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40,000

BLOOD ANGELS

BLOOD OF SANGUINIUS

MARK CLAPHAM

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BLOOD OF SANGUINIUS

Mark Clapham

Kravin woke in agony. He didn't know how long he had been unconscious, or how he had been injured. All he knew was pain.

Only one of his eyes would open. His helmet display was a mess of flickering glyphs, broken. The vox was a low hiss of static, useless. The only clear thing he could see was a countdown through the fuzz. It had only a short time left to run.

The countdown stirred a memory: charges they had set to destroy these catacombs once and for all, burying any traces of the heresies committed here. They had been halfway back to the surface when they were attacked, their desperate foes firing heavy weapons in too confined a space. Kravin had been at the edge of an explosion, knocked off a parapet and left plunging into darkness.

The countdown continued. He didn't have much time. He could die. He was a Blood Angel and had no fear of death, but what he was carrying couldn't be buried down here.

Kravin needed to get up. He had landed face down, and he tried to move his arms. The right one wasn't working, and he couldn't see through the cracked visor of his wrecked helmet. Using his good arm, he pushed himself up on to his knees. The sensation of pressure in his chest was lightly alleviated as he did so, but it also caused more pain. He used his good hand to reach under his chin and force off what was left of his helmet. The buckled metal pressed against his skin as he pushed it off, but it came loose and he let it roll away.

He looked around with his good eye. He was at the bottom of a narrow ravine, dim light penetrating the darkness from somewhere high above. The rocky floor was scattered with debris, but there was no sign of his squad, or the enemy.

The coppery taste of his own blood was in Kravin's mouth. He could feel the pull of the Red Thirst, and spat the blood out onto the ground. He ran his tongue around his mouth – a few teeth lost, including one pointed fang. His right eye still wouldn't open, and it felt like that side of his skull was crushed, his eye socket shattered. He looked down at the blood he had spat on the dirty ground, and regretted the loss – not to him, but to the Chapter.

He saw why his right arm wouldn't work – it had been severed at the elbow, blood dripping from the stump. He also saw the source of the pain in his chest, a broken spur of rock that had pierced his chestplate. It was still lodged there, and Kravin dared not remove it. He could feel the loss of his primary heart, and knew from the blood dripping from around that wound and the stump of his arm that his Larraman organ had been crushed. He didn't have long to live, and he couldn't afford to bleed out before he reached the surface.

The Chapter depended on him to not spill any more blood, so he needed to move. He held his good hand over the stump of his right arm, trying to stem the bleeding, and forced himself up. His right leg was in incredible pain, but it was still attached to his body and it still worked. He limped around and saw a slope leading upwards, then he shuffled in that direction as fast as he could.

After a few minutes, or at least what seemed like it, he realised he should have brought the helmet so he would know how much time he had left. Too late now, Kravin thought dimly. He could think little else, requiring all his focus to put one foot in front of another. The pain in his face and leg were terrible, but he was more worried about the blood loss, the drips escaping between his fingers, lost forever on the dusty rock floor.

He was a Blood Angel. He would not fade away, slipping into unconsciousness as he bled out. He would reach the surface or die on his feet as the catacombs collapsed.

The end of the spur of rock embedded in his chest caught against the wall briefly, and Kravin felt it press against his second, damaged heart. The pain threatened to plunge Kravin back into unconsciousness, and he

recited some meditative words to overcome it, words he had taught to others of his Chapter in how to manage the Red Thirst. Still muttering to himself, Kravin tilted his body and managed to squeeze through, his power armour screeching in protest as it scraped against the rock, and out into a wider space.

He recognised where he was. Not far from the surface. He was near. He could make it.

Then he heard the explosion. A colossal blast, distant but echoing through the stone walls and floor. The ceiling above his head began to crumble, and Kravin did what he had thought he could not – he began to run.

Kravin ran, ignoring the pain burning through him. He felt death now, as he ducked under an archway before it collapsed behind him. His vision was failing, blackness seeping in from the sides, reducing his sight to a blurry tunnel as he ran down one corridor, then the next, dodging falling stone.

He could feel the anger rising, the injustice at the death of another, father to all Blood Angels.

No, Kravin would not give into the Black Rage, not now. He had to think not of anger in regard to his death, but of what he carried – the importance of it.

He ran on, across a narrow bridge over a deep pit. The stone was falling beneath his feet. So close now, but his vision was failing him, and his leg was giving way.

Something blocked the bridge, as tall as he was, a looming darkness. A surviving enemy? A pile of rubble? A phantom of his own mind? Kravin couldn't tell, but he lashed out in a sweeping gesture and the shadow was dispelled, its source either dashed into the pit or never there to start with.

As the bridge fell away, Kravin stumbled onto more solid ground, collapsing to one knee. Everything in his body told him to stop, to rest.

No, not far now. He pushed himself up and on, staggering forwards in unsteady steps. He was sure he was near, but dust had filled the air, an outrush of debris from the explosion, choking him and interfering with his sense of direction. He feared he was lost.

But then Kravin stumbled out into the light, the dust cleared and he found himself facing the bolters of a dozen of his fellows, a cordon to

prevent any stragglers escaping the destruction of the catacombs.

‘Brother!’ said one, rushing to his aid. Kravin could barely see now, and he let himself be lowered to the ground, closing his remaining eye. He couldn’t tell who was helping him, and he wasn’t sure he was recognisable with his injuries.

‘The Prime Helix...’ said the Blood Angel who had helped him, his voice distant now. ‘A Sanguinary Priest... By the Emperor, it’s Kravin. Quick, bind his wounds. We must save his blood...’

That voice was barely audible now, and Kravin let his attention drift, felt himself let go. Though his life was fading away, darkness overtaking him, he knew the blood that flowed through his veins, the blood filtered through the bodies of generations of Sanguinary Priests, would be preserved and passed on.

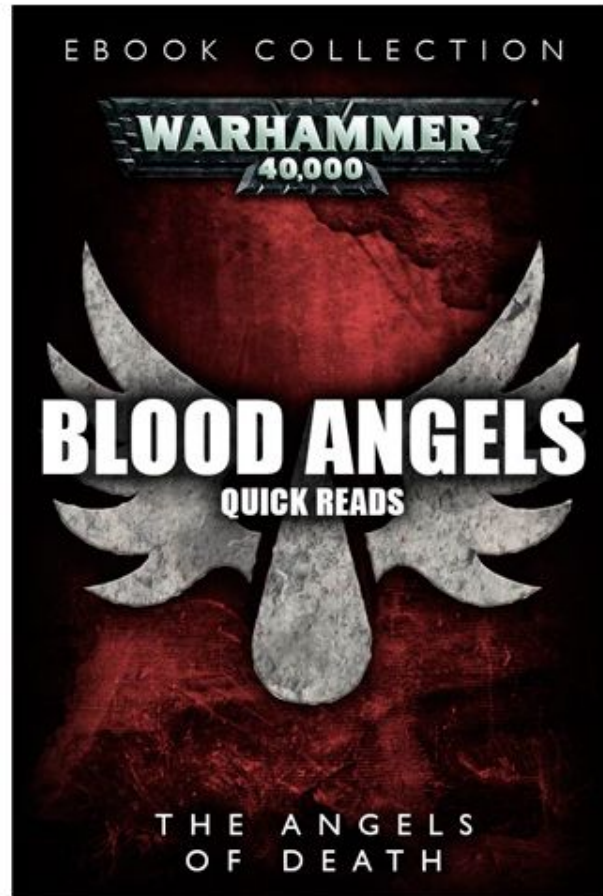
The blood of their primarch, their legacy as Blood Angels.

The blood of Sanguinius.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Clapham is the author of the Warhammer 40,000 novel *Iron Guard* and the short stories 'The Siege of Fellguard', 'The Hour of Hell', 'In Hrondir's Tomb' and 'Sanctified', which appeared in the anthology *Fear the Alien*. He lives and works in Exeter, Devon.

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