

# PAX IMPERATOR

Eighty seven twelve lies breathless under the last hammer blow of the summer's heat, brought to compliance in a bloody extravagance of war and death.

The Pax Emperor stands in the rubble of a city whose delicate spires once reached elegant and ornate fingers towards the cloudless skies. Scorched lines and grooves, the desperate efforts of the city's gun emplacements, pepper the observation platform high above. The air here is thin, and my respirator clicks on with a low hiss. At this height, the shattered glass of buildings and landmarks glitter like minerals in so much fine sand. We are detached from the world, separate and aloof. We are carried across the field as the angels of old legends, and the tread of our feet brings doom.

The princeps has stopped screaming now. A fine beaded sweat covers his body, and his breath is ragged. This time, in his spasms, he has driven his teeth through the soft flesh of his lower lip, and blood has pooled behind the starched collar of his uniform. His eyes are hollow and unfocussed, and exhaustion is writ clear upon him. Those of us who wonder about such a thing have found nothing but rumour in our hushed whispers. We remain steadfast, keeping this strangeness secret to ourselves, but to see a man so decorated become only a circuit within the mind of a raging beast is unsettling in the extreme.

I call it a beast, although never aloud. The Pax is the last of its maniple; a lone god engine accompanied only by the ghosts of fallen brothers, and when battle is joined our commander opens his mouth for the machine spirit to scream its loss through him.

Every battle is the same; writhing and shrieking until the violence is passed. Is it rage? A restless and uncontrollable desire for vengeance? Or perhaps fury that the peace of its existence has been disturbed. Certainly it has *brought* peace – quelling the armies of a dozen worlds, leaving the shattered remains of the impure to be brought back into the light of Terra's truth.

Our name is what we bring. As above, in the hushed stillness of the moderati, so below where the dying and the wounded lie side by side. It is peace at a price, but one which we pay without argument.

It is the Pax Emperor.

It is the Emperor's peace.