

**WARHAMMER**  
**40,000**



THE RED PATH 2

WILL OF THE  
BLOOD GOD

A KHÂRN THE BETRAYER STORY  
*by* CHRIS DOWS



**WARHAMMER**  
40,000



THE RED PATH 2

---

**WILL OF THE  
BLOOD GOD**

---

A KHÂRN THE BETRAYER STORY  
*by* CHRIS DOWS

# CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[The Red Path 2: Will of the Blood God](#)

[About the Author](#)

[A Black Library Publication](#)

[eBook license](#)

# **THE RED PATH 2: WILL OF THE BLOOD GOD**

**Chris Dows**

Cardinal Astral Voltorn Pradillo looked into the eyes of the Emperor of Mankind and wept. It was not the radiance of His glory that brought forth his tears, nor was this a show of joy for the benefit of Canoness Preceptor Alecia and Colonel Balacet standing in quiet contemplation behind him. The reason was the elaborately carved throne standing between the mighty golden legs of the statue that towered above him. It remained empty, and its lack of occupancy was the cause of his distress.

One of the figures behind him moved slightly, betraying the growing impatience Pradillo had long learned to live with. Even though his hearing was poor, the creaking of the highly polished dress boot gave Balacet away as much as the stifled yawn that followed. Pradillo had never decreed morning prayers to be mandatory for anyone outside the Ministorum. Although he would never say so, he would rather not have the colonel here, regardless of his standing. However, it was the only way for Pradillo to regularly meet both the leader of the Adepta Sororitas' Order of the Divine Perfection and the commander of the Imperial Guard garrison. While he knew they would never openly admit it, given the opportunity they would prefer to leave him out of any decisions regarding the safety and protection of Salandraxis. It had set the tone for his relationship with Balacet and – surprisingly, given the Sisterhood's eternal link to the Ecclesiarchy – Alecia since the day Lozepath had decided to leave the planet.

Ignoring the pain in his ancient bones, Pradillo rose from his knees. Without bidding, a serf stepped from out of the statue's shadows and handed him a pristine white handkerchief to wipe his eyes. Pradillo dabbed the tears from his wrinkled skin, and handed it back without acknowledgement. A second figure then stepped forwards, but this time Pradillo turned and nodded thanks to the

junior cleric who offered him his tall, oval headdress. Bending forwards, he allowed the young man to place it on his head and, with a wave of his shaking hand, Pradillo dismissed him too. Taking two steps back, Pradillo crossed his bony hands in front of him and gave a final bow to the huge statue of the Emperor. Pradillo took a few moments to steel himself, changed his expression to one of serene neutrality and then turned to face the canonesse preceptor and the colonel. Alecia was staring up at the statue, lost in her thoughts, while Balacet moved restlessly from foot to foot. Pradillo ignored the colonel's irritation. He would not be rushed in his own temple.

He had neither the energy nor the inclination to move quickly or speak loudly. As he shuffled along the gold-tiled floor, Alecia and Balacet joined him on either side, the surcoat of the towering, blonde-haired woman sweeping along the floor as she fell into step with the squeaking boots of Balacet. It was a well-rehearsed stroll past the series of smaller statues and massive supporting pillars that lined the circumference of the enormous circular hall to the temple doors. Despite Pradillo's personal entourage – a few clerics bustling underneath the temple's ornate, glass-domed ceiling and a number of ceremonially dressed Adepta Sororitas stationed on either side of the exit – he was content their conversation would be private. Given its nature, it needed to be.

'Still no news from the crusade fleet, I take it?'

As usual, Balacet had his gloved hands clasped behind him and, as usual, he answered with a barely disguised sigh.

'No, your grace. With the flotilla passing through the vanguard of the Archenemy, it is unlikely we shall hear from the fleet until it can safely broadcast long-range vox. It would be imprudent to risk astropathic communication again. Unless it is a dire emergency.'

Pradillo pretended not to see the vicious look Alecia shot Balacet at his comment. He was being deliberately inflammatory and she had clearly found it a step too far. Instead, Pradillo cast his mind back to long weeks ago, when he had received the single, terse communiqué from the *Light of the Emperor*. It had not only informed him that the Living Saint had been victorious in his latest campaign near the Cadian Gate but, blissfully, that he was now returning to his one true home. The relief had nearly brought the cardinal to his knees.

Pradillo took in a sharp breath at the memory, and his serf stepped forward to offer his arm. The cardinal waved him away. Balacet and Alecia glanced over to him, but he gave them both a raised eyebrow and they continued to walk. Since the day Lozepath had left to take the Emperor's word to the enemy, Pradillo had

become a shadow of his former self. Oh, he had tried to stop the Living Saint from leaving; at no small risk to himself or his position, he had begged Lozepath to stay. More than anyone, Pradillo understood his divine power was integral to the defence of Salandraxis and without it, the cardinal had argued vehemently, the planet was exposed and vulnerable. Yes, it was heavily fortified, but Lozepath provided as much physical protection as he did spiritual symbolism. Without him, Salandraxis was vulnerable, incomplete.

Lozepath had sat and listened to Pradillo's arguments on the very throne he had just wept before. He had duly dismissed Pradillo's concerns in favour of taking the battle to Chaos rather than wait for it to come to them. Both Canoness Alecia and Colonel Balacet had done little to support Pradillo, something he bitterly resented to this day.

'I can assure your grace we can protect this planet quite adequately without the aid of his holiness. Without hubris or boast, we can defend Salandraxis,' the canoness said, as if reading his thoughts.

Pradillo stopped his painful progress and stared up into the deep blue eyes of the preceptor. She did not flinch from his gaze, returning it with a look of defiance and curiosity. The cardinal was the one to break eye contact and continue on his way, concerned he had come close to revealing the doubt he held at her words. It was all well and good being assured reinforcements would flock to them from all corners of the Empire if – *if* – an attack did come, but Abaddon the Despoiler had accelerated his bloody advance across the sector. They desperately needed Lozepath.

'Of course, your grace, that is not to say we would prefer to fight without our Living Saint. His power is divine, given by the Emperor himself. But you have to admit, in his absence there has been no attack on Salandraxis from any of the enemy's forces. Perhaps you underestimate the power of the Astra Militarum,' the colonel intoned.

Balacet had always been hopeless at diplomacy. Stepping past the Adepta Sororitas sentries standing either side of the massive curved doorway, the old cardinal exited into the brilliant sunshine of Salandraxis Municipalis first. He gazed upon the expansive tree-lined avenue Lozepath had marched down to board his flagship all those years ago. The pain of his absence swept through him anew, and he took in a faltering, shaky breath to steady his resolve.

'I am reminded of the last thing the Living Saint said to us before he left. *The shadow of Chaos might be long and it might be deep, but do not fear it, Children of the Emperor. It shall never consume the shining pearl that is Salandraxis.*

*Through me, the Emperor resides upon it.'*

Pradillo did not look to Balacet and Alecia to see if they had taken the warning he was giving them. His faith was in Lozepath's ability to protect Salandraxis, and that alone. Once again he felt a tear rolling down the deep wrinkles of his face.

'Please inform me if you receive any notification of the fleet's position or status. If you will excuse me, I must resume my duties in the High Temple.'

Pradillo saw the look of relief in Balacet's face as he was dismissed. He watched the canoness preceptor and colonel move off in opposite directions down the ceremonial steps leading to a bustling walkway. Both went to join their patiently waiting retinues, Balacet marching off immediately towards a waiting Valkyrie gunship, Alecia staying to speak with a number of her sisters. Looking to the sky, Pradillo sighed heavily. He was a deeply religious and spiritual man, but he was also a pragmatist. With every passing day that Lozepath did not return, the cardinal's confidence that Salandraxis would not share the fate of countless destroyed worlds faded. Slowly, painfully, he returned to the hallowed sanctuary of the temple, shaking off the help proffered to him by his junior cleric. Too many things outside of his control were in play, and Pradillo knew he had only one option left open. He would prostrate his unworthy form before the towering effigy of the Emperor, and pray.



What little respect Khârn had held for the White Scars before battle had been joined was quickly evaporating in the burning air of Haeleon. For a brotherhood that claimed to be great hunters, they were quick to run from a fight and poor at covering their own tracks. So far, the mirror-flat surface of Haeleon had readily revealed the marks left by the escaping bikes, making the pursuit disappointing in its ease.

At the speed Khârn was maintaining on his stolen mount, he had to screw his eyes near-shut due to the air rushing past his exposed head. Such was the heat generated by the planet's three suns, there was little cooling effect on his burning brow. The skin on his face and exposed left arm had started blistering in large pockets under the withering radiation, but he had shunted the pain to the back of his mind. The bleeding from his cuts and gashes had stopped, but the process had taken longer than normal. Perhaps his ill-advised haste to claim the Chogorian khan's head would make this quest a true challenge. The discomfort

he might experience at the mercy of this hostile planet was nothing compared to the disapproval of the Blood God. Even so, Khârn conceded his helmet would have provided welcome protection.

In the far distance, Khârn saw a glint on the horizon. It only appeared for a fraction of a second before it was gone in the shimmering haze thrown up from the planet's surface.

As he neared the location, the tracks split into two directions. To the left, the twin lines of the attack bike angled away while, to the right, the single line of the assault bike disappeared into the distance. Khârn leaned his mount over to the right, immediately hitting rougher ground. Haeleon's surface might have been diamond hard where they had originally fought, but on this part of the planet, the geology was different. Fissures and troughs appeared, and the tracks became darker and more erratic. Meandering left then right in ever-widening arcs, the White Scar had picked his way through the potential hazards and inadvertently created a path for Khârn to follow. The blood pumped harder through his veins. Khârn could sense he was closing in on his kill. With the tracks straightening out, the Chosen of Khorne opened the throttle wide and roared ahead.

The bike hit the ground with a bone-jarring crash, pitching Khârn forwards in his seat. He pulled the brake lever as hard as he could, and both wheels locked up, sending the bike slewing to one side. Khârn fought against the machine until it came to a halt, and as the engine idled impatiently, he took in lungfuls of scorching, stale air. A faint cracking sound began, then quickly grew louder. Khârn peered down to see thick lines appearing from beneath the front wheel, radiating out in all directions. The ground was clearly unstable, so he engaged gear and crept ahead slowly. Looking behind, he estimated the drop from the plateau had been at least ten yards. Had it not been for the balance of his stolen White Scars bike, it would have nose-dived straight into the fragile crust and likely taken him straight through it. Perhaps the whole planet had a network of valleys and gorges hidden beneath its surface, similar to the one he had used to ambush the White Scars. Khârn smiled. The planet was proving a more satisfying challenge than the Chogorians.

As he shifted his weight on the bike, another loud cracking sound issued from somewhere beneath him. The rear of the bike dropped, angling Khârn upwards into the air. Clinging onto the near-vertical machine, he gunned the throttle as hard as he could and put the sinking bike into gear. Just as he readied himself to jump off the bike, the brute power of the huge drive wheel finally overcame the angle at which it sat, and the bike catapulted upwards and burst out of the

sinkhole. As it smacked onto the surface, the glassy floor cracked and crazed with the impact. Khârn increased speed, and the machine growled as it surged forwards. Khârn's disrespect for the White Scars did not extend to their equipment; his mount had withstood considerable punishment and he had driven it to its limits in Haeleon's hostile conditions. Unfortunately, the twin crashes had taken their toll. A loud grinding noise started from the front wheel and within a couple of seconds, the bike began to shudder uncontrollably. The pitch of the sound escalated to a squeal, and a large piece of metal tore itself free of the front guard.

Khârn had to duck to avoid it taking off the top of his head. Inevitably, the machine began to lose power and slowed. Craning forwards, he could see the ground was again giving way, the tracks on it no longer visible. This vicious planet wanted to claim a trophy of its own. In a flash, he understood why the marks back on the plateau had suddenly become darker and thicker. The rider had reversed his route to where the two sets had split. Khârn had been deliberately led onto this unstable ground.

The impact hit his bike like a giant hammer, tearing Khârn's vice-like grip from the handlebars of the machine. He felt himself spinning, three fiery balls of light whipping past him in quick succession. Landing with a crash, he rolled straight to his feet, grabbing for Gorechild instinctively. Around a dozen yards away, his ride was spinning on its side, grinding out shards of silica in all directions. Bolts tore into the ground all around him, one cannoning off his leg armour and sending him sprawling once again.

An attack bike with jagged red honour markings was speeding towards him. The gunner was firing the heavy bolter, keeping the gun trained on Khârn while the rider leant into a turn, deftly navigating the rough ground. Their armour was hung with horsehair totems and oath papers, marking them as veterans from their khan's retinue. Khârn roared at the attackers, filled with wild joy and rage. The battle in the chasm had not sat well with him, skulking and waiting like some frightened animal. This was the true way, the enemy clear in his sight with no place to hide. They circled and curved back towards him, firing bursts from both weapons, but Khârn disregarded the lethal hail and broke into a sprint.

Khârn reached for his plasma pistol, but as he pulled the trigger, it only gave off a high-pitched warning chime. It was still exhausted from the previous battle. Khârn ducked and charged across the empty glass. The surface below him was beginning to fracture from the bike's explosive fire, and his foot disappeared into a depression, bringing him to a sudden halt. The Chogorians roared closer, and

Khârn struggled to release his trapped leg. He would be torn apart if he could not move. But the fools thought they had him cornered and bravado got the better of them. The gunner unbuckled himself and rose on the rapidly approaching machine, drawing his blade and uttering a long, almost melodic war cry. Khârn stopped struggling to free his foot and braced to stand his ground.

The White Scars gunner hurled himself into the air, his curved tulwar raised high, the blade pointing down. Khârn ignored the roar of the attack bike as it tore past him, instead bringing Gorechild up to block the ferocious blow from the Chogorian who charged into him with a tremendous crash. Khârn felt his foot come free as he fell. The White Scars veteran rolled to one side and straight up onto his feet, adopting an attack stance and whirling his blade in a show of martial prowess. Somewhere behind him, Khârn heard the squeal of tyres as the other veteran turned to witness the fight with his battle-brother. This was the kind of combat Khârn cherished. At last, the White Scars were proving themselves to be worthy opponents. With a hoarse bellow, Khârn launched himself into the air, his great axe held above his head in both hands.

Khârn drove Gorechild down with all his might. It crashed into the tulwar, the sheer force of his chainaxe smashing the glinting blade aside. The Chogorian did not try to oppose the blow and allowed himself to spin away, keeping an expert hold on his weapon as he did so. In a flash of steel he turned nearly full circle, striking out at the same time. Khârn felt the sword's tip slice into his exposed left arm. He turned his right shoulder towards the White Scar, crashing into his chest and driving him back. The Chogorian tossed the blade from right hand to left and reached for his pistol, clearly realising Khârn had the stronger arm. He raised the weapon and fired, but Khârn launched himself forwards, smashing into the midriff of the Space Marine and knocking him to the floor.

The veteran kicked and writhed, unleashing shot after shot, but Khârn held on to his wrist, rolling his full weight onto the arm and bringing Gorechild up with his right. He brought the chainaxe down between the veteran's pauldron and neck. He was unable to swing fully, but it did not matter. Gorechild's teeth found purchase, eating through the ceramite and juddering down into the bone and flesh beneath. The Chogorian cursed in pain and rolled violently to his right. Khârn let go of his weapon and sprang to his feet, watching as the veteran tried to do the same. Gorechild had chewed so deeply into his armour that only the top half of the blade could still be seen. Blood gushed from the wound, and the Chogorian's attempts to pull the mighty weapon from his body were hindered by the blood streaming down the handle. Falling to the side, the veteran looked

around frantically for his tulwar. With his last remaining strength he reached for it. He died with his hand only inches away from the weapon.

Khârn heard a roar of fury, and the attack bike's engine screamed with sudden acceleration. Khârn pulled on Gorechild's handle, levering it free from the gaping wound it had made in the fallen Chogorian. As he turned, a shot careened off his pauldron and spun him to the ground. A split second later, the chatter of the attack bike's bolter salvo tore overhead, tracer fire streaking past him into the distance. Khârn immediately realised the first shot had come from a different direction. He quickly looked around and spotted another bike in the distance, racing ahead of a cloud of glittering dust. The White Scars leader was rushing to join the fight.

The attack bike roared towards Khârn, its rider drawing a straight-bladed chainsword. These White Scars had run like craven mortals, but now that they had decided to fight, they honoured the kill. Their hubris would be their undoing. Khârn held Gorechild loosely in one hand as he slowly unwrapped the chains around its handle with the other. He heard the Chogorian give another battle cry. Khârn took a few steps back, and the rider corrected his course. The thick front tyre was so close, Khârn could feel shards flicking from it into his armour. Khârn stiffened and prepared himself for the moment of impact.

Khârn drove Gorechild into the side of the wheel, burying it as deep as he could into the spindle. Such was the speed of the bike, Khârn's arm was nearly wrenched out of its socket as he held on to the chainaxe's handle a fraction too long.

Khârn turned and watched as the wheel and mounting were torn apart by the massive blade. The bike slewed to one side, and what remained of the front forks dug into the surface, at first cutting a deep groove but then hitting something harder and pitching the machine forwards at top speed. Spinning into the air, the rider was flung off. The bike smashed into the ground and came to rest upside down, drive wheel still spinning furiously. Khârn was up and on his feet immediately, the Chogorian rider turning from the wreckage of his mount a second later, purring chainsword in hand. Despite the bone-shattering impact of his fall, this veteran clearly had only one thing on his mind – claiming his prey.

Any thoughts of retrieving Gorechild fled Khârn's mind as the veteran ran towards him, swinging the sword around his head and unleashing a battle cry. Khârn advanced, trying to keep as close to the ruined bike as possible. The Chogorian twirled and swished the blade in a blur of silver. Khârn knew he would try to attack his arm and neck, so brought his right vambrace up and

allowed the weapon to cut into the ceramite of his armour. The blade glanced off but swept up beneath Khârn's arm, skimming over the reinforced cables on his chest plate and grazing the bicep of his left arm. Khârn grunted at the sudden pain and rotated right, pushing the White Scar's left arm away and kicking him viciously in the abdomen. The veteran counter-attacked, ramming Khârn with his pauldron, and followed up with a downward slice of his chainsword. Khârn angled his head to the left, and the blade bit into the upper ledge of his chest armour, sparks flying off into the haze.

The sound of another engine rose. The khan would be there in seconds. Dropping to the ground, Khârn spun himself around and brought the feet out from under the Chogorian with a sweeping kick. The veteran stumbled backwards onto the glassy surface, leaving a fine criss-cross of cracks, and with a roar of frustration scrambled to get back to his feet. Khârn spotted a piece of frame that had snapped away from the attack bike and seized it with both hands. He knew it would not withstand a single blow from the chainsword sweeping towards him, so he ducked and charged below the veteran's guard. He used his speed to ram the long, jagged pole through the grill of the White Scar's helmet. Khârn kept the momentum going and dropped to his knee, pushing the tube through the veteran's screaming mouth and out the back of his throat. The body fell backwards and arrested on the length of pipe. Khârn met the dead eyes gazing up at him. He had no time to savour the brutal victory; the khan stared down at him as he spun his bike to angle the charge, and his voice boomed over the screeching tyres. Khârn threw himself to the side and rolled to find Gorechild's haft.

'You cannot hide from me, barbarian. I am the hunting falcon. I will avenge my fallen brothers.'

The khan was racing towards him now, his pistol holstered and both hands on the bike's controls. Khârn jumped to his feet and readied Gorechild to strike, but the White Scar leaned away from the sweeping arc of the weapon and tore past. Khârn felt pain build upon pain in his bare arm. Looking down, he could see the handle of a dagger sticking out from the top of his bicep, the tip of its razor-sharp curved blade protruding from underneath. The bike squealed to a standstill only yards away, and Khârn turned to face his opponent. His blood raged with the desire to tear the White Scar's head off with his bare hands.

'And now you taste Chogorian steel, berzerker. How do you find it?'

Khârn held his bleeding arm up into the air so the khan could see. Slowly, deliberately, he grabbed a hold of the dagger haft and pulled the weapon out.

Tossing it to the ground, he spat onto the bloody dagger and glowered at the White Scar.

‘A fine little trinket. I will teach you not to play with your prey.’

‘No. The time for lectures is over. I will put you down like a wounded dog.’

The rider pulled back on the throttle, spinning the rear wheel until the machine started to snake left and right with the massive torque pouring into the drive train. Releasing the foot brake, he let the machine rear up into the air. Khârn waited for the White Scar’s head to disappear behind the bulk of his steed and sprinted as hard as he could towards the bike. The Chogorian realised the danger in the last second and twisted to evade, but Khârn jumped towards him with an almighty roar.

He grasped the handlebar of the bike with one hand, immediately sending the White Scar swerving. It was only his ancient power armour that kept him from losing his arm as he was yanked forwards and thrown free. Khârn crunched onto his back, the air driven from his lungs by the impact. Ahead of him, the Chogorian came to a halt in a great cloud of shards. He was a skilled rider indeed. As he got to his feet, Khârn felt the ground beneath him start to give way. A spider’s web of fissures was spreading across the smashed and battered surface. His left foot suddenly dropped, and he had to move fast to stop himself falling into an ever-widening hole. Looking ahead, he could see the khan would be fully turned within seconds.

This Chogorian was truly testing Khârn’s mettle. Gripping onto Gorechild, he readied himself, keeping entirely still despite the ground around him groaning and cracking with the strain.

The bike sped towards his position, the khan’s long, curved blade raised for the final charge. Khârn hefted Gorechild. Despite its great speed, Khârn saw the ground craze directly beneath the machine, wide splits lancing outwards in all directions. The Chogorian had the blade raised higher now, readying to strike. Bringing Gorechild above his head, Khârn took a step to the right, directly into the path of the oncoming bike, and brought the chainaxe down into the ground with all of his might.

The effect was immediate.

The narrow crevices covering the ground joined together and rushed towards the now-unbearable weight of the White Scar’s bike. Khârn rolled to avoid being swallowed by the rapidly developing chasm beneath him, then turned to see the bike lurch to one side. The Chogorian leaned in the opposite direction, tulwar still in hand, as he tried to counterbalance while accelerating. The front wheel

dropped by half a yard, and the khan fell forwards with the sudden deceleration, crashing into the ground that had risen in front of him.

The whole area was sinking, and Khârn saw the Chogorian scramble onto the ledge that was becoming ever higher around him. The White Scar's bike slid off its perch and fell into the crevasse in a cloud of glittering crystal. Khârn quickly plotted a path that would take him to his trophy. He jumped over a deep fissure, but as he landed on the other side, the weight of his armour caused the ledge to give way. He felt himself falling, and only just managed to catch the edge of the crevasse with his hand. More lines began to appear to his left and right, the polished, glassy rock rending open to reveal enormous hollows. Khârn could see Haeleon's surface was only inches thick in places, and he swung himself over to the left towards a thicker section, using Gorechild to hack into the ground above for purchase. In seconds he was back on the surface, but it continued to splinter and drop away. The khan was standing in a broad stance some yards away, his ornate tulwar in one hand, a bolt pistol in the other. Khârn charged forwards and crashed into his chest, sending them both screeching across the disintegrating ground. Despite Khârn twisting and turning to get the advantage, the White Scar was up first, bolt pistol raised and aimed between Khârn's eyes.

'This is revenge for my fallen brothers. It ends now, barbarian.'

He pulled the trigger.

The bolt ricocheted off Khârn's raised vambrace and into the ground with an angry buzz, the firing distance too close for its warhead to prime. Khârn's bloody visage twisted into an ugly grin. Tossing the pistol to one side with a curse, the White Scar reached behind his back, ignoring the crackling of the ground underfoot.

'Now you will taste *my* steel, Chogorian,' Khârn hissed.

Khârn attacked, his head pounding with bloodlust, Gorechild spinning at full throttle. He could barely see through the mist of fury rising inside him. The White Scar met him with scimitar in one hand and another shorter blade in the other, his eyes gleaming with deadly intent. Khârn swept his chainaxe wide, forcing the Chogorian back towards a fissure, but the White Scar turned from the thrust and brought his duelling blade down across the side of Khârn's head. Khârn felt a burning sensation at his ear, and blood running down his neck into his armour. The White Scar was two strikes up. But only the last strike counted.

Khârn slammed his foot down onto the ground and jumped to his right, sweeping Gorechild upwards with his right hand. A crack opened up between the White Scar's feet, unbalancing him, and he was forced to take a step into the

path of the chainaxe. Gorechild's mica-dragon teeth gouged a hole into the Chogorian's chest armour, but he quickly recovered and leant into a parry with his blade, cutting into the berzerker's gauntlet. Khârn pushed the scimitar away with an outward swipe, and felt the White Scar's dagger stab into his left arm, the Chogorian having swept across his body and under Gorechild with lightning speed. Enraged, Khârn slammed his right shoulder into the White Scar, pushing him back before bringing Gorechild down in a furious arc. It bit into the khan's pauldron and carved a chunk off the curved outer edge, but its speed and weight took Khârn's arm down with it. Khârn felt the dagger slice across his cheek and continued to turn, dropping to one knee.

Khârn saw a streak of light flash before his eyes as the tulwar sliced through the air inches above his head. He was dangerously out of position. Or so it must seem. Rotating Gorechild flat in his right hand, Khârn swept backwards with the weapon, driving the churning blade into the Chogorian's greave. It bit its way through the ceramite, severing the lower half of the White Scar's right leg and partially chopping through the left. Khârn heard his opponent's roar of fury as he toppled over onto his back, and turned to see blood pluming from the mortal wounds. Khârn jumped to his feet, and had it not been for the ground giving way under his right boot, the dagger thrown at his face would have embedded itself between his eyes. Before him, the White Scar fell back onto his now-empty hand, propping himself up so he could brandish his tulwar in defiant rage.

Khârn stepped forwards, relishing the moment of victory. This one had been hard fought, a true challenge at last. The air was filled with a wrenching sound, and Khârn looked down to see cracks snaking towards the prone figure of the White Scar, the weight of his armour having created a fatal pressure point. The Chogorian looked to the sounds, then up to Khârn.

'You shall have no trophy for your Blood God. All that is natural turns against you, abomination.'

There was mockery in the White Scar's voice, and Khârn realised he had only seconds to claim his kill. As he moved forwards, the khan smashed the blade of his scimitar deep into the ground, speeding up the fractures all around him. Khârn roared and disarmed the Chogorian with a downward swing of Gorechild, but the White Scar was already beginning to slip beneath the surface. Khârn dropped to one knee and brought Gorechild across, sweeping the blade parallel to the disintegrating ground. With a shriek of teeth ripping through ceramite, the Chogorian's helmet came off cleanly, and as Khârn caught his prize the body disappeared into the newly formed crevasse. Khârn stepped back, raising the

dripping chainaxe aloft in one hand and the khan's head in the other. Looking to the sky, he felt the burning gaze of Haeleon's suns. He could sense the eyes of the Blood God upon him.

If Khorne had not witnessed this glorious battle in his honour, he would certainly hear his cry of victory.



Lukosz stood in the deep shade cast by the transport's open loading door and watched the last of the salvaged White Scars bikes being loaded onto the vessel. Keeping the warband occupied had been his way of diffusing the tension of the stand-off after Khâr'n's sudden disappearance, and for a time, the remaining berzerkers had worked as a reasonably efficient unit, with no new blood challenges being made. The uneasy respite had given Lukosz opportunity to keep a careful watch on Samzar. His actions were becoming increasingly provocative, hampering Lukosz's efforts to keep the warband's aggression directed outwards. Even now, Samzar had deliberately positioned himself in full view of the five remaining conspirators and was revving his drawn chainsword to a wailing shriek. He was proudly displaying the mutineer Morenna's newly flensed skull on top of the broken horn of his helmet. Lukosz pondered darkly on the last exchange with his comrade. Samzar had wanted to take a squad out and look for Khâr'n, but Lukosz had again reminded him that such an attempt would not be welcome if it succeeded. And besides, they both needed to be present to ensure the berzerkers did not turn on each other, undoing his efforts in a murderous spree.

*'Lord Lukosz, this is the Skulltaker.'*

Lukosz recognised the voice of Roderbar, the shipmaster. His breathing was laboured as always, but the voice was calm. Whatever had been happening in orbit to prevent him replying to hails was clearly over.

*'Lukosz here. Report.'*

*'The White Scars vessel has been heavily damaged and is moving out of position. It is in no state to launch any vessels upon you. Shall I pursue and re-engage?'*

Lukosz watched as Samzar strode from the adjacent drop ship, shadowing two of Morenna's followers while being watched by the other three. As the duo disappeared into another transport, Samzar stared at the three until they returned to their duties, then turned and gazed at the horizon. Lukosz could see his

comrade's hands clamping open and shut. Looking to his left, he saw the rest of the berzerkers at ease in small groups, cleaning weapons and trophies, awaiting the order to load up and ship out back to the *Skulltaker*. Something inside Lukosz told him it would be better to stay on Haeleon for the moment. There was no point in risking extraction during battle before Khârn had returned, regardless of how crippled the White Scars ship might appear to Roderbar.

'No. Let the vessel go and remain in orbit. We may need you to search for Khârn. Keep your augurs turned to the White Scars ship. If it launches a counter-attack, then destroy it. Await further commands.'



Samzar did not turn to greet his comrade. His head was a cauldron of violence, hotter even than the scorched planet on which they stood. The Nails were readying him for combat without an obvious enemy to fight. Perhaps they knew more about the five traitors than he. Perhaps they were trying to warn him. If he went back on the same transport as them, he could rend them all apart before they reached the *Skulltaker*. Yes. A good plan. He could—

'How long do we wait?'

Samzar's bloody reverie was disarmed by the calm in Lukosz's voice. The rage within him began to subside, but far slower than it once had. In his increasingly rare lucid moments, Samzar realised something had changed in him, but then the Nails would start shouting and hammering at him again. Blood must flow, always.

'We should be looking for him now, Lukosz. He left us bearing injuries and without his helm. There is a trail for us to follow, but the suns are bleaching the tyre marks away.'

His old comrade grunted his agreement. Samzar felt lost without Khârn. The Chosen of Khorne had given him so much opportunity to provide merciful relief from the suffering his Nails inflicted upon him. It did not matter that he might become Khârn's next victim. He had struck that bargain with the Blood God, and was willing to pay up when the time came.

'We shall give him six more hours. If you wish to take one of the bikes and look for him, I shall remain behind and keep the warband together. The *Skulltaker* is in readiness to provide support from orbit. Does that sound acceptable?'

Samzar stroked the handle of his chainsword as he considered Lukosz's words.

‘Aye.’



Khârn dragged himself across the endless, glassy plane, the sweat from his brow running into his eyes. Between the radiation on his exposed head and the blood loss from his injuries, his strength was beginning to desert him. The ground had become steadier the further he had travelled, but even so fatigue was eating away at him. This was not the only problem. At first he had thought his eyes damaged from the exposure to the relentless brilliant light, as he was having difficulty focussing on the bike tracks. As he realised that the suns were scorching the marks from the face of the planet, he quickened his pace considerably. Without them, there was no telling how long he would be lost in this forgotten desert.

The surface of the planet was so undistinguished, it was possible to see the curve of the horizon from where he walked. Gorechild’s chains rattled as he broke into a jog, the sound of metal and skulls clattering against his armour and providing a rhythm for him to follow. He would return to the location of the first battle within a few hours if he kept up a steady pace. The three suns beat down on his naked head, their burning heat making his face pour with sweat and their invisible rays plaguing him with dizziness. His answer to their challenge was to run faster.

A strange sound filled the air – a rasping, deathly rattle that coincided with his movement. Khârn looked around, but there was nothing to see. Still the sound persisted, and he hefted Gorechild from his back, holding it ready. Khârn picked up the pace, but the noise grew closer, more urgent. Coming to a stop, he whirled around, snarling at his unseen foe. And then he realised he had been listening to the sounds from his sand-dry throat.

His mind was playing tricks on him.

Shaking his head, he wiped his peeling, bleeding face with the back of his raw left hand. He would not succumb to his own body’s weaknesses. Holstering Gorechild, he began his run again, ignoring the sounds that immediately returned. It made little difference where he looked; the glassy surface reflected as much light up at him as the sky beat down, and a strange blindness was fogging his view. His peripheral vision began to darken, first to brown and then to scarlet. It refused to blink away, and as he looked up his view had changed.

The indistinguishable curtain of white had been replaced by two towering embankments to his left and right. They rose high into the air, their steeply

sloping sides forming a narrow valley through which he now ran. White domes erupted from the dark red earth, pushing outwards like the joints of broken limbs. The ground fell away to reveal skulls, millions of them, snaking into the air on still-intact spines. Khârn was running through a valley of bones, and the skin-flensed heads were all slowly turning to follow his progress, their mouths opening and closing in a ghoulish chorus. High above, the sky swirled purple and black, as if the Eye of Terror had suddenly descended upon Haeleon and swallowed it whole.

Khârn felt something rush past his feet. He looked down to see that the glossy surface of Haeleon had disappeared under a slick red fluid, rising over his boots and creeping up around his calves. Looking ahead, he saw it was a river of blood flooding the valley floor from behind. It carried him along, easing his weary legs. To his left and right, a handful of the skulls detached from their vertebrae and drifted towards him. They were human, but enormously proportioned. Khârn recognised them as the skulls of Space Marines. One turned to ether and drifted into the Chogorian trophy Khârn had so recently taken. The Blood God was pleased with his work. But then the river began to bubble and boil. More skulls left their supports, and began to swirl and swoop around the berzerker. The current became stronger, pushing him ever faster down its channel.

Some way ahead of him, the red of the river began to lighten as a brilliant, golden object emerged from the foaming viscera. The light was almost as dazzling as the suns of Haeleon, but its glow caused far greater discomfort to Khârn. The radiance began to fade, showing the details of a planet he did not recognise. Still the golden glow remained, forming a halo around its circumference, which broke apart to form two ethereal wings. A fork of lightning split down from the blackened skies above him, burning an impression onto Khârn's eyes.

The wings folded back and lost their shape, absorbed by the image of the planet, which was glowing brightly once again. Khârn's speed increased, and he struck out with blood-covered fists to deflect the pulsating orb rushing towards him. Slick red fingers of gore reached up from the river and pulled the planet down beneath the surface, extinguishing the glow and drowning it in blood. Faster Khârn moved, the skulls racing by his side, many engraved with the eight-pointed symbol of Chaos, taunting him to take them. With a roar, Khârn tore Gorechild from his back and swung at them, smashing the closest ones into pieces, revelling in the power flowing through him with every strike. The skulls vanished into the darkness of the sky and the river rose higher. He was propelled

even faster, and he could see the valley stretching into the distance. It had no end, no destination, but he cared not. The torrent buoyed him up, refusing to claim him, and he understood the truth of his epiphany. He would let the flow take him where it would and consume him if it had to, for what surrounded and guided him was the Blood God.

This was the Red Path, rich with trophies and glory.

Khârn opened his eyes. Somewhere in the distant haze, he spotted movement under Haeleon's furnace suns. Squinting against the ferocious light, he could see an armoured rider streaking towards him on an attack bike. For the briefest of seconds he readied himself for combat, but as the vehicle came nearer, Khârn could see the rider wore dark red armour and a berzerker helmet, one of the horns shorter than the other. Samzar, the loyal fool. All feelings of fatigue left him. Raising Gorechild high into the air, he roared his praise to the Blood God.



What passed for an Apothecary within the ranks of the warband had died in the fighting with the White Scars, so the thankless task of tending to Khârn's wounds fell to Lukosz. Most of his cuts and abrasions were proving slow to heal, an affect of being on this planet that he had experienced with his own injuries. He contented himself with removing the largest pieces of shrapnel and shards of the planet's surface from his flesh. The burns on Khârn's arm and head he could do nothing about. Lukosz had felt his face burning within minutes of removing his helmet, and Khârn's exposure to Haeleon's insidious rays had been extensive. Khârn's physiology would allow his skin to regenerate in time. For now, the almost noble features of his leader were masked behind a blood-encrusted mess.

Khârn sat entirely still and bolt upright during the treatment, in full view of the wreckage-strewn battlefield. Lukosz could see he was watching the berzerkers as they assembled before the drop ship's open crew bay, one hand resting threateningly on Gorechild. His old comrade Samzar stood to the right of the Thunderhawk's gently sloping ramp, a bolter cradled in his arms. Retrieving Khârn had calmed him somewhat, but Lukosz continued to cast occasional glances for any signs of him deciding to make an example of the five traitors. Lukosz had not had time to ask whether Samzar had discussed events with Khârn. He would not have been interested anyway. Other than agreeing to medical attention, the only words Khârn had uttered were for water and to order

the warband before him.

Khârn did not wait for Lukosz to finish his work before he rose to his feet. Ordinary mortals might have stayed within the shade of the transport, but not Khârn. As if to defy the planet that had caused him so much pain, he walked out into the blazing heat to address the berzerkers. Reluctantly, they removed their helmets and bowed their heads. Lukosz heard Samzar snorting to himself in derision. He quickly discarded the med-kit, picked up his weapons and took his place on the left flank of Khârn, his own watchful gaze matching that of his twitching brother-in-arms.

‘The Blood God has favoured me with a vision today.’

Lukosz watched the reactions of the berzerkers carefully. Had they all been World Eaters, he would perhaps have been better able to predict their moods and even control them, but they were made up of so many factions he had lost count. The one thing that brought them together was their allegiance to the Blood God. Their belief in Khârn was, at best, questionable. From his own experience, Lukosz knew the reality of individual motivation was far more complicated than simple subservience. Some, like himself, might fight for Khârn first, seeing it as a connection to a past life that still gave their existence meaning. Many others, such as Moreenna, fought for themselves, looking for any opportunity to further their own relationship with the Blood God. In battle, they had a common, simple aim – to take the skulls of the enemy. However, in between campaigns, something more had to bind them together. Once, it had been the honour of their Legions and Chapters, but that was a distant, forbidden memory.

‘He has shown me a sign that is not for me alone, but one we will all share.’

The words surprised Lukosz. Khârn did not care to lead, Lukosz knew that. But these were the words of someone who realised he may not be able to achieve what he wanted alone. A handful of berzerkers roared their approval, thrusting their chainswords high into the air. Others were not so obvious in their delight and stared ahead impassively.

‘We will return to the *Skulltaker* and leave orbit. We now all tread the Red Path, and we shall follow it no matter where it might take us, for it promises trophies the likes of which we have never seen. Our harvest will be unending, the glory to Khorne without measure.’

More weapons rose into the air, and louder cries of ‘Blood for the Blood God’ resounded from the shimmering surface of Haeleon. On the opposite flank, Samzar raised his bolter and fired into the air, setting off a chain reaction of celebration. The tension broke. Amongst the cries and whoops of victory and the

thunder of bolter fire, Khârn raised Gorechild over his head and roared at the congregation.

‘We shall kill! We shall maim! We shall burn and destroy! Blood for the Blood God!’



It was fortunate that the Astropath of the *Malevolent Shade* was entirely blind, because even within the shadowy confines of its dank and gloomy chamber it could not have missed the look of revulsion on Captain Locq’s face. Locq had killed humans and xenos on countless occasions and stood in the presence of the vilest of daemons, but nothing turned his stomach quite as much as these squirming, babbling creatures. He could have sent the shipmaster to interrogate the abomination, but he needed to be sure about this.

Urkanthos’ command had sent Locq off on a trail of whispers and conjecture, and Locq’s anger at this ignoble mission had grown ever greater since the day the *Malevolent Shade* had set out. In two weeks, they had not picked up so much as a suggestion of warp-spoor from the berzerker vessel. With no destination to head for, Locq could see his opportunity to prove his worth in the eyes of Abaddon slipping away. This was his chance to break the Lord Purgator’s bond, to take his place next to the Warmaster. Locq knew that while most of his warband were entirely loyal, some out of the two hundred had sworn their oaths before Urkanthos. It was the way of things, and while it infuriated him, he accepted it. Locq had waited long enough. He needed to take command of the situation and show any that might doubt or challenge his leadership that he was in complete control. Unfortunately, all of this hinged on the snivelling wretch sitting before him.

The hooded figure made a strange, moaning noise and shifted in its seat. Its robes were squalid and filthy, and there was a smell in the air that made Locq’s wide, flat nostrils flare. He had been waiting nearly half an hour for an answer to his question, and he was finding it increasingly difficult to control his anger.

‘I can see you.’

Its voice was little more than a murmur, and held within it a childish quality. Rising to its feet, the Astropath stretched out its arms, hands sweeping through the foetid air as if it were trying to grab hold of something. The hooded creature cocked its head to one side, listening for something from behind, then whirled and carried out the same bizarre movements, this time giggling to itself like an

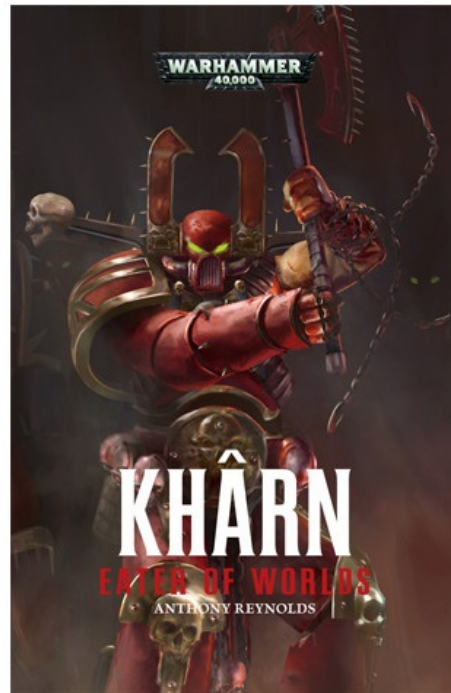
imbecile. The arms eventually came down, slowly, and it turned to face Locq, pushing back its hood to reveal a sagging, grey face and empty eye sockets. It took three steps forwards and Locq instinctively reached for his bolter. The look he received from the psyker was one of amusement.

‘I can see you, Locq the Hound. And I can see where you need to go.’

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Chris Dows** is a writer and educational advisor with over twenty years' experience in comic books, prose and non-fiction. His works for Black Library include the Warhammer 40,000 short stories 'In the Shadow of the Emperor', 'The Mouth of Chaos', 'Monolith' and 'Glory from Chaos'. He lives in Grimsby with his wife and two children.

[A pivotal tale of Khorne's greatest champion. The World Eaters are leaderless and on the brink of extinction. They need a hero. They need Kharn.](#)



BUY NOW



**READ IT FIRST**

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS | EARLY RELEASES | FREE DELIVERY

[blacklibrary.com](http://blacklibrary.com)

# THE BLACK LIBRARY NEWSLETTER



**Sign up today for regular updates on the  
latest Black Library news and releases**

**SIGN UP NOW**

## **A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION**

Published in 2016 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd,  
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Cover illustration by Paul Dainton.  
Produced by Games Workshop in Nottingham.

Will of the Blood God © Copyright Games Workshop Limited 2016. Will of the Blood God, GW, Games Workshop, Black Library, The Horus Heresy, The Horus Heresy Eye logo, Space Marine, 40K, Warhammer, Warhammer 40,000, the 'Aquila' Double-headed Eagle logo, and all associated logos, illustrations, images, names, creatures, races, vehicles, locations, weapons, characters, and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are either ® or TM, and/or © Games Workshop Limited, variably registered around the world.

All Rights Reserved.

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

ISBN: 978-1-78572-196-0

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](http://blacklibrary.com)

Find out more about Games Workshop's world of Warhammer and the Warhammer 40,000 universe at  
[games-workshop.com](http://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.