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THE VENGEFUL FIST

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Warm winds whipped and tugged at Chapter Master Kantor's tunic. He stood on the balcony of his personal quarters, high on the south-facing side of the keep known as the Cassar. The sun was rising to the east. He turned his face towards its welcome glow.

The spires and domes of the Zona Regis, still intact as if the war had never happened, shone bright in the morning light. Beyond them, however, the view told an altogether different, and more truthful, tale. Even now, almost a standard Imperial year after the city had been returned to peace, most of the scars of those fateful months remained. The vast hab-towers of the residential zones stood with innards exposed, walls and roofs blasted away by the high-explosive bite of greenskin heavy artillery.

Home should have meant safety, a place for eating together, for sleeping and for the raising of children. But the millions who had lived in those towers had died in them, their lives snuffed out by an alien species that revelled in slaughter for slaughter's sake.

His bare hands gripped the ancient stonework of the balcony.

It was our duty to protect them, to prevent all this.

But no, he was being unfair to himself and his brothers. The Chapter had been ruined just as completely as the city. It was against fate and all chance that the Crimson Fists had endured to stand victorious. Snagrod had fled. Reinforcements had arrived with no time to spare. Somehow, he and barely a company's worth of his Space Marines had come through it all. The cataclysmic tragedy at Arx Tyrannus and the retaking of the planet had already taken on legendary status. Nobles had commissioned inspiring artistic works depicting the turning of the battle. Glorious statues had been raised. The people's spirits, argued the councillors, must be rebuilt first if they were to rebuild all else that was lost.

There was sense in that.

Kantor looked down to the streets and scowled. Such minimal traffic. By now, the streets should have been filled with carts and the market squares filled with squawking merchants eager to make the first sale of the day.

For a moment, he remembered the sight of the lumbering ork Gargants and the wake of death and destruction they had left. Such ugly, ungainly machines, but no less effective for all that. He remembered skies filled with ork fighters and bombers, the tides of fire in the avenues and plazas below as they carpet bombed his people.

There was a soft clattering to his right. It brought Kantor back to the moment. He turned to see his new major-domo, Ordinator Velasco, bend down to retrieve the las-pen he had just dropped.

‘Forgive me, m’lord,’ said the man with a bow. He returned to scribbling on his data-slate.

Kantor stood looking down at the top of Velasco’s shaved head for a moment, but it was old Ramir Savales whom he was thinking of. Velasco’s predecessor, Savales had died in the same explosion that had wiped out most of the Chapter, its relics and resources. Kantor felt a familiar twinge of sadness. Search and retrieval parties were still scouring the Hellblade Mountains for anything that might have been blown clear in the blast, but, after a year, there seemed little hope of recovering much. The loss of the Sceptre of the Sacred Blood was particularly hard to bear. The blood it had contained in its crystal sphere – the blood of Primarch Rogal Dorn himself, no less – was the holiest of icons and could never be replaced.

What crime did we commit that fate saw fit to deal us such a blow?

By way of answer, and not for the first time, Kantor’s mind landed unbidden on memories of the Marines Vigilant and of the terrible destruction the Crimson Fists had brought down upon them. That troubled Chapter, suddenly and inexplicably unwilling to fight even xenos forces, had not raised a single hand in its own defence while, on orders from the Adeptus Terra itself, the Crimson Fists had rained down death and destruction in growing grief and misery. It was the most distasteful act in the Chapter’s history. Despite the question, however, Kantor did not truly believe the universe operated along a system of moral laws and balances. Fate needed no excuses. Good men died, evil men prospered. It was mankind’s habit to seek reasons, to expect some kind of natural, universal equilibrium, but such a thing was false, a myth the species had stubbornly clung to since its earliest beginnings. Nothing more.

‘Squad Daecor returned just before dawn,’ Velasco read from his slate. ‘Squad Grimm is still in the field. Squad Victurix is due to depart within the hour.’

‘For the Harga Pass,’ said Kantor, his voice far deeper than the serf’s.

‘Just so, m’lord. Revised reports suggest an opposition force upwards of four hundred orks on foot. No armour or artillery that we know of. They continue to march south towards the border between Orpeo and Hellestro.’

‘And Victurix will deploy in full strength. Ten battle-brothers in Terminator armour.’

‘Indeed, my lord, unless you wish to issue last minute orders to the contrary...’

Velasco’s tone and meaning were clear. The Crusade Company’s Tactical Dreadnought armour was among the last of the precious Chapter relics and counted for much of the Fists remaining strength. The preservation of such a resource was crucial to the rebuilding of the Chapter. Should it be risked right now when that work had barely started?

Again, Kantor’s mind returned to those dark days of battle and bloodshed that had ravaged all he loved. He saw again the grotesque faces of the enemy, the tiny red eyes, the jutting teeth, the way they revelled in their butchery of the Rynnite people. His lips twisted into a snarl as he recalled his own righteous fury and the gratifying sensation of hot alien blood spraying his face as another foe fell to his power fist and storm bolter.

‘It has been too long,’ he murmured.

‘My lord?’ queried Velasco.

Kantor turned from the balcony and retreated into his chambers. The serf followed.

‘I have several appointments this day,’ said Kantor.

‘Indeed, m’lord. A reconstruction meeting in one hour with the nobles and senior agents from both the Administratum and the Adeptus Mechanicus. General Mir has an audience scheduled with you to discuss militia deployments in Deoz and Ijua. And Chaplain—’

‘None of these are pressing,’ said Kantor. ‘Cancel them all. I will deploy with Squad Victurix.’

Velasco gaped for a moment, but if he had even the slightest thought of protesting, it withered under a look from the Chapter Master.

‘Very well, m’lord,’ nodded the serf.

‘Alert the Armoury at once and have them prepare my Terminator armour. And contact Rogo Victurix. He and his squad are to await me by their

Thunderhawk.’

Kantor strode towards the main doors and pulled them open, then disappeared off down the torch-lit stone corridor before Velasco could say another word.

The ordinator crossed to a comms panel on the wall, keyed it to the requisite channel and issued the Chapter Master’s orders.

Four hours later, the fighting was over. The Harga Pass was awash with blood, carpeted in the bodies of the dead. The battle had been fierce, but glorious. Eleven in ancient armour stood against four hundred and seventeen and taught them the meaning of the word *revenge*.

No Fists had fallen, though nine of the eleven bore injuries that would grant them fresh scars.

Kantor, powering down his weapons at last, surveyed the aftermath. The stink on the air was foul, an acrid mix of fungus, spilled viscera, gunpowder and burning promethium. The dead would need to be burned. Their spores could not be allowed to take root, lest the purge never see a true end.

He looked down at his arms, the gloriously embossed blue armour now painted thick with alien gore.

I needed this, he told himself. Truly, I did.

He thought of his friend and brother, Alessio Cortez, Captain of the Fourth, Master of the Charge, who had left Rynn’s World with a single squad of brothers – more, in truth, than the Chapter could spare – to hunt down the greenskin warlord responsible for all that had happened.

Cortez would have understood only too well.

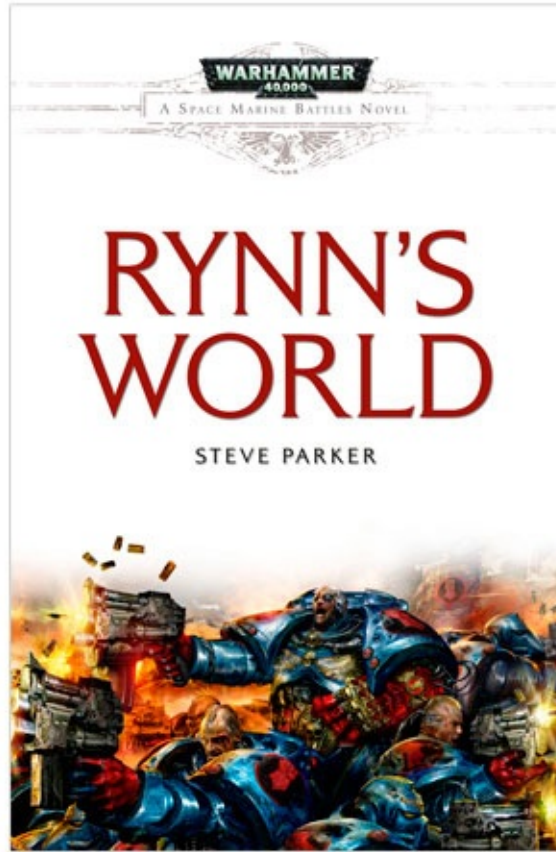
Reconstruction would one day heal the wounds of the planet and its people. New towers would be raised, new crops planted, new children born. Rynn’s World would live again as it had done in ages past, following the cycle of the seasons, the plantings and harvests. It would be a wiser world, and more wary perhaps, but it would prosper.

Only revenge, however – the most violent and bloody of retributions – would ever heal the wounds of Pedro Kantor and the unrelenting Space Marines of the Crimson Fists.

And we will have it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland, Steve Parker currently lives and works in Tokyo, Japan. In 2005, his short fiction started appearing in American SF/fantasy/horror magazines. In 2006, his story 'The Falls of Marakross' was published in the Black Library's Tales from the Dark Millennium anthology and his first Warhammer 40,000 novel, Rebel Winter, was published in 2007. He introduced readers to the Deathwatch kill-team known as Talon Squad in the short stories 'Headhunted' and 'Exhumed'. When he's not writing, he enjoys martial arts, heavy metal music and supporting wildlife conservation.



When ork hordes lay waste to the planet of Badlanding and wipe out the Crimson Fists sent to stop them, Chapter Master Kantor prepares a hasty line of defence on Rynn's World.

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