

WARHAMMER
40,000

**GALL OF
CHAOS**
BLOOD AND IRON

by **ROBBIE MACNIVEN**

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No one, man or daemon, could remember a time before darkness ruled over Dementius. It was not the darkness of the night, for there were no stars, no moons, no constellations to be seen above the hell-forges. It was the blotch of a canker, the blackness of rotting, diseased lungs, the eternal pall of unrestrained and ever-grinding industry. The only light that existed there was even worse – the flare and fury of a million blazing, mile-high stacks, the white heat of city-sized furnaces, the shimmering glow rising from oceans of bubbling, molten metal, and the sickly yellow illumination that leaked from the unnatural runes that covered every inch of the lost forge world's metallic surface. Damnation took many forms, and on Dementius, it was iron and steel, fire and smoke, and burning, melting flesh.

Ferrix, foremost warpsmith of the Iron Warriors, surveyed it all from the spiked observation tower of one of Dementius' numberless battle pits. The arena stretched before him, the packed dirt long ago obscured by a layer of shattered war engines, the side tiers now patrolled by the warriors of his personal retinue. Around the stadium, the manufactorums and slaughtermills pressed close, bloody processor spires, burning promethium chutes and belching, black-stained stacks all melding into a nightmarish cityscape that stretched in every direction for as far as the warpsmith could see.

It was all decidedly unimpressive. Dementius was nothing to Ferrix, nothing next to the true glories of his home planet. Medrengard revealed this place for the pathetic shadow it really was. Ferrix had stood beneath

the black sun of the Iron Warriors' fortress world and marvelled at crenelated keeps and spires that pierced the upper atmosphere. He had seen prisoners languishing in the heat of dungeons that pierced the planet's core, and manned bastions that encircled entire continents. He had stood atop the walls of the great citadel of his blessed primarch, Perturabo, and observed the warships of the collected warbands tethered to its upper towers, filling the white sky with iron. Dementius was a backwater, a fume-choked hellhole with nothing to commend it bar the volume of its production lines. That, and the pact for the war engine that had brought Ferrix to its polluted surface.

The blind servants of the Corpse Emperor had once described it as a god-machine. Ferrix had seen gods, had battled them and bound them during innumerable summoning rituals, had felt their wrath. He knew the thing looming over the far end of the arena was not a god. Gods, even the mightiest, manifested as flesh and bone, not adamantium plate and tempered steel. This was no god, not yet anyway.

Even so, the warpsmith had to admit that it was a construct worthy of his skills. At a hundred and eighty two feet from its splayed base-plates to the tallest spire battery that topped its back, the machine dwarfed even the nearest smoke stacks, towering over Dementius' industries like a brooding father stood among his children's play blocks. The machine had borne many names and titles down the centuries, but its latest, the one the hereteks of Dementius were even now christening it with, was *Bloodbane*. Ferrix's data feeds listed it as a warmonger-class Titan formerly of the Legio Gladius, now captured and enslaved by the Dark Mechanicum. As far as he was concerned, it was going to be his greatest work yet.

'The supplicants are ready, brother warpsmith,' Sallik said. The Iron Warrior's voice was strained, and Ferrix didn't need to turn his gaze from *Bloodbane's* mighty form to sense his subordinate's lust for butchery. Sallik was one of the few Iron Warriors who had sworn himself to Khorne, and although he had refused to repaint his power armour with the colours favoured by his god, in over six centuries of slaughter he had never cleaned the ceramite. His battleplate was now caked in a thick layer of dark, dried blood. For his dedication, the Blood God had blessed Sallik with a mutation that morphed his right forearm into an organic parody of a chainaxe, the bones bent backwards, the flesh twisted and remoulded into

a broad head, the fingers shattered and sharpened into teeth. Unlike the other brethren of the Legion, Sallik had refused to replace his deformity with the blessed purity of bionic augmentation. The Khornate warrior was, as far as Ferrix was concerned, a disgusting and deranged barbarian. But where the warpsmith's mission to Dementius was concerned, the barbarian had his uses.

'We wait,' Ferrix said. 'The machine needs to be anointed further before you start your butchering.'

'Khorne demands skulls,' Sallik said, the bass voice issuing from his vocaliser rising in volume.

'Khorne always demands skulls,' Ferrix said dispassionately. 'He'll get them soon enough.'

'The Blood God will not be dismissed,' Sallik barked.

Ferrix rounded on him. Even with his Chaos-warped bulk, Sallik still found himself having to look up at his legion-brother. The warpsmith's gunmetal ceramite was accentuated by extra layers of riveted battleplate. Down his back bristled a thick cape of cables, data cords, uplink plugs and servo spines. Six mechatendrils – segmented, serpent-like appendages that sprouted from his fume-belching backpack – writhed and hissed at the Khorne champion, their metal maws snapping and drills buzzing. The warpsmith's green bionic lenses, set into his leering metal skull helm, whirred. The Khornate Iron Warrior took a pace backwards.

'We wait for word from the heretek,' Ferrix said, smashing the bottom of his barbed power glaive into the tower's gantry for emphasis. 'You will not seek to amend my plans again, Sallik, and if you do, I will cut your limbs off and lobotomise your miserable, worthless shell. Is that understood?'

Sallik said nothing. Ferrix turned away from him, mechatendrils still snapping agitatedly. Khorne's savages understood nothing but brute strength but, if necessary, the warpsmith could demonstrate that in abundance. He keyed his vox uplink, patching into the personal channel utilised by Warp-magos Ghool.

'Report your progress, venerable magos,' he ordered. There was a moment's laboured breathing before the phlegm-choked voice of the corrupt tech-priest came back over the net.

'How did you gain access to this channel?'

‘Your encryption data is ancient and utterly obsolete, Ghool. It took me point seven seconds to break it. Now, I asked you a question.’

‘We are still on schedule, warpsmith. The eight thousand, eight hundred and eighty-eighth supplicant has just been executed. My prognosticators are sensing the machine-spirit beginning to turn.’

‘Then I shall begin the ritual,’ Ferrix said. ‘Keep me informed of your progress.’

‘May the Dark Gods bless—’ Ferrix cut the link before the simpering magos could finish his meaningless catechism. He could feel expectation radiating from Sallik, but made a point of not looking at the Khorne warrior, instead continuing to observe *Bloodbane*.

It was a truly mighty engine. Each leg was the size of an Imperial bastion, the baroque outer walls now swarming with hundreds of chained slave gangs who hacked away the loyalist iconography of the once-proud Titan and befouled its surfaces with vile runes and fresh blood. The torso was draped in a vast banner sewn from human hides and daubed with the great skull crest of the Blood God. Each arm was a weapon, wondrous in its sheer size – the left a plasma annihilator, the right a hellstorm cannon, both bound in heavy chains. Upon its back, it bore what had once been a mighty Imperial battle-basilica, bristling with flying buttresses, spires and secondary weapons batteries. The rituals had begun within the basilica’s echoing halls, which were now carpeted with dismembered corpses and hung with the marks of Chaos. Heldrakes and lesser flying daemons were already roosting in its towers, and terrible shapes slunk, just out of sight, beyond the shattered stained-glass windows.

The machine’s head, set low between its shoulders, was a great, grinning metal skull not dissimilar to the sigil of the Iron Warriors Legion embossed on Ferrix’s right pauldron. The lenses of the machine were dark and dead, for now. If Ferrix was successful, they would soon blaze with infernal light.

‘Warpsmith.’ Sallik was speaking through clenched teeth. Ferrix finally turned, gesturing down at the pit below them.

‘Go.’

Sallik didn’t hesitate, scrambling down the tower’s ladder to the pit with curses and oaths on his lips. The arena space was full, though not with its usual combatants. Normally, the warp-fuelled slaughter machines created

by the planet's deranged hereteks did battle against one another in arenas such as this, each one competing for the dark honour of joining the ranks of standardised engines like the defilers, forgefiends and soul grinders. Now however, the broken wreckage was carpeted with hundreds of souls, human and daemon alike, united by one thing – they all bore on them the favour of the Dark Prince, Slaanesh. They'd been corralled in the arena beneath the levelled bolters of Ferrix's Iron Warriors, each one bound to a metal stake. It had taken months to assemble them all together, ripped from Dementius' assembly lines or seized from its slave pens. As Sallik thrust between them on the way to the dais at the pit's centre, they began to let up a wailing cacophony.

Ferrix ignored the eerie sound, satisfied by the knowledge that the beast he was seeking to summon loved nothing more than slaughtering his god's most hated enemies. He would not be able to resist this many Slaaneshi skulls offered up to him.

Two of Ferrix's Iron Warriors took hold of the ritual's first victim, a bare-headed noise marine of the Angels of Ecstasy, and hauled him up onto the dais. The fallen Angel seemed lost in a daze, his mind addled by centuries of sensory overload. Ferrix shuddered with disgust. The debased servants of the Prince of Pleasure were as unworthy as a blood butcher like Sallik. Unrestrained worship of the Dark Gods brought only lunacy and mutation. Ferrix's ambitions were considerably more grandiose.

Howling with glee, Sallik swung his arm, and his flesh-axe thudded down through the noise marine's bared neck. Purplish ichor splattered across the sigils carved into the dais. The horde of prisoners wailed louder, chains rattling as they strained and struggled. Ferrix's warriors fetched another victim, a writhing manufactorum dreg with eyes mounted on stalks and a nest of tentacles sprouting from his belly.

The executions went on. Ferrix set a remote counter on his visor's uplink display and turned his attention to Kwemmich. The little mechanical daemon-cherub had returned with the item he'd sent it to his shuttle to collect – a great, yellowing skull, elongated and jaw-jutting like some monstrous primordial hound. The mark of Khorne, carved into the centre of its forehead, still seemed to burn with latent bloodlust. Kwemmich, iron pinions rattling, clutched the relic to its chest with both diminutive claws.

Ferrix held out his hand, and the iron cherub paused for a moment as it

steadied itself midair before dropping the skull into the warpsmith's hand.

'Thank you, Kwemmich,' Ferrix said, and the tiny construct's rotor hummed with contentment. Kwemmich had been Ferrix's first daemon engine, forged and bound ten millennia earlier, when the Long War had been young and the former Techmarine had first started on the path of the warpsmith. It remained, to this day, his favoured construct.

One of Ferrix's me chatendrils snaked round and opened its maw, spilling a stream of blood across the skull's top. The vital essence of a hundred ritually slain psykers had taken Ferrix the better part of a century to collect. Not only would it delight Khorne's servant, the blood should sustain the entity for long enough within the skull for it to be installed in *Bloodbane's* former princeps node.

That was assuming Ferrix could bind the beast to its former skull in the first place.

Kwemmich came to rest on one pauldron, wings scissoring away as Ferrix smeared the blood across the cranium's bone. The Khornate rune at its centre pulsed a little stronger.

'Soon, Kwemmich,' Ferrix hissed to his familiar, looking into the baleful relic's empty eye sockets. 'I can feel him drawing nearer. He will be my greatest work yet.'

Before the diminutive daemon engine could react, Sallik's howl seized the warpsmith's attention. He turned back to the arena just in time to see the blood which now drenched the central dais beginning to rise, as though drawn into the air by some great vortex. The gory matter started to swirl and coalesce, taking on a roughly coherent shape. The counter on Ferrix's visor read a little over eighty-eight.

'Keep going, Sallik,' he ordered, though he needn't have bothered. The jubilant berserker had already beheaded another victim and was personally dragging a bound and gagged daemonette to the chopping block. As the creature's pale head joined the pile littering the edge of the platform, the swirling viscera pulsed and surged, leaving the dais and storming like a sentient flood into the remaining prisoners. The outermost wailed in depraved pleasure as the savage flow whipped the flesh from their bones and drained their flayed bodies dry.

'He's here,' Ferrix whispered. Kwemmich made a grating, mewling sound and edged behind the protection of the Iron Warrior's backpack

vents. The warpsmith flexed his grip on his power glaive and activated the VOX.

‘Brethren, stand by.’

The last of the Slaaneshi captives collapsed, little more than bloodless, drained husks. As the final one slumped there was a crack like thunder and a roar that set the whole arena shaking. The swirling blood came together with a crash, resolving itself around the shape of what looked like a vast, crimson hound. Freshly formed, meat-red muscles rippled with savage intent beneath gore-matted black fur, while a bestial head, full of fangs and edged by frills of raised green flesh, glared around with daemonic intelligence. A spiked brass collar binding the beast’s thick neck throbbed with witch-hate.

The Red Hound, Slaughterclaw, Khorne’s Huntsmaster, the Relentless One, this particular daemon of the Blood God bore many names, but Ferrix knew it as Gorgoth, and it had pounced right into the warpsmith’s trap.

‘Open fire,’ Ferrix ordered. The bark of bolters immediately reverberated around the stadium. Gorgoth twisted and howled in fury as hard rounds chewed at its unnaturally resilient hide, turning at bay as it tried to pick which of its attackers to charge first. Sallik made the decision for it. Utterly overwhelmed by the manifestation of one of his deity’s most favoured servants, he’d fallen to his knees before the huge hound. Gorgoth snapped forward and, with a single bite, cut the Iron Warriors berserker in half.

Ferrix descended into the pit, activating his glaive with Kwemmich swooping and darting behind him. He could feel his own bloodlust – tracked by the scrolling visor-data monitoring his heartbeat and adrenaline levels – rising due to his proximity to Khorne’s avatar. He couldn’t let it get the better of him.

Swallowing Sallik’s bloody remains, Gorgoth began to scabble up the arena’s side to get at the nearest Iron Warriors firing down into it, ignoring the bolter rounds chewing away ineffectually at its red flesh. Ferrix started to sprint across the arena towards it, raising the old skull in one fist.

‘Gorgoth!’ he bellowed. The daemon turned at the wall’s base, snarling at the mortal who dared address it by name. Ferrix came to a halt, letting Kwemmich catch up and snatch the skull back up into the air.

‘Do you recognise yourself, daemon?’ he demanded. ‘Do you remember

the last material form you took before you were banished by a warrior mightier than you?’

Gorgoth howled and leapt, trying to swipe at Kwemmich, but the diminutive machine imp darted back out of reach. The daemon turned on Ferrix, bloody claws snatching at him. The warpsmith took a step back and parried with the adamantium haft of his power glaive, warp-spawned talons grating against the crackling metal. Ferrix stamped a foot down to gain purchase among the wreckage littering the pit’s floor, servos and bionic limbs whining as they battled against the vast strength of the furious daemon.

The other Iron Warriors had ceased fire for fear of hitting their warpsmith. Gorgoth was the first to break the death-grip, rearing back on its powerful hind legs to snap at Ferrix’s visor. One fang scored a groove against the silver skull, and the Iron Warrior went back another pace, a swipe of his glaive keeping Gorgoth at bay.

‘Submit,’ Ferrix ordered, mechatendrils writhing and snapping as they sought to hold the daemon back. ‘Submit now, or I swear you will suffer a fate worse than mere banishment.’

Gorgoth lunged again, darting inside Ferrix’s guard with a speed unimaginable in something so large. The Iron Warrior cursed as he felt the beast’s jaws clamp around his left leg, one of the few parts of him still comprised of flesh and bone. With a twist that spoke of uncounted millennia of successful hunts, the monstrous daemon brought the warpsmith down and was on top of him in a heartbeat. Warning runes flashed red across Ferrix’s visor.

The warpsmith snarled and twisted in the beast’s grip, and the two mechatendrils not pinned beneath him darted forward. One rammed itself into Gorgoth’s slavering maw, its metallic pincers spread wide to keep the fangs parted, while the other, its sinuous coils tipped with a charged fusion cutter, hovered before the daemon’s open mouth. In the same instant, one of Gorgoth’s talons closed around Ferrix’s neck seal, threatening to snap it with the slightest exertion.

‘I will name you, Gorgoth,’ Ferrix spat. ‘If you don’t submit to my binding, I will speak your true name, and you will belong to me forever.’

Both Iron Warrior and beast, locked together in a violent embrace, went completely still.

The beast blinked. For all its seemingly unthinking savagery, the daemon was far from a mere bloodthirsty animal. That was why it was dangerous. That was why Ferrix needed it.

You lie, the creature said, a voice like the crashing of razor-sharp steel on brass shields projecting directly into Ferrix's mind.

'Perhaps, daemon,' the warpsmith said. 'But I have bound more terrible creatures than you down the ages. If you force me to name you, I will seal you far from any battle or place of bloodshed. I will torment you for the rest of eternity. Submit freely, and you can quench your bloodlust here and now.'

'I am no mere machine-spirit,' Gorgoth roared, grip tightening fractionally around Ferrix's neck. **'I will not be shackled to one of your constructs!'**

'*Bloodbane* is more than a machine,' Ferrix managed between gritted teeth. 'With it you can slaughter entire worlds. Nothing will stop you. It's that, or suffer a naming.'

For what seemed like an age, Ferrix held the hate-filled gaze of the warp beast. Then, almost imperceptibly, the creature's grip on him lessened. Slowly, Ferrix eased his mechatendrils back.

'I believe we can reach an agreement that satisfies both of us,' the warpsmith said. 'For the Blood God, and for Perturabo.'

'Warpsmith Ferrix!'

The voice of Warp-magos Ghool, choked with the rot of Nurgle, caused the Iron Warrior to look up from the data-slate he'd been scanning. The master heretek was approaching, his bloated, rusting form borne aloft on a scrap-littered computational palanquin carried on the backs of two-dozen blinded slave dregs. The Dark Mechanicum overlord waved one palsied hand at *Bloodbane*, towering over them both.

'Is it not a sight worthy of the Dark Gods themselves?'

Ferrix let one of his mechatendrils take the data-slate, following Ghool's gesture. Even now, Kwemmich was delivering the bloody skull binding Gorgoth to the Titan's inner sanctum, while a hundred thousand supplicants wailed praises from the basilica spires and bastion limbs of the war machine. The ceremony was nearing completion.

'By what means did you bring the Red Hound to heel?' Ghool continued,

surveying Ferrix from beneath the rotting folds of his green cowl. ‘I heard you lost at least one of your battle-brothers in the process?’

‘The Warpsmith Coven does not share the secrets of the gods with others, magos,’ Ferrix said. ‘I’m sure the Mechanicum appreciates that as much as we do.’

He sensed the heretek tense with anger, doubtless infuriated that the mastery of melding monster and machine was so blithely denied to him. Before he could concoct another barbed question, the chanting of the supplicants struck a howling crescendo. Ferrix looked up in time to see bloody crimson light flare into being behind the Titan’s lenses. His bionic eyes picked out Kwemmich, the daemon’s skull properly implanted, skittering down the Titan’s cliff-like front towards him.

‘It’s waking up,’ he said.

For the first time since its capture by the forces of Chaos, the Warmonger Titan moved. It was a ponderous, almost imperceptible shift, its arms raising slightly to pull taut the vast chains that bound it. A low growl echoed from huge vox grills set into its lower jaw.

‘Everything specified by your warsmith in our pact has been assembled at landing zone Epsilon,’ Ghool said, staring up at the towering engine. ‘Munitions, slaves and more.’

‘And more indeed,’ Ferrix said, turning his back on the magos and keying his vox. ‘Brethren, it is time. Activate the melta charges.’

There was a distant *crump*, followed by a second and a third. Searing flashes of white light lit up the Titan’s defiled lower limbs. Chains began to fall from the daemon engine, the links molten and broken. Ghool shifted his bulk into a more upright position, sickly spume pouring from his open mouth as he stared askance at the detonations breaking his new war engine free.

‘Wh— What are you doing?’ he bumbled, turning to Ferrix. The Iron Warrior said nothing, watching as more preset melta bombs wrecked the Titan’s restraints. The daemon engine yanked its weapon-arms, the remaining chains shattering and the heavy links crushing those caught beneath. It let out an ear-splitting bellow of triumph.

‘Treachery!’ Ghool wailed. ‘You fool! What have you done?’

Ferrix finally turned back to face the heretek, signalling with his glaive to his retinue. Without a word, the Iron Warriors opened fire, mowing down

the twisted skitarii scrambling to protect their master and blasting apart the screaming slaves trying to keep his palanquin aloft.

Ferrix leapt as Ghool's platform began to sway, mechatendrils splayed, cords and cables snapping out behind him. He landed before the corpulent warp-magos with a crash, power thrilling along the barbed blade of his glaive.

'I didn't bind him,' he said, staring down into the terrified eyes of the heretek. 'Not in the fullest sense. Gorgoth possesses the Titan, and he is free to do as he wills. You are a fool to believe you can control a creature like him.'

'Our pact,' Ghool stammered. 'We're giving you—'

'Not enough,' Ferrix finished. 'While Gorgoth wrecks your pitiful domain, my brethren will strip it bare. You and your kind never contribute enough to the Long War, Ghool. That ends today.'

Before the warp-magos could speak again, the Iron Warrior swung his glaive, opening the heretek's blighted belly. A flood of bile and thick knots of writhing maggots burst out, splattering Ferrix's silver greaves. Hissing with disgust, the warpsmith cut the pitiful creature's head from his shoulders and dropped off the edge of the bolt-riddled palanquin.

Behind him, the daemon Titan was fully awake. Its furious roar split Dementius' polluted air, and the thousands of pallid, suppurating slaves still cramming its basilica battlements shrieked with agony as dark flames burst forth from every surface of the corrupt engine, consuming flesh and soul alike. Burning figures plummeted like falling comets down its sheer sides. Ferrix raised his hand so that Kwemmich could alight on his fist, the little daemon's metal head turning a hundred and eight degrees so it could observe its handiwork.

Then *Gorgoth Bloodbane* took its first step.

With leaden grace, one bastion-limb rose, trailing rubble and crushed corpses. Ferrix watched the huge metal appendage swing ponderously overhead, the Titan's shadow passing across him as falling debris pattered from his armour. Despite the danger, and despite the illogicalness of the emotion, Ferrix couldn't deny a rush of excitement. It was a sight even the Long War did not often provide him with.

Then the foot had passed over him and came crashing down behind, the impact flinging Ghool and the mangled corpses of his minions high into

the air. Even with his auto-stabilisers activated, Ferrix barely kept his footing.

‘Warpsmith,’ one of his subordinates voxed. *‘The fleet is breaking from the warp on the system’s edge. They will be in orbit within the hour.’*

‘Upload the drop sites I scanned earlier to the warpsmith,’ Ferrix ordered. ‘The faster we strip this place clean, the better.’

Gorgoth fired its plasma annihilator, the weapon’s recoil kicking up rubble all around them. With a blast of light as bright as the birth of a new star, a distant manufactorum district disappeared. A second shot followed, liquefying a huge tech-temple in a white blaze. The Titan’s hellstorm cannon began to spin as the creature bellowed with blood-crazed delight, shaking the scarred earth beneath Ferrix’s feet.

The warpsmith turned his back on the glorious sight, looking up at the black skies for the first signs of Dreadclaw assault pods. Time passed differently on places like Dementius, but by his best calculations, it would take the Dark Mechanicum between eight and ten standard years to completely wreck *Gorgoth* and banish him from the Titan’s blazing structure. There was even a slender chance the daemon would achieve its wish and kill every living thing on the planet. Either way, Ferrix and his Iron Warrior brethren would be long gone, the holds of their fleet filled with the twisted forge world’s most valuable artefacts.

A long time ago, when it was still possible, the warpsmith might even have smiled. It really was his greatest work yet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robbie MacNiven is a highland-born History graduate from the University of Edinburgh. His hobbies include reenacting, football and obsessing over Warhammer 40,000. He has written the Deathwatch short story 'Redblade', and the Warhammer 40,000 stories 'A Song for the Lost' and 'Blood and Iron' for Black Library.

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