



WARHAMMER[®]
40,000



C Z Dunn

ATROPHY

A Chaos Space Marines short story





WARHAMMER
40,000

C Z Dunn

ATROPHY

A Chaos Space Marines short story



ATROPHY

C Z Dunn

The screams of the dying are matched only by my cries of ecstasy as I carve through the feeble ranks of Imperial Guard. Blood coats the length of my blade, its vital warmth spilling down to the hilt and flowing in torrents to the dusty ground below. Human wreckage tumbles after it, this nameless desert world now their grave.

Behind them, others see me and halt, fear writ in every inch of flesh and muscle. Have they heard of me, these wretched slaves of the Corpse-Emperor? Has my reputation spread this far into the fringes of the Imperium? Have they heard the tales of Kerbalkalyth, ravager of the Floradine Cluster, slayer of the Running Wolf, chosen of She Who Thirsts and pride of the warband of Eusebius the Proud, oathed these ten millennia to the Emperor's Children? Or do they simply recognise majesty and power when it reveals itself before them in those final moments before they die?

They do not even die well. There is no sport to be taken from their end, and the slaughter is over in a matter of seconds. A few, those with faculty enough to at least raise their weapons in some semblance of resistance, I kill cleanly, heads removed or hearts pierced. Those too cowardly, unworthy of the mercy of quick death, are left to a painful, lingering demise, their guts spilled on the sand, flesh torn open to the mercy of the punishing sun. Their wails for clemency and a swift death sound like music to me, an atonal and discordant opera that fuels my master's pleasure.

They are just reaching the aria when a new sound joins their chorus. Overhead, two Thunderhawks of crimson and ivory swoop low, disgorging their occupants into the heart of the massacre. The tinny whine of Imperial Guard las-weaponry is augmented by the staccato boom of bolter fire and a newfound vigour envelops me at the promise of a true challenge.

Emboldened by their transhuman reinforcements, the common soldiery of the Imperium renew their assault. Many of their shots go awry, the awe I have

instilled in them yet to fully dissipate, but those that do find their mark are simply deflected or absorbed. I grant them all instant death, as much from my desire to move on to more worthy foes as a reward for their willingness to fight back.

The first of the Space Marines tears his way through a phalanx of cultists to reach me, his chainsword revving in protest as it bisects meat and bone. The white pauldrons stain the same crimson as the rest of his armour, obscuring a Chapter icon that I do not recognise. As he gets close, he launches himself from the ground, raising the chain weapon above his head to bring it down in a crude killing stroke. My blade meets his and teeth burr and shear off as Techmarine-crafted weaponry meets warpforged alloy. The weapon chokes as its buckled chain edge clogs the mechanism. The blocks he musters for the next trio of strokes aimed at him are hurried and improvised as he struggles to get his weapon functioning again. Undeterred, he comes back with three strokes of his own, entirely artless and lacking in grace. I allow him a fourth attack, one final chance to demonstrate that he is a foe worthy of my attention, but all he can muster is a club-like flail of the stricken weapon.

Before he can react, I pierce the seal where helm meets armour, my blade passing clean through his throat and out of the other side. As I withdraw, I adjust my angle slightly to destroy the progenoids and when his body crashes face forward onto the sand, I run him through the chest, depriving his Chapter of their genetic inheritance.

Cries of defiance ring out from his comrades, the still-twitching corpse a focus for their rage and grief. They channel their anger, their shots and sword blows no less controlled or accurate but with a newfound sense of hatred driving them on.

Good. I was beginning to get bored.

One of them, a Scout, calls out a challenge. It goes unacknowledged, naturally. Who is a mere Space Marine Scout to challenge one of the galaxy's finest and most ancient warriors? Pthoric, a recent addition to Eusebius's warband, having turned his back on his former Chapter some four centuries past, moves to intercept the impertinent whelp.

A consummate swordsman in his own right, it takes less than three seconds and only half a dozen blows before Pthoric becomes just another corpse soon to be buried by the desert winds.

Piqued, I look on as Barbaratharon moves to intercept the Scout. The duel is not as swift as the first, and the Emperor's Children legionary at least draws blood with his first blow – a nick across the meat of the bicep – but the flurry of

blows in riposte ends with Barbaratharon's head and sword arm being removed from his body.

Qlymachs, one of the Legion's true sons and rumoured to have spent time in the duelling cages with Lucius himself, is the next to engage him. The Scout ducks under the first stroke and, as he brings his power sword up to meet Qlymachs's blade, wrenches the ancient blade from Barbaratharon's dead grip and swings it with his off-hand.

Qlymachs feints to avoid the blow, the monomolecular edge gouging deep into his plastron, and he breaks his blade-lock with the Scout, using his superior strength to push the dual-wielding Space Marine back.

This is no neophyte, I realise. This warrior bears all the hallmarks of training and combat experience and the way he brings the fight to his enemy is redolent of one disposed to leadership. Is he their sergeant? Their captain even? It matters not. Qlymachs is the second best swordsman in the warband. The Scout's temerity will soon be punished.

Fending off swipes from both weapons, Qlymachs aims a killing blow at the Scout's chest only to find the progress of his glaive impeded by crossed blades. The Scout swiftly withdraws both swords, attempting to overbalance his opponent, but Qlymachs is too wily and seasoned to fall for it, instead forcefully flicking the blade with his wrist in an attempt to split open the Scout's skull.

All that splits open is the torso of the Emperor's Children warrior.

Anticipating the nature of the counterattack, the Scout drops low, allowing the flicked stroke to pass overhead while he lunges forwards with both blades, impaling Qlymachs before drawing the blades, and his midriff, apart.

Not even granting his dying opponent the mercy of death, the Scout leaves Qlymachs to bleed out while he advances upon the true focus of his wrath.

Such skill. Such finesse. Such cunning. Such hatred. Such potential.

His previous three kills were merely a prelude and he charges in a blur of steel and coruscating energy. Each blow met by my blade, every stroke parried and returned in kind. The most equally matched foe I have faced in millennia, the duel raises me to heightened levels of pleasure long since denied to me.

Obviously well-practised in swordplay, he throws feints that I have not seen since the days of the Legion and employs defensive strokes and ripostes the origins of which lay with races long since extinguished or fled from the galaxy. Twice he almost lands killing strokes, turned away at the last with desperate, almost instinctual, blocks.

If this is how good it feels to fight against him, just imagine the ecstasy to be

experienced by being wielded by him.

With the third killing stroke ready to slice down, I draw upon the power of the warp to temporarily rewrite the laws of physics, increasing my mass a hundredfold in Eusebius the Proud's sword hand.

Anzo Riegler raised the power sword above his head one final time before slashing down with it while simultaneously bring his looted blade around in a chopping stroke. Amazingly, the traitor did not raise his own weapon in defence and both swords drove cleanly home, the two halves of the traitor's head dropping wetly to the shifting ground underfoot.

Still alert to any danger, the Crimson Sabres Scout-sergeant raised both blades and circled around, ready to face the next foe, but he found none. Another nine pink-clad traitors, in addition to the four he had slain himself, lay dead in the desert sands while the remaining members of the warband were in rout along with their cultist cohort. Already, the Thunderhawks were circling back, ready to pick up the five squads of Second Company along with Riegler's single squad from the Tenth. Within minutes they would be airborne again, ready to bolster the Imperial Guard forces pursuing the fleeing traitors.

Dropping the looted sword, Riegler shut off and sheathed his own weapon. He knelt down over the headless corpse of the final traitor he had slain and prised open the dead fingers of the sword hand. He pulled the dark-bladed sword free and gripped it by the ornate, pearlescent pommel. In contradiction of how much trouble his foe had in lifting the blade to mount a final defence, the sword felt light in his hands and he swung it experimentally. It felt like an extension of his own being, so much so that the sword's temperature was exactly that of the blood now coursing a little faster through his veins.

Every day for over six decades, Anzo Riegler had practised his skills for hours on end in the training cages of his Chapter's fortress-monastery and ships of the fleet, honing his skills with the blade until it was near unrivalled among his peers. In all those years of training, in all the volumes on weaponry and swordcraft he had pored over in that time, never had anything come close to the perfection of the weapon he held balanced in his hand.

'Really, Anzo?' said a voice from behind him. Riegler turned around to find Captain Kranon striding up the sand dune towards him. The air was in tumult from the Thunderhawks coming in to land, whipping sand up from the desert floor and creating the illusion of mist. 'You're actually going to take that thing as a trophy?'

‘It is a fine blade, Sevarion. Finer even than the one your brother wields so well.’ The two Crimson Sabres had been squadmates when they were first inducted into the Scout Company and although Sevarion had eclipsed Anzo by rising to the captaincy of Second Company, Sevarion’s brother Sevastus had outdone them both by ascending to the mantle of Chapter Master.

‘It is a tainted thing. Throw it away and be done with it.’ Sevarion removed his helm revealing his shock of jet-black hair. He fixed the Scout-sergeant with his intense sapphire eyes.

‘It belonged to Kyal’s killer.’ Both men looked back to where two of Kranon’s company were preparing to take their fallen brother’s corpse aboard one of the waiting Thunderhawks. ‘I claim it as my own, as is my right.’

In recent centuries, the Crimson Sabres relations with other Chapters and branches of the Imperium had become strained and some of their ways had deviated significantly from the strictures laid down in the Codex Astartes. While trophy taking – skulls, ornamentation, scraps of armour – was common amongst some Adeptus Astartes brotherhoods, the taking of weapons from a fallen foe was still considered abstruse. In spite of their tolerance for the practice, it was still forbidden to actually carry those weapons into battle.

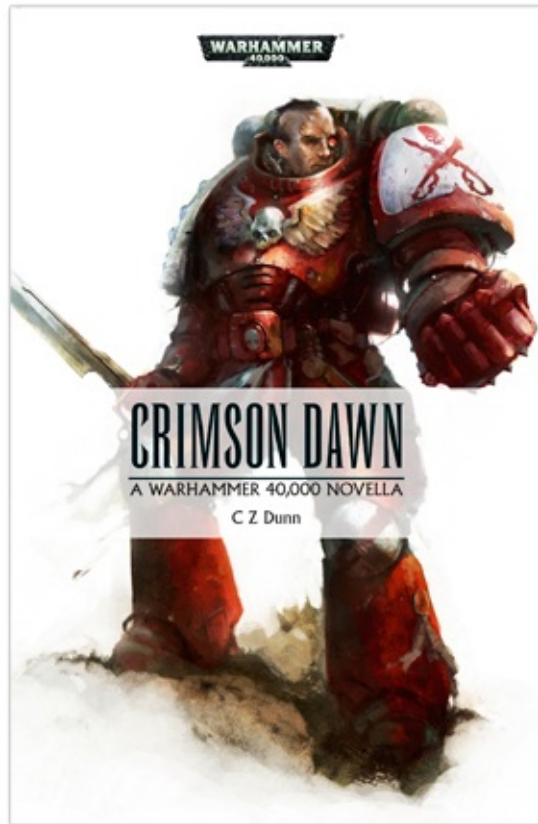
Kranon sighed. Anzo removed the scabbard from the Emperor’s Children corpse and sheathed the sword.

‘Besides, brother, what is there to worry about with you constantly around to keep watch upon my immortal soul?’ Anzo said, heading off in the direction of an impatiently idling Thunderhawk. ‘Come now, or do you think the archenemy will wait for us?’

Shaking his head, Sevarion Kranon followed his brother, for better or for worse.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Domiciled in the East Midlands, C Z DUNN is the author of the Apocalypse novel *Pandorax*, the Dark Angels novella *Dark Vengeance* and the audio dramas *Trials of Azrael*, *The Ascension of Balthasar* and *Malediction*, as well as several short stories. Having spent many years in the publishing industry, with a strong leaning towards genre fiction, he is an expert in e-publication, audio production and zombies.



Excommunicated, hated and hunted, the Crimson Slaughter turned from the Emperor's Light and have since carved a bloody trail through the Imperium. But before they betrayed their oaths and turned to the worship of the Dark Gods, they were the Crimson Sabres, stalwart and loyal.

This is the story of their fall.

[BUY NOW](#)



READ IT FIRST

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS | EARLY RELEASES | FREE DELIVERY

blacklibrary.com

A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION

**Published in 2014 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd.,
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK**

Cover illustration by Alex Boyd.

© Games Workshop Limited, 2014. All rights reserved.

Black Library, the Black Library logo, The Horus Heresy, The Horus Heresy logo, The Horus Heresy eye device, Space Marine Battles, the Space Marine Battles logo, Warhammer 40,000, the Warhammer 40,000 logo, Games Workshop, the Games Workshop logo and all associated brands, names, characters, illustrations and images from the Warhammer 40,000 universe are either ®, ™ and/or © Games Workshop Ltd 2000-2014, variably registered in the UK and other countries around the world.

All rights reserved.

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

ISBN 978-1-78251-481-7

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise except as expressly permitted under license from the publisher.

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.