

WARHAMMER
40,000

YARRICK

CONCORDAT

DAVID ANNANDALE



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David Annandale

‘I was wondering if we would see you here, Commissar Yarrick.’

The voice was a familiar one. I wouldn’t say it was welcome, but I did not react with immediate suspicion. There was a time before when I had.

I looked back to see Inquisitor Hektor Krauss of the Ordo Hereticus walking down the hall towards me. Superficially, he looked much as he had when we had first met on Mistral. The same iron formality and elegance in his dark cloak, vest and trousers. The same care, bordering on vanity, in the sweep of his blond hair. The same conscious patrician nobility married to the judgmental eye. But he had lived through the war on Mistral. He had experienced much of what I had, and I could see the change in him. He was more weathered around the edges and there was a new caution to him. Perhaps there was even the ability to doubt his own infallibility.

I hoped so, though I wasn’t ready to gamble on that possibility.

We were deep in the warren of the Departamento Munitorum palace on Aighe Mortis. The complex was an ugly one, a palace in name only, and thus in keeping with the vast majority of the architecture on the planet. The halls were grey rockcrete and looked damp even when they weren’t. Its vaults were prefab and crude, almost completely unadorned apart from indifferently executed aquilas. The walls were pitted and the corners were crumbling. The exterior facades of many of the planet’s buildings were so eroded by the polluted soup of the atmosphere that they looked like petrified sponge. Aighe Mortis was a hive world whose economic value was winding down. Its hundreds of billions of inhabitants lived in a civilization on borrowed time. The lucky ones would be dead before the final collapse came.

For now, though, Aighe Mortis still had a useful export: troops. Its 77th Infantry and 110th Armoured Regiments had been smashed to ruin on Mistral. It

wasn't too far from the truth to state that they still existed only because Colonel Georg Granach said they did. He had retained his command after Mistral, and he refused to let the veterans of that conflict experience the dishonour of seeing their regiments disbanded and absorbed into others. Their banner would continue to fly, and the victory on Mistral would be commemorated in their records. Because it *had* been a victory, hard as it was for any of us to think of it in those terms.

Krauss caught up to me. Munitorum functionaries brushed past us. 'You are meeting with Colonel Granach?' he asked.

I nodded. 'My secondment to the Armageddon 252nd is over. Lord Commissar Rasp has requested I return to his service, and he is still working with the Mortisians.'

'So you're helping with the recruitment,' he said, confirming his hypothesis. 'Have you met with the lord commissar yet?' he asked.

The question wasn't an idle one. I don't believe Krauss was capable of casual conversation.

'Very briefly.'

'How did you find him?'

I hesitated, reluctant to tell Krauss anything more than the minimum necessary. I trusted him within sharply defined limits. He was honest and he was honourable, but he also saw what he wanted to see, and that came with a cost for those objects of his judgement.

'He has recovered most of his strength,' I said.

'Physically, you mean.'

'You've seen more of him than I have, I take it,' I said.

Krauss ignored my dodge. 'Did you find him at all changed from the officer you knew previously?'

'We were all changed on Mistral,' I pointed out. 'He was betrayed and tortured. It would be strange if he were an exception.' I wondered if there was another sort of change Krauss had in mind, but knew better than to expect he would offer up information of that sort. I did try to pry something else out of him. 'And what brings you to Aighe Mortis, inquisitor?'

I could accept a certain degree of chance in our encounter. But only to a point. Aighe Mortis was a world of minor importance and, at this point in time, politically stable. There was little to concern the Ordo Hereticus. Many decades later, the Ruinous Powers would come very close to tearing this world in half. But those troubled days were still a long way off.

Krauss didn't answer right away. He watched the endless parade of administrators for a few moments. The recruitment had jolted the planet's branch of the *Departemento Munitorum* into a sharp increase in activity. What was underway was less than a full founding, but it was notable increase over the annual tithe. Administratively, the replenishment of the regiments was an event that required a glacier to make sharp turn.

After a minute, Krauss surprised me by being quite forthcoming. I doubted he was any more fond of me than I was of him, but it seemed we both considered the other trustworthy. The war had forged an unspoken accord between us. 'I am completing the work begun on *Mistral*,' he said.

'I don't see the connection.' The heresy he had confronted was local to that world.

'Contagion,' he said. 'Events are never perfectly isolated. Many soldiers witnessed things that the ordinary citizen of the Imperium should never know exists. Soldiers tell tales. Word spreads. Gossip spreads weakness and worse.'

'Have you come to any conclusions?' I did my best to keep my displeasure from my voice. There was nothing to be gained by getting into a confrontation with the inquisitor here and now. But the soldiers who had given so much on *Mistral* deserved better.

To be sure, the heresy we had uncovered there had been particularly insidious. It had hidden behind the masks of friendship and trust for a long time. We had all been deceived to one degree or another, especially Lord Commissar Rasp. But there had been no treason from within the ranks of the *Mortisians*. Krauss had brought Inquisitorial pain down on Guardsmen who had done nothing but fight with loyalty for the Emperor. I had intervened then, and would do so again if I had to. The Imperial Guard had its own mechanism for preserving morale and rooting out the unfit. I was part of that system. The Inquisition had more useful ways of deploying its strength.

'I think I may be able to leave soon,' Krauss said. I had never seen him smile in a way that wasn't calculated or superior. He didn't then, but there was a barely perceptible sag in his posture. He was close to granting himself the luxury of being relieved.

'I'm glad to hear that,' I said. And I was. Perhaps the ripples from those events had exhausted themselves.

Though I didn't know it at that moment, I was worrying about ripples from the wrong event. There were others nearby, and I had my first hint of them after I left Krauss. I was still several dingy corridors and drab flights of stairs from

where I was to meet with Granach and about to step into a stairwell when the hairs at the back of my neck prickled. I was sure I was being observed. I turned around sharply. The bureaucracy of war flowed past. But I caught a glimpse of one functionary in a doorway a few metres back. She had been motionless, and now she walked through the door and out of my sight. I didn't get a good look at her. I wasn't even sure that she had been watching me, but she seemed familiar. There was no reason why she should be; I had never been to Aighe Mortis before. The impression made me uneasy. If I had seen that woman before, she had not been wearing the garb of a Munitorum drone.

I made my way back down the corridor to the place where I had seen the woman and tried the door. It was unlocked and opened into a filing chamber with three other exits. Two bored men glanced up at me, then went back to their cataloguing work. There was no sign of my observer.

I headed up to my meeting with Granach, wishing I had caught a better look at that face.

There was not a lot of space for hope on Aighe Mortis. All its hives had, over the centuries, blended into one. The entire surface of the globe was paved over with habs and now mostly defunct manufactoria. Its citizens had few illusions about their world, though survival dictated that they hold fast to a few. They also had their faith in the Emperor, and it was that faith that the recruitment rallies emphasised, reinforcing it for the citizens who would not be joining the Astra Militarum, and driving home the responsibilities of service for those who would be entering the ranks. Aighe Mortis produced its fair share of mercenaries as well. It was one of my duties to make clear the moral imperatives of the recruits' new lives.

'You'll be needed to speak at a rally,' Granach told me when I met him. 'I saw what you did on Mistral, Yarrick. We'll need some of your gift here.'

Granach would accompany me, but would not be speaking on this occasion. He was not an inspiring orator and we both knew it. He was an effective officer, and he had an intelligent grasp of his own weaknesses. So I would be speaking on Concordat Hill.

The Hill was one of the few remaining distinct features of Aighe Mortis's topology. The conical rise was topped by the largest manufactory cathedral I had yet seen, the Concordat that gave the hill its name. The location would become the site, many years hence, of the decisive battle for the soul of the world, a battle led by the Black Dragons, a Chapter I would come to know on

Armageddon. On this day, Granach and I climbed scaffolding to one of the lower terraces of the massive, squat ziggurat. Vox-casters blasted calls to prayer and labour. Thronging the hill were new recruits and thousands more citizens who would join them in the days ahead.

There was another crowd as well. At the base of the Concordat its massive doors stood open to an endless line of supplicants. These were the most desperate of desperate people. The line snaked down one of the main avenues of the hill, extending far beyond my sight. These people had come to answer the call emanating from the cathedral. The line advanced slowly and steadily into the building. On the eastern flank of the complex, a foul river of industrial effluent flowed, and I found myself making a connection between the workers going in and the debris that exited.

I saw the look on Granach's face. I think the same thought had occurred to him.

'Today we offer them a better choice,' I said, and he nodded. Life in the Imperial Guard was brutal and it was often very short. Untold numbers of anonymous troopers that we would recruit this day would go through the grinding machine of war and end in a river of their own blood. But there would be glory in their struggle and in their end. That, surely, was better than what waited inside the Concordat.

Granach and I approached our positions on the westward flank of the manufactorium. I looked down at the assembled masses flowing in from the streets that ran up to the large open space at the crown. The exhortations from the Concordat continued without cease. 'Are we going to try to speak over that?' I asked.

'The system will be turned over to us at the start of the rally,' Granach said.

Just ahead of us was a platform with a portable vox-unit installed for that purpose. I checked my chronometer. 'Now?' I asked.

'Now,' Granach confirmed.

I strode to the podium and picked up the handset. Granach stood beside me, his stance wide, his arms clasped behind his back – the picture of the silent, assured commander. Behind us, the imposing bulk of the Concordat symbolized the strength of the Imperium. Rising above us were the terraces of the complex. Chimneys thrust skyward from the corners of each level, but the roof, which doubled as a landing pad, was clear except for the immense spire. Shaped as a crozius, it was the highest point for hundreds of kilometres and was one of the few true landmarks of Aighe Mortis. Today, the gathered Mortisians would look

up at it as I called upon them to take up arms. It was the symbol of the Emperor, the symbol of why they would fight.

I watched the crowd, waiting for the broadcast prayers to stop. I was less than ten metres above the ground and had a good view of the front ranks.

The Concordat's speakers fell silent, giving way to the background chug and rumble and clash of the interior workings of the manufactorum. I was about to begin speaking when I saw the face again. The woman was towards the front of the crowd, about four rows back. She was a few dozen metres from me, but I could see her clearly enough.

Now I recognized her. The shaved head, heavy brow and perpetual frown belonged to Schenk. She was part of a group of inquisitors I had crossed swords with on Molossus. They had wilfully unleashed the Zombie Plague, the Plague of Unbelief, in one of that planet's underhives in some deluded attempt to learn how to control the curse. I had killed Askonas, the leader of the cabal. Schenk and the others – Brand, Ehrar and Meinhardt – had been quarantined, but only Askonas had been infected. As Inquisition, they were beyond the reach of the planetary authority. They would not have been detained long.

‘Citizens of Aighe Mortis!’ I said. ‘You are all loyal servants of the Emperor. But today, you become heroes of the Imperium!’

As I spoke, I scanned the multitude for Schenk's cohorts. Brand would be easy to spot if he was there. He looked so much like Schenk – they were, I was sure, siblings. As for Meinhardt and Ehrar, they weren't brother and sister, but twins in dangerous self-righteousness. I couldn't see any of them other than Schenk. She didn't move, and stared at me with open hostility. On Molossus, she and the others had believed with a perfect fanaticism in their project. I had destroyed the experiment and killed their master. Schenk had good reason to despise me, and I returned the sentiment.

‘Your regiments have won a great war on Mistral,’ I continued. ‘They brought glory to the name of Aighe Mortis. Now they call to you. To further that glory, and to share in it.’

While I spoke, I evaluated my situation. The four inquisitors had every reason to wish me harm, and they had the means to achieve it. I had stymied them on Molossus, but not neutralized them. Given the silent threat Schenk was sending my way, I knew they had come to Aighe Mortis to exact retribution.

That fact gave me some hope. They were on a personal vendetta. This was not official Inquisition business.

Another hopeful sign: I was not already dead. I was standing in the open.

Killing me during my address would be simplicity itself, but it would also be public and draw attention. So they planned to take me down quietly.

‘I know you will answer the call,’ I told the people of Aighe Mortis. ‘I know you will honour your heroes by marching by their sides.’

I considered my options. I could avoid being alone while on Aighe Mortis, but I dismissed the possibility as soon as it occurred to me. It was defensive, it was cowardly, and it did nothing but postpone the inevitable. I had no intention of surviving the day only to be taken by surprise in another system. Trying to kill them first wasn’t feasible either. Even if they were all present, and I was able to overcome the odds, I could then find myself at war with the Inquisition. That war would be very brief.

‘This monument of faith and industry is your strength made manifest. Take your strength further now. Hurl it against the foes of the Emperor!’

I wondered why Schenk had allowed me to see her. Perhaps she had made an error in the Munitorum palace, and had decided to be more direct, putting me on notice. It bothered me that I could not spot her allies.

In the end, my immediate choice was a simple one: wait for the blow to fall, or lure the foe out of the shadows. But after that?

Inspiration struck: add new variables to the equation.

I finished speaking and stepped back from the podium, shifting the focus of the crowd to Granach. I was not a son of Aighe Mortis, Granach was. Let them see the veteran colonel, and know what heights could be reached. While the people cheered, I looked along the facade of the Concordat. There was a service door midway between our position and the scaffold.

The rally drew to a close, and the crowd could now turn to the recruitment posts that had been set up around the top of Concordat Hill. The vox-casters resumed their liturgy.

‘Colonel, I won’t be accompanying you. There are some matters I must attend to here,’ I said to Granach.

He raised an eyebrow, but made no objection. We had worked well together on Mistral, and he trusted my judgement. ‘Anything I should know about?’ he asked.

‘For the moment, I believe you would prefer not to be informed. This is unfinished business from my secondment. It has nothing to do with Mistral or with Aighe Mortis.’

After a moment’s thought, he asked, ‘Would you like company?’

‘Thank you, colonel. I appreciate the offer, but I think it is best that you not be

involved at all. There is one thing you could do for me, though. Are you in contact with Inquisitor Krauss?’

‘I am. He travelled with us from Mistral.’

Of course he did. The better to monitor the battered regiments for the slightest deviation.

‘Would you ask him to meet me here?’ I said. ‘Inside the Concordat?’

‘Inside?’ Granach’s eyes widened. ‘Throne, how will he find you?’

‘He should look for me on this level. I suspect that events will make his task a simple one.’

‘You are expecting events, then.’

‘I am.’

‘I see. Good luck, commissar.’

We exchanged salutes, and he walked away. Now I just had to stay alive long enough to have a conversation with Krauss. I remained where I was for a few moments longer. I wanted to be visible. I looked down again. Schenk was still there. We exchanged stares, then I turned and walked to the service door. She wouldn’t be able to see it from the ground, but she would know I had gone inside if I did not come down the scaffold.

The door opened onto a catwalk that ran along the perimeter of the great central hall of the manufactory. The faded daylight of Aighe Mortis came in through stained glass windows, but the majority of the illumination was in the form of sconce-mounted lumen globes. The pools of light they cast barely reached the centre of the hall, where the hulking machinery of the manufactory rose from the floor almost to the height of the catwalk. Conveyor belts moved between the thousands of workstations, carrying components past the workers and hauling away completed products. Some of these streams consisted of small arms. Others were of objects whose use was utterly mysterious to me. The Concordat was an institution impervious to time and change, and it was likely that here were devices that had fallen out of use in the Imperium, and were produced only to be discarded.

Down the length of the walls were gigantic tapestries, so darkened by the oily air that it was impossible to make out what they depicted. They were important merely because they existed. They were tapestries, and thus sacred. Not that the workers paid them any attention. They sat in their tens of thousands on benches shaped like pews. They were chained in place, and their work was unceasing. They took on their shifts voluntarily, but once committed, they had no freedom to change their minds. Servitors moved through their ranks, dispensing bowls of

grey sludge that the workers consumed without pausing in their labours.

The smell was atrocious. Smoke, promethium, diesel, sweat and human waste merged into a single eye-watering assault. The sound was almost as bad. The rhythmic pounding of the machines was deafening, but the tinny vox-casters were even louder as they broadcast the endless exhortations to labour for the Emperor. The workers were here voluntarily, though I doubted that any left the Concordat alive.

But they found a purpose here.

The ceiling was another twenty metres above me, at about the level of the next terrace. I imagined I would find another hall of prayer and industry up there.

I stayed in the doorway, bolt pistol drawn, and waited. Schenk would have to choose between tracking me directly and taking the same entrance, thus falling into my ambush, or attempting to come at me from another direction without knowing where I might be in the building. I maintained my position for almost an hour. By then I knew she wasn't going to make things simple for me. It was time to abandon the doorway. I was too vulnerable here. If all four were present, they could block off my avenues of escape.

I moved down the catwalk. The gloom in the upper reaches of the hall was profound. I could see a few metres ahead on my path, but little else in my vicinity. I walked with care, eyeing the shadows for movement, looking for a position that would work to my advantage. In the middle of the hall, girders and cables came from all sides to meet in a tangled nest of metal. It supported the vox system, and at its centre was the pulpit from which the dark-robed ecclesiarch led the prayers. He was indefatigable as a servitor, and I wondered how many hours he held forth before another took his place.

I had no wish to disrupt the good functioning of the Concordat, but that confluence of lines offered the best cover within reach, and the best perspective. I would be able to see anyone approaching me there. I moved a little faster, still checking over my shoulder and scanning the floor below for any sign of Schenk.

There were other doorways before my destination. I slowed as I reached each one, my gun pointing into their darkness. I was ready for an ambush. I expected one. Then, just before I hit the last door before the girders, I climbed up to reach the vox nest and spotted Schenk. She was on the catwalk on the opposite side of the hall from me. She had a bolt pistol in her hand. I swung my pistol her way.

And fell into the trap.

Brand exploded out of the doorway. He was a blur in the corner of my vision, and I whirled, cursing myself. He swept a chainknife at my throat, but I blocked

the swing with my pistol. My movement was clumsy, barely in time, and his blow was ferocious, knocking the gun from my hand. It sailed over the railing and clattered against the flagstones far below.

‘You do not cross the Inquisition,’ he hissed.

I dropped beneath his next swing, fell back on my hands and kicked out at his left knee. ‘I don’t,’ I said as my boot connected. The crunch was good. He yelped and stumbled back, but kept his footing. I jumped up, drawing my sword. ‘I interfere with the rogue agenda of some sad little conspirators.’

Before I could press my advantage, a bolt shell smashed into the catwalk just ahead of me. If I’d been a bit faster, I would have run into Schenk’s fire. I crouched again and rolled past Brand, then rose and ran for the vox nest. I needed shelter; I couldn’t fight them both at once.

Brand pursued. There was an uneven rhythm to his clanging footsteps. He was limping. Good. I had bought myself a few seconds.

Two more shots from Schenk chewed up the catwalk before me. One of them ripped open a gap a metre wide. I leapt over it, and reached the nearest girder leading towards the pulpit. I glanced ahead to see if there was an access ramp from this side of the hall. There was not. But as I climbed over the railing and into the web of metal, I saw movement at the far end. Ehrar and Meinhardt had shown themselves. They fired too and took out some cables, which snapped with an iron shriek and deflected the trajectory of the shells just enough to save my life. The sound of the Concordat prayers grew even more harsh as some of the vox-casters blared static.

I was climbing through the weave of metal supports now, and the inquisitors held their fire. Brand was right behind me. All the while, the ecclesiarch never wavered from his sermon. Below, no one looked up at the conflict. Their unending, monotonous, exhausting labour had reduced them to little more than servitors. Servitors who nonetheless were capable of prayer, and gave praise to the Emperor with every moment of consciousness. Once the Concordat took hold of its worshippers, it never let go. The inquisitors had the privacy they wanted for their assassination. There were tens of thousands of souls present, but not a single one would notice my death.

I clambered up through the branching girders. There appeared to be so many more supports than were needed for the preacher’s platform. The excess worked to my advantage, and I didn’t question it. As I reached the midpoint of the hall, I saw below me one reason for the proliferation of iron. The pulpit was directly above a nexus of the hall’s machinery. The conveyer belts of surplus and

discarded material converged there. Massive toothed cylinders ground metal into fragments. It was like looking down into a steel maelstrom. There was no practical value in the configuration, but the symbolic one was strong. The Concordat was a cathedral as well as a manufactory, and the preacher raged above the omnipresent reminder of the fate that awaited the Imperium if vigilance was ever relaxed.

Brand was still in pursuit. 'You denied the Imperium a great weapon against its enemies,' he called. 'Doesn't that crime warrant execution?'

'I shut down the mad scheme of power-hungry conspirators,' I said. 'And I was too merciful.' A few metres down from the platform, I planted my feet on a wide girder and looped my right arm around a nearly vertical cable, swinging myself around to face him. I thrust with the sword as I completed the turn. My timing was good: my blade aimed right at his chest. But he was fast. He stopped dead in his tracks and brought his chainknife snarling upwards. He blocked my strike and cut through my blade, leaving me with half a sword.

I still had the momentum of my spin. The girder we stood on sloped downward towards Brand. I let go of the cable and hurtled into him. We grappled, dropping our weapons as we fought with gravity and each other. His hands closed around my throat. Choking, I pushed forward. His right foot slipped off the girder into space. His left leg took all his weight, and his injured knee gave out. He began to fall.

If he had kept his grip on my neck, we both would have pitched over the edge at once. But he panicked, let go and flailed. He clutched my greatcoat and pulled me down. I slammed against the girder. A rib cracked and I bit through my tongue. Brand dangled below. I started to slip and punched downward with my right fist, breaking his nose. His hands slipped from my coat.

Brand plunged towards the grinding cylinders. His scream was so loud it cut through the din of the Concordat. It stopped all at once as his bones were crushed to powder.

I pulled myself up. I had no weapons now. My breath was ragged. My right arm, which had ached off and on since Mistral, throbbed from the strain of the climb. I braced myself for the next attack.

It didn't come.

I turned around slowly, peering past the girders into the gloom of the Concordat. I couldn't see Schenk or the others.

'Commissar Yarrick?' a voice called.

I looked down at the floor of the hall and saw Hektor Krauss. Even from this

distance, I could see the confusion on his face. That rare sight was almost worth the pain of my injuries.

‘I will join you shortly, inquisitor,’ I shouted back.

As I made my way back to the catwalk and towards a ladder that would take me to the floor, I rehearsed what I would say to Krauss. He was of the Ordo Hereticus. Based on the nature of their project on Molossus, I judged my foes to be Ordo Malleus. Krauss was, as far as I could tell, a Monodominant. Schenk, Ehrar and Meinhardt were not only radicals, but their vendetta suggested to me that they had been operating without the knowledge of their ordo. Krauss would not be eager to trigger an inter-ordo conflict, but nor would he be able to ignore the monstrous heresy of experimenting with the Zombie Plague to the cost of millions of lives. He would have to look into the case.

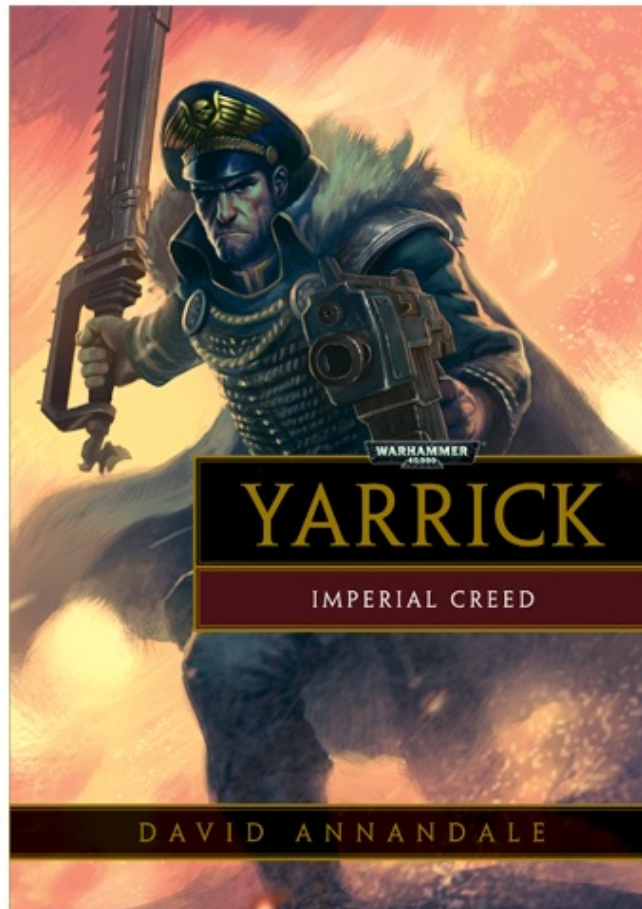
I had survived the attack. Now my countermove would lead to collisions within the Inquisition; collisions that, I hoped, would grind the other three members of the cabal as effectively as the machinery had eaten Brand.

Politics, in the end, are another weapon of war. And I am a political officer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Annandale is the author of The Horus Heresy novel *The Damnation of Pythos*. He also writes the Yarrick series, consisting of the novella *Chains of Golgotha* and the novel *Imperial Creed*. For Space Marine Battles he has written *The Death of Antagonis* and *Overfiend*. He is a prolific writer of short fiction, including the novella *Mephiston: Lord of Death* and numerous short stories set in The Horus Heresy and Warhammer 40,000 universes. David lectures at a Canadian university, on subjects ranging from English literature to horror films and video games.

[Before he becomes a legend, a man must become a hero.](#)



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* 9. If any part of this license is illegal, or becomes illegal as a result of any change in the law, then that part shall be deleted, and replaced with wording that is as close to the original meaning as possible without being illegal.

* 10. Any failure by Black Library to exercise its rights under this license

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