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FORGEFATHER

*A short story by Nick Kyme*



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Nick Kyme

The fire of the forge blazes. Its heat prickles the back of my neck, induces sweat to form on my muscled torso. I am laid bare to its burning touch as it scalds my skin, and I revel in it.

A glow emanates from the coals where a weapon begins to take shape, the light framing my stern expression in fiery amber. What was once blunt rock, ore ripped from the mountain, now takes on a killing edge as it is transformed upon my anvil, and I have to fight to suppress a smile.

Much time has passed since I was here in the deep heart of the mountain, amongst its lifeblood and its monsters.

I am a monster too, one with black skin and eyes like the firestones of the Arridian Plain. We are, all of us in our own way, monsters. I see it when those not of Nocturne and the Promethean creed look upon us. I welcome it. It is necessary and makes our task easier.

For we are war-forged, just like the blade I am shaping in the fire.

Every beat of my fuller makes a ring that echoes with the beat of my proud heart. It has brought an audience, who watch silently from the darkness as I work the metal.

Forgefather, my Chapter calls me, though it has been many years since I felt worthy of that accolade. But then again, you never lose the craft. It is as natural to us as breathing.

As is battle.

My audience stirs, eager for a closer look at my art.

The blade tempers, steam rises from silver metal as it touches cooling water. I have little time, and yet this must be savoured, it must be done right.

I gave up my name, my kin, for this honour. I walk in *his* path, no longer a battle-brother but a questing knight in a company of one. It is lonely work, I will freely admit that but the time I have spent in this forge of forges has provided

perspective. I am glad I came here, to the heart of Deathfire, in its deeps. It almost makes me forget, just for an instant, that I will soon have to leave it again.

My audience comes closer still, watching as I affix hilt to blade and measure the weapon's heft.

I hear them hiss and growl, the creatures who are watching, but do not raise my eyes, for my concentration is here at the anvil and can be nowhere else. But I must be swift, for they will not be wary forever.

Scale scrapes rock. There is a spit of errant flame in what I interpret as a challenge, and I know craft must give way to action.

I have no armour, no artefacts and no weapons, save the one I have fresh-forged. Here, now, in these shadow-haunted depths, amidst the endless clouds of smoke and ash, warrior and Forgefather become one.

Two drakes, large creatures from the deep earth, have come to my forge. Their eyes are like fiery coals, not so different from mine.

The first springs, its powerful hindquarters propelling it across the lava chasm and atop my anvil. By the time its claws seize metal, I have withdrawn, blade in hand, to a defensive fighting position.

I roar a challenge.

It is met by two others, one from the beast squatting upon the anvil; the other from its mate, now spewing fire at me.

I roll, then dive, ducking the blade beneath me as I go, feeling the heat of the metal against my chest and the fire of the drake caressing my back.

Skin burns. I smell it and know it is my own.

The two have come to this place, drawn by my hammering, just as I knew they would. Hunting in the deeps is difficult, but predators are always eager for more prey.

Even in the dingy, smoke-occluded light, I see one of the drakes has thick yellow spines all the way down its back. The tail has a mace-like nub and the beast's scale is fire-red in colour. It rounds the anvil, sweeping towards my forward arc. It is trying to catch my eye, so its mate can attack my blind side.

I don't engage, staying elusive and on the defensive until the other has been drawn out. This one is lithe, longer of bone but not as muscular. A pair of flesh sacs sit beneath its angular chin. Within is the natural enzyme that, upon ignition, becomes fiery death. Unlike its brazen kin, this beast is coal-black, its lidded eyes the same to better blend in with the dark.

A spear of flame rips from its gullet and I vault over the anvil, using it as

cover.

It will take a few seconds before it can spit again.

The first beast attacks, as I knew it would, seeking to protect its mate, vulnerable now its chief killing-method is temporarily inert.

I let the bigger drake lunge, turning my defence into attack as I weave away from its claws but turn on my heel to ram my sword deep into its flank.

That brings a wail of pain and a thrashing panic. I let it, ripping out my blade savagely and presenting a tempting target for its wrath. The drake lunges again, and this time I simply leap aside and allow its head to strike the anvil. The impact is bone-crunching and I can almost imagine the resulting fissures in the beast's skull as it takes the hit. It is dazed, but I have no time to finish it.

The fire-spitter comes for me. Seeing its mate insensate and in obvious distress sends the drake into a berserk fury. It thinks me cornered, flesh sacs bulging as it shapes to immolate the flesh from my body. I counter by rushing forward. A Themian war cry stalls the beast just long enough for me to dip below its guard as the first embers of flame flicker forth and slit one of the flesh sacs open.

Ignition is rapid and violent. For a few seconds the drake is enveloped in its own fire, before the conflagration consumes all and its head explodes.

Patting down the flames on my back and chest, I regard the scene.

One drake is a headless, smoking ruin; the other is all but dead, its skull crushed, flank ripped open.

I turn over the blade I have forged in my hands. Its lustre is dulled and the edge is chipped, but still sharp. Drake scale is one of the most invulnerable, impervious materials on all of Nocturne. Here, in the deeps, amongst monsters such as the two I have just slain, even a power sword would struggle to cleave it open.

My fresh-forged blade achieved that feat with ease, ending the lives of these two savage beasts.

And yet, I am not satisfied.

Four days I spent forging the sword I now break across the anvil and toss back into the flame.

Four more I shall spend, drawing other fell beasts to my forge, until I get it right. My craft is not yet as it should be.

Much time has passed since I was here in the deep heart of the mountain, amongst its lifeblood and its monsters.

The fire of the forge blazes.

Taking up the hammer, I begin again.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NICK KYME is the author of the Tome of Fire trilogy featuring the Salamanders. He has also written for the Horus Heresy, Space Marine Battles and Time of Legends series with the novels *Vulkan Lives*, *Fall of Damnos* and *The Great Betrayal*. In addition, he has penned a host of short stories and several novellas, including 'Feat of Iron' which was a *New York Times* bestseller in the Horus Heresy collection *The Primarchs*. He lives and works in Nottingham.



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**Published in 2013 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd.,  
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK**

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**ISBN 978-1-78251-363-6**

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