

The background of the cover is a dramatic, dark scene with a central figure, a Grey Knight, standing amidst a storm of lightning and fire. The knight is wearing heavy, dark armor and a helmet with a prominent crest. The overall color palette is dominated by dark browns, greys, and oranges from the fire and lightning. The text is overlaid on this scene in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

WARHAMMER
40,000

GREY KNIGHTS
**SONS OF
TITAN**

DAVID ANNANDALE

The Mourning Tower

David Annandale

The tolling began. In the spire of the Mourning Tower, the great bell sounded its peals. Each note was deep, loud, as harsh as grief and as commanding as iron. The tolling was slow – the measure of a funeral march. It was picked up and repeated by the other lesser chapels, monasteries and cenotaphs of Sitheros. The echoes of the memory rite for Korzun echoed across the shrine world. The bells would sound for the next ten days.

Relic Keeper Aldhelm passed through the high funerary wall and began the long walk towards the centre of the Plain of Anger, where the Mourning Tower rose, its jagged claw stabbing at the night sky. The plain was, in reality, the top of a plateau whose slopes were dense with houses of worship and reflection. Ringed by the wall, it was a circle five kilometres wide and paved with black cobblestones. On each was carved the name of a great loss. A capital ship, a city, an army, a moon – all consumed by the Ruinous Powers. Extinguished, too, from the official memory of the Imperium. Not on Sitheros, though. Here, with extreme care and precautions, the losses were recorded, and the remembrance of what had been preserved. Sitheros was the lone planet of its star, and the system was isolated in the Maeror subsector, far removed from any trade routes. The Inquisition was the supreme authority on Sitheros, and the existence of the world of memory was unknown to most of the Imperium.

The most powerful safeguards were used within by the Mourning Tower itself. It was the memorial to the greatest losses and the most profound tragedies: entire worlds. The names were engraved on the walls. Below ground, the archives held the cultures and histories. Aldhelm avoided the archives as much as possible. He devoted himself instead to the monument and its rituals of sanctity and grieving. The Tower was built of the same black basalt as the cobblestones. Its form was tapering, twisting flame. A staircase spiralled up its exterior. There was no interior: the Mourning Tower was a solid mass, its height pierced by pairs of windows that starlight shone through. The top of the spire was hollowed out to contain the great bell, and the names of the lost worlds blazed in electro-runes visible from dozens of kilometres away. For the next ten days, the most recent addition would pulse and flare with every peal of the bell.

Korzun. Unimaginable. Korzun the Pious fallen, utterly consumed by daemonic forces. Subjected to Exterminatus.

Aldhelm looked up at the name high on the Tower, his old joints aching from the walk on the cobblestones. That was his destination. He had come to mount the stairs and pray before Korzun's memorial. When he lowered his eyes, he saw another figure crossing the Plain of Anger from the direction of the north gate. They met fifty metres from the entrance to the archives at the base of the tower.

'Inquisitor Ravel,' Aldhelm said. 'When did you arrive?'

'Only just.' The inquisitor was close to Aldhelm's age, but much more limber, thanks to heavy juvenat treatments and augmetic legs.

'Are you here for the Korzun observance?' They had to raise their voices to be heard over the bell.

'I am.'

'You were familiar with the world?'

'Very.'

They walked together towards the entrance.

'Ah. The archivists will be pleased.' Aldhelm was careful to keep his distaste from his voice. He believed in the commemorative function of Sitheros, but was less sanguine about the research that went on beneath the surface of the Plain of Anger. The records of the lost worlds included everything known leading up to their fall, and the dominant inquisitorial faction on Sitheros was Xanthite. Its adepts were avid students of the data. Their stated purpose was to understand the causes of disaster, and to discover how better to combat the Ruinous Powers. Aldhelm and many of his fellow ecclesiarchs were leery of the practice. Its dangers were clear. But he had no authority to interfere. The Xanthites' grip on Sitheros was absolute.

Ravel was silent until they reached the huge bronze doors of the entrance. On their surface, agonized figures writhed in frozen horror. The damned were drowning in the medium of their creation. At the top of the doors, the sculpture of a robed, hooded figure hunched forward, its hands clasped in prayer or

judgement. Ravel said, ‘Actually, I wonder what sort of welcome the archivists will give me.’

‘Why is that?’

‘I have come about the future, not the past.’

Hadriana Furia’s quarters on the strike cruiser Tyndaris were the mirror of her discipline and rigour. The shelves of her personal library occupied two of the walls. The other two were dominated by shelves that held her records – stacks of sealed metal cases containing the notes and evidence of the cases she had undertaken. Those walls, Justicar Styer thought, were a mausoleum of daemonic crime.

A large, marble-topped rectangular table dominated the centre of the chamber. The inquisitor paced before it, spreading sheets of vellum and scrolls, and consulting multiple data-slates. The material was damaged, much of it torn, burned or marked with claws.

‘You wanted to see me,’ Styer said.

Furia nodded. The red crystals of her eyes did not look up. Her face of bronze and scars remained focused on what was revealed to her on the table. ‘I’ve been going over what we recovered from the Blade of Purity,’ she said. The frigate commanded by Purifier Sadon had been sent to put an end to the daemonic incursion on Korzun. Not only had Sadon failed, his ship had become the site of a struggle between cultists and genestealers.

‘Have you learned why Korzun fell?’

‘No. What I have discovered is that the Blade of Purity did not come here alone.’

Styer frowned. ‘We heard nothing from Titan about another ship.’

‘Which is just one of my concerns. I doubt its presence was sanctioned at any level by the Ordo Malleus. It was the Tenebris Scientiam.’ She tapped a finger on one of the data-slates. ‘Inquisitor Johannes Ravel.’

‘Do you know him?’

‘I know of him. He is Xanthite, but careful. His reputation is of one more inclined to forbidden knowledge than to the actual practice of warp sorcery. But...’

‘Yes?’

She waved her arm at the documentation. ‘The references to Ravel’s presence during Purifier Sadon’s mission are very fragmentary. They appear as brief tangents in very disparate notes. He was definitely aboard the Blade of Purity, though.’

‘You think he attempted to destroy the records of his presence?’

‘I do.’

‘We must find him.’ If Ravel had been corrupted by events on Korzun, the mission of Styer’s squad had not ended with the destruction of the planet and the death of Sadon.

‘Agreed.’ Furia picked up a log book. ‘According to this, Sadon gave orders to his astropathic choir to send reports about Korzun to Sitheros.’

‘So he knew the planet was lost before the genestealers attacked.’

‘So it would seem. And this,’ she gestured to a scrap of vellum, ‘is not in the Purifier’s hand. It is an annotation about the power of memory.’

‘Of which Sitheros is a concentrated repository.’

‘Precisely.’

‘Then our course is clear.’

When the Tyndaris transitioned into the materium at the Sitheros System’s Mandeville point, the vox communications from the planet were normal. And when the strike cruiser made anchor, the Grey Knights found another vessel in geostationary orbit over the position of the Mourning Tower: the Tenebris Scientiam. The Inquisition sloop did not respond to hail.

Standing in the strategium, Epistolary Gared said, ‘The ship is dark.’

‘Dead,’ said Styer.

‘Do you plan to board?’ Vohnum asked.

‘No. We’ll find Inquisitor Ravel on the surface. However... Shipmaster!’ he called.

‘My lord?’ Bruno Saalfrank answered.

‘If that vessel does anything at all during our absence, even if it is no more than the firing of an engine, destroy it.’

‘As you will, my lord.’

The descent in the Stormraven Harrower was without incident. Brother Warheit brought the Stormraven down in the Plain of Anger. The night was illuminated by the cold glow of the Mourning Tower’s runes. The bell tolled as Styer and his battle-brothers disembarked. The squad’s losses had yet to be replaced, and six Grey Knights set foot on the square: Styer, Epistolary Gared, and Brothers Vohnum, Andrax, Gundemar and Tygern. Furia stood with them. Warheit remained aboard the Harrower, the engines at low rumble, ready for rapid take off and engagement.

An aging ecclesiarch approached from the base of the tower. He was a thin man, stooped, moving with some difficulty, but without a staff. As he drew near, he slowed down even more, staggered for a moment, clearly awed by what he saw and uncertain about who these giants in Terminator armour were. His lank hair was white. His eyes were bright, but they were not youthful, Styer thought. Their light came from faith, and the knowledge of following his life’s calling. The man bowed low and introduced himself as Relic Keeper Aldhelm.

‘You are welcome, lords,’ he said. ‘Your presence honours us.’ He paused, looking as if he wanted to say more. He was looking at the Harrower.

‘Speak freely,’ Styer told him.

‘I mean no disrespect, but your landing site is... unusual.’

‘You fear disrespect for the memorials on these stones.’

Aldhelm spread his arms, agreeing without speaking words to offend. ‘Your descent within the walls suggests you are at war.’ He smiled to show he knew the absurdity of his words.

‘We believe we are,’ Styer said. The evidence against Ravel was not conclusive. But it was more than suggestive. He didn’t need the prognosticators to point him in the direction of Sitheros. He had had the sense of events linking themselves together ever since the Sanctus Reach. The battle against Ku’gath over Squire’s Rest, a daemonic incursion triggered by the arrival of the Grey Knights, the Plaguefather’s later psychic attack against Gared, which had raised the impossible spectre of a possessed Grey Knight. That apparition, still false, summoned again aboard Sadon’s desecrated vessel. Even where there was no causal link between the crises, Styer could see a pattern: doubt. That was the seed every conflict seemed calibrated to sow.

He would battle the doubt with certainty and he would banish all thought of coincidence. Were there hints that Ravel was corrupted? Then he was. Was it strange that the fall of the famously pious civilization of Korzun should next point towards a shrine world? No. It was inevitable. It was another link, another portion of an even larger pattern, one whose shape he had yet to discern.

He had learned a hard lesson over Squire’s Rest. He was treating Sitheros as an active battlefield. By bringing the Harrower within the Mourning Tower’s wall, he had laid claim to the high ground. His squad was ready to unleash its firepower upon the instant.

‘What is the military standing of Sitheros?’ he asked Aldhelm.

The old man was taken aback. ‘My lord, I don’t really know. That is not my province. I know the Inquisition has a large contingent of Astra Militarum veterans at its disposal. The Frateris Militia has many adherents, too, but...’

‘Yes, I see.’ The militias who fought for the Adeptus Ministorum were strong in numbers, but had no training. Their equipment would be haphazard.

‘I need to speak with the ranking inquisitors,’ Furia said.

‘The council is below,’ Aldhelm pointed to the doors at the base of the Tower. ‘In the archives.’

‘The whole council?’

‘Yes, since earlier this evening, at the request of Inquisitor Ravel.’

Styer exchanged a look with Furia. ‘It will be here, then,’ he said.

‘And before we can summon reinforcements,’ replied Furia. The nearest gate was thousands of metres away. A long run even if Aldhelm could point her to the nearest barracks.

‘We can accelerate their arrival,’ Styer said. He raised his right arm, waited for the pause between the peals of the bell, then fired a burst from his wrist-mounted storm bolter into the air.

Even in the dim, shifting light of the plain, Aldhelm had turned visibly pale. ‘What is happening?’ he cried. ‘I don’t understand...’

A roar drowned him out. Styer felt it build beneath his feet. It thrummed up through the ground. The cobblestones vibrated. Their engraved memories blurred.

A halo of energy crackled around Gared’s psychic hood. The Librarian was preparing a strike as he faced the doors.

‘Pray well,’ Styer told Aldhelm. He marched towards the base of the tower. The head of his daemon hammer pulsed, the Nemesis weapon reacting to the nearby unleashing of the immaterium’s energies. ‘With me, brothers. We are the right hand of the Emperor. Let it fall heavily on the enemy.’

The subterranean roar grew louder and closer: a wind rushing to the surface. Styer was less than ten metres from the doors when a fireball blew them open with such force that they flew off their hinges and they crashed to the ground on either side of the entrance. The flames raged upward. They spread wide. For a moment they were like wings – a constant billow, a monstrous torch. A figure staggered up the stairs from the archive, his clothes charred and smoking. His hair had burned away and his flesh was blackened and glistening. He stumbled to the side of the doorway and he leaned against the wall of the Tower.

‘Inquisitor Ravel?’ Adhlem called.

The man's mouth opened and he shook. He was laughing, Styer realized, though he could barely stand. Ravel looked at Styer. 'Justicar,' he said, 'are you here to fight the past or the future?'

Styer walked towards him, hammer raised. 'Neither,' he said. 'I am here to slay the witch and the daemon.'

'The past and the future then.' Ravel sank to his knees. He glared at Styer with manic intensity, but he carried no weapon. Nor did he seem to be preparing a psychic attack.

But the earth tremors continued, growing stronger. Styer glanced at Gared, who shook his head. 'There is no sorcery about him. Not now.'

The justicar started to bring the hammer down on Ravel's skull but stopped mid-swing. He had to know what was coming. 'What have you done?'

Ravel tried to grin. His melted lips clung to his teeth and tore. He tilted his head back and looked up at the Tower. His eyes were starting from their sockets in pain. He could still see, though. 'Loss,' he whispered.

Styer leaned closer. Even with the sensitivity of his Lyman's ear, it was difficult to hear the dying man over the rumble in the ground, the roar of the fire, and the tolling of the bell.

'Loss,' Ravel repeated. 'So much power in it. So much grief.' He stared at the great spire as if mesmerized. 'This reservoir...' His voice crumbled into silence.

Reservoir? Styer thought. He looked up at the Tower. The shapes of the runes were the same. So were their colours. But the quality of their light was altering. It grew colder, more intense. It became the shine of bleeding wounds and jagged bone. A twisting, pulsating nimbus formed around the Tower. It gathered strength and spread, a plague writhing over the night.

As the runes changed, so did the meaning of the monument. The Mourning Tower transformed from memorial to threat. It became a threat because it was a memorial. All those worlds, all those billions of souls mourned. The collective grief of the Imperium gathered in one location, given a single form. The Tower was a psychic lightning rod.

‘Why?’ Styer asked. Whatever Ravel had hoped to achieve, he had been deceived. He was dying, but Ravel’s motivation was important. Had he believed himself to be loyal, or was he greedy for power? The reason for his fall could bear the trace of the real threat, and knowledge was a crucial weapon against the Ruinous Powers.

Ravel brought his gaze down to Styer. ‘It was my destiny,’ he said. Clear fluid leaked from the corners of his mouth. His teeth were black with ash and his smile was a savage beatitude.

His face stilled with death.

His corpse erupted with black flame. The blast knocked Styer back, and he stumbled again as a massive convulsion shook the earth. The ground heaved up and down, once, as if a ripple passed through the archives and was channelled into the Mourning Tower. The runes blazed with the light of grief, searing the night with red and death-white. The bell tolled again, and the peal was immense. Reality itself vibrated. The black flames entwined themselves with those that jetted still from the entrance. The two fires merged, twisted, grew. Their roar became a scream and laughter. They raced up the path of the spiral staircase. In seconds they enveloped the Tower, changing it into a cyclopean torch. The runes of memory shone through the obsidian and crimson of the fire, their light a movement now – a shriek and a howl to the nightmares beneath the real.

Gared cried out. Styer felt the psychic wound too. Vital seals were rent asunder. The veil was shredded, and the warp forced its way onto Sitheros.

The rift opened to Styer’s right, in the north, beyond the Mourning Tower’s wall. It was close to the surface, invisible from this perspective except as a sick, pulsing glow in the night. It was the colour of grief, the shade of vengeance and veined with fate. Something bellowed with rage. The voice soared over the spires of Sitheros, accompanied by the clanking and hissing of machinery. Then came the sounds of impacts, explosions and the collapse of masonry. Human voices screamed, while inhuman ones babbled and snarled.

‘Brother Warheit,’ Styer voxed.

‘At your service, justicar.’ The engines of the Harrower howled, the gunship ready to leap to the skies. Tygern was closest to the hull and he pulled the side door back. The Grey Knights and Furia raced aboard, and Warheit took off for

the north. Styer and Gared moved forward from the troop compartment to the cockpit. They stared through the armourglass at the enemy that had come to Sitheros.

From this height, the daemons seemed numerous as insects. A carpet of abominations spread out from a ragged tear in reality. They rampaged through the streets, falling on the panicking mortals. From the barracks near the wall, platoons of acolytes and Astra Militarum headed down to meet the threat.

‘They haven’t a chance,’ Warheit said.

‘They are the honourable doomed,’ Styer agreed.

The mortals were marching towards a cornucopia of monstrous change. The colours of madness and evil swarmed up towards the wall, flesh in shades of pink and blue, a spreading contusion on the streets. The horrors and flammers of Tzeentch lurched and whirled into the humans.

Leading the army was a monster as large as the chapels it destroyed. Its six legs were mechanical leviathans, big as a cathedral’s flying buttresses. Its torso was a monstrous knotting of muscle. One arm was a fusion of flesh-covered pincer and cannon. The other was an iron claw that could crush a tank in two. Its elongated skull was parted in a perpetual bellow of rage. Its fangs were long and numerous, and some appeared to be growing through its lips.

The Soul Grinder advanced through the houses of worship. It smashed every wall in its path to powder. Holy sanctuaries millennia-old fell to ruin in its passage. It batted the obstacles aside as it closed in on the peak, where the Mourning Tower waited.

Styer frowned. There was something about the daemon that struck a familiar chord. Something in the architecture of its machinic limbs.

‘What are your thoughts, justicar?’ Warheit asked.

Styer shook his head, dismissing his speculation.

‘Only of what we must do,’ he said. ‘Drop us at the wall, then thin the ranks.’

Warheit banked the Stormraven and flew back to the Mourning Tower’s wall. He

vectored the thrust of the gunship's engines downward and slowed to a near hover over the ramparts. The rear hatch lowered. The squad dropped to the parapet, and the Harrower descended the slope again. It lit up the darkness with the holy fire of its twin-linked assault cannons and heavy bolters. Styer listened to the beat of explosions and waited for the Soul Grinder to appear.

Gared said, 'And did we bring this about too?'

'No,' Vohnum snapped. He had rejected every facet of Styer's contention. 'The heretic inquisitor was here before us. We did not know he was at Korzun, and we were too late to stop him here. This incursion would have happened without our presence.'

'Would it?' Furia asked.

Vohnum snorted. 'Of course. The question is ridiculous.'

'But why this manifestation?' Styer asked.

'Does it matter?'

'Yes, brother,' Styer told him. 'It matters a great deal.'

The facade of the crematorium before them exploded outwards. The Soul Grinder shouldered its way out between support columns, which fell away and the roof of the building plunged to the ground behind the daemon. Its limbs propelled it forward with a scuttling movement that pounded the earth like an artillery barrage. Its head and shoulders were taller than the wall. Looking down at the Grey Knights, its bellow dropped to a bone-shaking growl. And then it spoke, its voice a cyclone of flies. 'Korzun was mine,' it cried. 'Sadon fell. He cannot have that victory. Korzun is mine! Its death is mine!'

It lunged forward and brought its claw down on the wall. The squad parted to the left and right, evading the blow. The wall disintegrated. It was no more a barrier than the air itself. The Soul Grinder advanced over the Plain of Anger. As each limb came down, it shattered stones to dust, erasing memories forever. Behind it the daemoniac forces boiled through the gap, drenched in the blood of the mortals they had butchered. They capered and celebrated behind their giant leader, then shrieked as the Harrower returned for another pass. Its shells chewed up the daemoniac flesh, leaving behind shapeless, evaporating puddles.

‘Korzun’s death...’ Gared voxed to Styer.

‘I know,’ Styer answered. He knew why he felt as if he had seen the daemon before. Its metal limbs bore the ruins of statuary, and though it had been twisted into a blasphemy by the unholy forges of the immaterium, the iconography was recognizable. Styer had seen it adorning the hull of the Blade of Purity.

This is what we are meant to believe, he thought. Sadon’s victory in death turned against us. The bones of a vessel of the Grey Knights transformed into an abomination. Corrupted.

A vision designed to plant the seeds of doubt.

‘The daemon lies within its very being!’ Styer called to the squad. ‘Destroy it with truth!’

Stormstrike missiles flashed from their pods and exploded against the Soul Grinder’s shoulders. The daemon shrugged off the blast and stretched out its right arm. The cannon fired a volley of shells at the gunship. Shaped warpstuff struck the starboard wing. Eldritch light swallowed Aegis armour plating. The daemon wrestled with the sacred, and the Soul Grinder attacked again, vomiting a cloud of energy on the same wound as Wahrheit passed overhead. The wing sheared off, the edges turning fluid as their material reality dissolved. The Stormraven went into a spin, coming down at an angle and ploughing a furrow through the cobblestones before coming to rest midway between the ruined wall and the Mourning Tower.

Styer led the squad at a run parallel with the Soul Grinder. A pink horror caught up with him. Eldritch bolts streamed from its talons. Their blows pulled at Styer’s identity. They sought to make him other, to push him into the abyss of change. His strength, his will and his faith rejected the curse. He brought his daemon hammer down with rage, and with righteousness. He smashed all the way through the abomination, shattering its body utterly. The holy energy of the Nemesis weapon destroyed the daemon’s own essence, blasting it apart with such power that it disintegrated. Styer turned from the dissipating warp glow with contempt and smashed aside another horror. He struck with furious vengeance, disposing of enemies unworthy of his attention, and committing all his focus to bringing down the Soul Grinder and erasing its blasphemous existence. So did his brothers. They blasted the flesh of the daemon with their

storm bolters. Their fire converged on its abdomen. Gouts of the monster's material essence flew into the air. The damage did nothing.

Gared hurled a wave of psychic fire at the foe. The blast was white-hot, purging, the force of sanctity made tangible, the immaterium's power turned back on itself. The wave sideswiped a leaping flamer daemon. With a shriek, it vanished into ash. Gared's fire swept up the flank and skull of the Soul Grinder. The daemon roared and smashed at Gared with its claw. He hurled himself back, escaping the direct blow, but the glancing concussion was enough to knock him to the ground.

Styer saw the epistolary fall. If the Soul Grinder had given Gared another moment of attention, it could have destroyed him. But it stormed on, tearing over the ground to the Mourning Tower.

The Tower was the daemon's goal. Therefore the Tower was the key.

The lesser daemons flocked around Gared. Furia was at his side, lashing at the abominations with her neural whip. The weapon could hold them at bay long enough for the rest of the squad to move into a protective formation around him. Sanctified bolter shells and Nemesis blades cut the daemons apart. Styer helped Gared to his feet.

'Brother,' Styer said, 'why the Tower?'

Gared staggered forward, his eyes on the monument. The red and black flames still surrounded it, and the runes of commemoration still shone through the conflagration. The Soul Grinder covered the remaining distance in a few massive steps. It turned its wrath against the stones. With claws and cannon and exhalations of pure immaterium, it attacked the face of the Tower. The first of the runes vanished. The final memory of an entire world was destroyed.

Styer's soul recoiled at the desecration.

Gared said, 'Pride. Memory is not just of loss, but of pride.' He straightened and walked more easily. As he spoke, his voice grew distant, as if his awareness were already fusing with the Mourning Tower. 'In whatever fell ritual he performed in the archives, Inquisitor Ravel used the Tower's memory as a reservoir of loss. But those names are also our goad, brother justicar. They remind us to fight. The Tower summons and repels the Ruinous Powers.'

‘Then we must reclaim memories,’ Styer said.

Gared turned his face away from the Tower with a visible effort and looked at Styer with driven intensity. ‘You must be our hammer, brother justicar.’

Already Styer felt a familiar presence taking shape in his consciousness. It multiplied and it unified. Gared was linking the spirits of the entire squad and channelling the collective psychic force through Styer.

He knew what he must do. As his brothers scythed a path for him through the lesser daemons with storm bolter and Nemesis blade, Styer pounded towards the spiral staircase. He was aware of himself as individual and collective at once. His mind sang with silver force. He was surrounded by holy purpose. The daemon hammer shone with ferocious light.

Styer reached the base of the stairs, a quarter of the tower’s circumference away from the Soul Grinder, and climbed the steps two at a time. It sought to burn him as he ran through the warp flame, the heat worming its way through his armour. He felt as if he was catching fire from the inside out, and perhaps he was. He kept running. As he passed the names of the worlds, the silver power grew. The hammer shone ever more brightly. As the corrupted Ravel had somehow drawn on the grief embodied by the Tower, Gared now drew on the memories. The traces of world upon world once faithful to the God-Emperor came together. Ghosts sought redemption at the last. Remembrance became crusade. Styer could barely see for the light he carried.

The light through which no doubt could pass.

He rounded the Tower at the height of the Soul Grinder’s head. It saw him and slammed its claw into the staircase, destroying an entire span, and turned its maw towards Styer. He leapt into the void, towards the daemon, his hammer high. He seemed to fly on the wings of vindication, a thousand billion souls raged through him as he directed their blow.

He struck the Soul Grinder, and all he knew was consumed by the supernova of the wrathful past.

The darkness of unaltered night returned. Styer rose to his feet. The explosion had thrown him hundreds of metres from the Tower.

From where the Mourning Tower had been, he now saw. Instead of the soaring spire, there was a smoking, guttering depression half a kilometre wide. The memories had annihilated themselves along with the Soul Grinder. The other daemons too, had been purged from Sitheros.

Furia stood beside the pit. Styer joined her. The rest of the squad was a few steps behind.

‘This is for the best,’ she said. ‘There was too much knowledge contained here. Too much reckless exploration.’

‘Too many uncontrolled memories,’ Gared added.

Styer turned from the crater and looked towards the burning shrines of Sitheros. ‘The function of this world is dangerous. It cannot continue. Sitheros must become a memory too, one limited to our order.’

‘What are you suggesting?’ Furia asked.

‘The dissolution of all shrines. Deportation and mind-wiping of the population. Containment. Whatever must be done.’ He stopped short of Exterminatus.

‘What about him?’ Vohnum pointed.

Styer blinked. Aldhelm still lived. The relic keeper was on his knees not far from the fallen Stormraven. He had his hands over his face.

‘Mind-wipe him too,’ Styer said. Consigning Aldhelm’s memories to oblivion would be an act of mercy. He had already lost his life’s purpose with the destruction of the Tower.

Styer looked towards the crater once more.

‘Brothers,’ he said, ‘we have been tested by more than war.’

‘Tested by what?’ Vohnum asked.

‘By doubt. It is how the Ruinous Powers have been attacking us. They cannot corrupt us, so they would have made us doubt ourselves instead. And they have failed.’

‘They have failed.’

He repeated the words, turning them into a refrain. There would be further tests, and the daemonic powers would fail again.

Of this, he had no doubts.