



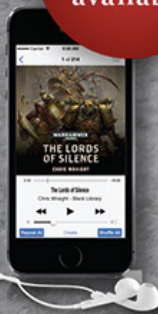


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Canticle - David Guymer

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CANTICLE

By David Guymer

The boy had no name.

The capsule that had first brought him to this world had labelled him *X*, but he had earned a great many names since that day of his awakening. The storm giants of the Karaashi Pinnacle, elementals of dark rock fused into cognitive sheaths of mineral armour, artificer-sages and warrior-mystics, had called him *Cataclysm*. It had been his planetfall that had sundered their mountain monastery, and his explorations that had unwittingly released the great wyrm from its captivity there. The boy had not been able to stop it. He had not been strong enough. From that day, the boy had called himself *Hunter*. Following its path of destruction brought him to the black ice of the surface world. The undying phantasmagoria that haunted the foothills of Karaashi - shades of code-personality mis-phased from time and dimension, and from sanity itself - had called him *The Finality*. Further south, where black ice gave way to gritty tundra, the pyramid complexes of aeons-lost civilisations broke through the layers of dust, their perfect geometries unscarred by the howling storms, their seals unbroken until the coming of the boy. The mecharachnids and phasewraiths that guarded the labyrinths of those tombs had not sought to name him, only to kill him. But the eidolic algorithms that had, as a last resort, sought to communicate had called him *Rehew Netjer*. It had meant Son of Man.

The fragment warlords of the Subliminat had called him *Flesh*.

The name had, at first, been extemporised as an expression of desire, for a resource too priceless to leave unnamed. Then with contempt, as their

efforts to assimilate the boy into their worker collectives proved fruitless. Then with fear-code, as the boy dismantled their harvester cohorts one by one and came for them.

Of all the names he had worn or been given, it was the one that had resonated with him the most.

He was flesh.

But it had not stuck. What need did he have for a name?

He had walked from the wreckage of the Black Pinnacle and the ruins of the once-mighty civilisation therein for a time he could not track and a distance he could not measure, ever south, following the trail of the biomechanical beast he had set loose.

If there was a sun around which this black world turned then it was alien to the boy. If there was a season then it was winter. Its changelessness was a black cloak over a landscape where each blast of wind was an apocalypse. There was no day. There was no night. Light emerged spontaneously. Frenetic wind-speeds and an abundance of electro-dense particulates in the air generated frequent, albeit erratic, electromagnetic bursts. The boy had been taught none of this, but he knew it, intuited it, pursued such understanding with the same voracious appetite with which he submitted his changing physiology to each new trial of its limits.

And if it had any then the boy had not reached them yet.

He had gauged the erosion of time by the new challenges that he faced, and by the steady lengthening of his limbs as he walked, the thickening of muscle, the slow change of his body from that of a boy into *something else* that he could not yet define.

For not once in all that time had he encountered a being that came anywhere close to resembling himself.

The boy reached out towards the dead thing.

It was marginally smaller than he was, encased in a bronzed ceramic shell that had, before grit and dust and age had scoured the curved plates to senility, borne some kind of pictorial script.

It had two arms, two legs, a single head. Though similar to many of the robotic, semi-robotic and *infernal* creatures that he had encountered, vertical symmetry was an uncommon template in the boy's experience. There was something intuitively familiar about this body's design

however, something that appealed to his sense of logic.

He brushed dust from the corpse's face. The wind broke against the back of his hand, black sand quickly piling up past the line of his middle finger, briefly shielding a visor screen. A network of shatter lines tunnelled through the tempered glass, opaque rings where windblown particulates had impacted but without force enough to break the material entirely. Some of the damage looked significantly older than others, the stress halos wider. The boy did not think the body had lain here long enough to account for the damage. Raw material, flesh or otherwise, did not stay unpicked for long. What the wind did not bury or destroy, every techscavenger with even a partial auspex in range would soon be flocking towards.

He looked through the cracked visor.

Inside, a face.

It was hard and pale, a face painted on bone, its own internal symmetry framed by a mess of long, ash-black hair. The forehead lay against the inside of the helmet, as if glancing away, hair covering the mottling bruises. The eyes were wide and dark. The lips were blue. The boy stared, fascinated. He had always understood that he did not belong to this world. He knew, in his bones, that he had a purpose that went beyond the bruising challenges of his immediate environment. He did not know what it was, only that it was out there, somewhere, and that he needed to be strong enough to face it. This frail corpse was not it, but it felt like another step on the path he would take towards finding it.

He looked up.

The mountains of the northlands lay behind him. Ahead, a lowland of fierce winds and biting, almost predatory squalls of dust. A trail of metal fragments littered the desert. The wind animated them. Twists of metal walked end-over-end, misshapen legionaries of dark iron that for all their apparent vigour went nowhere, the wind pushing them two steps backwards for every two steps forwards, burying them piecemeal under black sand.

Soon, they would all be gone.

Then they too would be sand.

Beyond their trooping ranks, a great trapezoidal hulk of weather-beaten steel lay on its side. The scaffolding of its undercarriage lay exposed. Like an armoured creature tipped onto its flank to bare the soft parts beneath.

Solid rubber tyres taller than the boy, with treads as thick as the length of his hand, jutted into the wind. Bits of track lay strewn amongst the wind-tossed debris, along with other, larger, fragments of sponson, hull armour, and coils of sense array. The boy mentally reassembled the super-heavy vehicle. It was long, low-slung over a bed of enormous tyres and nail-studded tracks, with a low centre of gravity that nothing short of a once-in-a-millennium storm would put onto its side. To the boy's intuitive understanding it was obvious that the monster had been attacked. The warping of the armour shell was consistent with that of a plasma blast. The body he had discovered had probably been crewing one of the sense nests before being thrown clear by the explosion. They would have been killed in the blast or expired shortly after when their exo-armour's umbilicals had been torn, severing them from their vehicle's environment.

The boy withdrew his hand.

The dust buried the face anew.

He looked again over the wreckage, largely succeeding in ignoring the growls of complaint from his belly.

He subsisted on a diet of sand, supplemented by whatever minerals and metals he could scavenge. His physiology was able to metabolise whatever inorganic material he could ingest, but even scraping the organic tissues from the cyborgnetic ghouls and skin-wearing demimachinic reavers he could run down and kill did little to soften the pangs. The last time he had been truly sated was when he had slain the last fragment lord of the Subliminat. He had broken into their amnioesis vats, feasted on amino acid slurries and lipid pastes until he had been too full to move so much as an eyelid, but even that banquet had not satisfied his metabolism for long. In a way, the boy almost liked the feeling of hunger. It was like a spirit familiar, keeping him focused, keeping him sharp.

If not for its growls, he might have ignored the vehicle wreck and carried on south.

He considered breaking open the corpse's exo-armour and devouring the meat inside, but he did not. The boy was not entirely sure why, except for that haunting familiarity of face and form. He hoped he would not regret it. He knew he could not guarantee that the body would still be there when he returned.

With a creak of metal, he rose.

Even by the definitions of later years his armour would be considered a masterpiece, limited only by the materials available to him and the tools he could obtain to work them, but not by the visionary genius that underpinned the whole. Adamantium plates were bolted together with bronze rings, ribbons of kineto-mimetic crystal chemically welded to sheets of ultra-hard glasteel. The tapestry of colours and materials unavoidably left parts of his body bare. His left forearm, both legs, his hands, his head. His eyes shone like silver coins. His hair was rugged and black.

The wind broke against him with storm force and the boy set his jaw, enjoying the sensation of its pushing, clawing, his muscles bunching and resisting.

Winning.

He drove the haft of his weapon into the sand.

It was best described as a bardiche. The long pole had originated within the spinal cabling of the seer-king of the storm giants. The curved blade had been the claw of a phasewraith. It seemed to have retained some of its transdimensional properties even after the boy had torn it from the ghost machine and it had blended itself to the weapon shaft as if moulding itself to the boy's vision. He had discovered any number of ranged firearms in the desert, powerful solid projectile weapons, devices that harnessed exotic forms of matter and every type of energy his innate genius could conceive, and had assembled several of his own design from found parts. He had built conversion blasters powered by electromagnetism and autocannons to fire bullets of compacted sand. But however much ingenuity he bent to the task he had not been able to craft a weapon that could kill as reliably or well as a blade wielded with his own two hands.

The boy crunched over the first rank of wind-tossed debris as he walked, the tear in the super-heavy crawler's side gaping dark and savage, and curiously enticing.

No corpse stayed unpicked for long.

He found a scavenger chewing on the circuitry exposed by the evisceration of the sense nest. The creature was hunched over the torn-out panelling with the intense focus of an invertebrate predator. Metallic encrustations and strings of cabling blotched the cadaverous black flesh of its back. As

the boy's bare foot creaked onto the crumpled metal bulkhead that had since become the floor, the creature's gaze shot up from its meal. Half-chewed wires spilled from its mouth. Its eyes had been refashioned with dull sense augmetics, lasers crisscrossing the violated cupola and splashing across the boy like weak acid. It moaned. A low-wattage kinetic field flickered as it rose, capable of casting off the low-mass, high-velocity impacts that would shred the flesh parts from a cyborg zombie's metallic skeleton in moments.

It was next to useless against a blade.

The boy impaled the zombie on his bardiche before it could rise off its haunches, cracking open torso armour before driving through at an angle and pinning it to the corner of the bulkhead it had been feasting on.

The weird energies bound up in the material of the blade dumped their charge into the electrics, forcing a blizzard of sparks from the wall. The cyborg zombie jerked and blackened before the boy's eyes, a hundred small wires stuffed down its throat and force-feeding it electrical power, but despite everything, it failed to die. It continued to chew on the wiring that was cooking it from the inside, grasping for the boy with both hands.

The boy was not sure whether it was the construct's hungry moans or the spark cascade that signalled the others.

Narrow corridors went left and right from the cupola, deeper into the immobilised hulk. A drop hatch revealed an iron-runged ladder that the vehicle's current list had turned from a straight vertical climb into a horizontal crawlspace.

Bestial groans and metallic squeals issued from all three.

The boy spun as a cyborg zombie raced from the corridor to his right. Its body was sheathed in bladed edges, eyes glowing, its metallic exoskeleton tearing sparks from the conduits as it ran. These creatures were slow to get moving, but once they identified a target they were almost as swift in the hunt as the boy. Their lower limbs had been replaced by spring blades and pistons, their bodies studded with electro-stimm grafts and crawling with waste energy.

Leaving the bardiche to pin the first zombie to the bulkhead, the boy caught the second cyborg's grasping claws in his palm. He twisted the cyborg's wrist behind its back, then drove his right hand into the side of the zombie's face and smashed it against the wall. Brain paste leaked

through his fingers. Electricity spasmed across the wrecked cranium, shocking the boy's fingers, as the now headless zombie tore into his girdle plating with its talons.

The boy scowled as a third freed itself from the net of cabling hanging across the corridor behind him with a moan of hunger. He had expected destroying the organic brain to kill them. Throwing the headless cyborg from him, the boy turned to deliver a kick that slammed the newcomer into the bulkhead. A fourth pulled itself from the drop hatch.

With, at best, a second before he found himself surrounded, the boy grabbed it by the provoker rods that dotted its scalp and dragged it out of the crawlspace. Clamping the zombie between his fist and the frame of the hatch like a metal sheet for beating, the boy dropped a punch onto its spine. Something cracked. One arm fell limp as motor control died.

The boy performed a mental calculation. He put the motive cortex somewhere between the twelfth and seventeenth vertebrae. Taking a guess, he smashed his fist down a second time. The creature's back bent a V towards the bulkhead and the lights behind its sense augmetics blinked out.

The other two recovered their footing at about the same time. The headless zombie swayed, thrashing wildly at the air with its talons. The other moaned and ran into the boy's arms. The stink of electrically stimulated carrion flesh filled the boy's mouth as he struggled to push the unliving cyborg off. Its talons ripped at his armour. Mechanical buzz-jaws ground for his face. With a roar, the boy drove the zombie into the bulkhead. Blunt trauma squelched the cyborg's soft tissues. It did not react. It bit down on the boy's shoulder. The buzz of its teeth became a shriek as the zombie gorged on the mineralogic content of his armour. Next to the riches offered by the downed hulk's electricals it must have been a meagre feast, but the boy supposed that the zombies' scavenger protocols worked to a hierarchy that directed them to devour immediate threats first.

The headless cyborg stumbled in behind him, butting the back of his head with the wet stump of its neck. It was still trying to eat him. The boy realised that he probably had a matter of moments before its core programming reassessed the situation and redirected it to ripping him apart with its talons.

With the first zombie content to feast on his shoulder plates, the boy reached behind him to rip out whatever wire and circuitry he could tear loose from the headless cyborg's neck cavity. Bits of gristle and rubberised tubing came away in his grasping fingers before he had dug away enough meat to uncover the bevelled head of a copper spindle. The boy pulled hard. It parted. A large chunk of augmented respiratory system came away with it and the thing finally died, asphyxiated, a rubber lung and a spidery jumble of associated machinery jammed in its neck.

His shoulder plate was almost gone.

The pain was horrific.

With a roar, the boy shoved the last zombie off and punched.

His fist broke through teeth, through brain, through the back of its skull, and proceeded to do superficial damage to the bulkhead behind it. Switching algorithms, the cyborg attempted to grab him with its talons, only to find itself securely pinned by the boy's arm in its face. Claws raked the boy's already tattered armour as he planted his heel in the zombie's midriff and, with a growl of effort, tore the cyborg's torso from its legs. He dug inside the creature's rotten abdomen for the motive cortex and crushed it.

Walking unsteadily, the boy planted his foot on the shoulder of the zombie he had left skewered in its half-crouch against the bulkhead and pulled out his bardiche.

Then, breathing hard, pinning it to the floor underfoot, he smashed the animate construct to pieces using the butt end.

The boy quickly decided that there was no way his body was going to fit through the drop hatch, so he entered the crawler via the corridor. With a fifty-fifty decision to make, he went right. The stale odours of a contained environment had sunk deep into the metal, and in spite of the gale that howled through the cupola mere metres behind him, the corridor still reeked of oil and urine and sweat. The fit was tight, even for a boy, and he crawled on his belly along what was supposed to have been a wall for about five metres before his nose wrinkled from a fresher and fouler stink.

He dropped out of the 'wall' and into a cylindrical chamber of scuffed metal, fluff-choked ventilator stacks and crumpled radiation grilles. An array of consoles folded into the ceiling, now the left-hand wall, but the

attack and subsequent cannibalisation of the vehicle had caused them to drop down, gut-like spools of heavy cabling looping towards the ground. The consoles and wiring had been well chewed. The half-eaten pieces of one of the crew lay scattered over the equipment trays. The source of the smell. There was not much of a face left to speak of, but enough to suggest a familial resemblance to the body that the boy had found outside. A man, like him. There was no sign of exo-armor. The boy supposed that there had been no need for such protection before the hull had been breached.

Paying the body parts a cursory glance, the boy turned his attention to the consoles. They still had power. Just the occasional brown-out and sputter where the cyborg zombies had chewed through the data insulation. He checked over the displays quickly but methodically, noting anything that pertained to an inventory or an equipment manifest. Food. Fuel. Weapons. Material. The boy tugged ruefully on the pauldron of his armor, able now to fit all four fingers of his right hand through the bite that the cyborg zombie had taken out of the plate. A repair was long overdue anyway. His body had not stopped growing yet, and he had already started to outgrow the plate.

The downed super-heavy certainly represented metal enough to rebuild the entire harness, but only if he could hold it, which he knew he could not.

The cyborg zombies would just be the beginning. Every ghoul and reaver with an auspex unit and a taste for metal would be drawn to a carcass this large and the boy knew that even he could not fight them all.

The northern tundras taught a boy to be strong, but they also taught him to be wise, to fight only the battles that he could win and to forget those that he could not.

Chewing thoughtfully on the digits of a hand that he had torn from one of the cyborg zombies in passing, the boy tapped at a likely looking display. Operating the data interface felt almost akin to an instinct. In the same way that he had emerged from the wreckage of Karaashi knowing how to fight and how to survive, he somehow understood the belligerent pictorial text by which he could navigate the crawler's computer system. It was as if it had been purposefully designed and built for his mind. Or his mind had been purposefully designed and built for these systems. The boy called up what looked like a blueprint, enduring the agonising lag intervals as the

simplistic interface intelligence rerouted his requests to bypass cannibalised pathways.

He tapped on the image as it finally manifested.

The screen fuzzed.

There was a strong room in the middle of the crawler, at the furthest point from the exterior, equidistant between the critical locations of the engine plant at the rear and the drive room at the front. According to the schematics in front of him it had its own parallel power supply, environment shielding, and instrumentarium.

If there was anything of value here worth scavenging then it would be there.

The boy punched the glass from the terminal, then ripped out the interface panel. He had already memorised the schematics and did not want to risk something or someone else finding the same information and cornering him in the tight passages of the hulk. Finishing off the zombie hand, his teeth grinding on bone, the boy spat metal nuggets into his own hand to stow for later.

Then he took up his bardiche and crawled back into the corridor.

There were six more cyborg zombies.

Two scratched at the blast doors like mechwolves at a dirt grave. Another licked and gnawed at the control systems. Its electro-stimmed strength and undead patience had succeeded in tearing away the fascia panels, but the door lock's cryptex keys looked several orders of magnitude of complexity beyond the zombie's basic decryption wetware. The last three ate the lumes from the bulkhead sconces and the ceiling tubes. The few remaining lights flickered with their last life, casting the feasting zombies like the cyborganimated nightmares they were.

On open ground the boy could take six. But in close confines like these, his armour already hanging off him like foil strips, he was not so confident. Not confident enough to charge headlong into another battle.

But whatever was in that strong room that they wanted, *he* wanted.

The boy undipped a grenade canister from his bandolier and rolled it into the anteroom.

It clattered over the riveted wall-cum-floor, six sets of sense-augmetics swivelling towards the sound. He had picked it up from a wreck like this

one, albeit much older, picked bare, forcing the boy to dig just for that much, but it had proven its value. He used it to carry water. When he had water. Now it was empty, but for a few grains of sand, but the cyborg zombies could not know that. Their sense-augmetics perceived a grenade, and their scavenger routines reacted to it accordingly.

Tracking the canister with their 'eyes' they lurched out of the way, unbundling from the immediate vicinity of the blast doors and turning their backs as the boy entered.

A scything blow from the bardiche beheaded the zombie nearest to the corridor. The boy took one more step inside, turning, using the combined momentum as he shortened the grip on his bardiche, wielding it like a sickle, and ripped it across the zombie's midriff. Ropes of atrophied intestine spilled from the cyborg's belly. The force of the blade's exit dragged the zombie forwards, lifted it a centimetre from the bulkhead. Flesh tore away from metal as the construct's abdomen sailed another metre after the boy's blade. Its legs folded to the bulkhead. The boy spun the bardiche back under control, turned again, then delivered an uppercut that carved a second zombie in two from groin to cranium. One half slumped to the ground, dead meat weighted with lead. The other spasmed in epileptic overload as it dragged itself with one arm and one leg towards the boy.

By then, the other four had updated their algorithms.

The air took on a tang of charge as electro-stimm grafts fired, filling the ante-chamber with the smell of soured meat and reheated blood. There was a pop of autopropellant as the nearest one still standing threw itself at the boy.

He raised his bardiche like a barrier. The flying zombie smashed into it. Raw momentum forced it onto him. The boy backpedalled as it champed over the haft for his face. He roared, turning his upper body and driving the zombie up against the wall. Leaning into it, he relieved one foot, kicked back. The bone of his heel connected with a zombie's pectoral plating and knocked it to the ground, it fell on top of the bifurcated cyborg that was still crawling towards him, effectively terminating its spasms.

The boy drew the bardiche across the cyborg he held pinned to the wall. Electrical discharge and sluggish fluid systems gushed from its chest as the boy back-handed the blade into the shoulder of another creature.

Encased in thin plates of some ultra-dense metamaterial, the transdimensional blade simply banged off it. The actual damage might have been minimal, but the boy was strong enough that the force of the collision alone was enough to send the zombie sprawling.

The boy made a mental note to return for that shoulder plating after the battle was done.

Moaning cyborgs converged on him from all sides.

Three left.

He bit, kicked, chewed, butted, ripped metal and flesh from decaying bodies even as their energy-wreathed talons tore at his. Brute strength dislodged one against a wall, threw off another, gave him a handful of moments in which to beat one to total shutdown before the other two could recharge and return. One was marginally swifter, leaping back on spring-blades. The boy caught it by the metal protrusions of its chest-plates. Turning his wrist palm-up he made a fist, and then with the strength of one arm and a cry of rage drove the zombie's head through the shattered lume sconce in the bulkhead above them. The boy let go as electricity jagged through the cyborg's body, animating it for one last flurry of kicks. The last zombie was still running at the boy as he backed off. He stamped down on its leg. He timed it perfectly. The zombie's metal-plated shin snapped in mid-charge, crashing it into the bulkhead and slewing it across the boy before he skewered its spinal cord with his bardiche. A flurry of up-and-down strokes walked the crooked length of its spine until all four of its limbs lost motor control.

Its jaw continued to gnash at the bulkhead, but the boy could live with that.

The boy took a deep breath, then bent to wrench the exotic metal sheath from the fallen zombie's shoulder. He attached it to his belt, then moved to crouch over the control console embedded in the 'floor' by the blast doors.

The zombies' unsubtle attempts at decryption had done little to damage the core hardware. The doors were an adamantium alloy sheathed with some kind of energy dampening ceramic, designed to withstand a melta bomb or a chain fist or even a ramming by another armoured vehicle. That kind of durability would hardly have been worth the value of the materials involved if the underlying systems could be forced so easily.

A cursory examination revealed several layers of defence around the core

spirit, a series of biochemical and genetic keys providing the initial authentication screen before expanding to present a string of increasingly hostile runephrase and pattern recognition demands. The cyborg zombies would not have broken its encryptions in a thousand years of trying. If the boy, or whatever else would be drawn to the vehicle after him, had not intervened then they would very likely have continued to attack the door lock with basic combinations until their bodies crumbled around their working brains.

It took the boy about five minutes.

The fight beforehand was only marginally less challenging.

There was a dunk of disengaging locks and the blast doors hissed open.

The boy stepped inside.

The walls were lined with aluminium shelving, bolted to the walls in order to keep them and their contents secure over harsh and changeable terrain. It had presumably worked too, before the crawler had been thrown onto its side, dumping tins and jars and packets of dried food onto the bulkhead. With his foot, the boy sifted through his haul. He smiled. It was food and water, mostly. There were also some medicae supplies and ammunition dups, neither of which he had any great use for, but added to the metal he could scavenge from the blast doors and the zombies, plus some of the instrumentation from the sense nest to upgrade his own auspex unit, then this would have proven a worthwhile expenditure of energy and time. The boy toed a packet of dehydrated protein bars from another corpse.

This one was better preserved than the last. His white skin, black hair, and the hand-sewn leather panels of his clothing remained uneaten. Only the crater in his back and the ring of curdled, melted tissue that surrounded it spoke of an unpleasant end.

'Drop the spear...'

He looked up from the ground, and froze.

A woman in scuffed black exo-armour crouched behind a small barricade of tins at the other side of the strong room. She was holding a weapon that fell somewhere in the grey categorisation zone between a heavy pistol and a compact assault weapon, all twitching vanes and bulky power cells.

The boy was fluent in over a dozen languages.

He had mastered the inscrutable linguaforms of the storm giants,

translated the hieroglyph code of the great tomb computers, the tongues of past and future and of the realm beyond, where machine-spirits dreamed, but he had never heard the words of mortal flesh spoken until then.

'You are... like me.'

'Throw it on the ground.' She emphasised her grip on the trigger. 'You can drop whatever you have in those belt pouches too.'

The boy looked down at his belt. He looked back up.

'No.'

'I am holding the gun.'

The boy smiled. His eyes were as cold as silver.

He opened his mouth to speak again, to remind her that her crawler had been ambushed and immobilised, overrun by cyborg zombies, the basest vermin in the lands of shadow, and that she had been trapped in her own strong room. He would then have pointed out to her, for the boy did believe in fair warning, that with the charge level indicated by the colour gauges on the pistol's casing she would have at best one shot, one shot that she would in all likelihood miss, before he crushed that gun along with the bones of her hand. Considering the weapon, however, he hesitated. It was a plasma talon. He looked again at the marks on the body on the floor. He recalled the damage to the outer hull. He noted that the woman was wearing exo-armour. Both of the corpses he had passed inside of the vehicle had been clad more simply.

'You are not one of the crew. You were one of the attackers.'

The woman took a step forwards. 'I said *drop* the spear.'

His smile broadened.

'Last warning,' she snarled.

'What is your name?' the boy asked.

'What do you care?'

The boy considered the truth of that, and nodded.

'It took strength to bring down a vehicle this size. Its crew were too confident in its power. It made them weak.' He glanced at the bardiche in his hand, then threw it down. 'Take it. You have earned it. I do not need it.'

The woman's gaze flicked to the discarded weapon, then up again. Her pistol's aim stayed fixed on the boy's face. The bars of glare on her visor masked her expression.

'You could come with me,' she said. 'Between the cannibals and the crew

I'm the last one left. My clan could use someone like you.'

The boy gave it thought.

He shook his head.

'What is *your* name?' she said.

'There is something I still have to do. When it is done... When it is done, perhaps I will be able to tell you.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Guymer wrote the Primarchs novel *Ferrus Manus: Gorgon of Medusa*, and for Warhammer 40,000 *The Eye of Medusa*, *The Voice of Mars* and the two The Beast Arises novels *Echoes of the Long War* and *The Last Son of Dorn*. For Warhammer Age of Sigmar he wrote the novel *Hamilcar: Champion of the Gods*, the audio dramas *The Beasts of Cartha*, *Fist of Mork*, *Fist of Gork*, *Great Red* and *Only the Faithful*. He is also the author of the Gotrek & Felix novels *Slayer*, *Kinslayer* and *City of the Damned* and the Gotrek audio drama *Realmslayer*. He is a freelance writer and occasional scientist based in the East Riding, and was a finalist in the 2014 David Gemmell Awards for his novel *Headtaker*.

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