



**WARHAMMER**  
40,000



WAR ZONE  
**FENRIS**



**LEGACY OF RUSS 4**

**THE BROKEN  
CROWN**

ROBBIE MACNIVEN

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



WAR ZONE  
**FENRIS**



**LEGACY OF RUSS 4**

**THE BROKEN  
CROWN**

ROBBIE MACNIVEN

# CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

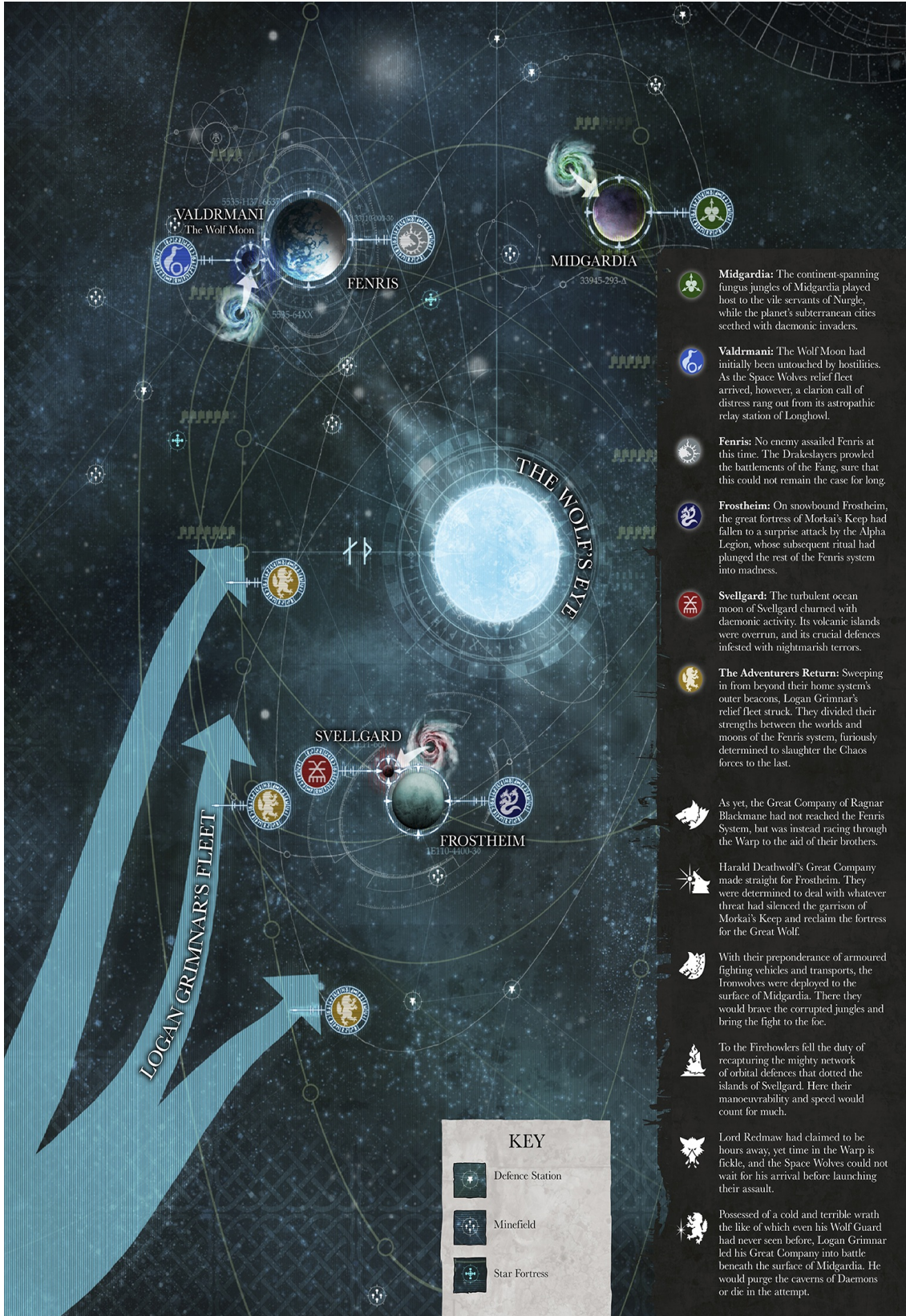
[Map](#)

[The Broken Crown – Robbie MacNiven](#)

[About the Author](#)

[A Black Library Publication](#)

[eBook license](#)



**Midgardia:** The continent-spanning fungus jungles of Midgardia played host to the vile servants of Nurgle, while the planet's subterranean cities seethed with daemonic invaders.

**Valdrmani:** The Wolf Moon had initially been untouched by hostilities. As the Space Wolves relief fleet arrived, however, a clarion call of distress rang out from its astropathic relay station of Longhowl.

**Fenris:** No enemy assailed Fenris at this time. The Drakeslayers prowled the battlements of the Fang, sure that this could not remain the case for long.

**Frostheim:** On snowbound Frostheim, the great fortress of Morkai's Keep had fallen to a surprise attack by the Alpha Legion, whose subsequent ritual had plunged the rest of the Fenris system into madness.

**Svellgard:** The turbulent ocean moon of Svellgard churned with daemonic activity. Its volcanic islands were overrun, and its crucial defences infested with nightmarish terrors.

**The Adventurers Return:** Sweeping in from beyond their home system's outer beacons, Logan Grimmar's relief fleet struck. They divided their strengths between the worlds and moons of the Fenris system, furiously determined to slaughter the Chaos forces to the last.

As yet, the Great Company of Ragnar Blackmane had not reached the Fenris System, but was instead racing through the Warp to the aid of their brothers.

Harald Deathwolf's Great Company made straight for Frostheim. They were determined to deal with whatever threat had silenced the garrison of Morkai's Keep and reclaim the fortress for the Great Wolf.

With their preponderance of armoured fighting vehicles and transports, the Ironwolves were deployed to the surface of Midgardia. There they would brave the corrupted jungles and bring the fight to the foe.

To the Firehowlers fell the duty of recapturing the mighty network of orbital defences that dotted the islands of Svellgard. Here their manoeuvrability and speed would count for much.

Lord Redmaw had claimed to be hours away, yet time in the Warp is fickle, and the Space Wolves could not wait for his arrival before launching their assault.

Possessed of a cold and terrible wrath the like of which even his Wolf Guard had never seen before, Logan Grimmar led his Great Company into battle beneath the surface of Midgardia. He would purge the caverns of Daemons or die in the attempt.

**KEY**

-  Defence Station
-  Minefield
-  Star Fortress

# THE BROKEN CROWN

*Robbie MacNiven*

*Exfill Shaft twenty-nine point seven two, the Underworld, Midgardia*

Egil and his Ironguard had barely gone a hundred yards before their vox-links picked up a squeal of transmission code. It was gone in a heartbeat, vanishing once more into Midgardia's cavernous depths. Fifty yards later there was another blurt.

'Press on,' Egil ordered, fighting to keep the frustration from his voice. Logan Grimnar was down here somewhere. Some of his Kingsguard had to have survived as well. The Iron Wolf would find them, or his bones would remain beneath Midgardia for eternity.

The tunnel they were taking was painfully low and narrow, requiring the Space Wolves to stoop almost double as their pauldrons ground against its crumbling dirt flanks. The air was close and hot, and the scuffle of ceramite through muck, the hum of power armour and the panting of his packmates filled Egil with a claustrophobic, fang-baring impatience. Until the vox squealed a third time.

'Come in,' Egil snapped, click-cycling through half a dozen channels as he hunted for a solid connection. They could not be alone down here. There had to be survivors.

Ahead, Borgen Fire-eye added fuel to his hopes.

'Bolter fire,' the Wolf Guard said. 'Not far away.'

Moments later the familiar thunder reached Egil's auto-senses, echoing down the tunnel to him.

'Keep going,' the Iron Wolf ordered.

They did so, snarling with the effort of forcing their way along the mining exfill shaft. Egil's dirt-caked armour tracked his rising adrenaline, a growl building in his throat. His decision to come down into these infernal depths had been

justified. There were still fellow Wolves down here. Surely Logan Grimnar was among them.

Finally, the vox made proper contact.

*'Not an inch, brothers,'* came a growl, followed immediately by the crash of more bolter fire. Egil heard the echoes of the shots bouncing down the tunnel ahead. He recognised the voice.

*'Brother Lenold,'* he said. *'It is Egil, of the Iron Wolves. We are inbound on your location. What's your current status?'*

*'By the primarch, it's good to hear you, lord,'* Lenold responded. *'We're holding shaft intersection twenty-nine-B. There's wyrd-scum everywhere.'* The rest of his sentence was cut off by a howl, and the furious revving of a chainsword.

*'Hold fast, Champions of Fenris,'* Egil said, then switched to the inter-pack channel. *'Borgen, how far?'*

*'I can see the end of the tunnel,'* the Wolf Guard replied. *'More plague filth.'*

*'Into them, brothers.'*

Egil saw the light of lumen strips stabbing around the silhouette of Borgen ahead of him, and moments later the rasp of the Wolf Guard's combi-flamer and the sickly stench of burning promethium reached him. He followed his Ironguard out into intersection twenty-nine-B.

It was a cavernous meeting point for monorail lines and mining shafts, plasteel beams and bare-wired lumen strips providing a hub for half a dozen separate excavation sites, along with grav lifts to the surface, rappel-lines to lower levels, and rail routes to the nearest of Midgardia's subterranean hive cities. Egil and his pack burst from one of the smaller exfill shafts running north to south, catching a brace of shuffling plague daemons in the flank as they dragged their swollen, rotting bodies towards the knot of Space Wolves at the intersection's centre. Skol, Egil's iron-plated servo-skull, counted two dozen Adeptus Astartes as it hummed overhead, the image from its miniaturised caster transmitted directly to Egil's bionics.

*'We have you, brothers,'* the Wolf Lord voxed as Borgen's combi-flamer ignited the nearest plaguebearers, their sonorous chants turning to deep-throated wails as their diseased flesh melted from their canker-ridden bones.

*'It's coming again,'* Lenold voxed back. *'Brace yourselves!'*

*'What is—'* Egil began, but didn't need to finish. He felt the earth around him shudder, dirt cascading from the intersection's high, steel-ribbed ceiling. Then the ground a dozen yards ahead heaved upwards, splitting apart a monorail track with an ear-shuddering clang. Something surged through the blast of earth and

shattered stone, fang-filled maw agape, dragging its long, prehensile body up through the hole it had burrowed into the intersection.

‘*Plague wyrm,*’ Lenold voxed. ‘*Bring it down!*’

‘Borgen,’ Egil snapped. The Ironguard was already bringing his weapon to bear, spearing a lance of liquid flame at the huge, nightmarish wyrm as it dragged the last of its fleshy folds from its maw-tunnel. It was at least two dozen paces long, and as thick around its centre as any of Egil’s warriors. The parts of it that weren’t caked with Midgardian soil were the corpse-white of a creature that had never known sunlight, and hideous, disease-blotched organs were visible pulsing through its membranous flesh. It made a gargling, squealing noise as it cringed away from Borgen’s flames, twisting with ghastly speed towards the Wolves fighting back-to-back at the intersection’s heart.

‘It’s headed your way,’ Egil voxed.

‘*Destroy its burrow,*’ Lenold replied. ‘*Quickly!*’

Egil saw why moments later. There were things crawling up out of the wyrm’s maw-hole – plague beasts and nurglings, clawing arm over arm, scrambling on top of each other as they dragged themselves up from Midgardia’s depths.

‘Changing canisters,’ Borgen said, anticipating his jarl’s orders as he screwed a fresh fuel cell into his combi-flamer.

‘Grenades,’ Egil shouted. He hammered his boot into the spilled guts of the first plaguebearer to stagger up out of the pit, slamming it back down into the yawning, writhing hole. In the same breath he snapped a frag grenade from his belt clamp and pitched it after the wailing daemon. There was a crump and a blast of shredded, rotten meat and black ichor jetted up from the burrow.

‘Close it,’ Egil ordered. ‘Send these monsters back to the wyrdrealm.’ His Ironguard rallied to him, power weapons carving apart the plague daemons even as they scrabbled for a foothold in the intersection. Then Borgen stepped up to the edge, his combi-flamer reloaded. With a *thump-whoosh* he flooded the hole with liquid flame, roasting the things choking it. The sickening stench of burning wyrdflesh filled Egil’s nose, penetrating even his armour’s filters.

‘The hole is losing integrity,’ Moln warned.

A second later Egil felt the earth shift beneath him. He threw himself back just in time as the hellish burrow collapsed in on itself, dragging the edges down into a sucking, crushing vortex of grey muck. Borgen, standing close to the centre, was too slow to avoid being caught in the earth’s unyielding grip.

‘Brother!’ shouted Orven, lunging after the falling warrior. He managed to snatch onto the edge of his backpack, but the pull of the collapsed hole was too

strong. It dragged Borgen further down before Orven could get a better hold on him. The Wolf Guard choked on muck as he drew breath to bellow defiance. In just a few seconds he was gone, the settling dirt showing no sign of his passing.

Bjorn and Moln hauled Orven back before he too was dragged down. Egil cursed and spat. It was not the sort of death he'd have wished on the rashest, most obstinate Blood Claw, let alone a warrior whose sagas had filled the halls on many a feast night.

*'It's escaping!'* Lenold's voice over the vox tore his attention away from the dirt scar that had become Borgen's grave. The wyrm had buried its hardened, fang-filled head into one of the intersection's walls and was rapidly worming its way back into the underground. Egil saw the flesh in its side bulge and twist horribly, and realised that it had swallowed one of the Champions of Fenris whole. The warrior was struggling to escape the creature's gut, even as its bile melted the flesh from his bones.

Lenold and his Wolves pursued it, chainswords ripping at pale flesh and bolt-rounds blowing chunks from its body in bursts of stinking yellow slime. It regenerated every blow, its vile flesh reknitting seconds after each strike. With horrific speed, it had twisted itself into its fresh tunnel, leaving the Champions of Fenris behind.

'That is the third time that infernal beast has struck,' Lenold snapped. 'I cannot say if it was the same one, or whether there are many. Its wounds heal as soon as we make them.'

'It's how the wyrdlings have been traversing the underworld,' Egil surmised, eyes on the churned earth of the collapsed tunnel.

'Your arrival was timely, lord,' Lenold said, pacing across the intersection to clasp Egil's arm. Around him the Champions of Fenris clustered. They were universally dirt-grimed and bloody, the armour not befouled by Midgardia's depths scarred silver by the strike of blade and talon. Even the half dozen Wulfen slinking among their number were panting and breathless, their tough bodies criss-crossed with fresh wounds.

'Where is the Great Wolf?' Egil asked. 'Where is Logan Grimnar?'

'We do not know,' Lenold said. 'He pressed too far ahead with his Kingsguard and the Slayer. Going by his last vox transmissions he had penetrated Deepspark and engaged a large infestation of wyrdspawn there. Then the lower tunnels collapsed and we lost all contact.'

'The surface is even worse,' Egil said. 'We could not hold what ground we gained. I ordered my Great Company to withdraw to the Magma Gates and then

into orbit.’

‘Yet you are down here with us?’

‘Just my Ironguard and I. Would you have abandoned the Great Wolf in a place such as this?’

The question required no answer.

‘At least the air isn’t befouled down here,’ Bjorn observed. ‘Not yet, anyway.’

‘Where are the rest of the Champions,’ Egil asked Lenold, ‘if Grimnar was only with his Kingsguard?’

‘Lost, scattered. The vox-links are almost useless this far down. What you see here are the remnants of three packs – my Wulfborn, Korvald’s Fangbrothers and Fjyr’s Stormbringers. We’ve been getting scraps of transmission from Tormund’s pack to the south. We were on our way to link up with them when that damn wyrm struck. The daemons follow in its wake.’

‘You’ve tried all available routes into Deepspark?’ Egil asked. ‘Are all the tunnels collapsed?’

‘All on these levels, and the lower ones. We hoped to try higher once we had consolidated our strength.’

‘I fear we will grow weaker rather than stronger the longer we delay,’ Egil said. ‘I have never seen wyrdlings attack with such relentlessness.’

‘They sense their victory is close,’ Lenold growled.

‘Then let us prove them wrong. Where is the nearest tunnel to the upper levels?’ Lenold pointed at a grav lift at the far end of the intersection.

‘This far down most of the mechanisms still seem to be intact,’ he said. ‘It will be faster than trying to take the tunnels, and risk the plague wyrm striking again.’

‘We will use the lift then. Will you and your pack come with me?’

‘Without a moment’s hesitation, Jarl Iron Wolf. I will not see the light of the Wolf’s Eye again until the Great Wolf has been found.’

### *Low orbit, above Frostheim*

Fire parted Frostheim’s storm-clouded heavens, its light reflecting back from millions of snowflakes as they swirled and eddied around the bleak crags of Morkai’s Keep. It fell not as an inferno, not indiscriminately like a shower of blazing meteorites. It was a single beam, a lone rapier thrust of crackling power delivered from low orbit by ancient targeting savant-engines and warriors who were now more machine than man. It struck the uppermost towers of Morkai’s

Keep and split the ancient, frozen citadel right down to its casements.

Harald Deathwolf watched the destruction in silence. He had raged and snarled enough, firstly to the impassive black visor-plates of the Iron Hands, then via vox to the Ultramarines Captain Epathus, the Shadow Hunters Captain Slythe, and an Astra Militarum general whose name he didn't remember. All in vain, the Wolf Lord reflected as he watched the Iron Hands battle-barge, *Iron Requiem*, destroy his Chapter's fortress from orbit. The ancient vessel's lance strike pierced Frostheim's cloud cover, and in his mind's eye Harald saw bastions melting and explosions blossoming through the ancient bulwarks with fiery finality. He saw daemons incinerated and charred to ash, burned in the keep's collapsing vaults in their thousands. It was not enough. Grimacing, he turned away from his flagship's viewing port.

'Put me through to Stolvind's lair,' he ordered the vox huscarl.

'*Lord?*' asked Stolvind the Wolf Priest over the link.

'How fares Canis?'

'*He is stable, my jarl. His wounds are grievous though. Considerable augmetic surgery will be required if he is to walk again, let alone fight.*'

'Is he awake?'

'*Intermittently. His sus-an is flickering between wakefulness and a catatonic state. All he has done is ask about his thunderwolf.*'

'How fares Fangir?'

'*He lives too, though it will be a long time before he is healed enough to bear his wolf-brother into battle again.*'

'Your skills do you credit, Wolf Priest,' Harald said. 'We were right to refuse the Iron Hands' help. Keep me informed.'

'*Yes, lord.*'

'Sire,' called another huscarl from the communications pit beneath Harald's bridge throne. 'The crusade fleet is beginning to break from orbit. Their projected destination is Svellgard. It would seem the Ultramarines and elements of the Astra Militarum mass transporter fleet are already in orbit above the moon.'

Harald bared his fangs in anger. Svellgard. Frostheim's moon and the location of the World Wolf's Lair, the control hub for the orbital defence batteries buried among the satellite's many bleak islands. The last transmissions from the moon's surface had suggested Sven Bloodhowl and his Great Company were still locked in a brutal battle with the invading wyrdspawn there.

'*Vox Iron Requiem,*' Harald ordered.

‘We’ve tried, lord. No response.’

‘Any other ship in the crusade fleet then. Adeptus Astartes, Imperial Navy, Astra Militarum, Imperial Knights, I don’t care. Get me someone.’

‘Lord, they have all locked us out of their communications channels again. They won’t even receive our incoming signal code.’ Harald cursed.

‘Set a course for Svellgard immediately,’ he ordered. ‘And try to raise Lord Bloodhowl. We must not let what has happened on Frostheim repeat itself there.’

### *The World Wolf’s Lair, Svellgard*

*‘Harakonari an tellika regala!’*

The Konndar-dialect battlecry of the 51st Harakoni Warhawks rang out across the vox-nets of the Space Wolves and the bleak skies of Svellgard as they began their airborne assault. It had been preceded by twenty minutes of fury – carpet-bombing by Marauders of the Imperial Navy’s 111th Segmentum Obscurus Atmospheric Fleet and ground attack runs by Vulture gunships of the 88th Tactical Wing. By the time the Harakoni Warhawks had started to jump from their Valkyrie transports, there were few daemons left on the islands surrounding the World Wolf’s Lair.

Still, the soldiers of the Astra Militarum met bloody resistance. Warhawks died, ripped apart by claws and talons, run through by warp-forged steel, ground beneath iron-spiked wheels or disintegrated by gouts of bile, boiling blood and molten metal. Others fell by the hands of their own comrades and commissars, minds shattered by the horrors they found themselves facing. But the hammer of the Emperor, once swung, could not be prevented from falling. Some of the platoons among the first drops – the one-way ticket boys – survived long enough to create little las-studded bastions of resistance among the tide of insanity. The aircover focused on these defensive points, strafing the monsters around them before they could amass the numbers needed to overrun the Warhawks’ positions among the crags and tundra of the islands.

Then the second wave made their drop, grav-chutes flaring, las-carbines snapping bolts of crimson death at the warpspawn. Less than an hour after Sven Bloodhowl had first spotted the beginning of the assault in Svellgard’s skies, the Lair’s three surrounding sister islands were declared secure.

Reinforcements continued to arrive. The gunners and equipment of the 155th Royal Cantabrian Light Artillery were dropped via Valkyrie as the Warhawks started to dig in. In a matter of minutes six batteries of fixed-position

Earthshakers had been assembled on the peaks of the islands, creating concentric points of fire support for each neighbouring landmass. The air shuddered with percussive thunderclaps as they began to shell the beaches of the Lair, still awash with daemonic invaders.

‘Keep up your fire,’ Sven snarled at his Great Company over the vox. ‘Drive them back into the sea.’ The Firehowlers obeyed. Caught between the pounding bolters, plasma guns and streaking missiles of the Space Wolves and the shuddering explosions of the Astra Militarum’s heavy artillery, the daemonic assault disintegrated. Earthshaker strikes sent up great gouts of sand and grit, laced with burning globules of warp-flesh and ichor. The air shimmered as whole cohorts of wyrdlings were unmade, vanishing from reality with howls of fury, pain and hungry denial.

Finally, the big guns fell silent. Sven ordered his packs to cease fire moments later. There were no more daemons left on the beaches of the World Wolf’s Lair, the stony stands shimmering as their corpses vanished back into the immaterium.

‘Raise them on the vox,’ Sven ordered, gazing out at the neighbouring islands. More aircraft were arriving, bigger transports carrying light armour, sentinel walkers and prefabricated flakboard bulwarks. A wing of matt-grey Thunderbolt heavy fighters streaked low overhead, banking south as they scanned the choppy seas for the next assault.

‘They’re not responding,’ Olaf Blackstone growled. ‘All vox-channels have been closed and locked since they landed that artillery.’

The euphoria of a battle won cooled rapidly. Looking out at the distant barrels of the Earthshakers studding the islands’ ridges, Sven felt a sudden foreboding creep over him. There had been no Astra Militarum elements in-system last he’d heard. Where had they come from?

‘Raise the fleet,’ Sven said. ‘They must know more than we do.’ The vox squawked in his ear.

‘*Lord Bloodhowl,*’ said a familiar voice.

‘Lord Deathwolf,’ Sven replied, scanning the transmission’s source. ‘You’re no longer on Frostheim?’

‘*No. Morkai’s Keep has fallen. I am bound for the World Wolf’s Lair.*’

‘Fallen?’ Sven echoed, disbelief warring with sudden anger. ‘How can that be? I thought you’d purged the Alpha Legion traitors and their wyrdspawn allies?’

‘*It was not the heretics who took it,*’ Harald Deathwolf replied. ‘*Do not communicate with anyone until I arrive. And maintain your defensive positions.*’

‘What is happening, Deathwolf?’ Sven demanded.

*‘I will explain in person, Bloodhowl. There is maleficarum trickery at work.’*

### *Star Drake, the Void*

*Gormenjarl*. A mountain cast from plasteel and adamantium and set adrift in the void. It filled the viewing ports of the *Star Drake*, the light of the Wolf’s Eye glinting from its gargoyle-edged bulkheads and the gaping maws of its defence batteries. Those weapons could blaze with enough firepower to decimate a fleet, yet now they lay inert, as silent as the star fort’s vox-channels.

‘Still nothing?’ Captain Stern demanded. The huscarl shook his head, eyes not leaving his blinking instrument displays. Stern watched *Gormenjarl* through the *Star Drake*’s open ports, imagining its defences flaring with sudden life. Their shields would hold for less than a minute, and the weight of ordnance would leave the proud Space Wolf Strike Cruiser a listing, gutted wreck in the time it took for them to fire a single salvo.

But the guns stayed silent.

‘Maintain the docking vector,’ Stern ordered. ‘And inform me of any contact. I will be with my brethren in bay alpha one.’

As Stern strode from the bridge he keyed his personal vox, opening a private channel with Brother Theo. Alone among the Brotherhood, Stern had ordered him to remain aboard the *Star Drake* and guard the unconscious Wulfen confined to the ship’s brig.

‘Any change?’ Stern asked.

‘None, brother-captain,’ Theo replied. ‘*The beast still slumbers.*’

‘You are to ensure that remains the case,’ Stern said. ‘And if you do not hear from me within the next hour, you are to take this ship to Midgardia and demand an audience with the Dark Angels. Do not let this madness continue, brother.’

*‘I understand, brother-captain.’*

Stern closed the channel, confident Theo would carry out what may be his final orders. The other eleven Grey Knights were waiting for him in the cavernous corridor that acted as the *Star Drake*’s primary docking bay, standing in a tight circle with heads bowed and force weapons held at rest. Brother Latimer was leading them in the Canticle of Absolution, the Six Hundred and Sixty-Six Secret Words, the High Gothic cant ringing back eerily from the bay’s ceiling. The Space Wolf Chapter-serfs manning the bay hung well back, staring at the huge silver-plated warriors with undisguised fear.

Stern took his customary space within the circle, taking the lead from Latimer

with practised ease.

‘No despicable trickery will thwart us, no Damnation will bring us low.’

‘There is no peace for us,’ the rest intoned as one. ‘For an eternity we strive.’

‘Though mere mortals in His service, everlasting shall be our True Duty.’

*‘Et Imperator Invocato Diabolus Daemonica Exorcism!’*

Stern finished the oath-prayer of the Grey Knights with the Benediction of the Third Brotherhood.

*‘Itur in fauces iumentorum. In os gehennae. Imperator dei estis lux. Vestri sumus foedus inite gladio. Gloria tibi in saecula.’*

Into the jaws of the beast. Into the mouth of hell. God-Emperor, you are our light. We are your sword. Glory to you forever.

The chant finished, its echoes rebounding one last time from the ship’s walls before they too fell silent. As one, the Grey Knights raised their heads and came to attention.

‘Brothers,’ Stern said, addressing them without his helmet. ‘We are about to walk into a trap. Beyond those blast doors is a Ramilies-class star fort dubbed *Gormenjarl*. No communication has been received from its crew since the outbreak of the first daemonic incursions in this system. We must assume the worst. Our objective is to secure this docking spine and protect *Star Drake* while its crew effect repairs. If possible, we will then attempt to purge any taint that may have manifested within the star fort.’

‘Brother-captain, isn’t our objective to reach Midgardia?’ asked Brother Gideon. ‘If the star fort is infested then purging it will slow us down considerably.’

‘Which is why we will only go on the offensive if it is practical,’ Stern replied. ‘*Gormenjarl*’s current trajectory is taking it past an extensive asteroid field known as Alpha Eleven-Nineteen, lying spinward of Fenris itself. If the opportunity arises I will attempt to storm the fort’s command deck and reroute it into Eleven-Nineteen. If a real-space collapse has occurred onboard *Gormenjarl* then we cannot afford to leave it open, regardless of the situation on Midgardia.’

‘My lord.’ The huscarl’s voice blared over the bay’s vox rig. ‘*We are moving into our final docking position. You will be able to break the atmospheric seal and board Gormenjarl within the next five minutes.*’

‘Brothers, make ready,’ Stern ordered. ‘Wrathhammer formation. I will take point.’

His Grey Knights assembled in a wedge around him, standing before the heavy, wolf-stamped blast doors of the docking bay, snapping home storm bolter clips

and murmuring prayers to the spirits of their armour and weaponry. Stern pulled on his helmet, clamping and locking it with his gorget seal. A blink and the retinal visor display of his auto-senses came online, filling his vision with targeting reticules, vox-channels and vital signs. Around him he felt *Star Drake* shudder, its adamantium hull groaning and straining as its helmsman eased it into contact with *Gormenjarl's* main docking spine. It was almost as though the venerable Strike Cruiser had no wish to touch the foreboding, silent star fort.

One last long, agonising moan rose from the ship's metal, and there was a distant, shuddering thump that reverberated up through Stern's boots. Then all was still.

'*Stand by,*' the huscarl's voice crackled over the vox.

'*Post tenebras lux,*' Stern said. After darkness, light. His Brotherhood echoed him, and as one they activated their nemesis force weapons, holy energy surging and sparking up glaive, sword and halberd.

A warning claxon shrieked. The light above the blast doors blinked red. Stern's grip on his force sword tightened. There was a thump of disengaging magnetic seals, a pressurised hiss, the grating of autobolts and servo-locks. The light above the doors blinked green.

The blast doors rolled back, and Brother-Captain Stern led his paladins' charge. Straight into the mouth of hell.

### *The Void, Fenris System*

'Are you sure this is wise, lord?' asked Sister Marie. Her hawkish features – scarred by the flamer burns so common among members of her Chamber Militant – were set in a familiar expression of disapproval.

Lord Inquisitor Banist de Mornay shifted fractionally on his auto palanquin, the vitae cables plugged into his flesh flexing with the movement, and tugged the trapped hem of his dark red robes out from underneath him. The deck beneath his recliner's tracks shuddered as the shuttle clamped onto the hull of the larger vessel beyond the docking bay's blast doors.

'We should have activated the mark seventeen exo-plate,' Marie continued. 'At least then you would have rudimentary protection from these animals.'

'The Wolves are not our enemy here, Marie,' de Mornay said, his voice chiding. 'Many wish us to believe they are, but we must not be swayed by their lies. Do not allow them to influence your judgements of these warriors.'

'They are harbouring mutants,' Marie pressed, unable to even utter the last

word without her features twisting with disgust. ‘The Dark Angels do not lie about that, and you know it.’

‘The genetic heritage of the *Vlka Fenryka* is a complex one, that I grant,’ de Mornay said. ‘But we must examine the outcomes of actions, regardless of what we perceive their intent to be. Thus far the Wulfen seem only to have acted alongside their battle-brothers, and exhibit very little animosity towards the God-Emperor’s servants. They are fighting as hard as any of us to rid this system of daemonic taint. That in itself must count for something.’

‘I merely worry about my ability to protect you in a ship full of beasts,’ Marie said. ‘We should have brought VX Nine-Eighteen as well.’

‘Sometimes a subtler touch is required,’ de Mornay said. He had ordered the rest of his in-field retinue to remain aboard *Allsaint’s Herald*. ‘The last thing we need right now is to antagonise our hosts. We require them if we are to make progress, after all these years.’

Marie said nothing, but de Mornay could feel the distaste radiating off the Adepta Sororitas. He could not wholly deny that he didn’t share that disgust. Genetic impurity, especially amongst the hallowed ranks of the Adeptus Astartes, was something he’d struggled to uproot for decades. To wilfully overlook evidence of mutation went against his instincts as a member of the Ordo Hereticus. But for now there were greater matters at stake – and darker secrets to unravel – than the curse of the Wulfen. In their eagerness to persecute their old rivals the Dark Angels had left themselves exposed. De Mornay had waited a long time for such an opportunity to present itself. All he needed now was muscle.

Hydraulics whined and thumped, and the blast doors leading from his private shuttle’s docking strut into the Space Wolf battle-barge ground open. A single figure waited for them on the other side, wreathed in decompression steam. He towered in the blue-grey power armour and furred pelts of the Space Wolves, and though his unhelmeted head was a latticework of old scars and blue knotwork tattoos, his eyes were disarmingly calm and grey. Seeing de Mornay’s cable-covered servitor-palanquin rolling through the venting steam, he bowed.

‘Lord Inquisitor, well met. I am Thierulf Bloodhanded. I have been sent by my jarl, Ragnar Blackmane, to escort you to the *Holmgang*’s bridge.’

‘The pleasure is all mine, Thierulf,’ de Mornay said, making the sign of the aquila. ‘By all means, lead on.’

He had heard it said that every Wolf Lord shaped his Great Company to his own dominant personality. Travelling through Ragnar Blackmane’s flagship, de

Mornay could well believe it. The Space Wolves he passed were more often than not young, armour and blades inscribed with new kill markings, and had that hungry look about them that had Sister Marie's hand fixed to the hilt of her holstered combi-flamer almost every step of the way. One snarled at de Mornay as they passed, holding the inquisitor's gaze long after most would have flinched away. As they neared the upper decks he became aware of an ever-increasing pack of Wolves following them. Despite his outward confidence, he felt cold sweat pricking across his body, anticipation setting his pulse racing. His fingers brushed his plasma pistol in its ornate leather holster, strapped to the palanquin's flank.

'Pay the pups no mind,' Thierulf said, as though reading de Mornay's thoughts. 'They've just been caged for too long. The currents of the Sea of Stars have been fickle of late. I was starting to think we'd never make it home.'

'You're aware of what's happening throughout the system?' de Mornay asked.

'Aware enough. Wyrdling scum are attacking everything bar the Hearthworld itself, and the sons of the Lion are trying to intervene with a crusade fleet. Meddling where they're neither wanted nor needed, as ever.'

'I'm here to try to do something about that,' de Mornay said.

Thierulf made a growling noise. After a second the inquisitor realised he was laughing, albeit mirthlessly.

'All depends what you want out of it in return, pyre-builder.'

'Who ever said anything about wanting something in return?'

'It's always so with your kind. Here, we've arrived.' Thierulf came to a halt before a wire-mesh grav lift, and entered a string of codes on the rune lock.

De Mornay spent a moment looking at the jagged lines of the Fenrisian *Juvjk* script on the lock. He had to remember to have Peterkyn create an auto-upload file for that language. An understanding of it was looking increasingly useful.

'I should return to my pack,' Thierulf said. 'They are grown restless in this torpid transport. Take the lift to the bridge level. My jarl Ragnar will meet you there.'

'My thanks, Wolf,' de Mornay said, rolling onto the lift platform as its grille door juddered open. 'We will doubtless both do the God-Emperor's work again soon enough.'

'Allfather be praised,' Thierulf grunted, and hit the activation rune. The doors snapped shut, and the lift began to rise with a low whir.

'If they mean to slaughter us, now is when they'll do it,' Marie muttered.

De Mornay allowed himself a smile, glancing briefly up at the pict feed

monitoring the lift's occupants.

'Your suspicions make me think you've served in my retinue for too long, honourable Sister,' he said. 'Regardless, we shall soon discover whether your beliefs are well-founded. Into the wolf's lair...'

The grav lift chimed as it reached *Holmgang*'s highest level, the bridge that lay at the top of the ship's command spire. The doors opened once again, and the hubbub of an Imperial warship's control nexus washed over the two Inquisitorial operatives. It was stilled by a deep growl, a growl that became words.

'Welcome, Lord Inquisitor de Mornay. It's rare to have a visitor from the ordos aboard my ship.'

De Mornay rolled his palanquin onto the bridge, assuming the mask of haughty indifference he had relied upon for so long. In his profession it did no good to show weakness or fear, either to friend or foe. But beneath the dozen predatory eyes that observed his arrival, indifference was a difficult appearance to maintain.

The bridge of the *Holmgang* was a cavern-like space, its walls and high ceiling cast from Fenrisian stone, carved with intricate scenes of the battles and the mythic adventures that the Space Wolves knew as sagas. Lumen globes flickered in alcoves or hung suspended from chains overhead, their light battling the green glow of cogitator screens and augur arrays. Chapter-serfs in plain blue-and-grey shifts bent over their workstations, fingers tapping at rune banks or adjusting heavy brass levers and gauges. Huscarls, their robes trimmed with fur, paced the walkways between the stations, monitoring the ship's vital signs and its progress through real space and relaying pertinent information to the command dais. That raised platform of seemingly primordial rock dominated the bridge's centre, the rune-carved stone throne at its top draped with heavy pelts. Upon it, like a techno-barbarian warlord from the darkest days of the Age of Strife, sat the figure that could only be the Young King. Ragnar Blackmane.

His grey battleplate was trimmed with gold, and hung with fang tokens. A dark wolf pelt was draped over his right pauldron, while a green gem glittered at the centre of his Belt of Russ, the relic that marked out all Wolf Lords. He wore no helmet, his long, black hair and sideburns lending his features a wild look. The appearance was only accentuated when he grinned, revealing vicious canines.

'You are a bold one, witch hunter,' he said as de Mornay ground to a halt before the throne, Marie at his side. 'I like that. But will I like the reason you are here?'

Ragnar was not the only Space Wolf on the bridge. Half a dozen of his pack leaders stood around his dais, their pelts grey, their eyes surveying de Mornay

with something akin to hunger. Native Fenrisian wolves also prowled the bridge, seemingly at liberty to come and go as they pleased. They sat and watched the two interlopers with as much restrained savagery as their transhuman wolf-brothers.

‘Any true son of Fenris would approve of the reason that I am here, my lord,’ de Mornay said to Ragnar. ‘Defending your Chapter’s honour, recovering your Great Wolf and purging your native system of daemonic infestation. That is what I am here to request your assistance with.’

‘That may be,’ Ragnar said. ‘But I doubt that’s the only reason you have sought out my fleet.’

‘Why else would I seek an audience in person?’

‘To discover if the rumours are true.’ Ragnar grinned again, a savage expression that carried with it little warmth. ‘I can tell you now, they are. Sverri!’

A low growl answered the Wolf Lord’s summons. De Mornay followed the sound to the far side of the bridge. Emerging from the shadows of a strategium cell came a creature seemingly born from the wildest and most savage of imaginations.

It bore only a passing resemblance to the other Space Wolves on the bridge. It was larger, and its iron-hard muscles bristled with bestial black hair. It wore less armour, what battleplate it did possess appearing archaic and timeworn. Its lower limbs were more like those of the Fenrisian wolves that padded around the bridge, distended and claw-toed. Its features were even more terrible – they were no longer recognisably human. Its nose was flattened and nostrils flared, while its predatory yellow eyes were sunk into a heavy brow. Its hair was long and matted, and its thick jaw was studded with rows of fangs that jutted out over its lower lip. As it moved towards Ragnar’s throne it adopted a loping, hunched gait, claws scraping on the bridge’s stone floor.

De Mornay felt Marie freeze beside him. He held up his hand, afraid the Adepta Sororitas would be overcome by disgust and draw her weapons. He was in no doubt that such a move would spell immediate, bloody death for both of them.

‘My lord,’ the thing Ragnar had addressed as Sverri snarled, struggling to form the syllables between jutting fangs and heavy, panting breaths. With some difficulty, it knelt before the throne.

‘Sverri, this is Lord Inquisitor de Mornay of the Ordo Hereticus,’ Ragnar said, looking at de Mornay. The inquisitor could sense the Wolf Lord studying his reaction, searching for the revulsion he expected. Sverri also turned to look at de Mornay, in a half crouch, watching him with the wary caution of a beast sizing

up an enemy. Judging whether it was predator or prey.

‘Lord Inquisitor, this is Sverri, pack leader of my Great Company’s newly adopted Wulfen Murderpack,’ Ragnar finished the chill introduction.

De Mornay held Sverri’s calculating, lupine gaze. It was the oldest law of nature. To look away would be to show weakness, and weakness was more often than not fatal.

‘The Wulfen are not my concern,’ de Mornay said slowly. ‘Not yet, anyway.’

‘So why are you here?’ Ragnar demanded. ‘I do not have time for the Inquisition’s games. As you yourself have said, my home system is beset and my lord Grimnar is missing. Speak plainly or get off my ship.’

‘The Dark Angels above Midgardia intend to fire-bomb its surface,’ de Mornay said. ‘They must be stopped before they go any further. Azrael and his Inner Circle have remained unaccountable to the Imperium for too long.’

‘So your hand is revealed,’ Ragnar said. ‘The lion is the one you’re hunting, not the wolf.’

‘After a manner of speaking, yes.’

‘But why?’

‘It is a grim tale,’ de Mornay said, ‘and we have little time for it.’

‘You will get nothing from me unless you explain yourself,’ Ragnar said. De Mornay sighed and nodded.

‘Then I will be brief. Fifty years ago I was bringing word of a greenskin invasion to the Calva Senioris System, in the Narthex Nebula. The foul xenos struck before a defence could be organised, and I was left leading an underground resistance. The Dark Angels and Silver Eagles were dispatched to spearhead a liberation, but one of the Angels, an Interrogator-Chaplain named Asmodai, received word of my resistance movement. He attacked our camp, slaughtered loyal Imperial citizens, and would have killed or captured me had I not proven my membership of the ordos before his battle-brothers.’

‘Why?’ Ragnar asked. ‘Why would he attack you?’

‘I have spent the past five decades asking the same question,’ de Mornay said. ‘You may scoff now, Wolf, but once I was a fine young warrior, active on the God-Emperor’s front lines, striving to enact His will and banish the darkness that forever threatens our Imperium. After Asmodai’s atrocity I went directly to the home world of the Silver Eagles and told their Chapter Master everything. That the Dark Angels had butchered fellow servants of Terra, and that many Silver Eagles had also fallen after Asmodai abandoned their fight against the orks to pursue me.’

‘And what did the Silver Eagles do then?’ Ragnar asked. He was leaning forward in his throne now, eyes fixed on the inquisitor. The Wolves, de Mornay remembered, loved their sagas.

‘The Silver Eagles did nothing,’ he said, letting the bitterness in his voice show. ‘Or next to nothing. They would not confront the Dark Angels. They merely petitioned Supreme Grand Master Azrael. He claimed he would censure Asmodai. I doubt any censure was ever carried out.’

‘The sons of the Lion have always been a secretive brotherhood,’ Ragnar said. ‘They have little honour, and I would not trust one of their battle-brothers as far as I could throw him. That being said, you are the inquisitor, not I. If you cannot bring the Angels to justice yourself I do not see how I can help. I have a war to fight.’

‘Our paths are linked now, Lord Blackmane,’ de Mornay pressed. ‘And they have been ever since the Dark Angels decided to invade your system. I believe they are not only here for your...’ he hesitated, glancing at Sverri, who seemed to be following the discussion with a silent, animalistic understanding.

‘I believe they are trying to misdirect the Imperium,’ de Mornay continued. ‘They were hiding something on Nurades, a relic perhaps. If your Chapter hadn’t purged the daemons infesting that world we may never have realised it, but I have never seen the Dark Angels move with such decisiveness unless the Inner Circle felt threatened. I want to end the insanity that infects this system. I want to confront Azrael, and I’m not strong enough to do that alone.’

‘You will start a civil war,’ Ragnar said doubtfully. ‘I would not listen to a wyrd-damned word uttered by one of the Lions, but nor would I expect them to listen to me. I would add nothing to your negotiations bar the threat of my Great Company’s presence.’

‘Then let me do the talking,’ de Mornay said. ‘I simply wish your fleet to accompany me to Midgardia. Unless I’m badly mistaken, that is where you’re headed anyway.’

Ragnar exchanged glances with his Long Fangs. Sensing his opening, de Mornay kept speaking.

‘In ancient times the sons of Russ were the Emperor’s executioners. All Legions feared you. The same cannot be said today. The Dark Angels treat you like animals, to be baited, trapped and shamed. They may well have already opened fire on Midgardia. They will not stop until the Fenris System is nought but ruins and ash.’

‘We are indeed bound for Midgardia,’ Ragnar allowed, again fixing de Mornay

with his unsettlingly bestial gaze. ‘And you may accompany us. I do not know what we will find there, but it seems as though the rest of the Imperium has turned its back on us. I would be a fool to scorn an inquisitor offering an alliance during such times.’ De Mornay bowed his head.

‘If it is any consolation, I do not believe your Wulfen are warp-tainted, Lord Blackmane,’ he said. ‘And regardless, their judgement can wait. For now, we have to stop this madness of Angels, before we slaughter each other at a daemon’s behest.’

### *The World Wolf’s Lair, Svellgard*

Harald Deathwolf’s Thunderhawk put down on the landing pad jutting from the Lair’s central control keep. Sven’s Bloodguard joined Harald’s own Riders of Morkai, forming an honour guard as they led the Wolf Lord into the command chamber. Sven Bloodhowl was waiting for him.

‘Lord Deathwolf,’ he said as Harald stepped into the room. Low and plated with plasteel, its illumination pulsed dully from emergency lumen strips lining the walkways, from the monitors of vox arrays and from the Lair’s missile targeting systems. A holochart dominated the centre of the chamber, currently deactivated.

‘What in the name of Russ is happening?’ Sven went on as Harald joined him at the edge of the chart.

‘Wyrd-damned treachery, that’s what,’ Harald growled. ‘We were locked in battle with wyrdling scum in the vaults of Morkai’s Keep when a strike force of Iron Hands made contact with us. Their captain told me he would destroy the keep from orbit, whether my warriors still garrisoned it or not.’

‘What sort of madness is that?’ Sven growled. ‘Did they succeed?’

‘Morkai’s Keep is a ruin,’ Harald said. ‘Resisting would have resulted in the annihilation of my Great Company. Believe me brother, I considered it. I have tried to raise the Fang, and the Great Wolf on Midgardia, but I have heard nothing. I can only assume this fleet is but part of a larger incursion.’

‘Are they here for the Wulfen?’ Sven asked darkly.

‘I can see no other motive. They are too numerous to be a response to the daemonic incursion. Such a force must have been gathering for weeks prior to the invasion. Have they tried to contact you?’

‘I’ve heard nothing,’ Sven said. ‘The Astra Militarum have occupied the nearest islands. Their artillery is zeroed in on us, but they won’t communicate. The daemons have been driven back, but they will soon return. Their numbers are

unending. I fear the warp rifts below the oceans are widening. The scans say there are at least three down there.'

'I am going to order my Great Company to deploy here, in full strength,' Harald said. 'I have given up enough of our Chapter's territory today. I will not evacuate again.'

'Won't they repeat what they did on Frostheim?' Sven asked. 'An orbital bombardment would achieve two objectives for them. It would wipe out both us and the wyrdlings.'

'If that's to be our fate I will die with my boots in the dirt of one of my Chapter's worlds,' Harald said. Sven looked him in the eye for a moment, before a fanged grin split his tattooed features.

'And if need be the Bloodhowls will burn alongside you, brother. Whatever is to happen, we will make the Saga of Svellgard one that will be sung in the feast halls of the Fang for millennia to come.'

### *Ramilies-class star fort, designate Gormenjarl*

Stern's worst fears had been realised. *Gormenjarl* had become a gateway to hell.

Mankind's collective nightmares had been made manifest onboard the star fort. The walls of the docking bay had twisted and melted like candle wax, plasteel and adamantium now studded with fleshy maws that snapped and spat, or clusters of eyes that wept black ichor. The decking underfoot flowed and shifted like quicksand, the metal molten and writhing, or plated with fresh growths of chitin. The air was heavy with sweat vapour, and vibrated with some gigantic, hellish heartbeat.

'Brothers, purge this filth,' Stern roared as he swept through the *Star Drake's* blast doors, his nemesis force sword inscribing a crackling white arc through the shuddering air. The first daemon to meet his blade, a red-skinned bloodletter, disintegrated beneath the blow, its hellsword shattered into a hundred black shards.

The Grey Knights stormed what had once been the star fort's docking spine, storm bolters hammering death into the warpspawn packing the arching corridor, the roaring flames of Brother Tomaz's sanctified incinerator torching the tainted walls and filling the air with the stench of roasted daemonflesh. Stern led his brethren in the Chants of Admonishment, the strength of their hatred and the purity of their faith like a physical force that sent daemons shrieking and scrambling back down the corridor.

‘To the far end,’ Stern voxed. ‘Secure the junction.’

At the end of the corridor the spine split into two sub-routes, both leading deeper into *Gormenjarl*’s guts. There the corruption was even worse. The floor, walls and ceiling now resembled the tract of some foul creature’s intestinal organs, carpeted with flesh that throbbed and pulsed with unnatural life. Stern stamped down on a bloodshot eye that glared up at him from what had once been the deck, bursting it in a spray of milky ichor. Around him his brothers stood firm, the protective wards edging their silver aegis armour blazing white with heat. The very air of the star fort pulsed and bent around them, as though the tainted atmosphere was seeking to avoid contact with the holy paladins.

‘We hold here,’ Stern ordered. ‘Bulwark formation.’ He blink-changed channels. ‘Huscarl, how long before *Star Drake* is void-worthy again?’

‘*We are reactivating the engine blocks right now, sire,*’ the Space Wolf thrall replied, voice choppy with static. ‘*After that we will need to couple with the star fort’s external coolant array. The systems estimate fifteen minutes.*’

‘Make it ten,’ Stern ordered, and cut the link.

The level of *Gormenjarl*’s infestation was worse than even he had expected. There had to be a warp rift open at the star fort’s heart. That meant another front in the war for the Fenris System.

‘We must seal away this filth, before it can spread any further,’ he voxed to his brethren.

‘If we are to seize whatever remains of the bridge, it will take all of us to get that far,’ Gideon replied. ‘We would leave the entrance to *Star Drake*’s docking bay undefended.’

‘Besides, if we adhere to our previous plan, I doubt we would find any way to redirect the star fort into the asteroid field,’ Tomaz added as he jetted a fresh gout of blessed promethium into a clutch of squealing horrors. ‘If the level of corruption on these external levels is this bad, I assume the inner command centre is completely lost.’

Stern impaled a lunging daemonette, banishing the creature in a blaze of light. He knew his brethren were right. They were too few to fight their way to the root of *Gormenjarl*’s infection. Even holding the docking spine looked like a desperate task.

‘But if the star fort’s directional controls no longer work,’ Brother Artemis voxed, ‘then will its targeting systems? Or its shields?’

The thought was interrupted before it could gain traction. A terrible sound bounced down the flesh-corridors towards the Grey Knights. It was a howl, at

once chillingly familiar to Stern, and yet horribly different. It was distorted, as if by vox interference, rising to an unnatural pitch before diving to throaty depths. The eerie sound sent the daemons ahead of the Grey Knights into a frenzy, throwing themselves onto the Space Marines' blades and bolters. Not in rage, Stern realised, but in desperation. In fear of whatever was coming down the twin corridors behind them. The words of the huscarl earlier, aboard the *Star Drake*, came back to him. A pack of Grey Hunters, the Redpelts.

'Brethren, brace!' he shouted.

*Gormenjarl's* complement of Space Wolf defenders still lived, but in the most nightmarish way imaginable. And now they were coming for the silver-armoured interlopers.

*Transit line four hundred and three, the Underworld, Midgardia*

Transit line four hundred and three was the primary level-one subsurface route into Deepspark. The grav lift took Egil and his ragged retinue to a maintenance station half a mile from what had once been the subterranean hive's entrance. As he stepped into the wide, tracked tunnel, the vox display on the edge of Egil's visor uplink finally showed signal connectivity.

'All Imperial forces, come in,' he said, setting the vox tuner to roam.

'We should be able to make contact with the surface this high up,' Lenold said.

'That's what I'm attempting to do,' Egil replied. 'It may take time to lock onto a signal though. We should proceed.'

The Wolves set out, following the dual rail lines that wound their way through the dirt-walled tunnel. Skol buzzed ahead, its pict feed relayed directly back to the Iron Wolf's bionics.

'Signs of fighting,' he said as he walked, scanning the walls with his remaining unaugmented eye. 'Recent. Also, the air is showing higher spore toxin content.'

'The nearer to the surface we are, the higher it'll be,' Bjorn said.

'Even more so if plague wyrdlings passed this way recently,' Lenold said darkly.

'And they may well have,' Egil said. 'Skol has found something.'

It was a body. A Grey Hunter, slumped across one of the tracks, fingers frozen in claw-like rigor mortis. The blood from the wound piercing his breastplate still glistened red.

'Dredwulf,' Lenold said grimly, kneeling beside the fallen Hunter. 'From Storrie's pack. They were the nearest to catching up with the Great Wolf before

he was cut off.'

'The body is not old,' Egil said, eyes scanning the dark shadows that flickered beneath the tunnel's wan lumen globes. The keen senses of the Wolf Lord, even enhanced by his augmetics, detected nothing. 'They must be close.'

'We should press on,' Lenold said.

'Agreed.'

Further down the tunnel, Egil's vox finally picked up something. A blurt of signal code cut across the long-range frequency.

'I've detected an Imperial transmission,' he said, coming to a halt. 'From the surface. I'm locking on now.'

'I'm getting it too,' Lenold said. 'Seems to be coming from the Magma Gates.'

'Conran,' Egil said as his Ironguard's identifier rune lit up on his visor. 'It's a looping non-verbal distress code.'

'You still have part of your Great Company on the surface?' Lenold asked.

'I shouldn't,' Egil said. 'Conran was ordered to lead the withdrawal of the Ironwolves in my absence. He shouldn't still be on Midgardia.'

'Or transmitting,' Lenold noted. 'Do you think something has befallen the Magma Gates? Can it be possible that they are already overrun?'

Egil snarled with annoyance. Surely Conran would not have disobeyed his orders to lead the retreat? If more of his Great Company were still on Midgardia wouldn't he pick up their vox transmissions as well? But if only Conran had come back, then why? And what fate had befallen him if all that remained was a distress transmission?

A growl from ahead broke his train of thought. While the rest of the makeshift pack had halted, the remaining Wulfen had slunk further down the line. Now their bestial warnings echoed back up the tunnel.

'They've found something,' Lenold said. Egil felt his pulse quicken, hairs bristling with a sudden sense of foreboding. He led the pack at a run along the tunnel.

The Wulfen had discovered more bodies. Four of them, more of Storrie's Grey Hunters. Dismembered, still bloody. If they had taken any wyrdspawn with them, the creature's bodies had already melted back into the immaterium. The Wulfen were clustered in a tight circle at the centre of the group of bodies, crouched over something, snuffling and growling in obvious distress.

'Stand aside, wolf-brothers,' Lenold commanded, parting the circle. They scabbled back in the dirt, letting out a low, mournful moan.

'What have they found?' Egil demanded, reaching Lenold's side. Skol darted

overhead, stab-lumen picking up the object the Grey Hunters had died defending. The Iron Wolf caught his breath as the light shone back off gilded metal.

It was Fellclaw. The huge thunderwolf's plated skull, the one that had been borne aloft on Logan Grimnar's back ever since he had slain the mighty beast during his Trail of Morkai almost a millennium ago. Its gilding was battered and befouled with muck and blood, and a number of fangs had snapped off.

'The Great Wolf's crown,' Lenold muttered. 'Then he's been this way.'

'Or Storrie's pack found it elsewhere and were carrying it with them,' Egil said.

'Either way, he is not lost. Surely he lives.'

Egil said nothing. Lenold bent to retrieve the gilded skull, lifting it with reverence. 'He is close. I can feel it.'

'Something else is closer,' Egil said as his visor lit with warning runes. 'The toxicity levels in this tunnel just rose threefold.'

'*Lord,*' Moln voxed. '*We are detecting movement back down the tunnel.*'

'I can smell them,' Lenold snarled. 'More plaguespawn.' Around them, the Wulfen began to howl. Egil's wolf claws slid free.

'Brothers, to me!'

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Robbie MacNiven** is a highland-born History graduate from the University of Edinburgh. His hobbies include reenacting, football and obsessing over Warhammer 40,000. He has written the Deathwatch short story 'Redblade', and the Warhammer 40,000 stories 'A Song for the Lost' and 'Blood and Iron' for Black Library.

[The Great Wolf is missing. Ulrik the Slayer and Krom Dragongaze set out on an odyssey to find him. The hunt is on...](#)



BUY NOW



**READ IT FIRST**

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS | EARLY RELEASES | FREE DELIVERY

[blacklibrary.com](http://blacklibrary.com)

# THE BLACK LIBRARY NEWSLETTER



**Sign up today for regular updates on the  
latest Black Library news and releases**

**SIGN UP NOW**

## **A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION**

Published in 2016 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd,  
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Cover illustration by Jon Cave.  
Produced by Games Workshop in Nottingham.

The Broken Crown © Copyright Games Workshop Limited 2016. The Broken Crown, GW, Games Workshop, Black Library, The Horus Heresy, The Horus Heresy Eye logo, Space Marine, 40K, Warhammer, Warhammer 40,000, the 'Aquila' Double-headed Eagle logo, and all associated logos, illustrations, images, names, creatures, races, vehicles, locations, weapons, characters, and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are either ® or TM, and/or © Games Workshop Limited, variably registered around the world.  
All Rights Reserved.

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-78572-205-9

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

See Black Library on the internet at  
[blacklibrary.com](http://blacklibrary.com)

Find out more about Games Workshop's world of Warhammer and the Warhammer 40,000 universe at  
[games-workshop.com](http://games-workshop.com)

## **eBook license**

This license is made between:

Games Workshop Limited t/a Black Library, Willow Road, Lenton, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, United Kingdom (“Black Library”); and

(2) the purchaser of an e-book product from Black Library website (“You/you/Your/your”)

(jointly, “the parties”)

These are the terms and conditions that apply when you purchase an e-book (“e-book”) from Black Library. The parties agree that in consideration of the fee paid by you, Black Library grants you a license to use the e-book on the following terms:

\* 1. Black Library grants to you a personal, non-exclusive, non-transferable, royalty-free license to use the e-book in the following ways:

o 1.1 to store the e-book on any number of electronic devices and/or storage media (including, by way of example only, personal computers, e-book readers, mobile phones, portable hard drives, USB flash drives, CDs or DVDs) which are personally owned by you;

o 1.2 to access the e-book using an appropriate electronic device and/or through any appropriate storage media; and

\* 2. For the avoidance of doubt, you are ONLY licensed to use the e-book as described in paragraph 1 above. You may NOT use or store the e-book in any other way. If you do, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license.

\* 3. Further to the general restriction at paragraph 2, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license in the event that you use or store the e-book (or any part of it) in any way not expressly licensed. This includes (but is by no means limited to) the following circumstances:

o 3.1 you provide the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.2 you make the e-book available on bit-torrent sites, or are otherwise complicit in ‘seeding’ or sharing the e-book with any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.3 you print and distribute hard copies of the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.4 you attempt to reverse engineer, bypass, alter, amend, remove or otherwise make any change to any copy protection technology which may be applied to the e-book.

\* 4. By purchasing an e-book, you agree for the purposes of the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 that Black Library may commence the service (of provision of the e-book to you) prior to your ordinary cancellation period coming to an end, and that by purchasing an e-book, your cancellation rights shall end immediately upon receipt of the e-book.

\* 5. You acknowledge that all copyright, trademark and other intellectual property rights in the e-book are, shall remain, the sole property of Black Library.

\* 6. On termination of this license, howsoever effected, you shall immediately and permanently delete all copies of the e-book from your computers and storage media, and shall destroy all hard copies of the e-book which you have derived from the e-book.

\* 7. Black Library shall be entitled to amend these terms and conditions from time to time by written notice to you.

\* 8. These terms and conditions shall be governed by English law, and shall be subject only to the jurisdiction of the Courts in England and Wales.

\* 9. If any part of this license is illegal, or becomes illegal as a result of any change in the law, then that part shall be deleted, and replaced with wording that is as close to the original meaning as possible without being illegal.

\* 10. Any failure by Black Library to exercise its rights under this license for whatever reason shall not be in any way deemed to be a waiver of its rights, and in particular, Black Library reserves the right at all times to terminate this license in the event that you breach clause 2 or clause 3.