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**HIDDEN
TREASURES**
CAVAN SCOTT

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HIDDEN TREASURES

Cavan Scott

Elias didn't know what he hated more: this dark stinking hole or his brother for making him come down here. He wished they'd never discovered the place.

They'd been hiding from the Kerlons. They were always hiding from the Kerlons, the bloodiest gang in Manos City. It had been his brother's fault, as always. Marco had crossed a line, stealing from a Kerlon-protected store. He hadn't even needed the food. He did it to get a reaction, to prove what a big man he was.

He hadn't looked so big cringing in the dark, snot running over a bloodied lip.

Then they had seen it, glinting in what little light filtered through the hole in the ceiling.

The first treasure.

Elias swore as his elbow scraped against the stone wall. This was the last time, he promised himself. The last time he'd let Marco bully him into coming down here with the vermin and the shadows and Throne knew what.

He didn't care what he'd find or how much money it would bring. Nothing was worth this. Nothing.

Something scuttled over his hand as he squeezed through the gap in the wall of the back room. He snatched it back sharply. The building was a shell, too derelict for even vagrants to make shelter. But that wasn't the worst of it.

The walls felt wrong. He couldn't explain it. They were cold, covered in

muck and mould, but there was something else. Something deeper. They felt rotten. Diseased. The air itself felt sick.

His feet dangling into the void of the cellar below, Elias eased himself through and hung for a minute, half tempted to pull himself back up and run; away from Marco, away from everything.

Who was he kidding? Marco would kill him, brother or not.

He closed his eyes and let himself fall.

The sound of his boots hitting the slabs below echoed around the musty space. Something small ran out of earshot, clawed feet scrabbling against the stone. Elias fumbled for his luminator, dropped it and cursed. He fell to his knees in the darkness, groping around the floor, flinching as his hands splashed through ice-cold water.

Finally, his fingers found the cold metal. Thank the Emperor. He gripped the luminator in shaking hands, but froze, unable to hit the activation rune. What if something else was in the dark with him?

‘Idiot,’ Elias hissed. ‘There’s no one down here. There’s never anyone down here.’

No one else was that stupid.

He forced himself to hit the rune. The beam of light was weak and yellow, but calmed his nerves. A little.

Elias swept the light over the wreck of an ancient staircase, collapsed long ago, the trapdoor above boarded safely shut.

To keep people out or trap something in?

Nothing had changed. The same mouldering crates shoved into the corner. The same dusty webs draped from the rafters. The same stench stinging his nostrils, making his stomach flip.

He scanned the floor. Nothing on the cracked rockcrete slabs save the droppings of vermin. As he’d expected. The treasures were always in the other room.

Elias swallowed hard as he flashed the light over the doorway that led into the next chamber, summoning the courage to approach the threshold.

Run away, screamed the voice in his head. *You shouldn’t be here. No one should.*

But the memory of Marco’s fists won the battle. Elias took a step forwards, his breath fogging in front of him.

They found a knife on that first day, lying in the next room, discarded on the floor, like nothing they'd ever seen before. A vicious serrated blade with a curved metal handle, scarlet trimmed with gold, runes set along the edge. Runes encrusted with blood.

Elias tried to pull Marco back, but his brother didn't listen. He snatched the weapon up, greed glinting in his eyes.

'Look, Elias,' he grinned, forgetting all about the Kerlons. About his fear. 'Must be worth a fortune.'

They came back the next day with a luminator and found a sword; long, heavy and strangely warm to the touch.

But that wasn't all. As Marco examined his find, there was a flash, and movement in the corners of their eyes. Something clattered across the floor as if thrown. They spun around, but the luminator's glow found only an old wall, full of cracks and creeping damp.

A helmet rolled to a stop by Elias' feet.

'Pick it up,' Marco barked.

'You pick it up!'

Marco brandished the huge sword with two hands, his arms shaking with the effort. For a second Elias thought his brother was about to run him through, plunge the blade deep into his chest.

'Pick. It. Up.'

The helmet's faceplate was crushed as if by a hammer blow. Elias didn't want to touch it. He knew what it was. And he knew who had worn it.

'For Terra's sake,' Marco spat, letting the sword drop and marching towards Elias, who threw up a hand. 'No. Marco, don't, it's—'

Too late. Marco was holding it in front of him now, like a trophy.

'Yeah,' he said. 'I know. An Angel of Death.'

Elias pleaded with him. This belonged to a Space Marine. How it was here, he didn't know, but it didn't bode well. They should leave it alone, climb out of here and never return.

He didn't see the blow coming. Marco smashed the helmet into Elias's face, the sharp metal and ceramite slashing across his cheek. He fell to the floor, spitting out teeth and blood.

His brother just stalked from the room, leaving him alone in the dark.

And that was it. They came back every day. Sometimes the cellar was empty, but sometimes there were new treasures on the floor. Weapons.

Scraps of armour.

Marco was right: they were worth a fortune. He found collectors. Gang members. Those rumoured to be members of illicit cults. Anyone willing to pay for their scavenged booty.

Marco never asked where they came from. Never worried where they were going. Why should he care what his customers did with their purchases? It wasn't his problem. And when Elias dared ask the question, he just answered with his fists.

Marco had always been a brawler, but never like this. It was as though he'd discovered more than a helmet in that cellar. He'd discovered a bloodlust, an anger.

After a while, no one stood up to him. Not Elias. Not even the Kerlons.

Marco stopped going down into the cellar himself. He didn't have to, not when he had Elias to descend into hell and return a prize.

The torchlight played across the floor of the second room. Elias sighed in relief. There was nothing there. Yes, Marco would beat him, maybe break a rib, but at least Elias wouldn't have to touch any more of the accursed stuff. Not today.

Then he saw something in the corner of the room, not far from the door. Something metal – something that didn't belong. Fear gripped him. He could lie, go home empty handed. Leave it for another day. But Marco would know. He always knew.

Elias hurried over and bent down. Nothing much. A few links of a barbed chain that hadn't been there yesterday.

There was no point in putting off the inevitable. He reached forwards and carefully picked the chain from the floor, spikes scraping against the flagstones. It was heavier than it looked. Should raise a few credits, at least.

Swinging his leather pouch from his shoulder, Elias started dropping the chain into the bag, praying that the barbs didn't slice through the hide. They clanked together, the noise filling the small room. Too loud. Not that anyone would hear, or come to see what was happening.

He turned to leave – and the world *changed*.

At first there was a noise like thunder, but not from the permanently grey skies above the derelict hab.

It came from behind the walls. From behind *that* wall. From the cracks.

Elias should have run, but he was fixed where he stood, staring wide-eyed into the gloom, listening to the approaching storm. No. Not a storm. There was nothing natural in the sound. It wasn't thunder, it was weapons-fire. Battle cries.

Then he appeared. The Angel of Death. There was a flash and a grey-armoured Space Marine was tumbling back into the room, his back slamming into the floor, weapon still firing into the wall itself.

Elias jumped, crashing into the corner, the shock sending his luminator spinning from his hand. It clattered onto the floor, the sound lost beneath the din of the Angel's weapon. The light stayed on, illuminating the scene as shells disappeared into the wall. There should have been chips of brickwork spraying around the room, but the round just vanished, as if spirited away.

Until they met something else.

A second figure pushed through the wall, a massive axe held high, bigger even than the Space Marine that lay sprawled on his back. It roared as explosive bolts pounded into it. Its red chest-plate was lined with gold. Like the knife. Like the helmet.

'Die!' it screamed, spittle spraying from thin lips. The axe came down hard, missing the Space Marine, who rolled clear at the last moment. The whirring chain-toothed weapon buried itself where the Space Marine's exposed head had been, sending shards of rockcrete flying.

The Space Marine swung his body around and kicked out. Armour met armour as the axe-wielder's feet were taken from beneath him. It fell back, throwing up an arm that passed cleanly through the wall as if it wasn't there.

It crashed to the floor, reaching for its axe, but the Space Marine was already on his feet, his weapon's muzzle thrust into the fallen warrior's face. The Space Marine didn't hesitate. The gun barked, discharging its payload straight into his opponent's head. There was no armour to protect the enemy now, only flesh and bone. Elias clasped his hands over his ears, trying to block out the gun's clamour. But it was hopeless. Nothing could silence its terrible report. He would hear it for as long as he lived.

The red-armoured warrior's body convulsed as his head was reduced to mush. Finally, after what seemed like a lifetime, the weapon fell quiet, a

wisp of smoke curling from its barrel. The Space Marine stood frozen, gun still in place, as if he expected his foe to leap from the ground again and continue the fight.

But the corpse remained still.

Elias couldn't move. He couldn't even breathe. He watched, convinced he would be next as the Space Marine dropped his weapon and looked up from his kill. The Angel of Death cocked his shaven head as he studied the wall. He raised a gauntleted hand and cautiously reached forward. His fingers slipped through the bricks and he pulled them back sharply. There he stood gazing at the impossible portal like a statue, the profile of a white skull embossed on one large, grey pauldron.

Then his head turned slowly to glare at Elias.

Elias tried to push himself through the corner of the room, but the walls that trapped him remained steadfastly solid.

The Space Marine stomped forwards – covering the small space in two strides – and towered over Elias. He glared down with one piercing blue eye that seemed to shine in the half-darkness of the room. But Elias was staring at the hole where the other eye should have been, an empty socket beneath a heavy brow.

'I'm sorry,' Elias whimpered, not knowing why he was apologising.

'The bag,' the Space Marine snarled, showing a mouth full of silver teeth. 'Open the bag.'

When Elias didn't move the bolter swung up to cover him. The Space Marine didn't need to ask again. Elias almost threw the pouch from his shoulder as he wrenched it open, the chain tumbling between his legs.

The Space Marine's solitary eye followed it down, before flicking back up to Elias. It narrowed for a split second before he reached down and retrieved the chain. He slung it over his shoulder and turned back to tramp towards the fallen warrior.

Elias watched, expecting the Space Marine to spin and tear his body apart with a volley of hot metal, but instead the giant reached for his belt and unclipped a device. There was a series of beeps followed by a heavy clunk as he dropped it down on the corpse's chest.

'Get out,' he growled over his shoulder. 'And remember.'

Elias didn't wait to be told twice. He scrambled to his feet and made for the door, glancing back as the dark figure marched forwards to the wall.

There was another flash of light as the Space Marine disappeared from sight, and Elias didn't look back again. He was through the door and scrabbling up the wall towards the hole before he realised he'd left his luminator on the cellar floor.

He didn't need it. He knew the way, and he would never go back down into that pit again. Marco could kill him. He didn't care anymore.

He squeezed through the hole, panicking slightly as he got stuck half way, imagining the dead fingers of the red-clad warrior closing around his flailing ankles. Then he was free, rolling up onto the floor above, stumbling to his feet and running – running fast. He tore out of the back room, over to the window with the loose shutter. He flung it aside.

He had only swung one leg over the sill before the blast hit him. It was like a wall of sound and fury, blossoming beneath him, throwing him out into the street. He didn't feel himself hit the road outside, didn't feel his collarbone crack as he rolled clear, burning rubble crashing all around him.

He couldn't even feel his skin bubble where it had been exposed to the flame.

He didn't care. The cellar was gone, consumed in fire, with its impossible walls and hidden treasures. Marco could do what he wanted now. He was free.

Chuckling weakly to himself, Elias let his eyes close, his face pressed against the cold, hard street.

The laugh caught in his throat. In his mind he could see the Space Marine looming over him with his empty socket and metallic sneer.

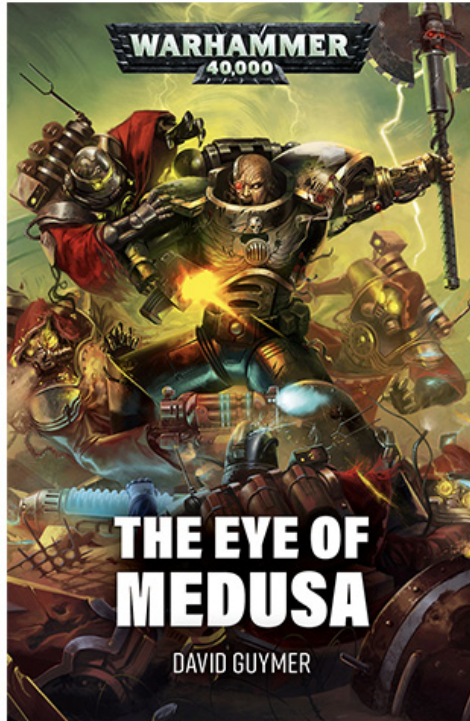
Remember.

Elias's eyes snapped open, wider than ever. If he closed them again, the Angel of Death would be waiting. Forever, in the dark.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cavan Scott is the author of the Space Marine Battles novella *Plague Harvest*, along with the Warhammer 40,000 short stories 'Doom Flight', 'Trophies', 'Sanctus Reach: Death Mask' 'Flayed' and 'Logan Grimnar: Defender of Honour'. He lives and works in Bristol.

When the Adeptus Mechanicus world of Thennos falls into insurrection, the Iron Hands bring retribution upon the traitors.



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