



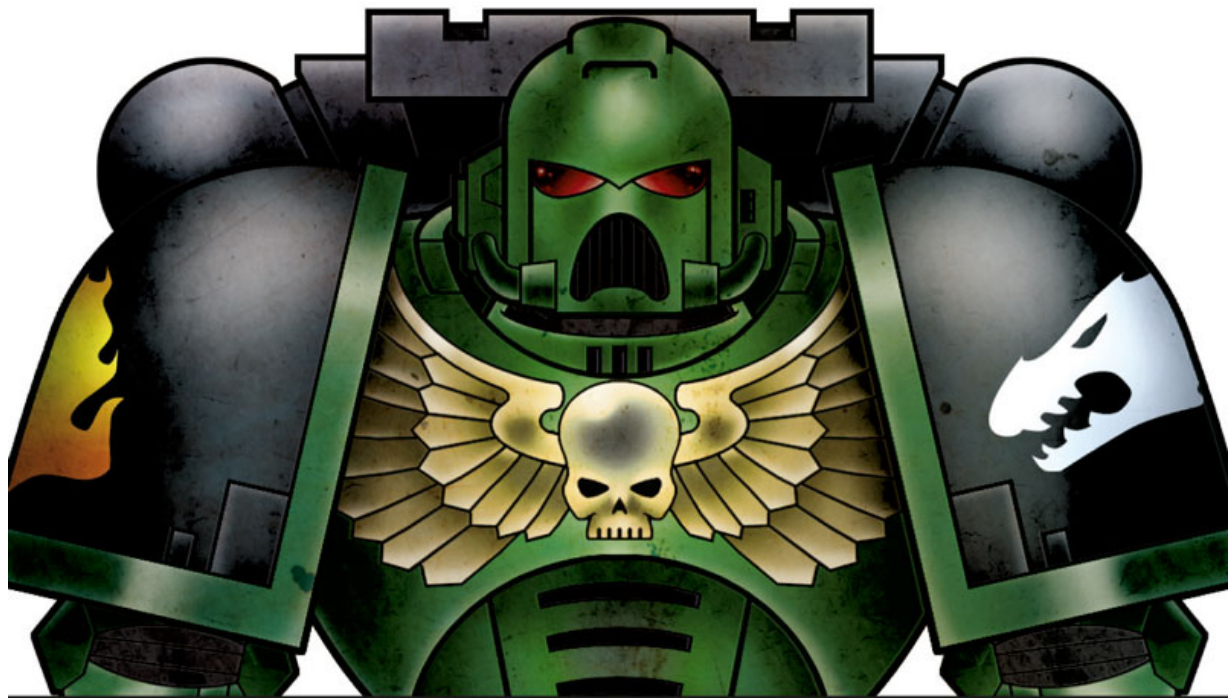
Angels of Death

RITE OF PAIN

N I C H K Y M E



WARHAMMER
40,000



— *Angels of Death* —

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RITE OF PAIN

Nick Kyme

‘Again.’

A prickling heat presaged the actual fire, followed a split-second later by the stench of his flesh burning.

The prisoner strapped down to the stone slab convulsed, his pelvis thrusting upwards in response to the pain. His wrists and fingers twisted, struggling against their bonds. His legs thrashed impotently in the manacles fastened to his ankles.

‘Don’t struggle,’ the voice warned. ‘Struggling only makes it worse.’

There were three others in the room with the prisoner. One, his actual torturer, never spoke. He carried the burning brand, the fork at the end of it blazing like a tiny sun. Another observed, keeping back and out of the weak light shining from above. The few glimpses the prisoner managed to snatch in his throes of agony suggested that the observer had his arms folded and shifted irritably.

The third, the one who had spoken, rasped and stayed close. His eyes were coals, smouldering red, the mirror image of the branding iron’s business end. He and the observer were hulking, armoured in war-plate that growled and whirred as they moved, as if some animus of their draconic namesake was still trapped within and trying to escape.

‘I will kill you both!’ spat the prisoner, baring his fangs and snarling.

The third nodded, his black armour rimed a dusky orange from the forge-flame being pressed to the prisoner’s exposed skin. It burned again, inscribing a line in his flesh, drawing pain.

‘He is savage,’ said the observer after the torturer had ceased. The torturer was smaller, dressed in robes rather than battle armour. He would die last, the prisoner decided.

‘How many did he kill?’ asked the observer.

‘Seven. He killed seven brander-priests before I took him,’ the black-armoured warrior replied.

The observer muttered something in response to that fact. The figure could not hear the exact detail, but the tone suggested disbelief.

‘Are you certain this is right? He *is* savage,’ repeated the observer.

‘A monster,’ said the third, leaning in close to talk to his prisoner. ‘Are you ready to submit to the rite of pain?’

Deep, heavy breathing, with a growling undercurrent, answered. Cold, dark eyes like chips of flint regarded the third. He smiled.

‘You want to gut me, don’t you? Even now, you are working to release yourself from your bonds, planning your escape?’

For a few seconds there was no response, then the figure nodded. Slowly. Certainly.

The black-armoured warrior laughed, hollow and echoing in the solitorium. The torturer was about to advance when he raised a hand, stopping the human.

‘This isn’t working.’

‘Then what do you suggest, Elysius?’

Elysius had been talking to himself, and hadn’t expected a response.

‘You need him, Agatone,’ he answered. ‘If you’re going to hunt, this one will be of great use. But not before the rite.’

‘Then what do you suggest?’ Agatone repeated his previous question.

After a moment of silence, Elysius said, ‘Out. Both of you.’

The human brander-priest obeyed at once, bowing his head and shuffling out of the chamber. Agatone was more reluctant.

‘What are you going to do, Chaplain?’

‘Teach him.’

Agatone lingered.

Elysius never let his gaze waver from the prisoner, though he turned his face a fraction towards the captain behind him.

‘I said *out*. You might captain the Third, Agatone, but here in this solitorium chamber, I am in charge.’

Sensing a change, the prisoner began to relax, though his breathing was still frantic, heightened to battlefield intensity.

‘And what if he kills you?’ Agatone nodded at the prisoner. ‘You’ve seen the state he’s in. Even when he’s not under the branding iron, he’s still a savage creature.’

Elysius smiled again. ‘No captain, he isn’t. He’s much worse than that. Now, please leave.’

Agatone was out of objections. He did as Elysius asked, leaving him alone in the dark with the monster.

‘Just you and I now,’ Elysius said once Agatone was gone.

‘Your mistake.’

‘I think not.’ The Chaplain picked up the branding iron left behind by the human priest. The coals of the brazier in which it was kept hot crackled and spat as it was pulled free. ‘Stings, doesn’t it?’

‘Not as much as my claws will.’

Elysius chuckled mirthlessly.

‘Very well then,’ he said. ‘Time to earn your rite.’

A sub-vocal command issued through his gorget quick-released the manacles on the prisoner’s ankles.

The prisoner laughed, ‘You’re really going to regret this...’

A second command released the collar fastened to the prisoner’s neck.

Rotating his wrist, Elysius swung the branding iron around as if it were a sword, leaving fire trailing in the dark behind it. His other arm ended in a stump at the elbow. His prisoner would think him disadvantaged, crippled even. That would be his mistake.

‘Come then. Show me.’ Elysius released the last bindings, the straps and chains spilling loose in a flood of leather and metal. Before his bonds had even hit the floor, the prisoner was up. He sprang off the slab and launched himself at Elysius with a roar.

The Chaplain cuffed him with a well-timed uppercut that stunned his jaw and sent the prisoner sprawling back with his own negated momentum. Then he advanced, lunging with the branding iron, searing flesh.

Screaming, wrathful, the prisoner tried to fight, but Elysius butted him, shattering his nose. Dazed, the prisoner swung, bone claws extending from his forearms. Elysius parried with the iron, smacking the claws away to deliver a second burning brand. He dodged an overhead slash and heard

bone scraping metal as he brought his armoured knee up into the stomach of the prisoner, who gagged and spat.

Elysius kicked him over, lashing out with the brand again and again.

‘You *are* a savage creature!’ he snapped. ‘But do not think you are more brutal than I. This is an infirmary and I am the surgeon, cutting out weakness, flensing doubt and disloyalty. Tell me whelp, whom do you serve? With whom do you forge your bonds of brotherhood?’ Elysius burned the prisoner one final time, finishing the mark, ending the rite of pain.

The prisoner did not struggle. He was too beaten for that. He let the burning in, allowing the brand to scorch his skin.

‘I am fire-born,’ croaked the prisoner, all defiance leaving him. ‘I forge my bonds with the Salamanders.’

‘And whose flame ignites your fury?’

‘Vulkan’s fire... beats in my breast. With it I shall smite the foes of the Emperor.’

Elysius backed down, allowing his breathing to return to normal. He ached. The rite had taken as much out of him as it had the prisoner before him. He put the brand down and held out his hand.

‘Then rise, and be my brother.’

The figure touched the scar upon his chest. It was shaped in the head of a drake. He let Elysius help him up and felt his anger draining away, to be replaced by something more lasting, permanent... He felt a sense of *belonging*.

‘How do you feel?’ Elysius asked.

‘Raw... but strong.’

‘You are fresh-forged, that’s why. Your armour is waiting for you, as are your other trappings.’

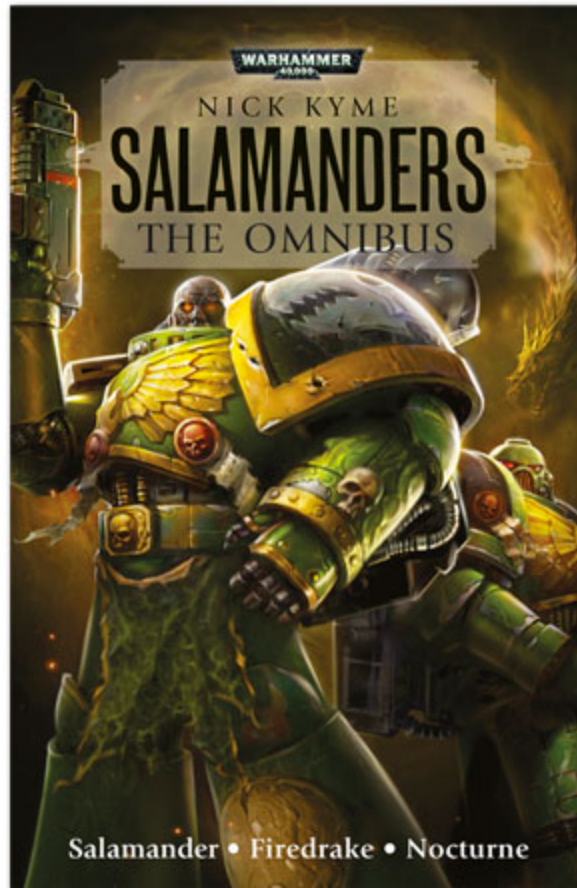
The prisoner snarled, ‘Then to war.’

There was a glint in Elysius’s eyes, a stoking of the fire within at hearing that word.

‘Indeed, Brother Zartath. To war.’

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NICK KYME is the author of the Tome of Fire trilogy featuring the Salamanders. He has also written for the Horus Heresy, Space Marine Battles and Time of Legends series with the novels *Vulkan Lives*, *Fall of Damnos* and *The Great Betrayal*. In addition, he has penned a host of short stories and several novellas, including 'Feat of Iron' which was a *New York Times* bestseller in the Horus Heresy collection *The Primarchs*. He lives and works in Nottingham.



The Salamanders, fire-born sons of Vulkan, unite to face a threat to their very existence in this omnibus edition of tales from Nick Kyme.

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