



TERROR NIHIL

PART TWO OF THE STROMARK
MASSACRE

CZ DUNN



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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

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.

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

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

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.

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.'

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.

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 Castellán'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

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

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, Iniastigon 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.

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 Iniasagon 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.

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

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.'

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 *Occulus Horriblus*.'

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

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.'

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

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.

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

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 tyranid 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

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.'

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,

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.

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

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 Ptolemy 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 Castellans 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 inhabitant standing before it like a giant

blue sentinel. The Castellan 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 Castellan's words. He was just about to repeat himself - only louder this time in case the years of seclusion had rendered Ptolemius 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?'

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

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!'

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.

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.

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 tyrannid 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.'

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.'

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,

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.

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. Iniastigon 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]

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.'

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