



ABADDON:  
CHOSEN OF CHAOS

*A short story by Aaron Dembski-Bowden*



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Aaron Dembski-Bowden

*From shame and shadow recast.*

*Free.*

*When all others bow to the Throne.*

*In black and gold reborn.*

*Brothers.*

*When all others stand alone.*

When the prisoner is brought before us, I cannot tell if he possesses enough dignity not to struggle in futility, or simply lacks the strength to fight back. His armour, once cast in the regal white of his butchered Chapter, is now a ruined suit of gunmetal grey. Where honour badges and deed tokens once showed proud on the ceramite, scars and scorch marks are the only decorations he now bears. I could say that Fate has not been kind to him, but that would be a lie. *We* have not been kind to him. Nor to his Chapter. Nor to the population they sought to protect.

Fate had nothing to do with this.

My Rubricae cast him to the muddy ground. This duty done, they turn their faceplates to me, awaiting orders.

*Kill him if he moves*, I send to them, silently.

They level their ornate bolters on the prone captive with the slow, wraithly movements of those that can no longer even feign life. Rain hammers all of us in an oily torrent, hissing from the horned helms of my brothers and the Kheltaran crests of my ashen dead servants.

‘Let me,’ says Lheor. His helmet’s mouthpiece is a snarling thing of clenched ceramite fangs. Once it was red. Now it is black. ‘Let me carry out the sentence.’

In recent years, Lheor has taken to scratching his kill-markings on his armour. His hands twitch in unpleasant spasm without weapons to grip.

When our commander offers no reply, Lheor steps forward, resting the toothed edge of a chain-axe against the captive's neck.

'Ezekyle. Let me have this honour.' I sense nothing but loyal, wrathful devotion from him. It emanates from his mind in a stinging, unseen mist.

The prisoner looks up – a defiant stare, yet not entirely able to hide his surprise at the name my brother has spoken. But we are the Ezekarion. We are the only souls permitted to speak the Warmaster's name.

Telemachon stands next to me, watching with arms crossed across his breastplate. His mind is sealed to me, and I am content to leave it thus. It has been nine years since I last tried to kill him. It has been seven since he last tried to kill me.

'A little restraint, brother,' he says to Lheor. 'This one may be useful.'

Telemachon has the most beautiful voice I have ever heard. A voice to sway souls and cleanse consciences – soft without implying weakness; strong without arrogance. Even the crackle of vox corruption cannot flaw its smooth tone.

'Khayon,' the Warmaster says. I turn at my name, looking at Abaddon, who alone among us stands barefaced in the rain. It is difficult for those of us with sixth senses to look at him for long.

'Ezekyle,' I reply, already looking away.

'What do you counsel?'

He knows that I am weary of this war. I have threatened, more than once, to take my fleet and sail ahead of the Legion, hunting other prey. Only by the Warmaster's request have I stayed with them here, on the front lines.

'If you wish me to divine destiny from his entrails, brother, I suggest you ask the White Seer or the Weeping Girl.'

I risk another glance towards him. His eyes glint unhealthily amber in the fading sun. Veins cobweb beneath his cadaverous skin, thick with the power that ripens his immortal flesh.

I hear his sword beginning to whisper to me, and realise that I have looked for too long.

At once, I turn back to the prisoner. The warrior – a captain of his thin-blooded Chapter – trembles as death draws near. One of his hearts has already failed. The blood-stink is strong on him; not even the heavy rain and the bitter wind can hide it. His breaths rattle in his half-cut throat.

'I need no prophecy from his death throes,' Abaddon tells me, and steps

forward himself. He rests the Talon's curved scythe-blades on the prisoner's shoulder. 'Why did you allow yourself to be taken?'

The brother-captain lifts his head and... spits upon the clawed blades of a weapon that butchered a primarch.

Lheor chuckles, wet and dark. Telemachon's laughter is a mellifluous thing, inspiring others to laugh with him. Even I feel a smile creep across my mouth at this warrior's last act of defiance. Rain washes the acidic goblet of saliva from the curved adamantium.

Only Abaddon remains outwardly untouched by mirth, though I feel his amusement pulsing from his mind in a flicker of unconcealed honesty. He crouches before the prisoner in a grinding, whirring chorus of armour joints.

'Did that soothe your shame?' he asks the captain. His voice is brutally gentle. Almost... kind. 'That little surge of spite. That little act of defiance. Did it ease your shame at dying with your duty undone? Did it avenge the one thousand brothers that we have murdered and desecrated? Did it vindicate your failure to defend this world?'

The captain spits again, this time into the Warmaster's face. Abaddon smiles as it trickles down his cheek.

'These, my brothers, are the thin-blooded, mind-scrubbed children that the Imperium has birthed in our absence. These are our inheritors.'

More chuckles. The captain's defiance is sincere, but he is playing proud to the wrong audience.

'Once,' the Warmaster tells him, 'we were angels. Not outside Imperial law. *Above* it. Not the defenders of humanity. The *lords* of it.'

The captain draws his last breath, ready to spit a third and final time. Abaddon denies him the chance. With almost loving slowness, the Warmaster sinks a single talon into the Space Marine's chest, carving hearts, lungs, muscle-meat, and spine in a slow caress.

'Do you hear that screaming?' he says softly. 'That shrieking at the edge of your fading senses? The Gods are coming for you, hero. They are coming for your soul.'

Abaddon withdraws the claw and kisses the dying warrior on the forehead – a Bronze Era warlord blessing one of his chosen warriors.

'Sleep, brave champion of humanity. A life without worth is coming to a close, and you go to your reward in the Sea of Souls.'

He rises to his feet. No longer supported, the captain's corpse topples into the mud. But before the Warmaster turns away, he hesitates.

‘Khayon,’ he says to me.

‘Brother.’

‘Can you find the daemon that devoured that warrior’s soul?’

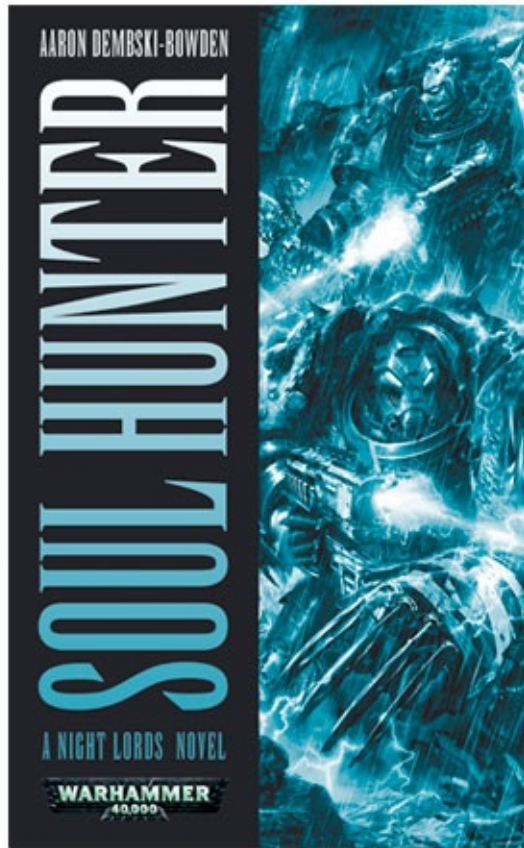
He knows I can. He is asking if I will.

‘It will be done,’ I tell him.

‘Thank you. Bind it into the corpse, and cast it in with the rest of the Secondborn.’

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AARON DEMBSKI-BOWDEN has written several novels for Black Library, including the Night Lords series, the Space Marine Battles book *Helsreach*, *The Emperor's Gift* and the *New York Times* bestselling *The First Heretic* for the Horus Heresy. He lives and works in Northern Ireland with his wife Katie, hiding from the world in the middle of nowhere.



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**Published in 2013 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd.,  
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK**

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**ISBN 978-1-78251-364-3**

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