

# ***THE LAST CHANCERS***

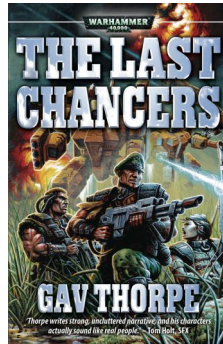
*A Warhammer 40,000 omnibus*

*By Gav Thorpe*

Contains the novels *13<sup>th</sup> Legion*, *Kill Team* and *Annihilation Squad*

*Kage is desperate man. A hardened criminal, he is given one last chance at redemption. Under the command of the seasoned Colonel Schaeffer, Kage and his team of fellow criminals are sent off to nightmarish warzones and on countless, increasingly dangerous missions.*

*The Last Chancers collects 13th Legion, Kill Team and Annihilation Squad into one great value omnibus novel and tells the story of Kage's illustrious career. Can Kage keep his head while everyone is getting theirs shot off? Can he ever redeem himself in the eyes of the cold, inhuman Schaeffer? How can he possibly get out of the next battle alive and with his sanity intact?*



## ***MORE OMNIBUSES FROM THE BLACK LIBRARY***

*The Inquisition War* by Ian Watson

*(contains the novels Draco, Harlequin & Chaos Child)*

*Eisenhorn* by Dan Abnett *(contains the novels Xenos, Malleus & Hereticus)*

*The Konrad Saga* by David Garnett

*(contains the novels Konrad, Shadowbreed & Warblade)*

*The Vampire Genevieve* by Jack Yeovil *(contains the novels Drachenfels, Genevieve Undead, Beasts in Velvet & Silver Nails)*

*The Ambassador Chronicles* by Graham McNeill

*(contains the novels The Ambassador & Ursun's Teeth)*

*The Ultramarines Omnibus* by Graham McNeill

*(contains the novels Nightbringer, Warriors of Ultramar, Dead Sky Black Sun)*

The following is an excerpt from the anthology *The Last Chancers* by Gav Thorpe.

Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Copyright © Games Workshop Ltd, 2006. All rights reserved. Reproduction prohibited, in any form, including on the internet.

For more details email [publishing@games-workshop.co.uk](mailto:publishing@games-workshop.co.uk) or visit the Black Library website [www.blacklibrary.com](http://www.blacklibrary.com)

The guardsman's nose explodes with blood as my fist crashes between his eyes. Next, I hit him with a left to the chin, knocking him backwards a step. He ducks out of the next punch, spitting blood from cracked lips. My nose is filled with the smell of old sweat and fresh blood, and perspiration from the blazing sun trickles down my face and throat. All around I can hear chanting and cheering.

'Fraggin' kink his fraggin' neck!' I recognise Joret's voice.

'Break the son of an ork apart!' Franx yells.

The Guardsmen from Chorek are cheering their man on too, their flushed faces looking dark in contrast to their white and grey camouflage jackets and leggings.

He makes a lunge at me, his face swathed in blood, his dusty uniform covered in red stains. I easily side-step his bullish charge, bringing my knee up hard into his abdomen and feeling some ribs crack under the blow. He's doubled up now, his face a mask of pain, but I'm not going to stop there. I grab the back of his head with both hands and ram my knee up into his face, hearing the snap of his cheek or jaw fracturing. He collapses sideways, and as he falls, the toecap of my standard-issue boot connects with his chin, hurling his head backward into the hard soil. I'm about to lay into him again when I realise everything's gone dead quiet. I look up to see what the hell's happening, panting hard.

Pushing through the Chorek ranks is a massively muscled man, and I spot the insignia of a master sergeant on the blue sleeve of his

tunic. He's got the black pelt of some shaggy creature tied as a cloak over his left shoulder and his eyes are fixed on me with murderous intent. In his hand is a sixty-centimetre metal parade baton, red jewels clustered around one end, and as he steps up to me he smashes the point of it into my guts, knocking the wind out of me and forcing me to my knees.

'Penal legion scum!' the Chorek master sergeant barks. 'I'll show you what they should have done to you!'

He pulls his arm back for a good swing at me but then stops in mid-strike. Just try it, I think to myself, I've killed harder men and creatures than you. I'm still fired up from the fight and ready to pounce on this jumped-up bully of an officer. I'll give him the same treatment I've just dealt out to his man. He glances over my head and a shadow falls over me. A prickly sensation starts at the back of my neck and turns into a slight shiver down my spine. I turn to look over my shoulder, still clutching my aching guts, and see that he's there. The Colonel. Colonel Schaeffer, commanding officer of the 13th Penal Legion, known by those unlucky enough to be counted amongst its number as the Last Chancers. The swollen dusk sun's behind him – the sun always seems to be behind him, he's always in shadow or silhouette when you first see him, like it's a talent he's got. All I can see is the icy glitter of his sharp blue eyes, looking at the master sergeant, not me. I'm glad of that because his face is set like stone, a sure sign that he is in a bad mood.

'That will be all, master sergeant,' the Colonel says calmly, just standing there with his left hand resting lightly on the hilt of his power sword.

'This man needs disciplining,' replies the Chorek, arm still raised for the blow. I think this guy is stupid enough to try it as well, and secretly hope he will, just to see what Schaeffer does to him.

'Disperse your troopers from the landing field,' the Colonel tells the master sergeant, 'and mine will then be soon out of your way.'

The Chorek officer looks like he's going to argue some more, but then I see he makes the mistake of meeting the Colonel's gaze and I smirk as I see him flinch under that cold stare. Everyone sees something different in those blue eyes, but it's always something

painful and unpleasant that they're reminded of. The Colonel doesn't move or say anything while the master sergeant herds his men away, pushing them with the baton when they turn to look back. He details two of them to drag away the trooper I knocked out and he casts one murderous glance back at me. I know his kind, an unmistakable bully, and the Choreks are going to suffer for his humiliation when they reach their camp.

'On your feet, Kage!' snaps the Colonel, still not moving a muscle. I struggle up, wincing as soreness flashes across my stomach from the master sergeant's blow. I don't meet the Colonel's gaze, but already I'm tensing, expecting the sharp edge of his tongue.

'Explain yourself, lieutenant,' he says quietly, folding his arms like a cross tutor.

'That Chorek scum said we should've all died in Deliverance, sir,' I tell him. 'Said we didn't deserve to live. Well, sir, I've just been on burial detail for nearly a hundred and fifty Last Chancers, and I lost my temper.'

'You think that gutter scum like you deserve to live?' the Colonel asks quietly.

'I know that we fought as hard as any bloody Chorek Guardsman, harder even,' I tell him, looking straight at him for the first time. The Colonel seems to think for a moment, before nodding sharply.

'Good,' he says, and I can't stop my jaw from dropping in surprise. 'Get these men onto the shuttle – without any more fighting, Lieutenant Kage,' the Colonel orders, turning on his heel and marching off back towards the settlement of Deliverance.

I cast an astonished look at the other Last Chancers around me, the glance met with knotted brows and shrugs. I compose myself for a moment, trying not to work out what the hell that was all about. I've learnt it's best not to try to fathom out the Colonel sometimes, it'll just tie your head in knots.

'Well, you useless bunch of fraggin' lowlifes,' I snap at the remnants of my platoon, 'you heard the Colonel. Get your sorry hides onto that shuttle at the double!'

As I jog towards the blocky shape of our shuttle, Franx falls in on my left. I try to ignore the big sergeant, still annoyed with him from a couple of days ago, when he could have got me into deep trouble with the Colonel.

‘Kage,’ he begins, glancing down across his broad shoulder at me. ‘Haven’t had a chance to talk to you since... Well, since before the tyranids attacked.’

‘You mean since before you tried to lead the platoon into the jungles on some stupid escape attempt?’ I snap back, my voice purposefully harsh. He wasn’t going to get off easily, even if I did consider him something of a friend. A friendship he’d pushed to the limits by trying to incite a rebellion around me.

‘Can’t blame me, Kage,’ he says, with a slight whine to his deep voice that irritates me. ‘Should’ve all died back then, you know it.’

‘I’m still alive, and I know that if I’d let you take off I wouldn’t be,’ I reply, not even bothering to look at him. ‘The Colonel would’ve killed me for letting you go, even before the ’nids had a chance.’

‘Yeah, I know, I know,’ Franx tells me apologetically.

‘Look,’ I say, finally meeting his eye, ‘I can’t blame you for wanting out. Emperor knows, it’s what we all want. But you’ve got to be smarter about it. Pick your time better, and not one that’s gonna leave me implicated.’

‘I understand, Kage,’ Franx nods before falling silent. One of the shuttle crewmen, looking hot and bothered in his crisp blue and white Navy uniform, is counting us off as we head up the loading ramp, giving us sullen looks as if he wishes they could just leave us here. It’s hot inside the shuttle, which has slowly baked in the harsh sun. I see the others settling into places along the three benches, securing themselves with thick restraint belts that hang from beams that stretch at head height along the shuttle chamber’s ten-metre length. As I find a place and strap myself into the restraining harnesses, Franx takes the place next to me.

‘How’s Kronin?’ he asks, fumbling with a metal buckle as he pulls the leather straps tighter across his barrel chest.

‘Haven’t seen him. He went up on the first shuttle run,’ I tell him, checking around to see that everybody else is secured. Seeing that the survivors of my platoon are sitting as tight as a Battle Sister’s affections, I give the signal to the naval rating waiting at the end of the seating bay. He disappears through the bulkhead and the red take-off lights flash three times in warning.

‘I haven’t got the full story about Kronin yet,’ I say to Franx, pushing my back against the hard metal of the bench to settle myself. Franx is about to reply when the rumble of thrusters reverberates through the fuselage of the shuttle. The rumbling increases in volume to a roar and I feel myself being pushed further into the bench by the shuttle’s take-off. The whole craft starts to shake violently as it gathers momentum, soaring upwards into the sky above Deliverance. My booted feet judder against the mesh decking of the shuttle and my backside slides slightly across the metal bench. My stomach is still painful, and I feel slightly sick as the shuttle banks over sharply to take its new course. The twelve centimetre slash in my thigh begins to throb painfully as more blood is forced into my legs by the acceleration. I grit my teeth and ignore the pain. Through a viewport opposite I can see the ground dropping away, the seemingly haphazard scattering of shuttles and dropships sitting a kilometre beyond the walls of Deliverance. The settlement itself is receding quickly, until I can only dimly make out the line of the curtain wall and the block of the central keep. Then we’re into the clouds and everything turns white.

As we break out of the atmosphere the engines turn to a dull whine and a scattering of stars replaces the blue of the sky outside the viewport. Franx leans over.

‘They say Kronin is touched,’ he says, tapping the side of his head to emphasise his point.

‘It’s bloody strange, I’ll give you that,’ I reply. ‘Something happened to him when he was in the chapel.’

‘Chapel?’ Franx asks, scratching his head vigorously through a thick bush of brown curls.

‘What did you hear?’ I say, curious to find out what rumours had started flying around, only a day after the battle against the tyranids.

Gossip is a good way of gauging morale, as well as the reactions to a recent battle. Of course, we're never happy, being stuck in a penal legion until we die, but sometimes some of the men are more depressed than usual. The fight against the alien tyrannids at the missionary station was horrific, combating monsters like them always is. I wanted to know what the men were focusing their thoughts on.

'Nothing really,' Franx says, trying unsuccessfully to shrug in the tight confines of the safety harness. 'People are saying that he went over the edge.'

'The way I heard it, he and the rest of 2nd platoon had fallen back to the chapel,' I tell him. 'There were 'nids rushing about everywhere, coming over the east wall. Most of them were the big warriors, smashing at the doors of the shrine with their claws, battering their way in. They crashed through the windows and got inside. There was nowhere to run; those alien bastards just started hacking and chopping at everything inside. They lost the whole platoon except for Kronin. They must have left him for dead, since the Colonel found him under a pile of bodies.'

'That's a sure way to crack,' Franx says sagely, a half-smile on his bulbous lips.

'Anyway,' I continue, 'Kronin is cracked, like you say. Keeps talking all this gibber, constantly jabbering away about something that no one could work out.'

'I've seen that sort of thing before,' says Poal, who's been listening from the other side of Franx. His narrow, chiselled face has a knowing air about it, like he was a sage dispensing the wisdom of the ancients or something. 'I had a sergeant once whose leg was blown off by a mine on Gaulis II. He just kept repeating his brother's name, minute after minute, day after day. He slit his own throat with a med's scalpel in the end.'

There's a moment of silence as everybody considers this, and I carry on with the story to distract them from thoughts of self-murder.

'Yeah, that's pretty grim,' I tell them, 'but Kronin's case just gets weirder. Turns out, he's not mumbling just any old thing, oh no.'

He's quoting scripture, right? Nathaniel, the preacher back in Deliverance, overhears him saying out lines from the Litanies of Faith. Stuff like: "And the Beast from the Abyss rose up with its multitudes and laid low the servants of the Emperor with its clawed hands". Things like that.'

'Fragged if I've ever seen Kronin with a damned prayer book, not in two fragging years of fighting under the son of an ork,' Jorett announces from the bench down the middle of the shuttle, looking around. Everybody's listening in now that we can be heard over the dimmed noise of the engines. Forty pairs of eyes look towards me in anticipation of the next twist of the tale.

'Exactly!' I declare with an emphatic nod, beginning to play to the audience a little bit. I'm enjoying having a new tale to tell for a change, and it keeps them from falling out with each other, which usually happens when we wind down from a mission.

'Nathaniel sits down with him for a couple of hours while we bury the dead,' I continue, passing my gaze over those that can see me. 'I heard him explaining his view on things to the Colonel. Seems Kronin had a visitation from the Emperor himself while he lay half-dead in the chapel. Says he has been given divine knowledge. Of course, he doesn't actually say this, he's just quoting appropriate lines from the Litanies, like: "And the Emperor appeared with a shimmering halo and spake unto His people on Gathalamor." And like you say, how in the seven hells does he know any of this stuff?'

'There is nothing mystical about that,' answers Gappo, sitting on his own towards the rear of the shuttle. Nearly everybody seems to give an inward groan, except a couple of the guys who are looking forward to this new development in the entertainment. Myself, I've kind of come to like Gappo – he's not such a meathead as most of the others.

'Oh wise preacher,' Poal says with a sarcastic sneer, 'please enlighten us with your bountiful wisdom.'

'Don't call me "preacher"!' Gappo snarls, a scowl creasing his flat, middle-aged features. 'You know I have left that falsehood behind.'



‘Whatever you say, Gappo,’ Poal tells him with a disdainful look.

‘It’s quite simple really,’ Gappo begins to explain, patently ignoring Poal now. ‘You’ve all been to Ecclesiarchal services, hundreds even thousands of them. Whether you remember them or not, you’ve probably heard all of the Litanies of Faith and every line from the Book of Saints twice over. Kronin’s trauma has affected his mind, so that he can remember those writings and nothing else. It’s the only way he’s got left to communicate.’

There are a few nods, and I can see the sense of it. People’s heads are half-fragged up anyway, in my experience. It doesn’t take much to jog it loose, from what I’ve seen. Emperor alone knows how many times I’ve felt myself teetering on the edge of the insanity chasm. Luckily I’m as tough as grox hide and it hasn’t affected me yet. Not so as anyone’s told me, in any case.

‘Well I guess that makes more sense than the Emperor filling him with His divine spirit,’ says Mallory, a balding, scrawny malingerer sitting next to Poal. ‘After all, I don’t think the Emperor’s best pleased with our Lieutenant Kronin, ‘specially considering the fact that Kronin’s in the Last Chancers for looting and burning down a shrine.’

‘Of course it makes sense,’ Gappo says, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. ‘There might not be an Emperor at all!’

‘You shut your fragging mouth, Gappo Elfinzo!’ Poal spits, making the sign of the protective eagle over his chest with his right hand. ‘I may have murdered women and children and I know I’m a lowlife piece of ork crap, but I still think I shouldn’t have to share the same room with a fragging heretic!’

Poal starts to fumble at his straps, having trouble because his left arm ends in a hook instead of a hand. I can see things might be getting out of control.

‘That’s enough!’ I bark. ‘You all know the score. Doesn’t matter what you did to wind up as one of the Colonel’s doomed men, we’re all Last Chancers now. Now shut the frag up until we’re back on the transport.’

There are a few grumbles, but nobody says anything out loud. More than one of them here has had a cracked skull or a broken nose for answering me back. I'm not a bully, you understand, I just have a short temper and don't like it when my men start getting too disrespectful. Seeing that everybody is calming down, I close my eyes and try to get some sleep; it'll be another two hours before we dock.

The tramp of booted feet echoes around us as the Navy armsmen march us back to our cells. Left and right, along the seemingly endless corridor are the vaulted archways leading to the cargo bays, modified to carry human cargo in supposedly total security. There are twenty of the massive cells in all. Originally each held two hundred men, but after the past thirty months of near-constant war, nearly all of them stand empty now. It'll be even emptier for the rest of the trip; there's only about two hundred and fifty of us left after the defence of Deliverance. The armsmen swagger around, shotcannons grasped easily in heavily gloved hands or slung over their shoulders. Their faces are covered by the helms of their heavy-duty work suits, and their flash-protective visors conceal their features. Only the name badges stitched onto their left shoulder straps show that the same ten men have been escorting my platoon for the past two and a half years.

I see the Colonel waiting up ahead, with someone standing next to him. As we get closer, I see that it's Kronin, his small, thin body half-hunched as if weighed down by some great invisible burden. The lieutenant's narrow eyes flit and dart from side to side, constantly scanning the shadows, and he flinches as I step up to Schaeffer and salute.

'Lieutenant Kronin is the only survivor of 3rd platoon,' the Colonel tells me as he waves the armsmen to move the others inside, 'so I am putting him in with you. In fact, with so few of you left, you are going to be gathered into a single formation now. You will be in charge; Green was killed in Deliverance.'

'How, sir?' I ask, curious as to what happened to the other lieutenant, one of the hundred and fifty Last Chancers who was alive

two days ago and now is food for the flesh-ants of the nameless planet below us.

‘He was diced by a strangleweb,’ the Colonel says coldly, no sign of any emotion on his face at all. I wince inside – being slowly cut up as you try to struggle out of a constricting mesh of barbed muscle is a nasty way to go. Come to think of it, I’ve never thought of a nice way to go.

‘I am leaving it to you to organise the rest of the men into squads and to detail special duties,’ the Colonel says before stepping past me and striding down the corridor. A Departmento flunky swathed in an oversized brown robe hurries down to the Colonel carrying a massive bundle of parchments, and then they are both lost in the distant gloom.

‘Inside,’ orders an armsman from behind me, his nametag showing him to be Warrant Officer Hopkinsson.

The massive cell doors clang shut behind me, leaving me locked in this room with ten score murderers, thieves, rapists, heretics, looters, shirkers, desecrators, grave-robbers, necrophiles, maniacs, insubordinates, blasphemers and other assorted vermin for company. Still, it makes for interesting conversation sometimes.

‘Right!’ I call out, my voice rebounding off the high metal ceiling and distant bulkheads. ‘All sergeants get your sorry hides over here!’

As the order is passed around the massive holding pen, I gaze over my small force. There’s a couple of hundred of us left now, sitting or lying around in scattered groups on the metal decking, stretching away into the gloom of the chamber. Their voices babble quietly, making the metal walls ring slightly and I can smell their combined sweat from several days on the furnace-hot planet below. In a couple of minutes eight men are stood around me. I catch sight of an unwelcome face.

‘Who made you a sergeant, Rollis?’ I demand, stepping up to stand right in front of his blubbery face, staring straight into his beady black eyes.

‘Lieutenant Green did,’ he says defiantly, matching my stare.

‘Yeah? Well you’re just a trooper again now, you piece of dirt!’ I snap at him, pushing him away. ‘Get out of my sight, you fraggin’ traitor.’

‘You can’t do this!’ he shouts, taking a step towards me and half-raising a fist. My elbow snaps out sharply and connects with his throat, sending him gasping to the floor.

‘Can’t I?’ I snarl at him. ‘I guess I can’t do this either,’ I say, kicking him in the ribs. Forget about the murderers, it’s the out-and-out traitors like him that make me want to heave. With a venomous glance he gets to his hands and knees and crawls away.

‘Right,’ I say, turning to the others, putting the fat piece of filth from my mind. ‘Where were we?’

Alarm sirens are sounding everywhere, a piercing shrill that sets your teeth on edge. I’m standing with a pneu-mattock grasped in both hands, its engine chugging comfortably, wisps of oily smoke leaking from its exhaust vents.

‘Hurry up, wreck the place!’ someone shouts from behind me. I can hear the sound of machinery being smashed, pipelines being cut and energy coils being shattered. There’s a panel of dials in front of me and I place the head of the hammer against it, thumbing up the revs on the engine to full, the air filling with flying splinters of glass and shards of torn metal. Sparks of energy splash across my heavy coveralls, leaving tiny burn marks on the thick gloves covering my hands. I turn the pneu-mattock on a huge gear-and-chain mechanism behind the trashed panel, sending toothed wheels clanging to the ground and the heavy chain whipping past my head.

‘They’re coming!’ the earlier voice calls out over the din of twisting metal and fracturing glass. I look over my shoulder to see a bunch of security men hurrying through an archway to my left, wearing heavy carapace breastplates coloured dark red with the twisted chain and eye mark of the Harpikon Union picked out in bold yellow. They’ve all got vicious-looking slug guns, black enamelled pieces of metal that catch the light menacingly. People hurrying past jostle me, but it’s hard to see their faces, like they’re in a mist or something. I get a glimpse of a half-rotten skull resembling

a man called Snowton, but I know that Snowton died a year ago fighting pirates in the Zandis Belt. Other faces, faces of men who are dead, flit past. There's a thunderous roar and everybody starts rushing around. I realise that the Harpikon guards are firing. Bullets ricochet all over the place, zinging off pieces of machinery and thudding into the flesh of those around me. I try to run, but my feet feel welded to the floor. I look around desperately for somewhere to hide, but there isn't anywhere. Then I'm alone with the security men, the smoking muzzles of their guns pointing in my direction. There's a blinding flash and the thunder of shooting.

I wake up from the dream gasping for breath, sweat coating my skin despite the chill of the large cell. I fling aside the thin blanket that serves as my bed and sit up, placing my hands on the cold floor to steady myself as dizziness from the sudden movement swamps me. Gulping down what feels like a dead rat in my mouth, I look around. There's the usual night-cycle activity – mumbles and groans from the sleepless, the odd murmured prayer as some other poor soul is afflicted by the sleep-daemons. It's always the same once you've dropped into the Immaterium.

I've had the same nightmare every night in warp space for the past three years, ever since I joined the Imperial Guard. I'm always back in the hive on Olympas, carrying out a wreck-raid on a rival factory. Sometimes it's the Harpikon Union, like tonight; other times it's against the Jorean Consuls; and sometimes even the nobles of the Enlightened, though we never dared do that for real. There's always the walking dead as well. Folks from my past come back to haunt me: people I've killed, comrades who have died, my family, all of them appear in the nightmares. Lately I've realised that there's more and more of them after every battle, like the fallen are being added to my dreams. I always end up dying as well, which is perhaps the most disturbing thing. Sometimes I'm blown apart by gunfire, other times I'm sawn in half by a poweraxe or a chainsword, sometimes I'm burnt alive by firethrowers. Several people have told me that the warp is not bound in time like the real universe. Instead, you might see images from your past or your

future, all mixed together in strange ways. Interpreting warp dreams is a speciality of Lammax, one of the ex-Departmento men. I think they threw him into the penal legions for blasphemy after he offered to read the dreams of a quartermaster-major. He says it's my fear of death being manifested.

Suddenly there's a demented screaming from the far end of the cargo hold where we're held, down where the lighting has gone fritzzy and its arrhythmic pulsing gives you a headache. Nobody's slept down there for months, not since there was enough room for everyone to fit in at this end. With everyone gathered in one cell now, someone must have had to try to get to sleep down there. I push myself to my feet and pull on my boots over my bare feet. As I walk towards the commotion, I rub a hand across my bared chest to wipe off the sweat. My body tingles all over with a bizarre feeling of energy, the map of scars traced out across my torso feels strangely hot under my fingertips. I look down, half-expecting the old wounds to be glowing. They're not.

I tramp into the gloom, watched by most of the others. The screaming's loud enough to wake up the Navy ratings on the next deck up. I understand their suspicion and morbid curiosity, because sometimes when a man starts screaming in warp-space, it's not with his own voice. Luckily it's never happened to anyone I know, but there are guys here who tell tales of men being possessed by creatures from the warp. They either go completely mad and kill a load of people before collapsing and dying, or they get taken over totally becoming a body for some strange creature's mind, in which case they'll stalk along the corridors calmly murdering anyone they come across. And that's even when the Immaterium shielding is still working. You don't want to know what happens on a ship whose warp-wards collapse under the continual assault from formless beings intent on the death of the ship's crew.

'Emperor of Terra, watch over me,' I whisper to myself as I'm halfway towards the source of the screeching. If it is a Touched One, this could be some really serious trouble. They don't allow us anything that can be used as a weapon, so we're virtually defenceless. Still, that's just as well really, because there'd be a hell

of a lot less of us left if we were armed. Fights break out a lot, but despite what some people think it takes a while to beat someone to death and somebody usually breaks it up before there's a casualty. That said, if I wanted to kill someone I could, particularly if they're sleeping.

My whole body's shaking, and I'm not quite sure why. I try to tell myself it's the cold, but I'm man enough to admit when I'm scared. Men don't scare me, except perhaps the Colonel. Aliens give me shudders now and then, especially the tyranids, but there's something about the idea of warp creatures that just shivers me the core, even though I've never had to face one. There's nothing that I can think of in the galaxy that's more unholy.

I can see someone thrashing around in a blanket ahead, just where the lights go gloomy. It's hard to see in the intermittent haze of the broken glow-globe, but I think I see Kronin's face twisting and turning. I hear footsteps behind me and turn suddenly, almost lashing out at Franx who's got up and followed me.

'Just warp-dreams,' he tries to reassure me with a crooked smile, his big hands held up in reflex.

'Like that makes me feel better,' I reply shortly, turning back to the writhing figure of Kronin. I can just about make out words in the shrieks bursting from his contorted mouth.

'And from the deeps... there arose a mighty beast, of many eyes... and many limbs. And the beast from the... darkness did set upon the light of mankind... with hateful thirst and unnatural hunger!'

'Don't wake him!' Franx hisses as I reach out a hand towards the struggling figure.

'Why not?' I demand, kneeling down beside Kronin and glaring back at the sergeant.

'Preacher Durant once said that waking a man with warp-dreams empties his mind, allows Chaos to seep in,' he says with an earnest look in his face.

'Well, I'll just have to risk a bit of corruption, won't I?' I tell him, annoyed at what seems like a childish superstition to me. 'If he

carries on like that for the rest of the cycle, I'm not going to get any sleep at all.'

I rest a hand on Kronin's shoulder, gently at first but squeezing more firmly when he continues to toss and turn. It still doesn't do any good and I lean over him and slap him hard on the cheek with the back of my hand. His eyes snap open and there's a dangerous light in them for a second, but that's quickly replaced by a vague recognition. He sits up and looks straight at me, eyes squinting in the faltering light.

'Saint Lucius spake unto the masses of Belushidar, and great was their uproar of delight,' he says with a warm smile on his thin lips, but his eyes quickly fill with a haunted look.

'Guess that means thanks,' I say to Franx, standing up as Kronin lowers himself back down onto the blanket, glancing around once more before closing his eyes. I stay there for a couple more minutes until Kronin's breathing is shallow and regular again, meaning he's either really asleep or faking it well enough for me not to care any more.

Why the hell did Green have to get himself killed, I ask myself miserably as I trudge back to my sleeping area? I could do without the responsibility of wet-nursing this bunch of frag-for-brains criminals. It's hard enough just to survive in the Last Chancers without having to worry about everyone else. I guess I'll just have to not worry, let them take care of themselves. Hell, if they can't do that, they deserve to die.

*The Last Chancers* can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

Price: £8.99 (UK) / \$10.99 (US) / \$15.00 (CAN)

ISBN: 1 84416 300 8

Bookshops: Distributed in the UK by Hodder. Distributed in the US by Simon & Schuster Books.

Games & hobby stores: Distributed in UK and US by Games Workshop.

UK mail order: 0115-91 40 000      US mail order: 1-800-394-GAME

Online: Buy direct care of Games Workshop's web store by going to [www.blacklibrary.com/store](http://www.blacklibrary.com/store) or [www.games-workshop.com](http://www.games-workshop.com).



