



**WARHAMMER**  
40,000

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A BLOOD ANGELS TERMINATORS STORY  
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Peace.

An almost impossible moment for one who had been raised in the hell of Baal's radioactive deserts and who had spent a lifetime waging war against the foes of the Emperor, cursed by psychic powers so that even outside battle there was ever a contest to keep out the clamour of the warp and the minds of his fellow Space Marines.

Here there was nothing. Alone on the boarding torpedo, there was not even a pilot to disturb Calistarius's contemplation. All was still. The torpedo's launch provided enough silent momentum to carry the one-way transport across the few hundred kilometres of void to the Blood Angels Librarian's destination.

No thoughts, no noise, just the barest murmur of background hum from the resonance of the warp itself.

The peace brought clarity.

Calistarius knew better than to fill this moment with distracting thoughts – concerns over the mission he was about to embark upon, ideas of higher philosophies or idle contemplation of the latest Chapter rumours and news.

He focused on himself and nothing else. A mote of life encased in a ferrolene and ceramite cylinder drifting across the vacuum of space, infinitesimally insignificant to the universe. He enjoyed the feeling of pointlessness. For just a few minutes Calistarius was totally freed from care. His righteous burden awaited him, but until the boarding torpedo plunged through the metal skin of the space hulk marked SA-BA-325 he was free from all responsibility and expectation.

His breaths came slowly, inhaling and exhaling in slow rhythm with the beating of his twin hearts, a soft after-shudder in his chest as his third lung inflated with a slight delay. His cardio-pulmonary system was a simple but

enchanting quintet piece, occasionally accompanied by a solo percussion creak or ping from the hull of the boarding torpedo.

Calistarius had not known music as a child. The closest that the tribes of Baal Secundus came to orchestration was war drums and pyre dirges. It was only when he had passed the trials of the Blood Angels and become a son of Sanguinius that young Calistarius had learnt of instruments – of flute and viola, violin and helleschord, pantache and cymbal.

Before that discovery he had never heard the music inherent in the universe, not until he had been played symphonies composed to emulate the vast array of nature's moods. He had listened with delight, his mind's ear turning screeching chords to the howl of the Baal winds, the petulant percussion of tom-toms converted to the drumming foot beats of a carrion-reaper charging over the dunes.

A gift from the Blood Angels – civilisation. Art in all its forms: poetic, literary, visual and military. The legacy of mighty Sanguinius, that the deformed, radiation-scarred vagrants of the deserts could be lifted above their station and turned into demigods. Not just a physical transformation, but a mental, cultural uplifting as well. To be defenders of humanity one needed not only bolters and power armour, but a sense of what was so important that it required the keenest sacrifice. The boons of giant physique and razor-sharp mind were simply part of the exchange. In return, every Blood Angel would give his life and death in service to the Emperor and the Imperium of Mankind he had created.

A new, harsh sound ripped into Calistarius's thoughts, dragging him out of his reverie. Arrestor engines screamed into life, jolting the torpedo with fierce deceleration for a few seconds before the melta-charges in the tip exploded into life, tearing the hull of the space hulk to allow the energy-shielded prow to punch through.

More detonations followed as the front of the torpedo petalled outwards, forming an air seal and disembarkation ramp. Calistarius was free of his harness and on his feet even before the torpedo had finished moving. The moment the splay of the torpedo's tip was wide enough, he ducked through the opening portal and leapt down to the deck two metres below.

He checked his bearings and located the initial exploratory squad's position on a wrist-mounted auspex. They were about three hundred metres away, deeper within the structure of the hulk where teleportation was far riskier. Calistarius already had his bolt pistol in his left hand. He pulled free a power sword with the right and set off, all senses alert to possible attack.

The clank of his boots echoed harshly from metal bulkheads, ringing strangely from the buckled material of the outer hull. A broken ventilator fan whickered close at hand, letting forth a scraping snarl every few seconds. Something clattered above the ceiling like a spoon rattling against the bottom of a ration tin: an old pump, perhaps.

The thrum of the power blade springing into life added another noise to the mix.

There was no symphony here. No peace.

War had returned.

Calistarius encountered the first of the initial landing squad guarding a cross-junction two hundred metres from where the Librarian's boarding torpedo had breached. Brother Santiago's Terminator armour almost filled the corridor as he turned one way and then the other, his storm bolter held at the ready. Santiago acknowledged his battle-brother's approach with a lifted power fist.

'Nice of you to join us.' Santiago's attempt at humour masked an unease that Calistarius had sensed the moment he had laid eyes on the other Blood Angel. He did not have to be psychic to detect his battle-brother's restlessness.

'The... other warrior, he is still alive?'

'Yes, brother. The strength of Sanguinius must truly flow in his veins, because very little blood does.'

'Then I will not delay here any longer.' Calistarius gave his companion a nod of respect as Santiago stepped aside to allow him to proceed down the corridor.

Closing in on the rest of the squad, the Librarian saw that they had dispersed – two of the Terminators were at the target location beacon on the auspex, while the other two held strategic bottle-necks further along the deck. Calistarius headed straight for the objective location, noting the sensorium transponder signal of Sergeant Dioneas in the same chamber.

There was only one way into and out of the room, until recently sealed tight. The scorched, buckled marks of claws and lasers marred the door and the wall around the locking mechanism, but override codes had pried open what the brute strength of the unknown assailants had not.

The inside of the chamber was lit only by the suit lights of Dioneas and Brother Marciano; the latter stepped away from the door as he saw Calistarius approaching, allowing the Librarian to see inside.

The sergeant stood over another figure in bulky Terminator armour, slumped against the far bulkhead. Calistarius knew what to expect but still experienced a

moment of pause when he saw the Blood Angels livery painted on the ancient suit of armour. Worse still were the many gashes in the heavy war-plate. Much of the suit had been ripped away, the endo-skeletal struts and fibre bundles twisted and tattered by immense tears.

Dioneas shifted as the Librarian entered and for a moment his suit light played across the face of the injured Blood Angel. His mouth was locked in a bestial snarl, lips drawn back to expose dark gums, eyes glaring, glinting fiercely in the passing light.

In the moment of contact Calistarius felt madness. Deep, utter hatred and bloodlust surged into the Librarian's thoughts, pounding upon his mind like hammer blows.

Calistarius closed his mind off in an instant, shielding himself from the sensation as though it were an attack.

'You know what this is?' Dioneas's voice was quiet over the vox-link.

'Of course,' said Calistarius. 'The signs are obvious. Why did you request my presence, brother-sergeant?'

'Our initial landing and sweep detected nothing,' the sergeant explained. 'It was only when we were preparing to expand to a secondary perimeter that we detected the heat source of his tactical dreadnought suit. This is exactly how we found him, locked inside this empty armoury magazine.'

'And you wish me to delve into his thoughts?' Calistarius kept his gaze fixed on the sergeant, not willing yet to look at the contorted features of the collapsed Space Marine. 'What do you hope I will find there?'

'Anything,' whispered Dioneas, turning his bulky armour to look at the prone Blood Angel. The suit lights caught the jagged edges of the rips in the adamantium, flared from the shattered plates of ceramite and glistened on exposed flesh and bone. 'Who he is, why he is here, what did this to him.'

'You have no hint of his identity?'

'His suit transponder is dead. No markings, nothing we can use, have been left on his armour.'

'Why have you not transported him back to the battle-barge?'

'Does it look to you that he would survive such a journey?'

'No,' admitted Calistarius. 'What is the current tactical situation? Clearly he was attacked by something.'

'No life signs detected by the primary surveyor sweep and nothing on the sensorium until we found... this.' Dioneas took a step toward the door. 'It will be just the six of us for now. Captain Raphael is not prepared to send in the main

wave until we have a better idea of what they might run into. As soon as you can confirm whether there is a credible threat aboard or not, the sooner our reinforcements will arrive.'

Calistarius nodded. 'I shall endeavour to conclude this swiftly.'

The other two Blood Angels left the room. Dioneas stood guard at the door while Marciano moved out further to reinforce the perimeter defence. Calistarius looked at the broad back of the sergeant standing outside for a while, wondering if he should ask him to return. The Blood Angel they had found was in some kind of catatonic coma, but there was no way to predict what would happen when Calistarius began his psychic probing.

'Sergeant,' he said after considering the matter, 'I would prefer it if you kept watch on... on my subject. While I am inside his mind I will be vulnerable if he strikes out.'

'As you wish, brother,' said Dioneas.

When the sergeant stepped back into the chamber the lights of his war-plate glinted from the splintered tines of the fallen Space Marine's lightning claws. There was dried blood – not his own – splashed along their length. Calistarius crouched to examine them more closely.

'I noticed that too,' said Dioneas. 'If his claws had been functioning, the energy sheath would have vaporised any exposed liquid.'

'He carried on fighting even after his claws stopped working,' concluded Calistarius. 'Curious, but not surprising. If he was gripped by... If the gene-curse had possessed him he would have no control over his actions. He would fight until dead.'

'So why is he still alive?'

'Perhaps he killed all his foes?'

'Leaving no evidence of them for us to find?'

'How would he have had the presence of mind to lock himself in here, if the Black Rage had him?'

'You ask the same questions that provoked my call for assistance,' Dioneas said pointedly. He gestured towards the near-dead Blood Angel. '*He* has the answers.'

Reaching out hesitantly, his pistol holstered, Calistarius laid a hand on the mortally wounded Space Marine. He almost flinched at an imagined response, but the dormant Blood Angel did not move, not even a flicker of the eyes. He looked physically dead but there was enough anima left in his Terminator

armour to sustain vital functions.

He reached with his mind also, sensing that the soul of the warrior was still intact. The Librarian had his psychic defences fully prepared. Physical contact was not necessary to dig into the dying warrior's thoughts, but Calistarius hoped the Blood Angel would feel it somehow and gain a sense of comfort before his mind was peeled apart by the Librarian.

Calistarius looked at the mess of armour and torn flesh and pondered Dioneas's analysis. It seemed that the Space Marine was certainly in a state of suspended animation, and the activation of the sus-an membrane could be triggered instinctively at the verge of death. However, the curse, the Black Rage as it was known amongst the Blood Angels, was an all-encompassing bloodthirst. Those who succumbed to the flaw of the Chapter wanted nothing but oblivion, consumed by inner agony and anger. Once the Black Rage took hold of a warrior, death was the only release.

'Who are you?' Calistarius whispered, moving his hand from the broken shoulder plate to the cheek of the fallen warrior. He opened his thoughts and asked the question again, allowing the response to flow back from the inert form of the Blood Angel.

**SLAYER!**

The raw strength of the Black Rage hit Calistarius and though he had been expecting it, at the moment of contact he shared the deepest loathing and despair that fuelled the warrior beneath his fingers. He wanted to kill until he was killed, uncaring of any other action or fate.

The Librarian wrestled himself free, forming a ball of pure consciousness like ice amidst the flaming maelstrom of anger. The ice was melting slowly as the rage lapped at it, but in turn its presence cooled the surrounding fire, allowing Calistarius to send tendrils of interrogation into the Blood Angel's mind, trickling them in like water.

He encountered memory, and upon examining it relived it as his own.

*Aboard the Arch-traitor's battle-barge. The strike force had been scattered and there was no sign of the Emperor or Rogal Dorn. Some of his warriors were with him, nine from his honour guard in scarlet and gilded armour. The communications network was a cacophony of screams and urgent situation reports, overlaid with horrific cackling and demented braying.*

*A drop of blood fell on his cheek. His eye was drawn up to the ceiling. There was a Space Marine trapped there, inverted, having reconstituted halfway into*

*the material of the ship itself. One leg and arm hung from the metal as his life fluid seeped along lines of rust like artificial veins. He thrashed for a moment and then fell limp.*

*‘My lord!’ One of the honour guard was demanding his attention. He dragged his gaze away from the contorted body above. ‘What are your orders, Lord Sanguinius?’*

It was wrong. These were not real memories. Calistarius pushed through them, ignoring the tide of longing that flooded through him as he touched the soul of Sanguinius and felt emptiness and loss.

*The surge of disorientation from teleportation dies away, leaving him in a half-flooded corridor. The rest of the squad are close at hand on the sensorium and the sergeant calls off names to ensure they have all arrived.*

*‘Vesperario?’*

*‘Present, brother-sergeant,’ he responds, forging through the thigh-high water towards a broken bulkhead to his right. ‘Starting security sweep.’*

‘Vesperario,’ Calistarius croaked, pulling himself back through the demented ravings that roiled like storm clouds across the other Blood Angel’s thoughts. The Librarian looked up at Sergeant Dioneas. ‘Brother Vesperario. You should check with the data-cogitators on the battle-barge.’

‘No need,’ replied the sergeant. He sighed heavily. ‘There have been only a few brothers named Vesperario in the history of the First Company. I know which one this is.’

‘I also have a recollection of code-name: *Omen of Despair*. A space hulk called *Omen of Despair*.’

‘Yes,’ said Dioneas. ‘It was discovered in the Verium Placus belt near the Ordanio system, two hundred and forty-six years ago. That is nearly seventeen thousand light years away. Two First Company squads went aboard for primary reconnaissance. The wreck unexpectedly dropped back into warp space almost as soon as they boarded. All ten warriors and suits of battleplate were lost, presumed destroyed.’

‘But not so,’ said Calistarius. ‘We must be aboard the *Omen of Despair*.’

‘Apparently so.’ There was a click as the sergeant changed his vox-channel, presumably to transit this message back to the battle-barge. A few seconds later

the click sounded again as he returned to the squad address channel they had been using. 'That answers one question, but it does not tell us what happened, or what we might expect to find. I would prefer not to share their fate.'

Calistarius, armed with this new information as a guideline for his probing, turned his attention back to Vespesario. Everything dropped away as he lowered himself into the turbulence of the Blood Angel's mind. Again the rasping hatred sawed at the Librarian, threatening to cut through his thoughts and infect him with its purity of purpose.

*Vespesario.*

He fixed on the name like an ancient navigator might choose a star to gain his bearing.

It did not stop the flames lapping again at the Librarian's defences, seeking a way into his inner thoughts, probing his mental strength even as he sought ingress to Vespesario's memories.

As before, there was an outer layer, an ashen, black crust formed from the gene-curse that was bound up in Vespesario's every fibre, now unleashed.

*'Send rally signals. All Blood Angels to converge on my position,' he commanded. The order came easily, the need for action sweeping away any vestiges of horror he might have felt. His words, his voice, settled those around him, giving them strength with his presence alone. The honour guard checked their weapons and fell in behind their lord as he surveyed the chamber more closely.*

*The walls were like nothing he had seen aboard a battle-barge. The power of the warp was in them, creating curves and peculiar organic shapes even as spines of iron jutted with jagged edges and sheaths of plastek slid over light fittings like blinking eyes. The dimensions of the room did not quite fit each other, so that corners seemed higher than the ceiling and walls longer than the floor.*

*He had not experienced the like on a ship, it was true, but he had encountered the power of the warp many times before, and he was reminded of Signus. Its effect was much reduced. He concentrated, pushing aside the impossibilities. There was a doorway ahead, open to reveal a grandiose hall beyond. He headed for it, calling his sons after him.*

*There was movement ahead and a moment later the first of the daemons appeared.*

*The staging ground is secure, but all contact has been lost with the strike cruiser. The sergeants are holding a brief conversation and soon they announce the outcome of their deliberations.*

*'We have translated into the warp,' Sergeant Commeos tells them. 'Moments after we teleported aboard.'*

*'How are we not dead?' asks Geraneos.*

*'A functioning Geller field,' Vespesario answers, guessing. 'Pure luck.'*

*'Not so lucky that we are on our own in here,' says Sergeant Adonius. The sensorium lights up with contact warnings. Something is closing on their position. 'Ready your weapons, brothers.'*

For a split-second Calistarius was caught between three realities: the *Omen of Despair* in the present; the space hulk more than two centuries earlier; and Vespesario's Black Rage-induced gene-memories of their primarch trapped aboard the Warmaster's starship.

*'We have multiple incoming signals.'*

It took another three seconds for the Librarian to realise that the words were in his ear, not his mind, spoken by Sergeant Dioneas. He broke away completely from Vespesario, lifting his hand from the near-dead warrior's cheek to check the auspex.

Life signals, fore and aft of their position. They were still half a kilometre distant, approaching slowly but growing in number.

*'What are they?' Dioneas demanded. 'What is coming for us?'*

Calistarius did not understand why the question had been directed at him. How was he supposed to know what the others did not? Realisation dawned.

Vespesario knew.

He closed his eyes and this time pushed into the flames without wavering.

*At first the daemons were shifting, formless things, drawn to the Space Marines as wisps of bright energy. They circled and danced, never staying still, growing in strength and numbers, flitting past doorways and skimming overhead, not quite coming into the range of power axe or chainsword. A few of the Blood Angels opened fire with bolters and pistols, sparking bursts of detonations against warping bulkheads as they tried to track the flitting apparitions.*

*'Cease firing, save your ammunition,' he told them.*

*A constant moaning and screaming accompanied the party as they forged along a corridor of crystal walls, faceted to fragment and disperse the*

reflections of the legionaries. He glanced at one such image, seeing himself whole for a moment – tall, finely featured, eyes of deep blue, shoulder-length hair. But there was a cruel smile on his lips and wickedness in his gaze as something else looked back at him in mockery. A shift of view, another reflection, of lifeless eyes and half his skull missing, his throat slit. He moved his eyes again and this time saw himself in triumphant ecstasy, eyes filled with crimson, blood dripping from fangs that had split his gums.

He knew nothing of what his companions saw but their disconcerted grunts and whispered curses told him that the visions were not welcome.

The crystal passage brought them to a state room, furnished lavishly with a wood and leather suite of chairs and couches, bookcases on the wall lined with volumes and a table on which sat a decanter filled with a deep purple liquid.

‘Touch nothing,’ he warned, catching a glimpse of the spines of the books, marked with changing runes in a tongue that was anathema to sanity and reason. ‘Read nothing.’

A book fell from a shelf to his right, opening at the image of a screaming child with tentacles erupting from her eyes. One of the Space Marines stooped to look at it and gave a disgusted snarl. As though prompted by this reaction, the image burst into life, tentacles uncoiling out of the pages, whip-fast, around the Space Marine’s neck and helm.

Before a shot was fired, the legionary was dragged forward into a gnashing maw where the girl’s ruby lips had been, head bitten off by the fanged monstrosity. Tossing aside the decapitated remains, the book-pseudopods grew even longer, seeking a fresh victim.

More books hurled themselves off the shelves, revealing pictures of nightmarish beasts with curling horns, cyclopean figures with ruptured skins and spilling guts, steel-clawed hounds and diamond-eyed succubae. The Blood Angels did their best but could not avoid seeing these demented pictures. Their instinctual fear and revulsion gave life to the magic within, drawing forth the daemons bound within the pages.

In a few seconds the room was full of ghastly foes of mad proportion and terrible purpose. Wailing, screeching and howling, they fell upon the Space Marines with baroque curved blades and dagger-like talons. Battle-cries and shouts of alarm rang out, punctuated by the roar of bolters.

He threw himself into the fray, sword glittering, pulses of plasma from his pistol incinerating the Chaos monsters. As he sliced a red-skinned creature with the head of a goat and the body of a dwarf, his stare fell upon the pages of a

*book depicting an infinitely deep maw. In a moment the air was being sucked from the room, books whirling, furniture upended by the all-consuming vortex.*

*With a contemptuous snarl he fired his pistol, turning the book to a blackened mess that bubbled and steamed.*

*'Press on,' he called to the others, pointing his sword at the vast wooden door at the far end of the room. 'We seek the Traitor.'*

*Signals were clogging the sensorium data-feed, so that individual life readings were blurring together into a mass of returns a little more than two hundred metres from the perimeter. It was as though the hulk itself was coming alive, vomiting forth a stream of unidentified foes that were remaining just out of sight and out of reach.*

*'What are they?' asks Geraneos. 'Where are they coming from?'*

*'Secondary ducting,' Sergeant Adonius answers the second question. He offers no opinion on the first. 'Air vents, cable tiers, maintenance access.'*

*'Fast-moving,' comments Vespesario. 'Biding their time, not simply charging towards us.'*

*'Perhaps they are afraid of us,' suggests Brother Lucasi. 'That is why they do not attack.'*

*'What do we do?' Brother Tarantus gives voice to the question that has nagged Vespesario for the last few minutes. 'What is our mission here?'*

*The silence of the sergeants is disconcerting. The Blood Angels had come to investigate the Omen of Despair and report back to their captain. Now they were trapped in the warp, most likely to die drifting on the immaterial tides.*

*'If there are working Geller fields there could be a operational warp drive,' Sergeant Commeos says eventually. 'We should locate and secure the controls.'*

*'We stay together,' Adonius adds. His voice gains confidence as he continues to speak. 'We must consider all contacts to be hostile. Emperor alone knows how long this hulk has been drifting, picking up all sorts of infestations and stowaways. Orders are to terminate any life form on sight.'*

*'My squad will lead,' says Commeos. 'Orthodox sweep pattern alpha. Serrajo takes rearguard.'*

*The nominated Terminator accepts this duty with a grunt and turns aside as the others continue along the corridor.*

*They come out in some kind of systems hub: a cavernous vault lined with pipes and cables, a plume of steam gathering around ruptured feedlines. The air is thick with vapour, which catches as droplets on their armour. In the light of the*

*emergency lamps set into the bulkhead, they turn into rubies that slide down the painted ceramite, leaving glittering trails.*

*The sensorium shifts focus as Serrajo directs his suit's scanners to the rear. The life signs are on the move, gathering behind and to the flanks of the Terminators' line of advance.*

*'Trying to keep away from us?' says Vespesario, but his question is answered by the readings on the sensorium. The life signs become bright signals of movement as the semi-circle of returns collapses towards the two squads.*

*'Incoming enemies. Purge them swiftly,' calls Adonius.*

*The first of the signals reaches the chamber in a shockingly short space of time – scant seconds after the enemy began to close.*

*'They were here already,' barks Commeos. He lifts his storm bolter and fires up at the ceiling. 'Dormant in the steam cloud!'*

*A body falls out of the gloom, riddled with bolt wounds, trailing yellow ichor. It has six limbs: two legs, recurved and double-jointed; two upper appendages like tentacles, lined with bony spurs; two other arms each ending in three dagger-like claws. Its head is bulbous and mottled with lumps of moss growth from long hibernation; black, lifeless eyes above a flattened snout and a mouth filled with needle-like fangs. Under dark grey chitin marked with white tiger stripes is purplish flesh tight with muscle and tendons.*

*Another of the creatures looms out of the darkness towards Vespesario, claws outstretched, mouth opened wide. A tubular tongue glistens with alien fluid.*

*This one is alive.*

'Genestealers!' Calistarius shouted the warning the moment he dragged himself free from Vespesario's memories. 'They are using thermal ducts and power exchanges to mask their hibernation areas. Watch for attacks from sub-ducting beneath the decks.'

'Hold positions, defensive stance,' ordered Dioneas. A click and a buzz heralded his switch to long-range transmission to the strike cruiser.

Calistarius stood up, almost disappointed. Space hulks were known to carry all manner of potential threats, including orks and other aliens, adepts and devotees of the Dark Powers and even Traitor Space Marines. In the last few decades genestealers had become an increasingly prevalent peril, and the Blood Angels had encountered their fair share of the hideous xenos. Only a few years earlier Calistarius had been part of the boarding teams that had cleansed the *Sin of Damnation* of another swarm.

‘Standard infestation protocols,’ Dioneas continued, having received orders from Captain Raphael. ‘We will fall back to the insertion point and establish a breach-head for the incoming second wave. Estimated time to reinforcement is seventeen minutes.’

‘What about Vesperario?’ asked Calistarius. ‘We cannot leave him here.’

‘This area is too tight for a solid defensive cordon against a superior close assault foe,’ replied the sergeant. ‘We need to withdraw to the outer galleries where we have better lines of fire.’

‘And abandon one of our own?’

‘That is not a Blood Angel.’ Dioneas’s voice was harsh over the vox as he turned away. ‘It is a hunk of meat kept alive by a combination of sus-an membrane and barely functioning armour life support systems.’

Calistarius was about to argue further but the sergeant cut him off, his tone more conciliatory.

‘When the secondary wave arrives we shall make this chamber a primary objective. We can secure the area with more warriors and allow the Apothecaries to do their work.’

It was hard for Calistarius to step away. He had shared Vesperario’s thoughts and knew that there was something of the Space Marine still inside the broken body and shattered armour. He had made a connection with his battle-brother, though separated by centuries, and owed it to a fellow Blood Angel to ensure the best chance for survival. Vesperario had done all that he could, sealing himself inside this room, and somehow he had endured. Now that the Blood Angels had breached the door there was nothing to stop the genestealers finishing what they had begun so long ago.

Calistarius was also prepared to admit to himself that he was intrigued by the potential of examining the mind of a Black Rage victim in more detail. Normally delving into the thoughts of one of his brothers so deeply would be taboo, especially those beset by the blood curse. It was a unique opportunity to gain an insight into what the victims of the Black Rage experienced and, perhaps, a chance to ease the suffering of others or maybe even take a step closer to a cure.

‘Wait, brother-sergeant,’ said the Librarian as he was about to step across the threshold. Dioneas was heading away down the corridor and did not stop. ‘Why did he lock himself away like this? We have to find out.’

‘An easily defensible position to make a last stand against the genestealers,’ replied Dioneas, still advancing along the passage. ‘Little mystery to be explained, I think.’

‘A remarkably rational decision for one gripped by the madness of the Black Rage.’

Dioneas stopped at a junction a few dozen metres ahead and turned back to face the Librarian. ‘Your meaning?’

‘No plainer than what I have said,’ continued Calistarius. ‘I do not have an answer to that, but from everything we know he would not retreat and he certainly would not have had the presence of mind to close and seal the bulkhead. Something strange happened here two centuries ago.’

‘I agree, and we shall uncover the truth of such events once we have properly secured a breach-head and expanded our cordon.’ Dioneas turned away. ‘We must withdraw, Brother-Lexicanium.’

Captain Raphael had made it clear before Calistarius had departed that battlefield command fell to Sergeant Dioneas, a veteran of several centuries more than the Librarian. Chapter law demanded that Calistarius obeyed the direct command of his superior, but his every instinct was warning him otherwise. As a psyker, he knew instinct was often an indication of some deeper sense.

When Dioneas realised that the Librarian was not following, he stepped back into view.

‘Your orders are clear, brother. The warriors of the Librarian are not immune to censure and punishment. Follow me.’

Calistarius used a sub-vocal command to switch to the command hail channel.

‘Captain Raphael? This is Lexicanium Calistarius. I must speak with you urgently.’

‘Calistarius?’ Raphael’s voice was deep and rich, and he spoke calmly despite the unorthodox nature of Calistarius’s communication. ‘This is the command channel. What has happened to Sergeant Dioneas? His transponder reports normal vital signs.’

‘The sergeant is unharmed, captain. We cannot withdraw. Not yet. I must continue my psychic scan of Brother Vespesario. Abort the reinforcement wave until I have completed my probe.’

There was a long pause before Raphael replied.

‘Second wave is being despatch in forty seconds. You have thirty to convince me.’

Calistarius quickly told the captain of his suspicions concerning Vespesario’s behaviour. Raphael listened without interruption and when the Librarian finished asked a simple question.

‘Are you willing to stake your honour and good name on this... instinct?’

There was no doubt in the Librarian’s mind. It was some unfocused warning from his psychic sense, a warp-powered intuition that made it more than a simple hunch. ‘Absolutely, brother-captain. Delay the reinforcement wave for five minutes, that is all I ask.’

‘Very well, you have five more minutes.’

The vox-link broke into static for a couple of seconds and then went quiet. Another few seconds passed before Dioneas spoke up, during which the sergeant received fresh orders from the captain.

‘You circumnavigated the chain of command, brother,’ the sergeant growled, advancing back along the corridor towards Calistarius. ‘You are placing yourself and our battle-brothers in great danger. We cannot hold this position for five minutes if the genestealers attack. I urge you to reconsider.’

‘I will not, brother-sergeant,’ said Calistarius. ‘I cannot. I am prepared to wager our six lives against the ninety more that will be risked should the second wave be launched.’

‘Your five minutes have already begun,’ the sergeant said, pointing at Vespesario with his power sword. ‘Use the time wisely.’

The Librarian said nothing as he returned to Vespesario’s inert form. He was about to slip into synchrony with the near-dead Space Marine when the sound of a storm bolter firing resounded across his auto-senses. Several blurs of light on the auspex had detached themselves from the mass holding back, and were moving around the perimeter. Brother Santiago’s report crackled over the vox.

‘Two targets eliminated. Three more incoming.’ Another, longer, burst of fire. ‘Eliminated.’

The sensor readings showed other probing movements receding for the moment, moving back to the outer corridors and the decks above and below. Sergeant Dioneas stopped beside Calistarius.

‘Scouting attacks. Let us hope that they do not realise our numbers are so small before the second wave arrives.’

Calistarius needed no further encouragement and crouched down with arm outstretched, his gauntleted fingers falling upon the bloodstained skin of Vespesario’s forehead.

*The ship itself tried to fight them as well as the daemons. Doorways appeared in solid walls and closed up again, separating the Blood Angels from each other. Vents in the shape of snarling mouths spewed clouds of flies that exploded like*

*small incendiary shells. Metal decking melted underfoot, turning to a quagmire from which snapping tentacles and fanged maws erupted to drag down unfortunate legionaries.*

*They pressed on regardless, blasting and hewing their way through the daemonic assault, pushing ever onwards to the strategium where he knew the Arch-traitor would be found. They crossed impossible bridges over bottomless gulfs, battling red-skinned axe wielders with white eyes and bronze armour. They were assailed by multicoloured flames gouting from scything beasts that swooped down upon them from the heights of kilometre-long processional halls.*

*He knew that progress was slow, but there was something else at work. The interior of the Warmaster's battle-barge was like the inside of a warp breach, contorted and folded upon itself, a contained bubble of the immaterium far bigger than its external space.*

*There had to be something sustaining the breach, pouring warp energy into the real universe to uphold the diabolic structure and its daemon inhabitants.*

*Horus.*

*The Warmaster was a living portal, his superhuman body the only thing capable of transferring so much Chaos energy into the material realm. Not until the Warmaster was slain would they be freed.*

*As if this thought prompted a response, the Blood Angels, now numbering only six warriors, were confronted by warriors of the Traitor's Legion. Bolt and plasma converged upon them from galleries and mezzanines, forcing them to return to the winding passageways they had just left, where daemons waited with sickle blades and paralysing tongues.*

*Undeterred, he carved a path through his foes, borne forward not by hate or rage, but the desire to save his sons from this perverted torment.*

*They fight their way to the upper decks, advancing purposefully into the heart of the enemy, securing bulkheads and blast doors to seal off the foe's lines of attack. It is a folly to hope that they can achieve anything meaningful, but they are Space Marines, Blood Angels, sons of Sanguinius, and they will fight to their last breath. Cleanse and purge. Kill the alien. Suffer not the xenos to live. The main bridge may be their objective but extermination is their true goal.*

*They fire their storm bolters in short, controlled bursts, conserving ammunition as much as they can. The sergeants have their power swords, cutting down any genestealer that survives the hail of fire. Brother Geraneos has a heavy flamer. Blasts of super-hot promethium clear whole chambers of foes, the*

*incendiary fuel a barrier to further attack, buying scant respite to reload and redistribute ammunition.*

*Cercanto, Rabellio, Zervantes and Desarius are dead. There is no thought of recovering their ancient battleplate, but their spare magazines do not go to waste.*

*The foe withdraw from the advance, but none of the Blood Angels mistake this for victory. The genestealers are not mindless animals, that much has been learnt in previous campaigns. They possess patience and cunning, guided by a psychic gestalt for the near flawless coordination of attacks. The Blood Angels' foes are waiting, biding their time while the Terminators traverse the open galleries and broad storage halls of the third and fourth deck; there are few crawl ducts and hiding spaces from which to launch an ambush. Perhaps they know that the Space Marines are heading for the controls in the bridge and are saving their numbers for a last overwhelming defence.*

*The Blood Angels take stock, pausing for a few seconds in one of the long mess halls that run nearly four hundred metres along the spine of the ship. The number of rusted benches and tables riveted to the floor suggest that the ship must have housed thousands of crew. A few lighting strips still work, powered by some auxiliary system, flickering dismal yellow in patches, creating shadows that dance with their own life.*

*'Not to sound overly optimistic, brothers, but I think we might have a chance,' says Serrajo. 'I've studied the sensorium readings and I think the enemy number in their hundreds, not thousands.'*

*To most warriors such news would be cold comfort – hundreds of genestealers against half a dozen seems impossible odds – but to the Blood Angels of the First Company this is greeted with cautious hope.*

*'A small infestation,' says Sergeant Commeos. 'You are right, we might yet survive this encounter.'*

*'We have a small group moving on the right flank.' Lucasi's warning turns the ad-hoc squad in time to see figures scuttling through the broken mess doors. To the surprise of the Space Marines, lasbeams and bullets zip and whine out of the darkness towards them.*

*The figures spilling into the hall are a contortion of human form, hunched and misshapen as though made of wax and left near a flame. Some have extra eyes, while others sport additional flailing, jointless arms. Many are disfigured with protruding spines and haphazard growths of serrated chitin.*

*Unlike the purestrain genestealers they carry weapons. Inaccurate fire patters*

*on the Terminators' armour and the tables nearby as the Space Marines move to respond, their storm bolters throwing a hail of rounds into the incoming mass of degenerate half-breeds.*

*'Hybrids,' snarls Adonius. 'Wipe them out.'*

*Shotguns boom and autoguns rattle in response as the Terminators close on their foes, their tactical dreadnought armour designed to withstand anti-tank rounds and artillery bombardments. Power gloves smash bones and crush limbs as the crippled hybrids throw themselves ineffectually at the Emperor's chosen. Vesperario swings his fist without relent, pulping skulls and mashing internal organs.*

*Suddenly a white-blue bolt of energy screams across the hall, catching Commeos on the side of the helm. The plasma explodes in a detonation of raw energy, turning the sergeant's head into an expanding cloud of vaporised liquid and tissue.*

*A lascannon bolt slices through the bulkhead close at hand, narrowly missing Serrajo.*

*'Back,' orders Adonius, turning his storm bolter onto the new arrivals.*

*There are too few of them to risk losing a warrior to the hybrids' heavier weaponry and they retreat from the mess hall, covering their withdrawal with a continuous stream of bolts.*

Retracting his mind from the whorl of Vesperario's thoughts, Calistarius passed on this vital piece of intelligence.

'Those are not scouting attacks,' responded Dioneas. 'The genestealers are attempting to lock us into position while their hybrids bring heavy weapons to bear. The tactical situation is not improving, Brother-Lexicanium. We need a mobile defence or we will make easy targets.'

'A minute, no longer,' Calistarius told him. 'I have almost found out what happened to the previous boarding party. I sense that if I can locate his memories of what happened on the main bridge we shall know what we are facing.'

'Sixty seconds, no more.'

Calistarius nodded and focused his thoughts. There was no more time for subtlety, exploring Vesperario's thoughts as though sifting through wreckage. If the Librarian were to discover what had occurred two centuries ago he needed to find it swiftly. The extension of his thoughts into the other Blood Angel became a lance of burning energy, drilling down through Vesperario's psyche into the pulsing core of his memories, shredding everything else in the vicinity. After the

Black Rage and so long in suspended animation, Vesperario no longer possessed anything close to a rational mind that would be destroyed by the intrusion. Only good grace had stopped Calistarius being so blunt before.

Growling and snarling, feeling the Black Rage seeping into his soul, Calistarius opened himself up to the weight of Vesperario's experiences, allowing everything to flood in. Fighting against the tide of pain and anger, the Librarian ripped free what he needed, raw and bleeding like a heart torn still beating from the chest.

*The strategium. Darkness suffused the massive chamber, broken only by the hellish glimmer of daemon eyes and pulsing warp energy. Bathed in the actinic glow was the Warmaster, encased in battleplate fashioned from the artifice of lunatics and shaped by the whim of Dark Gods.*

*Horus held up his claws, brandishing them in a display of defiance.*

*Sword flashing, he hurled himself at the Traitor, ducking beneath a sweeping claw, blade outstretched. A glowing fist met the burning sword and sparks erupted, filling the darkness with a moment of blinding light.*

*He attacked again, and again was parried with a storm of lightning. Eluding a return blow, he lunged for the head but his sword was turned aside, ripping across armour plates, carving a white-hot furrow where it passed.*

*The Warmaster snarled and swept his claws upwards, raking agony across the chest of the Blood Angel. Staggering back, he half-warded away the Traitor's next blow, losing a shoulder pad to the slashing talons.*

*He threw himself aside to dodge the next assault, ignoring the burning in his lungs, the agonised thrashing of his heart.*

*The next attack came not from the Traitor's claws but his mind. Psychic energy flared, coruscating through the darkness to hurl the Blood Angel across the strategium. Fronds of sable energy crackled over his armour, scratching and stinging like a million wasps.*

*Worse still, the Warmaster's thoughts were inside his head, threatening and cajoling, daring him to fight, demanding his surrender.*

*He could be immortal, Horus promised, if he would only swear his allegiance to a new master. There was nothing to be gained by this pointless resistance. A painful death was no reward for so many centuries of service.*

*The promise was an affront to all that he held dear. The idea that the Warmaster thought he was capable of being swayed by such argument was too much. Fuelled by a sudden rage he lashed out, his thoughts hurling back the*

*psychic attack, his sword piercing Horus's side.*

*The Traitor's scream was mixed with demented laughter, a howl of victory as much as pain.*

*It was then that he realised he would fail if he fought. His sons would perish and all those he had sworn to protect would be consumed by the warp-spawned madness that had been unleashed.*

*The rage wanted him to fight. The hatred was boiling in his veins, urging him to slash and stab and rend this vile mockery of the man he had once called brother. But he could not give in to the anger, could not submit himself to the vengeance of mindless violence. There was a deeper truth that had to be protected.*

*He threw himself into the darkness, letting it consume him, the icy chill of the abyss freezing his lungs, setting a chill in his veins, numbing his thoughts until he was part of the darkness itself.*

Calistarius struggled, the sacrifice of Vesperario sending a surge of memory into him, breaking like a shard of ice in his thoughts, filling him with a single imperative: slay the Traitor!

Reeling away from Vesperario, Calistarius barely noticed the final glimmer of life had fled the Blood Angel's body. With his last measure of vitality the Terminator had sent his final warning.

'The main bridge!' Calistarius barked. He switched to the command channel. 'Captain Raphael. You must despatch the second wave immediately!'

'Explain yourself, Brother-Librarian,' snapped Sergeant Dioneas as Calistarius exited the chamber and set off along the corridor. 'What did you see?'

'A trap, brother-sergeant. A terrible, beguiling trap.'

*Slamming his fist into the vestiges of the bridge door, Vesperario opens a hole wide enough to step through. Behind him Sergeant Adonius's storm bolter roars for a few more seconds as he cuts down another genestealer attack.*

*Pushing his way onto the main bridge, Vesperario finds himself in near-total darkness, the only light a few blinking indicators on a panel to his right and a red haze from a broken viewscreen ahead. His armour's auto-senses flash through alternatives to the usual spectrum, strobing his view for a half-second before settling on thermal register. Even so it takes a few more seconds for him to realise all is not right with the console beneath the shattered plate of the central display screen.*

*Twists of cables and snaking wires form a constricting web around something entirely organic. It is hard to discern where mechanical and biological meet, but in the grey shades of cool air he notices that what he took for corrugated tubing is in fact ribbed flesh, sheathed in a segment of black chitin. Above is a nodule that he interprets as an elbow and a flare of carapace over the shoulder.*

*Though some of its bulk is lost in the mess of machinery, it is easily twice as large as the Terminator. Two human-like arms slowly flex back and forth, tri-fingered hands opening and closing with dormant menace, while the lower set of the torso appendages are tiny, fidgeting digits no bigger than two fingers pressed together, tipped with a slender claw. More chitin covers the chest and abdomen, haphazard with random nodules and aberrant wart-like clusters of malformed hard tissue.*

*He drags his eyes to the bulging, monstrous head, larger than any creature's he has seen before. More cables intersect with ichor-dribbling apertures, either side of a ridge of flanges running along the crest of the scalp. The mouth hangs open limply, fangs stunted and blunt, but the eyes that open slowly to regard him with malign alien intelligence are all too familiar.*

*It is almost too much to understand, so far outside his experience, so far from expected behaviour that he doubts his own senses for a moment. Vesperario struggles to find answers for the questions that crowd his thoughts. It is a collision of opposites, of the feral nature of the genestealer and the artisanship of the Cult Mechanicus. Hybrids bearing weapons is one thing, a fully grown genestealer patriarch meshed with human technology is something entirely different.*

*There is something else, something so far out of place that he had disregarded it at first.*

*A third eye splits the forehead of the monstrous half-mechanical genestealer. He meets its gaze for a moment and time loses all meaning.*

*Like ash ascending on the smoke of a pyre he is lifted up, swept from his weak body into the embrace of a loving god. Brotherhood and belonging, duty and sacrifice, these are values the brood understand. These are virtues to them.*

*The brood survives, and he will survive with the brood. Others will come, others like the first that were taken and others like him. They will come to be part of the brood also and know the infinite satisfaction of belonging.*

*It has happened before and will happen again. Timeless, the brood continues, luring in the curious and the dutiful, taking them unto itself to sustain the brood for another generation.*

*Vesperario has feared nothing since he survived the deserts and came to the people of the Blood. Not death on the battlefield, not injury or torment. Bodily dread is impossible to him, but as he witnesses the eternal life of the brood, leeching its life from those it traps, using them to steer it to more victims, he is filled with a far more existential fear.*

*The Omen of Despair is no itinerant threat, no random visitor to worlds and systems, deposited by the vagaries of the warp. There is purpose behind its peregrination. It moves with a will, guided by the bloated creature that rules the brood, a far superior creature to any mere genestealer patriarch. This ship, the heart of the space hulk, provided something new and invigorating, something that altered the genetics and the destiny of the genestealers that had come aboard.*

*The third eye is all the evidence required, proof of the obscene nature of the brood's interbreeding for a dozen generations and more.*

*The Navigator's eye, a genetic mutation bred into the Navigator Houses during the Dark Age of Technology so that they could look upon the warp itself and steer a ship. Those genestrains bred into the aliens again and again through new human hosts, attempting to perfect with random mutation what ancient Terra's scientists had constructed in laboratories, and given final form in the navigator-patriarch.*

*For centuries it has moved across the galaxy, emerging from the warp using the resonance of humanity's thoughts, guided to populated worlds and drifting starships, dropping back into the warp to trap aboard those who have come to investigate and conquer. An ancient ship, a treasure vault of archeotech and lost knowledge so powerful that not even the Blood Angels would destroy it out of hand. The perfect guise, the perfect lure for adepts of the Machine God, Ecclesiarchy missionaries, Imperial servants of all ranks and divisions, ensnared by the false promise of glory and bounty.*

*Worse still is the glimpse of the future, the desired path of the Omen of Despair, its ultimate destination arrived at from the desires and memories of a hundred thousand victims of the brood. A planet teeming with life, billions upon billions, and at its heart a mind so powerful that it broadcasts a beacon across the galaxy. The Astronomican, light of the Emperor, the guiding path followed by Navigators for ten thousand years, entrenched into the most fundamental genetics of the brood, an imperative that drives everything they do.*

*A return home. To Terra.*

*To be one with the creator-Emperor.*

*The sensation fills Vespesario, fulfilling every desire, his own gene-seed aching to be united with the primogenitor, the Master of Mankind. The brood feels it too, the bond singing like a choir in their minds, calling him to come with them, to guide them to the paradise they seek.*

*The thought terrifies him. It terrifies Vespesario in a way that no mortal danger ever could. The idea that he might bring this unholy infection to the doors of Terra itself fills him with a grief and dread so grave that if he could have willed himself dead at that moment his hearts would have stopped.*

*And greater still is the fear that he will not be able to fight the urge much longer, the knowledge that he will succumb. A physical foe he can face, but a psychic attack will eventually wear down even the defences of a Space Marine.*

*In reaction to this hopelessness, rage erupts. A rage burned into the gene-seed he carries, a psychic after-echo of a disastrous fate that still echoes down the millennia. The rage gives him strength, shattering the bond of the patriarch-navigator, granting him a moment's clarity as battle-hormones surge through his system in unprecedented quantity, awakening every cell in his body to the latent strength encoded within.*

*The brood recoils from the gene-rage, sickened by its touch.*

*He has but a moment and strikes, firing his storm bolter to gouge a wound in the patriarch's flank. It is not enough, not nearly enough to slay such a beast, but he senses that it is all he has the strength remaining to do.*

*It is not enough to die here. Like moths to a flame, others will be drawn to the space hulk, feeding the brood's gene-hunger for another generation, bringing the Omen of Despair a few more light years closer to the heart of the Imperium, a grotesque spider in the guise of a resplendent butterfly.*

*The rage gives him strength to fight the brood but duty, honour, sacrifice, these are the qualities that bolster the courage he needs to run, to flee, to protect himself so that he might carry a warning.*

*Adonius is dead at the door but the brood do not attack when he emerges, still confused by the conflicting psychic signals and pain emanating from their patriarch. Vespesario breaks into a lumbering run, heading into the depths of the ship, closing doors and bulkheads behind him, forestalling pursuit until even he does not know where he is.*

*His wounds are great. Only the madness of the Black Rage sustains him, and he knows that his sanity will not last much longer. He wants to turn and face his foes, to cut them down with storm bolter and rip them apart with his power fist.*

*A deeper goal flares inside, just long enough to find the small magazine*

*chamber, just long enough to open the locks and step inside the closing door, breaking the mechanism to seal himself into a living tomb. He hears them scratching and battering the door but the ammunition storage cell is designed to withstand starship bombardments. On the verge of death he waits, praying for calm, for peace, and for the strength to survive.*

*And the cold comes as his life leeches away, hearts slowing, breaths becoming shallower, the sus-an membrane flooding his system, becoming one with the rage and hatred, sealing the truth inside a coffin of flesh.*

With Calistarius leading the charge, the Blood Angels punched through the gathering genestealers. The aliens had not been expecting an attack and were caught unawares by the sudden offensive. Spurred on by desperation, Calistarius hurled psychic blasts as much as he used his pistol and sword, incinerating the genestealers. The storm bolters of his brethren finished off the survivors of the psychic assault.

‘Why do we not wait for the second wave?’ asked Sergeant Dioneas.

‘As soon as reinforcements land, the navigator-beast will activate the warp engines.’

‘So why did you call them in?’ the sergeant demanded. ‘Have you not doomed the whole company?’

‘I am sure the creature knows we are just a scouting force. If it judges we are going to leave, I think it will simply take us into the warp. It must be able to detect the incoming boarding torpedoes and so it will wait. We have to kill it before they arrive.’

‘If we fail?’

‘You must send the abort signal before the second wave makes contact. They must not set foot on the *Omen of Despair* or we shall all be lost. Better that we are taken than the whole of the First Company.’

‘That is a terrible gamble, brother, I hope you know what to do.’

Calistarius said nothing, but the piece of memory stuck in his mind from Vesperario was more than enough to give him confidence.

The truth lay in delusions, oddly enough. Everything Vesperario had witnessed, everything he had experienced on board the *Omen of Despair* had been translated into his rage-fevered hallucinations as Lord Sanguinius.

A febrile creation, not memories at all.

The Librarian could feel its presence even now, lingering in a corner of his mind like a smouldering ember, ready to ignite again if he gave it a chance. For

most the Black Rage was a curse but for Calistarius and his companions it had become a blessing, the last chance for Vesperario to give them his warning two centuries after his doom.

‘Get me to the bridge, that is our only objective,’ the Librarian told his battle-brothers. Dioneas was content to comply, despatching the squad to create a breach-head around the command deck. It took several minutes to push back the lingering genestealers with storm bolter and flamer, but eventually the cordon was secure enough for Calistarius to make his last move.

The door of the bridge was still rent asunder from Vesperario’s attacks. Calistarius hardened his thoughts, both to the vile scene that awaited him and to the psychic attack that would surely come. He stepped over the threshold, sword at the ready, and confronted the genestealer patriarch.

It was even more horrendous than Vesperario’s memories had conveyed. It had expanded, filling half the bridge now, disgusting sub-growths of soft flesh and chitin suspended by wires, sustained by pulsing feed tubes that filled the air with the stench of decay. Calistarius’s olfactory filters were almost overwhelmed by it.

The third eye had become a semi-autonomous appendage, jutting from the bloated face of the patriarch on a long stalk, pierced by clips and hooks linked by coiled cables to the warp engine console.

The eye swung toward Calistarius even as the navigator-patriarch’s clawed hands reached for him. Rather than trying to avoid its otherworldly stare he met the alien’s gaze full-on, allowing the Black Rage of Vesperario’s memories to flow forth.

He felt the same timeless void of the brood, as old as the stars, impossibly distant and ancient, reborn through a million generations since a beginning in another galaxy, the tiniest fragment of a much greater whole yearning to be reunited, forever devoured by inner emptiness.

The rage boiled up inside him and he seized hold of the psychic connection, pouring wrath and scorn into his foe without relent.

Psychically and physically the patriarch thrashed to break free, emitting an unearthly wail as ten thousand years of grief and desire for vengeance were made manifest in its mind. It burned like fire, turning alien intelligence to ash, searing through the hypnotic lure of the brood, leaping from one genestealer to the next like a plague, infecting their thoughts with alien anger and hatred so intense that they fell upon each other in their desire to rend and kill.

Claws as hard as titanium closed on his armour, cracking ceramite, puncturing fibre bundles, pushing closer and closer to his gene-enhanced flesh and bones.

He saw not a bizarre hybrid of alien and machine but the very image of treachery – the thrice-cursed Warmaster, Horus the Betrayer, the Architect of Ruin. Calistarius lunged as Sanguinius had lunged, reincarnated as the Lord of the Blood Angels, the Saviour of Baal.

His sword passed into the wound caused by Vespesario's storm bolter, sliding deep into the patriarch's innards, parting nerve bundles and piercing its pulmonary organs.

With a last twitch of muscle the patriarch tossed Calistarius across the bridge. The Librarian lost his grip on his sword, leaving it lodged in the thorax of the alien monster. Ichor spewed from the wound, splashing onto the deck, bubbling with escaping air.

The patriarch-navigator's third eye flopped to its face, the psychic light within dimming to nothing. Its chest collapsed with a wheeze of expelled breath, and it fell still.

In disarray at the loss of their brood-leader, the genestealers were easy prey for the vengeful Blood Angels. Calistarius was content to let the First Company purge the *Omen of Despair* and allowed himself to be escorted back to the breaching zone by Sergeant Dioneas.

'I would think you would be in a more celebratory mood,' the sergeant said as they arrived at the outer perimeter and were met by an Apothecary and a Techmarine ready to tend their wounds and damaged armour.

'I'm tired, very tired,' explained Calistarius.

It was true. He felt a fatigue the like of which he had never known before, drawn out by physical exertion, psychic combat and, most of all, the harrowing ordeal of sharing Vespesario's Black Rage-induced warp-memories.

But it was more than exhaustion that quietened Calistarius. Something altogether more disturbing occupied his thoughts. It was a moment, a passing vision that had entered his mind at the instant he had unleashed the Black Rage into the thoughts of the patriarch. He was not sure if it were one of Vespesario's cursed hallucinations, an actual memory from the Terminator's ordeal two hundred years before, or something else far more dangerous: a glimpse of something yet to happen.

His instinct told him it was the latter.

For a fraction of a second, Calistarius had felt himself entombed, buried in a vast mausoleum, gripped by a terrible thirst for blood, shrieking for release, enslaved to the curse of the Black Rage.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Gav Thorpe** is the author of the Horus Heresy novel *Deliverance Lost*, as well as the novellas *Corax: Soulforge*, *Ravenlord* and *The Lion*, which formed part of the *New York Times* bestselling collection *The Primarchs*. He is particularly well-known for his Dark Angels stories, including the *Legacy of Caliban* series, and the ever-popular novel *Angels of Darkness*. His Warhammer 40,000 repertoire further includes the Path of the Eldar series, the Horus Heresy audio dramas *Raven's Flight* and *Honour to the Dead*, and a multiplicity of short stories. For Warhammer, Gav has penned the Time of Legends trilogy, *The Sundering*, and much more besides. He lives and works in Nottingham.

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**Published in 2014 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd., Willow Road,  
Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.**

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