

# MASTERS OF THE FORGE

## Narrative Campaign

### Black Deeds

Please help us by playtesting these rules and messaging us on Facebook or at [mastersoftheforge@gmail.com](mailto:mastersoftheforge@gmail.com).

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## Black Deeds

When the Black Templars arrived at the Arviat Orbital Stations, their enthusiasm in the meticulous extermination of the Coven of Agony's Kiss was exemplary of their rich history of brutality against xenofoms. The various and imaginative mortifications wrought upon the Arviat people at the hands of the Webway Eldar revealed themselves as the Black Templars gained ground. The blasphemous manner in which the humans had been ruined infuriated the Astartes. Their zealotry in exacting justice evolved into a crimson rage.

Those Dark Eldar unfortunate enough to be trapped within the confines of the various structures clinging to the surfaces of the stations, or within the stations themselves, met inglorious ends. Their delicate bodies were all but vaporised by promethium flames or blasted to chum by bolter shells. They barely had a moment to exult in their own suffering.

The cloud of ancient stations above the dead world of Arviat had become charnel houses, first under the oppression of the Coven, and then after the arrival of the Black Templars. For three thousand years since Arviat's atmosphere had begun to bake off, those residents who could afford it had emigrated to the many void stations in orbit around the world. Over the millennia, the exploding population had built upon these stations much like traditional Hive Cities build upon themselves.

Now, the Arviat Orbital Stations had very little in the way of true resources or manufacturing to offer the Imperium, except, of course, hearty troops with the perfect skills necessary for void warfare. When the Black Templars began purging the stations of the Xenos threat, many pockets of human resistance also flared up and joined in the struggle.

When their fortunes turned sour, the more intelligent among the Eldar boarded their flimsy, yet nimble skimmers and attempted to extricate themselves from the combat zone. The coven's spindly Ravagers and the Templars' Land Speeders danced a deadly waltz in the void between the stations and also throughout their rickety, monolithic towers and shadowed valleys. The Eldar were able to gain a considerable lead on the Land Speeders by hugging the terrain close and making risky maneuvers. When they were certain they had the advantage of range, they broke away and blasted for the next nearest station, smaller than the last, but still large enough to block the Templar's line of sight.

There, they expected to find their hidden, black-sailed voidship awaiting them. Instead, they found a cloud of dust and, beyond it, a Black Templars Strike Cruiser. Trapped between certain doom and the same except for chance of taking a few Black Templars with them, the Coven transports reversed course and made a last charge against their pursuers.

The Black Templars did not engage this charge directly. They banked away, peeling off into four directions and diving back into the maze of broken orbital stations. The Eldar gave chase, dividing their forces without pause. Once again, the raven-black machines pirouetted around each other throughout the strata of iron, steel, gold, glass, and ferrocrete.

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Neophyte Lehrer never dreamed of a battlefield such as this. Massive, haphazard towers of steel and glass rose to either side and behind him. Shadows permeated everything, though his Astartes eyes could pick out enough detail to negotiate the strata of junk without puncturing his pressure suit.

"Eyes forward, Neophyte," Initiate Mal voxed on the squad channel, "This isn't a holiday."

Lehrer risked a weak excuse, "Taking in my surroundings, sir. You never know. May I ask why we are just standing here, sir? The Xenos are either inside or fighting with our Speeders."

“That’s the Sword Brother’s responsibility, Neophyte. Your job is to have your weapons at the ready and pay attention to the canyon entrance. The rest of the team depends on you doing your job. By extension, the Crusade, the Chapter, and the Emperor Himself depends on you doing your job. Do you understand?” Mal’s instruction wasn’t delivered with admonishment. It was simply a matter of fact.

“Understood, sir,” he said with sincerity. Lehrer joined the other four Neophytes where they stood on relatively clear ground behind a large collapsed hunk of plasteel. The Neophytes seemed hungry. Their stances with their black-lacquered bolt pistols and chainswords were aggressive. Their eyes were fixated on the cavern entrance several clicks away where sunlight gleaned off steel and glass.

Sword Brother Kelzig’s apprentice, Neophyte Jaze, privately voxed, “Good of you to join us.” Lehrer couldn’t tell if Jaze was serious or giving him a hard time.

“Of course, Brother. I’m happy to come over here and stand with you. What stance is that? Melee 12 and 4? I prefer 11:30 and 3:45 myself. Perhaps even 3:40.”

Jaze turned his head to face him. Lehrer couldn’t see the Neophyte’s eyes through the helmet’s goggles, but he was fairly certain Jaze was glaring at him. Lehrer chuckled to himself and assumed a stance of readiness at 12 and 4.

“Your Neophyte needs instruction on battlefield decorum, Initiate Mal,” Sword Brother Kelzig said. Had Kelzig heard his discussion with Jaze? Were the private channels not private?

Mal replied, “Your Neophyte needs instruction on levity, Sword Brother. You may send him to me. I will teach him the fine art of the sarcastic mono-tonal jibe. In turn, I shall send *my* Neophyte to *you* for instruction on bloody well paying attention in a warzone.”

All five Neophytes turned their heads slightly, as if they were certain they hadn’t quite heard that right. After a tense moment, the two Battle Brothers laughed. Kelzig said, “Very well, then. It is a done deal, Mal”

Throughout the exchange, neither the Initiates nor the Sword Brother had dropped their guard; they reacted immediately when two Land speeders made hard turn maneuvers into the shadows of the steel canyon. “Neophytes. Crouch. Become one with the surroundings,” ordered Kelzig. While the other four Neophytes crouched immediately, Lehrer slid a meter forward, closer to the wreckage. “You four,” barked Kelzig, “join Lehrer.”

The other Neophytes had shouldered up next to him just as a squadron of agile Dark Eldar Ravagers made easy work of negotiating the turn, then accelerated into the Space Marines’ trap.

“Emperor,” voxed Kelzig, “give us the strength to wage your justice upon this filth.”

The Land Speeders pulled up hard, nearly grazing the drab structure at the end of the canyon, pushing gravity that would make any common man lose consciousness and any lesser machine’s fuselage rip itself apart.

“Lend us your clarity, Father!”

The Eldar, with far more time to react, pulled up at an easier angle, eager to bring their weapons to bear on the Black Templars’ speeders which had lost a great deal of speed due to their ascent.

“Initiates, Now!” barked Kelzig.

The Initiates burst into action. Bolter shells and melta beams stitched open the exposed bellies of the Ravagers, ripping them apart and spilling Eldar hither and yon. Most of the Eldar were killed instantly, ripped to shreds as their momentum dragged them across the canyon’s broken floor, or smashed to chunks when they slammed against the jagged back wall.

Five Eldar survived the fall, rolling with their momentum when they hit the ground. They took advantage of the light gravity and launched themselves at the Black Templars' position. Their knives glowed red-hot in the gloom.

Lehrer holstered his Bolt Pistol and readied himself.

Kelzig roared, "Neophytes. Butcher them!"

Their mag-boots disengaged automatically when the Neophytes' powerful Astartes legs kicked against the Orbital station's cracked surface. The Dark Eldar streaking towards the Initiates were met with brutal body checks from below.

Lehrer hugged his victim close with his sword arm while delivering a flurry of crushing punches with his free hand. The stunned Eldar attempted to strike out with its blade, but Lehrer snatched the monster's weedy arm in his free hand while he let go of the Eldar's body with his other arm. The two, for a moment, appeared to be dancing in the void, but the only music was Lehrer's breathing set to the staccato of his hearts beating.

Lehrer allowed himself a moment to look into the Eldar's mirrored faceplate. He only saw his own reflection, but he could feel the alien presence staring back at him. Just one in countless billions. Just one could he claim for the Emperor. It was a pitiful offering, this flimsy thing, so easily broken. Just the same, he imagined the suffering this single, small creature had wrought against the common people of Arvat. He imagined its sniveling, devilish face alive with glee as it excoriated one innocent citizen of the God Emperor's Imperium after the other.

The Eldar swung its blaster arm around in a desperate gambit. Lehrer crushed the creature's arm in his grip, its bones crunching under the pressure, and knife jumping out of its hand. Lehrer yanked the Eldar towards him and hacked at his opponent with a wide, clumsy swing of his chainsword. He poured every liter of his hate into the swing, first ripping through the arm holding its blaster, then through its midsection. At the end of its arc, the whirring blade glanced off Lehrer's own plasteel boot. He disengaged the sword's mechanism immediately to avoid injuring himself. The bottom half and the arm of the Eldar floated away in a lazy, eternal spin.

Lehrer took stock of the situation. Two battle brothers still struggled with their Eldar combatant while, several meters away, Jaze floated alone. Had he killed his opponent? Lehrer decided that was unlikely. Jaze was floating freely and making no attempt to head back to the surface. He also had a few knife holes in him. Lehrer looked for his foe, scanning the three airlocks he had seen earlier, and found it at the nearest one. The Eldar already had the console open and was fiddling with the wiring.

"No," he said, "You do not *stab* my Brother and get away. You do not get to do that."

Lehrer crouched and positioned the corpse under his feet, then kicked out. The movement was small, but enough. In seconds, he was almost level with the escaping Eldar. "No pity!" He drew his bolt pistol and fired. Chunks of Xenos splashed across the airlock door. "No remorse!" That was two, now. He delighted in the knowledge that his impact was already starting to add up.

The momentum of his shot took him to Jaze's floating body which he captured. They were spinning quite badly by then, but Lehrer was able to take a shot into the Void above them with his Bolt Pistol, giving them enough thrust to make it back to the ground and activate his mag boots. The other Neophytes had dispatched the rest of the Eldar and had followed suit.

Lehrer marched over to Initiate Mal and saluted with his free arm. He held Jaze in the other. "Sir."

Mal returned the salute, "And that's why we're 'just standing here', Neophyte."

“Underestimate the Black Templars at your own peril, my lord. If anything, heed that advice. The Coven thought they were too cunning to be outmaneuvered by the Black Templars and they paid for their pride with their lives.”

Lord Valda Galvanus leaned forward in his massive throne, “Thank you, Champion Corian. Informative and entertaining. Be sure to convey my pleasure to your agents.” He tipped his bronze cup in Corian’s direction, “As always.”

Galvanus leaned back and shifted in his huge battle plate. It was a suit of ancient MkIV Astartes Power Armour, the design of which resembled the pre-industrial terran knight armour of old. The plate was tinted jet black and adorned not with spikes, but rather plumes of spines. Chains had been welded to every individual plate. These snaked around his body and ended in a collar of adamantium chain which was threaded through the very flesh between his neck and shoulders. The helm, now sitting on the heavy, wooden table in front of him, had been altered into the shape of a disturbing grimace. It bore a single, curved horn where the bridge of the nose ought to be. Regardless of his discomfort, Galvanus still used the throne during meetings with his subordinates. The throne, fashioned to resemble his battle plate, sent a message to those who might forget to whom they owed their lives.

Corian managed a small bow, “Thank you, my lord.”

“Interesting that you note that the Space Marines pushed their Neophytes into combat first,” He emptied his cup and put it on the table where a small, steel spout rose from the shadows and snaked over the brim. The human servant operating the tube device did not make a sound as he filled the cup with more swill.

“Yes, my lord. It isn’t that the Neophytes are seen as expendable. Far from it. However, every moment of battle is a chance to learn. Also, while the situation was dangerous, it was not dire. It was an excellent chance for the Neophytes to slick their blades with Xenos blood and feel the fire in their bellies as it were.”

“Not all Crusades are the same,” Galvanus said, taking another sip from his cup, “Some protect their Neophytes more, each Initiate sticking with his Neophyte at all times. Others consider them totally expendable, letting them prove themselves in the fires of battle. It all depends on the Astartes in charge. He sets the tone. It seems the Castellan of this Fighting Company prefers that his Neophytes act as a team, but defer to their respective mentors in matters of instruction.”

Corian nodded, “Quite so, my lord.”

Galvanus allowed himself to regard Champion Corian with a smile, “Also fortunate that the station’s distress messages were able to break through the Eldar jamming technology.”

Corian raised an eyebrow, a gesture of feigned innocence which Galvanus did not buy for a second, “Indeed, my lord. And without alerting the Coven, either. Quite fortunate indeed,” he smirked.

That twisted smile never failed to unsettle Galvanus. He did not fear Corian, but that smirk communicated an understanding that he had the skills and the resources to do as he pleased. Moreover, it said that Corian would not hesitate to use his unique gifts against Galvanus himself if need arose. It was not an idle threat. Corian had always been very good at making grandiose claims about his own capabilities. Over the decades, the Champion’s actions had never cast doubt on the image he’d fashioned of himself. Of course, regardless of this, Galvanus could not afford to trust Corian fully, and there were times he felt as if Corian respected him all the more for his doubts.

A spark of fire flared at his right side. The smell of smouldering tabac filled the room. The Crone took a long drag from her pipe and leaned back in her rocking chair, “Very nice, Champion Corian,” her husky, burned voice croaked, “You always do such good work for us. You should name a price for its delivery.”

“No and thank you. I must decline.”

“Come off it, Corian,” Galvanus protested, “The resources for this mission must have cost you dearly. You must have need of something.”

“None at all, my lord. My continued service is thanks enough. And, with all due respect, I would not touch any gift that passed through the Crone’s hands.”

It frustrated Galvanus that Corian would not play the game. The rest of his minions were more than happy to dance on eggshells for his favor, let alone his gratitude. Corian never accepted a single ounce of reward for his successes, yet paid in full for all of his failures, though these were rare in the extreme. Not for the first time, Galvanus wondered where Corian found the resources to operate such a wide network of operatives.

“Very well, Corian. If you will not accept any material gifts of thanks, you will accept a promotion. You are now my First Blade, Champion Zige is getting as old as the boils on the false emperor’s rump anyways.”

Most of the other Champions present laughed at this, but Zige exploded out of his chair, “My lord!” he roared, his pink face growing red with indignation, “You wound me, brother!”

“Silence, you old grox. If you want the rank back, then take it from him. Go ahead. I’ll wait.”

Zige’s steel eyes pierced from beneath a mop of dirty, blonde hair shot with silver. He measured the quality of his rival head to toe. Corian was resplendent in his blue and green power armour. He seemed untouched by the blessings of Chaos. By comparison, Zige was a ruin of his former self. His rusted, red armour hung on naught but old bones, sinew, and tumors. He could still heft a bolter and chainsword, but he would be no match for the hale Champion Corian. Zige cast his gaze down to his goblet, picked it up, drank it to the dregs, and collapsed into his chair. He belched, the sound of it echoing in the high, domed meeting chamber. “Sod off. Fine. Heavy is the hand that wields the sword.”

Corian had watched the old warrior’s display with more than a little amusement, then to Galvanus, he said, “Your second in command, Lord? Surely there are more worthy Champions in our ranks,” he gestured to the handful of other brooding characters at the table. Galvanus had broken most of his subordinates to the point where loyalty was assured in the theatre of war. However, few of them were command material. Each one of them was either so hungry to take Galvanus’s place that they could not be allowed within arm’s reach of him, or he had broken them so completely that they were too dangerously mad to be trusted with anything of substance. Corian needed neither material resources nor did he care for a prestigious rank which would expose him to greater scrutiny.

“There are not, Corian,” and Galvanus leveled a look at Corian that said his implied sarcasm was not appreciated, “Perhaps, henceforth, we can both be a bit more forthcoming with one another.”

Corian opened his mouth to say something, but The Crone shut him up with a rude noise, spitting with her tongue between what remained of her teeth, “Shut up, Corian. Take the job. You can keep lying to him if you want. You just have to do it more often, eh?” She cackled and tapped the bowl of her pipe against the table.

“Enough,” Galvanus growled. Her choking laughter turned into a coughing fit that lasted for some time. Galvanus talked over it, “What is the disposition of the Black Templar on Jolanda? The Imperial lottery is the real prize.”

The world of Jolanda possessed some of the most sophisticated Cogitatus Forums in the galaxy. Among other things, they were used to calculate the numbers needed for planetary tithes and then regurgitate these numbers to the Imperial Commanders throughout the galaxy. The data on force dispositions hidden within the datacrypts of Jolanda were priceless. It would be a major boon for him were he to present such a gift to the Warmaster.

“After their short crusade at Arviat, the Black Templars have continued to loiter in the Jolanda system, sir. We can’t explain why. Perhaps it is the system’s vicinity to other important yet lightly defended targets. Also, the nearby Strife

Nebula makes for an excellent staging ground for hit and fade attacks. Vigilance is the only real defense in this region.”

“Yes, but this should be the job for an Imperial Fists Company or an Ultramarines successor. The Templars should be on the move, not resting on their laurels. Who commands them?”

Corian replied, “They are under the command of Castellan Bront. He’s new to the position, my lord, but he’s not inexperienced. I have it on good authority that the maneuver on Arviat was entirely his doing.”

“Setting something like that in motion shows foresight and wisdom. This holding position also shows foresight and more than a little temperance. Not your typical Black Templar Castellan.” Galvanus sighed and leaned forward, clasping his hands, “And not easy quarry.”

“No, my lord,” Corian regarded his dataslate. The green glow of its pict display cast ghastly shadows on the spy’s face, “If we were to wait a month, we could gather enough renegade forces to break their Crusade, but it would be a pitched battle.”

“No. I do not have time to wait and I do not have time to waste licking my wounds after. The Warmaster needs this intelligence and I intend to be the one who presents it to him.”

“Of course, my lord. I am in full agreement on that matter. It is simply my duty as First Blade to offer all the possible courses of action.”

Had Corian decided to use his promotion as an excuse to taunt him? Galvanus tried to conjure a more convincing glare. “Think of a better course of action.”

“Well, my lord, we could also remember that Bront is still a Black Templar,” Corian suggested, but offered no more details. Corian had apparently decided his new position would not put an end to one of his favorite games: Beg the Question. Galvanus decided not to indulge him this time.

Before Corian could relent and say what was on his mind, Zige spoke up, “What do you mean by that?”

There was a twinkle in Corian’s eye when he replied, “Well, Zige, I mean if you are a snake, and snakes must slither and bite, so you must slither and bite. If you were an eagle, and eagles must soar, so you must soar. Castellan Bront is a Black Templar and we must, at the very least, expect him to act as such. Black Templars are brought up by other, more experienced Black Templars for a reason. It weeds out those ill-suited to wear the white cross. Their traditions, philosophies, and combat doctrines have persisted for so long because the elders grind it into each new generation of Neophytes. They do not sway.”

Galvanus mulled this over. There was more Corian could say, of course. He always felt like there was more Corian could say. There had been a time Galvanus would have thought Corian was trying to make him look a fool in front of others. Now, he felt as if his Sword Hand was hoping he’d guess at it. Had their entire partnership throughout decades of warfare been a series of tests? If so, Galvanus suddenly felt very much like it was not he who was taking stock of Corian’s worthiness. Rather, it was Corian who was studying him.

“Again,” Galvanus finally growled, “It was quite advantageous that the messages from the Arviat Stations made their way to the ears of the Black Templar.”

“It was,” Corian smirked again.

“And the disposition of the Coven, it was brazen. They were almost,” he gestured, thinking of the right word, “Taunting, daring someone to stop them.”

Zige interjected, "The Templars couldn't resist that, of course. Who could?"

"Yes," Corian replied, nodding and tipping half a wink at the old warrior, "Who, indeed? His Sword Brethren must have clamoured for the opportunity to come to the aid of Arviat. Templars don't sit about waiting for the Crusade to come to them. In order to maintain morale and whatever respect he has from his subordinates, Bront must acquiesce to their base desire to exact justice upon anyone in the region who seems to have it coming to them."

Galvanus stood, his heavy throne groaning against the marble floor. "Then the plan is simple. One Blade of our forces shall strike at Arviat. Zige, you shall lead this attack."

"Me?" Zige sputtered.

"Of course, you. Every warlord in the region has come to recognize your hunger for weak and dying prey. They call you The Vulture of Strife, do they not? In fact, I want you to announce yourself to the stations upon your arrival. Then, you shall pillage them for all they are worth, both equipment and slaves. Set each station aflame once it is empty of anything useful. The pitiful security forces on these stations, particularly after spending months in the hands of the Dark Eldar, should pose no threat to you or your forces."

Zige did not protest, though he looked sick at the prospect. Sicker than usual, at any rate.

"We shall allow a few short distress signals to be transmitted. If not once, why not again? Bront will be unable to resist breaking his Company in two pieces and leading another short Crusade on Arviat. He'll also be pleased at finally ridding the sector of such a devious scoundrel such as yourself, Zige."

Several Champions at the table chuckled at that.

"I see, but forgive me my lord; my men and I cannot hope to defeat even half a Fighting Company of Black Templars."

The Champions present booed with mocking displeasure and thumped the table with their gauntlets. One barked, "Coward!"

"Peace, brothers," Galvanus raised a hand to quiet them, "Zige is correct. One Blade is no match for a Company of Black Templars, even under the command of our greatest of Champions," Galvanus paused. He studied Zige to see if he understood the veiled jab. He gave no such indication. Instead, the vapid oaf seemed vindicated. Zige had always been a good force commander on the battlefield, and loyal. However, the old Marine was not suited for the maneuvering and backstabbing required to negotiate the politics of The Brotherhood of Blades let alone the Black Legion as a whole.

Galvanus continued, "When the Black Templars arrive, the rest of our fleet will be hidden among the derelict orbital stations. When the time is right, we will rise from the wreckage and attack, taking them completely by surprise and blasting them into atoms. Then, we shall be free to conquer Jolanda and any other world in the sector that gets in our way!"

The Champions roared and slammed the table with their fists. Their howls and The Crone's laughter echoed to an impressive din in the high-vaulted chamber.

Corian smiled wider and nodded at his lord. Galvanus wasn't sure if he wanted Corian's approval. In fact, it made him quite uneasy.

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Five stations had fallen, two of them literally. Internal explosions had knocked them from their fragile orbits, then dashed them against the surface of the dead world below. The other three stations still hung in the void, burning off what remained of their fuel stores and oxygen. The sixth station was nearly under Zige's control. Thousands of slaves had already been packed into the station's highest towers where they would be tendered onto bulk freighters.

From his Forward Command Base on the station's tallest peak, Zige could see the five freighters only a few clicks distant. Using the few consoles which were not burned out, he could monitor the movements and communications of his Blade as it purged the station. A humanoid shape was hunched over one of these stations. Mechadendrites snaked out from under its dark, stained robes and interfaced with the device.

"Champion Zige," said Heretek Thirteen, "Would it not be wise to begin loading the transports now? Station Gamma is nearly under our control."

Zige frowned. He looked down where, through the floor grating, he could see the filthy throng of humans in the cavernous chamber below. Many of them were silent, but most roared with rage or cried in despair. The Slave Shepherds bullied, lashed, and even killed some of the pitiful wretches, and still they chose to make their pointless gestures of rebellion against their new masters. "No. They need to know they are beaten, right down to their core. When we can bring their leaders and their militia before them, and cut the throats of their protectors before their very eyes, then it will be safe to dock the transports."

"Yes, Champion Zige. As you say," the Heretek buzzed.

"Trust in this, Thirteen" he growled, "I do not want to be here any more than you do. No one has shown for days. No Black Templars. No Brotherhood of Blades. Nothing."

"Sir, it is possible that one or both are closer than you think. This equipment is still in poor condition and its readings cannot be trusted."

"You've got a lot more excuses than usual, Thirteen. Can't you get those consoles wor..."

The command tower was suddenly bathed in white light. Zige's genetically-enhanced Astartes eyes adjusted immediately. Through the viewport, he could see that one of the transports had been reduced to fragments. The others were trying to maneuver themselves into an escape route, but no fewer than five Black Templars frigates crippled them in a single pass.

"Finally," Zige said, "I can't wait to get out of this Throne-forsaken system. Thirteen! Relay the disposition of our fleet the moment our forces make themselves known and we shall coordinate our attacks."

There was no answer.

"Thirteen?" The Heretek was still slouched over the console, but wasn't moving. This was especially odd because the old Heretek was so poorly augmented that her remaining human parts tended to shake violently in stressful situations. Zige strode over and clasped Thirteen by what passed for shoulders. The body leaned back, revealing an empty socket where the Heretek's head and parts of her torso were once framed. Thirteen had not suffered from some kind of accident; she was just gone.

The vox relays crackled with reports from within the station. His Blade was engaging the Black Templars in battle. Out in the void, Zige's cruiser, Hatepyre, was maneuvering its broadside lances to bear with the enemy. Captain Druzuz was able to blast three of the frigates to wreckage. As the ship slowly turned, a Black Tempars Strike Cruiser emerged from the far side of one of the burning orbital stations. Heavy batteries pounded the Hatepyre's aft quarter. Its engines instantly began venting radiation and plasma not only from emergency vents, but also windows and outer hatches. The Hatepyre was burning herself alive and taking the crew with her.

Zige felt a hint of panic begin to creep into his chest. Where were the Brotherhood? Where was Lord Galvanus? He watched, helpless, as Captain Druzuz somehow managed to get his twisted vessel to lift her nose up with a blast of her control thrusters. The maneuver flipped the vessel in a half somersault in order to protect its damaged quarter and bring its weapons to bear. The crippled ship released a desperate fusillade of torpedoes at the charging Strike Cruiser. One nuclear warhead found its mark against the enemy vessel's void shields, but it was able to avoid the rest. This evasive maneuver brought the Hatepyre's starboard lance batteries to bear against the Strike Cruiser, but still only managed to further weaken her void shields.

Captain Druzuz's bad fortune turned catastrophic when the control thrusters which he had used to engage the Come About maneuver failed to disengage. The Hatepyre was soon somersaulting through the void with such violence that she broke herself in two. The fore section spun away into the void while the aft collided with one of the orbital stations, washing it with plasma and debris. Millions died burning and screaming.

Meanwhile, more internal transmissions begged Zige for help, for some kind of guidance. One by one, Zige snapped off the vox relays until the voices were silent. Then, he reached for another control lever, comically small in the Astartes' huge, gnarled hand. Simply touching the lever caused klaxons to scream in the huge chamber below. He pulled the lever down and it engaged with a heavy, corroded, mechanical "Clunk". The klaxons switched to a high-pitched scream. He twisted the lever and pulled it down further. Below, a bang shot through the cavern of protesting, arguing, crying humanity. For a moment, they screamed as they were blown into the void, then there was nothing. True silence, if not for his own thoughts.

After a moment, he engaged the lever again and air roared back into the chamber.

"Time to go," he said to no one.

"Agreed," a voice replied. Almost no one. It was deep voice, a clean voice, not one tainted by the touch of one Chaos power or another. It was Astartes. Zige turned around and faced a lone Black Templar clad in black, white, and gold Terminator armour. A sizzling Iron Halo ringed the Space Marine's helmet. He bore a magnificent power sword in one fist and storm shield in the other, "Stand in judgement, Heretic!"

Zige tried not to break down, but he lost that battle. He leaned against the console and laughed until he hurt all over. "Oh, you loyal toad," he blinked back the tears of mirth and misery.

"Speak for yourself, heretic," the Castellán advanced on him with caution, clearly wondering what Zige was playing at.

"Oh, I *am*, Castellán. I am at that and I have already paid a dear price. What more can you take from me? You, on the other hand, have so much to lose. You also have a butcher's bill to pay, though you don't yet know it."

"Strong words for a former battle brother who's about to experience the justice of the chosen sons of Dorn." Bront was a whisper away now, his shield protecting him from whatever trickery he imagined Zige possessed.

Zige slowly reached up and grasped the edge of the storm shield. Its coruscating energy danced on his bony fingers. "No games, Astartes. I'm finished. You have me. I have no cards up my sleeve and I am clearly outmatched here."

"So it seems."

Zige's fear and anger had become manic. His mind was breaking. He knew his reaper had come. "Before you execute your duty, Castellán, answer me this one question. What possessed you to dedicate so many of your forces here? Why would you do such a thing?"

Castellán Bront seemed momentarily conflicted, but replied by striking out with his sword, the power field clinging to the blade's surface allowing it to bite past Zige's own corroded power armour with ease. With a grunt, Bront pushed

the blade through Zige's body. It pierced one of the Champion's hearts, exploded out his back, and into the darkened console behind him, pinning him there. Zige chuckled again, coughing blood as he did so, "Too bad I sold the other heart fifty years ago."

Bront Pushed the blade deeper, "Die."

Zige's eyes rolled with the pain, but he still smiled, "Thank you, Brother," he found the strength to reach out further, clasping the Black Templar's pauldron with his right hand, "Thank you for finally ending this. But I must tell you, I was not the only one deceived today."

~ \* ~

All that remained of the defenders of the Jolanda Datacrypt gates were a zealous pack of Planetary Forces and less than a dozen Black Templar Initiates. The Black Templars had only left a token force to guard the datacrypts. They and the Jolanda Planetary Defense Forces had been no match for the coordinated attack Galvanus had devised.

A week of unending slaughter had culminated to a standoff at the gates where the Brotherhood of Blades maintained a continuous bombardment of the enemy position. The ordnance officer raised a concern about ammunition expenditure, but Galvanus silenced her with a glare. It was important that his human renegade forces continue their barrage. He did not want to give the Space Marines a window to consider sabotaging the datastacks or even destroying the valuable Cogitatus Forums and the sophisticated machine spirits within.

The bombardment would end soon enough. Galvanus was on a time table. He could not allow Castellan Bront enough time to realize he'd been outmaneuvered and return; Galvanus had to finish this job today. He had already begun the preparations for assault. That morning, smoke had joined the clouds of pulverized ferrocrete dust billowing with the wind.

The Crone stood to his right as always. She took a long breath, savoring the smells of battle, "The rank odor of fallen PDF and Black Templars cooking upwind from them should be giving them," she croaked, "conflicted feelings," then cackled. True mirth danced in her eyes.

Galvanus didn't respond. In battle, he rarely spoke. Usually, Zige or Corian gave the orders on the battlefield. Instead, Lord Galvanus simply stood quietly in his ugly, black, spined armour wrapped in chains.

Corian was as polished as ever. His blue and green Corvis-pattern Power Armour glinted in the world's oppressive sun. He studied the enemy position with a pair of magnoculars. "I think they know something is coming. Bring the storm, Crone."

She grimaced. "Yes, yes. Wash them out. Wash the dears out. They must be so dirty." The crone first crouched, then kneeled. "My prince," she said to no one, "Hear my call! This parched world aches for a storm!" The Crone rocked back and forth, her arms crossed at her chest. She reached at the sky, "Yes! Hear me!" and then prostrated herself before an unseen entity. She mewled piteously and squirmed on the ground, "Wash them out! Wash them out!"

Dark clouds began to form over the enemy position, blotting out the relentless sun. The clouds built into roiling thunderheads which growled in the distance. They seemed hungry.

The Crone squealed, "A price! My prince demands a price, Lord Galvanus!"

"Then pay it, Crone!" he replied, annoyed. To either side of them, his warband had assembled for the final assault. Rhinos and Chimeras alike were filled to the gills with enough warriors to break the enemy to pieces and yet the majority of his host were pitiful human followers on foot with unkempt uniforms from a dozen or more regiments. Their lasguns were in serviceable shape, but showed signs of wear and many repairs. Silver and black engine tape held the conscripts together more than bone and sinew, he wagered. Galvanus had resolved to stand, charge, and

fight with the rabble. Many of them gazed, awestruck at his massive size made even more impressive by his layered black armour, and his reputation. Some worlds had named him the Black Knight of Despair. Others named him "The Black Redeemer." Both were monickers he could live with.

"No, my Lord. He demands it of *you*. And might I suggest you must pay the price. I would not want a storm such as that striking our position rather than that of the enemy," She looked up at him, her eyes imploring, "He does not ask for much, my lord. Just a favor."

On his left, Corian sputtered, "One small favor. That's pure comedy. I wonder, my lord, how many small favors Champion Zige has accepted since the Crone joined our warband."

The Crone was small, even for a typical human. Her body was broken and twisted from over a century of abusing the power of the Empyrean. Many of Galvanus's Champions had benefited from her ministrations, though the corruption had changed them. The most crippled among them, Zige had used the Crone in many of his battle plans. Her foresight and command of the elements was mighty and Galvanus knew that more than a few of Zige's victories had been borne on the Crone's bent back.

Without pause, he replied, "My first great mistake was trusting you. It shall not be my last."

In a single, smooth motion, Galvanus skinned his bolt pistol and squeezed the trigger. A satisfying crack followed by a wet splash marked the end of the Crone and her corrupting presence. The human witnesses gasped in unison and spread away from him. He could smell their fear. It did not fade when he re-holstered the pistol. Meanwhile, the thunderheads dispersed as quickly as they had coalesced.

"Well done, my lord," chirped Corian, "Well done, indeed. I daresay, the Black Templars are correct on some of their prejudices."

"Time will tell, Brother. Thousands of our forces will now pay the price because I would not."

"Damn the battle if you must lose the war to achieve victory, my lord. What say we make it up to them and join the vanguard? I would hate for the remaining Templars to die ingloriously to lasgun fire," he unsheathed his power sword and smiled. It wasn't his usual smirk, but a genuine, warm smile.

For the first time in centuries, Galvanus shivered. In order to get that image out of his head as much as anything else, he drew his gladius and pointed it at the enemy. His voice boomed from his helm and also all of the voxcasters within a ten click radius, "Death to the false Emperor!" The cry was echoed back at him. Galvanus lept towards the enemy, kicking dust behind him. "Charge!"

~ \* ~

Neophyte Lehrer held the MkVI helmet in his hands, the eyes glowering at him in the gloom, "Sword Brother. I can't."

"You can and you will, maggot food. I will not have your head popping off in the first moments of battle. The helmet's power umbilicus should be compatible with your own suit's couplings. You won't have all the available features, but you don't need any of them to hack renegade filth to pieces with your chainsword. I'd just prefer your head not be melted by a stray las beam. You'll wear the shield, too. It's not much, but it could save your life."

Lehrer set the helmet aside and lifted the Combat Shield. It seemed such a simple device; a plain surface in the shape of the the Black Templars chapter badge, a white cross with a skull at its center. Maglocks on the back were designed to affix it to armoured plate. When activated, it could, if you were quick, deflect even the most terrible of death blows. Unlike a Storm Shield, this was light enough that he could still operate his Bolt Pistol in the same hand.

“Forgive me, Sword Brother. I simply thought it would be years or even decades before I was allowed to wield relics such as these.”

Sword Brother Kelzig was a rock for all the emotion he conveyed beyond his hatred for the renegades which surrounded them. The constant mortar shelling did not faze him. The bad morale among the humans did not faze him. Even the loss of so many Battle Brothers did not faze him. “You are still learning and you still have not earned the right to wear a full suit of battle plate. However, you *have* learned quite enough to be entitled to keep your head, regardless of the questionable quality of the meat inside it.”

Lehrer blinked at the Sword Brother. Had that been a joke? He decided to play it safe and simply say, “Thank you, sir.”

“You’re welcome. You can also thank me because I am taking you on as my apprentice. Both Initiate Mal and Neophyte Jaze are dead now. It only seems fitting that we carry on henceforth in their honour. We shall observe the proper rituals when we have destroyed our foe, of course.”

Before Lehrer could gush his gratitude at the seasoned veteran, Kelzig stalked away. The Sword Brother was moving from bunker to bunker, personally relaying their battle plans and putting in a few monotone words of faith and encouragement to the men therein. The veteran’s stoicism was an inspiration for Lehrer to be sure. He hoped to one day master that kind of cold confidence. He wasn’t so sure it was very reassuring to the humans.

A voice moaning from within the bunker broke him from his reverie, “I can smell them. Oh, Emperor save us, I can smell them and I am so *hungry*.”

Lehrer rose and donned the helmet. The bright displays within the ancient helm lit up with data. Moreover, he could see perfectly in the dark. His own Astartes eyes were better than the average Human of course, but the helmet was a wonder for the senses. One of those senses was smell. The helmet processed and detected the nature of any particulates it filtered out. In this case, among them were ash floating on the wind. The helmet’s crude genetic analysis confirmed the remains were both unaugmented Humans and Astartes.

The young man who had spoken cowered in the back of the bunker. Tears leaked from his eyes, though Lehrer knew not why the boy’s body would allow him to waste water on such behavior. Like the rest, his uniform was disheveled, his hair unkempt, and his hygiene a complete disaster. His boots were worn nearly to the quick and his pants were stained with blissfully unrecognizable things. A crude, low-gothic “VIII” had been spray-painted in white on his uniform, as was the case for all the troops in the bunker, but it was chipped and bloodstained. His neck tags bore the name Pvt. K. Morzen.

He didn’t know what to say to the troubled infantryman. Should he console the youth and explain to him that the Emperor Protects the brave fighting soldiers of the Imperial Guard? Should he dress him down for cowardice? Even shoot him as an example to the others? In the end, Lehrer decided he was no Priest, he was no Commissar, and he sure as Throne was no Sword Brother Kelzig.

“You are alive, aren’t you?” he said, trying to summon as much of his Astartes baritone as he could muster through the helmet’s vox.

The infantryman cast his eyes down and bit his lip. At least he had shame enough not to actually say “for now”.

“You are. And why is that, Private Morzen?”

“You saved us, Space Marine.”

“Private, do not lie to me again or I swear to the God Emperor, that I will waste one of my last bolt rounds on your miserable face, sir.”

The language of that last admonishment seemed to confuse young K. Morzen, but at great length he said. "I killed them. I killed them before they killed me."

"That's well right, Private. Your lasgun is shy about ninety percent of its charge and you've got no power packs left. Chunks of cauterized flesh stain your uniform and are still stuck in your hair. Dried blood is drenched on the handle of your knife. The look of the emperor's justice is in your eyes, but for my life, I could not say why it haunts you, soldier. You have killed heretics! Dozens of them by the looks of you, many of them in brutal hand-to-hand combat. You have done more in 6 days than most men do pushing script their entire lives. Your misery confuses and rather sickens me, sir."

The young man was meeting his gaze now, as were all the little Humans in the bunker. A couple were even smiling.

Neophyte Lehrer smiled, too, under his helmet. His mind reflected on all the brothers who had died in the initial assault, all good Marines and some with storied histories. It had bothered him to see their lives snuffed out in such a pedestrian manner by the forces of the Brotherhood of Blades, a fourth-rate Chaos warband if there ever was one. His mind roiled to find meaning in their sacrifice at the hands of those so unworthy of it. He found himself voicing the answer to the pitiful rabble of Jolanda PDF Field Squad VIII.

"We lived. They did not. We lived so that we may avenge those we lost. We live so that we may give them justice so that they may rest. The Emperor spared us, not so that we could survive and carry on with life as usual. He spared our lives, chose each one of us, because he knew our hearts would be aflame with hate and our mouths would thirst for justice."

Thunder rolled overhead, replacing the sounds of mortar fire. The Humans all stood and grabbed their lasguns. The oldest of them, Pvt. N. Gayel, said "There it is, Space Marine. Battle begins soon."

"Indeed it shall. 8th squad, pair up and prepare to receive a charge, in the formations we practiced."

They all nodded and broke down into the pairs he had set up for them, in the only way he'd known how: mentor paired with neophyte, experience paired with youthful vitality. When Private Morzen found his mentor, she smacked him playfully in the chest. He bore it and smiled. He seemed taller. They all did. Lehrer turned away, and hefted his chainsword which bore a manacle dangling from a chain. He clasped the manacle to his left wrist, maglocking it tight. He attached the Combat Shield to his right bracer and activated its mechanism, strengthening the molecular bond across its plasteel surface.

"Ready yourselves. We go up, over and forward on my mark. Remember, we do not stand against their charge. We meet their charge with momentum of our own. They are sick with arrogance. Make them pay for it with their lives."

The platoon responded with a unified grunt.

"Also, if their gun works better than yours, take it."

The laughter behind him lifted his hearts in ways that no Chaplain's sermon ever had.

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It was a massacre. Galvanus wasn't certain for which side, but the battle had certainly devolved into base butchery. The human defenders had met their assault with a counter-charge. Many of the defenders were whipped into a zealous frenzy. Some of the humans didn't even bother shooting their lasguns. Instead, they gripped the weapons by their barrels and swung them as bludgeons. Others picked grenades from fallen cultists and pulled all the pins before diving into the charging mass. Frag explosions rippled across the front lines. No ammunition was spared.

When the ammunition wore out, both sides tore into each other tooth and nail. The cultists' cruel bayonets made a foul mess of chests and bellies. They left their victims to slowly die where they lay. However, even through the cacophony of battle, a comrade would appear by their side, apply pressure with a medpack or a cloth and straps of engine tape, then slap a stim pack on their forehead. In seconds, the casualty, pale and in shock, would stand, grip their lasgun in blood-smeared hands, and charge back into the fight.

Screams of "For the Emperor!" and "Dorn!" and "No fear! No pity! No remorse!" echoed from one end of the battle to the other.

Certainly, Galvanus hadn't received the gift of the bloodbath he'd hoped for. Many of his number were dying to the frenzied counter-assault. The battle had reached a stage where both sides were pressing in and grinding each other to chum. Galvanus exulted in it. Every loyalist fool who died was one more soul damned for their false hope and ignorance. Every human he butchered dimmed the Emperor's candle that much more.

He destroyed every opponent who dared stand before him. His powered Gladius was quicker than most power swords wielded by Space Marine captains. It was smaller, but his natural reach was long. He cut down dozens of humans and at least two Astartes during the press. Even if his entire line wasn't gaining ground, Galvanus was.

Corian had joined him, though kept his distance. Together, they had formed a spearhead where their men could regroup and then push back into the fight with fresh strength. Galvanus momentarily worried that this movement would close their flanks against themselves and allow the enemy to encircle them. He pushed the thought away. There were too few of the enemy to successfully carry out such a maneuver.

In time, after an age of murderous butchery, they were scant meters from the datacrypt gates. A flimsy formation of Astartes and humans stood there in defiance of his progress. Galvanus did not possess the need to quench a bloodlust. He had no pride to maintain. He caught Corian's attention with a hand signal and pointed at the gate's defenders, then flicked his hand at them. Corian nodded.

Moments later, a red and black Rhino transport roared through the lines of battle, its soot-caked stacks blasting smoke and cinders into the sky. A single Krak grenade exploded against its hull, but it shrugged off the annoyance and surged forward without pause. When the Rhino drew near, it executed a hard turn, throwing both tracks in the process. The rear hatch blew open and ten Brotherhood of Blades Marines leapt out and charged the wall defenders. Their armor was quartered red and black. They had decorated themselves with vicious spikes and unfettered chains to signify their freedom from the oppressive rule of the Corpse King of Terra.

Even as Galvanus fought a fresh throng of enemy guardsmen, he kept his attention on the assault at the gate. Through the cloud of dust and smoke, Galvanus counted half of the Brotherhood's numbers cut down with concentrated las fire and bolters. It was not enough, however. Two massive goutts of promethium belched into the defenders' ranks. Some screamed in the purest of all agonies and continued to do so before finally going into shock. The lucky ones were instantly turned to ash. Unsurprisingly, the Black Templars met the Brotherhood's assault with their own merciless charge. When the dust and smoke had cleared, two Black Templars and three humans remained standing. At least forty others, including the Brotherhood Marines, were added to the butcher's bill.

Those were odds Galvanus was comfortable with.

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A truly massive Space Marine in monstrous, black, spined MKIV battle plate broke from the cacophonous melee and charged the remnants of Jolanda PDF Field Squad VIII, bolt pistol chugging as he did so. One found a mark on Lehrer's helmet, glanced off, and exploded inches away. The force of it was enough to make him take a knee, but he recovered quickly. The second round finished Lieutenant A. Higg in an instant. The third round found a mark on Private Morzen. His leg exploded and bone shrapnel peppered his mentor who stood beside him. They both went down.

As the Black Knight charged, Lehrer and Sword Brother Kelzig emptied their own magazines in an attempt to bring him down. Every bolt shell either careened off the enemy's armour or he shrugged off the impact. Throughout his charge, even as he executed one perfect pistol shot after another, he leveled his sword at Kelzig. When the Sword Brother's ammo was spent, he cast aside his bolt pistol and picked up the chainsword of a fallen Initiate. Brandishing both power sword and chainsword, he accepted the enemy's challenge and met his charge with a roar of defiance. "Dorn and the Emperor!"

The two warriors met in a concussive blow. Neither felt the need to use their blades in the initial assault. They simply checked against each other, allowing their momentum and raw strength to gain an early upper hand. Sword Brother Kelzig was knocked off his feet and sprawled back. He recovered quickly, rolling on his side and stopping his momentum by anchoring his feet against the loose, shell-blasted earth. He crouched against the skid, then sprung out of it, catapulting himself back at his enemy, this time with blades crossed before him. The Black Knight lifted his own blade to block. Kelzig allowed the power sword to strike the Black Knight's blade, but he pulled back with the chainsword and jabbed for his enemy's midsection. The Knight grunted and delivered a powerful headbutt to Kelzig's face using his massive horn, forcing the Sword Brother back a few paces. Kelzig ripped off his helmet, which was cracked in two. Blood was already coagulating on his forehead.

As for his enemy, the Black Knight had managed to get his arm plate between his body and the Gladius. However, the chainsword was sticking clean through his arm. Something like a chuckle emanated from the beastly warrior. He cast away his own bolt pistol and dislodged the blade from of his arm by activating it and yanking hard.

While the duel wore on, Lehrer kept the zone clear of enemy combatants who might try to take advantage of the Sword Brother's distracted position. He noticed that the Black Knight had an ally of his own keeping an eye on any Guardsman who dared interfere. The traitor bore MKVI Corvus armour tinted a brilliant shade of blue decorated with sickly green scales. Lehrer did not recognize the pattern of the traitor's pistol, but when turned against a human guardsman, it reduced them to ash. Lehrer kept his distance, but the traitor in blue didn't seem to be interested in attacking either him or Sword Brother Kelzig.

Kelzig was having a hard time finding an angle through his opponent's defenses. The armour was heavier than it seemed and the joints were well-protected. The spines made it difficult to pierce the armour on its flat surfaces without causing injury to anyone who would dare to make the attempt. Because of this, the Sword Brother was forced to do all the work while the Black Knight merely pivoted on the spot and blocked the inevitable attacks. At great length, Kelzig's frustration became his undoing.

The Sword Brother closed within the Black Knight's reach and jabbed his power sword into his opponent's armpit. At the same time, a black, barbed spine punctured through Kelzig's forearm. Both warriors stumbled, but the Black Knight pitched forward and Kelzig was slammed between the Black Knight and the ground. Snarls and curses spat from both combatants as the Black Knight pressed against Sword Brother Kelzig in order to extricate his armour from the Templar's body. The bloody spines glistened in the brilliant sunlight.

The Traitor loomed over the choking, gasping Black Templar and pulled the power sword out of his armpit (and likely one of his lungs). He dropped to his knees in the dust and pulled off his helm, casting it aside. "Well fought, Brother," the Black Knight gasped wetly.

Kelzig reached up and grabbed the chain which snaked through holes in the Traitor's neck. Kelzig mumbled something imperceptible and the Traitor nodded. With his weak arm, the Black Knight covered Kelzig's face. The other hand took up his own powered Gladius and drove it into the Templar's chest, puncturing both hearts. In his death throes, Sword Brother Kelzig pulled on the Traitor Knight's chain, drawing it tight. The Knight gritted his teeth but bore it until Kelzig finally breathed his last.

Something hit Neophyte Lehrer in the back of the head. He spun around to confront his assailant and found the blue-armoured traitor standing before him. Where had *he* come from? Lehrer activated his chainsword as he swung it at his attacker's neck. The pistol in the traitor's hand went off once and Lehrer's chainsword was no more... and so was his hand.

The pain was far away. He leapt at his attacker, and swung the Combat Shield in a clumsy arc. The traitor advanced within Lehrer's reach and brought him down with a single fluid close combat maneuver. Lehrer tried to fight, but he was already on his back foot and he bore no weapon save the shield and a charred stump. His assailant had him pinned in moments.

"So, do you want to live, Neophyte Lehrer?"

"I want to kill you, Traitor!" he spat.

"Is that any way to talk to the one who is offering you your life? Also, my name is Corian. Pleasure to meet you, Lehrer."

"Show me your face behind that mask and maybe we can discuss terms fairly," he bluffed.

"Oh ho ho! And expose my beautiful visage to whatever pointless attack you have planned for it? I don't think so, Lehrer, but good try. Fair play, mate. Fair play."

Adrenalin and other exotic chemicals pumped through Lehrer's body, driving him to the brink of madness, "Kill... you... Traitor!"

"Death, then? I must say, lying in the dust, victim of an ambush does not seem to be the end I'd have for Neophyte Lehrer. I don't like it one bit."

"Burn in hell!"

This touched his assailant off. Peals of laughter emanated from the beaked helmet. "Oh, my good friend, more than likely to be sure. More than likely. Someday, for sure. Today? No."

"Kill you!"

"Well, then, here goes nothing."

Lehrer felt cold steel drive into his chest. The pain was still distant, but he could feel the work the blade had done.

"Feel that, Neophyte Lehrer?" He had disengaged his helmet's vox unit. Instead, he whispered, "Do you feel the blade's proximity to some of your more important internal organs? Right now, it rests nestled in your latissimus dorsi muscle and in some rather unimportant connective tissue. The trick is, if you move, even a little, your heart starts bleeding internally. In a few minutes, you will die. You will die here. In the dust. Your other option is to lie here and wait for salvation. It should come soon, I'd wager. A few days. By then we'll be gone gone gone. Choose wisely, Neophyte Lehrer."

The Traitor stood and scanned the area. "Yes, it does seem as if things are going rather well here. Time to check on my lord commander, though. He seems to be in some distress."

"Wait..." Lehrer whispered. He dare not speak louder. Even breathing seemed to make the knife move a little.

The Traitor knelt beside him, "Yes? You have questions? Requests? Last rites? I must say, they fall on quite deaf ears, I'm afraid."

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Do you let me live.”

“Fantastic question, Lehrer. Fantastic. Let’s see. I have answers. Many answers, but first, look at the mark on my pauldron. Do you see it there? It’s kind of small, but I wear mine more prominently than most, actually.”

“A three-headed serpent. A dragon.”

“Almost, Neophyte. It’s a hydra! Incredible creatures. You cut off one head and another appears in its place, amazing, isn’t it?”

“What...”

“What does it mean? What is it’s significance? Well, young Neophyte Lehrer, to us it means all kinds of things,” the Traitor kneeled hard on Lehrer’s working arm as he spoke. The large stone Lehrer had been able to take in that hand popped out and rolled away.

The Traitor continued, unfazed, “For you, well you only need remember one thing,” at this, the Traitor drew himself closer, wrapping his gauntleted hand around Lehrer’s throat. His tone changing completely from one of boastful mirth to pure malice, “It means that you do not *get* to know *WHY*.”

The Traitor stood up again and Lehrer could hear the smile in his voice return, “See you around, Neophyte,” he mocked, “For the Emperor!”

# New Characters

## Lord Valda Galvanus

Galvanus is a **Chaos Lord** with a power sword, bolt pistol, Spined Artificer Armor, and the Chain of Dark Purpose. Galvanus is a huge Astartes and has a Strength of 5 rather than 4. He is 170 Points

**Spined Artificer Armour:** Lord Galvanus's armour is adorned with plumes of poisoned spines. The poison actually keeps enemies alive who would otherwise perish from grievous wounds. Sometimes Galvanus simply leaves his opponents to die in excruciating pain on the battlefield. Other times, he uses the poison as an opportunity to capture his enemies and put them to the question. Galvanus enjoys +1 attack in close combat with the **Poison** special rule.

**Chain of Dark Purpose:** His armor and flesh is threaded with a cursed chain which binds him to his duty to the Warmaster. Galvanus has the Eternal Warrior and It Will Not Die special rules. In addition, he enjoys a 5+ invulnerable save.

## Ascendant Brother

Ascendant Brother is a template which can be applied to any Space Marine Veteran, Space Marine Sword Brother, or Chaos Aspiring Champion. For 15 points, they add an additional wound and +1 Leadership. Champion Zige and Champion Corian count as an Ascendant Brothers

## Champion Corian

Corian is a Chaos Champion with the Ascendant Brother upgrade (15pts). He wields a Power Sword (15pts) and Volkite Serpenta (15pts, see the Horus Heresy rules from Forge World). Also, champion Corian has the Veterans of the Long War upgrade regardless of whether his unit does. In addition, Champion Corian has the **Intelligence** special rule: if Champion Corian is a part of your army, you may re-roll the dice when determining mission type. If you do not take advantage of this ability (or if the mission is predetermined by the narrative), then any unit Champion Corian is a part of gains the Scout special rule instead. In total, Champion Corian costs an additional 70 points above the usual cost of a Chaos Champion.

Note that you should feel free to use any squad Champion you desire to upgrade to Champion Corian as he is a master of disguise and infiltration. To forge a complete narrative, when deployed with Lord Galvanus, Champion Corian usually leads Galvanus's squad of Chosen. In the field, Corian will usually lead a squad of Havocs or Chaos Space Marines.

## Champion Zige

Zige is a Chaos Champion with the Ascendant Brother upgrade (15pts). Champion Zige has 3 Gifts of Mutation (30pts), a bolter, bolt pistol, and chainsword (2pts). In addition, Zige and whatever unit he is a part of gains the **Opportunist** special rule. Zige's unit gains Zealot if engaged in close combat with an enemy with either a Strength or Toughness of 3 or less. Conversely, they gain the Hit & Run special rule if engaged in close combat with an enemy with a Strength or Toughness of 5 or greater or a Walker. In total, Zige costs an additional 50pts above the usual cost of a Chaos Champion.

To forge the narrative, Champion Zige is best used as an upgrade for a non-marked Chaos Space Marines unit in Power Armour.

## Hedge Witch

Many aspiring Chaos leaders rely on the gifts of the Warp for success. Chaos Space Marine Sorcerers are in high demand, however, and have aspirations of their own. The Hedge Witch is an unaugmented human with the ability to harness the Warp, however this is far more risky than relying on a well-trained acolyte of the dark powers.

For the purposes of forging the narrative for Black Deeds, **The Crone** is a hedge witch.

	<b>WS</b>	<b>BS</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>LD</b>	<b>SV</b>
Hedge Witch	2	3	2	3	1	2	1	8	-

**Battlefield Role:** Special, see “Warlord’s Pet”

**Faction:** Chaos Space Marines

**Points:** 40

**Unit Type:**

Infantry (Helpless Character)

**Unit Composition:**

1 Hedge Witch

**Wargear:**

- Close combat weapon

**Special Rules:**

- Psyker (Level 1)

**Helpless:** Helpless Characters may not accept or issue challenges, even if they are part of a faction which normally requires they do so. Moreover, models **MUST** attempt to Look Out, Sir for Helpless Characters if they can.

**Warlord’s Pet:** The Hedge Witch always moves with and joins units along with your army’s Warlord. They are not an Independent Character, but acts as such for movement and joining purposes when moving with the Warlord. In addition, the Hedge Witch may not move farther than 2” from the Warlord for any reason. If events would cause such a thing to happen, all other models must shift to allow the Hedge Witch to find their proper place by their master’s side!

**Puppet of the Gods:** Whenever the Hedge Witch would take a wound from Perils of the Warp, roll a dice. On a 3+, if the Warlord is still alive, they take the wound instead.

**Options:**

- May add up to three Gift of Mutation - 10pts each
- Add a Laspistol - 3pts
- Upgrade to Level 2 Psyker - 25pts
- May purchase one of the following:
  - Mark of Tzeentch - 5pts
  - Mark of Nurgle - 6pts
  - Mark of Slaanesh - 4pts

**Gift of the Gods:** If the Hedge Witch has a specific Mark of Chaos, they may select powers from that god’s Discipline.

## Detachment: Blade of the Brotherhood

The Brotherhood of Blades are a mobile Chaos Warband who excel at identifying targets and deploying lightning raids upon them. They have organized their warband into nimble and somewhat independent groups called Blades. While they must ultimately answer to Lord Galvanus, they are free to operate on their own. This allows the Warband

to operate in cells which are far more difficult to pin down by the Imperium. They are meant to hit a target and immediately disengage with their quarry. Consequently, if a single Blade finds itself somehow locked in a protracted battle, it is likely to find itself abandoned by the rest of the Brotherhood.

### **Special Rules:**

**Skirmishers:** All units without the Bulky or Slow & Purposeful Special Rules from this Detachment have the Hit & Run Special Rule

### **Detachment:**

#### **Core (1):**

- 2-6 units of Chaos Space Marines
  - These units may add a Chaos Rhino as a Dedicated Transport at no cost, although upgrades for the Rhino are not free.
- 0-6 units of Chaos Cultists
  - Units of Cultists with 10 models or less may add a Chimera Transport as a Dedicated Transport using the costs listed in Codex: Astra Militarum.

#### **Command (0-1):**

- Lord Valda Galvanus
  - If you take him in your army, Lord Galvanus must be your Warlord.
  - When a part of a Blade formation, all units within 12" of Lord Valda Galvanus have the Zealot special rule. This counts as his Warlord Trait.
- Warpsmith
- Dark Apostle

#### **Auxiliary (1-10):**

- Three Heads of the Hydra
  - 3 units of Chosen
  - One unit must be upgraded to contain Champion Corian
  - These units gain the Infiltrate Special Rule
  - While Champion Corian is alive, whenever one of the other two units of Chosen are completely destroyed, they go into Ongoing Reserves instead.
- Brethren of the Dark Covenant (Crimson Slaughter Formation)
- Cult of Slaughter (Crimson Slaughter Formation)
- 0-1 Daemon Engine Pack (Black Legion Formation)
- 1 Fast Attack
- 1 Elite
- 1 Heavy Support

#### **Lords of War (0-1):**

- 1 Lord of War

## **Formation: Swift Strike Cavalry**

In many cases, a fast and mobile cavalry is required for both reconnaissance and striking at flanks. This type of force also excels at chasing down routing enemies.

### **Formation:**

- 3-5 skimmers and/or flyers capable of skimmer mode, including Infantry units with Vehicles such as these as Dedicated Transports.

**Special Rules:**

**Fake:** At the end of their movement phase, you may swap the positions of two Vehicles in this formation as long as they are within 18" of each other. You may only do this once per Formation per turn.

**Juke:** In the assault phase, all Vehicles in this formation which have not been immobilized may move 2d6" in any direction, but may not pivot as they do so.

# Black Deeds Campaign

## Scenario 1: The Cleansing

The Black Templars have arrived at the Arviat Orbital Stations and are bent on cleansing the region of the Dark Eldar menace known as the Coven of Agony's Kiss.

### The Armies

For a full narrative version of this mission, one player selects units from the Adeptus Astartes: Space Marines Codex using the rules for the Black Templars while another selects theirs from Codex: Dark Eldar or Corsairs to represent the Coven of Agony's Kiss.

For this Zone Mortalis mission, the Black Templars use the Attacker Force Organization Chart and the Dark Eldar use the Defender Force Organization Chart. You may play any size battle you wish.

### Game Play

Both players roll off to see who decides to deploy first. The player deploying first also goes first unless their opponent can seize the initiative. This game uses variable game length. If you are playing on a Zone Mortalis battlefield larger than 4' square, then you may wish to delay the end of the game rolls for 1 turn.

### The Battlefield

Set up your Zone Mortalis board in any way you see fit. The Orbital Station has seen better days, so any locked doors are actually just malfunctioning or stuck, so are considered locked for both players.

**Deployment:** Players deploy in opposite corners of the battlefield outside of 9" of the center.



Although the map depicts a 6x4 battlefield, the mission is completely scalable to a 4x4.  
You can pick up an Industrial FaT Mat at [frontlinegaming.org](http://frontlinegaming.org)

## Special Mission Rules

**Reserves, Night Fighting, Zone Mortalis**

### Scoring and Victory Conditions

**Purge the Alien:** Players score **1 Victory Point** for each destroyed enemy unit. Additionally, you score points for holding ground.

**Size Ground:** Players score **3 Victory Points** if they have more units **completely within** a table sector than their opponent. Table sectors are defined as full 2' square sections of the battlefield. On a 4'x4' battlefield, there are 4 sectors and on a 6'x4' battlefield, there are 6 sectors. If you are playing on a 3'x3' battlefield, then reduce the sector sizes to 1.5' each.

**Secondary Objectives:** Score **1 Victory Point** for **Slay the Warlord**, **Linebreaker**, and **First Strike**. In First Strike, the player who killed the first unit gets the point, but then their opponent has until the end of the next player turn to also kill a unit. Units dying to happenstance do not count, but units fleeing from the battlefield do.

## Scenario 2: Waltz of the Skimmers

The Coven of the Agony's Kiss are attempting to make a break for it, but they are being chased down by the relentless Black Templars.

### The Armies

Both the Dark Eldar player and the Black Templars player may only use the Swift Strike Cavalry Formation to build their armies, although they may take as many of the Formation as they need to fill out the agreed-upon points limit. For a full narrative version of this mission, allow the Black Templars to take two Crusader Squads in addition to their Skimmers.

### Game Play

Both players roll off to see who decides to deploy first. The player deploying first also goes first unless their opponent can seize the initiative. This game uses variable game length.

### The Battlefield

Set up the Battlefield with lots of tall, line-of-sight-blocking towers. If you don't have these, ruins will do. You can also set up other narrative terrain for your own campaign. All terrain in this scenario should be considered completely impassable as it is very tall. No models may be placed on this terrain.

**Deployment:** Hammer & Anvil

### Special Mission Rules

#### Reserves, Night Fighting

**Hugging the Terrain:** Flyers may not go into Zooming mode during this mission.

**Drift:** If a Vehicle is jinking and more than 25% obscured by a building or ruin, they enjoy a +1 to their jink save.

**Evade:** A Vehicle may, instead of shooting, choose to go into Evade mode until the start of their next turn. At the start of their opponent's shooting phase, an Evading Vehicle may move up to 3d6"

### Scoring and Victory Conditions

This mission uses all the same scoring and victory conditions as Purge the Alien.

### Variant: Thieves!

In this variant of the mission, one player plays the attacker and the other player plays the defender. The Attacker is trying to get away with precious cargo. When any of the Attacker's Vehicles are destroyed, scatter the placement of an Objective 2d6" from where they were destroyed. Each Objective is worth 3 points if held by the Defender while each surviving Skimmer is worth 3 points to the Attacker.

## Scenario 3: The Purge

The Brotherhood of Blades have taken advantage of the weakened position of the Arviat Orbital Stations and are making off with both material and slaves. The Black Templars have returned to exact justice upon the Brotherhood and once again rescue the people of Arviat

### The Armies

For a full narrative version of this mission, one player selects units from the Adeptus Astartes: Space Marines Codex using the rules for the Black Templars while another selects theirs from Codex: Chaos Space Marines using the rules for the Brotherhood of Blades.

For this Zone Mortalis mission, the Black Templars use the Attacker Force Organization Chart and the Brotherhood of Blades use the Defender Force Organization Chart. You may play any size battle you wish.

### Game Play

Both players roll off to see who decides to deploy first. The player deploying first also goes first unless their opponent can seize the initiative. This game uses variable game length. If you are playing on a Zone Mortalis battlefield larger than 4' square, then you may wish to delay the end of the game rolls for 1 turn.

### The Battlefield

Set up your Zone Mortalis board in any way you see fit.

**Deployment:** Players deploy in opposite corners of the battlefield outside of 9" of the center.

**Objectives:** Place a single objective as close to the center of the battlefield as possible. Then, players take turns each placing one objective in each of the four table quarters using the usual rules for placing objectives. Note that, for this mission, the Objectives simply represent holding ground and are not impassable nor are they Mysterious.



Although the map depicts a 6x4 battlefield, the mission is completely scalable to a 4x4.  
You can pick up an Industrial FaT Mat at [frontlinegaming.org](http://frontlinegaming.org)

## Special Mission Rules

### Reserves, Night Fighting, Zone Mortalis

**Catastrophic Damage:** The station has suffered a great deal of damage since being invaded by the Dark Eldar and the Brotherhood of Blades once and the Black Templars twice. Use the Zone Mortalis Catastrophic Damage Table for this mission.

**Door Control:** The Brotherhood of Blades have managed to gain control of the station prior to this mission and they may open and close locked doors at their leisure.

**Civilians:** In addition to the armies, randomly place 6 units of 5 Cultists throughout the battlefield. These represent Arviat civilians. These units do not fight unless assaulted and wield only a single Close Combat Weapon each. Civilians can be controlled by moving within 3" (and line of sight) of them with a unit. If a player "controls" a unit of Civilians, they become a part of that player's army for all purposes. These Civilians remain "controlled" until the end of the game unless your opponent manages to gain control of them. Civilians controlled by more than one unit will favor the force with the most models within line of sight.

### Scoring and Victory Conditions

**Purge the Alien:** The Black Templars want nothing more than to annihilate their foe. They score **1 Victory Point** for each destroyed enemy unit.

**Hold Ground:** The Brotherhood of Blades is desperately trying to hold the line. They score **3 Victory Points** for each objective they hold at the end of the game.

**Rescue:** The Black Templars receive **2 Victory Points** for each surviving squad of Civilians at the end of the game.

**Slave Trade:** The Brotherhood of Blades receives **3 Victory Points** for each squad of Civilians they control at the end of the game.

**Slay the Warlord:** Players score 1 Victory point if the enemy warlord is slain by the end of the game.

## Scenario 4: Assault

While most of the Black Templar's forces are tied up at Arviat, the Brotherhood of Blades assaults the Imperial Lottery on Jolanda.

### The Armies

For a full narrative version of this mission, one player selects units from the Adeptus Astartes: Space Marines Codex using the rules for the Black Templars allied with Astra Militarum while another selects theirs from Codex: Chaos Space Marines using the rules for the Brotherhood of Blades.

### Game Play

For this scenario, we suggest you simply select your favorite mission from the 40k rulebook or any other Echoes of War or Altar of War scenario.

## Scenario 5: Counter-Assault

The war between the Black Templars and the Brotherhood of Blades comes to a head. The Black Templars rally the Jolanda PDF to meet the Brotherhood's assault head-on.

### The Armies

For a full narrative version of this mission, one player selects units from the Adeptus Astartes: Space Marines Codex using the rules for the Black Templars allied with Astra Militarum while another selects theirs from Codex: Chaos Space Marines using the rules for the Brotherhood of Blades.

### Game Play

For this mission, players roll off to determine who deploys first. The player deploying first places only one unit. After they deploy one unit, their opponent deploys a unit. They continue until all units have been deployed. Note that Independent Characters and other models which must be attached to units must be added as the parent unit is deployed; they may not be added after. The player who deployed first goes first unless their opponent can seize the initiative. This game uses variable game length.

### The Battlefield

This warzone is littered with destroyed vehicles and abandoned bunkers. Feel free to also dot the landscape with crumbling ruins.

**Deployment:** Vanguard Strike

**Objectives:** One of the ruins on the Imperium deployment zone should be designated the Jolanda Lottery Gate. Players, then, take turns placing one more objective each in the Imperium table half. These Objectives may not be placed within 12" of the gate.



## Special Mission Rules

### Reserves, Night Fighting

**Counter-Assault:** During **turns 1 and 2**, after the Chaos player moves a unit, the Imperium player may also move one of their own units as long as they are not moving closer to their own board edge. Also, in **any turn** of the game, immediately after the Chaos player makes a successful charge, the Imperium player may also attempt a charge.

### Scoring and Victory Conditions

**Take the Gate:** The army with the most models in the Jolanda Lottery Gate at the end of the game scores 8 Victory Points. The army's Warlord counts as 5 models for this objective.

**Push the Lines:** Players score 3 points for each other Objective they hold.

**Fodder:** Players score 1 Victory Point for each destroyed enemy unit at the end of the game, although units of Chaos Cultists and Imperial Guard Platoons do not score Victory Points for this Objective.

**Slay the Warlord:** This Objective is worth 3 points in this scenario.