



TRUTH IS MY WEAPON

AN ALPHA LEGION SHORT STORY



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I

I turned on the vox and pressed my eye to the spy hole. The prisoner's back was towards me. I knew he sensed me, despite the tonne of rockcrete and reinforced blast plates that separated us. And then he spoke, his voice echoing in the bare chamber.

'You are back,' he said. His voice was calm, happy almost, which intrigued me. His words had an odd glottal pronunciation that I could only ascribe to his High Gothic being ten thousand years older than mine. It was hard to understand at once, but I learned the intonation, and I could always go inside his head.

I put my mouth to the vox-link. I have been an interrogator in the service of the Inquisition for longer than most men live their entire life. There was command in my voice when I asked, 'What is your name?'

For the forty-ninth time the traitor answered the same.

'Alpharius.'

II

Stripped of his blue armour, Alpharius's musculature was impressive.

He had been bound to a device that my master had devised. It was called the Chair of Answers. I nicknamed it the 'Wheel'. It turned even the most resolute heretic to babbler.

As I stood before him, his size was daunting. The power, the ferocity, the uncaged evil. His face was abnormally large, his skin a waxy white, except where swirls of blue heretical tattoos twined themselves about his bull-thick neck. His body was completely hairless.

The Wheel had already drawn blood where he had struggled against it.

+You cannot break free.+

He was not surprised to have me inside his head.

+Why not?+

‘Speak properly, interrogator,’ he said and opened his eyes. They were red and burned with a slow hatred.

‘You are the one,’ he said and let out a sigh, almost as if I had come to share a bottle of amasec with him.

‘What do you mean?’

He laughed. ‘You have been sent to question me. Your name is...’ He turned his face up and the look was malevolent. He licked his lips, as if tasting for the name. ‘...Wodin Grime.’

III

I was on Ephesus Prime when the Sanktum Sect rose up. I was there, at the Alms Gate of the Cathedral of Holy Terra, when the pressing crowds began to shout and point as it seemed men and women were picked out at random, and lifted by the power of their faith.

I remember their faces, bright with fear and hope as they rose straight into the air, beyond the clutching hands of fellow pilgrims, mothers, fathers and comrades. There was a fifteen-year old girl with fair hair and a crooked foot; a mother who had lost her firstborn son and was come to pray for another and a veteran of the Crinan Fourth who had sworn an oath, too holy to break, that if he survived the air drop on Gramma Signus, then he would make this pilgrimage.

They rose, a hundred and eight of the holy, straight over the crowd, until they were as high as the cathedral walls. They hung there, weightless, and a rare joy went through the crowd, turning to horror as the figures combusted with green flame. The screams were terrible. The crowd responded like a wounded beast that reacts without thinking – pushing and shoving, and stampeding towards an exit to the square.

Gobbets of melting human fat were raining down on us, and then the shooting started.

I checked my watch. The rebellion was five minutes late.

+It has begun,+ I signalled back to base.

IV

+How do you know my name?+ I asked.

The prisoner laughed.

+Are you really Alpharius?+

He laughed again. 'I thought the Inquisition knew all.'

My psychic powers were not strong, and I had failed to surprise or shock his mind into revealing the answers I needed. 'What did you hope to achieve in raising the Sanktum Sect?'

He closed his eyes. 'Do not question me, human.' I turned the handle and razor spikes stretched the skin of his back before the blood began to flow.

He grunted a little, then let out a long breath. 'There are some who enjoy that,' he said.

'You are a creature of evil,' I told him.

'I am a slave of the Dark Masters,' Alpharius said.

'What is your name?' I asked.

'My name is Alpharius.'

'What was your Legion?'

'Was?'

'What was your Legion?'

'What *is* my Legion, you mean.'

I turned the handle again. I kept turning till I elicited a groan out of him.

'You cannot be Alpharius,' I said. 'He and his Legion have been expunged from the galaxy.'

'Three times,' he laughed. His arms, thighs and chest tensed with anger, and blood began to flow freely.

'How many of your brethren are left?'

'Seven,' he said.

I noted down this answer.

'I am Alpharius and you are Wodin Grime, sanctioned psyker in the service of Inquisitor Neit. You were born on the planet of Divine, in the Poad District, and spent three years with a gang known as the Southern Templars before you were picked up by Inquisitor Brunnet. You spent five years with him, before he promoted you to the rank of explicator. When he was lost in the Darius Schism, you joined Inquisitor Neit. He promoted you to interrogator. And now you want to know how I know all this. In fact, you want to know why I allowed myself to be taken prisoner. Why I am speaking to you at all.'

My heart quickened but I did not want to show the fear I felt. Only a select few within the Inquisition knew my biography.

I turned the handle until he arched away from it and blood was streaming onto the floor, but he looked up with a playful smile, as if I were the one trapped in Ublit, not he.

‘I know who you are,’ he whispered. ‘I know all about you.’

V

My master knew when the Sanktum Sect would rise. He knew that they would rise and that the Alms Gate would be the place where they tried to storm the Ecclesiarchy’s most holy monument this side of the Fritz Nebula. He even knew the time, and so it was not hard to have resources, shall we say, at my disposal.

I bore the Inquisitorial rosette on behalf of my master, as he had spent centuries finding the right tools for any job. Perhaps releasing packs of arco-flagellants was the ideal way to cure this sickness. I would have chosen a sharper blade.

They destroyed the revolt in the matter of three days, finally storming the command bastion as the twin moons rose over the three-peaked smokestack of distant Denekil Hive.

It took three hours for the arco-packs to fight their way through to where the Sanktum Sect leader, an overweight baker who had specialised in providing cheap name-day food, and who had begun to have visions a year before.

Their leader thought himself safe. My mental presence was in the room with him. He was unshaven, sweating despite the cold, and kept patting his laspistol as if that could save him.

‘These unholy beasts they have unleashed upon us,’ he said, and it struck me how similar the enemy could be to us, ‘will never break through that door.’

His confidence was laughable. I was controlling the arco-packs and had a number who were wired up with enough melta bombs to break through any door. I motioned two of these forward.

The blast was enough to slaughter most of those in the room. But the pack of flagellants did not care. They came as a blizzard of whirling steel and turned the insides of that smoking chamber red.

But it was his last thought that rocked me back. His one last despairing thought.

‘Alpharius promised me help.’

I saw the image in his mind, of a giant warrior in dusty power armour with a green symbol on his shoulder plate. Then the hunt was really on.

It was Skynner who had tracked this renegade down. He was hiding on the top floor of a deserted hab-zone, home only to oil-scoopers and the deranged. Skynner had gone in with twenty of his men. He had come out with four, and one of those died before I could get help to them.

VI

‘Alpharius.’ I stood before him and held up an icon of the Holy Emperor Ascendant. ‘See the Emperor in all his glory. He is the only one who can offer your soul salvation from the Dark Gods. There is nothing left for you now. You are in the hands of the Inquisition. You will tell me all your secrets. I will break you. Mentally and physically.’

I saw his eyes go to the bolt pistol at my waist. It was a Gryphonne pattern in a black leather holster, creased and worn supple, even when it was given to me thirty years before. It was a lovely antique piece that pulled a little to the left at long range, but had saved my life many times. It had a silver filigree aquila along the barrel, a handle inlaid with black narwhale tusks and bound with tarnished silver wire. It had the right beauty and gravitas for executions.

‘Yes,’ I said to him in a soft voice. I pulled up a stool and sat down next to him. ‘You can still repent, even now. Then I will offer you the Emperor’s Mercy.’

‘I have nothing to repent.’

I let out a long sigh.

‘Just think,’ I said. ‘Ten thousand years of woe vested upon humanity because of the pride, the arrogance, the *weakness* of creatures like you.’

I saw that the word ‘weakness’ irritated him, though he tried to hide it.

‘It was not weakness,’ he said.

My psychic abilities were not strong but I pressed them all into a fierce stab that made him shut his eyes and arch his back, drawing blood at many points.

‘Are you really Alpharius?’

It laughed as before. ‘I thought the Inquisition knew all.’

‘How do you know my name?’

‘Do not question me, human.’

VII

I had broken Space Marines only twice before. The first had died raging and slavering like a wounded grox. I do not think it had enough sanity left to give me any answers worth using. It gave me nightmares after, but not as bad as the second, which – it pains me to remember this – was torn apart from within by some creature of the warp.

I almost lost my life then. I unloaded a magazine of blessed bolts into it, but it was only Skynner's headshot and the invocations of Inquisitor Neit that sent it back to wherever it had come from. Yet these were lesser beings, renegades who had chosen the path of darkness more recently.

One had been a brother of the Sons of Orpheus, once. The other I could not tell you, though from his answers I guessed his Chapter had been part of the Abyssal Crusade. Throne bless their unholy souls.

But Alpharius, if that was his name, was a challenge. He was, I am sure, one of the unspeakable. The original traitors. The ultimate heretics who had betrayed the God Emperor. I worked his ten-thousand year old flesh and mind with calm, measured, precise pain.

For three days he would not speak. For three days I broke Alpharius upon the wheel. Each night his wounds healed, and the floor was dark with drying blood. His body was healing, but his mind was not, and I felt confident that today he would spill the last of his secrets. You get a sense for this once you have broken other men. The weak blabber like fools, the strong try to resist, but each man has only a certain store of resistance in them. Once that is gone they are like babes in arms.

I spent the night in meditation. I was ready for him, and that morning, as enforcers tranquilised the last of the arco-flagellants, I made my way through Ubliet to the cell where he was held. Skynner was there, standing guard in the shadows.

Skynner came from a swamp world so deadly he joked that they went to Catachan for holidays. I was glad of his presence. He had saved me more than once.

'Done?' he asked. He spoke in one-word sentences.

'For today, I think,' I told him.

'Good,' he said.'

VIII

It took me two more days. But he started to talk.

‘You are a creature of evil,’ I told the bleeding wreck that lay before me.

‘I am a slave of the Dark Masters,’ he said through bloody lips.

There was a long pause. I still wanted to know how he knew so much about me. My mind had travelled many paths and all led to the fact that my master, Inquisitor Neit, had some unholy connection with these traitors.

The truth shook me. I wanted to prove that this was not so and kept him alive, with this sole purpose in mind. He was a ruin by then. Even his body could not heal at the rate I was destroying it. His one remaining eye blinked away the blood and looked towards me with that same mix of hatred and contempt.

‘You have another question for me,’ he said.

‘How do you know?’

‘I know everything,’ he said. ‘I am Alpharius.’

I drew my bolt pistol and lifted it to dispatch the foul thing before he could tell me any more lies. ‘You are a heretic and a traitor to the Imperium!’

‘I made the Imperium,’ the voice said. ‘I am Alpharius!’

I pressed the barrel into the thing’s mouth.

‘How do you know these things?’

He struggled to speak. ‘Because they are true.’

+What would you know of truth?+ I pulled the trigger and the sacred bolt blew his heretic brain out the back of his skull.

It is a signature of mine to speak inside a traitor’s skull as I pull the trigger. I want the last thing they know to be the Inquisition inside their heads.

Skyunner was waiting with his knife as I came out.

‘Done?’ he said.

I nodded. He flinched, as though I had wounded him by not allowing him to deal the deathblow.

‘Sorry,’ I said.

IX

I have learned that sometimes your enemies speak truer than your friends.

I watched my master after that, and much of what Alpharius, if that was his name, had said appeared to be true.

Why he told these things to me I do not know, but it was a decade later that I was made inquisitor myself, and the third thing I did was to track my old master down. I had Skyunner with me then. I caught my master, and brought him back to Ubliet.

I think it was the same chamber, in fact.

‘How long have you been a traitor to the God-Emperor?’ I asked him.

He had ranted and raved at me, as if I were the madman. Pain brought sanity back to him. He understood that I was serious.

‘I am no traitor,’ he repeated.

‘Do not lie to me,’ I told him, and bent to wind the Wheel a little harder. A human body, especially one as old as this one, was not as resistant as that of a Space Marine.

‘Remember Ephesus?’ I said at last.

His eyes darkened for a moment as he searched his memories. ‘Ephesus?’

‘The Sanktum Sect?’ I prompted. ‘I led the attack on the traitors. You told me how it would befall, and all that you foretold came true. Tell me how you knew these things.’

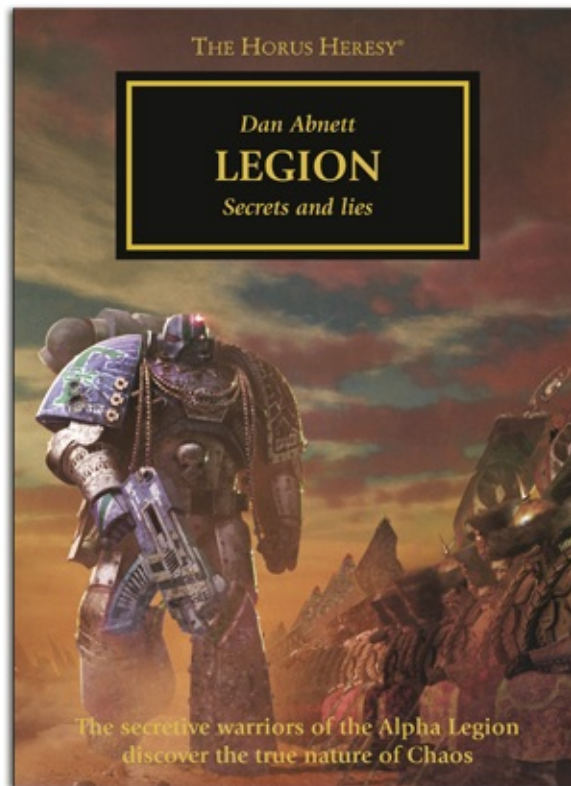
‘I do not remember,’ he said.

He was lying. I understood that, but through a man’s lies you can see the truth, as through the veils of a dancing girl, you see the body beneath. He denied it all. Until he ran out of resistance, and then he broke, and the story came out. I blessed him at the end and put the barrel of my bolter to his forehead, a tender gesture. He had been my master after all, and I remembered that, even though he had fallen to the Dark Paths.

Then I gave him the Emperor’s Peace.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JUSTIN D HILL's previous story for Black Library is 'Golgfag's Revenge'. 'Truth is my Weapon' is his first short story set in the Warhammer 40,000 universe. He has always believed that good fiction should combine beautiful language with convincing characters and page-turning plots and this approach seems to work, with numerous awards to his name for his writing, which covers both fact and fiction. He has a degree in Old English and Medieval Literature, and spent several years as a volunteer overseas.



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