

WARHAMMER
40,000

**GALL OF
CHAOS**
BLACK IRON

by **GRAEME LYON**

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Graeme Lyon

‘What brings you before me, son of Olympia?’

Abaddon the Despoiler loomed over Kallus. The Iron Warriors warsmith knelt on the cold stone floor, his eyes downturned. He was unarmoured, clad only in a robe of black. No warrior of another Legion was allowed to bring armour or weapons into the Warmaster’s presence, he had been told, though he suspected that this treatment was simply to show him his place.

He was used to that. Anyone who had served Perturabo these past millennia was familiar with contempt. That was why Kallus was here before the lord of the Black Legion.

‘My lord, I—’

‘Look at me when you address me, warsmith,’ Abaddon boomed. ‘And stand. There is no need to kneel before me. We are brothers, are we not?’

Kallus hesitated. The question was double-edged. He opted to face the potential danger head-on.

‘My lord, we may be brothers in spirit, but in deed you are greater by far than I. You are Warmaster, the one who will bring ruin to the Imperium of Lies. I am but a humble custodian of the Lord of Iron’s domain.’

His breathing quickened as he continued to stare at the ground, expecting at any moment to be impaled upon the ancient blades of the Talon of Horus. He did not expect Abaddon to laugh.

‘Very good, Kallus. Like an Iron Warrior, you thrust a blade straight to the heart of the matter. Practical. I like it. Please rise.’

Kallus looked up. Abaddon met his eyes for several long moments. He nodded, as if confirming something, and strode over to the other side of the chamber. He gazed out of the immense windows set into one wall. The Iron Warrior rose and

hesitated.

‘Come, warsmith. Look, and tell me what you see.’

Kallus stepped over to the window and looked out upon a world of metal.

‘I see... a forge world, Lord Abaddon,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ replied the Warmaster. ‘A forge world in the heart of the Eye of Terror. A forge world of the Dark Mechanicum. A forge world where, by the very nature of the space it inhabits, all that is built is a blend of metal and daemon.’ Abaddon turned away and paced the chamber. ‘Nothing can be built here that is not corrupted by the touch of Chaos, Kallus. You know this, I think. You have spent a long time on Medrengard, yes?’

Kallus nodded. ‘Yes, my lord.’

‘And your primarch, in his wisdom, has you acting as a watchdog over a lone fortress within his domain. A castellan.’ Abaddon turned and his piercing gaze penetrated Kallus, seeing right into and through him. ‘It is a fitting role for you. But you believe you are capable of much more, do you not? And that is why you are here.’

‘Yes, Lord Abaddon,’ the warsmith replied, holding the Warmaster’s gaze, though he longed to look away.

Abaddon smiled. ‘Yes, I agree, Kallus. You can – will – achieve more. Much more.’ He turned away again. ‘Do you wish to serve me, son of Olympia? Do you wish to join my Black Legion?’

‘I do, Lord Abaddon. And my warriors with me. Nearly a thousand Iron Warriors stand by my side. They are tested and true, and ready to swear oaths to the Black Legion and serve you in all things.’

‘Does Perturabo know you are here?’

‘No, my lord. The primarch... does not concern himself overmuch with the world beyond his tower these days.’

‘No,’ said Abaddon. ‘I have visited his chambers. Perturabo prefers to play the craftsman rather than the warrior. He always did. It is a shame. His abilities could be of use. But no matter. I shall make use of yours instead. And I have just the task for you to prove your loyalty to me, Kallus.’

‘Name it, Warmaster, and it shall be done.’

‘Do you know why I chose to meet you here, Kallus, on this world?’

‘No, lord.’

‘Because this,’ Abaddon gestured at the window, indicating the world beyond, ‘is a problem. All the worlds creating new materiel for our armies are like this, overrun by the daemoniac. It is, as I said, the nature of the realm we inhabit. And

it has its place. But we need machines that are just machines as well. We need guns and swords, armour and Rhinos. We need the resources of forge worlds outside the Eye.'

'Aye, my lord,' said Kallus hesitantly.

'There is one such world, Kallus, out on the fringes of the galaxy, out of the control of the fraying Imperium. It is known to your Legion, I think. In fact, you have a garrison there.'

'You refer to Taris, my lord?'

Abaddon nodded. 'Indeed, Taris. Tell me of it, warsmith.'

'I know but a little. I have never been there. It is an ancient world, pre-dating the Imperium. It was discovered by the soldier Macharius in his crusade, and lost again in what the Imperium calls the Macharian Heresy.'

Abaddon gestured for him to continue.

'In that time, companies from the Fourth Legion took the world. Since then, it has produced weapons for the Iron Warriors.'

'And it remains uncorrupted?'

'Yes, my lord. The tech-priests there have no ties to either Mars or the Dark Mechanicum. They are... untainted.'

'I want that world,' said Abaddon. 'I want it producing weapons and vehicles for the Black Legion. Give me this, Kallus, and you will have earned your place in my army.'

Kallus' warband, the Dark Castellans, left Medrengard without ceremony or fanfare, and without any intention of ever returning. Kallus and his second-in-command, Brane, stood at a viewing port on their battle-barge, the *Fallen Empire*, and watched the world that had been their home and prison for millennia receding. Neither spoke until it was no longer visible.

'How are we leaving the Eye, warsmith?' asked Brane at length. 'The Cadian Gate is too well protected.'

'There are other ways,' Kallus replied. 'Dangerous ways, but our new allies believe they can guide us through safely.' He looked sideways at the trio of figures who stood at the other end of the long, narrow chamber. They were hunched and robed, and metal glinted where the light hit what lurked beneath their hoods.

'Why did the Warmaster send priests of the Dark Mechanicum if he wishes Taris to remain untainted?' Brane asked.

'They are merely with us to help us take the world. There is a plan.'

Brane said nothing.

‘Set a course for these coordinates,’ Kallus continued, handing his subordinate a data-slate. ‘And let me know when we reach them.’

The *Fallen Empire* passed out of the Eye of Terror without incident, slipping past a guardian created by the Dark Mechanicum to keep the route controlled. The daemon-infused machine was alive, great mechanical tendrils coiled around a stable entry to the warp. The Despoiler’s tech-priests transmitted arcane codes to the monstrous construct. Each caused a single tendril to uncoil, painfully slowly.

‘What happens if an incorrect code is sent?’ Kallus had asked the Dark Mechanicum priests.

‘It attacks,’ replied one of the tech-priests in a grating, mechanical tone. ‘It can devour a battle-barge in less than four standard minutes, and no known weapon can damage it.’

Kallus shivered and decided not to ask any more.

Once out of the great storms of the Eye and into the currents of the immaterium, they plotted a course for Taris. It took several weeks to arrive, giving Kallus and the tech-priests plenty of time to refine the plan and ensure that Kallus had the resources he required. It would work, he was sure. It had to.

Taris glimmered below them like a sapphire set in black metal. Unusually for a forge world, it had large oceans, with the temple-forges of the Mechanicum clustered on chains of islands around the equator.

‘Why this world?’ Brane asked. ‘And why not cover it in metal like other forge worlds?’

‘Something to do with the oceans,’ Kallus told him. ‘A property of the water that enhances power flow and allows greater operational efficiency. And the entire system is run by a central cogitator, into which is plugged one of the tech-priests. It all runs through his brain.’

‘That sounds like a fate worse than death,’ Brane said.

‘No worse than sitting out the Long War on Medrengard, brother.’

‘I suppose not. It feels good to be in action again. It has been too long. Too long by far.’

‘It has. But don’t be in too much of a hurry to start shooting, Brane. Not until we know who we’re shooting at. Have we had any response to our hails?’

‘Nothing yet, warsmith.’

‘Then I suppose we do this the old-fashioned way.’

A Thunderhawk gunship carried Kallus to the surface of Taris. He had donned his armour, an ancient suit of Mark III plate, and was accompanied by a single squad from his company. He kept a vox-link open with Brane on board the *Fallen Empire*.

‘What response has there been to our entering the atmosphere?’

‘Nothing yet, warsmith. Perhaps they’re waiting to see where you land.’

‘Likely.’

They touched down a mile from the prime temple-forge complex, on the shore of one of Taris’ vast oceans. As the Thunderhawk’s hatch opened, Kallus could hear the sounds of engines in the distance. He and his guard disembarked and waited, enjoying the salty tang of the air. At length, three Rhinos in the colours of the Iron Warriors came into view and slewed to a halt nearby. Their rear hatches clanged open and thirty Space Marines emerged, bolters pointed at Kallus and his warriors. Nonchalantly, he raised his hands.

‘We surrender,’ he drawled. He lowered them again and put one hand on his holster. ‘I am Warsmith Kallus. Tell Terrox that I demand to see him immediately.’

‘What are you doing here, Kallus?’

The Iron Warrior strode into the sparse interrogation chamber and barked the question.

‘Terrox. Clearly your temperament hasn’t improved in the last... how long has it been, eight hundred years or so?’

‘Answer the question, Kallus,’ Terrox demanded, banging his gauntleted fist off the table, leaving a dent. ‘I have no time for your insouciance.’

‘I’m here to relieve you, brother. The primarch has decided that you’ve served your time here and invites you back to Medrengard.’

‘Why you, Kallus? Why have you been sent to this world? What have you done to upset Perturabo?’

Kallus laughed. ‘Nothing, brother. In truth, I volunteered. We all know that on garrison duty, time sometimes seems to flow backwards. I grew tired of a world where that is sometimes literally true.’

Terrox was silent. He paced the small chamber, and Kallus could hear the subtle clicking that indicated a vox-link was active within his brother’s helmet. What was he doing? Kallus activated his own vox.

‘Brane, are you picking up any Fourth Legion vox-traffic down here?’

There was a pause before his underling responded.

‘Yes, warsmith, but with unusual encryption. It will take some time to find out what’s being said.’

‘No matter. I think I’ll find out before you manage that,’ he said and cut the link. Terrox turned back to him.

‘There has been no communication from Medrengard, brother. No indication that you were coming. And I do not like surprises. I don’t trust them. And I don’t trust you.’

‘I am hurt, Terrox! Why in the galaxy would you not trust me? Is it because I interrogated you that one time? You know that was merely a misunderstanding.’

Kallus knew that his casual demeanour would anger Terrox. In fact, he was counting on it.

‘You accused me of plotting against you and tortured me for a confession that I could not give, warsmith. You cut off my arm.’ Terrox flexed his bionic arm, pistons moving noisily. ‘You didn’t trust me. Why should I trust you?’

‘A surprisingly fair point, Terrox. Very well, what would you have me do?’

‘You will wait. I have sent word to Medrengard, and your vessel has been ordered out of orbit. You will be held prisoner until your orders are confirmed. And if they are not... then I might have to take my revenge on you, Kallus.’

On board the *Fallen Empire*, Brane prepared the company for war. There had been no contact with Warsmith Kallus since the order had come from Taris to leave orbit three days before. He had done so, albeit grudgingly, but now it was time to go in hard and fast. Besides, it had been far too long since he’d been in battle.

‘I will personally lead a teleport assault on the primary complex,’ he briefed. ‘One hundred Terminators will join me. The rest of the company will deploy by drop pod and gunship once we’ve knocked out whatever defences they have. Iron within!’

‘Iron without!’ chorused nearly a thousand voices.

The ancient teleportarium chamber flared with energy and Brane felt reality lurch. The effect was much like a starship entering the warp, but multiplied by a thousand. For a fleeting moment, he had the impression of a billion billion predators, all focused on him, sensing a soul on which they could feed, and then it was gone, and he was back on solid ground.

He spun, surveying his surroundings and orienting himself. He was in a large, multi-tiered chamber filled with robed tech-priests, all of them busy-looking,

attending to arcane tasks. Some of them looked around, and he heard a confused babble begin to break out, then an alarm went off.

‘So much for surprise,’ he muttered. ‘Squad leaders, sound off.’ Each of the squad commanders acknowledged, and he was pleased to see that all had arrived safely. ‘Secure the complex,’ he ordered. ‘Eliminate any resistance.’

Resistance had arrived. A score of skitarii warriors entered the chamber, weapons trained on Brane and his bodyguard.

‘Stand down,’ ordered one in a modulated mechanical tone, ‘or be destroyed.’

‘Ah, I hoped you would say that,’ said Brane. ‘Dark Castellans, open fire.’

He trained his combi-bolter on the lead skitarii and squeezed the trigger. The explosive bolts detonated in its torso, blowing its organic components apart. The cyborg’s bionic legs remained standing for a long moment, then crashed to the ground. Around him, Brane’s warriors opened fire too, and the rest of the skitarii joined their leader in death.

‘Move out,’ he ordered. He looked around for the nearest tech-priest and found one cowering behind a sparking console. He grabbed the red-robed woman in his power fist and raised her to face him. ‘Where is my warsmith being held?’ he asked.

‘I... I do not know,’ she said, and Brane detected the ammonia tang of waste fluids. She was still human enough to feel fear, then.

‘Where are prisoners held?’ he asked.

‘I... I...’ she stammered, and Brane sighed. He closed his fist, pulping her.

‘I’ll find out myself,’ he said, and marched over to a still-functioning console. He tried to access the systems, but couldn’t decipher the language the display used. He fired a bolter round into it in frustration.

‘I am going to find the warsmith,’ he voxed. ‘Inform me when the complex is secured.’

Kallus stopped one of the two chronometers that had been running in his helmet display when he heard the first bolter fire. ‘Nearly three days, Brane,’ he said to himself. ‘You showed some restraint.’ He stood up and peered out of the slit in the cell door. The skitarii guards were moving away from the cell, towards the sound of fighting.

He tried his vox again, but the Legion channels were all blocked. Brane must have anticipated that and used an alternative. He wouldn’t have attacked without being able to stay in contact with his troops. As he cycled through channels, he heard bolter fire outside the cell.

‘Warsmith?’ a voice called. Brane.

‘In here,’ Kallus shouted. ‘I’ll step away from the door.’

He did, and it exploded inwards. When the smoke and dust cleared, he stepped out. Brane stood in the narrow corridor, with five more Terminator-armoured Dark Castellans behind him.

‘Nice to see you, Brane,’ he said. ‘What’s the situation?’

‘A hundred Terminators in the complex, warsmith, securing it and deactivating defences for the main assault. The only resistance so far is skitarii. They’re not much of a threat.’

‘Ah... don’t kill too many of them, Brane. We’re going to need them.’

‘My lord?’

‘Never mind. No sign of Terrox’s Iron Warriors?’

‘No, my lord, though I found data in the cogitators that suggests he’s been recruiting. There may be as many as ten thousand loyal to him here. We... we can’t take on that many. Plus countless skitarii.’

‘Leave that to me, Brane. Just get the rest of the company down. Within the next...’ he checked the chronometer that was still running in his display, ‘... ninety minutes would be good.’

‘Aye, warsmith.’

It took less than sixty.

The Dark Castellans landed on the shoreline. Drop pods thudded into sand and shallow ocean, disgorging squads of power-armoured Space Marines who emerged with bolters raised, ready for resistance. Their erstwhile brothers provided it. Many of Terrox’s warriors had been part of the Dark Castellans once, before Terrox had broken away and formed his own warband, and Kallus’ warriors were still angry about that betrayal. Others were refugees from other companies, or new Chaos Space Marines created in the centuries since Terrox had left Medregard.

At Kallus’ command, Brane gathered his Terminators and headed towards the battle, leaving the warsmith in the complex. His own forces were outnumbered ten times, not even counting the tech-priests’ cyborg legions. But that wouldn’t stop them. He had gathered together his Terminators and crashed into Terrox’s force from the flank just as the main force engaged them from the front. In the ensuing confusion, the Terminators slaughtered hundreds and drove deep into the enemy formation. And now they were surrounded.

It was glorious.

He punched the head off an enemy Iron Warrior and threw the remains at two others, knocking them from their feet. He followed up with a burst of bolter fire and charged at them. He crushed one beneath the weight of his Cataphractii-pattern armour and kicked the other so hard that plates of his armour were driven into his body, crushing organs.

He turned and motioned his squad forward, and they advanced towards the heart of the enemy formation. Somewhere in there, Terrox would be leading his troops, and Brane wanted to deliver him to Kallus. Ferrum fired his heavy flamer, dousing the foe with liquid promethium and setting them alight. They fought on, but the flames weakened the seals on their armour, and pinpoint bolter shots penetrated the softer joins and killed them. He activated his vox.

‘Warsmith, we’re doing well here, but we can’t last forever. How close is the plan to completion?’

‘Hold them just a little longer, Brane,’ came Kallus’ voice. *‘We’re nearly there.’*

‘Acknowledged,’ sighed Brane, looking around for a new target.

Kallus stalked through the complex, contemptuously battering skitarii out of the way when they stood in his path. Finally, he reached his target, a heavily shielded chamber at the heart of the forge-temple. The door was sealed, but a handful of krak grenades saw to that, and he ventured inside. The chamber had a single occupant, a tech-priest wired into a throne. The throne turned as he entered, and the tech-priest looked at him with rheumy eyes and a dazed expression.

‘What... who are you?’ the priest asked.

Kallus ignored him and approached a console on the perimeter of the chamber.

‘Guards... guards!’ shouted the tech-priest, his voice weak.

‘They’re dead,’ said Kallus. ‘I’m here to take over your world.’

‘That... is impossible,’ the tech-priest croaked. ‘I control this world, and its skitarii legions. I have summoned them. All of them. They will be here soon, and you will die.’

‘No. They won’t,’ said Kallus, glancing once more at the chronometer running in his helmet display. It reached zero. ‘I’ve spent the last three days uploading a piece of scrapcode into your noosphere, exalted tech-priest. I just need to activate it, and control of everything on this lovely little world will pass to me... including your hundreds of thousands of cyborg soldiers.’

‘How...?’ the priest barked. ‘How is such a thing possible?’

‘The person I serve has been planning this for a long time,’ Kallus said. ‘His pet tech-priests prepared the code, but they needed someone who could survive within this complex for long enough to upload it. And that meant an Iron Warrior who Terrox would keep alive, for a time at least. I was just what was needed.’

Kallus toggled a switch on the console before him, and a world of data streamed onto his helmet display. He vaguely acknowledged a strangled scream behind him as the tech-priest was cut off from control of the forge world and suffered a fatal aneurysm.

Kallus focused on the command protocols for Taris’ skitarii legions and smiled. He was in control now.

Brane was surrounded and alone. He had run out of ammunition for his combi-bolter and been cut off from the rest of his squad some time ago, and had fallen into a rhythm of brutal melee combat. His armour was damaged in a score of places from bolter shells, power swords and other lucky strikes, and his helmet had been so badly damaged by a glancing blow from a power fist that he’d had to discard it. No single warrior had survived to hit him twice. He spotted an Iron Warrior with a crest on his helmet and was pushing towards him when a new sound invaded the susurrus of battle: the high-pitched whine of skitarii weaponry.

He turned. If the world’s defence legions had joined the battle on the side of Terrox, the Dark Castellans would be exterminated. A squad of crimson-cloaked cyborg warriors came into view through the fog of war, firing ornate rifles at the nearest Iron Warriors. Brane raised his bolter to defend himself as the nearest turned to face him. It regarded him for a moment then turned away, targeting a knot of Terrox’s troops.

Brane smiled savagely. ‘Dark Castellans,’ he roared over all vox channels, ‘our allies have arrived. Into these turncoats. Leave none alive!’

He opened a private channel to Kallus. ‘It worked, warsmith. The skitarii have joined the battle.’

‘Yes, I’ve taken command of the cyborgs. And the world, actually. Win the battle, Brane. And bring me Terrox.’

‘Aye, warsmith,’ said Brane. ‘Iron within.’

‘Iron without, Brane. Iron everywhere.’

The battle was won. Thousands of Iron Warriors had been exterminated in mere hours by the tireless skitarii. Many had tried to surrender, but Kallus had ordered

them killed. Some had betrayed him once. Others had only known loyalty to his rival, and he could never trust them. Terrox had been captured alive and brought before Kallus, on his knees and stripped of his armour.

‘You traitor,’ Terrox spat. ‘Perturabo would never have ordered this massacre. Why are you here? Whom do you serve?’

Kallus stepped towards Terrox and punched him in the chest. His old rival fell back, grunting in pain.

‘My loyalty is no longer to the primarch, it is true,’ Kallus said. ‘He deserves it not, idling in his tower when he could be leading us into battle. And forcing us to do the same, keeping us as guards when we should be warriors. The Despoiler will use my Dark Castellans better.’

‘The Despoiler? You have thrown in your lot with the failed Warmaster’s son? You are an idiot, Kallus. And it will—’

Terrox never finished his sentence. Kallus pulled him from the floor and snapped his neck in a single smooth motion. He threw the body down and turned to watch the control chamber’s other inhabitants.

The three Dark Mechanicum priests had travelled down from the *Fallen Empire* and were tinkering with the machinery in the control chamber. They had cleared the corpse of the tech-priest out of the chair, which now sat empty. One of them would fill it, Kallus assumed. That was not his concern. He had taken Taris, and would soon be returning to the Eye to take his place in the Black Legion.

He had sent a message to Abaddon, but was surprised when one of the Dark Mechanicum priests came to him bearing a portable hololithic projection unit.

‘The Warmaster wishes to speak to you, warsmith,’ it said in a monotone, and activated the device. A three-dimensional image of Abaddon sprang to life, and the Warmaster’s rich baritone filled the chamber.

‘Warsmith, you have done well. I am... pleased.’

‘I live to serve you, my lord.’

‘All went to plan?’ the Warmaster enquired.

‘Aye. As you expected, Terrox held me in the complex, allowing me to upload the code. From there it was easy.’

‘And you are in control of the planet’s systems and forces.’

‘I am, my lord, though I am ready to turn that control over to the tech-priests whenever they are ready.’

‘That will not be necessary, warsmith.’

Kallus thought he had misheard. ‘My lord? I don’t understand.’

‘I said that will not be necessary. You shall remain in control of Taris, Kallus.’

‘But my lord... I have completed the mission. I am to join your Legion.’

‘And so you shall, Kallus. You and your warriors may call yourselves sons of the Black Legion. And as warriors under my command, your orders are to garrison Taris. Defend it against any and all threats that present themselves, and use its resources to manufacture materiel for my armies.’

‘I... Lord Abaddon...’ Kallus looked around in horror. The three tech-priests hovered at the edge of the chamber, watching him.

‘I told you, Kallus, that castellan was a fitting role for you. And so it is. You will do well as commander of Taris, I am quite sure. Of course, you will have to be wired in to the command chamber, or so my priests tell me. Apparently it is the optimal way to control the forge-temples.’

‘No! This is—’

‘Priests, do your duty,’ Abaddon ordered.

The hololith faded and Kallus turned, raising his bolter, but it was too late. A manipulator arm emerged from beneath one of the priests’ robes and knocked it from his grasp. Mechadendrites unfolded from the other two and wrapped around Kallus. He tried to break them, but they were as solid as adamantium. His helmet was pulled from his head and he felt something in his neck. Cold paralysis flooded his body, and he was left unable to move, or to speak. He could only watch as his armour was stripped from his body. Over centuries in the Eye of Terror, the suit, once polished Mark III plate, had twisted and deformed, and parts had fused with his body. Where it didn’t come loose smoothly, the priests tore it from Kallus’ body, leaving ragged, gaping wounds that ached even through the numbing agent that flooded his system. The tech-priests lifted snaking cables that emerged from panels in the command throne and laboriously inserted them in to sockets on Kallus’ black carapace, chanting arcane syllables. Slowly, the warsmith was plugged into the command throne.

‘Activate,’ one of the tech-priests barked, and an entire world’s data flooded into his brain and overwhelmed him.

As he slid into unconsciousness, Kallus of the Black Legion, Castellan of Taris, screamed a silent scream.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graeme Lyon is the author of the Space Marine Battles novella *Armour of Faith* and the Warhammer 40,000 short stories 'The Carnac Campaign: Sky Hunter', 'From the Flames' and 'Kor'sarro Khan: Huntmaster', along with the Warhammer tales 'Bride of Khaine' and 'The Hunter'. He hails from East Kilbride in Scotland, but now lives and works in Nottingham.

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