

WARHAMMER
40,000

SANDY MITCHELL



THE SMALLEST DETAIL

A CIAPHAS CAIN SHORT STORY

WARHAMMER
40,000

SANDY MITCHELL



THE SMALLEST DETAIL

A CIAPHAS CAIN SHORT STORY

THE SMALLEST DETAIL

Sandy Mitchell

Jurgen had never liked people very much, and their returned indifference was fine by him. That was the main reason he'd joined the Imperial Guard: they told you what to do and you got on and did it, without any of the social niceties of civilian life he found both tedious and baffling. Since becoming a commissar's personal aide, however, he'd been forced to interact with others in ways which went far beyond the simple exchange of orders and acknowledgement, although he remained obstinately wedded to the most straightforward approach in dealing with them.

'What do you want?' the sergeant in the blue and yellow uniform of the local militia asked, looking warily at him from behind the flakboard counter walling off most of the warehouse-sized room. 'The Guard have their own stores.'

Jurgen nodded, unable to argue with that, having already worked his way through the inventories of every Imperial Guard supply depot close to the commissar's quarters. He didn't suppose there would be much here worth his attention, but you never knew, and it was a point of personal pride to know where he could lay his hands on anything Commissar Cain might feel the lack of at a moment's notice.

'Dunno yet,' he said, choosing just to answer the question, and ignore the statement of the obvious which had followed it. 'What have you got? And I'm not here for the Guard.' He readjusted the shoulder strap of his lasgun, so he could rummage in a pocket without the weapon slipping to the floor. After a moment he extricated a grubby sheet of vellum, embellished with a seal, and leaned across the counter to bring it within the sergeant's field of vision. The man stepped back hastily, as people so often did when faced with clear evidence of Jurgen's borrowed authority from close at hand.

'The bearer of this note, Gunner Feric Jurgen, is my personal aide, and is to be

accorded all such assistance as he may require in the furtherance of his duties.

Commissar Ciaphas Cain.

‘You’re with the Commissariat?’ the sergeant asked, a nervous edge entering his voice, and Jurgen nodded. It was a bit more complicated than that, he was technically still on secondment from a Valhallan artillery regiment he never expected to see again, but he’d never bothered to find out precisely where he now fitted into the inconceivably complex structure of the Imperial military. No one else seemed to know either, and he found the ambiguity worked to his advantage more often than not.

‘I work for Commissar Cain,’ he said, keeping it simple, folding his well-worn credentials and returning them to the depths of his pockets as he spoke.

‘So I see.’ Sergeant Merser forced an ingratiating smile towards his face. Though he outranked this evil-smelling interloper, he’d long since learned that his status in the planetary militia didn’t mean a thing to most Guardsmen; they regarded all locally raised units as little more than a civilian militia barely worth acknowledging, let alone according any sign of respect. Besides, this particular Guardsman appeared to be running an errand for a commissar, one of those mysterious and terrifying figures seldom encountered by lowly militia troopers, and a good thing too if even half the stories he’d heard about them were true. Not just any commissar either, but Cain, the Hero of Perlia, who even now was giving the rebel forces infesting the city the fight of their lives. However unwelcome his visitor may have been, it was probably best to appear cooperative, at least until it became clear what he wanted.

Jurgen leaned on the counter, and raised his gaze to the racks of neatly shelved foodstuffs in the cavernous space beyond. ‘Can’t see a lot from out here,’ he said.

‘No, of course not. Come on through.’ Reluctantly, the sergeant lifted a hinged flap in the boardsheet countertop, enabling him to tug open a sagging gate of the same material beneath it. Jurgen ambled through the gap, making a mental note of the man’s name at the top of the duty roster tacked to the wall as he passed. Even the most trivial detail could turn out to be important, the commissar always said, and Jurgen had taken the precept to heart, squirreling away whatever nuggets of information he could find as assiduously as pieces of unattended food or kit. You never knew when something you stumbled across might come in

handy.

‘Got an inventory?’ he asked, and Sergeant Merser nodded reluctantly.

‘It’s around here somewhere,’ he said, making a show of rummaging through the shelves under the counter. After a moment or two of Jurgen’s patient scrutiny it became obvious there was no point in attempting to stall any further, and he hauled out a venerable-looking book, leather-bound and battered, trying to hide his annoyance. ‘I think you’ll find everything’s in order.’

Jurgen said nothing as he took it, but his scepticism was palpable, hanging around him like the peculiar odour which had accompanied him into the stores. Merser found himself edging away from his unwelcome visitor, unsure of which he found the more unsettling.

‘I’ll get on, then,’ Jurgen said, dismissing the sergeant from his mind as thoroughly as if the militiaman had evaporated.

Merser watched, as the Guardsman worked his way methodically along the storage racks, periodically pausing while he leafed through the pages of the venerable tome. Now and again he glanced in Merser’s direction, with an expression of patient inquiry.

‘Some local thing?’ he asked, as a sliver of dried meat disappeared through the hole in his beard, accompanied by the squelching sounds of mastication.

Merser nodded. ‘Sand eel. From the Parch. Only things that can live out in the open down there, so the locals raise them for food.’ Aware that he was beginning to babble, he clamped his mouth firmly shut. The less he said, the less could find its way back to the commissar’s ears.

‘Had worse,’ Jurgen conceded, slipping a couple of packs of the leathery shreds into one of the pouches hanging from his torso armour. There had been none of that in the Guard stores, and Commissar Cain generally appreciated the chance to try new flavours. Come to that, they were both seasoned enough campaigners to find the idea of emergency rations which tasted of anything identifiable at all a pleasant novelty.

By the time Jurgen had finished working his way round the shelves, the pouch was considerably fuller than it had been, stuffed with other local viands which the offworld-supplied Guard stores had been without. There was little enough else to like about Helengon, a world which, in his opinion, was aptly named. He’d seen worse, of course, and at least the heretics they were fighting here were human enough instead of gleaming metal killers or scuttling tyranid horrors, but like most of the places he’d been since enlisting, the air was too warm and dry, and the ground too firm underfoot.

‘Anything else I can help you with?’ Sergeant Merser asked, and, reminded of his presence, Jurgen shook his head.

‘Got what I came for,’ he said, passing the book back.

‘I see.’ If the sergeant’s voice trembled just a little, or his face seemed a trifle more ashen than it had been, Jurgen didn’t notice: but then he seldom noticed things like that anyway.

One kind of subtle cue Jurgen was pretty much guaranteed to pick up on, though, was intimations of danger. By this point in his life he’d been on the receiving end of enough ambushes, berserker charges, and incoming fire to have taken it pretty much for granted that if something wasn’t trying to kill him now it was only a matter of time before it did. Accordingly, it didn’t take him long to realise he was being followed.

He glanced around, tugging gently on the sling of his lasgun, to bring it within easy reach of his hand without appearing to ready himself for combat. Sure enough, a faint scuffle echoed in the shadows behind him, as someone took a half-step too many before realising their quarry had become stationary, and froze into immobility in their turn.

Jurgen felt his mouth twitch into an involuntary sneer. Typical militia sloppiness, he thought. Not a bad place for a bushwhacking though, he had to give them that. He’d cut down an alleyway between two of the big storage units, which, from the signage stencilled on the ends, he’d deduced contained small-arms and ammunition, neither of which made them worth a visit. Those he could obtain directly from the Guard if he wanted them. Besides, most of the las weapons around here were of local manufacture, adequate, but no match for the products of an Imperial forge world; he had no desire to find a power pack shorting out on him just when he needed it the most.

Which could be any time now. Seeing no point in letting his followers know he was on to them, and needing a plausible reason for his sudden stop, Jurgen unsealed his trousers, and relieved himself against the nearest wall in a leisurely fashion. While he did so, he let his gaze travel around his immediate surroundings, as though simply passing the time until nature had run its course.

There were two men trailing him, trying to make themselves invisible behind a stack of corroding metal drums. They’d almost succeeded, but not well enough to escape the notice of a combat veteran of Jurgen’s calibre. A faint clank of metal against metal meant that at least one of them was probably armed.

In the other direction, a jumble of crates narrowed the gap between buildings;

a soldier in blue and yellow was lounging casually against one, puffing on a lho stick, and apparently keeping an eye out for his immediate superior; a performance which would have been a little more convincing if his head had spent more time turned in the direction of the alley mouth than towards Jurgen.

Completing his task with a sigh of satisfaction, Jurgen rearranged his clothing and his dignity, and resumed his unhurried progress towards the smoking trooper. As he'd expected, the soft padding of stealthy footsteps followed him. Only one pair, though, by the sound of it. That meant the other man would be lining up a weapon of some kind. His opinion of the Helengon militia plummeted even further, if that were possible; the gunman would be as much of a danger to his confederates as to Jurgen. More of one, even: Jurgen had a helmet and flak vest for protection, while the troopers stalking him were dressed simply in fatigues.

It never occurred to Jurgen to wonder why these men appeared to be after him; they just were. Reasons were irrelevant.

As he passed the smoker, the man attacked, lunging with the combat knife he hadn't quite managed to conceal behind his body while leaning against the crates. Either he knew what he was doing, aiming a single, precise blow at one of the vulnerable points in Jurgen's body armour, or he was an idiot, striking out blindly in the vague hope of finding an opening. Whichever it was, he was out of luck; Jurgen pulled the lasgun off his shoulder, ramming the barrel into the side of the man's arm, and deflecting his aim with a *snap* of shattering bone. The blade skittered off the tight carbifibre weave of his flak vest, and Jurgen pulled the trigger, putting a couple of rounds through the smoker's chest before he even had time to finish inhaling in preparation for an agonised scream. One down.

Jurgen turned, seeing the man behind him pick up the pace, hoping to close the distance between them before he could bring the lasgun round to bear. He was a slight fellow, whose uniform hung oddly on him, as though it was a little too large for its wearer; which might have struck Jurgen as odd, if he hadn't spent most of his life being issued with kit which didn't quite fit. Imperial Guard uniforms only came in two sizes, too large and too small, a problem most troopers solved by swapping what they'd been given with others in their unit; an option Jurgen had never felt inclined to pursue.

The running man was carrying a weapon in his hand, a crude stubber, which he brought up and fired as he came. Jurgen didn't flinch; the chances of hitting a man-sized target with a handgun while firing on the run were minimal, he knew, and his flak vest would probably hold even if the fellow got lucky.

Which he didn't. A burst of lasgun fire from a stationary shooter, on the other hand, was a lot more accurate, especially if the shooter in question had spent years bringing down moving targets in the middle of a firefight.

Stubber man folded and fell, his torso pitted with the ugly cauterised wounds characteristic of lasgun fire, his pistol skittering away as his flaccid hand smacked against the ground. He was probably dead before he hit the ground, but Jurgen put an extra round through his head anyway. He'd seen enough people keep going on the battlefield by sheer willpower, long after they should have laid down and died, insulated by shock and a final adrenaline surge from the full effect of their mortal wounds.

As Jurgen ran forward, angling for a clear shot at the man behind the barrels, his boot kicked against the fallen gun, and he glanced down at it disdainfully. It was an old-fashioned slug thrower, crudely made, and clearly not standard issue, even to the militia of a backwater world like this one. No wonder its owner had missed him; it was beyond Jurgen why anybody would choose to use a weapon like that, instead of the lasgun he'd been issued with.

The man behind the barrels had no such compunction, it seemed, a hail of lasbolts chewing up the rockcrete footings of the storage blocks, gouging a line of splinters across the crates and the knifeman's corpse behind Jurgen as he returned fire on full auto. That would deplete the power pack uncomfortably fast, he knew, but there was no cover he could take, and throwing himself flat to minimise his target profile would simply allow the hidden gunman to pick off an immobile target at his leisure. Better to advance behind a blizzard of suppressive fire, hoping that would be enough to keep his quarry's head down, until he was able to get a clean shot at him.

The tactic worked better than Jurgen had dared to hope. The hail of lasbolts threw up sparks from the metal drums, punching dents and ripping holes in them with a clamour which would have struck terror into the heart of an ork. It certainly terrified the hidden gunman, who stopped firing to retreat behind the metal cylinders' meagre protection, huddling in their lee.

Not that it did him much good. Liquid began seeping from the punctured drums almost at once, the thick, acrid smell of promethium lacing the air around them. As Jurgen continued to advance, firing as he came, either a spark from an impact or the heat of a lasbolt itself ignited the escaping vapour.

With a muffled *whump*, the whole stack exploded, making Jurgen stagger with the sudden wave of heat. He backed up fast as a lake of burning fuel began sloshing in his direction, scrambling over the crates which were already

beginning to blacken in the intense heat, just as the blazing tide began to lap against them. From somewhere in the middle of the inferno, he thought he could hear a prolonged, agonised scream, which was mercifully cut short in a sudden secondary explosion.

Choking from the smoke, eyes streaming from the acrid fumes, Jurgen stumbled into the open, gasping for breath. A thick, dense coil of smoke followed him like a questing tentacle, but he ignored it, sweeping his immediate surroundings for any further signs of hostility. Attracted by the noise, a score or more of the local militia were running towards him, some carrying fire suppressors, others with weapons ready, no doubt under the impression that the rebels were attacking.

‘You! Guardsman. Drop your weapon!’ someone shouted, and Jurgen turned, prepared to fight his way out if he had to; but this time it wasn’t an option. Five troopers had their lasguns trained on him, and it was clear that these ones knew what they were doing. They were too widely dispersed to take down; if he tried, he’d only be able to get a couple of them before the others returned the favour. They were dressed differently from the others too, in body armour and full face helmets, unit insignia which meant nothing to him stencilled on their chestplates.

He knew what they were, anyway, he’d seen plenty like them in his time in the Guard. Provosts, or whatever they called themselves in the Helengon militia.

‘Can’t do that,’ he replied evenly. ‘It’s against regulations.’ Imperial Guard troopers were responsible for their lasgun at all times, and although simply putting it down wouldn’t be a technical breach of standing orders, the next step would most likely be someone taking it out of his reach altogether. Even an ordinary Guardsman would find the threat of being disarmed well nigh intolerable, but for a commissar’s personal aide, it would be a mortal wound to his dignity. On the other hand, being shot five times at close range wouldn’t do a lot for it either. ‘But I’ll take out the power pack and stow it.’

‘Good enough,’ the squad leader agreed, after a moment’s hesitation. She raised her visor to look at him directly, then back to the column of smoke still billowing from between the warehouses. ‘Then you and I are going to have a little chat.’

‘You’ve got no idea which unit they were from?’ the provost sergeant, whose name had turned out to be Liana, asked, not for the first time.

Jurgen shook his head. ‘Never saw any patches,’ he repeated, and shrugged. ‘Probably wouldn’t have recognised ’em if I had.’

‘Probably not,’ Liana agreed. ‘But they should have had something.’ She gestured at the bustle of activity surrounding them. By now, over a hundred militia troopers had arrived to fight the fire, clear up its aftermath, and, in many cases, simply take advantage of the free entertainment. Every single one of them had insignia of some kind visible on their uniforms.

‘These ones didn’t,’ Jurgen insisted, mildly irked at having his word doubted. The commissar would have believed him at once. He glared balefully at the charred cadaver being carried past by a group of troopers who must have seriously annoyed a superior to be landed with that particular duty, and spat vehemently, to relieve his feelings. ‘Not that you could tell from that.’

‘Special forces, maybe?’ Liana speculated, at least willing to entertain the idea that he might not have been mistaken.

‘They’d have had better equipment than a backstreet stubber,’ Jurgen said, ‘and they’d have been better shots.’

‘Good point,’ the provost conceded, to Jurgen’s faint, and pleased, surprise. She turned to Sergeant Merser, who was hovering uneasily nearby, a data-slate in his hand. ‘Any luck tracing the lasgun one of them was armed with?’

Merser nodded, looking distinctly unhappy. ‘We managed to find a serial number. I would have thought the metal had melted, but the body...’ he swallowed, turning another shade paler, ‘what was left of it, had fallen on top. Protected it a bit.’

‘So who was it issued to?’ Liana asked.

‘That’s just it. It wasn’t.’ Merser held the data-slate out, as though he expected it to snap at his fingers. ‘It’s listed as still in stores.’

‘So it was pilfered,’ Liana said, and Merser nodded unhappily.

‘Looks that way,’ he replied.

‘Then we need to know who by,’ Liana persisted.

‘If we find out what’s missing, we should be able to deduce who’s responsible,’ Merser said. ‘I’ll start going through the inventories.’

‘We could start with yours,’ Liana suggested, fixing the heavysset sergeant with a calculating look.

Merser flushed indignantly. ‘My records are fine,’ he snapped. ‘What’s in the files is on the shelves.’ He looked at Jurgen for confirmation. ‘He’ll tell you.’

Jurgen nodded. ‘Everything matched,’ he agreed. He jerked a thumb in the direction of the latest corpse to be recovered, being dragged along in a tarpaulin by sweating, swearing troopers, leaving a faint trail of ash and flakes of charred meat in their wake. ‘And I’d have a roll call if I were you. Whoever’s missing’s

probably them.'

'Good idea,' Liana concurred. 'Then we can start chasing down their contacts. Wouldn't be the first time a quartermaster started diverting stuff to the black market.'

'I'll leave you to it, then.' Jurgen shouldered his lasgun, and turned away. 'I'm done here.'

'Maybe you should stay,' Merser said hastily.

Jurgen turned back, surprised. 'What for?' he asked.

'Yes, what for?' Liana turned a questioning gaze on the portly sergeant. 'It's not as though Gunner Jurgen's a suspect.'

'Of course not,' Merser said hastily. 'But he must have assisted the commissar in his investigations. Maybe he can spot something we might overlook.'

'Maybe he can,' Liana agreed, after a moment's consideration. She turned to Jurgen. 'Do you think you might?'

'Dunno.' Jurgen shrugged. 'Worth a try, I suppose, so long as it don't take too long' In truth, his involvement in investigations generally went no further than processing the paperwork and shooting the occasional traitor who resented his unmasking, but an appeal had been made to his sense of duty, and he felt honour-bound to respond. It was what Commissar Cain would wish, he had no doubt.

'Right then,' Liana said, looking from one man to another, and wondering if she'd just made the decision to consign her career to oblivion, 'might as well get started, I suppose.'

'What do you mean there's no one missing?' Liana asked, handing the data-slate she'd just been shown back to the provost who'd brought it in to her office; a small cubicle on the western side of the militia barracks, which would have seemed crowded with only one occupant. Currently it had three, Jurgen observing from a corner near the window, which Liana seemed to like jammed open as wide as it would go. He had no objection to this, as it gave him a good view of the militia compound, and the city beyond, from which the occasional crackle of small-arms fire could be heard. The rebels were making a concerted attempt to hold on to the southern quarter, with the Imperial Guard equally determined to dislodge them, and show the militia how it ought to be done by breaking the year-long stalemate in a matter of days.

'I mean everyone's accounted for, ma'am,' the provost said, and withdrew, a little hastily it seemed to Jurgen.

'Someone's playing games,' Jurgen said. 'Answering twice to cover for them.'

A common enough dodge in the Guard, when troopers had overstayed a pass, or been too hungover to report for duty.

‘Unless the men who attacked you weren’t soldiers at all,’ Liana said thoughtfully.

‘They were in uniform,’ Jurgen objected.

‘I went to a party dressed as an ork once,’ Liana retorted. ‘That didn’t make me a greenskin.’

Jurgen nodded, the way he’d seen the commissar do while considering an unexpected suggestion, and tried to see what she was driving at. ‘You mean they were pretending to be militia troopers,’ he said at last, reasonably certain he got it.

‘That’s right,’ Liana said, looking at him a little oddly. ‘Using stolen uniforms to get onto the base.’

Which sounded reasonable to Jurgen. If they could steal guns, they could steal uniforms just as easily. ‘If it was me,’ he added, ‘I’d have set charges in the armoury as soon as I’d finished helping myself.’

‘First thing we checked, believe me,’ Liana assured him. ‘Nothing there.’

‘Hm.’ Mindful that he was a guest in her office, Jurgen spat out of the window, rather than letting the gob of saliva land where it would. ‘Even the rebels here aren’t up to much.’

If Liana realised that was a thinly-veiled criticism of the local forces, she was tactful enough to let it go. Instead, she looked thoughtful. ‘You’re right,’ she said. ‘If rebels could sneak in and steal weapons, they’d definitely have sabotaged what was left so we couldn’t use them.’

Jurgen’s brow furrowed. ‘Who does that leave?’ he asked.

‘Gangers, I suppose,’ Liana said. ‘Plenty of those around, carving up territories for themselves while the fighting keeps us too busy to rein them in.’ She looked up, as Merser entered the office. ‘Any luck?’

‘I can tell you the records are a mess,’ Merser said. ‘Overstocks, items missing, half the inventories read like fiction ’zines.’

‘No change there, then,’ Jurgen said, shrugging. ‘Yours are the only ones I ever saw that tallied exactly.’

Merser flushed. ‘I like to pay attention to the details.’

‘I noticed,’ Jurgen said. He glanced at his chronograph, and stood. ‘I need to get back. Anything I can help with, contact the commissar’s office.’

‘Of course.’ Liana stood too, began to hold out a hand, then withdrew it hastily. ‘We’ll keep you informed.’

‘Of course we will,’ Merser added, standing aside to make room at the door. ‘Where’s your vehicle?’

‘Came on foot,’ Jurgen lied, and left them to it.

In fact he’d commandeered a motorcycle, which someone had been careless enough to leave unattended in the regimental motor pool, the better to navigate his way around the warren of streets surrounding the Imperial Guard deployment zones. He’d have preferred a Salamander, but he’d have had to divert around so much rubble if he’d chosen one that it would have all but doubled the distance he would have to travel.

After retrieving his mechanical steed, he coasted into the lee of a battle-damaged Chimera, which a party of engineers were energetically reconsecrating, and waited a few moments.

As he’d expected, the distinctive figure of Sergeant Merser emerged from the building almost at once, at the closest to a trot he could manage. The heavysset non-com swung himself into the cab of a parked truck, against which a soldier with no visible unit patch had been lounging, and gunned the engine, while his companion scrambled up beside him. No sooner were they both aboard than Merser slammed the lorry into gear, roaring out of the yard as though half the daemons of the warp were after him.

It was almost too easy. After a quick conversation over his vox-bead, Jurgen opened the bike’s throttle, and set out in pursuit. He hung well back, keeping the luminator off, despite the rapidly gathering night, well able to judge the presence of any major obstacles in the carriageway by the intermittent flaring of his quarry’s brake lights. The risk of being spotted was minimal, he knew. Merser’s attention would be entirely on the road ahead, looking for a solitary pedestrian.

Before long, the lorry coasted to a halt at an intersection, where Merser paused, glancing up and down the converging carriageways. Nothing moved in either direction, except a Chimera patrolling the deserted streets. With nightfall came the curfew, and nothing would be moving now except military traffic. Nothing legal, anyway, but there was nothing to worry about. No one would look twice at a militia truck.

‘Where is he?’ his companion demanded, nursing a laspistol the armourer still hadn’t noticed was missing. ‘You said he was on foot.’

‘He can’t have got far,’ Merser said, still hovering indecisively. If he picked the wrong direction, the Guardsman would be safely back in the Imperial Guard

compound, reporting to the commissar before they could double back and correct their mistake. Before he could make up his mind which road to take, a motorcycle roared up out of the darkness behind them, and parked, its engine revving, next to the cab.

Merser glanced down, and found himself staring along the length of a lasgun barrel, with a well-remembered face at the opposite end.

‘I thought you’d leg it,’ Jurgen remarked, conversationally. ‘But I wanted to be sure. The commissar always likes to be sure, before he accuses anyone.’

‘Accuses them of what?’ Merser blustered, playing for time.

‘Trying to kill me, for starters,’ Jurgen said, as though that had been a perfectly reasonable thing to attempt. ‘You sent those frakkers after me, didn’t you?’

By way of an answer, Merser floored the accelerator. Jurgen debated pursuit for a fraction of a second, then squeezed the trigger of his lasgun instead. There was no way the cumbersome truck would be able to outrun the motorcycle anyway, so he might as well bring things to an end now. The hail of las-bolts shredded the lorry’s tyres, and he watched it veer off course and collide with a half-collapsed storefront with detached interest.

As it came to rest, amid a small landslide of displaced brick, the passenger door popped open, and the ersatz soldier bailed out, firing wildly as he came. He was no better a shot than his deceased companions, and Jurgen dropped him easily, without even bothering to dismount. As he swung his leg over the saddle, and began to walk towards the crippled lorry, the Chimera ground to a halt a few metres away.

‘Took your time,’ he said, as the hatch clanged open.

‘What can I say. Traffic,’ Liana said, which didn’t make much sense to Jurgen. So far as he could see, the streets were still deserted. She flung the truck’s tailgate open, and a cascade of ration packs spilled out onto the cracked pavement. ‘Looks like you were right.’

‘Course I was,’ Jurgen said. ‘Inventories never match up to what’s actually in stores. The only reason Merser’s would is if he was covering something.’

Liana nodded. ‘The way things are now, food’s like currency on the streets. Better. Him and his ganger friends must have been making a fortune.’ She paused to glare at the sergeant, who was being prised, none too gently, out of the battered cab by a couple of her provosts. ‘He must have realised you’d spotted something was wrong, and sent his accomplices to keep you quiet.’

‘That’s how I see it,’ Jurgen agreed. ‘I still don’t get why he wanted to keep me around, though.’

‘So we could try again, you idiot!’ Merser called, as he was half-dragged, half-carried towards the Chimera. ‘If you told the commissar, we’d be finished!’

‘Told the commissar?’ Jurgen repeated, in tones of honest astonishment. ‘Why would I bother him with a bit of pilfering? Everyone’s at it.’

Merser’s response was vocal, prolonged, and unflatteringly inaccurate about Jurgen’s genealogy.

Jurgen listened impassively for a moment, before quietening him down with a well-aimed punch to the face. ‘Ladies present,’ he admonished, although he suspected Liana had already heard a good deal of profanity in her line of work. Besides, he resented people trying to kill him.

‘We might need a statement,’ Liana said, after a moment, during which the power of speech seemed to have deserted her for some reason.

Jurgen shrugged, his attention already on the crippled truck. ‘You know where to find me,’ he said.

After all, he still had a bit of space left in his utility pouches, and the motorbike he’d borrowed had commodious panniers. And you never knew when a few extra ration bars might come in handy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SANDY MITCHELL is one of Black Library's best loved authors, and has written fiction set in both the Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 universes. He is best known for the nine books of the Ciaphas Cain series, along with a plethora of associated short stories and audio dramas. Also known as Alex Stewart, he writes screenplays for film and television.



When the world of Quadravidia comes under attack by the insidious tau, only one man can defeat the aliens and save the planet in the Emperor's name: the legendary Hero of the Imperium, Commissar Ciaphas Cain.

Buy now from blacklibrary.com



READ IT FIRST

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS | EARLY RELEASES | FREE DELIVERY

blacklibrary.com

A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION

**Originally published in the Black Library Weekender Anthology
2012.**

**Published in 2012 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd.,
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK**

Cover art by Clint Langley

© Games Workshop Limited 2013. All rights reserved.

**Black Library, the Black Library logo, Games Workshop, the
Games Workshop logo and all associated marks, names,
characters, illustrations and images from the Warhammer
universe are either ®, TM and/or © Games Workshop Ltd 2013,
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 978-0-85787-893-9

**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 the 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**

www.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.