

— TIME OF LEGENDS™ —

NEVER
FORGIVE
GAV THORPE

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NEVER FORGIVE

Gav Thorpe

Call it fate or luck, it had been fortuitous that Alandrian had found himself in the mountains of the Annulii when the sea had swallowed Nagarythe. Scouts had reported to the prince of House Anar that rebels hid in the Caerasin Dale, and he had responded, leading five hundred of his warriors into the highlands.

After the debacle at the field of Maledor, he and his company had managed to slip away into the marshes, but rather than flee to Anlec with Malekith and Morathi, he had chosen to forge further north, thinking the Naggarothi capital would become a prison, rather than a haven, when Imrik's army besieged it. Little had he suspected the insane plans of those to whom he had once sworn fealty.

Thus it was that the former ruler of Athel Toralien had not been on the plains when the fury of the seas had been unleashed. Alandrian and his warriors had looked on in horror as the tidal wave had swept from the north, scouring everything in its path. Nagarythe was a sunken land, the highest peaks now islands, the cities and towns and farms swallowed by the rising waters.

That had been four days ago. Like the others, he had been appalled, but Alandrian was also an opportunist. With the old regime washed away, those of ability would become the new masters of this ravaged land. They had pressed on up the vale, advancing on the Anar settlement, seeking to capture the village and turn its people to the service of Alandrian. It would be a humble beginning, but he had followed Malekith across the lands to the east and been instrumental in building the colonies. He had tamed the wilderness once and would do so again, starting in the Caerasin Vale.

The first sign that all was not well came when the scouts did not return with their midday report. Alandrian ordered his company to halt immediately, and sent out

more warriors to see what had delayed the scouts. The sun was sinking fast when Alandrian decided that the despatched soldiers were not returning either.

It was a difficult choice: to make camp where they were, or to move out of the vale. Alandrian decided that it was better to hold ground than be set upon on the move. The rebels knew these lands far better than he and would know the perfect site for ambush in advance of any retreat.

The Naggarothi built fires at the perimeter to push back the encroaching darkness. Soldiers with repeater crossbows stood watch, careful not to silhouette themselves against the flames, while the spear companies formed a ring around their commander.

They did not have to wait long before the Anars made themselves known. Arrows hissed from the gloom, loosed by warriors concealed beneath grey and green cloaks that blended with the rocks and scrub. A dozen warriors were felled before the snap of repeater crossbows sent reply. The shouts of the sentries conveyed their dismay, their targets flitting through the twilight as shadows.

‘Naegrin, push out to the west,’ he told his captain. ‘Take two hundred warriors with you and bring the fight to our elusive foes. If you can, open a path through which we might leave.’

Naegrin did not need further excuse to break from the camp as more arrows fell from the darkness. With ranks of warriors following, he forged out into the gloom.

Alandrian waited, shouting encouragement to his warriors as even more fell to volleys of arrows that whispered down from the heights. More than three dozen of them had been killed, the same number again moaning and crying in pain as they crawled in the long grass. The prince listened intently, hoping to hear the sound of metal on metal as Naegrin’s force attacked, but all he heard was the sigh of the wind, the creak of trees and the rustle of leaves.

Realising that they aided the enemy more than the aim of his own warriors, Alandrian ordered the fires doused. In the dusk glow, he tried to spy the figures moving about the camp, but saw only flickers and glimpses. Now and then, the setting sun glinted on an arrowtip a moment before it sliced through the air to take down a warrior. The clatter of repeater crossbows followed as his warriors sent hails of bolts in return, but no call or cry replied to testify to the accuracy of their aim.

Screams from the west tore through the night, and Alandrian knew in his heart that they were not made by the Anars. The cries for help and mercy were swiftly silenced, and soon after, the intensity of the arrow storm increased. Alandrian

could sense the panic in his warriors and knew they were about to flee. He would not be left behind by rout, and so broke into a run, heading back towards the hills.

He had not made more than two hundred paces when he saw a lone figure silhouetted against the sunset. The hooded warrior lifted arrow to silvery bow and Alandrian knew immediately that he saw the rebel leader, Alith Anar, the self-named Shadow King.

He flinched as the arrow took flight, expecting death, but the shaft caught him in the leg, just above the knee. Collapsing, Alandrian could not stifle a cry of pain. The figure disappeared into the gloom and the prince started to crawl away.

He had not gone far when a shadow fell upon him and a boot connected with the side of his head.

‘You spare me the time of hunting you,’ he heard before unconsciousness took him.

Alandrian woke sitting with his back to something hard. It was dark, but in the light of a fire he saw that his hands were bound, the rope looped over the branch of the young tree he was set against. Another cord tied his ankles to an arch of root. Coming fully to his senses, he realised there was a crowd of people around him, some of them children and infants.

Alith Anar stepped out of the group, his hood pulled back.

‘Alandrian, whose loins sired vile Hellebron, the butcher of Cothique,’ said the Shadow King. ‘This reckoning I have anticipated for a long time.’

‘Just kill me and be done,’ snarled Alandrian.

‘No, not so swiftly will you find death. Not without punishment for the torture and misery you have visited on others.’

The other Anars started to drift away, and as they did so, Alandrian could see the log buildings of their village not much further down the slope.

‘You intend to leave me here? To starve?’

‘Not even that swift shall be your death,’ said Alith. ‘The children will come each day and feed you and bring you water. They will grow up seeing the druchii filth that destroyed their homeland.’

‘Is that it?’ Alandrian laughed. ‘I am to be a prisoner?’

Alith looked up at the tree to which Alandrian was tied.

‘Our people are long-lived, and trees grow tall indeed,’ said the Shadow King. ‘Remember that as the years slowly pass and the ropes grow tight.’

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GAV THORPE is the New York Times bestselling author of ‘The Lion’, a novella in the collection *The Primarchs*. He has written many other Black Library books, including the Horus Heresy novel *Deliverance Lost* and audio drama *Raven’s Flight* as well as fan-favourite Warhammer 40,000 novel *Angels of Darkness* and the epic Time of Legends trilogy, *The Sundering*. He is currently working on a new Dark Angels series, *The Legacy of Caliban*. Gav hails from Nottingham, where he shares his hideout with the evil genius that is Dennis, the mechanical hamster.



In the wake of the Kadillus conflict, Brother Annael joins the ranks of the Dark Angels 2nd Company and is thrust into a conspiracy that threatens to tarnish the Chapter's honour.

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