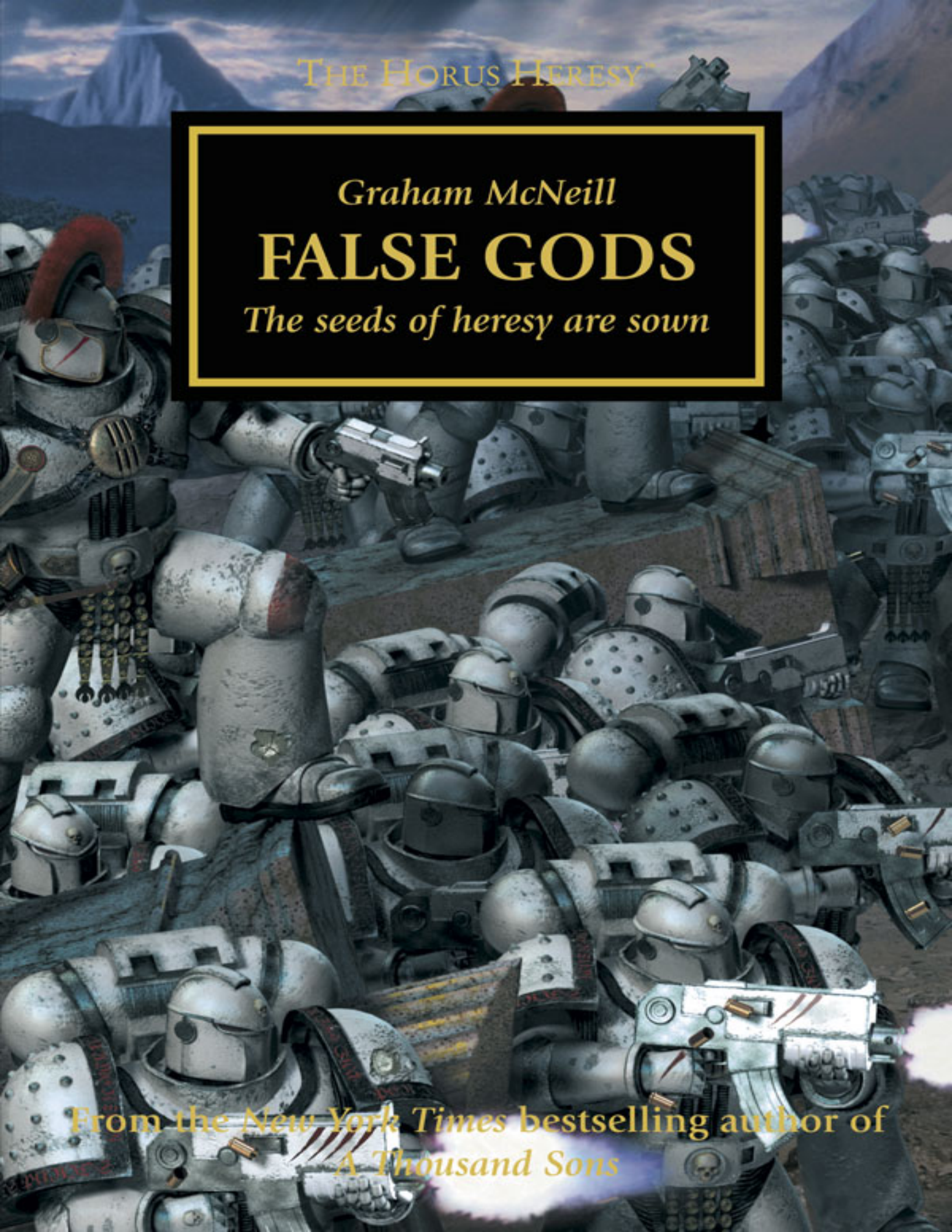




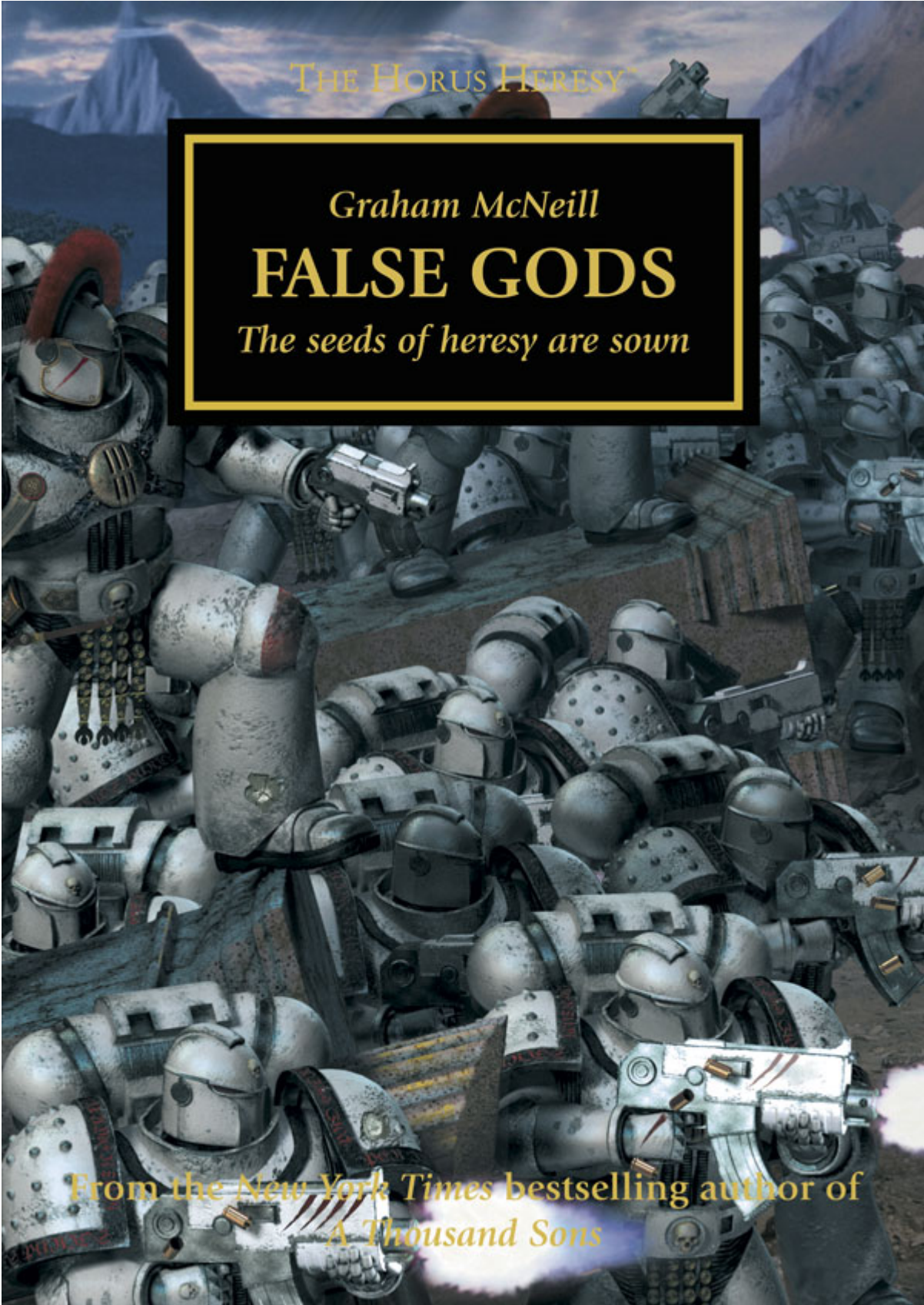
THE HORUS HERESY™

*Graham McNeill*

# FALSE GODS

*The seeds of heresy are sown*

*From the New York Times bestselling author of  
A Thousand Sons*



*"THE HORUS HERESY"*

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THE HORUS HERESY™

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# FALSE GODS

*The heresy takes root*



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# THE HORUS HERESY

*IT IS A TIME OF LEGEND.*

MIGHTY HEROES BATTLE FOR THE RIGHT TO RULE THE GALAXY.

THE VAST ARMIES OF THE EMPEROR OF EARTH HAVE CONQUERED THE GALAXY IN A GREAT CRUSADE – THE MYRIAD ALIEN RACES HAVE BEEN SMASHED BY THE EMPEROR’S ELITE WARRIORS AND WIPED FROM THE FACE OF HISTORY.

THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE OF SUPREMACY FOR HUMANITY BECKONS.

GLEAMING CITADELS OF MARBLE AND GOLD CELEBRATE THE MANY VICTORIES OF THE EMPEROR. TRIUMPHS ARE RAISED ON A MILLION WORLDS TO RECORD THE EPIC DEEDS OF HIS MOST POWERFUL AND DEADLY WARRIORS.

FIRST AND FOREMOST AMONGST THESE ARE THE PRIMARCHS, SUPERHEROIC BEINGS WHO HAVE LED THE EMPEROR’S ARMIES OF SPACE MARINES IN VICTORY AFTER VICTORY. THEY ARE UNSTOPPABLE AND MAGNIFICENT, THE PINNACLE OF THE EMPEROR’S GENETIC EXPERIMENTATION. THE SPACE MARINES ARE THE MIGHTIEST HUMAN WARRIORS THE GALAXY HAS EVER KNOWN, EACH CAPABLE OF BESTING A HUNDRED NORMAL MEN OR MORE IN COMBAT.

ORGANISED INTO VAST ARMIES OF TENS OF THOUSANDS CALLED LEGIONS, THE SPACE MARINES AND THEIR PRIMARCH LEADERS CONQUER THE GALAXY IN THE NAME OF THE EMPEROR.

CHIEF AMONGST THE PRIMARCHS IS HORUS, CALLED THE GLORIOUS, THE BRIGHTEST STAR, FAVOURITE OF THE EMPEROR, AND LIKE A SON UNTO HIM.

HE IS THE WARMASTER, THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE EMPEROR’S MILITARY MIGHT, SUBJUGATOR OF A THOUSAND THOUSAND WORLDS AND CONQUEROR OF THE GALAXY. HE IS A WARRIOR WITHOUT PEER, A DIPLOMAT SUPREME.

HORUS IS A STAR ASCENDANT, BUT HOW MUCH FURTHER CAN A STAR RISE  
BEFORE IT FALLS?

## ~ DRAMATIS PERSONAE ~

### *The XVI Legion 'Sons of Horus'*

HORUS, Warmaster

EZEKYLE ABADDON, First Captain

TARIK TORGADDON, Captain, Second Company

IACON QRUZE, 'The Half-Heard', Captain, Third Company

HASTUR SEJANUS, Captain, Fourth Company (Deceased)

HORUS AXIMAND, 'Little Horus', Captain, Fifth Company

SERGHAR TARGOST, Captain, Seventh Company, lodge master

GARVIEL LOKEN, Captain, Tenth Company

LUC SEDIRAE, Captain, 13th Company

TYBALT MARR, 'The Either', Captain, 18th Company

VERULAM MOY, 'The Or', Captain, 19th Company

KALUS EKADDON, Captain, Catulan Reaver Squad

FALKUS KIBRE, ‘Widowmaker’, Captain, Justaerin Terminator Squad

NERO VIPUS, Sergeant, Locasta Tactical Squad,

MALOGHURST, ‘The Twisted’, equerry to the Warmaster

### ***The Primarchs***

ANGRON, Primarch of the World Eaters

FULGRIM, Primarch of the Emperor’s Children

### ***Other Space Marines***

EREBUS, First Chaplain of the Word Bearers

KHÂRN, Captain, Eighth Assault Company of the World Eaters

### ***The Legio Mortis***

ESAU TURNET, Princeps of the *Dies Irae*, an Imperator-class Titan

CASSAR, Moderati Primus, one of the senior crew of the *Dies Irae*

ARUKEN, Moderati Primus. Another of the *Dies Irae*’s crew

### ***The Davinities***

AKSHUB, Priestess, Leader of the Lodge of the Serpent

TSI REKH, Davinite liaison

TSEPHA, A cultist of Davin and facilitator for Akshub

*Non-Astartes Imperials*

PETRONELLA VIVAR, Palatina Majoria of House Carpinus – one of the scions of a wealthy noble family of Terra

MAGGARD, Bodyguard to Petronella

VARVARAS, Lord Commander of Imperial Army forces attached to Horus's Legion

REGULUS, Mechanicum representative to Horus

PART ONE

# THE BETRAYER

*I was there the day that Horus fell...*

*'It is the folly of men to believe that they are great players on the stage of history, that their actions might affect the grand procession that is the passage of time. It is an insulating conceit a powerful man might clasp tight to his bosom that he might sleep away the night, safe in the knowledge that, but for his presence, the world would not turn, the mountains would crumble and the seas dry up. But if the remembrance of history has taught us anything, it is that, in time, all things will pass. Unnumbered civilisations before ours are naught but dust and bones, and the greatest heroes of their age are forgotten legends. No man lives forever and even as memory fades, so too will any remembrance of him.'*

*'It is a universal truth and an unavoidable law that cannot be denied, despite the protestations of the vain, the arrogant and the tyrannical.'*

*'Horus was the exception.'*

– Kyril Sindermann, Preface to *The Remembrancers*

*'It would take a thousand clichés to describe the Warmaster, each one truer than the last.'*

– Petronella Vivar, Palatina Majoria of House Carpinus

*'Everything degenerates in the hands of men.'*

– Ignace Karkasy, *Meditations on the Elegiac Hero*

# ONE

Scion of Terra

Colossi

Rebel moon

Cyclopean Magnus, Rogal Dorn, Leman Russ: names that rang with history, names that *shaped* history. Her eyes roamed further up the list: Corax, Night Haunter, Angron... and so on through a legacy of heroism and conquest, of worlds reclaimed in the name of the Emperor as part of the ever-expanding Imperium of Man.

It thrilled her just to hear the names in her head.

But greater than any of them was the name at the top of the list.

Horus: the Warmaster.

Lupercal, she heard his soldiers now called him – an affectionate nickname for their beloved commander. It was a name earned in the fires of battle: on Ullanor, on Murder, on Sixty-Three Nineteen, – a world the deluded inhabitants had, in their ignorance, known as Terra – and a thousand other battles she had not yet committed to her mnemonic implants.

The thought that she was so very far from the sprawling family estates of Kairos and would soon set foot on the *Vengeful Spirit* to record living history took her breath away. But she was here to do more than simply record history unfolding; she knew, deep in her soul, that Horus *was* history.

She ran a hand through her long, midnight black hair, swept up in a style considered chic in the Terran court – not that anyone this far out in space would know, allowing her fingernails to trace a path down her smooth, unblemished skin. Her olive skinned features had been carefully moulded by a life of wealth and facial sculpting to be regal and distinguished, with just the fashionable amount of aloofness crafted into the proud sweep of her jawline.

Tall and striking, she sat at her maplewood escritoire, a family heirloom her father proudly boasted had been a gift from the Emperor to his great, great grandmother after the great oath-taking in the Urals. She tapped on her data-slate with a gold

tipped mnemo-quill, its reactive nib twitching in response to her excitement. Random words crawled across the softly glowing surface, the quill's organic stem-crystals picking up the surface thoughts from her frontal lobes.

*Crusade... Hero... Saviour... Destroyer.*

She smiled and erased the words with a swipe of an elegantly manicured nail, the edge smooth down to the fractal level, and began to write with pronounced, cursive sweeps of the quill.

*It is with great heart and a solemn sense of honour that I, Petronella Vivar, Palatina Majoria of House Carpinus do pen these words. For many a long year I have journeyed from Terra, enduring many travails and inconveniences...*

Petronella frowned and quickly erased the words she had written, angry at having copied the unnatural affectedness that so infuriated her in the remembrancers' scripts that had been sent back from the leading edge of the Great Crusade.

Sindermann's texts in particular irritated her, though of late they had become few and far between. Dion Phraster produced some passable symphonics – nothing that would enjoy more than a day or so of favour in the Terran ballrooms – but pleasing enough; and the landscapes of Keland Roget were certainly vibrant, but possessed a hyperbole of brush stroke that she felt was unwarranted.

Ignace Karkasy had written some passable poems, but they painted a picture of the Great Crusade she often thought unflattering to such a wondrous undertaking (especially *Blood Through Misunderstanding*) and she often asked herself why the Warmaster allowed him to pen such words. She wondered if perhaps the subtexts of the poetry went over his head, and then laughed at the thought that anything could get past one such as Horus.

She sat back on her chair and placed the quill in the Lethe-well as a sudden, treacherous doubt gnawed at her. She was so critical of the other remembrancers, but had yet to test her own mettle amongst them.

Could she do any better? Could she meet with the greatest hero of the age – a god some called him, although that was a ridiculous, outmoded concept these days – and achieve what they had, in her opinion, singularly failed to do? Who was she to believe that her paltry skill could do justice to the mighty tales the Warmaster was forging, hot on the anvil of battle?

Then she remembered her lineage and her posture straightened. Was she not of House Carpinus, finest and most influential of the noble houses in Terran aristocracy? Had not House Carpinus chronicled the rise of the Emperor and his domain throughout the Wars of Unification, watching it grow from a planet-spanning empire to one that was even now reaching from one side of the galaxy to the other to reclaim mankind's lost realm?

As though seeking further reassurance, Petronella opened a flat blotting folder with a monogrammed leather cover and slid a sheaf of papers from inside it. At the top of the pile was a pict image of a fair-haired Astartes in burnished plate, kneeling before a group of his peers as one of them presented a long, trailing parchment to him. Petronella knew that these were called oaths of moment, vows sworn by warriors before battle to pledge their skill and devotion to the coming fight. An intertwined 'EK' device in the corner of the pict identified it as one of Euphrati Keeler's images, and though she was loath to give any of the remembrancers credit, this piece was simply wondrous.

Smiling, she slid the pict to one side, to reveal a piece of heavy grain cartridge paper beneath. The paper bore the familiar double-headed eagle watermark, representing the union of the Mechanicum of Mars and the Emperor, and the script was written in the short, angular strokes of the Sigillite's hand, the quick pen strokes and half-finished letters speaking of a man writing in a hurry. The upward slant to the tails of the high letters indicated that he had a great deal on his mind, though why that should be so, now that the Emperor had returned to Terra, she did not know.

She smiled as she studied the letter for what must have been the hundredth time since she had left the port at Gyptus, knowing that it represented the highest honour accorded to her family.

A shiver of anticipation travelled along her spine as she heard far distant klaxons, and a distorted automated voice, coming from the gold-rimmed speakers in the corridor outside her suite, declared that her vessel had entered high anchor around the planet.

She had arrived.

Petronella pulled a silver sash beside the escritorio and, barely a moment later, the door chime rang and she smiled, knowing without turning that only Maggard would have answered her summons so quickly. Though he never uttered a word in her presence – nor ever would, thanks to the surgery she'd had the family chaperones administer – she always knew when he was near by the agitated jitter of her mnemo-quill as it reacted to the cold steel bite of his mind.

She spun around in her deeply cushioned chair and said, 'Open.'

The door swung smoothly open and she let the moment hang as Maggard waited for permission to stand in her presence.

'I give you leave to enter,' she said and watched as her dour bodyguard of twenty years smoothly crossed the threshold into her frescoed suite of gold and scarlet. His every move was controlled and tight, as though his entire body – from the hard, sculpted muscles of his legs, to his wide, powerful shoulders – was in tension.

He moved to the side as the door shut behind him, his dancing, golden eyes sweeping the vaulted, filigreed ceiling and the adjacent anterooms in a variety of spectra for anything suspect. He kept one hand on the smooth grip of his pistol, the other on the grip of his gold-bladed Kirlian rapier. His bare arms bore the faint scars of augmetic surgery, pale lines across his dark skin, as did the tissue around his eyes where house surgeons had replaced them with expensive biometric spectral enhancers to enable him better to protect the scion of House Carpinus.

Clad in gold armour of flexing, ridged bands and silver mail, Maggard nodded in unsmiling acknowledgement that all was clear, though Petronella could have told him that without all his fussing. But since his life was forfeit should anything untoward befall her, she supposed she could understand his caution.

'Where is Babeth?' asked Petronella, slipping the Sigillite's letter back into the blotter and lifting the mnemo-quill from the Lethe-well. She placed the nib on the data-slate and cleared her mind, allowing Maggard's thoughts to shape the words his throat could not, frowning as she read what appeared.

'She has no business being asleep,' said Petronella. 'Wake her. I am to be presented to the mightiest hero of the Great Crusade and I'm not going before him looking as though I've just come from some stupid pilgrim riot on Terra. Fetch her

and have her bring the velveteen gown, the crimson one with the high collars. I'll expect her within five minutes.'

Maggard nodded and withdrew from her presence, but not before she felt the delicious thrill of excitement as the mnemo-quill twitched in her grip and scratched a last few words on the data-slate.

*...ing bitch...*

In one of the ancient tongues of Terra its name meant 'Day of Wrath' and Jonah Aruken knew that the name was well deserved. Rearing up before him like some ancient god of a forgotten time, the *Dies Irae* stood as a vast monument to war and destruction, its armoured head staring proudly over the assembled ground crew that milled around it like worshippers.

The Imperator-class Titan represented the pinnacle of the Mechanicum's skill and knowledge, the culmination of millennia of war and military technology. The Titan had no purpose other than to destroy, and had been designed with all the natural affinity for the business of killing that mankind possessed. Like some colossal armoured giant of steel, the Titan stood forty-three metres tall on crenellated bastion legs, each one capable of mounting a full company of soldiers and their associated supporting troops.

Jonah watched as a long banner of gold and black was unfurled between the Titan's legs, like the loincloth of some feral savage, emblazoned with the death's head symbol of the Legio Mortis. Scores of curling scrolls, each bearing the name of a glorious victory won by the Warmaster, were stitched to the honour banner and Jonah knew that there would be many more added before the Great Crusade was over.

Thick, ribbed cables snaked from the shielded power cores in the hangar's ceiling towards the Titan's armoured torso, where the mighty war engine's plasma reactor was fed with the power of a caged star.

Its adamantine hull was scarred and pitted with the residue of battle, the tech-adepts still patching it up after the fight against the megarachnid. Nevertheless, it was a magnificent and humbling sight, though not one that could dull the ache in his head and the churning in his belly from too much amasec the night before.

Giant, rumbling cranes suspended from the ceiling lifted massive hoppers of shells and long, snub-nosed missiles into the launch bays of the Titan's weapon mounts. Each gun was the size of a hab-block, massive rotary cannons, long-range howitzers and a monstrous plasma cannon with the power to level cities. He watched the ordnance crews prep the weapons, feeling the familiar flush of pride and excitement as he made his way towards the Titan, and smiled at the obvious masculine symbolism of a Titan being made ready for war.

He jumped as a gurney laden with Vulkan bolter shells sped past him, just barely avoiding him as it negotiated its way at speed through the organised chaos of ground personnel, Titan crews and deck hands. It squealed to a halt and the driver's head snapped around.

'Watch where the hell you're going, you damn fool!' shouted the driver, rising from his seat and striding angrily towards him. 'You Titan crewmen think you can swan about like pirates, well this is my—'

The words died in the man's throat and he snapped to attention as he saw the garnet studs and the winged skull emblem on the shoulder boards of Jonah's uniform jacket that marked him as a moderati primus of the *Dies Irae*.

'Sorry,' smiled Jonah, spreading his arms in a gesture of amused apology as he watched the man fight the urge to say more. 'Didn't see you there, chief, got a hell of a hangover. Anyway, what the devil are you doing driving so fast? You could have killed me.'

'You just walked out in front of me, sir,' said the man, staring fixedly at a point just over Jonah's shoulder.

'Did I? Well... just... be more careful next time,' said Jonah, already walking away.

'Then watch where you're going...' hissed the man under his breath, before climbing back onto his gurney and driving off.

'You be careful now!' Jonah called after the driver, imagining the colourful insults the man would already be cooking up about 'those damned Titan crewmen' to tell his fellow ground staff.

The hangar, though over two kilometres in length, felt cramped to Jonah as he made his way towards the *Dies Irae*, the scent of engine oil, grease and sweat not

helping one whit with his hangover.

A host of Battle Titans of the Legio Mortis stood ready for war: fast, mid-range Reavers, snarling Warhounds and the mighty Warlords – as well as some newer Night Gaunt-class Titans – but none could match the awesome splendour of an Imperator-class Titan. The *Dies Irae* dwarfed them all in size, power and magnificence, and Jonah knew there was nothing in the galaxy that could stand against such a terrifying war machine.

Jonah adjusted his collar and fastened the brass buttons of his jacket, straightening it over his stocky frame before he reached the Titan's wide feet. He ran his hands through his shoulder-length black hair, trying to give the impression, at least, that he hadn't slept in his clothes. He could see the thin, angular form of Titus Cassar, his fellow moderati primus, working behind a monitoring terminal, and had no wish to endure another lecture on the ninety-nine virtues of the Emperor.

Apparently, smartness of appearance was one of the most important.

'Good morning, Titus,' he said, keeping his tone light.

Cassar's head bobbed up in surprise and he quickly slid a folded pamphlet beneath a sheaf of readiness reports.

'You're late,' he said, recovering quickly. 'Reveille was an hour ago and punctuality is the hallmark of the pious man.'

'Don't start with me, Titus,' said Jonah, reaching over and snatching the pamphlet that Cassar had been so quick to conceal. Cassar made to stop him, but Jonah was too quick, brandishing the pamphlet before him.

'If Princeps Turnet catches you reading this, you'll be a gunnery servitor before you know what's hit you.'

'Give it back, Jonah, please.'

'I'm not in the mood for another sermon from this damned Lectitio Divinitatus chapbook.'

'Fine, I'll put it away, just give it back, all right?'

Jonah nodded and held the well-thumbed paper out to Cassar, who snatched it back and quickly slid it inside his uniform jacket.

Rubbing his temples with the heel of his palms, Jonah said, 'Anyway, what's the rush? It's not as though the old girl's even ready for the pre-deployment checks, is

she?’

‘I pray you’ll stop referring to it as a she, Jonah, it smacks of pagan anthropomorphising,’ said Cassar. ‘A Titan is a war machine, nothing more: steel, adamantine and plasma with flesh and blood controlling it.’

‘How can you say that?’ asked Aruken, sauntering over to a steel plated leg section and climbing the steps to the arched gates that led within. He slapped his palm on the thick metal and said, ‘She’s obviously a she, Titus. Look at the shapely legs, the curve of the hips, and doesn’t she carry us within her like a mother protecting her unborn children?’

‘In mockery are the seeds of impiety sown,’ said Cassar without a trace of irony, ‘and I will not have it.’

‘Oh, come on, Titus,’ said Aruken, warming to his theme. ‘Don’t you feel it when you’re inside her? Don’t you hear the beat of her heart in the rumble of her reactor, or feel the fury of her wrath in the roar of her guns?’

Cassar turned back to the monitoring panel and said, ‘No, I do not, and I do not wish to hear any more of your foolishness, we are already behind on our pre-deployment checks. Princeps Turnet will have our hides nailed to the hull if we are not ready.’

‘Where is the princeps?’ asked Jonah, suddenly serious.

‘With the War Council,’ said Cassar.

Aruken nodded and descended the steps of the Titan’s foot, joining Cassar at the monitoring station and letting fly with one last jibe. ‘Just because you’ve never had the chance to enjoy a woman doesn’t mean I’m not right.’

Cassar gave him a withering glare, and said, ‘Enough. The War Council will be done soon, and I’ll not have it said that the Legio Mortis wasn’t ready to do the Emperor’s bidding.’

‘You mean Horus’s bidding,’ corrected Jonah.

‘We have been over this before, my friend,’ said Cassar. ‘Horus’s authority comes from the Emperor. We forget that at our peril.’

‘That’s as maybe, but it’s been many a dark and bloody day since we’ve fought with the Emperor beside us, hasn’t it? But hasn’t Horus always been there for us on every battlefield?’

‘Indeed he has, and for that I’d follow him into battle beyond the Halo Stars,’ nodded Cassar. ‘But even the Warmaster has to answer to the God-Emperor.’

‘God-Emperor?’ hissed Jonah, leaning in close as he saw a number of the ground crew turn their heads towards them. ‘Listen, Titus, you have to stop this God-Emperor rubbish. One day you’re going to say that to the wrong person and you’ll get your skull cracked open. Besides, even the Emperor himself says he’s not a god.’

‘Only the truly divine deny their divinity,’ said Cassar, quoting from his book.

Jonah raised his hands in surrender and said, ‘All right, have it your way, Titus, but don’t say I didn’t warn you.’

‘The righteous have nothing to fear from the wicked, and—’

‘Spare me another lesson on ethics, Titus,’ sighed Jonah, turning away and watching as a detachment of Imperial Army soldiers marched into the hangar, lasrifles on canvas slings hanging from their shoulders.

‘Any word yet on what we’re going to be fighting on this rock?’ asked Jonah, changing the subject, ‘I hope it’s the greenskin. We still owe them for the destruction of *Vulkas Tor* on Ullanor. Do you think it will be the greenskin?’

Cassar shrugged. ‘I don’t know, Jonah. Does it matter? We fight who we are ordered to fight.’

‘I just like to know.’

‘You will know when Princeps Turnet returns,’ said Cassar. ‘Speaking of which, hadn’t you better prepare the command deck for his return?’

Jonah nodded, knowing that his fellow moderati was right and that he’d wasted enough time in baiting him. Senior Princeps Esau Turnet’s reputation as a feared, ruthless warrior was well deserved and he ran a tight ship on the *Dies Irae*. Titan crews might be permitted more leeway in their behaviour than the common soldiery, but Turnet brooked no such laxity in the crew of his Titan.

‘You’re right, Titus, I’m sorry.’

‘Don’t be sorry,’ said Cassar, pointing to the gateway in the Titan’s leg. ‘Be ready.’

Jonah sketched a quick salute and jogged up the steps, leaving Cassar to finish prepping the Titan for refuelling. He made his way past embarking soldiers who grumbled as he pushed them aside. Some raised their voices, but upon seeing his