



WARHAMMER
40,000

DELIVERANCE DETAIL

DAVID GUYMER

The background of the cover is a dark green color with a repeating pattern of a white skull with wings and a crossbones symbol. The skull has a menacing expression with small, slanted eyes. The wings are spread out to the sides. The crossbones are positioned below the skull. The pattern is arranged in a grid-like fashion, with the skull and wings centered in each square of the grid.

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It comes to me.

The ferrocrete wall at my back is a source of strange comfort, something I can feel, something I can touch. I press against it, retreating from the smudge of navy blue that seeps through my blindfold, the noon sun hot on my face. Sweat lathers my jaw, conspiring with several days' untended growth to create an unbearable itch. My legs shake, as if I have been standing for an age, but they lie. It could not be more than fifteen minutes.

I am last in line, and finally it comes to me.

'Name and number.'

The voice is an inhuman drawl, distorted by some speaker grille. It asks no question. Perhaps its augmetics are incapable of the inflection, but I think not. The loathing expounded by those mechanically-assembled syllables is crystal clear. It is merely accustomed to being obeyed.

I feel my parched lips peel open, but it's as if I never learned to speak. My tongue fills my mouth like blubber. My palms are grimy with sweat.

That I am in one of my planet's many military installations seems obvious. The bark of off-world voices and overheated hardware hem me in. Sporadic bursts of las-fire, like vox static, occasionally rise to drown out the din. More men are being ferried in, seemingly by the minute. Somewhere to my right, an engine snarls, wide tyres crunching over the baked roadway before hydraulic breaks bring the vehicle hissing to a standstill. Other, more distant, engines sputter and growl, throwing off a petrochem stink that, even blindfolded, I can almost see as a haze. I pick out men of my own world by their accents as they are herded like cattle from those transports. They are nervous, frightened.

Half an hour ago that was me. Now I am terrified.

I wonder if this facility might even have been my own base, but I can't tell. These pre-fab stockades all feel alike. And it hardly matters now. They all belong to the off-worlders, our conquerors. They call themselves liberators. I make a half-hearted struggle against the grip-tie pinning my wrists to the small of my back.

I could do with a little less of this ‘liberty’.

Strong hands take me by the shoulders and shove me against the wall.

‘The sergeant asked you a question, scummer.’ This voice is more human, but with the same harsh, off-world accent that I hear all around.

‘Callan,’ I manage. That word alone brings a dry pain to my throat, but I go on. ‘Nine-oh-two-one-five. Galicean First.’

‘*Gal-i-cee...*’ growled the augmetic.

‘An archipelago in the southern hemisphere,’ speaks another voice. The words are accompanied by a sequence of taps; hardened leather on a plastek softscreen.

‘You’ve come a long way for your masters’ war, Nine-oh-two-one-five.’ The voice cuts into a hiss of static, a gallows chuckle. I sense him stepping away. The tapping noise follows his footsteps, culminating in a null tone that I find oddly chilling.

‘The Emperor protects.’ I murmur it quietly. Our conquerors forbid us from speaking His name.

Disregarding my blindfold, I close my eyes and pray. For temperance. For deliverance.

The man to my left is muttering a hymn. I remember the cadence from my visits to the Imperial shrine as a child, but the words are long forgotten. I find myself humming in time, feeling a certain comradeship with this man I don’t know and have likely never seen. The thought that I may never do so brings with it an unexpected sadness.

For three years I did my duty. Three hard years of relentless shelling and muck-drowned terror as the off-worlder invasion degenerated into interminable trench warfare. For three years we held them – traitors, heretics, come to enslave our world and consecrate it to unspeakable gods, so we were told.

Except they weren’t. It was a lie. It was all of it a lie.

Even now, threatened by so many other feelings – none of them good – that sickening epiphany lingers like a tumour in my gut. The guilt, the anguish that flickered steadily into fury as I squinted up through the rain to witness that first Adeptus Astartes drop-ship burn through the atmosphere like an angel of fire. That was when I knew, when we all knew.

We were on the wrong side.

It was a strange, disembodied feeling, like watching someone else’s dream, as two million men set down their rifles and slowly marched, hands on head, across no-man’s-land to the enemy trench we’d just spent three years and a million lives trying to reach.

I had heard rumours that the planetary governor and his inner circle had already faced the Imperium's justice.

Good.

I hope he recanted in the pyre. I hope the Chaos-worshipping slime screamed for forgiveness. The betrayal was his, not mine.

The thought begets another. One I've been avoiding.

What is to become of me? I am loyal. I love the Emperor. Any true servant must see it in me. I have faith. It's just... It's just...

I'm afraid.

Unkind hands tear the blindfold from my face. Instantly, I turn away, the sudden glare like fingers pressed into the orbits of my eyes. I tighten them, lids blazing red like heat shields on the chariots of gods, as a threadbare voice begins to speak a prayer.

'Blessed Emperor, receive these men...'

Blinking away tears, I reopen my eyes. A blur of khaki about six metres distant resolves into a line of men. The aquilae on their lasrifles are buffed to an imperious shine. I try telling myself that I'm not afraid, but the unfairness fans a rebellious spark. I want to scream. I did nothing but my duty.

I don't scream. I don't know why, but I don't. I pray someone else will, but no one does. Maybe we believe we deserve this.

'...deliver their souls from the flesh of sin.'

The confessor turns in the direction of the Guard sergeant and gestures the aquila with a terse '*Ave Imperator*'. The Guardsman's bionic jaw clenches as he turns on the firing line. They look through us to the wall beyond, as if we are already ghosts. As if they have done this a hundred times already and expect to do it a thousand more.

My eyes water anew.

'Deliverance detail!' the sergeant bawls in his rigid monotone. 'Ready!'

I'm not ready.

My stomach clenches. The man to my left has his eyes scrunched, head bobbing on his neck, lips miming a silent prayer.

Thirty rifles swing up.

'Aim!'

The rifles lift, stocks to the Guardsmen's arms. Thirty sights train on their targets. I look down to see a red dot wavering over the soiled khaki above my heart.

I close my eyes too. Fifty million men-at-arms. Did they truly mean to execute

us all? The thought races through my brain but doesn't linger. In the honesty of my final moments, I don't care for the millions. I care for one.

Me.

Trooper Callan. Nine-oh-two-one-five.

At the last, I recall the opening verse of my comrade's hymn.

Emperor deliver me.

'Fire!'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID GUYMER is no stranger to the worlds of Warhammer, with exciting stories in *Gotrek and Felix: The Anthology* and *Hammer and Bolter*, with much more on the way. He is a freelance writer and occasional scientist based in the East Riding. When not writing, David can be found exorcising his disappointment at the gaming table and preparing for the ascension of the children of the Horned Rat.



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