



**WARHAMMER**

# VALKIA THE BLOODY

SARAH CAWKWELL

*By the same author*

THE GILDAR RIFT  
A Space Marine Battles novel

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VALKIA THE BLOODY  
Sarah Cawkwell

SCHWARZHELM & HELBORG:  
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# VALKIA THE BLOODY

## Sarah Cawkwell

Warrior-maiden and consort of the Blood God Khorne, the name Valkia the Bloody is feared among all the tribes of the north – friend and foe alike. From her earliest days as a shield bearer for her father King Merroc, she has known nothing but unending warfare and the brutal politics of the tribal leaders, and soon reaches out to seize power for herself. Though her feral beauty might attract unlikely suitors and her enemies may plot against her in secret, Valkia holds the patronage of the Ruinous Powers, and Khorne will not allow his chosen queen to fall.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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.

*Valkia the Bloody* 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 Circle of Blood, as it was known, was little more than a cleared area of dirt on the west side of the camp with a thick post hammered rigidly into the ground that marked its centre. The arena was a churned, pockmarked landscape of mud and slush, crusted with ice and spotted with sticky, crimson pools revealing its heavy and frequent usage. The Schwarzzvolf took the training of their young warriors very seriously and did not use practise weapons. A training session with the Warspeaker rarely ended in death, but it was not completely unknown.

Flakes of snow were drifting lazily down from the grey sky and Valkia raised her eyes to the heavens as she stepped into the circle, blinking away the flakes. Within days, these light flurries would turn to the endless snows of winter.

News of this trial of arms against the representative of an unknown tribe had spread throughout the camp like wildfire and a relatively large crowd had gathered. The fighting area itself was an open space but the Schwarzzvolf remained at a practised distance. A length of heavy, braided rope was threaded through a hole in the central post and lay in two ends that were equidistant. The baying audience stood a few paces back from the ends of rope.

Valkia had stripped back to nothing more protective than a leather vest and a pair of heavy deerskin trousers. Her arms were bare and exposed to the cold of the day, the flesh was dimpled and the hairs raised. She did not shiver, however, either from the temperature or from fear.

Despite the chill in the air, Deron had stripped off his heavy leathers and furs and was going to fight bare-chested. Valkia chewed on her lower lip at the sight of his physique. He was just as big beneath the clothing as he had been with it over his shoulders. His powerful arms and his broad back rippled with sinewy muscle and Valkia's eye was drawn to the curious brand in the centre of his chest. It appeared to be a strange, angular representation of a skull, and the sight of it stirred old childhood memories of a battle long past. She set them aside with easy detachment. There would be time enough to think on the discovery later.

By mutual agreement, they had decided on a knife fight and already Valkia was sizing up her opponent, working out opportunities to bring him down. She had thought that he would be big and strong, but seeing him like this, suspected that there might be a swiftness to his movements as well. Their left hands were bound with the free ends of the marker rope, creating an unbroken bond between them that must not be severed until the battle was decided. It could also be used, if so desired, to lethal effect by a canny warrior. More than one unlucky soul had met their end choked to death by its unyielding coils.

'To first blood, Valkia of the Schwarzzvolf?' Deron asked the question across the

arena and she confirmed her acceptance of the terms in a loud, clear and strong voice.

'To first blood. Deron of the Bloody Hand.' She readied herself, drawing the wicked, double-edged knife from the sheath on her thigh. It was a well balanced blade and one which she had used for many years. It had been her father's before hers and despite its age, the edge had never dulled. Some whispered that there was untamed magic deep at its heart. It was an unusually bright blade, not like the heavy iron that made up most of their weapons. It flashed in her hand.

The two combatants prowled around the arena, each weighing up the other and tugging at the rope experimentally. Valkia raked in the sight of the man opposite her and approved silently of his cat-like grace. These men were strong, fine warriors – that much she could tell – and that hint of madness she had seen in his eyes suggested that they were fierce.

For a time it was obvious that neither wanted to make the first move and then Valkia, perhaps tiring of the game, darted like a silverfish, quick and fast, feinting to Deron's right side and coming to a halt behind him. The move was lightning quick, but the big man spun on his heel and hunkered low in a defensive stance, the knife held out before him.

Several of Valkia's people made noises of approval as the two warriors in the arena came together. Valkia's slim, lithe body merged into the shadow of Deron's bigger one as they pressed against one another, assessing each other's strength.

'You are strong,' grunted Deron. 'Fast, too.' Another of those sharp-toothed smiles and he added the sting. 'For a woman.' He broke away from her in a movement that made her stumble slightly as the rope snapped taut. She did not fall but regained her balance quickly and dropped, rolling head-over-heels away from the downwards slash that he aimed at her arm. She got back up to a crouch and pounced, a dark-haired wildcat, towards his leg. The blade of the silvery dagger flashed in the weak winter sunlight and Deron jerked his body forward sending up a spray of mud. She missed his calf by a fraction of an inch.

She swore loudly and leaped back to her feet, only to be caught by a blow from his fist. She felt it crack across her cheekbone and her world exploded in pain. Her head whipped to the side and she turned back to glower at him in fury. There was a mad grin on his face.

'You wanted to fight, so we fight,' he said, simply. 'To first blood, yes? As we agreed? Blood for the Blood God.'

The words he spoke meant nothing to Valkia at all and yet they still stirred something deep inside her. All she knew was that this unfamiliar man who was a potential enemy of her people was taunting her and she would not let the insult go.

With a low bellow of rage, she hurled herself at the big man, not caring about form or style. She would claw out his eyes if she had to. His laughter did little to force back the anger.

'Fight!'



He said the word again as he moved easily from her attack. Her face was growing scarlet with rage. He was embarrassing her in front of her people. The thought that they were all watching this public humiliation woke something feral in her. A ululating scream left her throat and she leaped at Deron's back, winding the rope easily around his exposed neck. He was still *laughing*. And that made her even angrier.

She raised the knife, ready to plunge it into the arterial vein in his neck. She would give him blood for his Blood God, whatever that even meant. But no matter how angry she was, Deron was still bigger and stronger than she was and he threw her free quickly. She hit the ground hard and lay there for a moment, winded. The low sounds of approval from her people had swollen to cheers as she'd launched herself at Deron, but now a silence descended.

The snow was coming down more heavily and it settled on Valkia as she lay where she had fallen. Deron stretched out his shoulders in an idle way. He untangled himself from the rope and moved towards her.

'She is strong,' he said to the assembled watchers. 'But not strong enough, I think. She..'

Whatever Deron's opinion of Valkia might be was cut short as he moved within striking distance. She had been carefully waiting for him to approach, feigning injury, and the moment he was in her reach, the rope snapped taut once again, this time coiling around the big man's ankle. He flipped onto his back with a roar of surprise just as Valkia's blade flashed and stabbed deftly into the meat of his thigh. It cut through the leather trousers and bit into the powerful muscle there. He let out a growl that was somewhere between pain and outrage and put his hand to the wound.

It came away stained with red.

'First blood,' said Valkia between gritted teeth that felt slightly loosened in her jaw from his earlier blow. 'The victory is mine. Now give me one good reason why I shouldn't change the terms of this fight and gut you where you lay?'

He sat up and thrust his mud-spattered face close to hers. The next words he spoke were pitched so that she and only she could hear them. Any hint of a language deficiency was gone. He spoke clearly and with such clarity that she almost salivated.

'Because the Blood God favours you. And you want to know what that means. Kill me now and you will never know. Let me live and you will learn.'

He put out a hand to her and they stood together. He raised her arm into the air. 'Valkia of the Schwarzvolf draws first blood. Your leader, she is quite the fierce little thing.'

That awful silence that had so filled Valkia with dread was torn apart by the sound of her people – of *all* her people – bellowing her name at the top of their lungs. In that moment, she realised that she had won them over.

The Bloody Hand remained as the tribe's guest for one more day and Deron kept to his word. He told her of the god his people worshipped, an entity who in the telling was much like the god the Schwarzvolf knew as the Axefather. A dark, ancient god whose thirst for blood was engendered in the ruthlessness of his followers. He told her many things, but he did not tell her everything.

'One thing at a time, hetwoman,' he said when she had complained that he was not giving her the full truth. 'There is a truce between your people and mine and that will be honoured. We will speak more of an allied future after the winter. We must go back to our own people now, before the snows come and the hill passes are blocked.' He looked up to the dark, threatening skies and Valkia realised with a pang of annoyance that she did not want this strange warrior to leave. She had too many questions.

Deron smiled down at her. 'We will meet again in the spring,' he said. 'When we will form an official alliance of our people. Together, the Bloody Hand and the Schwarzwolf will be invincible. But when you kill, *whatever* you kill, dedicate it to the Blood God. He will reward you in kind. Of that, I am sure.'