

# ***A MURDER IN MARIENBURG***

*A Warhammer novel*

*By David Bishop*

*The biggest and richest port in the Old World, Marienburg is also a centre of crime and corruption. When the body of a high elf is found murdered, newly promoted watch captain and ex-soldier Kurt Schnell is tasked with the investigation. But this is the least of his troubles: he must first reclaim his watch station from the local crime lord, with a bunch of men who are little better than the villains they are supposed to be arresting. With rumours of monsters lurking in the sewers and the crime lords of Marienburg making a bid for power, can Kurt and his band of miscreants save the day, uncover the mystery and live to tell the tale?*



## **About the Author**

David Bishop was born in New Zealand, becoming a newspaper journalist at the age of eighteen. He emigrated to Britain in 1990, and worked as the editor of 2000AD before becoming a freelance writer. A prolific author, he also writes radio plays, tie-in fiction, articles, audio dramas, comics and has been a creative consultant for a number of video games.

The following is an excerpt from *A Murder in Marienburg* by David Bishop.

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KURT WAS WAITING outside the Watch Commander's antechamber when the dawn gong sounded. The sound boomed along the long, empty corridor, sustained by the high, vaulted ceiling and walls of stone. The headquarters of the City Watch was a grand, spacious building, in stark contrast to the places where lowly watchmen worked. Most stations were humble buildings in obscure corners of the city, often sited in converted homes or warehouses that had been seized from lawbreakers as part of their punishment.

Space was always at a premium in Marienburg, little surprise in a city constructed atop a collection of islands across the outlet where the Reik met the sea. Homes and businesses grew ever upwards, upper stories wider than those at street level, looming above the canals and cobbled passageways. The sun's rays never touched some streets, so they never dried, and those condemned to ground floor rooms suffered a lifetime of colds and chest infections, their clothes and homes perpetually damp.

By contrast, the headquarters building was warm and dry, sunshine filtering through stained glass windows, tinting the corridors with a friendly, cheering glow. Kurt had been here once before, the day after he stumbled into a job with the watch. It was a requirement of induction that all new recruits be presented to the commander before taking their oath of office. Kurt couldn't recall his last visit in any detail, it was buried in a haze at the back of his mind, along with all the events that had driven him out of Altdorf, the dark days he saw as a warrior during the war against Chaos and

the tragedies that had befallen him. Like most of the men who survived that conflict, those who saw the face of the enemy and lived to tell the tale, Kurt rarely spoke of his experiences on the battlefield. Seeing your brothers in arms struck down by a foe of such ferocity and unalloyed evil left deep wounds, buried far below the surface in places from which a few ales would not prise them free. Only cowards and liars bragged of their war exploits.

He looked down at his hands, studying the network of scars left behind by all the battles he'd fought to reach this doorway on this day. Had it been worth the sacrifices, the losses? No, in truth it hadn't. Kurt knew he could never recover all he had lost back in Altdorf, all that had perished on the battlefields of the Empire. But what's past had passed, as his old watch sergeant had been fond of saying. Better not to dwell on things you can't change. So Kurt determined to make a life for himself in the here and now, putting aside the memories, the pain of what had happened. If he didn't, they could drive him insane. Sigmar knows, that was how he'd ended up in Marienburg. He had no wish to relive those dark days again.

'Well, well, who's this?' a snide voice asked. Kurt looked up to see four men approaching in uniforms of the watch, all bearing the insignia of captains. He recognised them within moments, as much by reputation as by their appearances. The man who had spoken first was Bram Quist, a scar-faced veteran of twenty years in the Black Caps. He was responsible for keeping the peace in Noordmuur, to the north of Marienburg. On his left was a barrel-chested behemoth with a bushy red beard and jovial face – that could only be Titus Rottenrow, who ran the districts known as Rijkspoort to the east.

On Quist's right was a painfully thin man with waspish features and an unusual, rolling gait: Zachirias Wout. He led the watch in the Tempelwijk, to the west of Suiddock. Another figure was strolling along behind them, but Kurt could not yet see the final man's face. Even so, he had little doubt who it could be. The first three were among the leading captains in the city, all fiercely ambitious, all eager to take the commander's place when he eventually retired or died. But everybody knew who the golden boy of the watch was, the

prime candidate for the succession: Georges Sandler. Sure enough, when the quartet reached Kurt the last man was revealed as Sandler, a luxurious mane of brown hair swept back from those aristocratic features, the hint of flab around his jowls giving the face a curiously boyish aspect.

Kurt snapped to attention. ‘Watch Sergeant Kurt Schnell, stationed in the Goudberg district!’

Sandler chuckled at Kurt’s military precision. ‘I say, this chap’s taking himself a bit seriously, don’t you think, hmm?’

Quist scowled at Sandler. ‘Not all of us were born with a silver spoon in our mouths, Georges. Some of us had to earn our commissions, instead of having our parents buy them for us.’ Kurt felt Quist’s gaze shift to him. ‘That accent’s pure Altdorf, and judging by your stance... ex-military?’ Kurt nodded. ‘Best battle you ever fought in?’

‘There are no best battles,’ Kurt replied, ‘only victories and defeats.’

‘Quite the philosopher,’ Sandler quipped, earning a cheap laugh from Rottenrow and Wout. They were still guffawing when the doors to the antechamber opened and the captains were beckoned inside. Quist waited until the others had entered before resting a hand on Kurt’s left shoulder.

‘Don’t listen to that buffoon,’ the veteran growled. ‘He’s never fought for anything in his life.’ Quist was about to move through the doors when his brow furrowed. ‘Schnell, did you say?’

Kurt nodded. Here it comes, he thought, resisting the urge to lie.

‘Any relation to Erwin Schnell?’

‘He’s my father.’

‘Old Ironbeard is your father?’ Quist asked, unable to keep the admiration from his ravaged face. ‘Then you must be...’ As realisation dawned, so Quist’s expression soured. He removed his hand from Kurt’s shoulder, as if it had been resting on a dung heap. By the time Quist had entered the antechamber, he was muttering curses under his breath so violent they would have shocked any passing sailors. The tall, forbidding doors slammed shut, and the disgraced son of Altdorf was left alone once more in the corridor.

Kurt closed his eyes and waited for the wave of shame to pass. Would he never be free of the past?

The Watch Commander sat on a tall-backed chair behind an imposing desk, built from the timbers of a shipwrecked clipper that ran aground on Rijker's Isle forty years earlier. All this stood atop a raised dais, supposedly constructed to support the vast weight of the desk. In fact it was designed to help impose the commander's authority on all who came into his office. It was a large, ornately decorated chamber, created to intimidate and unease all entering it. Few left the better for having visited this place. The current commander needed no architectural affectations to impose his authority on anybody. He had a rasping voice and piercing, intense eyes that could unsettle the sternest of men. He was prone to laughing at the pain or discomfit of others, particularly when it was most inappropriate.

Some said he was an illegitimate genius who used his personal charisma to escape being drowned at birth with the other orphans begat by Marienburg's whores. Others claimed he had made some pact with the Dark Gods, no doubt signed in his own blood, as it was the only way to explain his irresistible rise from lowly gatekeeper to commander. But everybody agreed on two things – he was an incredibly shrewd judge of character, and a bastard in every sense of the word.

'Sergeant Schnell – tell me about him,' the commander said to Belladonna. She was standing in front of his desk, hands clasped behind her back, steadily returning his gaze. Meeting his eye was the best way of earning his respect, she had learned through bitter experience.

'He's quick and agile, good with his fists and feet. I'd say he doesn't start many fights, but he certainly knows how to end them. I used the coins you gave me to start a bar brawl at the Seagull and Spittoon last night. Schnell had already been on duty for twelve hours by that time, but he bested four men far larger than him with ease. He's brave, authoritative and a natural leader – takes command

well. Had no trouble fending off the advances of an overly amorous serving wench, either.'

The commander couldn't mask a smile. 'Let me guess – you bribed her as well?'

'No, there was no need. Inga seemed determined to live up to her title of serving wench. I had one other observation – Kurt Schnell is among the most ambitious men I've ever met.'

'Even more so than that fool Sandler?'

'I did say "among the most ambitious",' Belladonna replied lightly.

The commander frowned for a moment. 'And how did you assess his level of ambition during a tavern brawl? I know your powers of deduction can be remarkable, my dear, but still...'

'I'm told he's been waiting outside your antechamber for two hours.'

'Hmm, very well. Send in Quist, Sandler, and those two imbeciles that hang on Sandler's every word. Give us five minutes before telling Schnell to join us.'

Belladonna nodded. 'There's one other matter, sir – I'd like to request a transfer.'

'Why?'

'Much as I've enjoyed studying the machinations of office politics in your presence, I believe my talents would be put to better use on the streets. You don't need me here.'

'Perhaps not, but I enjoy your company,' the commander replied evenly. But his face had hardened and his eyes betrayed seething anger at her request.

'Be that as it may, I believe I would better serve the city in a more active role.'

'No doubt you have somewhere in mind?'

Belladonna smiled. 'Working with Schnell. I doubt things would ever be dull on his watch.'

The commander smiled, like a shark about to devour its prey. 'You should be careful what you wish for. I'm told the Cathay people have a saying about it being a curse to live in interesting times.' He placed his elbows on the armrests of his chair, forming

his fingers into a steeple in front of his brooding face. ‘When you bring Schnell before me, stay and observe what happens. If you still wish to go where I am sending him, then you are fool enough to deserve that fate – I will not stand in your way.’

She nodded her thanks and retreated to the antechamber.

KURT WAS SURPRISED when the woman from the Seagull and Spittoon appeared from the commander’s antechamber. ‘You can come inside now,’ she said, beckoning him in. Kurt had assumed she was merely a messenger, but it seemed she acted as adjutant to the commander. A curious arrangement in a city where women wielded the most power as matriarchs at home, or holding sway in courtly circles. Few females were seen in law enforcement, and fewer still in the watch. Perhaps she was the commander’s consort, and he employed her in his office as a ruse to hide her real role? Whatever her true function, Kurt sensed she was sympathetic to his cause. He jerked his head to the grand doors leading into the commander’s office.

‘I saw Quist, Sandler, Rottenrow and Wout go in – who else is in the room?’

‘Just the commander.’

‘Four captains and the boss,’ Kurt mused, trying to make sense of these portents.

Belladonna smiled at him kindly. ‘Don’t worry, you’re not in trouble. Yet.’ She waited another minute, busying herself with a few parchment scrolls at a desk before moving to the doors leading into the commander’s office. ‘It’s time.’ She admitted Kurt, before following him inside.

‘Come forward,’ the commander called, beckoning Kurt closer to the raised dais. The four captains were split into pairs, Rottenrow and Wout on one side of the dais, Quist and Sandler on the other. Kurt chose to ignore them and concentrate his attention on the commander. Always focus on the deadliest enemy in any situation, Kurt’s father had taught him. Deal with them first and the others will be easier prey. The brave warrior fights the hardest foe, even if it

costs him dear – that is the mark of bravery. ‘First of all, I’d like to congratulate you, Sergeant Schnell.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ Kurt replied. He said no more, holding the commander’s gaze but refusing to ask the obvious question – why was he being congratulated? Instead Kurt counted inside his head: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight–

‘Very good, Schnell! Most people in this situation cannot allow seven seconds of silence to pass without caving in and asking for more information. You show remarkable resilience of will.’

‘Must be in the blood,’ Quist muttered. ‘Shame he doesn’t have more of Old Ironbeard’s talents.’ The captain was silenced by a glance from the commander, before the focus shifted back to Kurt.

‘You’ve done well since joining the Black Caps. Some might even describe it as a meteoric rise through the ranks. In all the areas of Marienburg where you’ve served, reported crimes on dry land have dropped dramatically and clear-up rates for past offences have doubled. You’ve also been instrumental in ridding the watch of its more corrupt elements in those districts.’

‘I’ve been fortunate in my assignments,’ Kurt replied. ‘The likes of Goudberg are not what I’d describe as the city’s most dangerous or challenging districts.’

‘So, it sounds like you’re more than ready for something that’s more of a stretch, yes?’

Kurt nodded. Here it comes...

‘Good. I’m hereby promoting you to rank of acting captain. Your task for the next twelve months will be to re-establish a presence in an area of the city that we’ve been guilty of neglecting for far too long. You will reopen the old station and impose the firm spank of authority on the more recalcitrant elements nearby. It will not be a simple task by any means, so I’ve asked these captains to provide the help you’ll need. Each of them is sacrificing three of their best men to staff your new posting, and each assures me you’ll be getting the best of the best from among their ranks.’

A snigger escaped one of the captains, but Kurt did his best to ignore it.



The commander got up from his seat and came round the desk toward Kurt, but remained atop the dais. Even so, his eyes were just level with the newly promoted captain. ‘Succeed in this task, Schnell, and your promotion will become permanent. Fail, and—’

‘I won’t fail,’ Kurt cut in, his voice sounded far more certain than he felt. ‘Where is my station?’

The commander smiled broadly, mischief in his eyes. ‘Three Penny Bridge.’

Kurt felt the muscles in his jaw line ripple involuntarily as he fought to keep the panic from his eyes. He was not a native of Marienburg, but he knew the reputation of Three Penny Bridge all too well. It was the most dangerous, most lawless area of the city. The rule of law had not touched the benighted district of Suiddock for five long years. If you believed the legends, the abandoned station was cursed, destined to attract doom upon all who set foot inside it. ‘You want me to reopen the station on Three Penny Bridge?’ he asked helplessly, wanting to make sure this was not all some elaborate practical joke on him.

‘Correct. You did say you wanted a challenge, Schnell.’

Kurt nodded, ‘Didn’t the last captain go insane after being infected by Chaos?’

‘Joost Holismus was a good man,’ Sandler interjected. ‘I considered him a close, personal friend. Joost would never give in to that taint. He drowned himself, rather than see others infected.’

The commander snorted derisively. ‘Believe that if you wish, Sandler. The rest of us have our own suspicions about what happened to Joost, and none of them are quite so noble.’

Sandler started to protest but quickly fell silent beneath the commander’s glower.

Kurt took a deep breath. ‘When do I start?’

‘Tonight. Today, if you wish – the sooner that place is cleaned up, the better,’ the commander enthused, clapping a hand on Kurt’s right shoulder. ‘Good luck, Schnell – hopefully you will not need it, but I wish you every good fortune in the task ahead.’

‘Thank you, sir.’ Kurt stepped back, saluted and turned away. Belladonna was already holding open the door for him to leave. As

he strode from the office, Kurt could hear the captains laughing and joking with each other about his fate.

‘Twelve months? He’ll be lucky to last twelve days!’ Wout cackled.

‘Twelve days? He’ll be lucky to last twelve hours over there,’ Rottenrow chortled.

‘I give him until Geheimnstag,’ the Watch Commander said. ‘If he’s still there and still alive after the Day of Mystery, it would be a small miracle.’ The others laughed heartily as the door closed behind Kurt.

‘Did you see the look on his face when you mentioned the Three Penny Bridge, sir? Priceless!’

Belladonna rested a comforting hand on Kurt’s left arm. ‘Don’t listen to them. They’re just grateful you got the poison chalice, instead of them.’

‘Thanks,’ he grimaced. ‘That helps a lot.’

She shrugged. ‘Have you got anyone in the city you trust, someone to back you up?’

Kurt pondered her question for a moment. ‘One man, but he’s retired from the watch.’

‘Talk him out of it. You’ll need all the help you can get where you’re going.’ Belladonna gave his arm a gentle squeeze of encouragement before escorting him from the antechamber. The doors swung shut behind him and Kurt Schnell, acting captain for the Three Penny Bridge, was back out in the corridor where he’d waited since long before dawn. Now he was wishing he’d stayed in bed.

***A Murder in Marienburg*** 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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