**THE ENEMY WITHIN**

*A Warhammer novel*

By Richard Lee Byers

Dieter Schumann is a wizard of the Celestial college. When he is denounced by a witch hunter as a heretic in league with the Chaos Powers, he is forced into a deadly bargain – to clear his name he must infiltrate a Chaos cult and identify its leader. But such a deal has its perils, not least of which is the corrupting influence of Chaos. Just how far will Dieter have to go to find the information he seeks, and can the witch hunter even be trusted to uphold his part of the bargain?

**About the Author**

Richard Lee Byers has written over twenty novels, and countless short stories. A lifelong fantasy, science fiction and horror fan, he began his full time writing career in 1987 after working in the mental health field (he holds an M.A. in psychology) for many years. A resident of the Tampa Bay area, Richard spends much of his leisure time fencing foil, epee and sabre.
The following is an excerpt from The Enemy Within by Richard Lee Byers. Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

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THEY’D BEATEN DIETER with their fists, scourged him with a thin black whip, and left him dangling from a rafter with the weight of iron balls and chains hanging in turn from his ankles. Eventually he’d passed out, to wake bound and gagged on the cold dirt floor of a cell.

A rat came creeping, enticed, perhaps by the bloody smell of the lash marks on his back or the galls on his wrists and ankles. He heaved and thrashed as best he could until the rodent scurried away.

‘That works for a while,’ said a cheerful bass voice, ‘but eventually the rats figure out a prisoner in restraints can’t really do much to fend them off, and then they take their supper. I’ve seen it happen time and again.’

Dieter hitched himself around to face the bars and the corridor outside, where Otto Krieger stood. With the light of the torch in the wall sconce wavering behind him, the big man was little more than a shadow, but by now, fear and outrage had stamped every detail of his appearance into his prisoner’s memory.

Krieger was broad-shouldered and barrel-chested, with a square, pleasant face and a smiling, ruddy mouth. Had he opted to wear something other than the sombre garments and ominous regalia of a witch hunter, a new acquaintance might have taken him for a genial, convivial fellow, with nothing brutal or cruel about him. Unfortunately, the reality was otherwise.
Krieger selected one key on a ring, inserted and twisted it in the lock securing the door, and the mechanism clanked. He entered the cell, bent over Dieter – who struggled not to cringe – hoisted him up and sat him on the wooden bench by the back wall.

‘There,’ the witch hunter said, ‘that’s better than the floor, isn’t it? It’s certainly a better attitude for a friendly conversation. Although for that, we need to take the gag out of your mouth. Promise me you won’t try to cast a spell.’

With his back and joints throbbing, Dieter doubted he could have mustered the necessary concentration in any case. He nodded.

‘Good man.’ Krieger pulled down the knotted kerchief. ‘You must be thirsty.’ He produced a leather canteen and held it to Dieter’s lips.

Until now, the witch hunter and his assistants hadn’t given Dieter anything to drink, and the lukewarm water eased at least one of his miseries. He felt an irrational twinge of gratitude, and tried to quash it.

‘Now, then,’ Krieger said, ‘let’s talk about the evidence against you.’

‘There isn’t any,’ Dieter said. ‘There can’t be.’

Krieger tapped the satchel hanging with his broadsword and wheel-lock pistol from his broad black square-buckled belt. ‘I have the affidavits. Testimony sworn in Sigmar’s holy name. A woman named Elfrida never fancied you – I don’t know why not, you look all right – yet one night, she felt compelled to couple with you anyway.’

‘“Felt compelled”? Meaning, I bewitched her? She was drunk! We both were! It was Sun Still!’

‘Several witnesses saw you cast spells while in the company of a boy named Berthold—’

‘I plucked pennies from his ears to make him laugh. It’s not even real magic, just sleight of hand.’

‘—and subsequently, he wandered off alone into the forest, where wolves attacked and killed him.’

‘You can’t believe I made it happen!’
‘Several miners heard strange whispers in one of the shafts. Then a support gave way. A man lost his arm.’

‘A terrible accident, but again, nothing to do with me. Since I settled here, I’ve done nothing but try to help my neighbours. Much of Celestial magic is divination, and I tell the farmers where to dig their wells and when to plant. I help the miners locate veins of ore and coal. I search for lost sheep and cows, and lost children, when necessary. Anyone will tell you! Why would I work to help and harm the village?’

‘You do some small semblance of good so the town will tolerate a wizard in its midst. Then, having lulled everyone’s suspicions, you can address your true task: spreading pain and despair to advance the cause of Chaos.’

‘That’s insane.’

Krieger rested his hand on the satchel. ‘Your neighbours say otherwise.’

‘Then it’s simply because they have a morbid fear of any magician, and you played on it. Or because you bribed or threatened them.’

The witch hunter chuckled. ‘I will admit that, once I hinted I might pay a modest fee for pertinent information, several witnesses came forward. While after I made it clear that in my view, only a Chaos worshipper would seek to defend another such, a couple of folk who at first seemed inclined to speak on your behalf thought better of it.’

Dieter could scarcely believe what he was hearing. ‘Then you admit to manufacturing a case against an innocent man.’

‘There are no innocent men, my friend, simply varying kinds and degrees of guilt. Certainly there are no innocent wizards. Sigmar teaches that all magic derives from Chaos, no matter how you scholars of the colleges try to obfuscate the fact.’

‘That may be your opinion, but we have charters from the Emperor allowing us to practise our arts.’

‘Until you get caught abusing them. Let’s discuss the contents of your house.’
‘What? My telescopes? My star charts? My staff? A wizard of the Celestial Order is allowed to possess such tools.’

‘Arguably so, but what about this?’ Krieger unbuckled the flap of his satchel and removed a child’s toy comprised of a wooden cup and handle linked to a little ball by a length of leather string.

‘Recognise it?’

Dieter did. It had been Berthold’s. But he refused to say the words, as if that would make any difference.

‘How about this?’ Krieger produced a kerchief. In point of fact, Dieter didn’t recognise it, but suspected it belonged to Elfrida. ‘Or this?’ The witch hunter proffered a little clay figure of a man with one arm missing. ‘I believe they’re the sorts of items a warlock might have used to lay curses on the folk who have come to grief.’

‘You planted them!’

‘You’d be surprised how many witches utter such slanders. You probably wouldn’t be surprised that nobody ever believes them.’

Struggling for calm, Dieter took a deep breath. ‘You must realise, you don’t even have jurisdiction over me. I’m a mage of the Celestial College. If I’m accused of wrongdoing, my order is supposed to adjudicate the matter.’

Krieger shrugged. ‘Technically, you may have a point, but we’re not in Altdorf. I’ve spoken with the Graf, and, upright, pious child of Sigmar that he is, he’s eager for me to bring this troubling case to a quick conclusion. That’s why he allowed me the use of his dungeon.’

‘Damn you!’ Dieter said. ‘What’s the point of this? What is it you actually hope to accomplish?’

The witch hunter grinned and clapped his hands together. The smack resounded in the cramped confines of the cell. ‘Finally, you said something intelligent. Good. I was beginning to wonder if I had the wrong man.’

‘You do.’

‘Now don’t turn thick on me again. Obviously, I’m not talking about whether you really used sorcery to pry Elfrida’s knees apart, or fed poor little Berthold to the wolves.’
'What, then?'
'Have you ever heard of the Cult of the Red Crown?'
'No. I assume you’re talking about a Chaos cult? I’ve heard there
are many such groups, but I’ve never bothered to learn about any of
them. They have no relevance to my field of study.’
‘It’s a society devoted to the Architect of Fate, the Changer of
the Ways. My colleagues and I have learned that the cult has a
strong presence in Altdorf itself, and we suspect they’re in league
with a horde of mutant raiders who prey on caravans and other
travellers on the roads leading into the city.’
Bewildered, Dieter shook his head. ‘And you suspect this has
something to do with me, miles and miles away in little
Halmbran?d?l
‘No, not yet. But I intend for it to. You see, I’ve made it my
business to bring down the Red Crown, but it’s difficult, because of
the way they’re organised. At the top is a sorcerer called the Master
of Change. He only deals with his lieutenants, who aren’t told one
another’s real names. Each of the lieutenants leads a coven, and
none of the covens has any knowledge of the others. Do you see the
strength of such a system?’
‘I think so. You witch hunters can identify and attack a single
coven and still accomplish relatively little in terms of crushing the
entire cult. Because, no matter how you torture them, the members
can’t give up secrets they don’t know. Although if you arrest the
leader…’
‘So far,’ Krieger said, ‘I haven’t managed to take any of them
alive. If need be, they turn their magic on themselves. I need a
different strategy, and that’s where you come in.’
‘I don’t understand.’
The big man grinned. ‘It’s simple enough in principle. I break
you out of this prison. You run to Altdorf. You use your divinatory
abilities to find a coven, and then you infiltrate it. Once inside, you
ferret out the cult’s secrets, up to and including the identity and
hiding place of the Master of Change.’
‘I don’t know how to operate as a spy!’
‘Sigmar has given you the gift of finding hidden knowledge. It’s the essence of your art, and it’s what’s required.’

‘There must be someone better.’

‘You’d think so, wouldn’t you? But believe it or not, there isn’t. You have the proper skills, and in addition, you haven’t been to Altdorf in years. Not many people remember you any more, even at the Celestial College. Your particular mentor is dead, and your fellow students graduated and moved on. That anonymity will make it easier for you to pass yourself off as something you’re not. It would also make it easy for me to denounce you to your order and convince them of your guilt, but let’s hope it doesn’t come to that.’

Dieter took a deep breath. ‘Let’s say I do this for you. What happens to me afterwards?’

‘I clear you of the charges against you,’ Krieger replied. ‘You regain your freedom. Your good name. Your life. Whereas if you refuse to do your duty and serve Sigmar, and the Empire in its time of need, I’ll regretfully proceed with your torture, trial and execution. You’ll never see the sky again until my assistants march you to the stake.’

‘How can you justify killing a man you know to be innocent? How could you live with yourself?’

‘Oh, I’d manage somehow. So what’s it going to be?’

Dieter felt sick to his stomach. ‘This whole idea is crazy. I doubt I’ll even find the cultists, and if I do, they’ll unmask and murder me. But you’ve left me no choice except to try.’
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