

Entry Name: Divination





Librarian," intoned Domitian "proceed."

Tarchon bowed to Domitian, and turned from his captain, walking through the crowd of assembled warriors. They were not in ranks; they stood by their sergeants, forming a motley crew of horns, fangs, flesh, and claws. They were silent. Even with the low hum of Astartes power packs, the strike cruiser's hangar bay - usually a deafening maelstrom of sound - was eerily quiet, punctuated only by the librarian's footsteps. Each one echoed around the hangar and its dormant thunderhawks.

As he approached the Sacred Enneagon, Tarchon reached to his belt and drew his ceremonial knife. It was a simple instrument, unadorned, nothing more than polished, sharpened steel set into a wooden handle wrapped in leather. It was an instrument fashioned for a very basic purpose, but in his hands, in this ceremony, it became something more.

For the slave suspended above the Enneagon, there was no mistaking the librarian's intent. He saw the gleaming blade, and a final desperation set in - he thrashed about, desperately attempting to break the chains that secured his wrists and ankles. He could not beg - the steel cage locked around his head held his jaw and tongue firmly in place.

Tarchon reach the Enneagon. The slave's eyes pleaded with the librarian's cold, ceramite helm.

Tarchon pushed the dagger into the slaves abdomen, puncturing the man's diaphragm - the thrashing slowed, then died. The librarian drew the knife downward, sidestepping to avoid the gore as he completed the evisceration. He turned back toward the assembled warriors. The sea of blue ceramite and crimson helmets watched his every move with glowing yellow eyes. They were spellbound, fixated by his every move, even as he simply cleaned the blood from his knife with a cloth. He sheathed the blade and held the bloody rag to one side, feeling the rag taken from his grip by a serf. The company of warriors tensed as the librarian resumed his ritual. They knew Tarchon was about to begin the divination.

Tarchon's right hand pushed the hilt of his ornate force sword to one side so he could kneel unobstructed. His third eye, grown from the fusion of his helmet and his forehead, opened. He examined the entrails: *h ow* they fell, *w here* they fell, *w hy* they turned where they did. It was a pattern - a map - granted by the Architect of Fate to allow the faithful to perceive an aspect of His will; though this ritual, His followers might glimpse a facet of His all-encompassing design. Tarchon opened his third eye. He looked past the

illusory veil of the real, and perceived a moment of the immaterium.

Around him, the renegade Astartes leaned forwards, watching his every move as if hypnotised. They held their breaths as Tarchon swept his armoured hand over a region of the Enneagon, taking into account every turn, every trajectory generated by the viscera across the regions of the sacred shape. He followed the entrails across each boundary of the enneazetton and let their shape guided his spirit through the realms of the empyrean.

*He is in the realm of Tu'Luut, whose silver tower is swirling flame with shelves of burning metal holding volumes written in shadow on pages of blinding light. He flies to the fiefdom of Rnn'Ku'Lo whose head is a bird's and who uses his staff to creates eclipses so that he may steal the last brightness of dying stars. He is guided by the map to the lands of Xiannal'la, who sits on a throne of flesh that continuously alters its shape as the bones beneath break and reform. He arrives in a place where sound shines in a winding and ever-growing nautilus in colours that smell of growth and scratching and black marble. He is before the one who is to be his patron. Tarchon gazes at the being whose head is that of a stag whose antlers are extending and separating, repeating this process, each branch splitting in two, and then again, and again, and again, until the antlers become too small to see and all that can be observes is a haze of movement. Tarchon knows the daemon's name: it is Ramal'th'Adul.*

The Astartes watched the librarian reach inside the hanging corpse with his crimson gauntlet, pulling out the liver and holding it high above his horned helm in one hand.

*Ramal'th'Adul sees the offered soul. The neverborn opens its maw and breaths. It feeds, absorbing the offering, then exhales, it's sigh echoes in purple and searing, jagged, circles of blue. Ramal'th'Adul spreads its six wings. With single beat, they banish the nautilus and Tarchon sees they are now in a battle whose participants are formed from smoke and vapour. They solidify before him as the sounds of battle paint their colours on the scene.*

*Tarchon sees the Architect's design.*

*It is Domitian amidst loyalist Astartes in armour of gleaming red. An enraged and dread filled scream emanates from a red warrior - a Red Hunter - an exhortation to his brothers to protect the Inquisitor, to slay the traitor. A swipe of Domitian's claws, and a spray of gore that becomes dust in Tarchon's vision - a Hunter is felled. The next dies by Domitian's fist, the golden aquila on his breastplate shattered into fragments split*

*further by bifurcating fractures. A third tries to slash his claws across Domitian's back, but Domitian is already pivoting, despatching a fourth. Domitian rounds on the third and roars. It is not the metallic roar of an amplified vox caster. Domitian is changed; his helmet separates as he bellows his challenge; it opens to reveal fangs arrayed in an impossible geometry.*

*"Abomination!" A Red Hunters' captain is striding toward Domitian. "This ends now." Domitian faces the Red Hunter, and raises his gauntlets...*

*The vision is blown away and once again Tarchon stands before Ramal'th'Adul. The daemon gestures to the ground they stand on. Tarchon sees.*

The Librarian picked up a length of the entrails, and stared at them intently. A murmur rippled through the assembled marines. The threads of fate had separated only to be woven together again - they all converged on a single point, a singular event which was drawing everything to it.

*Tarchon sees. Domitian's armour is cracked, his pauldron is shattered, his cape is torn. Yet he stands over the broken Red Hunter. He is changing further - the yellow glow of his helmet's lenses has intensified; it is brighter, the raw stuff of the empyrean; it sears through the cracks in his ceramite plates. He is and is not surrounded by warriors in red; he is and is not surrounded by horned Astartes in armour of deep blue and gold trim. Regardless of what else comes to pass, regardless of who lives and who dies, Domitian stands; the Red Hunter is fallen.*

*Tarchon is seeing the completion of Domitian's... hecatomb. The duel is its culmination; the Red Hunter is its capstone. This is preordained. It is fated. It is the Architect's will.*

*The light from Domitian's armour intensifies. Tarchon hears the brightness but hears two conflicting notes. Then the battle is gone and he stands before Ramal'th'Adul again. The daemon nods its head, confirming the librarian's understanding. Tarchon bows in respect to his patron. He shuts his eye.*

Tarchon exhaled slowly, centering himself, allowing his consciousness to synchronise with his flesh. He knew in his bones what Ramal'th'Adul had revealed to him. Domitian's transformation was to be completed in the coming battle, but the neverborn could not reveal what Domitian would transform into. Domitian believed he was to be granted immortality. But his transformation could run another possible course...

"Speak, librarian." The hangar reverberated with Domitian's voice. Tarchon knew what

Domitian did to those who denied the inevitability of his apotheosis. *Don't lie.*

They were The Scourged - they heard all lies. They sensed the intent first. It began in the front of their heads, the pressure building until it felt like their entire brains were engulfed in flaming promethium. When the lie was spoken it broke their paralysis. The lies of entire worlds were carried by the warp's tides, and would bring the Scourged down upon them in a psychotic fury.

*Don't lie.*

Tarchon faced Domitian across a sea of expectant looks. Even in full armour the looks of his brothers were expectant - their subtle shifts in posture, their remaining a bit too still. *The behaviour of fanatics.* Tarchon often wondered whether he was the only sane one left.

The lies had taken their toll. All had reacted badly. Some launched suicidal missions, desperate to end the voices yet die in service to the Imperium. Others, like Tarchon, retreated into isolation - some were found in hidden areas of the ship, clutching their heads, rocking back and forth and babbling a nonsensical amalgamation of the falsehoods searing their minds.

But Domitian had reacted... differently. He felt no pain - the sensations *elated* him somehow. He felt the lies like he felt adrenaline coursing through his veins, like the fire in his belly that ignited prior to combat. He had been their Master of the Marches, but as the chapter shed its loyalties to the Imperium he had cast that title aside, remaking and proclaiming himself to be a champion of the Master of Fortune. He was convinced that fate had chosen him, and his conviction was magnetic. Domitian had attracted Astartes from other companies. Some captains tried to stop him and, when the Warp's currents brought a paralysing wave of lies crashing upon their psyches - when they were at their most vulnerable - Domitian had killed them. Around him had grown a cult of personality. His band of followers revered him, and they tolerated no dissenting opinions.

Even among his own followers, Domitian would savagely punish any slight - or any *perceived* slight - against him. His close circle of sycophants had known this for a while, understanding the price of disloyalty... and how Domitian might be assisted in perceiving disloyalty. Tarchon was in no doubt as to his own loyalty: he wished to leave - and possibly betray - this warband at the first opportunity. Anyone possessing psychic abilities would be able to feel his unease radiating from him.

That Domitian was not so 'gifted' was why Tarchon still lived.

“*S peak*, librarian” growled Domitian, his patience reaching its limits. Around him his bodyguard - clad in colossal suits of tactical dreadnought armour - tightened their grips around their brutal power mauls. The leather handles on their weapons creaked under the pressure. The subtle gesture was not lost on the librarian. In his darker moments, Tarchon frequently worried that Domitian would send these sycophants to his chambers, granting them permission to add his head to those impaled on their macabre trophy racks. More than one of their rogue brotherhood had been slaughtered by these executioners at Domitian’s command - armour, flesh, and bone crushed by savage blows from these mauls.

*Don’t lie.*

“Your ascension,” said Tarchon, choosing his words with care, “is possible. There are many lines of fate... what is necessary in them all, is that you slay the captain of these Red Hunters. To effect your transformation... he must be your final...” Tarchon groped for the right word.

“My final... offering.” mused Domitian.

Tarchon inclined his head. “Offer the soul of Red Hunter, Lord, and you will fulfill your destiny.”

He could see Domitian’s hunger. This Warlord’s obsession with his own destiny surrounded him with a palpable aura of excitement. Attunement to the empyrean was not needed to perceive Domitian’s swelling pride.

“Brothers...” Domitian prowled among his Astartes, “this battle will reward your faith in me... You have the... the *h onour* of bearing witness to a great transformation. You will see my destiny fulfilled.”

From anyone else it would sound absurd and deluded. But Domitian had an intensity about him - a *f aith*. The company waited like a coiled spring, awaiting the order.

“Board the thunderhawks!” Domitian commanded. “Take the fight to these Red Hunters and the filth of the Inquisition!”

A roar resounded - a roar that rapidly turned into a chant: “*D OM-IT-IAN! DOM-IT-IAN! DOM-IT-IAN! DOM-IT-IAN!...*”

Tarchon only watched as Domitian stood amongst his chanting followers and raised his gauntlets high.

