

WARHAMMER  
40,000

# TORTURER'S THIRST

ANDY SMILLIE



A FLESH TEARERS SHORT STORY

A WARHAMMER 40,000 SHORT STORY

# TORTURER'S THIRST

*A Flesh Tearers Story*

**Andy Smillie**

*'I must know. I must know what lies beneath the flesh, what powers a man to draw breath when death is so much easier. I must inflict pain to level you, to strip away your falsehoods and pretences. I must show you yourself, so that I may know your secrets.'*

**– Torturer's saying**

Appollus echoed his jump pack's roar as it drove him downwards. He landed hard, scattering a mortar formation and crushing their spotter beneath his ceramite boots. The enemy's ribs cracked, the bone fragments spearing his innards while his organs drowned in blood. Appollus grinned. The other six members of his Death Company slammed to the earth in ordered formation around him. The backwash of their jump packs scoured the flesh from a slew of enemy warriors, filling the air with the rancid tang of burned flesh.

'Bring them death!'

Appollus opened fire with his bolt pistol, dispatching a trio of the enemy in a burst of mass-reactive rounds. The Brotherhood of Change were everywhere. A teeming mass of mauve robes and onyx masks, they pressed towards him with unrelenting fervour. Appollus thumbed the fire selector to full-auto and fired again. A swathe of Brotherhood cultists died, their bodies blown apart, pulped by the explosive rounds. Yet they did not falter. Heedless of the losses inflicted upon them, the Brotherhood lashed out at Appollus like men possessed. The tip of a barbed pole-arm cracked against his shoulder guard. He side-stepped a thrust meant to disembowel him and jammed the muzzle of his bolt pistol into his attacker's torso. A shower of limbs and flesh-chunks rained over his armour as he pressed forwards, spattering his black battle plate crimson.

The sharp tang of blood was suffocating. It was a siren's call to the killer inside him, beckoning him onwards into the press of flesh. Another blade flashed towards him. He parried the downwards stroke with his crozius, and smashed his bolt pistol into the faceplate of another of the Brotherhood. The blow caved in

the side of the cultist's skull. Lines of brain-viscera clung to Appollus's bolt pistol as he swung it round and opened fire on the endless mauve horde.

The Brotherhood had been human once. Scholars from the librarium world of Onuris Siti, their counsel was sought by all who could afford it, from cardinals to Planetary Governors. But the Sitalites had turned their back on the Emperor and his Imperium. They had sworn dark oaths to darker gods, burned their librariums to the ground and denounced the teaching of the Ecclesiarchy.

Appollus snarled as he gunned down another group of attackers. He could smell the taint of the warp upon them; it saturated them, drifting from their pores like a foul poison. A warning sigil flashed on his helmet display. He was down to his last round. He blinked it away with a snarl, and blew the head from a bulbous assailant whose torso was at odds with his rawboned legs – only a raw aspirant was unable to discern his ammo count by the weight of his weapon. Appollus mag-locked the pistol to his armour, and buried his combat knife into the distended neck of the nearest cultist.

Behind them, the guns of the Cadian Eighth continued to fire in a desperate attempt to hold the line against the Brotherhood's advance. The snap of a hundred thousand lasguns crackled in the air like lightning, as a thousand heavy bolters continued their thunderous chatter.

Ahead of him, the Death Company were pushing forwards. Wielding their chainswords two-handed, they hacked a path through the Brotherhood's ranks. Orphaned limbs tumbled through the air like morbid hail, ripped from ruined torsos by the adamantium teeth of the Death Company's weapons. Still the enemy came, clawing and grabbing at their arms and legs. For all their rage-fuelled vigour, Appollus knew his brothers would eventually be pulled to the ground, drowned beneath the tide of flesh assailing them.

Appollus threw his arms out, his ceramite-clad limbs smashing ribs and shattering jaws. They needed to regain the initiative, to maintain momentum.

'With me!' Appollus growled over the vox.

He bent his knees, angling his jump pack towards the enemy at his rear. With a thought, he activated the booster. The cultist behind him died in a flash, incinerated in a gout of flame. Dozens more flailed around screaming, their flesh running from their bodies in a thick soup.

The raging thrusters threw Appollus forwards into a wall of enemy. He tucked his chin into his pauldron, using the shoulder guard as a battering ram. Bone broke, and necks snapped as he battered through the press of Brotherhood. A red status sigil blinked on his display – fuel zero. He pressed the release clasp and the booster fell away. Momentum carried him onwards another ten paces. He rolled, knocking over a handful of assailants, before rising to his feet to begin the slaughter anew.

‘Chaplain Appollus.’ Colonel Morholt’s voice crackled in his ear.

He ignored it and pushed onwards. His weapons blurred around him as he hacked off limbs on instinct. His blood hummed in his veins, his twin-hearts bellowing, choirmasters propelling him through a chorus of death. This was what it was to be a Flesh Tearer. To lose oneself in the joy of slaughter. To maim. To kill. He eviscerated an enemy and tore the midriff out of another, stamping his boot down to crack the skull of a cultist whose leg he’d removed a heartbeat before. Thick gore splattered his armour, blood pooled around his gorget.

He felt lighter without the jump pack, and his progress through the forest of bodies quickened. But the Death Company were already ahead of him, churning the Brotherhood into fleshy gobbets that slid from their armour like crimson sleet.

‘Chaplain, you’ve extended the cordon. Pull back to your sector.’

Appollus barely registered the colonel’s pleas, his attention fixed on the lumbering brute that was trying to bludgeon him to death with a pair of crackling warhammers. Hemmed in on all sides by the press of enemy warriors, Appollus had no room to manoeuvre. He blocked his attacker’s opening swing with his crozius, the weapons sparking off one another in a haze of blistering energy. Appollus felt his feet slide back under the force of the blow. The earth beneath his feet was slick, churned into a thick paste by constant bombardment and the hundred score warriors who had charged across it. He growled, sinking his weight through his knees to steady himself. The brute advanced on him, swinging again. Appollus stepped inside its guard and brought his head up into its jaw, grinning as he heard the sickening snap of bone. He reversed the strike, driving his forehead down into the brute’s face. The blow cracked the creature’s faceplate, and it cried out in pain as the obsidian fragments embedded

themselves in its skin. The brute dropped its weapons, reaching up to pull the shards from its flesh.

‘Die now!’

Appollus threw an uppercut into his foe’s chest. It spasmed hard, blood pouring from its broken mouth as the Chaplain wrapped his fingers around its heart. Appollus squeezed the organ, grinning as it burst in his grasp. He tore his hand free, beheading another of the Brotherhood before the brute had even collapsed to the ground.

‘Hold position! Emperor damn you, hold the line!’

Colonel Morholt’s voice became like a persistent whine in Appollus’s ear. He growled in response, deactivating his comm-feed even as he tore his crozius from another of the arch-enemy’s pawns. His duty was to lead the Death Company in battle, to direct their fury to the heart of the enemy. Their rage was beyond his means to restrain, it could be sated only by blood. They had no place anywhere but at the enemy’s throat. Brother Luciferus had made that plain before dispatching them to this accursed planet. Appollus grinned, never had the Flesh Tearers’ Chief Librarian spoken a greater truism. To pull back now would be to invite the Death Company’s wrath upon Morholt and the rest of his regiment.

A persistent warning sigil flashed on Appollus’s retinal display as his armour’s auspex detected incoming artillery.

‘Morholt,’ Appollus snarled.

Locking his crozius to his armour, he grabbed the nearest brute by its head. The hulking traitor voiced a throttled scream as Appollus threw himself to the ground, dragging the unfortunate down on top of him. His helmet’s audio dampeners activated to preserve his hearing a heartbeat before a staccato of explosions burst around him.

‘I am his weapon, he is my shield!’ Appollus bellowed the mantra through gritted teeth as the ground shuddered under multiple detonations.

The siege shells exploded in coarse bellows that threw dirt and malformed bodies into the air like sparks burning away from a firecracker. Flame washed

over him, incinerating the screaming brute sheltering him and burning the litany parchments from his armour.

The heat liquefied the ground beneath him, his armoured bulk sinking further into the muddied earth. Biometric data scrolled across his retinal display as the bombardment ended. The concussive force of the blasts had strained his organs, but his armour had held and he was already healing.

A pair of faded ident-tags told him Urim and Rashnu had taken direct hits, blown into fleshy rain by the artillery barrage.

‘Rest well, brothers.’

When the battle was over, Appollus would gather whatever fragments of their armour remained and take them to the Basilica of Remembrance. They would be mourned, as would the loss of their gene-seed.

‘Cease fire!’ Appollus growled into the vox.

A burst of static shot back in answer.

Snarling, he pushed himself up out of the dirt, cursing as his gauntlets slid into the earthy soup.

‘Hold your fire, Morholt, or by the blood I will kill you myself!’

Appollus surveyed the destruction. The enemy dead carpeted the landscape, like purple reeds flattened by the wind. The remaining four members of his Death Company were scattered among a line of shallow craters to his left flank.

Las-fire flickered from the edge of the blast zone. The Brotherhood were starting to rally. An autocannon shell glanced his pauldron, spinning him down into the mud.

‘Forwards!’ Appollus roared as he regained his footing.

But the Death Company were already charging towards the Brotherhood, bolters barking in their hands as they advanced into a hail of las-fire.

‘We are anger. We are death.’

Fire burned in Appollus's limbs as his legs pumped him towards the foe. Ignorant of the las-fire that licked his armour and the solid-state rounds that threw up dirt in his path, he charged towards the wall of enemy.

'Our wrath knows no succour.'

Ten more paces and he would be among them. His gauntlets would drip in entrails as he ripped apart their blasphemous forms.

'Our blades know no—'

Something unseen struck Appollus in the chest, flipping him to the ground. He landed hard, a crack snaking along his breastplate. He groaned as he lifted his head, blinking hard to clear his vision. Pain suppressors flooded his system but did nothing to quell the searing pain in his skull.

The enemy stopped firing.

Grunting with effort, Appollus got to his feet. He stumbled forwards, but the ground swung up to meet him. Blood filled his mouth as his head struck the ground. Roaring with frustration, he pushed himself onto all fours. He would crawl if he had to. Only death would stay his wrath.

Ahead the ranks of the Brotherhood stood immobile, taunting him.

Behind his skull helm, Appollus's face was set in a snarl of pure hate. He cast his eyes over the traitors, searching for sign of his Death Company. A flash of mirror-black armour among the mauve robes caught his eye. He made to look again, but in the same instant was yanked from the ground, tossed into the air and slammed back down with bone-breaking force.

Pain burned through him, as though a molten needle was being threaded into his very marrow. He couldn't move, his limbs pinned to the earth, trapped beneath a huge, invisible weight. Patches of hoarfrost rimed his armour, spitting as they cracked and reformed. The stench of sulphur choked the air around him.

Psyker.

The thought formed in Appollus's mind the briefest of instants before he glimpsed the mirror-black armour once more and darkness took him.

Filmy water dripped onto Appollus's face, stirring him. His head ached in a way he'd not felt since Seth had struck him in the duelling cages. Easing his eyes open, he saw thick iron chains looped around his ankles. He was naked, strung up like butchered cattle, his head a metre from the ground. His wrists were shackled too, fixed beneath him by a chain that ran through a loop set into the bare rock of the floor. Appollus strained at his bonds, his muscles rippling with effort as he tried in vain to break the irons from the floor.

'The blood grant me my vengeance,' he spat, growling with frustration.

The light in the chamber was poor, uneven. The faint smell of promethium hung in the air, drifting from oil burners. Appollus strained his eyes, snatching glimpses of his surroundings in the flickering lamplight. The chamber was perhaps five metres across, its walls pocked and irregular, hewn from solid rock by axe and pick. The air was damp, and algae and moss clung to the walls in thick patches.

There was no sign of an exit. Appollus closed his eyes, his Lyman's ear filtering out the noise of the water as it continued to drip from the ceiling. Slowing his breathing, he quietened his heart, the drumming of his warrior-pulse dropping to a whisper.

The door was to his rear. His skin tingled at the light wisps of air that pushed into the chamber through the gaps at its edges. Someone stood just beyond it. He could hear the regular exhaling and changeless heartbeat of a bored sentry. There were...

Footsteps.

Appollus focused on their steady rhythm as they grew closer. Judging by the gait, his visitors were human. Two men, one with a limp.

The guard's pulse quickened. Appollus smiled at his gaoler's discomfort.

The footsteps stopped outside the door, and Appollus listened as the two men spoke to the fearful sentry. The blasphemous curs spoke in the tongue of the arch-enemy. Appollus clenched his jaw. Though he couldn't discern what they were saying, he recognised the tone well enough. The visitors were the guard's superiors, his deference to them unmistakable.

The door opened inwards, the sound of its heavy latch sliding free a welcome relief from the ravaged consonants that ground from the men's throats.

Appollus tasted the familiar tang of recycled air as the door opened. The chamber was underground; a ventilation system fed air in through the corridor. He concentrated on the air as it brushed against his skin and decided that the nearest circulation shaft was perhaps ten paces beyond his cell. The door clunked as it swung closed. It was thick, but with a sufficient run-up he was confident he could fell it.

'Welcome, Chaplain.'

The speaker's voice brought Appollus's attention back into the room. The man stank of sulphur and day-old blood.

Appollus opened his eyes but remained silent. As a Chaplain, it was his duty to listen. To hear the sins of his brothers and distil their lies before they had even formed on their tongues. He had taken confession from the best of men, men of power and great strength. He had listened to the broken voices of terrible men, men whose twisted machinations had seen the end of civilisations, as they lay on his interrogation rack.

His visitor was neither.

'You hold secrets, Chaplain.' This time it was the second visitor who spoke. His voice was deeper than that of the first, and he struggled over the words as though unused to making their sounds. He bent down as he spoke, holding a long blade so that Appollus could see its blood-encrusted barbs. 'Secrets that our master would know.'

The man wore the mauve robes of the Brotherhood, though he wore no mask. Instead, the skin of his face had been dyed oil-black. Gleaming slivers of glass sat where his eyes should have been, sparkling even in the low-light of the chamber.

Fratris Crucio.

Appollus recognised his visitor from the numerous engagement reports and after-action accounts he'd studied. The Brotherhood's master interrogators were infamous throughout the Khandax warzone. Tales of their atrocities drifted from

foxhole to foxhole, hushed whispers that crept along the trench line. Fratriscrucio, a byword for terror. Storm-coated officers of the Commissariat had adopted the stories as their own. It kept the men of the Imperial Guard fearful, alert. Vigilance along the watch-line absolute. To be captured by them was to suffer a fate far worse than simple death.

Appollus spat in the torturer's face.

The man tumbled back screaming, clawing at his face as the acid-saliva burned away his flesh. His companion knelt down over him but did nothing to ease his torment, simply inclining his head and watching as the acid ate into his brethren's eyes.

'Your strength will not serve you.' The torturer said finally, picking up the fallen blade and pushing it into Appollus's ribs. 'It will not last.'

The pain was excruciating but Appollus did not cry out.

It was the least of his worries. Pain was temporary, ended by absolution or death; a slight inflicted upon his body and no more. But what the pain stirred in him – the anger, the bloodlust – that was terror. It thundered in his veins, threatening to drown his organs in a tide of red and rage. He would not allow himself to succumb to the curse; such a fate had no end.

Appollus closed off his mind from the pain. He pictured the High Basilica back on Cretecia, his Chapter's fortress home world. Tens of thousands of candles burned along the stone edges of the basilica's aisles. One flickering memorial for each Flesh Tearer who had donned the black armour of death. The red of the candle wax was used to seal the saltires and affix the litany parchments to the armour of every new Death Company Space Marine. As a novitiate in the Chaplaincy, Appollus had spent years tending to the candles as he recited the catechism of observance; a decade-long mass that armoured his mind and allowed him to walk among the damned of his Chapter, untouched by their madness.

He lost himself in the memory, beginning anew the observance as his torturers continued to violate his flesh.

'He has said nothing, lord. He will not speak.' The Crucio bowed as he entered the chamber, keeping his eyes fixed on the black curvature of his master's

armoured feet.

Abasi Amun, encased in full battle plate, sat on an immense throne wrought from the ore-rich stone of the cavern around him. He was still, unmoving, like a sculpture stolen from the grand halls of a monarch.

‘Nothing?’ Abasi Amun’s voice rumbled around the cavern. The metallic resonance of his helmet’s vox-caster sounding machine-harsh in the enclosed space.

‘He does not scream, lord.’

‘Then you have failed me.’ Amun said, standing.

‘No, no. Perhaps...’ the Crucio stammered, his mouth dry with fear.. ‘Perhaps he knows nothing.’

Amun shot forwards in a heartbeat, flowing like black water across the chamber’s expanse to lift the torturer by his neck. The Crucio gasped, his hands grasping in vain at Amun’s gauntlet.

‘He hides something, a truth.’ With a flick of his wrist, Amun snapped the Crucio’s neck. ‘I sensed it on the battlefield, he keeps something from us,’ Amun continued, talking to the limp corpse in his hand. ‘I will know his secret.’

Amun brought the corpse closer and whispered. ‘I will know.’

Pain. Appollus awoke with a start, expecting the sharp kiss of a blade or the cruel attentions of a neural flail. There was no trace of either. A lone figure stood before him, cloaked in shadow. The jagged light from the oil burners seemed to avoid the figure, flickering around the edges of his form but never quite illuminating him.

Appollus bared his teeth in a growl. He needn’t see his enemy to know him. He could hear the figure’s twin hearts thump like an indomitable engine in his chest. The shadow before him was an Adeptus Astartes. Greatest among traitors, a true pawn of the arch-enemy. A Chaos Space Marine.

Blood rushed to Appollus’s muscles as he tensed against his restraints. The hatred locked into his genetic code willed him to rend the figure apart, to strike

him dead. He bit down a growl. There was something else, something more. It clawed at his mind like a burrowing rodent. He could smell it. Hiding among the pungent, oleaginous balms the Traitor Marine used to maintain his armour was the foul, corrupting stench of the warp.

‘Psyker,’ Appollus snarled.

‘You are observant, for a puppet of a false god.’ The Chaos Space Marine paced forwards, throwing off the shadows the way a man might remove a cowl. ‘Where you look only to the blood of your crippled father for strength, I have embraced the power of the great Changer.’ The Traitor Marine flexed his arms. ‘His limitless majesty feeds my veins.’

The warrior’s power armour was mirror-black, its edges rounded and its surface polished to an impossible sheen. Yet it reflected nothing of the chamber. Its smooth plates were devoid of Chapter insignia and symbols of loyalty. Appollus averted his gaze. The armour was hard to look upon. It was at once dark and formless, yet as solid as the rock walls surrounding them.

Appollus looked again; he had seen its like before. ‘You were there, in battle.’

The Traitor Marine dipped his head in mock deference. ‘I am Abasi Amun. How should I address you, Chaplain?’

Appollus looked up at Amun’s breastplate, surprised to now see his reflection staring back at him, though the tortured figure he looked upon bared little resemblance to how he had last seen himself.

The Crucio had been studious in their work.

The master torturers had administered a potent mix of toxins that had retarded his Larraman’s organ and prevented his body from healing as it otherwise might. Hundreds of deep lacerations and patches of dark bruises covered his body. Several layers of skin had been shaved away from his abdomen, exposing the dermis. His face was gaunt, sapped of its chiselled sternness. Appollus met his own gaze, looked deep into his own eyes. They burned back at him with fierce intensity, reminding him of what he already knew – he would never break.

Appollus focused on the darkness of Amun’s helm. ‘Have you come seeking repentance, traitor?’

Amun laughed, a booming sound, incongruous with his subtle, insubstantial presence.

‘My Crucio have broken many of your kind. But you, you defy me still. So close to death and yet you will part with none of your secrets.’ Amun moved behind Appollus. The pressure seals around his gorget gave a popping hiss as he unclasped his helm.

‘If your body will not give me the truths I seek, then I shall take them from your mind.’

Appollus snarled, his eyes fixed on the wall opposite him. ‘I warn you, traitor. To know my secret, is to forfeit your life.’

Amun grabbed Appollus, his gauntleted fingers a vice around the Chaplain’s throat.

‘You are in no position to make threats, Chaplain.’ Amun relaxed his grip. ‘Save your piety. These are the final moments of your existence.’ Amun removed his gauntlets as he spoke. ‘I will find my answers. I will offer up your soul to my master and leave your body to rot, like the kingdom of your father.’

Amun’s eyes crackled with eldritch lightning that leapt to his outstretched palms. He curled his fingers back. The energy coalesced into a flickering ball of white fire. The temperature dropped below zero as Amun muttered a prayer in an inhuman tongue. Blood ran from Appollus’s orifices as frost began to rime his limbs.

‘I know... no fear.’ Appollus muttered, forcing his tongue to work through the viscous fluid filling his mouth.

The fireball drifted from Amun into Appollus’s torso, breaking into a fulgurant web that coursed over his flesh then vanished beneath it.

Appollus screamed.

Amun ripped into Appollus’s mind. In an agonising instant, the mental barriers that had taken the Chaplain decades to erect were torn asunder. His way unbarred, Amun proceeded with more care. Haste or disregard would leave Appollus a dribbling husk, his mind ruined and his secrets lost forever.

The chains binding Appollus rattled like weapons-fire as his body jerked. His skin rippled like water as half-clotted blood slid in thick clumps from his nostrils.

Amun cut deeper. He peeled away the surface thoughts that floated in Appollus's conscious mind and prized apart the lies of memory. Blood ran from the Chaplain's lips as they gave voice to a near constant stream.

Alone in the inner reaches of Appollus's mind, Amun snarled. The Flesh Tearer was close to death, but the truth still eluded him. Abandoning his earlier care, Amun burned to the Chaplain's essence. He would know, he must.

'There...' Amun's mortal body mouthed the word as his psychic tendrils found the truth he had been searching for.

Even as he touched upon it, Amun knew he had made a mistake. The Chaplain had no knowledge of the wider Imperial forces, he knew nothing of troop dispersments or defence plans. His secret was far more potent, far deadlier. He concealed a rage, wrath in its purest form. A burning halo fire that wrapped around his soul like a serpent. Amun tried to run to withdraw his mind back to the safety of his body. But it was too late. The rage had found a new home, a new vessel to enact its bloody will, and it would not be denied its prize.

Abasi Amun screamed.

The door swung open. Two of the Brotherhood burst in, their lasguns trained on Appollus.

'Lord Amun...'

Abasi roared and ran at the guards, knocking them to the floor. A panicked lasgun-round scored Appollus's thigh. Another clipped his bonds, burning a deep score in the metal links.

The guards screamed in desperate horror as Amun set about them. He was a starved creature, a cornered beast hunched on all fours. He growled, low and feral as he ripped the two cultists apart with his bare hands and sank his teeth into their flesh.

'While I breathe, I am wrath.' Appollus snarled with effort as he snapped the

bonds holding his wrists and swung up to break the chains around his ankles. His shoulder crunched like split kindling as he hit the ground.

Amun rounded on him, saliva and bloodied flesh-chunks dripping from his mouth.

In full battle plate, the sorcerer was more than a match for the naked and battered Appollus. But under the rage's thrall, the Traitor Marine was frenzied, uncoordinated. Appollus had fought among such warriors for longer than most men lived. He could read Amun's strikes before the warrior threw them.

Slipping a right hook, Appollus spun the lengths of loose chain dangling from his wrists around his fists, and punched Amun in the face. Blood fountained from his ruined nose, spraying Appollus's face crimson.

The Chaos Space Marine struck back with a flurry of reaching swipes. Appollus rode their momentum, absorbing their impact on his arms, though a shooting pain told of a fractured humerus. He snarled, stepping inside Amun's guard to deliver an uppercut. The sorcerer's head jerked backwards. Appollus followed it, landing two consecutive blows, before grabbing the back of Amun's head and pulling him into a headbutt.

Amun roared as he staggered backwards, lashing out with his foot at Appollus's legs.

The ceramite boot cracked Appollus's shin and knocked him to the floor. The Chaplain rolled to his feet, limping to keep the weight from his damaged leg and cursing himself for getting too close. He couldn't afford to be careless, he had to keep his own bloodlust in check.

Amun growled as he regained his footing, a stream of saliva washing from his mouth to hiss on the chamber floor. The smell of Appollus's blood was like a knife in his brain. He needed to taste it, to devour the marrow in the Chaplain's bones, to savour every last scrap of his flesh. Roaring, Amun charged.

Pain ran like molten steel in Appollus's veins as he darted forwards, turning around Amun to loop his shackles over the Chaos Space Marine's throat. The movement brought him around and onto Amun's back. He forced the chains tight, his arms burning with the effort as Amun fought to buck him.

Amun dropped to one knee, a gurgling roar dying in his throat as his wind-pipe collapsed. He thrashed at Appollus in a mix of panic and rage as the beast within him struggled against death.

‘Die, traitor.’ The words ground from between Appollus’s bloodied teeth as he wrenched Amun’s head from his shoulders.

Even in death, Amun’s body continued to fight, his adrenaline-soaked limbs twitching in denial as his corpse shivered on the ground.

‘Your place is at our enemy’s throat.’

Luciferus’s words resurfaced in Appollus’s mind as he watched Amun grind against the stone of the floor in the last spasms of his death throes.

‘Your blood be cursed,’ Appollus snarled, bending to retrieve Amun’s blade. He would speak with the vulpine Librarian when next they crossed paths.

Coated in blood, both the traitor’s and his own, Appollus was reminded of the crimson armour he’d donned before his ordination. ‘In blood we are one. Immortal, while one remains to bleed.’ Using his teeth to scrape a finger clean, Appollus guided a bead of saliva around his chest, burning the toothed-blade symbol of his Chapter into his breast.

The iron lift rattled to a stop with a sharp grinding of gears. Appollus threw open the mesh door and stepped into the corridor, leaving the crumpled bodies of two Brotherhood to bleed out behind him. He felt his pulse quicken as he thought of the moment his fingers had closed around the first’s aorta, and remembered the satisfying snap of the second’s neck. They were the third patrol he’d come across since his escape. He hoped they would not be the last.

‘His blood is strength.’ Appollus mouthed the axiom as he stalked, a little unsteady on his feet, along the corridor. The exertion of his escape had forced the bulk of the Crucio’s toxins from his system, adrenaline washing through him like a cleansing fire, and dark scabs of crusted blood covered his torso where his flesh had begun knitting itself back together. But he still ached to his bones, a pungent sweat clothing his body.

Appollus touched a hand to his head, rubbing his skin-starved knuckles into his temples. The psyker’s touch still lingered in that pain. But pain wasn’t the only

thing Amun had left him with. As he fought to stave off the rage, the Chaos Space Marine had been careless. In his panic, he had let his surface thoughts spill out; a tumultuous wave of half-formed images that had bombarded Appollus's untrained mind. The psychic noise had been like harsh bursts of static filtered through a howling gale. Yet Appollus had done more than hold on to his sanity. With iron-willed devotion and unyielding resolve, he had focused on his duty, on his brothers.

Appollus stopped as he reached a bend in the corridor, recognising every glint of ore in the wall ahead. Zakiel, Xaphan, Herchel and Ziel; the four Death Company were alive. If what he'd gleaned from Amun's mind was true then they were languishing in a cell at the end of the corridor. He pressed his back against the wall, feeling his muscles tense as the sharp rock tore into his skin, and listened.

There were two of the Brotherhood patrolling the corridor. Appollus ground his teeth, feeling his anger grow with every thump of their traitorous hearts. He listened to the fall of their booted feet, to the clack of their weapons as they swung loose on straps. His pulse raced as the stink of their unwashed flesh drifted to his nostrils. A red mist mustered behind his eyes. A tremor passed through his hands, forcing his fists into balls of sinew. The urge to kill was great. He looked down at the Chapter symbol on his breast as he waited and let out a slow breath of calm. Rage was not yet his master.

He waited. He counted. Focusing on the guards' footsteps, he waited until the distance was right.

'I am death!' Appollus rounded the corner and threw his knife into the chest of the nearest of them. Running, he caught the body on his shoulder before it fell, and charged towards the second. The man spun round, startled, sweeping up his lasgun and opening fire. Appollus felt his corpse-shield shudder as a half dozen rounds cut into it, and snarled as a round sliced the flesh from his bicep. A second later he barrelled into the guard, tackling him to the ground. Appollus recovered first, pinning the cultist beneath him and thundering a fist into his face. He hit him again and again, deaf to the cracking of bone and ignorant of the visceral lumps of brain matter that dripped from under the cultist's mask. Only when his fist struck rock, did Appollus stop.

The reek of torture greeted Appollus as he entered the cell, hitting him as surely

as any blow. He snarled in disgust, craving the air-filtering properties of his battle helm. The four Death Company hung from the ceiling, chained in the same manner as he had been. He growled, angered by the extent the Crucio had violated their bodies. Ziel was in the worst state, the skin of his left forearm peeled back to reveal bone. Their eyes widened as he approached. They wanted to kill. Even over the stench he could smell their bloodlust. He wouldn't keep them waiting. Raising the lasgun he'd stripped from the Brotherhood guards, he shot through their bonds.

'Brothers.' Appollus spread his arms. 'I feel your thirst.' He thrust an arm out, jabbing his blade towards the door, 'The enemy are many, but they are flesh. We, are immortal lords of battle. We are wrath. We are death.'

The Death Company growled, shaking their limbs loose, their fists opening and closing as they sought to rend.

'Kill until killed. Leave none alive.'

Appollus watched them go, surprised by how much effort it took not to follow them. He ached to join the Death Company in slaughter. The Brotherhood had wrought a terrible injustice upon him, and he vowed he would see it drowned from his memory by a river of their blood. But he had gleaned more than his brothers' location from Amun's mind, and he had another task to attend to first.

The cavern was immense. The largest by far that Appollus had encountered. Banks of luminators hung on racks of chain, suspended from the ore-rich rock of the ceiling. Plasteel panels had been bolted down over the rock of the floor to create something resembling a functioning hangar. Rusted supply crates were heaped in small clusters around the walls. At the far end of the chamber, an antiquated Stormbird drop-ship sat locked to the deck. Its oil-black flanks were polished clean of insignia. The armour on one of its wings had been peeled back, exposing the plasteel frame beneath. Fuel cables and pressure hoses hugged its sides like creeper-vines. Beyond it, a flickering energy shield kept out the infinite void.

Appollus stared through the electro-haze of the shield. The surface of the asteroid stretched as far as he could see, a pitted landscape of undulating rock and trenched gullies. If what he'd learned from Amun was correct, the damaged Stormbird was the only transport off this rock.

Shouldering his stolen lasgun, he moved towards the drop-ship. The weapon was lighter than he was used to, like a child's toy compared to the reassuring weight of his bolter. The lasgun followed his eyes as he scanned for targets. A trio of Brotherhood cultists rounded the Stormbird. Appollus fired, killing them without breaking stride. He ground his teeth. He missed the reassuring bark of his boltgun; the clinical snap of the lasgun was far removed from the visceral booming of mass-reactive rounds.

Klaxons screamed from what sounded like every surface. Strobing red light filled the cavern and cast wicked shadows among the rock. The resounding thud of booted feet warned Appollus of threats to his left and rear. The Brotherhood were spilling into the chamber from every angle.

He snarled as weapons-fire began competing with the klaxons, las-rounds cutting the air around him. Firing in blazing streams on full-auto, Appollus cut down the forerunners. He grinned darkly as the familiar tang of blood filled the air, and continued moving towards the drop-ship. The remaining Brotherhood approached with more caution, ducking back behind what little cover they could find. He counted at least sixty of them as he panned his weapon around, slamming in a spare powercell as the charge counter flashed empty.

To his left, an arm reached up to throw a grenade. He shot it off at the elbow. Its owner cried out an instant before the explosive detonated. Gobbets of flesh and bloodied robe fountained into the air. Fifty-seven. Appollus updated his mental tally as he ducked under the tangle of fuel feeds.

The Brotherhood stopped firing.

Appollus used the moment's respite to assess his options. The Brotherhood had formed a firing perimeter. A few had unsheathed blades and were edging towards him. He smiled. They were waiting for him to break for the Stormbird, but he had never had any intention of boarding the vessel.

Appollus opened the intake valve in the nearest fuel hose and lifted the locking catch. Choking promethium vapour wafted out, forcing a cough from his lungs. Appollus ejected the powercell from his lasgun and struck it hard with the hilt of his knife.

'He is my shield.'

Appollus dropped the sparking energy cell into the fuel pipe and ran. He ran with all the speed his enhanced physiology could muster. He ran like a man racing to the side of imperilled loved ones. He ran in the only direction the Brotherhood hadn't refused him. He ran towards the energy barrier.

Shutting his eyes to protect them from the shield's glare, Appollus threw himself through the barrier and out into the void.

Less than a heartbeat later, the Stormbird detonated, the promethium in its fuel tanks exploding outwards in a halo of fire.

Too late, the Brotherhood realised what Appollus had done.

The nearest of them were incinerated in the initial blast, vaporised where they stood. The others fled as best they could. Flaming shrapnel chased them across the chamber, tearing through flesh and bone with all the care of a maddened butcher.

Appollus watched as the rolling carpet of flame pushed out through the energy shield and vanished, its ire stolen by the airless void. He followed the fire's retreat, diving back through the barrier and rolling to his feet.

Shards of burning metal littered the chamber. The broken and torn corpses of dozens of Brotherhood cultists were strewn about like discarded dolls. Some of the traitors were still screaming, thrashing around as their faceplates seared their skin, the thin metal super-heated by the blast. The smell of cooked blood hung in the air, as tangible as the ground beneath Appollus's feet.

Fire and the flickering, red light conspired to recreate the Hell described in ancient Terran myth. Appollus smiled as he strode through the carnage: that made him the Daevil.

The remaining Brotherhood staggered from cover, their robes singed and ragged. They moved without purpose, staring at the smouldering wreck of the drop-ship, gripped by disbelief at what had transpired. Appollus paced towards them. Smoke drifted in wistful columns from his limbs, his void-frozen skin singed by the heat of the energy shield.

A bleeding Crucio, his face knotted in confusion, glared at Appollus. 'Fool. That was the only ship.' The Crucio indicated a smouldering crater filled with tangled

ceramite and plasteel plating. 'You are trapped here with us.' He spread his arms to indicate the rest of the Brotherhood who had recovered enough to ready their weapons. 'When I'm done with you, all the pain you have suffered thus far in your miserable life will seem like an eternity of ecstasy. On your flesh I shall redefine the art of my sect. I will hear you beg for death, Chaplain.'

'No, heretic.' Appollus stopped ten paces from the nearest cultist. He took a breath and looked down at the knife in his hand. Pulling back his broad shoulders, he straightened to his full height and raised his knife towards the Crucio. 'You are mistaken.'

At the rear of the chamber, a lift rattled and bucked to a stop, its iron grate swinging open.

'It is you who are trapped here with us.'

The Crucio looked over his shoulder.

Behind him, Zakiel, Xaphan, Herchel and Ziel paced into the cavern, bloodied blades grasped white-knuckle tight in their murderous hands.

Appollus smelled the torturer's fear and smiled.

'Fear not, torturer,' Appollus snarled. 'You will not have time to beg.'