

WARHAMMER
40,000

GALL OF CHAOS

BLOOD AND IRON

by **ROBBIE MACNIVEN**



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Robbie MacNiven

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 hereteks,’ 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

or not looking at the Khorne warrior in the pit below them.

warpsmith. Saink was speaking through clenched teeth. Ferrix finally turned, gesturing down at the pit below them.

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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

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 scrabble 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?'

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 slaving 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.

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.

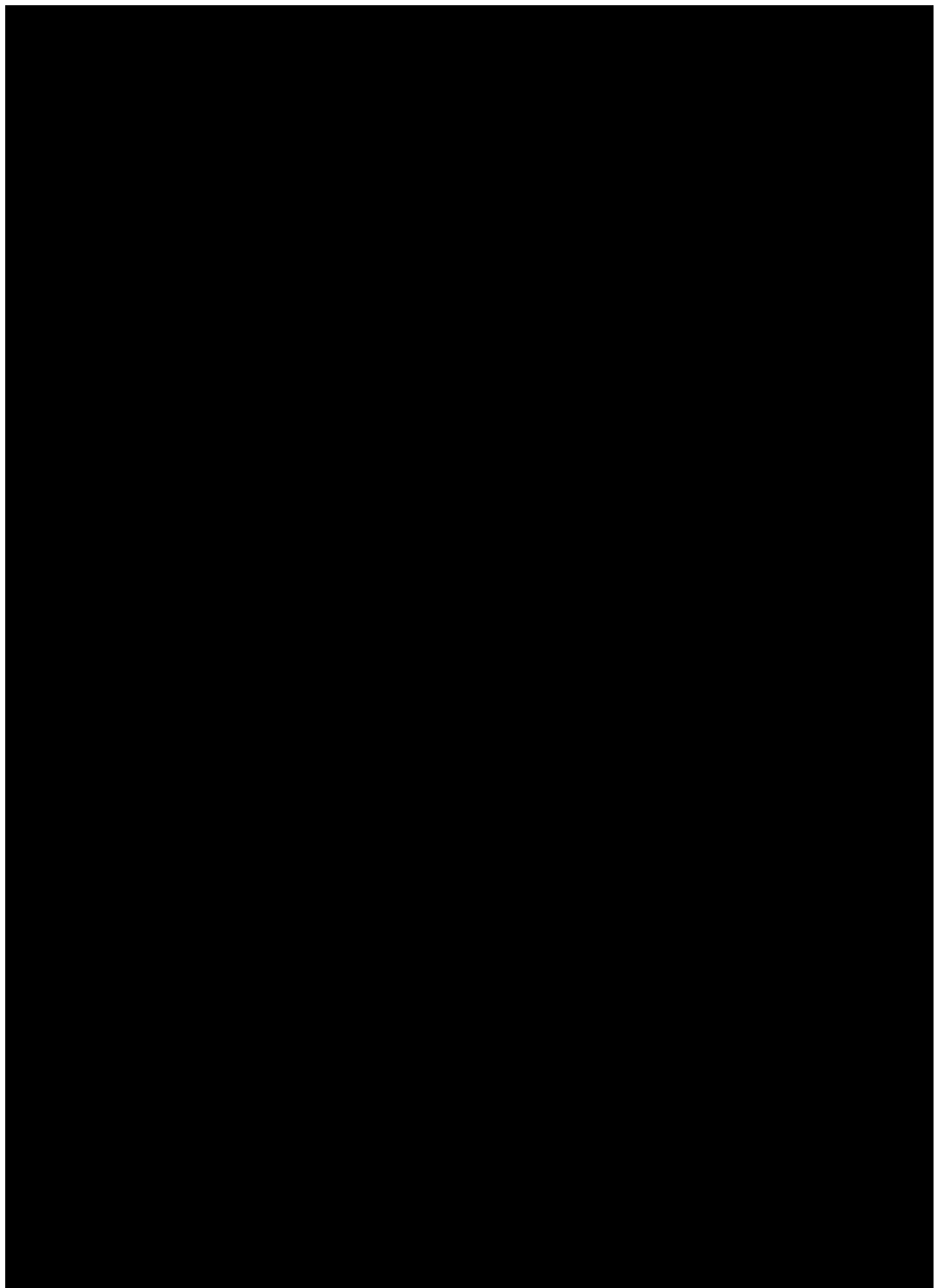
‘It’s waking up,’ he said.

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.



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 warsmith,' 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.

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