



AZRAEL:  
PROTECTOR OF SECRETS

*A short story by C Z Dunn*



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**C Z Dunn**

The doors to the palace were blown off with such force that fully a quarter of the three thousand traitor Imperial Guardsmen sheltered behind them were killed instantly by shards of adamantium that made ruin of flesh and bone as easily as they did the polished marble floor. Of those that survived, many wished they had been among the initial fatalities as, through the clearing smoke, wave after wave of Godesian Imperial Guard swept into the palace, flanked by the unmistakable ivory-clad terminators of the Dark Angels First Company, the Deathwing.

Those that did not turn and flee immediately were cut down by a wall of lasrifle and storm bolter fire; those that did remained breathing for only a few seconds longer. As soon as those guns had dealt with the treacherous brave, they were turned upon the traitorous cowards.

In their wake, as both Godesian and Dark Angel alike picked off the last of the enemy, Supreme Grand Master Azrael strode into the grand entrance hall, its splendour now diminished by the nicks and crevices blown out of the ornate walls and the layer of blood bathing the floor. At his side marched Major-General Thaddeus Absalom, Lord Commander of the Ninth Godesian Battlegroup and overall commander of the hundred thousand Imperial Guardsmen who had come to Exemeter VII to quell its governor's sedition. Behind him, battle banner held proudly aloft, came the major-general's youngest son, the deep ochre of the standard matching his and his father's uniforms. The winged skull icon embroidered onto the banner was also present on the sleeves and lapels of the immaculate uniform, but the insignia emblazoned below that, the winged sword of the Dark Angels, awarded for the Godesians' valour during the year-long campaign, was not to be found on the Imperial Guardsmen's tunics.

The sound of gunfire and the screams and pleas of the dying began to abate

and Azrael turned to Absalom.

‘Come, lord commander. Your men and my Deathwing will secure the palace. We have a traitor to slay.’

In the face of the Imperial assault, one spearheaded by Space Marines no less, the traitor Guardsmen had fled the palace in droves. As Absalom and Azrael, escorted by a ten-man squad of bodyguards and two Deathwing respectively, progressed through the palace they encountered only those most loyal to the man who had turned an entire world.

Absalom and Azrael quickly found out just how desperate these stragglers were to protect that traitor.

Emerging from around a corner, dozens of enemy foot soldiers charged down the resplendent hallway, shouting defiant oaths and opening up with their lasrifles. The response from the Godesian elite and the three Dark Angels was emphatic, their coordinated fusillade mowing down the front ranks with ease. Strangely, some of the traitors exploded when hit, their deaths appearing to be caused by grenades rather than bolt shells or las-fire.

‘They’re wearing bomb vests,’ said Azrael. ‘Suicide bombers.’

Without needing to issue the order, the Terminators and Godesians aimed for the heads of the remaining traitors. All fell save one. Azrael charged to meet him while his two battle-brothers’ storm bolters reloaded and the Godesians inserted fresh power packs into their lasrifles. Raising *Lion’s Wrath*, the Supreme Grand Master pulled the trigger of the ancient combi-weapon’s bolter.

Nothing happened.

The lone traitor continued onwards, almost in range to detonate the high explosives strapped to his chest. Azrael engaged the plasma gun portion of the combi-weapon, but met with the same response. Muttering a silent curse to the Techmarine who had supposedly blessed the archaic gun before the battle, Azrael reached for the hilt of the Sword of Secrets, hoping that it would be clear of its scabbard before the suicide bomber could detonate his payload.

The lord of the Dark Angels need not have worried.

A single shot rang out and the traitor collapsed to the floor dead, a crimson hole in the centre of his forehead spilling blood onto the pristine white marble. Azrael turned to see Absalom replacing a pearl-handled autopistol into the holster at his waist.

‘Brother Balthasar?’ Azrael said to one of the ivory-armoured terminators as they continued on along the hallway, crunching the ruined traitors beneath

armoured feet. ‘See to it that when the Librarians record this campaign in our Chapter annals that Major-General Absalom is mentioned by name for saving the life of the Supreme Grand Master.’ The Dark Angel nodded in acknowledgment.

The lord commander smiled from beneath his bushy beard. ‘Really, my lord, it is honour enough to simply serve.’

Rounding the final corner to the throne room, they were confronted by an elaborate pair of doors, the baroque finishing barely disguising their weight and strength.

‘Brother Mendrion, get those doors open,’ ordered Azrael.

The other Deathwing removed a grenade clipped to his waist and maglocked it to the doors. Priming it, he retreated back around the corner to where his Dark Angels brothers and Imperial Guard allies had taken cover. Seconds later, the wide corridor filled with the echo of detonation and acrid smoke tinged with the reek of scorched metal. Weapons raised, the Godesians and Dark Angels charged into the throne room to execute the orchestrator of the rebellion.

When they got in there, what they found was entirely unexpected, save, perhaps, to three among their number.

Where they had expected to find the pathetic figure of the governor, either waving a weapon in one last futile gesture of defiance or down on his knees begging for his life, they instead found a Space Marine sat in the massive throne. A black-armoured Space Marine.

‘I knew it would only be a matter of time before you caught up with me, “brother”,’ the Space Marine said, rising to his feet and holding his hands up in a placatory gesture. ‘Who was it that gave me away? Which one of them broke in the cells beneath the Rock and gave you my name and location right before you executed them?’

‘My lord, I don’t understand. Why does he bear the same icon as you on his—’ began Absalom. He was answered by the edge of the Sword of Secrets parting his neck from his shoulders. Before any of the lord commander’s bodyguards could react, Balthasar and Mendrion cut them down in a hail of storm bolter fire. Barrels still smoking, they trained their weapons on the Fallen.

‘Azrael to all Deathwing. Caliban Protocols are in effect,’ the Supreme Grand Master said, advancing on his erstwhile brother. ‘Kill them all.’

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Domiciled in the East Midlands, C Z DUNN is the author of the Apocalypse novel *Pandorax*, the Dark Angels novella *Dark Vengeance* and the audio dramas *Trials of Azrael*, *Ascension of Balthasar* and *Malediction*, as well as several short stories. Having spent many years in the publishing industry, with a strong leaning towards genre fiction, he is an expert in e-publication, audio production and zombies.



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