



WARHAMMER

WARHAMMER 40,000



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ANGEL'S BLADE



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ANGEL'S BLADE

BY THE BLOOD OF SANGUINIUS

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BLOOD OF SANGUINIUS

The Blood Angels are amongst the noblest heroes of the Imperium, selfless defenders of the Emperor's realm. Even amongst the Space Marines, the strength and courage of this Chapter is the stuff of legend. From the feral border worlds of the Arnax Cluster to the towering shrine-spires of Glorium, there are tales told of the Blood Angels, how they came from the skies and saved the Emperor's servants with their terrible wrath.

Not for the Blood Angels the calculated casualty ratios of the Iron Hands, or the secretive agendas of the Dark Angels. To these glorious golden warriors, no Imperial life is expendable. The honour rolls of their Chapter are replete with tales of Blood Angels who sacrificed themselves in order that evil might be punished or others saved in their stead. To the wider Imperium, the Blood Angels are saintly, if fearsome, figures – the embodiment of everything the Adeptus Astartes were created to be.

The truth is not so simple. There is a darkness that drives the Blood Angels onward, a tragic secret bound into their gene-seed that lends sorrow to their selflessness. This spiritual malaise stems from the last days of the Horus Heresy, the terrible civil war during which the Imperium nearly tore itself apart. Led by the traitorous Warmaster Horus, fully half the Emperor's Space Marine Legions turned against their master and clove a road of ruin through the nascent Imperium to lay siege to Terra, the birthplace of Mankind.

That monstrous conflict was defined by the actions of the Primarchs, the demigods of war who were the gene-sires of each Space Marine Legion. Though Horus was the mightiest of their number, the angel-winged Sanguinius, Primarch of the Blood Angels, was near the equal of his dark brother. During the last desperate battle for the Emperor's Palace, the Blood Angels' Primarch was everywhere at once, a beautiful, terrible avatar of war whose deeds of heroism beggared belief. He shielded his sons from the Warp-spawned witchcraft of the foe. He duelled the towering Bloodthirster Ka'Bandha in the shadow of the palace walls and – though sorely wounded – rose up and broke the vast Daemon over his knee. When, at last, the Emperor launched a desperate boarding action against the Warmaster's Battle Barge, Sanguinius was there at his gene-father's side. It was in that last fight that Sanguinius fell, hacked down by Horus before the Emperor slew the Warmaster in turn.

The Blood Angels were closer to their beloved Primarch than any other Legion, and the psychic shock wave of his death unlocked something terrible within them. A curse fell upon the sons of the Angel that day, and it has lasted ever since. A red thirst lurks within their souls, a frenzied battle lust that they must hold at bay every waking moment of every

day. It is a testament to the Blood Angels' nobility that they succeed in doing so, only giving in to their wrathful urges in the most extreme of situations.

Worse is the Black Rage. Where the Red Thirst is a physical defect, the rage is a spiritual darkness lodged like a splinter in the Chapter's soul. Should a Blood Angel give in to this shadow, he is driven irrevocably mad. He falls into raving hallucinations of the final battle for the Emperor's palace, or else believes himself Sanguinius, fighting amidst the horrors of the Warmaster's tainted Battle Barge.

It is possible that eventually the entire Blood Angels Chapter and all of their successors will fall to the curse that haunts them. Certainly, their numbers have dwindled over the millennia, and their ranks become ever harder to replenish. Yet this only drives Sanguinius' Sons on to greater deeds of heroism, for they reason that if they must face such an end then they will depart this galaxy in a blaze of glory and excellence, not beneath a pall of shame.

So do the Blood Angels hurl themselves into the Imperium's greatest and most terrible wars, fighting with a dynamism and determination that leaves even their brother Space Marines in awe. Of late, they have found themselves stretched thinner than ever, fighting simultaneously in the 3rd Armageddon War, in actions around the Eye of Terror, and against the onrushing horror of Hive Fleet Leviathan.

It was on the Shield Worlds of Cryptus that Commander Dante and many of his finest battle-brothers faced the horrors of the Cryptoid Tendril. This splinter fleet of Leviathan was headed straight for the Blood Angels' home world of Baal, and its advance had to be stopped. The Blood Angels prevailed against their xenos foes, yet Baal was still at risk. Dante's forces made all speed through the Warp to return and bolster the defences of the Chapter planet, but they were still many weeks distant when word reached them from High Chaplain Astorath the Grim.

A new threat had emerged in the Diamor System, an invasion by the armies of Chaos that could undermine the defences of the Cadian Gate if it were allowed to succeed. Already the Chaplain was en route at the head of the Blood Angels' 5th Company, but greater strength would be required to defeat the traitorous foe.

With a heavy heart, Commander Dante diverted much of his own force, knowing that every warrior sent away was another who could not defend Baal. Yet they were the Blood Angels. They could do no less. Dante pressed on towards Baal with little more than an honour guard at his side, while the rest of his warriors turned their craft and made Warp for the Diamor System.



+++AMETHAL STRATEGIC CHRONOLOG+++

+++SEGMENT ENGAGE 0011110000100+++

+++OMNISSIAHREGNUMPERPETUARI+++

ASC 000: CHAOS DOMINANCE OF DIAMOR SYSTEM
MILITARY/LOGISTICAL ASSETS STAND AT 36% [SUB-
REF: PERIDOS BLOCKADE] [SUB-REF IOLINE ATROCITY]
[SUB-REF: 'BLACK LEGION']. TRAITOR FORCE LED BY
BLACK LEGION SORCERER LORD XORPHAS [SUB-REF:
PROTEGE OF YGETHMOR], [SUB-REF: CHOSEN OF ABADDON]

ASC 001: CHAOS INVASION OF PLANET AMETHAL
COMMENCES — MULTIPLE ENGAGEMENTS BEYOND
ATMOSPHERIC ENVELOPE WITH RENEGADE ADVANCE-GUARD
[SUB-REF: CRIMSON SLAUGHTER] [SUB-REF: LEGIO
EXCRUCIATUS]. AMETHAL STRATEGIC CHRONOLOG
COMMENCES COUNT

ASC 001-010: METALICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
MOBILISES TO RESIST/REPEL ENEMY PLANETARY DROP-
OFFENSIVE. ASSET BREAKDOWN SKITARII 53% CULT
MECHANICUS 26 % HOUSE RAVEN 11% LEGIO METALICA 10%

ASC 011-028: MAJOR TRAITOR FORCE DEPLOYMENT
CONFIRMED AT KEY EXCAVATION HUBS ACROSS AMETHAL —
NORTH AND SOUTH CONTINENTAL LANDMASSES. ESCALATING
MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS AT ALL SITES. DANGER TO
IVASNOPHON EXPEDITION OBJECTIVES INCREASED BEYOND
UNACCEPTABLE RISK PARAMETERS.
AID REQUESTED: BLOOD ANGELS FORCES ENTER
BATTLE-SPHERE AT ASC 028

+++SEGMENT CONCLUDES 00111100101+++

CHAPTER 1

VENGEANCE AND DEATH



THE STORM DESCENDS

The tides of the Warp are fickle. The warships of the Blood Angels' 1st and 2nd Companies made up considerable time on Astorath and his 5th Company warriors, translating into the Diamor System within minutes of their brothers, almost as though some other agency was wishing to see them burst simultaneously into realspace. The momentary delay proved crucial, for it was all that stood between Captain Karlaen's forces and sudden damnation.

'What in the Emperor's name is that?' Captain Karlaen's voice was tinged with horror. The cavernous bridge of the Strike Cruiser *Sanguine Tear* was

lit by flickering, dirty light that spilled from its main view screens. Its source was the unnatural storm of energies whirling around the ships of the 5th Company, *Angelic Blade* and *Flame of Baal* barely visible amongst writhing tendrils that glowed with the livid colours of a bad bruise.

'It is sorcery,' murmured Librarian Asmasael, who stood at Karlaen's side. 'Sorcery of the darkest kind.'

Captain Karlaen stared a moment longer at the storm-cloud energies that battered and shook his brothers' warships. It seemed as though the phenomena were slowly dissipating. That only served to reveal sparking

rents and structural damage spread across both craft, and Karlaen's concern deepened as he attended to the gilded cherubim hovering about his throne.

'Speak,' he gestured at the first of the creatures. The fluttering servitor's eyes flashed from red to green, and the voice of Methusalae, Karlaen's master of astrogation, issued from its mouth.

'Lord, auspex reports a single enemy battleship five hundred miles beyond the anomaly, currently retreating.'

'No doubt the authors of this attack,' scowled Karlaen.



'Should we pursue, Lord?' crackled the skull-faced cherub.

'No, Methusalae. First we must attend to the safety of our brothers. Pass the word to all shipmasters, I want a full defensive cordon around the ships of the 5th.'

The cherub's eyes flashed amber, and it winged away to relay Karlaen's message to the vox-pit. The First Captain looked to another of the drifting creatures, this one clutching a ceremonial missive.

'Vox,' said Karlaen, 'have we established contact with Astorath's ships? Are they answering our hails?'

The cherub's perfect features twitched and its jaw distended to uncover its speaker-grill.

'Aye lord, contact with the *Angelic Blade*. We have Death Company Chaplain Daenor. It sounds bad, my lord.'

'Give him a direct link,' the First Captain said gruffly. The cherub twitched and jerked, and then a new voice – gravelly and strained – issued from its maw. It was accompanied by screaming, bellowing voices and terrible crashing sounds.

'Captain Karlaen? Captain, do we have vox communion?'

'We do,' replied Karlaen. 'Speak.'

'Captain, we have been subjected to a severe psychic attack that has wrought havoc amongst our ranks. They struck at the curse.' Karlaen and Asmasael exchanged a frowning glance.

'We had only just entered the system when they hit us.' In the background, something exploded in a fuzz of static. Daenor continued with forced calm. 'It was Warp sorcery of some kind. It engulfed our ships like a storm, but worse were its effects upon the minds of all on board. The storm inflicted... visions... of the sort our brothers hope never to see.'

There was a moment's pause as Karlaen digested this terrible news. The Black Rage. All Blood Angels dreaded its touch, but to have it forced upon them by some artifice of the foe... it was a violation of the highest order.

'How many have fallen?' Karlaen's voice sounded hollow in his ears as he asked the question.

'Hard to be certain at this time, First Captain, but it appears to be almost the entirety of the 5th Company.' Karlaen closed his one organic eye as the Chaplain continued. 'Lord Astorath and I, the other Chaplains on board, our Librarians... those with training or psychic defences survived. The rest... Lord, it is bedlam aboard these ships. Battle-brothers have fallen by the dozen, and the crew helots have cloistered themselves in terror. Some have been slain.'

'We will send you our Chaplains,' responded Karlaen immediately, 'and the Sanguinary Guard. They will aid you in bringing our fallen under control, and restoring your ships to order.'

'Understood, First Captain, I will advise Lord Astorath. We will recover from this madness, you have my oath.'

'And then,' rumbled Captain Karlaen angrily as he watched the last of the Warp energies flicker out upon his ship's screens, 'then we will have vengeance.'



The Stormraven juddered as it punched down through Amethal's atmosphere. Death Company Chaplain Daenor pictured in his mind's eye the flames flickering across its black hull. They seemed somehow appropriate.

The red-lit interior of the craft was full of muttering, moaning voices, sudden bursts of vox-amplified shouting ringing over the roar of atmospheric re-entry, then subsiding again. Clad in their midnight-black armour, with their jump packs primed and ready, the brothers of the Death Company surrounded him.

The Chaplain felt a deep and abiding hatred towards the traitors as he looked around at the twitching, muttering warriors in their drop-restraint harnesses. Each was going to his final battle. Each was lost to the Chapter forever, his light smothered beneath madness and rage. All Blood Angels knew this could be their fate, and all strove against it. But to lose almost an entire company to the Black Rage in a single hour? And worse, to have it forced upon them through the Warpcraft of traitors? It was a violation. It was unthinkable.

'How long until drop?' He voxed the question to the gunship's pilot, sitting up ahead in the cockpit.

'Three minutes seventeen to Hub Beta-Secundus, Brother-Chaplain,' came the reply. 'Re-entry unchallenged, following flight path Chalice to drop site.'

'Good,' replied Daenor. 'And the enemy disposition?'

'Crimson Slaughter warbands present at all primary Mechanicus Hubs,' came the response, 'enemy forces heavily investing north and south hemispheres of Amethal as expected, concentrated around the dig sites. Word is they have Titans and other super-heavy on the ground, brother Chaplain.'

Daenor nodded at this.

'So I had heard, brother. But we have the might of the Angel. Against that, no engine or weapon of the traitor shall prevail.' Daenor believed every word he uttered, his conviction total,

his faith in his Chapter and its lineage unshakeable. But he knew this would be a hard fight, and as his craft swept on towards its designated drop site, he led his fallen brothers in a litany of battle.

Daenor's Stormraven was one of a small fleet of craft streaking towards Hub Beta-Secundus, Stormravens and Thunderhawk Landers all garbed in the sable armour of the Death Company. It was an abhorrently large deployment of the damned, a whole company's worth of fallen warriors complete with deranged Dreadnoughts and swiftly repainted armoured transports. Led by First Chaplain Astorath, accompanied by none other than the fallen hero Lemartes, this army was a weapon of unmerciful annihilation.



Having brought their fallen brethren under control and established the wider strategic situation in the system, the Blood Angels had wasted no time in launching their attack. They could not do so quickly enough, for already it seemed as though the enemy's plans were well advanced.

Traitor warships harried the agri world of Peridos, pinning the Diamor System's navy in place with a cat-and-mouse battle to protect the system's food supply. The industrial world of Ioline had fallen to the traitors, its pan-polar manufactorums now churning out Daemon Engines to fuel the traitor war effort. And here, on Amethal, the supposedly cursed

jewel of the Diamor System, a massive force of the Crimson Slaughter had descended to attack the Adeptus Mechanicus excavation sites scattered across the globe. What the scions of Forge World Metalica sought on this planet, the Blood Angels did not know. Clearly, though, it was important.

Just as the Metalicans had deployed lines of prefab defences around their Hubs and set Skitarii, Knights, and even Titans to defend them, so the forces of Chaos had descended in great strength to seize the mysterious prize from them.

Captain Karlaen and Chaplain Astorath had determined that the bulk of their forces should deploy to reinforce the buckling Mechanicus lines before the traitors broke through and seized whatever it was they sought. To this end, the aircraft of Strike Force Astorath swept low over the nameless northern forests of Amethal. They crossed the terminator from night to day, skimming through the burning rays of a new dawn as they neared their target destination.

'Brothers,' came Astorath's sepulchral voice over the vox, 'one minute until deployment. Augury suggests that former Chapter Master Kranon leads the attackers in person at Beta-Secundus. Be advised, Mechanicus personnel on the ground are reporting some form of extreme malefic manifestation.'

'Daemons?' asked Daenor, gripping the haft of his crozius as he rose and moved to the drop ramp at the rear of the craft. His wards moved to stand with him, some shambling, some raving, but all following their Chaplain like Baalite dustwings around a dune lantern.

'Something else,' responded Astorath, static fuzzing his vox with a flurry of whispers. 'Information is confused, but it seems the renegades are manifesting exceptional physical and non-corporeal powers. Possession, perhaps.'

Daenor cast his death's-head gaze over the black-clad brothers at his back, each shuddering with the barely contained desire to kill every traitor in their path.

'They have nothing we cannot overcome, Lord Astorath.'

'Just so,' responded the High Chaplain. 'Go with the Angel's grace, brothers.'

The vox echoed for a moment with affirmations from the Chaplains who led the army of death. Then the channel dissolved into static-laden screams, and Daenor cut his link with a grimace.

'Ten seconds,' called the pilot from the cockpit, and with a whine of servos the Stormraven's rear ramp descended. The forest canopy was revealed barely twenty feet below, flashing by at speed. A hot wind blew in through the hatch, fluttering the oath papers that clung to the Blood Angels' armour.

'Ready drop, Angels descending,' came the pilot's voice as the forest gave way to blackened no-man's land and boiling smoke. Gunfire stuttered and leapt below, and blazing defensive structures flashed by.

'Now brothers! For redemption! For revenge! Attack!'

With those words, Death Company Chaplain Daenor launched himself from the back of the speeding Stormraven and into the maelstrom of war.

The Chaplain's jump pack flared, turning his plunge into a graceful, flame-winged descent. Behind Daenor, the brothers of the Death Company hurled themselves out into the sky, their own jump packs roaring. Below, a savage warscape was revealed, rushing quickly up to meet them.

Chaplain Daenor's genhanced senses took it all in, his post-human mind dissecting the whirl of information and assembling a detailed tactical map in a matter of heartbeats. He saw the yawning pit of the Mechanicus excavation site, Servitors and drilling rigs still labouring in its stygian depths. He saw the rings of defence lines, factorums and data-temples

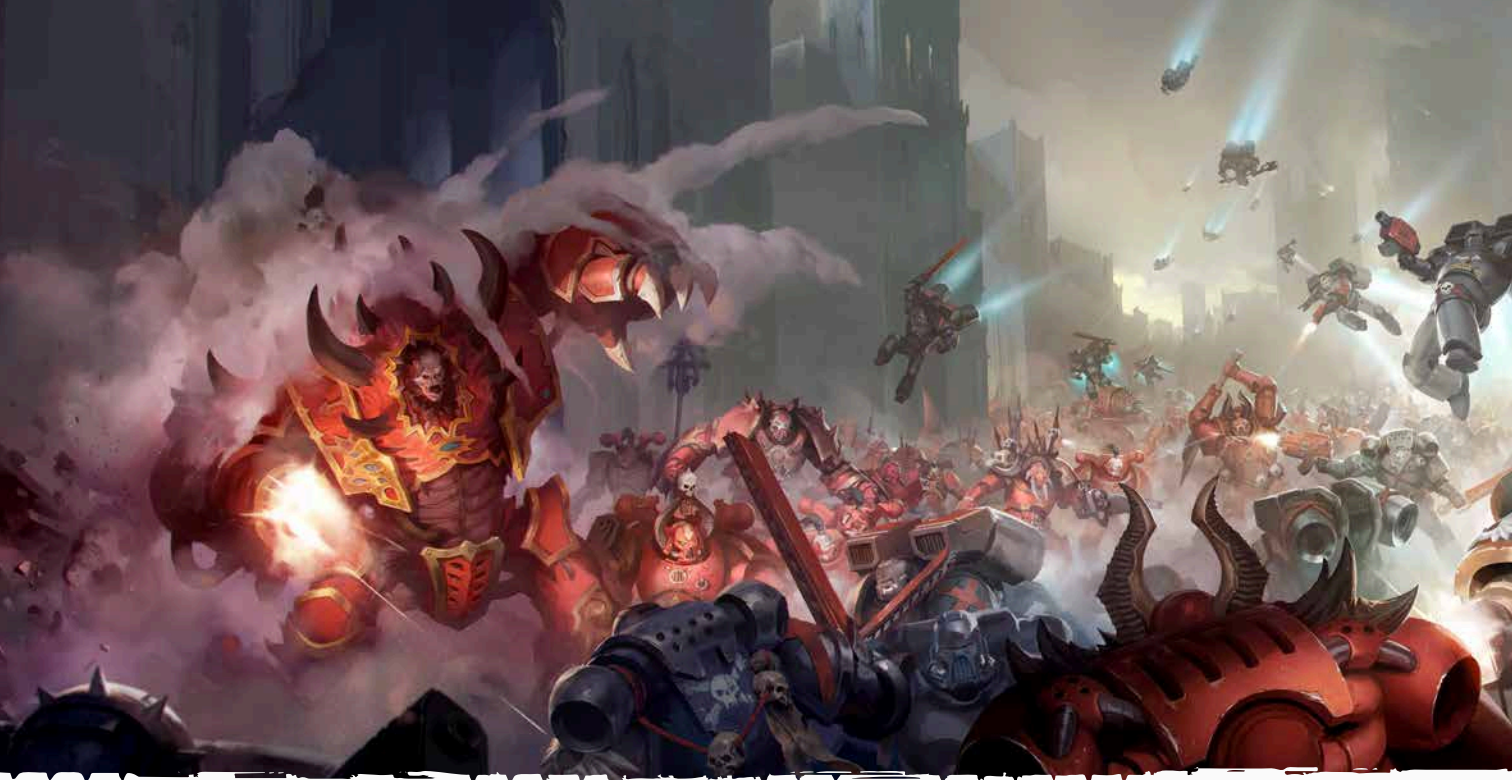
that surrounded it, many breached and aflame. He saw the surviving Metalican forces, struggling to maintain their grip on the last few streets and buildings before the pit edge. And he saw the traitors, the Crimson Slaughter and their Daemon Engines, rampaging through the hellish scene.

Then Daenor's armoured feet slammed down upon the ferrocrete road surface, hard enough to spread spiderweb cracks across its surface.

To his back, the Metalican firing line, Skitarii and Electro-Priests huddled behind makeshift barricades. To his fore was a charging mass of Crimson Slaughter renegades, their warped flesh and buckled armour sure stigmata of daemonic possession. As his brothers landed around him, Daenor levelled his crozius and spoke a single word across the vox to unleash the fury of the Death Company.

'Charge!'





THE MAD AND THE MONSTROUS

At Hub Beta-Secundus, the Death Company army dropped in two waves. Chaplain Daenor and his brothers came down well within the Mechanicus complex, landing between the advance elements of the Crimson Slaughter and their prize. Meanwhile, Astorath and Lemartes led the main force of the Death Company against the outer edge of the dig site's defences, constricting in a ring of blades and blazing gunfire. The Crimson Slaughter suddenly found themselves trapped against the defence lines they had so recently overrun.

Bolt shells flew back and forth upon plumes of flame. They exploded against black armour and red. Warriors were punched from their feet, armour rent or limbs torn off in sprays of blood. Few stayed down, delusional mania and unnatural energies driving them on.

To the north, Chaplain Lemartes led his raving brothers in great jump-pack leaps. They slammed down amidst the Crimson Slaughter, and chainswords and power axes splashed blood into the streets as the Death Company went about their hideous business. To the south, Chaplain Astorath led the attack, ebon wings stark against the war-torn skies. The enemy were every bit as empowered as

he had been warned, many writhing and twisting in the throes of some form of possession. They tore power armour open with claws and fangs, or lifted and hurled tank wrecks as though they were krak grenades. Astorath's axe did its bloody work nevertheless, every swing bringing an end to the murderous rampage of another traitor.

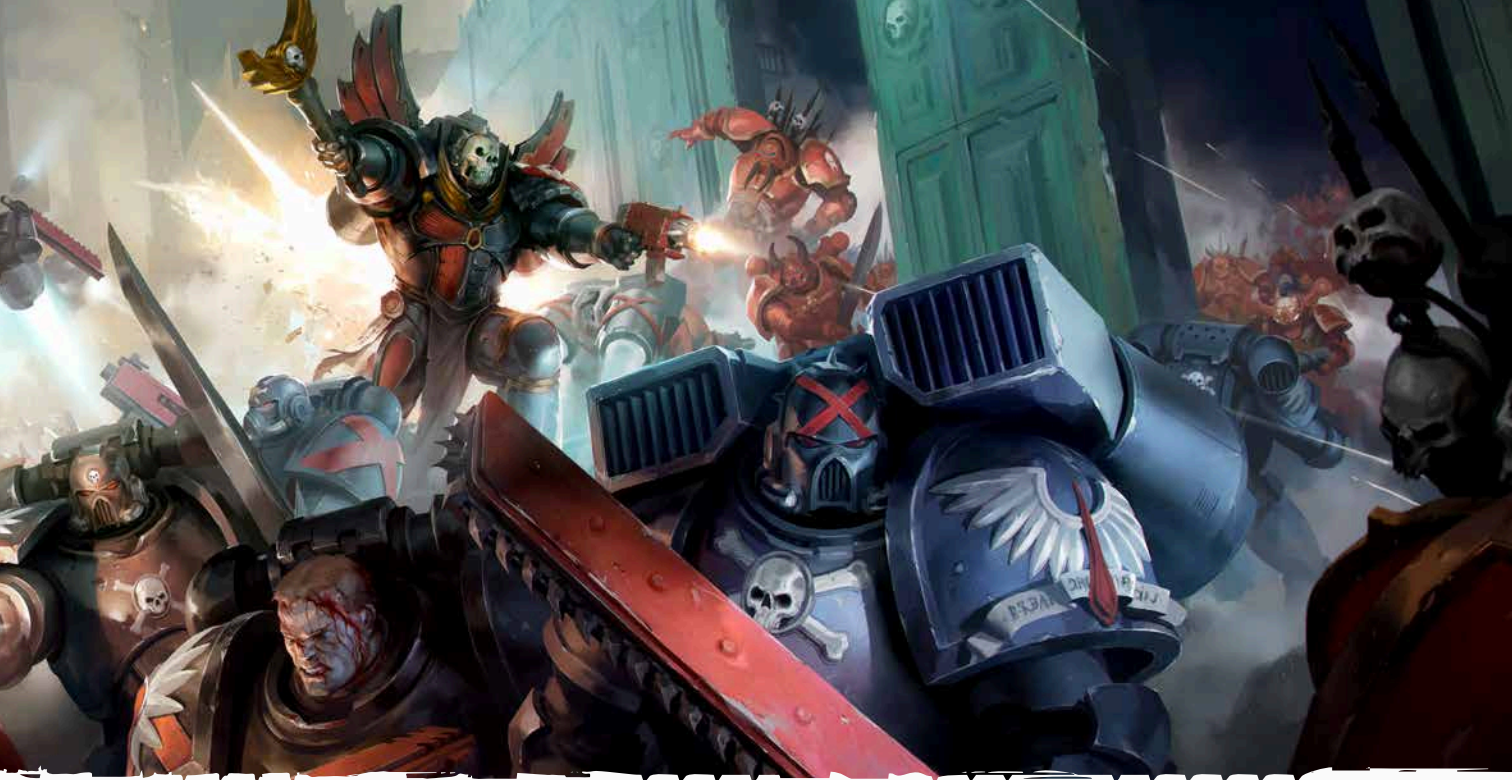
Everywhere, there was carnage as the Crimson Slaughter met the fury of the Death Company. Cultists scurried from one ruin to the next, rattling volleys of autogun fire into their raging enemies. They were vermin, caught in a fight between apex predators, and they knew it. The Metalican troops did what they could to support the Blood Angels, coordinating volleys to knock out Daemon Engines and Helbrutes. All the same, it was the Adeptus Astartes who would decide this battle.

Upon the primary processional, at the head of the ramp-way that led down into the pit, Chaplain Daenor and his brothers fought a brutal hand-to-hand engagement. Black-armoured brethren were punched off their feet, armour cracking under the unholy strength that drove the traitors' fists. Chainswords howled through scaled flesh and warping bone, hewing off limbs that writhed and screamed

upon the bloody roadway. One hulking traitor emptied his boltgun's clip into Chaplain Daenor's chest, but each shot detonated harmlessly upon the holy warrior's armour or the power field of his rosarius. In return, Daenor boosted forwards and swung his crozius in a tight arc, smashing his assailant's head from his shoulders in a spray of blood. The Chaplain found himself battling for several moments more against the traitor's headless corpse, which burned up in a bonfire of emerald flames even as it tried to tear him limb from limb.

Across the Hub, the Death Company fought on furiously, and the Crimson Slaughter met them with equal ferocity. The crystal-circuited corridors of the Omnissiah's Data-temple rang to the sound of crashes and screams as loyalist and traitor duelled through the sacred stacks. A trio of Daemon Engines tore through bunker complex Gamma-Hades-Gamma, only to be ambushed by Lemartes and his warriors. The cursed Chaplain landed atop the shoulders of a raging Maulerfiend, decapitating it with a titanic blow even as the thunder hammers and power fists of his warriors made short work of the Forgefiend and Defiler that had accompanied the beast.

Still the fighting raged on.



Kraron the Relentless bellowed, spectral flames leaping from his vox-grill. Wielding his sword one-handed, he wove the blade through a lightning-fast figure of eight, lopping both arms from his Death Company attacker. Blood jetted, and the warrior fell back. Then, impossibly, the Blood Angel hurtled himself forwards again, helmet cracking into Kranon's faceplate.

'I. Am. Sanguinius!' screamed the deranged Space Marine as Kranon staggered back, tasting blood. In response, the Chaos Lord raised one booted foot and kicked his foe square in the chest, propelling him backwards through a factorum wall like a cannonball. There was a rumbling crash as masonry and rubble thundered down.

'I think not,' growled Kranon, his voice doubling then trebling in his own ears. 'But I am Amethal, and I will be free.'

Kranon shook his helmed head, trying to clear his thoughts. He was not Amethal. But something that claimed to be was speaking through him. Whatever that entity was, it had poured its might into his followers, and used them as mouth-pieces to air its demands. Had he voxed the craft in orbit? Kranon thought he had, though he could not remember what he had said. Some crucial message,

an imperious demand to be passed on to Sorcerer Lord Xorphas of the Black Legion, the leader of this invasion.

Irrelevant now, thought Kranon as bolt shells rang from his armour. Spinning, he raised his plasma pistol and vaporised the chest of a charging Blood Angel at point-blank range. Borne by his own momentum, the warrior slammed into Kranon, and the Chaos Lord felt cold agony lance through his hip as the loyalist's power sword stabbed deep. Dropping his own blade, Kranon pistoned his fist into his assailant's unhelmed face, pulping flesh and shattering bone. He hit the Death Company warrior again, then again, his armoured gauntlet crunching through cartilage, bursting eyeballs, shattering teeth. After the third blow his enemy slumped backwards, skull all but hollowed out into a gory crater.

The Chaos Lord wrenched the sword from his hip, growling in pain as green energies licked across the wound, sealing it shut. Whatever this thing calling itself Amethal was, it was powerful, he would give it that. But he and his warriors had spent long years in the grip of possession, and he knew its feel. Something daemonic lurked beneath this world, something that had found easy purchase upon the Crimson Slaughter's already Warp-

touched souls. No matter how much power it was foisting upon them, it was not welcome. Nor was it helping them win, for though his warriors had manifested incredible abilities since the fighting had begun, Kranon could hear from the vox that they were burning up and mutating with alarming speed.

'Draznicht,' snarled Kranon through his whisper-choked vox, 'this fight is lost.' The reply came back moments later, his champion's voice shuddering with the effort of caging the unnatural might that flowed through him.

'It is, my lord. They are too many, and they just won't...' His words were punctuated by a savage grunt of exertion and hate. '...Won't stay dead!'

'Rally at the temple to the east,' ordered Kranon. 'The one with the Icarus arrays atop it. We will stage a break-out from that location.'

'Yes lord,' came Draznicht's voice, 'and then we will be free.' Kranon paused for a moment. Had those been his champion's words, or those of the Amethal thing? The sound of revving chainswords and running feet told the Chaos Lord he had no time to worry now, and with a curse, he set off at a run through streets boiling with the flames of war.





The Crimson Slaughter attack had lost all momentum. It was fragmenting by the second, caught from both sides by Death Company and Mechanicus forces. A pack of renegade Warhound Titans loped in from the north, summoned to Kranon's aid, but they were intercepted before they could join the fight. Pennants fluttering, a lance of House Raven Knights barred their path. Rapid-fire battle cannons thundered, stripping away the Titans' void shields in quick succession, and Baron Dargetus di Raven led a charge to engage the enemy war engines at close range. Several red-armoured Knights were blown apart in the fight that followed, the ground shaking as

their massive metal forms crashed onto their backs. The warriors of House Raven pushed forwards despite their casualties, binary chants ringing out as they hewed at the larger war engines with roaring chainblades. One of the Warhounds was finally brought down, a direct thermal cannon blast sending it sprawling in ruins across the burning grasslands. Its packmate turned to flee, loping away with long strides, but a tight volley of fire riddled its left knee-joint and sent the scout Titan tumbling down to join its brother in death.

Meanwhile, the devastation wrought by the Death Company was breathtaking. The Crimson

Slaughter were pushed back on every front, forced to huddle amongst the wrecked defences on Beta-Secundus' outskirts. Many of the traitors were becoming slow and clumsy, burdened by uncontrollable mutation or shuddering with energies that were causing them to literally burst into flames.

'Such are the wages of heresy!' bellowed Chaplain Daenor, dropping another convulsing foe with a bolt shell to the head. 'Such is the touch of false gods! There is only the Emperor and the Angel!'

The Death Company warriors at his side roared incoherently. They had fought with magnificent strength and courage, reflected Daenor proudly, despite their terrible affliction. Though the enemy had thrown everything at them, from brass-sinewed Daemon Engines to disgusting Warpcraft, still Daenor's warriors had prevailed.

The Death Company were advancing along a wide ferrocrete processional lined with crackling pylons, blue lightning leaping from one to the next in rapid sequence. Behind them came Skitarii, both Vanguard and Rangers, the bionic warriors struggling to keep up with the swift jog of the Death Company. Daenor's auspex told him that the foe were concentrating their forces somewhere ahead, around the base of a forge-temple.

'Lord,' voxed Daenor to Astorath, 'I am moving up towards the temple, but my force is stretched thin. The Metalicans cannot keep pace.'

'Understood, Chaplain Daenor,' came Astorath's response a moment later. 'Lemartes reports his brothers have also become thinly spread. Dreadnought Lucien is at least a mile west of his current position.'

'Our attack will be staggered, Lord,' stated Daenor. 'Should we hold back?'

'No, brother,' replied Astorath, his voice cold and deadly as a blade's edge. 'These traitors shall not draw breath a second longer than they must. We attack as we arrive, do not give them a moment' respite. Kill them all.'



'As you will it, Lord Executioner,' responded Daenor, switching vox channels as he primed his jump pack for action.

'Skitarii leader, come in,' he barked, and received an immediate response.

'Death Company Chaplain, this is Vanguard Alpha Decimus-rho, please go ahead.'

Daenor's jump pack roared to life, propelling him up in a long leap that his warriors followed without hesitation. Factorum facades rushed by on either side. Up ahead, his visual display picked out enemy silhouettes amongst the rubble.

'Decimus-rho, by the Angel's grace we are launching our attack. Move to support as quickly as you are able.' The Skitarii response crackled back over Daenor's vox even as enemy bolt shells started to whoosh and boom around him.

'Understood, Death Company Chaplain. Cogitate one point two four minutes decreasing to effective fire range. Go with the Ommissiah's blessing.'

Daenor leapt again, a lucky round striking his armoured shin and exploding. The Chaplain flew on through the blast, raising his voice once more in the litanies of battle as he plunged down into the enemy's midst. Then all was the crunch and slam of close combat between power-armoured giants. Daenor's first swing caught a renegade under the chin, ripping his helm loose in a spray of ichor. The Chaplain's bolt pistol roared, three shells striking another foe and blasting his breastplate open. The wounded renegade howled and lurched forwards, only to be pulped into the floor by a descending thunder hammer as one of Daenor's Death Company crashed down into the fight.

A traitor whose arms had become flame-wreathed chitinous talons lunged at Daenor, eyes bulging all across his armour. The Chaplain tore away one of the abomination's limbs with a blow from his crozius, staggering as the other pincer in and cracked the armour over his chest. Two more Death Company

brothers landed hard alongside him, hurling themselves at the mutated heretic with chainswords screaming. Blood sprayed and armour sundered, and the hacked remains of Daenor's attacker splattered to the ground.

Looking around, Daenor could see that his warriors were overwhelming their twisted foes. Few of these renegades could even wield a blade, they were so deformed. The thought caught in his mind, and the Chaplain cursed as he saw his foe's plan.

'These freaks are but a diversion,' he voxed, 'they're trying to slow us down. Decimus-rho, we're pushing ahead, mop up behind us.'

Daenor received a vox-pip of acknowledgement, the first radium rounds punching into heretic flesh and armour as the Death Company triggered their jump packs once more.

Soaring along the roadway, Chaplain Daenor now saw ahead the paved courtyard before the temple. There, Crimson Slaughter warriors were piling into revving tanks while Daemon Engines mustered around them. They were preparing to break out and escape their fate.

'No,' gritted the Chaplain as he plunged down for another landing. 'No traitor leaves this place alive!'



Chaplain Daenor's warriors were the first to reach the square before the temple, and they were met by a storm of firepower. Blood-spattered traitor Land Raiders blasted away with lascannons and heavy bolters, churning the ferrocrete into dust and rubble. Centauroid Forgefiends wheeled and vomited great gouts of ectoplasma into the Death Company's midst, vaporising several warriors. Still Daenor and his brothers came on, tank-busting weaponry ready in their armoured fists. Hurling himself forwards, one Death Company brother grabbed the churning track of a traitor Rhino and crushed a great section of it, forcing the packed transport to slew to a halt. Another landed next to one of the enemy Land Raiders and swung his thunder hammer straight at its rumbling power plant. The resultant fireball blew the Blood Angel off his feet and flipped the traitor tank onto its roof with a deafening crash. The tank's side hatches slammed open and warriors of the Crimson Slaughter scrambled groggily out, straight into the waiting blades of the Death Company.

The enemy's numbers were great, however, and the Death Company's

small. Though they crippled several transports and neutralised two Daemon Engines, Daenor's warriors were punished for their efforts. In under a minute, more than half of his warriors were dead, with the rest looking sure to meet the same fate.

'All Death Company brothers,' voxed Daenor, ducking the monstrous swing of a Helbrute's fist, 'if you are close, we need your aid.'

No sooner had the words left Daenor's lips than a nearby factorum facade crashed outwards, and a trio of Death Company Dreadnoughts stormed through the rubble. Meltaguns hissed, boring glowing holes in the Helbrute's torso and sending it crashing onto its back. Seconds later, the dread figure of High Chaplain Astorath leapt from a side street, another mass of Death Company at his back. Black Rhinos roared in with them, one hammering headlong into a fleeing Crimson Slaughter tank and smashing it over onto its side.

'Let none escape,' boomed Astorath, his amplified voice rolling like thunder across the square. 'Teach them that the price of heresy is death.'

Daenor leapt over the fallen Helbrute and ran on. He threw himself aside as a Heldrake swept low overhead, jets screaming and jaws spewing warpflame. Black-armoured warriors pressed on, still fighting despite being wreathed head to toe in unholy fires, and Daenor saluted their sacrifice. As the Heldrake banked up and away from the fight a sudden cloud of warheads streaked up to engulf it, tearing its hellish body apart and hurling the wreckage away into the ruins. Daenor glanced back to see Decimus-rho's Skitarii spilling into the square, smoke still drifting from the Icarus array of their lead Dunecrawler.

'On brothers, on,' exhorted Daenor. 'Wipe them out!'

A traitor Rhino ground to a halt before him, and the Chaplain boosted onto its roof. As the tank's top hatch burst open, he hammered his crozius arcanum into the face of the first renegade to emerge, hurling him back into his accursed comrades. Daenor primed a Krak grenade and sent it after the maimed traitor, leaping away upon the blazing wings of his jump pack just before the tank exploded.

Sanguinius spread his wings wide, leaping high with a great shout. He soared through the smoke of battle, seeing his enemies scatter in fear as his shadow fell across them. They could not escape his vengeance, for he was the Angel of Baal, and to the traitor, he was death. Sanguinius plunged down into the Square of Contemplation, landing in the shadow of the Ironstar Bastion. Around him, his children fought furiously against the vile Sons of Horus. Turncoats. Betrayers. The very thought made fury surge through him, and with a bellowed war cry, he swung his blade in a great arc that lopped the head from the nearest foe. Others turned their bolters towards him, daring to fire upon the Angel. He grimaced as their rounds struck home, surely causing more pain than any Primarch should feel. Some artifice of the enemy, he realised. Some curse or Warpcraft that lent power to their weapons. He shrugged off his hurts, ignoring the blood that spilled from rents in his black armour.

Another sword-stroke, and another traitor fell, cloven in twain. A parry, a spin, a thrust and a third victim was spitted. Sanguinius was brought up short as his next opponent came at him, clad in crimson armour he could not identify and burning with green fire. What trickery was this? The moment's hesitation almost cost the Primarch his head as the traitor swung a crackling axe at him. Sanguinius pulled his head back, the weapon nicking his helm's faceplate and crazing one lens.

Angry, the Angel wrenched the ridiculous thing off of his head. What need had he for such a helm? Why was he even wearing it? Baring his fangs, the Angel sawing the helmet with all his might, caving in his enemy's face with it before hurling the offending article away in disgust.

He turned again and froze for a moment as, all around him, reality seemed to churn. Where before had been bolt-riddled statues and trampled gardens, now there was the hellish interior of some vast chamber. Burning braziers that cast a baleful light hung from its vaulted ceiling, and marble steps led up to a monstrous throne crowned with an all-seeing eye. A figure stood before it. His brother. The Arch-traitor, Horus Lupercal. Sanguinius' rage surged once more as the power-bloated giant crooked one claw at him in mocking invitation. Raising his blade, Sanguinius charged. He rammed his sword through Horus' breastplate with all his might, blood spattering from his lips as he was impaled in turn upon the Warmaster's talon. As he tumbled slowly down the steps, his once-brilliant wings bloodied and broken, Sanguinius smiled, for with his death, he had struck the killing blow. The Warmaster was dead. The Imperium was saved.

With that last thought, brother Galleanus rolled onto his back amidst the traitors he had slain, a serene smile spreading across his features as he knew peace, at last, in death.

As he arced upwards, Chaplain Daenor could see that the jaws of the Death Company were closing upon the throat of the Crimson Slaughter host. Dozens of traitors had spilled from their wrecked transports, many stumbling a few paces before exploding messily or collapsing amid pyres of emerald fire. The rest fought like cornered beasts, hacking, bludgeoning and blasting the Death Company while screaming their hatred of the Emperor's servants. But with more Imperial forces arriving every minute, the balance of the battle had tipped. It could only be a matter of time before the last of the Crimson Slaughter were cut down.



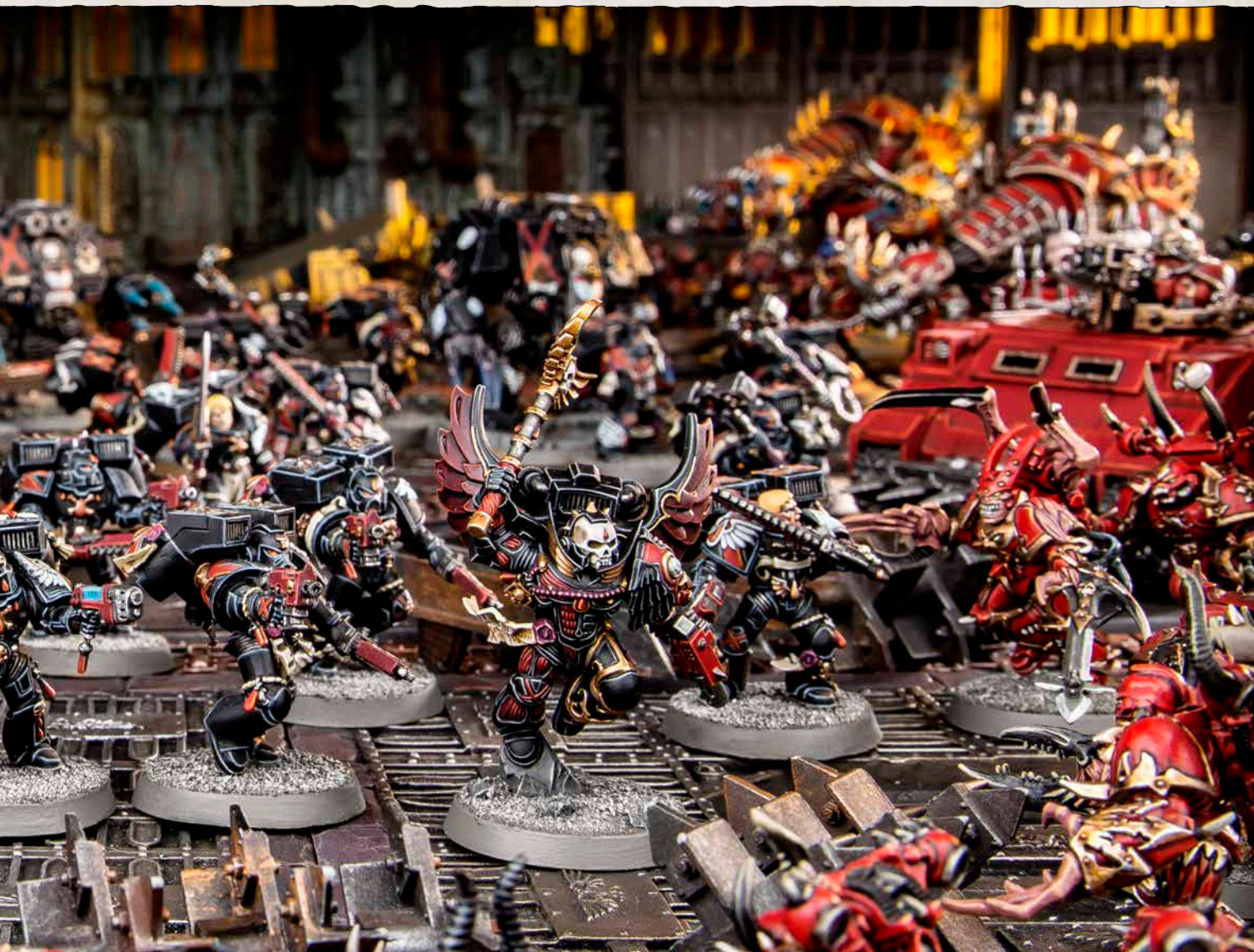
And then, as Daenor landed once more amid the bloodshed and mayhem of the battle, the western wall of the temple blew out with a mighty boom. Rubble spilled outwards in a great avalanche. Towering columns of armaglass and circuitry toppled, sparking, to shatter against the ferrocrete. Dust billowed out in a choking wave.

From amid the ruin surged a trio of Land Raiders, tracks churning furiously as they surged across the tumbled masonry and datastacks. A handful of Death Company Marines were caught in their path, still half buried in rubble, and the tanks' lascannons spat bright beams of killing energy at them as they surged past. Daenor cursed as he saw that these foes, at least, would make good their escape. The Blood Angels had nothing in the vicinity that could catch them.

'Let them go,' came Astorath's voice, a commanding note that cut through even the madness of the surviving Death Company. 'Chase them and we let more foes slip away. Finish this fight, and let the cowards flee.'







THE ARMY OF DEATH

It is rare for the Sons of Sanguinius to lose more than a handful of brothers to the Black Rage at a time, for only under the most extreme stress do the strong-willed Blood Angels fall. Yet that was what had happened in the Diamor System, when the traitor leader Xorphas' Warp-spawned storm sent almost the entire 5th Company into the clutches of the Flaw.

For many months, the High Chaplain of the Blood Angels had been a driving force behind the ongoing fortification of Baal, directing his brothers and the arriving warriors of the Successor Chapters in shoring their world and its moons against the coming storm of Hive Fleet Leviathan. Yet when the cry for aid came from the Diamor System, Astorath the Grim felt a presentiment of terrible danger creep over him and knew that he must answer this summons. Astorath sensed something dreadful at work, something that would see all that his Chapter had laboured for turned to ash should they fail to stop it. Yet with a heavy heart, he heard also the Song of the Lost within his mind, and knew that this battle would cost many of his brothers their minds and souls. Such has always been the burden of Astorath the Grim, to sense the sorrow of his brothers' fall before even they know of it, and to bear it for them unto the bitter end.

Astorath gave no hint of his dire premonitions as he ordered his force assembled, drawing warriors from the fortress garrisons and picket lines of the Baal System and readying them to strike forth into the stars. His strike force was built around the battle-brothers of the 5th Company, supported by elements from the Chapter Armoury and the Scout brothers of the 10th. Those warriors embarked their twin Strike Cruisers full of noble determination to make war upon the Imperium's foes, and protect the servants of the Emperor from harm.

To a man, they were ready for any battle, no matter how terrible. All had witnessed the works of heretics, and knew how to destroy them. Yet for all their conviction, and for all Astorath's dread foreboding, none could have predicted the horrors that would befall the brothers of the 5th upon translating from the Warp into the Diamor System.



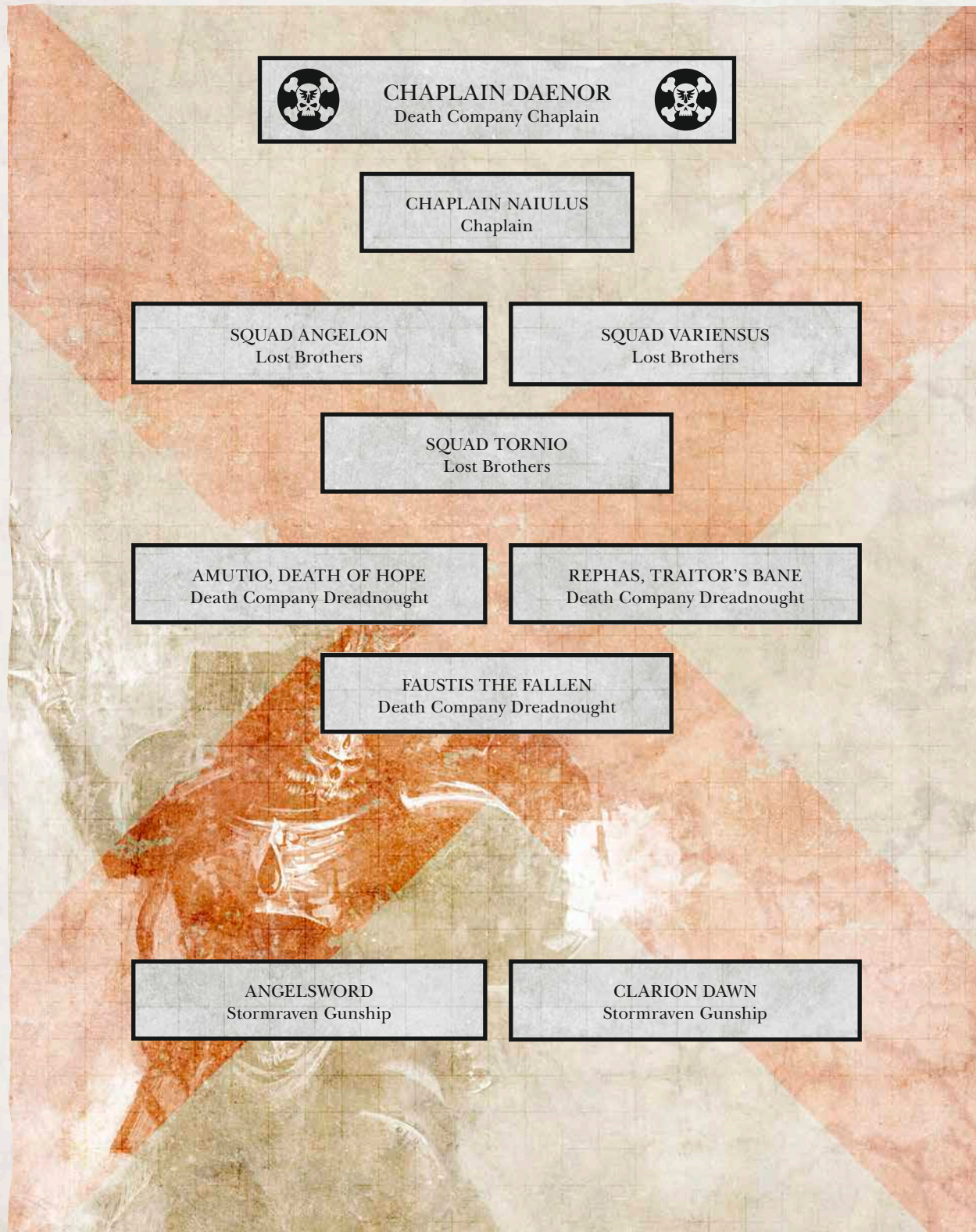
The Strike Cruisers had not even unshrouded their guns or woken the machine spirits of their augurs when the psychic storm engulfed them. The moment their Geller fields dropped, howling Warp energies flowed across their hulls and raced cackling down their corridors. Kaleidoscopic lightning danced over sparking hulls, while boiling clouds of ectoplasm formed leering faces in the void. Every Blood Angel aboard those craft was beset by horrific visions, perversions of the battle for the Emperor's palace in which fire rained from the skies and the Angel lay bloodied and broken amid the rubble. Madness raced through the ranks like wildfire, battle-brothers bellowing in sudden, uncontrollable fury or collapsing into fugue states in the corridors and cells of their ships. Some rampaged from chamber to chamber, convinced that they fought upon the Battle Barge of the Arch-traitor himself. Crew serfs and Servitors were torn apart by the lost brothers. Ship systems failed as the Blood Angels turned upon their own craft, and only the swift and courageous intervention of the Death Company Chaplains prevented disaster from becoming all out-slaughter.

Astorath and his Chaplains moved solemnly amongst the lost brothers, restraining their fury and gathering them together. Where words of solace and calm were required, they were given. Where lost brothers needed to be physically restrained, the Chaplains did their duty with strength and courage. It was clear that almost all of the 5th Company had fallen to the Flaw. So great was their sorrow that the survivors burned to rush straight to battle and tear their enemies limb from limb. Instead, they crushed down their rage and attended to their duties to the fallen. Power armour and transport vehicles were repainted in ashen black, daubed with the red crosses of the Lost. Oath papers were affixed, and final benedictions spoken over shaking, muttering warriors. Jump packs and close-combat weaponry were brought from storage with great ceremony and issued to the Lost for their final battle. By the time the Blood Angels loosed the fury of their fallen brethren upon Lord Xorphas' forces, they were no mere rabble of lunatics, but the Army of Death, a weapon forged in loss and fury that would tear the heart from their enemies before finally being destroyed in turn.



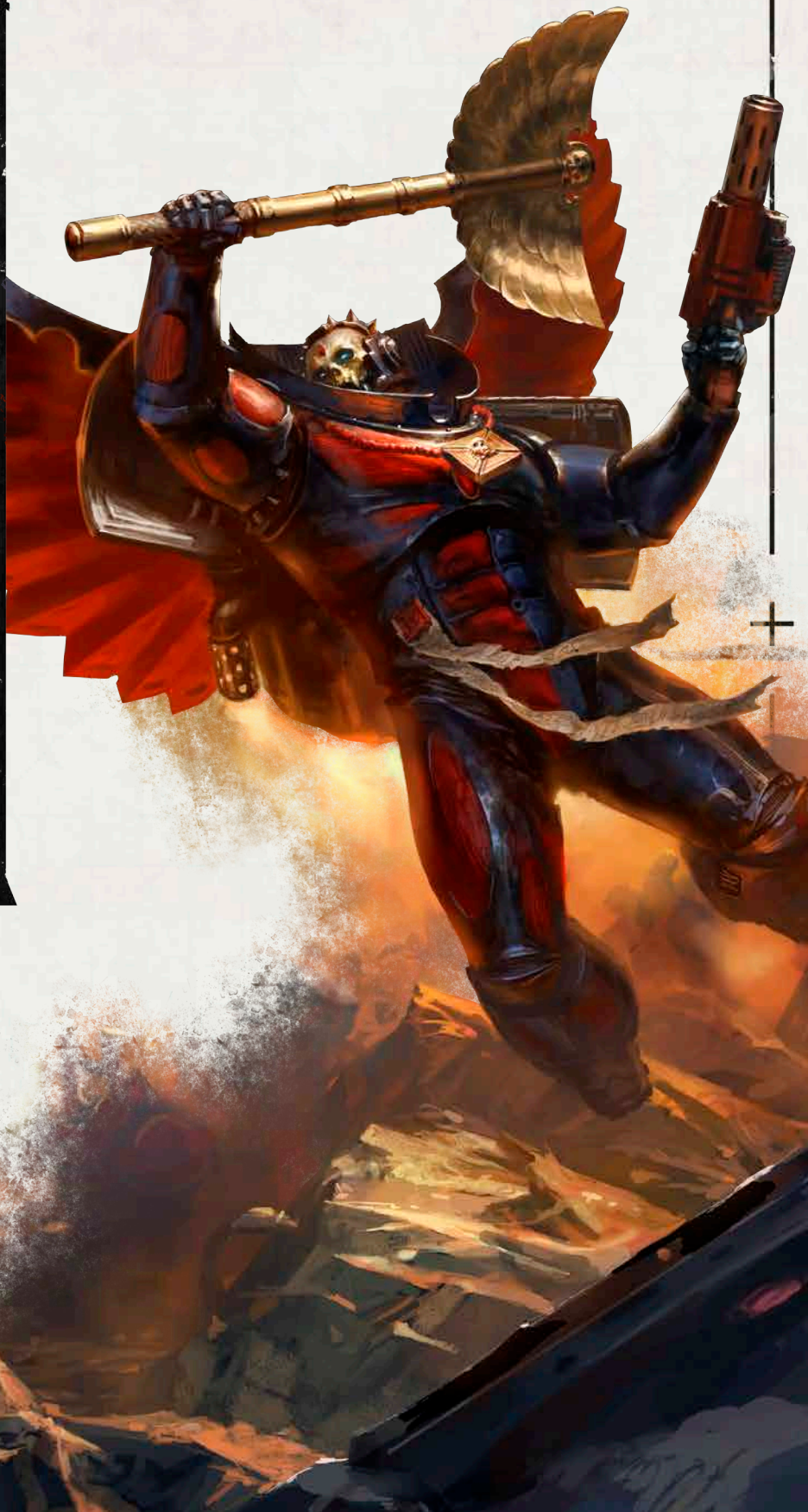
THE FALLEN AND THE LOST

When battle-brothers join the Death Company, they forsake previous squad organisation and loyalty. Instead, they are formed into ad-hoc brotherhoods by their Chaplains. These squads are named after any senior-ranking battle-brother amongst their number, as were the warriors who followed Daenor into battle on Amethal.



DEATH COMPANY CHAPLAIN DAENOR

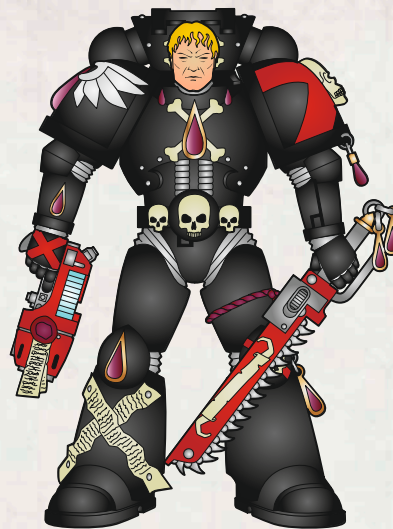
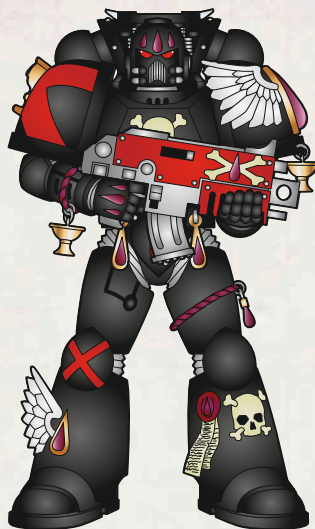
From the bloody slaughter in the Akatrian Heights, to the hellish invasion of the Nightmare Well, Chaplain Daenor has battled his way through some of the most horrific battles in the Blood Angels' history. Never once has his composure failed him. Never once has he succumbed to the Flaw, and this alone is enough to have seen him elevated to the rank of Death Company Chaplain. No matter how dire the circumstances or dread the foe, Daenor's icy composure never cracks. Moreover, his deep spirituality and natural leadership qualities do much to steady the warriors around him. He is a light in the darkness, a beacon of hope and fortitude amongst the smoke-wreathed hell of the battlefield, and even the most lost of his brothers follow his lead without question. Daenor is far more than a figurehead, of course. His skill in close combat is prodigious; even wielding his bulky crozius arcanum in battle, Daenor strikes and parries as quickly as any expert swordsman. It is here, in the heat of battle, that the coldly composed Chaplain reveals his true zeal. Every strike is driven with the furious strength of utter conviction. Each thunderous blow that connects hurls another broken foe to the ground, their life smote from them in the name of the Angel and the Emperor.



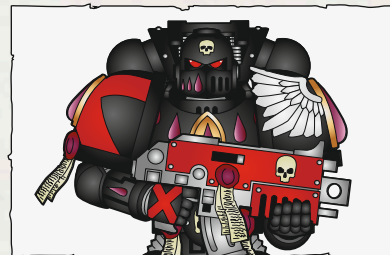
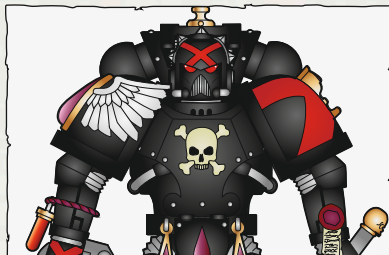
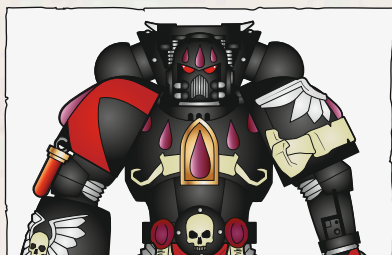
HERALDRY OF THE DEATH COMPANY



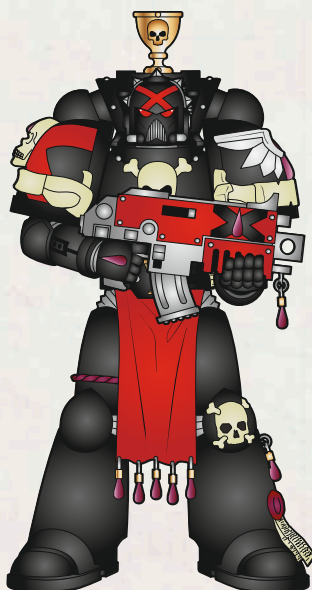
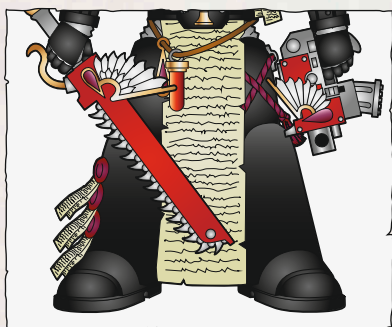
The battle-brothers of the Death Company fall under the purview of the Chapter Reclusiam. These doomed warriors are guided to war by Chaplains, whose duty it is to ensure their final sacrifice is a worthy one. To signify this new allegiance, to show a departure from their previous company, and to reflect the mournful nature of their plight, the lost brothers are clad all in black.



Crimson saltires decorate the armour and weapons of the Death Company, signifying the shed blood of Sanguinius.

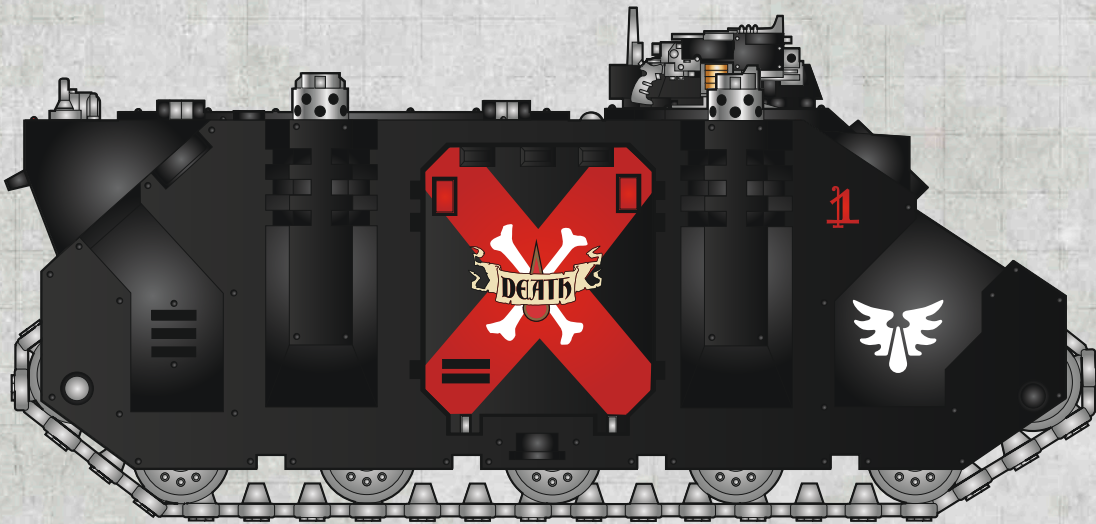


Death Company armour is no less ornate for its bearer's affliction, for his role in battle is as honoured as it is tragic. The skulls and bones symbolic of the Reclusiam feature heavily, as do the blood drops associated with the Chapter.



The weapon casings of the Death Company are blood red, as opposed to the stern black of those carried by the battle-brothers of the other companies.

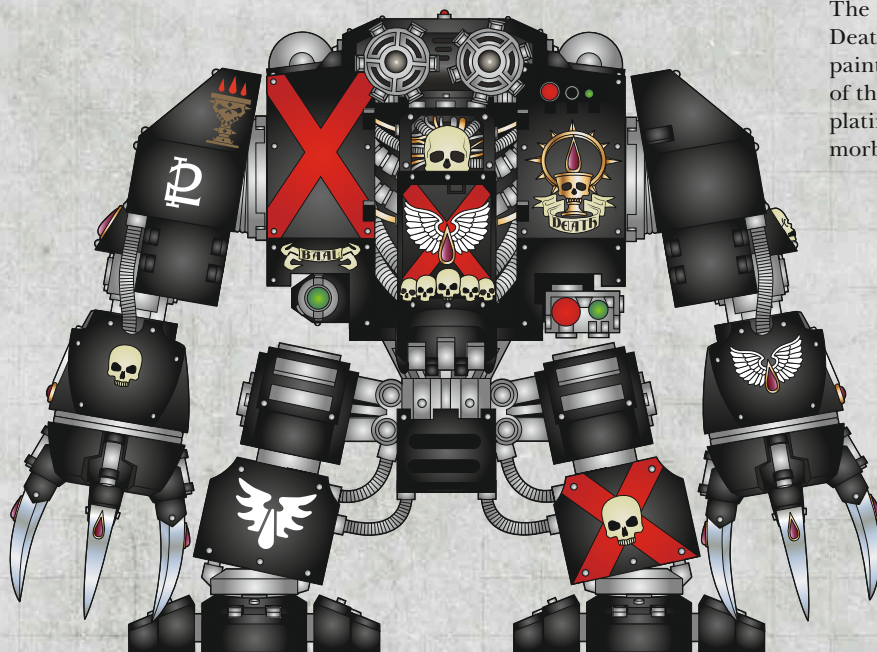
Engraved flayed musculature gives Chaplain Daenor a terrifying aspect.



Death Company transports bear no company or squad markings, for such information no longer has meaning to their passengers. However, the Chapter icon is still displayed, as are slogans and Death Company iconography.



Vehicle numerals can be displayed upon transports to aid commanders in identifying which Death Company battle-brothers are embarked within.



The Dreadnought brothers of the Death Company have their hulls painted black to match the armour of their living brothers. Their plating is further decorated with morbid iconography and saltires.



ASSAULT ON AMETHAL

>>> ASC 001-039

The Blood Angels made all speed for the Diamor System. On board their Strike Cruisers, they prepared to bring battle to the hated Black Legion. This enemy was the product of Horus' perfidy, and the sons of the Angel were ready to punish them for their treachery. Yet they were to emerge straight into the jaws of an insidious trap.

At the time of the Blood Angels' arrival, the Diamor System had already been plunged into a savage war. Its settled worlds burned, and many millions of Imperial servants lay dead at the hands of the worshippers of the Dark Gods.

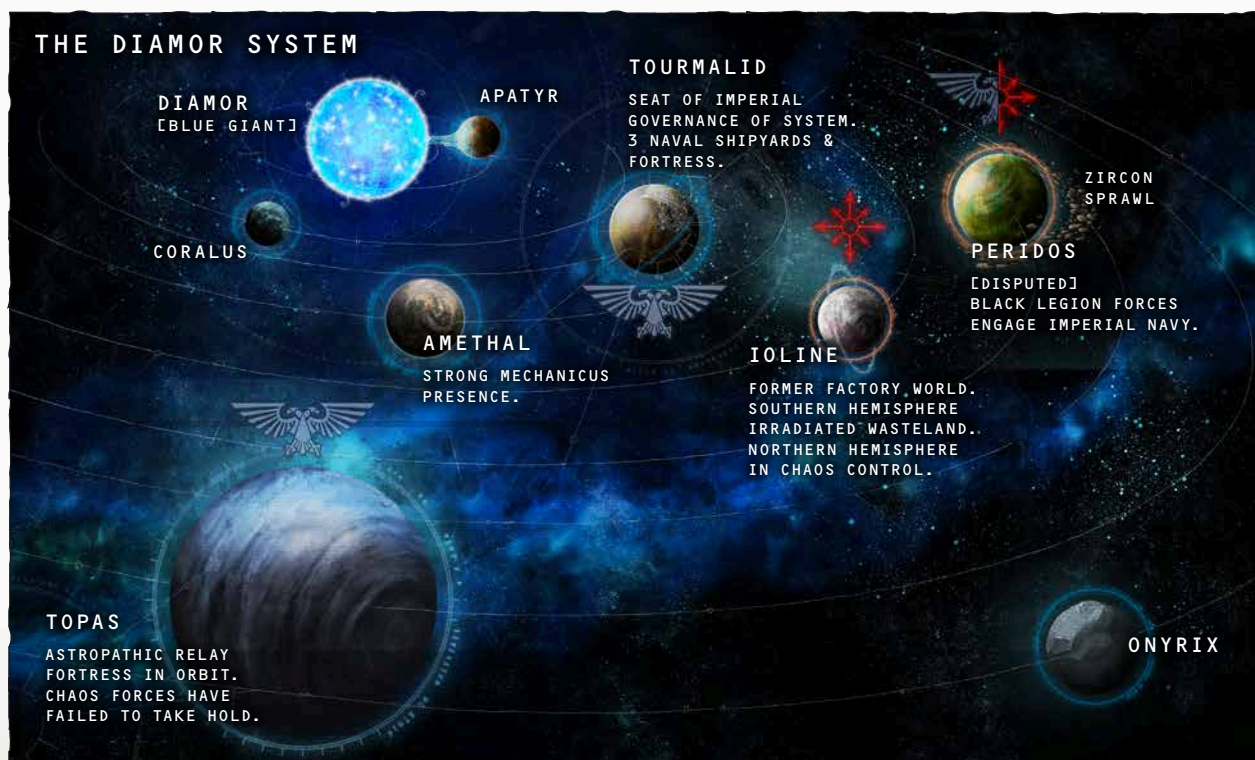
It had begun with piratical attacks by Black Legion craft around the sixth planet in the Diamor System, the agri world of Peridos. Packs of Black Legion cruisers emerged from the dense asteroid field of the Zircon Sprawl and began striking at the enormous grain barges that wallowed in Peridos' orbit. It was these craft that ferried food supplies to the rest of the Diamor System, and their survival was paramount. The planet's defenders had fought back as best they could, defence lasers spitting fire into the sky while Lightning squadrons scrambled from airfields amongst the oceans of gene-crops. For all the heroics of those brave pilots, their numbers had been swiftly winnowed, while the Chaos cruisers continued to raid with impunity.

An Imperial response had not been long in coming. The system capital was the huge half-planet of Tourmalid, a strange relic of the Great Crusade that boasted an entire hemisphere of naval shipyards, grav-hives and voidbound structures. Tourmalid was an operational hub for the warships of Battlefleet Obscurus, and as such, it was ruled over by Planetary Governor Gordus, a former Lord Admiral of the Imperial Navy. This heroic veteran of void warfare

recognised the terrible threat to his system posed by the loss of Peridos and its barge fleet. Moreover, his infamous ire was stoked by the sheer audacity of the Chaos attack. Bellowing that it simply would not be borne, the Lord Admiral despatched almost the entirety of his planet's naval strength to protect his system's supply lines.

It was a commendably swift and decisive move, made for solid strategic reasons. It was also precisely what the Chaos forces were waiting for. Melting back into the cover of the Zircon Sprawl, the Black Legion cruisers began a cat-and-mouse fight, forcing the Imperial Navy to spend their strength hunting for targets and defending the vulnerable convoys of Peridosian grain barges. With the enemy fleet committed elsewhere, the main Chaos armada broke from the Warp and descended upon the industrial world of Ioline.

Lord Admiral Gordus and his court could only watch in horror as the warriors of the Black Legion and their Word Bearer allies slaughtered the defenders of Ioline's pan-polar hives. Worse was to come as, rather than launch a conventional assault against the world's southern hemisphere, the Chaos invaders simply deployed Ioline's atomic arsenal against it. One half of the old industrial world tore the other half apart in a hideous act of self-immolation, leaving billions dead and the invaders firmly in possession of Ioline's polar manufactorums. They wasted



no time in converting these through dark ritual and arcane science, creating monstrous Daemon Engine factories that would provide a steady stream of reinforcements for the war to come.

Those early assaults were but a preamble, the foundations upon which the true Chaos attack would be built. Now the traitors turned their attention to their real goal, the cursed paradise of Amethal.

A huge and idyllic garden world with a human-compatible biosphere, Amethal should have been the jewel in the crown of the Diamor System. Instead, it had long been an enigma to be feared. Astropaths and Navigators alike could say only that there was something 'wrong' with Amethal, the sense of a vast staring eye occluded by a mysterious veil. Though numerous attempts had been made to colonise Amethal over the centuries, none had been successful. The planet's beautiful meadows, lush forests, obvious mineral wealth and teeming oceans begged to be exploited by the rapacious Imperium. But like a starving man presented with a poisoned apple, a single bite proved lethal. Within hours of landing upon Amethal, human colonists reported nausea, dizziness, and crippling headaches. Auditory and visual hallucinations followed, accompanied by insomnia, dislocation and paranoia. The longest any prefab settlement had lasted on Amethal was two weeks. By the end of that time every last colonist had either killed themselves, or been slain by the others.

Amethal had thus remained unsettled and unexplored until just months before the Chaos invasion. It was at that time that Technoarcheologist Dominus Ivasnophon arrived at the head of a huge Explorator fleet from the forge world of Metalica. Though the Magos had declined to share

with Lord Admiral Gordus the nature of his work, he had insisted that his forces be permitted to land upon Amethal and to excavate its surface as they saw fit. Dismissing warnings that the world was cursed, the Metalicans pressed ahead, landing prefabricated macrotemples, forge factorums, extensive defences and huge excavator machines. They were accompanied to the surface by hundreds of thousands of Skitarii, Electro-Priests and Combat Servitors, as well as a sizeable force of Knights from the Mechanicus-aligned House Raven.

'MAKE READY FOR WAR, MY SERVANTS. THE OMNISSIAH DESIRES THE SECRETS OF THIS WORLD, BUT WE SHALL NOT WIN THEM WITHOUT BATTLE.'

- Magos Dominus Ivasnophon

Ivasnophon and his followers wasted no time in establishing massive archeotechnological digs at key sites across the northern and southern hemispheres of Amethal. It was clear that they sought something beneath the surface, perhaps some ancient technology or powerful weapon. They also seemed to expect attack, for their fortification lines were formidable, and the blackened kill zones they blasted out around each of their enclaves could be seen from space. The machine spirits of the Metalican macrotemples linked noospherically across the globe, churning through endless reams of data as they worked on some grand computational conundrum. As the Mechanicus worked, they accepted the slow but steady attrition of their biological units as a reasonable cost for continued operations on Amethal's surface.





Curt misses from Ivasnophon to the office of Lord Admiral Gordus suggested that, after many months of toil, the Mechanicus were on the verge of a breakthrough that would be of paramount importance to the Imperium. And then the Black Legion and their allies struck.

By the time the ships of the Blood Angels' 5th Company broke Warp on the edge of the Diamor System, the Metalian forces were already firmly on the back foot. Kranon the Relentless, and a massive force of his infamous Crimson Slaughter, had executed headlong combat drops onto Amethal's surface, closing in upon the Mechanicus excavation sites and laying siege to their defenders.

The Blood Angels had barely time to gather the most basic auspex and vox data on the system before the enemy struck. Two Strike Cruisers, *Angelic Blade* and *Flame of Baal* bore the warriors of the 5th Company. Aboard both ships, alarms howled and emergency lighting strobed madly. Machine spirits attempted to seal Warp transit shutters, confused by auspexes flooded with conflicting data. On board both craft, the cloistered Navigators had time to scream in horror before a vast wave of sorcerous phantasms struck. This was no random translation catastrophe, but rather a Warp-spawned psychic storm conjured by the Black Legion Sorcerer Lord Xorphas, whose flagship, the *Stygian Beast* had waited in ambush within five hundred miles of the Blood Angels' emergence point. Billowing thunderheads of filthy unlight flowed around the Blood Angels' ships and subjected those on board to hideous psychic assault. Crew helots wailed in terror as their craft bucked madly around them and weird phantasms whirled behind their eyes. Yet worse by far were the psychic storm's effects upon the Blood Angels. Each battle-brother was transported in an instant to the darkest hours of the siege

of Terra. They witnessed screaming Daemons on every side, the walls of the Emperor's palace toppling in flames, and the godlike apparition of Horus, laughing triumphantly in the burning skies above. Worst of all, each of them saw Sanguinius lying broken amid the ruin of the Emperor's dreams, slain by the traitor's hands. A few, those of exceptionally strong will or possessed of the full wisdom of the Reclusiam, were able to endure. Dozens of noble battle-brothers did not, their sanity shattering as the Black Rage roared up from their souls to claim them. By the time the curse-storm finally dissipated, only Astorath the Grim, the stasis-frozen Chaplain Lemartes, and a handful of Librarians, Veterans and Death Company Chaplains remained sane. The Strike Cruisers themselves were paralysed, their helot crews stunned by the shock of what had befallen them. At that moment, the Chaos flagship might have struck and annihilated its victims while bedlam reigned upon the Strike Cruisers' decks.

Yet, for reasons unknown, it hung back. The timely arrival of those ships despatched by Commander Dante – Strike Cruisers and escorts bearing the 2nd Company and a large portion of the 1st – saw the Chaos battleship retreat, leaving madness and misery in its wake. Outraged at the horrors that had been wrought, Captains Karlaen and Aphael formed a cordon of ships around their stricken brothers and despatched their Chaplains and veteran brothers to help restore order. Still, it was the best part of a day before the newly fallen Death Company – nearly one hundred strong – could be gathered, armed and armoured as befitted their damned status. During that time, Karlaen spoke via astropathic message with Lord Admiral Gordus, and with Dominus Ivasnophon on Amethal. A plan of action was swiftly established, and Karlaen swore that he would see the Black Legion pay for their heinous act.



After despatching an honour guard to Tourmalid to protect the Lord Admiral, the primary strength of the Blood Angels then drove straight for Amethal. It was theorised that this was the enemy's true objective, and that with their deviant sorcery they had perhaps hoped to prevent the Blood Angels from intervening in the battle. First Captain Karlaen was glad to disappoint them.

The five excavation sites dotted across Amethal were clearly the areas of primary importance on the planet's surface, having borne the brunt of the Chaos assault, and so the Blood Angels forces were split between them. The three sites in the northern hemisphere had been designated by the Metalcans as Hubs Alpha-Prime, Beta-Secundus and Cognis-Tertius. To the south were Hubs Daedalus-Quartos and Enigmus-Quintus. All were beset by Lord Xorphas' Crimson Slaughter allies, but Beta-Secundus and Enigmus-Quintus required the most immediate aid. The former had been all but overrun by Kranon the Relentless and his personal guard, who were reported to be exhibiting unusual levels of supernatural strength and fortitude that the Mechanicus believed were linked to a hidden power that lay beneath the planet's surface. Meanwhile, Magos Ivasnophon was in personal command of the forces fighting at Enigmus-Quintus, and demanded immediate audience with Captain Karlaen. The Magos claimed that he was in possession of vital strategic information, but that this was so sensitive it could not be exchanged even via encrypted vox.

While smaller Blood Angels strike forces split off to oppose the Crimson Slaughter elsewhere, Karlaen led his Archangels to Enigmus-Quintus, and the entire newly created Death Company descended upon Kranon and his Crimson Slaughter forces at Beta-Secundus.

Skimming low over woods and rivers in their black-hulled Stormravens, the Death Company fell upon Kranon's forces in a ferocious surprise attack. They were led by an assortment of heroes: Astorath the Grim, hefting his executioner's axe; Chaplain Lemartes, shaking in the perpetual grip of the Black Rage; and the sombre Death Company Chaplain Daenor and his brethren of the Reclusiam. It was these legendary warriors who led the way as the Death Company leapt from the assault ramps of their Stormravens and plunged into battle.

Kranon and his followers had breached the Mechanicus defence lines and hurled their enemies back to the very edge of the dig site. In part, this had been due to a strange manifestation of unnatural powers amongst the Crimson Slaughter, something an order of magnitude greater than the poltergeist activity previously documented to occur in their presence. Renegade Space Marines had been witnessed lifting and hurling Onager Duncrawlers, shrugging off direct hits from neutron lasers, and ripping open ferrocrete bastions with their bare hands. Yet the traitors' power appeared unstable. Many of them had burned up in its fires by the time the Death Company struck.

The black-armoured Blood Angels dropped in three distinct groups, led by Astorath, Lemartes and Daenor respectively. The first two of those groups landed on the edge of the blasted kill zone outside the Mechanicus defences, supported by bellowing Death Company Dreadnoughts. They lit their jump packs and soared swiftly into battle, making for where the Crimson Slaughter had overrun the defences so recently seized from the Metalcans. Daenor and the third group slammed down amidst the rubble-strewn streets, near to the excavation site



itself and the surviving Mechanicus defenders. Guided by the resolute will of their Chaplain, these Death Company Marines threw back the Crimson Slaughter who were pressing in towards the excavation site, and rallied the surviving Metalicans.

From a position of near victory, Kranon and his warriors suddenly found themselves beset from both sides. They were trapped amidst the defence lines they had taken, forced onto the defensive while the Death Company and their allies carved into them from both sides.

It was a brutal fight, packs of Daemon Engines storming out to engage conclaves of Death Company Dreadnoughts while wings of Stormraven Gunships streaked back and forth overhead, strafing the traitors with heavy fire. Three times, the Chaos forces attempted to drive their enemies off. They were met each time with the controlled ferocity of the Death Company and its lords, and were hurled back in disarray. After the third such defeat, with Daenor's spearhead hacking their way through his followers amidst the bunkers and trench-lines, Kranon the Relentless staged a vicious breakout.

The remainder of the Crimson Slaughter were not so fortunate. Death Company warriors ripped their renegade foes apart like rag dolls, hemming them in and overwhelming them through sheer brute force. Those few Crimson Slaughter who escaped the Blood Angels' encirclement fell to the waiting Metalican Skitarii, riddled with shots or vaporised by energy beams. By the time the guns fell silent around Hub Beta-Secundus, many of the Death Company and great swathes of the Mechanicus garrison had been slain, but of the Crimson Slaughter, not a single cursed warrior remained alive.

TO KNOW THINE ENEMY

Imperial strategos and cryptoscriptorialists have – since the opening salvos of the 13th Black Crusade – been trying to determine the true strength of Abaddon's forces. Even with the shadowy aid of the Officio Assassinorum's Vanus Temple, they have been fighting a losing battle. The swirling cauldron of war engulfing the Cadian Gate has proved nigh unquantifiable, fresh waves of traitors and madmen flowing from the Eye of Terror by the hour. Where traitor forces have struck at neighbouring systems, however, the Imperium's intelligence gatherers have proven more successful. Such attacks have typically been made by select forces, smaller invasion fleets led by trusted Black Legion lieutenants and bolstered by allied renegade warbands.

The attack upon the Diamor System was no exception to this pattern, and the strategos of Tourmalid had soon collated all available information on their attackers. The Sorcerer Lord, Xorphas, led a core of Black Legion warriors, a sizeable army of Chapter-comparable strength embarked upon several Black Legion warships. Allied to this already-sizeable force came a second fleet, larger and more diverse, of Crimson Slaughter warships and bulk landers. Such was the main force of Lord Xorphas' fleet, and it was the Crimson Slaughter shock troops who were sent first against Amethal. Other traitor elements were also present in smaller numbers, from the lone Word Bearers warship *Cacodaemon*, to the immense engine-landers of the traitor Titan Legio Excruciatu. Each opened new strategic avenues for Lord Xorphas to exploit, and presented the Imperial defenders with yet another threat to be faced.







+++AMETHAL STRATEGIC CHRONOLOG+++

+++SEGMENT ENGAGE 0010110010101+++

+++OMNISSIAHREGNUMPERPETUARI+++

ASC 040: DEEP SPACE CONTACTS CONFIRMED TO BE NEWLY ARRIVED TRAITOR FLEET. KHORNATE ICONOGRAPHY IDENTIFIED BY ASTROLADIC AUGURY. PRESENCE OF PERSONA HERETICUS EXTREMIS [SUB-REF: KHARN 'THE BETRAYER'] CONFIRMED AMONGST TRAITOR FORCES. INTERACTION WITH EXISTING TRAITOR ASSETS MINIMAL, DIRECT AND UNSUPPORTED ADVANCE UPON PLANETARY ENGAGEMENT ENVELOPE.

ASC 041-45: CONFIRMATION OF FOCUSED DROP PATTERN BY KHORNATE FORCES TO SECTOR H8L330 / TWENTY MILES SOUTH-EAST OF HUB BETA-SECUNDUS. KHORNATE DROP ENGAGED BY METALICAN SKITARII AND KNIGHTS OF HOUSE RAVEN - FORCES MOBILISED FROM DEFENDERS OF EXCAVATION ZONE. INITIAL CASUALTY RATIO EST. 1/100 IN METALICAN FAVOUR. AT ASC 44, SITUATION DESTABILISES UPON LANDING OF KHARN AND SUPER-HEAVY DAEMON ENGINES [SUB-REF: LORD OF SKULLS].

ASC 046-53: KHORNATE FORCES BREACH HUB BETA-SECUNDUS PERIMETER AND ADVANCE THROUGH FIRST TWENTY-ONE INTERCINE GRIDS. DEATH COMPANY LEADERSHIP PERSONNEL [SUB-REF: HIGH CHAPLAIN ASTORATH, CHAPLAIN LEMARTES, DEATH COMPANY CHAPLAIN DAENOR] ORCHESTRATE ORDERED RETREAT BEFORE OVERWHELMING ENEMY FORCE. DESPITE NEARLY 100% CASUALTIES - INCLUDING SEVERE INJURIES TO CHAPLAIN DAENOR DURING COMBAT WITH KHARN - BLOOD ANGELS FORCES HOLD KHORNATE FORCE [SUB-REF: BUTCHERHORDE] LONG ENOUGH FOR LEGIO METALICA REINFORCEMENTS TO ENTER ENGAGEMENT ZONE.

ASC 054-057: LAST REMNANTS OF DEATH COMPANY FORCES EVACUATE ENGAGEMENT ZONE [EXTRACTION POINTS 2726 / 3221 / 5454] BY STORMRAVEN SQUADRON DEPLOYMENT. LEGIO METALICA ENGAGE MAIN STRENGTH OF KHORNATE FORCE IN VIOLENT URBAN ENGAGEMENT. CASUALTY RATIOS: 39% METALICA CASUALTIES, 74% KHORNATE CASUALTIES. KHORNATE FORCE DIVERTS FROM HUB BETA-SECUNDUS, DISPERSES INTO RAIDING PARTIES THAT DISRUPT METALICAN HOLDINGS ON DUST-PLAINS EAST OF HUB BETA-SECUNDUS [AUDIO-LOG X23Y/ X27U RECORDS ACCOUNTS OF SECONDARY ACTIONS AND COLLATERAL ASSET LOSS].

ASC 058-060: IMPERIAL FORCES SECURE STRATEGIC GAINS ACROSS NORTH AND SOUTH CONTINENTAL LANDMASSES. OPPOSED BY INCREASING WAVES OF HERETIC REINFORCEMENTS DEPLOYED BY BULK LIFTER FROM PLANET IOLINE [SUB-REF: HEX INFERNIUM, DAEMON ENGINES]. INCREASING STRENGTH OF TRAITOR ARMOUR UNDERMINES IMPERIAL MOMENTUM. HALTING ENEMY REINFORCEMENTS IS STRATEGIC PRIORITY: OMEGA.

+++SEGMENTCONCLUDES00111100101+++

CHAPTER 2

HEX INFERNIUM





THE HELL FACTORIES

The arrival of the Blood Angels had changed the tides of war upon Amethal, and made possible a concerted counter-offensive on every front. Moreover, the attack by the Death Company upon Hub Beta-Secundus had seen Kranon the Relentless and his elite guard hurled back in disarray. For a time, it looked as though the war was turning resoundingly in the Imperium's favour. When the Chaos response came, however, it was devastating.

'Captain Karlaen. Word from Beta-Secundus.' A veteran battle-brother held out an ornate dataslate, which the Captain of the Archangels took with a nod of thanks. The First Captain frowned as he read the text. Karlaen's Terminator honour guard waited close by. They burned to know what had become of the Death Company, for news had been fragmented and contradictory since a Khornate fleet had entered the system and launched a combat drop against Hub Beta-Secundus. After digesting the information, Karlaen spoke.

'It is a report from Princeps Kadashi of the Legio Metalica. He confirms that the attack was carried out by a Khornate horde of prodigious size. The Princeps estimates enemy numbers were many times those of the Death Company. By the time his battle group reach Beta-Secundus, the majority of our lost brothers were already dead.

'The Princeps confirms the rumour that Khâr'n the Betrayer led the attack. We cannot know whether his arrival is part of the enemy's plans, but given their inexplicable strategy and apparent flashes of prescience, I am tempted to believe it.'

Karlaen was quiet for a moment, his stern gaze distant. The Sergeant of his Terminator Squad, Brother Alphaeus, spoke up into the silence.

'First Captain, what of Astorath, Lemartes, the other Chaplains?'

'Some good news there, at least,' replied Karlaen, snapping back to the present moment. 'Kadashi reports that his Scout Titans engaged

in a brief vox-burst with a pair of Stormravens that escaped the combat zone. They reported extraction of Astorath, Lemartes, and Death Company Chaplain Daenor, though the latter was severely wounded. He is believed to have fought the Betrayer.'



Sergeant Alphaeus shook his head in amazement.

'Then his continued survival is a blessing from the Angel.'

'Indeed,' nodded Karlaen, 'and we require as many of those as we can get. Vox-reports suggest the enemy have shipped in fresh waves of Daemon Engines from Ioline.'

'More?' one of the Terminators said, scowling.

'The Metalican advance across the Hollow Peninsula has stalled in the face of the enemy reinforcements, and the Legio Metalica have been pulled away from Hub Beta-Secundus. It is as we thought. We must stop these armoured reinforcements from Ioline, or we will lose Amethal.'

Karlaen and his honour guard stood atop a set of steel steps, before the arched doorway of Hub Enigma-Quintus' temple primus. Metalican structures rose on all sides, their smokestacks and heat exchangers thrusting into the sky. Servitors, Skitarii and machine-priests bustled past, ignoring the armoured demigods in their midst.

The Blood Angels had come at the summons of Technoarcheologist Dominus Ivasnophon, the leader of the Adeptus Mechanicus on Amethal. The Magos had hinted at the dark secrets he believed the enemy sought on – or rather beneath – this world. If his guess was right, Captain Karlaen dreaded to think what failure could mean. Yet the Magos' discoveries on Amethal could also herald an amazing opportunity for the Imperium...

Karlaen's train of thought was broken as a series of bells rang a jarring salute above the temple's door. From the gloom emerged the Magos Dominus, a hunched presence gliding at the head of a procession of chanting priests. A quartet of Servitors lumbered at the Magos' back, bearing between them a bulky contraption of riveted iron, runic panels, and glowing tubes.

'First Captain,' the Magos' voice buzzed from his vocal emitters, 'you still intend to launch a surprise attack against the Hex Infernum on Ioline?'

'After what you have told me, Magos? More than ever.'

'Quite,' whirred the Magos. 'Then have your Techmarines make arrangements to transport this device aboard your chosen spacecraft. My acolytes will aid in integrating its machine spirit with that of your ship.'

Karlaen looked dubiously at the tangle of technology before him.

'What will it do?'

The Magos favoured him with the glare of his blue-lit eye lenses.

'It will render your ship invisible, First Captain. It will give you the element of surprise.'

Days later, and many hundreds of thousands of miles away, diabolical factory lines churned. Pistons thumped and pounded, lubricated with steaming blood. Fang-mawed furnaces roared, molten brass running from their jaws into moulds of adamantium and bone. Heavy



industrial armatures and bloated servitors laboured ceaselessly to hammer runes of binding into spike-studded hull plates. Rivet guns whined. Chains rattled. Conveyor belts of metal and flesh whirred ceaselessly on, bearing empty Daemon Engines towards the armoured summoning pens. Cultist labourers toiled beneath the cracking lashes of their overseers, shovelling fuel, dragging laden carts and hammering iron panels until their hands bled. Radioactive rain fell through the shattered roof of the half-ruined manufactory, splashing down upon the hopeless masses that laboured within. The massive building was itself just one of many, ranks of crumbling gothic structures clustered around the feet of the vast and terrible Hex Infernum. This was summoning and binding on an obscene scale, an abomination of twisted industry.

Into this hell flashed the Blood Angels of Strike Force Karlaen. One moment, the purgatorial drudge of the engine factory ground on as it had since Ioline's fall. The next, lightning crawled across infernal machineries and blinding Warp light strobed madly through the building.

An expanding sphere of energy billowed between two heavy conveyor units, scything through steam-pipes and exploding rune-encrusted datastacks as it rushed outwards. Cultists staggered back in panic, blinded and deafened by the sudden blooming of the teleport flare.

With a boom, the energies dissipated. In their place stood the finest warriors of the Archangels: Captain Karlaen and his hand-picked Terminators; gold-helmeted Veterans, both Vanguard and Sternguard; Mephael, a grizzled Sanguinary Priest; the looming Dreadnought, Brother Zorael, his frag cannon primed and ready. And beside them, no less than twenty Sanguinary Guard, almost the entirety of their elite order.

The strike force's guns lit with fury before the Chaos forces had even grasped that there were foes in their midst. Storm bolters howled to life, drumming shells into Cultists, who exploded in fountains of gore. Hellfire rounds sprayed incendiary fuel across clusters of the foe, Chaos worshippers reeling and screaming as they burned. Dreadnought Zorael's

frag cannon discharged with a deafening bang, obliterating a knot of Black Legion overseers as they rushed into view. Bolt pistols cracked. Frag grenades span through the air to rip Cultists to gory tatters. In under a minute, well over one hundred Chaos worshippers were dead, and the Blood Angels' immediate area was completely clear.

'Brothers,' barked Captain Karlaen, 'let us not waste the element of surprise. Advance, attack pattern Rephalim.'

The Blood Angels moved out with the cool efficiency of veteran warriors, heading for the distant warding towers of the Hex Infernum. It had been unsafe to teleport any closer to that cyclone of Warp energy, but the structure's mighty towers made for an unmissable point of reference. Now Karlaen and his warriors were determined that nothing would stop them reaching the nearest of these. They switched magazines and charged power cells as they went, auspex beams sweeping out to search for unseen threats amidst the industrial tangle. The Sanguinary Guard and Vanguard Veterans took



point as their jump packs carried them forwards in great bounding leaps. Slower than his companions, Brother Zorael took rearguard duty, pounding unstopably between thundering conveyor belts with his sarcophagus torso tracking right and left in search of threats.

It was not long before the Blood Angels found themselves under attack. Screaming praise to the Dark Gods, masses of Cultists charged along the gangways between the production lines, and clattered along gantries suspended overhead. Autogun fire rained down on the Blood Angels from all sides, wild shots causing factory systems to short out around them in showers of sparks. As the wave of Cultists closed in, a cruel voice echoed from huge biomechanical speakers strung from the manufactory's distant ceiling.

'Corpse worshippers,' echoed the voice, warped by feedback and outrage into a distorted storm of sound, 'I do not know how you came to invade my domain without warning, and I do not care. Just know that you stand amid the Forges of Warpsmith Althedrak, and that your

trespass upon this sacred ground means death.'

The Blood Angels ignored the echoing voice, concentrating upon the targeting runes that scrolled across their retinal displays. Bolts and energy blasts sprayed outwards, creating a zone of death through which no enemy could pass. In the cramped confines between the industrial machineries, the tightly packed Cultists stood little chance. Even those who dived into cover soon found themselves peppered with shrapnel, or engulfed in sheets of flame. Sparks flew as gunfire scythed through support cables, sending gantries tumbling down into vats of molten brass, taking gangs of screaming heretics with them.

Although the enemy continued to pour forwards, Captain Karlaen would not allow his advance to be stalled. With the Captain at their head, Assault Terminators charged forwards with their lightning claws swinging in gory arcs. They ripped a path through the onrushing foe, digging through flesh and bone as though carving a tunnel. From on high the Sanguinary Guard plunged

down, glaives encarmine lashing out and angelus boltguns hammering to reduce the Cultist hordes to bloody mist. These were no angels of mercy; they were the Emperor's angels of death, and they gave no quarter to the traitors and renegades they fought.

Steadily, relentlessly, like men wading through rushing floodwaters, the Blood Angels continued to forge a path forwards. Enemy corpses piled up so thick that Karlaen's warriors sometimes had to barge through mounds of the slain, but still they did not stop. Here and there, a Veteran would stumble for a moment as the weight of fire drove him back, but then he would press on once more. A few Blood Angels fell, lucky shots punching into armour joints or smashing through the eyepieces of helmets. Most rose and battled on. A handful did not. No matter the cost, Strike Force Karlaen slaughtered its way onwards, drawing closer to the Hex Infernum with every step.

At the forefront of their advance, the wall of an alleyway crashed down in a sudden tide of rubble and twisted girders. Brother Varrian leapt backwards, the Sanguinary Guard's



jump pack boosting him through the hissing rain and out of danger. Through the tumbling ferrocrete came a massive shape, a hulking monster of iron and brass whose eyes and maw glowed with furnace fires.

‘Another Daemon Engine,’ voxed Varrian. ‘It has blocked this alleyway with rubble.’ The monster swiped with one massive claw and Varrian jumped aside, only to be struck in the chest by one of the thing’s metal tentacles. He felt his black carapace crack under the force of the blow, which drove him to the very mouth of the alley. Varrian raised his encarmine sword, ready to fend off the next blow, when a booming voice came from directly behind him.

‘Duck, brother.’

Recognising the heavy clunk of Brother Zorael’s frag cannon priming, the Sanguinary Guard threw himself flat. A thunderous cloud of shrapnel roared over his head, close enough to send the proximity warnings in his armour clamouring. It slammed into the Daemon Engine’s head, sending the thing reeling back. Another blast followed the first, pounding through the mangled wreckage of the Daemon Engine’s face and blowing its torso apart in a hail of spinning metal fragments.

Varrian rose, driving rain and burning iron rattling from his armour. He turned and nodded his thanks to the Dreadnought looming behind him.

‘Another path is blocked?’ rumbled the massive walker.

‘It is,’ replied Varrian.

‘Then we will find another way!’ boomed Zorael, wheeling and stomping away.

‘We shall,’ muttered Varrian. ‘But where?’ The Sanguinary Guard shot a quick glance up and down the street. It was hemmed in on both sides by scabrous manufacturums, from within which thundered the din of continued industry. That sound was almost drowned out by the crash and rumble of the battle raging all around. Despite their best efforts, the Blood Angels had become ever more spread

out, and their momentum had slowed to a crawl. Warpsmith Althedrak had begun sending Daemon Engines against them some minutes earlier, and the ironbound monsters were taking their toll. Cultists still flooded in from all sides, their numbers augmented by hardened knots of Black Legionnaires whose gunfire had claimed the lives of several Archangels already. The nearest warding tower of the Hex Infernum loomed above the streets just north of their position, so close that its crackling energies made Varrian’s skin crawl and his soul itch. With the foe pouring down upon them as fast as the irradiated rain, and every route blocked by fresh obstacles, it might as well have been on another planet.



The Blood Angels fought on with everything they had. They would never give in, no matter the odds. It was not in their nature.

‘Brothers,’ came Captain Karlaen’s shout over the vox, ‘Form on my position. Krak grenades at the ready. We’ll bring down the wall on the north side of the street and push forwards through that manufactorum. They won’t stop us.’

It was then that the street began to shake. Rubble and dust sluiced from the manufactorum facades, spilling into the street. The rain hissed red and bloody from armour and ferrocrete, and the roadway began to crack and splinter, vomiting molten brass and leering human skulls.

‘No...’ breathed Varrian, a moment before a towering monster of blood and brass crashed through the ruins and ploughed into the roadway. As tall as the buildings that surrounded it, rumbling forwards on a track unit as wide as two Land Raiders smashed together, the Lord of Skulls was a behemoth of war. Heat rolled from the thing in waves. Irradiated steam wreathed it.

As the monster rumbled into battle, the Cultists all around gave a mighty scream of terrified adulation. The many-barrelled cannon on the Daemon Engine’s arm spun up with a deafening whine, and an entire squad of Vanguard Veterans simply disappeared in an unstoppable hail of massive shells.

Varrian cried in outrage at the sight. He triggered his jump pack and hurtled up the street towards the abomination. His brothers flew with him, closing in from all sides to battle the Daemon Engine. The machine turned with shocking speed, its vast chain cleaver lashing out. Four golden-armoured warriors were struck from the air, smashed into a manufactorum wall by the weapon’s churning teeth and mangled to bloody ruins.

Varrian soared over the swing, landing on the monster’s shoulder guard and lunging forwards. The point of his sword rammed into the side of the Daemon Engine’s helm. Varrian’s cry of triumph was choked off as his masterwork blade shattered like glass against the thing’s armour.

With an echoing roar, the Lord of Skulls shook Varrian free. The Sanguinary Guard tumbled down to the road below. Varrian landed in a crouch, seeing the fire of his brothers hammering against the Daemon Engine’s armour to no avail. As it raised its cannon to let fly once again, Varrian knew a moment of despair.

Then the Sanguinary Guard saw a golden light plunging down through the churning clouds like a falling star, and hope soared within him.





VICTORY OR DEATH

Karlaen, too, felt hope rise up in him as the Sanguinor struck from on high like the sword of Sanguinius himself. The golden angel slammed down onto the Lord of Skulls' broad shoulders and rammed his sword through the top of its helm. Where Brother Varrian's blade had broken against the thing's hell-forged hide, the sword of the Sanguinor could not be stopped.

It stabbed down through the war engine's head all the way to the cross guard, before ripping free again in a geyser of molten brass. The Daemon Engine lurched, trying to swat its attacker with its massive cleaver, and Karlaen felt a moment of horror at the thought of that monstrous weapon striking the golden angel.

Yet the Sanguinor had already leapt away, coming down atop one of the tanks of boiling blood on his enemy's back. A swift flick of the angel's

sword and the tank's armaglass flank shattered, followed by another, then another. Scalding gore spilled in a tide across the roadway. The Lord of Skulls lashed out again, more sluggish now, and as it did so, Captain Karlaen saw his moment. Turning his back upon the Cultists who packed the street, he pounded down the roadway and swung his weapon with all his might. Karlaen's thunder hammer crashed against the Daemon Engine's nearest track, severing it in a blast of concussive force and stranding the monster amid a spray of buckled track links.

The Lord of Skulls gave a bellow of pure fury, but it was cut short as the Sanguinor swooped down to finish off his crippled foe. His blade sang. Metal sheared explosively. The Daemon Engine's severed head crashed down into the roadway. The Lord of Skulls juddered and spasmed as molten metal and gore bubbled up from its

neck like lava from a volcano, and then it ground to a halt.

'For Sanguinius!' shouted Karlaen, his battle-brothers joining him in a mighty cheer. It drowned out the moans of the Cultists, who stared in dismay at their butchered idol cooling to dull metal in the pouring rain.

With redoubled ferocity, the surviving Blood Angels cut a path through the enemy ranks. Dozens of Cultists were mowed down or ripped apart in a matter of moments. Traitor blood mingled with the falling rain, spreading in crimson slicks and spilling away into rubble-choked gutters and drains. Every second saw the heretic death toll rise, the Cultists' panic hampering their aim and shattering their cohesion. If such a mighty engine of death as the Lord of Skulls could not bring the invaders low, ran their thoughts, then what could?



When the golden angel swooped down from the dead engine's shoulders to join the fight, the enemy masses lost their last shred of nerve. They fled screaming into the surrounding streets, abandoning their sorely outnumbered Black Legion masters to a swift death. Their cries of terror even drowned out the furious voice of Warpsmith Althedrak, still booming impotently from gargoyle-mouthed speakers that lined the corpse-heaped street.

Even as his brothers were scything down the last of the surrounding foe, Karlaen dropped to one knee before the Sanguinor. Rainwater sluiced down his face as he raised it to look upon the golden countenance of his Chapter's guardian angel. Wordlessly, the Sanguinor bade Karlaen stand, then turned his gaze towards the crackling, biomechanical monstrosity of the nearby warding tower. Arcs of black lightning leapt and twined



between the tower and its distant counterparts, then on around the cyclopean circumference of the Hex Infernum, forming a cage that held the whirling Warp rift in check.

'Yes,' said Karlaen resolutely, 'time is short. The enemy have been driven off, nothing more. We must get this done before they return.'

The Sanguinor nodded once then took wing in a rush of air, leaving Karlaen to order his surviving warriors. So many dead, thought Karlaen sourly as he watched the Sanguinary Priest moving between the bodies with his narthecium clicking and whirring. The traitors would pay for those deaths. He would make them mean something.

'Brothers,' he voxed, 'to me. Watch the flanks and follow the Sanguinor. We have bought ourselves a moment's respite; let's make the most of it.'

The Blood Angels moved quickly, their objective in sight and the Sanguinor soaring above as their guiding star. The surviving Sanguinary Guard gravitated to him, leaping and gliding in the angel's wake.

Karlaen watched his retinal display carefully, absorbing auspex feed, vox-intercepts, ammo counts and strategic dispositions with superhuman efficiency. The enemy were circling like vultures, fresh packs of Daemon Engines and bands of Black Legionnaires massing, herding the Cultists together before them. The circle was closing around Karlaen and his small band of survivors.

'This is going to be a close-run thing,' voxed Karlaen to Terminator Sergeant Alphaeus. 'If I order it, you will lead our brothers to the extraction point. I have the vortex grenade. It only takes one of us to set it off.'

'Understood, First Captain,' replied Alphaeus, his tone conveying his displeasure at the command even as duty compelled him to accept it.

Then the roadway turned, the manufactorums ran out, and the

Blood Angels found themselves standing upon the edge of an area of rubble and wreckage. Karlaen looked up at the obscene immensity of the warding tower rising above him, taking in its pulsing cables, its twisted amalgam of flesh and metal, and the glowing proliferation of eldritch runes that burned across its surface. He tasted ash and metal in his throat. His mind recoiled from the seething maelstrom of Warp energies half visible through the black lightnings leaping out from the tower.

'Unclean,' growled Sergeant Alphaeus. 'Let's kill the damned thing and be done.'

Karlaen shot his subordinate a humourless grin and set out across the rubble, leading his men towards the base of the tower. The structure was huge, easily thrice the height of a Warlord Titan, and riddled with tunnel entrances that receded into darkness. Karlaen glanced again at his tactical display. He watched the converging waves of the foe closing in. They had moments at most.

'Brothers,' began the First Captain, coming to a decision, 'from here I go on alone. I shall trigger the vortex grenade within the base of the tower and set loose the energies to bring it low. You will fight your way to the extraction point.' Several of the Blood Angels raised their voices in protest, but Karlaen silenced them.

'There is no time, and the enemy numbers are too great. Your breakout will distract the foe, providing enough time for me to trigger the grenade and complete the mission. We will not dishonour our fallen brothers by wasting their deaths.'

His warriors fell silent and Karlaen hefted the bulky vortex grenade, looking for a moment upon the last weapon he would ever wield. The destructive power of this rare device would be more than enough to rip the tower's base apart and bring it tumbling down.

Karlaen turned to do his duty, and found himself face-to-face with the expressionless mask of the Sanguinor.

Minutes later, the surviving battle-brothers of Strike Force Karlaen were fighting their way along a rain-slick street with the Hex Infernum at their backs.

‘These curs are slowing us down,’ growled Karlaen, blazing shots into another Black Legionnaire and sending him sprawling. ‘The Sanguinor will have the device in place by now.’

‘True,’ intoned Brother Zoraël, catching a traitor in his power fist and crushing him. The Dreadnought staggered as a Krak grenade burst against his shoulder, ripping through armour plates and setting broken wires to sparking. His fist seized up, still gripping the pulped wreckage of his victim. ‘Which means we must make haste.’

Karlaen grunted in agreement and swung his thunder hammer, smashing aside a knot of Cultists. He led the way between the mangled wrecks of a pair of Daemon Engines, his warriors following. Stomping in Karlaen’s wake, the Dreadnought shouldered the wrecks aside, blasting frag rounds down the street towards the next approaching band of enemies. More Blood Angels poured through in his wake, firing back at the enemy hordes that dogged their steps.

‘Heretic scum!’ boomed Zoraël. ‘Do you not know you stand in the path of the righteous? Death is too good an end for such as you!’

‘They’re thicker than the Phodian swarms,’ gritted Karlaen, as enemy shots rattled from his armour and his brothers returned fire all around him, ‘but we must break through. Our strength is needed elsewhere.’

‘True, First Captain,’ rumbled Zoraël, and for a moment Karlaen could have sworn he heard a hint of grim amusement in the Dreadnought’s voice, ‘but according to my auspex readings, the golden angel has just detonated your vortex grenade. We’ll see them scatter now, will we not?’

The next moment, there came a vast, sky-shaking roar. Looking back the way they had come, Karlaen saw the top of the warding tower shudder. The Sanguinor must have succeeded

in triggering the vortex grenade. The weapon’s devastating energies would now be running rampant through the tower’s base, consuming everything they touched and dragging the matter of reality into the sucking abyss of the Warp. The tower-top shook again, then the whole structure began to lean and, slowly, to topple. As the tower fell it gathered pace, its structure buckling and collapsing as it was subjected to stresses it could no longer support. White fire jetted from between cracking supports, tearing sinews and bursting slime-spewing pipes. The tower fell faster, its rumble drowning out all other sound as thousands of tons of metal and flesh hurtled to the ground.



Karlaen smiled grimly as the tower came down, and a glowing golden speck hurtled up from the growing devastation to vanish amidst the swirling clouds.

‘The Sanguinor has done his part,’ rumbled the Dreadnought with grim satisfaction. ‘Now let us leave. Ioline is about to become inhospitable.’

The Dreadnought’s words were reinforced by a series of shuddering explosions that shook the ground and lit the sky with multicoloured fire. Black lightning forked madly out from the collapsing tower, lashing out to raise crackling detonations amidst the grim manufactorums.

‘Brothers,’ roared Karlaen over the catastrophic din of destruction, ‘on to the extraction point. Stop for nothing. Move!’

The Blood Angels increased their pace, the jump-troops maintaining a moving perimeter around their slower comrades. In their retinal displays, each warrior could see the distance to the extraction point winding slowly down, the gap closing between them and the defiled Square of the Emperor’s Grace where their Stormravens waited to extract them.

Absolute bedlam was erupting all around. Where before the enemy had pressed in from every side like the jaws of some monstrous beast, there was only a disintegrating horde of fleeing figures. Cultists ran screaming for their lives, fleeing the thunderous destruction of the tower or throwing themselves to the ground and praying for salvation. Some of the Black Legion ignored the Blood Angels entirely, dashing through the streets towards their own extraction craft. Others, the most fanatical, continued to hurl themselves at the Sons of Sanguinius. Their hatred of the loyalists eclipsed even the threat of approaching doom. A pack of Black Legion Raptors plunged down into the street ahead of Karlaen’s warriors, blazing away with their weapons. To the Captain’s left, Terminator Brother Taelador stumbled and fell, a glowing tunnel bored through his gut by a meltagun shot. Karlaen bellowed in anger, feeling the Red Thirst press close behind his eyes. He pelted headlong into the shrieking Black Legion assault troops, battering the melta-gunner into the floor with his hammer. Karlaen’s backswing took another foe in the helm, crushing his skull. The rest fled, screeching spitefully as they bounded away over a nearby rooftop.

The Blood Angels pressed on, reaching the end of the rain-slick roadway and bursting into the Square of the Emperor’s Grace. Karlaen cursed as he saw their Stormravens beset by foes. Several of the craft were on the ground, guns blazing as the Black Legion tried to storm them. The other aircraft were hovering overhead, holding station despite the howling gales and arcing lightning that filled the skies.

‘They’re not trying to destroy them,’ shouted Karlaen. ‘The Black Legion are trying to steal our craft. Sons of Sanguinius, slay them all!’

Battered, wounded, scorched and driven to the point of exhaustion, the surviving Blood Angels launched one last charge. As they hurtled forwards, the fallen warding tower gave one last convulsive boom and its sorcerous field collapsed completely. Feedback raced around the Hex Infernum as the unbound energies of the Warp clashed with the crackling wards of the eldritch towers. Daemonic entities shrieked through the air, mad cackling spiralling around the Blood Angels as they cut down the Black Legionnaires in the square. Warriors fell on both sides, hacked, impaled or riddled with shots. In the end, it was the Blood Angels who prevailed, their enemies trapped between the Stormravens' guns to the fore and Karlaen's strike force to their rear. Assault ramps whined open, and thrusters fought the screaming winds as the Blood Angels piled aboard their craft. Brother Zorael was the last to be recovered, the limping Dreadnought snatched up by the magna grapples of the last Stormraven to lift off.

The Blood Angels craft opened their thrusters and punched up through

the convulsing skies, streamers of raw Warp stuff streaking around them. Fighting the g-forces, Captain Karlaen dragged himself up to the cockpit of his Stormraven, hanging on to the back of the pilot's throne as he watched the destruction below. He had to know that it was done.

Below, amid the ruins, the warding towers of the Hex Infernum writhed, overwhelmed by powers they could no longer contain. Fail-safe wards kicked in, nullifying hexes and spells of abjuration that beat the Warp rift back and crushed it down, preventing empyric overspill. The very energies that fought to close the rift also overloaded the remaining

towers. Science and sorcery clashed hideously, catastrophically deforming the natural laws of the universe before imploding with the force of a dying star.

The last thing Karlaen saw of the surface, before the boiling clouds of the upper atmosphere spread their veil across all, was a cataclysmic shock wave hammering outwards at incredible speed. Nothing would survive its touch.

'Brothers,' voxed the First Captain wearily, 'in Sanguinius' name, victory is ours.'









STRIKE FORCE KARLAEN

For the attack on Ioline, First Captain Karlaen assembled a force of Blood Angels elites. This was a daring tactical strike in which skill, speed and resilience would far outweigh the benefit of numbers. Only the finest of the Angel's sons stood at Karlaen's side, a gathering of heroes whose valour and martial might would have made Sanguinius himself proud.

First Captain Karlaen is amongst the greatest strategists of his Chapter. The Captain sees grand patterns and logistical minutiae with equal clarity, assembling strata of information with incredible speed and gauging his enemies' moves with near-prescient accuracy. This talent alone would make Captain Karlaen an extremely effective military commander. When coupled with the audacity and selfless courage of his Blood Angels heritage, and Karlaen's own tightly controlled anger at those who would threaten the Imperium of Man, these qualities combine to forge a hero of exceptional worth. Karlaen's warriors follow him with absolute, unquestioning loyalty, sure in their hearts that they fight at the side of a true son of Sanguinius.

It was this bond that led every single warrior under Karlaen's command – and all of the Sanguinary Guard present on Amethal – to volunteer for the seemingly

suicidal raid upon the Daemon Engine factories of Ioline. Prudent and wise, Karlaen chose only the force he believed he would need from amongst these courageous battle-brothers, leaving the rest to shore up the defences of Amethal in case his mission should fail.

Strike Force Karlaen had aid from the Adeptus Mechanicus for their surprise attack, ancient relics of lost technology bequeathed by Magos Dominus Ivasnophon himself. The frigate aboard which Karlaen's force rode to battle was augmented with a complex stealth system, an ominous-looking tangle of incomprehensible archeotech that hid the ship's drive emissions, heat signatures and auspex returns, and even veiled its presence in the Warp. Alongside this incredible gift, the Magos Dominus also had his servants make adjustments to the teleportarium of the *Angelus Redemptor*. Originally, Karlaen had believed he would have



to teleport his Terminator squads into battle as the first element of his attack, who would then have to hold out long enough for the rest of his force to reach them aboard Stormravens. Thanks the Ivasnophon's esoteric gifts, every single Blood Angel in Strike Force Karlaen – even the towering Dreadnought Brother Zorael who accompanied them – was able to deploy in a single, devastating teleport assault from on high.

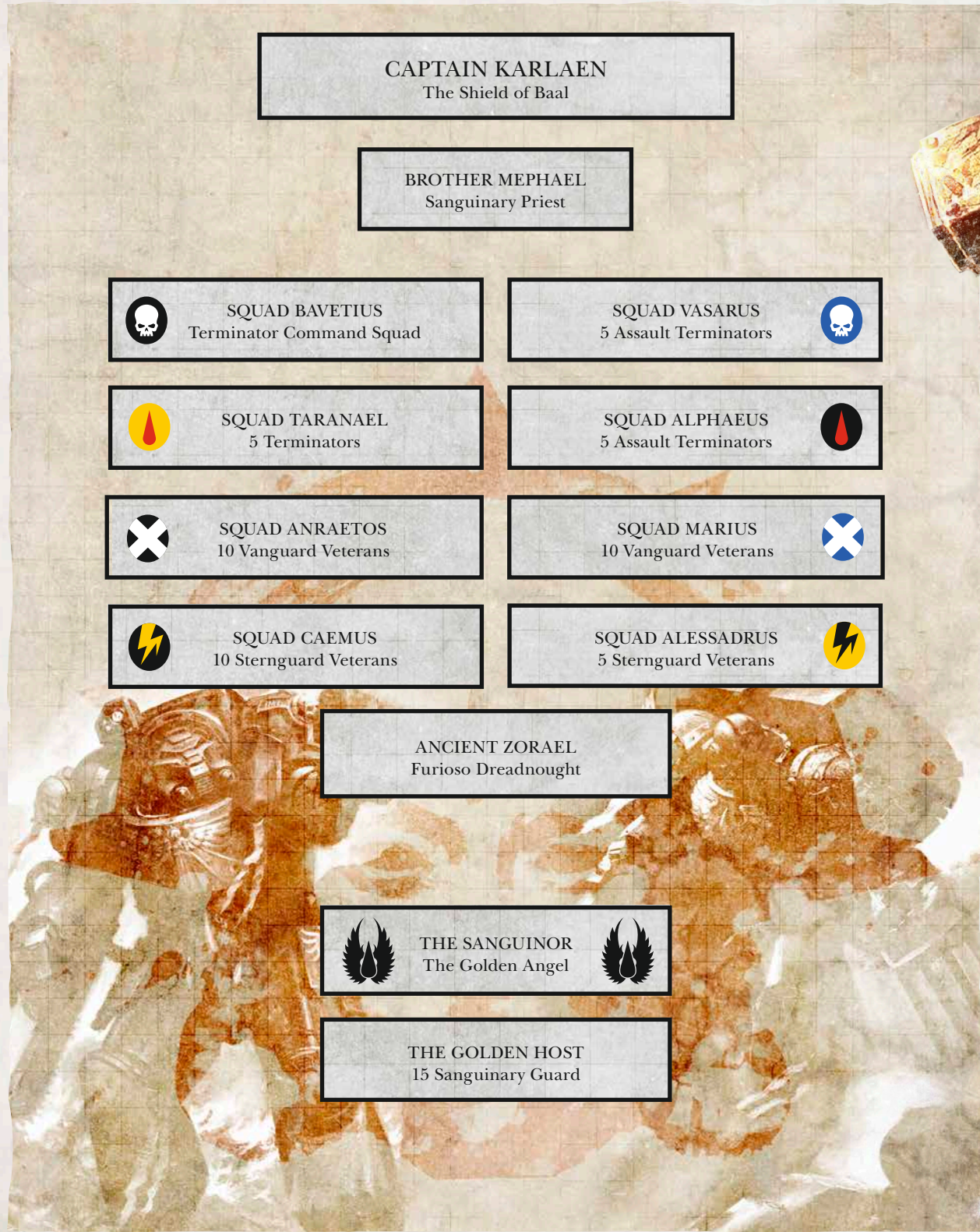
With his typical strategic skill, Captain Karlaen had assembled the perfect force to fully capitalise upon such advantages. Leading from the front, Karlaen and his Terminator-armoured Command Squad headed up an Archangels Demi-company. The lightning claws and thunder hammers of that formation's Terminators were ideal for tearing apart the enemy in the close confines of this twisted city-fight. Supporting these resilient close-quarters warriors strode the armoured form of Brother Zorael, a Dreadnought with an arsenal of weaponry intended specifically for short-range fire fights against massed foes.

Around this unyielding core of his Chapter's finest warriors, Karlaen layered squads of Sternguard and Vanguard Veterans, hard-bitten warriors of the Archangels equipped to dispense swift death either in the crush of melee, or in brutal, close-ranged gunfights. Knowing that he was likely to face the very Daemon Engines whose production the Archangels were trying to stop, Karlaen ensured that these squads were well equipped with weaponry to handle such ironclad monstrosities; meltaguns and plasma weaponry were much in evidence, while all who could carry melta bombs and krak charges did so.

The final ace up Karlaen's sleeve was the Golden Host that accompanied him, a near-unprecedented gathering of Sanguinary Guard. Each of these gilded heroes was a veritable one-man army, a fearless master of combat both ranged and hand-to-hand, whose presence greatly increased Karlaen's chances of success. With the unexpected leadership of the Sanguinor himself, this force of angelic heroes was the bane of every Chaos worshipper foolish enough to stand in their way.

FORCES OF THE 1ST

Below can be seen the forces that First Captain Karlaen led into battle during the Ioline Raid. Built around a core of Archangels battle-brothers, the force incorporated further elite Blood Angels elements to form a force powerful enough to overcome Xorphas' Daemon Engines.





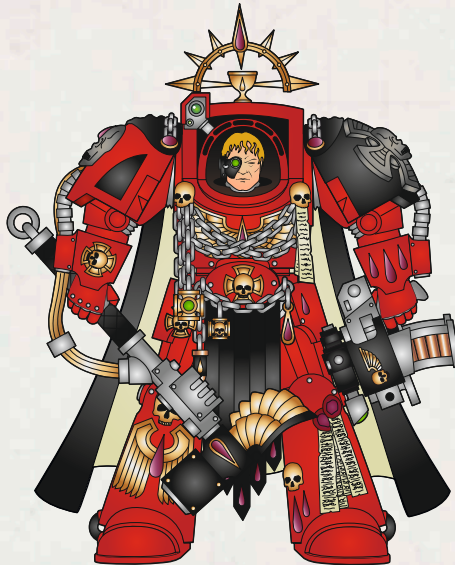
CAPTAIN KARLAEN

A masterful strategist and unstoppable warrior, it is for good reason that Captain Karlaen is known by many as the Shield of Baal. He has worn the mantle of 1st Company Captain for two centuries now, and has distinguished himself over and over again during that long span of years. At the battle of Forlorn Falls, Karlaen and his Terminators sundered the defences of their Iron Warrior foes to crush the traitors wholesale. During the cleansing of the infested Space Hulk *Solace in Sorrow*, Karlaen demonstrated the full breadth of his tactical brilliance, seamlessly coordinating battles across ten separate combat zones despite the failure of the Blood Angels' auspex web. Most recently, Captain Karlaen proved the faith of his old mentor, Commander Dante, by displaying matchless heroism during the war against the Cryptoid Tendril of Hive Fleet Leviathan. Were that terrible xenos swarm to have broken through the Cryptus Shieldworlds, it would have swept down upon the Blood Angels' home world like an all-consuming storm. Instead, Captain Karlaen was instrumental in seeing the aliens reduced to drifting, void-borne corpses.

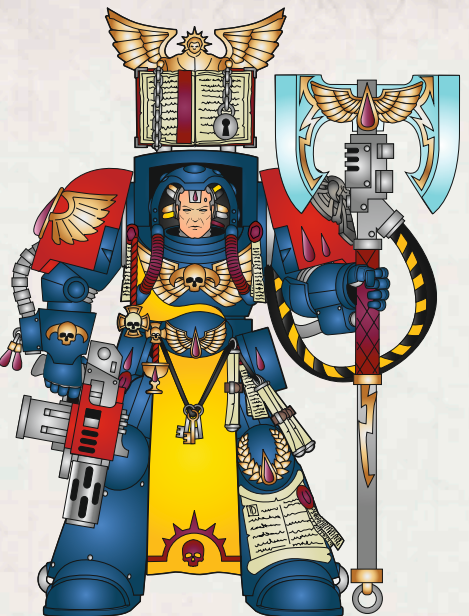
COLOURS OF THE 1ST



The finest veteran warriors of their Chapter, every single Blood Angel of the 1st Company goes to war bedecked in honours, as befits heroes of their stature. Their armour is ornate, elaborately worked and intricately decorated by the Chapter artificers. Many display fine scrollwork and beautifully wrought slogans upon their battle-plate, while others are bedecked with purity seals and oath papers, or hung with talismanic relics of the battle-brothers who came before them in the war eternal.

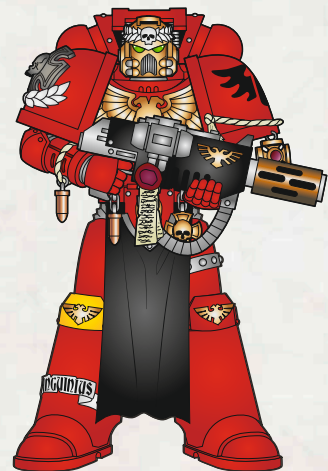
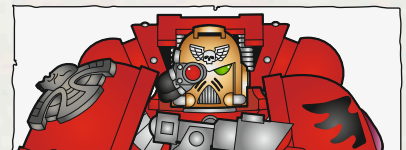


Captain Karlaen displays the skull emblem of the Archangels in several places upon his armour.

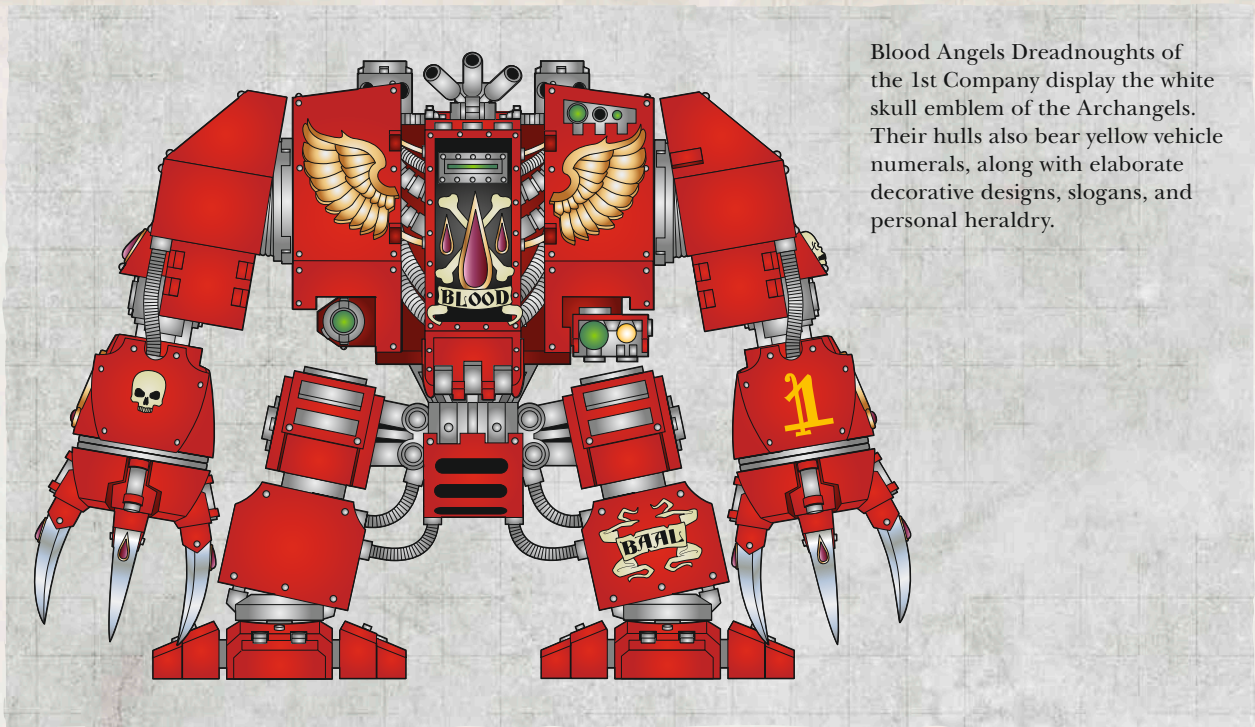


As with most Chapters' Librarians, those of the Blood Angels go to battle clad in the blue of the Librarian.

The Company Standard of the Archangels is a masterwork heraldic piece, showing the company's numeric designation and icon alongside the wing of Sanguinius, which symbolises excellence.



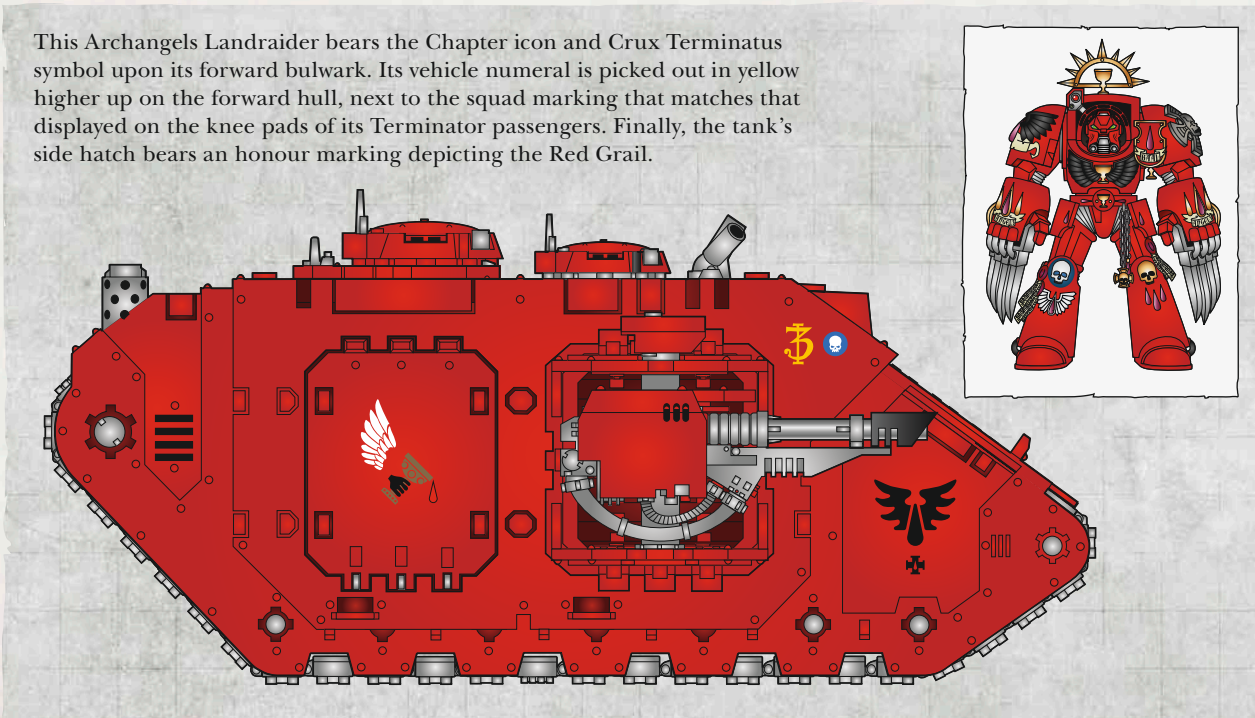
The helmets of Archangels Sternguard and Vanguard Veterans are finished in gold to mark their elite status.



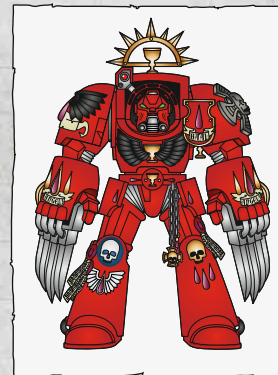
Blood Angels Dreadnoughts of the 1st Company display the white skull emblem of the Archangels. Their hulls also bear yellow vehicle numerals, along with elaborate decorative designs, slogans, and personal heraldry.



Many Archangels bear honour markings upon their armour. Each signifies a spectacular deed performed, a terrible danger endured, or a mighty foe slain.



This Archangels Landraider bears the Chapter icon and Crux Terminatus symbol upon its forward bulwark. Its vehicle numeral is picked out in yellow higher up on the forward hull, next to the squad marking that matches that displayed on the knee pads of its Terminator passengers. Finally, the tank's side hatch bears an honour marking depicting the Red Grail.



THE IOLINE RAID

>>> ASC 040-065

All across the Diamor System, spaceships, war engines and warriors battled to the death. Each war zone was a cog within a machine of Lord Xorphas' design. Those cogs meshed to achieve a dark and diabolical whole. Yet the Chaos plan's intricacy was also its weakness; if the Blood Angels could rip a single cog from the machine, the whole thing might fail.

In the wake of the Blood Angels' arrival, the war for the Diamor System entered a new phase. The Sons of Sanguinius had turned the tide upon Amethal, their engineered psyches proof against the planet's strange curse and their warrior strength a match for the battle-ravaged Crimson Slaughter warbands. Around several of the Mechanicus Hubs, and in numerous secondary combat zones scattered across the globe, the armies of the Imperium fought resurgent. Titans of the Legio Metalica and Knights of House Raven strode across highland wilds, weapons thumping as they exchanged blazing volleys of death with their traitor counterparts. Armies of Skitarii and Cult Mechanicus forces pushed back rampaging packs of Daemon Engines, or coordinated their attacks with the fast-moving Sons of Sanguinius to surround and eliminate Crimson Slaughter forces wherever they were found. Pristine woodlands burned and once-beautiful rivers ran with blood and ichor, but the forces of Chaos were pushed back hard.

Captain Karlaen, meanwhile, had learned from Technoarcheologist Dominus Ivasnophon what was at stake. The First Captain, initially angry at the Magos' imperious summons, had become serious and engaged as Ivasnophon revealed the nature of the technology that he sought upon Amethal. It was an ancient prize, something made by those who ruled the galaxy long before the first Terran life forms emerged from the primordial ooze. Other examples of its

sort had been found across the galaxy from time to time, hints at an incredibly potent weapon against the powers of Chaos. Ivasnophon specialised in the location, excavation and imitation of such archeotechnological treasures. For centuries he had been following a tenuous trail of clues towards this, his greatest find. Amethal was not a planet, he explained, but rather a skin of rock and biosphere stretched as camouflage over an ancient cage. Vast beyond belief, wreathed in arcane wards and dark technologies, it was a prison-eternal for daemonic entities. It was the Magos Dominus' belief that the Amethal Cage contained hellish beings beyond count, trapped for millennia behind warded bars. Why the ancients had sought to isolate these creatures from the Warp was a mystery lost to the mists of time, but the Magos was certain they had succeeded. Captain Karlaen was horrified at this revelation, for if that were true, then the empyric inmates of this world represented a dreadful danger to the defences around the Cadian Gate. At the same time, he was not slow to grasp Ivasnophon's purpose on this world. Building upon his countless decades of study and experimentation, the Magos Dominus was at last nearly able to replicate the technologies of the Daemon cage. He was weeks, months at most, from creating – and then mass producing – devices that could cage Daemons on a vast scale. Though not a permanent solution to the daemonic threat, such devices might end daemonic incursions as soon as they began, and thus turn the tide in the war for the Cadian Gate.







The Metalican excavations across Amethal had revealed that there was terrible danger here as well as great reward. The Daemon cage had a weak point, discovered beneath the excavation site at Hub Beta-Secundus. Whether an intentional exit or the product of millennia of wear and tear, there was a zone in Amethal's northern hemisphere where daemonic energies – whispering voices and strange phenomena – leaked through. Until this point, it had proven a localised hazard for the Metalicans but little more – a number of their excavation Servitors and Skitarii guards had mutated or engaged in murderous rampages, but these were acceptable losses considering the prize at hand. Now, however, it appeared that Lord Xorphas had learned of the weak spot as well. Magos Ivasnophon theorised that the heretics had deployed their Crimson Slaughter shock troops primarily for this very purpose. The daemon-haunted nature of the renegades was well documented, and it seemed that Xorphas had cynically exploited that open connection to the powers of the Warp.

If the planet-wide combat drops by the Crimson Slaughter had been punishing, the focussed hammer blow that had fallen next upon Hub Beta-Secundus was little short of apocalyptic. From the skies rained wave after wave of Dreadclaw and Kharybdis Drop Pods interspersed with heavy drop craft, all painted in the blood red of Khorne. Landing in a great mass in and around Beta-Secundus, Cultists, Berzerkers and war engines of the Blood God spilled from their transports with Khârn the Betrayer at their head. Elements from Forge World Metalica and House Raven moved to neutralise the drop sites while the leaders of the Death Company strove to gather their scattered

and psychotic battle-brothers. Initial Khornate casualties were high. The heretics spilled from their craft with no thought for strategy or cohesion and were mown down in their hundreds. But what the Chaos forces lacked in tactical acumen they more than made up for in murderous fury and sheer weight of numbers. Worse, they had Khârn. Within the first hour of battle, the Betrayer and his red-armoured tide of killers had overrun the Adeptus Mechanicus forces arrayed around Hub Beta-Secundus. Next, they surged in a great mass towards the heart of the hub. The Khornate horde poured through the ragged gaps in the area's defences and spilled down ferrocrete streets between the blazing ruins of prefab manufacturums and shrines to the Ommissiah. Lords of Skulls rumbled forwards amongst the masses, the ground shaking with their advance.

The surviving brothers of the Death Company met their enemies head-on. The expert leadership of Astorath and Death Company Chaplain Daenor had restored some order to the lost brothers' ranks. Spearheaded by the furious Chaplain Lemartes, the Death Company then counter-charged their enemies, dictating the shape of the battle rather than waiting to be overwhelmed. It was a daring move, and one that slowed the Khornate advance. Yet soon enough the massively outnumbered Blood Angels sustained appalling casualties. Over ninety percent of the Death Company were slain by the time multiple engines of the Legio Metalica were able to reach the engagement area. The thunderous advance of the Titans drove the Khornate forces back and fractured their cohesion, providing time for Astorath and Lemartes to extract the last remnants of

their forces. Chaplain Daenor was born from the battlefield by Astorath himself, hacked and mangled by Khârn the Betrayer. The loss of the Death Company brothers was acceptable, for it had always been their destiny to perish in selfless battle, and they had sold themselves as dearly as they could. Astorath would not allow Daenor to perish, however, for the Death Company Chaplain was amongst the most accomplished of his order.

In the wake of the Titans' attack, the surviving Khornate warbands scattered away from Hub Beta-Secundus, marauding at will in search of blood and skulls. The surviving Legio Metalica engines also disengaged, the Titans' strength needed elsewhere to defend against the fresh waves of Daemon Engines being flown in from Ioline. Neither was this danger restricted to Hub Beta-Secundus. As the war raged on across Amethal, Imperial counter-attacks were being driven back or ground down by huge packs of newly forged Daemon Engines. Baron Dargetus and his Knights of House Raven came to the fore at this time, driving hard into the monstrous packs of enemy war engines and ripping the heart from one Hellforged Warpack after another. It was the Knights that retook Hub Daedalus-Quartus from overwhelming traitor forces, driving out the Daemon Engines that had infested its ruins and crushing a warband of Crimson Slaughter sheltering amidst the destruction. Yet this was a temporary solution at best. The traitors were receiving a steady stream of powerful reinforcements. The Imperial forces were not. By the inescapable arithmetic of war, it could only be a matter of time before Chaos was victorious.

Captain Karlaen knew now more than ever that this could not be allowed. He thus opted for a daring solution to the problem, one that only the superhuman warriors of the Adeptus Astartes would have any hope of achieving. The Blood Angels would cut off the enemy reinforcements at their source. They would destroy the Daemon Engine factories on Ioline.

It was a dangerous gamble, but Magos Ivasnophon was able to improve the Imperial odds. With much ceremony and binharic chanting, he and his senior acolytes vanished into the depths of their temple primaris at Hub Enigma-Quintus and emerged some hours later with ancient and mysterious devices. Ivasnophon assured his allies that the machine spirits of these devices would conceal whatever spaceship they were installed aboard, allowing a Blood Angels craft to reach Ioline's low orbit undetected and launch a massed teleport assault against the planet before the foe even knew it was there.

Only days after the savage battle between the Death Company and Khârn's Khornate hordes, the Blood Angels frigate *Angelus Redemptor* ghosted into orbit over Ioline's northern continent. The industrial world had been reduced to an unrecognisable horror by the attentions of the Black Legion and their Warpsmiths. Auspex scans revealed that, where once had stood teeming hives and industrial macro-complexes, now there were cannibalised ruins, bleak shrines to the Dark Gods, and sprawling hellscape of daemonic forge-factories drenched by a constant, irradiated downpour.





These vile sites churned brimstone fumes into the sky as they constructed Daemon Engines by the hundred, depositing their brazen shells into holding areas around a vast circle of biomechanical warding towers. This was the Hex Infernum, an impossibly huge warding circle within which whirled a gateway to hell that spat legions of Daemons through its meniscus to be bound into the waiting engines.

Captain Karlaen led the attack upon Ioline in person, at the head of his elite Archangels. By the grace of the Mechanicus, squads of Terminators, Sternguard and Vanguard Veterans all teleported down into the industrial hell of Ioline, alongside more than a dozen of the golden-armoured Sanguinary Guard.



Unable to risk deployment within the swirling energies thrown off by the Hex, the Blood Angels flashed into being some way to the south amidst the thundering industry of a Daemon Engine factory. The element of surprise was total; the Cultists who worked the monstrous production lines died in droves beneath the Blood Angels' guns. Within moments of their deployment, Strike Force Karlaen was pushing north. The Blood Angels did not waste time with localised sabotage – destroying individual factorum units would be like trying to bring down a cliff face with a chisel. Instead, Karlaen's plan was to fell the nearest of the warding towers with a vortex grenade, and in doing so destabilise the Hex Infernum. Such a catastrophic containment breach would cause an implosive collapse that would seal the rift and devastate Ioline.

Though their teleport attack allowed the Blood Angels to swiftly advance upon their objective, resistance quickly increased. The Blood Angels had landed within the domain of Warpsmith Althedrak, a former Iron Warrior who had sworn himself to Abaddon's cause in return for great power. Althedrak was not a subtle creature; upon discovering that enemies had infiltrated his infernal factorum and were clearly making for the Hex Infernum, the Warpsmith flew into a rage and threw everything he had at the Blood Angels.

So it was that Karlaen's forces found themselves mired amidst a warren of thundering industrial devices, roaring furnaces, looming ruins and narrow streets. Traitors poured in from all sides, driven by the exhortations of their Warpsmith master, while Daemon Engines flattened everything in their path to reach the interlopers. Karlaen and his warriors laid down a withering hail of fire, melta blasts ripping the enemy engines apart while Sternguard Veterans mowed down rank after rank of the enemy. Still

the Blood Angels could not stay where they were, for they would surely be buried in foes. Each attempt they made to press forwards was stymied, Althedrak jamming alleyways with the corpses of his underlings and bringing buildings down in avalanches to hold the Blood Angels at bay. When a bellowing Lord of Skulls loomed over the depleted strike force, it appeared as though the Blood Angels' attack was doomed to costly failure. Yet at that moment there came a manifestation of a mysterious power that has long aided Sanguinius' sons in their darkest hours. Blazing with golden light, the Sanguinor dropped from the storm-lashed heavens and drove his blade through the Daemon Engine's skull.

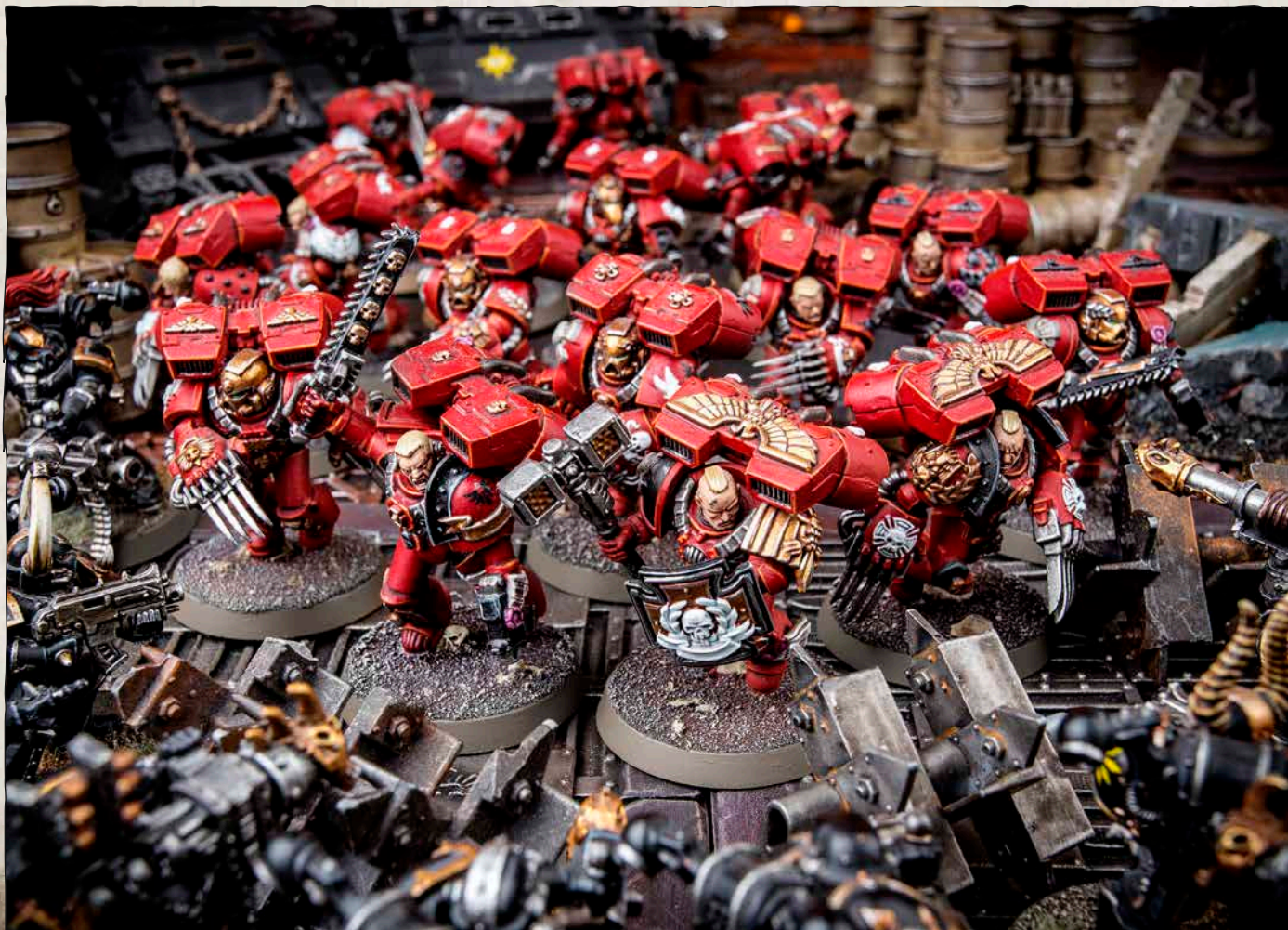
Led now by their Chapter's avenging angel, the surviving Blood Angels rallied and carved a path to the base of the warding tower. Barely half of Strike Force Karlaen still lived by the time they reached the tower's base. With massed traitor forces closing in on three sides and the maelstrom screaming on the other, the Blood Angels prepared to sell their lives dearly in order to achieve their objective. But before Karlaen could make the ultimate sacrifice, again the Sanguinor came to the fore. As the First Captain and his remaining brothers watched in reverence, the golden warrior took the vortex grenade and soared high, plunging headlong into the tangled workings of the warding tower. The entire edifice seemed to squirm and pulse as though it fought the Sanguinor's invading presence, and then with a thunderous roar the tower began to collapse.

Karlaen wasted no time in ordering a fighting retreat. With a swirling empyric hurricane blowing at their backs and the enemy ranks collapsing into panicked confusion, the Blood Angels cut a path through the encircling foe and dashed for their extraction point. They barely made it. With one warding tower fallen, the Hex Infernum raged out of control. The raw energies of change and madness swept through Ioline's tortured streets like a tidal wave, obliterating everything in their path. By the time the Blood Angels' extraction craft were burning for orbit and a rendezvous with the *Angelus Redemptor*, the Hex had detonated altogether.



In the hours that followed, a roiling blast wave swept across the planet's surface, obliterating all trace of Chaotic industry on the planet, and leaving nothing but blackened, glowing ash in its wake. It took seven days before the fury of the global firestorms burned down to fume and smoke, by which time the planet was little more than a ravaged shell. The destruction was unimaginable, but the Blood Angels had their victory, and had dealt Xorphas' forces a dire blow. And the Sanguinor? Karlaen himself had seen him escape the explosion of the warding tower, a streak of gold soaring away into the heavens. When the hour was once again dark enough, he would return.







+++AMETHAL STRATEGIC CHRONOLOG+++
+++SEGMENT ENGAGE 0011110001101+++
+++OMNISSIAHREGNUMPERPETUARI+++

ASC 061-063: IOLINE REINFORCEMENTS IDENTIFIED AS PRIMARY HAZARD TO WAR EFFORT ON AMETHAL [2.4% INCREASE PER HOUR SIDEREAL]. BLOOD ANGELS 1ST CAPTAIN KARLAEN LEADS STRIKE FORCE [SUB-REF: ARCHANGELS/SANGUINARY GUARD] AGAINST DAEMON ENGINE PRODUCTION FACILITIES ON IOLINE [SUB-REF: HEX INFERNIUM]. AID PROVIDED BY MAGOS DOMINUS IVASNOPHON [0011 BINHARIC RECURSIVE CLEARANCE - CLOAKING ENGINE/OMNIFACTORIAL TELEPORTARIA].

ASC 064: IOLINE RAID SUCCESSFUL [SUB-REF: SANGUINOR]. HEX INFERNIUM DESTABILISED, COLLAPSE OF HEXEGRAMMIC FAIL-SAFES TRIGGERED QUANTUM COLLAPSE. IOLINE SURFACE SCoured BY ECTOPLASMATIC ENERGY STORM, ALL BLACK LEGION ASSETS DESTROYED. ARCHANGELS EXTRACT SUCCESSFULLY FROM ENGAGEMENT AREA. 57% CASUALTIES SUSTAINED.

ASC 064-066: TRAITOR RESPONSE TO IOLINE RAID EXTREMELY RAPID. BLACK LEGION FLEET MOBILISE IN VOID SECTOR ALEPH-DAU-ZEPHRA, ADVANCE AGAINST PLANET AMETHAL. WORD BEARERS BATTLESHIP [SUB-REF: 'CACODAEMON'] DETECTED IN DEEP ORBIT BEYOND RANGE OF CAPITAL PLANET TOURMALID NAVAL GUNS. MALIGN EMPYRIC SIGNAL DETECTED FROM WARSHIP AT ASC 065. SIMULTANEOUS HERETIC CULT UPRISINGS IN TOURMALID GRAV-HABS AND DOCK-SPIRE FACILITIES PARALYSE SYSTEM GOVERNANCE ORGANS, COMPROMISE SHIPYARDS AND ORBITAL RESERVE ELEMENTS [SUB-REF: WORD BEARERS, DARK APOSTLE GORATH-HEL]. BLOOD ANGELS HONOUR GUARD ENGAGE INSURGENTS AND WORD BEARER ELITES.

ASC 066: BLOOD ANGEL'S 2ND CAPTAIN APHAEL ENGAGES GLOBAL HOLOLITH STRATEGIC COUNSEL WITH PRIMARY MILITARY LEADERS ON PLANET AMETHAL [SUB-REF: HOUSE RAVEN, IVASNOPHON EXPEDITION, PRINCEPS PRIMUS LEGIO METALICA, SUBSID NAVAL OFFICERS - FULL AUDIO LOG X31B]. RESPONDING TO BLACK LEGION VOID-MOBILISATION AND SUSPECTED STRIKE COORDINATES, ALL AVAILABLE IMPERIAL FORCES MOVE TO DEFENCE OF HUB BETA-SECUNDUS.

ASC 066: ADDITIONAL - TRAITOR FORCES MOVE IN FOR OBJECTIVE ASSAULT ON AMETHAL [SUB-REF: BLACK LEGION] [SUB-REF: LORD XORPHAS]. UNEXPLAINED METEROEMPYRIC PHENOMENON ON DUST-PLAINS WEST OF BETA-SECUNDUS, EST 82.335% CHANCE TRAITOR LEADER KHARN REGATHERING REMAINING AVAILABLE FORCES AND RE-ENTERING PRIMARY ENGAGEMENT ZONE.

+++SEGMENTCONCLUDES00111100101+++

CHAPTER 3

THE SCREAMING PIT



FOR THE IMPERIUM

Stirred to action by the destruction of Ioline, the Black Legion had struck at Amethal. They concentrated their full force upon Hub Beta-Secundus, and the dark prize that lurked there. The Imperial forces had gathered to form a great noose, marshalling their strength before they struck the last blow to eradicate the Chaos threat once and for all. The plan belonged to Captain Aphael, whose own forces formed the southernmost element of the offensive.

Standing atop his command Rhino, Captain Aphael took a deep breath. He smelled machine oil and old sweat rising from the hundreds of Skitarii who stood in serried ranks before him. He heard the hum of power armour backpacks from the Blood Angels warriors gathered around him.

Aphael began to speak, his voice amplified by his helm to a godlike boom. He knew the vox would be carrying his words out around the perimeter of Hub Beta-Secundus to every battle group of Imperial warriors assembled there. Blood Angels. Knights. Cult Mechanicus. Titan crews. All would hear his rallying cry.

'Sons of the Angel. Servants of the Ommissiah. Warriors of the Imperium. Already, you have fought long and hard for Amethal. Already, you have faced dangers and hardships that would have broken lesser men. Yet to you proud souls this is nothing more than your duty, and for that I salute you.'

Aphael slammed one fist against his breastplate in a warrior's salute. The Blood Angels around his command tank mirrored the gesture.

'But our war for this world, this system, is not over. The sternest test still lies ahead. To the north, the traitors are landing their forces within the ruins of Hub Beta-Secundus. These faithless cowards have renounced every oath we hold sacred, and given in to weakness and fear. They make a mockery of our faith, our courage, our very species. And yet, in their arrogance, these spineless traitors think they can sweep aside the noble warriors of the Imperium and take whatever they want from this world.' Aphael's voice rose to an impassioned shout as he swept towards the conclusion of his speech. His audience watched, enraptured.

'Brothers of the Imperium, we may hail from different worlds, but within us all is the same strength. It is the strength to face temptation and evil, and to deny them. Within us all burns an unquenchable fire, and it is that fire that will bear us on to victory even as it scours the taint of Chaos from this world forevermore!'

All around Aphael, his battle-brothers raised a rousing cheer, brandishing their weapons in salute of Aphael's words. Even amongst the ranks of the Skitarii backs straightened, heart valves pumped faster, and binharic victory chants buzzed out from vocalisers. In response, Captain Aphael swept up his ornate blade, pointing north to where the sky was criss-crossed with the contrails of Chaos drop-craft.

'For the Emperor, the Angel and the Ommissiah!' he roared, 'Forwards, brothers, to victory!'

Even as he spoke, a wing of Stormraven Gunships screamed low over Aphael's head, the red of the Blood Angels and the Black of the Death Company stark against the hazy morning sky.



His speech delivered, the Captain of the Blood Angels' 2nd Company dropped through the roof hatch of his Rhino. Engines were gunning and snorting all around as the tanks of his strike force began their advance. Space Marine bikes slewed round, raising fans of dust and dirt as their riders swung their mounts towards the ruins of Beta-Secundus. Skitarii maniples marched in perfect lockstep towards the distant foe, their Ironstriders loping out ahead of them like weird flightless birds. Motivated by Aphael's words, and their detestation for the traitorous foe, the armies of the Imperium advanced on all fronts, a closing noose intended to strangle Lord Xorphas' tainted followers once and for all.

'An effective oration,' crackled Magos Ivasnophon's voice across Aphael's vox. 'I project that it will have raised the combat effectiveness of our combined forces by a variable value of between zero point seven and four point three percent.'

'I'm glad you approved,' responded Aphael wryly, as his Rhino accelerated across the churned grasslands, 'and that you support my plan of attack.'

'It is the optimal response to the enemy dispositions and objectives, given the difficult variables present in the strategic equation upon this world,' responded the Magos in his monotonous voice. 'Taking into account the almost complete devastation of Hub Beta-Secundus, and the scattered nature of our own forces at the time of Black Legion fleet mobilisation, attempting to secure and hold the hub would have been an inefficient response. Even with the sacrifices our fleet has made to delay the traitors outside of the orbital envelope, my projections confirm that we would not have been able to invest Hub Beta-Secundus with sufficient materiel to hold it against a concerted traitor drop.'

'Instead,' came a new voice, cutting into their command channel, 'you've gathered our strength, and forced the traitors onto the defensive. Make them hold that pile of rubble and ruin if they want it so much, and see how they like spreading their forces thin on every front. Good work, brother.'

Aphael's stern expression broke for a moment into a handsome grin.

'Ha! Captain Karlaen! Inspirational work on Ioline, brother. Where are you now?'

'On high,' came Karlaen's response, 'moving back into orbit aboard *Angelus Redemptor* with what's left of the raiding party. The fleet is moving in now to draw off the Black Legion ships – we'll punch through the blockade once it's sufficiently strung out, and meet you on the ground. But brother, be advised, there's a lot of iron up here and it's pointing in your direction. Expect heavy bombardments before you reach the hub.'

As though summoned by Karlaen's words, the first lance beam stretched down from the clouds just seconds later, blasting a vitrified crater a hundred yards across and annihilating a squadron of Baal Predators. Aphael watched his auspex, the grin gone from his face, as the ordnance began to fall and the world turned to thunder and fire. There would be terrible casualties, he thought, but they must press home their attack. This was the last battle for Amethal, and it was one they could not lose.



As one, the armies of the Imperium advanced across the burned-out kill zone that the Mechanicus had cleared so many weeks before. They charged into the blizzard of fire hurled from on high by the warships of the Black Legion. Barrage bombs sailed down to explode with enormous force, sending Knights sprawling and turning squads of Skitarii to ash. Lance beams hammered Titan void shields, or atomised squads of Assault Marines. Yet though the bombardment was heavy and the destruction horrific, the Imperial forces did not slacken their pace.

Technoarcheologist Dominus Ivasnophon advanced unflinchingly through the barrage. Sub-routines within his cerebral processors tracked the fire patterns of the enemy craft. He did what he could to direct the Electro-Priests, Servitors and robots that surrounded him out of the path of the enemy's fire, but Ivasnophon knew that casualties were inevitable. Many of the cybernetic warriors that followed him to war this day were priceless relics, wondrous examples of the Ommissiah's beneficence. Yet they were all expendable in this war. It was the will of the Machine God that the foe be stopped before they could unlock the secrets of the Daemon cage, and if that cost the life of every faithful warrior on Amethal, still the equation would balance. Besides, thought Ivasnophon, the Ommissiah would not let him find lasting death while the secrets of replicating Daemon cage technology remained hidden from him.

'That is not part of his design,' vocalised the Magos, as barrage bombs slammed down to the south of his position. Though well over two thousand yards distant, the pressure wave from the explosion swept across Ivasnophon and his followers, raising a vast cloud of dust that engulfed them completely. Those Electro-Priests closest to the detonation stumbled and a number fell, their organics pulped by the overpressure. The rest regained their footing and marched on, faces turned toward the ruined hub that loomed ahead.

Visibility was terrible. The bombardment was raising apocalyptic clouds of dust and smoke that whirled

across the battlefield, while the electromagnetic pulses of the lance strikes fouled auspex and augurs.

'Congregation is to repeat the canticle of the strengthened spirit,' ordered Ivasnophon, 'and focus prayers upon the abjuration of hostile energy phantasms. Never blind is he who sees with the dataframe clarity of the Ommissiah.'



The distance was closing rapidly. Ivasnophon calculated his forces would be leaving the bombardment zone and entering the fire-fields of the Black Legion within the next twenty-five seconds. He performed a cognimitive scan and learned that he now led a force of precisely eight hundred and seventeen combat-capable warriors. Casualties from the bombardment had been significant, standing at fifty-six percent of his force.

'This is Technoarcheologist Dominus Ivasnophon,' announced the Magos across the Blood Angels' command channel. 'Advisory: my force has suffered significant casualties. Enemy bombardment heavier than calculated. Projections for success at breaching hub defences now at forty-two percent.' The vox channel crackled with static, even the hardened comms of the Adeptus Astartes struggling to cope with the disruption of the bombardment.

Ivasnophon could see from the noospheric net that his allies were pressing forwards with their own attacks, and it seemed unlikely that any were aware of his predicament. He received no response to his hails.

With sudden fury, the Black Legion guns opened up. Heavy weapons thumped and howled, hurling fire from concealed positions amongst the rubble. Bolters hammered, scything shells through the Cult Mechanicus ranks, and the Magos triangulated multiple battle cannons firing as Daemon Engines rained explosive death upon his forces. Calmly, Ivasnophon sent noospheric commands flitting through his forces, compelling them to attack.

Kataphron Destroyers hurled searing orbs of plasma into the enemy defences, vaporising power-armoured foes. Phosphor blasters sprayed the fringes of the hub, Kastellan Robots lighting the battlefield with the harsh glare of their weapons. Crackling with power, the bands of Fulgurite and Corpuscarii Electro-Priests charged headlong, weathering the Black Legion firepower in their determination to bring the foe to battle.

It took Ivasnophon less than five minutes of all-out battle to assess that his forces had been rendered insufficient to carry the enemy's defences. He and his followers were expendable, but there was no sense wasting their lives inefficiently. Better to pull back, try to lure the enemy from their defences, then probe for weak spots and strike there instead.

With that thought, the Magos sent out the commands to pull his surviving followers – now some four hundred strong – back from the fight.

It was then that Ivasnophon's static-fouled augurs detected movement to the rear, closing rapidly. The Magos' cerebral cogitators whirled, projecting possible threat scenarios and responses. Was this reinforcement? The lie was put to that faint hope when, from amidst the murk, a bestial war cry rang out.

'Blood for the Blood God! Kill! Maim! Burn!'

The next moment, red armoured figures charged in to attack. They brought with them vast black clouds, unnatural meteorological phenomena that caused Ivasnophon's logic circuits to rebel. But there could be no denying that red-lit storm clouds were rolling overhead, nor that blood was falling from them in a hissing deluge.

Caught between the Black Legion to their fore and the sudden charge of Khârn and his Berzerkers to their rear, the Cult Mechanicus fought desperately. Electrostatic gauntlets spat coruscating bolts of power that electrocuted Berzerkers and hurled them from their feet. Chain axes screamed as they carved through flesh and metal. Krak missiles and

battle-cannon shells continued to fall amidst the mayhem, obliterating loyalist and traitor alike.

Gliding through the madness, Ivasnophon lashed out at the traitors surrounding him. With each swing of his power axe or shot from his volkite blaster, he sent another Chaos worshipper sprawling into the bloody mud. His only thought now was to weaken the foe enough that he could break out with the last of his warriors and withdraw. The numbers had been against his force from the beginning, and now defeat was inevitable.

And then came Khârn. The Betrayer's axe swept out of nowhere, faster even than Ivasnophon's optics could follow. The first blow severed his caliver from its mechadendrite and carved deep into the flesh and metal of his body. As Khârn raised his weapon for a second strike, the Magos diverted all power to his saviour protocols, watching data spooling out in his mind's eye, flowing away through the noosphere.

'You cannot kill me,' he began, voice still flat and calm despite his horrific wounds. 'The Ommissiah—'

'Has not the might of Khorne!' roared Khârn, bringing his screaming axe around again and hacking Ivasnophon's head from his shoulders. The master of the Metalican exploratory force felt one last roaring burst of neural feedback, and then he knew no more.



Captain Aphael's Rhino rang like a struck bell. The speeding vehicle lurched with the impact, then skidded to a halt. Smoke drifted from somewhere in the vehicle's workings, and the hull rattled as more enemy fire struck it. Aphael didn't hesitate. He shot a glance around at the battle-brothers of his Command Squad, and slammed a palm against the activation rune to lower the tank's rear ramp. The Blood Angels emerged into a scene of furious battle. 2nd Company battle-brothers and red-hulled battle tanks streamed past on both sides, guns blazing. Enemy fire lashed them, shredding tank tracks and punching Space Marines off their feet.

'Forwards brothers! For the Angel!' Aphael rounded his stalled Rhino and ran hard for the enemy lines. He could see the Black Legion ahead through whirling dust and smoke. They were dug in amidst the rubble and ruins of Beta-Secundus' southern fringes, pouring everything they had into stopping the Blood Angel assault. The Black Legion fire overlapped with lethal efficiency, hulking flesh-metal warriors and horn-helmed traitors making the Blood Angels pay for every yard they advanced. A battle-brother ahead of Aphael was smashed into the floor, his arm blown off by a shot fired from the sagging ruin of a factorum. To Aphael's right, a band of Assault Marines soared down on tails of fire to slam into the Black Legion lines. To his left, Librarian Asmasael led his Librarius brethren into battle, lashing the enemy with psychic lightnings and thunderous shock waves of force.

Then the Captain was in amongst his foes, plasma pistol blasting and power sword swinging. He stabbed his blade through the throat of a nearby traitor, spinning away from a point-blank bolter blast before scything down the weapon's wielder. Stormravens screamed overhead, assault cannons howling. Aphael's Command Squad locked blades with the enemy all around him, power-armoured figures wrestling, hacking and blasting amidst the ruins.

'Keep up the pressure, brothers,' voxed Aphael, plasma pistol boring a shot through the chest of a monstrous Obliterator. 'All tanks, suppress any enemies attempting to reinforce the

foe. Assault squads, gather on me. We will break their line here.'

Aphael had fought his way into the shadow of the crumbling factorum, his mind intent upon the developing tactical picture as his warriors pushed the foe back. The next second, a Chaos Space Marine plunged down upon him from the balcony above. Aphael just got his blade up in time to block his attacker's own. The Blood Angels Captain parried a series of lightning-fast cuts, back-peddalling before the ferocity of his enemy. The Black Legionnaire was clad in ornate armour that lent him the appearance of a Daemon. It fought like one too. Aphael weaved around the next swing and attempted to run his enemy through, but before he could a terrible blast of sonic energy exploded from the traitor's vox grill. It was like being struck by a speeding tank. Aphael was smashed onto his back, senses screaming with overload. Through a haze of pain, he registered his Company Champion, Amadael, blocking the enemy's killing stroke and driving the traitor back into the press of battle. Gradually, as though in slow motion, Aphael's superhuman biology overcame the cracked bones and ruptured blood vessels he had suffered, dumping pain blockers into his blood stream and helping the Captain propel himself back to his feet.

Aphael was just in time to see the Chaos Champion ram its blade through Champion Amadael's head, splitting the valiant warrior's skull in two. Red tinged the edge of Aphael's vision as rage and guilt sought to overwhelm him. Yet he was a Captain of the Blood Angels and he would not give in to the Flaw. Aphael surged through the combat, coldly cutting down every enemy that barred his path. The Captain followed his quarry through the hollow doorway of the ruined factorum, where he found the Chaos Space Marine lurking, its back to the entrance.

'I must hold them back,' he heard it hiss, and felt nothing but contempt as he raised his plasma pistol.

'No, traitor,' spat Captain Aphael, pulling his trigger and unleashing his weapon's killing power, 'all you must do is die.'









INTO THE PIT

While battle raged on the planet below, vast warships duelled in the void high above Hub Beta-Secundus, salvos of explosive ordnance bursting against shuddering void shields and lance beams cutting the darkness. Fighters and bombers swarmed around capital ships, darting in to sting their prey before flitting away. Through the midst of the battle plunged the *Angelus Redemptor*, slipping between the larger craft like a knife between an enemy's ribs. Within the *Redemptor's* teleportarium chamber, Captain Karlaen and the survivors of his strike force stood ready to deploy.

'We're a smaller force than when we hit Ioline,' the Captain voxed privately to Sergeant Alphaeus. 'So many lost.'

'Smaller, but not lesser, Captain,' responded Alphaeus proudly. 'This force can still win the war.'

'I wouldn't doubt it for a moment,' replied Karlaen proudly, before switching his address to the warriors gathered amid the machineries of the teleport chamber. 'We shall honour the fallen through victory in battle. Every brother who fell upon Ioline will be repaid tenfold upon our return to Amethal.' A rumble of assent stirred through the chamber; these brothers still bore the scars of Ioline, and Karlaen expected no wild cheers from them. But he could see it in his warriors' eyes. Every last one of them was ready.

Moments later, the electrosconces of the chamber pulsed, and the timbre of the thrumming engines deepened. The attendant Techmarines looked up expectantly from their consoles.

'It is time,' declared Karlaen. 'Prepare yourselves, my brothers. For the Angel and the Emperor.'

The Blood Angels gathered upon the broad, rune-glowing platform of the teleporter. Arcane energies whirled into a crackling storm, and an etheric gale howled through the chamber. With an implosive rush of kaleidoscopic light, Karlaen and his warriors teleported into the midst of the battle for Hub Beta-Secundus.

The moment he re-manifested, Karlaen assessed and analysed the situation. The Archangels and Sanguinary Guard had flashed into being near the edge of a vast pit, clearly the Mechanicus excavation site. Nearby, a broad ramp of packed earth wound down the pit's inner wall. From the pit came a terrible, sawing scream, a distorted cacophony that tore at the mind and soul. The sound filled Karlaen with dread. Perhaps the Imperial forces were already too late. The Captain burned with urgency to find the source of that twisted symphony and silence it.

Karlaen and his warriors stood upon cracked ferrocrete, surrounded by the blasted ruins of what had once been prefab Mechanicus structures. The ordered enclave had been reduced to a vast sprawl of slumped architecture, scattered wrecks and heaped, mangled corpses. Titans, both loyalist and traitor, loomed over the ruins in the distance, hurling torrents of firepower at one another, while unnatural storm clouds seethed overhead, sluicing bloody rain down upon the field of war. Karlaen's auspex was distorted by electrostatic, but he could make out Imperial battlefronts pressing in from the north, east and south. He did not need his auspex, however, to see that all around his immediate position were dozens of hostile contacts. Chaos Space Marines. Cultists. Daemon Engines. It was a sizeable enemy force, but the Archangels had the element of surprise. Swiftly, the First Captain leapt into action.

'Open fire,' he roared. 'Expanding fire pattern, kill-priority on their armour. Hold until reinforced!'

As one, Strike Force Karlaen let fly. Bands of Black Legionnaires span with superhuman speed, trying to bring their weapons to bear. They were smashed off their feet by bolt rounds and plasma blasts. The foe had evidently been massing its Helforged Warpacks here for a counter-attack, as a clanking, roaring wave of the ironclad beasts burst from the ruins of a nearby manufactory. Storming from amid the collapsing architecture of the factory came

huge, loping horrors and scuttling monstrosities of brass and spiked iron. Metal tendrils lashed. Glowing cannons whined as they powered up. Helbrutes bellowed their madness as their huge claws flexed.

'On our left,' barked Karlaen. His Sternguard Squads levelled their weapons and sent hissing melta beams out to meet the ironclad beasts. Forgefiends detonated in fountains of gouting ectoplasm. A Defiler crashed sideways as two of its legs were sheared off. The hideous contraption tried to scramble upright, resembling a wounded spider for a moment before a Krak grenade blew off its head.

Still the Warpack came on, their fire chewing through the Blood Angels and felling several. One Maulerfiend, its hull ornately decorated and its eyes blazing with power, lunged in and ripped three Sternguard open.

For a moment, the Archangels' line buckled, then Karlaen charged in at the head of his Terminators. Like knights of legend, the Blood Angels elite battled the monsters hand to hand, feet braced amidst rubble and ruin as they smashed and battered at their foes. Energy fields flashed as lashing tentacles and massive claws crashed against storm shields. One Terminator was snatched off his feet by a Defiler and crushed like a ration tin, blood and pulped flesh squirting through the thing's brass talons as it squeezed. In return, Karlaen and his brothers wrought mayhem. Crackling hammers and lightning-wreathed claws swung, connecting with deafening bangs that crumpled armour plate and sprayed molten gore across the ruins. Iron skulls were staved in, hull plates and weapon limbs torn to scrap.

The Daemon Engines and Helbrutes pressed forwards despite their losses, their fury carrying them on even as their numbers thinned. Wherever their guns roared and their talons swung, they left red- and gold-armoured corpses strewn across the rubble. Yet Karlaen's warriors were undaunted, and within moments the last few Daemon Engines were

surrounded by vengeful Blood Angels. At the same moment, the last of the Sanguinary Guard leapt high, streaking across the battlefield to fall upon the iron-tentaed Warpsmiths at the Warpach's rear. Energised halberds flashed, clashing with black-bladed axes. Warriors fell on both sides before the Sanguinary Guard managed to surround and cut down the last Warpsmith.

Karlaen took a moment, hearts pumping from the exertion of battle. His auspex showed more enemy contacts moving in from the south, but they were coming fast and erratic.

'They're not advancing,' he smiled grimly, 'they're fleeing.' Karlaen changed vox channels and called out a greeting.

'Captain Aphael, I see you sent us a gift, brother.'

The Cultists burst from amidst the ruins in a panicked mass, skidding to a halt with expressions of horror as they saw the heaped Daemon Engine wrecks blocking their path. Before the heretics could turn and try to flee again, Captain Aphael's warriors smashed into their rear. The Blood Angels of the 2nd didn't waste ammunition, clubbing and smashing with bolter stocks, or carving through their terrified victims with bloody chainswords. The Archangels joined the massacre, charging in from the front and ripping apart the degenerate slaves of the Dark Gods. Within moments it was done, Aphael and Karlaen meeting over a sea of broken Cultist corpses.

'Well met, Captain Karlaen,' grinned Aphael. 'You and your men have laid the enemy reserves low, I see. That explains why their southern lines collapsed so suddenly.'

'Glad you joined us when you did, brother,' replied Karlaen. 'What's the situation? And what is that Angel-forsaken cacophony?'

'Nothing good,' replied Aphael, suddenly serious. 'The Legio Metalica are fighting their way in from the east and we have Skitarii moving up on our tail to secure this area. Our Death Company Stormraven was knocked from the air north of here, but Astorath and Chaplain Daenor have led the survivors from the wreck and are fighting their way towards our position. Reports from across the hub suggest the Black Legion lines are collapsing. It is as though their morale broke on all fronts at once, or...'

'Or as though the order to retreat has been given,' finished Karlaen. 'And if that is the case, then we may already be too late.'

'Not while we still draw breath, brother,' replied Captain Aphael, checking the charge on his plasma pistol and signalling Librarian Asmasael and his brothers to move up and join them. 'Let us put an end to this.'

'As you say,' nodded Karlaen, turning towards the excavation site, and the terrible cacophony still rising from its depths. 'Into the pit...'





Karlaen, Aphael and Librarian Asmasael led their warriors to the edge of the screaming pit, the Archangels Terminators and the survivors of Aphael's Battle Demi-company standing at the heroes' backs. Dirty, bruise-coloured light pulsed up from below, throwing the rocky walls of the vast hole into flickering relief. From their vantage point, the Blood Angels could see a massive shard of crystal, jabbed like a dagger into the distant floor of the pit. It was from this madly vibrating shard that the light and sawing screams undoubtedly emanated, and Karlaen and Aphael exchanged a look of dismay as they saw the shuddering cracks that radiated out across the ground from the wailing stone.


'The cage,' shouted Karlaen over the cacophony. 'They don't seek its secrets. The lunatics are trying to open it.'

'We must stop them before they throw wide the gates of hell,' replied Asmasael, power flickering in his eyes. He gripped his force staff in both hands. 'My brothers and I shall crush the power of that cursed stone.'

'Then let's move,' ordered Karlaen, 'We're not getting down there without a fight.'

The dirt ramp wound down and away into the depths, wide enough for a squadron of Land Raiders to drive two abreast. As the Blood Angels jogged down it, they could see an opposing force rising up to meet them. Black Legion Terminators were storming up the ramp, accompanying a band of weirdly attired Cultists and Sorcerers. At their head came a darkly regal figure clad in baroque armour, with dark psychic lightnings playing around him. There could be little doubt that this was the leader of the Black Legion on Amethal, the vile Sorcerer Lord Xorphas. It was he that had unleashed the psychic storm upon the ships of the 5th Company, and Captain Karlaen's blood ran hot at the thought of exacting vengeance for his fallen brothers.

The two forces opened fire upon one another as they closed the range, hammering gunfire joined by lashing psychic powers unleashed by the psykers of both sides. Even as the air



screamed with the energies of the Chaos crystal, it twisted and crackled at the manipulations of the powerful battle psykers on the ramp.

Karlaen saw Librarian Asmasael stab one hand forward, fingers working a mystical sign as his eyes flashed blue. Arcs of lightning shot from the Librarian's outstretched hand, crashing into a knot of Black Legion Terminators. Two of the elite warriors danced and twitched as they burned, while another was blown from the edge of the ramp and plunged into the darkness below. Kinetic bolts and black lightning flew back and forth in a storm, hammering against Terminator armour with a sound like some infernal forge.

Karlaen shrugged off a string of boltgun hits, the shots exploding against his adamantium breastplate, before he swung his hammer into the shooter's face. The Black Legionnaire's helm shattered in a cloud of metal and blood, and his heavy body crashed backwards and slid away down the slope.

'Traitors! Heretics! Know the Angel's justice!' roared Karlaen, ripping off another volley of shots from his storm bolter. He cursed as the rounds exploded in mid-air, stopped by a rippling shield of energy projected by Lord Xorphas. Karlaen started forwards through the fight, but the Sorcerer Lord was not done yet. The Sorcerer sucked daemonic power from the air around him and hurled a geomantic shock wave up the ramp. The packed soil exploded with a series of loud thumps, a racing wall of energy hurling rock and dirt into the air before ripping away the ground beneath the Blood Angels' feet. Veteran warriors who had survived days of harrowing battle yelled in alarm as they were pitched from the ramp and sent plummeting into the pit. Karlaen felt the ground torn out from under him, crashing onto his side with a snarled oath. The next moment everything was engulfed in a thunderous roar as the Sorcerer's powers leapt on, hammering the rock wall of the pit and spreading yawning cracks through its surface. Boulders the size of Drop Pods were torn loose, tumbling down onto the Sons of Sanguinius with killing force. A roaring tide of earth and rubble

followed, sweeping over the Blood Angels and burying those it did not smash from the ramp.

For a split second, Captain Karlaen lost consciousness beneath the pounding avalanche of rubble. As light and sound returned, he realised that he was all but buried in tumbled rocks, and that many of his brothers' predicaments were as bad, if not worse, than his own. With a surge of anger, he realised that the surviving traitors had seized their chance. They were scrambling over the rock fall as fast as they could, breaking through the Blood Angels' line while their enemies were stunned.

Using every iota of his superhuman might, Karlaen ripped his way free of the tons of soil and stone that buried him, servos screaming in his armour as detritus sluiced from its blood-red plates. With a roar of fury, the First Captain charged after the escaping Chaos worshippers. He blasted the legs out from under the rearmost Terminator, before smashing a pair of Xorphas' acolytes from his path with his hammer. Yet even as he swung back his arm to smite the fleeing form of Lord Xorphas, the searing energies of a teleport flare burst to life. There came a mighty boom, a swirling of unclean Warp-light, and Captain Karlaen's hammer swept through thin air. The last handful of traitors had been teleported away to safety, their leader amongst them.

Captain Karlaen looked up to where Black Legion Thunderhawks and landers were even now rising into the sky, guns hammering as they lifted off. Breathing heavily in his fury, he clenched his fist tight upon the haft of his hammer.

'Cursed traitors!' he roared. 'Damned cowards! You will not escape the vengeance of the Blood Angels!'

Karlaen felt a hand grasp his arm firmly. He looked into the face of Captain Aphael, his ire cooling at his comrade's dire expression.

'They're gone, brother. Let the fleet deal with them. We must stop the Chaos stone.'

So began a desperate race to the bottom of the pit, the surviving Blood

Angels ripping themselves free of the rock fall and rushing down into the depths. The closer they got to the madly screaming crystal, the more their senses reeled. Noses bled. Eyes ached and swam with hallucinations. Ears rang while the vox network choked on the gibber and cackle of daemonic voices.

As the Blood Angels reached the cracked floor of the pit, their Librarians moved to the fore, deploying their powers in a bid to still the furiously shaking ground. Blood was pouring from the bedrock around them, streaming into the yawning maws that flowed and screamed across the surface of the howling crystal. More cracks opened in the ground, infernal light glowing up from the depths of Amethal.

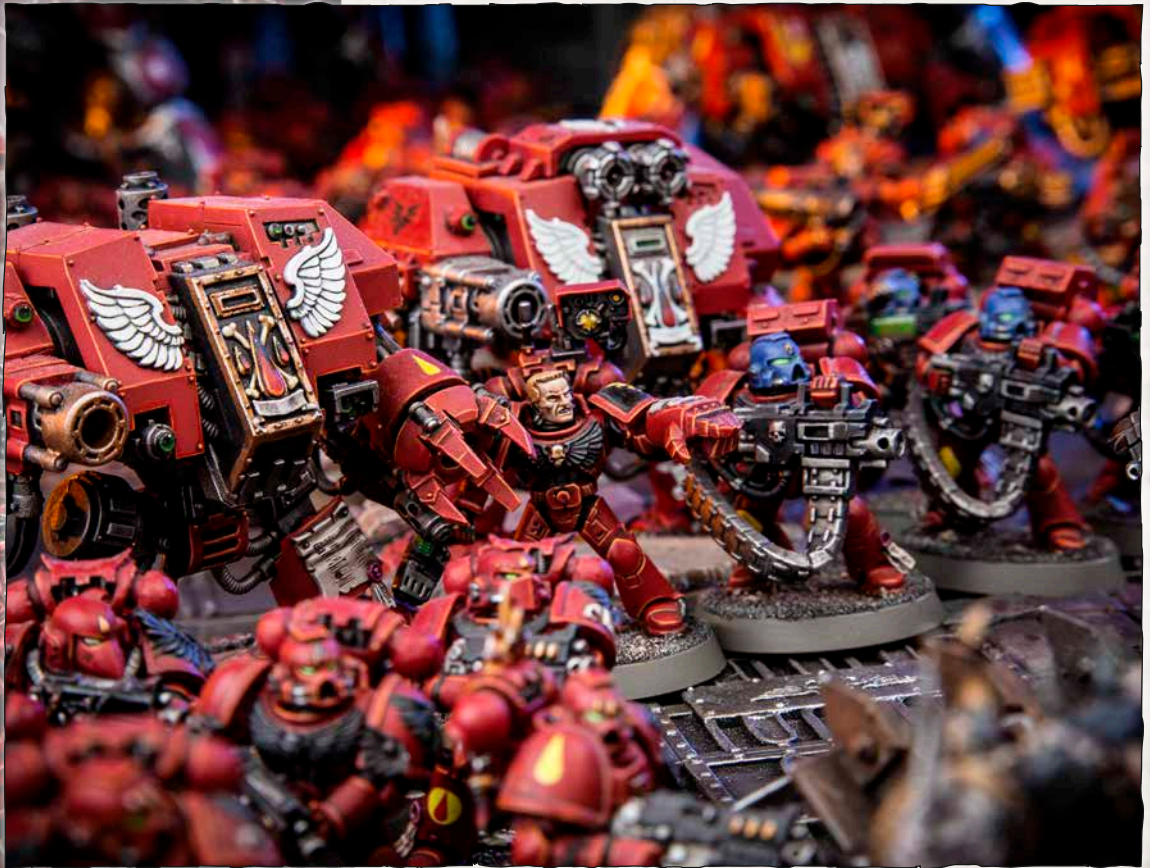
Karlaen watched as Asmasael and his brothers pushed through the obscene cacophony towards the stone, hands outstretched and force weapons glowing. One Librarian dropped to his knees, hands clutched to his bleeding eyes as his mind was overcome. Another screamed as ethereal flames engulfed him, turning him into a living torch. Still the Librarians pushed forwards, their chanting voices rolling and echoing around the pit even as the rest of the Blood Angels were driven back by the stone's piercing screams. Finally, with a whip-crack of force, Asmasael channelled the energies of his Librarian brethren and smote the terrible crystal with his glowing force staff. A sound rolled forth like the breaking of every mirror in creation, and then a blissful silence fell.

Gradually, Karlaen's hearing returned to him, bringing with it the crackle of triumphant Imperial voices across the vox network. The enemy were in full rout. The Chaos crystal had been shattered and slain. Lord Xorphas had fled.

'They are calling it victory,' said Captain Aphael, eyes blazing with triumph.

'In this battle, perhaps,' replied Karlaen, his grim gaze fixed upon the shattered stone, and the glowing cracks spreading from its base. 'But in the war? I fear this may be just another of the Sorcerer's tricks...'





THE BLOODED

The heroic warriors of the Battle Companies are the heart and soul of the Blood Angels Chapter. Of these august brotherhoods, none has garnered more renown than the 2nd Company, known as the Blooded. The warriors of the glorious 2nd have fought and won time and again, from the Valvadre Crawlcities to the gas refineries of Helios.

In recent years, the star of Captain Aphael has been very much on the rise. Master of the Watch and commander of the Blood Angels' 2nd Company, Aphael has won himself countless commendations for victories against seemingly impossible odds. The Captain is possessed of boundless strength, energy and dynamism. He values the life of every single servant of the Emperor, be they Space Marine, Mechanicus cyborg, or unaugmented human soldier, and will fight with everything he has to preserve and defend them. Aphael is charismatic in the extreme, from his angelic features and noble humility to his exceptional skills as an orator – his words lift even the most desperate and defeated of warriors, filling their hearts with new courage and a determination to do the Emperor's will. It is the Captain's sheer force of personality, his optimism and hope as much as the words he speaks, that rouse his followers to new heights of heroism. More than one seemingly doomed

fight has been won at the last by the impassioned rhetoric and heroic deeds of Captain Aphael.

The Captain's skills in combat are every bit as great as his words. Aphael is a skilled swordsman and an excellent shot, but if his century and a half of battlefield experience has taught him anything, it is that personal heroics – while grand and often crucial to victory – cannot match the might of an army of exceptionally trained and equipped warriors acting as one. Aphael has drilled his Battle Company to perfection. The Captain watches over every aspect of his battle-brothers' lives, ensuring that not only are they exceptionally well drilled for combat, but that their spiritual focus is absolute and their command theoreticals are of the highest standard. Every Space Marine Battle Company is highly trained and elite, but the Blooded stand out as exceptional, even by these standards. Aphael claims



with confidence that, should he and his lieutenants fall in battle, any given warrior from amongst his ranks could rise to take command of the company at a moment's notice. It is, furthermore, an undeniable fact that the 2nd Company suffers the fewest instances of both the Red Thirst and the Black Rage of any Blood Angels Company save the 1st.

All of these qualities stood the Blooded in good stead upon the battlefields of Amethal, allowing them to shrug off the pernicious influence of Chaos and discharge their duties with flawless skill and heroism.

At the heart of the 2nd Company force stood its Tactical Squads, each equipped to deal with a variety of enemies and capable of facing any strategic challenge without hesitation. Each battle-brother amongst these squads was a warrior seasoned by many decades of battle in the Emperor's name. They were versatile and deadly sons of the Angel, whose dedication to obliterating the Chaos threat was total. Supported by a fleet of transport vehicles, as well as heavier armoured assets from the Chapter Armoury, this

formidable core of warriors was in itself powerful enough to conquer an entire world. Though their numbers were comparatively few, every single Blood Angel was worth many times their number of human warriors, and their valour and skill was such that even the traitors of the Black Legion would struggle to fight them toe-to-toe.

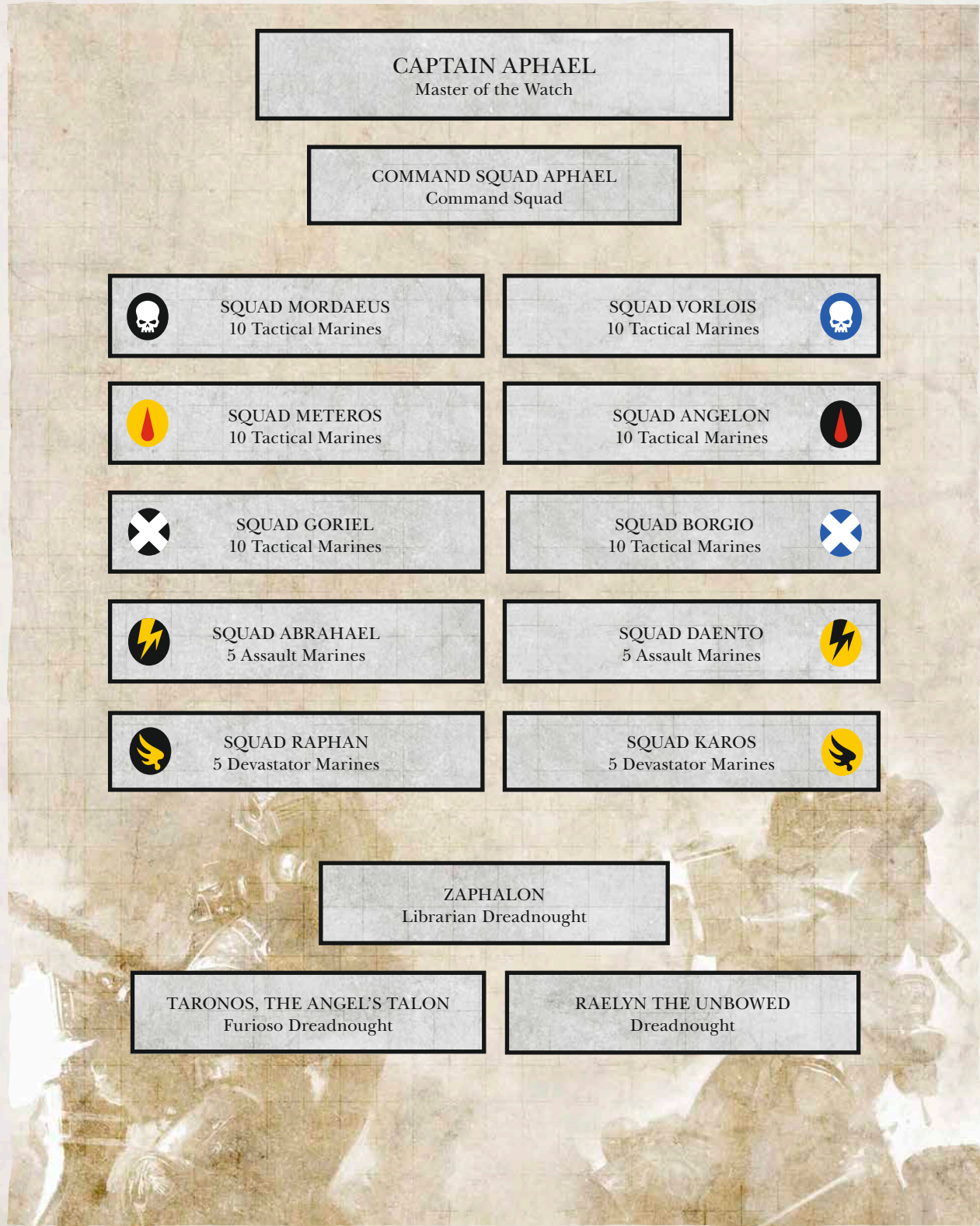
The company's might and strategic versatility were further enhanced by the Assault and Devastator Squads who marched alongside their Tactical brothers, the former adding speed and close-quarters lethality while the latter slaughtered the foe from afar with their heavy weapons.

This potent force was rounded off by the addition of the Chapter Ancients, a trio of Dreadnoughts who wielded their veritable arsenal of weaponry with the skill and wisdom of those who had seen entire millennia of war. Bolstered by the sage experience and armoured might of these warriors of old, Aphael's Blooded were a force fit to seize victory upon Amethal, no matter the dangers they faced.



WARRIORS OF THE 2ND COMPANY

With the 5th Company lost to the Black Rage, it fell to the battle-brothers of the Blood Angels' 2nd to form the mainstay of Captain Karlaen's forces on Amethal. This was a task they rose to admirably, for the Blooded are heroes one and all, and with their full strength present the 2nd were a mighty force indeed.



CAPTAIN APHAEL
Master of the Watch

COMMAND SQUAD APHAEL
Command Squad

 SQUAD MORDAEUS
10 Tactical Marines


SQUAD VORLOIS 
10 Tactical Marines


 SQUAD METEROS
10 Tactical Marines

SQUAD ANGELON 
10 Tactical Marines


 SQUAD GORIEL
10 Tactical Marines

SQUAD BORGIO 
10 Tactical Marines

 SQUAD ABRAHAEL
5 Assault Marines

SQUAD DAENTO 
5 Assault Marines

 SQUAD RAPHAN
5 Devastator Marines

SQUAD KAROS 
5 Devastator Marines

ZAPHALON
Librarian Dreadnought

TARONOS, THE ANGEL'S TALON
Furioso Dreadnought

RAEALYN THE UNBOWED
Dreadnought

CAPTAIN DONATOS APHAEL

A charismatic hero and dynamic leader, 2nd Company Captain Aphael is venerated in statuary, stained glass and illuminated script across countless Imperial star systems. He is a shining example of all that the Adeptus Astartes stand for, a shield to the Emperor's servants and a deadly blade to his foes. Captain Aphael seeks always to live up to the example of his angelic Primarch, for he refuses to allow the hidden darkness of the Chapter's gene-seed to undermine his heroic deeds. The Captain demands no less from the battle-brothers of his company, driving them hard to excel in every area. This exhaustive regime includes the perpetuating of an ancient and little-spoken-of tradition of the 2nd Company, the *Blooding*. During this rite of initiation, each battle-brother allows the *Red Thirst* to take them fully, venting the resultant savage fury upon a hapless enemy of the Imperium. They then gain mastery over their own fury by sheer force of will, learning to subdue their inner beast by looking it square in its bloodshot eyes.

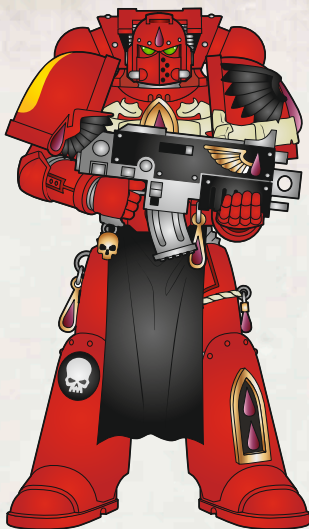
It is from this ritual that the 2nd Company get their name, and though it sounds barbaric, there can be no denying that Aphael's brothers display the lowest rates of succumbing to the dreaded *Black Rage*.



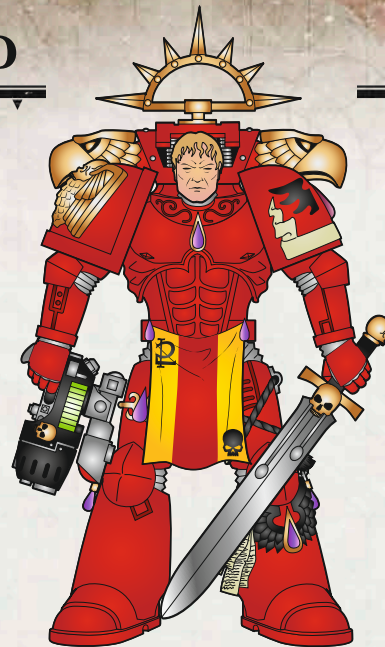
ICONOGRAPHY OF THE BLOODED



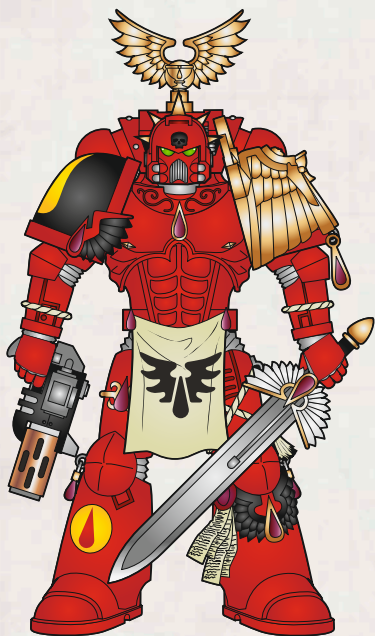
The Blood Angels 2nd Company, known as the Blooded, are typical of their Chapter's line formations. Heroic and courageous, many bear marks of honour upon their armour and wargear. Personal embellishments are much in evidence, for the Blood Angels are artistically gifted and individualistic warriors who honour their weapons and armour with the fruits of their creative talents.



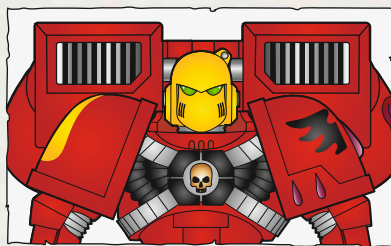
The golden-yellow blood drop is the symbol of the Blood Angels 2nd Company.



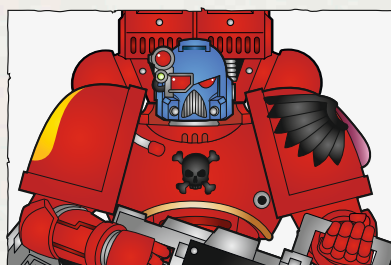
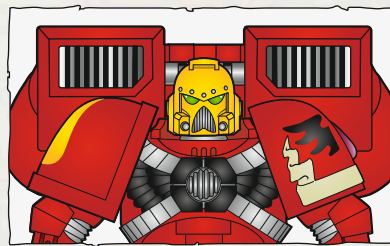
Captain Aphael bears the golden colour and gothic numeral of his company upon his tabard.



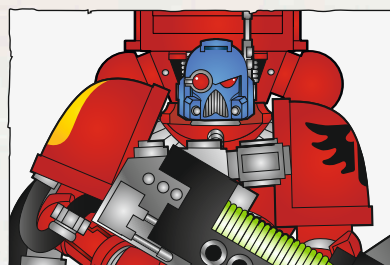
This Company Champion bears his squad marking on his greave due to the sculpted design of his knee pad.



These 2nd Company Assault Marines wear yellow battle helmets to denote their assault status.



As with all Blood Angels Devastator Marines, these 2nd Company brothers wear blue battle helmets.



The battle-brothers of the Blood Angels usually wear their squad markings on their right knee pads, and the warriors of the 2nd Company are no exception. Each symbol represents the squad to which the battle-brother belongs, making him easily identifiable by his fellows.



1st Squad



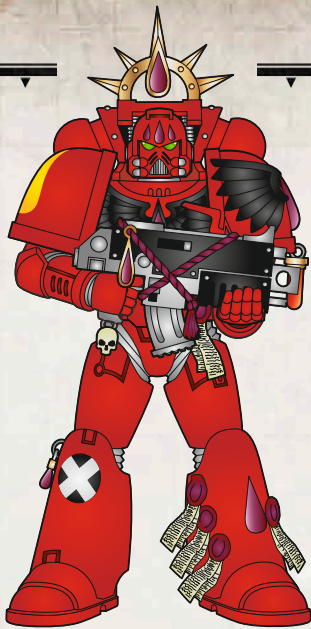
2nd Squad



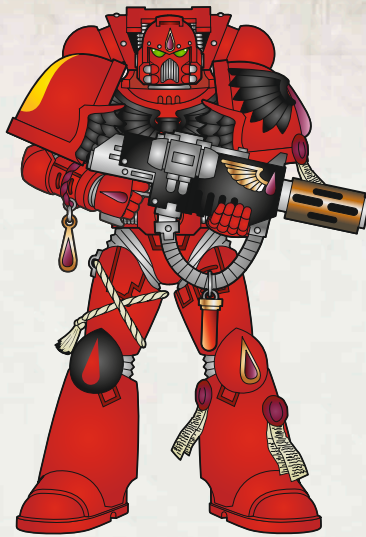
3rd Squad



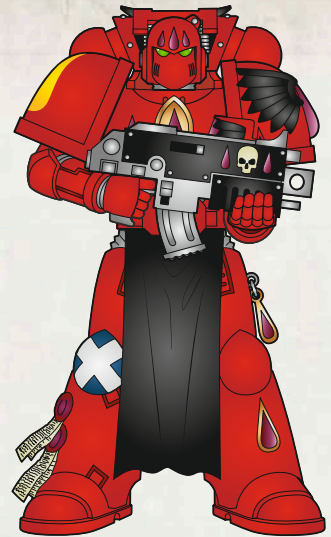
4th Squad



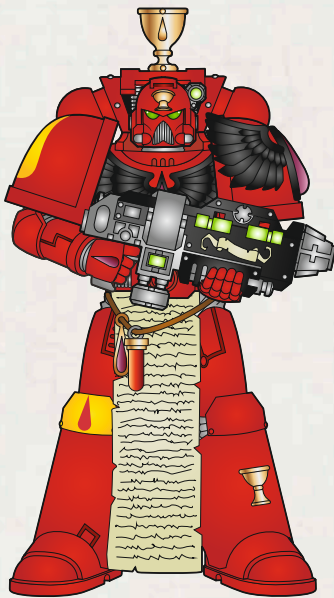
This battle-brother is a member of the 5th Squad, as denoted by the marking on his right greave.



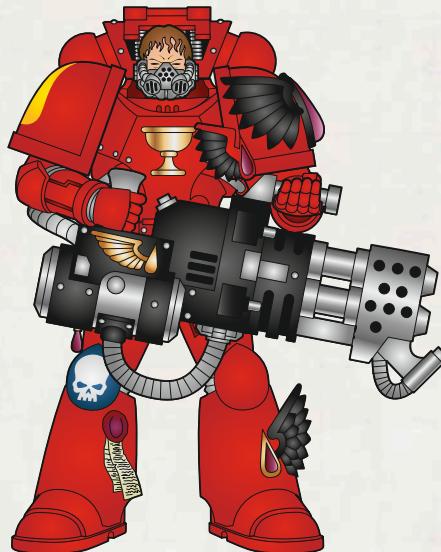
The blood drop on this battle-brother's right knee pad shows he is part of 4th squad.



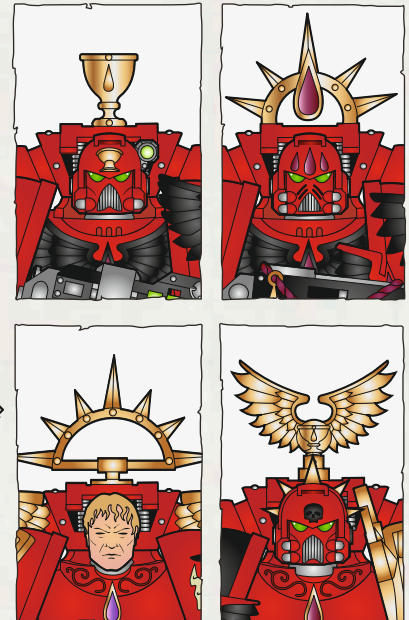
Details such as tabards tend to be ashen black, matching the Blood Angels' gun casings.



The Blooded sometimes take to the field adorned with scrolls proclaiming their noble victories past.



The more veteran battle-brothers of this company often bear adornments such as wings or golden chalices.



Decorations borne upon the power packs of battle-brothers' armour show their elite status.



5th Squad



6th Squad



7th Squad



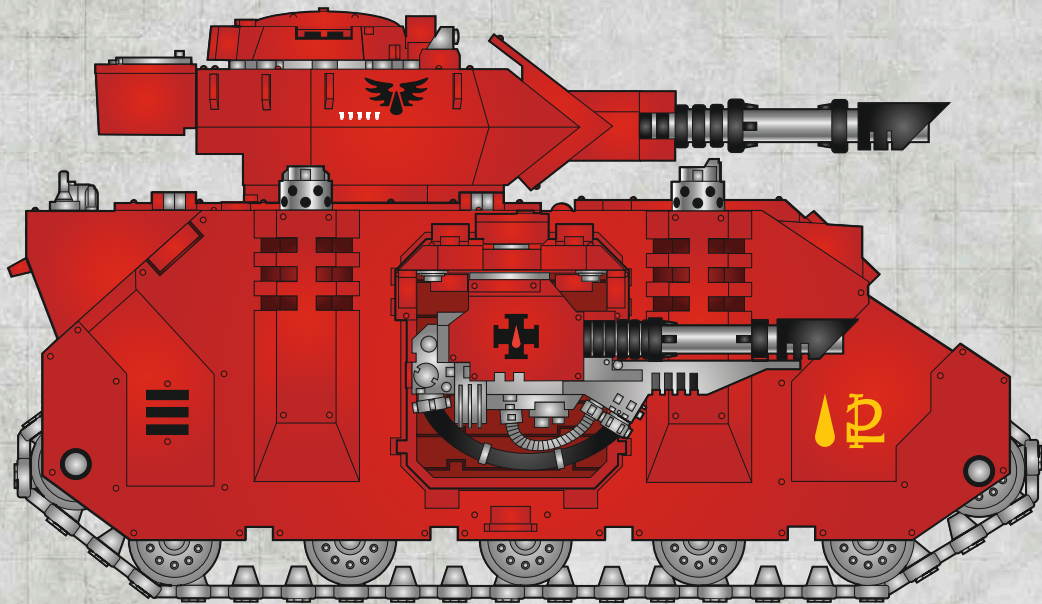
8th Squad



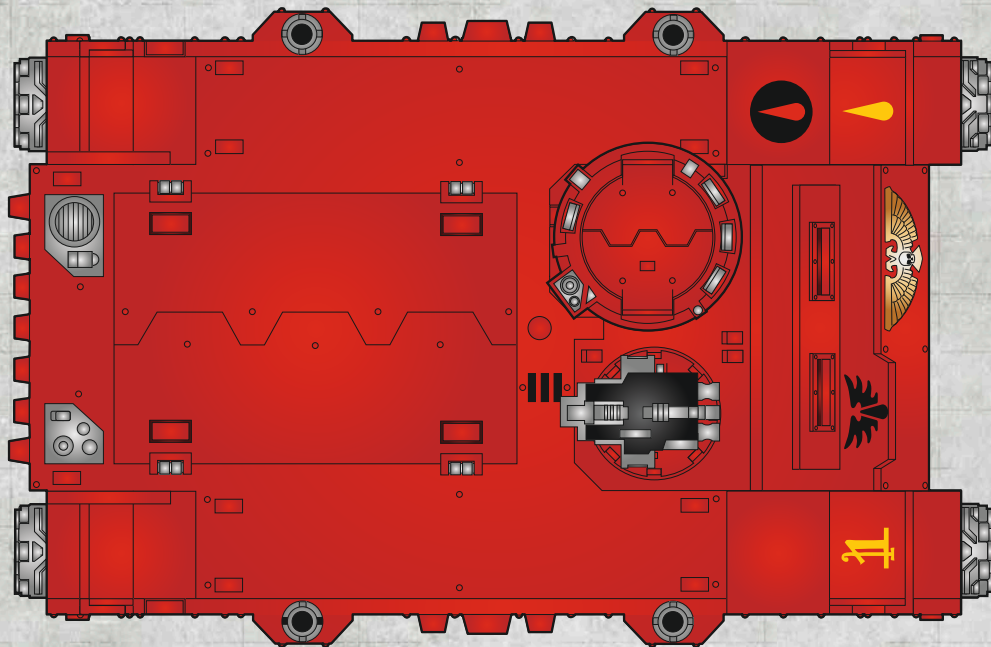
9th Squad



10th Squad

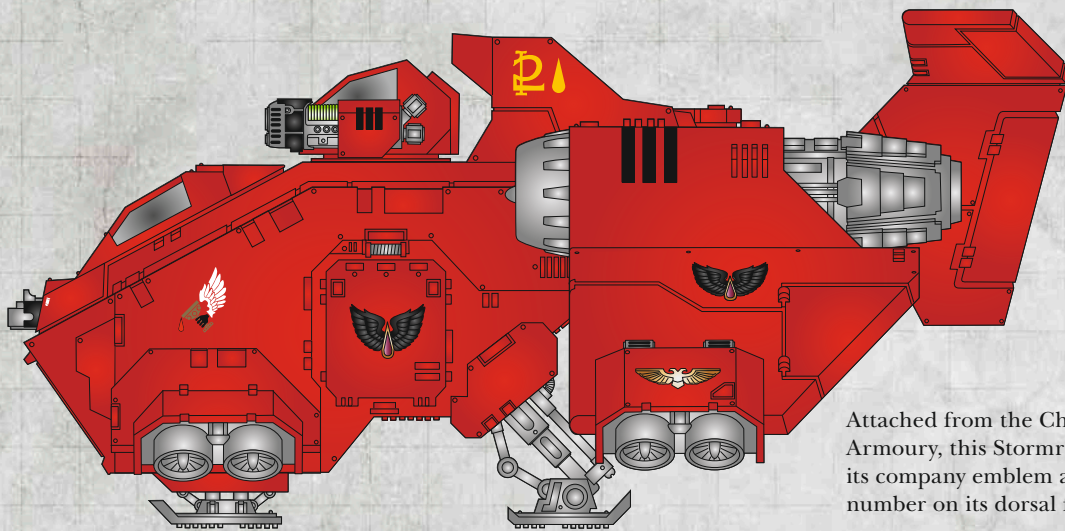


Attached to the Blooded for combat operations on Amethal, this Predator shows their company emblem on its forward bulwark, along with its vehicle numeral, denoting it as the second vehicle in its squadron.

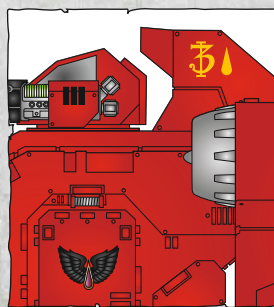
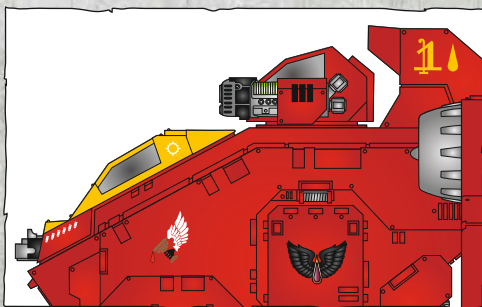


Blood Angels transport vehicles bear their Chapter icon and a vehicle numeral upon their hulls, along with the company emblem and squad marking of the Blood Angels that they provide transport for.

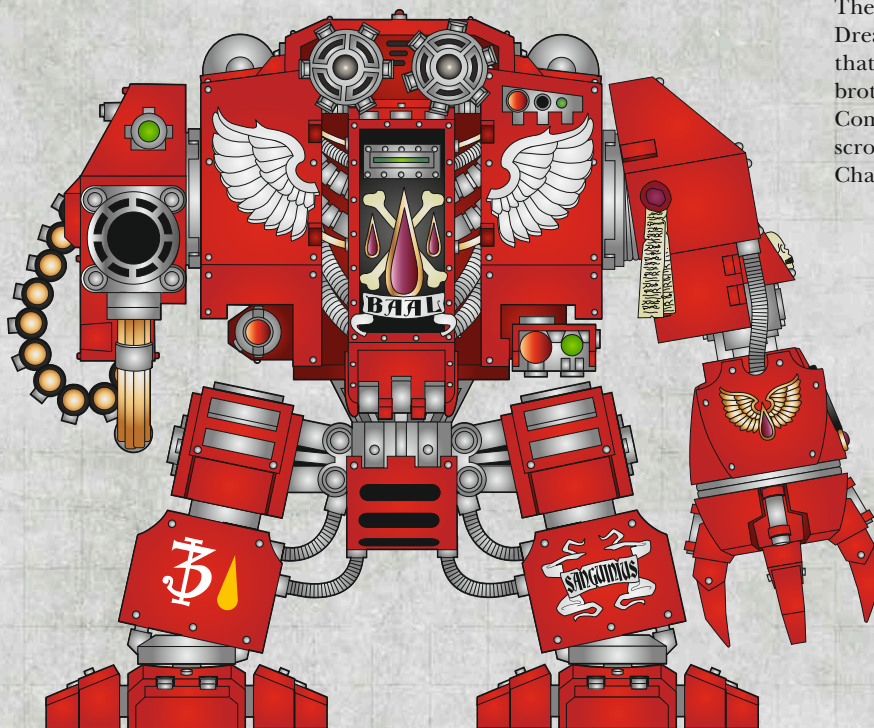




Attached from the Chapter Armoury, this Stormraven shows its company emblem and vehicle number on its dorsal foil.



The numerals shown here are vehicle numbers within a specific squadron of aircraft, with '1' being the squadron leader. Its status is also denoted by its yellow cockpit hatch.



The markings on this Dreadnought's right greave show that he is the third Dreadnought brother of the Blood Angels 2nd Company. On his left greave is a scrollwork design in honour of the Chapter's Primarch.

BATTLE FOR AMETHAL

>>> ASC 066-082

In the wake of the Archangels' destruction of Ioline, the war for the Diamor System entered its finale. Within hours of the Hex Infernum's destruction, word reached the Imperial leadership of combat escalating across the system. Meanwhile, Chaos ground forces moved to strike the killing blow. The time had come for victory, or death.

Captain Karlaen's battered raiding party made it back to Amethal, only to find their foes already engaged in orbit. Until now, the compact Black Legion fleet had lurked in the void beyond Ioline. With that planet lost, the Black Legion had moved fast to seize victory, before the Imperial forces could regain control of Amethal.

Lord Admiral Gordus and his strategos had been furiously attempting to discern why the Black Legion had been holding back in this way, but they could not establish what the traitors' master was up to. Why drip-feed forces into the Amethal war zone over days of costly battle, only to see each attack wave slowly picked apart? Some of Gordus' advisors scoffed that the enemy were fools, but the Lord Admiral had seen the machinations of Chaos before. He understood how nonsensical the schemes of the Ruinous Powers could seem, until the very moment it was too late. However, with the majority of his ships tied up defending Peridos, Gordus barely had enough left to maintain skeleton patrols around Tourmalid, let alone hunt enemy battleships. Yet as the Chaos armada fell upon Amethal, Gordus prepared desperate orders to mobilise what reserves he had left.

Before the orders could even be sent, more bad news reached Tourmalid's astropathic choir. Anticipating the Imperial strategy once again, Lord Xorphas had ordered his piratical raiders to break from the Zircon Sprawl and

launch an all-out attack against Peridosian high anchorage. It was a fight that the Chaos cruisers were unlikely to win, but with glory-hungry veteran captains at their helms, and prodigious firepower and resilience on their side, they would not die quickly. With a heavy heart, Gordus commanded all convoy ships to turn and consolidate on Peridos once again. Even should they triumph over the Black Legion pirate craft, the Diamor System's navy would play no part in the battle for Amethal.

At the same time, Tourmalid itself came under attack as hidden cells of Chaos Cultists rose up amongst the populace. The fighting that followed was brutal and confused, with Terminators of the Word Bearers teleporting in from points unknown to make an attempt upon the life of Lord Admiral Gordus himself. The Word Bearer insurgency was comparatively small, a suicide mission by fanatics doomed to destruction, but it served its purpose. Tourmalid's naval yards were thrown into chaos. Multiple warships, dry-docked for repairs, were destroyed completely. The Tourmalid muster was shattered, and, before the Word Bearers Terminators could finally be slain, every last one of the Blood Angels Honour Guard, sent by Karlaen to protect the planetary governor, sold their lives dearly to save that of Lord Admiral Gordus. With destruction and confusion rife, no reserves would be sent from Tourmalid in time to aid the defenders of Amethal. They were on their own.





Thus, as the Black Legion swept down upon the cursed world, they were opposed by only a handful of spacecraft. Still, the flotilla of Blood Angels and Mechanicus warships fought hard, unwilling to cede orbital dominance of Amethal so easily. Gathering the tattered remnants of the Crimson Slaughter and Khornate warships in their wake, the Black Legion spread out and pounced upon their enemies from all sides. The Imperial warships did what they could, Metalican Explorators deploying ancient super-weapons that split Chaos warships from prow to stern, while the sleek Blood Angels Strike Cruisers danced like blades to cut and kill.

Soon enough though, the wealth of traitor gun decks and lance batteries began to tell. Two Explorer ships had been reduced to drifting wreckage, and the *Flame of Baal* torn in half by tainted torpedoes by the time the surviving Imperial ships fought their way clear and disengaged. With the battle in orbit lost, it was left to the Imperial forces on the ground to stop the attack.

Originally, the Imperial commanders had intended to follow the fall of Ioline with an offensive on all fronts. With the enemy reinforcements curtailed, the plan had been to drive the outnumbered invaders from their last enclaves around the Mechanicus hubs, before consolidating their defensive strengths around Beta-Secundus.

The speed of the Chaos response made that plan impossible. Imperial forces were scattered across the surface of Amethal or, in the case of Karlaen and his returning strike force, even further afield. Yet the Black

Legion attack was focussed solely against Hub Beta-Secundus. If that site fell, the traitors would have their victory, and with all that was at stake, that could not be allowed to happen. Matters were desperate. Khârn's horde had been scattered during the previous engagement, but they had torn the Imperial defenders of Beta-Secundus apart. It would take time to mass sufficient forces at the site, to bolster its wrecked barricades and reconsecrate the machine spirits of its orbital guns – time they did not have. Magos Ivasnophon calculated that, by the time the Black Legion landed, those loyalist forces that could reach Beta-Secundus would be singularly insufficient. They would do some damage to the heretics, even slow them a little. Then they would all die.

Instead, Captain Aphael advocated a daring solution, one supported by Astorath himself. The Black Legion could not be stopped, so the Blood Angels would not attempt to do so. Instead, all available Imperial forces made haste to staging areas surrounding the hub, ready to pounce the moment the traitors landed. From the north came the surviving Knights of House Raven. The remaining Titans from Legio Metalica gathered to the east. From the west came a grand procession of the Cult Mechanicus led by Magos Ivasnophon, while to the south the Blood Angels' 2nd Company – bolstered by elements of the Armoury and the 10th – mustered their strength. On all fronts, maniples of Skitarii marched into position. Scattered elements of countless War Cohorts gathered once more into coherent forces, their binharic control signals allowing them to muster with a seamless ease that no other army could have matched.

Ivasnophon had calculated the precise amount of time that the traitor forces would be delayed in orbit, and how long it would take them to land, based upon stolen data on their force strengths and dispositions. The numbers were tight, with many Imperial forces racing desperately through foe-haunted territory or burning wilderness to reach the staging points before the signal to attack was sent. Even so, as the countdown chron in Captain Aphael's retinal display reached zero, it was clear that the armies of the Imperium had mustered a huge force of infantry, tanks, aircraft and super-heavy war engines with which to crush the Chaos invaders.

Standing atop his command Rhino, the 2nd Company Captain drew upon every iota of his skill as an orator to deliver a speech across the vox-networks that stirred even the cold metal hearts of the Skitarii. He spoke of duty. He spoke of vengeance. He warned of the consequences of defeat, and then of how the Despoiler's evil plans would never come to fruition. Aphael raised his blade to point north, to where the blazing jets of Chaos drop craft and the shadows of low-orbiting spaceships turned the skies to darkness and flame. With a single bellowed order, he began the attack.



The thunder of the Imperial advance rolled across the burning plains. Tank engines roared as squadrons sped forwards, bouncing through craters and raising plumes of dust and smoke behind them. Titans and Imperial Knights shook the ground with their footfalls, sounding out long, booming notes from their war horns. Skitarii advanced double-time in perfect lockstep, tracked Servitors grinding along beside them. Overhead, flights of Stormraven Gunships settled into attack vectors, shrieking out across no man's land towards the Black Legion lines.

Quickly the noose closed, the Imperial forces moving at top speed. Then the shooting began. The Chaos warships in orbit were first to launch their attacks. Fire rained from the heavens as barrage bombs and lance strikes pounded the kill-zone, hurling great spumes of rock and dirt into the air. Metalican soldiers were blasted to ash in a heartbeat. The Reaver Titan *Divine Fury* crashed to its knees as its void shields imploded and its bridge was vaporised. Battered but unbowed, the Imperial forces pressed forwards.

Moments later, the orbital bombardment slackened as, defying the orders of Captain Aphael, the last of the Imperial space fleet swept back into the fight. Seeing their enemies wallowing in low orbit, the Blood Angel and Mechanicus captains seized their chance. Sweeping

in high, they raked the larger enemy fleet with firepower. The Chaos ship captains were forced to choose between staying on station, and thus remaining exposed to Imperial torpedo and lance fire from above, or breaking off their bombardment in order to fight back. Most chose the latter. As lance fire flashed back and forth between the duelling ships, a single, smaller craft arched through the midst of the fight. This was the *Angelus Redemptor*, carrying Karlaen and his surviving Archangels. On the 1st Captain's orders it made straight for the orbital engagement zone above Hub Beta-Secundus.

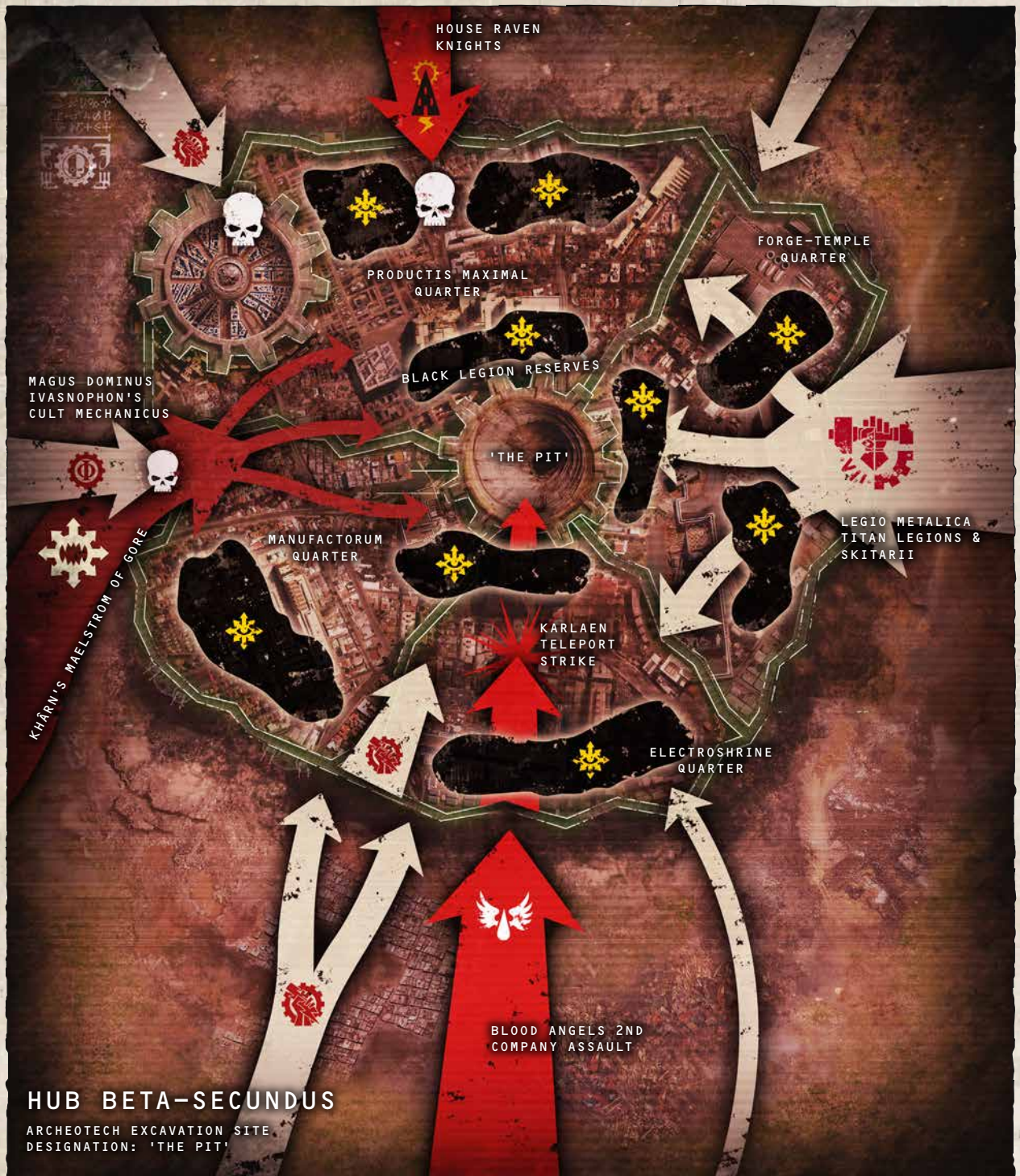
Having braved the bombardment, the lead Imperial elements were closing on the Black Legion defences. The traitors had deployed in a ring around the excavation site, Chaos Space Marines drawn up behind ruined defences alongside rumbling tanks and snarling Daemon Engines. In the split second before the Chaos lines opened fire, Stormravens streaked overhead in tight formation, missiles stabbing down from their wings to hurl traitors off their feet amid blossoming explosions. Then the Black Legion let fly with everything they had, and the kill-zone became a hellish cauldron of flame.

Tanks exploded and rolled to a stop, billowing thick black smoke. Ironstriders toppled, or strode aimlessly on with their pilots slumped dead in the saddle. To the north, the Knights of House Raven hunkered behind their flickering ion shields, wading into the enemy fire like men striving against gale-force winds. Imperial warriors died by the hundred but, firing back furiously, the Emperor's servants pressed their charge home.

On some fronts, it was not enough. To the west, Magos Ivasnophon and his sprawling Cult Mechanicus procession found themselves being cut to pieces by the hammering fire of Daemon Engines and Black Legion heavy weapons. Calculating that his forces would be obliterated before they could conclude their attack, the Magos began a steady retreat, only to meet enemy forces at his rear. Khârn had returned from the western plains at the head of a Maelstrom of Gore.

It was Ivasnophon's great misfortune to find himself caught between the guns to his fore and the Berzerkers to his rear. Electro-Priests duelled with frothing Khorne worshippers amidst the indiscriminate explosions of the continued bombardment, but the mauled Mechanicus forces were outmatched. Ivasnophon's followers were hacked and mangled, the Magos himself despatching precisely thirteen power-armoured enemies before Khârn fell upon him with a roar of hate. Gorechild swung once, twice, and Ivasnophon's severed head thumped into the gore-slick mud.

Though the Imperial attack from the west collapsed, to the east, the Legio Metalica was unstoppable. Titan Princes snarled with the fury of war-gods as they blitzed fire into the foe. The world exploded before them, and even the twisted engines of the Legio Excruciatius could not stay their wrath. Meanwhile, to the south, atop the packed-earth ramp that led down into the dig site, crackling energies burst to life as Karlaen and his surviving warriors teleported into battle.



BLOOD ANGELS



CULT MECHANICUS



SKITARIII



WORLD EATERS



BLACK LEGION



IMPERIAL FORCES ELIMINATED





Their armour still scorched and battered from the fighting on Ioline, the Archangels opened fire, their guns punching shocked Black Legionnaires off their feet and blasting tanks apart. Karlaen and Aphael had coordinated their strikes to perfection, for even as the Archangels and Sanguinary Guard appeared amid the Chaos rear lines, the 2nd Company hit their enemies from the front in a speeding armoured column.

The Archangels ripped their way through a huge Helforged Warpack, despite the savage casualties inflicted by the massed Chaos war machines. As the Blood Angels battle tanks continued to fire, their transports slewed around and spilled red-armoured warriors into the fray. Meanwhile, the last battle-brothers of the Death Company were borne into the fight by Stormravens, led – against all odds – by the still-limping Death Company Chaplain Daenor.

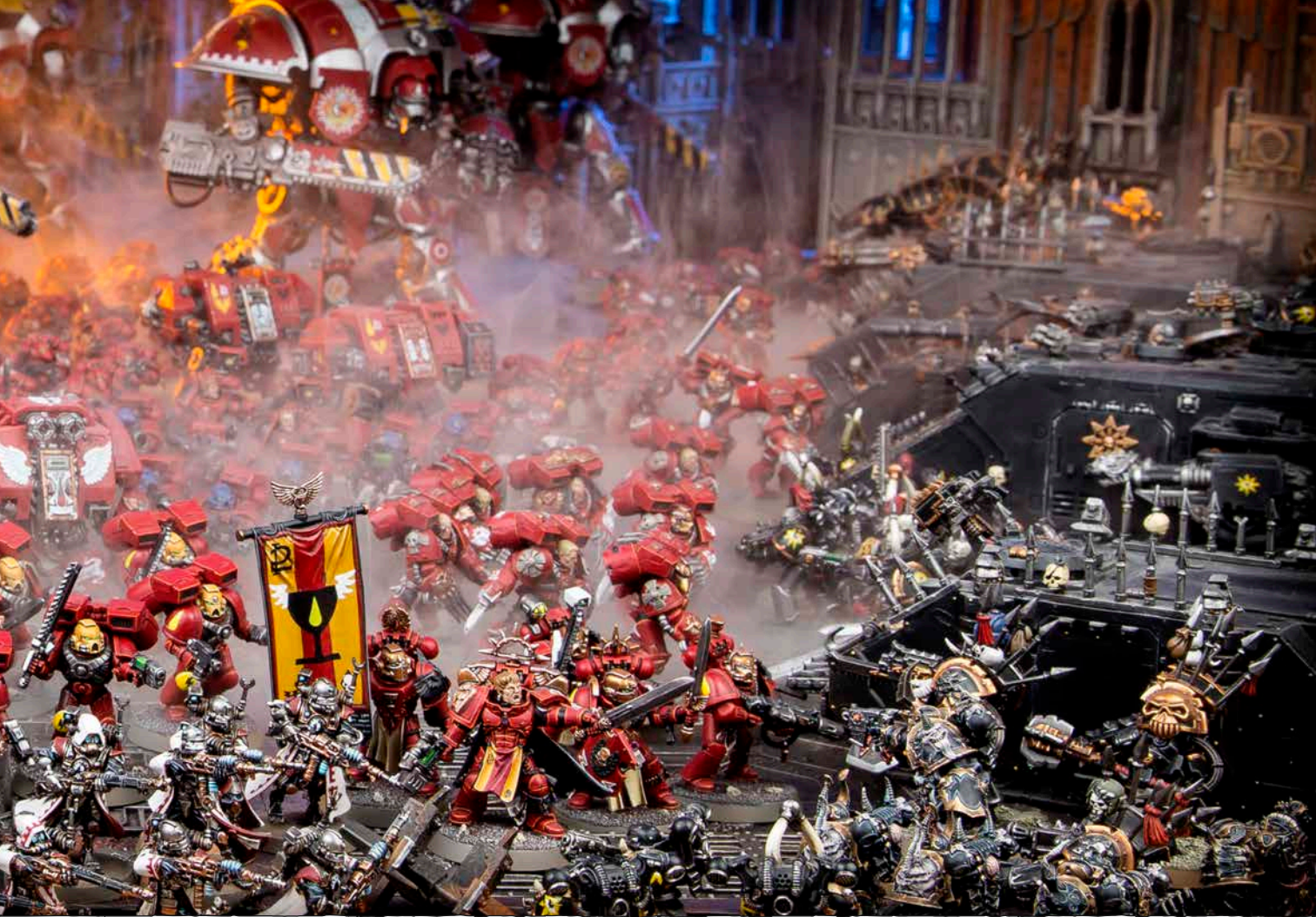
The Black Legion had been forced to spread their defenders to every side, facing an attack on all fronts by a foe who were now numerically superior thanks to earlier victories in the southern hemisphere. Captain Aphael's tactical nous showed as the concentrated might of the Blood Angels tore through the foe.

A gap was smashed in the Chaos defences as the two Blood Angel forces linked up, the Captains of the 1st and 2nd Companies clasping gauntlets upon the very edge of the excavation pit. With Skitarii pushing in to widen the breach, and supporting fire raining down from the Legio Metalica, the Blood Angels prepared to press down into

the depths of the excavation site, from which rose a hellish cacophony of sawing screams.

With their heroes at the fore, Sanguinius' sons advanced onto the packed-earth ramp that wound down around the pit's edges to its depths far below. As they did so, they saw a force of Black Legion warriors pressing up towards them, and became aware of the terrible howling din growing louder by the moment. The pit was lit by weird, multihued light that spilled up from a massive crystal shard driven into its heart. The rock walls gushed blood. It was from the strange crystal that the awful sounds emanated, and cracks shuddered through the bedrock all around it. Yet the Sons of Sanguinius did not have long to stare at this terrible sight, for Lord Xorphas and his elite guard were upon them. The Chaos leader hit the Blood Angels headlong, he and his sorcerous acolytes hurling dark lightnings and tearing up the ground with geomantic spells. Around them marched the elite of the Black Legion, clad in baroque Terminator armour.

The clash that followed was bloody and brutal, and saw many veteran warriors fall on both sides. Before the Blood Angels could strike Lord Xorphas down, shimmering teleport energies swathed their hated enemies and whisked them from the battlefield. Xorphas and his elites had not been looking to fight, but to flee, and as the Sorcerer and his acolytes vanished, so the entire Chaos army began to disintegrate. Clearly the order to retreat had been given, and the Imperial warriors cursed as the traitors made a break for any craft that could carry them to safety.



It looked like victory, but the heroes of the Blood Angels felt a terrible sense that they had been manoeuvred into attacking too late. With their foes gone, the red-armoured warriors rushed down the earth ramp and into the flickering depths of the excavation site. There they faced the screaming horror of the Chaos artefact, a twisted crystal the size of a boarding torpedo around which blood was welling through the cracking bedrock in lapping tides. It was Warcraft of the darkest sort, surely the weapon the Black Legion were using to break the bars of the cage, and as the Archangels and Blooded alike were driven to their knees by its energies, it seemed as though Xorphas might still be triumphant. At the last, it was the Librarians who ended the threat, Asmasael channelling his powers through his force staff to turn the crystal's disharmonic barrage back upon itself and shear the evil stone into fragments.

With that last heroic effort, the Blood Angels ended the war on Amethal. It would be hours before the last of the traitor forces at Beta-Secundus were slain, and weeks before the rest of the world was pacified. Yet Xorphas and the great bulk of his followers had fled, taking the Betrayer with them.

The Chaos warships took in as many fleeing craft as they could before turning and breaking away, vanishing into the Warp upon the system's edge and leaving the Diamor System reeling in their wake. The war had been costly and desperate, but victory belonged to the Imperium. Or so it seemed, until Librarian Asmasael and his brothers reported their findings to Captain Karlaen. The Blood

Angels had hoped that Xorphas had simply fled at the very moment of his triumph, choosing to save his own skin rather than complete whatever diabolical ritual he was engaged in. The otherworldly senses of the Librarians told a different story. They reported empyric emanations shimmering from the site of Beta-Secundus in greater quantity than ever before, and a fluctuation of Warp currents as though the Immaterium pressed close to the surface. Perhaps, suggested Asmasael grimly, the enemy had done more damage to the Daemon cage than the Blood Angels had first realised. Perhaps defeat here had not been avoided, only delayed. It was a sobering thought, especially when coupled with the loss of Magos Ivasnophon and his knowledge of the technologies he had so nearly unlocked.

As they gathered their forces to depart the system and return to Baal, the Blood Angels left behind Librarian Asmasael and a squad of 10th Company Scouts. They would remain on Amethal, attempting to gauge the true extent of the damage done, and standing watch in case the bars of the Daemon cage should ever threaten to break asunder.

Meanwhile, many light years distant, arcane systems churned to life. Mnemoschematic units hummed and biometric feeds spooled up. In a hidden laboratory, deep below the surface of Forge World Metalica, Magos Ivasnophon began the laborious task of inloading his personality and mental algorithms to his backup body. Only in death does duty end, and the Magos' work for the Omissiah was still not done...





+++AMETHAL STRATEGIC
CHRONOLOG+++

+++SEGMENT ENGAGE
01100110+++

ASC 067-082: TRAITOR AND LOYALIST FORCES ENGAGE IN AND AROUND HUB BETA-SECUNDUS. SIGNIFICANT CASUALTIES ON BOTH SIDES [ATTRITION RATES OF 77% FOR TRAITOR LOSSES, 82% IMPERIAL].

ASC 083: FULL TRAITOR WITHDRAWAL FROM ENGAGEMENT ZONE, CAUSE STILL UNCONFIRMED [SUB-REF: AUDIO FILE X43Y - TOURMALID STRATEGOS DEBRIEF].

ASC 084: TRAITOR FORCES DEPART DIAMOR SYSTEM ENTIRELY. SYSTEM FLEET ELEMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTAL METALICAN CRAFT [SUB-REF: EXPLORATOR-CLASS BATTLESHIP] RE-ESTABLISH DEEP-SPACE INTERDICTION CORDON.

ASC 085+: EMPYRIC READINGS REGISTERED AROUND HUB BETA-SECUNDUS EXCAVATION ZONE CONTINUE TO INCREASE [SUB-REF: AQL 001 - EXCAVATION MONITOR LOGS RH077]. FULL QUARANTINE ESTABLISHED, NON-ESSENTIAL FORCES WITHDRAWN, METALICAN ASSET RECOVERY COMMENCES.

ASC 086: ON AUTHORITY OF BLOOD ANGELS [SUB-REF: LIBRARIAN ASMASAEL] VERMILION-CLEARANCE CODED ASTROPATHIC COMMUNIQUE DESPATCHED AT HIGHEST ASTROPATHIC STRENGTH [SUB-REF: TITAN/ GREY KNIGHTS CHAPTER]

+++AMETHAL STRATEGIC
CHRONOLOG ENDS+++

+++AMETHAL QUARANTINE
TALLY BEGINS+++







