

The cover art features a central figure of a Dark Angel, a heavily armored warrior from the Warhammer 40,000 universe. The figure is depicted in a dynamic, forward-leaning pose, wearing intricate, dark armor with gold highlights. A prominent feature is a large, spiked halo or crown-like structure on the head. The figure's right hand is raised, holding a glowing, golden skull. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky in shades of blue and white, suggesting a battlefield or a celestial realm. The overall tone is dark and intense, characteristic of the Dark Angels chapter's aesthetic.

WARHAMMER

40,000

DARK ANGELS THE BLACK PEARL

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THE BLACK PEARL

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THE ENGINES OF the gunship roared as the Thunderhawk tore through the atmosphere. Inside, Interrogator-Chaplain Uzziel of the Dark Angels led four squads of Space Marines in the Litany of Battle. As he chanted the sacred words to prepare them for the imminent combat, Uzziel ran his fingers over his rosarius but today he did not pray in the prescribed Imperial manner. Today his fingers kept returning to the single black pearl on his string, the only pearl that really mattered. He had earned it by coaxing one of the Fallen Angels to repent and receive the Emperor's mercy.

That wretch was much on his mind as he finished the prayer, the enthusiastic voices of his twenty Marines joining him to boom the final refrain. As their voices faded, Uzziel pushed back his cowl. Filled with his faith in the Emperor, he launched into his sermon.

'Brethren.' he began, 'it has been a long journey and now, at last, battle is upon us. Before we engage the enemy, I want to tell you all something. This is no ordinary mission.' He paused to let this sink in. 'My brothers, this is a quest, a most holy quest to bring back to the Rock... a sacred artefact, long-missed.' Uzziel stared intently at the Marines. He saw men of varied origins, but they were all united in their blazing faith in the Emperor, in their oath as Dark Angels and in the Sacrifice of the Lion. He wished they could understand the full meaning of their mission but knew such a revelation could shake their faith. Today, he needed that faith.

'Should we succeed.' he continued, 'your names and deeds will long be praised in the halls of the Rock. We will sit in the company of the Chapter's greatest heroes. So fill your heart with the grace of the Emperor, remember the sacrifice of our blessed primarch, Lion El'Jonson, and gird yourself with the righteousness of faith!' Uzziel leapt up, possessed by holy fury, and slammed his fist to his chest. 'For Jonson and the Emperor! Victory or death!'

'Victory or death!' the Dark Angels returned his salute with barely suppressed savagery.

Uzziel smiled. With such men at his back, how could he fail?

IT WAS NOT so long ago that Uzziel, newly-promoted to the position of interrogator-chaplain after his inspirational leadership on the Bylini campaign,

had walked the halls of the Rock, the giant space fortress that was home to the Dark Angels. He remembered the looks of envy on the faces of his comrades when he brought back his first Fallen Angel for interrogation. They couldn't believe that one so young had succeeded where they had failed. Many had dismissed it as pure luck but Uzziel knew better. To prove it, he swore to extract the confession due from the renegade himself.

It was not the first oath Uzziel had ever sworn, but it proved the most difficult to fulfil. The traitor had roundly mocked Uzziel, the Dark Angels and the Emperor. He told gleeful stories of his hundreds of campaigns as a mercenary, an endless catalogue of rape, murder and torture. Uzziel was not a man who shrank from violence, but he believed that it needed to serve a greater, righteous purpose. The wanton slaughter of the Fallen Angel's tales had sickened him, and he had to suppress a powerful urge to rip the wretch before him limb from limb, to pay him back in kind for each of his deeds.

Uzziel had fought off his immediate desire for vengeance. First, the confession. The Fallen Angel had seen the hatred in Uzziel's eyes and laughed. "What's the matter, whelp, do my stories frighten you? Can't you stand to hear how a real Marine goes to war? You can keep your cowls and your prayer beads, monk. A true warrior goes into battle with lust in his heart, lust to spill the red blood of victory and taste the glory of war. That's what you lack and that's why you'll always lose!"

Those haunting words were with Uzziel even now, echoing sickeningly inside his mind as the Thunderhawk screamed through the atmosphere. Despite the passing of time, the revulsion the chaplain felt recalling that moment was immediate and real. He relived his rage at the renegade's insolence and his desire to make him pay for that insolence.

Back there, in the interrogation cell, he had let his emotions overwhelm him for just a moment. Uzziel had backhanded the traitor, then grabbed him by the hair and slammed his head hard against the stone wall. 'You seem to have forgotten which one of us lies in chains, filth!' he had shouted. 'I've already won. We need only determine if the Emperor will have mercy on your soul!'

*'You understand nothing!' the Fallen Angel spat back. 'After all you've heard,

you still don't know why I fight, do you?'

Uzziel had stepped up close to his prisoner and the two had locked eyes, faith and faithlessness colliding with unmatched fury. 'You fight because you are tainted by Chaos.' Uzziel had begun. You had your chance to serve the Emperor and you failed him utterly. You, and Luther, and all of your wretched cohorts chose to betray he who gave you life!'

The Fallen Angel had stood firm in the face of these accusations, and stared back at Uzziel, his every feature screaming defiance. Snarling like an animal, the traitor had lashed out at his tormentor with venomous scorn. 'I was once like you, monk! Loyal, righteous, dutiful.' He paused to spit, as if the words themselves were poisonous. 'Despite my virtues, I was left behind on Caliban by Jonson while he went fighting across the galaxy.' The renegade's harsh voice became strained with emotions long-buried as he continued, 'While my brothers fought battle after battle, I was left at home with the invalids, the women and the children! What did I do to deserve such a fate? I was born to go to war, but the Lion and the Emperor turned their backs on me and the others.' His voice rose to a scream of pure hatred. That's why I've fought and killed my way over more worlds than you could even name. And now you think you have the right to judge me!'

The Dark Angel had said nothing at first, so shocked was he by the monstrosity of the traitor's replies. How the Fallen twisted the truth to hide their own failure! It would be tragic, had the traitor's hatred not driven him to a life of mindless butchery.

In sadness, the interrogator-chaplain had turned away and walked towards the heavy iron door that sealed the room shut. The rusted hinges gave out a tortured shriek as he forced it open, but he paused before leaving his prisoner alone to ponder his sins.

'Heretic.' he intoned, 'I had hoped for more from you. I prayed that some trace of the Lion still lurked in your soul, but I can see I was wrong. By your unrepentant actions you force me to use any method to save your soul. So let it be done.'

The door slammed shut, entombing the Fallen in the bowels of the Rock. Over the following days, Uzziel had displayed his expertise as he ground the Fallen

Angel down. The weak would call it torture; Uzziel knew it to be justice. Eventually, when his tools were sticky with the traitor's blood and the screams had ceased, the Fallen Angel had broken. He had admitted his guilt, and that of the other Fallen Angels, and repented in full for his crimes. Ultimately it had been a pitiful spectacle, as the broken man, once one of the Emperor's elite, poured out his litany of evil deeds.

As Uzziel prepared to give the man the quick death his repentance had earned him, the Fallen Angel had spoken for the last time. 'Confessor.' he

had whispered through broken teeth and swollen lips, 'there is one thing that I have yet to tell you.' His body was wracked by a coughing spell of such length and intensity that Uzziel had thought the repentant traitor might pass away. Hacking and wheezing to draw more of the stale air into his tortured lungs, the Fallen Angel was finally able to speak again. 'I'm sorry, confessor, but this deed fills me with regret as no other.'

'Go on, brother,' Uzziel had urged. Your repentance will not be complete until you tell everything.'

The Fallen Angel had nodded slowly before continuing. 'Confessor, three years ago I was in the Knight Worlds serving as a mercenary. My unit raided the eldar exodite worlds regularly and I relished the opportunity to spill the blood of such a spineless and decadent race. We went on countless sorties, hunting down the cowards and slaughtering them as they deserved.' At this point, the Fallen Angel's voice had become animated once more, talk of bloodletting seeming to arouse him from his pain. 'On one such raid, a band of eldar took refuge in an ancient place of power. They called on their gods, but the gods did not listen to their pathetic cries. We stormed the place and left not one of them alive.'

The Fallen Angel had paused, caught up in the memory. The obvious pleasure on his face had brought bile to the chaplain's lips. 'It was while we were sacking the place that I found it, confessor - an artefact of power lost since the breaking of Caliban.' The Fallen Angel had abruptly stopped again, overcome with another spasm. The spell did not pass until he had coughed up a wellspring of his own lifeblood.

Uzziel grew concerned, knowing the signs only too well. Even a Marine's body

could take only so much punishment, and the chaplain had pushed this one past its breaking point.

Consumed with impatience, Uzziel shouted, 'What did you find, damn you? Tell me!'

The prisoner had pulled his body erect. Blood ran freely from his mouth, giving an evil cast to his grin. 'Fear not, confessor, I am not finished so easily' The pain had washed over him again, but he fought it this time and forced out the words by willpower alone. 'In the temple, confessor, amongst the bodies of the slain... I found the Lion Sword.'

Uzziel had been stunned. The sword of Jonson, lost these ten thousand years? It could not be.

The Fallen Angel had seen the disbelief on Uzziel's face, but he was determined to be heard. 'I know it sounds fantastic, confessor, but I swear it is true. I could never forget the sword of Lion El'Jonson.' His confession delivered, the Fallen Angel's body had gone limp.

Uzziel's mind had swirled with confusion. How could he trust one of the Fallen? But if he didn't, the confession was meaningless. Still undecided, the chaplain had held up his prisoner's head, wiped the blood from his mouth, and spoken to him gently. 'Brother, what did you do with the Lion Sword?'

The Fallen Angel's life was near its end. He had struggled to talk, only a barely audible croak escaping from his lips. 'I was afraid... to face up to what I had done... so I left the sword where it lay.' His body had convulsed, blood gushing from his nose and mouth. Choking and spitting, his words ran together. 'I regret that I didn't take it. I could have returned it... to where it belongs, but I... failed again. Forgive me, confessor.'

Uzziel had almost been overcome in that moment. He could not deny the power or dignity of the confession, but neither could he forget the deeds that had brought his prisoner to the dungeons of the Rock. Holding the Fallen Angel's head, he had used his dagger to deliver the man's absolution. 'Brother, you are forgiven.'

THE JUDDERING OF the Thunderhawk snapped Uzziel from his reverie, and he shook his head to clear his mind, so clear and vivid were the images. Steeling his brow, Uzziel took his hand from his rosarius and returned his mind to the task at hand. They had a battle to fight, and he would not let himself be distracted when his men's lives were at stake. Striding the length of the command bay, Uzziel called the sergeants to go over the assault plan again, before checking his weapons one last time. Moments later, the Thunderhawk reared up suddenly, engines screeching like a bird of prey, before hitting the ground with a bone-jarring crash. The bay doors opened and the first squad rushed out, their bolters singing a song of death. The symphony of battle had begun.

AILEAN STOOD AT the Martyrs' Tomb, his fist clenched over the runes around his neck. Even now, days after the dream, the runes of divination gave him no clue to its meaning. He had dreamt of a bird of prey, a sword of power and a man with no soul. He looked for a pattern but saw only blood. He opened his senses but felt only a cold wind running through him, as if a great evil were about to awaken.

From the east came Dragonlord Martainn of the Seana. Tall, gaunt and wrapped in robes of black, Martainn looked like a wraith on his great steed. From the west rode Dragonlord Barra of the Eamann. Long hair flowing in the wind and brightly polished armour shining in the sun, Barra appeared blissfully unconcerned. Laughing and joking with his warriors, the Eamann leader signalled for a halt. His rival did the same. Leaving their retinues behind, the two chieftains rode up on their great stomping beasts. Their dragons hissed and spat at each other, raking their claws in the earth and lashing their tails in eager anticipation of battle. Both leaders dismounted, but did nothing to calm their beasts.

Ailean could see that their frosty exteriors belied the raging anger within. Let their hatred flow, he thought. They will need it this day.

Barra, so raucous amongst his men but now icily intent, spoke first. Warlock, why have you summoned us to this accursed place? Are not

the living trouble enough?' he asked, shooting a vicious glance at Martainn.

“Why disturb the dead?”

‘We meet here because the spirit runes demand it.’ Ailean pronounced.

‘I’ve no time for your cryptic comments, warlock.’ Martainn growled. ‘I fear neither the living nor the dead.’ He looked meaningfully at Barra and the ancient temple ruins. ‘I’ve only come here at your bidding and out of respect for our king. But Ailean, know this: the so-called knights of this coward cut down my son in cold blood and there will be no peace between us until the matter is settled.’ He looked keenly at Ailean. ‘Blood has been spilled, warlock, and blood will be spilled again before I am satisfied!’

Barra spat in disgust. ‘Your son died because he was feeble and that is no fault of mine.’

Martainn bristled at the insult, gripping his sword so tightly that his knuckles cracked. He took one step forward and drew his blade halfway out of its ornate scabbard. Before the warlords could take further action, Ailean was between them.

‘Martainn.’ shouted the warlock angrily, ‘draw that sword now and I will banish you from Lughnasa!’ He pointed his spear at the enraged Seana warlord and invoked the power of his office. ‘None shall disturb the King’s Peace until judgement has been passed. Now sheathe your sword and hear my judgement.’

The warlock and the Seana dragonlord faced each other while Barra watched with wry amusement. Martainn slowly pushed the sword back into its scabbard and removed his hand from the hilt. ‘My quarrel is not with you.’ he said. ‘Pass your judgement.’

Ailean remained between the two dragonlords, and pondered a moment more before speaking. ‘It pains me to see eldar lords consumed with hate.’ he uttered, ‘but sometimes our follies can still serve a higher purpose. I find the grievance of Dragonlord Martainn of the Seana to be legitimate and I decree that it should be settled on the field of battle.’

Both dragonlords smiled. Martainn stared past the warlock and addressed his rival. ‘Barra, you have robbed me of my only son and for that I will make you pay.’ With that, he strode off to his dragon. The mighty beast reared and gave out a roar of defiance, as Martainn pulled his laser lance free from his tall saddle

levelling it at Barra. 'Prepare to die, Eamann scum!'

The reckoning is indeed at hand, Seana.' Barra shot back, swinging up into his own saddle. 'Your mate will weep the tears of Isha before nightfall.'

'Both of you, cease your prattle!' Ailean ordered. 'The Seana and the Eamann do not fight each other this day.'

'What?' Martainn shouted. You promised me vengeance, you traitor!'

'I did not.' Ailean said icily. 'I said you would settle your grievance on the field of battle, and so you shall. But you will not fight each other.'

"What in Khaine's name are you talking about?" the bewildered Barra asked. Who are we to fight, if not each other?'

A deafening sonic boom rolled over the temple. Looking up, all could see the Thunderhawk gunship swooping down upon them. Ailean was immediately forgotten, as the two warlords whipped their beasts around savagely and returned to their men. War cries echoed across the field as the two veteran warriors prepared the exodites for battle.

Ailean, alone in the ruins, returned his attention to the runes. He did not hear Martainn's angry voice drift across the battlefield, proclaiming, 'Barra, this is not over!'

The runes were speaking to the warlock again and the critical moment bore down upon him. He reached for the runes of summoning and cleared his mind. The hawk.' Ailean whispered, 'we fight the hawk.'

In the Martyrs' Tomb, only the dead could hear him.

UZZIEL STOOD AT the top of die Thunderhawk's landing ramp, heedless of the shuriken that hissed all around him, and scanned the battlefield. Squad Beatus was in the vanguard and they had found cover behind a low stone wall some thirty paces ahead. To the right of the wall, there was a small copse of trees; Squad Strages was busy hauling its heavy weapons under the cover it promised. Beyond the Marines' makeshift line was the target of their attack: an ancient

eldar temple.

Uzziel stared intently at the old ruins but could not see any defences. Good. The chaplain jogged down the ramp of the gunship, unhindered by the heavy jump pack strapped to his back. Squad Beatus was already receiving heavy fire from eldar warriors, who seemed determined to keep the Space Marines pinned down behind the stone wall. In the distance, Uzziel could see exodite dragon knights mounting their beasts and preparing for battle. It seemed that his surprise attack was barely a surprise at all. The eldar were obviously ready for them and Uzziel could only wonder how. Whether he liked it or not, however, the battle had been joined and was escalating rapidly. He could analyse it later; now he had decisions to make.

‘Squad Beatus, stay in cover. Watch for a counter-attack.’ Uzziel began. Squad Strages, on my signal, lay down a suppressing fire with your heavy weapons. Squad Redeptor, left flank and support Squad Beatus. Squad Ferus, you’re with me!’ He started forward, followed by the members of Squad Ferus, whom he had chosen specially for the mission. Armed with chainswords and plasma pistols, they had a well-earned reputation for savagery. Uzziel could see that only the tight leash of command prevented them from jumping forward to engage the enemy immediately.

Soon, my brethren, soon.

Behind them, the Thunderhawk fired its massive thrusters and clawed its way back into the sky. Uzziel activated his communicator again. ‘Gunship Cestus, adopt Strafing Pattern Primus until the enemy is engaged. Then fire at available targets and be prepared for pick-up.’

The gunship’s commander replied without pause, ‘By the Emperor, it is done.’

Uzziel turned to Codicier Ahiezar, the librarian accompanying them on this mission. Uzziel had never fought with Ahiezar before, but he knew him by repute. Unfamiliarity in the heat of battle always worried Uzziel, and he prayed that his wavering of faith was unwarranted.

‘Ahiezar, do you detect any psychic activity?’ asked Uzziel.

‘No, nothing yet, interrogator-chaplain.’ The Librarian’s voice was cool, as if he were unused to being questioned.

Then remain vigilant, brother.’ Uzziel ordered, ‘and shield us from the witchery of the cursed eldar!’ Turning his attention back to the enemy, the chaplain could see that the dragon knights were massing in two impressive formations.

As alien warriors frantically lashed their beasts into action, the Thunderhawk dropped back out of the clouds. Screaming low over the battlefield, the gunship swivelled its multi-lasers at the two clusters of mounted eldar. Deadly accurate pulses of white-hot energy swept over the dragon knights, blowing holes in their elaborate armour and slicing through their raging beasts. The Thunderhawk roared past the decimated eldar batde groups, its mighty engines kicking up dust and debris as it swung around for its next attack.

Even in the face of the withering fire from above, the eldar reformed their ranks with admirable discipline. The earth shook as the two eldar formations charged the Space Marine line. Filling the air with cacophonous battle cries, the alien warriors held their weapons high as their beasts’ clawed feet propelled them violently towards the waiting Dark Angels.

Calmly, Uzziel noted that the rained temple, clearly visible behind the streaming pennants and laser lances of the exodites, now seemed all but undefended. If Uzziel could break this charge, the Lion Sword would be his! ‘Squads Beatus and Redemptor, hold fast and concentrate your fire on the left-hand group. Squad Strages, you take the right-hand. In the Emperor’s name, fire!’

Guns erupted all across the Dark Angels’ line. Standing firm, the Space Marines rained destruction on the charging knights. On the left, shell after shell slammed into the massed eldar ranks, sending knights tumbling from their saddles and riddling the dragons. At the same time, the heavy weapons of Squad Strages were blowing holes in the other eldar battle group with missiles and plasma.

Despite the rain of destruction, a few of the dragon knights on the left completed their charge. With wild shouts of ‘Seana!’ they smashed into the

Space Marines' line. The bolters, so effective just seconds before, were all but useless in close-quarter fighting. The eldar drove home their laser lances, blasting Dark Angel power armour open, sending them flying backwards or impaling them on their wicked tips. Others were trampled by dragons, torn apart under clawed feet.

Uzziel wasted no time. 'Squad Ferus, for Jonson and the Emperor, attack!' He immediately activated his jump pack and let the jets propel him towards the swirling melee. Codicier Ahiezar and the rest of the squad were a heartbeat behind, howling with delight now that they had finally been unleashed on the foe. As the Dark Angels arced over the battlefield, the remaining eldar foot troops brought their shuriken catapults to bear on them.

The air was immediately filled again with vicious discs of razor-sharp metal. Uzziel cursed aloud when Brother Alexius fell from the sky, his armour punctured in a dozen places. The chaplain commended his fallen soul to the Emperor, and added a prayer of thanks for the stout armour that had protected him from the hail of eldar fire.

Moments later, he landed, power sword in his right hand and bolt pistol in his left, scant feet from a bellowing dragon knight. Uzziel watched in horror as the enraged eldar warrior plunged his laser lance through the visor of Brother Caleb, killing him instantly. Seeing Uzziel, the knight tried to pull his lance free, but he was already too late. Filled with righteous fury Uzziel raised his bolt pistol and unloaded half a dozen shells into the eldar, blasting him right out of the saddle. The dragon opened its gaping jaws and howled a forlorn cry at the loss of its master. Uzziel swung his power sword in a mighty arc and silenced the beast with the bite of steel. The dragon's body collapsed to the ground, pumping steaming blood onto the scarred soil. Uzziel looked down at the lifeless body of Brother Caleb and whispered, 'Rest easy, brother. You are avenged.'

Looking about for fresh opponents, Uzziel saw that his assault squad had broken the charge of dragon knights. With deadly chainswords and white hot plasma, Squad Ferus had smashed the proud eldar and continued to rain death down on them as they fled. Codicier Ahiezar stood proudly over the smoking skeletons of two knights he had annihilated with crackling blue bolts of psychic energy.

Dead and dying eldar lay everywhere, their lovingly-etched armour shattered and useless, their loyal dragons quivering in death-throes and filling the air with

the scent of charred meat, their brilliant pennons broken and trampled in the blood-stained grass. The pitiful survivors had turned their mounts around and were fleeing the battlefield in disarray, unable to defend themselves from the preying Thunderhawk that continued to harry them with death from above.

The chaplain quickly regained his wits. Realising that the eldar temple was now undefended, he turned to the librarian and yelled, 'Ahiezar! Follow me!'

Again the jets of his jump pack lifted him across the battlefield. As he flew through the air, aiming for the eldar temple, he saw that it had become mysteriously obscured. A dense and swirling mist covered the area where Uzziel knew the temple to be. Cursing, the chaplain cut his jump short and landed just outside the fog. The codicier landed behind him, force sword at the ready.

"What witchcraft is this?" Uzziel asked angrily.

The librarian licked his lips. 'I am unsure, interrogator-chaplain. Perhaps there is a warlock in the area. I sense something,' he said in a slow voice, 'but I've never felt its like before.'

Uzziel turned back towards the mist. He hardly needed Ahiezar to tell him that there might be an eldar witch in the temple. 'If there's a warlock in there,' the chaplain growled, 'he'll taste the Emperor's steel.'

Chanting the Lion Hymn quietly to himself, Uzziel stalked into the mist. An unearthly quiet immediately enveloped him and he quickly became disoriented. The chaplain couldn't hear himself praying - he couldn't even hear himself breathing. Surrounded by swirling darkness, the Dark Angel could barely see five feet in front of his hand. He felt he was floating in limbo.

Gritting his teeth against the sorcerous manifestation, Uzziel tried doggedly to keep walking forwards, but it was difficult to keep to any kind of bearing. Strange thoughts crept into his mind, and his concentration drifted. He saw the Emperor's Golden Throne, but the body inside was a decayed corpse. Twelve hooded figures surrounded the throne, laughing as they carved up the Emperor's corpse with cruel knives and issued edicts in his name. Nearly overcome with the force of the vision, Uzziel stopped and shook his head violently, willing the evil thoughts to cease. He was a Dark Angel and a chaplain, and nothing would

shake his faith!

A startling flash of crimson lit up the miasma in front of him, illuminating an enormous serpentine mouth bearing down on him. Uzziel barely had time to fling himself out of the way, as row upon row of razored teeth lunged for his head. The beast loomed over him, its gargantuan body an indefinable shadow in the mist. As he tried to scramble away, a long tail snaked out of the darkness and thrashed him to the ground. The Dark Angel could see the beast's mouth, open as if screaming in rage, but in the all-enveloping dream-mist he heard nothing. He could only feel the awful shaking of the earth as the dragon drove its weighty bulk forward on monstrous limbs.

That dreadful head descended again, but this time Uzziel was ready. As the widening jaws plunged to engulf the chaplain, Uzziel rolled beneath the beast's slaving maw, jamming his power sword through the underside of its cavernous mouth. Black blood burst out of the wounded beast as the sword drove through scales to pinion the creature's jaws shut. The beast reared back in pain, clawing and lashing in fury. Uzziel tried to pull

his sword free but it had become deeply embedded in the dragon's sinew and bone.

Desperate but determined, Uzziel refused to release his grip on the power sword, and found himself lifted bodily off the ground by the enraged monster. Suspended twenty feet off the ground, Uzziel struggled to use his bolt pistol as the crazed beast thrashed in agony. Straining his muscles almost to breaking point, he heaved himself upwards and planted the pistol against the skull of the monstrosity. Ignoring the searing pain in his tortured shoulder, he squeezed the trigger again and again until he had emptied the magazine. The mighty dragon fell to the ground with a soundless crash, the top of its head a bloody ruin. Using his last reserves of strength, Uzziel managed to twist his body away as the dragon fell, narrowly avoiding a crushing death under the monster's dead weight.

Heart singing with the joy of victory, Uzziel staggered to his feet. Planting his foot on what was left of the monster's head, the chaplain yanked his power sword from its fleshy sheath. He was alive!

Even as he stood panting and exhausted, the body faded into the mists and was gone.

The chaplain's sword arm was burning with pain, but Uzziel would not slow. Such sorcerous defences could only mean that the prize was near at hand.

'The Lion Sword!' The words were sweet upon his whispering lips.

Uzziel began chanting the Lion Hymn anew and strode forward. He would not be stopped. Suddenly, a wall emerged from the gloom in front of him - the temple, at last! Stumbling over the rained remnants of the temple wall, Uzziel entered the Martyrs' Tomb. The mist was thinner here, mosdy swirling about the floor and walls, and a pulsing red light illuminated the place. Uzziel stepped into the temple and immediately his boot sank into a deep sludge. Puzzled, he bent down and dipped his glove into the mire, raising it to his face through the fog so he could see its nature. He realised, to his revulsion, that his gauntlet was covered with congealed blood. He gasped. What cursed place was this? As if in answer, dim figures staggered from the mist.

Uzziel brought his sword up, ready to defend himself, until he saw them more distinctly. From all around him they came. Eldar men, women, and children, walking towards him, their bodies bearing terrible wounds. Here a man with no legs pulling himself across the floor, there a woman staggered with her shattered brain exposed. Uzziel's battle-trained eye could see the horrid tearing wounds of chainswords, the gaping holes that only bolter shells could make, flesh seared by boiling plasma. Countless victims with countless wounds, the eldar dead paced towards him. They said nothing to the chaplain, merely stared in silent condemnation.

With savage clarity, Uzziel realised what he beheld. These were the victims of the Fallen Angel and his cohorts, brutally murdered so many years ago.

Stunned, the chaplain could do nothing but stare back at their accusing faces. As the dead approached, Uzziel fought an overpowering urge to flee. The phantoms assaulted his mind, threatening to overwhelm him with madness. He cried out to the Emperor but his prayer was swallowed up by the hungry silence.

Surely nothing is worth facing this for? The seductive whisper snaked through

his mind. Your wounds justify an honourable withdrawal.

Uzziel almost obeyed the voice in his head. Almost! Then he thought of his brethren, even now valiantly fighting and dying in the Emperor's name. Could he abandon his quest after his men had served him so well, giving up their very lives so that he might bring the Lion Sword back to the Rock? Of course not! He was compelled forward by his loyalty to the Emperor, by his oath as a Dark Angel, by the sacrifice of the dead. For Brother Caleb and all of his fallen brothers, he knew he must fight on.

The Lion Sword will be mine, no matter the cost!' he roared in rage. Driven by will alone, Uzziel lifted his sword and slashed at the nearest of the walking dead. It melted to nothing before his blade. Relief flooded his mind as he banished the apparition. As a chaplain, he recognised too well that fear was the weapon of the dead, and he had proven himself fear's master.

With mounting confidence, Uzziel passed through the dead, their images fading before him, and strode purposefully towards a low slab of rock, an ancient altar. Uzziel paused for a moment, before raising his power sword high and bringing it down hard, cracking the time-worn stone in two. Something metallic glinted beneath the shattered stone. Uzziel pushed aside the rubble, revealing an ancient eldar box of intricate design. Cold sigils blazed on its surfaces. It had the look of some kind of weapons case and crackled with arcane energies. Maybe this was the stasis field generator that held the Lion Sword?

With trembling hands, Uzziel touched the box. As he did so, he heard an unearthly humming noise. Sound had returned to the world. Uzziel looked around to locate its source, but could see little despite the thinning mists. Even as he searched, the noise increased in pitch to a keening wail, followed by a gurgling scream. Spinning around, Uzziel saw Codicier Ahiezar framed in an emergent doorway, sharp metal sticking through his chest. The metal slowly withdrew and Ahiezar collapsed into the sludge of blood.

The fallen body of the slain librarian revealed a tall eldar wearing rune-encrusted armour and carrying a silvered spear. The eldar weapon was alive in the warlock's hand; it purred with pleasure now it had tasted the librarian's blood. The exodite spun the spear around and held it before him.

'I am Ailean, warlock of the King of Lughnasa. I know why you have come and

I am here to deny you. You, human, have no right to disturb this place and you may not have what that stasis chest holds.'

Uzziel shook with rage. You speak so of the sword? No right? I have every right! That sword is the birthright of my Chapter and has been kept

from us for ten thousand years. I will take it back to my brethren or die in the attempt. So I swore.' The chaplain removed his hand from the stasis box and gripped his power sword with both hands, wincing at the daggers of searing pain which streaked from his injured arm. He was ready to face the meddling warlock.

'You humans are strange,' Ailean said, seemingly unaware of the towering anger that filled the Dark Angel. You should thank us for keeping a sword such as this safe for as long as we have. Instead, you come to my world, kill my people and disturb the dead. Is the sword really worth all that? It would be better locked away for all eternity than loosed again upon the world.'

'Heretic!' Uzziel screamed. You will feel the Emperor's wrath for your insolence!' Uzziel charged, his power sword tracing a deadly arc. Ailean, apparently ready for such a manoeuvre, parried the blow swiftly. He tried to unleash a bolt of psychic energy at the Dark Angel, but found his power neutralised by the Space Marine's armour. Uzziel smiled inside his helmet, and silently mouthed a prayer of thanks for his Aegis suit. He would not fall to this warlock's witchcraft.

Ailean tried another psychic blast and this too was quashed. The warlock began to take the duel more seriously, shifting his spear into an offensive position and lunging with deadly intent at the raging Dark Angel. Uzziel met the spear stroke for stroke and the lance howled as it was thwarted time and again. The two were well-matched opponents, Ailean fighting with graceful elegance, Uzziel countering with berserk fervour.

Eventually, the sheer power of Uzziel's blows began to tell, and he drove the warlock back into a lichen-covered wall. Ailean still tried to pierce Uzziel with his hungry spear, but the Dark Angel grabbed the weapon's haft with his injured hand and held it fast.

The chaplain longed to sheath his blade in the eldar's flesh, but couldn't at such close quarters. Instead, he struck the warlock full in the face with the hilt of his power sword. The blow drove Ailean's head into the wall with an audible crack, and the warlock joined Ahiezar in the mire of blood.

Wasting no time, Uzziel sheathed his power sword and staggered towards the stasis chest. He was breathing heavily and bleeding from a number of spear wounds. Without further ceremony, the chaplain picked up the long box and all but ripped it in two. He could feel the energy dissipate as the alien device cracked open and the stasis field disappeared.

Reaching inside the shattered chest, Uzziel pulled out a sword encased in an ornate sheath. The shock nearly overwhelmed him, and he leaned on his own blade for support. Up to this moment, he had been prepared for disappointment and lies. A Fallen Angel could never really be trusted. But how could he have passed up any opportunity to recover the Lion Sword, no matter how remote the chance?

Now he, Uzziel, stood in this alien temple with the very sword in his hand! What a moment!

Uzziel began to pray fervently, thanking the Emperor and Lion El'Jonson for choosing him for this moment. The sword came free of the sheath and shone with a blinding brilliance. The remaining fog and mist burned away in seconds, exposing his surroundings for the first time. Uzziel was alone in the temple, save for the bodies of Ahiezar and Mean. Now Uzziel could see that the once elegant temple was mostly a ruin. The towers that once flanked it had fallen and parts of the roof had caved in. Lichen covered the walls, which somehow glowed with an inner light.

A little calmer now, the chaplain examined the sword. The hilt was carved of gold, in the shape of an angel, its spreading wings forming the weapon's guard. Overcome by its beauty, Uzziel took the sword to a place where the sun shone through. There it gleamed in the light for the first time in ten thousand years. Uzziel hefted the blade and tried its balance. Perfection. This was a sword of kings, of conquerors. As if in a vision, he could see himself at the head of armies, wielding the unmatched blade and vanquishing the enemies of the

Emperor.

His mind swam with heady visions of power and conquest. With this sword none could stand before him. Surely he was chosen! A weapon of greater power even than that wielded by Azrael, Supreme Master of the Dark Angels. Now Uzziel knew his time was upon them all! This was the evidence and the power to silence all his most jealous brethren back at the Rock.

Uzziel gasped involuntarily and laughed aloud that fate had sent him to this place! Soon he would be hailed as the greatest interrogator-chaplain in the Chapter's history, greater even than the legendary Molocia! All would fall before him, all would bow to him, and not just those of his Chapter.

No, now was the time to put away petty differences of Chapter and creed. The Imperium would be his. Swordbearer, conqueror, first of a new breed of primarch. Giddy with elation and power, Uzziel saw the universe laid bare for his legions, ready for the taking. This was decreed. It must be.

As Uzziel continued to gaze at the gleaming weapon, he noticed an inscription on the blade. This is below your notice, Lord Uzziel, an inner voice chided him, and so persuasive was its tone that he almost ignored the battle-worn lettering. But the small cold presence of his conscience pulled at his mind. Looking closer, he squinted to read the ancient letters. Each word pierced him like a dagger to his heart.

TO LUTHER, FRIEND AND COMRADE-IN-ARMS. MAY YOUR FAITH BE YOUR SHIELD. LEJ.

Uzziel staggered back and dropped the sword. Immediately, its treacherous power was broken, and he realised the full extent of his folly. This was not the Lion Sword, but the Sword of Luther, arch-traitor and most hated of the Fallen Angels. Once a noble weapon, it had been twisted by

the power of Chaos as Luther led the Fallen Angels down their doomed path.

And had Uzziel not felt its power, listened to its lies and been ready to make it

his own? How could he have been so blind? Tempted by the very sword that had killed the Lion! The chaplain shuddered with horror, thinking of the Lion's noble sacrifice. What folly! And so many noble eldar dead!

Thoroughly disgusted, steeped in self-loathing, Uzziel carefully sheathed the cursed blade. He would not be tempted again. He would not listen to the now-raging voice. He must, he would deny it!

Inside his helmet, his communicator crackled to life. 'Interrogator-chaplain, this is Gunship Cestus. Strong eldar reinforcements are heading towards us from the north. What are your orders?'

Uzziel paused a moment. He considered ordering his men away and staying to die at the hands of the eldar. 'I deserve no better!' he howled in torment at the sky.

But he could not. As a chaplain and a Dark Angel, he had to face up to his actions. Sighing heavily, he replied at last, activating his communicator link. 'Tell the troops to fall back by squads to rendezvous point secundus and meet there.'

'Yes, sir. By the Emperor, it is done.'

Uzziel walked to the stone doorway, where the prone form of the dead librarian lay. He looked out over the battlefield; more bodies lay everywhere. Many of his brethren had fallen today, their lives thrown away because of him and his pride. He had wanted to find the Lion Sword so much that he had let himself be fooled by one of the very traitors who had torn the Dark Angels asunder. Even the heretic had been given a merciful death as well!

Now there would be consequences, of that he was certain.

He considered leaving the sword in the temple, but too many had died for him to go home empty-handed. It was a part of the Chapter's history and as such belonged in the Rock. Perhaps Asmodai would know what to do with it.

Asmodai. He could not think of the aged Space Marine, the greatest living interrogator-chaplain, without touching his rosarius. Asmodai's rosarius had only two black pearls, and that was the work of hundreds of years. Uzziel looked at his own black pearl, the source of so much pride just hours ago. Now revulsion filled his soul at the sight of it.

Slowly, Uzziel unclasped his rosarius and slipped off the black gem. He placed it carefully on the hard rock of the temple floor before bringing the heavy boot of his power armour down upon it. The black pearl shattered and Uzziel ground it to bitter dust beneath his foot.

Next time, there would be no doubt.