

THE HORUS HERESY®

GARRO

SHIELD OF LIES

James Swallow



BLACK LIBRARY

Part One

SCENE 1: EXT. SHIPYARD - NIGHT

[ATMOS: a colossal shipyard; gigantic vessels under construction amid the hiss of welders, metal on metal, clanking cranes]

She knew they would find her.

[SFX: panicked footsteps approach, scrambling to a halt; a woman panting, out of breath and very afraid]

It was only a matter of time.

The pursuit squad she fled on the administration level was the first of many. Blind luck saved her from their clutches, that and the adrenaline coursing through her system. But others followed them, blocking her at every turn.

Each avenue of escape was being meticulously closed off, one after another. The public shuttle terminal, the cargo bays, even the mass conveyors - all were barricaded by hunter patrols. In the old days, back when this place had been policed by humans and not machines, she would have taken her chances and risked an attempt to slip past the officers of the Adeptus Arbites. But not now. She dared not pass before the unblinking synthetic eyes that tirelessly scanned the streets of the city.

Dropping into cover behind a towering service gantry, she took pause and made an attempt to compose herself.

TALLERY (to herself): Panic is an unproductive emotional state. Can't just keep on *reacting*. Have to *think*.

She looked up, following the lines of the massive cranes moving overhead, seeing the flashing motions of beam-welders.

Warships were taking shape in the titanic dock-spaces all around her. Bulky things with chisel-shaped prows that bristled with crenellated missile turrets. Brass-clad system boats built around spine-mounted mega-lasers. Autonomous platforms packed with kinetic kill rods.

Forever adrift on anti-gravs miles above the surface of Terra, the

untethered city of the Riga orbital plate had always served as a lathe for the Imperium. But the Fall of Mars, and the struggle to control what remained of the Ring of Iron about the Red Planet, had changed much. The city's work was now the building of smaller craft for the Solar System's defence fleet - vital preparation for the coming conflict.

Since word had arrived of the Warmaster's insurrection, the aerial platform had not known a moment's peace. The rebellion of Horus Lupercal against his father the Emperor had put the galaxy on a war footing. Riga looped forever on a slow course back and forth between the rad-lands of Merica to the region in Old Ursh after which it had been named. And all the while, the planet beneath, like every other Imperial world, prepared for invasion.

She had been born down there on the ground, thirty years ago, at the edges of the Atalantic Scarp; but Riga had become her home ever since her assignment here as a scribe-novitiate of the Estate Imperialis. She had come to love it, in an abstract way, to know the great floating metropolis as though it were an old friend...

But that conceit seemed foolish now. The sky-city had turned against her. There was no place on the floating

plate for her. She would be found. The tireless hunters would come.

[SFX: somewhere overhead, a heavy mechanoid marches past on a walkway, scanning the area as it passes]

TALLERY: [reacting, gasps]

As if the thought itself had summoned it, an armoured Thallax machine-soldier crossed a catwalk high above, its bronze head turning this way and that as it moved. A fan of sapphire laser light washed across its path as scry-sensors peered into the gloom. Looking for her.

Shrinking into the folds of her hood, she did not dare to move, to breathe, to exist until it was gone. One mistake, one slip, and they would take her. It terrified her to think of what would happen if she were captured. She might have been able to reason with a human. But a combat cyborg would only see her as a target, as an objective to be captured... or *killed*.

TALLERY (to herself): Accursed artificials... Don't they ever rest?

[SFX: she moves off carefully, and we go with her]

Carefully - shifting from cover to cover, always staying in the shadows - she moved on down the length of the dockyard. To one side, the edge of Riga fell away into a sheer drop towards

open, polluted skies, and she kept a wary distance. Metal shapes moved out there, endlessly circling; hawk-like gunship drones governed by synthetic bio-mechanical brains cultured in vats.

[SFX: distantly, gunships fly past]

They too were looking for her. She imagined that every machine in the city knew her face and ident code.

TALLERY: Let's not make it easy for them, then...

[SFX: fleshy, tearing sounds; she reacts in pain, like pulling out a fingernail, but it has to be done]

Her sub-dermal data-implant was not designed to be removed by something so crude as a writing stylus, but she had nothing else to hand. Slick with her blood, she levered it out from beneath her skin until she had the glistening sliver of silicon between her fingers.

With a grunt of effort, she threw the implant over the edge and watched the wind take it. That might keep them off her back a little longer. Long enough, she hoped, to come up with something approaching a plan.

The pain from the self-inflicted wound helped her to focus. She feared that if she dwelled upon her circumstances, it would be enough to sap her will.

A few days ago, she had been nothing

more than a minor functionary, a scribe in the employ of the monolithic records division of the Departamento Munitorum.

Now she was a criminal, declared *excommunicate traitoris*. Marked for high crimes against Terra. The words had been spoken across the enforcer watch-wire for all to hear. Such accusations sickened her. They were lies, fabrications created by those who wanted her silence... and as the Emperor was her witness, she was afraid they would soon have it. There were no more places to hide.

[SFX: distantly, a heavily armoured form moves]

For it was not just the machines that were hunting her. There was someone... *something* else.

At first, she thought it to be a trick of the mind, some element of the fatigue creeping over her. She was human and so she was subject to human frailties. She could not run forever. She would have to rest eventually.

The hunter - *the shadow* - did not seem to suffer the same limitations. She glimpsed it on rooftops when she pushed through the crowds on the mainway, heard its weighty footfalls in back alleys. She caught a shimmer of twisted light, like rays of the sun through a rain-slick window. Something was tracking her, cloaked beneath the

mantle of a Falsehood. The camouflage mimetic adapted moment by moment, rendering her seeker near-invisible.

[SFX: the pursuer is getting closer]

TALLERY (terrified): It's close...

Her blood turned to ice in her veins as she rolled back her hood. She peered through the dimness, towards a nearby landing gantry. *And froze.*

TALLERY: [gasps]

There, a brutal, hulking figure twice the size of a man stood watching her, the rippling mirror-effect of the metallic cloak gathering at its back. An armoured giant, heavy with menace and the promise of terrible destruction, it resembled an ancient war god from the histories beyond the Age of Strife.

It was not a machine, she knew that instinctively. Nothing mechanical could move like this warrior did, fluid and martial, as if born to the business of a death-dealer.

In lattices of shadow cast by the moving cranes on the upper docks, the eye-slits of the figure's helm glowed green above a sharp, angular snout.

Every fear she had ever experienced, every night terror and irrational dread, paled before this sight.

They had sent a legionary to end her.

One of the Emperor's Angels of Death. Like some mythic revenant, it slowly raised one hand and pointed towards her. The meaning of the gesture was clear. *There is no escape.*

And because she was only human, in that second her will broke.

**SCENE 2: EXT. CARGO DOCKS -
NIGHT**

[ATMOS: similar to Scene 1, elsewhere]

Reason shattered like glass. In its stead, panic rose in a tidal wave and she was suddenly running, heedless of where her path might take her.

[SFX: Tallery runs for her life; the armoured legionary is close behind]

She fled towards a low-hanging gantry and scrambled beneath it, tearing her robes as she threaded through a gap too small for the legionary to follow. Bursting out the other side, she emerged into a canyon formed by lines of cargo modules.

TALLERY: [running, exertion]

[SFX: the legionary storms over the

barrier, landing hard, still coming]

The warrior's pursuit did not slow. He came crashing over the gantry at speed, seemingly too swift for something so heavy. She felt the deck plates beneath her feet resonate with each step as he bounded after her.

At the last second, she jack-knifed into a narrow alley between two bulk tankers, choking as she pushed through a vapour of spent promethium fuel. Beyond, there was darkness, the safety of deep shadows, and for one giddy moment she thought she might actually get away.

[SFX: with a crash, the legionary forces his way between the tanks and catches up]

But too late the price of her headlong flight was revealed. The shadows did not conceal an escape route, as she had hoped. Instead, they ended in a sheer wall of iron rising high towards the docking towers.

TALLERY: Oh, Throne. No...

[SFX: the legionary slows, and approaches; he draws his sword]

He drew his sword, power humming through the shimmering edges of the blade, the weapon almost as long as she was tall. She saw him clearly now, the full threat of the armoured Space Marine revealed under the sodium-bright

lights of the shipyard.

GARRO (helmet-vox): You are Scribe-Adepta Second Classificate Katanoh Tallery. And you are accused of treason.

Her every instinct was to kneel. She had never been in the presence of a warrior of the Legiones Astartes before, only glimpsed them at a distance or in the still images of a pict-slate. But now, close enough to touch this one, she knew that all the stories of their menacing aura were true. This was a gene-engineered killer standing over her, a being created only for war. How could she ever have hoped to escape him? The turncoat Warmaster had thousands of such warriors at his command - was it any wonder that one of them could come to end her with such ease?

But for all the fear that gripped her, Katanoh Tallery was not ready to die in silence.

TALLERY (whispering): I am not a traitor. [**louder, more defiant**] I am loyal!

Shaking, she managed to draw herself up. It took all the effort she could muster to look the legionary in the eye.

TALLERY: You will not cloak this act in lies! I have done nothing against

my Imperium, no matter what has been said against me!

Tallery turned away, her hands trembling. She pulled at a golden chain about her wrist, hidden inside the cuff of her robe. From it dangled a tiny charm resembling the great symbol of the Imperial aquila, the two-headed eagle that looked both to the future and to the past. She took it between her fingers, as if to draw strength from its noble form.

TALLERY (almost a prayer): The Emperor Protects... The Emperor Protects...

[SFX: a long moment passes; then, with a hiss of pressure, the legionary removes his helmet to reveal...]

GARRO: Look at me.

She did as she was told.

The face behind the legionary's dread helm was revealed to her. Flesh that was a map of healed wounds, old scars and the near-touch of death. And yet... those eyes. For all his fearsome aspect, the warrior's eyes had a kindness in them.

GARRO: The icon you wear about your wrist. Where did you get it?

TALLERY: What does that matter? If I am to be executed for a lie, what is any truth worth?

The tip of his great sword dropped towards the deck, and Tallery felt him take the full measure of her. There was doubt on that scarred, ravaged face.

He was not what she had expected. The warrior seemed almost... *human*.

GARRO: I am Nathaniel Garro. Tell me your truth, scribe, and perhaps you will live to see tomorrow.

**SCENE 3: INT. MUNITORUM OFFICE
- DAY**

[ATMOS: flashback to a future-gothic office complex; brassy clockwork machines, vacuum tubes, some typing and the scratching of ink pens]

TALLERY (all business, dictating):

Attention, servitor. Addendum number six-three-six-one-two-one. File Gamma. Protocol Omnia Majoris. Scribe Tallery recording. [clears throat] Let it be known that the four hundred and ninth supply convoy to the Mertiol System has been diverted via the colony on Rocene due to anomalous stellar navigation hazards. This datum to be recorded and transmitted by astropathic medium to all relevant contact points, see sub-clause eight-alpha.

SERVITOR: *Servitor confirms. Scribe Tallery.*

It was, on reflection, remarkable how circumstances could change so radically after just one unexpected event. That was all that it took to begin the unravelling of Katanoh Tallery's well-ordered world - the breaking of a single link in the chain of fate. The unanticipated ending of a life.

TALLERY (dictating): Stocks of class two engine coolant modules for Javelin variant attack speeders are to be increased from forty thousand extant to sixty-seven thousand, expedite immediate. Refer and submit docket.

[SFX: a chattering ticker-tape spools out a paper copy of her dictation]

So the axiom of the great Terran Administratum held, there was no more serious task than the logistics of empire. In an Imperium that spanned not just planets and star systems, but an entire galaxy, the business of maintaining government, of financing war and peace, of keeping supply lines open, was an endless challenge.

If the warriors of the Legiones Astartes were the fist of the Imperium, the Navigator Guild its eyes and the astropaths its voice, then the monolithic Administratum was the heart pumping vital lifeblood through its veins.

Nothing moved from world to world - not a starship, not a man, not a morsel of food - without the great machine of the Administratum to manage it. And in a time of conflict, the vital responsibility of this office became even more important.

TALLERY (all business): Servitor? Record that battle salvage from engagements on Zhodon and Hellicore is now cleared for repurposing. Wrecks and deadships pending dispersal to primus forge worlds.

SERVITOR: *Docket. Confirmed.*

This was Tallery's life, this kingdom of numbers, and she was proud to be a part of it. One amongst many ranked scribes on Riga now working for the Departmento Munitorum, it was her task to see that the food, supplies and weapons passing through the orbital plate's docks moved seamlessly across the vast span of the Emperor's domain. It was a task that she was ideally suited for, with her natural eidetic memory.

TALLERY (all business): Next item. You will request a signal confirmation from the proxy server array on Luna, refer to-

[SFX: footsteps approach at a run]

KELKINOD (urgent, approaching):
Tallery! Scribe Tallery! Your attention!

SERVITOR: *Please. Re-state. Command.*

TALLERY: Dictation *halt*. [**sigh**]
Kelkinod, you cannot simply interrupt
me in the middle of-

KELKINOD (urgent, interrupting):
This is important. Stop what you are
doing.

The impromptu appearance of Scribe-Adept Volo Kelkinod was never something that Tallery enjoyed. A fussy, self-absorbed man, he always seemed swamped by his official duty robes, in direct contrast to Tallery's rake-thin and somewhat angular aspect. Although they technically shared the same rank in the complex operational structure of the Departamento Munitorum, Kelkinod always spoke to her as though she were an inferior.

He had an irritating habit of taking an interest in logistic operations that were nothing to do with him, offering so-called 'advice' that was never anything more than thinly-veiled criticism.

But his usual querulous manner was absent. In its place, there was real panic.

TALLERY: What has happened?

KELKINOD (almost conspiratorial): It is my burden to bring grave news. Our honoured Adept Senioris, Curator Lonnd... He was found dead in his dormitorium this morning!

TALLERY: *What? How?*

KELKINOD: The medicae say it was heart failure. He did work so hard...

TALLERY (taking it in, slowly): Only in death does duty end...

KELKINOD: And it does not end with Lonnd! Come with me. We must take steps... And do not speak of this. It is imperative that the work-flow remains constant!

SCENE 4: INT. CURATOR'S OFFICE
- DAY

[ATMOS: elsewhere in the same complex,
a cramped private office]

[SFX: Tallery and Kelkinod enter the
room]

Curator Lonnd was only notable by his absence in the Riga Munitorum complex. Given to sequestering himself in his private chambers for days at a time, Tallery's superior was barely visible to those who toiled under his orders. His existence was only confirmed to her by the steady tide of advisory notes and information requests that flowed from his data queue to hers. Or so it had been until today.

KELKINOD: Look. Do you see? We have a problem, Tallery. Lonnd's work is

piling up and we cannot allow it to bottleneck in this office. The last thing any of us want is... **[shudder]** an audit.

TALLERY: Agreed. We should contact the centrum office, then. Inform them of the situation.

KELKINOD: I have already done so. A new curator will be dispatched from Terra to take up Lonnd's post as soon as possible.

TALLERY (deflated): *Oh...* I thought-

KELKINOD (interrupting): You thought I was going to suggest you be promoted to take his place, is that it? **[snort]** You forget yourself.

TALLERY: I have more than enough experience.

KELKINOD: The man's flesh is not even cold, Tallery! I hardly think it appropriate to brush him aside so swiftly.

TALLERY: **[beat]** They turned you down for the post, didn't they?

The other scribe's face took on colour, and she knew that her guess had been on the mark. He grimaced and moved to Lonnd's wide desk, gesturing sharply at neat piles of data-slates and sheets of photic parchment.

KELKINOD: Our late curator's work in managing the movement of military

hardware, starships and assorted materiel through Riga's docks was... It is a vital cog in the battle to oppose the treachery of the Warmaster!

TALLERY: I am well aware of that.

KELKINOD: Then you also know that something as trivial as one man's untimely demise cannot be allowed to slow the processing of our data! The flow of permissions, certifications and other sundry formulae must continue, in order to oil the gears of the Imperial bureaucracy! Without that, there will be-

TALLERY (finishing): *Chaos*, yes. Of course.

KELKINOD: [beat] I have been granted authority by the centrum office to shift all of your current assignments to your servitor adjunct for temporary processing-

TALLERY (disbelief): That half-witted cretin?! I don't want a brain-wiped menial blundering through my data queue!

KELKINOD (ignoring the interruption): -and task you with completing all of Curator Lonnd's unfinished assignments, until such time as his replacement arrives on Riga.

TALLERY: What? For Throne's Sake, Kelkinod - there must be two hundred incomplete dockets here!

KELKINOD: At the very least. So, I suggest you get started immediately.

[SFX: Kelkinod leaves the room]

Tallery scowled, and by force of habit her free hand went to her wrist, to the golden chain and the icon hidden beneath the cuff.

TALLERY (to herself): Emperor, give me strength...

**SCENE 5: EXT. CARGO DOCKS -
NIGHT**

[ATMOS: back to the present, as Scene 2]

Garro studied the woman as she spoke, sifting her every word for the slightest hint of mendacity. He found none.

GARRO: This man... This Curator Lonnd. Do you believe his death was unnatural?

TALLERY (wary): No. Well, at least, not at first. But now I look back over everything that has happened since then and I cannot help but wonder... Did Lonnd make the same mistake that I did? Was he silenced the way they want to silence *me*?

GARRO: Who are "they"?

TALLERY (hesitating): It is complicated, my lord.

GARRO: In my experience, things usually are. Continue, then. Tell me what you found.

She gave a rueful smile, and briefly the fear that marbled the scribe's aspect faded. Tallery did not seem like any kind of traitor-kin that Garro had crossed paths with before, but the warrior was not about to lower his guard until he was certain of her character.

The enemy excels at betrayal, he reminded himself. He would offer trust if he could, but only if he were sure.

TALLERY: I suppose a warrior of the Legions would think my work to be dull and inconsequential...

GARRO: We all fight the war in our own way.

TALLERY: Yes. That is what I kept telling myself. But now I wonder if I have unwittingly served the enemy all along, and never known it. Have I become complicit by my own ignorance?

[SFX: a gunship flies in overhead, hovering for a few moments before moving off again]

In the clouded skies above the dockyard, a raptor-like gunship drifted past, suspended high on plumes of jet

thrust. Tallery flinched back towards the wall, but the machine dithered, its sensors probing at the air, before moving on to search another area.

GARRO: It cannot see us down here. The metal of the cargo modules disrupts any long-range scrying. Go on, scribe.

TALLERY: The evidence was all there. In Lonnd's docket. One only had to know what to look for.

GARRO: Evidence of what?

TALLERY (grim): High treason.

GARRO: So you submit that the curator was working against the interests of the Imperium.

TALLERY: No! Oh no, not at all. He may never have known what was going on. The poor fool... I wish I could have been as blinkered as he was. Then none of this would have happened...

GARRO: I would hear everything.

**SCENE 6: INT. CURATOR'S OFFICE
- NIGHT**

[ATMOS: flashback, as Scene 4]

[SFX: Tallery working away on data-slates and scribbling on parchment]

Hours spent in Lonnd's chambers soon turned into days. For each docket that Tallery pursued, another three were uncovered. The work grew like weeds, every assignment or protocol sprouting into multiple additional tasks that each required her careful scrutiny.

TALLERY (working, to herself): File complete. Submit and transcribe. Open next...

[SFX: thud of a rubber stamp, and a ticker-tape printer]

She ate sparingly, ordering menials

to bring her rations to the chamber, leaving only to see to her bodily needs. Tallery quickly took to sleeping on the grox-hide couch tucked in the corner of the office, rather than return to her own quarters on the dormitory tiers. She soon lost track of time, day and night becoming abstract concepts in the windowless chamber.

TALLERY (stifling a yawn): File...
Complete. Submit. Transcribe. Next...

Lonnd's data queue had fallen far behind, and it was a struggle to drag it back onto schedule. But she worked diligently to do so, knowing that a single erroneous docket could mean the difference between life or death to some distant colony world. A misplaced decimal point, and a food shipment would never arrive, a vital reinforcement would never be sent...

[SFX: more paper spooling out of the printer]

TALLERY (sighing, to herself): Is there no end to this?

And it was here, in the dark hours before dawn, that she found the first anomaly.

TALLERY: [a long pause] That can't be right...

At first sight, Tallery thought she was looking at a correlation error, perhaps an incorrect datum entered by

some other functionary who was not so conscientious as she.

An auxiliary ship - a cargo lighter called the *Shepherd of Borealis* - was carrying the wrong amount of fuel for the mission profile to which it was assigned.

It was a tiny mistake. One figure a point higher than it should have been. Easily corrected... and yet...

Something pricked at the scribe's thoughts. The error nagged Tallery like a paper cut, raw and irritating. On an impulse she could not quite explain, she put aside her work and looked at the document again. She drilled down, following the line of permissions that the paperwork had taken to reach Curator Lonnd's desk.

[SFX: searching the files, typing on a wood and metal keyboard]

To her horror, the mistake was not the only one. There were many more. And as she went deeper, as she looked more carefully, the number of anomalies Tallery discovered increased.

TALLERY: This should not be possible...

She considered the likelihood that it could be the result of some programming error, something broken in the great wired network of cogitating devices that supported the work of the Estate

Imperialis and the Munitorum. But such a failure would have been rooted out immediately, detected by the cohort of tech-adepts employed from the Mechanicum for just such duties.

Even though there was still distrust between the nation-states of Terra and their Mechanicum cousins from Mars - the legacy of disloyalty by the followers of the old Fabricator General - Tallery could not believe that they would so wilfully corrupt Riga's systems. She dismissed the idea as foolish. No, the points of data were too well-ordered to be random, too careful to be destructive in nature.

The anomalies were indicators left behind by changes that had been made, deep in the complex, ever-shifting flow of information. Changes made in secret.

TALLERY (to herself): Who has this authority? No one does!

Her assignments fell by the wayside as she became consumed by this new problem. What at first glance had seemed to be nothing more than a handful of small discrepancies was now forming into a disturbing, regular pattern.

[SFX: more clattering on the keyboard]

The errors were always in the same places. Shipping dockets and bills of lading. Navigational route advisories and scrap yard permissions. Secretly,

quietly, hidden beneath the everyday running of Riga's administration, someone had been using the orbital plate as a base for a wide-ranging, clandestine operation. The roots of this deed reached far beyond Riga, Terra, and the Solar System. It touched countless Imperial worlds, and it was insidious in its ingenuity.

She found that fractional amounts of cargo bound for the war effort were being diverted, each one painstakingly concealed so as not to raise an alert. There were shipments of equipment, materiel, weapons... Even personnel and whole vessels that were being sent away from the lines of battle.

But to where?

TALLERY (an order): Interrogative, datum search. Show destination data for all highlighted transfers.

[SFX: the hololith activates, and data appears]

At Tallery's command, a hololithic display shimmered into being over Curator Lonnd's great desk. A torrent of information flowed down the phantom pane hanging in the air before her. She studied it for some clue as to the end point for all the diverted shipments.

But each one terminated with the same fragment of information. An alias that was attached to nothing. A single word.

TALLERY (reading aloud, considering):
Othrys...

**SCENE 7: EXT. CARGO DOCKS -
NIGHT**

[ATMOS: back to the present, as Scene 6]

GARRO: I know of no world by that name.

TALLERY: That's because there isn't one. I ran a cross-check with the entire Munitorum archive. Nothing. And there is no starship, space station or orbital with that designation, nor a city or planetside outpost. It was only when I expanded my search to include historical records that I found a match to the name - specifically, in the piecemeal libraries that survive from the time before Old Night.

GARRO: It is a Terran word, then?

TALLERY: Just so. Othrys was a mountain in what used to be the islands of ancient Hellenicae. It no longer exists, now ground to radioactive sand by acts of forgotten war and time's passing. The references to that name are the sole constant in the discrepancies I discovered.

GARRO: A codename for the location where these materials are being sent.

TALLERY: That is my guess. But I confess I do not know why it is happening.

GARRO: Weapons. Supplies. Men. Ships. These are the elements one would gather to build an army, Scribe Tallery. If what you say is so, this discovery is of grave import.

TALLERY: Yes. Yes! You understand.

GARRO: I do not. Why did you not take this information to your colleagues, or to the Mistress of Riga herself? And if this conspiracy holds true, why are you the one named traitor this day, and not the architect of this subterfuge?

TALLERY (defiant): Because I didn't know who to trust! What I have revealed to you is part of a grand conspiracy, lying right here in the heart of the Imperium! I knew I had to act, but I was paralysed! Anyone

on Riga could be a part of this lie! Lonnd... Kelkinod... Even those in the court of the mechlords... **[beat]** You see my dilemma?

GARRO (remembering): I have lived it. I know what it is to face treachery in your own halls, among those you hold most trusted. But all the more reason then to stand opposed to it. Deceit dies in the light, Tallery. It must be exposed, no matter the cost.

TALLERY: Perhaps if I had your fortitude, I might have found it easy to be so bold. But forgive me for my frailty - I am human, and I am fallible. It is hard to go against all I know... **[sigh]** I am convinced that agents of the turncoat Warmaster Horus have infiltrated the Departamento Munitorum. I believe these agents are working to undermine Terra's defences by diverting key materials from where they are most needed. Weakening us, before the invasion comes.

GARRO (suspicious): You speak of Horus coming to Terra as if you think that it is inevitable.

TALLERY (bleak): Don't you?

GARRO: [a long beat] What did you do with the information you recovered?

TALLERY: I did what any loyal subject of the Emperor would.

SCENE 8: INT. MUNITORUM OFFICE
- DAY

[ATMOS: as Scene 3]

[SFX: moving with Tallery, who walks swiftly with Kelkinod following at her heels]

KELKINOD: Scribe Tallery, where have you been? A summons was transmitted over the watch-wire four hours ago! You did not respond!

TALLERY: Not that it is any concern of yours - I went down to the deep stacks. I had to check something...!

KELKINOD: This is most irregular! I demand you halt this instant and explain yourself!

TALLERY (determined): What I have to say is for the ears of the new curator *only*.

KELKINOD: He has barely set foot in the building! You cannot simply barge into his chambers and demand attention... After your failure, I would expect you to stay out of sight!

TALLERY (hotly): What did you say to me?

KELKINOD: You failed to complete the tasks the centrum office assigned to you! You have put us *behind schedule!* Curator Lonnd's dockets remain incomplete, and that lies at your door, Tallery. You were told to expedite them.

TALLERY: Something more important came up.

KELKINOD: More important than our documentation? Are you deluded?!

TALLERY (dismissive, pushing past him): I don't have time for this conversation. Get out of my way.

KELKINOD (parting shot as he is left behind): You'll be lucky if you aren't sent to count spent bolt shells on some backwater forge world before the day is out!

SCENE 9: INT. CURATOR'S OFFICE
- DAY

[ATMOS: as Scene 4]

[SFX: Tallery enters; someone is working in here, typing rapidly and constantly on a keyboard]

Curator Lonnd's replacement had set up in his predecessor's office, and all trace of the previous occupant had been erased. The great desk, the couch, the sparse human touches about the place - all were gone. Now the chamber was featureless and gloomy, lit only by the faint light of a hololith table.

Tallery approached slowly, her eyes adjusting to the dimness.

TALLERY (hesitant): Sir? My name is Katanoh Tallery, I am a Scribe-Adepta Second Classificate. May I address you?

At first, the new curator did not respond to her presence. She saw a thin, drawn face emerging from a heavy hood, eyes fixed upon a ghostly, projected screen floating between them.

TALLERY: Curator, I must speak with you on a matter of the greatest urgency! I have discovered criminality at work in this office. *Treachery, sir!*

[SFX: the typing stops ABRUPTLY on the word "treachery"; faint buzz-whir of cybernetics]

TALLERY (cont'd): I, uh, I have a set of shipping logs here from the eighth and eleventh dock sectors, these are just the most recent examples... Curator, it appears that someone is wilfully diverting important supplies away from the war effort, toward some unknown destination...

The curator seemed to notice her then for the first time, augmetics clicking as he focused on Tallery's words. After so many days of bottling up the evidence she had uncovered, the scribe could barely stop herself from disclosing it all. She had to share it, if only to expunge the sense of toxic paranoia that tainted the information.

TALLERY: I have imparted this to no other, sir. My colleagues here... They are not above suspicion!

The curator said nothing, taking in every word, his thin fingers hovering suspended over the keypad before him.

TALLERY (conclusion): I could find no terminal ident to trace these alterations to their source. I have no way to locate the person or persons responsible. The only recurrent factor in this phenomena is the reference to a location designated as "Othrysts".

CURATOR (sounding it out): *Oth-rysts.*

[SFX: Tallery doesn't catch on at first, but the Curator's diction and manner are almost identical to the Servitor we met in Scene 3]

TALLERY: Yes. There's no listing for that location in any of our records. Does it mean anything to you, sir?

CURATOR: Othrysts. Othrysts. Processing.
[beat] No. Nothing. Scribe Tallery. Do not be concerned. Resume your Duties.

[SFX: the typing starts up again, as if nothing has happened]

TALLERY (the penny drops): Wait...
Who... *What* are you?

She came forwards in a rush, disrupting the gossamer hololith as she moved to stand over the figure at the keypad. Tallery reached out and pulled away the hood covering the curator's head.

TALLERY: [gasp]

The curator did not shy away from her touch as a normal human might have; instead he sat serenely, continuing to work at his tasks as the hood fell back to reveal his true nature.

[SFX: soft clicking and whirring of complex clockwork in the Curator's open skull]

Once it had been a man. Years or decades before, this curator had been someone with a name, a life, a full identity. But all of that was gone from him now - excised like the portions of his skull and brain missing beneath the hood. In their place, there were fine mechanisms of brass and silver clockwork - tiny cogs spinning endlessly amongst networks of mnemonic crystals and data capsules.

This *thing* that sat before Tallery lived and breathed as she did, but it was no more self-aware than the dumb terminal cogitator she used to input her docket. Curator Lonnd's replacement was nothing but a mind-wipe, a servitor puppeted by programs on punch-card wafers and remote commands from... somewhere.

The first trickle of fear rose in Tallery as her gaze found the thick cables snaking down from sockets on the curator's bird-like neck. They disappeared beneath the folds of his

robe to emerge again near the floor. Tallery followed them across the room, peering owlshly into the shadows, until she came to a hollow in the wall where the cables terminated. The curator-servitor was wired permanently into the Administratum data network - a body modification that smacked more of the Cult Mechanicum than the Departmento Munitorum.

And if he - if *it* - were only a puppet for some distant master elsewhere...

Tallery looked into those glassy, dull eyes, seeing no recognition, no understanding. She wondered who it was that was looking back at her from behind them.

CURATOR: Resume your. Duties.

TALLERY (covering): Y-yes, of course... You're quite right, I'm sure it's nothing. Just a rounding error or some-such, no reason to be alarmed... I will do as you say...

It was all she could do not to turn and run.

[SFX: she exits the room in a rush]

**SCENE 10: INT. MUNITORUM OFFICE
- DAY**

[ATMOS: as Scene 3]

[SFX: continuous, moving with Tallery]

As she exited the curator's chambers, Tallery was suddenly aware of each and every scribe in the office turning away from their work to look up at her. Some seemed indifferent, some fixed her with cold, measuring gazes that bore her nothing but ill-will.

She had no allies amongst her colleagues. She had never been one to socialise with the others between shifts, and that had bred suspicion of her. Before, Tallery had been indifferent to such petty behaviour - but now, when she badly needed support, she knew there would be none.

And then she spied Kelkinod, across the far side of the room. His words were lost to her, but he was in animated conversation with a maniple of bulky humanoid mechanicals, the four of them towering over him.

Each of the machines was detailed with a complex livery, a kind of binaric heraldry that Tallery could not read. She knew only that the symbols designated them as combatant serviles in thrall to the Mistress of Riga herself, the ruler of the floating city-state and a scion of the Legio Cybernetica. The mistress's cyborgs were what passed for law enforcement on the orbital plate, stripped-down versions of her cadre's battlefield Thallaxii. They tirelessly patrolled the city's streets, dealing out harsh, dogmatic justice to any criminals unlucky enough to attract their attention.

Tallery's heart sank as she saw Kelkinod say her name and turn to look in her direction. He pointed, and as one all four of the cyborgs set their gazes upon her. The glinting faces of the machines were featureless and utterly devoid of emotion.

[SFX: the mechanoids approach]

THALLAX (approaching): *Katanoh Tallery. Remain still. You are bound by law under the authority of the Imperium of Man.*

[SFX: fear and confusion from the other scribes]

TALLERY: No, there must be some mistake.

If the cyborg heard her words, it gave no sign. Instead, it advanced across the room with its cohorts in lockstep formation, iron arms rising to present capture claws and the maws of electro-guns.

[SFX: stun-gun crackles as it powers up]

She backed away, the action purely reflexive. Her thoughts raced. Was this how Lonnd had met his end, at the hands of these machines? Had she said too much, foolishly betraying what she had learned to the very forces trying to conceal it?

Tallery had the sudden and very certain impression that if she surrendered to the cyborgs, her life would be over. She was a good citizen, a loyal subject of her beloved Emperor... and more besides. But this day she had looked up to find herself at the centre of a whirlwind of distrust. If she were to vanish, no one would know about Othrys and the missing ships, the stolen munitions...

That could not be allowed to happen.

THALLAX: *Katanoh Tallery. Remain still.*

TALLERY: I'm sorry... I can't take the risk...

The machine was almost upon her when the scribe burst into motion. She pushed away from a grasping claw, and almost collided with a drooling servitor pushing a wheeled hod filled with heavy ledgers and data-slates.

Reacting without conscious thought, Tallery grabbed the shoulders of the servitor and shoved it hard towards the Thallaxii.

SERVITOR (falling): *Awwwwk!*

[SFX: the servitor crashes into the mechanoid; books go flying]

The thick books and glassy slates tipped from the hod and came down around the machine-soldiers like an avalanche. Their advance was momentarily blocked and Tallery used the confusion to make a break for the corridor.

[SFX: ZAP! Stun blasts are fired; the other scribes panic]

Pulses of energy lit the air as they opened fire. Tallery heard a choked-off scream as one of the other functionaries was too slow to get out of the way, and she saw him go spinning to the floor, writhing as a discharge meant for her shocked through him.

THALLAX: *Do not resist arrest.*

KELKINOD (shouting in distance):
Tallery, what have you done?!

**SCENE 11: INT. MUNITORUM
CORRIDOR - DAY**

[ATMOS: similar to previous scene, but a more enclosed space]

[SFX: continuous, moving with Tallery, her boots across a tiled floor; the mayhem from the office is still in the background]

She burst out into the corridor and ran full tilt for the conveyor shaft at the far end. In her mind's eye, she was plotting out the route she would follow.

The conveyor would take her all the way down the length of the Munitorium tower to the sub-levels. From there, Tallery could lose herself in the thronging crowds of people, finding safety in numbers. She would need to seek a way

off Riga, perhaps by shuttle or freight barge-

[SFX: in the distance, the clanking footfalls of another combat mechanoid; Tallery skids to a halt, breathing hard]

Her plan crumbled to dust in an instant as a second maniple of cyborgs rounded the far corner and took up a position directly in front of the conveyor shaft.

TALLERY (cursing herself): Throne and blood, no!

She was trapped, her escape route cut off, with the other mechanicals close at her heels.

THALLAX (distant, approaching):
Remain still. Do not resist.

Tallery cast about desperately. She had committed herself to this course of action, and she could not draw back from it. She knew that the machines would never listen to her explanations. They considered her a flight risk now, and she would be lucky to avoid being gunned down where she stood.

The rebellion of Warmaster Horus had put Terra on a war footing - and with that change came others, more sinister and repellent. The shadow cast by the turncoat was not just from fear of him and what he might do, but from fear of his father the Emperor as well.

The Imperium's grip on its citizens was tightening as people imagined treachery in every shadowed corner.

And they were right to do so. There were traitors on Riga - and they wanted Katanoh Tallery.

TALLERY: I won't surrender!

She shrugged off the near-panic and concentrated. A few metres away, light flooded in through a tall window of colourful glassaic, depicting farmers hard at work in the fields of some agrif-world. Without hesitating, Tallery grabbed the end of a short bench resting along the wall and upended it, shouldering it towards the glass.

TALLERY: [effort]

[SFX: the bench goes through the window; sci-fi city and traffic sounds from outside, under the wind]

THALLAX: *Halt. You are bound by law. Halt now.*

Ignoring the commands of the machine, she vaulted up to the window frame and pushed out onto the ledge through the broken panes, where the bulky cyborg could not immediately follow.

**SCENE 12: EXT. MUNITORUM TOWER
- DAY**

[ATMOS: high up over the city streets;
wind blowing; flying vehicles race past]

[SFX: continuous, Tallery scrambles out
onto a ledge and picks her way along
it]

She had never really considered how tall the tower was. Not until now, as she looked down towards the thronging streets far below.

Cargo transports and smaller tiltjet flyers charted courses around the building and the habitat blocks nearby. As a passenger skiff shot past, she called out and tried to flag down the pilot.

TALLERY (calling out): Hey, you! Help me!

The skiff did not come back around. If Tallery could not get off the ledge soon, her pursuers would find a way to get out after her. But surely there would be someone who would come to her aid? A whole city's worth of sky-traffic was racing past just a few metres away - would they all ignore her?

Was everyone on Riga afraid to lift up their heads and call out injustice when they saw it? Was everyone too scared to get involved?

[SFX: the crumble of breaking stone - the Thallaxii are coming through the walls, continuing under dialog]

TALLERY: [reacting fearfully]

THALLAX (through wall): *There is no escape.*

With flawless logic, the relentless machines had chosen a more direct approach to Tallery's capture. Reconfiguring their talons into mailed fists, the Thallaxii set to work smashing an opening through the wall of the tower, sensing her through the stonework with their thermal imagers.

[SFX: mechanical arm grabs for her]

A thick plasteel arm emerged through a rent in the masonry and grabbed at Tallery's robes, snatching at the material. She cried out and tried to pull free.

TALLERY (struggling): Release... me!

THALLAX (through wall): *Do not resist.*

[SFX: stone crumbles away; cloth rips]

TALLERY (panic): No! No!

She saw it happening, and Tallery knew there was nothing she could do to stop it. The stone ledge beneath her feet cracked and broke away, her robe tearing as gravity pulled her down.

For one sickening second, she hung suspended by what remained of her hood.

And then she fell.

TALLERY (scream, falling):

NOOOOoooooooooooo...!

[SFX: a heavy cargo flyer roars past, blotting out her scream - smash cut to next scene]

**SCENE 13: EXT. CARGO DOCKS -
NIGHT**

[ATMOS: back to the present, as Scene 5]

Garro eyed her coldly and without pity.

GARRO: You should be dead.

TALLERY: I thought so. But there was a cargo flyer, it passed beneath me and I struck it as I fell. I grabbed on for dear life... [**she can hardly believe it**] I survived. The Emperor Protects...

GARRO: He does. [**beat; then more gruffly**] Fortunate for you. You made the worst choice you could have. The window was a foolish decision. Where did you possibly hope to go? What were you thinking?

TALLERY: I was terrified! I reacted on instinct! I told you before, my lord - I am merely an imperfect human. Not a fighter like you. This is all new to me.

GARRO: That much is certain. Your choices have been flawed, simple to predict. It is why I was able to track you so easily - count yourself lucky that the Legio Cybernetica's machine-soldiers are lacking in such insight. If they could think instead of just react, you would have been in their clutches days ago.

He frowned. The woman represented a complication of the kind he wished to avoid. But with each passing moment he realised with greater certainty that Tallery's dilemma could not be easily resolved.

TALLERY: Perhaps... this is meant to be. It is fated.

GARRO: I have thought the same, in days past...

TALLERY: I heard the warrant in my name being broadcast over the watch-wire. They have labelled me a traitor. My own colleagues are turning on me, that rodent Kelkinod and all the others... They all believe that I am guilty of treason against my world and my Emperor. But nothing could be further from the truth! **[beat]** Do you believe me?

The question caught Garro off-guard. He stopped short of nodding in agreement, and looked away.

GARRO: What I believe... Is that there are lies here. And traitor or not, you are bound up with them, scribe.

TALLERY: If you take me back to the authorities, I will be executed. If the Mistress of Riga is part of this, she will want me silenced... and if not, those who have manipulated events up until now will manipulate her as well. No one can be trusted.

GARRO: And yet you trust me with what you know, to make me stay my hand. How do you know I am not a part of it?

TALLERY: Because you would never have let me speak. That great sword of yours would have taken my head from my neck.

[SFX: the sword rings as he holds it up]

Garro brought his weapon up from where its point rested against the steel decking.

GARRO: This blade is called *Libertas*. The name can mean many things, among them "truth". And I believe that is what you have given to me. **[beat]** Do you know what I am? What it is that I do?

TALLERY: You are one of the Emperor's Angels of Death... A Space Marine. Although I confess, I do not recognise the colours of your armour... Of what Legion are you?

GARRO: I have no brotherhood. Not any more. The Legion I was born to has fallen to infamy, and I have been renewed in a greater duty. I have a new purpose. I serve as Agentia Primus for Malcador the Sigillite, Lord Regent of Terra. I hunt for him, scribe - to find warriors of like spirit, and to track and terminate the Warmaster's spies.

TALLERY: Is that why you are here, in the city? You were sent to end my life?

Garro ignored the question. His reasons for being on the Riga orbital plate were his own, and he had no desire to speak of them to anyone else.

GARRO: I was drawn to your hunt when I heard the warrant on the watch-wire. My presence here is a secret, even to Malcador.

TALLERY: The Sigillite sees all.

GARRO: So he would like us to think. But I have learned that there are many places where his gaze does not fall.

[SFX: sword slides back into scabbard]

He put away his blade. Garro considered the slight, unassuming woman. Her story of this missing materiel, of the insidious turning of Imperial might against itself, all of it rang a familiar note.

A few years earlier, as Horus pulled the trigger that began his bloody rebellion, another incident of treachery like the one Tallery described had taken place. The gargantuan warship the *Furious Abyss* had been stolen by traitor forces from the shipyards of Jupiter. It was a great failure of Imperial security, the culmination of a clandestine plot that revealed exactly how vulnerable the Solar System was to the Warmaster's network of spies.

Despite the purges and pogroms that had followed, it was certain that traitors still lurked close to the Throneworld. As close as Riga, so it seemed.

But there was another reason why Garro had let Tallery live. It was not just to hear her tale.

His gaze was drawn again to the golden aquila about her wrist.

GARRO: I know what you are, Katanoh Tallery. I know what you *believe in*.

TALLERY (afraid): Wh-what do you mean?

GARRO: The charm you wear. It is the secret sign of the cult of the

God-Emperor. You believe that the Master of Mankind is more than he claims. You consider him a living deity, worthy of your worship even as he forbids it. Your church, your faith, is forbidden by the Imperial Truth.

She stared at the ground and nodded slowly.

TALLERY: It is true. I believe in Him. It is by His grace that I live still. It must be so. **[beat]** You think me a fool for admitting this.

Garro gave a rueful smile and shook his head.

GARRO: Then I too am a fool. I have learned with blood and fire that faith is the only true constant. The Emperor Protects, Tallery. If that is a lie, then there is no purpose to this conflict... And I will not accept that. **[beat; then back to business]** To your feet, scribe. We cannot stay here. The gunships will return.

[SFX: Tallery gets up, and they move off together]

SCENE 14: EXT. SHIPYARD - NIGHT

[ATMOS: as Scene 1]

[SFX: Garro and Tallery moving stealthily]

With a civilian in tow, Garro no longer had the luxury of using the Falsehood to shroud his movements. The camouflage cape folded back over his wargear and instead he returned to baser tactics, sticking to the depths of the shadows as they made their way through the shipyard.

To her credit, Tallery was a quick study and she mirrored Garro's motions as best she could, stepping where he stepped, staying well clear of anything that could get them noticed. She did not question him, and that spoke to

her character. His enhanced senses could smell the sweat on her skin, hear the urgency of her breathing, and he knew that terror walked with her. He imagined that it was only fear of death itself that ranked above her fear of *him*.

The common humans of the Imperial citizenry, people like Katanoh Tallery, had been taught from birth that the Legiones Astartes were war incarnate, scions of battle to be revered and dreaded. Sometimes Garro and his kinsmen lost sight of that.

He turned and gave her what he hoped was a nod of approval, but it was difficult to tell if she took it as such. He wanted to explain to her that they were not so different, the warrior and the scribe, both the victims of betrayal in their own ways. Garro too had been called traitor by short-sighted men, and he knew how that accusation burned. Even if he understood nothing else of Tallery, he understood that.

GARRO (low): This way.

TALLERY: Where are we going, my lord?

GARRO: To find-

[SFX: the sudden crash of spotlights snapping on]

Without warning, bright beams of light stabbed down from the gantries above

their heads, drenching the deck with a stark glow.

Garro hissed as his augmented eyes adjusted to the glare. But Tallery had no such genetic enhancement and she shielded her face with her hands, staggering backwards.

THALLAX (distant, loud-hailer):

Remain still. You have been detected.

Do not attempt to flee.

Garro cursed their luck. He had gambled that doubling back along their path would sneak them through the patrol lines of Thallaxii, but it appeared that the machines were not as dull-witted as he had hoped.

GARRO (to himself): How many of these things have they sent? All this just for an accountant?

Bulky metallic forms were visible as shadows behind the sharp illumination of the spotlights, and he picked out the shape of electro-stunner weapons and shock mauls. One such cyborg would have been no match for him, cut to shreds by the edge of *Libertas* in short order, but there was a full cohort of the machines descending towards them, and with Tallery to keep safe, the balance of any engagement would slide away from Garro's favour.

He chose to wait, keeping his hands close to the hilt of his sword and the

bolt pistol holstered at his hip.

TALLERY: They're going to kill us...

GARRO: I will not allow that. Stay back.

[**SFX: mechanoid footsteps approach and halt - there's a dozen of them, at least**]

THALLAX: *Your presence in this sector is not sanctioned. Identify yourself.*

GARRO: I am Battle-Captain Nathaniel Garro, Agentia Primus of the Regent of Terra. By my authority, I order you to lower your weapons.

THALLAX: *Your authority is not recognised. Step aside. Surrender the scribe to our custody.*

GARRO: You defy the will of Lord Malcador?

He tapped the lone sigil hidden upon the pauldron of his otherwise featureless armour, a symbol that represented the Sigillite's official sanction.

GARRO: You know what this means, machine. Stand down. I command it.

THALLAX: *Command refused. Termination of target supersedes all other authority. We answer only to the Mistress of Riga.*

It was not the answer he had been expecting, and Garro sensed Tallery tensing behind him.

No human would have dared to speak so to a representative of the Regent, even if - as in Garro's case at this moment - they were operating outside the Sigillite's orders. But the masters of the Riga orbital plate were not mere humans anymore, he reminded himself.

Unique amongst the floating cities that drifted over Terra's surface, rulership of Riga had been granted to the mechlords-in-exile after their new master, the Fabricator General Kane, had escaped the Fall of Mars. In the aftermath of those events, certain loyal houses of the Legio Cybernetica had gained favour in the Imperial Court, and Riga had been a reward for their constancy.

Garro was not privy to the politicking behind such power-games, nor did he wish to be. All this meant to him was that there were emotionless machine patrolmen standing in his way, instead of flesh-and-blood Arbitrators that he might have cowed more easily.

THALLAX: *Scribe Tallery has been designated excommunicate traitoris. Her life is forfeit. Stand aside.*

GARRO: I refuse. She is under my protection.

[SFX: stun-guns are raised]

THALLAX: *Then you will be reclassified*

as an accessory to her crimes, and treated accord-

[SFX: very fast, Garro draws his sword and takes off the mechanoid's head]

THALLAX: [cuts off in a death squeal]

In the blink of an eye, *Libertas* left the scabbard on Garro's back and drew a shimmering arc through the air, ending in a seamless cut that beheaded the machine-soldier.

GARRO (to Tallery): Scribe, seek cover!

His other hand brought up the bolt pistol and fired a close range shot into another of the *Thallaxii* before it could discharge its electro-gun.

[SFX: bolt pistol shot, and another mechanoid goes down]

THALLAXII (multiple, overlapping):
Attack. Apprehend. Terminate. Attack.
Apprehend. Terminate.

[SFX: the fight begins; the mechanoids open fire and Garro shoots back]

TALLERY (in background): [reacts, panicked]

Garro waded into the engagement and let the old, familiar battle-sense wash over him. In combat with these machines, he had no need to pull his blows as he might have if he were engaging human opponents. The warrior's

lip curled as he began to take the artificial beings apart with swift, forceful and deadly strikes.

Blow by devastating blow, shot by pinpoint shot, Garro battled the small army of machines. The lesson he taught them was that transhuman flesh and bone could be every bit as unyielding as plasteel and brass.

SCENE 15: EXT. SHIPYARD - NIGHT

[ATMOS: as Scene 14]

**[SFX: continuous, Garro battles the
Thallaxii]**

Shocked and awed, Tallery watched the legionary fight. Garro dismembered the Cybernetica's machine-soldiers with brutal precision, weathering blows from their shock mauls with grim determination and beating them back. The decking beneath his feet ran dark with spilled oil and organic processing fluids. Severed robotic limbs twitched where they had fallen, grasping blindly while power still ran through their systems.

The grey-armoured warrior killed another mechanical with a point-blank shot,

blasting fragments of metal shrapnel into the air. He had cut a gap in their line, and as Garro risked a glance towards her, Tallery instinctively knew what she should do next.

GARRO (urgent): Scribe! *Run!*

[SFX: Tallery runs; we move with her]

She felt a pang of guilt as she broke into a headlong sprint - a strange reaction towards someone who a short time ago had been on the cusp of executing her.

But with this action, and with his willingness to let her speak, Garro had proven himself a good soul, ready to defend her. To believe in her.

It had been so long since anyone had believed in Katanoh Tallery that she hardly recognised the feeling.

TALLERY (as she runs): Come on!

They'll be calling in reinforcements!

She half-turned as she ran, and a gasp caught in her throat. The quick, deadly machines marshalled their strength and attacked the legionary as one.

GARRO (still fighting): Don't look back!

[SFX: back with Garro, multiple stun-guns fire; Garro cries out in pain and stumbles]

A salvo of shock-blasts bombarded

Garro from every angle as the machine-soldiers fired in concert. Serpents of brilliant lightning slithered over his battleplate and into his flesh. Pain that would have killed ten men tore an agonised howl from the warrior's throat and he stumbled, falling to one knee, struggling to stay conscious.

Or so she thought.

GARRO: [roar of effort]

With a monumental roar, Garro took in the agony and endured it. He rose again, shrugging off coruscating webs of blue fire. His sword shone in the hard glare of the spotlamps, coming around in a blazing arc of murderous steel.

Tallery understood. He had let the machines come close, reeling them in so that he might end this engagement with a single, perfect strike.

[SFX: Garro strikes out, and takes down the remaining mechanoids with a powerful sweeping blow]

The sword crossed the necks of the remaining Thallaxii, beheading them one after another. *Libertas* flashed, ending the fight in a breathless instant.

TALLERY (impressed): It is as they say - your kind are the hammer of the Emperor. His will is made manifest through you.

GARRO (approaching): That is one way to see it. **[beat]** I told you to keep running. If I had been defeated-

TALLERY: That did not seem a likely outcome.

GARRO: I am not invincible. No one is. Not even the Emperor, no matter what we may think of him...

TALLERY: [a long beat] It would seem the Mistress of Riga wishes me dead.

GARRO: Perhaps. But a machine can be made to think anything you tell it to. They have only the loyalty they are programmed with. Other influences may be at work.

TALLERY: Whoever is behind this, they'll be coming for both of us now.

GARRO: No doubt. So it falls to you and I - we must find the truth.

TALLERY: I don't know where to begin.

[SFX: distant gunship jet noise, rapidly approaching]

Whatever reply the warrior was going to make was suddenly lost in a storm of jet noise from above.

[SFX: the gunship we heard back in Scene 5 roars in, hovering over the pair, buffeting them with its downwash]

TALLERY (shouting to be heard): A *gunship!* Look out!

The raptor-like drone aircraft hovered over them, wings curving downwards, thruster wake striking with the force of a tornado. Heavy ballistic cannons, powerful enough to rip through the hull of a battle tank, turned to target them. Tallery saw the blank sensor eyes of the machine-mind predator lining up for the kill.

GARRO (shouting to be heard): My pistol is empty! Scribe, get behind me!

GUNSHIP: *Targets located.* Terminate.

Part Two

SCENE 16: EXT. SHIPYARD - NIGHT

[ATMOS: the scene continues]

Garro sneered his defiance at the drone aircraft, brandishing his sword.

GARRO (shouting to be heard, defiant):
I will not perish in this place, at
the hands of some clockwork avian!
Come then, try to kill me if you
dare!

But before the machine could open fire,
the scribe ran out into the open and
sprinted directly towards the gunship.

GARRO (shouting to be heard):
Tallery, no!

GUNSHIP: *Primary target locked-on.*

Garro thought that the woman was making
some brave, suicidal gesture, willingly

putting herself in harm's way to save him from being fired upon; but then he saw Tallery throw up her hands and address the twitching sensor head of the drone directly. She was calling out to it.

TALLERY (shouting command): Heed me! Command input directive, Officio Centrum Omnis Pentalia!

To the legionary's surprise, the gunship's machine-brain actually *hesitated*.

GARRO: What in Terra's name...?!

TALLERY (shouting command, quickly): Override. Zero-zero-one, one-one-zero-one, one-zero-zero, one-zero-one, one-zero-one-zero, zero-one-zero-one, zero-zero-one.

[**SFX: the gunship's cannons power down**]

GUNSHIP: *Directive accepted.
Returning to Hangar Four-Eight.*

[**SFX: The gunship flies away in a blast of jet noise**]

As abruptly as it had descended upon them, the gunship powered away into the sky without firing a single shot.

TALLERY (amazed): It worked. Praise the Emperor, it actually *worked!*

GARRO: What did you do? Those words you said, that was a Mechanicum code...

TALLERY: A base Gothic form of binaric, yes. I used a Departmento override command to convince the drone that its weapons were in need of re-arming. It's heading back to the hangar right now... A machine can be made to think anything you tell it to, isn't that what you said? You just have to know how to talk to them, of course.

GARRO: Huh. Could you not have done that with the machine-soldiers as well?

TALLERY: Different mechanoids have different command protocols. I remembered those of the gunships from an addendum in Curator Lonnd's files. I remember all I see... It seemed a practical risk to take.

GARRO: You seem to have a proclivity for risking your life. You could have been killed.

She took a shuddering breath, and Garro saw Tallery go pale as the adrenaline drained from her.

TALLERY: That would have happened anyway. **[beat]** We have to go. Other drones will come to take that one's place, and my trick won't work twice... Is there somewhere you can send me? Into custody of some kind? If you are Malcador's agent, then perhaps he can keep me safe until this all out in the open...

In spite of himself, Garro's scarred face twisted in a scowl. His presence on Riga was unsanctioned, and he was reluctant to speculate on what might happen if he brought this before the Sigillite. Malcador was not a man to tolerate disobedience lightly, as others had learned to their cost.

He shook his head.

GARRO: As much as I wish it, for now that option is not available. Circumstances mean we must remain together, scribe. I will have need of that perfect memory of yours, if I am to cut through the lies surrounding this conspiracy. We must find Othrys and learn its secrets.

Garro thought she might oppose him; but then the scribe gave a reluctant nod.

TALLERY: My life is in your hands, my lord. As it has been all along.

**SCENE 17: INT. DOCKING TOWER -
NIGHT**

**[ATMOS: a small control room; chiming
consoles and clicking clockwork in the
background]**

They found their way to the secondary docking ring beneath the lip of the orbital plate without further incident.

Stalactite-like towers extended out from the underside of the floating metropolis, with nothing but open air beneath them and the Throneworld far below. Between each tower there were bays where war-wounded ships lay waiting for new orders.

For many of these once-proud vessels, grievously mauled in battle against the traitors, the only fate before them was the maw of a breaker's yard. One

such ship - a small corvette that had served with the defence fleets outbound from Proxima Centauri - lay at anchor nearby, making ready to set sail for the last time.

In a small control compartment inside one of the towers, a lone servitor worked the dock systems in an endless, monotonous cycle of arrivals and departures.

DOCK SERVITOR: *Ready for. Decoupling. Stand by.*

[SFX: hatch suddenly opens, Garro and Tallery enter]

DOCK SERVITOR: *This area. Is restricted.*

GARRO (ignoring the Servitor): Make sure this is the right one.

TALLERY: Aye.

[SFX: she works a keyboard]

DOCK SERVITOR: *Stop. Identify yourself.*

GARRO: Look upon the brand on my armour, servitor. Recognise the authority.

TALLERY: And if it does not? That didn't work the last time you tried it.

[SFX: Garro slams a fresh clip of ammo into his bolt pistol, and cocks it]

GARRO: Then things will not end well for our half-brained friend here.

The slave-worker hesitated, ruby-lensed optics clicking as they peered at the sigil of Malcador.

DOCK SERVITOR: *The Mark of. The Sigillite.*

GARRO: Let me make this clear. Obey me or I will end your wretched existence.

DOCK SERVITOR: *Understood. My Lord.*

TALLERY: It learns quickly. **[beat]** This is the right vessel, Garro. A "deadship" with the same registration I saw in the hidden files. Records indicate it is bound for the scrap-works of Jupiter's moons...

GARRO: Servitor! Where is this hulk *really* going?

DOCK SERVITOR: *Exact destination. Unknown.*

GARRO (trying something else): Where is Othrys?

At the mention of the codeword, the servitor began to twitch like a victim of palsy.

DOCK SERVITOR (twitchy, error): Unknown. Unknown. Cannot answer. Data purged.

TALLERY: Stop. **[beat]** Must be a mnemonic block. It doesn't know that

word because it *can't* know it. All references to "Othrys" have been burned from its mind.

GARRO: Even a psyker would be unable to find anything in there. **[beat]** How long until this wreck is sent on its way?

DOCK SERVITOR: *Egress will occur. In ten. Minutes.*

GARRO: Time is short. We must move quickly...

**SCENE 18: INT. DEADSHIP
CORRIDOR - NIGHT**

[ATMOS: an echoing, rusted corridor;
metal grinds on metal as the hull
shifts under its own weight]

[SFX: a heavy airlock hatch opens to
admit Garro and Tallery]

What few guards there were watching the docking bay had their attention elsewhere, allowing Garro and Tallery to steal aboard the derelict in short order. The scribe did her best to keep pace with him, but she was flagging. He frowned, holding the wide airlock hatch open so that she could enter.

GARRO: Hurry. The umbilicals are already detaching. The ship will be under power in a few seconds.

[SFX: clanks and rumbles from the ship
as it powers up]

TALLERY: I hope you know what you are doing, my lord.

GARRO: You have faith in the Emperor, Tallery. Grant me some fraction of the same. Actions of this kind are not new to me.

TALLERY: I have never been to the Jovian yards... In all honesty, I have never left the orbit of Terra in my life.

GARRO: I doubt that Jupiter is our destination. Othrys could lie anywhere within range of this ship's engines.

Tallery halted and shot Garro a worried glance.

TALLERY: But, if we take to the warp... We could be in transit for days! Months!

GARRO: Or more. But we are committed to this now.

[SFX: the ship leaves the dock, creaking and grinding]

Thrusters firing, the deadship disconnected from Riga and got underway. Within minutes it had pulled away from the gravity of Terra, rising out of the atmosphere. It came about to put its broken bow towards the stars.

The deck beneath their feet trembled as velocity increased, dim lights flickering over their heads as power

ebbed away to maintain more vital systems.

A heavy chill began to descend. Rimes of frost formed on the metal walls, and their breath blossomed into streamers of white vapour.

TALLERY (coughing): The cold... Where is it coming from?

GARRO: I expected this. We are aboard a derelict, scribe. This ship has no human crew to speak of, only cogitators and servitors to run it. All the other decks are empty... So there is no need for life support down here. Oxygen. Water. Heat. All unnecessary.

TALLERY: And how exactly am I supposed to survive a journey without those things? I have heard that Space Marines can endure even the vacuum of the deep void, but I am not so gifted!

He gestured down the corridor, indicating a compartment off to one side, and beckoned Tallery to follow him.

[SFX: they walk over the frost-rimed deck]

GARRO: I have not brought you this far only to let you suffocate or starve. You are correct that my genetically-enhanced physiology allows me to live for extended

periods in a state of suspension. For decades, if need be. I have something similar in mind for you.

[SFX: another hatch opens; vapour hisses out into the corridor]

**SCENE 19: INT. DEADSHIP STASIS
CHAMBER**

[ATMOS: a cold, enclosed space, like
the interior of a meat locker]

[SFX: the hatch shuts behind them]

The scribe balked at the sight of dozens of glassy capsules, each the size of a coffin, wreathed in wisps of sub-zero gases.

TALLERY: Stasis caskets... You're going to put me into deep-sleep?

GARRO: I will stand guard while you slumber.

TALLERY (beginning to panic): No! I can't! What if I don't awaken?!

GARRO: Soon the atmosphere in this part of the ship will thin to the point where you will not be able to

breathe. I have seen men lost to that manner of death and it is not a clean ending. You must survive. I need you so we can finish what we have started.

TALLERY: This is all too much for me...

GARRO: I do not believe that. You are braver than you think. You faced that gunship without fear.

TALLERY (dry chuckle): Oh, there was quite a *lot* of fear, my lord.

GARRO: You will be safe. You have my word.

The operations of such stasis devices were known to Garro, recalled through old regimens of hypnogogic instruction given to him as a Legion recruit. The data implanted in him a lifetime ago as a Death Guard neophyte now returned, and he set to work bringing the system on line.

[SFX: Garro activates the system, continuing under narration]

He knew that if he allowed Tallery to dwell upon her plight, the scribe's resolve would soon erode. He had to keep her focused on something else.

GARRO: I would know how it was you came to see the Emperor's divinity, scribe. Why do you think him to be a god among men?

TALLERY: I am not alone in such

belief. Even if the Lords of Terra do not wish it, even if He himself shies away from *our* Imperial Truth... Our numbers swell as time passes. Those who share true insight, who embrace the faith - we are many.

GARRO: You did not answer my question.

TALLERY (with a sigh): I read a book. It was called the *Lectitio Divinitatus*. A rough thing, printed on real paper, if you can believe that. Smuggled to me by a friend now dead and gone. What was written there... **[beat]** All I can tell you is that it *spoke* to me. In a way I cannot articulate. But I felt as if I had been blind all my life, and only then learned how to see. **[beat; then faintly amused]** It sounds irrational when I say it aloud.

GARRO: To some, perhaps. Not to me.

TALLERY: Do the Legions worship the Emperor? **[shiver]** You are the sons of his sons, the primarchs, after all.

GARRO: We obey him. But it is seen as... *improper* to consider the Emperor as a divine being.

She studied him closely.

TALLERY: You think otherwise.

[SFX: Garro pauses in his work]

GARRO: It is difficult for me to

put into words also. I have seen horrors, Scribe Tallery. Worlds burning. Monsters. Brothers turning upon brothers. Death and war. All I rescued from that madness was my unbroken faith.

TALLERY: In what?

GARRO (reverent): In Him. I believe he preserved me for something. He saw me to be... *of purpose.*

TALLERY: Then I envy you. [**shiver**] After what I have been through these past days, my conviction has been severely tested.

Garro's gaze turned inward.

GARRO: You are not alone. It is the nature of this conflict. I came to Riga because I was looking for answers... I have spoken of that to no other until now.

TALLERY: You are looking for the Saint Keeler, yes?

GARRO: You know of her?

TALLERY (now shivering): How could I not? They say she gives enlightenment with every word she utters. But I have never seen her. There are rumours that the Saint moves from station to station, never straying far from Terra... You came to Riga in the hope that she would be there.

GARRO: I was mistaken. Euphrati

Keeler once helped me see clearly.
I had hoped she might do the same
again.

What seemed like an eternity ago, Garro had led a crew of fugitives aboard the starship *Eisenstein* on a desperate mission to escape Horus's treachery at the Isstvan System. The woman Keeler had been with them on that fateful journey, and along the way Garro learned that she had been changed by the Warmaster's actions just as he had. Keeler became, for want of a better word, a prophet... And he had become a believer.

TALLERY (cold, laboured): The air...
is getting thinner. Difficult... to
breathe now.

**[SFX: stasis casket lid opens; Tallery
climbs in]**

GARRO: Here. Climb inside the casket.
It will preserve you for the duration
of the journey.

Warily, the woman stepped up and
settled herself into the padded
interior.

TALLERY: I am trusting you with my
life once again. In the name of the
Saint... and the Emperor.

GARRO: Your faith is not misplaced.

[SFX: casket lid starts to come down]

TALLERY: Neither is yours. Like

courage, that comes from within,
not from... the words of others.

[laughing, as lid closes] I read that
in a book-

**[SFX: casket lid shuts and locks,
cutting her off; the hiss of gas and
crackle of ice as Tallery goes into
stasis]**

Garro watched the stasis casket gather
up Tallery's fragile life and hold it
in check. Frozen in an instant of time,
she would survive for as long as it
would take them to reach Othrys.

Wherever that might be.

GARRO (quietly): Sleep, Katanoh
Tallery. I will keep watch.

SCENE 20: EXT. DEADSHIP - SPACE

[ATMOS: the deep void of interplanetary space; all sounds and dialogue seem distant and dreamlike, like a detached, feverish hallucination; the low rumble of ship engines]

Terra fell away into the endless blackness, and the derelict ventured on alone. Its drives blazing against the void, the vessel was only a guttering candle, a tiny shard of corroded steel in the unforgiving night.

As Tallery faded into the mindless non-sleep of stasis, Garro joined her in his own kind of suspended animation. The legionary allowed himself to drop into a trance-state. The Cataleptean Node implant deep in his cerebellum let him take rest without the need for

true sleep as humans knew it. As one hemisphere of his brain went dormant, the other maintained a baseline level of alertness, shifting function back and forth so that he would never truly lose himself to unconsciousness.

The days stretched and thinned like heated glass. In the dark and dreamless abyss between worlds, the silence was all-encompassing. Out here, where stars turned upon pillars of gravity and the night went on forever, one might be able to briefly forget that this was a galaxy in flames.

But those who looked with sharper eyes, those who could perceive the foulness tainting those distant beacons of light, they saw the threads of corruption reaching from world to world. The suns burning out and the planets becoming ashen, barren and forgotten. In the silence, the galaxy screamed.

But Garro did not hear it. He remained behind the walls of his own mind, in the company of thoughts that moved with a glacial slowness in the thrall of the half-sleep. For the former Death Guard there were only the questions that never left him. The doubts and the fears.

GARRO (whispered, echoing): Keeler...
Where are you?

His unquiet spirit pulled at the

tethers of his soul, resisting the truths he had set out for himself. If he did have faith, as he had told the scribe, then why was it so hard to accept the way of things?

Was there still some small part of Nathaniel Garro that longed to see the rebellion end peacefully? Was there a vain hope that all the terrible acts he had seen committed might somehow be *undone*?

Too many secrets. Garro had come to Riga searching for meaning, and for his folly he had uncovered only more questions. And so a more pressing uncertainty was left at the fore.

GARRO (whispered, echoing): What is Othrys?

The ship fell through space towards the answer.

[ATMOS: a long, quiet pause, bleeding slowly into the next scene]

SCENE 21: EXT. DEADSHIP - SPACE

[ATMOS: as Scene 20]

The voyage seemed to go on forever.

[SFX: proximity alerts chime softly, rising from the weird silence; the engine rumble changes pitch as the ship manoeuvres to land]

But finally, at journey's end, after time unreckoned by the silent, unmoving warrior and his reluctant companion, the old and wounded corvette allowed itself to be captured by the gravity well of a cloudy, umber sphere.

Had there been an observer at the armourglass portals on the command deck, they would have noted that from a distance, the planetoid seemed to be without surface features of any kind.

But upon closer approach, it became clear that this world was shrouded in a thick mantle of billowing haze, held aloft by constant, powerful winds.

The ship shifted course and dropped towards the ocean of shade, manoeuvring thrusters jetting out blasts of fire to set it on the correct path. Other craft that had come in from differing points of the aetheric compass were following the same mandated route. Some of them were near-wrecks like the corvette, others newer vessels fresh from forge world shipyards all across the segmentum. All had come here in secret purpose, their crews either lobotomized half-minds or a scant number of souls gifted with a most confidential trust.

[SFX: the ship enters the atmosphere]

Reaching the point of atmospheric interface, the craft cut into the dense, alien sky, briefly transforming into a lance of fire before tearing through. The derelict's last flight was almost over, and rather than be taken by the teeth of distant Jupiter's breaker-rigs, its iron bones and steel skin would be repurposed here instead by other hands, for duties unguessed at by the Imperium at large.

[ATMOS: as the ship passes through the clouds, sound quality begins to return to normal; they are travelling through

a howling, primeval typhoon on an alien world]

Emerging from the thick, swirling cloud base, the ship began a wide turn over the coast of a methane sea, tacking into the wind and a driving hydrocarbon rain. Crossing sculpted crags of black ice and cryovolcanic ridges, its engines fired one final time to settle it into the grasp of the towering cranes that would disassemble it.

[SFX: the ship touches down; cranes swing into place and clamp onto the hull]

Swallowed by the unknown sky, the dying note of the main drives fell to stillness. Othrys had taken another claim... and the count was far from ended.

**SCENE 22: EXT. BEYOND THE
CITADEL - DAY**

[ATMOS: far overhead, thunder rumbles;
thin, constant rain falls]

[SFX: the sounds of ship
decommissioning; cranes moving, cutting
torches spitting, metal creaking]

The cutters set to work before the old
corvette had cooled from the heat of
re-entry, paring it down as a servant
might carve a roasted animal for the
pleasure of their master's supper.

[SFX: airlock hatch from Scene 18 opens
and closes again]

GARRO (approaching): Quickly, scribe.
We must get clear of the ship.

**TALLERY (approaching, laboured, gas-
mask):** All right. What is... What

have you put on my face?

GARRO: A breather mask. The atmosphere on this planet is nitrogen-rich. My augmented lungs can process it, but you...

TALLERY (laboured, gas-mask): Oh, of course. **[beat]** I feel weak.

GARRO: A side-effect of the stasis. It will pass.

TALLERY (laboured, gas-mask): Is this... Have we found Othrys?

GARRO: We have reached the end of our search.

TALLERY (gas-mask): Throne... Look at this place!

[SFX: distant sounds of heavy construction]

Behind them, lines of decommissioning bays stretched away towards a broken ridgeline of dark peaks. They resembled the shipyards of Riga, but here it was clear that the reclaimed vessels were being remade into something quite different. A grand pattern of cannibalisation was in progress.

Monorails and grav-lifts carried repurposed metals towards a vast construction site in the shadow of a great black mountain, a gigantic circular pit that had been laser-cut into the stone-hard ice that lay underfoot. Tallery glimpsed the work of

countless construction teams in hazard gear and exo-skeletons - some toiling as they laid rockcrete foundations, others assembling vast blocks of marble and granite into walls, battlements and donjons.

Scaffolding that reached from the lowest levels of the pit to beyond the height of the tallest crane swayed gently in the wind, warning lamps blinking through the constant, oily drizzle. She saw pieces of a large construction through the framework and, as her head tilted up to take it all in, she had a sudden jolt of insight.

Growing from the dead centre of the work pit was an artificial pinnacle that rose almost as high as the mountain that overlooked it. Although - like everything else before them - it remained unfinished, Tallery immediately understood that she was looking at a stronghold of some kind. The great citadel was the heart of the edifice, and at its feet the roots had been laid for many more buildings of similar scope and majesty.

TALLERY (awed, gas-mask): What are they building here? I have never seen the like before.

GARRO (grim): I have. On Barbarus, built after the coming of the Emperor. It is an echo of similar constructions on Baal, Macragge,

Fenris and other worlds. **[beat]** This is a battle fortress. A place from which wars will be waged.

A sickening chill washed through her. Tallery blinked, wiping rust-red rain from the lenses of her breather mask so that she might see more clearly. The closer she looked, the more it became clear that the fortress was nearing completion. Her gut twisted as she considered what kind of army such a bastion could house. The scribe was no tactician, but she understood numbers and logistics all too well - even at a conservative estimate, she guessed that the great fortress and its dominion would be able to support thousands of soldiers and war engines.

Taking cover behind a rocky crag, they surveyed the site in greater detail. Garro was silent for a long time, but the grim cast of his expression spoke to his mood.

GARRO: I see no Legion sigil. No mark of garrison or company that I recognize.

TALLERY (gas-mask): Just like your armour... **[beat]** So Othrys is a secret base, as we suspected. That makes sense. All the hardware, all the equipment being secretly diverted from Riga, it's been coming here. They're using it to build everything we can see.

GARRO: Not just from Riga. I'll warrant that the data you uncovered on the orbital plate was just one stream of supplies. To keep such a thing secret... One would draw off just enough not to raise the alarm, and do it a hundredfold across the Imperium. In time of conflict, it is a simple matter to misplace a ship here, a freight convoy there...

TALLERY (gas-mask): This is so much worse than I thought it could be. We have uncovered more than just some corrupt governor lining his pockets! This is a nest of the Warmaster's collaborators on our side of the battle lines! **[beat]** I can hardly believe it, that such a thing could go unseen!

GARRO: Remember, Horus's cohorts built and then stole the *Furious Abyss*. This is an evolution of the same tactic, only played on a grander scale. Assemble a secret stronghold deep inside the territory of your enemy, use it to strike at their vulnerable underbelly. The genius of it is that the traitors have used our own infrastructure to build it. **[cold smile]** I almost admire the arrogance.

He raised a gauntleted hand and pointed.

GARRO (cont'd): Do you see the spires, up there on the ridgeline?

Those are detector baffles. Dozens of them surrounding the whole site, projecting an energy grid that would confuse any scry-sensors looking this way. That, and the cloud cover... A ship passing within scanning range of this world would see nothing amiss.

TALLERY (gas-mask): But who could orchestrate a scheme of this magnitude? No one could construct a fortress inside Imperial space and avoid detection forever!

GARRO: They did not avoid it, Scribe Tallery. You found them.

[SFX: five or six sets of metal-shod footsteps march by in the middle distance, in almost artificial unison]

Garro nodded over her shoulder and she turned to see a cadre of hooded figures trudging in lockstep across the rain-slick ground. Each wore robes of muddy crimson lined with a cog-tooth trim. The brass shapes of their bionic limbs caught the weak light as they walked.

GARRO: So, their treachery has grown beyond the insurrection on Mars...

TALLERY (realising, gas-mask): The Mechanicum!

**SCENE 23: INT. MONORAIL WAGON -
NIGHT**

[ATMOS: a large freight carriage]

[SFX: the wagon clatters over the rails; a dodderly steam engine growls as it pulls the train]

The diffuse glow of day through the orange sky waned, and night fell across the surface of the planetoid. It brought with it a chill that turned the oily rain into a greasy fall of chemical snow.

Garro knew that remaining out on the perimeter of the construction site would eventually lead to their discovery. Keeping Tallery close to his side, he moved as fast as he dared, down into the work pit.

They stole aboard a pressurised

monorail wagon and allowed it to take them the rest of the way to the citadel. Peering through a grate, he saw the skeletons of incomplete battle bunkers passing by, and gun towers armed with repurposed starship batteries. Nothing was going to waste in the forging of Othrys. It was a design that would rival the siege works of the Imperial Fists when complete... but only if he allowed it to continue.

Garro toyed with the idea of making a stealthy approach into the heart of the citadel itself. If it followed the design protocols of a standard Imperial fortress, there would be a mighty reactor on the core levels. He knew how to weaponise such a device, but a catastrophic overload would obliterate everything for five kilometres in all directions. The secret of Othrys would be consumed in fire, taking him and Tallery with it...

He frowned. Garro had no way of knowing their exact location, and even if he managed to destroy this place, those responsible for creating it would not be brought to account. There would be nothing to stop them from beginning anew elsewhere. At best, he would only delay their plans.

GARRO (to himself): No.

To end this, the full truth behind the

scribe's unwitting discovery had to be brought to light.

TALLERY (aside): My lord. Come look at these.

GARRO: What have you found?

TALLERY: Containers. These all bear item codes I recall from Curator Lonnd's files.

Tallery had prised open the lids of several of the shipping containers. Garro saw racks of fusing cores for melta bombs, and boxes of heavy-gauge bolter ammunition. In the last crate, there were complex frames for heavy weapons, directed energy cannons of a kind he had only a passing familiarity with.

TALLERY: What kind of firearms are these?

GARRO: They are conversion beamers. It is rare to see so many in one place.

TALLERY: There are dozens here. No power cells in any of them, though.

GARRO (grim): Whoever is gathering this army wants it to be well-equipped. A single beamer can obliterate heavy armour with one shot.

[SFX: the train sounds its horn, and begins to slow]

TALLERY: We're slowing down. The loading bay is ahead.

GARRO: Re-seal those cargo containers, quickly! Be ready to jump. We can't be on this train when it reaches the dock.

TALLERY (warily): Very well...

[SFX: Tallery quickly closes the crates]

GARRO: Have courage, scribe.

Tallery gave a wary nod and pulled her breather mask back into place.

TALLERY (whisper, gas-mask): *Ave Imperator.*

[SFX: carriage hatch rolls open]

GARRO: *Now!*

[SFX: they both jump]

**SCENE 24: EXT. CITADEL LOADING
BAY - NIGHT**

[ATMOS: a wide cargo dock, open to the air]

[SFX: monorail trains arriving and departing; cargo being unloaded by walking machines and gas-masked workers]

Damp drifts of methane slush cushioned their fall, allowing Garro and Tallery to make their way along the service course beneath the monorail platforms. Staring up through the gridded metal decking, they had a perfect view of the carriages as bipedal walker-mechs unloaded their cargo.

GARRO: You must take in all that you see here, scribe. Study everything, omit nothing. That eidetic memory of

yours will serve as witness.

TALLERY (gas-mask): What good are my memories if I perish before I can recollect them?

GARRO: You *will* go home, Tallery. You are the mission now. I will do everything in my power to see you safely back to Terra. The truth behind Othrys must be made known.

[SFX: thrusters roar distantly overhead - a ship is coming in to land]

Something slow and heavy darkened the low clouds as it descended from the sky, and presently a wallowing iron barge fell towards the citadel on spears of retro-thrust.

GARRO: Another cargo vessel coming in...

TALLERY (gas-mask): No, it's not a freighter. I recognise the configuration. That is a medicae transport. A mercy ship.

The warrior frowned, watching as the great craft settled into a landing cradle extending out from the sheer walls of the citadel.

[SFX: still distant, the thrusters fade and the ship docks; hatches open, and wounded soldiers disembark]

Instead of supplies, weapons or materiel, the new arrival deposited men. Garro's enhanced sight allowed him

to pick out lines of injured soldiers, some being helped along by their comrades. The faces were recognisable to him - although he did not know these men, he knew their kind.

The war-wounded.

Garro had seen such men alongside him in battle on many worlds during the Great Crusade, or in the halls of his Legion, amongst the neophytes. Warriors all, but young with it, and still untested even though the fires of their martial fury burned bright.

GARRO: Each time I think I have some grasp upon this mystery, another twist reveals itself...

TALLERY (gas-mask): Why are they bringing injured men here? This place is no hospice!

An answer began to form in Garro's mind, creeping into his thoughts like the cold wind over his flesh.

Upon the hull of the mercy ship he saw the heraldry of a world that he knew. *Mertiol*. Lost now, so the astropaths reported, lost to the warp storms and the iron grasp of the Warmaster, its cities burning and its people subjugated.

Only a handful of ships had managed to flee the colony before Horus's war fleet blackened *Mertiol*'s skies... And the question before Garro was now why

this loyalist craft had fallen into the grip of Othrys, and not returned to safe harbour along with all the other refugees.

GARRO (beginning to understand):

Those men are all dead. Their names will have been struck from record, their ship listed as missing in the void. I think I understand. They will be healed, Tallery, and then given purpose anew. The army of Othrys will be made of ghosts.

The scribe rounded on him, her eyes wide behind the visor of her breather mask.

TALLERY (temper rising, gas-mask):

How much more do we need to see? You have brought us to some misbegotten ball of black ice and poisoned skies, a place crawling with Mechanicum renegades. We have no means of escape, no way to call for help. You've doomed us both! And damn you if you tell me to have courage!

Garro gave a solemn nod in return.

GARRO: We will both be damned if we do not finish what you began back on Riga. The Imperium must know of this place. A hidden outpost at the heart of a web of secrets - Othrys cannot be allowed to exist.

TALLERY (gas-mask): We'll need a ship. Something a lot faster than that barge.

[SFX: Garro draws his bolt pistol, and cocks it]

GARRO: Follow me.

**SCENE 25: EXT. CONVEYOR
PLATFORM - NIGHT**

[ATMOS: similar to Scene 24, elsewhere]

[SFX: massive lifts rise and fall]

Tallery moved as quickly as she could in Garro's wake, but it was difficult to keep up with him. Even in the bulk of his unadorned, slate-grey battle armour, the legionary was more nimble than she could have hoped to be. He made it look effortless, and he moved without fear or doubt.

The scribe had worked hard to keep her panic sealed tight, drawing on her own inner strength - but it was challenging. She was so far outside her experience in this that it was beyond reason. Katanoh Tallery had been trained to be a calculator of numbers,

a hand to compute figures and settle accounts. She was no spy, no agent of war... and yet Garro's single-minded determination had made her into that for the duration of this desperate mission. All at once she resented him for it, even as she knew that he was the only thing keeping her alive.

And so she did her best to keep pace. Following the circumference of the citadel tower, they came to a huge elevator platform at the foot of the fortress.

Cylindrical conveyor platforms as big as the monorail carriage they had ridden were moving up and down the length of the tower, carrying equipment and supplies to the upper levels. She watched them passing each other as they rose and fell in a complex ballet. Their motion reminded Tallery of the pneumatic vacuum tubes in the offices on Riga, where capsules containing sealed papers would jet away to the curator's chambers.

TALLERY (gas-mask): Why are we here?

GARRO: Look up.

Garro indicated a circular landing stage halfway up the length of the unfinished fortress. Growing out from the sheer rock of the tower like a disc of fungus from a tree trunk, the platform seemed small and insignificant. It was easily half a kilometre above ground level.

GARRO: That is our way out.

TALLERY (gas-mask): Shouldn't we be moving away from the centre of activity? I am not a tactician but what you suggest seems contrary to good sense!

GARRO: Don't make the mistake of thinking that you have a choice, scribe.

TALLERY (bitter, gas-mask): Yes. It seems my life is doomed to follow a path determined by everything but my will. **[beat]** Believing in the Lectitio, that is the only choice I have ever made for myself. And see where it has led me.

A shadow passed over the warrior's face, and Tallery felt an unbidden pang of sorrow for him.

GARRO (introspective): That is the way of fate. It takes us, makes us into what the universe needs us to be. Not what we want to be. **[shaking it off]** We need to take control of a conveyor to reach the landing platform, without attracting attention. And for that, I require a distraction.

He studied her intently.

TALLERY (realising, gas-mask): *Me?*

**SCENE 26 - EXT. CONVEYOR
PLATFORM - NIGHT**

[ATMOS: as Scene 25, but closer to the lifts]

[SFX: massive lifts moving; half-machine skitarii foot soldiers patrolling back and forth]

TALLERY (gas-mask, approaching):
Umm... Hello?

[SFX: a skitarii sees her, and zeroes in]

The scribe walked slowly towards a static conveyor, her hands raised, her robe open to show that she concealed no weapons and posed no threat. At the embarkation ramp, a number of skitarii - the heavily augmented foot soldiers of the Mechanicum - paused in their patrol pattern and turned their cold gaze upon her.

With their bionic implants, cyber-weapons and dermal armour, the skitarii were formidable. Each had a steely limb with a built-in lasgun, and as she came closer they moved to put her in their sights.

SKITARI #1: Halt. Identify yourself.

Beneath their crimson hoods, what Tallery had first thought to be breather masks like her own were revealed, on closer inspection, to be surgically-altered human flesh. Eyes had been replaced with bulbous optical sensors and twitching antennae, mouths and noses sealed behind featureless grilles fed by throbbing oxygen pipes.

Unlike the servitors she knew from Riga, these man-machine hybrids moved with a quick economy of motion, exuding a sense of threat.

TALLERY (gas-mask): I... uh...
require your assistance.

SKITARI #2: This site is restricted.
You are an intruder.

TALLERY (gas-mask): Quite so, yes.
That's why I'm surrendering, of course.

SKITARI #1: Restrain her.

[SFX: the skitarii grab Tallery and march her forwards]

Steel talons extended to clamp around Tallery's arm and she was shoved

towards the waiting conveyor car, the humming muzzle of a charged lasgun pressed into her back.

She cast around desperately, her heart thudding in her chest. The scribe saw no sign of Garro in any direction, and for a terrible moment she was afraid that he had abandoned her.

**SCENE 27: INT. CONVEYOR
PLATFORM - NIGHT**

**[ATMOS: as Scene 26, but on the lift
itself]**

The skitarii released its grip and pushed her over the lip of the ramp, and into the cavernous space of the carriage. As the soldier kept a bead on her, a second skitarii yanked the heavy control lever.

**[SFX: lever clanks; the huge elevator
starts to rise]**

Rising on a thick chain-drive, each link as tall as a man, the conveyor climbed away from the loading deck. Peering out over the open edge of the platform, Tallery watched the ground fall away and she experienced a flash of sickly recollection, remembering the

heart-stopping instant that she fell from the ledge on Riga.

TALLERY (to herself, gas-mask): Not again...

SKITARII #1: Do not speak.

She looked away, and glimpsed movement in the corner of her eye. A hunter. A shadow.

TALLERY (gas-mask): I'm afraid I must. How else would I be able to distract you?

SKITARII #2: What do you-

Light rippled behind the cyborg soldier, and with a flourish the Falsehood snapped off, revealing the towering form of the legionary beneath the metallic camo-cloak.

[SFX: in quick succession, the skitarii react; Garro comes at them, slamming their heads together with the crash of metal on metal]

GARRO: [effort]

SKITARII #1 & #2: [pained screeching]

It happened almost too fast for Tallery to follow; Garro surged forward and grabbed the two skitarii about their throats. With a violent jerk, he slammed them together, cracking their augmented skulls against one another with enough force to break bone and splinter steel.

[SFX: one damaged skitarii crawls away, sparking and leaking vital fluids]

TALLERY (gas-mask): That one still lives!

SKITARII #2 (damaged): Alert... Alert...

[SFX: Garro kerb-stomps it]

SKITARII #2: [dies]

GARRO: More resilient than they look.

[SFX: a distant bell sounds the alarm]

TALLERY (gas-mask): Do you hear that? They've raised the alarm!

GARRO: So much for stealth... [forget it] It never was my strong suit.

[SFX: Garro snaps off a skitarii's gun, with a crunch of metal]

Garro reached down and snapped off one of the dead skitarii's cyber-limbs, ripping the implanted lasgun free from its mounting. He offered it to Tallery.

GARRO: Take this. The Emperor protects those who protect themselves.

**SCENE 28: INT. CONVEYOR
PLATFORM - NIGHT**

[ATMOS: as Scene 27, moving up with the lift]

[SFX: heavy clanking from far below, as a second elevator rises quickly to move parallel with theirs]

Within moments, a second conveyor carriage was rising from the lower levels, moving to match the climb of their own. Tallery dared to steal a glance over the edge and saw a dozen more skitarii soldiers staring back up at her.

[SFX: a couple of lasgun shots impact on the first lift]

TALLERY (taking cover, gas-mask):
There's a lot more of them than I would wish!

GARRO: Good. I have had my fill of skulking in shadows.

TALLERY (gas-mask): I told you before, I am not a fighter!

GARRO: Fortunate for you, then, that one legionary is worth a thousand common soldiers. **[beat]** Here they come!

[SFX: the second elevator pulls level; the skitarii attack]

The second platform pulled level with their ascent and, as one, the skitarii troops leapt across the gap, hydraulic pistons in their legs propelling them up and over. Garro snarled and raised his bolt pistol, killing three of them with centre-mass shots before they passed the apex of their leaps.

The rest landed hard upon the deck and came up with claws and weapons deployed. Tallery found cover behind a control panel, las-beams slicing through the air around her. Hot droplets of super-heated metal seared her robes as near-hits gouged scars in the platform.

She fired back blindly, pointing her salvaged lasgun towards the sounds of battle, too afraid to raise her head above the console for fear of losing it.

[SFX: Garro fighting the skitarii; gunfire, sword blows, general mayhem]

Nearby, Garro waded into the engagement with weapons high. *Libertas* sang as it cut down any attacker who came within reach of the sword's edge, cold power flashing down the length of the blade. The legionary's bolt pistol barked, mass-reactive shells finding their targets and blasting them apart.

Slow to anger but strong in his fury, the warrior fell easily into the familiar mindset of battle. This was where he was at his best, engaged in death-dealing with a perfect, lethal precision.

He fought without fanfare or great displays of martial flourish. It was his way, and the manner in which he had been trained. Once a Death Guard, always a Death Guard, Garro took to combat as the necessary means through which right was maintained. There was no glory in this, merely duty. Glory was something he had left behind, burned away in the ashes of his forgotten brotherhood. He was only a defender now, a crusader no more.

[SFX: lasgun fire strikes the chain-drive; the chain fractures, failing with a sound like suspension cables snapping; the huge platform grinds and shrieks]

Shots deflecting off the ceramite of his battleplate, Garro spun away as a concentrated salvo of beam fire burned

across the platform. Stray las-bolts ripped through the conveyor's drive mechanism and, with a sickening jolt, the carriage shuddered on its supports.

GARRO: Tallery! The chain-drive has been hit.

The scribe burst from cover as the platform canted sharply beneath their feet.

TALLERY (gas-mask): We're going to fall!

GARRO: No. To me, *now!*

With a backhand blow, Garro knocked a skitarii gunman aside and bounded across the deck to Tallery, even as his boots began to lose their grip.

[SFX: Garro swats a skitarii aside and runs; the elevator platform tilts, metal breaking; several skitarii fall from it]

TALLERY (gas-mask): The platform!

GARRO: There's another way!
[exertion]

Holstering his weapons, Garro swept the scribe off her feet, and before she could protest, he hurled her across the gap between the moving conveyors.

TALLERY (gas-mask): **[scream]**

[SFX: she lands messily on the other platform]

Tallery landed in a heap on the other platform. With her safe for the moment, Garro broke into a headlong sprint to follow her across.

[SFX: Garro runs and jumps; clatter of armour as he almost misses]

GARRO: [exertion]

Encumbered by the weight of his armour and his weapons, it was almost too far for him to reach, but Garro's gauntlets caught the edge and held fast. Behind him, the other carriage broke away and surrendered itself to gravity's embrace.

[SFX: other lift falls away, ripping apart]

SKITARII #3: Intruder! Intruder!

The lone skitarii came out of nowhere across the platform, training its lasgun on Garro's head. One shot would blast him off the edge and send him spiralling down into the wreckage far below.

[SFX: lasgun shot]

SKITARII #3: [dies]

**GARRO (with effort): Tallery...
[exertion]**

With a grunt of effort, Garro hauled himself up, and found the scribe standing over the dead soldier, a smoking weapon in her trembling hands.

TALLERY (gas-mask): Did I kill it?

GARRO: We live. That is all that matters.

[SFX: the second elevator continues upwards]

**SCENE 29: EXT. LANDING STAGE -
NIGHT**

[ATMOS: an open platform, high up over the construction pit; the winds howl much louder here]

[SFX: the elevator approaches and comes to a clanking stop]

The chill breeze that pulled at Tallery's robes at ground level was a howling gale atop the landing stage, and the scribe gathered in her ragged hood to capture any warmth she could retain. Despite whatever attempts there had been to terraform the environment of this desolate planetoid, the noxious atmosphere, the deep cold and the poison snow were all hostile to anyone without a heavily-augmented physiology.

Following Garro off the elevator

ramp, she could not stop herself from throwing a last look back at the corpse of the skitarii she had shot. An ugly burn-wound in the warrior's back showed where the bolt from the lasgun had hit, melting flesh and plasteel into a blackened slurry.

What struck her was how swift the death was. Alive one instant, ended the next. Was that how Curator Lonnd had perished, she wondered? Had there been time to see the end coming, time to understand and make peace with it?

Tallery had dealt in life and death many times, through records of births in Riga's habitat blocks, to lists of casualties on battlefields across the Imperium. But those had always been abstract things. Numbers on a chart. Ones and zeroes. From this day on, she knew that she would never see them that way again.

GARRO (middle-distance): Scribe.

Over here. That Stormbird is fully fuelled. We will take it.

She turned away and went to the warrior's side. A winged combat dropship stood before him, crouched on one of the landing pads like a sleeping hawk.

TALLERY (gas-mask): You do know how to fly this craft...?

GARRO: I can get us into the void.

From there, we'll have to send a distress call on fleet channels, and-

Garro's words died in his throat and Tallery saw him tense.

TALLERY (gas-mask): My lord, what's wrong?

GARRO (to himself): Damn them.

[SFX: Stormbird hatch opens]

Unbidden, the Stormbird's drop ramp fell open, revealing a dozen shadowy forms within.

[SFX: Garro draws his sword; three or four sets of heavy, one-man caterpillar tracks come down the ramp]

Too late, Tallery realised that they had delivered themselves into the jaws of a trap. A cohort of heavily armoured Mechanicum Praetorians - more than a match for a lone Space Marine - advanced from the dropship's cargo bay. The maws of plasma cannons and hell-guns targeted the pair of them, never wavering.

[SFX: booted footsteps approach quickly, as more troops arrive to encircle them]

TALLERY (gas-mask): More, behind us...

From out of the shadows came more soldiers, blocking off any escape route. But these new arrivals were not

of the Mechanicum's tech-guard. Tallery felt a chilling sense of recognition run through her as she saw the colour of the carapace armour worn by the troopers - a stormy shade of grey, bereft of any symbols denoting unit, command or allegiance.

Garro saw it too, a question flickering behind those kind eyes of his before he locked it away. He raised his sword into a guard stance, his open hand dropping to the grip of his pistol.

GARRO: I am sorry, Katanoh. But it seems I will not be able to keep my vow... To you or to myself. I did not wish to bring you to such an end.

TALLERY (gas-mask): We are going to die here.

GARRO: That seems a likely outcome.

He stepped forwards and stared into the guns arrayed against him, glaring with defiance.

GARRO: Take your shot, if you will. We shall see how many of you follow me into darkness!

Tallery waited for the first shriek of a las-blast, the first thunder of bolter fire - but there was nothing but the howl of the wind.

[SFX: the soldiers put up their guns]

TALLERY (gas-mask): They're lowering their weapons...

PRAETORIAN: Battle-Captain Garro. You will come with us.

GARRO: Why should I obey you?

PRAETORIAN: Our master would speak with you.

**SCENE 30: INT. OBSERVATION DOME
- NIGHT**

[ATMOS: a wide, echoing, arena-like space under a great glass dome; the storm still rages outside]

[SFX: moving with Garro and Tallery as they are escorted by the tracked Praetorians and booted troopers]

Flanked by the human troopers and Praetorians, Garro and Tallery were escorted in silence to the uppermost level of the unfinished citadel. They emerged into a wide circular chamber that resembled the duelling arenas of a Legion training ground. Above them, the roof was a dome made from triangular pieces of glassaic. The churning amber sky rolled over it, propelled by the constant winds.

Ahead of them, in the centre of the chamber, a raised dais of black marble glittered with reflected light. Garro spied an ill-defined shape beneath a dark cloak standing atop it - a hooded figure turned away from them. An aura of cold fury seemed to emanate from the figure, chilling the legionary even through his power armour. The air around him felt waxy and full of static, as though it were being held in check by some powerful force.

[SFX: everyone halts]

A creeping sense of foreboding gripped Garro's heart, and he chanced a look towards Tallery. The scribe had removed her breather mask and her eyes were wide with fear, but she held her terror under control. He gave her a nod that he hoped she would find reassuring - but in truth, the warrior's own mind was in turmoil as a sinister and potent possibility rose to the fore.

[SFX: faint crackle of chemical/psychic fire, continuous]

He knew then what he would see beneath that dark mantle.

The figure turned slowly, its face lost in shadow. Gripped in one gnarled hand, a long staff of black iron came out of the dimness and sent an echoing crack of noise as it tapped the marble. Firelight from plasmatic flames illuminated the space around the dais, and spilled

from a narrow steel basket atop the staff. In those flames sat a golden eagle, and inscribed links hung in chains about its talons.

Garro knew the staff as he knew the man who wielded it. The hood dropped back and the old-but-ageless face of Malcador the Sigillite stared down at them, displeasure written clearly upon it.

TALLERY (terrified): Lord... Regent...

Unable to resist the indoctrination that had been bred into her since birth, the scribe dropped to her knees in supplication. She bowed her head, and the skitarii did the same, showing fealty to the man who stood second only to the Emperor of Mankind.

Malcador. First Lord of the Council and Regent of Terra, and the master that Nathaniel Garro had sworn to obey.

But despite every impulse in his flesh to do so, the legionary did not kneel.

GARRO: How... How are you here?

MALCADOR: I am everywhere and nowhere, Garro. This place belongs to me. **[beat]** You should not have come. You are not ready to see this. The preparations are incomplete.

GARRO: Are you a traitor?

MALCADOR (a grim chuckle): Open your eyes. You know what I am.

The Sigillite is the Emperor's right hand. To betray him would be impossible.

GARRO: Horus Lupercal might once have said the same.

Malcador's eyes flashed, and his face darkened.

MALCADOR (far more menacing): Never compare me to the arch-traitor. I will burn your mind if you speak those words again. **[beat]** Kneel, Nathaniel. Obey me.

GARRO: Not until you explain all... *this!*

Garro cast around, gesturing at the walls, the Praetorians and the troopers in grey.

MALCADOR (with terrifying authority):
I told you to *kneel*.

[SFX: an ominous rumble of psionic power; Garro falls to his knees]

The Sigillite glared at him, and Garro lost control of his legs. In a heartbeat he was down on his knees, his great strength as nothing to the telepathic force pressing him to obey. Locked in place inside his own armour, he could only turn his head to hold the other man's baleful gaze - even as he knew that it had taken a mere fraction of Malcador's monumental psionic power to humble him.

MALCADOR: I am the keeper of the secret of Othrys, the secret you were so eager to know. Turn your sight to the skies, then. See where your blind path has brought you.

Garro looked up, and saw Tallery daring to do the same. Out past the great glassaic dome, the sea of orange cloud thinned, as though some unnatural force were reaching out to part the veil. Black night sky beyond the planetoid's atmosphere was suddenly revealed, and there, hanging in the darkness like some shimmering jewel, lay a familiar gas giant world haloed by gossamer rings.

TALLERY (amazed): Saturn... That is *Saturn!*

GARRO (held in place): Then we stand upon-

MALCADOR (interrupting, impatient): The Titan moon, yes. Did you think it to be some distant death-world beyond the pale?

Garro struggled to process what he was seeing.

GARRO (held in place): This makes no sense... If what you are building here is in service to the Emperor and the Imperium, why hide it behind this shield of lies? Why seek to silence anyone who learns of it?

MALCADOR: You question me?

GARRO (held in place): *I do!* This fortress citadel and the complex beneath it, it can be for only one intention - for the creation and training of a new Space Marine Legion!

TALLERY (concerned): Only the Emperor himself may grant life to the Legiones Astartes...

GARRO (held in place): Does he know you are doing this, Malcador? Does the Emperor know what you do in his name?

MALCADOR: My Master. He has his great tasks to occupy him... and I have mine.

**SCENE 31: INT. OBSERVATION DOME
- NIGHT**

[ATMOS: continuing Scene 30, but from Tallery's POV]

Part of Katanoh Tallery wanted to close herself off in the depths of her mind and wait for the inevitable end to come. But another, ever-inquisitive shard of her could not look away from the great psyker-lord.

TALLERY: Are these secrets worth my life? And Curator Lonnd's?

MALCADOR: My dear - the answer is yes. A hundred thousand times over, yes. For the greater good of our Imperium.

Garro struggled to bring his fist to his chest plate.

GARRO (held in place): This is not enough, then? My strength? That of Rubio, Ison, Loken, Varren, Gallor and all the others? It is not enough for you to have your agents at large in the galaxy, now you must have an army?

MALCADOR: You are my Agentia Primus, Nathaniel. But what I forge here will not be for me. A handful of Knights Errant are not enough. Not for the coming war.

TALLERY: You're not just talking about the Warmaster's rebellion, are you? You mean something else. Something worse.

MALCADOR (impressed): She has insight, this one. I see now why she has caused such problems.

With his iron staff tapping out each pace, Malcador stepped down from the dais and advanced towards them.

[SFX: Malcador walks towards them, his staff striking the floor with each step - continuing as he speaks]

MALCADOR: Nathaniel has seen the dangers that lie beyond the edge of reason. He has fought them face-to-face. I have looked into that darkness, divining the myriad skeins of futures-yet-to-be. The things that Horus has allied himself to - otherworldly, *daemonic* things - they

will threaten humankind for millennia to come. I know this in my blood. So we must be prepared for the war that will come after this one. A war that will be for our very souls.

TALLERY: And this is to be where those defenders are forged. Othrys.

MALCADOR: In the old tongues the name means "the home of the titans." The symbolism of it seemed fitting.

The Sigillite turned his back on Tallery and moved to Garro's side, removing the warrior's sword from its scabbard.

[SFX: Malcador draws Garro's sword]

MALCADOR: Do you see now? These preparations must be made in secret, not only to conceal them from the eyes of Horus and his allies, but from our own people. From an Imperium that is not yet ready to accept the truth of what horrors lurk in the warp. Am I wrong, Nathaniel?

GARRO (held in place): **[a long beat]**
No. No, Lord Regent, you are not wrong.

[SFX: brief psychic pulse]

With a nod of his head, the psyker relaxed the telepathic grip he held on Garro, and the warrior was released. Malcador turned *Libertas* in his hand and offered the weapon's hilt.

MALCADOR: These secrets can only be kept by those of unflinching courage, through sacrifice and the shedding of blood. Because of an insignificant error, because of pure happenstance, Scribe-Adepta Tallery learned something she should never have known.

TALLERY (knows what's coming): I... I am loyal! I will never speak of this! I swear it on the Throne of Terra, and in the Emperor's name-

MALCADOR (ignoring her): She cannot live with this knowledge. Even the most loyal can be suborned, even those who never speak can have their secrets torn from them by arcane means. Only the dead cannot vouchsafe the truth. **[beat]** Take the sword, Nathaniel. I am not cruel. Make it swift and without pain.

TALLERY: Captain... Garro...?

The warrior hesitated, eyeing the weapon.

GARRO: He tests me, Tallery. I defied him by taking my leave to Riga without his permission. I have stepped outside the bounds of his orders in days past. So now he tests me with this, to see if I will still obey.

MALCADOR: It must be done. Even the scribe herself knows that. She is

truly loyal. She will not resist.

GARRO: [a long beat] I regret that I must refuse your command, Lord Regent.

TALLERY: [gasp]

Malcador's eyes locked with Garro's, and his baleful stare was terrible to behold.

MALCADOR (cold fury): I have only to think it and her heart will stop!

GARRO: Then it will be you who murders an innocent. You that takes the life of a faithful subject of the Emperor, who has done no wrong, who has committed no crime but to serve the Imperium! [beat] And if that is your choice, then end me into the bargain. For I do not wish to be party to such choices as an arch-traitor would make.

MALCADOR: What other choice is there?

Garro glanced at Tallery, and she drew strength from him. He looked away again, matching the Sigillite's gaze without flinching.

GARRO: You said it yourself, my Lord. The scribe has insight. I can attest to that, and to her courage and fidelity. So why not use those talents? Make her part of what is done here. Bring her into the circle. Tallery was clever enough to find a

flaw in the security of Othrys, from the other side of the Solar System. She could solve that for you, and seek out any other weaknesses that might yet be unknown.

Tallery held her breath, knowing that her life hung in the balance. Closing her eyes, she knew also what she needed to do. Her fingers found the golden aquila about her wrist and gripped it tightly.

TALLERY (faint whisper, like a prayer): The Emperor protects... The Emperor protects...

**SCENE 32: EXT. LANDING STAGE -
DAY**

[ATMOS: as Scene 29]

**[SFX: in the background, a Stormbird
prepares for takeoff]**

Garro held the sword at eye-level and sighted down the length of the blade. There were no nicks in its edge, no discolorations in the metal. It seemed perfect, as if it had been newly forged that day. And yet, the weapon had lived for centuries in various forms, and been soaked in the blood of many souls long dead.

He comforted himself in knowing that no innocents had fallen to the blade while he had been its master.

**[SFX: he replaces the sword into its
scabbard]**

Returning the weapon to its scabbard, he turned to watch a Stormbird on a nearby landing pad as the flight crew prepared it for departure. It would take him away from Titan - not back to Terra, but towards his next mission under the Sigillite's command. The thought of that brought a frown to him, and he felt a bleak mood gathering on the horizon.

TALLERY (approaching): Legionary!
[beat] Captain Garro, I mean. Did you intend to leave without saying farewell?

He gave a shallow bow, making the sign of the aquila across his chest.

GARRO: I did not wish to interrupt your new duties, Scribe... Forgive me, *Curator-Adepta Primus* Tallery.

TALLERY: The title seems a strange fit to me. And so does my life, if that makes any sense. Everything is different now.

GARRO: It will never be the same. I know whereof I speak. After Isstvan, after the flight of the *Eisenstein*... I felt the same way.

TALLERY: Changed.

GARRO: Yes. And for the worse as well as the better. You will learn more in the days to come, Tallery. Terrible things. And there may come a time when you resent me for not doing as Malcador ordered.

TALLERY: I will face those challenges with faith and courage. You reminded me where to find them. In this new role I will be able to serve my Imperium and my Emperor - my *God-Emperor* - to the very fullest in the days to come.

GARRO (warning): You must never speak that name before Lord Malcador, or the others. They would not be... receptive to it.

TALLERY: Yes. In time, perhaps, but not now.

GARRO: [beat] You will never be able to go home again, you realise.

TALLERY: A small price to pay. [beat] I never had the chance to thank you for defending me. The Sigillite was correct - I would not have resisted, if my death served a greater good.

GARRO: Fate had another path for you. For both of us. You will make a difference here, in the war against the insurrectionists.

She reached up and laid a hand upon his armoured gauntlet.

TALLERY: I hope you find the answers you are looking for. In the words of the Saint, or elsewhere.

But despite the warmth in the woman's tone, Garro felt a darkness creeping across his spirit.

The ghosts of emotions he could not fully articulate clouded his mind. This bleak sense of his future had been the spur that sent him looking for Keeler, searching her out on Riga and finding nothing. It was as though a hollow bell were ringing in the far distance, and with each peal Nathaniel Garro was slipping further and further away from it.

Tallery saw the haunted look in his eyes.

TALLERY: What's wrong?

GARRO: There is a shadow out there, Tallery. A shadow of my future. I can only grasp the edges of it, but I fear that my path is not what I first thought it to be.

[SFX: Stormbird engines fire up]

The Stormbird's engines rumbled to life and Garro stepped away, throwing her one last glance.

GARRO (darker): I do not know where my destiny lies. I only know that it is not *here*.

[SFX: Stormbird engines cycle up to full power]

TALLERY (calling after him): You must have faith, Nathaniel! Remember that...

[SFX: the hatch slams shut; the Stormbird roars away into the sky]

TALLERY (cont'd): ...the Emperor
protects.

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