



**WARHAMMER**  
40,000

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It was called the Arc de Tuitia and was one of the many triumphal archways that decorated the avenues and terrace aisles of the collegia moon. Universitae scholars dated the Arc de Tuitia as pre-Imperial, but preservation dictats almost as ancient prevented further excavation of the crumbling brickwork. If they hadn't, scholars would have discovered something far, far older.

In the emptiness of the boulevard, within the ancient span of the Arc de Tuitia, an immaterial blaze erupted. It barely had time to assemble the tessellate-matrix of reality required for interdimensional entry when a jetbike blasted from its nothingness.

Like a wraithbone talon tearing its way up the boulevard, the bike carried Inquisitor Bronislaw Czevak into existence. With his harlequin coat trailing a prismatic smear of shape and colour, Czevak leant this way and that, rocketing the jetbike through monumental gateways, around statues and across ceremonial gardens. About him the collegia, universitae and repositories of Savignor reached for peaceful, purple skies. All were crafted from dark, local stone. Weaving through the columnar magnificence of temples and around stately, street-sunken amphitheatres, Czevak found himself in a cultural gemstone of the segmentum crown. Despite being situated uncomfortably close to the Eye of Terror, many of the sector's most powerful families sent their sons and daughters to complete their education at Savignor. Czevak himself had attended the collegia moon.

The inquisitor slowed the jetbike to an idling glide before drifting to a gentle stop on an esplanade between a colossal archive and a mountainous librarium. Czevak stared about the esplanade. Something was wrong. Robed academics were absent from the streets, as well as the pamphleteers and podia speakers. The streets were deserted.

Czevak dismounted. His hand drifted down to the armoured covers of the *Atlas Infernal*. The tome dangled from his shoulder in its strap. It would make a worthy addition to Savignor's ancient archives and collections. There was a light breeze. Then creaking. Looking up, Czevak saw that the esplanade was lined

with ornamental trees and from those hung the bodies of the absent academics, their necks in improvised nooses. The inquisitor strode across the street to get a better look at the courtyard below. He saw them now. On the bike – at speed – he had missed the bodies. They were everywhere. Some were hanging from arches and balconies. Others sat in the gutter, their wrists slashed and bodies drained of blood. Some had simply leapt from the heights of belfries and reliquary spires, ending their lives on the splattered esplanades below. Even non-academics like Guardsmen and Adeptus Arbites – the representatives of law and order on Savignor – had eaten the barrels of their pistols and blown their brains out across the dark stone.

Something terrible had happened here. Czevak found himself hoping that it was just restricted to the capital district. He knew he was wrong. The bells of the academy quads weren't ringing and the airships that usually cruised the skies above the schola steeples, vox-hailing lectures and compositions, were gone.

His eyes travelled up and out of the quiet carnage, away from the mass suicide, the brown pools of blood and the swinging cadavers. Above the grim skyline of collegiate silence and self-slaughter, Czevak found the reason he had come to Savignor. Looming over the scholastiscape was the citadel-reclusiam of the Universitae Imperialis, referred to the planet over as the Dark Tower. Indeed, it was constructed from the same stone as everything else on Savignor, but that wasn't why it was called the Dark Tower. It housed items deemed by the arch-chancellor as forbidden and censured for study, and even warranted its own Imperial Guard garrison. While all other archives on the planet were devoted to enlightenment, the tomes and exhibits stored in the citadel-reclusiam were restricted. This hadn't stopped Bronislaw Czevak as a student. It didn't stop him now.

Streaming through the deserted district, Czevak rode up to the imposing form of the Universitae Imperialis. Leaving the jetbike hovering amongst the statues on the ordinarily swarming plaza, Czevak stood before the ceremonial portcullages. They were open. With the Dark Tower reaching into the purple skies above him, the inquisitor stepped inside.

Like the Universitae Imperialis, the Dark Tower had not been furnished with elevators. Study was not restricted to the dorm or library. Scholars and students were encouraged to resist the sedentary lifestyle of the academic by walking and talking. Stairs were the order of the day, thousands and thousands of them. Even as a student, Czevak had looked upon the tower-spiralling staircases with less fondness than the archives to which they led. The inquisitor had

travelled light years to reach the collegia moon, however, and wasn't going to let several hundred flights of building-spanning steps stop him.

The staircase told its own story. Like the district below, the universitae had suffered the same life-taking calamity. Clerks, acolytes, pedagogues, autosavants, linguisticants and sisters of the Orders Dialogus: all had killed themselves. Some hung from the balustrade by their robes. Others had splashed the marble stairway with their precious blood. As step after exhausting step took him up through the security gates of the citadel-reclusiam and into Dark Tower, the story changed. The slaughter changed in nature. Bolt holes riddled the walls. The marble baluster had been smashed. Bodies littered the steps: archivists, the arch-chancellor's tower proctors and Guardsmen in ceremonial robes. All had either been blasted to ragged flesh by bolt rounds or smashed into the unforgiving marble and staircase walls.

Czevak had seen this kind of slaughter many times before. This was the work of Ahzek Ahriman's Rubric Marines, living suits of ancient plate, enslaving the tortured souls of Emperor's angels, long turned from His light and wisdom. As unstoppable as living statues and sculptures, Ahriman's Rubricae had entered the Dark Tower and blasted their way through to the maximum security exhibits and sections of forbidden lore.

The inquisitor knew exactly where the path of destruction led and he sprinted the remaining floors. It was the reason the inquisitor himself had returned to Savignor. As a student, sneaking into the citadel-reclusiam, Bronislaw Czevak had seen something he did not understand. A crystal statue of some xenos abomination, as ancient as it was heretical. It had been labelled as representing one of the elder races of the galaxy, a civilisation said to have bloomed before the dominion of the Imperium and humanity's crusade to the stars.

Only now, with the benefit of knowledge earned in the Black Library, had Czevak come to realise that the censured exhibit had been mislabelled. It didn't *represent* a member of the elder races. It *was* one of them. In the Black Library, Czevak had been shown a sacred chamber, right at the core of the craftworld. A biodome, housing a forest of wraithbone trees. A place of spiritual calm and serenity. It was here that the spirits of deceased eldar were transferred from precious spirit stones to the craftworld infinity circuit. It was here that the spiritseers of the eldar race came to commune with the dead and farseers made their most ambitious divinations. Czevak discovered that it was also where the most ancient farseers of the craftworld came to become one with the infinity circuit, standing, remaining, taking root amongst the trees. Czevak came to know

this sanctum as the Dome of the Crystal Seers. He knew what he had witnessed in the Dark Tower had been a crystal seer, an alien and ancient farseer that had long transmuted into psychically-sensitive crystal.

As Czevak arrived in the breached exhibit chamber, he knew he was too late. Bodies littered the floor, both guards and researchers who had devoted their lives to securing and studying the exhibit in secret. That hadn't stopped Ahzek Ahriman.

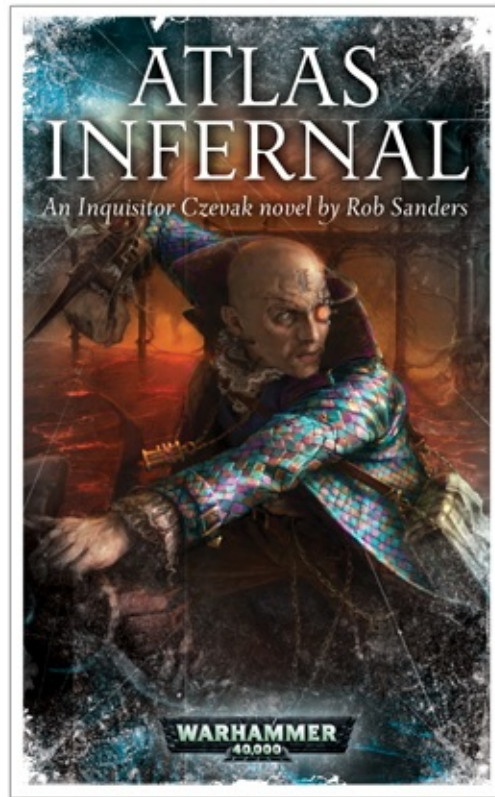
The inquisitor looked down at the shattered crystal. Shards and slivers twinkled in the gloom. The smashed seer decorated the chamber. The jagged base sat like a once-glorious remnant, while chunks of crystal glowed with a dull radiance. Everything else was dusted with splinters. Upon entering the bolt-ravaged chamber, Czevak came to understand his doom and much more beyond.

Bathed in the psychic aftershock that still afflicted the chamber, Czevak witnessed a mind-splitting vision of his nemesis. Ahzek Ahriman: warrior, sorcerer, aspirant. The Emperor's fallen angel, ascending to ruinous godhood. How and when, Czevak could not know. The inquisitor fell to his knees amongst the crystal wreckage. His darkest fears for the future had been revealed in the presence of the decimated seer. Ahzek Ahriman had destroyed the crystal seer to drink deep of its secrets and witness the galactic horror to come. At the moment of destruction, however, a psychic shockwave had rippled across the surface of Savignor. Like a beacon of fate, the Dark Tower had revealed to each and every Imperial citizen on the collegia moon the secrets of their personal doom. It had been too much for their all-too-ordinary minds, leaving them with only their lives to take.

Bronislaw Czevak willed himself to his feet. He felt the weight of the galaxy on his shoulders. It was a burden he had grown accustomed to, but that made it no easier to bear. He stumbled and reached for the wall, overwhelmed and unsteady. Retreating from the psychic potency of the crystal fragments, the inquisitor made once more for the stairs. Ahriman had beaten him to the Dark Tower and had learned something of his fate. Czevak could only hope that what they had both witnessed was one future of many, rather than a singular doom to come. He vowed to stop the sorcerer, either way.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROB SANDERS is a freelance writer, who spends his nights creating dark visions for regular visitors to the 41st millennium to relive in the privacy of their own nightmares, including the novels *Atlas Infernal* and *Legion of the Damned*. By contrast, as Head of English at a local secondary school, he spends his days beating (not literally) the same creativity out of the next generation in order to cripple any chance of future competition. He lives in the small city of Lincoln, UK.



Escaping from the Black Library of the eldar,  
Inquisitor Czevak steals the Atlas Infernal  
– a living map of the Webway.

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