

WARHAMMER
40,000



SIGNAL
TO NOISE

C Z DUNN

WARHAMMER
40,000



SIGNAL
TO NOISE

C Z DUNN

CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Signal to Noise - C Z Dunn](#)

[About the Author](#)

[A Black Library Publication](#)

[eBook license](#)

SIGNAL TO NOISE

C Z Dunn

Sister Agentha of the Order of the Fractured Cipher realised what she was listening to over the vox mere seconds before the eldar raiders sprang their assault. One moment she was standing next to Chaplain Gerataus on the bridge of the Black Templars' strike cruiser *Inevitable Retribution*, the next she was sprawled unceremoniously across the deck as xenos fire rocked the Space Marine ship.

Blinking into realspace, almost three dozen of the dark craft discharged full weapon salvos against the *Inevitable Retribution*, though most of their firepower was reserved for the vessel accompanying the Black Templars, the Executioners craft *Guillotine*. Taken unawares by the aliens' surprise attack, *Guillotine's* captain had neither the time to raise its shields nor return fire and in the space of mere seconds the huge vessel was bleeding atmosphere into the void. Vast rents opened up in the hull through which poured manpower and materiel. The human crew and Chapter serfs perished instantly, their physiology no match for the ravages of open space, while the battle-brothers of the Executioners drifted aimlessly, their power armour life support systems preserving their existence.

Several of the smaller eldar craft broke off from the assault and targeted the survivors. No mercy was shown and the zone surrounding the two Space Marine vessels was soon filled with slowly dissipating balls of crimson and metal.

The *Inevitable Retribution*, by virtue of being further away from the point of the eldar's realspace translation, did not take as many immediate hits and was able to raise its shields before catastrophic damage was inflicted. On the bridge, klaxons wailed and Black Templars and crew alike barked and relayed orders,

getting fire teams to the sites of the most crippling damage and calling up replacement crew from below decks to take the positions vacated by those who succumbed to the initial assault.

Castellan Kaleb commanded the helmsman to face their ambushers head on. For tortuous minutes the massive vessel swung around, eldar craft harrying the ship with sustained barrages of fire that dissipated against the shields. Halfway through the turn, all those on the bridge witnessed the final demise of *Guillotine*.

Also attempting to turn and fight, the stricken ship had ponderously rotated, but this did little more than present its unshielded flank to the xenos raiders. Like hungry animals pouncing on a scrap of meat, the eldar lit up the void with the discharge from their weapons, raking the exposed side of the ship and setting off a series of detonations that culminated in *Guillotine's* warp drive going nova. Despite their greater speed, not all of the eldar vessels were able to outrun the corona of immaterial energy, and several of them disintegrated as the raw stuff of the warp engulfed them.

'Brace for impact!' yelled the Castellan across the bridge, and Space Marine and Chapter serf alike gripped anything that was riveted down as the tsunami of Chaos energy broke against their shields and washed over the ship. For the second time in the space of minutes, Agentha slammed against the deck of the bridge, sustaining a deep gouge just above her brow.

'Captain, damage report.' The Castellan was rooted in the same position he had been before the wave had struck. The only other woman on the bridge besides Agentha, answered him.

'Shields are down to less than ten per cent and warp drives were damaged during the initial assault. Praise His name that we did not suffer the fate as those unfortunate souls.' Through the oculus, Agentha could see *Guillotine* slowly falling through the dust belt of the planet below, inexorably caught in the pull of its gravity well. The captain didn't need to say that if the eldar came back for more, their chances of survival, let alone victory, were virtually nil.

Agentha pulled herself up to a sitting position and dabbed at the gouge on her forehead with the sleeve of her robe, the orange fabric slowly turning to crimson around the cuff. All around her, medically trained serfs were tending to the wounds of their comrades, applying bandages and tourniquets to the most severely injured and removing the bodies of those beyond treatment. All of them ignored Agentha. Her presence on the mission had been a necessity, as she was only one of a handful of people in the Imperium able to read the complex hieroglyphs of the necron Khansu Dynasty, but her initial excitement at leaving

the order and seeing more of the galaxy had soon turned sour.

The Black Templars barely tolerated her being on board one of their ships, and since the cleansing of the tomb world she had been virtually confined to her quarters. The only reason she was on the bridge when the eldar attacked was because the vox-operators had picked up a faint signal from the world below, and Chaplain Gerataus had ordered her aid in deciphering it, which she believed she had done just before the alien attack.

'All stations,' the Castellan said, opening up a ship-wide vox-link. 'We are taking the ship into the dust belt around the planet. Those alien vessels do not have sufficient shielding to follow us in, and that should afford us enough time to effect repairs.'

From the other side of the bridge, the figure of Chaplain Gerataus strode purposefully towards the Castellan until their faces were only centimetres apart.

'Need I remind you, Castellan, that it is not the Black Templars way to run and hide. Chapter protocol dictates that we turn and face the xenos scum, and not relent until they are vanquished.' Such was the passion with which he delivered those words that Agentha could see flecks of spittle landing on the Castellan's cheek.

'Chapter protocol dictates that I do not needlessly send this ship and the battle-brothers on board to their certain doom.' The Castellan's words were calmer, more measured than the Chaplain's. 'We take shelter, we make our repairs and *then* we strike back.'

The Chaplain stood there for a moment, the red lenses of his two ocular implants staring the Castellan square in the eyes, before slowly turning and making his way back to the vox-array.

Agentha had fashioned a workable dressing, and though she could still feel her wound pulsing as it gently bled, blood no longer poured into her eye. Unusually for a Sister Dialogus, Agentha's eyes were unaugmented. Sisters of the Order of the Fractured Cipher believed that they were created in the Emperor's own image and accepted no form of bodily modification. Some of the senior sisters of her order even frowned upon Agentha's use of eyeglasses, which she now wiped clean in the folds of her robe before placing them upon her nose.

The bridge had become a much calmer place since their descent into the dust belt and the near-silence of serfs and crew carrying out their duties was only punctuated occasionally by the sound of a large chunk of debris smashing against the shields of the *Inevitable Retribution*. Agentha made her way back

over to the vox-array. A serf had just finished repairing the communications device and was fiddling with dials to test whether it still functioned.

'May I?' Agentha asked the startled serf as she gestured for him to give her the headset. Frozen like a small mammal trapped in the beam of a hunter's lamp, he glanced towards the Castellan, who nodded. The robed youth hastily dropped the headset and scurried away. She picked up the headset from where it had been dropped to the deck and, placing them over her ears once more, tried to tune it to the same frequency it had been on before her work had been so rudely interrupted. She gently rotated one of the large dials, but moments later quickly pulled the headset off, face painted in a grimace.

'Is there a problem, Sister?' Gerataus said, irritation evident in every syllable.

'The signal. It's... It's much stronger than before.'

The Chaplain broke off from the chart he was studying and loomed over Agentha. 'Impossible. The only way that could happen is if it was being transmitted from the planet below, but all auspex returns confirm that it is a dead world. The vox-array must still be damaged. Serf! Get back here and perform a proper repair of this unit.'

'No. It's not that.' Agentha waved a hand at the serf to gesture him away and once more the baffled youth had to look to the Castellan for confirmation. Kaleb ordered the serf to return to what he was doing and joined Gerataus and Agentha at the vox.

'Then what is it, Sister?' the Castellan asked, ignoring the Chaplain's scowl.

'I'm not certain, but I believe that this is an old signal that has somehow retained its integrity over the millennia. My guess is that the dust field trapped the radio waves.' She put one of the headset cups to her left ear, leaving the other free to listen to the Space Marines.

'Ridiculous. Why are you even listening to this girl, Castellan? That head wound has addled her mind.'

Agentha had spent time in the company of the noble Adeptus Astartes before and though she knew to give them their due deference and respect, she would not be cowed in this matter. 'It's not ridiculous. On old Terra, mariners who traversed the polar regions would often report picking up radio signals from centuries previous, just as the ice preserved whatever was frozen in it, the signals bounced off its surface, gradually weakening until they eventually faded altogether. I think that's what the dust belt is doing here, bouncing the signal around and preserving it.'

The Castellan looked impressed, but sceptical. 'But you said that this signal has

been preserved for millennia, not centuries. How can you tell, and how could it have been sustained for so long?'

'I realised how old it was before the attack. The signal is a voice speaking in a derivation of High Gothic.'

'I too heard that broadcast, girl, and whatever language that voice is speaking, it is *not* High Gothic.' Gerataus turned to the Castellan. 'See. I told you that injury had scrambled her faculties'

'It *is* High Gothic... Just an ancient version of it.'

'Explain.' The Castellan sounded as if his curiosity had been piqued.

'My entire life has been dedicated to the study of language, and in that time I have come to realise that it is a living thing. Language grows and evolves, discards those parts of itself that no longer serve a purpose and shapes itself to its environment and current needs. All languages do this, be they human or xenos, and have done ever since the first life forms gained the ability of speech.'

The Castellan nodded thoughtfully. Even the Chaplain looked as if he was giving this some consideration.

'High Gothic is no different, but it has the added complications of being one of the oldest human languages, pre-dating the Imperium even, and being a ceremonial language spoken on a million worlds. If you were to speak High Gothic to somebody living a thousand years ago or a hundred light years away, then you should be able to understand each other almost completely. Comparatively little of the language would have changed. But if you were to go back five thousand years, or to the other side of the segmentum, then you'd have a hard time understanding each other but may get a general sense of what is being conveyed. Go back further than that, or to the far ends of the Imperium? Well, you might not even recognise it as the same language.'

'So, that's what we're listening to here? A local form of High Gothic from over five thousand years in the past?' Gerataus said.

'Yes. Some of the words are identical to current usage, and the grammar hasn't changed a great deal, but this is definitely an ancient form of High Gothic.'

'How ancient?' asked the Castellan.

'I believe that it is around ten thousand years old... from the time of the Great Crusade.'

Castellan Kaleb eyed her incredulously. 'How can you be so sure?' he said.

'Because in the time we've been speaking, the voice on the signal has mentioned the term 'Great Crusade' over a dozen times and 'Emperor' almost twice that. Here, listen.' Agentha flicked a switch on the front of the vox-array

and the bridge filled with the sound of a woman's voice delivering what appeared to be a sermon. 'There. Can you hear that? 'Imperator'. That phrase there? That's 'Imperial Truth!'

Though her vocation meant she dealt mainly with the written word, all Sisters of her order were trained to recognise the spoken forms of all languages they dealt with, for those rare occasions when dead languages unexpectedly sprang back to life, often on the lips of a race or culture long thought vanquished by the Imperium.

'I think I can make out the word for 'fleet'. It's the same term some of the Venerables use for it. What's that word she's using before it? 'Exploratory'?'

Agentha cocked her head and squinted, deep in concentration. 'Close. It's 'Expeditionary' I think.'

The scowl returned to the Chaplain's face. 'So we know it's somebody speaking High Gothic. That still doesn't explain how the signal has persisted for so long. You said the radio waves on ancient Terra broke down after only a few centuries, but this woman's voice has been preserved for over ten thousand years. How is that even possible?'

Agentha bowed her head slightly. 'My lords, I do have one theory.'

'Well, what is it, girl?' The Chaplain's patience had worn parchment-thin.

'I believe the signal was extremely strong in the first place and thus has taken longer to decay. Rather than being a vox-to-vox communication, this was originally broadcast on a very wide spectrum.'

Kaleb and Gerataus both came to the same realisation simultaneously.

'This was a broadcast to the entire planet,' the Castellan said.

The darkened confines of Agentha's chamber flickered in the dull light afforded by the handful of candles she had managed to scavenge. Her chamber, more a cell if she was being strictly accurate, was sparse, with only a bedroll and blankets, a seat and a simple table. The only other items in the room were a stack of ancient books and charts, arrayed almost floor to ceiling, that she had recently acquired from the ship's archive.

With the *Inevitable Retribution* effectively trapped while repairs were made, Castellan Kaleb had granted permission for Agentha to carry out research into the world below and the origins of the transmission. It was a vain hope at best, but, as she was escorted into the ship's archive by a battle-brother of the Black Templars, her spirits lifted.

The archive was easily as large as the library back at her order's convent, but

where the Fractured Cipher's vaults held only tomes pertaining to languages both dead and active, the *Inevitable Retribution's* collection - only a fraction of the Chapter's as a whole - covered all manner of subjects. After poring over a collection of antique star charts, Agentha turned her attention to the Military History section, which formed easily a third of the archive.

Chaplain Gerataus, having had a similar idea to Agentha, was already in that section and, after relieving her of several of her most pertinent star charts, took his leave along with a number of dusty tomes of indeterminate age.

The battle-brother who had been ordered to watch over her did not take kindly to lugging armfuls of books from the archive to the her cabin but, remembering that the Castellan had ordered him to aid the Sister Dialogus, grudgingly relented. Now, safely within the four metal walls that had been home for the past eighteen months, Agentha was deep into the task of identifying the world whose dust belt they were now sheltering in.

Agentha's skillset was firmly in the realms of the linguistic, but two decades of ten-hour days spent studying with the order had conditioned her for research, and after the simple matter - for her at least - of deciphering the keys to the star charts, she had begun to narrow her search down to a handful of sub-sectors in this region which contained worlds similar to the one below. Her initial hopes that it was a planet called Culchare was dashed when further research proved that world had been destroyed entirely during the Great Heresy. Other promising candidates soon fell by the wayside: Jindran - only discovered four thousand years ago; Osiris - destroyed by the Inquisition; Durmian VII - its surface of boiling sulphur was completely unlike like the inert world below.

For hours Agentha referenced and cross-referenced, eliminating many worlds from her study but coming no closer to the identity of the planet. When her final long shot - that the world may have shifted orbit in the intervening millennia - didn't pay off, she slumped over the charts on the table, utterly exhausted. She rubbed her eyes and contemplated unpacking her bedroll for some much-needed sleep, but could not bring herself to do so. Castellan Kaleb was only indulging her for as long as they were stopped for repairs. As soon as the warp drive, shields and weapons systems were functioning again, they would bring the foul xenos to battle, then be on their way. The signal would be lost, possibly forever. She had only one chance and needed to make every minute count. If only it were like deciphering a new language...

And that's when it struck her.

Being careful not to disturb the thick layer of charts coating the table, she

moved over to the door of the chamber and pulled hard on the lever that activated the lock. She swung it open and poked her head out into the gangway. There, exactly where she had left him many hours earlier, was the Black Templar who had escorted her to the archive.

'Beg your pardon, my lord,' she said with mock timidity. 'Is your armour's vox keyed into the ship's?'

'It is. Why do you need to know?'

'I'd like you to ask the Castellán something, please. It's to do with my research.'

The Black Templar paused for a moment, contemplating. 'Very well. What do you need to ask him?'

'It's regarding the dust belt. I need him to sweep it with the auspex and let me know its composition.'

The Black Templar hailed the Castellán and after relaying Agentha's message there was an awkward pause while they both awaited the response.

'Very well, I'll let her know,' the Space Marine said eventually, breaking the silence. 'The Castellán doesn't quite understand it. He had expected the auspex to return readings of naturally occurring rock and minerals, but the dust belt is comprised entirely of man-made alloys and materials. He says that if you can offer an explanation, I'm to escort you to the bridge immediately.'

'If you could give me just a little while longer, I'm sure I'll have all the answers the Castellán requires, and more.' The Black Templar nodded and Agentha retreated once more into her chamber.

It was just as she'd suspected. Just as languages evolved and developed, so too had this world. Where languages gained new words over time, this planet had gained its dust belt. The fact that it was comprised of man-made materials strongly suggested that a space battle had taken place around this planet at some point. If Imperial forces had been here during the Great Crusade, then it was probable that it had been fought more than ten thousand years ago.

She carefully removed the top few layers of star charts from the table and began to reassess the maps she'd discounted early on in her studies. If the battle had been as vast as she imagined, then once she discovered the name of the planet, finding out more about it should be a relatively straightforward task.

Carefully moving aside a brittle, yellowed parchment she unveiled a hand-drawn chart that had started to develop brown patches on its mottled surface. Gently moving her finger over the lines and circles denoting worlds and long-forgotten routes, her eyes widened as she found the name of the tomb world the Black Templars and Executioners had so recently cleansed. Hurriedly, she traced

a line to the galactic east and her finger came to rest on the tiny dark circle that indicated the world below.

And once she knew the name of that world, she needed no book to discover exactly what had happened here. She already knew.

The quiet of the bridge had given way to the noise of activity during Agentha's hours of study, and as her Black Templars escort led her in, only the Castellan and Chaplain paid her any heed. The repairs to the *Inevitable Retribution* were almost complete, and systems were being checked and rechecked in preparation for the counterattack against the eldar pirates.

'It would seem you are too late, Sister. Chaplain Gerataus has already solved the riddle of our mystery transmission.'

'With the correct charts, it was a simple task to identify this world and the matter of mere minutes to cross-reference the relevant tomes in our archive,' the Chaplain began.

Yes, and if I'd had access to that material then we would have all been standing here having this discussion a lot sooner. Agentha considered vocalising her thoughts but prudence and survival instinct won out.

'The world we orbit is Remonora Majoris, one of the many planets brought to compliance by the Emperor himself during the Great Crusade,' Gerataus continued. 'His fleet arrived here to find a sophisticated human culture that had persisted through Old Night but, bereft of the Emperor's benevolence and rule, had degenerated into a debauched society that readily embraced depravity and sought personal gratification above all else.'

'Yes, but—' Agentha attempted to interject. Gerataus simply ignored her.

'After the Emperor's initial communications with the world were rebuffed, He chose to enlighten them in the ways of the Imperium. To urge the people of Remonora Majoris to step off their path to damnation and expose them to the Imperial Truth. For two entire days, the iterators of His fleet broadcast to the planet but to no avail. So caught up were they in the pursuit of pleasure that their eyes had been blinded to the obvious and so, when it was clear that Remonora would not come to compliance willingly, the Emperor Himself addressed the population.'

'But that's not—'

Gerataus once again ploughed through Agentha's interruption.

'He urged them to see sense and offered to show them mercy. 'Become one again with mankind or suffer its wrath,' he told them, but still they did not listen

and thus that wrath became manifest. With unswerving fury, Imperial forces landed and put an end to the perverted ways of Remonora Majoris. The spaceports filled with those trying to flee the Emperor's judgment, but the instant their craft broke from the atmosphere, the weapons of the fleet were brought to bear on them and this...' He swung an arm towards the oculus, gesturing at the dust belt. 'This was the result. A graveyard of the impious.'

'Please—'

Gerataus was no longer registering her presence, let alone her words.

'In less than a day, Remonora Majoris was brought to compliance and took its place in the Imperium, while the Emperor departed to carry out His great work and bring yet more worlds back into to the fold and under His protection.' The Chaplain moved towards the vox-array. 'Ten thousand years ago, this was the site of a great Imperial victory, and today it shall be so once more. On that day, the sons of the Emperor went to war with His voice ringing in their ears, and so too shall we!'

He wrenched the headset from the vox and the speakers kicked in allowing the sound of the iterator's voice to once again fill the bridge. He turned to Agentha, finally acknowledging her. 'Your work here is done, girl, and your efforts are... noted. Brother Atreus will escort you back to your chamber. We will summon you when we find a suitable planet upon which to set you down so that you may seek passage back to your order.' He turned to speak to the Castellan.

'You're wrong,' Agentha said, clearly and calmly.

Gerataus slowly turned to regard her, his augmented eyes burning like balefire.

'You're wrong,' she repeated.

Impossibly swiftly, the Chaplain advanced on the Sister Dialogus, but Castellan Kaleb loomed in front of her, barring Gerataus's way. Kaleb held up a palm in placation. 'Let us listen to what the Sister has to say. She is on this mission for her expertise and it would be churlish of us to dismiss her out of hand.'

The Chaplain's gaze bore through the Castellan. 'Very well,' he said. The Castellan nodded at Agentha to share her thoughts.

'My lord's research was very thorough and, in the main, highly accurate,' she began.

'Of course it was. My sources date back to the years immediately following the Great Heresy. They are as accurate as if I stood there and witnessed the events myself.'

The Castellan once again raised his palm, this time to impede the Chaplain's tongue.

Agentha cleared her throat. 'The date of your source is its very problem. In the years following the Warmaster's betrayal, millions of books and documents were either destroyed or put beyond reach because they told of the heroic acts that the Traitor Legions had once performed for the Emperor and the glory they brought upon his name. Any work or text that venerated a Traitor Legion or fallen primarch was expunged and history was either erased or altered to match the new Imperial Truth, the new version of history built upon the ashes of betrayal.

'Lies and heresy! Show me the nearest torpedo tube and let us be done with this wretch's untruths. How could she possibly know all this?' The Chaplain's ire was up.

'I know this because I have translated and transcribed such documents. Although the overwhelming majority were put to flame many thousands of years ago, from time to time one will surface in the personal effects of a heretic, or buried deep beneath the ruins of a long forgotten city. When they do, it is the task of the Order of the Fractured Cipher to interpret them so that our masters within the Ecclesiarchy can determine the fate of the text.'

'That is all well and good, Sister, but why do you believe that the Chaplain is wrong?' The Castellan was still strategically placed between Gerataus and Agentha.

'I *know* that the Chaplain is wrong because one of my first duties upon ascension to the Sisterhood was to translate a manuscript detailing the pacification of Remonora Majoris. It was written by a scribe who accompanied the sixteenth Legion during the Great Crusade and was found upon the wreck of a vessel formerly belonging to that Legion.' She pushed her eyeglasses back up the bridge of her nose. 'When the iterator on that broadcast stops speaking - in, by my estimate, about fifteen minutes, Terran standard - it will not be the voice of the Emperor that you hear. It will be the voice of Horus.'

The Chaplain lunged forwards, but the Castellan thrust his palm against Gerataus's chest and shoved him back. He looked ready to pounce once again, but the voice of the ship's captain cut through the tension.

'My lords, the xenos craft are currently passing overhead, carrying out a sensor sweep. If we strike now then we would have surprise as our advantage.'

'How close to full operational capacity are we?' asked the Castellan, his gaze still fixed upon Gerataus.

'Warp drive is functioning again, shields at eighty per cent. Bombardment cannon is still under repair but all other weapon systems are online.'

The Castellan took no more than a few seconds to assess the situation before

answering. 'Captain. Bring the *Inevitable Retribution* out of orbit and let us avenge the loss of the Executioners and *Guillotine* with the blood of our enemies.'

The noise of activity rose as the bridge crew busied themselves for battle, almost drowning out the woman's voice emanating from the vox. Gerataus finally turned from Agentha and strode over to the vox-array. He forcefully spun one of the dials all the way to the right and the iterator's voice rose in volume to an uncomfortable level. 'Come. Let us go to battle knowing that soon we will be blessed by the voice of the Emperor!'

The *Inevitable Retribution* burst from the dust belt of Remonora Majoris like a leviathan from the deep, its prow breaking the surface and showering its hull in the debris of long-destroyed spacecraft. Caught unawares, two of the sleek eldar craft found themselves directly in the strike cruiser's line of fire and soon became yet more celestial flotsam orbiting the world below. The remaining xenos vessels altered their courses and swung back around, stabbing lances of energy weapons discharge heralding their path, but bouncing futilely from the *Inevitable Retribution's* shields. With the element of surprise on the Black Templars' side, the battle was taking a very different course this time.

On the bridge, the iterator's voice was reaching a crescendo, at a volume so great that the sound of alien weapons fire hitting the shields was barely audible. Through the oculus, Agentha watched as another eldar ship was torn apart by the weapons batteries of the spacefaring fortress, the darkness of space illuminated by the orange bloom of explosions. She saw two of the xenos ships peel off from the main formation and target the bridge of the strike cruiser. The first was shot down and tumbled away into the void, but the second was helmed by a pilot of some skill. The small craft jinked and swerved, deftly avoiding incoming fire while all the time keeping its weapons targeted on the bridge. The shields held, and as the eldar marauder grew overconfident, the *Inevitable Retribution's* guns found their mark, shearing a wing from the alien ship. Even with his doom imminent, the pilot kept true to his course and in one final act of defiance attempted to ram the bridge with his ailing craft.

'Shields full forward!' the captain shouted across the bridge.

The eldar ship exploded against a wall of energy. Agentha had to cover her eyes, such was the glare from the blast, and when her vision returned, she saw that more enemy craft had peeled away from the main formation, emboldened by their comrade's actions.

'What do we have left in the shields, captain?' the Castellan barked, struggling to be heard over the sound of klaxons and the voice of the iterator.

'That hit took a lot out of us. Down to under forty per cent.'

All of the *Inevitable Retribution's* forward-facing weapons opened up at once, putting a wall of fire between it and the eldar raiders. More of the alien craft perished, but more still broke off from the main formation until all of the xenos ships were using their superior manoeuvrability to full advantage, striking swiftly before retreating beyond the range of the Black Templars' guns. Another eldar ship took a direct hit, this one spinning away and barrelling into another of its kind.

Through the occulus, Agentha saw one of the smaller ships weaving around the debris clouds and weapon discharge, mimicking the actions of the earlier vessel which had so very nearly breached the shields. Castellan Kaleb saw it too.

'All gunnery stations, target your fire on the smaller vessel,' the Castellan commanded over the ship-wide vox.

Spears of orange and yellow energy lanced towards the small alien ship, but its diminutive size made hitting it near impossible. As it closed on the bridge of the *Inevitable Retribution*, one shot came close to scoring a direct hit, but instead of eliminating the onrushing craft all it did was scorch its hull.

'Brace for impact!' Kaleb ordered as the craft sped inexorably towards the rapidly failing shields.

The last thing that Agentha heard before the blackness took her was the iterator's speech finally coming to an end.

Agentha came back to consciousness to find a Black Templars Chapter serf dressing her head wound; it had reopened during the impact. Squinting, her eyeglasses having fallen to the ground after she blacked out, she looked out through the occulus at the blackened carcasses of eldar vessels hanging in the void. From the absence of activity on the bridge, and the lack of the alert klaxons, she presumed the Black Templars had won the battle.

But another noise was absent too.

The serf tied off the bandage leaving a few strands of her auburn hair poking out from beneath it, and took his leave. She rose to a kneeling position and began to pat around on the deck, attempting to locate her eyeglasses. As she did so, a giant shadow crept over her. She looked up, expecting to find Chaplain Gerataus, but instead saw Castellan Kaleb. His massive hand was outstretched and in his palm lay her eyeglasses, one lens cracked but otherwise intact. She

took the proffered optics and pushed them snugly onto her nose.

'The signal? Did it—?' She began, but broke off when she saw where the Castellan was pointing.

There, off to one side of the bridge sat the smashed remains of the vox-array, Chaplain Gerataus's crozius arcanum embedded in it.

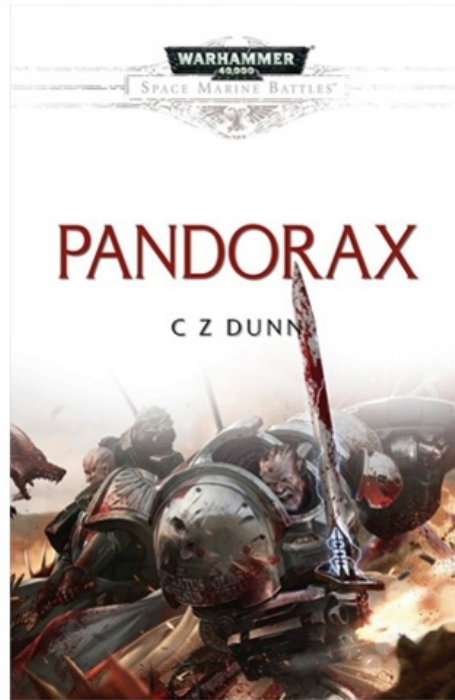
Agentha looked up at the Castellan, who smiled down at her sadly. 'Brother Atreus. Please escort Sister Agentha back to her chambers,' he commanded. Atreus nodded and was quickly by her side. Agentha readjusted her robes slightly and wiped her fingers down them, leaving red smears in their wake.

'And Sister?' the Castellan said just as she was on the threshold of the bridge. She turned back to see the Black Templar still wearing that same sad smile. 'Please try and stay out of the Chaplain's way for the rest of your voyage with us.'

Agentha simply pushed her eyeglasses back up the bridge of her nose and took her leave.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Domiciled in the East Midlands, **C Z Dunn** is the author of the Space Marine Battles novel *Pandorax*, the novellas *Crimson Dawn* and *Dark Vengeance* and the audio dramas *Trials of Azrael*, *Ascension of Balthasar*, *Terror Nihil*, *Bloodspire* and *Malediction*, as well as several short stories.



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

‘Signal to Noise’ was first published in the *Black Library Weekender Volume II (2012)* anthology, copyright © 2012, Games Workshop Ltd. This eBook edition published in 2017 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd,
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Produced by Games Workshop in Nottingham.

Signal to Noise © Copyright Games Workshop Limited 2017. Signal to Noise, 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: 978-1-78572-704-7

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.