

**WARHAMMER**  
**40,000**

**GALL OF  
CHAOS**  
**JACKALWOLF**

*by* C Z DUNN

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C Z Dunn

Lukas the Trickster, Lukas the Jackalwolf, Lukas the Strifeson, Lukas the Laughing One, Bane of Hrothgar, Blight of Dvorjac and Saviour of Elixir, was well into his cups when the Blood Claw burst into the Great Hall. Around him, his fellow Space Wolves were noisily engaged in arm wrestling bouts, drinking games and orating boastful tales of past glories.

‘Brothers,’ the young Space Wolf said, voice raised to capture the attention of his drunken brethren. ‘Fenris is assailed! An Archenemy fleet lies on the edge of the system and its commander broadcasts his threats across an open channel.’

The Space Wolves, despite their inebriation, stirred at the Blood Claw’s announcement, some getting to their feet in alarm. Lukas broke off from his attempt to drink Jurri Ironclaw under the table and staggered towards the messenger, gesturing lazily for his battle-brothers to stand down. The stasis bomb grafted in place of one of the older Space Marine’s hearts pulsed rhythmically, a promise yet to be kept. Lukas stared at the boy intently, swaying slightly under the effects of three days of imbibing nothing but *mjod*.

‘You look familiar,’ Lukas slurred. ‘Did I know your mother?’ He jabbed the boy in the chest with a finger as he spoke.

‘I don’t know, brother,’ the young Blood Claw replied. ‘We have this conversation every time you revel.’ Unlike Lukas, who had come through the procedures and rituals of becoming a Space Marine with a relatively solid hold on the events of his past life, the junior Blood Claw had lost most of the memories of his youth on Fenris.

‘I think you have my eyes. It must have been your great, maybe great-great, grandmother I was... acquainted with.’ Lukas laughed, long and hard. ‘Now then, what’s this business about an Archenemy fleet?’

‘Their lord is hailing us, threatening to bombard the Fang from orbit.’

Lukas closed his eyes momentarily, allowing his oolitic kidney to flush his system of the toxins that were impairing his vision, judgement and various other faculties. With all but one of the Great Companies a-hunting in the Imperium, and Wolf Lord Bloodhowl leading the rest of his company in a purge of Fenris’ great beasts while the rays of the Wolf’s Eye were at their brightest, Lukas – despite spending his entire time as a Space Wolf among the lowly ranks of the Blood Claws – was effectively in charge of the Fang and its defences. It was not through choice that Lukas remained behind; the latest in a string of transgressions that had arrested his progress through the Chapter’s ranks had also angered Sven Bloodhowl so much that he had told Lukas to remain out of his sight for thirty nights lest the Wolf Lord slay him in a fit of anger.

When Lukas opened his eyes, his pupils were no longer dilated, his speech no longer impeded. ‘Put him over the Great Hall’s vox casters.’

The Blood Claw padded over to the comms lectern at the end of the vast chamber and manipulated the controls. A voice, ancient and terrible, echoed from the thick stone walls.

*‘...bathed in the fires of Calth, reborn among the flames to carry the Primordial Truth among the stars, to wreak bloody vengeance on all those who venerate the Corpse Emperor, to spread darkness where there is light, to–’*

Some of Lukas’ pack now abandoned their drunken activities and listened. Lukas spoke, cutting off the voice mid-sentence.

‘Who in the Nine Hells are you and what are you blathering on about?’

The speaker’s incomprehension at being spoken to with such irreverence was palpable in the silence that followed.

*‘I am Lord Moe franc of the Word Bearers Legion, chosen of Lorgar Aurelian, destroyer of a hundred worlds, enslaver of a billion souls, and the Doom of Fenris!’*

‘Never heard of you,’ Lukas said, looking around the Great Hall to see if there was any flicker of recognition among his pack. In return, he received only shakes of the head.

The Word Bearer spoke again, his voice tinged with impatient rage. *‘At Kavlok Prime I personally slew a score of your grey-haired veterans! On Setok’s World I claimed the souls of three-score of your Chapter’s champions! Only scant months ago, your lord Hrothgar fell to my blade, his blood tainting the soil of Qi’Ki’Ci even as its core erupted and was torn asunder. Each time I was denied the triumph that was my due. Now the False Emperor’s mongrels will pay for*

*their temerity!*

Lukas spoke quietly so that his words would not be picked up by the vox. ‘Hrothgar is dead? He never liked me, nor I him, but somebody remember to tell Grimnar the next time we see him.’

*‘For millennia, the curs of Fenris have interfered with my destiny, but today is the day I shall offer up your hearts and bones to the Ruinous Powers! My fleet stands ready to reduce your fortress to rubble. Now beg, Space Wolf. Beg for mercy before I order your destruction. Beg like the craven dogs I know you and your kin to be!’*

‘It seems like the act of a coward to destroy us from the safety of high orbit. Then again, I would expect no less from a sanctimonious whoreson of the XVII Legion.’ Lukas paused. ‘Based on your track record against my Chapter, though, I would fully understand if you chose to avoid making planetfall.’

The Chaos Space Marine’s voice boomed from the vox casters, reverberating from the walls of the Great Hall. *‘I will crush you! I have nigh on four hundred Word Bearers at my command and at least two hundred thousand faithful ready to obey my every word.’*

‘That doesn’t sound like a fair fight. We can wait while you go and recruit more if you like.’

The Word Bearer cut the vox link as voices of zealous indignation welled up in the background. When he reopened the channel seconds later, his voice was resolute. *‘Who among you leads, dog? Speak!’*

‘That would be me,’ Lukas said.

*‘Truly Russ’ whelps have fallen far! So be it. I invoke the warrior’s right of ritual combat – a trial of champions, on open ground. We shall see which of us is the coward when I pluck your fangs from your skull and hammer them into your eyes. Name the place of your death, mongrel.’*

Without any urgency, Lukas approached the lectern and operated the controls. ‘Challenge accepted. A trial of champions, with honour guard.’ He pressed a discreet rune on his vambrace, plucked the portable data-spike that had been concealed beneath from its cradle, and inserted it into one of the lectern’s input jacks. The lectern’s vid-screen flickered, before columns of High Gothic characters mixed with Fenrisian runes began rapidly scrolling down the display. ‘You will see that I have just opened up a window in our system and orbital defences. You will also see that the approach vectors I am sending you now...’ Lukas twisted the data-spike in the jack, ‘...lead to an area of open ground suited to such a combat. It is land sacred to our Chapter, where such conflicts have ever

been resolved. We will be ready for you there within the hour. Prepare to die honourably, traitor. The manner of your death will do naught to absolve your crimes against the Allfather, but I suppose we all have to start somewhere.'

*'Enjoy the hour, Space Wolf, it will be your last,'* the Word Bearer said before Lukas cut the link.

The Blood Claw messenger and the other green-blooded initiates swiftly assembled before the senior Space Wolf, awaiting his orders. Lukas ignored them and headed in the opposite direction, towards a table that was littered with mugs, jugs, bottles and tankards. He picked up a full keg of mjod and put the tap to his lips, emptying the container without pausing for breath. Still not satisfied with his level of drunkenness, he repeated the process with another vessel, then another. His blood-toxins finally back at a suitable level, Lukas wrung out his now-soaking beard, lay down on one of the benches and closed his eyes. His pack looked on, bewildered.

'We must prepare for battle, brother,' said the messenger.

'I'll raise Lord Bloodhowl over the vox,' said Jorgenn Straightclaw.

'Aye, and you must share with us your plan for defeating this superior force,' added Morten Sternhammer, his white hair and beard making him look much older than his thirty winters.

'There will be no battle,' Lukas replied without opening his eyes.

'I don't understand, brother,' said Ole Brightfang. 'The Word Bearers are about to land on Fenris, and you refuse to face them?'

'I don't refuse to face them,' Lukas said. His tone was irritated and he opened one eye to look upon his pack. 'I ensured that there will be no enemy to face.'

A murmur of confusion spread among his charges.

'The Corsair-grade data corrupter I sent has provided their ship's machine spirit with a false topography of Fenris, along with coordinates for the very middle of the Sea of Lost Souls. As well you know, the ice there is thin at the best of times, but during the summer, it could barely hold the weight of a snow hare, let alone a fully armoured Space Marine.'

He closed his eyes again and rolled onto his side.

'Feel free to wake me up if, by some miracle of Russ, any of them make it to shore,' Lukas said before the Great Hall was filled with the sound of his snoring.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Domiciled in the East Midlands, **C Z Dunn** is the author of the Space Marine Battles novel *Pandorax*, the novellas *Crimson Dawn* and *Dark Vengeance* and the audio dramas *Trials of Azrael*, *Ascension of Balthasar*, *Terror Nihil*, *Bloodspire* and *Malediction*, as well as several short stories.

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A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION

Published in 2015 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd, Willow Road,  
Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Produced by Games Workshop in Nottingham.

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ISBN: 978-1-78572-020-8

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