

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

**GALL OF  
CHAOS**  
**WITHOUT  
FEAR**

*by* **AARON DEMBSKI-BOWDEN**

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# WITHOUT FEAR

Aaron Dembski-Bowden

Earth to earth. Ash to ash. Dust to dust.

Earth from Iax. Ash from Calth. Dust from Macragge.

He consecrates his gauntlets with the sacred soil of three worlds. The ritual complete, with the fusion of soil-types marking his gloves, he reaches for his weapons.

The first is older than the empire it defends, with a full ten thousand years of venerated service to its name. It has been reforged, rebuilt, repaired – yet never lost, never abandoned, never destroyed. His other weapons – the boltgun in his personal armoury, the chainsword mag-locked at his hip – these are newer, with legacies that last mere decades. The pistol is a more majestic piece, a wide-mouthed Umbra-pattern born in a brighter age and preserved through millennia of war. All bolt weapons bellow when fired; this one roars louder and harsher than its kindred, a sign of its machine-spirit's pride.

Along its length, the words *Sempram Fiberi* shine in burnished bronze against the black: *Always Free*, when translated literally into Terran High Gothic. Macragge's centralised dialect of Gothic is a far more aggressive vernacular, and the words have a subtly different and more defiant meaning: *Never Conquered*.

A chrome Imperialis marks the weapon's opposite side, the winged skull sigil of unbreakable loyalty hearkening back to a time when there could be no trust between brothers, when the galaxy burned in the fires of a traitor's ambition then fell beneath the great, inevitable shadow of encroaching darkness.

Old, battered trinkets hang from slender chains on the pistol's grip: two of them, alike in humility and dignity, both made by human hands rather than wrought in a Forgemaster's foundry. The first is a simple icon of the primarch, no longer than a finger, with decades of wear smoothing out Guilliman's carved

features to nothingness. It is the kind of good fortune token offered by the members of high-blooded families – a caring mother or sister, perhaps – when a son is taken from his academy and chosen for the Trials.

The second, similarly worn and just as precious, is a black iron seal the size of a coin, depicting the flowering stem of a verbena plant wrapped around a plain, sheathed sword. It is a symbol with its roots among the First Families of Iax back during the Founding of Ultramar, known as the crest of the honoured Lukallius bloodline.

The warrior performs the necessary rites of blessing one last time, speaking praise to the spirits of his bolt pistol and chainblade before locking them against his armour plating once more.

He stares through a red-lensed retinal display, running through the third and final calibration to ensure there is no delay between the movements of his eyes and the location of his targeting reticule. All is in order. His squadmates' biosigns play along the edge of his vision in a minor spillage of runic data, a far cruder representation than the comprehensive vision allowed by an Apothecary's diagnosticator helm, but a useful insight nevertheless. Everyone's read-outs are stable, with no sign of adrenal spiking or chemical alteration from the reserves of battle narcotics in the false-veins of their armoured suits.

He is ready exactly as expected, in the moment before the Thunderhawk gunship shivers with the pressure and heat of an atmospheric breach.

The flickering alert lights of the shaking crew bay bathe his battleplate in cycling flashes. The rhythmic illumination flashes across the name engraved upon his shoulder guard: *Aeneas Lukallius* – acid-etched and gold-chased with an artisan's precision within the numeric symbols of his squad designation.

*'Animarus estac honori,'* Sergeant Visanius says. *Courage and honour.*

Each of the Ultramarines replies with the sign of the aquila, armoured gauntlets thudding against breastplates.

Visanius has no need to relay their orders. Each warrior knows what they will face, retaining eidetic recollections of their briefings even down to the calculated, projected odds of their own survival.

Sergeant Visanius takes his position at the squad's lead. *'Hexus-Octavus,'* he says, speaking the brothers' designation, shown in white marble numerals on their battleplate and the steeldust rims of their pauldrons: *Sixth Squad, Eighth Company.* His voice is beginning to crackle with the vox distortion of atmospheric entry. *'Tusca paratim?'* he asks them. *Stand you ready?*

*'Sinah meturos,'* they speak in unison. *Without fear.*

The gunship rattles now, its heat-shielding aflame as it lances groundwards. Hydraulic locks in the front ramp clank and clatter as their void seals unbind. In less than a minute, they will disengage. Ten seconds after that, they will release. The gang-ramp will grind open with the Thunderhawk still six thousand metres high.

Without needing to be told, two of the warriors step forwards in the same moment, flanking the sergeant. Caius and Erastes both bear ritually sanctioned flamers in their cobalt gauntlets. The honour of the first assault – *oppugnare primaris* – will go to them at Visanius' side. This is the way of Hexus-Octavus, as it has been since Visanius took command twenty-nine years ago.

The flickering alarm light burns brighter, its flashes turning wilder. The gang-ramp opens in a juddering yawn, letting in the buffeting wind. The ship is below the clouds, and the reaved earth of a war-torn world awaits. The Thunderhawk streaks high over the grey bones of a burning city.

Other voices join the squad's vox; voices from the surface, each one calm and focussed, delivering brief slivers of relevant data and then falling silent.

Visanius takes a step forward as if beckoned by the voices of his embattled brothers below.

*'Ignae ferroqurum,'* he says at last, giving voice to the battle-dictum of Squad Hexus-Octavus. *With fire and iron.*

Sergeant Visanius takes three running steps, and falls into the sky. Caius and Erastus follow scarce metres behind him.

Aeneas and Tyresius are fourth and fifth. Behind them are Jovian and Priscus, and Caelian – the youngest – last of all.

Aeneas falls. He drops with all the weight of his active battleplate towards the city, which rises up to meet him, spreading out wider and wider in time to the cycling feed of altitude numerals. Silently, he beseeches the primarch to witness his deeds this day. In the same breath he entrusts his soul to the Emperor's care. Here, now, there is a sense of some brief, strange serenity. The void is above and the war is below, but for now there is only the open sky.

Altitude signifiers become warnings. Scrolling numbers become flashing runes.

Through rising smoke and the skyward flashes of anti-air fire, their deployment is as perfect as any simulated drop assault, the legacy of drilling until training becomes instinct. Visanius is first, plunging into the heart of the foe, his thunder hammer sweeping down with tectonic force. Caius and Erastes land either side of him, turning in viciously smooth motions, their flamers spewing torrents of corrosive chemical fire in a whirling spiral. They ignite the closest enemies and

send others shrieking and falling back. They scorch the very earth, making room for their brothers to land. The site was once a plaza for the exchange and barter of goods. Now it is a mustering field around the most profane monument. Hexus-Octavus will remake it into a killing ground.

Aeneas fires his jump pack's descent thrusters for the seventh and final time, a precise and controlled burst, then strikes the rocky, burning earth with his weapons already in his hands.

*'Haek,'* he says, the very moment his boot touches the ground. *Here.*

Three steps bring him to a halt at the edge of the incinerated circle, his armoured boots crushing the unfortunate corpses of those who stood against Caius and Erastes. Already, he's shooting. Within his helm, Aeneas' targeting array is a calculated yet messy web of overlaying information. The Umbra pistol roars with each kick, firing bolts in quick succession. He leads his targets, gunning them down with torso shots, blasting them apart from within.

Humans. Just humans. Just shouting, shrieking, bleeding men and women in armour of industrial corrugate and barbed wire. Profane scars cut into their skin run with fresh blood. Many of them wear rebreather masks suited to forge or mining work. Others – those once loyal – fight in ragged remnants of Astra Militarum uniforms. Spittle flies as they shriek and bay like beasts. Many of them have slit their tongues in two, or removed them entirely in ritual gestures the meaning of which Aeneas cannot fathom. He kills them regardless, feeling their bayonets and cudgels breaking against his battleplate as he lashes back with cursory swings of his chainsword. Between his strength and the blade's monomolecular-edged teeth, their unarmoured bodies are riven to pieces.

Just humans, true. But so many of them. Feverishly praying to a broken idol, a thing of sundered armour pieces chained to the hull of a long-dead, burned out Baneblade.

Aeneas' heart soars as he sees the chained relic, even as the shame of the sight burns him to his core. The crucified Dreadnought has endured the erosion of weather and the defilement of hateful hearts for three years, since the last war seen upon this world. Its armour plating, what few parts of it aren't cracked open and punctured or rusted with acidic rain, shows none of the red that once so proudly signalled its allegiance.

There, engraved upon its dismantled sarcophagus, is the tarnished emblem of the Genesis Chapter, cousins and kindred to the Ultramarines since the Legions were severed by the will and wisdom of the Avenging Son. The name of the warrior within, a rotten husk of disconnected and desecrated bones wrapped in

barbed wire, shows across the coffin-plate.

*Benedictus of the Coblii.*

The familiarity of the name smites him. Truly, the two Chapters are cousins.

'*Caveantes,*' warns Tyresius, a thirty-year veteran, born of Macragge's own Uthii bloodline. *Beware.*

Aeneas is already aware of the threat. He's turning as his brother voxes the warning, raising his pistol and sending three bolts into a team of filthy, hunched dregs bringing up a heavy stubber from a nearby roadside gutter serving as a makeshift trench. All three gun-bearers burst from torso shots. Aeneas doesn't see them fall. He's engaged once more, turning aside a jury-rigged pike with a deflecting parry of his chainsword and killing the wielder of the scrapyard spear with a boot to the woman's head. She drops, her skull shattered and her back broken.

Others rise in her place, jabbing at the encircled warriors with polearms made from mining pikes and packed with crude fyceline detonation sticks. Chainswords cut and chop. Bolters bark. Where the Ultramarines aren't scrambling over a ground made uneven by fallen bodies, they soon splash toe-deep in impure blood. It spatters up Aeneas' armour, reddening him to the shins.

By now, any sane human would have fled. These wretched things, these emaciated revenants decorated with scarred flesh, fall upon the Ultramarines with knives, rocks and even their own bodies, breaking their teeth on cobalt ceramite.

Aeneas hears his sergeant across the wider vox-web, reporting on his squad's deployment as ordered. Hexus-Octavus are the falling blade, driven down into the dragon's heart. Now they kill, and kill, and kill, breaking this horde in advance of their brothers in the Third and First Companies. The former are already engaged elsewhere in the city, putting down the unrest that grips this rebellious world. The latter wait in orbit, praying in the bellies of the behemoths that serve as the strike force's fleet.

Hexus-Octavus fights on. Genhanced strength or not, the sheer weight of flesh against them defies the squad's precise fury and butchery. Vital signs start to spike as battle narcotics squirt into bloodstreams with stinging spurts. Pain suppressors numb poisoned scratches and stabs that manage to pierce the softer joints in the Ultramarines' armour, and chem-purges cleanse the minor wounds before they can become infected.

Every battle has its ebb and flow, no different from a tide. A warrior senses it, feeling for that moment when the enemy's collective will wavers, when so many

of its number have been slaughtered that even a faith-crazed horde must catch its metaphorical breath at the foes it faces.

Aeneas senses it in the same moment the command comes.

*'Promavoi!'* Visanius orders, raising his voice for the first time. *Advance!*

First blood to the Chapter. Now the second strike will fall.

Turbines whine to life, then start howling. Fire breathes from their jump packs. Hexus-Octavus leaps skyward. Stubber fire, rattlingly insignificant, zips and cuts past Aeneas as he kicks off from the ground.

In their wake, a teleport beacon winks at the horde's heart, singing its song to the ships in orbit.

The few renegades not crying their hatred at the skyborne Ultramarines turn to vent their rage on the machine in their midst, thrusting their weapons at the thrumming homing beacon – but they're too late to end its clarion call. The last of Hexus-Octavus' victims are still dying when the first thundercracks of dislocated air herald the arrival of the hulking warriors of the First Company.

Aeneas crouches atop the ruined spire of an Administratum building, which has been decorated with the crucified bones of loyal citizens. Rain begins to fall, its hissing caress steaming on the still-live engine housings strapped to his back. His retinal display dims to compensate for the livid flashes of apportation flares below. The Chapter's veterans take to the field, manifesting in fusion-bright bursts of teleportation.

He smiles at the sight. *'Laurelas,'* he voxes to the rest of his squad. *Victory.*

Sergeant Visanius nods with a curt purr of collar servos. New orders already scroll along his eye lenses.

*'Tusca paratim?'* he asks his brothers once more.

*'Sinah meturos,'* is the unified reply.

As it should be, among those who know no fear. As it always is.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Aaron Dembski-Bowden** is the author of the Horus Heresy novels *Betrayer* and *The First Heretic*, as well as the novella *Aurelian* and the audio drama *Butcher's Nails*, for the same series. He also wrote the popular Night Lords series, the Space Marine Battles book *Helsreach*, the Abaddon novel *The Talon of Horus*, the Grey Knights novel *The Emperor's Gift* and numerous short stories. He lives and works in Northern Ireland.

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