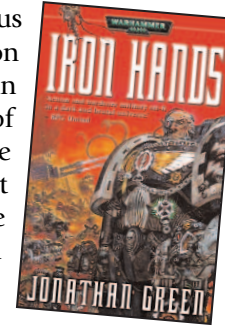


IRON HANDS

A Warhammer 40,000 novel by Jonathan Green

AMONGST THE WARRIORS of the Adeptus Astartes, there are few as fanatical as the Iron Hands. With their conviction comes an implacable contempt for any show of weakness and a determination to expunge it at all costs. But when these stalwart warriors come under attack from the hordes of Chaos, it's not just their iron bodies that are tested but also their iron will!



Jonathan Green works as a full-time teacher in West London. By night he relates tales of Torben Badenov's Kislevite mercenaries and the adventures of the Underhive bounty hunter Nathan Creed for *Inferno!* magazine. He became one of the Emperor's scribes in 1994 and has since penned a number of articles for *White Dwarf* and an ever-growing number of short stories for the Black Library. *Iron Hands* is his fourth novel.

Iron Hands can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

Price £6.99 (UK) / \$7.99 (US)

Bookshops: Distributed in the UK by Hodder. Distributed in the US by Simon & Schuster Books.

Games & hobby stores: Distributed in the UK and US by Games Workshop.

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US mail order: 1-800-394-GAME

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PUBLISHED BY THE BLACK LIBRARY

Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK

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ISBN: 1 84416 094 7



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published by BL Publishing, 2004.

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from *IRON HANDS*

THE BLACK HULL of the Thunderhawk rose into the air, kicking up great clouds of dust and ash, spitting autocannon rounds into the closest ranks of traitor Guardsmen, providing the disembarked Iron Hands with covering fire as they secured the drop zone.

There was an explosion in the air that shook the ruins on the ground and threw some of the Space Marines to the ground. It would be madness for the *Iron Eagle* to risk its own survival to ensure the safety of the troops on the ground. With a scream of jet engines the Thunderhawk rocketed away from the imperilled ordinatus.

Weapons-fire snickered out of the smoke and swirling dust, beams of dazzling light streaking out of the gloom and darkness beneath the broiling black clouds of the promethium fires, a vile smog so thick that it turned day to night.

With a terrible roar, autocannon shells began to eat up the ground between the Iron Hands and the enemy. Huge shapes sporting auto-loader hoppers and whirling chain-blades the size of dozer blades clumped towards the Space Marines out of the blackness, supported by armoured warriors as large and imposing as the Iron Hands. The drop zone had already been compromised.

To the Iron Hands' right, and apparently leading towards the overrun ordinatus, was a series of rat-runs that must once have formed part of the mine workings here in the ore-rich foothills of the Argentum mountain range.

The Iron-Father clambered into the trench. Behind him, his servitor bodyguard did the same. Squad Erastus also dropped into the trench, even as Brother Zorian's shoulder was clipped by a spinning piece of shrapnel, which gouged a chunk from the Vurgaan lightning-strike symbol proudly displayed there.

Gdolkin saw Librarian Melchor's squad make for the dark zigzagging scar of another trench on the southern side of the no-man's-land, Apothecary Caduceus's armour shone incongruously white amidst the black carapaces of the other Iron Hands, through his silvered left hand still marked him out as one of them. They were given covering fire by Squad Vincien.

The Ordinatus *Gehenna* lay to the west of their current position. Gdolkin had briefed his men thoroughly beforehand: their mission was to secure the ordinatus weapon from the enemy with the ultimate intention of finding the errant Magos Thule.

The Iron Hands moved off. Their armoured boots splashed through a muddy soup of polluted water, spilled blood and chemical discharge. The corrugated sheet shored trench was already choked with the bodies of the dead. Corpses in Imperial Guard uniforms lay in messy, broken heaps and here and there could be seen the sigil-cut bodies of heretic turncoat soldiers. The watery gut of the trench was awash with unidentifiable body parts.

There was a shrill whistling, the *crump* of an impact and then a cascade of foetid earth and rock was thrown into the air above the ridge of the trench, as part of the trench wall collapsed. Brothers Taudis and Naltech extricated themselves from premature burial and then the Iron Hands were on their way again, their painstakingly maintained power armour lending speed and strength to their jogging strides.

Then the enemy were upon them, and Gdolkin knew them by the abysmal stench they exuded, if nothing else.

The heretics dropped on the Space Marines in a tide of pestilential martyrdom. They cared not that they died almost instantly at the gauntlets of the Iron Hands, their minds twisted by the foul contagions they had gladly welcomed into their bodies – the gifts of a benevolent, pestilential deity. They cared only that they played their part to hinder those they saw to be servants of a false emperor and allow their masters to fulfil their corrupted plans.

The Iron Hands cut through the diseased bodies of traitor Guardsmen, robed cultists and deformed mutants, spraying the trench with a lethal concoction of grey brain matter, blood and bacteria-bloated viscera.

They were the lost and the damned now, but they cared not. They lived – if it could be called that, considering the suffering their bodies had willingly undergone – only to die for Father Nurgle. And they had served the purpose other malign intelligences had determined for them. As Gdolkin cut down a pincer-armed ape creature, he saw the three-eyed visor of one of Nurgle's own Death Guard appear through the green-grey mist at the same moment as the Plague Marine raised an acid-dripping blade above its head.

Gdolkin's power axe met the corrupted plague sword in mid-air with a crackle of discharging energy and a burst of sparks. A drop of the viscous venom splattered Gdolkin's armour. He was aware of a bubbling hiss as it ate a small crater through the paint into the bonded ceramite beneath.

The Iron-Father swung his axe free and, seizing the initiative, swung in low at the Plague Marine's legs. If the force blade connected with the rusted greaves it would slice through them like a laser through mercury.

Despite the Plague Marine's bloated appearance, suggesting that its movements might be slower than those of the tech-enhanced Iron Hand, the Nurglite brought its blade down to block Gdolkin's strike. The Iron-Father raised his boltgun in his left hand and, taking a step forward, rammed it into the topmost of the three eye-lenses, cracking the

grimy, green tinted glass as he did so. He pulled the trigger. Several rounds of destructive shells blasted into the horned helm of the Plague Marine, exploding out of the back of it in a welter of cauterised brain matter and bone fragments. The corrupted creature's body spasmed briefly and then collapsed onto the ground, folding in on itself.

The Iron Hands engaged the Death Guard in a storm of bolter fire and brute strength. Hurling aside the last of their mutated attackers, they crashed into the Plague Marines' line as the thrice-cursed horrors continued to advance towards them from the other end of the trench.

The trench was wide enough at this point for four Marines to engage the enemy. Sergeant Erastus had forced his way up next to the Iron-Father, throwing devastating plasma fire into the packed squad of plague troops. So here they were, fighting shoulder to shoulder again, with Gdolkin's gun-servitors laying down such a storm of suppressing fire from behind them that the corrupted Nurgle-creatures must have felt that their Daemon-Primarch Mortarion had abandoned them.

But the rest of the Death Guard continued to push from behind. The bloated bodies of those in front soaked up the bullets of the Iron Hands until their corrupted forms could take no more and they exploded in a mess of blood and cancerous tissue, rusted armour pulverised to ceramite dust. Then there was no more room to wield firearms effectively and the two sides joined in close-quarter combat.

A gaunt, shadowed face was suddenly before Gdolkin, one cheek eaten away by the voracious red of a suppurating abscess. The unclean warrior was completely hairless, scabbed sores on the dull grey flesh of its pate crusted with brown and green filth. The Iron-Father blocked a jab from a corroded plague knife with his power axe as he hastily locked his bolt pistol back inside the holster-space inside his left leg.

His left hand free again, he threw a servo-assisted punch into the Plague Marine's head. The bionic replacement connected with the warrior's face. There was an audible

splintering sound as the front of the Traitor-Marine's head caved inwards in a spray of blood and stinking yellow pus. The Death Guardsman staggered back, putting his hands instinctively to his face. Gdolkin followed through with a swing at his opponent's body with his axe. The curved blade smashed through a ruptured fissure in the Plague Marine's distended gut, cooking the organs inside.

Gdolkin pulled the axe free again only to find ropey intestines knotted around the blade. Making pathetic, unsettling mewling sounds, the Nurgle worshipper began to advance again, rolling in the viscera connecting it to the Iron-Father.

There was the staccato roar of a heavy weapon letting rip and the Plague Marine faltered again as armour-piercing shells pounded its body. The servitor Gibeon XII put a fusillade of shells into the resilient plague-thing's body from its rattling belt-fed assault cannon arm, one of the rounds detonating inside the corpulent body, finishing the Nurgle worshipper dramatically.

Still more of the blasphemous Marines pressed in on the Iron Hands. Every one of the enemy was unique in some vile way. Some wore necklaces of rotting fingers and ears cut from the dying and the dead, others had shrunken heads hanging from their belts. The metal and ceramite of their armour was pitted and scarred by corrosion. Injuries that would have felled other soldiers, even the superhuman warriors of the Adeptus Astartes, barely even caused the Plague Marines to falter in their relentless, zombie-like advance.

Fat flies buzzed over the heads of the Death Guard, drooping pallid white abdomens pregnant with virulent infections. Gdolkin swept his power axe through the air above him, incinerating several of the rancid insects in the weapon's coruscating energy field.

A Nurgle Marine larger than the rest forced its way between its fellows, rising above them like a corpulent colossus, made big by the disease multiplying within every fibre of its body. The newcomer was without a helmet and clad in a patched suit of Terminator armour, emblazoned

with the triple-sectioned fly badge favoured by some of the plague devotees. Rising from the backplate of its suit were three spikes, each skewered with a human head, faces elongated in death-screams, one still wearing the helm of a Cadian. A grotesque pus sac, barely contained within a bag of almost transparent skin, bulged and wobbled from its neck.

Servomotors squealing, Gdolkin leapt into the air. The servo-assisted exoskeleton of his power armour carried him over the fallen body of a Death Guard with a worm-ridden face and sent him crashing into the plague Terminator. As he hit his target he swung his power axe at the cultist, removing the trophy spikes as his opponent doubled up under Gdolkin's impact.

The Terminator crashed back into the mud and slime filling the bottom of the trench, sending a spume of filth fountaining into the air. Gdolkin landed awkwardly and compensated as best he could, coming into a crouched position. The Terminator struggled to rise, as it did so, raising the baroque ornamented muzzle of its storm bolter.

The Iron-Father flung himself sideways as the storm bolter roared into life.

Gdolkin heard the impact of shells and a cry behind him. He dared a glance over his shoulder and saw Brother Oved standing exposed within the middle of the trench, shorn cables and ceramite splinters hanging from where his bionic right arm had been sheared off.

Despite the neural shock, Oved returned fire with the boltgun clasped tightly in his gleaming gunmetal left hand. Then Gdolkin was on his feet and bringing his own axe down on the Chaos Terminator. The first blow struck the thick armour and was half-deflected in a spray of sparks as the Nurglite shifted again as it tried to get up. A round from Oved's bolter found the pus-sac beneath the creature's chin. It burst with a wet pop and Gdolkin recoiled as the greaves of his armour were splashed with viscous yellow fluid. Anger flared inside his chest and he drove in again with the axe.

The crackling tip of the energy-sheathed blade pierced the Terminator's deformed neck where it was exposed above the rim of its corroded helmet seal. Gdolkin twisted and the cultist's head came away in a torrent of corrupted black blood.

Joab XIII's heavy bolter exploded into life with a chugging roar, and one of the Death Guard, slime oozing from between the joints of its armour, faltered, millennia-aged ceramite plates fracturing under the impact of the high-calibre missiles.

Gdolkin turned his attention back towards the pack choking the trench. The Plague Marines were determined to halt the Iron Hands' advance but the destruction of the Terminator tempered their zeal born of a devotion to the corrupted Lord of Flies.

A cancerous black growth deforming the belly of another plague-creature, ruptured under a blow from Gdolkin's power axe, spewing tar-like slime from within its diseased mass. Brother Erastus had grasped a tentacled limb in his augmetic left hand as it tried to wrap its suckered, rubbery flesh around him, and tore it from the shoulder socket of the Plague Marine it was attached to.

Iron-Father Gdolkin's axe connected with the shoulder plate of a buboe-disfigured Marine. The corrupted ceramite splintered with a shearing of tortured metal. A black void opened up beneath it and a cloud of black bodies erupted from the hole with a buzzing roar. Gdolkin's vision went black as the flies bombarded his helmet, crawling all over its surface, looking for a way in. With even his augmetic eyes blinded by the dense living morass, Gdolkin swung at the tiny plague-carriers, but it was a futile effort. The energy field of the power axe sizzled and crackled as it burnt a path through the insects but it made little difference to the pestilential mass pouring from within the depths of the Death Guard's armour.

The Iron-Father railed against the impotency of his attack: that something so small should prove so resistant to his attacks!

Over the furious buzzing flies Gdolkin heard the *whomph* and hungry roar of a flamer firing. Brother Fundare had brought his weapon to bear. The Iron-Father began to see a corosant glow behind the black screen in front of his visor. He swept a gauntlet across his faceplate, crushing flies under his indelicate touch, smearing the disgusting sacs of their bristling bodies across his helmet.

The remains of the flies' host was burning furiously in the middle of the trench. At the death of their host whatever enchantment kept the insects attacking the Iron Hands was broken and the swarm dissipated into the air around them.

And then Squad Erastus and Iron-Father Gdolkin were through the line of Death Guard. Their assault on the Plague Marines' position had effectively driven a wedge through the heretic hordes on this front.

Gdolkin allowed himself a moment's exultant satisfaction: the steadfast might of the Sons of Ferrus Manus had overcome the corrupted Chaos Marines.

The great ordinatus engine rose up before them again, only now it seemed a more achievable objective.

The forces of Chaos have been unleashed into the Imperium, but can even the legendary warriors of the Iron hands Chapter repel them?

**Find out in:
IRON HANDS**

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