



GRAEME LYON

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A LEGION OF THE DAMNED SHORT STORY





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Graeme Lyon

Around me, a world burns.

My entire Chapter fell upon this planet-ship, this Craftworld Idharæ. We bring the Emperor's wrath to the heathen eldar.

But that is not why the world burns.

'Seoc, fall back! We cannot—'

Sergeant Aedd's words are cut off as a spear longer than he is tall impales him. His power plant whines and Aedd, a warrior I have served with for four decades, disappears in atomic fire as his reactor is breached. My genhanced eyes shield me from the glare, and when vision returns, the spear's wielder is striding towards me.

It is a daemon. It stands thrice my height, and is formed of burnished metal and living flames. Its face is set in a snarl of hatred, and where it walks fire rages and death beckons. The spear – still intact, despite the blast – thunders towards me, hurled with immense strength. The weapon misses by a hair's breadth and I glimpse cracks on its haft where the explosion damaged it.

Dozens of my brothers have died in the minutes since this god of war appeared. It rampaged through our forces, invincible. I attack anyway. My chainsword roars and sparks fly as it strikes the daemon's metal skin. It feels like striking a starship. I duck as the spear swings overhead and roll, firing my pistol. The bolts explode against it and my armour is splattered with molten metal. The daemon isn't slowed.

One of my battle-brothers runs past me, pushing me down, and starts chopping at the daemon with a power axe. Molten blood flows as he growls, 'Get away, Seoc. Alert the rest of the Chapter.'

The daemon casually backhands him and he is hurled aside, armour crumpled by the blow. The spear arcs towards me again. Desperately, I gun my jump pack.

I look up, granted a moment of respite from the carnage as my jump takes me towards the distant ceiling. A great glass dome stretches above me, the tranquil

light of a purple nebula silhouetting the starships that carried us here. I activate my vox.

‘Seoc to the Eighth.’

There is no response.

‘Eighth, this is Seoc. Invaders, respond!’

Still nothing. Am I the last of my company? Have near a hundred noble warriors of Ogrys been killed? I try other channels. ‘Seoc to all Invaders. Requesting reinforcements.’ There is a burst of static and nothing more.

I reach the apex of my jump and look down. I must get out of this area. The other companies are elsewhere in this vast craft, and they must be warned about the daemon. I see an exit from the dome, a huge arch of sculpted bone. I land a hundred metres from it, the marble-like floor cracking beneath my boots. The daemon is behind me and only fire stands between me and relative safety.

I step forward and see shapes moving in the flames, large and bulky. Space Marines. Survivors? I call out.

‘Well met, brothers...’

I trail off as the figures step from the flames. They are Space Marines, but they are not my brothers. Hulking black shadows wreathed in witchfire, they are of sinister aspect, ebon armour decorated with arcane sigils made of what looks like bone. They are skull-helmed like Chaplains, and their bolters lift as they stride relentlessly forward.

As I see them, I feel a curious sensation. I am a Space Marine, and I know no fear. But as I look upon these apparitions, their armour cracked and broken with cold, pale flesh and bare bone showing between sundered plates, a shiver passes through me. As I gaze upon their infernal countenance, I realise that while the daemon behind me is a threat, these abominable Space Marines – so like me, yet so very different – are more dangerous by an order of magnitude.

Fingers squeeze triggers and I prepare to feel their rounds strike my battleplate, not knowing why this is happening, angry and confused. But the shots pass me, trailing flames. As adrenaline surges – *I am still alive* – I turn and see the daemon. It raises its spear and casts it towards us. I throw myself to the side, but the spectral Space Marines simply continue to walk. The spear passes through them as though they were mist, before arcing round and returning to its wielder’s burning claw.

Utterly silent, the dark warriors continue to fire. The creature roars and sweeps its spear around in a great arc, to no avail. The Space Marines loose more rounds, the flaming fury of their weapons equally ineffectual against this god of

fire. *Fire.*

‘The fire!’ I exclaim. I open my vox to every channel, hoping that the silent figures will hear. ‘Fire,’ I say. ‘It is a creature of molten fury. Your flames cannot harm it.’

They hear. As if guided by a single will, they pivot and loose more shells, this time towards the glass dome. A barrage hits it and cracks spread across the surface. For a moment, the universe seems to hold its breath, then breath becomes irrelevant as the glass breaks and the air rushes from the chamber, taking bodies, eldar and Invaders alike, and other debris with it. In an instant, the fire is snuffed out and the spectral figures vanish. They came from the flames and now leave with them.

I grip a pillar, my gauntlets biting deep into the surface and holding me steady. I turn my attention to the war god. It has thrust its spear into the ground and has both claws wrapped around it. Its fire has extinguished and it seems diminished. I see again the cracks on the spear’s haft. I see vengeance.

I pull myself around to face my enemy and with a blink, I activate my jump pack. It pulls me towards the daemon, struggling to give me thrust against the air. I push the power past safety limits and it is enough. I barrel into the spear, and the impact shatters it.

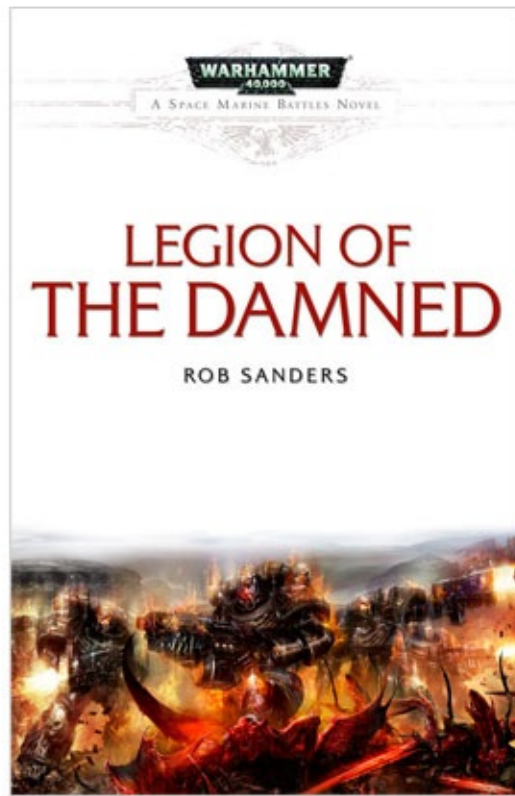
For an instant, the daemon and I hang there. We lock eyes, and an eternity of hatred, war and unfathomable despair floods my senses. Then we are both pulled towards the breach. My vision blurs, the world spinning around me. I try to activate my jump pack again, but there is no response, and I black out.

When I awaken, I am in the void, surrounded by the floating bodies of Space Marines. Some may still be alive – their armour will sustain them as mine will until I can be rescued. I activate a distress beacon and spin myself around to look down at Idharae.

I see fire, and I think again of the spectres that appeared from the flames, and again, I feel that unfamiliar shiver. I steady myself and wait, watching as beneath me a world burns.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hailing from East Kilbride in Scotland, GRAEME LYON moved to Nottingham in 2011 to join the ranks of the Black Library where he now works as a Commissioning Editor. His published short stories include, 'The Hunter' and 'Sky Hunters'. It is well documented that Graeme has a deep loathing of cheese, likes dogs but fears cats. He also makes a mean chocolate chip cookie.



The Excoriators seem powerless to protect the small cemetery world of Certus Minor from the berserk World Eaters, but their salvation soon comes from a wholly unexpected quarter...

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