

**WARHAMMER**

**40,000**

NICK KYME

# THE BURDEN OF ANGELS

A SALAMANDERS STORY



**WARHAMMER**  
40,000

NICK KYME

# THE BURDEN OF ANGELS

A SALAMANDERS STORY



# CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[The Burden of Angels - Nick Kyme](#)

[About the Author](#)

[A Black Library Publication](#)

[eBook license](#)

# THE BURDEN OF ANGELS

*Nick Kyme*

Mortals call us angels. Our wings are of fire and our wrath is terrible to behold, but there is nothing supernatural about us. We are flesh, blood and bone. Neither vaunted nor immortal. Yet, we are both awed and feared like beings of true light.

I once believed there was one amongst us, he who was descended from the deific, that could claim this mantle. Noble beyond reproach, ageless and wise, if asked I would have said he was a true angel. It was not until the day, when I saw his mask slip and then the mask beneath it also fall away, that I learned truly how angelic Dante was.

My revelation began on Hecatomb...

Rust-red sand skirled across a barren plain, obscuring the hulking silhouettes of gunships. One of those vessels belonged to us, though it was lost in our wake and the storm winds eddying down from the northern mountains.

Our footprints were gone too, swept away as if we had never walked on the high plateau to where our faltering auspex told us to find the Blood Angels.

A burst of flame soared up from a volcano amongst the high mountain peaks, presaged by a bellicose rumble. It was but child's laughter to a Salamander, but Vulcanis appreciated the symmetry as he watched it erupt.

'A taste of home,' he murmured across the vox.

'You whelp. Drygnirr spit has more ferocity,' replied Zad'ir, argumentative as always.

Beneath my draconic faceplate, I smiled at their banter. It was right and good for Firedrakes to have some volatile spirit. It had to be instilled. I trusted this task to Praetor, my sergeant of the Firedrakes, but his mood had grown dark of late. He fought an inner war, in a crucible that would either forge him stronger or break him. Praetor would have mocked this drab world's fury too.

Hecatomb was a much lesser version of Nocturne. By comparison, its skin-searing heat was a gentle caress, its mountains like diminutive crags to the Salamanders who had seen soaring peaks that rose and obscured the sun.

'Your breath does, Zad'ir,' remarked Xakkus, siding with his brother.

'Sked-eating—' Zad'ir began.

Ikanius interrupted. 'Ahead,' he said, the slate-screen of his auspex crackling with interference. 'Two hundred metres and closing.'

Despite the static, I could see the range counter clicking down to zero.

'Are you certain, Vanguard?' Zad'ir asked, using his derogatory nickname for Ikanius. It reflected his eagerness to always lead the line. His tenure as a Firedrake in my retinue was shorter than the others. Soon enough he would learn he had nothing to prove. 'I recall a desert basin some eight hundred metres back that looked nothing like our destination.'

'The storm was fouling my instrumentation.'

'Sure it's not your nose for direction that is foul?'

Ikanius turned and glared at Zad'ir, but when others joined in with his laughter any unmeant insult was forgotten.

'Are we discussing your breath again, brother?' Ikanius replied, though he looked serious.

More laughter. I was glad to hear it. There had been precious little to laugh about since the invasion. But Nocturne had survived Nihilan and his Dragon Warrior renegades. Our Chapter and its tribes also lived, but I still carried many burdens.

'Do not pity this world's anger,' I said to my warriors. 'Bask in it. Defy it. And should it still dissatisfy you... only then turn to Zad'ir for a true test of your courage.'

The laughter grew raucous. It was a rare thing for us, though Firedrakes were known for their choleric temperament. In that way, we had much in common with the Wolves. But it was not Grimnar and his Fenrisian dogs of war I had come here to see. As the winds abated, the sand thinned to reveal ruby-red gunships and a half-sunken citadel behind them.

It was an old bastion of the Blood Angels made of smooth, pale granite, though the red sand had stained it and eroded some of the statuary clinging to its curved walls. A banner hung from a lancet arch above us, fluttering mournfully in the breeze.

A wide archway granted admittance to the bastion. It might once have been large enough to allow mighty war engines through its missing gates but it had

sunk so low and awkwardly that only a warrior in power armour could pass through the archway now.

Three such warriors stood before it to greet us.

I knew Israfel. The Herald nodded to us as we approached. I saw also Cassiel, the seneschal never far from his master's side.

Between them stood a figure as noble and imperious as I remembered him. His war-plate had been crafted to resemble unadorned muscle, albeit wrought from gilded adamantium and ceramite. Largest amongst its many gemstones was a ruby blood droplet emblazoned upon his chest, two angelic wings spreading out from it across his armoured pectorals. A gold mask hid his face from us, again made to look like the face of an unarmoured man, and he wore an exquisite looking axe at his hip. As a Salamander, I could appreciate a finely forged blade and this one had few equals.

It had been years since we last met to honour the pledge. Here, on Hecatomb at the sunken citadel, the ritual between our Chapters would finally take place again.

As we reached the angels I knelt and so did my warriors.

'Rise, Tu'Shan, all of you,' said Dante, his voice melodic yet strong, 'and know you are amongst friends.'

As I arose, Dante gripped my wrist in the manner of warriors and we embraced as brothers.

'Well met, Tu'Shan.' He sounded pleased to see us. 'Tell me all that has happened since we last spoke.'

'A tale not as warm as this welcome, I am afraid.'

'I see.'

I noted Dante's warriors bowed respectfully but did not shake hands with my drakes. The Angels were often reserved in this way. Poised, always. I considered Dante's efforts towards me exceptional.

The Lord of the Host went on in the same vein, clapping my shoulder guard.

'Then let us speak inside, out of the storm. I have warm kharash all the way from Baal.'

Worn by entropy, the blood droplet above the immense arch of the sunken citadel was a reminder of whose territory this was. As we passed under it, I was reminded of something else - the vaunted history of the Angels and their taste for blood.

The kharash tasted hot and acerbic on my tongue. On Nocturne, I was used to

something stronger but the Baalite wine was not without flavour and potency.

Dante watched me keenly, sipping at his chalice as I drained my own silver goblet dry in short order.

'Not one to savour wine, are you, Tu'Shan?'

'I reserve my indulgence for the forge, Dante.'

He laughed at that, as if amused at some private joke.

Dante's chambers were dark and spartan. Statues and banners, half hidden by the shadows, comprised what little decor there was within. Dante had removed his helm soon after entering the room and sat cloaked in darkness on a simple iron throne. I took the one opposite, facing the Lord of Hosts and the faded mosaic behind him. It depicted a pair of angels, one of the light and one of the dark, benevolent protector and wrathful avenger on both turns of the figurative coin. Duality of the self came through heavily in its symbolism. Artistic, beautiful, the mosaic suggested an internal struggle, one not fought with blades but willpower. I wondered what it meant and considered that I was reading too much into it.

Sipping at his kharash, which had a more coppery scent than the wine I was drinking, the Lord of the Blood Angels looked pensive as he read my reaction to the mosaic.

I had already related the tale of the war that almost brought Nocturne to its knees, of the return of the Dragon Warriors, of the defection and subsequent corruption of two of my brothers. I needed the drink to quell my remembered anger or my nerves; I could not be sure which.

Here before me was Dante, one of the oldest and wisest Chapter Masters in the entire Adeptus Astartes. Our deeds, my own and my Chapter's, on Armageddon had earned his respect. A bond had forged between us.

At the end of the 'Dragonstrife' as some were calling it, I had need of his counsel more than ever.

'Mastery of a Chapter is a heavy burden,' Dante said, taking another sip of his kharash. 'Emperor knows we have all felt it.' He seemed wearisome, as if gripped by sudden listlessness. Dante had outlived many, seen much and fought in hundreds of battles. Did his martial pride hide some latent sense of apathy? His next words prevented my asking this question.

'Your world endures, your Chapter also. I fail to see reason for doubt.'

'It isn't doubt,' I said. 'If I am unworthy, another will replace me. None have stepped forwards. I seek counsel to avoid the mistakes I have made before and to ward against future complacency.'

'And you think you were complacent?'

'I should have seen it. The canker worming within.' I felt the urge to lower my gaze but resisted, not wanting to seem weak. I am not weak; my blood runs strong with promethean fire and my will is the same iron it has ever been, but I know I have erred and must make restitution for that failing.

I hoped Dante would have some insight.

'Had you known, had you seen, it would have been little different.' Dante was almost nonchalant but I knew he was trying to ease the blow to my ego. I both hated and admired him for that.

'What if there is something insidious at the heart of my Chapter, Dante? Can it be purged?'

'With fire...!' His voice level, he remained studiously neutral. 'This existence of ours has a way of corrupting even the most stalwart hearts, Tu'Shan, and not just to Ruin. Lest we forget, we are still human, albeit transcended. You and your kin are perhaps the most human of us all. Even angels can misstep, brother. Our measure should not be how we came to do so but rather in how we rectify it.'

Now I bowed my head, but out of respect not shame.

'As ever, I am humbled by your wisdom.'

'Do not be so. I only tell you what you already know. In you and your Salamanders I see the same nobility you perceive in me, Tu'Shan. I admire your humanity. It is both your greatest strength and greatest weakness. You are a contradiction, as am I.'

'I see only unimpeachable honour, brother.'

Finishing off the last of his kharash, he leaned forwards and I saw the purity and divinity of his face without the veil of shadow to obscure it. A being of true light.

'Then look closer...'

A strain of dark red mildly affected the sclera but otherwise Dante's eyes were alive with undeniable power and deep wisdom.

I remarked as much, at which he laughed sadly.

'A mask, I assure you, Tu'Shan.'

At that moment, I did not understand what Dante meant.

Israfel entered the chamber and bowed, preventing any further enquiry. The time of the ritual was upon us.

A gallery led from Dante's spartan chambers to an audience hall both magnificent and veneered by age.

In the middle of the vaulted hall there lay a slab of black Baalite rock.

Smooth as obsidian, unyielding as dacite, it possessed a nonagonal shape to signify the old Legion designation of the Blood Angels.

Xakkus stood upon the slab. In place of his armour, the Salamander wore Nocturnean ceremonial garb. His arms and legs were bare to display his branding scars, but his chest was clad in a metal breastplate. His shoulders and back were swathed by a long pelt of drake hide. A second pelt of leather covered the loins.

Head bowed, and down on one knee like a supplicant before his watching lords and brothers, Xakkus awaited introduction.

I knew he would not dishonour me with what followed.

Standing at the edge of the slab, Israfel the Herald spoke in a clear, clarion voice that carried to the entire hall.

'Here then we stand again, our two Chapters aligned in fealty and honour.'

Although they were but four amongst a host of many, I saw the pride in the eyes of my honour guard at the Herald's words. I know, for I felt it too. For a moment at least, brotherhood banished the spectre of doubt and the burdens of being Chapter Master.

'So it was on the first day, so it shall be again and until the Time of Ending. Our pact of brotherhood is sealed by the exchange of battle honours. Blood meets fire and each finds strength in the other.' Israfel bowed again. 'Ave Imperator.'

And as I echoed his final words and heard it echoed again in Dante and our warriors, I turned my attention to Xakkus.

His head slowly rose, and his fiery gaze met mine. Twin hammers emerged from where they had been tethered behind his back. He ignited the heads with a deft movement. Fire cast flickering shadows across the Baalite rock and reflected in the eyes of Xakkus. I saw purpose and intensity. With a powerful shout, he sprang from his crouch and the saga of Khugar'ath began.

Khugar'ath had been a mighty, vengeful beast that had taken several of my Fire-born to bring to heel and then slay. Artisans of the Sanctuaries had wrought the monster's flesh into a banner that I now gifted to Dante. Xakkus would present it through an ancient ritual.

The *morgash* was both a ceremonial war cry and an aggressive posture dance that relied on percussive hammer strikes against a metal breastplate and stamping foot movements. It was bellicose, a physical narration of how a war trophy had been won.

The Blood Angels looked on, but their faces were unreadable.

As hammer blows chimed stridently throughout the chamber, Dante turned to ask, 'The war cry... a vestige of old Nocturne?'

I nodded. Xakkus thrust one hammer out in front of him, the other held to his mouth before he arched his neck to spit out a gout of flame.

I noticed some of the Angels flinch ever so slightly at this incendiary display and hid my proud smile.

'Xakkus speaks the old language,' I said to Dante. 'The sigil dialect of ancient Nocturne. Millennia ago, it was spoken by the first tribal kings and taught to them by the earth shaman. Few now live who can speak it so fluently.'

The spit of flame died and Xakkus rang the hammers against his scorched breastplate. With the resonance of metal striking metal yet to fade, he put each fuller down, bowing to his lords as he did so, and took up the mantle of Khugar'ath. He thrust it high like a spear, bellowing one last time to emulate the dying cry of the beast.

And then it was done.

Silence reigned for a short while until Israfel returned.

He took the proffered banner of Khugar'ath from Xakkus, who bowed and left the Baalite stone, before ushering in the Blood Angel pact offering.

The ranks of Blood Angels lining the edge of the chamber parted to admit Abathor.

As a Librarian, Abathor had a touch of the arcane and aetheric about him that remained undiminished by his simple red robes. He wore the clothes of a tribune, not a psyker, and clutched a long roll of crumpled vellum in one strong, pale hand.

In the other was a casket, long enough for a gladius.

'Lo then did the Angels come to Hecatomb and the sunken citadel of Raegus Malifact.'

A sonorous tremor inflected Abathor's voice, a sampling of his witchery, as he regaled all with the tale of this dark champion's demise.

His recitation was long and verbose, a far cry from the uncouth exhibition of our death world tribesman.

Abathor described how the Blood Angels first came to Hecatomb and how the dominion of Raegus Malifact had been near absolute. His destruction was meted out by Dante himself, first breaking the champion's sword and then cutting him down in turn.

His blood was spilled in this very chamber, the daemon inhabiting his flesh banished back into the Eye.

'His bones were cast to ash, his essence forever sundered,' said Abathor, his gaze upraised to engage his audience despite the length of unfurled parchment he was holding.

'Here then,' he brandished the casket, 'is the broken blade of Raegus Malifact, rendered into dormant metal as a totem of Lord Dante's tri-umph over—'

The halt was so sudden I failed to see what was wrong at first. 'Abathor...?' Dante began.

Scattered, confused muttering came from the onlookers.

Abathor was staring at his feet, at the crack in the Baalite slab that had miraculously just formed.

I saw it too, as did Dante and now several others, but my attention was on the casket.

It too had cracked and a strange un-light, like natural darkness only more pervasive, came spilling through the fissures in the stone. Scratching, like nails against stone, resonated around the chamber. I heard voices in it, though they spoke in a tongue foreign to an earthly realm.

Above, my eyes were drawn to the shadows that had shrunk away from the un-light and were coalescing into forms that had arched backs and long, curved horns.

Several Blood Angels had already reached for their blades. Some had them half drawn when one of their battle-brothers in the throng collapsed in profound and unexpected apoplexy.

Out on the slab, Abathor dropped the parchment and the casket, holding out his hand in a warning as Dante tried to approach him.

'Stay away, my lord,' he said, the effort of speaking a strain. 'Some-thing is wro—'

His head lurched back, body convulsing as a fount of blood spewed from his throat and into the air. Abathor fell to his knees. His eyes were aflame, his body too soon after.

'Abathor!' cried Israfel.

I felt Zad'ir's hand upon my shoulder. He had been joined by Ikanius and Vulcanis who closed in protectively around me.

Xakkus was on the other side of the slab watching Abathor die, as were we all.

Vapour issued in smoking tendrils from the blood the Librarian had vomited up. As it coalesced, one tendril congealing with another, forms began to manifest.

Blades slipping from scabbards filled the audience hall with a dis-cordant echo. I heard the racking of bolter slides.

Dante had donned his death mask. Instead, I wore a savage snarl. As I saw the enemy now before us, I cried out.

'Daemons!'

The word was still ringing in my ears and my hammer was already in my hands as I attacked them.

The creatures in the blood-smoke were denizens of the warp. Wiry, with crimson skin the hardness of adamantium, they were a warrior breed and one my kind had fought for centuries.

Dante was beside me, his axe a sliver of leaping gold in his gauntleted fist.

We fell upon the daemons with abandon.

As I crushed the skull of one of the horned creatures with my hammer, I saw the smouldering carcass of Abathor in my peripheral vision.

'What is this devilry?' asked Zad'ir, smiting one of the creatures with his glaive.

I scowled. 'We have seen this before. Something has broken through into our reality and used poor Abathor as the bridge.'

'His defences were breached without him knowing,' said Dante, cleaving a daemon in half. 'Something in the casket and the broken blade...'

My eyes were drawn to where it lay bare and revealed on the slab.

I smashed another daemon's ribcage, its body dissolving even before I had ruptured its spine.

Sporadic bolter fire cut into the rising sound of the melee but at such close quarters it was short lived. The growl of chain-blades and the harsh ozone-snap activation of power weapons prevailed.

'How many?' I called to Dante, even though he was fighting at my side.

He scythed a red-skinned devil from groin to sternum, and it collapsed into ether like all the others we had banished. A second was decapitated by Dante's backswing.

'Enough,' he replied, hewing a third daemon through the breastbone then wrenching the axe-blade free as the creature rapidly atrophied.

No two banishments were the same. Some devolved into ichorous sludge, others turned into smoke or self-immolated. Their 'deaths' were myriad, though the nature of the daemoniac foot soldiers remained uniform as they appeared in the chamber like sparks thrown from a furnace.

Brutal hand-to-hand combat boiled at the heart of the room until every man and daemon was fully engaged.

Through the carnage, I saw Xakkus fighting with his blacksmith's fuller.

'Stay close to the Chapter Master,' I heard Zad'ir remind the others. They

needed no urging, but had to fight hard to keep up with me, and I with Dante.

His blade threshed limbs and necks, carved torsos and split skulls. My muscles burned from the effort of breaching hardened daemon-hide but Dante was tireless.

Fury overtook him, cascading in a red rain from the creatures he slew.

'Sanguinius!' He shouted his father's name, and it was as if something old and primal awoke from within him...

The Lord of Hosts became wrath and as he butchered, I heard a roar emerge out of the tumult of battle. Like a brazier lit in a darkened room, eyes fell upon a Blood Angel rampaging through the morass of bodies.

Feral rage twisted his features, the burring chainsword in his hand no I longer able to distinguish friend from foe...

'Brother Aczinor!' shouted Dante at the frenzied warrior.

Instead of wrath, the Lord of Hosts cried out in grief and anguish. He made for Aczinor.

I did not understand what was happening, only the primacy of the threat in our midst.

Daemons were still amongst us.

I was about to order my warriors to follow Dante when Vulcanis growled a warning.

'Firedrakes, look! The corpse...'

Abathor, believed to have been destroyed, was crawling and dragging his smouldering remains towards the broken blade of Raegus Malifact.

I had no doubt now that the dark symbolism of this place had lain in wait to exact vengeance against those who had put its master asunder. Some vestige of the champion remained, perhaps bound in the broken fragments of his old blade, and it was using the husk of Abathor to reach it. That could not happen. Dante and his warriors clashed against the growing tide of madness afflicting some of the Blood Angels, but I knew our mission was to stop whatever was rising from Abathor's ashes.

It now clambered to its feet, blackened robes sagging beneath its arms like diaphanous wings.

'Destroy it, brothers,' I cried. 'Don't let it take the broken blade!'

The melee split, the Blood Angels led by Dante fighting their own deranged kin and a small knot of Salamanders trying to prevent something terrible.

Xakkus had been trying to reach us the moment the skirmish had broken out. He had heard my order and got to Abathor before any of us. Except it was not

Abathor, not anymore. A revenant regarded Xakkus through fire-seared orbs, its skin a blackened parchment.

Despite its ostensible frailty, it ignored the hammer strikes of Xakkus and sent him sprawling with a single desultory blow. His cry of agony sounded above the furious battle taking place in the chamber.

'Xakkus!' Vulcanis was about to rush in when Zad'ir held him back.

'Wait,' he said. 'Divided, it will kill us. Together, brother.'

Vulcanis nodded, but I saw his concern for Xakkus.

'As one, then,' I said, unable to keep the snarl from my voice.

We charged, bellowing Vulkan's name, beseeching the primarch for his courage and strength to overcome evil.

Muttered imprecations spewed from the scorched remains of Abathor as it turned to face us.

It was a wretched, horrible end for such a vaunted warrior and I grieved for Dante's Chapter to have such a dark episode now forever engraved in their historic annals.

Ever the vanguard that was his namesake, Ikanius leapt in first. He had a sword in each hand: a harpe in the left that he used to lead, and a kaskara in his right. The attack came as a blur of adamantium. Chunks of burned flesh and even bone slivers fell from the Abathor-revenant as Ikanius cut it apart. It raised a clawed hand against him, but Ikanius severed it at the wrist.

I lifted my hammer against the thing but it battered me back with a heavy blow that cracked the ceramite of my armour. Zad'ir clattered into the back of me and we both staggered.

Vulcanis had fallen back, crouched down to drag his brother away from the killing field.

Ikanius cleaved into its shoulder and neck in an attempt to decapitate it. Intent on the killing stroke, he missed its return blow, which dug deep into his gut, tearing through armour and mesh like it was parting the scales of a fish.

The kaskara fell from his blood-slicked grasp.

Zad'ir dragged Ikanius off the revenant, and the embedded claw withdrew with a sickening tearing of flesh. Blood gushed freely down Ikanius's torso and abdomen. With no strength left in his legs, he collapsed. Zad'ir and Vulcanis returned to my side to avenge their fallen brother.

'Take it apart,' I roared, hammer high as I waded in. 'Every wretched piece!'

I went in low, snapping one of the revenant's legs from under it. It flailed, hissing vitriol, and I caught a glance of the daemon-kind struggling to manifest

through Abathor's borrowed flesh. Realising it was outmatched, it turned and hobbled towards the knife.

I buried my hammer into its back, actinic fire wreathing its form in crackling azure heat and corposant. A second swing took out its standing leg and it crumpled.

Still it crawled on its belly.

'Don't let it touch the blade,' I cried. 'Kill it now!'

Zad'ir impaled it to the ground with his glaive, lodging the weapon two-handed as Vulcanis staved in the revenant's skull with his maul.

'Nothing remains,' I growled to my brothers and together we reduced poor Abathor's corpse into tenderised meat and ash.

I gasped for breath by the time it was over, and saw Vulcanis and Zad'ir do the same.

Elsewhere, the daemons were all but vanquished.

Summoning my strength, I crushed what remained of the broken blade and saw its power shattered. A flash of dark light filled the chamber and somewhere amidst the fell, echoing voices I heard a discordant scream.

'It's over,' I said, to myself more than to my brothers. Dante had said there was something in the blade.

Sheathing his weapons, Vulcanis went to Xakkus.

Zad'ir came to my side, watching as the Blood Angels finished their work. He wrenched his glaive free, returning it to the clasp on his back.

'I think the offering was a little misguided,' he uttered.

'Something had been harboured in the blade. When it came into contact with Abathor, he became the conduit for the blood of Raegus Malifact and the thing half-bonded to the weapon in his hand.'

'It possessed him.' I heard the voice of Dante from across the chamber.

He and his Angels had their backs to us. In destroying the daemons sprung from Malifact's blood, a passage in the chaos had formed between Blood Angels and Salamanders.

I noticed something else, too: bodies of red-armoured warriors. Most wore their battle-helms but some bared their crazed features openly. Such madness I saw in their eyes.

And still, Dante and the others had not turned.

'Aczinor...?' I asked, enquiring about the Blood Angel I had seen driven to frenzy.

'Dead,' uttered Dante, his back still to me, and a feral snarl in his tone. Though

his power armour masked it, he was breathing hard, as were his brothers.

I stepped forwards, believing the danger over and letting my drakes tend to their wounded. Closer to the Angels, I saw some of the bodies at their feet had been mauled, their throats torn out. I saw Cassiel crouched down drinking the blood from the dead.

I discerned other things, half hidden by shadow... violent spasms, exsanguination, a crimson-smear across a mouth, a savage countenance, the imbibing of blood...

'What is this, Dante?' I asked, uncertain. I had to resist the urge to draw my hammer again, telling myself there had to be some explanation.

'Stay back...' the Lord of Hosts warned. His death mask glinted on the ground. Arterial spatter marred its polished golden surface.

I risked another step. By now, Vulcanis and Zad'ir had noticed what was happening and were on their feet.

'Come no closer!' Again, Dante snarled. It was louder this time; loud enough for me to detect the unearthly tremor in his voice.

'What is upon you, brother?' I reached out, my brother's shoulder almost close enough for me to touch. 'Please, let me he—'

Dante turned - no, whirled - around, faster than a cracked whip. He struck the side of my unprotected face with the back of his hand, so hard it lifted me off my feet.

I scrambled, tumbling, but managed to land in a half-crouch.

There was blood in the air. I could taste it, that familiar coppery tang upon my tongue. I shook my head, groggy from the blow, and looked up into the face of my attacker.

Dante growled. Blood dripped down his bare chin, splattering against his discarded death mask.

I tried to reach him, to get through the feral thing that Dante had become.

'Brother! Come to your senses!'

As he snarled, I saw red-rimmed teeth. Fangs protruded over pale, crimson-flecked lips. At least three bodies lay at his feet, their throats torn out.

He meant to turn on me next. I could see it in his eyes, those pitiless orbs awash with fury.

The blood had enslaved him. It had taken every one of them and ripped away all sense. Monsters, not angels, were standing before us. In the dim light of the audience hall, I saw his honour guard resolve like crimson spectres. Ruby-like eyes, taut with hunger, measured us.

'Dante...' I tried one final time, before knowing reason had fled this place.

I backed away, three slow steps. Not to flee - I needed more room to fight. I let the hammer's haft slide through my gauntleted fingers, before I firmly seized the grip.

Vulcanis and Zad'ir followed my lead, edging back and unsheathing their weapons.

'No guns,' I warned. To raise arms against our honoured allies was bad enough without shooting at them. I tried not to consider the ramifications if we actually killed one of them, or they us.

Vulcanis grunted, dragging Xakkus behind us, before hefting his shield and maul. He left the mace head deactivated, but I could see his desire to power it.

Zad'ir was Themian, descended from a tribe of barbarians and huntsmen; he needed no reason to seek a belligerent course. Unsheathing his glaive, he thrust it forwards like a goad.

'Master Tu'Shan...' I heard Ikanius behind me. His voice was weak. He had lost a lot of blood. 'We cannot prevail...'

'I know,' I said. My eyes were unyielding like my demeanour as they met those of Dante and his prowling warriors.

The Angels had fallen. They had bled their own to cease the mindless rampages of the afflicted and now they wanted us to bleed too.

'If we must die, we'll die on our feet,' I declared to my brothers. 'Unto the anvil!'

They echoed my cry as one before the Angels fell upon us.

A red surge swept out from the shadows, fangs glistening in the half light. They almost immediately overwhelmed us, dragging at our limbs, pushing us down to try and bare our throats to their hunger. Our only advantages were the fact they all couldn't tear into us at once and that their blood-fever made them reckless. I hoped also that some vestige of sanity yet remained and, through the fog of blood, some part of the Angels still perceived allies and were trying to hold back.

Vulcanis and Zad'ir fought as two sides of a triangle with me at the apex and Ikanius and Xakkus between us. They battered the thirsting Blood Angels back, but did little more than repel them for a few seconds.

Dante came for me.

Mercifully, the Axe Mortalis lay discarded, forgotten in his blood-red fury. I held him at bay with the haft of my thunder hammer pressed against his armoured chest but his strength and ferocity was still enough to bear me down.

Like vermin, his warriors began to swarm over us but Dante held them off with

snarls and the baring of his fangs. I was his kill, they said.

Letting go of the hammer, I managed to get my left hand around Dante's chin without him biting it off at the wrist.

Blood-red filled his eyes, obliterating retina and pupil until all that remained was a crimson sclera. The remains of those he had drank dripped upon my face, like hot splashes of metal.

'See!' I urged, seizing his noble chin in my grasp.

Dante struggled, and I felt the awesome strength in his limbs.

'Look into my eyes and know me,' I cried.

Still, Dante fought to claim his kill.

I had to stop him and somehow appeal to the man inside the monster.

'You are not a beast,' I told him. 'You are Dante!'

I held him fast and thought I felt his struggles ease a little.

'Know me,' I said again, more calmly, hoping my demeanour would transfer by showing Dante my humanity.

'Tu'Shan,' I said, my expression filled with silent urging, 'your friend... your brother.'

Dante blinked, and the feral look in his eyes softened, though did not retreat entirely.

He gagged and I let him go.

'Stop!' he shouted, weary, sated. 'Brothers, stop this!'

Dante's senses returned, the lucidity of the moment reasserting itself as the enslavement to his baser instincts diminished.

Slowly at first, but confounded enough so as to pose no further immediate threat to my warriors, the Blood Angels emerged from their red thirst.

'It is within us,' he said, 'a curse, I—'

Rising, a glance to my drakes for them to stand down, I waved Dante's words away.

'You'll never have to explain yourself to me, brother.'

Dante looked surprised at first. About to smile, his mood turned grim at the sight of Abathor's remains.

'I missed it,' he uttered to himself, to me, his kin, it didn't matter. 'The blood... it's always in the blood.'

Averting his eyes from the dead and returning them to me, he said, 'You honour me, you honour us. I could not want for a stauncher ally than you, Tu'Shan.'

I bowed to acknowledge his words but Dante wasn't finished.

'I asked you to look into my eyes, brother,' he said. 'Do so again now, and tell

me what you see.'

I saw red, an ocean of crimson, a darkness encroaching at the edge of every thought and violent deed. A thirst. A madness. I was reminded of the mosaic, the struggle between light and dark described by the artist.

'An exemplar,' I told him, 'a noble warrior worthy of my respect.' I clapped my hand upon his shoulder as he had done to me. 'I see a friend, Dante.'

His smile turned rueful, his eyes faded back to what they were before, albeit tempered with regret.

'Burdens,' he told me. 'That is what you see. I have mine. You have yours. Our desire is the same. To keep our brothers on an even path, to guard against sedition and to ward our souls from damnation.'

'Burdens,' I echoed, knowing we would have to raze the sunken citadel to ash, 'but neither of us need bear them alone.'

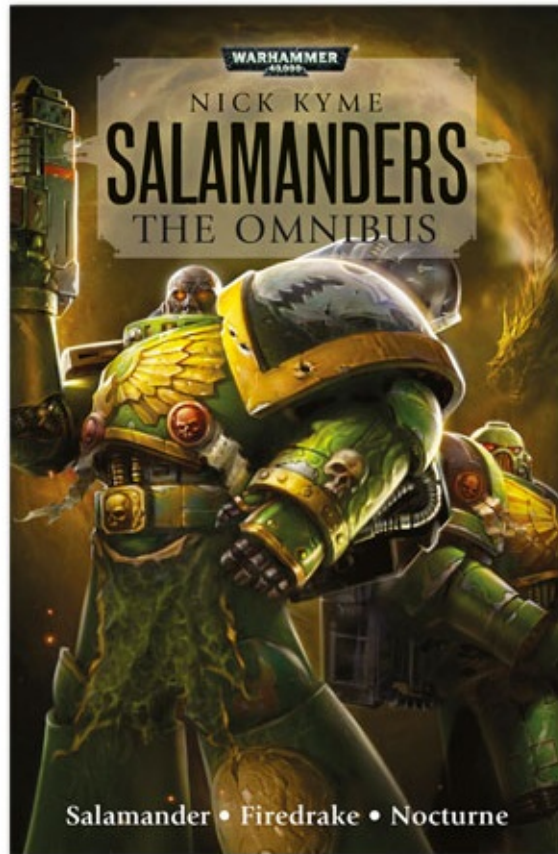
'Our charge is to be alone, Tu'Shan.'

I shook my head, finally understanding.

'A brotherhood is never alone, Dante.'

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Nick Kyme** is the author of the Horus Heresy novel *Vulkan Lives*, the novellas *Promethean Sun* and *Scorched Earth*, and the audio drama *Censure*. His novella *Feat of Iron* was a New York Times bestseller in the Horus Heresy collection, *The Primarchs*. For the Warhammer 40,000 universe, Nick is well known for his popular Salamanders novels, including *Rebirth*, the Space Marine Battles novel *Damn*, and numerous short stories. He has also written fiction set in the world of Warhammer, most notably the Time of Legends novel *The Great Betrayal* for the War of Vengeance series. He lives and works in Nottingham, and has a rabbit.



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.

[BUY NOW](#)



**READ IT FIRST**

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS | EARLY RELEASES | FREE DELIVERY

[blacklibrary.com](http://blacklibrary.com)

# THE BLACK LIBRARY NEWSLETTER



**Sign up today for regular updates on the  
latest Black Library news and releases**

**SIGN UP NOW**

## **A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION**

First published in Great Britain in 2014

This eBook edition published in 2016 by Black Library, Games Workshop  
Ltd,

Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Produced by Games Workshop in Nottingham.

Cover illustration by Jason Juta.

The Burden of Angels © Copyright Games Workshop Limited 2016. The Burden of Angels, GW, Games Workshop, Black Library, The Horus Heresy, The Horus Heresy Eye logo, Space Marine, 40K, Warhammer, Warhammer 40,000, the 'Aquila' Double-headed Eagle logo, and all associated logos, illustrations, images, names, creatures, races, vehicles, locations, weapons, characters, and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are either ® or TM, and/or © Games Workshop Limited, variably registered around the world.

All Rights Reserved.

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

ISBN: 978-1-78572-198-4

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](http://blacklibrary.com)

Find out more about Games Workshop's world of Warhammer and the Warhammer 40,000 universe at

[games-workshop.com](http://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.