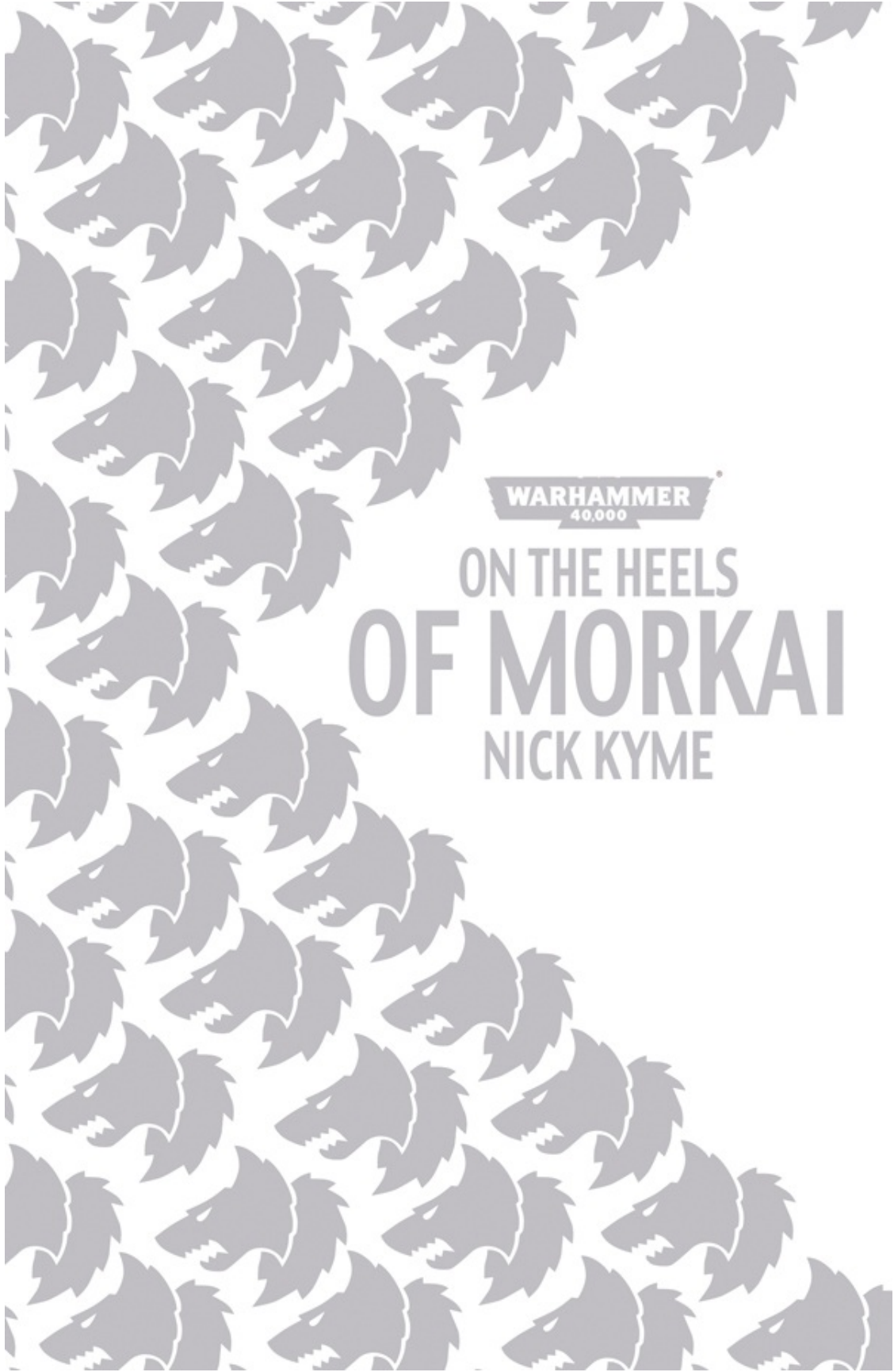




WARHAMMER  
40,000

ON THE HEELS  
**OF MORKAI**  
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# ON THE HEELS OF MORKAI

Nick Kyme

At the lake, they finally catch up to him.

Though he can't see them, he knows they are close. He hears their snorting breath, smells the reek of their fur, damp with sweat and blood.

They scent him too and howl in anticipation of the hunt.

He runs, forcing tired muscles into a kilometres-eating stride that has him halfway across the glittering slab before his pursuers can match him.

A forest encroaches on the lake. It is dense and thick, foul with bracken, hellspines and beasts. In Fenrisian, the lake is called *rjalka domra*, which means 'mawdoom'. His pursuers will not venture onto its frozen expanse, preferring the forest and its denizens.

Something dies and the sound of its scream echoes across the ice lake, causing a shadow lurking beneath its frozen surface to stir.

He doesn't slow, but watches the dark shadow begin to uncoil below him. He has his saw-edged *seax* tucked in his belt, but is naked of his armour and carries no other weapon, save tooth and claw.

Boosting into a sprint, he pumps with his arms, weaves around the jagged spikes of ice jutting from the frozen plain, which is far from flat. All the while, the lurker below awakens and his hunters track him.

The shore looms, a short scrub of ice-rimed tundra that quickly gives way to swathes of near-impenetrable forest.

Something large and innately predatory presses against the *rjalka domra* and cracks start to web its surface. A dirty black membrane, pulsing with hibernation hunger, pushes up to the metres-thick ice and attempts a breach. Short, questing tendrils spill out like geysers of oil from the main, gelatinous mass of the lurker and probe for weak points.

Still he runs, keeping the knife at hand.

The shore draws closer, but he knows he will not reach it in time. His tongue lolls from his mouth, drawing in air, making his body work harder and faster. From within, the black wolf stirs and he embraces the spirit of Morkai, body and soul.

An almighty *crack* heralds the emergence of the lurker. Three of its tendrils have broken free of its ice prison and are blindly seeking food.

He rolls beneath the first, trusting in his momentum to carry him over the slickness underfoot. The second he vaults in a lupine crouch, gripping with bare toes and using his thighs to propel him. The third he cuts and does so savagely. A shriek emanates from beneath, muffled through the frost. He lets it echo in his wake, scrambling ashore and leaving *rjalka domra* behind.

There is no time to slow, no chance for breath or rest. The hunters are almost upon, his encounter at the lake negating any lead he might have had on them.

Now he sees them, blurring through a lattice of coal-black trees as they fall in either side of him.

Fangs glisten in the penumbral twilight. Eyes possessed of feral intelligence flash like captured firelight. Their bodies, glimpsed only in part, are muscled and loping. One is the hue of umber, large and vital; the other is smaller with fur like a winter storm, dark grey and white. She is the leader and howls to her packmate.

He grins savagely in what might be reckless abandon.

*The pups of Asaheim look even more feral by the light of the moon.*

Silver limns his body, casting it in a pellucid veneer. It shines off his densely-packed muscles, creates pearls from the half-frozen droplets of sweat dappling his skin. His hair, a long and unkempt mane, flows around his bulky shoulders like mercury.

The forest wanes, passing by in a furious explosion of branches, bracken and steel-thick trunks. Overhead, a jagged cliff thrusts up through the canopy, parting it like a veil.

Reaching the boulder-strewn scree at its base, he begins to climb.

The hunters are on his heels, snapping and growling.

Hand over hand, taking fat fistfuls of rock, he powers up the barren cliff face.

Below, the hunters give chase.

Though he doesn't look, he knows they are close. The stink of their breath, redolent with the casual kill they'd slain earlier, washes over him.

The summit of the rise beckons, a four hundred and forty metre sprint climb, sapping strength from already weary limbs.

He relishes it, embraces it, lets the black wolf have its fill of his pain.

So close now, the hunters are almost at his back. A single leap and...

With a massive effort, he crests the rise, heaving his body onto the plateau but gazing straight into the retinal lenses of a power armoured warrior.

Clad in winter grey, festooned with fetishes and a vast pelt sprawled languidly across his pauldrons, he recognises the rune priest at once.

‘Vyargir, *hjolda!*’

The pair of wolves scramble onto the plateau a moment later, mewling disconsolately.

He turns to them, pressing two meaty fists to his hips. A thick sheen of sweat evaporates off his body into the freezing night, but he barely notices.

‘Timba, Mia,’ he says, his tone paternal. ‘We shall run again, and next time you might beat me.’ His smiling face turns to granite when he faces Vyargir the Runewrought.

‘So then, brother?’

Vyargir bows, his ancient armour growling as the servos go to work and he manages to kneel.

‘Lord Wolfborn, the Rout is waiting. Word has come, a plea for us to murder-make.’

Canis Wolfborn smiles a feral smile, baring teeth like daggers that shine in the moonlight.

Behind Vyargir Runewrought another figure stirs, a massive beast of such size and immensity that its presence fills the cliff-top. Sighting the other wolves, it snarls.

The pups Timba and Mia quail before it, recognising its dominance.

‘Fregir...’ the Wolf Lord warns his mount, patting its shaggy, iron-hard hide.

‘What is our answer, Lord Wolfborn?’

‘It augurs well, this murder-make?’

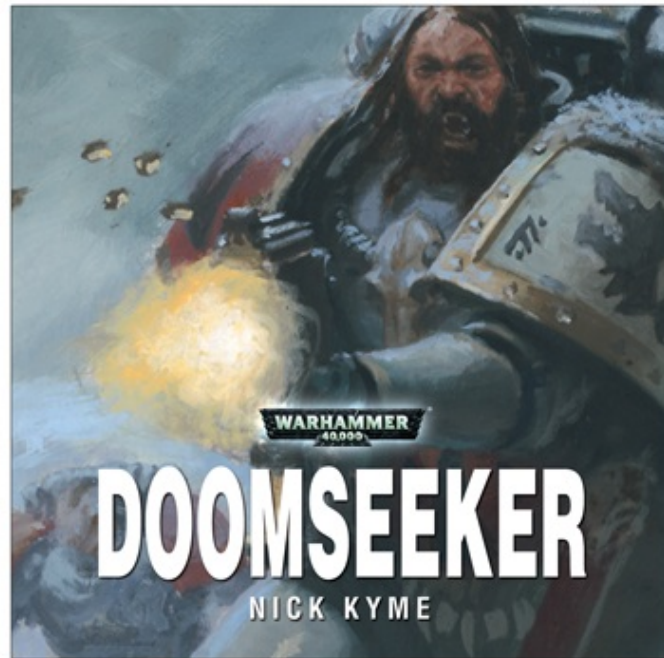
‘Aye, the runes are cast and favour it.’

Canis grins again, meeting the collective gaze of his beloved wolves.

‘Then there can be but one answer,’ he says, before lord and wolves both throw back their heads and howl at the night.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NICK KYME is the author the Tome of Fire trilogy featuring the Salamanders. He has also written for the Space Marine Battles and Time of Legends series with the novels *The Fall of Damnos* and *The Great Betrayal*. In addition, he has penned a host of short stories and several novellas, including 'Feat of Iron' which was a New York Times Bestseller in the Horus Heresy collection *The Primarchs*. He lives and works in Nottingham.



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