

BLOOD BOWL:

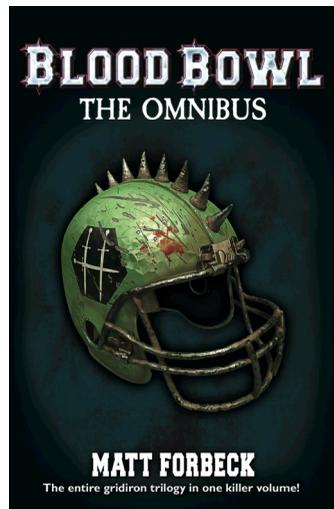
The Omnibus

By Matt Forbeck

Madcap sports action in the grim world of Warhammer. Welcome to the world of Blood Bowl – American football played fantasy–style, where teams can be human, orcs and ogres, and players are as likely to throw a goblin as a ball! These three stories follow the career of Dunk Hoffnung as he works his way up from unemployed adventurer to star player with the Bad Bay Hackers. Containing Blood Bowl, Dead Ball and Death Match, along with a brand new short story and an introduction by the author, this is a great value introduction to the fantasy world of Blood Bowl. Carnage and mayhem in the game of fantasy football.

About the Author

Matt Forbeck has worked full-time in the adventure game industry for over 15 years. He has designed collectible card



games, roleplaying games, miniatures games, and board games, and has written short fiction, comic books, and novels. His previous novels include the critically acclaimed *Secret of the Spiritkeeper* for *Wizards of the Coast*. *Rumble in the Jungle* was his fourth novel for the Black Library.

•MORE BLOOD BOWL•

RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE

Matt Forbeck

The following is an excerpt from *Blood Bowl: The Omnibus* by William King and Nathan Long,

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Dunk Hoffnung hated his life, or what little he thought might be left of it. He hadn't always felt this way. In his youth, in Altdorf, he'd led the kind of sheltered life that only wealth and privilege could provide. As the eldest heir to the massive Hoffnung fortune, he'd lived far above the squalor of the ghettos of his hometown. Back then, he'd been mostly and happily ignorant of the kind of existence the vast bulk of the population scratched out in the shadow of his family's towering keep.

Then everything had gone wrong.

'No one ever made a fortune without making a few enemies,' Dunk's father, Lügner, liked to say. He'd repeated it often enough that Dunk felt comfortable ignoring it. After all, he'd reached twenty-three years of

age without ever having tripped over that particular dictum. Then it reached out and bloodied his nose. So, scant months after his family's fall from grace, Dunk found himself clambering up the side of the forsaken pile of rubble called Mount Schimäre, bent on doing something to redeem his name and, by some extension on which he wasn't quite clear, that of his family. Here in the Grey Mountains, right on the edge of the Empire and more than a hundred miles from his old life, the sky looked different, colder somehow, more distant. It was still all part of the same world though. Perhaps it was he that had changed.

Dunk was still tall, graceful and strong; the benefits of the best trainers in the arts of war and athletics that his family's gold crowns could buy. His hair was jet black, and he'd had to have it cropped short to keep it from snarling and falling into his eyes. He'd lost his fine silver combs along with everything else when his family had been run out of their home. His eyes were still the penetrating silver of a bright, full moon. They saw the

same things as before, but the man behind them had changed.

Dunk's boot slipped on the gravel of the trail up to the creature's lair, snapping him out of his thoughts. Self-pity would do him no good here. No matter how much he might think he deserved death, he was determined to make the dragon at least work for it.

The people of Dörfchen had warned him against taking this path. 'Fear not, good people,' he'd told them. 'By tonight, you will no longer shiver in the shadows of the foul beast that has terrorised your hamlet for so long.' They'd just laughed and sent him on his way. At the town's only public house, the Crooked Arrow, they'd been happy to tip a pint or three in his direction for his efforts. Old Gastwirt, the innkeeper, had even stood Dunk the price of a bottle of brandy as a sign of support. 'You can pay me for it when you return,' he'd said. The inn's common room had fallen uncomfortably silent at those words. Gastwirt's own laugh had caught in his throat, but he'd still managed to hand Dunk the

earthenware bottle with the red wax seal still intact over the cork.

Dunk had made good use of the bottle on the road to the dragon's cave. The spirits tasted like they'd been fermented in casks tainted with warpstone, the shards of coagulated Chaos that spawned the mutants that were rumoured to teem beneath the streets of the Empire's cities. Even the smell of the stuff made his head swim, but Dunk needed something to stoke the guttering fires of his courage. In that respect, the foul liquid served all too well.

Dunk hadn't realised how much he'd had to drink until the trail into the mountains had become so bad that he'd had to dismount from Pferd, his faithful stallion, a fine beast with a coat and mane as black as Dunk's hair and a cantankerous attitude to match. Only two steps out of his stirrups, the hopeful hero found the earth tilting under his feet, sending him tumbling back down the slope until he lodged in a gnarled buckthorn bush that brought him sharply to his senses.

Now, here, only steps away from the steaming mouth of the dragon's cave, Dunk's head started swimming again. His heart hammered so hard that he was amazed that it didn't knock against the inside of his armour's shimmering breastplate, announcing his presence to the creature within. His hand went to the hilt of his sword, and the earthenware bottle clanked against it, causing him to jump.

Dunk looked down at his hand as if the bottle had suddenly grown out of it. Then he pulled the cork from it again with his teeth and took one last belt for good measure. As he did, he wondered if the beast he sought could spit gouts of fire from its gullet. At that moment, Dunk felt maybe he could match that feat.

Dunk pressed the cork back into the bottle and put it down at his feet. If he survived the day, he promised himself to finish it in the victory celebration the grateful people of Dörfchen would no doubt throw for him.

Otherwise, he hoped the next worthy hero who happened along might use it to toast his memory.

Finally faced with the objective of his quest, the lair of the beast whose blood he hoped to spill and thereby wash clean his sins, Dunk drew his sword and opened his mouth to speak. Though before a sound escaped his lips, he stopped cold.

Try as he might, Dunk could not think of what to do. The honourable thing, from the heroic stories on which he'd been weaned, would be to announce his presence and call the dread beast forth to impale itself on his blade. That had been what he'd intended to do once he first heard of this damnable creature, but in the clarity of the moment – such clarity as he could find with his head swimming as it was – that seemed like nothing less than sheer folly.

'Perhaps I should poke around a bit first,' Dunk said to himself, louder than he'd intended. When no winged fury came screaming out of the cave to answer his slip, he nodded to himself and crept forward as quietly as he could.

Dunk's armour clinked and clanked so much as he moved that he felt he might as well be wearing a set of cymbals, to announce him like a visitor to a foreign court. The old stories he had once been so fond of, no matter how foolish they seemed now as he peered into the darkening cave, told of the deep slumbers in which dragons waited between snacking on their yearly virgins, and he fervently hoped that at least this part of the tales might be true.

As Dunk shuffled further into the cave, he realised that he had forgotten to bring something with him to light his way. He had some torches back in his saddlebags, but those were with Pferd.

Dunk gazed behind him to the west and saw the sun dipping toward the canopy of the wide forest beyond. He knew that if he went back for a torch it would be pitch black before he could return to the cave. While the thought of putting off his destiny for another day appealed to him, he couldn't bear the thought of returning to the Crooked Arrow to spend the night. He

feared that the tales the townspeople would surely repeat about the dragon would force his will from him for good and send him off to another part of the Empire in search of easier means of penance.

Instead, Dunk sheathed his sword, trotted back to the earthenware bottle, and snatched it up. Then he removed the red silk scarf he'd worn around his neck every day since young Lady Helgreta Brecher had given it to him nearly a year ago. At the time, he'd treasured the gift from his betrothed as his most valued possession. Now, his arranged marriage was nothing more than a bittersweet memory and the scarf was little more than a reminder of how far he'd fallen. It was only fitting then, that it help light the path to his redemption.

Dunk uncorked the bottle and stuffed the end of the scarf into it with the barest tinge of regret. The contrast between the finery of the scarf and the crudity of its new home struck him as appropriate, although he couldn't say how. Then he pulled his tinderbox from his pocket and struck a fire on the scarf's free end.

Carrying the makeshift light high in his left hand, Dunk drew his sword again with his right. As he entered the cave, the light from his bottle-lamp showed that the interior cavern was much larger than its mouth implied. It seemed to go back and down forever, disappearing into blackness beyond his light's reach.

The wind whistling past him like something alive, Dunk moved further into the cave. When he realised he couldn't see the walls to either side of him, he started to panic. He clink-clanked as quietly as he could over to his right until he reached the comfort of the wall there, then walked along again, hugging it close.

As Dunk crept further into the cave, the sound of the wind breathing through the cave's mouth fell behind him. He found the silence strangely comforting, although the nothingness it implied put him on edge. Where was the pile of gold and gems on which the great beast had made its bed? Or maybe that part of the stories was wrong too. But where was the beast itself?

Perhaps the dragon was out hunting, terrorizing another village elsewhere in the mountains. Could it be plotting evil ends with some fiend of Chaos in the Forest of Shadows that lay on the other side of these rough, high peaks?

It was then that Dunk tripped over the pile of bones. He'd thought the first of them was some kind of rippling formation in the rocks, possibly formed by the heat of the dragon's fiery breath over the centuries. He'd stepped right on them, and they rolled beneath his feet like the smoothed logs on which the young Dunk once watched dwarf labourers draw battered ships out of the River Reik and into Altdorf's legendary dry-docks. He spilled forward and found himself unable to control his fall, rolling along on more and more of the brownish, flesh-stripped things until he came to a clattering halt in a heap of skeletal remains in which he could have buried a mountain bear.

Dunk thrashed about in the mound of bones for a moment, crunching them under his armoured bulk. It

flashed through his head that the bones were alive, grabbing at him, trying to pull him down to share their communal grave. When he finally stopped smashing them down though, he realised the only threat they posed to him was that he might stab himself on one of the broken ends he'd created.

Throughout the fall, Dunk had managed to keep aloft his left arm and hold on to his makeshift torch. He'd dropped his blade somewhere in the process, but was pleased that he had held on to the bottle-lamp so well. He could use that to find the sword, but if he'd kept the sword instead of the light he might never have been able to find his way out of the cave.

Dunk cursed his luck as he scrambled to his feet, shards of bone falling from his armour.

'Only I could find the lair of a missing dragon,' he said. As the words left his lips, relief washed over him. He'd done his duty, faced up to his fears, and everything had come out all right. He was still alive.

Dunk wasn't sure just how he felt about that. He'd been robbed of a chance to earn fortune and glory, after all, but the thought that he'd traded that for a reprieve from all-but-certain death tempered his regret.

He brought the light closer to the bones. There had to be dozens of skeletons here, representing most of the peoples of the Old World. Many of them clearly had once belonged to humans. Others displayed the short, stout frame of dwarfs, and a few more were even smaller, either those of halflings or – the thought made Dunk shudder – children. One set of long, thin bones convinced him that the dragon must have once made a rare snack of a wood elf too. He pulled his sword from beneath its delicate ribcage.

Something grated on Dunk's nerves, and for a while he blamed it on the bones arrayed around him. He imagined the voices of all these doomed souls crying out to him for vengeance, and he grimaced at the thought that he had no idea where to find their killer.

The silence of the cave finally grabbed Dunk's attention. The noise from the wind had stopped.

Unnerved, Dunk stepped from the rattling pile of bones and made his way back towards the exit. As he drew closer, he grew concerned. The day's dying light that had streamed in through the cave's mouth wasn't where he thought it should be. Had his sense of direction become confused by his spill? He considered going back and trying to retrace his steps again when he saw the darkness shift before him.

Dunk's breath caught in his chest. He realised that one problem with wandering through a dark cave with a light was that creatures could see you long before you could see them.

The hissing noise that stabbed from the darkened region between Dunk and the exit nearly made him leap from his armour. The serpentine head that followed it, striking into the glow of his bottle-lamp's light, shocked him in a different way. The head was long and thin, mounted on a

snakelike neck, but he had expected something much larger. He almost giggled in relief.

Before he could finish his thought, an angry bleat filled the cave. A goat? In here? Had the dragon been out hunting and brought back the poor beast for its evening's repast? Dunk saw the outline of the billy goat's horns stretching out on the edge of the darkness. It wasn't a fair damsel, he knew, but he could still hope to save it from joining the other bones in the back of the cave. Here, at last, was a chance for him to do someone – or rather something – some good.

Dunk's hopes for gratitude vanished like an arrow fired into the night when a deep growl reverberated throughout the cave. He snapped his head about, searching for the source of this new threat. Then the face of a lion poked into the light next to the serpent's head, on the other side from the goat.

The configuration of faces confused Dunk, and he stood stock still, staring at them as though they were a living puzzle that would somehow solve itself. And then it did.

The creature moved forward towards the would-be hero, into the makeshift lamp's light as it guttered in the face of its three breathing heads. Its leonine front paws scraped at the cave's rocky floor, as if it were sharpening the wicked claws before launching an attack. It unfurled its greasy, bat-like wings, which were wide enough to fill the cavern, brushing them against the opposing walls. Its tail, like something that should have been attached to a gargantuan scorpion, curled forward between the wings, small flashes on the tip convincing Dunk that even this appendage had eyes. As its three heads, and its tail, glared at the intrepid fool who had dared invade its home, the chimera clopped and scraped its hoofed hindquarters like a bull preparing to charge.

BLOOD BOWL: THE OMNIBUS can be purchased in all Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

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