

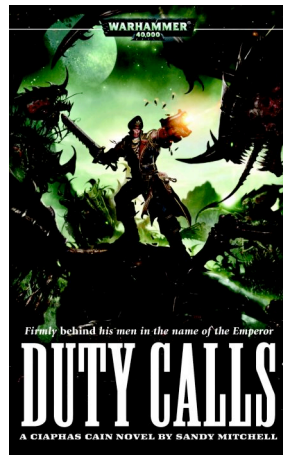
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DUTY CALLS

The fifth Ciaphas Cain novel

By Sandy Mitchell

On Periremunda the populace are rioting. With local forces unable to contain the widespread civil disorder, Commissar Cain and his regiment of Valhallans are called in to help. However, it seems there is more to the rebellion than first appeared and Cain suspects sinister forces at work behind the scenes. When the commissar is reunited with Inquisitor Amberley Vail his fears are realised as he is thrown into a deadly conspiracy that even he might not be able to emerge from alive.



About the Author

Sandy Mitchell is a pseudonym of Alex Stewart, who has been working as a freelance writer for the last couple of decades. He has written science fiction and fantasy in both personae, as well as television scripts, magazine articles, comics, and gaming material. Apart from both miniatures and roleplaying gaming his hobbies include the martial arts of Aikido and Iaido, and pottering about on the family allotment.

• **CIAPHAS CAIN** •

Ciaphas Cain: Hero of the Imperium

(Omnibus containing books 1-3 in the series: *For the Emperor*,
Caves of Ice and *The Traitor's Hand*)

Book 4 – *Death or Glory*

Book 5 – *Duty Calls*

Book 6 – *Cain's Last Stand*

• **DARK HERESY** •

Book 1 – *Innocence Proves Nothing*

The following is an excerpt from *Duty Calls* by Sandy Mitchell. Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

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IF I'D HAD ANY hopes of a quiet life once we got to Periremunda, they didn't last for very long. Mind you, these things are relative. By the time we arrived the regiment had spent almost half a year in the warp, with only a few days spent in real space on Simia Orichalcae and a rather longer period being comprehensively debriefed by Amberley and her Inquisition lackeys on Coronus Prime after our unexpected return there, so even the fact that the entire planet seemed on the verge of imploding into anarchy wasn't able to diminish the troopers' enthusiasm at finding themselves back on terra firma for the foreseeable future. In fact the prospect of getting stuck into a flesh and blood enemy, instead of the blank-faced metal horrors we'd faced on their frozen tomb world, was a positive bonus so far as most of them were concerned.

'At least these bastards can bleed,' Major Broklaw said, summing up the mood of the regiment in his typically forthright manner.

Colonel Kasteen, commanding officer of the 597th, nodded judiciously, concurring with her executive officer's assessment. 'Anyone know what they're revolting about?' she asked.

I shrugged. 'Haven't a clue,' I admitted. As usual I hadn't bothered reading the background briefing provided by the Munitorum, and, as usual, it seemed, I hadn't missed much. I knew that Broklaw was punctilious about such things, if only to save Kasteen the bother of wading through the verbiage herself by

providing her with a cogent summary, and if neither of them was aware of the reason that half the planet seemed on the verge of erupting into armed rebellion the answer clearly wasn't to be found among the data files. 'These situations are so fluid that all the news we had when we left Coronus will be completely out of date by now anyway.'

Both officers nodded in agreement, and as so often before I was struck by the contrast between them; Kasteen's red hair and blue eyes stood out vividly against her pale complexion and the muted tones of her uniform, while Broklaw's slate-grey irises almost matched the colours of his clothing, combining with his dark hair and equally pale features to make him appear to merge with the shadows surrounding him.

We were standing in the quietest corner we could find of what was in the process of becoming our command centre, leaning on the railing of a metal gantry overlooking the wide rockcrete floor. Below us troopers lugged boxes and equipment around, arguing heatedly with one other over where they were supposed to go, and our engineers connected cables with what seemed to me to be an almost wilful disregard of potential trip hazards or accidental electrocution. (Since most of them were at least as much metal as flesh, I don't suppose the odd jolt of electricity would have bothered them too much in any case. Some of them even seemed to like it.)

In other words our deployment was proceeding as efficiently as it ever did, and as usual I was content to stand back and let the lower orders get on with the grunt work while I considered the wider issues, like how to ensure that my own stay on this peculiar world remained as comfortable as possible. In this I had the inestimable assistance of Jurgen, my aide, whose degree of indispensability was matched only by the power of his body odour. Secure in the knowledge that even now he was sequestering the most desirable quarters for my own use, and was setting up my office in a suitably inaccessible location, so that I need only be bothered with the most pressing of duties, I returned my attention to the conversation.

'Why do the peasants ever revolt?' Broklaw asked rhetorically. It can hardly be denied that uprisings occur right across the Imperium

with monotonous regularity, only to be put down with commendable vigour by the appropriate authorities, to the extent that in themselves they're hardly a remarkable event. In general they tend to be spontaneous and barely organised, sparked by a particular grievance or sense of injustice, and easily contained by the local law enforcement agencies or Planetary Defence Forces. But the insurrection on Periremunda was different.

For one thing, it was rare for a co-ordinated campaign of violence to break out across the entire surface of a planet almost simultaneously, without any of the usual warning signs like riots, protests, or the burning of the governor in effigy cropping up beforehand. It was even more rare where the planet in question was, for the most part, quietly prosperous, with an unimaginative and Emperor-fearing population, and a governor who actually appeared to care about the welfare of his citizens. And for almost a dozen Imperial Guard regiments to be deployed in response was almost unprecedented. That implied that someone high up in the subsector command staff thought the PDF couldn't be relied on to contain the situation if it continued to deteriorate, which implied in turn that their loyalty was suspect. And that, you may be sure, was enough to set the palms of my hands itching, in the uncomfortable fashion that they tended to do when my subconscious was joining dots and coming up with a picture that my forebrain really wouldn't like at all if it had been able to bring it into focus.

'There's bound to be a briefing,' Kasteen said, following the swearing, sweating troopers lugging her desk into the office that she'd earmarked for her personal use almost as soon as we'd taken possession of the jumble of warehouses that had been allocated to us as a staging area and makeshift garrison, on the periphery of the starport landing field. On the one hand that suited me very nicely; I always like to feel I'm close to a line of retreat if things turn out badly, and a pad full of orbit-capable shuttles within easy running distance is about as good as it gets. On the other, though, it meant we were nicely situated for rapid deployment by dropship to anywhere trouble might flare up, and if my itching palms were anything to go by, it wasn't likely to take too long to materialise.

Another gaggle of troopers scurried in and out of Kasteen's cubbyhole with chairs to go along with the desk, and we all sat, looking out over the floor of the warehouse again. She'd chosen well, I thought, one of a line of glass-fronted cubicles on a mezzanine gallery roughly halfway up the wall facing the big doors fronting the loading docks. From here she'd have a commanding view of everything going on in the main body of the building.

And outside it, too, at the moment; the doors were open, admitting a steady stream of laden troopers, lugging boxes from the backs of the trucks backed up to the loading bays, and a flurry of snowflakes from the open expanse of rockrete outside where our Chimeras were snarling their way through a thin film of freezing slush. By Valhallan standards, of course, it was warm enough, most of the men and women I could see still in their shirtsleeves, some of which were even rolled up. It was chilly for me, though, and I was as grateful as ever for my commissarial greatcoat, into which I huddled, trying to ignore the draught punching its way in through the open door. Abruptly the chill breeze became imbued with the odour of month-old socks left to marinade in compost, and my aide appeared in the gap.

'Tanna, sir?' he asked, depositing a tray on the newly installed slab of wood between us.

'Thank you, Jurgen,' I said, accepting the fragrant beverage gratefully, while he handed tea bowls to Kasteen and Broklaw, who held their breath almost by reflex as he moved closer. They sipped their drinks thoughtfully, and I tried to restrain the impulse to gulp mine, feeling the warmth spreading gradually through my body as I swallowed. Jurgen refilled my bowl.

'You're welcome sir.' He handed me a message slate. 'This came in for you a few minutes ago.' I took and scanned it, and glanced up at the two officers.

'Well,' I said, trying to restrain my sudden flare of enthusiasm at the prospect of being able to skive off to somewhere a bit warmer for a while. 'This might give us a few answers, I suppose.'

'Who's it from?' Kasteen asked, her surprise showing in her voice. We'd only been dirtside for a few hours, hardly long enough

for anyone on Periremunda to be aware of our presence yet, let alone send us messages.

‘The local arbitrator,’ I said. I skimmed the slate across the desk, so she could read it. ‘He wants to discuss jurisdictional protocols, in case our boys and girls get a little over-exuberant in their off-time.’ This was a common enough request when a Guard regiment or two pitched up on a planet somewhere, so that when the troopers started getting into mischief (which they invariably did, or my job would have been pretty pointless) everyone involved knew whether they should be handed over to the local courts, the military provosts, or directly to the Commissariat.

Of course you’d probably get as many different answers to that as there were commissars on the planet, but in my case I always asked for any of our troopers who got into trouble to be remanded directly into my custody, a habit I’d got into right at the beginning of my career with the 12th Field Artillery, and seen no reason to break in the years since. For one thing it fostered the impression among the troopers that I cared about their welfare, and would always go out of my way to take care of one of our own, which was good for morale generally, and for another it gave me a good excuse to leave the regiment in search of more congenial activities on a fairly regular basis. On the occasions I couldn’t be bothered, or was genuinely too busy, I could always rely on Jurgen to take care of the paperwork. I shrugged. ‘I suppose I could just call him back, but...’

‘You’re thinking of going in person?’ Kasteen asked.

I nodded. ‘I’m sure he’d appreciate the courtesy, and it never hurts to make a good impression.’ Not to mention the fact that the planetary capital was a good couple of thousand metres lower, and a damn sight warmer, than Hoarfell, where we were currently stationed.

Broklaw looked concerned. ‘Get some rest first, at least,’ he counselled. ‘You’ve been on your feet since we made orbit.’

‘No longer than anyone else,’ I said, contriving to look as if I was stifling a yawn. In truth I wasn’t all that tired, having managed to catch a short nap on the shuttle trip down, which had not only refreshed me a little but had conferred the added bonus of avoiding

Jurgen's inevitable discomfiture at being airborne in an atmosphere. I'd never known him to actually be sick, such a thing being beneath the dignity he fondly imagined was conferred on him by his exalted position as a commissar's personal aide, but his anxiety about the possibility tended to combine with the physical nausea to make him sweat like an ork, which in turn would ripen his habitual bouquet to quite an astonishing degree. I shrugged. 'Besides, it's too good a chance to miss. If anyone can tell us what's really going on here, it's the local arbitrator.'

'Good point,' Kasteen said. 'If you think you're up to it.' She looked at me narrowly. 'Anything you can get out of him is bound to be more reliable than the pap we get through the usual channels.'

'My thought exactly,' I said, 'and the more we know about what we're facing here, the better we'll be able to deal with it.' Words that were to have something of a hollow ring, in retrospect, but at that point I had no idea just how little anyone really knew about the true state of affairs on Periremunda, apart from a handful of people who knew altogether too much for comfort.

Duty Calls can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

Price £6.99 (UK) / \$7.99 (US) / \$9.99 (CAN)

ISBN 13: 1 84416 465 3

- Bookshops: Distributed in the UK and the US by Simon & Schuster Books.
- Games & hobby stores: Distributed in UK and US by Games Workshop.
- UK mail order: 0115-91 40 000 US mail order: 1-800-394-GAME
- Online: Buy direct care of Games Workshop's web store by going to www.blacklibrary.com/store or www.games-workshop.com.

