



WARHAMMER

WARHAMMER 40,000



BLACK
CRUSADE



TRAITOR'S HATE



The Warhammer Vault exists to preserve the rich lore and background of Warhammer 40,000 and Warhammer Age of Sigmar. As such, outdated game scenarios and unit rules have been removed from this publication.



TRAITOR'S HATE

THE LONG WAR

CONTENTS

THE LONG WAR.....	4
CHAPTER 1: THE SLAUGHTER BEGINS	6
Death in the Diamor System	8
War Zone Carnage	12
Amethal Incarnate	16
Kranon's Cursed Host.....	22
The Slaughterers	24
Butchers in Crimson	26
The Diamor Invasion	30
CHAPTER 2: KILL! MAIM! BURN!	38
The Anointing	40
Blood in the Streets	50
Khârn's Butcherhorde	56
The Blood-soaked Hordes.....	58
Heraldry of the Butcherhorde	60
Slaughter Unleashed.....	64
CHAPTER 3: RITUAL'S END	72
The Banshee Stone	74
The Doom of Amethal.....	82
The Hand of Xorphas.....	88
Bane of Amethal.....	90
Colours of the Black Legion	92
Breaking the Cage.....	96



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THE LONG WAR

Ten thousand years have passed since the galaxy burned in the fires of the Horus Heresy. Ten millennia since the Gods of Chaos corrupted the greatest of the Primarchs – Warmaster Horus Lupercal – and turned him against the Imperium of Man. Fully half of his brother Primarchs rebelled along with Horus, their actions plunging the Emperor’s realm into the most destructive civil war Humanity has ever seen. Much of that dark time has been lost beneath the dust of aeons, or else blurred into allegory and myth. Yet one sure fact remains. In the last days of Mankind’s greatest war, Horus led his traitor legions to Terra, and there they laid siege to the Emperor’s Palace.

The siege was a battle that shattered mountain ranges and blackened continents. Traitor starships rained ordnance down upon the cradle of Humanity until tectonic plates buckled and cracked. Armies of Titan god-machines duelled amidst the blazing ruins of vast and wondrous cities, while thousands upon thousands of turncoat Space Marines flung themselves at the palace walls. Just as all seemed lost, the Emperor led a daring attack upon Horus’ Battle Barge that saw the two gods of war engage in a final duel to the death. The Emperor triumphed, though his victory left his body broken and consigned him forever to the life-sustaining edifice known as the Golden Throne. The Imperium lay in ruins, the dream of galactic utopia ashes in the void.

If the ruin wrought upon the Imperium seemed terrible, the fate of the traitors was worse. Horus had gambled all in his assault on Terra, and had failed. Their Legions shattered and the Warmaster slain, the traitors fled across the galaxy with their vengeful kinsmen at their heels. They took refuge in the swirling Warp rift known as the Eye of Terror. Within that twisted realm, the traitors fell upon one another. They broke into ravaging warbands and fought for the favour of the Chaos Gods, degenerating further into mutation and madness. Their raiding parties still burst from the Eye to engage in piracy and violence against the Imperium of Man, but as a coherent force, their strength was spent.

Yet there were those who continued to fight the Long War in earnest, who never lost sight of the true goal – to see the Imperium of Man in ruins and the Emperor slain. Greatest amongst these was Abaddon the Despoiler, Horus’ successor and greatest living heir. Abaddon took the title of Warmaster for himself and vowed to succeed where his gene-father had failed. He has spent the last ten thousand years fighting to make his vow a reality. Abaddon has led twelve Black Crusades against the galaxy, eliminating threats and claiming powerful weapons in a scheme so long as to defy mortal comprehension. At last, he is ready, and as the Thirteenth Black Crusade breaks against the Cadian Gate, the fate of the whole Imperium – and with it the galaxy – hangs in the balance.







+++AMETHAL STRATEGIC CHRONOLOG+++
+++SEGMENT ENGAGE 0011110000100+++
+++OMNISSIAHREGNUMPERPETURARI+++

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 AT ASC 028.

+++SEGMENT CONCLUDES 00111100101+++

CHAPTER 1

THE SLAUGHTER BEGINS



DEATH IN THE DIAMOR SYSTEM

At the head of a vast armada of traitors, madmen and mutants, Abaddon the Despoiler began his greatest ever attack upon the Imperium. Even as traitor armies fell upon the stalwart defenders of the Cadian Gate, other heretic warbands were on the move. These invasion fleets struck at neighbouring systems, their missions crucial to the success of the Despoiler's grand plan. One such renegade offensive aimed straight for the Diamor System.

Amid the darkness of the void, reality tore open like a wound. The split grew quickly wider, filthy Warp-stuff vomiting from it like ectoplasm from a psyker's gullet. Out of the yawning rent came a blade-like prow the height of a cliff face. It was followed by the surging mass of the battleship *Red Honour*, flagship of the Crimson Slaughter war fleet. More baroque warships came in its wake, miles-long hulls encrusted with leering gargoyles and spiked Chaos symbols. A large fleet of ships cleared the translation point, and the Warp rift snapped shut behind them. Throughout the fleet, empyric shutters jolted, then rose slowly into their recesses. Gun decks were unshrouded. Lance batteries were powered up. Local space cracked with the prying sensor-waves of high-gain auspex sweeps. The Crimson Slaughter had come to the Diamor System, and they were ready for war.

On board the cathedral-sized bridge of the *Red Honour*, Kranon the Relentless prowled his command gallery like a caged predator. Half of his mind was intent upon the twisted things that crewed his warship's biomechanical consoles. The other half was battling against the screams and muttering voices that echoed through his mind. Kranon's breathing rasped through his respirator grill in angry snarls as he tried to fight the voices down.

'They are loud today, my lord.'

Kranon's head snapped round as combat stimms momentarily flooded his system. Occupied by the voices, he had not heard Draznicht, champion of his Chosen, approach.

'As you say,' he growled in response. 'They sense bloodshed in the offing.'

Draznicht gripped the railing of the command gallery beside Kranon, his gaze directed towards the image of the planet filling the main screens. His third eye, in the centre of his forehead, remained closed.

Kranon followed his gaze. Amethal. The planet was vast and verdant but for the scars of recent industry that marred its surface.

'Have you foreseen anything of this place, Draznicht?' asked Kranon. 'Any prophecy of what lies ahead?'

The Chosen raised a hand towards his forehead, an unconscious gesture which he halted part way.

'Hints,' he admitted. 'Quick flashes. But strange. And they brought pain and clamour with them like I have never known.'

Kranon digested this response for a moment, watching his bridge crew labouring at their tasks. They would be establishing vox links with the other ships of his fleet, sweeping for localised threats, and ensuring his craft had sustained no serious damage during its passage through the sea of souls.

'Do you believe that on Amethal we will find a cure for the voices, as Xorphas claims?'

Draznicht gave a mirthless bark of laughter.

'Always they seek to lead us by that leash, eh? But, no my lord, I have seen no evidence to support the claims of the Black Legion sorcerer lord. There is something down there. Something of incredible power. That much I have foreseen clearly in the flashes.' Kranon nodded as though he had expected nothing else.

'No doubt. Something that the great Abaddon himself desires. Something the Black Legion needs. We will be the first to attack. Such an honour.'

On the surface of Amethal, amidst dark forests and grassy plains, the Adeptus Mechanicus were at work. On the orders of Technoarcheologist Dominus Ivasnophon, multiple dig sites had been torn into the planet's hide. Excavator engines had ripped out thousands of tons of soil and stone to create vast, dark pits. Around these, the servitor work maniples from forge world Metalica had erected perfectly ordered complexes of manufactorums, cogitator shrines, generator blocks and mile after mile of prefabricated defences with blackened kill zones scorched out on all sides. No other force in the Imperium could have established fortified enclaves with such speed and efficiency.

As he stood amidst his maniple on the western barricades of dig site Beta-Secundus, the sheer industry of the spectacle filled Vanguard Alpha Decimus-rho with pride – or as close an approximation as he was capable of feeling. As to what Magos Ivasnophon sought beneath the surface of Amethal, Decimus-rho

had no idea. It was not the place of so lowly a creature as he to comprehend such truths. It mattered only that he did his duty, for in error-free accomplishment of one's allotted tasks lay the true service of the Omnissiah. Admittedly, those tasks had been made more difficult by the adverse conditions. Decimus-rho had seen multiple Skitarii and servitors falling prey to subroutine corruption and illogical, destructive behaviour that had necessitated their liquidation. If he was honest with himself – and he was incapable of being anything else – even Decimus-rho had felt the unnatural energies of this world, heard the susurrus of whispering voices in the dark watches of the night. Another matter he was unworthy to consider. His duty was more immediate, more tangible. Twenty-three point two seven minutes ago, enemy forces had been detected approaching the orbital envelope of Amethal in great strength. Decimus-rho knew satisfaction once again. War was soon to be waged, and that was a task that the Alpha was not only worthy of, but born to fulfil.

Scorn dripped from Kranon's words. The Crimson Slaughter were haunted by spirits that drove them half mad. They had bent the knee to Abaddon and his Black Legion, and sworn themselves as his attack dogs. None of that made them weaklings or fools, regardless of what Xorphas – this invasion's ultimate master – clearly thought. Dwelling on it did no good, however, and Kranon changed the subject with a curt gesture to one of his senior deck crew.

'You. Have the Black Legion done as they said they would?'

The hunchbacked menial bowed low, keeping his eyes on the deck as he spoke.

'They have, my lord. The Warptouched confirm that Black Legion ships are engaged over Peridos. They have drawn off much of the system's fleet.'

'And Ioline?'

'Taken, great lord. Seized by the Black Legion. The dark factories labour and the warding towers hold.'

'Then Xorphas has done that much right, at least,' rumbled Kranon. 'The way is open.'

'Shall I signal readiness, lord?' asked Draznicht, a note of eagerness creeping into his voice.

Kranon swept back his cloak and placed one gauntleted hand upon the pommel of his blade.

'Do it,' he ordered, 'this world will be butchered, and we shall cleanse our souls in its blood. No delays. The attack begins at once.'





Less than an hour after Kranon's order to attack, the battleships and cruisers of the Crimson Slaughter swept down upon Amethal. They did not do so unopposed. Bulky Fleet Mechanicus ships lit archaic drives and surged into battle. Neutron lances and vast galvanic batteries hurled devastation at the Crimson Slaughter warships, causing void shields to shudder and collapse. Aboard the escort cruiser *Ironwasp*, hundreds of traitors were burned to ash as a volley of servitor-guided plasma torpedoes slammed through the ship's hull and flooded the bridge and crew decks with molten death. Elsewhere, the heavy transport *Hellbound* shuddered under multiple volleys of radium shells. Its captain was forced to seal screaming masses of gunslaves behind emergency bulkheads to prevent his entire ship from becoming an irradiated tomb.

The Crimson Slaughter ships ploughed on regardless, their gun decks thundering and their lance batteries stabbing shot after shot into their foes. Within the minds of every renegade Space Marine, babbling voices screeched and cajoled, threatened and mocked. The cacophony only added to the traitors' resolve, for in bloodshed they would find their release.

Seated in the command throne of the monstrous battleship *Scimitar*, Vorlak the Sly secured his own blood-peace with every shot his gun crews fired. The greatest shipmaster of the Crimson Slaughter, Vorlak commanded with effortless ease, predicting the moves of his cumbersome foes long before they made them.

'Helm,' barked Vorlak, his burning red eyes locked upon the forward view-screens, 'hard to port, roll thirteen.' His vast warship reacted with gratifying speed, tilting in the void and causing an incoming volley of torpedoes to streak harmlessly by.

'Gunnery, status,' demanded the shipmaster. The hulking flesh-metal creature that filled the nearest ordnance pit bubbled and squirmed as it responded.

'Chambers full and clear for firing, lord. Lances charged and ready.'

'Good,' purred Vorlak as he saw an Explorator warship filling his screens. 'Prow lances, target that wallowing sow's engines.'

The view-screens washed out for a moment with purple radiance as the *Scimitar*'s lance batteries let fly. The gunner-thing was inhumanly accurate, its shots placed perfectly. Fire billowed silently in the void as the enemy ship's engines detonated, sending the bulky craft yawing slowly out of control.



Vorlak gripped his throne's arm rests with taloned fingers, scratching fresh grooves in the worn brass as he felt the pleasure of imminent victory. He bared vicious fangs in a predatory grin, visualising his vessel as a monstrous predator ripping its way through herds of dull prey-beasts.

'Helm, hard starboard and match velocity. Bring us alongside the prey.'

As his crew scurried to obey his commands, the shipmaster spared a glance at the auspex runes. *Hellbound* and *Deathbringer* were both taking fire, but nothing that heavy transports like those couldn't handle. The cruisers were moving to intercept. Lord Kranon would get his planetfall in full force, not that Vorlak cared. He was a predator of the void. Leave the dirt-grubbing to lesser warriors, for he had bigger game in his sights.

Vorlak felt the *Scimitar* buck under him, shuddering with the force of multiple impacts.

'Report!' he snarled.

'Ranged shots from sector one-seven-three, lord,' responded the albino mutant at the damage control console. 'Lucky hits. Shields holding. No damage to hull or systems.'

'Mark the craft that fired upon us,' ordered Vorlak angrily. 'Their impudence has earned them the horror of my wrath. For now, continue the attack run.'

Kill one target before engaging the next. One of the oldest tenets of warfare, one that even the gibbering voices at the back of Vorlak's mind could not drive out. Besides, it was a matter of pride to the shipmaster – once he had marked his prey, they did not escape.

Engines bellowing, shields flickering with repeated impacts, the *Scimitar* drew alongside its wounded victim. The Fleet Mechanicus ship was tumbling slowly off its axis, falling gracefully through the void with no way of arresting its helpless momentum. On Vorlak's orders, the *Scimitar* fired thrusters and came abreast of it, lining up primed gun decks at point blank range.

Vorlak let the moment stretch long, savouring the seconds before the bloodletting. His wet, serpentine tongue flickered between his parted fangs, and then he uttered a single order: 'Kill it.'

Every weapon on the *Scimitar*'s port side opened up at once, hammering down the void shields that protected the wounded Explorator and spreading rippling blasts along its flank. Again and again, the gun decks spoke until, riven with the flash and flicker of internal explosions, the Explorator came violently apart. Even as the luckless battleship suffered in its death throes, the Crimson Slaughter combat drop began, dark specks raining down on Amethal amidst the plummeting wreckage of its defence craft. Vorlak and his fellow captains had done their work well. Now, it fell to Kranon and his renegade warriors to continue the slaughter upon the planet below.

WAR ZONE CARNAGE

The attack by the Crimson Slaughter was the first of several waves planned to fall upon Amethal. A sizeable fleet of Black Legion warships lurked in the void beyond the inner planets of the Diamor System, but on the orders of Lord Xorphas, they held back. Kranon the Relentless cared not. He intended to take this world with his own hands and prove that his warriors were the greatest amongst the Chaos ranks, while also quieting the voices that haunted them with the blood of the slain.

Kranon's boots rang against the ramp of his lander as he stormed out into a firefight. Radium bullets sizzled past his head, punching one of the Ravagers off his feet as he followed

his lord down the ramp. Kranon ignored his follower's death. At that moment, Crimson Slaughter forces were executing drop assaults all across Amethal, hitting the primary excavation sites of the Adeptus Mechanicus. Kranon had designated each of these sites a war zone, and named them for the horrors his followers would inflict there. His was the aptly named 'War Zone Carnage'.

'Attack,' bellowed Kranon, his voice amplified to a thunderous roar by the vox-grill of his horned helm. 'Close the gap. Cut them down like the chaff they are.' Spilling from drop craft and Dreadclaw pods around him, Kranon's warriors answered his words with bloodthirsty roars, Chaos Space

Marines and chanting Cultists surging to attack.

War Zone Carnage was bordered to its east by an untouched expanse of forest, which Kranon's warriors used to cover their initial deployment. They burst from the forest's eaves into the blackened kill zone beyond, and right into the gunfire of the Metalican Skitarii. Before Kranon stretched a wasteland of drifted ash, scorched tree-stumps and bare rock that his helm display told him was precisely two miles wide. Beyond it lay the dark bulk of the Adeptus Mechanicus bunkers and barricades, with larger structures crowding behind them that belched smoke into the skies. The Metalicans



were keeping their big guns back, bombarding the invaders from a distance, but maniples of Skitarii were advancing across no man's land towards Kranon's warriors, raining fire into their ranks in an attempt to wipe them out. That was their mistake, thought the Chaos Lord.

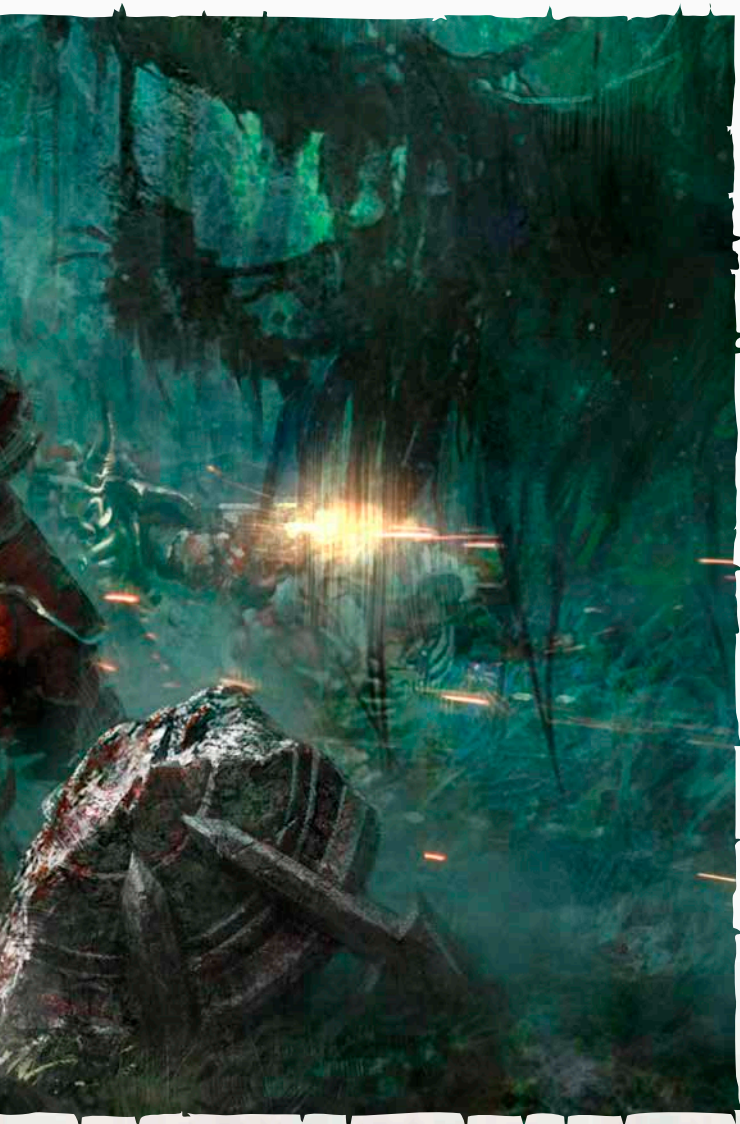
'Kill for silence!' he roared, breaking into a run. Draznicht and his Ravagers followed, charging forwards through the pummelling fire of the Adeptus Mechanicus. To Kranon's right, Lakdar's Chaos Terminators strode through the enemy barrage, spraying shots at their cyborg foes. To his left, a pack of Daemon Engines was rampaging through the Skitarii who had advanced into range.

In Kranon's mind, the voices that haunted him bayed with blood-lust, drowning out the rasp of his breathing as he charged. His helm vox crackled, Draznicht's strained voice breaking through the maelstrom in his mind.

'The haunting breaks loose, lord.'

'Use it,' rasped Kranon. 'Use the madness.' As one, the Crimson Slaughter braced themselves for the sudden onrush of the ghosts that tormented their bodies and minds. Helm displays roared with static. Vox links filled with demented chatter and ominous whispers. Skitarii were dragged aloft by invisible hands, then rent apart like rag dolls. Insane

laughter swirled upon a howling gale. Soldiers of the Machine God blurted scrapcode as ghosts infested their augmetics, which caught fire and ran in streams of molten metal. Others were compelled to open fire upon one another, their movements jerky and puppet-like. Seizing the moment, Kranon lunged forwards through the poltergeist madness and hacked his blade into the neck of his nearest foe. As the Skitarii crumpled, headless, to the ground, Kranon felt a surge of energy unlike anything he had known. It was not the parasitic clinging of the possessor spirits. This was something else. Something exhilarating. The Chaos Lord hacked down another foe, glorying in the unbound energies of death.



Gorath-Hel listened with satisfaction to the reports spilling from the vox gargoye of his private sanctum. The Crimson Slaughter were pushing in towards their objectives. The Word Bearer leaned over the font of communion, black eyes reflected in the thick blood within it.

'Lord Xorphas, hear me.' For a moment, the surface of the blood pool shuddered with the engine tremor of the Word Bearers' ship. Then a change came over it, the liquid spiralling lazily as though vanishing down some impossible whirlpool. Gorath-Hel's breath clouded in a sudden rush of cold air.

'Speak, Dark Apostle. And tell me good news.' The voice was rich and commanding, drifting up from the whirlpool of gore.

'Lord Xorphas. Octed's blessings on you. The cursed ones have descended with fire in their hearts. They suspect not that—'

'I said speak,' interrupted the voice with a note of irritation, 'not sermonise. Make it brief, priest. I've a war to orchestrate.'

The Dark Apostle bristled, fighting down the anger that surged at such an unaccustomed snub.

'The Crimson Slaughter have landed, Lord,' he bit out, 'and are advancing into their designated war zones.'

'Better,' replied the echoing voice, its tone laced with menace. 'Now get down there and watch for the signs. Find me the cage, Gorath-Hel. The Despoiler expects...'

With that, the pool stilled. Face set in fury at his curt dismissal, Gorath-Hel straightened and bellowed for his wargear. His Cultist attendants scurried to obey, terrified by their master's anger. Not one of them would have switched places with the Imperial soldiers who were about to face his wrath. Not for all the rewards the Gods could send.





AMETHAL INCARNATE

While Kranon and his warriors battled around War Zone Carnage, the Crimson Slaughter planetary assault gathered pace. From the tangled forests of the northern plateaus to the southern grass-seas, the servants of Chaos sank their fangs into Amethal. Around the Metalican excavation sites, savage fighting had erupted as the Crimson Slaughter pressed forwards across well-prepared kill zones. Larger traitor war engines were beginning to land in support, super-heavy Daemon Engines and lumbering Titans disembarking to add their fire to the fight. Across Amethal, the fires of war raged higher by the hour.

Darkness clung to the battlefield like a shroud. Every few moments, the pall was torn back by the bright flare of gunfire, the crawling electrostatic blasts or the strobing muzzle-flash of boltgun fire. Kranon's auto-senses filtered the glare and overlaid his vision with thermal wire-frames, allowing him to see perfectly despite the gloom. With their cybernetically enhanced senses, the warriors of the Adeptus Mechanicus had no more trouble than he in that regard – as it had been for the last few hours, their fire was still deadly accurate.

Kranon broke from behind the blackened hulk of a spike-studded Rhino. He dashing headlong across no man's land with whipping, cracking fire chasing his heels, and

threw himself into the cover of a plasma-vitrified crater. His warriors were doing the same all around him, forced into cautious, stuttering advances by the constant hail of lethal Skitarii firepower. They were moving forwards, but slowly. Kranon's glorious assault had turned into a grinding crawl across the kill zone, and he was not happy about it.

'Draznicht,' he growled into his helm vox, 'what word on the Titans?'

'Still landing, Lord,' the champion's voice crackled back from his position somewhere to the north. 'They will not reach this position for hours.'

Kranon swore. Away to the south, he heard a mechanical bellow, and the hiss of a multi-melta rolled across the battlefield. Something large exploded, eliciting another roar. The deranged Helbrute, Hakorath was still wreaking havoc, but without a concerted push, the Crimson Slaughter would never break through in sufficient strength to secure the war zone.

Kranon gritted his teeth as his ghosts cackled and mocked. Yet suddenly, as though a switch had been thrown, they fell ominously silent. In their place, Kranon heard something whispering in his ear, different to the usual mocking, spiteful voices. The Chaos Lord was reminded of the strange surge of power he had felt

when slaughtering the Skitarii earlier that day. What was going on?

'What are you?' growled Kranon. 'What do you want?'

'Lord?' came Draznicht's confused reply, but Kranon ignored his subordinate. He could almost make out the words, louder now, more insistent.

We are... we are Amethal... we are Amethal... we are in darkness... we want the light... give us the light...

Kranon felt again that surging power, rising through his body, tingling along his nerves like an electrical current, causing his fingers to twitch. The whispers grew louder as the energy flooded through him.

We are Amethal... we see you... we see you all... we are Amethal! We want the light! You will give us the light!

'Lord,' came Draznicht's voice over the vox, mingled with those of Kranon's other squad leaders. 'What is this? This power! What...?'

Then all was drowned out by the roar of blood in Kranon's ears, the hammering of his twin hearts and the rising chorus of hatred in his mind. He was Kranon, yet he was Amethal. He was the trapped, yet also the angel of liberation. He was death, twice-wrought and starving for blood. With

Decimus-rho steadied his aim and rattled off another tight burst of radium bullets from his carbine. The darkness was no hindrance to his accuracy, and he felt a spike of satisfaction as his shots cut the legs out from beneath a charging Chaos Cultist. Around him, the Skitarii of his maniple were firing their own volleys into the gloom, fire patterns overlapping perfectly to keep their section of the line clear of foes. The mounds of traitor corpses beyond the barricade spoke well of that efficiency, while the inviolate condition of the forge-temples at Decimus-rho's back was further cause for satisfaction. Hub Beta-Secundus continued to operate at ninety-two percent efficiency despite the sustained enemy assault. The data spilling through Decimus-rho's neural processors indicated that the archeotech dig was proceeding uninterrupted. Praise the Ommissiah, he thought, his wheezing lung-bellows puffing with pride. The heretics and their false gods were no match for the might of the galaxy's only true and logical deity.

Strange energy spikes suddenly registered upon the Vanguard Alpha's sensorium. Red hazard warnings rimmed his vision for a moment, and several of his comrades let out blurts of coded consternation. Out amid the kill zone, the Crimson Slaughter rose from behind their wrecked tanks and crater edges with strident roars of rage. Calmly, Decimus-rho sighted on the nearest enemy and slammed a tight grouping of shots into his chest. Error code wound along his cortex-spools as the target kept coming, a rippling corona of green flame dancing around it. Decimus-rho fired again, and again, a frown creasing the rad-blackened flesh of his brow as his target refused to die. Then the Chaos Space Marine was over the barricade, clearing it in a single bound, and punching the head from Vanguard Phaetor-aleph. Decimus-rho could not panic, but he knew with sinking certainty that some variable had been altered, and that his warriors could no longer win this fight. With a single binary blurt, the Alpha ordered his squad to fall back.

an amplified roar, Kranon surged up from the crater and charged for the Adeptus Mechanicus barricades. Lethal firepower rained down upon him, only to flicker and flash into nothingness against the bulwark of energy that now wreathed his body. Up and down the lines, Kranon was dimly aware of the same scene being repeated, the Crimson Slaughter burning with mysterious power and charging heedless through the Metalicans' fire.

Ahead, one of the Adeptus Mechanicus' walking tanks stalked from between two armour-clad bunkers and levelled its weapons. Kranon laughed with mad exhilaration as he threw himself forwards, rolling beneath the searing cut of a neutron laser, and then came back to his feet at the vehicle's side. Strength burning through his limbs, the Chaos Lord grabbed the tank's nearest leg and pulled with all his might. As he did so, he pivoted on his heel. Impossibly, the Duncrawler left the ground and swung like a wrecking ball into the side of the

nearest bunker. Sparks and flame rained down as the walking tank was smashed to ruin, hammering deep cracks into the bunker's flank in the process. Kranon hurled the broken wreck aside with a grunt, then raised one hand and felt incredible energies surge along his limb. A bolt of roiling force burst from his palm and smashed into the damaged bunker wall, imploding it in a shower of razored shrapnel. Desultory fire spat from within the sundered bunker,

but Kranon waded through it without a second thought. What was this incredible power, he wondered, that had seized him and his warriors so completely? It was not their possessor spirits, of that he was sure. This was so much more ancient. So much more mighty. This was the power of Amethal, and it would be free.



The high ceiling of the Ommissiah's Shrine was formed of intricately meshed cogs, pistons and gears.

To the untrained eye, it would appear as a churning mass of machinery. To Technoarcheologist Dominus Ivasnophon, its artifice was perfect, its depiction of the Ommissiah's glory faultless. The Machine God was found even in the smallest details, reflected Ivasnophon.

A comparison could be drawn with the Magos' prize upon Amethal, its complexity a thing of beauty. As he stood and cogitated amid the hiss and rumble of the shrine, Ivasnophon flattered himself that what he sought here might prove one of the greatest offerings to the Machine God since the days of Arkhan Land. The Magos was a seeker of ancient technologies, gazing deep into the workings of the galaxy and teasing forth those secrets that furthered the might of the Adeptus Mechanicus.

Such treasures he laid upon the altar of the Machine God, and in doing so, hoped to replicate their magnificence. Understanding was neither sought nor desired, for many of the timeless mechanisms that Ivasnophon uncovered were xenos in nature, or so old as to have been corrupted by the touch of Old Night. But to harness the power of sacred archeotech? To claim that power for the Ommissiah and use it to drive back the alien, the mutant and the heretic? That was holy work indeed, a calling that Ivasnophon had gladly devoted his life to.

All that sacred work, the Magos' greatest offering and all it could do for the realm of Man, was in jeopardy. The worshippers of the Dark Gods had come, as Magos Ivasnophon had calculated they might. He had prepared for such an eventuality as best he could. The Magos' forces were significant, including many Battle

Maniples of Skitarii, processions of the Cult Mechanicus, Knights of House Raven and the towering god machines of the Legio Metalica. Still, as the Magos' projections showed, even such martial strength would not be enough.

'Balus-Tao, tasking,' rasped the Magos to one of his hovering servo skulls, 'bear a repetition of my message to the astropathic hub every seven point three minutes. Reiterate to the Governor that the Blood Angels must make all speed.'

The servo-skull burred a coded litany and hovered away to obey its master's instructions. Ivasnophon watched it go, then turned the lenses of his eyes up to the ceiling once again, looking for inspiration in its divine workings. The Blood Angels must hurry, he thought to himself with cold detachment, or they would find no one left alive to reinforce.

Gorath-Hel wove aside as the buzzing blade passed within an inch of his face. His lip curling with contempt, the Dark Apostle swung his tainted crozius, slamming it into the breastplate of his gangling assailant. Energy discharged from the head of the weapon with a loud bang, crumpling the Ruststalker's torso and hurling its broken body away to bounce off a nearby tree trunk.

'Thus do the curs of the corpse-Emperor find their end,' sneered the Word Bearer. 'May they writhe in the hell-fires of the Dark Gods for time eternal.'

The Dark Apostle glanced around the clearing, making sure there were no more spindle-limbed assassins creeping across the hilltop. The immediate threat was gone, though he could still hear the sporadic sounds of his warriors engaging the last of the Adeptus Mechanicus patrol in the woods below. Several Word Bearers were down, heads severed or torsos carved apart by the vibrating blades of their attackers. That was no matter, thought Gorath-Hel; the Gods of Chaos cared not for weaklings. More were wounded, but they would live or die upon their own merits.

What mattered were the bound slave psykers – skeletal, eyeless wretches who shuddered in their bonds amidst

the darkness. They were still huddled together on the ramp of the Word Bearers' tainted Thunderhawk, unharmed, and shielded by Gorath-Hel's hulking Chaos Terminator bodyguards. That was good, reflected the Dark Apostle. Their loss would have complicated matters.

Gorath-Hel pointed with his weapon, a corrupted badge of office, levelling the imperious gesture at the psykers. The slaves moaned and wept, sensing his pitiless regard.

'Bring forth the sighted ones,' Gorath-Hel intoned in a voice well used to ritual. 'Let the eyeless see what even the blessed cannot.'

With a menacing whine of armoured servos, the Terminators marched forwards, forcing the psykers to run or be trampled. Dragging on the chain leashes around the witches' red-raw throats, the Word Bearers guided their slaves into position. The unfortunate wretches formed a loose ring, dotted around the bare hilltop above the treeline, surrounded by the burning forests below. Clad in rags, and gaunt from malnutrition, the psykers shivered uncontrollably in the cold night winds. They moaned and flinched back from where distant explosions lit the horizon to the north and south.

'Hear me,' boomed Gorath-Hel. He raised his tainted crozius high, and read aloud from a crumbling tome bound in onyx and blood. The words that spilled from his mouth squirmed through the air like living things. 'Gy'nath el'shzy! X'gakhar y'shel y'shel! In the name of the Dark Gods of Chaos, with the blessings of the unholy Octed whose power dwarfs all else, look thee outwards with thine eyeless gaze and speak of the cursed ones. Tell me what they have found upon this blighted world. Tell me! Z'ghasha H'kul!'

Goaded by the dark incantations, the slave psykers convulsed and wailed, froth spilling from their lips as their empty eye sockets burned with ghostly flames. Their backs arched and their arms splayed wide as they threw back their heads and spoke as one.

'The cursed ones fight. The cursed ones die. They war beneath the darkened sky.'

'How do they fare?' boomed Gorath-Hel, the howling wind whipping at the scrolls that adorned his armour. 'What have they found?'

'Death, and blood, and fire, and hate,' chorused the psykers, bodies writhing as ropes of stinking slime drooled from their open mouths. 'Many die to find the gate.'

'The gate?' Gorath-Hel's tone was tinged with excitement. 'Where is the gate? What of the power on this world? What of the Despoiler's prize?'

The psykers shuddered and screamed, hateful voices spilling from them that were not their own.

'Tell me,' thundered Gorath-Hel, 'Y'sothon Xesh! Y'shel, y'shel!'

As one, the psykers' bodies burst into spectral flame, their flesh blackening and turning to ash. Yet amid their screams, the daemonic voices rose again, chanting out their answer.

'Where lord accursed leads the fight, the imprisoned ones demand the light. The trap is weakest at the gate, there your master meets his fate.'

With that, the psykers' burning bodies exploded into clouds of ash that were snatched up by the howling wind and borne away into the dark night skies. The chains of their leashes clattered to the ground, smoke rising from scorched and twisted metal.

Gorath-Hel lowered his crozius and slowly closed the pages of his daemonic tome, the book giving a satisfying thump as its pages met. He was silent for long moments, his face an unreadable mask. His followers held their places, well used to their master's wrath for those who acted out of turn. Gorath-Hel spoke with the voice of the Dark Gods, and there were few indeed brave enough to court his ire.

At last, the Dark Apostle's cruel features split into a twisted leer. He turned and stared out to the north, the dancing fires of distant battle reflected in his eyes. As he did so, he snapped his fingers at the nearest of his warriors.

'You. Bring me the font of communion. Take that one,' he pointed at a wounded Word Bearer, who moaned and struggled as his brothers closed in. 'Bleed him as the ritual demands. I need to speak to Lord Xorphas. The Crimson Slaughter have contacted the imprisoned. Just as the Despoiler said, they have led us straight to the gate.'







KRANON'S CURSED HOST

Haunted by ghosts from the Warp, the Crimson Slaughter are half-mad murderers who charge to battle surrounded by freakish poltergeist phenomena. Abaddon marked these renegades as exceptional terror troops, loosing them on the Imperium to spread horror and despair. Lord Xorphas had a different use for their Warp-touched souls...

The force that Kranon the Relentless led to the Diamor System represented a significant portion of his renegade warband's strength. Some of his followers, the Sorcerer Severin Drask amongst them, were elsewhere, engaged in their own missions of terror and destruction. Each offensive was crucial to the Despoiler's plans, but Kranon trusted no other with the battle for Amethal. The Chaos Lord had left others to guard the Space Hulk *Lost Hope*. He had worked too hard, for too long, to risk the future of his warband on a single endeavour, even if it was Abaddon himself giving the orders.

For all this, Kranon's Cursed Host was a powerful force of hundreds of Chaos Space Marines supported by a sea of fanatical Cultists. Renegade armour, wings of Helderakes, packs of twisted Daemon Engines and even super-heavy war machines all waited in the holds of the Crimson Slaughter's

heavy transports to support the attack upon Amethal. This potent army was divided across the planet's surface in a simple but effective deployment. Smaller forces – single squads of Crimson Slaughter Chaos Marines or bands of zealous Cultists – were assigned to secondary targets on the planet's surface, striking at communications relays, fuel depots and the like. Kranon's main strength was split between the five Adeptus Mechanicus excavation sites.

Each site was attacked by a sizeable warband, led by one of Kranon's trusted lieutenants and amply supported with armoured might. Kranon suspected the Black Legion were using his warriors as expendable shock troops, but he intended to turn their presumption back upon them. He and his warriors would teach their allies the mistake of underestimation when his fast and brutal assaults brought victory on Amethal.



For his attack at War Zone Carnage, Kranon had selected his followers with brute force in mind. The Chaos Lord had little interest in subtlety, planning to put his enemies off balance and then simply ram his forces like a spear into their wavering guard.

To that end, the Chaos Lord led a warband heavy in elite Crimson Slaughter warriors. The Chosen known as the Ravagers formed Kranon's personal honour guard, their gifted champion, Draznicht, acting as his second in command. These hard-bitten killers had proven themselves to Kranon in battles from the strongholds of the Imperium to the Daemon worlds of the Eye of Terror, and he knew they would not fail him now. The Terminators of Lakdar's Brethren added weight to the tip of Kranon's spear, their armoured resilience and firepower proving great assets during the headlong assault across the blackened Metalican kill zone.

Kranon personally selected some of his finest Chaos Space Marine squads for the assault. Thanks to the attrition

of ceaseless war, his warband no longer had the luxury of a fleet of armoured transports to fully mechanise their attacking forces. However, Kranon ensured that a scattering of these vehicles was available to his warriors at the war zone, providing them with greater speed and survivability. Chaos Space Marines and ravening Possessed raced into battle alongside spearheads of battle tanks and loping packs of Daemon Engines. The Cursed Host also made prodigious use of Crimson Slaughter Helbrutes to support their attack. Kranon had great faith in the berserk war engines, especially the long-lived Hakorath, and so deployed a number of them to provide heavy fire support and brute strength to his army.

The final components of Kranon's force were swift and deadly strike forces of Chaos Bikers and Raptors, alongside scattered bands of Chaos Cultists. It was these forces that would encircle the war zone's perimeter, striking targets of opportunity and forcing the enemy to spread their firepower while Kranon's elite punched through to rip the heart from the enemy defences.



THE SLAUGHTERERS

The first Chaos forces to drop onto the surface of Amethal, Kranon's Crimson Slaughter spread their strength across each of the major war zones marked out as primary targets on that cursed world. The army led by Kranon the Relentless was the greatest of their invasion forces, and its haunted might was terrifying to behold.

CHAOS WARBAND

KRANON THE RELENTLESS
Chaos Lord

DRAZNICHT'S RAVAGERS
5 Chosen

LAKDAR'S DESTROYERS
5 Chaos Terminators

THE WARP-TOUCHED
5 Possessed

HALKOR'S FLAYERS
10 Chaos Space Marines

VRASAD'S REVEILED
10 Chaos Space Marines

SHARAK'S FLESHGORGED
10 Chaos Space Marines

DROVECH'S BUTCHERS
10 Chaos Space Marines

THE CARRION CLAWS
5 Raptors

T'VAKAR'S SWIFTMURDER
5 Chaos Bikers

HAKORATH
Helbrute

HELFORGED WARPACK

VORDAX
Warpsmith

FIREMAW
Forgefiend

THE IRON BEAST
Maulerfiend

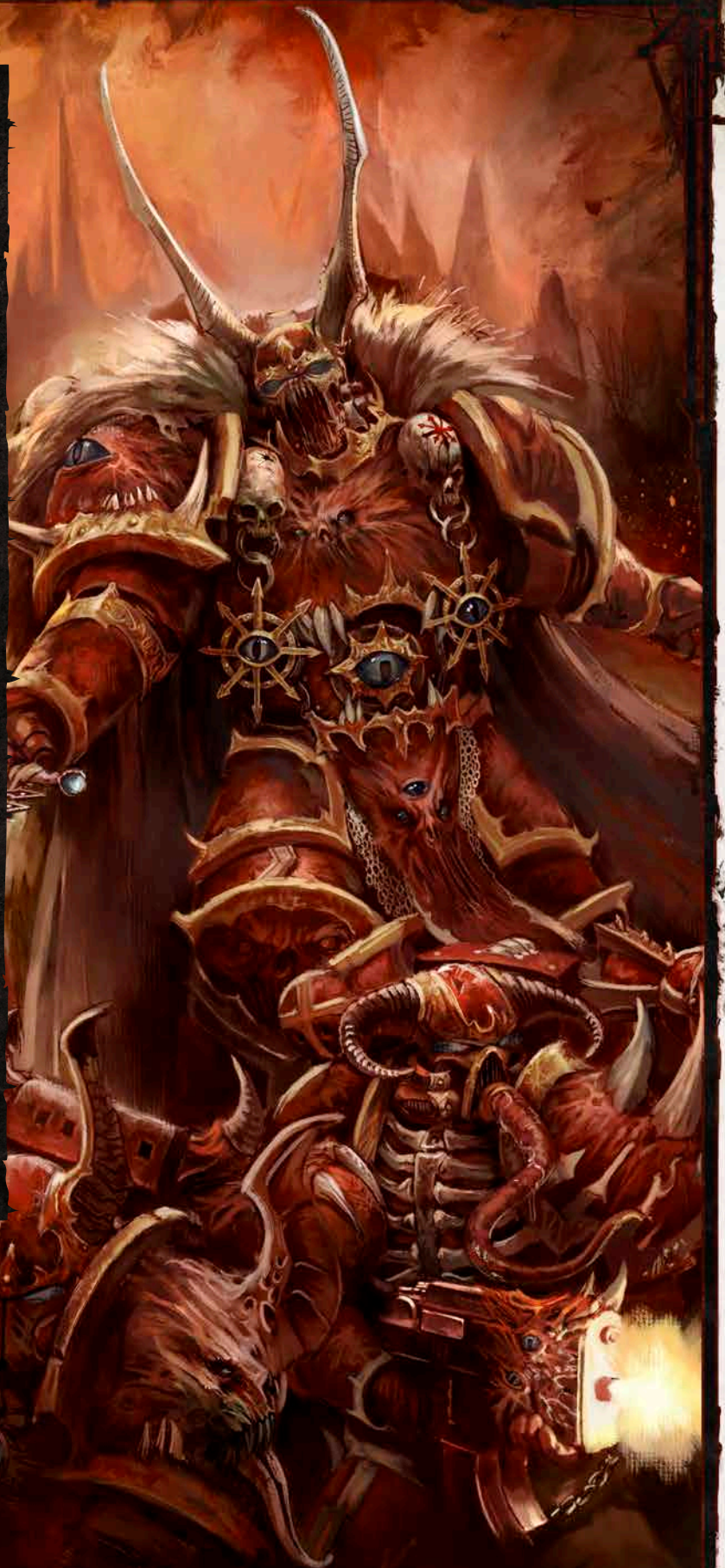
MAELDRAK
Helbrute

KRANON THE RELENTLESS

Kranon the Relentless is the master of the former Crimson Sabres, and the dark antithesis of everything he once stood for. He is a twisted parody of the honour and nobility of the Adeptus Astartes, a being with all of their strength and determination but loyal only to his own selfish desires.

Until their fall from grace, the Crimson Sabres were a loyal Space Marine Chapter. Their only fault was an excessive determination to prove their spiritual strength and uncompromising detestation of Chaos. It is the nature of the Dark Gods to pervert such strong ideals, and when the Sabres' purge of the cults of Umidia was twisted by Daemons into a genocidal massacre, the Chapter's damnation was inevitable. Kranon and his warriors found themselves haunted by strange entities that manifested poltergeist phenomena even as they tore away at the Space Marines' sanity with the cacophonous screaming of those they had slain.

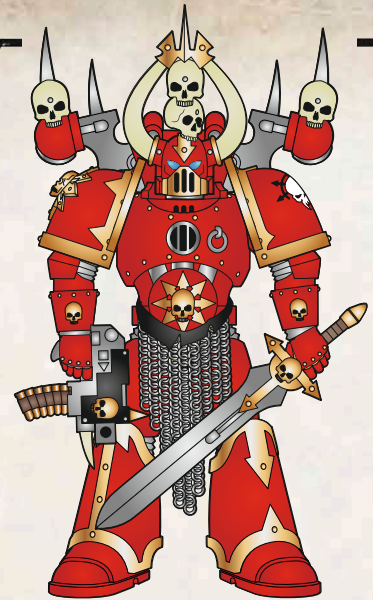
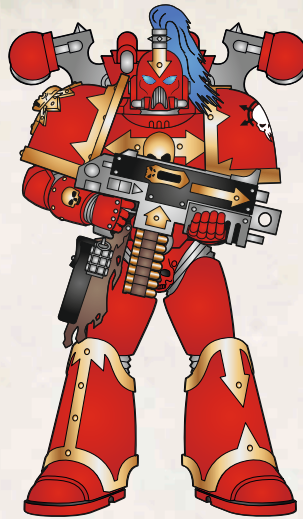
The Crimson Sabres degenerated into bloodthirsty madness, discovering that only through wholesale butchery could they quiet the voices for a time. The Chapter – now a renegade warband calling itself the Crimson Slaughter – might have shattered altogether but for the determination of Kranon the Relentless. A skilled leader and exceptional warrior for all his faults, Kranon fought furiously not only to hold his followers together, but to rebuild their strength. Too proud was Kranon to accept failure, the Chaos Lord pushing his warriors harder than ever to fight and to survive. His quest has been so successful that Kranon has come to the attention of the Despoiler himself. Now the Crimson Slaughter fight at the forefront of Abaddon's great war, Kranon leading them in devastating terror raids to shatter Imperial morale and spread panic through the Emperor's realm.



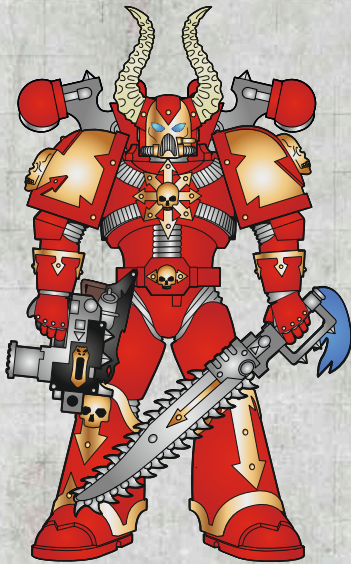
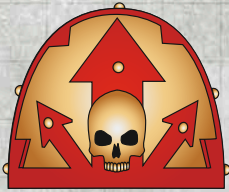
BUTCHERS IN CRIMSON



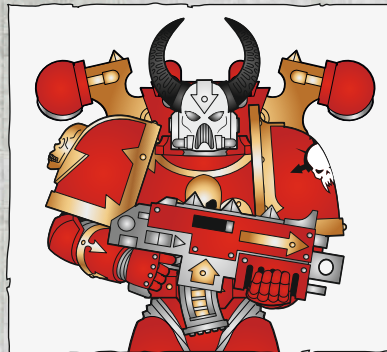
The Crimson Slaughter retained the arterial red of their old Chapter heraldry, but have replaced the insignia of loyal Space Marines with the debased iconography of renegades. Their insignia has become a spike-haloed skull, replicated in a variety of strange and baroque fashions across the shoulder guards and hull plates of these degenerate traitors to the Imperium.



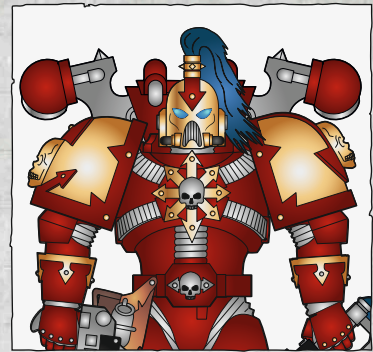
The warriors of the Crimson Slaughter wear tainted power armour of vivid blood red, edged in warpgold and detailed with silver and bone. Their weapons are typically cased in black, though this can vary from one warband to the next.



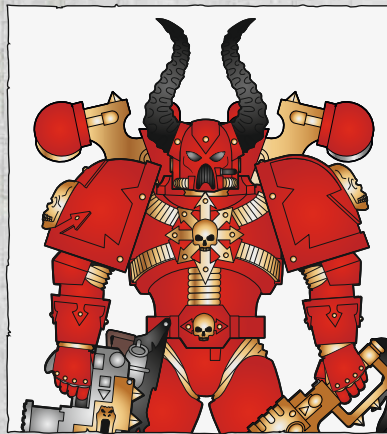
Some Crimson Slaughter champions wear armour which inverts their colour scheme at the helm and shoulder guards to mark them out as favoured warriors.



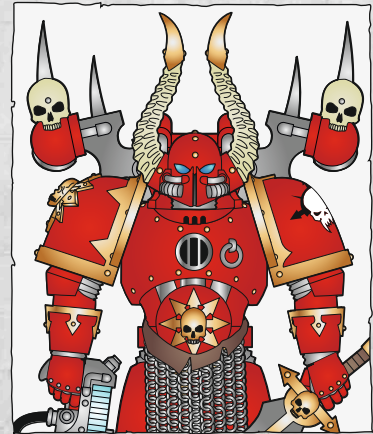
This champion's white helm indicates he has slain an Imperial Saint.



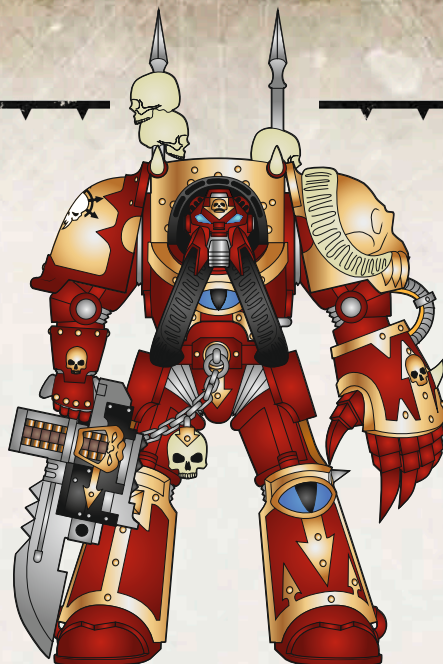
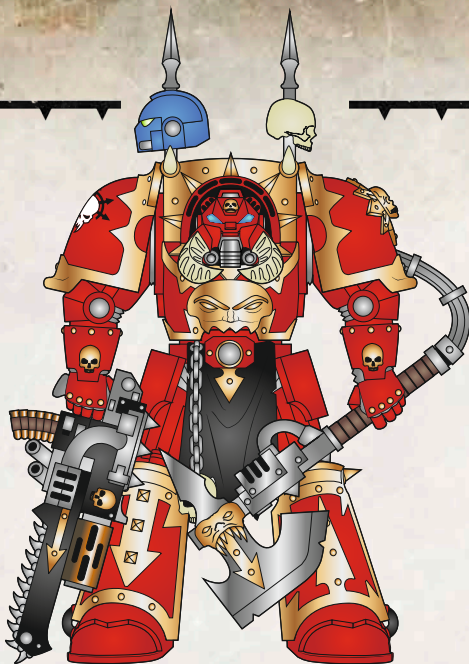
This champion displays a gilded Chaos star upon his breastplate.



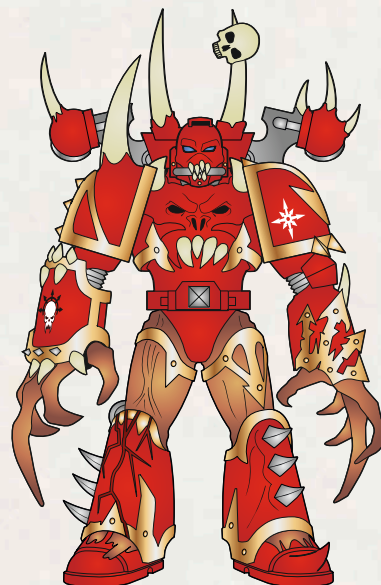
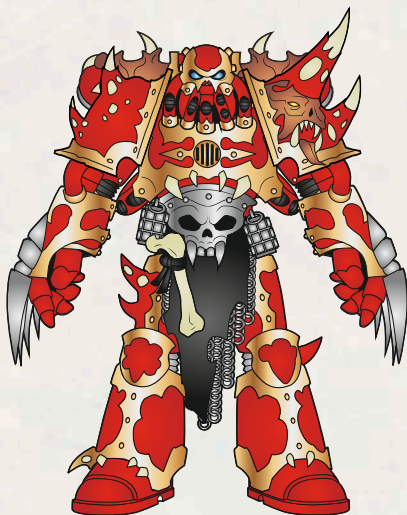
The red trim on this champion's armour shows devotion to Khorne.



Twinned loyalist Space Marine skulls are displayed by their slayer.



The Chaos Terminators of the Crimson Slaughter decorate their armour with a great variety of twisted honour markings, from the black loin cloth of one who has slain ten loyal Space Marines, to the black tusks of the Daemon killer.

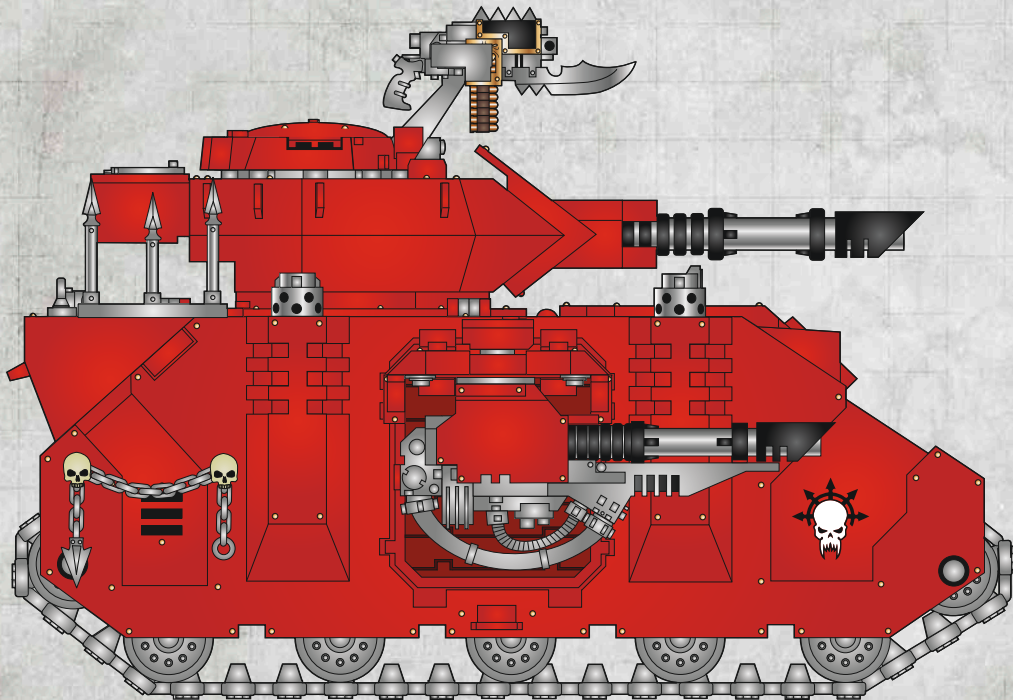


The Chosen of the Crimson Slaughter wear a more elaborate version of the red and gold of their warband.

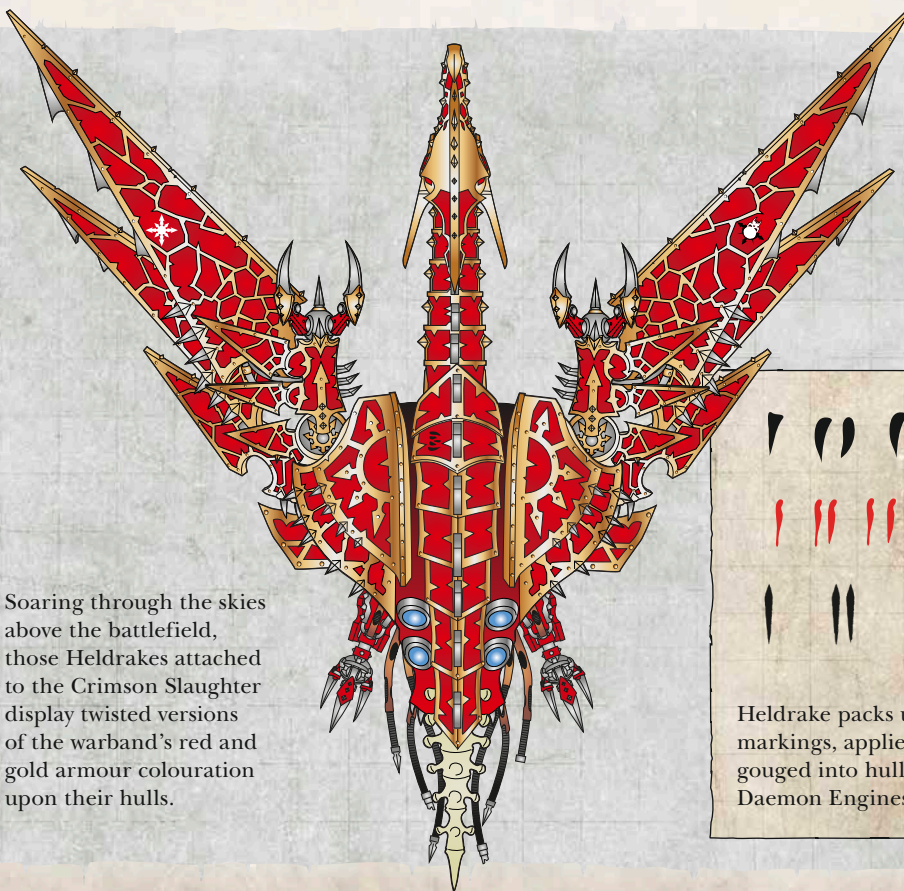
Twisted though it is by the daemonic energies within, Crimson Slaughter Possessed nonetheless still display their warband's insignia on their warped, fleshy power armour.



The Crimson Slaughter field howling masses of fanatical Cultists, whose garb apes that of their haunted masters. Blood reds, golds and blacks are all much in evidence in the liveries of such cults.



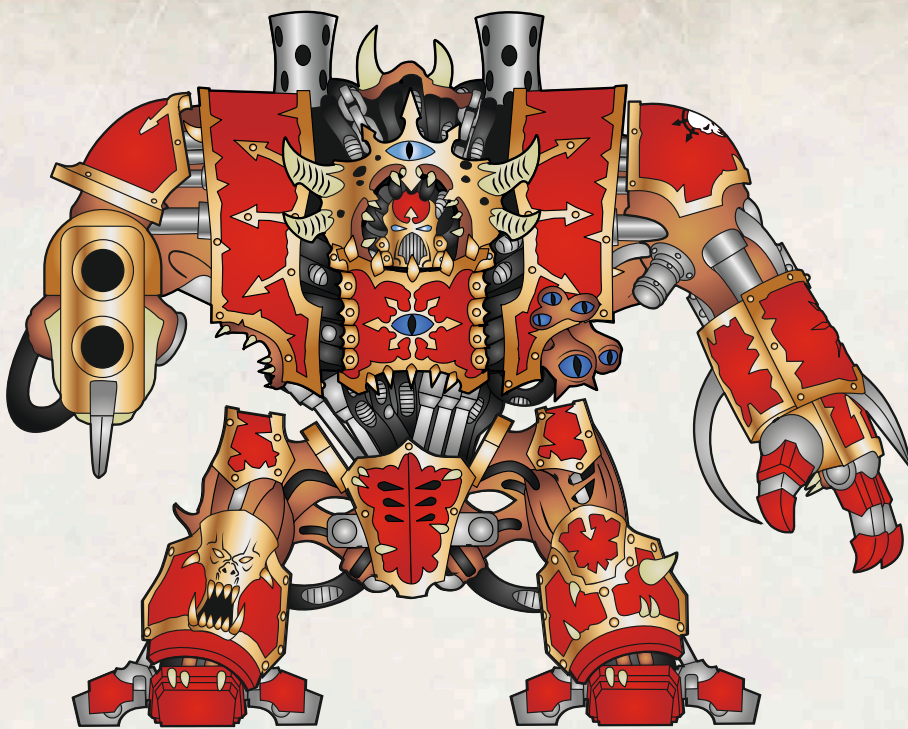
The armoured fighting vehicles of the Crimson Slaughter are predominantly red and black, displaying only small amounts of gold trim, and few insignia beyond the spike-haloed skull of their warband.



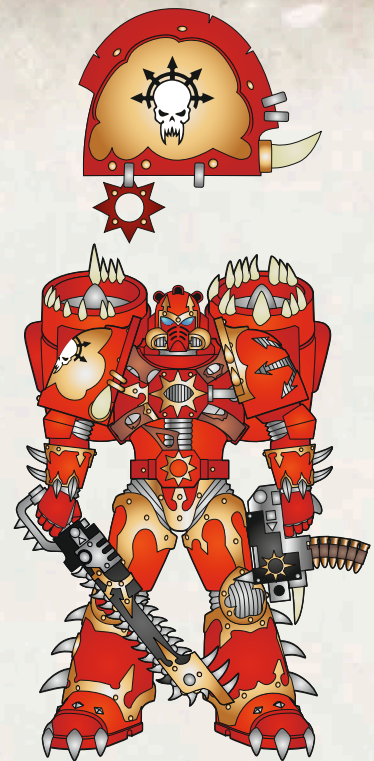
Soaring through the skies above the battlefield, those Helderakes attached to the Crimson Slaughter display twisted versions of the warband's red and gold armour colouration upon their hulls.



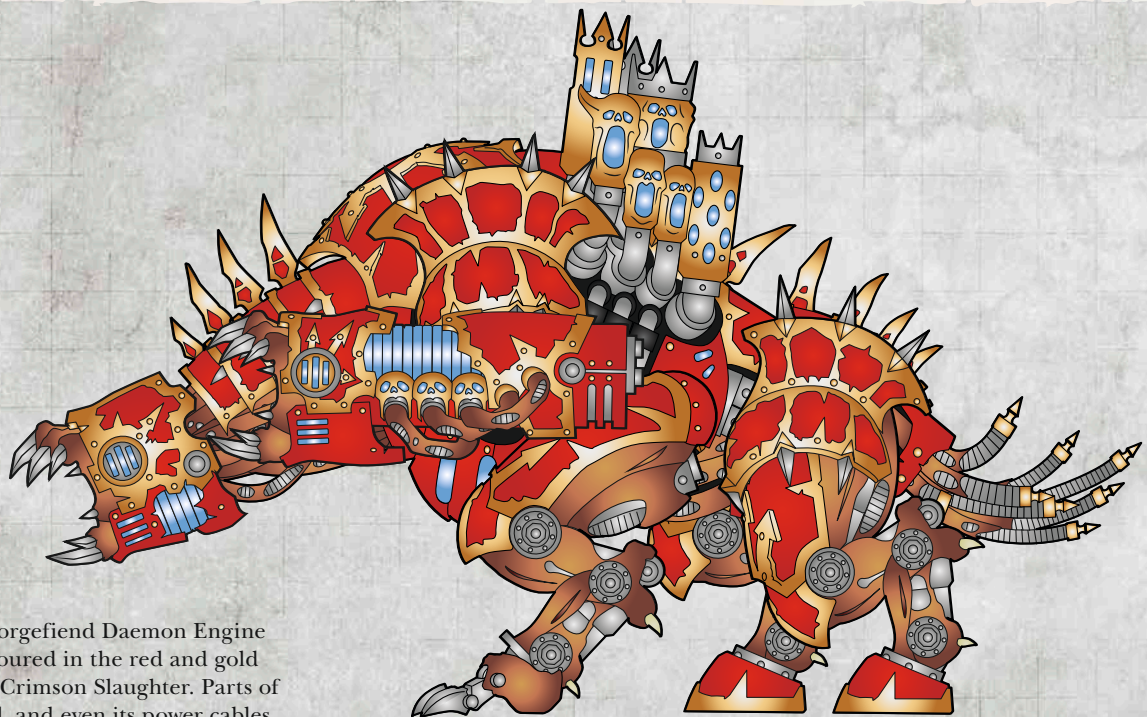
Helderake packs utilise a number of kill markings, applied by the Warpsmiths or gouged into hull plates by the talons of the Daemon Engines themselves.



Twisted masses of flesh, metal and hissing cables, the Helbrutes of the Crimson Slaughter are hideous in their biomechanical splendour. Their twisted armour plates are coloured the same red and gold as their less monstrous brethren.



The Raptors of the Crimson Slaughter tend to have golden right shoulder guards showing the warband emblem.



This Forgefiend Daemon Engine is armoured in the red and gold of the Crimson Slaughter. Parts of its hull, and even its power cables have turned to leathery brown flesh due to the mutating powers of Chaos.



THE DIAMOR INVASION

>>> ASC 001-028

Lord Xorphas' attack on the Diamor System was planned as a devastating sequence of cunning feints, each building towards a dark goal. In the opening stages of the invasion, savage space battles erupted across the system as the Imperial defenders attempted to fight back, never realising that they were being led away from the traitors' true prize.

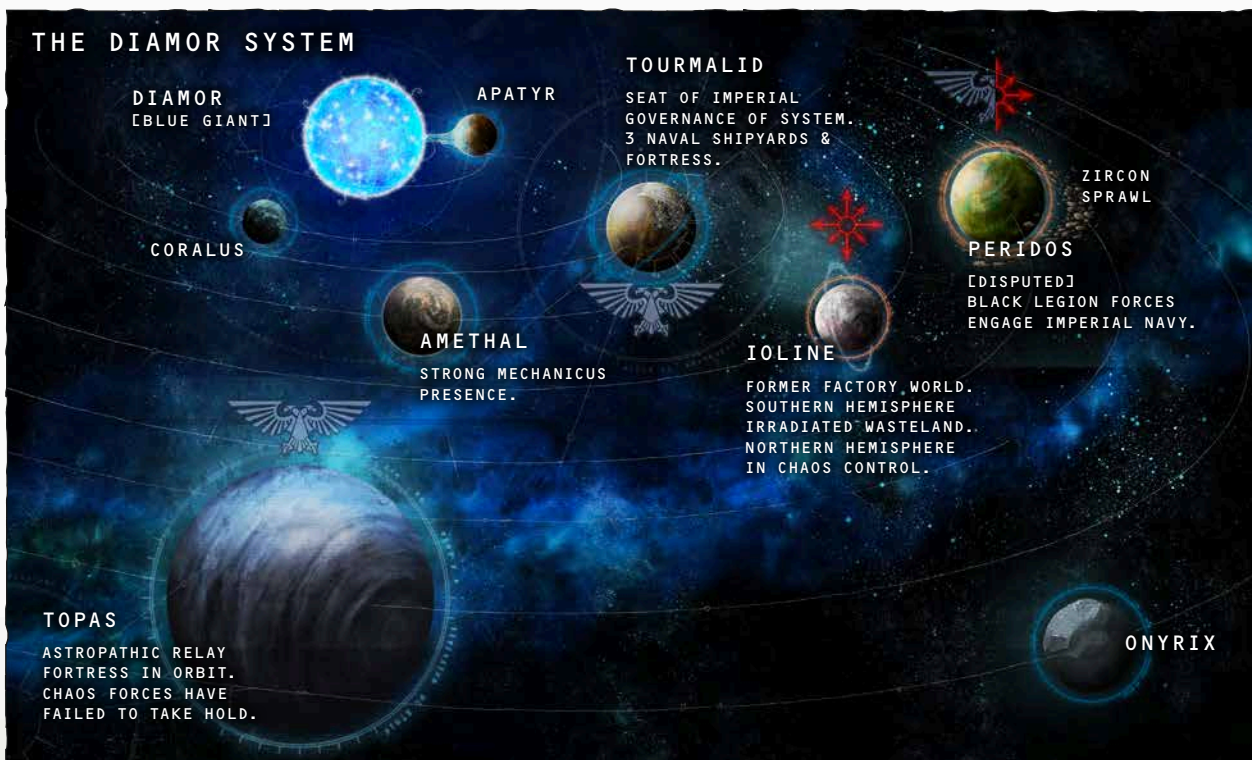
The Chaos attack upon the Diamor System commenced with a series of sudden, vicious raids by Black Legion spacecraft. Surging from the Warp, Murder and Carnage-class Cruisers struck at Peridos. A prolific agri world, Peridos was the system's breadbasket. Wallowing grain barges came and went daily from the planet's upper atmosphere, keeping the rest of the Diamor System fed. Peridos had defences – a scattering of orbital platforms and several dedicated squadrons of Thunderbolt Fighters to discourage pirates. Against the Chaos warships that came surging out from between the tumbling asteroids of the Zircon Sprawl, they were wholly insufficient.

Word of the attacks swiftly reached the world of Tourmalid, the Diamor System's seat of governance. Tourmalid was a wonder of technological mastery. Claimed during the Great Crusade as a shorn half-planet, it had been rebuilt with thousands of miles of girder work, naval shipyards, docking cradles and grav-habs. The planet's artificial hemisphere served as a major staging point for Battlefleet Obscurus. Tourmalid's Governor – and ruler of the system – was the venerable Lord Admiral Gordus.

The Lord Admiral had been a true hero in his day, and age had done little to dull his bellicose spirit. Outraged at the thought of losing his system's main food source to Chaos raiders, Gordus despatched a powerful fleet of system monitors and Obscurus warships to deal with the threat.

So began a cat-and-mouse battle through the fringes of the Zircon Sprawl, the outnumbered Chaos raiders using the asteroid field to evade their enemies and continue their strikes against Peridos' grain barges. The Imperial fleet found itself forced into escort and blockade duties, its lighter ships prowling the asteroid belt on the hunt for Chaos pirates while its cruisers and battleships stood guard over the crucial grain shipments.

With the Diamor System's navy dragged into protracted conflict, the Chaos forces could launch their next wave of attacks. An invasion fleet of ships from the Black Legion, Word Bearers and Crimson Slaughter translated from the Warp recklessly far in-system. This sleek attack fleet encircled the industrial world of Ioline. Traitor drop-craft darkened the polluted skies of Ioline's northern hemisphere, braving thundering Icarus batteries and orbital defence silos to disgorge thousands of warriors into the hives of the pan-polar states. Ioline's defence levies fought courageously, but the Chaos forces swept them aside with shocking ease. Within a matter of weeks the pan-polar territories were in Chaos hands. In the southern hubs of the Iron States, determined Imperial defensive lines were drawn up. They would be of no use. With contemptuous amusement, Black Legion sorcerer lord Xorphas turned the planet's polar defence silos against the Iron States. Warheads rained down on trails of fire, obliterating the southern hemisphere in an appalling rad-holocaust.





From the moment traitor boots crunched down onto Ioline's streets, the Black Legion Warpsmiths had begun their evil work. By the time Lord Xorphas launched his killing strike upon the Iron State cities, a series of twisted biomechanical towers had been raised amidst the ruin of the pan-polar capital, Radium. Graven with eldritch hexes and sigils, these towers formed the anchor points of the vast Hex Infernum. With the apocalyptic sacrifice of the Iron States' populace, the Warpsmiths' ritual was completed. A screaming rift burst into life between the warding towers of the Hex Infernum, a swirling portal to hell within which daemonic entities writhed. So began the Warpsmiths' true work, vile factory units rumbling to life all around the rift to produce a steady stream of Daemon Engines into which the summoned entities could be bound.

With the enemy fleet tied up defending Peridos and armoured reinforcements building on Ioline, the Chaos invaders were ready to strike at their true target. The spacecraft of the Crimson Slaughter made for the cursed world of Amethal, and the hidden power it concealed.

Amethal was equal parts paradise and pariah. To all appearances it was a garden world of stunning natural beauty, whose bounteous forests, meadows and oceans should have been devoured by the Imperium long ago. Yet every attempt at settlement upon this huge planet had failed. Those who landed upon Amethal soon complained of headaches, nausea and growing paranoia. Insomnia and hallucinations came next, worsening until the killing began. The verdant lands of Amethal bore the remains of over a dozen documented attempts at colonisation, each one reduced to ghostly ruins and craters that told a chilling tale of frantic self-destruction.

The ships of the Crimson Slaughter that swept down into orbit over this strange, gigantic world had been given the honour of striking first by Lord Xorphas. They would not do so unopposed, for in recent months, the Adeptus Mechanicus had claimed Amethal. Even from orbit, the macrofactories and prefab fortifications of the Metalican regiments were clearly visible, blighting the verdant continental landmasses like spreading mould upon a ripe fruit. Vast quarry-like pits were being dug by towering excavator engines. Each dig site was of incredible scale, surrounded by bunkers, bastions, generatorums, shield generators, servitor factories and anti-orbital batteries. There were also a number of Fleet Mechanicus Explorator ships hanging in orbit, and these craft opened fire upon the Crimson Slaughter as the Chaos planetstrike commenced.

The volume of fire generated by the Metalican forces was incredible. Ancient weaponry filled the void of space with searing energy bolts and volleys of esoteric warheads. Ground-based servitor-guns tracked the incoming Chaos ships, macrobatteries spitting thousands of shells a minute up into the atmosphere. The Crimson Slaughter battleships *Red Honour* and *Scimitar* swept on regardless, explosions blossoming across their void shields as they soaked up the ire of the Adeptus Mechanicus. Behind these mighty flagships came dozens of smaller warships and bulky troop transports. From them fell a rain of Dreadclaw Drop Pods and armoured landing craft. Loaded with traitor warriors, this invasion force plunged recklessly through the Metalican flak curtain. Lasers punched through Dreadclaws, bursting them like seed pods. Landing craft were buffeted by concussive explosions, tumbling from the sky to detonate upon the ground far below. Engines flared and blew out. Armaglass canopies shattered, tearing pilots apart.

The Crimson Slaughter attack waves came on, wings of Heldrakes screaming down around them with their guns blazing. From orbit, the Chaos fleet rained death upon the Adeptus Mechanicus ground defences, flattening bunkers and reducing batteries to craters. Under cover of their draconic Daemon Engines and orbital fire support, more and more of the Crimson Slaughter made it to the surface of Amethal. Power-armoured warriors in crimson and brass spilled from Dreadclaw Drop Pods, poltergeist energies swirling around them as they raised their boltguns and opened fire. The spiked ramps of bulk landers yawned wide, vomiting masses of howling Cultists into battle. Idyllic meadowlands were churned to muddy ruin as squadrons of traitor armour roared to war, while packs of Daemon Engines crashed through dense forests and

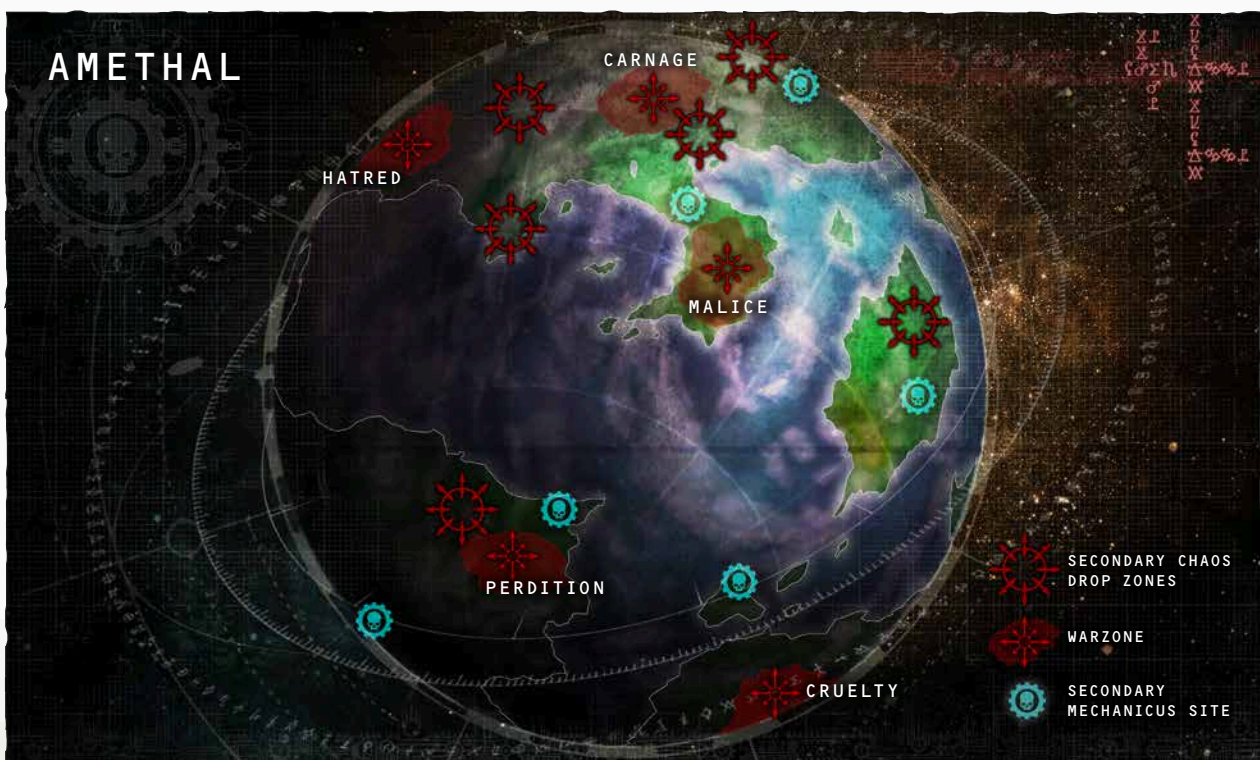
stomped across the blasted wastelands before the Metalican defence lines. Everywhere, the forces of Chaos were on the advance. With typical fearlessness, the forces of the Skitarii and the Cult Mechanicus readied themselves to face the heretical hordes.

'THIS IS NO SIMPLE TERROR RAID. I'M NOT SENDING YOU TO PULL THE ARMS OFF MILITIAMEN, OR SCARE A GAGGLE OF GUARDSMEN INTO SOILING THEMSELVES. THIS IS THE DESPOILER'S WILL. DO IT RIGHT, OR I'LL SKIN YOU.'

- Lord Xorphas' Warp communiqué to Kranon the Relentless prior to the invasion of Amethal

The Crimson Slaughter's deployment had been strategically targeted. Five major concentrations of Adeptus Mechanicus activity existed on Amethal, three in the northern hemisphere and two in the south. The Chaos forces landed in great strength around – and in some cases amidst – those heavily defended excavation sites. Scorning whatever designations the Metalicans had assigned these locations, Kranon the Relentless – master of the Crimson Slaughter – had given the primary landing zones code names of his own. To the north were War Zones Hatred, Carnage, and Malice. To the south were War Zones Perdition and Cruelty.

Kranon himself led the assault against War Zone Carnage, while favoured lieutenants led the other offensives. The leader of the Crimson Slaughter knew that his mission was to annihilate the Adeptus Mechanicus ground forces, and in so doing win a mighty source of power for Abaddon's Black Crusade.



In truth though, Kranon cared little why Xorphas had ordered him to attack this world. The Chaos Space Marines of the Crimson Slaughter were cursed warriors, haunted by supernatural entities that drove them mad with their constant whispers and screams. Kranon knew that many considered his renegade Chapter to be weak because of this, and ripe for slaughter or exploitation. He aimed to prove the opposite on Amethal. The Crimson Slaughter would show their might by securing a swift victory for the Despoiler, and then move on to worlds where more blood could be shed.

'CRUSH THE SCUM BENEATH YOUR BOOTS. TEAR THEIR FLESH AND CRUSH THEIR METAL. CLEANSE YOURSELVES IN THEIR JETTING BLOOD. THESE FOOLS THINK WALLS AND GUNS WILL HOLD US AT BAY. BROTHERS, PROVE THEM WRONG!'

- Kranon the Relentless before the attack upon War Zone Carnage

So motivated, the Crimson Slaughter drove hard into the teeth of the Adeptus Mechanicus defences. At each of the five war zones, masses of power armoured heretics surged across no man's land with bolters roaring and chainswords at the ready. Bow waves of supernatural energy rolled before them, swirling masses of Warp ghosts that buffeted the combatants and spattered ectoplasm across the battlefield. Metalican warriors found their mechanical components rebelling as ghosts flowed through their machinery, twisting the luckless cyborgs into hideous biomechanical nightmares. Scrapcode blurted forth, sound turning to rancid pus as it clotted the air. Despite it all, the firepower brought to bear by the Adeptus Mechanicus was ferocious. Tracked battle servitors and serried ranks of Skitarii drew up alongside many-legged walking tanks and ancient battle robots to unleash a killing barrage. The ground shuddered to the tread of the Knights of House Raven, while towering over all came the looming Titans of the renowned Legio Metalica. The Adeptus Mechanicus had scoured efficient kill zones around each of their excavation sites, mile-wide strips of blackened ground that offered little in the way of cover from their merciless fire. What followed was absolute carnage.

Hundreds of Cultists and renegades were obliterated, but the Crimson Slaughter continued their advance regardless. Unnatural energies flowed around them, absorbing the worst of the firestorm, while fresh waves of heavy support elements landed to add their might to the battle. At War Zone Hatred, a dozen heretical engines of the Legio Excruciatu strode forwards, blitzing the enemy defence lines with overwhelming firepower. At War Zone Perdition, traitor forces were able to land in significant numbers amidst the Adeptus Mechanicus defence lines. Skitarii formations wheeled with clockwork efficiency to catch the

new threat in a lethal crossfire, but in doing so, were forced to slacken the weight of fire being hurled out into the kill zones. Seizing their opportunity, a spearhead of Daemon Engines and Crimson Slaughter tanks punched through the enemy defences and tore open the Adeptus Mechanicus positions from within.

The fighting raged on into darkness, traitor forces breaking through in some places while the Adeptus Mechanicus defences held in others. Countless smaller zones of conflict blossomed across Amethal as columns of reinforcements were ambushed and large-scale outflanking or counter-attack manoeuvres were attempted. Though these conflicts were savage and costly, none was as important as the attack by Kranon and his warriors against War Zone Carnage. It was here that a strange phenomenon manifested itself, lending unprecedented strength to the traitor assault. Slowly at first, but with increasing speed and violence, the Crimson Slaughter found themselves gripped by strange energies. Drowning out the Warp spirits that tormented them, these new malicious energies poured into the Chaos Marines like water into empty vessels. Those Chaos Space Marines so affected found themselves burning with unholy might, able to tear open tanks with their bare hands and shrug off enemy fire as though it were summer rain. With such incredible powers at their command, the Crimson Slaughter swiftly overran War Zone Carnage, claiming it in the name of their lord.











+++AMETHAL STRATEGIC CHRONOLOG+++

+++SEGMENT ENGAGE 0011110000111+++

+++OMNISSIAHREGNUMPERPETURARI+++

ASC 027-029: RENEGADE FORCES [SUB-REF: CRIMSON SLAUGHTER] ENTRENCHED INTO FORTIFICATIONS AROUND HUB BETA-SECUNDUS. CONTINUED WARP PHENOMENA DETECTED. ABERRANCY OUTPUT 63% AND INCREASING.

ASC 030: BLOOD ANGELS STRIKE CRUISERS *ANGELIC BLADE* AND *FLAME OF BAAL* ENTER SYSTEM BEYOND THIRD ORBITANEIOUS DIQUARTILE. IMMEDIATELY ENGULFED IN UNKNOWN PSYCHIC PHENOMENA. SOURCE SUSPECTED TO BE TRAITOR LEADER [SUB-REF: SORCERER LORD XORPHAS] [SUB-REF: BLACK LEGION]. 92% RATE OF SPIRITUAL DEGENERATION DETECTED.

ASC 030.1: BLOOD ANGELS STRIKE CRUISER *SANGUINE TEAR* AND ATTENDANT FLEET ENTER SYSTEM, RENDER ASSISTANCE TO *ANGELIC BLADE* AND *FLAME OF BAAL*. BLACK LEGION FLAGSHIP [SUB-REF: *STYGIAN BEAST*] WITHDRAWS.

ASC 032-034: BLOOD ANGELS FORCES EXECUTE INSERTION ASSAULTS AT STRATEGICALLY SIGNIFICANT SITES ACROSS AMETHAL PLANETARY SURFACE. COORDINATE WITH METALLICA MANIPLES/HOUSE RAVEN/TITAN BATTLEGROUPS ACROSS EXCAVATION SITES.

ASC 036-039: COMBINED IMPERIAL OFFENSIVES DRIVE CRIMSON SLAUGHTER FROM KEY OBJECTIVES. SIGNIFICANT BLOOD ANGELS DEPLOYMENT [SUB-REF: DEATH COMPANY] AT HUB BETA-SECUNDUS. TRAITOR FORCES TAKE HEAVY CASUALTIES. LEADER [SUB-REF: KRANON THE RELENTLESS] ESCAPES WITH ELITE PERSONAL GUARD. PRIMARY CRIMSON SLAUGHTER STRENGTH ANNIHILATED. BLOOD ANGEL CASUALTIES: MODERATE-HIGH.

ASC 040: ADDITIONAL TRAITOR FLEET DETECTED MOVING RAPIDLY IN SYSTEM. MINIMAL CONTACT WITH TRAITORS ALREADY ENGAGED. [SUB-REF: DEEP-SPACE VOX MONITOR SEGMENT 44/8HB.W - AUDIO - 'KILL! MAIM! BURN!']

+++SEGMENT CONCLUDES 00111100101+++

CHAPTER 2

**KILL! MAIM!
BURN!**



THE ANOINTING

The Crimson Slaughter only briefly held the war zones of Amethal. The arrival of the Blood Angels saw a massive Imperial counter-attack sweep across the planet, driving the renegades back. Even Kranon was put to flight by a tide of Death Company warriors, all as Lord Xorphas had planned. There were many parts to his scheme, of which the Crimson Slaughter were only the first. And even their deaths served the Sorcerer's ends, clearing the way for what was to come.

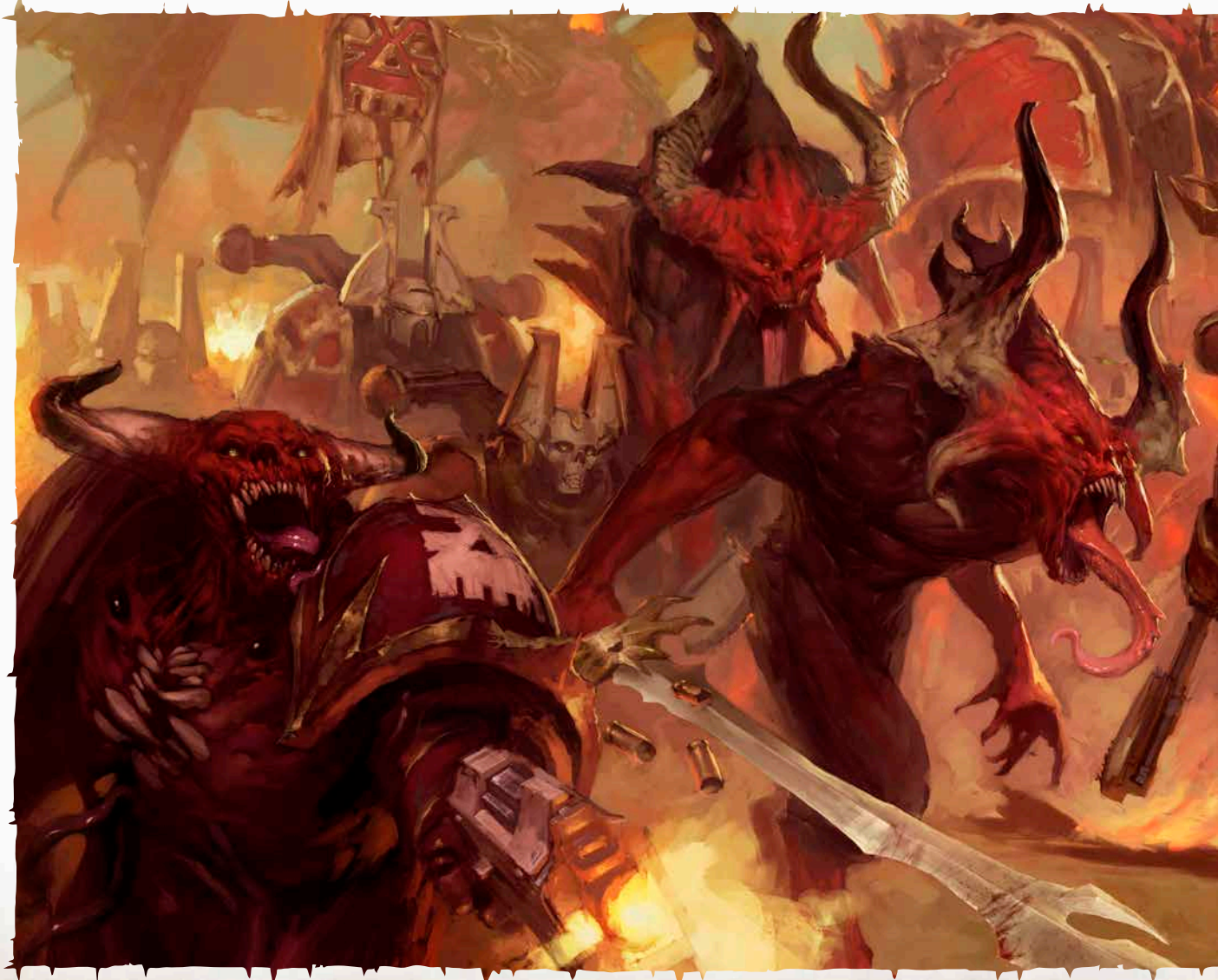
Deep within the bowels of the Black Legion warship *Stygian Beast* lay the sanctum of Lord Xorphas. The chamber was broad and shadowed, its high ceiling held up by eight pillars

of red-veined marble, its eight walls daubed with the sigils of the Chaos Gods. Warped flesh-things dangled in brass cages, wailing from their many mouths. Bloating, Ogryn-like creatures lurked in the shadows, chained to massive drums skinned with human flesh. The floor of the sanctum bore a carrion octagram, an eight-sided ritual sign made from the charred and rotting bodies of sacrificial victims. Illumination spilled across it from a trio of onyx braziers dotted around the room's circumference. Two burned with flames of yellow and green, the other with a leaping inferno of black and gold.

At the heart of that hellish shrine, a dark ritual was well underway. Lord

Xorphas stood at the chamber's centre, his back to a hideous altar that was as much squirming meat as it was iron and crystal. The scorched ruin of an ancient casket lay at the Sorcerer's feet – the fell Miserium that had been used to curse the Blood Angels with madness lay within. Around him in a circle stood his most favoured acolytes. Black Legion Sorcerers and blank-masked cult-demagogues, the figures swayed and chanted in the emerald firelight, forming harsh and sinister words that tore at their bleeding lips.

'Brothers,' intoned Xorphas, his voice deep and rich like molten brass, 'acolytes. We do the will of the Gods. We do the will of the Despoiler.'



'The Despoiler,' chanted his acolytes.

'The Miserium is burned,' cried Xorphas, raising his jagged blade high, 'the storm has dragged the Angels from their perches and cast them into the abyss of madness!'

'The abyss,' chanted his acolytes.

'The ritual proceeds,' smiled Xorphas cruelly, 'the second anointing has been completed.'

'The second anointing,' hissed the acolytes as their master turned to look upon the small crystal spheres that hung in the air above the altar. There had been three when the Black Legion had entered the Diamor



System, each filled with a dark, glimmering liquid. Now only two remained, slowly orbiting one another above the shattered remains of their broken brother.

'The second anointing,' chanted the acolytes again, and as they did so, Lord Xorphas reached out and crushed another of the orbs in his armoured fist. Black, impossibly glowing ichor oozed between his fingers, drizzling into a slaving maw that peeled open in the fleshy altar's surface. It guzzled hungrily, its thick, clumsy tongue cutting itself on misshapen crystal fangs as it guzzled down every last drop of the spilled fluid. As the last trickles were consumed, a wave of shadowy energies surged through the chamber. The acolytes raised a great cry, and at the chamber's edges, the chained drum-slaves set their instruments to thundering, hammering out a frenzied rhythm. There was a roar like dragon's fire, and the fires in the second brazier curdled with dark tendrils of energy. Now two tall pyres of black and gold flame leapt and danced in the sanctum. Only one remained green and yellow.

As the drums continued to boom, Lord Xorphas turned back to his acolytes, raising his arms high.

'So I have foreseen,' he intoned, relishing the words, 'to open the gate where the Neverborn scream, first must come the threefold anointing. The blood of the scholars, the living machines bled. The cursed ones, haunted by power and open to the thirsting soil. The Fallen Angels, nobility turned to madness and spilt blood. All these we have brought to pass. Only one step remains.'

Xorphas' acolytes chanted and cried out, the Sorcerer basking for a moment in their wild adulation.

'First lord Kranon and his dogs bled the Machine-priests for us, and by their madness showed where the gate could be found.'

'The gate!' boomed the acolytes, accompanied by the maddened pounding of drums.

'Then we wrought a madness of angels, and as foreseen, they fell upon Kranon's cursed brothers with great fury. Even as they made war, they were the sacrificial blades in our hands!'

'The blades!' howled Xorphas' coven, many brandishing their own wicked ritual daggers.

'And now,' drawled Lord Xorphas, 'must come the third and final anointing. The blood of friend and foe alike must run in rivers, so that the screaming stone be fed.'

He raised his blade once more, then swept it down, hacking the burned remnants of the Miserium in two.

'Now!' he roared, 'now comes the appointed hour!'

The drums ceased their beat. The acolytes froze, barely even daring to draw breath. For several heartbeats, the only sound in the sanctum was the crackle and flicker of the braziers.

Then came a dolorous chime, and from the maws of the sanctum's vox gargoyles spilled the voice of the *Stygian Beast's* captain.

'Lord Xorphas. My lord, the warpvanes have detected multiple contacts translating beyond Onyrix and moving rapidly in-system. Their spoor is that of renegade warships, but they are not answering our challenges. Should we move to intercept, lord?'

'Would you deny the sacred blade of the Gods themselves?' asked Xorphas by way of reply.

'Lord?' Came the confused response after a moment, and the Sorcerer barked a mirthless laugh.

'Fire on those ships, and I'll skin you myself. The final anointing is at hand. Khâr has arrived...'

Out in the void, a ragged flotilla burned hard for Amethal, plunging like a great dagger towards the cursed world. Upon the flank of each battle-scarred warship was branded the brazen rune of Khorne.

Korbadash exulted in the G-force rush of the Dreadclaw's descent. The ancient Drop Pod plunged through Amethal's atmosphere, and the Khorne Berzerkers within felt every last pound of the crushing pressure. They had disabled the craft's atmospheric wards and gravitic compensators to make it thus; such coddling comforts were for weaklings.

Above, beyond Amethal's atmosphere, the battleships of the Butcherhorde's fleet were savaging their enemies. Below lay the place prophesied in blood, where the Sons of Sanguinius would be fought and slain. They had already swept the Crimson Slaughter aside. No matter, thought Korbadash with a brutal leer, the angels would face some real warriors.

'Soon I shall claim the skulls of the fallen angels,' roared Korbadash over the shuddering howl of the Dreadclaw's descent.

'Ha,' barked Vrakha from across the pod. 'You will stumble in my bloody wake, Korbadash. I may leave you the chaff if you are lucky, but the skulls of the angels are mine.'

Korbadash growled as the Butcher's Nails bit deep into his mind, fuelling his anger. One eyelid flickered, and his sharpened teeth ground together hard enough to crack enamel.

'You?' he grated in disgust. 'You are slow, Vrakha, old and frail. I would take your skull before theirs, were it even a worthy offering.'

The other Berzerkers strapped into the Dreadclaw laughed savagely at this, or spat threats and imprecations of their own. Chainaxes revved. Fists were slammed against breastplates, the millennia-old Legion salute perverted into a gesture not of honour, but of raw aggression.

The Berzerkers' boasts were silenced as the Dreadclaw's vox came alive with a howl of static. Through the rasping hiss came the voice of the Betrayer. It was the voice of murder given physical form, a gravelly snarl that carried barely restrained fury in every bitten out word.

'Warriors of Khorne, listen well.' Korbadash knew this would be reaching out to every drop craft in

the massive attack wave about to fall upon the world below. He bridled at the arrogance of the Betrayer, commanding the entire Butcherhorde to hear his words. The Berzerkers kept shouting and bragging, but they listened to him all the same.

'In moments, we land,' growled Khârn, 'and when we do, we kill for Khorne.'

'Kill for Khorne!' roared the Berzerkers in response.

'But know this. I lead the attack,' rumbled Khârn menacingly. 'The most worthy skulls are mine. Those who forget, I butcher like dogs.'

The Berzerkers' warcries mingled with bellows of outrage and anger. Foam frothed over their bloodstained lips as they cursed the Betrayer. Each swore they would claim more skulls than him, or even kill Khârn themselves, and in so doing win the Blood God's eternal favour.

'Blood for the Blood God!' roared Khârn. 'Skulls for the Skull Throne! Kill! Maim! Burn!'



Then, the Dreadclaw's retro-thrusters fired with gut-punching force, the drop restraints released and – as the pod's hatch irised open – the Khorne Berzerkers leapt out into battle. They were met by a hail of firepower. Vrakha dropped out first, eager to make good on his boasts. He was spun off his feet instantly, half his helm melted away by plasma. Korbadaash leapt after him without hesitation, boots clanging down on his comrade's armoured corpse. He had not even drawn breath for a war cry before shots were hammering him like hail.

A sane warrior might have at the very least flinched. Instead, Korbadaash hoisted Vrakha's body like a shield and waded into the rain of death. His former comrade's body danced and twitched as it was pummelled, blood spraying in all directions.

'How many skulls will you claim now, eh Vrakha?' roared Korbadaash, laughing madly. 'How many?'

Behind, more Berzerkers were dropping from their Dreadclaw, which was itself being riddled with heavy calibre shots. To the fore, Korbadaash could see grey-robed Adeptus Mechanicus warriors, drawn up in a firing line on the rocky ridge that overlooked the landing site. More Khornate craft were slamming down all around, but the Skitarii were present in numbers, and in the distance Korbadaash could see Knights looming over the trees.

'It's just more skulls for the taking,' he grinned, then hurled aside his comrade's corpse and charged.

Galvanic rounds whined around the Berzerker, more spanging and bouncing off his red and brass plate. Electrical charge crackled across him where each shot struck home, and the smell of cooking flesh filled Korbadaash's nostrils. He shrugged off the pain, just as he ignored the servos sparking out in his armour and the whine from his over-strained power pack.

'Skulls for Khorne!' he bellowed, as his boots bit into the rocky ridge, propelling him forwards like a battering ram. He leapt the last few yards in a heartbeat, chainaxe raised high, then crashed into the midst of his foes. His weapon swung and swung again, howling teeth chewing through metal and flesh. Oily blood sprayed. Goggle-eyed heads bounced and rolled down the slope, all pallid flesh and sparking neck stumps. Korbadaash took another shot to the chest, point-blank, stopping one of his hearts dead. He ignored it and butchered his way on through the press. These things were chaff, he thought through a red haze. They were just in the way. It was the angels' skulls he wanted, and he would claim them even if he had to battle Khârn himself for the honour.



The Khornate combat drop came down almost twenty miles outside of War Zone Carnage. There was no order to the attack, no strategy or regimentation. At the first signs of the Chaos attack wave descending, the remaining Metalican forces around Carnage moved to intercept. They drew up in firing lines around the drop zone. They rapidly projected the flight trajectories of the enemy craft, lined up their sights upon pre-cogitated landing sites, then waited for the optimum moment.

The Khornate craft met with a thunderous rain of fire, many exploding even before they hit the ground. More slammed down only to be blown apart by volleys of missiles, or filled with phosphor flames the moment their ramps yawned open.

Still the drop craft rained down, more blood-red vessels making landfall with every passing minute. Khornate Cultists boiled from spike-hulled landers, only to be ripped apart by flickering rains of energy or atomised by explosive munitions. Berzerkers launched themselves howling from within their craft, and were punched off their feet by arquebus fire and searing laser beams.

Here and there, the Blood God's worshippers made it into the enemy ranks. They wrought bloody havoc, at least until combat servitors and armoured robots lumbered in to pulp and crush. The Khornate tide continued to grow, but the methodical annihilation being wrought by the Adeptus Mechanicus was sufficient to stem it.

Then, diving down through the hammering flak screen came a baroque Thunderhawk, its hull twisted into grotesque shapes and painted the hue of dried blood. Icarus warheads hammered into its armoured hull as it neared the ground. Trailing flames, the craft hurtled relentlessly onwards and executed a brutal combat landing amid a mass of Electro-Priests. The aircraft's front ramp crashed down like a castle drawbridge, and from within burst Khârn the Betrayer.

Khârn took in the scene even as he charged down his craft's assault ramp, Gorechild roaring in his fist.

'Kill!' howled Khârn, a single axe-swing carving three Electro-Priests apart in a welter of gore. 'Maim!' he roared, weaving around the swing of a stave and shattering its wielder's skull with a thunderous headbutt. 'Burn!' Khârn bellowed, firing plasma pistol shots into a nearby Dunecrawler until it detonated in a fierce fireball.



Khârn's retinal display was swarming with foe-runes and hazard warnings. The Betrayer saw only skulls to be taken, murder to be wrought. His hearts were hammering like bolters on full auto, his system flooded with combat drugs and daemonic energies that slowed his reality to a crawl.

Khârn stepped contemptuously aside as a volley of plasma blasts seared past, then charged into the midst of the tracked battle servitors that had fired them. Gorechild took the first, splitting it from crown to tracked carriage in a single blow. The second rotated, gimbaled gyros whining as it tried to get a clear shot. Khârn spun inside its firing arc. He hacked off its plasma culverin, then fired his pistol up through its jaw to reduce the thing's head to a smouldering stump.

'Kill! Maim! Burn!' bellowed Khârn again, vox-grill amplifying his voice into a god-like boom. 'Blood for the Blood God!' A deranged roar went up from the Khornate masses, and they redoubled their efforts to close with their foes.

Despatching the third servitor, Khârn ploughed on into his massed foes. Where they directed volleys of rad-

rounds at him, the Betrayer slid under the shots or hurled himself through them without slowing. Where blank-faced robots tried to crush him in their ironclad fists, Gorechild whirled to lop off limbs, sunder metal bodies and hack the heads from the magi who directed the machines. Nothing could stand before Khârn's fury. No enemy was quick or deadly enough to stop his rampage. He hacked down Skitarii Alphas and butchered their squads. He chopped his way through masses of Electro-Priests, shrugging off their arc-bright blows and ripping them apart. With every moment that passed, the Betrayer's rampage barrelled onwards through the Imperial forces and left ever-greater heaps of corpses in his wake.

It was then that the sky darkened with heavy craft, monstrous drop ships resembling ragged chunks of gothic architecture hurled at the planet by a careless god. Void shields flickered and burned around the super-heavy ships as the Adeptus Mechanicus hammered them with fire. A false dusk fell as their shadows pooled and spread, before they made their landings with ground-shaking force.

Khârn growled his approval as he saw the ships' huge ramps slam down, crushing Metalicans and Khorne worshippers alike. Within glowed hellish forge fires, flickering through the sulphurous fumes that spilled across the battlefield. From their depths came vast Khornate war engines, Lords of Skulls and skitter-legged Brass Scorpions falling upon the Metalicans like alpha predators.

Millennia of war told Khârn that the fight was tipping fast in his favour. The Metalicans' perfect defence was cracking. With each new fault that developed, more and more Berzerkers, Cultists and Daemon Engines slipped through the web of firepower. Ever more Khornate craft rained from the skies, landing now amongst and even behind the Adeptus Mechanicus lines. Yes, thought the Betrayer, battle was about to become unholy butchery.

The ground shook with pounding footfalls, and a vox-horn boomed out a binharic war cry. Looking up, the Betrayer saw a red-hulled Knight looming over him, its head tilted

down to pin him with its dispassionate stare. The war engine's roaring chainblade swept down and Khârn hurled himself aside. He rolled to his feet with a manic laugh, sweeping Gorechild up in a thunderous arc. Mica-dragon teeth bit through adamantium and ceramite in a rain of sparks, and the Knight's severed chainblade crashed to the ground.

The war machine took a step back, trying to swing its battle cannon to bear. Before it could, the Betrayer leapt high and clove through the Knight's nearest knee-joint. Again, Gorechild could not be denied, and the towering machine left half of one leg behind as it tried to back away. Slowly, like some great tree, the Imperial Knight tipped sideways, before crashing down hard. Khârn laughed as his followers boiled across the felled machine, tearing its canopy open and hacking madly at the exposed pilot within. These fools were doomed, thought the Betrayer contemptuously. Time to move on in search of a more worthy challenge.









Korbadash sprinted hard across the open ground, leaping craters and dodging the bullet-riddled wrecks of Crimson Slaughter tanks. The ground shook and split beneath the grinding tracks of a nearby Lord of Skulls, but Korbadash kept his footing with a warrior's skill. Other Berzerkers pelted along to either side of him, and hundreds more followed behind, but only one was ahead of him. Only one was closer to the smoke-belching ruins of the Adeptus Mechanicus' fortifications, and the Blood Angels that waited there.

Khârn. Betrayer, and hated favourite of Khorne. With Khârn in his sights, Korbadash ran all the harder. Both of his hearts were beating again now, the remarkable healing properties of the Adeptus Astartes sustaining his frame as he charged through battle. They drove him forwards, legs and arms pumping, warcries spilling from his lips. The edge of the ruins loomed.

Engines screamed as, swooping out of the smoke, a trio of black-hulled Stormravens shot overhead. Missiles detached from their wings on trails of fire, streaking down over Korbadash's head and detonating amongst the Khornate horde. He felt the heat wash from the blasts, and his autosenses dulled for a moment to preserve his hearing from the thunderous booms. Korbadash kept running. Those who died were weak, not worthy of his thoughts. Those who lived remained as rivals.

Khârn had reached the edge of the prefabs now, clearing a mangled barricade in a single leap and vanishing amid the shadows of the looming ruins. Korbadash was hot on his heels, vaulting the barricade and sprinting on along the cracked ferrocrete of a war-torn processional. Lightning flickered between the buckled pylons that lined the roadway, and heaps of rubble lay before the sundered facades of buildings like

guts spilled from a corpse. Khârn was nowhere to be seen.

'Come on!' roared Korbadash, firing his bolt pistol into the air. 'Angels of death! Angels of the corpse god! Where are you?' More Berzerkers were spilling into the street behind him now, as they would be all along this edge of the battle-scarred complex. 'Are you afraid to face real warriors?' screamed Korbadash, anger surging hot through his veins and washing his vision with a haze of red.

In answer, the Stormravens swept overhead, coming back the other way and straight up the processional. A howling storm of bolts washed the ground before them, sending Khorne Berzerkers juddering to the floor in splattered halos of blood. At the same moment, the ruins to either side of the street came alive with black-armoured figures. Bellowed Baalite warcries rang out across the ruins. Jump packs coughed and spat

flame and, like the closing jaws of a predatory beast, a wave of Death Company Marines sprung from the flanks of the procession to attack.

'Yes,' leered Korbadaash, turning and charging straight at the nearest black-clad warrior. He swung his chainaxe in a long arc, aiming to disembowel his foe before the final decapitating strike. The Blood Angel was too quick; snarling through his vox-grill, the loyalist swung his chainsword to parry the blow. The two weapons met in a spray of sparks, chain teeth grinding against one another. Korbadaash leaned all his weight upon his weapon, trying to bull through the Blood Angel's guard, but found his savage strength held at bay. The Berzerker's eyes bulged behind his faceplate as he realised it was he, not the Blood Angel, who was being pushed back.

'You will not take the palace, traitor!' shouted the black-clad Space Marine, his whole body shaking with rage. 'Horus will fall!'

By way of a response, Korbadaash kicked his enemy as hard as he could in the knee. Ceramite buckled, bone shattered, and the loyalist pitched sideways as his leg gave out beneath him. It was all the opening Korbadaash needed. The Berzerker stepped aside as the Blood Angel's chainblade chewed into the ground, raising his axe and bringing its whirling teeth straight down on his enemy's neck. Blood jetted as he hewed the Death Company Marine's head from his armoured shoulders.

Reaching down, Korbadaash plucked the helmeted head from the ground, hoisting it high and bellowing out praise to Khorne. Here was his offering, the first of many. This was the bloody crucible in which the Blood God's favour could be won. But then, if that were true, thought Korbadaash suddenly, where was Khârn? With a snarl, the Berzerker mag-locked his victim's helmet to his hip and plunged on into the ruins. Wherever the Betrayer was, he thought fiercely, that was where the true glory would be had. Perhaps he would even slay Khârn with his own blade, and then he, Korbadaash, would become the chosen of Khorne.



BLOOD IN THE STREETS

Khârn felt the enemy moving all around him. He knew they were out there, he could scent their souls, taste the blood pounding through their veins. Their numbers were nothing like those of the warriors who followed him, but each angel was mighty in his own right. Khârn knew the Death Company's leaders would be coordinating their attacks, moving not as a horde but as a single entity to reap the Khorne-worshippers' lives in great number.

Lords of Skulls ground down flaming streets, black-armoured Blood Angels disintegrating before their gunfire. Khorne worshippers flung themselves mindlessly at their foes, dozens blown off their feet in hails of bolter fire

before they could get to grips with the Death Company. Khârn exhorted them onwards, bellowing a constant mantra of blood-mad hatred through the vox. He cared nothing for strategy, or lives. He cared only that Khorne have his due.

'Kill! Maim! Burn!' roared Khârn as he smashed through a cracked wall and into a wide roadway between two sagging data-shrines. He emerged between a mass of Berzerkers and Cultists charging from one direction, and a jump-packing band of Death Company Marines coming from the other. Khârn's eyes settled on the Death Company Chaplain who led the lost brothers. His armour was magnificent in its artifice, his crozius

crackled with power. Here was a worthy skull for Khorne, thought the Betrayer with a surge of battle-lust.

'Kill! Maim! Burn!' bellowed Khârn again, breaking into a headlong charge down the ruined street. The Khorne worshippers swept in behind him, howling like mad dogs at the prospect of bloodshed. The Death Company didn't slow, even with Khârn the Betrayer coming straight at them. They boomed out warcries of their own and jetted hard into battle.

Khârn met the first of the black-armoured warriors with a point-blank plasma blast to the face. The shot vaporised the Blood Angel from the gorget upwards, and Khârn



shouldered his corpse aside with contempt. Stormravens screamed low overhead, their rockets raising leaping fireballs in the next street along.

'Blood for the Blood God!' shouted Khârn, smashing a Berzerker from his path with Gorechild then lashing out at a Death Company Marine. His swing was stopped before it could connect, met in a burst of crackling energy by the crozius of the Death Company Chaplain.

'Face me, monster,' boomed the Chaplain over the clangour of battle, 'I am Daenor of the Blood Angels.'

The Betrayer barked a laugh.

'It's a fool who places his head on the block and dares the executioner to take his best swing. And I am no fool,' growled Khârn, stepping back from this challenger and mag-locking his gun to his thigh. 'How long do you think you can stop me from taking your head, Daenor of the Blood Angels? Five seconds?' Khârn swung Gorechild back and forth in roaring cuts. 'Ten?'

'I will break you as Sanguinius did Ka'Bandha before the gates of the Emperor's Palace, traitor,' responded Daenor. 'I am a son of the Angel.'

'There was only ever one Angel,' growled Khârn, his voice rising to a shout, 'and he was red!' Khârn

hurled himself at the Chaplain with breathtaking speed. Daenor swung his crozius, attempting to crush the Betrayer's skull. Instead he took Khârn's shoulder to his breastplate, ceramite cracking under the impact. Daenor's jump pack flared, propelling him backwards out of his enemy's reach. It was a timely move. Gorechild's screaming teeth only missed Daenor by a hair's breadth. The Chaplain landed some distance from the swirling street fight, and Khârn followed, hacking through friend and foe alike. Khârn charged again, swinging Gorechild in an overhead cut. Daenor blocked with his crozius. The Chaplain raised his bolt pistol, but Khârn grabbed its muzzle and squeezed, crushing the barrel. His enemy dropped the weapon with a curse and pistoned a punch into Khârn's faceplate instead.

Khârn laughed as his helm rang like a struck bell. This one gave good sport. The Betrayer swung Gorechild in a series of lightning-fast cuts, striking crackling blasts of energy from his foe's weapon each time he parried. He drove the Chaplain back until his jump pack thumped against the data-temple wall, then spun in a mighty full-circle swing. With nowhere to go, the Chaplain fired his jump pack again and shot straight upwards, but not quickly enough. Gorechild whipped round and caught the Chaplain's shin as he lifted off, buckling armour and shattering bone.

Khârn's enemy landed in a ragged hole partway up the data-temple wall, and limped inside. The Betrayer knew that Daenor was leading him away from the remaining Death Company. He didn't realise that Khârn cared nothing for the fate of those who fought in the street behind him. They were all just meat and skulls. They would all be claimed.

Khârn swung Gorechild again, cleaving a ragged entrance into the building. Roaring, he plunged through the rent and into the temple's rubble-strewn interior. Khârn ran along one corridor then turned into another, ignoring the sparking armaglass panels and sacred datastacks that surrounded him. He could hear the thump of his victim's hearts, ahead and upwards. Without a second thought the Betrayer crouched, then executed an inhuman leap, his incredible strength propelling him up through the ceiling into the corridor above. Rubble rained down as Khârn landed before his resolute enemy. Staggering on his mangled leg, Daenor raised his crozius before him like a holy symbol to ward away some Daemon. In response, Khârn dropped his shoulder and charged headlong. He hit the Chaplain at the waist and propelled him off his feet. Khârn roared as he hammered the Chaplain backwards into the corridor's far wall and out, in an explosion of ferrocrete dust, into the street beyond.

Korbadash skidded to a stop as two figures burst from the flank of a nearby building. Khârn, locked together with a Death Company Chaplain. Trailing rubble, they fell from the first floor of the ruin into the street. Khârn landed atop his foe with an audible crunch of bones, before hammering his fist into the Chaplain's helm. The Betrayer rose, straddling his victim with his back to Korbadash. This was his moment, realised the Berzerker. He would slay both the Betrayer and his quarry, and earn Khorne's greatest blessings. Daemonhood beckoned!

Korbadash broke into a run, closing the gap upon the battered combatants. As though in slow motion, Khârn raised Gorechild high and brought the weapon arcing down. The Chaplain raised his crozius at the last moment, turning the blow in a bloom of white light, but as the flare died away it was clear that would be his last act of defiance. Gorechild had severed the warrior's arm and sent it, crozius and all, tumbling away into the dust.

Korbadash's mouth split in a hungry grin. His chainaxe swept around to strike the killing blow. One moment, the Betrayer seemed utterly oblivious, intent on his mangled prey. The next, he was turning, on his feet, weaving aside from the Berzerker's killing stroke with speed that seemed impossible for such a hulking butcher.

And then Korbadash was sprawled in the roadway. The Berzerker tried to rise, but slumped forwards as he realised that Khârn had hacked him in half. Korbadash rolled onto his side, blood spilling from his mouth as the strength gushed from his body. His vision dimmed fast, and everything seemed to shake as though the ground itself was shuddering in death agonies along with him.

The last thing Korbadash saw was a vast figure looming over him, a shadowy mountain, a god come to claim its due. With that last terrible thought, Korbadash died.

Khârn looked slowly up from the cloven body of his ambitious would-be murderer. An Imperial Reaver Titan loomed into view above him, footsteps shaking the ground. The engine seemed to fill up the whole world with its enormity. Its shadow engulfed him utterly, throwing a shroud across both Khârn and the maimed Chaplain who still lay in the roadway. The Metalican emblem upon the Reaver's chest left Khârn in no doubt of its loyalties.

The Titan raised one tank-sized foot and took a striding step down the street. Khârn leapt back as the war engine's foot descended, slamming down like a pile driver. The ground buckled beneath the god-machine's tread, and Khârn was hurled unceremoniously from his feet. He cursed, scrambling upright again amid the billowing dust and unnatural shadow. The Betrayer felt the air pressure contract around him, his ears popping and his armour crawling with corpusant as the war engine's void shields passed over and enveloped him. The Titan hadn't even registered the foe beneath its feet, its weapons drawing down upon targets in more distant streets. It stung the Betrayer's martial pride to be treated as an irrelevance, and he howled with anger as he pumped plasma shots up at the thing's knee joint. This was no Knight, however. The ravening blasts of energy splashed against the Titan's leg, blackening its paintwork but achieving little else.

"MODERATH, ADJUST SPEED TWO KNOTS AND TARGET THE DAEMON ENGINES TO OUR RIGHT. POWER UP THE PLASMA BLASTGUN AND... WHAT... WHAT WAS THAT? UPON THE HULL? AUSPEX SWEEP, NOW! IT CAN'T BE. NO. NO! KEEP THEM OUT! NO!"

*-Last words of Princeps Gauvanos,
Legio Metalica*

Then the Titan was moving again, swinging its other leg forwards to pass the first. The roadway was barely wide enough for the god machine to progress down it, but that mattered little. Where the Titan's weapon limbs struck the buildings they simply tore away great chunks of masonry, smashing the buildings aside with

the ease of a man parting tall grass. Rubble sluiced down upon Khârn in a landslide as the Titan swept over him.

The Betrayer cursed in fury as thundering wreckage and billowing dust engulfed him. He fought against the stony tide, but darkness swallowed him as the rubble closed over his head. Khârn raged. He thrashed. He shattered and clawed until he was free once again. By the time he had dragged himself from the tumbled ruins, both the Titan, and his Chaplain victim, were gone.

Denied his worthy skull, the Betrayer's rage was beyond mortal comprehension. A wave of pure fury rolled out from his armoured form, scorching the rubble black, and his deafening war cry shattered those few windows that remained in the street's battered facades.

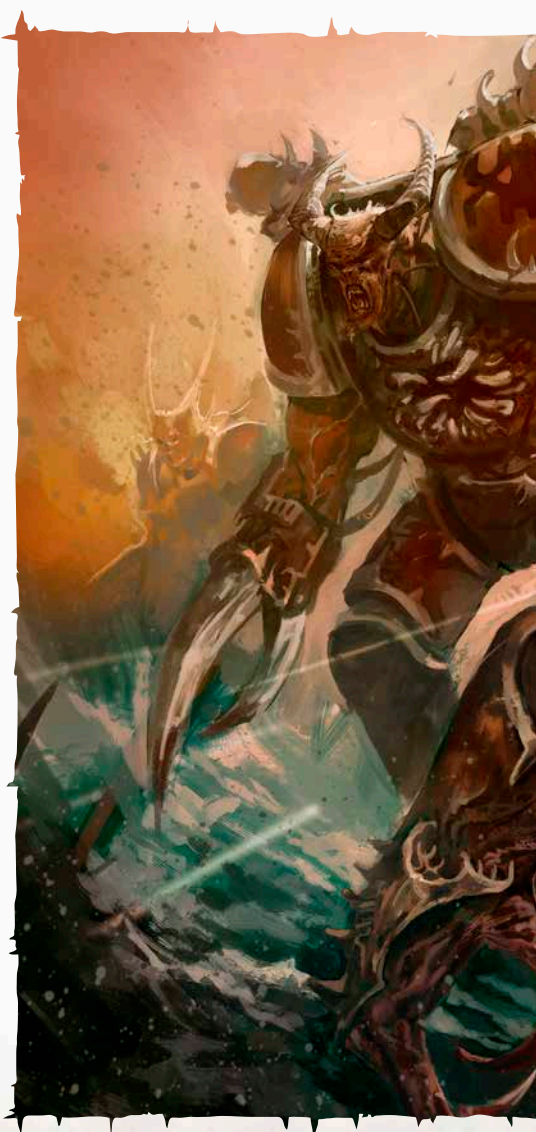
Over the rooftops of the ruins around him, Khârn could see the god-like forms of more Imperial Titans moving, wading through the devastation with their weapons tracking right and left. As they sighted his followers, their guns lit with apocalyptic fury, blazing columns of light and fire stabbing downwards to blow buildings apart and scour the streets of Khorne worshippers. There was bloodshed in this, thought Khârn, but not glory. Not the skulls of the Imperial lapdogs. This could not be allowed. The Titans must die.

The hours that followed were a whirlwind of violence. The Titans of the Legio Metalica swept into War Zone Carnage, bulldozing those structures that got in their way and blasting ragged holes in the Khornate horde whenever they caught sight of them. The remnants of the vastly outnumbered Death Company disappeared amidst the mayhem, most likely slain to the last. Without their Chaplains to guide them, those Blood Angels lost to the Black Rage would not notice the danger of their position or recognise an extraction point, even if they were standing in it.

This left the red-armoured psychopaths of the Butcherhorde crashing against the Titans of the Legio Metalica like waves against towering cliffs. Khârn witnessed whole bands of the faithful crushed by

descending footfalls. He saw missiles the length of Rhinos slam down, one after the other, filling roads with fire and reducing warbands to ash. He felt the drumming pressure of building-sized weapons discharging over his head, and watched thermobaric shock waves burst Cultists like blood-filled balloons as they rolled across them.

Khârn fought like a lunatic, exhorting the followers of Khorne to greater heights of violence and spitting scorn upon them where they showed weakness. It was Khârn that led a loping Warhound Titan out into the wreck-scattered square before the eastern forge-temple, and straight into the teeth of a Trinity of Blood. Booming monstrous warcries, the three super-heavy Daemon Engines hammered the Titan with fire from every side, collapsing its void shields



and rolling forwards to hack it apart with vast chain cleavers.

It was Khârn, also, who scaled the flank of a towering factorum-stack at the head of fifty Khorne Berzerkers and leapt from its heights onto the carapace of an Imperial Reaver as it was moving between engagement zones. The Betrayer hacked his way through the war engine's armoured hull, leading those few Berzerkers who had survived the strafing of the Titan's gatling blasters. They butchered the machine's crew, leaving it looming, cold and dead in the middle of the street.

By the time darkness fell across the blazing ruins around the Adeptus Mechanicus dig-site, casualties had become horrific on both sides. The streets had been baptised once more

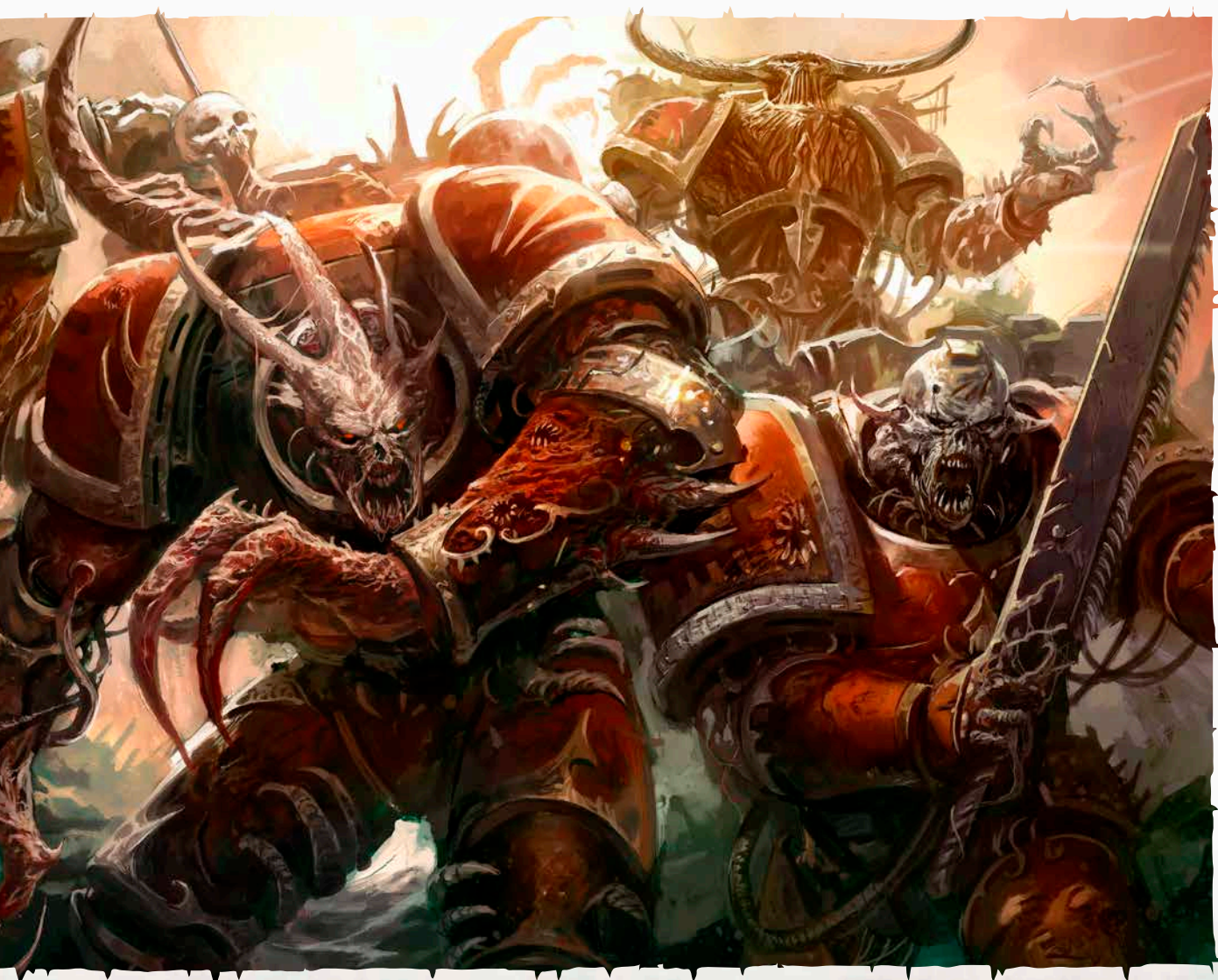
in the blood of the slain, the Blood God's due staining the streets. The Death Company were annihilated, and no fewer than six engines of the Legio Metalica had either fallen, or been so badly damaged by their deranged foes that they had no choice but to disengage, unable to continue the fight without repairs.

In return, the Blood Angels and god-machines had massacred vast swathes of Khorne worshippers. They had piled their bodies in bloody mounds, and reduced their war engines to sparking scrap metal. Dozens of Daemon Engines had been blown apart, and of the vast red attack wave that had swept down upon the landing zone earlier that day, only scattered warbands remained. Whatever cohesion the Khornate attack had possessed was broken,

and as the surviving Legio Metalica engines limped away into the night, so too did the last of the Khornate forces scatter to the four winds.

Khârn lived still, upon a world full of foes. The greatest remaining strength of the Butcherhorde followed in his footsteps as he set out from War Zone Carnage into the firelit night, pushing west onto the dust plains in search of the roving Imperial patrols and Metalican facilities that dotted that cratered expanse.

The Betrayer knew that the Blood God would be pleased with his offerings this day, for thousands of skulls had been piled before his great brass throne. But there must always be more, for Khorne's lust for murder is never sated, and so Khârn pressed on in search of fresh skulls to claim.









KHÂRN'S BUTCHERHORDE

The Khornate horde that attacked Amethal was a ragged and fractious alliance of bloodthirsty lunatics, held together by the unbreakable will of Khârn the Betrayer. Separate from the invasion force led by Lord Xorphas, Khârn's Butcherhorde nonetheless furthered the will of the Black Legion thanks to the machinations of Abaddon the Despoiler.

Khârn the Betrayer led his monstrous Butcherhorde to Amethal with but a single goal. He sought to take the heads of the most worthy Blood Angels heroes, to hack their skulls from their necks and place them at the foot of Khorne's great throne. Where that notion had come from, not even Khârn could say. The Betrayer's perception of reality was so warped by rage that he could not be sure whether he had been given his task in some gore-drenched vision from Khorne, or whether some outside agency had planted the seed in his mind. Not that it mattered. Khârn's service to Khorne was absolute, his manic devotion so powerful that – now that the idea had taken root in his mind – no force in the galaxy would keep him from butchering the masters of the Blood Angels like cattle.

Khârn had not set out with the intention of forging a vast army of conquest to aid him in his quest. Indeed,

to Khârn's mind, those who needed others to fight their battles were weaklings undeserving of victory. Rather, the Betrayer's brutal deeds had spread through reality like ripples upon the surface of a bloody pool. So spectacular was the carnage he wrought, so monstrous the butchery of his passing, that Khorne's faithful were drawn in his wake. At first, Khârn fought alone, then at the head of a warband of Khorne Berserkers.

After slaughtering his way across the Sundered Reach, the Betrayer had found himself the master of a murderous army. By the time he had exterminated all life in the Pandoric Colonies, a whole fleet of spike-prowed warships were his to command, their holds crammed with maniacs, murderers, and hellish war engines. It was not power that Khârn had sought, but nor did he cast it aside. Like any true servant of Khorne, the Betrayer knew a deadly weapon



when he saw one. If it was the Blood God's will that he wield that mighty implement of death, then who was he to question it?

So was the Butcherhorde forged, and a terrifying engine of war it was. Great masses of Khorne Berzerkers formed its thundering heart, the warriors from dozens of disparate warbands drawn together in the name of unholy murder. Only the overriding will of the Betrayer kept this psychotic horde of killers from ripping each other to pieces, and even then, blood was spilled daily between them. Khârn cared nothing for the lives of his followers, and so did nothing to intercede. So long as they wrought fit slaughter upon the foe when the time came, it mattered nothing to him if the weak were weeded out by the strong in the meantime. Every warrior slain was another skull for Khorne.

For their part – though the Berzerkers of Khârn's horde followed him as an avatar of their bloody god's will – many amongst their ranks saw him as both a hated rival and the ultimate skull to claim in order to win Khorne's favour.

Such is the way of the Blood God's servants. It was a rare day that the Betrayer did not have to strike down a handful of his own followers as a result of their frenzied attempts on his life.

Many more servants of the Blood God followed in Khârn's wake, lending their strength and numbers to the Butcherhorde. Seething masses of Cultists screamed praise to Khorne as they followed their demigods of slaughter into battle. Looming Daemon Princes led their own bands of followers to war in the Betrayer's name, bringing with them rumbling battle-tanks and deranged Helbrutes that lent the horde heavy firepower.

Most terrifying of all were the massed Daemon Engines of the Butcherhorde. Amongst the packs of prowling Maulerfiends and Defilers towered super-heavy abominations such as the scuttling Brass Scorpions and the Lords of Skulls. Driven by the caged fury of Khorne's most powerful Daemons, these engines of annihilation were nearly as deadly as the Betrayer himself.

THE BLOOD-SOAKED HORDES

The sprawling mass of murderers that Khârn led to Hub Beta-Secundus numbered in its thousands. Amongst the swathes of deranged Cultists and expendable mutants, the blood-splattered Khorne Berzerkers and towering Daemon Engines stood out as by far the most dangerous elements of that skull-reaping horde.

MAELSTROM OF GORE

KHÂRN THE BETRAYER
Champion of Khorne

THE GOREFISTS
8 Khorne Berzerkers

THE BRAZEN TALLY
8 Khorne Berzerkers

THE SKULLRIPPERS
8 Khorne Berzerkers

THE THIRST UNENDING
8 Khorne Berzerkers

THE WORLDENDERS
8 Khorne Berzerkers

THE INFERNAL SLAUGHTERERS
8 Khorne Berzerkers

THE RED FURY
8 Khorne Berzerkers

THE HELLBEASTS
8 Khorne Berzerkers

TRINITY OF BLOOD

GARTOTH THE ANNIHILATOR
Lord of Skulls

XU'KUL OF THE EIGHTH REAPING
Lord of Skulls

AZAGOR, RUIN OF WORLDS
Lord of Skulls



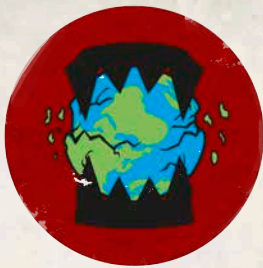
KHÂRN THE BETRAYER

Khârn the Betrayer is the Blood God's greatest mortal champion. For ten thousand years he has slaughtered his way across the stars, reaping the skulls of so many foes that they tower over the Blood God's throne like a mountain. Many mortals would glory in such destruction, proclaiming their deeds from the highest towers and believing themselves due their patron's boons as reward. The Betrayer cares for none of it, for he long ago surpassed such mundane concerns as power or status.

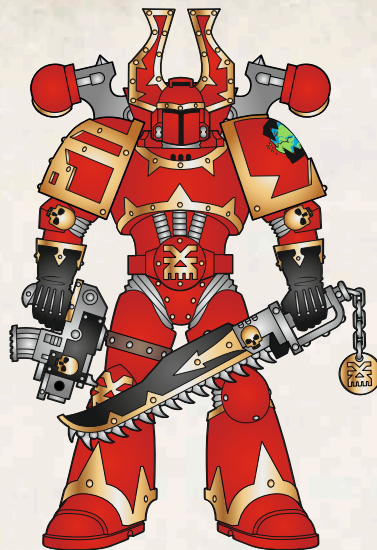
Khârn is the embodiment of Khorne's fury, the incarnation of the eightfold path, and he kills not for his own aggrandisement but for the glory of his wrathful god. This single-minded butcher has nothing but scorn for any who show a lack of resolve in service of the Blood God's cause. Khorne cares not from where the blood flows, only that it does. Those who truly understand his creed know their own skulls are just as welcome as those of their foes, and that even their closest allies are but more grist for the blood god's gory mill.

So it is with Khârn, who will turn his violent rage upon the worthy and the weak with equal readiness. Friend and foe alike are sent sprawling, their bodies torn open and their heads lopped from their shoulders simply for daring to stand before – or beside – Khorne's chosen destroyer amidst the mayhem of battle. A tide of blood spills out from the slain, until Khârn wades through knee-deep gore, slaying everything in his path in the name of almighty Khorne.

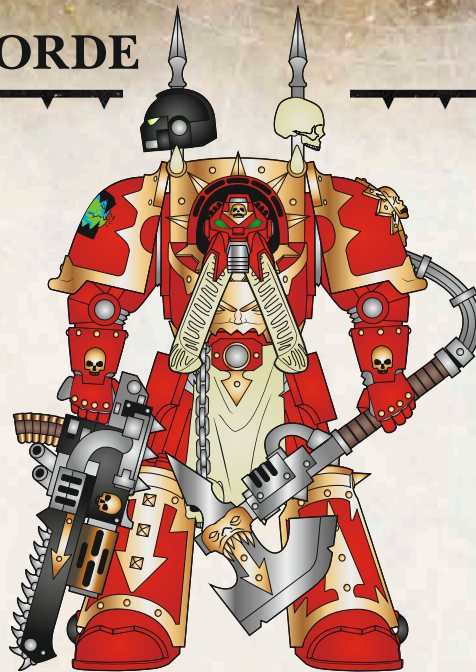
HERALDRY OF THE BUTCHERHORDE



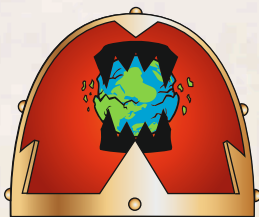
Those warriors who worship Khorne are anarchic individuals, their armies little more than ragged coalitions of rival warbands ready to turn upon one another at the slightest provocation. Only the leadership of a truly mighty individual can hold such a force together for long. So it was with the Butcherhorde, whose numbers included many former World Eaters fighting alongside dozens of minor cults and reavers.



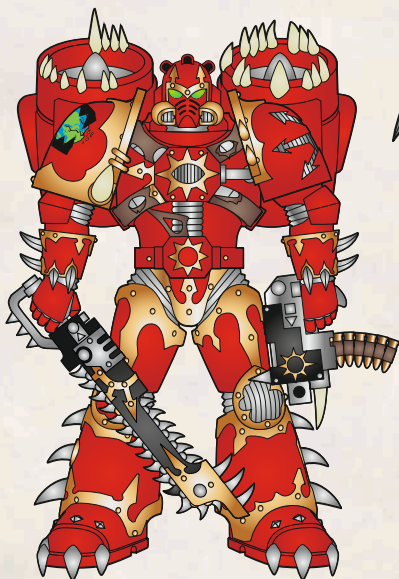
This warrior wears the blood red armour, gold trim, and yawning maw emblem of the World Eaters.



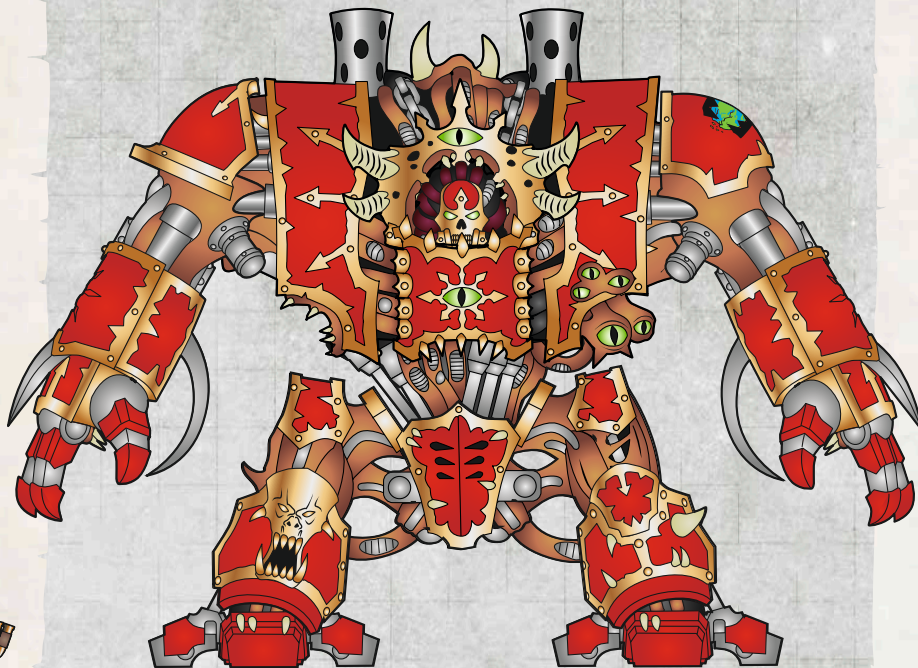
A World Eaters Terminator, boasting his shattered legion's icon upon his right shoulder guard.



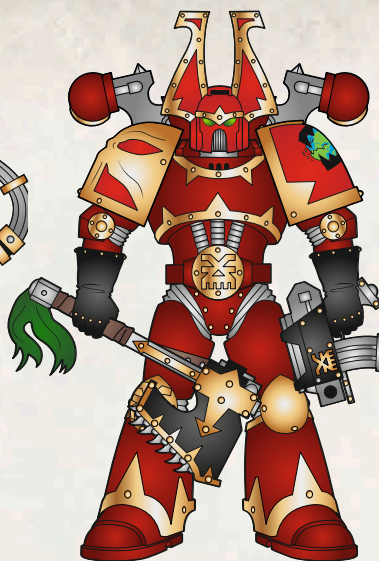
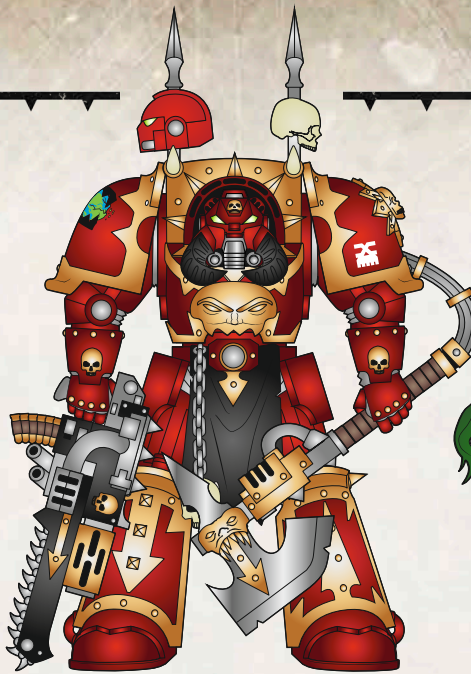
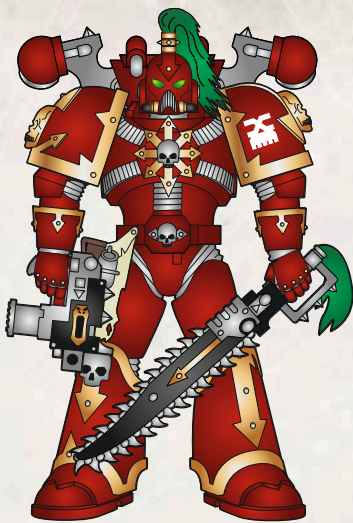
The distinctive symbol of the former World Eaters Legion depicts a planet devoured by a monstrous maw.



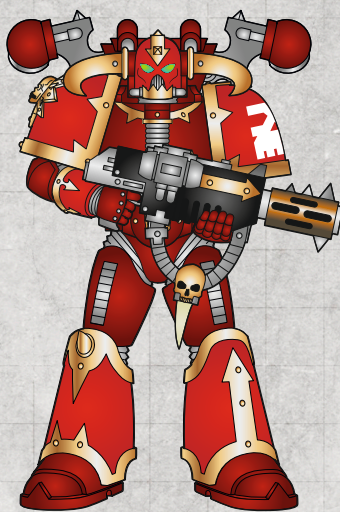
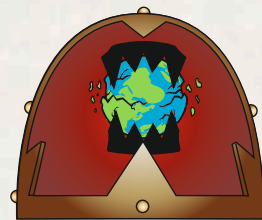
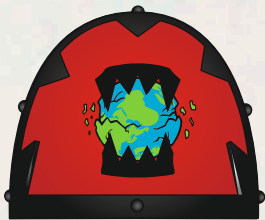
A World Eaters Raptor, displaying his former Legion's symbol upon his right shoulder guard.



This monstrous World Eaters Helbrute is equipped for savage close combat. Its former Legion allegiance is clear from the icon on its shoulder guard, while the eye of the Dark Gods staring from its chest shows that it has the favour of its vile patron.



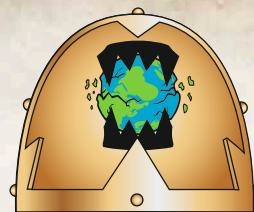
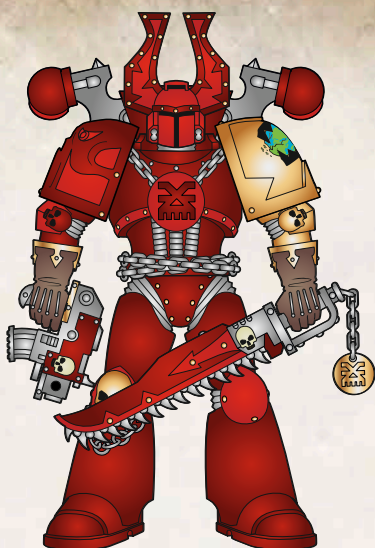
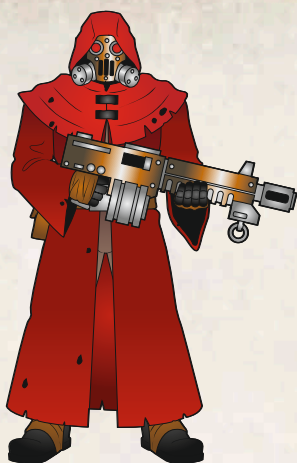
Many warbands made up the Butcherhorde. Some were warriors of the World Eaters, who themselves are splintered into countless murderous hosts, while others bore their own macabre icons alongside the rune of Khorne.



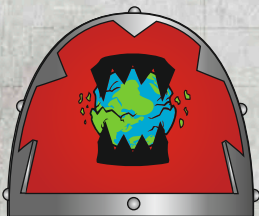
The Black Feast are a cannibalistic sub-sect of the World Eaters who devour the bodies of the fallen after battle as a final mark of disrespect for their weakness.

This Chaos Space Marine belongs to the Sons of Slaughter, as denoted by the white on red rune of Khorne on his shoulder guard.

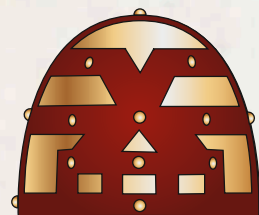
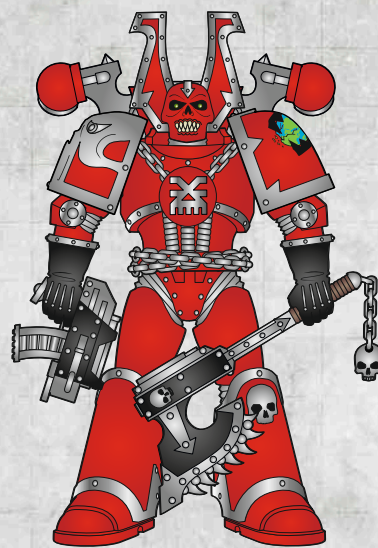
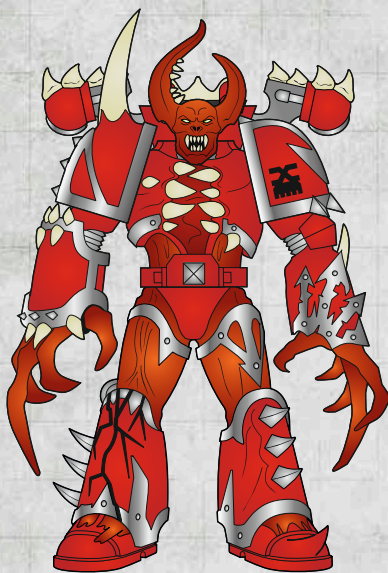
A splinter of the World Eaters, the Harvest Macabre boast brass war helmets and skull designs upon their armour carved from the bones of their victims.



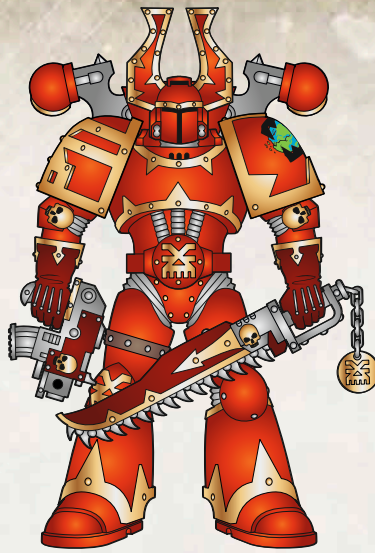
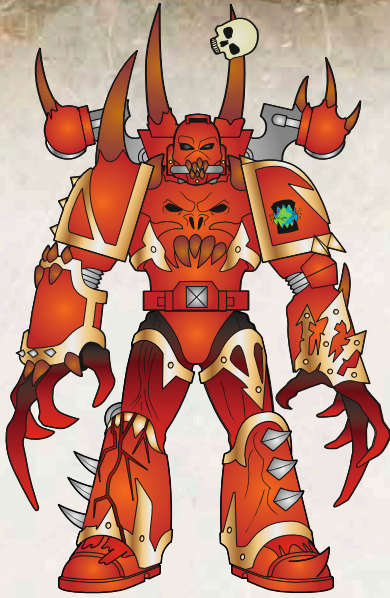
One of the most vicious World Eater warbands in galaxy, the Forge of Hate can be recognised by their golden left shoulder guards and arm plate. Those deranged Cultists who worship them affect golden weapon casings or battle armour, looting Imperial shrines for the raw materials.



The warband known as Angron's Fury edge their armour with gun metal trim, while their icons, gauntlets and weapon casings are black. This warband has many Possessed amongst its ranks, whose spines and claws often manifest as living steel.

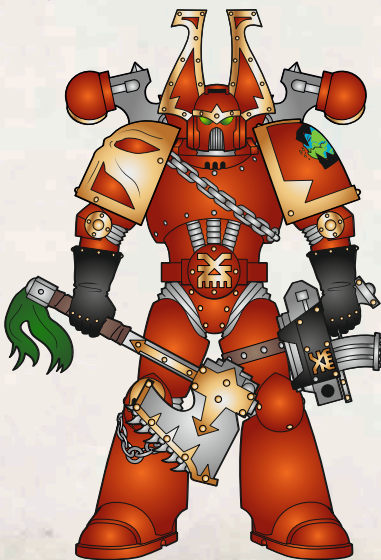
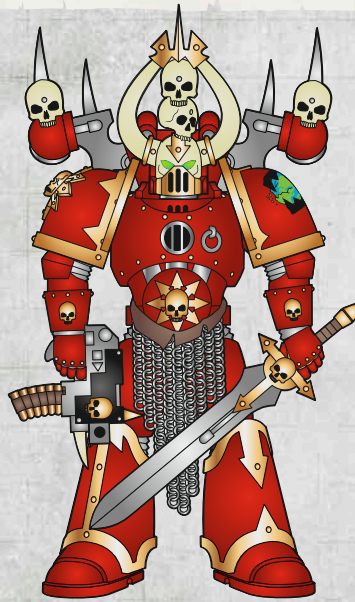


The Oblivion Butchers are a splinter warband of the World Eaters who trace their origins all the way back to the disaster on Skalathrax. Their emblem is a blood red rune of Khorne upon a brass backdrop, and it is feared across the eighty-eight worlds of the Riven Spiral.



Nobody knows where the Endless Murder come from, or where they go when the killing is done. Appearing like a tidal wave from a becalmed ocean, they strike without warning and reduce all before them to bloody carrion and heaped skulls. Then they vanish once more like mist.

The Wrathful Dead wear bone helmets to signify the fact their skulls belong to Khorne. In this way they pledge their deaths to the glory of their wrathful god, robbing their enemies of their victory even should the foe cut them down to the last.



Having waged a century-long war against the Orks of Waaagh! Killstomp, the Bloody Path proclaim their victories with tassels the green of Ork flesh.



The faded armour plates of the Lifeslayers are a result of the extreme war zones through which they fight – they test their might against the very worlds on which they war.



SLAUGHTER UNLEASHED

>>> ASC: 029-057

The traitor invasion of the Diamor System did not go unanswered. Responding to astropathic distress cries, a force of Blood Angels converged on the system. Though subjected to the sorcerous trickery of Lord Xorphas, the Sons of Sanguinius fell upon Amethal and drove back the Crimson Slaughter. Yet worse threats were looming.

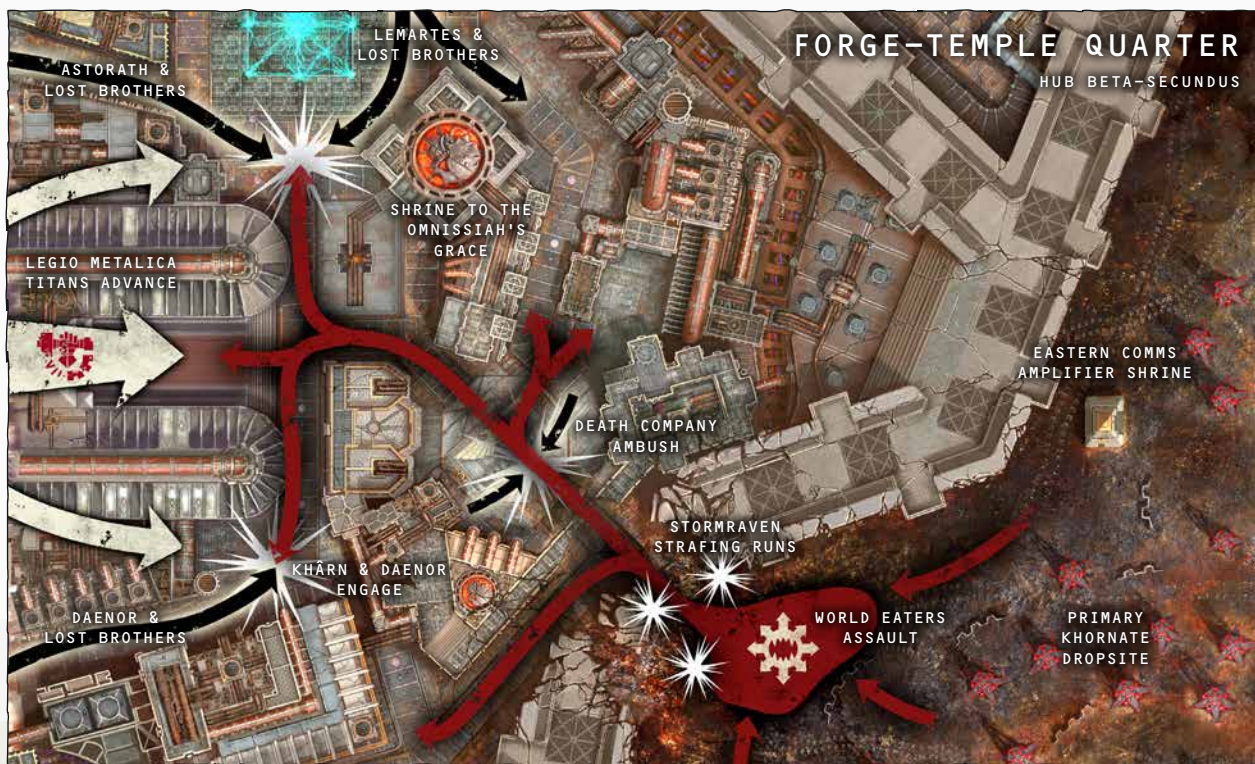
The scrying of the Black Legion sorcerers had revealed much of what would transpire within the Diamor System. Guided by these prophecies, Lord Xorphas had set plans in motion that seemed – to the Imperial Strategos on Tourmalid – like weirdly prescient madness. When the first Blood Angels ships broke from the Warp within the Diamor System, Xorphas' flagship was waiting for them. Hanging alone in the void, the *Stygian Beast* had played host to a terrible blood ritual. Sacrificing the Miserium – a hideous artefact Xorphas had acquired at great cost in munitions, fuel and war machines, as well as the lives of many warriors – the ritual had birthed a roiling psychic storm. The Strike Cruisers carrying the warriors of the Blood Angels' 5th Company had barely torn their way into reality when they were engulfed by its energies.

Coiling thunderheads of unclean Warflight billowed through space, engulfing the Blood Angels' ships and shaking them like trees before a hurricane. On board, systems sparked and failed, while secondary explosions wrought damage throughout the craft. The main damage was to the Blood Angels themselves, however. Bombarded by terrible visions of traitor victories and their angelic Primarch torn apart by leering Daemons, one battle-brother after another succumbed to the Black Rage. Like a psychic plague it swept the decks of the Strike Cruisers *Angelic Blade* and *Flame of Baal*, reducing nearly a hundred noble warriors to deranged killers in a matter of minutes.

Those few Blood Angels to survive the onslaught with their sanity intact waited for the killing blow to fall, but it did not. With his curse unleashed, Xorphas turned the *Stygian Beast* and retreated swiftly, mere minutes before fresh Blood Angels spacecraft exited the Warp. These were the Strike Cruisers *Sanguine Tear* and *Halo of Blood*, accompanied by a number of smaller warships that raced to form a cordon around the drifting craft of the 5th Company.

With elements of the Blood Angels' 1st and 2nd Companies now present in force, it seemed that the Black Legion had missed a perfect chance to eliminate the 5th Company at a single stroke. The Blood Angels were no fools, however; they had seen the Flaw used against them before, and recognised such plots for the weakness-exploiting stratagems they were. What they could not comprehend was how releasing the caged fury of the Flaw would benefit the heretics' schemes.

Unsettled and angry, the Blood Angels swiftly formulated a response. Under the direction of Astorath the Grim, warriors from the 1st and 2nd Companies corralled their fallen brethren, and helped to prepare them for their last tragic battle. After despatching an honour guard to Tourmalid to liaise with and defend the Lord Admiral, the main strength of the Blood Angels force made straight for Amethal.





Lord Xorphas watched with satisfaction. Upon entering the Diamor System, he had found that strange energies spilling from Amethal muddled the currents of fate, rendering them unreadable. He knew what lay beneath the cursed world's surface, and had been ready for such disturbances. Xorphas' plans had been carefully laid long in advance, the steps of a vast ritual to be trodden one by one. Already, the phenomena experienced by Kranon and his followers around War Zone Carnage had shown the Sorcerer where his true prize lay, and anointed the sacred ground with blood. Now the Sons of Sanguinius were rushing to enact the second step. Let them battle the Crimson Slaughter, and bleed in their turn. All served Xorphas' ends.

So began an Imperial counter-offensive that pushed the Crimson Slaughter back on every front. As the Blood Angels Strike Cruisers and their escorts thundered into orbit over Amethal, they lent their firepower to the beleaguered ships of the Fleet Mechanicus. The traitor warships retreated, leaving their ground forces cut off. Urgent missives winged out into the void from the Crimson Slaughter's warpspeakers – increasingly furious demands for Black Legion aid that went wholly ignored.

With the way cleared, Blood Angels Drop Pods and flights of Stormravens and Thunderhawk Landers sped down through Amethal's atmosphere. They dropped spearheads of elite forces in support of the Metalican maniples and the Knights of House Raven.

The traitor invaders now found themselves fighting unsupported against a greatly strengthened foe. Around

War Zone Hatred, the gains made by the traitor Legio Excruciatas were lost in a matter of hours as Blood Angels tanks and aircraft joined House Raven in an unstoppable, rolling breakthrough. Imperial casualties were heavy, but within hours no fewer than five of the Traitor Legio's engines lay blazing in the dirt, while the rest were forced to stage a fighting retreat before their vengeful foes.

At War Zones Malice, Perdition and Cruelty the Crimson Slaughter were hit hard. In many cases, warbands had been bogged down in the cleared kill zones, unable to break through the unfaltering Adeptus Mechanicus defence lines. Those same forces were trapped between the avenging Blood Angels to their rear and the Metalican guns to their fore. Desperate battles erupted all around War Zones Hatred and Cruelty, while at Perdition the Crimson Slaughter manned defences recently seized from the Adeptus Mechanicus and now fought as the besieged.

It was against War Zone Carnage that the greatest fury of the Blood Angels fell, just as Xorphas had hoped. The newly created Death Company was set loose, squad after squad of black-clad psychopaths leaping from Stormraven Gunships to pin Kranon and his followers behind the defences they had so recently cleared. Led by Astorath, Lemartes, and the inspirational Death Company Chaplain Daenor, the Death Company clashed with the Crimson Slaughter in a series of brutal battles. By that point, the strange energies coursing through the Crimson Slaughter were beginning to have a terrible effect. As they fought, many renegades found their bodies bursting into spectral flame. Others mutated with sudden ferocity, squirming



tentacles and bulging muscle spilling from their sundered suits of power armour. The Blood Angels exploited this degeneration amongst their foes, punishing them with one furious assault after another until Kranon and his last surviving warriors were forced to stage a breakout or be crushed mercilessly.

After days of bloody fighting, victory on Amethal appeared to be within the grasp of the Imperial forces. On Tourmalid, Gordus' advisors scoffed that the true nature of the traitor was revealed in the Black Legion's betrayal of their Crimson Slaughter allies. They feared to face the Emperor's Angels, went the cry. Yet Xorphas had only been biding his time.

The Crimson Slaughter were expendable. They and their enemies had all served as sacrificial victims within his grand ritual. Following their deaths, the next step was taken. In the darkness of the void, fresh blooms of filthy Warplight flickered as a new fleet of traitor warships entered the system, precisely when and where Xorphas had foreseen. Upon every hull was blazoned the monstrous rune of Khorne, the Blood God, and within the lead battleship rode his mightiest mortal champion. Khârn the Betrayer had come for the skulls of Sanguinius' greatest sons, and he would not be denied.

The Khornate war fleet bludgeoned their way into orbit over Amethal with no thought for their own survival. With their void shields aflame and their gun decks spitting fury, the Khornate craft rained Dreadclaws, Kharybdises and heavy landing craft down over War Zone Carnage.

THE SECRET OF AMETHAL

The adepts of the Adeptus Mechanicus understood the true prize that the Black Legion sought upon Amethal, even if few others did. It was the thing that had brought Technoarcheologist Dominus Ivasnophon and his followers from the forge world of Metalica to this cursed world. It was a power of unbelievable magnitude, though the Imperium and the traitors sought it for very different reasons. Lord Xorphas knew its true nature, for it was he and his cabal who had located it for Abaddon. The Despoiler had set his forces in motion at once. The battle to come would bear upon the success of the Thirteenth Black Crusade, for it offered an opportunity to extend Abaddon's Crimson Path like a bloody wound across Imperial space.

The secret that the Black Legion sought, and that the Adeptus Mechanicus were racing them to seize, lay deep beneath the surface of Amethal. It was ancient – unspeakably, unimaginably so. It was a device the size of a world, forged by godlike beings before Terra had even spawned its first single-celled organisms. It was a cage for the infernal creatures of the Warp, a weapon to dwarf the Damnation Cache that had slipped through Abaddon's fingers on Pandorax. And, according to the divinations of Lord Xorphas and his followers, it was full to the brim. It required only the correct ritual to be broken open, at which point the sudden release of so many Warp entities would tear a gaping wound in reality itself...

The skies over Amethal's northern hemisphere flickered with flame and churned with blood-bruised clouds as the slaughterers of the Blood God descended. Vox-nets planet wide filled with a deranged mantra, screamed over and over again by a million rage-filled voices. 'Kill! Maim! Burn! Kill! Maim! Burn!'

The sprawling war horde of Khârn the Betrayer fell upon War Zone Carnage like the blow of some titanic axe, drawn by the sheer scale of bloodshed already enacted there. There was no subtlety or precision to the landing, no strategic disposition. Instead, Drop Pods and landing craft slammed down all around the area, spilling tides of murderous lunatics and snarling Daemon Engines into the fray.



At first, it seemed as though the Khornate forces had misdropped catastrophically, and would be cut to pieces for their lack of cohesion. Knight detachments and maniples of Adeptus Mechanicus Skitarii moved in to bracket the haphazard landing sites with lethal firepower, sweeping green pastures, blasted mudflats and blazing ruins alike with their tightly ordered volleys. The first waves of Khornate forces were slain before they could so much as scream their warcries, yet as their mangled bodies crashed to the ground, their comrades were already trampling over them to get to grips with the foe. In ever greater numbers, Khârn's followers crashed down upon the war zone and surged to battle, joined by fresh waves of Daemon Engines flown in from Ioline. Soon, the Imperial defenders were being overrun.

Deranged Cultists died in droves, only for hundreds more to scramble over the ramparts formed by their bodies and fling themselves to the attack. Khornate war engines rumbled forwards, the ground shuddering beneath brass treads as their firepower punched Knights off their feet or ripped through whole phalanxes of enemy infantry. Masses of Khorne Berserkers pelted forwards through rains of shot and energy blasts to chop heads from necks and eviscerate torsos with their snarling chain-axes. At the head of the horde, utterly unstoppable, came Khârn himself. The Betrayer was a force for unbridled destruction, a whirlwind of murder and a lodestone of carnage around which the Khorne Berserkers massed. Charging through the mud and fire of the battlefield, the Betrayer hacked through everything in his path, leading his rapidly cohering horde in a thrust towards the heart of War Zone Carnage.

It was here that Khârn and his monstrous army of killers met the remaining Death Company in savage battle. During their fight with the Crimson Slaughter, the Death Company had become overextended, their ranks thinned by attrition. With the Adeptus Mechanicus forces around the Khornate landing zone obliterated, the cursed sons of Sanguinius stood alone against the Khornate charge.

The fight that followed was apocalyptic in its ferocity. Shepherded by Astorath and Chaplain Daenor, the Death Company met their enemies' charge with one of their own, seeking to stagger the foe and buy time for reinforcements to reach them. In places around the ruined Adeptus Mechanicus defences, this tactic worked. Chaplain Lemartes led a suicidal jump-assault against a rumbling Lord of Skulls, engaging the machine amongst the tumbled wreckage of a combat-servitor fabrifactorum. Circling the Daemon Engine upon wings of flame, the Blood Angels wore it down with constant hit-and-run attacks until, at last, they were able to shatter the blood-tanks upon its back and leave it powerless amidst the ruins. The fight cost them dearly, the raging Daemon Engine sending one Death Company brother after another screaming into oblivion with roaring swings of its great cleaver.

Elsewhere, wave upon wave of Cultists and Berserkers hurled themselves at Astorath the Grim and his squad of Death Company, who had been pushed back to the blazing shell of a shrine to the Ommissiah. Mounds of corpses built up around the shrine's walls as the Imperial warriors battled against overwhelming odds, but soon only Astorath fought alone amidst the mangled bodies of his brothers.

Amidst the rubble-strewn streets, Death Company Chaplain Daenor and another band of surviving Death Company met the headlong charge of Khârn the Betrayer and his followers. The battle was swift and savage, devolving into a sprawling melee in which no quarter was asked and none given. Khârn butchered his way through the black-armoured Blood Angels until Daenor met him in single combat, calling upon the Primarch to aid him in destroying the Betrayer.



Though he fought with courage and skill, Daenor was utterly outmatched by his berserk opponent, being forced back over the tumbled corpses of his slain brothers and away from the last few who lived. Those warriors fought on, surrounded, yet the approach of a monstrous Trinity of Blood meant they had but minutes to live. It was at that moment – as Khârn finally hacked Daenor's arm from his shoulder and kicked him to the ground – that the Titans of the Legio Metalica arrived to turn the tables. The ground shook as the towering war engines waded into the Khornate horde, Reavers and Warlords hammering the ruins with incredible fusillades of firepower.

Driven apart by the explosive mayhem that ensued, Khârn and his last few victims lost track of one another in the swirling firestorm. After hours of savage battle street-to-street and block-to-block, even the Titans would be forced to retreat before the insanity of the Khornate hordes. Regardless, their attack had fragmented Khârn's forces into disparate warbands, who scattered away from the ruins of War Zone Carnage, each seeking to claim the greatest tally of skulls for Khorne.









+++AMETHAL STRATEGIC CHRONOLOG+++

+++SEGMENT ENGAGE 0011110001101+++

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ASC 057: AFTER BATTLE AGAINST BLOOD ANGELS [SUB-REF: DEATH COMPANY] KHORNATE FORCE DIVERTS FROM HUB BETA-SECUNDUS, DISPERSES INTO RAIDING PARTIES THAT DISRUPT METALICAN HOLDINGS ON DUST-PLAINS WEST 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 GIVEN STRATEGIC PRIORITY: OMEGA.

ASC 061-063: IOLINE REINFORCEMENTS IDENTIFIED AS PRIMARY HAZARD TO IMPERIAL WAR EFFORT ON AMETHAL [2.4% INCREASE PER HOUR SIDEREAL]. BLOOD ANGELS 1ST CAPTAIN KARLAËN 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 BINARC RECURSIVE CLEARANCE - CLOAKING ENGINE/OMNIFACTORIAL TELEPORTARIA].

ASC 064: IOLINE RAID SUCCESSFUL [SUB-REF: SANGUINOR]. HEX INFERNIUM DESTABILISED, COLLAPSE OF HEXAGRAMMIC 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 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 SURROUND HUB BETA-SECUNDUS.

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

+++SEGMENT CONCLUDES 00111100101+++

CHAPTER 3

RITUAL'S END



THE BANSHEE STONE

The sanctum swam with Warp light, the delirious illumination twisting everything into nightmarish shapes. Lord Xorphas' altar writhed and screamed in the blazing glare thrown by the eight lit braziers. Even the decomposing corpses scattered around the floor appeared to twitch and stir. Dark sorcery suffused the air and the sense of potentiality was overwhelming.

Though his ritual neared completion, Lord Xorphas was furious. Worse, for the first time since coming to the Diamor System, he knew a sliver of doubt.

'Tell me again,' he commanded the quaking acolyte before him. 'Be swift, and be concise.'

The robed cult magister could not hide his fear, despite the featureless mask that concealed his face. He reeked of terror, and shook like a leaf in a gale.

'The Angels, my lord,' he stammered, 'they struck Ioline. Somehow they remained undetected... we... they must have...'

'Concise,' repeated Xorphas, his deep voice as cold as the void of space.

'They teleported to the planet's surface, lord. An elite band. The golden Angel led them, the one they call Sanguinor. They... Lord, they destroyed the Hex Infernum. Ioline is no more.'

Lord Xorphas nodded, absorbing the information and allowing the reality of it to flow through him. A lesser servant of Chaos might have raged. They might have slain the messenger in a fit of spite, perhaps even swept the chamber of all life. Xorphas could have done it in a heartbeat. His power was fearsome and – at that moment – his anger great.

Instead, he stayed perfectly still for several, drawn-out seconds as his mind whirled. Xorphas had foreseen much of what had transpired in the Diamor System, but with the daemonic clamour of Amethal crowding the paths of the future, this impulsive Blood Angel attack had been invisible to him. If it could happen once, it could happen again.

Worse, now that the future had been altered, there was no telling how it might spiral out of control. Alternate paths flickered before his mind's eye, glimpses of oracular insights gleaned before his

fleet invaded the Diamor System. Some of them threatened defeat. That could not be allowed.

Xorphas breathed out slowly, sorcerous embers dancing on his breath. He became conscious once more of the magister, now prostrate upon the floor before him and shaking with terror.

'Get up,' commanded the Sorcerer, 'I've no use for worms.'

The cultist scrambled to his feet and made to apologise. Xorphas raised a hand to forestall him.

'Shut up. Listen to me now. You will proceed to the arnaciium and relay my commands. The Banshee Stone is to be woken, and made ready for transit. Now.'

The magister turned and rushed away. Xorphas dismissed the man from his thoughts, instead taking a moment to focus his mind before he opened a vox-address to the ships of his fleet. Upon his command, the Black Legion would fall upon Amethal, and the final stage of the ritual would begin. And then, the paths of fate would converge.



Lord Xorphas stood upon the lip of the War Zone Carnage excavation site, and laughed. There was not a single Imperial soldier present to repel the Black Legion, which could mean only one thing: the war had spread his enemies' forces too thin. They must have realised that rushing troops piecemeal into War Zone Carnage might slow the Black Legion, but would not stop them. Instead, some canny mind amongst the enemy had surely elected to mass their forces, then strike a killing blow. It was sound thinking, but it would be their undoing.

'Our enemies do not understand the magnitude of their error,' said Lord Xorphas, addressing the Chosen standing silently behind him. He spoke over the vox, compensating for the thunderous roar of the Black Legion drop craft coming in to land all around. Tank engines thundered. Heldrakes shrieked as they swooped overhead. Armour clattered as Black Legion warriors took up defensive positions.

'They fear to face us, Lord,' snarled the monstrous Terminator champion, Dorzogh the Slaughterman.

'No,' replied Xorphas, 'It's not fear, but sense. They are massing, closing a noose about us.'

Another of the Chosen, the ornately armoured Verzekh, panned his gaze across their surroundings. War Zone Carnage had been reduced to ruin by the successive battles fought across it. There was little here now but rubble, wrecks and mounds of corpses.

'They are wise, Lord,' he rumbled. 'This is poor ground for a fight. They force us into the role of defender in a battle where attack must surely carry the day.'

'Verzekh speaks truth, Lord,' rasped the twisted warrior known to the Chosen as the Sorrow. 'Were it me attacking, I would come in force, from all sides. With our defences spread thin even we cannot hold the Imperial scum forever.'

'Just so,' agreed Xorphas, 'but this is no conventional battle. We need only hold the foe until my ritual is complete. Their ignorance will be their undoing. They have given us time to deploy the Banshee Stone unopposed. It will shatter the cage.'

The Chosen turned as an ancient Black Legion Stormbird settled nearby in a cloud of dust. Down the craft's ramp came a broad grav-platform, the rune-carved dais flanked by acolytes. An energy field rose up from the dais, holding aloft a twisted shard of crystal the size of a boarding torpedo. The stone's surface was carved with screaming faces, and energies the colour of a livid bruise pulsed within its depths.

Lord Xorphas issued his orders as the Banshee Stone was guided towards the wide, packed-earth ramp that descended into the shadowed pit.

'Dorzogh, you and your Terminator brethren shall accompany me into the pit. The rest of you, spread yourselves along the perimeter. Put steel in my warriors' spines. Hold the foe back no matter the cost. Bleed them for me.'

Xorphas' Chosen slammed their fists against their breastplates, then turned away to fulfil his commands. The Sorcerer shot a brief glance up at the roiling sky, muttering a prayer to the Dark Gods. Then he moved to the head of his acolytes' procession, and led the way into the pit.



Verzekh hauled himself up onto the sagging balcony of a ruined factorum. From his vantage point, he inspected the southern defences. Below him stretched a thin line of black-armoured warriors, hunkered down amidst the ruins. Havocs sighted their heavy weapons out across the kill zone, watching the rising dust cloud that marked the approaching Imperial forces. Obliterators spat corrupted machine-code, flesh-metal slithering as they manifested their weapons of choice. Here and there lurked Daemon Engines or Black Legion tanks. All hungered for battle, thought Verzekh. All thirsted for loyalist blood.

The Chosen's auto-senses dimmed suddenly, adjusting to the first vivid flash of the Black Legion orbital bombardment. A lance beam reached

down from the clouds, leaving a vivid cerulean slash across Verzekh's vision. Fire bloomed where it hit the ground, a roiling explosion that drew roars from the Black Legion warriors.

'So begins the slaughter!' bellowed Verzekh, magnifying his vision to drink in the sight of Blood Angels tanks reduced to blazing wrecks. The enemies were coming fast, racing armoured transports, speeding bike squadrons and rumbling tanks. They would soon close the gap.

More orbital blasts stabbed downwards, lance beams joined by plummeting barrage bombs that raised great clouds of dust and smoke with each detonation. The ground shook as the rain of fire fell along the horizon, arcing away to the east and west of Verzekh's position. There were

more enemies out there, he knew. The Imperials were attacking from every side at once. His vox crackled with reports of enemy Knights and Titans, and maniple upon maniple of the Adeptus Mechanicus cyborgs. Verzekh even caught mention of Kranon the Relentless, a report of the surviving Crimson Slaughter racing in from the blazing eastern forests with the Legio Metalica on their tails.

'Cowardly dogs,' murmured Verzekh to himself, then louder, addressing his warriors. 'Now is the time! Mighty Black Legionnaires, servants of the Despoiler. Let's show these Imperial runts how real warriors fight!'

His followers raised another ferocious bellow of approval. The next moment, bursting from the billowing smokescreen of the bombardment,



the Blood Angels came racing into battle. Stormraven Gunships streaked overhead, fire stabbing down from their assault cannons to blitz explosions through the traitor lines. At the same time those Imperial ground units that had survived the gauntlet of the barrage executed their own, armoured charge. There were a lot of them left, thought Verzekh with grim relish.

Missiles streaked up from the Havocs to his left, drawing lines of fire between their position and the racing Stormravens. The nearest of the gunships was pierced by multiple warheads, exploding in midair. Another banked hard, only to be hit from the side by a roaring Heldrake. The Daemon Engine's talons bit deep, and both aircraft tumbled out of view behind the ruins.

The bulk of Verzekh's warriors rained fire upon the Blood Angels tanks and bikers. Muzzle flare flickered up and down the line as a hail of bolts, missiles and laser blasts engulfed the loyalists. A red-armoured Rhino exploded, blazing figures scrambling from within. A Land Raider slewed sideways as its track was severed, spooling out in a spray of links and leaving the vehicle stranded. Blood Angels Bikers were punched from their saddles, or had their fuel tanks detonate beneath them. Still the enemy came on, bellowing the name of Sanguinius as they spilled from their transports and ran headlong for the traitor line.

'Hold them!' roared Verzekh, his gold-chased bolter spitting shells down into the charging foe. He spun a Blood Angel off his feet, blowing

the warrior's arm from his shoulder. 'Let none pass!'

Away to the right, a Black Legion Predator exploded, pierced by multiple lascannon blasts. Its demise shook the balcony on which Verzekh stood, staggering him for a moment. When the Chosen looked up, a glorious warrior in sculpted red armour had fought his way almost to the base of the factorum. A Captain, by the look of him, power sword swinging as he hacked through a band of Black Legionnaires with his Command Squad at his back.

'Time to die, noble angel,' hissed Verzekh. Slinging his bolter and drawing his own blade, the Chosen took two steps back, then made a running leap from the balcony and plunged into the fight.





All around the perimeter, the Imperial forces hit hard and fast. The devastating orbital bombardment had slackened as loyalist battleships executed a courageous attack in orbit. The sky filled with the shooting stars of tumbling wreckage as the Black Legion craft broke off, and rose to engage their tormentors.

On the ground, the Blood Angels and Adeptus Mechanicus pressed forwards in the shadow of towering Imperial war engines. Black Legion fire continued to rain down upon them, blasting tanks to rolling wreckage and annihilating waves of infantry. As the fighting raged, bloody thunderheads loomed above the western plains, racing swiftly closer. They billowed above Khârn and his Maelstrom of Gore, who rushed back in towards the raging battle. As the Betrayer neared the flash and thunder of the war zone, his keen eyes caught movement ahead. Cult Mechanicus forces – Electro-Priests and Servitors retreating in the face of overwhelming Black Legion firepower. Roaring battle cries, Khârn and his warriors crashed into the Metalicans from behind, ripping through them like a bladed whirlwind. Desperate, point-blank firefights erupted as the warriors of the Cult Mechanicus tried to stave off the enemies hitting them from both sides. Black Legion fire rained indiscriminately into the fight as Berzerkers slaughtered and Electro-Priests blasted and slew.

Amidst the slaughter, Khârn caught sight of a looming figure, the Magos who led this ill-fated procession. Power stabbed from the machine-priest's weapons, blasts of focussed plasma burning through the chests and helms of three Berzerkers in quick succession. The next moment, Gorechild's whirling teeth lopped the caliver from its mechadendrite mounting, sweeping on to carve deep into the Magos' robed form. Blood and oil spurted. Electrical discharge crackled, and the Magos' eye-lenses flickered with flaring power.

'You cannot kill me,' rasped the priest, his voiced fuzzed with static. 'The Ommissiah—'

'Has not the might of Khorne!' interrupted Khârn in a furious roar, before lopping off the Magos' head

with one mighty swing. The machine-priest's body convulsed, then slumped to the blood-slick ground as his sparking head rolled into a ditch. There, its eye-lenses went dark for the last time.

Khârn neither knew, nor would have cared, that with a single axe-stroke, he had denied the Imperium its best chance to acquire the Daemon cage technology. He knew only that another worthy skull lay now at the feet of Khorne, and that he must add more. Roaring to the bloodclouds above, the Betrayer ploughed on into War Zone Carnage, hacking through Metalican and Black Legionnaire alike in his murderous frenzy.



To the south, Verzekh fought with spite and skill against his Blood Angel opponent. The Captain was an expert swordsman, his blade flashing as it cut the air to ring against Verzekh's guard time and again. Yet the Chosen could see his foe's crippling nobility. The Captain fought with restraint, as though caging his true fury behind bars of iron will.

'Your mistake,' spat the Chosen, convulsing his mutant third lung to unleash a scream that burst blood vessels all across his body with its force. The howl slammed forth like a hammer-blow, knocking the Captain from his feet and cracking his armour. Verzekh raised his blade with a roar and swept it down upon his dazed opponent. His blow was blocked by the golden sword of another Blood Angel, whose combat shield cracked into Verzekh's helm.

'Get back, traitor,' roared the Blood Angel, driving Verzekh away from the prone Captain with a series of swift hacks and cuts. 'Your base trickery shall not avail you.'

'Oh, it might,' snarled the Chosen, opening his jaws and spitting a wad of acid into his enemy's faceplate. Ceramite hissed as it melted. Cursing, the Blood Angel ripped his helm from his head. It was all the opening Verzekh needed, and his blade stabbed into his enemy's now-unarmoured face. The molecular field that surrounded the sword parted flesh and bone, and as Verzekh ripped his weapon free the Blood Angel collapsed, his head bisected.

The Chosen allowed the tides of battle to sweep him back, absorbing the state of the battle. Matters were turning against him. Knots of Black Legionnaires still fought, but they were outnumbered by the vengeful Blood Angels overrunning their lines. Ducking back through the hollow factorum's doorway, he keyed his vox.

'This is Verzekh on the southern perimeter. The foe have broken through. Warpsmith Octorian, send your Daemon Engines.'

The response, when it came, was set against a backdrop of fierce gunfire and explosions.

'They are here too,' grated Warpsmith Octorian. 'Teleport strike.' The rasping voice cut out for a moment and Verzekh's vox spat static. When the Warpsmith's voice returned, it was pained and furious. 'They are tearing my engines apart. They have reached the pit. We cannot—'

Verzekh broke the link with a curse.

'I must hold them back,' he muttered to himself, mind whirling with strategic possibilities. The next second a figure darkened the empty doorway, and the Chosen turned to find the glowing muzzle of the Blood Angel Captain's plasma pistol. His foe had found him again.

'No, traitor,' intoned Captain Aphael, 'all you must do is die.'

Plasma flashed, and Verzekh's world vanished in white fire.





THE DOOM OF AMETHAL

The Banshee Stone screamed, and the world screamed with it. Set into the cracked bedrock at the base of the pit, the crystal pulsed and writhed. Blood welled from the rocky ground and gushed from the earthen walls, flowing from the anointed soil in crimson streams. The Banshee Stone drank it in. Suffused with sacrificial might, it howled with disharmonic power. The ground shook. Cracks spread. Beneath the ground, the cacophonous resonance reached the shell of the Daemon cage and broke its wards one by one. Lord Xorphas threw his arms wide, ears and eyes bleeding from the pandaemonic din. A powerful sense of destiny gripped him. This was victory. He knew it. His moment was at hand.

'Lord,' the hissing voice of the warrior known as the Sorrow cut through his triumph, barely audible in his vox, 'defences are collapsing to the south and east. Their Titans have annihilated our armour. There is nothing more we can do to slow them. The angels will soon breach the pit.'

'Understood,' barked Lord Xorphas, before switching his vox to address the surviving Black Legionnaires fighting above. 'It is done,' he boomed. 'You have served the Despoiler well. Now, fall back. Let them have this doomed world.'

With that, Xorphas spun and set out across the shuddering floor of the pit. He moved swiftly, his acolytes and

lumbering Terminator bodyguards keeping pace. The traitors dodged around dead servitor-excavators and rode out the planet's convulsions, the Banshee Stone pulsing ever brighter behind them. Several of Xorphas' entourage were lost as the ground opened to swallow them. Ignoring their fate, the Sorcerer and his followers strode onto the earth ramp that wound up the pit's flank. High above, they could see the sky, billowing with bloody storm clouds. With every pace it grew closer.

They were almost at the top of the ramp when the Blood Angels blocked their path. Xorphas saw red-armoured Terminators, led by a roaring warrior with a bionic eye and an ornate



thunder hammer. Behind him came veterans and golden Sanguinary Guard. Bolters flashed and roared as the Blood Angels and Black Legion opened fire upon one another.

Xorphas threw up a warding sigil, conjuring a shield of power from which the enemy fire rebounded. With a contemptuous snarl, the Sorcerer drew upon the powers of the Warp and tore the ground out from under his enemies' feet. A thumping series of tectonic detonations raced up the ramp, hurling several angels into the pit. Xorphas was not done. Roaring with triumphant fury, the Sorcerer channelled the rampant energies of the Banshee Stone itself, stealing a portion of its hideous

disharmony. The power leapt out as bolts of crackling black lightning, and ripped a massive chunk of rock from pit wall. The Blood Angels staggered as the avalanche slammed down on them, burying many in rubble. Those who could still do so continued to fire, punching several more Black Legionnaires from their feet.

'Forwards!' snarled Xorphas, leading his warriors up the ramp and through the midst of their half-buried foes. He wove aside from the furious swipe of a chainfist, noting with alarm that the enemy Terminators were already ripping themselves free. More Blood Angels were closing in from the south, and off to the east, loyalist Titans loomed.

'Stygian Beast,' he voxed, 'do you have teleport lock?'

'Aye lord,' crackled the response from on high, 'your sigils and wards are holding. The machine spirits have your blood scent, and that of the Betrayer.'

For a single, slow second, Lord Xorphas watched the ornate thunder hammer of the Blood Angels' leader sweeping towards his face, ploughing through the gathering energies of a teleport flare. Then, with a hollow bang, Xorphas and his followers vanished from the surface of Amethal, snatched away by a teleportarium modified by spells of Xorphas' own cunning creation.



Khârn fought amidst a crimson haze. Victims swam into focus, there then gone again as his axe took their lives. He hewed down the sons of Sanguinius and Horus alike, claiming their skulls and spilling their blood for the only master who truly mattered.

The Betrayer leapt aside as a Land Raider roared past, its spiked ram stirring a memory of an ancient wounding, a terrible agony in his chest. Khârn shook the memory off and plunged into a mass of Skitarii, hewing them like firewood.

As the last of the cyborgs fell, Khârn registered drop craft dusting off around him, lumbering into the skies with their guns blazing. Weaklings, he thought, fleeing before the butchery was done. He and his Berzerkers would not display such cowardice. Yet even as he formed the thought, the Betrayer saw wisps of ethereal energy twining about his limbs. His runes of Khorne blazed, overwhelmed by sorcerous powers.

'What—' Colours whirled. Gravity surged and vanished. The ensorcelled teleport plucked Khârn from Amethal and dumped him unceremoniously into the armoured hold of a spaceship.

Khârn's senses reeled from the sudden transition, the energies of the Warp leaving his thoughts momentarily sluggish and confused. He took in voices, dark magi hissing that they had followed the orders of the Despoiler himself, that Khârn had been saved from certain and wasteful death through Lord Xorphas' vile sorcerous ritual. That he should be grateful to be singled out for rescue when so many had been left to die. Their prating needled his mind like the Butcher's Nails, and Khârn felt his fury rising. He had been snatched from glorious battle, had been forced to leave the faithful of Khorne to their holy end as if he were some slave of Abaddon's to be borne away at will. Gorechild revved in Khârn's fist, and the magi had just enough time to shriek in panic before he came for their heads.

Elsewhere amidst the madness of War Zone Carnage, Kranon swung his monstrous blade, cleaving a Blood Angel in two. The bloodied halves of his foe flopped to the floor and Kranon leapt over them. To his left, Draznicht and the last of the Ravagers hacked and tore, cursed and blasted. To his right, the Helbrute Hakorath led the ragtag remains of Kranon's Terminators and Chaos Space Marines across the rubble, guns roaring. The last of the warband's tanks lay blazing somewhere in their wake, reduced to scrap by the guns of the Imperial Titans. But the Crimson Slaughter would get off this hellish world alive. They would return to the *Lost Hope* and rebuild. Kranon was utterly determined.

The war zone was total bedlam, with traitors and loyalist armies tangled together and fighting with wild fury. Tanks roared through walls and blazed point-blank fire into masses of enemy warriors, only to be blown apart by their foes in turn. Khorne Berzerkers were attacking everything in sight, wreaking indiscriminate carnage. Knots of Cultists screamed out prayers to the Dark Gods as they

were surrounded and gunned down by the vengeful loyalists. Over the madness came a sawing wail, rising from the pit nearby and causing the ground to shudder and crack in time with its nerve-shredding screams.

All around, Black Legionnaires were staging fighting retreats towards their last remaining transports. It was towards the nearest of these that Kranon now drove, cutting down anyone that got in his way.

'The Amethal voices,' snarled Draznicht, 'they're getting louder again. It's this damned place.'

'You're right,' growled Kranon, watching as emerald flames began to crawl along his limbs. 'But it's different now.'

He grunted in exertion as he lopped the head from a Black Legion warrior who had lunged into his path. 'Before they wanted us, needed us as vessels for their will. Now it's just overspill. Whatever Xorphas has done, he's brought the Daemons so close to the surface that they don't need us any more. They'll be free soon enough.'

Ahead, Black Legionnaires were piling aboard a traitor Thunderhawk, the aircraft's guns blazing as they staved off the Skitarii closing in from both sides.

'That,' snarled Kranon raising his blade, 'is ours.'

The leader of the Crimson Slaughter led the charge, pounding headlong towards the ramp. The handful of Black Legionnaires turned on the boarding ramp, and their guns came up without a second's hesitation. Several bolt rounds slammed against Kranon's armour as he charged, and more than one of the Crimson Slaughter fell to Black Legion gunfire. Then the Chaos Lord was up the ramp and into his foes, the Ravagers close on his heels. Powered blades and crackling maces swung. Armour crumpled and bones shattered. Bolters boomed in the confined hold, blowing red-armoured warriors back down the ramp like rag dolls. Still the Crimson Slaughter pressed forwards, hacking and hewing at the frantic Black Legion, backing them into the Thunderhawk's hold and massacring them like cornered rats.

The fire was huge, a roaring conjuration of green and yellow flame that danced upon a bed of blackened wraithbone. It filled the echoing Warp chamber with diseased illumination and threw twisted shadows that cavorted across the walls and ceiling. Abaddon stood before the Daemon pyre, brows drawn down as he watched the images swimming within its depths. He watched as the Diamor System burned, as Ioline fell. He watched the ebb and flow of battle across Amethal's surface. Victorious champions swam into sight, roaring battle cries, only to be replaced moments later by the ash and bones of the slain. Abaddon watched it all play out, a tale of angels and traitors told in the fires of the Warp itself.

Finally, he saw the Banshee Stone, shuddering and screaming in cacophonous fury until, at last, the Librarians of the Blood Angels shattered it with the power of their minds. **Too late,** hissed a ghostly voice in his ears, **they were too late to stop it.**

'Then it is only a matter of time,' rumbled Abaddon, his deep voice echoing around the twisted chamber.

Yesss, came the whispers. **The ritual is complete. The cracks are spreading and the wards are dying.**

'You have done well, Lord Xorphas,' murmured Abaddon.

The flames crackled and jumped. Shadows danced and whirled. Then the whispers came again. **We have hidden ourselves from**

loyalist eyes amidst the Zircon Sprawl. We continue the rites that the stone began. The cracks widen. We watch. We wait.

Abaddon nodded to himself, a slow gesture of satisfaction.

'Do so,' he replied, 'complete this task and, upon my return, you shall have such rewards as loyal service brings.'

Abaddon turned away as the pyre died back, and strode to the armaglass view-port set into the chamber's outer wall. He looked out from one of the Planet Killer's many baroque spires towards the approaching fringe of the Eye of Terror. Realspace blurred with the out-spilled corruption of the Warp, creating great clouds and flickering borealis of kaleidoscopic energies that Abaddon's flagship dived into without pause.

This was but the fringe, thought the Despoiler, just the leading edge of the twisted realm within which he had forged his vast armada. Now he must go deeper than ever before, leaving his lackeys to win his battles while he grasped the power to win the entire war. That power would be his, thought the Despoiler, unconsciously clenching his fists. He had fought too long, and too hard, for it to be otherwise. He would entertain no other outcome. At last the hour of victory was at hand. The corpse Emperor would burn upon his broken throne. With that last thought, Abaddon plunged deep into the Eye of Terror, and left the savage battles of the Thirteenth Black Crusade blazing on in his wake.

The last fighting ended when Hakorath lumbered aboard. A single desperate Black Legionnaire made a dash for the ramp, but the Helbrute caught him around the head with its massive fist and crushed his skull like an egg.

Kranon looked around. Barely fifteen warriors were left standing from a force of several hundred, without counting the thousands of Cultists slain. He had lost a lot of warriors on this world. It would take time to rebuild, and once he did, Lord Xorphas would have a great deal to answer for. But that was another day. For now, they just had to live.

'Draznicht,' he growled, 'take two of your men and persuade the pilots that we are leaving. Now.'

The champion nodded his horned helm, then disappeared towards the cockpit with a pair of the Ravagers at his heels. Meanwhile, the surviving Crimson Slaughter warriors drew up at the top of the ramp and coldly gunned down anything that moved into their field of fire.

A few moments later, the assault ramp rose with a welcome whine of servos, sealing the Crimson Slaughter inside. Kranon felt the craft's engines engage, then the Thunderhawk was rising, turning, and leaping forwards as Draznicht hit the jets hard.

Kranon hung on to a hand grip as the Thunderhawk burned for the upper atmosphere with enemy fire ringing from its hull. As they rose away from War Zone Carnage, he felt the pressure of the exultant Daemon voices easing in his mind until at last they vanished altogether. Blessed silence fell, and the lord of the Crimson Slaughter released a slow breath before wrenching off his helm and barking a weary laugh.

The voices would return, of that he had no doubt. Not those of Amethal, but of the twisted entities that had haunted the Crimson Slaughter for so long. But for now, Kranon's mind was his own. And while he could think, he was getting his followers out of here.

'*Scimitar*,' voxed Kranon, 'lock our Terminators' teleport homers and move to rendezvous. We're in a stolen Thunderhawk. Vorlak, don't shoot us down. Have the other craft muster on you and be ready to fight if you have to. I don't care what the mighty Abaddon commands. We are done with this place, and we are leaving...'







THE HAND OF XORPHAS

Lord Xorphas carefully marshalled his Black Legion forces during the invasion of the Diamor System. Other than their defeat on Ioline, the Sorcerer's warriors remained fresh and unharmed by battle. Xorphas' was not a large force compared to the grand armies striking against the Cadian Gate, but it was powerful, and fit to enact the Despoiler's will.

Lord Xorphas the Tainted is one of the greatest Sorcerers to have risen from amongst the ranks of the Black Legion. An acolyte of Ygethmor the Deceiver, Xorphas is cunning and perceptive, while his psychic abilities are exceptionally potent. The Sorcerer is a true believer in Abaddon's cause, holding nothing but scorn and hatred for the Imperium of Man. Some whisper that Xorphas is far older than he appears, and that once, long ago, he called the Crimson King his master. It is from those ancient days that Xorphas' hatred for the Imperium supposedly stems, and if that is true, it has not dimmed over time. Xorphas desires above all things to see the Emperor dead upon his broken throne, and he will do whatever he must to achieve that end.

Xorphas' hate is cold as the void; he is neither impulsive nor given to bouts of blunt aggression. Instead, the Sorcerer is calculated and methodical. He sifts the

strands of time and space for the most auspicious paths. He courts the favour of the Dark Gods and offers grand sacrifices in return for the power to achieve his ends. The Sorcerer turns reality itself into a series of great rituals, the consequences of which are dire for his foes. No one is safe from Xorphas' diabolical transactions, for he will just as gladly spill the blood of friends as enemies, providing it meets his ends. Xorphas is no Khornate butcher, however. Lives are the true currency of power, and Xorphas never wastes power. Though he sent the Crimson Slaughter to their deaths like victims flung into a volcano, and left Khârn's forces to attack unsupported, both of these steps were necessary to complete the anointing. His Black Legionnaires were more fortunate.

Xorphas had certainly despatched smaller raiding parties – and wave upon wave of Daemon Engines from Ioline

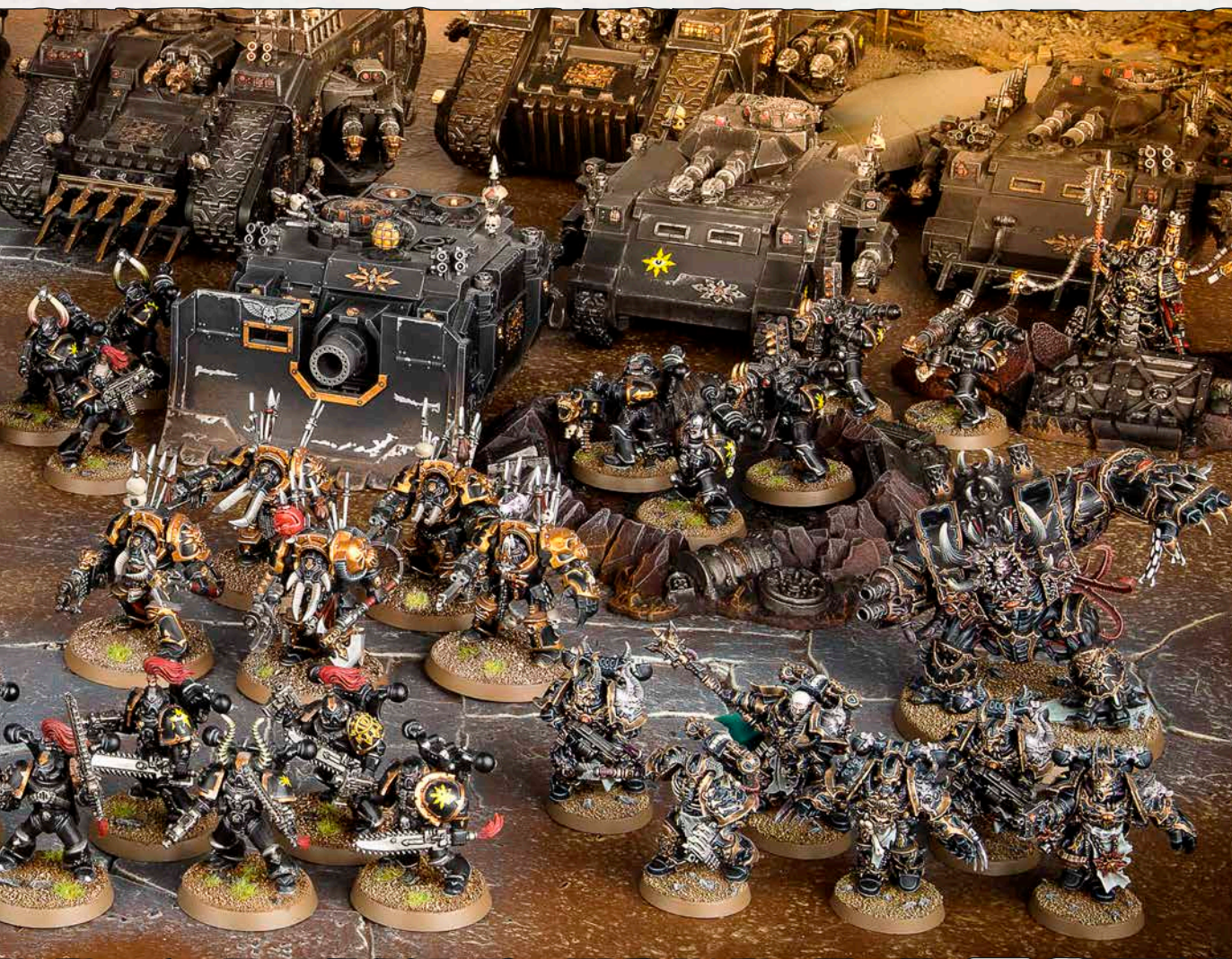


– to the surface of Amethal during the fighting. Black Legionnaires had knocked out shield generator hubs, ambushed reinforcement convoys and other strategic targets, but always in conflict zones well away from those areas being ritually blooded.

Now, the Hand of Xorphas descended in full strength upon the cursed world of Amethal. It was a truly prodigious gathering of might. At the army's head marched an assemblage of Black Legionnaire champions – chosen warriors and conquerors all – alongside a coven of Xorphas' most powerful sorcerous acolytes. Below these fought numerous warbands of Black Legion Chaos Space Marines, some of whom bore the marks of the Dark Gods upon them. Warriors from the Hounds of Abaddon and the Children of Torment fought alongside those from more unmarked brotherhoods such as the Black Talons and the Sons of Oblivion. This core of hardened warriors bore between them a great range of heavy weaponry and specialised wargear that made them ready to face any threat.

Superior heavy infantry assets were strongly in evidence amongst the Hand of Xorphas. Handpicked Terminators from the Bringers of Despair joined lumbering Obliterators and keen-eyed Havocs in providing heavy fire support, while cults of Mutilators flexed talons and revved blades in anticipation of the kill. Raptors, Warp Talons, Black Legion Bikers and twisted Possessed, all provided the Hand of Xorphas with yet more close assault power, each as eager as the next to spill the blood of hated loyalists and claim glory in the eyes of the Despoiler.

In support of all these mighty warriors rumbled battle tanks, Helbrutes and Daemon Engines in great numbers. Whole squadrons of possessed Predators and Land Raiders shook the ground with their passing, growling with their eagerness for the kill. Defilers and Forgefiends guzzled ammunition from internal hoppers and prepared to shred the armies of the Imperium with infernal firepower. They were accompanied by the looming Titans of the Legio Excruciatius and the last remnants of Xorphas' erstwhile allies. This was an army to slay a world.



BANE OF AMETHAL

Lord Xorphas had spent long years gathering a powerful following of warriors who he knew were loyal, skilled, and tempered in countless battles. He had winnowed from his ranks any who might fail him when his moment for glory came. So it was that Lord Xorphas led an elite guard of veteran killers down into the ruins of War Zone Carnage.

LORD XORPHAS THE TAINTED
Sorcerer

CHAOS WARBAND

LORD NARAKHON
Chaos Lord

THE CLAWS OF XORPHAS
5 Chosen Marines

DORZGOGH'S DARKWATCH
5 Chaos Terminators

THE HATEFISTS
5 Chaos Terminators

THE VENGEFUL
10 Chaos Space Marines

THE HOLLOW
10 Chaos Space Marines

THE BLEAKBLADES
10 Chaos Space Marines

THE DOOMGUARD
10 Chaos Space Marines

THE ABOMINATORS
10 Chaos Space Marines

THE TRUTHSLAYERS
10 Chaos Space Marines

THE VOIDSHRIEKERS
5 Raptors

THE BLACK DRAKES
5 Chaos Bikers

THE DESOLATORS
5 Havocs

MAGNOPHRAX BALEFIST
Helbrute

FIST OF THE GODS

WARPSMITH LORVAKH
Warpsmith

HELHAMMER
Chaos Vindicator

STALKER
Chaos Predator

BELICHOSE HATE
Chaos Land Raider



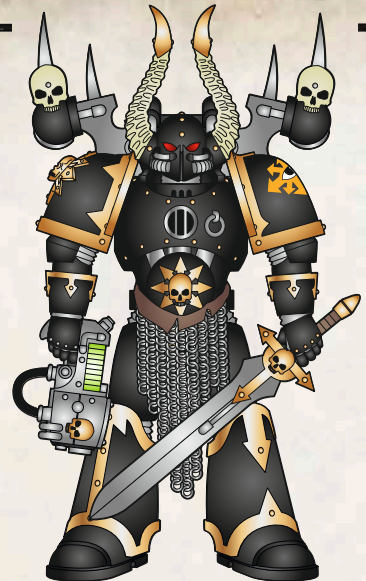
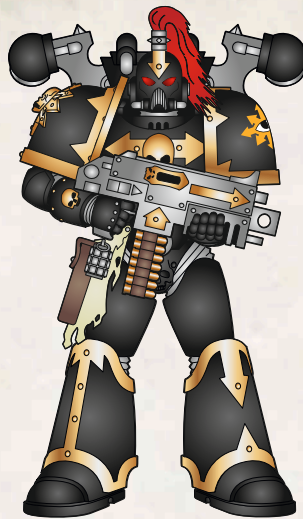
LORD XORPHAS THE TAINTED

The cruel Sorcerer known as Xorphas has served Abbadon – and by extension the Dark God Tzeentch – for over five centuries. In that time, this supremely intelligent and merciless battle psyker has amassed great power and prestige. A favoured protégé of Ygethmor the Deceiver, Xorphas has won a string of victories from Ilmoritas to the Broken Worlds that have seen him elevated to lordship over a great force of Black Legionnaires. Borne across the void in baroque traitor warships, supported by rumbling masses of armoured fighting vehicles and Daemon Engines, this black-armoured host has the power to crush whole worlds. It is a power that Xorphas wields with supreme cunning, utilising the gifts of his patron deity to foresee the future and deploy his warriors where they will have the maximum impact against the foe. Unlike many of his peers, Xorphas is neither wasteful nor callous with the lives of his followers. He cares nothing for their individual fates, of course, but the Sorcerer recognises that judicious application of force works far better than grand gestures of wrath and ruin. It is a strategy that has served him well, Xorphas' masterfully directed warriors crushing his enemies time and time again.

COLOURS OF THE BLACK LEGION

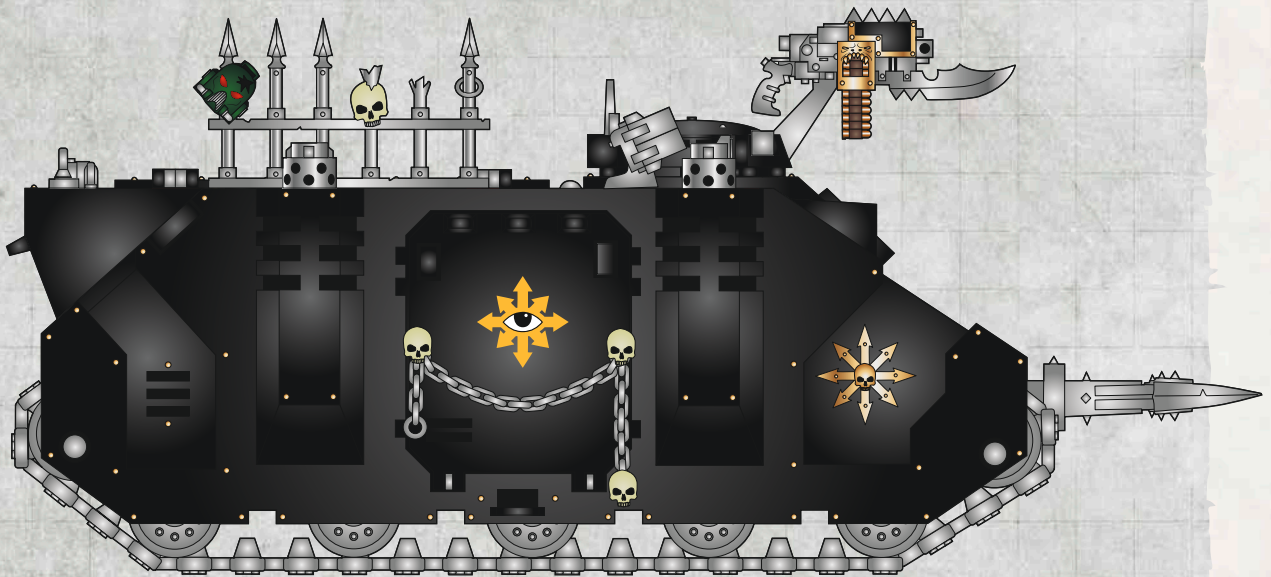
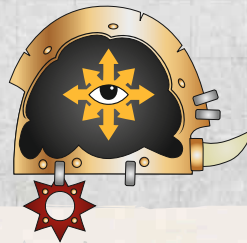
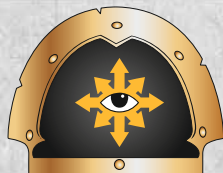


The Black Legion are amongst the most notorious of the Traitor Legions. They began as the Luna Wolves, but were renamed the Sons of Horus in honour of their then-favoured Primarch, the Warmaster himself. It was only after that tainted demigod's fall that his turncoat sons became the Black Legion, preserved from destruction and born anew through the vision of Abaddon the Despoiler.

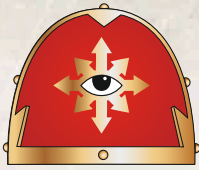


As their name would suggest, the Black Legion paint their armour midnight black to proclaim their allegiance to Abaddon and their dedication to the Long War against the Imperium of Man.

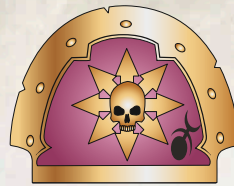
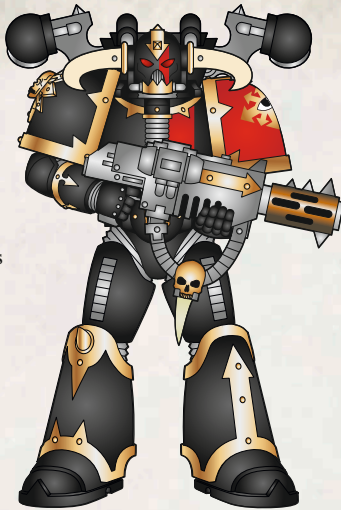
Black Legion shoulder guards display their symbol, the Eye of Horus within an eight pointed Chaos star. This is edged in the gold that the Black Legion wear to proclaim their superiority.



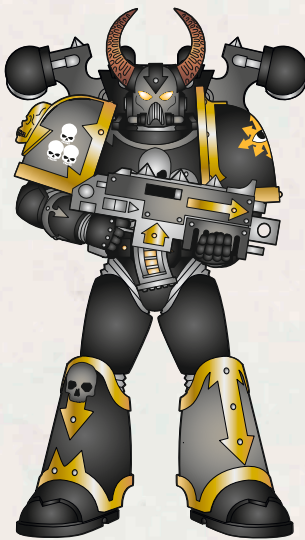
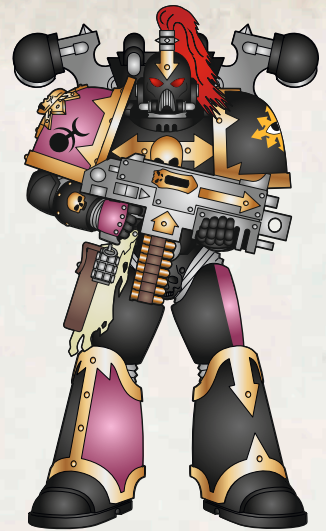
Black Legion vehicles display the Eye of Horus upon their hulls to show their allegiance. Beyond this, many vehicle crews add icons of the Dark Gods, and twisted trophy racks to proclaim their martial might.



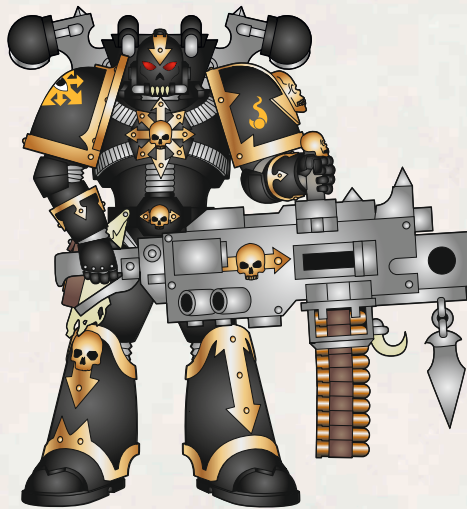
The Hounds of Abaddon are a warband within the Black Legion that worships Khorne, the Blood God. The red on their armour proclaims their allegiance to this wrathful deity.



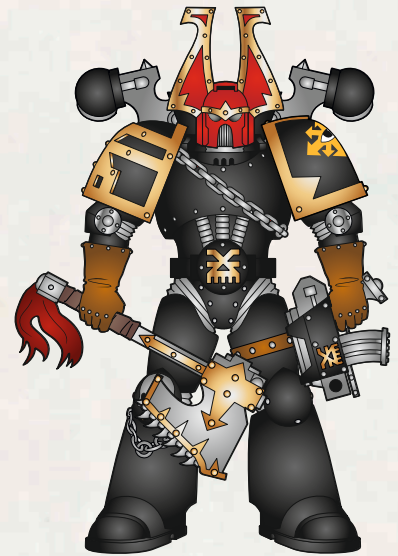
The lurid pink panels on the armour of the Children of Torment marks them out within the Black Legion as worshippers of Slaanesh. This warband are notorious for their vile excesses.



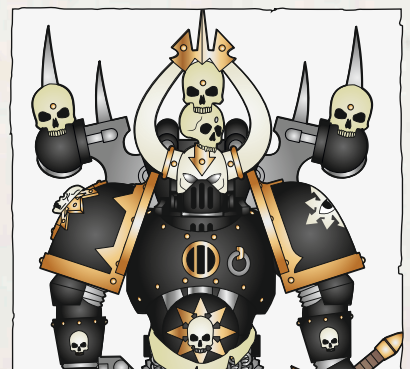
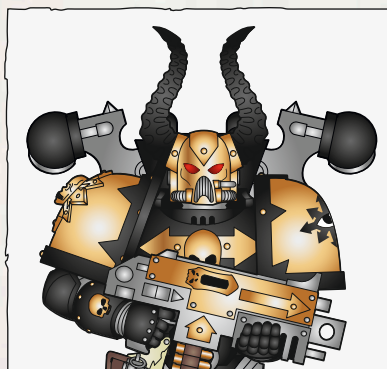
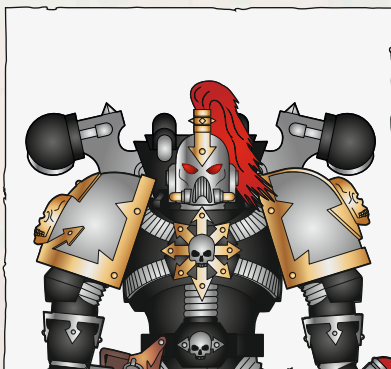
The Nurgle-worshipping Bringers of Decay bear the mark of the plague god upon grey armour plates.



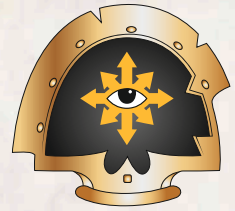
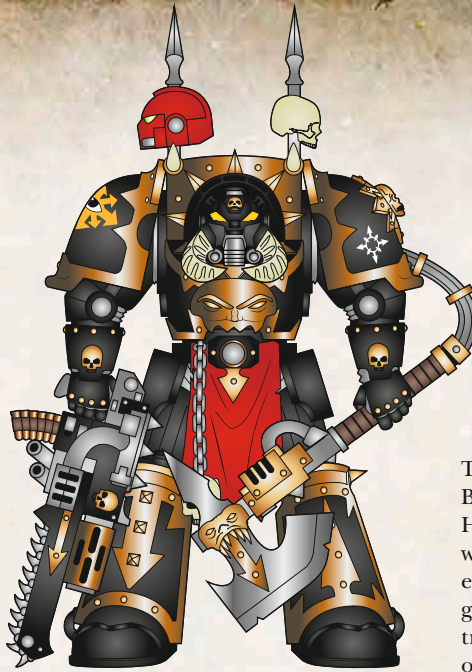
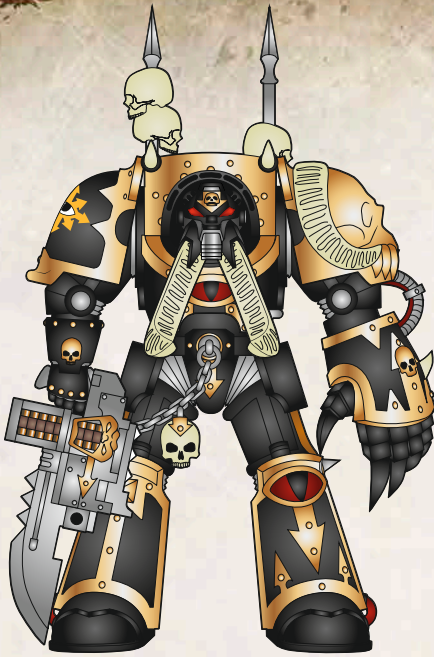
As befits Tzeentch worshippers, the Sons of the Cyclops show only subtle Tzeentchian icons on their armour.



Even such outlandish warriors as Khorne Berzerkers pledge themselves to Abaddon and his Black Legion.



Most squads of Black Legionnaires are led by Aspiring Champions of Chaos. These warriors bear individualistic garb that proclaims their might and displays the favour of their deities, be it golden plate, tall crests, or baroque horns and spikes.



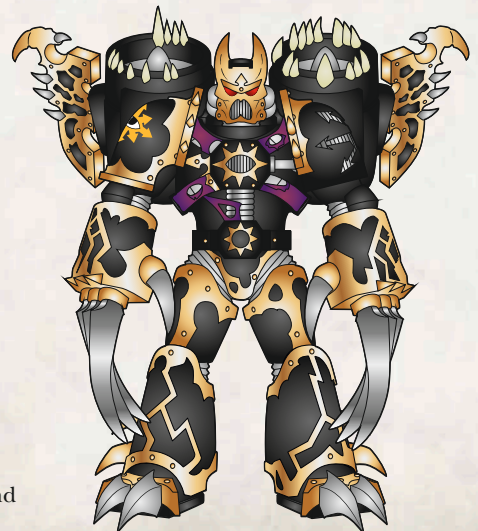
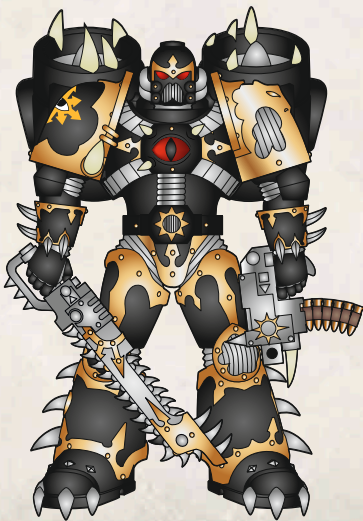
The Chaos Terminators of the Black Legion bear the Eye of Horus on their armour, along with a great deal of personal embellishment, grandiose golden decoration, and macabre trophies taken from the corpses of those they have slain.



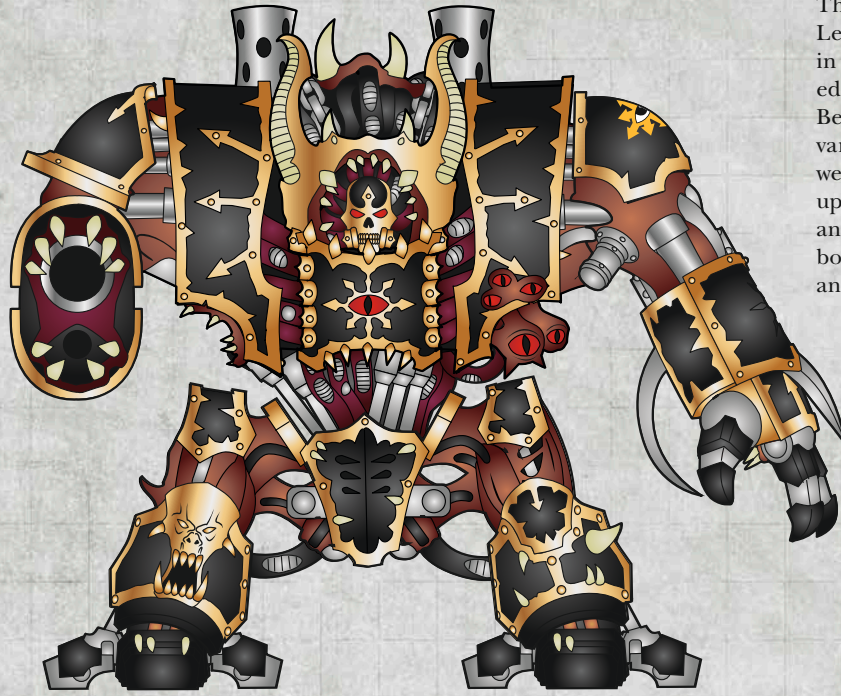
Black Legion Chosen have a great deal of gold on their armour to show their elevated station.



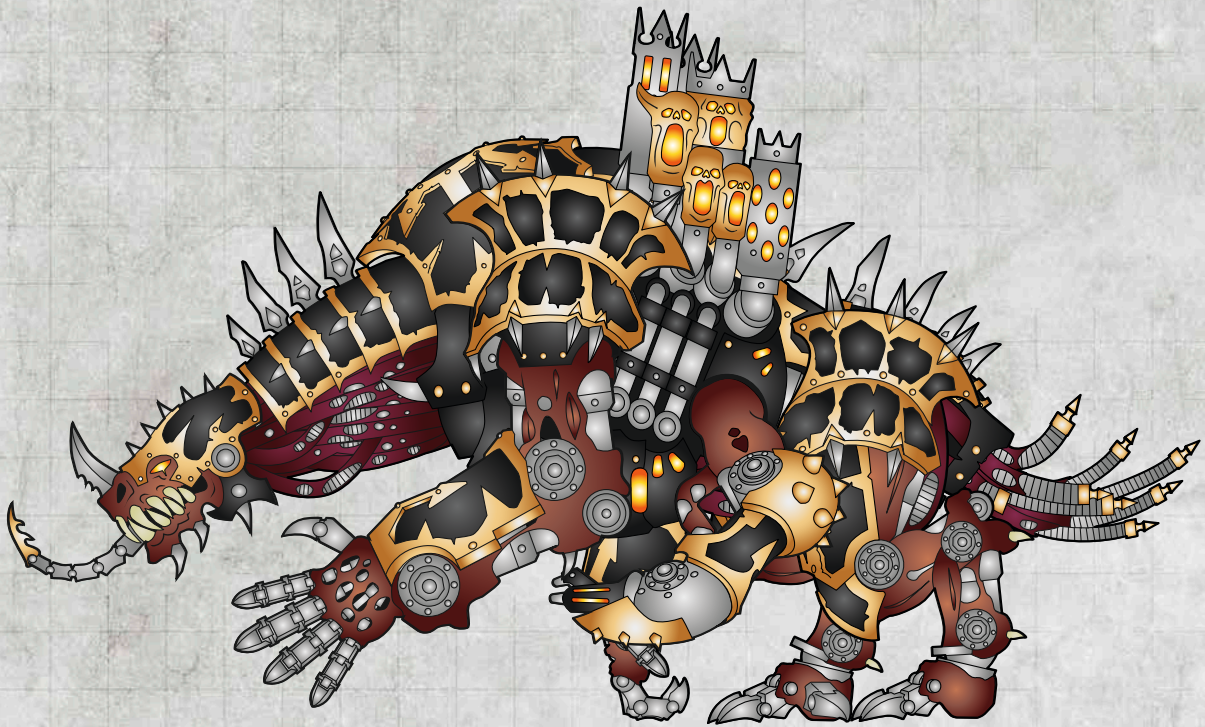
The Chaos Cultists who worship the Black Legion wear muted colours, and always display the black of their chosen masters.



To the left is shown a Black Legion Raptor, while on the right is a Black Legion Warp Talon. Even such swift and individualistic hunters as these bow to Abaddon, painting their armour in the black of the legion and bearing the Eye of Horus.



The Helbrutes of the Black Legion have their armour painted in the black of their legion and edged in the same regal gold. Beyond this their appearance can vary enormously. This Helbrute wears a golden death mask upon its foul flesh-sarcophagus, and displays the Eye of Horus both on its shoulder guard and breastplate.



The Daemon Engines of the Black Legion are baroque and monstrous-looking things of night-black armour plate, gold and silver metalwork, and flowing daemonic flesh. This Maulerfiend also displays the eight pointed star of Chaos atop its carapace, an important part of the wards that bind the Daemon within the machine.



The final battle for the Diamor System would be fought around the blood-anointed environs of War Zone Carnage. It was only one of the savage conflicts raging throughout the system, but the others were mere distractions – Lord Xorphas had eyes for this battle alone. Here lay the Despoiler’s prize, and the Black Legion threw everything they had into claiming it.

In the wake of the attack by Khârn’s Butcherhorde, Lord Xorphas met with his first true setback. Every action changes the weave of fate. Unlike the skilled seers of the Eldar, those Chaos worshippers who predict the future do so by interpreting the whispered half-truths of Daemons. Around Amethal, the screams and threats, beguilements and imprecations of the caged Daemons filled the ether. Under such conditions even the most skilled oracle could discern nothing of fate. Xorphas’ third eye was blinded, and though he had laid his plans as best he could, the Blood Angels diverged from the path he had set them.

Led by 1st Captain Karlaen, an elite force of Blood Angels veterans and Sanguinary Guard had launched a blistering strike against the Hex Infernum that fed Ioline’s Daemon Engine factories. It was an audacious move. Fierce fighting had raged through the streets around the Hex Infernum, the Blood Angels’ element of surprise carrying them only so far before the overwhelming numbers of the Chaos forces began to tell. Yet just as a rampaging Lord of Skulls looked set to crush the attackers, the Sanguinor struck from the heavens.

Inspired by the angel of Sanguinius, the surviving Blood Angels succeeded in destroying one of the biomechanical warding towers that stopped the energies of the rift from rampaging out of control. Mayhem ensued as the daemonic maelstrom broke its bounds and devoured the factories it was meant to feed. Karlaen and his raiders escaped aboard Stormraven Gunships, even as the Hex Infernum detonated in a roiling wave of Warp energies that annihilated all life on the planet. The loss of Ioline was a major blow for the Black Legion. Lord Xorphas’ ritual teetered upon the brink of completion. To fail now would invite hideous consequences. He had hoped to shed more blood upon the thirsty soil, but the Blood Angels had forced his hand. At the head of the Black Legion invasion fleet, the Sorcerer led the final attack on Amethal.

The Black Legion fleet was not vast, certainly not large enough to bolster all of the faltering traitor battlefronts on Amethal. Imperial Strategos had concluded that either their enemy was hesitantly frittering his forces away piecemeal, or the heretics were playing some other game, the rules to which the Imperial forces were not privy. It was this second scenario that filled Lord Admiral Gordus with dread, and led him to order all remaining ships and planetary defence levies on Tourmalid to stand ready. Wherever the Black Legion struck, Gordus would throw the last of his might into helping his allies stop them.

Gordus’ devotion was admirable, but Lord Xorphas’ cunning and prescience would be the governor’s undoing. It began over Peridos. The Black Legion cruisers emerged from hiding, surging from the Zircon Sprawl in an all-out attack against the Imperial naval cordon. It would be a desperate battle for the outnumbered traitors, but one

in which they might win great glory. More importantly, from Xorphas’ point of view, it would ensure that no reinforcements were available to defend Amethal.

Meanwhile, a lone traitor battleship settled in the void just outside the range of Tourmalid’s orbital guns. This was the *Cacodaemon*, craft of the Word Bearer Gorath-Hel. The Dark Apostle had business with the capital world and its vital dockyards. He would ensure that no aid for Amethal came from that quarter.

With the board set, Lord Xorphas moved all his pieces in for the final blow. His fleet thundered down upon Amethal, gathering up the scattered remnants of the Crimson Slaughter and Khornate warships as it went. The Blood Angels and Fleet Mechanicus flotilla fought bravely to hold back the tide, but they faced a fleet fresh and undamaged by the fighting thus far. After the Strike Cruiser *Flame of Baal* was torn in half by sustained torpedo bombardment, and two Mechanicus Explorator ships were reduced to drifting wreckage, the remaining Imperial craft fell back.



With the skies clear, the Chaos planetfall began. Their objective was the ‘gate’ of the primordial Daemon cage. Thanks to the Crimson Slaughter, Lord Xorphas knew where the cage’s wards were weakest, and where its inmates’ powers could leak through. The Black Legion brought with them a mighty weapon, a disharmonic crystal torn from the throne room of a Slaaneshi Daemon Prince who had foolishly thought to oppose Abaddon. Known as the Banshee Stone, this monstrous artefact would form the focus of a ritual to shatter the bars of the Daemon cage. Every drop of blood shed around War Zone Carnage, every day of seemingly senseless and wasteful battle, had served to prepare the way for this dread weapon. It had been sacrificial magic on a global scale, and Lord Xorphas held the knife. The ground had been anointed, the way prepared. Drinking deep the blood of the slain, the Banshee Stone would unleash its discordant fury to burn out the wards of the Daemon-cage where they were weakest. The vast prison would crack wide open, and billions of Warp entities would be set loose all at once.

Such an incredible surge of empyric energy would be more than reality could bear. The Diamor System would peel open like a hideous wound, causing a new-formed Warp rift to billow forth in its place. Abaddon's Crimson Path would leap suddenly forwards, a fault line in reality ripping from Cadia, to Diamor, and on towards Terra. It was a diabolical masterstroke, and one that, if successful, would hasten Abaddon's war by months, perhaps years.

The last stage of this grand ritual would be performed in the deep pit at the heart of War Zone Carnage. This would take time, and the Black Legion had learned well the lessons of Pandorax. Xorphas and his cabal landed upon the very lip of the dig site, accompanied by a force of Black Legion Terminators, battle-tanks and Daemon Engines. It was here that Lord Xorphas met with his second surprise of the campaign – his forces fell upon War Zone Carnage unopposed. The Sorcerer knew that his enemies must, by now, have realised his objective if not his purpose – they were no fools. No, reasoned Xorphas, if his enemies were not present then they could not be far away, probably massing for a decisive blow. In this they had miscalculated, but he must still move quickly to exploit their error.

On Xorphas' orders, drop craft after drop craft landed around the dig site, disgorging traitor warriors and war engines. They were to delay the enemy for as long as they could, and at any cost. Renegade Knights and Khornate Kytans strode into position alongside the surviving engines of the Legio Excruciatas, their massive guns tracking the war-blasted approaches to the ritual site. Flights of Helderakes soared through the local airspace like dragons defending their hoard. Overhead, spacecraft settled into low orbit. Their bulk darkened the skies as their macrocannons and lance batteries were readied. As he descended into the pit with his cabal to begin the ritual, Lord Xorphas felt the hand of Tzeentch heavy upon his shoulder. He would change the galaxy here, if his followers could hold out long enough.

When the Imperial attack came, it was expertly coordinated. Massed maniples of Skitarii advanced on every front, Onager Dunecrawlers stalking in their midst as Ironstriders loped out ahead. Chanting masses of Electro-Priests marched to battle with tracked battle servitors and towering robots looming over them. From the north came the remaining warriors of House Raven, many of their Knights exhibiting hastily repaired battle damage but still flying their colours with pride. From the east came the engines of the Legio Metalica, the boom of their war horns echoing across the blasted landscape. Finally, from the south came the forces of the Blood Angels, direct from the pacification of War Zone Cruelty. The warriors of the 2nd Company were much in evidence, rumbling transports raising dust tails in their wake as they sped towards the battle. Overhead skimmed Stormraven Gunships, bearing veteran assault troops and the last remnants of the Death Company on Amethal.

The Imperial noose drew tighter around the traitor forces before, with a rumble like thunder and a fire that lit the skies, the Chaos spacecraft began their bombardment. It was a reversal of the initial Chaos attack upon Amethal, but writ upon an even larger scale. The Imperial forces hurtled towards the thin black line of their foes, daring the barrage fire of the battleships above to close with the Black Legion defenders. Guns in their thousands lit with muzzle flare as both sides opened fire, and explosions wreathed the battle lines as the Imperial forces pushed home their attack against Lord Xorphas' outer defences. Even though many of those who fought did not truly understand what was at stake, all sensed that the deciding moment of this savage war was upon them.

As the enemy closed the gap, the Chaos forces hammered them with everything they had. Havocs and Obliterators blazed away with screams of hatred upon their lips. In a daring move, the surviving Imperial spacecraft launched harassing strikes against the Black Legion fleet. The

While the battle for Amethal raged, another fight began on Tourmalid. Cult cells – seeded into the sprawling worker-populace of the planet by the cruel artifice of Dark Apostle Gorath-Hel – suddenly activated. These unfortunates had, in many cases, been abducted and tortured by the Word Bearers, runes of servitude carved into their ribs before being hidden once more beneath stitched flesh. Aboard his warship Cacodaemon, the Dark Apostle triggered the runic bindings and drove his Cultists to attack. Bombs exploded in fuel reservoirs and aboard dock-to-ship umbilici, damaging spacecraft and venting screaming naval crewmen into the void. Hordes of Cultists swept through the corridors of grav-habs and rotational hub-stations, chattering autoguns mowing down

the planetary defence militia who had mustered to take ship to Amethal. Though the Cultists were scattered amongst the sprawl of Tourmalid's cities and docks, the element of surprise allowed them to wreak disproportionate havoc. Several docked Imperial Navy Cruisers that should have been released to aid the fighting on Amethal were crippled by fuel-line fires, unsanctioned weapons discharges, or the venting of decks to hard vacuum. Precious teleport homers were deployed by the cult leaders, using foul fetishistic totems that guided breaching strikes. They brought in hulking brutes in scarlet Terminator plate who led the cults on to spill through the corridors and grav-shafts of Tourmalid, surrounding the fortified palace of Lord Admiral Gordus. If the Governor was slain, system strategic command would collapse and

Tourmalid's defences would be crippled. Yet it was against the palace's defences that the Chaos attack ground to a halt. After their arrival, the Blood Angels had sent a ten-man squad of Sternguard Veterans to protect the Governor. The seasoned warriors steadied the Governor's Guard, and the palace defenders that had been driven back before the traitor advance. They wrought a cast-iron defence that turned the approach corridors to the fortress into killing zones and saw the Cultists exhaust their strength in wave after wave of attacks. When the Word Bearers Terminators advanced the stalemate was broken, for nothing could stop them. At the last, the Blood Angels called in a lance strike from a dry-docked cruiser, annihilating themselves and their foes in a single great blast and saving the Lord Admiral's life.

beset Black Legion captains were forced to choose between remaining vulnerable in low orbit, or breaking off their bombardments to rise out of the atmospheric envelope and engage the Imperial fleets. Spike-studded warships rumbled up to punish the loyalists with lance and torpedo fire. As they did so, the bombardment of the surface slackened by the moment. Blood Angels Terminators – just returned from the Ioline raid – teleported into the midst of the Chaos lines on the southern edge of the dig site, their swift strike allowing them to cripple a huge Helforged Warpack waiting in reserve. Against this weakened portion of the lines fell a massed strike of Blood Angels and Skitarii under the leadership of 2nd Company Captain Aphael. Xorphas' most trusted lieutenants led the counter-attack, but the hated loyalists had come on in such force that victory was impossible, even for the elite of the Black Legion. At the same time, the outnumbered Titans of the Legio Excruciatas found themselves facing an uneven duel to the east, pushed back step by step by the triumphant Legio Metalica. Though their ferocious

firepower had felled many Knights to the north, and driven back the Cult Mechanicus processions attacking from the west, to the south and the east the Black Legion defences were buckling.

At this point, the ritual at the base of the dig site pit was well underway. The Banshee Stone had been lowered into position at the heart of the pit, the blood of countless fallen welling up from the rocky ground and pouring in red rivers from the excavation walls as the stone drank it in. With the monstrous artefact pulsing the colour of a livid bruise, an awful disharmonic cacophony had begun, a moaning, sawing, screaming note that drowned out the chanting of Xorphas and his acolytes. Those energies were flowing down into the planet, shuddering through strata of soil and bedrock to where the extraplanar shell of the Daemon cage thrummed with primordial power. Already, cracks were forming in that ancient device, spreading slowly through its millennia-old wards and extinguishing them one by one.



Everything hung in the balance, from the space battle occurring on high, to the duelling forces that fought across the ruins of War Zone Carnage, down to the fate of the planet, the system, and perhaps even the Imperium itself.

That was when Khârn returned to the battle, drawn from the burning plains to the west by the sounds of so vast a conflict. The Betrayer led a massed Maelstrom of Gore against Magos Dominus Ivasnophon and his Cult Mechanicus forces retreating in the opposite direction. What followed was a swift, brutal battle. Though his procession put up a fierce fight to defend their master, the Magos' head was struck from his shoulders and his followers butchered to the last. As Khârn rampaged on across the battlefield to slaughter traitor and loyalist alike, he left the Imperium's hopes of replicating the Daemon cage technology bloodied in the dust behind him.

Meanwhile, the situation to the south had become critical. Led by some of the Blood Angels' greatest heroes, a red-armoured spear tip had driven through the Chaos defence lines and met at the very lip of the pit. Skitarii maniples were funnelling through the gap, while several engines of the Legio Metalica were laying down a steady bombardment from the east to drive the traitor forces away

from the breach. Though the ritual was not yet complete, Lord Xorphas realised that he was out of time. This would not be another Pandorax, however. The Banshee Stone had reached a terrible pitch of disharmony, and massive damage had been wrought upon the wards that held the Daemon cage closed. It might not rupture today, but it would not last long. Let the Imperial fools think they had stopped his ritual in time. Xorphas knew better.

With a booming psychic command, the Sorcerer ordered the retreat. Abandoning the Banshee Stone to run on for as long as it could, Xorphas and his cabal stormed up the ramp that led out of the pit. Accompanied by black-armoured Terminators, the Sorcerer and his acolytes unleashed the full fury of their psychic might to drive back the Blood Angels who rushed to meet them. With breathing space secured and a clear teleport lock established, the Black Legion were whisked away in a blaze of Warplight, leaving their foes raging in their wake.

Everywhere else furious battle devolved into anarchy as the traitor warbands fell back to whatever craft could carry them. The elite of the Black Legion staged skilful fighting retreats, falling back in good order and lifting off with all guns blazing. Others, like Kranon the Relentless and his





handful of surviving Crimson Slaughter followers simply bludgeoned a path to safety, slaughtering friend and foe alike in order to claim a traitor Thunderhawk and escape. On the northern edge of the battle, the last of the Legio Excruciatu made it aboard their monumental landing craft, only for the Knights of House Raven to shoot out its port-side thrusters. The enormous ship tilted sideways as it attempted to lift off, thundering down in a lazy arc to birth a new sun on the plains to the north.

The rest of the Chaos hordes, the Cultist chaff and murder-mad Berzerkers, were abandoned to the vengeful guns of the Imperial troops. The only exception was Khârn. Lost to the joy of slaughter, the Betrayer had carved a path of carnage through Imperial and Chaos forces alike and showed no signs of slowing, when swirling teleport energies engulfed him. Abaddon still had uses for Khârn, and so Lord Xorphas did his duty in ensuring that the Betrayer was not left to die. The blood-sigils and ensorcelments that Xorphas had wrought around his flagship's teleportarium had cost the Sorcerer dear in his own energies and lifeblood. This would be small comfort to those aboard the *Hammerfang*, the ship onto which Khârn was unceremoniously beamed. The Betrayer's murderous rampage would last for days...

On the planet's surface the slaughter continued for many hours before the last of the traitor forces were destroyed. Only by the combined efforts of Librarian Asmasael and his psychically attuned brothers was the Banshee Stone cracked and its hideous lament silenced. By that time, the traitor fleet had scattered, making for predetermined retreat coordinates.

Only one craft remained, veiled behind skeins of illusion. Lord Xorphas' flagship ghosted its way into the fringes of the Zircon Sprawl and there it powered down all but its most essential systems. It would wait, invisible to all, upon the orders of the Despoiler himself. The Imperium believed that they had won a great victory on Amethal, that they had foiled the Despoiler's plans once again. Lord Xorphas and the surviving acolytes of his cabal knew they were wrong. Here the Chaos Sorcerers would lurk, protected by their bodyguards and continuing the dark ritual of disharmonic unbinding begun by the Banshee Stone. Already, the cracks in the Daemon cage had spread beyond repair, even had anyone living known how to fix them. The energies of the Banshee Stone were no longer needed – it was just a matter of time before Lord Xorphas and his followers completed their diabolical task. The bars of the Daemon cage would break. It was already beginning.





+++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 FORCES,
82% LOYALIST].

ASC 083: FULL TRAITOR
WITHDRAWAL FROM ENGAGEMENT
ZONE, CAUSE STILL NOT
CONFIRMED [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+++







