

# ***DAWN OF WAR: ASCENSION***

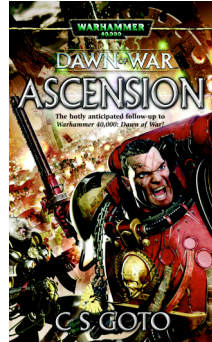
*The second book in the Dawn of War series*

*By C S Goto*

*Following the catastrophic losses during the Tartarus campaign, Captain Gabriel Angelos journeys to the planet of Rahe's Paradise in a desperate attempt to recruit new warriors into the Blood Ravens Space Marines.*

*However, once there, he discovers an archeological dig that could challenge all he thought he knew about the origins of the Blood Ravens. Under scrutiny from the Adepta Sororitas and under attack from his old nemesis, the eldar Farseer Macha, Gabriel is unwittingly threatening the resurrection of something ancient and terrible from both his and the eldar's past!*

*As the fleets clash above the planet's surface and all-out war is unleashed around them, Angelos and his allies must discover the secrets of the past, and it is a revelation that could destroy them all.*



## **About the Author**

C S Goto has published short fiction in Inferno! and elsewhere. His previous novels for the Black Library include the Necromunda novel Salvation and the Warhammer 40,000 epic Dawn of War.

***Dawn of War: Ascension*** can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

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The foundations of the monastery-outpost on Rahe's Paradise were heavy and deep, plunging down into the rock substructure of the planet's crust. Although the edifice was only an outpost, with a minimal detachment of Marines, it was still the largest building on the planet, and it needed every centimetre of its foundations, especially when it fired its huge air-defence cannons. Its jet-black, ornamented and armoured gothic walls towered over the rocky desert, dwarfing the outcroppings and boulders that peppered the sands.

Father Librarian Jonas Urelie had been based at the outpost for decades. He was old, even by the extended standards of the Blood Ravens, and he was not discontent with the slower pace of life on the backwater planet. In many ways it was an important post, being both the furthest reach of the Blood Ravens' realm and an important source of fresh warriors for the Chapter. After Cyrene and perhaps Trontiuix III,

Rahe's Paradise was the closest thing that the Blood Ravens had to a home; the locals were not technologically advanced, but they were an intelligent and passionate people showing excellent psychic potentials, which suited the librarian-rich Chapter.

Most of the planet was violently inhospitable for human life, with vast, scorching deserts fading into permafrost around the poles. What little life there was on the planet was concentrated into the hoop of massive mountains and volcanoes that swept around the crust, forming a perfect, diagonal ring that could be seen from orbit. The foothills were lush testaments to the fertile alluvial soils that the volcanoes spewed from time to time, and they received all of the scarce precipitation of the world, as the water vapour was forced higher into the atmosphere, riding up through the jagged passes of the mountains.

Life in the shadows of the mountains was manageable, although competition for the scarce food resources was intense. As a consequence, the various peoples of the range were fiercely xenophobic, distrusting anyone from outside of their groups, perhaps fearing for the security of their storehouses. Hence, the children grew up with weapons in their hands, always ready to defend their homes from the threats of others, or from the claws of the various wild beasts that also competed for food in the same restricted spaces. Life was hard in the mountains, but compared with life in the desert it was a veritable paradise.

One of the early Blood Ravens missionaries, the legendary Chaplain Elizur, had remarked to a local that this was a harsh place to live, and the local, perhaps not understanding exactly what the huge, god-like warrior had said, had thrown his arms wide to indicate the lush vegetation of the foothills and said: 'No, this is my paradise.' The local chieftain had been called Rahe. The scene is portrayed in a fresco in the great entrance hall of the monastery-outpost, beneath calligraphy in High Gothic: Rahe's Paradise, Raised out of Hell. The name had stuck, and the irony of it had been noted by many subsequent visitors.

It had been to the surprise of many that Jonas had specifically requested the posting; he had been a great warrior in his time, and his brethren could not imagine him fading away in the dark. Rahe's Paradise was certainly no humiliation – it was a worthy post for an aging Space Marine librarian – but there was little combat to be had, except for occasional ork raids and not infrequent civil wars. However, Jonas had harboured a desire to visit Rahe's Paradise for a long time: it

had something more important than war buried beneath its sands.

Since arriving, he had started excavating under the flagstones in the lowest level of the monastery, digging down into the foundations. At first he had tentatively lifted a few slabs and had dug carefully in small, controlled areas, not wanting to cause too much disruption and not confident that there would be anything to find. His explorations were not entirely official. But after only a few weeks it had become clear that there was even more down there than he had ever hoped.

Over the years, Jonas had lifted nearly all of the stones out of the cellars, even transferring the dungeons into one of the monastery's towers, which he reinforced with the stone taken from the floors. There was not much need for them on Rahe's Paradise, but it would have been unthinkable for a Blood Ravens outpost to be without detention facilities. Occasionally, local warlords might take a step too far in their competition with their neighbours, and then the Blood Ravens would step in. But, in general, the Marines left the local population to their own devices, only imposing their presence when it was time for the Blood Trials once again. At those times, the warring groups would pause and the finest warriors from all sides would congregate in the ancient amphitheatre, cut into the volatile volcano, Krax-7, which loomed up behind the imposing shape of the monastery. And during the trials themselves, the animosity between the contestants only made them fight harder.

Most of the ground that had once been the floor of the lowest level of the monastery was now an elaborate dig, roofed in by what was once the ceiling of the dungeons and cellars. Gradually bringing in more machinery, Jonas had cut down through the sand and rock, shifting tonnes of debris and effectively lowering the base level of the building by nearly ten metres. The excavation had become so deep that he had felt it wise to buttress the great walls of the monastery to prevent his digging from weakening their massive structure.

Eventually, the site had become too extensive for him to manage on his own, and he had sent out a request to the Order of the Lost Rosetta, an Order Dialogous of the Adeptus Sororitas, ostensibly affiliated with the Ecclesiarchy. Sister Superior Meritia had answered the call.

The Blood Ravens had an ancient agreement with the Ecclesiarchy that Sisters of the Lost Rosetta would be seconded to them on request, for the purpose of mutually beneficial historical research. In fact, the

Blood Ravens were one of the few Chapters of Space Marines that maintained better than cursory relations with the Ecclesiarchy. Most Chapters kept the priests at arm's length, disapproving of all the dogma and the rituals that subordinated everyone absolutely to the God-Emperor. The Adeptus Astartes had a much more complicated relationship with the Emperor – he was simultaneously both more and less than a god: he was not exactly the ineffable, untouchable, pristine figure at the centre of Ecclesiarchal law, but rather he was a father and a hero – the historical founder of the Space Marines, friend and battle-brother to the great primarchs. In many ways, the Emperor was the first and greatest of the primarchs themselves, and the Adeptus Astartes were living incarnations of his will – angels of death, born of the Emperor himself. They had no objections to the Ecclesiarchy preaching absolute obedience to everyone else in the galaxy, but they themselves required no reminders of the debt or duty they owed, and they were certain that they owed nothing to the bureaucrats and priests of the Ecclesiarchy.

However, the Blood Ravens were serious about scholarship, and to that extent they had something in common with certain parts of the Ecclesiarchy. As long as questions of dogma could be subordinated to questions of history, things tended to progress smoothly, more or less. It was to their mutual advantage to suspend their grievances and, more importantly, it was to the benefit of the Emperor and to the history of his glorious Imperium. Everyone could agree that such glory was a good thing. At the most fundamental level, that was the commonality that kept much of the sprawling Imperium together, despite the variances and differences between its myriad and multitudinous parts.

Between them, Jonas and Meritia had uncovered dozens of Adeptus Astartes artefacts from the dig. To their mutual fascination, many of them dated from before the recorded date of the arrival of the Blood Ravens on the planet, from before the construction of the monastery-outpost itself, or even the now legendary Blood Trials that were conducted by the missionary-chaplains Elizur and Shedeur. Even more incredibly, they had discovered the suggestions of the remains of another fortress that had been built on exactly the same site before the construction of the current monastery. The archaeological evidence suggested that the previous structure was at least co-extensive with the present buildings, and that it had been home to a considerable number of Marines.

Jonas had heard rumours about lost Blood Ravens fortress monasteries before, when he had been still a young librarian, little more than a scout, and he had always thought that they might hold the secrets of the lost period in his Chapter's history. However, when he came to Rahe's Paradise he never really believed that he would discover something like this.

'Meritia,' said Jonas quietly, sweeping his hand across a slab of engraved rock and sending up little clouds of dust. 'Meritia, have you seen this?'

The Sister was kneeling to the ground inspecting the cracked remains of what had once been an auto-reactive shoulder plate – its red sheen suggested that it was from a long dead Blood Raven, but the Chapter markings had weathered away, so she could not be sure. She rose to her feet and turned to face Jonas, letting her ragged grey hair flop over her face. She was not an old woman; her hair was prematurely grey. It had been shimmering and black when she had first arrived on Rahe's Paradise, but she had awoken one morning after a restless night of violent dreams to find her hair glittering and grey.

'What is it?' she asked softly as she strode over towards him. She always felt as though she should whisper on site – it was like being in a library.

Jonas dug his fingertips down into the sand next to the tablet, feeling along its length for a crack. With a slight nod of satisfaction, he found some leverage with his index finger and drove it underneath the stone. With a faint grimace of effort, the librarian prised the slab of rock off the ground; it pivoted along the far edge, as though hinged, and cascades of sand fell away, revealing the full extent of the object. The tablet was nearly two metres long, perhaps a metre wide, and at least ten centimetres thick.

As she approached, Meritia shook her head in amusement: Jonas hadn't even noticed that he had just lifted more with the index finger of one hand than most men could have done with the strength of their entire bodies. It was remarkable, in fact, how quickly the excavation had been able to proceed because of Jonas's considerable abilities. Space Marines and their librarians were not designed with archaeology in mind, but, in the hallowed halls of the Lost Rosetta Convent, there were whispers of admiration about the military efficiency with which the Blood Ravens executed their scholarship. Between the two of them,

Jonas and Meritia had made more progress on this dig than an entire team of Ecclesiarchal researchers could have done.

The dirty, red sand fell easily off the stone lid as Jonas tilted it, revealing curving patterns of engraving beneath. For a moment, Jonas cast his eyes over the cursive inscriptions, taking instant and careful note of the patterns that he recognised and those that he didn't. Most of the intricate detailing was already familiar to the librarian from other finds that they had discovered in the site; it was ornamentation that would have been familiar to any Blood Raven – swirls of High Gothic and stylised imagery of wings. However, the designs on the artefacts uncovered in this dig had a different quality from those found elsewhere in the galaxy. The images were broadly the same, but there were some subtle differences – different angles of curvature, extra strokes added to the wing-shapes, and some slightly altered characters in the script, a more archaic form of High Gothic. If anything, these designs were simply more beautiful than those Jonas was used to – less purely functional – and these artefacts were older than anything the Blood Ravens had ever come across before.

Meritia gasped, and Jonas snapped his attention away from the carvings on the stone and followed her line of sight down into the small chamber that he had uncovered beneath it. The stone slab had evidently been some kind of lid on a long, slender casket. It had been well sealed, and not a single grain of sand had found its way inside. Laying in the centre of the uncovered space was a shimmering black tablet, nearly a metre in length and perhaps half a metre wide. It seemed to contain a universe of miniature stars, glittering and winking in a complicated darkness.

Entranced, Meritia could find no words. She had never seen anything like it before; it just seemed to draw her in, capturing her eyes and her mind in an eternal instant. She had read about such materials, and had heard accounts from other Sisters who had been fortunate enough to glimpse it, but she had never dared hope that she would come so close to it herself. Legends told that it was fashioned out of the very fabric of the warp itself, rendered material by the impossibly ancient technologies of the eldar. And the warp contained no time – it was utterly timeless. This manifest fragment might be older than the galaxy itself. Her mind seemed unable or reluctant to grasp what she was seeing.

‘Is that wraithbone?’ asked Meritia, still staring at the object with wide, brown eyes. It seemed to thrill as she spoke its name, drawing her down to it. With aching trepidation, she stooped to look at it more closely, crouched under the lid that was still propped delicately against Jonas’s finger.

The librarian closed his fingers around the edge of the heavy stone slab and lifted it clear of the exposed interior of the casket, placing it carefully onto the ground with one hand. Then he knelt softly on the sand next to Meritia and stared at the tablet. ‘Yes,’ he said simply. ‘It is wraithbone.’ Jonas had had dealings with the eldar before, and this was not the first time that he had come across their mysterious material.

As they watched, the surface of the glistening tablet started to shift and stir. Little marks began to appear, like gashes through the fabric of space itself, revealing glimpses of something unspeakable beyond. But the marks stretched and swirled, swimming into different configurations before finally settling into a distinct pattern.

‘Those are eldar runes,’ said Meritia, squinting slightly with concentration as she tried to decipher their meaning.

‘Yes, but ancient ones – different from any I have seen before,’ replied Jonas, unable to work out what they said.

There was a long pause while the two scholars knelt at the side of the grave, gazing silently at the entombed alien object that they had unearthed in the remains of an ancient fortress.

‘We should take it to the library,’ suggested Jonas eventually, breaking the spell. ‘Perhaps we will be able to translate it there.’

Meritia nodded absent-mindedly, her thoughts lofty and distant, but then she voiced the question that was also niggling at the back of the Blood Raven’s mind. ‘Jonas. What is it doing here?’

*More CS Goto from the Black Library*

DAWN OF WAR  
SALVATION  
WARRIOR BROOD