



DARK MAGENTA

Scent of Betrayal

By Ruaridh Dall

'The planet's at war with the greenskins and the best you can do is three laspistols, four charge packs, one frag grenade and some cursed xenos axe?' Lucius van der Voohen shook his head in frustration as the contents of Crupa's rucksack rolled out onto the makeshift table. 'You can start by throwing that blade away and pray that the Emperor didn't see you touch it.' He turned one of the laspistols over in his hand. 'Turf this too - the barrel's bent.'

'I'm sorry,' Crupa said, head bowed. 'I didn't want to venture too far. It's the Orks; I don't want to run into one alone.'

'There aren't any Orks for miles,' van der Voohen snapped. 'That nose on your face works, doesn't it?' Crupa nodded hesitantly. 'If there were any greenskins within half a mile you would have started retching at their stink.' Van der Voohen balanced one of the other pistols in his hand and clipped a charge pack into it. The charge indicator lit up a reassuring green. 'Besides, our quarry isn't likely to be putting himself anywhere near the front line. 'This is good,' he added, removing the cell from the pistol and picking up another.

'I suppose he wouldn't. Be near the front line, I mean,' Crupa replied. She slid the choppa and the faulty laspistol off the table and into an empty ammo crate as van der Voohen finished checking the last of the charge packs. The indicator glowed red. He removed the spent power cell and threw it into the crate as well. Crupa looked at her meagre bounty and sighed. 'This lot here won't be enough to get Tucker's attention, will it?' she said.

'He'll throw a cred bar our way, but we won't get a sit down meet with him,' Lucius answered. 'I watched him laughing as his boys stripped a deserter earlier today. He won't waste time with small fry.'

'We need more then.'

'Definitely.' Lucius ventured to the shack's entrance and leant on the doorpost, casting his eyes over the burnt-out landscape beyond. 'Where did you search this morning?' he asked.

'To the east,' Crupa answered, joining him at the doorway. She pointed at the mountain range a few miles distant. 'The first defence line at the foot of the Morik Pass.'

Lucius rubbed his chin thoughtfully. 'The first line held a long time,' he said. 'There would have been plenty of time for the Thibosians to gather up their gear before they fell back to the second line. The Orks overwhelmed that one pretty quickly if the reports are right though.'

'They lost hundreds.' After a second's consideration, Crupa shook her head and smiled wryly. 'Hundreds of guns to go and pick up then.'

'Bet you wish you'd have thought to look there first, ay?' Lucius said, clapping Crupa across the shoulders. 'Would have saved you this return trip.'



Clouds of vapour poured over the observation wall of Goddard's stateroom, spoiling the view of the rings of Ursathron. They had started taking damage then, he mused. The pirates had come upon them suddenly, perhaps thinking the Brilliant to be a lone patrol ship, or perhaps a wounded naval vessel far from home, but they had desperately underestimated the little Sword class that would have shown on their augurs. The Brilliant boasted banks of laser weaponry that would make a Dauntless feel uneasy, and in Jako Tigres, a captain that had turned traitor Astartes vessels into scrap. They were anything but the easy prize the pirates had expected, and their ramshackle vessels were suffering for their impudence now. Goddard had watched one of the three break apart through the observation wall some minutes ago now, and the chatter from the command deck suggested the other two were attempting to run. He hoped the damage they had received was merely a lucky shot on the part of the pirates, and that Jako was preparing to make the two ships pay dearly for wounding his baby. Whatever the captain chose to do, Goddard would respect his decision. He was simply too involved in the hunt for Saussure to concern himself with the fate of two parasites in a destitute system like this.

Ormantep was a dreary mining world, no more than a dwarf planet with the slightest hint of an atmosphere. Thanks to the ore in its crust though, the world was of vital importance to the Cadian war effort, and like so many of the worlds of the Sectors Ocularis, had felt the touch of Chaos upon it. War had raged in its shafts and dockyards before the shock troopers of Cadia had driven the hordes of traitors and mutants from its surface. Stability had been maintained under martial law, but when the Cadians had departed for fresh conflicts, rebellion began brewing amongst disaffected miners who had lost everything, and then been forced back to work without basic supplies in shafts riddled with unexploded ordnance and damaged infrastructure. The miners were perhaps worthy of some sympathy, but for thousands of worlds

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things were no different, and the war effort continued unabated. This malcontent spoke of outside interference, and there was none more capable of pulling off such an act of Recongregation as Inquisitor Benedict Saussure.

Agripinaa had been five months behind Goddard when the truth of Saussure's deception began seeping out of the interrogation cells. He had called upon Theobald to launch a secondary investigation into the spread of the daemonic taint that had allegedly affected the Lords Ryan, offering her every resource he could muster. Elisabel had set to work extracting confessions from any who had survived the purges on the noble house through torture and in concert with Soren Mosul, psychic means. The telepath had been a latecomer to the investigation on Agripinaa, but after the resistance the heretic Kuipers had put up before the incident at the chemical plant in Sector Beta Four, Goddard had thought a telepath would be invaluable to the investigation. As Theobald snapped bones, Mosul ripped open memories, and between them they began to shape a picture of the inside of House Ryan in the weeks leading up to their overthrow. It was not the story they expected at all.

Prayer meetings and midnight gatherings were prominent, but only in the Emperor's name. The House Guard dealt harshly with any citizens that stood against them as they purged the Ryan's business interests of insurrectionists. Emissaries from the system's other planets came and went, and Echinvar Ryan even held meetings with Rear Admiral Takana over the safety of his space lanes. Nowhere was there suspicion of dealings with the malefic. Theobald knew better than most that the followers of Chaos hid in plain sight, but she poured over reports from the purge in the hope of finding something the Arbitrators had missed, but no secret altars or forbidden iconography had been uncovered. There was nothing that pointed to the Ryan's being in league with a daemon.

Theobald had begun to postulate that Cato Ryan had worked alone, perhaps with the aim of usurping his brother and assuming the Governorship, so had turned her attention to the Magistratum Headquarters where Cato had led the local law agency. The Arbitrators and Sisters of the Ebon Rose had come down hardest of all on them when the purge had begun, as their loyalty to their master was absolute. A few had been taken by the Arbitrators for public execution, and Lisa had Mosul run through their minds before they took to the rack. One of them, Trooper Gethesemane, had been a near-permanent feature on Cato's security detail, and his mind told them of a bizarre change in routine mere weeks before the purge. Lisa recognised this deviation from the norm as the venture in the sulphur distillery that had seen her shot, stabbed and almost burnt alive. Cato had never visited the facility, nor even mentioned it to any of his security team before the visit that Mercyday that had seen Choi lose an arm. Cato had given a nonsensical reason for visiting it - securing a stockpile of boltguns - and had returned to the Arvus Lighter with a face of confusion and not even a single bolt shell. Gethesemane had even begun to worry that the Procurator Marshal was beginning to lose his mind. Mosul delved deeper into Gethesemane's mind, searching through years of memories for evidence of Cato's involvement with the Brotherhood or other insurrectionists, but could find nothing that linked him with any of the heretics. Mosul could find no signs of mind-hacking or mem-cleansing either. Cato had headed to Sector Beta Four for no reason they could fathom, and it increasingly looked like Cato had not been involved with either the recidivist movement or a daemonic patron. The whole overthrow of the Ryan household now seemed to rest on the information found in the cogitator at the sulphur distillery, and unless Cato had managed to enact all the meetings and plans detailed on it with his security team unawares, it was all bogus. Cato had been framed, and Theobald and Mosul could think of only one individual involved with the Ryan case with the resources to pull off such a deception: Saussure.

The revelation that the Ordos Terran Inquisitor could have set up the Ryan dynasty to take such a titanic fall had hit Goddard hard. Still recovering from the wounds inflicted on that fateful Mercyday, Goddard had ordered Theobald to verify her facts twice before he had allowed his pride and belligerence to be overcome. He had been used, plain and simple. Saussure had fabricated heresy purely to appease his own desire to see new rulership of Agripinaa, and Goddard had been the grease that had let the gears of his radical plan turn. Embarrassed and furious in equal volumes, Goddard had set to tracking down Saussure to hold him to account for his actions. He knew it would be next to impossible to have someone as highly regarded as Saussure denounced by a High Conclave, so planned for a far more personal trial. Just Goddard, Saussure and the pain needles.

Saussure had left little indication of his plans following Agripinaa, but the strife in the Sectors Ocularis would have been easy to blend his acts of Recongregation into. Goddard's widespread cells had all been instructed to put resources into the search, and with the specialist manhunter Lucius van der Voohen coordinating the task, Tomashek was confident that it would only be a matter of time before he caught up with Saussure again. Ormantep was next on his list, and if he didn't find Saussure, someone else would very soon. No one escaped the attentions of the Ordo Malleus.



'Two laspistols, three charge packs, a frag grenade and a shivving ork axe? Get out of my sight!' The powerful figure on the dais sat back against his throne of polished brass and dismissively waved a tech-studded hand at the pair knelt before him. Gregol Tucker, the Carrion King of the Meta Sector did not take kindly to scum wasting his time with mere handfuls of battlefield pickings. Two bodyguards stepped forward from either side of the reclaimator, their implanted pneumatic clamps snapping open and shut in unified reflection of the other. The pair on the ground scabbled away from the weapons they had brought to trade and whimpered for forgiveness. One tentatively pleaded for some reimbursement, complaining of starving children and cold nights. Tucker fixed her with a furious stare through his revolving eyepieces, before throwing her a small denomination credit bar. She sang Tucker's praises as the bodyguards escorted her and her partner from the room.

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'Next!' Tucker called, flicking a stray dreadlock away from his face as he fixed his eyes on the next pair to offer up their battlefield scraps. 'Ah, another couple of refugees. And how many malnourished runts have you left behind in your cave?'

Crupa glanced sideways at van der Voohen and smirked as he tapped the casing of his bionic eye. 'Not many refugees sporting these.'

'You'd be surprised,' Tucker cut back. 'This war's affected more people than you'd know. Not many of them have realised the opportunities such carnage can bring.'

'It takes a special kind of intellect to prosper in a war zone.'

A mocking smile danced across Tucker's face. 'Cute. Now, what do you have to sell?'

Van der Voohen unslung the pack from his back and pulled out a pair of lasguns. Tucker raised an eyebrow and made to dismiss them.

'There's more,' van der Voohen cut in, 'a lot more. We counted at least three hundred.' Crupa approached Tucker with a pict-capture from the trenches and handed it to the reclimator. He slunk back into his throne and began drumming the fingers of his right hand on the brass arm rest as he took in the view of the arms they had gathered.

'The weapons are secure?' he asked.

'Booby-trapped the bunker they're in myself,' van der Voohen said. 'You'll notice it's not just lasguns either. Three heavy stubbers, an autocannon and enough frags to rip this place to pieces. Bet you haven't had an offer like this in a long time.'

'No.' Tucker shifted in his chair and beckoned for one of the bodyguards to come to his side. An exchange of whispers passed between them, too quiet for van der Voohen to follow. Twice the bodyguard's eyes flashed his way, and Lucius began to prepare for the worst. He'd been to plenty of exchanges like this before, and he knew that men like Tucker didn't get rich from just selling arms; they never parted with cash they didn't need have to. Crupa and he were no match for even Tucker and his bodyguards, let alone the band of deserters and desperadoes milling around the fringes of the den. The one comfort he could take was that they hadn't been shot the second Tucker had cast his eyes over the pict-capture. Tucker though had the look of a man who took pleasure in forcing confessions from people. Van der Voohen just hoped his desired fee would throw the reclimator off before he pulled out the molar forceps.

The conversation between Tucker and his man finished, and the bodyguard took a step in van der Voohen's direction. Lucius raised his hands, Crupa swiftly following suit.

'The guns won't cost you anything Tucker,' van der Voohen said. 'We're not here to make money.'

Tucker snorted. 'You came for the hospitality?'

'All we want is a name. A man came to see you four weeks ago before departing for Bruga. Who was he?'

Tucker drummed his fingers on his armrest again. 'You're not a refugee after all, are you?' This fellow must be worth an awful lot to you if you're willing to give up so many guns for just his name.' Tucker leant forward in his chair, his brow furrowing. 'But I'm giving you nothing. He's an old friend of mine, and I don't make a habit of betraying my allies. They're hard to come by in places like this.' With a faint nod, Tucker sent the bodyguard striding purposely towards Lucius again.

'What if I threw in a tank?' Desperation twinged van der Voohen's voice as he played his trump card. He'd expected Tucker would play hard ball, but hadn't thought his life would be in danger. The bodyguard hesitated, and Crupa pulled another pict-capture from her robes and passed it to him.

'It's a Leman Russ,' he said to Tucker, showing him the image in turn.

'It's thrown a track, but it's fully functional apart from that,' Lucius said. 'I'm sure that won't pose a problem for you.'

Tucker stroked his chin. 'The man's name was Bartek. Now where is my property?'

'The second line at Morik Pass.' Lucius reached inside his cloak and produced a remote detonator. He held it up for Tucker to see. 'The green button disarms the frags in the bunker.' He placed it on the ground with the lasguns. 'You can't miss the Russ.'

'Nice doing business with you,' Tucker said. 'Now get out of here.'

Lucius nodded his thanks and turned to Crupa, smiling. His lead had been right. Kuerten had been here. Now they had him, Saussure would be next. He had to contact Goddard, and quickly.

About the Author

Ruaridh Dall is a newly qualified dentist working in Elgin in the north of Scotland. While not filling teeth he can be found working on far too many modelling projects at once and thinking about grown up stuff like buying a house. He goes by the online moniker Van Helsing.