

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

# **GALL OF CHAOS**

**GLORY FROM CHAOS**

*by* **CHRIS DOWS**

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Smoke spiralled lazily from the smashed frigate into the emerald-green sky of Valaena, carried away on the same high breeze that bore several wheeling eagles, curious at the violent disturbance to their tranquil world. They carefully avoided each other and the still-burning pyres of debris strewn out in a rough arc around the ship, flames made greedy by the oxygen-rich atmosphere. A handful of armoured figures picked their way through the ruins, salvaging what was useful and abandoning that which was beyond repair. To most eyes, the image was one of violation, of nature torn asunder by the works of man, but the lone figure watching from the gently hovering golden disc was no longer human, and cared as little for the damage to the planet as for the loss of his ship.

If the feeling could be given a description, Karnel the Ruinous, Thousand Sons lord and sorcerer of Tzeentch, felt a tired satisfaction at the vista before him. True, he had lost more of his followers than anticipated, but the final trap in his carefully executed plan was now set. Those who considered themselves the greatest hunters in the galaxy would soon become his prey, and within a few short hours the Tzeentchian lord would command a warband unlike any other. And not a moment too soon, as the tremendous energy he had expended was finally taking its toll.

With a turn of Karnel's head, the living platform on which he balanced pitched and rotated, the underside of one of its upwardly curved barbs brushing carelessly against the carpet of grass beneath. The sorcerer's blue and gold cloak whipped crazily as he willed the disc of Tzeentch to accelerate, leaning forward on his bedlam staff as he glided over the brow

of the hill and into the wide rolling valley below. Within seconds of his descent, Karnel was enveloped in a black-purple darkness, Valaena's clean, sweet atmosphere exchanged for the stench of putrid decay. A thunderous roar filled the air, punctuated with low moans and high wails, a symphony of despair and misery to match the swirling maelstrom that had engulfed the valley's floor. Bringing his disc to a halt, Karnel dismounted and strode towards the six towering figures stretched out on jagged X-shaped crucifixes on the edge of the swirling portal behind them. Despite being stripped of their armour and sporting the marks of months-long abuse, the White Scars were still an imposing presence.

Karnel stood before the nearest Chogorian and waited for the warrior's good eye to fix upon him. While the White Scars' suffering had helped create a temporary gateway to the warp, it was Karnel's powers that hid it on Valaena. As their lives slipped away, the portal got that bit smaller, but Karnel had calculated the torture perfectly. It was true, of course, that the longer the conduit remained open, the greater were the chances of a daemon tearing into this realm and taking everything for itself, but he had done his very best to hide it from both sides. The effort had been enormous, but it was a risk the sorcerer was prepared to take.

The Chogorian began to speak, every word heavy with spite and venom.

'Karnel... My brothers will not abandon me... they will hunt you down... and send you back to that abomination from which you came.'

The Tzeentchian lord looked up at the battered warrior, the tips of the curved golden horns on his helmet not reaching the chin of the massive Space Marine. He had to shout his reply, such was the eruption of noise generated by the warrior's naked hatred within the seething conduit behind him.

'That is what I am relying on.'

The body of the khan stretched out before the three-score White Scars should have been resting in the chapel of the Strike Cruiser *Talons of the Hawk*, but the sanctum had been badly damaged in the battle with Karnel's ship, along with most of the drive systems and all of the heavy weapons. As the crippled vessel limped its way through space, the decision had been made to hold the last rites on the drop pod flight deck, as it was the only place left where the surviving brothers could assemble in number and pay

their respects. No one really minded; being surrounded by assault bikes was entirely fitting.

‘And so the soul of the khan shall roam forever on the Chogorian plains, to hunt with our ancestors and join with the spirits of our home world.’

Stormseer Khaguran Amal finished his solemn incantation and regarded the survivors of his brotherhood. It had been a long and brutal hunt for the Chaos lord, and their numbers were significantly diminished from when they had started all those months ago. However, they had inflicted mortal damage on Karnel’s ship and, somewhere on the approaching planet below, the Tzeentchian sorcerer was theirs to claim. This would normally be something to savour, but the loss of their astropath to a massive psyker attack during the space battle left Amal deeply troubled. The Stormseer had also been overwhelmed by darkness during the fight. While he had survived, the astropath was now lost to confusion and despair, and Amal could not shake the suspicion that they had been drawn into the battle deliberately rather than them finally tracking down Karnel’s ship, as it had appeared to the khan and most of the veterans. There was also something about that planet, Valaena, he could not make sense of. The auspex showed nothing unusual; in fact, it appeared to be perfect for the White Scars’ style of fast, mobile fighting, but the closer they approached, the greater became his unease. He had to speak his mind.

‘We face a choice brothers. Do we wait for repairs to *Talons of the Hawk* and have its full support during our attack, or press on without?’

The brothers looked to each other uncomfortably. The question had to be asked, and now had to be answered. After the low murmurs finally died down, Samlak stepped forwards, stroking his long, black moustache in thoughtful preparation before he spoke. Samlak would never be hurried, and when he spoke, all listened.

‘Our brothers are on that planet. We must free them of their suffering.’

Nods of assent were exchanged, eyebrows furrowed and jaws set grim.

‘Quite right Samlak. The very purpose of this hunt is to release from their purgatory those we have seen with our own eyes to be corrupted by Chaos, and to free those being held by Karnel and his renegades. But we do not know if any of them survived our attack on their ship. It may be we strike from a position of weakness for nothing.’

The front row of the assembled White Scars, veterans all, bristled at his

words. The Stormseer ran a hand over his scarred and weathered face. *Something* was colouring his thoughts, and now his words. He must be careful.

‘Nothing? *Nothing?*’

Louk-Sen sported a fresh gash across his face from the recent battle, the tear only just congealed enough to stop the bleeding.

‘What about avenging our fallen khan? Or the thirty brothers we have lost? Karnel is the prey. We are the hunters. We have him. He must be finished.’

The scent of the quarry had quickened Louk-Sen’s blood. They all shared the sensation.

‘We must be sure, Amal. Not one of us can tolerate the idea of turning to Chaos. It is true that those who do are no longer our brothers. But what of our own six?’

Amal sighed and folded his arms at Louk-Sen’s words. They had been taken by Karnel early in the hunt, a surprise move neither he nor the khan had anticipated. The Stormseer looked up to the row of armoured figures, his gaze resting on the newest brother in their ranks, just elevated from novitiate and still to be given his own assault bike mount. He stood attentively at the back, eyes burning bright and keen, his ritual scars still pink from the cutting.

‘What say you, Jetek Suberei? We are under-strength, unsupported and without the sight of our astropath. The enemy’s power is unknown. We may be heading into a trap... or worse.’

Hands tightened around ceremonial lances and daggers in anger, with some of the brotherhood glowering at Amal’s bold words. Passions were running dangerously high, but it was Jetek, completely unfazed at being asked so direct a question, that broke the tension.

‘We attack. *Now.*’

Karnel watched the drop pods land on the far side of his wrecked vessel and smiled. Signalling his deliberately revealed forces to retreat up the slope towards the valley, he felt the fury of the daemon barely contained within the bedlam staff ready to be unleashed. He would use the power of its scream to harvest the White Scars’ souls.

There was only one thing complicating Karnel’s plan. A single young

Chogorian, prized above the others by the Changer of Ways, was not to be his. He knew not why, and knew not to ask. It was a small price to pay for such little interference in his schemes.

Amal accelerated hard, the attack bike's thick front tyre ploughing through Valaena's soft ground. Past the rattling figure of Jetek Suberei hunched behind his sidecar-mounted bolter, two dozen assault bikes emerged from the far side of Karnel's wrecked ship. The same number maintained position to his right. They were barely half the force they had once been, and the dread kept on growing within Amal's chest. The auspex might well show a clear path to the enemy forces over the high ridge a handful of miles distant, but his warp-sight was clouded to the point of uselessness. This planet was hiding something, and he felt certain it was soon to be revealed.

Jetek, too, felt uneasy. At first, he had felt an immediate connection to the beautiful planet; he was no Stormseer, but his affinity with the natural world had always been stronger than that of his other brothers. His greatest concern was the eagles circling above. There was something about them that...

Sky. Land.

Jetek shook his head, but the view did not change. An aerial view looking down, the acuity of the image better even than his augmented eyesight. He saw the line of White Scars bikes closing up around the front of the smouldering crashed ship. He saw himself, sitting in the sidecar next to Amal at the centre of the pack. He saw the enemy forces clustered on the brow of the hill, with Chaos riders waiting patiently in a line.

And just before his view down the barrels of the bolter returned, he thought he saw the valley floor shimmer darkly.

'By the Emperor's Throne!'

Jetek's amazement was clear in his breathless comment. He'd broken radio silence, and a clamour of curses flooded his ears. A sharp knock came on his right pauldron and Amal signalled him to change channel so only the two could communicate.

'What is it Suberei? Speak. And speak the truth.'

The column would be climbing the hill within seconds, and Jetek did not know whether to share his experience. But the Stormseer had clearly

picked up on the shock from the young warrior – that and his shared realisation that all was not right on Valaena.

‘A revelation, Stormseer. Through the eyes of an eagle.’

Amal eased off the throttle slightly, and the flanking rows of assault bikes surged forwards, several riders choosing their quarry from the assembled Chaos riders at the top of the hill and headed directly for them.

‘A powerful vision, young Suberei. I fear–’

Whoops and calls of the hunt overrode his words as the pack leaders closed in on their prey. As one, the dark forces turned their mounts and roared out of view into the valley below, followed quickly by the closing White Scars silhouetted on the horizon. Suddenly, the ground exploded in a brilliant rupture to Amal’s right, showering earth over both him and Jetek. Turning to look behind, the Stormseer saw a line of dark shapes pouring from the wreckage of Karnel’s ship as dozens of his renegade followers mounted a rearguard attack. Their over-eagerness had left them exposed, and Amal cursed bitterly for not insisting they check the remains of the vessel as they had passed it.

Karnel weighed his bedlam staff in his hands and readied it for his first attack. From his position halfway down the slope, he waited for his riders to hurtle past, then willed the disc of Tzeentch further away from the ground. Within seconds the slope was filled with White Scars bikes churning flurries of soil with their enormous wheels, bolters and tulwars raised high and horse-hair standards whipping proudly in the breeze. Spotting the Chaos lord, many changed their direction, realising their weapons might prove useless, while the more foolhardy aimed straight for him, unleashing a murderous hail of fire as they rode. Karnel deflected the bolts with ease, snorting at the futility of it as he rose higher into the air.

As the first wave of riders passed beneath him, the sorcerer unleashed a wave of dark power across the bottom of the valley with a sweep of his staff. Before the astonished eyes of the White Scars, the tranquil vale into which they were chasing their quarry disappeared, replaced by a seething pool of darkness. The sky above changed from green to black and, to their horror, the forward riders saw six of their brothers, transfixed on enormous metal crosses, directly in their path. Three attack bikes smashed into the slumped and broken forms of the tortured Chogorians. The impact

spun their mounts, themselves and their crushed brothers into the Chaos rupture. Black ribbons of living malice lashed outwards and upwards, the entire portal seemingly digesting the offering with greedy abandon. Karnel noticed the conduit shrink dramatically. With half of its nourishment now gone, the gateway had reduced to nearly half its original size. It remained enough for the Chaos lord's needs, but even so he realised time had suddenly become an enemy rather than a friend.

Karnel directed his Chaos riders to engage the White Scars around the edge of the portal, their orders to disable or unbalance their mounts rather than fire at the bikers directly. Confusion reigned, with some of the White Scars careening into the swirling current or dragged in by thick tentacles of Chaos-formed miasma. However, it did not take long for the remaining Chogorian riders to realise the true horror of their situation, and they retreated back up the steep slopes of the valley away from the vile morass. This, too, had been anticipated by Karnel and, with a terrifying scream from his staff rending the foul air, the Chaos lord swept down like a vengeful spirit on the closest fleeing White Scars biker.

Louk-Sen had nearly made it to the top of the hill when a searing pain tore through his right shoulder. Looking down, he was infuriated to see a glistening spike projecting from beneath his pauldron. He grabbed onto it with his throttle hand, but the metal – or whatever it was – suddenly changed, its surface writhing and shifting, making it impossible to grip. As he felt himself rising into the air, the burning turned to a tearing sensation, and the weight of his armoured body forced him to slide backwards. Twisting and kicking, he managed to move forwards a few inches and thought he might be able to free himself from impalement, but the end of the spike reformed itself into four backward-facing barbs. Roaring in frustration, he unsheathed his tulwar and hacked at the hooks, but to no avail. Directly below, the broiling portal loomed, and he felt himself pitching forwards, sliding towards the barbs, which transformed into a slender spike on his approach. As black tendrils wrapped themselves around his thrashing body, the last thing Louk-Sen saw was the blade on the underside of the disc as it was reabsorbed into its upward-sweeping shape, and Karnel hurtling away in pursuit of his next target.

Amal and Jetek heard the cry in their helmets, but were too busy avoiding

the suppressing fire from the pursuing Chaos bikers and Predator tanks to consider its significance. Karnel's forces seemed determined to prevent a retreat, and when the vox chatter changed from the triumphant cries of the hunt to urgently shouted orders and furious oaths, it became clear the battle was turning against them. Jetek unleashed a carefully aimed burst of fire at an approaching Chaos bike, shattering its front left-hand fork and causing the wheel to flip up and under the frame. The machine slammed into the ground, pitching the flailing rider head first into the soil as the bike cartwheeled over him then rolled to a halt. Jetek concentrated bolter fire at the helmet. The rider did not get up again.

And then his vision changed once again to the rolling plains of Valaena, except this time he could see the swirling maelstrom of darkness at the bottom of the valley and his brothers being herded into its dreadful grasp. He could see his position, trapped between the forces behind them and the forces beyond. He could see a gold disc travelling at tremendous speed, a cloaked and helmeted figure atop it sweeping a long, dark staff towards himself and Amal.

Colour erupted inside Jetek's head. As he spun over the lip of the hill and down to the valley below, he saw dazzling flashes from Amal's force staff as the Stormseer tried to fend off the onslaught from the Chaos lord who had swooped in on them from above. Landing heavily on his back, Jetek could see the eagle overhead through whose eyes he'd witnessed the attack, its wings beating strongly to avoid the darting ebony wisps snaking up from the void at the bottom of the valley. Jetek's view was suddenly blocked by a large object hurtling towards him, and the young Chogorian staggered to his feet as his mangled attack bike thumped into the ground beside him. The scene down the slope of the valley was one of turmoil; some of his brothers had managed a counter-attack on the Chaos riders to the right, but the engagements were precariously close to the edge of the swirling black vortex. Several White Scars assault bikes idled without riders, including the one previously ridden by their slain khan. Where the riders were, Jetek was unsure, but it was likely they had fallen victim to another one of Karnel's aerial assaults or been driven into the clutches of the portal and dragged to their doom. Jumping over to the sidecar, Jetek wrenched a bolter from its mounting and started firing at the nearest enemy.

It was then he saw the three wretched forms of his crucified brothers.

Bellowing in fury, he strode ahead, cleaving a path with bolter fire at the renegades who had turned to confront him. Something very large hit him in the back and threw him to the ground, the weapon spinning from his grasp.

Karnel floated yards from Jetek's position, resting heavily on his glowing staff. The upswept blades of his disc of Tzeentch were thick with blood, some of which dripped in a thin line of crimson from the razor-sharp tips to the ground below. The Chaos lord seemed oblivious to the raging battle behind him, instead beckoning Jetek to stand before him. There was no sign of the Stormseer. Karnel had caught them completely by surprise, and such was the sorcerer's terrible power, it was likely Amal was either dead or dying. Whether it looked like bravado or a sign of his utter contempt for this force of evil, Jetek didn't care; he still unsheathed his tulwar and felt comforted by its familiarity. The gold curved horns of Karnel's helmet accentuated his glance at the action and there was amusement in his voice.

'So, Jetek Suberei. You still refuse to recognise the futility of fighting against the Changer of Ways?'

The young warrior heard a clamour from behind the hill. Explosions shook the ground and debris rained down around him. Most of it seemed to belong to Karnel's renegade forces, which gave him great heart despite his desperate situation.

'I see no futility in hunting you to extinction, or slaying those who have turned their backs on the Imperium.'

The staff released a scream so piercing it made the blade in Jetek's hand sing in sympathy. The Chogorian's head spun, and the Chaos lord sounded as if he was speaking from the bottom of a well.

'The gifts of Tzeentch are far greater than those bestowed by your desiccated Corpse-God. The way of Chaos is the only true path to glory. You yourself know this; I see the doubt in your soul as clearly as the fear writ across your face.'

Jetek's hand tightened on his weapon. The words were sliding through his mind, worming their way into his thoughts and dreams.

'You desire that glory, don't you Jetek? To become the greatest hunter the White Scars have ever seen. If you must serve that dead idol, you need not forsake your loyalties to wield such power – the power that has been

foreseen by the Changer of Ways himself. Think of the hunt you could lead within the Eye of Terror.’

The disc hovered closer to Jetek. He was rooted to the spot, mesmerised by the power of the sorcerer who leant forwards towards him.

‘Think of the *glory*.’

And then he was looking down on himself and his brothers fighting against the rearguard forces of Karnel, battling to the last so they would not be driven into the seething black chasm. He saw himself, so close to the edge of damnation. He saw the three remaining crucified brothers, their heads lolled onto their chests, clinging to life. The arrogance of the White Scars, their absolute belief in their superiority over others, had led them to this point. Jetek closed his eyes and felt the sensation of wind beneath wings, of freedom and clarity of purpose.

Despite how much he desired what was offered, his own hubris would not triumph.

‘Your god is an abomination, a lord of lies! I shall not succumb. I would rather die.’

Karnel stood upright and held his staff between his hands. He had done what was bid of him by his master, had made the offer for the White Scar to turn of his own free will.

It was time for him to finish his great gathering of souls.

‘It is of no consequence what you shall or shall not do. You will face the warp, be reborn in its beauty and then serve the Great Changer regardless.’

Jetek roared his defiance and raised his weapon. Karnel looked down and the nearest blade reshaped itself into a lance, ready to skewer the Chogorian and drag him into the slowly eroding portal behind.

A blast of crackling energy lit the gloom of the valley floor, blasting Karnel onto the black-encrusted ground. The daemonic disc immediately spun and moved towards its master, tilting to protect the sorcerer from the barrage of naked warp energy lancing from Amal’s skull-topped force staff.

‘Suberei... the khan’s bike... hurry. We have very little time.’

The life force was draining from Amal as he shouted, the intensity of his bombardment diminishing as Karnel sheltered behind the disc. Jetek did as he was bid, sheathing his tulwar and vaulting onto the rumbling attack bike with its torn and ragged command pennants snapping in the lashing

energy. Gunning the throttle, he rode towards Amal, who was sagging to his knees on the scorched ground. He could see Karnel was readying his staff for a counter-attack, and had Jetek not been so fast and skilful on his newly acquired mount, the maelstrom unleashed by the sorcerer from his bedlam staff might have torn the Stormseer apart. Instead, Jetek grabbed Amal and swung him with all his might onto the pillion behind, accelerating the instant he was astride and leaving empty space as a target for the Chaos lord.

‘Head for the crucifixes. We must either rescue or kill our brothers. Their suffering is feeding this portal.’

Jetek needed no second bidding. All around the valley, White Scars tried to manoeuvre away from the conduit but the rearguard forces had pushed nearly the entire brotherhood into the arena, driving them down the slopes with intensive fire and suicidal runs. Behind him, Amal had turned around so the two were back-to-back, giving him a better opportunity to level his staff at the pursuing Chaos lord. A summoned blast hit the underside of Karnel’s disc, but as the sorcerer accelerated and descended, the front blades of the disc extended into deadly spears ready to puncture the two riders. The Stormseer shouted a warning to Jetek, who forced the bike into as sharp a left turn as he dared at that speed. The Chaos lord overshot, Amal ducking beneath the lethal projections on the disc’s underside and channelling warp energy directly at the living metal. The strange daemon writhed and shrunk back into itself, but Karnel was already turning to present an undamaged blade to his target.

Directly ahead, Jetek could see the three figures hanging lifelessly on their crosses. Amal panted his command, his voice cracking with exhaustion and pain.

‘Aim for the middle, then broadside all three. You will have to—’

The Stormseer’s words turned into a wet gurgle. To Jetek’s right, a gleaming spear tip grazed the side of his helmet, smearing blood across the white surface. The young Chogorian’s ears were filled with the roar from Amal as he rose into the air, but he had not given up the fight. Dark and light energy arced between the two psykers at point-blank range, and Jetek knew he could do nothing for the Stormseer. Aiming straight for the figures now only yards away, he threw the bike into a slide, released his grip and let the tremendous momentum of the machine do the work. It

ploughed into the two figures on the left, taking them into the rift over which the sorcerer now hovered.

Karnel knew he had won the fight. Despite his own power being severely depleted, he could feel the life ebbing away from the White Scars psyker skewered directly in front of him. The Stormseer could barely hold his force staff now, and it was time for the Chaos lord to finish him and take the good number of bikers still fighting so ferociously for their very souls. Willing the disc towards the edge of the portal, Karnel readied himself to push Amal into the tendrils of its dark grasp with his boot.

But the portal was not there anymore. The outer edge receded dramatically, leaving only a pool a couple of yards wide swirling and bubbling in the middle of the valley.

Looking over to the crucifixes, Karnel saw only one remained, and that single Chogorian was being released from his bonds by one of his brothers. Realising he had run out of time, Karnel howled with rage – and felt a searing pain shock through his body.

That single moment of distraction was all that Amal had needed to pull his body along the disc's lance and ram his force staff into the Chaos lord's thigh. The last of his energy poured into Karnel, and the sorcerer could feel his connection with the disc, even the Warp itself, breaking. Amal ducked under Karnel's wildly swung bedlam staff and grabbed onto the disc with his dying strength, willing the inhuman creation back to its own dimension. Taking the command as that of its master, the disc pitched downwards into the conduit back to the Empyrean, taking a raging Karnel and lifeless Amal with it.

Jetek Suberei opened his eyes. He could not remember being thrown so high into the air by the shockwave from the collapsed portal, and was confused at how he could see most of his fellow warriors finishing off what was left of Karnel's warband. At the bottom of the valley, others tended the surviving tortured White Scar and burned the bodies of the Chaos riders, finally releasing them from torment. Removing his helmet, Jetek screwed his eyes closed and could hear the beating of wings from above.

The warrior opened his eyes to see a huge brown eagle watching him

coolly from the seat of an attack bike. Rising to his feet, Jetek stood quite still as the bird continued to regard the Chogorian closely. This, Jetek realised, was the creature whose vision he had shared. The feeling of dread had abated, and while the Chaos energies had disappeared, the connection with this noble creature still remained. Jetek had no idea why, but respected the gift this planet had bestowed upon him.

Raising his arm, Jetek offered a perch to the powerful beast, who cocked her head to one side and considered the invitation for a few seconds before fluttering over to land heavily on his vambrace. The two stared at each other for long seconds, then Jetek replaced his helmet and mounted the bike seemingly chosen for him by the eagle. He waited for her to hop onto his shoulder, then gunned the engine and headed towards the final clean-up of Karnel's abandoned forces.

## **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.

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