

Untouchable Introduction Part 1

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Published on Stories Space on 04 Apr 2016



With all odds stacked against him can Mabien find his place in the universe

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Untouchable Prologue Chapter 1 Prologue Chapter 1 My first mission under direct orders from the Imperial Inquisition was an absolute disaster; landing Gunnery Sergeant Maximus Christoff and myself on a backwater world at the edge of the Imperium. I begin here because I now realize that the entirety of my life prior to this event was inconsequential compared to everything that was and is to follow. Subjuga Two is a large Earthlike moon orbiting Subjuga Prime. It's the second of three orbiting the gas giant with about nine-tenths the gravity of the Emperor's homeworld. I prefer to operate on planets with gravity similar to Earth. It makes doing my job that much easier. My name is Mabien Frost; I'm a sniper with Force Recon of the Imperial Naval Storm Troopers. In other words, I shoot people for a living. Now don't confuse me with one of those troopers of the Imperial Guard, which has a very similar organization operating under the same name. No way buddy, I'm Imperial Navy, born and bred, all the way, through and through. Now I'm sure our counterparts in the Guard are all very good soldiers; but when it comes down to it, we're far better trained and equipped than they'll ever be. Unlike them with their patented Carapace Armor, we come equipped with the far superior and much more complete suits of Power-Armor the Navy issues each and every one of us. On top of that, we generally have a great deal more combat experience, as we are all permanently stationed aboard warships and get called into action far more often and sooner than they could ever dream. As I was saying: I prefer operating on planets with similar mass to Earth, it makes zeroing my SK-43 much easier. I don't have to adjust the sights as much to compensate for gravity. Today, most snipers in the Imperium can be found using Laze Rifles. Not this guy; I'll take the reliability and durability of a bolter over one of those pieces of shit every time. Additionally, bolters pack far more power for long-range shots as photonic dissipation does not apply. Let's not forget that hard yet satisfying kick only a bolter can reward you with as it sends another kill-shot downrange. That special little jolt lets me feel as if I'm actually reaching out and touching the enemy. I've reached out and touched the enemy two hundred fifty-one times now, with two hundred and forty-eight confirmed kills... I rarely miss. Yes, my name is Mabien Frost, but most call me the Ice Man, but only partly because of my name; more so by way of my skill with a bolter. We'd been sent to Subjuga to investigate a short emergency message fleet received from an advanced colonization expedition. The report stated, "Twisted Imperial Warship" orbiting the moon through astropathic communiqué. The

expedition never made another transmission. They are assumed lost. My guess is whatever they'd seen went ahead and made damn good and sure it'd be the last thing they ever saw. The orders that brought us came three weeks earlier from the great Commodus Voke himself to my unit commander, Captain Drennan, who subsequently picked the best team for the job, Gunney Christoff, and me. We'd hopped aboard a small imperial cruiser the day we received our orders and were just arriving in system. They could only take us to the edge of the system to avoid detection and a possible confrontation with the much larger and better armed warship mentioned in the message. Having been taken as close to our objective as possible; we would now take a stealth cutter the rest of the way. "So what do you think?" Gunney asked as we made our way towards our transport in the ship's launch bay. "I don't know Gunney, but sounds like Chaos to me." "I agree. Make sure you're ready for anything we might run into down there." "Roger that, whatever's down there'll be gone before they know what hit em." That brought the hint of a smile to his face. Christoff was more than just my C.O.; he was also the closest thing I had to a friend. Not only had he hand-picked me from sniper school, he'd spotted every mission I'd ever been on. I trusted him with my life, and he trusted me with his. He was the only person I'd ever met that could stand to be around me for any length of time. Hell, even my own parents couldn't stand me and proved it by signing me over to the Storm Troopers at the youngest possible age of twelve. I'm twenty-six standard today. Fourteen years and still just a corporal? Well, when half the people you meet are afraid of you and the other half can't stand the sight of you, you have to fight. And I've fought.... a lot. I've lost more rank than most will ever make, only to earn it back to lose again in another fight. The commissar would have shot me years ago for these antics had it not been for my excellent wartime record of heroics and bravery. Not to mention my uncanny ability to hit anything up to and including three clicks with my precious SK-43. For any of you civvies' out there, "Click," is just trooper-talk for kilometer. It wasn't until Gunney selected me to be his shooter that I stopped getting in trouble. His philosophy was simple; just keep me separate from the other soldiers and let my combat record speak for itself. I've only found it necessary to beat the shit out of four people in the three years since. We stepped into the launch bay and headed for our Night Hawk. A Night Hawk is a specially designed, jet-black, stealth, recon cutter used specifically to get a small number of soldiers into a hostile environment as quickly and as quietly as possible. We passed by half a dozen other small spacecraft as we approached the transport. Upon reaching it, the ramp on the back lowered, and we both stepped inside. "Not one fraggin' thing after that transmission is what's making me uneasy." Gunney walked to the front of the Hawk's passenger compartment and slipped into the co-pilot's seat. I smiled, "Relax Gunney; everything dies... even Chaos when a bullet cracks their brain-case." This is something else you'll come to learn of me; unlike most, I'm rarely nervous prior to putting myself into a combat situation. I don't know why this is, but I don't question it, but as a soldier, this part of my personality has always served me very well. Gunney laughed out loud, "That's the attitude I expect from the Ice Man." I slid into the pilot's seat and closed the ramp door. I then powered up the ships systems and engines. The cabin pressurized itself. As soon as it finished an alarm rang out notifying anyone still in the area that the massive launch bay doors were about to open. Once control visually confirmed that there was indeed no one left in the bay, they

depressurized the massive room and cycled the doors open. "Take us out," Gunney ordered. I increased power to the engines and raised the landing gear. We cleared the bay and pulled away from the cruiser with increasing speed. Once free of the bulk of the ship, I adjusted course for Subjuga Two and engaged the autopilot. We had roughly two and a half hours to traverse the distance in the sub-light speed craft. Gunney and I used, this time, to get into our power suits. My armor is a specially modified advanced recon model just like Christoff's. It's lighter and provides more mobility than those most Storm Troopers wear. The trade-off; is that there are larger gaps in its ceramite plating to provide that mobility. It also has jump-jets good for three fifty meter jumps in standard earth gravity. They can take a little less damage than normal suits, but allow me to move about forty percent faster. I fell in love with this suit the very first time I donned it. I'm in top physical condition from nine years as a trooper and five in recon. I can run twenty kilometers in fifty degree weather without stopping. I can run twice that distance in half the time in my cooled power suit. It also runs quieter, the hum of my armor's servos is nearly imperceptible; I could easily sneak up behind you completely undetected while wearing it; try that in standard armor . I finished donning my armor - minus the helmet - and sat back in the pilot's chair next to Gunney, who'd finished just shortly before. I checked the computer and looked over to Christoff, "ETA two hours Captain." "Don't call me that; I work for a living." He spat back. With that we both remained quiet for the rest of the trip; each mentally preparing ourselves for whatever we may run into. The short flight to our target was uneventful. We flew unmolested through the Subjugan system for two very boring hours. When we arrived to our destination I activated our sensors and checked the readouts, "Sir, I'm not detecting any ships in orbit." "Me either Frost, let's go ahead and check the blind side of Prime just to be sure. Engage stealth flight." "Roger that, engaging stealth flight." I reduced speed to allow the ship to activate its stealth drive. "Stealth flight engaged." "Stealth flight fully operational," he acknowledged, "take us in." I turned off the auto-pilot and adjusted our course for a clandestine orbit of Subjuga Prime. The brightly marbled red/ orange of the massive gas-giant grew steadily in the view screen. The unspoken beauty of the planet briefly drew both of our attention away from the dangers of the mission at hand. "Coming around Gunney... still detecting no enemy warships." "Me either..." He continued to watch the sensors for another minute before finally saying, "if they're here, I sure can't see em.' Take us to primary objective." "Roger that," I turned the cutter for a high orbit of Subjuga Two to begin our search. -Nighthawks are outfitted with sophisticated sensors and cameras perfectly suited for this type of reconnaissance; so it didn't take long to find what we were looking for, "Sir, I'm picking up activity on the southernmost continent." "Got it, let's have a look. Take us over and lock geosynchronous orbit." "Roger that." I locked the computer into an orbit four hundred kilometers above our target and activated the cameras. "There they are." I pointed to a small camp with people milling around some kind of xenos ruin. "Magnifying," I enhanced the image to get a better look at our target. "I got ten armed guards packing laze rifles... and between twenty and thirty unarmed workers." "That's my count." he confirmed. We both watched for a couple of minutes until Gunney started snickering at one of the guards who'd begun to beat a worker with the stock of his rifle. "Uh-oh, he's in trouble." Gunney chuckled as the guard continued to ruthlessly beat upon the man while the other

workers stood by and watched. The beating ended with a kick to the unfortunate man's rear that sent him scurrying back to work. The guard then pointed to the other workers and said something that made them immediately go back to their labors at a significantly increased pace. "Let's consider them non-combatant forced labor. What do you make of the guards?" "They appear to be some kind of soldier; all seem pretty focused. I'm betting most, or all have some kind of combat experience, but I'm totally unfamiliar with those uniforms." I replied. "I agree," Gunny said as he turned to look at me, "but I have seen those uniforms, and those soldiers are definitely Chaos." Chapter 2 In my fourteen years as a Storm Trooper, I've fought and killed half a dozen different life forms across a couple dozen different worlds with little emotion. From the stinking green-skinned Orcs, to just plain old disaffected human rebels. But there's nothing, absolutely nothing; I hate more than those traitorous bastards fighting under the banner of Chaos. They're by far the most dangerous enemy mankind faces. Fanatical to a man, they charge until either you or they are dead. And the twisted symbols of Chaos they wear can turn a coward out of any good soldier. Or even worse, drive him mad enough to kill his own friends. Those are the extremes; Chaos has some lesser effect on everyone who looks upon it. Everyone that is, except me. Chaos has absolutely no effect on me, it never has. I've never understood how a bunch of crude symbols, that look as if some demented eight year old drew them, could do so much to a man. But they do and do so frequently. Gunney stood up fast, "We're going in, I want eyes on whatever the hell it is they're up to before we frag em'. Our orders are to investigate and eliminate if necessary. We will definitely have to eliminate if we want to find out what they're up to inside that xenos structure." "Xenos" is a term used by the Imperium to describe anything non-human and alien. Now the simplest course of action would be to launch one of our nukes and frag them all to hell from space, which I'm always for. But doing so would eliminate any chance for the recovery of evidence of which the Inquisition explicitly requested we gather. In my very humble opinion, a request from the Inquisition should always be followed by the words, " Or else ." Destroying evidence during this mission could very well land us in front of a firing squad. And our fleet commissar very much favored making strong examples out of dumb troopers. Gunney Christoff and I are both far from stupid, so you can believe we were going to make every possible effort to do exactly as they'd asked. But more so than that, we're Force Recon; we like to get our hands dirty. Gunney walked over and opened a weapons locker. "Send a message to the cruiser and get them caught up on our situation." He continued without looking at me, "Tell them we're going in." He pulled his laze rifle out and slapped a power cell into place. "If they don't hear back from us in twelve, tell em' to send the cav." I sent the vox transmission, waited for confirmation, and went over to my own locker. I opened it up and pulled out my trusty SK-43. I checked the slide on the bolter to make sure it moved freely by charging it back a few times. Satisfied it was functioning properly, I slapped a five round mag of fifty-caliber antipersonnel rounds into place. I grabbed another seven mags of antipersonnel and one more of armor piercing. I then loaded eight slugs into the shotgun attached to the underside of its barrel. I took my sidearm and loaded it with a ten-round clip, putting two extras in my leg compartment. Gunney grabbed an additional three power cells, four frags, and the same side arm compliment. Gunney looked up, "You good?" "I'm good." To emphasize the point, I chambered a

round into both my bolter and side arm. I peered down the sights to make sure my scope was fully operational. I looked up to see Gunney now seated in the pilot's chair. "I'm taking us down twenty clicks north of our objective to avoid being seen. We'll hoof it the rest of the way." He took hold of the control stick. Looking at the terrain, I could easily understand why he chose to approach from the north. There was a forest there that would provide cover the entire way from our landing zone to a point just under two clicks from our primary objective. I would then fire from the tree line, right there in my comfort zone. Now I know plenty of snipers who will tell you without the slightest bit of hesitation that it's absolutely impossible to hit consistently from that distance; but like I said, they're using laze rifles, I'm packing a fifty cal' bolter. Some form of this weapon has been used by snipers for as long as man can remember, and for good reason. I can take the head off an enemy at three clicks, two's my sweet spot. At that range, my first target will be dead before anyone hears the crack of my bolter. The second and possibly third will drop before anyone knows what's happening. Like I said, I'm very good at what I do. Christoff programmed the entry sequence and hit the execute icon, bringing us around to begin the entry process. I felt an almost imperceptible shake as the craft made contact with Subjuga Two's Earth-like atmosphere. Night Hawks use a slow descent to prevent the atmospheric flare that would make a normal ship's entry visible for miles. It's about the smoothest planetary landing you'll ever make, far removed from the gut wrenching drop-ships the Navy typically uses. I flexed my hands and stretched my fingers out. Then turned my neck from side to side, feeling the bones crack within before placing the helmet upon my head. The heads up display, (HUD); lit up and cycled through the startup process. COOLING NOMINAL BIOMECHANICAL INTER F ACE NOMINAL JUMP JETS NOMINAL SENSORS NOMINAL I did a vox check with Gunney. "Loud and clear, let's get these bastards." I then activated my visor/scope interface and watched my suit and rifle sync data with each other. SUIT/USER WEAPON INTER F ACE NOMINAL I then checked my suit's power supply. SUIT POWER 99.8% LEVELS SET FOR OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE A standard suit of armor is typically good for two to three days on one charge, but I've killed one in as few as twelve hours. That was one hell of a day, though, in which I lost half my squad. A recon suit, on the other hand, is designed to conserve power, with an extended cell that allows me to operate for up to a week if I'm carful; so needless to say, I had absolutely no fear of running out of power on this very short mission. Chapter 3 We touched down in a small clearing amidst a heavily wooded area twenty clicks north of our target. I programmed an auto-extract in another clearing just three clicks from our fire positions. Any sniper worth half his salt always has a ready means of escape. Doing this seemingly mundane and easily overlooked task has in all actuality saved our hides on more than a couple of occasions. The ramp dropped, and I took my first steps on Subjuga Two. I felt the weight change immediately. I'm one hundred ninety-seven centimeters tall and one hundred twelve kilos of pure muscle, which makes me bigger and stronger than most people. The lessened gravity of Subjuga Two made me about ten percent lighter and stronger. My natural size is another thing that throws most people. My sheer physical ability coupled with this size has led Christoff and many others to compare me to a Space Marine. My third year in -based on high marks in physical fitness and weapons proficiency- the Ultramarines actually tried to recruit me, but the imperceptible

wrongness of my personality caused the recruitment officer to label psychologically unfit to receive the gene-seed. Whatever the frag that means; I am who I am and if they didn't want me, the hell with em'. The strength increase would be a definite advantage; the enemy would also benefit, but not as much. Their bodies were probably already adapting to the lessened grav. It's common knowledge that the human body always adapts to the local environment. The effect is pretty standard; increased gravity will make you stronger, decreased will make you weaker. To mitigate this effect and remain ready for any environment I may be ordered to fight in; I consistently train in the grav-room at greatly increased G's. I put the cutter in standby with the auto-extract function ready to go. This prompted Gunney to come up and slap me on the side of the helmet. I slapped him back. We then grabbed each other by the helmet and butted our heads together. "RECON!" we both yelled. Pre-combat ritual complete, I activated my helmet-cam so it would record everything that followed; I then turned south and began to run. We started at a nice clip of twenty-five kilometers an hour, an easy clip. We moved in complete silence through a picturesque deciduous forest with Gunney leading the way. There was no foliage on the ground which helped make our go of it all the quieter. I love to run. It makes me feel free, far from the stigma that's affected me my entire life. I took the time it would take us to get to our target to take in the natural untouched beauty of Subjuga Two. The scenery was breathtaking with a myriad of different multicolored trees and vegetation. About halfway to our destination, I was briefly followed by a trio of strange, pink-colored birds with four wings; that much to my surprise seemed completely unafraid of me. They were just curious of these strange monsters in all black armor that had come to their home with the intention of doing very bad things to very bad people. As we approached our objective, we slowed to a walk and stopped in a small clearing just three clicks from our first fire positions. We then proceeded to double check our armor and weapons. "This is our extraction point," Gunney said, referring to our present location as he pulled a map of the area up on our HUDs. He scrolled the image to the south, so it now displayed our target area. "Your fire point is here." A blue dot labeled (FP 1), popped up on my display two clicks northwest of our target. "My observation point is here." A second blue dot labeled (OP 2), appeared to the southwest of the clearing half a click closer to the compound than my position. "Targets are here and here." Two more red dots appeared near the xenos site, one next to the ruins; the other next to a prefabbed human habitat. "Scans show roughly ten enemy combatants with twenty to thirty non-combatant slave laborers working here." "Plan of attack?" I asked. "Cool your ion-jets; I'm getting there." He admonished, "Now, even though these guys are slaves, it's likely some of them are now so corrupted by Chaos that they'll probably take up arms against us. So keep an eye on them just in case." I'm the best sniper in our battle group, but Gunney Christoff is by far the most experienced spotter. I hadn't even considered the point he'd just made before he'd made it. I guess that's why he's in charge, and I'm not. He continued, "If they're dumb enough to take up weapons I'll handle them; you just keep your focus on the guards." "Check Gunney." "Plan of attack is standard. You will open up on the highest value targets I identify and maintain fire until your position is discovered. At which point you will proceed to fire point two." A third blue dot labeled, (FP-2) appeared on my screen followed by a fourth not far from it labeled (OP-2). "This is my second position. I'll probably be discovered first, so

you will cover me if and when the time comes. We will then eliminate any remaining opposition from our secondary positions." Gunney marked our current position with a blue triangle labeled (EP), "This is the extraction point" he said referring to the spot I'd already programmed the cutter to land in. I looked around the LZ, "With only ten to fifteen hostiles I doubt we'll need it." "I agree, but know it's here. Got it?" "Got it." "Then let's move out. And Ice..." "Yes?" "Emperor protect us." With that, he keyed up the Imperial Anthem to play over our headsets. He did this every time we were about to fight Chaos. It was more for his nerves than anything; he knew Chaos didn't affect me, another reason he coined the name Ice Man Chapter 4 We both reached position without incident though it did take over an hour to traverse the last kilometer. We had to check for electronic security along the way. I didn't run into anything, but Gunney's position was closer than mine, and he reported a device near it, which he then circumvented. I crept up to my first hide, low-crawling into a perfect spot under some brush next to a tree at the edge of the wood-line and waited patiently. I had to wait another half hour for Gunney to reach his position. He then sent me a text letting me know he was in position and proceeding to identify targets. It was late afternoon in Subjuga Two's nineteen hour day, and Subjuga Prime was setting in the east. I estimated we had about ninety minutes of useful daylight left. I zoomed my visor in on our objective and could only see seven of the ten guards. The other three must have been inside the habitat or xenos ruin. My bet was the ruin because all the lights in the habitat were off. I watched as workers milled in and out of the site and from time to time brought pieces of rock and unknown artifact out with them. Every so often a guard would again get frustrated and beat another slave; which was funny at first, but got old quick. I scanned the site and let my eyes settle upon a guard who was working on the cutter to the south of the ruins. He was underneath the left wing adjusting something. He appeared to be working on one of its engines. Just as I identified the cutter's pilot, Gunney outlined him on my HUD in an orange box labeled (PT PILOT) Primary target pilot. The transparent orange outline followed him wherever he went on my display, always keeping him framed within its borders. He would have been my first choice too. Neutralizing the pilot would make escape easier for us and pursuit more difficult for them. Two more orange boxes popped up around two more guards labeled (PT-2 OIC) and (PT-3 NCOIC) identifying the officer and non-commissioned officer in charge. The boxes followed my three targets around the site. I then saw three pink boxes outline and follow the three Gunney would take down. The seventh was left for whoever got to him first. I cycled through my marks from right to left to get the motion and make sure my aim was true. Gunney sent wind data. It was blowing just six or seven kilometers an hour. Unlike a laze rifle, environmental factors come into play when aiming a bolter. At this distance wind and gravity would have a significant, but predictable effect on the bullet's flight path. I would have to aim above and to the right of each of my three targets to hit them. So much so, that my cross hairs wouldn't even be on them when I pulled the trigger. Wind and gravity would push the bullet down and to the left during its flight and place it exactly where I wanted. It took years of training to master this ancient knowledge, but my thorough understanding of these things is what's separated me from lesser snipers. I zoomed the scope of the SK-43 in on my first target and made the appropriate adjustment to my aim. "Primary target locked," I said over the vox channel. "Roger that; fire when

ready." I flipped my selector lever to fire and placed my index finger on the trigger. I then inhaled slowly and held my breath to steady my aim. I slowly began to squeeze until the bolter issued a loud crack as the round discharged, causing it to kick me hard in the shoulder. I was already lining up my second shot when I saw his head explode. The bolter kicked hard again as I pulled the trigger on the second target who was just starting to turn. The bullet struck him in the side of his neck, instantly decapitating him where he stood. A spray of blood gushed from his neck a full meter above his dropping body. Gunney's first dropped with two accurate laze shots to the chest. I lined up my third whose legs had started working before his brain did. I watched with a smile as the idiot ran straight towards my position. I pulled the trigger and put a hole bigger than my head through his chest. To my surprise, he took an additional three steps before his body realized its heart and lungs were no longer anywhere to be found. I saw Gunney's second target die from a laze round that vaporized his face. Gunney's third and my fourth were running by this time, the slaves had panicked and were scattering in all directions. My guy got lucky and made it to cover behind a rockcrete wall my current ammunition wouldn't penetrate. So I lined up Gunney's man and shot him instead. "Sights off mine!" he spat over the vox. A guard came running out of the xenos structure, and I fired on him. Gunney hit first. His laze round dropped him milliseconds before my bullet could travel the distance, causing me to miss. Frag! I heard Gunney chuckle. Now bullets travel at extraordinary speed, but lasers travel at the speed of light. Technology, not skill, robbed me of that kill. "Get the smart one," Gunney said in reference to the guard now returning fire from behind the rockcrete wall. Horribly aimed laze shots were also being fired from inside the ruin. I dropped the expended magazine and slapped the mag of armor piercing rounds into place. I charged the rifle and took aim at a spot on the wall directly in front of the so-called, "smart one." I lined up the shot and squeezed the trigger. I watched the round put a very small hole in the face of the barrier; yet another very useful thing a laze-rifle can't do. The only confirmation of my kill was a spray of blood from behind the wall. This all took less than ten seconds. Ten seconds of glory. All my training paid for itself in that very short span of time. Little did I know; that no amount of training in the world would prepare me for what would happen next. Chapter 5 The laze fire coming from within the site abruptly stopped. Shortly after, a dismembered torso flew out from the darkness within. Everything became deathly silent. It remained that way for more than a few seconds. I eventually began to see movement from within the tomb and very slowly an object began to coalesce from within. The unknown shape continued to grow steadily as it neared the light until finally it turned into the form of a hulking giant. It stopped at the edge of the darkness just before I could make a positive identification and paused there for a second. I was just getting ready to put a round into its massive silhouette when without warning, it very purposely walked the rest of the way into the light; finally revealing the true nature of its horrifying self as it did. Holding a screaming red power axe in its right hand, and the largest hand bolter I'd ever seen in its left; it stepped amidst the carnage we'd just wrought like nothing in the world was wrong. I magnified the image on my visor and saw the marks of Chaos inscribed all over the ancient red power armor he wore. My mouth dropped open as I recognized this beast for what it really was. Even though I'd never before seen one in person, it only took one cursory glance for me to be absolutely sure. He was one of the few, the dreaded, Chaos

Marines. Now before I continue, I have to share with you the little I knew about Chaos Marines at the time. The first being; that beyond any doubt, they are absolutely the most feared beings in the known universe. Genetically engineered super-soldiers, they actually share a genetic link to the Emperor himself, they're known to be a nearly unstoppable force on the battlefield. They are all, at least, two meters tall and can weigh in excess of two hundred kilos. In truth; they're about the closest thing a human will ever get to actually becoming a walking tank. In fact, I've personally heard stories of infantry commanders calling in tanks just to stop a squad or two of Chaos Marines. The fear they command is so great; that stories of them are frequently told to the newest of troopers with the sole intention of scaring the hell out of them. Seeing the beast that now stood just a couple thousand meters away, I realized that none of these stories had exaggerated in the very least. Most people would have frozen at the mere sight of this monster, but for some reason, I can honestly say to you that he didn't scare me, not even a little bit. I just looked at him through the eyes of a trained sniper and proceeded to try and figure out the best possible way to go about killing him. I would soon find out what all those infantry commanders already knew; that there isn't any good way, short of calling in a tank, to effectively kill a Chaos Marine. The massive helmet he wore started scanning the tree line from left to right passing right over Gunney's position and settling on mine. Impossible! My hide was too good to be seen from that distance. I guess no one found it necessary to take time out of there day to tell him what he was doing was impossible; because without any hesitation he raised the axe and pointed it directly at me. He simultaneously opened fire on Gunney's position with the bolter in his left. As he did, two more giants burst from the tomb at full gait, both moving impossibly fast straight for my position. The one pointing at me broke left and similarly headed straight for Gunney Christoff. I quickly analyzed the situation. Three targets - all fully armored Chaos Marines, two for me, one for Gunney. Horrible odds I know, but I also knew that most wars are won not through statistics, but through the brave and decisive actions of the men fighting them. As I watched these monsters move with impossible speed, I remembered that Gunney's position was closer than mine, so his would reach him about a minute before the two tracking me. Time for some decisive action. I lined up one of mine and fired. The fifty caliber armor-piercing round struck him directly in the chest and immediately dropped him to the ground. Great, they can die. Seeing this, the other one pulled up short and pinned me down with impossibly accurate fire from his hand bolter. With rounds zipping by just meters away; his suppressive fire had very effectively immobilized me. I wasn't going anywhere, to move was to die. I looked over to Gunney and saw that he wasn't moving either, but he also wasn't firing. He was just lying there, very still, in the same position as before. "Gunney it CAN see you, hiding will NOT work, move to O.P. two!" No answer. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught more movement. By the Emperor, it wasn't possible! The one I'd just shot was getting up! That was an armor piercing round I'd hit him with! I'd just put that same round through thirty centimeters of rockcrete, but by the Emperor he stood up! A fist-sized chunk of ceramite missing from his chest plate. As soon as he was on his feet he pulled up its bolter, leveled the massive gun, and also began firing at me with uncanny accuracy. This allowed the other to holster its bolter and continue the charge. I had maybe a minute left before I was toast. He would surely cleave me in half with that axe when he reached my position. I

looked over to Gunney, who had maybe thirty seconds less to live than I did. "GUNNEY MOVE!" No answer. He was transfixed by the sight of the dreaded Chaos Marine. Think Mabien think! I needed to buy him more time. I sighted in on his Marine and lined up the shot center mast -quickly realized how ineffective that would be - and targeted his legs where I knew the armor was thinner instead. "I might not be able to kill you, but I can damn sure slow you down." The bolter jerked twice as I sent two armor piercing rounds into his legs. The impacting lead caused him to trip, fall, and slide face first across the ground a good ten meters. "Gunney, you need to get your ass in gear!" A bullet smashed into the tree to my right. My brain started working then, and I quickly formulated a plan. I activated the cutter's auto-extract function and read as the computer's acknowledgement flash across my HUD. AUTO EXTRACT ACTIVATED - ETA 4 MINUTES I was on my last armor piercing round and silently cursed myself for not bringing more. I still had plenty of personnel rounds but was pretty sure they'd be totally ineffective against these monsters' armor. I leveled my rifle on the marine holding me down and aimed center-mast. That's when I saw it. My first shot had almost penetrated his chest plate. A second shot placed directly within the first would surely hit flesh. I had a chance if I could just hit that fist-sized target from fifteen hundred meters out. The shot would be even harder since I was no longer receiving environmental data from Gunney. I looked down the scope and prepared to take one of the most difficult shots of my entire life. I held my breath, steadied the rifle, and began to squeeze the trigger. Wait! The grass... it wasn't swaying anymore. The wind had gone, died down. At the last possible moment, I adjusted my aim and pulled the trigger. The milliseconds it took the bullet to traverse the distance stretched into eternity. I was just beginning to think I'd missed when a beautiful fountain of blood gushed from his chest-plate. The marine spun violently with a gruesome spray of blood and muscle that looked like a macabre version of one of the fountains in the capitol city of my home-world. The stricken creature spun twice before landing on his back, motionless, with eyes locked skyward. This time, he was truly dead; the bullet bouncing around inside his armor had liquidated his organs. The marine still charging, slowed, came to a stop, and looked back just in time to watch him die. He stood there dumbfounded for a second before letting out a savage and bloodcurdling roar, "I WILL EAT YOUR SOUL!" "YOU'RE NEXT!" I yelled back. I looked over to Gunney again, "Maximus, wake your ass up! We need to extract... NOW!" I dropped the expended magazine and again cursed myself for not bringing more armor piercing bullets. I slapped a fresh one in and was just sliding the bolt forward when an idea hit me. I opened a vox channel with Gunney and started humming the notes to the Imperial Anthem. I hoped desperately the melody would bring him out of it. His Marine was up and headed for him again; half walking, half jogging with blood pouring from his wounded legs. Gunney had maybe thirty seconds left. I hummed louder as I watched it continue its death march. The beast fired up his power axe. I hummed louder... I started singing the words drilled into my head from day one as a trooper. I looked back to my Marine, who was again headed for me at full speed. I opened fire. I watched every single bullet bounce off his armor. He was closing fast. I kept singing. The first signs of life from Gunney came when I heard him humming along to my piss-poor rendition of our Imperial Anthem. I was beginning to think he wasn't going to snap out of it in time when his lazy rifle finally opened up. "For Emperor's sake, stop your damned singing

already." "Roger that." I watched him put dozens of accurate lazy shots into his steadily advancing Marine. I couldn't believe my eyes as the hulk's armor shrugged off every single round. The Marine marched through the hail of fire like he didn't even notice the lasers hitting his suit. "What the hell does it take to hurt this thing?!" He yelled over the vox. "I seriously doubt you have anything that can. You need to move right now!" "Roger that. Moving to O.P. Two; please tell me you activated the extraction sequence." "Affirmative." "Good... Moving now." Gunney got up and started to run. Also seeing this, his marine stopped, drew his bolter, and quickly began to track him. "Move it Gunney; it's got a bead on you." He was moving incredibly fast, but his foe's uncanny aim tracked true. Bullets started exploding just ahead and behind every step he took. He ran with all his might and dove behind a large tree just as the marine expended his final round. Good, he's safe for the moment. A wet cough came over the vox. "I'm hit, Frost... it's bad." He coughed twice more, and my heart began to sink. "I'm coming to get you!" "Negative," he gasped, "you'll never make it." His Marine was running again; it seemed as if his legs were healing right before my eyes. He'd maybe fifteen seconds. He was right, even if I started now I wouldn't make it. That didn't matter though; Gunney was my best friend, and I was going to do whatever I could to save him. I re-aimed at the running beast and fired again, but once again the bullet just bounced off his armor. What I would give for just one more mag of armor piercing rounds. "Forget me and extract!" "Frag off, I'm coming to get you!" "You WILL NOT! You WILL extract! That's an order." I heard him issue a series of sickly coughs. I then watched as he pulled the pin from a frag grenade and chucked it around the tree towards the Marine. It fell short, and I again watched in disbelief as the Marine ran right through the explosion coming out the other side blackened, but unhurt. "One of us has to escape and let fleet know what's going on here. You have to make it out of here... ALIVE!" I zoomed in. He was now sitting with his back against the tree. I saw bright red blood pouring from his side where the massive slug had made contact and blown straight through the armor protecting it. The fact he was still conscious was a solid testament to his extreme discipline. "I froze Mabien. I saw Chaos and froze... this is my fault. You have to make it." He took his helmet off and coughed up blood. "Now MOVE YOUR ASS! That's a fragging order!" He pulled the pins from the rest of his grenades and placed them between his legs to hold the spring-loaded spoons in place. The marine had reached him and was just rounding the massive tree he'd been using as cover. "Emperor protect you." The marine stepped around the tree and looked down at the broken soldier. He holstered his sidearm and took a two-handed grip on his chain axe, "Your soul is mine." I heard over the vox. Gunney spat blood at him, "That may be," he released his hold on the grenades. The marine watched dumbfounded as the spoons flew free, "But your ass is mine!" The marine started to backpedal, but it was too late. The grenades detonated simultaneously in one massive explosion. They blew the marine a whole five meters through the air and totally annihilated my best friend in the process. The marine landed flat on its face in mangled armor and ceased to move. "NOOOO!" The only friend I'd ever known was gone. There was nothing left, nothing to bury. Nothing to prove my brother in arms, Gunnery Sergeant Maximus Christoff, ever existed. He would live on only in my memories. That was it. I'd had it; enough hiding. I would have my vengeance. I threw out everything I'd ever learned in sniper school; stood up, and stepped out of my hide to face

my tormentor head on. Seeing this unexpected action; the surprised Marine pulled up short, stopped, and holstered his sidearm. We both just stood there for a minute and stared each other down. Anger over the loss of Gunney made it hard for me to breath, so I pulled off my helmet. All sense of self-preservation left me at that moment, and sweat and tears ran down my face as I dropped it to the ground. He laughed demonically, "Don't cry mortal, you'll be joining him soon enough." He didn't seem to notice or even care as I flexed my hands on the SK-43 and thumbed the selector lever to shotgun, rage burning in my heart. "But answer me this," he continued, "Do I not frighten you? I see no fear in your eyes, only hate." "What's there to fear you worthless son of a whore? You're just another traitor for me to kill." Hate dripped from every word I spoke. "Look at me. Look at the runes engraved upon my armor. Do you actually feel nothing?" I looked him up and down, "Yeah, I feel something. I feel it rather strongly." "And that feeling? Is it fear?" "No." "Is it confusion?" "No." "Then what? What is it that you feel?" "I feel you look like a fragging idiot." I cocked my shotgun, slamming a shell into place. He stepped forward, took a two-handed grip on his massive axe, and revved it up. He started to take another step, but something stopped him short, and he shook his head violently. "There... there's something different about you. I... I feel nothing. I cannot feel your presence." Agitation crept into his voice, "What's wrong with you?" I stared at him coldly. He was raising his voice now. "I can see you standing there, but the warp is telling me nothing." His confusion was quickly turning into rage. "WHY, CAN, I, NOT, FEEL YOU?!" He roared. I didn't know what the hell he was talking about, but I saw my chance, "Oh you'll feel me all right." I wiped the sweat from my face and dried my power-glove in the black stubble of my buzz cut hair. I placed my hand back on the shotgun prepared for action, "And I'll be the last thing you ever feel!" With lightning speed, I whipped the shotgun tightly to my shoulder, leveled it on his face, and pulled the trigger. BOOM! The first shell spider webbed his face plate. BOOM! The second struck him directly in the right side of his chest with such force he dropped his axe and started stumbling backwards. I walked forward, firing from the hip. Cha-chick, BOOM! Cha-chick, BOOM! Cha-chick, BOOM! Three more shells slammed into his chest. I continued my advance faster now, quickly closing the distance to increase the damage each slug would do. Cha-Chick, BOOM! He started to spin. Cha-Chick BOOM! He continued his spin, tripped, fell, and landed flat on his back. Huge chunks of ceramite were missing from his chest-plate. He was struggling to sit up when I reached him. I placed my foot on his chest and forced him back to the ground. Cha-Chick.... I stuck the shotgun right into his face. As he looked down the barrel I could see through his broken face-plate and into his eyes; I detected a hint of fear in them. All the fight left him then and he stopped resisting, his face now full of confusion. "What are you?" He asked pleadingly. "I'm Force Recon, you son of a bitch!" BOOM! The shell blew straight through his helmet and tore half his face off down to the skull, taking his left eye with it. His whole body shuddered violently as I expended my last round. He lay still, and I'm quite sure, dead.