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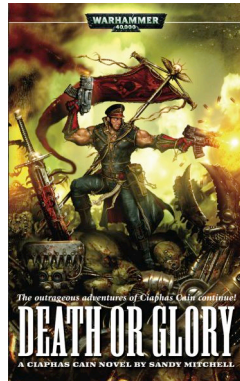
DEATH OR GLORY

The fourth Ciaphas Cain novel

By Sandy Mitchell

Ciaphas Cain is back, this time weaving a tale of his early life as a commissar in the armies of the Imperial Guard. Serving his formative years with the 12th Field Artillery, Cain travels to the beleaguered world of Perlia in an attempt to stop the battle-hungry orks from gaining a foothold on this Imperial world.

But that's as far as Cain's luck holds out. Shot down over enemy lines, Cain and his repugnant aide Jurgen find themselves right in the heart of enemy territory. With thousands of lumbering greenskins between him and safety, Cain only has one option. Gathering together all the human survivors he can find, Cain makes for freedom, but how can he possibly come out of this one looking like a hero?



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. His television credits include the high tech espionage series *Bugs*, for which he also wrote one of the novelisations.

• **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 *Death or Glory* by Sandy Mitchell. Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

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IF I'VE LEARNED one thing in the course of my long and discreditable career, apart from the fact that the more blatant the lie the more likely it is to be believed, it's that an enemy should never be underestimated. A mistake I made a few times in my younger days, I have to admit, but I was always a fast learner where keeping my skin in one piece was concerned; which accounts for the fact that, notwithstanding the odd augmetic or two, most of it's still where it belongs.

Of course back in the twenties I was far more naïve, having managed to emerge from a couple of early scrapes with the beginnings of the reputation for heroism which has followed me around like Jurgen's body odour ever since, and a fine conceit of myself I had as a result you may be sure.

So picture me then in the relatively carefree days of my youth, cocky and overconfident, and still basking in the kudos of having single-handedly saved Keffia from the insidious genestealers who had almost succeeded in undermining our glorious crusade to eradicate them from that remarkably pleasant agriworld. (In actual fact, several Guardsmen and a couple of Arbites had accompanied me, but the newsies hadn't let that inconvenient fact stand in the way of a good story.)

In the manner of all good things the war had finally come to an end, or to be more precise petered out to the point where the locals could clean up their own mess with the aid of a long overdue inquisitor and a couple of squads of Deathwatch Astartes, and the

12th Field Artillery were being pulled out for reassignment along with everyone else.

‘So where the hell is Perlia anyway?’ I asked, raising my voice above the growling of the Trojans hauling our limbered-up Earthshakers out onto the apron of the main cargo pad of Keffia’s premier starport. By which I mean that it had a proper rockcrete landing field, and some rudimentary repair and maintenance facilities for the shuttles that grounded there. Most of the others were little more than cleared fields, where the shuttles from the grain barges in orbit could simply load up and depart again without undue ceremony. No wonder the ’stealers had found the planet so easy to infiltrate.

Lieutenant Divas, the colonel’s subaltern, and the closest thing I had to a friend in the battery, shrugged, his fringe falling into his eyes as usual.

‘Somewhere to spinward I think.’ If he was going to say anything else he was forced to give up at that point, as a heavy-lift cargo hauler screamed in overhead, its landing thrusters kicking in at the last possible moment, and dropped to the rockcrete with an impact that resonated right up my spine through the soles of my boots. Clearly the pilot wasn’t about to take our victory for granted just yet, coming in as though the landing zone was still potentially hot; and given the number of cultists and hybrids still at large, I couldn’t altogether blame him for that. I shrugged in return, as the howling of the engines died away to a level where my voice might just be audible.

‘I’m sure the colonel will fill us in when he gets back,’ I bellowed, and turned away, already dismissing the matter from my mind, content to let Divas deal with the tedious job of supervising the stowage of our precious artillery pieces on his own. He nodded, absurdly eager as always, positively looking forward to the next war.

‘I hear they’ve got a bit of an ork problem,’ he yelled back. Well that didn’t sound so bad. Never having encountered the greenskins before I was sure they couldn’t be nearly as intimidating as the genestealers or the tyranid horde I’d already faced and bested. After

all, the popular image of them was of uncouth, slow-witted barbarians, which meant that, if anything, they were considered a bit of a joke, at least by those fortunate enough not to have actually faced them in the flesh, so I plastered a self-confident grin on my face and left him to it.

Wynetha had taken a few day's leave to see me off, and I could think of far better ways of spending my last evening on Keffia than watching sweaty gunners lug heavy objects about.

IN THE EVENT, the night passed more than pleasantly, and I found myself stifling a yawn at several points in the briefing the following day. The windows of the conference room had been left wide open to admit a breeze, sharp with the chill of approaching autumn, and I found myself unusually grateful for its assistance in keeping my eyes open. All the battery commanders were present, trying to look interested, while Colonel Mostrue, our commanding officer, regurgitated the information that had been passed on to him and the rest of the regimental commanders by the Lord General or someone equally exalted. In later years I was to be privy to the higher level briefings myself, of course, and find them a great deal more candid, not to mention worrying, but back then I still took a lot of what I was told at face value.

'Are we boring you, commissar?' Mostrue asked acidly, turning his ice-blue eyes in my direction. He'd never quite believed my hastily improvised explanation for being the inadvertent hero of Desolatia, when my perfectly natural attempt to make a run for it before the 'nids arrived had simply succeeded in luring an unsuspected flanking attack into the killing zone of our guns. Mostrue was too canny to let his doubts about my character show openly. Instead he tried to needle me at every opportunity, no doubt hoping I'd let something slip to confirm his suspicions. As usual I refused to respond, meeting the challenge head-on, as though I considered it nothing more than light-hearted banter.

'Far from it,' I assured him, allowing a visible yawn to get out in the process. 'Bit of a late night, that's all, lot of paperwork to get through before we pull out.' Both of which were true statements,

and if he chose to link them in his mind and draw the wrong conclusions that was hardly my fault. In fact, I had delegated most of the routine stuff to Jurgen, my malodorous and indefatigable aide, and was confident that he would deal with it in his usual meticulous fashion.

Despite his unprepossessing appearance, complete lack of social skills, and an all-pervading body odour that could fell a grox, Jurgen had turned out to be the ideal aide, at least in my case. For one thing, he was doggedly literal in following orders, unimaginative enough to simply accept whatever I told him without question, which meant that he had soon become an indispensable buffer between me and some of the more onerous aspects of my job. For another, he had turned out to have an almost preternatural talent for scrounging, which made my life a great deal more comfortable than it might otherwise have been (and probably his own as well, although I was careful not to enquire about that). At the time, neither of us was aware of his greatest asset, nor would be until our fateful encounter with Amberley on Gravalax a decade or so later, but I was to benefit from that as well on a number of occasions without ever realising the fact.

‘Then I suppose we should be grateful that you could spare the time to join us at all,’ Mostrue replied, not sounding in the least bit grateful, despite his words.

‘You know me,’ I said, nodding as though the colonel had paid me a compliment, and pouring myself a fresh mug of recaff. ‘Duty first.’ Given the Valhallans’ love of low temperatures I’d taken to making sure there was a hot drink waiting for me whenever I had to sit through a meeting with the regiment’s senior command staff.

‘Quite,’ Mostrue said dryly, turning back to the portable hololith. A star map appeared, the Keffia system easily identifiable in one corner from the cluster of contact icons marking the positions of the Imperial armada assembling in orbit. There seemed to be rather more ships there than I remembered, and I remarked on the fact.

Mostrue nodded, thinly masking his displeasure at being interrupted. ‘That’s correct. Our transport vessels and their escorts have been joined by a battle group from the sector fleet.’ I sipped

my recaff, which had suddenly become unpalatably bitter, a flutter of apprehension beginning to make itself felt in the pit of my stomach: that meant we would be on our way to a major war zone by the sound of things. I tried to quiet the nagging sense of foreboding. Even if that were the case, we would still be deployed well behind the front lines, far from the main bulk of the enemy forces. That was why I'd gone to so much trouble to secure a posting to an artillery unit in the first place, so that I could stay well away from the fighting, and by and large it had worked. The exceptions had been terrifying, of course, but I'd come out of those incidents hailed as a hero, and there was no reason to suspect that my luck wouldn't continue to hold on Perlia, wherever that was. I tried to remain calm, and sound insouciant.

'Sounds like a big operation then,' I interjected, more for the pleasure of putting Mostrue off his stride again than anything else.

'It is.' The colonel nodded, as though the remark had made sense. 'And it's still only one flotilla among many. Reinforcements are being brought in from all over the sector.'

The palms of my hands began to itch in earnest. This was beginning to sound more serious by the moment. Mostrue did something to the hololith, centring an otherwise unremarkable system a couple of subsectors away. Noticing that it was indeed to spinward, Divas grinned at me, and I nodded an acknowledgement. 'And this is where most of them are going. Perlia.'

'It doesn't look particularly remarkable,' I said.

Mostrue shook his head. 'That's because it isn't,' he replied dryly. 'Apart from the fact that it's been targeted by this.'

The picture in the hololith changed abruptly, eliciting a couple of startled intakes of breath from among the cluster of officers around it. A couple, older than the rest, flinched, reflexively reaching for their side arms before composing themselves.

'An ork,' I said. I'd seen holos of them before, and even a couple of preserved corpses at the schola progenium, but this one seemed particularly impressive. I assumed (wrongly as things were to turn out) that Mostrue was projecting it a little larger than life size for dramatic effect. It was as heavily muscled as most of its kind, more

so if that were possible, and wore a ramshackle suit of armour apparently assembled from random pieces of scrap. It carried a crude form of bolter, large enough to be hefted by a member of the Astartes, in one vast misshapen hand as though it were no more than a pistol, and a huge axe in the other. Small red eyes glared hatred from under the thing's overhanging brow.

'Not just any ork,' Mostrue said. 'According to the lord general, this is their leader, Gargash Korbul. He's united the greenskins of several tribes, and declared waaargh against the Imperial worlds right across the subsector.' He pronounced the ork word with noticeable distaste, and, as I was subsequently to discover, not nearly enough volume or saliva to get the true flavour of it. After giving us a moment longer to absorb the full ghastliness of the greenskin warlord, he switched the image back to the star map. 'So far they've struck here, here, and here.' Systems helpfully turned green with ork contact icons as he pointed. 'For the most part these incursions have been contained, however, at least for the time being. The critical system is this one, Perlia, where the bulk of the Imperial industrial capacity is. If they take that, they'll have all the resources they need to roll right across the subsector.'

'Then we'd better make sure they don't get it,' I said, summing up the mood of the meeting. Mostrue nodded.

'It sounds quite simple when you put it like that,' he said. His ice-blue eyes rested on mine for a moment, and I suppressed a shiver, which wasn't entirely due to the iceworlders' preference for wide-open windows. 'Let's just hope your confidence isn't misplaced.'

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

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