



# THE SCOURING OF THE NOSTRAMO SECTOR

*"When you collar a feral beast, you teach it nothing save patience. Its savage nature is unchanged, merely held in abeyance while the grip of its master remains strong. But should the collar slip and the beast come loose..."*

*Attr. Konrad Curze, the Night Haunter, on the nature of the Legiones Astartes.*

# AT EMPIRE'S END

'A day will come when sacred Ilium shall perish, when Praiemo King and all his people shall be slain.'

Attr. to the Helac warlord Skypio Aemilanos

In 017.M31, hosts of the Emperor swept outwards from Terra in vengeful pursuit of the Warmaster's broken hordes, the first loyal fleets reaching the north-eastern fringes of the galaxy, long a stronghold of Legions sworn to the cause of Horus. Composed largely of squadrons from Baal, Ultramar and other Loyalist enclaves, these outriders of what later chronicles would come to call the Scouring, were eager to inflict on the fleeing Traitors the same humiliation they had suffered themselves in the early years of the Horus Heresy. The armada bore a full panoply of those weapons once forbidden from use, rad-phages and virus weaponry of terrible potency, as well as numerous battalions of Legionnaires Astartes warriors, all honed by the fires of heresy and war to the pinnacle of human skill-at-arms. Such measures were considered barely adequate for dislodging entrenched Night Lords battalions, the VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion having had nearly a decade to fortify their domain and no hope of clemency from their brethren in the wake of the Siege of Terra to blunt their determination.

Yet despite all intelligence to the contrary, no determined resistance was to be encountered by these fleets. Of the VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion only scattered and isolated warbands were discovered, and none larger than a reinforced company. While these forces fought with all the vicious spite and skill that was to be expected of the Night Hunter's sons, each fought and died alone and unsupported, little more than irritations to the gathered might of the Loyalist armada. Of the great armies they had expected to meet, the fleet's scouts found only ruined fortresses and the battle-scarred wrecks of VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion void craft drifting in space, broken by some unknown force that had taken the Night Lords by surprise and left them dead in its wake.

Faced with a worrying enigma, and the possibility of some grand deception on the part of the Night Lords, the lords of the fleet withdrew the bulk of their forces to the remote fleet anchorage at Caith Laes. Those forces anticipated in and around the Nostramo sector composed perhaps a third of the expected remaining strength of the VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion, and the command officers of the fleet were wary of allowing their forces to be caught in ambush by the Night Lords, long since renowned as masters of such tactics. Instead, an extensive survey of the sector was made by the fleet's scout elements, a search that would last nearly six months and uncovered no hidden warriors or secret fastnesses, only more mysteries. With no immediate military threat and the desire for vengeance still strong within the Loyalist warriors, the fleet departed the Nostramo sector, en route to distant battle zones where

Horus' legions still fought. The final fate of some 30,000 of the Night Hunter's sons was of little import in those fleeting days of optimism and victory, and it is only now, as the enemies of Mankind slowly devour all that was built in our Great Crusade and we seek for all advantages that we may, that questions are asked.

Many have attempted to solve the riddle of the Nostramo sector, and few have arrived at the same conclusions. Collected here are some of the most revealing treatise from within the sealed archives of great Terra, each based on the fragmentary information that has been recovered from that area of space. Perhaps from the distilled wisdom of these accounts an answer can be divined for the question that still haunts the Divisio Militaris: what scoured clean the entire Nostramo sector in the dark years of the Horus Heresy?

This report and those that follow it are but a few of many billions of censored documents sealed within the great archives of Terra. Much information from the dark days of the Horus Heresy and the earliest days of the Scouring that followed has been hidden away and allowed to fade from the sight of history, yet in such forgotten scraps can be found glimpses of the true fate of the Nostramo sector. There has been some resistance to its printing as part of this document, but for now the needs of the Divisio Militaris inquiry have superseded the policy of erasing history that has occupied some sects within the Archivists Colleges.

This first fragment dates from the arrival of the first of the Retribution fleets, the initial wave of the Scouring that pursued the retreating hosts of Horus across the galaxy. In addition, I have appended some additional information from more standard archival sources for purposes of clarification. While the focus of the Legionnaires Astartes in this instance was not the same as the inquiry we have posed, the facts uncovered are intriguing in their ramifications.

# NIGHT LORDS VETERAN LEGIONARY

EXECUTIONER ENDROS SHEK  
DESPERATION PACIFICATION DETACHMENT  
9<sup>TH</sup> TERROR COMPANY, 18<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER

The VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion had always been known for its excesses; as renowned for the massacres it left in its wake as for the victories it brought the vast armies of the Great Crusade. Yet by 017.M31 they had cast off the last semblance of rational military logic, and where once the slaughters, culling pits and flaying of the defeated had been considered part of a greater military strategy, a blood-spattered means to a more noble end, they had become an end unto themselves. Lost in an endless nightmare of blood and death, the Night Lords Legion echoed the descent of their lord into madness and abomination.

This pict recording, salvaged from the ruins of the hive world of Desperation by the XIII<sup>th</sup> Legion in the wake of their assault, depicts Endros Shek, whose infamous Terror units were amongst those Night Lords forces who participated in the Culling of Desperation. In the hours before the Ultramarines made planetfall, the Night Lords of Shek's detachment set to the slaughter of the population of Desperation, preferring to render those they could not control into gore-spattered fetishes rather than allow them to fall into the hands of the enemy. By the time the first of the azure-blue landing craft of the XIII<sup>th</sup> Legion touched down on Desperation, the hive towers were draped in the shorn skins of their inhabitants, and the midnight heraldry of the Night Lords was obscured by a glistening sheen of arterial red.



The Bloody Hand Insignia of the Night Lords Terror Battalions.



Baroque Night Lords Legion insignia, intended for use by veteran elements of the Legion.

++Carta Segmenta++

++Tributis: Nostramo  
[Revoked]++

++863Y 477X56++

++Optio Limites++

++Viewing++

++ Classification

Cross referencing all worlds  
of the Nostramo Sector with  
the following keywords:

+Destroyed  
+Xenos Infestation  
+Unknown Aggressor  
+Zone Perditus

++Standard time reference:  
010-017.M31

++Display redacted data...

++Enter access cypher:

++Stand by ++

++Displaying all data...

## The Storm's Jaws

⊕ Ruins of Nostramo

++Destroyed, 984.M30.  
Moon Tenebor destroyed  
010/011.M31++

⊕ Cairn

++Destroyed, 012.M31++

## The Nostramo Sector

● Hale

⊕ Nethersken

++Lehrove infestation,  
011.M31++

## The Ether Keefs

● Ulan Hūda

## The Hūda Gulf

⊕ Kruun

++Destroyed, 012.M31++

● Kalleth

++Destroyed, 011.M31.  
Claimed as resources despoiled by  
the Blood Angels in  
017.M31.++

## The Dominion of Storms

● Gulgorahd

## The Gulgorahd Protectorate

● Garguun

● Memlock

⊕ Yaelis

⊕ Desperation

++Destroyed, 011.M31++

## The Thramas Sector

⊕ Thramas

++Zone declared Perditas,  
009.M31 by order of  
Lion El Johnson.++

● Sheol

All data sealed, by order of High Lords of Terra.

## SHADOWS OF THE PAST

++ IX<sup>th</sup> LEGION (COGNOMEN: THE BLOOD ANGELS)  
++ FIELD REPORT, DECAHELION-34458.663/LAMBDA  
++ 8-675-017.M31  
++ BATTLEFLEET VENGEANCE, NOSTRAMO SECTOR  
++ CONSUL-VIGILATOR SARGAN VARSARIS, 33<sup>rd</sup> COMPANY, 9<sup>th</sup> CHAPTER  
++ INVESTIGATION OF THE TENEBOR FACILITY WRECKAGE  
++ DEPLOYMENT ANALYSIS

Upon entering the Nostramo System, 33<sup>rd</sup> Company Command was notified that no active Night Lords combat units had been detected in-system, allowing no opportunity for further vengeance in Lord Sanguinius' name. The only contacts on our augur readouts were long-dead ship hulks and the remains of the fortress-moon Tenebor, all of which read negative for power or targeting-auspex emissions. The 33<sup>rd</sup> Company was returned to standby from active alert, with response sections remaining at combat readiness in case of hidden hostiles. As acting commander of the response sections in the wake of Praetor Kaelon's death at Sorhis, yet more of our best lost to the Traitors, it fell to me to lead recon elements in a sweep of Tenebor. We were issued three directives by interim chapter command: determine if Tenebor remained under hostile control; gather any intelligence on enemy disposition or strength in the Nostramo sector; and mark any usable supplies and munitions for later recovery. In case of contact with determined resistance we were under orders to fall back, alert the fleet and hold a beachhead position until reinforced.

### The Fortress-moon of Tenebor

Last remnant of Nostramo, Tenebor was spared the Night Haunter's wrath when he returned to purge the sin of his people. The moon itself had long been given over to the keeping of the VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion, remade into a fortress that had been intended to stand guard over Kurze's adopted world and to serve as home for those of the Legion stationed there. Carved into the dense, heavy element-laced fabric of the moon itself, Tenebor was a formidable redoubt, large enough to accommodate nearly half the Legion and bearing armament far in excess of any capital ship, save perhaps the legendary *Phalanx* of Inwit.

However, mirroring the decline of the Legion that had created it, by 007.M31 Tenebor was but a shadow of its former self. Its last recorded garrison numbered less than 3,000 of the VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion and much of its infrastructure

had been allowed to fall into disrepair. Of the mighty guns that had once warded Nostramo from xenos raids and the other terrors of Old Night, but a fraction remained operational, and few trained Legion thralls remained to serve their masters in times of war.

Despite these facts, the commanders of the Retribution fleets of that age had expected to find a reinforced and fortified battle station; indeed Nostramo had been set as the first strategic objective for the fleets due to the expected level of resistance. The discovery of its lifeless and gutted corpse was the first indication of the unknown misfortune that had descended on the Nostramo sector, a mystery that was seen as being of secondary importance while the final battles against the forces of the fallen Warmaster still raged.

### PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: TARGET INFILTRATION AND RECONNAISSANCE

The ceremonies of armament and dedication proceeded without incident, and all Oaths of Moment were duly recorded and witnessed before the task force departed. Eight reconnaissance squads, deployed by Storm Eagle gunships, were inserted into the wreckage of the fortress-moon, and as its structural and atmospheric integrity could not be verified externally, all Legionaries were equipped with void hardened battle plate as per standard Zone Mortalis engagement protocols. We entered the station through the emergency airlocks at the furthest bastions of the fortress, hoping to avoid any active defences around the main hangar bays. While the airlock itself proved both undamaged and easily bypassed, we soon encountered damage within the station itself. Much of the damage is easily attributed to small arms fire, with some unmistakably that of Legiones Astartes pattern bolt weaponry as well as smaller calibre ballistic and energy weaponry. Some of the energy scars we discovered were initially unknown to me, however Sergeant Antonis of 4<sup>th</sup> Squad, a Terran veteran of the Legion, noted their similarity to those of the earliest patterns of the Martian volkite weaponry issued to the Legions at the beginning of the Great Crusade. Such weapons have not been issued in numbers great enough to account for the blast marks we observed in over a century; indeed, amongst the 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter we retain no such weapons in active service, and as such it is unlikely they were employed by the Night Lords who defended the station.

Leaving one squad to secure the airlock, we moved to survey the station proper. Access corridors throughout the areas we entered were littered with debris, some of which had obviously been

arranged to provide makeshift firing positions. A number of these had been placed in positions suggesting the defenders had been under assault from a number of directions rather than a simple frontal attack, a complex undertaking, but a favoured tactic for a number of Legions, most notably the XVI<sup>th</sup> and XIX<sup>th</sup> Legions. We also discovered a number of corpses, all of which were either Legiones Astartes of the Night Lords or their chattel; the attacking force must have removed all of their own fallen. Of these Night Lords two facts were readily apparent: firstly, due to the state of the bodies, this conflict had been conducted long before our arrival, possibly a decade or more ago, and secondly, each Night Lords corpse we encountered had its progenoid glands removed, most likely by the attacking force.

Upon reaching the main hangar bays we discovered by far the greatest concentration of the dead, in this case several hundred auxilia and a lesser number of Night Lords. The auxilia corpses, left lying where they fell, appear to have been slain as they fled, many having cast aside their weapons and showing cavernous bolter shell wounds in their backs. Damage to the main hangar from las cutters and melta bombs would indicate this was the point by which the attacking force entered Tenebor, and the placement and sheer volume of blast marks around the point of entry suggest fierce resistance from the defenders. The hangar bays and adjoining storage vaults had been stripped clean of salvageable materials long before our arrival. So thorough was the salvage operation that it must have taken a significant length of time, suggesting that whatever force had captured Tenebor feared no immediate counter-attack from the Night Lords.

### +++ Secondary Objective: Data Acquisition

Our final target was the command spire of the station and the cogitator banks housed within. Again, this area showed extensive signs of combat, with a large number of Night Lords remains to be found in the access junctions before the main command halls. This appears to have been where the garrison made its final stand, with a number of corpses being found within the halls as though they had been dragged from the fighting to be treated or to allow fresh troops into action. This would suggest a protracted struggle for control of this area, with the Night Lords defenders fighting to the last. Past the main entry portals we found little evidence of further fighting, save at the centre of the spire where the headless corpse of a Night Lords praetor was discovered. The lack of collateral damage in the surrounding area and the nature of the fatal wound, as well as the singular nature of the body, suggest an honour duel was conducted that resulted in the death of the praetor, and that his head was claimed as a trophy by the victor.

The cogitator banks showed some signs of forced access, however a quantity of data was still accessible. As ordered, a search was conducted for information relating to Night Lords' dispositions in the sector and the identity of the attacking force. Information on Night Lords positions was retrieved, though all nearly a decade old, and oddly the station's records marked many of these positions as hostile, perhaps indicating internal strife within the VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion at that time. This information also bore tell-tale signs of having been accessed without the correct access ciphers, again presumably by the force that overtook and sacked the station.

### +++ Commanding Officer's Remarks

Of the station's attackers all that could be retrieved were several grainy pict-captures; these images clearly identified the attacking force as Legiones Astartes bearing an unknown heraldry of red and black, their sigil not known to us. Judging from the images retrieved and from the evidence of our survey, the attacking force must have numbered at multi-company strength, including a detachment of Cataphractii and specialist boarding and infiltration troops. Those images we recovered all show older marks of battle plate, mostly Mark II and Mark III, but with significant levels of non-standard alterations. This force engaged and destroyed the defending garrison, well over 1,000 auxiliary troops and some 300 Night Lords, before disappearing. We could find no information on where this force went or its current loyalty, and must classify it as a potential hazard to the fleet, despite its attack on a known Traitor Legion.



### ACROSS ASHEN TRAILS

Of those worlds within the Nostramo sector known to have been inhabited prior to the outbreak of the Horus Heresy and the subsequent loss of contact, only two retained any viable population by 017.M31. The rest lay in ruins. Some of these worlds were found to have been obliterated or infested by hostile xenos breeds, while others appear to have destroyed themselves in brutal internal civil strife, both between those of Loyal or Traitor sympathies and between factions of the VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion itself. However, some of these previously bountiful worlds were sacked and left barren by an unknown force of Legiones Astartes warriors bearing many similarities to those who struck Tenebor.

The following pict-record is from the personal logs of the Rogue Trader Erasmus Skathe, and is excerpted from the voyage his ship, the *Invidious Glory*, made through the Nostramo sector in the early years of the first century of the 31<sup>st</sup> Millennium. It deals with an expedition to the ruins of Hive World Cairn which, in the years before Horus tore the galaxy apart, was a hive world of untold billions and origin of much of the Nostramo sector's riches. While Rogue Trader Skathe found none of the wealth he sought, what he did uncover speaks of the character and origins of the unknown enemy who struck the sector.

LOG FILE 8446/014/NOSTRAMO, AS DICTATED BY ROGUE TRADER ERASMUS SKATHE, MASTER OF THE INVIDIOUS GLORY, TO HIS SERVANT, THE FAITHFUL CADMUS RAHN, IN 020.M31:

#### LOG FILE 944-ALPHA

Thanks to star charts set down to aid the Great Crusade, and the fitful graspings of our Navigator, we arrived in orbit of the world once known to the Imperium as Cairn. Described in the old records of the Great Crusade as an enclave of technology and reason among dark and squalid stars, Cairn was a towering bastion of industry whose creations brought untold wealth into the coffers of the lords of Nostramo before the Night Haunter brought destruction upon that world. Here, where the servants of the undying Emperor had reported only ruins and silence at the end of the Horus Heresy, we had hoped to find a treasure of salvage; a wealth in stored resources perhaps, or storehouses of arms and munitions still waiting to be claimed by the warriors of the Horus Heresy, maybe even that most sought after of treasures, the encoded secrets of a lost STC template.

#### LOG FILE 946-ALPHA

From orbit the appearance of the once great world dampened our enthusiasm, for whatever disaster had overtaken Cairn had rendered the towering hives into little more than blasted rubble. Our only consolation was that the sub-surface levels of the old hive cities appeared to be intact, sealed closed by the rubble above them and likely kept safe from scavengers. Intending to explore these artificial caverns, we set down a shore party by arvus lander, twenty-three of the ship's armsmen, many of whom were veterans of Solar Auxilia pattern regiments of the Imperial Army, myself, and such of the ship's engineering crew that had been initiated far enough into the mysteries of the Machine Cult that they could identify any items of true value.

#### LOG FILE 947-ALPHA

We made our second foray into the artificial caverns beneath Cairn, with tech-adepts moving in the wake of the armoured auxilia and utilising powerful but temperamental lumen-caster arrays to ward off the smothering darkness and to catalogue any potential finds. What we found within those caverns haunts me to this day: charnel pits that stretched beyond what light our equipment could cast, the squalid and hideous detritus of the cannibalistic nightmare that had consumed the survivors of Cairn. Every chamber and passage held the macabre remains of those dragged down by what had once been fellow citizens, and in the shadows about us, those who remained and the terrible progeny they had begot lurked and waited to feast upon us. Some units of Solar Auxilia were lost in that bleak realm, when their lumen-casters failed and the inhabitants of this shadowed realm overwhelmed them; of these souls we found little but bloody bones and torn fragments of their armour, the wounded dragged away as stock for their gruesome larders. Whatever humanity had once existed in these creatures, it had long since been extinguished by more than a decade trapped in the black pits beneath Cairn, forgotten by an empire consumed in civil war and never to return.

#### LOG FILE 946-BETA

Breaching the rubble that sat atop the lower levels like a shield proved more difficult than we initially imagined; it almost appeared as though someone had purposefully demolished the hive above so that it would form a formidable barrier to either entering or leaving the lower levels. We were forced to utilise specialist breaching tools in order to force entry, but could excavate only a small entrance lest we collapse the unstable layer of rubble above us. Within minutes of forcing a path into the hidden vaults below Cairn, we were attacked by a wave of stinking, hollow-eyed, emaciated creatures that we initially thought some debased xenos breed.

They came as a terrifying silent horde, scrabbling from the opening we had torn in the rubble, blinded by the weak light of Cairn's distant sun. The engineering adepts that had manned the cutting equipment were swiftly pulled down by the wretches and even our outlying sentries, veteran soldiers armed with modern lasrifles, fell prey to the numberless swarm. The creatures were only driven back at length by the disciplined fire of our armsmen, who retreated from the entrance way to form a firing line on more open ground, abandoning some few of our party to save the greater proportion. In this brief engagement, though we were to emerge triumphant, much of our limited supplies of ammunition were exhausted. In the wake of the attack, we determined that the creatures that assaulted us were in fact human, the remains perhaps of the original inhabitants, ruined and broken by life in the rad-soaked darkness of the ruins beneath Cairn. Rather than risk our depleted numbers in the pitch-black warrens beneath Cairn, I elected to bring down reinforcements from orbit, having fortunately bartered the considerable authority of my Writ of Trade for the services of the depleted 83<sup>rd</sup> Memlok Cohort of Solar Auxilia, who had previously been stationed at Gulgorahd for refit.

#### LOG FILE 947-BETA

As we scoured this lightless hell we discovered artefacts of Cairn's fall, but these were not the valuable tech-salvage I had hoped to procure. Instead they were the remains of Cairn's executioners: bolt shells and fragments of Legiones Astartes battle plate in a black and red heraldry that was unknown to me. The doom that had befallen the world had come at the hands of Legiones Astartes other than the Night Lords. Further artefacts of this distant catastrophe were uncovered by our tech-adepts as we cleared the lower caverns, most often items of Legiones Astartes' wargear rendered non-functional by damage and discarded, all in the same unknown heraldry pattern. Within the deepest vaults of the fallen hive we finally uncovered the remaining data archives, stored within a vast cogitator matrix of truly ancient design that had, to our great dismay, suffered extensive damage. It seemed that the deformed survivors of Cairn's fall had long since destroyed the caretaker automata that had once tended the data-engines, perhaps intending to silence the great machines themselves, and now nested in that complex in large numbers.

All our tech-adepts were able to coax from the machine's depths over the course of several fraught days of interminable invocations and ritual, the Solar Auxilia vigilant all the while to the ever-present threat of the creatures that dwelt in the depths of Cairn, were a series of recordings and data entries. While these provided little in the way of technical information, they did give a disturbing insight into the final days of Cairn. This world, it seemed, had not been merely destroyed, but rendered into a warning for other systems in the sector; its armies utterly annihilated and its population herded into the depths of its hive cities before they were collapsed and sealed, the price of their defiance. These tactics match well the descriptions of the Dark Compliance inflicted by the Sons of Horus on a number of worlds during the Horus Heresy, yet Cairn was already sworn in service to the Warmaster's cause through their Night Lords masters and would seem an unlikely target for such terror tactics.

#### LOG FILE 948-ALPHA

Clearly shown in a number of pict images are Legiones Astartes warriors, each outfitted in baroque variations of the older Mark II battle plate once common during the Great Crusade. The heraldry in use by these warriors is unlike any I have seen before, a deep black with the pauldron and helms daubed in a dull red. Many of the Mark II armour's segmented plates have symbols inscribed on them, not in a regimented pattern that would indicate marks of rank or status, but almost at random and in the form of primitive tribal runes or gang symbols like those once worn by the Sons of Horus. Many also bear the raptor and lightning bolt symbols of the Emperor, an honour usually reserved only for those Terran recruits who fought by His side on the battlefields of Ancient Terra and the other worlds of that system, and often considered a sign of Loyalist allegiance. Trophies of fallen enemies, in the form of fragments of weapons, and skulls and claws of xenos beasts adorn the warriors, many in forms I have never witnessed before, and I have seen much that few others have borne witness to in my travels, and small charms on carved green stone, similar perhaps to Terran jade. Most notably, each warrior displays a strange sigil upon the pauldron that would normally boast the symbol of one of the Legions, a circle ringed by jagged claws, ash-white on a field of red that matches the colour of dried blood, an ominous and sinister emblem.

#### LOG FILE 950-ALPHA

Wherever their loyalty, it was these warriors who plundered Cairn, for the information contained within the archives details a number of STC templates, construction matrices and other technological treasures that once were held by the rulers of Cairn, but now are notably missing. The world was broken and then stripped clean, before its attackers vanished into the chaos of the Horus Heresy. I can only wonder how many other worlds within the Nostramo sector fell prey to similar attacks by forces bent on their own gain and the creation of petty empires while the eyes of the mighty were fixed on distant Terra. I fear our expedition to the Nostramo sector may be doomed to fail.



#### TILL NIGHT'S SHROUD FALLS

For many years all that was known of the tragedy that befell the worlds of the Nostramo sector were rumours and half-truths, as those documents we have seen previously show. Yet in the later years of the Scouring, that last gasp of the Horus Heresy that has so bled the Imperium, new discoveries would come to light. On the bleak icy plains of Kalleth, deep in the ancient heartlands of Nostramo's old fiefdom, a ship was discovered, the *Shroud of Eventide*, the vessel of Ophion of the Kyroptera. This ship, destroyed in the same fires that had engulfed the Nostramo sector, still bore the touch of the enemy that had laid it low, stored within its frozen halls.

Marked by the IX<sup>th</sup> Legion for salvage during their initial return to the sector in 017.M31, it was not until 020.M31, in preparation for the coming edict of the Second Founding, that the warriors of the IX<sup>th</sup> returned to claim their prize. In the process of raising the hulk, the Blood Angels sought to extract and purge all remaining data records, cleansing the taint of the ship's traitorous origins, and in doing so unearthed the final moments of the battle over Kalleth, of Ophion's last victory and another glimpse of those who brought him low.

#### +++ IX<sup>th</sup> LEGION (COGNOMEN: THE BLOOD ANGELS)

+++ FIELD REPORT, DECAHELION-9972330.703/EPSILON

+++ 6-033-020.M31

+++ RECLAMATION TASK FORCE, NOSTRAMO SECTOR

+++ PRAETOR VARSARIS, 9<sup>th</sup> CHAPTER, IX<sup>th</sup> LEGION

+++ SALVAGE OF THE HULK DESIGNATED 'CRIMSON INTENT', FORMERLY 'SHROUD OF EVENTIDE'

+++ DEPLOYMENT ANALYSIS

+++ As ordered by Legion command, elements of the 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter, the Angels Vermillion, have supervised the raising of the wreck of the *Shroud of Eventide*, and seen to the cleansing and re-dedication of the hulk that it may serve the sons of Sanguinius that yet remain with honour. Our task here is complete, yet some of the information retrieved from the hulk's damaged data cores warrants a separate report, that it may find its way into the hands of those who might recognise its import.

#### +++ PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: SALVAGE REPORT

+++ The wreck itself was surprisingly intact despite having weathered planetfall and, judging by the scars on its armoured flanks, at least one intense void duel. However, the internal data mills have suffered severe damage, apparently intentional sabotage conducted after the craft had crashed. It is only through the labour of the Mechanicum's lex-mechanics that so much usable, if fragmentary, data was retrieved. This information regards the final battle of the *Shroud of Eventide*, the most pertinent sections have been reproduced herein, and a full copy of the data appended to this report.

#### +++ TIME-STAMP 002033011.M31, PRAETOR OPHION OF THE KYROPTERA, THRAMAS HIGH ORBIT

+++ The sector is in utter disarray. As Sevatar and others have feared, much of the Legion has fallen to infighting and the building of petty empires, and several of those who deem themselves commanders have disputed my authority as one of the new Kyroptera. Fortunately, I have sufficient force of arms at my disposal to disabuse them of such notions, permanently.

Having made appropriate examples of the dissenters, a sizable force of my brethren gathers under my banner. I plan to travel further into the sector to rally all those who yet have the will to fight and return to aid Sevatar at the Warmaster's side, where our numbers may tip the balance of power.

Rumours persist of a rogue Crusade fleet, returned from the outer rim, the dregs of Akam-sorhas, which ravages the outer worlds, exploiting the infighting amongst the Legion to strike at weakened targets. Yet, as they make no attempt to hold worlds in the Emperor's name, or to join those elements of the Loyalist Legions that persist along our borders, their allegiance remains uncertain. Regardless, they will be destroyed that my task may be accomplished without delay.



### +++ Time-Stamp 223033011.M31, Praetor Ophion of the Kryptera, Kalleth Local Space

+++ We have been engaged at the isolated world of Kalleth, a dozen cruisers emerging from the Warp to assault my small advance squadron, perhaps seeking to end my mission to gather reinforcements for the Warmaster or perhaps simply an opportunistic attack. I do not know. By their markings they are the rogue fleet we have heard rumour of, and the communications we have intercepted name them the 'Ashen Claws'.

Caught within the planet's gravity well we have little room to manoeuvre. The *Shroud of Eventide*, as the largest craft in the fleet, has moved to intercept the enemy and act as a shield for the smaller craft and transport barges. Some of the captains have argued for retreat and the abandonment of the slower transport craft as an acceptable loss to preserve our remaining ships, but I will not countenance this. If we can but hold out and repulse this initial assault then we shall claim the advantage.

However, in order to deter rebellion amongst the ranks I have ordered that the majority of our complement be deployed on the surface of Kalleth, under the pretence of securing their safety in the coming battle. These battalions are under orders to fortify the refuelling stations there and prepare to repel enemy assault. Truly, I fear for our Legion's unity of purpose were I not present to enforce the will of the Kryptera.

### Akum-Sorhas

The Akum-sorhas Cluster is a small group of habitable worlds on the very edges of the Ghoul Stars, a harsh stellar wasteland haunted by erratic pulsar stars and the most invidious of xenos breeds yet discovered by Mankind. The region was originally brought to Compliance by the Luna Wolves in the waning years of the 30<sup>th</sup> Millennium, but erupted into open revolt in 002.M31 under the influence of the so-called Unsighted Kings, a xenos breed of psyker-parasites that infested much of the population of those worlds.

Seeking to obliterate both the rebellion and the stain on his record of flawless conquests and Compliances, Horus, but recently crowned Warmaster, summoned the Space Wolves, Iron Warriors and Raven Guard to join his own Legion on the battlegrounds of the cluster. The campaign itself is renowned not for the victory that was eventually achieved, but for the massive casualties sustained by several of the Legions during the final battle, ordered by Horus to mount a direct frontal assault on the rebellion's key fortress.

In the aftermath of the battle, several of the participating Legions, notably the Raven Guard, Luna Wolves and Iron Warriors, were to contribute warriors to a number of Great Crusade fleets dispatched further into the uncharted reaches of the Ghoul Stars to locate and eradicate any further xenos nests before they could trouble the Imperium.

### The Ashen Claws

The term 'Ashen Claws' is not one immediately known to scholars of that most tumultuous period of the Imperium's history, the Horus Heresy. It is not listed as the title of any existing chapter, battalion or fleet within the eighteen Legions at the outbreak of the civil war, nor is it a title taken by one of those ad-hoc formations that survived to the war's end. Indeed, a casual search of the Imperial Archives on Terra reveals but

### +++ Time-Stamp ~6>\*19@~1.M31, #Alle^ O+<It

+++ Heavy fires on all decks and severe damage to the *Shroud of Eventide*'s thruster arrays. We no longer have the power reserves to maintain orbit or bre>& free of the gravity well, however encircling squadrs of the fleet have crippled two (#emy craft and the Ashen Cl#w fleet is falling back. As expected, they have no stomach for a battle of attrition and pr>#er to retreat than a>cept losses.

Some of their craft w#re able to dep#-t troops on the surface of Kalleth to strike at our #->'s there and the figh#\*ng rages still. Reports from those #>#ps below identify the foe as ghosts of the XI-#<\* Legi#\*, the last survivors of a fallen #-gion.

Nothing c#- now prevent our crashing on K>#leth, our vi#\*<ry achi#ved. Ho-#>er I fear that shou-- I fa#l to surv#@e the f-#et will fragment and n#>>e of those I have rallied will r#-h the Warmaster's si#<.

a few possible references: an Acheron class battleship that was designated the Ashen Claw, a Solar Auxilia cohort whose unofficial designation was the Ash Claws, and the patriarch of the Knight House Moritain, whose honorary titles include 'He whose claws rend all to ash'.

Obviously, none of these are linked to the unknown Legiones Astartes force that ravaged the Nostramo sector in 011.M31. However, those with access to the sealed vaults of the archives might uncover two further references that offer a potential answer to the puzzle. The first of these comes from the Legion records of the XIX<sup>th</sup> Legion, in the times before Corax took command and the warriors of the XIX<sup>th</sup> fought under the patronage of Horus Lupercal. These records note that among the chapters of the XIX<sup>th</sup> Legion there was a chapter by the name of the Ashen Claws, a name carried over from the Xeric tribes that these fierce warriors were recruited from. The Raven Guard of modern times hold no record of these warriors. Indeed, of the original Terran recruits of the Legion little is known, as it seems Corax bore a measure of ill will towards the Terran recruits within his Legion, both their time under the tutelage of Horus and their heritage as slaver-warlords in the asiatic dustbowls of Ancient Terra marked them out as unworthy in the eyes of their new master.

The second reference comes from those remaining fragments of the Luna Wolves' records, much of which were lost or destroyed by either war or the over-zealous loyalty of some scribes in the aftermath of the Battle for Terra. Within these volumes are several mentions of the Ashen Claw, apparently a favoured stratagem of the Warmaster himself involving a flanking manoeuvre around a sacrificial unit left in the open to attract the enemy's full might. Many engagements from the Great Crusade include units with the appended title 'Ashen Claw', indicating that it has been selected for the dubious honour of acting as the sacrificial unit at the heart of this strategy.



### +++ Commanding Officer's Remarks

Of the crew of the *Shroud of Eventide* little trace has been found. Less than a hundred corpses were noted within the wreck, and a mass grave located nearby, dating back nearly a decade, was found to contain roughly four hundred additional corpses, both human and Legiones Astartes. A ship of this class would require a crew of several thousand, and most likely rate a ship's company of several hundred Legiones Astartes at minimum. Signs of long ended conflict have been found elsewhere on the planet, as well as evidence of attempts to secure the bodies of the dead and the remaining wargear, yet the crash site remains mostly untouched.

Explorator teams assigned to the 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter did uncover signs that a handful of individuals may have survived in the deep canyons and ice caves of Kalleth, but certainly not in numbers enough to account for the balance of the missing crew. However, with the successful raising of the newly designated 'Crimson Intent', I see little reason to continue the investigation. If any survived the fall of their craft, they shall remain to rot on Kalleth. We shall depart orbit within days to complete the refit at the shipyards of Gulgorahd to rejoin those few of our brethren who remain.





#### AT EMPIRE'S END

Having scoured the archives of Terra over the course of many years and several expeditions to the lowest vaults seeking answers to the riddle of the Nostramo sector, it seemed that both the archives and the patience of their keepers had been exhausted by my search. Little more would be uncovered for some years as forces within our battered Imperium moved to secure their power and those of us who were seen as relics of a time now past were pushed aside. The next, and perhaps final piece of the puzzle to emerge would come from the distant halls of Ultramar, passed into my hands by a loyal acolyte whose travels had led him down distant trails.

Here presented is the record of one of the battles fought by those fragments of the Ultramarines that were separated from their brethren by the advance of the Word Bearers, left isolated after the fall of Honourum. In the final days of 011.M31, under the command of Arceas Odenathus of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter, the Ultramarines moved to assault the world of Desperation, on the coreward edge of the Nostramo sector, seeking to establish a zone of Loyalist control in the Dominion of Storms. While the result of the battle is of little consequence to my investigation, the circumstances that brought its conclusion have much import on its answer.



- +++ ULTRAMAR, SECURED DATA REPOSITORY 346/SIGMA, ARTICLE 4/997/011/31
- +++ INTERNAL LEGION DATA-MISSIVE #4-443-893
- +++ IDENT-IMPRINT: ARCEAS ODENATHUS, PRAETOR, 10<sup>th</sup> CHAPTER
- +++ PREFACE
- +++ A WISE MAN DOES NOT FEAR, A MAN AFRAID DOES NOT THINK. CODICIL 1:18

My Lord Guilliman,

As per your standing orders, I have compiled a full report of our recent actions for analysis and dissemination within the Legion, though I do not know when this missive may reach your person as the fighting turns bitter in the Dominion of Storms. Our recent success in battle against the garrison forces left by the Word Bearers and World Eaters has been marred by a defeat at the hands of the Night Lords and the loss of much of the 104<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup> Companies. The remainder of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter remains fit for battle, and we shall endeavour to harry the Traitors and force them to continue diverting manpower and resources to this segmentum.

#### +++ Section One: Of Preparations

##### +++ Ruthlessness is the Kindness of the Wise. Codicil 3:94

Having established our regional command post on the Loyalist Forge World of Gulgorahd, our initial strategic aim has been to create a buffer zone between Gulgorahd and nearby Traitor outposts. World Eaters units on Taur have been eliminated after being drawn into an ambush by Seeker squads from the 88<sup>th</sup> Company, and those Word Bearers companies on Caith Laes engaged in a protracted campaign of senseless genocide have been annihilated. The Night Lords stronghold of Kruun has fallen silent and Khrave nest ships have been sighted in orbit, and though it pains me to leave these foul xenos to butcher and raid unchallenged, we do not have the manpower to fight both the Traitor Legions and reavers from the Ghoul Stars. This has left Desperation as the only major enemy stronghold within striking distance.

Our last intelligence on Desperation, provided by stragglers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Legion fleet in 010.M31, placed twelve companies of Night Lords at Desperation as well as a small fleet contingent. As per our established doctrines, I mustered a force exceeding estimated enemy strength by at least fifty percent before engagement: ten companies of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter, seven taghma of the Taghmata Gulgorahd and a mixed company of Blood Angels and Iron Hands. This force was mustered on the recently captured world of Yaelis in 997011.M31 and subsequently moved to begin the assault in good order and provided with ample supply and fleet support.



#### +++ Section Two: Of Battle

##### +++ Wars are Won or Lost when the Battle Lines are Drawn. Codicil 18:03

On arrival at the outskirts of the Qetesh System, we found its fifth world, Desperation, to be more heavily defended than expected. Nine capital class craft and a score of lesser ships were set in defensive positions in high orbit, obviously placed to interdict long range bombardment of the planet and apparently well prepared for attack. Our own fleet, composed of six Legion strike cruisers of various types, five Gulgor assault barques and supporting small craft squadrons, held only a slight advantage in numbers. Yet as we retained the strategic initiative, our foe bound to protect the planet over which they orbited, it was decided that the fleet would press the attack. To that end the fleet was divided into three battle groups: two smaller battle groups composed of a pair of strike cruisers, each along with the majority of our more agile small craft, and a single larger formation that included all of the formidable Gulgor close assault ships and the largest of the two strike cruisers, a pair of Ancient Terran Excelsior class craft bristling with kinetic lance launchers. Utilising a variation of standard Legion envelopment tactics, the two smaller squadrons made probing attacks from opposite vectors, attempting to draw the defenders into spreading their forces thin at the centre, where the third formation waited to drive home a crippling attack at short range.

At first it seemed that the strategy had succeeded, with squadrons of Night Lords craft splitting off from the main force to counter our probing attacks. Indeed, the clumsy manoeuvring of the VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion craft would suggest a dire lack of a cohesive command element, with the sudden shifting of their formation causing some disarray within the fleet. With our flanking elements fully engaged, the main force of the fleet moved to engage the Night Lords ships, advancing at flank speed towards Desperation. Yet those squadrons not engaged with the smaller

battle groups, upon detecting the advancing phalanx of capital craft, either turned on our embattled flanking groups or fled local space entirely, making no attempt to defend the planet or engage our main force in complete defiance of established military logic.

There was little that could be done to avoid the loss of two of our cruisers, the *Amaranthine Vigil* and the *Heart of Valour*, overwhelmed by Night Lords vessels that closed to point blank range to cripple and board them. The collapse of one of the flanking actions left a clear vector for the remaining Night Lords craft to disengage and regroup on the far side of Desperation's binary moons, shielded from our guns by the two conjoined planetoids. Unwilling to retreat with the remains of the Night Lords fleet menacing our formation, the heavy assault craft began deploying landing craft and gunships, the initial stage of our conquest of Desperation. These craft took heavy casualties from surface-based defence lasers and macro cannon batteries, which the Night Lords had sited within the heavily populated hive cities of Desperation in an attempt to discourage orbital suppression with the spectre of collateral damage to the infrastructure and populace. These orbital-defence batteries were the primary targets of the initial assault groups, composed mostly of Ursarax cohorts commanded by the grim bronze-masked adepts of Gulgorahd, and Ultramarines of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Chapter, the destroyers of the Nemesis Chapter accompanied by hulking Leviathan pattern siege Dreadnoughts. As the assault groups fell prey to cunningly wrought ambushes, sabotage and entire towers rigged for destruction, the fighting bogged down into vicious, isolated street fights. We were also subject to near-continuous raids by small squadrons of Night Lords craft in orbit, targeting isolated craft and the lumbering transport barges. We were unable to fully suppress these raids while bound to protect those troops we had landed on the surface, placed in an invidious position by our own success in the initial stages of the assault.

#### +++ Section Three: Of Betrayal

##### +++ Hesitation in War is a Warrior's Greatest Betrayal. Codicil 6:14

At this point in the fighting, we had lost the initiative both in orbit and on the ground. In an effort to regain some momentum, the remainder of our landing craft were deployed, despite the destruction of less than half the enemy's ground defence batteries, heavy casualties being deemed better than complete failure. The additional forces began to shift the battle back in our favour, with Legiones Astartes of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter establishing safe zones for the deployment of heavy Gulgorahd artillery-automata. In orbit, the relative parity of strength between the two fleets left us with fewer offensive options, however, the intercession of a fleet of unmarked warships of Imperial pattern was to shift the balance in our favour. Emerging from warp space at some distance from Desperation, this unknown fleet, comprised of six capital class vessels, older Hoplon pattern assault cruisers of Jovian design, moved to engage the Night Lords ships. Caught between our own ships and the unidentified ebon-hulled craft, the Night Lords cruisers fell victim to a withering crossfire that left them in ruins. Only three craft managed to escape the conflagration, using the deaths of their brethren to mask the signatures of their engines as they pushed them to overload in the effort to escape our effective auspex range.

Now in control of orbital space above Desperation, we attempted to make contact with the craft that had come to our aid. The battle-scarred craft had disabled their ident broadcast signals, and did not display any sign of Legion heraldry on their hulls, yet their actions would have us suppose them enemies of the traitor Warmaster. Our attempts at communication, intended to secure their co-operation in the reduction of Night Lords' positions on the surface in the Emperor's name, met with curt rebuff, a communication transmitted across audio-only vox channels by a praetor who gave his name as Kirine, 'The Emperor consigned us to the care of a tyrant who sought to see us dead and forgotten; now the Raven Lord himself is dead, we care not to see the collar of servitude clasped around our necks once more, neither in service to the turncoat Warmaster or a failed empire.'



#### THE RAVEN'S CAST-OFFS

The Battle of Gate 42 has often been noted by scholars of the Great Crusade as the pyre that Corvus Corax hoped would burn his Legion clean of what he saw as the unwelcome taint of many of the Terran recruits. However, if such was his intent then it was not entirely successful, for some few among those who Corax had placed amongst the vanguard yet survived. Chief among them was Nerat Kirine, the brutally efficient Terran praetor of the Ashen Claws Chapter, whose inspired hit and run tactics had brought his veteran Legionaries through the fires of battle bloodied but unbroken. Several thousand of the 18<sup>th</sup> Chapter, the Ashen Claws, remained, near every one a Terran-born veteran of the old XIX<sup>th</sup> Legion, and many were angered by the callous disregard the Raven Lord had shown for their lives and record of loyal service to the Imperium.

These warriors were marshalled in the aftermath of the battle, but not to receive the honours bestowed upon those of other Legions that had fought in the battle. Instead, the Raven Lord formed the vast majority of the remaining veterans of the old XIX<sup>th</sup> Legion, along with those freed from Deliverance whose crimes and demeanour left them ill at odds with the Primarch's perception of his Legion, and formed them into Crusade fleets. These fleets were dispatched into the dim stars of the north-eastern galactic fringe, known to explorers of the time as the Ghoul Stars, there to bring the light of the Emperor to the dark at the edges of the galaxy, far from the eyes of the fledgling Imperium and the brooding lord of the Raven Guard.

#### +++ Section Four: Of Defiance

##### +++ Doubt is the Greatest Weapon of our Foe. Codicil 3:48

Despite such slander of the Emperor and His chosen Primarchs, the craft under Kirine's command did not attempt to target or engage our ships, but instead approached the planet and began to launch their own landing craft. Eager to avoid a three-way conflict, those Loyalist craft in the area were ordered to keep their distance unless locked onto by targeting augurs, however my attempts were to prove to be in vain. The dropcraft of the cast-off Raven Guard vectored towards the principal armorium of Desperation's sprawling hive, an area mostly under the control of pathfinder units of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter. These dropcraft disgorged a host of Legionaries Astartes clad in worn battle plate bearing a heraldry of black and red. Organised into small fast moving units, these Legionaries Astartes engaged in a brutal strike and fade assault against the Ultramarines in the area. Though far from unprepared for such a treacherous attack, for we had all learned lessons from the fall of Honourum and Calth, the sheer ferocity of the assault carried it home. With our surviving squads falling back to sound defensive positions, the Raven Guard were able to occupy the armorium, bringing up their landing craft with the apparent intent of looting the store of arms and munitions kept within.

For the next few hours, the site of the armorium became the focus of the fighting on Desperation, with the Raven Guard mounting a stubborn defence of the complex, now besieged by fresh Ultramarines units from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Chapters, and with Night Lords terror squads launching probing attacks and ambushing isolated units of either side. All the while, a stream of Raven Guard shuttle craft emptied the armorium under the watchful eye of squadrons of Fire Raptor gunships and smaller fighter craft, whilst in orbit a tense war of manoeuvre saw our capital ships attempting to force the enemy out of geo-synchronous orbit of the armorium. While we were unable to displace the enemy cruisers, and remained unwilling to endanger our remaining undamaged capital craft, a breakthrough in the defences thrown up around the armorium was forced by the Destroyers of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Chapter, their Leviathan Siege Dreadnoughts battering down the hastily erected barricades under heavy fire. With a hole punched in their fortifications, the Raven Guard were forced into a fighting retreat, evacuating as many of their units as possible as the noose was closed. The last of their units, a squad of Cataphracti Terminators, sealed the doors of the armorium behind them, though when it was later prised open they were gone, having most likely teleported to the waiting cruisers above. In the wake of the Raven Guard's evacuation, Night Lords units began a hive-wide counter-attack, surging forwards into the exhausted Ultramarines units across the city.



#### +++ Summation

##### +++ Knowledge is the Truest Weapon in a General's Arsenal. Codicil 9:23

In defence of our own troops, we were forced to evacuate those forces on the ground, suffering heavy casualties in the process. By necessity this left us unable to oppose the retreat of the Raven Guard cruisers, which left orbit in possession of a sizable store of munitions, but having paid for them in the blood of their fallen brethren. On Desperation the Night Lords once again controlled the hive city, which had been mostly reduced to rubble during the day's hard fought battles, and our only recourse was to bombard the city from orbit. While we assume that many Night Lords units were able to seek sanctuary in pre-prepared shelters in the hive's lower levels, the remainder will be combat ineffective and unable to leave the ruins with their fleet destroyed or scattered.



## CARRION BIRDS ALL; RED PINIONED AND BRIGHT-EYED

*'...And as Ilium falls to dust and ruin, so does the inevitable doom of Rhome hasten towards us.'*

*Attr. to the Helac warlord Skypio Aemilanos*

When gathered in hand, the various hidden, buried or lost scraps of history make plain a number of causes for the destruction found in the Nostramo sector at the end of the Horus Heresy. Prime among these being the actions of a fleet of Raven Guard turned not to the service of the Warmaster's dire schemes, but rather to a mandate of greed and mercenary intent.

Full research into the origins of the Ashen Claws fleet notes that they were despatched on-Crusade in 002.M31, the commander of the expedition, Praetor Calvus, a Deliverance survivor known for his loyalty to Corax. What fate Praetor Calvus met is unknown, but it is likely that by the return of the Ashen Claws in 011.M31 he had perished. With an original complement of thirteen capital craft, a score of smaller ships and some 4,000 of the Legiones Astartes assembled from the survivors of the fighting in Akum-sothos, the fleet was a significant force, even assuming that nine years of Crusading had taken its toll on the fleet. In fact, it is this slow bleeding of resources and manpower over the course of their exile that likely led to the tactics

displayed in the few records we have of their actions, all of which seem to have been focused on the acquisition of resources and munitions.

However, despite the focus of those accounts we have seen on the actions of the Ashen Claws, it is highly unlikely that they could be the sole cause of the collapse of the Nostramo sector. Indeed, the sources noted point out the other key factors in this end result, those being an influx of xenos attacks as the Imperial presence along the tumultuous borders of the Ghouls Stars waned, and the infighting amongst the fractious and leaderless Night Lords. That these were only exacerbated by the raiding and destruction left in the wake of the Ashen Claws is undoubted, but without these factors it is unlikely that the relatively small number of Raven Guard could otherwise have achieved such success. Indeed, this phenomenon was far from rare throughout the Imperium during the years of the Horus Heresy, innumerable sectors fell silent, some never to be heard from again, and it is likely that many of these were the result of other rogue

formations of Legiones Astartes unable to reconcile loyalty to either their Emperor or the Warmaster.

Whatever the causes, the fragmentation of the Nostramo sector would have dire repercussions for the north-eastern fringes of the Imperium. At the recommendation of the Divisio Militaris, the High Lords of Terra issued an edict declaring the Nostramo sector and those sectors adjoining it a forbidden zone to Imperial craft, save those with special dispensation. The borders of the Imperium contracted and a great swathe of space was abandoned to the ravages of xenos predators and the few scattered bands of rebels that lingered on remote worlds. With the final fate of the Ashen Claws undocumented, it may be that they also lurk somewhere within these forbidden stars, that far from the eyes of the Imperium those worlds brought to Compliance by their final Crusade still survive. I wonder perhaps, in the face of the changes wrought on the Emperor's realm in the wake of His hollow victory, if perhaps they chose the wiser course.

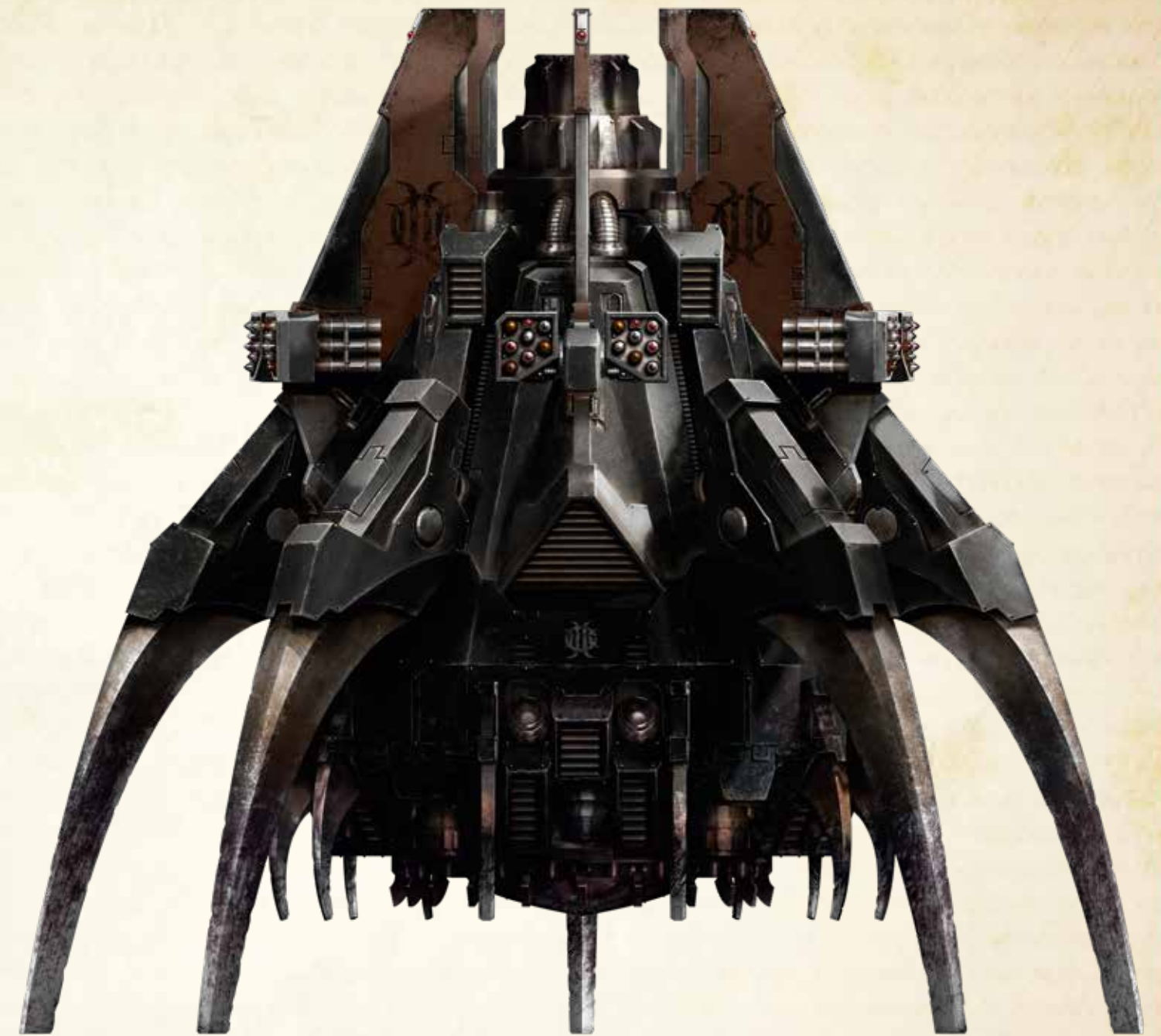
### ADDENDUM

Long years have passed since this report was entered into the archives of the Divisio Militaris, a relic of times past that has been reborn anew to serve a changed empire. Few in this new empire care to look back at what once was, and of those even less have time for the forgotten mysteries of a war now passing into legend and myth – yet some few still harken to the words of an old man whose time is fast drawing to a close. Passed to my hands by those who still remember the days when the Emperor walked among His people is this one last piece of the puzzle, a warning perhaps that in the dark beyond, there yet remain those who are unwilling to accept the new order that now overtakes the Imperium.

FAR RIM MONITORING STATION OCCLUDUS, 108<sup>TH</sup> INDEPENDENT COMPANY, CAPTAIN CRYSOS MORTURG COMMANDING. DEEP RANGE PATROL REPORT, 063.M31  
As part of a routine sweep along the outer edges of the restricted sectors of the Ghouls Stars, the strike craft of Spectre squadron intercepted a fragment of an Astropathic message bearing Imperial code-memes of ancient provenance. The transmission date appended to the message would have it as being less than a year old, but this must be in error as no human realms are known to have survived in the Ghouls Stars. As such, the nature of the message leads us to believe that it may be some kind of warp echo, perhaps dating back to the days of the Great Crusade, although it shows none of the degradation that usually accompanies such echoes.

A full transliteration follows:

*'...Fourth Company reports the asteroid settlements of the Orcades brought into Compliance as per the edicts of the Second Crusade, one thousand souls claimed as bondsmen for the Legion that it may grow and prosper. Expect our return to Atargatis within the month for reassignment.'*



### ASHEN CLAWS KHARYBDIS ASSAULT CLAW

UNIT DESIGNATION UNKNOWN  
BATTLE OF KALLETH

Scattered pict records recovered from the wreck of the Night Lords cruiser *Shroud of Eventide*, depict this assault pod among the squadrons of boarding craft launched against the Night Lords vanguard that held the line over Kalleth. Such was the stubborn defiance of the VIII<sup>th</sup> Legion crew, that when the broken hulk of the *Shroud of Eventide* descended into the clouds of Kalleth there were over two dozen boarding torpedoes and assault craft latched onto its skin.

Though lacking in certain patterns of more recently issued equipment, the raiding fleet known as the Ashen Claw seemed well supplied with these oft-maligned craft, deploying squadrons with abandon during the closing phases of the void battle above Kalleth. Operating in the deep void and within the atmosphere of Kalleth as both transport and heavy gunship, these craft appear to be one of the favoured transports for veteran infantry units among the Ashen Claw.

# ASHEN CLAW ORBITAL INTERFACE ASSAULT GROUPS

In all of the scant reports of encounters between forces engaged in the grand wars of the Horus Heresy and the piratical warband known as the Ashen Claw, the forces of that enigmatic group have displayed a marked preference for the deployment of orbital interface craft, almost to the exclusion of other types of support unit. While, as with all the Legiones Astartes, the armoured post-human infantry of the Space Marines remains the core of their operations, all of the great Legions supplement these forces with a variety of support units, each intended to fulfil a specific goal upon the field of battle.

Not so the Ashen Claw, whether by necessity or tactical preference these raiders and pillagers deployed a variety of interface fighters, bombers and assault craft in

support of their fast moving infantry forces, shunning the slower moving armoured columns that typified some Legions.

Perhaps this extreme military specialisation is a consequence of the supposed limited manpower and material available to such a splinter faction of the larger conflict, reinforced by need and circumstance. If this is so then it must be assumed that the Ashen Claw had already prosecuted war in this limited fashion for some time in order to explain their experience and skill in the deployment of such ad-hoc formations and tactics. Honed perhaps to a keen edge on long since forgotten alien worlds in the deep black beyond the Imperium's borders, these tactics proved a deadly surprise to those forces they encountered on their return to Imperial space.

As evidenced by the few recorded instances of the Ashen Claw in combat, their ground assaults are preceded by a wave of interface fighters and gunships, Storm Eagles and Primaris-lightnings tasked with the elimination of anti-aircraft defences and key strongpoints. Following these craft are massed Kharybdis and Dreadclaw drop pod squadrons, packed with the fleet-moving infantry squads favoured by the Ashen Claw. These infantry formations rarely sought to hold ground, instead seeking to suppress and circumvent the enemy's main strength and defeat him piecemeal. The aim of such attacks was almost always the seizure of munitions and weaponry rather than conquest or simple slaughter, a focus that left more conventionally minded tacticians among the Legiones Astartes wrong footed when facing them in battle.



## ASHEN CLAW PRIMARIS-LIGHTNING

UNIT DESIGNATION UNKNOWN

XIII<sup>th</sup> LEGION DESIGNATION 'BLOODHAWK'

During the fighting on Desperation, this Primaris-lightning, its pilot unknown, accounted for four Ultramarines Xiphon fighter craft and decimated several ground detachments. Flying eight sorties over the course of the battle, its destruction was deemed a primary objective for the XIII<sup>th</sup> Legion forces, who identified it by the distinctive red wing art and its vindictive strafing runs over field hospitals. Post battle reports indicate the craft was intercepted by a wing of Fire Raptor gunships, but cannot confirm the destruction of the craft.



