

The cover art depicts a Terminator in its iconic red armor, standing in a dark, industrial environment. The Terminator's face is a metallic mask with a stern expression. It holds a sword in its right hand. On its chest, there is a small, rectangular, glowing red object, possibly a power source or a weapon component. The background is dark and textured, suggesting a gritty, war-torn setting.

**WARHAMMER**  
40,000

MIKE MASON

# POTENTIA

AN INQUISITION STORY



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# POTENTIA

*Mike Mason*

‘You don’t see us. In the shadows... watching...’

With this, his mouth formed a tight grimace and his hands, held firm in the manacles, formed small fists.

‘Go on...’

The cell was still, the air frozen. Two men, one standing, the other sitting and chained to the desk; their eyes locked.

The silence was eternal until the murderer coughed, broke eye contact and said, ‘For everyone like me there are a dozen more, ready and waiting.’

The interrogator turned his head too sharply. ‘Waiting for what?’

‘Well, that’s the point. Isn’t it? Waiting... waiting...’

The murderer’s grimace broke into wide grin revealing yellow teeth filed into lethal looking points.

‘Like I’m waiting now? Waiting for you to tell me something worthwhile. You know that all I have to do is press this button again...’

‘Yes! Yes I know,’ the murderer said, looking down at the fiery-red raw flesh of his wrists. ‘You think *this* pain is a torment? You know *nothing* of torment.’

A slender leather-gloved finger slowly depressed the button and the high-pitched screaming began. Again.

‘Tell me why you turned yourself in.’

‘Enough. I will tell,’ the murderer said, spittle drooling from his bruised lips.

The interrogator took a step to the vacant seat on his side of the desk. Sitting down, he leaned across the desk and looked into the twisted face of the killer.

‘Why are you here? Why walk into this facility and confess?’

‘It is my desire to confess, don’t you see? I have saved you time. Your culprit is caught.’ The murderer lifted the manacles in a theatrical gesture and smiled

broadly. 'No reason to play cat and mouse. My work was done.'

'Your work? You mean the murders of five innocents?' Pressing a different button, images of five faces ran across the vid screen surface of the desk. The harsh neon lighting accentuated the contrast, bringing the wounds in the victim's faces to the fore. '*This... is your work?*'

'Not my best perhaps but yes, mine.' The murderer paused, his eyes lifting up from the images into those of his interrogator. Another broad smile. 'They look better now. No more worries, no more quotas to reach. The unhappy little industrial workers rest now. See, they are smiling. Showing *you* that their misery is ended. Nevermore slaves to the great Imperium of Man.'

'Why these ones? Why not people in authority? Why not their masters?'

'It is not time for them. Or,' he paused, 'you.'

The interrogator stared into the murderer's pale eyes, straining to hold back the absolute contempt, the anger that was rising inside him. *Who was this little man? He was nothing new.* The interrogator had met his kind before and it always ended the same. *No. Control. Remain in control.* He breathed slowly, imperceptibly, releasing his tension.

The murderer waited. It would not be long now.

'They were opportune. These people have no connection other than working in the same munitions factory. What's the link? Perhaps by these deaths the Imperium will fall? Will the deaths of these workers begin a chain reaction, reaching out from this city to the very ends of space? I think not.'

The interrogator sat back in the chair. He had regained control.

'You aim too high, young acolyte.' A callous, hollow cackle sent spittle across the vid screen's surface.

'I apologise. Tell me then, what is your wondrous plan? Maybe I credit you too highly.'

'That you do,' the murderer replied, eyes looking up at the figure on the other side of the desk. 'The Imperium of Man will not fall today. Well, at least not due to me.'

With this, another cackle and more spittle landed on to the illuminated face of one of the murdered munitions workers. The cackle faded back into laboured breathing.

'This work was for another purpose.' The murderer's shoulders shifted, almost trembling with excitement. 'Have you ever killed someone weaker than yourself? Of course you have. I'd wager you have killed more than I. Not even an inquisitor yet and your hand has already choked the life from a hundred

people. By now you'll be getting quite a taste for—'

'Enough! You murder for pleasure. I kill for duty. There can be no similarity.'

'Ah, but you see, there is.' The murderer smiled. 'Whatever the reason, the result is the same for both you and I.'

'And what reason could that be?'

'Power.' The accompanying grin made a grotesque mockery of his face. 'See? Each packet of walking meat we extinguish brings us the same reward. Different eventualities yes, but the same reward.'

'No.' The interrogator's curt reply belied the truth of the murderer's words. *Was that it?*

'Every case you uncover, every festering sore you gauge out from the body imperialis, every malcontent you put down... kill, brings you one step closer to power. That power will allow you to do great things. You will stride amongst the stars, tear out the beating hearts of your enemies and whole planets will curse your name. Why? Because one day you will become an inquisitor! Your title forged in the blood of the thousands you have slain, all in the glorious name of the Emperor of Mankind.'

'You value me highly. Such a title I do not yet possess.'

'Ah but one day you could, young acolyte. One day...'

The cell was silent, both men staring at the other. Yet the words rang true. *Every heretic killed by his hand would form a corpse-strewn pathway to his longed-for ascendance to inquisitor. The cold truth was inescapable.*

The moment passed. The interrogator shut down the train of thought as if closing a dark, cellar door. 'It matters not. My career is not the subject of this interrogation.'

'Oh but it is!' snapped the murderer. 'You really haven't got it, have you?'

'I know that you are wasting my time and that your petty game is nothing but a distraction to lead me away from the truth. You have one last chance to tell me the purpose behind your murders.'

'To bring me here of course.'

The murderer's pale eyes seemed to flicker, sparking with a malign glow. His twisted grin was ripped open by laughing that came from deep inside. Spittle flew about the cell as the murderer's body convulsed. A meaty blob landed across the interrogator's face.

The interrogator wiped the spit away, anger visibly rising, 'Your riddles tire me! I see that I am indeed delaying the inevitable.' *He wanted to do it now. Yes, another corpse for his ascendance. No. Remember your training. Control. Stay*

*in control.* ‘Do you have anything else of *value* to say before I execute you?’ The words leaked through gritted teeth.

‘So hasty. I can feel your desire growing. You wish to kill me. Yes? Get it over and done with. Another body to be thrown on the golden path to your ascension? Yes, you want to do it. Pull the trigger, end my life and go on to whatever mission your master has in store for you. Don’t waste anymore time. Ha! Time is running out... for yyooooouuuu...’

As the murderer’s bitter words were released, his eyes rolled white in their sockets. His head flung back and his body shook, convulsing. A terrible wailing filled the cell.

The interrogator reached inside his coat for his weapon, tearing it from the holster and pointing it at the man chained before him. The room swirled, colours bleeding from the vid screen. He couldn’t see the murderer, just a morass of shaking flesh violently forming as great jets of blood sprayed about the room. An angry, hollow sound was now coming from the thing that was once a murderer. Blood flew into his face, burning hot and tasting of death.

‘Get thee gone!’ He shrieked as the weapon fired into the abomination before him.

Turning on his heel and diving for the floor, he fought against the dreadful pull of the reaching, bloody limbs. The smell of burning leather and the reek of the abyss consumed his breath as stringy twines of flesh twisted around his neck and held his body. Choking, fighting to stay alive, his hands tried to find purchase and rip the foul vines away from him. Weapon dropped, hands flailing, his life ebbing away with each breath stolen by the monstrous creepers.

*Not like this. Not now. Had he come so far only to fall by this miserable creature’s trick?* As a sickening squelching filled his ears he screamed aloud, ‘No!’ Hands tore at the abomination’s tentacles, reaching into his coat, catching the hilt of his dagger. With a sudden jerk he pulled the dagger free and began slashing, carving into the fleshy limbs that were squeezing the life from him. Each cut lessened their grip, allowing him to draw breath. Rolling on the floor, he made for the door, hacking at the reaching flesh vines until his left hand caught hold of the door release.

For one brief moment he looked back into the cell. The bubbling mass of flesh seemed to be filling the room, it’s undulating bulk no longer recognisable as human. As the thing’s arms hammered the cell’s walls and door, forcing the metal to buckle, he drew the sigil in the air and whispered the words. A burning blue flame appeared to pass through the cell door into the room. He clasped his

hands over his eyes as the blue flame grew and lashed at the abomination. A sound, as if a thousand voices were screaming in unison, broke around him. And then nothing.

He would have to be imaginative in his report. He should have known it was a trick. A trap. He was lucky this time and fortunate he had memorised the sigil – and that it had worked. He checked himself over. No sign of contamination. He hadn't meant to use it, wasn't meant to use it. Better he should not mention it in his report. His master would not look kindly upon such reckless behaviour, let alone the potential for corruption.

Yes, he thought, better to keep it secret. No harm could come of that...

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Mike Mason** is a writer and editor who has extensive experience in the roleplaying game industry. He was heavily involved in the development of the Ennie-award winning Warhammer 40,000 game Dark Heresy. 'Potentia' is his first story for Black Library.



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