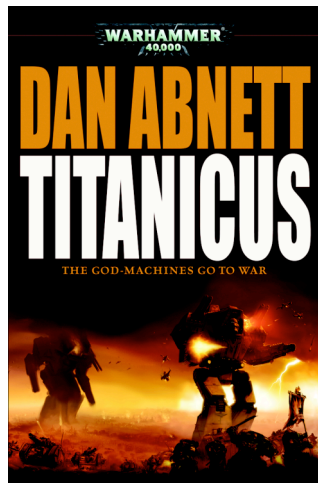


TITANICUS

A Warhammer 40,000 novel

By Dan Abnett

Fresh from a hard-fought campaign, one of the Imperium's most celebrated Titan Legions prepares to ship out to the Sabbat Worlds. Stopping at the forge world of Orestes for refit and repair, the Legion's princeps finds himself thrown back into battle when a force of Chaos Titans attacks. But as the flames of war spread, a religious schism tears the Adeptus Mechanicus apart, testing the resolve of the Imperial defenders to the limit.



About the Author

Dan Abnett is a novelist and award-winning comic book writer. He has written twenty-five novels for the Black Library, including the acclaimed Gaunt's Ghosts series and the Eisenhorn and Ravenor trilogies, and, with Mike Lee, the Darkblade cycle. His Black Library novel *Horus Rising* and his Torchwood novel *Border Princes* (for the BBC) were both bestsellers. He lives and works in Maidstone, Kent.

Dan's website can be found at www.DanAbnett.com

• **GAUNT'S GHOSTS** •

Colonel-Commissar Gaunt and his regiment, the Tanith First-and-Only, struggle for survival on the battlefields of the far future.

The Founding

(Omnibus containing books 1-3 in the series: FIRST AND ONLY, GHOSTMAKER and NECROPOLIS)
DAN ABNETT

The Saint

(Omnibus containing books 4-7 in the series: HONOUR GUARD, THE GUNS OF TANITH, STRAIGHT SILVER and SABBAT MARTYR)
DAN ABNETT

The Lost

Book 8 – TRAITOR GENERAL • Book 9 – HIS LAST COMMAND
Book 10 – THE ARMOUR OF CONTEMPT
Book 11 – ONLY IN DEATH
DAN ABNETT

Also

DOUBLE EAGLE
DAN ABNETT

The following is an excerpt from *Titanicus* by Dan Abnett.
Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road,
Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Copyright © Games Workshop Ltd, 2008. All rights reserved. Reproduction
prohibited, in any form, including on the internet.

For more details email publishing@games-workshop.co.uk or visit the
Black Library website www.blacklibrary.com

‘Will they walk?’ asked the Adept Seniorus. He framed the question in binaric cant, and issued it as a data-blurt of rapid pulses through augmitters built, like gills, under the corners of his jaw. The speed and pitch of the blurt conveyed the nuance of his impatience and concern. The executor fetial was named Djared Crusius. He bowed respectfully before the august assembly. He stood alone on the wide marble dais, the focus of their attention. More than five thousand notables had gathered that afternoon to hear his answer. Numinous silhouettes, they filled the rings of seats below the dais, bathed in a haze of late summer sunlight that flooded the vast auditorium through the panes of the domed roof. Crusius kept his eyes, dutifully, on the Adept Seniorus. ‘Honoured lords,’ he replied in clear, precise Low Gothic. ‘Etiquette obliges me to conduct this conference verbally. Not every person present is binaric-fluent.’ The Imperial high officers and grandees in the chamber clapped in approval. They were outnumbered almost three to one by the magi of the Orestean Mechanicus. ‘Thank you for the courtesy, executor,’ said the Imperial Governor, rising from his seat. ‘Given the import of this session, I would prefer not to listen to baffling machine sounds for the duration. With respect to my honoured friend the Adept Seniorus, of course.’ Governor Poul Elic Aleuton was a dignified, charismatic man juvenated to look sixty, a quarter of his meat-age.

He wore the heavy white plate of the Orestean Pride Guard comfortably, thanks more to a lifetime of formal duties and state parades than actual military service. In him, the power of the Golden Throne was invested. He was the voice of Terra on Orestes, the proxy of the Council, and his voice commanded all of Orestes and its system holdings. Still, he looked deferentially across the sunlit auditorium at the Adept Seniorus. Solomahn Imanuel, red-robed, ancient, and ninety-one per cent artificial, was the master of the Orestean Forge. Imanuel nodded back graciously.

‘My apologies, Lord Governor,’ Adept Seniorus Imanuel replied, also rising to his feet, ‘my frustration got the better of me.’ His fleshvoice came out clumsy and nasal, like the speech of a man profoundly deaf. The Adept Seniorus was unaccustomed to verbal exchanges.

‘I may not know cant, but I can guess the adept’s question,’ Aleuton continued, looking up at the executor. ‘Will they walk?’

Djared Crusius, like most executors fetial, had chosen to receive only subtle or encysted augmetic work. He presented as a tall, handsome male, with regal cheekbones and cropped silver hair, his height emphasised by the crisp drop of his simple black robe. He was an ambassador, a go-between, an arranger, and his appearance was skilfully designed to be reassuring and comfortable to non-Mechanicus parties. Most of the legio’s negotiations, down the years, had been conducted with Imperial agencies. Only his uniform robe, and a slight, electric green cast that filled his eyes when the light caught him at certain angles, betrayed his fealty to Mars.

Crusius was also a master of the dramatic pause. ‘They will walk,’ he said, nodding.

The magi seated in the marble circles below him exhaled a general wheeze of relief, even though most of them no longer needed to breathe for any practical purposes.

There was a flutter of applause and a few triumphant cries from the Imperial contingent.

Crusius raised an elegantly gloved hand. ‘Understand, please,’ he said, as the applause died away, ‘my legio requests supportive statements from all of you. We are breaking with our orders to come to your aid, and those orders were issued by the Warmaster himself. He is expecting us to join him at the Sabbat front in sixteen weeks.’

‘He will be disappointed,’ said a magos called Egan.

Crusius knew all their names. His adapted eyes saw what the Imperials present could not: the limnal skein of the noosphere, a green aura that read data transfers as zips of light, and appended to each and every magos present an overlay spec declaring their name, biography, specialisation and vital record. To Crusius, to all of the Mechanicus personnel gathered in the massive auditorium that afternoon, the air shimmered with columns of visible data and the synaptic fizzles of information exchanges.

‘He will,’ Crusius agreed, ‘but explanatory statements from the elders of Orestes should ameliorate that disappointment. It is important that Warmaster Macaroth understands why we have diverted. Bad feeling between the Mechanicus and the Warmaster must be avoided.’

‘I will transmit an explicatory apology to him before nightfall,’ said Governor Aleuton.

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Crusius.

‘I will do likewise,’ said the Adept Seniorus, gnawing the words out with his clumsy tongue.

‘Again, my thanks,’ said Crusius.

‘What is your current strength, executor?’ asked a red-robed magos, rising to speak from the row behind the Adept Seniorus. The noosphere told Crusius that the magos’s name was Keito.

Despite his earlier remark, Crusius half-opened his lips and replied with a ten-second data-blurt of soft, rapid squeaks that issued from the augmitter in the roof of his mouth.

‘Forty-eight engines,’ said Keito, his eyes mirroring slightly as he reviewed the data suddenly scrolling across his retinas.

‘Forty-nine, Brother Keito,’ replied Crusius, ‘if the Warlord Dominatus Victrix can be made battle-ready. It is eager to walk too.’

‘The plants at Antium are ready to receive it,’ another magos responded. ‘The fabricators have been roused and fully stimulated. Given your summary of the damage to Dominatus Victrix, the fabricators estimate eight days.’

‘Ryza would do it in six, Brother Tolemy,’ Crusius said, smiling.

The Adept Seniorus gestured dismissively with one of his tailored steel manipulators. ‘Ryza is Ryza. They do everything the day before they were asked. This forge’s resources are more limited. Eight days.’

‘Eight days is perfectly reasonable,’ Crusius replied.

‘Invicta has been fighting the eldar?’ asked Egan. ‘I see this from the inload. Eight years in the Beltran Cluster?’

‘Seven years of actual combat, brother,’ Crusius corrected, ‘the last year has been spent in transit. The Beltran Campaign was a demanding walk. The eldar produce subtle, swift engines. We lost eight units.’

‘I would be most gratified to inload your data experiences of that war,’ said another magos called

Talin. 'Any supplementary throughdata would be welcomed.'

'It's yours,' Crusius replied. 'I will exload what I have via your grafts. When the legion deploys, I will instruct the princeps to transfer all gunbox data to your archive deposit.'

'I am gratified,' said Talin.

'I believe our business is concluded,' said Crusius. 'I thank you for your patience, lords.' He made another bow. 'The Legio Invicta is at Orestes's command.'

>

'But we're breaking orders,' Famulous Sonne complained as he scurried along behind Crusius. They were out in the open sunlight, walking the long processional that linked the auditorium to the set-down annex. Lines of intricate topiary half-shaded the processional path. Below them, the magnificent sprawl of Orestes Principal fell away.

'Your point?'

'Macaroth will be pissed off with us, won't he?' Crusius halted and looked down at his famulous. 'Of course he will. Additional: where did you learn a phrase like that?'

Sonne shrugged. 'I... I don't know.'

'Pissed off. That's very earthy. Very Imperial. What's the rule?'

Sonne sighed. 'We of the Mechanicus prefer cant and system code imagery to biological ones.'

'So?'

'Macaroth will be very error shunt abort with us.'

'Better.'

Sonne snorted. 'I thought executor training meant we had to embrace and acknowledge unmodified bio-traits,

so as to better understand the Imperials we have to do business with?’

‘It does,’ said Crusius. He frowned. ‘That sounds like part of a lecture.’

‘One of yours, six months ago. I ’chived notes.’

‘Well done.’

They started walking again. ‘Besides,’ said Sonne, ‘pissed off has a certain phlegmatic power.’

‘You’re not wrong,’ Crusius admitted. He looked down at his apprentice. Sonne was sixteen, and virtually unplugged. ‘It must be so hard for you,’ said Crusius, ‘opting out of the standard upgrades.’

‘I want to be an executor fetal,’ Sonne replied. ‘I understand the demands. Next year, I’m assigned to receive my amniotics, my subtle haptics, and my noospheric receptors.’

Crusius smiled. ‘Already? Rudimenting: it seems like only yesterday you were an unmodified boy sent to me for specialisation.’

‘Have I disappointed you, sir?’ Sonne asked.

‘Glory, no,’ Crusius replied. ‘You keep on this way, another sixty or seventy years, and I’ll recommend your full bio-sheafing for executor status.’

Sonne’s eyes were wide. ‘Sixty or seventy...?’ he began.

‘What?’ Crusius winked. ‘Can’t I make a joke? Binaric humour bores me so.’

Sonne laughed.

‘So, to review, yes, Warmaster Macaroth will be pissed off with us. There’s nothing we can do about it.’

‘Because Orestes is a Mechanicus colony?’

‘Because Orestes is a Mechanicus colony, and it is under attack, and the Warmaster can just learn to live with it.’

‘In six thousand years,’ said Sonne, ‘the legio has seldom disobeyed an edict from the Imperium.’

‘Recite, date and circumstance.’

‘Decanting: the War of Lochrisus, 412.M35. Warmaster Gallivant ordered the Legio Invicta to Shackropal, to stem a swarming by the lethids. Gearhart refused, claiming it would be a waste of engines. The Shakropal sun ignited the next year, and the lethids were immolated without need of execution. That was the last time.’

Sonne looked pleased with himself.

‘Good,’ said Crusius, ‘but actually, thirty-eight years ago, Gearhart countermanded the orders of Warmaster Hengis on Talphus VII.’

‘Really? Really?’

‘Hengis was clinically insane. We were forced, eventually, to annihilate him.’

‘I never knew that,’ said Sonne.

‘We keep it quiet. It’s sequestered in the archives. What are you doing, Sonne?’

‘I’m incanting the data to my memory buffer.’

‘Well, don’t. Objection tone: it’s sequestered. Didn’t I just tell you it was sequestered? Wipe your buffer this instant and decant me a wipe-memory record.’

‘Sorry.’

Crusius blinked as the record arrived in his noospace.

‘That’s better. By the way, when you refer to him you might at least call him Lord Gearhart.’

‘Sorry,’ Sonne repeated.

‘It’s all right. Sonne, our legio has functioned for almost twelve thousand years. Once in a while, we are faced with a task that leaves us with no choice.’

‘Like pissing off Warmaster Macaroth?’ asked Sonne.

‘Exactly like pissing off Warmaster Macaroth,’ Crusius agreed.

>

Adept Feist took a sip of nutrient fluid from the straw-sac attached to his left wrist, sighed, and returned to his work. His fingers played in the warm air in front of him; the subtle haptics laced through his epidermis actuated and sorted the data drifting in the noospheric realm in front of his eyes. He closed images, opened others, scanned and stacked, enlarged, tightened, enhanced. It was slow work. The data source was crude, to say the least.

<Pan two eighty,> he whispered to the noosphere.

<Hold. Rotate. Hold. Magnify four hundred. Hold. Embellish. More. Stop. Enhance box eighteen. Impose character recognition. Request match.>

No match occurs in the Orestes archive, the noosphere told him in soft green binaric script.

Feist sighed again. He rocked back in his seat and rubbed his eyes. The Analyticae was working to capacity again, nine hundred adepts and logis, toiling at their cogitators like communal insects. Day and night, for over a month, since the war began, shift teams had been reviewing any and all data received from the fighting zones, no matter what the quality, and processing it, hunting for any clue, any tactical advantage. The air smelled of clammy metal, heated coils, and sweat: human sweat and the odd secretions of those adepts modified for floodstreams. Magos Egan was running their section that evening, wandering between the busy adepts, examining any finds or curiosities. Egan had set them, twenty of them, to the job of close scanning all extant pict capture of the archenemy engines, most of it gun camera footage or auspex targeter feed. It was poor quality stuff, most of it risibly fuzzy, and it frequently cut short in disturbing ways.

These are things people have seen in the seconds before they die, Feist thought. What a terrible thing to die with this as your last sight.

For an hour, he had been trying to discern surface detail from a pict feed showing the head of an enemy engine as it approached through drifting smoke.

He wasn't getting anything.

<Crusius, the executor fetial of Invicta, has personally charged us with this task,> Egan had told them all at the pre-shift briefing. Red-robed, his mechadendrites flexing anxiously, he had looked each one of them in the face. They had all been selected for their keen processing skills. <We're looking for weaknesses, my brothers and sisters, anything that might aid Invicta as it makes this execution on our behalf.>

<What exactly do we look for, magos?> a junior adept next to Feist had asked.

<Identifying marks. Insignia, especially defaced or excised markings,> Egan had canted. <Remember, these vile engines were once ours. They were lost to us, but we made them, may the Ommissiah forgive us. Yes, they are changed and corrupted, manifestly so, but if we can, by any means, identify or isolate their original model, origin, pattern or derivation, we might be able to pull up early specs held on archive and pinpoint characteristics or weaknesses.>

<Query: do we hold specs that old, magos?> Feist had asked, raising his hand.

<If we don't, we can request them from Mars, adept. The Mechanicus never deletes anything.>

They laughed. It wouldn't have sounded funny in human words, but in binaric cant the phrase was a neat numeric pun that lifted their spirits. Egan was trying to keep them lively, focused.

<You're tired, adept,> Egan canted.

Feist looked up and found the magos standing at his shoulder.

<I'm fine, magos,> he replied. <It's just that I've been studying this image for over an hour...>

Egan smiled at him. <Advisory: don't break yourself. You're no good to me burned out, Feist. I see from your skein you've been inloading at a high flow-rate. Your cortex will suffer. Take a few minutes' rest.>

<I'm really all right,> Feist replied. <Thank you for your concern. I want to do this, for the forge, for all of us. This pict just won't give up its secrets.>

Egan bent down and looked over Feist's shoulder so he could accept the noosphere as Feist saw it. <Inloading. You've enhanced?>

<Yes, magos. I've washed it through all the advanced modifiers. It's a Reaver.>

<It most certainly is. When was this caught?>

<Four days ago at Gynex, the gun-box feed of a Vulture. You see the head here? Near the neck joint? Some marking has definitely been excised.>

<Yes, you're right. Nothing from the archives?>

<No match at all.>

Egan straightened up. He patted Feist gently on the shoulder with the manip of his lower left mechadendrite.

<All right, Feist, nothing more you can do. Move to the next one. In fact, go for a walk and cool your head. Then move to the next one.>

Feist nodded. <I wish the data we were getting was cleaner, magos.>

<So do I,> Egan agreed.

Feist pointed to the frozen image. <Two seconds more, and this one cuts off in noise. You can hear a man screaming like—>

<Take a walk. Then move to the next,> Egan advised. Feist sat in his seat and stared at the image a while longer. Why was there no match in the archive? The Mechanicus never deletes anything. Pithy, clever. True. Except... Feist stood up. ‘Magos?’ he called. Egan, busy with another adept, turned and walked back to him. ‘Feist? What is it?’ ‘We never delete anything,’ Feist said. ‘No, we don’t.’ ‘So how much do we sequester?’ Feist asked.

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

Price £7.99 (UK) / \$8.99 (US) / \$11.99 (CAN)

ISBN 13 UK: 978 1 84416 784 5

ISBN 13 US: 978 1 84416 785 2

- Bookshops: Distributed in the UK and the US by Simon & Schuster Books.
- Games & hobby stores: Distributed in UK and US by Games Workshop.
- UK mail order: 0115-91 40 000 US mail order: 1-800-394-GAME
- Online: Buy direct care of Games Workshop’s web store by visiting www.blacklibrary.com/store or www.games-workshop.com