



PART V: VICTORY IS VENGEANCE

'We have no room for hope. We plan and we act. Hope is for dreamers and poets. We have our will and our weapons, and we shall dictate our own fate.'

Lord Corax,
Primarch of the Legio Astartes Raven Guard

THE RAVEN GUARD'S NINETY-EIGHT DAY
WAR FOR DELIVERANCE

An account compiled from surviving vox/pict records, and the testimony of those who endured its trials

In the aftermath of the Dropsite Massacre, all was anarchy and ruin on Isstvan V. Of those Space Marine Legions that had been betrayed to their deaths, those few who had survived knew despair and horror. Confronted with treachery of such scale and the terrible killing power ranged against them, each Legion reacted according to its own nature and demeanour. The Salamanders cast themselves wholesale into the searing crucible of war though confronted by unassailable odds, the majority never to return. The Iron Hands, driven beyond reason by the inconceivable spectacle of their Primarch, the Gorgon, beheaded by his own brother, were consumed by unreasoning hate. The Raven Guard, however, were different. Guided by their own nature, the

Raven Lord's legacy carried his remaining sons not towards the fire, but away from it to the shadows. Corax had survived, and this factor above all others was to be the salvation of his Legion.

Swiftly upon divining the merciless trap enclosing around the Loyalists at the dropsite, he ordered a general extraction of his Legion as soon as he had extricated himself from direct and bloody confrontation with his brother-Primarchs turned foes: Lorgar and Curze. Here the Raven Guard's longstanding arts of war, focused upon rapid manoeuvre and hit and run, made telling difference. Protocols long practised by the Raven Guard enabled a plan for a swift, fighting withdrawal to be enacted despite the havoc that engulfed them. Battle-cant rendezvous and emergency dispersal coordinates were code-burst across the Legion's command net by Corax, using phrases and idioms dating back to the Lycaean Uprising. Corax rightly suspected

his Legion's command and control net was compromised and this fact alone would save many of his Legionaries' lives.

As his Legion began its fight out of the killing zones, Corax went to the aid of a body of his sons cut off by a mass of Word Bearers. The Raven Lord himself was an umbra-clad storm of death, his eyes blazing wells of hatred, savage and merciless in his vengeance and yet not without purpose. He had lost one lightning claw in battle against his twisted kin, the Night Hunter, but where the other lashed out, his every blow cut an enemy Legionary to ragged shreds and cast steaming viscera on to the thirsting black sands, and when he took to the sky upon his black-pinioned flight pack, it was to descend once more to scythe down scores of Traitors and to rescue pockets of Loyalists who had been cut off and surrounded, falling like lightning on their attackers and allowing them to break out of the killing ground.

The Raven Lord's defiance and rage was not unreasoning, but channelled into a single purpose—to allow time for his sons to fight their way clear of the murderous anarchy of the Urgall Depression. Squad by squad, company by company, the Raven Guard disengaged from the Traitors, Legion reconnaissance squads using the general chaos to identify extraction routes and muster points in the wastes beyond. The sable-clad Moritats of the Legion stalked the battlefield too, seeing this dark hour as their time come to fulfil their direst purpose and find bloody redemption, falling upon enemies the recon squads could not circumvent, many selling their lives dearly so that the doom of their entire Legion might be averted. Less than an hour after the Traitors' great act of betrayal commenced and the massacre began in earnest, all who would escape the Urgall Depression alive were fighting their way through the enemy's rearguards and streaming through the hills, and those who could not reach them were now doomed. All that is apart from Corax himself, who was by now surrounded by many thousands of Traitors in the sea of carnage and fire at the centre of the cauldron of battle, ever shrinking in size at the centre of the dropsite. Though Corax had slain hundreds and could have killed hundreds more given leave, even one as mighty as a Primarch would in time have been overwhelmed by the sheer weight of numbers that pressed in from all quarters.

With hordes of Traitors closing in on the now isolated Corax and a storm of fire

scything through the air, a single Raven Guard Thunderhawk gunship successfully descended from the fire-streaked skies against the odds, and blasted a landing zone nearby the Primarch. Having boarded, Corax remained at the open assault ramp, and it is said his black eyes burned as he cursed the numberless hosts even as the gunship rose once more, the backblast of its rocket engines making a pyre for the betrayed dead that had fought to the last alongside their lord.

The Thunderhawk was commanded by the Legion's Master of Descent, Strike Captain Alvarex, the officer responsible for leading the Legion's planetary landings. Unwilling to countenance the loss of his Primarch, Alvarex had ordered his command Thunderhawk to negotiate the burning skies above the dropsite, whilst evading enemy fire that had brought dozens of other vessels plummeting to the corpse-strewn ground. Though the pilot's skill, determination and luck held for long enough to reach Corax and to ensure the Primarch was embarked, they could not hold forever. Inevitably, the sheer weight of fire directed at the Thunderhawk shredded its armoured skin, tore one wing clean off and ripped its cockpit canopy wide open, slaying both pilot and co-pilot in an instant. Wrestling with the ruined controls even as the cockpit burned around him, Strike Captain Alvarex fought to arrest the stricken gunship's terminal descent, turning what would have been a catastrophic crash into a controlled landing. Though most of the crew were slain and the Strike Captain badly wounded, the Primarch survived thanks to Alvarex Maun's dedication and sacrifice, the two rejoining the Legion as the sun finally set on that great day of betrayal.

The Night of Butchery

All that remains of the first night on Isstvan V is a scattering of fragmentary accounts, many of them entirely contradictory. Some survivors later spoke of tides of Traitors surging across the hills in a berserk frenzy, howling for the blood of the survivors. Others described a deep, sonorous chanting that rolled through the valleys like thunder and stirred dread in the hearts of those still loyal to the Emperor. Still other evidence shows bands of Traitors descending on isolated Loyalists and tearing them apart in an atavistic savagery, while circling gunships loosed fire indiscriminately, little caring of who they slew so long as it was not their own. How many battles raged throughout that night cannot be known, for every Legionary fought his own bitter war for survival.

Even as the main body of the foe harried the Raven Guard from behind, others fell upon them from above as they passed along the cracked ravines. Few Legionaries had any ammunition to spare, and so most of these battles were fought with fists and combat knives. When individual Raven Guard fell, their brothers made impossibly valiant attempts to rescue them from the howling, blood-maddened foe. Those who could walk bore those who could not, the withdrawal ever teetering on the edge of being overrun. But by the time the wan light of Isstvan V's sun appeared on the horizon, barely penetrating the tortured, smoke-stained skies, the bulk of the surviving Raven Guard had broken free of their pursuers, finding sanctuary in the maze-like ravines beyond the Urgall Hills, for a brief time at least.

As the Raven Guard were fighting alongside their Primarch, those Legionaries unable to escape the noose of the Traitor armies were being systematically butchered. As the tides of war receded, the Traitors stalked the battlefield, knee deep in the shattered bodies of their erstwhile kinsmen, seeking the dying that they might deliver death. Others sought out the wounded in order to perform abominable tortures upon their already ruined flesh. Some Traitor Legions piled their own dead on to great pyres so that their deaths might be honoured as the growing flames licked the blackened skies. The World Eaters are known to have performed one of the basest acts of savagery that day by butchering the dead and dying, decapitating them, flensing the flesh from their skulls and piling these in massive ossuary-cairns. The Word Bearers, following the teachings of their damned Primarch, enacted their own victory rituals, the terrible significance of which is now all too well known to us.

As if to heap infamy upon ignominy, the Traitors began another, still worse mutilation of the fallen. Tens of thousands of corpses had their Progenoid glands—the implant that bears the Space Marines' gene-seed by which the Legions themselves are propagated—torn bloodily from them, for what fell purpose few would dare speculate.

THE HEAVENS AFLAME

Even as the Raven Guard slipped their howling pursuers, yet another torment was visited upon the war-shattered surface of Isstvan V. The flaming hulks of those Loyalist war ships caught in the Traitors' ambush now began their inexorable and fatal descent. The vox-nets shrieked as if in pain, stuttering machine code and screaming

feedback interspersed with hopeless pleas for aid. The few Techmarines and Masters of Signal left in the Raven Lord's force fought in vain to establish a two-way link with the source. Soon however, the tortured, smoke-wreathed skies were lit orange by flickering conflagrations high above the clouds and the growl of stratospheric explosions rolled over the surface like distant thunder. From horizon to horizon, the clouds churned with unimaginable energies as Loyalist and Traitor alike paused to look upwards. Then the first fragment not incinerated by the fires of re-entry speared downwards, parting the clouds and smashing into the ground with a force equal to a planetary bombardment. The resulting explosion scoured a crater a hundred metres across and sent up a mushroom cloud tens of thousands of metres into the atmosphere. Moments later, searing debris rained down and a wave front of ashen smoke smothered all. It was the first of many hundreds of impacts that would fall upon the embattled planet's surface over the coming days, weeks and months, wreaking indiscriminate destruction upon Loyalist and Traitor alike.

With the wreckage falling from orbit overwhelming the vox-net with impenetrable interference and the choking debris drastically curtailing visibility, the Raven Guard pressed ever deeper into the cracked land beyond the Urgall Hills, a vast, broken region called the Illium Rifts. By dusk on that second day, little definite had been learned of the fate of the Iron Hands and the Salamanders, and so Corax was seen to pace the outer limits of the rifts, his gaze dark, his humours swinging violently between cholera and melancholy. Several times he led his chosen warriors out into the hills in search of his lost Raven Guard sons, and any others of the Loyalist force who might survive yet. Several times he returned with Raven Guard Legionaries, having come upon them in the hills.

Signs of other survivors having broken free of the massacre at the Urgall Depression were found all about, many in the form of tracks terminating in the broken corpses of once proud warriors run to ground like cornered animals. Throughout the night, still more scattered bands of Raven Guard staggered into the refuge, many wounded almost beyond the ability to fight, in body and in mind. Of all the horrors they had witnessed, of all the hurts they had withstood during the wars of the Great Crusade, here was an entirely new phenomenon. The betrayal that had split the Legiones Astartes

THE NIGHT OF ASH

By the dawn of the third day, precious little of the Isstvan system's star's light could penetrate the black clouds that had settled upon the Urgall Depression and were steadily creeping outwards in every direction. The so-called Night of Ash was initiated by the sheer destruction unleashed during the hours of the Dropsite Massacre, and intensified as towering funerary pyres belched ever-thickening columns of churning black smoke into the heavens. For long days, a fine rain of ash drifted from the skies, a rain that was, quite literally, ashes in the mouths of the Loyalists, for it was made of the incinerated remains of their fallen kin.

The miasma cloaking the skies was made denser still by the countless tonnes of particulate matter cast upwards by the impact of so much space craft wreckage. The effect was not limited to reducing visibility or stymieing the potential for close air support for the Traitor search formations—for the hulks raining down upon the surface represented a further peril far beyond their sheer ballistic potential. In amongst the wreckage were reactors, fuel cells and other components constructed using esoteric technologies often pre-dating the Imperium and ill-understood by the Mechanicum. Soon, the most hazardous materials known to Mankind were seeded throughout the atmosphere and scattered across the blasted wastes. When at last the rains came, they were tainted by radiation and poison, as well as the psychic spoor left behind by the deaths of countless Navigators and Astropaths. The rains that followed the Night of Ash proved lethal to those not of the Legiones Astartes or otherwise warded from their effects by technological or biological means. Those few survivors of the Imperial Army left behind on the surface of Isstvan V had little chance against the hateful rain, most falling prey to its horrendous effects within days.

in twain had inflicted upon them a wound no other foe had ever struck—for the first time in the experience of any present, the vaunted spirit, wrought by the hand of the Emperor himself, was stretched unto breaking point.

SURVIVAL

Under the unheeded gaze of the vigilant Raven Guard, the Traitors' intent unfurled. Ultra-heavy transport barques descended from the still-churning skies upon columns of fire, disrupting the wounded atmosphere still further. The heaviest were large enough to embark the mighty Traitor Titans, while hundreds more would ferry the bulk of the Traitor Legions' line units into orbit and away to the next phase of the Warmaster's betrayal. Far-ranging Raven Guard reconnaissance squads spied upon the vast, extinct volcanoes to the west and north of the Warmaster's fortress that were now transformed into landing zones, hundreds of thousands of Legionaries and their serfs winding across the depression to embark. Corax demanded an accounting of their numbers and the recon units reported back that the bulk of each turncoat Legion was departing, but that each appeared to be leaving behind it a core of warriors, to what ends they could not determine. The only Legion not taking its leave was the World Eaters, who ranged the hills and the wastes beyond, ever seeking to run more survivors to ground and to add more flensed skulls to the growing ossuary-

cairns. Angron, it seemed, would not depart Isstvan V until the slaughter was complete.

Ruinous Venerations

Confronted with the stark reality of the strategic situation, the Raven Guard fell back upon battle doctrines and field craft instilled within them by their Primarch during the years preceding the Lycaean Uprising. Traitor death squads, in particular those of the World Eaters, scoured the hills and the wastes in increasing numbers in their hunt for survivors of the Dropsite Massacre. In response, Corax instigated a cunningly conceived series of diversionary attacks that drew Traitor hunters away from the gorges of the Illium Rifts in which the Raven Guard had taken refuge and led them away into the mountains and deserts to the north and south of the Urgall Depression. Raven Guard squads ranged far and wide in the course of these actions, sometimes returning with more survivors, more often with fresh wounds and fell accounts of the sights they had seen. The Traitor death squads were hunting down survivors as if engaging in sport, and enacting unspeakable tortures upon the bodies of those they ran to ground.

The return of one particular force brought with it dark tidings indeed. Having ambushed and destroyed a Sons of Horus death squad, the party came upon the Traitors' prey, a trio of Legionaries from the Raven Guard's 12th

Battalion. Yet the occasion was no cause for celebration, for the erstwhile prey turned upon their would-be rescuers with unreasoning savagery. Corax's sons were taken by surprise by their brothers' act and one was slain in the ensuing confrontation. At length, the maddened Legionaries were subdued, though not without both sides suffering still more grievous wounds. Even when restrained, the maddened Legionaries strained against their bonds and spat bitter curses at their rescuers, their black eyes pits of inexplicable fury.

Soon enough, the phenomenon was repeated. A number of Legionaries who had once served in the Librarius but upon the proclamation of the Edict of Nikaea had renounced their roles as warrior-psykers and joined the line companies, approached their Primarch with their suspicions. Even without consciously engaging their psychic skills, each had detected a slow but inexorable build-up of psionic pressure. At first, they had taken the effect for a manifestation of so much violent cholera unleashed in such a concentrated period and location during the Dropsite Massacre. Yet, as the days wore on, it had become increasingly apparent that something far darker and contrary to reason was occurring. The Primarch, however, was already aware of the phenomenon, though he

kept his own counsel as to the true extent of his knowledge. It was the work of the World Eaters, and represented yet another sign of just how far the Traitors had fallen.

All across the Urgall Depression and beyond, the World Eaters were raising ever taller pyramids of flensed skulls. At first they appeared random in form and function, though redolent of the death-fanes and ossuary-temples cast down on the most savage of human worlds during the Great Crusade. The act of gathering the skulls of the fallen, flensing them and piling them into vast pyramids all across the Urgall Depression and ever further into the hills was revealed as some form of rite of victory. Somehow, this rite was proving to be the source of the madness that had afflicted the rescued Raven Guard and many others who tarried overlong in the shadow of the monuments. Some manner of psychic resonance was pulsing outwards from the vile monuments, filling those it touched with anger and bloodlust.

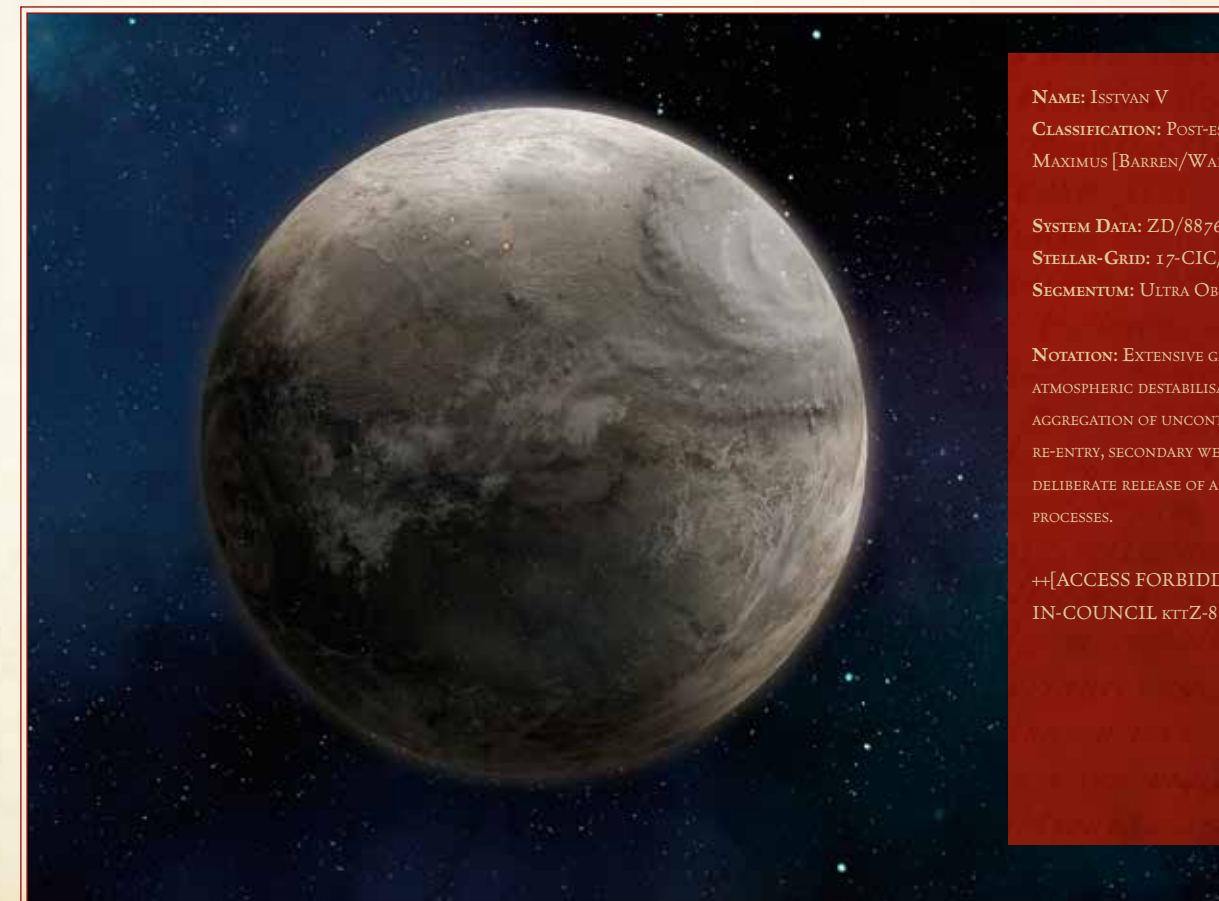
Later on, Raven Guard reconnaissance squads would witness their erstwhile allies performing savage victory rituals about the monuments, confirming to many that the sons of Angron remained at heart no more than bloodthirsty primitives. Others saw

in the rituals something far darker still, something spawned long ago in the darkness of Old Night.

It would be several years until the true nature of the phenomenon was revealed, their Primarch may have known more, the Raven Guard being blissfully ignorant of such things at that time, though even then it was obvious that some agency beyond the natural order of reality was abroad. Keeping his own counsel on the matter, the Primarch ordered a series of attacks against a small, select number of these vile structures, strike forces of chosen warriors planting melta bombs at their bases. The resulting detonations brought the targets crashing down in cleansing flames, the fell effect they exerted on the surrounding regions lessened, though it never entirely relented.

Consolidation

As the battles wore on, the Primarch reorganised his Legion, forging it anew into something resembling less the brutalised victims of the Warmaster's betrayal and more a band of warriors determined to survive, or to sell their lives dearly in the attempt. Raven Guard strike forces launched a series of cautious, yet bold attacks against Traitor death squads isolated from the greater mass of the enemy, winning numerous small but



NAME: ISSTVAN V
 CLASSIFICATION: POST-ESCHATOLOGICA GRADE
 MAXIMUS [BARREN/WAR ZONE]
 SYSTEM DATA: ZD/8876//KHΣ
 STELLAR-GRID: 17-CIC/LC-26
 SEGMENTUM: ULTRA OBSCURUS
 NOTATION: EXTENSIVE GEOLOGICAL AND
 ATMOSPHERIC DESTABILISATION CAUSED BY
 AGGREGATION OF UNCONTROLLED STARSHIP WRECKAGE
 RE-ENTRY, SECONDARY WEAPONS EFFECTS AND
 DELIBERATE RELEASE OF APEX STAGE ATMOS-PHAGE
 PROCESSES.

++[ACCESS FORBIDDEN UNDER ORDER-
 IN-COUNCIL RTT Z-838437340]++



++ TRAITOR LANDING FACILITIES ++

++ NORTHERN URGALL HILLS ++

++ EXTINGUISHED VOLCANO CHAIN ++

++ LERGHAN RIDGE LINE ++

++ TOR VENGHIS ++

++ TRAITOR FORTIFICATIONS ++

++ LOYALIST RETRIBUTION FORCE DROPSITE ++

++ URGALL DEPRESSION ++

++ ILLUM RIFTS ++

++ EDGE OF GULAR SALT PLAINS ++

++ SOUTHERN URGALL HILLS ++

++ UNCATALOGUED XENOS STRUCTURES ++

KEY

- DAY 0
PRIMARY BREAKOUT AND INFILTRATION PHASE
- DAY 1-30
INITIAL ESCAPE AND EVASION PHASE
- DAY 31-40
RETRIBUTION OPERATIONS
- DAY 41-97
WITHDRAWAL PHASE
- DAY 98
DELIVERANCE
- SONS OF HORUS
- NIGHT LORDS
- IRON WARRIORS
- WORD BEARERS
- WORLD EATERS

+URGALL DEPRESSION+
 ++LEGIONES ASTARTES RAVEN GUARD++
 ++ESCAPE/ EVADE/RETRIBUTION/DELIVERANCE++
 ++ORBITAL PICT-CAPTURE/CIRCA 601.006.M31++

bitterly fought battles out in the wastes. Many of these confrontations were fought with combat knives or improvised weapons; the objective to slay the foe and carry away what supplies could be scavenged from their bodies. In time, ammunition stocks were replenished to such a degree that more overt assaults could be launched, and it was as small groups of Raven Guard pushed ever deeper into the Traitor-haunted lands about the Urgall Depression that a grim discovery indeed was made.

From a distance it appeared as if a jagged forest had sprung up along the crest of the Urgall Hills. Upon closer inspection, hundreds, even thousands of iron spikes and columns were found, driven into the black volcanic ground. Atop each was mounted the body, or body part, of a Loyalist Space Marine. Most had been executed while others lived on still, the superhuman physiology of the Legiones Astartes holding death at bay despite being eviscerated, impaled, dismembered and exsanguinated or having a hundred other, equally cruel and darkly inventive injuries inflicted upon them. It was to the eyes of the Loyalist onlookers as if some plague of insanity had spread through their former brothers; that alongside treachery as terrible as it was, something of horror and madness unlooked for and inhuman had taken root. Here was the fate that the Traitors would inflict upon every Loyalist not slain in the cauldron of the Dropsite Massacre. Here, the Raven Guard recognised, was the fate the Warmaster would visit upon all those who refused to bow before him, even should every human world drown in blood.

In the east, a force of Raven Guard scouts came upon a vast and hidden underground complex akin to the alien ruins which the Traitors had used as their dread fastness. With this discovery the Raven Guard had their sanctuary, and operations to relocate began within hours. The move could not have been more propitiously timed, for as the last of the Raven Guard moved out, the night skies far to the west filled with the fires of massed retro jets. A vast flotilla of vessels was landing in the calderas of the extinct volcanoes over the western horizon, a flotilla belonging to the Warmaster's Traitor Mechanicum allies.

RECLAMATION

If the transport barques that had delivered the Traitors from the surface of Isstvan V in the aftermath of the Dropsite Massacre were epic in scale, the Mechanicum vessels now

lowering themselves tortuously through the air were more vast still. From the cavernous holds of these gargantuan vessels marched a cohort of traitor Mechanicum tech-helots, and thousands upon thousands of servitors and tech-thralls were driven forth towards the wreckage-strewn Urgall Depression. The Warmaster's renegade Tech-Priests were beginning a reclamation operation of staggering scale, one that would grant the Warmaster an immediate advantage in supply and matériel. The entire depression was strewn with equipment of incredible military worth—even those vehicles and other items damaged beyond repair still of enormous value as salvage. The wrecks of hundreds of super-heavy tanks still smouldered there, while the toppled forms of once mighty Titans were testament to the sheer destruction unleashed in the few hours of the Dropsite Massacre. The ground was carpeted by the remains of hundreds of thousands of slain Space Marines, each of whom bore full Legiones Astartes battle plate and carried weapons and other items of equipment representing the very pinnacle of human technological achievement. Within hours, the flickering glow of plasma cutters was to be seen all across the depression as reclamation parties began their grim harvest.

The operation would continue for many weeks, pushing outwards across the depression until, at length, only the worthless detritus of war remained. Even weeks after the Dropsite Massacre, still-living bodies would be discovered in amongst the thousands of dead, the gene-enhanced physiology of the Legiones Astartes able to enter a state of suspended animation in which the body might heal from the most horrendous of wounds in time. Some Traitors, most notably elements of the Word Bearers and Emperor's Children—in whom it seemed the dark madness of nightmare had truly awakened, but whose true cause was not yet suspected by outsiders—took cruel delight when these were discovered; sometimes administering alchemical preparations to awaken them, only to torture and execute the unfortunate victims, exacting upon them what amounted to a second death. The sons of the Raven did what they could to disrupt the work of these reclamation parties, even while seeking to avoid their own capture and tortuous end. Dozens of Tech-Priest overseers fell; victim to the silenced sniper rounds of Legion Seekers determined to exact vengeance for the dark crimes witnessed through their targeting scopes, or found explosives booby-trapped to their would-be prizes of salvage. But

ultimately, such counter-attacks were mere pin pricks to the vast scavenging effort the Traitors had undertaken.

The Hunters

Around the twentieth day after the Dropsite Massacre, the Legion's fight for survival entered a new and bitter phase. By this point, the Traitors were aware that a significant force of Loyalists survived yet and had made a number of attempts to bring them to battle. Lord Corax, however, was not to be drawn into an open confrontation his forces had no chance of winning. Instead, he executed a series of strikes designed to divert and disrupt the enemy's operations and challenge their domination of the wastes surrounding the Urgall Depression.

The greater number of Traitors left behind to scour the world belonged to the World Eaters Legion, led by their savage Primarch Angron. Despite the Loyalists' actions, the World Eaters rarely split their forces, instead scouring the depression and the wastes beyond in a vast and ravaging mass, their war cries audible for many kilometres all about. The other, smaller, Traitor Legion contingents deployed differently, however, leading the Raven Guard to the conclusion that those left behind on Isstvan V were some sort of punishment detail or else represented elements of the Traitor Legion their Primarch had decided to keep apart from the bulk of their forces. This hypothesis was further evidenced as a number of these remaining Traitor contingents were revealed to be fractious and ill-disciplined, the glory and nobility of the Emperor's Great Crusade apparently forgotten to them. The Sons of Horus were often encountered in small bands of hunters, most accompanied by cyber-mastiffs able to detect the proximity of even the stealthiest of Raven Guard warriors and to track them across many kilometres. The Word Bearers by comparison followed their own agenda, their actions driven by their own unknowable ritualistic dogma and often staying clear even of their own supposed allies—perhaps because these actions would have prompted too many questions they would prefer not to answer of their 'brothers-in-arms'. The Iron Warriors contingent, smaller but well provided for in terms of heavy vehicles and war machinery, scoured the wastes in compact armoured columns, the largest three of which presented Corax with the opportunity he had been seeking.

The Raven Lord's campaign against the Iron Warriors armoured columns was to span

several weeks and heralded some of the most intense fighting prior to the very final battles on Isstvan V. Initial operations saw Raven Guard squads shadow the enemy as they scoured the hills, gathering intelligence on the Iron Warriors' strengths and weaknesses. The sons of Perturabo appeared not to be following any particular search doctrine, or at least that its officers were perhaps competing with rather than aiding each other. It was therefore a relatively simple matter for the disciplined Raven Guard to ascertain the Iron Warriors' strength and to isolate them at a time and place of their choosing. Each of the three largest columns consisted of several dozen armoured vehicles, at least half of which were transport vehicles such as Rhinos and Land Raiders carrying a substantial infantry element. The remainder were Predator battle tanks and Thunderstrike heavy artillery tanks, a class of war machine highly favoured by the Iron Warriors. Of greater concern to the Raven Guard scouts were the squadrons of Scimitar jetbikes ranging ahead of the columns in their ceaseless hunt for Loyalist survivors. On several occasions, Raven Guard scouts were spotted as they shadowed the columns and many paid the ultimate price for the knowledge they gleaned.

Eventually, the Raven Lord had gathered the information he needed and so he mustered an ambush force to the north of the Urgall Depression. His target was the smallest of the three Iron Warriors armoured columns, against which he intended to test the Traitors' capacity and will to fight. The attack was launched in the hours before sunrise, such as it was, as the Traitors prepared to move out from their laager. Surprise was total, for in their arrogance the Traitors had not anticipated facing organised Loyalists. Before the enemy could even muster a response, the first wave of Raven Guard assault squads, led by the Primarch, were in amongst the Iron Warriors' positions and slaughtering their foe with cold, precise abandon. The battle could not have lasted even an hour before the Primarch ordered his warriors to withdraw, for Traitor reinforcements were inbound and the Raven Lord's primary objective had been attained.

When Corax and his warriors withdrew, they left behind the corpses of several hundred Traitors and the guttering hulks of dozens of vehicles. Militarily, the battle paled into insignificance compared to the losses the Traitors had inflicted upon the Loyalists at the Dropsite Massacre and afterwards. In terms of morale, however, it could not have

been more important. The Raven Guard had struck a meaningful blow against the Traitors, and even if every son of Corax eventually died on the blasted surface of Isstvan V, they would do so vindicated and with honour.

History records an additional footnote to this battle. As the Raven Guard melted into the shadows, a deep, atonal dirge was heard to echo across the wastes. Corax and several of the Mor Deythan watched the rear as the main body withdrew. The sound was repeated, much closer this time, and a beam of red light stabbed through the gloomy morning mist. At the last, the Raven Guard witnessed a phalanx of walkers making for the site of the battle, their form unfamiliar but clearly the product of some esoteric discipline practised by the Warmaster's Traitor Mechanicum allies. This was the first recorded sighting of the war engines that would come to be known as the 'blind-hunters', a class of mechanical automaton possessed of a dark intelligence and a fearsome array of weaponry, and intended to hunt down every last survivor left upon the surface of Isstvan V. Their very existence and presence on the planet at that juncture was further evidence of the staggering scope and scale of the Warmaster's treachery.

The Fallen Crusader

The Raven Guard had but days to consolidate after their victory before another Iron Warriors armoured column was reported pressing eastwards across the wastes, winding its way into the twisting ravines of the Illium Rifts. Lord Corax ordered an immediate and overwhelming attack, forging the ire of his warriors into a weapon no Traitor could stand against. The Primarch mustered his assault formations and led his force out into the ravines, his expression making it clear to all he had bloodshed on his mind.

The battle that ensued took place in the abyssal darkness of the ravines and was as bitterly fought as any boarding action or hive scouring the Legion had ever undertaken. The lead squads of both sides ground into one another as they fought hand-to-hand across a frontage often as narrow as a single warrior. Soon, the deep gorges were choked with the dead and the dying of both sides, forcing Legionaries to step over the writhing forms of their brothers in the effort to engage the foe. The Primarch was ever to be found at the heart of the fight, while the jump pack-equipped units made wide outflanking manoeuvres so that the Iron Warriors were cut off, attacked from multiple

directions with no hope of retreat. The sons of Perturabo might have been traitors and turncoats, but they fought with all the determination of the Legiones Astartes, made all the more concentrated by the knowledge that they were doomed. The Iron Warriors fought without thought or expectation of quarter, their manner bitter, cold and inexorable, each Legionary having accepted the fact of his death long ago and caring not for the specifics of the time and place of its coming. The Iron Warriors gave not an inch even as their dead choked the gullies.

At length, the Traitors were reduced to a single mass concentrated into a deep crater, the Raven Guard pressing in from four separate gullies. Though less than a hundred Iron Warriors remained, they were bolstered by the presence of a dozen Dreadnoughts of varying patterns. The Raven Guard slowed their advance, knowing that to press further was to crash against the solid ring of ceramite and steel formed by the towering Iron Warriors Dreadnoughts. Visual recordings from the Raven Guards' visors show that as the tide of battle receded for the first time in hours, the surviving sons of Perturabo mustered in silence while the grim-faced Raven Guard stepped back towards the shadowed gullies. From the Loyalists' midst strode the Raven Lord, his expression unreadable but his void-black eyes fixed upon the nearest of the enemy war engines, an ancient Contemptor class Dreadnought, its power claws encrusted with the dried blood of all those it had slain since the day of betrayal. A single word passed between them, the Primarch speaking the name of the Iron Warriors veteran within the Contemptor, evidence that the two must have fought alongside one another during the Great Crusade. This curse spoken, the two squared off against one another in the manner of pit fighters preparing to fight to the death for some master lusting for blood.

The visor-recordings which show this battle were barely able to register the speed and violence of what was to happen next; the Primarch leaping high into the air and coming to land atop the Dreadnought's back in a flickering dark blur. Even as the serrated blades of the Contemptor's power claws sought in vain to grapple the Primarch, Corax used one hand to steady himself on an exhaust stack, while plunging the other through the Dreadnought's ceramite armour. In utter silence, the Raven Lord withdrew his arm to hold aloft the armoured brain case and trailing spinal column of the veteran

Iron Warriors Legionary who had been interred within the sarcophagus. A moment later, the Contemptor's systems disengaged and the once-mighty war engine collapsed, the Primarch leaping clear before it hit the ground. This was the signal to attack.

The Raven Guard leapt from the dark to fall upon the beleaguered Iron Warriors. The two forces crashed together, the Primarch engaging several more Dreadnoughts as his assault squads cut into the enemy Legionaries. Though dozens more Raven Guard warriors gave their lives to defeat the last of the enemy, not a single Iron Warriors Legionary was allowed to escape, and in truth none attempted to do so, each

fighting to the bitter end. Eventually, silence descended upon the scene, the rocky floor of the crater carpeted in the broken bodies of over a hundred Iron Warriors and not a small number of Raven Guard. In amongst the wreckage were the ruined, smoking hulks of a dozen Dreadnoughts, the remains of the once-mighty heroes interred within cast to the bloody ground by the vengeful Primarch of the Raven Guard. His contempt for the scope of their fall from grace was writ across his grim visage.

With a nod, the Raven Lord gave the order for his force to withdraw, the dead left in their wake a powerful message to the Traitors. It would not be the last of its kind.

Into the Rifts

As the shadow play of resistance and search, hard-fought ambush and flight wore on, the presence of increased numbers of Word Bearers within the Illium Rifts made it apparent that the Traitors were pushing their hunt for survivors ever further outwards, once again threatening the safety of the Legion's sanctuary. Soon, Raven Guard sentinels spied enemy units guided by baying cyber-mastiffs approaching dangerously close to their sanctuary. Steps were taken to move the Legion's wounded, as well as its meagre stores and limited command facilities ever deeper into the mighty chain of caverns deep beneath the rifts.

The further the Raven Guard pressed into the stygian darkness, the more apparent the alien nature of the tunnels became. At length, the Raven Guard took refuge in a vast hall, its floor, walls and vaulted ceiling cast from some ultra-dense compound even the most learned of their Techmarines could not identify. The material itself appeared to have a deadening effect on a wide band of electromagnetic radiation. Furthermore, the construction seemed to be exerting an influence on the psionic level too, serving to nullify or shroud psychic effects. It cannot be determined if this contributed to the Traitors' inability to locate the Loyalists' refuge using technological or psionic means, but many claim it must have done so, for the Traitors

scouring the lands above never discovered it using these methods, despite passing within metres of the entrances on several occasions.

One particular group was not searching using any subtle or esoteric method the alien-constructed refuge might be able to neutralise. The third armoured column of the Iron Warriors was forging eastwards, crushing all it encountered in its ceaseless hunt. The Traitors force was set on a course that would take it directly past a number of the hidden entrances to the refuge, and it was judged a certainty that the Iron Warriors might discover, by dogged search or blind chance, what their fellow Traitors had failed to locate by more subtle means.

Faced with the likelihood of imminent discovery, the Raven Lord mustered all available warriors and moved silently, but rapidly out into the wastes. The Iron Warriors column consisted of dozens of vehicles of numerous classes, the hulls of its Rhinos, Land Raiders and Predators bristling now with iron spikes, atop which were mounted the grisly trophies of the Traitors' hunt.

The Raven Guard committed every available warrior to the assault, sweeping in upon the Traitors with hatred welling in their hearts. The Iron Warriors responded with the implacable ferocity for which they were so well known and the combat devolved into a





bitter, gruelling contest from which only one side could emerge. While the Iron Warriors fell back upon ingrained doctrines, the Raven Guard appear to have fallen victim to a lessening in their own, well-known precision and discipline. Some even claim that, in the corpse-choked ravines of Isstvan V, with the sons of Perturabo closing upon their final redoubt, the Raven Guard reverted to a form of war that pre-dated the coming of their Primarch. For a brief moment, it was as if the XIXth Legion of old was resurgent, its long-suppressed bloody-handedness wresting control of its descendents at what might well have proved the moment of their extinction.

But that dark fate was not to be, Lord Corax spurning his warriors at the height of the battle and forging his own path through the carnage, as he is held to have done at times during the bloody years of the Lycaean Uprising. Even as his sons fought on, mired in the blood of friend and foe alike, the Raven Lord plunged into the cauldron of war alone, his black armoured form transformed into a penumbral phantom as his single lightning claw lashed out in great, thirsty sweeps. Fuelled by the power imbued within his every cell by the genius of the Emperor, the Primarch of the Raven Guard was an arc of black lightning grounding itself in the iron-clad bodies of the Traitors, his movements rendered perceivable only

by the spray of atomised blood that cast the poisoned air crimson. No being save another Primarch could hope to stand against such a force. The third and final portion of the Iron Warriors Legion left behind to scour Isstvan V of Loyalists was utterly destroyed, and while others of their kin remained in the Urgall Hills manning their fortifications, as a coherent force of aggression the sons of Perturabo were spent.

In the aftermath of the destruction of the third armoured column, the Raven Guard returned to their sanctuary in silence, none willing to speak of the atavism that had risen unbidden within each. Even as the Raven Guard marched wearily back towards their sanctuary, the harrowing-horns of the Traitor Mechanicum's blind-hunters echoed out across the cracked wastes, and black storm clouds gathered in the grey skies overhead. At the last, the clouds broke and black-tainted rain fell upon the blood-crusted surface of Isstvan V.

The Raven Lord Alone

The black rains lashing the wastes enforced a temporary cessation in hostilities, the Traitors pulling back from their grim hunt and the Raven Guard taking the opportunity to consolidate in their sanctuary. For several days, the Legion's officers reconstituted and reorganised while the apothecaries tended

to wounds long neglected in the midst of constant war. At the height of the rains, Lord Corax once again took his leave of his sons, heading out alone into the rain-blasted gullies without a word of explanation. Those Legionaries who knew their Primarch of old counselled the others to fret not, for it was well within the Raven Lord's demeanour to act alone in such circumstances, utilising his unique Emperor-gifted abilities to pass unseen where few others could.

History does not record where the dark-eyed Primarch walked, nor what grim sights he bore witness to during the day and night he went alone across the wastes. Fragmentary accounts compiled much later based on his conversations with the Primarch Rogal Dorn hint that Corax penetrated deep into Traitor-held territory, perhaps even treading the corpse-carpeted Urgall Depression itself. When at last the Primarch returned, he convened a council of his most trusted senior commanders and while the words that passed between them go unrecorded, the Primarch's intent remains unequivocal. The Raven Guard must survive, he ordained. Not simply to preserve the Imperium's might, although that must surely have been a consideration. Rather, while but a single Raven Guard continued to fight, no Traitor could rest without fear that justice would be visited upon him.

The Sundered Legion

Records show that in the aftermath of the long contaminated rainfall, a dense, stinging fog reeking of chemical-rich blood rose from the broken ground to blanket hundreds of square kilometres. This all-pervading taint of death, which can be said perhaps in retrospect to have some Warp taint infecting it thanks to the Word Bearers Legion's dark ministrations, took its toll on many of the Raven Guard, stretching the sanity of many ever further towards breaking point. As Legiones Astartes, not a single Space Marine would surrender to cowardice or weakness of will, yet the apocalyptic slaughter and the cumulative effect of weeks of fighting, combined with little or no rest or sustenance and the need to wreak bloody vengeance upon the heads of the Traitors caused many to descend into a twilight existence somewhere between exhaustion and rage, denial and dejection. Under such relentless pressure, even a Space Marine takes on a haggard cast, the already pale, hollow-eyed Raven Guard coming to appear as armoured vagabonds, their battle plate a haphazard amalgamation of replacement parts scavenged from the dead of any and all Legions present on Isstvan V.

At some point around the fortieth day after the Dropsite Massacre, a large force of Word Bearers, under the command of the war-leader Elexis, penetrated the ravines to the north of the Raven Guard Legion's sanctuary. Elexis had discerned that the Raven Guard his forces had encountered earlier were a part of a far larger force, and he was determined to claim their heads for himself. It is noteworthy that Elexis appears to have withheld his suspicions from other Traitor factions, in particular the World Eaters, whose Primarch Angron still scoured the far wastes in search of one or both of his lost brothers. Had he done so, there is little doubt the Traitors' assault would have been a direct and brutal one, far from the cunning infiltration from an unanticipated quarter that was in the event launched.

On this occasion, the Raven Guard did not launch an all-out attack to repel the infiltration. Instead, the Word Bearers were allowed to penetrate many kilometres into the ravines and the twisting gullies while the Raven Guard watched on from the shadows, allowing the Word Bearers to pass by as other units feigned retreat in the face of the Traitors' advance.

Eventually, the trap was set and the Raven Guard launched their ambush. At a stroke,

dozens of separate Word Bearers units were engaged, none of them able to lend aid to their brothers. The aim of the ambush was twofold: in addition to cutting down hundreds of the hated foe, the Raven Guard were able to capture several of the Traitors, though all but one were able to take their own lives before they could be subdued.

The sole remaining Traitor was brought before Lord Corax, a circle of Raven Guard forming about the base of the ancient crater where the Traitor was cast as the skies were split by unnatural lightning and the black rains came down once more. The Raven Lord brought himself to his full height, visibly casting off the shadows in which he was habitually clad and unveiling the true and terrible splendour of a Primarch roused to anger. Even the Raven Lord's loyal sons were struck dumb by primal awe, as lower tier predators are cowed into abject submission when confronted by an apex hunter. The effect on the Traitor was still more pronounced, the Word Bearer was forced downwards as if by some supernatural weight, prostrating himself upon the rain-slick rock before the sheer majesty of the Primarch. Despite his submission, the Traitor's expression burned with unquenchable hatred, a sight that would become all too familiar to us in the coming age of darkness.

None would later speak of the manner in which the Primarch and his officers questioned the Traitor, nor of the nature of the death he was afforded at the last. Soon after though, a stream of orders were disseminated through the Legion and from these certain facts have been pieced together. It was confirmed that Angron was the only Traitor Primarch who had remained on Isstvan V and that his World Eaters represented the only Legion still deployed in full strength, the remainder having left behind only limited contingents to hunt down the last remaining Loyalists. Perhaps the most vital information extracted from the Traitor was that Angron was aware that Corax lived yet, and was intent upon scouring the entire Illium Rifts in order to bring him to battle. A massive assault was being prepared, one that the Word Bearers commander Elexis had attempted to pre-empt for his own glory, and failed.

Forewarned of the imminent attack, the Raven Guard made immediate preparations to relocate once more. There were many amongst the ranks of the Raven Guard who objected to what they regarded as

retreat. These fatalists spoke out in favour of defending the subterranean refuge, or making a bold last stand if defence was impossible. The line officers quelled such opinions the instant they were voiced, but it was inevitable that the Legion's upper echelon officers and the Primarch himself should hear of them. When this happened, the reaction was curt and uncompromising. The Raven Guard would live and die at the word of the Primarch alone. If the end was to come, it would be at a time and place of his choosing, and none other.

The evacuation of the sanctuary could not have been timed more fortuitously, for even as the Raven Guard's rearguard units cast a final glance westwards over their shoulders, they spied its demise. A cohort of blind-hunters was closing in on the hidden main entrance, the baleful dirge of their harrowing-horns blasting out across the wastes. In the wake of the fell war machines came a great mass of Legiones Astartes, the white and blue livery of the World Eaters easily visible against the grey sky and black ground. At the last, Corax himself joined the rearguard and watched silently as the land was swallowed in a mass of explosions, the savage sons of Angron setting the region aflame in their anger at having discovered their prey had escaped them yet again.

THE FINAL DAYS

In the aftermath of the evacuation of the sanctuary, the Raven Guard Legion's fight for survival and vengeance entered still another phase. Where before the Legion had been able to exert some control over their fate, albeit one that could not be maintained forever, now they were the victims of circumstance once more. The Raven Guard numbered even fewer warriors than they had in the immediate aftermath of the Dropsite Massacre, eighty days and more of continuous battle and hardship having claimed hundreds more. Many of the most severely wounded Legionaries evacuated from the sanctuary had taken their own lives so that their brethren might not be burdened by them, despite the efforts and protestations of their kin. With this a deep melancholy settled upon the Raven Guard, who had never been an ebullient kindred even at the height of victory. Individual Legionaries became sullen and withdrawn as a grim acceptance of the inevitable took hold. Though the Raven Guard Legion fought on against any and all Traitors it encountered, many fought because the only alternative was to die, not because they cleaved to any hope of eventual victory.

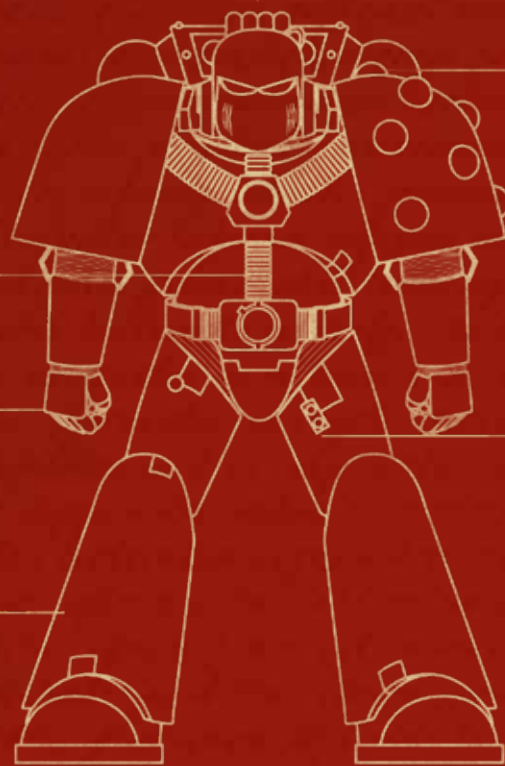
LEGIONES ASTARTES SEEKER WARGEAR LATE CRUSADE ERA

Limited Dissemination Mechanicum
Prototype Legiones Astartes
Power Armour
– Production Ident: [Pending/Cat Ref
07394.7333]
– Undergoing Field Trials with
Legiones Astartes Raven Guard

Multiple Redundancy
Power/Auto-sense Conduits

Gauntlet Integrated
Bio-feedback Nodes

Reinforced Ceramite Greaves



Power Unit, Incorporating Stabilising
Jets, Life Support, Reactor, Power
Cells and Overheat Bleed Vents

Auto-reactive Shoulder Armour with
Reinforcing Bonding Studs

Full Black Carapace Auto-sensory
Integration

Tigris Pattern Boltgun
– Multi-spectrum Targeter
– Auto-sense Integration Node
– Special Issue Ammunition Selector
[Kraken, Scorpius & Tempest]



Tigris Pattern Combi-melta
– Seeker Issue
– Contingency Anti-armour/
Fortification

Tigris Pattern Combi-plasma
– Seeker Issue
– Contingency Anti-heavy Infantry/
Light Vehicle



Tigris Pattern Combi-flamer
– Seeker Issue
– Contingency Anti-armour/
Fortification

Tigris Pattern Bolt Pistol
– Standard Issue Side Arm
– Elevated Ammunition Issue



Ryza 'Sunspite' Pattern Plasma Pistol
– Strike Leader Individual
Requisition

MkV-c 'Krak'
Shaped-charge Grenade



MkXIX Lucifer Pattern
'Melta-bomb' Thermic Charge

MkII 'Frag' Fragmentation Grenade

The fighting was continuous. The only difference was that now the Legion had no refuge other than the twisting ravines of the Illium Rifts, and it soon became apparent that there was scant chance of locating another refuge, for the World Eaters and the Mechanicum's blind-hunters were relentless in their efforts to bring the Raven Guard to battle. Though they remained one step ahead, the Raven Guard were rarely afforded the time needed to properly reconnoitre the path ahead or to formulate a strategy to counter the Traitors' incessant attacks. Try as they might, the Raven Guard could not wrest the initiative from the Traitors, a situation entirely anathema to them. Step by step, the Raven Guard were being pressed ever eastwards. Inevitably, they would eventually be driven into the trackless, inhospitable Gular Salt Plains, an uncharted land even the superhuman physiology of the Legiones Astartes could not withstand over-long.

The Beginning of the End

As these battles raged, the western skies flickered stark white as the Traitor Mechanicum incinerated the regions they had cleared of salvageable matériel. Explosion after explosion consumed the horizon and boiled away the clouds as the skies themselves burned. Grim faced, the Raven Guard could only fight on as the destruction spread ever outwards from the Urgall Depression, breaking like a wave over the Urgall Hills and spewing kilometre after kilometre across the wastes and into the Illium Rifts beyond.

For long days and nights, the Raven Guard fought on in this manner, selling their lives dearly as the wastes echoed with the sound of Angron bellowing for his brother to face him. The salt plains grew ever closer to the east as the raging fires consuming the western skies crept ever onwards. Though the Raven Guard fought with every ounce of determination and skill bred into them by the Emperor's gene-wrights, they were by now outnumbered at least ten to one and had no hope of reinforcement or resupply. With the inexorable march of the Mechanicum's land-razing firestorms, all hope of finding any other survivors or of locating any fresh source of ammunition was fled and now they were being channelled into an ever narrower field of flight by the massed firepower of the Whirlwind and Scorpius tanks the World Eaters had deployed to the flanks of their advance, bracketing all avenues of escape with withering fusillades of missile fire. Yet still, the Raven Lord did not order his Legion to

turn and face its pursuers and make the last stand all knew must surely come, and soon. The Raven Lord kept his own silent council, and none dared raise a word of objection.

Sunrise, such as it was upon the tainted, fog-shrouded surface of Isstvan V, on the ninety-eighth day after the Dropsite Massacre saw the last three thousand Legionaries of the Raven Guard mount the crest of the final rise and look down upon the endless expanse of the Gular Salt Plains. The air was thick with toxins rolling in from the crusted plains and the black contrails of whirlwind fire, the eerie howl of the tortured winds almost loud enough to drown out the bass roar of the tens of thousands of World Eaters charging across the broken land.

Now, at last, the Raven Lord ordered his sons to halt. Backs to the Gular Salt Plains, the Raven Guard would make their final stand. They had survived for ninety-eight days. They had fought with honour and determination, for no other course of action was possible. The Raven Guard had proven themselves loyal to the end, choosing survival over betraying their oaths, a choice which, we can

be sure, never once occurred to the Primarch or a single one of his sons. The Raven Guard had been forged in the searing crucible of the Lycaean Uprising, where resistance, however futile, was the only option, even in the face of utterly crushing, hopeless oppression.

As Angron's savage challenge rose above the roar of his Legionaries and the first of the Traitors' bolt shells struck amongst the Raven Guard's ranks, Corax issued what all assumed would be his final orders to the last of his proud Legion. Here the Raven Guard would stand; here the Raven Guard would die. But now fresh thunder split the skies above the last battlefield of Isstvan V, and with it came black-winged charnel birds which fell in a fire-spitting flock from the tumult above, their wrath unleashed not upon the few who remained to the Raven Guard but instead upon the World Eaters whose reckless headlong charge to finally grapple with their foe left them exposed before these birds of prey. In a storm of shot and shell was Angron denied his bloody prize. In fire had the Raven Guard been almost exterminated, and now in fire were the Raven Guard delivered from Isstvan V, the world the Warmaster had sought to make their tomb.

The Deliverance

There are some who name the deliverance of the Raven Guard a miracle. What else could it be called? How is it that Marcus Valerius, the Praefector of the Therion Cohort, an Imperial Army unit bonded to the Raven Guard, could have known of the Legion's predicament? How could a dream have summoned the Therion Cohort and the last of the Raven Guard from their home world of Deliverance to Isstvan V from across the vast reaches of space, only for them to arrive in orbit at the very moment the World Eaters were launching the final charge? When the Stormbirds and Thunderhawks descended from the blasted skies and delivered the Primarch and his last surviving sons to safety, some called it serendipity. Later on, others called it providence, even destiny. Now, there are many that call it a miracle, naming it but the first of many events that, in the coming war, would challenge our view of the universe forever.

Whatever the truth, the Raven Guard survived Isstvan V where so many others did not. Even reduced to a tenth of their strength, the Raven Guard fought on in the face of impossible odds with little or no hope of survival, their continued existence only possible because of the relentless leadership of their Primarch. Against the will of his masters, Praefector Valerius risked all to make for the Isstvan system, acting on the certain belief that the Loyalists' mission had failed and that the Raven Lord was in dire need of rescue. In order to launch his rescue attempt, Valerius had first to convince the commander of the Raven Guard left on Deliverance of its necessity, a challenge which very nearly cost the Praefector his life. Yet he prevailed, and the thousand Legionaries tasked with guarding Deliverance, as well as the Therion Cohort, made the impossibly arduous voyage across half the galaxy and more. The rescue force arrived at Isstvan at the very moment the World Eaters were sweeping down on the last of the Raven Guard survivors, its drop ships snatching them away from the very teeth of death.

That a voyage of over fifty thousand light years should result in such a timely rescue is beyond comprehension for many. There are some who claim that it could only have come about through the intervention of the Emperor himself.

