

A BROTHERHOOD OF IRON

The ancient Ural mountains might not have seemed any different from the time when men gazed upon the snow capped peaks in an ancient age long since forgotten. Across kilometers of jagged black rock stretching from the Kara Oceanica to the ancient Rus, one could walk for months before seeing even so much as a crumbling ruin to mankind's presence. There was however, one exception.

To look upon the peak of Mt. Narodnaya is to see a towering spire of blackened steel and stained ferrocrete belching noxious plumes as dark as ink. This was but the tip of the great underground capital of the pre-unification Terrawat Clan. The techno-barbarian enclave had been founded by Theologiteks who during the dawn of the Cult Mechanicus, landed upon the desolate Terra to fulfill the will of their Machine God. Through generations they delved long and deep, deep enough to reach a pocket of volcanic activity and reap many ores and exotic minerals in abundance. The underground enclave lived in prosperous isolation and once suitably ready and defensible, revealed themselves to a world engaged in a perpetual war of tyrants and savage empires. Safely conducting trade and technological acquisition from the security of their mountain stronghold.

During the Unification Wars, the Emperor himself personally visited them and, in an act of skillful diplomacy, offering his vast knowledge and collection of technological wonders from Terra's distant past in exchange for their fealty. This act would secure his Thunder Warriors with a steady supply of advanced weapons and technology. Now, as the last vestiges of the old Techno Barbarian orders were swept away to give rise to a single Imperial identity, and

following the Treaty of Mars, they had at last re-joined in holy communion with the Red Planet and the Cult Mechanicum. The rechristened forge of “Terrawatt Hive” was now home to one of the last great temples of religion upon Terra, and still retained its great importance to production and industry of the Throne World. Many of its citizens justified their beliefs that they and their city must surely have been blessed, for the Ommissiah himself had sought them out and made them great. Their beliefs would be vindicated time and again, as the city would see the visitation of many of His demi-god sons. Today was such a day.

Ferrus Manus and TalOS Davis arrived to a wave of inevitable fanfare and mass hysteria, the teeming masses kept only in check thanks to ceaseless efforts of arbites and secutarii to maintain order and the general tendency for the Mechanicus to encourage the dulling of emotions via cybernetics upon their workers. Two of the Sons of the Ommissiah had come to visit, both famed for their skill and craft, one a giant of a man whose arms were of silvery steel and a face stuck in a perpetual scowl, the other a hulking mass of adamantium, whirring servos and red robes and purity scrolls. More importantly to Hive Terrawatt, this mechanical being was none other than the Sanctus Dominus, the so-called Prophet of the Machine God. But faith was not the purpose of their visit, and TalOS Davis was not here to make grand sermons or speeches. He was here for one reason alone: to spend some quality time with his rediscovered brother.

Time passed for the Sons of the Dragon and the Iron 10th, both stationed together near the Lion’s Gate Spaceport. It was known that their Primarchs had gone to spend time together as brothers, expecting at most a few days but it soon transpired they would be gone for many weeks. It soon

became known their fathers were now engaged in a competitive and long act of forging what surely must have been weapons of tremendous potency. Many joked that there must surely be earthquakes and thunder around the Urals. In the interim, the Iron Hands and Legio Proelitor had much time to spend together, and discovered they were like two-cogs of the same machine whose gears perfectly meshed together. There were no other legions so devoted to the mechanical and cybernetic arts as either of them, not even among the 4th Iron Warriors or 18th Dragon Warriors.

In the first few days Acillians and Iron Hands had already begun with sharing of weapon designs and smaller contests of strength and speed. Very soon came the first combat duels, organized and disciplined, pitting their best mechanically augmented warriors against one another, and using the data to improve them further only to return again for a new challenge. Reichmarshal AL4N would eventually find himself sparring with Lord Commander Amadeus DuCaine, and in turn Reichmarshal VADAR would fight First Captain Gabriel Santar. Weapons Testing, Vehicular Upgrades, even augmenting and battling Automata were shared by both legion of astartes, who had never had this opportunity to be in proximity to brothers so like minded and skilled as them in techno-arcana. Interspersed between these fights and contests, as warriors made repairs to damaged augmetics and healed any injuries to what little flesh remained, they drank ever increasing quantities of Lucian B33R. Not as much as if the Vlka Fenryka had been around, but enough such as to make the dead ancestors of those Astartes of Jermanyc origin proud.

Far beneath the Urals, the sound of thunder did boom throughout the deepest tunnels of Hive Terrawat. At the very lowest point of the underground hive lay a lake of superheated rock, a

geological abnormality hot enough to keep steel itself molten and white. The hive would use it both as a reservoir for vast quantities of liquid steel and to siphon geothermal heat extract rare elements. It was not a place that should have permitted any living thing, let alone mankind to survive. And yet there were two men down there. Two giants, standing upon its shores, a pair of anvils and other tools at their side, dipping their hands every now and again into the molten metal. Like the cyclopeans ancient Mykenean myth, they used the very heat of hades itself to craft and manipulate alloys of extraordinary quality with their own hands.

For weeks they toiled without rest, talking, joking and jabbing at each other as only brothers could, and handling the extreme temperatures as only Primarchs could. And yet, for all the masterful craft that TalOS had put into the forging of his own body, using metallurgical arts unmatched by any in the whole of the Mechanicum and perhaps even any STC, it was Ferrus who seemed to be the one to outlast him. Whatever enigmatic metal made up Ferrus Manus' arms (the exact nature of which eluded his finest auspex scans or any theoretical molecular compositions TalOS could conceive of), was proving to be superior to his own metal. Warning runes and temperature gauges alerted the 2nd Primarch he would either have to cease work to cool down, thus conceding to Ferrus Manus, or risk damage to his own metallic body.

It was then that TalOS silently gave thanks to his other brother, Leman Russ. It was during their first meeting he had been given a gift by the Wolf King. With a thought, TalOS now activated a prototype device he had been working on since that meeting. Energy weapons were the preferred tool of his Legion, from volkites to plasma to lasers, yet for all their power the

universal drawback of each and every one of them was the problem of overheat. No matter how masterfully crafted, such weapons had limits to their rate of fire which could not be breached without danger. TalOS sought to exceed those limits. He activated a device that contained a small blue Helfrost crystal, and soon his mechanical body was infused with a surge of frigid coolant. This allowed him to continue his competition with his brother through the heat of the forge.

It would be nearly a month of hard forging before both brothers neared the completion of their weapon. Years from now, there would be another, even greater duel of creative prowess between the Gorgon and the Pheonix; but for all the Pheonix flame and passion, he would still need to use the tools of men. Only the Dragon could touch the heated metal directly as the Gorgon did, without being burned.

Just before they were done, Ferrus posed TalOS one more question.

“That name, ‘The Dragon’” he asked.

“What of it?” replied TalOS.

“Why do you like that name?”

The 2nd Primarch paused, but he knew the answer already.

“I have studied the tales from ancient Terra, the old epics. ‘It’s scales were like tenfold shields, the whip of its tail a thunderbolt’” TalOS quoted from memory. “Such a creature layers itself in armor, amasses treasures to its name, and would leave naught of its foes but ash and bone.”

“I have slew such creatures before” said the Primarch of the Tenth bluntly.

TalOS had no mouth to smile but gave a hearty laugh.

“Then I should count myself lucky to not be your foe, brother!”