



JOSH REYNOLDS

REMORSELESS

A LEGION OF THE DAMNED SHORT STORY





JOSH REYNOLDS

REMORSELESS

A LEGION OF THE DAMNED SHORT STORY



REMORSELESS

Josh Reynolds

The external alarms of Hive Coramonde shrilled in mechanical panic as the defensive grid went down and the sky over the oldest and greatest of the hives on the shrine world of Wayfarer was lit up with fire. The artillery batteries of the Iron Warriors had done their work. Imperial forces scrambled to meet the invaders as vessels rose, carrying terrified hordes of refugees to the dubious safety of the transport vessels above the once verdant world. They would not escape. Rings of iron encircled the planet, even as they encircled the hive, and all would become grist for the daemon-machines of Medregard.

Skaranx blinked slumber from his eyes and stirred on his bedroll as the subcutaneous implant at the base of his neck prodded him into wakefulness. He saw smoke rising overhead, curling into the ash-choked sky and sighed. It was time, at last, to earn his keep.

‘Bring me my helm,’ Skaranx murmured, motioning towards the item in question with one thick, scar-covered hand. The helmet, black and shaped like a skull, sat grinning in a pot of red embers. The latter were stirred occasionally by one of the hooded and cowed mutant slaves who saw to the needs of the men in the crooked siege-trenches sprawling across the muddy wastes before the hive. They were bred to serve, and reacted to his soft voice the way a dog twitched at the huntsman’s call. A second mutant moved forward with awkward alacrity, bobbing and shuffling as he – or she, Skaranx couldn’t be sure – lifted a heavy set of tongs and snatched the helmet out of its heated nest. In the cold air, the skull steamed. The slave shuffled towards him, the tongs extended as far as possible from his – its – body.

The skull helm was a thing of curved plates with thick, spike points lining them like rivets. A loose gorget, on which the eight-pointed star of Chaos was crudely carved, dangled from a gargoyle jaw. It flexed in the air, and seemed to twist and squirm in the clutches of the tongs as if fighting to be free.

Skaranx sat up, heavy body moving smoothly despite the ache that sometimes

infiltrated his joints. He flexed his arms and legs, one after the other, and then rose to his booted feet. His thick frame was clad in grimy fatigues that had been washed in the mud of a thousand worlds and he wore a battered armaplas chestplate, stripped from a fallen enemy, that had seen better years. His arms were bare, and heavy with muscle, scars and the branding sigils of his Master. The equipment belt that hugged his middle was another trophy of war, and his fingers brushed across the defaced Imperial eagle in a ritual gesture that was so ingrained as to be instinctive.

‘Well, look at that, the gland-hound is up and about – must mean the war’s almost over,’ one of the other men in the trench said. Like his fellows, he was clad in the mottled uniform of the 23rd Brigannon Ironsides – dark fatigues and ill-fitting body armour, with a bug-eyed gas mask dangling from his sore-encrusted neck, raw fingers playing idly with a bayonet. Raucous laughter from the others greeted this witticism. Skaranx took no offence. He could hear the panic below the mockery. The war *was* almost over, and that meant that they would have to fight. They all knew, to a man, just who and what they’d be fighting against. Of them all, only Skaranx was looking forward to it.

He ignored the cat-calls and jokes and reached forward with his bare hands to gently pry his helmet from the tongs. The skin of his fingers sizzled and blackened, but he felt nothing. The others in the trench fell silent, their laughter pattering away into nervous silence. Pain had been flayed from him, like all weakness. He lifted the helmet up and set it over his head. He felt the red-hot metal bite into the scar tissue that served as his face and smelled the stink of his flesh cooking. Men edged away from him as that stink filled the immediate area.

He snapped burnt fingers in a gesture of impatience. ‘My philtres, my blade, quickly now,’ he said. He did not roar or bellow. That too was weakness. And Skaranx was not weak. He knew neither fear, nor rage nor frustration. Or so he liked to think. The Benefactor had promised him that he was free of such hooks as the gods used to goad men. That was what made him useful to the masters of the black mills of Medrengard and his Master both. He could not be goaded, frightened or lured. He could only obey, as the slaves hurried to do now.

One unrolled a leather strap, revealing a number of rusty, unpleasant looking syringes, while another hefted Skaranx’s wide-bladed chainsword in two flipper-like paws and waddled forward to present it to him, hilt-first. He took the blade, the muscles in his forearm bulging with the effort of lifting it, and swung it experimentally. It had belonged to an angel, once, before Skaranx had taken it for his own. He had carved the symbols and deplorable words into it himself, to

baptise it into its new life. Like him, it had been made into something better.

‘Kneel,’ he said.

The slave did, hesitantly. It whimpered, rubbing its malformed paws together. Skaranx thumbed the activator switch and the chainsword gave a discordant howl as it awoke. The vibration of the teeth caused his arm to tremble. He paused, admiring the dull, deadly weight of it. Then, with a lazy swipe, he split the kneeling slave from crown to groin. He tore the blade free of the slumping red wreckage and gave a grunt of satisfaction. The discordant howl had smoothed out to a rumbling growl at the taste of blood. It was always grumpy, first thing, and needed to be fed.

‘My philtres,’ he said, extending his free hand. The other slave ensnared his wrist with a scaly pseudopod and Skaranx made a fist. The slave jabbed each syringe in turn into his bulging veins. Skaranx shuddered as the combat drugs cycled through him, mingling with the philtres and chemicals that already inundated his system. His vision sharpened and he could hear the thudding, bird-nervous heartbeats of the men who shared the forward trench with him. He felt strong, all of his aches and pains swept aside by the cold fire that now roared through him.

The Benefactor had cut him to the meat and beyond that, to the marrow, with his humming butcher’s tools. He had emptied him of weakness and filled him with strength, and made him a fit hound for the kennels of Medrengard. Skaranx was a hunter of heroes, an angel-slayer and a retriever. And he was good at it. The Benefactor had made sure of that.

‘My pistol, my vials,’ he said. The remaining slaves scampered forward. One fastened his pistol belt about his waist. The holster was made from a man’s scalp, and the grips of the laspistol were made from the same man’s jawbone and teeth. Another mutant held up a bandolier of brass and armaplas cylinders – progenoid vials – and Skaranx looped it crossways over his chest. Between the vials hung grenades, scavenged from a thousand armouries – frag, Krak and smoke grenades, the tools of his trade.

Drums thudded from deeper within the trench-works. ‘Time to go over the top,’ one of the troopers muttered, clutching his lasgun tightly. Smoke boiled out of the cracked hive, eclipsing the sun, and covering the field of shattered ruins that separated the trenches from the outer shell of the hive in a grim pall. Somewhere in the smoke and thunder, angels walked, waiting to be harvested. Skaranx grabbed the lip of the trench and hauled himself up. Shouts echoed behind him as the company commanders shrieked out orders. Whips hissed, men

groaned and kit rattled as the soldiers of the 23rd Brigannon Ironsides rose up from their trenches and scrambled in his wake, fixing bayonets as they fell into a semi-disciplined dogtrot and advanced into the burning ruins that lay before the hive. The barrage resumed, hammering the space ahead of him, clearing it of opposition so that the gap in the enemy's defences could be exploited by the Ironsides and their masters.

Skaranx caught glimpses of the latter, moving purposefully through distant trench-lines. The light of the hive's destruction caught on gleaming power armour, wrought in the forges of a thousand worlds. They were in no hurry, and he knew from previous campaigns that they would choke the defenders with the corpses of the Ironsides and the other mortal regiments until it came time for the final, surgical blow. That was how the Master and his brethren fought – cold, calculating, their collective will like a thing of iron. A flicker of pride stirred in him. The Benefactor had raised him up at the behest of the Master, he and his brethren. Of a hundred chosen through test and trial, only a bare handful had proven worthy to be made over into something better, something with purpose – something without remorse or fear. They had been made better than mortals, by the will of the gods.

The antique comm-unit in his helmet had cooled enough to begin receiving, and he heard a crackle. A holographic image sprang to life before his eyes.

'My hound,' the Master rumbled. His voice was as deep and as wide as the gulf which separated him from Skaranx. 'Are you ready?' His dark eyes, like two smudges of ash in the cavernous sockets of his pale, battle-scarred face, bored into Skaranx's own, even in hologram form.

In person, he was almost twice the size of Skaranx, and, as ever, clad in gunmetal-grey battleplate that upclose stank of forges, gun-oil and spoiled blood. His greaves and pauldrons were painted with hazard chevrons and cracked, yellowed skulls hung from his kilt of iron hooks. He wore a cloak made from tightly woven scalps, threaded through with armaplas plates, and the gorget that rose from his featureless chest-plate was decorated with the fangs of some great beast, drawn from the warp and smashed down by the massive, ancient powerfist that, even now, occupied one hand. It clenched and relaxed constantly, the clawed fingers flexing with apparent impatience. The other hand rested heavily on the pommel of a broad-bladed gladius sheathed on his hip. Heavy coils of pressure tubing and bundles of reinforced cabling snaked down through the crevices in his armour, which wheezed and grinded with each and every movement. Skaranx could still make it out through the linkup.

‘Yes, Master,’ Skaranx said.

‘Good. Hunt them for me, hound. Bring them to ground and collect my bounty.’ The Master raised his powerclaw and extended a talon as if to poke Skaranx gently between the eyes. The helmet vibrated slightly. ‘My brother captains, Grievoux and Malvount, claim their gland-hounds shall outstrip mine in the culling of the enemy. I would show them otherwise. Do me proud, my pet, and I shall reward you. I shall let bile play with your flesh some more, eh? Win me this contest and I shall make you a masterful hound indeed.’ The bone-deep rumble of the Master’s voice thundered through him and the ancient targeting relays in the helmet fuzzed and blurred to life, fastening on distant targets that even his chemically sharpened vision could not yet discern amidst the crackling flames and billowing smoke.

The helmet had been fashioned by warpsmiths in the employ of the Master, and fed Skaranx the electronic ‘scent’ of his prey. The Master spoke a word and strength flooded through him as endorphin caches spilled their contents into his bloodstream. He swiped the chainsword through the smoke and it roared with an exultation that he could not feel.

‘I shall take your prize, Master,’ he said, as the hologram faded.

‘Up and at ‘em, boys, and after the gland-hound, or the masters will have our skins for pillows,’ someone said behind him. A whip snapped and he heard those who’d shared his stretch of trench hurrying after him. He didn’t bother to slow down. The angels were coming and he needed to be ready to meet them.

The ground shook beneath his feet as the artillery continued to unleash a deadly rain. The Master and his brethren cared little if their own soldiers were caught in it, so long as the enemy were driven from their entrenched positions. The once-graceful curve of the hive’s outer dome, composed of millions of solar intake plates, rose up before him, cascading upwards, filling his vision. The ruins that surrounded the dome had once been factories, moisture plants, reservoirs and strongpoints. The latter had been erected early in the siege but the defenders had been forced to fall back as the trenches of the invaders crept closer day by day, and the artillery batteries had swelled in size. Skaranx had not been in at the first thrust. He was too valuable. But now he was to be the tip of this particular spear, as he had been many times in the past. He would seek out an angel, and strip him of the geneseed that his Master desired, as they attempted to stymie the assault. The tools hanging from his combat harness had been crafted specifically for that task by the Benefactor.

It was not an easy task, even for one such as Skaranx, who had been modified

for that very purpose. It took time and preparation, and the sacrifice of lives. Once, there had been many like him – they had acted in packs, dragging down their prey. But war had made many into some, and some into few. Now there were only a handful of them left. Not enough to risk all in one go, but killing angels was a tricky business and it required a sacrifice. Those like Skaranx who remained were forced to make do with less reliable materials than their pack-mates had done. They joined the lesser dregs, huddling in their trenches and spending as many lives as required to accomplish the goal.

The tramp of boots filled the air as the Ironsides were fed into the maw of Coramonde. Smoke and dust mingled, filling the air like a choking cloud. Heat from the growing flames washed over him, and he occasionally heard the howls of men who'd gone too close to superheated metal or slagged rock and been burnt. The carcasses of shattered structures still stood, despite the barrage that pounded at them, and they sucked in the heat and vomited out flame. He moved beneath shattered arches and across fallen columns. The rulers of Coramonde, as befitting the masters of a shrine world, had not been content with functionality in their facilities. Every building had been a nave, with wide aisles and curved vaulting. Some of the latter remained, even now. The stone walls were soot-stained and heat-blistered, but they still stood. Scenes of holy meaning had been carved on them, and Skaranx considered defacing them, before pushing the desire aside. That was not his purpose.

Glass crunched beneath his boots and the ground was covered with debris as well as the cooked remnants of year-old corpses. The ruins had been a no-man's-land for some time, and the enemy had made them as inhospitable as possible. The latter point was driven home when a number of explosions rocked the area. Booby traps, Skaranx knew. There would be more the closer they got to the outer shell of the hive. He climbed up the slope of a roof that had collapsed long ago, creating a weird hillock within the four crumbling walls of the building it had once topped. He paused at the apex.

The hive stretched from horizon to horizon before him, and he could see it rising up through the gutted windows and above the cracked curves of the walls. He could see the rupture in the dome, where the artillery barrage had cracked it like an egg, and he could hear the *thud-thud-thud* of the enemy's anti-infantry emplacements attempting to drive back the first wave of besiegers – the 35th Brigannon, he thought, or the 12th, or more likely one of the many blood-cults now running loose across Wayfarer who'd been rounded up at the Master's order, to be set loose at opportune times. The frothing lunatics made excellent

shock troops, and would bury the defenders in their own corpses, if nothing else. The war for Wayfarer was done. All that was left to do was claim the prize owed them.

There were two of his remaining brothers somewhere out there, sent by the Master's rivals. There was a bounty on Medrengard for viable geneseed. Commanders who brought in a viable progenoid gland were rewarded handsomely. Even one was cause for celebration amongst the reclusive Apothecaries of the Legion. Whole worlds had been immolated to secure but a handful of geneseed, uncorrupted by the vagaries of the Eye of Terror. Wars were fought in the dark alleys and industrial cul-de-sacs of Medrengard to claim the merest opportunity to create more Space Marines. It was a prize like no other, and more valuable than the lives of a thousand men.

Said men murmured nervously, somewhere behind him. The Ironsides had been tested in the crucible of battle many times, both against the Imperium and against the rivals of their masters. They had held their ground against howling, armoured Imperial fanatics and stoic, bulge-bellied fly-worshippers alike. But the defenders of Coramonde had tested them to the breaking point. Skaranx could feel it in the air. The sour smell of fear clung to them even now, with victory so close.

There was something different about Coramonde. Something different to all of the other sieges and sackings they'd participated in. That was what they said when they thought no one was listening. They had seen burning angels stalking the trench-line, moving like phantoms out in the smoke and dust. Some swore that it was a sign of the gods' displeasure, while others said that the enemy had already slipped out, and were waiting to launch a counterassault while the attentions of the masters were on the hive city. Still others, more quietly than the rest, whispered that it was the sins of the masters come back to haunt them. Invariably, they had been looking at Skaranx when they murmured the latter, crouched in the wet trenches. He knew what they meant, though he ignored them. As long as they did as they were told, what did he care whether they were afraid or not?

He looked up, and saw stone cherubs crouched in the angles where columns met arches. They gazed down at him in stony disapproval. He felt no remorse, no shame at his undertaking. This world was no holier than any other, the claims of its defenders to the contrary. The world and the Imperium it belonged to were things long past their allotted span, fit only to be ground under and gutted. Their gods had no power, compared to his. The Master and the Benefactor were the

only fit gods for men, for they rewarded and punished as they saw fit.

The crack of lasguns pierced the gloom. The men behind him stopped and sank down in a firing line. Skaranx paused, and looked at them over one brawny shoulder. Then he dropped off the fallen section of roof and scrambled quickly out of the way. No sense getting caught in the line of fire. The sound of las-fire rippled through the air. Men screamed.

In the dust and smoke, something yellow flashed. Skaranx froze and sank down, suddenly alert. The targeting relay in his helmet beeped dolorously as sigils flashed across the internal screens. His prey had taken the bait.

Stone paving crunched beneath a swift, heavy tread. The firing line tensed as the commander of the squad bellowed instructions and imprecations with equal volume. Silence fell a moment later. Skaranx sank down into a lizard-like crouch, his belly level with the ground. The chainsword vibrated in his hand, its growl muted. He could see the shape of the angel, as it stood hidden in the roiling smoke that still spewed from the cracked dome of the hive.

Then, the angel of death spoke and men died. The bolter in the power-armoured giant's hands roared out a greeting to the invaders. Men were sent sprawling, in pieces. Skulls disintegrated, limbs were shorn clean and torsos vanished in a red mist as the Space Marine began to stride forward unhurriedly, firing as he came. Every shot was like a roll of thunder in the confined space of the ruin. Skaranx watched the carnage, sizing up the newcomer. His armour was yellow, and on his shoulder plate was an insignia shaped like a black fist on a white field. Skaranx let loose a hiss of satisfaction. It was an Imperial Fist. The Iron Warriors favoured their geneseed, though as to why, Skaranx had never learned.

The giant's armour was blackened in places, and stained with soot. A bandolier of grenades and extra ammunition clips hung across his chest, and he had a bolt pistol holstered on one hip. On his opposite hip hung a square, ironwood case, carved to resemble a reliquary. He wore a helmet with a targeter mounted on the side, and purity seals and parchments hung from the flat surfaces of his armour. He was kitted out for war, and fully capable of waging it alone for some time.

Skaranx scrambled further into the ruin, circling the confrontation with practiced ease, the chemical cocktail in his blood heightening his sense of spatial awareness even as it dulled the jitteriness caused by the combat drugs. As he moved, he caught glances of further targets moving through the ruins around him. It was a single squad then – ten at most, likely less – moving forward to slow the advance. Which they would do, until the Master or his brethren arrived,

or some bright young Brigannion officer called in the heavy armour or an artillery strike. But that wouldn't do, not for Skaranx's purposes. He didn't want the angel mangled until he got what he was after.

It was always a race, to see which death felled the prey first – Skaranx and his fellow hounds or the guns of the army. After this initial contest, he would be content to scavenge from the dead, but with the living ones, you were sure of getting a viable gland. The problem was that the living ones fought. Skaranx, at his best and doped to the eyeballs with combat drugs, couldn't equal a single Space Marine. Not alone, at any rate, but with the deaths of his comrades, he'd had to become inventive.

The Imperial Fist moved forward, ignoring the las-bolts that struck his armour and glanced away until he reached a defensible section of rubble and dropped below it. As Skaranx slithered through the thicket of broken steel beams and tumbled stone columns, he could hear the Space Marine relaying his position to his fellows. When he'd done so, he leaned around the rubble and fired off a burst from his boltgun, plucking the leg out from under an unlucky trooper and sending the man's body pinwheeling through the air.

The squad was falling back now, hunting cover. Half of them were already down, dead or good enough as either. Their comms-operator was shrieking for help over the vox. The Imperial Fist continued to fire. Skaranx, perched above him on the slope of the sunken roof, saw what he was up to immediately. The Space Marine had a frag grenade palmed and ready to be thrown. His shots were herding the squad towards a crater in the floor. They thought it was cover. In reality, it would simply make it easier to kill them all with one grenade. Skaranx grunted. If that trick were repeated enough times, the advance would almost certainly falter. It wouldn't stop it, but he knew that the yellow-armoured giants weren't trying to stop the advance. They were merely trying to bog it down while the hive's defenders retreated to stable defensive positions or fled altogether.

Skaranx had seen similar stratagems played out on a hundred battlefields. It was the same tune, over and over again, and he had grown used to it. When he had been a man, he would have found the idea of confronting the warrior below him a frightening prospect. Larger than two men, clad in battleplate as thick as any tank hull, firing with a precision that was impossible to match, the giant truly was an angel of death. He was a thing to be feared and fled from. But the Benefactor had stripped fear from Skaranx and made him into a harvester of angels. He had hunted them across the segmentum at his Master's command. He

had killed angels who wore red and angels who wore blue.

And he would kill this one.

With a bit of help from what was left of his trench-mates, of course. That was what they were there for, after all. Skaranx reached up and plucked a grenade from his combat harness. It likely wouldn't do much more than startle his prey but that was all he needed. He primed the grenade and readied it. Before he could toss it, however, something caught his eye. A flicker of what might have been a tongue of flame, curling through the smoke close by. He stared at it, unable to look away, and felt something stir within him. The air felt thick with heat and something he could not define or describe.

The lenses of his helmet whirred and focused, trying to isolate and enhance. The targeting relay was having fits. Was it another target – or something else? He caught sight of its outline, a heavy shape, armoured, and then – nothing. He blinked. There was nothing. Another Space Marine perhaps – coming to his fellow's aid? Skaranx blinked.

Suddenly, it was there again, impossibly close, bone and flame and black armour and eyes like twin suns burning into his own. He jerked back, slashing at the phantom with his chainsword, the growling blade biting nothing but smoke and air. Rubble shifted beneath his feet and the grenade slipped from his hand.

It bounced down towards the Space Marine. The Imperial Fist's enhanced senses outstripped his own and the giant whirled at the first bounce, firing up at Skaranx who flung himself backwards – all thought of the phantom banished. The grenade exploded, but the Space Marine was already moving. Skaranx slid down the incline as the Imperial Fist stepped out of cover, hurled his own grenade towards the Brigannion squad, and began to run steadily towards the other side of the nave. A spatter of las-fire brushed across the yellow-daubed power armour as a second squad entered the ruin and tried to assemble into a gunline. The Space Marine ignored it and raced towards them. What was left of the first batch of Brigannions was trying to regroup but they'd be no help to their comrades, from what Skaranx could see.

The Imperial Fist smashed into the gunline like an out-of-control grav-loader, sending men flying. A yellow gauntlet backhanded a soldier so hard that the head tore free of the body and bounced across the floor, leaving crimson puddles to mark its route. At close range the bolter wreaked even more terrible havoc, and men died in twos and threes. The Space Marine drew a combat knife and bisected the skull of the squad leader as the latter's crackling power maul bounced off his shoulder plate. Skaranx watched for a moment, waiting, judging

the distance, and then made his move.

He'd hoped to flush the Space Marine out of cover and bog him down with the Brigannions. It was a tactic that had worked several times before, but if it hadn't been accomplished exactly the way he'd hoped; well, Skaranx had never been one to look askance at a gift from on high. He came in low. The Space Marine was fully immersed in his wet work. Skaranx took a breath and felt the drugs cycle through him. Then, with no sound at all save the shriek of the chainsword, he lunged for his prey.

Despite the Benefactor's gifts, Skaranx was not a match for the Imperial Fist and he knew it. He was neither as strong nor as fast, and his reflexes were at best on par with those of the Space Marine, even bolstered as they were by the drugs. Nonetheless, he had killed them before, albeit with much effort and sacrifice of materials. In this case, the materials in question were the Brigannions, though he'd happily use any tool provided. Angels were mortal and anything that could be killed was not to be feared. Skaranx had studied his prey over the course of long campaigns and he had the scars to prove that he'd earned his experience the old fashioned way.

It was the shell that was the main problem. It was nearly impossible to crack unless you got close and even then you had to have the right tools. A meltagun or plasma gun would have done the job, but there was also a chance that what he sought would be ruined in the use of those. He was left with old fashioned brute force. Applied properly, it was as effective as any weapon.

He waited until the Imperial Fist extended his arm and then launched his blow. The chainsword smashed down on the crook of the Space Marine's elbow, biting through black carapace and pressure hoses. The giant spun, bolter booming. Skaranx ducked aside, spinning an unlucky Brigannion in front of him to take the shot. As he whirled about, he cut a gouge in the Space Marine's backpack. It vented steam. The backpack was the suit's power-source, and Skaranx knew that harming it was as good as harming its wearer.

Blood pumped from the wound he'd made, staining the yellow gauntlet. The Space Marine didn't seem unduly troubled, but Skaranx hadn't expected him to be. He scuttled through the crowd of desperately fighting soldiers, keeping out of the Space Marine's line of sight. It was an old trick, but a good one: flood the field with targets and strike while the prey was distracted. It was a tactic that the Master had used to good effect in his sieges, and Skaranx was happy to utilize it on a smaller scale.

An opening presented itself. The Imperial Fist jerked a screaming trooper from

his feet and crushed his throat. Skaranx darted in. His chemically strengthened muscles propelled him quicker than the human eye could follow. His chainsword bit into the armoured power cables that clustered thickly across the Space Marine's belly and vanished up into his chest plate. Sparks and steam spewed, and the Space Marine staggered in surprise. He swept the bolter around firing, tracking Skaranx as he sprinted away. Skaranx used the panicked soldiers as cover, weaving through them, forcing his prey to expend ammunition.

It was a game of increments. That was what the Master said. You had to peel the defences away one at a time to reach the prize within. A Space Marine was an army in a can. Every blow weakened that army and the can as well. You just had to make sure that you hit them often and hard enough.

Skaranx's perceptions were stretched tight. Everything was moving in slow motion as he slipped fully into the flow of battle. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of an armoured shape, wreathed in flame. He blinked and it was closer. With every blink of his eye, every thud of his augmented heart it drew closer, without seeming to move. It was a twist of smoke, a curl of flame, a gleam of bone, drawing ever closer until it vanished between one blink and the next. The targeting relay fuzzed and sparked and he shook his head, trying to clear the static that had infected his vision. The Imperial Fist rose up, throwing off his attackers. Bodies tumbled past him like raindrops. Skaranx threaded through the falling bodies, taking his chainsword in both hands and letting the screaming blade extend behind him. The Space Marine turned, the bolter coming up.

Skaranx sliced the bolter in half, rotated on his heel, and brought the chainsword around to crash against the side of the Space Marine's helmet with every ounce of muscle he could muster. The Imperial Fist stumbled, but recovered quickly. A yellow fist struck out like a piston, nearly taking Skaranx's head off. He backed away, blade extended. The Imperial Fist pursued, battering a soldier out of his path with the remains of his bolter. He drew his bolt pistol and fired, splitting rockcrete at Skaranx's feet. Skaranx skidded backwards.

Las-bolts struck the Space Marine, drawing his attention. He twisted around and blazed away at the Brigannions who'd taken cover in the crater. Men lunged at the giant with bayonets and gun butts. None of it was effective. Skaranx primed a krak grenade and rolled it towards the knot of struggling figures. The explosion consumed the group. Bodies toppled, flesh smoking and voices silenced.

Skaranx stalked forward, through the cloud of dust thrown up by the

explosion. Bulky shapes seemed to glide through the dust towards him, but when he turned, they dissipated. His flesh tingled, not from the heat, but something else. He blinked, trying to focus. It was as if something were trying to distract him. A black hand reached for him out of the dust and for a moment his heart froze mid-beat. It stretched towards him, trailing fire and greasy smoke and he could see the white bones that gilded the fingers and knuckles. He heard a voice, almost like that of the Master, crawling up towards him through the layers of static that snarled in his ears – no, not a voice, many voices, low and dolorous, like the intonation of some dark apostle, praying to a hated god. The words seeped through him, and pain followed them. They were asking him something – no, demanding it. But he couldn't make it out, and he didn't want to. He had his purpose. He had no time for voices.

He stumbled on a chunk of rockcrete, and was startled back to the matter at hand. The voices vanished as if they'd never been, leaving behind only static. He looked around. The explosion had cracked and shattered the ground. The Space Marine staggered in the middle of a newborn crater. He had been shielded from the worst of the blast by his opponents, but the grenade had done its work well enough. The yellow armour was covered in cracks and fissures but still functioned. The Imperial Fist had dropped his pistol in the explosion, leaving him defenceless save for his knife, which was still buried in the twitching body of one of the Brigannions.

Skaranx knew from experience that an explosion like that at close range jostled the sensory feeds in his prey's armour, though only for a few moments. Blind, deaf and dumb, the Space Marine had two choices – tough it out or to remove his helmet. Skaranx hesitated, waiting to see which it would be. When the Space Marine tore his knife free of the dead man and his armoured fingers began to fumble at the edges of his helmet, Skaranx sprang forward. He would only have a few moments to act.

The helmet came off with a hiss of separated hoses and slipped vacuum seals. The Space Marine dropped it, but not quickly enough. Skaranx's chainsword roared down and bit into the exposed face of the Imperial Fist. Blood and weather-beaten flesh were gouged free of bone and the Space Marine bellowed in shock and pain. It was the first sound he'd uttered, and Skaranx intended it to be his last. The Space Marine swayed, off balance, one hand seeking his wounded face, the other slashing out with the knife, trying to drive his attacker back.

Skaranx slipped back into the fuming smoke and circled his prey. He ignored

the chirp of his targeting relay. Whatever it was trying to warn him would have to wait. He was too close now. His blow had nearly chopped through his opponent's skull and had severed the Imperial Fist's jugular. Blood pumped freely from between fingers that clutched at the wounded area. But even grievously injured, a Space Marine was dangerous. Drug-fuelled synapses fired, showing him angles and probabilities. His mind settled on the quickest. He stabbed his chainsword down and snatched his laspistol from its holster. He snapped off a shot from the hip, catching the Space Marine as he tottered forward. The las-bolt tore through the Imperial Fist's eye with improbable accuracy and turned the brain behind to mush. The giant reeled forward, one step after the next, smoke issuing from his eye socket and mouth. Skaranx hesitated, wondering if he'd misjudged. Sometimes they didn't die right away. Sometimes they didn't die at all, and kept coming despite having a brain burnt to gruel.

Then, with a something very much like a sigh, the angel toppled backwards. The rockcrete trembled as if in sympathy as his body smashed down, arms flung out. Skaranx quickly holstered his weapon, snagged his blade and trotted towards his kill. He looked down at the dead warrior, and dropped gracelessly to his haunches. He looked into his prey's remaining eye, and waved a hand over it as the light of life faded from it. He wondered what they saw just before death. *Are you afraid*, he wondered. *Are you afraid of me?*

He hoped they were.

He hated them. He hated them for what they were, and for what he could never be. He was as good as them, fearless and strong, but he was not an angel. He was a dog. And he hated them even as he loved the Master, for making him strong.

His vox-feed writhed suddenly, piercing his skull with a high-pitched whine. Slithering around the solid nail of agony was a babble of confusing voices, muted as if by distance, their words lost in a jumble of solid noise. He struck the side of his head with his palm, trying to switch frequencies. His comm-unit whirred and clicked. Every vox-feed was the same. Voices that rumbled like distant thunder, saying nothing understandable, but in a tone of – what? Promise? Or perhaps it was a warning. He shook his head, discarding the thought. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered, save that which the Master commanded.

Without further pause, he severed the Space Marine's head, just to be sure, and kicked it aside. Then, with a deep breath, he set to work. The chainsword yowled as he used it to cut away the chest plate and torso armour, in order to expose the body inside. He tossed the ragged sections of ceramite away and set the weapon

aside. He drew his flensing tools and set to work, extracting nodes and peeling flesh from the hard carapace beneath. A monofilament scalpel was next, to slit the carapace and expose the muscle tissue.

As he worked, he heard the Brigannions regrouping. There wasn't much left of either squad. A few ragged remnants: those too cowardly, too injured or too frightened to fight the enemy. Their squad leaders had been the first to die, though whether at the hands of the Space Marine or at the whim of an ambitious subordinate, Skaranx couldn't say. The Master encouraged such upwardly mobile thinking in the mortals, if only for the amusement it provided to him and his brethren.

All told, the encounter had only taken a few minutes at most. He could hear the rhythmic bark of other bolters nearby and the pitiful screech of lasguns. He paused and let his gaze sweep across the ruin. Something prickled at his senses. He felt as if he was being watched, and he looked around. Through the cracks in the walls, he saw black smudges of shape move and writhe, ballooning up and fading to bare sticks like the wavering of a mirage. He smelt burning meat, stronger than it should have been, as if he had just put on his helmet, fresh from its fiery nest. More shapes passed through the smoke around him, fading between footsteps.

Abruptly, eyes like red-hot coals set into a skull-faced helm bored into his and he snatched at his laspistol, bringing it up. The eyes vanished in a swirl of smoke and he swung his pistol around, trying to track the phantom. His throat felt dry and his veins cold. The initial flush of the drugs was wearing off. He blinked, trying to clear his vision. It happened sometimes... Ghosts got caught in the targeting array, leaving him hunting things that had already died. He holstered the pistol, saw the soldiers warily examining him and ignored them. They had served their purpose, and the survivors would serve again until the battle was won and the bounty claimed.

He set aside the scalpel and selected a wedge-knife to crack the reinforced ribcage and expose the internal organs. Siege guns roared, and he heard something explode nearby. A tank, perhaps – were the enemy employing tanks? He paused again, listening. It paid to be wary, even at this stage.

'There are more of them out there,' one of the troopers said. He was crouched near a shattered window, his lasgun held close. Skaranx recognized his voice – the wit from earlier, in the trench. He thought the man's name was Otto, though he couldn't be sure. They all looked alike, with their worm-pale faces and fear-bright eyes. 'I can see them moving around in the smoke.'

‘Yes, several,’ Skaranx said. He hissed in satisfaction as the object of his hunt was revealed and opened one of his cylinders. Men backed away from the sight as he extracted the dead Space Marine’s progenoid gland and slid it into the cylinder. They were superstitious about such things, even now after all they had seen and done in the service of the masters of Medrengard. To gut an angel of death was a sin in the eyes of the False Emperor. To them his wrath was no less real, though somewhat less potent, than that of the gods they served. He sealed the cylinder and wiped his bloody hands on his fatigues.

‘More than several,’ Otto said. ‘They’re preparing to march out of the city.’

‘Good. More yellow shells for me to crack,’ Skaranx said, staring at his prize. It was beautiful, in its bloody way. The lump of meat and gristle held the secret of the angels within it. It could make a man over into an angel. He wondered what it would be like to be an angel, clad in baroque armour and wading through oceans of blood and eternities of slaughter.

‘These don’t have yellow armour,’ Otto said.

Something in his voice caught Skaranx’s attention. There was a raw note there that coursed through the others, jumping from one man to the next like chain lightning. They began to mutter amongst themselves or stumble towards the windows. Skaranx made a quick calculation – there were fifteen men left, from the two squads, barely enough to slow down another Imperial Fist, let alone more than one. He cocked his head, listening. He could hear the crackle of flames and the hiss of dust falling from the dome as the siege guns pounded at it. He could hear the crash of shattering solar panels and the rumble of collapsing rockcrete. He could hear the roar of artillery and the screams of dying men. But he heard no tell-tale tread of power armoured boots, no bark of bolters. He thought of the phantom shapes he’d seen on the targeting relay and the skull-faced thing that had lunged at him.

Curious, he scrambled up the slope of the collapsed roof, chainsword in hand. It murmured in warning as he swept it through the smoke. The fog of war wasn’t dissipating anytime soon. His targeting relays focused in on nothing. The Space Marines he’d spotted earlier had vanished.

He tried to focus the sensors in his helmet, to pierce the ambient atmospheric effects of the battlefield. There was something out there – he could feel it, like a fingertip brushing across an exposed nerve ending. He saw nothing, save smoke and fire. Even the sound of weapons had faded, leaving only the crackle of flame and the grinding of collapsing structures. The vox-feed pulsed softly, with strange murmurings, like hundreds of quiet conversations taking place just out of

earshot.

For a moment, the cloud of ash and dust cleared and he could see movement, the heaving columns of the Brigannion infantry moving forward in the wake of siege tanks and spider-legged daemon-engines. The advance continued, unimpeded. The dome of the hive rocked as artillery smashed down on it. He saw no sign of resistance, no indication of a counterattack coming through the gap in the hive's dome, only fire and smoke. But he could hear nothing. It was as if a bubble had settled over the ruin, blotting out all noise from outside.

Down below him, he heard a clatter. He looked and saw one of the Brigannions wrestling open the reliquary that had hung from the dead Space Marine's hip while his companions were occupied. The man attacked the ancient, lacquered wood with his bayonet, gouging the face plate loose. The conversations on the vox fell silent. Everything went quiet, as if the cherubs that crouched at the shadowed corners of what was left of the archways were holding their breath.

Skaranx's perceptions shifted and warped. He could see the smoke that lay like a shroud over the ruin thickening and solidifying around the trooper as he reached into the reliquary and pried loose the object within. It was a skeletal hand, clenched in a fist, the yellowing bones scrimshawed with curt, intricate characters whose meaning Skaranx could not discern. The trooper held it up for a moment, eyeing it. Then, satisfied that it held no intrinsic worth, he tossed it aside.

It never struck the ground.

A hand, garbed in night-black armour, fell atop the looter's head. The fingers, painted to resemble fleshless digits, closed almost gently on the unfortunate trooper's pate. Bone cracked and burst and the man screamed in agony. The others whirled or shot to their feet, comically slow to Skaranx's altered perceptions. More figures, clad in black plate and surrounded by flickering halos of ghost-light, glided soundlessly from the smoke. Or perhaps they were the smoke, given form and flesh. A chainsword revved soundlessly and swept down to split a screaming soldier in two, slopping gore across his fellows.

Otto, still at the window, made to fire his lasgun when hands wreathed in smoke and flame grabbed him from behind, from within the very brick of the wall, and broke him like a child's toy. Black shapes oozed through the walls, hefting bone-gripped bolters that roared like dragons as they spat flame and death.

Shapes stalked through the smoke. They were Space Marines, but not any kind

Skaranx recognized. They flickered and faded, bleeding in and out of sight like phantom spots on his retinas. Flames licked the oily air about them, and their char-black power armour was covered in gleaming bone, bleached painfully white. They seemed to have no more substance than shadows in one moment, and then more solid than anything around them in the next. He could not even tell how many of them there were. The bolters spoke death, spitting burning bolt-rounds into the Brigannions, tearing the hapless soldiery apart with hellish ease.

Skaranx stood, rooted to the spot. He felt a flicker of something in his gut, a quaver of sensation that he had not felt since he had first gone under the Benefactor's knives. He could only watch as men died, quickly save for the one who'd opened the reliquary. He clawed at his punctured skull and wailed like a broken-backed cat as he was held aloft by his attacker. Flames curled from the fingers that pierced his skull, dripping across his blood and grime-streaked flesh, and enveloped him with a greedy whoosh. He kicked and screamed for long moments, thrashing in obvious agony, his cries bouncing from broken arch to grinning cherub before spiralling up into the air. Then, he made no more sounds and hung limp. His killer dropped him.

It was over in an eye-blink. Fifteen men dead in as many moments, their bodies lying spoilt and burnt on the ground, spread out in a circle around the body of the Space Marine. The skeletal fist had been placed back in its reliquary, which sat beside the corpse of its owner. Skaranx realized that he was clutching the cylinder with the progenoid gland. He looked around. Eyes glowed hot in the swirling gloom. They were all around him, waiting, but for what he couldn't say. They filled the ruin, from one end of the nave to the next, a congregation of bone and fire, and all eyes were on him.

Something rattled. Two helmets, which superficially resembled his own, were tossed up to him. Both were ruined and dripping. He kicked them aside. He heard the tell-tale clatter of progenoid vials. A hand was raised, and two bandoliers identical to his dangled from it, the cylinders catching the firelight as they shifted slightly in the breeze. Some of the cylinders were occupied with two or three progenoid glands, glistening wetly. He felt a flare of annoyance that the others had beaten him by such a wide margin. The bandoliers fell, and the sound they made when they struck the ground put Skaranx in mind of the Imperial Fist's body toppling over. A hand pierced the smoke, one finger extended. Skaranx touched his prize to reassure himself that it was still there. Whoever they were, he knew what they wanted.

‘No,’ he said.

A second later, the smoke roiled and a massive, black shape charged up the incline towards him, the chainsword purring quietly in one hand, the other hand reaching out as if to grab him. Flames flickered on the giant’s armour and bones rattled as he moved, and the sound of it shook Skaranx from his paralysis. Skaranx brought his own blade up and blocked the blow. He’d traded blows with his prey before. This one was stronger than any he’d faced. His arm ached all the way to the shoulder at the first touch of their blades.

They whirled around each other, blades drawing sparks from the air. His veins swelled as more and more adrenaline caches released their payload into his system, swelling his muscles and drowning his aches and pains in a rush of strength. He forced his opponent back, hammering at him. He’d gone toe-to-toe with Space Marines more than once when it was necessary. It was never pleasant, but it could be done when it had to be done. He was conscious of the others, how many he still didn’t know, watching the duel from below. Well, they could watch all they liked. They could watch him kill their companion. And then he would take the geneseed lying below as his prize.

Energized by the thought, he stepped back as his opponent’s chainsword slashed towards his face. He made a swift lunge, into the Space Marine’s reach, and ripped the grinding teeth of his own blade across the warrior’s belly. As the giant staggered back, Skaranx ripped his bandolier from his chest, popped the full cylinder from it, and slung it around his enemy’s head. Then he leapt back, dropped his chainsword and drew his laspistol. He fired. The las-bolt struck one of the frag grenades, causing it to explode. The remaining grenades followed suit, and the Space Marine was enveloped in multiple explosions. Cradling his bounty to his chest, Skaranx snatched up his chainsword, slid down the incline and made to scoop up the two other bandoliers.

An armoured boot slammed down, nearly taking his fingers off. He scrambled aside, falling over the bodies of the dead Brigannions in his haste to get out of range. Red eyes gazed at him, and he felt as if some silent judgement were being made. The voices on the vox fell silent for a moment. Then, as one, the strange Space Marines looked up, towards the incline, where their champion had been consumed by Skaranx’s ploy.

Skaranx’s heart stuttered in his chest. The Space Marine wasn’t dead. He wasn’t even hurt. He stalked down the incline, stripping the charred remnants of Skaranx’s bandolier from about him. His armour was seemingly untouched, the flames that crawled across his battleplate undimmed, his eyes blazing more

brightly than they had before.

It was impossible. The sable armour should have been cracked open as easily as an eggshell by the explosion. But Skaranx couldn't deny the evidence of his own eyes. The Space Marine was untouched. Even the spot where he'd hacked at him with his chainsword was unmarked, though he'd felt the blade bite metal.

As the giant descended, his eyes seemed to grow brighter and brighter, until Skaranx could not meet them. The comm-unit hissed and crackled, and a voice spoke. He could not make out the words, but the message was clear. The others looked at him as one, and the cacophony bristled in his ears, a riot of voices, tight with the agony of ages, clawing at his ears.

Are you afraid, they hissed. *Are you afraid of me?*

And Skaranx realized that he was. He felt the gelid weight of fear settle in his stomach, anchoring his feet to the ground, and he could taste the bitter ashes of his pride and eagerness. He had been a killer of angels and the angels had at last come to make him pay for his crimes. He clutched the progenoid cylinder more tightly. Otto and the others had been right to mutter and whisper. Skaranx swiped at the smoke as it stretched towards him, carrying the heavy armoured shapes closer. They moved without sound, closing in on him, and he could feel the heat of their flames.

All he could think of was escape. There had to be a way. He looked up, his eyes fastening on the columns. If he could get up, over and out, he might stand a chance. He needed room. He slashed out at them as they closed in around him. If he could reach the Master, he would find protection. The Master would not let his hound die the way the others had. He hacked at them, screaming imprecations.

Then, when he saw an opening, he seized it. He sprinted towards a window and hurled himself through. He lost his chainsword in the process, but did not stop for it. He could hear it wailing for him as he ran, like a child left behind by its parent.

Outside the walls of the ruin, noise buffeted his unprepared ears from all sides. The siege of Coramonde was not going well. The ground shook, and the whine of rockets and the grotesque roar of dying daemon-engines filled the air. Men screamed and gods bellowed in agony. He gaped, stunned by the sight that greeted him.

Across the battlefield, the burning, flowing army swept over the dead, trampling their corpses into something unrecognizable. Before Skaranx's eyes, a hundred men died, and then two hundred – three, four – whole regiments swept

aside by a burning scythe-edge of black armoured ghosts that marched slowly, purposefully out of the broken hive. A hellbrute slashed out at phantasmal attackers and swung massive claws, but was dragged under by sable-clad enemies. A maulerfiend cried out in distress as it was pierced by burning weapons that stripped its ruinous protections from it as if they were nothing.

He looked down at the single progenoid gland in its cracked cylinder cradled against his chest and clutched it more tightly. He began to run, sprinting through the explosions that chewed the battlefield around him. It was his only chance. He had to find the Master. And behind him, all around him, the black armoured shapes of the bone-encrusted Space Marines pursued him silently.

They did not run, but they kept pace regardless, winnowing through solid objects like tendrils of smoke. They moved like a flock of ravens, like a pack of loping wolves, charging bulls and swooping angels, never still, always out of the corner of his eye or above him or behind him, keeping pace like his own shadow given flesh. They reached for him from metres away, and he could feel the scalding touch of their fingers regardless of how fast he ran. And through it all, they whispered to him through the vox, their voices like sand pouring through metal, or the hissing of embers.

If they were part of the army that even now swept through the besiegers, they seemed to have a different purpose. They stayed close to him, showing no interest in the fleeing Brigannions or the dying daemon-engines that vomited smoke and collapsed nearby. He knew why. They wanted what he had. It was just as much a prize for them as it was for him. A small voice inside him whispered that if he only gave it to them, they would stop chasing him. They would leave him be. They would let him lose himself in the rout. But he couldn't. He wouldn't.

The siege of Coramonde had been broken. The Master would be falling back to the bastions erected during the first week of the siege, where the Legion's vessels awaited, ready to take them back up to their ships in orbit. Skaranx felt the drugs in his system fading as he pushed himself harder and faster. His muscles tore and his bones creaked as he ran faster than he'd ever run before, hurtling tank traps and sections of strangle-wire. And through it all, he cradled his prize. Hatred and fear flooded him in equal measure, lending him strength as the effects of the drugs weakened and vanished entirely.

He could make out the blocky shape of the bastion, far ahead of him. A moment later, it was gone. Fire plumed up into the sky, and chunks of smouldering rockcrete struck him. He dove into a trench and covered his prize

with his body. A ship rose from the flames, but didn't get far before it lost altitude and crashed somewhere close by.

Shapes surrounded him, and rose up behind and beyond him. He tore his laspistol from its holster and fired again and again at them. He wondered, idly, if this was how the Brigannions had felt as he fed them to his prey, one squad at a time. His laspistol beeped and hummed, its power-pack running low. He dropped it.

There was nothing for it. There was no escape. But he didn't want to burn. He didn't deserve to burn. He had been a good hound. He had only done as the Master commanded. But they had run him to ground, even as he had run his own prey. Fear rippled through him. The Benefactor had lied. The Master had lied. He saw their lies in the flat, searing gazes of his pursuers. They were not gods and he was not better, not superior. He was just a man, and he was frightened.

'Is this what you want then?' he screamed, raising the cylinder. If he could give it to them, they would let him go. That was what the voices had been trying to tell him. All he had to do was show penance. 'Take it, just take it!'

The shapes stopped. The armoured giants stared at him, their silence enveloping the trench. He swallowed bile. His eyes flickered to the cylinder.

It was broken.

The gland inside was charred and pierced by broken metal. It was ruined. Something like a sigh swept through his pursuers. There was an ache in that sound. Like an old wound, newly reopened. One of them cradled the reliquary he'd seen on the Imperial Fist. The sable-armoured figure held it tenderly, as if it meant something to him to them.

The vox crackled. He could hear the Master snarling orders, but the words were lost in the painful static that consumed communication as swiftly as the newcomers' fire consumed their enemies. Other voices, louder than that of the Master, roared in his ear, bellowing wordlessly. It was the raw, throbbing roar of a fire, the growing pulse of a frigate's engines nearing overload, or the crackle of a comet impacting upon a defence shield. It was the voice of doom and damnation, the bellow of the warp-leviathan before it swallowed you whole. It was the scream of ten thousand gutted Space Marines and of their corpse-emperor as well. It was the howl of the unborn and the never dying, of fates broken and destinies never to come to fruition. Skaranx knelt and clawed at his head, trying to pry his helm off as the sound smashed through him and his brain pulsed in white-hot agony.

As the howl washed through him and over him and the black shapes of his

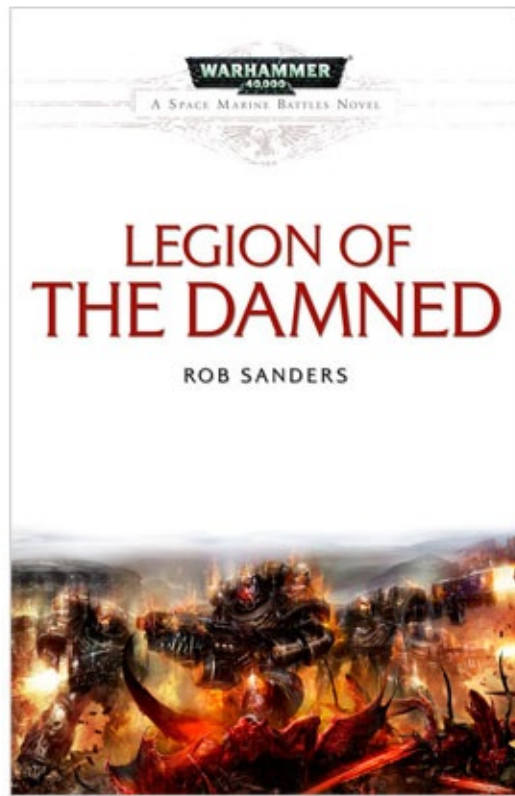
pursuers filled the trench, their armour covered in flame, he knew that he had been given a chance for an easy death, and he had turned it down. He had been given the chance to show remorse for his crime and he had ignored it.

Now it was too late.

Now he would burn.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author of the novels *Knight of the Blazing Sun*, *Time of Legends: Neferata* and *Gotrek and Felix: Road of Skulls*, JOSH REYNOLDS used to be a roadie for the Hong Kong Cavaliers, but now writes full time. His work has appeared in various anthologies, including *Age of Legend* and several issues of the electronic magazine *Hammer and Bolter*.



The Excoriators seem powerless to protect the small cemetery world of Certus Minor from the berserk World Eaters, but their salvation soon comes from a wholly unexpected quarter...

BUY NOW



READ IT FIRST

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS | EARLY RELEASES | FREE DELIVERY

blacklibrary.com

A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION

**Published in 2013 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd.,
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK**

© Games Workshop Limited, 2013. All rights reserved.

Black Library, the Black Library logo, The Horus Heresy, The Horus Heresy logo, The Horus Heresy eye device, Space Marine Battles, the Space Marine Battles logo, Warhammer 40,000, the Warhammer 40,000 logo, Games Workshop, the Games Workshop logo and all associated brands, names, characters, illustrations and images from the Warhammer 40,000 universe are either ®, ™ and/or © Games Workshop Ltd 2000-2013, variably registered in the UK and other countries around the world.

All rights reserved.

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-78251-260-8

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise except as expressly permitted under license from the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

See Black Library on the internet at

blacklibrary.com

**Find out more about Games Workshop's world of Warhammer
and the Warhammer 40,000 universe at**

www.games-workshop.com

eBook license

This license is made between:

Games Workshop Limited t/a Black Library, Willow Road, Lenton, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, United Kingdom (“Black Library”); and

(2) the purchaser of an e-book product from Black Library website (“You/you/Your/your”)

(jointly, “the parties”)

These are the terms and conditions that apply when you purchase an e-book (“e-book”) from Black Library. The parties agree that in consideration of the fee paid by you, Black Library grants you a license to use the e-book on the following terms:

* 1. Black Library grants to you a personal, non-exclusive, non-transferable, royalty-free license to use the e-book in the following ways:

o 1.1 to store the e-book on any number of electronic devices and/or storage media (including, by way of example only, personal computers, e-book readers, mobile phones, portable hard drives, USB flash drives, CDs or DVDs) which are personally owned by you;

o 1.2 to access the e-book using an appropriate electronic device and/or through any appropriate storage media; and

* 2. For the avoidance of doubt, you are ONLY licensed to use the e-book as described in paragraph 1 above. You may NOT use or store the e-book in any other way. If you do, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license.

* 3. Further to the general restriction at paragraph 2, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license in the event that you use or store the e-book (or any part of it) in any way not expressly licensed. This includes (but is by no means limited to) the following circumstances:

o 3.1 you provide the e-book to any company, individual or other legal

person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.2 you make the e-book available on bit-torrent sites, or are otherwise complicit in 'seeding' or sharing the e-book with any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.3 you print and distribute hard copies of the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.4 You attempt to reverse engineer, bypass, alter, amend, remove or otherwise make any change to any copy protection technology which may be applied to the e-book.

* 4. By purchasing an e-book, you agree for the purposes of the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 that Black Library may commence the service (of provision of the e-book to you) prior to your ordinary cancellation period coming to an end, and that by purchasing an e-book, your cancellation rights shall end immediately upon receipt of the e-book.

* 5. You acknowledge that all copyright, trademark and other intellectual property rights in the e-book are, shall remain, the sole property of Black Library.

* 6. On termination of this license, howsoever effected, you shall immediately and permanently delete all copies of the e-book from your computers and storage media, and shall destroy all hard copies of the e-book which you have derived from the e-book.

* 7. Black Library shall be entitled to amend these terms and conditions from time to time by written notice to you.

* 8. These terms and conditions shall be governed by English law, and shall be subject only to the jurisdiction of the Courts in England and Wales.

* 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 for whatever reason shall not be in any way deemed to be a waiver of its rights, and in particular, Black Library reserves the right at all times to terminate this license in the event that you breach clause 2 or clause 3.