



**WARHAMMER**  
**40,000**

# INCORRUPTIBLE

A GREY KNIGHTS TERMINATORS STORY  
BY DAVID ANNANDALE

Incorruptible

David Annadale

The silent ship moved across the oculus. Lights still shone from the superstructure of the Gladius-class frigate. There was a dull, red-star glow from its engines as they maintained the orbit. But those signs, Styer thought, were lies. The silence was the truth. The Blade of Purity was dead, a tomb cutting through the void above the clamorous planet.

The world named Korzun was not dead. The Blade of Purity had been sent to save it. Now the Tyndaris would have to kill it.

In the strategium overlooking the bridge, the Grey Knight justicar stood with his squad and Inquisitor Hadriana Furia. They surrounded the tactarium table. Styer and Furia had moved a pace away from its end, drawn forward by the portrait of profound loss forming in the oculus. Grief battled with anger in Styer's chest.

'Are you still hailing?' Furia asked Bruno Saalfrank.

'Yes, inquisitor,' the shipmaster answered. 'No response of any kind.'

'Keep trying.' To Styer, she said, 'I fear the worst, justicar.'

'And what is the worst?' he asked. 'Death? Failure? Both?'

She said nothing, which made him wonder if she was contemplating darker possibilities. Styer turned his head to the left to look at Furia. Her face was unreadable. So it had always been, for as long as he had known her. Her features were even more closed to scrutiny since her injuries during the Sanctus Reach campaign. She had fought Malia Orbiana, a Xanthite inquisitor whose radical agenda had ended in catastrophe. Before that battle, the left half of her body had already been bionic, that side of her face an unmoving, cold bronze. Now both her arms were artificial. So were her eyes. They were unblinking, red glares of judgement. She had chosen to preserve the portions of her flesh that could be saved, but the right side of her face was almost as still as the metallic left. It had an armour of scar tissue. It was taut, criss-crossed with wounds. Her lips barely moved when she spoke and her larynx was bionic. It had been before she had

sustained her latest injuries. but the voice that emerged from it seemed more hollow, less human. Even so, her concern over the situation aboard the Blade of Purity was clear.

Styer shared that concern. He too anticipated the worst. And if it had been Furia who had asked him what the worst was, he would have been unable to answer.

‘If Purifier Sadon could respond, he would have by now,’ Epistolary Gared said, walking forward to stand by Styer.

‘That presumes he is aboard his ship,’ said Vohnum. He did not move from his position at the table.

‘If he is planetside,’ Styer put in, ‘his failure is beyond contemplation.’

Purifier Sadon was a figure of awed whispers, even among the Grey Knights. His crusades were legend. Where he passed, he left nothing but the ashes of warp-spawn. He had taken the Blade of Purity to Korzun to purge a daemonic incursion foreseen by the Prognosticators on Titan. This was not a world that had previously shown signs of corruption. On the contrary, the piousness of Korzun was watchword throughout the subsector. This made it an even more attractive target for the Ruinous Powers, and any fall, however contained, would have to be met with pitiless retribution. The greater the piety, the greater the punishment for betrayal. So the great Purifier had come to Korzun and fallen silent. The Tyndaris had come to find the reason for that silence.

Based on what Styer saw below the Blade, the threat must have been far more severe than either Sadon or the Prognosticators had anticipated. The atmosphere of Korzun was diseased and roiled with storms. Their spiral arms covered the entire globe, and there was no break in the clouds through which the continents or oceans could be seen. The vortices were stained with all the colours of rot. What had once been a jewel of the Imperium now looked like the corpse of a gas giant. The movements of the atmosphere were the slow ripples of flesh. Styer saw things emerge from the clouds and vanish again before their nature became clear. He thought of worms: maggots of impossible size squirming through the air, devouring the body and soul of the world.

‘Shipmaster,’ Styer said. ‘Is there any vox-traffic from Korzun?’

‘Ambach?’ Saalfrank asked the augur operator.

‘We have not been hailed, lord,’ Ambach told Styer. ‘We are, however, picking up communication signals between locations planetside and directed outward.’

‘Let us hear them.’

Ambach bent over her terminal. A moment later, the damnation of Korzun echoed across the bridge of the Tyndaris. A cacophony of voices spilled out of the vox speakers. Some of the voices were human, but many were not. Insanity gibbered. Perversion raged. From the jagged confusion, syllables began to form. They shaped words in a language no human should speak, and none could hear without harm. The Tyndaris’s crew stiffened in shock.

‘Shut it down,’ Styer commanded.

Ambach’s hand moved slowly, as if it were tangled in the web of the sounds. But she, like all her crewmates, was a servant of the Inquisition. She had the faith and discipline to resist the daemonic longer than most mortals. She killed the voices.

Silence fell over the bridge and Styer watched the oculus. He could still see the cries of Korzun. They were in the convulsions of its air. A pair of storms over the equator fused into a greater one. The colours deepened to hues of dried blood and fevered dreams.

‘That planet is beyond redemption,’ Furia said.

Styer nodded. There was no question that Exterminatus was necessary. Korzun was lost.

But there was still the question of Sadon. The catastrophic failure of his mission demanded an explanation. Even more important, as far as Styer was concerned, was determining the fate of one of the great heroes of Grey Knights. He would not allow Sadon’s name to plunge into the fog of conjecture.

‘If Purifier Sadon is on Korzun, then he is dead,’ the justicar said. ‘If he is alive, he will be on his ship.’

‘Even if he is not aboard,’ said Furia, ‘there may still be answers.’

‘Then we are agreed.’

Furia nodded. She walked down the stairs from the strategium to the rest of the bridge. 'I will meet you at the Final Sanctity,' she said.

Styer turned to Gared. 'Your thoughts?' he asked the Librarian.

Gared spoke slowly. 'It seems to me,' he said, 'that the most disturbing factor here is not the fact that Sadon may have failed, but the reason behind it. I am uneasy.'

'So am I.'

Styer sat in the cockpit of the Final Sanctity with Warheit, watching through the viewing block as the Blade of Purity's superstructure drew closer. The Sanctity was a Caestus Assault Ram. There was no question of using the Stormraven. Styer knew the bays of the silent ship would remain sealed to them if they tried that approach. He also wanted to gain access to the ship as close to the bridge as possible. Even so, he thought. An Assault Ram. Necessity didn't make the strategy any less distasteful.

Vohnum didn't hide his displeasure as the Sanctity cut across the void between the vessels. 'This is wrong,' he said, his voice reaching Styer over the squad vox-channel. 'We are attacking one of our own ships.'

'Brother,' Styer said, 'if you know of another way of doing what we must, I would have been happy to hear it before we boarded.'

Vohnum refused to answer directly. 'It is the principle that dismays me,' he said.

'It dismays us all. Need compels us to this action.'

'Brother Vohnum, if we are engaged in the most distressing action of the day, we will be fortunate indeed,' Gared said.

Vohnum began to answer but Styer interrupted him. 'Brace for impact,' he said.

Warheit aimed the Final Sanctity at the level immediately below the bridge. The hull of the Blade filled the viewing block. Warheit fired the Assault Ram's magna-melta. The frigate's shields were still active, their flare as bright as outrage. The melta beam overwhelmed the shield and ate through the skin of the frigate. There was no retaliatory fire, and Styer was unsure whether or not he

should view that as a mercy. Then the Assault Ram's brutal prow slammed into the Blade of Purity, the jolt vibrating through Styer's armour. It was the blow of brother striking brother, and it sickened the soul.

Styer pushed away the distaste. He and Warheit charged out of the cockpit as the prow's boarding ramps crashed down and the squad advanced into the Blade of Purity. Seven Grey Knights and the inquisitor, whose destiny now appeared to be tied to theirs as the aftershocks of the battle over Squire's Rest continued to be felt. The squad had lost brothers in the Sanctus Reach, and before that on Angriff Primus. There had been time to repair the damage done to the Tyndaris, but the process of adding new battle-brothers to the ranks of the Chapter took much longer.

Even diminished, they were still enough to shatter an army.

The chamber into which the Assault Ram had broken through was a librarium. Though the Blade was much smaller than the Tyndaris, the holdings of its librarium were even more vast – a testament to Purifier Sadon's reputation and his erudition the equal of his faith. Styer led the way through a space large enough to be a loading dock. To his left and right, marble bookcases rose to the vaulted ceiling. The Ram had smashed several rows of them down, but the librarium was so large that most of the shelves still stood.

Even so, they were empty of books. The deck was piled high with ruined tomes. They were ripped and burned. The sconce-mounted lumen globes revealed the scorches of las and the craters of bolter-rounds. The chamber had seen fierce fighting – and then desecration.

There were bodies here, badly burned and mutilated, and half buried by the remains of the books and scrolls. There was little that was recognisable, but Styer could still see charred scraps of uniforms that marked the victims of the ship's crew.

'Who were they fighting?' Vohnum wondered.

'And where are the rest of the bodies?' Warheit asked.

He was right, Styer thought. There should have been more, given the scale of the destruction. He pointed to some paths that had been created in the piles of velum and parchment, leading to the librarium door. 'They have been dragged away,' he

said.

Furia picked up a few of the books. Their destruction was immense. ‘The enemy that destroyed this archive,’ she said, ‘is not the sort to concern itself with the disposal of bodies.’

Styer noticed Gared frowning. The Epistolary’s gaze was unfocused. ‘Brother Gared?’ he asked.

‘There is something...’ He shook his head, frustrated, and tried again. ‘We have a psychic enemy aboard the ship.’

‘Are we under attack?’

‘I’m not sure. I feel as if I am trying to pierce shadows. They are filled with terrors.’

Styer’s ability as a psyker was paltry next to Gared’s. Like all Grey Knights, though, he had some psychic strength. He had felt oppressed since the Final Sanctity had broken through the Blade of Purity’s interior. Something was pushing down on him; a wall had risen between his consciousness and the warp. It was no simple barrier.

The shadows were full of terrors, Gared had said. Styer agreed with his choice of words. He had no fear of what lurked in the suffocating veil that had fallen on them, but there was no doubt that this was no defensive barrier. It was an assault and it concealed threats. There was an edge to the smothering, and had Styer still been mortal, he would have been paralysed with terror.

‘This phenomenon is not unknown,’ he said. ‘There is an enemy whose presence has this effect.’

‘Yes,’ Gared agreed, ‘but the signs here are contradictory.’

True. The enemy that the psychic assault presaged might well have consumed the bodies, but it would have no interest in desecrating the librarium. That was the domain of a different sort of abomination.

Styer raised his daemon hammer. ‘We will destroy whatever enemy awaits.’ He was about to say that its nature was irrelevant, but he stopped himself before he

spoke that lie. The identity of the enemy was of the gravest importance. Why Sadon had failed mattered. It mattered a great deal.

The corridor outside the librarium showed more signs of combat. More las, more bolter-rounds and blood on the walls and the deck. As the squad made its way down the hall in the direction of the bridge, Styer watched for other signs of damage, signs of the other enemy he was expecting. There were marks on the polished granite of the walls that were suggestive, but could have been ricochets. Just before the intersection where a staircase led up to the next level, he found what he was seeking. They passed through a bulkhead. Its iron door had long, deep gouges on its surface. Styer pointed them out.

‘Claw marks.’

‘A strong indication,’ said Furia. ‘We should not ignore the contradictions. We may be misled into preparing for the wrong enemy.’

‘True. But we should also be prepared for this one.’

The staircase was wide enough to mount three abreast. They climbed in a wedge formation, Styer in the lead. He scanned the shadows in alcoves on either side, and in the gloom of the high ceiling. He blinked his photolenses into infrared mode. Nothing, though the smothering oppression was strong. There were no enemies here, but his squad was not alone on the ship.

They reached the bridge and entered slowly. They were ready for an attack, but not for the scale of what they found.

The bridge of the Blade of Purity was like the interior of a cathedral. Though it was not a chapel, its architecture was another reflection of the holy warrior in whose service it crossed the Imperium. The ship was millennia old, far more ancient than Sadon, despite his many centuries of battle. Even so, its character was so perfectly attuned to what Styer knew of the Purifier that it seemed the frigate had been constructed for him alone. The bridge, with its solemn lines, its Gothic vault over forty metres high and its banners commemorating the heroes of the Chapter, was holy war given shape in stone and iron.

Or so it had been.

The banners were destroyed. The walls and columns were defaced as high as a

mortal could reach with the runes of Chaos. The obscene markings had been daubed in blood or scorched into the surface and the terminals and control surfaces had been smashed, though not so completely as to cripple the ship's vital functions. More bloody runes had been splashed over the wreckage. The battle here had been larger. There were more bodies, both of the crew and the enemy. More of the remains were intact.

Styer turned over one of the enemy corpses with his boot. The man was dressed in ragged robes. Some of their markings were still vaguely recognisable as Administratum designations, only they were covered by jagged, eight-pointed stars. The cultist had shaved his head and slashed crude, serpentine designs into the flesh of his skull. He had pulled out all his teeth but the canines.

The body made sense, given the desecration of the bridge. But the psychic oppression implied a different enemy. The picture of what had happened on the Blade of Purity was no clearer.

'I was mistaken to say I feared the worst. This is much more severe than I had imagined,' Furia said.

Styer gave her a sharp look. 'What makes you say that? This wretch is not part of the crew. He came from Korzun.'

'That gives me little comfort.' She gestured at the runes on the columns. 'Look at what surrounds us. How could such sacrilege befall a vessel of the Grey Knights?'

Styer didn't answer. He saw where Furia's train of thought was leading but rejected the conclusion. It was unthinkable.

Relentless, Furia pursued her logic. There were short pauses between her sentences, though, spaces of regret. 'A battle was fought here between the forces of the Emperor and those sworn to the Ruinous Powers. Both lie dead. But this ship is silent. There was no victory for the Imperium. If the Purifier were fighting as he should, how could this be? And the desecration could not have occurred before the struggle.'

If the Purifier were fighting as he should. Even Furia was reluctant to state the obscenity aloud. It was Vohnum, in his anger, who spoke the words, even though it was in denial. 'Sadon was not corrupted,' he said. 'No Grey Knight has ever

fallen to Chaos.’

‘That is true,’ Furia replied. ‘Does that mean none ever will?’

‘It does.’ Vohnum’s fists were clenched. He bit the words off with such venom that he hissed.

‘Symptoms that resemble possession may be caused by a very different sort of attack,’ said Gared, speaking from hard experience.

Styer was still grappling with Furia’s words. He could not imagine any of his battle-brothers raising so monstrous an idea. This must be another consequence of the Sanctus Reach, he thought. It was, after all, a fellow inquisitor who had opened the way to a daemonic incursion there. Even though Malia Orbiana had been a philosophical enemy of Furia’s, her fate must have made it easier for Furia to conceive of an even worse corruption.

‘I will not believe Sadon has fallen without greater proof,’ Styer said, aware as he spoke that he had not shut down the terrible possibility. Doubt was forming in his chest, a doubt that he did not dare dismiss. If the unimaginable had taken place, the only thing that would make it worse would be to fail to confront it. ‘We must find the Purifier.’

‘How?’ Vohnum asked. ‘He could be anywhere.’

‘Then we will search this vessel until we find him,’ Styer snapped.

‘The chapel,’ said Gared.

Styer nodded. If Sadon’s back had been to the wall, he would have fought to the end to preserve the sanctity of that space.

‘Brother-justicar,’ Adrax called. He was mounting guard at the entrance to the bridge. ‘The enemy approaches.’

At the same moment, Gundemar pointed upwards. ‘In here too.’

Styer now heard the enemy coming down the corridor from the staircase. He heard the pounding of feet and the hard clicking of claws against metal. Above, shadows emerged from the gallery midway up the height of the nave. They

scuttled down the columns, hissing.

The silhouettes were bipedal but had four arms: two with clawed hands, and two limbs that ended in scythes. On their backs were ridged carapaces. Their heads were almost human, but the craniums were elongated and their jaws were wide and carnivorous. Their tongues flicked out, savouring the air and the taste of prey.

Genestealers.

Styer couldn't imagine the cursed circumstances that had led both genestealers and followers of Chaos to be on the Blade of Purity at the same time. His speculations didn't matter now. What mattered was destroying the enemy so he could find the answers.

'Grey Knights!' Styer called. 'Cut through the unclean foe! We make for the chapel. Cleanse the way forward, we are the hammer!'

'We are the hammer!' his battle-brothers echoed.

They charged for the exit at the same moment that the genestealers leapt from the columns. Xenos monsters scuttled across the deck towards them. Others landed in the midst of the squad. Styer caught movement in the corner of his eye and whirled, bringing up the Nemesis hammer to strike a genestealer in midair. The weapon's energy flash was as great and as furious as if he had been fighting daemons. He crushed the beast's thorax. Then he was moving forward again to join Ardax at the front of the wedge. They ran forward into the enemy, opening fire with wrist-mounted storm bolters.

The corridor boiled with genestealers. They raced forward on the floor, the walls and the ceiling. Insect-fast, their movements were jagged and unpredictable. The stream of bolt shells from the squad tore through carapaces and ripped bodies apart. Xenos jinked out of the line of fire and struck into the wedge. One clamped its jaws around Ardax's left arm. It bit hard enough to cut through his Aegis armour, but there was no flesh beneath. The Grey Knight had lost the arm in the Sanctus Reach struggle. He lashed out with the bionic replacement, crushing the genestealer against the corridor wall.

Lacking power armour, Furia compensated with speed. She had even less flesh than Ardax for the genestealers to target. She countered their agility with her

own, ducking beneath their lunges. She retaliated with neural whip and bolt pistol, incapacitating her enemy long enough to blast its skull apart.

A genestealer hurled itself at Styer, leaping up from the floor, beneath his line of fire. It grabbed his torso, its scythe limbs attacking his breast plate. They cut through armour that could withstand the strongest blade. Outraged at the desecration, Styer brought his right arm back and fired his storm bolter, severing the xenos's head. The corpse clung to him in death, but he tore it off as he ran on.

The squad blasted through the wave of genestealers. Tygern and Gundemar brought up the rear, taking down the attackers that followed until they retreated. Ahead, the corridor was clear.

‘It can’t be that simple, surely,’ Furia said.

Styer agreed. ‘Be ready for ambushes.’

The Grey Knights moved down the levels of the superstructure, going deeper into the ship. They encountered more signs of battle, and many of the lumen strips had been destroyed. The shadows were deep. Styer rotated through his photolenses. The darkness would not serve the enemy. But the genestealers were not waiting for them. The attacks did not come.

‘Where are they?’ Vohnum asked.

‘Their behaviour is unusual,’ said Gared.

‘Everything on this vessel is unusual,’ Styer said. ‘We are dealing with an unholy nexus of forces. We cannot count on anything.’

When they reached the chapel’s deck, they heard the sound of combat. The energy scream of lasguns cut through genestealer snarls.

‘Answers lie ahead,’ Styer said. He wasn’t sure that was a good thing, and the possibility Furia had raised on the bridge continued to eat at him. He doubted, and the mere fact that he doubted was a torment. But however dark the answers might be, they were also necessary.

They followed the echoes of war, heading to port down a corridor that ended at a

wider one. They turned towards the bow. The hall was majestic in its dimensions, resplendent in the iconography of faith as it led towards the chapel doors. Some of the aquilas had been defaced, but the desecration here was less than it had been on the bridge. The cultists had not had time.

The struggle extended down the last hundred metres of the corridor. It was at its most intense before the chapel doors. These had been defaced. They were also shut tight. The cultists were being cut to pieces by the genestealers, though there were enough of the heretics, with enough weapons, to prolong the fight a bit longer. For the moment, none of the combatants appeared to have noticed the arrival of the Grey Knights.

‘They are fighting for access to the chapel,’ said Gared.

Why? Styer thought, but didn’t say. Nor did he ask, Who are the defenders? He’d had his fill of questions. The route to answers was direct. ‘That space is sacred,’ he said. ‘No abomination will set foot in it.’

‘What lies beyond them may be worse yet,’ Furia said.

‘He is not corrupted,’ Vohnum insisted.

Styer responded to Furia instead of his battle-brother. ‘We have no choice in what we must do.’

‘No,’ she agreed. ‘We do not.’

‘We are the edge of the Emperor’s sword!’ Styer shouted, and the Grey Knights drove down the corridor. They were a blade, a grey scythe that sliced through xenos and degraded humans alike. The genestealers reacted fast to the new threat, shooting out from vents and side corridors, the ambush finally sprung. Two seized Gundemar, too fast for him to block with his sword: one grabbed his legs and the other swarmed up his back. His momentum almost took him down. Warheit brought his halberd down on the upper genestealer as its scythe arms jabbed into his brother’s gorget. Gundemar arrested his stumble and brought one massive ceramite boot down on his foe’s skull.

Styer swept the daemon hammer before him one-handed while he fired the storm bolter on his left wrist. Any cultists in his path exploded in a spray of blood and pulverized bone. The concentration of fire cleared the way forward and held the

xenos monstrosities at bay long enough for the squad to reach the doors. Styer didn't slow. He turned his shoulder and rammed the doors where they met at full speed. The impact would have stopped a Leman Russ in its tracks.

The doors flew open and the squad entered the chapel.

Sadon stood in the centre of the nave. He held his Nemesis force sword point-down against the deck, his head was lowered. His armour was scarred, its purity seals ragged and covered in blood. Some of it was clearly his. There was a large stain near his neck where the damage to his armour was most pronounced. As Styer started down the nave, Sadon appeared deep in meditation.

'Purifier...'

Sadon jolted into action. Without a word, he lifted his sword and charged. The deck shook with his footsteps.

'Purifier,' Styer shouted, desperate to stop what was already happening.

At the door to the chapel, there was a sudden rush by the genestealers.

'Keep them out!' Styer ordered, bracing for Sadon's attack. 'Keep them all out!'

Then Sadon was upon him.

The fraction of a second that it took for the Purifier's sword to descend stretched out. It was made eternal by terrible implication. On a Grey Knights vessel disfigured by the markings of Chaos, one of the Chapter's most celebrated warriors had turned on his brothers. The impossible had manifested before Styer. The incorruptible had been corrupted.

Even as he brought up the daemon hammer to block the sword blow, Styer did not believe it. He could not afford to do so. The horror ran counter to the most basic truths of the Grey Knights. No brother had ever fallen.

Yet now Sadon's blade was descending towards his head.

Styer stopped the blow with the shaft of the daemon hammer. Two holy weapons collided. The sword cut into the shaft, scoring it as no other weapon ever had. Sadon took one step back and came at him again, making the same attack. Styer

blocked aggressively, advancing, forcing Sadon back along the nave and preventing the Purifier from attacking for a few seconds.

Styer's response was hampered by his reluctance to fight to the death. Even with Sadon trying to cleave his helmet and skull in two, he could not accept that the Grey Knight had been corrupted. He wanted to subdue the Purifier, not kill him. But all his means of attack were lethal, and in single combat he knew how poor his chances were against Sadon.

A growl more animal than human emerged from Sadon's helmet grill, and he threw his weight against Styer. His strength and mass were greater, and he pushed the justicar back. Styer managed to keep their weapons locked against each other, prolonging the stalemate.

Sadon's attacks were all wrong. They were powerful and deadly, but obvious. He did not fight with the skill Styer knew he possessed. Styer should have been fighting for his life, not for time. If Sadon kept making such blunt assaults, Styer would be able to hold him at bay for some time yet.

'Justicar,' Furia called. There was strain even in her artificial voice. The struggle at the doors was fierce. The genestealers were hitting in heavy waves. There was an urgency to their assault; the beings of the shadows were attacking with a directness worthy of orks. They had sustained losses in overwhelming the last of the cultists and now they were throwing the full strength of their numbers at the Grey Knights.

Styer blocked another brutal hit, but Sadon had the force to win through in the long run. Styer swung his hammer, forcing Sadon back, and stole a look back at the entrance to the chapel. Gundemar and Ardax were shoving the doors closed as far they could while the others fired through the gap. There were genestealers trying to push their way in for the entire height of the doors. Warheit, at the rear of the squad, was blasting holes in the ones who made it through. The battle would tip towards victory or defeat in the next few moments.

'You must finish him,' Furia said. 'We know the worst. End it.'

'No,' he said. Despite his doubts, he still had faith. He still believed in the truth of his Chapter, and in the incorruptibility of all his brothers. Sadon's rough, unskilled attacks suggested another possibility. Styer would not call what he felt hope, but it was all he had.

‘Kill the xenos abominations. Drive them back.’ Sadon’s next strike was so fast he almost didn’t stop it. It drove him to his knees. ‘At any cost, drive them back,’ he voxed as he locked weapons with Sadon again. ‘Gared, do anything.’

‘The interference is too strong,’ the Epistolary said. ‘Even if I tap into the warp, the results will be uncontrollable.’

‘Do anything.’

Gared did. He cried out in psychic agony as he broke through the smothering barrier created by the genestealers. Styer winced as something was unleashed, and he felt it as something jagged cut through his consciousness. He stumbled, and Sadon caught him on the pauldron with a blow that could have sliced a battlecannon in two. The power blade cut through his armour and deep into his arm.

Beyond the door, reality vanished. Time lost meaning. The warp screamed into being and reached down the corridors of the Blade of Purity in greed. Halls and decks ceased to be, and a hand of madness crushed the centre of the superstructure in its grip. The immaterium’s flowering was so sudden, so total, that it drew the attention of dark minds. Styer felt their gaze turn his way. The psychic pain blinded him. He couldn’t see Sadon.

The explosion stopped and Gared fell. The wound in the real vanished. The dark gazes moved on. The ship groaned, structural integrity twisting in its injury.

Gundemar and Ardax slammed the doors shut against the surviving genestealers. Claws scraped at iron, but they were far fewer.

Styer’s vision cleared and he could see Sadon had dropped his sword. With a groan that came from the depths of his soul, Sadon removed his helmet. The features that confronted Styer were noble, strong, scarred.

Agonized.

‘Purifier Sadon?’ Styer tried.

‘No longer.’ The words were slow, the effort to speak them like carving an epitaph on a tombstone. ‘The genestealers...’ He paused. ‘Realized too late... Took me by surprise...’

‘And the heretics?’ Styer asked.

‘They boarded after... I was already lost.’

‘Lost,’ Styer repeated, but he understood. He wondered how despair and faith could be the same thing. Sadon had not been corrupted by the Ruinous Powers. The impossible had not taken place. But he had been infected by the genestealers. His attacks had been under their telepathic control.

No wonder the intelligence that guided them had sought to preserve this great prize.

Sadon sank to one knee. ‘Thank you, brother, for granting me this freedom. One more gift, please.’

Despair, faith, hope, gratitude. All the same in this moment. All the same.

Styer wished he could protest. He could not, but he hesitated.

‘I am unclean,’ Sadon whispered. ‘There are still too many aboard for me to resist... Drawing nearer...’

A greater, more implacable will was coming to shut him down once more. Sadon was performing one more miracle by resisting even this much.

Styer aimed his storm bolter at Sadon’s bowed head. The Purifier’s progenoid glands were tainted. He would be unable to render his final service to the Chapter. Even so, Styer granted the great warrior the full measure of the Emperor’s Peace. ‘Finis Rerum,’ he said before he fired.

The Grey Knights, carrying the unconscious Gared, headed back to the Final Sanctity. They worked their way through the tangled, surreal wreckage of the decks nearest the chapel. They climbed upwards through metal that had sprouted blind eyes. Some of the formations had been frozen in the moment of acquiring daemonic life. The silence of the Blade of Purity had become an arrested scream.

With Sadon dead, the genestealers retreated to the shadows. They made a few probing attacks, but did not commit to a full assault. They no longer had the numbers.

‘They hope we will leave the ship to them,’ Furia said as they boarded the Sanctity.

Styer grunted. ‘Let them be its final passengers.’

When they returned to the Tyndaris, Styer ordered that Sadon’s funeral pyre be constructed. His body could not be returned to the Dead Fields, but he would have a proper end.

The strike cruiser’s guns pummelled the Blade of Purity until her orbit degraded. On the bridge, Styer watched the frigate approach the writhing atmosphere. ‘Now,’ he told Saalfrank, and the cyclonic torpedoes travelled down to the surface with Sadon.

The planet exploded with the incorruptible fire.

‘Our brother completes his mission,’ Styer pronounced. ‘He purifies Korzun.’