IMPERIAL ARMOUR

VOLUME EIGHT
RAID ON KASTOREL-NOVEM

WARHAMMER 40,000

EXPANSION

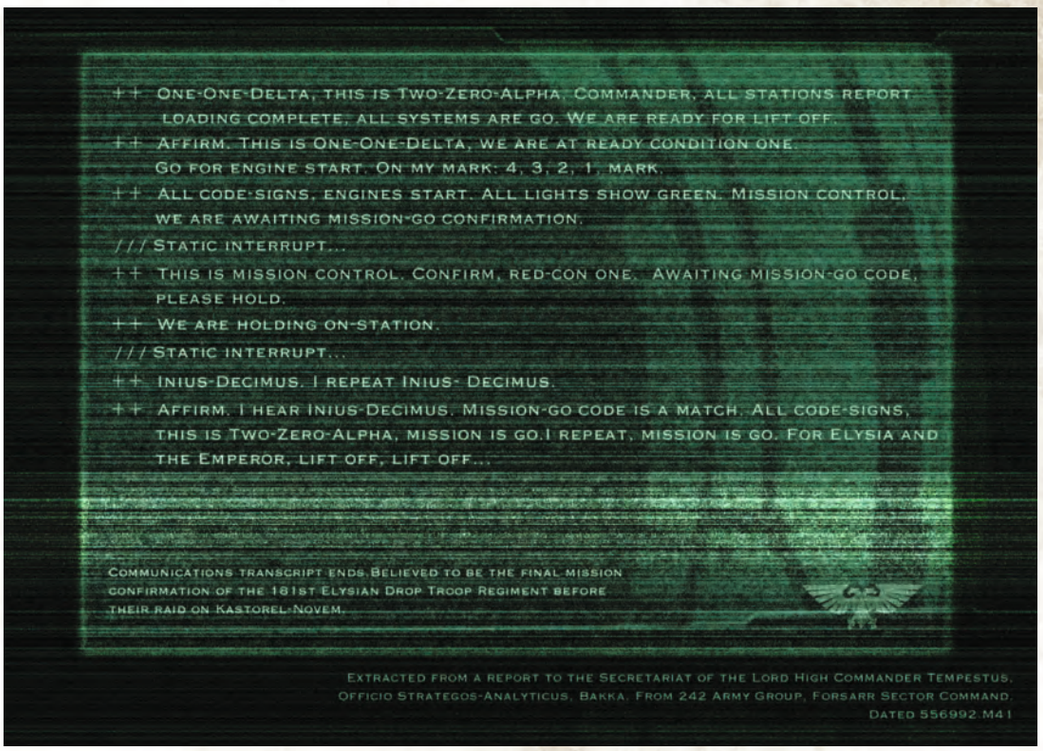
WARHAMMER VAULT
WARHAMMER+

The Warhammer Vault exists to preserve the rich lore and background of Warhammer 40,000 and Warhammer Age of Sigmar. As such, outdated game scenarios and unit rules have been removed from this publication.

IMPERIAL ARMOUR™

VOLUME EIGHT
RAID ON KASTOREL-NOVEM

by Warwick Kinrade



Credits

Written by..... *Warwick Kinrade & Alan Bligh*

Graphic Design by..... *Paul Rudge, Sam Lamont & Kenton Mills*

Artwork by..... *Karl Kopinski, Adrian Smith & Paul Bonner*

Photography by..... *Sam Lamont, Warwick Kinrade, Tony Cottrell & Kenton Mills*

Digital Photographic Artwork by..... *Tony Cottrell, Warwick Kinrade, Paul Rudge, Sam Lamont & Kenton Mills*

Technical Line Drawings & Colour Profiles by ..... *Chris Bristow, Kenton Mills, Warwick Kinrade, Paul Rudge, Stuart Witter & Sam Lamont*

Acknowledgments

Forge World Models Designed by..... *Daren Parrwood, Will Hayes, Mark Bedford, Simon Egan, Phil Stutcinskas, Daniel Cockersell, Stuart Williamson, Tony Cottrell & Brian Fawcett*

Terrain Boards by ..... *Daren Parrwood, Mark Bedford, Phil Stutcinskas, Stuart Williamson, Paul Rudge, Kenton Mills & Warwick Kinrade*

Models Painted by ..... *Phil Stutcinskas, Mark Bedford, Stuart Williamson, Owen Branham, Stuart Witter, Paul Rudge, Daren Parrwood, Warwick Kinrade, Will Hayes & the 'Eavy Metal team*

Proof Reading..... *Talima Fox, Alan Bligh, Paul King & Ead Brown*

Thanks to ..... *The staff at Forge World and Games Workshop for their continued support, advice and encouragement. Everybody who e-mailed the Imperial Armour address with suggestions and feedback on our experimental rules.*

PRODUCED BY FORGE WORLD
First published in Great Britain in 2010 by Forge World, Games Workshop, Willow Road, Lenton, Nottingham, NG7 2WS.

© The copyright in all text, artwork and images herein is the property of Games Workshop Limited 2010. All Rights Reserved.

Games Workshop, the Games Workshop logo, GW Citadel and the Citadel Device, Warhammer 40,000, the Warhammer 40,000 logo, 40K, the Aquila logo, 'Eavy Metal,
Forge World and the Forge World logo, Imperial Armour and all associated marks, logos, devices, names, characters, illustrations and images from the Warhammer 40,000 universe are ®, TM and/or © Games Workshop Ltd 2000-2010, where applicable registered in the UK and other countries around the world. All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording
or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

British Cataloguing-in-Publication Data. A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library. Pictures used for illustrative purposes only.

Certain Citadel products may be dangerous if used incorrectly and Games Workshop does not recommend them for use by children under the age of 16 without adult supervision. Whatever your age, be careful when using glues, bladed equipment and sprays and make sure that you read and follow the instructions on the packaging.

Product Code: 60040187012

Forge World Code: BK-PUB-B-019

ISBN: 978-1841549774

Printed in Great Britain.

Games Workshop Web site: www.games-workshop.com
Forge World Web site: www.forgeworld.co.uk

Contents

THE RAID ON KASTOREL-NOVEM

Chapter 1 6

Chapter 2 13

Chapter 3 28

Ork Burnaboy 31

Chapter 4 39

Chapter 5 48

Chapter 6 62

Chapter 7 72

RAID ON KASTOREL-NOVEM

Ork Mega-Dread, part of Warboss Grahkrag's Goff warband.

KASTOREL-NOVEM – PLANETARY SURVEY

Segmentum: Tempestus

Sector: Forsarr

Sub-sector: Kastorel-Severus

System: Kastorel

Surveyed: 170373.M41

Planets: Fourteen

Inner Planets:

Kastorel-Unus	rock, no atmosphere, irradiated
Kastorel-Secundus	rock, no atmosphere, irradiated
Kastorel-Tertius	rock, no atmosphere, irradiated
Kastorel-Quattuor	rock, thin atmosphere, highly volcanic
Kastorel-Quintus	gaseous, poisonous atmosphere
Kastorel-Sext	desert world, no atmosphere
Kastorel-Septem	desert world, no atmosphere
Kastorel-Octo	rock (possible trapped meteor)
Kastorel-Novem	temperate, stable atmosphere

Outer Planets:

Kastorel-Decimus	gas giant
Kastorel-Undecim	ice world
Kastorel-Doudecim	iceball
Kastorel-Tredecim	iceball
Kastorel-Quaddecim	iceball

Asteroids: Occupying outer regions. Midis Corpus Field- uncharted.

Comets: None known.

KASTOREL-NOVEM

Summary: Mineral rich world. Chemical extraction. Refinery and manufacturing facility are located on the Itdarina continent.

Size: Equitorial Distance – 7160 miles

Gravity: 0.93 G

Satellites: One

Population: 2.1 million approx

Rotation Speed: 990 mph

Orbit: Mean orbital distance is 132 million kms from star.

Climate Classification: Temperate - arid (stable).

Mean Surface Temperature: 20° C

Tropospheric Composition: 76% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, 0.9% argon, 0.5% carbon dioxide and trace amounts of other gases.

Tithe Grade: Aptus Tertius – Maximus [Departmento Munitorum conscription exempt].

Aestimare: E7

Climatic Regions: Polar caps – small, deteroriating rapidly.

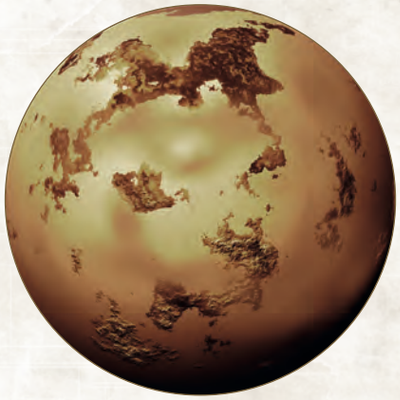
Seas: 72% planetary surface.

Mountain/Highland: Northern and southern. Unexplored highland regions.

Plains/Lowland: Strip mining operations.

Climatic Phenomena: Cyclonic atmospheric conditions form typhoon weather conditions on northern and southern continents. Equatorial belt is stable.

Flora: Limited to simple cactaceae type organisms. Some cultivated for hydroponic foodstuffs.



Fauna: Eradicated for food supply.

Economy: Limited internal markets only, regulated by Adeptus Administratum officials. Principal export markets: Segmentum Tempestus forge worlds.

Society: Hierarchial (Imperium): Workers, supervisors, administrators and rulers. Planetary Governor appointed – hereditary position.

Water Supply: Natural precipitation.

Principal Exports: Refined chemicals: mercury-chlorides, sulphides & fulminates. Munitions.

Principal Imports: Foodstuffs, engineering equipment, fuel, manpower.

Food Supply: Hydroponic, supplemented by imports.

Urbanisation: The area of manufacturing and refining facilities have been established on the continent of Itdarina. This includes space ports landing fields, workers' habitation blocks, hydroponics and other infrastructure. 90% of the population are contained here.

10% operate the strip mining facilities on the northern and southern continents, accessible only by aerial transports.

Tectonic Activity: Moderate. Plate movement on the northern and southern continents has resulted in several moderate earthquakes. Continental drift is slow but accelerating.

Known History

034461.M38	First colonised for strip mining of chemical ores.
756539.M38	Ore refinery begin.
540973.M38	Munitions manufacturing begin.
230216.M39	First Departmento Munitorum conscription. Founding of 1st Kastorel Imperial Guard regiment.
467869.M39	Final Departmento Munitorum conscription. Founding of 14th Kastorel Imperial Guard regiment. Conscription tithe commuted to Aptus-Non in favour of increased production targets.
104915.M39	Labour Uprising. Suppressed by local Adeptus Arbites forces.
376276.M41	Ork pirate raid.
866322.M41	Ork pirate raid.
454490.M41	Ork pirate raid.
548602.M41	Ork pirate raid.
064952.M41	Invasion by forces of Warlord Garaghak.
723952.M41	Garrison station (including 49th Terrax Guard), destroyed during Ork attack. Under Xenos occupation.

CHAPTER ONE
THE ORKS & THE FORSARR SECTOR

THE RISING GREEN TIDE

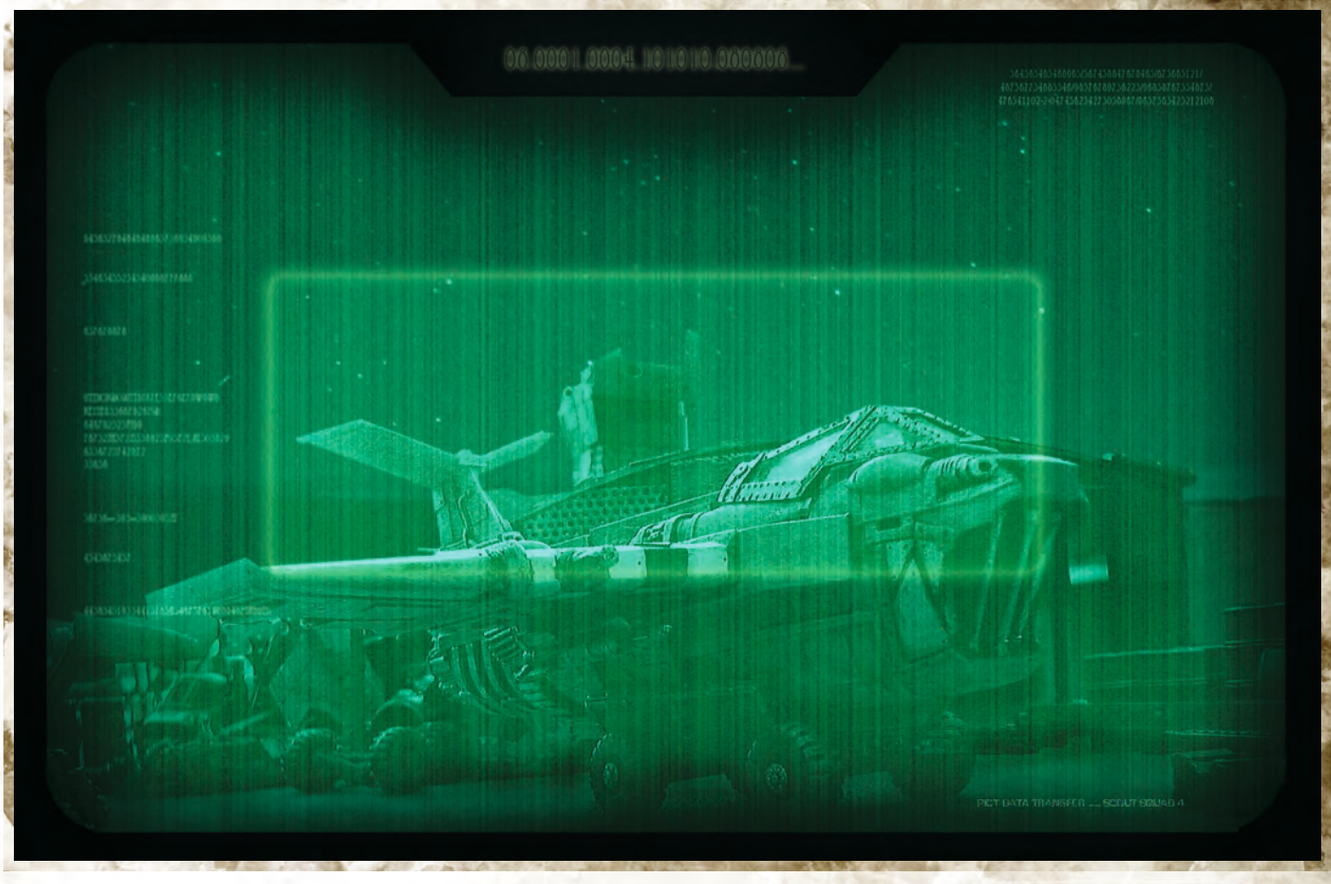
As the engine whine built to a crescendo around him, its bass roar filling the transport compartment so that all communications were reduced to hand signals, Captain Thanstadt curled into his cramped seat inside the Valkyrie transporter. Jammed in around him were Guardsmen of the 181st Elysian Drop Troop Regiment, each man weighed down with weapons and equipment, pouches and packs bulging with ammunition, grenades, melta-charges and rations. At lift-off the captain said a brief orison to his Emperor, part of his own superstitious routine before battle, a relic of his Cult Imperialis indoctrination as a young conscript.

"The Emperor embraces us at the hour of our death."

Outside the Valkyrie it was still dark. The first tinge of orange-dawn was yet to peek over the horizon. It was 541992.M41, Captain Thanstadt's strike force was part of a deep raiding force about to drop into the heart of Ork territory on the planet Kastorel-Novem in the Forsarr sector, Segmentum Tempestus.

The Ork threat to the Forsarr sector had been growing for the past fifty years. Under their ambitious and power-hungry warlord, Garaghak, the self-proclaimed 'Arch-Killa' and the 'Overfiend of Tallarax', the Orks' usual ragged and independent tribes, clans and warbands had started to unite. The Warlord's rise was following a pattern familiar to the Logis Strategos of the Administratum – a single Ork warlord emerging from the chaos of the Ork tribes' internal wars and divisions had become dominant, first over his own clan, then over the surrounding clans and eventually gaining enough notoriety amongst the Orks to draw more and more warbands to his banner. When he had gathered enough Orks under him, Garaghak's increasingly bold attacks upon Imperial worlds would gain the momentum of a full Waaagh! When the Waaagh! took them, then the Orks would be driven into a frenzy of violence and destruction.

Below: By dawn's first light a Vulture gunship leads a Valkyrie squadron towards their drop zone.



Above: A Space Marine Scout's image-intensifier goggles relay important target locations. Their stealthy work would inform the Raven Guard's attack plan.

There would be millions of green-skinned aliens descending on the populated systems of the Forsarr sector in an unstoppable tide of pillaging and bloody war without mercy.

Warlord Garaghak's attacks had not officially become a full Waaagh! – yet, but alarmingly the momentum was obviously building behind it. Captain Thanstadt and his Guardsmen of the 181st Elysian Drop Regiment, supported by Space Marines of the Legio Astartes Raven Guard were about to interrupt Garaghak's momentum by launching a high-speed surgical raid upon Kastorel-Novem.

Colonised in M.38, Kastorel-Novem was first claimed for the Emperor as a mining outpost. It was rich in phosphorous, mercury, sulphur and other useful chemical compounds. From the initial strip mining operations, refineries for the chemicals were soon added to reduce the mineral ore's bulk before transportation to forge worlds across Segmentum Tempestus. From these refinery operations manufacturing soon followed, bringing in other materials from surrounding systems to produce more complex chemicals, such as mercury-chlorides, sulphides and fulminates for use as explosives to meet the Imperium's insatiable demand for munitions.

The Imperium's expanding chemical production facilities were centralised on a single continent, known as Itdarina, with mining operations across the planet's habitable equatorial zone.

Since first colonisation the planet had been the target of several major Ork raids. Its location within striking distance of the Ork Empire of Octavius and more recently the advent of Waaagh! Skullkrak in a neighbouring sector meant that Kastorel-Novem required a substantial Imperial Guard garrison force stationed there to protect the planet. One large raid by Ork pirates caused major disruption to production and resulted in the addition of two orbital defence stations and a squadron of monitor gunships to deter further Ork attacks.

Then, suddenly, a new Ork threat appeared in the Forsarr system in the form of a determined assault by the rising Goff warlord, Garaghak. Garaghak's initial surprise landing and mass enslavement of the outpost on Thoria III suddenly left Kastorel-Novem's defences looking inadequate and the Forsarr sector in deepening peril. Following his overwhelming victory on Thoria III, more Orks were drawn to Garaghak's success and the promise of future conquests and plunder. Soon Orks of every clan, as well as Freebooter warbands, were marching under Garaghak's banner.

Additional Imperial Guard regiments were quickly deployed across the sector to boost garrison strengths and help counter Garaghak's arrival. The majority were sent to reinforce the world of Tallarax, with the plan of turning it into a fortress world strong enough to deter the Ork's ambitions. Tallarax quickly became the lynchpin of the Imperium's defensive strategy to halt Garaghak's rise.

But the Imperial Guard commanders had under estimated the speed of Garaghak's ascent and, as yet, had failed to recognise

that behind his success was a brilliant Ork-mind – a rare Ork technical genius known as Mek Boss Buzzgob. Also, Garaghak saw the build-up of the Imperium's forces on Tallarax as a challenge, an invite to a 'proppa scrap', that he and his Ork boyz could not resist.

Pounded by Buzzgob's fleet and spearheaded by a horde of rickety, clanking war machines, including many Dreds and several Stompas, Garaghak's warbands attacked the fortress of Tallarax head-on. The world only fell into Ork hands after a three year war in which millions died, but with the Imperium's main forces on Tallarax destroyed, the rest of the sector was now wide open for future Ork attacks. The Goff warlord eyed the rest of the Forsarr sector with glee. He could now take his pick of the surrounding worlds – none of their garrisons could match Garaghak's large, and still growing, armies. After Tallarax many new warbands had also united under the new supreme leader. They were warbands with names such as Blackfinga's Death Skullz, Logrok's Bad Moons, Zurgo's Flyboyz, Dagrod's Killboyz and Buzzgob's Dredheadz.

The next planet to face the Ork menace was Kastorel-Novem. The Ork invasion began with the destruction of the orbital defence platforms and the capture of the orbital extraction stations circling the gas giant, Kastorel-Decimus. All these space stations were later towed into orbit and crash-landed on the planet to be stripped for a wealth of materials and parts.

The Ork attack on the Kastorel system, masterminded by Mek Boss Buzzgob himself, targeted the Imperium's centralised manufacturing facilities. The garrison regiments, Planetary Defence Force and hastily raised and trained workers militias put up a stubborn fight, with the 49th Terrax Guard providing the backbone of the defences.

The Orks paid in blood for Kastorel-Novem, finally breaking the last of the defenders' bastions by the deployment of Buzzgob's three Stompas. The Stompas carried heavy firepower which the defenders had little answer to. The survivors of Kastorel-Novem's important Adeptus Mechanicus technicians and Administratum Prefects were evacuated from the last landing pad in the Imperium's hands. By then many of the planet's refineries and manufactorums had been reduced to rubble and scrap in the fighting. No astropathic communications have been received from the planet since the last evacuation. For the past thirty-five standard years Kastorel-Novem has been listed as a xenos-occupied system.

Despite their defeats across the Forsarr system, it had not all been bad news for the Imperium's commanders. The bloody toll extracted by the Orks in taking the fortress world of Tallarax and then Kastorel-Novem had, for now, stalled Garaghak's attacks and bought the Imperium enough respite to re-organise and, more importantly, reinforce. The brave sacrifices on Tallarax and Kastorel-Novem had bought the Imperium some time to bolster the next line of defences. As yet the Imperium had not mustered an army capable of delivering an effective counter-attack or retaking any of the lost planets, but the Departmento Munitorum had searched its local strategic reserves for Imperial Guard regiments to deploy onto Forsarr itself. Meanwhile, the Ecclesiarchy had raised huge numbers of Frateris Militia and they encouraged the zealous followers of the Red Redemption cult to defend their threatened shrine world of Magdelene IX.

But the respite they had won was only temporary. The prospect of Waaagh! Garaghak were still very real. The next Imperial-controlled system to lie in Garaghak's path was the hive world of Forsarr itself, the sector's primary planet and centre of the Imperium's power in the sector. With a population of over 30 billion souls, Forsarr could not be allowed to fall. Perhaps worst still, should Forsarr fall, then the next system in the Orks' path could easily be Lycaeus. The principal planet of the Lycaeus system was Deliverance, the home world and fortress-monastery of the venerated Raven Guard Chapter of Space Marines.

As the Imperium was desperately reinforcing so Garaghak, now proclaiming himself as the 'Arch-Killa' and 'Overfiend of Tallarax', was also building up for his next big assault. He wanted Forsarr. His next invasion would be a war to make Tallarax look like a mere skirmish. More Orks were mustering daily, eager for the big battles to come, arriving from the Empire of Octavius to join the fighting. But, as his army grew so did its demands for the materiel of war. All that was delaying Garaghak's invasion was a problem of logistics.

It fell to Mek Boss Buzzgob to meet Garaghak's supply demands. Since its capture, Buzzgob had established a manufacturing base on Kastorel-Novem, now renamed by the Orks as Mekslag-Ikks. Shipped to the planet came the loot, plunder and scrap of the Orks' previous victories. On Garaghak's orders millions of tonnes of junk metal, stripped from across the Forsarr sector was dumped on Kastorel-Novem. To the Orks, Mekslag-Ikks was a bonanza. Warbands were sent to make use of the massive piles of fantastic scrap from which they could build all manner of war machines and weapons. Under Buzzgob's instructions everything from sluggas and shootas to Battle Fortresses and Stompas were being constructed and shipped to Garaghak for the big invasion of Forsarr.

As the Departmento Munitorum worked to defend Forsarr, they were not the only ones watching the progress of Garaghak. Since the fall of Tallarax the Raven Guard Chapter had been aware of the Ork advance and had already been keeping a close watch on developments. The continued mobilisation of Orks across the sector meant that the Raven Guard were forced to act. The potential Ork threat to Deliverance could not be ignored.

Swift action was called for. The Raven Guard fully mobilised to defend their home world. Every company within the Chapter had been brought up to its full fighting strength. Those strike forces already on deployment were recalled, including Shadow Captain Shrike's strike force currently on an extended mission fighting Waaagh! Skullkrak. Even before Shrike's battle brothers had returned to Deliverance, the Chapter had begun its operations to forestall Garaghak's growing Waaagh!

Over the coming years the Chapter would begin its operations by dispatching a series of long-range reconnaissance forces deep into the Ork-held territory of the Forsarr system. Moving with speed and stealth, with the Scout Company

providing the bulk of the manpower, their first mission would be intelligence gathering. Operating in darkness and shadows the Scouts had to find out what the Orks were up to – were they where strong, where they were weak and discover their key leaders, as well as how many boyz each warboss led. It was a necessary first step before any offensive action could be taken.

Each of these scouting 'Shadow Forces' would have to operate in Ork-held space for a long deployment, perhaps years. The intelligence gathering phase was placed under the command of 10th Company's commander, Shadow Captain Korvydae.

Once the Chapter had received Korvydae's reports, its other captains could then plan and execute a series of their trademark lightning attacks. These would be targeted to strike at the Orks' weak points. The Raven Guard wanted to minimise the risk of facing the Ork hordes in open battle. That task they would leave to the Imperial Guard regiments which were digging in to defend Forsarr. The time might come for open battle, but first they would raid deep into Ork territory. By stealth and infiltration, and then with a series of swift, powerful strikes, they would systematically target and destroy key Ork bases and leaders.

Squad by squad, team by team, the black-clad Scouts of the Raven Guard scattered themselves across the Forsarr sector, using their well-honed skills in concealment and observation to infiltrate Ork-held worlds. Secretly they set up observation posts and surveillance equipment and then vanished before the Orks knew they had ever arrived.

RAID ON KASTOREL-NOVEM – THE ELYSIAN PLAN

As instructed by the Raven Guard, Colonel Taihon and his company commanders planned their part of the raid in detail. Drawing on their schooling in the Tactica Imperium, the ground attack would be a classic hammer-and-anvil assault. The 'hammer' would be the first attack, driving the Orks back onto the waiting 'anvil', which would be a strong stop-line, with heavy weapons in place, ready and waiting for the Orks to be driven into their killing fields.

The hammer was codenamed 'Sword' force and given to the command of Captain Xhyst. His F Company, supported by elements of G and H Companies would target the area of Ork industry around the Gargant construction site. Their sudden assault, supported by Vulture and Vendetta gunships, should catch the Orks unawares and drive them northwards onto the waiting heavy guns of Shield force. In the process they would overrun the Gargant construction site and destroy it with demolition charges and melta-bombs.

Meanwhile, Shield force would be the anvil, under the command of the veteran Captain Thanstadt; his would be the largest single Elysian deployment. It would be this force that engaged and destroyed the majority of the Orks in their pre-sighted killing zones. Getting Shield force into position would be difficult, as its transport requirements could not easily be met by the available Valkyries. It would mean withdrawing Valkyrie support from other forces in order to get enough drop troops in position in time.

Once on the ground, Shield force would be mostly static, holding position around its landing zone. Being static made it vulnerable to outflanking manoeuvres. From the south it would be protected by Sword force's advance, and the Orks coming from the south should already be in disarray after Sword force's lightning assault. The northern flank would be more problematic. Orks coming south in response to the landings could easily find their way into Shield force's rear areas and attack from behind.

To avoid this, a third force would be deployed, a screening flank-protection unit codenamed 'Dagger' force. It would be built around A Company, under Captain Gerek. They would screen Shield force with mobile patrols and establish a skirmish line to intercept, divert and delay any Orks approaching from the north. It was the smallest of the three drop forces but they only had to hold long enough for Shield force to complete its work. Overall, the mission plan was scheduled for two days of combat, then a rapid extraction back to base.

A fourth smaller force would be given the mission of base security and act as a limited reserve in case of emergency. This force would be under Colonel Taihon himself, who would not be taking to the battlefield but would be overseeing the battle from the regiment's command post at its base.

This was because the most complex part of the Elysian operation was their air-plan. This would be Colonel Taihon's main role in the mission, planning and overseeing the schedules for aircraft use. The machines and aircrews would be pushed to their limits to keep a constant flow of men and equipment into the drop zones. As well as the transport plan there were the close support aircraft to integrate into it; Vultures and Vendettas which must be given their supporting roles over each drop zone. All this had to be carefully planned, based on fuel consumption, to keep at least some support in the skies over each drop zone once the fighting started. Inevitably the regiment would never have its full aerial firepower on station at any one time. The third part of the plan was the inclusion of Imperial Navy fighter squadrons, whose primary task would be keeping the skies clear of any Ork aircraft and flying close escort for the Valkyrie formations as they made their way to and from their drop zones. The Thunderbolts would

The first phase of the operation began as the Raven Guard's Scout teams landed upon Thoria III, Kastorel-Novem and at Warlord Garaghak's current base on Tallarax. Even as the Raven Guard watched and waited for their moment to attack, the Orks launched an attack upon the Viridios system. It was a welcome diversion, led by one of Garaghak's lieutenants, Blackfinga, probably as a rebellious attempt to grab some extra plunder and glory for himself. It ended in disaster for the Orks. Blackfinga's vessels were suddenly attacked by an Eldar fleet. Where the Eldar came from and why was unknown, but the Eldar inflicted a heavy defeat upon Blackfinga. Most of his vessels were left drifting as hulks and no Ork warbands reached Viridios' surface. After the battle, the surviving Ork ships towed the hulks away, destined for Kastorel-Novem where they would be crash landed as fresh scrap. New spaceships might spring from the wreckage of the old.

Shadow Captain Korvydae's Scouts also observed a further development. Warlord Garaghak's rise to power had not gone unnoticed within the Ork-held Empire of Octavius. A second great warlord arrived at Tallarax in his converted space hulk. Sent by the Overfiend of Octavius himself, Gogrok was a trusted lieutenant and he arrived to contest Garaghak's waxing power, seeking to overthrow him and take over the growing Waaagh! Gogrok, a huge and heavily-scarred Bad Moon veteran of a hundred raids and battles, arrived ready to do battle with Garaghak's boyz. Before he could attack, Warlord Garaghak called a parley of both side's warbosses. Nobody knows what transpired at the meeting of leaders, but it must have ended in Garaghak issuing a challenge. The winner would take all, both warbands combining into one huge horde – a horde big enough to crush the puny defenders of Forsarr.

None of the Imperium's scribes recorded the result, but history shows that Garaghak must have won his death-duel. Gogrok's space hulk along with its attendant Kroozers, Roks and his entire warband (estimated at between 3,000,000 and 5,000,000 Orks in total), all fell straight into Garaghak's green-clawed hands. The space hulk was claimed as Garaghak's new flagship. He was closer to launching his invasion.

At 705988.M41, the Ork onslaught on Forsarr started. The Ork fleet, led by the space hulks and Roks, clashed with the Imperium's flotilla and orbital defences in a fleet engagement that lasted days, before millions of Orks descended upon the forlorn hive world's defensive bastions. The ground war on Forsarr had begun…

Even as the fighting on Forsarr escalated daily, with more and more Orks landing, the reports that most interested the Raven Guard's officers came from Kastorel-Novem. A Scout team operating there soon learned that the planet had become Garaghak's manufacturing base. From here, the weapons and equipment that would soon see battle on Forsarr were being shipped in massive quantities. They also learned that a single powerful Ork Mek Boss was directing the operation and he had also begun construction on a Gargant, a huge stomping war machine the size of a Warlord Titan and an important symbol of the Waaagh!.

Here was an opportunity for the Raven Guard to attack Garaghak's horde without confronting the strength of his warbands. If they could disrupt his weapons manufacturing facilities, the knock-on effect would slow or stall the invasion of Forsarr and buy more time to deploy fresh Imperial Guard troops and stabilise the crumbling defences. On Kastorel-Novem the Raven Guard could also target the Ork leadership. It was obvious that Garaghak was relying heavily upon his chief Mek. Kill the Mek Boss and it would be an irreplaceable loss.

181st DROP TROOP REGIMENT – KASTOREL-NOVEM DEPLOYMENT

Sword Force

C-i-C	Captain Xhyst
2-i-C	Captain Nybur
F	Company
G	Company
	-(elements of)
I	Company
	-(Sentinels - elements of)
4799th	Storm Trooper Company
	-(elements of)

Dagger Force

C-i-C	Captain Gerek
2-i-C	Captain Rylr
A	Company
E	Company
	-(elements of)
I	Company
	-(Sentinels - elements of)
4799th	Storm Trooper Company
	-(elements of)

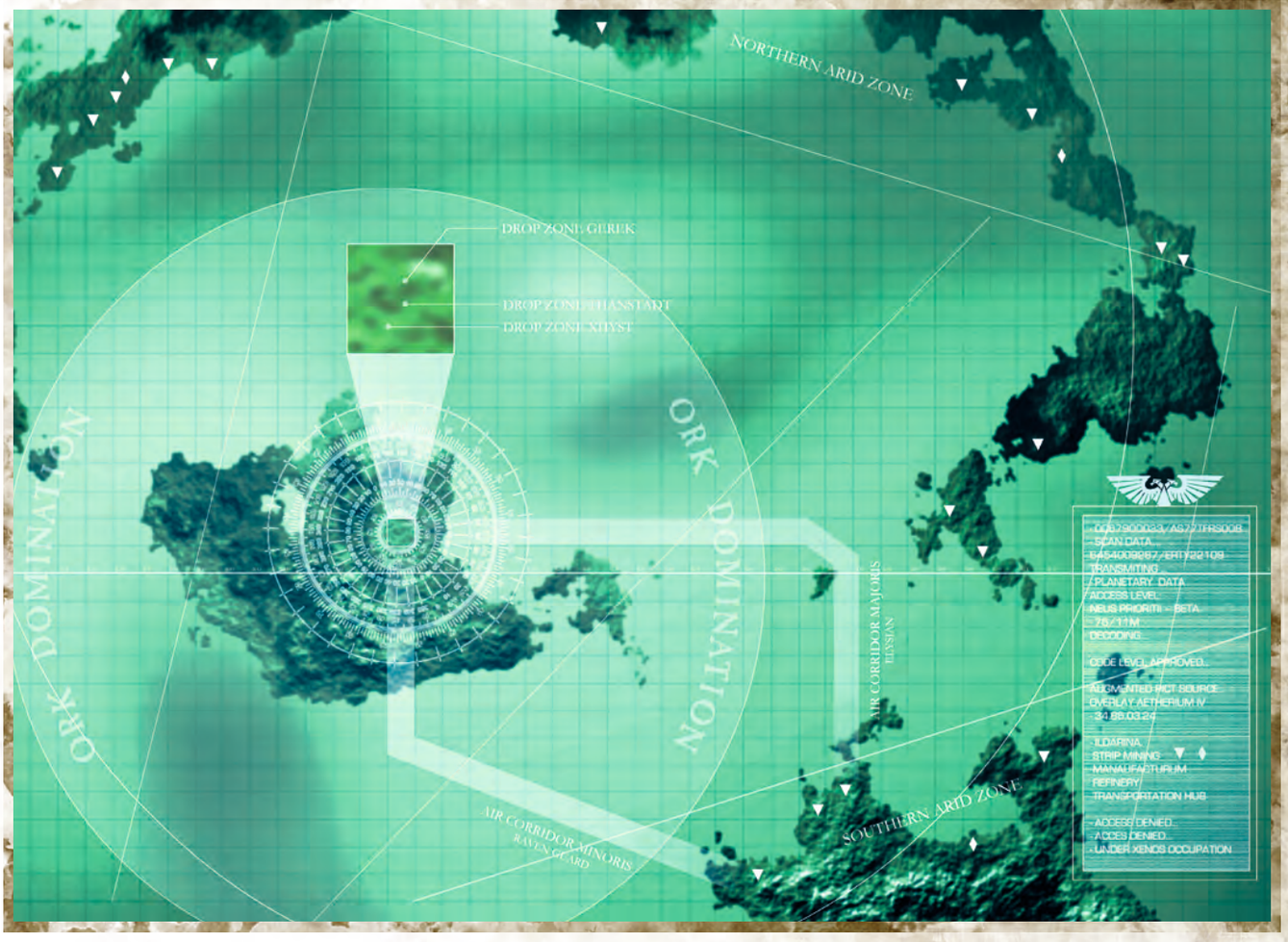
Shield Force

C-i-C	Captain Thanstadt
2-i-C	Captain Doam
B	Company
C	Company
D	Company
E	Company
	-(elements of)
G	Company
	-(elements of)
J	Company
	-(Sentinels)
4799th	Storm Trooper Company
	-(elements of)

Reserve Force

C-i-C	Colonel Taihon
2-i-C	Captain Dexler
H	Company

also have to be figured into the close support schedules. Finally there was the bomber squadron. The Marauders were the regiment's heavy hitters, but would be of limited use in direct close support of ground troops. Their mission would be to try to interdict the battlezone area and hit the Orks' manufacturing facilities. They would strike deeper than the other aircraft, using the guidance of their single Marauder Vigilant aircraft to find and bomb concentrations of Ork manufacturing and pre-identified airfields. The bombers would need fighter escorts too. The air-plan was highly complex, hence the need for the Colonel's full attention. He would delegate his senior captains to lead the actual fighting on the ground.



The Kastorel-Novem Raid

Despite repeated, urgent requests for assistance from the Imperial Guard's commanders at the front on Forsarr, the Raven Guard had found their own target. The Scouts were recalled and two strike forces were quickly assembled. The first would be dispatched to Forsarr to help on the front line against the tide of greenskins now sweeping from hive city to hive city. Shadow Captain Shrike and his elite assault talon would lead the first strike force. In return for the pledge of Shrike's aid, the Raven Guard also requested and received assistance. The 181st Elysian Drop Troop Regiment was fully equipped, trained and already prepared to deploy to Forsarr; instead it was diverted to aid the Raven Guard's second deployment.

The second deployment would be a strike force destined for Kastorel-Novem, again led by 10th Company's Shadow Captain Korvydae. For this mission the 181st Elysian Drop Troop Regiment, newly equipped with Valkyrie transports and Vulture gunships, would be placed under Korvydae's command. Between the elite Imperial Guard drop troops and Shadow Force Korvydae, they would launch a powerful raid on Kastorel-Novem. The Elysians' part of the mission would be to target and destroy the Orks' manufacturing facilities, especially the Gargant construction site. The Raven Guard's primary mission would be to hunt down and kill Mek Boss Buzzgob.

Detailed planning for the attack began straight away. Using information provided by their Scouts, the Raven Guard identified the centre of the Orks' manufacturing facilities on Kastorel-Novem, along with the best sites for their own defendable landing zone. This would have to be well away from the Orks, but the Imperium's forces would be completely air mobile, so the distance mattered little.

The planners selected two locations as their base of operations: one for the Elysians and one for the Space Marines. These were both far from the continent occupied by the Orks. Kastorel-Novem's inhospitable southern continent had never been populated, but strip mining and quarrying for ore had taken place and, after closer investigation by the Raven Guard Scouts, these were found to have been largely looted-out by the Orks and little remained. The Orks had now abandoned them as useless. Two former mines would now become the raid's air bases. The attack force would make planetfall on the southern continent, out of reach of the Orks (except of any roving Ork aircraft) and then quickly prepare their aircraft and troops for the drop assault.

The Elysians would need time to get their Valkyries and Vultures assembled and ready for battle, and get all their fuel and ammunition supplies in place, as would the Imperial Navy squadrons that would be adding to the assault's air support. Time was critical. The longer they delayed the attack, the greater the chance of discovery and the Orks being pre-warned and ready. The Raven Guard gave the Elysians and Imperial Navy just three days. They would have to work night and day to be ready…

At 406992.M41 the Raven Guard

KASTOREL-NOVEM RAID – THE RAVEN GUARD PLAN

The 181st Drop Troop Regiment was only operating within a broader plan initiated by the Raven Guard. Before arriving on Kastorel-Novem, the Chapter had pre-planned the attack in detail and designated the Elysian Drop Troopers their mission objectives.

The Raven Guard's own forces also had their objectives. Before offensive operations could begin they would be sending seven Scout teams back onto Kastorel-Novem. These would already be operating in secret when the main attack began. Once the Orks had been stirred into action by the Elysian landings, the Raven Guard would be airborne in Thunderhawks and their strike cruiser would be racing into position to deploy their drop-pod squads.

During the raid the Raven Guard's mission was to identify and eliminate the Ork Warlord's chief technical specialist. Their Scouts would be seeking him out. Once located, the Raven Guard's main strike force would land en-masse and attack. In the general confusion of the fighting and with the Orks already fully distracted by the Elysians, the Raven Guard would be able to overwhelm the Ork commander's bodyguards and kill him, thus inflicting an irreplaceable dent in Garaghak's ambitions.

A secondary objective had also been pre-identified. Scout forces had already noted the location of the Orks' main fuel reserves. A former chemical refinery was now being used as a storage facility for massive amounts of fuel. It had also been marked for destruction and, once the battle was in full swing, a small orbital insertion force would be dropped from the Aeruginosus. The timing would prevent the Orks being able to react to the attack and give the smaller force time to defeat the guards and set demolition charges. The loss of their main fuel store should have a crippling effect, not only on the Orks on Kastorel-Novem, but it would also prevent these stockpiles ever reaching the warbands fighting on Forsarr.

Shadow Captain Korvydae would be the overall commander of the raid and the battlefield commander of the Raven Guard's main strike force, whilst Chaplain Eitath led the orbital assault force against the fuel dump.

SHADOW FORCE KORVYDAE
RAVEN GUARD RAIDING FORCE – KASTOREL-NOVEM DEPLOYMENT

Commander – Shadow Captain Korvydae (10th Company)

1st Company
- 2 x Veteran Squads
- 1 x Venerable Dreadnought 'Brother Kraai'

5th Company
- 4 x Tactical Squads
- 1 x Devastator Squad
- 6 x Land Speeders
- 5 x Rhinos

8th Company
- 1 x Chaplain Eitath
- 6 x Assault Squads
- 1 x Dreadnought 'Brother Skele'

10th Company
- 7 x Scout Squads
- 8 x Land Speeder Storms

Armoury
- 3 x Techmarines
- 10 x Servitors
- 1 x Land Raider Prometheus – Command
- 6 x Predator Destructor
- 3 x Predator Annihilator
- 9 x Land Speeders
- 3 x Thunderfire cannons
- 6 x Sentry Guns

Apothecarion
- 3 x Apothecary

Librarius
- 1 x Epistolary Kyaneus

Fleet Command
- 1 Strike Cruiser – *Aeruginosus*
- 2 x Gladius-class Escorts – *Oenanthe-Primus, Oenanthe-Secundus*
- 7 x Thunderhawk Gunships
- 6 x Thunderhawk Transporters
- 10 x Drop-Pods

strike cruiser Aeruginosus and its two escorts, the Gladius-class Oenanthe-Primus and Oenanthe-Secundus, rendezvoused with an Imperial Navy transport convoy designated ADV-548. The holds of these three armed transports were full of aircraft: Valkyries, Vultures, Thunderbolts, even a few Marauder bombers, all dismantled. The entire Elysian 181st Drop Troop Regiment was also embarked, along with support personnel and penal labourers. The vessel's navigators set course for the Kastorel system, and battle with the Orks.

CHAPTER TWO
DROP ZONE X LANDINGS

STRIKE FROM THE SKIES

'Two-zero-alpha confirms. Drop complete. Sword force in position and beginning the attack...'

Captain Xhyst,
F Company, 181st Elysian Drop Troop Regiment

Captain Xhyst unclipped himself from the narrow Valkyrie seat into which he was wedged and lurched up, hanging onto a grab rail beside the open door, through which hammered a fierce blast of rushing air that was swirled around the transport compartment like a tornado. The gunner, partially blocking the doorway, glanced back at him and gave him a thumbs up, grinning beneath his mirror-visored helmet before turning back to continue scanning the ground rushing past below.

Xhyst leaned over to estimate the distance to the ground: maybe a hundred metres.

The Valkyrie was travelling fast and low, the din of its twin engines announcing their rapid approach to drop zone X. Suddenly the door gunner's heavy bolter boomed a sharp burst, its shells whining away towards the ground where a huddle of Orks – or was it Gretchin, Xhyst couldn't tell at this speed – were taking aim skywards. As he watched, fire came snapping towards the Valkyrie, one round ricocheted off the under-wing with a bright spark and a metallic ping. The door gunner fired another burst back, then another as the target receded behind.

Sword force was taking fire already and they hadn't reached the drop zone yet. It worried Xhyst. In his helmet communicator the pilot announced they were thirty seconds from target and almost simultaneously he felt the Valkyrie's engines power down as they decelerated for final approach. He turned back and gave the hand signal for the drop troopers inside to stand up.

Below: An Ork Flak Trukk passes the burning remains of its victim.

There was a bustle of activity as one after another the Guardsmen un-clipped their seat harnesses and rose, weapons in hand, in well-rehearsed order.

• • •

Xhyst and his men were in the first wave of drop troops about to jump over drop zone X, named for the captain leading the battle on the ground. This small vanguard force preceded the main body by five minutes, with the task of clearing any enemy from the immediate drop zone area, marking the area with auto-direction finding beacons for the following aircraft and deploying the tactical ground scanners. The scanners would give Xhyst and his air support a quick overview of where the Orks were and how many there might be. Just from his approach run Xhyst already suspected there may be more Orks than his pre-mission intelligence summary had estimated.

Xhyst jumped from the Valkyrie's rear ramp at about one hundred metres. He was the last of his 'stick' to exit. By the time he stepped out into open sky the first of his men would already be on the ground. Even before he exited the Valkyrie he could hear the deep thud-thud-thud of the door gunner's heavy bolter laying down a suppressing curtain of fire. The Valkyrie was hovering now, but the jet wash from its engine's turbulence buffeted the captain as he jumped clear, his grav-chute unit activating instantly. He had no time to check it, or to form the standard cruciform jump position. He hit the ground almost before he knew he was airborne. His ingrained muscle-memory from countless training jumps meant he didn't tense on impact, making for a 'soft' landing. Even so, the impact jolted him to the bones and forced all the air from his lungs. Without thinking he rolled with the impact, coming to rest amidst dusty red earth. Instantly he was up in a crouch, un-holstering the laspistol at his waist and checking about him, before unhitching the grav-chute harness with its quick release buckles and shrugging the bulky backpack off. It hit the ground with a thump. Released from its weight, Xhyst was ready to fight.

The hand-picked Guardsmen of the first wave knew their tasks well, they had trained for this mission a hundred times. Sergeants assembled their teams and squads about them. Armoured men were scurrying to and fro, recovering drop canisters which they cracked open. Vox-sets were checked as one-by-one the squads reported in to their platoon commanders. Overhead the Valkyries emptied their ammunition magazines. The staccato pop-pop of multi-lasers was interrupted by the sudden whoosh of Hellstrike missile rocket engines igniting. The missiles streaked away into the distances, impacting in a sudden blossoming orange fireball. Then, one after another, the aircraft banked away, engines at full thrust as they climbed clear of any incoming ground fire. The transports were returning to base to re-arm, refuel and help bring the follow-up wave of Xhyst's force.

The Captain climbed to the top of a low pile of junk; it seemed to be the remains of some machinery, now long dismantled and heavily rust encrusted. Once on top he pulled out his magnocular scanner and swept it across the horizon, pausing to focus on a distant tall structure that jutted skywards like a skyscraper under construction.

The half-built Gargant was a ramshackle collection of steel plating, scaffolding, chains and pulleys and what appeared to the Elysian captain to be nothing more than accumulated scrap metal. It was difficult to believe that given time it would become a massive smoke-belching leviathan of a war machine, bristling with weaponry of all kinds. Turning his scanner to full magnification he could see the small figures of workers, Orks or Gretchin – again he could not tell, scurrying about over the ungainly edifice. He also noted that amongst the building-sized piles of scrap were the tell-tale barrels of anti-aircraft weaponry. The Gargant construction site was ringed with them, and more would be hidden from view. It was his mission to attack and overrun that site, in so doing driving the Orks northwards. First he needed the main body of his strike force to find his position and jump in. Then he had to get his squads organised, deployed and moving north. It was a race against time to smash the Orks before they were able to muster more forces. Xhyst scrambled back down from the machinery to where his vox-operator awaited. 'First platoon reports beacons are in position and broadcasting, sir,' he reported. Xhyst nodded his approval. 'Confirm message received and understood. Get me an update on the ground scanners. How long before calibrations are complete? I want to know as soon as any squads make first contact with the enemy.'

• • •

Mek Boss Buzzgob heard the aircraft approaching from the south. They came in fast, low and loud, all roaring engines and blazing shootas. It might almost have made him smile, if he hadn't already been so angry. His mood was already sour, he had just finished arguing over an assignment of parts with a mob of blue-painted Lootaz. They'd found the parts he needed for the right arm main power-coupling, including some almost-new shiny heavy cabling, but they'd also had the affront to up the agreed price, due to 'da quality of da goods'.

Buzzgob didn't like the Death Skullz, few Orks did. He suspected they all worked for Skalk Bluetoof, the scabby old scrap-king of Mekslag-Ikks who was busy getting stinking rich whilst he was busy making the weapons to win Warlord Garaghak's war on Forsarr. He had sent the lootaz away with a warning that he'd have to report them to Overseer Grahkrag if they didn't hand over his parts, and Grahkrag took a dim view of pesky flea-bitten Death Skullz who got in the way of Buzzgob's important work. Grahkrag's bully boyz no doubt would find them and pull a few ears or limbs off, to teach them a lesson about who they all actually worked for. Still, he'd had to make sure the mob had been escorted away, otherwise Gork-knew what their thieving fingers would alight upon before they left.

After the brief heated exchange, the Lootaz had finally handed over the parts in return for crates of ammunition and barrels of fuel. Buzzgob's two grot assistants, Nitnuckle and Lunk, had struck the parts off 'da big list of missing bitz'. Now Buzzgob needed a Mek to get to work fitting them. It was as he was grumpily discussing with his two clever little grots which Mek was currently under-worked and needed a new job, or a good kick up the rear-end, whilst at the same time fishing about in his pouch for a smoke, that he heard the first distant whine of a jet engine approaching, growing steadily

Above: A Looted Wagon (in this case a captured Rhino) responds to the Elysian landings.

louder and louder. At first he assumed it would be those mad flyboyz testing out their latest fighta-bommer engine, but the single engine had rapidly built into the thunderous din of an airborne armada. Interest piqued, he climbed the nearest scaffolding to get a better view of the aircraft's approach.

His cigar was totally forgotten as Buzzgob watched in amazement. All the work around him had stopped as the Orks and grots gathered alongside him to gawp. Eighteen aircraft had appeared over the southern horizon and from them tumbled the tiny figures of humies. Puny humies falling from the sky like rain, or, come to think of it, like Storm Boyz! Buzzgob saw, then seconds later heard, the violent swoosh of two rokkits launched from the lead aircraft. The missiles streaked towards the Gargant, arrow-straight and fast, before smashing into the ground ahead of Buzzgob. There was an orange flash, an explosion and the gantry swayed violently underneath Buzzgob. Thick smoke billowed up, quickly followed by a second blast amidst a pile of discarded parts over which a few grots had been searching all morning. Jagged metal and the severed body parts of several grots flew into the air and landed close by in a bloody steaming mess. The smell of cordite powder, blood and burned flesh drifted to him. Buzzgob's bad mood was suddenly lifted. He inhaled deeply. It was a smell he loved, almost as much as that of old grease, oil and exhaust fumes. It was a smell all Orks loved. Buzzgob grinned; it was the smell of battle...

• • •

The Elysian drop troops had made first contact. The incoming fire was not yet intense, but Guardsman Wayt Orek heard the snap of rounds as they zipped overhead, wildly inaccurate, but then he had fought Orks before and wildly inaccurate is what he'd come to expect. It was up close you didn't want to meet one, face-to-face. He crawled further up the pile of twisted rubble that had once been a wall of some kind, his Accatran mark IV sniper rifle in front of him, and his head down. Once he reached a vantage point he stopped, flipped down the weapon's bipod and settled into a good firing position. Somewhere out there, amidst the junkyard lying before him there was at least one enemy. He removed the dust cover from the lens of his scope and peered down it, slowly, methodically searching. More rounds fizzed past. Not close enough to bother him. He didn't think the Orks knew where he was. They were probably just shooting for the hell of it.

Orek watched and waited, patient as the hunter. From his elevated position he had a good overview. He saw movement to his left and zeroed in. In his sight he saw a greenskin, small and child-like. It reminded Orek of a Cthonian swamp-toad, the way it hopped about from one foot to another, dodging back and forth. It was armed with a pistol, crude and, by the looks of it, barely functional. The pistol flashed again and a bullet ricocheted around, whining off the scrap piles harmlessly. Orek coolly waited, motionless. Next time it hopped out Orek fired first. The laser blast fizzed briefly, a white streak, and the Gretchin's head seemed to explode. The remaining torso fell hard, flailing. Moments later a second little greenskin appeared and Orek dropped it too with another clean head-shot, its body landing next to the other. A third Gretchin broke cover and ran, its weapon discarded. As Orek placed his sight reticule upon the back of its skull a flurry of las-bolts flashed

from his right and the creature vanished from sight as it fell. He clicked open his comms-mike. 'This is alpha-four-four. We have contact front. Three enemies down. Holding position.'

• • •

'Captain Xhyst, sir, alpha-four-four report enemy contact at their position.' The comms operator updated the captain as he strode amongst the junkyard, standing tall like an officer must. The first shots had been fired. It wasn't important, just the briefest of firefights with stray Gretchin, not organised resistance. 'Get me an ETA for the second wave,' he demanded of his vox-man, who quickly set to flicking switches and dials to find the required comms channel. Xhyst's first wave was in place. Everything was up and running in minutes. His long range ground scanner units had nothing to report so far, no major enemy movement. But he still needed to get moving north.

'Second wave inbound. ETA over drop zone ninety seconds, sir.'

Xhyst turned to look back southwards, any minute now a flight of Valkyries and supporting Vendetta and Vulture gunships would come rushing into view. He pulled his heavy jump helmet off to better hear the approaching engines.

He did not have long to wait. Preceded by the thunder of engines the Valkyries soon came racing overhead, drop troopers tumbling out in their wake. Amidst the drop troops came Sentinels, each mounted upon a grav-sled that ejected it out of the rear ramp. Each of the walkers also mounted a large grav-chute unit on its rear and as it fell the Sentinel righted itself before impacting the ground upon its reinforced leg pistons in a cloud of dust and debris. From that dust cloud the walker reared up to its full height and stalked forwards, weapon swivelling. They were gawky, awkward-looking machines of war, lightly armoured with a single pilot hidden inside the cockpit's roll cage, but each carried a heavy weapon. Their weapons provided the infantry platoons with the sort of heavy firepower mere men just could not carry into battle. More men and equipment followed. Transport after transport sped above him, scattering their cargos of Guardsmen and drop canisters before banking away sharply for home. The Vultures remained on station, circling high, ready for a call into an attack run.

Over the vox, reports from platoon and Sentinel squadrons were coming in thick and fast now. Captain Xhyst gave his command squad, all squatting close by in cover, the word to prepare to move out. Then he issued the order for all platoons to begin the advance north towards the Gargant.

The Mek Boss sent Nitnuckle and Lunk running to summon all the boyz they could, with Buzzgob's order to 'get da Dreds' still ringing in their large pointy ears. As the two grots deftly slid down the gantry ladder, Buzzgob roared more orders to anybody within earshot 'Get yer gear and get movin' he bellowed, waving in the direction of the incoming

Below: Air strike imminent. A ground scanner image locks on to an approaching column of Ork vehicles.

aircraft and the humies. All around him gawping Orks were suddenly running, grabbing anything they could use as weapons. There was going to be a fight, a proper big fight and there was an almighty scramble to be first to the battle. Buzzgob himself set about grabbing and flinging any Ork or grot within reach in the direction he wanted them to run, heedless of the fact that he was stood three storeys up on a scaffold gantry!

Below him the bosses and Meks were gathering the boyz. From within the Gargant's belly a group of Burnaboyz appeared, their cutting tools still glowing red hot from working within. They looked bemused, not having yet registered that they were under attack. A Mek ran up and quickly apprised them of the situation. 'Da humies had landed, over der!' The Burnaboyz need no second invitation. Hefting their big cutters they set off running south. Amidst the clamour, Trukk engines fired into life and boyz and grots leapt aboard before racing off, weaving through the scrap piles.

• • •

Guardsman Orek watched through his powerful scope as the Elysian troops moved out, advancing in good order through the ruins. He thumbed the scope's power to full and scanned the distant horizon. After his first kills he had changed position, as trained. Now he had climbed to the top of the tallest scrap pile around, and carefully dug himself in. From here he could cover the whole sector with accurate sniper fire. If any greenskin poked its head out, Orek was waiting to shoot it off. From his new vantage point Orek saw a band of Orks approaching in a wide-tracked vehicle. It was some form of truck, all spluttering engine, rumbling tracks and big exhausts. It seemed to have little suspension by the way its passengers were clinging on for grim life as it bucked and bounced over the uneven ground. He counted about ten other Orks and a driver, with a variety of weapons. Some seemed to just be carrying pieces of pipe as clubs. He took careful aim on the driver, trying to track its erratic movements.

He squeezed the trigger. A single las-shot flashed but only impacted on the front of the bouncing truck, scorching the metal but doing no serious damage. He aimed again and fired, this time the shot missed the Ork driver's head by inches and again did no damage. As the track ground to a halt the Orks piled off, running. The driver ducked low in his cab and began to turn around. More of Orek's shots fizzed into the vehicle, but the truck accelerated away.

Above: An Ork Scrap Trukk blends into the background amidst the industrial detritus.

At that moment a Vulture gunship slid overhead and opened fire with its two large Punisher cannons. The gatling cannons sounded like the tearing of heavy fabric. All around the truck the ground erupted. Great chunks of metal flew up from a cloud of dancing sparks. When the Punisher cannons stopped the truck was a wreck, track links and road wheels torn off, its engine steaming. The driver was nowhere to be seen. Either he had jumped clear or been caught in the hail of bullets and had disintegrated.

The presence of the gunships loitering overhead gave Orek and his Elysian compatriots' great heart. Many had fought Orks before and knew that they were an alien race that lived for battle. Yes, they lacked discipline, training and battlefield tactics, but they made up for it all with aggression and a seemingly thick-skulled belief in their own invincibility. In close combat the Elysians knew that an Ork could easily pull their arms off and would grin whilst doing it! They were sadistic, brutal and merciless creatures. But with the Vultures, Valkyries and Vendettas overhead it was unlikely the usual mob-handed rush of a green skinned horde would get anywhere near their leading squads.

As Orek continued his vigilant overwatch he could see more Orks massing to the north. At this range it looked like thousands, but it was more likely to be hundreds, and many of them would be the little Gretchin, which were about as dangerous as an armed child. As yet he couldn't see any larger war machines, and that was a blessing from the Emperor. If he did, his comms channel was ready to call down a missile-armed Vulture to blast it back into the scrap it was no doubt constructed from.

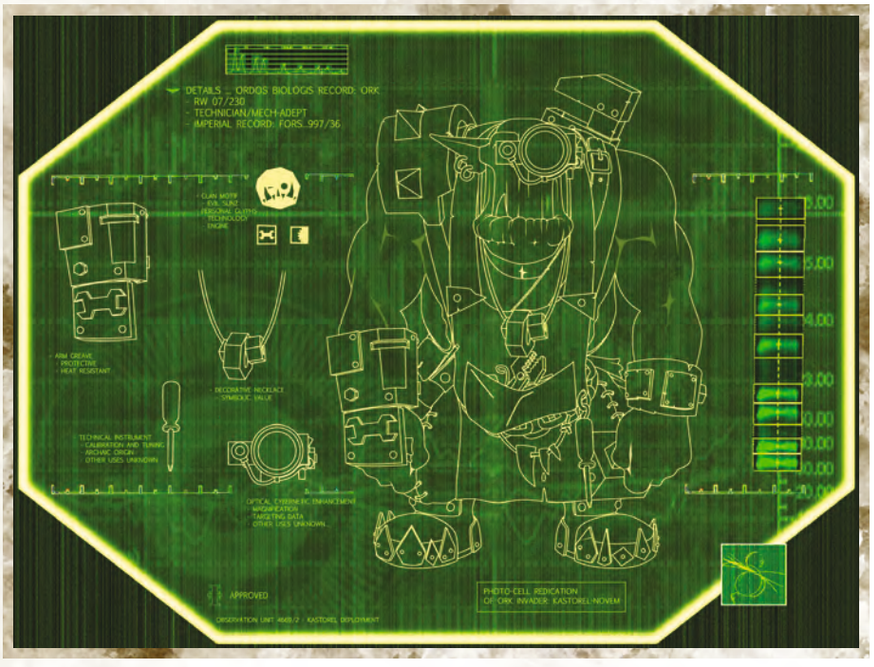
• • •

When Tufrukk emerged from the bowels of the Gargant, his burna still glowing red hot from dissecting steel plating, he was bemused, even more so than usual. Protected inside his heavy helmet and facemask he hadn't noticed that work had ceased for the day until just about every other Ork had vanished. Eventually he emerged from the smoky darkness inside what would eventually become the Gargant's engine room, blinking into the sunlight. All around Orks were running about, grabbing weapons and shouting in a frenzy of chaotic activity. He stood and watched for a minute, still none the wiser. Only when old Gorwaz arrived and pointed out that some dumb humies had landed not far away and there was going to be a scrap, did the penny finally drop. Tufrukk laughed. Well, fightin' beat workin'. He immediately started running, the crushing weight of his burna and its fuel packs momentarily forgotten. As he went he bawled for the other boyz to join him.

He ran south, through an area they all knew well, where parts for the building work had been sorted and stored. Ahead the sky was infested with aircraft, more aircraft than Tufrukk had ever seen in one place. They were all darting about like stinging insects. Tufrukk and his boyz tried to keep up with the crowds of Orks and grots now moving in the same direction, but the weight of their tools (soon to become weapons), slowed them down. A Big Trakk loaded down with more whooping boyz raced past. They were just one of many mobs now heading to the fight.

Tufrukk's boyz first encountered the humies at what had once been a road intersection, but the road was just broken ferrocrete now and empty fuel barrels lay scattered everywhere; some were still leaking green gunk. They started off across the open ground, humping it as fast as they could when an aircraft appeared and opened fire. The ground erupted as rounds impacted about him. Somehow, by Gork's luck, they missed him, but old Mek Gorwaz was killed, shredded by the hail of big slugs. Tuffruk paused to drag Gorwaz's body away and wedged it under a tottering pile of fuel barrels close by. He wanted to come back and strip the old Mek of his gear and pull his teef out, but if he left his body lying in the open he knew he'd find some thieving Death Skull had looted the body by the time he got back. He was still repeatedly kicking Gorwaz's body deeper into its hiding place when he saw the first aircraft shot down.

The boyz cheered wildly as the smoking trail of a rokkit curved skywards. It hit the aircraft on its tail boom, close to the engines and big chunks flew off in the explosion. Then, for a few seconds the aircraft just hovered unsteadily. First it pitched sideways, as if in slow motion, rolling over as the pilot lost control. It plunged down and crashed close by, crumbling into the ground and throwing up a huge pall of orange dust. The crash brought more cries of joy from the boyz and Tuffruk changed direction, heading straight towards the downed aircraft. There was good scrap to be had off it and he had just the tool for the job.



Captain Xhyst watched the first Vulture gunship go down through his magnocular scanner. He could clearly see where one of its tail booms had been blasted away by an explosion and the aircraft pitched sideways into the ground. It had been lost in the gathering mass of Orks ahead. There was little hope of rescuing the pilot and weapons officer onboard. If the Emperor was merciful they would have been killed in the impact rather than left to the Orks.

The battle had started for real. Up ahead the firing had grown in intensity. The pop of lasguns and the bark of heavy bolters were soon joined by the sudden explosive crump of mortar rounds landing. He could hear the vox-caster behind him, now wedged on the ground, chattering with the reports of squad leaders and platoon commanders as they fought the Orks. From Xhyst's position the enemy seemed to be shooting from everywhere, shells whined overhead. A lot was happening at once. The Orks were arriving in numbers, but his air support was starting to thin out. Overhead his Vulture gunships were running low on fuel and ammunition. They couldn't loiter close by forever; soon they would have to turn for home. Captain Xhyst had known his most powerful weapon couldn't operate indefinitely out there, but the attack plan included a second wave of gunships that should already be inbound. Before they started making bombing and strafing runs the aircraft needed the location of Xhyst's forward squads, to avoid attacking their own side. It was to this task that Xhyst now committed himself.

• • •

Buzzgob stalked through the Ork ranks, waving and roaring his boyz forwards. A missile streaked overhead and exploded just behind him, the hot blast wave washing over him in a torrent of flying debris. 'Get 'em. Get 'em,' he urged all the Orks around him. The Ork boyz were shooting now, the rattle of shootas and sluggas becoming a cacophony, music to his ears. A bomb exploded amidst the scrap to his left, and a thick metal girder was sent flipping end-over-end by the blast, splattering an unsuspecting grot as it landed. Another bomb landed, and then another followed. Lobba rounds, Buzzgob nodded his approval. The humies obviously had some 'eavy gunz, he could do with some himself, he thought.

It briefly occurred to Buzzgob to go and fetch 'da Big Lugga', his Stompa, but it would take too long to round up the krew and he would have to quit the field and he'd only just got here. Things were just heating up nicely.

Which reminded the Ork Big Mek, where the hell were Nitnuckle and Lunk? The little grots had scampered away to fetch more boyz and his Dreds. They should be back by now. Most likely they had found a safe hole and crawled into it, stupid puny grots! Still, he tolerated their cowardice, they'd be difficult to replace if they got themselves killed.

To Buzzgob it seemed all was going well. The boyz were getting well stuck in, a good fight had been what they needed. He'd even seen an aircraft get shot down. He made a mental note to tell Lunk to make sure he got first pickings off the scrap from that wreck. The flyboyz would pay well for the engine parts.

• • •

The Orks and the drop troopers had been fully engaged for over an hour now. At first the aerial firepower of the gunships had raked the massing Orks and held back the tide, scores of greenskins lay dead amidst the junk and wreckage of the previous battle for Kastorel-Novem. Under the curtain of heavy fire the Guardsmen had been able to push forwards towards the objective, fighting on the run as they made good ground. The second wave of gunships had also arrived and quickly unloaded their payloads onto the Orks, adding to the devastation and carnage being wrought upon them.

But they had also retired from the battle and would not return for several hours. The drop troops now fought without their heaviest fire support and the battle was turning. Amongst the rubble and scrap, the Elysians fought with just lasguns and grenades.

Captain Xhyst had moved his command post forwards, temporarily occupying an old bomb crater. Lying prone at the crater's lip he listened to the vox-chatter. The half-built Gargant was a lot closer now, looming ahead of them and the Ork resistance had slackened after the last air strike. From where he was lying the captain could see at least six Ork and Gretchin bodies, most missing limbs and heavily burnt, scattered upon the ground. Three Sentinels were just beyond them, firing repeatedly with the dramatic whoosh of super-heated air as their multi-meltas turned another scrap pile into pools of steaming liquid slag.

• • •

Tufrukk ran as swiftly as he could around the junkyard. He had been on Mekslag-Ikks for the past five years, earning his teef carving scrap into useful bitz for building Trukks, Battlewagons and Dredz. Before then he'd seen lots of fighting on Tallarax, that's where he'd earned himself the burna and joined a Burnaboyz mob. This was his first real action since that time (if you didn't include several brawls over squig-juice and teef payments). He moved with the greater mob, darting from scrap pile to scrap pile for cover, trying to get close enough to put his burna to work. He had already seen his target, a Dred-like walking machine that looked like their legs would come off easily.

He was back in the fight after being forced to abandon his attempt to grab some good plunder off the crashed aircraft because Big Mek Buzzgob had showed up, claimed the wreck for himself and ordered them all back into the battle.

Still, Tufrukk relished the fight. The humies were fightin' 'ard, giving no quarter and their bommerz had been busy. Twice Tufrukk had almost been blasted to pieces by bombs. Still, for all their bombs and guns the humies weren't very brave or tough. Without all their aircraft the boyz would easily have surrounded them and then killed them, probably with their bare hands, just for the fun of it.

He made a dash to the corner of the next scrap pile. There was already a crowd of boyz behind it, firing blind over the top. The humies' return fire was fizzing around them. As he ran, one laser bolt punctured a steaming hole in his left biceps. It bled, but it didn't hurt.

Combat at Drop Zone X. Elysian forces deploy directly into battle.

Next he rushed to the smouldering wreck of a Trukk that had been hit earlier. Scrambling under his bulky equipment, Tufrukk ducked into cover in another hail of laser fire. He, and several of the boyz that had followed his lead, lay behind the Trukk and started shooting back. He saw one humie shot in the head, his helmet flying off and rolling across the ground. He took aim at where he thought the walker would next appear – a narrow gap between a scrap pile and a half-fallen wall and waited for his chance.

• • •

Guardsman Orek was in the thick of the fighting, running alongside a Sentinel as it stalked forwards, kicking aside a pile of discarded old tyres and the remains, Orek thought, of a rusting vehicle's chassis. The Orks infested the area, every scrap pile and fuel drum could conceal a lurking greenskin. He dropped to his knee, snapped off three rounds at movement up ahead, then was up and moving again. The Sentinel did not pause to fire and Orek ran to catch up again. Just as he did, the walker exploded in a shower of sparks and yellow flames. Arc-bright a sudden bolt of light had smashed into its right leg, shearing through the pistons and hydraulic cables like a lascannon blast. The Sentinel tottered then fell, pitching sideways as its right leg gave way under it.

Orek jumped back as the Sentinel's fuel cell ruptured on impact, spilling high-grade promethium. From behind, Orek couldn't see the pilot, but suspected he'd been knocked unconscious in the fall. He thought about making a dash to rescue him, but the slightest spark would ignite the fuel and turn the stricken walker into an inferno. Instead, Orek found himself some cover and watched the Sentinel from there. The first Orks to appear wouldn't get their plunder without a fight.

The first Ork to appear wasn't an Ork at all but a clanking war machine, ungainly with arms flailing, its heavy weapon shooting seemingly at random into the air. Orek couldn't miss, the metal monster filled his sights as he scoped-in on it. He fired once, saw the laser bolt impact without result and took a careful second aim on the vision slit. He fired again, then again, both shots fizzing off the Dreadnought's armoured front plate; then a returning burst of fire sent Orek ducking back into cover. The Dreadnought clanked on towards the fallen Sentinel, which lay silent in an expanding pool of its own fuel. With a roar of rushing air the Sentinel was engulfed in flames. A spark from the Ork machine must have ignited it. More Orks were following the Dreadnought towards Orek now. Reaching into his arm pouch he pulled out a krak grenade, flipped off the cap and thumbed the detonator button. Breaking cover he hurled the anti-tank grenade at the Ork war machine, then, hoisting his sniper rifle, turned and ran. The grenade detonated with a sharp crack. Orek didn't look back to see what damage it had done. Instead he found a new position, skidded into the cover and settled behind his sniper rifle again. The Orks were closing in and it seemed reinforcements had arrived. Their chanting and wild shooting was getting closer.

• • •

At last his Dredz had arrived. They'd taken their time, Buzzgob thought, as he pointed them in the right direction. The boyz had taken a bit of a pounding, but his two grots had finally got the Dredz moving and now they were here, ready to join the battle. Killer Kans, Deff Dreds and even one of his own Mega-Dreds came swaying and stomping through the junk and rubble.

• • •

All along the Elysian front the advance had now stalled, ground down into a series of bloody skirmishes that were costing men but not gaining any ground. The Elysians had killed a lot of Orks, but there had been a lot to kill and more were still arriving. Orks were being ferried into the area by trucks and wagons and now their Dreadnoughts had joined them. Buzzgob's personal retinue of Dreadnoughts had not been far from the Gargant site. Most of the Meks that built and maintained the Dredheadz were the same Meks that were now constructing Grahkrag's Gargant.

The Dreadnoughts had thick armour and the Elysians were not well equipped to meet them on the ground. The drop troops relied upon their air support and for now it was gone. Captain Xhyst was urging Colonel Taihon to send extra air strikes, but the regiment was now fully committed to its planned attacks and just about every aircraft was either engaged in delivering Shield force to their drop zone, or in transit between the battle zone and the airbase. Xhyst was painfully aware that it was one of the main drawbacks of airpower over ground power. Tanks might need fuel and ammunition but once they were in place very little was going to move them. Aircraft needed fuel and ammunition too, but they couldn't hold ground.

Captain Xhyst's earlier worries about Ork numbers had now become more serious. The Orks were still coming and his platoons were being eaten up. There were far more Orks defending this Gargant than Sword force was equipped to deal with. He estimated that they had killed the Orks at a ratio of maybe three or four to one, but he felt as if the initiative on the ground had ebbed away. The Orks were still being reinforced and were starting to counter-attack. He could stand and fight and maybe hold out until the gunships returned, but even then he wasn't sure he had the manpower left to wrestle the initiative back and get his men moving to that Gargant again. Better, he reasoned with himself, to look to fall back, re-organise and buy some time by giving up some ground. That way he could preserve some of his fighting strength and coordinate a second push, perhaps drawing upon the regiment's emergency reserves when the air transport became available again. Of course withdrawing wasn't going to sit well with Colonel Taihon or the Space Marine captain for that matter, but as the man on the ground it had to be Xhyst's call. He was the officer in command here, in the right place to make the tactical decisions. He knew he couldn't afford to leave it too long either. An Ork attack could overrun Sword force and then any withdrawal would become a pell-mell rout rather than an organised retreat.

His mind made up Captain Xhyst got back on the vox to issue the fall back orders to his platoon commanders. It was time to give up the ground they had won and get some space between his squads and the Orks. Sword force had lost the initiative; weight of numbers was beginning to tell. For the moment the Gargant was out of reach.

The drop troopers began to withdraw as fast as they could. Some squads remained

in place to cover their comrades, but most made a rapid withdrawal over the ground they had just fought to take. It was ground littered with the detritus of battle. Smoking and burning wreckage spilled acrid black smoke. A small lake formed by the oil slick from a leaking storage tank was burning fierce orange flames that roared twenty feet high, casting a dense cloud into the sky. The dead, human and Ork, littered the ground, their equipment lying around them. Many of the Elysians were assisting their wounded comrades as they fell back. Squad sergeants tried to maintain order, barking commands to stick together. Nobody was to discard any weapons. This fight was over; they were just regrouping for a second attack.

Captain Xhyst himself remained in position, watching the men trailing past him, dirty and weary. He'd seen battle many times before, made retreats before, and knew that he had to remain visible, had to let the men see his confidence if the withdrawal wasn't to become a rout and a defeat. He hadn't lost this battle yet. Just then, out of nowhere and with no warning, a mortar round landed, impacting no more than two metres from the officer. The blast lifted him clean off his feet, a smoking chunk of shrapnel smashed into the side of his knee. His armoured kneepad saved his leg from being cut clean off, but the metal had sliced deep through the flesh and bone. Small pieces of shrapnel had also peppered his right side. One piece had smashed his front teeth out and blood was leaking down his chin. Dazed and bleeding on the ground, Xhyst tried to suppress the howl of pain that was building inside him. His knee felt like it was on fire from the inside. Instinctively, he tried to stand, but fell and cried out in pain.

The captain's vox-operator was first to him, arriving as another mortar round landed and sprayed them both with more red dirt. Under fire he jabbed an ampoule of pain killing chemicals into the captain's neck. It took mere seconds to work, and meant he could help the captain up without him passing out. The vox operator yelled for the medic. The command squad's medic had been a busy man all day, scampering to and fro, his medi-pack was all but exhausted of supplies. When he arrived on the scene there was little more he could do for his commander. The knee wound was bad, it needed surgery to remove the hunk of metal. It might cost him the leg after all. He helped the vox-operator carry Xhyst and they started moving back. The captain was out of action. Sword force had lost its commander on the ground.

• • •

Buzzgob wondered where all the humies had gone. The fighting seemed to have died down, just as his Dredz had arrived and started to get in on the action. One minute there was loads of dakka flying, now it seemed the humies had run off, which was disappointing because he'd been hoping to watch the Dredz do some serious mangling. He walked over to inspect the charred wreckage of one of the humie's funny little walking dred-machines. It was just a blackened hulk with nothing worth salvaging left. The pilot was a hunk of shrunken charred flesh. Buzzgob gave the machine a solid kick, just to see, and his heavy boot made a big dent in the heat-softened metal. Useless junk!

Buzzgob marched on, stepping over and on the bodies of the dead as he went. Most of his boyz and Dredz had raced on ahead of him, still in hot pursuit. Some malingerers were lurking back here, looting. Notably most had the blue war paint of Death Skullz. He suspected that most had shirked the real fighting and had just hung around to get the best pickings at the end. Grots were also scurrying about, gathering up armfuls of weapons and gear. It was then that Nitnuckle and Lunk reappeared, again suspiciously after the shooting had ended. The two grots came running up with expressions of urgency. 'Boss! Boss! Der is more humies, north of 'ere.' Nitnuckle blurted. 'Lots more, an' Skalk's rounded up his boyz for da fight.' Lunk confirmed eagerly.

More humies meant more fighting. That made Buzzgob pause for thought. The battle wasn't over then. If wily old Skalk was going to fight then there must be some seriously good lootin' to be done. Buzzgob stomped off after his boyz, he needed to get them moving north, now.

SWORD FORCE IN RETREAT

Sword force's initial assault upon the Gargant landing zone had started well. The Elysians had arrived at their drop zones and begun their advance. Initial progress was soon slowed as opposition grew. It seemed there were many more Orks in the area than had been anticipated and this included unusually large numbers of Dreadnoughts.

Buzzgob's absolute unquestionable authority meant the Orks reacted quickly to the surprise attack. They were ready for a fight and gleefully raced to the battle. The Elysians' air power was soon inflicting heavy loses but not enough to halt the tide of greenskins that was amassing. Driven on by Buzzgob and with the air cover forced to retire to base to re-arm and refuel, the Orks pressed their attack. Overwhelmed by numbers, Captain Xhyst was forced to withdraw, his assault had failed. It was during that withdrawal that he was critically injured.

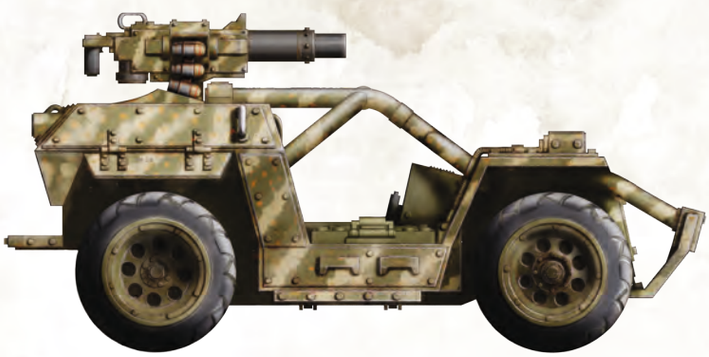
The failure of Sword force was to be the first in a series of events that turned the Elysian surprise attack into a bloody battle for survival. The Elysians had disturbed a hornets nest and rapidly found themselves facing vast numbers of Orks, all well-equipped and battle-frenzied.

The Gargant objective was never reached and despite a quickly improvised plan for the Imperial Navy's Marauders to bomb it, only superficial damage was inflicted.

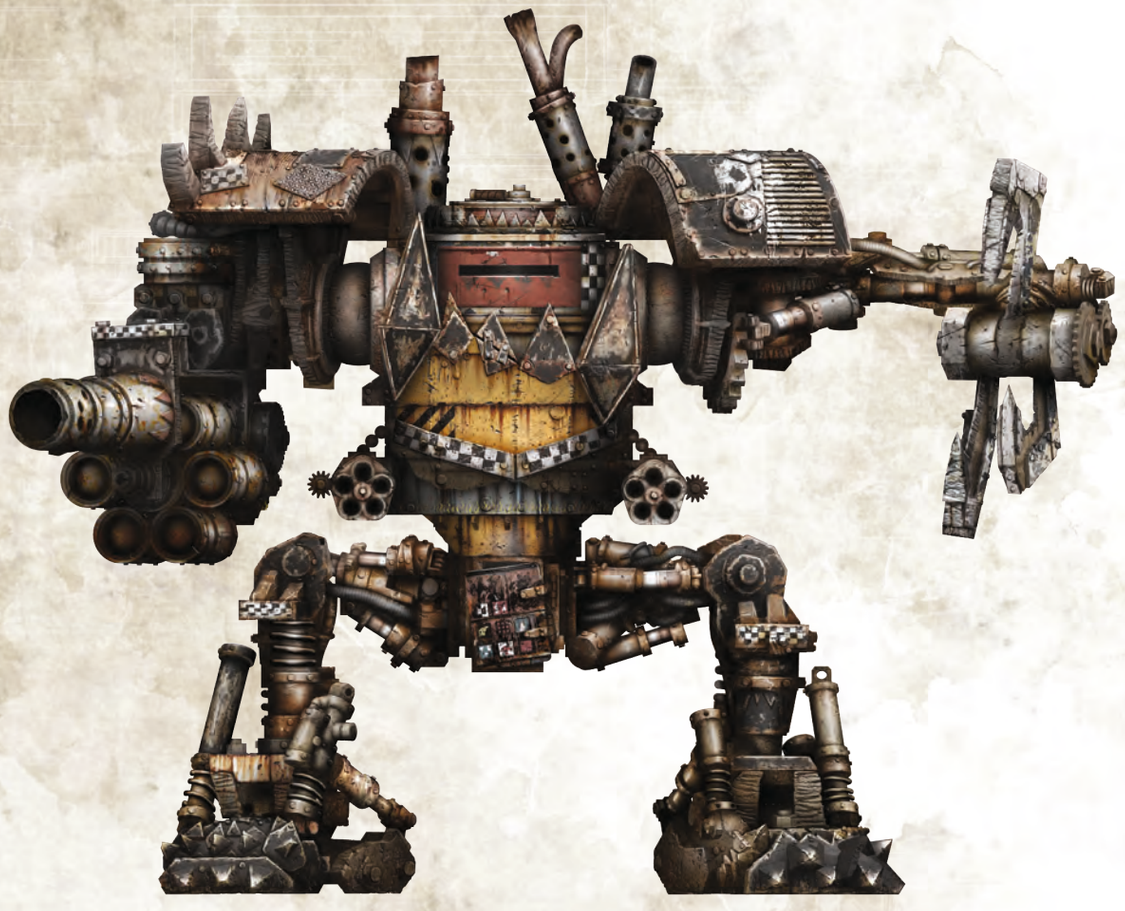
Valkyrie airborne assault carrier of the 181st Elysian Regiment.
This is a squadron command aircraft bearing dedicational aquila wings.

Valkyrie airborne assault carrier of the 181st Elysian Regiment.
This aircraft was part of Sword force's initial landings, before being transferred to support Shield force.

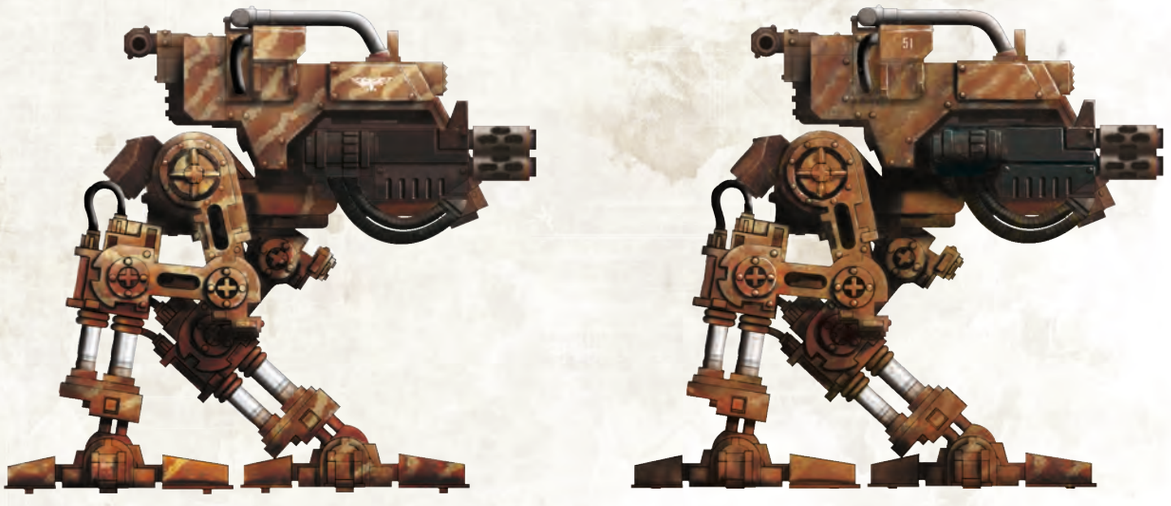
Vulture gunship. Part of the air support dedicated to Sword Force's attack. It was shot down during the battle.



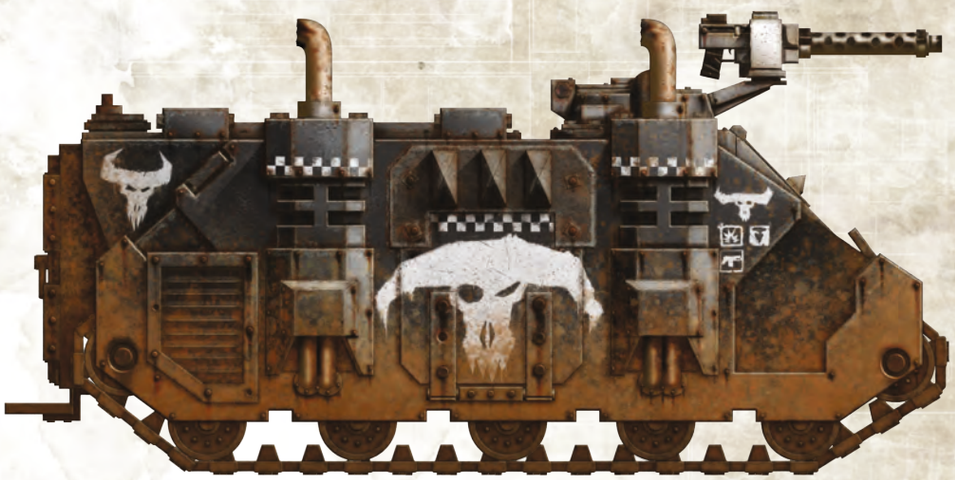
Tauros rapid assault vehicle. Most of these vehicles formed Dagger Force, but a few operated on the flanks of Sword Force's attack. All were lost in battle.



Mega-Dread, part of Buzzgob's Dredheadz. First encountered during the drop zone X fighting, it would later reappear at Shield force's drop zone T.



Drop Sentinels of I Company, 181st Drop Regiment. A Sentinel squadron was directly attached to each infantry platoon for heavy weapons support.



Looted Rhino of the Goff clan. Orks seem to value the Rhino's rugged design and powerful engines. Space Marine Chapters make the destruction of any of their vehicles in xenos hands a high priority.

Death Skullz warbike. All Orks enjoy the thrill of speed and bikers are common to all clans.

Gun Wagon of the Death Skulls clan, armed with a large calibre mortar (ref: Lobba).

CHAPTER THREE
DROP ZONE G LANDING

PATROLLING THE NORTHERN FLANK

'We cannot shy from the hopeless fight. Endeavour is its own reward.'

Captain Gerek,
A Company, 181st Elysian Drop Troop Regiment

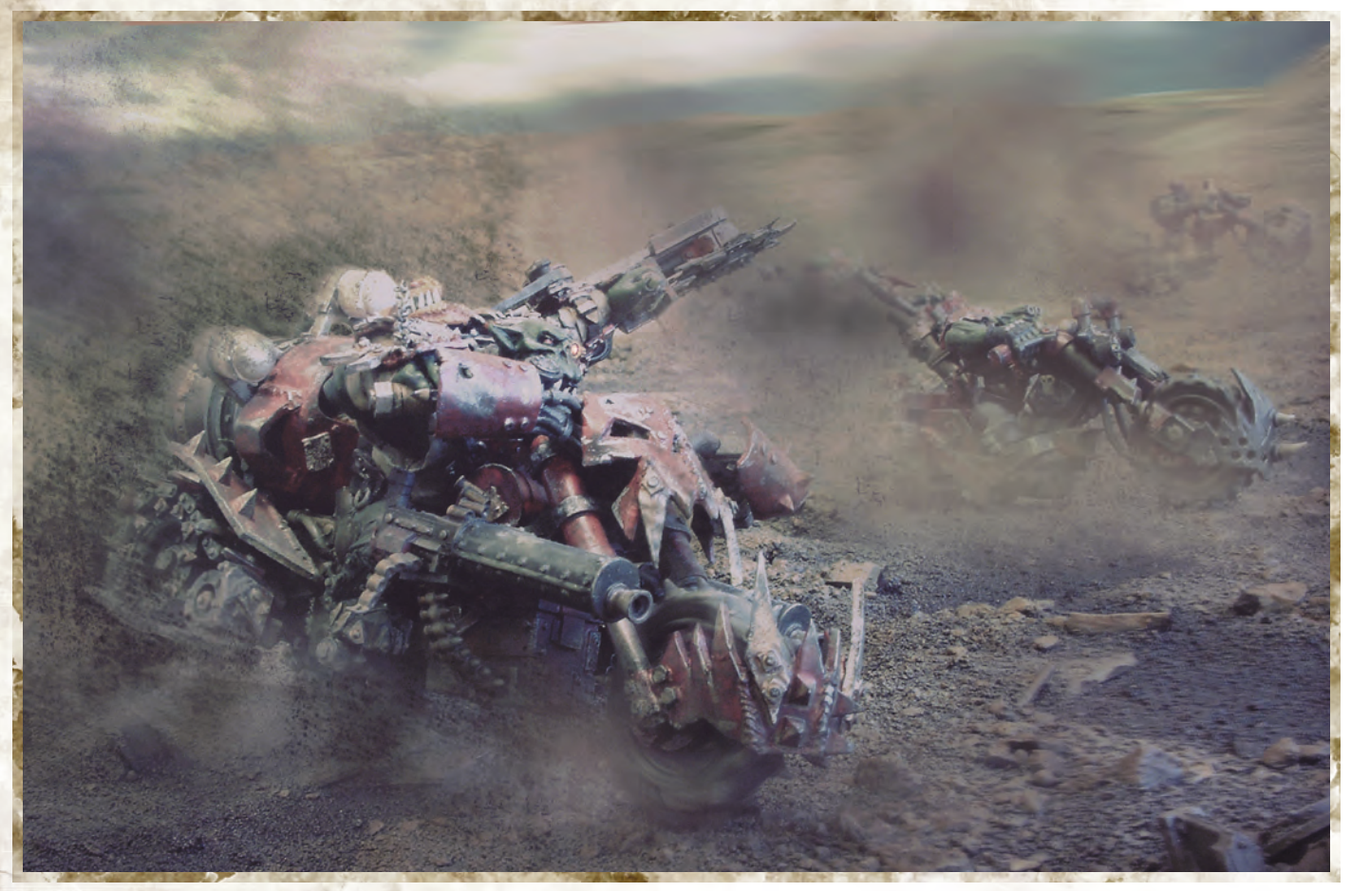
The Tauros all-terrain vehicle swayed violently as it was lowered to the ground. Dust and debris flew about wildly as the Valkyrie's jet wash hammered the ground, turning it into a whirlwind of dust and grit that browned-out the ground below. Captain Gerek braced himself against the shock of landing. With a jerk the magnetic clamps that held the Tauros released and the vehicle plunged, maybe only three metres, to smash into the ground. The vehicle's big suspension coils took the force of the impact as Gerek and his driver, Trooper Ardo, were held tight by their harnesses.

Captain Gerek activated his helmet communicator in a burst of static. 'Clear,' he instructed the Valkyrie pilot, still hovering somewhere in the swirling dust maelstrom above him. The Valkyrie's engine note changed, its twin thrusters kicking in as the Sky Talon climbed away from the drop zone. Trooper Ardo powered up the Tauros, its multiple battery packs humming into life. Gradually the brown-out cleared. Gerek unclipped his restraining harness and rose from his rear seat behind the driver. About him other vehicles were being landed, each swung below its own transport aircraft. Looking further back he could see more Sky Talons approaching, each with a Tauros slung underneath. Dagger Force was on the ground.

• • •

Captain Gerek's Dagger force was composed mainly of the 181st Regiment's A Company. Equipped with Tauros and Tauros Venator rapid pursuit vehicles, they were the regiment's forward reconnaissance unit. Able to cover great distances at speed and operate without

Below: Red ones go faster... an Evil Sunz Warboss leads the high speed charge.



Above: On patrol. A Tauros Venator, with an infantry squad in close escort, clear one of the many Ork shanty towns.

support far from the regiment's main body, their standard mission profile was to find the enemy and report.

Today was not a standard mission. Gerek and his men were acting as the regiment's flank protection. Whilst Shield Force was landing and positioning itself for what would be the decisive battle of the raid, Dagger Force was to protect their vulnerable right flank. The planners knew more Orks were north of the battle zone, and it was likely they would respond quickly to the attack. Without Dagger force blocking the way, any of those Orks could easily outflank Shield Force and attack it from the rear.

Captain Gerek and his men were to set up patrols and a skirmish screen to ambush and delay any Orks that tried to move south. His force had a large area to cover, hence the need for the fast vehicles. Each squadron had been designated its own patrol sector and they would be supported by a detachment of drop Sentinels and a few infantry platoons for extra firepower. Gerek himself would oversee the operation from his command vehicle and remain in reserve with his rapid response force. This was a unit held back, ready to move in quickly and intercept any enemy moves that the patrols couldn't deal with. He also had a flight of three Vendetta gunships on-station overhead for when the fighting got heavy.

• • •

Sergeant Leto's number six squadron formed up into line abreast, the three Tauros Venators about thirty metres apart. The ground ahead was relatively flat but scattered with debris and rusting junk, old tyres, barrels, and unidentifiable scrap. In places crumbling power pylons still stood or lolled over on the verge of collapse. The advancing all-terrain vehicles took it all easily, rumbling steadily over the debris as each driver carefully guided it around the larger junk; behind the driver each turret gunner scanned the horizon ahead for signs of the enemy.

From his gunner's rear seat in the central vehicle, Leto watched. Briefly he thought he had seen movement ahead. Alerted, he settled behind the turret's sights and got ready. Up ahead, maybe four hundred metres away, there was a low pile of scrap where a power pylon had fallen, but it was big enough to hide an ambusher. The Tauros rolled towards it. There it was again, Leto could swear he saw it, movement. Whatever it was, it was small and agile.

'Six squadron hold position,' he ordered and the three Tauros rolled to a halt in line. Through his sight reticule Leto saw his target, a little green creature, maybe a metre tall. It was armed with a side arm of some sort – a Gretchin, and it was unlikely to be alone.

'Enemy contact front. Four hundred yards. All stations, weapons free.' He passed on the instruction and then opened fire. The twin multi-lasers blazed a trail of bright bolts, blasting gaping holes in the metal scrap. The second Tauros joined in, shooting up the scrap pile. The third Tauros laid on its lascannon and fired. The powerful bolt smashed into the scrap, sending debris high into the air. Something in the pile started to burn fiercely. Out-gunned the Gretchin broke

cover and ran. There was a group of about ten of the little creatures, fleeing away as fast as their spindly legs could carry them. Leto adjusted his fire then sent a long burst fizzing through the mob. Two or three fell dead, one was set alight, its ragged clothing burning. The others kept on fleeing through repeated bursts of laser fire, then vanished from sight.

'Ceasefire,' ordered Leto satisfied that the enemy had been neutralised. It was their first enemy contact but it hadn't been much of a fight. It at least proved the Orks were here. The Gretchin had just been scavenging, and were unlucky enough to be in the path of Leto's squadron. The sergeant ordered his patrol to move on, before adjusting the vehicle's communicator and reporting the brief skirmish to Captain Gerek.

• • •

It was difficult to actually see the Orks, although not hard to see where they were. Captain Gerek had been tracking the approaching band for ten minutes by the growing dust cloud and the black smoke trails. Even at maximum magnification his scanner could not make out much, an occasional glimpse of an Ork mounted upon a bike or a four-wheeled buggy bucking wildly as it closed on his position.

Even as he watched, the Orks were approaching fast. He estimated there were maybe twenty or thirty of them at most. Suddenly rounds whizzed overhead. Gerek couldn't believe they had opened fire – it was terrifyingly foolish! The fire was wildly inaccurate, but the Orks seemed just to fire for the hell of it. The captain watched with bewilderment, the enemy's ammunition expenditure must be unsustainable. Even Orks couldn't keep up this pointless shooting for long. Gerek's men had orders to hold their fire until the enemy was closer. There was no point in wasting ammunition at this range. As a company that operated so far from their own lines, Gerek's men were all well practised in strict fire discipline. Despite the lack of return fire, Gerek was not simply waiting to be attacked. He had already called up the Vendetta flight. The three gunships had confirmed the coordinates and were inbound, weapons primed, missile racks full.

• • •

The growl of jet engines grew louder and louder, then arrived in a screaming torrent of noise, three gunships sweeping in low over Gerek's position, drowning out the sound of the approaching Ork engines and the fizz of their wasted bullets flying by. After their initial burst of over-enthusiasm the Orks' fire had slackened. Now, it was the Elysians' turn to respond.

The three Vendettas had locked-on to Gerek's target point, and the captain watched as the wing-mounted missile clusters fell away from the pylons, briefly racing to the ground. The blast and percussion of the fireball explosions rushed over him, the heat stinging his face. Incendiary yellow and orange explosions mushroomed about the Orks, one after another, burning intensely then fading into a shrouding cloud of brown dust. The Vendettas, their payloads empty, steeply climbed away and vanished into the distant sky.

Gerek waited as the dust clouds slowly dissipated. Where once there had been the on-rushing Ork bikers and buggies, there was now just heat-blackened earth. He couldn't see a single Ork left. Their firing had stopped altogether. The Vendettas had scored a direct hit. He ordered one Tauros to scout forwards and investigate the remaining wreckage whilst the rest of that squadron was to cover the move. From his vantage point it looked to Gerek like the Orks had been obliterated by the missile strikes. Such a fierce demonstration of firepower might teach these reckless creatures a measure of caution.

• • •

Caution was not a word Warboss Zhadsnark had ever encountered. It was not in his nature or his blood. Attack! That was Zhadsnark's only order and he always led the way. He had seen the humie's aircraft far to the south, hundreds of them darting about in the sky. Humies that had fallen from the sky, like a gift from Mork. It meant one thing – a fight!

The warboss set about rounding up as many of his boyz as he could, sending bikers racing in all directions to gather them to him. Ognaz's biker mob were closest to the landings, so they should go first and find out what was happening, then come back and let him know. Meanwhile, he would gather every biker boy and buggy, every Trukk and every grot he could. When Ognaz got back he'd know if he needed more boyz or if he had enough to attack immediately.

Patience was another word Zhadsnark had never encountered, and even if he'd known it, he didn't have much. With growing frustration Zhadsnark waited and waited, but Ognaz never came back. He was only supposed to go and take a quick look then come back, but, judging by the distant explosions, the smoking wreckage and the three humie bommers now climbing away high into the sky, Ognaz had gone and got himself blown up! Perhaps, he thought, he should have sent someone else; after all Ognaz didn't have the brains of a squig! Despite Ognaz's messy demise, the prospect of imminent battle gladdened Zhadsnark's heart. Around him more of the boyz were arriving: bikes, buggies, wartrakks and trukks. All came racing to his call with more boyz clinging to every hand-hold and grab rail, shootas and choppas in hand. Judging by the numbers it was time to smash some humies...

Grinning, Zhadsnark climbed aboard his huge tracked trike, 'da Beast'. It was larger than most of the buggies and had a jet engine welded to the back. That engine currently sat silent, slowly dripping oil and fuel into an expanding puddle. He quickly checked that the bike's ammo drums were full, and then hoisted his huge weight onto the starter pedal. The engine roared into life as Zhadsnark twisted the throttle hard, the engine screaming in response, straining against its brakes. For effect he pounded on the throttle, revving and revving, the noise of it got his blood pumping and from behind him the boyz cheered their warboss and answered with their own revving engines. A plume of dirty blue-grey fumes enshrouded them. Zhadsnark stood in his saddle, waved the mob forwards and let go of the brakes.

BURNA BOY

Burna Boyz are those pyromanical greenskins whose desire to burn and destroy grows to consume them entirely. Often they join forces with Mekboyz who they depend on to keep them in promethium fuel and the heavy blow torch/flamethrowers that give them their name. These dedicated arsonists take great delight in setting fire to the enemy (and anybody and anything else they can lay their hands on if no enemy are available), and it takes a strong warboss or the blackmailing powers of the Meks to keep them in line. However, the benefits of these lunatics in any Ork warband just about outweigh the risks of getting anywhere near them. The Burna Boyz can be a powerful asset on the battlefield, whether in small teams or large mobs; their mass incendiary firepower can prove devastating, particularly against enemy infantry, flushing out foes from defended positions and bringing down bestial creatures. Also, with their weapons turned to the searing hot point of a blowtorch flame, they can wield them to hack and slice up enemy armour and vehicles. They serve a vital secondary role in this regard, cutting up battlefield salvage for later use.

1. Burna
The boyz' main armament, the burner, is a heavy duty combination cutting torch and flamethrower, alternating between the two functions with a simple twist of the spigot and altering the fuel pressure. Burnas themselves, like most examples of Orkish engineering, are designed to sustain the worst sort of battering and are very robust. They have to be, as more than one Burna Boy has been reduced to using it as a bludgeon after getting over-enthusiastic with his fuel supply!

2. Blast Mask & Harness
Almost as important to a Burna Boy as his weapon and fuel is the heavy hide war-harness and webbing used to support it and the drop down mask that prevents the Ork blinding himself or burning his own face off in the flame backwash. This harness takes some of the weapon's weight, making it easier for the Ork to wield in a fight and most Burna Boyz also use them as a convenient place to hang a few armour plates and glyphs. The glyphs invariably brag about the various kills or former campaigns the Burna Boy has fought in.

3. Promethium Tank
Vital to the Burna Boy is their ammunition supply. In this case it is a volatile mix of pressurised squig-oil and promethium. Each Mek that manufactures the toxic liquid swears by his own special 'burnin' brew'. Burna Boyz generally do their best to carry as large a tank of fuel as they can, so they can flame as much as possible on the battlefield. Of course, this has its own dangers, as the canister tanks risk premature and spectacularly lethal detonation from stray rounds.

4. Mekboy Tattoo
This tattoo brand indicates that the Ork is part of the infamous Mek Boss Buzzgob's forces on Kastorel-Novem.

5. Toolz
That this particular Burna Boy works in a Mek Boss' warband can clearly be seen by the presence of such tools about his person as a decent sized spanner. It is not uncommon for Burna Boyz to be led in combat by fully-fledged Meks and the Burna Boyz also form a core contingent of 'Dread Mobz' and scavenger crews, slicing up armour and wrecks for the commanding Mek Boss.

6. Freeboota Glyph
The golden Ork skull and crossbones glyph on this burna boy's fuel canister indicates allegiance to the 'Grogscar's Plundras' freebooter warband. This piratical Ork force, based on a trio of Kill Kroozers, was the scourge of Imperial shipping in the Lascar Drift for decades before being drawn into Waaagh! Garaghak. It is unclear if this Burna Boy was a part of this warband before coming to Kastorel-Novem, or is merely using equipment either intended for the freebooters or, more likely, looted from one of its former members!

7. Slugga
This Burna Boy is sensible enough to be carrying a back-up sidearm, this is a slugga, a high-calibre semi-automatic projectile firearm. Suitably loud enough to be an Ork's weapon, and while often crude in design, sluggas have very limited accuracy but huge stopping power thanks to the massive shot they fire and the dangerously large powder charges that propel them. Misfires are common.

This is Burna Boy Tuffruk, part of Mek Gorwaz' mob of Buzzgob's Dredheadz.

Above: Deffkoptas run headlong into the Elysian defensive screen, here held by a battery of automated sentry guns.

Da Beast leapt forwards violently, kicking into the air before smashing back to the ground, the twin tracks biting and throwing out great clods of earth and grit-stones like bullets. The trike accelerated at breakneck speed, bucking wildly from side to side. Massively strong, Zhadsnark controlled 'da Beast' with ease with just one hand. 'Waaagh!' he bellowed to the skies, his war cry drowned out by the thunderous din of the engines just behind him as his boyz raced to keep up. Zhadsnark's biker boyz headed south towards battle and the world would turn black beneath their treads...

• • •

The Orks had not learned caution. The first doomed approach had just been a probe, a testing of strength. Now the main body of the Evil Sunz warband was coming, and their numbers darkened the horizon with dust and fumes. The air thrummed with the cacophony of engine noise, like a black thunderstorm approaching. The Elysians readied their guns; most of the Tauros vehicles were dug-in behind cover with only their turrets protruding. Others waited just behind, ready for the order to rush forwards and meet the Orks in the open, to break up their mobs before they could reach the Elysian lines. To Captain Gerek the expenditure of his air support so early seemed like a folly, but he had not been able to know that there were so many more Orks to follow. The display of aerial firepower had been formidable, but not enough to put the Orks off from another headlong charge.

• • •

Sergeant Leto's Six squadron had been recalled from their patrol sweep. They had seen the bright explosions in the distance and knew there must be action, but it seemed now the enemy were approaching in strength and Captain Gerek had gathered his furthest ranging patrols to support the main line. The Tauros' low hum became a high-pitched electronic whine as they turned around and bounced back the way they had come, swerving and dodging as they went. Since shooting up the Gretchin scavengers, Leto had not seen anything of the enemy, but now he could see their approaching dust trails, hundreds of them. Taking the lead he directed his squadron by the fastest route back, a straight line into the thick of the fighting.

As the Tauros barrelled along suddenly gunfire erupted all around. A shot cracked off the multi-laser turret, just centimetres from Leto's head. The comms-channel screamed 'Enemy right,' and Leto swung the turret hard to face five Orks on bikes that were closing in then letting fly with their big cannons. The Ork rounds zinged and popped as they flew close by. Leto returned fire with a furious fusillade of laser bolts. The Tauros Venator under him was travelling flat-out over rough ground and his shots flew wild. Leto's second vehicle was taking the brunt of the attack, two of its rear tyres had been shredded and it wasn't returning fire. Leto suspected the gunner had been hit. The third vehicle was further behind still, swerving through the wreckage as the warbikers swooped ever closer.

The closest Ork biker hurled a crude grenade, some form of explosive warhead on a short stick. Leto could see it as it arced through the air, bounced twice then exploded in a dirty grey puff of smoke. The force buffeted his Tauros but did no more. He tried to lay his sights on the enemy grenade thrower, but both vehicles were

moving too fast and his burst of fire again missed. Dodging, the Ork biker swerved away. 'Hard right,' Leto yelled into the comm, and his driver responded, swinging the buggy into a wild skidding right turn, straight into the path of the Orks. From nowhere an Ork rocket skipped across the side panel of the Tauros with a shriek of metal on metal. Leto expected the warhead to detonate and turn his buggy into a fireball, but it didn't, it just whizzed past, flying off to land behind him, lost in the junk – a dud.

His driver aimed directly at an on-coming Ork, trying to ram him. The biker was agile and swerved the buggy around at the last second, but at this speed the rider had lost control and Leto saw him smash head-first into a scrap pile and be ejected over his handlebars. The bike lay smoking, its wheels spinning uselessly.

As fast as they had struck, the warbikers were gone. Leto scanned a full three-sixty in his turret but could see no more targets. His second vehicle had come to a halt further back, its driver and gunner both riddled with bullet holes. The cab was daubed in blood. The third of six-squadron's vehicles arrived, reporting one enemy destroyed by its lascannon. He could see the combat damage on the outside of the Tauros, the dents and scrapes of bullet impacts were all superficial. 'Cover me,' he ordered its gunner, before releasing himself from his harness and climbing down from his own turret. He ran back to check the wreckage and confirm the crew of the wrecked vehicle were indeed dead. They were. Not willing to leave the Tauros as plunder for the Orks, Leto fetched a melta-charge from his own stowage, set the fuse and dropped it into the stricken Tauros. As the two remaining vehicles of Six-squadron moved out again, the charge detonated in a white hot shower of sparks, leaving the Tauros a burned, twisted hulk.

• • •

At Captain Gerek's main line the Orks were attacking in force. Bikes and buggies swirled around in a thickening gloom of dust and choking fumes. The battlefield was littered with wreckage but his own lines had held, just. He'd lost a lot of men and equipment in the fight. Already nineteen Tauros had been destroyed. The Orks had paid in blood too, but heavy losses just didn't seem to worry them Orks. For now there was a lull in the shooting. The Orks had sped away, no doubt to regroup or to find somewhere else to attack. Gerek's own Tauros was tracking them, using data relayed from ground scanners he had positioned on first landing. He re-directed three squadrons to shadow the Orks, whilst he pulled the others together and processed damage reports.

The fighting here had been heavier than expected. The Ork bikers had arrived swiftly, but Dagger force had done its job. If his squadrons hadn't intercepted these bikers, then by now they would have been tearing into the rear of Shield force's positions in the south. Still, Gerek was concerned. His was a light scouting force, designed for hit-and-run actions. Instead they had been slugging it out with the Orks and the attrition was starting to tell. His force wouldn't stand up to much more of this rough treatment. In order to conserve it he decided to pull back. He would withdraw by bounds. One squadron covering the other as the all-terrain vehicles and Sentinels retreated, to give them breathing room and open ground between him and the enemy. It was open ground into which he could request more air support. From his comms reports Shield Force were now engaging in a large fight with more Orks, so he assumed Sword force had done its job, although he had received no official confirmation of that from the colonel. Despite his losses, the mission seemed be progressing as planned.

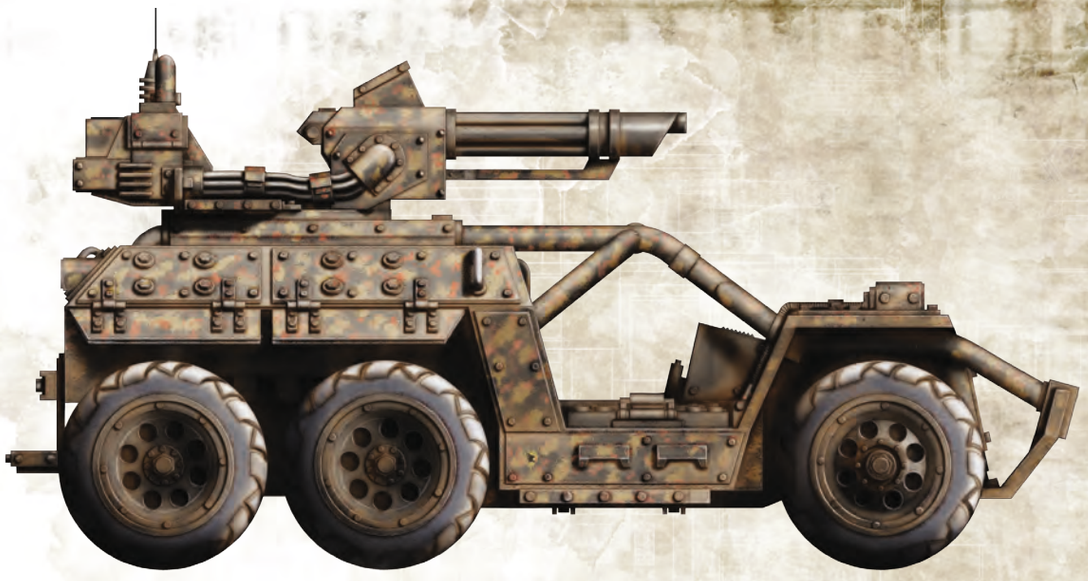
• • •

Zhadsnark heaved a massive kick into 'da Beast', which sat mutely, jet engine still gently steaming; the trike's front forks had been sheared off by a laser blast. Da Beast's front wheel was lying somewhere close by and Zhadsnark was furious. Not only was his prized trike damaged but he'd only just reached the battle when he'd been ejected from his roaring stead by the catastrophic damage. The boyz had raced on without him and most of the battle had passed him by. He walked back to investigate his only victim, a skinny walker machine that da Rippa, the huge buzz-blade Zhadsnark wielded in battle, had sliced its leg off. The vehicle had toppled over, which had made Zhadsnark laugh, only for his manic laughter to be cut short as his bike suddenly detached from its front wheel and he became airborne as the vehicle flipped over. His pride might be hurt but not much else was. No Ork warboss liked the indignity of finding himself sprawling headfirst in the dirt. Zhadsnark pulled out his slugga pistol and emptied the clip into the wreckage of the humie walker in frustration. It didn't help. Then he stomped off to find a Mek. He wanted that trike running again, now!

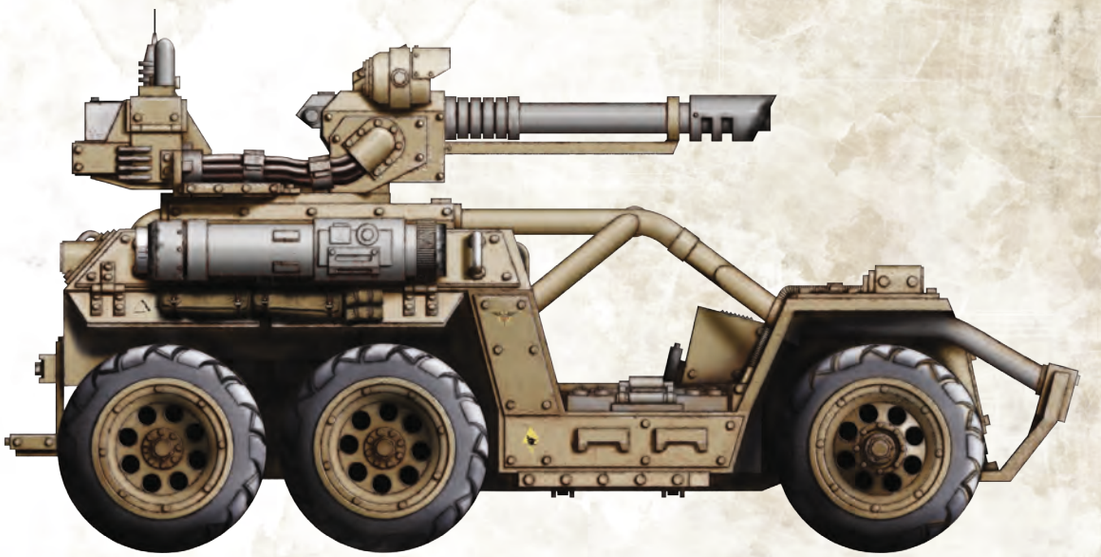
DAGGER FORCE IN RETREAT

Having halted the Evil Sunz biker warband, Dagger force had completed its primary mission. By their actions Captain Gerek's men had prevent the Orks from surrounding Shield force. When the battle at Shield force's drop zone turned against the Elysians, Dagger force received new orders to break contact with the Orks and rendezvous with Shield force at a new location. Captain Gerek ordered all units to disengage and escape from the Orks, then to meet up at the rendezvous point for a last stand and hopefully an evacuation. Each squad and squadron had to make its own way. The Ork bikers gleefully gave pursuit, and there was a running fight as Dagger force withdrew in a pell-mell chase through the scrap and wreckage.

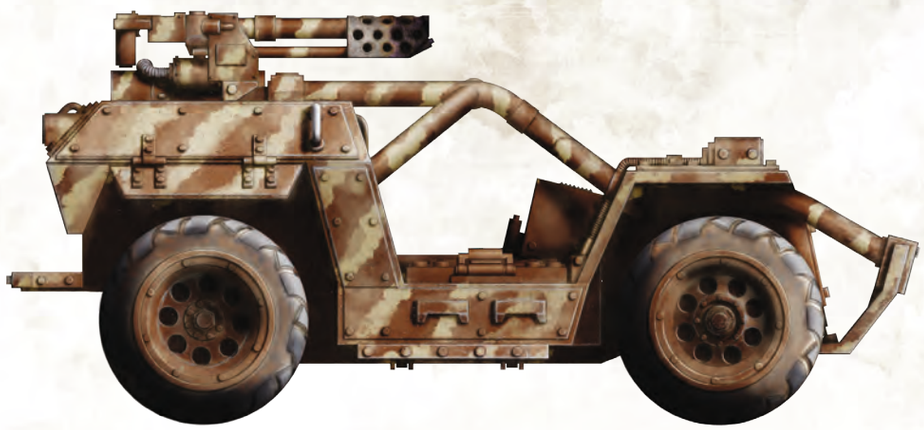
Captain Gerek's Tauros were the first to reach the rendezvous point. It was the remains of an old refinery and they quickly set up a new defensive perimeter. As darkness fell, so the battle-weary stragglers from Shield force began to arrive, squad-by-squad, platoon-by-platoon. Upon arrival each squad was given a new position to hold and by dawn's first light most of the survivors were in place, awaiting the inevitable Ork dawn assault.



Tauros Venator armed with multi-lasers. 181st Drop Regiment A company – 3 Squadron.



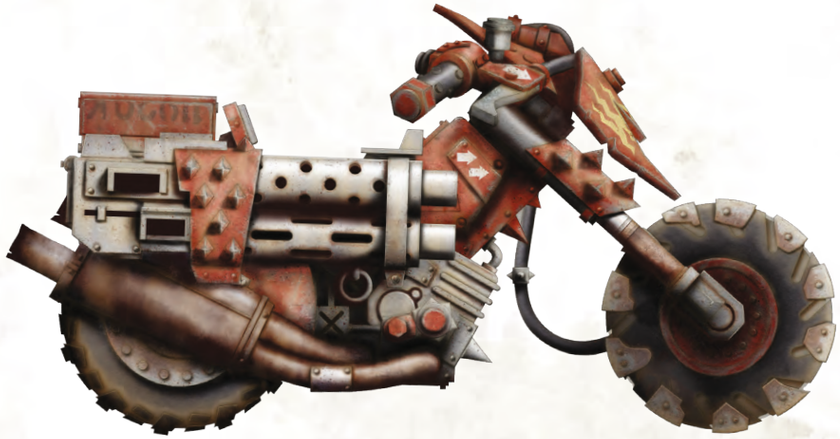
Tauros Venator armed with lascannons and hunter-killer missiles. 181st Drop Regiment A company – 5 Squadron. There seems to have been little standardisation of camouflage schemes for this mission.

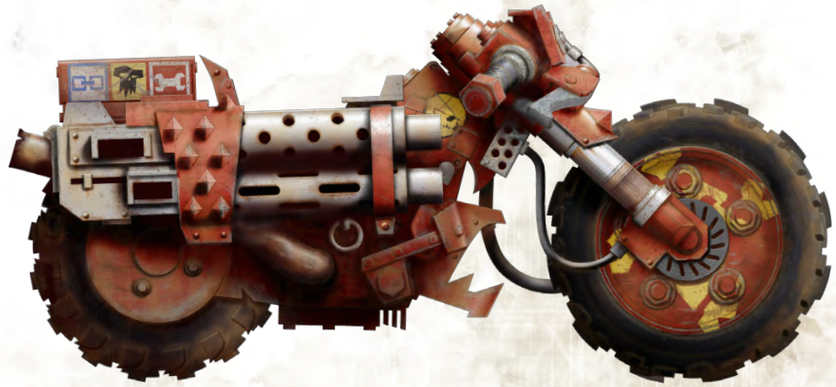


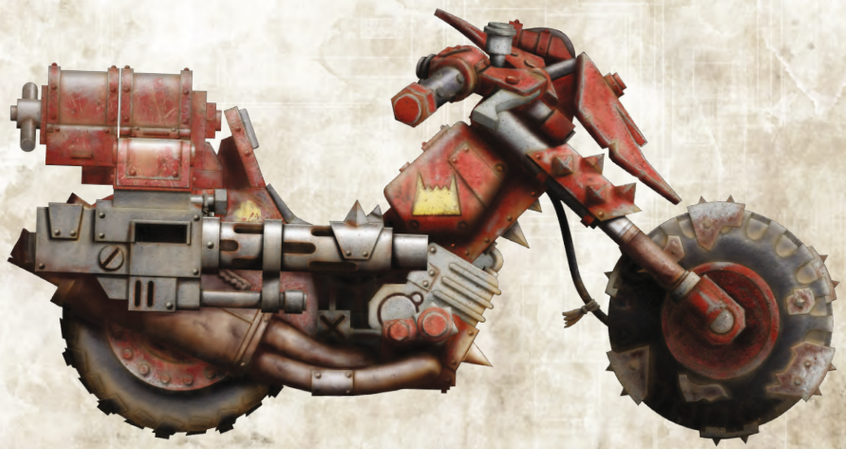
Tauros armed with heavy flamer. 181st Drop Regiment A company – 7 Squadron. This vehicle was destroyed during the battle.

Vulture Gunship, part of the air support allocation of Dagger Force.

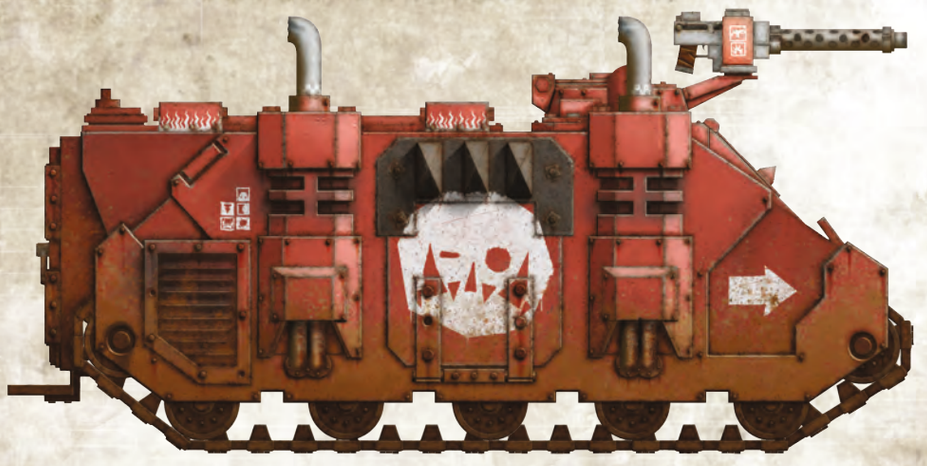
Valkyrie Sky Talon loaded with a Tauros Venator.







Evil Sunz Warbikes. Differences in appearance are superficial only, with each Ork personalizing his mount. Each carries multiple automatic weapons (ref: Dakkaguns).



Looted Rhino of the Evil Sunz clan. This vehicle still retains its original tactical squad marking, although it seems unlikely that the Orks know its significance.

Trukk of the Evil Sunz clan. The clan's modus-operandi is for high speed attacks and mobile warfare, so transport capacity is always prioritized.

Gun Wagon of the Evil Sunz clan. No heavy weapon is mounted to allow for extra transport capacity.
Note: All the above vehicles are indistinguishable from those from the Kult of Speed.

CHAPTER FOUR – DROP ZONE T

SHIELD FORCE'S BATTLE

Drop-trooper Yano splashed through a large puddle of oily slime that stained his fatigue trousers black, before sliding into position behind a barricade. The cover had been hastily built of tyres, scrap metal and the drop-canister in which the heavy bolter team's weapon had landed. It wasn't a fortress wall by any means, but it provided Yano and his loader a good measure of protection. He hefted the bulk of his heavy bolter onto the top of the barricade, which creaked under the weapon's weight, then lined up the sights. Com-chatter reports were that the Orks were closing in. Yano was expecting contact at any moment. His loader, Trooper Aginis, threaded the ammunition belt into the weapon and piled several more ammunition boxes close by. Yano hauled the heavy bolter to his shoulder and took aim. Bracing himself for the weapon's violent recoil, he scanned the skyline for the first sign of the enemy.

Shield force was now in position. The drop had gone well and Yano and the rest of his squad had gathered the drop-canisters with their weapons and the extra ammunition inside before moving into their designated position. As yet they hadn't seen any Orks, but the distant rumble of explosions and roar of jet engines told them all that the battle had started, if not for Shield force, then at least for the main assault by Sword force. Trooper Yano's job was to hold and reinforce their position, hence the improvised barricade, and wait for the Orks to come. Sword force would be driving them onto Yano's waiting gun.

• • •

Captain Thanstadt moved swiftly from one position to the next, clambering through the rumble and over the detritus and wreckage. He had left his command squad behind; he moved faster on his own, lightly equipped with just his lasgun across his back. He sought out each platoon commander in turn, checked his position and defences and made sure each squad was well supplied with ammunition and grenades for the coming fight. Since first landing his men had been preparing their defences and reinforcing. He had expected the Orks to react quickly, but so far there had been no contacts reported. The forward Sentinel squadrons had probed westwards, but as yet it seemed the Orks had been drawn to the sounds of the fighting to the south and this place, this grimy oil-stained junkyard come shanty town, seemed deserted. All the more time to prepare for the battle, thought Thanstadt. More Valkyries were already inbound carrying hundreds of extra canisters of supplies. His only concern was his air support. The Vulture gunship squadrons were on-station, ready to strike when the Orks attacked, but their fuel capacity would not allow them to linger close by forever. If the Orks didn't come soon then they would be forced to return to base, leaving Thanstadt without his heaviest firepower.

The captain was a veteran of many such battles. He trusted that come the fighting the air support wouldn't let him down. Shield force was relying upon it, and so the mission was relying on it. When the fighting got heavy and if the Orks attacked with heavy armour, then it was his best chance of holding this ground.

• • •

Skalk ordered his boyz to fetch Bonemuncha; the battle had already started and he wasn't about to let all the new loot fall into Grahkrag' and Buzzgob's dirty claws. The news had reached him when one of his mobs had skidded to a halt in their Trukk and excitedly announced that humies were attacking Buzzgob's Gargant. Skalk couldn't care less about the Mek Boss's Gargant, except that Buzzgob paid well for the parts he needed, but Skalk wasn't about to fight to save it. If the machine got destroyed then they would only make another, and that would require even more parts.

There was no rush to battle. Skalk didn't want to get his boyz chewed up in the thick of the fighting, he could leave that to Buzzgob's Dreds and Grahkrag's Goffs – they would no doubt be spoiling for a big scrap. He just wanted to be in at the end, to make sure his boyz were present when the loot was up for grabs. There would be the usual horse-trading between the bosses and nobz over the best bitz, but if he could keep them all busy arguing over that, his boyz could be plundering the other stuff to their hearts content. By the time the other bosses realised, half the loot would already have been claimed and spirited away on his own Trukks. Possession was, after all, all the law and the others could fight him for the gubbinz if they felt like it. But, he guessed, after a long fight with the humies, nobody would be willing to take on Mekslag-Ikks' scrap king and all his boyz.

Feeling satisfied that his plan was suitably cunning and that his loot hoard was about to get a whole lot bigger, Skalk sent his runners to gather his boyz to him. He wanted every grot and squig they could find. Meanwhile he would send out a few boyz and grotz to check up on where the humies were before marching into the fight.

• • •

'Enemy, 200 metres, ten o'clock,' blurted Loader Aginis into Yano's helmet communicator. Automatically, Yano swung the heavy bolter left, lined up on the target and pulled the trigger. The bolter spat fiercely, each miniature missile-round igniting as it left the barrel in a whoosh of fire and air, speeding it towards the target. The first rounds flew high and Yano fought the weapon's ferocious recoil to bring the barrel down onto the target. Through his sight the target was a big green Ork, maybe two metres tall, with long muscled arms, in which it clutched a massive two-handed axe. It was ugly, all fangs and scar-tissue, then it was gone. A second burst of bolter rounds impacted in a rapid succession of small, bright explosions. The big Ork vanished from sight, either it ducked or had disintegrated amongst the bolter shells, Yano couldn't tell. He waited for more movement. There was none,

but he let fly a third burst just for good measure.

The comms-reports crackled with more enemy contacts; the sound of battle was rising about him. The pop-pop of lasgun fire, the jarring roar, swoosh, bang of heavy bolters, the crump of frag grenades, the first skirmishes of a long day's fighting to come.

• • •

Amidst the reverberation of guns, rockets and mortars a new sound distinguished itself above Captain Thanstadt's head – a high screaming howl as a jet engine blasted low overhead followed by a sudden, immense, earth-quaking series of explosions that sent Thanstadt staggering. Then a second almighty concussion wave swept over him, forcing him to the ground. Bombs impacting, and very close, too close for his liking. He pulled a yellow smoke grenade from his pouch and armed it before rolling it forwards of his position just a few yards away. It fizzed as thick, ochre, raw-smelling smoke billowed out.

The smoke would mark his position for the air support, a precaution against another attack run aimed too close for comfort. More yellow smoke bombs were bursting into clouds around him as squad sergeants followed his example.

Through the rapidly thickening yellow haze Thanstadt surveyed the skies for the next in-bound Vulture. A large black shape suddenly plunged at him, growing huge in size and suddenly filling the sky. The captain had no time to think, he had assumed all the aircraft in the air over this battle would be his own, but this was no Valkyrie or Vulture or even a Thunderbolt. The aircraft careened wildly, leaving a black smoke trail behind it, and at first Thanstadt thought it had been hit and was going to crash right onto them until, at the last second, the aircraft bucked upwards, its shark-like nose rising, and something detached itself from the aircraft's wings. 'Enemy aircraft!' he yelled, diving for cover, but even before he could get the words out the Ork fighter-bommer had flashed over them, a streak of rusty red.

A funnel of dense smoke and yellow flame rushed up out of the ground to meet Thanstadt, earth mushrooming high into the sky to rain back down over them in a cascade of filth, smoke and jagged iron, spilling in all directions, like the blast of an invisible rocket-jet howling about him, smashing him back to the ground again. A piece of shrapnel wedged into his breastplate; another, the size of man's hand, whistled just over his shoulder, less than a metre from completely decapitating him. Punch-drunk from the bone-jarring blast, Thanstadt crawled, then staggered to his feet. The yellow smoke hadn't saved them from friendly fire, it had just attracted the Ork pilot to them. A wave of concussion-induced nausea washed over him, making the captain wretch. A drop trooper rushed to his side to support him, assuming he was injured. Miraculously the captain was not seriously harmed. The disorientation would soon pass, but he ordered that yellow smoke should not be deployed. It just told the Orks where they were.

• • •

At last Skalk was ready. Seated high on his swaying throne on top of Bonemuncha, he could clearly see the columns of smoke in the distance where Buzzgob was fighting and the northern horizon was also smudged with grey; there was something going on up there too.

Below: Unleash the Beast! Death Skulls accompany their Squiggoth towards the Elysian front line.

When his scoutin' boyz returned they'd been shot up. They had run smack into a big band of humies to the east, all dug in, just waitin'. It occurred to Skalk that if Buzzgob was fighting in the south, then these humies weren't actually fighting anybody. They were just waiting, for what Skalk didn't really know or care, but it seemed to Skalk that it might not be a good idea to just ignore them. These lurking humies were up to sumfink, he felt it in his bones. He knew sneakin' gitz when he saw them. He thought hard, the strain etched on his blue face. No, he couldn't risk ignoring them. Instead, he would attack. This would be Skalk's own battlefield. He barked an order to his closest nobz to get da boyz movin' east and barked for the swaying squiggoth to veer left.

• • •

From behind his barricade Trooper Yano continue to scan his target-sector. The first few Orks hadn't put up much of a fight, they seemed to pull back rather than face the guns, which was uncharacteristic of Orks. Still, the first Orks had no doubt gone to fetch help and would soon be back for more.

As he waited, out of nowhere a storm broke about Yano. Thunder rolled from the sky as steel rained down. Every Ork must have opened fire. Shells whined and cracked, lightning flashed as explosions drummed across the front line, hundreds at once as the Ork barrage began. Smoke cumulus rolled across the battlefield, miniature tornadoes burst suddenly, erupting left, right and centre. Yano and his loader were showered in dirt, once, twice, then a third time as the air above them fizzed with buzzing shrapnel. Cloying cordite fumes lay thick all about as the gunner and loader both hugged the ground. Yano's heavy bolter was tossed from its perch on top of the barricade, clattering to the ground nearby.

As suddenly as it had started the barrage subsided, the intensity of the explosions slackening. A new noise could be heard. After the deafening cacophony of the bombardment there was a roar, a cheer or a battle-cry, rolling towards them, hundreds or thousands of feral voices raised as one. 'Waaagh!' came the cry, dim at first, but growing louder. 'Waaagh!' A lot of Orks were coming.

'Enemy infantry approaching. All stations engage at will.' The order crackled through Yano's headset from his command squad.

Above: 'Eavy metal, Ork Kill-tanks represented a major threat to the lightly armed drop troops.

Trooper Yano crawled after his weapon, dragged it back into cover and began quickly checking it for damage. Beside him Trooper Aginis poked his head above the barricade and levelled his lasgun, covering Yano as he worked furiously, clearing dirt from the firing mechanism. To the right another heavy bolter opened fire, hammering out a stream of shells. Mechanism cleared, Yano heaved his heavy bolter back into place and was suddenly confronted by a tidal wave of green aliens. Before him the ground was packed with Orks, racing towards them, all waving axes, swords and guns. Many were covered in blue warpaint and tattoos. More and more Orks, hundreds of them, came charging towards the barricades. Firing without conscious effort, momentarily the heavy bolter's muzzle flash obscured Yano's view. The tiny blips of tracer chased each other into the approaching horde. Instantly a succession of mini-explosions blossomed amidst the Orks. More guns were firing from the left and right. Mortar rounds began to land, falling steeply onto the Orks, who advanced in rushes. Each time more aliens fell as the explosions and heavy bolter fire swept the ground.

Yano's own heavy bolter thudded away, its barrel beginning to glow hot. Trooper Aginis slammed home belt after belt of ammunition, each time slapping Yano's leg to alert him that the task was complete. There were a dozen lines of tracer criss-crossing this sector, each scything through the Ork ranks. Now the Ork charge had become a mass of stumbling, crawling, falling green bodies amidst a maelstrom. Raked by explosions the Orks hesitated and eventually they ran, falling back before the merciless onslaught of bolts, laser blasts and shells. Yanos fired after them as the Orks disappeared from view, back where they came from until he could see no more targets. The metal of his weapon's barrel had been stained purple by the intense heat bloom, the cooling metal gave a tortured shriek as it shrank back into shape. Next to Yanos, Aginis had dropped down behind the barricade and was furiously counting ammunition. Over half their supplies had been used up.

• • •

While the Orks' mob-charge disintegrated, their barrage continued, scattering plumes of earth, rubble, metal and flame across the junkyard. In places this started small fires which added to the thickening toxic atmosphere, full of harsh smoke and the stench of burning flesh... the smog of battle.

From the front line Captain Thanstadt reviewed the damage reports. The first serious Ork attack had been repulsed by the Elysians' potent firepower, but the aliens would be back for more. Already he could hear the throbbing engines of armoured vehicles approaching. The first infantry wave had been no more than a screen, next would come the full fury of the Orks. He passed on the order for all units to hold their positions. This fight was just starting.

• • •

His first attack had been repulsed. The humies had some impressive dakka-power and a lot of Skalk's boyz had just been blasted to bitz, but there was plenty more where they came from. Skalk wasn't worried, the old warboss would attack again, and this time would bring up his big gunz and Battle Wagons, he'd let the humies have it with everything he'd got. He would lead the attack himself from Bonemuncha. It was time to find out if this squiggoth was actually worth all the teef and good scrap it had cost him.

• • •

Captain Thanstadt saw the huge beast, a great lizard-like creature, at least three storeys high, two curling tusks twice the size of a man protruding before its flattened, pug-nosed face, underneath which glistened rows of sharp fangs the size of swords. Each of its four footfalls made the ground tremor as the beast bellowed in anger. Laser blasts raining off its horny hide; itself protected by swinging plates of metal armour crudely cut and attached via chains. The squiggoth rampaged forwards, head lowered to butt as Orks, men and machines were barged in all directions. Before it most of the Elysians fled, falling back to find safety, rather than be trampled beneath its elephantine feet. He saw one brave drop-trooper pause to hurl a krak grenade at the beast, seconds before being tossed high by a flick of the creature's tusk, his torso severed from his legs as he landed in a wet spray of gore.

On the creature's back was a howdah, again crudely cut from scrap metal. In it rode a swaying, cheering, whooping gaggle of blue-painted Orks, each firing frantically, bullets spitting in all directions as the squiggoth left an indiscriminate trail of destruction in its wake.

Kneeling, Thanstadt levelled his lasgun and took careful aim. He engaged the weapon's auxiliary grenade launcher, a narrow tube beneath the lasgun's barrel. He lined up his sights on the creature's left eye, and fired. In a puff of cordite the krak grenade winged its way straight into the creature's head and detonated on impact. The powerful shaped charge was designed to penetrate tank armour, but it could not pierce the creature's thick boned skull. The explosion left a bloody scar streaked across its face and the creature staggered, bellowing in pain now. As it swayed violently a few of the Orks on top were pitched sideways out of the howdah, falling like flailing rag dolls to crumble on the ground. Despite its wounds the squiggoth did not stop, it just charged on like a lumbering, unstoppable express train. Behind it more of the beasts followed.

• • •

Trooper Yano saw the beast coming. 'Last belt,' advised Aginis as he pushed the ammunition home, slapping the gunner's leg again. 'Ready.'

Trooper Yano was almost out of ammunition. He took aim and stitched a short burst directly into the creature, then again and again. It loomed massive above him – he couldn't miss. Then, momentarily blinded by an explosion against its skull, the creature lurched towards him. Yano, abandoning his heavy bolter, dived clear as its great tusks rammed the barricade, scattering it in all directions. Loader Aginis rolled away, only for the beast's great foreleg to kick over the remaining barricades and stamp down hard. It was a mercy that Yano could not hear Aginis' death-scream over the din of battle around him, but as the squiggoth marched on there was nothing left of his loader except a red smear on the ground.

Unarmed, with his firing position overrun, Trooper Yanos headed for the rear. It wouldn't be long before this place was swarming with more Orks and to continue the fight, he needed to find a weapon.

• • •

The centre of his line had broken. The squiggoth's reckless charge, led by the giant creature, had punctured clean through and more Ork vehicles and mobs were now pouring after it. Thanstadt gathered what stragglers he could about him, determined to make a fight of it, even as he gave orders for his left and right flank companies to fall back and regroup, ready to make a second stand. His men had fought hard and bravely, as the Emperor expects, but the Orks had just been too many and too well equipped with heavy weapons and armoured vehicles. They had killed hundreds, maybe thousands, of the aliens, but it had not been enough. The tide of this battle had turned against him, Thanstadt understood that much. He must salvage what he could and regroup for a fresh stand.

• • •

Darkness was approaching as the surviving senior officers of Shield force

gathered in the remains of a burnt-out small shack for an orders group. Captain Thanstadt, smoke blackened and sallow-eyed from battle fatigue, laid out the situation in blunt terms. B Company had been badly mauled by repeated Ork onslaughts and was now in full retreat towards the disused refinery site he had chosen as the rally point. C Company to the south had borne the brunt of repeated Dreadnought attacks, but had held their ground well until the arrival of an Ork Stompa. Air support had inflicted serious damage but had not destroyed the war machine and that company had also been forced to withdraw. Again the losses in men and equipment had been great. To the north, most of D company was still in good fighting order. They had been in combat, but here the Orks had been less numerous and less heavily equipped. However, D Company could not be expected to hold their positions now the other companies were in retreat and so were also forced to fall back too. They would be providing the rearguard platoons that would hopefully delay the enemy's pursuit.

The news from Sword force was bad. Their assault had failed to break through to the Gargant and been overwhelmed. Scattered survivors were now being picked up, as and when Colonel Taihon could organise an airlift for them. Captain Xhyst had been critically wounded in the fighting.

The news from the north was better. Captain Gerek's Dagger force had done its job well and screened their northern flank. Thank the Emperor for that, because without them they would all be surrounded by Orks right now. The survivors of Dagger force had raced to secure the rendezvous point and were holding it now. Everybody else should make their way to them tonight. There would be no stopping for rest. The more men that could be gathered, the better their chance of survival tomorrow.

Each officer gave him a rough head count, and the numbers didn't look encouraging. Over a thousand men had landed in Shield force; after today Thanstadt thought he had about four hundred left. How many he could get away would depend on how tomorrow went. First they had to regroup and fight off the inevitable Ork attacks. If they could see the Orks off then there was still a chance they might all live to fight again another day.

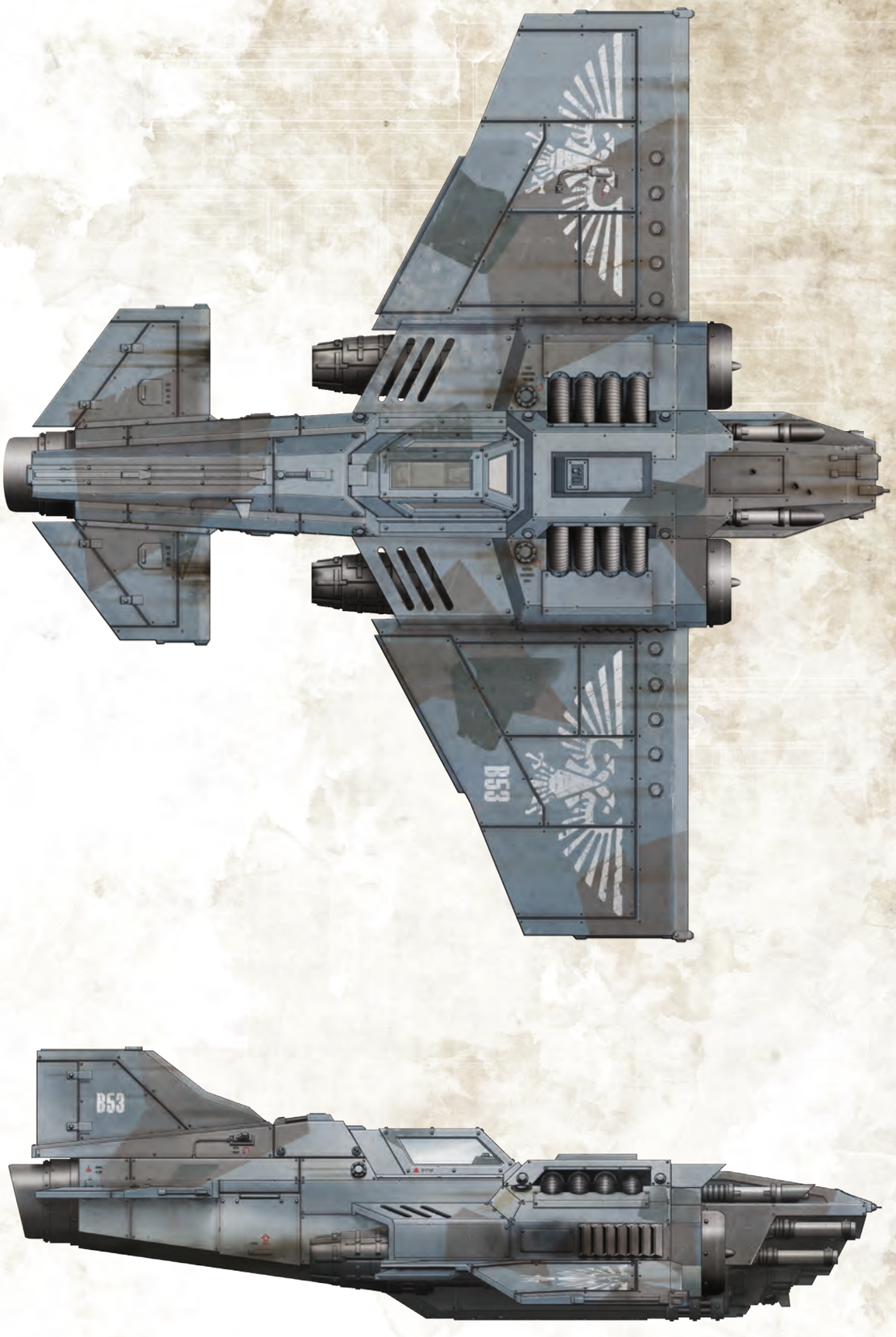
Of the Space Marines Thanstadt knew very little. He did know that Scout units were still operating in the area, but his authority did not allow him to intervene in their mission. The colonel had assured him that the Raven Guard had not abandoned the Elysians or the mission and they would be available for the evacuation mission that was being hastily organised for tomorrow. Colonel Taihon was preparing to commit the regiment's reserve company in a fresh drop at first light. He would lead that reserve company himself.

He reassured his officers that although they were retreating they were still in good shape. They still had enough men and air support to beat the aliens. The orders group complete, Thanstadt wished the Emperor's protection on them all and bid them return to their companies and platoons. He would see them all at dawn for their second stand.

Below: Skalk renews his assault upon Shield Force with all the boyz and wagons he can muster.

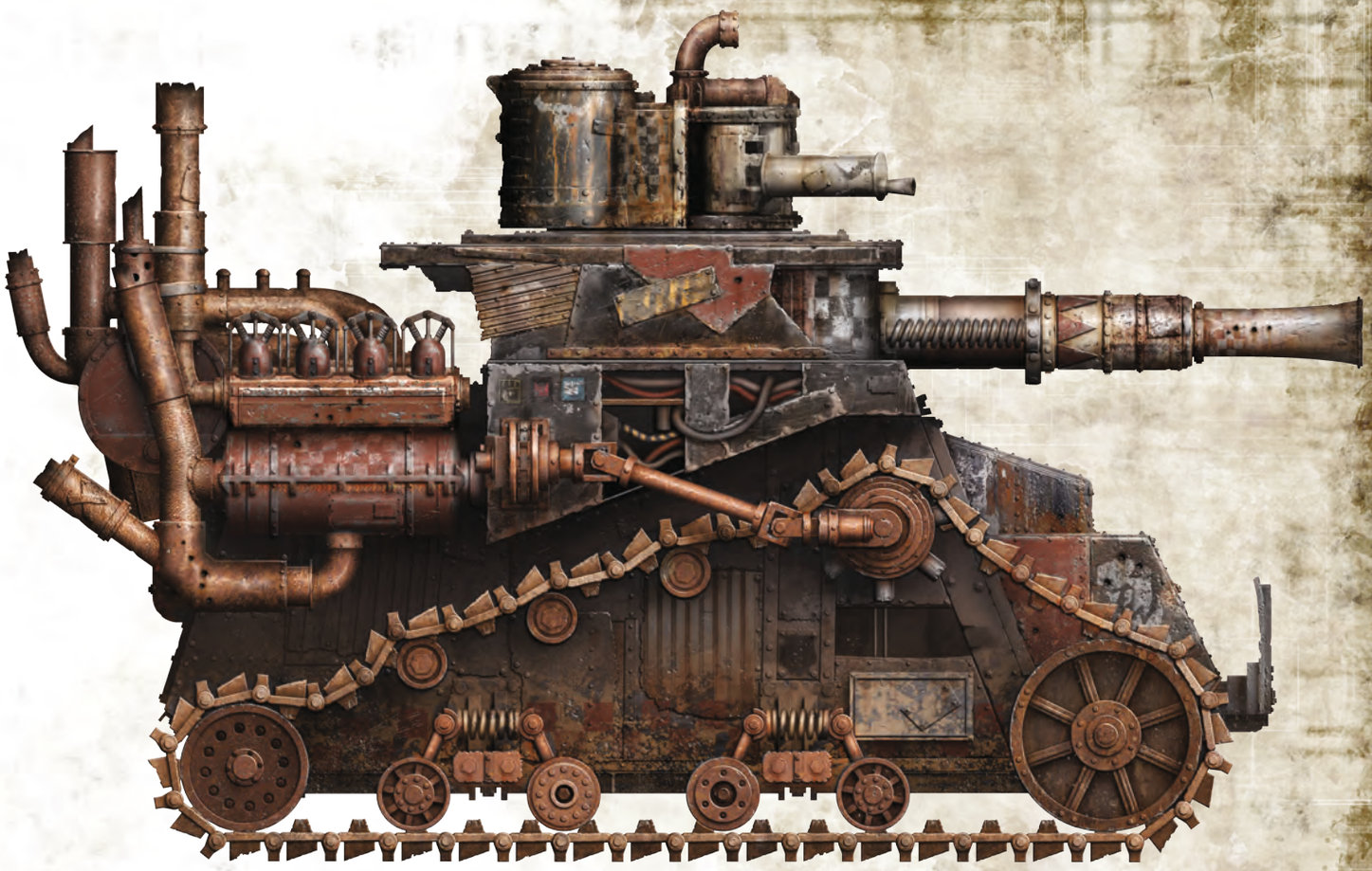
Vulture gunship. This aircraft's unusual camouflage for low level operations has been improvised for this mission.

Valkyrie Sky Talon, destroyed during Shield Force landings.

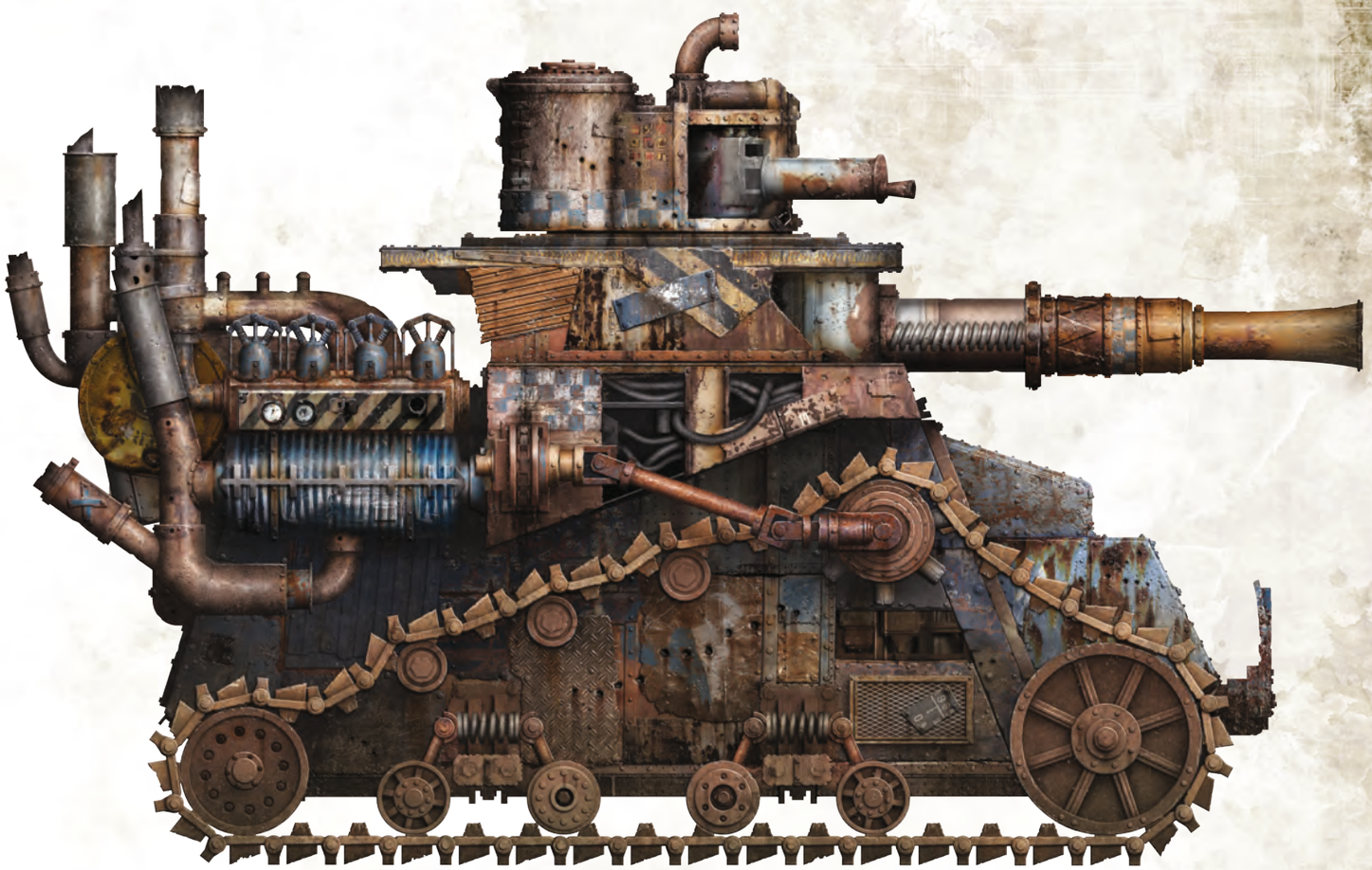


Thunderbolt heavy fighter of 1922nd Imperial Navy Fighter Wing. The wing's two Interceptor squadrons and single Bomber squadron were active in the skies above the battlefields throughout the raid. This aircraft was piloted by Flight Sergeant Seric.

Gargantuan Squiggoth, 'Bonemuncha'. This is the personal steed of Death Skulls Warboss Skalk Bluetoof and the only squiggoth of such size encountered on Kastorel-Novem.



Kill Krusha Heavy Tank. A heavy vehicle favoured by the Goff clan, Warboss Grahkrag deployed at least three.



Kill Krusha Heavy Tank. This mobile scrap pile was destroyed during fighting at Drop Zone T.

CHAPTER FIVE
WINGS OF THE RAVEN

STRIKE FORCE KORVYDAE'S ASSAULT

'Eons may pass and our bones will long have turned to dust, but by our actions and by our example, humanity shall endure.'
Shadow Captain Korvydae

The reverberations of atmospheric re-entry shook the drop-pod fiercely as it sped towards the planet. Inside, Chaplain Eitath and his men could not see their target looming ever larger below them. They were locked into their restraining harnesses, each of the ten Space Marines stood bolt upright to attention, unable to move despite their powered armour. The drop-pod's descent from the orbiting strike cruiser to the landing zone below would take just a few minutes. A few minutes of bone shaking g-forces that would have crushed any lesser man to death. But these were no mere men. Each was a Space Marine of the Raven Guard Chapter, a genetically adapted super-warrior, made for battle, loyal only to their Emperor and merciless to His enemies.

Chaplain Eitath felt the drop-pod jar violently as it adjusted its descent trajectory. Automated telemetry data was scrolling across his helmet visor, reading directly from the pod's onboard logis-engine. The machine's spirit was directing them into battle, but it was not the machine's spirit that was Eitath's concern, it was his battle-brothers'. He opened his helmet-comms channel and repeated the first stanza of the Litany of Battle, to embolden their fighting-hearts before disembarking and bringing the bloody retribution of the Emperor's wrath to the foul xenos that had tainted this world and many others like it across the Forsarr sector.

'As our bodies are armoured within adamantium, our souls are protected with loyalty. As our bolters are charged with death for the Emperor's enemies, our thoughts are charged with vengeance. As our ranks advance, so does our devotion, for are we not Space Marines? Are we not the chosen of the Emperor, his loyal servants unto death?'

The Chaplain's command was a small strike force of five drop pods carried just thirty battle-brothers of the Raven Guard, but each was a match for many times their number. Even this small force would be enough to complete their mission, to destroy the Orks' main fuel stockpiles. Their orbital assault and just these few Space Marines could inflict a crippling blow on the Orks.

• • •

Brother Uirroth crawled slowly forwards, under the abandoned remains of a destroyed vehicle. It might once have been a Chimera armoured troop carrier, but now most of the vehicle had been looted, leaving just the rust encased metal bones of the chassis. The Scout's cameoline cloak adjusted to his cover's colouring and its camouflage changed accordingly. Hidden by the cloak's chameleon-like qualities, the Scout was all but invisible as he lay still, watching.

He was tracking Orks. No more than a hundred metres away large mobs of the rowdy green aliens were trampling northwards, each carrying large weapons and draped in a lot of ammunition. Several smaller Gretchin mobs were trailing behind struggling with large ammunition crates. Beyond the green skinned mob was a group of five Dreadnoughts, ramshackle walkers that swayed and staggered, arms waving wildly. To the Scout they seemed on the brink of pitching over, but always seemed to right themselves. Brother Uirroth had been silently watching for several hours; many Orks had been travelling along this worn route heading northwards. The fighting that had been raging to the south had died down. For the first time in hours the air wasn't being buffeted by explosions or the shriek of jet engines and missiles. There was still the occasional distant burst of heavy bolter fire or the crump of a mortar shell landing, but it seemed that the battle was all but done. The Orks were now redeploying, heading northwards in considerable numbers towards drop zone T, where more of the Elysian drop troops were in place to meet them.

Brother Uirroth decided he had seen enough. He should rendezvous with the rest of his squad and report in to Captain Korvydae. It was obvious that the Elysians at drop zone X had been defeated. The assault plan was failing. Now those Orks that had been engaged in the south were moving north to join the battle at drop zone T. Which meant that the Elysian force there was likely to be overwhelmed as well.

The Scout slowly slid backwards, his attention never straying from the Orks ahead of him as the unruly aliens marched out of sight, still arguing amongst themselves. During his vigil he had counted over three hundred alien warriors, at least twenty Dreadnought-sized walkers, some large, some small and one far larger walker, a Stomper. That was just in his designated observation area. The rest of his scattered Scout squad would have seen more. The Orks were on the warpath in strength.

Once out of sight Brother Uirroth rose, slung his sniper rifle over his shoulder and scurried quickly away. He summoned his transport. It was time to regroup. Crouching in cover he waited until, skimming quietly and low over the ground came the Land Speeder. It hovered briefly as he leapt up, gripping the grab-rail tight as the speeder accelerated away,

Below: Enemy forces approaching. An augur-scan threat assessment relay locates the main Ork force.

still keeping close to the ground to avoid being spotted. The Land Speeder Storm was specially adapted for scouting missions. One-by-one it collected the rest of Uirroth's squad from their observation posts. Their reports confirmed his own. The Scouts withdrew to safety and flashed their report back to Captain Korvydae's command vehicle.

• • •

'Arrrgh!' Smash! The two big Orks roared as they met at a flat run, forehead to forehead. Both recoiled from the bone-breaking impact of the flying head-butt, staggering slightly. They glared at each other, and then one toppled backwards, smashing to the ground, groaning and then unconscious. Grahkrag laughed out loud, his chuckle more of a guttural bellow. He had won again! He was undefeated, the undisputed head-butting champion of Mekslag-Ikks, as well as its top warboss and the 'ardest Ork for light years around.

The unconscious Ork at his feet started to moan slightly, groping its head. Grahkrag stuck the boot in for good measure, to da victor da spoils! 'That's two more teef u owes me,' he reminded his conquered opponent as he crawled away. Rubbing his own head Grahkrag stomped away. Was that it? Was that the best entertainment to be found on this dump of a planet? Warboss Grahkrag was bored, and that made him mean and angry. Winning head butting contests was all very well, but it was no substitute for a real fight. Maybe he would take a trip out with a few of his boyz and find some mangy Death Skullz rats to beat up.

Grahkrag's violent reverie was interrupted when a small grot, eyes bulging in fear and panting hard, came skittering into the room. Tongue lolling, the grot was about to collapse with exhaustion. Grahkrag's two burley minderz stepped towards the intruder threateningly and the grot shrank backwards.

'Wat d'yoo want?' demanded Gorrag, Grahkrag's chief minder as he reached threateningly for the choppa on his belt. The grot almost passed out with fear.

'Erm, erm, erm...' it stammered.

'Spit it out before I bite yer 'ead off!' warned Gorrag.

'Humies, loads of dem. Dropping from the skies.' it blurted before sinking to its knees in abeyance.

That got Grahkrag's attention straight away. He leapt to his feet, still rubbing his bruised forehead.

'Where?' he demanded urgently.

'Erm, erm...' the messenger squirmed on the floor, 'don't kills me your warboss-ness, your magnifi...'

'Shut it. Tell me where?' Grahkrag could feel his blood rising. The call of battle.

'At the Gargant. Mek Boss Buzzgob's fightin' 'em. There's loads and loads of 'em. Even Skalk's fightin' 'em.'

'Get da boyz. Get da wagons. Get everyfing!' he yelled at Gorrag. 'Move! Der is fightin' to be done'. 'Move!' he bellowed into the minderz' faces. Both immediately sprang away out of the throne room.

'Yeaaaaaah!' Grahkrag roared his excitement. At last, action. The snivelling

grot messenger forgotten, Warboss Grahkrag strode from the throne room in search of his best armour and biggest shoota. As he did, one large iron-booted foot squashed the prone messenger flat without the warboss even noticing…

• • •

As the Chaplain-led Strike Force Eitath descended, so Shadow Captain Korvydae's own force was circling in a formation of seven Thunderhawk gunships, awaiting their target. The captain himself was seated inside his command vehicle, a Land Raider Prometheus slung on magnetic hooks beneath its Thunderhawk transporter.

'Brother-Captain,' the voice of the Thunderhawk's comms-officer spoke into his helmet-communicator.

'Continue.' instructed Korvydae.

'Scout Squad Uirroth reports large numbers of Orks moving northwards, including Dreadnought support and at least one large war machine. They are reinforcing against drop zone T. No confirmed sighting of our primary target.'

'Relay me all your augur data for that position. Detail Squad Uirroth to move south and re-deploy to their second sector.'

The Prometheus's command screen flickered into life, green runes and icons flashed onto the screen as the Thunderhawk's own sensors swept the ground below and passed the images on. It was imprecise information, no replacement for eyes on the ground, but it gave Captain Korvydae an overview of what was happening. The sensor sweep was picking up the Ork's movements. He keyed in new sector coordinates and the screens flickered and changed again. The grainy icons and indistinct blobs showed where the Elysians were fighting at drop zone T. He keyed again and his helmet comms adjusted to the Elysian comms channels. He listened in to the faint sounds of their reports and orders. They seemed so far away, like the distant ghosts of an ancient battle.

'Boost that channel,' he ordered the aircraft's comms operator and the noise suddenly distorted, before growing louder. The reports were not positive. The Elysians were heavily engaged and taking losses already. The reported Ork reinforcements might be enough to break them. Korvydae felt frustration rise and pushed it away. Cool heads were needed. He knew he could be at the Elysian's side in minutes but without a positive identification on his target he would be sacrificing his own mission. For now the Guardsmen would have to struggle on alone.

'Give me a report on Strike Force Eitath,' he demanded.

'Telemetry data from the *Aeruginosus* says first wave will be making planet fall in 10, 9, 8, 7, 6... 2, 1. Now.'

The bark of bolters surrounded Chaplain Eitath as he advanced, their weapons fire flashing in the pre-dawn darkness, crozius arcanum held high above his head, to show he was at the fore and for his battle-brothers to follow. He placed the sight reticule of his autosenses on an Ork's face and automatically pulled the trigger of his bolt pistol. Three bolts launched and instantly smashed the Ork's head like an over-ripe fruit, its green body collapsing as a twitching heap on the ground.

The entire target area was a mass of old pipe works and storage tanks. Most of it looked disused, but it was difficult to tell with the Orks. Fuel barrels lay scattered about everywhere, in places leaks had pooled into black oily lakes. Chaplain Eitath could not tell how deep. Behind him his squads had spread out, deploying from their drop-pods as they burst open, bolt guns firing. The first Ork guards had been caught by surprise and quickly overwhelmed; their torn bodies now littered the area. A few of the Gretchin had fled rather than face the implacable, divinely-inspired wrath of the Space Marines.

Over the comms the squad sergeants were issuing orders, getting their combat squads into position before the Orks recovered and counter-attacked. It did not take them long. More Orks, mostly in black-painted armour, came charging, bellowing their bestial war-cries. Eitath emptied his bolt pistol's magazine into them, and then stepped forwards to meet the charge. The first Ork he met was a big dark-skinned brute, its face hidden by an iron-armoured jaw, two large animal horns curved from its helmet, a chainaxe screamed in its hand.

The Ork's charge smashed into him, trying to use its size to drive Eitath back but his armour's servo-actuators responded, locking him in place as the Ork tried to push him over. Grappling with each other, the Chaplain's enhanced strength forced the Ork backwards as he swung down powerfully with his crozius arcanum. The golden wings of the weapon crackled as its energy field smashed into the Ork. Its helmet buckled and split, its skull caving in as the blood-splattered crozius rose again. Grievously wounded the Ork flailed backwards, the teeth of its chainaxe biting deep into Eitath's own armour, shards of ceramite and adamantium exploding from the rend.

Eitath swung again, another clubbing blow that sent the wounded Ork boss reeling to its knees. Blood was pouring from its head wound, splashing upon the Chaplain's ornately decorated powered armour. Around him more Orks were dying under the chainswords and power swords of his Assault brothers. The Ork gurgled something in its own guttural language before Eitath placed a power armoured boot on its forehead and kicked it to the ground. It writhed beneath his foot before he drove the crozius down one last time, delivering the coup de grace. Struggling, the Ork died.

Chaplain Eitath paused briefly to reload his pistol before moving on, scouring the landing zone of Orks one after another. The second wave of drop-pods was landing now, each crashing into the ground in a plume of dust before disgorging more Raven Guard battle brothers.

'Combat Squads Pygargus and Daurica begin setting melta-charges.' he ordered.

There was a huddle of three or four crude Ork shacks, each made from scavenged sheet metal which had turned red with rust and dust.
Bolt pistols and combat knives in hand, Scout Squad Uirroth moved through the buildings. It was deserted. Only the filth of the Orks was left behind. Whoever called this stinking pile of junk home had already left. Brother Uirroth considered demolishing it, but didn't want to give away his squad's presence to any wandering Orks close by. Satisfied

Above: A Goff Nob, his Boyz and Gretchin servants dismount from their Gun Wagon.

that it was all clear, he and his brother-scouts went about setting up their new observation post. Four of them scattered, disappearing into the landscape to keep an all-round vigil, whilst the fifth set up the augur and comms equipment they had already unloaded for their Land Speeder Storm. The Land Speeder itself was not far away, concealed and awaiting their call for extraction or, in an emergency, fire support.

Shadow Captain Korvydae was concerned about the situation on the ground. His strike force had been circling now for hours without any target location. Meanwhile, the battle was raging. All three of the Elysian drop zones were engaged whilst his elite strike force was idle. It sat ill with the captain that other men should be fighting and dying in the Emperor's cause whilst his battle-brothers sat impotent. Still, he must have patience. Their time would come.

Chaplain Eitath removed his engraved, skull-faced helmet and watched as the first melta-charge detonated. First, a sudden bright spark of yellow flashed then the entire fuel storage tank, a tall structure at least four storeys high, exploded. The Ork fuel detonated in an expanding orange fireball that raced skywards. He felt the heat wash over him, then a towering column of black smoke poured out. Soon the dark cloud had blocked out the sky, shrouding the old refinery in a cloying smog. Eitath snapped his helmet back into place as the comms channel burst into life

'Squad Daurica reporting. Second charge is in place and fused. We are withdrawing before detonation.' A second fuel tank was ready for destruction.

Brother Uirroth levelled his sniper rifle on a distant grey smudge of dust on the horizon, sighted in and thumbed the magnification to maximum. The smudge rushed towards him in the eye piece, blurred momentarily, then refocused. He panned the weapon down onto its source. The Scout could see, still small, an armoured vehicle, some form of heavy tank with multiple turrets. He didn't recognise it, but then again all these Ork vehicles seemed to look different anyway. It was black and mounted with the horns of some enormous beast across its radiator. Behind it followed more vehicles, he could just about make out each of the crews in the hatches, and clinging to the side of each vehicle were more Ork tank-riders bouncing along. The column continued to grow. Three, four, five rickety vehicles, wheels and tracks churning as they all headed north. Another Ork warband was approaching.

He clicked his communicator open to report his latest sighting.

Shadow Captain Korvydae was faced with a dilemma. The situation on the ground was deteriorating. Slowly, the Elysian drop troops were being overwhelmed and, whilst offering brave resistance, it seemed that unless they were evacuated they would be destroyed. He could not sit by and allow this to happen. New reports of more Orks arriving from the south, an armoured column of Battlewagons and tanks making its way towards the

battle zone, at speed, left him with a hard choice.

He hadn't yet located his main target and with every passing minute that mission's importance was being reduced by the situation on the ground. To intervene now might mean abandoning any hope of completing that mission. But the crisis moment of the battle had come. All his instincts told him it was time to act.

Korvydae worked quickly. The Elysians should disengage and fall back to a new location from where they could set up a new defence, and then a rapid extraction operation would begin. In order for the Elysians to have a chance to regroup, he needed to buy them some time. His strike force would land and place themselves between the Elysians and the newly-arriving Ork armoured column, fighting a delaying action long enough for the drop troops to pull back and dig-in again. Meanwhile, he would dispatch Thunderhawks to recover Chaplain Eitath's strike force and redeploy them to aid the Elysians. It was tactical thinking 'on the fly' but Korvydae needed to be flexible. The battlefield situation was fluid, so rigidly adhering to his old plan was folly. In effect his new self-appointed mission was now a rescue operation, to save as many Elysian drop troops as he could whilst inflicting as much damage on the Orks as possible.

The Raven Guard captain would use his Scouts on the ground to target the Ork column and harass them whilst he deployed his strike force for the ground battle. The only other aid he could call upon was from the strike cruiser. The *Aeruginosus* could begin with an orbital bombardment of known Ork concentrations, lending some much needed heavy firepower to the drop troop's withdrawal. Without further hesitation he began issuing the necessary orders.

Brother Uirroth had the Orks in his sights and was cleared to open fire. It was time for his observe-and-report mission to end and for the killing to begin.

At four hundred metres his sight was filled by each Ork as he panned over the lead vehicle. They were unaware of his presence. The Scout took careful aim, selecting the largest of the massive tank's riders. His training taught him to hit the biggest Orks first, they were invariably the leaders. He had waited patiently until the Orks had moved into his best killing range. Carefully, he squeezed off his first round, the silenced barrel of his weapon muffling the sound into an almost polite cough. The bolt flashed, smacked the surprised Ork boss in the side of the head and he tumbled off the side of the vehicle. To Uirroth's surprise it wasn't dead. Bleeding, the Ork got up again, looking shocked, but seemed to be relatively unharmed. He took aim again at the dazed target and fired again. The second blast hit it square in the chest, punching it off its feet. The other Orks were jeering and laughing whilst looking around for the source of the firing. Underneath his cameoline cloak Uirroth was just another patch of dirt. His third round finished his target with a second clean headshot. His work done Brother Uirroth crawled away to change his firing position.

The Scout snipers took a steady toll on the Orks as they advanced, but they soon learnt to keep their heads down and use their vehicles as cover. Still, each dead alien now was one less the Raven Guard battle-brothers would have to kill when they arrived. Even as Uirroth and his fellow Scouts were working over the armoured column with accurate sniper fire, from afar, the Thunderhawks of Strike Force Korvydae were placing the Assault squads and heavy vehicles directly in the Orks' line of advance. As the Orks approached the Raven Guard positions, Uirroth and the other Scouts were recalled to join the main battle line and support it with their lethally accurate shooting.

• • •

Just as darkness was starting to fall across Kastorel-Novem, the Raven Guards' ground assault began with the blinding flash and monstrous shock of lascannon blasts, the rapid bark of Thunderfire cannons, heavy bolters and the impact of the Thunderhawk's Hellstrike missiles, all bursting in blooms of red, yellow and orange that bathed the battlefield in fierce strobing light. The Orks responded with poorly aimed barrages of mortar rounds and rockets that traced arcs of red fire across the deepening purple of the sky.

The Raven Guard surged forwards to meet the advancing Orks, shadowy black armoured figures against the twilight. Their intent was to strike the vanguard of the Ork reinforcement column hard, destroying it and stalling their advance and buying the hard-pressed Elysians to the north time to regroup and prepare a new defensive position. The battle had been quickly planned and executed, but each Space Marine knew his task well. Years of training and experience on battlefields across the segmentum had honed each into a formidable warrior. With meticulous coordination, provided by Captain Korvydae's second-in-command from his command post inside his Land Raider Prometheus, the assault began.

The Raven Guard squads crashed through the junkyard, their vehicles in close support just behind, firing over their heads. As was customary, their captain was at the front, in the vanguard of the attack. They were moving quickly. A barrage of Ork shells fell about them, one impacted directly amongst a combat squad, its blast lacing them all with shrapnel and blowing two off their feet. The veteran brother leading the troops reported he had lost two of his men, and without instruction the Apothecaries immediately moved to aid the stricken brothers.

Leaving the Apothecaries behind to deal with the wounded and dying, Shadow Captain Korvydae burst over the top of a scrap pile into plain view of the Orks; an undisciplined mob of greenskins were gathered around their vehicles, the smoke of their heavy weapons fire already enshrouding them. Korvydae saw the closest vehicle's battlecannon fire again, the shell screamed straight at him. Instinctively ducking, it whistled just over his head, hit the ground, skittered across the floor and came to a standstill before suddenly exploding in a grey plume of dirt. 'For the Emperor! Attack! Attack! Attack!' he ordered and powered the jump generator upon his back into life. He sprang forwards, whining turbo-jets boosting him through the space between him and the Orks. He aimed directly at the closest greenskin, both power-armoured feet smashing into the alien and driving it to the ground as he landed directly on top of it, before pounding its skull open with a single strike of his thunder hammer. Around him other Assault battle-brothers

were doing the same, chainswords and power weapons hacking down as they landed amidst the enemy. The Orks fought back savagely in a whirling confused melee of swords and axes. There was no time for reports or tactical planning now, just the bloody rush of battle at close quarters, kill or be killed. Death was close, Korvydae could feel its grip upon him, but he would not let it take him yet, not before he had slaughtered these alien fiends in the Emperor's name.

In the gathering gloom Warboss Grahkrag leapt down from his idling Battle Fortress. His boyz and nobz were gathered about him, weapons in hand, hungry for some action. Up ahead the firing had intensified; the big booms of kill-kannons and lobbas sounded close, stray bolt rounds fizzed past, several ricocheted off the battle fortress' roller and detonated in the air overhead. Determined not to miss out, the warboss strode towards the sound of the guns, shoving aside grots and boyz as he went. Trailing behind him were his retinue of nobz and 'ardboyz, his best fighters, tough Orks all.

Up ahead he saw a Trukk, big shoota blazing wildly left then right, suddenly turn into a bright fireball that cast long shadows across the darkening battlefield. Figures were moving about in the firelight, bulky figures in big suits of armour – Space Marines. Grahkrag beamed a wicked, fanged grin. Here was some real fight then. The humies had sent their own 'ardboyz.

'Come on ladz, let's hav' 'em. Come on! Waaagh!' he broke into a sprint, as did his boyz and ran headlong at the closest Space Marine.

• • •

It was dark now, but it mattered not to Brother-Scout Uirroth, his sniper rifle's sight lit the battlefield in a green-tinged light through its lens. He could see clearly the hot spots of Space Marine powered armour, their sub-atomic core power packs glowing brightest of all. The Orks were a dull smudge, and it was on these that he placed his sight reticule and fired. From his vantage point he had a good field of fire. More and more Orks were coming, there was no shortage of targets. He fired again and again, not pausing to see if each target had been killed.

As more Orks arrived the fighting intensified, more shells shrieked and boomed, more blasts tore about them. The Orks were howling, their guns were hammering and darkness had come. Korvydae knew it was time to withdraw.

Below: Thunderhawk Assault. Shadow Force Korvydae disembark from their transports to face Grahkrag's Goff warband

NEW PLANS

The Raven Guard's intervention had not been as planned. Whilst Chaplain Eitath's orbital strike force had captured and then destroyed the fuel stockpiles, Shadow Captain Korvydae and his larger strike force had been unable to identify the location of Buzzgob and been left as bystanders as the Ork pressure on Shield force at drop zone T intensified. Captain Thanstadt's men were already fighting Skalk Bluetoof's Death Skullz and the arrival of Buzzgob's Dredheadz (who by now had boarded his personal Stompa), but without Sword force's supporting assault Shield force was being overrun. It was all Captain Thanstadt could do to withdraw and regroup for a second stand. In doing so he called all the Elysian forces left to his aid, including the northern screen troops of Dagger force.

The arrival of Grahkrag's Goffs, including their heavier armoured vehicles would surely have seen the remaining Elysian forces destroyed but for the swift change of plan by Shadow Captain Korvydae. He used the mobility of his Thunderhawk gunships to interpose his battle-brothers between the Elysians' and the Goffs' advance. There followed a sharp engagement, which halted the Goffs' march but also cost Korvydae many battle-brothers and much equipment. With the Goffs bloodied, he quickly extracted his strike force again.

Meanwhile, the Elysians had been able to withdraw and regroup for a final stand, hoping to hold out until the evacuation mission could begin. This would involve holding off the Orks long enough for the Raven Guard reinforcements to reach them and securing a wide enough perimeter so that the Valkyries could get in and rescue the troops. Captain Thanstadt, now joined by the remains of Dagger force, chose his ground as best as the situation would allow. His forces gathered at the remains of a long disused refinery complex. Here they would make their stand.

His attack had been ferocious and he personally had killed ten, fifteen, twenty aliens… he had lost count in the swirling hand-to-hand combat. His black armour was rent and worn. One shoulder pad had been torn away by a blast but it had saved his life. Instructing the Scout snipers to cover his withdrawal, he ordered all squads to break away from the battle and regroup. Overhead the Thunderhawks were arriving again to evacuate them. He knew he was leaving the Orks in possession of the battlefield, but his swift assault had torn the heart out of this warband. Battlewagons were burning. The bodies of the dead littered the ground in all directions. He was satisfied that these Orks were no longer the threat to the Elysians they had been.

Rumbling out of the darkness the Land Raider Prometheus arrived. He could see the multiple deep-impact scars of shells on its armoured prow door as the ramp dropped. He strode inside, followed by his fellow battle-brothers. He noted that the vehicle's ammunition bins were almost empty.

'Back to the evacuation point.' he ordered the driver, and the Land Raider jolted violently as it reversed away, gathering speed.

Korvydae immediately went to the command consoles and began to evaluate the cost of his intervention. It pained him to leave the bodies of his fallen brothers behind but they, and the Emperor, would understand. This raid had become a desperate fight and there was no time now for the customary ceremonies for the fallen and due reverence; those must wait until they returned to Deliverance. Now was the time for butcher's work and it was far from over yet.

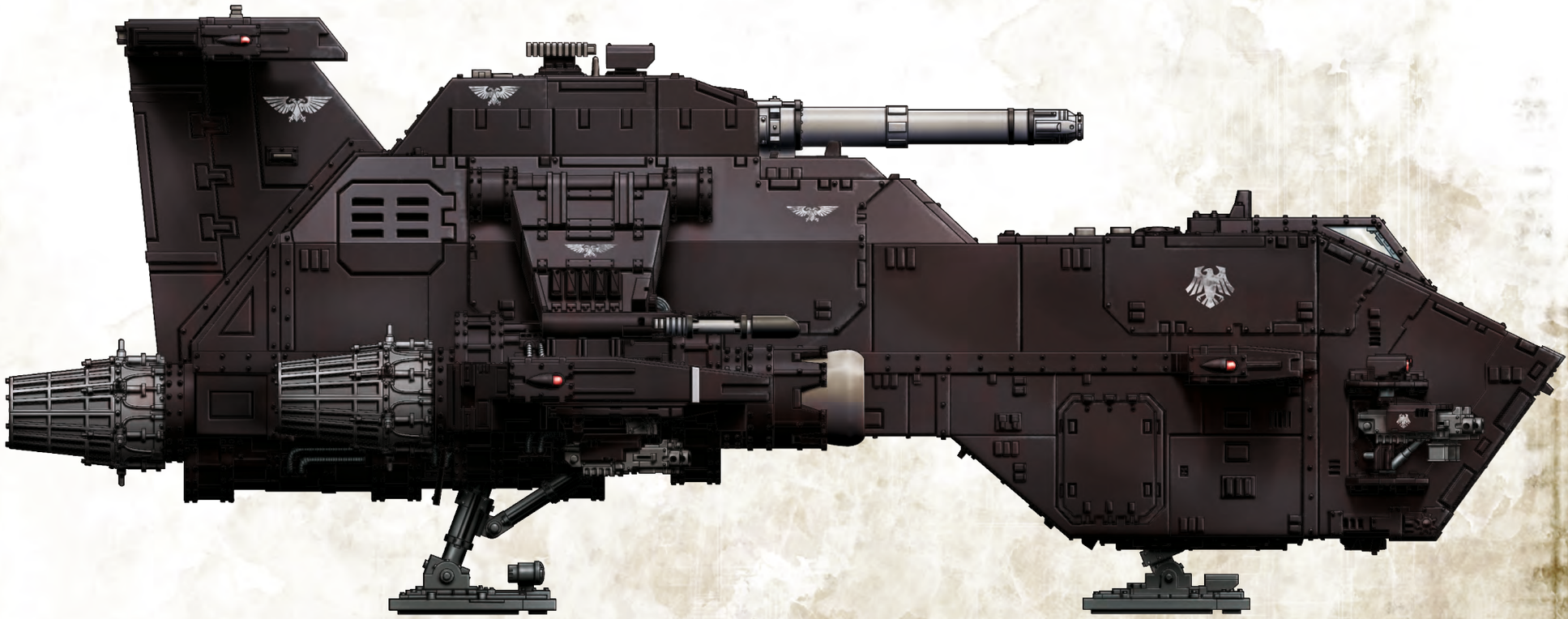
Warboss Grahkrag picked up the body of a fallen Space Marine, grasping it in his power-klawed hand he hefted it up to eye level. He looked at it closely. Black armour with white trim, the symbol of a beaked flying creature emblazoned in white upon it. He liked it, the colours appealed to his Goff nature. No wonder they had fought so well, the humies wore black too. It was the colour the 'ardest boyz always used. He tossed the body to his closest nob, Gorrag, who caught it, staggering.

'Stick it on a wagon.' he ordered. 'It was good fightin'. Put him right on da front, so every scummy grot and weedy humie can see what we did!' Boss Gorrag grinned and nodded his agreement. It was a worthy prize from a worthy foe.

Top: Kill! Krush! Kill! Krush! The build-up of Goff heavy armour forced the Raven Guard to respond.
Bottom: A Land Speeder Tempest squadron makes their attack run.

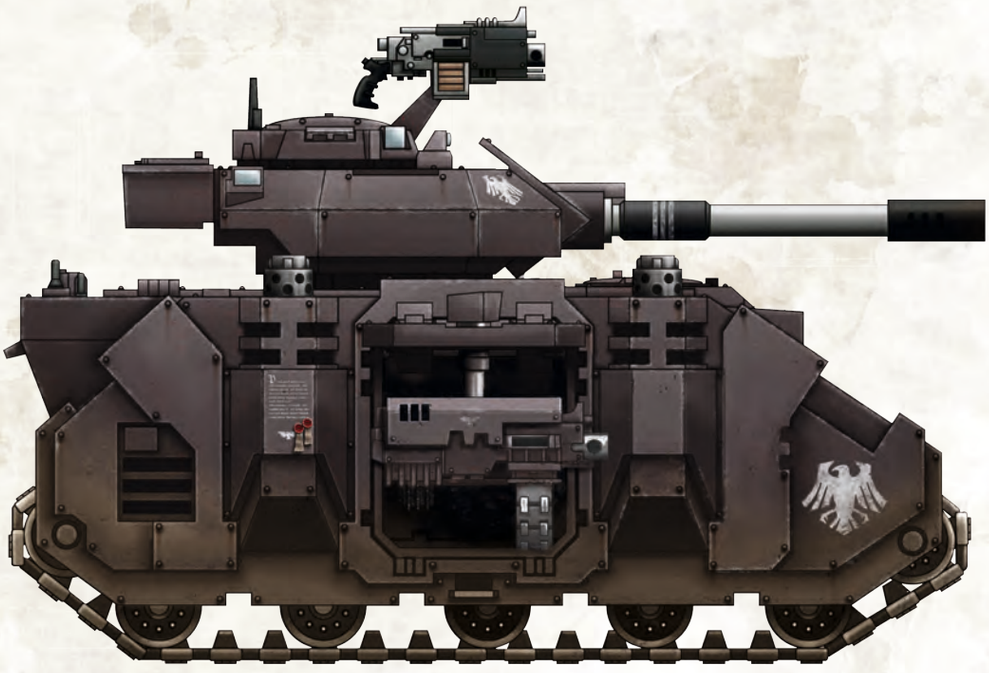
Top: The Raven Guard's ground attack was co-ordinated by the strike force's single Land Raider Prometheus.

Bottom: Advance to contact – Veteran Brother Kraai in action.



Raven Guard Thunderhawk gunship. One of seven aircraft from the Chapter Fleet commited to the raid. All seven survived the battle.

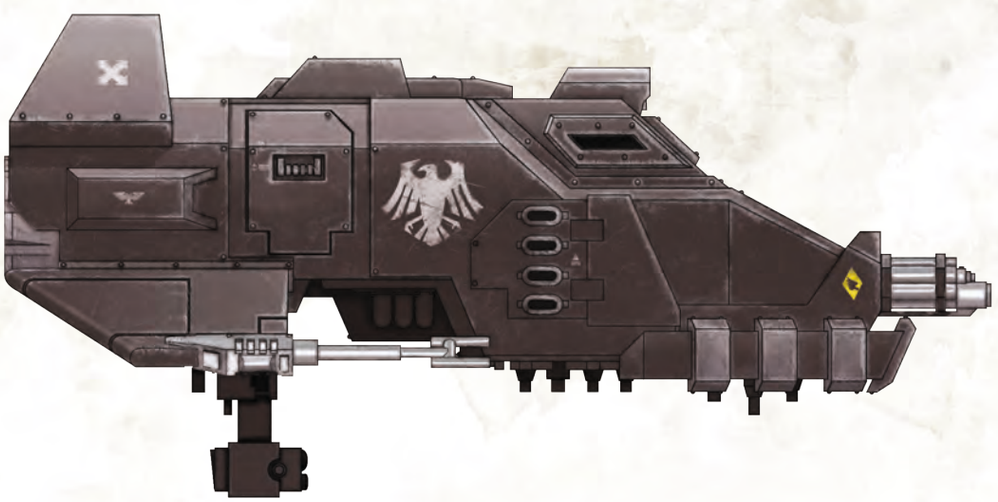
Land Raider Prometheus. Acting as the command and control hub for the Raven Guard's ground forces, the Prometheus was later destroyed, its machine spirit commended to the Emperor in the battle's post-mortem.



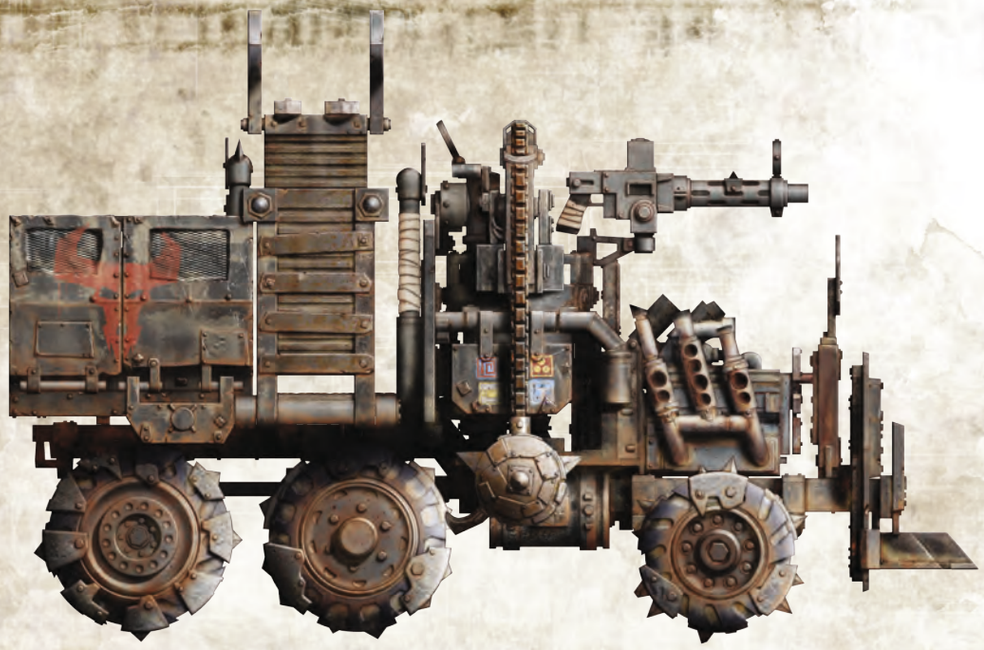
Predator Destructor armed with heavy bolter sponsons. Lighter and faster than Land Raiders, Predators provided Shadow Force Korvydae with its main armoured support.

Land Speeder Tornado. This is one of 5th Company's own vehicles.

Land Speeder Typhoon. First vehicle of the Chapter Armoury. For their mobile operations, the Raven Guard make wide use of Land Speeders of all types.

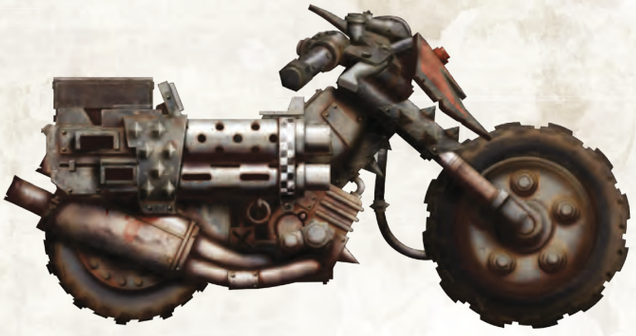


Land Speeder Tempest. Note the campaign badge borne on the aircraft's nose.

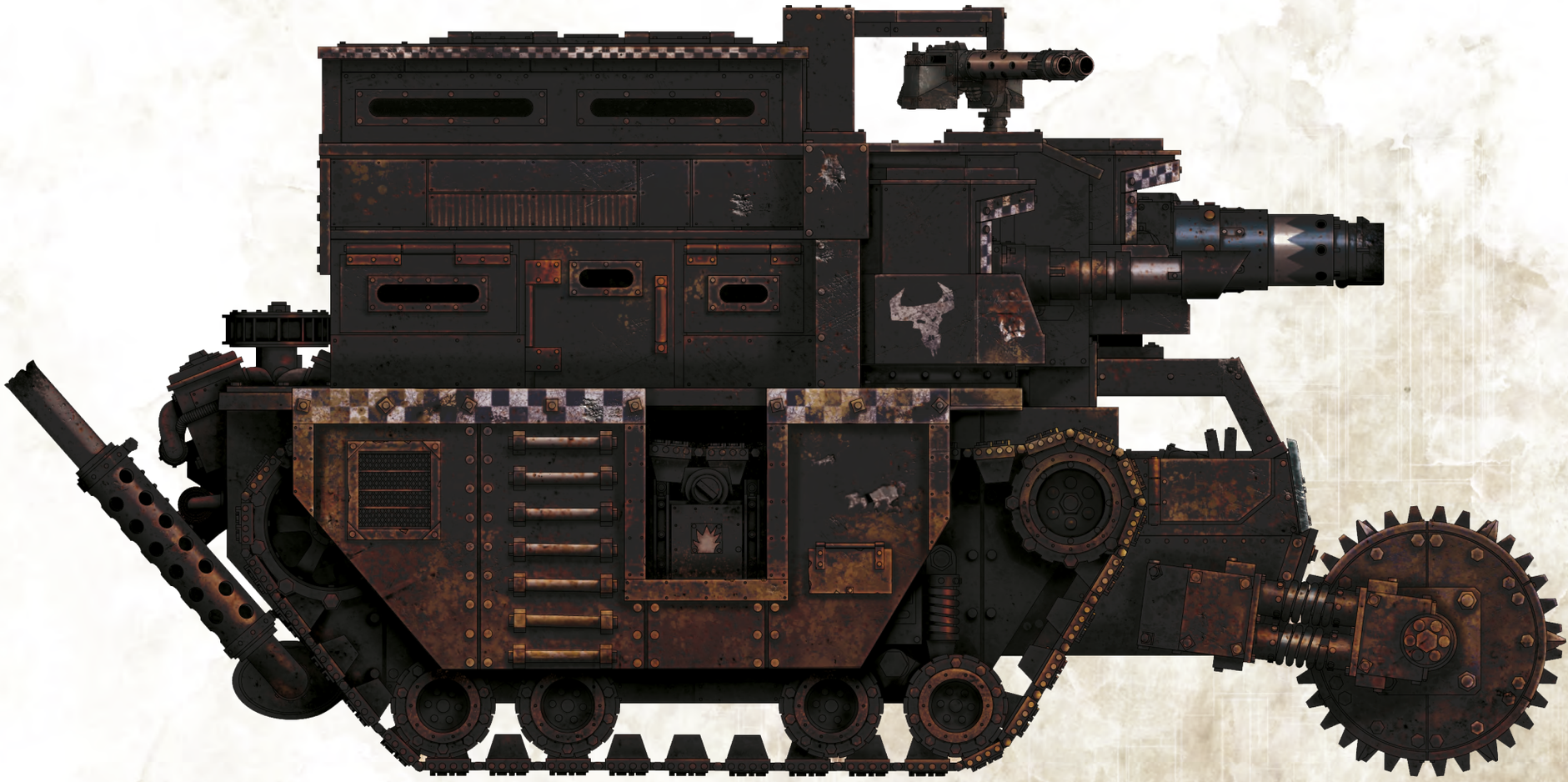


Trukk of the Goff clan. Note the wrecking ball attachment, typical of the Goffs, who prefer close combat.

Gun Wagon, armed with a large kannon. Destroyed during the Raven Guard's assault.



Goff Warbike. Not all Warbikers are Evil Sunz, sometimes Goffs make use of bikes to close with the enemy faster.



Deth Rolla Battle Fortress of the Goff clan. This may well be Warboss Grahkrag's own transport.

CHAPTER SIX
ELYSIA'S LAST STAND

THE FINAL BATTLE

'We have died well. It is our greatest revenge against a cruel foe.'

Captain Thanstadt,
F Company, 181st Elysian Drop Troop Regiment.

The night's darkness was never quiet. Captain Gerek, monitoring reports and comms chatter, stood close to his Tauros, which was hull-down, partially concealed amidst the debris. He could hear ferocious shooting off in the distance, the sounds carrying to him from the west through the still night air. Rearguard actions, sharp firefights that kept the pursuing Orks at bay whilst the rest of Shield force trailed back into the new perimeter. Every once in a while a Vulture gunship would come roaring in low, a fleeting black shadow in the sky, suddenly illuminated by the muzzle flash of its weapons in a frenzy of shooting and explosions that rumbled and growled in the night.

Gerek had the gritty taste of dust and gunpowder in his mouth. He was parched and reached for the canteen on his belt, dribbling out the last dregs to wet his lips. He rubbed the grit and tiredness from his eyes. It would be a long, long day when dawn finally broke. It would not take the Orks long to find them again and when they did they would attack. It was the only way they knew.

Around him weary Elysian troopers crunched through the darkness amongst rubble and smashed machinery, each a study in fatigue. They were blackened and pale-faced, eyes rimmed with red. Squads had become just an ad-hoc collection of stragglers and platoons had been reduced to squads by yesterday's battles. Sergeants were organising the distribution of the last ammunition supplies. Valkyries had dropped extra canisters of ammunition just before darkness fell, Gerek's men had gathered them together but they were all Colonel Taihon could send. Still, it would be enough for one last fight.

• • •

Drop-trooper Yano inspected the Accatran-pattern lasgun he had picked up during his retreat. He had prised it from the hands of a dead trooper. The Guardsman had had his helmet and head smashed in by an Ork's heavy club, and was lying in a pool of pink and red gore. But Yano needed a weapon after losing his heavy bolter and the lasgun was standard issue. He had also relieved the gory corpse of its spare ammunition cells, two frag grenades, a rations pack and its water canteen. At least now he was ready to fight again.

On arrival at the rendezvous point he had been directed to join one of the ad-hoc squads being formed, and found they were members of C and D company and a medic, who had discarded his medical equipment in favour of weapons. There were eight of them in all. They had been given two new power cells each and sent to man a section of perimeter. Now Yano was on sentry duty, watching the darkness for any approaching Orks and trying to stay awake. He hadn't slept in over twenty four hours. He wouldn't be getting any rest for at least another twenty four hours either.

• • •

Captain Thanstadt arrived with the last of his rearguard platoons. He had guided the unit back to the perimeter after a series of confused exchanges of fire with skulking Orks and Gretchin. The platoon was still in good fighting shape, forty men strong, and they had done their job of keeping the Orks back. As dawn began to broach the horizon with a faint glimmer of orange, he had ordered them all back to the new perimeter. Thanstadt thought he had less than an hour before it was light enough for the Orks to attack in force.

Warboss Zhadsnark climbed back onto

Left: Armoured assault. By the time the Elysian units had regrouped, the Orks had regathered their full strength to crush them.

Above: Stompa! The final Ork onslaught saw them deploy every weapon in their arsenal, including such huge war machines as Stompas. This walker was confirmed destroyed during the Raven Guard's attack, after first being immobilised by Thunderhawk fire, then multiple melta-charges were set by Assault squads.

his patched-up trike – da Beast would ride again. Two Meks had spent all night rebuilding the front forks. The pair hadn't had any choice. Zhadsnark's ultimatum was fix it or he would have pulled their arms off! He inspected the work. It seemed good. He bounced his weight to feel the suspension and grunted his satisfaction, much to the relief of the two Meks, who both backed away, relieved to still have all their appendages.

Time to fire it up. In a throaty roar the trike's engine sprang to life, throwing out a pleasing cloud of dirty smoke. Zhadsnark revved it hard, the brakes squealing as they struggled to hold da Beast in place. Yeah! Just like the old Beast. Zhadsnark was ready to go, eager to go! Yesterday he had missed out on the fighting. Today would be his day. First to round up his boyz, then, at first light he would lead the charge.

• • •

Buzzgob climbed into the pulpit of his Stompa, da Big Lugga. Around him the grot riggers were preparing the Stompa for battle; tightening bolts and feeding more ammunition into the shoota hoppers. Some Burnaboyz were welding new plates over yesterday's battle damage from missile strikes. Buzzgob had inspected it and was satisfied it was all superficial. Dawn was slowly arriving and Buzzgob surveyed the surrounding scene. Far below him boyz mobs were gathering alongside Deff Dreads, Killer Kans and Trukks and Trakks, Battlewagons and bikers. Skalk's boyz were here too, blue-faced, with teams of grots dragging kannons and big lobbas into place under the lashes of the Runtherds. Behind his Stompa the Evil Sunz biker boyz were racing in circles, warming up their engines under a thickening cloud of grey smoke from their exhausts. He could hear the growing thrum from the rotors of Deffkoptas and Warkoptas ferrying more boyz to the fight.

Buzzgob reflected briefly. Yesterday had been a good battle, they had given the humies a good kickin'. Today would be da real fing, a big fight. All da boyz, grotz and mangy squigs for miles around were here, ready for the action. Far away, through the rising exhaust smog, Buzzgob could just about see the tanks and gantries of the old refinery where the humies were hidin'. That was where they would all be headin', as soon as he gave the order. He had a plan. He would lead the Dredheadz and go right. Skalk would lead his boyz left and they'd squash the humies in da middle.

• • •

Captain Korvydae and Chaplain Eitath both waited on the Thunderhawk gunship's ramp in the pool of green light cast from the aircraft's interior. The entire Raven Guard strike force had now consolidated before the Thunderhawks had landed at a safe distance for the night. They would soon be airborne again. His Scout squads had reported that even before first light the Orks had gathered into a single large horde. They had identified the Stompa, and it seemed to contain the Ork's leader. Currently there were too many Orks to risk a direct assault. His Space Marines would obey any order he gave, but they were a precious resource, the Emperor's finest, and he would not pitch them into a battle they could not win. First he needed the Orks to disperse from their muster point before committing. He was confident that the lure of the Elysians would do just that. Once the Orks had engaged in battle the Raven Guard would attack. The Stompa would be their primary target. Destroy that and they would also kill a powerful Ork warboss, maybe the overall ruler of this blighted planet, and, despite the heavy losses, he could consider this ill-fated mission at least partially successful.

Korvydae and Eitath agreed that timing their assault would be crucial. Wait too long and the Elysians would be crushed by the Ork numbers. Attack too soon and the gathered Ork horde would be too strong even for his battle-brothers to deal with. For the Raven Guard everything was in place, even their strike cruiser was in position to launch its orbital bombardment. For the time being there was nothing to do but wait for the Orks to make their move.

• • •

From their dug-outs and barricades, the tired Guardsmen of 181st Drop Troop Regiment could hear the distinctive roaring sounds and see the plumes of exhaust smoke thrown up by the approaching bikers. Behind them was the deeper grinding and clanking sounds of heavier vehicles, churning away as the Ork horde approached. Captain Thanstadt sprinted forwards to get a clearer view of the approaching enemy. He leapt over several fallen pipes and crouched behind another. Scanner in hand, he tracked the Orks, bikers circling to the right and left. The first stray Ork bullets snapped overhead, not aimed at him, just the usual over-eager firing flying high and wild. As the first bikers appeared they were met by a volley of lasgun fire from the Elysian forward positions. The battle had started.

Thanstadt moved back into better cover and began issuing orders to engage. Then a terrific barrage started. Mortar bombs and heavier shells plunging down all about the refinery. Steel was buckled and bent as a gantry took a direct hit and toppled down, scattering the drop-troopers who were sheltering underneath it. The Orks had let fly with just about every gun they had. In response Thanstadt flicked his comms channel to his designated air support officer. It was time for the Vultures and Thunderbolts to hit back.

• • •

Wing Sergeant Seric eased back on the control stick, watching for a break in the smoke and clouds that spread in a heavy layer just above the ground. Several Ork vehicles were already burning. His Thunderbolt continued to circle, high above the battle now raging below, awaiting the call for aid and a target grid. The pilot didn't have long to wait.

He rolled the Thunderbolt over into a steep dive, the g-forces building as the aircraft plummeted towards the ground. Seric felt his grav-suit expanding, holding the blood in his body in place as it tried to force its way into his extremities. The Thunderbolt was accelerating fast, so Seric powered down. The smoke layer rushed up to meet him. The aircraft swooped through it in a rush of air and then Seric pulled the nose up hard, levelling out as the target came into view.

A slight jink adjusted his weapon targeters as they locked on, 'All weapons armed' flashed across his headset. Seric thumbed the fire switch and the quad autocannons

Above: Engage and destroy. A Raven Guard Predator targets Ork armour in support of the Chapter's ground assault.

howled into life as a stream of tracer arced towards the ground. Locked in his sights was a massive lizard-beast, bellowing and stomping through the rubble.

At point blank range Seric let fly with everything. Autocannons, lascannons and all four Hellstrike missiles ignited under the wings, simultaneously launching. Four large armour-penetrating warheads instantly hit the creature and exploded as Seric wrenched back the control stick and powered up again, climbing steep and fast away from the carnage his strafing had just wrought.

• • •

Bonemuncha crunched the wreckage beneath its heavy treads, still straining at its leash and bellowing. Suddenly through the smoke a jet-fighta appeared in a howl of engines and a blaze of fire. The dakka-power was impressive, even to Warboss Skalk, as the torrent of shells impacted and ricocheted around him. The aircraft flashed overhead, so low Skalk almost ducked as he was buffeted by its jet-wash. Suddenly, the world around him exploded.

• • •

The volley of Hellstrike missiles turned the massive squiggoth beast into hunks of flying flesh, bone and blood. Mortally wounded the creature staggered then fell, squealing pitifully in pain as it crashed over on its side, dead before it hit the ground from massive internal wounds. The armoured howdah on its back was torn off by the fall, spilling Orks in all directions before it came to rest in a mass of splintering metal. More las-blasts raked across the bleeding remains of the beast as the surviving Orks tried to crawl clear of the wreckage. Trooper Yano saw one old, heavily-tattooed Ork duck furtively away. He tried to get him in his sights, but before he could snap off a few shots, the Ork was gone. Still it lifted the Elysians' hearts to see the thundering creature die in the devastating air strike and the Orks around it were already retreating in the face of their accurate, steady fire.

• • •

As the formation of Valkyries approached, the Orks turned their guns skywards in a barrage of fire. The first Valkyries made it through, but the second echelon was badly shot up. Captain Gerek watched as one aircraft's engines burst into flames and, as its drop troops hastily leapt clear, it banked away, streaming flames and smoke until it hit the ground and became an expanding ball of fire. Seconds later a second aircraft was also shot down, the squad trapped inside the transport compartment helpless as the out of control Valkyrie plunged into the ground. The surviving flight screamed overhead and from the rear of each aircraft tumbled out a cluster of small figures. Colonel Taihon had committed the last of the regiment's reserves, the training and replacement company that had formed the airbase's security detail, but the situation on the ground had forced the colonel's hand. They needed every man that could fight.

Leading the green recruits personally, Taihon and almost two hundred men had jumped from eighteen Valkyries. Each drop troop's plunging grav-chute dive lasted just six seconds before they hit the ground. As they did the battle below was already ferocious. Waves of Orks were attacking and being shot down as they stormed the barricades, cutting down Elysian Guardsmen in turn.

Shadow Captain Korvydae's Thunderhawk

was inbound, racing low over the surface, triple engines at full burn. His target was in sight, the pict-relay from the Thunderhawk's augurs showed it as a grainy ill-defined image of a tall walker – the Stompa. Shells were bursting about it, but it still strode forwards, slow and ungainly, fire seemed to rain off its armour like water. As he watched, the Stompa's head exploded in a burst of light – a green energy beam leapt from its eye, crackling and fizzing before hitting a storage tank which exploded. The residue of old chemicals inside began to burn brightly. 'Target the head,' he instructed the Thunderhawk's gunner.

Korvydae unhitched his harness and made his way to the forward ramp, beside Chaplain Eitath. 'Touch down in five.' the Thunderhawk's pilot reported and the prow ramp began to lower on hydraulic pistons. It clanged open just as the Thunderhawk's landing pads touched the ground and the Space Marines inside burst out. The Thunderhawk's heavy bolters were barking a stream of shells towards the Orks as Korvydae gave the order to advance with him directly towards the Stompa. Left and right more Thunderhawks were touching down and disgorging their passengers onto the battlefield, alongside them the transporters were depositing their vehicles.

The Raven Guard moved forwards behind a blizzard of bolter fire; there was no headlong rush just a steady advance. Squads fanned out, weapons levelled. A missile streaked overhead and impacted on the cab of an Ork vehicle, which slewed out of control and crashed, spilling Orks from the back. The enemy's return fire was building; bullets and shells whizzed, snapped and fizzed past Captain Korvydae, the occasional round ricocheting wildly off his powered armour. Behind him the Thunderhawks lifted off again, powering skywards.

The best form of defence was a strong offence, Captain Gerek remembered the ancient proverb from his Tactica Imperium schooling. His vehicles had been adding their turret weapon's firepower to the ring of defensive fire about the Elysians' positions but it would not be enough to hold. More Orks were coming all the time and, even as Colonel Taihon's reinforcements were positioned to bolster the main defence lines, Gerek felt that they would not hold out all day.

Climbing into the turret seat of his Tauros he

Below: Mek Kustom Stompa, 'da Big Lugga', although heavily damaged in the battle, it was not destroyed.

ordered his surviving squadrons to join in at his position. He would launch his own rapid counter-attack. The next time the Orks came, he would strike and try to cut through them. That should stall the assault and if he could get through, then he would be free to make mischief in the Orks' rear area, amongst their heavier gun batteries.

From atop his Stompa, Buzzgob could see the Space Marines and their big, black aircraft landing – a new enemy. He ordered the Stompa to swing right to face the new threat and bring all its weapons to bear. 'Fire! Fire! All da dakka we got! Fire!' he bellowed into the comms tube that connected his observation gantry with the control room in the head.

Captain Gerek launched his attack, tyres squealing as the all-terrain vehicles accelerated and kicked up clods of dirt. Gunners opened fire in a fusillade of laser blasts. From his turret seat Sergeant Leto took aim at a group of heavily armed blue-skinned Orks, each carrying some form of heavy weapon. There were plenty of targets to aim at as the Tauros' began their assault. Leto loosed a long burst from his multi-lasers into the Orks and saw one greenskin, with a white and blue skull painted on its chest, come apart. First its arm was severed then the alien's head and chest exploded in blood. The rest of the Orks scattered, ducking away into the closest cover.

The Tauros had formed a line abreast and were advancing fast. At least three vehicles had already been hit. The blast of an explosion had flipped one clear into the air. It had landed on its roof, crushing the crew. The volume of Ork fire surged around them, so many bullets that it seemed the Orks couldn't miss. Leto felt rounds impact on the turrets, and then a round punctured the turret armour and hit him, piercing his right thigh. Immediately blood started to well up through his jumpsuit and run down into his boot. The pain almost overcame him. He howled, stifled his scream then almost passed out, fighting to stay conscious. He was barely aware that the Tauros had rolled to a halt. In front of him the driver was already dead.

Bouncing along at high speed, the Ork bikers were shooting frantically in all directions. The howling engines and roar of shootas drowned out everything. Zhadsnark saw a rokkit zip past, felt the concussion of its near miss. It was a wild melee and Zhadsnark loved it, amidst the din there was the grunting and screaming of Orks and humies dying. In the chaos his trike had been hit again. The front tyre was flat, rubber was peeling away in strips, other bitz had fallen off too and da Beast's jet engine didn't sound good, but he just kept going. The speeding bikers were proving hard to hit as they swirled around the rusted wreckage of pipes and rubble. The Evil Sunz warboss had da Rippa powered up, and used it to slash wildly at anything within reach. Bits of pipe and machinery were lopped off in a shower of sparks. Several humies had also been lobbed into bitz – he'd taken one's head clean off and Zhadsnark had laughed hard as it had bounced away like a ball.

Captain Gerek's Tauros was wheezing to a halt, having taken multiple rounds through it. His driver was bleeding badly, shell fragments had slashed Gerek's face as well. The communications equipment was shot, shredded, sparking and smouldering. Gerek climbed out, staggering, bullets were still cracking by. He helped his driver, Ardo, out but the wound looked serious. About him Gerek could see more Orks and Gretchin closing in. He drew his laspistol and fired to keep them back, still supporting his driver with one arm. 'Let's get out of here,' he reassured the man, even though it didn't look like Ardo was going to live long. Captain Gerek turned to make his way back the way he had come but found his path was blocked by more glowering Orks. He was already surrounded. The Ork mob closed in, swords, axes and pistols in hand.

Shadow Captain Korvydae had withdrawn into his Land Raider Prometheus command post. The vehicle had caught up with him through the battle outside and he needed to check on all his squads. The Raven Guard ground assault had run into trouble when Ork Dreadnoughts had counter-attacked; small ones, big ones, just about anything that could stagger on legs had charged headlong into the Raven Guard's ranks. The Space Marines had been forced to withdraw and call in their own air support. Thunderhawks were even now strafing the Orks to keep them back. They hadn't reached the Stompa and it too was still out there, thundering away with volleys of fire and blasting its green laser light.

Suddenly the Land Raider shook violently beneath him, almost wrenching Korvydae off his feet. The battle tank slewed sideways, then a second impact almost lifted the seventy tonne vehicle off the ground. Korvydae scrambled to the side exit, hit the emergency open button and the Land Raider's door exploded outwards. The vehicle was being shaken from side to side. Leaping through the door, Korvydae looked back. A huge Dreadnought, at least six metres tall, loomed over the Prometheus. Its massive power claw was raking across the top of the Land Raider, piercing the top armour and tearing a great gouge through it. The huge Dreadnought pulled away armoured pieces and discarded them. Helplessly, the stricken tank was being violently demolished.

Captain Thanstadt had climbed to a vantage point on the still-smoking ruins of a storage tank, clambering up the remains of the ladders to get a clear view. All around and below him the drop troopers and Orks were still locked in battle. Above him aircraft soared and roared, both Elysian and Ork, bringing their payloads of rockets and bombs to add to the raging inferno of battle below.

From up here he had a better view of what was happening. Through the smoke he could still plainly see, away to the south, the squat shapes of Space Marine Thunderhawk gunships making their attack runs. Amidst the smoke was the distant hazy outline of the Ork's Stompa,

Above: Warboss Grahkrag's arrival, leading the Goff armoured column.

the Space Marine landings had mercifully diverted its own advance. As he watched through his magnocular scanner, a streak of red fire raced from the upper sky and flashed into the ground, impacting in a great explosion – the Space Marines' orbital bombardment. The cloud of dust and debris thrown up obscured his view further.

Closer by, the Elysians were down to the last of their manpower. Squads and platoons had been butchered to the man by the repeated Ork charges and overwhelmed by the Orks' heavy firepower. Captain Gerek's A Company had been destroyed. Gerek himself was lost, missing presumed dead. His own F Company was down to the last thirty or forty survivors, not even a full strength platoon remained. The other companies were similarly shredded. Colonel Taihon was also dead, killed fighting off another charge by the Ork bikers. That left Thanstadt in overall command of the regiment, which wasn't much of a promotion. Still, around his perimeter the bodies of Orks had piled up, three or four deep in places. Wrecked and burning Ork vehicles, bikes, Trukks and Battlewagons added to the carnage. Captain Thanstadt had now resigned himself to their defeat and destruction. As a last resort he had called in the Valkyrie transports to make a last ditch effort to lift any survivors they could clear from the battlefield. It would be a dangerous mission, almost suicidal as the Valkyries would be vulnerable as they came in to land, the entire area was infested with marauding greenskins.

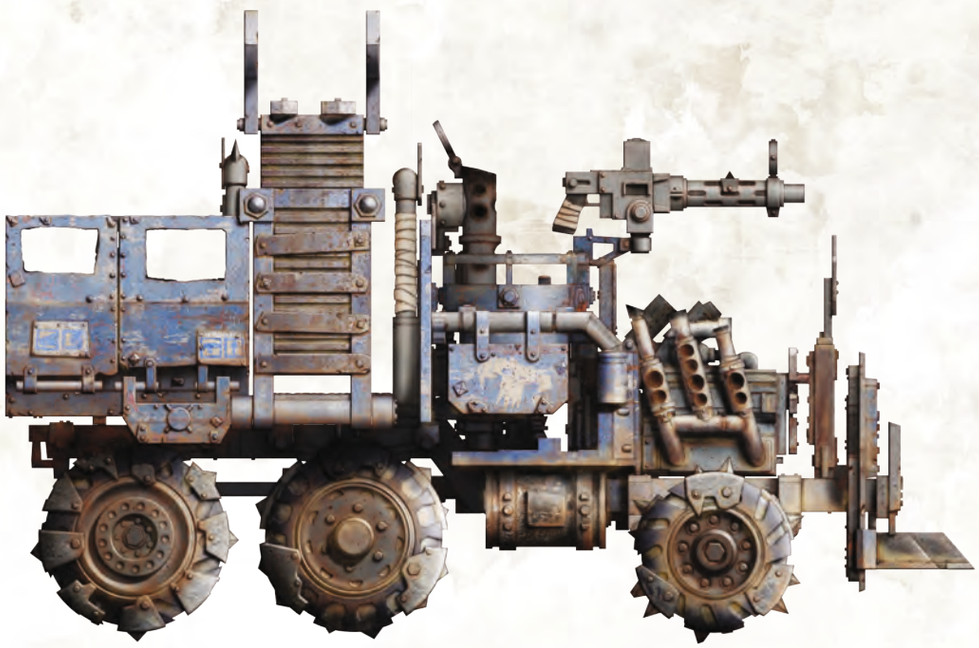
The regiment was beaten though, and there was no choice but to make an emergency evacuation back to their base. No doubt the Orks' fighters would pursue them all the way.

• • •

'All squads to break contact and withdraw. Thunderhawks disengage and prepare for extraction to strike cruiser.' They were not orders Shadow Captain Korvydae had expected to have to give, but there was nothing more his depleted strike force could do here. The Elysians had been overrun and his own force faced the same prospect unless they got clear now. They had failed to destroy the Stompa or find the Ork commanders, but to continue a hopeless battle and waste the lives of his brothers would be a greater dishonour than any failure here. There was no disgrace or dishonour in giving battle with determination and valour and expunging hundreds of these green xenos from the galaxy in the name of the Emperor. Still, Captain Korvydae would have to bear the mark of his failure until he could erase it with a greater victory. He would do long penance for these two days. Perhaps he would volunteer for a period of service with the Ordo Xenos as a fitting self-imposed exile.

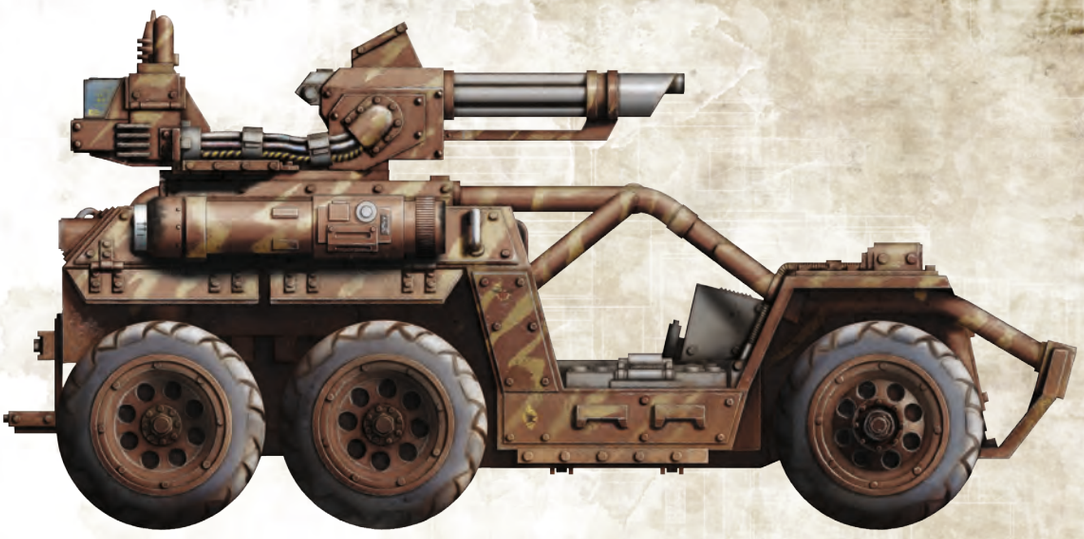
Ork Fighta. The Orks on Kastorel-Novem had built several scattered airfields.
Marauder bomber raids inflicted damage, but failed to stop the Ork air force from joining the battle.

Fighta-Bommer. The scourge of the Elysian air support,
Ork Fightas and Fighta Bombers accounted for most of the Imperium's aircraft combat losses.

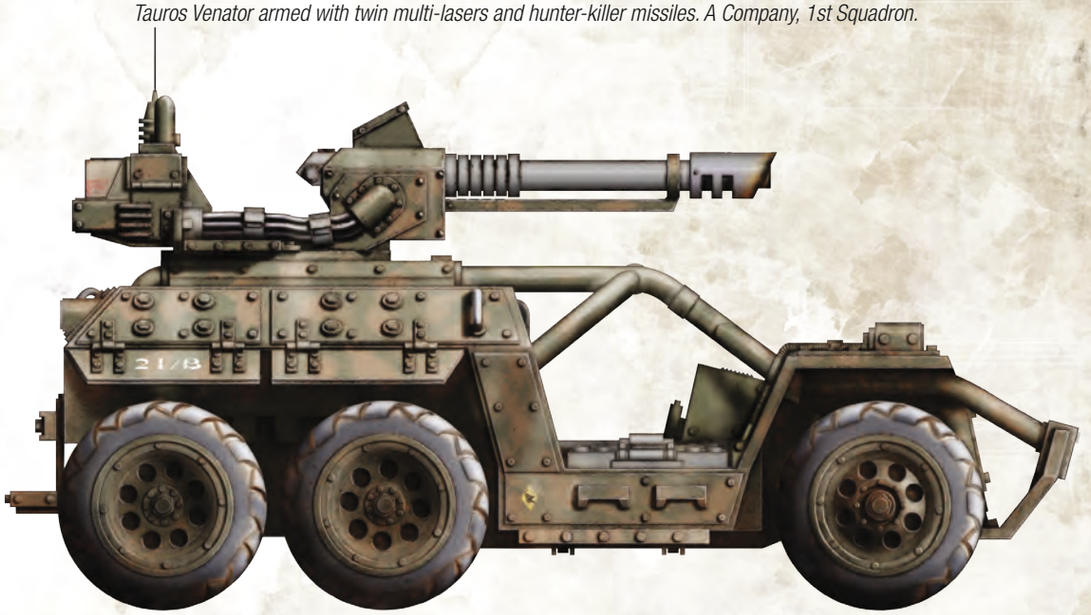


Death Skulls' Trukk, armed with a single Big Shoota. This vehicle was confirmed destroyed during the battle.

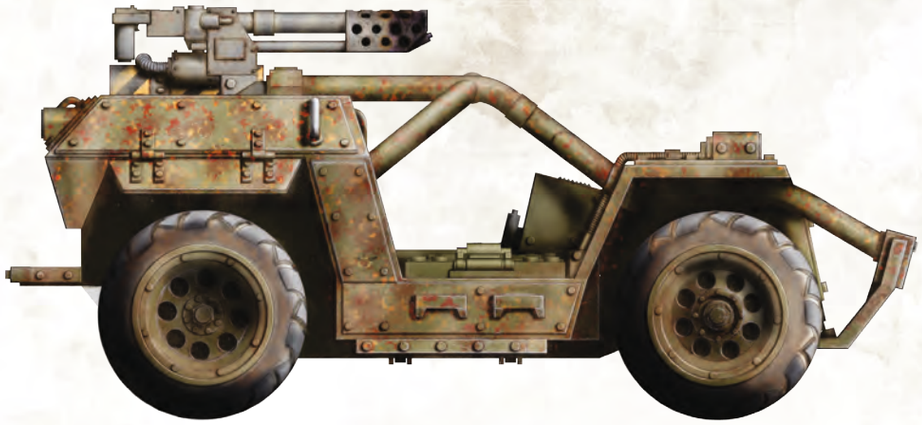
Bommer. Very few Ork Bommers were encountered. It is thought that most were destroyed in the Marauder's pre-emptive strikes. Only three would be seen in the skies over the battlefields.



Tauros Venator armed with twin multi-lasers and hunter-killer missiles. A Company, 1st Squadron.



Tauros Venator armed with twin lascannons. A Company, 8th Squadron. The number stencil is likely to be a transport tracking number.



Tauros armed with a heavy flamer. Another distinctive camouflage scheme. It seems crews had licence to adapt their own vehicle for the mission's environment.

CHAPTER SEVEN
DEFEAT AND WITHDRAWAL

THE END OF THE KASTOREL-NOVEM RAID

'Pray only for our fallen brethren and that the future will vindicate our actions.'

Chaplain Eitath,
Eulogy for the slain, Kastorel-Novem

They rode back in the Valkyrie in silence. There was nothing left to say and no more orders to give. On the outward trip each Valkyrie had been packed with men, drop-canisters and extra equipment. Now the transport compartment seemed empty. Captain Thanstadt had boarded the last Valkyrie to make the rescue run. In the process they had taken a lot of ground fire from the Orks, but the pilot had blasted them clear. Now it was touch and go if the aircraft would make it back to base at all. There were just five other Guardsmen with Captain Thanstadt, each looked like they had been seriously beaten, with their bruised faces and red swollen eyes. Most were still bleeding from wounds. The transport compartment's floor was a mess of discarded equipment and blood-soaked bandages. Thanstadt himself could feel blood slowly oozing from a shallow wound on his hip where a shard of shrapnel had skimmed just passed him. Earlier, during the battle, he had hardly noticed the wound, now it ached, but then what muscles didn't after two days in combat? He would live, which was more than could be said for most of the drop troopers he had led onto Kastorel-Novem.

• • •

Trooper Yano was struck by how empty the airbase was now. When they had boarded the Valkyries for the attack, the place had been a frenzy of activity and noise as thousands of men and hundreds of aircraft made ready for battle. Now it was almost deserted, just a few mute stragglers and the gusting wind whipping across the sand and rock. There were few people left now, mostly maintenance crews and labourers, the men who had been part of the regiment's support echelon, but even most of these had now been lifted back to the transport in orbit.

Yano threw down his sweat soaked helmet and began unstrapping his flak armour's breastplate and pauldrons. There were scorch marks on the breastplate and in one place a huge dent, front and centre, where an Ork bullet had hit him square on, but the synthi-plas had stopped it. He could feel the big bruise on his chest from the impact – it should have killed him.

Around him the survivors were doing likewise, shedding their heavy equipment. Some were methodically field stripping their weapons, a force of habit too ingrained to stop even at the point of exhaustion. Other troopers had simply slumped down and fallen asleep. There would be more work to do when the orbital landers returned to lift them back to the transports, but it was obvious there weren't enough Guardsmen left to dismantle and reload the equipment and the aircraft that had arrived here. Any of the surviving aircraft would have to be sabotaged beyond use by the enemy and abandoned.

• • •

The battle was over but Shadow Captain Korvydae's work was not complete. They still had the evacuation mission to complete. His battle-brothers had returned to their strike cruiser, but the remaining Elysians also had to be lifted clear. He had already dispatched the orbital landers to their airbase to begin the operation. The heavy equipment was to be destroyed and left. Korvydae wanted to be away from the system quickly, before any Ork ships arrived to intercept them. He was confident that the *Aeruginosus* was fast enough to outrun anything the Orks might pursue them with, but the transport vessels would need protecting until they could make their warp jumps. Of the three transport vessels that had arrived, two had already been dispatched, empty. The remaining vessel would be more than enough for the Imperial Guard survivors.

• • •

The Battle Fortress rumbled to a halt in a screech of brakes. The big black-clad Goffs clambered and jumped down from it, searching for an enemy to shoot at. Before them was a scene of smoking ruin. Bodies littered the ground; humies, Ork and grots. Fires were burning out of control, somewhere inside one of those fires ammunition was still exploding, one loud detonation after another. Cordite smoke was thick in the air. Warboss Grahkrag inhaled deeply; he loved it. The place looked good; there were few sights as magnificent as a battlefield after a battle.

Flanked by his minderz he crunched over the rubble to investigate closer. As he had arrived he had seen the last of the humies' aircraft blasting off and racing away. It was too late. He had arrived too late for the fight, which angered him greatly. His convoy had sped all day to get here, but they couldn't make up the time lost in yesterday's fighting. Surveying the surrounding area it looked like it had been a good scrap. He noted with satisfaction the charred fleshy remains of Skalk's big squiggoth lying dead. Good, with Gork's luck the crooked old git had got 'imself killed, which would be one problem Grahkrag wouldn't have to deal with when it came to splitting up all da loot.

He turned back to his boyz and ordered them back onto the Battle Fortress. It was time to find Buzzgob, and he better still be alive or Boss Garaghak would make sure they were all dead...

Buzzgob was still inspecting the battle damage on his Stompa. High up on its

head he was peering deeply into the burnt out and twisted remains of its weapon, the Gaze of Gork they called it, but the laser had taken a direct hit from one of da humie's big guns and been turned into charred scrap. Most of the workings had been fused into one big mess of cables and gubbinz and its insides were still sparking and glowing red hot. He took out his large wrench and began pulling pieces off to see if anything could be saved.

The rest of da Big Lugga had weathered the battle pretty well. In places the armoured skirt had been torn away and one shot had penetrated through and mangled some of the leg workinz, including a few grot riggers that had been caught by the explosion, their bitz were splattered all over the place in there. A lot of workin' bitz had shaken loose and the riggers were already busy tightening up bolts before anything vital dropped off. He gave up on the laser, time for that later, first he had to get his boyz and Meks plundering any scrap they could get their hands on. 'To da victor da spoils,' and Buzzgob knew he had definitely won this battle...

EPILOGUE

The raid on Kastorel-Novem had been a costly defeat for the Imperium. Even for the vaunted Space Marines of the Raven Guard Chapter there was little of positive value to salvage from the slaughter wrought by the Orks.

Before the attack the 181st Elysian Drop Troop Regiment had been a well-equipped and trained Imperial Guard regiment, with a good mix of veterans and new recruits. The Departmento Munitorum had rated its combat readiness as 'optimum' when it received its orders for transportation to the Forsarr war zone. It was that optimum rating that had seen it selected for the Kastorel-Novem mission, at the Raven Guards' request. In two days of fighting it had effectively been destroyed. Very few of the regiment's 2,400 men and almost none of its equipment, including over 100 Valkyrie airborne carriers and 30 Vulture gunships were evacuated from Kastorel-Novem. Perhaps as few as 400 Guardsmen returned. Departmento Munitorum auditors for the Forsarr sector struck the regiment off its strength at 548992.M41. Elysia's next round of conscriptions would see the regiment re-founded with fresh manpower and new equipment provided. The 181st Drop Troop Regiment would fight again but it would contain no veterans of Kastorel-Novem. Many of the survivors were transferred to the 73rd Harakoni Warhawks as reinforcments.

The Raven Guard's plan had failed. It had cost Strike Force Korvydae over seventy of its battle-brothers. They had come close, but ultimately failed, in their primary objective of killing Big Mek Buzzgob. In some circles of the segmentum's high command, the Chapter would come in for strong criticism for its failure and the perceived waste of an Imperial Guard drop troop regiment that could have been better employed elsewhere. But such voices were to be rapidly silenced when the Chapter deployed to Forsarr itself (although some would suggest that the Chapter's delayed deployment to the war zone to meet Garaghak's main force only came about as a result of their failure on Kastorel-Novem and their need to atone for the heavy losses incurred).

Other commanders argued that perhaps the raid had not been a complete failure. An estimated 6,000 Orks had been killed

Below: The one that got away. This is final image-relay from Scout Squad 2. There was no time to engage before withdrawing...

in the fighting; none of them would now see battle elsewhere. Manufacturing on the world would be disrupted by the loss of manpower if nothing else. The Raven Guard had also destroyed a huge fuel stockpile and this in turn must have had some knock-on effect on the Forsarr battles. In the end history would show that the damage inflicted would not be enough to save the hive world from being conquered by Garaghak's armies.

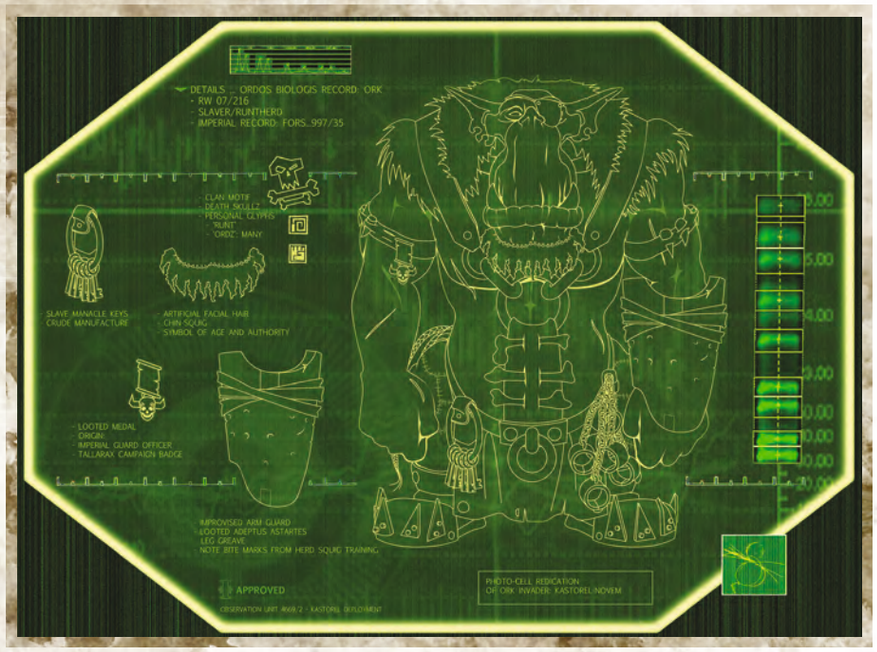
In truth these arguments were merely small compensations to be salvaged from a mission that had gone badly wrong. The major mistake had been the under-estimating of Ork strength. The raiders had simply not had the manpower to deal with the massive number of Orks present on Kastorel-Novem. It was a failing that had dogged the Imperium's fight against Garaghak since his first surprise attack. It took the fall of Forsarr and then Magdelene IX before the Administratum finally recognised Garaghak's attacks as a full Waaagh!, when arguably it had been exactly that since his victory in the Tallarax war. The wheels of the Imperium's bureaucracy had been characteristically slow to react.

For the Orks the raid was a brief distraction from the main battlefield on Forsarr and, if nothing else, it signalled the Imperium's willingness to go on the offensive and operate deep in Ork territory even if the risks and losses were great – Garaghak's growing domain was not secure from the speed and mobility of the Space Marine Chapters. Following the raid, Garaghak sent one of his own trusted Goff warbands to Kastorel-Novem as new guards to replace the losses and keep a much closer eye on Buzzgob. At Garaghak's urging the Mek Boss would eventually leave his base on Mekslag-Ikks and take to the battlefield again at the head of the Dredheadz. Buzzgob's Dred Mob led the invasion, and capture of the Magdelene IX shrine world.

Skalk Bluetoof and his Death Skullz also joined Buzzgob, but only once Skalk had completed the task of creating his own Dread mob. His experiment with squiggoths was consigned to history as a failure in favour of imitating Buzzgob's impressive mechanical warband.

Zhadsnark's biker boyz would replace their losses and eventually move on to Forsarr to join the war. Over the course of that war Zhadsnark would rise to become one of Garaghak's most feared warbosses and by the end of the Forsarr conquest he would be leading an Evil Sunz warband that ran to an estimated 50,000 Orks, making him Garaghak's most powerful Evil Sunz warboss.

Grahkrag too would survive Warlord Garaghak's anger at the raid's destruction and disruption and finally get his wish to see battle on Forsarr. Once it was complete he would take command of the Gargant, naming it 'Grahkrag's Mangler'. The Strategos-Logis still have the Gargant listed on their inventory of Garaghak's known forces.



POSTSCRIPT

The lessons of the raid on Kastorel-Novem were not quickly learned. After the fall of Magdelene IX, the Adeptus Ministorum was vehement that their shrine world should not be allowed to remain in Ork hands without a fight. They used their political influence to insist on an immediate counter-attack. The regiment selected for this mission was the 73rd Harakoni Warhawks, another newly deployed 'optimum' rated drop troop regiment, but this time the attack was not supported by any Space Marines. The Raven Guard refused to have any involvement in such a rashly conceived mission (they at least had learned a lesson). The Warhawk's drop on Magdelene IX was another disaster. That drop troop regiment too was wiped out for little or no gain.

It marked the last of the Imperium's attempted counter-attacks against Garaghak, the wasting of forces in piecemeal small actions was ordered to halt. The main effort must be in building up enough forces to halt the Orks' invasions in defensive battles before any further attempts at re-conquest would be sanctioned.

THE GROWTH OF WAAAGH! GARAGHAK

FORSARR SECTOR, SEGMENTUM TEMPESTUS

'Most benevolent Lord of the Administratum I beseech thee… for over seventy years the Emperor's divine rule over the Forsarr sector of

Segmentum Tempestus has been threatened and harassed by a growing Ork menace – the Arch-Killa Garaghak, name him not, the cruellest of foes, may his name be forever cursed.

Even now, these unholy xenos sit upon the Cardinate throne of the holy shrine of Magdelene IX, blaspheming His name with their foul presence. As I write, Ork foot soldiers are barracked in the ruins of our once glorious hive cities. Our faithful citizens are enslaved to his alien will.

How long must we endure these torments? How many more worlds must fall before this green-fiend's soldiery? How many loyal citizens must be sacrificed before the enemy's cruel reign is halted?

Send us stoic soldiers of the Imperial Guard. Send us legions of the faithful Adeptus Sororitas. Send us your most revered Adeptus Astartes. Send us your aid… in the Emperor's name, preserve us, your most faithful servants.'

Lord-Confessor Mytanar Javun
- Petition to the Master of the Administratum
- 994999.M41

170936.M41 Garaghak's Goff horde, allied with the Bad Moons of Dagrod's Killaboyz, launch a surprise attack on the outpost world of Thoria III and rapidly defeat its garrison and enslave the population.

346937.M41 Success on Thoria draws more Ork warbands to Garaghak and Dagrod's banners, including Bad Dok Fisk Skullsplitter's renegade warband of Cyborks, Zurgo's Flyboyz, Blackfinga's Death Skullz and many wandering Freebooter bands.

031939.M41 Warlord Garaghak treacherously attacks his former ally Dagrod. Slaying Dagrod, the Killboyz join his warband. Garaghak is now the undisputed Ork leader on Thoria III.

772945.M41 The Departmento Munitorum respond to the increased Ork threat by deploying five Imperial Guard regiments to Tallarax, turning it into a fortress world.

289948.M41 Garaghak's enlarged fleet enter the Tallarax system and overwhelm the planet's fleet and orbital defences. Landings begin on Tallarax itself.

348948.M41 Landings complete, a three-year ground war for possession of Tallarax begins.

608951.M41 Tallarax finally falls to Garaghak. To celebrate his victory, he reinforces the armour on his personal Battle Fortress with masonry taken from Tallarax's bastions. Garaghak declares himself the 'Overfiend of Tallarax'.

064952.M41 With Garaghak's permission, Big Mek Buzzgob and his 'Dredheadz' warband lead an attack on the Imperial industrial world of Kastorel-Novem.

723952.M41 After strong resistance by Kastorel-Novem's garrison, including the 49th Terrax Guard, the planet is evacuated and falls. Mek Boss Buzzgob

establishes himself on Kastorel-Novem, turning it into his own manufacturing base. It is re-named Mekslag-Ikks by the Orks.

453960.M41 Blackfinga's Death Skullz fleet split from Garaghak to attack the small forest world of Viridios Prime. An Eldar fleet intercepts Blackfinga in the Viridios system and destroy the Ork fleet. No Orks reach Viridios.

211966.M41 Warboss Gogrok arrives from the Ork Empire of Octavius to challenge Garaghak, backed by his own large fleet including a massive space hulk. Garaghak fights Gogrok and wins the duel, inheriting his entire horde and fleet.

779970.M41 Garaghak continues to attract more Ork warbands, swelling his forces further, including Logrok's Bad Moons, Speedlord Vagracka's Blitzboys, Nazgrad's Kill Konvoy, Krog's Blood Axe Armoured Brigade and Gnashrak's Freeks.

Small Ork raids across the Forsarr system continue, but it is obvious Garaghak is mustering his forces for his next big invasion.

935979.M41 Departmento Munitorum officials order more Imperial Guard regiments to defend Forsarr hive world. Their logis predictions make Forsarr the next target for Garaghak's conquests.

705988.M41 Garaghak launches his long expected invasion of Forsarr. Millions of Orks rampage across the hive world in a war which will eventually last eight years.

541992.M41 Raid on Kastorel-Novem. A Raven Guard strike force and the Elysian 181st Drop Troop Regiment attack Garaghak's manufacturing base on Kastorel-Novem. A two day battle results in heavy losses to the Imperium's forces. Despite the Raven Guard's efforts to kill him, Mek Boss Buzzgob survives.

296994.M41 Siege of Sussuro-Prime Hive on Forsarr ends with the hive falling as Garaghak's overwhelming numbers storm the defences. The 227th Mordian Regiment is annihilated in the ten day pitched battle.

870995.M41 On Forsarr, a Raven Guard strike force under Shadow Captain Shrike counter-attack at the 89th Parallel, encircling and largely destroying Wakskum's Dakkaboyz, a large Blood Axe led warband.

023996.M41 Big Mek Buzzgob launches his own invasion from Kastorel-Novem against the Shrine World of Magdelene IX. His Dredheadz are aided by Skalk Bluetoof's Death Skullz and more Goff warbands sent by Garaghak. The shrine world is defended by Frateris Militia, thousands of cultists of the Red Redemption and Sisters of Battle of the Order of the Black Selpulchre.

411996.M41 The Fall of Forsarr. It is re-named Garaghak's World. For the Imperial Guard's High Command the loss of the primary hive world now makes the sector indefenceable. Imperial Guard forces are re-deployed en-masse, abandoning the Forsarr sector despite vehement complaints from Ecclesiarchal representatives. They demand the Imperium defend the shrine world of Magdelene IX to the last man.

866996.M41 Without aid Magdelene IX falls to Buzzgob and is immediately claimed by Garaghak, now calling himself the 'Warlord of Forsarr'.

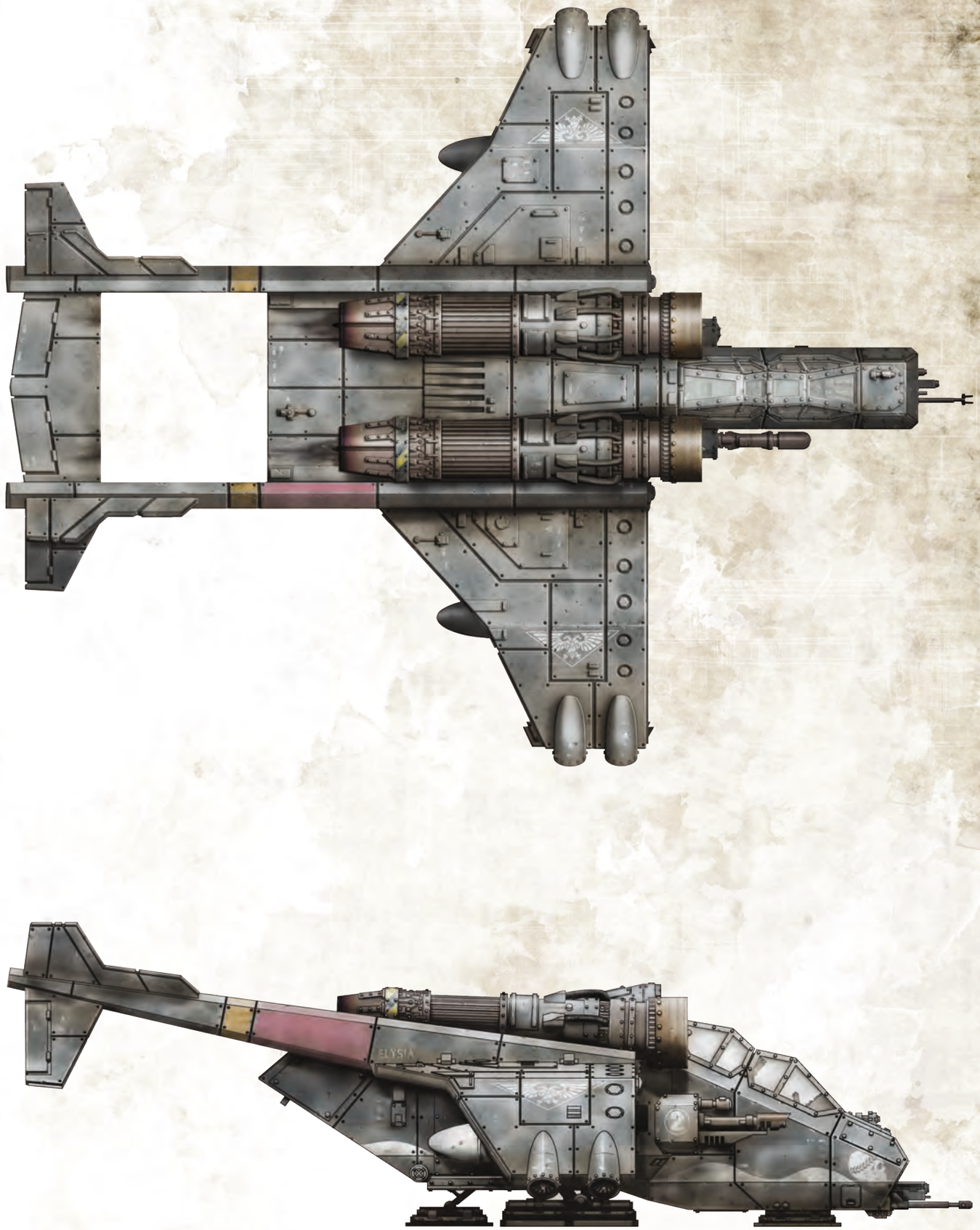
390997.M41 Snakebite warbands of Gursk's Braves join with Garaghak, emerging from their home planet of Ogrolla, deep in an area of wilderness space. Aided by Garaghak the entire population of the planet migrates to join the Waaagh! including hundreds of Squiggoths.

476998.M41 Under diplomatic pressure from the Ecclesiarchy to rapidly re-capture Magdelene IX, the 73rd Harakoni Warhawks are ordered to launch an ill-advised counter-offensive against the shrine world. The attack fails with heavy losses.

995999.M41 Garaghak's on-going invasions are officially designated as Waaagh! Garaghak by the Administratum. Garaghak's warbands are now estimated at approximately two billion Orks. His hordes are now all mustering on Garaghak's World, Mekslagg-Ikks and Magdelene IX.

996999.M41 More Imperial Guard regiments, along with large Ecclesiarchal forces and a demi-legion of Legio Titanicus Astramana (Morning Stars) are now being deployed to halt the Orks. Space Marines of the Revilers, Aurora and Death Eagles Chapter have also arrived.

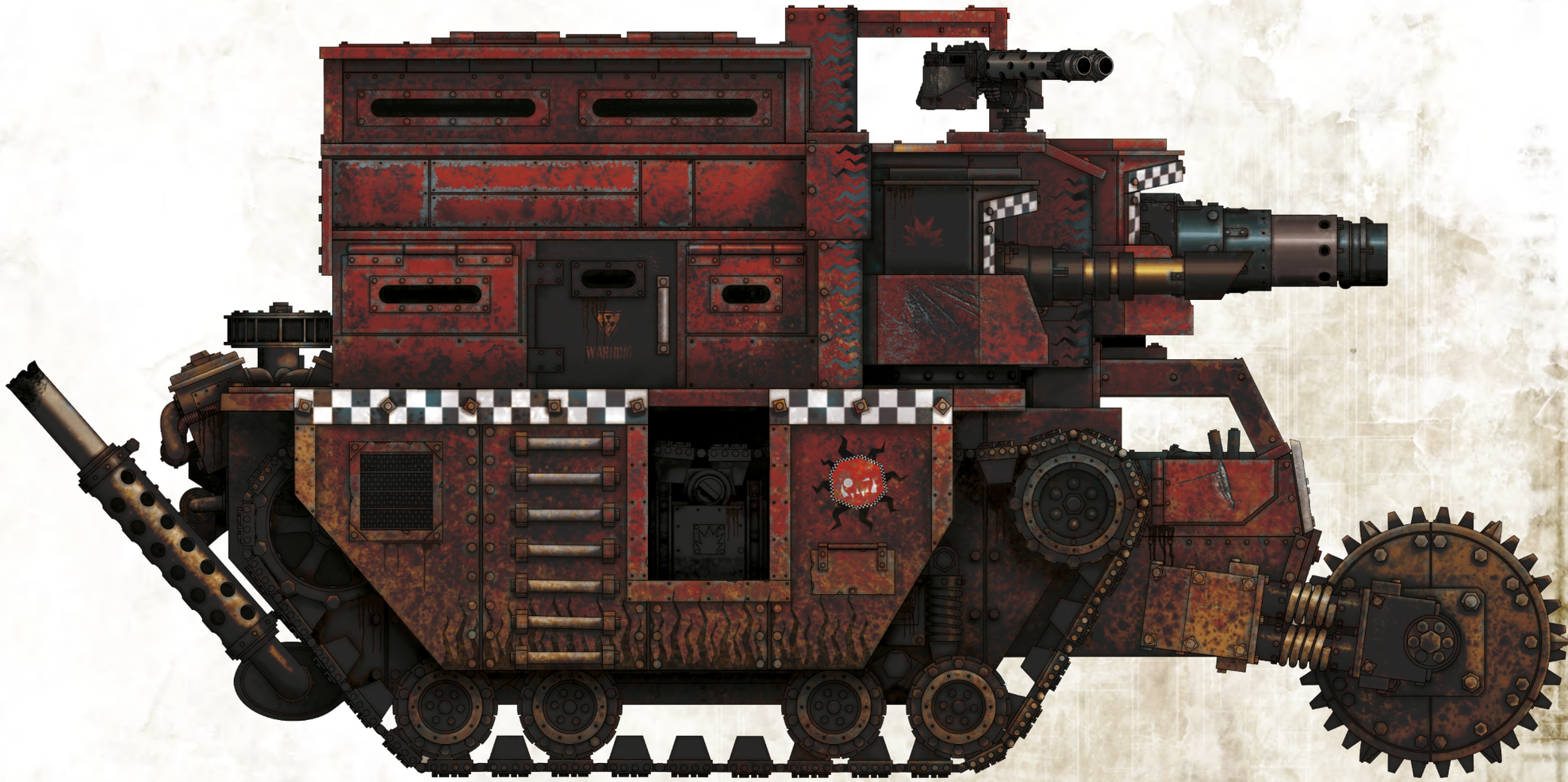
The entire Raven Guard Chapter stands ready to defend their home world, Deliverance, which now lies in the predicted path of Waaagh! Garaghak…



Valkyrie airborne assault carrier of 5136th Imperial Navy Tactical Wing. In all it supplied eighty Valkyries to the mission. Note, the replacement panel on the tail boon, it must have sustained serious damage earlier in the operation. There was no time to match the replacement panel.

Squiggoth of the Death Skulls clan armed with a lobba. The owner's bosspole is mounted upon the howdah.

Squiggoth of the Evil Sunz clan armed with a zap gun. This is an unusual example, as Evil Sunz tend to favour fast vehicles.



Deth Rolla Battle Fortress. A high-status vehicle, it must belong to an unidentified Evil Sunz Warboss.