

# Index Astartes



## RISEN FROM THE UNKNOWN

**The Depthwatch  
Space Marine Chapter**

**By Messor**

There exists only a small, albeit dedicated, sect of Imperial scholarship that still gives credence to stories of the Depthwatch Chapter of the Adeptus Astartes. Though a number of references to marines bearing the armor and heraldry associated with the Depthwatch exist, they are only that: references. No reputable accounts, much less recordings, have been found that would truly confirm that the Chapter existed. It has been through the sponsorship of small and relatively insignificant dynasty of Inquisitors that the search for information regarding the Chapter still continues. There is still much debate, but the majority belief among these scholars and Inquisitors is that the Depthwatch was created during the 24th Founding and came to be stationed in the Segmentum Tempestus, where most of the myths originate, and which aligned with the need for fresh Imperial defenses at the time. It is generally assumed that the Chapter must have restricted itself to patrolling reaches of empty border space, regions that might make tempting openings for xenos incursions. This fits with the few existing records of materiel requisitions to the region for which any notation on the recipients has been lost.

Many of those searching for the truth behind the Depthwatch have long held the belief that somewhere in the galaxy, its progenitor may still hold records that would finally solve the puzzle, but between the reticence of many Astartes to allow Inquisitorial interference and the lack of any hint even to what genetic lineage the Depthwatch bore, no search has yet proved fruitful, and the trail has long been cold. The search has recently been rekindled, though, following reports of the bodies of Primaris marines vanishing from the battlefields where they fell.

### Origins: Remade in the Deep

Most scholars believe that the Depthwatch, if it existed, was destroyed no more than 300 years after its creation. Among a handful of worlds in the Segmentum Tempestus, however, legends persist of a Chapter matching their description still protecting Imperial worlds to this day. And there is always a bit of truth in legends.

For the Depthwatch did, indeed, exist. Toward the end of the 39th millennium, the chapter answered a call for aid from a beleaguered PDF from a colony on a moon called Vervloek on the very edge of the segmentum. The colony had been besieged by a host of Chaos Demons rising from the vast oceans that dominated the moon. Despite initial successes in repelling the demons, the guard forces stationed there were in no wise equipped to pursue the demons into the waters, and were forced to simply wait for each new wave to appear and attack, grinding down the defenders bit by bit. A force of Astartes ought to have been more than enough to, figuratively, turn the tide.

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Impressed by the staunch defense the natives had put up, and sensing a potential recruitment world, Chapter Master Pelorus Bygrave rallied what disparate elements of the Chapter fleet he could and led them to the moon.

No sooner had the Astartes arrived, then the situation on the surface worsened. Depthwatch marines landed amid pulsing, writhing hordes of screamers, horrors, and other nameless demonkind, chittering and screeching war cries in the name of their gods. While the Chapter's added forces were sufficient to hold the demons at bay, the renewed vigor of the invasion again kept them from going on the offensive.

After rebuffing numerous assaults, Watchlord Bygrave finally ordered the full might of the Chapter brought down on the Chaos hordes. It proved to be a wise decision, for as the battle dragged on from weeks to months and more Depthwatch forces arrived, the seemingly endless flow of demons continued to swell, the defenders barely keeping them in check. Over the course of the long, hard-fought siege, almost the entire Chapter joined the defense.

Finally, with a massive counterassault supported by the Chapter fleet in orbit, the beaches of Vervloek were cleared. The defenses secured, the Depthwatch finally took to the seas, many simply walking across the seabed in their armor, so eager were they to stem the flow of demons for good. At first resistance was scant; they encountered only a few groups of rallying demons, but nothing like the hordes that had besieged the coasts. But the hostile presence grew as they descended deeper. The 1st Company, with both the Watchlord and the Chief Librarian at its head, sought out the stiffest resistance, and their course eventually led them to a great ocean rift, a rift alight with crackling Chaos energy. It had been turned into a portal to the Warp itself, demons teeming both inside and out as they mustered another invasion force. Resting on the very lip of the rift was a massive, crystalline gem, its impossible geometries making it unclear if its shape was natural or of sentient design. The glowing energies pulsing in and around it, though, made its origins apparent.

Battle began anew, and again neither side seemed able to gain the upper hand; the demons endless numbers constantly replenishing, while the Astartes superior might and strategy made each man among them worth countless demons.

Seeking a new strategy, and suspecting that destroying the crystal might seal the portal and end the invasion, Bygrave ordered focused fire on it. As the first shots detonated, the effect was immediate. The demon host shrieked and recoiled as one, as if the assault on the gem caused them pain. The Chief Librarian reached out to contribute his psychic might to the attack, but as soon as his power connected to the crystal, his demeanor changed. He tried to react, to call a psychic cease-fire, but it was too late. The next moment, the crystal shattered, unleashing an incomprehensibly large Warp explosion. Perhaps this is what the demons had been working

toward along. Perhaps it truly was the only way to stop them. Whatever the case, the Warp shockwave spread with frightening speed, claiming first the watery battlefield and everyone on it, then the surrounding sea and the hard-won beachhead defenses, then the continent, and finally, the entire moon disappeared, leaving only the roiling echoes of a warpstorm in its place. When the storm abated not long after, nothing, not even debris, remained. So passed the Depthwatch and the backwater moon of Vervloek out of almost all Imperial knowledge.

## DEATHWORLD LOCKUERA

"Drowned?" Ko'dis asked again, an uncomfortable feeling pricking up his spine.

"To a man, Shas'el," replied the drone, matter-of-factly, floating between the body bags laid out in the tent. "There were no other signs of trauma."

Ko'dis stood silently for a moment, brow furrowed, before turning and stepping out into the blistering heat, watching with a mixture of pain and confusion as the medical drones worked, glistening under the baleful sun, collecting the other bodies scattered around the desert valley.

## Home World

It would be a great triumph for those pursuing knowledge of the Depthwatch to ascertain even what might have been their home sector, let alone a home world. In the past the stories and legends attributed to the Chapter have originated in the Segmentum Tempestus, and new attention has been brought to the region as separate forces of multiple space marine chapters, including the Champions Eternal, the Wolfspear Chapter, the Moritficators, and the Raven Guard have raised claims of unidentified, but ostensibly loyalist, astartes absconding with the bodies of fallen Primaris marines. With the voice of the Raven Guard involved, more groups within the Inquisition have begun to take interest, though the Champions Eternal have vowed to find and punish the desecrators themselves.

The original Depthwatch was fleet based before the events on Vervloek, with their monastery and primary command housed in the Battle Barge Lusca. While the fleet, including the Lusca, was claimed with the storm that took Vervloek, both still survive. It is unclear, however, exactly how they are connected with the Depthwatch now. Home? Transport? Prison? Though the Depthwatch no longer seem to have need of boarding torpedoes, drop pods or landing ships, the Chapter fleet is still always present when they appear, and always with it is the

phantom moon itself, appearing like an omen of vengeance over worlds where it doesn't belong, but where the Emperor's Angels of Death are needed.

## Recruitment

Who or where the Depthwatch recruited to their ranks is impossible for Imperial scholars to know, given the much more fundamental questions that they still cannot answer, and the truth would have been rather mundane. The Depthwatch didn't originally maintain much ritual to their recruitment practices. Their duties kept them distant from most worlds, and so they typically collected a simple tithe of candidates from whichever worlds were nearest when recruitment was necessary.

Now, of course, things are different. Living mortals no longer suffice for transformation into new marines, and while they are unnaturally resilient, the warriors of the Depthwatch can be destroyed, making replenishment a necessity.

Spectral though they may now be, the Apothecarion of the Depthwatch continues to bear responsibility for the propagation of the chapter. When a Depthwatch marine falls in battle, body too ruined even for their supernatural powers to overcome, they are visited by an Apothecary in a moment mirrored by any normal chapter. However, instead of extracting progenoid organs, Depthwatch Apothecaries will breach the armor over the marine's primary heart and, from somewhere in their chest, extract a dull crystal shard.

The dull crystals harvested by the Apothecarion begin to glow in the presence of mortals who have recently died, as if in anticipation, and following an implantation process that would do more harm than healing to a living being, these dead rise again, ready to serve. Acquiring these "recruits" has made it necessary to steal the bodies of astartes from other chapters. Until the Ultima founding, these dark thefts were subtle enough to go almost unnoticed. But the disappearances have increased, in recent times, and the loss of new and vital Primaris armor and genetic material has not gone ignored.

## KILLING FIELDS OF EXUMA

Battle-brother Morous lay dying, explosions bursting in the air high above him. His brothers fought on, advancing past him, alongside the strange marines that had come to their aid. There was a chill at his side, likely the blood ebbing away, and then an apothecary was there. Not one of the Fire Angels Apothecarion, but one in the livery of the other marines.

"Away," Morous groaned, "I am a Fire Angel."

"Would you live and fight again?" Asked a voice. It seemed to come from his own mind, rather than the unmoving apothecary standing over him.

"We have no—ngh—more sarcophagi," he answered weakly.

"Not in metal," said the voice, "in your own flesh."

There was a pause, before Morous finally whispered, "I will."

He felt the apothecary's hand on his chest, and then seemed to sink, the color washing from the sky, the sounds of battle growing dull, until he was taken by darkness.

## Combat Doctrine

Collected myths and songs associated with the Depthwatch paint a picture of a force focused on ambush tactics. Epics tell of "star sailors" who made use of celestial bodies like asteroid fields and nebulae to strike unexpectedly at invading enemies. According to some tales they could strike from all directions, always seeking to remove any chance of retreat and utterly destroy their foes, rather than simply repel them.

There is no rational explanation for the methods by which the Depthwatch arrive and conduct combat since their transformation. New myths and stories have grown up alongside the old which describe battlefields becoming mired in thick, unnatural fog. Pools of water appear where there were none. And then, from unseen angles, the Depthwatch simply emerge, already in the act of destroying their enemies. Even heavy armor, Dreadnoughts and Predator tanks with water still streaming from their hulls, seem to simply roar out of the mist unleashing destruction. Few live that have actually witnessed the Depthwatch emerging from the murky pools that gather before each ambush. Apart from the muffled stuttering and screeching of their weapons and engines, the marines carry out their work in eerie silence while their foes scream and die around them.

## Organization

Like their recruitment methods, the scant information that researchers have gathered over the centuries is not nearly enough to support guesses as to how the Depthwatch was organized.

From the time of their founding down to the Incident, the Depthwatch maintained near full strength for a codex adherent chapter, and was led by its original Chapter Master, Watchlord Pelorus Bygrave. Organized to fill the roles demanded by crusade fleets, the chapter's companies were codex adherent, though with their somewhat limited

opportunities to engage in planetary combat, the chapter did not maintain a large motor pool.

Watchlord Bygrave, like much of the Chapter, survived the events on Vervloek . . . after a fashion. The fallout of their victory, if it could be called that, was that the Watchlord and the marines of the Depthwatch have virtually been stripped of autonomy and all sense of self. The only emotion they still know is the hatred of the Emperor's enemies that they felt at the time of their transformation. The only thoughts that rule their minds now are to destroy any and all that threaten Imperial citizenry. Even these single-minded feelings are only fragile echoes of the individuals they were before, and they only persist through the constant effort of one man: the Chief Librarian of the Depthwatch, Fathom-Seer Kamal Ikutarsa. By means unknown, the psychic backlash from the warp crystal's destruction on Vervloek infused Ikutarsa with incredible power. With that power, rather than let his chapter be destroyed, Ikutarsa bound everything the warp touched, remaking it even as it was unmade, and tethering it to his own mind and soul. His battle brothers, the colony, the fleet, even the very moon itself have essentially become extensions of his being. The only truly living individual left in the Chapter, virtually all his focus and effort is now given over to continuing their existence, and allowing them to continue carrying out the Emperor's will. What few free thoughts he has have always been to wonder if there was a way to restore the minds and souls of his brother, but he can risk very little distraction. Connected as he is to the warp, Ikutarsa guides the Depthwatch and their phantom moon from warzone to warzone, as a single body with a single purpose.

## PELEGOSTOS HIVE

"Rise, brothers and sisters! Now the sacred shadow bursts! Now the dead Empire falls!" howled the magnus, throwing her hand out toward the upper heights of the hive spire as her kin poured out of windows, doors, the sewers below, as though the city was bleeding. "Take what is ours! Throw down the false—"

The tide of mutants stilled and quieted as it flooded onto the next street. Moving quickly to their head, the magus saw why.

Astertes. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, silently blocking the thoroughfare. It wasn't possible, they had cut off everything; communications, transportation both planetary and orbital. How were they here? As the babbling horde of cultists pushed and jostled uncertainly, a pair of battle tanks rumbled up, seemingly from within the wall of marines. At their front stood a larger marine with a curved power sword. In the moment the magus' eyes fell on him, he activated the sword, and all hell broke loose.

## Beliefs

Occasionally the debates that take place about the chapter broach the subject of their beliefs, more specifically their loyalty, but the discourse is only questions, never answers, and from decade to decade popular opinion sways on whether this lost chapter was traitorous or true.

The few long ago who claimed to have encountered the chapter on peaceful terms, before their change, at least gave consistent descriptions of intensely zealous individuals in whom the hatred for xenos, witch, and traitor could be seen burning in their eyes. Indeed, the Depthwatch were deeply devoted to the Emperor. Their rites and rituals were heavily driven by the knowledge that every astartes bore part of the Emperor deep within him, and to remember this would preserve them mentally and spiritually from all forms of corruption. What remains of the Chapter, both physically and spiritually, still appears as loyal and dedicated as before, to the extent that they can be, as they come to the aid of besieged and harried Imperial forces during their hour of need. The only belief that truly remains is that of the Fathom-seer, that the battle brothers of the Depthwatch, and their fallen comrades claimed from other battlefields, are better off serving in soulless undeath than being consigned to oblivion.

## LORE BOX TITLE

Use these to fill empty space and provide additional info about your Chapter. You'll need to download the Caslon Antique font if you want the font to match the official articles.

## Gene-Seed/Geneseed

The genetic origin of the Depthwatch is as lost to the Imperium as the rest of the Chapter's history, a subject of endless discussion among the tiny faction of scholars that still defend the Chapter's existence. While a few go as far as to try inferring lineage from the scant descriptions of the Chapter's character, most others deride anything less than verified genetic data, something that most researchers have given up ever finding.

In truth, when they were created, the Depthwatch were gene-sons of Dorn. The tireless search for the truth or fiction of the Depthwatch would have ended long ago had their progenitors, a chapter known as the Omastygians, still existed. Unfortunately, they were destroyed along with all their records under unknown circumstances shortly after founding their successors. The little information that they had provided Terra during their service left no hint as to the identity of the Chapter they sired.

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## VERVLOEK, THE DREAD MOON

As another minute, another hour, another eternity of resisting the whispers ticked by, Iktarsa found familiar, insidious thoughts slipping into his mantras. Cursing that he had ever been a psyker. Hungering for a chaplain's wisdom. Raging against the eternal futility of it all. With some effort he pushed the wasted emotions aside. He was grateful to them for one thing. They still stoked his hatred of the Ruinous Powers. All their temptations, and all they had taken from him. It only hardened his will.

### Using a Depthwatch Army in Warhammer 40,000

The Depthwatch was developed with the 8<sup>th</sup> Edition of the game in mind. They are most appropriately played with the

standard Space Marine codex, using Successor Tactics that emphasize durability and/or implacability.

### About the Author

The Moderati Cedo titled "Procreator Cohors" and known as Messor to the Liber Astartes of the Bolter & Chainsword is an easily distracted hobbyist with a taste for the Warhammer 40k universe that far, far exceeds his budget. While no particular expert on the lore, he enjoys the rabbit hole searches born from trying to develop a concept and make it viable in-universe. This does occasionally conflict with his propensity towards crossovers with other media that are less kind to the immersion of readers, but at the end of the day, it's all for fun, isn't it?

## THE BLASPHEMOUS TRUTH, WHISPERED FROM TOMES IN THE BLACK LIBRARY

Behold, a memory woven from the recollections of Men and Aeldari,  
both living and dead.

++Governor's Palace, Agri-World Saint Dominigus++

++Morning++

"And the knife-ear raids, did you get him to call fo—"

"No, Captain, I could not convince him of the need to request assistance. He has given us leave to adjust our perimeter as we see fit to protect the palace, only."

"Commisar, that won't do, you know that won't do. You showed him the transmissions from Ismorta, didn't you? The fires were visible from orbit! We need reinforcements before they co—"

"And we're not getting them, Captain! I did all I could. The man has become bloated on his indolent lifestyle and quite immune to appeals to reason or actions that require effort. We must make do. Our orders are quite explicit to fortify only the palace. I suggest you prepare emergency shelters within the outer walls for as many of our workers as possible, and withdraw as much of the regiment as we can afford to defensive positions around it."

"And our units left outside? The millions of workers who'd never be able to travel to the palace, let alone fit inside the walls? What about them?"

"...The Emperor protects, Captain. That is all."

++Low Orbit++

++Twilight++

As if a patch of the starry sky became a silken sheet and slipped away, a Dying Sun battleship appeared in the upper atmosphere of Saint Dominigus, followed closely by a dozen Torture-class Cruisers. The Blackguard Kabal had arrived.

As Archon S'iaofex strode through the teeming mass of warriors on the launch deck, all rushing toward landing crafts, his Heirarch appeared at his elbow.

"You will be disappointed, master," he said cautiously, "the Mon-keigh expected us, but their defenses are pathetic. There is a handful of nearly unprotected complexes where the workers dwell. Their real defenses are concentrated around a single compound while large, and mostly unprotected caravans have been identified traveling towards it. There is plenty for the taking, but the slaughter will be...dull. Hardly worth your time."

"Hm, a shame," S'iaofex intoned, his pace slowing for a moment as he seemed to pause, consider, before resuming as before, "But it has been too long since I have set foot on a ripe world myself to spill its blood, and I thirst for slaughter. This will have to do. Direct our warriors to the largest caravan at the edge of their defensive range. Let them watch as we fall upon their wards."

"Very good, master," the Heirarch bowed and disappeared into the crowd.

++28 kilometers south of the Governor's Palace complex++

++Nightfall++

"Keep it movin', keep it movin'" the guardsman called over the rumble of feet, vehicle treads and frightened murmuring, "You'll all be sleepin' sound in short orda'!"

He turned to look over the front of the column just in time to see a massive lance beam scythe through it, atomizing dozens of civilians and carving a flaming gouge in their path.

"Taaake covaa—" He began to shout, before a fighter bomb detonated only a few meters behind him, obliterating the man and another group of civilians nearby. All was chaos. Shadow-like open-topped gunships swept down all around the convoy, unloading kabalites already in the act of unleashing their full firepower on the defenseless humans. The token force of guardsmen and volunteers that defended the convoy were struck down quickly, and the Drukhari began to close in, relishing the opportunity to savor the humans' suffering up close.

In the space of a heartbeat, the battlefield changed. Wisps and tendrils of fog twisted into existence seemingly out of nothing,

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a thick, translucent shroud falling over human and eldar alike. The fighting paused, not with the hesitation of those who have lost sight of their enemy, but with the uncertainty of those who sensed that something was...wrong.

The lull was brief, though, as the drukahri lust for murder had been far from satisfied. They began to pick their way, perhaps a little cautiously, through the stifling mists towards the muffled cries of their prey, firing occasionally in the direction of the callouts and screams from the stranded caravan members. The Heirarch moved through the murk somewhat more leisurely than the other warriors, the thrill of bloodshed not as strong in him, knowing how weak their prey was. He came to a sudden stop as the terrain beneath his feet abruptly changed. He looked down at the pool of rippling water he'd stepped in, confused but not quite able to articulate why. The mon-keigh cultivated this world for food; it should come as no surprise that it would be damp. Then why did this disturb him so?

Nearby, a lower kabalite warrior froze, halfway across a similar pool. A motionless, hulking form lay in it, a form he recognized, one that should not have been there. The warrior reached out a hand to touch the armor, oblivious to the second looming figure that rose out of the pool behind it. The kabalite paused, hand mere inches from the armored form, then seemed to make a decision, turning abruptly to call out. In a flash, a blade nearly the length of the drukahri's arm rammed up through his throat from behind, and he expired with little more than soft gurgle.

Through the impenetrable mist, the Heirarch noticed nothing, brow wrinkling as he continued to stare at the water in front of him. Understanding finally dawned on him, as he realized that he stood on the water as if it were a polished mirror instead of a shallow pool on a pitted, muddy road. No sooner did this realization come, than an eroded, ceramite gauntlet burst from the water and clamped down on his throat like a vice. The Heirarch stared with bulging eyes at the visage emerging from the water behind the fist. The form of the mon-keigh space marine was a familiar, if unwelcome, sight in its own right. But this one...ancient in appearance, rust gathered at the joints of the pale armor, and both the helmet optics appeared to have been lost, but still from somewhere inside came a cold, blue glow. Water continuously streamed out of gaps and large cracks in the armor, over every surface, flowing like life from a body. His own body, the Heirarch numbly realized, as darkness closed in from the edges of his vision. He had a vague impression that the armored figure was descending back into the pool, taking him with it.

As if the disappearance of the Heirarch was a signal, the mists lit up with bolter fire, eliciting screams from a new source as the drukahri were cut down in quick succession. The tall silhouettes of astartes materialized in the mists, striking and disappearing just as quickly. Kabalites howled in anger and terror as some tried to fight back against the elusive figures, while others were dragged into pools, vanishing completely beneath the surface. One warrior, twisting around every way in the mist, just trying to lay eyes on the enemy, and eventually he threw his weapon down in panic, shouting at the fleeting figures of their assailants.

"I surrend—" the eerily dampened report of a bolter cut off the shout, just one more shot among many in the foggy darkness.

A pair of reaver jet bikes came singing discordantly through the fog, swooping low and slowing in their efforts to pick targets. One of them managed a glancing blow across the back of a marine, only to be swatted out of the air in a gout of flame and water as a massive mechanical arm burst from a pool in its path. With creaking and groaning of metal, a towering, rusted war machine rose from the water, turning its other fist toward the surviving reaver while beginning to lumber across the battlefield. A hail of bolter fire stuttered from below its metal wrist, several rounds detonating along the flank of the bike and sending it crashing into the ground. A moment later the dreadnought stomped into another large pool and seemed to collapse and vanish into it, even as several shots from nearby raiders pinged off the aged armor.

S'iaofex stood amid the chaos surrounded by the few remaining members of his guard. The bodies on the ground showed a loose perimeter that had been chipped away bit by bit. A pair of shots pierced the mist, the first deflecting off the armor of one the Incubi bodyguards, detonating against the ground nearby, but the second shot punched through the helmet, the drukahri's head bursting as the round exploded. S'iaofex fired in the direction of the bolter fire. He was sure he had killed at least a few of them with shredder blasts, but their bodies were gone each time he tried to confirm it.

His own armor had absorbed several glancing blows already, and couldn't stand much more. He hissed retrieval orders into his helmet for his personal gunship, but heard only static in response. He whipped around, searching for another target, only to be confronted by a solitary astartes, rising from a pool just in front of him, a dripping bolt pistol leveled at his head. For a moment, S'iaofex's grip on his shredder tightened, and he snarled, but then dropped the weapon. The pistol discharged, but the Archon's head was no longer there; he

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moved with lethal grace, a splinter pistol in his hand where there hadn't been one before. He flowed in closer to the marine, using one arm to block the marine's intercepting movement as his own pistol slid in under the marine's chin and fired.

The shot burst from the top of the marine's helmet, and S'iaofex had a moment of satisfaction as warm liquid spattered on his face, but his smile faded as the body collapsed and he saw the source, tasted it on his lips; not blood, water. Before he could give it more thought, a proximity alert signal sounded in his helmet, and the dark shadow of his gunship descended smoothly through the fog above, coming to a hover next to him.

"We barely received your summons, Lord," called the pilot, "There's some kind of inter—"

"Get us back to the assault boat, now," S'iaofex hissed, leaping aboard.

"Yes, Lord," came the quick answer, and the vessel rose up through the mist. Their ascent seemed quick enough, but they didn't break the mist. Just as a chill of fear began to blossom in his stomach, they burst through the ceiling of the fog into clear night air, and he was ready to allow himself a sigh of relief. But his unease hadn't faded. The sky was alarmingly bright; an immense blue moon hanging in the sky. It seemed oppressively close. He loathed it; the night was supposed to belong to the Blackguard, but it had betrayed them.

"Take us to the fleet," the Archon ordered as he dismounted, climbing into the hold and dropping tiredly into one of the jump seats.

"Setting course for the rendezvous," came the pilot's voice over the comms, knowing better than to ask about the fate of their forces still on the ground, "We haven't had contact since your assault began, my Lord."

Not for the first time that night, S'iaofex felt a prickling on the back of his neck. They cleared the atmosphere quickly, and after taking a few moments to compose himself, S'iaofex made his way into the cockpit. As they reached the rendezvous point, they could pick out the Archon's battleship, the Tyrannical Mother already waiting. Approaching the flagship, though, it became clear that it had not arrived unscathed. Smoke and

sparks poured from a number of large breaches in the starboard hull, but the ship still appeared to have full power.

"What happened?" He demanded.

"Our communications are still down; it's some kind of interference, possibly psychic."

Growling, he turned away, moving towards the main hatch. In short order he was striding down a corridor toward the bridge of the Mother, tailed by several attendants.

"We tied them up with the other cruisers, but they came out of nowhere," one was saying.

"They all looked like mon-keigh vessels," put in another, "but we can't identify their defenses. Many of our weapons seemed to have no effect."

The doors to the bridge opened, displaying the inky void ahead of them through the great viewports. S'iaofex turned away from the conn, coming up behind the communications pit, the hapless kabalites shrinking from his gaze.

"Get me something," the Archon hissed through his helmet, eliciting flinches.

One leaned forward, making a console adjustment, "My lord," she said, keeping the tremor out of her voice.

Static filled the chamber, punctuated by bursts of voices; calls for retreat, screams of pain, roared commands, coming in broken pieces. The rest of the crew listened, some grimacing, some grinning. These sounds would have been music to S'iaofex's ears if they had come from another source. Now they just marked his failure. He glanced out the viewport again at the looming, mocking moon hanging before them.

Turning back to berate his crew, the Archon froze, feeling the prickling on his neck again. The moon had not been in view before. He straightened up and whirled back to the viewport, the crew following his gaze. The moon was there, impossibly close...and a Mon-keigh battle barge directly in front of them, growing as it advanced, listing slightly to the side as it seemed to careen towards the bridge, filling their view. Somehow they

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could hear it, the distressed groan of the colossal metal plates, and finally someone shouted, "Brace for impact!"

He turned and ran, lowering himself in anticipation of the collision. A sudden rumble came, and screams behind him, but nothing more, and glancing back he saw a wall of water instead of a fiery explosion rushing towards him. Hard as he ran, he couldn't escape, and within moments he was overtaken and the water slammed into him, tearing him off his feet and sending him hurtling down the corridor.

Tumbling end over end, a couple of times he collided with a wall, or a corner, until finally he was slammed against a sealed bulkhead, the current flattening against the closed doors. He felt his armor buckling under the pressure, and the doors straining beneath him. Just when he thought the water would crush him into oblivion, the pressure withdrew. S'iaofex floated for a moment, trying to see down the corridor, but the scant lighting maintained on the ship had all but gone out. Looking to the ceiling, he could see the water beginning to recede. Steadying himself in the water, he waited for it to lower further.

The water was still receding when S'iaofex saw that he wasn't alone. The head of a tall figure was visible above the water, moving steadily towards him in the dark. He dived back and tried opening the doors. They parted slightly, but seemed to stall. Turning back, he saw nothing in the water, but surfacing again, the figure was visible once more, now a full head and wide, armored shoulders above the water. This space marine wore no helmet, and his hair, long and dark, moved unnaturally as he seemed to stride through the water, drifting behind him as if he was still submerged. As he came closer, a glow began to emanate from the armor, casting a ghastly light on his face from below. His eyes, too, began to glow, illuminating pallid, wet skin.

"What are you?" S'iaofex called at the tower of the aged, rusted armor. The marine advanced in silence, the water having lowered enough to reveal a crackling power sword in his hand, curved and with cruel serration on one side.

"What are you?" the Archon demanded, back pressed against the obstinate doors as one hand tried vainly to open it. He could see the face more clearly now, gaunt, skin cracked liked desert earth with glistening inky blackness underneath. The marine was less than a dozen meters away, the water now just around their ankles.

"WHAT ARE Y—" S'iaofex's last roar was cut off as the power sword impaled him, spearing through the door at his back. The body went limp, and as the last of the water drained away, S'iaofex's limp form collapsed to the deck, his corpse alone in the corridor.

The Tyrannical Mother drifted in a decaying orbit over Saint Dominigus, its fires all extinguished, but dead all the same, the battle barge emerging from its stern as if the two had never touched. The engines of the astartes ship flickered to life, and it laboriously turned, making its way toward the waiting moon, joined in short order by other ships in the same pale, faded livery.

With hesitant whimpers and moans, the survivors of the convoy to the governor's palace stirred as the mists retreated, finding them on the outskirts of a silent battlefield, strewn only with the bodies of their attackers, the skies lit only by stars.