

Horkos' Lament

Horkos, out of his battleplate and stripped to the waist, submitted to the apothecary's mercies, ignoring the clanging and tumult in the hanger bay. Thralls, Astartes and servitors thronged the huge, echoing space. They were engaged in the routine that had become familiar over the months... after any engagement they repaired, refitted and re-tooled the equipment that could be saved and cannibalised that which could not. He looked over at the area they called the boneyard – carcasses of Rhino's, twisted and burned, armour plate moulting – neatly categorised and sorted pauldrons, helmets, greaves and packs from various marks of power armour. The thralls had rigourously cleansed the plate they had taken from traitors, and these armour plates were just bare ceramite. The armour of their loyalist brethren they kept – overpainting it in the colours of the Neikea, but honouring their prior owners. A row of thralls were stripping and cleaning bolters, of different patterns, Phobos, Tigris, Umbra, Sarum, all relentlessly passed down the ranks, elements disassembled by one thrall, passed to the next, dunked, wiped, polished, cleaned, re-assembled, oiled, blessed by the tech priest who watched over the thralls with unblinking red augmetics, – until at the end of the hanger a rack waited, and the cleansed bolt weapons were hung on them, poised for the next engagement

He closed his bright red eyes and focused inwards, shifting his shoulder and feeling the grind of broken bones, the loose contraction of his damaged musculature. He had shunted the pain to the back of his mind almost as soon as he suffered the wounds, and as he sank into his consciousness he interrogated and questioned the feelings, analysing his body. His implants and organs were running at a high pitch, knitting and repairing damaged soft tissue and hardened skeleton. His two hearts were thumping in a near syncretic rhythm, boosting his blood flow and shunting hyper oxygenated plasma around his physique in huge spurts. He could feel this pulse in his temple, each beat a discernable twitch in his veins, pressuring his eyeballs uncomfortably and pulling on his ear. His boosted post-human body was running hot, consuming its chemical resources at a phenomenal rate. He could feel the cold as the drip insertion in his left arm thirstily sucked on the fluid, and the rivulets of sweat running down over his shoulders, pooling around the interface sockets of his black carapace, and the creaking of his ribs as the interlocking armour plates of his skeleton expanded to give his body the oxygen it needed. Other beads of sweat on his face caught temporarily on the raised bumps from his ritual scarification before dripping from his chin and hitting the floor.

The apothecary, L'Kthesis, limping himself from his own clash with the Death Guard leader, growled at him to stop moving. Horkos did, sinking into his meditation, tweaking his system outputs to augment the repair.

The Apothecary sprayed his shoulder with de-clotting agent and began the process of pulling his severed muscles fibres back into place while the servo skull that hovered just above them to extend its mechadendrites and needles proboscis that stitched, whirred and tightened, knitting the repair, the noise like the sound of an oversized blood sucking insect persistently circling his ear. The blood from the de-clotter flowed down his arm, collected by an attentive thrall.

Horkos gazed at the scene, showing no outward emotion, but he mourned again the loss of his brothers and the reduction of the Neikea's capabilities. The two clashes with the Death Guard had shown just how fragile their resources were and he ran through checklists of their available wargear. Their list of equipment wore thin. And the remorseless calculus of war meant their tally of effective equipment, astartes, ammunition and armour only ever shrank.

The Neikea – ‘the Spirits of Retribution’, ran the translation into the gothic tongue. But Horkos knew this translation to be brutal and simplistic, in some ways reflecting the leaden might of the Imperium of Man, having none of the nuance that the Promethian term contained to the Salamanders. Yes, Retribution was at the heart of the myth, but also sorrow at the loss of brotherhood not by death, but by betrayal, the grief at the core of this retribution, the impermanence of emotion, and the poetry that surrounded the myth. Also a sense of inevitability – that the path taken had a single end, and while the struggle continued to be the right thing to do, retribution achieved very little. “Retribution” in the Gothic was a poor facsimile of the nuance.

On Isstvan, Horkos had already been clearing the tunnels on their way to the exfiltration zone when the bright atomic flash annihilated his father, his legion and his hope. In some sense he felt insulated from the fallout, as the news arrived by fuzzed and scattered comms, picked up during the times when Horkos and his cadre came near to the surface. For him there had been no scalding moment of horror and realisation, but as they had spoken to the dropships swooping in at the extraction site he had observed a negative space in all the chatter around the leadership of the Salamanders. A careful ellipsis of continuing to do the task at hand, in the face of almost certain annihilation. No one on the network spoke the primarch’s name after the great betrayal. He had heard the cordon and blocking forces of the rearguard reform, strike, withdrawl, mirroring their own experiences in the tunnels beneath, pursued by the filth of the Word Bearers. He had emerged from the tunnels blackened by ash and flame, and with eh knowledge of their father’s death etched into his heart – though he did not know how the knowledge had settled there.

After their unlikely escape from Isstvan, the survivors, Iron Hands and Salamanders alike had enacted a ritual, led by the inspirational leader K’Lian, the indomitable figure who had led them to their escape, cutting through hordes of the traitors. It had been improvised, with all present knowing their primarchs lay dead. Kneeling in a circle, Wardens, Centurions, Apothecaries, Legionaries, all together mourned. They passed a knife and a bowl full of blackened sand from the surface of Isstvan V around. Each in turn cleaned the blade, then opened the skin on their cheeks in a single long cut, then took some sand from the bowl and rubbed it into the cut. The cuts in their faces would heal quickly, their Astartes physiology closing the sand and dirt inside the scars. Each would carry this small memory of the black sands with them, as a bonded cause and as their burden.

But K’Lian had since retreated into himself, rousing only for battle, and while his savagery and determination remained, their escape had somehow soured the praetor. Horkos believed his leader, his brother, had wanted to die at Isstvan with his legion, but even in that small wish he had been cheated.

“How long?” he asked the Apothecary.

There was a pause as L’Kthesis considered his response. Eventually, never taking his eyes from the slow stitching and running repairs on Horkos’ shoulder, he replied. “How long until you can return to the fight? How long until your arm is reacting as it used to? Or are you really asking how long we can sustain this fight? How long until we are so ground down that we can no longer operate? How long until K’Lian leads us all into death?”

Horkos opened his eyes in shock, and stepped back, disturbing the servo skull, which tutted to itself and returned to it’s stabilised position. He ignored it. “Enough, Apothecary. Enough. You forget yourself.”

"Do I, Warden Horkos?" L'Kthesis only now returned Horkos' stare. "I was there when Lord K'Lian was downed by the Luna Wolves, caught in a trap and at their mercy when we had every advantage. I was there when he led the charge against the Death Guard and was nearly overwhelmed by their numbers. He just sent you and many of our best against a fortified position without cover, or artillery, or..."

Horkos took a pace forward, his eyes locked on L'Kthesis', voice low and tight. "I said enough!"

At that the apothecary nodded. "As you say, my lord."

The apothecary interrupted him calmly, and his certainty silenced Horkos. "Yes, he saved us. But he lost something there – and now he seeks death. Kortus was a disaster. We barely escaped. You know this. Now we must save ourselves... him if we can, but we do not owe him loyalty if he can no longer lead."

Horkos bit his lip. As much as his rage wanted him to deny this, and his psycho conditioned loyalty pushed him against the statements of the apothecary, they held the heft of truth.

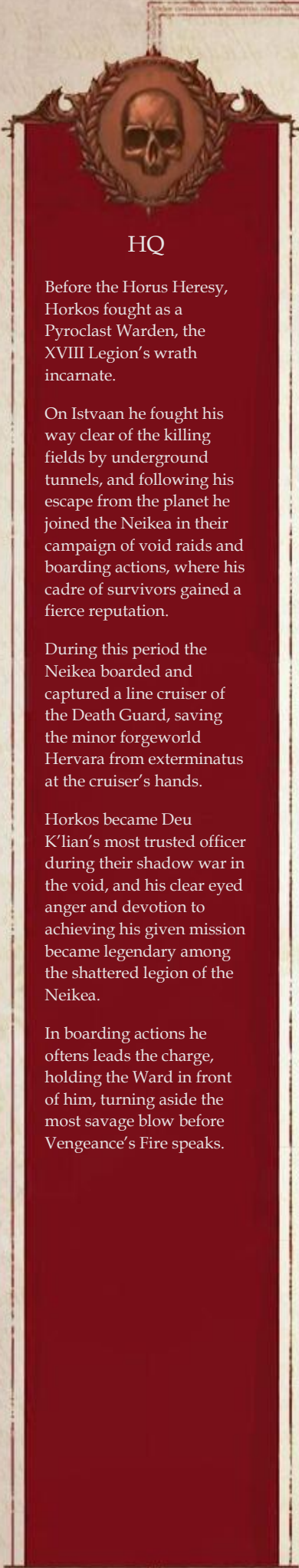
He held the apothecary's eyes for long moments, fighting with every fibre of his being. But eventually, abruptly, he knew. And suddenly the months of fighting, of every moment of struggle, caught up with him and his resistance to the truth collapsed. He saw clearly what needed to be done.

He nodded, collected his thought and then spoke with low urgency. "K'Lian is lost. But we *will* save him. And you will not repeat these sentiments to anyone else. Do you understand me? You are my friend, my brother. But until Terminarch K'Lian returns, I am your leader. I say again..." He locked his eyes on L'Kthesis'. "Do you understand?"

At that the apothecary nodded. "As you say, my lord."

Horkos nodded, slowly, exhaled... "We will return to Akkar."

Then, as the servitors, apothecary, servo skulls and thralls worked to repair his body, Horkos allowed himself to cry. He wept silently, tears running together with the rivulets of sweat and the spray of blood from his ruined shoulder.



Horkos 'Oathsworn'

Wordbound of the Neikea, The Incandate, Equerry to Deu K'lian

140 Points

HQ

Before the Horus Heresy, Horkos fought as a Pyroclast Warden, the XVIII Legion's wrath incarnate.

On Istvaan he fought his way clear of the killing fields by underground tunnels, and following his escape from the planet he joined the Neikea in their campaign of void raids and boarding actions, where his cadre of survivors gained a fierce reputation.

During this period the Neikea boarded and captured a line cruiser of the Death Guard, saving the minor forgeworld Hervara from exterminatus at the cruiser's hands.

Horkos became Deu K'lian's most trusted officer during their shadow war in the void, and his clear eyed anger and devotion to achieving his given mission became legendary among the shattered legion of the Neikea.

In boarding actions he often leads the charge, holding the Ward in front of him, turning aside the most savage blow before Vengeance's Fire speaks.

Horkos Oathsworn

WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld	Sv
5	4	4	4	2	4	3	9	2+

Unit Composition

- ◆ 1 (Unique)

Unit Type

- ◆ Infantry (Character)

Wargear

- ◆ Vengeance's Pyre
- ◆ Oathsworn's Ward
- ◆ Artificier armour
- ◆ Frag & krak grenades

Special Rules

- ◆ Independent Character
- ◆ Legiones Astartes (Salamanders)
- ◆ Consul: Delegatus
- ◆ Counter Attack
- ◆ Warlord (if Horkos is the army's warlord, he has the Wordbound trait instead of rolling randomly)

Vengeance's Pyre

After their escape from Isstvan V the Neikea found safe haven among the Mechanicum of Hervara. Yet even their adepts could not mimic the art of Vulkan, and Horkos' flame projector would never function properly again. So in gratitude the forgeworld manufactured a power fist for him, combining elements of their own technology with the Salamanders' own to create a fearsome weapon that burns at range and crushes with equal facility.

Weapon	Range	Str	AP	Type
Vengeance's Pyre	12"	5	2	Assault 2, Blind, Gets Hot
	-	x2	2	Melee, Master-crafted, Blind, Unwieldy

Oathsworn's Ward

The Ward is a beautifully worked shield that is capable of turning aside the most savage blow. Containing Drake Scale elements, it provides a 5+invulnerable save and Horkos may re-roll failed saves against flamer, plasma and melta weapons.

Warlord: Wordbound

Horkos and any unit he joins with the Adeptus Astartes special rule have the Stubborn special rule.

