



WARHAMMER
40,000

DUEL



A SILVER TEMPLARS STORY



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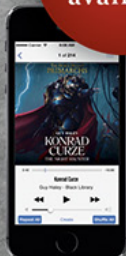
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CONTENTS

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[Duel](#)

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DUEL

A Silver Templars story

The Emperor fell as Lieutenant Keltos of the Silver Templars reached the forward trenches. Explosions wrenched the Emperor's feet, shattering his shins and pitching him onto his face. The towering statue smashed down, its legs on one side of the deep chasm and its head and shoulders embedded on the other. Around Keltos, Astra Militarum soldiers cried out in shock, priests and officers shouting orders at them to adjust their targeting and hold their lines.

'By the Throne, is there no deed to which these heretics will not stoop?' boomed Intercessor Sergeant Dimitrin.

'Not to compliment the traitorous dogs, but it's a daring move,' replied Keltos. 'With the Charybdyn and Scylos bridges demolished, the Astra Militarum should have been able to hold the enemy beyond at bay indefinitely. Instead, the Black Legionnaires are about to force a beachhead at a wholly unexpected point. Or rather, they would have, if not for us.'

The chasm had opened during the early days of the war for Ultach, a result of tectonic convulsions caused by orbital bombardment. Many miles in length, it had ripped through the macro-industrial tangle of Phoenysys Hive. The chasm was a three-hundred-foot-wide gulf that dropped a quarter of a mile into seething lava. Bridges had been raised to allow Imperial forces to push across the gap in the sector. Now, with the heretics staging a furious counteroffensive, those same bridges had been demolished in the hope of stalling the enemy's momentum.

Now, in response, the Chaos forces had fashioned a bridge of their own. A

squad of figures in baroque power armour was already storming onto the statue's far end.

'Black Legion,' spat brother Thessos. 'Turncoat scum.'

'Thank the Emperor that Librarian Akillus foresaw this moment in his visions. Without our aid, these Imperial Guardsmen would never have hoped to stop the attack that is about to hit their lines.'

'We had best be about it then,' said Dimitrin.

'That we had,' replied Keltos, drawing his power sword, *Mercy*. 'Brothers, commune with your weapon-spirits. Let their strength become yours, and let your wisdom guide that strength. Renew the Bond Martial and prepare for battle.'

Keltos' battle-brothers followed his example, offering prayers to the machine-spirits of their bolt rifles. The Silver Templars were a Chapter of weapon masters and duellists. This was thanks, in part, to the Bond Martial, the spiritual link they forged over thousands of hours of practice with their chosen weaponry. It rendered their guns and blades closer to comrades or familiars than mere tools of war.

Keltos thumbed *Mercy's* activation rune and its blade crackled with lethal energies. He checked the load on his bolt pistol, then vaulted out of the trench. Keltos launched himself into a pounding run towards the statue's head.

'For the Emperor!' he bellowed. Sergeant Dimitrin's Intercessors followed, sprinting through the industrial ruins. They dropped into covering positions near where the Emperor's huge marble head had been driven into the ferrocrete. Raising their bolt rifles, the Intercessors sighted on the Black Legionnaires and loosed a hammering volley of shots. Chaos Space Marines jerked as armour-piercing rounds punched into them. Mass-reactive bolt-shells detonated and several of the traitors were flung from the statue-bridge with craters blasted in their bodies.

A harsh voice bellowed vox-amplified orders, and half the remaining Black Legionnaires took up firing positions to cover their comrades' advance. They raised boltguns and let fly. One of Squad Dimitrin gave a cry of pain as heretic shells blew him off his feet.

Lieutenant Keltos kept running, shells whipping back and forth around him. Several enemy rounds hit his armour, ricocheting in showers of sparks, but not a single one of his brothers' shots even came close to

striking him. Each Intercessor would have chosen an enemy to engage in a one-sided duel of marksmanship; when their victims were slain, the Intercessors would select new foes and repeat the lethal process. Keltos' task was different.

They were the shield.

He was the sword.

The lieutenant gathered himself and sprang. Servos in his armour boosted his prodigious strength and launched him in a soaring leap that saw him slam down upon the Emperor's broad marble back. Keltos levelled his bolt pistol, *Absolution*, and selecting his opponent, he fired. His shots hit the leading Black Legionnaire and blew his arm off, spinning him from his feet and pitching him into the chasm.

Keltos advanced to the middle of the statue-bridge and planted his feet. As his comrades' fire howled around him, he stood with his blade ready in silent challenge.

A response was not long in coming. Shoving his way through the throng came a hulking figure in spiked armour and a horned helm. He wielded a roaring chainsword in each fist, and as he charged, the heretic bellowed a war cry in the same deafening voice Keltos had heard moments before.

'Blood for the Blood God!'

Keltos mag-locked his pistol to his thigh, spun his blade in a swift circle, then clasped its grip double-handed.

'Come, *Mercy*, let us end this traitor,' he whispered. The Chaos Space Marine came in like a whirlwind, swinging his chain-blades in wild arcs. Keltos parried the first swing and wove around the second.

He stepped smartly back, then spun to deliver a powerful cut that should have bisected the champion at the waist. It was blocked by the crossed blades of the warrior's chainswords, and with a bellow the heretic heaved Keltos backwards. Another snarling blade-swing carved a chunk from the lieutenant's shoulder guard and jarred his arm so badly he almost dropped *Mercy*. To lose his bonded weapon in such a way would have been unforgivable for a Silver Templar; Keltos would rather have lost his arm than his blade.

The lieutenant gave ground, reading every nuance of his foe's fighting style and assessing his options. Decades of one-on-one blade duels against every conceivable type of foe had prepared him to defeat enemies far more

skilled than this berserk brute, he thought contemptuously.

By the time the monstrous champion came at him again, Keltos was ready. Rather than parry, he wove aside from the first swing. Ignoring the buzzing teeth that chewed past his right ear, Keltos dropped low. The second chainsword whined above his head. Overcommitted to his ferocious attack, the Chaos champion was left open for a split second.

It was enough.

In a single smooth motion, Keltos lunged, driving the point of his crackling blade up into the Chaos Space Marine's chest-plate. The power sword's molecular disruption field parted ceramite, flesh and tainted bone as though they were water. Foul blood spilled down Keltos' arms in a steaming flood and he ripped *Mercy* upwards to complete his killing blow.

The Chaos champion staggered, mangled organs pulsing in the gory ruin of his chest. Then he gave a rattling gasp and toppled backwards, crashing to the ground.

Bolt-shells still flew back and forth along the bridge. The enemy was still pressing, but they were wary now, their numbers more than halved.

'Air support is five minutes out, brother-lieutenant,' voxed Sergeant Dimitrin, bolt rifle hammering. 'We just have to hold the enemy until the Stormravens arrive, then they'll put enough rockets into this bridge to pulverise it. We'll ask the Emperor's forgiveness afterwards.'

'Just so, sergeant,' replied Keltos, flicking the blood from *Mercy's* blade and drawing his bolt pistol. 'Choose your opponents and bring them down, brothers. We will duel the foe until the gunships arrive to finish the job. For the Emperor!'

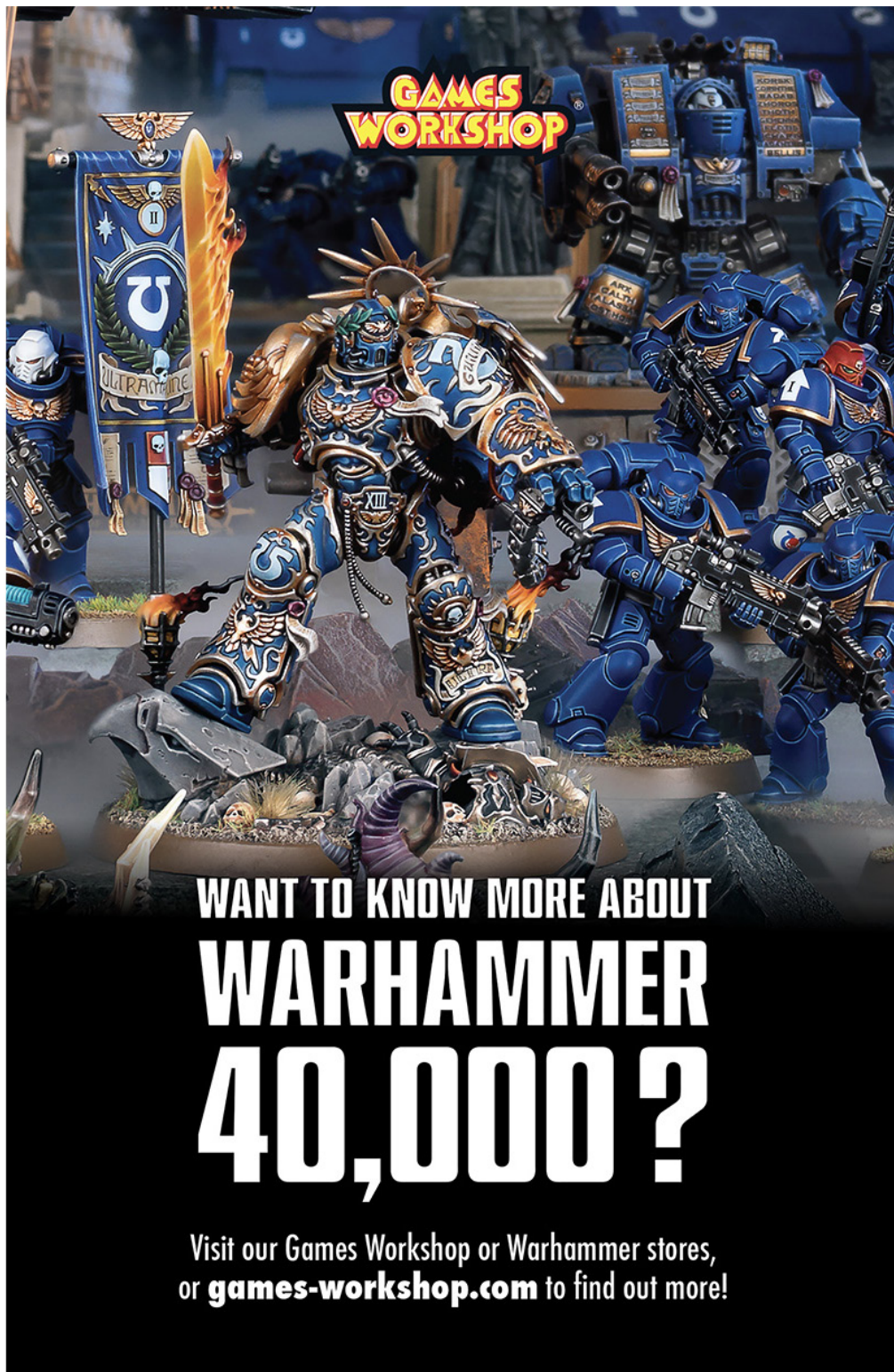
'For the Emperor!' they cried, and the roar of their bolt rifles echoed their oath.

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