



CATACHAN ONE NINE MARK FOUR MARK TWO

THE SANCTUARY

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



CATACHAN ONE-NINE MARK FOUR MARK TWO

7.2: THE SANCTUARY

By Stephen J Dutton BSc (hons) BEng (hons)

After being caught in a devastating Ork ambush the surviving forces of the Catachan VII Division are scattered and cut off from support. For any of them to survive they will need to reunite their forces and establish a base that they can defend against the overwhelming Ork forces on the planet. An ancient fortress seems to offer such a location but it is already held by the Orks and taking it from the will require bold action.

Further Warhammer 40,000 fan fiction is available at:
<http://thehazugfiles.uk/Index.htm>

Copyright notice:
Warhammer 40,000 is the intellectual property of Games Workshop Ltd. This story is unofficial and Games Workshop has not endorsed it in any way.

1.

At the sound of each explosion the Catachans of the Second Platoon of Fourth Company, Catachan XIX Regiment paused and looked around, checking that it did not herald an attack by Ork forces lying in wait for them as they moved through the jungle. Ordinarily Orks were not known for tactics that required them to remain in place undetected for prolonged periods of time but there appeared little that was conventional about the greenskins that inhabited this particular planet. Just a few days earlier a force consisting of the Catachan XII, XIX, XXV and XIV Armoured regiments had been deployed as the vanguard of an invasion force that was supposed to retake this planet for the Imperium of Man. The invasion plan had centred around having a team of specialist Space Marines from the elite alien hunting Deathwatch kill the local Ork warboss, the chieftain of all the Orks on the planet and thus throwing them into confusion and infighting as rival lesser Ork nobles fought among themselves to determine which of them would take his place. However, in a move that was highly uncharacteristic of Orks a decoy had been deployed and when the marines took this out the Orks had feigned retreating and fighting among themselves in order to lure the VII Division away from their fortified landing zone so that they could be ambushed. Attacked by overwhelming numbers, even the specialist jungle fighters of Catachan found themselves overrun and the order had been given for them to scatter and find whatever safety they could.

Second platoon had been away from the drop zone when it was attacked, acting in support of the Deathwatch kill team. The marines themselves had withdrawn before the decoy had been revealed but Second Platoon had been left to dispose of the Ork bodies and this had kept them away from the landing zone and surrounding area when the massacre had taken place. When the order to go to ground had been given Captain Emilia Wolf, the commanding officer of Second Platoon had immediately begun to search the maps on her dataslate for a good defensible position. Remaining at their current location while she searched was dangerous, the Orks would be aware that there had been a small force of human troops there and more of them could be on their way and so Wolf had already given the order to move, heading away from the landing zone to avoid the high concentration of Orks now in that area.

"Having second thoughts captain?"

Wolf looked up from her dataslate when she heard the question and looked at Vance, her platoon sergeant and second in command. Wolf depended greatly on Vance for support, she was not a native of the death world of Catachan and despite having successfully led Second Platoon through several campaigns she was still what Catachans called an 'outsider'. Her own troops would follow her orders but there were even some of them who still wanted her replaced with someone who was one of their own. Thankfully Vance himself had always been willing to support her even if he too acknowledged the fact that she was not a true Catachan jungle fighter.

"No, I'm just wondering where we might find Orks lying in wait for us." she replied, "It's no good finding somewhere for us to shelter if it's already home to a bunch of greenskins."

"We've got Rull moving ahead of us." Vance reminded her, "He can check out any position you chose and then you can decide whether its worth the risk of us taking on any Orks we find."

Rull was Second Platoon's sniper and even among Catachans his ability to stalk a target through the jungle while remaining unseen were outstanding. Once part of a squad he now operated alone and it had been him that took out the decoy Ork warboss with a single shot before the trick had been discovered.

"I suppose so." Wolf replied, nodding, "It's just that I don't want anyone saying that I'm the outsider who led my men into an ambush and got them all killed."

"And just who do you think would say that?" Vance asked.

"Your wife? Grey? Grey's wife? Anyone not in Second Platoon?" Wolf said and Vance smiled.

"Okay so maybe there are a lot of people who would say that. But at least you'll be dead too so what will it matter to you? You'll have been welcomed into the embrace of Him on Earth." he said.

"Gee thanks." Wolf said then she sighed and held out her dataslate so that Vance could see the screen, "Look, I've found what looks like an old survey station about ten kilometres from here. It was abandoned even before the Orks took over the planet so maybe they never occupied it. If it's still intact then that will provide us with a good defensible spot. Plus its a fixed point on a map, once we've secured it we can use it as a reference to contact other surviving units and rally them to us." she said.

"Sounds like a good plan. In fact-" Vance began before Wolf's microbead headset activated.

"Captain we've got greenskins ahead of us. About two hundred metres. They haven't noticed us yet but if we get too close they're bound to hear our ogyrns." Sergeant Molla, the leader of First Squad said. In addition to the four squads of Catachans that Wolf had under her command, not including her own command section, Second Platoon also included a seven strong squad of abhuman ogyrns. The massive creatures were incredibly strong and their ripper guns gave them each close range firepower equivalent to a heavy bolter but

even their leader Sergeant Khor who had had his intelligence enhanced through the process known as Biochemical Ogryn Neural Enhancement, leading to him being known as a BONEHead, possessed only limited intelligence. The ogryns' method of getting through the jungle, as well as just about everything else they encountered, was simply to smash through it rather than move carefully around.

"How many?" Wolf asked.

"About a dozen that I can see but they've got an armoured vehicle of some sort so there could be more of them inside." Molla told her.

"Go around?" Vance suggested but Wolf shook her head.

"No this could give us a victory that will lift everyone's spirits." she said before activating her microbead again, "Sergeant Grey." she transmitted.

"Yes captain?" he replied. Grey remained one of the most sceptical members of the platoon about Wolf's ability to lead it and she was always careful when giving him an order that she did not sound as if she thought she did not take the skills of Catachans seriously.

"Sergeant I need you to take Second Squad over to First Squad's position. Sergeant Molla will show you your target. It's an Ork vehicle that I want you to engage with your squad's missile launcher. You and Sergeant Molla are then to engage any surviving Orks and wipe them out as quickly as possible. All other squads are to be on alert for any other Ork forces in the area. They're bound to hear it when that vehicle goes up."

Grey and Second Squad moved forwards to where Molla had already deployed his men and Grey found Molla himself looking through his magnoculars, observing the Orks.

"What have we got Tari?" Grey asked Molla as he joined him.

"I think it used to be a Chimera. Or at least something on that hull." Molla replied as the two men looked at the Ork armoured vehicle. This had the lozenge shaped hull of a standard Imperial Guard Chimera transport that was also shared by several other vehicles such as Basilisk self-propelled artillery guns and Hellhound flame tanks. However, whatever this vehicle had been manufactured to be that had been long ago and since then it had been heavily modified by its new Ork owners. Now the armoured vehicle was fitted with a bulky turret that mounted a stubby high calibre gun that through the magnoculars Grey and Molla were using to observe it could be seen to be a smooth-bore weapon, suggesting that it was either a massive shotgun or was intended to deliver explosive area effect rounds. In either case the weapon could pose a serious threat to the Catachans even given the poor marksmanship of Orks.

"Looks like they've upped the armour a fair bit." Grey commented, studying the crude pieces of metal that had been fixed to the vehicle's hull.

"Think your boys can still take it out in one go?" Molla said.

"Oh I think so. We've got a good angle at the side from here and I can see where plates have just fallen off. Whoever fixed them on didn't do a very good job. We still need to get closer though, once we take out that tank we need to deal with any surviving Orks and they've got too much cover at this range." Grey answered.

"Agreed. It'll get even worse if they break and run. I doubt we'd catch them all." Molla replied and the two sergeants got up, "Okay everyone we're moving forwards about a hundred metres." Molla told the other members of the two squads.

The Catachans spread themselves out as they advanced, keeping low to avoid being spotted by the Orks but before they had got the hundred metres Molla had told them to travel he suddenly came to a halt and signalled for the others to do the same.

"What's wrong?" Grey said softly and Molla pointed at a tree ahead of them.

"Look there." he said and Grey looked at the tree.

For a moment nothing appeared out of the ordinary to Grey but then he saw damage to the tree bark where it had been pulled down as if by someone climbing it. Looking up into the tree he then saw a trio of Gretchin, smaller and much less muscular versions of the green skinned Orks. The Gretchin existed as a slave caste in Ork society and carried out menial tasks that the Orks themselves could not be bothered with, one such duty being acting as sentries.

"If we get any closer those big eared xenos will hear us and raise the alarm." Molla said.

"And then just one blast from that cannon they've got will send us all into the Emperor's embrace." Grey added, "There's bound to be more of them around so I guess we do this from here."

"I better let the captain know. There's no way that we'll get them all. As soon as the Orks are gone they'll make a run for it." Molla said, reaching for his microbead, "Captain it's Molla. We have a slight problem."

"Slight? Go on sergeant." Wolf responded.

"Yes captain, we've encountered Gretchin look outs. If there's one group here then there are bound to be more of them around." Molla told her.

"Understood sergeant. You're telling me that some are bound to get away, right?"

"Yes captain. We could try using the entire platoon to surround them but-" Molla began.

"No sergeant, I want this dealt with quickly. Gretchin will run but it will take them time to return with reinforcements. Deal with the Orks in our path and we can be on our way before any more turn up to investigate." Wolf ordered.

"Yes captain." Molla replied before he turned to Grey, "Wolf's orders stand. We take out the Orks. The Gretchin can be allowed to get away."

"That outsider better know what she's doing. We can't just wandering around randomly in the jungle or eventually we're going to run into something too strong for us to take on." Grey replied. Then he turned to the two men of Second Squad's missile launcher team, "Deploy here and prep a krak round." he told them, "Everyone else spread out and wait for the fireworks to start."

While the two man missile launcher team was setting up their tubular weapon the rest of Second Squad were spreading out to be able to fire their weapons towards the area around the Ork vehicle. At the same time First Squad were deploying in a similar fashion, with their heavy weapon team setting up their tripod mounted heavy bolter while the grenadier and most of the riflemen deployed around them. However, Molla directed two of his men to instead target the Gretchin sentries.

"Green, Masters, I want those Gretchin taking out of that tree before they can use it to fire down at us." he told the men, knowing that Gretchin had superior aim to Orks and would be able to use their higher position to their advantage as soon as they realised that the Catachans were there.

When the missile launcher team was set up the loader slid a round into the back of the launcher until it locked in place, at which point the loader raised his hand to signal that they were ready to fire.

"Your boys ready Tari?" Grey asked Molla and the sergeant of First Squad nodded.

"Take out that tank and we'll shred some Orks." he replied.

Grey raised a hand to his microbead, connecting to the missile launcher team.

"Fire." he said simply and there was a flash of light, accompanied by a 'whoosh' sound and a cloud of smoke behind the launcher as the missile itself shot out of the front and its rocket motor ignited. The missile sped towards the ramshackle Ork vehicle and struck it side on just as the Catachan gunner had intended. The warhead detonated on impact and the shaped charge easily punched a hole right through the vehicle's crudely applied armour. Inside the vehicle the jet of molten metal created by the missile warhead struck something volatile and less than a second after the initial detonation there was a second much larger explosion that consumed the entire vehicle in a ball of flame. This was followed by screams of pain as burning Orks staggered and rolled out of any exit they could find, desperate to try and avoid being burned to death inside while the Orks who had been gathered around the outside of the vehicle all turned towards the source of the attack.

The Gretchin looks out in the tree had seen where the missile came from and they immediately began to call out in their own language, pointing towards the Catachans and waving. However, almost as soon as they began to do this both Green and Masters opened fire with their lasguns set to automatic. Lacking the physical durability of their larger cousins, the Gretchin were easy prey for the two guardsmen and they shrieked as they were struck by repeated blasts before their bodies fell from the tree into the undergrowth below. At the same time as Green and Masters engaged the Gretchin the other Catachans opened fire on the Orks surrounding the burning tank with every weapon at their disposal. Almost immediately three of the Orks were cut down by fire from First Squad's heavy bolter while others were hit by blasts from lasguns. More resilient than the smaller Gretchin, none of the Orks fell to the las blasts right away but they still howled in pain before returning fire. Being unable to identify the exact locations of the Catachans did not concern the Orks and they simply fired sustained bursts of projectiles into the jungle at random, hoping that they would hit something. Sure enough one of the Catachans in Molla's squad fell backwards clutching at his throat as a bullet struck him and the soldier beside him ceased fire, taking a field dressing from his webbing and hurrying to try and stem the bleeding. The two Catachans armed with grenade launchers then began firing, sending several fragmentation grenades towards the Orks and the detonations sent two of the aliens flying away as shrapnel tore through them.

It was then that another pair of Orks that had been out of sight behind the armoured vehicle. Unlike the other aliens who were clad only in lightweight armour these two slightly larger specimens wore mechanical suits that were reminiscent of the power armour of the Adeptus Astartes only much cruder with numerous exposed pistons and power cables. This armour also left the Orks' heads uncovered and it was easy to see that they both had numerous cybernetic implants in their skulls. Both of these Orks also carried larger weapons than the others of their kind were armed with and they too pointed these into the jungle and roared as they fired them. Unusually for Ork personal weapons these were energy weapons that unleashed blasts of what appeared to be plasma blasts that burned their way through the vegetation unhindered. As with the other Orks these two new arrivals had no specific targets and they fired at random, striking another of First Squad and momentarily turning him into a pillar of flame before his body was reduced to ash.

"Take down those armoured beasts!" Molla yelled and the Catachans began to focus their fire on the armoured Orks. These Orks ignored the hits from the Catachans' lasguns entirely but when First Squad's

heavy bolter team turned their weapon on the closest his improved armour proved itself to be of little use against the mass reactive explosive rounds, stopping the first few before it was cracked open and the next round punched through to explode inside the Ork killing him instantly. The second armoured creature turned towards the heavy bolter team and raised its plasma weapon, however when it fired the inherent instability of these weapons demonstrated itself as it exploded in the alien's hands and the Catachans instinctively looked away from the blinding light.

Startled by the loss of the larger armoured Orks, the remaining aliens suddenly stopped firing and as one they turned to flee from the battle.

"They're running. Don't let any escape." Grey called out as he got to his feet and the Catachans abandoned their position, rushing forwards to engage the Orks at close quarters while firing their lasguns on the move. Focused entirely on escaping, the Orks did not return fire and one after another they tumbled forwards when hit by las blasts, a few killed outright while others continued to drag themselves onwards until further shots finally finished them off. However, as the Catachans charged past the still burning tank they discovered what it was that had prompted the Orks to stop their vehicle here to disembark and they ground to a halt.

"Throne." Molla said, looking down at the ground where the remains of a person in red robes lay scattered around.

The remains were obviously those of a tech priest of the Adeptus Mechanicus with the scattered body parts being mechanical rather than biological in nature and it was apparent that the armoured Orks had been in the process of looting as much of the body as they could for use in their own creations. The largest single part in the remains was the head and chest that were still connected and intact while everything else including the tentacle-like mechandrites that would normally have connected to the tech priest's spine had been removed and was in the process of being dismantled for parts. Molla was about to suggest that the Catachans continue after the fleeing Orks when all of a sudden all of the Catachans' microbeads activated. "Frequency identified. General broadcast. Multiple system failure. Recovery urgent." a synthesised voice said.

"What was that?" Molla said, looking around.

"I think it was him." Grey replied, looking down at the remains of the tech priest.

"You mean he's still alive?" Molla asked.

"Current survival confirmed. Long term survival unlikely without assistance." the synthesised voice said.

"Looks like he can hear us." Grey said and then he frowned and added, "Assuming it is a 'he'. I don't think he has any of the relevant parts any more."

"Biological reproductive function irrelevant. Recovery required." the tech priest broadcast.

"Okay forget the Orks we need to get this guy back to the captain." Molla said and he turned to his squad,

"Pick him up, every piece. Maybe there's some way that the other cogboys can stick him back together again."

2.

When the rest of Second Platoon caught up with First and Second Squads Wolf and her command section headed straight for Molla and his men who had gathered together the parts of the tech priest.

"Torrent take a look at him." Wolf ordered, glancing at the platoon's medicae.

"I'm not sure I know where to start." the Catachan woman replied as she moved closer, "How many organic bits are left?"

"It's some cogboy from the Fourteenth Armoured so probably not much." Molla told her.

"How do you know that sergeant?" Wolf asked and Molla picked up what had been a shoulder pad before the Orks had ripped it from the tech priest's body and pointed to where 'XIV' was stencilled along with a row of binary digits underneath that only another tech priest would be able to understand.

"Okay but do we know exactly who it is and how he ended up here?" Wolf asked.

"Not yet. After we started picking up all the pieces he suddenly went silent. He's either dead or doesn't think us regular people are worth talking to." Molla replied.

"Well I think he's alive." Torrent said, looking up while she crouched beside the tech priest's head and chest, "There's something here that looks like a valve from a surgical ventilator and I think it's feeding oxygen to the head. Why do that if the brain wasn't still alive?"

"Okay then we take him with us. One of Khor's ogryns can carry all these pieces but I want him kept close to me. If he is still alive then he might have information that's of use to us and I want to be there when he chooses to share it." Wolf ordered just as another Catachan, this one armed with a shotgun in place of a las weapon came rushing up to her, "What is it Sergeant Quinn?" she asked.

"Captain Rull just checked in." he told her, "He chased after some of those greenskins that got away from Molla and Grey. He managed to pick off most of them but some made it as far as an Ork camp of sorts about two kilometres from here. Rull says that there are about twenty Orks there, plus Gretchin. The main point he made though was that they're holding prisoners. About a dozen of them."

"Tankers from the Fourteenth maybe?" Vance suggested.

"You can't abandon them." Torrent said, getting to her feet and staring at Wolf.

"Don't worry, I'm not about to. Where would either of us be if that was how things were done?" Wolf replied.

Both women had joined Second Platoon only after being rescued from alien captivity, in their case from forces loyal to the Tau Empire, "If the Orks behave as they normally do then most of them will come after us, leaving Gretchin behind to guard their prisoners and that gives us an opportunity. I want the platoon deployed to cover the most direct approach from the Ork camp to here, that's the way they'll likely come at us. Corporal Mayer set up your mortars to lay down fire along their likely route."

"Yes captain." Mayer, the leader of Second Platoon's mortar squad responded and he immediately began to direct his men to set up their heavy weapons while Wolf then turned to Quinn.

"Sergeant Quinn you are to take Third Squad to the Ork camp itself. When you hear the shooting start I want you to free the prisoners. Quietly." she told him and he smiled.

"I think quiet can be achieved captain." he said and he patted the stub pistol holstered on his leg. The barrel of this protruded from the main body of the weapon slightly, exposing the thread designed for a silencer.

The sun was setting as the Orks came rushing through the jungle towards Second Platoon without any thought about whether they might be charging straight into a trap and they made no effort to conceal their approach, instead roaring and shouting out in their native tongue as they ran. Second Platoon was deploy in a 'V' formation so that they could catch the Orks in a crossfire with First and Second Squads on the sides while Mayer's mortar squad was at the point with the gaps in between filled by Wolf's command section and Khor's ogryns and this meant that Grey was the first to spot the approaching aliens as he trained his magnoculars on the area of the jungle that the noise was coming from.

"Incoming." he said into his microbead, "Orks, twenty plus. Entering the kill zone now."

"Very good." Wolf responded.

"Okay Bomber, it's over to you now." Vance added and then he heard the sound of three mortars being fired in rapid succession.

One after another the mortar rounds dropped through the trees into the middle of the advancing Orks before exploding. The roars of the Orks changed to screams as the shrapnel tore through them and they scattered in all directions, seeking to get out of the bombardment zone.

"Open fire!" Wolf yelled and all of a sudden the gloom of the jungle was lit up by bright pulses of las fire as the muzzle flash from heavy bolter and ripper gun fire. No matter which way the Orks ran they found themselves heading into the path of gunfire that ripped through them. Even those that tried to retreat back the way they came found no safety as carefully aimed rounds from a sniper rifle picked them off before they

had even got ten metres.

“That’s it.” Quinn said quietly when he heard the first explosions and he waved his squad forwards. All nine of the surviving veterans had swapped their usual shotguns, flamers and meltagun for stub pistols fitted with silencers. These were not standard issue, they had been recovered from the wreck of an ancient starship and adopted by Second Platoon as reserve weapons while the surplus were kept for trade with other units. Given that the pistols needed only one hand to wield this left the other free for the Catachans’ traditional long knives and each of the veterans also wielded one of these as they crept towards the Ork camp.

As expected most of the actual Orks had left as soon as they heard about more enemies to fight close by, leaving behind them just three of their number plus a larger number of Gretchin. Only the Ork appeared to have any kind of firearm, with bulky pistols tucked into belts whereas the Gretchin instead carried only an assortment of melee weapons, most of which were nothing more than sharp spikes mounted on the ends of poles.

The Catachan prisoners that the greenskins were guarding were gathered together in a group, each of them bound by their wrists while a chain connected all of them together by their ankles. Some of the prisoners were obviously injured, however this did not matter to the Orks and there were no signs of them having been treated. Most of the Gretchin were clustered around the prisoners, occasionally poking at them with their crude weapons. On the other hand the Orks themselves were clustered beside a camp fire examining a pile of Imperial Guard issue weapons and equipment taken from the prisoners and bodies of Catachans killed by this group of Orks.

Being so focused on guarding their prisoners the Orks had not set lookouts and Quinn’s veterans were able to get all the way to the edge of the camp without being noticed. Pausing there Quinn took aim at one of the Orks who had his back to him and squeezed the trigger of his pistol. The sound of the shot was barely audible and the greenskins were making too much noise themselves to hear the shot. However, when the Ork Quinn fired at was hit in the back of his head his comrades could not help but notice as he suddenly fell forwards with a hole in the back of his skull. Tossing aside the objects that they had been investigating the other two Orks roared as they reached for their weapons but a volley of pistol fire brought them both down before they even saw who was attacking them.

The sudden deaths of their larger masters sent the Gretchin into a panic as they searched for the source of the attack. However, in doing so they turned their backs on their captives who realised instantly that they were being rescued and those that were still able to leapt into action, grabbing the diminutive creatures and dragging them to the ground where despite their bonds they kicked and beat the screaming Gretchin.

“Quick, cut them free.” Quinn ordered as he and his men rushed out of the undergrowth, “Who’s in charge here?” he added, addressing the captive Catachans.

“I am.” one of them responded, “Corporal Fuller. Fourteenth Armoured.”

“Sergeant Quinn. Nineteenth.” Quinn responded, “Are you lot missing a cogboy?”

“Yes he managed to get away when the Orks hit our column. An entire company of tanks taken out in minutes. We had to drag him away while he was ranting about the Orks defiling our vehicles. Then when we were caught trying to save more crew from the wrecks he ran off.” Fuller said.

“Well he didn’t get too far. We found pieces of him not far from here. He’s still alive mind you but someone needs to tell our medicae how he fits back together.” Quinn told him and Fuller grinned.

“I think we can manage that.” he said.

It was standard practice for the Imperial Guard to gather the corpses of Orks and all of their associated sub-species together and burn them after a battle. The Ork reproductive system released spores after the creatures’ deaths that could develop into a new generation of alien killers and burning them would destroy these spores. However, with the threat of further attack Second Platoon could not afford the time to do this and so Wolf instead ordered just a basic search of the Ork corpses for anything that could be of value. Ork weapons and ammunition were known to unreliable and so these were abandoned but among the bodies a number of stolen Catachan blades were found and these were being taken back by Second Platoon when Quinn arrived with the freed prisoners from the XIV Armoured Regiment.

“Captain these are the troops we freed.” Quinn called out and Wolf turned to look at them for herself. Just as Rull had reported there were twelve in all, two of whom had injuries that prevented them walking unaided. Some of them carried weapons that had been recovered from the Ork camp, theirs before being captured, but there were not enough to go around and a few were unarmed.

“Very good. Torrent take a look at their wounded would you.” she said.

“An outsider?” Fuller said, looking at Quinn, “I should have known when I saw her. There aren’t any ratlings on Catachan.”

Wolf frowned when she heard this. Being barely a metre and a half tall the majority of Catachans towered over her, this was something she was used to but to be referred to as an abhuman was obviously meant as

an insult beyond the use of the term 'outsider'.

"Captain Wolf is our commanding officer. You'd do well to remember that." Vance said sternly.

"She's your officer. Right. Now where's this cogboy that needs fixing?" Fuller asked, making it plain that he did not regard Wolf as his superior and looking away from her.

"Sergeant Quinn please show the corporal where the tech priest is located. If he needs anything then I will gladly listen to his request." Wolf said and Quinn nodded.

"Yes captain." he replied before grabbing hold of Fuller and pulling him sharply, "This way corporal. Mind your step though, this ground is uneven."

Wolf sighed as Quinn was dragging Fuller away, followed by the other freed prisoners not being seen to by Torrent.

"Even Grey's never been that bad." she said to Vance.

"And there could be more like him out there." Vance replied and Wolf frowned, "Think about it captain, there are units of us scattered all over the place now. I know your plan was to get to the survey station and then try to rally others to us but maybe we should try to find out who's left first. Tell them where we're heading and get them started on the way now before wandering around at random gets more of them caught by the Orks."

Wolf considered this for a moment and then turned to her command section's vox operator.

"Kline I need the vox." she said and the Catachan vox operator passed her the unit's handset, "This is Catachan One-Nine Mark Four Mark Two to any units that can hear my voice. The Ork warboss that was killed was a decoy, nothing more than a puppet similar to our own servitors. The genuine Ork warboss remains at large and we do not know where it is. The Ork forces cannot be counted on to turn on one another. We are falling back to a survey station marked on our maps in sector eleven by thirty-eight. I recommend all units regroup at that location to await further orders."

Wolf was just about to pass the handset back to Kline when all of a sudden the vox activated.

"Calling Catachan One-Nine Mark Four Mark Two. Captain Wolf come in." a familiar Catachan voice said.

"Colour Sergeant Stubbs?" Wolf asked. Stubbs was the senior non-commissioned officer of Fourth Company and served in Major Trent's company command section.

"Yes captain." Stubbs replied.

"Is Major Trent there?" Wolf asked.

"Negative captain. We were attacked by a number of Ork dreadnoughts. The major—"

"Is he dead?" Wolf interrupted and Vance stared at her when he heard this.

"No captain, although a lot of Fourth Company are. Major Trent destroyed one of the dreadnoughts with a melta-bomb but he was injured in the process." Stubbs explained and Wolf's jaw dropped as the consequence of this sank in.

"But if Major Trent is incapacitated then—" she began before Stubbs interrupted her.

"Then you're the ranking officer. You're in command of Fourth Company right now." he said.

"Who's left?" Wolf asked, fearing that Stubbs would then tell her that Fourth Company had been reduced to just a handful of survivors beyond her own platoon.

"First and Third Platoons have lost about a quarter of their strength. All of Lore's new recruits are gone and Reilly's had to merge what's left of his two rifle squads into one. Gant's sentinels were all trashed as well, she managed to get out alive but the rest of her squadron weren't so lucky. Selena's reserve platoon was hit hardest though. They were in base camp when the Orks dropped out of the sky and it was all they could do to fight their way clear. They got Doc Altman and his staff out with the help of Enginseer Cornelius but the cogboy had to sacrifice most of his servitors. They aren't with us yet, we were heading to link up with them so I'll know more about who's still alive when that happens. I thought I heard preaching in the background when I spoke to Selena so I'm guessing that means Preacher Black is still alive. Oh, I'm sure you'll be glad to know that Commissar Layne and Adept Veneel are still alive. Somehow the Orks managed to miss the leash and the witch." Stubbs explained.

"You may tell Commissar Layne that I am overjoyed that the God Emperor has obviously been watching over him and has kept him safe." Wolf replied sarcastically, "Colour sergeant I want you to rendezvous with Lieutenant Selena and escort her reserve platoon to the location given in my previous broadcast. Do you understand?"

"Yes captain, we'll see you there."

"Good and gather as many other units along the way as you can. Wolf out." Wolf ordered and then she passed the vox handset back to Kline, "You heard?" she asked, looking at Vance.

"I heard. Major Trent is out of action so as ranking officer and his chosen second, you're in command of Fourth Company." he said.

"Now I guess we find out how many more of you will follow the orders of an outsider." Wolf commented.

3.

The freed tank crew were able to confirm that the tech priest was in no danger of dying although they could not repair his body without specialised tools that they did not have. Therefore, the original plan to have one of the ogryns carry him was carried out instead as Second Platoon set off towards the survey station. The tank crew were formed into a unit of their own for this, with those men still without weapons acting as stretcher bearers for the two injured men. Wolf noticed that this improvised infantry squad kept a discrete distance from her, lurking at the rear of the platoon behind Mayer's mortar squad. This did not bother Wolf who welcomed the fact that they had taken up a position that gave them the least opportunity to disrupt the platoon by repeatedly calling attention to her status as an outsider.

The Catachans were equally able to navigate through the jungle at night as they were during the day and whenever Wolf checked her dataslate to confirm their position they were never more than a hundred metres out from where Vance told her they were. Travelling by night also offered the advantage of avoiding Ork patrols more easily. Very few of the Orks had any form of night vision equipment and they tended to use burning torches to light their way. This combined with the noise they made when storming through the undergrowth yelling at one another in their crude language made them easy to spot long before they got close enough to realise that the Catachans were there. However, when Second Platoon was just over half way to the survey station they heard the sound of something smashing its way through the jungle and Quinn contacted Wolf on her microbead.

"Captain, Rull says that we should check this out." he said.

"Did he happen to mention why?" Wolf asked.

"Sorry captain, he just stepped out from behind a tree to put the fear of the Emperor himself into one of my men, said his piece and then headed off again." Quinn replied and Wolf sighed.

"Sometimes I think we need to put a bell on him or something." she said before she addressed the platoon,

"Spread out and stand to. Rull thinks that this patrol deserves attention so let's see why." she said and around her the Catachans took cover, pointing their weapons towards the source of the sound.

"I don't like this." Vance said as the crashing sound from in the darkness grew louder, "Could it be more of those Orks wearing the same battle armour as the decoy warboss? Getting through that with our weapons isn't going to be easy and they might have night vision."

"There is a lot of noise." Wolf agreed, nodding, "It's either something big or a lot of regular Orks." and she raised her las pistol.

It was then that a massive humanoid shape even bigger than the largest Ork that the Catachans had yet encountered strode through the undergrowth, using its own bulk to clear a path. The figure was not alone though and three more of them appeared behind it.

"What the hell?" Wolf said, reaching for her magnoculars but before she could lift them to her eyes he heard Grey over her microbead.

"Ogryns." he said.

"Ogryns?" Wolf repeated as she looked through her magnoculars.

"Ogryns!" Khor yelled from close by when he heard this.

"Not you." Vance told him and he too looked through his magnoculars, using their light amplification system to clearly see the large group of abhumans coming through the jungle, "Ninth company." he said, noticing that some of the ogryns had been branded with XIX-IX to indicate their assignment. The XIX Regiment's Ninth Company was a penal formation made up of assorted criminals and was the only company in the regiment that made widespread use of non-Catachan troops as needed. Commanded by a commissar instead of a regular officer, three squads of ogryns were permanently attached to it to help maintain discipline. No baseline human, not even a Catachan, would ever challenge an ogryn in close combat.

"Commissar Chen." Wolf added when she saw a human among the ogryns. The commissar had lost the distinctive cap that individuals of his station wore but he still had his bolt pistol in one hand and a chainsword in the other, "Stand down." she then broadcast to her troops and stood up, "Commissar!" she called out, waving and Chen turned towards her.

"Who's there?" he replied as the ogryns with him also ground to a halt.

"Captain Wolf. Fourth Company."

"May the Emperor bless you captain." Chen said, stumbling as he moved towards her but just about managing to stay on his feet, "Emperor bless you all."

"Commissar where is the rest of Ninth Company?" Wolf asked when she realised that Chen was the only ordinary human accompanying the ogryns.

"I told them to hold fast." Chen replied, "Told them all but they wouldn't listen. No matter how many I executed they wouldn't hold fast. They ran and the xenos cut them down, all of them Only the ogryns, my

loyal ogryns, only they held fast. Held fast and brought death to the enemies of the Emperor.”

“I don't want to worry you but does this guy sound like his tarot deck is missing a couple of cards?” Vance whispered and Wolf nodded.

“What are you doing out here commissar?” Wolf said.

“You, I came looking for you. I heard your signal. Sector eleven by thirty-eight. I have seen no-one else alive but when I heard your signal I knew that the Emperor's work was still to be done here.” Chen said and he tapped his microbead. Although the headset devices were intended for short range communication only they could still receive more powerful vox signals from greater ranges. The only limitation was that the communication would be one way only, the wearer of the microbead would not be able to reply until the larger vox set was brought closer.

“Of course, the message. I know that the rest of Fourth Company is on their way and hopefully more are as well.” Wolf said, “Now if you'd like to join us you and your ogryns can deploy with Sergeant Khor and his-” “My place is with you captain Wolf.” Chen said before Wolf could finish, “My ogryns shall of course join yours but I will accompany your command section to make sure that discipline is maintained.”

“Commissar that isn't necessary.” Wolf said while while Vance slowly moved away from her, positioning himself behind Chen and signalling to Torrent to come closer.

“Nonsense captain. Right now you need all the support you can get. Like it or not the xenos have inflicted a massive defeat on our forces and moral will be poor. Your men need to know that the Emperor's justice will be-” and then there was the sound of an injection gun discharging and Chen collapsed to reveal a grinning Vance stood immediately behind him.

“The commissar seemed a bit stressed out.” he said as he handed the device back to Torrent to be returned to her field kit, “Maybe he'll feel better when he wakes up.”

“How much did you give him?” Wolf asked and Vance shrugged.

“Don't ask me, I'm not a medicae.” he said and he turned to Torrent, “Torrent?” he asked.

“Well the leash is still breathing so not enough.” she replied.

“Never mind. Have one of his ogryns carry him and let's move out. I want to be at the survey station by first light.” Wolf said.

The addition of the ogryns from Ninth Company meant that the small force made far more noise as it moved through the jungle and Wolf compensated for this by having Rull and First Squad move further ahead so that they could provide more warning of any Orks in their path. However, there were no further encounters with either Orks or surviving Imperial forces before Second Platoon reached the survey station, just as the sun was starting to come over the horizon.

“Okay we hold position here.” Wolf ordered when the Catachans were just over a hundred metres from the large clearing in which the survey station was built, “I want everyone to get something to eat and drink while they can. Cold rations only though, I don't want any camp fires giving us away. Sergeant Molla I'm afraid that you'll have to wait for a break. I want you to accompany me forward to check out the survey station. I'm not having us just go charging in blindly if it's full of Orks.”

“You have noticed all those ogryns we have now haven't you?” Molla replied, “Just charging in is what they do best.”

“Maybe but that's not my plan, now come on.” Wolf told him and she and Molla set off towards the edge of the clearing.

When the survey station had been built a large area around it had been covered over with concrete and this was the reason for the existence of the clearing. Over time the concrete had become cracked and vegetation had been able to take root in these, widening the cracks and covering the area with grasses and moss.

However, the concrete was still intact enough to prevent any larger plants such as trees from growing and this left the area around the survey station open. The survey station itself looked largely intact, with none of the buildings visible over the three metre tall perimeter wall having collapsed despite their age although large patches of moss and fungus could be seen covering a number of surfaces. As well as this growth there were numerous small holes in most of the structures where metal components had been ripped out, presumably looted by the Orks and used to make some of the weapons that had then been turned on the Catachans.

“Back on Catachan that level of growth could happen in two days.” Molla said from beside Wolf.

“This has been abandoned for more than a century.” Wolf reminded him and he snorted.

“After a year the jungles of Catachan would have pulled down everything you see here.” he said.

“Even the flagpole?” Wolf asked.

“Even the flagpole.” Molla answered and he looked at where the vertical pole could be seen inside the survey station's perimeter.

“A pity we don't have a suitable flag available ourselves.” Wolf commented, “It would be nice to be able to fly it over at least part of this planet.”

“You know we could always improvise.” Molla said and Wolf stared at him.

"Sergeant Molla you are not running my underwear or any other item of my clothing up that pole." she said sternly.

"I wasn't going to suggest that you'd be wearing it." he said, "Besides it's not like it would be the first time you led us in your underwear." he added before something suddenly caught his eye, "Movement." he said, pointing and both he and Wolf looked up at the roof of one of the structures.

"That's an Ork." Wolf said and then she frowned, "A naked Ork."

"Now that is a sight that I can't un-see." Molla said as he trained his magnoculars on the Ork.

"The Orks must be using this place as a garrison." Wolf commented, "I'm not surprised but I had kind of hoped that the Emperor would be with us on this one."

"Something's not right about that Ork." Molla said.

"You the fact that it's wandering around naked?" Wolf replied.

"I mean it looks sick. Look at the size of it compared to the others we've seen here." Molla said and Wolf studied the Ork again and saw that he was right. This Ork looked smaller than any Wolf had previously seen, looking to be about the same size as Molla.

The Ork seemed to be searching for something on the flat roof and all of a sudden it gave out a roar as it pounced on something before leaping back to its feet with a small creature of some kind in its hands that it bit into, tearing a lump of flesh from its body before chewing.

"Looks like it's his breakfast time as well." Molla said.

"I think that's a newly born Ork." Wolf said as she put down her magnoculars and took out her dataslate instead, searching it for the files on Orks, "Yes, here we go, reports from various Magos Biologis suggest that Orks increase their size and muscle density through combat. By the time we encounter them in battle they are already experienced fighters from all the infighting in their culture. If you can call anything about them cultured."

"So the more they fight, the bigger they get?" Molla said, looking at Wolf and smiling. Wolf then frowned and punched his arm, "Throne! What was that for?" he added.

"You were about to ask if it would work for me weren't you?" Wolf said.

"Actually I was thinking more of Short Arse Selena. I've seen you fight plenty of times and you're no bigger than when Khor first dumped you on the ground in front of us all trussed up by the Kroot." Molla protested, using the derogatory nickname that the Catachans had for Lieutenant Selena that was based on her height. She was one of the very few Catachans of a similar size to Wolf.

Wolf returned her dataslate to its pouch, not believing a word of what Molla had just said.

"If I'm right then securing this place should be straight forwards. Any greenskins inside won't have anything more dangerous than a club or axe and they won't have any proper leadership. Although if there is a spawning ground around here then we'll need to find it and destroy it or we'll have to deal with a never ending stream of Orks literally crawling their way out of the ground." she said.

"So we just rush in and deliver the wrath of the Emperor to any greenskin in there? Sounds like a perfect job for ogryns." Molla replied.

"Yes and it just so happens that we have plenty of them on hand." Wolf said.

4.

The Ork warboss stood taller than an ogryn, towering over even the other Orks present in the cave that was currently serving as his headquarters. The warboss wore the crude camouflage that was particular to the Blood Axe clan in place of the plain colours that adorned the Orks of other clans. The Blood Axes were generally distrusted by the other Ork clans for their underhanded, almost human methods of warfare and for one to become a warboss of an entire planet meant that they had to be especially dangerous. This particular warboss had left behind him a trail of tens of thousands of corpses of his own species to rise to his current position and now he was adding Imperial troops to his tally in large numbers as well.

"We can't get 'em to stand and fight boss." one of the lesser Ork leaders present reported, "When we finds 'em dey disappear into da trees. Den when we follows 'em dey lays traps for our lads."

"Dat's exactly wot I'd expect 'em to do." the warboss replied, "We beat 'em and now dey ain't got da numbers or da guns for a proper scrap so dey is tryin' to pick off our lads without losin' any more of dare own. Dat's wot I'd do."

"Yeh boss, ya is a git lovin Blood-" another Ork said without thinking about it first and before he could finish his sentence the warboss let out a roar and spun around, lunging at the startled Ork and grabbing him by the throat. Then he slammed the Ork back against the rock wall behind him, producing a loud 'thunk' as his head hit the rock and leaving a dark red stain of blood on it. The warboss then let go of the Ork and let him fall to the floor but he was not done yet and he roared again as he stamped repeatedly on the Ork's head even after it was obvious that he was dead. When he finally stopped stamping on the Ork he stepped away and waved at the bloody remains on the floor, "Get rid of dat." he said and a group of Gretchin scurried across the room to pick up the pieces, focusing on the Ork's teeth that were used as currency by Orks and making sure that they had every last one before dragging the body from the room, "Anyone else got anythin' dey wants to say about da Blood Axes den?" the warboss added, glaring angrily at the other Orks present but none of them said anything, all of them avoiding eye contact with the warboss.

"Ya ain't won yet." an ork voice said from the back of the room and the warboss turned to look at the weirdboy who was hunched there, resting on his copper staff.

"Oh yeah, dem three wot's supposed to be standin' in me way. Wot was dey again?" the warboss said, "Da traitor, da assassin and da-"

"Da Wolf." the weirdboy said, unconcerned about the risks of interrupting the warboss, "Dey is comin' for ya boss and if ya don't find 'em first den da git will steal dis world from da Orks."

"So where can I finds dis traitor, assassin and wolf den weirdo? Do ya cards tells ya dat?" the warboss said and the weirdboy moved to a nearby rock and sat down before producing a deck of cards from a pouch. These were obviously not of Ork manufacture, having been crafted by humans who believed the Emperor's Tarot to provide a means of divining the future. Slowly the weirdboy shuffled the deck of cards and began to lay a row of them out.

"I sees da traitor, da assassin and da wolf." the weirdboy said and the warboss let out a growl.

"Ya said dat last time. I wants somethin' new or I'll ram dem cards down ya throat so far ya'll 'ave to wipe da crap off 'em before ya can play with 'em again. No get on with it."

"Dey ain't together." the weirdboy said, "One is leadin' and another watchin'. Da third is just waitin' but I don't see which one is which. But I sees 'em all headin' for a fortress. Stop 'em all from getting' dare and dis world will stay yours, but dey takes it den ya better take it back quick or it'll belong to dem instead."

"Ogryns charge!" Khor bellowed and the combined force of abhumans from Second Platoon and Ninth Company roared as they burst out of the jungle, racing across the broken ground around the survey station as they headed for the main gate.

The newly born Orks inside could not help but hear this noise and acting purely instinctively they all came out of their various dens to meet this unexpected but welcome challenge. With resupply uncertain, all of the ogryns had been ordered to remove the ammunition from their ripper guns to conserve what they had. This left them only to swing the weapons like clubs but they were designed with this purpose in mind and the superior size and strength of the ogryns still gave them a huge advantage over the Orks.

Khor himself made the first kill, swinging his ripper gun upwards and striking an Ork under his jaw so hard that his neck snapped as he was lifted off the ground and hurled through the air. Another Ork stepped forwards to take this one's place but Khor simply shoved the alien out of his way, pushing him to the ground where he was trampled by the ogryns who showed no interest in slowing down as they continued to head towards the survey station's gateway, fatally smashing any Orks in their path out of the way.

Bursting into the survey station's courtyard, the ogryns began to spread out, charging towards the Orks that were still spilling out of the surrounding structures. Despite their obvious inferiority in terms of size and

strength the recently born Orks still hurled themselves into battle and several of them were able to leap on an ogryn that had become separated from the others and drag it down to the ground before repeatedly stabbing the abhuman in the head, throat and chest. These Orks had little chance to celebrate their victory, however as more of the ogryns rushed to help their comrade, enraged by what the Orks had achieved. Khor had been beating an Ork corpse for almost a minute before he realised that there were no further aliens charging towards him and he tossed the dead Ork aside before looking around for a fresh opponent. All he saw though was more ogryns continuing to attack dead Orks, not yet realising why they were not fighting back.

“Ogryns stop!” Khor shouted and the ogryns halted what they were doing, all of them looking around as they waited for fresh orders. Satisfied that he had carried out his orders to the letter, Khor strode back to the gateway and stood at attention in it, “Orders complete. Place secured.” he called out and Wolf then emerged from the jungle, prompting Khor to salute as soon as he saw her walking towards him at the head of the platoon.

“Thank you Sergeant Khor.” she said, returning his salute so that he would stand at ease. Then she looked over her shoulder at the other members of Second Platoon, “I want every room in every building searched. There could still be greenskins hiding here and I want them dealt with. Plus there’s the issue of the spawning ground. If there is one here and the Orks didn’t just happen to be sheltering here then it needs to be destroyed.”

“Okay you heard the captain, fan out and get searching by squads. One squad per building. Molla I want First Squad on the gate to make sure we don’t have any unexpected visitors.” Vance added while Wolf approached Torrent.

“We’ll need an infirmary setting up. Take your pick of which building you think will be best and we’ll clear that one first.” she said.

Generations of Orks had used the survey station as dens and the structures were littered the evidence of their habitation filled every structure in the form of discarded scraps of clothing, bones from both meals and Orks who had lost out to others in fights and here and there primitive weapons that had been left behind when the feral Orks finally migrated away to join their more advanced kin in mainstream Ork society. No further Orks or even the lesser Gretchin or Snotlings were discovered among this refuse but there was a significant number of smaller animal forms that made up the bulk of the Orkoid ecosystem. Some of these subspecies could grow as large as super heavy battle tanks but the examples found around the survey station were no larger than small canines and the Catachans quickly disposed of them with their traditional knives.

There was one exception to this pattern among the structures, a building that had originally had been a greenhouse used for growing food for those based here. The transparent material used to construct this was still intact but the accumulation of dirt over more than a century had rendered it opaque. The conditions inside remained ideal for the growth of fungus though, the fertile soil offering a growth medium while the structure still trapped significant heat. The result of this was that when the reproductive spores of Orkoids of any type settled in here they were able to sprout and grow and the large number of fungus inside made it clear to the members of Second Squad who were the first to discover it that they had found the spawning ground.

“So what do you want to do with it captain?” Grey asked as he showed Wolf the contents of the greenhouse, “Quinn’s flamers could clear all of this in minutes but-”

“But we’d risk the fire spreading to other buildings.” Wolf interrupted, nodding in agreement and then she looked around, checking on what each of the other squads was doing. Most of them were carrying refuse from the other structures, making them fit for human use once again but she could not see Fuller or any of the other soldiers from the XIV.

“Mayer.” she called out when she saw him and his squad dragging refuse from another nearby structure that was then being picked up by an ogryn that would carry it out of the station perimeter entirely.

“Yes captain?” he replied.

“Have you seen Fuller or his men?” Wolf asked.

“Yes, they’re over in the infirmary that Torrent’s set up.” Mayer answered.

“Let me guess, they aren’t assisting Torrent with treatment.” Wolf said, “Corporal Mayer I want you to go to the infirmary and tell Corporal Fuller that I want his men to clear all this.” and she pointed to the fungus in the greenhouse, “It needs digging out and burning somewhere where it won’t set the entire place on fire.”

“Yes captain.” Mayer responded and he turned around and hurried towards the infirmary.

“Captain we’ve got movement in the trees.” Molla told Wolf suddenly via her microbead and she turned towards the gate where his squad was deployed on the walkway inside the wall just above the main gate.

“All units stand to. Platoon Sergeant Vance meet me at the main gate.” Wolf said into her own microbead and she dashed towards the gateway, getting there at the same time as Vance and the pair rushed up the steps that led to the walkway over it.

"What have we got?" Vance asked as they neared the top to find Molla looking out over the wall into the jungle with his magnoculars.

"Large scale movement. A hundred at least, heading right this way." Molla told her.

"Has Rull checked in?" Wolf asked as she took out her magnoculars as well.

"No. He reported the movement but then went dark." Molla answered.

"The Orks can't have found him. He's too good." Wolf said.

"He could just be keeping quiet to avoid detection." Vance pointed out.

"Here they come." Molla said, lowering his magnoculars and taking aim with his las pistol, "Stand by everyone."

"Don't fire until you can visually identify your target." Wolf added but then the first figure emerged from the jungle.

"That's Stubbs!" Vance exclaimed, "It's the rest of Fourth Company."

"Thank the Emperor, they made it." Wolf added and she turned to run back down the steps to meet the approaching Catachans, with both Vance and Molla following her.

It was with a mixture of joy and horror that Wolf watched the remainder of Fourth Company as it came out of the jungle. She was familiar enough with the other Catachans to know their squad assignments and it was obvious that almost every squad had lost someone while others were missing entirely. In addition to the dead, a significant number of those who had made it to the survey station alive were injured and many had to be either helped or carried along. This included Major Trent himself who was laid out on a stretcher being carried by two members of his command section while Doctor Altman, the company's chief medical officer walked alongside him.

"Captain Wolf," Fourth Company's commissar called out as soon as he saw her, "I understand that Colour Sergeant Stubbs has briefed you on the injuries suffered by Major Trent."

"Yes Commissar Layne." Wolf replied.

"Good, in that case I am turning over command of the company to you." Layne told her and Wolf smiled, knowing that although Layne would have thought he was in command of Fourth Company on their way here the Catachans would have done whatever it took to avoid following any order he gave, "Oh and the colour sergeant passed on your relief at my survival, your sentiment was appreciated greatly."

"Doctor what is major Trent's condition?" Wolf asked as Stubbs grinned at her.

"He's bleeding internally. I need to get him into surgery as quickly as possible." Altman replied.

"Our medicae has been setting up an infirmary. She doesn't have much equipment but she's made it as suitable as she can. It's right over there and signposted." Wolf told him, pointing back through the gateway. Then she noticed a figure wearing red robes over power armour, "Enginseer Cornelius," she called out to him as Altman and the stretcher bearers were carrying Trent towards the infirmary, "I think you should go there as well."

"I am not a qualified medicae Captain Wolf." the tech priest replied.

"There's another of you cogboys there as well." Molla told him, "Or at least the pieces of one. The Orks got to him before we did but he's still alive."

"Another of my order survived?" Cornelius said and then the tech priest began to walk forwards, "Nathin, accompany me." he added to his Catachan assistant and the pair also started making their way towards the infirmary, passing through the gateway just as Mayer came through the other way.

"Captain we've got a problem." he said and Wolf sighed.

"What is it corporal?" she asked.

"Fuller and his men refused to leave the infirmary." Mayer replied.

"You told them what my orders were?" Wolf said and Mayer nodded.

"Yes but Fuller said that he was a corporal as well so I couldn't give him an order and he wasn't going to follow one from you." Mayer explained and Layne scowled.

"Mutiny? I'll deal with this captain." he said, his hand reaching for his bolt pistol.

"No commissar that won't be necessary, we can't afford to lose any more men. Colour Sergeant Stubbs." Wolf said.

"You want me to go and kick their arses captain?" Stubbs asked.

"No thank you colour sergeant, but do you have the company roll?" Wolf replied and Stubbs frowned.

"Right here, but-" he said.

"Just give it to me colour sergeant." Wolf ordered, holding out her hand and Stubbs gave her his dataslate on which all of Fourth Company's personnel were listed by name, rank and serial number, "Aubray Mayer, you have carried out your duties for the Emperor with due diligence and bravery. As acting commanding officer of the Fourth Company of the Nineteenth Catachan Regiment I hereby reward you with a field promotion to sergeant. Commissar Layne please bear witness to the fact that I am updating the company roll to reflect Sergeant Mayer's new rank."

"So witnessed captain." Layne replied, nodding as Mayer stared at Wolf in shock.

"Well done Bomber." Molla said.

"Now go kick some insubordinate corporal arse." Vance added.

"Wait one moment." Wolf said, "You had better pass me your dataslate first. You'll need proof of your promotion. Oh and if they still refuse then feel free to check with Doctor Altman as to what body parts Corporal Fuller can still do his duty without before shooting them off."

"Thank you captain." Mayer said as Wolf updated his dataslate.

"You deserve it Bomber." Vance told him.

"I guess that means you'll be moving your stuff into the sergeant's tent and taking the spare bunk. At least when we get our tent back." Molla added.

"Do you have a problem with that Sergeant Molla?" Wolf asked, returning Mayer's dataslate to him.

"Of course not captain but every now and again you've used that bunk. Now I suppose you'll need to find someone to share with. Of course I'd be happy to-" Molla replied, smiling at Wolf.

"Oh don't worry about that Sergeant Molla." Wolf interrupted, "If I need someone to share with then I'm sure that Sergeant Mayer will be willing to show me his gratitude in any way I demand it." and as the smile vanished from Molla's face both Vance and Stubbs laughed.

5.

Reinforced by the remainder of Fourth Company, Wolf determined that the next step was to determine what resources they had at their disposal and if possible what other elements of the VII Division remained. To do this she gathered together all of Fourth Company's senior staff in a room that had been cleared of most of the signs of Ork occupation other than the strange glyphs and crude drawings that had been scrawled across the walls. Doctor Altman, Lieutenants Reilly, Lore and Selena along with Vance and Stubbs were all instructed to attend and, knowing that the Adeptus Mechanicus had means of communication superior to regular Imperial Guard units, Wolf also included Engineer Cornelius as well as the now repaired tech priest from the XIV Armoured Regiment. Just in case his psychic powers were able to divine any additional information she also included Adept Veneel on her list of attendees. However, in addition to the staff Wolf chose to be present at the meeting there were three uninvited attendees. Both Commissar Layne and the newly awoken Chen arrived as the others were gathering as did the Ministorum priest assigned to Fourth Company, Preacher Black.

"We should all give thanks to Him on Earth for delivering us to this place of sanctuary." Black announced just as Wolf was about to begin the meeting.

"Yes of course." Layne responded, "Without his guiding hand we would all have perished."

"It was Captain Wolf that led us here." Reilly commented from beside a window that he was staring out of instead of looking at any of the others in the room.

"I thought you were making sure Fuller and his men cleaned out that greenhouse properly." Vance added.

"The xenos presence has been put to the torch. Now we should give thanks to the Emperor for our deliverance." Black replied.

"That may be but right now I just want to know what sort of position we're in." Wolf said, "How long can we hold out here and what are our options for linking up with any other units of survivors?"

"With respect captain how long we can hold out here is just a question of how long until the Orks find out where we are." Lore said, "Those walls are just meant to keep wildlife out and without gates they aren't going to be much good at that. When it comes to stopping an attack they'll be useless. An Ork dreadnought could smash its way right through them without breaking stride."

"If it's just infantry then we can still take them." Reilly added, turning away from the window, "Give me your veterans and that sniper Rull and with them First Platoon will turn that jungle into a killing zone."

"We should of course endeavour to take the fight to the Orks at every opportunity." Layne added.

"Abhor the alien. Kill the alien." Black added.

"If we strike at the Orks in their hiding places then we will keep them away from-" Chen began.

"Our hiding place?" Altman interrupted and then he looked at Wolf, "Wolf we've got a lot of wounded people and very little in the way of medical supplies. I can cauterise wounds and splint broken bones with wood but without a supply of antibiotics then eventually we're going to start losing people to infection. We should avoid any action that would put pressure on our supplies. Send out patrols by all means but I can't deal with the aftermath of an all out offensive whether it's a success or not."

"I agree." Selena added.

"Cowards!" Chen hissed, "I should execute the pair of you now." and he reached for his bolt pistol. However, before he could draw it Reilly, Lore, Stubbs and Vance all drew their own sidearms and took aim at the Commissar.

"Think carefully leash." Reilly said.

"Drawing a weapon on a commissar is mutiny." Layne said.

"Perhaps everyone should calm down." Wolf said, "Doctor Altman holds the rank of captain as well. It is within his authority to suggest a course of strategy. I wouldn't have asked him here otherwise."

"And he was asked." Stubbs added, reminding the two commissars that their presence had not been requested.

"If everyone could lower their weapons." Wolf suggested and then she turned to Selena, "You think we shouldn't be carrying out any significant offensive actions either?" she asked.

"No." Selena replied, "We're Catachan so we can live off the jungle indefinitely, but to wage war we need ammunition and medical supplies."

"The power cells for las weapons are self charging." Chen pointed out.

"The recharge time from empty to full of a standard energy cells issued to the Seventh Division is nineteen hours in the sunlight available here." Cornelius said, "It can be discharged by less than thirty seconds of continuous firing. Given the number of power cells issued to each trooper this charge to discharge ratio cannot be maintained for a sustained period of time."

"We also have only a limited supply of ammunition for our other weapons." Selena went on, "My platoon tried

to grab what we could but most had to be left behind. Mind you we rigged some of it give the Orks a surprise when they try taking it."

"Okay so our supply situation is nearly non-existent." Wolf said, "What about other survivors? Does anyone have any idea if anyone else is left?"

"Well we know that we can't count on Ninth Company." Lore commented.

"We heard all sorts of chatter but most of it was bad." Stubbs added, then he smiled, "Mind you Eighth Company seemed to be giving the Orks hell." Eighth Company was the XIX Regiment's cavalry company, often referred to as rough riders. Whereas most of the Imperial Guard's rough rider units rode into battle on horses almost identical to those that human warriors had ridden into battle before even the development of motorised ground vehicles, let alone interstellar travel, there were no horses on Catachan and so theirs instead made use of vicious reptilian mounts that were barely domesticated.

"I'm not surprised." Wolf said, smiling, "But we're going to need more than lances to take on Ork tanks. Enginseer Cornellius, can the Adeptus Mechanicus offer any more information?"

"The noosphere is heavily disrupted Captain Wolf." Cornellius answered, "However, Enginseer Lucas THX one-one-three-eight was in contact with elements of the Fourteenth Armoured Regiment longer than I was." and Wolf looked at the now repaired tech priest standing beside Cornellius.

"That is correct Captain Wolf. Adeptus Mechanicus units attached to the Fourteenth Armoured maintain a shared database in the noosphere of the status of ourselves and all of the machine spirits under our care." Lucas said, "Before I became disconnected from this it was apparent that the Fourteenth Armoured Regiment no longer exists as a coherent fighting force. There may be a handful of vehicles remaining but without the facilities to maintain them they will run out of fuel or ammunition or their machine spirits will fail within seventy-two hours."

"You're telling me what we don't have." Wolf said, "I want to know what we do have or at least might have."

Quinn's squad was taking its turn guarding the main gate when the sound of armoured vehicles moving through the jungle was heard and he brought his shotgun up to his shoulder.

"Tanks!" he yelled, "Straker get ready with that meltagun and someone find me some missile launcher teams."

Catachans were rushing towards the walls and improvised barrier constructed across the gateway, ready to defend the survey station when all of a sudden the first of the approaching armoured vehicles came crashing through the vegetation. This was not one of the crude armoured vehicles operated by the Orks though, instead it was an Imperial Guard Hellhound flame throwing tank that bore the markings of the XIX Regiment and behind two such vehicles appeared before being followed by a number of Chimera infantry fighting vehicles. However, all of these had their hatches sealed and there was no way for Quinn or his men to tell who it was that was driving them.

"Hold fast." Quinn ordered, "Let's wait and see who's inside those things."

All of a sudden the large top hatch at the rear of one of the Chimera's was thrown open and a young woman stuck her head out and smiled at Quinn.

"Are you going to shoot me Ibram?" she asked in a Catachan accent and at the sight of his younger sister Quinn relaxed and smiled.

"Throne, Bess what are you doing here?" he called out from the wall.

"Doing my job big brother. There are people here who want to speak to Captain Wolf." Bess replied just as the rear ramp of her Chimera dropped open.

"Would you be so kind as to remove that barrier?" Colonel Shryke, commanding officer of the XIX Regiment walked down the ramp and turned to look at Quinn, "Quickly. The general is a busy man."

"General?" Quinn said and then he looked down from the walls, "Clear the gate. Third Squad with me to form honour guard."

While the Catachans in the gateway were clearing it of obstructions Quinn and his squad rushed down to the courtyard and formed a line, all nine remaining veterans standing at attention as the armoured convoy drove through the now cleared gateway and the Chimera Bess and Colonel Shryke rode in pulled up at the end before the ramp opened again.

Bess and Colonel Shryke were first out of the Chimera, followed by Regimental Commissar Garratt and astropath Kaitlyn Shaya. Only then did General Fortnam himself emerge.

"General Fortnam sir, it's good to see that you survived." Quinn said.

"Yes, well I had some help in that. Captain Wolf is here?" he asked, standing right in front of Quinn.

"Yes general. All the survivors of Fourth Company as well as the remains of Ninth Company are present."

Quinn replied and Fortnam glanced across the courtyard at where all of the ogyrns present had suddenly snapped to attention and were saluting.

"Ah, I didn't think that Fourth Company had so many ogyrns." he said and then he turned towards the ogyrns, stood at attention himself and returned their salute, "Carry on." he called out to them and the bulky

abhumans returned to their work.

"If all of Fourth Company is here then what about Major Trent? Isn't he in command?" Shryke asked.

"The major was injured sir." Quinn told him, "As his nominated second in command Captain Wolf took over."
"And you recognise her right to command?" Garrett said. As both a commissar and a non-Catachan he knew of the hostility that Wolf could potentially face when trying to give orders to them.

"I am sure that they do commissar." Fortnam said before he turned back to Quinn, "Now sergeant, where can we find Captain Wolf? I have brought some important people to see her." and Quinn frowned.

"Who is more important than you sir?" he asked before the ramp of a second Chimera opened behind him and looked over his shoulder as he heard the sound of heavy armoured footfalls walking down it.

6.

"Wolf! Where is the Wolf?" a loud voice boomed out from the hallway outside the room where Wolf had gathered her officers for the status meeting.

"Sergeant Onund?" Wolf said in surprise, recognising the voice immediately and she turned to the doorway just as the armoured Deathwatch space marine was bending down to be able to get through it.

"Wolf!" Onund called out again and he strode across the room to embrace her, "By the Allfather it was good to hear that you survived."

Next through the doorway were two more space marines, these one wore the same black Deathwatch armour as Onund but whereas Onund's grey shoulder pad showed off his origins in the Space Wolves chapter one of the others wore the blue of the Ultramarines and the other the Dark Green of the Dark Angels.

"Captain Aetus." Wolf said to the Ultramarine as Onund finally released his grip on her and the captain nodded in response before Colonel Shryke appeared and Wolf and the other Catachans snapped to attention, "Colonel Shryke sir." she said and then her eyes widened as General Fortnam followed him into the room, in turn followed by Garratt and Shayal, "General." Wolf said.

"At ease everyone, we have important matters to discuss." Fortnam replied.

"Excuse me sir but I notice that Inquisitor Tobias is not here. Did he not survive?" Wolf asked.

"Tobias? That coward?" Onund snapped, "I swear by the Fang that I'll skin him alive if I ever see him again."

"The Inquisitor fled back to the fleet when the Orks attacked captain." Shryke said.

"Now it is up to us to turn our situation around without him looking over our shoulder all the time." Fortnam added, "Captain Wolf, what is your situation here?"

"To be honest general, not very good." Wolf replied, "This facility offers us little more than shelter. I don't have the manpower or supplies to defend it against a determined Ork assault."

"I thought as much. However, it's location does offer us one advantage. Are you aware that there is an old fortress about fifteen kilometres from here?" Fortnam asked and Wolf nodded.

"Yes general, I saw it on the maps when I found this place. As I understand it dates back to before the time of the Great Crusade. When rival tribes on this planet warred with one another they built fortresses like that to keep control of the surrounding area. It seemed too far away to be of any use as a shelter and I thought it likely that it would be occupied by the Orks." she said.

"It is." Garratt said, "Tens of thousands of the creatures by our estimates."

"However, it also offers us a secure base of operations. Protected enough to resist a heavy bombardment and large enough to hold all of the division's survivors. Plus once we have a secure position we can contact Admiral Tashimoto to arrange resupply drops." Fortnam told her.

"Couldn't we request those here general?" Selena asked.

"Only if you don't mind telling every Ork on the planet exactly where we are lieutenant." Shryke pointed out.

"So how are we supposed to deal with tens of thousands of Orks holding a fortified position general?" Reilly said.

"I am sure the general has a plan lieutenant. Mind your tongue." Chen snapped.

"Yes I'm sure that he has a plan as well. Hopefully one that doesn't include executing all his own men until there aren't any left." Reilly responded.

"From what I saw of the fortress in the data files it looked like a difficult target to crack." Wolf said, "Even if we still have the weapons to breach its walls then we'd be reducing its value to us in the process."

"The general is aware of that captain." Garrett said.

"This location is adequate as a staging area for us to launch an assault on the fortress but I have no intention of entering into a protracted engagement against its defences." Fortnam told the gathered Catachans, "I want the fortress batteries destroyed and the gates opened before we attack. The Seventh Division will storm it and clear it room by room. Then I dare the greenskins to try and take it back from us."

"That sounds like you want to send an advanced team inside." Wolf said, "Am I to take it that Second Platoon is the force you have chosen? We did infiltrate an Ork Gargant after all."

"Ah, I can see why Major Trent made you his second in command captain." the general said, "Yes, I intend for your platoon to infiltrate the Ork fortress while the rest of Seventh Division gathers here."

"You won't be going in alone though." Captain Aetus added, "My men will also accompany you. Along with one other."

"Who?" Wolf asked.

"Take a look outside captain." Fortnam said and Wolf looked towards the window for a moment before she walked over to it.

"Him?" she said as she looked outside.

"Who?" Vance said and he hurried to stand beside her, looking out into the courtyard where he saw a large

Ork leaning on one of the Chimeras that was flanked by two more Deathwatch marines. Koroth Nightkilla was a Blood Axe Ork that Second Platoon had first encountered in the Drukhari city of Commorragh. Being a Blood Axe he was willing to co-operate with humans if it suited his purposes and he had assisted the Catachans in their escape from that place. It was only when she was being briefed about the invasion of Rema Anta that Wolf had discovered that following their escape Koroth had gone to work for the alien hunters of the Inquisition's Ordos Xenos and he had been assigned to this mission as an adviser.

"There is one complication though captain." Shryke said.

"One?" Wolf commented, turning away from the window.

"Perhaps I should let Shayal explain." Shryke said and he turned towards the green robed astropath.

"The witch?" Preacher Black hissed.

"A witch who has touched the mind of the Emperor." Veneel commented and Black glared at him, angry at Veneel's mention of the soul binding ritual that all astropaths went through in order to gain the power to send and receive telepathic messages across interstellar distances as well as protect themselves from attacks by the inhabitants of the warp. The process stripped astropaths of their sight but their psychic powers were magnified greatly by the ritual.

"There is a presence." Shayal said, "Something drawing on the Emperor's tarot."

"I thought that was supposed to be secure." Veneel said.

"And it is. But if a deck of the cards has fallen into the hands of the Orks then it is possible that one of their psykers has been able to make use of them."

"Blasphemy!" Black shouted, "No xenos witch can commune with the Emperor."

"Captain," Veneel said, looking at Wolf, "if the Orks have access to the tarot then they may already know that we are coming."

"It also means that the Orks could have a psyker to use against us." Vance pointed out.

"In which case in the absence of a librarian we should take your psyker with us as well Captain Wolf." Aetus said.

"I just knew you were going to say that." Wolf replied, sharing the distrust of psykers that the vast majority of the human population possessed.

"Perhaps I should accompany the assault team as well general." Layne suggested, "The captain will need someone to observe the psyker and monitor him for corruption."

"That's a very kind offer commissar but we have a lot of ground to cover in a short and you'll only slow us down." Vance said.

"Neither Veneel or Captain Wolf are native Catachans. Their speed through jungle terrain is no superior to mine." Layne pointed out and Vance visibly winced as he realised that Layne was right. Under normal circumstances he would have said nothing, instead co-operating with the other members of Second Platoon to make sure that Layne suffered some sort of 'accident' that would prevent him from accompanying them on the mission. However, he doubted that any such move would go unnoticed by the vigilant space marines that would also be travelling with them.

"Then it is settled." Aetus said, "Captain Wolf's platoon will support my kill team directly while Adept Veneel provides psychic support under the watch of Commissar Layne." then he turned to General Fortnam, "In the meantime you must rally your troops to storm the fortress when we open the gates for them."

As Second Platoon prepared to deploy more Catachans continued to arrive at the survey station and it was not long before there was insufficient room inside the perimeter for them all so they began to construct shelters in the jungle, keeping the open ground around it clear to avoid detection from the air. As each new unit arrived they were questioned about what they had seen, not only as the division's leadership attempted to build up a more accurate picture of the forces they still had at their disposal but as Catachans sought word on what had become of friends.

"Emilia!" a non-Catachan voice called out as Wolf was walking across the courtyard towards her men and she smiled as she saw her sister rushing towards her. Like wolf, Elisa had been transferred to the XIX Catachan Regiment but her transfer had taken place much later than Wolf's, when the XXXII Lyreian Regiment had been almost totally wiped out. Elisa had also retained her role as an administrator instead of being assigned to a combat unit but she had still faced the same distrust of outsiders that Wolf had following her reassignment.

"Elisa, you're alive." Wolf exclaimed as they embraced.

"Thanks to Colonel Shryke, yes. He made sure all his staff got out in one piece. You can tell your Sergeant Molla that Jenni's here as well. She headed straight to the infirmary building with all the other medical staff."

"The colonel hasn't said how badly hit the regiment has been." Wolf said, "I know that there's next to nothing left of the Ninth Company but do you know anything about the others?"

"Most of the Sixth Company is gone as well. Emilia, Captain Lokk is dead as well. But I've been hearing that the Twelfth Regiment has been almost totally wiped out. They're down to less than two companies and

Colonel Mann has been critically injured. He may not survive." Elisa told her, "But what about you and your platoon? I can't tell you how good it felt when I heard that you were putting out a call to rally everyone here." "Captain Wolf." Layne's voice then said from behind Wolf and she frowned for a moment before turning to face him and smiling.

"Ah commissar, I'm glad you're here." she lied and then glanced towards where the rest of Second Platoon had gathered along with the five Deathwatch marines under Captain Aetus' command and Koroth. Although in theory Wolf and Aetus held equal rank, Aetus' status as a space marine meant that he had seniority regardless of rank, "It looks like everyone else is ready so we can leave now. The sun is up and I would like to reach our destination by nightfall. The marines may be able to march for days on end but I can't and I'd rather not have to set up camp overnight out there." she added.

"Excellent. No time like the present eh?" Layne replied and Wolf and her sister waved to one another as Wolf and Layne began walking towards the rest of the strike force.

"Platoon present and correct captain." Vance said as they approached.

"In which case where is Guardsman Rull?" Layne asked as he searched for the sniper.

"Rull went on ahead commissar." Vance told him.

"He's going to let us know if there are any Orks in the jungle that might find that black coat of yours a tempting target." Grey added.

"In that case you have my permission to deploy Captain Wolf." Layne said and then he looked towards Veneel and drew his bolt pistol, "And I will be watching you carefully." he added.

"You will holster your weapon commissar." Aetus said sternly.

"Holster my weapon?" Layne repeated.

"Bolters make a quite a loud 'bang' when they go off." Vance said.

"Captain Aetus and his men have such weapons." Layne pointed out.

"The Deathwatch has access to specialised ammunition that is not available to ordinary members of the Imperial Guard commissar." Aetus told him, "Our weapons are loaded with silenced stalker ammunition. Now holster your weapon or leave us."

"Very well." Layne replied, knowing that he could not countermand an order from a space marine officer as he could from an Imperial Guard one and he returned his bolt pistol to its holster.

"Don't worry commissar." Vance told him and he held out another pistol holster, this one containing one of Second Platoon's stub pistols with a silencer already attached, "We had a couple of spares for you and Veneel."

Layne took the weapon and fixed the holster to his belt.

"You're welcome by the way." Vance commented.

"Come along Wolf." Onund said to Wolf as she took her place with her command section alongside the Deathwatch marines, "Our packs move out for the hunt." and then she staggered forwards as he slapped her on the back.

Walking from the survey station, Second Platoon passed through the area of the jungle that was rapidly filling up with survivors from the VII Division. With so many troops concentrated in one area it was easy to forget that the Catachans had just suffered a major defeat, but it the current estimates that Wolf had heard then almost half the division were dead and most of their vehicles and supplies had been abandoned. Once beyond the Catachan camps the jungle suddenly became empty and eerily quiet, the local animal life having been scared off by the heavy human presence.

As he had gone on ahead Rull left markers for the rest of the strike force to follow. Based on hunting signs from Catachan these were obvious to anyone familiar with them but looked like innocent breakages of vegetation to anyone else.

Although the route marked by Rull led the strike force through the jungle in a path that avoided Ork patrol routes and camps there were still occasional signs of the Ork presence. Most of these were the bodies of various types of greenskins, killed either by other members of their own species or Rull when he came across them. However, on one occasion Molla brought the force to a halt when his position in the front let him be the first to see the crucified commissar.

The dead man had been nailed to a tree with metal spikes driven through his outstretched arms along two branches on opposite sides of the trunk. However, rather than simply leaving the commissar to die his killers had sped up his death by slitting his throat.

"Vile creatures." Layne hissed when he saw this, "Captain Wolf have your men cut him down and bury him."

"No." Aetus said before Wolf could answer.

"What? You can't think that it is acceptable to leave this man like this." Layne said.

"Cutting him down will not bring him back to life. However, the time wasted on conducting a funeral will slow us down." Aetus said.

"Sergeant Molla you may proceed." Wolf called out and Molla nodded before he set off again through the

jungle.

"Animals." Layne muttered, "The galaxy will be a better place when we wipe every last one of them out." then he heard a low growl from close by and looked around to see Koroth looking down at him.

"Your inquisitor seems keen to get revenge for his comrade." Onund said to Wolf and she smiled.

"Yes he does, doesn't he?" she replied.

"Something amuses you little Wolf?" Onund asked when he saw her expression.

"The body of just one commissar impaled against a tree in the middle of the jungle? Where were his men and why was there only one neat cut to his throat instead of him being hacked to pieces like greenskins favour? I'm not so sure that he fell victim to the Orks." Wolf said and she glanced at Vance to see him also smiling as he listened to her.

"A very interesting theory captain." he said.

Four officers entered the room where General Fortnam stood looking out of the window. As well as Colonel Shryke there was Colonel Hatch of the XXV Catachan Regiment, the only woman among the group, Colonel Vorris of the XIV Catachan Armoured Regiment and a major called Stanner who was filling in for the injured Colonel Mann of the XII Catachan Regiment.

"Do you have the final numbers for me." the general asked.

"The Nineteenth has lost about a third of its strength overall." Shyrke answered.

"The Twenty-Fifth came off slightly worse than that." Hatch added, "About forty percent of my troops and machines have been lost. Good news though, my Second Company was able to ambush an Ork force carrying equipment and ammunition they'd been able to recover from the landing zone. They carried what they could back here and hid the rest. I've sent men out to get it."

"Good, we need all the supplies we can get." Fortnam replied, nodding. Then he looked at Colonel Vorris, "And what about the Fourteenth Armoured?" he asked.

"My infantry survived but they had to abandon their Chimeras to do so. Apart from that I've got the equivalent of just over three companies of tanks left, thirty-two machines and no artillery." Vorris replied.

"I'd heard it was worse than that." Hatch commented.

"So did I." Vorris replied, "But it seems that one of my company commanders hit on the idea of turning the tables on the Orks and he and his men took a bunch of scrap from some Ork tanks that they'd just blown up and strapped it to their own vehicles. Then they dumped promethium straight on their engine blocks to make them smoke like Ork vehicles and drove right through the alien lines with their hatches all sealed up. Not one of the greenskins was smart enough to realise what was going on."

"And what of the Twelfth?" General Fortnam said and all eyes turned to Major Stanner.

"The entire Twelfth Regiment is now smaller than the company I commanded before this massacre general. I have one hundred and twenty-six men fit for action, no vehicles and only four heavy weapons. Two heavy bolters, an auto-cannon and a missile launcher." he said, "Colonel Mann made sure that the Orks paid for every drop of Catachan blood they spilled but he might not live long enough to ever know that even that handful escaped."

"A dozen squads is better than nothing." Hatch said.

"For the purpose of this attack I'm going to have the Fourteenth's infantry fight under the banner of the Twelfth." Fortnam said.

"That'll double your strength." Vorris told Stanner but this did not appear to cheer the major up.

"It also leave you free to concentrate on your remaining armour." Fortnam said.

"What exactly do you see my armour's role in this assault general?" Vorris asked, "We're going to have to clear that fortress room by room and a Leman Russ won't fit through most doorways."

"No, but from what little we know about that fortress it has large battlements, I want your tanks to take them. If Captains Aetus and Wolf do their jobs properly then most of the Orks will have been cleared from them and you should be able to drive right up with minimal resistance. From there you are to provide fire support for our forces and also form our first line of defence when the Orks inevitably counter attack."

"General I hate to ask but aren't we getting somewhat ahead of ourselves here?" Hatch asked, "What exactly do we do if our people don't manage to take out the fortress' defences and open the gates?"

"Then we send another strike team to try colonel and another after that and another. We will take that fortress or the Catachan Seventh Division will die here in the jungle like we grew up knowing we would eventually." Fortnam replied.

7.

When the Dark Age of Technology had given way to the Old Night of the Age of Strife fifteen thousand years earlier the population of Rema Anta had found themselves cut off from even their nearest neighbours and their once advanced civilisation had collapsed as different sections of the planet went to war with one another over the limited resources now available to them. These wars served to further reduce their resources and level of technological ability, turning a planet that had been able to construct hypersonic combat aircraft and long range missiles into one that had to transport its warriors in horse drawn carts and towed artillery. The names of the builders of the fortress that now offered potential sanctuary to the Catachan VII Division had been forgotten long ago, before the Great Crusade had brought Rema Anta to compliance and returned it to wider human civilisation, however it was known that they began work at a time when their planet still possessed a level of technology that was enough to create powerful artillery pieces and the fortress's thick walls were designed to resist this level of attack while numerous bizarre Ork artillery pieces now occupied the battlements.

The fortress had been built on top of a mesa, its steep sides providing further protection by limiting access to it to the four wide ramps that led to gateways wide enough to admit either a Baneblade super heavy tank or three Lemman Russ tanks side by side and each of these approaches was covered by the guns on the walls as well as being guarded by large groups of Orks.

"Dat's a lot of big guns." Koroth said while the strike team observed their target from a distance.

"I count eight batteries. One above each gate and one at each corner. At least six guns in each." Mayer added.

"I don't suppose that we can count on those Orks going inside now that the sun is going down can we?" Wolf asked.

"Nah." Koroth answered, "Even if dey did go inside den dey'd close da doors. Same if dey is attacked. All dem lads on da ramps would come chargin' down and da bosses would lock da doors and let da big guns do dare jobs."

"There's no way that we can get up one of those ramps without being seen captain." Vance said and Wolf looked at Aetus. Unlike the Catachans who needed their magnoculars to study the fortress the autosenses built into the marines' powered armour combined with their own enhanced vision was enough for them to observe it without any further magnification.

"No, we marines could not make it either." he said.

"So we need another way in." Wolf said.

"What about him?" Mayer asked, looking at Koroth, "Can't he just walk right in?"

"No." Layne said before anyone else could respond, "I can't approve him going in there unescorted. He could easily betray us."

"Dat's right. I could if dare was enough teef involved." Koroth agreed and Layne appeared startled by the Ork's honesty.

"Look at those trucks heading in through the western gate now." Grey said, "They're covered over. If we could hijack some of those then we might be able to sneak in using them. He could bluff our way past the guards." and he glanced at Koroth.

"An interesting idea and not without merit." Aetus said, "However, there are a great many variables to consider. Firstly identifying a suitable vehicle. Secondly acquiring it without damaging it beyond use or alerting the Orks to our presence. Then there is the matter of how many of us can be infiltrated in a single vehicle."

"Maybe there's another way in." Wolf said, directing her magnoculars down towards the mesa on which the fortress was constructed. However, the density of the jungle concealed the base of this and made any other entrances that might exist at that level invisible.

"Checking out every cave and tunnel could take time and the general will be waiting to hear from us." Vance commented.

"Grots." Koroth said suddenly.

"What?" Wolf asked.

"The alien means Gretchin." the Dark Angel member of the Deathwatch kill team said from behind her.

"Ah, Trethor son of the Lion finds his tongue." Onund added.

"Grots 'ave tunnels under every fort and city so dey can move around quicker. Dey ain't gonna want to 'ave to pass through dem gates with dare guards so dare'll be a load wot lead right out into da jungle. Well 'idden, but dare." Koroth explained.

"I might be able to find them." Molla said, "Even if I can't then Rull will be able to." Molla said.

"Maybe but I'd like to know where they come out. I don't want us sneaking inside just to find ourselves

surrounded by a hundred well armed Orks." Wolf replied.

"So I goes in and takes a look about." Koroth said, "I finds one dat comes out in a good place and follows it back out. Simple."

"I think we've already established that you aren't to be trusted, Ork." Layne said.

"I thought of dat. I needs two things, a big sack and somethin' from one of ya beakies." Koroth responded and he looked towards the nearby marines.

Koroth strode up one of the ramps leading to the fortress, a bulging sack over one shoulder and a large mushroom in the other that he proceeded to eat as he walked.

"Old it right dare git lover." one of the Ork guards old him, using the insulting slang term for Blood Axes among Orks that referred to their habit of occasionally co-operating with humans, "Where d'ya think ya is goin'?"

"In dare. Where else does this ramp lead ya squig brain?" Koroth replied and he took another bite of his mushroom.

"Wotcha been up to?" another of the Ork guards asked.

"I 'as been out 'untin'. So get out me way." Koroth told him.

"Find another gate git lover." the first Ork said

"Careful," the second told the first, "remember da big boss is a git lover an' all. Maybe 'e's one of 'is mob."

"Nah, just me." Koroth said.

"So find another gate." the first Ork told him again.

"I don't think so. Dis one will do just fine." Koroth said and the Ork guards raised their weapons.

"I don't think so git lover." one of them said.

"Now lads perhaps ya better wait and see wot I caught out 'untin' before ya starts trouble." Koroth said and stuffing what remained of the mushroom he was eating into his mouth as he set the sack down before reaching inside it. Then Koroth pulled his hand out of the sack rapidly, revealing the Deathwatch marine helmet he had had inside and he swung this at the nearest of the Ork guards, striking one with such force that he was knocked backwards and fell over the side of the ramp, "Well?" Koroth added as the screaming Ork plunged to his death in the jungle below, "Anyone else wanna try and stop me goin' inside?" and he held out the helmet for them all to see.

Space marine helmets were prized trophies among Orks and any of their species, regardless of their clan was held in high respect if they were able to claim one in battle.

"No boss." one of the guards said as he and the others stepped back, allowing Koroth to continue on his way.

"Now dat's more like it." Koroth said as he walked past the guards, noticing that they moved to make sure that they did not get between him and the edge of the ramp.

Koroth walked calmly through the gateway, still holding the sack in one hand over his shoulder and the helmet in the other as he entered the interior of the fortress. The large courtyard that he found himself now standing in was filled with hastily constructed buildings occupied by Orks. The most common material for these appeared to be wood but there were also numerous pieces of scrap metal visible among them.

Hundreds of Orks as well as vehicles made their way between these and it was obvious to Koroth that the fortress was being used as more than just a military fortification, it had become an Ork settlement in its own right. Koroth smiled at this, knowing that it meant that the tunnels he expected to find beneath it would be extensive given the amount of time the Orks must have been present here to become so settled.

As soon as Koroth saw the first Gretchin inside the fortress he began to follow it, knowing that the creature would lead him to the entrance to one of their tunnels sooner or later. He paused when he saw the Gretchin headed down an alleyway and then disappear under a dirty sheet hung against the side of a set of steps and waited to see whether or not it would reappear. While he waited Koroth studied the alleyway itself, taking note of the entrances to the buildings on either side. Then when the Gretchin failed to come back out from under the sheet he walked over to it and pushed his hand through, moving it aside with his arm to reveal the entrance to the downwards sloping tunnel lit by the occasional burning torch behind it. He quickly entered the tunnel and began to walk down it until it levelled out in a small chamber where several other tunnels led away, at which point he set down the sack and the helmet.

"Okay dare ain't no-one about. Ya can come out now." he said before Wolf came crawling out of the sack, picking pieces of mushrooms from her hair and clothing.

"About time too." she replied, "It was filthy in there with those mushrooms. They stank as well."

"Probably all da dung dey was grown in." Koroth said and Wolf winced then sniffed at her clothing, wondering exactly what some of the marks now on them were, "Did ya 'ear wot dat guard said about da big boss?"

Koroth asked and Wolf frowned.

"I don't speak your language." she reminded him.

"Oh yeah, ya should learn." he suggested.

"I have no intention of learning any language other than gothic. Why don't you tell me what they said?" Wolf

said.

"Dey said dat da big boss was a Blood Axe." Koroth told her, "Dat's well strange. 'E must be really 'ard to 'ave managed that." Koroth said.

"That explains a lot though." Wolf said, "The whole use of ambushes instead of frontal assaults and the fact that the decoy was being guarded by Blood Axes." then she drew her silenced stub pistol and looked around, "So where are we?" she asked. Her surroundings had the appearance of a natural cave, with irregular walls, ceiling and floor but there were also tool marks in several places as well as mountings for torches. From where wolf stood she could see tunnels leading off in several directions.

"I followed a grot to dis tunnel. We needs to follow it to find out where it leads. Den ya can tell ya lads to use it to get into da fort."

"Good. Now give me a hand with this thing, I'm not use to it." Wolf said as she dragged the vox set that Kline normally carried on his back from the sack and began to thread her arms through the shoulder straps. Aware that her microbead might not penetrate the rock of the mesa, Wolf had brought along the more powerful communication device so that she could contact her platoon if she needed to. Koroth lifted the vox set effortlessly and held it as Wolf strapped it to her back before connecting it to her microbead so that she could use it without having to unhook the handset. Then she looked at Koroth and nodded, "Okay, so which way now?" she asked.

"Dat way." Koroth replied, pointing along one of the passages leading from the chamber.

"Is that a guess or is there something special about that way?" Wolf asked.

"It slopes down." Koroth pointed out and then he walked over to a nearby torch and removed it from its mounting before he headed down the passage.

"This is Wolf, does anyone read me?" Wolf's voice asked and the vox operator of Second Squad handed Grey the handset.

"It's the captain." he said.

"Captain." Grey responded with the handset to his head and he waved to the other nearby squad leaders, "What is your status?"

"Fine, but feeling a little lost. Koroth got us into the fortress and from there to the tunnels. Now we're hunting for a route down to the jungle. Can you put Vance on?" Wolf said.

"He's right here now captain." Grey said and he held out the handset towards Vance as he approached, "The outsider wants you." he said.

"Vance here captain. Captain Aetus is beside me." Vance said, glancing up at the massive space marine.

"Good. Platoon sergeant what is your situation?" Wolf asked.

"Monitoring what's going on. We've just seen a large contingent of Orks head out in tanks. They were heading in the opposite direction to the survey station though so it's unlikely that they've found the general's location. Veneel has been dealing out a deck of those cards over and over. He says he's hunting for whatever is disturbing them but he's not having any luck yet and Rull is scouting out the base of the mesa, looking for tunnel entrances."

"In case I fail?" Wolf commented.

"He didn't say that specifically captain." Vance answered.

"No, I'm sure he didn't." Wolf said, "There's something more though, Koroth has information about the Ork warboss. One of the guards told him that he's another Blood Axe. That explains the strange tactics they've been using as well as the bodyguards for that decoy. I want you to let Captain Aetus know just in case it makes a difference to his planning. General Fortnam may need to know as well. The Orks are likely to carry on using unconventional warfare and he needs to be prepared for it."

"Captain Wolf." Aetus, who had been listening in using the communicator built into his power armour said.

"Yes Captain Aetus?" Wolf replied.

"Time is pressing. I want you to check in at half hour intervals or as soon as you discover anything of note. Do you understand?" Aetus told her.

"Yes captain."

"Very well. Then we shall speak again in half an hour. In the mean time I will send some of your men to the East. When you next contact us we will then be able to triangulate your position. Aetus out."

8.

A sound from further along the passageway they were heading down made both Wolf and Koroth come to a halt. Wolf could tell that she was hearing voices but she did not understand what was being said. It sounded like the grunts and growls she associated with Orks but these had a higher pitch to them than her limited experience had led her to expect.

"Grots." Koroth said quietly, "Wait 'ere. I'll make sure dey don't cause us any trouble." and Wolf nodded, raising her pistol while he continued along the passageway and disappeared from view around a corner. In front of him Koroth now saw a group of four Gretchin surrounding the corpse of a large animal. This was not one of the many breeds of squigs that were the animal form of the various Ork subspecies which meant that it was a native life form instead. From this Koroth concluded that if he and Wolf continued to follow the passageway it would lead them out into the jungle where the Gretchin had obviously either caught or found this beast before dragging it back into the tunnel.

One of the Gretchin looked up at Koroth as he came walking towards them and grinned at him.

"Meat? One toof for this much." the Gretchin said, holding out its hands about half a metre apart but Koroth said nothing as he continued to head towards them.

"Good meat." another Gretchin added, slicing some of the creatures flesh and holding it up and Koroth came to a halt.

"One toof." the first Gretchin said, still grinning but instead of handing over any money Koroth let out a sudden loud roar and drew the cleaver-like blade he carried from his belt. Before the Gretchin standing right in front of him could even cry out Koroth swung his weapon down and split the unfortunate creature's skull wide open, prompting the other three let out high pitched shrieks of panic as Koroth then lunged at them. Grabbing hold of another Gretchin, Koroth dragged it towards him and dropped it to the tunnel floor before stamping his foot down on its ribcage and there was a 'crunch' as the bones shattered.

A third Gretchin turned to run and Koroth hurled his blade at it. The weapon hit the back of the Gretchin's head side on and although this meant that the blade could not embed itself in the creature the force of the impact was enough to knock it over, clutching at the back of its head and screaming in pain. Koroth then rushed at the Gretchin and scooped up his blade before hacking at the helpless Gretchin.

All of a sudden a shot rang out and Koroth felt the impact of a bullet in his side. With one hand clamped over the wound he spun around to see the final Gretchin pointing a crude pistol at him and he snarled. However, before he could take any action against the armed Gretchin there was a second shot, this one heavily muffled and the Gretchin was hit in the chest. Koroth then turned towards the source of this second shot but he already knew what to expect, Wolf was standing at the corner of the passageway pointing her silenced stub pistol in his rough direction.

"Wotcha doin'?" he hissed as he strode towards Wolf.

"Saving your life. That one had a gun." she replied, lowering her pistol.

"Savin' me life? Wot, from dat Grot?" Koroth said.

"You're injured." Wolf pointed out and Koroth removed his hand from the wound to his side and looked down at it.

"Dis? Dis is just a scratch. I'll walk it off." he said, "But if dat Grot 'ad seen ya den he would 'ave called it out for anyone else down 'ere to 'ear."

"I'm not the one firing off an un-silenced weapon or roaring his head off." Wolf replied, "If anyone heard that--"

"Den dey 'eard an Okr killin' a bunch of Grots. No-one's gonna care about dat." Koroth interrupted and Wolf suddenly realised what he had been doing. Ork society had no rules against them fighting and killing one another and their attitude of 'bigger is better 'and 'might is right' meant that Gretchin could be killed just because an Ork was bored and looking to kill some time by killing something smaller than himself.

"Throne! I didn't think." Wolf hissed.

"Nah, ya didn't. But da good news is dat we can't be too far from da way out. Dese Grots must 'ave dragged dis thing in from outside and dey ain't gonna dag it further dan dey 'as to." Koroth said and then he kicked the creature's body.

"Yes, it's a grox. They were probably brought here by the human settlers." Wolf replied, nodding. Then she reached for her microbead, "I better let Captain Aetus know that we're close." and she activated the vox set suing her microbead, "Wolf to Captain Aetus, do you read me?"

"Yes Captain Wolf, I read you and have your bearing logged." Aetus responded.

"Same here captain." Quinn's voice added, "We should be able to determine your exact position."

"Good because Koroth thinks that we're getting close to an exit in the jungle." Wolf said.

"Great. Rull's reported that he found an entrance himself but it's too small for a marine to fit through, let alone our ogryns. He's going to see if he can get into the fortress himself though."

"Well we came across a group of Gretchin that had brought a grox into the tunnel so the entrance to this one must have a larger entrance." Wolf said.

"Very good. In that case we will move in. All units are to advance to within five hundred metres of the mesa. Captain Wolf will confirm our final destination. Aetus out." Aetus ordered.

"They're on their way." Wolf told Koroth, "We should hurry."

"Come on den." Koroth replied and he continued along the passageway, following the marks on the floor that showed where the Gretchin had dragged the grox along it.

Now that the sun had gone down there was no sunlight to leak into the tunnel mouth as Wolf and Koroth neared the outside but Wolf felt a draught.

"Is this it?" she said.

"Maybe, Wait 'ere." Koroth told her.

"Why?"

"Because dese may be Grot tunnels but dare could still be Ork lads guardin' it. All it takes is one of 'em to see ya and let off a signal dat dare is hummies about." Koroth told her and he continued towards the tunnel exit, leaving Wolf behind.

"Just as long as there's nothing else in here with me." Wolf commented, crouching down and holding her pistol at the ready.

Quickly reaching the end of the tunnel Korroth stepped out into the night and looked around. The ground was disturbed enough to tell him that this tunnel entrance was in regular use but at this moment in time there were not traces of either Orks or Gretchin in the area.

"Come on out. Dare ain't no-one 'ere." Koroth called out and he found a nearby rock to sit down on while he waited for Wolf to emerge.

When she finally emerged from the tunnel she also looked around.

"Arte you sure that there aren't any patrols nearby?" she asked and Koroth smiled.

"Not unless dey is Blood Axes." he said, "Any other lot of Ork lads would be makin' enough noise for us to 'ear 'em and given dat it's dark I bet all da Grots 'as already gone back inside. Dey'll be too scared to stay out 'ere at night. Now call dat beaky boss and let 'im know dat 'e can bring ya lads 'ere." he added and Wolf reached for her microbead again.

"General we've just heard from Captain Aetus." one of General Fortnam's surviving command staff told him and the general quickly got his feet from the bunk he had been resting on, "His strike force has located a way into the fortress and is in the process of infiltrating it."

"Excellent. What is our status?" he asked.

"The teams returned with the supplies buried by the Twenty-Fifth two hours ago and they've been distributed according to need. The Fourteenth's infantry have been reassigned to the Twelfth and command structures for both regiments are in place. Fuel supplies are a concern but everything has enough to get to the target and back if necessary. We can deploy whenever you want."

"Pass the word, we move now. Non-combatants as well. I want to attack the fortress at dawn and we can't leave anyone behind to guard them. Once the fortress falls they can follow us in." General Fortnam replied.

Leaving the room that had been serving as his quarters General Fortnam headed out of the building and into the courtyard. Here one of the VII Division's remaining Leman Russ battle tanks stood under a camouflage net to conceal it from aerial observation. This particular tank was one of the 'Conqueror' variants that replaced the main battle cannon with a lighter weapon that made the normally lumbering vehicle more manoeuvrable at the expense of firepower. The general climbed into the turret of this tank and sat in its commander's seat, putting on the combined ear defenders and communication headset that would allow him to talk to the crews of this and other vehicles over its internal noise. Then he paused as he looked around at the instruments in front of him, reacquainting himself with them after so many years. Thankfully the war machines of the Imperium changed little over time and he quickly remembered where everything was.

"General are you okay?" the tank's loader asked and Fortnam looked down at him and smiled.

"Fine corporal." he replied, "It just all seems cramped compared to a Baneblade."

Quinn's veterans had already reached the tunnel entrance by the time the rest of Second Platoon arrived along with Captain Aetus and his marines.

"'Ere ya go. 'Ave dis back." Koroth said, tossing the marine helmet back to its owner while Aetus stared into the tunnel.

"Where does this tunnel lead?" he asked.

"I followed a Grot down an alley dat led to a way down to da tunnels. It ain't far from da gate so dare's probably another way up close by that'll take ya right there." Koroth told him.

"Then it's up onto the battlements to take out the gun batteries there." Wolf added, "We should be able to make our way around to the other batteries and gates up there as well so we can avoid the streets."

"A sound strategy." Aetus responded and he looked up at the cloudy sky, "The darkness will give us cover but we need to make sure we reach our targets before dawn." then he looked at Korothe and added, "Lead the way alien." he said.

"Hold on a moment." Wolf added as she began to release the straps holding the vox set to her back, "Kline you can take this thing back now, I've had enough of carrying it around."

As the strike force began to enter the tunnel a squad at a time Grey waited so that his men could bring up the rear. However, the ogryns also remained outside the tunnel, not approaching it at all.

"What are you waiting for?" Grey asked Khor.

"Small. Dark." the ogryn responded and Grey winced. Ogryns were notorious for their dislike of confined spaces and even getting them aboard troop transports could prove difficult at times.

"Captain we have a settling problem here." he said into his microbead, knowing that the abhumans' childlike loyalty to the Emperor and his representatives was stronger than their fear, "Khor's ogryns are reluctant to enter the tunnel."

"Hang on, I'll handle it." Wolf responded and moments later she reappeared in the tunnel entrance and looked at the ogryns, "Sergeant Khor bring your squad into the tunnel." she told him and he stood up straight.

"Ogryns follow." he ordered, waving the other six ogryns forwards as he led them into the tunnel, forcing Wolf to press herself up against the wall as the massive abhumans lumbered past her.

As the strike force made its way through the tunnel network, heading back towards the entrance in the alleyway Wolf glanced at Veneel and noticed that he did not appear well, his expression was one of pain and discomfort that got worse the further they went.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"It's the Orks." Veneel told her, "The species resonates a collective psychic field. There are enough of them above us that I can sense them from down here."

"Is he corrupted?" Layne said, bringing up his pistol.

"Stay your hand commissar." Aetus said from ahead of them, "I have heard of this from librarians. The psyker will be fine as soon as he is no longer so close to so many greenskins."

"Ere." Korothe said suddenly and he came to a halt in a small chamber where several passageways met. To Wolf the tunnels they had walked through all looked the same but the presence of a sack that was half filled with mushrooms lying on the floor told her that this was where Korothe had carried her to, "Da alley is up dare." the Ork added and he pointed along a passageway that sloped upwards from the chamber.

"What about the nearest gatehouse?" Aetus asked.

"Over dat way somewhere." Korothe answered, pointing along another passageway, "About an 'undred paces or so in a straight line."

"Then that is where we head. Find us a way out of these tunnels into the gatehouse." Aetus told the Ork and Korothe shrugged.

"If ya say so." he said before walking off down the passageway that led in the direction closest to that which led to the nearby gatehouse.

Following Korothe, it did not take the strike force long to reach a point where the passageway suddenly became a dead end. However, unlike the irregular walls that were present everywhere else in the tunnel network, the end of this particular passageway was made of smooth concrete that was obviously not of Ork construction.

"This must be the outer wall." Wolf said.

"Then the gatehouse has to be close by." Vance added.

"Up dare probably." Korothe said and he pointed to a nearby hole in the side of the passageway. This was set about half way up the wall and was barely a metre across and it sloped upwards steeply.

"That looks like it's going to a squeeze." Molla said and then he looked at the marines, "Even for those of us who'll actually fit."

"We will need to find an alternate route." Aetus said.

"Wait." Wolf responded and Aetus looked down at her.

"You have an alternative idea Captain Wolf?" he asked.

"At least let me and my men go up and see if this even comes out in the gatehouse. If it does then we can secure it and maybe find another way down here." Wolf said.

"Very well Captain Wolf. You may proceed." Aetus told her and he stepped away from the hole.

"Okay Quinn, your squad is up first." Wolf said and while Quinn and his veterans were starting to climb up the hole she turned to Khor, "Sergeant Khor you will remain down here. You follow the orders of Captain Aetus until he or I tell you otherwise. Do you understand?"

Khor looked at Aetus and suddenly snapped to attention and saluted.

"You better salute him back or he'll stay like that all night." Wolf told Aetus.

9.

The uneven sides of the hole provided plenty of hand and footholds as Quinn climbed up it, his way lit only by what light came up from behind him. The narrow tunnel ended in a wooden hatch and Quinn pressed himself against its sides with his legs and back to prevent him from falling back down while he unholstered his stub pistol while reaching up to slowly open the hatch just far enough for him to see what was on the other side.

Through the narrow gap between the hatch and the floor it was set into Quinn could see that the tunnel led to a store room filled with crude wooden crates and sacks. He could also see a single Gretchin moving between them, alternating between examining the contents and looking over its shoulder. Quinn glanced in the direction that the Gretchin kept looking and saw a closed door, suggesting to him that the alien was here to steal some of the contents of the room and was concerned about being caught. Lifting his pistol Quinn pushed the silencer through the gap he was looking through and took aim at the Gretchin, then when it turned away from him again he squeezed the trigger once and shot it in the back of its head.

The Gretchin collapsed without crying out and Quinn quickly pushed the hatch wide open and scabbled out into the storeroom.

"Clear." he said softly, pointing his pistol at the doorway just in case there were any more greenskins outside while his squad exited the tunnel behind him. Now that he was in the storeroom itself Quinn was able to better judge its size and it was clear that even with just his squad in it it would be crowded, therefore if the rest of Second Platoon was going to come up through the tunnel as well his men were going to have get out of it. Creeping to the door Quinn opened it slightly just as he had done with the hatch and peered into the next room. This contained two Orks that he could see, both of them sat with their backs to him and from the sounds he could hear Quinn guessed that they were eating, cramming food into their mouths as rapidly as they could manage. This presented a problem for the Catachan. It would only take one of the Orks to realise what was going on and raise the alarm and Quinn doubted that he could take both of them out with his pistol before one of them would realise that he was there. For a moment he considered requesting that one of the Deathwatch space marines in the tunnel below send up one of their bolt pistols so he would have a weapon that was more likely to offer a one shot kill against an Ork but then he remembered that he would not even be able to hold a marine's bolt pistol properly given the size of their hands.

Then an idea occurred to Quinn, an idea of how to use the Orks' own personalities and societal norms against them and he looked back across the storeroom, closing the door so that the Orks would not be able to hear him.

"Downs take a look in that sack behind you. What's in it?" he said.

"Lumps of some kind of fungus it looks like sarge." the other Catachan replied and Quinn smiled.

"Then pass me a handful. I need the silencer from your gun as well." he said.

Quinn broke the fungus he was given into pieces small enough for him to be able to insert them into the end of the silencer that Downs had taken from his own pistol while Quinn had set his down on the floor beside him. With a piece of fungus in the end of the silencer Quinn then opened the door slightly again and brought the silencer up to his mouth while the rest of his squad gathered behind him with their silenced pistols in their hands. Pointing this at the head of one of the Orks he then blew down it as hard as he could and sent the piece of fungus flying across the room where it struck one of the Orks' ears.

The Ork immediately raised a hand to where it had been hit and glared at the other one, saying something in its own language that the other issued an abrupt response to before both got back to their meal. Meanwhile Quinn reloaded his improvised weapon and spat another piece of fungus at the ork again. Hit on his ear again, the Ork let out a roar and shoved the other alien which then provoked him to push back as the pair yelled at one another. The pushing rapidly escalated as one of the Orks threw a punch and the pair attacked one another, roaring and yelling at one another. The sound that this made was loud enough to carry through the other door to the room but the aliens' violent nature meant that there was nothing about it would sound suspicious to any other greenskins within earshot.

Scooping up his pistol, Quinn pulled the door wide open while the Orks were fighting one another and then he and his squad opened fire at the aliens. The hail of bullets hit both Orks repeatedly and both cried out in pain. However, neither of them had the chance to call out a specific warning about the humans who had suddenly appeared in the doorway to the storeroom before the pistol fire hit vital organs or blood vessels and they died.

Quinn and the other members of his squad then moved through the door, keeping their pistols held at the ready. This second room was larger than the store room and it was dominated by the mechanism of ropes and pulleys along one side. There was also a narrow window in that wall and Quinn dashed over to it and

peered through. Outside he saw the gateway that gave access to the fortress and he could see the ropes connected to the massive gates themselves. Looking back at the mechanism behind him he instantly realised that this was intended for opening and closing the gates.

"Captain Wolf we've found the controls to the gate." he said into his microbead, "It looks like the Orks use a system of ropes, pulleys and counterweights to open and close the gate. Cutting some of these ropes ought to jam the system but I can't say how much attention that will attract."

"Excellent work sergeant. We're on our way to you now." Wolf responded, "Have you found any more tunnel entrances?"

"Err, not yet captain. Mind you I've not been looking." Quinn said.

"Very well. I'm on my way up now. Perhaps Mayer can figure out how the gates work." Wolf said and Quinn smiled.

"Well Bomber needs to do something to justify his new sergeants' pay." he replied before shutting off his microbead.

Rather than just wait for Wolf to arrive Quinn made his way over to the next doorway. Just because no Orks had come through this to investigate the noise did not necessarily mean that the room beyond was empty and so Quinn repeated the process of carefully opening the door just far enough to see into it while remaining out of sight himself. This time he found himself looking into a small hallway that was totally unoccupied. There were three doorways leading out of this hallway but these were not what caught Quinn's attention. Instead he focused on two other features in the hallway, the first of these was the stone staircase that led up to the next level while on the floor of the hallway there were several wooden boards covering part of the stone surface.

"Now I wonder what's under that." he said to the Catachans immediately behind him, "Cover me." he added, opening the door wide enough to be able to step through into the hallway.

While the other Catachans pointed their pistols either at the other doorways or up the stairs Quinn kept his weapon trained on the wooden boards. When he reached these he used the heel of one of his boots to push it aside slightly, preparing himself to fire at anything that may be underneath. However, as the boards slid away from him he saw only a large gaping hole beneath them and he smiled.

"Sergeant Quinn to Captain Aetus, do you copy?" he said, activating his microbead again.

"This is Captain Aetus. Go ahead sergeant." Aetus responded.

"Captain I think I've found another way into the tunnel network and this one looks big enough for your marines and our ogryns. We're about twenty metres further east from the tunnel we took to the surface." Quinn told him.

"Then there must be a parallel tunnel. We will attempt to locate it. Hold your position sergeant and inform me if you see anything. Aetus out."

Quinn crouched down and pushed the boards further aside to expose more of the hole. Now he could see down just about far enough to make out the floor of the tunnel and as he stared down Wolf and her command section emerged from the doorway behind him.

"Sergeant Quinn I was listening in on that conversation. I take it that this is the hole?" she said, looking over his shoulder and he nodded.

"Yeah, this is it. Hopefully Captain Aetus will be able to bring his men up through it. Khor as well." Quinn said.

"And what about these stairs sergeant? Have you investigated them?" Layne added as he looked up them.

"Not while I've been watching this hole, no commissar." Quinn replied.

"And why not?" Layne demanded.

"Because I contacted Captain Aetus as soon as I found this and he'd only just told me to stay put when you arrived." Quinn responded.

"Very good sergeant." Wolf said before Layne could press the matter further, "Vance, with me. We'll see where this staircase leads to." she added.

"Yes captain, right behind you." Vance replied, grinning and then he began to make his way up the stairs ahead of Wolf.

The stairs led up to a large storeroom over the fortress' gateway and given that it was located directly under the battlements where a battery of artillery pieces was located it was not surprising that it was filled with ammunition for the large guns. Wolf and her command section, along with Veneel and Layne began to spread out between the pallets and crates of artillery shells and propellant charges. They could hear the sound of alien voices from somewhere in the room but the owners remained out of sight. Thankfully Orks did not find the idea of bombarding an enemy from a distance appealing and so despite the larger greenskins being more physically suited to reloading and operating the heavy weapons the task of manning artillery guns in their armies fell to Gretchin, with just a handful of Ork overseers to make sure they aimed their weapons at the right side.

Hearing footsteps ahead of them Wolf and Kline leapt between two piles of crates and watched as a pair of Gretchin wandered past them, walking up to a nearby crate filled with charges where one began to unload

them, handing them to the other one at a time.

Wolf tapped Kline on the shoulder then pointed at him and then the Gretchin now holding a small pile of artillery charges. Kline nodded, understanding that Wolf was instructing him which of the Gretchin he was to shoot. Then both took aim and fired simultaneously. Rather than fire just one or two shots the pair fired their pistols repeatedly until the two Gretchin fell dead and the charges were scattered across the floor. The sound of this attracted another of the creatures and it stepped into view, calling out something in its own language only to suddenly freeze when it saw Wolf and Kline. However, before the Gretchin could call out a warning about the humans there was another muffled shot that sent it sprawling across the floor and Layne stepped into view beyond it, nodding at Wolf.

"Oh great. Now I owe him for that." Wolf whispered as Layne turned away and Kline frowned.

"You know I could easily-" he began and Wolf knew that he was about to suggest shooting the commissar in the back.

"No we better not. Major Trent 's always saying how easy he is to manipulate and a replacement might be tougher." she interrupted.

While Wolf and Kline had tried to avoid being seen by the Gretchin, Vance opted to hunt them and did not even risk the sound of a suppressed pistol shot. Instead he holstered his pistol and drew his long knife. Then when he heard the sound of a Gretchin nearby he crept up behind it, clamped his hand over its mouth so that it could not cry out and then slit its throat. As the Gretchin fell dead Vance suddenly noticed another set of stairs leading upwards and through the open hatch at the top he could see the night sky, telling him that this was the way up to the battlements where the artillery battery was located.

"Vance to Wolf. Access to target located in north west corner." he said quietly into his microbead.

"Understood Vance. All units report status." Wolf responded.

"Captain this is Mayer. I've taken a look at this system for operating the gates and it looks pretty easy to jam. All we need to do is cut one rope and everything will unravel. If anyone comes in here it'll be obvious but that's the only way they'll find out that something's wrong. There won't be any signs from outside."

"This is Grey, Second Squad is heading up the stairs to you now."

"First Squad still covering the tunnel we came up from captain." Molla added.

"This is Quinn, Captain Aetus has arrived we've dropped lines down to them and they are heading up to us now."

"Captain Wolf," Aetus added, "you are to hold your position. Do not attempt to take the artillery position until my kill team can join you."

"Understood." Wolf replied as she and Torrent made their way towards the battlement access where they found Vance crouched beside a pallet of artillery shells where he had a view of the top of the stairs leading to the battlements now holding his stub pistol in his hand. When he saw them approaching he raised a finger to his lips and then signalled for them to stay low. Creeping forwards, Wolf and Torrent joined Vance and looked up the stairs where they could just about see a large Ork whose body featured a large number of cybernetic enhancements while tools hung from his belts.

"The Ork equivalent of a cogboy?" Torrent suggested.

"I think so. One of the overseers for the Gretchin gun crews." Vance replied.

"He's going to be a problem." Wolf said, "If he's anything like ours then he'll be able to raise the alarm as soon as he sees us."

"And even if we do take him out quickly we don't know if there's another of them up there." Vance added.

"I'm sure that Captain Aetus and his men will be able to come up with something." Wolf said.

When Second Squad arrived in the ammunition store they deployed further away from the stairs, positioning themselves to be able to rush them at a moment's notice. It was not long after this that Quinn's veteran squad came up the stairs from below, accompanied by Captain Aetus' five strong kill team. The armoured marines moved surprisingly quietly given their size and the weight of their armour.

"Where is Sergeant Khor's squad?" Wolf asked.

"I thought it best to keep them on the stairs until we need them. Ogryns aren't exactly know for keeping a low profile after all." Quinn replied.

"Agreed." Wolf said before she looked up at Aetus, "Captain we have-" she began but at that point Aetus interrupted her.

"There are two Ork mechaniaks above us along with more than a dozen Gretchin gun crew." he said and Wolf frowned.

"How do you know that?" she asked.

"Your sniper Guardsman Rull communicated it to me on my squad's channel. You must tell me how he knew how to do that at some point captain." Aetus told her and Wolf sighed.

"He probably managed to take a look at your equipment settings when we were out hunting that fake warboss." Wolf said, annoyed that Rull had chosen to contact only the marines even though Captain Aetus did have overall command of the mission.

"You train your pack well little Wolf." Onund commented.

"I understand that one of the Orks is occupying a position near the top of these stairs." Aetus continued and Wolf nodded.

"Yes, he appears briefly every so often but we can't get a clear shot from down here." Wolf replied.

"That does not matter. My men will storm the battlement and neutralise this Ork. That will be the signal for your sniper to do the same to the second. After that your platoon will follow us up and we will secure the artillery." Aetus told her and the five marines formed a line side by side at the bottom of the stairs, raising their bolters, "Brother Trethor take point. I trust you to neutralise our primary target with your first strike."

"Yes captain." the Dark Angel responded.

"Your Lion will look unfavourably on you if you fail." Onund commented but Trethor ignored him, instead suddenly rushing up the flight of stairs.

10.

The sound of armoured feet running up the stairs attracted the attention of the Ork mechiak and he turned to look down the stairs, his eyes widening as soon as he saw the five marines now charging towards him. However, before he could call out a warning Trethor unleashed a burst of five stalker rounds, producing a series of hissing sounds in rapid succession. Unlike standard bolter ammunition, stalker rounds used only a compressed gas charge as a propellant and there was no sudden sound of rocket motors firing to propel the projectile through the sound barrier. Additionally, when the four rounds all struck the Ork in his upper torso they relied purely on the force of their impact and hardened tips to punch through the alien's tough hide, thus the Ork died without any significant noise to alert anyone to what was happening. The second Ork still noticed his comrade fall, however and he turned to laugh at his clumsiness right before a single carefully aimed shot struck the centre metal plate nailed into his forehead. This bullet shorted out a number of the cybernetics embedded in the Ork's head and he quivered for a few seconds, his face spasming uncontrollably as smoke began to leak from his ears and nostrils before his head simply exploded.

The Gretchin gunners who had been busily working on maintaining the artillery pieces above the gatehouse knew that something was wrong when both of the Ork overseers who had been yelling orders at them and delivering as many kicks and punches as were needed to explain those orders suddenly fell dead. The Gretchin reacted instinctively to this by panicking and hurling themselves under the guns they were working on in an attempt to hide as the five marines came rushing up from below and began firing, their bolters hissing with the escape of gas while the Gretchin continued to scream.

Wolf led the elements of Second Platoon that had been in the ammunition store up the stairs after the marines and the Catachans took advantage of their smaller size compared to the genetically enhanced and power armoured marines to root out the Gretchin from their hiding places, despatching them with a mix of stub pistols and their traditional knives.

When the last of the screaming died down the marines and Catachans paused, searching for further targets and listening for the war cries that the Orks would let out if they had been detected. However, despite the screams of the Gretchin it appeared that no-one beyond the gatehouse had decided anything was wrong.

"We need to put these guns out of commission." Wolf said.

"Agreed." Aetus responded, "Then we shall clear the other batteries."

"Sergeant Mayer," Wolf said into her microbead, "we're going to need your expertise up here. I want you to jam the gates and get up here. The same for everyone else. The gatehouse guns are secured and we'll be moving onto the next battery as soon as possible. Sergeant Khor that includes your ogryns."

"Yes captain. Ogryns coming." Khor responded and almost immediately Wolf heard the sound of the ogryns running through the ammunition store below before all seven of them came running up the stairs to the battlements, joined shortly after by the rest of Second Platoon including Sergeant Mayer and his mortar squad.

"Sergeant over here." Wolf said, waving him towards her.

"Yes captain?" he asked as he approached her.

"Sergeant we can't hold this position and still take out the other batteries. That means we need to disable these guns before we move on."

"That should be easy enough." Mayer said, nodding as he looked at the guns. In true Ork fashion no two of the powerful weapons looked the same and they were a mix of projectile, rocket and energy weapons, "We could just remove a few pieces and toss them away."

"You've got a better idea I take it Bomber?" Vance asked.

"Not for the energy cannons, I've no idea how those things are supposed to work but the other weapons look like we should be able to rig them so that they explode if anyone tries to fire them." Mayer suggested and Wolf smiled.

"I like the sound of that." she said before turning towards Aetus, "What about you captain?" she added.

"Providing it can be done quickly then I agree." Aetus said, "You have ten minutes Sergeant Mayer, after that we must continue our mission."

"Yes sir." Mayer replied before he and his men began to examine the Ork artillery pieces.

"And what about you Adept Veneel?" Aetus said, turning to the psyker, "Can you sense the source of the interference with the Emperor's tarot from here?"

"No captain." Veneel replied as he looked out over the Ork occupied city inside the fortress, "The Ork psychic field is quieter up here than it was in the tunnel and I cannot sense any particular concentrations of psychic power from anywhere nearby."

"That is understandable." Aetus said, nodding, "I do not believe that the Orks have any of their shamans present in this settlement."

"What makes you say that captain?" Wolf said.

"Look around you little wolf." Onund told her, "Ork shamans reside in huts mounted on top of great metal poles to keep their power away from other greenskins. Do you see any small huts mounted on such poles?" "She cannot see as well as we can brother sergeant." Trethor commented.

"Don't worry. I'll trust you Sergeant Onund." Wolf said.

"Ha! You see son of the Lion? One wolf will always trust another." Onund exclaimed and Wolf staggered forwards as he slapped her on the back.

The crudely designed and built Ork weapons proved to be easy to sabotage. Rivets and pins were removed from cannons so that their chambers did not seal and firing them would result in explosions while the rocket firing weapons had the simple fuses used to ignite their motors connected to their warheads instead. Only the energy weapons could not be sabotaged in this way but they were still put beyond use by removing and smashing numerous components before putting what remained back in place so that it would appear that nothing was wrong.

"Now we shall clear the rest of the battlements." Aetus announced, "Captain Wolf you will take your platoon in a counter clockwise path around, while I shall lead my kill team clockwise. We will not have time to delay to do anything to the enemy's artillery other than put them out of commission so do not attempt. I expect that we shall meet somewhere near that corner position there." and he pointed out over the Ork settlement to one of the corner artillery batteries. If both the marines and Catachans moved at the same rate then they would have met up at the opposite gate house, however the corner position that Aetus had indicated that he expected them to meet at was more than half way around the battlements, suggesting that he expected his men to progress much faster than the Catachans.

"Very well captain." Wolf replied before turning to her troops, "Okay everyone you heard Captain Aetus, we need to clear these battlements as rapidly as possible. Obviously we're still in an Ork held fortress so I want silenced weapons only. Sergeant Mayer I want you to bring up the rear with Sergeant Khor's ogryns. You'll be responsible for putting the Ork artillery out of commission."

Without any further word to Wolf or the other Catachans the Deathwatch kill team suddenly raised their weapons and began to dash away, moving in a clockwise direction around the battlements. After he watched them leave Vance then also turned towards the rest of the platoon to address them.

"Now let's see if we can show those marines that Catachans can match their pace." he said and there were smiles from the other soldiers.

The battlements were wide enough for a dozen men to walk along side by side, having been originally designed for vehicles to be able to use them to rapidly carry troops to wherever they needed to be to defend the fortress. Despite the fortress not currently being under attack these had not been left totally unmanned though, having numerous Gretchin lookouts positioned all around the fortress walls to keep watch over the jungle in addition to the occasional unit of Ork troops who were on hand to respond immediately if the fortress came under attack. All of their focus was directed out into the jungle though and the guards and lookouts paid no attention when they heard footsteps coming towards them along the battlements instead. Aetus and his kill team engaged these greenskins with carefully aimed stalker rounds fired either individually or in controlled bursts to conserve ammunition. At the same time Second Platoon was moving in the opposite direction. Along the way they too encountered Orks and Gretchin on guard duty, however when these were encountered individually they were already dead, single bullet holes through their heads or chests.

"Looks like Rull's clearing the way for us." Vance said when they encountered the first of these bodies and Wolf nodded.

"Maybe with his help we will make it to the other side of the battlements before even the marines can get there." she replied.

"Orks!" Grey exclaimed suddenly when the shapes of several humanoids appeared ahead of them on the battlements.

Wolf did not need to order her troops to open fire, all of them knew exactly what to do and they fired their pistols as rapidly as they could, relying on the sheer volume of fire they could produce to defeat the Orks' natural resilience. One of the aliens who happened to be standing by the inner edge of the battlements was hit in his leg first and he promptly tumbled over the side, screaming as he plunged to his death below when he struck the sloped roof of a building before his corpse rolled off and fell to the ground. To the Orks close to where the body landed there was no thought to investigate why one of their species had suddenly fallen to his death with a bullet wound in his leg, instead they began to fight among themselves as they each scrambled to loot the body of its possessions and teeth. Some of the Orks survived long enough to be able to bring their own weapons to bear on the humans that had suddenly appeared as if from nowhere and returned fire, striking one of Grey's men and killing him. The sound of this gunfire could be heard from the streets below, but as with the falling corpse the cause was ignored by the Orks still out. The guards on the walls were well known for relieving their boredom by firing their weapons at wildlife outside the walls or even

just at random into the jungle. As long as the gunfire sounded like it had come from an Ork weapon the other greenskins did not care about why there was shooting taking place on the battlements.

"We can't leave him behind." Wolf said, knowing that if any other greenskins happened to come along then finding a human corpse would alert them to the Catachans' presence.

"Khor, have one of your squad carry him." Vance ordered and the BONEHead picked up the corpse and handed it to another of the abhumans.

"Ogryn carry." he said simply and the other ogryn nodded as he slung the body over his shoulder.

The next artillery emplacements encountered by both the marines and Second Platoon were located at the corners of the fortress walls. These batteries were both crewed in the same way as the one above the gatehouse, with a pair of Ork overseers watching the Gretchin gun crews scurrying around as they worked clean the guns at the end of the day.

Even with Rull clearing most of the way ahead of Second Platoon it was still Captain Aetus and his kill team that reached their next target before the Catachans reached theirs and Aetus gestured at his men to tell them which of the artillery pieces he wanted them to clear and disable. While ordinary mass reactive bolter ammunition would have been able to disable the weapons the stalker rounds the marines were currently using were much less effective in an anti-materiel role. Instead the marines used a mix of bolter fire and their combat knives to deal with the cowering Gretchin crew before resorting to alternative methods to disable the guns.

The marines turned to their enhanced strength to achieve what they needed to do, ripping parts of the guns off and kicking them so that their mechanisms were deformed or smashed. It did not matter that this process of smashing the guns made a considerable amount of noise, sounding as it did the same as any other hammering that typically formed the basis of Ork maintenance procedures. Then after every gun had been rendered inoperable, a process that took only a few minutes, the marines moved on, heading for the next gate house and its battery of heavy guns.

Second Platoon employed similar means to deal with the guns and crews when they reached the first battery in their path. Two precision shots from Rull took out both of the Ork overseers in rapid succession before the rest of the platoon set on the Gretchin crew.

"Sergeant Khor, destroy the guns." Wolf ordered as she fired her pistol at a Gretchin that was attempting to hide beneath one of the artillery pieces and Khor grinned.

"Ogryns smash!" he ordered and the abhumans charged at the closest of the artillery pieces, all seven of them slamming into the weapon and ripping it free of its mounting before upending it.

"Everyone keep watch, that sound will have been heard by every greenskin for a hundred metres." Vance said and sure enough there was a shout from the ammunition store below the battlement as a Gretchin that had been trying to sleep found himself awoken.

Korothen then yelled something loudly in the Ork language and he rushed over to the hatchway leading down to the ammunition store, reaching it just in time to stop the curious Gretchin from climbing out on to the battlement and a single hard kick with the heel of his boot sent the creature tumbling back down to the floor below before Korothen slammed the hatch shut.

"Dat ought to stop any more of da runts down dare pokin' dare big noses into wot we's doin' up 'ere." he said, looking at Wolf and she nodded.

"We should jam the hatch." Molla suggested.

"Any of this junk ought to do." Quinn added, pointing to the wrecked guns.

"Sergeant Khor put one of those heavy guns on top of the hatch. I don't want anyone coming up from below to investigate." Wolf ordered and Khor briefly snapped to attention.

"Yes captain." he responded before scooping up part of one of the cannon mountings that had broken off the rest of the weapon and carrying it over to the hatch before setting it down on top of it to prevent anyone below from opening it.

"Good, that's another battery down. Now let's get a move on to the next, Captain Aetus and his men are probably ahead of us." Wolf told the platoon.

Both parts of the strike team continued this process as they made their way around the battlements, using silenced weapons to kill any Ork or Gretchin they encountered so that they could not raise the alarm and brute force to make sure that the artillery intended to defend the fortress was rendered useless. Aetus' prediction of the two groups' relative progress turned out to be accurate and just as Second Platoon were disabling the artillery at the next corner battery they heard the sound of armoured footfalls and turned to see the five black armoured marines come running out of the darkness.

"You have disabled the defence batteries on this side of the fort Captain Wolf?" Aetus asked and she nodded.

"Yes captain. We've also blocked access to the, from below as you see here." she replied.

"Very good. What is your situation?" Aetus said.

"We lost one man on the way round, though it probably would have been worse if Rull hadn't been giving us supporting fire. But we're running low on ammunition for our stub guns." Wolf told him.

"Yes, my marines are in a similar situation but we still have our combat blades for what I want us to do next." Aetus said.

"And what's that exactly captain?" Layne asked, "We have disabled the Ork artillery defences and ensured that the division will have a way inside the fortress."

"One way, yes. I intend to provide them with a second. We will return to the gatehouse my kill team has just destroyed the weapons of and secure the entire structure, holding it until General Fortnam's force can arrive." Aetus said.

"Captain my squad could fire our mortars from the roof of a gatehouse." Mayer suggested and Wolf smiled.

"Koroth where would the defence of this fortress be organised from?" she asked and Koroth pointed towards the centre of the settlement where there was a structure that looked like a smaller independent fortress within the main one.

"Da boss'll be dare." he said.

"Sergeant Mayer do you think you can hit that with your mortars?" Wolf asked.

"Easily. Though how much damage we'll be able to do is another thing captain." Mayer answered and Wolf turned to Aetus.

"Captain Aetus I'd like to recommend that when General Fortnam arrives we engage the Ork command centre. Even if we can't destroy it we might be able to disrupt their ability to control their troops." she said.

"Ya should put a few rounds over dare an' all." Koroth added, pointing to another part of the settlement.

Even from the distance that the strike force was at from this it was possible to hear Orks roaring.

"Why? What's over there?" Wolf asked.

"Da fightin' pits." Koroth said.

"The what?" Wolf said.

"It's where the Ork gather for entertainment. There will be many of them there crowded into a small area." Aetus explained, "Your suggestion is an excellent one Captain Wolf. Once we have secured the gatehouse your men can deploy their mortars." he added.

As one, the strike force made its way back to the gatehouse where Captain Aetus and his kill team had just smashed the mechanisms of the artillery battery stationed there and among these wrecked guns the corpses of numerous Gretchin as well as their Ork overseers were visible.

"Perhaps Koroth should take a look down there first." Wolf suggested as the marines gathered around the hatch leading down into the gatehouse.

"Captain Wolf I thought it was established that the Ork would not-" Layne began.

"I'm suggesting that he sticks his head down the hatch, not surveys the entire building commissar." Wolf interrupted.

"The idea is sound. Ork, see what is down there." Aetus said and the marines stepped aside to let Koroth through to the hatch.

Lifting this open the Blood Axe peered into the room below, finding it filled with ammunition just as he had expected.

Among the crates and pallets of artillery shells and rockets Koroth noticed a bed of straw and he could just about make out a sleeping Gretchin on it.

"Dey's asleep." he said softly.

"Then we kill them before they can wake," Onund said, stepping forwards.

"Wot? Ya beakies in ya 'eavy armour? Grots'll wake up before ya get within five paces of 'em. Let dem do it. I seen dem move quiet." Koroth said and he looked over his shoulder at Second Platoon.

"Captain Aetus, Sergeant Quinn's veterans can move silently." Wolf added.

"Very well. I will allow it." Aetus responded and Quinn grinned.

"You heard that Astartes officer." he said to his men as he holstered his stub pistol, "Now let's show off what we can do."

The other veterans copied Quinn, holstering their pistols so that they had only their traditional Catachan knives in their hands before the squad crept down the stairs into the ammunition store. It did not take long for the veterans to locate the straw bed and the row of Gretchin that lay on it fast asleep. Making their way carefully towards the sleeping aliens Quinn and his men formed a row of their own so that each of them stood in front of a single Gretchin while the two veterans left over kept watch just in case any more of the creatures happened to still be awake and moving around.

Quinn then held up one hand with his fingers spread out and slowly he lowered each finger in turn as a silent countdown. Then when the last finger was lowered the Catachans struck in unison, all plunging their knives into the sleeping Gretchin's chests. They aimed for the lungs instead of the heart, twisting their blades to spread the ribs and open up the wounds. The effect of this was to open up the Gretchin's chests so that even if they woke up they would not have any breath with which to cry out and all of them died silently.

"Clear." Quinn said into his microbead quietly and behind him Aetus and his marines led the strike force down the stairs.

"If this gatehouse is laid out the same as the other then there should be a cluster of rooms down there that will include the gate operating mechanism." Vance said as he stood at the top of the staircase that led down from the ammunition store.

"My men and I will investigate." Aetus said, "Captain Wolf have your troops set up on this floor and the battlements above."

"Of course." Wolf replied and she pointed to the wall that faced into the fortress, along which there were numerous small windows, "Molla I want your squad's heavy bolter set up inside one of those. Grey, we can't use your missile launcher inside so Second Squad will deploy on the battlements with Sergeant Mayer's mortar squad. Once Captain Aetus and his men have secured the lower floor then Third Squad and our ogyrns will deploy down there to deal with any Orks that try to break in from the ground level."

"We should get rid of this ammo." Molla said, looking at the stacks of explosive projectiles and rockets, knowing that all it would take was one round to penetrate the walls of the gatehouse to cause it all to explode.

"Okay, while we're waiting for the marines I want every squad not deploying in here to carry as much of it up onto the battlements as they can." Wolf ordered.

"Right Khor, get your squad loaded up." Quinn added as he picked up a nearby artillery shell himself.

"Wolf." Onund said when he returned to the now empty ammunition store alone and removed his helmet so that she could see his face as he looked at her.

"Sergeant Onund, where are the other marines? I didn't hear any-" Wolf asked, concerned that something may have gone drastically wrong.

"Fear not little wolf." Onund interrupted and he rested a hand on her shoulder, "The lower floor is secured. The gates have been jammed open and the entrance we found to the tunnels below is being watched by Trethor and Konrad."

"That's a relief. For a moment I thought-"

"You thought that a few Orks would get the better of us? Ha! You should have more faith little wolf. The Allfather protects after all." Onund said, "Now contact your general and tell him that we have opened the gates for him. Then send your Sergeant Quinn downstairs with his men and your ogyrns to help us defend the base of this tower."

"Ah right on time." Wolf said when Quinn promptly came down the stairs from the battlements.

"That's the last of those shells." he said, "They're all lined up along the battlements. Bomber's suggested that we could knock a few off into the streets below. He says they're unstable enough that half of them will probably explode on impact if they're dropped from this height."

"Very good sergeant, but Sergeant Onund reports that the lower level has been secured. Take your squad and Khor's ogyrns downstairs and deploy as Captain Aetus instructs you. We're going to hold this gatehouse until General Fortnam arrives."

"This is Catachan One-Nine Mark Four Mark two calling Catachan Zero Seven." Wolf's voice said over the vox system of General Fortnam's Lemman Russ and he immediately activated his transmitter.

"This is General Fortnam. Go ahead captain." he responded.

"General we have successfully infiltrated the Ork fortress with minimal casualties. The northern and southern gates have been jammed open for your approach and all defensive artillery disabled. The guns of the northern gatehouse have been rigged to explode if used. Captain Aetus' kill team and my platoon are currently holding the southern gatehouse and are prepared to disrupt the Ork response to your attack. Over." Wolf explained to him.

"Very good Captain Wolf. Be advised that we will launch our attack in three waves. A diversionary group will attack the north gate, at which point you are to begin your action. The first primary wave will then come in through the south gate before a second wave through the north gate when the Orks have their attention elsewhere." the general then glanced at his watch and double checked the tank's position, mentally plotting how long it would take what remained of the VII Division to reach the fortress, "Our approximate ETA is three and a half hours. Fortnam out."

Back in the gatehouse Wolf looked at her own watch.

"Three and a half hours." she said to Vance and he smiled.

"And then these Orks find out why you should never fight Catachans in the jungle." he said.

It was the Ork guards on the north gate that first saw the attacking Catachans when a squadron of three Lemman Russes drove into view and opened fire. These three tanks were all of the 'Exterminator' variant, mounting a pair of fire linked auto cannons in their turrets in place of a larger battle cannon and these raked the area around the gatehouse with fire that tore apart half of the guards in their opening salvo. The Catachan tanks made no effort to hide their positions, using large spotlights to guide their fire in the darkness and the surviving Ork guards began shouting out warnings of an attack as they fell back inside the fortress. They also called for the gates to closed but there was no response at all from inside the gatehouse and so the largest of the guards charged inside, ready to deliver a beating to the gate operators for failing to do as they were commanded and it was then that he found their bodies as well as the sabotaged gate mechanism. "Spread da word!" he shouted at the nearby Orks, "Dare's gits in da fort. Tell da boss while I finds out why dem big guns on da roof ain't shootin' yet." and the Ork then headed up the stairs, noticing but ignoring the blood stains in the ammunition store since they did not appear to be particularly unusual. However, when he reached the battlements above the gatehouse and found all of the gun crews dead he ground to a halt and roared.

Fresh Gretchin were quickly found to man the guns, the creatures beaten until they figured out how the artillery guns positioned about the gatehouse functioned and then ordered to fire on the distant tanks. However, the first that they tried to fire, a bizarre energy cannon simply failed to operate and one of the Orks now handing out orders to the conscripted gun crews began to beat the Gretchin operators of the weapon even more for their failure. This beating was cut short when another new gun crew loaded a shell into a large cannon and tried to fire it, discovering the hard way that the weapon had been sabotaged so that instead of the shell being fired off over the fortress walls it exploded inside the chamber. This explosion triggered a chain reaction among the ammunition stored around the guns on the battlements and the entire battery was consumed in one large blast while the Catachan tanks continued to advance.

"There!" Wolf exclaimed when the sky was lit up with fire as she peered through a window in the ammunition store and she activated her microbead, "Mayer, now." she ordered.

"Mortars firing captain." Mayer responded and moments later there was the sound of a rapid salvo of mortar fire from the battlements that was directed at the Ork fighting pits.

Having had time to calculate the exact aiming requirements for their targets, the members of Mayer's mortar squad had pre-prepared a large number of mortar bombs each and while the first salvo was still in the air the Catachans fired another salvo at the fighting pits.

"Switch targets. Fifteen degrees left." Mayer ordered and his squad quickly adjusted the facings of their mortars, bringing them to bear on the building that Koroth had identified as the Ork headquarters before firing again. Now though the squad did not fire in unison, instead each mortar team fired their weapon as rapidly as they could to rain explosives down on the Ork headquarters.

The sound of the mortars firing alerted the Ork guards standing just outside the gatehouse that something was wrong and one of them rushed up to a doorway into it and flung it open. The moment the door opened

though there was the booming of a shotgun as Quinn fired his primary weapon, no longer concerned about making noise now that Second Platoon's mortars were firing openly. Another Ork followed and this one's head simply exploded when one of Aetus' kill team fired his bolter using standard mass-reactive ammunition. The use of these weapons proved to the Orks close by that there were human troops in the gatehouse and every one of them nearby roared and drew a weapon before charging towards the structure.

"Open fire." Wolf ordered and the Catachans waiting in the ammunition store and on the battlements all opened fire together, lighting up the night with las blasts as well as a steady stream of fire from First Squad's belt fed heavy bolter that tore through the Orks caught out in the open.

The lower level of the gatehouse had only a limited amount of internal space and this meant that only a small number of the marines and Catachans there could act at any time but now that their presence was known to the Orks Aetus no longer felt the need to stay hidden.

"Outside. Spread out and cover all approaches." he ordered and Khor grinned.

"Ogryns charge!" he bellowed and the abhumans all roared as they rushed towards the doorway, smashing the door itself to pieces as they led the charge out into the open.

Although the sudden appearance of the massive abhumans came as a surprise to the Orks it did not deter them from continuing to rush towards the gatehouse and their advance was only brought to a halt when Khor gave his next order.

"Ogryns fire!" he shouted and all seven ogryns opened fire with their ripper guns at the same time. The combination of rate of fire and the spread pattern from these weapons firing together took a heavy toll on the Orks right away and the first ranks of aliens approaching from all directions fell dead.

Not everything went the way of the strike team though and there was the rattle of automatic fire from the roof of another as an Ork fired the belt fed weapon it was armed with. Despite the Ork's poor marksmanship, the number of shots being fired combined with the large size of the ogryns making them easy targets meant that the abhumans were hit repeatedly. Two of them fell to the ground, one dead while the other screamed in pain as it clutched at the injury to its abdomen. The fire from this automatic weapon was brought to a halt soon after when there was a flash and a 'whoosh' sound as a missile was fired by Second Squad that slammed into the building on which the Ork stood and blasted a large hole right where the alien was located.

Inside the Ork headquarters the leader of the greenskins reacted with fury when he was told that not only was the fortress under attack from human troops outside but also that it seemed a number of them had already sneaked inside and sabotaged its defences. The Ork leader responded in traditional Ork fashion, killing the unfortunate Gretchin that had been made to deliver the news by Orks who knew exactly what the response would be.

The Ork leader was then about to start giving orders for the defence of the fortress when there were the sounds of nearby explosions and dust fell from the ceiling as his headquarters itself came under attack. Ignoring the falling debris the Ork leader then began to give orders, commanding that fresh gun crews be sent to all of the fortress's defensive batteries, along with mechaniks to check them before they were fired. He also began to issue orders to begin organising the Orks in the fortress into units for its defence and runners were sent to relay these to his troops. The first runners sent were Orks but these faced two problems as they charged out onto the streets, the first was the continuing rain of mortar bombs that exploded all around the headquarters and had already reduced several vehicles parked outside to burning wrecks while the other was more subtle. The first Ork to rush out of the headquarters was in such a hurry that he did not notice as a tiny red dot appeared on his chest before all of a sudden a noiseless bullet punched through his lightweight body armour and killed him instantly as it pierced his heart.

It did not take long for the Orks to determine that sending runners through the streets was not a reliable means of getting orders to where they needed to be though and they soon switched to sending Orks down into the Gretchin tunnels beneath the fortress instead.

Following the destruction of the artillery battery located on the north gatehouse the tank squadron rumbled into motion again and drove towards the open and undefended gateway. However, before they could make it as far as the entrance to the fortress a swarm of ramshackle Ork vehicles came speeding through to challenge them. Some of these were heavily armoured half tracks mounting numerous large weapons but the majority were lighter open topped trucks and buggies that sped past the heavier vehicles and rushed headlong towards the Catachans' tanks.

The tank squadron came to a halt when these vehicles appeared and they opened fire again, targeting the lighter vehicles with their turret mounted auto cannons and also the heavy bolters they carried in sponsons and in two of the tanks in forward hull mountings as well. The rounds fired by these weapons were easily capable of shredding both the lightweight Ork vehicles and their crew. The third tank mounted a las cannon in its hull in place of the heavy bolter that the others were armed with and its gunner lined the powerful energy weapon up on one of the heavier vehicles before firing it. An intense beam of light erupted from the

muzzle of the las cannon, striking the main turret of one of the armoured half tracks and there was an explosion as the ammunition stored inside it was struck. This did not bring the half track to a halt, however and instead it ploughed onwards with flames and smoke billowing from the hole in its upper hull. The sheer number of the vehicles meant that the Catachan tanks would be surrounded and cut off if they continued to hold their position though and so they began to reverse, keeping their weapons trained on the oncoming Orks. Seeing their enemy retreating spurred the Orks onwards and the alien drivers accelerated, eager to prevent the Catachans from escaping but in doing so they blundered into the trap that had been laid for them.

In addition to the three Leman Russ Exterminators a number of heavy weapon squads armed with missile launchers and las cannons had deployed to the north of the fortress, remaining out of sight while the tanks engaged the Orks. Now that the Orks had left the safety of their fortress and were speeding towards them though, they came into range of the Catachans' weapons.

The first that the Orks knew of this was when the Catachan anti-vehicle weapons were fired. Located in multiple positions, the Catachan gunners caught the Ork vehicles in a cross fire, striking them repeatedly and in under a minute the entire mechanised force was reduced to burning wrecks without them having caused any casualties to the Catachans.

The pounding of mechanical legs heralded the arrival of a trio of Ork dreadnoughts at the south gate and the marines and Catachans scattered to avoid the hail of fire from the automatic weapons that they mounted.

"Straker!" Quinn shouted, "Melta, now!"

Straker spun around the corner he was using for cover and aimed his melta-gun at the advancing machines. The pilot of one spotted the Catachan and turned to aim his weapons at the man but Straker fired before he could. The intense beam of energy burned right through the dreadnought, first incinerating the pilot and then destroying the engine and triggering an explosion of fuel that consumed not only that machine but also the one immediately behind it. The flames from the blast forced their way into the dreadnought's interior where the helpless pilot of the second dreadnought was roasted alive and his machine collapsed in a heap.

The third dreadnought was then hit by a Krak grenade fired by the grenadier in Second Squad but the anti-armour round struck a particularly well protected spot and failed to do any significant damage. In response the Ork pilot elevated his machine's ranged weapons and fired them up towards the battlements, one of these was a rocket launcher that sent an explosive projectile flying high up over the Catachans and then over the fortress wall before it detonated harmlessly. On the other hand the second weapon was a belt fed automatic gun that sprayed bullets at a high rate and both the grenadier and one of the squad's riflemen were both hit, the grenade launcher falling from the battlement to the ground as its dead owner let go of it.

The narrow field of vision that his dreadnought offered meant that when the pilot of the last machine turned to target the Catachans above him he was no longer able to watch what was happening at ground level and Trethor took advantage of this to dart out from his position and charge at it, his armour shrugging off the small arms fire coming from several nearby Orks. As he ran Trethor plucked a Krak grenade from his belt and armed it before wedging the explosive in the dreadnought's hip joint, rolling out of the way before the grenade went off. The shaped charge blasted through the joint and severed the leg entirely, sending the machine crashing to the ground where its arm flailed about as the pilot tried to find out what had happened. Trethor was still close enough to the dreadnought to take advantage of this though and he leapt on top of it before pressing the muzzle of his bolter into the machine's vision slit and firing a rapid four round burst, the pilot having just enough time to realise what was about to happen before the first of these rounds exploded inside his skull.

12.

From her position in the gatehouse Wolf could see where the members of the strike team at ground level were now deployed to hold back the Orks while those inside continued to provide covering fire. Second platoon had taken a number of casualties so far and even one of Aetus' marines had been injured by a fluke shot that hit the gap in his armour at the back of his knee and now all of the injured Catachans were lined up in the ammunition store while Torrent administered what treatment she could. The injured marine was an exception to this, he had been brought to the ammunition store to keep him safe but Torrent could do nothing to treat his altered physiology and so he had taken up a position by one of the windows and was picking off Orks one by one with his bolter.

Wolf smiled when she saw the three Ork dreadnoughts destroyed but her face fell when she then heard the familiar rumbling sound of tanks.

"The Orks have more armour but I don't see where." she said as she hunted for the approaching vehicles. "That's because they're behind us." Vance told her, "Those aren't Ork vehicles, they're ours." and moments later the familiar shape of a Lemman Russ Demolisher tank in Catachan colours rolled into view below Wolf and swung its turret towards an Ork occupied building. The stubby cannon mounted in the turret boomed loudly and then the building it was pointed at vanished in a cloud of smoke before the tank rolled forwards again. This was followed by another tank and then a third, all three driving towards a ramp that would take them up to the battlements that ran all around the fortress walls.

More armoured vehicles followed this first squadron, turning to the left and right to follow the inside of the fortress wall until they reached the ramps leading up to the battlements. As they drove along the streets the Catachan armour raked the Ork buildings with fire from their weapons, reducing many to rubble and setting others ablaze.

Behind the armour came the infantry of VII Division, these troops initially deploying to reinforce the perimeter that Wolf and Aetus had established just inside the south gate. As more troops began to enter the fortress though they started to push deeper into the settlement.

"Captain Wolf," a familiar voice said suddenly from the stairs behind Wolf and she turned to see Colonel Shryke and his staff entering the room, including her sister.

"Colonel." Wolf said, saluting.

"At ease captain, I'm here to set up a command post. The general wants the fortress secured in twelve hours. I need to know everything you can tell me about it." Shryke told her.

After ordering troops towards the northern gate only to have human troops suddenly come pouring into his fortress from the south sent the Ork leader into a rage.

"I've 'ad enough of dis!" he snapped at his subordinates, "Ya all is as useless as a bunch of grots. I'm gonna drive dese gits outta me fort meself." The Ork leader then stormed out of his command centre, picking up his weapons on the way as he headed for the exit from his headquarters. Being too large to fit into the Gretchin tunnels beneath the building he had no choice but to exit onto the street outside and as he emerged he saw Orks and Gretchin rushing around wildly as they received contradictory reports of which direction the human troops were attacking from. He paused to start yelling at these Orks, intending to lead them to the southern gate but as he drew in breath to shout he blinked suddenly as a red light shone directly in one of his eyes. Instinctively the Ork leader waved his hand in front of his face to try and block the source of the light.

"Ere boss, wot's dat dot on ya face?" a nearby Ork asked but before the leader could reply Rull put a bullet between his eyes.

Without a common leader different groups of Orks began to act according to what they saw as their own interests in defending the fortress. Some rushed headlong at the Catachans attacking from the south but they did so piecemeal and instead of being able to carry out a major counter attack they found themselves picked off in smaller groups. Others decided to focus on defending just small parts of the settlement, typically those places that interested them, but again this prevented them from taking genuine advantage of the superior numbers they still possessed over the Catachans and each of these smaller defensive positions was taken one by one by human troops supported by fire from the tanks and heavy weapon teams that now controlled the battlements. The troops and vehicles located up on the battlements used their commanding view over the settlement to attack the Orks from above, breaking up any large forces that began to be organised before they could be thrown into battle. In some areas of the settlement rival groups of Orks even fought among themselves over control of resources such as weapons and ammunition, wasting both with this fighting instead of focusing their efforts against the Catachans.

This level of chaos among the Orks inevitably led to panic and some of them began to retreat, reasoning that

it would be better to let the humans have the fortress and then come back later with a larger force to reclaim it. However, their retreat was not as straight forward as they had hoped and one of the three gateways that offered the most obvious means of escape turned into a death trap for the Orks that fled to the north when all of a sudden the Catachan force that had taken part in the initial diversionary attack turned out to be larger than it had seemed and launched an attack of its own on the northern gate, storming the fortress to squeeze the Orks between two different forces.

A number of Orks and Gretchin tried using the tunnels beneath the fortress to escape but these were coming under attack as well. The Catachans knew that these could be used to move troops around the settlement out of sight to where they could launch attacks from unsuspected directions, therefore whenever they found the entrance to such tunnels they used explosives to seal them and this caused sections of the tunnels to collapse and trap Orks and Gretchin inside them.

For those greenskins that did make it outside the fortress, whether through the eastern or western gateways or through a tunnel that had not been collapsed, the chances of them escaping alive were good, however. The Catachans' primary mission was to secure the fortress for their own use and Orks that had fled no longer presented a danger. Thus the only sporadic fire was directed over the walls after fleeing greenskins. The last holdout of Ork resistance was at their headquarters building in the centre of the settlement. Here the large Orks that had formed their leader's inner circle had initially fought among themselves for control of what remained of their forces and it was not until the sun was coming up that one of them was finally able to establish his dominance over the others. By this time though most of the Orks were either dead or had been able to flee into the jungle and the headquarters was being continually rocked by the sounds of explosions as the Catachans attacked it directly.

"I needs to know wot lads we got left and where dey is." the new Ork leader told the others around him and one of them ran for the doorway. However, the moment that he opened the door to leave there was the booming of a shotgun blast and he fell backwards before the first of three grenades were thrown into the room.

Outside the headquarters Catachans cheered now that they had gained control of the fortress, providing them with a defensible position and their cheers grew louder when a Leman Russ Conqueror drove up to the building and General Fortnam appeared from inside the turret.

The Ork warboss scowled as he was told of the loss of the fortress.

"Cunnin'." he said, "Dey sent kommandoes in to take out da guns and gates before sendin' in dare main force just like I woulda done." he said and then he turned to a row of his subordinates, "I wants every lad, wagon and big gun dat ya can find sent dare now. Order dem to surround da fort but not to try stormin' it yet. Dey can shoot kannons at it but I don't want no lads goin' inside until I can get dare." he ordered.

"Ain't ya forgettin' wot I told ya?" the nearby wierdboy said, leaning on his power dissipating staff, "Da hummies 'ave taken da fort. Da traitor, da assassin and da wolf. Dey'll all be waitin' dare for ya."

The warboss then grinned.

"I knows dat. Dat's why I'm goin' dare meself. I is gonna make dat dis is done proper. Da hummies is all crammed inside dat fort now and I ain't plannin' on takin' it back from 'em. I is plannin' on bringin' it all down around 'em and buryin' 'em all in da rubble."