

# **FELL CARGO**

*By Dan Abnett*

*Luka Silvaro knows how dangerous the waters of the Old World are, because he was once a pirate himself. But that's all behind him now. Long believed dead, he turns up out of the blue, reclaims his ship and his crew, and sets off on a deadly mission to hunt down the Butcher Ship, an infamous galleon that has been terrorising the coast of Tilea.*

*To hunt down such a powerful foe you need allies, and Luka has to rely on his brother Guido to captain a ship at his side. But can Guido be trusted, or is his pirate blood too thick? With allies as untrustworthy as his enemies are deadly, Luka Silvaro has to pull every trick out of his sleeve to defeat his enemy in this rollicking tale of adventure on the high seas.*

*With pirates, vampires, zombies and sea monsters, top-selling Black Library author Dan Abnett invites you into the blood-stained waters of Fell Cargo!*



## **About the Author**

Dan Abnett lives and works in Maidstone, Kent, in England. Well known for his comic work, he has written everything from the Mr Men to the X-Men in the last decade, and received particular acclaim for his five year run on *The Legion* for DC Comics. His work for the Black Library includes the popular strips *Lone Wolves*, *Titan* and *Darkblade*, the best-selling Gaunt's Ghosts novels, and the acclaimed Inquisitor Eisenhorn trilogy.

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

On sale January 2005 (UK), February 2006 (US)

Price £6.99 (UK) / \$7.99 (US) / \$10.99 (CAN)

ISBN: 1 84416 301 6

Bookshops: Distributed in the UK by Hodder. Distributed in 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

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The following is an excerpt from *Fell Cargo* by Dan Abnett.

Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

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EVERYONE GAZED AT the big man standing in the shadows under the breeze tugged flap of the awning.

‘Luka?’ hissed Guido.

‘Yes.’

‘You’re back?’

‘Yes. I’m back.’

‘But they said... you’d been executed.’

‘Not effectively, it seems.’

Guido got up suddenly. His stool fell over.

Luka looked over at the girl. ‘He’s called “Lightfinger” because he’s light on fingers. He used to be my number two, and I took a finger off him every time he played me wrong. Didn’t I, Guido?’

‘Yes.’

‘Show her.’

Guido raised his hands. The heavy cuffs of his velvet jacket slid away, revealing hands that were just claws. Just index fingers and thumbs.

‘How many times did you cross me, Guido?’

‘Six times.’

‘It’s a bloody wonder I never killed you.’

This, thought Grecco, is going to be interesting.

‘What do you want?’ Guido snapped.

‘My ships.’

Guido snorted. ‘They’re mine now. Passed on to me, as accords the code.’

‘I know,’ said Luka Silvaro, stepping fully into the lamplight. He was tall, and as massively built as a four-masted galleon, with a forked black goatee and a thick mane of curly, greying hair tied back in a pigtail. When last they had seen him, he had been fleshy, with an increasing thickness and a distinct paunch brought on by the good living his trade had afforded. There was not an ounce of fat on him now. He looked lean, pinched, hungry, and somehow that emphasised the scale and breadth of his naturally big frame. His eyes, however, were just as they remembered: the colour of the sea before a storm, cannonball grey.

He let his cloak drop off his shoulders to show he was unarmed. ‘I hereby issue challenge, according the code, to take them back.’

All of the men jostled away from the table. Guido drew his sword. It was a hanger with a stirrup-hilt of gold, heavy, curved and double edged.

‘By the code, then. See if any stand with you.’

Luka nodded. ‘A blade?’

His companion, until then just a shadow in the background, pushed into the light and offered Luka his elegant smallsword.

‘No,’ said Luka. ‘No, it can’t be you. Not for the code to work. Step out.’

His companion backed into the shadows again, frowning and not a little ill at ease.

‘Who’ll blade him?’ cried Guido. ‘Anyone? Eh? Anyone?’

In an instant, a ribbing knife as long as a man’s forearm landed, quivering, in the bench top beside Luka. It had been tossed by Fahd, the company’s wizened cook from Araby. Almost simultaneously, a flensing dagger thumped in next to it, thrown by the giant Tende.

Guido grinned at the juddering blades. ‘Choose your weapons,’ he mocked.

There was a clatter. A sabre landed on the bench. It was an Estalian blade, a slender ribbon of watered steel, curved in a thirty-degree arc, with straight quillons and a wire-wrapped pommel. It was still in its enamelled silver scabbard.

The companion couldn’t tell who had thrown it in, but Luka knew.

He picked it up, drew out the fine blade and tossed the scabbard aside. He made a couple of whooshing practice chops in the air and then smiled at Guido.

‘Take your guard,’ he commanded.

There was no ceremony. They went at each other as the press of men backed further away to be out of reach of the slashing blades. Vento, the master rigger, obligingly scraped the trestle table aside to give them space.

The swords struck and rang like bells, over and over. Guido danced back and forth with a low guard, his left arm swinging free, like a goaded bear at a stake. Luka was more upright, shoulders back, the knuckles of his left hand pressed against his hip like an illustration from a fencing manual. It looked almost comically dainty, for a man so big, but for the undeniable speed of his cuts.

The packed onlookers shouted encouragement. Amongst them, Grecco watched. He’d witnessed enough duels, many on his own premises, to have the measure of this one. There would be three deciding factors. First, if Guido’s brute style could better Luka’s tutored perfection. Second, if Luka had the sense – and skill – to

guard his slender sabre against a direct blow from Guido's much heavier blade. Caught right, the sabre would break under the hanger's weight. Grecco had seen more than one fight end that way, and had still been sponging the blood off his flagstones the morning after.

The third thing... Well, he was waiting for that. It was against the code, but it always happened, so much so it was an expected part of a code-duel. Any moment now.

Guido stamped in and thrust with the tip of his sword. Luka deflected it away from his heart, but still it slashed a line through the wide sleeve of his shirt. He flicked up, caught his edge against the loop of Guido's stirrup-guard, and pushed him away, but Guido back-sliced and drew blood from the knuckles of Luka's sword hand. Only his fat gold signet ring had prevented Luka from losing a finger.

Now there's irony, Grecco thought.

Luka whipped round and the tip of his Estalian steel sliced off several strands of Guido's bead-plaited beard. Guido cursed, and presented with a down slice, followed by a side cut, forcing Luka back towards the cave mouth and the cooking fires. Some of the men were clapping rhythmically now, slap-slap-slap. The campanica player, oblivious in his drunkenness, took this as a cue and started to play until the blind gurdy-man advised him to shut up.

Guido cut Luka across his right forearm. The white linen of his shirt began to stain dark red. Luka rallied and split the tip of Guido's nose. A gout of blood splashed out and dribbled down his mouth and beard. Guido returned so hard that Luka had to duck his swishing blade.

In the shadows, the anonymous companion began to back away, wondering how far he would get if he started to run now.

The fighters clashed blades, locked, pushed each other away, and then clashed again. Guido kicked his former captain in the shin. Both swords swung, and both missed.

They're getting tired, Grecco thought. If I'm any judge, that third factor will come into play just about...

Two of the company broke from the onlookers and rushed Luka from behind. Girolo, a hairy brute in a blue satin frock coat that he insisted on wearing even though it was too small, and Caponsacci, the barrel-chested yardsman.

‘Have a care!’ roared Grecco.

Luka broke fast, spinning to deflect Caponsacci’s razor-edged tulwar, and then back-cutting to knock away Girolo’s stabbing sabre. The three swordsmen drove at Luka from the front quarters, jabbing and slashing, forcing him back out from under the awning, into the keg-yard. The audience scattered to let them through.

Girolo lunged and Luka ripped him away with a horizontal blow that sliced the meat of his shoulder. Girolo wailed and fell back. Caponsacci pressed in. Luka darted to the side, wrenched over a keg full of ale, and rolled it hard at Caponsacci with his foot. The yardsman tried to leap it, but it caught his shins and toppled him onto his face.

Guido was blocked by Caponsacci for a moment moved right, coming up at Girolo as he tried to recover, his beloved blue satin coat drenched red down one side.

Girolo’s sabre wasn’t fast enough. Luka sliced his throat and knocked him, choking and sucking for air, to the ground. The crowd gave a great roar.

‘Choose your sides more wisely,’ Luka panted at the dying man. Girolo gurgled, and expired so suddenly that his head hit the floor with a solid crack.

Guido and Caponsacci flew at Luka, who was bounding back under the awning on his toes. They came on like furies. Even with his speed, Luka couldn’t fend off the heavy, curved hanger and the long, straight tulwar simultaneously.

He scrambled in retreat and managed to pluck the cook’s long ribbing knife out of the tabletop as he passed. Then he turned, adopting the low, head-on stance of a sword-and-dagger fighter. He knocked back Guido’s sword with the sabre in his right hand, deflected Caponsacci’s broad-blade with the knife in his left, then scissored both blades, long and short, together to vice out Guido’s rally stroke.

At the back of the rowdy audience, the anonymous companion rummaged inside his cloak and pulled out an engraved wheel-lock pistol, a quality Arabyan piece. He cocked it and raised it. A hand sheathed in soft kidskin reached in and gently took it from his hand.

‘Don’t,’ said a voice.

The companion looked round with a start. A louche Estalian mariner in ostentatiously rich clothes stood beside him, carefully uncocking the pistol before handing it back. The man was unnecessarily handsome, his complexion dark, though not as dark as his eyes. His long, straight, black hair fell like a veil down the sides of his cheeks, framing a wolfish face.

‘But–’ the companion began.

‘Silvaro won’t thank you for it. This duel is by the code. He has to fight alone, or there’ll be no honour in his victory.’ The man’s voice was thick with the Estalian accent.

‘There’ll be no victory at all!’ the companion spluttered indignantly. ‘That Guido calls in his cronies. It’s not a fair fight!’

‘No, señor,’ admitted the Estalian with a grudging nod. ‘But it is the code. The challenger must be alone. If any of the crew choose to side with the master, then... so it goes.’

‘Madness. It’s unfair!’ snapped the companion.

‘Ah yes, tut tut. But...’ the Estalian shrugged. ‘It is the way. Put your fine pistol away before someone steals it.’

There was another braying howl from the crowd. Luka had glanced Guido’s weighty steel aside and now locked Caponsacci at the quillons with the ribbing knife. The thick-set yardsman tried to turn his wrist and plough the knife away, but Luka sank his sabre a hand’s span deep into the mariner’s chestbone. Caponsacci’s eyes turned up, and he crashed to his knees.

Before Caponsacci had even toppled nose first onto the flags, Luka had twisted his sabre out and turned, blood flying from the blade-groove. His knife came up in a cross, and the flat of it stung away Guido’s down slash. Then the long, watered steel blade of Luka’s borrowed sabre was resting on Guido’s left shoulder, the edge pressed to the side of his neck. Guido froze.

‘I suggest... you yield,’ wheezed Luka.

Guido's eyes flicked wildly from side to side. No one else was stepping forward to help him now. The Estalian blade bit gently into the flesh of Guido's neck.

'Now,' Luka urged.

The hanger hit the flagstones with a clatter. Luka's sword at his neck, Guido slowly sank to his knees.

'I yield,' he mumbled.

'Louder!' Luka snapped.

'I yield!'

'And?'

'I... I submit to you the ships and command that was previously yours, and lay no future claim on them. I say to the hearing of those here present that Luka Silvaro is captain and master of the Lightfingers company.'

Luka smiled. He tossed the knife aside and wiped the sweat from his forehead with his freed hand. 'And is this submission witnessed?' he asked loudly.

There followed a pandemonium of cheers, applause and thumping.

Luka acknowledged the tumult with a few smiling nods and a wave of his free hand. He took the blade off Guido's neck. A hush fell.

'My first act... is to exact penalty.'

Guido looked up and whimpered. 'Spare me...' he gasped.

'What is the penalty?' Luka called to the onlookers.

'Death!' someone shouted, and this notion was loudly cheered in some quarters.

'Please...' whined Guido, gazing up at Luka.

'Well, Guido, what do you suggest?'

Feeble, reluctant, Guido slowly raised his left hand and stuck out his index finger, one of the last four digits he possessed.

Luka smiled and nodded.

The sabre flashed and Guido screamed. His left hand lay on the flags. Blood pumped from his severed wrist.

'You bastard! Aaaaah! The whole hand!'

‘Consider yourself lucky,’ Luka said. ‘It’s a bloody wonder I’ve never killed you.’

Grecco hurried out to staunch the stump with a tablecloth. Some of the mariners came forward and helped to carry Guido’s kicking, shrieking body back into the cave so that the stump could be cauterised.

‘My second act,’ shouted Luka above the din, ‘is to rename this company the Reivers.’

More full-throated cheers.

Better, thought Grecco, hearing this above the fizzle of burning flesh as he pressed a red-hot skillet against Guido’s truncated wrist.

Guido howled, retched and passed out.

‘Why didn’t he kill him?’ the companion asked.

The Estalian shrugged.

‘I mean, he deserved it. From his lack of fingers he’s been given many chances already. Why didn’t he kill him?’

The Estalian smiled. ‘He has to cut him some slack. He is his brother after all.’