



StarCraft: Evolution

By Timothy Zahn

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An action-packed novel that ushers in a new age of adventure in the critically acclaimed *StarCraft* series from Blizzard Entertainment

Award-winning author Timothy Zahn pens the latest chapter in the stunning *StarCraft* saga, building on the game's rich legacy to create an unforgettable new story.

After nearly a decade of brutal warfare, three mighty factions—the enigmatic protoss, the savage zerg, and the terrans, humanity's descendants in the sector—have entered a cease-fire, but the peace is tenuous at best. When the sudden restoration of an incinerated planet is brought to light, tensions erupt. Neutrality swings back to hostility, and old enemies are accused of developing biological weapons to reignite the bitter conflict.

An expedition of terran and protoss soldiers and researchers is deployed to investigate the mysterious zerg planet and its inhabitants' intentions. But the lush alien landscape is host to other denizens, creatures shrouded in shadow, and should they be unleashed, they will change the fate of the entire galaxy.

Praise for *StarCraft: Evolution*

"I couldn't put the book down. . . . If you love science fiction, solid characters, and great action sequences, you'll love [*StarCraft: Evolution*]."—**CinelineX**

"This one is definitely a fun read."—**Analog**

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

Timothy Zahn is the author of more than forty novels, nearly ninety short stories and novellas, and four short-fiction collections. In 1984, he won the Hugo Award for Best Novella. Zahn is best known for his *Star Wars* novels (*Heir to the Empire*, *Dark Force Rising*, *The Last Command*, *Specter of the Past*, *Vision of the Future*, *Survivor's Quest*, *Outbound Flight*, *Allegiance*, *Choices of One*, and *Scoundrels*), with more than four million copies of his books in print. Other books include the Cobra series, the Quadrail series, and the young adult Dragonback series. Zahn has a B.S. in physics from Michigan State University and an M.S. from the University of Illinois. He lives with his family on the Oregon coast.

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Chapter One

The war was over.

The nightmares weren't.

Marine Sergeant Foster "Whist" Cray didn't mind the dreams so much. Hell, he'd survived five straight years of living nightmares while he was deployed. He ought to be used to fear and panic by now.

What got him about the damn things was the monotony.

The war had been hell on wheels, but at least it had offered occasional changes of scenery. His platoon had been deployed to desert, jungle, forest, grassland, city—they weren't so much cities as they were heaps of shattered masonry and twisted pipe by the time his platoon got there, but it still counted—and once even on a beach.

The enemy had been pretty diverse, too. He'd blasted away at zerglings, hydralisks, ravagers, and all the rest of the umpty-ump hell-spawned varieties of zerg. Sometimes the overlord or queen or whoever was running that particular assault sent in the nastier monsters, at which point the marines would grab some dirt while a viking or a Thor waded in to deal with them.

But even new enemies meant something different to look at. He'd seen a few protoss, too, usually on the far side of the battlefield where they weren't doing the Dominion forces a whole lot of good. Once or twice he'd even ended up taking a potshot at one of them when the big alien had been careless enough to get in the way.

But the nightmares were all annoyingly the same.

It was always zerglings and hydralisks. It was always him and Jesse and Lena, standing shoulder to shoulder against the onslaught.

And his damn C-14 gauss rifle never worked.

It fired just fine. It barked out the usual thud and mule-kicked against his combat suit's shoulder just like it was supposed to. But instead of the 8mm spikes blazing toward the charging monsters at hypersonic speeds, they just blooped out in a pathetic little arc that nose-dived them into the dirt a couple of meters in front of him. He would fire again and again, not accomplishing a damn thing except to make a collection of spikes in the ground. The zerg kept coming, and they were just opening their jaws for lunch when he woke up in a cold sweat.

He never knew what happened to Jesse and Lena. He often wondered if they survived the dream.

Probably not. They hadn't survived the war. No reason they should survive the dream, either.

Afterward he usually just lay alone in the dark, listening to his heart thudding as he waited to fall asleep again. Sometimes he slipped out of his room in the marines' new barracks in Augustgrad and took a cup of coffee up to the roof to clear his head in the cold night air.

But today was special. Today was the sixth anniversary of the end of the war, or at least his part of it. Today the nightmare, and the reminder of the sacrifices of Jesse and Lena and all the others, called for something more.

Usually the roof was deserted, because sane people who weren't on night duty were in bed at this hour. Tonight, though, someone else was already topside when Whist arrived. The man was short and thin and hunched over a little, leaning his elbows on the low parapet and gazing toward the outskirts of the city. "About time," he called as Whist stepped out of the stairway.

Hastily, Whist lowered the bottle he'd liberated from the Noncommissioned Officers' Club, hiding it behind his leg. Hard liquor wasn't supposed to be consumed outside the club's controlled environment. "Excuse me?" he called back.

The other man half turned, and in the reflected light from the central part of the city behind him Whist could see the all-too-familiar fusion of physical youth and crushing psychological age. A war vet, for sure. "Sorry," the kid said. "I thought you were someone else." He beckoned. "Come on—join the crowd. I see you brought the refreshments."

Whist wrinkled his nose. So much for keeping the bottle hidden. For a second he thought about turning around and making a run for it before he could be identified, then decided he really didn't give a damn. "You've got a whacked idea of good places to meet people," he commented, starting across the uneven roofing material.

"I'm here for the view, not the ambience," the other said, gesturing over the edge of the roof behind him. "A buddy and I were going to watch a night training session. He must have slept through his alarm."

Whist frowned past his shoulder. In the distance, above one of the collections of rubble that had once been a suburb, he could see ten muted glows buzzing around like unhappy hornets. "What are those?"

"What do you think?" the kid countered with a snort. "Who else except reapers gets dragged out for training in the middle of the night these days?"

"I thought reapers mostly just kangarooed over hills and off cliffs," Whist said. "When did they start zooming around in circles?"

"Oh, they used to do that all the time," the kid said. "When the reaper program started, they were given fully flight-capable jetpacks."

"Sounds like fun."

"I'm sure it was," the kid said. "Trouble was, the new recruits also had a tendency to crash. A lot."

"I heard the packs used to explode, too."

"More often than anyone liked," the kid conceded. "Anyway, after the war ended and they suddenly had enough time for proper training, they started phasing in the old equipment design, keeping some of the standard units the same while putting others in the new, improved packs and taking them back to the original mission statement."

"Minus the random explosions?"

"So we hope, yes."

"Well, floating around certainly makes them better targets," Whist commented, choosing his words carefully. We, the kid had said. So he was a reaper, too? Terrific.

Because if marines were the best of the best, reapers were the worst of the worst. Literally.

Or at least they used to be. During the war, under the reign of Emperor Arcturus Mengsk, the whole corps had supposedly been made up of hardened criminals whose antisocial tendencies couldn't be brain-panned away, and who had opted for crazy-ass military duty as an alternative to prison or worse. Marines might like the way reapers could swoop down out of nowhere onto a zerg attack front, but no one really trusted them.

The new emperor, Arcturus's son, Valerian, was purportedly changing all that. Personally, Whist would believe it when he saw it.

"Spoken like someone who's been one of those targets." The kid offered his hand. "Lieutenant Dennis Halkman, 122nd Reapers."

"Yes, sir," Whist said, stiffening to attention and throwing a salute. A reaper and an officer. This just got better and better.

And if Halkman had been in the 122nd, he'd almost certainly been in the war. Possibly for years.

Which made him a definite anomaly. Typical service lifetime for a reaper was six months. "Sergeant Foster Cray, 934th Marines," Whist continued, identifying himself.

"Nice to meet you, Sergeant," the kid said, making no effort to lower his hand or return the salute. "And I should have mentioned that's former lieutenant. I've been rotated into the reserves, and you probably hate officers anyway, so let's skip the sirs and saluting, okay? And call me Dizz."

“Yes, sir,” Whist said, frowning. Definitely not the kind of officer interaction he was used to.

Of course, Dizz would have an entire pre-reaper criminal skill set tucked away. Maybe this folksy, aw-shucks approach to new people was something he’d developed to put them at their ease. Maybe he’d been a con man? “And you can call me Whist,” he added, taking Dizz’s hand and shaking it. Dizz had a good, strong grip, the kind that dripped confidence and trustworthiness. Definitely would fit a con man persona.

Then again, it would fit a lot of other criminal types, too, up to and including serial murderers.

Did the reapers accept serial murderers?

“Much better,” Dizz said approvingly, a frown creasing his forehead. He was probably wondering if Whist was speculating about his past sins, a conversation Whist had no intention of getting into. Certainly not on a deserted rooftop when he wasn’t even wearing his sidearm.

So, okay. The minute Dizz started steering the conversation that direction, Whist would make an excuse and head back to his quarters—

“The 934th, you say,” Dizz continued. “Were you the unit sent to clean the zerg out of the Northwoods Forest on New Sydney?”

Whist blinked, disengaging his brain from his mental gymnastics. The Northwoods Forest? “We were there, yeah,” he confirmed. “You were the reaper unit, right?”

“Oh, yeah, that was us,” Dizz said, grinning suddenly. “So I’m guessing you had a front-row seat when Boff brushed one of the trees, bounced sideways, and nearly cannonballed into one of your guys?”

Whist snorted. “Front-row seat, hell,” he said. There were few enough reasons to smile in battle, but that incident had been one such rare gem. “I was maybe three marines to his left when your boy started his pinwheel act. For a second I thought he was coming straight at me.”

“The way he was flying, probably everyone in the unit thought that,” Dizz said. “I remember being impressed as hell that none of you hit the dirt or even flinched.”

“Trust me, we were flinching inside,” Whist said. “Just wasn’t time to actually do anything.”

“Except swear,” Dizz said. “That marine he tried to flatten—what was his name again?”

“Grounder.”

“Right. I think Grounder swore for three minutes straight without ever repeating himself.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Whist said. “I was too busy with a pair of zerglings right after that to pay much attention. But if you wanted an applied history of terran vulgar language, Grounder was your man. Never knew anyone with that depth of vocabulary.”

“Well, he sure impressed us,” Dizz said. “Though probably less about the language than about the fact he kept Boff speechless that long.”

"I think he got in a sorry, mate once when Grounder stopped for breath," Whist offered. "But that was about it."

"Made for an interesting day, all right," Dizz said. "That, plus the fact we won."

Whist hissed between his teeth, the brief glow of humor from that day fading away into the rest of the bad memories. Yes, they'd won. But at a hell of a cost. "Yeah," he said. "What happened to Boff? Did he make it?"

"He made it through that particular battle, anyway," Dizz said. "He was transferred right afterward, and I never heard what happened to him. How about Grounder?"

"He lasted three more battles," Whist said, looking away. "Bought it in the fourth."

"Oh. Sorry."

"Yeah," Whist said. "Not like he was the only one."

"Not by a long shot," Dizz said grimly. "How do you think I got promoted to lieutenant this young?"

"Usually it's for ability or courage."

"Maybe that's how it is with the marines," Dizz said. "With reapers, it's for whoever lives the longest. Sort of a reverse consolation prize." He sighed. "Actually, I kind of hope Boff didn't make it. The guy was a three-time murderer. Hell of a debt to society to have to pay off."

"Yeah," Whist said through suddenly stiff lips. For a minute there he'd forgotten who he was talking to. "I suppose that kind of background might come in handy when you're shooting at zerg."

"Not as much as you'd think," Dizz said, turning to look over his shoulder at the reaper exercise still going on in the distance. "That's why they're trying to bring in a whole new crop of kinder and - gentler??.??.?damn."

"What?" Whist asked, focusing on the floating lights. Nothing seemed different.

"They're greening," Dizz bit out. "Damn stupid—you got your comm?"

"Yeah," Whist said, popping it off his belt and holding it out.

"You want Reaper Sergeant Stilson Blumquist," Dizz said, making no move to take the device. "When he comes on, tell him his two southern flankers are greening."

"Okay," Whist said, punching for the base comm nexus and wondering what the hell greening was. The computer responded, and he fed in Blumquist's name. "Shouldn't you be the one to tell—?"

"Sergeant Blumquist," a terse voice snapped from the comm. "Who the hell is this?"

Again, Whist started to offer Dizz the comm. Again, Dizz waved it away. "I've been instructed to inform you that your two southern flankers are greening," Whist said.

“Really,” Blumquist said. “And you’d know this how?”

“Because I can see them,” Whist growled. “Just fix it, okay?”

He keyed off. “What the hell is greening?” he asked Dizz.

“Jealousy or envy,” Dizz said, still focused on the distant lights. “In this case, a pair of hotdoggers trying to outdo each other with fancy and stupid maneuvers. Oh, and here they come.”

Whist felt his eyes widen. “Here they come?”

“At least Blumquist knows how to do a needle search,” Dizz commented. “You told him you could see him, and he pinpointed you. So not a complete incompetent.”

“Good to know,” Whist ground out. The lights were definitely on the move now, and definitely moving in their direction. “Should we, uh, make ourselves scarce?”

“Well, I should,” Dizz said, brushing past Whist. “Oh, and I’ll take this,” he added, plucking the bottle deftly from Whist’s hand.

Very deftly, in fact. Did that imply the man had been a pickpocket?

“Don’t worry—you’ll be fine,” Dizz added over his shoulder as he strode swiftly toward the door. “Just tell him he can’t talk to you that way.”

Whist stared at the kid’s back as he reached the door, his muscles tensed in fight-or-flight knots. Whatever was going on here, it had zero to do with him. The smart move would be to follow Dizz into the building, return to his bunk, and forget all this had happened.

But for the second time that evening, he suddenly decided he didn’t give a damn. He’d done nothing wrong—for a change—and there was no way in the world he was going to run. And sidearm or no sidearm, if a bunch of wannabe reapers felt like making trouble, he would show them the marine definition of the word.

Ten seconds later they arrived.

Their technique was a little chaotic, he noted as they dropped out of the sky around him. Their timing was off, and a good half of them couldn’t even stick their landings. But the encirclement itself was competent enough, and a lot of the sloppiness was probably just basic inexperience.

There was only one of the group who showed as even halfway competent. Whist made sure he was facing that one when he pounded onto the roof. “Sergeant Blumquist,” he greeted the reaper. “Nice night for a flight.”

“Can it, fekk-head,” Blumquist spat, taking a long stride forward.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bob Bartlett:

Book is written, printed, or descriptive for everything. You can know everything you want by a reserve. Book has a different type. As we know that book is important point to bring us around the world. Adjacent to that you can your reading proficiency was fluently. A publication StarCraft: Evolution will make you to be smarter. You can feel more confidence if you can know about almost everything. But some of you think that will open or reading any book make you bored. It isn't make you fun. Why they might be thought like that? Have you looking for best book or appropriate book with you?

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