

THE HORUS HERESY[®]

STRATAGEM

Nick Kyme

Aeonid Thiel is summoned to a mysterious audience with the Master of Ultramar

THE HORUS HERESY®

STRATAGEM

Nick Kyme

Aeonid Thiel is summoned to a mysterious
audience with the Master of Ultramar

CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Stratagem – Nick Kyme](#)

[About the Author](#)

[A Black Library Publication](#)

[eBook license](#)

STRATAGEM

Nick Kyme

Footsteps echo down a solemn hallway, foreshadowing his arrival. Phosphor lamps flicker, burning low, snapping at the darkness.

This is the second time he has walked this public gallery to the Residency, or so he has been told. The first time he did so accompanied by a squad of nine others clad in cobalt-blue. Now, he walks alone and his armour plate is not so marred by war. *That* suit is missing, and has been since he returned to Macragge. He had intended it as a gift, but it is lost now to whatever petty bureaucracies hold sway over Ultramar, taken by servitors the moment he arrived.

A procession of eyes is upon him. They stare from marble countenances, half hidden by alcoves, and he cannot help but feel the judgement in their gaze. He is not given to whimsy – it isn't practical – but he wonders if they recognise him from the other that claimed his name.

A portal looms ahead, rendered in steel and brass. Gold engraving describes the foremost Battle King of Macragge on the large wooden doors. It is Konor, father to Roboute Guilliman. The artisan has captured a stately but fierce aspect in the work. Perhaps this is what awaits Thiel on the other side.

He finds it curious that this place holds with tradition and retains the old cultural style of Macragge. Everywhere else now claims a broader aesthetic, as if stone and steel can speak to the alliance of many Legions and make them one under the unified ideal of Imperium Secundus.

He wonders if this is why he is here, to discuss his role, to suffer further censure for what he has been doing since coming back from Calth.

Two of the Invictus guard the doors, bringing him back to the present.

‘Relinquish your weapons, brother-sergeant,’ barks one.

Their purpose is singular, clad in all-encompassing XIII Legion Terminator plate, visors down, bladed polearms barring entry. They are protectors, but there is an underlying tension to their movements and the tone of their words that hints at a past failure.

They take his battle-helm, that he has clasped in the crook of his arm. He hands it over without hesitation.

The blade upon his back, the longsword, they let him keep. This is also curious. Another unanswered question to add to the many already posed. So many theoreticals – it should not make him this edgy.

At an unseen signal, the guards step aside and the doors yawn open. Thiel steps quickly across the threshold before they shut behind him again.

Shadows persist in the Residency. They have been allowed to remain in an effort to mask the damage. Less so are the scars of the attack, the fractional splinters still embedded in the wood of picture frames, or the dust from the shattered bust of Konor only recently restored. More is the pride of a primarch blinded by misplaced sentiment and hubris.

Roboute Guilliman cuts a powerful, impressive figure. The primarch is standing next to his desk. Fresh stone from the Hera’s Crown Mountains making up its impressive mass has been recently freighted to the Residency. Some areas are lighter, more lustrous than others. New replacing old. There are many scrolls and papers upon it – a diligent, exhaustive work.

‘Sergeant Thiel.’

The primarch gives only a curt greeting, though the brightness of his eyes suggests more warmth as they assess and calculate.

Ceremonial armour has replaced his battleplate, a deliberate statement of confidence over protection. The plastron carries the ubiquitous Ultima of the Legion, a pair of shoulder guards clamp a crimson cloak in place. He has neither bolt pistol nor blade.

I am not afraid, it says. This is, and shall always be, my domain.

‘My lord,’ says Thiel, and bows.

Guilliman smiles but his strong jaw is set. Parts of his fair hair look uneven in colour, lighter in places where the healed wounds have left it inexplicably mismatched.

Wounds heal, scars do not.

Another armoured figure watches from the shadows, but Thiel pretends not to

notice. A new life-ward, possibly? He doesn't detect the scent of wet canine, so it can't be Faffnr. Maybe Drakus Gorod has finally convinced Guilliman that he needs a shadow.

'May I see the sword?'

Thiel obeys and draws it from his back. Its blade catches the low light and flashes brightly. He briefly activates the electromagnetic edge. It is not a flinch that Thiel sees in the primarch but there is a reaction, a subtle tremor in the cheekbone.

'Do you wish it returned?' Thiel asks.

Guilliman gives a single shake of his head. 'Sheathe it, Aeonid. It is your blade now.'

Thiel wants to thank him but it would seem churlish to do so when he stole the weapon in the first place. Instead, he nods and graciously accepts the gift. The sound of the blade deactivating punctuates a brief but awkward silence between father and son.

'May I speak freely, my lord?'

'Of course. Do you wish to sit?' Guilliman offers Thiel a chair as he sits down behind the desk, ostensibly at ease.

'I would prefer to stand.'

Guilliman shrugs as though it matters not.

'Was it in here that it happened?' asks Thiel.

'I think you already know the answer to that.'

'Then why come back? Why not take greater precaution? Why relive it?'

'Because a lord must be at his ease in his own domain. This is my private residence. I won't let it become a prison cell with Gorod and Euten as my wardens.' Guilliman steeples his fingers. His gaze is stern, penetrating. 'When a legionary claiming your name last walked into this chamber, he came to kill me. He did not come alone – nine of his comrades were with him. I invited them in. I survived. That's powerful. It sends a message. I want it to resonate.'

The primarch's outward confidence and disdain will dissuade, not encourage, another attempt. It is a very practical reaction, reminding Thiel how fiercely intelligent his father is, how he is always calculating, assessing, planning. To think on it is staggering.

Guilliman points to the large windows that overlook Macragge Civitas.

'Do you see beyond that glass, Aeonid?'

It is night and much of the city's magnificence is shrouded in darkness but one structure dominates this vista, made visible by stark ground illumination.

‘The Fortress of Hera.’

‘Aye,’ Guilliman murmurs. ‘The seat of an emperor who does not take up his throne on the counsel of his men.’

‘Lord Sanguinius.’

‘Finding my brother is no easy task. I know the Lion has had some difficulty of late.’

He smiles at that. His intent and his mind are difficult to discern, but Thiel thinks he detects some fraternal rivalry and amusement at the Lion’s misfortune.

‘I realise I have enemies at large amongst what is left of the Five Hundred Worlds,’ the primarch continues, ‘but I refuse to show them anything other than my defiance and power.’

Another tremor. Anger this time, not trepidation. The statesman in Guilliman counsels consolidation and the raising of an empire, but the warrior still demands vengeance.

Thiel knows that such a debt could never be paid. It does not stop him from trying, though.

‘Is that why we still contest Calth, to send a message?’

Putting his palms flat on the desk, Guilliman narrows his eyes.

‘You and I adopt a different position on this matter, a fact well known to us both.’ He pauses to emphasise his impatience. ‘What is it you really want to ask me, Aeonid?’

Deception is not Thiel’s forte, so he opts for the truth.

‘Why am I here?’

‘Because I need your help with something.’

‘I am at your service, lord.’

Guilliman smiles again. It is warmer this time, but hides something deeper. To the primarch’s credit, he doesn’t wait long to reveal what it is. ‘Tell me, Sergeant Thiel, what are the “Red-Marked”?’

Thiel allows himself an indulgent grin. ‘Is that what they are calling us?’

‘Us? So you admit the existence of this group?’

‘I do. I formed them, my lord. Volunteers only, men who can be spared—’

‘Is it not *my* decision who can be spared, Aeonid?’

Thiel bows his head, but quickly raises it again. He does not wish to wallow long in contrition.

‘I saw what was necessary and acted.’

Guilliman tries but cannot fully mask the admiration he feels at his sergeant’s temerity. It is what makes Thiel such a singular warrior.

‘And what, in your eyes, is necessary?’

Thiel answers boldly. ‘The defence of our realm and borders. You said yourself, lord – you have enemies. I agree. They are hiding in the ruins of our former worlds. Some have vessels and gather in warbands. Left unchallenged, they will unite once more. The Red-Marked are dedicated to rooting out these renegades.’

Guilliman leans forwards. ‘Tell me about the Red-Marked, Aeonid. How do they operate?’

It is unusual to be questioned by someone who would normally provide the answers, to be pressed for knowledge by such a peerless leader and tactician.

Nevertheless, Thiel answers.

‘Smaller divisions. Two or three squads, sometimes fewer.’

‘It is faster that way? Deployment, reactivity?’

‘Yes, it provides flexibility. One legionary can do the job of many in some situations.’

‘Thus removing redundancy,’ Guilliman asserts.

Thiel nods again.

‘And their composition?’ asks the primarch.

‘Adaptable. Tactical with provision for almost countless potentialities,’ says Thiel. ‘I assigned a specialist to every squad.’

‘So you broke with convention and ignored the tenets of the Principia Bellicosa.’

This statement rings like an accusation to Thiel’s ears. He expects to suffer sanction.

‘I did, my lord. If I have erred then I—’

‘No, Thiel,’ Guilliman cuts him off, ‘you have not. I want to give this endeavour my support. Take the men you need for the Red-Marked, cleanse our lawless borders and know that you shall receive the authority you require.’

Authority.

Thiel glances at the other figure in the room, the one he has been ignoring until now, the one who has neither moved nor spoken since he entered the Residency.

‘Is this the reason why we are not alone?’ Thiel gestures to the silent warrior. A stronger, more experienced – no, *less reckless* – hand at the tiller, no doubt. ‘Please introduce us, lord, and tell me which worthier legionary is to be my superior.’

Guilliman laughs. ‘You misinterpret my intent, Aeonid.’

A directed lumen ignites, throwing light onto the legionary that Thiel assumed was his replacement. He recognises the empty armour, because it belongs to

him – a suit of battleplate inscribed with Thiel’s own tactical argot.

Guilliman stands. ‘Your gift?’

‘One I thought lost.’

‘Do you know what this is?’ Guilliman makes a sweeping gesture across the many scrolls and papers on his desk. ‘Tactics, doctrine... *Stratagem*, Aeonid.’

He approaches the armour.

‘These markings...’ Guilliman traces them with his eyes, absorbing and cogitating. He looks up and says something that Thiel never thought he would hear from his primarch’s lips. ‘I recognise the tactics they describe, but I can see a methodology emerging from them I had not considered before. Does the juxtaposition of one stratagem to another have meaning also? I believe there are correlations to my own work.’

Thiel is bewildered by his primarch’s ability to decipher meaning and even interpret fresh purpose from such an idiosyncratic set of instructions. He had not considered for himself how the relative position of each piece of tactical doctrine could affect another. He answers as fully as he can.

‘I used it as the foundation for the Red-Marked. Every practical, everything I learned on Calth.’

‘A smaller, more flexible structure. Expertise spread amongst squads, not divisions and companies.’

Thiel nods, realising that he will need to provide little to no spur to Guilliman’s formidable logic.

‘We were few, and fighting a guerrilla war. It is the same for the Red-Marked. Practically, it made sense.’

‘Efficacy?’

‘Exceeding an acceptable mean.’

‘Optimal, then.’

‘Situationally speaking, yes.’

Guilliman is voracious in his appetite for knowledge. His intellect and military mind has uncovered a partial revelation, one he wishes to embrace, adapt, hone and modify to strategic perfection.

Thiel realises that *he* is the catalyst for this quantum leap in his father’s unfathomable thought process, and cannot help but feel humbled.

‘I have been wrong about several things...’ Guilliman returns to his desk and gathers up the scrolls and papers. He tears them apart, intending it as a gesture rather than a practical means of destroying them.

Thiel’s horror is obvious.

‘What are you doing? That is your doctrine, your work!’

‘It is flawed, Aeonid, and it took you to show me the error in it.’

‘It is? I mean... I did?’

‘To function as we have, in our unwieldy Legions, is no longer tenable. I thought these tenets inviolate. I believed them to be the most efficient way to deploy and yoke our strength in battle. But in my hidebound blindness, I missed the utility that was in front of my very eyes.’ Guilliman nods at Thiel. ‘You, Aeonid.’

Thiel frowns. ‘I do not follow, my lord.’

‘We are not akin to the armies of old, a warlord and the horde that follows him. We are not one Legion, not any more.’ Guilliman smiles and his eyes alight with belligerent possibility. ‘We are hundreds of thousands of individual legionaries, each in support of the others, adapting, reshaping. Moulded not to a single purpose but to many, to *any* and *all*.’

Thiel is taken aback. He has never seen his primarch so animated. Guilliman isn’t finished.

‘Until I saw the armour, and heard of your Red-Marked, I thought us a hammer. We are, we can be, but we do not *need* to be.’ He makes a fist, making as if to deliver a mighty blow. ‘A hammer takes effort to heft with skill. It requires strength. It is inefficient, profligate.’ He opens his hand again, fingers straight and knifelike. ‘A rapier kills with a single thrust. Surgical. Efficient. Deadly.’ He punctuates each word as if stabbing them. ‘We must become the quick death, the blade stroke to the heart.’

Guilliman approaches Thiel. He places a hand upon his shoulder, looking down at his son, grateful for the revelation he has given him.

‘You are the practical to this theoretical, Aeonid.’

They part as Guilliman turns his back, his thoughts laid open for Thiel to hear.

‘Lorgar outmatched me once. I had no theoretical that countenanced his treachery and no practical responses ready. That won’t happen again. Practical, theoretical... Fresh thinking must prevail over these outmoded concepts. We must become more *tactical*.’

Thiel finds that he agrees, and asks the obvious question. ‘How?’

Guilliman turns and faces him once again.

‘The Codex, the sum of all practical knowledge and its application. For if this war has taught me anything, it is the danger of hubris. That is *your* wisdom, Thiel.’

Thiel bows and sinks to one knee, overwhelmed. His pride overflows.

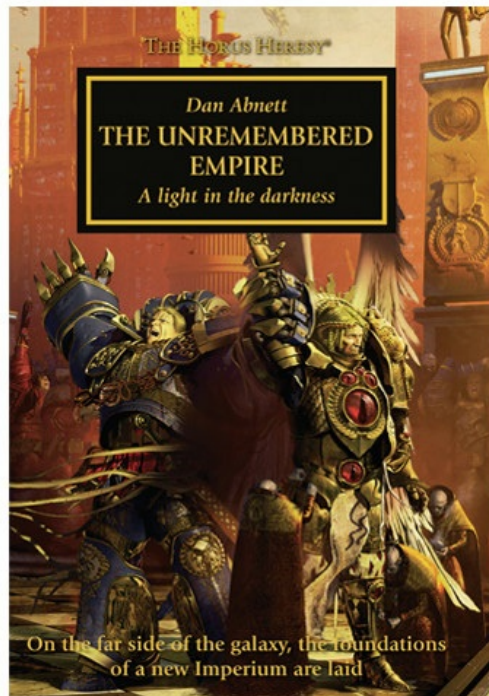
‘You honour me beyond all possible aspiration.’

‘That is well, for you have earned it. Now rise. Our work begins now, in earnest. I have a Codex to finish. Your insight has inspired me, and the future of the Legions will not wait.’

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Kyme is the author of the Horus Heresy novels *Deathfire* and *Vulkan Lives*, the novellas *Promethean Sun* and *Scorched Earth*, and the audio drama *Censure*. His novella *Feat of Iron* was a *New York Times* bestseller in the Horus Heresy collection, *The Primarchs*. Nick is well known for his popular Salamanders novels, including *Rebirth*, the Space Marine Battles novel *Damnus*, and numerous short stories. He has also written fiction set in the world of Warhammer, most notably the Time of Legends novel *The Great Betrayal*. He lives and works in Nottingham, and has a rabbit.

[The Emperor is dead, the Astronomican extinguished. Roboute Guilliman sets out to preserve mankind with Imperium Secundus. But enemies lurk on Macragge itself...](#)



BUY NOW



READ IT FIRST

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS | EARLY RELEASES | FREE DELIVERY

blacklibrary.com

THE BLACK LIBRARY NEWSLETTER



Sign up today for regular updates on the
latest Black Library news and releases

[SIGN UP NOW](#)

A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION

First published as an audio drama in Great Britain in 2014.
This eBook edition published in 2016 by Black Library, Games Workshop
Ltd,
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Produced by Games Workshop in Nottingham.

Stratagem © Copyright Games Workshop Limited 2016. Stratagem, GW, Games Workshop, Black Library, The Horus Heresy, The Horus Heresy Eye logo, Space Marine, 40K, Warhammer, Warhammer 40,000, the 'Aquila' Double-headed Eagle logo, and all associated logos, illustrations, images, names, creatures, races, vehicles, locations, weapons, characters, and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are either ® or TM, and/or © Games Workshop Limited, variably registered around the world.
All Rights Reserved.

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-78572-439-8

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

See Black Library on the internet at
blacklibrary.com

Find out more about Games Workshop's world of Warhammer and the Warhammer 40,000 universe at
games-workshop.com

eBook license

This license is made between:

Games Workshop Limited t/a Black Library, Willow Road, Lenton, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, United Kingdom (“Black Library”); and

(2) the purchaser of an e-book product from Black Library website (“You/you/Your/your”)

(jointly, “the parties”)

These are the terms and conditions that apply when you purchase an e-book (“e-book”) from Black Library. The parties agree that in consideration of the fee paid by you, Black Library grants you a license to use the e-book on the following terms:

* 1. Black Library grants to you a personal, non-exclusive, non-transferable, royalty-free license to use the e-book in the following ways:

- o 1.1 to store the e-book on any number of electronic devices and/or storage media (including, by way of example only, personal computers, e-book readers, mobile phones, portable hard drives, USB flash drives, CDs or DVDs) which are personally owned by you;

- o 1.2 to access the e-book using an appropriate electronic device and/or through any appropriate storage media; and

* 2. For the avoidance of doubt, you are ONLY licensed to use the e-book as described in paragraph 1 above. You may NOT use or store the e-book in any other way. If you do, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license.

* 3. Further to the general restriction at paragraph 2, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license in the event that you use or store the e-book (or any part of it) in any way not expressly licensed. This includes (but is by no means limited to) the following circumstances:

- o 3.1 you provide the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

- o 3.2 you make the e-book available on bit-torrent sites, or are otherwise complicit in ‘seeding’ or sharing the e-book with any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.3 you print and distribute hard copies of the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.4 you attempt to reverse engineer, bypass, alter, amend, remove or otherwise make any change to any copy protection technology which may be applied to the e-book.

* 4. By purchasing an e-book, you agree for the purposes of the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 that Black Library may commence the service (of provision of the e-book to you) prior to your ordinary cancellation period coming to an end, and that by purchasing an e-book, your cancellation rights shall end immediately upon receipt of the e-book.

* 5. You acknowledge that all copyright, trademark and other intellectual property rights in the e-book are, shall remain, the sole property of Black Library.

* 6. On termination of this license, howsoever effected, you shall immediately and permanently delete all copies of the e-book from your computers and storage media, and shall destroy all hard copies of the e-book which you have derived from the e-book.

* 7. Black Library shall be entitled to amend these terms and conditions from time to time by written notice to you.

* 8. These terms and conditions shall be governed by English law, and shall be subject only to the jurisdiction of the Courts in England and Wales.

* 9. If any part of this license is illegal, or becomes illegal as a result of any change in the law, then that part shall be deleted, and replaced with wording that is as close to the original meaning as possible without being illegal.

* 10. Any failure by Black Library to exercise its rights under this license for whatever reason shall not be in any way deemed to be a waiver of its rights, and in particular, Black Library reserves the right at all times to terminate this license in the event that you breach clause 2 or clause 3.