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THE FIST OF DORN

A short story by Anthony Reynolds



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Dark metal plates, edged in black and yellow chevrons.

Iron Warrior.

From the ground, the broken traitor glared up at his executioner. A massive yellow armoured boot had him pinned to the ground amid the detritus of the siege.

The Chaos Space Marine's lips were drawn back in anger or pain or both, revealing blood-stained metal teeth. His heavy armour was cracked and sparking, ruptured in a dozen places by bolter fire, but those wounds were not fatal. No, the blow that had felled him had crumpled his breastplate inwards, shattering the fused ribcage within.

There was not much that could withstand a blow from the Fist of Dorn, not even power armour.

The First Captain of the Imperial Fists glowered down at the traitor, his brick-like features set, his immense thunder hammer poised.

The traitor was close to death, but no Space Marine died easily, no matter his allegiance. When he spoke, his words quite literally dripped with venom. The blood and acidic spittle dribbling from his lips ate into his damaged war plate.

'By coming here... you've let... thousands perish,' he breathed. He gave a hacking laugh. 'Their blood... is... on... you.'

'I had no choice,' said Captain Darnath Lysander.

The Imperial Fists Scout stands over the corpse.

It's an abhuman. Ogryn. Augmented for industrial labour. It's a massive slab of muscle, and must have stood at least eight foot tall. Nevertheless, it's been ripped in two like it was nothing.

The body is still warm. Blood is pooling beneath it, and it is not the only

corpse.

His quarry is close.

He checks his pistol. Only three bolts remain. It will have to be enough.

Through rain and blood and darkness he tracked his enemy here. He is the last of his squad.

He is deep within the manufactory now. Pistons like mountains rise and fall, and chain-links as big as battle tanks grind past overhead. Oily smoke and the stink of industry are heavy in the scalding, airless atmosphere. Molten metal glows like the lifeblood of Hel itself as fifty-tonne ladles upend their contents into ceramite moulds. Steam rises, hissing like enraged serpents as vats are doused.

Workers stand nearby. An overseer steps from their mass. Human, unaugmented. Her face is hard, and stained with oil and scorch burns.

‘I know where it is going,’ she says.

The Scout picks up a sledgehammer used to knock heavy pins from engine moulds. He hefts it, feeling its weight. It feels good.

‘Show me,’ he says.

His enemy is wounded. Damaged servos grind and spark with every step. The Scout has him in his sights.

He squeezes the trigger, twice.

The Iron Warrior registers his target lock in the instant the Scout fires. He jerks back, avoiding the kill-shot. He is hit once on the shoulder and once on the breastplate. Non-penetrating. Non-fatal. The traitor brings up his bolter, tracking it towards the Scout’s position.

He has no cover. He has no time to think.

The Scout launches from the upper gantry. Two bolts roar past him. A third ricochets off his side and detonates. He’s bleeding, his flesh lacerated and scorched, but there is no time for pain. He hits the Iron Warrior shoulder first. It’s like hitting an iron girder, but he is strong too. They crash to the ground together.

The Scout is up first, less encumbered by his armour. He kicks away the enemy’s tainted bolter, and levels his pistol. One bolt. He fires just as the Iron Warrior swats the bolt pistol aside. The shot goes wild and the pistol sails off the edge of the platform.

A serrated combat blade flashes. The Scout roars. The blade is embedded in his thigh up to the hilt, transfixing the limbs. One-handed, he slams the head of

the sledgehammer into the side of the Iron Warrior's grilled helm and takes a staggering step back. His leg is awash with blood.

'I'm going to rip you apart, just like the others, boy,' says the Iron Warrior. His voice is a static-infused, mechanised growl.

The Iron Warrior begins to push himself to his feet. With a roar, the Scout steps forward and hits him under the chin with the sledgehammer. He's wielding it two-handed and puts all his strength and weight into the blow. There is a heavy *clang* as the Iron Warrior's helmed head snaps back. Stepping in close, the Scout drives the haft of the hammer square into his chest.

The Iron Warrior grasps for him, at the air, for a handhold, for balance. He falls backwards off the platform.

Overhead, a heavy ladle grinds past, brimming with liquid metal. The Scout staggers three steps and halts its movement at the nearby emergency controls. Below, the Iron Warrior is lying on his back. He sees what is coming. He will not survive.

A movement in the shadows. The woman. The overseer. She is standing down there, clutching the Scout's fallen bolt pistol. It is heavy and even holding it in both hands she struggles to keep it steady. It's levelled at the Iron Warrior.

'No!' the Scout calls, too late. She pulls the trigger. Nothing happens. The Iron Warrior strikes. He has her in his grasp and looks up at the Scout. His visor lenses gleam like balefire.

'Kill me and you kill her,' he growls up at the Imperial Fists neophyte.

The Scout pauses. Indecision wars within him.

'You are a fool,' laughs the Iron Warrior. Dragging the overseer with him, he backs off into the darkness and is gone.

The Scout roars his frustration. He rips the knife from his leg. By the time he makes his staggering progress down below, the enemy is long gone. He finds the woman, though. Her neck has been broken.

The immense Captain of the First Company stared down at his fallen foe, hate and contempt written in his stony glare.

'You chose... to let them... die. Those... loyalist lapdogs...' the dying Iron Warrior said. '*You.*'

His guttural laugh gave way to a bloody cough.

'Out of mercy for an innocent, I once let one of your bastard kin walk away alive when I could have ended him,' said Lysander, his voice a low, dangerous rumble. 'By not taking that opportunity I condemned tens of thousands of others.'

That was long ago. I know better now.'

Servos whined as Lysander increased the pressure on the broken traitor's chest. Blood bubbled from the traitor's lips. He raised the Fist of Dorn to strike the fatal blow.

'You say to me I had a choice – to kill you or save them,' said Lysander. 'I say there was no choice at all.'

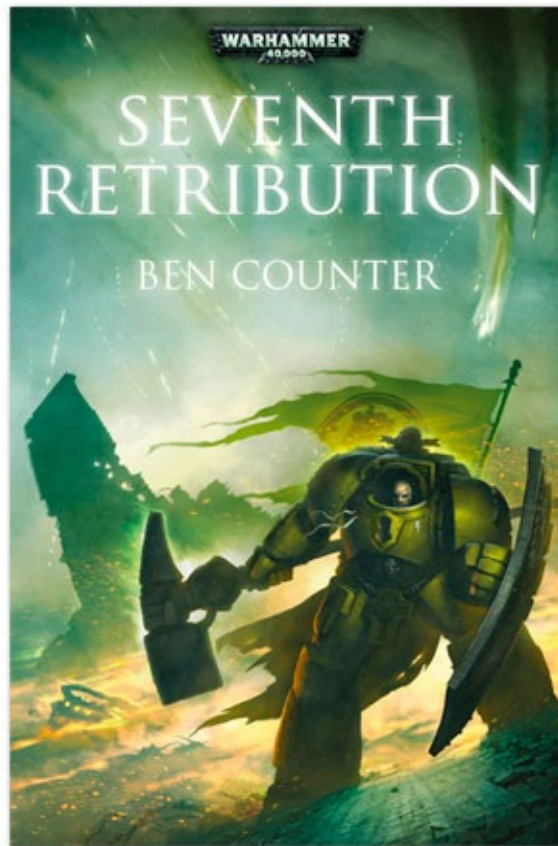
The Fist of Dorn came down sharply, and the Iron Warrior's head disappeared.

Lysander turned away, looking out across the shattered fortress.

'Shon'tu,' he spat, invoking the name of the Iron Warrior that he allowed to live, so many years ago. 'Never again.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANTHONY REYNOLDS'S work for Black Library includes the Word Bearers trilogy, the Knights of Bretonnia series and the Horus Heresy short stories 'Scions of the Storm' and 'Dark Heart'. Originally from Australia, Anthony moved to the UK where he worked within Games Workshop for many years before returning to his homeland. He is currently touring the world, taking inspiration from natural wonders that he can twist into devious monstrosities to populate the 41st Millennium.



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