



**WARHAMMER**  
40,000

# BLOOD ANGELS

THE BLOODING

RAY HARRISON

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# THE BLOODING

Ray Harrison

A monster walks in step beside me, and it is made of teeth.

I feel the press of the Thirst as I meet my enemy in the heart of the cathedral. The monster. *My* monster. It is part of me. It is all of me. It hungers for the blood of traitors, and today it will be fed.

I will be blooded.

The traitor wears iridescent purple armour, split with curving horns and draped with flayed skin. He smiles at me.

‘Seeking glory, are we, little angel?’

My answer is the rasp of my sword as I draw it.

The traitor laughs. His voice is like the scrape of fingernails on stone. The Thirst pushes me, and I run. I am fast but he is faster. He parries my first few strikes with lazy ease. I can smell the blood running underneath his corrupted skin. I am unrelenting, pushing the traitor back across the marble floor and taking strike after strike into the bargain. The pain is nothing compared to the need to defeat him. To *destroy* him. I break his guard by breaking his arm. He’s not smiling now. I punch my sword through the traitor’s chest and pull it free. Blood spray anoints me, crowning me the prince of death.

I taste the blood and I become blind, deaf and mute.

I become the monster.

*Master the Thirst and it cannot master you.*

They are Aphael’s words.

I think his name and see him before me. I am no longer in the church, beneath the gaze of a hundred shattered saints. I am on Baal. Rust-red dunes stretch out into the distance and the air scorches my lungs. The Captain of the Second Company stands before me, haloed by light so bright I can barely look upon him.

*The monster will claim you, if you let it.*

The sand shifts around my feet and I begin to sink. It draws around my feet and my legs, pulling me down.

‘Brother!’ I reach for Aphael. The sand is up to my chest.

*If it claims you, then you are lost. There is no going back.*

Aphael stoops and picks up a handful of the sand. He scatters it on my head, as if he is throwing the first handful of earth into an open grave.

‘Aphael!’ I scream this time, but the sand fills my mouth and pours down my throat, consuming and burying me. Becoming me.

When I awake, there is no sand but there is fire. Around me a city burns. Humans flee, weeping and injured. They are being hunted through the streets by hunched, loping shapes.

Monsters.

Monsters made of teeth.

I leap at the nearest creature, halting its charge. It fights back like a rabid animal, snarling and screaming. I catch the barest glimpses of armour and oath seals in the unnatural darkness. I draw my sword and drive it upwards into the monster’s chest. Its struggling limbs go still. Behind me, an explosion blooms and people scream. For a moment, the thing in front of me is illuminated by the burst of flame.

And it wears my face.

I stumble back into the roadway. More of the monsters come and they fall upon me, biting and clawing and screaming. I fight them even as they murder me. My vision tunnels, and I fall.

When I open my eyes, I am in the fortress-monastery. It was the closest thing I ever had to a home, though in its current state I do not recognise it.

The great hall at the heart of the monastery is open to the sky and the walls are blackened by fire. I walk between monoliths of shattered stone.

In places, ruined banners still hang, catching in Baal's unkind wind. Oath scrolls and prayer papers scurry across the floor at my feet.

I cannot even weep to see it. The devastation is too much.

There is movement ahead. A figure clad in battered crimson armour stands at the head of the hall. He turns to face me. His armour marks him as Second Company, but I do not know him. I pause, wary of this stranger clad in the colours of my brothers.

'I thought I was the last,' he says. His voice is a wet rasp.

The implication of his words stops me dead.

'Who did this?' I shout the words, and they echo in the tomb that was once my home. *'Where are my brothers?'*

The stranger looks up at the curdled clouds overhead. They tremble and boil as a fresh bombardment begins.

'We did this,' he says. 'We had no choice.'

As the firestorm falls to earth, I finally find the strength to weep.

I awake again. I am in a clean, white space. Before me is a table, and on the table is a chalice. The chalice is beautiful, wrought in gold and set with gemstones.

'It always comes back to blood, Helias.'

A figure stands in my peripheral vision. It moves as I turn to face it, so I can never truly see it. I never heard such a beautiful voice.

'I can master it,' I tell the figure.

'No!' The figure roars the word, and it is terrible to hear. After a moment of silence, it speaks again, more softly. 'There is no mastering the monster.'

'For decades my brothers have practised the Bleeding,' I say. 'By taking the blood of our enemy and enduring the Thirst, we emerge stronger. It is the only way to keep the monster at bay.'

There is another long pause. I hear a sound like the turning pages, or fluttering wings.

'You honestly believe the rite will protect you?' the voice asks, a trace of hope in its question.

'I have to.'

'Then drink from the chalice. Endure. Emerge stronger.'

The figure, the flickering shape at the edge of my vision, disappears with a burst of white light.

I pick up the chalice. It is filled with blood. The smell is overwhelming. I put the chalice to my lips and drink.

This time, I truly wake. I am kneeling on the cathedral floor and the traitor's body lies broken on the marble before me. His armour is shattered and cracked. His throat has been torn out.

It must have been me.

*I* tore it out.

'Helias?' Captain Aphael's voice reminds me of shifting sand.

'Yes, sire,' I manage.

'It is done?'

I look down at the ruin of the Traitor Space Marine.

'Yes.'

'Then the monster is defeated. You have done well, brother.'

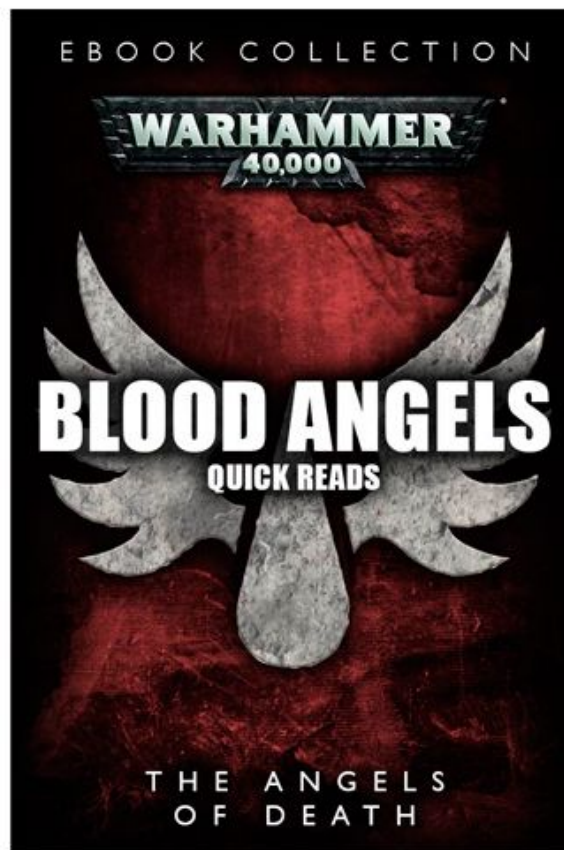
I catch my own reflection in hundreds of panes of broken glass. Blood hangs in thick strings from my fangs. I see alabaster skin and black-pit eyes. I see gold-trimmed armour and hands curled into claws.

I am not so sure.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Ray Harrison** is the author of the Warhammer 40,000 short stories 'Binding', 'The Third War' and 'The Bleeding'. Ray is based in the East Midlands and currently working on more tales set in the grim darkness of the far future.

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