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# KNOW THYSELF

ANDY SMILLIE

A FLESH TEARERS SHORT STORY

# KNOW THYSELF

**Andy Smillie**

The *Victus* stretched out below Balthiel like an armoured continent. The Flesh Tearers' flagship was a colossal vessel. Teeming with weaponry, it was possessed of a near-impenetrable hull, wrapped in miles-thick slabs of ceramite armour. By the *Victus*' guns had the populace of a thousand worlds died, its lance batteries boiling away their atmospheres as its seismic torpedoes shattered their tectonic plates.

The Librarian stood in the observation tower, his attention fixed on the lone ship edging its way towards the portside docking bay. Its approach heralded more menace than the largest enemy battle group, promising a threat that no salvo could halt. The dagger-shaped craft was smaller even than a single barrel of one of the *Victus*' close protection batteries, its void-black hull free of markings and insignia, a ghost ship - invisible save for the glowing, stylised 'I' that emblazoned its prow.

Harahel stood immobile in the launch bay, relishing the unusual quiet. The dozens of servitors and gangs of engineering serfs that worked the deck were absent. Plasma saws and arc welders lay discarded on workbenches. Two Thunderhawk gunships stood untended, awaiting refit and repair. Overhead, a squadron of Stormravens nestled in transport cradles, fuel hoses hanging like limp vines from engines in need of proper ministrations. The silence was oppressive, punctuated by the whisper of the chamber's air filters and the gentle hum of Harahel's armour. To his left, Appollus's power fist crackled as he tested its charge.

'Seth should never have allowed this.' Appollus seethed with displeasure, his mood as black as his armour.

Behind the angular grille of his battle helm, Harahel grinned. As Company Champion it was his duty, if not his honour, to meet the arrivals. Appollus, on the other hand, was there as punishment. The Chaplain had pressed his point too hard, and it was unwise to tell the Chapter Master he was wrong. Seth would have Appollus remember his place. 'What would you have him do?' asked Harahel, his gaze fixed on the docking tunnel. His eyes followed a black craft as it drifted through the entry doors. 'Defy the Inquisition?'

Appollus didn't answer. As he watched the toothed slabs of the entry hatch slide closed behind the Inquisitorial shuttle, his jaw was set as stone.

The arrowed craft touched down in total silence. The technology powering its engines was derived from a xenos discovery, its capabilities far in advance of the thrusters that powered the Thunderhawk gunship in whose shadow the shuttle rested. A ramp emerged from the near side of the ship, widening from a sliver of metal to a slender plank that extended to the deck.

Appollus growled, 'That vessel is no warship. They've sent a politician to judge warriors.'

With a faint hiss of pressure, a section of the hull slid away, revealing a doorway. A lone figure alighted onto the ramp, its heavy footsteps resonating around the chamber. A gilded heavy bolter replaced its right arm and shoulder, its barrel inscribed with intricate High Gothic. Its eyes were elongated brass optics that

protruded from a diamond-encrusted face. A blue targeting matrix passed over Harahel's armour as the gun-servitor scanned the deck. 'Perhaps not,' he said, touching the pommel of his eviscerator.

'Clear,' the servitor intoned, its soft cadence at odds with its mechanical exterior.

The air around the gun-servitor shimmered, and Harahel's helmet cycled vision modes as its codifiers struggled to maintain focus. A fulgurant web of energy crackled in the air. The distortion cleared a moment later, and the rest of the craft's occupants resolved into view at the base of the ramp.

Harahel bit down a snarl, his body willing him to attack.

+Calm yourself+

Balthiel's voice pushed into Harahel's mind. He ground his teeth, irritated by the Librarian's intrusion.

+It's a distortion field. He is not a psyker. Proceed+

Harahel massaged his temple as Balthiel's voice faded.

'The Librarian?' Appollus asked.

'Yes. I'll be seeing our brother in the duelling cages.'

A persistent icon flashed on Appollus's tactical display.

'Pity,' he said, and blinked the rune for *stone* to Manakel, ordering the Dreadnought to stand down.

Seth had been clear with the Inquisition - no psyker would be permitted to set foot upon his vessel. Manakel stood within the nearest of the docked Thunderhawks, ready to enforce the Chapter Master's edict. *Another time old friend.* Appollus removed his helmet, cupped it under his arm and spat on the deck. The acid saliva bubbled on the metal with a hiss.

'Let's get this over with.'

Harahel echoed the Chaplain, mag-locking his helm to his waist, and approached the Inquisitorial warband.

Seven figures stood in loose formation on the deck, an inquisitor at their head. He wore golden power armour that shone as though fixed under a bank of luminators. The symbol of his office bisected his breastplate, its onyx finish mirroring the man's dark eyes. Four warriors in artificer plate-mail flanked him. Each carried an oversized blade and storm shield. A slender woman in a crimson body-glove, her fingers adorned with jewels, stood behind them. Her narrow eyes flitted between the Flesh Tearers and the final member of the party, a hunched savant whose crooked fingers dug through the folds of his robes for a data scroll.

'I am Inquisitor Corvin Herrold of the Ordo Hereticus.' The inquisitor stepped forward to meet them, folding his arms over his breast in the sign of the Aquila.

'Harahel, First Company Champion.' Harahel clasped his fist to his breastplate in salute.

Corvin nodded and looked at Appollus next. The Chaplain said nothing, disdain etched on his face. His cold eyes studied the inquisitor. Corvin's jaw tensed. Appollus heard the quickening thrum of the shield-warriors' heartbeats, as their bodies prepared for combat. Appollus's honed instincts could easily detect the subtle shift in posture that belied their intent. The Chaplain remained silent.

Harahel broke the stalemate. 'Our Lord awaits you.'

'Of course.' Corvin's smile didn't reach his eyes. 'Shall we?' The inquisitor motioned his henchmen forwards.

'Just you,' Harahel barred the way with his massive bulk. 'Your warriors stay here.'

'Respectfully...' Corvin gestured to the savant, whose brass eye whirred as he looked up from a data-slate. 'I must bring my chronicler to record every detail of this engagement.'

Appollus stiffened at the inquisitor's choice of words. If the inquisitor was there to *engage* the Flesh Tearers, then he had brought woefully inadequate forces.

'No.' Harahel didn't move. 'My lord will not forget a single detail of your meeting. Our

scriptographers can transcribe it before you leave.’

Corvin only came up to Harahel’s breastplate. He had never been so close to a Space Marine before. He suddenly felt very small. ‘Very well,’ he said, nodding to his bodyguard to stand down and falling into lockstep with the giant Flesh Tearer.

Appollus lingered behind as Harahel left with Corvin. He eyed the savant scrawling on a data-slate. The neuro-quill trembled. The savant let out an involuntary whimper and tried to creep further into his robes. The Chaplain glowered. He would credit the serf who cleaned his armour with more backbone than that hunched wretch. Turning on his heel, he followed the inquisitor from the deck.

The Reclusiam was as much museum as place of worship. Venerable relics from the Chapter’s past decorated the curved walls, their sanctity maintained by stasis fields which were themselves artefacts from a forgotten age. The mosaic floor was crafted from the armour of fallen captains, the story of their demise ever present in the irregular tiling. Reclaimed honour-blades stood up like vicious candles in a moat of volcanic sand that bordered the pulpit. Seth knelt in the Reclusiam’s centre, naked save for an ashen tunic that draped his broad frame.

To Balthiel, his Chapter Master looked to be chiselled from the same immutable stone as the statues that stared down in judgement. Even fully clad in his battle garb, the Librarian knew he stood at no advantage over the hulking Flesh Tearer.

‘My lord,’ said Balthiel, dropping to one knee.

Seth remained still, his gaze fixed above. The duel visages of Sanguinius and the Emperor stared down at him, their likeness engraved on the greyed armour-glass of the ceiling that worked to diffuse the light from the single luminator. ‘He has arrived.’

‘Yes, lord. Harahel waits with him in your war-room.’

Seth didn’t reply. The Chapter Master of the Flesh Tearers was unusually contemplative. Even without his gifts, Balthiel could have discerned his lord’s feelings of contempt towards their guest. Seth was a direct, brutal warrior that few could match. But the Inquisition was an insidious agency. It could not be stopped by blade or by anger. Its operatives could not be met head on. Defeating them required patience and cunning - two concepts as alien to Seth as the charges that the inquisitor was no doubt there to level against him and his Chapter.

‘The blood guide you,’ Balthiel rose and walked from the chamber, leaving Seth alone with his fathers.

Seth met the eyes of the Emperor. ‘Give me counsel.’ He paused, losing himself in the threads that cut across his progenitor’s armour. Imperfections in the plaster served as a reminder that no defence was impervious.

‘Bind my rage.’ He turned to Sanguinius.

‘Give me the strength to endure this affront.’

Unlike the Emperor, Sanguinius was sculpted unarmed.

A second truth - the sons of The Angel needed no weapons to smite their enemies. Seth bowed, touching his forehead to the floor. ‘Paschar.’

Outside the Reclusiam, a serf eased himself to his feet. His knees and hips ached from days of inaction, making him feel old beyond his twenty-six Terran years. ‘Yes, liege?’ Paschar rasped, his throat hoarse from lack of water.

‘Bring me my armour.’

There were no chairs in the chamber, forcing Corvin to stand while he awaited Seth. Unlike the

ostentatious command thrones and strategiums found on Imperial Navy battleships, the Flesh Tearer war-room was barren, empty save for a circular table that sat at its centre. Corvin removed a gauntlet and ran his hand over the table's surface, flinching at the touch of cold steel. A sterile chill permeated everything on the *Victus*, an atmosphere exacerbated by the lack of heating and the grilled walkways. His nose was numb from the cold, his breath fogged in the cold air.

The Flesh Tearers were seemingly unconcerned with those who didn't share their enhanced constitution. The grinding of cogs stirred Corvin from his reverie as a pair of heavy brass doors swung inwards, their hinges worn from centuries of use. The doors had seemed immense, unnecessarily so, until Seth stood between them. His armoured bulk was massive, easily filling the double-doorway. As he strode into the room, a crimson cloak trailed behind him. An iron halo framed by bronzed wings sat atop his backpack, adding to his deific stature. His armour, though more intricately worked than Harahel's, was as perfunctory as the war-room. Brutal rivets locked together robust plates whose toothed edges could tear a man to shreds.

Corvin regarded Seth's face. The Chapter Master's angular jaw looked capable of taking a hit from a power fist, and was in stark contrast to his own patrician features.

'Lord Seth,' the inquisitor said, bowing. 'I thank you for granting me an audience.'

The inquisitor wielded the power to scour the life from an entire sector. He could marshal battle groups and bombard civilisations out of existence. Yet before the Chapter Master he was but a child, easily dispatched by a casual flick of the wrist. Corvin was afraid, Seth could smell it. He looked past the inquisitor to Appollus and Harahel.

'Leave us.'

The two Flesh Tearers startled Corvin as they departed. He'd almost forgotten that they were there. Their faces sealed within their helms, they'd been stood in the corner, as lifeless as the many statues they'd passed on the way from the hangar. Corvin fought down the urge to run out after them as the doors ground shut, leaving him alone with Seth.

'Speak your piece, inquisitor, I have wars to attend to.'

'You... ' Corvin struggled, his throat felt dry. 'You Space Marines are hardly known for your civility, but I see you are as cold and efficient in matters of peace as you are reported to be on the battlefield.'

'No.'

Corvin frowned. 'No?' He started pacing in an effort to increase the distance between them without looking weak.

Seth was not fooled. 'No, inquisitor. You are mistaken.'

'I—'

Seth turned with the inquisitor's movement, filling the space between them without taking a step. 'There is no peace amongst the stars. Here, or anywhere else.'

'How true,' Corvin nodded, thankful the cold was keeping the sweat from his brow. 'Well then, to the matter at hand.' He managed to speak with a measure of composure. 'As I'm sure you're aware, this is not the first time my Ordo has had cause to question the actions of your Chapter.'

Seth said nothing, his expression unreadable.

'The Eclipse Wars are well documented. All actions accounted for. Except,' Corvin paused. 'Honour's End...' He spoke slowly, letting the words hang in the air.

Seth stayed silent, his eyes fixed on the inquisitor.

Nerves sucked the moisture from Corvin's mouth. He coughed, clearing his throat. 'According to the official report, the Flesh Tearers were instrumental in defeating the archenemy.'

'I have seen the report. Make your point.'

‘Yes, I’m quite sure you have. And like you, I too know of the greater truth.’

‘Do I?’

‘The Flesh Tearers, warriors under your command, your brethren, killed hundreds of Imperial citizens. Hundreds. In cold blood. All innocents.’

Seth’s jaw tightened. ‘Is that so?’

‘Yes, I believe it to be the case.’

‘Then again, you are mistaken. The *citizens*,’ Seth spat the word, full of a warrior’s contempt for the weak, ‘you speak of had succumbed to the taint. They had become pawns of the archenemy. They were righteous kills.’

‘A claim, I believe, that can be neither confirmed nor denied, seeing as your forces left no one alive to testify to the facts.’

‘Choose your next words wisely, inquisitor.’ Seth’s voice was edged with menace.

Despite his instincts urging him otherwise, Corvin held his ground.

‘It is not my words which trouble me Chapter Master, but those of Brother-sergeant Jorvik of the Space Wolves.’

A low growl rumbled from Seth’s throat at the mention of the Wolves. Corvin backed up a step.

‘Your forces engaged the Space Wolves, did they not?’

‘They attacked us. Assaulting our rear like cowards.’

‘They fought to protect the populace of the hive.’

Seth clenched his fists. He could feel his pulse drumming in his veins, hear its roar as it called him to blood. He was going to kill the inquisitor, rip his head from his shoulders and crush it between his fingers.

‘Please,’ Corvin held up his hands, trying to placate the seething Chapter Master. ‘My purpose here is only to understand your actions, to hear your side. Not to pass judgement.’

‘Is that so?’ Seth’s voice was like the bark of a heavy bolter.

‘Yes and—’

‘Then understand this,’ Seth closed the distance between them in a heartbeat, lifting the inquisitor up by his gorget so that their faces were level.

Corvin let out a gasp, locking his hands around Seth’s vambrace in a futile attempt to break the Flesh Tearer’s hold.

‘This Chapter has served the Imperium since before you crawled mewling from your mother’s womb. It has stood at arms and bled almost unto extinction, while you treat us with suspicion and doubt, dishonouring the very warriors who have died to ensure you yet live.’ Seth tossed Corvin to the ground. ‘I am done with your questions, inquisitor.’

‘You dare...’ Corvin began as he regained composure, and his feet. ‘You dare strike me?’

Seth ignored him and turned for the door.

The inquisitor lunged forwards, anger robbing him of prudence. ‘To turn your back on me is to turn your back on the Throne!’

Seth spun around, murder in his eyes. ‘Be careful, inquisitor. My patience has its limits.’

Corvin opened his mouth to speak. Seth didn’t let him.

‘You have fifteen minutes to leave my ship. Through airlock or your own vessel, it matters not.’

The access panel winked green. The savant retracted his data keys and took a step back as the doors hissed open. Skulking into the corridor, he pressed against the wall. A row of luminators stuttered overhead, following the line of the passageway as it snaked round to the left. He crept forwards, keeping

to the shadows, the folds of his cowl camouflaging him in the darkness.

The three previous corridors had been deserted, but he could not afford a mistake. His mission was too important for laxity.

At the end of the corridor, he negotiated another lock and climbed down a service ladder to the deck below.

Stepping from the ladder to a metal grille floor, he rolled his shoulders back, easing out the tension and standing straighter than he'd done in months.

*Almost there.* The thought sent a surge of adrenaline through his system. *Victory is never further from your grasp than the instant before you claim it.*

He took a steadying breath, remembering the maxim his master had taught him. He pressed on.

His steps became more assured, his stride lengthening as his legs remembered their former power. Splaying his fingers, he flexed his hands, throwing off the malaise that had settled on them. The final door was before him.

He pulled off his robe to reveal a dark suit of segmented armour, and set about shedding the rest of his disguise. Unclamping the brass augmentation from his eye and screwing it into the haft of the blade that hung from his waist, he reached into a velvet pouch to produce the last piece of his true attire.

Running his finger across the debossed 'I', the real Corvin Herrold slid the Inquisitorial signet ring onto his index finger and pressed the door release. With a slow, deliberate grinding, the doors came apart.

Darkness greeted the inquisitor as he stepped into the corridor beyond. No luminators shone, the gloom was total, thick and impenetrable.

'Emperor walk with me.' Activating the portable luminator on his gauntlet, the inquisitor pressed into the passageway. The door growled shut behind him.

The corridor was unlike any of the others. The panels of the floor were warped and dented, rusted from disuse. The ventilation grilles had been welded shut. The air was rank and stale, ripe with blood and faeces. The walls were dotted with hatches, each leading to small cells. None were occupied, broken manacles the only clue that they ever had been.

'Where are you?' Corvin whispered to the darkness as he passed another set of cells, their doors slack on battered hinges.

Noise from further along the corridor pushed Corvin into a crouch. He held his breath, straining to hear. The noise was indistinct, faint. A less experienced operative might have mistaken it for ambient background noise, emitted from one of the warship's many systems. But Corvin had supervised the interrogation of hundreds of heretics, put thousands more to death. He was more familiar with the sounds of pain than he was with his own voice. He drew his inferno pistol, its primed muzzle glowing amber-hot, and took a cautious step forwards. The screaming grew in intensity as he approached another set of cells. This time the doors were sealed.

Corvin listened. Pained, angry cries emanated from within. But there was something else - a hoarse roar that sounded almost feral. A sound like nothing Corvin had heard from the throat of a man.

The inquisitor reduced the focus of the luminator beam, tightening it on the nearest of the cell doors. He moved up against the wall. The door was fusion-bolted shut; there was no way to prise open the lock. Pressing the nose of his pistol to the first of the two hinges, he fired, melting the bond in a flare of super-heated metal. He aimed down and shot out the second, swinging round to kick the door in an instant later.

A roar. The sharp rattle of chains. A black-armoured beast rushed at him. Corvin fired twice, recoiling against the wall of the corridor. He heard his attacker slump back, the chains clattering as the tension on them eased. The noise from the other cells intensified, as though the beasts sensed the carnage nearby, or perhaps, Corvin thought with a shiver, they smelled his fear.

Guiding the luminator into the cell, the inquisitor took his first proper look at the beast within. He grinned in satisfaction. It was as he suspected, a Space Marine. Though not as he had previously known them. The beast was a dark parody of the Imperium's superhuman champions. Corvin activated his pict-recorder.

Swollen veins threatened to push through the skin of its forehead and neck. The scleras of its eyes were gore-red, and its throat emitted a continuous growl as it writhed on the floor. It wore black armour emblazoned with blood-red saltires. Tattered, blood-soaked scrolls hung from its pauldrons and breastplate.

'Subject shows remarkable resilience.' Corvin zoomed in on the gaping holes he'd blasted in its chest, before raising his pistol and shooting it in the face. The Space Marine slumped backwards and lay still.

'But not to head shots.'

'That was a mistake, inquisitor.'

Corvin spun around and fired. The opposite wall glowed faintly, scorched by the melta blast.

'To have come here under false pretences, to have killed one of my flock.' The voice in the darkness was closer this time.

'Show yourself, daemon!' Corvin tapped his luminator, expanding the beam to encompass the corridor. Appollus's leering skull helm appeared from the darkness. In terror, Corvin pulled the trigger. The Chaplain was quicker, crushing the weapon between the fingers of his power fist, and shouldering Corvin to the ground. The inquisitor rolled, letting the momentum take the sting from the blow.

'You have uncovered a secret.' Appollus advanced on him. 'Our secret.' The Chaplain let the haft of his crozius slide down his hand until the flanged head hung a few inches from the floor. 'And like all secrets, its knowing comes with a price.'

'It is you who shall pay the price.' Corvin unsheathed his sword, energy arcing along its blade. 'I have summoned my warriors. We will commandeer this vessel, and you and your kind shall answer for your perfidy.'

'Is that so?' Appollus growled in contempt as the inquisitor retreated. He reached out to tap a pict-viewer on the wall.

++Recorder 10A9: Bay 17++

Harahel tore his eviscerator from a shield-warrior's chest, the weapon's teeth churning his torso to red mist. The giant Flesh Tearer reversed the grip, driving his blade through the back of a prone figure clad in golden armour. The rest of the Inquisitorial warband lay dead at his feet, now unrecognisable as anything more than a pile of orphaned limbs.

++10A9: Segment Ends++

Disbelief held Corvin's tongue.

Appollus grinned.

'You are alone, inquisitor.'

'No, traitor, I am never alone. The Emperor stands by my side.' Corvin's blade flashed towards Appollus's throat.

The Chaplain slipped the blow, smashing his crozius into Corvin's breastplate. The inquisitor flipped backwards, his armour cracking under the blow. 'You have spent too long in the shadows. Judgement's light has found you wanting.'

Corvin tried to push himself to his feet, his chest alive with pain. He could barely breathe...

Appollus yanked the inquisitor up by his hair. Holding him level with the soulless eyes of his helm, he drove a finger of his power fist into his chest, cracking ribs. The inquisitor screamed. 'Twice you shot my brother. Are you as resilient as he?' The Chaplain stabbed a second crackling digit into Corvin, eliciting

another tortured cry.

‘Emperor...’ Corvin’s lips trembled.

Appollus pulled the inquisitor closer, the visage of his skull helm filling Corvin’s world. ‘He is not listening to you.’

Harsh light shone above Corvin. He blinked hard in an effort to shake the torpor from his eyes, forcing them to focus. He tried to reach for his face but his arm was pinned. Shock snapped him to alertness. He was strapped into some sort of chair, his arms and legs bound by thick clamps. He struggled against the restraints, crying out as pain stabbed through his chest. His ribs were broken.

‘The restraints are for your own protection.’

The Chaplain. Corvin remembered the skull helm. ‘You go too far, release me or—’ The inquisitor’s jaw cracked as something struck it. His vision swam, clearing to show the face of another Flesh Tearer looming over him.

‘Do you know who I am, inquisitor?’

‘Y-yes.’ Corvin stuttered, the granite face of Gabriel Seth unmistakable.

‘You came here seeking truth, inquisitor.’ Seth gestured to Corvin’s right. ‘Let us show you our truth.’

Beside Corvin, strapped to another chair, was a black-armoured Flesh Tearer, his armour daubed in red saltires.

At Seth’s gesture, Balthiel removed his gauntlets. He stepped between the two chairs. Placing a hand on the forehead of the Death Company marine, he turned to Corvin.

‘No! No! Wait, no!’

Balthiel ignored the inquisitor’s pleading and completed the psychic union.

‘A cowardly mind is a weak mind. This will not take long.’ The Librarian reached out with his gifts. The Death Company marine’s mind was incandescent. His anger burned, a pyre that called to Balthiel. He dove into the flames, until they surrounded him, shuddering at the power in the warrior’s blood. The rage was absolute. The flames licked at his armour, trying to find a way to his flesh. The wards inscribed on Balthiel’s battle-plate held, glowing as they turned aside the fire’s advance. He pushed down to the kindling that had given the fire life. Scooping up a pile of embers in his palm, he sought the inquisitor’s mind. It hid beneath layers of disguises and barriers. Corvin was well prepared, but Balthiel would not be deterred. He tore through the inquisitor’s mental defences with a savagery that would have killed an untrained mind, burrowing down past Corvin’s fears to his very essence. There, among the winds of the inquisitor’s soul, Balthiel let the embers fall from his hand.

Corvin screamed. His cry became a guttural roar as the rage overtook him. Blood rushed to his muscles, which began to convulse as adrenaline saturated his system. He would tear free from his restraints, kill Seth, wear his skin like a cloak, crush his bones to powder.

‘Die!’ Corvin growled, thrashing in the chair. Blood ran from his mouth as he bit off his tongue, one of his legs broke with a sickening snap as he tried to free himself.

‘Enough.’

Seth ordered Balthiel to end Corvin’s torment, and close the psychic conduit he had created. After it was done, the inquisitor continued to spasm, his teeth rattling as he went limp in the chair. The effort of communion had taken a huge toll on Balthiel, who dropped to one knee breathing hard.

Seth rested a hand on the Librarian’s pauldron ‘Return to your cell, brother. Rest.’

‘Yes, lord.’ Balthiel nodded and left the room.

‘Watch him,’ Seth voxed Appollus on a closed channel. The Chaplain dipped his head in acknowledgment and went after the Librarian.

Tears streamed from Corvin's eyes as he sobbed between laboured breaths. His body trembled. Seth knelt down next to him, his voice little more than a whisper. 'And you would dare call us traitors. We who channel this anger, this curse, each and every moment in which our hearts pump our father's blood through our veins. We who endure this torment and yet stand ready to fight for humanity. You. You who cannot handle our pain for a heartbeat dare question our loyalty.' Seth stood, snapping the restraints from their housings. 'Leave and pray to the Emperor that you never cross my path again.'

Inquisitor Corvin Herrold lay among the corpses of his warband, thankful the shuttle's pilot had been spared. The inquisitor couldn't stand, let alone steer the craft. His nervous system was shot and his muscles were shivering from withdrawal as the remains of the rage left him. Sweating with effort, he propped himself up. The symbol of the Inquisition stared accusingly at him as he adjusted the ring on his finger.

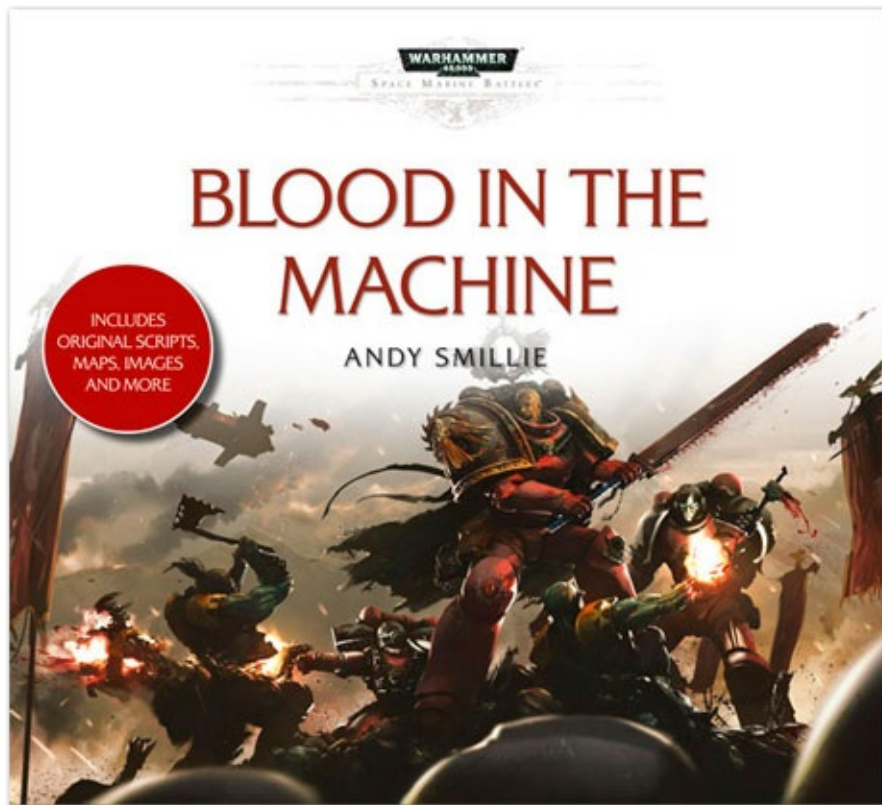
*Who am I?*

Tears soaked his cheeks as he searched for an answer. Grief pushed him to remove the ring from his finger and toss it away. He looked to the ceiling; the galaxy stared down at him through the translucent hull as they edged away from the *Victus*. No stars shone. Yet the darkness of the void was as a beacon of light compared to what he'd felt living inside the Flesh Tearers' souls.

'Emperor save us.'

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hailing from Glasgow, ANDY SMILLIE is best known for his visceral Flesh Tearers novellas, *Beneath the Flesh* and *Flesh of Cretacia*. He also has written a host of short stories starring this brutal Chapter of Space Marines and a number of audio dramas including *Deathwolf* and *From the Blood*.



A Flesh Tearers audio drama by Andy Smillie

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