

**WARHAMMER**  
40,000

A SPACE MARINE BATTLES SHORT

# THE STROMARK MASSACRE

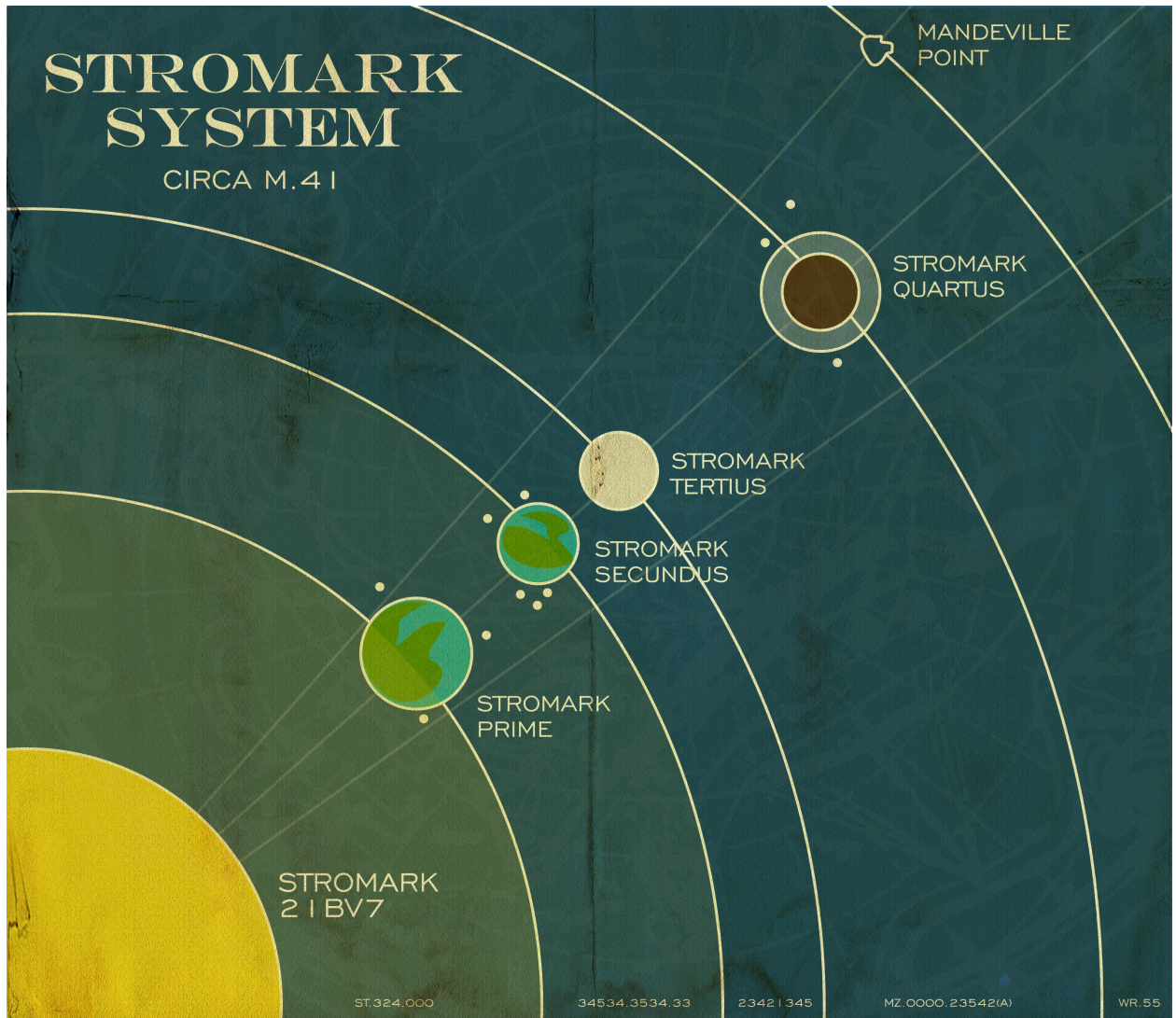
ANDY SMILLIE • C Z DUNN





# STROMARK SYSTEM

CIRCA M. 4 I



MANDEVILLE  
POINT

STROMARK  
QUARTUS

STROMARK  
TERTIUS

STROMARK  
SECUNDUS

STROMARK  
PRIME

STROMARK  
2 | BV7

ST.324.000

34534.3534.33

2342 | 345

MZ.0000.23542(A)

WR.55

# FROM THE BLOOD

ANDY SMILLIE



BLACK LIBRARY

## PROLOGUE

### BALTHIEL'S CELL ON THE FLESH TEARERS' STRIKE CRUISER

Balthiel's serf lay dead on the floor, his body chalk-white from exsanguination. Arterial fluid had fled from his orifices until his veins were empty. Hoarfrost rimed the chamber walls. Unnaturally frozen air molecules cracked like agitated ice.

Balthiel knelt in the centre of the lightless cell, oblivious to the serf.

'By his blood, am I made.'

The Librarian trembled as he spoke. It took all of his focus, all of his training to stay conscious. Pain that he thought he could never have endured wracked his body. His hands ached from gripping the floor, his fingers dug knuckle-deep into the steel.

The unknown figure stepped towards Balthiel.

'By his blood, am I armoured.'

Blood trickled from Balthiel's nose, striking the floor with a regular rhythm. He heard each droplet as it fell. They thundered in his mind like the firing of a siege cannon. Weeping, he held the trance; he would see the end this time. He had to. He would know the face of his tormentor.

The shadow-fire obscuring the figure filtered away...

'By his blood...'

Smoke exuded from his pores and drifted off his skin in a black-grey pall.

A black armoured Space Marine stood before him. Its battle-plate resembled his own but it bore the bloodied saltire of the damned. It laughed.

'By his blood, shall I triumph.'

The Space Marine removed its helm, exposing its true face. It was a red skinned beast. A daemon. Still laughing, it opened its fanged mouth and roared.

*From the blood are monsters born.*

The psychic vision faded, throwing Balthiel up and back against the wall. He collapsed to the floor. Before darkness took him, the Librarian tapped the last of his strength and called for aid.

‘Apothecary...’

## ONE

### WAR ROOM ON THE IMPERIAL WARSHIP *EMPEROR'S FIST*

‘Master Zargo, Brother Arjen.’

The Flesh Tearer clamped his fist to his breastplate, saluting the two Angels Encarmine.

‘Chapter Master Gabriel Seth sends his regards.’

Balthiel entered the strategium proper, joining Zargo under a grey-blue hololith projection of the Stromark system.

Zargo scoffed, ‘I see Seth at least had the good sense to avoid this conflict.’

Balthiel hid the annoyance from his face. He’d fought alongside Zargo and his Chapter before. Of all the sons of Sanguinius they were the most aloof, displaying a contemptuous disregard for the weak. Their arrogance surpassed that of the Blood Angels themselves. Balthiel held Zargo’s gaze. The Chapter Master’s haughtiness did far more to mark him as an Angel Encarmine than the winged Chapter-symbol on his left pauldron.

‘My lord is needed elsewhere.’

Castellan Zargo grinned, a glimmer of disappointment in his eyes. He would have enjoyed sparring with the Flesh Tearer. Zargo turned to the strategium’s sole human occupant.

‘Leave us.’

Admiral Vortimer’s face crumpled. He was master of the Emperor’s Fist, the largest warship in the Epeyrion battlegroup, and this was his war room. Vortimer pulled his shoulders back in an effort to regain some dignity, and glared up at the three giant warriors. Each took up the space of four of his officers as they stood around the tactical console. The Space Marine’s crimson armour purred as they examined the hololith. This was not the first time Vortimer had encountered the warriors of the Adeptus Astartes. On Pleuvus Seven, he had borne witness to the

speed and ferocity of a White Scars assault. Still, it seemed impossible that even a superhuman could manoeuvre clad in such heavy battle-plate.

‘As you wish.’

Awe, and if he was honest, fear, held Vortimer’s tongue in check. He made the sign of the aquila, clicked his boots together and left the Space Marines to their task.

Arjen chuckled, ‘It is as well he is gone, the drumming of his coward heart was growing tiresome.’

Even a passive reading of Arjen’s mind revealed the malice behind his jest. It would not be long before Zargo’s First Captain succumbed to the rage boiling in his blood. Of that, Balthiel was certain.

‘My orders are to secure Stromark Prime.’

Balthiel looked to Zargo.

‘Yes, we will enter the Stromark system together. You will drive for Prime while we take Secundus.’

Zargo manipulated the image. Blue orbs depicted the sister worlds. Each planet had been a bastion of industry, charged with supplying the Emperor’s armies with the weapons needed to prosecute its campaigns of reclamation. The petty feuds that had long existed between their rulers had escalated to a system wide conflict and could no longer be ignored.

‘Governess Agrafena has fortified her palace well.’

Zargo indicated the line of reinforced positions framing the palace.

‘There’s a dense network of anti-air batteries and surface-to-low-orbit missiles. We cannot risk thunderhawk deployment.’

Several threat sigils sprang up across the hololith as Zargo spoke.

‘Teleporters?’

‘The palace is void shielded. Drop pod assault is the only option.’

Balthiel studied the hololith, executing the mission in his mind. He had led hundreds of such attacks on enemy positions. There were always casualties.

‘Losses are likely to be significant.’

‘You must find a way, Flesh Tearer. The Axion campaign will stall, perhaps even collapse, should the Stromarkians continue to focus their efforts on destroying one another. You must ensure compliance, the Emperor demands it.’

‘Why not send an assassin, murder the perfidious weaklings in their sleep? We belong on the front, killing orks.’

Arjen drew his hand through the hololith, distorting the image.

‘Were it only that simple...brother.’

Chaplain Appollus stepped from the shadows of the corridor, his black armour seeming to coalesce from the darkness.

‘Chaplain.’

Zargo greeted the Flesh Tearer coldly, annoyed by the contempt in his tone.

Arjen said nothing.

Balthiel suppressed a smile, reading Arjen’s desire to kill Appollus even as the Angel Encarmine formed the thought.

*Not with a dozen of your brothers.* The Librarian pushed his words into Arjen’s mind.

‘There is more to this conflict than the greed of two individuals. The Stromarkians have long been rivals. This war runs in their blood.’

Appollus adjusted the hololith. Stromark Prime spun into sharp focus.

‘We must crush their spirit. We must remind them that the needs of the Imperium are of more importance than their own petty concerns of state.’

Appollus tapped the keys on the tactical console. The hololith shuddered. The image resolved to show several clusters of red orbs that blinked over Stromark Prime, indicating primary bombardment targets.

‘We will drown the Stromarkians’ arrogance in a tide of blood.’

The hololith continued to change as Appollus spoke. Its cogitators extrapolated landing sites and predicted enemy casualty rates, illustrating the destruction Appollus and his Death Company would wreak upon Stromark Prime.

*We cannot repeat Honour’s End.* Seth’s words rang in Balthiel’s mind. He stared at the Chaplain. Appollus’s eyes were as dark as his armour. Balthiel remembered his vision, the black-armoured daemon etched into his memory, and shivered. The Death Company were a terrible force to behold, their unrestrained fury the stuff of nightmares. Tendrils of icy foreboding stabbed at Balthiel. They were about to unleash terror upon Stromark. Such a massacre would not be without cost.

Balthiel reach out tentatively with his mind, probing the Chaplain’s thoughts. He saw nothing. Appollus’s intentions were hidden behind mental barriers as fierce as the skull helm he wore in battle.

The Librarian turned back to the slowly turning image of Stromark Prime, his eyes lingering on the civilian casualty numbers as they continued to count upwards.

‘The blood grant me strength.’

## TWO

### ***DEATH'S COWL'S BRIDGE, ABOVE STROMARK PRIME***

Death's Cowl bled into realspace, exiting the warp in a shimmer of fractured light. The vessel's hull stretched to infinity, defying all laws of artifice, before snapping to its original proportions. Tendrils of ethereal fire clung to the Cowl's ashen flanks as it powered towards Stromark Prime, a final echo of the nightmare realm that the Flesh Tearer strike cruiser had traversed.

'Range?'

Chaplain Zuphias's voice boomed across the Cowl's command bridge like the rumble of thrusters. Even by Space Marine standards he was ancient, his oil-black armour scrubbed clean of insignia by the ravages of time.

'Seven minutes to optimal firing distance, liege.'

'Nine minutes to deployment range, liege.'

The serfs spoke near simultaneously, a practice Zuphias insisted upon. On the battlefield, he had commanded hundreds of warriors, interpreting an unceasing barrage of sensory information, while he fought blade-to-blade with his enemy. He would have his warship function at maximum efficiency. There was no place in battle for civility.

'Chaplain Appollus, you have less than nine minutes. Be ready.'

A moment after the voxed status update, an acknowledgment sigil flashed on Zuphius's retinal display.

Zuphias stared across the monastic expanse of the bridge. Below him, dozens of serfs scurried around, performing the myriad tasks necessary for the strike cruiser to function. He pitied them. They existed as echoes of the warriors they delivered to battle. The serf's ashen robes were a poor substitute for the dark armour worn by the Death Company ensconced in the lower decks. The saw-toothed blades wrought into the floor of the bridge no more than an homage to the Chapter symbol all Flesh Tearers carried on their pauldrons.

Zuphias looked up and growled, glaring through the realspace window as Stromark Prime edged closer. He would give his primary heart to be making planetfall with Appollus and his battle-brothers.

It was true that he commanded the power to obliterate planets, to cut a bloody path through the stars. But naval engagements were detached, passionless things that left him as cold as the void they were fought in. Zuphias yearned for the immediacy of personal combat. To once again hear the bark of a boltgun, to feel it judder in his hand as it spat death. He wished for nothing more than to taste the sharp tang of super-charged air as his crozius struck down an enemy. He sighed; such things would never again be his to experience.

A monstrous, red-skinned daemon clad in fire and bronze had mortally wounded Zuphias in the Lypherion campaign. Khorne's mightiest child, its axe a burning totem of murder, the daemon had shattered Zuphias's bones and bisected him with a single stroke of its blade. Only his tenacity and burning anger had kept his twin hearts pumping until the Apothecaries found him. They had interred him in the Cowl's command throne, keeping his body alive through a regimen of electro shocks and bio fluids. Zuphias was to be transferred to a Dreadnought sarcophagus on his return to Cretacia, given an armoured body in which to continue his battle against the enemies of his Chapter. But operational requirements had necessitated he remain on the Cowl. Now, after more than six decades, he could no longer be removed from the vessel.

Zuphias looked down at the bundle of wires and cabling that replaced his legs. This was to be his fate until oblivion claimed him.

The chamber's luminators flickered as the ship sensed its captain's frustration.

'Enemy contacts, liege. Closing.'

Zuphias growled, 'Show me.'

Zuphias studied the tactical hololith as it materialised in the air above him. A pair of warships and a shoal of support frigates were moving to intercept them. He cast his eye over each of the warships in turn, bringing them to the forefront of the image. The Cowl's machine spirit analysed their engine signatures, displaying a raft of tactical data, including the offensive and defensive capability of each vessel. The Pride of Halka was a lunar class cruiser, The Emperor's Guardian a dictator class whose energy output suggested it was carrying a full

complement of Starhawk bombers. Three Cobra class destroyers were trying their best to hide among the modest flotilla.

To the front of the chamber, a communication serf spun round from his console to address Zuphias.

‘My liege. They have sent request to negotiate over the comm-net.’

‘Vox silence, hold course.’

‘Liege?’

The comms serf had spoken without thinking. He felt his throat go dry as too late he realised his error.

Zuphias, angered, snapped, ‘We are not here to settle a dispute. We are not Arbitrators. We are the chosen of Sanguinius, the Angels of Death, and we have come to deliver judgement.’

Sweat glistened on the comms serf’s brow.

‘Yes, liege. Forgive me,’ stammered the comms serf.

Zuphias could have killed the serf for his insolence. He knew of several of his brothers who would have done so for less. But he needn’t expend the effort; the serf would not live long.

He did not learn the names of his human crew; to do so would be a waste. Their time on the Cowl was short lived. It was a vessel unlike any other. Home to the bulk of the Flesh Tearer’s Death Company, it was tasked with but a single objective – to bring ruin to the enemies of the Emperor. The human mind was unable to cope with the miasma of anguish that saturated the ship. Most killed themselves within two Terran years.

## THREE

### MUSTER DECK, WITHIN *DEATH'S COWL*

Appollus stared down from the gantry. Below, twenty ashen-armoured Death Company stood in ranks of five. Each awaited the command to board the drop pods that stood on deck like giant black teardrops, ready to bring sorrow to the Stromarkians.

Serfs drifted between the rows of Death Company, anointing their armour with lubricating oils and unguents of warding. Appollus regarded the nearest serf as its body quivered during its task. A neuro-cable threaded through the serf's crimson robe, connecting its brain to its spinal column. The serfs were all lobotomized, little more than drones. Appollus felt his grip tighten on the gantry's support rail. His warriors deserved better. But no sane man could be coerced to stand so close to the murderous Space Marines. The Death Company were cursed, the walking dead. Their bodies intact, their minds consumed by the Rage. Without the burden of conscience, all that remained for them was to ensure that they didn't enter death's embrace alone. Appollus was honoured to lead them in their final charge.

In the eaves of the chamber, the Chapter's cherubs began intoning the prayers from the *Iraes Lexican*.

'Our wrath shall be unceasing.'

Appollus echoed the choir, reciting pertinent lines.

Uncoiling his rosary, the Chaplain began the *moripatris*, the mass of doom. The service was traditionally held on the eve of battle, to draw out those among the *Flesh Tearers* whose rage threatened to take them, and fold them into the ranks of the Death Company. Appollus had never needed the *moripatris* to identify his flock. Even before his induction into the chaplaincy, he had always been able to look into the eyes of his brothers and measure their spirit.

'Flesh is ephemeral, wrath eternal.'

Appollus used the *moripatris* in his own way, combining it with the teachings of

the Iraes Lexican to churn his warriors into a fervent rage. They would fight possessed of an unshakable purpose, ignorant of even the most grievous wounds. They would set about the foe with the strength and vigour of a Cretacian jungle terror. They would slaughter unto death.

## FOUR

### ***DEATH'S COWL'S BRIDGE. SPACE, ABOVE STROMARK PRIME***

Searing spears of light flickered out across the void to stab at the Death Cowl's prow as it powered towards the Stromarkian fleet. The vessel's shields rippled and flared, failing under the vicious onslaught.

'Status?'

'Shields collapsed, liege. Cycling again now.'

At range, the Stromarkians had the advantage. Their warships were studded with huge turrets, each housing quad-banks of energy projectors that spat concentrated beams of destruction. Such lance weaponry enabled them to easily outdistance the Cowl's weapon batteries.

'Helmsman, more speed.'

Zuphias bunched his fists as the Cowl shook under another lance strike. He leant forward in his throne, snarling, 'Get us closer!'

'Yes, liege. All ahead full.'

Zuphias took a breath and sat back, 'Follow this attack line, take us through them.'

Zuphias indicated a course that would bring the Cowl through the middle of the Stromarkian vessels. It was a bold, aggressive move, one that would expose the Cowl to a withering hail of broadsides. But it would allow Zuphias to close the distance quickly and prevent the Stromarkians from manoeuvring away.

A slew of warnings scrolled across his retinal display. Trajectory assessments, collision predictions and damage projections cautioned him against his course of action. He blinked them away with a snarl. He would trust to the discipline of his crew, to the Cowl's speed and the metres-thick layer of armaplas and ceramite plating that wrapped its hull, to bring them victory.

Zuphias growled as another barrage of lance strikes struck the Cowl, burning through the outer layer of ablative plating to scar the strike cruiser's flanks. He stared out through the real space window, his eyes fixed on the distant outlines of the three Stromarkian vessels. More than ten thousand souls cowered inside each of their hulls.

He would kill them all.

## FIVE

### DROP POD WITHIN *DEATH'S COWL*

‘By the blood.’

Balthiel snarled as the drop pod bucked in its cradle. He felt helpless as the Stromarkian guns continued to hammer the Cowl without answer. Mag-harnessed inside the assault craft, the Librarian was indebted to the capriciousness of fate. He hoped Zuphias knew what he was doing. Even from the bowels of the ship, Balthiel could feel the Chaplain’s anger, his desire to rend, to kill. It boiled through the ship like an inferno, smouldering at the edge of Balthiel’s thoughts.

The Death Company could sense it too. Balthiel fought down the urge to draw his force sword as he thought of the five death-armoured killers who shared the drop pod. He had never been so close to a squad of the cursed. Under normal circumstances, only a Chaplain was considered to have the strength of mind and purity of spirit to accompany the Death Company into battle. A tangible air of mortality followed them. It drove even the soundest of warriors mad and dragged them into the Rage’s embrace. Balthiel took a breath and relaxed his muscles. He was no Chaplain, but he had little choice. Without the aid of his gifts, the Death Company would never make it through the air defence batteries guarding the skies above the Governess’s palace. Deploying further out would allow the defenders valuable time to bolster their lines. Appollus had been clear, Stormark Prime had to die in a day.

Craning his neck, Balthiel regarded the Death Company to his left and right. Their crimson optics glowered in the low light and together with the incessant snarls that rumbled in their throats, reminded Balthiel of the Night Terrors. Figures of Cretacian folk-lore, the Terrors were said to stalk the darkness. They awaited the unwary, boiling away the soul of a man with a single glance before fading into the shadows. Balthiel’s unease grew as he thought again of the black-armoured daemon that haunted his dreams.

Balthiel felt the Death Company grow angrier in response to each jarring strike

against the Cowl. He sensed their desire to be free of the drop pod, to be vambrace deep in their enemies' entrails. They were the most terrifying warriors Balthiel could conceive. He had seen the sons of Angron humbled by their battle fervour, and borne witness to the terrible violence the enraged Flesh Tearers were capable of. But he did not fear them. He feared no one.

Balthiel's disquiet was rooted in the weakness of his own flesh.

His burden was great. As a son of Sanguinius, he feared the Flaw, the blood lust and the madness, the promise of succumbing to the Rage and joining his brothers in the black armour of death. As a Librarian, he feared the moment of laxity that would see his soul devoured by the things that hungered in the warp.

Balthiel growled in frustration. He was twice cursed, destined to succumb to the monster within or the daemon without.

He focused on the Death Company, on their anger. He listened to their hearts beating, pounding in their chests, racing to thrust blood around their murderous veins.

Balthiel felt his own pulse quicken in response. He craved the charnel drumming of his twin hearts, the visceral immediacy of combat that filled him with a clarity of purpose and armoured him against doubt.

He would kill until killed. Duty demanded it, but his soul willed it.

## SIX

### ***DEATH'S COWL'S BRIDGE. SPACE, ABOVE STROMARK PRIME***

Zuphias ignored the red warning sigils that flared across his console. If the Cowl was functioning well enough to complain, then they were far from dead.

‘Power the bombardment cannon, target the carrier.’

The Cowl’s single, prow-mounted bombardment cannon was a mammoth weapon, accounting for almost thirty per cent of the strike cruiser’s mass. The heaviest armament carried by any Space Marine ship, it was designed to pulverise cities from high orbit but worked just as well against enemy vessels.

‘Yes, liege.’

The gunnery serf made the necessary adjustments to the targeting cogitators, gradually feeding power to the bombardment cannon’s firing cells. In the depths of the Cowl, a thousand indentured workers pulled on the metres of thick chain that lifted the magma shells from their housings and loaded them into the weapon’s breach, an onerous task that took them less than a minute under the stern direction of the gang-master’s neural whip.

‘Weapon ready. Target acquired.’

A reverberating thrum shook the Cowl from prow to stern as its primary weapon cycled to full-charge.

‘Fire.’

The Cowl shuddered as the bombardment cannon unleashed its wrath, sending a salvo of magma warheads burning towards The Emperor’s Guardian.

The dictator class’s shields flared like a new-born star, overloading as the first of the warheads struck home. The remainder rolled over the carrier in a tide of destruction, stripping the hull and destroying the super structure. Secondary explosions erupted along the Guardian’s length, blanketing its outline in flame.

‘Target hit, liege. Shields down, engines disabled. Vessel crippled.’

Zuphias kept his eyes fixed on the tactical hololith as the surveyor serf relayed the damage assessment. The dictator class was defenceless. Its engines were leaking plasma, a blue mist that bled away into the void. What little of the carrier’s crew survived the conflagration would soon die from exposure.

The Cowl’s master snarled.

‘Fire again.’

The Emperor’s Guardian was a drifting hulk. It posed no further threat to the Cowl. The mission dictated they expend their efforts elsewhere.

The gunnery serf turned to Zuphias, his objection dying in his throat. The Chaplain’s scarred flesh was pulled drum-tight over his face, as though his bones fought to break free of it. The bionic ocular that sat in place of his right eye shone crimson, while his skin was cast into blue relief by the hololith. The serf swallowed hard.

‘Liege, yes liege.’

The deck shook under Zuphias as the Pride of Halka raked the Cowl with its lances.

Zuphias growled, they should not have been able to fire again so soon. He consulted the data streaming across the tactical hololith. The Stromarkian vessel had diverted energy from their engines, decreasing the recharge time of their weapons. They sought to punish the Cowl for the damage wrought on the Emperor’s Guardian.

Zuphias grinned. Such careless indulgence of anger would cost them.

‘Ready to fire, liege.’

‘Finish them.’

Without the protection of its shields, The Emperor’s Guardian was defenceless against the wrath of the bombardment cannon. The magma shells slammed into its hull with fierce intent, pulverising its armoured skin. Secondary explosions

erupted from within the vessel, as fire consumed everything. It broke apart from port to starboard, shattered by the merciless barrage.

The two pieces of the carrier tumbled away from one another, falling towards Stromark Prime like flaming heralds of the fate that awaited the world.

A wing of hastily launched bombers raced away from the dying carrier, their ident-runes flashing on Zuphias's tactical display as they burned at full thrust.

Zuphias grinned, it was a noble effort but their flight was in vain. He watched with grim satisfaction as one by one they blinked dark. Bubbling explosions and secondary detonations had continued to wrack the aft section of the Guardian until the ship's warp drive ruptured. The bomber wing was annihilated by a halo of expanding plasma as the Guardian's death throes overtook it.

The Cowl shuddered as a hail of las-fire and solid state projectiles hammered its starboard side, forcing Zuphias to brace himself against his throne. Below him, a handful of serfs jerked back from their stations, killed by an electrical discharge. The shock had blackened their skin and left flames licking their robes.

Five more willing servants stepped from the wings of the bridge to take over from their fallen comrades.

'Liege, we are in weapon battery range.'

Zuphias was pleased by the replacement gunnery serf's dedication to duty. He seemed unperturbed by the blood that smeared his console or the smell of charred flesh.

'So it would seem.'

Broadside for broadside, the Cowl was outgunned. The Halka's hull was pock-marked by gun ports and weapon housings each ready to unleash a hail of tank-sized shells upon the Flesh Tearers vessel.

'Helmsman, new heading.'

The Halka's directional thrusters faltered, emitting a guttering roar as they tried to react to the Cowl's sudden course shift. With her engines running below optimal, the Stromarkian vessel was left to flail in the void like a beached sea

mammal as the Cowl manoeuvred.

The strike cruiser turned, presenting only its armoured prow to the Halka's guns.

Zuphias felt his muscles bunch in anticipation as the Halka grew to fill the real space window. At such close range, he could make out every detail of the ship's gilded hull. Its armoured skin had been finely wrought into towering basilicas, pious bulwarks against the dangers of the void.

Zuphias scowled. He had no intention of trading blows with the Stromarkian vessel.

He was going to ram it.

'Brace! All hands brace!'

The surveyor serf's voice crackled through every vox on the Cowl, warning of the imminent collision with the Halka.

The Halka's shields hissed and cracked, overloading as the Cowl pushed into their embrace. The Stromarkian guns fell silent, its crew dumbstruck by the insane manoeuvre, and unable to adjust their aim in time.

'Bring them death!'

Zuphias drove the Cowl into the Halka, using the serrated armour of his vessel like a gargantuan chainblade to mutilate the Stromarkian ship. The Flesh Tearers ship continued forwards, ripping along the Halka's flank until it was wedged in place, tangled in the mess of destruction.

Breaches opened up across the Halka, its hapless gunnery crew sucked into the void like withered chaff. Fire washed through the ship, scrubbing entire decks and mushrooming out through lesions in the hull to illuminate the destruction.

'Now! Fire!'

Zuphias slammed his fist against his console.

With its weapons' batteries pressed against the Halka's ruined hull, every shot found its mark. A torrent of missiles, las-bolts and plasma rounds savaged the

Stromarkian vessel, stripping its armaplas bonding and broiling its innards.

The Halka's hull fractured, breaking off in chunks under the unremitting onslaught. Internal detonations wracked the vessel from prow to stern, signalling its end.

The weight of firepower ripped the Cowl free from the Halka.

'Helmsman, full reverse. Shields.'

The Cowl's weapons fell silent, its shield flickering into life a microsecond before the Halka's engines imploded.

The Pride of Halka detonated in a blue flash. Adamantium blast shutters locked down over the Cowl's real space window, protecting the bridge crew from the piercing brightness. The shock wave crashed through the shields, and broke against its hull.

'Report?'

'Shield generators are disabled. Hull integrity failed on decks seven, eighteen and thirty.'

'My brothers?'

'Assault bay is secure.'

Zuphias looked out through the real space window as the shutters receded. Nothing but debris remained of the Stromarkian battleship.

'Target the frigates. Kill everything.'

## SEVEN

### GOVERNESS'S PALACE, STROMARK PRIME

Jurik walked as fast as he dared, weaving his way between the military and clerical staff that rushed past him in the opposite direction. It angered him that they paid the halls they moved through so little respect. The Primus was a palace like no other. A jewel of architecture and sculpture, it was founded by their forefathers and had been the seat of leadership on Stromark Prime for ten thousand years. Though the Governor's palace on Stromark Secundus was considerably larger and better defended, it could not claim the same grandiosity as The Primus.

Jurik slowed as he reached the Hall of Remembrance, his soiled boots sullyng the marble floor.

JURIK: 'Forgive me.'

Jurik glanced up at the stone sculptures that lined the walls. He stopped at the end of the corridor, smoothed down his tunic, and ran a hand through his hair. Taking a breath, he pushed open the vaulted glass doors and stepped into the royal receiving chamber.

FX – Classical music plays, birds can be heard in the palatial gardens. It's an echo-ridden, grand hall.

JURIK: 'Governess.'

Jurik bent to one knee as he addressed the ruler of Stromark Prime.

Governess Agrafena stood with her back to Jurik, her attention fixed on the red-crested birds that fluttered between the trees outside in the palatial gardens. Clad in a black body glove overlain with a mesh of refractive armour, she was not as Jurik had come to expect. Her long locks had been tied back, hidden in a tight ponytail that draped her back like a scabbard. Instead of the golden sceptre of her office, she held a slender sword and rested on its golden hilt.

AGRAFENA: 'At another time I would have had you flogged for this

interruption.'

From the Blood 45

Jurik stayed silent, a bead of sweat forming on his brow.

AGRAFENA: 'What do you have to report?'

Agrafena motioned for Jurik to continue.

JURIK: 'The fleet, Governess. Our fleet is gone.'

AGRAFENA: 'And our divisions? What news of them?'

Jurik faltered before answering.

JURIK: 'Gone too, they are all gone, my lady.'

Agrafena turned, fixing Jurik with a granite stare.

AGRAFENA: 'Gone? Explain yourself, footman.'

Jurik allowed himself a quick glimpse of his ruler's face. Her eyes were hard, as they always were, her skin ice smooth like the northern lakes. A mist of ruby and crimson coloured her cheeks, and though they did little to warm her demeanour, Jurik almost smiled. It lifted his spirits to see that she had not lost herself completely to the chaos ruling around her.

JURIK: 'My lady, our armies have been scattered, destroyed. Every soldier beyond the shield... everyone outside the palace... is... they're all dead.'

46 Andy Smillie

Agrafena stared at him for a moment, her eyes unwavering as she received the news that her world had been reduced to a mortuary.

AGRAFENA: 'The Brigade Halka?'

Agrafena asked after her personal regiment. The thousand elite warriors who protected the Primus.

JURIK: ‘Captain Aleksander and his men stand ready, Governess...’

AGRAFENA: ‘Then we shall win the day. We shall show the Secundians our true mettle. The Brigade Halka has never been bested. These walls never breached. Never. I will not yield to them, Jurik. I will condemn all to ash before I make peace with those treacherous cowards.’

JURIK: ‘You cannot mean...’

AGRAFENA: ‘I mean exactly that.’

Behind Jurik, the noble visage of Stavros Halka, her father, looked down upon her. The oil on canvas of Stromark Prime’s most celebrated leader hung over the chamber’s far wall, next to the family crest. Stavros had been a great tactician, a peerless swordsman and beneficent ruler.

Agrafena lingered on the painting, finding her own face in her ancestor’s. She would not disgrace his memory by failing, whatever the cost.

From the Blood 47

JURIK: ‘Forgive me Governess... but it is Space Marines we face. The Emperor has sent his immortal champions to destroy us. We cannot... we cannot best them.’

AGRAFENA: ‘Lies!’

FX – shattering of glass.

Agrafena lashed out with her arm, striking a crystal sculpture of Stromark Prime from its place on the mantle. The irony of which was not lost on Jurik as the fragile globe shattered across the floor.

AGRAFENA: Everything can be killed.’

Agrafena spread her arms, gesturing to the dozen members of her honour guard that stood watch around the chamber. They were gene-bulked warriors, armoured in thick carapace, and carrying heavy plasma rifles.

AGRAFENA: (softly) ‘You need only find the right weapon.’

## EIGHT

### A DROP POD, HURTLING TOWARDS STROMARK PRIME

ATMOS: THE DROP POD IS SHAKING AND RATTLING, WARNINGS KLAXONS SOUND. ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE BOOMS IN THE BACKGROUND.

APPOLLUS: <<'Balthiel! '>>

Appollus's voice burst across the vox-link, shaking the Librarian from his reverie.

APPOLLUS: <<'I am not against dying today, brother. But it shall not be because you failed to do your duty.' '>>

BALTHIEL: <<'Patience. (annoyed) I will not be able to hold the shield for long, we must wait as long as possible.' '>>

APPOLLUS: <<'You sound like Zargo. The coward waits in orbit around

50 Andy Smillie

Secundus while hundreds bleed to save him sullyng his hands. He is a disgrace to our warrior bloodline.' '>>

BALTHIEL: <<'You cannot force his hand, brother.' '>>

FX – anti-aircraft fire.

APPOLLUS: <<'Have you ever known anything that I cannot force? (pause) Just don't wait too long, Librarian.' '>>

Balthiel bit down a reply. He understood Appollus's agitation. It went against everything the chaplain stood for to trust his life to a psyker.

FX – more explosions as anti-air fire intensifies.

Warning runes twinkled like bloodied stars from the drop pod's ceiling as

another barrage of anti-aircraft fire barked at its hull.

FX – vox feed opening.

BALTHIEL: <<‘Brother Jophiel.’>>

Balthiel looked up as he spoke.

Back onboard the Cowl Jophiel was watching, monitoring Balthiel through the pict-recorder mounted on the wall of the drop pod.

BALTHIEL: <<‘You are my keeper.’>>

Balthiel stared down at the remote melta charge locked to his thigh.

From the Blood 51

BALTHIEL: <<‘Do not hesitate.’>>

The light on the pict-recorder blinked twice in acknowledgment. Balthiel closed his eyes.

BALTHIEL: ‘Emperor, defend my soul this day of battle. Let my weaknesses be overcome by your strength that I may serve the Chapter.’

The temperature inside the drop pod plummeted as Balthiel reached out with his powers. A layer of unnatural frost formed on the walls, crusting the Death Company’s armour as Balthiel eased his consciousness from his body.

The shield of Sanguinius, as it was known amongst Balthiel’s order, was a psychic barrier, a physical manifestation of a Librarian’s will. He knew of no one who had ever attempted to manifest the shield on the scale he prepared to. Drawing on such power was dangerous. His soul would blaze in the warp, a refulgent feast for the denizens of that daemon realm. Should he succumb to their seditious whispering, should the foul powers take command of his flesh, Jophiel would end him.

Free from his flesh, Balthiel’s mind ghosted through the cold ceramite of his armour, pushing out beyond the drop pod to hang in the Stromarkian air. Above him, a dozen dark stars were burning downward. He let his mind wander over

them, the way Cretacian children ran their hands through acaulis bushes.  
Appollus and the

52 Andy Smillie

rest of the Death Company's minds shone like hot embers, their thoughts fixed on the slaughter to come. Balthiel pulled back, turning his attentions to the ground below.

FX – Fizzle of energy shield.

The palatial void shield shivered violet-blue as another piece of the Emperor's Guardian finished its fall from orbit and dissolved against it.

FX – Thunderous anti-air fire.

The Stromarkian defence guns flared from under the shield's protective mantle, spewing a torrent of explosive rounds towards the Flesh Tearer assault force.

Balthiel turned his back on the weapons to look up at the drop pods. He held out his hands. Thread-lines of golden energy grew from his fingertips, weaving into a shimmering blanket that expanded to fill the air beneath the Flesh Tearer assault vessels.

The Librarian focused on the barrier, strengthening it with his mind. It was as unbreakable as his spirit, an indomitable shield without flaw or weakness. It could not be breached by man or daemon. Unless he was weak. Unless he was flawed.

FX – explosions, rocking off the drop pods.

APPOLLUS: <<'We are fury!''>>

Appollus's voice snarled over the vox.

From the Blood 53

FX – weapons fire deflecting off the energy barrier.

Blood ran from Balthiel's nose and ears as the Stromarkian guns hammered his

psychic barrier.

APPOLLUS: <<'We are wrath! '>>

The Chaplain's voice barely registered as Balthiel fought to maintain the shield.

BALTHIEL: 'Sanguinius, my father. Sanguinius, my armour. Aid me now.'

His body trembled. Balthiel forced the words through bloodied lips as the drop pods tore through the palace's defences and struck the earth, disgorging the Death Company into the enemy.

FX – thud/impact noise as the drop pods hit the ground, pneumatic noise as their 'petals' open.

APPOLLUS: <<'We are Death! '>>

## NINE

### GOVERNESS'S PALACE, STROMARK PRIME

ATMOS: QUIET IN THE AFTERMATH OF BATTLE. FAINT SPARKING OF PSYCHIC ENERGY. SOUND OF BATTLE IN THE NEAR DISTANCE.

The polished marble of the palace floor was slick with blood. The torn remains of Governess Agrafena's bodyguard lay strewn around the antechamber. The elite of the Stromarkian army were now little more than fleshy gobbets, churned up by chain-weapons and blasted apart by bolt-rounds. Balthiel stood in the middle of the chamber, a halo of psychic energy glistening around his body as the quickening faded.

BALTHIEL: 'It is done.' (exhausted)

Outside Balthiel could hear the roar of

56 Andy Smillie

chain weapons and the harsh crack of bolt pistols as the Death Company continued to vent their rage upon the corpses of the Stromarkians.

BALTHIEL: 'Bring them to heel.'

FX – Clack of a magazine being slotted into a gun.

Appollus slammed a fresh clip into his bolt pistol.

APPOLLUS: 'Not yet. Stromark Secundus has yet to be cleansed.'

BALTHIEL: 'That is not our fight.'

APPOLLUS: 'There will be no fight.'

Appollus gestured towards a heap of bodies at the far side of the room. One of them was moving.

AGRAFENA: (pained moaning)

Agrafena's vision swam. She felt cold, weak.

AGRAFENA: (grunt of pained effort)

Shaking with effort, Agrafena pushed Jurik's corpse from on top of her. The footman had taken a round meant for her. Touching a hand to her abdomen she felt the sticky wetness of blood. Jurik's sacrifice had been for naught. The explosive bolt had torn through his chest, showering Agrafena in lethal fragments. She was dying.

The Governess didn't spare the footman a second thought, her mind fixed on what she

From the Blood 57

must do. She dragged herself up against the wall, wiping away blood from her lips.

She would die on her feet and she would not die alone.

AGRAFENA: (coughing)

Balthiel snapped his bolt pistol up to fire.

APPOLLUS: 'Wait.'

Appollus grabbed Balthiel's wrist, staying the Librarian's hand. The Governess had fought to the last. Even now, in the face of certain oblivion, she refused to accept what her body told her to be true. She would kill with her last action.

BALTHIEL: 'What are you doing?'

Behind his skull mask, Appollus grinned darkly. The Governess was one of his flock whether she knew it or not.

APPOLLUS: 'Wait... and watch.'

Agrafena bit down and depressed the data chip secreted under her tongue.

FX – vox link opening.

AGRAFENA: <<'Omega one. Epsilon Nine. This is Governess Agrafena. By my father. For our children. Launch.'>> (pained, broken).

FX – vox link closing

BALTHIEL: 'Brother...'

Balthiel looked to Appollus.

58 Andy Smillie

APPOLLUS: 'Zargo has yet to set foot upon Secundus. They have deployed more Guard regiments and requested a further force to hold orbit so that they may depart the system. This will force Zargo to act, and expedite the resolution on Secundus.'

FX – crackling as vox opens

Zuphias's voice crackled over the vox, his communication distorted by the charged particles lingering in the world's atmosphere, an aftereffect of the orbital bombardment the Cowl had rained down upon it.

ZUPHIAS: <<'Brothers, Surveyors detect a massive energy build up on the near side moon.'>>(a static-filled communication)

BALTHIEL: 'You knew?'

Appollus nodded.

BALTHIEL: 'I knew you were a bastard, Appollus...'

APPOLLUS: 'From the blood are monsters born, brother.'

FX – klaxons

On Stromark Prime's second moon, within one of the many mining complexes operated by the Halka consortium, thousands of long-dormant Apocalypse missiles rumbled to life.

FX – rumbling, rockets

From the Blood 59

The missiles crested the surface, arcing round the moon's orbit to burn towards the manufacturing and population centres of Stromark Secundus.

Above Agrafena, the marble visages of her ancestors stared down approvingly.

FX – chesty coughing

A wracking cough sent her into spasm. Blood filled her mouth and trickled from her ears. She let her head loll to the side, and found her father above the mantle. The artist had done well to capture his rugged nobility. Agrafena gazed into her father's eyes and smiled. Her legacy would outlast his, her final thought as the last of Halka blood bled from her veins.

## EPILOGUE

### THE DEPTHS OF AN ADMINISTRATUM BUILDING

ATMOS: CHATTER OF TYPEWRITERS, THRUM OF MONITORS AND THE PRINTING OF PAPER REPORTS.

The gentle hum of the luminator was lost under the heavy chatter of keys being depressed in rapid succession. A hundred thousand servitors stood in regimented rows, tirelessly inputting the endless information that defined the Imperium of man. The lobotomised serfs worked in total darkness, their augmented eyes having no need of the light.

Senior Clerk Mathias Wido was just as able to see unaided but he enjoyed the luminator's warm glow. It made him feel more... human.

62 Andy Smillie

FX – Scribbling on data-slate.

Mathias scribbled on the record slate with his data quill, double checking his calculations. Yes, everything was as he'd concluded. He placed the slate down on his desk and sat back in his chair.

FX – Creaking of wooden chair.

The aged Jovian oak creaked as it adjusted to one of Mathias's rare movements. His skin ached as his lips pulled to a line across his face in the closest approximation of a smile that he could muster. He'd checked the data thoroughly. The numbers had stayed the same: Three hundred billion, dead. Eight million structures reduced to rubble. A further fifteen million ruined. Seven continents declared uninhabitable. Four oceans boiled to dust. Some would describe this as a catastrophe. To the war machine of the Imperium it was merely an inconvenience. The population of Stromark would be recovered to acceptable production levels within only seven generations. Full output could be regained in as little as ten.

Mathias picked up the slate and closed the file, tagging the Stromark incident as

an occasion of minor loss.

He paused before pulling another data-slate from the pile towering beside his desk and began the process again.

FX – fade on scribbling and chattering typewriters.

# TERROR NIHIL

C Z DUNN



BLACK LIBRARY

SCENE ONE – EXT. STROMARK SECUNDUS

ATMOS: VIOLENT NUCLEAR WINDS RAVAGE THE PLANET'S SURFACE WHILE A RAIN OF ASH AND POLLUTANTS LASHES DOWN.

FX – Wet irregular footfalls, tortuous wheezing breaths

NARRATION: Even before he turned traitor, Pavel Minzen had never been a devout man but, as he dragged himself across the nuclear ravaged landscape of his homeworld, he silently offered up a prayer to the God-Emperor of mankind, begging forgiveness for turning away from His light. Every breath was a supreme effort, emanating from radiation scarred lungs and his flesh draped from him in reddened strips. Each heavy footfall, burning his feet where his standard issue boots had

4 CZ Dunn

simply dissolved in the corrosive mire underfoot, was a step closer to death.

FX – Five whines of craft heading towards the ground followed by wet impacts

Pavel looked skyward through melted eyelids and saw the blazing contrails of missiles streaking towards the planet's surface. He dropped to his knees and spread his arms wide, ready to embrace the fate he'd been denied during the initial bombardment, when he'd found himself outside the protection of the palace as the nuclear hellfire rained down. Time froze as he awaited the

inevitable wash of searing heat and blinding light, but the inevitable never came.

Confused, Pavel struggled to his feet and dragged himself sluggishly in the direction of the impacts. He and his entire regiment had rebelled, taken up arms against those they once called allies, and they'd paid the highest price. While most of the population lived, sheltered in the palace and the intricate network of underground bunkers that ran for thousands of kilometres beneath it, the surface of their world had become uninhabitable. If the objects he'd just witnessed were not yet more nucleonic warheads then what new kind of punishment was being meted out on him and his kin?

He did not have to wait long for an answer.

FX – multiple heavy wet footfalls.

Terror Nihil 5

Through the constant downpour of ash and the chemical haze, five figures resolved. A quintet of giants clad in crimson sent forth to wreak their bloody vengeance. Their movement was ponderous and slow, as much a result of their sheer bulk as the swamp-like conditions, but they moved with purpose, as if bent on a singular, vital goal.

Life rapidly running away from him, Pavel picked up his pace in the vain hope that these Angels of Death would grant him swift mercy, but in the end it was futile. With the newcomers close enough that he could begin to make out the markings adorning their armour - a pair of wings surrounding some icon or other, his vision was so utterly ruined that he could not be certain – Pavel fell face-first into the sludge. Gasping, his mouth filled with the vile mud and the corrosive soup slid down his throat setting to work on already devastated

innards. By the time the five had reached the spot where he fell, Pavel was already dead; half-drowned, half-disintegrated from the inside.

Oblivious, one of the red giants trod Pavel's corpse even further into the mire, ignorantly eradicating all evidence of the man's existence as he strode inexorably towards the slaughter yet to come.

SCENE TWO – INT. BRIDGE OF THE

IN EXCELCIS

ATMOS: SERVITOR AND COGITATOR NOISE. BACKGROUND RUMBLE OF ENGINES.

CREWMAN: ‘My lord, a small craft of some kind has just appeared on the auspex. Not one of ours as it isn’t identifying itself with any valid code. It appears to be attempting to run the blockade.’

Castellan Zargo, Chapter Master of the Angels Encarmine, gazed out through the unshielded viewport of the battle barge In Excelcis. Even without the aid of an auspex, his augmented vision could pick out the small cutter weaving its way through the vast capital ships of the fleet. Whoever was piloting the craft was no fool, keeping close to the strike

8 CZ Dunn

cruisers and support craft so that the larger vessels dare not open fire through fear of incurring collateral damage. The Angels Encarmine were a Chapter constantly at war, permanently traversing the galaxy in search of their next battlefield. Zargo would not risk any of his ships suffering such unnecessary damage as any time wasted on repairs to the fleet was better spent hunting down the enemies of the Imperium.

ZARGO: 'Wait for it to clear the fleet and then destroy it.'

The Chapter serf sitting at the auspex array eyed his Castellan with incredulity.

CREWMAN: 'But, my lord, it is only a small passenger craft. Is the use of our-'

ZARGO: 'Never presume to tell me what the best course of action is. Do you think that the Flesh Tearers are down there having their tactics second-guessed by mere Chapter serfs?'

Zargo gestured out of the viewport with his gauntleted fist. The twin orbs of Stromark Prime and Secundus sat benignly in the heavens.

CREWMAN: 'My lord I meant no-'

ZARGO: 'Our debased cousins have probably already prosecuted their campaign and are enjoying their spoils of war while the Angels Encarmine sit in orbit awaiting the

Terror Nihil 9

outcome on Stromark Prime before we can make our move.'

The Castellan drew himself up to full height, towering over the rest of the bridge crew.

ZARGO: 'I want those traitors down below to be left in no doubt about the fury they will face. That rogue ship will be shot down with such force that the population of Stromark Secundus will tremble in the knowledge that when the Angels Encarmine finally do set foot upon their world, no mercy will be extended. Such is the fate of all those who defy the Emperor!'

Zargo turned to two armsmen.

ZARGO: 'Remove this man. Though insubordinate, he may yet serve the Chapter still.'

Without protest, the serf allowed himself to be escorted away. All around the bridge, crew members glanced nervously at him, the implication of Zargo's words fully apparent to them all: the serf would be lobotomised and redeployed as a lowly servitor. Where once he sat and operated the ship's auspex, in only a few hours he would likely to be operating the manual system that aimed that sensor array in the correct direction. As the three serfs solemnly departed the bridge, another Space Marine entered.

10 CZ Dunn

ZARGO: 'Captain Fracimmion, any news from Balthiel and his Flesh Tearers?'

FRACIMMION: 'No, Castellan. Reports from the surface of Stromark Prime and several of its satellites suggest there are pockets of intense combat but nothing to indicate victory. On the basis of past encounters, it's probable they've won but don't yet realise it such is their passion for the kill.'

The Castellan smirked. Though all successors of the venerable Blood Angels bear the dual flaws to their geneseed that cause them to become mindless beasts when in the throes of battle, the Flesh Tearers above all others embrace that bloodlust almost to the point of encouraging it among their ranks. It was no secret among those of Sanguinius's line and one that in all likelihood would come to a head in the fullness of time. Over Zargo's shoulder the orange glare of an explosion lit up the blackness of space before waning as quickly as it blossomed.

FX – Muffled explosion

Fracimmion looked quizzically at his Chapter Master.

ZARGO: 'Somebody was arrogant enough to think they could run our blockade. I thought we'd show them, and their wayward brethren, the folly of that.'

Terror Nihil 11

CREWMAN 2: 'My lord, we're picking up more movement on the auspex. Lots more movement.'

ZARGO: 'It would seem our warning to the population below came too late. Very well, launch the Thunderhawks and we'll make swift work of these cowards.'

CREWMAN 2: 'No, my lord, you misunderstand me. I'm picking up hundreds of heat signatures and they originate from one of the moons, not the planet.'

The serf rotated the auspex's picter module so that it was visible to the two Angels Encarmine. Zargo and Fracimmion could only look on helplessly as the screen filled with countless fast moving red dots.

FRACIMMION: 'Missiles. Stromark Prime have launched their entire stockpile against Secundus.'

FX – Single muffled explosion quickly followed by more.

Through the viewport, the first of the warheads struck the unsuspecting world below driving a mushroom cloud up through the atmosphere before perishing upon contact with the airless void of space. Others too found their mark, igniting the oxygen-rich air of the planet and whipping up a firestorm that quickly bled across the entire surface.

12 CZ Dunn

FX – insistent bleeping of cogitator units

Sensor arrays flashed and alarms sounded as the In Excelsis's systems registered the massive spike in radiation levels on the world below.

ZARGO: 'Oh, Seth.'

The Castellan's face bore a look that was part concern, part smug satisfaction.

ZARGO: 'What have your brothers done now?'

SCENE THREE – EXT. STROMARK SECUNDUS/TERRA

ATMOS: THE WINDS STILL RAGE BUT THIS HAS BEEN JOINED BY THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE. THE NOISE OF THE SPACE MARINES MOVING AND FIRING WEAPONS IS INTENTIONALLY INCONGRUOUS HERE – THE REALITY IS THAT IT IS FIVE DREADNOUGHTS STORMING THE PALACE BUT THE NARRATION IS THE FICTION PROJECTED ONTO THE PENT BY PTOLEMIUS.

FX – Particularly loud and close heavy weapons fire.

As one, the five Space Marines turned and directed their aim at the turret atop the Palace wall that mere seconds ago had sprung to life and spat fire at them. Each of their shots was accurate and true and they fired with such fluidity it was as if their weapons were an extension

14 CZ Dunn

of their bodies. The turret was soon rendered a smouldering wreck but, as if to make sure that the ruined weapon could never threaten anybody again, the figure in blue power armour employed his psychic talents and engulfed it with sapphire flame, quickly melting it down to bubbling slag.

CASSIEL: ‘Isn’t that just overkill, Brother Ptolemius?’

The Librarian’s arm was still bathed in coruscating warp energy and he waited for it to abate before answering the sergeant’s question.

PTOLEMIUS: ‘Given what has already been unleashed upon this world, I would say my actions were quite restrained, Sergeant Cassiel.’

The red-armoured figure gave a wry smile. Nucleonic and rad weapons were a hangover from the days of the Great Crusade and many of the Space Marine Legions had put them beyond use before the outbreak of Horus’s rebellion. Though some of their traitorous brethren still employed such dishonourable methods of waging war, the more civilised of their fraternity had long since shunned them. To unleash such devastating power against an entire world smacked of a cowardice that was anathema to Space Marines of such noble lineage.

FX – lascannon fire

More turrets opened up from out of the

Terror Nihil 15

miasma that clung to the planet's surface and bolts of las-fire peppered their position. As if unbothered by this latest barrage, the five Space Marines slowly turned and, when the lascannons fired for a second time, answered them with a barrage of their own. Seconds that felt like eons passed but the weapons did not fire again.

CASSIEL: 'All haste! Make for the shelter of the Palace wall. We'll be out of their turrets firing arcs there.'

Taking point, the sergeant was followed by Jorachiel, Iniasstigon and Torriel with Ptolemius at the rear of their formation. The five of them had served together for longer than any of them could remember and they fell into familiar patterns easily. Hugging the line of the Palace perimeter, they advanced in single-file, seeking out some point of egress that would allow them access within the walls and to their objective awaiting them inside.

The palace was a vast structure, covering almost an entire hemisphere of the planet's surface, and sections of wall ran for kilometres with neither feature nor joint, just the smooth monotony of the stonemason's craft granting as much protection and security as though a primarch himself had overseen its construction. Heavy weapons turrets bristled along its apex but posed no threat to the five crimson figures scores of metres below sheltered by the lee of the wall.

16 CZ Dunn

After several hours – perhaps days - time passing uncertainly in the unvaried post-nuclear landscape, the outline of the Palace began to change and the straight line they had moved in for so long became a gentle curve that swept right. After several more kilometres, Sergeant Cassiel drew them to a halt.

CASSIEL: 'There, up ahead. Some kind of gate.'

The others gazed through the chemical smoke and made out the vague

impression of two huge doors.

CASSIEL: 'Almost certainly heavily defended. Torriel and Iniastagon with me. Ptolemius and Jorachiel remain here and take out any automated weapon systems the instant they become active.'

FX – lascannon fire

Within moments of the three Space Marines leaving the sanctuary of the wall, lascannons trained upon them and raked the ground. The air itself combusted as the chemicals released during the nuclear bombardment ignited and clouds of flame formed briefly before burning out as quickly as they'd sparked. Tracing the shots back to their sources, Jorachiel and Ptolemius took out the heavy weapons with swift efficiency but, just as Cassiel had posited, the gate was very well protected and yet more systems activated in response to the others' destruction.

Terror Nihil 17

Undeterred, the sergeant and his two battle brothers charged towards the doors but, with only metres left to cover, a new sound joined the din of battle.

FX – pip, pip, pip of a detonator gradually speeding up.

CASSIEL: 'Proximity mine!'

The three Space Marines stood helplessly as a thick metal cylinder popped up out of the ground, red lights blinking furiously to signal their impending doom.

Then, just as the insistent beeping threatened to become a constant whine, Brother Torriel stepped forward and placed himself between the mine and his two comrades.

CASSIEL: 'Torriel, No!'

FX – Mine detonates.

SCENE FOUR – INT. STRATEGIUM OF THE  
IN EXCELCIS

ATMOS: BACKGROUND RUMBLE OF ENGINES.

FX – armoured footsteps pacing back and forth.

Castellan Zargo paced the strategium, his initial blush of anger having risen to an almost total rage after contacting Balthiel to voice his objections to the Flesh Tearers' reckless tactics. Though his tone had been conciliatory, Balthiel had finally pushed the Chapter Master over the precipice of calm when he suggested that the missile barrage may have done the Angels Encarmine a favour. Any suspicions Zargo harboured that the Flesh Tearers had been aware of the nuclear arsenal were confirmed with that single comment and the tirade he unleashed against Balthiel ceased

20 CZ Dunn

only when he destroyed the vox array in an outpouring of anger. He stopped pacing and turned to face the assembled captains of his Chapter, currently only five in number thanks to the losses incurred due to their constant desire for battle.

ZARGO: 'Arjen. What is the latest on conditions planetside?'

The First Company Captain stepped forward, sheaves of readouts crumpled in the gauntlet of his right hand. He threw them onto the stone table in the centre of the strategium.

ARJEN: 'I'll give our cousins this – they did an impressive job of bringing utter devastation to a world in such a short space of time. Everything above ground has been utterly vapourised and the radiation levels are so high that nobody is going to be able to set foot on the surface for at least another decade, even a Space Marine.'

The other captains shook their heads. What use was a battlefield no soldier could set foot upon?

ARJEN: 'The population, anticipating orbital bombardment from our fleet, cower in shelters below the palace. Intercepted communications from Secundus High Command suggest they are planning their counterstrike against Prime as soon as the radiation storms have abated.'

Terror Nihil 21

FRACIMMION: 'Then we don't just bombard them from orbit, we destroy them from orbit. If we target fault lines then it will be a simple matter to tear the entire planet apart. Then we'll see what good their bunkers are to them.'

FX – murmur of agreement.

ZARGO: 'Under normal circumstances I would agree with the Master of the Fleet. This is no battle for the Angels Encarmine to become embroiled in. We seek higher glory than sorting out petty disputes between wayward Imperium outposts. Instead we should be liberating worlds from the predation of the greenskins, halting the onslaught of the insidious Tyranids and sending the ancient enemy back into the Oculus Horribilus.'

FX – more enthusiastic murmur of agreement.

ZARGO: 'But I fear that the actions of the Flesh Tearers will draw censure and I wish to do nothing to compound that. This world will once again be of use to the Imperium in time and, though it brings us little glory, we must bring it back into compliance.'

ARJEN: 'It will be months before even a Space Marine can survive those conditions down below. We could blockade the world before launching a

22 CZ Dunn

ground assault but Stromark Secundus will have its own nuclear arsenal primed within weeks and we can't hope to knock all of them out before they find their targets.'

The Castellan turned away and looked out through the strategium's viewport at the planet still burning in the distance.

ZARGO: 'True enough, Captain Arjen. A Space Marine can't survive down

there but I'm not talking about deploying Space Marines.'

FX – murmur of disbelief

ARJEN: 'But they haven't been deployed in more than a millennium.'

Zargo turned and looked the First Captain square in the eye.

ZARGO: 'I'm fully aware of that, Captain, but we are left with no other option.'

In turn he made eye contact with each of the others.

ZARGO: 'It is time to unleash The Pent.'

SCENE FIVE – EXT. STROMARK

SECUNDUS/TERRA

ATMOS: AS PER SCENE THREE

FX – tail end of explosion and debris showering down.

CASSIEL: ‘Sanguinius smiles upon you this day, brother.’

Debris fell to the ground like sharpened metal rain, tiny daggers plinking off the Space Marines’ helmets and pauldrons. Torriel turned to face his sergeant, chunks of shrapnel encrusting the front of his scorched red armour. Though he bore the brunt of the blast, he not only still lived but was conscious and had all four limbs intact.

TORRIEL: ‘As he does us all, Sergeant Cassiel.’

24 CZ Dunn

Jorachiel and the librarian moved up to join their comrades, relieved and surprised that Torriel’s valourous act had not exacted a heavier toll. With the automated weapon batteries disabled, the Space Marines were able to plan their next move without distraction and Cassiel examined the metal gates closely.

CASSIEL: ‘Adamantium. At least half a metre thick, possibly more. Short of a siege cannon, I doubt we’ll get through here.’

INIASTAGON: ‘We could always try knocking.’

Iniastagon raised a huge power fist and, balling it, swung his arm back theatrically before unleashing his full momentum against the gate.

FX – massive fist impacting against metal x 2

The gates held fast but the force of impact had caused them to buckle and warp so when Iniastagon delivered a second blow, both doors folded inwards exposing the palace to the radioactive storm.

FX – small arms fire. The gasps of the dying.

Desultory fire issued forth from the scattering of guards stationed behind the gate but, exposed to the unseen fallout, their flesh blistered and burned and no more than a handful of shots deflected harmlessly from the Space Marines' armour

Terror Nihil 25

as they strode forward. One of the traitors, a bearded man in a trenchcoat and peaked cap, was futilely wasting his last moments of life attempting to apply a radmask and Cassiel gripped him by the throat, raising him high off the ground.

CASSIEL: 'High command. Where is it?'

The human looked tiny in Cassiel's grip, legs flailing pathetically as he tried in vain to prise the Space Marine's hand from him. The sergeant's fist closed tighter in his impatience for an answer.

TRAITOR: 'Bottom of the sub... sub-basement. Twe... twelve levels down. You'll never make it... though. There's an entire army between... between here and there.'

CASSIEL: 'One army against the five of us?'

FX – throat being crushed followed by wet thud of corpse hitting a wall.

Cassiel regarded the traitor for a moment before clenching his hand into a fist. Crushing the human's windpipe, the Sergeant casually tossed the corpse aside. It slammed against the wall, half-snapping, half-disintegrating under the impact.

CASSIEL: 'Those odds hardly seem fair.'

FX – loud noise of a very large weapon being fired.

26 CZ Dunn

The sergeant said, raising his weapon and wiping out the first of the reinforcements who had responded to the Space Marines breach of the Palace.

SCENE SIX – INT. BRIDGE OF THE

IN EXCELCIS

ATMOS: SERVITOR AND COGITATOR NOISE. BACKGROUND RUMBLE OF ENGINES.

In the hours since the captains had convened, the violent balefire that had engulfed Stromark Secundus had burned itself out, the planet's oxygen exhausted in fuelling the blazing tide. What remained was a blackened husk hanging in space like a negative against the starry void. Castellan Zargo stood on the bridge of the In Excelsis, both hands clasped behind his back, staring out over the devastated world. In the distance, engines flared before reality itself rippled as the few Flesh Tearers craft that Seth had deigned to despatch to the Stromark Cluster translated into the warp. As far as they were concerned their mission here

28 CZ Dunn

was accomplished and the Angels Encarmine could deal with the fallout.

Literally.

There would be a reckoning in the fullness of time and Castellan Zargo's greatest desire was that he would be there to witness it.

ARJEN: 'Castellan Zargo?'

The First Company captain strode onto the bridge, eliciting salutes from the serfs who quickly went back about their business.

ZARGO: 'Arjen. What are you doing here? My orders were for you to prepare The Pent for deployment. Is there a problem?'

Arjen ran a hand over his close-cropped hair and aimed his eyes towards the ground. For a warrior the Castellan had seen defeat a tyrannid carnifex with only his bare hands, Captain Arjen was exhibiting signs that Zargo could only interpret as... embarrassment.

ARJEN: 'It's Librarian Ptolemius, my lord. He's refusing to go into battle unless ordered to by Castellan Jerricho.'

SCENE SEVEN – INT. PALACE, STROMARK SECUNDUS/TERRA

ATMOS: CONFINED SPACE. ALL BATTLE NOISES ARE EVEN LOUDER AND CLOSER NOW.

FX – intense small arms fire interspersed with occasional shots from much larger weapons.

The halls and corridors of the Palace were choked with the bodies of the dead and the dying; piles of human wreckage left in the Space Marines' wake. With the interior now exposed to the ravages of the planet's surface, many of the defenders had succumbed without the intervention of the Angels of Death and corpses with blackened and blistered skin greeted the five around every new corner and every fresh chamber.

Cassiel and his brothers were far from idle though and when they did encounter

30 CZ Dunn

resistance, it was soon obliterated in a storm of ammunition or crushed like a bug underfoot.

JORACHIEL: 'He promised us an army to fight. This is nought but an army of the dead, and corpses pose no threat. Perhaps their ghosts will give us a better fight?'

PTOLEMIUS: 'Do not be so quick to judge, Brother Jorachiel. There are still many levels of the Palace for us to battle through before we reach High Command and besides...'

FX – crackle of psychic energy followed by bodies slamming into bodies.

The Librarian sent a cascade of psychic energy forth from his hand, lifting half a dozen corpses from the floor and flinging them in the direction of an onrushing squad of traitors. Bone shattered against bone and those few that did survive the Librarian's assault were swiftly mopped up by his brothers.

PTOLEMIUS: 'The dead are not entirely without their uses.'

More traitors filled the gap left by their fallen conspirators and, after offering only token small arms fire, they too were easily despatched.

CASSIEL: 'Beware, brothers. The radiation has not yet penetrated this deep into the Palace and their resistance is stronger.'

Terror Nihil 31

To reinforce the Sergeant's point, Jorachiel strode boldly around the next corner only to be met by a traitor heavy weapons team aiming a missile launcher directly at him. Laboriously, he raised his weapon to fire but failed to unleash his shot in time.

FX – whoosh of missile launching, followed by explosion.

At such short range, the missile could not miss such a large target and the warhead detonated against Jorachiel's chest, staggering him backwards and almost bowling over his four battle brothers following him around the bend. Frantically, the traitors attempted to reload but, in the face of the Space Marines' vengeful barrage, they were soon rendered to nothing more than crimson stains coating the smooth Palace walls.

FX – really ramp up the weapon fire here almost to the point where it's uncomfortable to listen to.

The crater in his chest still smouldering from the detonation, Jorachiel grimaced and turned to Ptolemius.

JORACHIEL: 'Seems I'm not ready to join the ranks of the fallen just yet, Brother Librarian.'

Traitors were spilling forth into the corridor at a rapid rate and Jorachiel charged, firing and swinging wildly,

32 CZ Dunn

felling two or three enemies with every shot or blow.

Ptolemius gave a knowing sigh before following him into the fray.

SCENE EIGHT – INT. DREADNOUGHT CHAMBER OF IN EXCELCIS

ATMOS: BACKGROUND RUMBLE OF ENGINES.

FX – sound of a service lift descending a deep shaft.

NARRATION: Deep within the bowels of In Excelsis, the most ancient warriors of the Angels Encarmine slept the slumber of the ages ready to be woken from their stasis in the hours of the Chapter's greatest need. So rare were these calls to arms that not a single living battle brother had seen one of their own Furioso Dreadnoughts take to the field. Even Zargo himself, entering his sixth century of existence, had only known of one Angel Encarmine who had ever witnessed their venerables at war and he had perished at the hands of the Eldar some half a millennia ago.

34 CZ Dunn

Just as the number of battle brothers had dwindled down the years, so too had the Chapter's Dreadnoughts.

The last of the Death Company Dreadnoughts, Quiesco Eternus, had fallen at the very dawn of the 41st Millennium, the Black Rage coming over him one final time as he valiantly took down three Helbrutes in the colours of the reviled Emperor's Children Traitor Legion. Of the 'ordinary' Dreadnoughts, none bearing the winged blood-drop icon of the Angels Encarmine had been fielded since the great Haematic Fury vanquished the daemon Korbatherite but could not escape being dragged through the rent in the warp torn open by the fiend's slaying.

That left only The Pent.

Five Furioso Dreadnoughts who had given their lives in service to the Emperor many thousands of years ago only to be reborn as avatars of war, kept alive in a suit of armour more akin to a mobile fortress than the power armour they once wore so proudly and with such distinction. Though the truth of the matter had long since been obscured by the passage of time, it was whispered that the Furiosos predated the foundation of the successor Chapters – even those of the second founding – and that all occupants of Furiosos fell alongside Sanguinius during the Heresy. When the great Primarchs Dorn and Guilliman divided the

legions following the galactic civil war, the Furiosos

Terror Nihil 35

were split between all of the progeny Chapters so that a link to their parent Legion would be maintained long after the last of the founding battle brothers had passed into legend.

Though this longevity made for considerable experience in the ways of war and a zeal borne of remembrance of the great galactic schism, coupled with extended periods of dormancy it could lead to a detachment from reality that manifested itself as befuddlement and madness.

As appeared to be the case with Librarian Ptolemius who would now only take orders from a Chapter Master who had died almost nine hundred years ago and whose suit of armour Zargo now wore.

FX – lift coming to a halt. Massive steel doors sliding open.

The long descent to the Dreadnought chamber came to an end and the great elevator, of such heavy construction that it could carry two of the ancient warriors at once, deposited the Castellán in a hangar of vast proportions. The gradual loss of these mighty engines of war down the centuries was rammed home to Zargo in the starkest fashion; where there were enough stasis chambers to accommodate over three dozen Dreadnoughts only four were bathed in artificial blue light denoting that they were occupied. One other was split open like a huge metal cocoon, its recent habitant standing before it like a giant

36 CZ Dunn

blue sentinel. The Castellán covered the gap between them swiftly and, while he was still a respectful distance away, took to one knee and bowed before the Furioso Librarian.

ZARGO: ‘Ancient One. I come before you today to seek your aid in a matter of war. A matter that only you and your venerable brethren are capable of prosecuting on behalf of the Chapter.’

An uncomfortable silence followed the Castellán’s words. He was just about to repeat himself – only louder this time in case the years of seclusion had rendered

Ptolemy hard of hearing – when the behemoth spoke.

PTOLEMIUS: ‘You.’

His bulk shifted to look Zargo up and down.

PTOLEMIUS: ‘You are not Castellan Jerricho. You wear his armour and that is his cloak set about your shoulders, his sword at your hip yet you are not him. How can this be so?’

ZARGO: ‘Castellan Jerricho died nine hundred years ago, Ancient One. I am the fifth brother of the Angels Encarmine to have held the title of Castellan since then.’

PTOLEMIUS: ‘I see. I have been asleep a very long time then?’

Terror Nihil 37

ZARGO: ‘You have lain in stasis for over a thousand years, venerable Librarian. It is now the dying days of the 41st Millennium and your Chapter has need of you. Will you serve us once again?’

PTOLEMIUS: ‘Is that what today is? A ‘dying day’? Is today a day for death?’

ZARGO: ‘We are the Angels Encarmine. Every day is a day for death. Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow. It matters not. What does matter is that we are the bringers of death, not the recipients.’

The Dreadnought shifted again in its chassis, this time moving from side to side to take in its surroundings.

PTOLEMIUS: ‘It would appear there has been a lot of dying since last I walked the Imperium. This hangar was half full the last time I awoke. Where are the young ones? What has happened to them?’

ZARGO: ‘They gave themselves unto the anvil of war and were broken, Ancient One, though not before they did some breaking of their own. Each one died a hero and each one lives on in the annals of the Chapter.’

PTOLEMIUS: ‘A dead warrior is of no use to anyone except a historian! Is this

why you come to us now? Because

38 CZ Dunn

we are the only ones left? How many battle brothers does the Chapter number? Are they all dead too? Only you remain and now you come to beg us to fight your battles for you.'

Zargo rose to his feet and approached the Librarian.

ZARGO: 'The Chapter is barely at half strength, such has been the ferocity of the war we have fought but the glory we have covered ourselves in lives long in the memory. Our honour roll now rivals that of the very Blood Angels themselves and-'

Without further acknowledgement the Dreadnought turned ponderously and headed back towards the stasis chamber.

ZARGO: 'Wait, Ancient One.'

The Dreadnought showed no sign of having heard the Castellan and continued onwards.

ZARGO: 'If you doubt the veracity of my words, doubt the genuine need we have of your aid then use your gifts to learn the truth.'

Ptolemius continued on for a moment longer before coming to a halt. He paused as if in contemplation and then turned back to face the Company Master.

PTOLEMIUS: 'Very well then.'

Zargo dropped the shackles that bound his mind and allowed the Librarian to drink deep of his memories.

SCENE NINE – INT. PALACE, STROMARK SECUNDUS/TERRA

ATMOS: AS PER SCENE SEVEN.

Gore and viscera coated the five's armour, red atop red signifying the barbarism that had carried them to this place. The army they had faced was an army no more and the bodies that lay crushed and torn on the levels above numbered in the tens of thousands, so total had been the massacre they'd carried out. Now, as they approached the threshold of High Command, the traitors made ready for their final stand.

CASSIEL: 'Lay down your arms, allow us through to claim your leaders and we will show you mercy. Your ends will be swift and painless. Defy us, and prepare to face our wrath!'

40 CZ Dunn

The human soldiers arrayed behind a heavy barricade hesitated and murmurs of dissent rippled through their ranks. Faced with five beings of such supreme power any offer of clemency, even one that would still result in death, deserved sensible consideration. Before a consensus could be reached however, the decision was made for them by panicking traitors opening fire on the Angels. Las-fire and hard shot bounced harmlessly from red plates of armour and, seemingly oblivious, Cassiel addressed his brothers.

FX – scattering of las shots

CASSIEL: 'For Sanguinius and the Emperor!'

FX – Battle noise reminiscent of if the Apocalypse itself had come

As one, the five unleashed a wall of fire, and began their slow advance towards the enemy position. Limbs were shorn from bodies and traitors disintegrated in plumes of blood in the face of the unrelenting volley. Hundreds fell in those first few seconds, the barricade of anything the traitors could find in the palace to impede the Angels advance granting no succour as it splintered and evaporated as easily as flesh and bone. The screams of dying men were drowned out by the crash of weapons and as the five hit the traitor lines, the sound of bodies being thrashed and crushed joined the deathly chorus.

## Terror Nihil 41

The final engagement lasted less than a minute as, backed up against the entrance to the command centre, the traitor forces had nowhere to retreat to. Every swing of an Angel's arm, every stomp of a foot, connected with soft flesh and Cassiel's promise of unleashing their full wrath was made tapestry in blood upon the Palace floor.

Satisfied that he and his brothers were the only five living souls left outside of the command centre, Cassiel raised the weapon he carried in place of his right arm and prepared to blow open the doors.

SCENE TEN – INT. DREADNOUGHT CHAMBER OF IN EXCELCIS

ATMOS: AS PER SCENE EIGHT

PTOLEMIUS: ‘Such sacrifice, but such glory too.’

The Furioso Librarian rocked uneasily on his chassis, unaccustomed after a millennia in stasis to gorging on the remembrances of others. His mind was burgeoning with six centuries of his Chapter’s history and the second-hand memories of several centuries in excess of that. The constant drive to bring war to the foes of the Imperium in whatever guise they may take and whichever dark corner of the universe they may linger in. Visions of heroes, all of them dead and often in the white armour of the Chapter’s Death Company. A once great brotherhood now diminished by the ravages of eternal war.

44 CZ Dunn

Specific images washed over him too; Zargo’s predecessor Ilemnial falling at the hands of an arch-enemy daemon, the Castellan’s sacrifice allowing the Angels Encarmine’s librarium to send the creature back to its hellish domain; an entire company of battle brothers lost to a vastly superior force of greenskins with valour so great that the battle was called The War of a Hundred Thousand Dead in the Chapter’s annals; The loss of the Strike Cruiser Scion of Baal at the culmination of a decade long crusade to rid the galactic South of a tyranid splinter fleet – two score of the Chapter lost but three entire sectors had not suffered alien predation since; the nuclear holocaust unleashed upon the world below.

ZARGO: ‘I have no choice but to call upon The Pent to go once more into battle. You see now how our Chapter stands upon the threshold, staring death in the face but spitting in its eye at every opportunity. I cannot in all conscience send our brothers down to that planet knowing that they will survive the battle only to die later.’

PTOLEMIUS: ‘I do see that, Zargo, and I see that you do not idly throw our brothers onto the altar of war. Though our numbers may have dwindled, the heart of our Chapter beats as strongly and as bravely as ever. I will do this thing for you.’

Terror Nihil 45

ZARGO: 'You have my gratitude, Ancient One, but what of the others? Will they not take to the field of battle once more in the Chapter's name?'

PTOLEMIUS: 'My psychic gifts help safeguard my mind from the degradations of prolonged stasis but I fear for the mental condition of my four brothers. When last we were called upon to fight, their minds were already addled, barely cogent and near-incapable of carrying out orders.'

The Castellan sighed, resigned to a course of action he would rather not pursue.

ZARGO: 'Then that is it. As great as your abilities are, Ancient One, sending you down there alone would achieve nothing except the loss of a Legion relic. I will not order the Death Company to die in vain and for the same reason I cannot ask you to fight this battle.'

Zargo turned to leave, content for Ptolemy to spend some time among the Chapter before being placed back into stasis.

PTOLEMIUS: 'Wait, Castellan.'

Zargo stopped and faced the Dreadnought.

PTOLEMIUS: 'I think there is one way my brothers could be convinced to fight once more.'

46 CZ Dunn

ZARGO: 'Whatever you need to make it happen, is yours.'

PTOLEMIUS: 'This is not something you or anybody else can aid me with, Castellan. This is something that I will have to do alone, something that will stretch my gifts and my conscience to their very limits.'

The Castellan nodded respectfully.

ZARGO: 'If I might be so bold, what is this thing that you must do?'

PTOLEMIUS: 'My brothers and I fell in battle together many thousands of years

ago, before the formation of the Angels Encarmine even. We fell with an oath to the primarch unfulfilled and though our heroism earned us prolonged existence among the ranks of the Dreadnoughts, the knowledge that we did not make good on that oath still haunts us and likely hastened the other four's descent into madness.'

Ptolemius paused as if weighing up his next words.

PTOLEMIUS: 'We fell on a battlefield not unlike the one you would have us fight upon now and I can use that to the Chapter's advantage. Ten millennia ago our mission ended in failure but today my brothers will refight that battle and where once we failed the primarch and the Legion,

Terror Nihil 47

instead we shall atone by bringing glory to the Chapter.'

SCENE ELEVEN – INT. PALACE, STROMARK SECUNDUS/TERRA

ATMOS: AS PER SCENE SEVEN.

FX – crunch of bones being crushed.

The last of the secessionist high command died as easily and as brutally as the rest.

When the door to the command centre blew open and five crimson Dreadnoughts stomped through, several of the traitors had dropped to their knees, their plaintive wails for mercy the last sounds they ever made. Those foolhardy few who took up arms were soon eliminated leaving only the handful hiding under instrument consoles and map desks to be despatched by The Pent.

50 CZ Dunn

FX - body being thrown against a wall.

Ptolemius cast the corpse aside as if it were nothing more than rags and, content that their mission was over, relinquished his influence over the minds of his fellow Furioso Dreadnoughts. The strain on his psyche eased and he felt the initial wave of confusion from his brothers as the illusion they had been labouring under slipped and they slowly became aware of their surroundings. All rotated in their chassis regarding the carnage they'd so recently wrought, taking in the product of their rage. Torriel looked down at the mass of shrapnel embedded in his reinforced chest armour and began picking at it with his blood claws while Jorachiel did likewise with the crater gouged just below his head where the missile had struck. Iniasstigon flexed his blood-encrusted blood talons, human debris dropping to the ground from where it had been dislodged from between the joints.

Cassiel treaded over to Ptolemius, crushing bodies underfoot with each step. Still not entirely aware of where he was, he carried on forwards until he was face-to-face with the Librarian.

CASSIEL: 'Did we win brother? Did we fulfil our oath and bring yet more glory for the Angels?'

[NB: Cassiel's voice is different now, closer to how Ptolemius sounds in his conversations with Zargo]

Terror Nihil 51

The Librarian looked first to the other members of The Pent, then to the devastation around him, then back to Cassiel.

PTOLEMIUS: 'Yes, Brother Cassiel. This time, we did.'