



Extremis

Diabolus

Relictors - III

EXTREMIS DIABOLUS

The Relictors Chapter of the Adeptus Astartes were once amongst the staunchest of Humanity's defenders. Now, however, the insidious, corrupting tendrils of Chaos have tainted the very heart of this once-proud chapter. Graham McNeill recounts recent events and the threat to the Relictors' existence...

The dream memory always begin in the same way. Katanen would see the face of the man he had just killed, begging him through bloodied lips not to open the vault as his lifeblood flooded from a fist-sized crater in his chest. Katanen and his battle-brothers of the Relictors Chapter had ignored the dying guardian of the vault and pressed on towards their goal - the Diamedes Archive. Great monolithic doors, weathered and dusty with age, swung wide on squealing cogs that had not turned in millenia and Katanen felt a great vindication as Captain Pediese entered the vault.

But then his dream no longer mimicked his memories as a bright light shone from the depths of the vault, searing and unbearable in its intensity. It burned through him, darkening to become a sickly yellow glow that reeked of corruption and evil. A laughing from the vault, its features cruel and hungry. It turned its gaze upon him, burning eyes stripping the armour and flesh from his body even before he had breath to scream.

Katanen awoke, instantly alert, his senses razor sharp. For the briefest instant, he believed he could still smell the stench of scorched flesh, but dismissed the notion as ludicrous. A Space Marine did not dream. He did not know what these things he was experiencing were, but they could not be dreams. The hour was early, he still had some time before morning devotions and prayer, so he rose and donned his exercise garments, padding silently from the dormitory and into the attached gymnasium. Katanen eased into his morning ritual of devotional callisthenics, stretching and working his muscles in time to catechisms of ritual obeisance. Though he knew it was impossible for a Space Marine to dream, the images of the mission to Fremas kept intruding on his rest period.

The Diamedes Archive had been constructed, as near as the Techmarines could deduce, almost four thousand years ago, though how it had come to exist buried in the heart of a mountain top, with no obvious way in or out, was a mystery they had no answer to. An earthquake some five centuries ago had cracked open

one of the deep tunnels that led within and soon after its contents had been sealed by order of the Ordo Malleus. No one, save the highest adepts on Terra, truly knew the contents of the Archive. No one, that is, until the Relictors had captured a newly-created daemon blade from a warband of Word Bearers on Subiaco Diablo. The Librarians of the Chapter had coerced the bound entity to translate ancient texts known to have been penned by its servants thousands of years ago. The text had spoken of the Diamedes Archive and the ecret held in its hidden vault; a secret that had been sealed away for all time.

Time had made its guardians complacent and it was a simple matter for the six Space Marines to overwhelm the company of Guardsmen stationed within the fastness and open the vault. Inside was a treasure of the Ruinous Powers, a treasure that groaned with the weight of ages and dark knowledge. Reverently placed within a stasis chest before being transported in great secrecy to the Chapter's fortress-monastery, it now sat in the warp-sealed Reliquarius, studied by the most powerful and pure Librarians of the Chapter. The secrets of the Immaterium it could unlock would make the deaths it had taken to retrieve it worthwhile and, though there would be those who would persecute them for their chosen path, the Relictors were careful to leave none alive who could speak of what they did.

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Inquisitor Cyarro watched the burning wreck impassively from the bridge of the battle barge, Hammer of the Unrighteous, his breath wheezing from the gurgling machinery attached to his back. Thick pipes coiled from the machine, sutured to his flesh and piercing his ribcage with puffs of steam venting from the artificial pumps that now breathed for him. His own lungs had been destroyed by the strike of a daemon weapon on Subiaco Diablo and only the swift attention of an Ordo Malleus Medicae team had saved his life. That and his own determination to hunt down those who had killed his men and left him to die in the blasted ruins of the defiled cathedral. The Relictors Chapter of the Adeptus Astartes.

The ship burning in space before him was one of their vessels; a rapid strike cruiser ambushed and destroyed while refuelling at an outer-rim waystation. The Hammer's Astropath had detected no outgoing messages from the stricken vessel, and Cyarro was confident the element of surprise had been maintained. Another three days travel would see his fleet detachment reach the core systems where his spies had informed him the Relictors' fortress-monastery was

anchored, badly damaged after the fighting in and around the Eye of Terror during Abaddon's devastating invasion. The Relictors' fleet was depleted, their cursed base weakened; there would never be a better time to enact retribution on these traitors. Following the Relictors' treachery on Subiaco Diablo, Cyarro had woken upon the medicae slab in Nemesis Tessera, the finest Chirurgeons of Inquisitor Lord Coteaz having rebuilt his shattered body with prosthetics, bionics and vat-grown plasflesh. Upon his recovery, Cyarro had convened a gathering of the most senior Inquisitors who had survived the relentless assaults of the Ruinous Powers on the Inquisition fortress, and petitioned the Secret Masters of his Ordo to have the Relictors declared Extremis Diabolus and their lives forfeit. The decision was swift and unanimous. The Relictors had turned from the Emperor's Light and were to be hunted down and destroyed; their gene-seed wiped from the galaxy and all record of their deeds expunged from Imperial history.

The thought made Cyarro smile.

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Katanen felt a shiver of premonition as he lifted his bolter from the racking and slid a magazine of shells home. He whispered the Prayer of Armaments and completed the seven Rites of Ordnance before kneeling and offering his strength-at-arms to the Emperor's shrine that sat at the end of the armoury. He and his fellow battle-brothers were hardened veterans, who had fought with courage and determination during the titanic conflict that had raged around the Eye of Terror, but they had lost a great many of their number and their beloved monastery had been badly damaged during the recapture of Finreht. It had taken all the skill of the Chapter's Master of the Fleet to secretly move them to anchor in the Taeloth systems, where they could recover their strength and make use of the knowledge they had gleaned from the dark treasure within the Diamedes Archive.

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"Will they be aware of us?" asked Cyarro, his voice rasping and cold.

"No." said the Hammer's Master of Surveyors, confidently. "I have brought us in on the far side of the planet to which the Ramilies is anchored. They will not know we are here."

“What of their Astropaths?”

“We dropped out of Warp space much further out than normal. If they have felt our arrival at all, it is likely that they will believe it to be navy ship passing through to Chinchare or Jubal.”

Cyarro nodded, sure that the silver armoured Master of Surveyors was correct, but needing to hear the words spoken aloud. He had suffered too much and the Relictors had committed too many atrocities for him to fail now. His fresh skin, pink and raw from surgery was now stippled with dark inks, tattooed with the names of those men who had been murdered by the Relictors while under his command on Subiaco Diablo: Chouan, Kaotsu and many more. His heart burned with hatred for these traitors who had betrayed their oaths of loyalty to the Emperor. Cyarro himself had once crossed the line into what many amongst his Ordo termed Radicalism, but he had suffered for that mistake with the blood of innocents and had paid his penance. He had returned to the path of righteousness and though the temptation of his former path still gnawed at him daily, he would persecute those who had fallen with the fiery passion of a zealot.

“All ships report that they are in position and ready to commence the attack.” said the Master of Surveyors.

Cyarro turned to the captain’s pulpit, where an armoured giant in blue-steel armour nodded solemnly.

“Commence the attack.” Cyarro said simply.

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The first lance strikes from the two Retributor battleships smashed through the outer hull of the Relictor’s fortress monastery, blowing whole decks into space and venting crystallizing oxygen like glittering blood. A flurry of torpedoes, launched from half a dozen smaller vessels roared from their launch bays and ponderously gained speed as they slashed towards their target. Ruby red explosions rippled across the surface of the fortress-monastery and it shuddered like a wounded beast. Though weakened and damaged, a Ramilies starfort is a terrifying enemy to fight and once its defenders overcame their surprise, a deadly tracery of fire erupted from its guns. One of the attacking vessels was crippled almost immediately, its shields overloaded and its engines blasted from the hull. The attacking fleet scattered, the larger ships concentrating their fire

upon the damaged sections and manoeuvring to take advantage of the dead zones in the starfort's coverage. Space between the attacking ships and the starfort was criss-crossed by torpedo trails and streaks of bitter fire, a lethal web of explosions that lit up the stars around Taeloth with dazzling explosions. The Hammer of Righteousness surged forwards to a sagging, firelit wound in the side of the starfort, her prow launch bays rumbling open and disgorging a host of Thunderhawk gun ships that flocked towards the fortress-monastery like hunting birds of prey.

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Katanen stumbled as the fortress monastery shook under another barrage of explosions. Klaxons blared and warning bells chimed, sounding for all the world like his sacred home was screaming in pain. An explosion ripped through the basalt corridor before him, knocking him to the ground and filling the air with fire and smoke. Crackling vox contacts in his helmet told him that their fortress-monastery was dying, breaches were being blasted all across its structure and boarding parties were penetrating deep into its sacred depths. Shadowy figures moved through the haze, firelight gleaming from long bladed polearms. He picked himself up, shouting. "Up, brothers, up! The enemy is upon us!" before firing a hail of shells into the fiery maelstrom before him.

Sparks flew from the impacts of his shots, but none of the figures fell. Internal recyc-umts fought to clear the air and Katanen could see the attackers clearly for the first time. Armoured in burnished suits of Terminator armour that gleamed with a blue-steel sheen, the warriors were figures of awe and terror. Covered in embossed scriptwork and with a multitude of purily seals fixed to their armour, the warriors were the very image of the Emperor's fiery retribution. Katanen was transfixed as he recognised the attackers for what they were; Grey Knights; scourge of daemon kind and the corrupt. The lead Terminator, a magnificent warrior with a crimson, fur-edged cloak swirling about him raised his bulky gauntlet and spat. "Trafficker with daemons, prepare to die."

Katanen dived to the side as a storm of gunfire and flame filled the corridor, hearing the cries of wounded men behind him. He rolled to his feet and deflected a blow from a crackling blade that would surely have decapitated him, but succeeded only in tearing his helmet free of his gorget. The blade bit into the wall, flaring sparks leaping from its energy-wreathed edge. Katanen dragged free his own sword and hacked through the polearm's shaft as a gauntlet hammered

into his chest and sent him sprawling. He reached for his weapon, hearing the sounds of desperate battle behind him, the dish of steel and the roaring of boilers filling his senses, but an armoured boot slammed down on his arm and pinned it in place. He tried to pull himself free, but a hissing blade touched his neck and he froze, feeling the hot from the power sword scorch his skin.

He looked up into the face of the man who held the blade, a hairless, scarred individual wreathed in voluminous red robes stitched with gold Inquisitorial rosettes. He bore hissing machinery upon his back and was surrounded by faceless, hooded adepts and servitors. A trio of Grey Knights kept their storm bolters trained on him and a flitting skull with a burning red eye buzzed around the Inquisitor. The man's skin was covered with swirling text that Katanen realised were names, scores upon scores of names. It was the face of a fanatic. Worse, it was a fanatic he recognised.

"I know you." he said "You were on Subiaco Diablo."

The tattooed man's eyes narrowed, "I was, yes." he said slowly "You murdered my men.

"We had no choice," said Katanen. "They had seen the daemon blade."

"You are a murderer and a trafficker in blasphemous magicks. I will see you and your kind wiped out for your crimes against the Imperium!"

"Crimes?" snapped Katanen, the skin of his chin blistering and raw from the heat of the Inquisitor's sword. "You dare accuse me of crimes? We seek to preserve the Imperium by whatever means necessary. If that means shedding blood then I am not afraid to see it spilled."

"You consort with daemons and slay the true warriors of the Emperor." snapped Cyarro, forcing the blade lower. "You are a traitor with no right to live and I will not bandy words with a trator any more."

Katanen closed his eyes and said, "Do what you will, you merely doom yourself to an earlier extinction without the knowledge we have gained."

The inquisitor's sword sliced downwards.

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Cyarro watched as the fleet he had assembled at Belis Corona hammered the dying remains of the Relictors fortress-monastery with concentrated fire from their gun batteries. A Ramilies starfort was a massive edifice and took time to fully destroy, but they would love only when no stone was left upon another and every trace of the Relictors was reduced to dust. He felt a grim satisfaction as he watched mother powerful explosion rip through the remains of the starfort, his fingers drumming upon a carved wooden box, locked tight with silver chains and inscribed with powerful pentagrammic wards. He heard armoured footfalls behind him and turned, drawing a black cloth over the box to hide it from view.

“What news, Captain Pelega?” asked Cyarro.

Some of their ships managed to fight their way past our picket line.” said the Grey Knight Captain.

“The starfort is no more. Inquisitor, we must give chase to those who escaped its destruction before we lose them in the Eye.”

“Yes...” said Cyarro at last, resting his hand atop the cloth covered box.

“It is almost certain that whatever the Relictors stole from the Diamedes Archive is aboard one of those ships. We cannot afford to let them get away.”

“Very well.” said Cyarro. “Weigh anchor and give pursuit. Indeed you are correct, Captain Pelega, the prize must be with one of the traitors who fled like cowards”

The Grey Knight Captain bowed and retreated from the Inquisitor’s chambers.

Cyarro ran his hands across the black cloth covering the sigil-carved box.

And smiled.