

# WARP RIFT

THE BATTLEFLEET GOTHIC NETZINE



# FROM THE NEXUS PUBLISHING HOUSE

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+++ THE AFTERMATH +++

Hello,

Another issue of Warp Rift. An odd one. A strange one. Tzeentch may have caused it but I know better!

Heh, no battlereport in this issue despite I received a couple of good ones. Somehow I didn't use them in this issue. Why? Good question!

Next issue I'll have two for you! Why? Again, good question.

I am rambling. But that doesn't matter. I hope. I also hope that the Specialist Games forums will make for a soon return. But I know Cybershadow and Mod-Lex are working hard on the whole deal.

Last month I released Project Distant Darkness and I hope you liked it. If only for the layout or story. But we are in Warp Rift now. So, what do we have around this month?

We start with a short story, especially written for Warp Rift and the rules for Commissars. A special thanks to the gifted writer that Richard Swan is. You can find more stories by him on the Black Library forums, he goes by the name of FireFox on there. We also bring you a ship, a monster of a ship, with a dedicated step-by-step guide to build the behemoth of the stars. Don't forget to check out the Showcase section for the best vessels this year. And finally a scenario to get your teeth in plus the last part of High Anchor.

Enjoy!  
Horizon

+++ WARP RIFT BLOG +++

You can check out our blog at the following location:

[http://www.players.tacticalwargames.net/tiki-view\\_blog.php?blogId=10](http://www.players.tacticalwargames.net/tiki-view_blog.php?blogId=10)

+++ WARP RIFT FORUM +++

Check out the Warp Rift forum at:

<http://www.tacticalwargames.net/forums/index.cgi?act=SF;f=89>

+++ WARP RIFT WARMASTER +++

“Greetings admirals out there, I am honoured for the opportunity that Roy and Warp Rift staff have given me to contribute at the expansion of this fantastic webzine. First of all, my goals for Warp Rift are to create a new Battle Report section, where you can read of adventures and wars of others in our magnificent Battlefleet Gothic Universe. Then, we are going to expand the Tactical Center with some *Masterclass* from the brave admirals out there and with deep analysis of manoeuvres. I am glad to serve in the ranks of Warp Rift, and hope that you and the Emperor (or other deity) gonna love my works. See you in Immaterium. Class Dismissed “

Davide ‘Kratz’ Ferrari

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# INSPIRATION GROWS FROM THE BARREL OF A GUN

BY RICHARD SWAN

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**INS ATHERSTONE  
UVOLON CLUSTER  
ULTIMA SEGMENTUM  
746 M41**

The illumination panels above dimmed and the grilled flooring shook violently, as another bout of Tau ordinance found its way through the Atherstone's void shields and detonated against the adamantium hull. With a snarl of anger, Lord Commissar Albrecht Vandemarr righted himself and shouldered his way on, through the cramped gangway of the crew quarters and on towards the engine deck.

They'd engaged shortly after 05:00, ship time, and already the exchange was into its second hour, as both the Lunar-class cruiser and the Tau vessel – a Hero class, so he'd been informed – traded blows and tested each other's reactions. It had been theatre so far, a show of strength; no one, including Vandemarr, had expected it to come to anything more than a short contact. But the minutes wore on, and the intensity of ordinance increased. Now the Captain – Lord Scarcroft – was growing impatient. The engines needed to be primed for the planned flanking manoeuvre which would, if correctly executed, find the weak point between the Hero's semi-circular bridge and the main bulk of the vessel, and destroy it piecemeal. But if the reactors weren't sufficiently geared up, they could fall short, and expose themselves to the Tau's main starboard battery.

Vandemarr had been tasked with making sure they were.

'Make way, damn you!' he roared above the yammering of acceleration alarms and impact sirens. He moved aside only for damage limitation gangs to sweep past; anyone else caught in his way found themselves sprawled against the gangway.

His gloved hand closed about the pommel of his bolt pistol, and he yanked it from its holster, thumbing the safety catch off.

'Make way, in the name of the Emperor, or taste his wrath!' he cried. Ratings, ensigns and junior officers, bustling through the corridor, either didn't hear or ignored him. Yet they were all secondary to his mission. His objective was the engine deck, and the motivation and success of the engineers therein. If he was slowed in any way, either through negligence or stupidity, it was counter to his goal – and he would not hesitate to take appropriate action.

'Shift!' he growled, and broke the jaw of an ensign who stumbled in front of him. 'Bloody move!' he snarled, slamming another's head into the hull. The man jerked and crumpled against the grilling. Vandemarr ignored the damaged man, and strode on.

He turned left at the next bulkhead, and then on to an open walkway which afforded considerable room for manoeuvre. Satisfied, he holstered his bolt pistol and broke into a jog.

'Make way!' he cried for good measure. The floor trembled again as another salvo of Tau ordinance contacted with the hull. 'Throne damn it Scarcroft,' he muttered angrily in the temporary blackness of the failing lights.

He turned right so that he was heading aft, and darted into an alcove which housed a screw-stair, winding down to the engine deck. Already he could feel the heat of the power core, where the thousands of plasmastats and central reactor stood. Surrounding it, the ancillary power nodes stretched down the length of the deck; huge, piped brass drums, housing the carbon fires and laboured over by thousands of grimy, sweaty deck slaves.

He reached the engine deck, and though he was freely sweating he did not remove

his midnight blue trench coat or braided cap. Around him, the fires raged and the air was rank with soot, clogging the scrubbers and caking every surface. Everywhere, a flickering red glow poisoned the artificial atmosphere, and the shouts and screams of the slaves and their drivers filled the air.

The ancillary nodes were not yet his concern, and he headed for the power core. He could feel it thrumming the deck under his feet, the colossal plasma reactor with enough power to annihilate a small star.

‘You men!’ he called, the red glow of the fires replaced by the blue glow of the plasmastats. Steam, vented from the ceiling high above, choked the air, and sparks and bolts of static crackled fitfully through the charged atmosphere.

A group of engineers pulled away from the plasmastat they were maintaining, and looked at him through augmented eyes and metallic breather masks. Red robes cloaked their bodies, and servo arms, cluttered with tools, recessed slightly in the presence of the scarred Lord Commissar.

‘Lord?’ one asked. They stank of sacred unguents and oils, and servitor cherubs fluttered through the air, swinging incense burners.

‘Orders from Lord Scarcroft,’ Vandemarr snapped. Prayers and rituals didn’t make engines work; honest toil and labour did. He spared little time for the reclusive members of the techpriesthood. ‘These engines need to be ready for a rapid flanking manoeuvre – that’s full ahead by full – in the next five minutes,’ he said, feeling himself perspire heavily in the stifling heat.

‘Five minutes, lord, will not be –’ the first engineer began. Vandemarr yanked his bolt pistol free and fired off a single shot. The bolt connected with the techpriest’s left eye and detonated its head in a shower of blood, oil and metal casing.

‘Consider yourselves motivated,’ Vandemarr snarled. The remaining engineers, with a vigour born from a healthy fear of a sudden and violent death, returned to the plasmastats and immediately began making the necessary adjustments. The limp body of the decapitated techpriest swayed, then slumped to the floor.

Vandemarr turned smartly on his heel and headed back towards the ancillary power nodes, feeling the electrical, static heat of the plasma reactor replaced with the hotter, fiery heat of the nodes. Hundreds of slaves shovelled heaps of carbon into the burners, sweating and grunting with the exertion, almost all of them

bearing signs of flogging. Scores lay dead or dying on the grilling, unable to move from exhaustion and dehydration.

Vandemarr hauled his lean, yet muscled bulk onto the top of an overturned carbon cart, and took in a deep lungful of semi-poisonous air.

‘Double water rations and a day’s respite for the first team to fully charge their node!’ he bellowed. The effect was instantaneous, but he repeated it;

‘Double water rations and a day’s respite for the first team to fully charge their node! Full ahead by full in five minutes! Who will earn the Emperor’s pride this day?’

Flogged, sweat-soaked, exhausted men suddenly forgot the pains of their labour. Amidst shouts of enthusiasm and encouragement, they changed from loping to sprinting, and shovelled heaps of carbon into the nodes like men possessed. With a flanking manoeuvre such as the one planned, Vandemarr knew all too well how much power it would drain from the plasma reactor. Without the ancillary nodes, the void shields and lightning would fade in seconds.

He jumped down from the cart, and stumbled as, once again, the Tau scored a successful hit against the Atherstone.

‘This is Lord Commissar Vandemarr,’ he said, pressing a finger against the microbead in his ear and striding back towards the screw stair. ‘The engine decks have been informed and motivated.’

He took out a small hip flask of water and drained half of it, waiting for the reply from vox command on the bridge.

‘Acknowledged, Lord,’ came the reply. ‘Report to the launch decks for inspirational duties.’

‘Copy. Vandemarr out.’

He cut the feed and mounted the screw stair, pulling himself up past the crew quarters and to the upper launch decks, where the Atherstone’s main batteries were housed. He quickly mopped his forehead with a handkerchief and checked his bolt pistol holster, before dismounting the stair and shouldering through the two armsmen guarding the entrance to the launch deck.

He jogged across the expanse of plate grilling which led to the port batteries, then punched the door release on the bulkhead on the far side. It slid open and revealed a twenty-metre gangway beyond, containing four solid ordinance batteries partitioned from the flanking deck by two damage control bulkheads.

They were colossal hulks of steel and adamantium, smooth shafts of gun barrel each fifty metres long, ribbed by scores of derricks and gantries and edged by massive trajectory cogwheels. The breach assembly was a huge, cubic structure with a recessed housing that could take a variety of ordinance depending on the situation. Currently the launch crews were loading nuclear flechettes to jar and overload the Tau cruiser's shields – forty metre, sabot-encased darts.

Vandemarr moved forward.

'The Captain has decreed that I inspire you men,' he began, standing at the foot of the colossal battery. 'He tells me that you are not firing enough. That this, the Emperor's most glorious battleship, is not pulling its weight.'

He paused. The men were heaving lungfuls of air in, sweating over the weight of the flechettes, the loading mechanisms, rattling chains and connectors, hooking the warheads to their gantries and loading them with drilled efficiency; but they were also listening. They were as eager to please the Lord Commissar as they were to destroy the enemy; Vandemarr had worked long and hard to build the respect he rightly deserved as the Emperor's will incarnate.

'Well, I can see that you men are,' he continued. 'That you are pulling your weight; that you are loading the ordinance and firing as ordered, with the speed and discipline that I would come to expect of the holy Imperial Navy.'

'LOCKED!' one of the men shouted. Vandemarr paused as the breach cap was rammed home on a hydraulic piston arm, and sealed with a locking lever.

'CLEAR!' another man shouted, checking the lever.

'FIRE!' the last man shouted, the battery commander. The gun recoiled thunderously down its runners as the nuclear flechette exploded from the barrel and, shedding its sabot in the gulf between the two ships, slammed into the Hero's shields, sending a ripple of energy down its surface. Immediately, from the deck above, a trio of dual-powered lance batteries opened up, trying to find a hole in

the overloading shields; but were denied as they held fast.

'But hear this!' Vandemarr shouted as the process repeated, and gangs began hauling the breach cap open and removing the empty casing. 'The Captain wants to flank in less than five minutes! I have been to the engine decks myself to ensure the reactor is prepped and ready! Why not deny them that satisfaction? Why not end this battle before Scarcroft gets his flank? More fire from the batteries, men! And take the glory for yourselves! It's there to be had, to be won, with the rigor and discipline the Emperor's finest gun crews are capable of! Your craft is death! Fulfil it! Honour it now! Destroy that frakking ship, and make the flank unnecessary! Do it now, and do it quickly! The rewards will be rich, men! Of that, you have my word!'

By the time he had finished, a second flechette had been launched and a third was in position. The men grunted and strained and worked furiously – harder and faster than before, yet still with the rigid discipline that was the hallmark of the navy's gun crews.

Vandemarr turned, and moved on to the next battery.

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Fire slammed into the Tau's starboard flank, and the aliens responded in kind; but the upper hand was firmly in the Imperial's grasp. As they two huge ships edged closer, trading steams of ordinance and munitions, Lord Scarcroft seized the opportunity the second it presented itself; a lull in the Hero's dorsal battery fire. It was either a malfunction or a shell shortage, but it mattered little to the Captain of the Atherstone. With the plasma reactor up to full power and the ancillary nodes charged to take the brunt of the sudden and massive acceleration, the Lunar-class cruiser powered forward in a sudden burst of energy and swept round the fore flank of the enemy vessel.

The Tau shields, battered to the point of overloading by the renewed vigour of Imperial port battery crews, hadn't a hope in hell of withstanding the three quad-powered lance strikes to its neck; and with a blowback of energy that scrambled half its starboard sensor arrays, they failed.

The Atherstone had emerged the victor, and sealed the Hero's fate with a full fifty-gun broadside, smashing the neck of the cruiser into oblivion and tearing the semi-circular head from the main body. The follow-up strike saw the starboard

flank of the Tau cruiser explode into a nebula of blue and yellow light, and sent its broken form tumbling into the depths of the void, the decks of its exposed hull jutting out like a gigantic ribcage trailing globules of molten hull.

\*\*\*

Captain Scarcroft watched from the prow sensor arrays as the Tau cruiser listed into deep space, and smiled. Next to him, Lord Commissar Albrecht Vandemarr arrived on the bridge, holstered his bolt pistol, and wiped another man's blood from his forehead.

'Everything in order, Lord Commissar?' Scarcroft asked, his downturned features contorting into an unpleasant smile. Vandemarr nodded.

'The men have been inspired, sir,' he said, striding towards vox command. 'The men in the counter-boarding garrison, however, had been prematurely relieved. I found them in the barracks decks a full two minutes before the end of the engagement.'

'As per my orders, Lord Commissar,' Scarcroft said, slightly uncomfortably. 'We had pressed home the attack, and succeeded.'

'Yet the engagement was not over,' Vandemarr said. 'Such laxity of discipline will not suffice on an Imperial cruiser. A surprise board may well have been the enemy's last plan of attack before they rightly conceded defeat.'

He pulled his bolt pistol from its holster, and levelled it and his attentions at the Senior Vox Officer's skull. 'For relaying such an order, your life is forfeit. As a man who deals in communication, you should have known better than to stand the men down.'

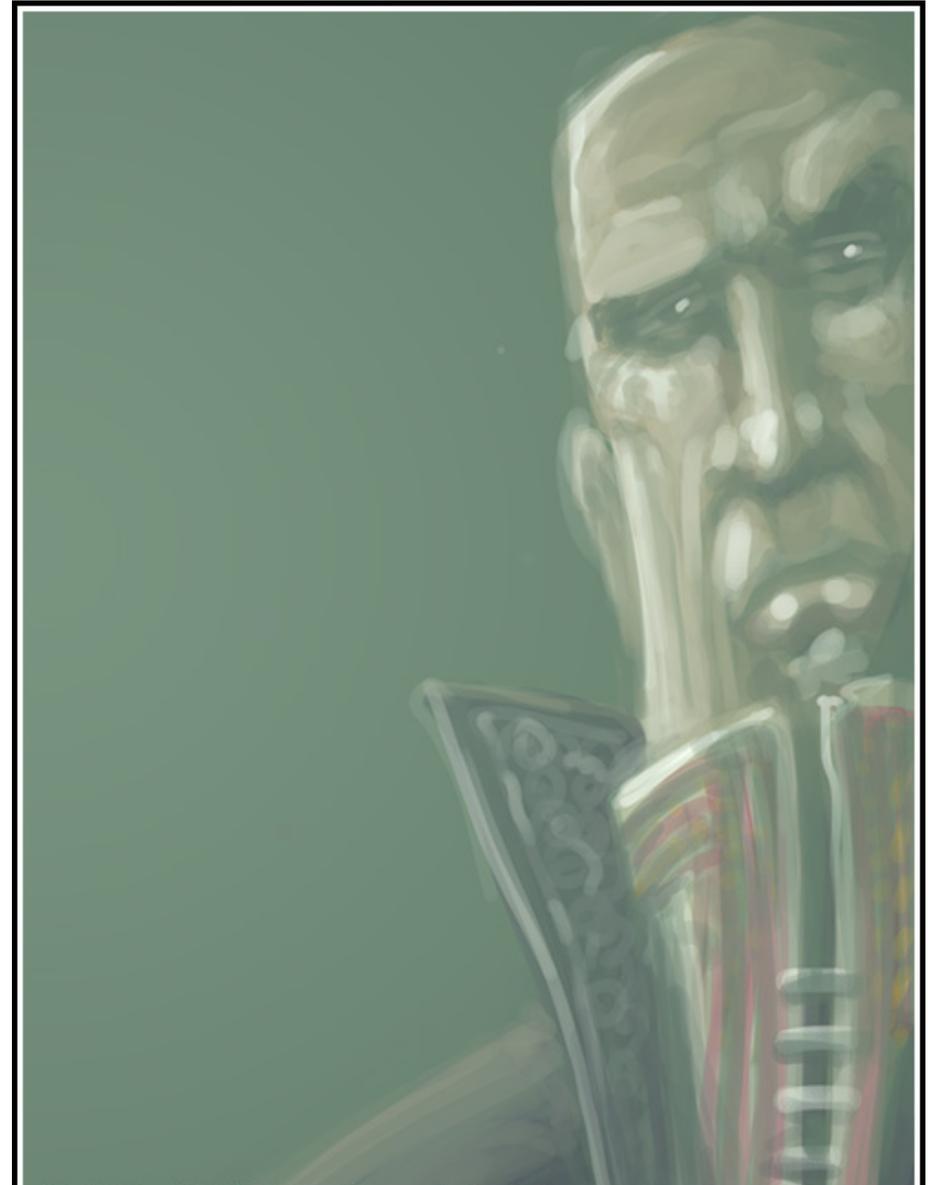
He pulled the trigger as the SVO was halfway through pissing himself, and his brains flayed the vox console.

'Dear Emperor, Commissar!' Scarcroft half shouted, trying to press himself back into his seat. The crewmen sat nervously, clearly shocked, though none dared cry out.

'Helm! Set course for Port Veshlun,' Vandemarr snapped, turning the bolt pistol on Scarcroft. He fired, and the Captain's head, like his SVO's, exploded over the command console. 'We require a new Commander. A competent one.'

He holstered the bolt pistol and strode towards the bridge exit.

'Carry on.'



# LORD COMMISSAR

BY THIJS BAXTER

*Of all the millions of men that serve in His Divine Majesty's Navy, only the merest fraction prove themselves worthy to bear the title of Commissar. These few men and women are responsible for maintaining discipline aboard the vessel they are assigned to – no small task, considering the thousands of ratings and officers required even to crew the frigates of the Imperial Navy and the months or even years that such a crew may be called upon to serve without rest or respite. Life for the crew is tough; discipline tougher – a Commissar will not bat an eye at the prospect of condemning scores of ratings to the firing squad for misdemeanours that, to most, would seem forgivable; perhaps even negligible. A Commissar, however, knows that an infraction against the edicts of the Navy is as good as an infraction against the Emperor himself and will not suffer those who show the Immortal Emperor such disrespect to live. Further to this, a Commissar is expected, at all times, to show utter valour in his actions, ruthless determination to do the Emperors bidding and wisdom beyond the ken of most mortal men. All of this makes the men and women of the Commissariat some of the most feared and respected members of a ship's crew and some of the most instrumental in attaining victory for the Emperor.*

*And yet, even amongst this elite, there are those who perform above and beyond all expectations. They are the Lord Commissars and their exploits are the stuff of legend. The title of Lord Commissar may only be bestowed through the combined authority of the Segmentum Commander and the Ecclesiarchal Prelate, with the express permission of the Sector Lord of the Inquisition, and it is an honour granted infrequently. These few men and women number only in the hundreds, an inconceivably minute fraction of all humanity's trillions, and yet they make their presence felt wherever the Admiralty*

## **0-1 Lord Commissar 100pts**

Up to one Lord Commissar may be included in an Imperial Navy fleet of 1500pts or more. The Lord Commissar is embarked on a ship before deployment begins and is assumed to begin the game on the bridge.

The Lord Commissar grants an additional fleet re-roll. He also grants the ship he is present aboard a +1 modifier in the event that the ship is boarded. If a Lord Commissar is included in the fleet, increase the attack rating of the fleet by +1

I relieve you...

*see fit for them to serve. A lifetime of dutiful and exemplary service is expected of every Commissar, so only those who regularly perform acts that the Astartes would balk at are even considered for the rare and auspicious title of Lord Commissar. These are men and women who have achieved the impossible in the name of the Emperor many times over, and lived to tell the tale. Men and women such as Commissar Doram, who single-handedly stormed the bridge of the Murder Class Cruiser "Despicable", challenging and besting in single combat her captain, the Chaos Space Marine Innik Dereggen. Or Commissar Vandemarr, who (along with a small team) defeated an entire Genestealer cult, which threatened Ancient Terra herself. Or Commissar Vallia, who led the defence of the stricken Emperor Class Battleship "Indomitable" against waves of Ork boarders for over 70 hours, without respite. Having finally repulsed the boarders, she led the counter-assault against the Orks and succeeded in crippling the enemy vessel, despite suffering multiple grievous wounds.*

*A precious resource, these legendary men and women are dispatched to serve aboard the Emperors vessels only when they are most sorely needed – be it their iron discipline that is required, or their tactical expertise – it is guaranteed that they will rise to the challenge. Having learned through their years of service that the best way to get things done is to do them yourself, a Lord Commissar will not shy away from dividing his time around the ship – even taking temporary command of certain aspects of the ship when it is clear that this would be advantageous. Through this as much as their reputation, a Lord Commissar has a marked impact on the performance of the ship they are assigned to, as well as the performance of the fleet as a whole and is not to be underestimated.*

The Lord Commissar may move about the ship he is present aboard in the movement phase, before the ship moves. He does not have to move. Depending on his whereabouts aboard the ship, he will have the following effects:

*Engineering* - the Lord Commissar arrives on the engineering deck to personally "motivate" the engineers. The ship automatically passes the leadership test for using the All Ahead Full special order.

*Fire Control* - the Lord Commissar temporarily

relieves the officer directing the ship's firepower. All weapons batteries benefit from a left column shift. Lances may re-roll failed "to hit" rolls.

*Launch Decks* -the Lord Commissar oversees the loading and re-loading of the ships ordnance. Failed Reload Ordnance leadership checks may be re-rolled.

*Bridge* - the Lord Commissar takes his place on the bridge, where he can distribute his attentions throughout the ship. The ship gains a +1 leadership modifier to a maximum of ten.

# SEGMENTUM ULTIMA – A CADET’S GUIDE

BY AGAINST THE STREAM

## **Segmentum Ultima – A Cadet’s Guide an address by Lord Solar Admiral Huascar, Imperial Terran Naval Academy.**

When gifted and ambitious Fleet Cadets consider which postings within the Imperial Fleet to apply for, Segmentum Ultima’s many and varied sectors are rarely among their top choices. Ultima lacks the overwhelming naval power, the frequent warfare and the rapid promotion prospects of Segmentum Obscuras with its massive bastion fleets. Similarly, Ultima lacks the high technology, substantial power and immense prestige of Segmentum Solar. Segmentum Tempestus is well known through the exploits of forces such as Battlefleet Bakka. Even Segmentum Pacificus holds more reknown than Ultima – with the ships of Hydraphur being relatively well known across the empire and their designs highly regarded. By contrast, cadets sent to Segmentum Ultima, according to common belief, are condemned to very long patrols or boring escort duty with relatively little action and strictly limited prospects of major fleet engagements. This reputation is wholly undeserved and I hope to convince many of you to come and join my forces in Ultima.

For those of you who know nothing of the Eastern Fringe beyond “Rogue Traders”, here are a few tantalising details:

- 1 Ultima is the largest Segmentum in the Empire with its Segmentum Headquarters based on the forge world of Kar Duniash.
- 2 Ultima includes the most varied range of solar systems and spatial environments spanning from the Galactic Core all the way to the Galactic Rim.
- 3 Ultima includes the mineral-rich Squat/Demiurge Homeworlds with their coveted technologies.
- 4 Ultima provides 60% of all the Imperium’s raw materials and has a massive Navis Merchantilis.
- 5 Ultima only includes 18% of the lawless rabble that it pleases the Emperor to call his loyal subjects, only 15% of the Imperium’s industrial capacity and the smallest fleet of any Segmentum – so we have to use innovative approaches to produce and sustain a Galaxy-spanning victorious fleet and protect our merchant shipping.
- 6 Kar Duniash is privy to some of the most advanced and exotic technologies in the Imperium and from beyond its frontiers.
- 7 Kar Duniash enjoys some of the most talented of the Emperor’s servants including many of the best of the Adeptus Mechanicus, Rogue Traders, Adeptus Titanicus’ Divisio Mandati Orders, Astrotelepaths and outstanding Navigators.
- 8 Ultima includes the second largest permanent Warp Storm in the Galaxy (after the Eye of Terror) and Ultima’s Battlefleets hold the forces of Chaos and renegades in check there every bit as effectively as happens in Segmentum Obscuras.
- 9 Ultima is more gravely threatened by xenoscum than any other Segmentum. There are ongoing major Tyranid incursions, numerous foul Orks and arrogant Eldar and the young Tau Empire poses a serious and growing challenge to the Imperial Navy in several sectors of the Segmentum.
- 10 Beyond the reaches of the Astronomican and Ultima’s furthest astrotelepathic navigation beacons, there exist human empires surviving from the Dark Age of Technology. These have untold technological treasures but are dangerous as many have allied themselves with aliens and view the Holy Emperor as a tyrant.
- 11 As well as those yet to receive the Emperor’s light, there are those who have already forsaken it and yet others who are neither one nor the other – they have been banished from the Imperium. They are the Exiles. These were once noble marines and titan crews whose

legions defected to the damnable Horus, but they refused to renounce their vows to the Emperor and fought against their treacherous brothers until arrested and disarmed by the Inquisition. Deemed to have tainted Geneseed, these marines and titans were rearmed but banished to the Galactic East, far beyond the reach of the Astronomican.

- 12 Ultima's small fleet does perform routine patrols and escort duty – but our battlefleets also race between conflict zones and even patrol ships and escorts are rarely to grow lax and out of practice for long. Our ships are advanced and impressive and our crews are well trained and drilled.
- 13 With relatively few people in many of the sectors, our personnel are well looked after. Conditions of service are good and rules are firm but not harsh. We are pragmatic rather than dogmatic. In some sectors, many of our ratings are paid volunteers.
- 14 Our ships often spend long periods far from help and our crews and leaders are expected to be independent, hardy, self reliant and resourceful. We do not need (or want) mindless order-followers or sycophantic yes-men. We believe that talent should speak for itself and the cream should rise to the top.
- 15 Ultima enjoys a huge Frontier Zone – making it a Segmentum of incredible opportunity for all ambitious cadets! There is not another Segmentum like it. You will never get a better opportunity than this. The Imperium needs you

– apply for Ultima today!

## ULTIMA FLEET LIST

### FLEET COMMANDER

0-1 Admiral

Fleet Admiral (Ld 8)	_____	50 pts
Admiral (Ld 9)	_____	100 pts
Solar Admiral (Ld 10)	_____	150 pts
Master of the Fleet (Ld 10)	_____	50 pts

*An Admiral comes with 1 re-roll. They may purchase an extra re-roll at a cost of 25 points.*

*A Master of the Fleet can only be taken if the fleet is a pure Space Marine fleet.*

### CAPITAL SHIPS

*Ships may be selected from any Imperial Navy list presented in the main rulebook or the Armada supplement.*

#### Battleships:

You may take 1 Battleship for every 4 cruisers and battlecruisers.

#### Battlecruisers:

You may take 1 Battlecruiser for every 2 cruisers. *(compact – 1 for boarding assaults (defence unaffected) but extra sensitive sensorium)*

#### Cruisers:

You may take 1 Cruiser for every 1 Light Cruiser + 1 Destroyer squadron *(compact – 1 for boarding assaults (defence unaffected) but extra sensitive sensorium)*

#### Light Cruisers and Strike Cruisers:

Unlimited

Frigates, Destroyers, Corvettes and Escorts:  
Unlimited

#### Ordnance:

(Scout Furies – see below)

#### Reserves:

(scrap fleet – see below)

### Battleships

Battleships are rarer in Ultima than in other Segmenta. Those crews who are posted on battleships can expect to perpetually travel from one major conflict zone to another, only stopping for refits, repairs, training and occasional fleet exercises. The intervention of a fleet containing a battleship typically follows careful reconnaissance and Ultima battle doctrine seeks the complete elimination of an inferior enemy without significant loss – efficient and deadly. Ultima cannot afford to suffer heavy losses in battles. Very occasionally, large fleets must gather for war – this tends to be a more costly affair. Sector Battlefleets are usually heavily reinforced for such awe inspiring events.

### Battlecruisers

Battlecruisers are not uncommon. They are often sent to minor conflict zones and to quell rebellious systems which have small in-system fleets or strong defences. Battlecruisers are typically sent alone or with a single escort squadron for such missions. Kar Duniash Battlecruisers have a number of adaptations to the conditions of Ultima Segmentum (see Cruisers below).

### Cruisers

Cruisers are common in Ultima – many are sent on long patrols and their resourceful crews are

renown for fighting one-on-one combats against equally potent opponents with no prospect of reinforcements. This has led to a different type of cruiser. Compare any Kar Duniash pattern cruiser with a Cypra Mundian equivalent and you will see it is significantly smaller. The need for long patrol endurance has led Kar Duniash to minaturise equipment, make ship-systems more power-efficient, automate crew functions and reduce crew numbers. Fewer crew and more efficient systems require smaller plasma reactors and such vessels can be made more stealthy. The reduction in crew numbers mean Kar Duniash cruisers and battle cruisers may sometimes suffer a penalty when mounting boarding actions but automated defences prevent the ship from being hindered when defending against boarding actions. As one-on-one ship and small-fleet actions are more common in Ultima, considerable effort has been put into providing an enhanced sensorium. The ability to detect an enemy long before being detected gives a greater advantage in Ultima than the raw power of larger plasma reactors and more crewmen.

**Light Cruisers**

Light cruisers are the most common capital ship



in Ultima. Often many years on patrol, crews are expected to be resourceful enough to handle pirates, quell rebellious planetary systems or ambush treacherous escort squadrons without external assistance. As with cruisers, Kar Duniash produces light cruisers that are stealthy and boast impressive sensor capabilities. Light cruisers are also swift and designed to be exceptionally swift in warp-travel. Usually the first to arrive at the scene of trouble, light cruisers may need to warn Battlefleet Command and then patiently shadow superior enemies until a strike fleet arrives.

**Destroyers**

The Cobra destroyer is the most common in Ultima. It is frequently found in two variants – the torpedoes and weapon battery variant and a slightly slower torpedoes and lance variant. Cobra squadrons are compact and efficient and can be expected to perform lengthy patrols and escort duties when not assigned to Strike Fleets or Battlefleets.

**Ordnance**

In addition to regular starhawk bombers and fury interceptor variants, Ultima makes extensive use of longer-range Fury Scouts. These modified interceptors have reduced armament but enhanced sensors, stealth features and increased endurance and are excellent for in-system reconnaissance while the mothership remains safely hidden and powered-down.

**Reserves**

The limited industry in Ultima constrains the Segmentum’s ship-building capacity but warp-capable crippled ships and obsolete ships from other Segmenta are often transferred to Ultima for lengthy rebuilds and repairwork. This means that Ultima’s fleets include some rare, ancient and exotic ships from elsewhere in the Imperium. Ships from the forgeworlds of Cypra Mundi, Mars, Hydraphur and Voss can all be found in Ultima, along with dreadnoughts, Praetor class cruisers and rare alien vessels brought back by rogue traders.

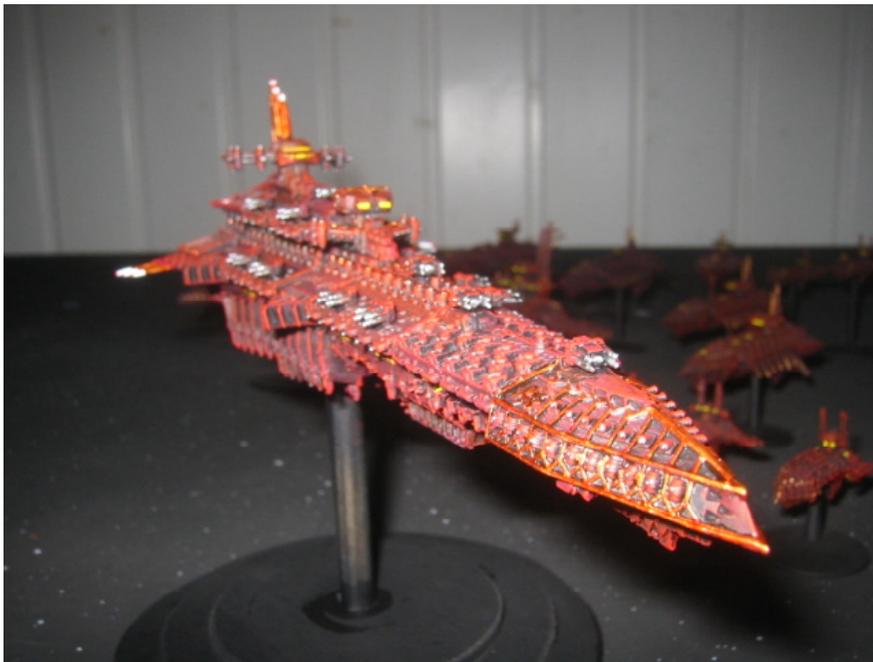
# DELIVERANCE

BY ADMIRAL ROB DE BERTL

## Introduction

*Hi fellow Admirals! I guess most of you guys have your own favorite ships – your own personal command battleship. I also guess that most of you have converted them in some way – after all it is a special ship. Well, the guys from Warp Rift were so kind as to allow some space in their great Netzine for me to show you my favorite – and since it is an extensive conversion, we are sitting here in Dry Dock. I provide you here with fluff (interesting, I hope) experimental rules (always debatable) and step by step construction instructions for those who will give this conversion a shot. So go ahead – it's a modeling project well worth it. By the way, contrary to many great conversions out there I tried to make the ship look like a GW/Forgeworld model, for I believe that the best conversions are those which are not recognized as such.*

*Admiral Rob de Bertl*



## Background

Contrary to the mostly intermittent information available on the ships of the arch enemy, the history regarding the chaos Super-Battleship Deliverance is quite complete and well known (at least to the Inquisition). The Deliverance can not be allocated to any class of ships, as her construction was as monumental as it was singular.

## History:

The history of afore mentioned ship begins with the unexpected coincidence of two events which each by itself would not have prompted the construction of the ship. In 358/M33 the rule of the planetary governor of the industrial world Dalos, Jean-Paul Dalos was usurped and the lord executed by his half brother Lucius Dalos. In parallel, Dalos was requested by the Administrantum to tithe a ship of the line to the Segmentum Solar Sector Fleet. Lucius, megalomaniac and deeply paranoid, saw in the request a chance to legitimize his rule and to heighten his personal prestige with the Lords of Terra immensely by tithing a truly imposing ship. Thus in 359/M33 he ordered the Dalos orbital docks to construct the biggest / most powerful / most monumental Battleship of all time. Although such a project by itself is noble and most welcome, this particular effort could end only in disaster. As Dalos did not have any modern ship designs available, a synthesis of the older Desolator and Despoiler designs, along with some heretical blueprints from the Dark Age of Technology, was used as a basis. Although it was clear from the beginning that the monumental effort needed to build the ship would never coincide with its effectiveness, Lucius ordered the construction.

Two years into construction and with 28 years left, disaster struck. The augurs prophesized a warp storm to hit the Dalos system in one decade at the latest, which would isolate the planet for years or perhaps centuries to come. Lucius saw himself as being cheated for his prize – what was the ship worth if he could not deliver it? Lucius chose to pump absolutely all resources of his planet into the construction in order to complete the ship before the storm hit. In the beginning the population of Dalos was quite enchanted with the project, however an exorbitant tax rise and food shortages led to rebellions as more and more resources were diverted to the

construction site. The PDF collected the taxes without mercy, and went as far as pressing the population of entire cities into the work force if quotas were not met. Large parts of the construction force were worked to death and even more citizens died simply of starvation as nearly all agriculture was abandoned in favor of the construction project. Unrest was violently suppressed and thousands executed to keep the population in line, all the while Lucius and his court accompanied the construction with lavish parties and luxurious excesses.

This immense effort was to bear fruit, albeit with some side effects. Not a decade after the first screw was placed into metal, in 367/M33 the ship was deemed complete. The yet unnamed vessel dwarfed everything ever placed by man into the stars. Fully 20 km long, up to 8 km wide and 6 km high, it was a weapon encrusted fortress, which only space stations rivaled in firepower.

In fact the ship could only be described as a hive in space, with promenades, plazas, residential areas and factories. A large section of the ship was devoted to the most luxurious casinos, bars, theatres and parks so that the officers and concubines along with important guests would find every kind of distraction on long space voyages.

The hangers and Docks were not only capable of handling the biggest freighters and luxury yachts available in the sector, but also harbored a number of fighter and bomber squadrons exceeding those of the biggest available carriers. In addition, the ship was equipped with an enormous amount of long range weaponry and lance batteries, making it able to take on any ship.

Powered by many powerful plasma reactors feeding gigantic shield generators and encrusted with short ranged, stand off weaponry, the ship is as well protected as any other.

Lucius was truly proud of his accomplishment, and while the planet below was ripped asunder by anarchy and open rebellion, Lucius and his court prepared to christen the ship in a lavish ceremony and then leave orbit. Lucius had decided to personally deliver the ship to the High Lord of Terra and at the same time evade his people, who were screaming for his blood. The first omen for impending doom was revealed during the christening ceremony. According to legend, as Lucius tried to christen the ship to the name The Magnificent Lord Lucius Dalos, the golden flask with the rare armasec shattered only on the ominous fourth try. (According to some eye witnesses, chaotic, evil laughter could be heard during each unsuccessful attempt).

The immanent Warp storm could already be seen clearly in the sky and all augurs and astropaths advised against the maiden voyage, but Lucius was insistent. With

an armada of yachts, showboats and transports accompanying the Lord Dalos, the ship made for the system jump zone and powered its warp engines just as the warp storm broke.

Lucius had announced his coming with a well executed propaganda campaign, thus expectations with the Administrantum and the Sol Sector Fleet were high. When the ship did not appear in the designated time frame, the sector fleet was at first thinking of navigational problems due to the warp storm in the sector. Five years passed and the Lord Dalos still did not reach the Sol System – the sector fleet pronounced the Lord Dalos as lost in the warp.

As suddenly in 372/M33 an object with the approximate size of the Lord Dalos appeared in a debris field in close proximity to the Sol system, everything was deemed o.k. A welcome committee comprised mainly of the Battleship Terra Eternus and her escorts made for the object and send greetings. The Lord Dalos answered the greetings with a massive broadside, smashing the escorting cruisers aside and crippling the mighty battleship with a single blow. In all haste battle squadrons were put en route towards the renegade vessel, but could only witness how the Super Battleship, emitting evil laughter and Lord Dalos' bone chilling psychic scream "DELIVERANCE!!", slipped back into the warp. Subsequently the Administrantum named the vessel Deliverance and ordered its destruction – albeit unsuccessful until this day.

### **General description:**

The Deliverance does not belong to any class of ship, she is just similar to a number of other vessels, which were constructed during the few first millennia of the Imperium, some of them even dating back to the Dark Age of Technology. She belongs to the group of super battleships, each one unique and rivaling in size and power space stations and the biggest space hulks. In the race for power amongst the stars ships were built bigger and bigger which ended finally in monumental space hives with millions of crew / inhabitants.

At one point the natural borders with respect to economics and chains of command were breached. For the price of just one of these behemoths, entire battle fleets could be fielded, which are much more in line with fleet tactics and politics. In addition the size, and therefore the bloated command structures lead to unacceptably long reactions times with respect to the orders of the ship commanders (captain is too small a word) so that it was quite usual for a maneuvering order to only result in a course change a couple of hours later. This situation made these ships tactically inflexible and reduced their value in space battles to those of point defense. The big aim of using these monsters to offensively break the lines of the enemy was never achieved. This situation was

compounded by the loss of more and more automation technology from the DAT in the millennia after the 30th., and leadability was further reduced. In the end these ships had become cities in space, movable space stations which at one point in time were replaced by the STC versions of the Ramiles Star Fortress.

### **Size:**

The Deliverance can only be described as a hive in Space, fully 20 km long, 8 km wide and 6 km high. The number of main decks is listed at 62 with an unnamed amount of secondary decks numbering in their hundreds. She sports a main navigational bridge at the rear and a main, heavily armored battle bridge at ship center. Dozens of other command and fire control bridges are spaced throughout the ship. A nearly 200 km long magnetized monorail along with thousands of freight elevators make inter ship travel and transportation possible. The waste disposal areas and recycling plants are bigger than destroyers. The number of ship crew varies according to birth and death rates somewhere around 550,000 with regular members of the fleet numbering around 375,000. The rest are either family members or auxiliary staff. This places the fighting force of the ship along the lines of 30 regiments of imperial guard – small wonder that the ship was never successfully boarded – only once during the maiden voyage with a limited crew of just under 10,000. As an example: just the repair and maintenance crews associated with the fighter and bomber squadrons number over 4,000 – the ship sports two independent pilot schools to train new ordnance crews as well as factories producing new air/spacecraft.

### **Power Supply:**

46 main fusion reactors provide power along with over a hundred secondary reactors. Every second mass in an order of magnitude of grams is converted to energy providing terrawatts of power. This huge amount of energy is necessary to keep the billions of ship systems running; a bored administrator once calculated that ships of this size permanently operate around 20,000 vacuum cleaners or servitors with cleaning functions around the clock.

### **Armament:**

The armament of the Deliverance is awe inspiring. As main arsenal the ship has six lance batteries on each port / starboard side, each fed by a main reactor. These are supplemented by four dorsally mounted lance complexes powered by two reactors each, the added energy needed to traverse the massive turrets at an acceptable rate. In fire mode this extra energy is used to focus the beams even more tightly, resulting in a 25% range increase.

As main batteries the Deliverance is equipped with plasma cannons, mass drivers

and makro cannons combined in 16 fire control centers on each port/starboard side. These are supported by a further 6 central fire control centers – a single well placed salvo can easily cripple a heavy cruiser or even a battleship.

The cavernous halls located in the prow house the torpedo batteries. A mighty salvo of 12 of these monsters can be fired, and although this is more than most other ships can deploy, this weapon is more suited to deliver the coup de grace to a crippled enemy, as due to the bad maneuverability of the ship this weapon is less useful in regular combat.

Due to her large dock areas the ship can deploy 10 mixed squadrons of spacecraft at any one time – more than most carriers. All in all the Deliverance houses nearly 50 fighter squadrons and 30 bomber squadrons along with an uncounted number of transporter, tugs, barges and assault craft.

In addition the ship also sports a peculiarity usually not found among spaceships – rear mounted weapons rivaling the power of escorts.

Usually the exhaust plume of a ship obscures any targets to the rear quarter, making weapons in this sector ineffective. However the Deliverance is so large that portions of the sensor systems and auspex phalanxes protrude far enough into space to be able to detect targets in this fire arc, as many escort ships discovered to their woe while trying to sneak into the Deliverance's rear quarter.

### **Defenses:**

With 26 reactors powering the weapon system, fully 10 are allocated to keep up the mighty shield phalanx. The dampening field around the ship is so strong, that even slow moving matter is inhibited. Beyond that the shields are recharged at an enormous rate so that the concentrated fire of several capital ships is necessary to collapse them to an extent where damage to the superstructure itself is possible. Except for certain especially vulnerable areas the ship is no better armored than other capital ships of the era. Size alone is an effective protection – even if a solid hit rips open a dozen decks – below that are hundreds more to keep up the fight. For close in point defense the hull is encrusted with numerous layers of overlapping defense fire. Turbo lasers, flack batteries, stand off missile and Gatling goal keeper systems create a dense net of defensive fire capable of punching anything out of the sky. Accepted, the Deliverance is just too big up close to miss, but usually nothing important is hit by attacking bomber formations. As numerous attacking formations had to find out, a coordinated attack run is nearly impossible due to the dense defensive fire – any straight trajectory for more than a couple of seconds and you are history.

**Warp Drive:**

The Deliverance is one of the few ships equipped with redundant warp drives and gellar field projectors. Accidents due to warp travel are unknown and the transition between warp and real space seems to pose no problem at all. On several occasions imperial hunter formations reported that the Deliverance disappeared under the most obscure circumstances, even slipping into to warp while affected by strong gravitational fields which make the transition from real to warp space a high risk maneuver for any other ship. This behavior is however also attributed to the spirit of the ship itself which is said to lead a life of its own.

**Current Situation (M41):**

Throughout the millennia the ship has seen many commanders, but never a master. Currently the daemon prince Kahrkaras van Diehl of the Alpha Legion Chaos Space Marine Legion seems to be commanding the ship. How he has managed to gain control is a matter of speculation but never the less the Deliverance has gained new notoriety during his term of command. Employing the ship for well planed and executed raiding maneuvers against a variety of targets the Deliverance is currently leading a renegade fleet in the Styrgis Sector. The fleet was not part of the last great Black Crusade of Abaddon the Despoiler, the daemon prince seems to follow his own agenda.

**The Deliverance and Lucius Dalos**

The Deliverance is unique for a number of reasons, not the least being the amount of information available on her. Interestingly enough, this is connected to Lucius Dalos, the first commander of the ship. As the ship jumped into the warp for the first time, the present warp storm short circuited the minds of every astropath and navigator on board, leaving burned out shells behind. Without the means to navigate, the crew in panic and Lord Dalos sinking even further into madness, the ship drifted aimlessly through the warp. After a year the food supply started to run out and Lord Dalos ordered cannibalism – from then on the bodies of selected virgin boys and girls were served up in his court. This practice could not be covered up for long and a bloody revolt rocked the ship. For months on end different sectors of the ship fought each other with the bodies of the slain becoming the basis of nutrition. Two years later a Night Lords Strike Cruiser stumbled over the drifting vessel and had no trouble capturing the ship. All resistance was quickly annihilated. Deep in the main palace the Night Lords were able to capture Lord Dalos, locked away in his throne room, gnawing on the bones of his last mistresses. Always delighting in dark humor and sadistic acts, Lord Dalos was entombed by the Night Lords in the sarcophagus of a destroyed dreadnought and coupled with the sensor systems of the ship.

For we must not forget that although Lord Dalos was a megalomaniac psychopath and an incompetent and sadistic ruler, he was none the less a loyal servant and staunch supporter of the Imperium. Being entombed in a sarcophagus and chained to the main battle bridge, Lord Dalos is forced to forever witness the atrocities committed with his ship in his name – and able to lament his fate to all who will listen, until the ship, and with it Lord Dalos, is destroyed.

This however seems to be an unlikely prospect, as the ship seems to have a mind of its own – focused on survival. The Deliverance has on several occasions, after receiving crippling damage, made an emergency warp transition – not initiated by the crew. The ship seems to regenerate in the warp and obviously deems its own survival higher than the commands of its captain - as the second captain of the ship had discover to his absolute surprise. Captain of the Night Lords Krull used the mighty ship to raid a heavily shielded military convoy, using the might of the ship as a counterweight to the imperial cruiser squadrons. At the height of the engagement Lord Krull boarded the imperial flagship, counting on support from the Deliverance. However instead of launching a second wave of attack craft the badly mauled Deliverance chose to disengage and slipped in front of Lord Krulls unbelieving eyes into the Warp – leaving him and his marines behind, to his now well motivated enemies.

**Construction Instructions**

DRY DOCK

Below you will find a step by step modeling instructions that allow you to recreate the ship – or build your own version. Pictures of all relevant steps are included.

1. The tools of the trade: clippers, tongs, drill, sharp modeling knife & extra blades, metal saw, files and lots of Green Stuff (GS).



2.  
I used in the construction of the ship::

- 2x Desolator Battleships
- 1x Repulsive Grand Cruiser
- 1x Vengeance Grand Cruiser
- Lots of Bits



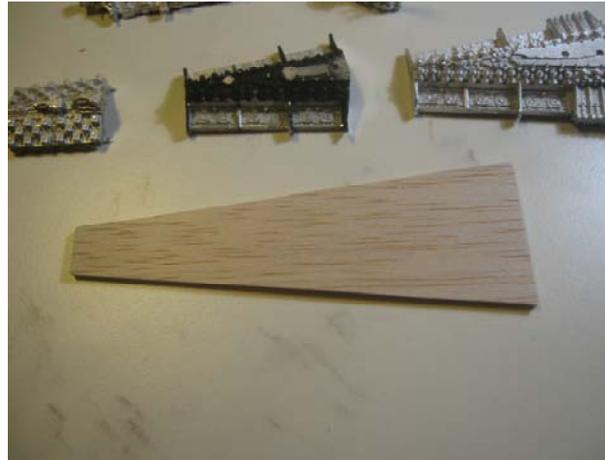
3.  
The general construction idea:

Tip of the Repulsive, parts of the Desolators for the main body. Cut off one Desolator main deck behind the weapon slots, as well as the Repulsive. Cut the second Desolator main deck along its long axis.



4.  
Add a base plate.

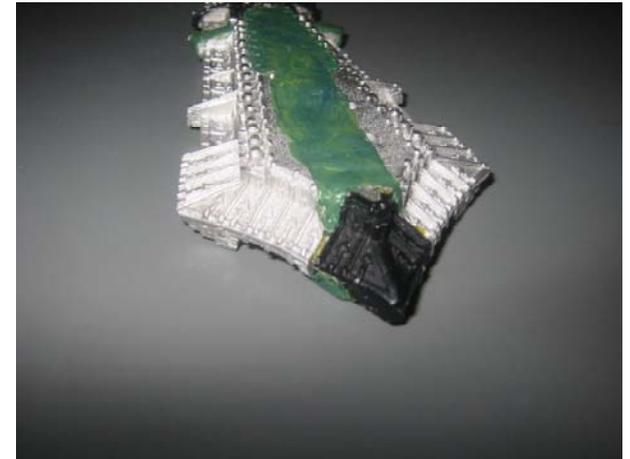
I used a 3mm strong balsa wood plate to create the main deck – it makes mounting the different parts so much easier.



5.  
The assembled parts...



6.  
Insert a piece from the left over desolator tail. If its well done, the entire deck looks like it was made from one piece...



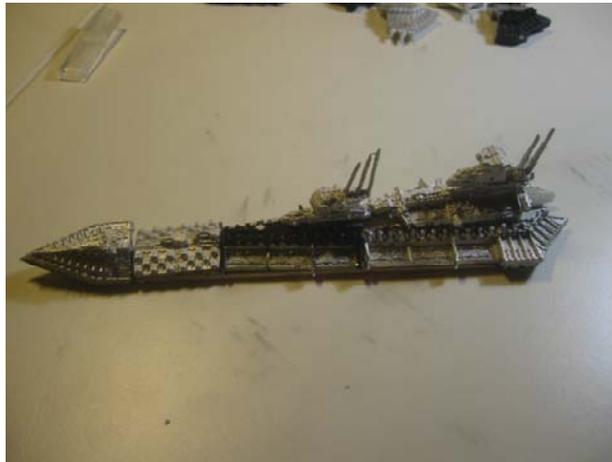
7.  
Fill the main hole with bits of balsa wood and GS... lots of GS... Looks like one piece, eh?



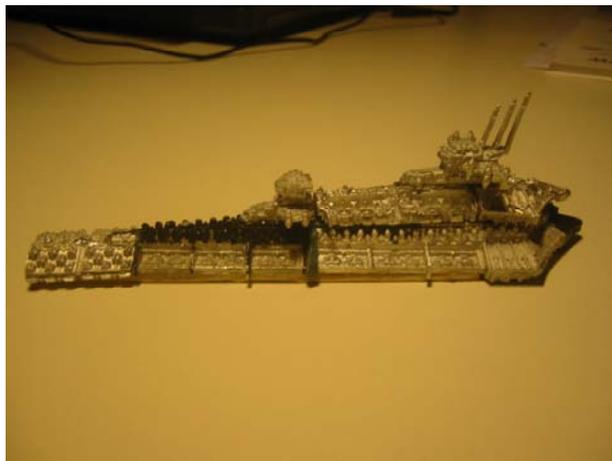
8.  
Creating the upper deck...  

- 1x Grand Cruiser Main Deck
- 1x Grand Cruiser Rear Element
- 2x Battleship Bridges

 Go ahead and try out different variants...

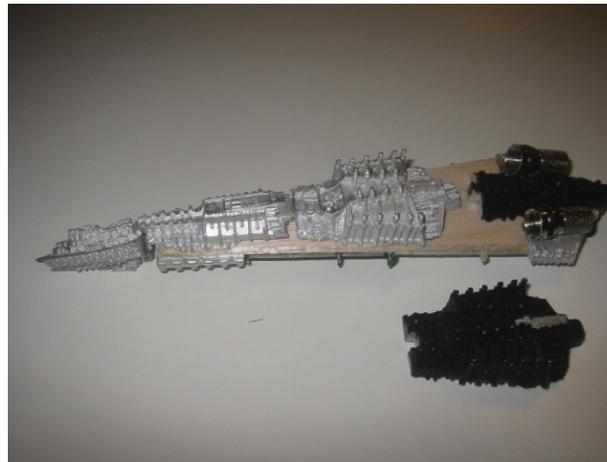


9.  
Upper Deck  
 I settled for this variant. Make the cuts with the saw and file everything plain so that it fits snugly. DO NOT GLUE YET!  
 We need to do the lower deck first...



10.  
Lower Deck (Bottom), Made from:  

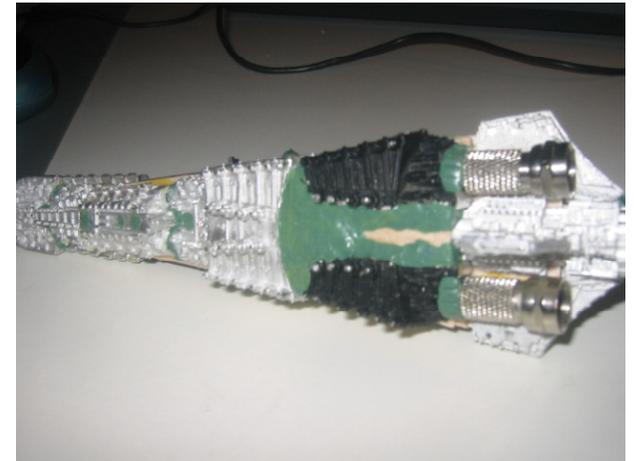
- Repulsive Bottom
- 2 Battleship Bottoms (one cut lengthwise)
- Vengeance Bottom (in the picture a part of a Desolator prow)



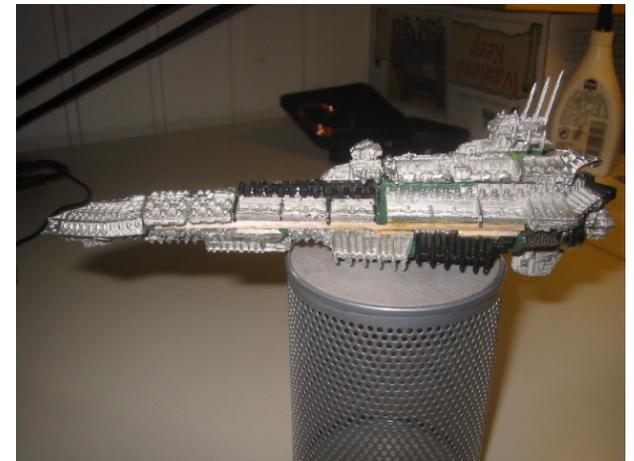
11.  
Lower Deck  
 All parts assembled. I searched long and hard for suitable main engines and finally found them in a DIY Store: Coax Cable Plugs!



12.  
Lower Deck  
 Cut, file, fill with balsa pieces and then add GS, again lots of GS. Pictured here with the Vengeance bottom.



13.  
Final Assembly  
 Add upper Deck, glue the pieces together and fill all gaps again with GS...



14.

Final Assembly

Construct a SOLID base and stem, otherwise you risk total annihilation (or lots of broken antennas...I did). Time to plunder the bitz box – add weapon slots and lance turrets.

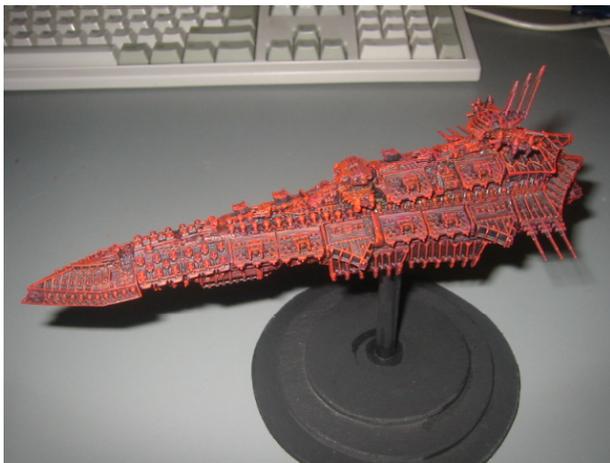


15.

Paint Job

The whole thing starts to look good once undercoated black... (use a spray can).

- 1x dry brush Scab Red
- 1x dry brush Red Gore
- 1x dry brush Blood Red



Weapons:

- 1x Chainmail Silver
- 1x Black Ink
- 1x Mithril Silver

Trim:

- 1x Shining Gold
- 1x Chestnut Ink
- 1x Shining Gold

Lights:

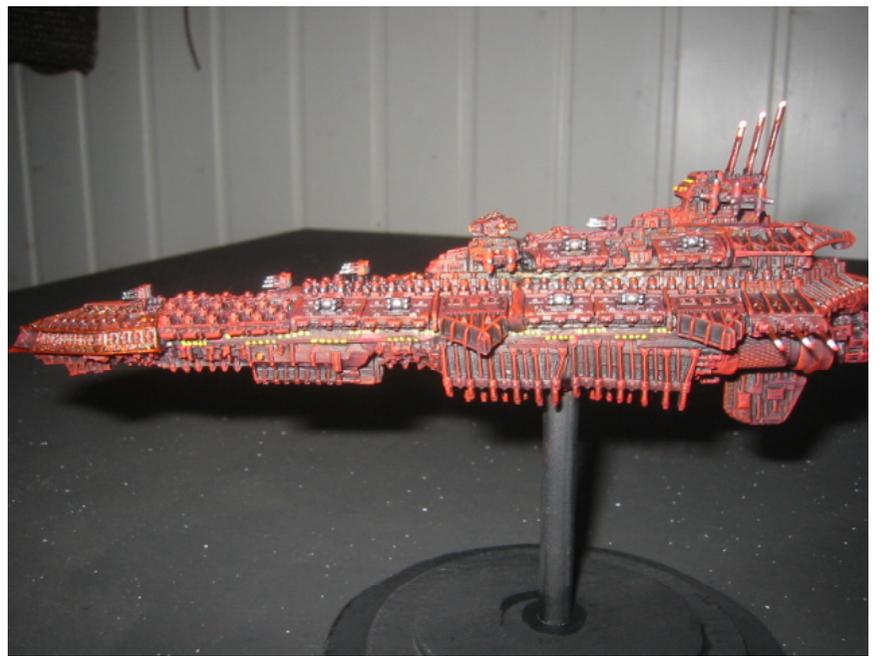
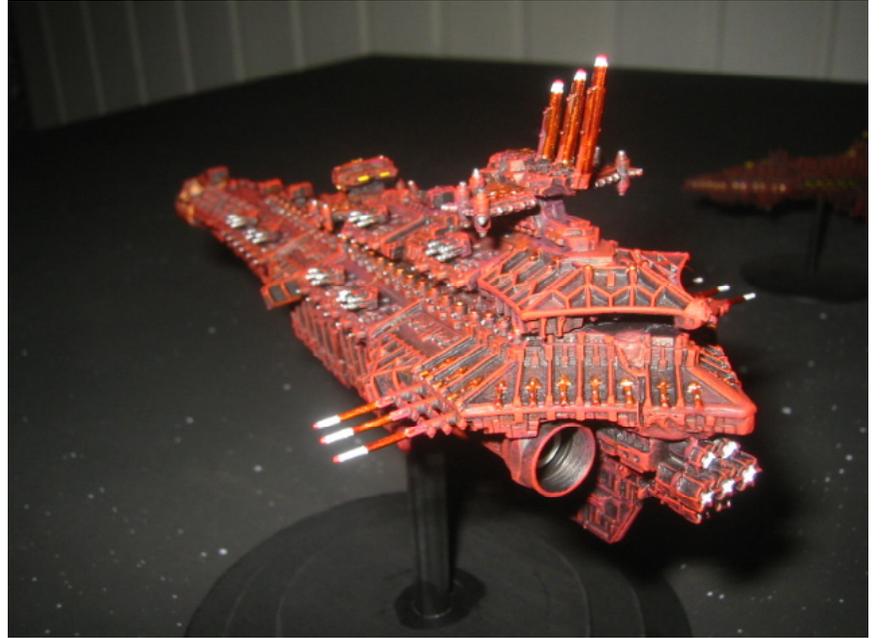
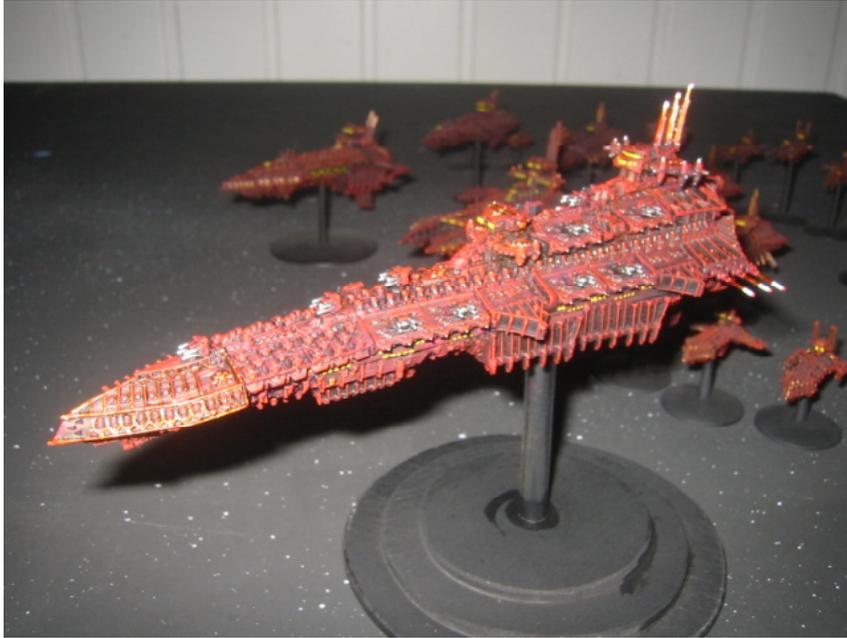
- 1x Golden Yellow
- 1x Sunburst Yellow
- 1x Bad Moon Yellow

Antennas:

- 1x Dwarf Bronze
- 1x Skull White
- 1x Blood Red (tips)



DRY DOCK



## Experimental Rules

### Deliverance Super Battleship

points: 1000

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Battleship/20	15 cm	45°	5	5+	5
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR	FIRE ARC	
Port Weapons Battery		45 cm	16	L	
Starboard Weapons Battery		45 cm	16	R	
Port Lances		45 cm	6	L	
Starboard Lances		45 cm	6	R	
Dorsal Weapon Battery		60 cm	6	L / F / R	
Dorsal Lances		60 cm	4	L / F / R	
Prow Torpedoes		30 cm / O.P.	12	F	
Port Launch Bays		fighters 30cm Bombers 20cm Assault Boats 30cm	5	L	
Starboard Launch Bays		fighters 30cm Bombers 20cm Assault Boats 30cm	5	R	
Rear Weapon Battery		30 cm	4	Rear	
Rear Lances		30 cm	2	Rear	



### Special Rules:

#### 1. Cumbersome

The Deliverance can not receive the Orders “Come to new heading” or “All ahead full” due to her mass.

#### 2. Huge

The Deliverance is so big, that no assault party could ever be strong enough to cause significant damage – the ship is immune to Boarding Actions and Teleport Attacks.

#### 3. Massive

The size of the ship allowed for redundancies in all ship systems – the ship has a special 4+ save against any critical hit – count a successful save as a regular hit instead.

#### 4. A mind of its own...

The ship has a strong survival instinct. If she becomes crippled, she will try to disengage at the end of each turn. A successful command check is necessary to prevent this from happening. If the ship disengages, the opponent receives full victory points.

*And that is all. I hope you have a lot of fun with the ship, I did. Not really useful in normal battles, but an excellent centerpiece for a special scenario. All aboard!*

*Admiral Rob de Bertl*

# GOTHICOMP 2008 - WINNER

THE PAINTING CONTEST WINNER ELDRITCH PATH BY GIULIO DDM

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*Due other circumstances Giullio has not been able to write a small piece of text to go along his excellent painted vessel. In Warp Rift 17 this vessel was shown in the showcase section. This issue we will leave you with a large picture of his winning entry,*



# GOTHICOMP 2008 - WINNER

THE CONVERSION PRIZE WINNER INVICTUS BY CANUCKS FAN

Hi all,

Thanks for all the support for my Ultramarines Battle Barge Invictus. This ship was certainly a challenge to construct, illuminate, and paint. Much of the original metal BB from the box set was modified. The bridge is from the plastic cruisers set, the icons from Forge World, the wings made from sheet plastic, the main turret from putty. Much of the original detail was trimmed down to make room for the freehand painting.

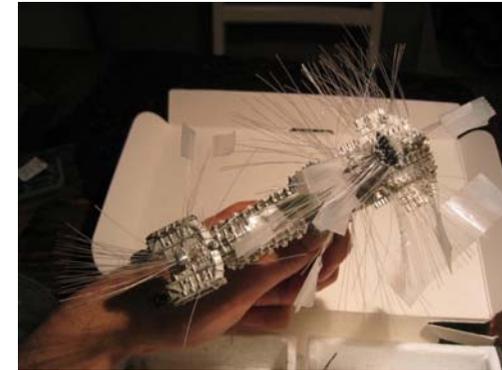
For the electronics, the green plasma cannons were made from casting the stock cannon from Forge World's Epic Warhound, with a green LED placed inside the clear resin. The light blue small lights are miniature Fiber Optic filaments, which run throughout the ship. Much of the metal was hollowed out to provide room for this. Unfortunately, many of these threads were lost, or obscured during the painting process. The power supply for Invictus is two 3V watch batteries. The power cords travel out of the ship down the support stand onto the base where they attach to the batteries.

Most of Invictus was painted using an airbrush. The ship was airbrushed a dark blue to start. Then, pure white paint was airbrushed mainly from the above, and tapering out to the sides of the ship. This gives a subtle two-toned effect, highlights the details, and simulates the light and shadow from a light source. The skulls were all painted using successive layers (glazes) of dilute white paint with a brush. The gold icons

were all painted with a modified non-metal metallic technique: They were highlighted with glazes as with the traditional NMM technique, then lightly glazed with a gold metallic color in the brightest highlighted areas.

Thanks again for the interest, and feel free to take a look at more WIP photos and tutorials for Invictus at:

<http://www.tacticalwargames.net/forums/index.cgi?act=ST;f=8;t=12607;st=15>





*Four pictures of the finished and almost finished (top left) Invictus.*



# FANNON'S PATROL

BY REG STEINER

*This is one BattleFleet Gothic scenario from our narrative campaign, built around a variable number of scenarios - depending on who wins and how often. The original campaign was themed around Imperial attempts to 're-settle' an area of stars that had fallen to Ork expansion. However, renegades and traitors could be found in these same wild regions, so substitutions of the forces listed with Eldar pirates, Chaos Legions, or even Imperial ships as the attacker, can all be variations to this battle.*

## Background

The last convoy to arrive at Laura's Planet reported being attacked by a swarm of small pirate vessels. Only the fact that this had been a fast convoy, and so outran the attackers, did anyone survive to make the report. A normal slow convoy would never have had a chance. Fleet-Admiral Fannon, bragging of past victories, prevailed on Admiral Smithson to lead an expedition to expunge the pirate vermin. Because there is only one safe route to the mines on Laura's Planet, through the cloud of asteroids all around this star, no attempts to interfere with trade traffic can be tolerated.

## Forces

Imperial

2 cruisers (only 1 may be a battle-cruiser)

3 Swords (Squadron 1)

3 Swords (Squadron 2)

Ork

The Ork player chooses 3 types of escort, then rolls 1D6 for each type. A roll of 1 or 6 is a miss, a 2 thru 5 equals the number of that type escort. This is accomplished twice. The resultant force is hidden in two of the 3 asteroid fields described below. For a real tough nut of a game, place a third randomly generated force described above in the third asteroid field!

## Table Set-up

On a 4 x 6 table, place a gas planet in one corner, 5cm from either edge. This is the Imperial starting edge. On the long table edge opposite the planet, measure 30cm from the Imperial starting edge, and place the first asteroid field, no more than 15cm into the table, and 25cm long. Place a second asteroid field 25cm further down the same edge, also 15cm by 25cm, also not extending the asteroids more than 15cm into the table. Lay out the third 15cm by 25cm asteroid field 25cm along the same edge from the second field. There should now be 3 fields of asteroids, 15cm by 25cm, each right to the edge of the table and spaced 25cm apart. (Model Railroad hobby shops sell bags of fake rocks - perfect asteroids!) The opposite table edge is one great asteroid field, and any ship exiting that edge is destroyed. Both short table edges are open, and any vessel leaving the table that way are considered to have escaped.

## Mission

The Imperial force is supposed to destroy the pirate presence, not knowing how big that force is. Standard Victory Points are used. Only destroyed and crippled vessels count, escaped vessels do not count for either side. The game continues until one

side is totally destroyed, or has exited the table.

The starting two randomly generated Ork forces are written out on paper detailing strength and location, and set aside for later - don't let the Imperial player get advance intelligence! All Ork ships are considered near the edge of the field, "running silent". The Ork forces can attack at any time, and when they do, all ships within that asteroid field are revealed, but not necessarily the second group, unless they also attack in the same turn.

Imperial ships move first, entering the table on turn one, from the short table edge nearest the gas planet.

This scenario can be played over and over, what with the many types of Imperial cruisers to choose from, added to the wide variation in numbers and types of Ork escorts available and force sizes randomly rolled up. Imperial escorts attacking an Eldar pair of cruisers and accompanying escorts, is yet another example of possible variations. Bring your favorite race, and see how they fare against swarms of enemy escorts!

Good Hunting!

# HIGH ANCHOR - PART THREE

BY RICHARD SWAN

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## ELEVEN

“Grechte...you...son...of...a...bitch,” Grant murmured through useless lips. Only the blurred shape of his equerry was visible to him through his now thoroughly limited vision. The buzzing was intolerable in his ears, a terrible crescendo of noise that made him weep. His limbs lay limp and lifeless. The swirling cocoon of holoscreens had vanished. His interface was weakening by the second.

“Shut up,” Grechte snapped, licking his vermillion fingers clean. “Pathetic man. Soon your blood will just be another meagre gallon for the Blood God, your skull just another for his mighty throne. You disgust me with your...” his lips curled around glistening fangs. “...self-righteous indignation.”

The former aide de camp turned and quickly decapitated Grant’s Senior Vox Officer with a rusty, sword-like extension from his forearm, relishing in the bloodletting. A fountain of arterial crimson soaked the equerry’s uniform, and he cried out in his – to him – erotic display of brutality.

“Blood! YES!” he shouted to the high, domed roof of the bridge, laughing manically.

The remaining crewmen – lined up and bound – gasped and struggled. Those that had been armed – the auspex and engine officers – had been the most swiftly dealt with. Soaking up their hard pistol rounds like a sponge to water, he had sunk his teeth into the first officer’s neck and dragged out a long cluster of stringy gore, before stuffing his hand in the fresh cavity and ripping out what remained. The second officer was then punched through the stomach as he retched at the sight, wet viscera showering out the gaping exit wound like a burst water balloon, before both corpses were quickly flayed and impaled on broken wall piping. The rest had charged him, but their feeble attempts were akin to those of children, and it had been no difficulty in restraining them.

Of course, to say that the Fleet Admiral hadn’t been too happy would have been a severe understatement: but his direct neural interface with the ship had left him irrevocably impotent. The power core had been shut down because of his link to it, which had in turn weakened him. That, along with the all-pervading Chaos presence, had meant his apoplexy was all the stronger – and he was all the more powerless.

Now the remaining crewmen had been lined up and bound – thirty four in total – and had, like the SVO, been executed in all manner of ways – unless they succumbed to Chaos.

So far, the Fleet Admiral had noted with some pride, none of them had. But with twenty-six left, and the punishments for renouncing the Warp Gods becoming increasingly violent, he didn’t much rate their remaining mental strength.

And his fears were confirmed when his Junior Auspex Officer, kneeling in urine-soaked breeches, chokingly accepted Grechte’s offer.

\* \* \*

His pumping legs were screaming in oxygen debt. His muscles burned with all the ferocity of a ship’s engines. His breath rasped loudly in his heaving lungs. Sweat streaked and dripped across his face.

Shedding his stiff midnight blue jacket, so that only a white string vest remained to cover his muscle-knotted torso, First Officer Mulbern sprinted through the officer’s quarters as fast as he possibly could, as fast as his perspiration-soaked legs would take him. He gritted his teeth as stitches gnawed his innards, as the lactic acid built up in greater and greater quantities, as his heart palpitated painfully below his sternum, as his bicep bulged and pulsed with gripping the stubber.

None of it mattered now. His own physical discomfort was paltry in comparison

to the Fleet Admiral's safety. He no longer cared for anything – only finding, and killing Grechte as quickly as humanly possible.

The preservation of the *Titan Imperial* was all. His single purpose, as if everything in his life was geared up to this deciding moment. This was his time, now. It had already happened to the *Glory*. It damn well wouldn't happen to his ship. Not while there was breath in his lungs.

Biting his lower lip as the pain became almost unbearable, he upped his pace another notch, and charged towards the command centre.

\* \* \*

The stairwell to the command centre wasn't the dingy access shaft Greeves had imagined it would be. It was a twenty-metre wide, claret-carpeted, marble flight of the most decorated and ornate steps Greeves had had the pleasure of gawping at. Of course the officer's quarters and command centre required something of a grand setting, but this was...

Was...

He was drooling.

"Captain?" A lieutenant enquired, appearing next to him. Hallen, Greeves remembered. Lieutenant Hallen.

"Yes Lieutenant?" he asked, giving his lasgun a cursory check.

"Are you alright, sir?"

"What? I'm fine, man, get back into line." Greeves snapped, scanning the top of the staircase. It was the last place he wanted to be in the entire Imperium, yet he felt...*drawn* to it somehow. Like it was beckoning him.

"Alright men, let's move it! The bridge is just up ahead!" he shouted, waving an exultant arm forward.

The hundred and fifty men under his command chased him up the staircase, their greasy boot heels marking the exquisite carpeting, lasguns prone. Following in Greeves' fearless example, the men felt their own spirits lift. Perhaps the

Archenemy wasn't as bad as all the stories they'd heard. Perhaps it was all folly.

Their hopes were quickly dashed as, after a short run through the command centre, they were met by fifty impaled corpses – the sad remnants of the *Glory's* bridge crew – and Captain Fulden, draped in a cloak of flayed skin, standing in the middle of them.

\* \* \*

Grechte smiled triumphantly as the trembling officer looked into his eyes. Little more than a boy – perhaps nineteen – his eyes were red raw and brimming with tears. His lower lip stuck out in a disgusting fashion, and snot dribbled from his nose.

The aide de camp was less than satisfied he would make a fine Chaos warrior – but that didn't matter. As long as he was willing to accept the Warp Gods, they could bestow upon him whatever gifts they saw fit.

"You, boy, would embrace the light of Chaos, and leave behind your...*false* Emperor, your pitiful devotions?"

The boy choked back his tears. Anything was better than the prolonged and terribly painful death that awaited him should he refuse. Anything at all. He would abandon all his peers to survive. He would relinquish all his faith. If it meant living.

"I-I-I w-will, m-my l-lord," he half-whispered.

Grechte smiled, licking his lips.

"Very well," he said, eyeing the junior officer.

"Don't listen to him son!" Grant cried from his delirium, stuck fast in the steel throne. "Follow in the example of your brothers! Join them now, and dine in the Emperor's Halls! It's not too late!"

"*Shut up you overgrown tin can!*" Grechte snarled, "Your time will come...soon."

He laughed, turned back to the boy, ignoring Grant's fever-bound, pathetic raging behind him, and closed his eyes, placing his hands on the boy's head.

*As long as he was willing, it didn't matter.*

“Do you renounce your Imperial teachings, boy, and accept the gifts of the Warp Gods? That they can make you strong? That they make you a slave to your utmost desires, a champion of darkness, as eternal as the stars, as powerful as a thousand mortal men? Do you pledge to join the legions of Khorne, and swear to deliver the blood of the innocents to the Blood God? To deliver their skulls to His throne? Do you swear to do all these things and more, in *HIS* service?”

The boy looked up, transfixed by the goutts of purple steam venting from Grechte's body, the blood dripping from the hem of his trousers, the deep black eyes. In them he saw power, his for the taking. He saw riches beyond his wildest dreams, hosts of beautiful women, entire legions of men under his command, slaves to him. He was worshipped as the god he should be – as he was destined to be.

And the evil in his heart, tiny and locked away, grew. It turned to greed, to malice and power-hunger. It grew into hatred for the Imperium, disdain and mocking for its teachings, murderous intent for its followers, and utter, utter devotion to the energies of the Warp and its dark gods.

“Blood for the Blood God!” Grechte roared in ecstatic frenzy as he felt the boy's soul open up, as he felt the Warp permeating his very essence. With the on-looking line of terrified crew – both at the spectacle itself, and the expression on the boy's face – and the Fleet Admiral as an audience, the thing that had once been Grechte raised the Junior Auspex Officer into the air, a cloud of malicious purple smoke surrounding him, and channelled the energies of the Warp into his flesh.

The boy screamed. He screamed in pain as his body writhed. The bridge filled with an awful stink, of rotting flesh and sulphur. Blood began to slip and slash from the boy's body, dousing the terrified crewmen, splattering the pallid face of the Fleet Admiral. The screams of a thousand damned souls surrounded the amphitheatre like some satanic chorus, increasing in fervour and volume. Glass shattered, instruments ruptured. The ship's astropath, his shaven skull ribbed with tubing and pulsing violet veins, exploded, showering those next to him with oily detritus. Noise and light tore great seams in the air, and the men and women clawed at their ears and eyes.

Then all was silent.

The change from the cataclysm of sense-bombardment to complete soundlessness felt like a physical blow, like a wall of pressure had descended. When they dared open their eyes, they wished they hadn't. The boy had been transformed – and it wasn't into anything recognisable.

It was a snarling mass of rubbery red skin – a bloated sack of Chaos energy and Warp detritus. It writhed and screeched – the only discernible feature an elongated head on the end of a twisted, sagging neck, with rows of serrated, jagged teeth. Arms, tentacles and other appendages extruded from the seething mass of flesh and organs intermittently, with no real purpose other than to maim and kill. Hooked scythe-like talons whickered through the air, fused to knarled bones. The imprints of screaming faces stretched and indented the skin, forming agonizing rolls of wart-covered membrane that drooped and leaked pus of the floor. A haze of purple steam surrounded the beast, and it stank – the same rotting, sulphurous smell, but concentrated and distilled a million times.

In the few seconds he'd been exposed to the Warp, he'd been crammed full of as much Chaos energy as possible, and it had mutated and contorted his form into a being greedily and murderously sought by many dark Champions.

“The Gods have been...*kind* to you, my son,” Grechte breathed, marvelling at the spawn. It screeched and flailed in response, eviscerating a young, bound ensign. Warm, wet intestines spilled out over the deck, and the young man could do nothing but squirm in horror, waiting for sweet death to take him.

Grechtel laughed at his agony, and turned his back from the row of empty-bladdered crewmen to look at the Fleet Admiral.

“Oh Admiral?” he called mockingly to Grant's sagging head, “Look what I've brought you!”

\* \* \*

“That son of a bitch!” Grippen growled, as soon as the deafening smash of the elevator, crumpling into the base of the atrium far below, had subsided. “He's sliced the winch!”

The other armsmen gave voice to their concerns. Having brought no water, they were rapidly dehydrating in the plasma-charged air. Sweat no longer appeared in

patches – it had soaked their grey fatigues an entirely darker shade.

“What’re we going to do now?” a young Corporal asked – Dunn.

Again, the others voiced their concern.

Grippen stroked his unshorn chin, the stubble scratching his fingers nicely. He stuck his head into the shaft. It was a long way up to the command centre.

“Guess we’ll just have to start climbing,” he sighed, eyeing the rather long metal ladder that extended up the length of the shaft.

## TWELVE

Greeves stopped and stared.

Fulden seemed surprised to see them, having built a small world of his own and become thoroughly absorbed in it. The helm had been fashioned into a sick altar of some kind, with flayed skin draped over a frame of coolant piping making the table itself, and votive candles for the Emperor’s Deliverance placed around it. The Imperial corpses – originally having come from the ceiling, judging from the particular pattern of blood splatters across it – had been impaled and arranged into an eight-pointed star, with a great pool of blood in the First Officer’s dais. Chunks of organs and meat decorated the walls, fluids smeared into symbols depicting obscenities and blasphemies. The air was rife with a healthy purple mist that stank – a lot worse than the ‘rotten alcohol’ smell they had discovered earlier.

And everywhere seemed to have...aged. The bolted metal walls had rusted and warped, relatively new consoles were nothing more than heaps of old junk with cracked glass displays - and everything was grimy and dusty, like the interior of the notorious ‘space hulks’ they’d all heard stories about.

“Emperor save us,” Greeves whispered, taking it all in.

Fulden wheeled round at the mention of his former god, droplets of blood spinning away from the cloak of skin. His appearance was horrifying, to say the very least; great black spines extruded from his back, dripping a greasy black fluid and pinning the cloak to his hide. His mouth was fanged, and his eyes

had merged into one single ocular ball – a purple sclera with an enlarged black iris. Horns sprouted from his head – great, misshapen, bovine horns dangling ragged strips of torn flesh. His face and remaining skin was red and smothered in obscenities, and imprints of faces had stretched great folds of it outwards in snarling, screaming mouths. Black claws had replaced nails. His lithe frame was padded out with great knots of bulging muscle, marked with black veins.

What little remained of Captain Fulden had long disappeared behind a veil of Chaos filth. In fact, Greeves wasn’t exactly sure how he’d known it was Fulden in the first place. The...thing in front of the shocked assembly of Imperial Guard bore little resemblance to him.

“Captain?” Greeves asked in a shaky voice, his muscles trembling. He brought his lasgun up and trained it on the ‘man’ in front. The Guardsmen around him did likewise, their movements rubbery and uncomfortable in the pressure suits.

The thing laughed at the mention of its former rank, a mighty cackle that seemed to bend the walls of the very Materium itself.

“Fire at will,” Greeves said quietly over the microlink, squeezing the trigger of his lasgun. “For Throne’s sake fire,”

It wasn’t Fulden anymore.

\* \* \*

Mulbern almost suffered a coronary when he finally burst into the bridge – not just from the unbearable punishment he’d just forced upon his sweat-slicked body, but from the terrible sight that confronted him from within.

The remaining crewmen – about twenty, he quickly guessed, were bound and lined up on their knees. Roughly ten were dead – a stretch of mutilated corpses, dismembered and headless, adorned the decking beyond them – and another, a young man, was bleeding and gagging into unconsciousness, his intestines sloshed out onto the grilling.

But that was not all.

Equerry Grechte had become a giant figure, a beast of a man; his body bulged with muscle, his features were bulky and distorted, and he was surrounded by a

malicious purple haze. A wide pool of blood marked the floor around him and dripped from his long black fingernails. Perhaps more remarkable was what lay beyond him – a real beast – a three-metre sack of Chaos filth, screeching and rolling, dribbling pus and blood everywhere.

Mulbern recoiled in horror, both at the stench that assaulted his nostrils – the smack of urine, rot and death – and the sight of the two Warp monstrosities themselves.

“What have you done?” he cried, lifting the stubber and training it on the spawn.

Grechte, who surprisingly hadn't noticed the First Officer's somewhat dramatic arrival, span round angrily.

“What in the name of Khorne do you want?” he bellowed, extending a finger.

Mulbern felt his heart skip a beat. Never had he been so conflicted between fear and rage. His hands gripped the stubber tighter, and he shivered uncomfortably.

“Put that down, boy, or you'll kill us all!” Grechte shouted. Mulbern decided against telling him it was subsonic ammunition. It would give him the upper hand if it forced the former aide de camp to think twice before attacking.

“Get back, traitorous dog!” Mulbern shouted back. The spawn writhed with more vigour, clearly vexed, though the First Officer found it difficult to believe there was any form of intelligence behind the swirling bulk of decay.

Grechte laughed, lowering his hand.

“You have no power here, Mulbern,” he spat, a mad grin adorning his hideous features. “One wrong move and I'll have your Admiral's head faster than you can squeeze the trigger of that...toy you're carrying.”

“We'll just see how much of a *toy* it is when it's ventilating your despicable hide, Chaos filth,” Mulbern spat back – though in truth, the sight of the obscenities disgracing the man's flesh were enough to make him weep.

Grechte laughed again, a deep basso rumble that acquired a frightening smatter of overlapping voices. Mulbern swore he could see shapes moving around the

Equerry, just out of focus. Even his shadow seemed to have a mind of its own.

“Put it down,” Grechte snapped, suddenly serious. The eviscerated boy on the floor coughed violently, tears streaming down his face. It was a sad wonder he hadn't died yet.

“Not on your life,” Mulbern replied through a grimace. He risked a quick glance over to the Fleet Admiral, who had long since fallen unconscious. Only basic lighting remained, giving the bridge a dark, gothic feeling.

Grechte reached down and hoisted the boy up, his innards sliding out of his body – though still connected by wet red ropes of tissue. He winced, the pain having long since sent him into shock.

“I can save him,” he whispered enticingly. “Look at your fellow crewmen, Mulbern. Look at my powers. I can save them. I'll start with the boy. Look at his face. Look at the agony he's in. I can make it one *hell* of a lot worse, Mulbern. Or I can make it all go away.” He licked his lips again, feverishly. “You cannot begin to understand my power.”

“I understand it enough to know it's evil, Grechte,” Mulbern hissed, lifting the stubber up to train it on the boy's head. Would he trade off a mercy-killing for his enemy's knowledge that the weapon wasn't powerful enough to breach the hull?

One look at the boy's pitiful expression gave him his answer.

“I'm sorry,” he whispered, and fired.

Grechte howled – first in anticipation of a white-hot flash of pain, then in triumph as he realised the slug was still firmly embedded in the boy's remaining brain.

“Ha!” he cried, throwing aside the corpse, “They wouldn't even give you a full-power weapon,”

Mulbern snarled his anger.

“It's powerful enough to waste your pathetic body,” he growled, leaving the stubber trained on Grechte.

The Equerry chortled nauseatingly.

"But not my beautiful here," he said, stroking the side of the spawn's rubbery flank. "And right now, I'm the only thing keeping it from slicing your Admiral's sick stomach wide open."

In the few seconds it took the First Officer to digest this news, he was full of a rage so profound his jugular threatened to burst.

"*You honourless son of a bitch!*" Mulbern roared, screaming his frustration to the ceiling. "I'll have you, you *bastard!* I swear it!"

Again, his anger was only met with laughter. Grechte hoisted the next crewman up – an ensign Mulbern didn't recognise.

"Just try it," the Equerry said, casually opening the man's carotid arteries with a claw. Hot, pressurised blood fired from the wound in regular goutts, and the man gasped and spluttered, an expression of horror plastered across his face.

"*STOP IT!*" Mulbern screamed, weeping and powerless. If he shot the spawn first, in the time it took him to unleash an adequate salvo of rounds, Grechte would be on him – whether with magicks or fists – and he didn't much fancy his chances against a Chaos-possessed brute. If he shot Grechte first, the spawn would kill the Fleet Admiral – or him.

It was an impossible situation, and it was an impossible situation that would soon see the *Titan Imperial's* most important crewmen dead. All whilst the many more thousands of men and women aboard the cruiser sat in their billets or garrisons, with no access to the command deck, completely oblivious to what was happening.

If he left to get help, they would all be dead when he returned – with the possibility of there being a greater number of spawns. If he stayed, they would all be killed, until he decided to take his chances with either of the...things in front of him.

Or he could wait for Grippen and the armsmen to arrive. But he'd foolishly sliced the hawsers on the elevator, and they'd be confined to climbing up forty decks-worth of ladder to get to the command level.

How could he have been so stupid?  
This was ridiculous.

He would go for the spawn first. Damn his own life, the Fleet Admiral's was more important. The crew's lives were more important! A string of well-aimed shots to the spawn's 'head'. That would surely end this...this *madness*.

In a surge of anger and resolve, Mulbern lifted the stubber, and took aim.

\* \* \*

Fulden span and jerked as the blizzard of medium-power las shots battered into his toughened skin, flaying great sections of flesh off and knocking him to the floor by the sheer volume alone. Steaming blood sprayed off in a haze of black, as the creature was filled with hundreds upon hundreds of cauterised, high-velocity wounds.

Captain Greeves felt his spirits rise. He'd expected the man – the *thing* – to have taken more of a punishment, what with all the Chaos magicks available to him.

But the simple fact was the sheer number of shots alone was killing the Captain. With typical Guard sledgehammer tactics, they holed the Chaos thing's body until it was no more than a pool of sludgy, spongy mess, slightly smoking in the heat-distorted ship's atmosphere.

As he looked around, he could see in his comrade's faces that they were as surprised as he was. Surprised that the tales of the Archenemy had turned out, at least in this case, to be false on the most base of levels. That the wealth of sorcery available to this monstrosity hadn't been employed. That they were able to kill this abomination in the sacrificial pit it had created.

Greeves suddenly froze, his finger releasing the trigger.

The sacrificial pit it had created.

*The*

*sacrificial*

*pit.*

"Cease fire!" he yelled across the microlink, his pulse suddenly rising

uncomfortably and his skin breaking out in gooseflesh. "Cease fire!

The unforgiving hail of laser fire died down almost as quickly as the tirade had started. But even before it had, the transformation was already taking place.

On the bridge of the *Divine Glory*, the remains of former Imperial Navy Captain Marcus Fulden were rising into the air, forming a spinning, swirling ball of entrails and gore. Droplets of blood flickered out in all directions as the mass rose further and further up into the air, hovering like a physical manifestation of the malign.

"Lieutenant?" Greeves called, transfixed by the ball and utterly terrified, "Vox Beta Company. Tell them to get off the ship. Now."

"Sir?"

"Do it, Hallen, for the love of the Emperor," Greeves said more urgently, still not taking his eyes off the ball.

Voices were rising in the wake of the ascending sphere, chattering like some deranged vocaster. The ball was suddenly sliced open as spears of purple and red energy stabbed out from it, forming a miniature sun of wholly evil light. Obscene chanting and strange symbols poured forth from the rift in the Materium, making the company of Guardsmen weep.

"Alpha C-Company," he stammered, his voice barely a whisper, "retreat..."

But they all stood immobile, watching as the sun span round, faster and faster, the vile Warp energies flickering out like whips. Tendrils of lightning licked the walls around them, stencilling Chaos symbols into the iron hull, grafting screaming faces into the metal. The chattering and chanting reached a terrible crescendo, and the ball lurched upwards, as if propelled by the purple lightning, before suddenly slamming into the deck.

A tsunami of blood vomited forth from the Warp core, hot and steaming, the chattering still staining the air. The screams of a thousand damned souls rose up, and with them came the Daemon, unchained from the Warp, unleashed and ready to wreak a terrible retribution upon the soldiers of the Emperor with an evil and reckless hate.

It was a huge, crimson, leathery form with colossal veined wings and a bovine head. It roared, bursting eardrums, loosening bowels, and emptying bladders. A profound stench like no other issued forth from its snarling mouth, hitting the company like a physical blow.

"*Throne*," Greeves whispered, feeling a warm dampness spreading about his crotch.

"Run," he murmured, desperately looking at the petrified Guardsmen around him.

"RUN!"

\* \* \*

After sixteen minutes of formation and reformation, clever uses of approach and attack speed, and general advanced combat preparation, Imperial attack pattern one, under the audacious command of Rear-Admiral Winchester, finally engaged the remaining nine Chaos ships. The two Dauntless class cruisers, the *Wrath of Termina* and the *Terra*, adopted attack protocol eight – vertically aligned on the battle plane, with the four remaining escorts forming diamond-defence pattern four.

The speartip hit the waiting Archenemy ships hard and fast. Though less manoeuvrable than attack pattern two had been, they had the advantage of a greater gun compliment. Indeed, their combined opening gambit of torpedoes alone destroyed the Chaos forward sentry, the *Champion of Decay*, a fifteen hundred-metre frigate that warped and bloated outwards under the pummelling in a nebula of irradiating energy.

The Imperials engaged the enemy fleet proper some three minutes later, amidst a hail of pulsing munitions that flashed and exploded against fully charged void shields. A criss-cross of laser fire converged on the frigate the *Son of Khorne*, soaking up its defences and enabling the *Termina* to strike it square on with its triple-power starboard lance. An ensuing series of pre-planned lightning manoeuvres quickly saw another Chaos escort, the *Bane of the Emperor*, transformed to a defunct hulk of red iron, its glowing belly sliced open and leaking ship vitals into the frozen depths of space.

A further five minutes into the engagement, however, saw the first Imperial loss:

the *Emperor's Will*, a frigate hit square on the prow by the *False Emperor* – still considered comfortably distant from its brethren by Winchester, despite the fact that it made the long shot all the more skilled. Its prow-mounted quad-power lance scored a great seam in the armoured nose of the escort, and the immense power of the vacuum crumpled the bulkhead. Power failure from a previous hit meant that subsequent bulkheads failed to lock down, and the decompression was propagated through the top deck, destroying the escort piecemeal.

Winchester acknowledged the news of the loss from his Auspex Officer with a grim nod of his head. He stood aboard the *Termina*, and gripped the railing of his command pulpit ever so slightly harder.

He said nothing, but the expression on his wrinkled face already betrayed his guarded thoughts. And the amphitheatre of crewmen knew what those thoughts were, because they were thinking the same thing.

How much longer was the Fleet Admiral going to take wasting his time with the Glory, whilst they fought and died in his name?

### THIRTEEN

Grippen paused briefly to draw a sleeve across his forehead, holding on to the metal rung of the ladder with his other hand tightly. He looked back down the elevator shaft behind him, seeing the other seventeen armsmen waiting for him to continue. Sweat drenched their bodies – though the ship was becoming colder ever since the power had shut down. Only perfunctory emergency lighting remained, telling them how many more decks they had to climb.

So far, Grippen had been pleased with their progress. It had taken them only sixteen minutes to climb just over twenty decks – though he had burning forearms and thighs to thank for it.

But their time was running out – or so he assumed. If he was to follow Mulbern's somewhat cryptic response to his frantic enquiries, then there was trouble on the bridge, with what he could only assume to be the Chaos spawn that had been in the power core. Possibly.

Grippen wasn't the brightest of men, but he had a knack for sensing danger. And right now, the whole situation reeked of it.

"Let's keep moving!" he shouted, hearing it echo down the shadowy atrium. A chorus of dejected replies answered him.

Feeling the shoulder strap of his lasgun dig into his flesh, Sergeant Grippen reached out a sore forearm, and pulled himself up another rung.

\* \* \*

The Greater Daemon of Khorne was deceptively fast.

As Greeves' company ran for their lives, desperately trying to recall the way to the docking tubes, they could hear its gargantuan footsteps behind them, drawing its massive bulk closer.

And closer.

Greeves had only watched the thing rise from its sacrificial pit for less than ten seconds, but even the brief image of the huge, snarling daemon was enough to haunt his dreams for many years to come.

Urine stung his legs as he ran, sweat burned his eyes, and his breath was cold and painful in his choked throat. He dared not turn around, even when the strangled cries and the thump of splintering metal resounded off the cramped corridors of the ship, indicating another unfortunate Guardsman crushed beneath the behemoth's axe.

There was nothing now, no purpose in his life but to run. Las fire, he had a strong inkling, would do nothing against such a mighty Warp creature. All his attention was on survival. And with every ear-splitting roar, with every inhuman growl, with every splatter and squelch of another dead Guardsman, the impulse grew stronger.

Fear was spreading like decay in his mind. As a young boy in front of him sprained his ankle on a stairwell, screaming out for help, he began to cry. The inevitable bone-crunching *wham* soon followed, sending a painful shock of terror-induced adrenaline through his system.

There were precious few left in the company now. At least half of the original hundred and fifty had been trampled and crushed. He knew nothing of Beta Company – his Vox Officer had long been killed, the bulky metal backpack

slowing him down too much. But even if they were still alive, there was no way he was waiting for them with the daemon bearing down on their heels, its every bellow seeing more sweat working its way from his pores.

The familiar layout of the corridors suddenly flooded back to him, as a section of hallway he recognised suddenly flashed past the mass of yellow-ochre clad troopers in front of him.

His heart palpitated even harder – if that was possible.

*They were going to make it.*

He was going to survive – and this would be another story to tell the new troopers – a true one. More adrenaline freely flowed through his veins now, but it was excitement. Secure in the knowledge that he was going to survive, an almost insane pleasure in the situation overcame him. He would have survived an encounter with a Greater Daemon of Khorne. Him. Captain Samuel Greeves, 15th Volongrad rifles. So desperate for new stories was he, that his fear – however profound it might have been – was suddenly replaced with an uncanny joy.

That was until the docking tubes suddenly came into view.

Or rather, the lack of them.

Sealed, warped hull was the only sign that the umbilici had ever been there, the head of the heat exchangers still lodged in the armour plating of the Glory's flank. The men ahead had seen it, screaming and crying their fears and protestations.

Beta Company had beat them to it, and sold them out.

He hadn't even told them what they were up against.

Crying helplessly, his excitement gone, Greeves kept running past the red-hot metal, the daemon still on his heels. The remaining fifty Guardsmen – at least, those quick enough to react – followed. The rest were quickly trampled and killed.

The Captain almost fainted as the sudden and palpable horror of the situation set in. Stuck on an empty ship, with no means of escape, it all boiled down to one, terrifying question.

*How much longer could they outrun a daemon?*

## FOURTEEN

“There it is!” Grippen shouted as the entrance to the bridge sprang into view. Following the directions of a ship schematic, he and the three squads of armsmen under his command had belted their way through the command level, their pace quickening as the Sergeant's unease had grown.

Their boots thumped loudly on the decking as they now sprinted, hastily loading lasguns and toggling safety catches off. Candlelit rooms of bewildered officers, engrossed in maps and plans, flashed past, oblivious to the drama unfolding in the sound-proof bridge – unquestioning as to the power failure.

Grippen acknowledge the irony of the situation with a grimace. Their running, however, was attracting considerable attention. Lieutenant Colonels, Colonels and Major Generals poked heads around doors, aides called questions after them; bodyguards offered only profanities as they tore past.

It was as if they were delivering some terrible news or important message that required an immediate audience with the Fleet Admiral – or perhaps even that they were the Emperor's own messengers.

The door to the bridge was just at the end of the darkened corridor. Grippen felt his pulse rise – not from the exertion, but from some inexplicable force beyond his control. He was being *called* to the door, called to what lay beyond.

He hoped Mulbern was in there.

“Faster!” he shouted, bringing his lasgun prone in a standard breach position. “Faster you dogs!”

\* \* \*

Grechte was busying himself with a young woman – an attractive brunette. Some kind of ensign, Mulbern seemed to recall as he took aim. Neither the spawn nor the freak of nature that was the equerry were paying him any heed.

He positioned the foresight of the stubber in the centre of the rearsight, the two slithers of metal aligning perfectly. With practiced precision, he flicked the safety catch off, and squeezed the trigger slightly, holding his breath halfway through exhaling – the way he'd been taught twenty-three years before in mandatory basic training.

\* \* \*

The door to the bridge was already opening when Grippen approached it, but he kicked it open anyway.

The eighteen naval armsmen spilled into the bridge, weapons prone, shouting and screaming, waving lasguns back and forth.

Someone else shouted something – Mulbern, the Sergeant guessed. He still hadn't taken the time to register what would soon become the most horrifying scene he had ever laid eyes on.

It didn't matter - the loud reports of a medium-power stubber firing on full-auto made them all duck before the First Officer had even finished talking anyway.

## FIFTEEN

Mulbern flinched as the loud *bang* of a standard-issue naval armsmen boot crunched into the maglock doors to the bridge, and turned to see Grippen and the three squads of armsmen he'd presumed stuck in the power core burst into the amphitheatre.

A clamour of noise suddenly erupted with all the ferocity of a volcano, as voices yelled and weapons were waved back and forth. Mulbern thought he saw one aim at Grechte – and remembered the words the possessed equerry had said to him:

*Right now, I'm the only thing keeping it from slicing your Admiral's sick stomach wide open...*

No...

"Don't shoot!" the First Officer cried out, instinctively opening up with the stubber. The armsmen ducked as round after round of solid slug tore into the hull

of the *Titan Imperial*, the noise of shrieking metal deafening. He turned back to see Grechte gesturing wildly at the Fleet Admiral, whilst he began dispatching the crewmen as quickly as possible, decapitating them with rapid strokes of his blade.

Everything that followed was a blur of fast-moving images and noise, as sheer pandemonium took hold.

Corporal Dunn was the first of the armsmen to respond – and the first to die.

Seeing the equerry tearing the crewmen apart, he fired, the half-power las shots thumping into corrupted flesh with all the power of a peashooter. Feeling himself experience the unwelcome sensation of pain, Grechte turned to the source of the disturbance, pure rage contorting already horribly contorted features, and flayed the young man alive with a blast of purple lightning.

"F-fire! Open fire!" Mulbern heard Grippen called out in horror, yanking the trigger spool of his lasgun backwards and feeling the rifle buck and kick in his arms as it spat out medium-charge blasts. A second later, a sudden hail of shots followed, as the remaining armsmen fired.

Grechte writhed as the bolts smacked into him – lethal when in large numbers, like some killer insect swarm. The screeching spawn behind him, sensing its master's imminent death, made for the Fleet Admiral.

"No!" Mulbern shouted, knocking a bound crewman over as he hoisted the stubber back up. A salvo of rounds thumped and squelched into the rubbery bulk of the beast, spewing gouts of black and purple ichor out of huge ragged holes.

But the spawn seemed unaffected by such a base assault, and reached Grant whilst the stubber's rounds were still pummelling into its flanks.

As Grechte gurgled and jerked into death behind him, the spawn reached the steel throne, and with a scythed talon, sliced a clean sweep through the Admiral's interface tubing, bioelectric cables and neuromech wiring – the huge trunk of ducting draped into the back of Grant's pallid skull severing like a knife through butter. Greasy transmission fluids and life-sustaining liquids sprayed from the tubes like blood from a severed artery, cables short-circuited, and sparks blew out in all directions.

As the Fleet Admiral spasmed and twitched, so the power came back on – his tainted body no longer hardwired to the power core. It made the setting all the more odd – the previous dark of the battle gone, and in its place harsh electric lighting.

The First Officer squinted slightly, watching as Grechte keeled over, blood pulsing from a hundred las-blasts in his torso. The purple haze around him seemed to grow more concentrated, until incisions of Warp light energy appeared down the length of his mutated body, and he exploded outwards in a shower of pulp and gristle.

“Sergeant!” he shouted as the spawn suddenly pulled its massive leaking bulk around and made for the First Officer, talons whickering out in front and teeth gnashing, its horrible roars baying for blood.

Grippen once again took aim, his grey fatigues not only covered in sweat but blood – Chaos tainted blood – and fired, directing fire from his squads as well. As Mulbern’s stubber clicked empty, the spawn lurched towards the new threat – the armymen.

It soaked up the las shots – most not even penetrating its hide – and made for the Sergeant at the front of the firing line of prone men, screaming and wailing Warp obscenities as it shifted its bulk with frightening efficiency.

That was until Colonel Burkhardt and a further host of armymen appeared, having heard the clamour through the now-open bridge door. He digested the whole absurd mess with one glance, and liquidated the spawn’s brain with a plasma pistol.

It slumped to the floor with a sickening, gurgling slap, guttering oily fluids from its neck stump, whilst the plasma bolt smacked into the bridge’s hull and melted a metre-long tract into the iron armour plating, fizzling out with a hiss and a shower of sparks.

And then, at last, there was quiet.

The incredulous silence that ensued was almost as painful to bear as the clamour of noise that had preceded it.

Even as Mulbern took it in, he could feel the tears in his eyes, hear the slow rise of

groaning and human suffering, see sights that would give his nightmares for the rest of his life. The stench of death and decay filled his nostrils, of Chaos filth, of corruption and taint.

But despite this assault on his senses, he was numb. A hollow shell. A shadow of his former self.

Gore was slobbered about the entire bridge – barely a surface having been spared its crimson onslaught; scores of corpses were piled about, only most of them human; smashed equipment lay scattered across the decking, instruments vital for the running of the flagship almost damaged beyond repair; and to top it all, the Fleet Admiral was slumped forward in his throne, dead from massive neural trauma, soaked in the various life-support fluids from the severed tubing dangling above his head.

First Officer Mulbern stood stock still in the centre of the bridge, his face cracked with sorrow. He had failed. He had let the Fleet Admiral die. There was nothing left. Everything he had known was gone.

At last, the situation in its entirety hit him.

At last he could understand.

Mulbern put his head in his hands, and wept.

\* \* \*

Inquisitor Dask ordered the destruction of the *Titan Imperial* three weeks later, after the battle above Omicron Septimus had been won not by the 701st, but by the timely arrival of the Segmentum Pacificus 90th Bluebolt Fleet under Admiral Hackhen. Deemed ‘irrevocably tainted’ by the Emperor’s Holy Inquisition, the flagship was set on a course for the Omicroni sun, and the four thousand year-old Mars-class cruiser, its Admiral and deceased Chaos inhabitants, became little more than another solar flare.

The remainder of the 701st fleet – two Dauntless class cruisers, the *Termina* and the *Terra*, and a frigate, the *Conqueror* – were assimilated by the 90th. Rear Admiral Winchester was awarded the Navy Star for ‘bravery in the face of overwhelming odds’, and retired from active service for administrative duties on Farrax-Carthage. First Officer Mulbern was given Captaincy of the *Emperor’s*

*Flight*, another Mars-class cruiser in the 90th *Bluebolt*, in recognition of his 'steadfastness and faith in the face of adversity'.

Fleet Magister Pustria escaped the battle onboard the *False Emperor*, and re-appeared three years later around the Eastern Fringe of the Imperium. His whereabouts remain unclear.

Omicron Septimus was eventually retaken after a second campaign was authorized under Lord Marshal Gould, 235 M41. It has since fallen to the Orks.

The *Divine Glory* was never recovered, and is presumed destroyed.

Bluebolt uniform. He sighed. The purple fires ravaging the forge world's surface were visible even from orbit.

"Landers away, sir. ETA two minutes. Shall I hold geosync, sir?"

He watched as the bulky, drab forms of the Imperial Guard heavy landers powered away from the belly of the cruiser, heading for the drop zone.

"No," he said after a while, smiling at some distant memory.

"Take us back to high anchor."

## EPILOGUE

Captain Mulbern watched as the grey orb of Daytimir Prime filled the screen in front of him, standing on the bridge of the *Flight* in his starched, emerald green

THE END

