



ASTORATH THE GRIM:  
REDEEMER OF THE LOST

*A short story by Andy Smillie*



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**Andy Smillie**

It has been a long time since I killed an enemy. Too long. A torturous burden for any warrior to bear. Yet I have not been idle. I have spent my decades steeped in blood. I have bent my talents to killing my brothers. A dark duty that has brought me here to this ashen waste. Hamenlina, a librarium world. Burned to cinders by the forces of the Archenemy as they sought to secure the knowledge contained in Hamenlina's datastacks and parchment-text archives. Its towering structures, crammed together like vast volumes stacked on too small a shelf, remind me of the cathedrals and reclusiams of holy Baal.

These, though, are blackened by battle, reduced to striated ruins. The charcoal landscape is as a painting, rendered in shadow by death's artisans. I drag my hand through a pile of grey brick dust, watching as it sifts through the fingers of my gauntlet to leave a trio of teeth in my palm. A solemn smile stretches across my face and I feel myself nod. This is a fitting place for angels to fight their last, a graveyard worthy of their bones.

I look down from my vantage point. Muzzle flare sparks in the distant gloom as the final shots of the war are fired. I feel my soul reharden itself against what is to come.

This war had not even begun when I started my journey here. The citizens of Hamenlina had not yet succumbed to the seditious promises of the Dark Powers when I boarded my vessel. Despite the improbable foresight that such certainty would require, I knew then that war would find this place, and that my brothers would be called to end it. I always know. It is a blessing that numbers foremost amongst my curses. The damned call to me. They reach across the cold vastness of space and time and beg for their souls.

From up here, amongst the desiccated remains of the Grand Oracle's chamber, I can smell the taint in the cursed blood of those below me. There are five of them left. The others are already dead, felled in battle as they waded waist deep

through the entrails of their foe. When first I was set on this bloody path, I had thought, hoped even, that battle might claim all of the damned, that I would not be required to bring them peace. I was naive. A few always survive. For what in this universe can stand against their wrath, if not me? They are a terrible force to behold, killers to their core. I touch a hand to my jaw, feeling the distended canines beneath my gnarled lips. I have not looked upon myself in almost a century, yet I know that my skin is ghoulish white, and that my eyes are pinpricks of blackness. To best these beasts, to fulfil my duty, my body and soul have become terror itself.

Yet I am not alone. Even stripped of holy boltgun, and set apart from my warrior brotherhood, I march to war with another. The Executioner's Axe, an unimaginative name for an unimaginable task; a weapon born for this purpose. Forged by hottest fire and ancient blood, its tip is as hard as my resolve, its edge as lethal as my fury. I straighten and tighten my grip on the weapon as the muzzle flashes below me fade into the gloom.

It is time.

Lord Emperor, Father Sanguinius.

We confess our unworthiness.

We are unfit to stand in your name.

Our blood is weak, our victories failures.

In death, we repent.

I pray for my brothers, dropping from the spire as the final syllable leaves my lips. I fall in silence, my jump pack unlit, my wings spread to slow my descent. A crimson ghost against a blackened sky, I fall.

The rockcrete of the roadway cracks underfoot as I land. One of the damned turns and snarls at me, a craven sound of lust and hunger. I cut his head from his shoulders, my axe passing through his neck before his blood can form on the blade. Then the others turn on me. Their boltguns growl. I react on instinct, catching the corpse of the first as it tumbles, pulling it to me. It shudders as explosive rounds hammer into it. I drive forward as they blast their dead brother's corpse apart, showering me in fragments of armour and gobbets of flesh.

Dropping my corpse-shield, I spin around to slice my axe through a forearm, twisting to strike again and claim another. I hear the dual clatter as the limbs and the weapons they're holding fall to the ground. The other two continue to fire.

A round strikes my pauldron and I drop into a roll, twisting my axe so that its blade is angled away and its butt faces forward. Rising, I swing out, letting my

hands slide to the edge of the haft to extend my range. The weapon hammers into my attacker's face. I hear his neck break an instant before his body flips backwards over itself.

I growl, stumbling to one knee as a round rips across my side. The *ki-clack* of an empty chamber saves me more pain. The fifth roars and tosses his gun away. Gripping his chainsword with both hands, he charges. I stay crouched as he closes, reading his movements. He means to split my skull from brow to chin. He raises his weapon, shifts his weight. I act. He dies before he can strike, my blade bisecting him from hip to shoulder.

The pair I disarmed earlier have rallied. I hear them at my back, pressing towards me, their chainswords screaming for blood. I turn and parry their blows. They are formidable, but I am better. It is not arrogance or conceit, but truth that lends strength to my limbs as I batter them back. I was birthed to this slaughter the way a sun was birthed to burn nova. Had I no body, my soul would continue to fight until my fallen brothers were naught but bloodied mulch. Igniting my jump pack, I use its thrust to spin through a tight arc, and tear my blade across their chests. They falter, staggered by the wounds. It is all the time I need to remove their heads.

Brother Elogis, Brother Uvall, Brother Haures, Brother Sitri and Brother Asag. I unfurl a length of the tapered parchments hanging from my armour, recording on it each of their names as I drag their corpses into a pile. It is now, in the moments between death and oblivion, that my duty hangs heaviest around my neck. Such warriors as these will never receive a proper burial, they will not be remembered in the annals of their Chapter and their names shall go missing from the Hall of Heroes. They are lost, and they must remain so. It is I, and I alone, who will remember them.

Only in death.

I whisper, tossing a melta charge amongst their corpses. The explosive detonates, searing away their remains. I wait a turn of the sun, still in silent vigil until the heat dissipates. Gathering up their ashes, I draw my palm across the Executioner's Axe. My blood mixes with the ash and I smear the thick paste over my wings.

It is done.

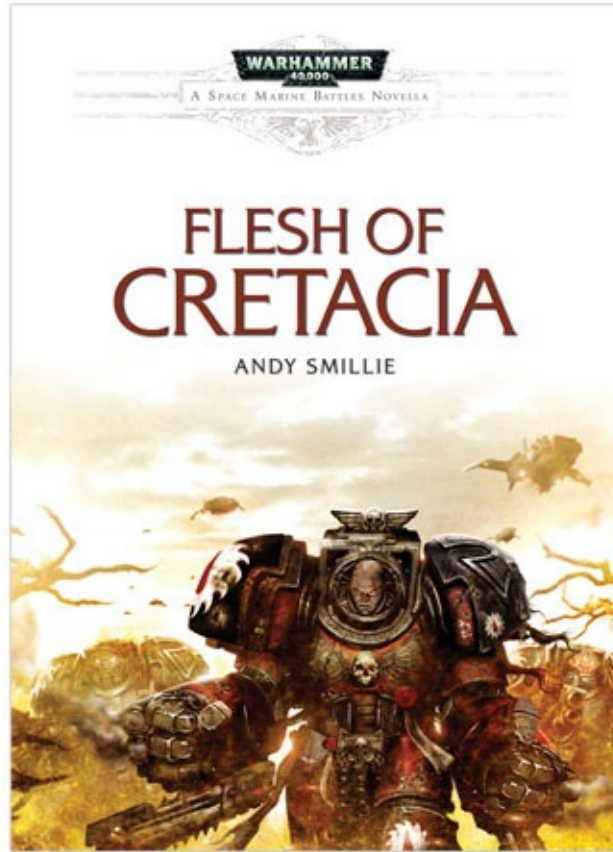
Kneeling, I look to the sky and coil my rosary around my wounded fist.

Sanguinius grant me strength.

This time, I pray for myself. For these were the Flesh Tearer's sons, and they will not die in silence.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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



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

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**ISBN 978-1-78251-358-2**

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