

## The Asuryata, Ballade of the Phoenix Lords

Water...water, lifeblood of countless organisms across billions of worlds. The Water of Life that gifts life as it takes death, drunk from those that are worthy and pure. In that same sense do countless lives depend on this drink for sustenance and existence. And for the Eldar, lords of the galaxy for over 65 million years, that lifeblood was about to be drained away. Taken by force. A force no mortal could triumph against, at least not alone, not even in individuals of a million strong, billion strong.

She Who Thirsts...Her birth cries echoing across the psychic landscape, devouring countless souls into a sustenance of her own. Her water; our lives taken up as Her water, Her lifeblood, Her drink. There was nothing we could do to stop this act, at least not after it became too late. The signs were apparent, the portents sure and indicating, but we heeded them not, those of us lost to depravity. And so it has come to this. Aboard great starships called Craftworlds did we set off, as far away from that "Eye of Terror" as possible. Forever eluding that gigantic predator, at least for now, delaying Her inevitable clutches, at least for the time being.

And now, I, aboard this Craftworld, do thus flee from Her, from the place at the centre of our most precious homeworlds, now lost forever. I heeded the portents, or rather, I was called, for my calling was one in many millions, and not one of an escape from certain death. I was to save my people. So here begins my story. *The Asuryata begins, Song of Phoenixes.*

~

"Looking out here Tethesis...we have gone a long way now from our homeworld. I can see it almost as a gash, feel it as a psychic gnaw at the edges of my sanity, peering back into whence we came from." Gazing out at the stars upon which beneath our great Craftworld sailed, I wondered if I would ever succeed in the quest in which I have taken. Taken upon myself, by unwilling degrees, but soon, soon enough, with enough necessity seen and observed, with a whole heart.

"I see it and I fear it, Asuryatna. It is thankful for your quest that has brought us away, and saved us from the inevitable doom that has clutched most of our race now, at this moment." All of a sudden a psychic scream that could crush their minds if they were any closer attempted to drag them back into the Warp. They all could feel it, feel the bare edges of insanity and depravity this creature was born from, and they regretted it. Regret it for the damage they could have undone had they not been so led astray into their own downfall, if they had sterner codes, strictures to abide by and guide their lives lest they be led to the extremities which they have come to learn, were to be avoided at all cost.

Even the great Craftworld's engines were taxed, as the warpscream attempted to drag them into the gaping mouth of oblivion itself, but the determination of the pilots shone through, and they managed to escape the clutches of She. The Great Enemy as She was known, lay unsatiated, dissatisfied, but there was nought She could do, or at least that's what we thought. From temporal warp portals opened from the psychic scream within the Craftworld, came pouring out little, lithe Daemons: Daemonettes. What?! Surely the psychic defences of the Craftworld would be sufficient to prevent such an intrusion? It appeared not, and they danced and they pranced amongst us, among our numbers, slicing heads off and lopping limbs with each gesture, in an almost graceful form in mockery of the movements of the Eldar. It appeared there was no stopping them, and the Eldar refugees were frightened and demoralised; was there no armed guard within the entire Craftworld? There was, and they were readied for such an occasion, and before too much damage spread, the Daemonettes had to be contained and banished. But before the defences of the Craftworld could reach the Daemons, someone had to stand up to them for the time being. There was mass confusion everywhere, each Eldar out to save his own life, scattering and running in fear of the Daemons. And that being was none other than me, Asuryatna Menshata, or Asurmen, a name gifted to me by a God.

I lifted up my arms, revealing two Shuriken Catapults from beneath my hood, a device as ancient as our race, and fired shot after monomolecular cutting shot into the prancing Daemonettes. They were at first unprepared to face them, unsuspecting a retaliation amongst our numbers, but as soon as the first few of them fell, they were in realisation. As much as they danced and attempted to dodge them, my aim was true, time after time felling one of these foul Daemons. They could not evade me, my true aim precisely accurate, something in which the witnesses, on both sides, beholden to the deadly spectacle, were in awe of. Tethesis fought at my side, my brother, wielding a Shuriken Catapult of his own. Unlike me, he was not skilled enough to wield two in both hands, but his skills with the sword were second to none.

Our hail of monomolecular, razor-sharp shuriken discs raked through their ranks, taking thirty of them down between the two of us. They had barely come on to us before the reinforcements arrived and removed the existence of the Daemonettes within the Craftworld. The Farseer Council of the Craftworld arrived, inspecting this area of the Craftworld where the intrusion occurred. "Increase the psychic wards of this side of the Craftworld!" barked an ancient Farseer, who appeared to be the leader of the Council. Maldern was his name, and he was a hard-nosed character, a stern figure among a populace of refugees. He would take no chances.

The people of the Eldar Craftworld, rose up and spoke their concerns to him and the Council, speaking of their fears of sabotage and death and possession. "What if a second attack occurs, who is to save us? We are not armed or ready for this! Not of a mass invasion from some alien source!" Maldern was at first stunned into silence, but before too long, he spoke, shaking off their fears. "Do not worry, we may be but refugees and it is expected along our journey that there will be dangers faced, but we as your Council will protect you, you can be sure of that. Now, as to the man and his assistant who protected these people with their weapons, I would like to hear an introduction from you..."

The mysterious hooded stranger and his assistant; that was how we were first known. And stayed known in my opinion, nothing has changed now, since then. Our motives are still unclear, our deliberations unnoticed. We are as much a mystery as the Eldar is to themselves. But so called forth, we stood forward, and revealed our faces from beneath our hoods.

"Ahh, so these are the two gentlemen who saved our lives. Wonderful, and what may I address either of you as?"

Tethesis looked at me with doubt, then nodded in seeing the affirmation in my eyes. "I am Tethesis, and he is Asurmen."

"Clarify your intentions. You appear to be no ordinary people." Maldern spoke with stern composure, expecting a compliance and almost an answer for their actions, even though they had been for the greater good of the Craftworld.

I interrupted at this point, blankly speaking thus, "I am the brother of Tethesis, not his assistant as you might have wrongly assumed. Or was it the other way around? In any case, our intentions are the same as any from amongst you, to escape the great tragedy of the Great Enemy, and restore the Eldar race to former strength."

Murmurs broke out amongst the gathered onlookers. "Interesting...restore the Eldar race to former strength? Is such a feat possible in the first place? As much as I would like to believe in the pride of our people, and of our great ability, there is no hope to prevail against that Enemy."

"We shall see. Do you not see my fellow Eldar? We run for our lives at the moment it becomes threatened, but the Water of Life gives death first before it grants life. Fear as you might, you cannot give into it anymore if you wish to live...I expect all we will be doing will be running from here on out...there will come a time when we will have to make a stand."

"As it stands now, it is unlikely we will survive for long. We will come to see that we will have to take up arms in order to continue on this journey, each and everyone of us. And in doing so, in that journey, we will restore the Eldar to glory."

There was one notable fellow among them. A bladesman, who wielded a gigantic glaive. He had not intervened at the entry of the Daemonettes, and stood impassive at the side. He appeared the only warrior among the group of refugees at the place of the Daemonic incursion, besides Asurmen and Tethesis. He rose thus at what Asurmen spoke, "Brave words spoken by an ambitious fool. The Eldar is a lost cause, not with something like that against us...Do you even know what has been spawned by our unwitting actions? Do you know the cause and reason for Its *being*? It is constituted of the very substance that we cannot avoid, the depths of darkness that will always be a part of our souls. How does one evade the very clutches of something that exists so close as a shadow to our beating, bleeding hearts?"

"He almost seems inclined towards Chaos...", Tethesis whispered into my ear. I addressed this newcomer curtly. "And who may you be, may I ask?"

"Arhra...they call me Arhra, Father of Scorpions."

"And what use is that great glaive if not turned against those very real Chaotic entities that threatened our very survival, just only?" It was Tethesis who led the questioning now.

"Have you heard of my name, I wonder? I could have easily turned away those intrusions earlier with the skill of my bladesmanship, but I left it to the two unwarranted, mysterious strangers aboard with us, who so happened to be equally skilled at the art of dealing death, or perhaps not?"

"Would you dare say Maldern, that he is not beyond questioning as well? He is equally armed like us..." Tethesis probed his questions to the leading Farseer now.

"I will say it is unlikely that need be. Not one among us does not know the legacy of the name, the Father of Scorpions. All aboard our Craftworld, from the Red Moon of Eldanesh, know of his genius skill at arms. There is none other that I am more willing to entrust the leadership of the Craftworld's safety and army than to him. Which goes on to the next question...who are you that are clueless of whom should none other be but our greatest warrior?"

"The Father of Scorpions, greatest warrior...eh? Perhaps not indeed, that we may be the better bladesmen. I, Tethesis, challenge you to a duel of arms. May the better man win." These were proud words against someone known famously throughout the Craftworld they were upon. But Tethesis, even if dwarfed by his elder brother, was a peerless swordsman, almost an equal to the swiftness of Asuryatna's blade. But will he be enough to live up to the challenge of the duel?

The way was cleared before them, with Arhra, dark Arhra, already calculating in a corner to the moves he will make to preempt the motions of his opponent. Tethesis knew that his pride was at stake, as it is with this lauded "greatest warrior", onboard this Craftworld. The victory of the match was to determine many things to unfold in the future, that much he knew. But it was to be with Asuryatna his brother, or Asurmen, ultimately to be the decisive agent here on out.

But Arhra did live up to his name as the Father of Scorpions, for such is his sting with the blade, that he darted with such speed as to avoid all possible contact until the moment there was a leak in the defences, and then striking with such decisive force as to cause Tethesis to be sent reeling. Tethesis met his match, this will be a tough fight, with such a skilled contender. Tethesis drew his blade in arcs, he was not to be outwitted. He stalled for time, as he took the chance to analyse the battle scenario. Here was definitely a very strong man, since he was wielding a gigantic glaive with such ease. Even then however, the glaive should be somewhat cumbersome to wield, and the swiftest of motions should still elude him, no matter how strong or skilled he is with the weapon. With this understanding, Tethesis hid his sword under his cloak to cover his motions, and then with golden opportunity realised and seized, did a downward arc swing, forcing Arhra to defend the blow with his glaive over his head. The weight of both Tethesis' sword and the glaive forced it down onto him, and gravity did the rest, his own blade cut into his own skin.

A slight groan of pain escaped from his lips, just as Tethesis, seizing the opportunity, did a turnabout kick into his groin, winding him and sending Arhra sprawling on the floor. Arhra felt humiliated. And enraged. He got up and rushed Tethesis, attempting to sever his head with a deathblow. Were it not for my timely intervention, my unprepared brother might have met his doom.

"That is enough. It is clear who is the victor here." I gestured towards Maldern, for his acknowledgement.

"My, this is unexpected..." The Farseer mused.

"And seeing that my brother was the victor, close as it is, I expect we will be decided to be the leaders of the Craftworld's defence force. Worry not, for it is within our interest as well to see to the survival and ultimate victory of our race. Maldern, let me introduce myself as the elder brother of Tethesis, and I carry the name Asurmen. I will be the leader here on out, and my brother, you can say, my assistant."

"The name Asurmen? By your name, are you to be the scion hand of Asuryan? What, relay, is the significance of your name?" The Farseer questioned.

"For that, is a secret to be hidden behind common understanding and awareness. Simply put, I am the acting regent for our lost God, His one last Will in His love for our race. The Undying Phoenix shall set right the stars, forever living in our hearts. I am the last immortal scion of our God, the one chosen by Him to see to our redemption and rising once again. Thus, so charged, think lightly not of the task set before me, as it shall become a part of you as well. Think not either that it is impossible, for the Eternal Light of Asuryan, progenitor of our great race lives on in me, and it is His Undying Will and Saving Power that are working with us to that eventuality."

*The Rhana Dandra...look into the distant future for it.* He whispered into my ears. For our preparation, His eagle eyes reading the skeins of the future. Asurmen, highly intelligent, knew what this all meant. There will be no true return of our race, no true resurrection in the sense of our revival into former glory. All that we can do is delay the coming of the end, the ending battle with Chaos and the Materium.

*My Lord, You have divined the future have You not? All readings lead to the end, the end of our once glorious race, snuffed out like a great light. All we can do, it seems, is to delay the end. I understand. And still I carry this burden and weight of responsibility, because if not me, who? Who is more qualified than me, prince of inheritance of the Eldar race?*

My lineage follows all the way from great Ulthanash. I, a prince unknown amongst our people, but if they were only to whisper Asuryatna Menshata, and then they will recognise their liege. I come in the disguise of a hooded stranger, with a hidden agenda. The crown prince of the house of Ulthanash, with his brother Tethesis. It would seem all along I was chosen for the task as the Hand of Asuryan, right from birth and name. Asuryatna Menshata...*Great Hand of Asuryan the Phoenix King*; read and translated.

I was the lord of our people on the planet which the Red Moon orbited, soon to be at least, their crown prince. In order to protect the sanctity of the royal house of Ulthanash from the corruption that laid about the lands, I escaped with my brother, under certain orders, to the Red Moon, where it was departing at that time a Craftworld. "Rebirth of Ancient Days", it was called; a fitting name for our chosen purpose. And here, onboard the greatest Craftworld of the Eldar race, was the Craftworld to become known as the one with the greatest proliferation of Aspect Warrior shrines, which is to be understood and appreciated, given it was the starting place of the greatest and first of the Phoenix Lords. But before he became Phoenix Lord, he was the Autarch of Biel-Tan.

Maldern acceded to the request of Asurmen, given that even his "assistant" was able to best their strongest warrior. In this way, Asurmen became installed as the first Autarch among the Craftworlds. A young girl as they come by the age of the Eldar was a careful and close witness of all that had transpired then. Then, Asurmen laid eyes on her, and it was as if a tangible skein of fate was struck upon the connection of their eyes. Asurmen could feel it within him, this was a child pure and still unsullied from the scars of our race's psyche, still young enough to be taintless and free from the troubles of our race.

*Should I, my Lord?* I whispered in my thoughts.

*It is as if you have chosen already. The first. And with good reason for it too, in your selection, for her name means "Silent One". First it comes with silence, the deceptive silence before the storm. It is a good beginning. I christen her, Jain Zar, the Storm of Silence.*

"Jain." I called out to her, as a test of her courage. She did not disappoint, instead of flinching at the entreaty of a stranger, at the tender age of 5, she responded with a curt wit, perhaps a mask of greater insecurities, but with sufficient strength to acknowledge at the least, that her name has been called without any possible means of me being informed of it in the first place. "How is it dear sir, that you are informed of my name? Have I been made famous prior without my noticing?"

"Ah, a brave girl you are. You shall grow up a great and beautiful lady, and if given the chance, pray, a deadly warrior too. I sense a strong bond of connection with you, as if Fate beckons between us, Morai-Heg's one last remaining intervention, a surviving flash of her powers of Fate. Just as Morai-Heg granted the Aspect of Her daughters to Khaine, Her husband, so too do I christen thee, the first of the Howling Banshees."

"Wait a minute here, what do you intend with our only daughter?" interjected Jain's father.

"I intend to make a warrior of her, as deadly as they come. With your permission, of course."

"That will not do, she is just a mere child, and to put her first in the line of danger as a warrior-in-training...we cannot bear to think of the consequences of such an action..."

"As much as I wish to insist on this, for Fate demands it, our meeting of eyes more than a significator of the bond of destiny between us. She is the Chosen Crone, the Fateful of Morai-Heg's Destiny Select, Khaine's Revenant Bride."

"Even then, we oppose of it, we cannot bear the pain of the possibility of losing our only child, not in light especially of what has happened to the majority of our race."

"The chosen hand of Fate has decided...I will leave it to the will of Morai-Heg, keeper of the fate of souls to redeem her to my side. She will be my first and greatest disciple, the one to wield and lead the Fates of all Eldar, just as her patron deity, of whom she takes after, steers and controls the fate of our race."

"Father, be acquiesced, I feel it within the timbres that resonate with my soul, like a scream of the War God igniting across my blood into ecstatic acknowledgement of my chosen status. Fear not, for my Fate has already been contained in the skin rune pouch of Morai-Heg, as Her last vestige, Her remaining presence, in sealing the Fates of all Eldar at the Rhana Dandra. For that very purpose I must be a part of, to see to the end of our race, whether to victory or to sorrow."

Seeing as even his child agrees to it with such meaning, Jain's father could find no way in denying his child's purpose and ardent wish. In this way, Jain Zar became the first of the Phoenix Lords after Asurmen. Her training began immediately, and Asurmen promised them a way out from the hunger of She Who Thirsts, by bonding their souls to a spirit stone, which upon their death would seal their souls into the crystal, preventing it from being swallowed by the Great Enemy. Asurmen was a tough taskmaster, and he trained Jain arduously in the ways of war, especially physical combat. She was taught a graceful form of the martial way of combat of the ancient Eldar, one that flowed with pressing terror in short bursts, especially along the charge. Fear, she was taught, was her weapon; the fear of the sudden strike, like lightning. With that, she mixed with the essence of her patron, and she was to teach her protégés the way of death by terror, death by song and dance. From this, as the Revenant Bride of Khaine, she devised the Revenant Strikes,

charging strikes that mixed song with the deadly dance of death.

But first, she was but beginning to learn the ropes of warfare from Asurmen. Throughout their training and sparring, she used a wooden sword, in mock practise. She was a fast learner, and she was to equal the skill of Tethesis when she grew up. But that was not the end or last of the first disciples of Asurmen. Given his duties to the Craftworld as their Autarch, Asurmen could not spend all his time training warriors, so he only chose a select few at his side at all times, to be trained besides Jain. Arhra, even though reluctant, was decided upon by Asurmen to be essential to the Craftworld, for he recognised his skill at combat, even if in that display of it, he had lost to his brother Tethesis. As it is with all wise rulers, talent is respected where it exists. There, he stood at his side, together with Fuegan, the Burning Lance he was called, one who fulfilled the needs of the Craftworld at that point in dealing with armour. He among the three of them was chosen to wield weapons of fire and destruction, powerful enough to blow holes through the crust of the Craftworld, if it must. Thus he earned his name, Fuegan the Burning Lance, one with Firepike like a lance of fire and flame, piercing all but the hardest of armour.

There was one crucial aspect of his character, that drew Asurmen to recognise both his potential, his latent talent and worth; Fuegan was a temperamental man, and Asurmen thought him suited to exemplify the spirit of fire, embodied within him so fittingly, and strongly, through that fearsome anger that cannot be denied, and in that capacity, destroying armoured elements on the battlefield, with a reckless regard for the risks involved, which Asurmen thought convenient, with his rage-fuelled passion, and the deliberate use of firepower that came from it.

Although Jain was the first of Asurmen's disciples, she was not the first to establish her own shrines, due to her young age. For that, it would be ever-ambitious Arhra, keen to the acclaim of seeing the proliferation of his fighting style throughout the Craftworld. It was decided as to the form of organisation of the combat elements of the Craftworld would follow a scheme, one that came about organically, with the purpose such inspiration usually lends itself to, where the respective Phoenix Lords would construct a war shrine within the Craftworld, from which those willing students could dedicate themselves to the specific way of warfare of their chosen founder. Each Aspect Shrine in turn was named after their founder, the Howling Banshees from Jain Zar, the Fire Dragons from the Burning Lance, and finally Arhra, Striking Scorpions from the Father of Scorpions, one who earned his moniker such was the darting speed of his strikes even with a gigantic glaive, from which could be likened to his sting.

But perhaps, the first true inheritors of the trademark style of warfare of Asurmen, were the very first troops of the Eldar Craftworld's invention, the Dire Avengers. That was at least their name, inherited from their founding father, Asurmen, for the very first soldiers of the Craftworld were taught to be consecrated to the divine duty of avenging the state of the Eldar race, modelling themselves after the ideal represented by Asurmen, epitome of the "Noble Warrior", as it is understood to be one who would sacrifice himself out of the nobility inherent of their duty.

### **Those Duty-Bound Noble Warriors**

It was with a slight reluctance that Maldern handed over the leadership of the Craftworld's armed forces to the Autarch, Asurmen. Perhaps the ancient Farseer had a tinge of ambition in him, that made him reluctant to become but a silent advisory to the workings of the Craftworld's army. But Asurmen was swift to take up his responsibility with an eagerness that originated from a sense of duty. And it was to be established too, within Asurmen's chosen Aspect, that he imparted a drive for war that was defined from that same sense of duty, above all else. That was the definition of the Noble Warrior, the aspiring template of all Aspect Warriors, one bound by duty to the revival and vengeance of their race, of which failing out of cowardice and irresponsibility would deem them incapable of claiming the title "Dire". It is in direness, the dire straits of the threat of war against the Eldar nation, that they are summoned, when they are most needed with pressing urgency.

At first, the citizens of the Craftworld were reluctant to take up arms, even if it was reminded of them to be for the sake of their survival. But Asurmen devised a method, even if they were to be converts on the knife, encouraging the strength of the resoluteness of their race, as they faced certain obliteration. "Dire" they became known, a title of certification they carried, sealed by cause and grit in its inevitability, without shirking or flinching from it, and they represent with the grimness of their race in its darkest hour, and "Avengers" they were by duty and spirit. Thus were born the Dire Avengers, warriors of necessity and duty. They followed after the Treatises of War, the tactical doctrines and methods of engaging warfare as dictated by Asurmen, first Autarch of the Eldar. This earliest incarnation of the Dire Avenger was expected to perform with equal skill in both assaults and firefights, given that they were the only type of soldier that existed in the early history of the Eldar army, and thus had to deal with all manner of battlefield situations, fluidly melding and engaging according to the shifting scenes of the chaos of war, a doctrine very much encouraged with the adopted primary weapon of these first warriors: the Shuriken Catapult. In time, the Shuriken Catapult was to be advanced into a unique form used by the professional soldiery of the Dire Avengers, called the Phoenix Catapult, a symbolism indicative of the advanced nature of the weapon, one that always stays at the forefront of technology, like a Phoenix of rebirth, ever reborn in unceasing immortality and symbol of the dire state of their race in seeking a return to previous glory, incorporating the latest in Eldar weaponry. In contrast, the weapon called the Direblade used by the Dire

Avengers, is symbolic and indicative of the past, and has remained stagnant in form and symbolism as a relic of the Dire Avengers, in which they use the very spirit stones that will contain their life essence upon death as a weapon, fashioned and sharpened into a keen instrument of death. There is a very real significance to this act, for the Direblade was the very weapon used to consecrate the early Eldar survivors to the cause of their race's war of survival. Following a creed, the Creed of the Noble Warrior, and through the Pledge of Blood of the Ritual of the Bloody Hand, the new initiates to the Dire Avenger shrine will take a slab of spirit stone and graft into the back of their hands the symbol of the Phoenix, while decreeing that "The noble warrior is forged out of necessity and duty bound as the necessity dictates, deviating or otherwise would bear consequences too great and mark them a failure to their people, in their dire hour of need."

This act, through pain and blood, reminds always the Dire Avengers of their duty, which stakes even the survival of their soul on the line, through the use of their spirit stones as a weapon. It is the ultimate bonding to the most sacred and noble of duties. There is nothing higher to the Eldar race than that, than the survival and their eventual revival to glory and power. But now, upon a nascent God just birthed with absolute power, that seeks to strip all Eldar souls maddeningly into the gaping maw of void itself, the Eldar have no choice in the affair, except to seek the quickest route of exit as refugees. At this point of time, Humanity was still on its rise to power, and the scattering of the Warpstorms around the planets owned by Humans, by the psychic birth scream of Slaanesh, allowed for the Emperor of Mankind to begin his Great Crusade to unite the worlds of Man into one leadership, one empire - the Imperium of Man, and to safeguard young Humanity against the enemies of the abyss, alien or otherwise.

The Eldar had more enemies than those who roamed for their souls, psychic entities from the warp that sought nothing better than refuge in the extremist minds of the Eldar race. And then there are those who had yet to abandon their practise, of debauchery, of perversions, and murderous delight, something that seemed to be carried in the taint of Arhra. It was not something visibly witnessed of course, except felt intuitively by Asurmen, an awareness of the darkness in his soul, something akin or aligned to that of their dark brethren, the Dark Eldar. Yes, Asurmen knew of them, even before any natural means of foreknowledge. It was the whisper...of one near omniscient and who knew all. He survived, yes He did, through inexplicable means beyond mere mortal comprehension, beyond all expectancy. But for now, He remains quiet, silent from the Eldar, for One who is so close to their hearts.

As the very first construction of the modern Eldar army, the Dire Avengers had to be tactically flexible to fulfill any role upon the battlefield, be it in assault or at ranged. For that, the initial armament of the Dire Avengers, the Shuriken Catapult, suited their purposes, as a weapon that could be fired on the move continuously, with the correct amount of battle focus, designed as such by the Smiths of Vault. These Smiths of Vault themselves took up arms as the Sword of Vault on the stage of war, as Fire Dragons wielding the power of flame and fire on the field of battle, those very same tools of the forge and their profession, led by their Phoenix Lord, Fuegan, destroying all enemy armour from a distance.

With new recruits into the war shrines of both Arhra and Fuegan, the burden of a wholesome and complete tactical integration became shared between them, allowing the Dire Avengers to be freed in devotion towards the standardised task of ranged firefights. Fuegan's disciples could be used against the hard armour of enemy vehicles, while for Arhra, the Striking Scorpions inherited the monstrous strength of their predecessor, together with his darting speed, as if wielding the potent and venomous sting of scorpions in the sudden strike. In fact, the Striking Scorpions were given their name in this way, in honour of their founder. And to the doctrines of war of the Striking Scorpions, Arhra taught them ambition, the boiling ambition, almost of greed, that could very well be his taint made manifest. Ambition was to be their rating on the fields of war, the grade of achievement that was defined by a fierce determination for power and the proving of one's superiority, and with it the allowance for the embrace of the darker aspects of war, no longer denied or forbidden, in all the manners and ways of this dark and dangerous pursuit on the battlefield, dangerous for what it seeks to inflict on the soul, even to the encouragement of the inner strife of competition within the bounds of his own disciples, of the proving of individual gain over and above themselves, and even against the greater good of the Craftworld. This intention of dark taint was to be the guiding force of the wrath of their God, Khaine, as it fell over their enemies like draping shadows without mercy, a death from the enveloping darkness, a way of combat, most dark and sinister, which the Striking Scorpions, as taught by the Father of Scorpions, sought to mimic. By Asurmen's astute observation, this was to be a way of warfare assumed and devoted to, as the Aspect of Murder inherited from the darker side of their God of War, Khaine, from which all the Aspects gained their inspiration from. In this way the taint latent within Arhra's soul was made evident in how his shrine came to worship the facet of the God of War represented by this Aspect, of dark and dangerous murder, now imparted to those who sought to learn beneath him, by the inevitable impressions of the influencing agency preserved in the signature style determined and established in its ways by its founder, Arhra, in this way carried over as a dark mark that was to become retained in the essence of the shrine of the Striking Scorpions' way of combat, even after his departure from them during his betrayal and great revolt, forever leaving the taint of Arhra's darkness expressed within their form of war. An inescapable scar, one that is not physical, but more a psychological effect, of which significance manifests primarily on the psyche, his darkness forever an indelible presence, in what is possibly the most violent of Aspects.

With Fuegan, it was a different case. The drive for war for the Fire Dragons was one, like their namesake, of fiery and furious passion. It was for the power and pull of emotions, decidedly as fierce as the tempestuous Dragon of legend, that

decided their purpose, drive of war and stance of military doctrine. Just as it is with that most of the warriors of the Fire Dragons came from the Smiths of Vault, so were the Fire Dragons known as the Sword of Vault. The passion of the art of forging weapons were imbued into their method of warfare, them taking an equal emotional bond to warring and fighting as they do with smithing. Indeed, they carried their knowledge of how such artifacts must operate, knowledge of intimacy from their own manufacture and design of these weapons and armours of war, and applied them in the handling of their destruction. For really, whom better to deal with firepower, than those most acquainted with it?

To be honest and true, the first Dire Avenger after Asurmen was none other than Tethesis, his brother, the one to be known as The Brother, in reference and homage to the tremendous importance of Asurmen the Great, first of the Phoenix Lords. Where Tethesis lacked the defining skill at shooting of Asurmen, he defined and emphasised the close combat aspects of the Dire Avengers, himself being noted as a Sword of Valour, one who was forged and recognised for his leadership in the taking up of arms during the crucial moments in the heat of a fight, leading with inspirational feats of decisive arms, as he boldly challenges and duels the opposing champion in ritual combat, as befitting as a leader of the Dire Avengers should. Asurmen himself was noted as a War Prince, one who was gifted with natural charisma and leadership skills. It is from a compilation of the observations of both Asurmen and his brother that the official standardisation and doctrinal format of the Dire Avengers were formed, a set of postures and stances known as the Noble Stances. With the development of these elegant motions and postures, the Dire Avengers are able to fulfill multiple battlefield roles with the pace of the wind, becoming a steadfast and unshakeable bastion of a ranged firing line, creating temporal firing zones soaked in shuriken discs as an act of deterrence against the advances of the enemy, or to stall for time with defensive postures in close combat, allowing the means for the more formidable and advanced elements of the Eldar warhost to close in and relief. In this way, they fulfill a support role superbly, versatily as both fire support and defensive tarpit.

### **The Pledge of Blood, The Creed of the Noble Warrior, The Ritual of the Bloody Hand**

"In order to seal our fates to the greater part of the Eldar race, forever removing any choice by duty to escaping our role as defenders of the vestiges of the Eldar race, bound as we are to this sacred cause, I Asurmen here henceforth proclaim as acting regent scion of Asuryan the Phoenix King, that us Dire Avengers are worthy aspirants to the clause of the Noble Warrior, upholders of the Undying Fire that is the immortal passion of our race, one unrelenting against all odds and foes no matter the danger or threat, unbending in knee in acknowledging no weakness. That is our Pledge of Blood, consecrated into our hearts by the grafting of the Ritual of the Bloody Hand, and the enunciation of the Creed of the Noble Warrior, one a physical act in which the legacy of Eldanesh our greatest is left in painful reminder of our uncompromising destiny, intertwined as it is with the rest of the Eldar race. Then, the Creed of the Noble Warrior, this Pledge gifted with blood, a mental reminder of the inspiration of the aspirant, as the Noble Warrior is forged out of necessity and duty-bound as the necessity dictates, deviating or otherwise would bear consequences too great and mark them a failure to their people, in their dire hour of need. Thus do end this sacrament, the merging of mind and body, of Asuryan the Ever-Living, with Khaine the War God, one the aspect of the eternal mental psyche as symbolised by the grafting of the Phoenix upon the back of the hand with the very tool that will be the residence of our reincarnation, while the bloody hand, the physical symbolism of the War God, Bloody-Handed Khaine, the two bonding as the two aspects of warfare, both mental and physical, into one. In this blessed union is thus born a Dire Avenger, and with great pride do we uphold both titles as the exemplars of the Noble Warrior, the dire grimness of our race carried on in legacy as the avengers of hope, in returning our past to glory. So thus do we fight, for the honour of lost times, for the sake of rebuilding our race to greatness, and dominion as the true lords of the galaxy."

Thus reads the Pledge of Blood, with the Creed of the Noble Warrior the highlight within. And so thus are Dire Avengers consecrated to an unbreakable promise and cause, their lives forever sealed duty-bound until destiny permits, either through accomplishment or death, more likely the latter. In this sense they are noble for the sacrifice they make for such a selfless cause as the greater good of their race, something seemingly entirely antagonistic to the pursuit resembling of dark murder, perpetrated by the one to become the Fallen Phoenix, "he who burns with the dark light of Chaos".

The Dire Avengers, as per the Treaties of Asurmen in his *Reflections*, are viewed as the cornerstone of the foundation of all Aspect Warriors, in doctrine and in task. Although they may pursue different reasons for war, being propelled and fuelled by different drives, from duty to blind hatred for the enemy, every other Aspects base their tactical doctrines in some part on those of the Dire Avengers, for they are the closest adherents to the formulations of Asurmen, in regarding the institution of the formal professional army that was as yet to achieve its modern incarnation as the Swordwind, apart from the citizen militia maintained out of a necessity stemming from the lack of numbers of their fallen and dying race.

Asurmen's ways and methods of war cover every aspect of it, from commanding and leading the strategy of an attack, to martial knowledge of combat, as established in his *Reflections*. This doctrine of the "The Way" of warfare, is especially regarded as sacrosanct and authoritative, which taught that the nature of combat between both sides is a summation of the direction of the "Flow" of the cumulative forces on both sides of the battle, merging and yielding on the battlefield. With the correct application of force, one can turn another person's momentum against himself. Thus, was "The Way"

carried over to the fighting style and ability of the Dire Avengers, showing itself in the study of the humanoid form, and how best to anticipate and manipulate the assailant's movements against himself.

The Way and Flow of Asurmen's teachings have been likened to water, its unimpeded flow and movement, the ebb and tide of the forces in the theatre of war, gaining strength at some opportunity, while receding at some other stage in the progression of the battle. Asurmen's tactical doctrines sought to minimalise those moments of weakness and loss, while enhancing those points when the tide of battle is gaining strength behind them, riding on the momentum to deliver the swift judgement of the Eldar host. This method of lightning deliberation was called and termed the "Swordwind" host.

This intimate understanding of Asurmen regarding the essence of warfare, was carried on and made practical by Arhra, in his own war shrine. There, Arhra taught among the most brutal of techniques inherited from the ancient combat style of the Eldar race. Asurmen acquired his consummate command of warfare as a prince of his people, being a part of the subjects studied by the nobility of the Eldar. So it is indeed ancient, a form of battle that can be traced back to the beginnings of our race, from which Arhra devised and derived his fighting style: that of the breaking and manipulation of bones and joints, all the more with dreaded attempt to subdue multiple foes with great strength and ease. Brutality is the trademark of their ambition towards power, characterised by a reckless disregard in absolute terms, for all other factors in their way, in a style that has come to embody and carry the taint of his own inner darkness. This style of combat is known as the Bonebreaker Techniques, and is the basis of what is likened as the stinging strike inherited by the Striking Scorpions from Arhra, before he turned to darkness.

### **The Reviving Fire of a Dying Race**

Those that live on in the Craftworlds after the tragedy of the Great Enemy, do so with the fear that their lives may be taken, if not for their spirit stones. Each Eldar would place a spirit stone upon their armour casing, except for the Dire Avengers, who actually use their spirit stones as weapons, called Direblades. In this way, together with the tactically flexible Shuriken Catapult, the Dire Avengers are able to fulfill a diverse set of roles on the battlefield, from close range assaults, to distant firefights.

Each Aspect Warrior, the main original six of them, has an affinity with an element. As of now, with the first of those chosen to become the first of the Exarchs, founders of their respective shrines, the Phoenix Lords as they are known and called, number only four, with Jain Zar, Fuegan, and Arhra, next to Asurmen. *The two shall come from the storm, appearing as night is to day.* Once again the whisper of his closest aide, spoke. Thus, Asurmen set about preparing for the eventual appearance of the two who shall complete and fulfill the destined roles of warfare remaining, that of inspired mobility and of absolute firepower. *They are to come as night and day, upon the secret moon of Vault, where the Blind Smiths of Vault have forged the greatest of the Eldar race's weaponry, armour and equipment. Upon there, lay your sights, in fulfillment of My guiding prescience, and prophetic divining.*

Thus, in his acting role as Autarch of the Craftworld, Asurmen commanded to return once more into the gaping maw that is the Eye of Terror, back into what they now know as the Crone Worlds, to reclaim hidden and lost technology, especially the works of the Blind Smiths of Vault. It was the hidden voice that prompted him there, and even he knew already that it would turn out like this, not by any foresight of prophecy, but through his keen intellect of analysis and association. The world of Vault, forge world of the Eldar, holds secrets too precious to be lost just like that. Besides, Asurmen analysed there was a strong reason for them to reenter the Crone Worlds, for some unknown purpose as of yet unseen by him. Asurmen was a warrior without peer, to the extent of even his mind, a Mind Warrior with prodigious ability in both realms mental and physical, and so thus with similar scrying to the Farseers, he glimpsed into the future, the future as instructed and indicated by the voice now.

*Ah...there will be much blood shed and battles fought, if we were to return back from whence we came. Are you sure this is the most practical of moves now?* Asurmen questioned.

*It will be, for in My scrying of the skeins of the future, I see only death and total annihilation, if we were not to return back now at this point, for the sacred Phoenix Armours of Vault. There, each armour possesses the ability to augment the specific nature of warfare taken by their bearer. And most importantly, to house the remaining sparks of sentience and life of the vestigial Gods. No, and yes, the Eldar Gods were not all lost, and yes there is hope to the revival of our race, as long as the six original Phoenix Lords are established, forming the backbone and the strength of the Craftworld Eldar's armed hosts. How has this come to be is by the Power of Reincarnation, as presided by Me as My prime gift and might, in the role and symbol of the Ever-Living Phoenix King, so there will be no true Death, even for our pantheon. There, by their actions and decisions, individuals though they are, they will shape and shake the very foundations of the Eldar race. They, these six Phoenix Lords, first and greatest of the Exarchs, will be the decisive force in the ending battle between the Materium and Immaterium.*

Asurmen's decision to return back from whence they came, in search of what has now become a Crone World in the heart of the former Eldar homeworlds, was at first greeted with much resistance, for by all common sense, it would be a



suicidal move, or at least by every appearance. But Asurmen with strict composure addressed his people, at the assembly grounds near the top of the Craftworld, telling them that they had gone far beyond cowardice, and that it was time to take up the responsibilities that would ensure the survival of their species. "Going back may seem suicidal, but I have an agent working for us."

"And who or what may that be?" They questioned in unison.

"It seems I will have to reveal more than might be sensible at this point, but the spirit of Asuryan lives on in me. I, as his acting hand and regent, am the Hand of Asuryan, Asurmen. He has chosen me, prince of my people, I, Asuryatna Menshata, of the lineage of Ulthanash, to see to the survival of His chosen race, us the Eldar. Such is His prophetic insight, something our Farseers merely mimicry, that Asuryan saw the coming doom and downfall of the Eldar race, so He appeared before me in voice and vision, warning of the end that was to come, and to go to the rescue of my people. That is why I now stand before you, for I escaped just in time to this Craftworld, under orders of the Phoenix King, Himself. Ironic that it will be the Craftworld from the Red Moon of Eldanesh, strongest of the ancient Eldar warriors, that I will begin my quest. So fret not, for greater victory is to be held even in death, if that death was in exchange for the survival of our people. There can be no victory without risks taken, have no doubts about that."

The people disbelieved him; how is it that their Gods, thought lost and devoured by Slaanesh, live on inside him? For in fact, as long as the Eldar remained alive and well, the vestiges of the power of their Gods remained, in essence even if not in form. It was in fact the saving power of Asuryan, His mastery over the reincarnating powers of His steed, the Phoenix, that allowed for the survival of the Gods, they being saved by the Reviving Fires that is the prime gift of the Phoenix. In this way, They lived on, even if compromised and in a weakened state.

"Asuryan with His prescience, sees all, knows all. If you do not trust me, whom can you trust? After all, have I not saved you from certain death, or lead you even now as Autarch of the army? Do not doubt my command of strategy, for I have been taught by the best, as a War Prince of our people, and have been so schooled with the very best of what we know as a race, ancient beyond proportions."

*You have spoken well, with great eloquence. It seems timely to reveal My true presence in their affairs. Have no regrets, for I am with you, and will lead you right into the heart of terror and back out again. We shall survive.*

"Do you still refuse? Do you doubt my leadership, or my finesse at commanding you, as your Autarch? You have made your oaths, and still you falter. If it is what it takes to revive our race by plunging into the heart of terror itself, then so be it. Even Maldern and his Seer Council can scan the strands of Fate as to the destiny of our race, and affirm to you what it will be, if we fail to turn back now for the sacred cause tasked to me by my God and Lord, Asuryan. The coming wars will test us, test us as a race in our resolution and strength of will. Will we survive...that will be a decision you will have to make, on account of your own capability, dependent on nothing more than your raw skill, without regretting. You alone hold the eventual fate of your lives, and it is owed on no one, given the grave mistakes of our race in their excess, for which we now suffer for their folly...this burden that the collective remnants of the Eldar race carry and all, will be secured at the planet of the Forge of Vault."

In this way, Asurmen convinced the people of his Craftworld, in one of his very first rallies, inspiring and motivating them with a force of charisma and bearing that only a true prince of the Eldar race would have. It would seem the Reviving Fire of the Eldar race came in fiery, flowing speeches. Through his inspirational words is the spirit of our Eldar race revived, unyielding and proud, as it was once. And so thus began the journey of the Craftworld, Biel-Tan, "Rebirth of Ancient Days", back into the heart of the Eye of Terror, in which there lie the Crone Worlds, once Dream Worlds of the Eldar, a station in their journey they have to make before finally resting on a Maiden World. At least, that was the plan, or so they thought. Rather, Asurmen knew that these Craftworlds will be journeying in their solitary wanderings for a long time, without any true means of residence on a Maiden World, for the Eldar race has been so weakened, and so depleted, that roaming endlessly through space and time was the only way to manage their survival, as it is with the other Craftworlds. Asurmen knew that the rebirth of their race would come upon the protection of those verdant worlds terraformed prior when the Eldar were at their height, where resided already the Exodites, the first of the Eldar to heed the warnings and saw through the debauchery of the Eldar for what it was; a sickening and twisting decline. As such, the most martial Craftworld, being the first to hold the first of the Aspect Warrior shrines, Biel-Tan, is ever vigilant to bring war and flame to all who would threaten the sanctity of the Maiden Worlds, as they were known.

### **The Maturation of Jain Zar**

The wars fought in the future were to be both a test of the strength of unity of the Eldar Craftworld, as well as a test of the ability of Jain Zar in battle, as was the case too with many other Eldar warriors. But it was especially important for the victory of Jain Zar in combat, for she was not just the first of the Asurya, but the one by the twisting hands of Fate as conspired by Morai-Heg Herself, to lead and found one of the most numerous and deadliest of all Aspect Warriors. Just like her namesake, she was the Storm of Silence that came on the onset of war, the first to begin, and the one to

leave with lasting terror.

She grew in skill both in her sparrings with Asurmen, as well as in actual practise on the battlefield. In this way she matured, in the blink of an eye to the age of 15, ten years ahead into the future. During that time, many battles were fought, against invading Roks filled with Orks, to the encroaching of the Great Nemesis' spawns, as they ventured back into the Eye of Terror, where roamed Daemons and other foul, nightmarish creatures. She fought besides Asurmen, wearing then a mere suit of Mesh Armour, until the recovery of the Phoenix Armours of Vaul, at least, and the engineers and artisans of the Eldar Craftworld were able to adapt and derive from the technology of the Phoenix Armours of the Blind Smiths, forging based on those designs, the derivatives that would form the basis of the Aspect Armours' definitive renditions, aligned with the roles served and assisted by their Augmentative Drives. With such limited protection, it was plain and obvious to the necessity of returning to the Crone World of Vaul's Forge, in order to recover the lost technology of the Blind Smiths. That was the destination of their race, and for over ten years they had searched without fruition.

In the meanwhile, Jain Zar slowly carved a name for herself for her deadly but graceful swiftness in battle, and the effectiveness of her Revenant Strikes earned lethal renown throughout the Craftworld. Throughout the ten years in search of Vaul's Forge, Jain Zar grew to become the peerless warrior as predicted by Asurmen. With her at his side, they won numerous wars for the survival of their Craftworld, and by larger extension, their race. Like once when a massive Ork Warboss terrorised the ranks of the Eldar, until so challenged by Jain Zar to a duel, whereupon she single-handedly defeated the gigantic Ork with nothing but a deftly dealt blow with her Vibrosword, as a testament to the graceful style of combat indoctrinated into her by her master and mentor, Asurmen. With that one blow was the tide of battle turned in favour of the Eldar, for that one blow was the severance of the Ork Warboss' head.

Asurmen was keen to address his people at every available turn, all in an attempt to consecrate them further to his chosen duty, that of the resurrection of their race. Asurmen gave them hope through his words, allayed their fears when they were down and beaten, and boosted their morale with inspiring rallies. Asurmen himself was aided in this task by Asuryan, Him whispering into his heart a guidance to the swiftest path for the return of their race. Jain once asked Asurmen, how happened him to the calling of Asuryan's voice, and so Asurmen told his story, as one to almost a daughter.

### **The Origins of the Phoenix Hand, Asurmen**

Asurmen was first known as Asuryatna Menshata, a name translated to mean Great Hand of Asuryan the Phoenix King, for he is a descendant from the noble lineage of Ulthanash. As a prince of his people, crown prince to the throne in fact, it was all important for Asuryatna to be trained and schooled in both warfare and matters of the state. Or perhaps it was by tradition, as according to the Tree of Discipline adhered to by the royal house of Ulthanash, the scions of the East, in contrast to the Western Tree of Vitality. The Tree of Discipline allowed for the strong structures of morality and purity that formed the basis of the foundations of the Eldar's rise to power, even the success of their race, so long ago back then. Initially reluctant to the responsibility of leadership emplaced and expected of him as crown prince to the throne, Asuryatna would have relinquished the throne to his more ambitious brother, if not for his skill as both a statesman and warrior. For that, he was unsurpassed, not since even in a hundred generations of the past. But Asuryatna had a lover, a princess from the house of Eldanesh, and it was thought that the two would be united in union of matrimony, for the succession and continuing of the royal Eldar line and lineage. But as a follower of the Tree of Vitality, she was guilty of participating in the pleasure cults, something that should be frowned upon given her royal stature, but was permitted anyway, due to the nature of the Tree of Vitality as abided by the house of Eldanesh, one in which encouraged the pursuit of excess, for the simple sake of experiencing the indulgent, like a tree that branches off with its leaves seeking the greatest warmth and vitality, even if the growth was haphazard in the process. One emphasised the strictest codes of self-control, the other the freedom of indulging in all arts, no matter what form, from the sensory to the mental or intellectual, for which one, great benefit, allows for the reaching of the limits and extremities of the full realisation of its adherents' potential, which is partly the reason why the Western House was more progressive.

But it is from this inspiration, of both extremes represented by the two Houses in this spectrum, that Asurmen thought of The Paths, the fulfillment of the best of both encapsulated within a single focus, meant to serve the dual purpose of concentrating the Eldar's formidable mental resources towards the singular mastery of a work, the "Path" so mentioned, which by itself acts as a guard from the straying of their potent minds into deviance, actions that had eventually led to their downfall. This invention of the Paths by Asurmen might be seen as a controlling form inspired or taken entirely from the Eastern House, and even if so, with good reason for its safeguards against the temptations of which led by their indulging, ironically to the loss of all, even their souls. In actual fact, as much as it is visible that its framework is based on the Tree of Discipline, Asurmen's inspiration saw further, for the Tree of Vitality is not without its fruits, and if brought within the regulating limits of a strict tradition or formula, the Tree of Vitality of the Western House's progressiveness could be controlled against the possible succumbing of the intensities the Eldar are inclined to and are capable of, as much as it infects the Eldar on its path with an extreme tempered, in essence salvaging the methods of both Houses, especially of their strengths, combining them and allowing the incredible focus an Eldar can expend by

committing entirely on a single Path to the effect and disregard of all others, a great fulfilling of the depths and potential only an Eldar within singular concentration can reach, yet without the fear of losing themselves to possible excesses without guard, in other words the focussing of extreme and excess within a single occupation bounded by certain disciplining parameters and conditions, that defines itself as a rigid code of conduct. The Paths is the focussing of the Tree of Vitality's extreme pursuit with the disciplining of just one single Path at any one time, within the guiding structure of tradition of the Tree of Discipline, a seamless merging of this polarity that only the brilliance of Asurmen could have devised. In this way, The Paths have become the defining principle of the way of life of all Eldar in the refuge of their Craftworlds, and by which method and result is to the effect of staving off the Eldar from the possibility of losing themselves to the depravity that they have sorely learnt, was to lead to a fate of damnation, falling prey to a doom of their own making, She Who Thirsts, Slaanesh.

"It was in this way that I lost my love, to the sickeningly hedonistic pleasure cults of the old empire. Then I was to hear the voice of the One we address as the oldest and greatest of our pantheon, Asuryan. His Undying Fire appeared before me in a vision, promising a way of avenging lost love, by seeing to the preservation of what still remained of His beloved people. *'I will lead you to sanctuary where still remains the hold of the rest of the Eldar race, scattered as we may be, through you as My acting scion, with My prescience as a guiding light even onto the darkest hours of our race.'* But given me already somewhat reluctant to carry the throne of our Eldar race, more so perhaps was I uninterested in seeing to what must have been the monumental task of saving our declining race. I needed a little more motivation, and that was when Asuryan opened my psyche, removing the wards of my mental refuge, and I became a fugitive of terror amongst a people sensitive and prominent as they are already to psychic proclivity, and all personal barriers that maintained my individuality, and established the separation of the distinction of my identify from others, were stripped from me. The absolute terror that took hold of me, as if the sole asylum of my mind had been breached and assailed by my own fellow Eldar in close proximity...I could sense their every thought-stream, and among a people in moral degradation, thoughts of murder and the perverse delight in it, surrounded me. There was to be no escape, and soon, the most murderous of our kind tracked my exposed presence, like how a radio received through its antenna, and I was thus hunted. I begged and entreated Asuryan, to nullify His curse, for I have seen the worst, and not a fate even against my worst enemies would I have wished for it. In this way I was coerced into my duty as the Hand of Asuryan. I fled with my brother Prince Tethesis to the Red Moon of Eldanesh, where was anchored this great Craftworld, among the last to leave the centre of the Eldar homeworlds, before it was all consumed in the debauchery of sinful, sensual gratification, and sundered through the birth of our Great Nemesis."

And so ended the tale of the origins of Asurmen, Great Scion of the Phoenix King.

### **His Inspirational Rallying Speeches**

After ten long years in the search of Vaul's Forge, even the most battle-hardened of our numbers had grown weary of the journey, to a point where even the act of war came as a welcome relief to the monotone of life itself. Thus, to spur on the fires of our people, in his symbolic act of imparting his own Undying Fire as the regent of the Phoenix Hand, he rallied them with great speeches of eloquence and empowerment, in this way passing on the torch of the Eldar's devotion to their unrelenting mission of upholding the Dream, through the device of word and speech. He made proud proclamations with bold words, encouraging and fostering them with his flowing wit, restoring lost morale at the turn of any great losses, and rewarding them with praises and stirring words on the onset of any victory. At the aftermath of the Ork invasion, as the Eldar had grown tired of the endless warring, Asurmen addressed them under the starlight of the great upper dome of the Craftworld. In fact, in the aftermath of every single battle, Asurmen would call for a rally, to raise their spirits with glowing ambition of the coming rebirth of once glorious days, just as the name of their Craftworld suggests. "Believe in it as you will, as long as this Craftworld exists, as long as we live and breathe, hope still survives on in the Undying Will of Fire of the Phoenix King. There, He exists as the one to open the way to reincarnation, once so long ago reserved to us prior to the Fall. Fear not! For even should the gaping maw of death beckons us as we travel back to the heart of terror itself, it will be but another test of the resilience and tenacity that will come to define the greatness of our race. Know that we stand on the precipice of an abyss, from which there is no turning back. A leap of faith would be required of us, and we will make it. For across it lies the destiny and fate of our race, intertwined with the souls of every single one of our billion-strong populace. Across it, lies **victory**, and the risks so taken will prove their own accord in time to come."

"I have 'killed' myself in relation to the Dream, being inseparable, such is my devotion to the duty of my people. Can you not follow in my path, to the same extent, same extremes? In my 'death' I have transcended all possible boundaries, as for it to be inconceivable to be separate from, almost in concept and form, the combining into a single entity, for this Dream is one worthy of devoting myself to, even unto the sacrifice of life and limb. It is said and taught, 'not in excess', but here I decry that; put your all for the Dream! See to it until its end, for it is the future of the Eldar race, and glorious is the noble parting in the sacrifice of our great mission...'Scheme'."

His inspirational rallying speeches came to be savoured by the Eldar of the Craftworld Biel-Tan. Through the practical command of the aspects and elements of the Eldar warhost in the actual theatre of war, Asurmen was able to perfect his

*Reflections* on commanding the disparate elements of the Aspect Warriors as one cohesive fighting force, known as the Bahzhakhain or "Swordwind", and also "The Tempest of Blades". The Swordwind's strategy is a single, swift strike meant to take out the heart of the enemy with the element of surprise on their side. In this way, casualties were kept at a minimum. And Asurmen, in his role as Autarch of the Craftworld and commanding general of the forces of the Swordwind, taught almost as an instruction, his *Reflections*, on the facets and application of war in its optimally distilled form. And such wisdom, so exquisitely matured from the expense of war, was treasured by the well-receiving ears of the Craftworld's populace. They acknowledged Asurmen's gifts from his noble heritage, and he became almost a teacher to them, for Asurmen knew that there was no good reason to keep his hard-earned battle experience and observations from his fellowmen, and that it would only serve their greater good, and lighten the burden of his leadership, just as how his teachings illumined the way to the success of their race. He taught about the "Flow" of "The Way", the coming together of two forces in a duel, and with the fluid transitioning of stances between assault and defence, ebbing like water where the resistance is strongest, only to flow into a position where the gathered momentum of the flow of the fight could be sent crashing down on the opponent's most vulnerable and exposed point. Truly, a proximation of the Swordwind in its earliest incarnation, still formidable even in its premature state. Through this, "the manipulation of the humanoid form, how best to transfer the enemy's momentum in reaction, to act against their own movements, is pivotal to mastering 'The Way', for 'Balance' to be achieved by controlling the merging of both opposing, annihilatory forces into a seamless union, in so doing earning the perfected strike and complete mastery over the art of duelling".

### **The Consecrated Promise**

They thought he had become lost to his power. Corrupted and deviated from the foremost priority that is the "Dream".

For two months, Asurmen severed all contact with the people, ceased his great assemblies where he will rally them and strengthen their bond and purpose to the Cause with his charismatic presence and inspiring speeches. Yet for two months, the past events of pain and joy shared, the battles fought, the inspirational rallies when their spirits dwindled, even the power and charisma that is him and his words; all these seemed but a distant memory. The people wondered, has he forgotten the "Dream", did he not say that he has "killed" himself, such that he "transcends all possible boundaries" in his relation to the "Dream"? Has he been so broken by power that he has lost his soul, a soul once thought to have died and reborn to be indistinguishable from the Cause? Was he destroying all that he has upheld at this very moment, relishing in his newfound power, committing it to excess on an escapade of decadence, exploring forbidden ways, condemned ways that have led to our Great Nation's downfall? Arts that should no longer ever be given second thought? To fulfill his every whim and fancy for pleasure? Becoming the very Beast he sought to kill?

These thoughts assaulted their minds daily and were constantly exchanged between them. After all he did act in a manner that was beyond all doubts a move made with selfish objectives, placing a death sentence on all who dared approach the porch that he would stand in all their assemblies, a consequence too severe to even contemplate for such a simple rule, as if he had broken the scales of justice and fairness and gone over the limits into the realms of a tyrant, an unreasonable and senseless gesture. Only the finest architects and landscape artists were allowed to approach and were sworn to silence, and even Jain, his Beloved, was under this dictatorial law. What was he actually planning, to the extent of imposing the penalty of death on all who approached within 20 metres of it?

Finally, after two months, whatever he was up to was finished. Suddenly, Asurmen made known his appearance again, walking openly through the streets, moving at a swift pace, his eyes bearing the same intense expression that he has always borne, as if nothing had changed. The people were very much in awe of his appearance and dared not approach him for that matter. It seems his target all along was to meet Jain, having some unknown business with her, walking purposefully and briskly without the slightest deviation or seeming concern for the seething doubts around him and his questioned place in the "Scheme". She was ordered immediately to drop whatever she was involved with, with no questions asked, and to approach the porch at midnight that very same day.

Asurmen was waiting at the elevating platform that led directly up to the porch itself, when Jain came. They went up together, and the only words being exchanged were Asurmen's instructions, "Prepare yourself, you are about to walk on 'Maiden Ground'." Puzzled by this strange request, she had hoped to decipher any further meanings from studying his expressions but he was his usual cool and collected self, his eyes gleaming with that far-off expression.

When they ascended into the porch, the scene before Jain brought her down to her knees; she thought she had entered another realm, crossed over some magical boundary that separated this world from the realm of twilight. Before her was the most intricately designed and realised vision of a garden she had ever laid eyes on in her entire life, that could be only thought to exist within a dream. It was so beautiful, that she was choked with emotions, her breath taken away. Every single intricacy, every single detail was fleshed out with the lush green of nature. However most ironical is that it was the porch itself that held centre-stage, not by any merit of its detail, for it held only two great pillars upon it, the ones that Asurmen would stand between in his address of the people. There the ground gave way from the grass into earth and gravel. The surface was not smooth by any margin, it was rocky and filled with granules of particles. It was

set as usual against the stars, as the porch has always been the highest point, closest to the roof of the Craftworld. She has viewed this porch many times, yet somehow everything seemed different from whatever Asurmen had done with it, an ethereal and otherworldly display in contrast to the earthy tones of the garden. It can be expressed as such, that to look at it was to have your gaze drawn inextricably into the distance, a distance set with the contrasting elements of the starlit roof and the vast assembly ground, both spanning off into the distance, to eternity itself, yet one the dark void of twilight, the other the bright of the artificial nodes of light engraved into the ground itself. It was as if a portal into the soul of Asurmen's vision of the "Dream" Itself, generating intense emotions and notions of grandeur of the romanticised "Dream", and speaks out to you as if to shout out your doubts of the course of Its fulfillment, that fills you with conviction that It has no limits, no boundaries not broken in the span of Its life, and that fills you concretely with the notion that, yes, it will all come together in this one place.

"To have my love for my people questioned and doubted...it was worth it." Asurmen gazed deeply into the distance, his eyes itself revealing the emotions seething within him.

Jain twirled about to get a full impression of the place. When she next looked upon Asurmen, he had his arms extended as if to embrace, his eyes closed, his head bowed.

"Despite seemingly how this would be best appreciated with eyes open, taking in the full wealth of colour and visuals, I have always found this position to be most suitable to satisfying my aesthetic senses. In the centre of all of this, my arms out to embrace the ethereal wind, my eyes closed, as if to feel was enough to visualise everything. In the making of this Dream of a Garden, I have implemented extensively the use of the two senses of sight and smell, to such an extent that to see becomes to smell, to smell becomes to see. The natural blending of smell and colour that is present in the leaves, have been exploited to its full extent, leaves carrying a scent that brings stunningly to mind pictures of lush greenery. As I stand here, arms extended to fully embrace the feeling of the wind as it washes over my body, I enter into a meditative state, in my quiet moments. The lush green of the leaves, the feel of the wind as it caresses my body, as it eddies and subsides and then draws strength again, flowing over me, filling my every being with this scent. I lose myself in it, giving strength to the wind to control and fill my every intent, my whole soul. It beats with the rhythm of the eddies, its subsiding and gaining matching the beatings of my heart, resonating with my soul, the rhythmic movements as if a mirror of the ups and downs of the events of my life, intensifying from one end to the next, intensity in emotions, intensity in the number of feelings generated with its motions."

It appeared to Jain that Asurmen was entering his poetic state. He continued without opening his eyes, unconcerned if the scope of her attention was brought to bear unto his words or not. It was almost as if he was speaking to himself, as equally as to her.

"This is the vision of a Dream of a Garden brought to life." He went on and Jain knew intuitively it would be another lecture, as he always had no difficulty in finding many opportunities for such, throughout their relationship. "Our race has always had a tremendous fondness for nature, incorporating elements of it into our art and architecture. I have always had this dream, that would drift to me at unexpected times, and then leave me as I hoped to capture it, all that's left is this feeling of futility. I have, through a consequentially intense amount of effort, created what is essentially an attempt to capture its every detail and intricacy, and the product is what you see before you." As if full of confidence that his words had successfully diverted her attention from the splendid view in description itself. "I have always shared the same sentiments with our race regarding nature and its appearance, maybe even more so, as you can embrace and affirm with your eyes the extent of my work. This is a dream realised, a dream that has always descended to me in fullness of detail in colour, defined to the limits that may be, yet fleeting in its presence in my mind, leaving so definitely and determinedly as it came, an elusive dream that I had wrought much pain in my efforts to lure into being. It is a showcase, of the 'Ideal World', future place of Our sanctuary, the 'Maiden World', the ultimate personification of the 'Dream', and, yes as I have heard of the current rumours and the vicious rounds it has made through our ranks, and, No, it has never left my mind not one day or night. How I have always pictured the settings of the world which we will finally make our own when all is done and spent, when we have finally regained our place in the stars, is physicalised into existence in this work. This is the fulfillment of the 'Dream', the ultimate goal and aim. It is, in contrast to all my current efforts that are militaristic in nature, one of peace. I have sealed it from the eyes of the public, and especially from you, because I wish to consecrate and seal your convictions to the 'Dream', you, you who would bear my torch willingly and, unwittingly. I am without doubt that of this scene, that it has affected your judgement on this matter to some degree, which I had further intended to augment through the mental forces of impact and impression. What I mean to say is, I wanted to surprise you..."

Asurmen opened his eyes and embraced Jain's fully, gazing deeply into her depths, transfixing her. The words that came forth were a crucial element to his plans, this entire stage and the work wrought upon it needed for the fulfillment of the "Dream", despite its seemingly one-sided origins and how, by appearance, was wrought through selfish and abusive means.

"From the very first time I laid my eyes on you, when you were a child of 5, very young by the standards of our race, a

child to our ways, to the nature of the universe, I knew you were the one that I will consecrate as the First, as my Beloved, the one who will bear forth my will and see that it comes to fruition. Be without doubt! My every actions onto you, all I have taught and imparted to you, is and has been to achieve but one aim, to fashion a tool of war, one that will bring our enemies onto their knees, a fighting force untempered and without restraint, as if but a young child of innocence, in that sense carefree and unfettered, a manifestation and expression of movement and being into one, gifted with the use of all the range of movements possible through imagination, to body.”

Asurmen started pacing around, gaining momentum in thought and action with the progress of his speech.

“You have existed since then from this very conception, and the moment of my acceptance of you as the First is for that one purpose. You bear the fruits of my will in you, I have created you, moulded you, you are inseparable from Me, a product of Me. My ideas and my dreams, my will manifest in form. **You.**”

Asurmen stopped in his movements and turned sharply around, as if to force his intentions through the force of his gaze.

“But make no mistake, all these, however contrary it may seem, is the testament of my Love for you, by turning you into an inseparable and integral entity with the 'Dream'; within the scheme of things, you are made One with Me. The ultimate Love that can ever be imparted, by my perspective.”

Continuing with the momentum of his speech, Asurmen continued to pace his round, this time towards her. His arms were outstretched in the moment of it, as if to physically translate the state of his mind, brimming with conviction and a whole range of feelings.

“I have 'killed' you the day I met you, and I have revived you into a new world, selfishly withholding any choice in the affair from you. I myself have died, and I have rebuilt myself into the 'Dream', becoming an inherent quality of it, yet being just one spark of life that constitutes it, not much different like you or any other I have consecrated to our great Cause. I have existed long simply as a tool for Its fulfillment...But you, my Beloved, I foresee at an indeterminable time in the future, that you will leave me, your life no longer flowing with mine against the tempest of war that would become my life, the strands of Fate no longer intertwined for us. But, I foresee still, that you will never truly leave the Cause, for I have so created and fashioned you to be inseparable in actions and deeds from my own, fulfilling the 'Dream' without lapse in your actions even despite your distance from me. We shall become one in a way that ascends all levels of understanding, you leaving a legacy, although unique to you, that shall be and will be a part of my Plan by default. I have so carefully poured my efforts into moulding you, you are rife with Me. Your personality and character have always shone forth from you and of you, but every nuance of your behaviourism, even the slightest of your tendencies and actions have been devised and monitored by me. I have deduced this from the style of combat that I have imparted to you, for your movements fulfill grace in every extent and intent, conveying through that I have taught you well. My Daughter, I have devoted much unto you; my work and yours, were never separate. These two months, and what I have secluded myself to do, I have done it for you, to further consecrate yourself to Me and the 'Dream', in such a way as to ensure that your convictions will never leave you, never fail you. You shall always be the bearer of my will. How can you not after what you have laid your eyes upon, ever flinch away from your duty?”

“Will you stand by me? Even unto the ends of time, as duty dictates?”

Jain was moved to tears, her voice choked with emotions. The two embraced fiercely under the stars.

“My Father...I am One with You...even if were we to become separated as you have said, I shall exercise all in my will and power to hunt for you unto the ends of time.”

### **The Fateful Crone's Intervention**

Then, Morai-Heg, still living on through Her scion, Jain Zar, deliberated the skeins of Fate from Her skin rune pouch, and in so doing, revealed within the twisting nether of the Crone Worlds, the place and location of Vaul's Forge. It was destiny that it would be found it seems, but that it would be revealed first through the prophesy of Fate before even finding it, was most ironic. But before they could make planetfall, they had one last obstacle to encounter and remove: the presence of the Slaaneshi Daemons that had taken up residence within the ruins of ancient Vaul's Forge. Facing their most dreaded nemeses within the boundaries of the Eye of Terror itself, right within the ever-shifting and mutating scenes of the Eldar Crone Worlds, was their greatest and final test before certain hope for the Eldar could be seized. The Daemons, upon noticing the great Craftworld anchored above the sky, used their foul Daemonic powers to teleport past the psychic wards' preventive measures and into the Eldar Craftworld. There, faced by the warhost of the Eldar were Daemonettes on Steeds of Slaanesh, Seekers as they are called, the cavalry to the foot soldiers of Daemonettes, as they marched in chaotic fashion and haphazard manner into battle.

Lesser Daemons of Slaanesh in mocking feminine shapes, they moved with such fluid grace and ease as to possess an

eerie and hypnotic glamour, which stood out further in presence to the sensitivities of the Eldar, impressing strongly across their sensibilities and psyche. Momentarily stunned by their hypnotic expressions in the way of their appearance and gestures, the first to react to the threat turned out ironically to be the first female warrior of the Eldar, Jain Zar. For comparing the eerie visages promoted by both sides, each was accustomed to the terror invocable through vision enough to be unmoved by it, although perhaps the Daemonettes, unnatural and perverse as they come, were never affected in the first place. The Seeker cavalry attempted to charge at the first respondent to their assault, Jain Zar, swiftest of the Phoenix Lords; but she did not earn her status as the Swift for nothing. Responding as quick as lightning, she zipped past with the Revenant Strike of the Lightning Revenant, inflicting a path of destruction in her wake. With just Vibrosword and Mesh Armour, through her charge, she ended up in the thick of the fighting behind enemy lines, without any aid in sight. Asurmen saw her predicament, and though thought her rash, led the assault to free her compromised position. But he knew that she was in good hands; her own, for her skill was even the rival of Tethesis. Tethesis knew that, and as if to challenge that notion, fought his way through with the Avenger Stance towards her position on the battlefield. There, back to back, they faced off against the myriad foe of the enemy, as colourful as Chaos itself. Tethesis, first of the Dire Avengers, wielded a Direblade, what that was to become the first Diresword with his eventual passing and the sealing of his soul into this venerated heirloom; his spirit stone. But even though Tethesis' time was to come, right now, he is as fit as ever, fighting with such vengeance as to deter even the most steadfast of foes. Wielding his Shuriken Catapult against those Daemonettes from afar, he skillfully diverted the attentions of the Daemonettes surrounding Jain, thus successfully saving her plight.

This time, Arhra was available to wield his great glaive against the enemies of the Eldar, tempering what he had learnt from Asurmen with his own unique style and techniques. Just like how the shadows fall about him as if at his whim and command, shrouded as such, did the hunter filled with murderous and deadly intent, Arhra, stalked his prey. And those who take after his lineage, the Striking Scorpions, followed after their master, despite the concealing darkness of their approach. From there, the most mysterious and shrouded of the Eldar Aspect shrines took birth. The greatest pupil of Arhra came by the name of Karandras, a name that meant "Shadow Hunter", one that he earned from Arhra given his respect for his superb hunting skills, that brought over his brutal taint through his stealthy and shadowy approach, for which Arhra recognised as to stem from a most natural source within him: his own instincts. Thus Arhra regarded Karandras as his greatest pupil, one whom he shared his greatest martial secrets with, techniques that perfected the hunt by the honing of instincts into singular-pointed intent, marked by them as the Ways of the Hunt, the Hunter's Instincts, as they were called, striking with certain decisive force and culminating in the Shadowstrike, the embodiment of the height of their skill, manipulating both the elements of lurking shadows and physical strength, of which the crux of their style of warfare was embodied. At this point though, the conception of dark Arhra left the mark of murder by shadows over the shrine of the Striking Scorpions, something that Karandras sought to temper and eventually be rid off, even as he sought mastery over those same shadows as a means of concealment, moderating the taint of the Dark Phoenix's murderous nature over his instincts with the patience of the hunter, of which he drew a separate Aspect of Khaine, as possessed in the thrill of the hunt, revelled by the predator in its approach and eventual subduing of its prey, exemplified by the deliverance of the stinging strike definitive of the Striking Scorpions' namesake, a killer by ambush and the potency of the first strike, achieved by the simplicity and purity of animal instinct.

That it would be Arhra, ever-ambitious, that would betray them, wasn't so farfetched to contemplate. After all, he lost his place as the candidate for Autarch after losing that duel with Tethesis, and there was always a taint of darkness visible in his soul, that would be cause for any suppressed bitterness. But for now, on the same side of the war against the Great Enemy, Arhra fought with sufficient valour for the cause of the Eldar. In fact, his contribution to the battle was one of the key, decisive factors in determining its outcome. Leading his Striking Scorpions, who wielded serrated chainswords known as Mandible Chainswords, they tore into the armourless hides of the Daemonettes, chewing through Daemonic flesh with contemptible ease.

The battle was vicious but short, as the entirety of the armed forces within the Craftworld were mobilised, right from the citizen militia of Guardian Defenders, to veteran Aspect Warriors, dedicated to the Path of the Warrior. To make up for the lack of manpower, the Craftworlds of the Eldar relied on and employed a militia formed from the ordinary citizens of the Eldar Path, that though lacking in the skill and experience at arms of the Aspect Warriors, made up for it with their numbers. This arrangement was well-suited to the ancient stoicism of the Eldar House of Ulthanash, called as the Tree of Discipline, a way of life counter to the House of Eldanesh's Tree of Vitality, where the adherents were allowed to roam with vibrance, seeking vitality over all sensations and experiences without the confining restrictions of the Tree of Discipline. That was where the seeds of vice that led to the eventual downfall of our race laid. So it is no small wonder that the surviving Eldar race was to choose this method and way of life, as almost an inheritance from the foolish mistakes of their forebears.

The Tree of Discipline dictated the rules of life of the ancient Eldar race, covering all aspects especially as a restraint on their extreme natures, tempering obsession with devotion. There, the Eldar assumed a separate persona to their daily occupation, becoming a merciless and cold-blooded killer upon donning his ritual battle armour, attaining an Aspect representative of Khaine the War God Himself.

## The Forge of Vaul, Preserve of the Phoenix Armours

Vaul's Forge was finally found. There and then, after the defeat of the Slaaneshi Daemons from the interior and surface of the Craftworld, the Eldar of Biel-Tan attempted to make planetfall, which they soon found and proved to be impossible. The shifting tides of the Aethyr upon the world of Vaul's Forge prevented the Craftworld from anchoring itself permanently, if even temporarily. Asurmen selected his closest aides, Tethesis, together with Jain Zar, Fuegan and Arhra, the last perhaps to overlook in case of a staged insurgency aboard the Craftworld, to make planetfall together on a Wave Serpent, hopefully locating the legendary forge where the greatest weapons of the Eldar were ever forged.

Asurmen learnt that the Phoenix Armours were a special request of Asuryan from Vaul, in His prescience foreseeing the inevitable Fall of the Eldar, and the necessity of the skill of Vaul's Forging, this time requisitioning the creation of specialised and extremely advanced armours, upon which the basis of the original six Aspect Warriors could draw and base their tactical doctrines around, and from which the Aspects of their individual shrines could draw inspiration for the production of the advanced armours that came to define the Aspect Warriors, in augmenting and supporting the fulfillment of their roles up to the current time frame, when enough experience and progress had been gained, resulting in the perfection of these armours and the technology of their Augmentative Drives, all of which were originally derived and formed from the technical fundamentals of the Phoenix Armours of Vaul's Making.

It was always suspect, from the start, in Asurmen's eyes regarding the reliability of Arhra. After all, he was a proud man, who might never have forgiven that slight when he lost the match to Tethesis. It was said that Tethesis was slain by a Daemon, and yes, that Daemon was none other than Arhra. Upon making planetfall, the ancient starmaps of the Wave Serpent were engaged, in order to better navigate the wild and perilous terrain of the Crone World. There, upon the Crone World of Vaul's Forge, Asurmen instituted the first of the Phoenix warshrines, the Shrine of Asur, and upon that barren world were the Asurya, first of the chosen children of the Asur, established and taught. They finally located the ancient Forge of Vaul upon this world, which they renamed Asur, after the first shrine of the Asurya, which was before the foundation of the differing styles of war across the separate shrines of the Aspects were first instituted, from which the Asurya drew their inspiration from in the setting of this first Shrine, seeing in it the device of practicality in the function and deed of the circulation of their particular aspect of the craft of war, and after such considerations, took to exploring the vast complex that was the Forge. In fact the consecration and inspiration for the proliferation of the Aspect Shrines came from this first instance of the place of gathering of the First and Prime incarnations of the Phoenix Lords all the way so long ago, then.

*Two of our numbers are still missing.* Asurmen sent a thoughtwave to Asuryan, his close and most vital aide. *They shall come with the passing of the wind, betwixt the twilight of night and day, that is My promise.* There, finally were the Phoenix Armours found, and they were established into distinct Casts, eight of them in fact. Each a breathtaking work of masterpiece, crafted to exquisite and elegant detail, befitting clothe for a Phoenix Lord. Each was drawn by their patron deity towards their select Phoenix Armour, except for Arhra, for although thought of as the Sword of Kurnous, the Hunter, in truth even He rebuked His scion, as being too much imbued with an ambition that bordered on murderous intent, as to cloud the proper judgement of his instincts, upon which should their art and craft of war and death be rightfully based on.

Instead, for him, he chose himself the most powerful armour within the Forge, one to match his great strength, the Phoenix Armour Cast: Stygian Colossi. Just as each Phoenix Lord was brought to union with their Phoenix Armour, so chosen by the promptings of their patron deity, was it fully established by the nature of the Armour's capability, the role they were to take up in warfare, augmented by whatever devices or instruments that came ancillary with the Armour. For Jain Zar, she bore the Phoenix Armour Cast: Assassinator Harbinger, that as its title suggests, allowed the fulfillment of the role as harbinger of terror, operating on the field as an elite shock troop that excelled against other small groups of elite and heavily armoured warriors, as they usually are, in this way performing the silent role of assassin of the elite of the enemy's forces. The Ghostsong Helm, as the mask of the Assassinator Harbinger was called, allowed for the psychosonic amplification of her voice into an almost tangible weapon, as the waves of psychic rage that translated from the voice of its bearer, was sufficiently felt enough within the nervous systems as to immobilise into silence the unwitting foe. As part of the arsenal of the Assassinator Harbinger came the Executioner's Blade, Zhai Morenn, Blade of Destruction, and the Triskele, Jainas Mor, Silent Death. Zhai Morenn was a glaive capable of shattering pass all manner of defences, just like her Aspect shrine was to be trained and equipped in the role of terrorising all but the hardiest of the most heavily armoured in close combat. The Triskele, Jainas Mor itself took its name after her, as the harbinger of the silence of the storm, initiating the strike by slicing a slender path through the ranks of the enemy, like a cutting whirlwind. How contradictory, that in the supposed silence of their role as assassins, they perform their dance of swift strikes accompanied with the Songs of Omen, greeting their foe with psychically charged assaults on their nervous systems, delivered with the sole instrument of their voice. In this way, they emulate their namesake, the revenant known as the Banshee, known too for the wail of her otherworldly voice, whose cry is said to possess an ethereal captivation especially towards the heightened senses of the Eldar, tempting and luring the spirits of the deceased from their spirit stones, and so the Banshee is known as a herald and harbinger of ill omen and woe, a role in war very much resembled by the Howling Banshees, the Revenant Brides of Khaine, spiritual



successors of Jain Zar, queen and Matriarch of her kind. In this manner, they seek to embody the fear as represented by this revenant, using the ethereality of their gestures and forms as a psychological tool to the undoing of their enemies, brought to a fear of a strike as swift and destructive as lightning, accompanied by the sonorous "thunder" of their eerie voices raised in Song, the cumulative effect of their collective efforts striking the presence of fear into even the most hardened of their enemies.

Fuegan, the Burning Lance, was to inherit the Phoenix Armour Cast: Aegis Incandescent, an armour befitting the select role of destroying and disabling armour on the battlefield, entities largely impervious to anything other than the most devastating of firepower. The Armour itself exudes a lambent aureole about its surface, earning its name as Aegis Incandescent, burning brightly with barely contained heat. It is said the fiery passion of Fuegan continues to light this aureole about the form of the Armour, protecting him as much as deterring would be assailants from even approaching anywhere near the scorching heat emitted, and that any other mortal enclosed within this Armour would have been fried outright, given the lack of discrimination of this great heat seemingly bound within the Phoenix Armour, and sustained through unknown means. Wielding the Fire Axe as a close combat weapon, a weapon capable of carving apart an entire vehicle or even crack a fortification, together with a customised Firepike, the Dragonlance, means that there is nothing that can ever truly deny an attack from Fuegan, with all armoured resistance melted into slag and dust. The runes of forging about the Fire Axe continue to seethe and burn so many millennia after its forging, a testament to the expert crafting of Vaul and His attendants.

And for Asurmen, he was led to the greatest of the Phoenix Armours, the Phoenix Armour Cast: Command Oversight. From the mind-link established within the Mindsight Helm, Asurmen is able to guide the movements of an entire army, just through communication of thought alone. This was the epitome of the height of Eldar achievement of craft within the Forge. And attached to the forearms of the Phoenix Armour were two Shuriken Vambraces, each on one arm. In this way, just like the Dire Avengers, heirs and inheritors of the flexible doctrines of war as taught and established by Asurmen, Asurmen himself was amply equipped in both firefights and assaults. As there was more than sufficient armours for the intended original six, Tethesis took one for his own, Phoenix Armour Cast: Incubus Executioner. Like the revenant from which the Phoenix Armour drew its name from, the terror of the Armour came as if a pressing nightmare, that clouded with hallucinogens, produced the most terrible of illusions as a means of defence and assault. This suited Tethesis well, for he will use the opening created by the hallucinations of the enemy, to dart in close with shadowy speed and deal the coup de grâce like an executioner, as his true nature and calling was always the sword, and never the firearm.

### **Betwixt the Twilight of Night and Day**

Having done equipping themselves with the Phoenix Armours, it was time for them to depart, at least they had little reason to stay on in that accursed moon. But it was not to be, a freak warpstorm erupted over the terrain of Asur, chosen shrine of the Asurya, the first teaching place to incorporate the study of all aspects of the Eldar art of war. There was no safe way back, no means of surviving a reentry into the chaos of the warpstorm. For the time being, they were to stay their time there, and hopefully Maldern and his Seer Council would be able to cope without the presence of Asurmen.

There they were stalled, but they made ample use of their time, sparring with their chosen armours, testing their powers to their limits. Unbeknownst to them, the freak warpstorm was caused by one of the Dark Gods, Tzeentch, Weaver of Fates. As ever and always, the Chaos Gods were one step ahead in the fickle game of mortal lives. And so it is that Tzeentch intervened, in the hopes of changing the outcome and fate of the Rhana Dandra, the war that was to come at the end of the Materium as it collapsed with the Immaterium. It would seem that the Asurya, first of the Phoenix Lords and children of the Asur, would prove to be a most decisive force in the workings against Chaos' influence over the material realm. For that, Tzeentch sought to undo the founding of the Asurya, with a warpstorm summoned to sever the head of the Eldar, Asurmen, from its body, the remaining Eldar upon the Craftworld, Biel-Tan.

The Phoenix Lords sparred amongst themselves, and were taught to perfect and hone their chosen skill of warfare by Asurmen himself, he being privy to the vast knowledge at the disposal of the ancient Eldar House of Ulthanash, and so was in a position to lead in the training of the Asurya. Then along the horizon, there appeared two distant figures, by whatever manner of means, were making their way to the Shrine of the Asur. And they were Eldar. It appears the two remaining Eldar Phoenix Lords have arrived, as per the prophecy of great Asuryan. And so it came to pass, as the Asurya fought their mock battles, did the two missing Phoenix Lords encroach upon the Shrine of Asur. There, before them was a mystifying sight, two brothers, one as solemn as the night, the other as vibrant as the day. Indeed, upon a warpstorm did they come, "the twilight betwixt night and day", as spoken by Asuryan. It appeared the duo were being led by the younger, fairer-skinned one, for his face was contorted into a mask of rapture, and by all appearances, had been led almost inspirationally to this place.

I came forth to question him, a demand of the reason for their presence. "Why and how have you made your way here, to this desolate and barren world, a Crone World at that?"

The fair youth did not answer, still absorbed within some rapture of inspired profundity. It was the darker and elder to speak. "We have made an appearance here, on the notions of my brother's visions. He has seen the Lord of Dance, Adamnan-na-Brionha, in ecstatic flights of fancy and awe, and being from youth one who drew much thought from his inspirations, sought an active means of absolving these visions, and it seems from the inspired visions prompted and given by the Lord of the Dance, that they have led us here. The Craftworld from which we have come from lies not too far from the peripheral of the Eye of Terror."

"Still that does not explain the form of your presence here, with the raging warpstorm preventing all means of communication, much less travel." probed Asurmen.

For that, did he fall silent. When he next spoke, it was with a certain tinge of respect and maybe even pride. "Baharroth, as my brother is called, has always found an affinity with the sky and all space above ground, being a natural flier. He was the one to steer the vessel through the rippling tides of furious pink warpstorm clouds. All in the hopes of fulfilling the visions that chased after him, like shadows to forms."

"I see...the promptings of these visions are no ordinary coincidence, or mishap of chance. You have indeed been led here, to the right place. Together with the rest of the Phoenix Lords, the original six are now found and founded, on the First Shrine of the Asur. Come with me, to claim your rightful articles, with one of the remaining three of Vaul's last masterwork, the Phoenix Armours of Vaul." One armour had a sinister skull for a mask. The Phoenix Armour Cast: Death Scythe, was at its name suggests, meant for bringing death like a scythe over their enemies from whatever length and distance. The skull helm itself of the Phoenix Armour was called the Harvestsight Helm, and assisted the aim through a mind-link that granted the user of the Maugetar, Harvester as was called the armament of the Death Scythe, sight of unerring accuracy from the very muzzle of the weapon, and together with sophisticated sensor vanes protruding from the Harvestsight Helm, allowed for the target lock on even fast-moving vehicles, their speed posing no difficulty or shield from the precision of the Death Scythe. The Maugetar was a brutal weapon of awesome firepower, gifted with a range above all others in the assemble of the Phoenix Armours, defining the role of the Warriors to come from the study of the Aspect of Khaine as represented by the Death Scythe, as the Destroyer from all distances afar. And for that, the dark brother, elder to Baharroth, gave name to his calling, as Maugan Ra, the Harvester of Souls.

The final article left to complete the cycle was the assumption of the most gifted and finest of the students of Asurmen, possessor of a skill unparalleled by any other given the nature of its premise based on the drive of inspiration, that for one so consumed by it to the neglect of all other forces, showed through its exception of the unfettered that was boundless and free, for which no device could successfully restrain. And that was represented by the Cry of the Wind, Baharroth, the great Raptor Enraptured. It is this free spirit that inherited what is arguably the most difficult in mastery of the Phoenix Armours, that perhaps only the nature and character of Baharroth could ever truly consummate the perfected flight. The most difficult given it requires a mastery of the motions of control of flight and its field of extension above the ground and beyond, the air itself the expanse of which the bearer of the Phoenix Armour Cast: Herald Zephyr, held an almost endless and unlimited freedom from restriction of movement and manoeuvring, and like all Aspects that follow the tactical doctrines of Asurmen's Treatises of War, the aspect of the Mind Warrior as embodied and strived towards as an extension of the Noble Warrior, the completion of the Warrior as manifest in the accomplishment of both the mental and physical domains of warfare, the different Aspects within various means, infused this concept of Asurmen's in their own distinct fashion, within the frame as it applies in their tactical niche. The helm of the Phoenix Armour Cast: Herald Zephyr is that of the Skysight Helm, a device that allows the wearer to engage aerial-borne targets with such effortless accuracy, that their otherwise elusive forms are easily penetrated and engaged.

For instance, the Exarchs of the Dire Avengers actually directly cultivate their latent psychic abilities, manifesting the mental aspect of their craft of war in the ability to wield the psychic powers of their race within certain limitations, in essence and truth the most direct example of adherence to the principal embodiment of the Mind Warrior. The Howling Banshees, as led by Jain Zar, wield the manifest part of their mental quality in the form of the Songs of Omen, through the use of psychosonic amplification within the device of the Banshee Masks, turning their voices into a living weapon that is modulated and generated by psychic intention, assailing and impairing the nervous systems of the designated foe. Most others are not as direct; for the Striking Scorpions, the attention of their psychic intents is manifested as a heightened awareness of the terrain surrounding them, and like an extension of their being, they steer the passage of their mental focus into a spatial sense of the environment around them, dissolving the separation of the boundaries of their bodies with an assimilation of the immediacy of their environment, even to some extent affecting and influencing the motions of those within this psychic field, for the greater ease of their subduing. The Fire Dragons are fuelled by the spirit of their passion, and this high, energetic and vibrant passion is like an engine that is run by the strength and intensity of the emotions of the Fire Dragons, stirred by the passion of war and the desire for wanton destruction and devastation wrought on the battlefield, the emotions closest to the Fire Dragons' motive. To this end, they are able to use the strong emotions and motive power of their passion as a driving force, that they take meaning and purpose in the pursuit of the art of war from, and channel this great pool of raw energy into destructive forms, which take presence as their abstraction of the embodiment of the Mind Warrior. In this light, their exercise of the mental discipline of their

craft is in a similar manner to the direct application of psychic ability as practised by the Exarchs of the Dire Avengers, in a way that fulfills their battlefield role of destroying and devastating enemy hard points of fortifications and defences. It is given name by them as the Art of the Inner Fire Spirit, relying on the strength of their emotions as the fire of their passion, becoming almost a fuel of furious energy to the production and generation of intense psychological energy, as the emotions of the Fire Dragons become transmuted and charged, and this source is the fount of the Fire Spirit's manifestation of psychic powers, a reference to this unique capacity displayed only and accessed by the passion of the Fire Dragons, which forms their primary drive of war, the thrill taken in the heat of the carnage of the battlefield, and every extreme emotion experienced therein.

For the two newcomers, one as of the fair day, the other the dark night, they brought forth their own unique gifts and traits with them, passing them on in the way of war of those that will descend from them. As has been explained, the role of Baharroth, though supplemented and aided by the Phoenix Armour Cast: Herald Zephyr, proves the most difficult to master, with its distinction of requiring a skill apart from the others, unique in comparison given the mastery of a range movements foreign from the security of the ground that the other Aspects belong to and do not depart from, a mastery so acquired in the performance of exquisite control over manoeuvres that extend to the mobility of motion pervading the entirety of sky and airspace. For the Swooping Hawks that were to come from the founding of the Cry of the Wind, Baharroth, the winds of the air themselves are their greatest ally, for which is the element they align themselves with and seek to imitate for its speed and swiftness, and consummately generated, their accompanying destructive force. The doctrine preached by Baharroth is imparted not with words or sound, but by gestures and action. Those that are capable of understanding this wordless dance of finesse within the inspired flight of the Cry of the Wind, soon realise that the greatest excellence achievable by any who seek the path of this Aspect, one that requires the highest of skill and display of artistry, is only possible should the Swooping Hawks give into the blindness and disregard within the expression of inspiration, from which the Swooping Hawks of the Sword of Adamnan-na-Brionha, the God of the Dance, draw their prime motivations and drive for war. Indeed, the inspiration that enraptures the minds of the Swooping Hawks is one that is inspired from the features of the theatre of war. Within this rapture do they fight, as if in a possessed trance, their attentions focussed on the movements of their winged harness in the air and sky, rather than the ground. There, the concentration of their psychic ability, the mental component to the physical side of their mode of war, is focussed, unlike the Striking Scorpions who attend to the extents of their environment in proximity, as an enhanced spatial sense, but on the entirety of the movements of their being, in body and in mind. Such exquisite mastery, of an art that very much represents the height of skill achievable in warfare, encourages that same rapture of inspiration that is relied on for the utmost efficiency, in the strong control of effortless flight.

As for Maugan Ra, the "night" to Baharroth's "day", he was of a darker inclination, for he revelled in the art of war, and the destruction wrought, for him, it was a morbid love of inflicting death on the battlefield, that got him drawn to the Phoenix Armour Cast: Death Scythe. And for that sole purpose, he bonded with a weapon that allowed him to do that indiscriminately at any distance, a weapon that his enemies could feel its deadly touch from the furthest reaches of his dreadful aim. The Dark Reapers, disciples that followed on from this Asurya, came to form the role of long-range support, the remaining component of judicious, absolute firepower, that completed the elements of the Eldar warhost, in the Bahzhakhain. This morbidity represented the element of darkness, the darkness of death dealt from afar. Love, for the cold dark embrace of death. This "love" for death, their drive of war, was represented too with how they would enter into deeper states of trances, losing some level of awareness, into an almost deathly state, producing an aura of death around themselves, that even affected friendly forces nearby. There are three known states, that they access and manifest their psychic potential through, Soma, which means "body", the state of full wakefulness, Trauma, "shock", referring to a state of temporal suspension of awareness, and Coma, "unconsciousness", a very deep state of mental reflection and meditation, that is close to a state of death. Their love for death is so obsessive, it is even reflected in their psychological aspect and arsenal.

### **Karandras, Shadow Hunter, Sword of Kurnous**

At that moment, another entity was to appear, just like the two brothers did. It was Karandras, and for how he came to be on the world of Asur, was to be by the same means as those two brothers, by riding through the Warpstorm and risking his life. It appeared he survived such a harsh journey, and he presented himself before Asurmen at the first Aspect Shrine of the Asurya. Asurmen was angry, for he had gone out of his way to meet them, even though caution decided against it, and he was needed onboard the Craftworld, as one of its leaders, whilst they await the return of the Asurya and Asurmen. For that, he replied that he could not sit back while the rest of them took hold of these precious armours, for he himself sought the power to defend all that he held dear. For that, before he could be given what he wished, he was given a task, a test of sorts, to find food to feed them, given they had gone for several days now without any real rations. In that way, he departed out into the desert wilderness of the moon called Asur.

It was suggested for him to hunt down the Desert Caribou, which had good and tasteful flesh. So he went about his task, approaching one of those Desert Caribou he could see, and attempting to pounce on them while they stood still. Yet every time his efforts were thwarted, the swift Caribou would react before he could even come close, and flee the scene, leaving him in the dust. This went on for several days, and he started growing tired, and fatigued, from the lack of food

and the strain of the efforts required. He started getting desperate, and in his weariness, his posture and stance started to stoop, forcing him to look at the ground. There he saw an inspiration, a what was called Desert Striking Scorpion, hunting for its prey. The Desert Striking Scorpion was a huge arachnid, which made its ability to hunt its prey rather remarkable, for its approach was silent until the strike, and despite its size, it went unnoticed until the prey realised it too late.

Studying the movements of this arachnid, Karandras became inspired. That was how he came to be known as the Shadow Hunter, after his mimicking the instinctual preying of the Desert Striking Scorpion, with his strike the lethal killing blow struck at the jugular of the enemy. With this new insight, he fought against his weakness, and went about approaching one of the Desert Caribou again, this time with a decisiveness accumulated by knowledge, the knowledge of the hunt. Keeping low to the ground, and hiding within foliage when possible, the Shadow Hunter slowly approached his prey, and when within charging range, a range where the blow could be dealt safely without alerting it into sudden retreat, pounced forth, grasping it by the neck and breaking it. In this way, the style of warfare of the Striking Scorpions, taking their namesake from the Desert Striking Scorpion, and their approach of the hunt, was imparted onto them, by mimicking the hunting of the Desert Striking Scorpion.

*Thrown into the wilderness, I was left to hunt within my own means, for the sake of bringing back food for the rest of the Asurya. Yet each time I attempted to hunt down one of the Desert Caribou, it proved fruitless, their agility too far above mine, too swift a target for me to successfully contain. As days went by, the efforts of the hunt and the lack of consumption of food, took its toll on me, the starving gnawing within. I was exhausted from my exertions. It was within this chance state, when the fatigue caused my attention to be thwarted down, that I saw the Desert Striking Scorpion, with its hunting techniques that inspired me. It was a large beast by all accounts, yet it could approach unseen by some method that allowed it to pounce at just the right distance at the enemy, dealing the deathblow with its striking sting, killing it. Watching its hunting pattern carefully, I came to acquire the instincts of the hunt, and so learning from the Desert Striking Scorpion, came to formulate the techniques and ways of the hunt for all future Aspect Warriors of the Striking Scorpions. On the hunt for a new prey, I spotted a Desert Caribou feasting on some foliage. Approaching stealthily, like the Desert Striking Scorpion, with my body low to the ground, I made my way silently, while facing the rear of the animal. At the right moment, I pounced forth, and clasping my arms around its neck, broke it, thus acquiring my kill, bringing it back then as food.*

*Feeling triumphant, and delighted with the success of my efforts, I returned to the Shrine of the Asur, only to be greeted with a storm of fire, the entire place engulfed with flames.*