

Index Astartes



“Defenders of the True Faith”

The Emperor’s Blade
Chapter

By Lysimachus

Chapter name: The Emperor’s Blade
Founding: 11th
Chapter no: 394
Homeworld: Threskeia IV
Chapter motto: “Defensor Fidei Veritas”

Origins

Early in the m.33 a vast host of the followers of Chaos spilled forth from the region of space known as the Maelstrom under the command of Traitor Marines of the Word Bearers Legion. This unholy crusade swept unchecked through several sectors, pillaging and desecrating dozens of Imperial systems. On every world, loyal inhabitants were forced into slavery, labouring under their cruel masters to raise vast cathedrals in praise of the Dark Gods.

The response of the Imperium to this invasion was one of horror and fury, particularly among the pious members of the Adeptus Ministerium. The leader of the Emperor’s Church at the time, Ecclesiarch Benedictio II, demanded of his fellow High Lords that a punitive campaign must be launched immediately to free the faithful servants of the Imperium. Thus the mighty war machine of Man began to move into action.

A crusade force gathered from numerous regiments of the Imperial Guard and accompanied by many hundreds of preachers, confessors and priests to counter the Word Bearers unholy beliefs was placed under the command of one of the Ecclesiarchy’s own war leaders, Lord Militant Davram Tolemias, a man of both strong faith and strategic wisdom. Further to this, the High Lords declared that one of the Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes being formed as part of the 11th Great Founding would be assigned to act as a spearhead for the Crusade. Chapter 394, whose genetic lineage was that of the Primarch Roboute Guilliman,

was selected to join the fight against the Word Bearers and Captain Septimus of the Ultramarines was chosen to lead them into battle. Born and raised on the world of Calth, Septimus carried in his heart a particular hatred of the sons of Lorgar, making him an excellent choice to bring the Emperor's judgement against them. When he left Ultramar to take command of the Chapter he brought with him a priceless gift from the shipyards of his home world, a newly commissioned Battle Barge named "The Wrath of Guilliman" that would act as a Fortress Monastery for the crusading Astartes, along with several Strike Cruisers and escort vessels. Once embarked aboard their mighty ships, Chapter Master Septimus brought his cadre of veteran warriors to Mars, where the new Chapter along with the Crusade Fleet and Army under Lord Tolemius was mustering.

Even as Septimus arrived at the edge of the Terran system, a great and holy discovery was being made in the deep vaults beneath the Ecclesiarch's palace, a fragment of script apparently composed by the hand of the God Emperor himself. Claimed to have been written shortly after he had first learned of the betrayal by his most favoured son, Horus, it read:

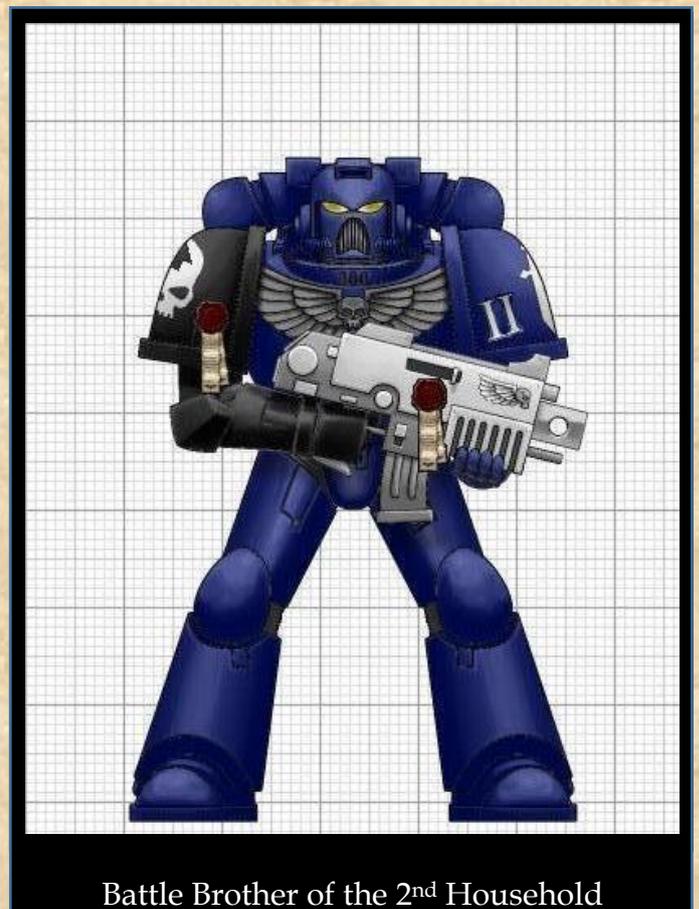
"If I do indeed sharpen my glittering blade,
And my hand takes hold on judgement itself,
I will pay back vengeance to my adversaries,
And render retribution to those who
intensely hate me."

That such a piece of writing should be found even as the Emperors finest warriors readied themselves to fight in his name could not be simple coincidence. The leaders of the Church insisted that the discovery was a sign of the Emperors blessing on their great undertaking. Benedictio II himself, although old and frail, personally carried the fragment to the gathering fleet, requesting of Septimus that he might speak to the assembled Battle Brethren. Septimus agreed and soon the

Ecclesiarch stood before the Astartes force. He spoke to his listeners of the ancient document and then read it aloud to them. As he finished reading, there was a hush in the vast Hall, and then he spoke again.

"You are the Emperor's glittering blade!
Carry forth his vengeance on his enemies!"

Immediately, there was an almighty cheer from the assembled Marines that echoed back and forth across the Hall. Septimus, deeply moved by the blessing, pondered silently for a few moments then spoke to his men. He told them that this discovery was surely not only a portent of great favour but also a revelation. It was clear to him that the Emperor was disclosing to the Chapter the name which they should take up - The Emperor's Blade. This announcement was greeted with an even greater cheer and over the following days the Battle Brethren began to mark their armour with their new badge.



The script was placed in the care of Lord Davram, to be used as a symbol to inspire the soldiers of the Imperium as they fulfilled their duty to destroy the Emperor's enemies. Days later, the Crusade Fleet moved out through the Segmentum Solar into the Ultima Segmentum, heading for the borders of the Maelstrom. As the fleet passed through Imperial systems, the priests of the Ecclesiarchy preached their message of the Emperor's divine glory and his holy retribution upon his enemies. As they did so, from among the populace of countless different worlds, a vast throng of devout volunteers gave themselves willingly to the Emperor's great cause. They came forth from every avenue of Imperial life in their hundreds of thousands; whole squads of Planetary Defence Force soldiers, brave hab-workers and even whole families of the fervent faithful, mothers and fathers with children at their hips. The local Churches of the Ecclesiarchy and other wealthy benefactors paid for vessels to carry these devoted followers of the Imperial Creed and soon the Crusade Fleet – formed of the potent ships of the Adeptus Astartes and the warships and bulk transporters of the Imperial Navy – was followed by a huge rag tag armada of smaller vessels that carried the pilgrim army behind them.

The Crusade

As years passed and the Malatoth Crusade, named after the Sector the Word Bearers had attacked, progressed towards the Maelstrom, Septimus began looking for new recruits to replace losses among the Emperor's Blade Space Marines. Among the innumerable host of loyal pilgrims that travelled behind the crusade army were countless families with sons who were of appropriate age. The life of such pilgrims was a harsh one, full of hardship, deprivation and frequent strife, making them ideal candidates for becoming Space Marines. Moreover, their faith and

conviction in the Emperor and in the crusade were ingrained from birth itself.

The campaign began well, with decisive victories against the Word Bearers vanguard taking back two Imperial systems in as many weeks. Septimus led his Marines with courage and skill, continuing their training in the strategies and strictures of Guilliman's great work, the Codex Astartes. However, once the Word Bearers recovered from the surprise of the first overwhelming attacks, the battles of the Malatoth Crusade became far harder and on Jotas IX, tragedy struck the Emperor's Blade Space Marines.

Brother Balius, a veteran Chaplain of the Ultramarines for over two hundred years and first Master of Sanctity for the young Emperor's Blade Chapter was attacked and killed by a cult assassin, presumed to be an infiltrator under orders from the hated Word Bearers. The Chapter mourned for many days. Master Septimus, full of sorrow and rage in equal amounts over the loss of his friend, was unsure of how to reconcile the loss of the Chapter's only spiritual leader. Balius had not yet appointed any other Marines to the honoured position of Chaplain who could take his place as Master of Sanctity, but according to Septimus' own strict interpretation of the Codex, while the Chapter Master could assign Marines to serve within the Reclusiam, only the Master of Sanctity could appoint a Marine to the post of Reclusiarch. Finally, after much deliberation, Septimus accepted that there was nothing he could do but request of the Ultramarines that a new Master of Sanctity be selected and sent to take the place of Balius. With a heavy heart at the dishonour of having to ask for help so early in his career as Chapter Master, Septimus commissioned one of his veteran cadre, Brother Ardias, to carry Balius' Crozius Arcanum and Rosarius back to Ultramar to be taken up by his replacement.

Perhaps more than any other event, the death of Balius would change the nature of the

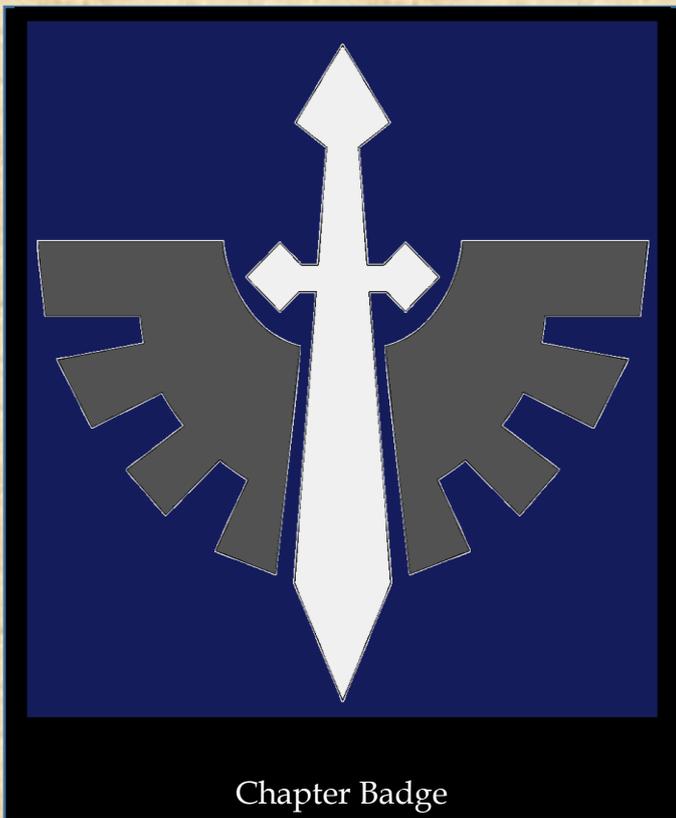
faith and fraternity with the Church of the Ecclesiarchy.

The Warden of the Faithful

One of the first initiates chosen from the pious followers of the crusade was a youth named Malchus, a strong young man with a fiery zeal for the Emperor's glory. As Malchus progressed within the Chapter, he came to build a reputation as both a talented warrior and a masterful tactician. However, it was his skills as an orator of the Imperial Creed that became truly famed among the Battle Brethren, his rousing rhetoric inspiring his squad mates to greater and greater feats of heroism in the Emperor's service. In time, his abilities brought him to the attention of Septimus himself, who inducted him into the 1st Company and honoured him with the guardianship of the sacred Chapter banner.

Soon after this the Chapter Master was able to observe first hand his subordinate's faith and conviction, when Malchus' stirring oratory led the Brethren in one of their greatest and most decisive victories of the entire campaign. Septimus recognized that in Malchus he had a devoted priest who could care for the spiritual needs of the Chapter until such time as a Chaplain arrived. He honoured Malchus by assigning him to the Chapter's non-existent Reclusiam and commanding that he repaint his armour from Chapter blue to pure black, marking him out for special service to the Emperor. Though Septimus could not give him the title of Reclusiarch, he did create a new position within the Chapter HQ, that of 'Warden of the Faithful'. Though he considered himself utterly unworthy of the honour, Malchus humbly accepted his Lord's commission.

Two years later the Crusade against the Word Bearers reached its climax as the Emperor's Blade drove their hated enemies back into the Maelstrom. The final battles took place in the Threskeia system, the loyalist forces under



Chapter Badge

Emperor's Blade Chapter, though such a change would not become apparent for many centuries. Brother Ardias would likely not return for many years but the spiritual needs of the youthful Brethren must still be met, especially when they must face the unholy dangers of the Chaos Gods. In his humility, Septimus knew that while he was well able to teach the Brethren the value of the Codex Astartes, he was not a spiritual leader. Therefore he spoke to Lord Militant Tolemias, who suggested that some of the priests of the Crusade army be assigned to minister to the Battle Brethren of the Emperor's Blade. While Septimus knew that these servants of the Ecclesiarchy did not hold to exactly the same beliefs as his former Chapter did, they were men of faith and their ministry would give his brave warriors courage and strength to face their dark enemy.

As long years passed and more and more new members of the brethren were selected from the pilgrim fleet, the combination of their background and the teaching of the Adeptus Ministorium gradually brought the Emperor's Blade Chapter closer and closer in

Septimus throwing the traitors back from each of its inhabited worlds in turn. However, tragedy was to strike the Emperor's Blade once again at the very moment of their triumph.

On Threskeia VI, Septimus personally commanded the besiegement of the last of the Word Bearers fortifications, a dark bastion as much a temple as a citadel. The Traitor Marines held their position for many days but were finally forced to admit defeat. In order to escape the encircling Imperial battle lines, they summoned a vast horde of their warp-spawned servants and attempted to break out of the siege. Septimus led his men forward in an attempt to bring final vengeance on the leaders of the unholy crusade, bringing them to battle outside the walls of the bastion. The Emperor's Blade Master fought bravely, slaying dozens of the enemy, but was mercilessly cut down by a mighty warrior in the blasphemously ornate armour of a Dark Apostle. The Chaos Marines escaped, fleeing deep into the Maelstrom and the Malatoth Crusade finally ended.

More than one hundred and fifty years after their mission began, the Emperor's Blade had achieved their goal, but it was at great cost. Septimus was gone. The Chapter mourned for their lost Master for several weeks but even as they did they knew that they must select his successor and continue in the Emperor's work. This Crusade may have been completed but there would always be more enemies to bring His judgement upon.

When it came to choosing Septimus' replacement, the devout Brethren were of one mind; that pious Brother Malchus, the Warden of the Faithful and already the Chapter's spiritual leader, should also lead the Emperor's Blade in battle. Malchus was honoured by his brothers' trust in his abilities but at first refused, citing the holy Codex and stating that officers of the Reclusiam should technically only command warriors inducted

into their number and therefore one of the Company Captains should be chosen as Master, with Brother-Captain Saul of the 1st Company being the obvious choice. Saul replied immediately that he was certain that Malchus was the right choice, that his unmatched zeal for the Emperor would make him the best leader for the Chapter, and that if it would satisfy the requirements of the Codex, he and all his company would gladly join the Chapter's Reclusiam. The other nine Captains and all the Battle-Brethren roared their agreement and Malchus finally acquiesced to their demands. At that time, in accordance with patterns laid down in the Codex Astartes, the entirety of the Chapter signified their loyalty to the new Chapter Master and the Reclusiam by repainting their right arms and shoulder pads in pure, holy black.

Homeworld

When the Malatoth Crusade ended, the Imperial army that had fought in it was disbanded, different Regiments of the Imperial Guard being sent on to battle in countless other war zones. Davram Tolemias, however, would not leave the vast pilgrim army that had faithfully followed the Crusade for so many years to make the long and dangerous home alone. After much deliberation he decided that he and they would remain on Threskeia VI and that together, on the very ground where the Word Bearers dark citadel had stood, they would construct a great cathedral to honour the Emperor's glory and commemorate the great victory his forces had fought so hard to achieve.

The Emperor's Blade also moved onwards. Malchus declared that while the forces of the Emperor had been busy fighting the hated Word Bearers, worlds across nearby sectors had suffered the attentions of other enemies, vile xenos like the brutish Orks or arrogant Eldar. These too must receive the Emperor's

judgement. However, before leaving the Threskeia system, Malchus was approached by Lord Tolemias. Davram explained that at the very heart of the great shrine he would construct it was his intention to place for all time the fragment of script that had given the Chapter its name, where it could be seen and honoured by devout citizens from across the Imperium. Further to this, he made a petition of Malchus that he would be honoured if the new Chapter Master would allow the remains of his predecessor to be laid out in state within the Cathedral, out of respect for all Septimus had done in the prosecution of the Malatoth Crusade. Malchus was delighted with this offer and accepted it immediately.

The Emperor's Blade Chapter left the Threskeia system and did not return for more than a century. At this time, satisfied that all opposition in the Malatoth Sector had been crushed and that the area was safely back under the rule of the Emperor, Malchus led his men back to Threskeia VI to pay their respects to their first Master and to recruit new Marines to replace their losses over the last hundred years.

When he arrived it was to find the Emperor's holy shrine completed in all its glory, with Septimus' remains lying as promised in a position of honour within its sacred walls. Malchus was taken aback by the sheer blessedness of the hallowed building and the world around it. Threskeia VI had become a Shrine World in every sense and its people, former pilgrims all, had dedicated themselves entirely to the Emperor's service and to care for his Church. They lived a life of self-imposed asceticism and hard labour, along with an unending program of religious activity. In addition, every year thousands of other devout pilgrims from across the Sector and beyond travelled to worship at the great Shrine.

Malchus had known that the pilgrims would be an ideal source of faithful aspirants, as

The Age of Apostasy

The Age of Apostasy was a dark time for the Emperor's Blade. Before High Lord

Vandire took power, the Chapters relationship with the Ecclesiarchy could be compared to that of a loyal retainer serving an ancient and wise master.

However, as Vandire's cruel acts of tyranny caused him to fall further and further from the ideals laid out in the Imperial Creed, Philemon, the Warden of the Faithful at that time, was forced to make a difficult decision. Like many Chapter Masters during that terrible time, Philemon cut his ties with Holy Terra, ordering his men to take full control of their home system, along with several of its neighbours.

While still protecting the God Emperor's realm from his enemies all along the edge of the Maelstrom, the Emperor's Blade closed their borders to the servants of Vandire and the rest of Mankind. This state continued for several years, until the rise of Sebastian Thor. The Emperor's Blade were among the first to join with his Confederation of Light, their goal to restore the true faith to the Church of Man. After many years of fighting this goal was realised and the Imperium returned for a time to a state of internal peace and unity.

Since that time, however, the relationship between the Ecclesiarchy and the Emperor's Blade has changed. Never again would the Chapter blindly follow the Church as an infallible servant of God, but now the Warden of the Faithful would have to carefully consider the requests of the Ecclesiarchy to ensure they were in harmony with the Imperial Creed. While this has led to some minor conflict between the Chapter and the Church, for the most part the bond they share is still strong and enduring.

they had for long years past, but now he realized that there would be no better place for the Emperor's Blade to settle permanently than their spiritual home. He ordered that the Chapter would remain in the Threskeia system and select a suitable site to build a Fortress Monastery from which to carry forth the Emperor's word against his enemies. After much consideration, Malchus chose Threskeia IV, an inhospitable world lacking an atmosphere or any form of life that would provide an ideal defensive position as well as a perfect space dock from which the Emperor's Blade fleet could take to the stars. Here the Chapter built its great Fortress Monastery, both terms an accurate description of the structure that is both a mighty and a holy place. The Emperor's Blade continue to recruit from the populace and visiting pilgrims of Threskeia VI, such youths providing an excellent source of truly devout aspirants to become worthy members of the Emperor's divine instrument of retribution against his foes.

Beliefs

Given the origins of their recruits and the Chapter's early history, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Emperor's Blade wholeheartedly accepts the Imperial Creed as expounded by the Holy Church of the Ecclesiarchy, acknowledging the Emperor for what he truly is, the Immortal God of Mankind. They also venerate all of the loyal Primarchs as the greatest of the Imperium's Saints, in particular their own Primogenitor Roboute Guilliman. The Marines of the Chapter view themselves as an instrument of Divine judgement, the 'glittering blade' in the Emperor's mailed fist with which he metes out vengeance on his enemies. They are in the fullest sense warrior-priests, pious and devout in their worship and acting as the Emperor's ministers on the battlefield, bringing salvation to the faithful who hope in him and death to those who deny him.

As such, the Chapter has a close relationship with the Adeptus Ministorium, often fighting at their request beside the Church's Ordo Militant, the Adeptus Sororitas, when anything may threaten their loyal adherents across the Imperium.

In contrast, the Emperor's Blade's relationship with other Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes has often become less than cordial, almost all refuting their claims of the Emperor's Divinity. While the majority, and particularly those who follow the Codex Astartes closely, will happily fight beside the Emperor's Blade, many view them with something approaching contempt for their belief that the Emperor was more than a man. This disagreement has never led to outright conflict, but often when a Company of the Chapter fights alongside another Astartes force, champions will be chosen to duel for the honour of their Chapter Cult.

Combat Doctrine

On hearing of the Emperor's Blade's utter devotion to their God, one might picture them as a rampaging force of fanatics, hurling themselves en-masse against the heretical foes of the Imperium. However, this could not be further from the truth. Chapter Master Septimus instilled in his Chapter a deep and abiding reverence for their Primarch and his work, the Codex Astartes. The Emperor's Blade view these tomes as a holy book, inspired by the undying Emperor himself, and therefore make war in perfect accordance with its words, although all the while declaring aloud their unending devotion to their God. They march to battle under great banners proclaiming the Emperor's glory and decorate their armour with numerous purity seals and litanies expressing their faith. The Brethren also paint the casings of their weapons, most commonly the mighty bolter and cleansing flamer, in pure white, signifying that the warfare that they undertake is both holy and righteous.

Over the course of the seven millennia since their Founding, the Chapter has faced every kind of foe plaguing the Imperium. However, their primary concern is guarding the borders of the Maelstrom and defeating the pirates, renegades and Chaos-worshipping traitors who emerge from its swirling currents to pillage and destroy. Therefore, while not becoming overly specialized, the Emperor's Blade has developed an aptitude for boarding actions, learning to engage and destroy their enemies before they can become a real threat to the worlds of the Malatoth Sector.

Chapter Organization

The Emperor's Blade Chapter is for the most part organized exactly as the Codex Astartes dictates, with the Battle Brethren, or 'The Faithful' as they are commonly known as among the Chapter, being formed into 10 Companies of one hundred Space Marines, plus their various command and support units. Each Battle Brother of the Emperor's Blade Companies aspires to be found worthy to join the Chapters 1st Company, home to its greatest heroes. The veterans of this Company, 'The Anointed', are the most courageous, skilled and devoted warriors within the Chapter and are therefore honoured by being allowed to use its limited amount of Tactical Dreadnought Armour, holy artefacts that are as much battlefield shrines to the Emperor as they are suits of armour.

Since the days of Malchus himself the entire Chapter has technically been part of its Reclusiam, signifying this by painting their right arms pure black but, oddly for a Chapter so devoted in its faith, the Emperor's Blade have no Chaplains. The reason for this stems from an event that occurred a little over a century after the Emperor's Blade had moved into their new Fortress Monastery on Threskeia IV. Finally, after long years of travelling, Brother Severian, Chaplain of the Ultramarines had arrived to take up the post

of Master of Sanctity. Malchus eagerly received his new brother and conducted him on a tour of the Chapter's home. While Severian was initially impressed, after a time he began to grow concerned at the Chapter's view of the Emperor as a God. He mentioned this to Malchus and the Warden of the Faithful responded coldly. The disagreement quickly became an argument, with Malchus finally declaring that Severian could leave as soon as he wished. Severian was shocked, demanding to know who would care for the spiritual needs of the Brethren. Malchus is said to have laughed and challenged the Chaplain, stating that the least of the Chapter's 'Faithful' could equal his religious understanding. If they could not, Malchus would place himself and the rest of the Chapter under Severian for religious instruction. Severian accepted and an opponent was chosen for him, a young Brother named Epaphras, newly attached to the 7th Reserve Company. In the Great Hall, before all the members of the Chapter on Threskeia IV at the time, they disputed for long hours, matching wits on the deeper doctrines of the faith, understanding of religious texts and quoting of litanies. Finally, Severian had to accept that he would never change the deeply held views of the Chapter and he left Threskeia IV in a rage, still insisting that Emperor's Blade were misguided fools and that they would fail and die without the ministrations of the Chaplaincy.

From that time onwards, the Emperor's Blade has had no Chaplains, but every Battle Brother must follow the example of Epaphras and be fully versed in the Imperial Creed. Squad leaders, Company Captains and the Warden of the Faithful himself must therefore, in addition to being strategic commanders of their troops, be paragons of faith and virtue worthy of leading them in the worship of their God.

Like any Chapter, the Emperor's Blade utilises a large Armoury of weapons and

vehicles and these are cared for and maintained by the Master of the Forge and a legion of other Techmarines, Tech-Adepts, serfs and servitors. Battle Brothers trained to provide for the Chapter's needs in this way often become isolated, rarely leaving the Chapter Forges except when they must accompany their war machines into battle. They are viewed as strange and set apart by their former Brethren, simply because their devotion to the God Emperor of Man is now by necessity balanced with their loyalty to the Machine God of Mars.

If the Marines of the Armoury are seen as set apart from the rest of the Chapter, the Astartes serving as part of its Librarium are viewed with outright suspicion. Paradoxically, however, the Emperor's Blade Librarians are at the same time held in a position of high honour. This stems from the Chapter's feelings about psykers and mutants, such as Astropaths or Navigators, sanctioned by the Emperor Himself at the dawn of the Imperium. The Emperor's Blade believe that being gifted with such power is a sign of a special link with the God Emperor himself. However, they also believe that power of such magnitude can only truly be the province of a God, not mortals, and that therefore these gifts are equally a potentially dangerous curse. Thus, while the Warden of the Faithful and his Captains will listen carefully to the words of the Librarium, they are also ever vigilant to ensure that no taint ever stain the purity of the Chapter's faith. The Librarians of the Emperor's Blade themselves tend to become among the most fanatically devoted to the Imperial Creed, as though to prove their continuing loyalty to the Emperor.

Geneseed

As scions of the Ultramarine Legion, the geneseed of the Emperor's Blade is that of the Primogenitor, Roboute Guilliman. The Chapter's deep respect for the Codex Astartes

includes a profound reverence for its numerous strictures regarding the initiation and genetic implantation of new aspirants. Thus, even after more than seven thousand years since its Founding, its warriors perfectly maintain the purity for which the offspring of their Primarch are known.

Several of the Chapter's recruiting Sergeants, along with numerous members of the Apothecarium, are permanently based on Threskeia VI in order to examine and select the youths who may eventually become part of the Emperor's Blade. The criteria for successful aspirants can be summed up in one word: purity. Firstly, physical and genetic purity are essential for such ones to be found worthy to be inheritors of the holy seed of Guilliman. Equally the candidates must be spiritually pure, proving themselves to be virtuous and devoted followers of the Imperial Creed and as such suitable to become defenders of the true Faith. Unusually for a Chapter of the Adeptus Astartes, the Emperor's Blade place more emphasis on such spiritual qualities over an aspirants level of combat training, believing that fighting skills can be learned but that the devotion needed to carry out the Emperor's Will, to the death if necessary, must come from the heart.

Battle-Cry

While the Emperor's Blade acknowledges that there are times when silence on the battlefield is necessary, for the most part when they go to war it is accompanied by the raised voices of all the Brethren present singing praises to the God Emperor, their vox-casters ringing out a chorus of hymns and psalms that form a marked counterpoint to the screams and death cries of their enemies.

"My Lord, surely not? They are as bad as the zealots of the Ecclesiarchy! Worse, for they should know better! I respect and value you as much as any man living, but their reaction to your arrival was... was... it bordered on heresy!"

Roboute Guilliman, Primarch of the Ultramarines and Lord Commander of the vast armies of the Imperium, sighed softly. "What else would you have me do, Marneus?"

"Censure them! Put them back on the right path! But do not reward their misguided notions of divinity with access to Cawl's technology?"

"I understand your concerns, my son. Their attitude concerns me deeply, perhaps more so than any others who proclaim my father's godhood... and I have my doubts about the many 'coincidences' that led to the Church's influence upon them... but we are in no position to be selective, especially where a Chapter of the Adeptus Astartes is concerned. The Indomitus Crusade needs warriors. Whether we approve of their beliefs or not, the Emperor's Blade are both capable and loyal. Do you see any reason to doubt either their proficiency or their devotion to our cause?"

Marneus Calgar, Chapter Master of the Ultramarines, frowned thoughtfully and then shook his head. If one ignored the hymnals and rhetoric - more suited to the Sororitas than the Astartes - the Chapter had proved itself as disciplined and effective in war as any of the Ultramarines' many Successors. Guilliman nodded back and continued.

"As to censure, I have given it in... similar... circumstances. I have seen what it can do. It can break a man, destroy him utterly. If we had chosen another path, found another way..." the Primarch paused pensively... "You cannot imagine how different things might be."

There was another long moment of silence. Finally Marneus bowed his head.

"As you will it, my Lord. The Emperor's Blade will have the Primaris technology. I will have the Tech-Adepts begin the transfer of data and supplies."

Guilliman nodded again and Calgar moved to leave. At the portal of his Lord's Sanctum, he turned back with a mirthless grin.

"Apparently they all want to cross the Rubicon, every last one of them! They're calling it a test of their faith and purity, whether they can accept the gift of the Emperor! Maybe the process will kill them all off and we can start over?"

Guilliman smiled back wearily.

"I hope not, my son. Whether their views are wrong and whether some day we can lead them back to the truth... for the time being, we need them."