Draigo narrowed his eyes.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): I name you as Mortarion, fallen Primarch of

the Fourteenth Legion, Master of the Death Guard. You are the Dread Liberator of Barbarus. You are the Reaper and the Traveller, the Death Lord and the Pale King. You are-

MORTARION (dismissive): \\Titles. Titles and epithets conjured from the minds of lesser beings, to venerate or denigrate. They would know me only by what I had done, or what they feared I might do. The sycophant and the subjugated, ally and enemy alike - who are they to seek to bind me with such paltry, mortal words?//

He raised an immense, gauntleted hand and pointed at Draigo.

MORTARION: \\Who, indeed, are *you*?//

**SCENE 2a: EXT. KORNOVIN PLAINS -
DAY**

**[ATMOS: huge battle, many Marines
against daemons and zombies; explosions;
insects buzzing]**

Only a few hours earlier, it had seemed as though the apocalypse of ancient legend was finally at hand. After months of famine and pestilence that had wracked the human population of this once verdant world and turned them against one another, those left alive had cried out for the merciful release of death. In the war that followed, such horrors as defied mortal comprehension were unleashed into the material realm, and the dead rose to walk the land once more beneath swarms of buzzing, bloated carrion flies.

Draigo knew not whether this had all been part of the Death Lord's grand design from the beginning, or whether

he had merely seized upon a nascent opportunity as it presented itself in this far-flung corner of the Imperium. Draigo knew only that this went beyond even the concerns of the Conclave Diabolus - this was no mere daemon seeking to expand his influence or curry favour with his patron god.

Mortarion had come to Kornovin himself, at the head of a vast plague-horde. Not lightly would one such as he venture forth from the Eye.

[SFX: middle-distance, several huge, heavy scythe swings; armour sliced open, men screaming, dying]

Once a noble primarch son of the Emperor of Mankind, he now towered over his foul minions upon the field of battle and strode onwards with grim purpose. With each mighty swing, the corroded blade of his war-scythe cleaved through his enemies' armour, flesh and bone with almost sickening ease.

Most of the mortal defenders of this world had long since fallen like chaff before the daemonic onslaught, and now time was running out as the horde advanced upon the capital. Only the valiant Space Marines of the Grey Knights Chapter stood against them, willing to sacrifice all in the name of this one, final victory. Draigo's every martial instinct cried out for him to abandon the southern cordon and order

his warriors to strike at the daemon primarch's elite cohorts instead, or even to redeploy his squads and support units just a few kilometres closer...

But he would not. He would trust in the Supreme Grand Master's vision.

[SFX: Draigo fighting zombies]

Draigo spun on his heel with surprising agility for one clad in heavy Terminator plate, and struck down another putrid daemonic revenant with his blade. In close order about him, his Paladin guard fought to keep the monsters at bay. They were honour-bound to protect him, the Grand Master of the Grey Knights Sixth Brotherhood, and yet he could not help but feel constrained by them when the fighting was at its thickest.

No living warrior of the Grey Knights Chapter, no worthier hero among the ranks of the Space Marine daemon hunters had proven themselves in combat more than Kaldor Draigo - why then could he now fight only in the spaces between his bodyguard? Why was he forced to extend his psychic battle sense to include his own men, seeking the gaps in their defences so that he could strike past them in the split-second between parry and riposte?

[SFX: psychic awareness]

There. To the right.

Without conscious thought, he fired two

rounds from his storm bolter.

[SFX: two bolter shots, killing zombie]

They whipped past Brother Aleph, within millimetres of his armoured visor, and decapitated the plague-creature he had been about to dispatch himself. Aleph glanced back as the thing's body toppled into the dirt, his momentary confusion seemingly written across his blank faceplate. Draigo nodded, smiling as he turned away.

DRAIGO: You're welcome, brother. It seems that every now and again I must protect my own bodyguard.

[SFX: Torvus laughs]

Behind him, he heard Torvus laugh. The Librarian was normally a sombre soul, and the sound was completely at odds with the furious warp-lightning he conjured from his fingertips to strike down a swathe of daemon-kin.

TORVUS: Still hungry for your share of the glory, my lord? Do I sense an uncharacteristic hubris in you this day?

[SFX: Draigo fighting zombies]

Draigo did not answer, but whirled forwards with his Nemesis force-halberd extended before him. With a wordless cry, he bisected three more of the creatures, spilling their foul innards and corrupted blood into the dust before

his Paladin guard could move to shield him once more. He planted the haft of the halberd into the ground.

[SFX: metal haft planted]

DRAIGO: You see what I have to contend with? They mean well, but these old nursemaids are too damned slow for my tastes. I'd be safer on my own!

[SFX: Torvus laughs]

The Librarian laughed again, then channelled another psionic blast into the throng.

[SFX: jetfighters approach, swooping low overhead and strafing zombies with rockets and mini-guns]

Draigo looked to the skies, seeing the sickly yellow clouds churn overhead; seconds before they appeared, he had sensed the approaching flight of Grey Knights gunships. The three craft tore over the battlefield in perfect formation, blasting the enemy horde with tightly ordered missile fire and strafing the survivors with their assault cannons.

Still the foul creatures came on. Daemons by the hundred - nay, by the thousand! - from the lurching, one-eyed revenants with their rusted plague knives; to honking, braying idiot-beasts that squirmed and writhed their clumsy bodies like giant, noxious slugs.

[SFX: even more daemons, cackling and bestial]

And everywhere, waddling underfoot and hanging from the slack flesh of their larger cousins, runty little horrors giggled and cackled, swarming over unwary opponents or jamming up vehicle treads with the pulp of their ruined bodies. There seemed to be no end to their number, nor to the clouds of ragged insects drawn to the stench of decay that followed them.

This was why Geronitan's assault had been so carefully orchestrated.

GERONITAN: <<Brothers, it is time. Let us finish this.>>

Every single battle-brother of the Grey Knights upon the surface of Kornovin heard the unmistakable voice of their Supreme Grand Master over the vox. It was a voice that could command whole worlds, or condemn them.

GERONITAN: <<All captains, prepare your advance.>>

Draigo's relaxed demeanour fell away. His eyes settled again upon the towering form of the Death Lord. At such a distance from the true enemy, it was easy to make light of the lesser daemon-rabble, but now Draigo's force had a vital role to perform.

DRAIGO: Captain Servian, form up your strike squads. Flanking pattern,

along the southern cordon. Lord Geronitan's trap is about to be sprung, and the Sixth will play our part!

[SFX: Servian orders 'Form ranks!'/'Open fire!' etc; his men advance like Spartans]

Heaving the daemons back with blade and bolt shell, at Servian's order the Brotherhood wheeled around and began their fighting advance. They drew the horde out over the wide flank, scores of armoured Grey Knights leading the plague-beasts out from the low slopes of the valley.

On all sides, the other captains were pulling in different directions, thinning the masses long enough for the fleet augurs to get an orbital fix on Mortarion and his retinue. Long enough, too, for Geronitan's surgical strike.

GERONITAN: <<*Into darkness I have strayed, that we might bring the light of purity to the Emperor's fallen sons. In His holy sight, only the righteous can prevail. May we be forgiven.*>>

The vox-link went dead. Draigo's brow furrowed. For the first time that he could ever recall, he had caught the faintest suggestion of something like doubt behind Geronitan's noble words.

SCENE 2b: EXT. VANGUARD - DAY

[ATMOS: no fade, continuing from previous, elsewhere on battlefield]

[SFX: loud teleportation]

In a blinding teleportation flare, the Supreme Grand Master and his entire Paladin entourage materialised with fiendish precision less than forty-nine paces from the traitor primarch. Fighting at Mortarion's side were the veterans of his corrupted old Legion - amongst them the infamous Deathshroud, each armed with a war-scythe of his own and clad in ragged robes that fluttered in the backwash of the teleport displacement.

[SFX: bolter fusillade cutting down Marines; flamethrowers]

The Grey Knights opened fire, cutting down those bloated warriors too slow to react. These were neither truly

the hardy Space Marines they had once been, nor yet the daemonic forms they aspired to become, but the speed of the Paladins' assault tore through them in less than the time it would have taken to describe it. With great gouts of psychic flame, the Grey Knights scoured the earth for metres in all directions.

Standing defiantly, Geronitan raised his blade - the legendary *Titansword* - and aimed it at the Death Lord himself in open challenge.

GERONITAN: Fall now for true, bastard son of the almighty Emperor! This day shall see your ending.

Mortarion drew himself up, letting the curved blade of his scythe come to rest on the ground, and turned his cowled head to regard this new foe. Vapours hissed from his archaic rebreather.

For a long moment, neither of them moved as the battle raged on around them - the infernal giant clad in baroque armour beneath a burial shroud robe, apparently transfixed by the psychic might of the Grey Knights Supreme Grand Master who stood bold and bareheaded before him.

[SFX: Mortarion laughs]

[ATMOS: battle falters]

Then the Death Lord began to laugh. It was a horrifying, choking laughter that carried far over the plains, and both daemon and Space Marine alike faltered

in their stride at the sound. The battle itself seemed to pause, both sides aware that a moment of destiny was upon them.

Geronitan spat.

GERONITAN: Make your peace with your dark masters, Foul One. Long have I followed you across this benighted galaxy, and all that has been sacrificed will be avenged. Now you will finally answer for your heresy against the noble Imperium. One by one, your wayward brothers fall to the Hammer of Righteousness, and so now shall I send you to join them. Such will be the fate of all traitors!

Mortarion extended a withered hand and spread the pinions of sparse, leathery wings behind his shoulders.

MORTARION: \\Foolish whelp. You are deceived.//

[SFX: large, slow wingbeats; wind rising into psychic storm]

With slow deliberate beats of his wings, he began to churn the air around them. It swept up the trailing vapours and gathered in strength, swirling like a poisoned hurricane with the Death Lord at its centre.

MORTARION: \\You have *all* been deceived.//

[SFX: Geronitan strains]

Geronitan sensed the gathering psychic force of the daemon prince. He raised a gauntleted fist and strained to dispel the noisome energies, but even with the aid of his Paladins it was already too late.

[SFX: storm breaks, exploding outwards, throwing Marines to ground; they choke and die, agonised]

The hurricane blasted outwards, hurling the heavily armoured warriors from their feet and spreading a foul mist in its wake. Gleaming silver war-plate buckled and corroded, armour seals ruptured, and the fallen Grey Knights gagged and choked as their superhuman resilience failed them.

[SFX: Geronitan gagging; sword drops]

Staggering alone in the plague wind, Geronitan clawed at his own decaying flesh and the *Titansword* slipped from his grasp.

**SCENE 2c: EXT. KORNOVIN PLAINS -
DAY**

**[ATMOS: no fade, continuing battle,
Marines against daemons and zombies]**

Draigo cried out. Though the Sixth Brotherhood had cleansed the southern flank, Geronitan had been overcome by the sorceries of the Death Lord. He watched the Supreme Grand Master fall to his knees before Mortarion, defeated without landing a single blow. Nonetheless, the daemon prince hefted his scythe like an executioner and prepared to deliver the killing stroke.

[SFX: distantly, Mortarion laughs]

Fresh daemonic laughter rang out through the roiling mists. Draigo bellowed in desperation.

DRAIGO: Torvus! Save him!

The Librarian snapped his attention

through the aethereal currents, stealing his mind against the horrors of the warp, and knew what had to be done. Time seemed to slow as Mortarion's scythe arced down to cleave Geronitan in two.

Torvus, his eyes screwed shut, reached out with both hands in a grasping gesture.

[SFX: quickly building psychic energy]

TORVUS (whispered): *Summon.*

[SFX: distant psychic teleport; scythe misses target]

With a screeching pop that echoed in the haze, Geronitan vanished just as the war-scythe passed through, cleanly slicing the empty air where he had been hunched only a moment earlier.

But not cleanly enough. Whether by chance or by the cruel intervention of the Dark Gods, Mortarion's blade found purchase in that instant, and came away with its edge traced red.

[SFX: closer psychic teleport; blood splatters]

In a burst of warp-displacement, Geronitan appeared directly before Torvus. The stricken Master's head snapped back, and arterial spray jetted from his throat over the Librarian and those other Grey Knights closest to hand.

[SFX: others cry out, shocked; Draigo

**pulls Geronitan down, grappling him;
Geronitan is dying]**

Draigo gritted his teeth and pulled Geronitan to the ground, trying in vain with clumsy, armoured hands to staunch the blood flow. Other warriors nearby dived in to help, battle-brothers of the Sixth in lighter power armour who might have more success.

Torvus took a step forwards, horror written clearly upon his bloodied face.

TORVUS (calling out): Apothecary!
Apothecary!

Geronitan pawed desperately at those around him, and a sickening gurgle that might have been a plea for aid bubbled through the bloody froth on his lips. Overtaken by disbelief, Draigo allowed himself to be dragged away; he saw the ragged slash across his master's throat beginning to blacken with some unnatural putrescence, undoubtedly the final legacy of the Death Lord's strike.

[SFX: Geronitan convulses; dies messily]

Even with a dozen armoured Space Marines holding him down, Geronitan began to convulse within his bulky Terminator suit. Psykers all, they could feel his life-flame guttering out like a candle in the dead of night. Then his sallow eyes rolled over white, and he fell still.

[SFX: Draigo and others are anguished]

Draigo roared in anguish, a cry echoed by many amongst his Brotherhood.

So ended the life of Linus Geronitan, the Forty-seventh Supreme Grand Master of the Grey Knights. It was witnessed by many, but felt most keenly by Brother-Librarian Torvus, and all the while accompanied by the distant, mocking laughter of the Death Lord.

**[ATMOS: battle fades, leaving
Mortarion's laughter until last...]**

SCENE 3: n/a. COMMUNION - n/a

[ATMOS: see 'Communion' note]

They met upon the astral plane.

Rare enough was it that any two of the Grand Masters might go to war side by side, once the Chapter's conclaves were ended, and yet five full Brotherhoods had already arrived at Kornovin.

Geronitan's grand strategy had demanded it; Mortarion had gathered every warlord and champion of the Plague God for a hundred sectors to his banner, and so the full might of the Grey Knights would be assembled to meet him in open battle.

Draigo's spiritual self hung in the infinite void, the illumination of his mind's eye casting him in a pale psychic light against the darkness. Stripped of mortal limitations and the weariness of his flesh, his soul still ached with grief and anger in equal measure, and

yet it fell to him to issue the summons. A communion had to be called. Even amidst the turmoil of war, it was the Chapter's way.

Master Cromm was the first to answer. Draigo felt the nearing of his presence, though his physical body was still likely many hundreds of kilometres away.

CROMM (approaching): Brother Draigo, the Second Brotherhood shares your pain. The greatest of us is fallen to the reaper's blade, and so are we all diminished.

Draigo acknowledged him with a sincere nod.

DRAIGO: Drystann. Brother. Mourn with me.

The two of them cast their psychic sight over the churning clouds below - a metaphysical echo of the conflict that had engulfed Kornovin. As much as there could be said to be any notion of up or down in this place, it broiled and seethed in the depths beneath them, shot through with sickly lightning and dull, actinic flashes.

They regarded it now with the detached eyes of immortals watching over the affairs of men, though they knew that they would soon be returning to it, whatever the outcome of their communion. Every flickering cinder that danced up from the tumult was another

death echoing in the empyrean; every thunderbolt the herald of some baleful weapon or psychic onslaught.

Another presence drew near, the spirit flaring raw and aggressive in comparison to Draigo and Cromm.

KAI (approaching): What foul treachery has robbed us of him? I would not believe it, but for the fact that I see the truth of it written in your souls, as clear as day.

The Seventh Grand Master, Vardan Kai, was the newest of their stalwart number. The only conclave he had yet witnessed was that which had elevated him to their ranks, and the grim formality of this occasion was perhaps lost upon him for now. He bristled at their silence.

KAI: Tell me the place where we are to strike back, and I will bring my entire Brotherhood to the fight.

In spite of Kai's boldness, Draigo saw the uncertainty, the anguish, beneath his words.

DRAIGO: Worry not, brother. Vengeance shall be ours. That I can promise you.

FENRICK (approaching): *Vengeance?*

The word swept over the three of them with an almost physical force, and they turned to face the newcomer.

FENRICK: This is not the time for vengeance, Brother Draigo - there is far too much at stake. It was you who summoned us here, so speak not to me of anything so petty as *vengeance*.

It was Jull Fenrick, the venerable Grand Master of the First Brotherhood. Each carefully projected thought-syllable was like a hammerblow, yet delivered with the grace of a master artisan crafting delicate crystal. He was a formidable presence in any psychic exchange, but in the wake of Geronitan's death he had assumed a far more warlike aspect. The others might have taken a knee before him, if any such gesture would have meaning on this plane of existence. Cromm moved instead to greet him.

CROMM: Peace, brother. Linus's passing weighs heavily upon them.

FENRICK: More heavily than upon *us*? For nearly three centuries, we fought together. None shall grieve the loss more than you and I, when this is done.

MORDRAK (approaching): And I.

Draigo had sensed his old mentor's presence close by on the battlefield, and yet he had been the last of them to reach the communion. Vorth Mordrak of the Third had led his Brotherhood in the opposite arm of the pincer, encircling from the north as Draigo had from the south when Geronitan had made that final, ill-fated move.

DRAIGO: Master Mordrak, you seem weakened. You managed to pull your warriors back from the engagement without incident, I trust?

MORDRAK: I'm your brother now, not your master. We're all brothers here. Only this time it feels as though we have lost our father...

His soul-light wavered, shot through with crimson lines of pain and exertion. Draigo regarded him for a long moment. Mordrak grunted.

MORDRAK: Hnnh. Nothing I can't handle.

DRAIGO: Very well, *Brother* Mordrak.

With the rumble of the psychic storm clouds swirling beneath them, Draigo cast his voice out deeper into the void, away from their gathering.

DRAIGO (louder): Brother Hasimir, Brother Elliath - will you also answer the summons and enter communion with us now?

As the echo of his words died away in the endless black, all five of them cast their preternatural senses outwards and scanned the non-existent horizon for a reply.

Elliath answered. His voice was tremulous and faint.

ELLIATH: ++The Eighth Brotherhood makes all speed for Kornovin, brothers.++

Fenrick and Cromm, being the most accomplished in such things, both scried the heavens for any trace of his soul-light approaching. Neither of them expected to hear Grand Master Hasimir's response mere moments later.

HASIMIR: ++So too does the Fifth, though it shames me that we were not ready to stand with noble Geronitan when his trap was sprung.++

Kai gestured away into the void.

KAI: I see him! **(louder)** Lexek, how far out are you?

HASIMIR: ++Hours. Days. An ill wind blows us from our course through the warp.++

ELLIATH: ++And us. It is the work of the Dark Gods, for certain.++

Fenrick surged towards Draigo.

FENRICK: This is a sign! Seven have answered. You know what this means - we must try for Titan! The Rites of Succession are clear on this matter. We can forego the normal process and elect in absentia!

Faltering, Draigo looked to Mordrak. The older Grey Knight seemed not to notice.

MORDRAK (murmuring): Seven of the eight. I would never have thought it possible, so far from Holy Terra...

Cromm addressed them all.

CROMM: Though I do not believe this is the time to speak of succession, Brother Fenrick is right. We *must* attempt to contact Titan. We must decide whether or not to proceed, given that there are clearly other forces at work here on Kornovin. Lord Geronitan risked so much, and it falls to us to decide whether or not his many sacrifices are to have been in vain.

SCENE 4: INT. ARMOURIUM - DAY

[ATMOS: large chamber, many Marines being armed by human servants; machine shop sounds, like garage/workshop]

Having fallen back from the cordon, the Knights of the Sixth Brotherhood regrouped behind the front lines. The order to withdraw had been met with confusion and horror from those fighting elsewhere on the planet's surface, and in the fleet orbiting above.

Something had changed in the instant that Geronitan had fallen. Something had broken the prescribed arc of destiny.

[SFX: gauntlet removed]

Torvus removed his gauntlet, and found his hand trembling beneath it. He took a deep, steadying breath, and tried to centre himself. He had gazed into the infinite futures, as had all of his Librarian brethren. They had divined the

strands of fate and confirmed that this was the time and place to strike at the Death Lord. They had been so certain. Could they have been wrong?

[SFX: workshop noises; armour plates removed]

His armourer serfs released the seals and removed his spattered breastplate, setting it upon the arming post. The congealed blood clinging to it - Geronitan's blood - was putrid, tainted by the touch of Mortarion's scythe, and the stench was repulsive.

[SFX: pressure-washer, steam cleaning; whispered incantations, see notes]

Torvus felt his gorge rising as one serf set about it with a steam jet, sluicing the worst of the corruption away. Another intoned wards against pestilence as he worked, and struck cleansing oils over the silvered plate.

The Librarian glanced warily about the makeshift armourium. While the sickly remnants of the local defence forces continued to barrage the advancing daemon horde, the Brotherhoods had pulled back behind the final bastion enclave. All around him, in the shadow of the city's main basilica, he could feel the hollow ache of despair. But while the mortal Guardsmen and Chapter serfs sobbed and numbly went about their duties, his battle-brothers prepared themselves.

The Grey Knights had suffered a terrible loss, yet still they tended their wounds and renewed their oaths. Should they be recalled to battle that day, then they would be ready.

Equally, if they were ordered to abandon Kornovin's planetary capital, then they would do so without ceremony or delay. In truth, much depended upon the outcome of Master Draigo's communion. The souls of billions hung in the balance.

[SFX: armour plate removed]

As the serfs lifted his right pauldron clear, Torvus returned his eyes to the grimy floor. He could not meet the gaze of his brothers, though they might normally look to him for strength, both upon the field of war and away from it.

He was truly a psyker amongst psykers, his abilities refined and honed in the same way that a Justicar might practise his aim with a bolter or train his sword arm. Torvus's powerful psychic gifts had always been his most trusted weapons, but today they had failed him. *He* had failed the Supreme Grand Master.

He dared not brush against the minds of his brothers with his preternatural senses, as he so often did. He dared not risk the inconcealable truth of their souls. He could not bear the silent accusation that Lord Geronitan's death had been *his* fault.

[SFX: slow, mechanical footsteps approaching; Marines reluctantly move aside]

His dark thoughts were interrupted by the approach of Inquisitor Norstrandt's damnable servitor. Its metal-shod feet shuffled and clanked as it negotiated the rows of arming posts and low benches, and the Grey Knights seated at them murmured in annoyance at the sight of it. Bedecked in the finery of a regency adept, it was a tottering, creaking reminder of the inquisitor's crippling paranoia.

SERVITOR: Seeking Draigo, Master, Sixth Brotherhood. Seeking Draigo, Master, Sixth Brotherhood.

The thing's grating mechanical voice came from the emitter grille embedded in its chest. In the absence of a head, it was ghoulish to behold.

SERVITOR: Seeking Draigo, Master, Sixth-

TORVUS (interrupting): Master Draigo is not available for audience.

[SFX: Torvus stands, untidily]

Torvus rose from his seat and scattered his armourers before him.

TORVUS: You might seek out the captain instead, though I doubt he would have reason to treat with your herald, inquisitor.

[SFX: servitor stops; mechanical lenses whirring]

The headless servitor halted. It held up its left hand, and the winking lenses built into the palm tried to focus on him.

SERVITOR: Identify.

TORVUS: [sigh] Brother-Librarian Torvus. Sixth Brotherhood.

[SFX: servitor legs lock; hololith begins]

For a few seconds it clicked and whirred, before locking its legs into position. Atop its empty shoulders, the hololithic projector built into the stump of its neck flickered to life, the image quickly resolving into the flawed simulacrum of a human head.

The head turned in place on the mechanical body, but disjointedly, as though the whole thing might be some absurd puppet. Even cast in light and juddering with artificiality - the pinched features, the officious sneer - it was unmistakeably *him*, and he regarded Torvus for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was almost as flat and emotionless as the servitor's had been.

NORSTRANDT: <<Brother Torvus.>>

TORVUS: Inquisitor Norstrandt.

Torvus was in no mood for diplomacy. Not today. Norstrandt seemed not to notice.

He sniffed impatiently.

NORSTRANDT: *<<Where is Master Draigo? This delay is unacceptable.>>*

[ATMOS: background quietens; Marines murmuring]

The Librarian's mouth became a stern line. Several of the Grey Knights, those seated closest to the herald, rose to their feet.

TORVUS: All of the exalted Grand Masters are engaged in communion. As I have already told you, Master Draigo is not available for audience with you at this time.

Norstrandt narrowed his eyes. The head crackled with interference.

NORSTRANDT: *<<Need I remind you that every moment you delay, this world edges closer to the brink of damnation. Would the noble Grey Knights surrender another planet to the Great Enemy so casually? Is your grief for Lord Geronitan enough to justify such dereliction of your holy duties?>>*

[ATMOS: now almost silent, except for hololith]

Torvus glowered at the hololith, biting back his outrage.

TORVUS: If you truly fear for the sanctity of this world, then perhaps you would care to set foot upon it,

instead of gracing us with this... soulless proxy. Some might question your dedication to the Ordo Malleus, in summoning the Grey Knights to war and yet managing all the while to keep yourself safely out of harm's way.

His words hung in the air for a long while. Torvus realised that the armourium had become as quiet as a tomb; the attention of every Chapter warrior, serf and retainer was fixed upon the two of them as the exchange unfolded. The inquisitor sniffed again.

NORSTRANDT: [sniff] <<Brother Torvus, this is what your kind was bred for - to fight and to die in service to the immortal God-Emperor. Would that we were all so blessed in His sight as you.>>

Finally, Norstrandt looked away, his own disembodied hand appearing within the projection cone of the hololith as he adjusted the vox-bead in his ear.

NORSTRANDT: <<Have your master contact me when he is done crying out into the void, and we will see what yet remains of Kornovin to be saved.>>

[SFX: hololith ends; servitor leaves]

With a stuttering flare, the projection ceased. The servitor-herald stood motionless for a single mechanical

heartbeat, before unlocking its limbs and striding away.

Torvus exhaled slowly, resisting the urge to lash out at the thing's retreating back with a spear of psychic force. He mastered his rage, feeling it drain from his soul just as Geronitan's blood had been washed from his armour.

But instead of the cold surety of polished ceramite and adamantium revealed beneath it, when the rage was gone he would be left with naught but his own sense of guilt and pain.

SCENE 5: n/a. COMMUNION - n/a

[ATMOS: see 'Communion' note]

There was much, it seemed, that the Chapter Lord had not chosen to share with all of his brothers in the planning of this final endeavour. Long had it been known that Mortarion's damned soul was in the ascendant, though none could have foreseen the scope and scale of the primarch's foul crusade.

Of the five of them present, only Master Cromm had been privy to Lord Geronitan's preparations for the war. Now that he was gone, the Supreme Grand Master's desire for secrecy had been outweighed by the need of the communion to establish their next course of action, or whether any kind of victory was still possible. Cromm spoke, and the others listened.

CROMM: This confrontation was always

Linus's destiny. He knew that. It was said that for this greatest of duties he was chosen from among thousands of Chapter supplicants, and that only he was found worthy. Even his name was divined and crafted to be the antithesis of the Death Lord's - the perfect opposition to an imperfect creation.

Draigo frowned.

DRAIGO: Imperfect, only in that the primarch was once a living being and not born of the empyrean?

CROMM: Aye. He is something else - ascended, swallowed by darkness, call it what you will. As a prince of the warp and in service to the Plague God, he is less than a daemon and yet so much greater. Linus Geronitan knew that he alone held the power to ritually bind and destroy Mortarion on the material plane, and that his own name was the killing word. He also knew that there would only ever be a handful of opportunities to bring about this confrontation.

[SFX: psychic 'glimmer', continuing...]

Moving forwards, Cromm traced a sphere in the space before them, and spun the thought out so that it shone in the darkness. Vast continental drifts and urban sprawls lined its surface. Fenrick scowled.

FENRICK: Kornovin. A predestined nexus where the ritual combat could be forced.

Cromm nodded.

CROMM: Why then did his plan fail, you ask? What fickle twist of fate can overturn such a great destiny? I do not pretend to know the answer, but I do know that after consulting for many long nights with the prognosticators, our brother sullenly withdrew to the Sanctum Sanctorum. The signs were grim. Not by strength of arms alone, nor by mere cunning or even the most powerful psionics could the Death Lord be defeated. Mortarion has shored himself up against all sorcery - as ironic as that may be - and even now he still holds true to the old ways. His is a dark and superstitious faith, likely one that was practised by the most ancient xenos before mankind ever set foot among the stars.

KAI: Speak not of the xenos. Their trivial histories do not concern me. Tell me instead why our brother chose to martyr himself, rather than ask any of us to fight at his side in this most crucial of battles.

Fenrick and Mordrak both glared at Kai, but Cromm continued.

CROMM: Geronitan came to me, to help him find what he sought. He still

praised me for my diligence and success in the Raxos uprising, and said that if anyone knew where to look in those archives, it would be Drystann Cromm.

[SFX: more psychic glimmer; images passing like fast-forward, fades when Draigo speaks]

The Grand Master cast his memory-impressions into the space between them, as though it might be a pict-feed drawn from the depths of his own mind. Draigo and the others looked on as a flurry of images and arcane symbology whirled past - some of their hexagrammatic symmetries seemed familiar to him, though many more were unknown, drawn from the millennia of forbidden lore that the Grey Knights had gathered and guarded.

CROMM: We turned to the most ancient records and prophecies of our Chapter - we were founded in darker times, brothers, and it was in the wisdom of the First Lords that I knew we would find the hidden truths of the Emperor's lost sons.

He paused for a moment before continuing.

CROMM: And, indeed, it was there that we discovered the secret that would form the basis of Geronitan's plan.

Draigo's own impatience was rising. Even now, the enemy drew near and time was

growing too short for such meandering theatrics.

DRAIGO: Tell us, then. Tell us what you found. Is it something we can still use, even without the Supreme Grand Master to lead us?

CROMM (balking): This is no trifling matter to be bandied about like bolter shells or the whereabouts of some fugitive. It is heresy. It is blasphemy. And yet... it is the means by which we might undo him.

It was then that Mordrak spoke up for the first time in a long while.

MORDRAK: Indeed, this is why we are here - to ascertain whether or not the naming of a successor will allow the ritual combat to be completed. If Mortarion is to be vanquished then you must tell us this secret, brother, or we shall abandon this cause as lost.

Casting his gaze warily around the group, Cromm shrank back, seeming unsure whether or not to give voice to the words.

CROMM (wary): Mortarion... Mortarion was not the name that the blessed Emperor chose for the Fourteenth Primarch. He was named by another, though I shall never speak of him.

Silence fell over the assembled Grand Masters. Mordrak gasped.

MORDRAK (awed): He has a *true name*... and you know it?

CROMM: I do. In a manner of speaking.

Kai laughed, though it was a hollow and desperate sound.

KAI (laughing): Pray then, brother - speak it! What is this, if not a weapon to be given to every single Grey Knight brother upon the surface of-

FENRICK: No.

Fenrick's mind-voice echoed in the void around them, and Draigo swore that he felt even his distant physical form tremble with the power of it.

FENRICK: This knowledge is not for all of us. A Supreme Grand Master has many secret burdens to bear, but so too does he hold many hidden weapons...

CROMM: Aye, I will gift this knowledge only to the new Chapter Lord, so that he might finish what Linus Geronitan started.

From the far reaches of the darkness beyond, Master Elliath's voice reached them once more.

ELLIATH: ++We must elect now. I regret that I will not arrive in time - Hasimir and I will stand aside to hasten the selection, though I have already made my choice.++

Kai nodded in agreement.

KAI: As have I.

DRAIGO: Patience, brothers. Do not be so hasty in your attempts to *trick* Fate. We must ensure that the Rites of Succession are properly observed, such being the command of Malcador the Sigillite at the creation of our order.

[SFX: faint psychic pulsing]

He made a flourish of his soul-light, the illumination growing in intensity like a beacon. When he spoke again, his psychic voice projected far out in the void.

DRAIGO (louder): Grand Master Tor - have you heard all that has been said?

For what seemed the longest time, there was nothing but expectant silence, save for the aethereal rumble of the war raging on beneath them. No matter how many perils the Imperium faced, nor how many crusades the Chapter were embarked upon at any given time, a single Grand Master and his warriors would always remain behind to stand sentinel over the home world.

Kornovin was far, far from Titan and the fortress-monastery of the Grey Knights, but the communion had reached the last of their number nonetheless. Tor's voice, when it came, was resonant and yet impossibly distant.

TOR: ++I HAVE.++

DRAIGO: And do the prognosticators offer any further insight?

TOR: ++NONE.++

Draigo turned back to the assembly.

DRAIGO: Very well. It is to the five of us, then. Grand Master Vardan Kai of the Seventh Brotherhood, you say that you have made your decision as to which of our number should become the new Chapter Lord. Name him now.

Kai did not hesitate for a second.

KAI: I name Drystann Cromm. He alone knew where to find the hidden truths that might undo a fallen son of the almighty Emperor. I can think of none more qualified.

Cromm looked up, suddenly. His spiritual form flickered with confusion.

MORDRAK: And I, Grand Master Vorth Mordrak of the Third Brotherhood, second the nomination.

Before Draigo could reply, Cromm surged into the centre of the group.

CROMM: Brothers, this is not right. If destiny is to play a part in this, then mine is the role of kingmaker - I shall arm our new Supreme Grand Master, though I'll not be him.

Shaking his head, Mordrak looked to Draigo.

MORDRAK: It must be unanimous. Cromm refuses.

Fenrick pushed Cromm aside.

FENRICK: Very well, I name myself.

Kai looked incredulous.

KAI: On what grounds, brother? This does not sit well with me.

MORDRAK: Nor with me. You told us that this was not the time for vengeance, yet this vanity reeks of it.

FENRICK (bitterly): You would rather one of us name *you*, instead?

Mordrak winced.

MORDRAK: Not likely. I am already wounded from battle. I'd be no match for the Death Lord.

CROMM: If any of us can be...

In that moment, a feeling of cold acceptance settled over Draigo. While the five of them argued the nomination back and forth, he knew that whatever chance they had to halt Mortarion's crusade was slipping away, second by second.

None of them had any real claim to the title of Supreme Grand Master, and none of them was an ideal candidate: Kai being too brash and inexperienced, Cromm too valuable to risk losing to a forlorn hope. Neither Fenrick nor Mordrak

would allow the other to rise without qualification.

Fate. Destiny. Draigo knew that it was not his to claim, but the words came without thought.

DRAIGO: I name myself.

The others stared at him. Fenrick sneered.

FENRICK (sneering): Impossible. Did you not hear our brother? This is a "vengeful vanity", indeed.

Draigo shook his head solemnly.

DRAIGO: No, it is not, for I neither wish for this honour nor consider myself worthy of it. I do not know the wording of the prophecies, nor do I honestly believe that Mortarion *can* be defeated here, today, now that Geronitan is lost. Events certainly have not played out as they were supposed to, or fated to... But I will face the daemon, nonetheless. It was the Sixth Brotherhood that failed our master on the field of battle, and so I shall make atonement, though I am certain that before the day is out the seven of you will be meeting again to appoint *my* successor.

Once more, silence descended. Draigo looked to each of them in turn, for any hint of-

TOR: ++SECONDED.++

At the sound of Tor's voice, Kai spun around.

KAI (confused): It was my understanding that he couldn't do that, in absentia...

Mordrak held up a hand.

MORDRAK: He cannot name a candidate, but he may second a nomination and so cast his vote. And since Kaldor is now the subject of the vote, I shall call it - brothers, in this communion there are no secrets between us. Speak now if you would have Kaldor Draigo as our *primus inter pares*, Chapter Lord and Supreme Grand Master of the Grey Knights.

Unsurprisingly, it was Cromm that answered first.

CROMM (relieved): Aye.

KAI: Aye.

HASIMIR: ++Aye.++

MORDRAK: Aye.

ELLIATH: ++Aye.++

All eyes fell upon Fenrick, who stared coldly back at Draigo. Such was the depth and gravity of that stare, that Draigo was suddenly convinced that he had just done something very foolish indeed. Fenrick muttered, half to himself.

FENRICK (muttering): Don't make me

regret this... [**louder**] Aye.

Kai laughed in obvious relief, but Fenrick stopped him before he could speak.

FENRICK: Wait. He must still take the oath, and for that he must swear upon the *Titansword*.

Only then did Draigo realise the full extent of what awaited him.

SCENE 6: INT. ARMOURIUM - DAY

[ATMOS: large chamber, many Marines and humans gearing up for war; sense of urgency; recorded alarum bells sounding over tannoys throughout city]

The clarion-emitters sounded throughout the capital, and the defenders of Kornovin knew that the final battle was at hand. Fresh oath papers and warding scripture fluttered from silver plate. Rituals of psychic invocation were observed. Blades were re-sanctified and charged for combat.

[SFX: large mecha suits power up, then lope away]

Torvus strode beside Captain Servian, seeing five mighty Dreadknight walkers rising up from their mounting frames with guns replenished. Attendant serfs and tech-adepts were scattered as the pilots ambled their war machines back

and forth, impatiently testing the calibration of their systems before loping away to the designated muster points.

When word had finally come from Master Draigo's sanctum, it had spread quickly. He was master no more - he was *lord*, and he would lead the Grey Knights to righteous victory this day.

[SFX: middle-distance, great metal doors opening; some people cheer]

Torvus halted as the great adamantium doors of the basilica opened, and he saw the new Supreme Grand Master conferring with his Paladins as they emerged from within. Cheers went up from the assembled battle-brothers, some of the mortal serfs even genuflecting as Draigo and his guard passed by.

The Librarian felt a twinge of apprehension as his former master approached, but Draigo embraced both him and Servian in turn with a statesman's smile.

DRAIGO (approaching): Brothers, friends. I have some news...

TORVUS: I believe we may have already heard it, my lord. As you know, there is little that escapes the good captain's ear.

DRAIGO: [laughs] Indeed, indeed. In fact, Brother-Captain Servian - you and I have matters of rank and

elevation to discuss, once this is done. For now, though, I must ask a great favour of you, Torvus. I have particular need of your talents on the battlefield.

Torvus hesitated.

TORVUS: My lord... I...

[SFX: nearby, raised voices; mechanical footsteps approaching]

The words died in his throat at the sound of some nearby commotion. His gaze shifted beyond Draigo to the armourium gates, and the hunched figure that shuffled through the throng towards them.

SERVITOR: Seeking Draigo, Master, Sixth Brotherhood. Seeking Draigo, Master, Sixth Brotherhood.

It was Norstrandt's servitor. Torvus rolled his eyes and gestured to the thing.

TORVUS: The inquisitor has been demanding to speak with you for hours.

Draigo turned, folding his arms across his breastplate. He spoke loudly and clearly, quieting the din of the armourium.

DRAIGO (bold): You have found me, herald.

[ATMOS: background quietens; people are listening]

[SFX: servitor halts; hololith begins]

The servitor froze, its internal systems recognising the voice straight away. The inquisitor's hololithic features coalesced before them once more.

NORSTRANDT: <<Master Draigo. I believe congratulations are in order, though Master Tor sends further word from Titan. He reports that the prognosticators have condemned your appointment as Chapter Lord.>>

DRAIGO: Heh. I can't imagine why.

NORSTRANDT: <<I am sure they have their reasons. Nonetheless, this whole debacle has cost us dearly. The daemon horde approaches the walls of the capital, even as we speak. I am not interested in the opaque politics and posturing of your Chapter's ruling council - I presume you will be taking up Lord Geronitan's former duties with immediate effect, so that we might finally cleanse this world of these horrors. In the Emperor's name.>>

Draigo frowned.

DRAIGO: Kornovin? The planet is already lost. This was never about saving it.

Norstrandt blinked once.

NORSTRANDT: <<Unacceptable. I was assured your complete deference and cooperation->>

DRAIGO (bellowing): My lord inquisitor! You forget your place! **[reprimanding]** You exist and operate here only because we have continued to allow it. Do not for one moment believe yourself the architect of this campaign, or that your desultory efforts will be remembered. Lord Geronitan - may his name live forever - allowed Mortarion to ravage entire sectors, so that we might bring him to battle and win a greater victory, here and now.

Norstrandt's face contorted, his expression exaggerated in the shimmering projection.

NORSTRANDT (outraged): <<You will not speak to me in such a manner, Space Marine! Do not forget whom it is that you serve. Your Chapter's honour is much tarnished of late, by Lord Geronitan's willful pursuit of vainglorious prophecies. I have tolerated this until now, but no longer. It is not for your kind to->>

[SFX: sudden, loud bolter shot; onlookers are shocked; servitor staggers, crashes down, systems failing messily]

Draigo fired a single shot from his storm bolter, taking the servitor squarely in its chest. It staggered back half a step before crashing to the floor, blood and pneumatic fluids spreading over the

flagstones as the ruined body twitched and sparked.

[ATMOS: almost silent, except distant artillery]

No one in the chamber moved. The only other sound was the distant rumble of artillery shells. Torvus peered over Draigo's armoured shoulder.

TORVUS: That was... unequivocal. And quite a statement, too.

Draigo exhaled slowly, though still visibly filled with tension.

DRAIGO (exhaling): In the grand scheme of things, I do not think it will change much.

The Librarian nodded to Servian and the Paladin guard.

TORVUS: My lord, we stand ready to serve you, and the Brotherhoods await your command. Also, Master Cromm's transport is inbound - he speaks of "the two weapons" that you will carry into battle. Would you have me prepare and prime your force-halberd?

With a thin smile, Draigo drew himself up and saluted his followers with the sign of the aquila.

DRAIGO: No. I will not need it.

[ATMOS: artillery grows louder, ceasing with scene end]

SCENE 7: EXT. REARGUARD - DAY

[ATMOS: daemons and zombies advancing, cackling and moaning madly; insects buzz]

The city's gunnery emplacements had fallen silent. The daemons hollered and whooped, revelling in the breaking of the defenders' spirits and anticipating the carnage to come. Foul, relentless and unyielding, they had poisoned and corrupted this world, and soon the last stronghold would fall.

They spread out over the plains to encircle the capital, trampling over the forgotten, flyblown corpses of the Grey Knights that had fallen to the Death Lord's sickening miasma as they went. It was the site of Geronitan's folly, and it was there that Draigo needed to be.

[SFX: loud, sudden psychic teleport; zombies hurled back; three Marines land, start attacking]

Torvus, Cromm and Draigo appeared a few feet above ground level in the midst of the plague-horde, with a shockwave of displacement that hurled the daemons' putrescent bodies away in all directions. Crashing down, the three of them laid about with bolter and psionic blast, driving the enemy back even further.

[ATMOS: desperate close-up battle begins]

TORVUS (embattled): Where is it?

[SFX: Draigo charges zombies]

Draigo shouldered a gaggle of bloated beasts aside, driving his fist cleanly through the brittle skull of their champion and putting down another with precise bolter fire.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): [grunt of exertion] I sense nothing. Their daemonic presence is stifling!

The three of them edged back-to-back, moving together as they fought. They had precious little time.

[SFX: twin short-swords; decapitated zombie]

Cromm lashed out with his twin falchions, striking the head from an emaciated revenant as he turned. Expecting the putrid body to topple, he was caught off-guard by the sudden projectile eruption of bilious fluid that

coursed from the thing's ruptured belly.

[SFX: disgusting acid vomit, burning armour; Cromm groans, stumbles]

It doused his faceplate, hissing and steaming as it ate into the seals at his neck and shoulders, and he stumbled backwards to the ground.

Draigo made to shield Cromm while he recovered his footing, but the Grand Master suddenly pointed away into the mud.

CROMM (helmet-vox): There! There it is!

Down in the filth of the battlefield lay Geronitan's blade, the *Titansword*. Draigo snatched it up, before removing his armoured helm.

[SFX: retrieves sword, removes helmet]

DRAIGO: Quickly, Torvus!

[ATMOS: psychic shield, halting battle; daemon sounds are muted]

The Librarian lowered his head, and threw out an invisible wall of energy that separated them from the horde, and even the swarms of carrion insects that sparked and fizzed against its surface. His gauntleted hands trembled with the effort, but the shield held.

[SFX: Cromm removes helmet; scrambles upright]

Tearing his own damaged helmet free, Cromm scrambled over to Draigo, who

sank to one knee. Surrounded by the clamouring servants of the Plague God, he took his oath.

CROMM (urgent, formal): Kaldor Draigo, do you accept your role in this? Will you take up the mantle of Chapter Lord and Supreme Grand Master, dedicating yourself to the final command of the Sigillite?

DRAIGO: I will.

CROMM (urgent, formal): Do you put aside all other claims upon your honour, all personal concerns and petty mortal rivalries? Will you employ every weapon and methodology in the destruction of our enemies, even unto the Terminus Decree?

DRAIGO: I will.

CROMM (urgent, formal): Do you pledge yourself in this oath without any thought of evasion, and secure in the knowledge that only in death will your duty end?

Draigo gripped the blade tightly.

DRAIGO: On this matter and by this weapon, I so swear.

CROMM (urgent): Good. Here.

Cromm thrust his hand out, the palm upon Draigo's brow.

Time seemed to slow. Their souls met.

[ATMOS: everything faint and muted,

shellshocked; something important within reach]

Draigo felt the passing of something - something cold, barbed and ancient. Cromm released the knowledge to him with the care of an ironsmith handing over a white-hot brand, and he took it into his own mind swathed in layers of obfuscating thought.

[SFX: psychic burning hiss]

Just for the barest fraction of an instant, Draigo tried to see what it was, but it burned him with a flash like a mental supernova, and he recoiled. As Cromm had said, this truth was for him to carry, but never to know for himself, and he buried it deep down in the most unassailable part of his subconscious.

[ATMOS: back to normal, behind shield]

Torvus grunted.

TORVUS (exertion): Lord Draigo... I can't hold them back any longer!

[SFX: helmet seal]

Draigo replaced his helm, and whirled the sword around.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): Go! Get him to safety!

TORVUS: But you need me to-

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): I am quite sure it no longer matters. Just go! Destiny will have to wait.

[SFX: psychic teleport]

**[ATMOS: shield drops; Draigo charges
zombies]**

Before Cromm could protest, he and the Librarian vanished. The shield collapsed, and Draigo barrelled into the waiting horde.

**SCENE 8a: EXT. KORNOVIN PLAINS -
DAY**

[ATMOS: continuing from Scene 1,
artillery battle still rages in
distance; daemons and zombies hanging
back as Draigo and Mortarion face off]

Mortarion twitched impatiently.

MORTARION: \\Speak, then! *Who are
you?//*

Having considered the question, Draigo
raised the *Titansword*.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): I am Kaldor
Draigo. I am the appointed successor
of Lord Geronitan, whose life you
have unjustly taken this day. I am
Supreme Grand Master of the Six-
hundred and Sixty-Sixth Chapter
Adeptus Astartes, the Grey Knights.
I am the keeper of the eternal flame,
and I sit at the-

MORTARION (interrupting): \\Again, titles. Nothing more. You rest upon the names and duties given to you by others. Have you nothing of your own, little witch?//

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): I am the Saviour of Acralem. By my hand were the beasts of-

MORTARION (interrupting, shrieking): \\No! You cannot cow me with tales of your deeds or the worthy foes you have laid low! I am greater! The son of a demi-god, and the disciple of a true god! I am the Lord of Death! *I am eternal!!!*

[SFX: thunder]

Thunder rolled across the heavens, as if in answer to the daemon prince's proclamations. Draigo gritted his teeth; it was clear that no strident boast or vengeful vow would pierce the primarch's otherworldly resolve. Instead he turned his anger inwards, letting it fuel his own psychic reserves. Mortarion was a convoluted and guarded soul - rather than batter in futility against those warp-gifted defences, Draigo would empower himself for the fight to come.

Destiny. It would always come back to destiny. He fixed his iron glare upon his foe.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox, building intensity): I am the spear of light

that will drive out the darkness.
I shall become the scourge of all
daemon-kin and devil-spawn. The
warp itself shall know my name, and
despair.

**[SFX: psychic charge building slowly
under dialogue; sword catches fire]**

Draigo's eyes shone brightly within
his helm. The *Titansword* flared with
the growing psionic charge, purple flame
coruscating along the blade's edge.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox, empowered): I
defy you, "Death Lord" - I defy
you as I defy all your kind, and
I shall not rest until the galaxy
is cleansed. The Emperor's divine
retribution for your unspeakable sins
is at hand, and I alone am the agent
of His true will. None since noble
and mighty Janus himself, First Lord
of the Chapter, have known such holy
rapture and glory as I shall.

[SFX: Mortarion laughs]

At this, Mortarion began to laugh.
Draigo remained resolute.

MORTARION (snorting): \\Oh, noble
and mighty Janus! Noble, mighty,
steadfast, pious and honourable
Janus-//

[SFX: psychic whipcrack]

Draigo snapped his hand out in a
punitive gesture, and a psychic blow

flashed against Mortarion's wards like the crack of a whip. It was delivered with the unwavering resolve of a beast-tamer bringing his charge to heel.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): Do not speak his name. You are unworthy. Janus was the first of us to stand against the forces of Chaos, and the greatest.

The primarch still rippled with mirth, but shot through now with a flicker of agitation.

MORTARION: *\\I am unworthy? I spit on the name of "Janus". You are more like him than you could ever know...//*

[SFX: psychic whipcrack]

Again, Draigo struck out with a lash of psionic force that stung the air between them. He loaded his voice with authority and preternatural determination.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox): No more. You will not speak of him again.

The Death Lord, suddenly appearing thoughtful, leaned upon the haft of his war-scythe. From deep within that cowl, Draigo felt the weight of a gaze heavy with ten thousand years of war and betrayal.

MORTARION (low, conspiratorial): **
But of course, I doubt even the archives of Titan would contain the original identities of the

Sigillite's... *errant angels*. Names. Power. It works both ways. Guarded. Hidden. **[pause]** The truth of Janus's past would shake your pitiful Chapter to its very foundations. Of that, you can be certain. Treachery, cowardice... *heresy*, and a brother who would willingly betray his own for the sake of some half-imagined redemption.//

Draigo faltered, just for a second, but Mortarion saw the moment of doubt in the Grey Knight's heart. The primarch's words became no more than a filtered whisper through the rebreather.

MORTARION: \\As I told your master before I cut him down - *you have all been deceived.*//

[SFX: Mortarion spreads wings; roars and attacks]

Then the towering daemon prince drew himself up, stretching the leathery wings behind his shoulders, and screamed his infernal rage as he lunged.

SCENE 8b: EXT. HORDE - DAY

[ATMOS: no fade, continuing duel; Draigo and Mortarion fight, daemons watch gleefully]

The attack came so quickly that Draigo almost failed to parry it. He would have lost his sword arm at the wrist, but for his instinctual flash of psychic force that turned the arc of the scythe blade into a hammerblow. The strength of it nearly knocked him from his feet, but he spun and brought the *Titansword* up inside the primarch's guard. Mortarion recoiled from the riposte, sweeping wide with the war-scythe again and again.

It was a duel worthy of legend. The lesser daemons gathered on every side, tumbling over one another and hooting with delight as their master toyed with his opponent. The formidable strength and cunning of the primarch should have been the end of Kaldor Draigo, but the

Grey Knight fought with a desperate, vengeful fury, always just managing to stave off the final, killing blow.

Draigo's psychic reserves were all but spent. Exhaustion began to creep into his superhuman frame, his limbs becoming heavy and his reactions slowing. By contrast, Mortarion seemed energised, renewed by the grinding conflict and the warp powers that favoured him. It was not long before the daemon prince pressed this unnatural advantage home.

He lashed out with the scythe, forcing Draigo into an awkward block. Then, before the Grey Knight could recover, he hooked the *Titansword* inside the crook of the blade and tugged Draigo forwards into an almighty open-palmed blow with his off-hand.

[SFX: powerful punch; daemons laugh as Draigo falls, gasping]

The daemon rabble cackled with glee as the Grey Knight crashed down insensible into the stinking mud, his sword knocked from his grasp. He struggled weakly for a moment, before Mortarion hefted a clawed boot and stamped down on his silver breastplate.

[SFX: powerful stamp of armoured boot; squeal of metal plate being crushed, continuing...]

Draigo groaned as the ceramite buckled and creaked, slowly driving the air

from his lungs, and the daemon prince laughed.

MORTARION: Die, little witch. You and all your misbegotten kind are as nothing to me. Seven times seven, times seven! The Great Corrupter will welcome your soul...

[ATMOS: Mortarion's slow wingbeats; wind building into psychic storm]

With Draigo pinned, Mortarion spread his wings and began to churn the sickly air once more. The sorcerous tempest rose with the two of them at its centre. Mortarion took a deep, rasping breath.

MORTARION: \\[inhales] Come, taste the elixir of death with me. Join your former master in the mansion of Grandfather Nurgle!//

[SFX: grips helmet with armoured hand, pulls; warning chimes inside]

The daemon prince reached down with his free hand and gripped Draigo's faceplate, tugging at the pressure seals beneath. Inside the helmet, warning symbols flashed and chimed on Draigo's visor display as the suit's integrity began to fail. His Terminator armour was aegis against most attacks, but without his helm he would fall to the plague wind just as Geronitan had.

He had one chance. One *last* chance, before the end. Draigo gripped Mortarion's immense gauntlet as tightly

as he could, and drew upon every last iota of psychic charge that he could summon.

DRAIGO (helmet-vox, gasping): In the sight of the immortal God-Emperor...
burn for your sins.

[SFX: psychic fire catches dry robes; quickly becomes inferno]

Sanctifying flame sparked in Draigo's grip, setting the primarch's forearm alight. Fanned by the gathering hurricane, it touched the tinder-dry robes that swathed the daemon prince's mighty form, and the flames leapt up into a searing conflagration. Mortarion blazed like a grand funeral pyre, hunching and growling at the searing pain of it, but his grip remained firm upon Draigo's helm.

MORTARION (pained): \\Treachery...
Sorcery...//

His cowl pulled back as it burned, shreds of blackened fabric falling away to reveal his veined, grey pate. Beneath a hairless brow, Draigo saw the daemon prince's eyes for the first time - though they were sickly with malice and hatred, they were surprisingly human.

[SFX: psychic awareness]

There it was. The moment of distraction.

[ATMOS: everything becomes faint and muted, shellshocked; something important passes over]

Before Mortarion could utter another word, Draigo reached down within himself and pushed the unspoken truth of his true name through the primarch's mental defences. It slipped in like a needle, and then it was gone.

[ATMOS: flames return; Mortarion drops scythe, and screams in agony]

Mortarion's grip faltered. One reddened eye twitched.

The great war-scythe fell to the ground, and the daemon prince screamed behind his rebreather mask. It was a soul-shattering cry of anguish and agony that set the closest of his daemonic followers to flight, some of them simply bursting out of existence in clouds of nauseating vapour.

[SFX: daemons flee; some burst]

For a few seconds, a greyish un-light shone through the flames from the cracks in his armour, and then Mortarion - the Death Lord and the Pale King - exploded outwards with a flare like a plasma reactor failure.

[SFX: sudden, loud psychic explosion; everyone blasted away; debris rains down]

Draigo was blasted up from the ground and sent skidding away, along with every other being within forty-nine paces. Fragments of the primarch's shattered armour rained down all around like so much battlefield debris.

[ATMOS: storm dies; artillery battle continues in distance; daemons fleeing]

[SFX: Mortarion falls]

The Grey Knight looked back to see what remained of the cadaverous giant topple over backwards, his torn wings fluttering slackly in the dying breeze as he fell.

At the sight of their master humbled, the plague-horde was routed.

[SFX: retrieves sword; Mortarion struggles weakly, heartbeat audible and gross]

Taking up the *Titansword* once more, Draigo strode over to where Mortarion lay. The primarch shuddered and twitched, the flesh torn away across most of his body to reveal raw muscle and large portions of his skeleton. His innards hung in loose, tumbled folds, staining the ground black around him. The plaintive gasping and mewling that escaped his lipless skull might have provoked pity, were it not so indescribably foul.

In spite of it all, Draigo knew that he was not defeated, not truly. Given time, the immortal daemon prince would be scattered to the aethereal winds only to gather his strength once more and return to the physical realm in which he was so firmly rooted. Until they could bring Mortarion to battle on their own terms, the Grey Knights could never bind him as

they might any of the Conclave Diabolus - they could only delay and prolong the inevitable. Maybe one day, 'the one' that the Death Lord feared would rise up to destroy him for good.

But today was not that day. Fate had been cheated, one way or another. What that meant for the future, Draigo did not like to guess.

[SFX: removes helmet]

He released his damaged helmet seals, and looked upon his foe; empty eye sockets still burned with residual unlight, and he clawed at the air with trembling hands. Standing over him, Draigo saw Mortarion's exposed heart still beating a fearful rhythm in his ruined chest.

He smiled grimly.

DRAIGO: For the future, then.

[SFX: Mortarion hisses, trying to escape; Draigo wrenches ribs open, carves letters into heart - continuing...]

Mortarion hissed, trying in futility to edge away from the inevitable kiss of the *Titansword's* blade-tip, but Draigo held him in place as he pulled the shattered ribs wide and scored the putrid meat of the daemon's heart.

{SFX: Mortarion screams repeatedly}

There was power in a name. Power in the

names of those who lived - and died - for the Emperor, and Draigo could think of no other more potent binding for the Death Lord's septic soul than the name of Linus Geronitan.

**[ATMOS: artillery getting louder;
growing melee in distance]**

As his battle-brothers pursued the broken plague-horde, Kaldor Draigo rose up to embrace his own destiny, and silenced Mortarion's screams with one final, single thrust of his blade.

**[SFX: Draigo roars; stabs down,
silencing Mortarion]**

A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION

First published as an audio drama in 2014.

This edition published in Great Britain in 2014 by

Black Library,
Games Workshop Ltd.,
Willow Road, Nottingham,
NG7 2WS, UK.

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