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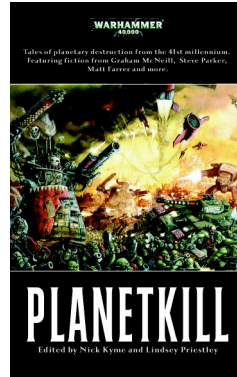
PLANETKILL

A Warhammer 40,000 anthology

Featuring fiction by Graham McNeill, Steve Parker, Henry Zou, Richard Williams, Matt Farrer and others.

Exterminatus, the destruction of an entire world, is the last and most desperate weapon of the Imperium of Man. Witness the struggle of mankind in the 41st millennium as it strives to throw back waves of deadly aliens and the warping powers of Chaos. The forces of the Immortal Emperor, the stalwart Imperial Guard and the superhuman Adeptus Astartes are the galaxy's only defence against such foes. There is respite, no chance for a lasting victory. In the grim darkness of the far future there is only war!

Featured authors include: Simon Dyton, Matthew Farrer, Robey Jenkins, Graham McNeill, Steve Parker, Richard Williams and Henry Zou.



The following is an excerpt from *PLANETKILL* edited by Nick Kyme and Lindsey D le Doux Priestley.

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From THE HERACLITUS EFFECT by Graham McNeill

EVLAME TURNED AND ran, knowing the genhanced vegetation underfoot and rampant growth of the forest would make stealthy movement impossible. He fled south, following the route of ribbed copper cables as they snaked through the humid forest like indigenous serpents. Pungent mulch carpeted the forest floor and Evlame felt like he was running in some terrible nightmare, where the monster is forever at your shoulder and your feet move as though through the most viscous glue.

Tears and snot covered his face as he blundered onwards, praying to the God-Emperor and every saint he could think of to deliver him from this terrible killer. He risked a glance over his shoulder, but could see nothing behind him. His foot connected with something solid and his world cartwheeled as he tumbled to the ground.

Evlame hit hard, the breath driven from his lungs by the impact and bright light exploded before his eyes. The cloying texture of fruit mash filled his mouth, as well as a pungent smell of opened meat. He spat seeds and fruit flesh, shaking his head as he pushed himself upright.

He knelt in an open clearing of enormous, ovoid fruit, most reaching to his chest in height and at least as wide – their enhanced growth rendering them swollen and ripe.

A headless body lay beside him, the ragged stump of neck still enthusiastically pumping blood onto the dark, almost black, soil. Another corpse lay amid the dripping carcass of an exploded fruit, its chest cavity ripped open as though an explosive charge had detonated within. Other bodies lay in similar states of terrible ruin – heads crushed, limbs removed or torsos ripped apart.

Evlame's mouth dropped open in mute horror, unable to take in such brutal, visceral evidence of murder. He pushed himself upright and set off towards the habitat domes, following the twisting cables like a lifeline. Rasping breath, like that of a consumptive, hissed behind him and he whimpered in terror, awaiting the blow that would split him open as surely as the ripened, overlarge fruits that surrounded him.

Such a blow never landed and he pushed his burning legs onwards, trampling through the soft mulch of pulped fruit and bloody earth. He sobbed with every step, his limbs flailing and his eyes streaming with tears of raw, unmaning fear.

Through his tears he saw the gleam of the silver-skinned habitat domes between the thick trunks of the towering forest and aimed his flight towards salvation. Surely Magos Szalin would know what to do? An entire company of cybernetically enhanced Tech-Guard were stationed at the Golbasto Facility and he began to laugh uncontrollably at the thought of reaching safety, his hysteria bubbling up like a geyser.

Evlame emerged into the open and stumbled across the automated firebreaks and pesticide barriers that protected the facility from the rampant growth of the genhanced forest. After the gloomy, spectral twilight of the undergrowth, the glare of the planet's warm yellow sun was dazzlingly bright and he shielded his eyes as he staggered and swayed like a drunk towards the Adeptus Mechanicus experimentation facility, the domes blurred through his lens of tears.

He saw movement and heard voices. He wiped his sodden face with the sleeve of his robe and wept in joy as he saw scores of massively broad warriors in burnished battle plate, their bulk unmistakable as anything other than Adeptus Astartes.

The Space Marines had come!

Relief lent his battered limbs new strength and he ran towards the facility with fresh vigour, anxious to have these brave protectors of mankind between him and the monster that pursued him. Evlame ran like a man possessed, smelling an acrid chemical stink from the smashed domes and seeing flame-shot smoke as it billowed into the clear sky.

Bodies littered the ground and the skins of the domes were pocked with bullet holes.

Clearly the monster had not come alone...

But now the Adeptus Astartes were here, there was surely nothing to fear, for what could stand against such perfect warriors – their flesh enhanced by the artifice of the Emperor and fragments of His greatness encoded into their very bones. Such holy vision had served as the model for their work on Golbasto and Evlame longed to speak to these warriors of legend to tell them of the achievements wrought here.

‘Over here!’ he yelled, his voice hoarse and rasping after his lung-searing run through the forest. ‘Help! It’s coming after me. There’s another one in the forest!’

The armoured giants turned at the sound of his voice, their massive, oversized weapons trained on him in an instant. He saw a confusing mix of armour marks and colours and laughed as he shook his head at their mistake.

‘No, no! It’s Magos Third Class Evlame!’ he shouted, the brief vigour lent to his limbs fading and his steps becoming more uneven. He laughed and waved his arms like a madman, simultaneously amused and terrified at the irony of nearly being gunned down by his rescuers. ‘I work here, I minister to the atomiser machines of the forest! I...’

His words trailed off as he dropped to his knees, his strength spent. He sank onto his rump, head tilted to the sun and his chest heaving as he sucked in shuddering breaths.

Evlame heard crunching footfalls and a chill fell across him as he was enveloped in the broad shadows of the towering warriors. He squinted into the glare of the sky and wiped the back of his hand across his tear-swollen eyes.

A trio of cruel faces cut from cold steel stared down at him, scarred and battle worn. One warrior's face was that of a killer, hostile and unforgiving. His skull was partly shaven and a ragged mohawk ran across its centre. Another warrior in dark plate wore his long black hair in a tight scalp lock, hooded eyes deep set in angular, pale features.

Half the final warrior's face was a ruined, knotted fist of crude augmetics, a glowing blue gem where his left eye ought to have been. His other eye glittered with cruel amusement and his close-cropped dark hair was smeared with blood spatters.

The one with the killer's face itched to do him harm and Evlame felt a burgeoning horror swell within him as the truth of the matter began to dawn on him.

No Astartes these, but...

'You work here?' said the warrior with the ravaged face, squatting down on his haunches before him. Evlame nodded, his jaw slack with terror and he felt himself lose control of his bodily functions. The warrior reached out and took hold of his chin. Even in his fear-demented state, Evlame was Mechanicus enough to notice that the arm was fashioned from shimmering silver, a prosthetic quite unlike anything he had seen before. The digits were cold and smooth and articulated without recourse to any joints he could see.

The icy grip turned his head left and right, as though he were being regarded like a specimen in a jar.

'Ardaric,' said the warrior with the strange arm, 'has Cycerin got everything we need?'

'He's almost done extracting the information from the senior magos,' answered the warrior in the black armour with jagged red crosses painted across his shoulder guards. 'The cogitators were smashed before we got to him, but the fool didn't think to wipe his own cranial memory coils.'

'And the canisters we came for?'

'Servitors are loading them onto the Stormbird as we speak.'

The killer with the mohawk said, 'Kill this last one, Honsou, and let's be on our way.'

The warrior named Honsou lifted his gaze to something behind Evlame. ‘Not yet, Grendel. I think I’ll let my new champion finish what he started.’

The warrior released Evlame and pushed himself to his feet. It took an effort of will for Evlame to tear his eyes from Honsou’s incredible silver arm.

He heard the whine of automatic targeting servos behind him and turned to see the incinerator units that had been used to contain the forest’s expansion aiming at a singular figure that marched across the scorched borders of the Mechanicus facility.

Evlame whimpered in terror as the patchwork-faced monster that had killed the rest of his colleagues walked towards him. Its pace was leisurely, though he could see a fire of agony in its storm-cloud eyes, as though its every step was painful.

Like most of the others in this terrible group, it wore Astartes battle plate the colour of bare metal with chevron trims of yellow and black. The closer it came, the more he could see its aquiline features were drawn in a mask of anguish.

Its skin clung to its skull but loosely, as though ill-fitting and not intended to clothe the skull beneath it. Wire stitching criss-crossed its ashen face and Evlame felt he was looking into the eyes of a madman staring through a mask of stolen flesh.

‘No...’ he whispered. ‘Please don’t... I never did anything to hurt you...’

The leathery-faced monster leaned down and said, ‘I live in pain. Why should you not?’

From VOIDSONG

by Henry Zou

‘DO SOMETHING!’ Silverstein yelled.

In his shock, it took Roth a moment to realize the huntsman was talking to him. He was caught up watching the catastrophe unfold before him. The panic was total. A caravan was almost scuttled off the edge; a pack mule went over tumbling. The press of frightened refugees was pushing their own people down the pass, gathering momentum like a rolling landslide.

‘I know! I know! Just let me consider my options—’ he began.

‘There aren’t any options! Just do something!’

Silverstein was right. He would have to improvise. Of course, making it up on the run was one of the rudimentary lessons taught to all Inquisitorial acolytes. His masters had called it aptitudinal adroitness, but it amounted to much of the same thing.

Brandishing his Inquisitorial signet in an upthrust hand, Roth broke into a run. The mountain sediment slipped and slid beneath him, pitching his run into a violent descent. He slid half of the distance and slammed his knees and elbows into the shale several times for good measure. Roth ended his skittering plummet with a flying leap over the scree bank, flailing briefly in the air before landing with a shuddering impact. He was right in the thick of it now.

‘Cease fire! Cease fire!’ he roared.

To the credit of the Guardsmen, their well-drilled fire discipline showed through. The whickering fusillade died out, but they didn’t lower their steaming muzzles. Roth was suddenly very aware of nine lascarbines trained on him.

‘Lower your weapons, I am Obodiah Roth of the Inquisition.’ Roth stressed the significance of his last word, thrusting his badge of office towards the troops.

As all soldiers would have done, they looked to their sergeant, a grizzly beast with the well-nourished build of a lumberjack. The sergeant, levelling his gaze on Roth, didn’t move.

‘Don’t listen to him lads,’ snarled Grizzly.

Roth breathed deeply. The still air was now heavy with the smell of burnt ozone. The gaping maws of nine las-weapons filled his vision. He didn't realise when exactly the Sirenese behind him had stopped screaming, but they didn't utter a sound now. He could tell the sergeant was staring at the stout chrome-plated plasma pistol in his shoulder rig, daring him to make a move.

Roth drew it.

'Lower. Your. Weapons.' Roth repeated.

'Don't be stupid now. We wouldn't want there to be any accidents between us,' replied Grizzly, his tone cold and even.

'I have the authority.'

'And I have my orders, inquisitor. This isn't your war.'

Roth's pulse felt like a war drum. He could tell they were not going to see reason. They were forcing him to play his final hand and Roth had hoped it wouldn't come to this. The inquisitor clenched his jaw and pointed up the mountain slope.

'Sergeant. Up there, three hundred paces behind you, is a huntsman with a Vindicare-class Exitus rifle. Don't bother looking, he's well hidden. What I can tell you, is that he was trained by the lodge-masters of Veskepine and I've seen him shoot the eyes off an aero-raptor in mid flight. Give him four seconds, he'll put down half your squad. It's your call Sergeant.'

'You're bluffing,' said Grizzly, but his voice wasn't so calm. This wasn't his game anymore.

'If you say so.'

There was a pause. Then the sergeant looked to his men and nodded reluctantly. Nine lascarbines were lowered to the ground. Far up the slope, a crop of slate rock and gorse weed juddered then moved. Bastiel Silverstein, in a fitted coat of dark green piranhagator hide unfurled himself from concealment. In his hands was a rifle, long and lean. Roth flashed his man the hand signal for stay alert and turned his attention back on the sergeant.

'Sergeant...'

'Sergeant Clais Jedda, 2nd battalion Airborne Sappers of the 45th Montaign Assault Pioneers.'

‘Sergeant Jedda.’ Roth repeated, letting the name hang heavily in the air before continuing. ‘What the hell are you and your men doing?’

‘Clearing a path, until you got in the way,’ he replied, still defiant.

‘A path to where?’

‘Urgent priority mission. On orders from my battalion colonel. It’s none of your concern, inquisitor.’

‘You made it my concern, sergeant. If you tell me nothing, I will charge both you and your colonel for collusion of criminal activity. He would be very displeased, don’t you think?’ Roth had cornered him. He knew Jedda was the type of soldier who would rather risk ire from the Inquisition than the wrath of his commanding officer.

‘There’s nothing criminal here. These people are all potential threats. Two days ago we lost a patrol of Pioneers on their way to an AOI. Gone. Wiped out. I’m not taking any chances with my boys.’

AOI. Guard terminology for area of interest. Roth raised an eyebrow, ‘What area of interest, sergeant?’

‘An off-world landing craft. A four-man patrol picked up signs of a large metallic object in an ice cavern two kilometres west of here. Their last transmission confirmed it was a lander, frozen solid with snow. Must have been right under our noses since before the winter months.’

Roth was definitely interested now. The snow entombment meant it must have slipped past the planetary blockade at least six or seven months ago. Perhaps it was linked to the psychic disturbances, perhaps not, either way he would need to know more.

‘Sergeant Jedda. You will cease terrorising these people immediately. Furthermore, you will not fire at all, unless permission is granted.’

‘Permission...’ he was really caught off guard now.

‘Yes sergeant. Permission from me. I’m coming with you.’

From MORTAL FUEL

by Richard Williams

ANOTHER CRACKLE OF the vox shocked Marcher from the sight. The foreman led him into the control spire. Marcher stepped inside and was hit by a wall of noise. The interior floor rose up in a great spiral to the top. People were everywhere, workers mainly. Administratum and Munitorum officials, distinctive in their uniform, were dotted around: directing, shouting, ordering, entreating the workers to fetch and carry, load and push. No sooner had a controller moved away from a piece of equipment than it was grabbed, dismantled, boxed and loaded onto the cargo trolleys rolling down around the far edge.

The foreman pointed Marcher in the direction of the ranking official, Governor-Adept Kaizen, who was pacing down around the inner curve of the spiral dragging a train of human servitors in his wake.

‘Take that. That’s done.’ Kaizen fired orders like an autocannon. ‘No, no delay for this schedule. I’ve approved this already. No to this. No to this. This is acceptable. This one, there is an error in the contingencies, rework it—’

‘Governor Kaizen!’ Marcher shouted, striding as quickly as he could to keep pace with the governor and his retinue.

‘This one is fine. Halve the schedule for this, he always pads his estimates. Get it done. Get it done. Who are you?’

‘I am Midshipman Mar—’

‘You’re here for your cargo. Follow me. Keep up. Keep up.’

Governor Kaizen increased his pace as he headed down the spiral further. Marcher decided to let propriety go hang and broke into a trot to keep up.

‘My lieutenant sends his comp—’ Marcher began.

‘I know you Navy men like your formalities, but I am in the midst of the final disentanglement of our presence on this entire planet. An operation of which I am the centre, the core, the nexus, the overmind. So do excuse me the formalities, for I have no time, no time.’

‘Yes, governor.’

‘Here,’ Kaizen said, drawing up to the side of a pit. ‘Here is your cargo.’

Marcher looked down. A sea of human faces looked back up.

‘Sign this.’ Kaizen slapped a data-slate into Marcher’s hand.

‘I think the lieutenant should be—’

‘No time. No time. Sign it.’ Marcher did so. Kaizen took the data-slate, tore off the top sheet and handed it back to Marcher.

‘That’s yours. Take it. Keep it.’

Marcher read what he had signed. It was a recruitment order. The men in the pit below had just been freed from their service to the Administratum and instantly bonded once more, this time to the Navy. They were to serve out their time in the work-crews on the lowest decks of the Relentless. Conditions were poor, mortality rates were high, these men were to be the mortal fuel the Relentless consumed. And they were volunteering. Better the bowels of a Battlefleet warship than what remained for them on Bahani after the Imperium left.

‘Three hundred men, Governor?’

‘Three hundred, fifty-seven. More than we expected. Men, women, somewhere in between, your captain’s request did not specify.’

‘It was from our first officer, Commander Ward. Our captain died several months ago.’

‘Still no replacement? Sloppy man management in the Battlefleet, always said so. Wouldn’t be acceptable in logistics. No, not at all.’

One of the servitors, a vox-unit built into its head, chirped. Its eyes unfocused and rolled back into its head as it opened its mouth to relay a message.

‘Governor, this is a security alert. We are under attack. Locals are massing at the main gate. A vehicle has breached the southern perimeter and is heading straight for the control spire.’

‘The control spire?’ Kaizen said, his voice rising. ‘I’m in the control spire! Call out the reserve squads; I want every one of them guarding this entrance...’

Marcher watched as Kaizen continued barking orders at the passive servitor who was faithfully relaying them to the security detail. Marcher noticed, however, what Kaizen hadn't, that all the workers around them had started to run. They weren't running from the main entrance, though, they were running directly away from the Governor. Marcher heard a noise from outside, an engine, roaring closer and closer. They weren't going for the entrance, the midshipman realised, they were coming straight through the—

The vehicle, a heavy loader weighed down with metal plates welded on as armour, crashed through the spire's wall. Marcher had already taken a hold on the Governor and yanked him out of the way as the loader ground to a halt, buried under the debris.

Brilliant sunlight streamed into the gloomy spire, as Bahani gunmen clambered through the breach in the wall. One of them clambered onto the loader's cabin and levelled an autorifle at the Governor's servitors still milling around in confusion.

'I will not have this,' Kaizen complained beneath Marcher. 'I will not have this operation disrupt—'

The shots interrupted Kaizen in mid-flow. A servitor fell beside them, its head a mess of blood and bone. Marcher's navy pistol was in his hand and he shot back. The head of the gunman snapped to the side and he fell. There were shouts from above as the guards at the entrance realised what had happened and redeployed. The Bahani gunmen pouring in found themselves being shot at from the levels above and began to duck behind cover to return fire. Marcher dragged Kaizen further from the firefight behind the lip of the pit. The crowd of people inside had heard the shots and wailed and screamed for their own lives.

One of the Bahanis saw them move and crouched up, a grenade in his hand, ready to throw. A shot somewhere above caught him. Too late. Marcher watched as the grenade sailed up into the air straight towards him. There was no time to run; his mind froze, but his body moved. He snatched the data-slate from Kaizen's unresisting hand and took a mighty swing and felt the solid contact as the data-slate smacked the grenade away. It flew back out through the breach and exploded with a heavy krump. It was then that

Marcher's mind clicked in and he realised what a stupendously stupid thing that had been to do. The mere impact alone might have set the grenade off in his face.

'Well done, midshipman.' Kaizen pulled Marcher back down into cover. 'Good job protecting your cargo.'

Kaizen took the data-slate back from Marcher's unresisting hand and peered at it. 'I'd check them anyway if I were you, as I believe you've invalidated your receipt.'

PLANETKILL 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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