

**WARHAMMER**  
**40,000**



**EMINENCE SANGUIS**  
**GUY HALEY**

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# EMINENCE SANGUIS

**Guy Haley**

**428.M41**

**Corinal**

**Corra System**

A crimson dagger sliced towards the planet Corinal. The silhouette and name of this sleek, fast ship were known well in a score of systems, for the *Eminence Sanguis* was the personal transport of the High Chaplain of the Blood Angels. Its appearance was rarely welcomed. The systems to which it went were those inhabited by the Sons of Sanguinius, and visits from the High Chaplain to the Successor Chapters rarely boded well.

On board were but five battle-brothers - Captain Lorenz, seconded to the Heavengate Fleet, Brother Bastus and Brother Collephon to assist him. With them Chaplain Astorath travelled as adjutant to the High Chaplain, who made up the fifth and principal member of their party. A force few in number, but mighty.

Corinal grew quickly in the unshielded oculus of the command deck. Lorenz and Astorath stood side by side, watching it until it filled the window.

Revealed was a planet dominated by bright desert and a boundless cobalt ocean. Green fringed the edges of the single, massive continent. Five long rivers dug worming emerald valleys across the land. A huge alpine mass at the centre was a striking collection of brown jungle canyons filigreed with white snowy ridges. The poles wore icy caps, bordered by grey tundra that gave way to

yellow grassland. But these varied colours of terrestrial life were smudges against the dazzling white sands of the continental interior. From these vast wastes came Corinal's planetshine, an uncompromising glow that bathed the small bridge in harsh light.

'Looks hot,' said Captain Lorenz.

Chaplain Astorath glanced at the warrior sidelong through his skull helm's ruby lenses.

'It does,' said Lorenz. He shrugged, his autoreactive pauldrons purring as they shifted to match the movement. Astorath and he were of very different temperaments. Lorenz was aware that Astorath disapproved of his less-than-grave nature. It only encouraged Lorenz to flippancy.

'Take us into low anchor, bring us into geostationary orbit,' said Astorath.

'As you wish, Chaplain,' said Lorenz. The captain walked from the fore of the bridge to his command dais. With armoured fingers he activated the input pads of the screens fixed to its rails. 'Execute the manoeuvre,' Lorenz ordered his blood thralls. The crew was small as befitted a craft of the *Eminence Sanguis*' size - a hundred mortals, a thousand servitors.

'As you command, my lord,' answered Lorenz's first officer. The instruction was passed down the chain of command. The ship rumbled as its powerful reverse thrusters spat fire, crowding the view through the oculus with flash frozen exhaust gasses. Metal sang from the stress of the steep curve the *Eminence Sanguis* took towards the planet. Mortal officers monitoring the distance and gravitic pull quietly conferred with one another, adjusting course and speed. Servitors voiced their unthinking assent to whatever was asked of them.

Wreathed in fire, the *Eminence Sanguis* came into a stable orbit, chasing night's terminator across the sea.

A single, cruciform orbital fortress hove into view, its crenellations lit strongly by the mellow sun and glare of the planet. Lights twinkled in dark recesses. Navigation beacons blinked on the arms of its docking piers, where a number of bulk hauler merchant vessels were attached.

'There. The ships of the Dovarnion refugees,' said Lorenz. He walked to a screen away from the oculus. 'Their identification signums are a match.'

'I see them,' said Astorath. 'Their lights are out.'

'The reactors are probably offline. Auspex, confirm.'

A man whose face was coloured green by the phosphor screens he hunched over replied, 'There is nothing, Captain Lorenz - no power, and no signs of life.'

Astorath made a noise of annoyance in his throat. The High Chaplain had warned them to expect this, but the Space Marines had hoped it would not come to pass.

Directly below the platform, reefs that had failed at the last to become islands shone purely in the sea. Upon them was built a lofty tower.

'Master of auspex, magnify the archipelago. Bring the hololith on line,' ordered Lorenz. 'Display the fortress-monastery, maximum definition.'

An electric hum burred across the noise of men about the work of spaceflight. With a crackling pop, a wide image sphere wavered on. Depicted within its banded light were the reefs and the fortress-monastery. A single spire pointed skywards, studded with cannons, fifteen hundred feet tall and topped with a monumental golden angel whose haloed face was bowed and hidden within a deep hood.

'The Bloodspike,' said Lorenz. 'Let us see if they are willing to talk.'

Lorenz keyed buttons. A bank of servitors lit up with green light and went rigid. Their wiped brains were co-opted to run Adeptus Astartes encryption protocols. Their mouths worked silently, forming nonsense syllables.

'Initiating contact,' said Lorenz.

Alarms rang throughout the command deck.

'Silence those,' ordered Lorenz.

'There are weapons locking onto us, my lord,' warned the master of auspex.

'Shall we respond?' asked the master of armament.

'We shall not,' said Astorath. 'The Angels Vermillion are secretive. They will not welcome our visit. They seek to drive us away, that is all.'

'Angels Vermillion, greetings, brothers,' said Lorenz. 'I am Captain Lorenz of the vessel *Eminence Sanguis*, Blood Angels Chapter, Adeptus Astartes. In the spirit of friendship, we request permission to dock at your station and descend to the surface.'

'Denied,' came a short, harsh reply.

The orbital grew larger. The *Eminence Sanguis* fell into its shadow. 'Talkative, are they not?' said Lorenz. He repeated his request. This time there was no verbal response. Tocsins rang again.

'For the love of the Great Angel, turn those off!' said Lorenz.

'More weapons locks, my lord,' said a thrall.

'They would not dare to fire,' said Astorath.

'I hope that is true. We are a static target here,' said Lorenz. 'Our chances of survival are minimal.'

'There is a reactor surge on the surface,' said the master of auspex. 'The Angels Vermillion are powering their defence lasers.'

'What about the orbital?' asked Lorenz, going over his own displays.

'Nothing as yet.'

'Well, this is awkward. What do we say to them now?' Lorenz asked Astorath.

'Wait. Hold position,' said Astorath.

An armoured figure strode onto the bridge. His battleplate was deep red and fashioned to look like muscle peeled of skin. Gold trim studded with fine jewels framed this gory art. Behind him came four mute servitors bearing an obsidian weapons case the size of a coffin.

The warrior was bareheaded, as was his right as High Chaplain. His name was Hereon, and it was said no angel of fairer countenance ever held the office. His skin was a perfect milk white, his eyes a pale, calming green, and his hair a deep, reddish blond. He exuded an air of power and nobility.

Astorath dropped to his knee.

'High Chaplain,' he said.

'We tell them that we are here on official Imperial business and will not be denied, Captain Lorenz. Put me on the vox.' A servoskull with a gaping vox horn for a mouth detached itself from the command deck's densely decorated ceiling and swooped down to hover over Hereon's head. 'This is High Chaplain Hereon. You will permit us to dock and descend to the surface. You will power down your weapons.'

'We shall not. You are not welcome,' responded the voice. 'Begone.'

'This is not an ambassadorial courtesy mission, my brother,' said Hereon sternly. 'We are here at the behest of Imperial Navy Sector command. They would like to know what you are doing in possession of these chartist transports. The authorities on Dovar have also requested that I discover what exactly has happened to the citizenry evacuated in the face of the recent xenos incursion.'

There was no reply.

'Either you allow us to land and speak with your Chapter Master,' said Hereon, 'or we shall depart with an unfavourable report. The next delegation to come here will be less amicable. It is better this matter is resolved between us, as brothers, rather than through the intervention of the Inquisition.'

Silence greeted his words.

'They are not disengaging their weapons,' said Lorenz.

'Any act of aggression against this vessel will be taken as a declaration of war by the Blood Angels,' said Hereon. 'Your Chapter will most likely be declared

renegade. Allow us access.'

For four minutes they waited for a response.

'They are not listening,' said Lorenz. 'I suggest we withdraw to the system fringes and contact Dante. This is a mess.'

'Wait,' said Hereon.

More minutes passed. Finally, the vox hissed as the channel was reopened.

'Proceed to anchor thirty miles from the High Corinal station. No direct access. Do not dock. You may proceed to the surface alone, High Chaplain, by transport.'

The vox cut out.

'Put us in close to the orbital,' ordered Lorenz. 'Nine hundred yards distant. I'm not standing off where they can blow us out of the sky without risk to their own facilities. Weapons systems to remain dormant, but ready gun crews for immediate retaliation. Enginarium, increase power output for combat readiness.'

'Do not provoke them,' said Astorath.

'A precaution, nothing more,' said Lorenz. 'They cannot complain. If you point a gun at me, it is only fair I rest my hand on the grip of mine.' A soft fanfare played as his orders were marked accepted. The reactor readouts climbed. 'I have had warmer welcomes from orks.'

'Prepare my Thunderhawk,' said Hereon. 'I shall follow their request.'

'That is not a wise course of action,' said Astorath.

'For once, Astorath and I are in agreement,' said Lorenz.

'It Is the only way open to us at this moment,' said Hereon. 'I trust you to rescue me should things get out of hand.'

Hereon's Thunderhawk was painted in the black and bone of the Chaplaincy. The hatches were the blood red of the Chapter, and bore its heraldry, but its chief livery was one of an order that transcended Chapter boundaries among those claiming descent from Sanguinius. There was none of that confraternity on display at Corinal.

The Bloodspike grew to meet the craft. Although from the void the shallow sea had appeared tranquil, close up, monstrous waves became visible. Blown across the deep oceans by unopposed winds, upon encountering the shallower waters of the continental shelf they were tripped by friction and gathered themselves up into masses of water tall as hills. The fortress-monastery was directly in their path. As the Thunderhawk circled, a wave nine hundred feet high swallowed two-thirds of the spire's height. When it moved on, sea spume cascaded in

thundering waterfalls from the spire's ledges and defence batteries, rushing back to join the greater body of the ocean. The sucking of this huge swell periodically revealed the reefs to the air. The giant sessile creatures that dwelt there flung wide their arms to snatch up stranded fish before they were submerged again.

Dozens of smaller waves followed, each lesser than the last, until the sea returned to something approaching equilibrium. Even then, it heaved and slapped at the fortress-monastery's mighty plasteel roots without pause. Corinal's ocean could never be still.

A blast shield slid open halfway up the spire, well below the level inundated by the ocean moments before. Clearance codes were transmitted to the ship silently, without courtesy.

Hereon stood alone in the Thunderhawk's transport bay as the ship plummeted down and levelled off. He saw none of what went on outside the vessel. He was focused on what he must do within the Bloodspike. The Angels Vermillion were isolationist and unfriendly. This would not be easy.

A change in engine pitch and a sudden deceleration preceded landing. Hereon shifted his weight within his maglocked armour to counteract the shifting g-force. The craft's landing claws clunked and the craft jolted, stopped, and sank into its undercarriage pneumatics.

Before he keyed the door open, Hereon donned his helmet. It too was decorated with scarlet ridges representing the shape of skinless muscle. With the helm placed upon his head, he became a grotesque, flayed giant, ivory teeth shining in the gruesome red around his stylised respirator grill.

The black wings of his jump pack shifted. Hereon gripped the Executioner's Axe, now uncased, that cursed blade which had claimed so many tainted lives down the millennia.

Via his armour, he sent a signal to the ship, bidding it open. The forward assault ramp hissed down. His boots disengaged from the deck. 'Await me here,' he signalled the pilot, and strode out into the fortress-monastery of the Angels Vermillion.

The open docking gate showed bright blue skies. That light intruded only a little way into the interior. Dim, bloody lumens saturated the hangar with a deep and unpleasant red. The floor was black marble, heavily veined, but what true colours the stone held were a mystery; everything bore the tint of vitae from the lights.

There were no thralls or other mortals present. Five servitors stood dormant in their cradles at the rear of the bay. It was a small deck, with space for a brace of

gunships, no more. A lone Space Marine awaited him in armour a darker red even than the light. His heraldry bore similarities to the Blood Angels: a blood drop framed by black wings, a skull enclosed within the drop. Hereon had seen many variations on this theme in his long life. With few exceptions, the badges of the Blood Angels successors cleaved close to their father Chapter. As primogenitor, the marking of the Angels Vermillion was closer than most. It was a mark of the awful bonds they shared - the black death of Sanguinius, and the curse that it brought.

The warrior exhibited no sign of brotherhood, however. He remained helmeted throughout the encounter. If this was a meeting of kin, they were long estranged.

'I am Kuldoth Moar, the First Blade of Chapter Master Chauld,' said the warrior. 'What is your business at the Bloodspike?'

'You greet your brothers poorly.'

'Though our blood is the same, the time of our parting is long in the past,' said Moar tersely. 'We go our own way, and owe nothing to the Blood Angels. State your business, or depart.'

'I will speak with your master. Immediately.'

'By what authority do you make this demand?'

'By the authority of Lord Commander Dante.'

'Dante is not the master of the Angels Vermillion,' said Moar. 'Chauld is lord here, no other.'

'Then by the authority of the Chaplaincy of the Blood Angels, over whom I am the master, and the redeemer of those lost to our bloodline. In this my authority encompasses even you.'

'Others may agree with you, High Chaplain, but we do not recognise your right to the role of redeemer,' said Moar. 'We redeem our own.'

'So then, by the authority of the Emperor of Mankind, whose vessels you wrongfully hold, and whose citizens have vanished in your care, your lord will meet with me.'

Moar said nothing.

'Do you reject His authority also?' Hereon hefted his axe meaningfully.

Moar paused. 'You will wait here.' He turned about without another word.

Hereon was left alone. A haunting siren sang, the hangar darkened. The world outside was plunged underwater by a giant wave slipping past the bay's atmospheric energy shield. The blast doors remained open, showing the High Chaplain he was no prisoner. That was no courtesy either, but encouragement to depart.

More waves rolled by. Half an hour later, Moar returned, flanked by two Sanguinary Guard garbed in armour as dark red as his own. The colour gave the deathmasks they wore a daemonic flavor Hereon did not care for.

'Chapter Master Chauld will see you. Briefly. You shall speak with him, and then you shall go.'

'That is all I requested. My thanks.'

'This way,' said Moar.

Moar led him into a huge hall at the centre of the Bloodspike. Statues lined the walls, each covered in a black cloth, hiding their nature from the High Chaplain. A statue of the primarch filled a huge section of wall, an altar at his feet. His wings and arms were spread. At least, Hereon assumed it was the primarch from the shape. Sanguinius' effigy too was concealed by a vast black shroud. On the fuliginous cloth the Chapter symbol was embroidered in red and gold, though the colours bled into each other in the dull blood light. What craftsmanship he could make out in this hellish illumination was exquisite, the equal of any the Blood Angels might produce, but every representation of the human form was covered. Moar ignored his charge, and became absorbed in the detail of the floor. The Sanguinary Guard marched away. Hereon's wings twitched as he watched them go.

The chamber was deserted. Another long, musical siren wailed through the fortress. A series of barely perceptible tremors shook the giant spire as it was again engulfed by the sea.

'Where are your servants and your brothers?' Hereon asked.

Moar looked up sharply. 'Our brothers?'

'There is no one here.'

'They are occupied. We change our thralls. Soon new servants will be ours - you come to us at an unusual but important time.'

'A festival?'

'The Sorrowing,' said Moar. He would say no more on the matter, and returned to his contemplation of the floor mosaics.

Another long wait beckoned. Hereon centred himself to fight his growing anger. He withdrew his senses within the cocoon of his armour, then sank into his mind. 'Serenity is the enemy of the thirst,' he said to himself, his whisper loud in his helm. 'Serenity is the beginning of restraint, the Fourth Virtue.' Hereon repeated to himself the words of the Solus Encarmine, letting time slip by to the rhythm of the chant.

'High Chaplain.' The voice broke his concentration. Letting out a long,

controlled exhalation, Hereon returned to the present. The Sanguinary Guard were escorting a richly armoured warrior. He had his helm off, showing a face that had the look of the Angel, but there was a sharpness in his features not found among the Blood Angels. His lips were thin and cruel, and the whites of his eyes blood red.

Moar was nowhere to be seen.

'You are Chapter Master Chauld?' asked Hereon.

'I am,' said the warrior. Annoyance clipped the Chapter Master's words. There was no concealing his impatience that Hereon be gone. 'You arrive at a poor time, lord. We are deep in preparation for the ceremony of the Sorrowing. Your visit here is an unwelcome distraction. If you had but sent message that you were coming, we could have arranged a mutually acceptable date.'

'You must forgive me,' said Hereon. 'Long have we respected your desire for solitude, though it saddens the Chapters of the Blood that you remain apart. Nevertheless, for millennia you have made your wishes clear to us, and we have abided by your terms. Alas, your actions have forced the hand of our lord commander, and our respect for your solitude must be set aside. We could not wait. The Inquisition grows suspicious of your actions, war threatens, and we would not see a Chapter of the Great Angel be declared renegade. I have come —'

'I know why you are here,' said Chauld coldly. 'Return whence you came, and tell your lord Dante that we shall return the chartist fleet to the guardianship of the Imperial Navy. We no longer have need of them.'

'What of their crews, and of the refugees they carried?'

'We will return the ships. Within a week we will declare a point of exchange,' said Chauld.

'What of the people?' said Hereon in a voice steeped in authority.

Chauld was a Chapter Master, but few could deny Hereon. He looked aside. He bared his teeth, breath hissing through them. When he looked back his expression had grown fiercer, and his eyeteeth had slid out from his gums, drawing a stream of blood from his lower lip.

'You wish to know what has become of these people, these forgotten thousands? Then I will show you.'

Curtly, he turned and waved Hereon on behind him. Hereon noticed sentries in alcoves watching him and the Chapter Master warily. The Sanguinary Guard fell into step with their lord.

'He must see!' said Chauld to the sentries as they came out from their armoured

killposts. 'So he shall see. He will observe our preparations for the Sorrowing.'

Chauld took Hereon through a door set into the ornate wall. A spiral stair descended, taking them into areas of more utilitarian nature. They came off the stair at a small landing. The entrance at its end opened, a pair of doors drew back sideways, then two beyond slid into the floor and ceiling. Lastly, a portcullis rattled upwards.

Chauld led him into a huge, industrial space. Rails were suspended on steel hawsers from the ceiling. Pipes belched steam from the floor. 'Here are your missing citizens,' he said.

Figures in translucent plastek sacks hung from the rails. Small data-pads wired into their chests winked in the ruddy gloom. Softseals in the bodysacks allowed in-tubes to penetrate the dormant figures at the wrists, necks and thighs, taking blood to containers hanging beneath their feet. White-armoured Sanguinary Priests walked the aisles between, checking on their harvest. Every ten seconds the lines lurched forwards to the grinding of some hidden engine and the squeal of wheels, setting the bags swinging.

Chauld led Hereon towards the centre, bodies either side. 'Some of these are the crew and cargo of the free ships we hold at our orbital,' he explained. 'The rest are our thralls. Their labours are done. Every fifty years we change our stock for new and the old are given a great honour. The processing is almost done - we are two thirds of the way through. New servants have been drawn from the remainder of the mortals from the ships and the rest will join with us and our freed servants, blood to blood.'

'You are draining them of vitae...!' said Hereon quietly. The stink of blood was causing his mouth to water. His gums ached as his teeth moved in his upper jaw.

'Yes,' Chauld said baldly. 'You must feel it too - the smell of this vitae excites you, you know its terrible lure. If you wish, you may drink of it, as much as you want.' He laughed a horrible, despairing laugh. 'We all must feed. It is our nature. In five days, we shall be finished. These bodies will be flensed, their bones cleaned, and they will be interred with all honour in the Chapel of the Isle of Martyrs. We shall bathe in their blood. Into it, we shall pour the essence of Sanguinius by opening the veins of one of our priests and draining him unto death. Then the blood will be treated again, and prepared into the liquid food of battle. Thereafter it is introduced into our armour's dispensers to nourish us in war. A half century's supply is here.'

'You have gone too far!' said Hereon. 'You profane the sacred life fluid of the

primarch himself!

'We do what we have to,' said Chauld. 'How far is too far in defence of the Imperium, High Chaplain? Exterminatus? The culling of whole populations to slay a few traitors? How is this any different in enormity?'

'They came to you for help. They thought you were going to save them.'

'We did. Dovar is still in Imperial hands. Most of the citizens remain. Through the sacrifice of those that fled, many more on other worlds will be saved! These men and women are honoured. They feel no pain. We treat them with respect.' They continued on down the intermittently jerking line, coming to a deep shaft running up the centre of the Bloodspike. There, a dozen production lines came to an end. The bodies were upended by an automatic process, and shaken hard to release the last few drops of vitae. Bare-chested men with naval tattoos unhooked the bags and yanked out the draining tubes from the limbs of the dead. The blood was carefully collected and the bodies tossed into wheeled bins which were pushed out of the hall by other thralls.

'We discovered early that by feeding the thirst we can control it,' said Chauld. 'We kept ourselves apart for shame, thinking ourselves afflicted alone. Ironic, it seems now. Only a handful of us fall to its ravages each year, and it forestalls the onset of the Black Rage for decades. We all fall in the end, but in not so great numbers as the rest of the Blood.'

'This is an abomination,' said Hereon in disbelief.

'It is necessary,' said Chauld softly.

'Nothing like this can ever be justified. It stops, now,' said the High Chaplain.

Hereon ignited his jump pack and leapt for the Chapter Master. Chauld looked up unimpressed as Hereon swept down, axe raised.

A ringing impact knocked Hereon sideways. A Sanguinary Guard grappled with him in mid-air. White wings entangled with black as the warriors fought. Below, the second guard was lining up his angelus bolter for a shot.

Hereon shoved back hard with the haft of his axe and ignited his jet again. Bolts slashed through the space where he had been, impacting with the corpse rail and bringing part of it down, Hereon's helm bleeped as he swooped back and around. Jump packs could not sustain true flight for long, and his fuel source was rapidly depleting. More shots chased him, blasting the unconscious mortals into shreds of flesh. Hereon thundered down towards the guard, weaving through a stream of boltgun fire. A round exploded on his plastron, causing more alarms to ring. Drawing back his axe, he swung for the nearest guard, the impetus of flight sending the broad head through armour. Blood fountained outwards, black in the

red light.

Spinning on his heel, Hereon parried a crackling strike from the second guard. He swept out with the haft, tripping the warrior and bringing him down with a crash. The smell of blood fogged Hereon's mind, stirring the beast in his breast to wakefulness. Had he been elsewhere, he would have spared the warrior's life.

The axe crashed down, splitting the Sanguinary Guard's head in two.

A searing blast knocked Hereon to his knees. His armour sounded its clarions of pain, but in his maddened state he barely felt the blow and turned to find the source so he might smash it.

Two squads of Angels Vermillion ringed him, weapons ready. Hereon snarled, and made ready to die.

'Stop!' bellowed Chauld. His shout penetrated Hereon's bloodlust. Only a hero of the greatest will could have fought the Thirst back down so quickly. Hereon's mind cleared.

'Do not harm him! Do not strike him down!' ordered Chauld. Green eye lenses glowed in the slaughterhouse. Boltguns were levelled at the High Chaplain. Bodies that had slid from the broken rails lay in heaps. 'Put up your axe, High Chaplain - you will not be harmed.'

Hesitantly, Hereon dropped the Executioner's Axe. Chauld nodded in his direction. Four Space Marines came to his side and restrained him.

Chauld addressed Hereon. 'I preserve your life not out of affection, High Chaplain, but because killing you would bring the wrath of the Sanguinary Brotherhood down upon us.' He looked around at the suspended bodies. 'Though the Emperor alone knows few among them are more innocent than we. All our hands are bloodied.' He looked back at Hereon. 'Your Chapter is blind. You are dazzled by the glory of ancient days that can never return. You do not see the evil that surrounds all we do. Sanguinius is a memory, and a cursed one at that,' he said, his red eyes blazing. 'His death dooms us all, but we would stand a little longer in defence of mankind! We—' Chauld drew in a shuddering breath and closed his eyes. When he spoke again, it was quietly, and under obvious self-control. 'You will return, and tell Commander Dante that we remain loyal subjects of the Emperor, but we cannot - will not - allow our Chapter to die because of the ravages of the Red Thirst. Who are these people here? They are drops in an ocean of shifting blood. They will not be missed. Their sacrifice is nothing when set against ten thousand years of loyal service to the Imperium. Countless others like them would be dead were it not for our tithe. Once every fifty years do we hold the Sorrowing. That is all. Do not think this brings us

pleasure. We name this ceremony as we do for the burden it places on our souls, knowing that so many innocents must be bled to hold our rage at bay,' said Chauld, coming close to Hereon's face, hunched, almost bestial. 'We are monsters when we should be angels, and it torments me every day. But we live in an era beset by worse monsters, and if embracing the darkness will keep the light shining for a little longer, then it must be so. Do you not see?'

The Red Thirst stirred in Hereon again. He struggled against the grip of the Angels Vermillion. His armour growled with the effort, but they were too strong, and he could not throw them off.

'You are wrong. The darkness must be fought against. This is slaughter! Better that you die and your Chapter be disbanded than this abomination be permitted to continue. Lord Dante will not stand for this.'

Chauld stood back, some of the bearing of a lord of men coming back into his demeanour. 'Dante has no choice. Do you think us fools? We have taken precautions.'

Hereon ceased struggling. 'How so?'

'Forever we of the Blood have kept our shame hidden from the eyes of the Inquisition, if the Blood Angels move against us, then we shall reveal the true nature of our Sanguinius bloodline to all. Not only we, but the Blood Angels and every Chapter of the Blood will be cast down, and the name of the perfect angel shall become synonymous with horror.'

'You will not.'

'What choice do I have?' said Chauld. 'Ever since the Second Founding, we have been ashamed of the Flaw, and the Red Thirst and Black Rage that it brings. In atonement we have dedicated ourselves to wars of penitence, fighting battles that are never even noticed long enough to be forgotten, yet every engagement keeps the light of mankind burning a little longer. Our contribution to the Imperium's future is small but vital. These deaths are a small price to pay to ensure our continued efforts.'

'And yet you are willing to destroy your brother Chapters? Madness.'

'Not madness! We must threaten to destroy you or you will destroy us, costing much in blood and diverting our combined efforts away from the foes of humanity into pointless civil war. We are not enemies, High Chaplain! If you could but see our roll of honour, you would appreciate these deaths are a worthy exchange. There is a price for everything. We pay this blood tithe for the privilege of duty with tears in our eyes. Just as Brother Hothor and Brother Cawal's lives were a fair price to pay for your understanding.' Chauld pointed at

the dead Sanguinary Guard and looked hard into Hereon's helm lenses. After a moment's searching he gestured to his men. 'He is no threat. Release him. Let him go to his ship, and his brothers. There has been enough bloodshed today.'

Hereon stood. Bolters raised around him. Chauld lifted his hands.

'My brothers, the High Chaplain will do nothing. He understands now. Return his weapon respectfully - it is a sacred relic.'

The Executioner's Axe was placed into Hereon's hand. He contemplated swinging it into Chauld's head. He could not. If there were war, many innocent lives would be lost to avenge those already spent, and the Blood Angels could not survive the revelation of their darkest secrets. He let the axe slide down, so that its haft thumped on the floor.

'You see, you do understand.' Chauld smiled ruefully. 'Go. Do not think to ever return here. Inform Commander Dante that there can never be rapprochement between our orders. We shall fight alongside you when circumstances demand, but we will never be a part of your wider brotherhood. Let the Blood Angels pursue their atonement for the Flaw. We shall deal with it in our own way.' He pointed out of the processing plant. 'Escort him back to his vessel.'

Astorath was waiting when the Thunderhawk landed in the *Eminence Sanguis*' main hangar. Hereon stalked out in silence.

'My lord!' called Astorath upon seeing the damage to the High Chaplain's armour. 'What happened? Were you assailed?'

Hereon turned to face his adjutant. 'It is unimportant.'

'Were your negotiations successful?'

'They will return the ships,' said Hereon.

'But what about the refugees, the crews?'

'Their fate is for Commander Dante's ears alone,' said Hereon darkly. 'Have Lorenz withdraw us to the Mandeville point. We are going home to Baal.'

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Guy Haley** is the author of the Horus Heresy novel *Pharos* and the Warhammer 40,000 novels *Dante*, *Baneblade*, *Shadowsword*, *Valedor* and *Death of Integrity*. He has also written *Throneworld* and *The Beheading* for The Beast Arises series. His enthusiasm for all things greenskin has also led him to pen the eponymous Warhammer novel *Skarsnik*, as well as the End Times novel *The Rise of the Horned Rat*. He has also written stories set in the Age of Sigmar, included in *Warstorm*, *Ghal Maraz* and *Call of Archaon*. He lives in Yorkshire with his wife and son.



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