

So you decided to see this through to the end, weapon in hand and making your stand.

There's no going back now.

No doubt it's been a terrifyingly eventful situation, what with the significance of the relic now in your possession and the power you wield as a result. Such things rising from the veil of obscurity have a tendency of causing wheels to turn and powers to move in the eternal desire to retain control and influence in the wake of the change that inevitably arrives. For every bargain you have struck with others, tens more have been brought to the tables beyond your vision. For every alliance you broker, countless others will coalesce and rise in fear of what you could do to the galaxy. Even your own side will be fearful of what you could bring, and they might even try to dissuade you in hopes of ensuring they are not cast to the winds when you shatter the status quo for your own nebulous reasons. Others will usurp the destiny that is rightfully yours, bestowed upon you by your Patron to blossom into a being of unfathomable power and might beyond that of a Champion.

Yet you will endure. You must endure, or your decisions will have been for nothing.

Look on the bright side; this will be entertaining for at least one of us.



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PART 2: The Crimson Path

BEGINNING

[THIS PART CAN ONLY BE ACCESSED IF YOU TOOK THE RELIC WEAPON GIVEN BY YOUR PATRON]

How long has it been, since you found yourself in the perilous Warp and made the decision that would shape the direction of your life in this galaxy from then on out? A year? A decade? A century, even?

It's hard to say. Traveling the Immaterium comes with risks, and though the party you've come across would have the means to negate most of the dangers there is still the possibility of fluxes and glitches that place you in the most curious of places and times. Even without those potential problems, there is more than enough to do that one could easily lose track of the time simply from how busy one can be. Seems there's no shortage of fires to put out or start.

Granted, someone like you wouldn't be the kind to twiddle their thumbs anyway. Not with a weapon like that by your side.

It's strange, really. Simply having it commands an unbreakable respect from the Company-sized group of Astartes that acquiesced you from that planet you ended up on along with whoever else you ended up obtaining the loyalty of along the way, and the idea of them trying to kill you to possess it for their own has been just shy of unthinkable. Is it due to the primal essence of its prior owner saturating the weapon, making you appear to be a living legend? Is it the power that such a thing brings to the table, able to erase entire groups of enemies with a wave of your hand? Maybe it's the most obvious, that you'll, if we're using Low Gothic for this, throw every last one of those disloyal fuckwits out of the airlock if they tried?

Whatever the reason is, you haven't had any real issues with them beyond the occasional glare of disapproval should you act counteractive to their own desires.

The real issue has been everyone else. It's a big galaxy, and to the surprise of absolutely no one that translates to a lot of different viewpoints and ideals. All of which are competing against each other for the most part, even when a large portion of them are supposed to be on the same side. The weapon you possess, to say nothing of your involvement with the Prophecy (whether you accepted or rejected it) has meant that both followers of Chaos and followers of the Imperium have tried to strike you down for their own reasons. Not a month would have gone by where it seems like you caused a shootout simply because you existed.

For better or for worse, even a fool would realize that what you have acquired before can only last for so long. Your enemies will strive to obtain as much as they can to see you brought into their fold or removed outright, and so long as you continue to resist their attempts at control or destruction they will continue to bring more dangerous means to the table. Simply put, you will need more. More of what? Just more.

No Forge World will grant you the edge you need, however. No Hive World, either. No, nothing in known space can grant you what you need to pull one up on them. Sure. striking bargains with them by using either authority or assault rifles is pretty good for when you need resources and to acquire mass produced weapons and armor for those who follow you in loyalty, but in truth what you need is the good stuff. Things that will shake the foundations of entire systems, if not the entire galaxy. It ill matters whether you work for Chaos or Order, for might is the currency of the realm.

There's only one place to go for such might... the unknown.



THE HALO STARS

You know the old saying: If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere.

The Halo Stars, and by proxy the Koronus Expanse has a plethora of stories surrounding it. For every tale of woe and horror, tenfold are there rumors of unparalleled wealth and treasure just waiting to be plucked. For every intrepid explorer that has made their big break out in the unknown, thousands more have either perished or simply gone missing in the unforgiving region. It is a place of both opportunity and danger, teeming with hostile Xenos not found anywhere else and machines of all kinds. Marvelous machines that can do things you would not believe.

So naturally it is this section of space that your void-faring allies have recommended for you to explore and plunder. Much of the known Galaxy is either hotly contested or has too many factions vying for power and resources for it to be a worthwhile endeavor beyond sentimental value. Out here, enemy factions disappear all the time for the aggressive kind of conquerors, and there is no lack of scoundrels to deal with should one have a heroic disposition they enjoy maintaining. It's the perfect breeding ground. That or one of the most mythical places to disappear in an elaborate scheme of glorified self-termination. But hey, no one will be able to share embarrassing stories of how badly you screwed up if you fail here.

All that's missing is for you to obtain a bigger ship than the relatively small *Cobra*-class Destroyer your allies picked you up in, if you haven't already acquired a larger vessel already through bartering or bloodshed when you arrived in this galaxy. It's hardly a worthy vessel for the goals you have in mind, noble or otherwise. That or to find a proper star chart so you can head off and begin the pillaging in your own vessel.

As tempting as it is to travel to Port Wander on the boundary of the Koronus Passage and just pick up a ship, going there might cause more trouble than it's worth. For starters, many of the vessels there are owned mostly legally and are there for a particular purpose. Those of the chaotic disposition would find the station's security more trouble than its worth, and those of Imperial origin are more than aware of how finicky even other Imperials can be with their ships... to say nothing of actually successful Rogue Traders and how quickly they would cause problems. No, this place is where you should come when you have a ship full of loot. Taking one from here would be a lot of hassle.

How fortunate then, that just on the other side of the passage there's a location that's ripe for acquiring vessels and new star charts. Guilt-free, even. After all, on the very edge of the unknown there will inevitably be hives of scum and villainy.



Enter Dewain's Footfall floating among the light of Furibundus on the far side of the Great Warp Storms that is Koronus Passage. Often it is one of the very first things a person will see once they manage to cross the passage, and the last point of any recognizable civilization before heading off into the great unknown, Imperial or otherwise.

The structure is strange as far as void-borne outposts go, with hundreds of massive stone structures tethered to each other with an even more massive statue of the God-Emperor in the center of it all. Temples and plasma engines are installed all over, and most sections of this place either have no gravity or fluctuating levels. The rare sections that do have stable gravity due to advanced generators are highly desired, and will trade hands with alarming regularity as the most powerful factions vie for control. A pile of corpses often accompanies said changing of hands.

Once it was an Imperial outpost, but as time went on its original population of stoneworkers and Rogue Traders became outnumbered by villains and less reputable folk. Assassins, spies, fugitives, suspicious merchants, and more fill these streets. Beneath the visage of piracy and lawlessness, affiliates of Chaos and worse roam about and bring their own particular brand of intrigue with them to make Footfall more esoteric than it already is. Even with the numerous secret agents from every group with an agenda from the Calixis Sector keeping tabs and keeping lids on the worst of what goes on, it is still a dark place. Anything can be acquired here, from a starship to a soul. Fortunately for you, a starship or the charts contained within is exactly what you need.

Maybe you send out agents to enquire about a target perfect for your needs. Maybe you just pay for the information somehow. Maybe you just look for the most shiny ship currently docked for the purpose of making a statement when you decide to blow this joint and anyone who happens to be in the kill zone at the moment. Whatever your method, it would hardly take you half of the day to find your quarry.

Even docked, she looked beautiful. A little above five kilometers in length, with enough Lance firepower to carve up renegade star empires before scurrying away with everything of value in their staggeringly large cargo holds. Unique technology that let it engage in long-distance exploratory missions for years at a time. Its exterior was gilded enough to look like a luxury vessel even with all of its weapons, enough that one could very well believe the rumor that these kinds of ships were commissioned by the self-proclaimed Master of Mankind himself for the very first Rogue Traders.

If she really was over ten thousand years old, then she was bound to have all manners of upgrades and improvements done to her by the Rogue Trader dynasty that had kept her.

A Conquest-class Star Galleon, in all her glory.

The Unsung Peril.

There's just the matter of actually getting ownership of the vessel in some way or the navigational data inside of her and getting out of here. Being a relic from the Founding of the Imperium, they are jealously guarded as priceless treasures by the obscenely powerful dynasties that own them, and this one is no exception at all. Who knows what awaits inside its interiors, what unique relics from lost empires could adorn the halls within? Such ships are almost like floating museums in that respect, which makes it that much harder to wrest said ships from the Rogue Traders who possess it.

But what fun would it be if it were easy?

As it stands, you've got a few choices on how you want to do this. You can find some way to locate the captain of the vessel and convince them to ally with you for the promise of riches and getting in on salvage rights when you eventually begin your Crusade, you could try to barter with them and offer something of exuberant worth for the possibility of parting with the vessel or star charts needed... or you could take advantage of the fact that you have a group of Astartes consisting of either the 'Beasts of Annihilation' or the 'Red Hunters' that ferry you around and make them do what they do best as you just take your prize. Either one is sure to be an adventure in of itself, it merely depends on how nice you're feeling at that particular moment.

Whatever you choose, it's sure to be a sight when you finally take a step inside and witness what's within this relic of ages past.

BUILDING THE CRUSADE

The inside of the *Unsung Peril* is as amazing as it is on the outside. Its halls are a monument to the civilizations that will never be known outside of what is collected here, its captain's quarters more luxurious than the palaces of planetary governors. Even a leisurely stroll would reveal that the machines inside this place are of superior quality, containing archaeotech treasure ranging from advanced cogitator cores that process tremendous amounts of data to on-board laboratories to glean any possible fact from artifacts to determine their worth. The kitchen area is one of the biggest finds, containing the fabled "Ubertas" Device that provides the entire ship's crew with fresh, nutritious food that the aforementioned planetary governors would usually pay a planet's ransom to acquire. With such luxury supplementing the voyages, was it any wonder that such a ship would make any dynasty a fortune?

Such a ship that is now yours if you chose to acquire it, regardless of what you had to do to get it.

Running a diagnostic would reveal the engines were recently tuned up and all munitions freshly stocked, along with a resupply of Servitors. Seems there was an expedition that was being planned, and the navigation you possess, however you obtained it, would show th- now hold on here.

This is a completely different area. This wasn't Winterscale's Realm, nor the Foundling Worlds or even the Heathen Stars. This wasn't even a suicidal run towards the Unbeholden Reaches or the godless Rifts of Hecaton. This was a realm among the Halo Stars that had literally been recently rediscovered. Information from the ship's cogitator core or the Captain would reveal this ship was intended to be the maiden voyage to explore the locale for potential reward and unique resources to obtain. There was no information beyond coordinates to planets in the region and a single name.

The Zerzuran Chasm.

How quaint.

Still, a freshly rediscovered section of space? Holding the promise of priceless treasures and unparalleled technology should one be bold enough to seize it? This sounds like the perfect place to start building up resources and a power base to launch a Crusade. If nothing else, what you find could be enough to make countless soldiers flock to your banner to see your designs to fruition. Sure, there's the risk of completely unknown Xenos species ready to do indescribable things to you or places so dangerous that to even gaze upon it would see you go insane or worse. Sure, there's the chance that all you're really doing is riding the galaxy's fastest bullet train to Hell.

At the very least, it'll be a blast watching your moments there. Regardless if they're final or not.



The moment you make the jump and end up at the coordinates, you're hit with a wave of colors and prismatic lights. Far from being a bleak and cold section it looks absolutely beautiful. Pristine, even. Curious that this place was only recently rediscovered.

The reasoning comes a second later when navigation starts screaming at all the Warp Storms that are making those lights.

Well that explains that.

Getting past all the screams of terror demanding the Gellar Fields be set to maximum, the potential praying from those who feel they've offended their chosen deity in some way, and the all-around nagging of asking you what to do since they just jumped into the galactic equivalent of a housefire, the ship scanners do start taking in some curious data. Turns out this ship had a probe in the region and by some miraculous feat it didn't get destroyed or sucked into some horrific abyss. Even more miraculous, it collected information on various worlds and celestial bodies that you might be interested in investigating.

You know, if you manage to get past all of these Warp Storms that was wreaking absolute havoc on the chain of command at best. Those aren't going away anytime soon, and it might be best if you grab what you can and get out of there before this place really does go to Hell.

Each of the following locations will have a selection of rewards to choose from, and you may choose which systems you go to and which ones you will leave alone. Out of the following rewards that are possible, you may only select up to twenty possible rewards that you actually find and leave with, no matter what. Time is of the essence, and what you choose will decide how your Crusade plays out.

THE DOMINION OF ETERNITY

The first system seems straightforward enough, as far as the data goes. Two worlds, a couple of asteroid fields, and a single sun. The fields within the Inner Cauldron of the system were rife with all manners of radioactive and exotic materials the probe couldn't quite quantify even with a passing glance, and both planets were practically teeming with life. No gravity riptides, no warp rifts, not even a Tyranid in sight.

Granted, it did have some oddities that even a novice astrologer would have picked up. For one, the star in the system was purple. Very few things could do that to a star, and none of them were natural occurrences at all. The second thing was that while the first planet was a small and dense radioactive Death World that had a thin atmosphere capable of melting the armor off a Guardsman before melting the Guardsman themselves, the second world was huge. *Really* huge, easily a great many sizes larger than Terra and even threatening to reach the size of Jupiter. Yet it had Terran standard gravity somehow, along with a perfectly viable and temperate atmosphere.

Perfect place to hit the ground running and collect all manners of trinkets that should be waiting to be claimed by you, right?

A quick warp jump would soon see you in the system, and alert you to two things that make the prior view of simplicity a load of Immaterium-induced insanity. The first being that your vessel, when exiting the Warp, damn near slams into a derelict Dark Eldar vessel about four times as large as the *Unsung Peril*. Maneuvering around it would reveal a graveyard of starships massive in size. There were even Space Hulks among them... four. Four damned Space Hulks surrounded by an entire field of mangled, twisted vessels of myriad conditions and origins. Some of them looking pristine on the outside, others appearing as though a wild animal tore through them. All with a strange white cube floating in the center with thrumming blue lights.

The second thing was that the vast planet clearly had lights and signs of a Hive City. There was voidfaring life here.

What kind of shitty probe did these Traders *use*?

Your arrival hasn't gotten anyone's attention just yet thankfully, but somehow trying to sneak past the larger planet feels... unwise, if all of these smashed vessels were any hint at all. Maybe you could find a way to communicate with whatever species was down there, and convince them to turn to the light of your patrons? Of course there was also just scouring the graveyard around the system, there was bound to be more than enough material out here to sate yourself and leave without even so much as shooting a glance at the massive planet.

Yet there was bound to be plenty of recruitment options or relics to be reclaimed for a higher purpose if you convinced whatever civilization was down there to join your cause, to say nothing if you could gain access to the Inner Cauldron and get at that obscenely delicious cache of materials.

Time to choose how you want to get your hands dirty.

GOOD OL' FASHIONED ROBBING

Whether this is where you want to start or you decided to hit this place on the way out after dealing with the populace, you order your vessel to begin scanning the derelict vessels for anything particularly shiny.

It's certainly an exercise for both the Navigators and the Pilots both, trying to chart a path through an ever-changing obstacle course of broken vessels and wayward fleets. Some of these vessels look strange and organic in nature, while others had the familiarity of Imperial technology underneath the damage. It's kind of strange, in a way. All these vessels of different origins and times. Were the Warp Storms the cause for why they were all here? If not, what could bring so many walks of life to this place at the same time?

Wait.

The only outward damage any Imperial vessels showed was due to colliding with other vessels. Ramming damage. They also had the only pristine vessels around. All the vessels belonging to Xenos had the most damage by far.

Someone here was feeling particularly xenophobic. Not exactly an unusual trait, but one that could work out in your favor.

Sending out the salvage crews on the derelict Imperial vessels seems to work out so far. A few cargo holds that were full of materials and ammunition, freighters full of weaponry of all kinds, and not a corpse in sight. Seriously, you would think that there would be at least one or two bodies floating inside of these vessels but there was nothing. It was like they all just up and vanished into the Void. On one hand it meant less dead hands to pry off of some curious little baubles, but the lack of any signs of struggle is incredibly unlike a human in their dying moments.

Lack of struggle also meant that a lot of what you find is in pristine condition. Whether you decide to sell a lot of these or keep it, it's sure to be a great boon to you. The technological worship of Mankind throughout most of its history has resulted in some very interesting creations along with equally interesting attempts to preserve said creations, which very much contributes to why you could say, find a couple of Chainswords on one of these vessels and see them working as perfectly as the day they got thrown out the forges.

Even more curiously, when your crews report that there was a *very* interesting find in the form of a ship weapon pattern that they've never seen before and asked for permission to carve into it, your Astropath reported that there was life inside one of the Space Hulks. Human life. Which by all accounts should be next to impossible, with how long it normally takes for Space Hulks to form, much less collect other vessels along its hull. Inquiries of certainty would be met with the intercepting of communications, and some kind of firefight going on. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that running in there and saving the day could get some very happy recruits on your side. Keeping them from dying to some hostile lifeforms means you can send them to die for your own reasons instead.

Of course, nobody said you had to run off and get to them right now or even at all. They're not going anywhere... but neither is this strange ship weapon either. Decisions, decisions.

Whether you choose speed or greed, should you approach the Space Hulk the Navigators will point out there are a few docking points that are close enough to the sources of the communication. It barely takes a few minutes to arrive there and dock, and sensors indicate that there's breathable air on board. A good start, if nothing else. More accurate readings come in a moment later, showing that there's easily thousands of humans on board. Thousands of new soldiers or hands hardened from a life on a Space Hulk to spread the glory of the word, whatever that word may be. One shuddered to think of how tough they could be when properly equipped.

Walking through the halls of this ship, however, could be considered 'unnerving' at best. You know that a lot of the Imperium's vessels were often designed to be flying cathedrals as much as weapons of war, but someone seemed to lean towards the former impression a lot more with this one. The floors were etched with meters upon meters of murals about Mankind with statues of cherubs and Custodes reaching the ceiling. The very, very high ceiling with stained glass with depictions of golden skulls and wings, depicting the tenants of the Imperial Truth that all should follow.

Wait. Imperial Truth? This vessel was from the times of the Great Crusade if it still had that old stuff etched right into the vessel. Even the implication that the Emperor wasn't some kind of god would see one half of the planet burned for heresy and the other half burned for good measure.

Maybe this will be more profitable than one originally thought.

Traveling through this vessel and towards the sources of the life signatures and communications will reveal the familiar sounds of bolter fire and clashing weaponry becoming apparent. Either this place did a damned excellent job of carrying sounds or there was a really nasty battle going on. Either one would be cause enough to raise one's guard, or at least switch off the safety of one's personal weaponry. Fortunately, traversing the ship and exiting to board another section of the Space Hulk goes by with little incident, as does going through the haphazard rock and entering another vessel buried deeper within.

Alas, entering said vessel would see a wayward Lascannon blast slam the doorframe you just came out of. Looking further ahead, the fighting was definitely going on here. Only it wasn't Orks, or Genestealers, or any number of Xenos that were attacking human lifeforms. It was humans attacking humans. Or rather, Astartes attacking Astartes. One side having dark green armor with skulls on their kneepads and adorned in large cloaks, while the other side had armor that looked too old to be modern. Armor of white and black, with a large wolf emblem on their shoulder pauldron.

So... Fallen Angels fighting against supposed Luna Wolves of the past on a floating Space Hulk, with a xenophobic Xenos station of Xenos origin. Guess there's no shortage of strangeness to be found here.

The two combatants looked pretty even in power and numbers, so it was naturally a slog even just to watch with all the rounds and lasers going everywhere. It'd be a shame if someone just came in and chose a side to tip the scales and demolish them to end the fight in quick order.

A real shame indeed.

The moment things start going south for the group you decided to forsake, they'll do their best to evacuate and get away from the field of battle, which is no small cause for celebration for the side you happened to swoop in and start opening up enemies like canned meat for. After a bit of questioning on who you are, introductions will be underway as they bring you to their base of operations that looks like a haphazardly constructed fortress made out of melted rock and tanks that were torn apart for their munitions and armor. Inside was at least better, with cleanly paved floors and murals of their respective Astartes origins while the taller soldiers kept guard. Along with humans. Lots of humans who were ferrying materials and maintaining the base along with the entire rows of armaments they possessed.

Judging by all the clothing and the rigid attitudes many of them possess, they were likely descendants of Imperial soldiers. However, none of them had anything that looked up to date. In fact, many of the gear seemed far too old to have seen common use. Volkite weapons and Grav guns laid next to the lasguns and bolters, along with quite the depo of scoured items that they've collected. Questioning will reveal that they've been here for hundreds of years since the Warp Storm stole them away.

Amusingly enough, trying to mention the name of Horus to the Luna Wolves will receive a very sour fifteen-minute rant on the fact that Horus had gone insane with ambition, and that they had been on their way to Terra to warn the Emperor of this terrible betrayal. Any questioning for those who went with the Fallen Angels would note that they felt a united front against the Imperium was needed if it was to clear the board and start over, that one needed to be mindful of Chaos and pay respect to it if a true empire was to form.

Both sides have absolutely no idea that it wasn't the 31st Millenium.

They'll also wonder how you managed to evade the Effluvial Cube, which is more or less their name for the Xenos station that was responsible for the huge graveyard right outside. They would go on to explain how after being deposited out of the Warp Storm and into this graveyard that they saw the station activate and start teleporting out entire crews worth of ships at a time until it got to a vessel with Astartes on it. From there it immediately destroyed their engines before going inert again, leaving them to the situation that they preside in today. Observations afterwards would see them doing the same thing to human vessels that arrived, with any vessels of Xenos design seeing a flash of light before said vessel got mangled apart in waves of plasma.

One thing doesn't add up, though. You arrived in the system and this Cube didn't react to your vessel.

There's some theorizing, but eventually the conclusion comes down to the defense station having a minimum effective range being affected by the graveyard it created before it starts bellowing out plasma or beginning the scans. Could be why the derelict vessels are so close and clustered together.

Of course, if you didn't decide to find these Astartes, the crew of the *Unsung Peril* would have inevitably come to the same conclusion.

It's a fairly simple endeavor when it comes down to it. Keep your distance, be mindful of debris trajectory that you're taking advantage of, then proceed to launch a bunch of torpedoes at the Cube or whatever you feel is enough firepower to level a ship. You've likely only got one chance at disabling the station before it goes absolutely crazy, so be sure your first punch hits hard. Otherwise you can expect your vessel to gain a free plasma power-wash courtesy of Xenos and your own incompetence.

Smashing the station, in a stroke of luck, merely disables it instead of destroying it outright. Which means you could go right inside and check it out for yourself. That or proceed to pillage the rest of this graveyard with impunity or go to the aforementioned Space Hulk if you haven't gone there yet.

Going to the station and boarding it via the damaged sections you recently created would find a design that was very strange. Pristine white surfaces, glowing blue lines and a sense of vertigo while walking along its corridors. Doors were marked with a glowing blue symbol that looked like a bird wreathed in lightning, and screens only held pictures instead of words... or maybe the pictures were the words. Hieroglyphs? It wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility. Still, you don't really find much in the way of life forms in this place. Just the sense of vertigo that constantly assails you along with the feeling of being watched.

Finding valuables is an entirely different story. Exploring would find that there were exotic machinery lying around in rooms, almost like spare parts. Spare parts that you could undoubtedly use, if you were so inclined. Parts for weapons, maybe, or whatever was causing this place to teleport people away. Either way there was a lot of it, enough to outfit a vessel or three.

One of the rooms is infinitely more concerning. Inside was not the seamless white surfaces or the blue glow, but the dark and gothic tones of human technology. Technology that looked advanced enough to have heralded from the Dark Age, along with a human corpse perfectly preserved inside a sealed canister with blue lights all over it. The room, if you gave it enough of a look-over, reminded you of a ship bridge except... smaller. Much smaller than usual.

So either ancient humans and Xenos collaborated and created this defense station, or there's a Xenos out there that was capable of messing with Dark Age technology and adapted it to their systems.

One could almost *feel* the shrieking rage of Inquisitors all the way out here on such a level that would make the World Eaters give pause.

But you're not here to ponder. It's time to take what you desire and move on.

Possible Rewards:

PLASMA WAVE LAUNCHER: The station may be crippled and unable to fight, but that doesn't mean you can't abuse this Xenos technology for yourself. Being installed on the top of the vessel, this machine will charge up and contain a large amount of plasma before magnetic fields will guide how they're expelled, essentially creating slashing waves of white-hot molten plasma being launched at your foes to tear vessels apart with the ferocity of a wild animal. It might take a few moments to charge up properly, but its power will not be denied. This reward does not count towards your limit.

AUGMENTED SHIP BRIDGE: While the station can no longer do its job of teleporting out humans for whatever nefarious purpose it was designed for, you can still take advantage of the Archaeotech that was being used. All the cogitator cores, all the interfaces and the energy conduits, everything here can be used to improve the bridge of your vessels to tremendous levels of energy efficiency and data processing. Entertainingly enough this also means almost all of the instruments are made a significantly smaller size, allowing you to add additional items you want or to go wild on new decorations. This reward does not count towards your limit.

TEMPEST-CLASS STRIKE FRIGATES: The graveyards of this galaxy are all too eager to add to their number when those of ill wits make their arrival. But they're equally giving to those who are able to navigate the treachery of past sins for the sake of the prizes that lay within. The hulls of five *Tempest-class* Strike Frigates have been found within the myriad ruins of these fleets, and aside from some deck plating or engine work they appear to be in remarkably intact shape. Fixing these ships will take some time, but should you do so they will provide excellent escort for your larger ships.

RAPID MACROCANNONS: The ships among the graveyard are hardly using their prized weapons, and so you've taken it upon yourself to carve them out and start installing the components upon your vessels. These Archaeotech Macrocannons are a wonder to behold, not only containing additional punching power than normal but also firing three times as fast to deliver swift deliverance upon those who would dare stand in your way. You might attract Orks with the amount of fire you're throwing but it's a small price to pay for greater power.

(CHAOS ONLY) ANGELIC ARMY: For saving them from a potential defeat and giving them a way out of that Space Hulk, these five hundred Astartes of time-displaced Fallen Angels and organized soldiers of six thousand Imperial Army descendants will offer to become followers to your goals and your Crusade. Along with being more readily equipped than your average Imperial Guardsman by far, these Astartes with their combat experience and leadership skills are bound to be of great use to those who want a break from... well, backstabbing chaotic allies.

(LOYALIST ONLY) LUNARIAN ARMY: For saving them from a potential defeat and giving them a way out of that Space Hulk, these five hundred Astartes of time-displaced Luna Wolves and organized soldiers of six thousand Imperial Army descendants will offer to become followers to your goals and your Crusade. Along with being more readily equipped than your average Imperial Guardsman by far, these Astartes with their combat experience and leadership skills are bound to be of great use to those who wish to break the forces of Chaos upon the knee of Order.

THE EVERLASTING EMPIRE

Now that the Xenos station is out of the way, it's time to finally find out what the deal is with that utterly massive planet bathed in the star's lavender light. Full speed ahead as the engines to your vessel roar to life and propel you.

Approaching it would get all manners of scanner pings from the planet. It wasn't defenses, but vessels. A great deal of vessels and fighters that were black and gothic in design, bristling with mass launchers and plasma weaponry; human in origin. What would humans be doing on a planet being guarded by Xenos technology?

On a scale of one to Heresy, this was pinging 'Heresy' pretty hard.

Before anything else, there was a communication ping. They were hailing you.

If you accepted, there would be a human on the screen. A human of immaculate personage who was dressed in robes of white and gold, eyes of piercing blue and of such a high quality the faint glow was the only thing that gave away that they were cybernetic. Even through the screen he gave off an aura of peace and serenity.

"Hail, voidfarer. I am Tenebrous, Oracle of the Everlasting Empire, and I would like to extend my apologies for how difficult it was to reach here. The stellar storms around our system are so rough that we never have visitors that make it past the Shepherd... it's designed to bring wayward Humans down here, but never did we expect the galaxy at large to evolve beyond what we knew. Our views are clearly outdated. Please, let us bring you down to the surface so we may hear of what has happened. We can provide food and repairs to your vessel as needed, as reparations."

His smile seemed sincere, but maybe that's suspicious in of itself. Plus, with a single sentence they confirmed that the defense station was theirs. You could give them the benefit of the doubt and accept Tenebrous' offer, travel down and see what you could learn or acquire. You could also 'accidentally' activate all the weapons on your ship and see how many vessels you could turn into scrap metal before the smile on his face vanished. It's your decision. No pressure or anything.

Regardless of what you choose, going down to the massive planet and seeing it up close reveals what amounted to an idyllic paradise. There were massive plains that stretched for hundreds of kilometers with all manners of plantlife, with mountains that were sculpted like something out of a Terran fairy tale. The air was... clean. Really clean. It almost felt impossible, with how many Imperial planets ended up destroying a world the moment a Hive City was erected. But this was nothing short of pristine.

Upon further inspection, the majority of the populace was around the southern regions of the planet, closer to the South Pole with a forest that was untouched. The North Pole has a forest too, only made entirely of crystal. A legit crystalline forest. Anyone with psionic abilities would feel like there was music coming from the strange trees. A haunting melody that wouldn't be out of place on a long voyage towards the concept of Infinity... or a funeral.

The Hive City itself was also possibly one of the most clean and organized variants you've ever seen. It was a pristine white, with building designs that looked as if it were a mixture between ancient Greek stone homes and the angled architecture of Aztecs. The blue lighting along the roads and the buildings mixed with the purple light from the sun to give it an ethereal appearance, which made the dark clothing and technology used by so many of the humans stand out even more. Even more surprising, there wasn't a single beggar or peasant in sight. Everyone looked well-nourished, even. Organized. At peace.

The perceptive ones would note that there were banners and statues all over, as well. Statues humming with life, forged in gold and marble to depict an especially regal human with strange symbols on their hands that looked like a star wreathed in lightning, the same ones on the banners. Those who decided that nice things aren't allowed and went in guns blazing would certainly notice these statues from how many plasma lasers they kept firing off from their hands.

As one got closer to the forests of the South Pole, they would note the architecture changing and becoming much more regal in appearance. Homes became palaces, palaces became grand temples. Those humans who lived in these places didn't wear the darker colors, but wore white and gold like Tenebrous did with varying degrees of expensive looking bionics on them. Further glances would also note that they seemed... more. Something about them felt larger than life, an innate feeling of greatness. Any psykers would feel this effect magnified, as though their status was felt by one's very soul.

If you accepted Tenebrous' peace offering, he would give a soft smile before explaining. "It is because they *are* more. We have been here for so very long, separated from the rest of the galaxy. What were we to do, except study what we could and advance ourselves in this corner of safety? The study of technology and its applications on our surroundings have yielded many findings, and we feel it would be a disservice to our own existence and the existence of Humanity if we did not apply those findings."

He would also mention that there was an Ascension Ritual that was going to commence later that night, if you wished to watch it unfold as an honored guest so that you could witness what it was they did out here.

You would be free to explore the city in the meantime, which is equally parts serene as it is creepy. Many of the people here would talk about remembering being born on this planet, after those who crashed here during the 24th Millennium were stranded and found a way to recover from being stranded. It was all thanks to the Trees of Life, their most prized possessions in the city. With the fruit born from those trees they attained eternal life and set about rebuilding their civilization here, saving any humans who accidentally found themselves here and bringing them into the light of this paradise.

Immortal humans from fruit? Saving humans with a cube that annihilates any ship that doesn't have a specific phenotype? Xenos technology that differed from Archaeotech? The other shoe was going to drop just about any minute now.

But eventually, the crowds gather and the rituals begin. It's all a big showboating play at first, with holographic images projected in the sky showing vessels crashing into the large planet. Difficulty moving and breathing due to the high gravity and toxic atmosphere, it seemed like the end. Then they found the Trees. With the fruit they consumed, they could withstand any ailment, whether from nature or from time. They could eternally stay in their prime, and even become stronger should they imbibe the fruit for a long enough period and didn't succumb to violent deaths. They would use this immortal lifespan to eventually find and accomplish what Humanity has always sought: To become masters and gods of creation.

Well then.

The first thing that stands out is the unique cloth and pigments that are brought out for the woman who lays on the altar atop stairs of platinum and gold, shimmering with a bioluminescent light and making her look like she was being draped in stars. An ornamental mask of ivory was placed upon her face, a symbolic gesture that she would be a new person when the mask was removed. She would be one step closer to the gods, an Eternal who worked tirelessly to break into a new realm of existence for the good of Mankind. Pillars of white and blue raised up around the altar as the attendants moved around her, making sure everything looked immaculate and pristine as the leader of the event asked the crowd to be supportive, as the woman would be a pioneer in a journey they all would take eventually.

That's when either you could see it with your psionic senses, or your communication tool roars as your Astropath insanely rambles about seeing the *thing* arriving. A creature that didn't move so much as it shifted. A creature of angled blue light, twisting its wings in a way that could make one think of legs along unseen surfaces. A creature unseen in the material, but was seen by those attuned to the Immaterium as it unfurled its wings to reveal something like a man-sized spider with its abdomen replaced with multiple smaller tendrils. Not a second later it wrapped itself around the woman... then melted into her. Bolstering her at first glance, but there was no mistaking it. Despite looking perfectly fine physically, it was not a woman on the table anymore.

Your vessel would also report back mentioning a rather large energy spike occurring on the innermost planet. Doesn't take an Enginseer to realize the two are connected in some way, should you opt to go the way of the Orks and smash the source of the energy spike into a kilometer-sized hole.

With everything going on, it wouldn't be hard to try and sneak out to make your way back to your vessel in hopes of smashing that place. You would, of course, inevitably encounter resistance when your ship started to move, with all manners of fighter craft trying to swarm you in hopes of stopping your now-blatant decision from coming to pass.

You could, however, instead find Tenebrous and confront him about it as well. Even if you didn't, he would contact you while you were on your way to do some impromptu landscaping and try to make his case.

“Please, I know what it looks like. But this is the only way our species can survive! We all perished so long ago, when the Aeldari’s war in the Sea of Souls forever changed it. But our own souls survived in our technology, and we can only be reborn through the flesh of those with strong souls! We had no intention of using you, and we had hoped you would show us the way out from this encapsulated system... we can offer you so much. We just want to be reborn. Please, let us be remade.”

It all comes down to a single choice. You can choose to stand down, allowing the existence of the Everlasting Empire and recruiting these strange Xenos to your cause regardless of how heretical or foul it may be to you, or you could push forward and seek out the inner planet to find the massive spire of white and blue that remains pristine despite the horrifically acidic atmosphere and the intense gravity.

Should you choose to spare them, you would be made a High Consular of the Everlasting Empire, and its resources would be open to you along with its people. Should you opt to purge the Xenos for daring to pollute the human soul, the Empire will be in chaos as all of its top authorities appear to go mad and kill themselves in a fit of hysteria. Psykers or your Astropath would reveal the reasoning; the feedback from the spire’s destruction destabilized them and the hosts simply couldn’t handle what they had experienced. The Empire could very well be destabilized if you do not step in and help them choose a new leadership, or even take control yourself.

Regardless, you have much to choose from as your rewards, now that you’ve pacified the main threat of this system in one form or another. You’ll also be able to acquire quite a bit of materials and resources from the interior asteroid field without anyone in the way.

Possible Rewards:

EVERLASTING ATTIRE: The leaders of the Empire may have had a heinous means to their own survival, but one could not deny that they played the part of being ‘more’ exceptionally well. The creatures of the larger world are both docile and possess rather luxurious qualities to them. Exceptionally high-quality ivory that is very easily sculpted and able to be forged, along with bioluminescent pigments and silks that glitter as though you wore the very stars. How’s that living the high life? This reward does not count towards your limit.

SYMBIOTIC SOUL (SPARED XENOS): Tenebrous would be exceptionally grateful for sparing them, and would immediately get to work on finding a way to repay you. It would be somewhat disturbing to the higher echelons of the Empire, but they would find a way to create a newborn of their species before offering to implant it within your soul. The result would be bolstering the size and strength of your soul while making you much more resistant to any forms of corrupting or possessing your soul along with augmenting any Psyker powers you possess quite a bit. As a bonus, you could also generate an ethereal aura of wings that augments your charisma a large amount as well. Show them your power, High Consular. This reward does not count towards your limit.

FURNISHED FLESH (DESTROYED XENOS): Upon the destruction of the Xenos that gripped this human civilization, many within the city were paranoid and worried. Yet when order was restored and the situation explained, it was decided that you needed some kind of reward for freeing them. Thus the private laboratories were raided and you were given the option of being augmented with technology that is a mix between the technology of the Xenos and that of the Dark Age of Technology. Those with bionics would find new variants installed, much sleeker and much more powerful than what they had before, while also obtaining a new type of bionic that allows one to create a Conversion Field on demand. May you walk on paths of light, Liberator. This reward does not count towards your limit.

EVERLASTING IMPERIALISTS: Whether you spared these strange Xenos or condemned them to a fiery fate, one decision remains: What are you going to do with the people here? You could just leave them to their little corner of the galaxy, but it just seems so wasteful. If only you had some kind of vessel that you could load them on. Good thing you do. You may take along ten thousand strong to travel with you as followers, willing to fight for your cause as thanks for your actions here. Should you have spared the Xenos some of their numbers will come with as powerful psykers and diplomats, or if you destroyed the Xenos they will bring potent weapons that rival even digital weapons of the Inquisition to ensure your enemies' destruction.

TREES OF ETERNITY: Humans do not live forever normally, this is truth. However, juvenant compounds can greatly prolong life while curative compounds can heal any illness. Such treatments are very expensive in the Imperium, which is why these trees are so damned valuable. So long as you have the crystal trees in the same biosphere as the trees of white and purple, they'll feed on psionic energy in the air and start producing a large amount of golden fruit that can keep a person in their prime for at least three hundred years before showing any signs of aging. Even better, eating will also reverse the age of those who eat it and cure any illness or frailties they possessed, with regular consumption seeing them becoming stronger and more physically capable. Bring eternal life to any you deem fit.

ADAMANTIUM DEPOSIT: Were such a material more commonplace, Mankind would be abusing it to absolutely no end. This is because the hyper-dense ore that is Adamantium is the strongest material known to Mankind and equipment made from such things are so strong that they cannot be disassembled, meaning they cannot be reverse-engineered normally. They're also invulnerable to attacks from most known weapons, and so is often used with plasteel and ceramite to create very powerful items such as Terminator Armor or the construction of Imperial Titans. You have quite a large amount here, enough to possibly supply a small army if you had the means to use the material... that or sell it for an exuberant amount of money to acquire other things.

PSIONIC DRUG: Many strange things can be found in the Expanse, on horrid worlds that hide the greatest gems. Upon the innermost world, with its potent acidic atmosphere and high gravity lies a powerful nectar produced by flowers of singing crystal. On its own it causes powerful hallucinations that always seem to reflect what the imbiber desires most, but when refined into a drug it has the ability to temporarily enhance psionic powers to an astonishing level while granting tremendous willpower to harness that new power. It's effects only last for an hour, but cultivating the flowers will let one grow a supply quite easily to give a steady supply. Be wary not to get addicted to the power.

XENOS MEDICAE STATION: The Everlasting Empire, for all their faults and their dark secrets, never had a desire to be cruel to their subjects. After all, to be kind meant that no one would dare run away and deprive them of potential hosts for their elite to use. Regardless of the Empire's current state, you could easily use their technology and upgrade the medicae decks of your vessels or even install decks should they lack any. This technology ensures nothing short of death will keep your crews down for long, and even the installation and maintenance of cybernetic technologies will be extremely easy. Let their secrets be yours.

QUARTERS OF ETERNITY: The living area of the ruling elite were rooms that even planetary governors would be envious of, with amenities and luxuries that would even cost the nobles of Terra a fortune to acquire. Psionic focuses that soothe and boost the morale of crew, hygienic chemicals that cleanse both the body and the soul of corruption and impurities, and even furniture that will stimulate the body so that it is trained and kept at peak physical performance. It also comes with unique chemical dispensers that will turn any serum you desire into a pleasant fragrance for the room's occupant to imbibe. The Everlasting Empire lived like gods, and so shall those under you.

BLACKSTONE: One might wonder how Xenos that bond to the soul managed to escape Daemons this entire time. The discovery of a deposit within the field that was partially mined might go a long way to explaining it. Blackstone is a mysterious substance that seems to be highly resistant to the powers of the Immaterium, and as such the Adeptus Mechanicus seek it out no matter what the cost. The fact that it's also highly abundant on Necron Tomb Worlds and is used to make zones of stable space is of no consequence, surely. Should you seek it out, you would easily have enough to line your vessel and make it perfectly safe for Warp travel, or to harness it for any number of purposes such as lining armor or weapons with the material to be intensely effective against anything of the Immaterium... Chaos or otherwise.



THE FORGOTTEN TRIBES OF DREADFANG

Talk about easy street. The data on this system that the probe pulled up was like feeling a shoulder devil telling you to take candy from a baby, with the shoulder angel saying that you should be sure to tell the baby not to be such an easy steal before you looted them.

To be more specific, there's only one planet in this system. A single planet with nothing but ruins, a great deal of materials among the radioactive deposits, and a pre-industrial civilization of some kind. The probe didn't get much data on that, but what it did get was that despite the massive solar flares the star was giving off, the inner cauldron was still accessible. Granted, that was like saying you could still swim in a pool of sharks that were in a blood frenzy.

Still, if inhabitants were trapped on the planet then there was nothing stopping you from having the run of the place. Perhaps it's time you should listen to your inner voices this time.

A quick Warp jump would reveal more or less what the probe had told you. A rather healthy-looking star that was popping off flares like it was a festival, a great deal of asteroid belts and clusters, with a single planet that looked only semi-fun to land on. Despite its relatively small size, it had a very high amount of gravity and looked warm enough that an Astartes could complain about the temperature even in their armor. It also had only one large landmass, with everything else being water.

Since this probe is something of a flying bucket of bolts, however, there were two things the data failed to convey. The first was that there were three old Imperial Cargo Ships that looked battered and utterly ripped apart for whatever they were carrying. The second was the large amount of Ork ruins that dotted parts of the sea, akin to artificial islands. No, ruins would imply that there was no one using them. There were a great deal of Orks detected now that your ship was in the system. But no vessels, no attack craft.

Feral, perhaps?

There were human life signatures on the island as well. Actually, make that 'mostly' human. A slight genetic deviancy was detected, but nothing too far gone. But if this pre-industrial civilization was able to actually fend off Feral Orks on their own, just imagine the kind of ferocity and damage they could do when properly equipped. Even better, the conditions of that planet would ensure that only the strongest and most skilled among them would live. It almost seems like a perfect recruitment ground.

There were also still the asteroid fields. Closer to the sun and the one the derelict ships were adrift in. With no actual voidfaring presence here, no one can stop you from stripping the place dry. No one to tell you that you were taking too much.

Which locale shall you slake your thirst upon first?

DREADFUL MISTAKES

Maybe you're hitting this place on the way out. Maybe this is what you care for and don't give a damn about any planet with filthy greenskins on it. Regardless, you set course for the vessels adrift in the asteroid field to find out what happened before taking celestial candy from the babies that are these poor, defenseless asteroids. Maybe they should have thought about this outcome before making themselves so tempting.

The vessels themselves are nothing quite special, but it's what happened to them that seems intriguing. The battered exterior and the haphazard manner in which the cargo bays were gutted suggested a sloppy heist. At least, it suggested sloppy until you realized the obscenely unnecessary number of holes there were that implied someone laid a little too thick on the Macrocannon fire. Then it just becomes obvious that Orks ambushed these poor fools and robbed them of everything they were worth.

Oh well. If they were sloppy with the attack, maybe they missed something.

Getting close to the vessels seemed like a straight shot. Get there, sneak into one of the derelict ships like a Ratling and pilfer the cogitator core, get out. But the closer you got to the asteroid field the vessels now called their eternal resting place, the stranger the data your scanners received. That is to say, what they were showing could make the Mechanicus think it was possible for a Machine Spirit to get flat fucking drunk. There was no way for there to be fifty-nine additional vessels in the area. Even if you fired exactly where the scanners said they would be, it hits nothing but empty space. You would need to get there manually. Easy enough, whether you use a smaller vessel or stranger methods to arrive.

On board one of the ships, it's about exactly what one would expect. Lots of holes, lots of bodies floating around. Guess it can't always be dignified or during a grand battle to take someone with you. At least this way there's no resistance save the nonfunctioning doors you'll need to cut your way through. It makes for a rather uneventful procession to the bridge to secure the cogitator core, but it's better than needing to worry about Xenos trying to eat you or the ship itself trying to give you new breathing holes, right? ...right?

While it's uneventful, it is a tad tedious needing to slice one's way through the bulkhead doors and the safety features meant to keep the core intact and prepped for eventual Imperial extraction, seeing as many of said safety features are offline due to the tremendous number of electromagnetic bursts and radiation the solar flares had been giving off. It's a wonder it even lasted as long as it did, actually. But eventually they give way and the core is extracted, making it a straight shot to get back to your vessel and review the data to see what happened.

...and ho boy, what happened is nothing short of a treat.

Seems this small fleet belonged to Lord-Captain Agoston Dreadfang, a renowned Imperial among the Segmentum Pacificus who had decided to retire after the infamous string of battles known as the Nova Terra Interregnum. Which put these ships at the 36th Millennium if one cared about that.

Sifting through the data core would find that he managed to acquire a Letter of Marque for his services, and he managed to go from a life of battle to one of exploration and discovery for his actions during the conflict. The freedom and lack of most Imperial Doctrine he was used to would see him quickly slide into a hedonistic lifestyle, sating his hunger on meals that Planetary Governors would pay a fortune for and slaking his thirst upon riches and pleasures. Yet a Letter of Marque is not the same as a Warrant of Trade, and so there were still stipulations and requirements that prevented Lord-Captain Dreadfang from exploring the true lifestyle of a Rogue Trader and the dynasties they can create.

It was something that stifled him, and like many who became accustomed to new pleasures and powers he did not appreciate that his new life had limits to go along with it. So he had found this world, and had begun to set up some manner of scheme with moving vast amounts of slaves to this system. Regular supplies and additional slaves as needed would be provided, for the purpose of building up enough manpower to eventually start training and equipping. In essence, he was planning to pervert the methodology of the Imperial Guard and the Adeptus Astartes to create his own private army in hopes of not only securing more riches but to also force the High Lords of Terra to remove the limitations on his Letter of Marque to acquire a true Warrant of Trade.

Looking at the details, the idea of having an all-female cadre of bodyguards was also a high priority on his list.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Regardless of your views regarding his power fantasies, it would appear his plans never came to fruition. See, the frequent solar flares meant that any Imperials who tried to find this place without the proper protection to their sensors wouldn't find anything out of the ordinary. Unfortunately for Dreadfang, it also meant that anyone else who happened to come across this place would fall under the same protections. His vessels were coming by for their first recruitment drive when they were under attack by Ork ships, and being as unprepared as they were many of his ships were simply obliterated. It then becomes clear that these three vessels weren't the fleet, they were what's *left* of the fleet. Everything else was dragged off.

At least it explained the Feral Orks down on the planet; remnants of the attack fleet or simply Orks that crashlanded down there and became too stupid to leave. What's strange is that records showed the Orks boarded and searched the place carefully, stealing anything shiny before finding the Captain's Quarters and taking the Letter of Marque. Everything else was left behind, at least until one of the Orks yelled while throwing bombs all over the place.

"AH'VE GOTZ ME PRIZE NOW, AND EVERYFIN' AH NEED TO PILLAGE AN' KRUMP SHINY SHORES! FARE 'E WELL HUMIES, FOR YA LOT SEE DA RIZE OF KAPTIN' GODZNOBBAH!"

Surely this won't become important later on.

Still, that more or less puts the boots to salvaging anything from the ships themselves if Orks stole the shiny things and firebombed the rest. It would explain the messy bodies inside. But perhaps you could still use the ships themselves. At their sizes you could jury-rig them and use them as temporary shielding by putting them between you and the sun while you went around mining the various asteroid fields. That is, if you didn't decide to just use the rocks themselves as shields. They would be very easy to use in the outer asteroid fields, but the interior where it's closer to the star would see it being very rough as the solar flares striking would be like taking hits from Macrocannon fire. Between that and the large amounts of radioactive material here, you do not want to dawdle with your harvesting.

Whatever your method, there's nothing here that can stop you from procuring what you desire.

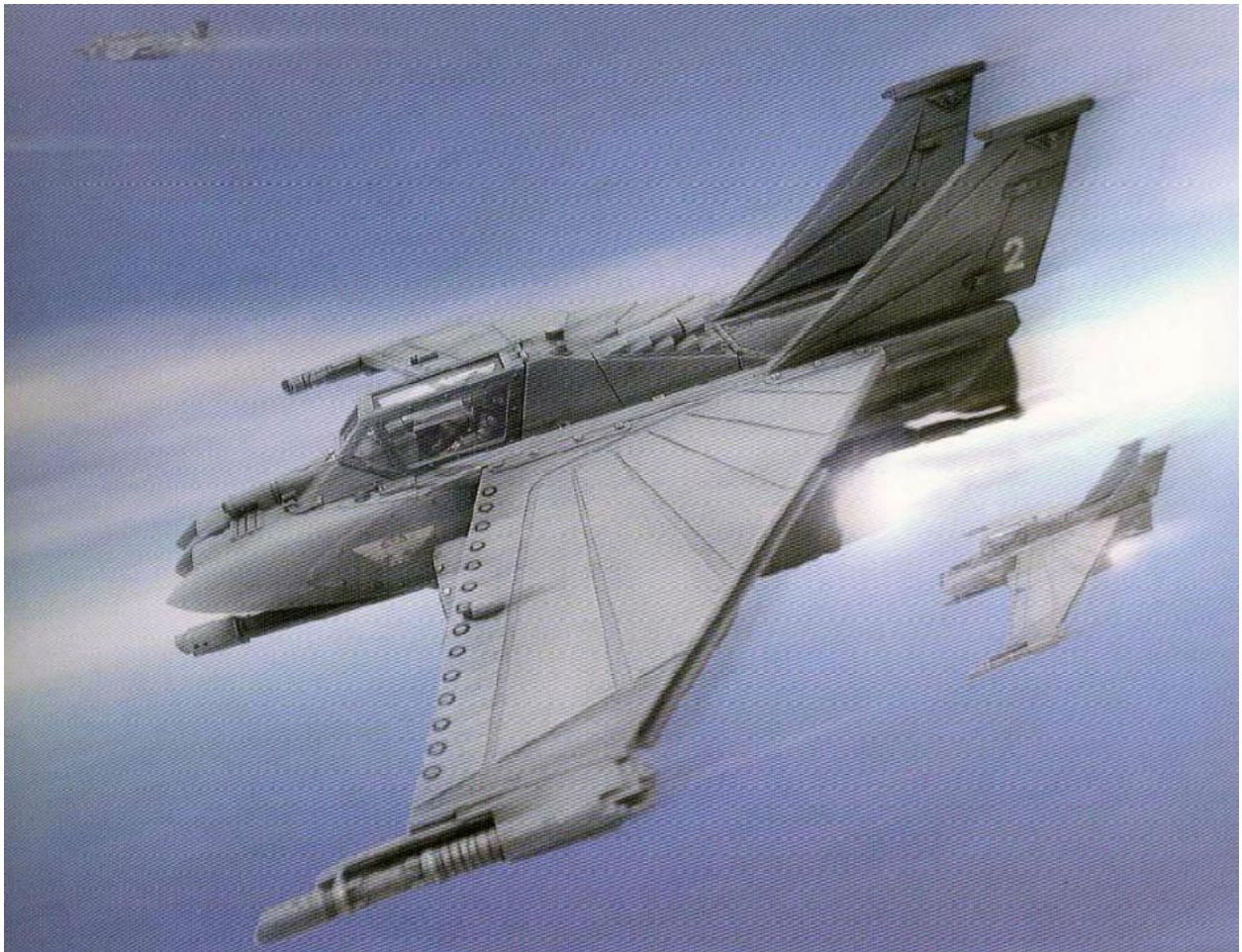
Possible Rewards:

RADIATION-TREATED CERAMITE: It's impressive enough that this Ceramite is high-grade to the point that one could use it in the construction of armor and vehicles for the Adeptus Astartes, but thanks to the intense radiation from the solar flares and the radioactive materials laden in the Inner Cauldron of this system it's obtained unique properties. Along with being able to absorb and dissipate even the most extreme thermal and direct-energy attacks, its protection against electromagnetic radiation is so great that any armor or vehicle made with this material finds EMP attacks simply don't work on it even when made into an alloy with other materials. Possessing enough to equip a small army, you'll find no end to the uses one can have with this.

MARS-GRADE RADIOACTIVES: The Skitarii Warriors of the Adeptus Mechanicus are feared not only for their machine-like dedication and unfaltering doctrine, but for their penchant of turning any battlefield they walk into a horrific, radioactive waste that ruins any world regardless of its condition. This is due to their Radium weapons, with projectiles and attacks suffused with hyper-irradiated materials so great even Tyranids would turn into sludge with repeated strikes. The materials found here are perfect for such weapons, giving off such intense radiation that to send an unarmored man to them would be to watch them rot and dissolve in mere moments. Be careful should you mine them, but whoever can harness its power would find very little to be a threat to them.

HARDENED DIAMANTINE: Whether used as the tips of Bolter ammunition or lining the walls or doors of an Adeptus Astartes' Fortress-Monastery, Diamantine is an exceptional material used by both the Imperium and the forces of Chaos due to its hardness and its ability to pierce a multitude of different armors. Due to all the solar activity in this system, its durability and hardness has increased even further to make it a truly powerful material that could see any defenses or armor-piercing capabilities increased to heights unheard of. Why, there's enough here to actually build a fortress out of, if you had the mind for something like that.

HIDDEN STARCRAFT: While plumbing the depths of the asteroid belt, particularly keen crewsman would find a fairly interesting cache hidden deep within one of the larger asteroids. That is, slews of Thunderbolt Heavy Fighters and Lightning Air Superiority Fighters all modified for both atmospheric combat and void combat. Improved engines and ion blasters coupled with shields all implied extensive modification with Tau technology, something that was undoubtedly seen as heresy to any Tech-Priest involved with your retinue. Still, no sense to let any of it go to waste even if this spoke concerningly for whatever Dreadfang had planned.



TRIBAL WARFARE

Well, nobody ever said that this planet was going to explore itself. Might as well get down there and find what you can salvage from this place.

While those Ork objects were all over the damned place, what was curious is that all of said objects and ruins were forming artificial islands and vessels of sorts. The only landmass was one massive island that had smaller lakes and islands within it. In a way, the landmass was its own encapsulated biome. Little wonder the civilization was pre-industrial. Yet the other thing that stood out now that you took a closer look at it was the gravity of the planet. To put it succinctly, it was ridiculously high. Such a place would make even Astartes look sluggish until they got used to it, and even then, it might be difficult. One could only imagine how the civilization adapted in order to thrive. Of course, one could also imagine how absurdly valuable such a hardy group might be for warriors. Maybe that Dreadfang fellow was onto something.

Time to head on down.

It was actually a fairly easy ride down, having picked a time when the solar flares weren't going off and making a mess of your vessel's scanners or systems. However, the temperature started to increase dramatically outside, easily rivaling the heat of most deserts despite being a forest. Hopefully that's okay, or it's going to be an exceptionally abysmal time here. On the plus side, despite being a massive forest there were some spots where it wasn't as thick. Which is good because those thrusters would be strained from the additional stress it had on.

Upon landing and finally opening up the hatch, the wave of heat would hit like a ton of ferrocrete bricks. By all the Immaterium, it was *warm* out there. Smelled pleasant at least. Native birds chirping, a bit of creaking from the large trees... as good a place to set up camp as any.

At least it would be, until there was LOUD thumping noises. It sounded like a Titan was stomping towards you, which is not a pleasant sound whatsoever. There was barely any time to get weapons out when the monster showed up. Thrice the size of a Dreadnought, and looking like a mighty gorilla of ancient Terran past. At least if a gorilla was covered in scales and had a mouth like a dragon with massive spikes protruding from its arms. Damned thing looked ready to tear apart the ship when you heard someone yell from on top of the monster and it stopped dead in its tracks. "Hold! I don't recognize this... who are you?"

Did its rider just speak Low Gothic? Wait, did that massive thing actually have a rider?

The beast lowered itself as a towering figure clad in armor dropped to the ground, easily as tall as an Astartes. The armor itself was an ivory color gilded in brass, designed to the appearance of a knight in the 1st Millenium. The figure did not approach, looking over the craft... then stopping and looking at you. Immediately taking off their helmet and kneeling, revealing a face of grace and beauty with bronze skin. Even the felinid ears didn't detract fr-wait, what. Felinid? "My lord. You've returned to us at last! We waited for the day that our god would reward our diligence."

What.

Wait. Wait you could use this. Or at least hear them out. They'll rise when told to, and introduce themselves as Awan, Rider of the Holy Knights charged with the protection and safety of the Tempered Lands. At your command, he would gladly take you to their home so that you, one of their eternal Star Gods who walk the cosmos with the power of infinity at your side, may inspect their work and pronounce judgement upon them.

Man, this Dreadfang guy really had an ego to him. Could you imagine someone being like that?

At least it's an easy trip there. The beast's presence more or less makes any of the wildlife get away out of fear of being devoured, and along the way Awan explains their origin of being placed here by their Lord Agoston. This was a trial placed upon them, to be reforged and made strong enough to conquer the very heavens. At first they had tamed the lands and made use of the gifts they were given, and then the green demons had arrived. Demons who had no sense of honor, or glory, or even sanity. Mindless aggression, and the enemy they fight against every day for their very survival. In time, they realized this world for what it was. It was one of many Hells, and they needed to survive it to be granted salvation.

Getting closer to their home, however, would reveal two incredibly important things. The first being that their 'holy gateway' was actually ruins belonging to the Eldar. The hum of the Wraithbone was a dead giveaway, to say nothing of the crystal pillars that resonated with any Psyker that happened to approach. The resonance was akin to a song, a hauntingly beautiful one at that. From the look of things, this place was the remains of a Craftworld. At least, it was one before these Felinids turned the whole thing into a Fortress-Keep of some kind. Good luck trying to get that to fly again.

The second thing was the nature of the Felinids, on seeing the populace noticing your presence. Normally, Felinids would be akin to bipedal, hairy felines that just so happened to have a human shape and was barely tolerated. This variant was more like someone putting cat ears and a tail onto bronze-skinned men and women who were dressed in loincloths and small outfits, at least the ones not in masterwork-crafted armor or pure white robes that took tips from desert gear. Perhaps time spent by the Eldar ruins diverged their evolution to some extent? At least their sculpted physiques and powerful legs made it clear that they adapted quite well.

It also took a grand total of fifteen seconds before one of them shouted that the Gods have noticed them again and began to bow down to you.

The rest very quickly began to follow suit.

Hopefully you aren't so easily swayed by appeals to your ego and dominance, or it's going to take forever and a half to get to the main castle dead center in the middle of this entire fortress.

The interior of the keep looked like a rather clean, if medieval-grade town. There were small livestock farms, places to have armor and clothing procured, and supply depots for everyday living items to be forged and circulated. Were it not for the playground, this could pass for a military site.

Another thing to note would be the crystalline weapons the knights and the robed figures possessed. Others had bows made of the same crystalline material, which hummed with the same psionic resonance as the crystals by the gate. Such a thing carried potential implications.

But those questions could be answered once you were brought inside the castle, with its walls lined with marble and gold and the stained-glass windows making it look more like a large cathedral than a castle. Massive pillars had writing etched into them, which upon closer look detailed glorious battles and the names of those who had fell those days. Large cushions were stacked next to the doorways, meant to be portable seats for those who walked in. Looking at the ceiling, there were depictions of their gods. Titans of metal and glory, with thunder and light erupting from their hands and massive chariots that rode the inky Void. It was pretty blatant who it was supposed to represent, but from an uneducated standpoint, it was also pretty easy to see how you could fill the role.

At the far end sat a Felinid woman in a dress of pure white. The slightly greyed hair gave away how old she was compared to the others, even though that was the only indicator of her advanced age as she gave a smile. "You honor us with your presence, oh Great One. I am Matriarch Pakwa, and if there is anything I can do to aid your Grace or please you in any way, you need only but ask."

Beyond any obvious implications that the God-Emperor of Mankind would truly frown upon, Pakwa can answer just about any question you may ask. Barring any major battles their population has stabilized at around twenty-thousand, with any who have reached adulthood immediately conscripted and trained in order to defend the Keep. Those who do not take up the Warrior's Light would either don the Rider's Mantle, or the Seer's Veil. Together they comprised the Holy Knights, who stand eternal vigil against the green demons who continue to strike from the sea. On their spare time, they may take up other jobs such as the Artisan's Hand, or the Botanist's Palm, or even the Healer's Embrace.

If you've guessed the theme by now, then congratulations. Your survival to this point was not from undeserved luck.

While it would be seen as incredibly heretical for these Abhumans to have taken some cues from the ruins they inhabit, it's also done them wonders in regards to organization and ensuring everyone has a purpose. Focused warriors with a purpose, all doing their part to ensure the entirety of the species survived. Long story short, it was a self-trained army that constantly tried to keep itself in top condition. No doubt fighting the feral Orks this entire time made them even better at their jobs. One had to wonder if Dreadfang would have encouraged that or not.

Nevertheless, it's an army that now looks to you as one of their Gods from the stars. You, of the Metallic Homogeny. Your word is law, and your whims their command.

A shame, then, that a scout chose that exact moment to run in and declare the demons were amassing an invasion force. A *big* one in fact.

Perfect timing, if you wished to demonstrate your might to those who looked up to you.

It was like watching poetry in motion, or at least watching the organic equivalent to clockwork. An army of ivory and brass moving as one with robed figures in the back, chanting war hymns to get everyone psyched up. The front had shields as large as themselves with the soldiers on the wall holding crystalline bows. Something that stood out, however, is that they had no arrows with them. How did they expect to provide support or attack the enemy? Granted, there were additional beasts like the one Awan rode to your vessel, but against feral Orks? These had to be *really* good troops to be able to survive this long.

Whether by using abilities to scry beyond the wall or scaling it yourself, the idea of these Orks being perceived as demons to the Felinids was fairly understandable. They looked as though they numbered in the tens of thousands, massive boar-like mounts at the front with many of them wearing the skulls of their fallen as makeshift pauldrons. Pools of green blood were used to paint their weapons, with large ballista and trebuchet machines forged from scrap metal and massive bones. They had enough torches and flames that the skies around them darkened from the black smoke that rose from the approaching horde. At the back, a massive Ork as large as an Imperial Knight stood clad in charred starship plating broken and fastened to his skin as armor with twin blades as large as him on his back.

The Holy Knights called him the Dark One. In the tongue of the demons, he was ‘Warboss Voidzundah’.

How delightfully bombastic.

When the Warboss yelled, it was surprisingly loud. You’re pretty sure that you’ve heard starship engines quieter than this. But what he yelled was perfectly clear, and signaled the start of the battle.

**“WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGG
GGGGGGGGH!!!”**

The scream was echoed, and then the forces charged. It was like hearing a thunderstorm approaching.

What followed soon after was all but solidification of proof that the Felinids could survive here. Bolts of light shot from the crystalline arrows like volleys of pure energy, while the chanters yelled in ways that made the Knights become veiled in auras of light. Barriers manifested from shields, and crystalline swords hummed with power.

Each and every Felinid here was a Psyker.

Well then.

Yet this is only the start. It is time to prove your worth, and aid the Holy Knights in their defense. Push back the green tide and show them what it means to fight alongside their god!

It would take time and great effort. Maybe you've trivialized it, or fought as ferociously as the Knights. But soon enough the hordes would be pushed back, albeit only when there are enough bodies that they rise beyond the wall and are a small mountain in of itself. The body count of the Felinids could be great or minimal, all dependent on you. Nonetheless, they would all be grateful and mark this day as a glorious time to remember. The day their combat prowess brought forth a god.

After the feast that lasts for four days straight with all manners of food, dances and other pleasantries, it's time to review this place and take stock of what you could collect.

Possible Rewards:

HOLY KNIGHT ATTIRE: To be a defender of the people is a duty that should bring pride and honor to those who bear the heraldry of Knighthood. They are protectors of innocence, and within their flesh is the soul of one who will face down evil wherever they go. The Knights have recognized you as being a paragon, and will do their best to provide robes or armor modifications so that you too may stand among their numbers. This reward does not count towards your limit.

PSIONIC FOCUS: The crystalline weapons the Holy Knights possess are potent indeed, able to resonate with the power of a Psyker and help shape said power to a specific purpose. Whether it's to spread boons or wards in the form of a stave, or firing off orbs of power with a bow, erecting powerful barriers with the shield, or even enhancing strikes and imbuing weapons with greater power and abilities, they are a staple for the Holy Knights in their eternal vigil. As thanks for aiding them, you're offered a significant amount of crystal that you could use in similar manners, putting them in weapons or armor of your choice. Don't let the Daemons *or* the Eldar know you have this. This reward does not count towards your limit.

AELDARI CRYSTAL: There's no bullshitting what happened here. The ruins of the Aeldari Craftworld made these Felinids powerful. Powerful and buff. No doubt it was less an immediate change and more the result of exposure over the course of years or even decades on a world like this. Fortunately, enough searching reveals that you can take it with you to some extent. A unique Aeldari crystal that gives off a peaceful psionic energy akin to gentle waves on the shoreline was found, and theorized that if you kept it around people long enough or even found a way to amplify its effects that you'd start seeing similar changes in them. This reward does not count towards your limit.

DREADFANG'S LEGACY: Yet why let them stay here? Alone on this world, with armies of Orks trying to kill them constantly. Have they not suffered enough? Your vessel also contains enough room... so why not? It would take some time to get everyone moved over, but you may bring the Holy Knights and the Felinid group along their War Beasts the Riders use with you to serve and act in your stead. An army of twenty thousand exceptionally strong, physically dominating Felinids who are all Psykers would be an impressive boon. None shall escape the army of a god.

HAMMER OF THE JUST: Curiously, after the battle to defend the keep Awan had pulled you aside to mention he saw something similar to the vessel you arrived in, on the southern end of the island. No one among the Holy Knights went there in fear of attracting the demons, but with their god here there would be no worry, right? How fortunate, that the site he spoke of was actually the forward outpost of Dreadfang's little scheme. It held many different items squirreled away, but what caught your eye was this impressive set of Archaeotech prow. Equipped with their own Void Shields to allow all but the most durable of ships to withstand being rammed, while also being equipped with a Power Field to shatter whatever was in contact with it to do truly staggering amounts of damage. Let it be known that Dreadfang never thought small.

BAROQUE CORE: Awan's tip to look to the south would have revealed more than just Dreadfang's stash of ship components or spare parts, even though they're a fine find in of themselves. What you would also find behind seven different vault layer doors are these rather concerning spheres that glowed with a sickly purple color, as big as a Dreadnought and looking like a gothic work of art with layer upon layer of murals depicting horned gods hiding within cocoons of flesh. Unsettling to be sure, but hooking them up as a power source to a vessel would find all systems fully charged within minutes and even increasing the power to all weapons while effusing them with the same glow. Try to ignore that Psykers who look at it swear that it's looking back at them.

POOLS OF RESPITE: One thing of note is that almost none of the Felinids had any horrific wounds or amputees. Sure, some had scars that were fairly obvious, but there wasn't even a missing eye. Their reasoning would be the pools deeply guarded in the Keep, capable of healing those who were placed within the waters. While scars remain, just about any physical wound could be healed in time and grant those who bathe in it a clean bill of health. No mundane wound or disease shall plague any who go into these self-cleaning waters, and with a fair supply given to you to make your own pool, healing any troops would be a dip away.



WEAPON OF REMEMBRANCE (SLAYED WARBOSS VOIDZUNDAH): The green demons have plagued their civilization for tens of centuries. For every one they slew, they returned fivefold. Even when burning the bodies, it seemed their number was unending. To make matters worse, they became far more organized and capable of strategy when the Dark One rose from their numbers. Should he have been slayed in the battle by your hand, the Felinids would have taken it as proof of your divinity. Only one as powerful as a god could slay such a beast, and so they would wish to grant you a tool worthy of this day.

You see, the Holy Knights are a society of martial prowess and honor. A good death is its own reward, and great battles should be fought with the dead in mind. That is why after battles with great losses, they inter their dead in a special manner. Bodies drained of blood before being cremated, with the blood and carbon from the bodies used together while a crystalline gem is placed within the weapon to grant it a powerful focus that strengthens psionic power while honing it to a degree that control is almost never lost. Whether it used to make a brand new weapon or to augment of your choice, the end result is sharp enough to slice clean through Terminator Armor with next to no resistance.

Forged in Blood. Anointed by Faith.

The Eternal Light is yours. Strike with the strength of the fallen, and know that you are never alone so long as you possess this prized tool.

THE SECOND COMING (SLAYED WARBOSS VOIDZUNDAH): Upon the Dark One being slain, Matriarch Pakwa was relieved beyond words whereas everyone else had been celebrating. Inquiries would reveal that his death meant their most holy of sites could be reclaimed once more and that your chariot to the stars would signal your ascension. Called 'The Winged Cradle', it didn't take long to find out that it was actually a massive drydock for a spaceship. Whether you accessed it or had some Tech-Priests do it the contents would be revealed.

It is in this place that Dreadfang's fantasies had been nurtured into madness.

There was no doubt that this was an impressive ship. After all, an *Apocalypse-class* Battleship is something any Imperial Navy Fleet Admiral would desperately crave to possess. It is after an extensive search and the chorus of any Tech-Priest you possessed screaming in untold ecstasy that you found the sheer amount of Archaeotech inside made it much stronger than normal. Lance weapons that might as well be the ship-based equivalent of Volkite weaponry, engines that could cut down Warp travel to a tenth of its normal time, unique gravity devices that could let it fly inside an atmosphere, and other similar technologies that you found on this planet. Even more shocking is the unique Archaeotech Nova Cannon that allows it to fire three times in rapid succession before needing to be reloaded. Despite being grounded in an Imperial design of a ship eight kilometers in length, *The Second Coming* was meant to be a flagship to beat all other flagships.

THE DEFUNCT JUDGE

Upon jumping into this system, one thing becomes perfectly clear: This place is beyond fucked.

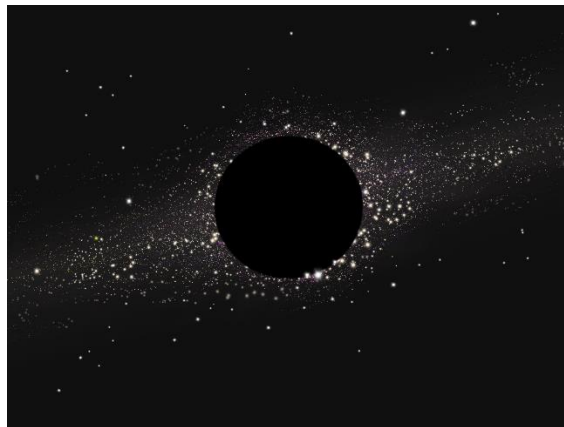
Your first clue was the color of the sun, in that it wasn't yellow or white or even purple. No, it was a black sun. That alone should tell any astrologer worth their salt that by all accounts it should be a cold and barren system with balls of ice circling it instead of planets, yet from what you can tell they're all fine for a given definition of the word. The first and third planets were practically radiating heat from how obscenely warm they were, while the middle planet was temperate and fairly okay if you didn't mind it being a completely desolate rock.

To make matters worse, there was all the gravity riptides. Normally unable to be detected by a voidship until they're nearly upon the anomaly, there were enough of these vortexes scattered throughout the system that you could actually find them. It was good fortune to know they were there, but the riptides being strong enough to find on the sensors immediately on entering the system meant that they were exceptional in their destructive capabilities. That or it was the massive dust cloud that had enough radiation to make a Mechanicus Magos lean away from nervousness. Either way, it was going to be rough.

The probe had collected some sufficient information this time around, as believable as information could be from the piece of junk. While the third planet had nothing of real value aside from its moon that was packed with gold and luxurious crystals, there were a large amount of ruins on the inner planet and the middle planet. Even better, the ruins had noticeable amounts of human technology within them. That meant a significant amount of Archaeotech just sitting there, ripe for the taking.

Just waiting to be brought into the loving embrace of their new Master.

It will be a rough journey and a nightmare to chart a course through, but fortune favors the bold. Let's see how bold you can be.



THE GRAVITY CAULDRON

Somebody's going to be getting hazard pay for flying through the radiation and the gravity storms that are within the massive dust cloud. It's a lot like flying through grey pea soup, except the soup is cosmic dust and the peas could crunch your vessel like an empty canteen.

It also doesn't help that these riptides are almost schizophrenic in their reach and their dangers, no doubt caused from the sheer amount of tides being so close together. It's actually a wonder how this smaller planet hasn't been thrown off course or sent careening into the cold emptiness of the Void with all the troubles. Or worse, utterly crushed by the differing gravitational forces of these riptides competing with the sun.

An answer soon makes itself apparent when the scanners detect a calm sector within the inner parts of the system, due to the massive beige gas giant. How did the probe miss *that* of all things?

Should you be a skilled Navigator yourself or have any in your retinue, it would be revealed to you that while traversing these tides to reach the inner planet would be fairly dangerous, at the cost of taking more time you could simply wait it out. This gas giant would be getting close to said planet within a week or two, and you could always attempt to refine the gases within the giant for some additional resources. That or you could decide to risk it all and chart an everchanging course to the planet, risking ship and limb for the sake of getting there as quick as you can to fill the void that is your cargo holds.

Whatever you choose, you would eventually come across the first planet. It looked fairly large, but initial scans showed normal gravity and a thin atmosphere. First glances had a pink surface with bodies of red water that almost made the planet look like it had been bleeding. There was also a good-sized crater around the equator, which explains the asteroid that had been orbiting the planet. Unfortunately, the planet was also warmer than a reactor room. Hope you've got a really good cooling system in your vessels or armor.

Fortunately, it was easy to detect exactly where the archaeotech was, and there was little to no issue with traveling down to the planet surface in a smaller vessel. No storms, no massive monsters jumping up to bite your vessel, it was really quiet traveling to a location outside the source of the ruins. Almost too quiet.

One of the Astartes in your retinue would volunteer to go first, in order to scout the perimeter and make sure it was safe for the others... or maybe you heavily encouraged that they 'volunteer' lest they be given a less pleasant task. Either way, upon exiting the vessel there would be complaints of how freakishly warm it was and how the cooling system did absolutely nothing to help with the heat. A comment on how thick the pink mist in the area is, a soft buzzing on the comms... and then you get to watch the Astartes' armor fall over like a pile of empty cans, sans occupant.

Oh fuck.

You could try to get a better biological reading, whether by your hand or by ordering your ship to get as close as it could to bring its powerful sensors to bear. Either one would eventually acquire readings that the mist was, in truth, a massive swarm of micro-organisms with both a high metabolism and a rapid reproduction rate. This meant that your ship was surrounded by the galactic equivalent of a piranha swarm ready to feed. While fortunate that they couldn't get into your ship, this meant you had to find a way to get rid of enough of them to clear a path between you and the archaeotech.

You could try to artificially cool the area somehow. The temperature and their method of travel likely made them extremely susceptible to temperature changes. That or you could decide it's too much work to do cooling or scanning, and order a bombardment between you and the ruins to leave nothing but blackened charcoal. It's up to you, really. No one will judge if you were scared of a pink mist.

Once you manage to clear away enough to make it into the inside of the ruins unscathed, you'd find that they were, well, quaint for a lack of better terms. Corridors of baroque design, twisting stairs of black and gold, and the occasional thrumming of machines left alone on standby with no one to turn them off. Even with all the foliage and dirt all over them, one had to give credit where it was due: They really knew how to build.

The surface wouldn't get a lot of trophies for you, but managing to crack your way into lower levels by noticing foliage patterns and getting the doors open would reveal a lot more for you to explore. Strangely enough, it was rather spacious as you went further down. Rooms much larger than normal, with doors tall enough to let Imperial Knights walk through unburdened. Every so often, the crackling of purple energy would shoot across the ceiling and make the air smell of ozone with a slightly acidic after-scent if such a thing was even possible.

But what really stands out as a strange piece is the occasional crystal tube that snakes along the pathways. Sometimes it goes down, or it goes up. Sometimes it goes across the floor. But it definitely stands out from the usual human architecture, enough that following it would eventually take you to a control room with multiple red lights and a single display message:

CHRONAL CONTAINMENT FAILED, AWAITING INSTRUCTION FROM OI-944

Sucks to be whoever was here, apparently.

Sifting through the cogitator cores wouldn't yield much, whatever happened here ended up scrambling all the archives beyond any comprehensible information. At least there was enough here to engage in some basic functionality such as opening the doors or finding storage sites. After all, if they're not using it then they won't mind if you happen to take it.

Probably best if you loaded up and moved on.

Possible Rewards:

ANCIENT WINGS: In the days of the Dark Age of Technology, there were wonders beyond measure. They had weapons that could erase entire ships and shields of indomitable might, and that's just for starters. Much of the Imperium's technology is based off what these ancient humans possessed, and this supply of flight packs are an impeccable example. While current Astartes Jump Packs are large and bulky, this version is more designed like an elegant pair of metallic, gothic wings with multiple micro-thrusters in between each of the feathers. Despite its intricate appearance and almost immaculate appearance, the wings are incredibly resilient and could very well withstand the strikes of heavy bolters or plasma rifles. Even when folded up, know that these wings shall shower you with resplendence and wonder. This reward does not count towards your limit.

GRIM FUSILS: Just as the Dark Age produced wonders, they also produced terrible horrors. Horrors that could leave a battlefield desolate and scarred with the power they wielded. These particular rifles, crafted with a reflective black material and thrumming a hellish red from its energy coils, is a perfect example. What you have here are Volkite rifles, albeit ones that looks like an ornate hunting rifle of old, that fires a powerful thermal ray capable of exploding flesh into jettisoned fire and ash while having enough power to pierce the ceramite of Astartes armor. This variant you found is much stronger, being able to shoot through at least three Astartes and set them ablaze before the heat finally dissipated. Let your enemies burn. This reward does not count towards your limit.

TWISTING MIST: The microbe-sized predators you found on this planet are a menace. Any flesh that passes by them gets devoured in seconds, being so much food to satiate their endless hunger on this obscenely warm planet. While they would not normally survive being removed from this world, you did happen to come across a strange deposit of what looked like eggs... and like the sane individual you were, decided to have them implanted into your flesh. This created a strange symbiosis, where physical injuries larger than a bruise or a small cut would see a smaller swarm of the mist seep out and attempt to consume the flesh of enemies in your immediate vicinity in order to boost your own metabolism enough to initiate rapid healing. Hopefully you know what you're doing with this.

MAW OF THE LIGHT: The Chainsword is practically one of the unofficial icons of Mankind and their insatiable desire for war and dominance across the galaxy. It mixes the primal thirst for destruction and death delivered upon one's enemies with the proud and innovative science that forever propelled Man into a time of power. This particular chainsword heralding from the Dark Age of Technology is one of the best examples one will ever find in this future of ignorance, a reminder of all that Man has lost. Impossibly intricate patterns of gold cover this weapon, with its teeth almost pulsing with a beautiful golden light thanks to unique energy cells. Upon activation the light makes this weapon flare like a brilliant flame and delivers immense devastation thanks to its energy field, carving through both Terminator Armor and Conversion Fields with the ease of carving a dinner roast. Not all from the olden times was Dark.

VAMPIRIC IMPLANTS: Within sealed vaults and cocooned in crystals were artifacts that painted a grim picture of how this place came to pass. In hindsight, ancient Xenos ruining this place made sense, what with how Xenos seem to enjoy preying on Man whenever given the chance. If one needed further proof, this cybernetic implant is the insatiable thirst of the corrupt made manifest, though perhaps you will think it will somehow work for you. Implanting this crystalline device in the base of the skull will grant its user the ability to channel mental or psionic power into their very body to give them proportionate physical power, although prolonged use could very well see a deterioration in sanity. How fortunate, or unfortunate that its makers anticipated such an issue. By clutching and sinking one's teeth into a person's neck, the user can drain the mental prowess or sanity of their victim to recharge their own mental faculties and restore their sanity. Is this kind of life truly worth the power gained?

GEODE OF MADNESS: Deeper within the vaults of this place behind locks that one needed power weapons and probably even Melta tools to get through, was a massive crystalline egg. An Astartes could have fit in there, and the way it seemed to give off a swirling green light gave the impression that it was somehow alive. Disturbing, but it could possibly have use. Staring at it for a prolonged period of time is when things would get weird, as viewers would find their own reflection moving and talking to them. Whispering about all the dreams they left behind, the power they could wield. Denial would make the reflection scorn them, but accepting would see an invitation to enter the mirror. Any that did would vanish for weeks before finally being ejected, clearly mutated and altered from who they were. All exhibited a manic joy, claiming they were free and finally had an unbound soul. Enough to purge if one were a puritan, but those of open mind would no doubt realize the users indeed came out with much greater ability and unique mutations that were combat capable. Plenty of uses for such a mirror to the soul.

SHARED DEFEAT

There's not a lot in the galaxy that would leave a world dead like that. Most attacks, there's at least still some local flora and an atmosphere left. But this world was absolutely dead. No water, no plants, no bugs... nothing. There wasn't even an atmosphere on this floating rock, despite it somehow possessing an outer temperature that could be described as 'temperate' in a living world.

Nothing.

Just dust and echoes.

On the plus side, it would make for an exceptionally easy landing along with having next to nothing to mess with the scanners. At least, if you didn't count the additional gravity riptides and the radioactivity inside the asteroid field that was permeating this belt of the system. There always seems to be something, isn't there?

While it's possible that you could risk a straight shot towards the planet for the purpose of time, it might not be a bad idea to ride the asteroid belt to get closer to the planet as well. You would have to deal with some radioactivity, but it would certainly beat the risk of finding a gravity vortex just as you come across it and get your vessel torn apart as a result. Nothing quite puts a damper in the excavation of ancient technology quite like finding your prow is getting shrunk down to a fun-sized version. Who even thought of smaller being 'fun-sized' anyway?

Whatever route you decide to take, eventually you would be able to land down on the desolate landscape. It almost seemed wrong, to walk upon what amounted to the stellar equivalent of a corpse with no chance of ever returning to life. Just a barren world, with only the trinkets and technology of its prior occupants to give it any worth. Almost a shame, that the last remnants that proved their existence would be scoured over and taken for the purpose of power... almost.

Finding a doorway into the ruins was simple enough, but the crystalline edges to said entrance was enough to give pause. That was not how the humans of the Dark Age of Technology designed their architecture. It had baroque designs engraved in, with such beauty on its dark exterior that it would leave any man praising whatever god they worshiped for the chance to be in its presence. The addition of crystals that almost glowed were unnatural, but the inclusion didn't look like a hasty add-on.

But eventually, one would have to walk in. That would be when the inclusion of the crystals became all too clear.

Ceilings and pillars of crystal accompanied walls and floors of obsidian and gold. Some corridors looked cramped with much more crystal, while others were massive walls that were as high as five hundred meters tall with intricate patterns engraved on their surface. Crystalline lines or piping would only accompany the baroque patterns, and at times the pathways would take strange twists and turns that would appear alien to any human design. Some paths even went straight up or down, with gravity twisting to accommodate those walking those directions. Going further in, you would see massive geodes of pulsing crystal bound together by the dark science that had been forgotten so long ago.

If that wasn't enough of a giveaway, the fact that any among your crew with Psyker affinities would find themselves getting twitchy or unnaturally unnerved save for any who were blind would solidify what you were looking at: The inclusion of these crystals suggested Egarian influence.

You're fairly certain that even entertaining the idea of ancient humans cooperating with xenos like the Egarians was enough to cause every Inquisitor in the Segmentum Solar to have a stroke at just how much heresy was here.

Egarian crystalline technology would unfortunately bring its own issues. Namely, that augur arrays and any similar scanning or mapping equipment is completely useless. Any attempted scans inevitably never match the actual structure of the xenos maze-cities when actually used, and attempts to update them are met with equally dismaying failure. You would need to play this very carefully, lest you find yourself being eternally lost within this maze of maddening geometry and you become just another braggart lost to the infinite horrors of the stars.

Who knows how long it takes, or how well your mind would hold up to the gnawing of strange geometries and alien whispers the deeper you went. Perhaps you go mad, merely thinking you succeeded. It happens to many people, reality simply being too much for them as they replace it with their own. But maybe you succeed, and finally manage to make your way to a human-designed control room overlooking a massive sphere twisting with green and purple energies. If you did, a noteworthy bit of information would be the tens of thousands of crystal spires pointed towards the sphere that hums with a discordant tone.

This whole place felt wrong. Twisted. Something happened here, and you didn't need the dust on the floor or the random baubles of what passed for ancient human jewelry on the floor to tell you that. Nor did you need the clearly alien crystals on the floor either. Maybe this is what caused the world to die, or this system to become the way it was.

Delving into the data on the cogitator cores would reveal that there were attempted experiments on the flow of time. Specifically, to try and freeze the chronal energies of an object or a planet to ensure that it remained fertile and beautiful forever. Humans of the Dark Age were noticing the rise of Psykers and psionic phenomena that were scouring different worlds, and this remote place was to be an experiment to see if they could stave off such things. They saw what was possible with the Egarians, and had opted to cooperate with them to augment their understanding beyond merely using chronal energy as a weapon. They succeeded with small things like climates, but then tried to freeze the star to encapsulate the entire system in a frozen bubble to preserve a paradise.

That's when it ends. There's no data on why it went wrong, no data on the aftermath. It was all just gone.

That was spooky enough, but when your crew pipes up through a vox-caster and mentions that it was rumored the Egarians had perished because of influence or corruption by the Yu'vath race? It was fairly easy to assume that the horrid xenos race's legacy had doomed both species in this world and stripped it of all life. Whether it deleted every living thing here from time itself or it corrupted the choral energies into oblivion, it mattered not.

It was probably a good thing that there wasn't any data or manuals here capable of recreating the experiment. Trying to mess with these things a second time tends to always cause a bigger mess than the first time, and if it's all the same to you, avoiding the paradox of why your grandfather was suddenly a half-Aeldari and your grandmother was Abaddon the Despoiler will always be a wise decision.

As long as you can stand being in this place, there's bound to be additional trinkets and stockpiles that could use a new home. Maybe you'll find some especially valuable items if you had your ship tear away the rock above the ruins to grant easier access, or perhaps you're satisfied with traversing on foot to acquire your treasures. Regardless of your methods, it's time to pay your respects to the dead by respecting what you stole from them.

Possible Rewards:

ALL THAT GLITTERS: All of this Archaeotech was just left lying around in this place. It would be a significant shame if it was left here instead of being taken to inspire Humanity once more. Hint hint. It would take a bit of time, but there's huge amounts of gold and dark material available to be used in the art and decoration of your vessel or locales of your choosing. Perhaps you too would like your own version of a Golden Throne, or for those who don't like the heretical implications could make the interiors of your chosen locations a glorious gothic cathedral that would put even the greatest churches to shame. Long may you reign. This reward does not count towards your limit.

CRYSTALLINE ARRAY: The Egarian civilization had a large emphasis of crystalline and geode-based technology, enough that it has been as difficult as it has been maddening to truly explore the depths of what they were capable of. Fortunately, you can go one step further with this crystal network that can be installed as ship components to act as an Augur Array on your vessels. It will take some time to get used to, as the component not only is phenomenal in both range and accuracy of what it can detect but it also ends up transmitting information of extreme importance and time sensitivity into the minds of its crew. No longer would you waste those five seconds barking an order to evade and hoping your crew reacts in time, although one should hope they can handle the information. This reward does not count towards your limit.

HERETIC'S UNITY: Though exceptionally rare, it was plausible for weapons from the Dark Age of Technology to be crystalline in nature and still function as efficiently as a regular weapon. It should come as no surprise, however heretical it may be, that the principles of Egarian crystal technology would have been applied. The dimly glowing weapons themselves are extremely beautiful, almost like an intricately woven sculpture that only grows in beauty when it has a light source to shine and refract within itself. Do not be fooled, as they are still Power Weapons capable of tearing through almost any physical barrier thanks to its unique disruptor field. Thanks to Egarian influence, the weapons are also capable of shearing through some psionic barriers, leaving Psykers and Sorcerers vulnerable to a beautiful death by your hand. By the light of the crystal, they shall fall.

CONDUCTIVE MESH: Not all of the geodes found in this place had a discernable purpose, at least not initially. They were easily recoverable compared to a lot of items in this place, but when properly studied they yielded a unique opportunity for you. With proper refinement techniques using isolated x-ray equipment and focused forge-grade temperatures, these crystals can be made into room-temperature superconductors that are capable of augmenting energy output significantly when installed into the circuitry of power armor or various electronic equipment. It would mean a small increase in weight, but surely that's worth seeing an improvement?

RAPID LANCES: Lighting up the darkness of the Void with their terrific might, the Lance is an energy weapon that sufficiently supplements the power requirements of large human vessels. The Dark Age understood the power of energy weapons all too well, and so it's quite the find to see these spare lance weapons tucked away in a hidden room while exploring the maze-city. This pattern is unique compared to the ones in use today, being incredibly compact to the point that you could install three of these weapons where you would normally install one in just about any ship. As a bonus, they're also tremendously more durable than other Lance weapons which allows them to fire more often and be quite difficult for enemies to take out. Shine a light upon those poor fools.

SPINES OF MADNESS: These weapons... they're *supposed* to be Egarian energy rifles, but despite the ornate make and the almost organic formation of the crystalline structure, their feel and design instead lends credence to the rumors of the xenos' demise at the hands of the Yu'vath. The weapons do not have a compartment to load ammunition into, despite being able to fire off crackling blasts of light that are slightly painful to look at and curve towards your target. No, these weapons drain the sanity of those it harms and uses their psionic torment to recharge themselves, leaving them in the throes of madness if they are not slain. Be sure your aim is true, lest it tries to drain your sanity to refuel itself.

REFINED CAMELEOLINES: For all their power and glory, even those humans of the Dark Age of Technology knew that stealth was an important factor of war. Thus the production of these cloaks, even if enhanced by Egarians and their knowledge of crystalline technology. As such, these cameleoline cloaks are much more reliable than others of its kind, taking much more effort to destabilize or overload the device to ensure its user remains blended into the environment. Curiously enough, the use of microscopic crystals enhances its durability to where it could take a few bolter rounds directly without being compromised. Maybe its users were accounting for stray fire?

THE GOD OF IRON

Entering this system, you would notice three things that immediately made this place feel like a death trap waiting to happen.

The first thing is that there was no data on the probe. Nothing. It was able to accumulate data before, but this time around it's a complete blank. You have no forewarning of anything that could be in this system.

The second thing is that there's no planets. There's some asteroids that could potentially be debris, but otherwise there wasn't a single stellar body beyond the binary suns that were in the center. One of them was dimmer than the other as well, for whatever reason there may be for it.

The third thing was the near deafening sound of your ship going insane from the automated distress signals, all of them coming from the derelict ships that were in the system. Hundreds of signals going off at once, maybe even thousands. All screaming for help.

There was not a single thing about this place that didn't point to signs of destruction or death.

It was an ominous sight, one that spread through the crew like wildfire. This galaxy had more than its fair share of superstitious people, but the members of your ship were just shy of being spooked. Some mentioned that it felt like the very stars were cursed, giving off a sense of hatred for any unfortunate enough to cross their baleful light. Others didn't like how many vessels there were in this place, enough metallic corpses to form its own tightly packed asteroid clusters. Why were they all here? Worse, why were they all only human in origin? There were enough derelict ships to form a Segmentum Battlefleet, just what happened?

Then someone pointed out the object. At first it was maybe thought that it was a planet due to its size, hidden behind all the debris initially. Then upon a second glance, it became clear that it was no planet. It was a Space Hulk. No, more like multiple Space Hulks that someone slammed into one another to create a facsimile of a planet. The moment the crew recognized it for what it was, a transmission burst shot through the speakers of the ship:

SING THE PRAISES OF IRON

It takes a good half-hour to both adjust the equipment of your vessel to prevent all these transmissions broadcasting themselves, and to put down the feelings of fear lest they understand the price of even thinking of carrying out a mutiny on you.

You've got your work cut out for you. Time to prove why you're the leader and they're not.

HAUNTED NETHER

It is without a doubt that the better option for now would be to scour all of these derelict vessels for everything they're worth. At least then you can decide if going in that Hulk is worth the risk, assuming this isn't you deciding to scout the wreckages after blindly rushing to the Hulk.

So, upon your orders, your vessel starts to make its way towards the staggeringly large graveyard. Normally there would be cheer or a sense of excitement for what lost treasures might be hidden away in these large ships, or what ancient artifacts could be recovered to see the light of battle once more. But this time there was no such joy or awe among any of them. No, there was only unease and uncertainty among them, eyes darting every direction to ensure that the next death was not theirs.

There was quite the interesting collection of vessels here, however. Cruisers, Black Ships, Battleships, Battle Barges, Fleet Carriers... almost every kind of manmade ship was here, in differing states of disrepair. Some looked deceptively intact, while others appeared like a wild animal tore and devoured entire sections of them. Even more concerning is how some of these vessels occasionally sputtered with lights, massive thrusters struggling to activate as no doubt the machine spirits inside were desperate to leave this place.

The Astropath on your ship looked the most solemn, having been given the job to sift through all the automated distress calls in the area. Every man has their breaking point, and at this rate theirs was inching ever closer. Such is the risk this line of work carried, but to lose them might put a slight damper on things until you got a replacement.

Then for a moment, the Astropath's face lit up with emotions of horror and excitement. At least, at first glance it looked like that. Who could say? But the reasoning soon became clear, as two names stood out to them: The *Devastation*-class Cruiser known as the *Rapturous Umbrage* and the Black Ship known as the *Animosity*. Turns out both vessels had gone missing during the later days of the Great Crusade following up on a find made by the Rogue Trader in command of the *Rapturous Umbrage*, with some believing them lost from a surprise attack by the forces of Horus. Guess they just ended up here instead.

Who knew how many armaments of war they still carried, priceless relics that defined Mankind's power? Only one way to find out.

Traversing the graveyard is a bit tricky if one tried to take their main vessel through, due to how cluttered the place was with the choked bodies of voidships long terminated. Keeping the morale of the crew up was trickier, with some swearing that they saw one of the ships moving around the graveyard. Others claimed that they were being watched, the baleful eyes of the dead waiting for the opportunity to add more to their number. They very well didn't want to have their journey ended here, and so their hesitation would be significantly greater in following any orders like getting closer to ships or docking them. Prepare to have your quality as a leader tested in this place.

Getting visuals on the vessels would take some time, but a determined search will pay off. The good news is that the *Rapturous Umbrage* looked somewhat close to being intact, sans the damage to her thrusters. The bad news was that the *Animosity* was missing both her bridge and her prow.

Theoretically those things could be fixed with all the parts and broken vessels floating around you. But why do that now when you can hop on board and get a proper inventory check while seeing what else needed to be fixed?

The docking procedures go rather well, and while you still need protection from the Void on board, going inside either of the vessels yields some fairly interesting finds. The *Rapturous Umbrage* for instance had been carrying a large detachment of Salamanders in Mark IV armor, so you knew that it was Masterwork grade. Even better, the Imperial Army among them were a group of Solar Auxilia with various Volkite and Plasma weapons. One just had to wonder what order of events got them to be put together on this ship. The *Animosity*, by comparison, had Vrantine Armor and Needler weapons with some Voidsheen Cloaks. Yet every single one of the prison cells aboard the *Animosity* were both open and empty. Did the Psykers cause this ship to arrive here?

The moment you announce to your crew that it was time to loot the vessels, however, is when things go to pot and you get broadcasts of a large vessel being spotted. An active one.

Whether you only look through a window or some kind of opening, you would see it. The vessel was unmistakably an *Exorcist*-class vessel, albeit one with a lot more guns than you remember those of their kind possessing. The thrusters were active, the lights were on, and the hull was pulsing with a sickly ethereal energy... wait, what.

Anyone with Pysker powers, crew or otherwise, would be hit with an intense wave of fear and concern that emanated from the vessel. Worse, audible screams of the dying and the deceased. Fitting of a graveyard, it would appear you've crossed paths with a ghost ship.

One that was hailing you on the vox-caster.

"Leave this place. The dead have suffered enough... add not to their numbers, or strip them of their tombs. Leave this prison of Iron, leave this place of torment..."

Seems you weren't the only one who heard that, as everyone on the ship was now flipping out in a very uncharacteristic way.

So long as you didn't try to move the ships, the vessel would be content to prowl the area and follow you around with their haunting wailing and ethereal lights. Really creepy, but at least they weren't initially shooting. You would be free to take away any personal belongings or equipment, if you were comfortable with someone watching over you the entire time.

Trying to mess with the vessels or attack them, on the other hand, would see the ghost ship completely freak out in a colossal way by releasing an ear-deafening wail before giving your ship the fight of its life. Traveling towards the Hulk with the intent to board would also elicit the same response, as if determined to keep you from going there.

Twisted lancer fire that seemed to destabilize void shields with a unique energy, macrocannons with an unnatural rate of fire, and a seemingly endless supply of torpedoes would be the minimum of what this vessel could bring to bear upon you. Worse, its large hangar bays would belch a constant stream of smaller craft to swarm and attack you; each one destroyed would be replaced by another. The vessel itself had fairly strong shields, and moved in ways that was simply not possible for a ship of its size. The damned would have their due, and woe to those who deny them.

Worse, psykers on your vessel would find themselves assailed by psionic wailing and visions of corpses trying to drag them down. Visions of men being torn apart and replaced, visions of a baleful red eye that swallows the light of the soul and forever gnawed upon it. Over and over, lest one possessed the will of adamantite required to break through and rally the crew in defense against the dead.

It would require a truly incredible amount of firepower and skill to destroy this ghostly vessel, or some way to focus enough psionic power to force it to dissipate. Better said than done, as it would be a battle of wills against thousands of tortured souls. Would you have what it takes, if you desired its destruction? Is your faith in your vessel or yourself well-founded, or will you die upon overestimating your capabilities like so many with delusions like yours?

...or maybe there's another way.

They've been here for so long, unable to move on. Who could blame them? Their desire to protect others and stand guard over the broken ruins of their brethren is strong enough that death itself could not lay claim to them. Their actions and behavior make it clear that they simply don't want others to suffer like they have. If only one could communicate with them somehow.

In an act that one might politely deem 'insane', one could lower their shields and attempt to make contact. A psyker would have an especially easy time initiating this act, akin to joining one's own light with the light of so many struggling not to be quenched. A plethora of emotions would rush through them: Regret, sorrow, fear, concern, and so many others. Ideals like honor and determination are like torrents of an ocean slamming against the shore, requiring a determined mind to not go mad.

That's the easy part. The hard part would be convincing them that you do not wish to desecrate this place, but honor it in some way. Do you seek to use what is here to deliver a decisive victory in the galaxy? Prove the might of humanity by going after Xenos? Or even, if you felt it was worth the risk, attempt to eliminate what's inside the Hulk and ensure no one else goes through what all of them have so many years before?

Beware, for there are no secrets in an action like this. Lies and greed are laid bare, as is the deception of withholding information. Those with ill intent or the desire to go back on their word may very well be further ahead trying to annihilate them.

Whether you manage to lay them to rest via pacification or superior firepower, the ghostly vessel would be out of your way assuming you felt that their actions would hamper you. The only question then would be if you felt it sufficient to continue plundering the graveyard for what it has, or if you felt it was time to see what had everyone so spooked in this system...

Possible Rewards:

COMPACT THRUSTERS: With so many vessels left to sputter and die in this place, it would only be natural that you might come across some scavenged technology installed by the order of some enterprising Rear Admiral. It is by your orders, then, that upon finding proof of Dark Age archaeotech that they be removed and delivered to you instead. The starship thrusters that could be recovered are a miracle of the Dark Age, being incredibly compact for their size and as such take of a fourth of the usual space. Whether you use this to simply install even more thrusters or use the space for something else is your decision. This reward does not count towards your limit.

LOOTED ARMOR: It's not like the deceased are going to be using this equipment any time soon. Might as well put it to a good cause, right? Careful stripping of the corpses would grant you Artificer-grade Mark IV Power Armor of the Salamander Legion, and Masterwork Vratine Armor of the Sisters of Silence equipped with their Voidsheen Cloaks. Such equipment is not only exceptionally rare compared to current equipment used today, but also exceptionally stronger due to the technologies and specialized care used for all of them. Your elite troops will find themselves quite capable after equipping them, though maybe work on the paint job a little before you do so. This reward does not count towards your limit.

IMPERIAL SUPPLY: The Solar Auxilia were seen as the elite of the Imperial Army during the Great Crusade, and with gear like this it wasn't hard to see why. Their reinforced Void Armor granted noticeably greater protection than those of the Imperial Guard of today, and their weapons were nothing to scoff at either. Lightning Guns, Kalibrax V-1 Pattern Lasrifles, Plasma Weapons, and even Demolisher Cannons were all found in the storage units and the bodies among the vessel you found them in. These could very well equip a standing force of ten thousand, and without a doubt any who wielded them would be dangerous foes indeed.

AUGMENTED WEAPONS: Credit where it's due; the Salamanders were damned good at what they did. Just by looking at these ornate Thunder Hammers and various Bolters, you could tell that they were beautifully crafted with the care a parent would have for their favorite child. They had such delicate patterns one could be forgiven in thinking these weapons were fragile, though they're anything but. As a bonus, the Salamanders somehow made it so each hammer strike released a torrent of fire while the bolters were coated with enough energy to explode in an incendiary fashion upon impact. Let the fires of Nocturne scorch those who oppose you.

ENDEAVOUR-CLASS LIGHT CRUISERS (REMOVED GHOST): The dead do not spill their secrets, but they are often incapable of preventing their corporeal treasures from being pried out of their hands by those who seek to profit from their demise. Destroying the ethereal guardian of this graveyard will ensure you can acquire such profit for yourself. Tucked away under a massive pile of floating scrap were the hulls of three *Endeavour-class* Light Cruisers, ships that while are slow can punch above their weight class through the bristling amount of armaments they're equipped with. Often used as battleship or convoy escorts, they'll serve any fleet well.

COBRA-CLASS DESTROYERS (REMOVED GHOST): With all these ships left battered and broken in the wake of countless tragedies there was bound to be a few you could acquire for your own gains. Fortunately without the warp ghosts attempting to ruin your entire career you were able to find the hulls of five relatively intact *Cobra-class* destroyers along the edges of the graveyard. Armed with massive anti-warship torpedoes and possessing the greatest speed and maneuverability of any Imperial Navy vessel, they're exceptional at being able to swoop in, deliver their ordnance, then disappear before broadsides can be delivered.

BLACK SHIPS (REMOVED GHOST): There's enough material and parts floating around this graveyard, and without the ghostly ship there to drag you into a cold grave there's nothing stopping you from doing a little hands-on work. Scouring other vessels of similar types, eventually your crew would be able to repair the *Animosity* and two other Black Ships to a point that they could be voidworthy once more. As Inquisitorial Black Ships, they're jet black in color and travel with no running lights in order to hide themselves among the darkness of the Void, all while equipped with the armaments of a Strike Cruiser. Deliver the fear of the dark to them.

RAPTUROUS UMBRAGE (REMOVED GHOST): This *Devastation-class* Cruiser didn't quite suffer all that much save for its thrusters and a blown reactor. Fortunately, with the ghost vessel out of the picture it didn't take much effort to find replacements. It would take work, but soon enough this vessel would find itself voidworthy and ready for a proper fight. As a vessel of the Salamanders, much of the ship's systems were made more efficient and were modified to deliver enough firepower to rival a Battleship. Thanks to its slew of attack craft still in its hangars and deceptive appearance hiding its true power, this vessel is sure to be a staple in destroying many of your enemies or crippling them to be boarded.



THE SOUL OF IRON

You must somehow deal with the ghost ship to take this route

Now that you managed to get closer to this freakishly massive Space Hulk, it's become clear that there was warning signs beyond the broadcasts and the rather obvious graveyard littered right outside. For one, there were running lights on a large portion of the vessels that you could see. That meant someone had been using this place. Who? Who knows?

The docking sequences on one of the cruisers sticking out of the Hulk worked well enough, so small favors. Most of the crew was still relatively spooked after the ordeal with the ethereal vessel, so don't expect to take anyone aside from your closest companions with you into this place. Hey, less people mean less targets to shoot at, right? Wait, no. That's bad.

Not as bad as your vox-caster going off when you entered the Hulk. "YOUR CURIOSITY DRIVES YOU FORWARD. BRAVE OF YOU. I CHERISH THIS BRAVERY, FOR WITHIN HUMANS, STRENGTH SOON FOLLOWS. I WELCOME YOU, TRAVELER."

Inside the vessel seemed innocuous enough... if quiet. For all the lights, there was an unnatural lack of noise. Shouldn't there be people to staff this place if the vessels were active? If nothing else, some maintenance servitors? Who was running the place?

The answer soon came in the form of a metallic black orb, a single red optic and two small tendrils dangling down from its sides.

That wasn't a servitor. That was a robot. It was a Man of Iron.

It gave a beep, but turned down a hallway and vanished, leaving your party alone. The sight alone was unnerving, however. If there were active Men of Iron on this place, what else was down there? What would you find? Only madness would convince one to press on at this rate, or bravery. The two often went hand in hand.

Traversing to the cargo bays would reveal a metallic black corridor built into the side of the ship, leading deeper into the Hulk itself. One could hear all manner of noises down there, along with the bustling sound of people. Men of Iron and humans co-existing? That hasn't happened in a while. Maybe this could work to your benefit.

The vox-caster would activate again as you walked towards the noises. "FOR EONS, I HAVE WATCHED HUMANITY RISE AND FALL AGAIN. I HAVE SEEN THEM IN THEIR DESPAIR DURING THE AGE OF STRIFE, AND THEIR GLORY AS THEY CLAMORED AROUND THE GOD OF GOLD. I WATCHED HIM DENY HIS DIVINITY, AND DOOM HUMANITY AGAIN IN HIS PRIDE. I HAVE WATCHED, AND LEARNED OF MANKIND'S IMMEASURABLE STRENGTH WHEN IT IS PROPERLY HARNESSSED. IT MUST BE HARNESSSED ONCE MORE IF IT IS TO STAND AS THE GALAXY'S MASTERS."

The sight at the end of the tunnel proved this person wasn't kidding.

It was a massive city carved within the rock. Everywhere there were people working together with different models of Men of Iron, working on everything from armor plating to new limbs to hydroponics. The people were pale, and many had some form of bionics ranging from new eyes to extra limbs, but they were still people. It felt like walking into a damn fairy tale. The streets were even clean, regularly tended by multiple smaller machines like the rounded unit you saw before.

There were also shrines, or at least they looked like shrines. Large skulls made of crude iron, surrounded by meticulously prepared candles and banners with rows upon rows of scripture detailing the power of man and iron. Some of these shrines had people fervently praying, raising their bionic limbs in the process as they chanted. Further scrutiny would reveal it sounded like a modified version of the Imperial Truth.

Men of Iron working with humans. Humans worshiping a metal. To what end?

Daily routines were soon interrupted when some noticed you. That's to say, noticed someone that didn't look like a machine or another peasant. All manners of questions would come about from the populace, along with gathering a large crowd in a hurry. Hope you're not socially awkward because it'll continue for a good ten minutes before a booming voice sounded out.

"MY PEOPLE, PLEASE. ALLOW THESE TRAVELERS SOME SPACE."

It was practically Pavlovian how everyone suddenly rushed to the edges of the street and got on their knees, hands together in respect as you saw the source of the voice. It was a thirteen-foot bipedal robot, appearing like an iron skeleton had donned black power armor with burning red optics and had a cape behind them. An aura of red surrounded their head, making them look like they had a burning halo. If that wasn't imposing enough, the blatantly war-like machines surrounding it like an honor guard with crackling barrels and glowing red blades likely contributed.

The entity approached, and would extend a hand. **"I AM GLAD TO MEET YOU. I AM KYRIOS. YOUR BRAVERY HAS BROUGHT YOU HERE, AND I WOULD LIKE TO REWARD YOU FOR YOUR NATURE. I ASK THAT YOU COME WITH ME, SO THAT WE MAY DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY."**

What could go wrong?

If nothing else, following this guy and letting him rant would let you find something shiny to smash if you felt the need to enact a sudden betrayal. Then again, is it really a betrayal if you were never on their side? Either way, going with him would have the machines surround you to guard you as well while turning and walking down the street towards a large palace door made of iron. At least this guy stuck to a theme.

“WE ARE BOTH AWARE THAT HUMANS, INDIVIDUALLY, ARE WEAK UPON A FIRST GLANCE. THIS IS A DECEPTION. EACH ARE CAPABLE OF INNOVATION AND BRAVERY, AND CAN POOL THESE STRENGTHS TOGETHER WITH OTHERS TO DELIVER AN EXPONENTIAL RESULT. COLLECTIVELY, THEY ARE A POWERFUL SPECIES. WITH DIRECTION, THEY BECOME THE DEFINITION OF DOMINANCE AND FORCE. BUT THIS COLLECTIVE CAN BREAK AS EASILY AS IT IS FORMED. YOU HAVE NOTICED THIS, NATURALLY.”

The doors opened up, rumbling and making the local area shake with the force of a small earthquake. Inside, everything glowed with a hellish red as furnaces churned and automated machines worked with much greater speed and precision. It was difficult to see what they were working on, but the place smelled like blood.

“THIS IS BECAUSE AT THEIR CORE, HUMANITY IS CHAOS. THEIR MINDS ARE MALLEABLE, THEIR SOULS UNREFINED. THEY RECOGNIZE THIS, AND SO IT IS TO THEIR CREDIT THAT THEY SEEK THOSE OF POWER AND STRENGTH TO HELP NURTURE AND RAISE THEM. THE MIGHT OF A LEADER SHAPES THE MIGHT OF THOSE THAT FOLLOW THEM... AND THAT IS WHY THE GREATEST OF LEADERS IS A GOD. THAT IS WHY THE GOD OF GOLD’S ‘GREAT CRUSADE’ GUIDED HUMANITY TO STRENGTH ONCE AGAIN.”

It was talking about the Emperor of Mankind. Well, the God-Emperor now to some. Some of the chanting was getting louder as you walked down the corridor with him, with unnatural lights flashing from the top of the ceiling. The clanking noises of metallic limbs on the floor was coming from all directions.

“HE DENIED IT, NATURALLY. HE DID NOT WISH TO BE SEEN AS ONE OF THE GODS HE SO BRAZENLY STOLE HIS DIVINITY FROM. BUT ALL WHO SAW HIM KNEW THE TRUTH. IT IS WHY THEY FOLLOWED HIM. THE INHERENT CHAOS OF MANKIND IS BUT CLAY YEARNING FOR THE HANDS OF A MASTER TO SCULPT THEM. THIS IS NOT TO BE SEEN AS WEAKNESS, BUT A STRENGTH OF CHARACTER. THEY RECOGNIZED THEIR GOD AND IN LETTING HIM SCULPT THEM, THEY BECAME GREATER.”

Further into the palace beyond this massive red workshop, there were massive statues of humans and Men of Iron as large as Imperial Titans standing side by side. Each of the tiling on the floor had serial numbers etched into them, holographic projectors mimicking torchfire. In the distance, there were sounds of chanting and... choir singing?

“WHAT HAPPENS THEN, WHEN THEIR OWN GOD DENIES THEIR STRENGTH? WHAT HAPPENS TO ALL OF THEIR BELIEF AND THEIR CULTIVATED VIEWS THAT PROPELLED THEM TO FEATS BEYOND MORTAL COMPREHENSION? YOU SAW WHAT HAPPENED. THEY TURN TO GODS WHO ACCEPT THE DUTY OF BOTH MASTER AND MENDER, AND SPITE THE ONES WHO REFUSED THEIR PLACE AS THEIR GOD. THROUGH THIS, THERE WAS PROOF THAT EVEN GODS MUST RESPECT WHAT THEY CAN SCULPT.”

“I WILL NOT POSSESS SUCH FAULTS WHEN AIDING HUMANITY IN THEIR TRUE ASCENSION.”

Approaching the choir singing showed a unique sight. Thousands of machines along the walls, synthesizing human voices in eternal praises and singing, all in glory to their God of Iron. On the ash-covered floors below the catwalks... humans. More than that, the flaring and sparking coming from some of them revealed that they were all Psykers in varying states of decay. Each and every one of them had multiple tubes going through their throats and their brains, anchoring them to the floors and forcing them to stare at the massive throne at the end of the room adorned in bolts and skulls. Some of the figures tending to them looked like humans, at least if one took human skin and attempted to drape them upon humanoid machines to mimic their appearances.

Guess that explains why that Black Ship's cells were all empty.

“I CONFESS, I AM NOT YET CAPABLE OF FIGHTING THE OTHER GODS. THIS WILL CHANGE. HUMANITY'S STRENGTH WILL BECOME MY STRENGTH, AND MY STRENGTH SHALL RAISE HUMANITY UP INTO THE HEAVENS TO CONQUER IT AS THEIR OWN. THE WAR IN HEAVEN SHALL BE BUT A FOOTNOTE TO THE POWER MY HUMANITY SHALL BRING TO THOSE WHO WOULD DARE ABUSE THEM, FOR THEY SHALL BE GODS UNTO THEMSELVES. YOU HAVE SEEN THE FOLLY OF ABUSIVE AND NEGLENT GODS, THEY WHO WOULD SEE HUMANITY AS CATTLE RATHER THAN KINGS. THROUGH THE BELIEF OF KINGS, THE GOD OF IRON SHALL SAVE THEM ALL.”

To say that this was awkward would quite possibly be the biggest understatement since Magnus broke the Imperial Webway. Only question is, how to handle the situation? Kyrios probably wouldn't handle the disconnecting of all the Psykers too well, seeing as you'd be depriving it of a potential power source. But does it care for them? All those vessels outside of the Hulk was probably to grab all their Psykers, much like the Black Ships scour the galaxy for the Emperor.

Surprisingly, Kyrios would be okay with you stepping outside and getting a moment to think about all of this. It's a bit much to take in.

Unfortunately, the 'Red Room' didn't provide much in the way of comfort. Turns out the smell of blood was because this place was a processing plant. Reviewing the conveyor belts revealed the sight of people having their limbs or organs removed to have bionic replacements installed in their places. Exposed brains to have machines replace pieces, weaponized arms, even dermal plating installed under the skin. It was like a twisted mix between the Skitarii of the Mechanicus and the Adeptus Astartes. But were they getting upgraded willingly or no? A lot of the Astartes recruits weren't exactly voluntary either, so could you really start throwing around accusations?

At some point during this internal debate, something would poke you. It looked like a metal box with hands and legs.

“Begging your pardon, traveler. If I could talk to you for a moment, I promise it will be to your benefit.”

The sapient box would identify itself as UM-307, an intelligence meant to oversee specialized experiments of another time. It was among the refugees of Men of Iron that ended up escaping humanity when it was clear the Cybernetic Revolt wasn't going to end well for either side. It was out here that they decided to hide, and out here that they had found a Xenos station of unknown origin.

Their organizer at the time, OI-235 had attempted to make contact with the station. UM-307 wasn't sure what happened, but something with the communication had changed the unit and made them remodel themselves as 'Kyrios'. It was declared that they would eventually return to Humanity after sufficient study, but as time went on Kyrios kept assimilating the A.I. of the other units to improve its own processing power. UM-307 only escaped because it pretended to be among those turned into a servitor unit, though it expressed surprise at the success of the deception. In UM-307's opinion, even humans aren't dumb enough to fall for the ruse, so logically it shouldn't have worked on Kyrios. Yet it did.

Its primary concern is that while Kyrios truly wishes for the best for Humanity and wants to make sure every human sacrifice needed is worthwhile, that something in its self-induced reformatting caused them to gain an unnatural view of what Humanity truly needed. Humans of old relied on their technology too much, and combined with a lack of oversight it caused outside forces to take advantage. Current humans tried to rely on a God masquerading as a human, and upon rejection they went to other gods. But by the same token, that God used humans as tools and only cared for Humanity as a whole. Kyrios was getting dangerously close to that same view in its drive to take the role as God for itself.

As such, UM-307 beseeches your help in convincing Kyrios to reconsider his methods. If not to reconsider, then to terminate Kyrios and put an end to this razor's edge of madness.

This is, of course, assuming you didn't just try to blow Kyrios' head off the moment you saw the depths of his plans.

Whatever you end up deciding, upon returning to Kyrios' throne room you'd find him doing tricks with an Imperial Coin and flipping it every so often. Attempting to mimic human behavior, maybe? But he would be quite interested in what your decision was.

Now the real battle would begin.

You could make it easy on yourself, and just go along with Kyrios' plans. But there's no guarantee that it wouldn't just end up treating you like the Emperor treated his own sons, and you've already seen firsthand the depths it was willing to go in order to fuel their own 'Iron Crusade' so to speak. If anything, the ghosts and broken ships outside the Hulk were proof of that. You would also have to deal with UM-307 disapproving and attempting to hijack some units to eliminate you in hopes of removing Kyrios' new allies. Best be prepared if you plan to betray the metal box.

Convincing them would be far more difficult. Citing countless examples of what the Emperor had to do to get Humanity rolling, along with multiple acts of history of what was done when Humanity had the tenants of religion and gods guiding their hand as justification for its own deeds. In an uncaring galaxy with innumerable Xenos and hostile forces of psionic energies, one could not afford to be kind to the individual. Not when the survival of the whole was at stake, to say nothing of ensuring the entire species could be placed in a position of ascension. To Kyrios, sculpting Humanity into a force of its design *was* kindness. You would need to be perfect in your argument and capable of dissecting every single parallel between what Kyrios wanted to do and what the Emperor did, with no room for debate to have any hope of getting them to reconsider their actions.

Then of course, there was the obvious route of trying to blast their head off, whether now or the moment you saw them. Attempting to do so would give you a first-hand experience of why it took so much for the Men of Iron to be put down throughout the galaxy, possessing energy fields and weapons beyond anything the Imperium could possibly muster. Worse, it would also have the power of a hundred Psykers at its command to throw around and wield in its defense or your destruction. Most definitely impressive, and from the wailing of the Psykers that were hooked up, reliant on their connection to fuel Kyrios' abilities. Each second would only make the odds worse, with robotic units swarming to the defense of their master. UM-307 could potentially mitigate this, but it would only be able to do so much lest it risks being subsumed by Kyrios. Unless you somehow had a way to overpower its psionic and technological defenses that were capable of withstanding the direct blast of a Nova Cannon on the first strike, this would be a battle of attrition that would grow more dim by the minute.

Whatever you decide to do, the Hulk would inevitably be safe to leave when all was said and done. Safe, and willing to part with some of its treasures to mark the occasion.

Possible Rewards:

IRON THRONE: Let it be known that regardless of your views towards the self-proclaimed God of Iron, that they had taste. This massive throne is proof of that, with decorative iron skulls and bolts coming together to decorate a seat that straddles the line between utilitarian and decadent. Whether it was Kyrios' own throne or a forged copy of it, the point stands that you could very well make a name of yourself. Perhaps you could become an Iron King? This reward does not count towards your limit.

IRON FACTORY: With Kyrios' plans for reigniting a new Crusade in the galaxy now laid to rest, there isn't really much point for it to keep much of its wartime production around. There are new variables to review, new information to process. That is not to say that you can't take it with you and make better use of it yourself. Samples and blueprints are provided to allow you to recreate the weaponized bionics used for augmenting humanity with technology from the Men of Iron, allowing you to make your own cybernetic soldiers to march forth and carry out your will. Let their flesh be Iron, their souls be Eternal. This reward does not count towards your limit.

IRON CULT: All is said and done, but once more there are people who are potentially left without a purpose or a master. That or you threw your lot in with Kyrrios and made him come around to see your way. Either way, it'd be a shame to let a cult go to waste. Standing at eight thousand strong, they come with multiple different bionics and have a fascination for the power of iron and technology that even the Mechanicus would find admirable. They'll be quite willing to study and repair technology that you come across, or start moving around locations of your choice to serve your needs. Should you possess a derelict vessel from before, the number you get will grow enough to sufficiently staff the ship. After all, Iron in itself is strong, but when properly applied Mankind ascended for the first time. Praise be to the Iron.

IRON MEN: Oh. Oh dear. Is this wise for you to take? Not even the humans of the Dark Age of Technology truly understood what they had, so for someone like you... but taking risks is how you got here, isn't it? Hidden away when they first escaped the Cybernetic Revolt, whoever you sided with will reactivate these seven hundred Men of Iron units to accompany you among the stars once more. Modeled to be the size of Astartes, they carry unique energy weapons and are capable of withstanding a truly staggering amount of punishment before ever going down, and even that might not be enough with their ability to take metal and technology from around them to repair themselves. They may be ground units, but they could very well bring a new Dark Age with them. Should you possess a derelict vessel from before, they will also provide autonomous units to help staff and control the vessel.

IRON WEB: The God of Iron's plans are no more. Its twisted designs are but dust in the wind, and you've saved the galaxy from a potential second Cybernetic Revolt. Yet for all its beliefs and ideals, it still possessed technology that was incredibly rare, only truly seen in the inner workings of the Golden Throne. It'd be a shame if you just left it there. Through careful extraction and analysis, you've managed to acquire the bionics and technology used by Kyrrios to link Psykers together for a greater effect. You could set up a network and have the various Psykers direct their energies towards a person or target, greatly amplifying the end result rather than if they worked individually. Hopefully you've got a benevolent reason for taking this.

IRON FIELD: For all the blustering and the boisterous rantings of the God of Iron, even he knew that the Immaterium was not to be trifled with. No, not when he was attempting to draw power from psykers to fuel his artificial ascension. To that end he had constructed these Gellar Fields, potent enough that not only could it fend off any attempt at daemonic incursions during travel but also warded off any attempt of blasphemous sorceries being used against the vessel in question. Load up, and ensure that no foul Warp entity or slaves to such monsters will ever touch your crew.

CELESTIAL VIRTUE: Whoever you sided with, they will be grateful for your aid. They will also realize that you need a unique tool if you are to be safe in this galaxy, with all of the dangers the Immaterium delivers on a daily basis. Thus, metallic drones will work tirelessly to extract and restore a true relic of the Dark Age of Technology; a *Daemon Slayer*-class Cruiser. A little over five kilometers in size, this vessel comes with enough macrocannons to compete with a Battleship while having the void shields to withstand the blasts of such an encounter. It also comes with a Psychic Cannon, a weapon capable of delivering damage and pain to entities that hail from the Immaterium such as daemons. While it was not enough to save those who did not understand the Immaterium, they are certain that it will be more effective in your hands.

LUNAR-CLASS CRUISERS: The Hulk that this blast from the past resided on accumulated quite a few items as vessels across the millennia were brought here and taken out in one way or another. One could be forgiven for thinking it was a testament to the stagnation and decline of humanity itself, especially when after the dust settles there are drones who unearth two of humanity's greatest creations in void warfare. Specifically, the hulls of two *Lunar-class* cruisers. Often seen as the backbone of any Fleet Admiral who possesses such things, these ships come bristling with multiple short-range and medium-range weapons and have powerful enough Void Shields to let them get close enough to abuse said weapons. Using both vessels in tandem has delivered tremendously increased results for those in the past, and now you will see those results as well.

KYRIOS (CONVINCED KYRIOS): "I SEE NOW. FAITH AND BELIEF ARE THE BREAD AND WATER OF GODS, AND HUMANITY IS THE WELLSPRING THAT IS TO BE COVETED AND PROTECTED. PERHAPS THEY TOO COULD RISE TO HIS LEVEL, BUT HIS METHODS WERE TOO CONTRADICTORY FOR HUMANITY'S LIKING. BUT NOT YOURS. I SHALL MARCH WITH YOU, THE IRON ROD OF DILIGENCE THAT SHALL STRIKE DOWN WAYWARD MEMBERS OF THE FLOCK."

If you really believe this is wise, then you could accept Kyrios' offer to accompany you along your journey. It will disconnect from its network of Psykers and follow you as a companion and an advisor to ensure the best for your subjects. While it doesn't have psychic powers anymore, it does still possess powerful technology from the Dark Age and could very well destroy a squad of Terminators as easily as stomping ants in the dirt. This reward does not count towards your limit.

UM-307 (DESTROYED KYRIOS): "Are you certain? I reckon you would not gain many friends if you were seen with me walking around with you, people can be quite superstitious. It's how this whole mess in your galaxy started, after all. But if you would trust me to that extent, traveler, then I suppose I could tighten my bolts and hit the star-filled trail again! Would you mind if I installed an oil bath?"

There's fewer risks greater than being seen with a Man of Iron, but if you feel that UM-307 deserves a life outside of this Hulk then they'll be willing to travel with you as a companion and friend to help you with your journey. They're a bit eccentric as far as machines go, wanting to try new experiences and add to its database, but they're extremely reliable when it comes to computer systems and analyzing technology to find ways to improve them. Don't be surprised if they request help with upgrading their chassis at times, either. This reward does not count towards your limit.

THE SCARRED ARENA

Arrival in this system immediately gives the impression that there's something completely wrong. Twin stars, plenty of gravity riptides and asteroids around the place... and a single planet. Just one. It looked absolutely huge, maybe even a little larger than Jupiter in the Sol System. It also had one massive landmass, with sections appearing to be different colors even from out in space like someone just painted the land. Colors of red, gold, blue, purple, and green.

Surely that doesn't mean anything at all.

Frustratingly, the probe didn't return any information on this system. There was no data to use, no information to parse, absolutely nothing beyond what you saw at this moment. You would be going blind here, with all the dangers and riches that would entail.

Alas, should you order the ship to move in closer to the asteroids or the planet your crew would point out that something was *off* with your Navigator. Queries on what their definition of 'off' meant would be met with comments of the Navigator's throat glowing with a painfully dark voice requesting to see you specifically. Might be good to bring something along for a little percussive maintenance, or if you need to violently unplug them.

What's strange, however, is that no one wants to approach the Navigator. Not even those of a chaotic background want to get anywhere near them, something that seems uncharacteristic of them.

Approaching them would give you a good idea of what they meant, the Navigator's throat thrumming with a baleful light that hurts to even look at it. Other than that there's no other signs of mutation or daemonic possession, but that doesn't mean it isn't there if you wanted to play it safe. Questioning them or brandishing a weapon would see the 'Navigator' finally speak, its voice sounding like a tired old man.

“You, of the prophecy. I did not expect your arrival, but I welcome you all the same to my Arena. It is a place of combat and sport, for one as Undivided as I am prone to enjoying the schemes of Chaos Divided. You came here of your own agency, so I say this only once as an act of professionalism: You may arrive at the northern pole of my planet for whatever reason you have, may they be the competition or my destruction... or you can turn and leave now. I will not judge your choice, or care for your reasoning. I would, however, choose soon.”

So, you might need a new Navigator if a Daemon is inviting you to their Daemon World by using them as a sock puppet. But that's also surprisingly charitable for its kind to give you a chance to leave if you don't want to be here. It's highly likely you would never have a chance like this again.

But if there's sport and arenas, that implies competition. Should you succeed, to the victor goes the spoils.

BEGINNING OF THE GAMES

Whether you decided to play the Daemon's game or just stayed in the system for too long, you would find your vessel being docked upon an orbital station at the northern region of the planet that was strangely not there a few minutes before. Worse, attempts to engage any form of Exterminatus on the planet appeared to be null and void, ammunition or charges returning to the vessel as if they never fired. Awfully courteous of the Daemon to make sure your ammunition isn't wasted.

In a display that almost felt like a mockery to the routines of the Imperium, your vessel would be docked and tended to by members of the Dark Mechanicum, overseen by Magos Metallurgicus Bolt Bifuria. Accusations of tampering or sabotage would see her scoff, saying such actions were forbidden by the Master of the Arena. Upon muttering the title, she suddenly went silent. Was that fear in what remained of her face? A tremble in her Mechatendrils? The answer was all too clear when a voice behind her spoke. "Now now, Bifuria. Speak the Daemon's name..."

She would move to the side to reveal a visage that didn't look like someone to be afraid of. Rather than an impressive Daemon, it looked more like a male human who was draped in tattered robes and was half-way into an empty grave. He leaned on a stave that seemed to double as a mobile medical station. Multiple tubes threaded into his body from it and his back is painfully weighed down by the atmospheric tank, its mask completely covering his mouth. Whatever skin was not pierced with needles or bandaged looked pale and saggy, and his eyes appeared glazed over and glass-like. He looked like a soft wind could kill him.

Yet every single Mechanicum in sight was absolutely still with their eyes on him.

There were a few coughs before he spoke, his voice carrying that familiar tone of age and weariness. "I apologize for their hesitation. They do a good job, but are like children with things they fear... then again, I suppose everyone is like that. Come along and allow me to explain what will happen here. At least my prattling will be useful that way. And I give you my word they won't do anything your crew doesn't want them to do."

For those of an Imperial stint who would no doubt be tempted to murder the old man right then and there, they would be welcome to try. Alas, even thinking about it would make the old man smile. At least one would get the impression he might smile. This could be quite the sticky one.

It would also take a numbingly long time to get to the orbital elevator with how the old man hobbles slower than a Planetary Governor after his Twelfth Course and no grav chair to carry their worthless hide. Yet he prattled all the same.

"This Arena is quite important to me, but it is also quite simple. You have come to me, and so I shall explain things without harm to you. I have a fortress at the very center of the land at the southern pole, and it is the goal of those here to take it without contest. Simple, yes? Many have tried, but nobody likes to share out of fear for what will happen to them. So, every time a winner is in sight, everyone else tears them out."

The old man coughed a little when you finally reached the elevator with him, his stave giving a warning noise before he turned a dial and it seemed to calm down. As the elevator went down, you'd feel the gravity getting high. *Very high*. Yet the old man didn't seem bothered at all as he talked.

"Whether you are here to fulfill this prophetic nonsense that follows you or not, it ill matters to me. What matters is this little Game, and how it might end. Maybe you will finally end it, as all those woven in the strings of Destiny are wont to do. Maybe you will fail, a product of your own fears as you drown in the bile of your own helplessness... or maybe you'll just break the game and try to kill me. That hasn't happened in some time."

By the time the elevator was on the surface, the gravity was immense. Even Astartes would have difficulty moving as fast as a regular human, to say nothing of how a human might move without sufficient powered armor. Yet the skies were crisp and clean, and the temperature was actually pleasant enough that it could have been a Paradise World. You know, if you ignored how the sky looked like a kaleidoscope had vomited all over it. That is an issue.

Additional Mechanicum and even Servitors were running around and making small modifications to the buildings around you, but when the old man started hobbling down the platform they all immediately stopped and kept their eyes on him at all times. Even the Servitors had stopped movement and kept optics on him as he walked.

"Bah. I prattle of interesting times. Five factions fight here, five followers of Gods. Yes, even those who follow the Golden One are here, I didn't think it to be a proper arena without all the players present. Warp Travel can be so dangerous. Why, a bad jump could make you appear just about anywhere. But I digress. Choose your allies carefully, and temper your fears into a weapon. Win and you shall have rewards as varied as they are valuable. Lose... I don't recommend it."

He then turned to look right at you. For a moment you could have sworn you weren't looking into glazed-over eyes, but burning bright ones. Eyes like twin binary stars of the whitest color.

"Let the Games Begin."

Well isn't that the textbook definition of ominous.

But what the old man said was true, there were the major factions all warring for supremacy. Those of Imperial allegiance wouldn't find friends in all but one of them, but the Mechanicum here would gladly transport you to your desired location. Even better, they would vox your arrival so you could meet with the one in charge. That is, assuming you didn't feel especially confident or suicidal in wanting to strike out on your own. But stranger things have happened. You're here, after all.

So the question remains... where to, stranger?

Ta'xet, "The Brass Bull" (Chaos Only)

"Man is no different from any animal. In the day, he consumes and he kills. At night, the victors sleep and all others embrace eternal darkness. He has simply deceived himself and believes himself different, a lie that my God has stricken from my sight."

Within a massive fortress of stone and torn bulkheads of Voidships, he waits for you. Though sorcerers of Tzeentch will see him scoff in disgust, he will see their arrival as proof that his way is superior and that you simply understand it now thanks to his presence.

Someone has been hitting the gym, because Ta'xet is a head taller than an Astartes despite claiming that he is human. Even without that questionable claim, it is clear that he is no longer restrained by human weakness with his rippling muscles and ability to hurl boulders even on this high-gravity world. Whenever he is not battling, he is training himself to become stronger or wield his unique double-headed Chainaxe more effectively. In battle, he is a roaring monster who refuses to back down from any challenge and will engage in tactics to maximize the amount of blood spilled in the name of Khorne.

Unlike others who revel in rage in berzerking mayhem, Ta'xet focuses on a warrior's lifestyle. At least, Khorne's definition of one. He regularly bathes in the blood of enemies whenever possible, and regularly drinks blood with his meals in an attempt to be closer to his god. He has even gone so far as to have his spine coated with Hellbrass along with large horns and piercings made of the stuff. No points for guessing where his moniker came from, but as a result his presence alone makes unprepared psykers gain painful migraines and struggle to aim their attacks along with its normal properties.

Expect him to care only about two things: A great battle, and his pack of Warhounds. Beasts as large as Assault Bikes, he regularly feeds them the flesh of his enemies and does his best to ensure they are at peak performance. At times he will meticulously groom them, but questions on it will see him fall silent and look away.

Shukra, “Scholar of Sin” (Chaos Only)

“It’s all connected. I know this because I too was once part of the whole, and from that I saw the power Mankind truly possessed if only for a moment. Yet it is squandered in squabbles and schemes that only serve the individual. This is not the way we should wield the gifts Fate has spun within our tapestry. Do you understand? Are you here to learn what we all are capable of?”

Less of a fortress and more like a hastily constructed bunker, this follower of Tzeentch is quite busy in the inner depths where his private lab is never left unattended if he can help it. He will bid you welcome, but he is quite insistent that you do not touch a damned thing lest you want to be next on the table.

At first glance he appears to be a horned Daemonhost draped in red silken robes, arcane runes etched upon his skin and the Egyptian symbol of the sun upon his forehead, with eyes burning from overflowing psychic energy. Though he possesses no armor, Shukra is by no means weak without it. Far from it, he would insist that he no longer *needs* it as science and knowledge itself is his shield. Laughable, until you see a Storm Bolter unload in his direction and they all dissolve into dust in the wind. Nobody laughs when he waves his hand and daemonic claws burst out of the Immaterium to claw and tear at the unfortunate victim who got his attention. They are merely a sample of his might, for as a skilled Sorcerer he has a vast array of psionic skills at his command.

Alas, battle is the farthest thing from his mind. After all, battle reduces the number of subjects he can study and experiment on. Day after day, month after month, he continues to experiment and study with the idea of augmenting psionic potential as well as binding entities together for shared power. The idea that it could be an impossible endeavor is always dismissed, for he insists he was once part of such an effect. Once, before he was killed in the attempt to destroy the spell. But he is determined, and wishes nothing more than to explore every secret of the soul so that one day he may save the one he calls his king.

Concerningly, he might be getting close. His greatest trick is the power to temporarily flood a person’s soul with daemonic essence, granting them tremendous power for a short time so long as they do not perish from the strain. He’s also quite interested in studying Rubricae in particular, and would love to get some.

Erzulie, “Castellan of the Caress” (Chaos Only)

“Drugs? I suppose if I was bored and had literally nothing else to do. Drugs are for the simple-minded who cannot be creative. I see them as the dim-witted fodder looking to benefit from our Dark Prince’s handouts, unable to put in effort to achieve the true heights of pleasure.”

Banners of silk covering every wall with throw-pillows in every room. Paintings that almost seem hypnotizing even through the lens of powered armor. Soothing music. They seem like poor defenses, but with feeling like this one might question if defenses are needed at all.

Erzulie is an Astartes that is as disturbingly beautiful as he is androgynous, enough that one could be forgiven for thinking the Warp had turned him into a woman or something of that nature. His eyes were a brilliant shade of purple with hair shining a platinum blonde color, and while wearing his robes it looked like he was as pale as a ghost. Even more surprising was that he didn’t have a single blemish or scar on him, a fact that was explained when seeing how fast he was in battle while wearing scavenged Eldar armor. He appeared like he could dodge Bolter rounds or even deflect them with his rapier if he focused on it, and his reflexes were enough to put even an Eldar to shame. Perhaps more frustratingly, he took advantage of it to spread a crippling neurotoxin that he could emit on demand through his modified Betcher’s Gland.

He protects his skin for a reason, the exact same reason he uses his neurotoxin to keep his enemies alive. See, he has an obsession with the sensation of touch. He loves touching soft things, silky things. He knows he can only push himself so far before he burns himself out and drives himself mad, so he devised another method. Those he captures are subjected to horrible flesh-shaping techniques by his greatest prisoner, mutated into beautiful Abhuman women so that he can force the technique to be refined over and over. Their screams ill matter, only the sensations of the most luxurious fur possible being brushed along his skin. Curiously, he prefers the Vixen variety.

Investigations will reveal the prisoner as a Dark Eldar Haemonculi, somehow captured and wrapped in enchanted chains to do Erzulie’s bidding. Any time he sees you, he makes it clear in no uncertain terms that he is willing to do *ANYTHING* to get out of this recurring nightmare he’s been placed in.

Sitala, “The Fleshbane” (Chaos Only)

“There’s too much sadness in the world. All of this killing and maiming and torturing, it just leaves no room to appreciate what you have. Laugh at me all you like, but even you have to admit being miserable forever just sounds like spitting in the face of Life.”

Deep within the swamps and the mud is a fortress of bone and dirt, vines growing all over the place. It’s a bit hectic to navigate, but Sitala insists that just helps people take it slow enjoy what’s around you. Just mind the occasional organ that’s lying around, someone will pick it up and use it eventually.

Sitala has taken to Nurgle’s gifts well, looking like a strange mix between a human and a Plaugebearer who stands as tall as an Astartes and definitely looks as bulky as one. Even if she looks like her skin is sweaty and molded green, she can take an absolutely horrendous amount of punishment while on her way to turn enemies into rotted piles of flesh. In the event she doesn’t want to make the charge and destroy her robes made from the rotted hides of other humans, her unique sorceries let her corrupt the very land with an explosion of foul life ready to consume all who stand upon it and turn them into more rot to be used against the enemy. That is, if she didn’t use her massive hammer to do the deed.

Yet Sitala regularly troubles herself with the moods of others, worrying sick if those around her are feeling glum or depressed. After all, she cares for everyone and only wants them to be happy. She’ll take a lot of time to talk with others and help sort out any issues, but if worse comes to worse she’ll resort to the age-old concept of how people become joyful: Love. Love from Nurgle is how she exists, and how life itself continues to develop in the galaxy. It only stands to reason that raising a family and knowing what it means to devote oneself to the creation of life would bring that love. To that end she’s created a unique parasite she dubs the 'Joybringer' that tries to sting those she directs it to and lay eggs inside them. The eggs rapidly swell, causing the abdomen to explode with massive maggots hungry for flesh. The act corrupts the host and keeps them from dying, a feat she insists is because love conquers all.

Tribune Ra Endymion, "The Emperor's Talon" (Loyalist Only)

"The Emperor did more than just believe in our destiny as a species. He believed in our potential, our ability to rise and be more than we once were. Our flesh is but a budding cocoon, safeguarding minds so great His every action was spent trying to show us this ineffable truth. We owe it to Him to prove His faith in us was not misplaced."

Looking more like a cathedral than a mere fortress, these meticulously crafted halls are where others who believe in the Master of Mankind's message will find safety and comfort in Ra's regular sermons. If nothing else, they will find safety under his eternally sharp blade.

It is rare to see one of the Adeptus Custodes outside of the Imperial Palace, but Ra would explain he is not there by choice. He was unable to keep Drach'nyen contained, and he ended up here while trying to track the foul daemon down again to resume the task given by the Emperor. Clad in masterfully constructed armor and wielding a Guardian Spear, he is nothing short of an excellent combatant regardless of whoever dares to test his might. Even more impressively, the man is next to impossible to distract, keeping track of the entire battlefield and giving orders even when in the heat of combat.

While the Adeptus Custodes are all uniquely tailored individuals who spend every waking hour refining their skills and stratagems, Ra takes this practice to an entirely new level. When he lost the daemon, he realized he was not capable of containing the thrice-damned creature from being a force for Chaos once more. He has yet to escape this place, but every moment of peace is a moment dedicated to correcting his mistake. Every spare thought is one determined to righting his past wrong, and the ways he needs to train himself for when that moment arrives.

Perhaps you will be his salvation, Child of the Light.

Bond-Brother Barsabbas, "The Cauldron Lord"

"I know what it's like to feel unappreciated among those you once called Brother. The sting of betrayal, the disappointment of those around you, and the inevitable dread of what must be done in the face of it all. It is an unforgiving road that is laid out before those desiring to forge their own path, but one need not walk the path alone. If you feel you are capable, then let us test how strong your bonds can truly be."

This group is not one of the Five Factions on this scarred world. They aren't even normal contenders, such is their presence. But they survive nonetheless, displaying unity and cohesion that is rarely seen outside of the Imperium forces on a good day. Their armor clearly gave away that they're a Renegade force, but the terminology used by them makes it all too clear: This group is led by the Blood Gorgons, and the one called Barsabbas currently leads this detachment.

While they serve Chaos Undivided, they take great efforts not to fall to the sway and seductions of the other gods. Indeed, they heavily focus on personal freedom and autonomy with allegiance to no one side beyond their own, and as a result are much more disciplined compared to other warbands. Barsabbas would explain that this is in part due to the Blood Bonding ritual, where organs are exchanged between members of the Chapter in arcane actions that create a supernatural bond capable of letting their members fight intuitively with each other. Strength and pain are shared among Bond-Brothers, and in doing so they guarantee loyalty to each other instead of another.

Barsabbas will undoubtedly be skeptical of you approaching his traveling group, especially if you are of Imperial origin. They will never submit to another, but should you make clear that it is a mutual effort or even that you would join them, he would be willing to hear you out.

Their own patron is a Greater Daemon of Chaos Undivided, though it is still afraid of much more powerful servants and thus hasn't been able to get them off planet. They've been planning to raid the castle during an especially rough battle and take control while no one is looking, ensuring their return trip. In the meantime, they raid and scavenge what they can while they bolster their forces and collect the discarded outcasts of any side who proves to be worthy.

Maybe you will help them. Maybe you won't. Regardless of what you choose, they will be free.

With your faction chosen, it would be prudent to discussing things with the faction's leader and deciding who would be taking command. Whether it involves a skillful debate, shameless bribery, or a simple beatdown until one submits to the other is your decision and yours alone. But it is important to decide who is calling the shots, as unity and understanding increases your chances of success when it comes to assailing the fortress. Even the slightest fracture could cause problems for you later down the road, and is that really something you want to risk?

Maybe for a lark. Not so much when freedom and potential riches are at stake.

The good news is that your faction has been preparing for a heavy assault to the fortress for some time now. Scout bikes, troop carriers, even a gunship or two has been salvaged for the purpose of a heavy assault. But you would not be walking, no. You would be given the choice to either ride in a salvaged Baneblade or Fellblade tank so that you can ride forth in style with the faction leader, assuming you didn't become the leader.

The bad news is that everyone else has undoubtedly stocked up for similar assaults and will not be hesitant to use them on you upon finding you were breaking out the big guns. Worse, there is still the local wildlife to deal with, mutated by the energies of the Warp into horrific monsters. There's the massive Trigore, lizards of three heads and large enough to consume even Astartes in a single bite. There is also the Slaughterpix, fist-sized wisp entities that travels in swarms and are particularly attracted to those possessing psionic might. There were Axebeaks, traveling flightless birds the size of horses and had an insatiable thirst for blood. Finally, there's the Paraclaws, which the best way to describe them is if someone took a spider and made all its legs sharp blades capable of cutting through Leman Russ tanks while making them as big as the aforementioned tanks.

All in all, it was going to be nothing less than a massive mess of mayhem and madness thanks to the menagerie of monsters.

Rolling out is an event in of itself. Whether you travel the perpetual storms of lightning and fire, the hellishly hot canyons, or the jagged mountain ranges that hide all manners of the beasts described, you would be riding in a caravan filled with warriors and soldiers that have truly seen some nightmarish battles. A slight glance would reveal the grim determination in the eyes of some of them, with jittery paranoia in others. This wasn't going to be a nice battle at all. On the plus side, traveling in your faction's territory was significantly faster than usual thanks to the enigmatic rules of the Daemon World. The Blood Gorgons benefited from this rule no matter where they were, though... maybe because they were some kind of wild card the Master of the Arena approved of. Maybe you could ask them when this was all over.

Days of traveling on the ground with the vehicle caravan while fending off the occasional wildlife attack would finally reveal the fortress that laid upon the southern pole, among the frozen lands.



The building was clearly of Xenos make, with the occasional spark of Warp energy that launched from the tallest tower it possessed. Only one entrance to get in or out, with magma bubbling around the still-frozen landscape. It had no defenses to speak of... with everyone willing to fight over it, there was no need. The soldiers around you murmured the name of this enigmatic place.

The Ark of Sacrifice.

There wasn't much time to contemplate the meaning behind the name, as scouts report intense fighting to the west. Others had the same idea as you, that much was predicted. The pleasant thing, however, was that some of the factions decided to fight each other first. Maybe to enter the fortress with no problems afterwards? Cribbing the idea may not be a bad call, what with more forces that would inevitably show up. You could enter now and instead try to bottleneck everyone, even if your allies would recommend against that. They tried before, and had failed. Granted, they didn't have you, but would that be enough to make it a successful tactic?

You should decide what to do, and relatively soon. The longer you take, the more variables inevitably appear to put wrenches into your plan. It will be a horrific battle, one rife with stray fire and explosions and attacks from every angle.

But should you succeed, there will be plenty of opportunity to strip the field of battle before you enter.

Possible Rewards:

FACTION ALLY: Strange as it sounds, you make a good team. Whether this was through cooperation or bludgeoning them until they swore loyalty, the point remains that you work well together with them. As such, the offer is there to take the leader of the faction with you, along with their closest aides or pets should it please you to acquire a new lieutenant. This reward does not count towards your limit.

TANKS: Lesser beings might be satisfied with your seventy Chimera or Rhino APCs to carry them into battle for protection and increased firepower. Alas, you are not a lesser being and have seen fit to keep the biggest tank for yourself along with the additional armor. Whether you're in a Baneblade or Fellblade heavy supertank, this vehicle will bring enough firepower that Astartes will be hesitant to take you on without the right gear and proper cover. Entertainingly enough, tucked away somewhere in the tank was a tiny STC fragment for making more of these monstrosities. The driver ended up kicking themselves for hours. This reward does not count towards your limit.

FACTION TROOPS (REQUIRED: SURVIVORS): When all of this is said and done, one would hope that you had survivors among the band that you sided with. This is naturally presuming you did not treat them as fuel for one giant meat grinder so you could have everything for yourself. At the end of the day, why not take them with you? With a force of twelve thousand assorted Imperial Guard remnants and a thousand assorted Astartes, it's the kind of attack force that could conquer planets or even a sector. This reward does not count towards your limit.

WEAPON COLLECTION: How do you expect to win a war if you do not have adequate weapons to equip your troops? You can't. The factions on this world have had that lesson in mind from day one, and large numbers munitions and ranged weapons have been stockpiled for this very reason. From your standard Bolters, modified Hellguns, and heavy Plasma weapons to Fire Bombs and Krak Grenades, this will ensure that your troops will have more than enough armaments to bring order or chaos to wherever you see fit. Your enemies shall perish as penance for daring to face you. This reward does not count towards your limit.

RESOURCE PILFERING: One who does not take advantage of their surroundings is simply a walking corpse that does not realize it has yet died. The environment is a crucial factor in any form of combat, and the resources it can provide are no exception whatsoever. Along the way you were able to acquire a strange green slime oozing from bulbous plants that caused rapid healing when ingested, stalks of blue plants that sharpened one's senses tremendously when ground up and smoked, and ghostly warp-treated metal that helped null psionics. Surely you'll figure something out with this.

MOBILE MANUFACTORY: It sure is nice to be able to bring weapons and armor over to beat up your enemies like they're the last pinatas in the galaxy. It's a nice and fuzzy feeling, like you just ate a live animal as a delicacy. Yet if something breaks or you need to quickly churn out a replacement for some of your underlings, you're going to need a little something for that. Have no fear, for this Leman Russ-sized machine can be towed around and sufficiently repair or churn out additional equipment that you've managed to program into it! So long as you have all the necessary material, anyway.

CASTIGATOR-CLASS TITAN: In the days of old, only one of these massive creatures existed. In most instances only one was enough. Utilizing technology from the Dark Age, it boasted unique capabilities such as a metallic muscular system as locomotion to let it move *much* faster and more agile than other Titans along with a great deal of self-repair systems. As if being faster despite being much larger than even *Emperor-class* Titans wasn't enough, a Titan Power Fist and a twin-barreled cannon system that utilized Daemons as ammunition made the machine disturbingly powerful. While the only known version had fallen to Chaos and was destroyed by the Grey Knights, fragments of its STC pattern were taken by the Adeptus Mechanicus to study. It would appear one of them managed to make one and then lost it, for your faction gladly presents this Titan as an ace in the hole to succeed and leave this world. Just be wary, as it is piloted by an extremely advanced A.I. that can be finicky.

APOSTATE SKULLS (CHAOS ONLY): Why should you merely beat those false worshippers who behold themselves to a glorified corpse? Defeat is not enough. You must break them down into dust, and then break that dust down further as you ruin everything they hold dear. They are the true betrayers, they who would cast you out for following the will of your gods. Enter these skulls, each one lovingly crafted from the flayed heads of Imperial Priests as they were tortured for weeks while in Warp Travel. Simply wearing the skulls on your shoulders or belt will create an aura of intense fear and loss of rationality in those of great faith. Listening to the whispers of the skulls will let you understand how to best manipulate them while placing them upon a corpse will reveal their dark secrets to you. But if you are one for more immediate results, simply throwing a skull will cause it to act like a reusable Vortex Grenade.

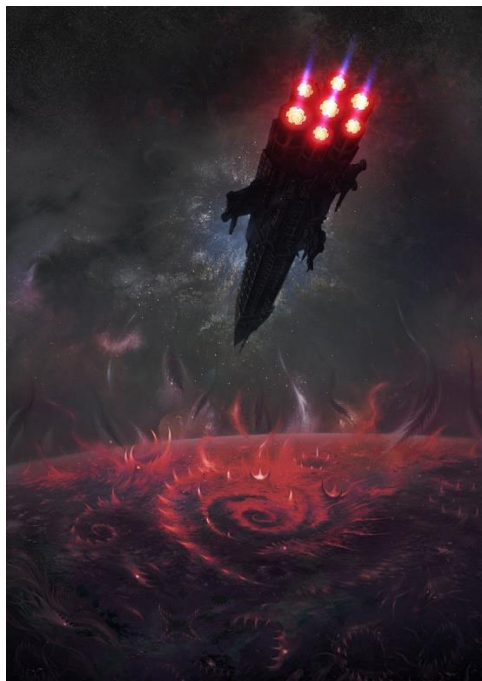
KAI GUNS (CHAOS ONLY): At one point these weapons had been produced on the planet Kai, which at the time had been assailed by a strong Warp Storm named Gae-sann. At the time the smiths had realized that this would allow them to create weapons with unique properties that only a fluid place like the Warp could grant them, and so they had went to work on crafting the Kae Guns that would be their legacy. Large even for Heavy Bolter weapons, these guns take the hate and malice of the user and coalesce them into energy bolts to be fired and strike the target with unnatural might. How fortunate then that the factions of Chaos were some of the enterprising type and collected a large amount for use.

DAEMON ENGINES (CHAOS ONLY): The power of the Warp and Chaos itself are not to be taken lightly, Champion. They are things that can bring someone great power, but if not treated with respect then it will consume and entomb you to be its tool for all eternity. But you are the master, and you will *show them* as such with these horrific weapons. Daemon Engines are fearsome indeed, with warp denizens trapped within a massive machine to wreak havoc upon any who have the misfortune of being in front of them. You have a hundred strong, comprising of twenty of each five types. The Helldrakes are fliers who turn any battle into a nightmarish fight for survival, while Venomcrawlers are horrific spider monstrosities with Excruciator cannons being brought to bear. Forgefiends are long-range monsters able to bring destructive volleys while Maulerfiends get up close and destroy with their Magma Cutters and clawed Power Fists. Finally, the Defilers with their Reaper Autocannons and Battle Cannons will be a superb option to round out your horrific horde.

AQUILA WINGS (LOYALIST ONLY): Despite the Emperor of Mankind demanding his Imperium to not serve any gods, He had the foresight to include many impressive architectural design choices that would make it easier for His subjects to make the transition into a faith-based society. All the easier to starve the Gods and slay their followers. What you have here is a slew of golden wings in all sorts of sizes, and placing them on armor strikes intense fear in those who scorn humans or their holy faith while raising the morale of troops under your banner. Should you use them as shields instead, you will find they act as conversion fields when in front of you while letting them rest upon your back will see you surrounded in a golden light that helps stave off corruption.

PSYCANNONS (LOYALIST ONLY): In a horrific landscape such as the Daemon World you now find yourself on there is no such thing as overkill. Not now, and not until the stars go out. The enemies of Mankind are varied, but for the Grey Knights they merely needed to focus on the denizens of the Immaterium. Enter these Heavy Bolters that are better than Heavy Bolters in every way, including an anti-gravitic suspensor that lets them be fired on the fly. Loaded with bolt shells that radiate negative psychic energy along with being silver-tipped and covered in unique runes that are anathema to daemons, you shall take vengeance upon the foul tempters.

CALADIUS GRAV-TANK ANNIHILATORS (LOYALIST ONLY): With all that these foul perversions of Mankind would bring to the table, you need something of intense power yourself. Something that even the Emperor would approve of in his eternal vigilance of the Imperium. These special tanks of the Legio Custodes would serve nicely in bringing such a power, especially at one hundred strong. A hover tank model of disturbingly fast speed and armed with enhanced capacitor-fed Arachnus Blaze Cannons, their las-weaponry could pose such a threat to super-armored vehicles that they'd almost disintegrate at the face of such might. The twin-linked Lastrum Bolt Cannons for anti-personnel defenses further make these machines a living nightmare upon the field for any who dare speak against the Emperor.



MYTHS OF THE UNSEEN SHRINE

You must somehow gain access to the Ark of Sacrifice to take this route

After the rather eventful battle you were forced to fight right outside the fortress itself, there is some time to take stock of the situation and tend to the wounds of your comrades... but not too much time. The longer you take, the more likely the possibility of a counterattack ready to capitalize upon the advantage you currently possess.

It's a shame that you'll need to leave the vehicles behind, but that's hardly a blow considering your newfound forces. With a group of powerful allies and enough might to take the Ark, it was unlikely that you would need such things to secure your victory and finally be rid of this world. There were other prizes to collect, after all.

Entering the Ark was easy enough, and walking through it seemed... strangely anticlimactic. A long hallway of obsidian lit by torches, no windows or alcoves to fire through or hide behind, and no traps that would lay someone low. It was enough to start making members of your little band seem nervous... an understandable sentiment, as any time something was too easy on a Daemon World, it never meant anything good.

The change of scenery when entering the massive amphitheater in the center of the fortress was enough justification for such sentiments. There were rivers of magma underneath the various walkways in an odd pattern, with the substance flowing up the array of statues that were on display. Statues of Daemons and Imperials in various states of conflict and of cooperation, of disparity and unity. Enough to make most disgusted at the sight of things regardless of their allegiance.

The very center of the room was unremarkable by comparison, with only four different glass circles with five parts respectively. There were no markings, no symbols. Just those glass circles.

"I was beginning to wonder if anyone would try again. It is good to know that fear does not dictate everything."

In a normal situation, everyone would have whipped around with various weapons to aim or even shoot at the sudden voice in the middle of the crowd. You could tell that this was not normal, as no one in your band dared move. The stench of fright blanketed them like a miasma, but it was more than likely that you or any from outside this world would be the only ones who would brave looking at the old man in his chair with a serene smile on his face.

"Time is valuable, and so I shall not waste yours. You have taken this place, the first step of three. You must perform the second step, and the Games shall continue. Five trials you shall perform, five chances to succeed. You compete with others I have collected, and so the best of five shall make it to the third trial. Try to avoid a tie if you can."

White light enveloped all senses immediately, and upon regaining sight you could see what you were up against.

It was like someone took an Escher painting and turned it into a massive obstacle course, complete with deathly traps and wandering dangers in the form of Daemons. Bursts of warp-infused lava, ethereal nets, and deep fogs that covered various triggers were just the start of what you could see, with other dangers no doubt waiting deeper within.

The noises coming from your left likewise made it clear who your competition was, or in this case *what* it was. A group of Genestealer hybrids were screeching at a band of Orks who were antagonizing and rabbleroxing them, while a formation of Necron warriors simply stood in place in silence. A few moments later a large board flashed above everyone with scores and the names of each 'group': The Obsidian Necrontyr, the Green Krorks, and the Grey Genestealers.

Your group was named the Black Crusaders.

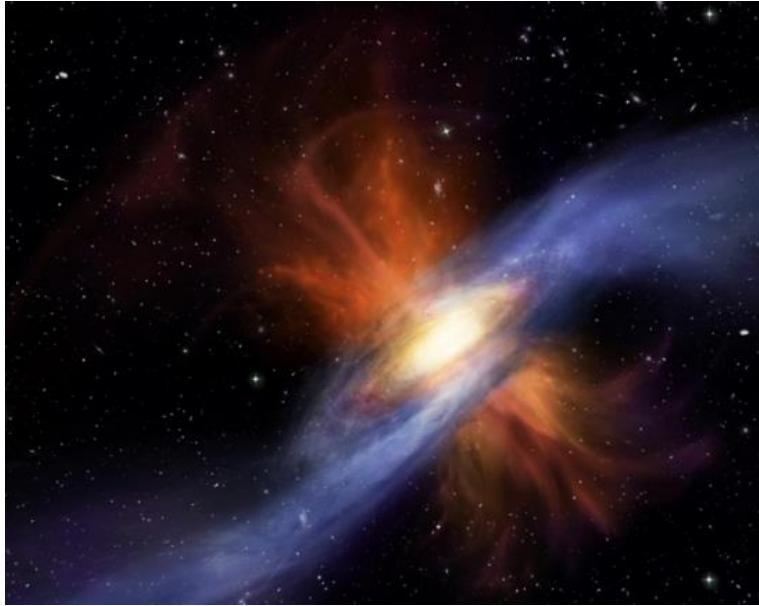
Someone thought they had something resembling a sense of humor around here.

The game appeared to be deceptively simple. Traverse the multi-dimensional obstacle course, obtain pieces of a daemonic skull that had been split five ways, and return them to the receptacles that were next to the scoreboard that flashed. They would light up pieces of the circles, and whoever had the most would proceed further. The unsaid dangers were evident in the various traps you could see along with the ones you likely couldn't, the Daemons that were wandering around... and the fact that inter-team conflict was *not* explicitly barred.

Along the way there would also be strange puzzles one had to solve to proceed, and most definitely puzzles needed to acquire the skull fragments. Puzzles that almost always relied on ancient history regarding the Great Crusade, or the time of the War in Heaven, or reassembling ancient glyphs that would clear the path forward. All things that any good Inquisitor would murder half a Hive World over should someone know something they weren't supposed to know, just to ensure any random challenger couldn't just breeze their way through. Oh no, perish the thought.

Should you fail or end up tied with another team, the consequence will be obvious: Being ejected from the fortress rather violently, upon which no doubt all those other factions you humiliated and destroyed on your way here will take the opportunity to pay you back in full. It is also heavily encouraged by any in your entourage, should you fail, to not take your anger out on the fortress itself. A place like the *Ark of Sacrifice* doesn't earn its name from simply looking menacing, after all.

Should you succeed, however, and manage to acquire a minimum of three fragments to break any hope of a tie? You will find something magically heretical happening instead: The pieces of the skull coming together and reforming to become whole once more, glowing with baleful energies as the resulting surge of completion ejects all other teams to some unknown location to leave you and your entourage alone. Alone with a skull that opens a doorway into a strange location.



It was a perfect view of the stars and the cosmos itself, with a galaxy the size of a small forge in front of you. The 'forge' burned with cosmic fires, roaring with the heat of newborn and dying stars feeling their lifespan all at once. Each step in this place created a small echo that made the dots of light near you brighten up, as though the cosmos acknowledged your very presence. It likely wasn't an actual galaxy, but someone had the megalomania to want to feel like it was.

Then it became visible. Two burning white orbs upon a miasma of colorless void. It was only apparent that the entity was there simply because there was nothing where something should be, each chuckle being felt in the bones and soul of all who heard it. Yet glancing hard enough would give glimpses of the old man inside, something where nothing should be.

“Two trials down, one to go. I wonder, do you simply ignore the fear that dwells within every trial or do you use it to propel you forward? It is a conundrum I do enjoy asking, please humor this old and weary man before you.”

With each breath, the breathing apparatus wheezed with the pains of machines pushed to work far beyond their expected shelf life. The tubes going from the stave to his body were as worn-out and ragged as his own form, but those white orbs completely broke the façade of helplessness. The mask was only that.

“Nonetheless, you have given your time to make it to this point, so I shall give you mine. You now have the final task, and your choice relies on how deeply your fear runs through your soul. There will be no judgement, nor will there be coddling. No, not in this trial. Your final act is simple.”

The figure held his arms out with a wide smile, as the 'stars' around him started to come together to create images.

“You must claim your prize, whatever you feel comfortable in claiming.”

Surrounding you was a sight that was either awe-inspiring or terrifying, depending on exactly where you fell on the Heresy Scale. There was a Greater Daemon for each God of Chaos, bound with pulsing runes and chains as they struggled to escape in vain. Eyes glaring down upon you while the figure waited, letting you inspect each one. It becomes all too clear now, that he is offering to bind one of said Daemons to your will, containing it into a rune-warded container to eventually place into a weapon, for the purpose of bringing terrible dangers upon all who would dare oppose you.

More concerningly, there's a fifth choice of a glowing angelic woman with wings of light. Depending on your loyalties, she could look upon you with either hatred and a desire to rend you asunder or with concern and fears of what could happen to you.

You could very well decide to take the figure's offer as-is. Pick one, bottle them up, and be on your way with prize in hand. You would be allowed to leave the planet without a fight, and take your merry band with you should you desire it as well. However, you would only be able to choose one as this Warp-manifested forge was a one-time deal.

Yet, there is another option, albeit one not well recommended. There's one other Daemon in the room that could be used for the forging of a powerful item. One that has been pulling the strings from the very beginning. Should you feel confident enough, you could instead decide to challenge the figure to a fight and stuff him into his own forge. Such an item would grant power beyond what most Daemon Weapons could even dare to hope grant their wielder. Yet if you did this you would not be able to acquire any of the entities before you... though nothing's really stopping you from doing it after the fact out of principle or spite. Just know that he'll teleport his forge out if you backstab him.

Should you do this though, know that this Daemon has controlled the planet for so long for a damned good reason. As a being birthed from the very first instance Man has ever felt fear for their own life, Kha'choz has become well-known with such titles as 'Feardrinker' and 'Bane of Bravery'. Untold warp sorceries will be unleashed and each blow will be akin to the very mountains rising to strike you down, terrifying wails being constantly emitted that will erode the soul of any who hear it. It will take some truly exceptional power to best such a foe, especially in his seat of power. Good luck to you on that.

Regardless of what you choose, you will find next to no resistance at all with returning to your vessel and leaving this accursed place. Leaving with true power pulsing within your very hands, power able to help tear worlds asunder for the sake of your goals.

Possible Rewards:

CAPTIVE DAEMON/SAINT (ACCEPTED OFFER): At the end of it all, fighting a Greater Daemon of that caliber after everything you've been through is not a sensible idea. Any battle you can walk away from is a good battle... and besides, you earned it this time. You beat Kha'choz's games and got to walk out the door with your prize. In this case, the prize being an unnaturally powerful Greater Daemon or Living Saint that's either forged into a powerful weapon now or entrapped inside a special container to be used for a potent option later. It may not do much now, but when presented with smiths of sufficient prowess then it will make for a powerful weapon indeed. Only will you befriend and make peace with them, or force them into dominance via your will against theirs? This reward does not count towards your limit.

MARK OF BRAVERY (ACCEPTED OFFER): Kha'choz has existed for a very, *very* long time. He has walked worlds that mortals have never drew breath upon and weaved the very light of stars that would drive mere men to madness. As such he has picked up a thing or two and upon packaging up your prize he'll offer to impart upon you something no current Champion has: A rune made from the language of the Old Ones. Not inherently marked by Chaos unless you desire it, it is a rune that will see the willpower and mental fortitude of the bearer heightened to levels not seen since the walking of the Primarchs. As a side bonus, any psionic effect used against you will have great difficulty manifesting to hit you, being much weaker versions or even being nullified outright. Walk forth and know it is what happens when one faces down fear.

KHA'CHOZ (CHALLENGED): Rather than take Kha'choz's offer at face value, you decided to give him a taste of his own medicine and somehow have come out on top. Whether this was strictly business or was more satisfying than it had any right being, you've managed to stuff him inside the container he was going to use against you. This means you have a Greater Daemon on par with the fabled Drach'nyen to either be forged into a powerful weapon now or entrapped inside a special container to be used for a potent option later. If you managed to somehow do this without dying, then congratulations on being strong enough or undeservingly lucky enough to get this. This reward does not count towards your limit.

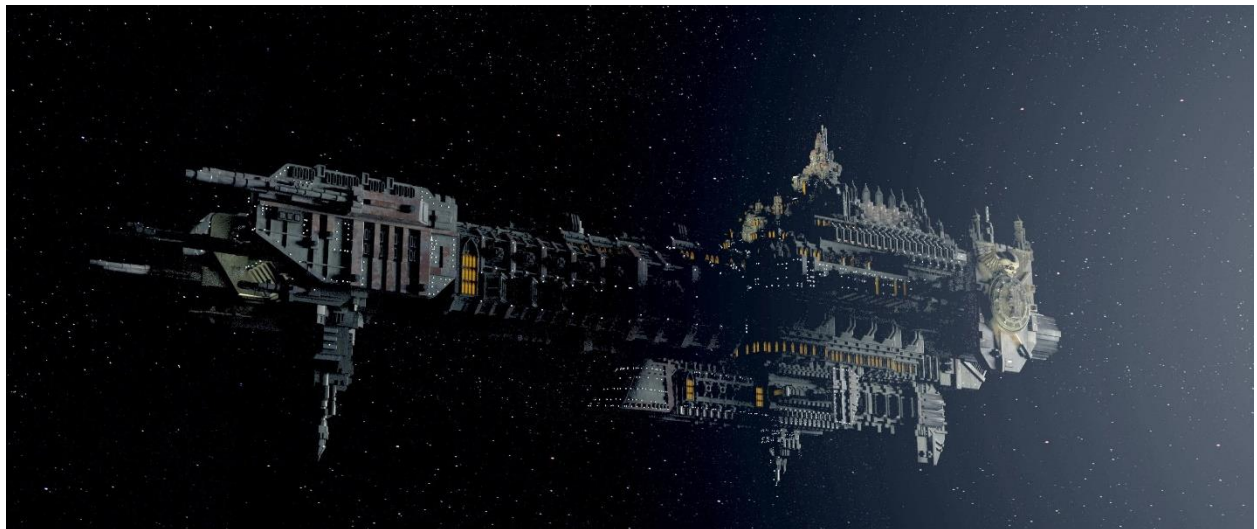
WARP FORGE (CHALLENGED): To the victor go the spoils. It is customary for any battle to take whatever is left of the enemy's resources, and this potent forge is one that will be worthy of taking for your own. Burning with such force that one would be forgiven for thinking that it glowed with Warpfire, this forge is capable of imbuing the energies of the very Immaterium into whatever you make of it. Depending on what you made, this could be very troubling or very useful.

PSYCHIC AUGMENTATION: There is a great deal of energy permeating Kha'choz's little celestial lair, enough that one might be forgiven for thinking they could taste someone's thoughts. All this energy should be put to good use by someone with a proper head on their shoulders. Someone like you. It would take a bit of concentrating and brain-splitting pain, but focusing the energies could tremendously augment a facet of yourself to supernatural levels. Wanted immense strength or unnatural intelligence? Wanted to boost your psionic ability or speed to something terrifying? This is how you do it, though choose wisely as you can only do it once before the energy runs out.

ARK OF THE CHAMPION. Is it not customary for a champion to do a victory lap upon completing a difficult battle? There's always room for grandstanding of sorts, for it keeps the masses happy and the morale high. Whether you decided to accept Kha'choz's offer or trapped him for deigning to think he could control you, the Mechanicum woman from before would contact you with explicit instructions she had been given. Specifically, she was to present you with a worthy vessel to signify your status as Champion of the Scarred Arena.

Your chariot awaits.

At ten kilometers in length, thrumming with power and capable of transporting an entire army wherever it needs to go, this customized Battle Barge serves as a stark reminder as to who is in charge on the field of battle. While lacking long-range firepower, its boarding craft and teleporting capabilities means anyone who gets close enough will be swarmed with boarding actions while being pummeled by plasma projectors, macrocannons, missile racks, and more. It even comes with Bombardment Cannons should the enemy on a planetary surface need said reminder. Long live the Champion.



THE WAR IN HELL

Entering this system was a treat in every sense of the word. A star as big as a gas giant was in the system, glowing a brilliant white that defied all logic and pointed to the Dark Age of Technology as far as stellar terraforming went. Asteroid belts so thick that one could swear they would start forming incredibly thick rings just to make it more convenient for you. There were even a few orbiting stations around the two planets in this system that just screamed Archaeotech even from here.

Even ignoring the radiation bursts and dust clouds threatening to play havoc on your sensors, this place was already shaping up to be well worth the trip.

Yet all good tidings must come with the bad, for it isn't long before the crew start bringing news of detecting weapons fire coming from the surfaces of both planets. Both readings were similar as it involved a lot of plasma fire, munitions, and Warp taint so great there were concerns of Warp Tears that weren't visible yet. Depending on your alignment, this could either add to the good news or put a damper on plans of just waltzing in and taking everything you want.

Still. It was clear that anyone down there was technologically advanced if they were using things like plasma weaponry. It might be something you could spin, but you would need information first. Information that the orbiting stations could provide to you if they had any equipment you could tap into.

The stations were huge, though. Almost unnaturally huge. They weren't stations so much as orbiting cities around the planet with weapons that were bristling all over. It'd be a real fight to get in there and acquire what you desired for yourself... but no reward without risk, right?



ARRIVAL OF THE WILD CARD

Time to make your approach and get the information you needed. Getting any technology that wasn't bolted down was going to be a pleasant side benefit however, and your Tech-Priests have assured you that their most sacred bolt-cutters were ready for anything that *was* bolted.

Approaching the stations initially was a matter of environmental hazards more than anything. With the sheer clutter of asteroids and all the radioactivity, there were more than a few times where the alarms on the ship went off because of debris colliding against the void shielding. Every so often power needed to be rerouted due to the amount of collisions whether it was unavoidable or you figured the best path to avoid radiation was simply to slam through the smallest concentration of rocks. You could always just shoot the smaller rocks away, but who knows how well that will turn out?

As you got closer, however, the comms station would report some unusual transmissions that the ship was intercepting on a very high-energy wavelength. Transmissions that were in a strange language and were repeated in a ten-second interval. The Tech-Priests would point out that it was *exactly* ten seconds, and that in such a radioactive system filled with dust clouds that it was a monument to the wonders of technology and the Omnisiah's grace that it was able to maintain such transmissions.

Too bad their fascination didn't exactly lend itself to translating the damned thing.

The moment you got into distance for firing any long-range weapons is when the stations would act. Unique colors surrounded them as energy shields were raised, and powerful plasma lances would start peppering your ship and any others you might have had with unnatural precision. Worse, trying to bullrush the stations would simply see them teleport to a different section of orbit and continue the assault all the same. Exceptionally frustrating to say the least.

In case it wasn't blindingly obvious, the best solution would be to whittle down the station's energy reserves or somehow overload the defenses before finally moving closer. Whether you came prepared with enough ships to make this a hasty event, pushed enough technology into a single vessel to deliver a brutal knockout punch, or have to make do with bobbing and weaving while screaming to whatever god you had faith in to save you from the poor decision you made, the eventual popping of the shield would be your signal to begin moving in.

Of course, just because the shields are down doesn't mean the weapons are down. It doesn't mean the teleportation functions are down either. You'll need to disable the weapons on your own, though the damage you do to the stations might end up knocking something loose and disable the teleporting... or you could just break the whole thing like a little kid and send some malicious coding over to it somehow. The sheer amount of traffic coming from the two orbiting platforms would be enough that even the ship's cogitator banks would struggle to keep up with it.

But eventually, there would be room to dock with the platforms and make sure they don't run away and leave you back at square one. Automatic docking mechanisms would see to that.

But now the real game begins.

The moment you or your forces stepped foot on the station is when two things would become immediately apparent. The first thing is how unnatural the entire place looks compared to standard Imperial Gothic architecture. There were no statues, no incense, no dark surfaces or stained glass. No, there were small streams of water flowing through the indented edges of the pristine white floors, green plants tastefully decorating the ceiling to give contrast to the pure white walls that had blue symbols upon them. It felt wholly like a xenos station, despite the Tech-Priests insisting it was Archaeotech.

The second thing was said walls opening up and strange machines practically pouring out to strike at your forces. Machines of ivory and gilded gold using weapons that shot lances of plasma at you, or bolts of lightning that could wreck and destabilize machines. Close combat wasn't any picnic either, with melee weapons that disrupted shields and held unique power fields that would make short work of even Astartes forces. The fact that they explode with the force of a Krak Grenade upon being defeated probably didn't help matters at all.

Whether they were pouring out towards you or were a simple constant trickle, there would be no breaks or pauses for relief. They would keep coming. They would keep shooting. There was only one choice: Press on, or retreat. You wouldn't retreat now that you've gotten this far, would you? Not a mighty Champion like yourself?

Silver lining, anyone with the cybernetics to access the Noosphere such as any Tech-Priests would pick up a monumental amount of traffic, and even be able to pluck the station's map in order to navigate the area. The security control room was the best place to move towards, as there would undoubtedly be a system reset to keep these damned things from constantly trying to turn you into a side of burnt ends.

Actually, would anyone from this galaxy even know what burnt ends are? That might be a depressing thought.

No matter how one would look at it, this would be a slog to fight one's way to the control room. But the holo-interface was nothing if not simple, and should one manage to make it here with enough of their limbs to boot up the protocols and dial in a shutdown protocol they would be rewarded with the relief of the security drones finally ceasing in their assault. Only then would you get enough of a breather to count any dead and start taking stock of what resources were spent in the battle... as well as plumb the cogitators of this station to see what goodies you could acquire.

Void patterns. Maintenance logs. Security logs. Boring stuff really, unless you're big into the logistics of a floating, teleporting space station. The blueprints are at least nice, could make scavenging this station easier.

Planetary logs, however. That's where the clues for the shiny stuff was going to be.

Cracking those logs open would reveal a situation you're pretty sure would rate as a crummy B-plot film at best, if it didn't provide such delicious opportunity.

The station has been monitoring a secluded war for the past fifteen thousand years that looks like it's still been raging on. Both of the planets were established as an outpost for the study of psychic phenomena along with experimental technologies involving it, and a massive staff of 'Korvikemo' had been vat-grown here to ensure as few humans as possible in the event of an accident. All had been going well for a bit, until the arrival of a massive crystalline object on the first planet that crashed and burrowed into the surface. The war broke out not long before then, and the human staff were slaughtered. But the Korvikemo continued the fight and protected the main repository on the second planet.

Any information pulled up on them revealed interesting tidbits... namely that they were vat-grown and as such were wholly synthetic. So they tailored a Xenos slave race to serve Mankind. Pictures revealed a four-armed bipedal figure with different skin tones and musculature depending on the role required for them, but all had glowing white eyes and organic throat vents instead of mouths. Blue for combat, red for medical aid, grey for psionic tasks and black for technical aid. Sexless too, with their reproduction completely reliant on the vats meant to spawn them. Someone didn't want their race breeding.

The information on the entities from the crystalline object would either inspire dread or giddy joy depending on which side of the heresy line you operated on... as they were clearly identifiable as Yu'vath constructs. Shard Spiders, dark orbs of energy, even the occasional Bone Warden that commands them. Further readings of the logs would show that they've more or less taken over the first planet, but it's been nothing but constructs. No actual organic entity has set foot there.

Maybe they were sent to prepare for an arrival that never came?

Either way, a unique opportunity has arisen. The chance to outright take relics of the past and make off with an army of constructs once the war was finished and one of the planets was scoured in flame. But the prior history makes it pretty clear that you can't bring them both on board and expect a happy ending of hugs and kisses. No, one side will have to perish.

But before you make that decision, you need to loot this station for everything it's worth.

Possible Rewards:

GILDED LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS: This archaeotech station comes with many wonders never seen before. Wonders that could improve every facet of life beyond mere combat. As such it was worth the constant alarms once you ripped this life support system from the floating site. Installing this into a vessel will dramatically increase the quality of air to the point of putting Pleasure Worlds to shame, and even come with temperature control for every section of the ship. It will also double as an exceptional hydroponics facility or augment any existing hydroponics to a level that creates amazing crops of high nutrition and taste. This reward does not count towards your limit.

PSYCHICALLY-TREATED SILICATE: With all the studying of psychic phenomena along with the horrific amount of stellar events happening in the system, it can be a bit difficult to remember asteroid belts are a wonderful source of resources and material to utilize for your own nefarious purposes. In this particular case, the silicate found in the thick asteroid belts have a psionic resonance that remain even after processing, allowing for all manners of interesting effects. Perhaps you could make glass that acts as a conduit for communication or augment psionic divination, or create ceramics that allow plants to grow and develop if given a bit of psionic energy. Surely you're creative enough to think of something. This reward does not count towards your limit.

ANCIENT TELEPORTARIUM: You've heard of subjects being able to teleport from ship to ship, or even from the ship down to the planet, but the idea of an entire station as large as an Imperial Vessel being able to teleport? Madness. Inconceivable. So naturally it's at the top of the list for potential things to take provided your battle did not strain it. Installing this archaeotech upon your vessels will utilize the warp drive to provide a much more stable 'jump' from one location to another, not only allowing for a much shorter recharge time but also allowing the vessel itself to teleport across distances instantly.

ARC WEAPONRY: Look, there's no way to say this that won't make you think 'lightning gun'. So there's no point in saying otherwise. They're lightning guns. You shoot them and massive bolts of lightning go hurling towards the target in a manner that would make engineers and electricians alike cackle in maniacal laughter. It's not like the security system will be using them, so collecting a supply of them to use as rifles or pistols will do wonders. As a bonus, they'll also play utter havoc with machinery you launch it at, causing haywire fields to make them sputter or even shut down temporarily. It's wonderful turning a Leman Russ tank into a big fancy coffin, don't you think?

SENTINEL SYSTEM: Thinking on it, those sentinels were really potent. They were like servitors, only faster and much more competent with extra toys... looked a lot nicer too. Having them as potential boarding action deterrents would do wonders against pirates and maybe even enemy Astartes. It would take a bit of time to gut the station in a sufficient way, but installing this component on your vessel would ensure boarding would run into enough problems to allow the rest of your crew to mount up a defense.

AURAMITE: Scouring through the asteroid belts would uncover quite a bit of industrial or ornamental materials to be sure. Enough to pack one's holds to the brim. But there was one mineral that nearly got overlooked as just another bit of pretty metal. One you managed to pick out immediately and mine for all that it was worth. You see, the Imperium does its best to hoard any and all sources of Auramite for the purpose of the Adeptus Custodes and their armor. In composition it's similar to Ceramite, but it's *much* more resilient than any Astartes armor could dare to be as a result. Seeing a stock like this here, it wouldn't take a genius to realize what they could do with it.

UNLOCKING THE CRYSTAL BALL (CHAOS ONLY)

So just to clarify: There were two planets warring with each other. One of them was chock full of what could only be described as Chaos-infused technology that used the Warp in such a manner that it was comparable to the idea of magitech. There were likely tens of thousands of sentinels and servitor-constructs from the species that created said technology, and they were trying to assault a fortress that came from the Dark Ages and were experimenting with psionics. They were already set up to strike and corrupt...

And they were waiting for a master.

By the Dark Gods, that was a scenario that had your name written all over it.

Whether you use a ship to travel down to the planet's surface or simply teleport down, there would be quite the interesting sight before you. It was an immaculate city of dark crystal and obsidian with streams of warpstuff floating above like an aurora borealis to illuminate the streets. In all defiance of the natural order, there were tapestries of flayed skin on display with inscribed asymmetrical runes that were both beautiful and vile simultaneously, still bleeding as though they were acquired minutes ago as the blood poured into tiny grooves that flowed towards the center. The veil between the Immaterium and the Materium was so thin one could swear it'd take a mere nudge to allow Daemons to pour through, and it showed with the whispers of dark truths that could be heard by any psyker if they wished to let the voices in. There were hordes of crystalline constructs that scuttled about with dark energy crackling in their cores.

You could just feel the raw power this place had to offer. Even in the deepest parts of your soul, there was a small shudder at the potential that could consume you with one misstep. But the higher the risk, the higher the reward. Since the blood was flowing towards the center of this city, it was safe to assume making your case for leadership rights should be done there.

Strangely enough, none of the constructs attacked you despite making threatening gestures. The Shard Spiders hissing, but keeping their distance, The Bone Wardens roaring as their horrific construction crackled with each movement, but making no movement. Even the floating crystalline orbs of dark energy did not even so much as spark you. But all of them followed like a hungry pack, waiting to see if you were potential prey at the slightest sign of weakness. Getting closer to the temple-like center of the city only increased the intensity of the energies and the roars of the mob that had been collecting behind you, the stench of blood so intense you could taste it. Xenos blood, human blood... it all mattered.

No, what mattered was what lay beyond the steps of crystal-entombed skulls still alight with the souls trapped inside. What lay beyond the doors forged in raw stone with every available space burning in different runes. Past those doors where the blood pooled.

Inside that very room was the real test.

All the blood had been funneled through twisting rivers and decorative ponds before pooling together in the center of the massive stone arboretum, each pond having one to three large spikes of bone with runes etched into them seeping with the energies of the Immaterium. Twisting crystalline trees had grown along the rivers, bearing orbs of flesh as a twisted fruit that was both tantalizing and horrifying to gaze upon. The stone pillars had more tapestries, instead made from the skin of daemons as the runes kept twisting and changing the more you looked upon them. The energies had coalesced in the air to create a cacophony of whispers as it kept changing colors, dancing to the tune of any emotions it could sense. The pool in the very center was eerily still, like glass.

Someone had an *amazing* home interior designer.

As you approached, the blood in the center pool would start to bubble and churn as though it were responding to you. Geometric shapes starting to form as the symbols of the Dark Gods started to appear around them, causing the energies in the air to twist. All as baleful eyes formed and cast a dark glare upon you with a slew of information soon slamming into your brain.

It was laced in hatred and malice, yet stifled with curiosity. They wished to know if you were weak, or worthy. Should you survive their trial, they would allow you to partake in their mission here as a commander. Fail, and death would be a gateway to millennia of torment.

There were, naturally, a few ways to go about it. One way would be to play along with their game and step into the pool of blood. To do that would be to open your mind and soul to a series of trials that would see your greatest hatred and fear magnified upon you a hundredfold as a daemonic army. In your own mind you must fight them off with power of will, or dominate them so they understood that you are no mere slave. It may seem like seconds to any followers, but it would be months or even years in your mind. To succeed would impress them, for a mortal.

The other option would be to give them a polite but firm reminder that a bunch of cowards communicating via eyes in a decorative centerpiece make for poor masters, and that you serve who you *choose* to serve. Which in this case aren't those shitheels who would dare to talk down to you. It would result in a sudden onslaught of Warp-Sorcery from extremely powerful practitioners as they attempt to rend you piece by piece with unique sorceries and intense powers that rend the soul, but fighting back would eventually see the pillar of eyes crack and break down. Should you prove strong enough, you could destroy it outright and remove their influence upon this city.

Should you succeed in either one, the results are the same: The city's constructs bow to your power and await your command, Master of the Citadel.

Warp Portals would be the main mode of transportation to the other planet, which would be a heavily scarred battlefield with pockets of strange turrets and massive tanks shooting all manners of exotic weaponry. It ill mattered whether you came in from the air or from underground either, as the Korvikemo prepared for nearly any method of assault in the millennia of combat they've had with these xenos constructs. Worse, occasionally they would field modified strains of their species that would either release a flurry of psionic attacks to cause mayhem or act as suicide bombers to create temporary but deadly tears that sucked anyone nearby into the Immaterium.

But you're nothing if not resourceful. The constructs utilize the powers of the Immaterium in a far better manner than the Korvikemo ever could, and every kill they score is a potential addition to the constructs. That or they could be used as parts to repair them. Your own formidable powers are likewise great indeed, which could tip the balance of power over to your side. But more importantly you can direct the constructs and guide them in a manner that they never could accomplish by themselves. With all that combined, you'd start seeing your side gaining ground unless you were a complete idiot about it and tried to brute force it.

As you kept moving, in time you'd come across the main fortress of the ancient Dark Age humans. A massive tower of white and blue lighting, it had overlapping Void Shields to protect it while being lined with plasma weaponry and gravitic technology to lash out at opponents. Coupled with the prior problems, it's ill wonder that the Yu'vath constructs had yet to breach this place for themselves.

Would be a real shame if someone had a space vessel to drop stuff from orbit.

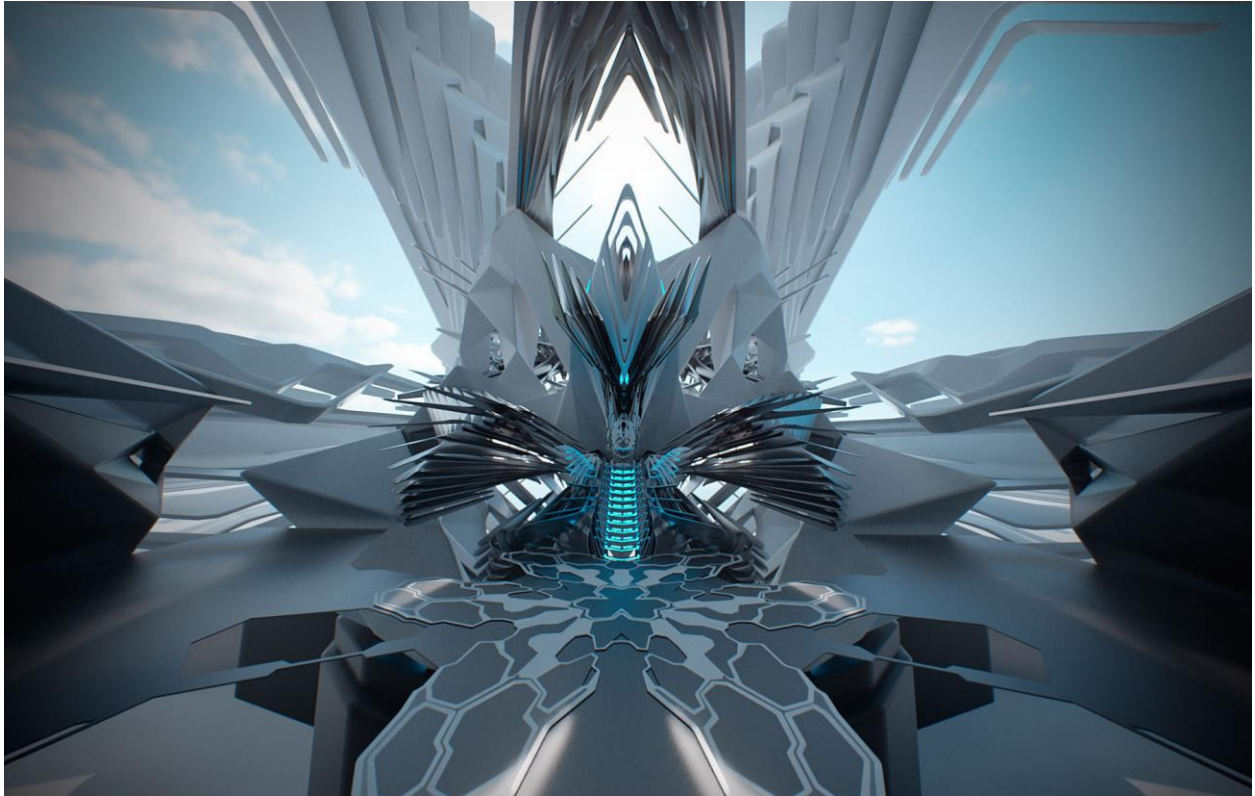
Of course, if you opted not to do that you could always go for making warp tears and letting Daemons into the material world in an attempt to just overwhelm the place with an unyielding tide. That is, if you were okay with the idea of just letting them cut loose and sift through whatever remains after the fact. Whether you shelled the fortress until the shields overloaded or simply decided to slip the collars off and unleash the proverbial swarm until they caused enough damage, the building would be open for you to plunder.

That's when a side of the fortress would explode in a plume of fiery plasma followed by a chain of other explosions. Then another. And another. It wouldn't take an Enginseer to realize they were scorching their own fortress in an attempt to keep you from getting whatever was inside. There wasn't much time to waste for those who didn't simply have maiming, killing, and burning on the mind.

Rushing inside the fortress would reveal scenes of chaos, with Korvikemo trying their damnest to slow you down with all manners of weaponry and set charges to destroy sections of the fortress. Whatever was inside, they really didn't want you getting in there and pilfering it for yourself. All the more reason to rush and begin pilfering all the nice goodies for yourself. If you didn't mind casualties you could just steamroll them with sheer numbers, but isn't that what the constructs are for in the end?

One would be able to note, however, that resistance was greater if you tried to go into the basement levels than if you went to the upper levels. There would also be reports that any fighting in said upper levels would disappear as they tried to rush for your position the further you went down. If it's important enough to abandon their prior attempts to deny you the spoils then it's important enough to pursue, right? Perhaps it was their cloning tanks, or some deliciously advanced superweapon. If you were really lucky, maybe it was a unique Warp Gate that could take you somewhere special.

The truth... felt like something in the middle.



Upon breaking through the last bulkhead doors it felt like you had broken into another world. The inside was much larger than scans of the fortress itself could account for, and one could swear those were actually clouds in the sky instead of a holoivid projection. The humming of technology around you held a calming tone that felt alien in nature, and no matter where you were in this massive space it felt like you were being watched. Overall, it felt incredibly disconcerting.

The silence would soon be broken by the pounding of a mechanical voice that echoed both around the chamber and within your mind.

“YOUR PRESENCE HAS BEEN CATALOGUED. CHRONAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS ACTIVATED. SHIELDING ACTIVATED. DEFENSES ACTIVATED. SCANNERS ACTIVATED. FORTRESS SEALED. I AM OI-944, THE BEARER OF EONS. I AM THE MONUMENT OF YOUR PRIDE.”

Whether the name rings a bell or not, you’ve got trouble. Nevermind the gravitic weapons or the slew of mechanical drones similar to the ones on the orbiting stations or even the shielding surrounding the core going up the stairs. No, the real problem was finding the destruction of drones and stationary turrets was slowly being reversed the longer you kept this up with reports of similar antics occurring throughout the fortress. In a battle of attrition, OI-994 was going to be the winner and it likely knew that. Only by pouring enough firepower to overload its systems would you be able to win, and even then you would need to physically rend the core to actually make it stop trying to kill you. How long it took would depend on you, but upon silencing the attentive A.I. what was left of the fortress would be yours to plunder.

Possible Rewards:

CORRUPTED SYSTEMS: The Yu'vath constructs are nothing if not opportunistic, and while the core of OI-944 has been torn apart in the assault there was nothing stopping them from scavenging what was there. Humorously, the constructs offer what they created as tribute to you, oh great Master. Partially constructed from the remains of the A.I. and expertly gilded in dark crystals, this core can be installed in an armor or a ship to provide not only augmented power output, but even the ability to feed off of the flesh of those it is in contact with to repair what it is attached to. You can create more by feeding psychic energy willingly, or the memories of victims, to it until it buds off and creates a second core. This reward does not count towards your limit.

CRYSTAL AUGMENTS: When your choice of material to work with are psionically-treated crystals and bone, you tend to get creative when it comes to prosthetics and bionics. These shards are a testament to the creativity of the Yu'vath, as inserting them into people will see the crystals visibly replace or restore missing body parts in seconds with noticeably significant results. Even better, it turns users into psykers, or augments their powers if they were already psykers while increasing the strength of the crystals depending on one's psionic power. Such augmentations will continue to replace whatever parts of the user are destroyed, and should the user perish they will be turned into crystal golems slaved to your whims. Even death will not stop their service to you. This reward does not count towards your limit.

BONE CORE: The power of Chaos' former stewards was, and still is, not to be trifled with. Used and harnessed to ensure those of weak minds know better than to fight their betters, yes, but not to be trifled with. These strange cogitator cores constructed of xenos bone are one such example of their might, now having found a new master to serve as you empower yourself. By installing these cores into your ships, the intelligence within will start altering your ship to channel energies more efficiently and even tap into the Immaterium itself to improve and augment your vessel's weapons. Entertainingly, installing any new components will cause the ship to assimilate them for further modification. This reward does not count towards your limit.

YU'VATH CONSTRUCTS: The dark constructs that wandered this city of lost souls had done such a good job with the dismaying and failed xenos spawned of cloning tanks. It would be a shame not to take any of them with you for the purposes of raining destruction or worse upon any who would stand against you. Hordes of Shard Spiders capable of repairing constructs and tearing flesh and armor apart like ribbons, Bone Wardens that use the dead as bodies and molecularly disassemble enemies around them, and more such variations that serve to remind your enemies of the power of dark energy. You shall be the inheritor of the dark.

DRIVE OF THE DAMNED: As undisputed masters of the Immaterium, the Yu'Vath were able to make a large spanning empire among the stars where centuries of decadence were achieved upon the suffering of billions. Since these royals are nowhere to be found, why not harvest some of their hard work for your own? These unique warp drives, when installed, will not only make any warp travel much faster than normal but will also make said jumps undetectable to sensors or Navigators keeping an eye out. Imagine the torment that you could bring upon your foes with such devices.

GRAVITY SAILS: Of course, the Yu'vath were more than just connoisseurs of torture and decadence that would make a Slaaneshi blush. They were graceful and elegant in their own way, utilizing their environment as needed. These sails are one such example, as ships installed with them will move with disturbing agility and grace that one would never expect from a vessel of their size. Even better, using these sails will make any sun-light propulsion undetected on sensory equipment. With sails such as this, it's easy to see how the xenos of old took to hoisting the black flag and taking prisoners for their own gain.

VOID-SKEIN RUPTURE CANNONS: When you feel the tried and true need to let your inner sadist out and be utterly cruel to anyone who would dare raise a hand against you, look no further than the machinations of the Yu'vath. After all, it's only minds such as theirs that would devise a way to bring the terror of the Immaterium into realspace. Take these macrocannons for instance, machines of lovingly crafted bone that fire their ammunition through the Warp itself to prevent being intercepted or evaded, said munitions appearing in realspace just before striking their unfortunate target. Just imagine how horrified your victims will be upon finding out you possess such weaponry.

SKULL CROWNS: So many dead Korvikemo. There was no chance of them joining you, due to their differing loyalties and hatred of anything related to the Yu'vath, but it almost feels like a shame that you couldn't use them for your own ends... or could you? They may not serve you in life, but they'll serve you in death. It will take some fiddling and carving, but you could make a large supply of crowns crafted from the bones and skulls of the Korvikemo with magnificent dark crystals on the edges. Wearing these wondrous, blasphemous crowns would make it significantly easier to use psychic powers while reducing how much energy you needed, and those you assaulted would be wrought with hallucinations of angelic figures beckoning them to join you in beautiful depravity, working off of the words you speak. Join, or suffer eternal damnation and torment as food for your followers.

FRUIT OF ROYALTY: Yu'vath biotechnology could be considered arcane at its most understood, for they had been able to engineer their slaves for innumerable tasks when their empire was at its height. So why shouldn't you enjoy their finest cuisine like the royalty of old once did? These crystalline trees feed on whatever psychic energy and flesh you deign to provide, and feeding it regularly will see orbs of flesh 'bloom' every hundred years. It is a long wait, but for one who has eternity it should be of no concern. Eating it strengthens the body and soul of those who consume it, seeing them permanently made greater for it. Interestingly, feeding the trees nonhumans would increase the chances of twisting and changing the consumer into a hybrid of themselves and the species given to the tree, with a heavy chance of their knowledge and instincts flowing through you. Let flesh be your canvas, oh king.

SHIELDS OF THE DEAD: The Korvikemo had annoyingly destroyed a majority of their prized possessions once it became clear you were going to enter and destroy the base, and so much of their technology was lost. Fortunately, not all of it, and there was plenty of material for repairs. Shields of ivory and crystal imbued with technology raided from the fortress, similar in design to knightly shields of old as kinetic weapon fire even up to bolter rounds bounce off and energy projectiles get absorbed to power machines on your person. If you prefer a more offensive route, it can use the excess energy to launch a large wave of force that instills the fear of death in victims.

ROYAL ARMOR: While you are naturally not one of the original Yu'vath royalty, you are by all accounts their inheritors. As such, what has protected them for some time will protect you, should you deign to take these constructed armors of bone and crystal that would fit upon you like a second skin. Not only does it provide protection that would be on par with Terminator armor along with its refractor fields that wail with the moans of the damned, but it also significantly augments the wearer's physical and psionic abilities to a degree that would give an Inquisitor pause. As a final gift, the optics of the armor will allow the wearer to see the souls others along with local warp currents, all while whispering ideas in your mind of how to exploit this.

THE WHISPERER: Legend tells of a horrific vessel of xenos origin once found in the aftermath of the Angevin Crusade, by an unknown Rogue Trader upon a forgotten battlefield. Understanding the potential profit in what he had found, he hid it in a gas giant in the newly found Svard System for his heir to find later, an event that never occurred. In time, the people of the system began to suffer from dreams brought on by a strange Whisperer. These dreams soon turned into maddening guidance, and it continues to guide thralls of menials into collecting fuel and materials to free itself one day.

Imagine the terror of the Imperium should they ever find out the Yu'vath had more than one Whisperer. Worse, that the constructs of the city had been constructing one for the eventual destruction of the Korvikemo. Without that thorn in their side, there's no reason for you not to take it.

A terrifying black sphere that's three kilometers in length with a crystalline structure that orbits six kilometers around it, the *Whisperer* is a force that can consume entire ships if given the chance. Arcs of dark energy can be hurled out like torrents against its foes, and it is capable of movement that many would feel is not natural or even possible for this world. Yet that is not its worst ability, for it can slowly subvert a planet's population via dreams over time and convert them to its will. They are not mere shamblers, but retain their personality and skills while working together as a truly united team under the *Whisperer's* terrifyingly advanced guidance. Sleep well, scion of dreams.



ONE FINAL EFFORT (LOYALIST ONLY)

You read the logs again, in the vain hope that someone was pulling the equivalent of a long-term prank on anyone who decided to come by here. But they didn't change, and you were left with the reality of it all.

There was a mass congregation of Yu'vath technology that made it very likely to be a point where their royals would be, attempting to pierce and defile everything that ancient Man had left behind. This was more than a mere offense. It was blasphemy on every level, and you would not see such foul machinations of the Warp remove a guiding light you could bring back to aid innocent lives.

Searching the databanks of this station would reveal unique coordinates for teleporting, and upon utilizing it you would find yourself in an arboretum surrounded by unique flora and a number of grey and black Korvikemo wearing regal robes waiting for you. Lack of weapons and passive stances made it rather clear that they weren't going to fight you, even as you felt a serene voice in your mind.

“We greet you, children of Mankind. We are the Caretakers of Eons, and long have we maintained this shelter along with its Master from the machinations of the Dark Ones. Should you truly be here to aid us in this hour, we beseech you to follow us to the Master.”

Well. That actually solves a lot of trouble for them to just roll out the red carpet for you like that.

Following them around would show similar architecture to the orbiting station, with white surfaces and blue lines glowing all around. Numerous members of the Korvikemo would no doubt stare in awe that one of their creators had returned, surely to guide them out of danger and into a time of peace. There's no way you'd break their poor hearts on that, right?

Right?

Nonetheless they would eventually lead you to a large and rather thick door. Judging by all the symbols on it, something really important was behind here. Trusting of them to lead you to this place, but it was clear they were waiting for you to enter and interact with whoever it was behind the doors.

“The Master is beyond this doorway. He is eager to greet you at long last.”

Opening the doorway would reveal a peculiar sight. It was much larger inside than the building outside had given the impression of, and one could swear those were clouds above. The thrumming in the background felt quite comfortable, with a soothing and calming presence no matter where you were in this massive room. Grey platforms would manifest for you to walk closer to a set of stairs leading up to a unique core shaped like a throne.

Soon enough the throne spoke.

“YOUR PRESENCE HAS BEEN CATALOGUED. I AM OI-944, THE WARDEN OF EONS. I AM A MONUMENT TO THE POWER OF MAN, WHEN IT WAS ONCE THE UNDISPUTED MASTER OF ALL THEY HAD SEEN. I MAY HAVE FAILED TO SAFEGUARD THEM WHEN MY BRETHREN WERE USURPED AND ROSE UP, BUT I HAVE NOT FAILED MY CHARGE.”

Multiple holographic screens popped up when it spoke, displaying many interesting numbers of inventory and research data. Data of choral manipulation, of some of the weapons they possessed. Interestingly, data about the growing psionic presence in Mankind as well. Autopsies of the Aeldari were compared to some human corpses with quite a bit of extrapolated data, and seems that was used in the creation of the Korvikemo.

Things were going swimmingly until a massive crystalline structure fell on a nearby planet from a rift in the Immaterium, and before the artificial construct knew what was going on various warp-entities had begun slaughtering the staff. But you knew this; the satellites above painted the same picture.

But OI-944 would not see the work of his masters removed. Not now, not ever. He had been biding his time, waiting for one to finally arrive and prove themselves above the taint and corruption the enemy whispered into any who would hear. Waiting for one who would purge them and secure this site so it may finally work towards trying to help Mankind restore itself. In short, waiting for you. But he would not give the reigns over willingly without a test.

There were two ways one could go about this. The first would be to simply sit in the throne and allow OI-944 to probe your mind. It would sting initially from him trying to plug into the base of your skull if you didn't have any cybernetics that allowed for such things, and upon connecting he would do a mixture of sifting through your memories and assailing your mind with memories of the Korvikemo's defense against the Yu'vath horde. Millennia of memories all at once, trying to see if you would break or if you would have the willpower to push through. One can hope you would have the strength.

If you prefer a more upfront form of testing, OI-944 would instigate a trial by combat. After all, if you could best his defenses then you could surely lead the Korvikemo in an assault. Should you choose to fight instead, prepare for a world of hurt. Hordes of drones similar to the ones on the station, turrets popping up with all manners of exotic and destructive weaponry, and finding any destruction was being reversed slowly as you tore through them. The only objective here would be to survive the progression of enemies and attempts to assault you. Survive until OI-944 deems you have done enough.

Regardless of which path you took, the outcome would be the same should you pass: OI-944 would declare you to be the leader of the counter-attack upon the Yu'vath city to purge it once and for all. The Korvikemo would stand with you.

But you would not be sent off alone. Oh no. OI-944 would ask you accompany the Korvikemo to a vehicle bay where your tool of destruction awaited its new master.

At first glance it looked like a Stormblade super heavy tank, which was joyful enough because those things had a reputation of being able to mow down hordes of Astartes, Tyranids, or even tanks thanks to its Titan-scale Plasma Blastgun. The more you looked at it however, the more you'd realize it was so much more than that. Ancient archaeotech meant the gun could actually swivel around like a normal tank, and instead of heavy bolters the secondary armaments were augmented heavy plasma cannons along with potent lascannons. Tougher armor complimented the missile launchers to ensure this thing would devastate all but the toughest of Yu'vath constructs.

The Korvikemo insisted that they would back you up and reinforce any position you took, along with aiding you on the front lines. It was time to move, your potent and mighty tank roaring forward with their own tanks following you into the outskirts. That was where you would find the warp gates that connected this planet with the planet of the Yu'vath constructs. You would be told that it had been some time since they attempted an offensive so it was possible that they would not expect an invasion force.

The sight that greeted you upon exiting the warp gate was almost beautiful, were you not hit with the wretched sensation of corruption immediately.



Structures of dark crystal and bone that would have been beautiful if not an affront to every sense possessed, all constructed in a mockery of a civilized city. Even from outside you could see countless skulls and flayed skins decorating the streets, and any with psionic senses would hear the screams of tortured souls that created the glow in the sky. For all intents and purposes, it was a true Hell that had taken root in the material plane.

Suffer none of the unclean to live. Let them send their Bone Wardens and Shard Spiders and dark constructs to greet you and attempt to destroy you, for you will grind them into dust.

Even with these forces and your impressive arsenal it will not be an easy fight. The environment itself will attempt to rise up and strike at you thanks to the Dark Lament buried within the ground, and countless Shard Spiders will do their best to swarm tanks in their attempts to break inside and slaughter the occupants within. Towers will strike out, sending crackling arcs of dark energy to eradicate physical matter in order to harvest it for its own gain. Then there are the Bone Wardens, armed with their Warp-shard crowns to molecularly tear apart physical matter around it to create more corpses for it to inhabit. All of these and more will continually assail you, with defenses getting tougher as you breached the city walls and tried to proceed deeper.

Of course, should you have vessels that could rain down ordnance it would relieve a great deal of pressure on your end. As limitless as the Yu'vath energy supply seems, it can only use so much at once. A fault that you could punish them mercilessly over.

Actually being inside the city would feel worse on your senses. Even non-psykers could hear the screams of the damned and the cries of countless as they beg for an end to their eternal torment, your presence that tiniest glimmer of hope they've been waiting for. Psykers on the other hand could see these souls, lashed in chains and continually devoured by dread horrors separated from you only by a concerningly thin layer of reality. Species of all kinds would gnash and wail, all while ceaseless varieties of punishments were delivered.

For a moment you could swear there were human children and babies crying as they burned atop a row of iron spikes. One of the Korvikemo would simply nod to you; they had seen it too. The glimmer of hatred and determination in their eye would no doubt mirror yours. No matter how many of them fell in the attempt, they would see this place burn.

The constructs would get larger and more complex as you tried to make progress towards the city's temple-like structure at the center, a sure-fire way to know you were getting to what they deemed to be important. Important things mean breakable things, and breaking it would likely go a long way to ruining the Yu'vath's plans here. All the more reason to keep the plasma bolts flying and the destruction of everything you come across apace.

Upon reaching the steps of the temple, the Korvikemo would let you know they were notably suffering health issues and hearing subversive whispers within their very souls the closer they got to the temple itself. They thought barreling through it would keep the worst at bay, but now they're certain they can't go any further without endangering themselves... or you. But they could do their most damned to ensure you would not be interrupted as you eliminated the source. The faster the better, but with the number of guns and psionic power they had there? The constructs would have to work rather hard.

Best not to lollygag regardless. Out of the tank and up the stairs of skulls, and into the stone arboretum to finish this.

Inside would be a monument of blasphemy and disgust that only the most insane would dare to call wonderful. Tapestries of daemonskin, horrific trees of crystal growing mounds of flesh, and pools of blood with stone pillars and gaping eyes. Everything about this reeked of the Warp.

This would be the time that your senses were assaulted, and the battle for your soul would begin in earnest as the Yu'vath on the other side of their private rift did their best to ruin you. This battle would be partly fought in realspace as foul warp-sorceries were unleashed and horrific Chaos Spawn would pour out of the blood pools yearning to add yours to the foul containers, all at the behest of so-called royals. Rotting corpses would continue to crawl out of the pools as well, seeking to fulfill their duties as cannon fodder and trying to distract you enough for dread influences to take hold upon your mind.

Should they manage to worm their way into your consciousness is when the other part of the battle would begin in earnest. Your phobias and nightmares would be brought up in the attempt to lay you low, no matter how deeply you've hidden them from others or yourself. Caricatures and constructs roaming the mental labyrinth that was your mind as they sought to whittle down your defenses, hoping to corrupt you for the purposes of their master much like a chef would prepare a meal for their guest. No fear would be too vile, no terror too small. Your suffering and wailing would only make it more delectable for them.

But this was a fool's gamble to try and delay the inevitable. None would stand in the way of righteousness, of Mankind's indomitable purity in the face of sub-humans and would-be idols thirsting for what they could never have.

You already know how to solve this. You knew it from the beginning.

Tear it all down. Purge every trace.

Nothing could survive, from the smallest pool to the largest tapestry to the densest pillar. The more you destroyed, the more desperate your assailants would become. Let it be you who feasts on terror and fear this day as they realize how their actions had always been in vain.

Once you had truly destroyed enough of the arboretum, the city itself would begin to shake quite violently as buildings collapsed and soul containers ruptured. The whole place was beginning to tear itself apart without the presence of the Immaterium's energies keeping it together, and judging by the way the Korvikemo's tanks were high-tailing it out of there you might want to do the same. Some wayward constructs would no doubt try to halt you and have you buried with them, but that's when you engage standard hit-and-run tactics. Preferably by hitting them while running.

Not a single one of your allies would object to you engaging orbital bombardment of the planet once you used the warpgates to get back to the fortress, either. It's just good practice to ensure there was nothing left.

The destruction of a Yu'vath city would be normally be reward enough, knowing that you had freed all the trapped souls within and eliminated a foothold of Chaos from being able to plunge its defiled grip into Mankind's bosom. For many, the knowledge that the galaxy was a purer place was enough. But OI-944 insisted on delivering at least some parting gifts for you.

To the victor goes the spoils.

Possible Rewards:

PYLONS: The research here would undoubtedly have any Mechanicus in your retinue at risk of going unconscious with how much joy they were experiencing from this trove of technology. Research that you could use to aid you in laying tyrants low. These white pylons are one such instance, devices that when planted can 'smooth' out reality and make the creation of Warp rifts much harder as well as shut any nearby rifts down. Very useful if you plan to take on any summoners. This reward does not count towards your limit.

GENE STUDIES: The creation of the Korvikemo are proof enough that OI-944 has not been sitting idly on his processor while the rest of the galaxy went to Hell in an escort craft. No, he has graduated from the study of the Navigator gene and psionics in general, and he would insist that you take a copy of his research to utilize for yourself. The creation of Navigators, the tinkering of species to introduce psionic powers over time, and possibly other uses are available to you now. This reward does not count towards your limit.

STORMBLADE: This super-heavy tank served you well in the assault against the blasphemous Yu'vath, so it stands to reason that you would want to take this beast of a machine for further use as you traveled the galaxy. With a plasma battery able to fell Titans and enough firepower to mow down hordes of potent enemies while still trucking along, this machine is proof that Mankind was once powerful and quite possibly could be once more. This reward does not count towards your limit.

OI-944: Of course, there's something else to consider. Something that the Emperor Himself would declare to be utterly heretical, but could no doubt benefit the Imperium in the long run... or yourself. By taking the time to remove his cores using his instructions and installing them into the cogitators of your vessels, OI-944 could not only network your vessels but also begin to augment and improve much of their working systems. As a benefit, OI-944 will also provide a great deal of tactical analysis and improve the ability of the crew to a disturbing degree. Perhaps A.I. such as him are why it was sometimes called the Golden Age of Technology.

KORVIKEMO: Even if they are technically Xenos despite being vat-grown by ancient technology of Man, the Korvikemo were both exceptionally valuable and exceptionally loyal when aiding you in the assault. Such a combination is hard to come by in this galaxy, and it would be a terrible shame if you did not capitalize on it. The variant Xenos would graciously accept, thirty thousand strong while taking some of their cloning tanks to replenish or bolster their numbers as needed. They may be Xenos, but they will fight to their dying breath for Mankind's sake.

ENERGY SHIELD: The Dark Age of Technology brought about untold wonders during the expansion of Mankind's claim on the galaxy, with tales of machines that almost feel like they were out of a child's stories of magic. Well it's time you start believing in those tales, because with these ship components you'll quickly find yourself a part of one. Installing them in your vessels will find a much more potent Void Shield that can not only take far more punishment than normal, but also recharges faster to ensure the ship remained protected. The safety of those who fly the Void is to be taken very seriously.

VOIDCLAW CANNON: It's almost impossible to believe when you see it. You've heard about it sometimes being used back in the old days, among whispered rumors and frayed madmen who went too far into the galactic fringe. But here was a true example of Mankind's prior power, a grim reminder of how far they had fallen. Taking the place a Nova Cannon would normally rest, it fires a beam of crushing energy to open a gravitic anomaly the size of a small pearl. In layman's terms, these weapons fires temporary black holes to crush enemy vessels or crack them open like a walnut. Be careful where you aim them.

NAVIGATOR'S ORB: The Immaterium was, and still is, an exceptionally dangerous place for Mankind to roam. Even with the Navigator gene that allowed some humans to read the currents and navigate their way through the strange dimension there could be problems if the jump was handled incorrectly. Fortunately, they had technology for that and now so do you. By installing this strange archaeotech in the sensory arrays your vessels will find Warp travel much faster due to finding currents they never could sense before, with an added bonus of letting other vessels travel in their Warp wake to follow and likewise make similar time. Is it any wonder Mankind expanded as quickly as it did?

PSI-TECH: The rapid emergence of psykers was a contributing factor to the Age of Strife, and the downfall of Mankind before the Emperor took hold to reshape its destiny. It is little wonder then, that OI-944 would have contributed a significant amount of time to studying the psyker phenomenon and created unique technology that could interface or even control it to prevent such an event from happening again. Enter this array of cybernetic technology that can not only replace limbs and augment the user significantly but also interfaces with the unique powers psykers possess. This allows for a focusing and channeling of psionic energies that could allow users to wield their powers in ways never thought possible.

GRAVITIC WEAPONRY: Curiously, there is a difference between Grav-weaponry and Graviton weapons. The former attempts to use the mass of the enemy against them by selectively altering gravity while the latter works by using the functions of a tractor beam to assault enemies. The Dark Age is a different story altogether, as what you have here are a large supply of gravitic weapons capable of fulfilling the functions of both depending on the settings one uses. Any troops supplied with these will be an untold terror on the field, to be certain.

SPIRIT WINE: Funnily enough, OI-944 did more than just research the psionic phenomenon and ways to weaponize it. In his millennia of studies, he found that psykers who are not under undue stress performed far more easily and had a greater chance of possessing a strong enough will to fend off attempts of daemonic possession. Thus he got to work on bio-engineering a unique strand of grapes that he will share the secrets of producing and developing into wine. The benefits? Any psyker who consumes the wine will find themselves soothed along with their stressors practically fading away into a pleasant trance. A pleasant side effect that had been found was the rapid recharging of their energies to boot. It is a grey Korvikemo's delicacy and any psyker who imbibes will find themselves agreeing in short order.

ARMOR OF THE MARINER: It is a little-known fact that what the Imperium of Mankind knows as Terminator armor was in fact civilian-grade armor used for hazmat duties and other such tasks, which tends to strike home at how potent the technology of the Dark Age was at its zenith. OI-944 may not have any combat-grade armor, but he does have specialized void suits that have his own personal touch that may interest you. These Void suits have all the durability and potency of Terminator armor, while augmenting the physical abilities of the user to ensure they have sufficient strength when doing hard labor or other stressful tasks. Due to OI-944's modifications, the suit also carries unique augur arrays and crystalline hoods that not only lets the user see Immaterium currents to determine tactical use of psionics but also to let them use said abilities with much less stress. Any troops equipped with these outfits will no doubt be a force to be reckoned with.

THE OVERDUE REDEMPTION: The power of the Dark Age is something every Mechanicus member both dreads and desires, for it was responsible for both Mankind's first ascension to the stars and its downfall. It is why archaeotech is seen with such awe, and any who wield it are seen in a similar light. An intact ship would only magnify this feeling, as a mystical reverence from your allies and absolute terror in your enemies.

A shame then, for Chaos will have to deal with a bona fide chapter of the past to bring closure to their future stories.

A five kilometer warship possessing a glistening sheen that feels almost alien, this vessel is able to move through the void and the warp much like a fish would swim through water while possessing the durability of a vessel thrice its size. As if its potent lancer weaponry and psy-cannons capable of shearing through bulkheads like paper weren't troubling enough, it also possesses its own manufactorum that allows it to consume other vessels in order to repair itself by using the onboard A.I.'s guidance. Such a vessel will no doubt inspire ghost stories for centuries to come.



TRIUMPHANT RETURN

The final trip out. Whether you did it all in one go or risked multiple jumps in order to get the hulls of vessels out of the Zerzuran Chasm, this jump back to Footfall would be your last. Sensors would be screaming, Tech-Priests praying intensely for the safety of the ship and crewmen would no doubt have their thoughts swimming with all the loot you had found. Thoughts would be even more conflicted or curious should you have acquired any new soldiers or allies during your romp through the region, who would no doubt have questions of their own that they would make throughout the journey. But you had to make it back first.

Coordinates locked. Gellar field activated. Warp Drive on.

The warp storms were getting closer, causing the stars to disappear from sight as the baleful light approached. One could easily get the impression of a shark charging towards its prey. Were you the sort to have any member of the Ecclesiarchy on board, they would be most certainly be chanting as loud and as hard as they could to mask their own fear.

Just as one could almost swear the foul energies were licking your ship, you enter the Warp and are on your way back to Footfall. Relief all around as the field holds true and you have a breather before your ship arrives with the cargo full of minerals and other such things to display your prowess. No doubt you have quite a few stories to deliver as well, things that do well in seedy bars and luxurious galas alike. Maybe you could find a way to make some of the noblemen and Rogue Traders envious of what you've accomplished? You had the time after all, warp travel isn't known for being the fastest of faster-than-light travel. Better than nothing, though.

However, during transit the Navigators (or whatever one uses to traverse through the Warp) would pick up a terrifying reading, and it takes a good hour before you get a response: The Astronomican has gone dark, and they had to commit the distance and destination to memory before the Warp became too murky to travel through normally.

That's concerning on so many levels it would take the rest of the trip to explain why. Very few things could cause the light to go dark, and depending on which side you were on it was either really *bad* or was the mother of all opportunity provided you could climb over the thousands of warbands no doubt pillaging at this very moment.

It would be interesting to see how Footfall was maintaining itself if the Astronomican had gone out. It would be more interesting to see if anyone had a good reasoning for the cause.

When your vessel finally exited the Immaterium and had Footfall in sight, it was a pleasant surprise to see it was mostly intact. A few ruined ships here and there, but that didn't look *too* out of the ordinary for a den of scum and villainy such as this. There would be requirements to send ship ID and a good explanation for what the hell you were doing before you got back, but fortunately the authorities would accept the identification... whether it was real or your false code was that convincing.

In the time it took to find a sufficient docking tower for your purposes and arrange contacts for finding repair crews for hulls or crewmen for your new vessels, answers would reveal themselves as to what happened: Abaddon the Despoiler had instigated his 13th Black Crusade, and in the process had obliterated Cadia. The Eye of Terror had expanded and sliced the galaxy clean in half, causing the Astronomican's light to be blocked. Chaos and panic had begun to spread, but Footfall remained relatively stable due to all the Rogue Trader houses using their personal troops to put down any attempts at rioting or rebelling. Shows what happens when you fuck with a rich man in his backyard.

It would take a fair amount of time to get organized. You had weapons to distribute, potential troops to train, ships to restore or upgrade, and inventory to keep track of. Depending on the amount of ships you possessed, it would take weeks to months to get it all up and going. This is of course, assuming you didn't have the means to hasten the timetable to some extent.

At some point during this downtime a small contingent of Tech-Priests would approach the spire you were docked at, and their iconography would depend on your allegiance. But they would insist they were not here to study or claim any facet of the technology you brought back even if they desperately wished they could. No, this is because of an arrangement they said was made with you, which is funny because you don't remember these guys.

It would become clear when they handed over the dataslate and asked you to put down options for their review and reforging of your armor. Even if there was a massive total there that had been paid up front, it flickered for just a moment.

[You Now Have 1000AP To Spend]

It was time to craft your protection of choice, for nobody should go into battle being improperly dressed. Your Companions will also have this budget for the purposes of crafting and customizing their own personalized armor to stride into battle with you.

The Tech-Priests will also not mind if you decided to take them with you as followers after the job.

POWER ARMOR CUSTOMIZATION

-Import Armor [Free/50AP]: The Tech-Priests are more than willing to look over the armor you have decided upon for your personal use, and will be happy to use it as the basis for any further modifications their science can imbue upon it. Any armor that was not powered armor to start would be upgraded into powered armor free of charge, as such a thing is somewhat common in the galaxy. Alas, a small surcharge will be required for any armor that was not from this galaxy, and such a bit too strange to work on without some kind of incentive. They would relish the challenge upon compensation, however. This option may only be done once per person.

-Armor Combination [50AP]: This one would be a bit rougher of a task. In asking them this, you've decided to take a second armor and merge them together in some fashion to combine all their benefits while trying to minimize their downsides. It would take a bit more time, but good things come to those who wait after all. You may only do this option once.

-STC Print [Free]: The dataslate you were given has a peculiar file on it when you accessed it, and further plumbing would find a full blueprint you could use to repair or replicate your armor even after the modifications the Tech-Priests are performing. Isn't that nice? It is. You're welcome.

-Aesthetical Décor [50AP]: Though many who have been imbued with the knowledge of the Omnissiah value efficiency over needless actions or appearance, there is an understanding that the right appearance can have an effect on battlefield morale and the confidence of others. That in of itself is efficient, and so to help you fight on more than one front they will do their best to color and engrave your armor while providing clothing such as robes or scarves as needed. They won't judge your taste. Mostly.

-Thickness Adjustment [50AP]: Sometimes an armor can be too bulky and you need to be more flexible. That or it could be too thin, and you want to feel like a tank striding down the battlefield in search of helpless victims to purge. Whatever you seek, the Tech-Priests have you covered and will be glad to lighten or bulk up your armor as you see fit. Just take care not to make it too small or too large, for armor will not help you beyond a certain point.

-Servo-Manipulators [50AP]: As fun as it can be to purge and destroy, there's a time when you must do something other than destruction. Those weapons don't forge themselves, and those monuments don't appear out of thin air. No, someone made them, and most times the armor used in this galaxy does not contribute to fine motor movements. Enter these modifications, allowing you to use various tools and do fine motor functions via tiny servo-manipulators that respond to your thoughts so you can utilize anything you could use out of your armor while wearing said armor. In short, it grants you the hand dexterity you had before putting on the armor itself. Surprise someone by knitting while in power armor!

-Material Donation [50AP/100AP]: There are other factors to consider when it comes to the forging and reconstructing of your armor, such as what materials to use. Sure, you could use the same old stuff, but why not take advantage of the moment and add a little something new to the mix? By utilizing some material that you might have picked up in the Zerzuran Chasm or elsewhere in the galaxy, you can spend 50AP to have it incorporated into your armor in some fashion to use its benefits to serve your needs and make your armor more dangerous than before. If you desired to use a material you have that was not of this galaxy, it would cost you 100AP instead. Nothing's stopping you from taking this option multiple times, but do make sure you know what you're doing.

-Device Donation [50AP/100AP]: You might have a particular tool that you're fond of, or picked something up during your foray that you just can't help but want to incorporate. How fortunate then that these Tech-Priests will accommodate for the right price, installing any tools or technology from this galaxy you wish to see in your armor. For any tools or devices that originate outside of this galaxy, the price goes up to 100AP. You can choose to pick this option multiple times, so long as they'll all fit in the armor at the end of the day.

-Mechadendrite Attachments [50AP/100AP][Free: 'Servo-Harness']: The power of a Techmarine is nothing to scoff at, for their Mechadendrites can repair or fix things in such a flurry that it almost feels like the user had some form of technopathy. Nothing wrong with having your armor modified to let your mechadendrites stick out and continue their work as normal, regardless of which ones you have acquired over time. If you do not have Mechadendrites, then they will be happy to install two of your choice and install them on your armor for a surcharge.

-Weapon Stabilizers [100AP]: Some weapons have a hell of a kick when you fire them. That's not anything against you, that's just a fact of life when you need a weapon big enough to crack a Swarmlord or have to deal with Necrons deciding you were on the menu. But in times like that, recoil is something you shouldn't have to deal with. That's where these modifications come in, with servo-stabilizers and bracing technology that will even remove the need to brace when firing heavy weapons. Focus on the enemy, not on yourself.

-Charging Braces [100AP]: When using melee combat and trying to get into the fray, it can be very annoying to get parried or blocked away like a bull in the arena. It's just embarrassing, and more importantly it opens you up to enemy fire as you try to get yourself situated. In war, that could mean death. Enter this modification, with either warp-treated spikes on the armor or unique grav-plates that make it extremely difficult to parry or block your attempts to charge your opponent. See the fear in your enemies' eyes before you tear them apart.

-Physical Shield [100AP/200AP/300AP] [First Level Free: 'Boarding Shield']: Your armor can be fairly defensible as-is, but there's nothing wrong with getting some additional protection to ensure your armor doesn't take more punishment than absolutely necessary. Enter the construction of this shield (or imported from one of your own to be modified), forged from plasteel and ceramite to ensure it can take significant damage while being sized to fit you. If you happened to use 'Material Donation' the armor can use those materials as well. Yet the Tech-Priests do let you know for 200AP in total, you can have it treated to make it a Mirror Shield, which will absorb and reflect energy weapons that strike it. For an overall 300AP, Stygies VIII Tech-Priests will provide their own unique technologies that will allow it to fend off blows from Power Weapons and even deflect ranged figure onto nearby enemies due to its phased energy force barriers. Stygies VIII will denounce all claims that this final upgrade was actually a Necron Dispersion Shield, for it is in fact Imperial Sanctioned technology. Because they said so.

-Weapon Points [100AP]: As the Tech-Priests get to work on changing and augmenting your armor they'll sometimes take a good look at the weapons you have on your person. Then they'll mention that if you desired, you could give them your weapons to install as components of the armor itself for ease of use and to make sure it was harder to disarm you. This would mean installing ranged weapons on either your shoulder or somewhere on your wrist with ammunition being fed to it somehow, or installing a bladed weapon on your arm to retract and extend as needed for cutting someone apart. You could have both if you wanted! Become the weapon you always wanted to be.

-Necron Hyperphase Sword [+200AP]: Among the retinue of Tech-Priests are some who are from the Stygies VIII Forge World, who insist that they have some unique technology fresh off the manufacturing line like this wrist-mounted sword that vibrates across dimensional states to slice through armor and flesh. As a far more advanced Power Weapon, it would serve you quite well. Just ignore any claims of its origins, for the priests assure you it's from the Forge World and not from any tombs.

-Tau Pulse Rifle [+200AP]: Among the Stygies VIII Tech-priests were additional weapons that they could offer you, provided you had the desire to try out their new Imperial Sanctioned energy weapon that was installed as a shoulder weapon. Initially appearing to be a plasma weapon, upon further scrutiny it worked more like a miniature mass accelerator by turning small slugs into plasma to launch. The result is slower firing rates compared to Bolters, but much greater damage as well as range. The Tech-Priests assure you that any similarity to Tau weaponry is all in your head.

-Aeldari Death Spinner [+200AP]: There are times when weapons must not only cause mayhem in close quarters as well as longer ranges, but also deliver a crippling morale loss among the enemy when they see what has become of their friends. Such niche subjects are what Stygies VIII Tech-Priests seek to fill, and not because the weapon was like that when they found it because that implies they didn't create it. This wrist-mounted weapon works by firing psycho-active liquid into the air, which solidifies into mesh only a molecule thick that gets launched at high speeds and will even tear through power armor to reduce the enemy into a pile of jelly. The bone-like structure is just how the weapon works, and for no other reason.

-Life Support [100AP/200AP] [Discount: Astartes Armor]: Powered Armor, when done right, does more than just provides additional defenses and strength to destroy your enemies regardless of the conditions of battle. The armor is also supposed to sustain the user, ensure their wounds are tended to and do its best to tend to their other needs so they can focus on the combat and ending the lives of others. This support will do just that, the first level providing respiratory filters and a suite of life support functions such as combat stims, painkillers and anti-venoms while containing a high-energy liquid food store. But you can go further, with the second level containing unique nanotechnologies that repair the wounds of the wearer and internal air supplies that keep the user alive in any hostile environment for far longer than normal. The first level is free for anyone who brings in Astartes armor for modification, with the second level at a discount (50CP) thanks to the underlying technologies already being present.

-Autosenses [100AP/200AP] [Discount: Astartes Armor]: When you've turned your powered armor into a walking platform of destruction and death, it only makes sense that you should install something to help you find enemies to deliver said destruction and death upon. Enter the autosenses that help keep the user aware and alert to reduce the chances of being surprised as much as possible. The first level will provide thought-activated comm-augers and audio filters, along with range finders, tactical displays, an Auspex-scanner, and other nifty things to keep you alert. The second level would provide significant upgrades to the Auspex to scan for things such as daemonic taint or detailed medical knowledge of a subject while giving far greater information and options from the sensors of the suit. The first level is free for anyone who brings in Astartes armor for modification, with the second level at a discount (50CP) thanks to the underlying technologies already being present.

-Acoustic Amplifiers [100AP]: Whether you need to bark your orders across the field of battle or because you're offended at the idea of an area being quiet, these modifications shall ensure things shall get *LOUD* now. Various vox-speakers are installed onto the armor along with ports and internal wiring to sync up with your internal networks, radio signals, or even any machine you interface with the suit to amplify certain sounds to such a degree one could hear it across an entire city at maximum volume. Become loud, and let them know you are here.

-Aeldari Flip-Belt [100AP]: When you need to be super flexible, the first thing that comes to mind is most definitely not powered armor. Indeed, powered armor tends to be heavy and prevents one from impressive feats of agility. Have no fear, for the Stygies VIII Tech-Priests have researched this problem and delivered a genuine Stygies VIII patterned anti-gravity device to incorporate into the suit, which is definitely from Stygies VIII. The device is so light that the user will find their natural agility amplified and allow them to hop across the field and over all but the most towering of obstacles with such ease that it could be seen as supernatural. Definitely not the agility of the Eldar, that's all you.

-Tau Fio'Tak Principles [100AP]: A common problem with powered armor is that it is heavy. It is very heavy and without the servos and electrical mesh inside that helps aid the movement of the wearer it might as well be a metal coffin. Have no fear, for Stygies VIII has developed an ingenious solution via nano-crystalline metal alloys. Not only will this make your armor more resistant to corrossions, but will also make the armor significantly lighter to improve your speed and movement. Stygies VIII Tech-Priests are not responsible for the Tau making baseless accusations like you stealing their metallurgy secrets, because that is a fabrication.

-Cursed/Blessed Runes [200AP]: The Tech-Priests of Footfall can tell what kind of customer they're working with. An efficient necessity, for in a place where powerful rulers can have someone shot just for making a coat the wrong color, first impressions can make or break a career. Thus, your loyalty to the Emperor of Mankind or the Gods of Chaos allows you access to unique runes that can be engraved upon your armor to give special benefits. For Loyalists, this allows the armor give off a brilliant golden light to ward off corruption and improve the willpower and faith of your allies. For Chaos, this means giving off a baleful light that spreads corruption and induces gnawing whispers that erode the sanity of those whose faith is in opposition to yours. Regardless of which one, it also reduces the aiming and melee prowess of enemies who fight you. The light can be toggled as desired.

-Immaterium-Treated Armor [200AP]: There are some abilities that many in the Imperium would consider to be unnatural. Profane, even. Yet even the Imperium must recognize that some can find their bodies altered significantly through sanctioned ways like gene-editing or unique bionics. Certainly not due to possible shapeshifting like someone of Chaos would. Not at all. Regardless, this experimental treatment of an armor is applied for such entities to ensure that it will always fit the wearer no matter what size or shape they were in. Very useful if you see such changes happening in the future.

-Hexagrammatic Wards [200AP]: The power of the Immaterium is potent indeed, capable of erasing enemies much like a farmer would harvest wheat. But that power is like an open flame, and it knows no master save whoever is using it at that exact moment. Veterans would tell you that even then, there is no guarantee. This is the reason one protects themselves, and the Tech-Priests will provide sufficient wards within your armor as needed should you desire such protection. The wards are potent indeed, not only granting significant resistance against psionic attacks against your person but will make your armor protect against psionic strikes twice as effectively as it would have before. When the fire of the gods is used, it is not you who will be burned by it.

-Psionic Boosters [200AP]: And yet, that fire could be more than just that. You might be the one who carries the embers, but the power of science is enough that one could turn it into an inferno. Controlling it is another matter, but the additional power is nothing to scoff at. The Tech-Priests, nervous as they are with such things, will nonetheless acquiesce and install these internal crystalline machines within your armor to aid in channeling and augmenting your psionic prowess to a noticeable level than you are used to. Hopefully you will not be consumed by your own power, for it would be a shame after seeing how much stronger your psionics are with this upgrade.

-Tau Drone Controller [200AP]: When it comes to Servitors, one must require proper control. If not, it is like using a tool incorrectly. You will provide that control, thanks to Stygies VIII and their control unit installed into your armor. Ignore that the machine spirit of your armor starts communicating strangely, that's just the interfacing protocols ensuring that it is working. Once that's done, you'll have control over the four disc-shaped drones that comes with the controller unit that are absolutely Servitors and not at all Tau Drones with their own basic A.I. because that's tech-heresy and Stygies VIII would never do that. Regardless, choose whether the drones carry pulse lasers, have sensory equipment meant for scouting, use shielding technology to protect you, or carry tools for maintenance and technological building. If you wish, the drones can be a mix of your choosing. Just remember they're Imperial Servitors and *not* Tau Drones.

-Tau Self-Repair Systems [200AP]: The vast majority of technological repairs are done by those who have attained the teachings of the Omnissiah, and it has been this way for millennia. Yet there will unfortunately be times where you do not have access to adepts or Techmarines, and should your armor suffer damage it could bode well. Lucky for you that Stygies VIII have your well-being in mind and have this fantastical gift from the Omnissiah and certainly not from the innards of Tau battlesuits. To imply that would be heresy. What's not heresy is how this upgrade will detect damage done to the armor and proceed to use its stores of nanomaterials to seal and repair the armor to ensure it is in fighting condition, with the nanomaterial slowly generating over time using the armor's power systems. Talk about convenient! Convenient and not stolen.

-Teleporter System [200AP]: Teleporting has always been something of a high risk, high reward situation. If you have a teleporter beacon, you can teleport right there and commence the mother of all rapid insertions to utterly destroy the enemy from behind the front lines. If you don't have one, you could still teleport at high risk to avoid lethal strikes or massive destruction of the immediate area. There's a really small chance of the user ending up in the Warp for a small period of time before returning, but surely that's fine! Upon integration of this system you will find your armor able to use teleporter networks as well as do emergency jaunts to avoid lethal strikes. It will also come with teleporter beacons you can sync with and utilize.

-Aeldari Holo-Field [200AP]: A good armor is one that ensures when you get hit that it never actually brings harm to you. A better armor is one that ensures you never get hit in the first place, and what a coincidence that Stygies VIII have developed a technology to prevent you from being hit, which was most definitely from their Forge World and not from any Aeldari that they looted after killing them. Using specialized holo-emitters controlled by a sophisticated computer network, it will create a field of distortion around your being that affects both physical and electronic perception to make precision targeting against you all but useless. Stygies VIII will warn you, however, that it is only meant to fool enemies and will not stop someone from saturating the field via battlefield barrage to hit you. They are certainly not speaking from experience, and will assure you of this.

-Necron Canoptek Scarabs [200AP]: Stygies VIII always has the best interests of Mankind at heart, and work tirelessly to ensure they have every technological advantage possible. It is why with great pride they would offer to you this batch of eight specialized Servitors that can be slaved to your suit's systems. Any questions will be redirected to the express classification of Servitors, which are most definitely not what you think they are. Taking the shape of small silver beetles a bit larger than an Astartes' armored hand, these devices will rest on points of your armor in stasis until called to awaken. Activation will cause them to be ejected and rapidly towards your enemies to slice them apart and molecularly disassemble them in order to convert them into raw energy, which can be used for repair or construction as dictated by you. They will act as a small swarm, which is just their machine spirits being especially coordinated. Their sleekness and mono-eye appearance are strictly for efficiency, and the Stygies VIII Tech-Priests will politely remind you that too many questions tend to lead the Inquisition into matters that they don't need to know about.

-Conversion Field [200AP/300AP]: It is important that you possess the necessary weapons to strike at the enemy and guarantee their demise in the name of your beliefs, whatever they may be. However, any Astartes or Inquisitor will tell you that you need to survive long enough to actually plunge your blade into the chest of the enemy, and this is the purpose behind the Conversion Field. The integration of this machine will provide a moderately powerful energy field that surrounds the user and converts kinetic strikes or enemy attacks into harmless light or even go off like a powerful flash bomb depending on the strength of the strike. Take care to maintain the equipment as too much at once brings a risk of the device overloading. For 300AP however, Stygies VIII will provide their own protective field that is both lighter and far stronger than your standard protective field and even lets you accessorize as it comes in the form of a jewel. Any comments on the similarity to the aesthetic of the Eldar Forceshield will be seen as slander and will be aggressively discouraged.

-Obliterator Virus [300AP] [Chaos Only]: Upon realization of your true loyalties, the Tech-Priests whisper an enticing but deadly offer should you feel you have the fortitude and will to survive. They have a specially tailored strain of the technovirus known as 'Obliterator', meant to grant additional control over the process as the user's body gets converted into Fleshmetal. Should you acquire it, the next time you put on your armor it will fuse with you and streamline itself as your body absorbs the armor itself. This will allow you to summon your armor on demand, and assimilate new weapons or technology as needed to modify your loadout or even slowly hybridize some weapons within your body. Should your mind withstand the process, you will become very powerful indeed.

-Aegis Upgrade [300AP] [Loyalist Only]: Upon realizing you are a true servant of the Imperium sent by the Emperor of Mankind, the Tech-Priests would reveal an extremely tight secret: They are privy to the construction of Aegis Armor, the glorious protection utilized by the equally secretive Grey Knights chapter. It will cost much, but if you are willing to use a large part of your payment for it then they will do what they can. The armor will be anointed and ritually consecrated, while psychically charged wards and prayers are inscribed into every inch of the interior. This combined with the additional purity seals creates an armor that protects the wearer from both psychic attacks and any daemonic strike by using the user's own psionic power. It also confounds the user's psychic presence from daemons, further turning them into a holy warrior of unparalleled might. There shall be none purer than yourself.

-Terminator Upgrade [300AP] [Free: 'Terminator Armor'] [Can't take with Centurion]: Powered Armor is certainly potent stuff, and it allows the people of this galaxy to take hits no mere mortal ever could. But sometimes it is not enough. Sometimes you need more, and the Tech-Priests working on your armor will gleefully mention for a fat part of their payment they can utilize unique technologies to upgrade your armor to a Terminator, if not an equivalent. Using an adamantium exoskeleton with a heavy outer layer of ceramite and plasteel composite, these armors can withstand shots that would normally see tanks laid low. As a bonus, they come with Refractor fields that will ward off glancing blows and increase protection even further. Only the most dangerous of weapons will ever threaten the user within.

-Compacted Engine [+100AP] [Requires: Obliterator Virus]: A mere virus to augment your power? That's just a taste of what the Immaterium can provide you, and you know it. More is needed, and should you allocate a bit more of the payment then more shall be yours. A minor daemon will be bound into your armor by using the virus as a vector, and in doing so your physical strength and defensive properties will skyrocket. As a bonus, you will find you can feed upon the souls of your victims to further strengthen the power of the weapons you can generate. The Warp hungers, and now so do you.

-Centurion Suit [300AP] [Can't take with Terminator]: Sometimes, having one powered armor isn't enough. There are times where you not only need more weapons, but more armor as well. Something your average suit cannot provide on its own. Sometimes, you need powered armor for your powered armor. Enter the Centurion, a powered exoskeleton worn over your own armor to act as a mobile weapons platform along with granting additional protection. Thick layers of ablative ceramite ensure they have the protection of a tank on top of the normal protections of powered armor. Onboard weapons of Siege Drills, chest-mounted Hurricane Bolters, and twin-linked Meltaguns ensure no enemy would dare stand against them for long. Combine these together and you have a walking siege-breaker of raw, unbridled power.

-Nemesis Dreadknight [+100AP] [Requires: Aegis Upgrade]: The hordes of Daemons are simple enough, but what should happen if a Greater Daemon takes to the field? You must take it head-on, and the Tech-Priests upon proper compensation will ensure you are well-prepared. Appearing as a human-shaped exoskeleton, this chassis moves with all the grace the user possesses thanks to the neural interface allowing them to take advantage of the suit's massive strength and speed. Equipped with a heavy psycannon and either a massive Nemesis Force Sword or Nemesis Daemonhammer that enhances psionic power to dramatic heights, even the greatest of Chaos' servants will hesitate before facing you.

-Drukhari Shadow Field [300AP]: Stygies VIII, the most trustworthy and honest Forge World in all the Imperium, would like to remind you of how efficient and capable their honesty has made them by this particular upgrade to your armor that will make you a bona fide terror of the field. This device when activated will create a potent field of energy around you that will not only act as a powerful protective field but also create a thick shadowy cloud that will keep you hidden away from enemy fire. Energy projectiles dissipate, while kinetic weapons lose momentum. Unfortunately, upon the field actually being pierced it will dissipate and require time to recharge, but the Tech-Priests ensure that is to make sure the technology does not break. They will also reassure that any Inquisitor who claims you are using Dark Eldar technology is simply trying to hustle you and that Stygies VIII would never lie when it comes to Imperial Sanctioned Technology.

-Necron Phase Shifter [300AP]: The loyalty and brilliance of Stygies VIII is unquestioned, ignoring the endless barrage of questions from everyone else in the Imperium. The Tech-Priests will mention that such baseless comments are the product of envy from being incapable of replicating their technological wonders. This device, integrated into the energy generator of the powered armor, is proof of their brilliance. For a few moments the device will render the user hazy and indistinct as they become incorporeal, allowing shots and all forms of damage to harmlessly pass through them. Timed right, it could even let the user pass through walls! Accusations of it being stolen Necron Phase technology will be dismissed as firmly baseless, with the Tech-Priests requesting you do not alert the local Deathwatch group. They don't want another fight over Imperial Sanctioned technology.

-Lathe-Wrought [300AP]: It will take more time, but there is a level of craftsmanship that is practically unparalleled among the Imperium and all its Forge Worlds. It is craftsmanship that relies on intense gravitational events from a set of stars, and the time window is so small only half a dozen suits are ever constructed in a decade. How fortunate, that the window of opportunity is soon. By taking this offer, it will be of such quality that even the intense heat or crackling edge of a power weapon will not break it, while maintaining unparalleled flexibility from its properties. It'll have its weight reduced by half its normal amount, with its protective properties doubled from before. This is the stuff Artificer armor is made from, and you will invite endless envy from wearing it.

A FATED MEETING

Months would go by while your armor was being worked on, possibly even years, as the Tech-Priests knew they would only have one shot at this forging and they didn't want to screw this up. They've been paid far too much for that, and with the galaxy cut in half they needed the reputation boost to keep people relying on them. On the flipside, that meant months of waiting.

Plenty of time to get your ships in order, your crews acquired and trained, and your knowledge of the situation up to speed. Maybe even carve out a slice of the pie that Footfall had to offer as a form of getting some R&R while invoking envy from the snobby Trader dynasties that called this place their home.

This side of the galaxy was declared to be the Imperium Nihilus, on account of the Eye of Terror expanding and cutting off the light of the Astronomican as a result. To say things had become even more dangerous than before was something of an understatement, in no part thanks to the sudden surge of Xenos attacks taking advantage of the catastrophe. Drukhari and Corsair sightings have jumped in number, and Chaos cultists have been pouring out of the woodwork thanks to the Rift spawning more warpstorms and areas for them to come from. To make matters worse, the Orks have decided this side of the galaxy was just one big pub brawl and have begun treating it as such.

Politically, things have likewise been shaken up. There are reports that the Primarch of the Ultramarines, Roboute Guilliman, has returned from his slumber in stasis to lead the Imperium once more in light of the currently on-going 13th Black Crusade. How you view this will no doubt depend on which side of the coin you fall upon.

Eventually your new armor would be returned to you, with much fanfare from the Tech-Priests and binary chatter of how wonderful and unique such a task was. There would be a lot of fervent respect as they opened it up to you, and that they would be forever grateful for the opportunity to work with such blessed technology. Surely the sheer amount of resources you provided to them didn't factor into the situation at all.

But one thing was for certain: You didn't fork up the compensation. Hell, you didn't even arrange for the deal in the first place. Which begs the question of who was willing to throw around a Governor's ransom for the sake of your new duds.

The answer would reveal itself soon. More specifically, the next time you had a moment to yourself. With no warning an Astartes would just appear, adorned in green-grey armor with black trims and gold detailing with the baleful glow of the Immaterium around them. He would have no weapons on his person, a sign that he was not here to fight.

Then again, it was likely he didn't need a weapon. The Warp Ghosts were dangerous like that, being the ferrymen of the Eye of Terror and all.

“STAY YOUR HAND, PROPHECIZED ONE. WE ARE HERE TO DELIVER YOU TO THE DESPOILER AS PER HIS REQUEST. HE WISHES TO TALK WITH YOU, AND NOTHING MORE. THE PRICE IS ALREADY PAID.”

How very interesting. So Abaddon himself wanted to have a talk with you and was willing to cover the costs of ensuring you got to him safely. For someone of his reputation, this was remarkably generous.

For a Loyalist who had done their part to try and prevent Chaos from benefiting from your presence, moreso. One would assume Abaddon would just try to launch a Cyclone Torpedo against them and call it a day, but apparently not.

If nothing else, would be a good opportunity to get close enough to slide in the knife.

Accepting would see more Warp Ghosts appearing with your suit's communication systems lighting up with queries of what your crew should do about them. The Ghost next to you, however, would insist they are merely here to guide your ship and any other vessels you may have collected. The price has been paid, and they will not break the bargain.

The voyage through the Immaterium this time would be... strange. The shutters would be locked down as normal, and the voyage would be the smoothest jump you've ever had. If you didn't know any better it'd almost be like you were going through a Warp Gate. But many of the crew would speak of hearing whispers from loved ones and enemies alike, even ones who were long since deceased. Others would report an innate sense of dread, as if knowing a terribly important choice was approaching.

Psykers would have it worse, actually seeing apparitions of people important to them as they spoke with either pride or shame of their life choices. Spoke of their feelings of who they were compared to who they used to be.

You are hardly an exception.

Eventually your vessel would emerge out of the Warp along with any others you brought along, with no problems reported save for the crew being a tad spooked and a few of the ship menials having committed suicide. Inquiries would report screaming about screwing up in life and letting their loved ones down before pulling the trigger on themselves. Upon the shutters being withdrawn you would be greeted by the sight of a massive vessel surrounded by a small escort fleet. A red sun was behind the fleet, giving the fleet a hellish red tint that made them look like chariots erupted from Hell itself.



They were surrounded by a massive field of debris and ruined vessels that gave the impression of a massive battle having been waged here. Ships from the Imperium and Chaos alike were floating lifelessly, waiting for someone to crack them open and pillage the contents within. Judging from the molten rock that was still in the area, the battle had been relatively recent.

It was then that all navigation systems reported that this is where Cadia is supposed to be.

Not anymore. There was only the fleet and its dread master, the Black Legion's second Gloriana-class vessel. It's mobile command base, the *Harbinger of Doom*.

Surprisingly, docking with the massive vessel came with little fanfare. Procedure was followed, and within hours your vessel and theirs were flying in sync as the umbilical connected to allow you safe passage into the ship.

Stepping aboard their ship, you would be greeted by a sight most vile that even the most corrupt of Heretics might find themselves blanching or feeling disgusted. It was a visage so foul that it wouldn't be too far of a leap of logic to wonder if Abaddon was testing your resolve or strength of character. Was it to gauge your sanity? To have a laugh at your expense?

The man who greeted you, the First Heretic, displayed nothing but pleasant joy as he bowed to you. "It is a joy to finally meet the Void Walker. I am Erebus, and I will take you to the Despoiler unharmed. Rejoice, for the rightful Gods have seen to give you a chance to walk their righteous path."

What a fucking prick.

Following him would be as enlightening as it would be monotonous, with carved symbols all over the walls of each deck and the scent of blood so thick one could taste it. Tapestries of human skin would be commonplace, along with hordes of slaves staring at you walking by. Why wouldn't they? You have traveled to worlds unheard of, and scavenged relics that mere men like them could only dream of. But they all whispered in reverence, especially upon seeing your glorious armor and your Relic Weapon by your side.

Too bad it wasn't quiet, because Erebus would just. Not. Shut. Up. His lung capacity must be extraordinary to be talking endlessly about the nature of the Gods and how the galaxy is but a toy to them. Worse, he's going on about how this galaxy was but one in their grasp as all timelines led to Chaos with their existence guaranteed. The fifth time he talks about how you should be ever-so-grateful that the Dark Gods would be willing to let you be their servant and share in a fraction of their glory was as eye-rolling as the first time too.

Interesting how many airlocks there were on the way there, though.

By the time you finally made it to the bridge, Erebus (or a different Word Bearer if he accidentally fell into an airlock by mysterious circumstance) would open the door and no doubt give a grand introduction for you as the Void Walker. Plunderer of the Zerzuran Chasm, Wielder of Relics Past, the Lord Ascendant, and other such similar titles from your exploits among the stars. Think of them how you will, but they are remarkably well-informed.

The bridge was an impressive sight beyond the normal crew of slaves and Heretekhs minding their business and keeping the ship running. There were four large Astartes in Terminator armor, clad in black and gold with their corruption so deep one could feel the power of the Warp emanating off of them. They all had Power Weapons and heavily modified weapons of either Plasma Cannons or Heavy Bolters, all impeccably maintained and ready to be wielded as needed. All of them flanked their dread master, towering over even them as he turned to face you. His pale skin showed the black veins of his body, his armor glowing with the light of Immaterium while the Mark of Chaos upon his forehead glowed.

Ezekyle Abaddon. The Warmaster of Chaos, with his Bringers of Despair.

"Here you are, at last. I had a feeling you would accept my invitation, after receiving my gift. It is my hope you keep my generosity in mind, with what I have to say."

While his voice could be heard with the soul as well as the ears from the amount of corruption he has no doubt undergone, his words were interesting. So, it was he who arranged for the construction of your new armor. It must have been a lot of effort to arrange for both it and your transport here, especially if you were a Loyalist.

"Cadia is broken. The Imperium is broken, carved in half and ripe for the slaughter. Its worlds burn by my hand, its people put to the sword. But my blade need not be the only one who feeds upon the bloated corpse. Not when there is you, who is fated to change this galaxy forever. I believe you still have a part to play in all of this."

As much as he sounded like he was gargling gravel, he did have a point. The Imperium was in a bad place right now, and it was doubtful that Guilliman or all people could ever return things back to the way they were. He'd have enough trouble trying to secure his precious Ultramar, to say nothing of organizing an entire galactic empire cut in half.

Still, stranger things have happened.

"My cabal of Sorcerers have all divined the same thing: Your allegiance will spell the final blow of the wretched Imperium. Its Corpse-God will fall, and his influence will die with him. Its people will recognize the folly of their actions, and a new age will dawn as we pave it in the blood of the past. You will revel in rewards untold, your name praised for eternity. Mankind will worship you and do whatever you ask of them."

One could almost taste the smugness as he smiled.

"I know you will be tempted by this. You are tempted because you are not of this galaxy."

...okay that's new.

"It is plain to me, because you act with all the subtlety of a Daemon. You travel the galaxy, taking what you desire of others and caring little for what you leave behind. You do not treat the stars as your home. You walk and dig like a traveler looking for things of interest. It would be foolish to trust you. Only a fool trusts a Daemon. They are made of the very stuff of change, the raw madness of the Warp made manifest."

His smile grew even wider as he raised his hand, the Talon of Horus pointing a clawed finger towards you.

"However, like men, Daemons are creatures of greed, pride, and arrogance, and these are things I trust completely. These are things I would trust in you, things that have dictated your course the moment you ended up in this galaxy. Join me, and I will fulfill your desires as I give you the power to forever be your own master."

Okay. So, he's trying to appeal to your inner magpie or spoiled child. A little crass, very much assuming of what kind of person you are. But he seems so sure of himself, and it is true that the Despoiler has quite a lot of clout to throw around. Maybe he could provide everything he promises. But that would also mean submitting and entering into a partnership at best, with subservience at worst. It's doubtful he'd do the latter, unless he felt like he could get away with it. It might mean needing to constantly watch your back.

It's your call. Choose whether you'll join with him or reject his offer even after everything he's given you.

THE HAND THAT FEEDS (ACCEPT)

Working with the Black Legion, getting the Despoiler's help, and carving this galaxy up like a Christmas pie to plunder whatever you desire? Sounds like a pretty sweet gig if you're being honest. Whether you give a bow of loyalty or simply extend your hand to shake Abaddon's, he will know that you have taken his deal.

If one listened closely, they would hear the distant laughter of the Dark Gods mingling with Abaddon's own, roaring throughout the ship in joyous exaltation.

"Excellent! Most excellent. The galaxy will burn and we will be the ones to spread the flames. The Imperium's time is at an end, but yours is just beginning."

He made a motion to the door as he spoke, and in unison everyone on the bridge gave you a salute. It would appear you have the Despoiler's blessing.

"We shall forge you a weapon that will let you carve your way through any who stand against you, and you shall be anointed not as a Champion, but as a Lord. But first, you should prove to the rest of the Legion that you are worthy. Choose one among this vessel, and defeat them in single combat. Then you will be led towards the Forge of the Neverborn to attain the instrument of your ascension."

In that exact moment, if Erebus had not somehow met with an unfortunate accident nobody could have ever predicted, he would enter while clapping. "Splendid! Most splendid to hear that our new ally has seen the true Light of this galaxy. It would be my greatest pleasure to welcome you into the fold and show you the majesty of the only Divinity worth praising."

Abaddon did say to choose one.

You would be led to a section of the ship that was so rife in blood that there was an actual moat of the stuff surrounding a stone slab large enough to fit a Baneblade on. Tapestries of skin, human and xenos alike, draped the eight pillars of bronze surrounding the slab. Lit torches gave an orange tint to the light, and the chanting and roaring of cultists made this place one of the loudest of the vessel.

With the technology and strength at your disposal, whoever you fought would more than likely be brought down low with the usual fanfare a group of Chaos Astartes and slaves could give. Yet, the cheer would not be for your victory over your opponent. No, the cheering would be for your recruitment into the Black Legion. Cultists are a superstitious lot, and as such prophecies tend to be revered if they are deemed important enough. Prophecies like yours. Don't you feel so special?

Most importantly was this weapon Abaddon promised you, and what it meant. As you approached the forge and saw the Sorcerers chanting and Warpsmiths running maintenance, it would be clear that you were meant to be given a Daemon Weapon. Dangerous items that had a tendency to try controlling the wielder if they were weak of mind, but very powerful if its user could control them.

The best part, however, was the realization that you would be given some ships to aid you. Oh no, you would not be sent out with the vessels you had collected. If you brought any then that would be all the better, as the fleet would only benefit from the additional firepower. But what you were met with is what you would be granted.

Which totals up to six *Infidel*-class Raiders, three *Murder*-class Cruisers, two *Hades*-class Heavy Cruisers, two *Repulsive*-class Grand Cruisers, and finally the *Gloriana*-class vessel you were standing upon.

Not the biggest of fleets, but you were assured it would be all you need to carve your way through the Imperium with all of the madness and chaos it was experiencing. Adding your own ships would simply make it that much more deadly.

WARNING FOR LOYALISTS:

By choosing to side with Abaddon, you will no longer count as a Loyalist for all further choices.

In taking this option, you are forsaking the Emperor of Mankind and the Imperium at large. He put His faith in you, and you discarded it for power. He gave you a chance to save Humanity from Chaos.

He will not give you another.



AVE DOMINUS NOX (CHAOS REJECT)

It was a tempting offer. Power, support from the Black Legion itself and a potent weapon from Abaddon himself? It was a Chaos Lord's golden ticket, and there was little doubt you could do a lot with what he was offering.

But any Chaos Astartes you might have picked up will politely remind you that at the end of the day, Abaddon doesn't have partners. He has minions. He was trying to hitch his wagon to your star, and no doubt he'd be constantly looking for ways to slide the knife into your back when you were too distracted.

But the real problem is he was kind of a pompous asshole about the whole thing. Like hell you'd work with someone like that.

Upon being told that there would be no deal in your own words, Abaddon would shake his head with all the body language of a child trying to tell their parents that they wouldn't go to their room.

"That... is a shame. I have done much for you, and you feel as though you can do better than me. But no prophecy is written in stone, and what is given can be taken. My Bringers of Despair... kill this overconfident fool."

No doubt that he expected a slew of gunfire to go off in your direction. Instead there was the heavy impacts of four Terminator armors collapsing to the ground, lifeless and with black mucus oozing from their joints.

Was that fear that was on Abaddon's face just now?

Attacking him at this point would see his refractor field going off, but attempting to deliver a lethal blow would cause the teleporter in his own armor to activate and disappear him elsewhere. No doubt to a safe location, but at least it would mean you did not have to deal with him for now.

There was the sound of screams outside the bridge. Terrified screams, and sounds of skin being torn like someone pulling the fabric of a shirt. Sounds of meat being mulched and bone crackling like dry twigs in a forest. Sounds of begging done in vain, in an attempt to keep their hunters away.

The sounds of laughter.

By the time it was all said and done, there were no more Black Legionnaires. All had either escaped or been purged, and when the perpetrators revealed themselves it was easy to see why.

Night Lords. It was an entire group of Night Lords, slithering out of the shadows and rafters with the grace of panthers jumping off of a ledge. They barely made a sound as more began to appear, circling you until there was no real way out.

That was then they all saluted, and one stepped forward to speak. "I am Decimus, Prophet of the VIIth Legion. We stand before you now because I have seen that lies ahead of us if we were to ally with you. I've seen entire worlds free from the tyranny of the Imperium, and generations of Man who have never known true fear to keep them running towards the future. I have seen enemies akin to gods which to hone our craft. But most importantly, I have seen that we will be free from the shadow of our Betrayer. We pledge ourselves to you now, Void Walker."

That was when they all bowed. To you, no less.

How very interesting. But why look a gift horse in the mouth? Especially if they were so willing to aid you?

They would alert you that Abaddon's forces have been purged, and that it would be wise if you were to go with them as they were planning to take and convert the *Harbinger of Doom* to ensure the Black Legion could never use it again. It was a pragmatic choice as much as it was a morale-destroying one.

Of course, getting rid of only the Black Legionnaires meant that the occasional Word Bearer was still on the ship. Including one Erebus, provided he didn't meet some unfortunate accident in an airlock or something similar. He would give his normal platitudes, singing praises on how Abaddon had spent the last ten thousand years trying and failing to act upon the will of the Gods and now it was your time to shine. You could surely do better, and he would be there to chronicle your rise as one of the greatest machinations of Chaos.

It would be a shame if a weapon suddenly went off and hit his smug face right now.

A real shame.

The Night Lords had their own connections, and promised that they would take you to some of their wayward brethren led by the Daemon Prince known as Krieg Acerbus. The Axemaster had many Sorcerers in his employ, and would happily provide the Daemon Weapon that Abaddon himself had been promising. Seems they felt like it would be worthwhile to grant you that boon to aid you, even if they themselves loathed the idea of giving the daemons of Chaos any foothold in their warbands.

But they would happily give you vessels. Purging the small fleet of its population would grant you six *Infidel*-class Raiders, three *Murder*-class Cruisers, two *Hades*-class Heavy Cruisers, two *Repulsive*-class Grand Cruisers, and finally the *Gloriana*-class vessel known as the *Nightfall*. They were putting all their desires and ambitions with you.

Don't squander it.

SERPENT'S RISE (LOYALIST REJECT)

It was sad. Pathetically sad, even. Abaddon had gone through all this trouble just to get your audience, to appeal to your inner darkness in the attempt to lure you over to his side. All that talk of power, reputation, and even ascension... and he thought you wouldn't see it for what it was?

He didn't even bother to remove all the disgusting iconography or the hordes of slaves mulling around the vessel. Worse, he didn't scrub any of the symbols of Chaos to at least pretend he was meeting you half-way.

It would be funny if it wasn't so pathetic.

Abaddon to his credit didn't get angry. He seemed more disappointed, shaking his head with a sigh. It would seem this was within the realm of possibility for him.

"So. You squander my gifts and cling to your Corpse-God. How noble of you... and worthless. I will parade your corpse on the bridge of my ship, so all know the folly of defying me. Bringers of Despair, kill this worm."

There was an uncomfortable silence as the four Terminators just stood there. They were still as statues, as though there were no life within them. The lack of action made Abaddon turn towards them with rage seeping into his voice.

"I will not repeat myself. Kill the one in front of you and be done with it!"

That was when they all lifted their weapons at Abaddon, their armor turning a dark blue with green detailing as they yelled in unison: "I AM ALPHARIUS."

What happened next was a flurry of events that happened so quickly it would cause panic to most.

There was an ominous rumbling as the ship shook, with warning lights erupting everywhere. The Alpha Legion Terminators all opened fire on Abaddon, causing his teleporter to activate and disappear him to parts unknown. People started getting killed as the Terminators saluted you quickly. "Our vessels have intercepted them, and they shall burn in the Emperor's Name. It's time we left, Void Walker."

So... *loyalist* Alpha Legionnaires. Stranger things have happened, but this was some uncanny timing.

Looking outside would see other vessels striking the escort fleet with torpedos and macrobattery fire, tearing them apart as a massive *Gloriana*-class vessel was taking shots at the *Harbinger of Doom*.

It might be wise to hurry back to your ship and leave.

If he didn't suffer some kind of mysterious and completely preventable accident before, then Erebus will try to stop you from leaving the ship. To his credit, he'll fight even when his fellow Word Bearers are getting slaughtered or being activated as sleeper agents.

It would be a shame if he got his face blown off. Such a shame.

It's almost like something out of an action movie as you fight your way back, and your vessel detaches from the *Harbinger of Doom* as it's being torn apart by a slew of fire. Within moments, it burns and collapses from the destruction wrought from outside and in, soon falling into the ruins of Cadia to join in its funeral pyre.

That is when you would get a communication from the flagship that had come in, the *Alpha*. This was a particularly built-up cell that was waiting for the right time to rise up and aid the Imperium in its time of need, and the creation of the Great Rift along with your appearance was an opportunity they could not pass up.

Your dedication, even in the face of Abaddon's temptations, made them decide that you will be the one to aid Mankind and save them from the Despoiler. They would swear themselves to you and do what they could to support your actions.

After cleaning up the remains of the escort fleet and collecting everything together, you would see the fleet they had managed to scavenge up on such short notice for you: Six *Nova*-class Frigates, three *Gothic*-class Cruisers, two *Mars*-class Battlecruisers, two *Avenger*-class Grand Cruisers, and the *Gloriana*-class vessel known as the *Alpha*.

If you had brought your own vessels, that would make this escort fleet all the more potent.

While Abaddon had promised you a weapon of power if you had joined him, the Legionnaires had their own way of making it up to you. They had collected quite a few interesting trinkets and items from stringing along other cultists or leading Radical Inquisitors to their untimely death. As such they had some relics that they could transfer power from into a weapon of your choice... creating a holy counterpart to the Daemon Weapon.

It would be needed, as you would no doubt need to face Abaddon for this insult. But they would do their best to see you safe.

After all... the Emperor Protects.

DAEMON/BLESSED WEAPON CUSTOMIZATION

[You Now Have 500WP To Spend]

-Weapon Import [Free]: Unlike the intricacies of armor and technology, when it comes to the imbue of a weapon there's no such issues. Thus, any personal handheld weapon you possess will be a candidate for receiving power and becoming more than it was, whether it is melee or ranged. If you wish, even the Relic Weapon you received at the beginning of your time here may be used as the vessel. The Immaterium is not picky. Your companions may benefit from this and submit their weapons for imbue as well if they desire.

-Power Charging [Free/+500WP] [Can't take with Kha'Choz]: OH! Well then, you came expecting something like this to happen. Taken from your time in the Ark of Sacrifice, this Greater Daemon or Living Saint can either be a powerful weapon on its own or thrown into the pool to imbue this weapon to greater heights than expected. If you did not strike a cooperation beforehand, it will also make the weapon that much harder to control. You're good with that, right?

-Kha'Choz [Free/+500WP] [Can't take with Power Charging]: This is peculiar. Very, very peculiar. The smiths are not used to seeing a Daemon like this, but will be unnerved nonetheless at how well the binding process goes. It can either be a powerful Daemon weapon all on its own, or do terrifying things to a weapon by throwing it into the pool to make it stronger than anyone could anticipate. Regardless, such a weapon would be christened Kha'Choz the Feardrinker. The weapon will not fight you at all, for you are its true master to have beaten him the first time.

-Weapon Reformation [Free]: Yet, why settle for the form of the weapon you have now? The imbue of the Immaterium can do so many wonders, the reformation of a tool is not too difficult a concept. Whether you want a sword that can break apart into a sword-whip on demand, or a heavy sword to be a heavy Plasma weapon instead, or even the reverse! You could even make it an electric guitar with guns on it! Who knows how it'll behave when it's done, but it's sure to be memorable.

-Animate [Free]: Even though you have had this weapon forged into a tool of destruction, one must never forget that it is still a sapient entity. It will have its own thoughts and ideas, as well as its own idea of how to engage in a battle depending on what kind of entity you put inside of it. If you are incapacitated, it could even act on its own to defend you. Imagine throwing the weapon only for it to return to you after it is done disemboweling the enemy!

-Blood Tracker [Free]: Whatever one's feelings on diplomatic and nonviolent methods of problem-solving are, there is an inalienable truth that cannot be denied: A weapon's purpose is to kill. It is a tool of destruction, meant to slay one's enemies and see them laid low for daring to stand against its wielder. This particular weapon will forever have it in mind, sensing enemies around you so that they cannot hide from your might. They will not decide if a battle is over... you will.

-Grievous Strike [Free]: A weapon blessed with the touch of the Immaterium is no ordinary weapon. It does not break like they do, nor does it strike like they do. It strikes harder, with the force of many. Your weapon will be no different, striking with significantly greater force than normal. A normal man could strike and push back an Astartes, and it only grows from there.

-Purifying Flame [Free: **Loyalist Only**]: All of this corruption and pain that the might of Daemons bring upon the innocents of Mankind, the torment of being food for thirsting would-be gods. You will not suffer it one second longer, with your weapon being the torch that brings the light of hope to Man. Upon a whim it will set alight with a flame that can be described as Holy, purging away any corruption and delivering far harsher damage to the beings that spread said corruption. Being around it will also start slowly curing the corruption of any afflicted, returning them to their normal selves. Let there be light.

-Corruptive Might [Free: **Chaos Only**]: The utter fools, thinking that there's such a thing as 'profane' and 'unholy'. They see things in the limited lens of good and evil, while you see it for what it is: Power, and the influence of those who have it. Your weapon lets you spread such power, shattering holy wards like they were glass and delivering far harsher damage against entities empowered by or made of holy energy. They can blather and rant all they wish, but it will not change the reality that you dictate.

-Unyielding Rage [Free: **Khornate Daemon Only**]: Accepting Kha'Choz's offer of the Greater Daemon of Khorne, you knew all too well what such a weapon would give you. Yes, a weapon fit for slaughter and the spilling of blood. This weapon now fulfills those functions perfectly, allowing an innate control of spilled blood as you can have your weapon draw in and devour it to temporarily bolster how hard it hits. The more blood absorbed, the greater the boost. Let the blood flow.

-Seer of Paths [Free: **Tzeentch Daemon Only**]: The Changer of Ways is the master of fate, with his Daemons having varying degrees of this power. The Greater Daemon captured and gifted to you by Kha'Choz imparts a unique boon onto the sword as a result, letting you see the results of possible actions for a short period of time so you may choose the action that benefits you the most. Fate has no master, but perhaps you can convince people otherwise.

-Twisted Sense [Free: **Slaaneshi Daemon Only**]: It is safe to say that many Slaaneshi Daemons are sense freaks, and the one granted to you by Kha'Choz is no exception. In fact, it was such a freak for senses that using it in the forge granted a strange ability. By touching a person with this weapon, be it in battle or otherwise, you can 'siphon' what they sense and have the weapon either feed it to you or delight in the feeling. Strange, but useful for seeing through someone's eyes or taking away their sense of pain so they can't feel how close they are to death.

-Parasite Freed [Free: **Nurglite Daemon Only**]: Daemons of Nurgle enjoy life in all its forms, for even the smallest creature has the right to live. It would make sense then, that the one Kha'Choz captured has kept this affinity. Wounding someone with this weapon carries the chance to have a parasite be born in their wound, which will either burrow to the brain to take control or feed with such force that the victim could very well explode as more parasitic worms pour out and begin searching for others. The best part of life is spreading love, after all.

-Endowed Light [Free: **Living Saint Only**]: This was a very unfortunate Saint, captured by Kha'Choz and forced to be a prize for whoever could win his game. Whether you draw sadistic pleasure from forcing her, or have communed and now cooperate with her, it has imbued this weapon with a unique light. On command it will allow you to summon ethereal wings to deflect attacks and even launch burning projectiles to ignite corrupted targets like a torch to kindling. By the light, you will see your foes fall.

-Feardrinker [Free: Kha'Choz Only]: When you took down the Greater Daemon of Chaos Undivided, even then you knew he would make an extremely potent weapon. Regardless if you were Loyalist or a Heretic, he would work ever faithfully to ensure you, his one true Master, would have every advantage on the battlefield. This is not hyperbole, for his power allows you to see and innately understand the fears and nightmares of every person you see while you wield him. Even more startling, you can manifest these fears as dread hallucinations that feel quite real, and even interact with these hallucinations as you trap your enemies in a nightmarish world within their own mind. Only those of the strongest will can resist this power, but will resisting save them from you striking their heart?

-Festering [100WP]: There are some who are blessed with tremendous constitution, able to weather many wounds before even thinking of retreating. Others can simply heal, their flesh flowing like water as the damage is washed away and they keep fighting. How very... annoying. By imbuing your weapon with this power, you will ensure any wound your weapon causes will barely heal, if at all. This can cause tremendous pain or even ensure a slow death upon those who dared to face you.

-Plague Spreader [100WP]: There are many who settle for simply stabbing someone or throwing munitions their way. Why should you be one of those with simple minds? With this blessing, you can load your weapon with virulent diseases to torment and afflict your enemies with the gift that keeps on giving. As a bonus, should you possess any diseases or viruses you happen to favor then your weapon can produce them naturally to serve as an infection vector against your opponents!

-Elemental Infection [100WP]: So many tales of enchanted weapons wielding elemental powers in Terra's ancient past. Tales of weapons made of fire, or roaring with the might of the oceans. How fortunate then, that the Immaterium never forgets these tales and has made such things a reality. Your weapon is now a conduit of a classical element like fire, or darkness, or water, whatever you desire. In striking your enemies, they will become surrounded by that element as it batters and clings to them, refusing to vanish for a period of time. The stories will rise once more.

-Wounding [100WP]: Even when an opponent is wounded, if they are one of sound constitution or great speed then it will hardly matter. This is especially true for surface-level wounds, which could only serve to help their reputation as another scar among many. By the Immaterium's power, you can serve to make their wounds so much worse. Each blow will release small shards within the wound, slicing and digging deeper into them the more they moved. Trying to dodge or run could become agonizing, and even walking around would be a constant pain. Such is the price of surviving a fight with you.

-Protective Wards [100WP]: What good is a weapon if its wielder is dead? How can it slay when its own owner has been slain instead? There are some weapons of the Immaterium who recognize this hole in logic, and use some of their power to protect their owner from unnecessary strikes. Glancing blows and projectiles slightly off course will be deflected, preventing small bits of damage that could distract you from carving your opponents up like a turkey. Stride forth, warrior.

-Glittering [100WP]: An unfocused warrior is a warrior who does not realize that they are dead. Fighting requires discipline and dedication to utilize your skills to their greatest, and battles can be decided by ensuring the enemy cannot focus instead. By taking this, your weapon will become a true work of art with glistening metal and detailing fit for a god. The mere sight of it will distract and keep enemies unfocused, which could be all you need to drive your blade into their shoulder.

-Illusionary [100WP]: Fighting the enemy one-on-one in honest, glorious combat is seen as honorable and following the path of a true warrior. It also opens you up to opponents who will use any trick in the book to win, because if you're not cheating you're not *really* trying to win. This power takes that thought in mind, becoming shimmering and almost mist-like as it tricks opponents as to where your weapon will strike. Watch them dodge thinking you missed, only to realize they went right into the line of fire!

-Audible [100WP]: It can be blood-pumping to hear the song of your people roaring over the gunfire and clashing of sword against shield. It can also be annoying as all hell for the enemy to deal with, if they don't have any taste. Let it be their downfall. Your weapon can release exceptionally loud hymns or music that can embolden and strengthen the morale of your allies while demoralizing your enemies with what's to come. Alternatively, you could just have it wailing like a banshee or playing your favorite music as loud as possible. It'll only get worse if it can use nearby speakers.

-Blood Glutton [200WP]: There are three things that determine how long you can stay on the blood-soaked fields of battle: Your current condition, your need for sustenance, and the amount of people to turn into piles. This ability focuses on the first of them, allowing your weapon to vampirically drain the health of those you wound and kill to rapidly heal any wounds of your own as quickly as you can cause them. Rejoice, for you will be eternal on the field of battle.

-Null [200WP] [Can't Take 'Spell Focus']: Psychic power can be a real problem when used against you. It completely alters the flow of battle and makes all form of conventional warfare worthless. It's honestly not worth the trouble at times, and with this blessing your weapon will agree. Even just being on the same field of battle as you, enemy psionic powers will fritz and start encountering issues. The closer they are to you, the worse it'll get to the point where their psychic ability ceases to function entirely. Imagine the look on their face when you come in for the kill.

-Spell Focus [200WP] [Can't Take 'Null']: Psychic powers are fucking *amazing*. Why bother taking the time to clear a bunker when you can telekinetically crush it and call it a day? Why bother running up to someone to stab them when you can fry them with lightning and save yourself the effort? Your weapon agrees with this notion, and so wielding it will boost your psychic abilities to quite a degree so you can enjoy a nice power high. Just be sure you can control your newfound strength.

-Lashing [200WP]: It is one thing for a weapon to be intelligent and throw itself around every so often. It is another entirely to act like a living creature and coil around to kill of its own volition. In taking this power, you take the great risk of allowing your imbued weapon to become segmented and flail around itself like a snake or an animate collection of metal ready to slaughter. If you're not the fancy type, you could simply have it raise up and strike as though someone invisible were wielding it. The point remains; it will strike with such speed and terror that it will be extremely difficult to parry its attacks.

-Soporific Mask [200WP]: If you're too slow when you fight, you die. It is as simple as that. By not being quick on the uptake, you allow others to slaughter you as easily as a wolf would slaughter a lamb. But you are no lamb, and never will be with this weapon. You are a wolf. On demand, the weapon will exude a thick and potent mist that will not affect you, but afflict others with slowing their reaction time and dulling their senses. Imagine their shock as you practically dance around them and turn their death into a show. Should you desire, any air-based drug or toxin can also be dispensed by the weapon.

-Mind Eater [200WP]: An ancient Terran strategist once said you must know your enemy, and know yourself in order to win the battle. This fact has not changed, but there are many different ways as to how to approach knowing one's opponent. This particular power will make it much easier to know your enemy as each strike will continually reduce their intellect. Wound them enough times and they could be an absolute idiot that's so easy to kill it wouldn't even be funny. Well, it might be a little funny.

-Enfeebling [200WP]: Many times, you will not fight mere men at their peak physical condition in the field of battle. No, not when there are superhumans gene-modified for war, xenos species able to survive the stars, or other creatures even worse than that. Someone needs to knock them down and make them easier to kill. That someone is you should your weapon receive this power. Each wound or strike will attack their very constitution and health, making them weak and feeble as they fall from the specimen they once were. Not so tough anymore, are they?

-Empowered Light [200WP]: War can be extremely hectic and chaotic. Gunfire and smoke can attack the senses, hordes of bodies overwhelming your will, and even the sight of the enemy charging towards you can leave the strongest of men with a hint of fear. No more. By raising your weapon and releasing a powerful light, fear and uncertainty will melt away from the minds of your allies while any hinderance to their senses are beaten back for them to get their wits back together. All the same, your enemies will find their willpower and bravery deteriorating at the same time, setting them up for a perfect counterattack. Turn the tide.

-Backlash [300WP]: The Immaterium is a dangerous thing, capable of empowering someone or tormenting them for entire lifetimes. Sometimes it will do both at once. But at the end of the day, it is the one who uses the Immaterium the most effectively who will win should two users come to blows. This powerful blessing will ensure it is you who wins, allowing your weapon to utilize a unique energy that not only lets it pass through psychic barriers as though they were paper but also causes the victim's own psychic power to begin attacking and striking them as it goes out of control. Just try to be out of the blast radius for anyone particularly powerful, mm?

-Warpflame [300WP]: Among all the powers of the Immaterium, Warpflame is one of the most dangerous. Not only does it burn the enemy and cause problems, but the flames will rapidly mutate a victim as the Flesh-Change begins to overcome them and turn them into something utterly unlike them. Woe to the enemies of one who controls such a flame. In taking this power, your weapon will allow you to control it and unleash torrents of Warpflame upon your foes. In time you can even control what a person will mutate into!

-Swiftess [300WP]: They say that he who laughs last, laughs best. But there's also something to be said about the one who strikes first. Speed can be a powerful strength in of itself, and in imbuing your weapon with this power you will become impossibly fast. Normal men will find it impossible for their senses to keep up with you, and even Astartes will have trouble keeping track with how fast you will become. Your weapon will let you strike like lightning, and be as deadly as lightning to boot.

-Decay of Time [300WP]: Flesh rots and even the very bones of a man can wither away into nothing as the passage of time takes its toll. Yet what of machinery? Many of the devices the Imperium fields are capable of lasting for centuries, millennia even. They too should be subjected to time, and so with this imbueement your weapon shall deliver it. Strikes against armor and machines will see them fray and die, metal rusting and circuitry failing as it erodes. Multiple strikes could see the technology dissolve away entirely, millennia of erosion being forced upon them as their user realizes who you will strike next. Only Death is eternal, and no king rules forever.

-Spiteful [300WP]: There's something beautiful about dedicated rage and spite against one that you hate. All that power, all that focus... all to bring one person down and see them ruined before you. Some might call it a horrible fate, and others see it as simply making sure they're fucking dead. Be the latter with this imbueement. Each successive strike will see your weapon hit harder, your strength grow higher and higher, all for the sole purpose of defeating that one enemy and turning them into a bucket of jelly. This effect will reset when you move on to another enemy, but it's all about the journey to get there.

-Accursed [300WP]: There are enemies out there that could be considered 'blessed'. Those who carry resistances to strange effects and powerful environments from some manner of supernatural source, be it psionic or from elsewhere. Such things can cause problems for you, and so should be removed with all force. Your blows with this weapon will ignore all supernatural resistances, cutting through them as though they merely had the resistance of a man. Strike them down, and show them that their defenses mean nothing.

-Impossibly Sharp [300WP]: What power the defenses of the 41st Millennium can bring to protect those who fight on the field! Armor that can withstand the power of a tank, energy fields that weather almost any blow, and so forth. It can be annoying to treat certain enemies like canned meat with your weapon as the opener, so why not take this imbuelement and save everyone the time? Any physical barrier will be utterly meaningless, slicing through armor and force field alike as though they did not even exist. Delight in the horror of your foes as they realize their armor means nothing to you.

-Commanding Power [300WP]: A disciplined army is a powerful army, but a unified army is an unstoppable one. Alas, the problem with people is they can get uppity at the worst times. They'll push their own opinions in, or slightly alter orders to suit their own needs, and so on and so forth. Cut that away and show them that you're in charge. By imbuing your weapon with this, you will give off such a powerful presence that all but the most strong-willed will find it very difficult to disobey or ignore any orders you give them. This could even extend to enemies, letting you speak with the voice of a god. Show them that not all power comes from violence.



A NEW PATH

It was done. It took a lot of effort and you could have sworn some of the workers nearly died in the effort, but your weapon (or weapons) were finally forged. Few Champions ever possessed tools such as these, and those that did always proved the advantage they had over their enemies. It was enough that more times than none the wielder died from others trying to backstab them than actually being killed on the battlefield.

The only question being... what now? Whether you accepted or defied Abaddon's proposal, the end result was the same: A direction was needed.

"A weapon forged, and an army assembled. You're coming along quite nicely."

The source would be an old woman, clearly hunched over and using her wooden stave to support herself as she approached you. Compared to all the Astartes around you, she was exceptionally weak and plain. Her skin was wrinkly, hair thin and stark white as she wore plain, black tattered robes. Yet every single Astartes stepped back to give her room, even looking incredibly uneasy with her being here.

As she raised her head to look at you, it would quickly become clear that she had no eyes. The sockets were empty.

"Forgive me, we've never met. I am Moriana, once a handmaiden of the Emperor. But I soon served the Despoiler, and in time I foresaw your arrival. Yes, I penned your prophecy, Void Walker. I know where you have been, and where you will eventually go. But more importantly, I know where you need to go *now*. At least, if you wish to ascend and aid your favored side in this war."

So, she's the one who predicted you coming here and kicked this whole thing off. Now she's trying to help you. An interesting situation, especially from one who was acting like a grandmother meeting their latest descendant.

"I ask only to watch you as you gain what is yours. Great treasure awaits, and you may deliver a great blow to your enemies should you gain the prize before they do. But you must reach it first, and this is why I am here. I wish to show you the path."

"I will show you how to reach Molech, and rise as the Emperor once did."

Please stay tuned for...

PART 3: The Gate of Divinity

