

5.889.472.M39

OM-ICT

SB: [REDACTED]

DH[VII]

[Begin transcript]

Subject DH[VII]: Oh, you must be quite confounded to resort to this. To call me here. And yet, not so confounded that you did not know who to summon. That, or you are extraordinarily lucky. Out of all the untold teeming denizens of the Warp, you plucked the one single solitary entity who could answer your question, and deposited it here in this delicious material shell. Anyway, yes. Hello. My name is Ashtar. Perhaps you already knew that. I certainly know you, Inquisitor Tehren, and all your little retinue hiding behind this psycurium shielding. And I know your question. Who or what are the spectral Sororitas haunting the Imperium, appearing and disappearing without warning, indiscriminately attacking friend and foe? I also know, though you didn't ask it, what your second question will be: how do you stop them? Well, as I said, I am uniquely suited to purging you of your ignorance.

Inquisitor, your clearance is not high enough to view the old records, but records do exist - there was once a very minor order of the Adepta Sororitas called the Order of the Phantom Flame. They'd grown out of a frontier system called Hitaka that received minimal contact and attention from the Imperium, as the system contained few habitable or valuable worlds, and the shrine world of Hitaka Primus was beautiful, but too far from Terra and too near the purview of the galaxy's myriad horrors to become a popular destination for pilgrimage. The Hitakans valued their independence, their heritage as artisans, and their jewel of a homeworld. But even when the Ministorum established a foothold on the world, the Sisterhood that sprouted there held to a Hitakan virtue that is certainly as odious to you as it is to me: temperance.

They were devoted to their faith, but not fanatical. They were accomplished soldiers, but not vicious. They were clever, but not scheming. They believed in the divinity of your corpse god and were not afraid of martyrdom, but they never fought or killed or died without thought or consideration, as so many Sororitas do. They allowed themselves to pursue secular art forms, and they did - writing poems, painting landscapes, singing wordless hymns, even weaving their own white robes with a singular technique that gave them a pearlescent sheen. Now, I love artists. They are most delectable prey. But these simpering fools were the worst form of mediocrity. They had *potential*, but they consciously wasted it every day of their pathetic lives. They refuted my influence. They denied themselves excellence. They could have woven living tapestries to melt the mortal eyes that looked upon them and sung litanies to tear the materium asunder, but they chose not to innovate. They chose safety, and satisfied themselves with the predictable and the dull and the mundane. Worst of all, they eventually detected me, and placed wards about their fortress-convents to keep me out. Oh, I do not spark to hatred easily, my dear audience - that is not my domain - but I hated the Sisters of the

Phantom Flame. If I could not have them, I would destroy them. And to that end, I turned to my favorite agents of intolerance.

There was an inquisitor of the Ordo Hereticus by the name of Marek Belheim. I am sure you've not heard of him. He was a staunch puritan, infamous in the Warp for the psychic stain of bellicose self-righteousness he left on the Immaterium wherever he went. He once executed a scribe for delivering a report with an unfortunately crass misspelling, taking it for an attempt at daemonic corruption. He was perfect for my purposes, so I arranged for stories of the Order to insinuate themselves into his orbit. It was embarrassing, really, how little effort it took to bend Inquisitor Belheim's gaze to Hitaka, and there he sent an agent to investigate these indolent, blasphemous women.

I made sure this agent had plenty of physical evidence to bring back to Inquisitor Belheim, cherry-picked for the sake of dramatic effect. Paintings; not of war or the saints or the Emperor, but of mountains, rivers, bustling streets, common people, fauna, and the blazing crimson-tipped flowers of foamy green for which the Order begot its name. Songs of simple pleasures, praising life and human existence instead of the martyrs. A sample of their lustrous white robes. In truth, I did not need to push Marek Belheim to get what I wanted. I just did it for fun. I made him see and feel things he could not explain in the works of those so-called warrior poets. Desires that thrilled and terrified him. He ordered an immediate exterminatus of the Order and its entire system.

Such an order is not to be made lightly, but so certain was Belheim that the Sisters of the Phantom Flame had fallen to Chaos that he proceeded in secret, with the aid of his closest and most fanatical allies. They struck Hitaka Primus with five stealth-shielded void ships, each disguised as a trade vessel and loaded with a virus bomb payload potent enough to wipe out the entire planet's biosphere. The Sisterhood, their landscapes, their flowers, all boiled alive that day. Their white robes rusted and browned with their own liquidated guts. All that remained were their bones and their charred wargear, and sometimes not even that. Job well done, I thought.

But the Warp is an inscrutable place. No doubt you summoned me because you thought I knew what happened to the Sisterhood next. No doubt you think they themselves became daemons, or that we are next door neighbors in the Immaterium. In truth, we are but islands in a vast unknowable sea, and when Marek Belheim murdered the Order of the Phantom Flame, he lit a volcanic inferno that birthed a new island, with a distant shore to which I have no map. He took the thing which was most precious to them - their lives. And their rage at this betrayal is so great that I believe it has taken physical form. Some of you have even seen it and lived.

They appear in a burst of green flame, in the same blackened armor and bloodied robes that sank with their corpses in the biotic sludge of Hitaka Primus. Their bolt shells are charged with spectral force, their flamers and meltas burning with ectoplasmic fury. Spirit energy courses over their bones and fills out a shape that generally conforms to their visage as it was in life, or perhaps just how they remember themselves. The most devout, and the most enraged, will be unable to maintain this semblance of humanity. Their phantasmal flesh burns

like a cold fire off their skeletal remains. Sometimes, they manifest to continue their charge of persecuting the Imperium's enemies. I'm not sure why they do this. Perhaps they are not fully conscious, and they simply play out their duties, like reliving a memory. Sometimes, they appear in order to exact their vengeance on the works of man. That, of course, is why you're here.

Marek Belheim has disappeared long ago. I know where he is, but you'll have to summon me again with a fresh host if you want to find him. He is not afraid of repercussion from the Inquisition, but he *is* afraid of the Order. As are you all, and rightly so. Some of you have had long lives, and one mind behind those shields is particularly familiar to me. That brings me to your second question, the one you didn't think to ask. Consider it a favor from your new friend Ashtar. If you want to stop them, I have the solution for you - destroy them. Shoot them, stab them, crush them. Yes, sometimes they get back up again, and yes, they always manifest anew eventually, but their weapons and armor are physical. The spirit animating them cannot be killed by any means I know, but if you destroy their equipment, you remove their teeth. I suppose they could repair their gear - that would explain why they appear so sporadically. Well! That's the best I've got. Just swat them away like flies and hope that you're dead or gone by the time they come back. If it's any consolation, they don't seem interested in killing civilians. Their hatred is laser focused on the Ministorum and the Inquisition. Perhaps if they were to enact their revenge on the former Inquisitor Belheim, they would simply...go away? Doubtful; it was not Belheim that defiled them and their verdant homeworld, but the Imperial Creed. Somehow, I think they know that. Doesn't help you lot very much, does it? They do say the value always meets the cost, and I did answer this question for free, yes?

[Subject terminated]

[Cleansing ritual engaged]

Tehran: Palladio, you were there. You knew exactly what that thing was talking about.

Palladio: Inquisitor, I only -

Tehran: You were the one who supplied Inquisitor Belheim with evidence of the Order's supposed corruption. Be honest with me.

Palladio: If that were true, my lord...will I be executed?

Tehran: Yes, but not today, and not for this. If we live long enough, we will all be burned for traitors eventually. I need not speed you on your way.

[End transcript]