

# AGE OF LEGEND Edited by CHRISTIAN DUNN

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## AGE OF LEGEND Christian Dunn

The dark origins of the Warhammer World are soaked in blood. Epic wars between kindred races reshaped continents, vast civilisations rose and fell, the dead walked the earth in legions. This is an age of mighty heroes whose like will never be seen again, such as the mangod Sigmar and Caledor, the Phoenix King of the elves. It is also an era of dread villains like the Witch-King Malekith and Nagash, the Lord of the undead. In these troubled times, dragons still flock the skies and magic exists that can doom or save the world.

It is an age of legend.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Paul S. Kemp** describes himself as a fictioneer. He has written both swords & sorcery and space opera, such as the 'Chronicles of Erevis Cale' and 'War of the Spider Queen' sagas. He has also written novels set in the Star Wars universe, including the *New York Times* bestselling *Crosscurrent*. He lives the life of an outlaw in Grosse Pointe, Michigan with his wife and children, and a steady supply of scotch.

**Sarah Cawkwell** is a north-east England based freelance writer. Married, with a son (who is the grown up in the house) and two intellectually challenged cats, she's been a determined and prolific writer for many years. Her first novel, *The Gildar Rift*, was published in 2011. When not slaving away over a hot keyboard, Sarah's hobbies include reading everything and anything, running around in fields with swords screaming incomprehensibly and having her soul slowly sucked dry by online games.

**Nick Kyme** is a writer and editor. He lives in Nottingham where he began a career at Games Workshop on *White Dwarf* magazine. Now Black Library's Senior Range Editor, Nick's writing credits include the Warhammer 40,000 Tome of Fire trilogy featuring the Salamanders, the Space Marine Battles novel *Fall of Damnos* and his Warhammer Fantasy-based dwarf novels and several short stories.

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Andy Hoare worked for eight years in Games Workshop's design studio, producing and developing new game rules and background material. Now working freelance writing novels, roleplaying game material and gaming-related magazine articles, Andy lives in Nottingham with his partner Sarah.

**Gav Thorpe** has been rampaging across the worlds of Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 for many years as both an author and games developer. He hails from the den of scurvy outlaws called Nottingham and makes regular sorties to unleash bloodshed and mayhem. He shares his hideout with Dennis, a mechanical hamster sworn to enslave mankind. At the moment Dennis is under house arrest for attempting to use Skype to hack the world's nuclear arsenals. Gav's previous Black Libary novels include fan-favourite *Angels of Darkness* and the epic Sundering trilogy, amongst many others. You can find his website at: www.gavthorpe.co.uk Josh Reynolds was formerly a roadie for the Hong Kong Cavaliers, but now writes full time. His work has appeared previously in anthologies such as *Specters and Coal Dust, Historical Lovecraft* and *How The West Was Weird* as well as in magazines such as *Innsmouth Free Press* and *Hammer and Bolter*. Feel free to stop by his blog (http://joshuamreynolds.blogspot.com/).

C. L. Werner was a diseased servant of the Horned Rat long before his first story in Inferno! magazine. His Black Library credits include the Chaos Wastes books *Palace of the Plague Lord* and *Blood for the Blood God, Mathias Thulmann: Witch Hunter, Runefang* and the Brunner the Bounty Hunter trilogy. Currently living in the American south-west, he continues to write stories of mayhem and madness set in the Warhammer World. Visit the author's website at www.vermintime.com

**Philip Athans** is the New York Times best-selling author of *Annihilation* and ten other fantasy and horror books including *The Guide to Writing Fantasy* & *Science Fiction* and the recently-released *Completely Broken*. His blog, Fantasy Author's Handbook, http://fantasyhandbook.wordpress.com/ is updated every Tuesday, and you can follow him on Twitter @PhilAthans. Born in Rochester, New York he grew up in suburban Chicago, where he published the literary magazine *Alternative Fiction* & *Poetry*. He now makes his home in the foothills of the Washington Cascades, east of Seattle.

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*Age of Legend* can be purchased direct from this website and GW mail order, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, and better bookstores.

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The GATES BURST open with a thunderous groan and Hergig's doom was sealed. For twenty-two days the capital of Hochland had stood firm against its besiegers, but no more. The gates fell, ripped from their dwarf-forged hinges by the mutated strength of the immense porcine nightmares that had crashed into them. Squealing and snorting, the barn-sized monsters charged into the city, their claws striking sparks from cobbled streets which shuddered beneath their heavy tread, and behind them came the warherd of Gorthor the Beastlord.

Braying and howling, the beastmen poured into the city like a living tide of filth. Of shapes and hues that only a madman could imagine, they hefted rust-riddled weapons and slammed them against crude shields daubed in the blood and fluids of defeated foes. The heads of orcs and men hung from their savage standards and they hurled themselves forwards like a force of nature, hard and wild and unstoppable. As they entered the foregate square, however, the men of Hochland were waiting for them with lowered spears.

The first rank of beasts impaled themselves on the spears, weighing the weapons down enough for the ranks behind to pounce with undiminished vigour upon the spearmen. Soldiers died as the creatures fell upon them and the survivors were slowly pushed back along the square.

'Hold! Hold position!' Mikael Ludendorf, elector count of Hochland, bellowed as he brained a beastman with his runefang, Goblin-Bane. Wrenching the strangely humming weapon loose of the pulped bovine skull, he grabbed the nearest soldier and shook the bloody sword beneath the man's nose. 'I said stay where you are, damn you!'

The spearman blanched and scrambled backwards, joining the rest of his unit as they retreated in ragged order in defiance of Ludendorf's order. Ludendorf turned even as another gor bounded towards him on swift hooves, a crude polearm clutched in its claws. Shrieking like a dying horse, it sprang at him. The elector count bent out of the path of the weapon and chopped the creature near in half, dropping it to the blood-soaked ground, where it twitched pitifully for a moment before going stiff.

'This is my city,' he said, spitting on the body. 'Mine!' Then he turned to face the rest of the horde as it closed in. He shook his sword. 'Mine!' he bellowed.

Fully armoured and covered in the blood of his enemies, as well as some of his own, Ludendorf stood between his retreating troops and the invaders and pointed at the closest of the approaching beastmen with his brain-encrusted sword. Like all runefangs, it was not an elegant weapon, being instead the truest essence of a sword, and in that it suited its wielder well. 'Who's first?' he roared.

The beastmen hesitated. Snarls ripped across the bare metres between them, and spears jabbed the oppressive air. Red eyes glared at him as hooves pawed at the ground. The closest beast danced awkwardly, coming closer then sidling back. For a moment, just a moment, the elector held them at bay with only his own stubborn refusal to give ground.

He locked eyes with one of the larger gors. It had antlers a stag would have been proud of and teeth that were the envy of panthers everywhere. 'You, you look like a likely brute. You first,' he said eagerly.

The big beast charged towards him with a snort. It had an old sword, the tip long since sheared off, and it swung it with more enthusiasm than skill. Ludendorf's battered shield came up, deflecting the blow, and he jabbed his sword into the creature's protruding belly hard enough to pierce a kidney. It screamed and reared back, leaving itself open for his follow-through. His blow caught it in the throat and it toppled backwards, gagging.

Standing over his dying opponent, Ludendorf slammed his sword into the face of his shield,

fighting to hide a wince. His arm had gone numb from the force of his opponent's blow. At the sound, the beastmen shrank back. At the rear of the crowd, he heard the snaps and snarls of the chieftains as they tried to restore the wild momentum of moments before.

'Hergig is mine!' he roared. 'This city - this province - is mine!'

'No,' a deep voice snarled. 'It is Gorthor's.'

A heavy shape shoved through the ranks of beasts, sending them sprawling as it moved to face Ludendorf. The elector count took an unconscious step back as the being known as the Beastlord stepped into view.

The creature made for an impressive sight. As big as any three of the largest members of his warherd, he was a creature of slab-like muscle and bloated girth, with hands like spades and hooves like anvils. Tattoos and intricate brands covered his hairy flesh, creating a pattern that seemed to shift with every movement. In one huge hand was the daemon-weapon known as Impaler – a spear with a head of black iron wrought with screaming sigils.

'It is all Gorthor's,' the Beastlord said, eyes alight with un-beastlike intelligence. 'Every scrap of ground, every chunk of stone, it is all mine. The gods have sworn it.'

'Your gods, not mine, animal,' Ludendorf spat. He motioned with his sword. 'Come on then. Dance with me, you overgrown mooncalf.'

Gorthor chuckled wetly, the sound echoing oddly from the creature's malformed throat. 'Why? You are dead, and Gorthor does not fight the dead.'

Ludendorf grimaced, his face twisting with hate. 'I'm not dead. Not by a long shot.' He cast a hot-eyed glare at the rabble behind Gorthor. 'I'll kill all of you. I'll choke you with your own blood. I'll take your heads and mount them on my ramparts!' Flecks of foam gathered at the corners of his mouth as he cursed them. Some of the creatures cringed at the raw fury in the man's voice. Gorthor, however, was unimpressed.

The Beastlord struck the street with the butt of his spear. 'What ramparts, man-chief? Do you mean these ramparts here?' He swung his brawny arms out to indicate the walls behind him. 'These ramparts are Gorthor's!' As if to emphasise his point, flocks of shrieking harpies landed on the walls and more spun lazily through the smoke-filled air, drawn by the scent of blood and slaughter. 'This city belongs to the gods now, man-chief. We will raze it stone by stone and crush your skulls beneath our hooves as we dance in celebration.' Gorthor made a fist. 'Bow to the will of the gods, man-chief. Gorthor has no mercy, but they might.'

Ludendorf made an animal sound in his throat and he started forwards, murder in his eyes. Gorthor bared sharp fangs and raised Impaler. Before either warrior could do much more, however, a rifle shot rang out, shattering the stillness of the square. Gorthor stumbled back, roaring in consternation as a bullet from a long-rifle kissed the skin on his snout, drawing a bead of blood to mark its wake. His warriors set up an enraged cacophony and stormed forwards, swirling around Ludendorf as harpies sought out the hidden marksman and pulled him from his perch. The unfortunate man's screams turned shrill as the winged beasts tore him apart and showered the square with his blood and the broken remains of his weapon. Below, the elector count hewed about him with Goblin-Bane, and after a few tense seconds, managed to cut his way free and stumble away from the beasts that had sought to pull him down.

Blood in his eyes, ears ringing with the sounds of steel on steel and the stamping and shrieking of his enemies, Ludendorf raised his sword. Beneath his feet, the street trembled as something heavy approached. 'Rally to me! Up Hochland!' he shouted. 'Count's Own, to me!'

'Here, my count,' shouted a welcome voice. Ludendorf swiped at his eyes and saw the familiar figure of Aric Krumholtz, the Elector's Hound and Ludendorf's cousin. He was a lean, lupine shape swathed in red and green livery and intricately engraved armour of the best manufacture. One gauntleted hand was clasped around the hilt of the Butcher's Blade, the weapon that came with the title. It was a brutal thing, a sword forged in Sigmar's time, or just before. There was no subtlety to the blade; it was meant to chop and tear flesh and little else. Behind him came the

Count's Own; the heavily armoured swordsmen, clad in half-plate and perfumed clothing, with the hard eyes of veteran soldiers. Each carried a two-handed sword that was worth more than the entirety of a common militia-man's wage. The phalanx of Greatswords trotted forwards and surrounded their count even as the street began to dance beneath the hooves of the oncoming beastmen.

'You took your time,' Ludendorf said, chuckling harshly as Krumholtz stepped around him and blocked a blow that would have brought the count to his knees. The Butcher's Blade sang out, its saw-edged length gutting the bulge-bellied beastman and hurling it back into its fellows.

'Couldn't let you have all the fun, now could I, Mikael?' Krumholtz said. 'Besides, if you hadn't decided to take them all on yourself, I wouldn't have had to come pull your fat out of the fire.'

'Rank impertinence,' Ludendorf said, using Krumholtz's half-cape to wipe the blood out of his face. 'Remind me to execute you after this is over.'

'You mean if we win?' Krumholtz said, taking off a gor's head with a looping cut. Even as it fell, more pressed forwards, driven into the narrow street by their chieftains' exhortations.

'There's no "if". I'll not be driven from my city by a band of animals. Not after all this,' Ludendorf snarled. 'Form up, you lazy bastards!' he continued, glaring at the Greatswords, who were pressed close and finding it hard to wield their weapons in the packed confines of the melee. 'Prepare to scythe this city clean of those cloven-footed barbarians-'

'You should fall back, Mikael,' Krumholtz said. 'Get to safety. We'll handle this.'

'Fall back? You mean retreat?' Ludendorf grimaced. 'No. Ludendorfs don't retreat.'

'Then make a strategic advance to the rear,' Krumholtz said tersely. He grunted as a crude axe shaved a ribbon of merit from his cuirass. Ludendorf grabbed his cousin's sleeve and yanked him back, impaling his attacker on Goblin-Bane.

'Maybe you should be the one to go, eh?' Ludendorf said, yanking his weapon free. 'Not me though. I want that beast's head on my wall!' he growled, gesturing towards where he'd last seen Gorthor. 'I want his horns for drinking cups and his teeth to adorn my daughter's neck-lace! And Sigmar curse me if I won't have them!' He started forwards, but stopped dead as the street's trembling became a shudder. 'What in the name of-'

The minotaurs tore through the ranks of beastmen, scattering their smaller cousins or trampling them underfoot entirely as they hacked at friends, foes and even the city itself with their great axes. They were massive brutes; each one was a veritable ambulatory hill of muscle, hair, fangs and horns.

Ludendorf's heart went cold. 'Minotaurs,' he hissed.

'Sigmar preserve us,' Krumholtz grunted. 'And Myrmidia defend us. We need to fall back. Get to the guns!'

The Greatswords began to retreat.

### From *The Gods Demand* by Josh Reynolds