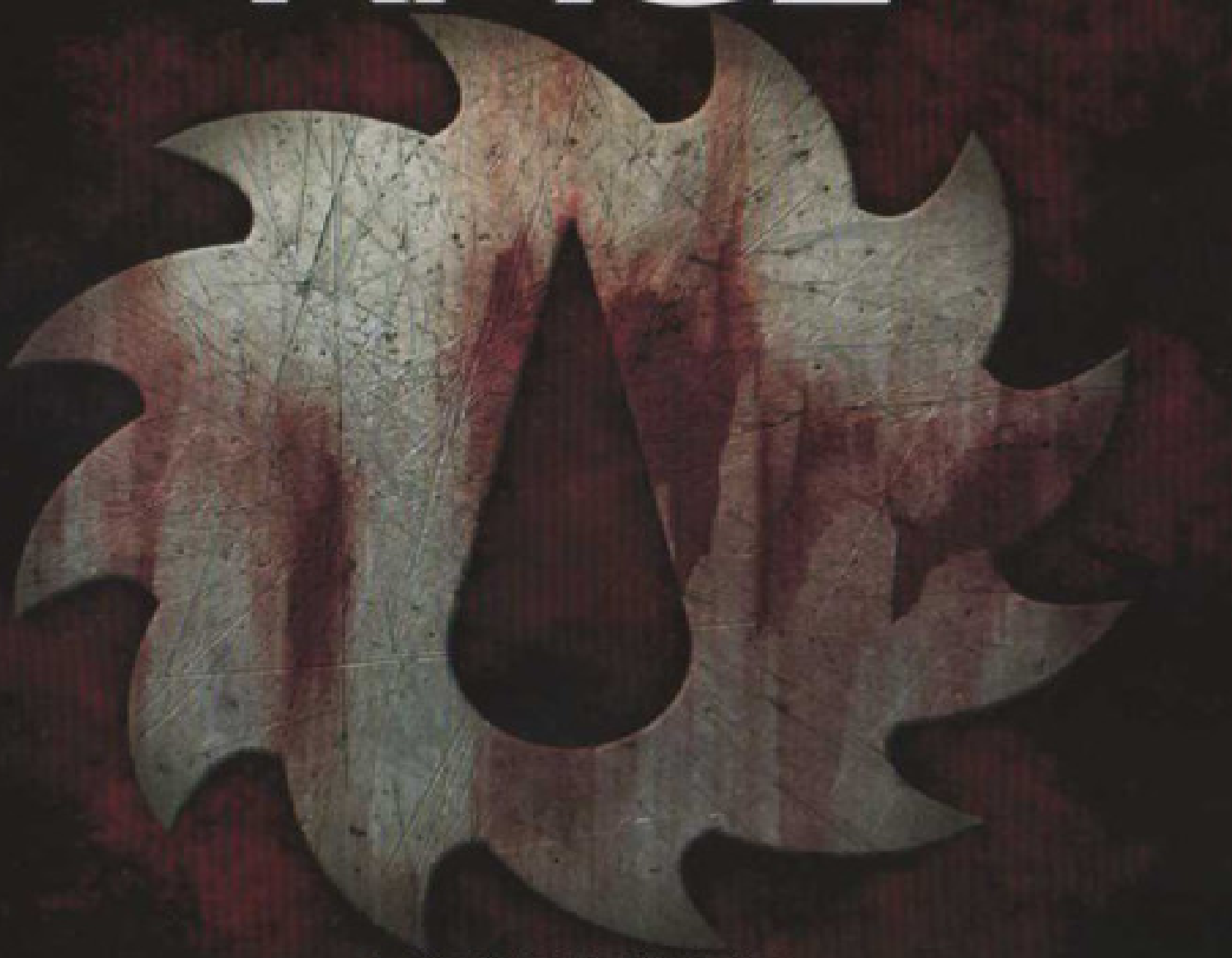


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BORN OF RAGE



ANDY SMILLIE

INCLUDES *DEBT OF BLOOD* AND
THE HORUS HERESY® STORY *SINS OF THE FATHER*



BORN OF RAGE

ANDY SMILLIE



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It is the 41st millennium. For more than a hundred centuries the Emperor has sat immobile on the Golden Throne of Earth. He is the master of mankind by the will of the gods, and master of a million worlds by the might of his inexhaustible armies. He is a rotting carcass writhing invisibly with power from the Dark Age of Technology. He is the Carrion Lord of the Imperium for whom a thousand souls are sacrificed every day, so that he may never truly die.

Yet even in his deathless state, the Emperor continues his eternal vigilance. Mighty battlefleets cross the daemon-infested miasma of the warp, the only route between distant stars, their way lit by the Astronomican, the psychic manifestation of the Emperor's will. Vast armies give battle in his name on uncounted worlds. Greatest amongst his soldiers are the Adeptus Astartes, the Space Marines, bio-engineered super-warriors. Their comrades in arms are legion: the Astra Militarum and countless planetary defence forces, the ever-vigilant Inquisition and the tech-priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus to name only a few. But for all their multitudes, they are barely enough to hold off the ever-present threat from aliens, heretics, mutants – and worse.

To be a man in such times is to be one amongst untold billions. It is to live in the cruellest and most bloody regime imaginable. These are the tales of those times. Forget the power of technology and science, for so much has been forgotten, never to be re-learned. Forget the promise of progress and understanding, for in the grim dark future there is only war. There is no peace amongst the stars, only an eternity of carnage and slaughter, and the laughter of thirsting gods.

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DEBT OF BLOOD

Sacrifice. To fight and to die in another's name. It is a warrior's burden, the essence of his duty. It is the one virtue that binds us, loyalist and traitor alike. We were all born as the Emperor's bladed shields, charged with service until sword or shell casts us down.

By his every action, Horus Lupercal knew this to be true.

Corrupted and ruined, he turned from the Emperor, embracing false gods in search of a more glorious end. When he died, it would not be in the name of his father. Wrapped in desperate arrogance, Horus sacrificed everything in a vain fight against the inevitability of his fate.

A cruel irony then, that in continuing to serve, to walk the bloodied path my father set before me, I am forced to make my own pact with devils. What will such devotion cost me? How much will I lose in order to keep us strong against the curse of our blood?

Even in asking, I know the answer.

MISSION TIME ELAPSED

02:58:23



Several kilometres clear of his landing site, Zophal detonated the drop pod. He looked south as a halo of erupting fire melted through the blizzard. The capsule had been packed with photon-flares, and the light of its destruction shone like a new dawn. Zophal waited a moment for the wind to carry the faint rumble of the explosion to his ears and nodded. If the single-man drop pod hadn't tripped an alarm on atmospheric entry, then the resulting explosion would have been enough to alert even a passive sensoria station. Emperor willing, it would draw at least a measure of the Ultramarines forces away from the Reliquarium. He had no wish to kill any more of them than he had to.

Satisfied, Zophal headed north at a run.

Nestoris had long ago drifted from its suns to languish in eternal winter. Its sub-arctic atmosphere dogged his every step. Cancerous frost formed and broke on his armour as he moved. The pressure Seals around his joints hissed in protest as they fought against the acidic cold. The snowscape was unyielding, obscuring the mountains.

Nestoris was formless, a frozen stone worn smooth by an indomitable tide of ice. The incessant wind whipped the snow up into a thick cloud that reduced visibility to a few metres. What light managed to bleed through the winter held the world in a perpetual dusk.

Three kilometres on and Zophal lost his footing, tumbling down a sharp incline to collide with a wall of ice. He snarled in pained frustration and pushed himself to his feet. The armour he wore was not his own. The suit of war-plate had been readied quickly, forgoing

the proper ministrations. It was ill-fitting and stiff around the joints, making his task all the more difficult.

His own armour awaited him back in his cell. He had been unwilling to wear it, unwilling to dishonour those who had worn it before him by scrubbing it of insignia and emblem. *No.* Zophal sighed. It was more than that - after this *mission*, he would need his armour. He would need it preserved and unchanged to remember who he was.

Ten paces from a patrol, Zophal stopped running. Shrouded by the snowstorm, he was invisible to the Ultramarines auxiliaries. A heavy plough flanked by two smaller vehicles sat at the centre of the formation. Ten men in fur-trimmed greatcoats struggled alongside each of the vehicles, dowsing their tracks in a constant stream of thawing chemicals in order to keep them operational. Weapon turrets juddered through a rotation as the vehicles panned for targets.

'This gets worse every season,' said one.

'Aye, we'll soon need a dozen of us just to keep the plough running.'

Zophal listened as the men moved on. Their voices were hoarse from shouting through thick scarves and rebreathers. He felt his pulse quicken as one of the auxilia passed within striking distance. Zophal's grip tightened on his weapons. He wanted to kill them. To rip open their corpses and drink the warmth from their blood. Zophal unclenched his fists and let them pass without incident.

The painful minutes of inactivity sent a shudder through Zophal's spine. Despite the insulation of his armour and the hardiness afforded by his enhanced constitution, he ached from the chill. Rolling his shoulders, he brought his nav-compass to the forefront of his helm display. Without its strobing guidance he'd be as lost to the blizzard as the footsteps he'd left behind him.

'You'll have to kill me quicker,' he growled, and continued towards the Reliquarium.



'WHAT YOU ASK is almost impossible, Blood Ang-' The magos paused, twitching as a data tremor shivered up her neck. Like Amit, she was clad in crimson. 'Correction, Flesh Tearer.'

Amit felt his muscles tighten at the mention of his former Legion. He had not adjusted to the enormity of the change Guilliman had forced upon him and his brothers, and with each voicing of his Chapter's name, it became more unlikely the Lord of the Ultramarines would be countermanded.

Then there is nothing more to discuss,' he said, and turned to walk from the chamber.

'Almost impossible.' A second figure entered through the seclusion chamber's single doorway. Standing side by side with the magos, the pair were identical, save for the mask of gold that covered the Second's face and reflected Amit's harsh features.

'I have come to speak with Magos Tigann Adora and her alone. Who are you?' Amit snarled at the Second.

'We are Magos Adora,' the Second answered, tilting her head to regard the First.

Two consciousnesses,' said the First.

Two forms.'

'A single identity.'

'Redundancy in all things is the only logical state.'

As one, the pair pulled back their hoods to reveal bundles of thread-fine cable that tumbled down from their scalps in woven braids to rest just below their shoulders. Data-chips and memory studs, engineered like small flowers, shone as they caught the light of the chamber's single lumo-candle.

Your reputation, Flesh Tearer, is a known factor The metal spheres of the First's eyes clicked as they widened, unfolding like petals to reveal deep brown irises bordering black pupils. Am it was surprised that the eyes had ever been human.

Amit grinned. 'It is good we understand each other, machine-wretch.' His voice dropped to a coarse whisper as his mind turned to violence. 'Cross me in this undertaking and I will devote every drop of Sanguinius's blood at my command to kill you. I will rip every trace of your ident-data from the memory banks of this life-forsaken planet.' Amit took a steadying breath, struggling against the urge to enact his threat. 'If vengeance is all that is left to me, I will have it'

Yes. Probability of you terminating us both before we raise the alarm is less than eighteen per cent.'

They had switched places, circling and gliding across the floor Amit began to lose track of which one was which.

There is a great deal of risk involved in what you ask,' said one, pulling a thin cylinder from the folds of her robes as she spoke and depressing its activation stud. In response, a blue hololith projection of the battle-barge *Victus* resolved in the air between them.

'Yes, unsanctioned modification carries a heavy penalty.' The image of the Flesh Tearer's flagship pulsed as the Second spoke. A section of its interior hull faded to black, indicating the hidden deck Amit required.

'Hiding a ship the size of the *Victus* while we complete the work will not be easy, and we will have to terminate a great many serfs upon the task's completion.'

Yes, even our own memory banks must be purged to ensure compliance with your request. An unpleasant experience.'

'One you won't remember' Amit's eyes narrowed, frustrated by the magos's posturing,

That does not negate the act of suffering,' said one.

'Ignorance is bliss. Not absolution,' said the other.

'What do you want?' Amit spoke slowly, aware that each word edged him closer to damnation.

They both faced him, suddenly still as only a machine could be.

'A weapon,' said one.

'We would have you acquire it for us.'

'I am not a *thief!* Amit snapped.

That depends on your definition,' said one, its tone the same emotionless level. 'You have taken many lives.'

The dead do not take their trappings with them,' said the other. 'Our blade has parted many from their possessions.' The magos paused a moment, casting its eyes over Amit's weapon before continuing. 'In any case, we ask for much less than you are capable of.'

The grinding of Amit's teeth was louder than the purr of his armour as he bit down the urge to kill the magos. 'What weapon?'

The Shield of Didactos.'

'You will find it on Nestoris.'

'Nestoris...' Amit turned the name over.

'It is a former planet of the Five Hundred Worlds, adrift and no longer part of Ultramar.'

'You would have me steal from Guilliman?' Amit fought to keep his voice level.

'Yes.' said one.

'You have understood us correctly.' said the other.

'I will not do this,' Amit spat. 'If you want it, take it yourselves.'

The bonds of allegiance are weak in the wake of your kin's treachery.'

'We cannot afford to cross the Lord of Ultramar at this hour. The Five Hundred Worlds are in turmoil.'

'Yes, yours was not the only blood spilled in denying Horus. Our forges are not ready for another war of such scale.'

'I would not have thought fear to weigh so heavily on your shoulders/' said Amit.

'*Fear.*' The First seemed to consider the word. And what *fear* does the master of the Flesh Tearers buckle under so that he must hide it away and never bear its full weight?'

The truth of the magos' words was like a noose around Amit's anger, strangling it before it could manifest, and robbing him of a reply.

'I will not betray Guilliman.'

'Yes, you will.'

The First stepped towards Amit, her head cocked to one side. The metal around her mouth shone amber, glowing hot as it retlowed into a smile. 'Do not pretend this notion disturbs you.'

'Yes, eighty-seven per cent probability that the increased blood flow we detected at the mention of the Ultramarine was the result of a negative emotional response. You would do as we ask for less than the prize we offer.' The Second paused a moment in consideration. 'You hate him.'

Amit ground his teeth and forced control into his voice. Very well.'

The First stepped back in line with the Second, a smile still warming her face. 'Excellent. You understand that this will not be all we ask of you.'

Yes-' began the Second.

'But it will be all you ask for today,' Amit snapped, cutting the conversation short, and made to exit the chamber.

'Wait.' The First reached into the folds of her robes and produced a fist-sized orb. 'You will have use for this.' The magos cupped the device in her outstretched hands.

Amit regarded it. The device's shape and the gentle hum rising from it were familiar. 'I have more than enough teleporter beacons.'

'Not like this,' said the First.

'Yes. This beacon will light the way back from any darkness' The Second nodded.

Amit scowled, fed up with their endless posturing, and closed his fist around the device, which shimmered azure under his touch.



THE DUAL FORMS of Tigann Adora stood side by side in silence as Amit left them, and the door's mag-lock hummed and sealed shut. 'He will comply.'

'Yes.'

'He is unaware of the road he has started down.'

'Yes, he is blind to the depths of his nature.'

'Fortunate for us.'

'Fortunate indeed.'

MISSION TIME ELAPSED



04:17:36

A rhythmic thrum at the edge of his hearing dropped Zophal into a low crouch. Narrowing his eyes, he searched the storm. Something was moving towards him. Pushing his helm's optics to the limit of their capability, he saw it. A pinprick of blue ceramite. A Land Speeder. It was headed straight for him. *Demented fools*. Whatever else he thought of Guilliman's sons, the Ultramarines were bold to pilot the craft in such conditions. Outfitted with advanced sensoria, they'd spot him with ease. He had to get out of the open.

He powered through the snow, sprinting towards a rocky overhang. Locking his fists together, he smashed his arms into the rock face. The stone juddered. Zophal struck it again. Loose snow slipped free to dust his armour. 'Sanguinius bleed you,' he swore, casting a glance over his shoulder at the closing Land Speeder. He hit it again, throwing his shoulder in after the blow. Finally, the snow overhead dislodged, burying him.

Zophal deactivated his armour. His world went dark, his heartbeats slowing as his metabolism surrendered to the cold. Tendrils of pain shivered across his skin. Frost sealed his eyes. In darkness he waited, unmoving, for a hundred beats of his primary heart. His armour shuddered as he reactivated its power core. Tensing, he drove his fists through the snow. The sudden movement shattered the thick layer of ice that had formed over his armoured joints. Digging himself out of the drift, he scanned the horizon. There was no sign of the Land Speeder or the Ultramarines.

Nestled among a rock-dense ridge, the grey adamantium of the Reliquarium was only just visible. Zophal studied the approach. The entranceway's vaulted doors were towering slabs of impenetrable metal, guarded by sensoria turrets and automated defences. He kept his profile low against the ground and edged forwards, working his way around the building in search of a viable way in. The bulk of the complex was underground, hidden away from the arctic winter. On the Reliquarium's eastern side, banks of generators and communication arrays sheltered behind cascading sheets of ice that melted as they passed over the complex's thermal block to flow down into a natural vent in the rockface.

Zophal leapt into the water. The current snatched him up and slammed him into the jutting rock. Warning icons swarmed onto his helm display in protest, and the acid-tang of blood filled his mouth as he endured the bone-rattling descent. Without warning, the fissure opened out, dropping him the last thirty metres. He let out a snarl of pain, landing hard in a bouldered pool.

He got to his feet. The pool was shallow, lapping around his knees as he cast his gaze around the cavern. The space was tight, no more than four strides across. Beyond the pool, there was barely enough room for him to move. The floor was a mess of misshapen rock that pressed in around him. Stalactites crowded the ceiling forcing him to stoop as he edged towards a rusting bulkhead set into the far wall.

Zophal unholstered his weapons.

* * *



'Were you not before me, I would think you lost to the madness of the curse.' Zophal stepped to within a handspan of Amit and glared into his eyes. 'You have allowed your hatred for Guilliman to eclipse all sense.'

'My hatred?' Amit thrust a hand into Zophal's breastplate, pushing him away. 'My *hatred*?' he snarled, smashing a fist into the wall. 'What of yours? Do not pretend it cuts you any less deep.'

'It is not by my deeds alone that this Chapter will be judged,' Zophal snarled, quashing the urge to strike his Chapter Master and dosing back on Amit. 'Your actions will damn us all.'

'I act to save us.' Amit struck, thundering his head into Zophal's face, following with a straight punch that knocked the Chaplain to the floor.

'This curse, Zophal.' Amit turned away. 'We do not know how thick it runs in our blood, how soaked our flesh is in its taint. I will not give in to the judgement of others. We must protect against the truth coming out. We must have a place for our secrets, for our shame. We must have the darkness if we are to fight in the light.'

Zophal pushed himself to his feet. 'Then I will go.'

'No.' Amit shook his head. 'This burden is mine. It is my duty to lead, not to commit others to fight where I dare not tread.'

'You think Barakiel or the other captains are ready to lead if you fail? They are not. I am going. To make it otherwise, you will have to do more than strike me,' Zophal said, putting himself between Amit and the chamber door.

'I am my brothers' keeper!' Amit roared.

'And I am yours.' Zophal thrust a finger at Amit. 'Your duty is to lead. Mine is to protect the souls of those you do.' He lowered his

arm, his voice little more than a strangled whisper. 'Even a soul as dark as yours.'

Very well, Zophal.' Even in acquiescence Amit's fists remained bunched tight. 'But if you are compromised..

You will do what is right for the Chapter.' Zophal placed his open palm on the symbol wrought into the wall of the room. 'It is my belief in that truth, and not blind loyalty, that sees me walk this Emperor-forsaken path,' he said, and stepped into the darkness of the corridor.

MISSION TIME ELAPSED



05:19:27

Z_{OPHAL} PULLED HIS fist from the serfs chest. The man's ruined body toppled to the floor with the others. Zophal had cleansed the outpost with methodical precision. Yet by design, all evidence suggested the opposite held true. He had left the legacy of a maddened butcher. Mangled corpses and severed limbs. Pulped organs and lines of viscera. The passageway was spattered with death. The hanging lumoglobes were shrouded in gore.

His deception had to be absolute.

Shame twisted in the Chaplain's gut at the blood coating his gauntlets and armour. Thick droplets fell from his helm to further stain the floor. Six dozen serfs, servitors and human auxiliaries had barred his approach to the relic chamber. He had killed them all. And he had not done so quickly. He had mutilated them. Worse, he had enjoyed it. 'Sanguinius armour me against the trials of flesh.' He whispered the axiom but found little solace in the words. Instead, he looked to his weapon. The chainsword was slick with death. He ran a finger over its barbed teeth, and grinned darkly.

Amit had chosen the Flesh Tearers Chapter symbol well.

Zophal secreted a final proximity charge inside one of the corpses and stepped into the shrine proper. In the chambers centre, the Shield of Didactos hung suspended in a stasis field. It was a storm shield of peerless design, an angular wedge of regal blue ceramite, emblazoned with a snow-crisp wreath and inscribed with the name of each of the Five Hundred Worlds it defended. Unblemished by time or use, it had been crafted by the Ultramarines first Forgemaster, Appius Ennio,

and now stood as the fallen warrior's headstone. Zophal sighed. The dead had no need of their trappings.

He moved towards-

A flash of movement caught his peripheral vision. He threw himself into a roll, saved by instinct as the familiar bark of a boltgun filled the chamber. The explosive rounds hammered the ground behind him, throwing up stone-shrapnel and dust as they stitched after him. He rolled to his feet, taking shelter behind a shoulder-wide pillar. His attacker kept firing, bolt-rounds smashing into the marble column. Zophal swung an arm around and opened fire, blindly guiding his bolt pistol towards the source of the attack. He listened as his rounds hit stone and sparked against a stasis field. Risking a glance at his attacker, he caught sight of the rich-blue pauldron bearing the stamp of the Ultramarines, before another torrent of rounds forced him back into cover.

'I have no wish to kill you, brother,' Zophal said over the din.

'I am not your brother, traitor.' The Ultramarine continued to fire.

Zophal reloaded and looked to the ceiling, using its dimensions to judge the size of the chamber. It was small. Perhaps seven strides across. He edged around the pillar, turning away from incoming fire as the Ultramarine switched position. Stone fragments peppered Zophal's helm as he continued to turn, the barrage of mass-reactive rounds exploding the pillar where his head had been an instant before. He tensed, fragments ringing off his armour. The fire ceased, and he had an instant to hear the silence ring in his ears. The grenade

landed next to him with a dull clank.

'Blood...' he said, leaping from behind the pillar. Gunfire chased after him.

With a cacophonous shudder, the grenade detonated. The blast threw Zophal from his feet, pitching him towards the Ultramarine and a hail

of bolt-rounds. Flushed with adrenaline, ignorant of the wounds in his shoulder and abdomen, Zophal slammed into the base of another pillar and rolled to a crouch. The Ultramarine .Was on him in an instant, swinging around the pillar to level his boltgun at the Flesh Tearer's head. Zophal lashed out with his blade and sheared through the gun's barrel, before bringing his ?Own pistol up. The Ultramarine reacted in a heartbeat, pulling .is sword from its sheath and bisecting Zophal's gun before the Chaplain could fire. Ignited by the power field that enveloped the Ultramarine's gladius, Zophal's pistol detonated. He winced in tgony as its super-heated remains stripped the armour plating from his vambrace and embedded in the meat of his forearm.

The Ultramarine reversed his stroke, angling for Zophal's neck. The Chaplain brought up his blade and managed an awkward defence, deflecting the blow so that it scored across his shoulder guard and gorget. The Ultramarine attacked again and again, stroke after stroke, thrust upon thrust, wielding his blade with furious skill. Crackling energy split the air as chainsword clashed with gladius. The Ultramarine's was the superior blade, and with each exchange it cleaved /off more of the chainsword's serrated teeth, sending them spinning from the duel in a hail.

Still on his knees, Zophal struggled against the relentless blows, hie grimaced as the Ultramarine's blade opened the meat of his thigh. He was tiring, and the wounds in his flesh were mounting, [he shimmering gladius slipped past his guard to scar his armour ind spill his blood. He could not maintain a defence for long. The Ultramarine would kill him. Jaw set in defiance, Zophal reached for the melta charge mag-locked to his belt and-

'Aggelos, wait!' Zophal yelled over the din of his weapon.

The Ultramarine faltered. It was the advantage the Flesh Tearer needed. Zophal sprung up, ramming his elbow into the Ultramarine's jaw, then another, and another, hammering into flesh and bone, driving the Ultramarine's head into the pillar. With a grunt of effort, Zophal shouldered him backwards and stepped out of range, moving

beyond Aggelos's reach. The Ultramarine recovered his footing, and spun to attack, but the Chaplain was already gone.

'How is it that you know my name? Tell me,' the Ultramarine barked, advancing on Zophal.

'The inscription on your gorget. I had not seen it until now.'

The Ultramarine touched a hand to his gorget as Zophal spoke.

'We are old allies, you and I', Zophal said, taking a step backwards and unclasping his helm.

'Zophal Thaine?' The Ultramarine froze in place, his eyes wide in disbelief, his blade held ready.

The Chaplain nodded, increasing the distance between himself and the Ultramarine. He could feel blood and strength leaking from him, even as his body fought to heal the damage.

'Emperor's blade. This makes no sense. What are you doing here, Chaplain? What madness has befallen you that you would stoop to such depravity?' Aggelos gestured to the bodies littering the chamber's entranceway.

'You owe me your life, Aggelos.' Zophal continued to circle away.

The Ultramarine's face creased in confused anger. 'Emperor damn you, Zophal. I cannot ignore what you have done here. Lay down your weapon and submit to your fate.'

'I am sorry, Aggelos, but I cannot. I have come for the shield.' Zophal indicated the relic, and took another careful step backwards. He felt his strength returning, his flesh knitting together. Recovered, and on an even footing, he was more than a match for the Ultramarine. He need only delay Aggelos a few moments longer. 'And I am not leaving without it.'

'Are you a fool? I will not allow you to take from the realms of Ultramar.'

'Hypocrisy does not suit one of your breeding', Zophal replied.
'What?' Aggelos snapped. 'What slight am I guilty of?'

'After Guilliman has taken so much from so many, you dare stand
In righteous judgement? Your father has stripped the Legions of all
/they held sacred/

Aggelos clenched his teeth. 'Do not speak of my father in such
manner. He does what he must.'

Zophal ran a hand over the blank surface of his pauldron. Anonymity
had not been the only reason he had donned the *ronin* war-plate. No
loyal son of the Emperor could do what he had and still claim to be
so. 'It would seem we are all naught but the sum of the lies we tell
ourselves.'

'Enough. You will pay for this slaughter.'

Zophal stopped retreating. 'You are a skilled warrior, Aggelos, but
alone you cannot best me.'

'Perhaps.' Aggelos said, the sound of booted feet echoing from the
hallway. 'But we shall not find an answer today.'

Zophal said nothing a wolf's grin curling his lips.

Aggelos read the next few moments in the Chaplain's dark eyes.
'No/ he roared, turning towards the corridor as an explosion unfolded
along it, throwing a wash of flame into the reliquary. The
Ultramarine's eyes narrowed to murderous slits. 'You will pay for
killing my brothers.'

'They are not dead. I shaped the charges to collapse the tunnel, not
to kill them.'

Then you are more fool than I thought.' Aggelos spat, and advanced on Zophal. 'This entire complex is shielded against teleporters. You've just removed your only way out.'

'Perhaps, perhaps not. How can you know the truth of a thing until you have tried it?'

'Damn you and die.' Aggelos said, rushing forwards.

Zophal threw a charge at him, the timed explosive detonating in front of the Ultramarine, enveloping him in a wall of fire and pitching him back against the chamber wall. Zophal allowed Aggelos no respite, diving through the burning air to pin him to the wall with his boot. Aggelos tried to rise, the futile effort worsening the fractures the melta blast had opened across his armour. He cast around for his blade, his eyes shifting as they searched. They went still. Zophal tilted the point of the Ultramarine's gladius so it caught the light.

'Stay down, Aggelos. I have no wish to kill you.'

'Never, I would rather di-' Aggelos convulsed as Zophal drove the gladius down through his primary heart.

Zophal stooped to check the Ultramarine's vitals. The wound had not been fatal. Aggelos had already slipped into a sus-an coma; his secondary heart would feed blood to his brain while his body healed.

'I walk in the darkness, brother. Bui it does not yet consume me.' Zophal spoke for his own benefit, and hoisted the Ultramarine over his shoulder. Gathering up the shield, he whispered a prayer to the Emperor and, hoping He was still listening, depressed the activation stud on the teleporter device that the Mechanicum had given Amit.



'YOU KNOW WHY I am here.' Roboute Guilliman did not keep the threat from his voice as he paced into the *Victus's* war chamber.

Amit looked up at the Lord of the Ultramarines. His armour was polished to perfection, its rich blue the colour of new skies and fertile waters. The gold trimming his pauldrons gleamed with the wealth of nations. The cloak draping his immense shoulders was the deep red of royal blood. He was as he always was: an exemplary warrior-statesman.

Yet, he was not. His noble jawline was set hard, his eyes ignited by fury. Guilliman was a warrior-god enraged. He could kill Amit in an instant, a fact that did not remove the Flesh Tearer's temptation i to strike the Ultramarine. You needn't have made the journey. Your (tripping of the Legions continues unabated.)

Guilliman's fist connected with Amit's abdomen before the Flesh Tearer could flinch. The blow threw him across the room, slamming him into the wall and dropping him to the steel floor.

'Rumour of your spiteful tongue has reached me even within the Walls of Ultramar.' Guilliman advanced on Amit as he spoke. Yet I would have thought even you, beyond the arrogance, needed to voice such misplaced sentiment in my presence.'

Amit grinned, his lips thick with blood, and used the edge of the War room's table to drag himself up, What you have done to the Legions is madness.'

'Your father trusted to my judgement. I would have you do the same.'

'My father is dead.' Amit stated through gritted teeth.

Your father?' Guilliman loomed over Amit, poised to smash the Flesh Tearer's head into the table. 'He... Sanguinius was my brother.' The primarch's features softened, all trace of anger dissolving as he spoke. You believe yourself lost, left to a wretched existence. Yet I

have lost my brother and seen my father rendered a cripple, his works cast down and undone. How deep do you think my pain runs, Nassir?

'Is it pain? Or is it just guilt you feel?'

'I would give my life and forsake my soul to take either of their ; places/

'It is too late for noble words.'

Guilliman glared at Amit, primed to deliver an angry rebuttal. The sight of his own face, reflected in the polished steel of the table, stayed his tongue. Guilliman's eyes were full of the despair he had once thought unique to his other brother, Konrad.

'Yes, it is.' The primarch let his head hang low. 'Perhaps if Sanguinius were here and not I, things would indeed be different. Your father was blessed by noble foresight,' Guilliman sighed. 'But he is not, and I will do what I think best.' Guilliman rested a hand on Amit's pauldron. 'I need your help, Nassir. Mankind is on the brink of destruction. If we fall now, if we give the Archenemy a moment's respite, then the sacrifice of our fathers was for nothing. We must fulfill the Emperor's vision. We owe them both that much, do we not?'

Amit was silent a moment. 'I-'

'Forgive me, lords. I have the traitor.' Chaplain Andras's voice crackled from the vox-stud set above the chamber's entrance.

'Bring him.' Guilliman's voice was like the cracking of ice.

With a grinding of cogs, the chamber's vaulted brass doors swung inwards and Andras entered. A thick chain hung over his shoulder, its length disappearing into the corridor behind him. Tensing, the Flesh Fearer Chaplain took the strain of the irons in a two-handed grip and dragged a black-armoured Flesh Tearer into the chamber behind him. Two of Guilliman's honour guard followed them inside.

Amit detected the electro-thrum of power cells rising to charge as the Ultramarines tightened their grip on the hilts of the long blades fastened to their hips. 'You will not draw them here. Not on my ship.' He shot them a murderous glare.

The Ultramarines looked to Guilliman for direction, but their lord's attention was fixed on the prone Flesh Tearer. 'What is his name?'

'Brother Juratus, lord.' Andras let the chain clatter to the ground, and hoisted Juratus up onto his knees. The imprisoned Flesh Tearer's armour was pitted and scarred, scorched clean of insignia and emblem. Its surface was as black as the Chaplain's. Juratus's hands and feet were manacled in the old style, cuffed in adamantium and bound together by a further length of chain. 'Forgive us,' Andras whispered to the Flesh Tearer, and stepped away.

'I would see his face.' Guilliman reached forwards and tore off Juratus's helm. Juratus snarled and snapped his jaw shut. The Flesh Tearer's eyes were wide and pulsed like drumming hearts. Blood-drool flecked his mouth as he continued to snarl and bucked against his restraints.

'What madness is this?' Guilliman rounded on Amit. 'Where is the Shield of Didactos?'

Amit's face was a slab of dispassion. 'We recovered Juratus like that. There was no sign of the shield.'

Guilliman glared at him, awaiting a fuller answer. Amit held his gaze.

'Regrettably, lord,' Andras said, filling the silence between the two warriors, 'Juratus is not the first of our blood to exhibit such symptoms.'

Yes,' Amit continued, his voice growing increasingly hoarse with every syllable as he struggled against his temper. The battle for your father and Terra has not left us untouched. Such a loss has driven

some of our brothers to an unhealthy blood lust. Many more have been left forever humbled, consumed by thoughts of death and failure.'

Guilliman looked again to Juratus. 'If you are lying to me, Amit...'
He spoke with the slow care of a warrior used to sentencing entire solar systems to death. 'I will visit my displeasure on all the sons of Sanguinius.'

Amit regarded him a moment, and suppressed a smile. He recognised the anger in Guilliman's eyes and was glad. That the Lord of Ultramar should know even a measure of the fury burning in his own veins brought him a moment's peace. 'Were you there, *lord*? Had you stood on the great walls, as the indomitable heroes of the Imperium were slain like children, you would know of the horrors that we faced and of the truth in what I say.'

Guilliman clenched his fists. Amit tensed, awaiting a blow that never came.

'We all carry shame' Guilliman locked a hand around Juratus's neck and lifted him from the floor. 'But only the weak among us let it define them.' The primarch marched from the chamber, Juratus flailing like a child in his grasp. As one, the Ultramarines honour guards followed in step behind him.

Andras waited for the chamber's doors to seal before he spoke. 'Was it wise to let Guilliman take him?'

'They will glean nothing from him.' Amit stood poised for combat, his gaze fixed on the doors, like an ancient gladiator waiting for an opponent to emerge so that he might visit his anger upon them. A long moment passed, before he spoke again. 'The curse steals our brothers from us, body and mind. Even under psychic interrogation, Guilliman's Librarians will find nothing of use within Juratus's mind.' Amit turned to look Andras in the eyes, his own shot red. 'The rage is impenetrable. A tide of blood lust that washes away any semblance of truth.'

Andras nodded. In contrast to Amit, his face was one of solemn reflection. 'Still, Juratus was a good warrior. This is not the end I would have wished for him.'

'Better he serve the Chapter like this than die broken and mad in a cell' Amit turned from Andras and stared up at the Chapter symbol that had been freshly carved into the stone of the chamber's ceiling - a single blood drop perched in the centre of a toothed blade. *Hope, shrouded in violence.* 'We should all be so fortunate.'



'YOU SHOULD HAVE killed me.' Aggelos touched a hand to the bare flesh of his chest. His wound had cauterised, the skin over his primary heart a criss-cross of scar tissue.

Zophal stepped from the shadows of the cavern and knelt before the Ultramarine. I have no wish to kill a brother.'

'Is that how you make peace with yourself?' Aggelos's face hardened. You think because I live, your betrayal is lessened? That the slaughter you visited on all those others is of no consequence?'

'It is well that someone who understands the wrong of my actions lives to hate me for them.'

Aggelos grimaced as he struggled in vain to get to his feet.

That won't be possible for some hours yet,' said Zophal, his eyes no softer than the spectral visage of the skull helm he'd removed. He leant forwards and hoisted Aggelos up so that his back rested against the rock of the wall. 'My brother Librarian bids you remain still a while longer' Zophal indicated the veil of hoarfrost covering the Ultramarine's legs.

'What have you done to me?' Aggelos's breath came in ragged gasps. 'Where are we?'

This world doesn't have a single name, not yet. It's divided. Its temples war over the best way to worship the being they are yet to recognise as the Emperor of Mankind.'

'My brothers will come for me,'

'No.' Zophal shook his head. They will not. We are far from the Emperor's reach, and much further from Ultramar.' Standing, Zophal paced to the edge of the cavern and returned with a boltgun and gladius.

'My armaments?' Aggelos turned his gaze over them. The familiar smell of cleaning unguents and purifying oils wafted from them. The bolter had been sanctified, the sword's blade re-honed.

You are a good soldier, Aggelos, and an honourable one.' Zophal laid the weapons by the Ultramarine's side. 'I believe you stand for everything your father did before grief robbed him of his judgment.'

Aggelos's eyes hardened at the comment.

You can bring order to this world, help its peoples embrace the Emperor's light.' Zophal gestured to the opposite side of the cavern. You will find your armour there. I have repaired it, as if it were

my own...' He paused. 'Except that my breastplate still carries the wound from your blade. A reminder'

'I will kill you for this'

'Then...' Zophal replaced his helm. 'You have given me hope'



AMIT WALKED ALONE. Innumerable adjuncts and sub-corridors, each barred by a grilled doorway, angled off at regular intervals. Molten metal hissed and snaked alongside him, flowing in deep trenches that bordered and bisected the walkway. Faces swam in the magma, stretched and distorted as though torn through a scream. Amit clenched and released his fists as revulsion gave way to pity. What he saw in the magma were not the spectral shapes drawn by a wandering mind. The corridor was part of a vast arterial system, feeding the planet's forges and keeping the fires of production burning. The liquid metal carried the remains of failed constructs and antiquated machine-life. Yet it was what he could not see that bothered him the most: flesh and bone. An unknown sum of biological matter was being dissolved and consumed by the heat. These Mechanicum did not bury their dead.

Further along the corridor, Amit was met by thousands of unblinking, augmetic eyes. They watched him from the darkened alcoves that studded the walls and distant ceiling. Glowering optics that formed a crimson star-field in the darkness around and above him. Each belonged to a battle-servitor. A ghoulish union of vat-grown flesh and machine, the servitors carried oversized tridents, the blades rippling with energy. Amit dipped his head to avoid a section of low-hanging chain, ignoring the flame that dripped from the irons to shiver and die on his armour. He was fourteen hundred and seventeen steps from the landing pad. The screaming

had been audible since the moment Amit entered the complex. A desperate wailing, dispersed by the immense turbines that forced air through the corridor. Here, fifty steps from the destination the magos had specified, it had evolved into a textured cacophony of anguished cries.

'Blood keep us from this,' Amit whispered, his thoughts turning to the dark cells where his cursed brothers languished.

A towering, gilded archway greeted his final step. Set back within its mounting a single panel of forged adamantium stood sentry.

Devoid of inscription, the door bore only the seal of the Mechanicum. The machine-skull emblem loomed large, its eyes burning with hidden fire. Amit snarled. If this was to serve as a reminder about how insignificant his Chapter was when measured against the bastard legions of the Mechanicum, he was unimpressed. If numbers and size mattered, his brothers would be forever indebted to the scum of the Imperial army, rather than dying in their stead. Amit grinned, relishing the familiar touch of anger as it warmed his blood. Numbers mattered not. *Will* was everything.

He snarled and reached for the door.

Sparks arced across his gauntlet as it collided with a power field. He withdrew his hand, a growl rumbling in his throat. In response, a panel set into the wall slid away to allow a servo skull to float free. The skull, no larger than a child's, hovered in the air a moment before an ident-laser flashed out to scan Amit's face.

'Flesh Tearer. Chapter Master. Amit. Presence authorised,' the skull uttered in lifeless machine idiom, jaw unmoving as the door edged open.

Amit entered.

The chamber was immense, its exterior walls disappearing beyond the limits of the Flesh Tearer's vision. Amniotic pods towered around him. Stacked on top of one another like the hab-capsules native to most hive worlds, they divided the chamber the way buildings segmented cities. Save for the thick stain of excrement and viscous

puddles of bio-fluid, the man-sized pods were barren. Amit drew his eyes from them and focused on the pair of magos stood in the shadow of the nearest stack of pods.

Tigann Adora?' It annoyed him that he'd had to ask. In truth, it was almost impossible to confirm a member of the Mechanicum's identity. Like all members of their debase cult, the magos were forever upgrading, forever tweaking their appearance in order to

appear less human. Even with a sample of their blood, Amit couldn't be sure. The thought, though, forced a feral grin onto his face.

'We are.'

'Is it done?' Amit barked. The air stank of incense and burnt flesh. He had had his fill of the Mechanicum's depravity.

Tigann Adora regarded herself.

'Is it done?' they echoed.

The magos glided forwards through a figure of eight, passing each other as they went. 'That is not the question you have come to answer, Flesh Tearer.'

'It is the only question I have come to ask.' Amit advanced until he was within striking distance of the magos. 'Do not make me ask you another.'

The magos seemed unperturbed, continuing to glide around Amit as they replied. 'And if we have completed the task...' said one of them.

'... would you wish it to be so,' said the other.

'Enough.' Amit's eyes flashed with malice, his face set in a bestial snarl. 'Have you done as I asked?'

'Are you sure, Flesh Tearer, of what you have asked?' Tigann spoke as one. Two separate voices blending to create a distinct third.

'Push me no further.'

The magos stopped moving. "We have done as you asked,' said one. 'We have altered the *Victus*

'The task is complete. Your sins may forever hang in shrouded purgatory.'

'But-'

'Are you sure you want what we have created for you?'

Amit stared into the dead cold of the magos's eyes. He felt heavy weighed down by the suffocating trials of secrets and laden with the burden of the past and the certainty of the future. He saw the dark of his own reflected.

'Yes.'

SINS OF THE FATHER

In my darker moments, I do not love my sons.

Sanguinius was unmoving as the blades clashed around him. His thoughts weighed upon him like the press of time. They rooted him in place, immobile at the centre of the duelling stone as the two combatants exchanged blows.

In these moments, I dwell on what is to come.

Garbed in a simple robe, the beauty of his form eclipsed the many statues and sculptures bordering the chamber, deep within the Fortress of Hera. A numinous, angelic being, he was an ode to the beauty and strength of the Emperor's creations.

And to all save his father, the furrow in his brow would have gone unnoticed.

My sons will never rise to my virtue. They will remain as tarnished mirrors, shining in poor reflection of a greatness my death will rob from them. They do not have the valour to rise against the curse of their blood. Except...

Except perhaps, for these two.

The Tempest of Angels was a perilous ritual. Sanguinius stood at its eye, as the blades of the Flesh Tearer and the Saviour whirled about him. He followed the ebb and flow of the duel, appraising the strength and skill of the pair as they snarled and railed against one another.

My father cast me in the image of an angel A divine protector or a wrathful destroyer, he has never said. It is a quirk of his nature to create that which might surprise his knowing. He has left it for me to decide how history shall record my deeds.

Sanguinius closed his eyes, letting his mind drift back to the Triumph at Ullanor. He had always felt alone. Even then. Even in the presence of so many of his brothers. He saw each of their faces, caught the glimmer of unfolding destiny in their eyes.

My brothers suffer from no such indecision. Magnus is no warrior and Angron no tactician. Their paths were chosen for them, freeing them from the burden of such questions.

Sparks danced across Sanguinius's face as the combatants' blades clashed once more. The twin slivers of Baalite steel were anger-hot with friction.

Destroyer. Protector. I am cursed to see the ends of each of these paths, and I know of the pain to turn from either. In my weakness, I tread the line of both.

He opened his eyes. The combatants fought almost on top of him, their furious cuts and thrusts warming his skin.

But these two, these flawed sons of mine, they walk only a single path.

Driven by murderous intent, a blade angled towards Sanguinius's throat. The primarch remained still, and lived - the Flesh Tearer's kill-stroke denied by the blade of the Saviour.

Azkaellon, chief among my Sanguinary Guard, is my greatest protector. The gold and bronze of his armour serves as an echo of the purity he carries in his hearts. Driven by duty, by pride, he is a masterful swordsman, his strokes balanced, measured and poised.

Azkaellon grunted with effort and shouldered his opponent back away from the primarch.

Amit, Captain of the Fifth Company, a warrior born. He would fight until the stars burned cold. His armour carries the scars others reserve for their soub. Caked in blood, it is stained the deepest crimson. He is a destroyer, fighting with the fury of a berzerker. His brutal blows allow for no defence.

Amit growled, regaining his footing and redoubling his attack.

Their single-mindedness will see them outlive me. It gives them the strength to do what others cannot.

And yet, I have foreseen a future without angels...



Ka'Bandha roars in triumph as my body brealzs against the ground. Satisfied in his vengeace, he beats his wings and hurls himself into a distant melee.

I lie still

'No!' Azkaellon's cry is one of rage and anguish.

He runs to me. Ignoring the calls of his warriors as he abandons them.

'L-lord...' he stammers, and falls to his knees.

He pulls me close, cradling my body against his own. My head rests upon his sculpted breastplate. My features are as they are now - virginal and unbroken.

'Father.' Azkaellon shakes me, driven frantic by grief as he searches for the life that no longer beats within me. 'He is dead...' He turns his gaze skyward, searching for some deity who would denounce his claim. 'Our father Sanguinius is dead!'

Around him, parts of the Palace blaze incandescently in their death-throes. Fire consumes the ground and broils over the towering walls. Ichorous flesh bums like oil, stripped from corpses and the still-living by gods bent on annihilation.

'How... how can this be.' Removing his helm, Azkaellon casts his gaze around, as though seeing the world with his own eyes might change its appearance. It does not.

Hell surrounds him. An absence of hope so absolute as to render the Blood Angel prostrate, his blade slipping from his grasp. His brothers are dying. Red-skinned daemons eviscerate them with barbed claws, while others hack them apart with obsidian blades. So fast are their enemies that the Blood Angels seem to fight in slow motion, the bark of their boltguns drowned out by the snarling of the beasts that they fight

It is a mosaic of carnage and madness, a nightmare made real. It is the end of all things.

'Lord! Lord Azkaellon, you must fight'

Azkaellon glances up at the Blood Angel standing over him. The warrior's armour is scorched black, charred by unnatural fire.

'My lord, we need your blade.'

Anger mixed with desperation twists the Blood Angel's face into a snarl.

'He... he is gone. We are undone,' Azkaellon's voice is hollow, stripped of emotion by despair.

'Commander Azkaellon, we need you! We cannot-'

The Blood Angel's head and torso vanish in a flash of crimson lightning, vaporized by some ensorcelled weapon of the enemy.

Azkaellon looks down at the Blood Angel's remains, losing himself in the expanding pool of blood as it spreads across the floor.

'We are lost.

Amit stumbles forward. Alone in a vast desert, lost amongst the shifting red dunes that stretch in every direction, he has only his rage to sustain him. He has followed his prey there, bleeding his own warriors into annihilation to do so. The sand beneath his feet is not crushed rock - it is a reminder of that gore-riven battle. He walks on the dust of the dead, hills of blood that have been dried and baked by the eight suns blazing overhead.

'I will find you!

Amit's voice is a rasping snarl, worn raw by those same four words.

The daemon laughs in response. It is a mocking growl, a rumble of contempt that echoes all around like primal thunder.

Amit thrusts his blade to the sky. 'You cannot hide from my blade, daemon. Not forever. I will find you, and I will kill you!

The crimson heavens crackle with fire, A lash of the daemon's will tears across it, opening a ragged wound in the firmament. Blood, crimson and dark, falls in a vengeful downpour.

'That will not stop me,' Amit snarls.

He is wrong.

The blood-rain falls in a thickening torrent, driving Amit from his feet and churning the dunes beneath him into a thick sludge.

'Face me, daemon,' Amit spits, grunting with effort as he struggles forward, fighting in vain to keep his bulk from sinking into the mire. 'Coward. Fight me!'

Frustration cuts him like a blade as the ground drinks its fill, and becomes as an ocean. Helpless, the lord of the Flesh Tearers sinks into the crimson abyss.

'No!'

Amit's cry is practically inaudible, swallowed by bloody waves that growl as they break.

He tries to rise, to swim to the surface, but the blood is too thick, his armour too heavy. He sinks downwards, down into the depths of murder that form the world.

'No...'

The thick, arterial liquid fills his lungs, dragging him downwards until he strikes the sea bed; an undulating landscape of polished skulls. Hundreds of thousands of them crowd the bedrock.

And yet, there is space for one more.



·STOP·

At Sanguinius's command, Amit and Azkaellon put up their blades. 'Switch places.'

'Lord?' Azkaellon's brow creased in confusion.

'Azkaellon, you will attack. Amit, you will defend me.'

'Lord, I have not the temperam-⁷

'No, Amit, you do not,' Sanguinius voice was hard but his eyes held no malice. You fight to kill with no concern for survival. And you, Azkaellon,' Sanguinius shifted his gaze to the other Blood Angel. You fight only to protect with no consideration to what survival might mean'

Azkaellon held up a hand in protest. 'I fight for the Legion, for the memory of the Bmperor and the Imperium-that-was.'

'No, you do not,' Sanguinius shook his head. You fight for your own honour. You fight for me.'

Azkaellon looked pained, as though stung by a blade. 'And what cause could be greater?'

"It is not a sin, and it has served you well. But it is not enough. When this new Imperium falls, and we have all been cast down... When I am gone, who will you fight for then?'

Azkaellon's eyes flashed with anger. 'Lord, that will not-'

You are so certain of a future that was hidden even from my father?

'Lord... forgive me,' Azkaellon bowed his head in deference.

'And you, Amit, you fight because the din of battle brings you peace.'

Amit looked away, unable to hold his lord's gaze.

'There will come a time when the cries of those you have led to death will drown out the roar in your veins. There will come a time when you must defend what little we have left.'⁷

Amit said nothing, his jaw clenched tight.

'Now...' Sanguinius returned to his position at the centre of the duelling stone. 'Switch places.'

Without another word, Amit and Azkaellon changed positions, and readied their blades.

'My life is in your hands, my sons. Do not waste it.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Smillie is best known for his visceral *Flesh Tearers* novellas, *Sons of Wrath* and *Flesh of Cretacia*, and the novel *Trial by Blood*. He has also written a host of short stories starring this brutal Chapter of Space Marines and a number of audio dramas including *The Kauyon*, *Blood in the Machine*, *Deathwolf* and *From the Blood*.

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