

THE BLOOD OF ANGELS

‘Would you really want to meet an angel? With the tip of one wing in heaven and the other dripping with blood, could there be any soul more tortured?’

- Angels Sanguine Chaplain, addressing aspirant Baalite warriors.

The burners roared, ripping the heavily shadowed air into strips of flame. Vast stone pillars reached up towards the rapidly descending figure, twisting into arches that aspired to the heavens. The jump pack threw fire into the yawning dark of the temple, propelling Tenjin down from the ugly crater he had punched through the gargoyle infested roof. At his back, chasing his diagonal path down through the echoing hollows of the inner sanctum, a shaft of moonlight pierced the shrouded gloom like a javelin stuck in his back. As Tenjin turned, gyroscoping throughout his spot-lit descent, searching for his target, the moonlight glinted off the blood-red that covered the right-hand side of his armour. He seemed to pulse with life.

The sanctum reverberated with the gaseous thunder of the jump pack, obliterating the awful silence that fled from its sanctimonious haven. Tenjin could hear nothing but the roar of flames and power. Blood throbbed in his brain, pounding out a pattern in his ears, sending a thrill through his body like the drums of war. His rapid drop from the giant and ornate ceiling had pushed him through greater negative g-forces than a normal man could have withstood, but his augmented body registered only a slight red tinge in his vision as some capillaries burst.

In the gloom that engulfed him, Tenjin could see almost nothing. His bloody eyes scanned the darkness for any sign of movement. The flames from his jump pack sent the shadows dancing into frenzies, projecting grotesque and unnatural images against the distant walls and pillars. His eyes flickered and darted, struggling to separate the random flood of movement from the silhouette of his enemy, knowing all the time that Ansatsu could see him clearly, falling out of the night sky like a burning meteor.

There. A flash of red. Deep red lost in the darkness. Darting from pillar to pillar.

Gone again.

Tenjin slowed his descent, provoking a powerful roar of resistance from the jets of his jump pack as they struggled to balance his gigantic form. He was hovering now. Stationary. Twenty meters from the ground. Fire spilled out from the base of his pack, incinerating a ceremonial banner, which fell in burning tatters from its tethers strung between two great pillars beneath him. Fragments of burning textile fluttered to the ground, shedding moments of light across the stone floor, rendering the temple into fractions of daylight.

There. Behind the pillar on the left. The red flashed back into hiding, but it was too late. Tenjin leaned forward over the barrel of his flamer, balancing the back-thrust it was about to produce with an angle from his jump pack. The flamer screeched into life, sending a jet of chemical fire hissing through the air until it plumed and rushed around the pillar like water around rock. The darkness receded from the flames, as though scorched by its ferocity. From the other side of the pillar came a sharp explosion, like a grenade suddenly igniting after being unexpectedly superheated by the chemical fire. An armoured warrior rolled crisply out from behind the stone column, accelerated but unhurt by the concussion. He rolled into a tight crouch, one knee resting on the ground, and clicked off two shots from the bolter in his left hand.

The bolts dove into the stream of flame and rocketed up against the current, seeking the source. Tenjin was an easy target - a fiery angel, hovering in a void of darkness. Ansatsu despatched his shots and then was back into the shadows. Tenjin twisted to the side, firing his jump pack suddenly, but the jets could not move him in time; the bolts punched squarely into his flamer, shattering its structure. In a single swift movement, Tenjin cast the flamer into the gloom and cut the power to his jump pack. As the bolts ignited in his weapon, the flamer exploded into a blinding rage of chemical flames. It spiralled straight into the immovable stone of a giant column.

Hidden behind the sudden and impossibly bright flash, Tenjin dropped heavily into a crouch behind the altar at the centre of the temple. His landing cracked the immense flagstones at his feet, but he was instantly ready with his bolter braced on one knee behind the cover of the altar. With his jump pack extinguished and his flamer destroyed, Tenjin could be just as invisible as his foe.

‘Come out, traitor!’ Tenjin’s voice echoed between the mighty columns that

dwarfed the two Space Marines.

‘It is you who are the traitor, Tenjin...’ The echo decentred Ansatsu’s voice, so Tenjin could not get a fix on his position. From behind the altar, Tenjin scanned the shadows with his red eyes and strained his ears in the sudden silence.

‘You have violated the sanctity of a Temple of Sanguinius and attacked the Honour Guard of a high priest, one of Sanguinius’ Chosen! You damn your soul and those of your fallen Death Company. You do a great dishonour to our glorious Chapter-‘

‘No!’ Tenjin could not listen to this. ‘It is you who damn our souls through your polluted ways!’ The red in his eyes grew darker as blood gushed into his brain, drowning his thoughts and curdling his intent. The blood of Sanguinius flows in my veins. Just as he stood firm in the face of his death, so I shall not falter now. For the Emperor and Sanguinius!

‘For the Emperor and Sanguinius! Death! Death comes for you!’ Tenjin was on his feet, spraying fire from the hissing barrel of his remaining gun. ‘DEATH!’ The superheated air roared into a kinetic frenzy, forging a ring of inferno around the chaplain as he swept the melta-gun from side to side. The giant stone pillars started to crack under the tirade; bubbles began to appear in the cracks. In an instant, the bases of two columns melted away into an ooze of molten rock and the stone above tumbled down to the ground in a deadly cascade of masonry. The distant ceiling split and collapsed, sending shards of decorated plascrete falling into the fray.

‘DEATH! DEATH COMES FOR YOU!’ Tenjin was screaming as he brought the world down around him, firing a continuous barrage of melta into the vague space within his Chapter’s most holy sanctum.

Above the roar of the melta, Tenjin heard a metallic ring and the burst of jets. Suddenly, from amidst the ocean of fire and magma that oozed unstoppably over the ground, a figure rose into the air, blasting gravity away with the force of its jump pack. In one hand, Ansatsu held the Grail of the Angels Sanguine and, in the other, the Chapter’s Exsanguinator - the symbols of his status as Sanguinary High Priest.

Ansatsu started to accelerate away from the liquid hell that was engulfing the floor of the temple. His jump pack flamed gloriously as it pushed him out of the

fire and into the encompassing darkness of the majestic arched roof - a burning angel returning to heaven. But Tenjin was moving faster than thought. He had already discarded his melta-gun and clicked his jump pack back into life. Having discarded his heavy weapons, Tenjin was lighter than Ansatsu and he rocketed through the space between them like a bolt from a gun. Tenjin roared through the gathering shadows, feeding energy into his power fist, which hummed into life over his left arm.

Just as Ansatsu reached the hole in the roof, Tenjin reached him. There was no pause for breath, no hesitation, no ceremony, no thought. Tenjin ploughed into Ansatsu diagonally from below, punching his power fist straight through the armoured plate covering his stomach. The fist ripped through armour, flesh and bone, and then armour again, as it wrenched free out of Ansatsu's back, impaling him on Tenjin's arm. Ansatsu opened his mouth in pain and shock. His eyes focussed momentarily on Tenjin. Then he was dead.

The momentum carried Tenjin and Ansatsu out of the hole in the roof before Tenjin could bring his jump pack to a stop. He looked down from the moonlit sky, surveying the ruined Temple of the high priest and the litter of dead Space Marines in the courtyard in front of it. For the Emperor and Sanguinius.

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Addiss allowed his hood to hide the horror on his face. On the steps of the Temple of the high priest, he could see the chaplain kneeling before the hideously violated figure of Ansatsu. A torrent of blood had gushed down the stairway, flooding out of the hole punched through his body, leaving the high priest in a pool of his own essence. The chaplain was soaked in blood and his eyes shone with red. His power fist lay in the liquid that puddle at his feet and his naked hand held the Chapter's grail, wrenched from the death-grip of his lord. In his right hand he held the Exsanguinator, rammed unceremoniously into the cavity in the high priest's abdomen. The device was working energetically, sucking out the sacred blood of Sanguinius' Chosen. But the chaplain was not collecting the precious fluid into the Exsanguinator's reservoir, rather he let it spurt and gush out of the machine into the thick pool around the body. It

congealed and coagulated as it trickled and oozed across the chaplain's armour, coating him in a new layer of ichor.

The inquisitor had seen more than enough. He made a swift signal, sending a knot of his retinue scattering into an offensive arc, encircling the foot of the staircase that acted as a podium for the gruesome chaplain's performance. With another signal from Addiss, the Marines lifted their hellfire bolters and focussed their implacable attention on the Angel Sanguine at the apex of the steps. He ignored them, intent on his task.

'Chaplain! It is finished. Cease!'

Tenjin turned his head slowly, his burning eyes dancing from the shrouded inquisitor to the Deathwatch Marine at his left shoulder. There was a flicker of recognition. The chaplain squinted slightly, as though in disbelief that the killing had not yet ended. Was it disbelief or relief? He couldn't tell.

'Chaplain. If you cannot hear me, you will die.' Addiss knew that there was a point of no return. A place somewhere beyond humanity from whence even a Space Marine of the Angels Sanguine could not return. He watched the chaplain slowly rise to his feet, thick tendrils of blood running down his slick armoured form, adding to the pool at his feet. He could see the fiery red in the Angel's eyes and, for a moment, he feared the phantom of righteousness that burned deeply in his glare.

'There are things far worse than death...' Tenjin's voice was tremulous, yet it thundered. The blood was pounding in his head, disrupting his thoughts and dragging his voice from unknown depths within him. 'I do not fear you.'

There was a click and then a roar of energy as Tenjin's jump pack ignited once again. He rose slowly into the air, arms spread wide, with the grail held aloft in his left hand. Droplets of blood fell from his feet, sending miniature tidal waves rippling through the pool around Ansatsu.

'I name you Traitor! Face me! For the Emperor! FOR THE EMPEROR!'
Tenjin's voice was incensed.

'You go too far,' muttered Addiss under his breath as he clenched his fist into the firing signal. A volley of bolts ripped through the air, focussed at the centre of the offensive arc, riddling Tenjin with tiny explosions. The impacts pushed him

back through the air and smashed him into the heavy doors of the temple. There was a mighty crunch as the collision sent splinters flying and decimated the jump pack on Tenjin's back. He slumped to the ground, crumpled and broken.

Climbing the steps towards the temple and the fallen Angel, Addiss paused to survey the scene. The inquisitor's retinue remained at their posts, guns trained on the ruined chaplain, overseeing the bloody mess of the high priest on the temple steps. Beyond them lay the gold-tinted bodies of Ansatsu's honour guard - the Chapter's standard fluttering forlornly in the gentle night breeze, still clutched in the dead fingers of the standard bearer. Interspersed amongst the bodies were those of Death Company Marines, the chaplain's own guard, who had fought to their deaths, first against their own Chapter and then finally against the might of the inquisitor's retinue.

'For the Emperor. For Sanguinius,' whispered Addiss in awed disbelief.

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'Do you know where you are?'

Tenjin opened his eyes and tried to look around. His head would not turn; thick straps of adamantium ran taut across his forehead and chin, clamping him to the cold table. He lifted his gaze to the face of the interrogator. 'No,' he said.

Addiss looked down at the chaplain. The red had faded from his eyes, leaving them glazed and slightly pink. The Angel Sanguine had been stripped of his armour and then strapped to the Lestrallio Tablet. Thick scars covered his skin, punctuated occasionally by the fresh craters left by the bolter shells of the inquisitorial retinue. Tenjin's augmented body was already healing the wounds. The blood had clotted and scar tissue was beginning to knit over the holes in his flesh.

'No? But you have been here before, chaplain. You have seen this place before, albeit from a slightly different perspective.'

The bright light above the table shone directly into Tenjin's sore eyes and

disoriented him. He squinted and searched his field of vision for clues. The Apothecarion. Of course. They had brought him to the Apothecarion. Tenjin had been here many times, as a chaplain of the Angels Sanguine. He had manacled his most desperate battle brothers in adamantium and strapped them to this table. He had watched them thrash and spasm, spilling their tortured minds through their mouths until the Black Rage finally destroyed them totally - crushing their consciousness and snapping their spines with a last violent twist. He had listened to the rantings of Angels lost in the echoing visions of Sanguinius' death aboard the battle barge of Horus himself, reliving those moments of hell as though they were their own. This was the place where the curse of the Blood Angels found its most pitiful voice - no glorious death in combat, swamped under insurmountable enemies, battling to the last - just the screams and shivers of a solitary Marine, alone with his inalienable nature.

Tenjin laughed quietly, blood gurgling thickly in his throat. How pathetic. Did this inquisitor really think that the source of the curse could be divined on Lestrallio's Tablet? Lestrallio himself had died in terrified lunacy strapped to a table just like this one, screaming at a phantom of Horus: 'I name you Traitor!' Does this inquisitor really think that I am so lost to myself that I need to be bound to this fate? Does he think that this is about the Rage, that I succumbed in the midst of my own?

'I see that you recognise your place at last, chaplain.' Addiss watched Tenjin's amused eyes in confusion. The glaze was fading, and the chaplain was gradually recovering the pristine, penetrating stare that revealed the clarity of his mind.

'You must answer some questions.'

'What do you hope to learn from me, inquisitor? Why didn't you kill me?' Tenjin's amusement was balanced precariously against a rising sense of suspicion.

'I am here partly because your actions forced me to intervene in the internal affairs of a Space Marine Chapter. You and your battle brothers killed the Sanguinary high priest and slaughtered his honour guard. Your chaotic mutiny was only thwarted by my intervention - who else could cleanse the twisted mess you created?'

'You are here to judge me, then? Would you judge Sanguinius?'

The inquisitor paused over this apparent blasphemy. ‘Only the Emperor can judge you. I am here merely to understand you and your kind. You will answer some questions. Let’s begin three months ago, when High Priest Ansatsu Rakuten transferred you from the First Company down to the Tenth...’

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‘As you wish, my lord.’ Tenjin bowed deeply, touching his right fist to his heart. He stood upright, looked straight into Ansatsu’s eyes for an instant, and then turned to leave. His anger was suppressed and barely noticeable - effectively transmuted into a dignified bearing.

Ansatsu watched his veteran chaplain carefully. He had known Tenjin for more years than a normal man would ever witness. The chaplain was the best of the Angels Sanguine. He was glorious in battle and meticulous in his duty to administer to the cursed and the doomed. Before every battle, Tenjin would wander amongst his company, stripped of his armour, carrying his ceremonial Death Mask under his arm. As he approached, each Angel would drop to one knee and clasp his right fist to his chest. Tenjin would stop, kneel before his flock, gaze deeply into their eyes and say nothing. Nothing at all. A silent blessing. The blessing of silence before the storm to come. Under his influence, fewer Angels were lost to the Black Rage on the eve of battle. He reassured them, inspiring them with pride and courage, suppressing the desperate thirst for blood that bubbled just below the surface.

When First Company Chaplain Reontrek had died, Tenjin had been the natural replacement. The body of Reontrek had been found deep in the catacombs of Hegelian 9, where the Death Company had been loosed to root out and slaughter the remnants of a defeated Tyranid army. The company had rampaged through the cavernous underworld, slaughtering indiscriminately, slaking their lust with alien blood. It seems that the Tyranids vanished before the Thirst, and the Death Company continued its search and destroy mission for several weeks before they were brought back under control by the high priest himself, Sanguinius’ Chosen enwrapped in the Holy Shroud of Servius and bearing the Standard of the Angels Sanguine. Only a power that inspired such awe could arrest the Rage of the

Death Company.

Ansatsu had found the body of Reontrek, torn to pieces by the maniacal fury of his own company. The chamber was strewn with fragments of black armour coated in viscous streams of blood. The bodies of six or seven Marines lay in varying stages of dismemberment, some still twitching pathetically, crying out for battle. It was then that Ansatsu had resolved to make Tenjin the next Death Company chaplain. Tenjin would bring the Rage under control, or he would die trying.

The young chaplain had been greatly honoured and had excelled where Reontrek had failed. Never again had the Chapter lost control of its Death Company; it was transformed by the rigid discipline and quiet inspiration of its new chaplain. Yet Ansatsu had not seemed altogether pleased by these long decades. He watched Tenjin like a hawk, suspicious and cynical.

Tenjin could feel Ansatsu's eyes boring into his back as he walked from the Temple of the high priest, fresh from his demotion. I will not turn around, he thought as he walked purposefully down the great staircase that dropped away from the imposing doors at the entranceway. His footfalls resounded heavily in the stone, echoing the gravity of his thoughts, and a swirl of wind whipped a red dust cloud into a shroud around his descending form. The sands of this desert planet stirred and Tenjin paused on the last step to allow them to engulf him. When the dust finally cleared, he was gone.

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'So you killed him to avenge your honour? Your anger became your Rage?' Addiss fired the accusation from nowhere, forcing a logical step where Tenjin could not see one.

'No, inquisitor. My honour was not slighted. All service in the name of the Emperor and Sanguinius is of equal honour. I killed him because he was a traitor. For the Emperor and Sanguinius, I took death to him.'

The inquisitor watched the sparkling eyes of the chaplain focus with determined

resolution. 'But you were affronted by the actions of the high priest. You were angered by his treatment of you.' No longer questions: statements.

It was not anger. But there had been Rage. 'I could not understand why he would transfer me from my station in the First Company. I was the only chaplain who could keep the Death Company under control. Ansatsu knew this.'

'So, your pride was your undoing?'

Tenjin smiled painfully and a bubble of blood caught in his throat. He coughed, straining the muscles in his neck against the adamantium shackles. 'No, inquisitor. My pride was Ansatsu's undoing. It made me suspicious of his motives.'

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The hooded figure knelt silently, gaze fixed on the floor, the black of his ornate power armour glinting where it was revealed beneath the folds of his heavy cloak. He was perfectly motionless, rigid in fierce deference and discipline.

Ansatsu considered the hunched figure for a few moments, inspecting the battered Angels Sanguine insignia on his shoulder, etched magnificently at some time before the high priest had even been born. He let his eyes caress the lines of the angelic wings, feeling them slide along a series of deep gashes in the figure's chest plates until they fell into the eye-sockets of the Deathwatch's skull on the other shoulder. What kind of claws could have made such channels in the armour of a Space Marine, pondered Ansatsu with interest.

'Welcome home, librarian.'

Ashok lifted his eyes to meet those of the high priest and could see the sincerity in those words. There was more than welcome in Ansatsu's eyes - delight perhaps.

'It is good to be back, my lord.' In truth, Ashok had never considered Baalus Trine his home. The traditionally peripatetic Chapter had relocated on this

irradiated rock only shortly before he had been summoned by the Deathwatch. He had not returned even once during the intervening decades.

‘It is an honour to see you again, Ashok.’

‘The honour of service is mine, my lord.’ The librarian had served under Ansatsu for only a year, between his ascension as high priest on Baalus Trine and his own call from the Deathwatch.

‘You will find much changed.’ Ansatsu searched Ashok’s eyes for something unspoken as he continued, ‘And for the better, I think.’

‘I have heard of some new developments here on Baalus Trine - interesting developments.’ Ashok returned the high priest’s gaze with a casual undertone of curiosity.

Ansatsu seemed satisfied. ‘Just today I have felt it necessary to remove a veteran chaplain from his position in the Death Company - you may remember Chaplain Tenjin?’

‘Indeed I do. He was a chaplain in the Second Company when I left. A solid man, I thought. I recall that he was assigned to the Death Company after that business on Hegelian 9.’

Of course, Ashok had been one of the survivors of the Hegelian 9 expedition. He had slaughtered seven of his Death Company brethren before bringing his Thirst under control by the force of his own will - mastering it and transforming his Rage into an awesome weapon. He had been presented with a Shroud of Lemartes - guardian of the damned - and the Deathwatch had called for him almost immediately. Ansatsu smiled as the realisation grounded itself in his thoughts. ‘I perceive pollution in our midst again, librarian, and Tenjin might better serve us elsewhere. We will see what the Death Company can do without this chaplain.’

Ashok nodded gravely. He had heard rumours of this pollution. ‘Tell me more about this Tenjin and the corruption of our purity.’

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The First Company scouts knelt in formation, heads bowed and fists clasped to their chests. They were arrayed before their attack bikes, which gleamed in the desert sun. The red dust speckled the armoured panels, hazing over the gold trim, the bulging tires and the black exhaust tubes that bristled out of the massive engine blocks. The scouts were bedecked in light battle armour, wearing the colours of the Angels Sanguine with the fresh pride of recent initiates. A crisp, vertical line bisected the armoured suits, separating the fathomless black of the left-hand side from the blood-red of the right. The warriors' armour, like their nature, was split between the glory of a bloody battle and the darkness that lurks within a blood-thirsty soul.

The scouts of the Angels Sanguine wore no helmets, so Tenjin could gaze directly into the eyes of each as he passed along the line, inspecting his new company. Each pupil blazed, fierce with deference and courage. Tenjin poured his wisdom into his stare and said nothing. In the eyes of some he could see sparks of recognition, fractions of moments in which the scout opened himself to Tenjin's influence; flickers of relief and self-assurance danced in the fires of their determination. But from others Tenjin received nothing. Blank eyes returned his gaze; eyes replete with hostility and violence. Impatient eyes. It was in these looks that Tenjin paused, delving deeper into the souls that they reflected.

There are too many. Tenjin hesitated at the end of the line and turned to take it in again. Too many are balanced too finely. He walked slowly back along the inspection line of his new company, pausing, lingering in front of nine separate scouts. They are right on the cusp, teetering on the brink of the abyss, desperately seeking combat. Too desperately. There are too many, he thought, an entire squad. The chaplain touched his hand to the forehead of the nine tainted scouts, muttering a silent mantra, and then walked swiftly off into his Reclusium. The nine sprung to their feet and followed their chaplain, their heavy boots kicking up eddies of sand as they marched.

'You nine will accompany me as my Honour Guard,' explained Tenjin as the others stood to attention. It might be the only way to control you once the enemy is sighted. Nothing fights the Thirst better than pride. 'We will form a single squad, together.'

The scouts barked their enthusiasm in unison. They were keen to impress their new chaplain, especially one as celebrated as Tenjin.

‘Local intelligence reports possible contamination in one of the settlements on the far side of the Bhabatrix mountains. We will investigate and, if necessary, purify the contamination. Understood?’

Tenjin was concerned. NINE new scouts seemed destined to succumb to the Rage in the battle to come - their very first battle as Angels Sanguine. This was an unprecedented figure, especially amongst such recent initiates. The Thirst usually took time to develop. Exposure to battle. Experience of shedding blood and slaughtering the enemies of the Emperor. Internalising the tragic mission of Sanguinius. These were the factors that usually seemed to induce the Thirst. Incidents increased gradually the longer an Angel served. The First Company, the Death Company, was full of veterans, the oldest, most experienced and most blood-drenched warriors of the Chapter.

Nonetheless, the Death Company held its name for a reason. Its Marines, the mightiest and most invulnerable of all Space Marines, brought death to innumerable enemies of the Emperor. They also brought death to themselves. Lost in the craze of the Rage, thirsting for blood, violence and combat, many would take on vastly superior numbers of the enemy - more than even a Death Company Angel could defeat. No matter how glorious or magnificent the victories of the Death Company, fewer would return to Baalus Trine than had departed. Death Company suffered more losses than any other company of the Angels Sanguine - bathing in more blood than even Khorne could crave. Tenjin shivered at the thought of the fate of his predecessor on Hegelian 9.

Nine novice scouts on the verge of the Rage seemed incredible, but Tenjin pushed his concern to the back of his mind. Perhaps I am wrong about them. Perhaps they are just awestruck. It has been a long time since I looked into the eyes of such inexperienced warriors. Let us see what combat does to their souls.

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The high priest reclined languorously into the thick, viscous fluid, letting it slip

around his body, coating his exposed skin in a deep lustrous red, seeping gradually through the nodal points in his carapace. He lay back into his ceremonial sarcophagus, inscribed with the ancient glyphs of previous high priests, permitting the blood to flood around his form, leaving only his face and chest exposed to the quiet reverence of the temple air.

‘My children, you may leave,’ whispered Ansatsu in a voice that echoed and snaked around the silence of the pillars in the sanctum.

A clutch of three men bowed deeply and unclasped the mechanisms from their necks, letting shiny droplets of blood speckle down onto the pristine white of the flagstone floor. After long moments of deference, the men eased out of their bows and shuffled awkwardly out of the sacred chamber, their bizarrely muscled forms forcing them to limp and stoop as they went. By the time they had gone, a heavy tablet had scraped into place in front of Ansatsu’s face, sealing him into the ritual rest of a Sanguinary high priest.

He lay in meditation, feeling the delicate pressure of the blood enwrapping his body, replacing the customary, firm metallic touch of his armour with the tepid embrace of the fresh fluid. Tiny waves rippled into tranquillity as they eased their way through the nodal mechanisms of the high priest’s carapace, drawn in by some long forgotten osmotic process.

Ansatsu closed his eyes and concentrated on the flow of his blood, visualising the gradual intermingling of the fresh with the staid, pumping the new vitality around his augmented body under the enhanced pressure of two hearts. The blood coursed through his omophagae organ and he could feel the effect immediately. A gradual warmth spread through his body, dappling his skin with rains of pain and pleasure, disorienting his senses and rendering the immersion tank into a box of blades and fire. Ansatsu twitched, sending ripples and splashes around the dark interior of the sarcophagus. The glory of Sanguinius burned in his blood.

With a sudden hiss of depressurisation the elaborate lid of the high priest’s sarcophagus retracted into the wall of the sanctum and a rush of cold, dry air slapped Ansatsu in the face. His eyes snapped open and he sat bolt upright, sending a red shower sleeting over the edge of his tank, splattering the decorated exterior of another of the sarcophagi that lined the wall of the ritual chamber.

He walked across the cold floor, blood cascading into a trail at his heels, and Ansatsu the altar where the Exsanguinator was kept. Lifting it from its podium, the high priest clicked the mechanism into place over the dedicated valve in his neck, which had been installed as part of the Ritual of Ascension to the High Priesthood. The device buzzed into life immediately, awoken by the trace of Sanguinius flowing through it. The mechanism clucked quietly, sucking a supply of Ansatsu's precious blood into a reservoir in the hilt of the Exsanguinator. Finally, pulling the machine from his neck, he detached the reservoir and poured small quantities into each of the ceremonial goblets that adorned the altar, ready for the internalisation of the neophytes and recent initiates.

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The night was broken by the orangng beams of the low moon as the bike squadron roared through the narrow mountain pass, sending torrents of rocks tumbling into avalanches. Powerful headlamps cast startling cones of light across the moutainscape, floodlighting the column of scouts from within. The path was only wide enough for single file, but the riders were confident and undaunted. They bounced and swerved their way over the uneven terrain, skirting the sheer drop to their left and scraping the paint from their armour against the mountain side on the right.

Tenjin raised his hand in a fist and slid his bike to a halt on the crest of the rise. The engine cut and the lights died as his squadron fell into silent obedience behind him. He was silhouetted against the moon, shimmering in an aura of golden light. Tenjin had an eye for drama, but he also knew the function of awe when leading squadrons of the cursed. He click the comm.

There was a hiss of static. 'Silence now. Nagaboshi and Endo with me. The rest, hold position here.'

Two scouts from the front of the line dismounted and marched to take positions alongside Tenjin. The three of them stood magnificently astride the top of the mountain pass. The moonlight played around their armour, sending sparks of brilliance dancing into the thin air. The other scouts gazed at their battle brothers in awe, with pride swelling in their chests.

Below them, tucked under a ledge in the precipice, there was a makeshift camp. A fire burned gloomily in its heart, spewing thick curdles of smoke into the sky, blotting out the stars and threatening the moon. Figures were moving spasmodically in the spaces between the tents and the flames. They were jerking and shuddering, twisting their naked forms into bizarre contortions. And laughing. Laughing loudly. In the background there was a faint, pulsating impact. Its power drove the figures into renewed frenzies of motion.

The chaplain took a step forward and brought his enhanced vision into tighter focus. The faces of the figures were wide-eyed and their mouths hung open. Dribbles of spittle trickled indelicately from their teeth, as though they were slightly rabid, running down their chins and necks, splashing across their abdomens like body paint. Like body paint - that was not spittle, it was blood. The patterns on their chests looked worryingly familiar.

Tenjin quickly scanned the rest of the camp. Figures sat languorously in the dust, knees pulled up to their chests, rocking slightly, blood oozing from the corner of their mouths. Some pulled chunks of meat out of the fire and gnashed at it hungrily, licking their lips like salivating dogs. A desperate group stood fearfully, chained to each other and to the mountain face at the side of the cave under the ledge.

The smoke swirled into a dense column, gyring back and forth like a lazy tornado. Then it clicked. The black smoke, the bloody mouths, the tearing of flesh. Tenjin strained his eyes into the fire. The flames leapt and flickered crazily, they crackled and hissed, spitting sizzling shards of fat into the faces of the lunatic figures. There.

The flames seemed to burn with an unusual red, tinted into orange by the reflection of the moon and the hunger of the fire.

There was a hand. It had been licked clean of flesh by the flames, but it was a human hand. It reached out of the fire as though thrown out for help; the last desperate action of a drowning man. Other forms began to resolve themselves in the fire. Feet, arms, heads and legs. Tens of them, piled on top of each other and set alight. A gargantuan pile of burning flesh, sending pungent plumes of death into the night sky - a grotesque barbeque.

‘What are they doing, sir?’ Endo’s eyes were taugth and perplexed. He was

horrified and fascinated all at once.

‘Dancing, Endo. They are dancing.’ Tenjin turned to the scout and looked into his eyes. They were burning and tinged with red. ‘Just dancing,’ he said gently, narrowing his gaze.

‘What should we do, brother chaplain?’ Nagaboshi’s low voice broke Tenjin’s concentration. He turned to face the other scout and was shocked to see his eyes wild and blood riddled. ‘We must do something!’ Nagaboshi insisted, his voice being dragged from some almost inaudible depth.

Tenjin paused for a moment, searching in the eyes of the scout, looking for something more or less than the urgency of blood. He could see nothing. Turning back to the grisly and gruesome party below them, he scanned the scene once more. The macabre dancers still twitched and wretched around the fire, the blood markings on their chests spelling out the sign of Khorne. The chaplain had to fight with himself to control his own Rage - he could feel it pulsing under his diaphragm, prodding him into rapid, shallow breathing. In his mind he whispered the Moripatris, drawing the thoughts deep into his lungs and letting them deepen his breathing back into normalcy.

‘You two, with me,’ he commanded in a powerfully whispered voice that permitted no resistance. The two scouts at his shoulders turned and followed Tenjin back to the waiting squad, snatching impatient glances back over their shoulders as they crept through the mountain darkness. At least they were following.

From a receptacle protruding from the back of his bike, Tenjin withdrew a spherical package, wrapped carefully in a shimmering black cloth. He unfolded the velvety material with care, revealing the stylised, bespiked skull of his Death Mask. It glinted with depths of darkness in the moonlit, emanating new shades of black into the night. The mask hissed into place as Tenjin pulled it over his head, the latches securing themselves into his carapace with unerring precision. Tenjin’s face was gone and the scouts found themselves gazing into the face of death himself - inhuman eyes burning with purple intensity in the skeletal sockets.

With the scouts of the Angels Sanguine arrayed before him, Death gripped his right fist to his chest, clasping the glowing Rosarius medallion tightly in his hand

- the soul armour of a Space Marine chaplain, a reluctant gift from the Ecclesiarchy. In his left, the chaplain held forth the Crozius Arcanum, his staff of office. The wings of Sanguinius radiated from the Crozius, spilling fountains of red light from the droplet of his blood enshrined in its heart, bathing the scouts in an aura of purity. I can do no more than this, Tenjin worried inside himself, looking into the mixed expressions of awe and impatience before him as he invoked the ritual of Moripatris - the Mass of Doom.

‘For the Emperor and Sanguinius! Death! Death comes for the deviants!’

‘DEATH COMES FOR THE DEVIANTS!’ enjoined the scout squad with a single voice.

In an instant the scouts were back on their assault bikes, engines purring with impatient power. Tenjin was at the head of the column, riddled with anxiety about his novice team, torn between a deep-felt need to annihilate the deviants on the other side of this mountain and an equally deep concern that this side of the mountain hosted an infinitely more dangerous deviance. He pushed the thoughts aside - battle will reveal their souls.

Raising the Crozius above his head he shouted, ‘For the Emperor and Sanguinius!’ Tenjin’s bike roared into life, bursting over the crest of the path in a blaze of blood reds and blacks, gilded with gold. Behind him came his column of righteousness, each Marine leaving the ground as he cleared the pass, their bikes leaping the sharp descent in a single jump, before thudding and skidding into the dust in the midst of the repugnant camp. Head lamps blazed brighter than the flames of the cannibalistic fire and the staccato onslaught of bolter fire drowned out the drums of the dancers.

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The librarian gently pushed back his hood, revealing his unshadowed face to the high priest for the first time since his return. ‘Thank you,’ he said, accepting the glass of red liquid from the outstretched arm of Ansatsu.

The two Marines knelt ceremonially, facing each other across a silent space,

underspread with the ancient Shroud of Servius. There were no attendants and no surveillance servitors in this place - they were quite alone.

Ansatsu watched intently as the librarian drank deeply from his glass. 'It has been a long time since I have tasted the blood of Baalus Trine,' conceded Ashok.

'It is sweet, is it not?'

'It does have a special quality, indeed.'

'The Deathwatch must change a Marine - even a librarian,' mused Ansatsu, as though to himself.

'Yes, but change comes in many forms and from many places,' replied Ashok with a faint smile, toying with the residue of his drink, swirling the blood into a whirlpool. He looked up, fixing Ansatsu's eyes with his own, which seemed to glitter with an unfathomable blackness at their core. 'Things are changing here too.'

'Had you not left so soon after our adoption of this planet as our home - so soon after I was honoured with the position of high priest - you would understand the changes more completely. After Hegelian 9, I had great hopes for you.'

Ashok nodded his head slightly, reaching out with his thoughts and testing the substance of Ansatsu's words. 'Yes, I can see that now. But the Deathwatch also had plans for me, and it was my honour to serve. For the Emperor and Sanguinius.'

*

The cultists fell like animals, squealing and running in panic. No, not in panic, in pleasure, Tenjin reflected as he watched the appalling features of a bloody, crazed face dissolve under the impact of his power fist. It was an orgy and a blood bath all at once.

For a few moments the scout squad maintained its formation - the column

circling around the camp, herding the deviants into a tight pack and then loosing bolts into the dense group. Tenjin had pulled his bike over into the shadows on the outskirts of the camp, just beyond the flickering light cast by the fire, picking off stragglers and the particularly fleet of foot. His power fist hummed with life and dispensed instant death to all those who glimpsed his terrifying features.

Not many had escaped the tactics of the squad and the chaplain soon slid his bike to a standstill and surveyed the scene. He was relieved to see the discipline of the rookie squad, their clinical workmanship as they whipped the cultists into a spiralling pen of execution. And he watched the cultists themselves, each bearing the mark of Khorne etched into their chests with blood, each perversely elated about their blood-drenched fate. They offered little resistance - this was not really a battle fit for Space Marines.

As the relief settled into his thoughts, Tenjin began to notice more details. The cultists were deformed. Some had scales piercing the skin on their arms. Others had the suggestions of aborted limbs sprouting from their abdomens. Most were overly muscular yet stooped in stature, as though their muscles had outgrown their skeletons and pulled them back into themselves. Some seemed blind, just running into circles because of the momentum of the crowd.

But it was not just the cultists. The prisoners chained at the edge of the camp were similarly mutated. Tenjin glanced back and forth between the prisoners and the cultists - the only visible difference was the grotesque brand of Khorne on the chests of the cattle at the centre of the scouts' ring of death.

Suddenly the scout squad broke formation. First to go was Nagaboshi, who swerved his bike violently out of the column, skidding the back wheel in an arc and then gunning the engine. Nagaboshi roared forward into the heart of the cultists firing wildly with his bolter, riddling the cattle with shells, punching holes through bodies and the crowd. In an instant he was upon them, his bike scything through the bloody bodies, crushing bones and skulls under its weight until the sheer mass of the crowd brought it to a halt. Then Nagaboshi was on his feet, spinning frantically in the heart of the cultists, loosing bolts in all directions. The shells from his bolter started to escape the rapidly thinning crowd, some punching into the armour of the encircling scouts, who rapidly broke formation.

Endo leapt from his bike as a bolter shell smacked into the engine block, sending

hissing jets of steam rising into the night. He cast his own bolter aside and pounced into the remains of the cultists, grabbing at figures with his bare hands, tearing limbs from bodies.

The other scouts scattered throughout the rest of the camp on their bikes, cutting down any deviant that they could find. Tenjin watched in horror as a knot of bikers roared passed the manacled prisoners and gunned them down in a merciless drive-by.

The chaplain kicked his bike back into life and held the Crozius aloft, urging energy into the staff and flooding the camp with the aura of Sanguinius. By the time he reached the centre of the camp, projecting a litany of control from his Death Mask, Endo had fought his way through the remnants of the cultists and was upon Nagaboshi in a flash. He smacked his fist into the back of his battle brother, shattering his spine and sending him sprawling forward into the sand.

Tenjin slammed the shaft of the Crozius into the ground and a bright light burst from the blood of Sanguinius held in its core. The scouts lurched into motionlessness all over the camp, stunned by the flood of awe that rushed out over them. They strained against the invisible leashes, as though battling with constraints secured deeply within them. Endo rocked visibly and then fell to ground holding his head in agony.

The chaplain stood majestically in the centre of the camp, emblazoned and radiant with the power of Sanguinius pulsing in his hands. There was blood everywhere, soaking into the sands and gathering into pools around the piles of corpses. Not a single tribesman was left standing. They were all dead. Cultist and prisoners alike. Including Nagaboshi, three scouts were also dead - although there was no way that the primitives of Khorne could have slain a Marine.

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‘Explain yourself, chaplain.’ The high priest stood impassively before the altar in the Temple of Sanguinius. Behind him was a Marine that Tenjin felt he should recognise. He bore the insignia of the Deathwatch on one shoulder plate and held the ornate Force Staff of a librarian in his right hand. His face was hidden under

the folds of his Psychic Hood.

Tenjin was kneeling before them. 'The tribesmen were followers of Khorne, my lord. They were also mutants. Purification was required.' The chaplain knew that this was not the desired response.

'Yes, but what of the villagers, the prisoners of the cultists?'

'They too were mutants, my lord.'

'But not cultists?'

'No, my lord. They were sacrificial prisoners of the cultists.'

'You are aware, brother chaplain, that all the tribes of Baalus Trine are at least slightly mutated, thanks to the radiation of this inhospitable world? We may be far from Baal Primus here, but it took the Angels Sanguine many centuries to find its first home world with conditions similar enough to that of the Blood Angels. Since then, we have passed through a long succession of planets over the millennia, but only this world has warranted the name of Baalus. We have settled here for a reason. Our gene-seed requires hosts with a genetic make-up compatible with those of our father Chapter - compatible with the people chosen by Sanguinius himself. The people here must be protected - they are part of our nature. Might I remind you, chaplain, that I myself was born on this planet.'

'I could not prevent their slaughter, my lord. The scouts were enraged by the deviance.'

'You could not, or would not, brother chaplain?' intoned the hooded librarian.

'And what of the dead scouts, Tenjin? What of Endo, who even now lays half-mad, ranting on the Table of Lestrallio in the Apothecarion?' There was an odd quality in Ansatsu's tone that made Tenjin recoil. The librarian also shifted his stance slightly, as though steadying his own thoughts. There was a vague elation in the air.

Tenjin flicked his gaze from the high priest to the librarian and back again. Something was wrong. The Deathwatch Marine was no stranger here; he bore the markings of an Angel Sanguine, battered and scraped by innumerable encounters with unspeakable foes. When did he return to the Chapter, and what

horrors did he bring back in the darkness of his expanded consciousness?

‘You are confined to your quarters, chaplain, until we determine your fate.’ The high priest waved his left hand casually and the librarian clicked to attention, bowed slightly, and then stepped up to escort Tenjin back to his rooms.

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The adamantium door slid closed behind him with a solid crunch, leaving Tenjin alone in his sparse quarters. He thought back over the events of the last weeks. He had been demoted from the Veteran First Company by the high priest, despite the fact that he was the only chaplain who could control their Rage. For an anxious minute, Tenjin wondered what kind of havoc the Death Company was raging out in the frontiers without him, while he had been reassigned to the novice Tenth Company, the scouts - a company always in need of guidance, to be sure, but not usually one teetering on the cusp of the Thirst.

Nonetheless, on his first mission, a fairly routine home world scouting sortie, he had lost control of an entire squad. The scouts had slaughtered indiscriminately, even killing three of their own. One was so lost to himself that he was even now strapped under adamantium shackles, raging against his daemons on the Tablet of Lestrallio. Tenjin had never heard of a scout being so utterly lost.

On the other side of the chamber, Tenjin spied his battered copy of the Codex Sanguine. His was one of the few original copies that remained, inherited from the veteran Chaplain Reontrex. It contained the restricted sections on the Curse that the Angels Sanguine had inherited from the Blood Angels - only chaplains and the high priests were permitted access to these pages. Tenjin clicked a switch, releasing the transparent cabinet that controlled the atmosphere around the ancient text. He carefully lifted the volume from its pedestal and sat in meditation. The familiar pages washed through him; he didn't need to read them, for long ago they were committed to his photographic memory. Holding the book merely reassured him - he was touching a piece of the Angels' ancient legacy. He read in contemplative silence, with his eye lids gently closed over his tired eyes.

So it was that after the terrible death of Sanguinius the Blood Angels were divided into myriad successors, of which the Angels Sanguine were the most glorious and faithful to his image. But the blood of Sanguinius himself no longer ran with life, so what little remained was drained into the Red Grail of the Blood Angels, from whence it was consumed by the high priests of the successor Chapters. Thus could the blood and vitality of Sanguinius be preserved in the bodies of his children. New initiates and neophytes in the Angels Sanguine would be injected with the blood of their high priest and would drink from the Grail of Angels, overflowing with this blood, partaking in the essence of Sanguinius himself through the medium of his Chosen One. The omophagae organ of the neophyte then works to transpose the blood of Sanguinius' Chosen into the soul of each Marine - thus each successor Chapter gradually took on the characteristics of its high priests, the Chosen. The Angels Sanguine drew their essence from Sanguinius himself and from the courage and honour of Servius, the first high priest of this ancient Chapter -

Tenjin broke out of his meditation, struck by a terrible realisation. He scanned his enhanced memory, searching for recollections of each Marine to whom he had administered as they succumbed to the Rage or the Thirst. The pattern was undeniable - before Ansatsu had become the high priest, the Rage was focussed in the veteran companies of the Angels Sanguine, presumably brought on by increasing and persistent exposure to bloody battle. Since Ansatsu had taken the Grail of Angels, however, incidents of the Rage had started to increase in the more junior companies. Tenjin's recent experience with the scout squad was the culmination of a definite trend.

What had Ansatsu said to him in the temple: all the tribes of Baalus Trine are at least slightly mutated. There had been a hint of satisfaction to his tone, Tenjin realised in hindsight. He also realised that the Angels Sanguine drew their new recruits from these mutants - that Ansatsu himself had been recruited from amongst their number, the first Baalus Trine Marine to rise to the rank of high priest. In the blood of the high priest runs a strain of deviance! Tenjin could hardly contain his visceral response to this insight, and he was on his feet in an instant, searching for a weapon. The purest blood of Sanguinius was diluted and curdled by the sullied blood of Ansatsu before being injected into the neophytes - of course the Thirst would strike increasingly at the novices, as the essence of Sanguinius was drowned out by the pollution of Ansatsu. The Grail of Angels was transformed into a Grail of Damnation. How long would it take for the whole Chapter to be ruined beyond repair? By the Throne, numbers were low

enough already. Tenjin resolved that this must end, now.

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‘Endo, can you hear me, my child?’ Ansatsu gazed affectionately down at the young scout and smiled. ‘Well done, my son. Well done.’ The scout bucked and thrashed under the adamantium shackles, shrieking at the unseen images that tortured his soul and screaming in agony as his blood burned.

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In full battle armour, resplendent in blood red on his right and deathly black on his left, Chaplain Tenjin pulled his Death Mask over his head, grabbed his flamer and melta-gun, securing his ancient power fist to the holster on his leg. The Rosarius glowed righteously, suspended over his primary heart on a chain of some long forgotten metal. On his back, his jump pack hummed quietly, waiting impatiently to burst into life on his command.

The chaplain flicked a krak grenade at the locked doors of his chamber. It detonated on impact, blasting the door violently out into the corridor. Tenjin stepped through the residual flames, emerging into the passageway beyond like a phantom of death itself. Two of his guards had been killed instantly, squashed into pulp by the sudden impact of the heavy adamantium. The others just stared at the chaplain looming over them in terrible clarity, flames licking at his armour, purple eyes piercing their souls from the depths of his Death Mask. The guards, dazed from the concussion and terror, turned and ran, vanishing into the maze of corridors - Tenjin let them go, not caring about the alarms that they would raise.

The route to the Temple of the high priest took Tenjin through the holding cells around the Apothecarion, the secured encampment of Death Company initiates while they waited to join their cursed battle brothers on campaigns off-world.

The chaplain blew the doors without a moment's hesitation, detonating a melta-bomb against the blast shields. Once inside, Tenjin was unsurprised to see the remnants of his scout squad, bedecked in the black armour of the Death Company. A chaplain knelt before them, chanting a litany of tranquillity, keeping them in control of themselves until they would be needed in battle. Without pausing for breath, Tenjin fired off a pulse of melta, instantly rendering the head of the shocked chaplain into a pool of molten flesh and bone.

'You six with me!' he demanded with a whispered authority that the novice Death Company could not resist. 'There is blood to be split. For the Emperor and Sanguinius!'

'For the Emperor and Sanguinius!' rejoined the Death Company as they chased out of the chamber, hot on the heels of the veteran chaplain, eager to please the awesome figure and desperate for battle.

The corridors were alive with guardsmen, digging themselves into junctions and blind corners. But they were no match for the rampage of the Death Company, which scythed through them, leaving a wake of blood and screams.

By the time Tenjin reached the Temple, Ansatsu's honour guard were arrayed before it. His standard bearer stood forward of the group, raising the banner of the Angels Sanguine for the charging Death Company to see. 'In the name of Sanguinius and his rightful Chosen, cease this treachery!'

The Death Company slowed, their already confused minds tugged in two different directions at once as the symbolism of their own standard yanked at their thoughts. But Tenjin was ready for this and was immediately at the front of the charge, his Rosarius blazing with life and his Death Mask filling his squad with awe. He fired his flamer as he ran, letting the flames plume out before him, obliterating the image of the Standard Bearer. This was enough, and the Death Company ploughed on through the flames to engage the honour guard - stoked with their own powerful sense of righteousness. By the time they caught sight of the standard again, it was too late, the two forces were already locked in combat and the formidable momentum of the Rage had obliterated their ability to reason.

Tenjin himself was in the air above the battle, the jets of his jump pack roaring with life as he cursed the cowardice of Ansatsu, hidden behind his honour guard in the sanctuary of his great temple. The chaplain blazed a fiery path through the

night sky, heading for the roof of the temple, which bristled with the ugly, gothic magnificence of gargoyles and jagged turrets.

Another krak grenade and the roof was open - a gap large enough for a Space Marine yawned into the darkness below, and Tenjin was through it before the rain of masonry had even fallen to the ground. Casting his Death Mask aside, he left the battle raging outside, searching for his prize in the shadowy interior. He gunned the engine of his jump pack. The burners roared, ripping the heavily shadowed air into strips of flame ...

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‘I think that I know the story from here,’ said Inquisitor Addiss, leaning back from the Tablet of Lestrallio and clicking a switch to release the adamantium bonds that shackled Tenjin. As the inquisitor shifted, Tenjin caught a glimpse of the strange Deathwatch librarian behind him.

Tenjin looked confused, spitting a mouthful of blood onto the ground as he struggled to sit up. His injuries were severe and even this slight movement racked him with pain. Without his armour, he felt weak and exposed. ‘Then, you believe me, inquisitor?’ The chaplain was suspicious and incredulous.

‘It doesn’t matter whether you are right. It doesn’t even matter whether I believe you. What matters is that you believe yourself, and that I believe that.’

‘Does the Inquisition not care what I have done?’

‘The Inquisition is more interested in why you have done it, brother chaplain. Your purity and honour are our concerns - your actions are your own. As I said, only the Emperor can judge those.’

‘I have been true to myself,’ insisted Tenjin, reassuring himself and the inquisitor all at once.

The inquisitor and the librarian exchanged glances. ‘Yes, that is clear to me now. What may not be clear to you is that you have also done a service to the

Inquisition.'

Tenjin tilted his head and looked quizzically at the inquisitor. 'No, that is not clear to me. My service was to the Emperor and Sanguinius.'

'Indeed. But it is also the case that I have been surveying the behaviour of your former high priest for some time. I was suspicious of his affection for the mutant tribesmen of Baalus Trine, suspicious enough to enlist the aid of Ashok as he returned from his term of service with the Deathwatch.'

Tenjin's eyes fell on the shadowy figure behind the inquisitor - the same one who had stood at the shoulder of Ansatsu three months before. He was the same Marine who had stood beside the inquisitor outside the temple, when Tenjin had finally been brought to the ground. And Tenjin was sure that he had him before - long ago. What role did this librarian serve?

'Ansatsu trusted Ashok, evidently believing that the Thirst of the Death Company could not really be mastered, and suspecting that he had been tainted by his years of exposure to the forces of Chaos in the Deathwatch - our librarian did not seek to disillusion him. Ashok reported on the "tastes" of the high priest - the blood rites in which he participated, drinking the blood of the Baalite cultists and their mutant victims. For the Inquisition this demonstrated that he was tainted already, perhaps a legacy of his years as a tribesman himself. For Ashok, however, a librarian of the Angels Sanguine, the fear was that this blood drinking would transform Ansatsu into a devoted follower of Khorne, as his omophageae organ internalised the cravings of the cultists whose blood he consumed. Ashok told me that Ansatsu's thoughts betrayed a plan to transform the Angels Sanguine, but he could discern no details. For a long time he suspected that you were part of that plan.'

'The Inquisition was also not ignorant of the increasing Thirst of the neophytes and the younger Marines,' continued Addiss, 'and I was suspicious that this was some part of Ansatsu's plan, but we could not work out how Ansatsu might control this. Your explanation of the function of the Grail of Angels is compelling in this regard.'

Tenjin was wide-eyed. 'When did you know that I was not part of this?'

'Not until now. Ashok began to doubt your complicity when Ansatsu removed you from the Death Company, letting it rampage uncontrollably around the

frontier, shedding immeasurable oceans of blood in which the high priest seemed to delight. But the actions of the scout squad under your command made him suspicious again - perhaps you were the agent of their corruption? However, Ansatsu was shocked and delighted by the slaughter those scouts unleashed. His plan was beginning to take shape. Now, it seems to us, he had the perfect excuse to remove you from the scene - his veteran chaplain, the most experienced Angel in the arts of controlling exactly what he wanted to release.

‘Your bloody confrontation with the high priest was ambiguous for us. It was possible that it was the result of your own flaws, that you had succumbed to the Thirst and that you were lashing out against your own battle bothers. There was Rage in your eyes when we found you outside the temple, and we could not take any chances.’

‘Hence the Tablet of Lestrallio.’

‘Exactly so. We had to be sure that you had acted out of honour and faith in the Emperor and Sanguinius, not out of a blind thirst for blood. It doesn’t matter whether your theory about the Grail of Angels is correct - Ansatsu was corrupt and your motives were pure ...’

The inquisitor trailed off, distracted by the movements of Ashok behind him. The librarian had dropped to his knees, sweeping his cloak into a whirl as he bowed his head and gripped his fist to his chest.

Tenjin had also seen the flamboyant deference of the veteran librarian, and understanding began to seep into his mind as though carried in his blood. He swung his legs over the side of the tablet and pushed himself painfully to his feet - the imperatives of dignity.

Addiss shifted his eyes from Tenjin to Ashok, his incomprehension gradually turning to suspicion as he saw the eyes of the two Angels Sanguine fix on each other, sharing an unspoken understanding. The inquisitor narrowed his eyes and calculated silently, sandwiched into this moment of recognition without sharing it. He had never trusted librarians, with their Psychic Hoods and Force Staffs. They reeked of Warp-taint. He could taste them in the air, and they made him nauseous.

And then there were the Angels Sanguine: Addiss had been within an eldar’s blade width of requesting a Sisters of Battle retinue for his visit to Baalus Trine.

How mutated did they have to be before they became heretics - living offences to their armour and their gene-seed? He had only changed his mind when he realised that such a request would have handed authority over to the Ecclesiarchy on a platter. Emperor knows that there is no love lost between the Ecclesiarchy and the chaplains of the Blood Angels. Addiss was not about to let go of this case.

Clarity began to filter through his confusion, and Addiss began to understand the impromptu ceremony being enacted around him. The pieces were falling into place. With Ansatsu gone, the veteran chaplain Tenjin had become the most senior figure in the Angels Sanguine - he would automatically accede to the position of high priest.

He watched the chaplain and the librarian as their eyes flashed in concentration, and he wondered what they would do now. How would they render these events into silence? How could they explain the loss of so many of their Chapter, including their high priest - especially with their numbers so low already? Would the Ordo Hereticus be interested in these explanations?

An unwelcome thought forced its way into Addiss' mind, pushing his pontifications aside and stamping its presence into his consciousness.

This is how we guarantee silence.

The inquisitor jolted out of his reverie and turned on his heel. The face of the librarian was deathly white and his eyes burned with a blinding red, piercing Addiss' soul and holding his body immobile.

You will tell no one of this, brother inquisitor.

Addiss could feel his oesophagus contracting, squeezing his breath out into the cold air of the Apothecarion. He opened his mouth to protest, to demand that Ashok release him, to force him to remember the battles they fought together over the last decades, but no words came out. He grasped at his throat in a futile attempt to tear away the invisible hands that strangled him.

Struggling against the librarian's restraints, Addiss turned to the face of Tenjin, letting his eyes reach out for some mercy from the new high priest. He found nothing but blood in those eyes, and he watched in horror as Tenjin performed a crisp cutting signal with his hand.

‘For Sanguinius and the Emperor,’ said Tenjin with clinical calm.

Ashok’s eyes flared even brighter and Addiss spun involuntarily to face him, his feet hardly touching the floor. He tried to look away, but Ashok held his gaze immovably.

The thoughts seemed to form somewhere down near his stomach, swelling and pushing their way up through his abdomen. For Sanguinius and the Emperor, death comes for you. The words bubbled through his blood, rushing through his jugular, flooding his brain with fatal certainty. Death comes for you. Death comes. It is here.

At the very end of his life, Addiss saw the world in glorious red-shift, a spectrum of crimsons, scarlets, and rubies. The capillaries in his eyes ruptured in their thousands as the blood in his head quested for a vent - creating new escape routes for the building pressure.

As the inquisitor lay dead, blood oozing freely from his eyes into a slow flood around his prone body, Tenjin nodded his approval to Ashok. ‘For Sanguinius,’ they said together.

‘Take the Second Company and deal with the remnants of his retinue,’ said Tenjin with calm certainty, ‘none must be allowed to leave this place.’

Ashok nodded his assent. Sliding his hood over his head, the Angels Sanguine librarian swept out of the Apothecarion, his Force Staff crackling in his hand.