

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



WAR ZONE  
**FENRIS**



**LEGACY OF RUSS 7**

**THE WILD  
KING**

**ROBBIE MACNIVEN**

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



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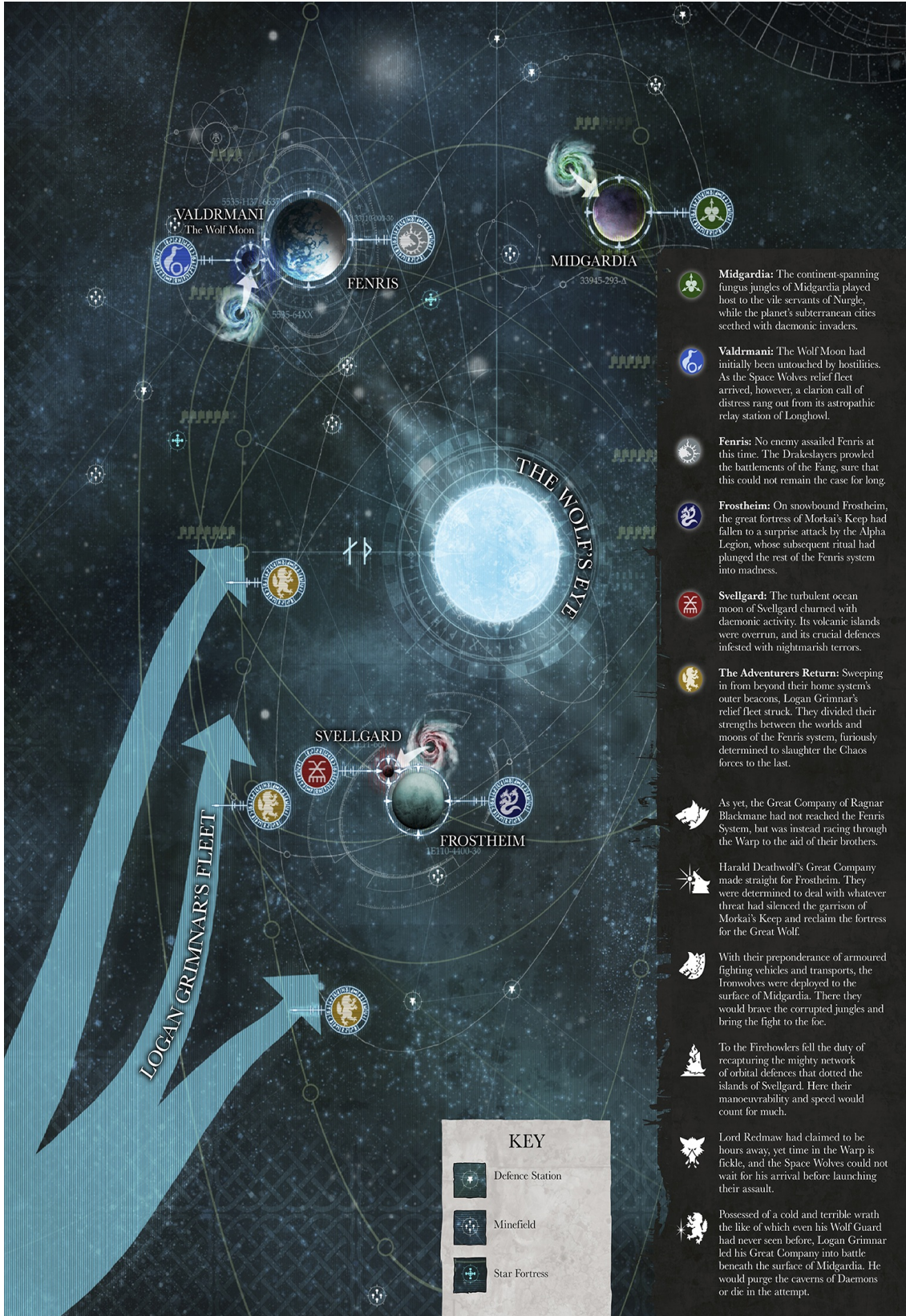
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5533-1137-6633  
**VALDRMANI**  
 The Wolf Moon

33724300-33  
**FENRIS**  
 5993-64XX

33945-293-A  
**MIDGARDIA**

**THE WOLF'S EYE**









**SVELLGARD**

1E110-H00-30  
**FROSTHEIM**

**LOGAN GRIMMAR'S FLEET**

**KEY**

-  Defence Station
-  Minefield
-  Star Fortress

-  **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.

# THE WILD KING

*Robbie MacNiven*

*The Void, Fenris System*

In a surge of shrieking wyrd-light, Bran Redmaw and his Great Company returned to Fenris. The warp spat them out off-course, dangerously deep inside the system, trailward of Frostheim. As his flagship's kaerls sought to triangulate their exact location, transmit ident codes and establish vox contact, Bran paced his bridge from one end to the other, bare, blood-encrusted fists clenching and unclenching.

He had thought they weren't going to make it. The wyrdrealm's maddening waves had mocked them, tossing and turning his fleet's vessels with bows of gibbering insanity, scattering them and ripping them away from their destination. As his Navigators had battled to hold on to the beacon of the Astronomican, Bran had been engaged in his own fight, with those he'd once counted as brothers.

They were still his brothers, he reminded himself. Regardless of the wounds they'd dealt him. Regardless of how they now looked, thought and acted.

'Lord, we have established a vox connection with Lord Deathwolf,' called a vox huscarl. 'His signal is currently being rerouted from Svellgard via his flagship.'

'Accept it,' Bran said, pacing to the communications station. Harald's lagging voice came through on a tide of static.

*'It's good to see you on our sensors, Redmaw.'*

'And good to be home, Deathwolf,' Bran replied. 'How goes the fight?'

*'It stinks. Young Bloodhowl and myself are on Svellgard. The place is crawling with wyrd-dung. Fenris is quiet, and we've heard nothing from Midgardia.'*

'My scanners are reading a large non-Chapter fleet in orbit above you,' Bran

said, glancing over the readouts flooding back on the monitors and oculus vidscreens from his fleet's augur probes.

*'Aye, and that's only the half of it. It's a crusade fleet, elements from fourteen different Chapters along with Russ-knows how much Militarum and Navy support, all come to call us to heel. A lance strike by one of their ships nearly ended both Bloodhowl and myself. They refuse to communicate with us.'*

'They're here for the Wulfen,' Bran surmised, fists clenching harder.

*'And more than reluctant to help with our little wyrdling problem. We're hard-pressed down here, Redmaw.'*

'My warriors are hungry for a kill,' Bran said. 'If Fenris is indeed secure we will deploy in full to support you.'

*'That may turn the tide,'* Harald said. *'Hurry.'*

As the connection ended Bran gazed out of the viewing port. Its blast shutters were rattling back, exposing the glittering expanse of the Sea of Stars beyond. The ship's bridge was reflected back in the thick layers of crystalflex, and Bran caught sight of himself towering beside the brass-edged vox banks. It was not a vision he was familiar with. His helmet was off and his dark hair lay unclasped, thick around his shoulders. He'd stripped off his pauldrons, rerebrace, vambrace and gauntlets, revealing thick arms that were criss-crossed with a latticework of fresh cuts and sheened by a slick of sweat.

They only respected strength. Bran had shown it. Even that would not be enough though, if they were not released to the hunt soon. Bran had promised to reinforce Svellgard as though he had a choice – the packs would demand he struck out at the nearest enemy, whether he'd wanted to deploy them to the moon or not.

*A crusade fleet.* That made matters even worse. How his brothers would react to his return had been worrying enough. He hadn't dared consider what the wider Imperium would do when they discovered what had become of Bran's Great Company during their warp transit. Confronting the wyrdspawn would surely mean confronting those who had come to accuse the Wolves too.

But that was a risk he was going to have to take eventually. Battle called, and with it a release of the primal hunger that had been building among the Redmaws. He called up his helmsman, eyes still locked on his own savage reflection.

'Set a course for Svellgard.'

*Ramilies-class star fort, designate Mjalnar*

The Wulfen had caught the scent of the wyrd just beyond the command deck's blast doors. They howled and gnashed their fangs as Ragnar entered the rune lock code, their eyes wide and wild with murderlust. The Young King turned to face them as the door rumbled open.

'Kill them,' he said. The Space Wolves charged.

The daemons answered the Wulfen's howls with ones of their own. *Mjälнар's* command deck was crawling with them, the star fort's cogitator control tiers – divided into gunnery, docking, directional, enginarium, vox and shield bays – playing host to cohorts of capering blue and pink horrors. The air was filled with the snap and crackle of changing, wyrdling energies, and shoals of undulating Tzeentch sky-screamers circled in the vaulted dome above. At the heart of the bedlam rose the primary control platform, the air above it rent and shimmering around a writhing portal that resembled the scaled form of a great, coiling fish. Lightning whipped and lashed from the warp rift, and even as Ragnar watched, more cavorting pink wyrdlings materialised beneath it with a crack of incandescent light.

At the centre of the control platform a large figure sat, occupying the station commander's throne. Ragnar tried to focus on him, but the air around the figure, seated directly below the warp portal, seemed to bend in on itself, like a mirror repeating its own reflection endlessly. It confounded Ragnar's eyes and made his headache redouble.

'Kill them,' he repeated through clenched teeth.

The Space Wolves stormed the deck, setting upon the Tzeentch wyrdspawn standing between them and the portal. Ragnar led his Blackpelts, cutting left and right with *Frostfang*, heedless of the claws that scraped and scratched at his scarred battleplate.

Behind the rush of Wolves, de Mornay hauled his palanquin to a halt and slotted a vox antennae back into his platform's chassis. It was time.

'And this is why we didn't bring the exo-plate, Sister,' he said to Marie. 'Deploy the beacon.'

The Adepta Sororitas reached into an alcove beneath the palanquin's recliner, set back from the engine unit that powered the servitor's treads. The device she pulled out resembled a small metal casket, easily held in two hands, with a key panel and a blinking input system inset on one side. She activated it with a mem-code and a small rod extended from the top with a click.

'Place it there,' de Moray said, pointing his plasma pistol at the area of decking just beyond the blast doors. Marie put the device down on the ichor-slashed

grille carefully, and stepped well back. A light beamed from the las-scanner on top of the casket, momentarily covering the space around it in a green grid. De Mornay's grip on his pistol tightened, and he found himself mouthing a prayer he hadn't uttered in a long time.

The las-scanner blinked red two, three, four times, and then became a constant green. The grid vanished. De Mornay waited, breath held, trying to ignore the howls and shrieks of the combat raging all around him.

And then, with a crack, Brother-Captain Stern and his Grey Knights arrived.

Stern had cleared de Mornay en-route to *Mjalnar*. As was so often the case with representatives of the Inquisition, even the encrypted information available to the Chamber Militant was fragmentary and incomplete. Banist de Mornay had been an operative under the late Lord Inquisitor Sebastian Cornwel for seven years, his interrogator for nine, and a full inquisitor for almost fifty. He'd held the rank of Lord Inquisitor for the past dozen. His data entries spoke of strenuous, unstinting service. Malar Nine, the Crusius Campaign, the Delphoid Purges – de Mornay had served on the front line in almost as many cleanse operations as Stern in the past six decades.

The data logs also hinted at more unsavoury activities. The incident files had been wiped, but following a period stationed in the Narthex Nebula fifty years previously de Mornay had spent a great deal of time seemingly operating alongside the Dark Angels. Formal complaints from the Chapter to the Segmentum's Inquisitorial Divisio headquarters seemed to show that the sons of the Lion were less than happy with his presence. For whatever reason, de Mornay appeared to have an obsession with them.

That, however, was not Stern's concern. For a moment the after-memory of the teleportation overcame him – the sucking, gelatinous grasping of tentacles against his silver armour, the searing bone-chill of the void, the stomach-knotting sense of dislocation. He'd always hated teleporting. De Mornay's homer had guided them true though, from the pentagram-inscribed, energy-charged chamber aboard *Star Drake* to the bloody, battle-rent command centre of *Mjalnar*.

The Grey Knights were moving the moment they snapped into existence onboard the star fort, spreading out in an Exodus offence pattern from around the teleport beacon. Stern analysed the situation in a heartbeat. The command deck was awash with Tzeentch warpspawn, their corruption emanating from a crackling silver split above the chamber's control platform. A powerful

daemonic entity dominated the same platform, its warding trickery so strong even Stern's aura was unable to pierce it and discern its true nature.

The Wolves battled their way towards the creature and its portal, most of them transformed mutant beasts. Stern saw immediately that they were fighting their way into a trap. In their haste to storm the platform they'd exposed their flanks. Shimmering, shapeless things riven with unholy light were drifting to envelop them, while a shoal of blue sky-screamers detached from the flock circling above to swoop down on the Wulfen's heads.

'Brethren, split and cleanse.' Stern ordered. He went right with Caldor, Alacar and Latimer, while Tomaz, Wilfred, Artemis, Ethold and Osbeth went left.

The flammers of Tzeentch met them. From their many sightless heads, from gaping maws and from the flaring ends of quad-jointed limbs, multi-hued warpfire spewed to engulf the charging Knights. The flames themselves screamed as they flowed around the silver paladins, grasping and snapping at them like the sinuous appendages of a living creature. Such an inferno would have reduced unwarded mortals to gibbering hunks of twisting, mutating flesh and blasted bare the sanity of the most devout Imperial servant. Stern felt the warding aegis engraved into his armour vibrate as it turned the daemonic energies aside. He spat one of the Prayers of Contrition as he thrust through the warpfire, nemesi sword a scything white arc.

The first flamer came apart beneath the holy steel, its own fires turning in on it and eating it up. Stern's brethren were beside him, their anointed weapons crackling with power as they cut apart the ever-changing monsters. They closed around him, united in a recital of the Canticle of Absolution. Stern threw a glance at the centre of the chamber.

The Wolves' advance had stalled.

Ragnar cursed when he saw the Grey Knights materialise amidst a flare of teleportation lightning. He'd known the inquisitor would go behind their backs at some point. There would be a reckoning with him when this was all over.

If any of them made it off the command deck alive. The sky-screamer came at him from above, filling the energy-charged air with the shriek of its passing chitin spines. Ragnar met it with an upswing of *Frostfang*, the chainsword's scream matching that of the airborne daemon as it sawed the thing in two, spraying the Blackpelts with stinking purple viscera. More of the creatures dived down at them, their manta-like bodies rippling on the invisible currents of the warp.

The Space Wolves' attack was blunted. Horrors pressed in from all sides, splitting and multiplying, bathed in hellish wyrdlight that threw crazed shadows across the embattled chamber. The sleek sky daemons above them struck in shoals, swooping at an angle so that their frills of spines and drooling maws skimmed the top of the melee. The Wulfen paid for their feral desire to remove their helmets, their unprotected faces gouged and torn by the passing screamers.

'Stay tight!' Ragnar bellowed at the nearest Wolves, slashing through another blue horror that leapt at him, all flailing arms and yawning mouths. 'Aim for the platform!'

Behind him he heard a grunt, and half turned to see Hrolf Longspear stumble, blood spilling from where a horror's claws had succeeded in breaking the thigh seal of his armour. Uller Greylock was also injured, his helmet buckled where a screamer's passing blades had hammered into him. The Grey Knights were on their flanks, wreathed in wyrdflame as they hacked at the sea of madness. It would not be enough.

It was Hostor who saved them. His Blood Claws, the only one of the three boarding packs to have resisted the curse of the Wulfen, burst onto the command deck from the far side of the melee. Their howls joined with the pounding of bolt pistols and the roaring of chainswords as they speared into the fight around the control platform. Almost immediately Ragnar felt the shuddering press of morphing wyrdflesh around him lessen as the Tzeentch daemons turned to face the new threat.

'Blackpelts, forward!' he barked, shouldering his way through the fight. The platform's stairs lay directly ahead, devoid of enemies, the eldritch energies of the silver warp portal coruscating above. Behind him he could hear his Wolf Guard struggling to keep the way clear, a fresh tide of wyrdlings breaking against their blades and armour as the creatures realised the Wolf Lord's intentions.

Ragnar parted a final horror with a swing of *Frostfang*, stamping on the thing's dissipating remains as he lunged for the stairs. He took the metal rungs three at a time, alone now, his fangs bared. The air ahead shimmered and warped, images repeating themselves, patterns shattering and reforming around the faceless, dark thing that sat beneath the warp portal's swirling quicksilver centre. Ragnar flung himself at the twisting barrier with a howl.

And stopped. Silence gripped him, sudden and complete. The frenetic bloodletting of the command deck was gone. Here, in a perfect sphere of unreality centred beneath the portal, all was calm and still.

The star fort's command throne lay before him. A figure sat upon it, huge, brooding, clad in baroque power armour and a horn-crested helm. The blue battleplate was trimmed with gold and inscribed with hundreds of leering daemonic heads, the eyes regarding the Wolf Lord with a mocking glint as he stumbled to a halt.

As Ragnar stopped the figure spoke, voice silky and slick with ten millennia of vile deeds.

'Hello again, Young King,' said Madox.

### Iron Requiem, *in high orbit above Svellgard*

More Wolves.

The augur arrays of the Iron Hands battle-barge had detected another fleet moving in-system. Their projected course took them to Svellgard, and the section of the crusade fleet surrounding the moon. Data logs showed the ships as belonging to the Wolf Lord Bran Redmaw's Great Company.

Terrek scanned the information, noting the class and size of each approaching vessel. With the fleets of three Wolf Lords combined above the moon their voidborne assets would outnumber those of this portion of the crusade fleet. And that was without factoring in the destructive power sitting dormant in the silos buried beneath the craggy tundra of Svellgard's islands. The Iron Captain cut the link with Sven Bloodhowl – who was still raging impotently at him from the moon's surface – and opened a channel to Epathus, back aboard the Ultramarines flagship.

'We should petition Grand Master Azrael for reinforcements,' he said.

'*Perhaps,*' Epathus allowed. '*But I have just explained the situation to Harald Deathwolf. He is in agreement with our projected assault plan.*'

'I do not trust the Wolves,' Terrek said, his flat machine tone giving the statement no inflection.

'*We have little choice other than to seek their assistance, for now. The forces at our disposal are insufficient for purging Svellgard alone.*'

'No force need be exerted if we destroy the moon from orbit.'

'*Such an act will not be sanctioned by the rest of the crusade, Terrek. It would mean the destruction of the Wolves' orbital defence systems, and would likely cause catastrophic damage to Frostheim as well.*'

The Iron Hand felt a surge of annoyance throb through his circuitry. He suppressed the unworthy emotion. The Ultramarine's words had some merit.

Regardless of where their loyalties lay, the Space Wolves currently occupied a powerful system-defence nexus. Destroying it would mean destroying valuable Imperial facilities whose ancient, sacred mechanisms ought to be recaptured intact.

‘I will transmit a request for reinforcements to the Rock,’ he said. ‘Then we shall begin planetfall, as per the prearranged assault plan.’

*‘I shall see you on the surface, Iron Captain,’* said Epathus.

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

‘Machine-loving, cogbrained, traitorous wyrd-scum,’ Sven spat. ‘I hope your servo-loving mother burns in the Seven Hells for the rest of eternity.’

The vox-link to the Iron Hands battle-barge had been cut over a minute earlier, but that didn’t stop the Wolf Lord’s invectives from echoing around the bunker. Eventually, Harald placed a hand on his fellow jarl’s shoulder.

‘What?’ Sven snarled, rounding on him in the confined, red-lit space of the Lair’s secondary command bunker.

‘I’ve just spoken to the Ultramarines captain, Epathus,’ the older Wolf Lord said. ‘He’s uploading a planetary assault overview to our systems right now. They’re going to spearhead a counter-attack.’

‘Yngfor is dead,’ Sven said. ‘And his pack with him. I’ll kill that Iron Hand traitor myself!’

‘Afterwards, Young Wolf,’ Harald said. ‘Right now we have more pressing concerns than vengeance.’

The thudding of bolter fire from outside the bunker’s reinforced walls underscored his words. Since the destruction of Infurnace the daemonic assaults had only increased. The outer bastions were hard-pressed and the combat channels were overwhelmed with reports of rising casualty rates and unsustainable ammunition expenditure. The ocean-eating warp rifts were still widening. If left unchecked, Sven knew they would swallow the whole moon, and create a cataclysmic rent in reality that would surely rip apart the entire Fenris System.

‘What do the sons of Guilliman want?’ he asked eventually.

‘They’ve identified three primary warp portals from orbit. They’ll attack one, the Iron Hands the second and we’ll strike at the third. An orbital bombardment will help seal them and clear us a path.’

‘They’re as likely to try to wipe us out as seal the rifts,’ Sven snarled.

‘That may be, but at the moment we have no choice but to trust them. As long as we try to hold the daemons, their numbers will only multiply. We have to go on the offensive. Also, Redmaw is on his way.’

‘He’s finally arrived in-system?’

‘With all his fleet. Now is the time to strike.’

‘And afterwards, hold these misguided fools to account for what they’ve done,’ Sven added.

‘Aye, that we shall, brother.’

### *Wolftide, in high orbit above Midgardia*

The Wolf Lord had returned to the iron-clad bridge of his flagship, boots ringing from the metal underfoot. Kreg bowed, eyes averted. ‘I could not stop him, lord. I tried.’

Egil didn’t respond. He was looking past the Long Fang, out of the *Wolftide*’s viewing ports. At the crusade fleet, clustered around the brooding, tower-studded bulk of the Rock. The Iron Wolf’s expression was dark.

He had returned minutes earlier, retrieved along with his pack by one of his flagship’s Stormwolves. They’d brought Conran’s remains with them, and the Great Wolf’s battered crown.

‘Conran tried to reason with the Lions,’ Kreg explained. ‘He believed if he proved there were still Wolves on Midgardia they wouldn’t burn it. He went himself.’

‘They know he went?’ Egil asked quietly. ‘They know he was on the surface when they began the bombardment?’

‘Yes, lord, he told them. We have the vox transcripts.’

‘And they knew I was still planetside as well? That I was hunting for the Great Wolf?’

‘Yes, lord.’

‘Gunner,’ Egil said to one of his huscarls. ‘You have a lock?’

‘We do, lord,’ the huscarl said.

‘Conran ordered us to load and lock all batteries before he departed,’ Kreg explained. ‘It was how we convinced the Lions to talk to us in the first place.’

‘Hail them again,’ Egil ordered.

‘We cannot, lord,’ the vox huscarl said, shaking his head. ‘The entire fleet has sealed us out of its channels.’

‘Gunner, what are you locked onto?’ Egil asked.

‘An Imperial Navy Lunar-class cruiser, lord. *Wrath of Man*, part of the 483rd Obscurus battlefleet sub-detachment.’

‘Message from bridge command to the forward bombardment cannon,’ Egil said. ‘Maintain current target. Open fire.’

*Ramilies-class star fort, designate Mjarnar*

Ragnar said nothing. Madox laughed, an oily, chilling sound that filled the bubble of unreality occupying the centre of *Mjarnar*’s command deck.

‘You seem surprised, Wolf,’ the Thousand Sons sorcerer said. ‘Is it really so strange that you should find me here, at the heart of all your frustrations?’

‘You’re dead,’ Ragnar said, pointing *Frostfang*’s idling blades at him. ‘I drove the Spear of Russ through your faceplate.’

‘A fine strike,’ Madox said, laughing again. ‘I remember it well!’

‘This is a trick. An illusion.’

‘Existence itself is an illusion. Life is a trick.’

‘I’m not here to bandy words with bad memories,’ Ragnar snarled, striding towards the Chaos Space Marine.

‘Of course. You’d be in danger of actually learning something if you did.’

‘You have nothing to teach me, wyrdling.’

‘What about the fate of Midgardia? I could tell you that it burns with fires set by Angels.’

‘Be silent.’

‘I could tell you the Lion’s son dances on the end of a daemon’s strings. I could tell you the Iron Wolf has turned his guns on the Corpse-Emperor’s warships.’

Ragnar raised his chainsword, snarling.

‘I could tell you he’s coming back,’ Madox said, but Ragnar wasn’t listening. *Frostfang* fell, a planet burned and died, and darkness took the Young King.

*The Rock, in high orbit above Midgardia*

Azrael sentenced Vox Seneschal Mendaxis to be auto-scourged, when time allowed. The punishment made the Changeling grin privately, for the fate that had already befallen the Supreme Grand Master’s real vox seneschal was far worse.

The Mendaxis-thing had returned to its communications pit, suitably penitent. Its inexplicable disappearance earlier had infuriated the normally detached Dark Angel. None thought to wonder where Interrogator-Chaplain Elezar had now

gone. He was surely in his reclusiam-cell, praying.

The Changeling was glad of the change of flesh. It provided the perfect opportunity for more distractions.

‘The captain of *Wrath of Man*, lord,’ it called up to Azrael, seated on the Rock’s bridge throne. ‘He’s been fired upon by the Space Wolves battle-barge *Wolftide*!’

‘A warning shot?’ Azrael demanded.

‘It struck him amidships, lord. His port shields have taken damage.’

‘What of—’

The Supreme Grand Master’s question went unfinished. Auspex arrays across the Rock’s oculus viewscreens and the ranks of cogitator pews lit up with a storm of warning symbols. Somewhere a claxon began to wail.

‘Sire, the entire Space Wolves fleet has just opened fire!’ shouted an Augur Chief. ‘Imperial Navy assets are reporting direct hits!’

‘Message to the entire crusade fleet, all ships are to hold fire,’ Azrael snapped. ‘And open a channel with the *Wolftide*.’

‘Yes, lord,’ the Mendaxis-thing said. ‘I shall see to it personally.’

He turned in the bottom of the communications pit and snatched a vox horn.

‘Patch this through to crusade fleet elements,’ he ordered the communications serfs hardwired into the stations around him. ‘All ships be advised – they may fire at will.’

### *Wrath of Man, in high orbit above Midgardia*

The *Wrath of Man* rocked like an Old Terran ship in a sea swell, its shields flaring around it with vigorous blue light.

‘Another hit, captain!’ shouted Lieutenant Renmann. ‘Port shields reporting thirty-one per cent integrity!’

‘I can see that Lieutenant, thank you,’ Captain Krief said through clenched teeth. ‘Kindly reduce your voice to a level befitting that of an officer of His Divine Majesty’s Imperial Navy, and then get me a secure channel with the Rock.’

The reprimand barely had an effect on his wide-eyed subordinate. The young Third Lieutenant scampered across the bridge to the vox bank, where communications deck officers in pristine white uniforms were scrambling to acknowledge the flood of engagement data coming in from the rest of the fleet.

‘Sir, signal from the Rock!’ he shouted, waving a comms chit at the captain. ‘Fleet assets are to engage at will.’

‘God-Emperor preserve us all,’ Krief said, leaning against the brass railings of his control platform and staring out of the viewing ports at the Space Wolves fleet. Had it really come to this? Even as he asked himself the question another bombardment cannon strike impacted against the *Wrath of Man*’s shields. He felt the deck shudder beneath him, and the bridge’s lumen globes blinked dangerously.

‘Sir, port shields at nine per cent integrity!’ Renmann squealed.

‘Hard to port,’ Krief said heavily. ‘Gunnery, man the forward lances, and prepare torpedo bays one through six.’

### *Wolftide, in high orbit above Midgardia*

‘Lord, all ships are reporting successful hits,’ said the vox huscarl. The bridge of Egil’s flagship was thick with the backdraught of weapons discharge and the stench of macrocannon propellant.

‘Have them cease fire,’ Egil said, eyes scanning the readouts of the bridge’s oculus viewscreens. ‘And check that link with the Rock. Tell me they’ve opened communications.’

‘Lord, scanners report incoming fire,’ shouted a frantic kaerl from the augur bay. ‘Lances and torpedoes!’

‘No change with the Rock,’ said the vox seneschal. ‘The channel remains closed.’

‘May the Deathwolf devour them all,’ Egil snapped. ‘Message to all ships, resume fire. And have all hands brace for impact.’

### *The Rock, in high orbit above Midgardia*

‘Lord, our Imperial Navy assets are returning fire,’ said the Augur Chief.

‘What?’ demanded Azrael. His voice carved through the hubbub of the Rock’s bridge. ‘Order them to cease at once. Mendaxis, link to me directly.’

‘Of course, sire,’ the Mendaxis-thing said, no longer even bothering to hide its grin from the dead-eyed serfs around it. It coupled the Supreme Grand Master’s throne vox cord to the broadcasting terminal, taking its time about it.

‘There appears to be a transmission fault, sire,’ it lied.

‘Secondary vox then,’ Azrael snapped to one of the communication sub-pits. ‘Link me!’

It was all the Changeling could do to stifle a laugh.

## Wrath of Man, *in high orbit above Midgardia*

‘Sir, communication from the Rock!’ shrilled Lieutenant Renmann. ‘All ships are to cease fire immediately!’

Captain Krief looked up from the damage readout on his control lectern, peering through the organised chaos that dominated the Imperial Navy bridge.

‘Clarify,’ he ordered.

‘Order clarified,’ Renmann replied after a moment. ‘All ships cease fire!’

‘Have the Adeptus Astartes taken leave of their senses?’ First Lieutenant Oppen asked. His words were punctuated by another shuddering impact. Krief’s eyes darted back to the damage readout scrolling across his lectern’s monitor. The shields were on the brink of shorting out. Like the other half-dozen Navy vessels nearest to the Space Wolves fleet, his ship was now fully engaged. To break the firing cycle and power down or even stall the targeting sequences would guarantee defeat, should the Wolves maintain their fire. By the time they were fully operational again, the fearsome armaments at the Space Marines’ disposal would have already transformed them into a listing, burning wreck.

‘We are not subordinate to them, captain,’ Oppen pressed. ‘The Imperial Navy answers to none but—’

‘I’m aware of the hierarchy of the fleet, thank you, First Lieutenant,’ Krief snapped. ‘Now kindly return to your post. You too, Mister Renmann.’

Another strike rocked his ship. His soul groaned in counterpoint to the agony of the overburdened shields. He’d captained the *Wrath* for the past twenty-five years, Terra-standard. When the venerable Lunar-class cruiser suffered, he suffered, and its triumph was his own. To take her out of what was on the brink of becoming a life-and-death fistfight with what could surely now only be a band of renegades and traitors went against every Navy-given value ingrained in him.

But ignoring orders also went against his nature, and regardless of Oppen’s bombast, Krief was under no illusions as to the position he occupied within the crusade fleet. Oppen could answer to the Angels of Death if he wanted.

‘Message to gunnery,’ Krief said. ‘Ceasefire, effect immediate. And pray to Him on Terra that those warp-damned Wolves do the same.’

## Wolftide, *in high orbit above Midgardia*

‘Lord, they’ve ceased fire.’ The huscarl’s voice was breathless. Egil’s flagship seemed to have gone quiet, still and silent like a weary predator, waiting to see if the killing was done.

Egil watched the bridge's blinking auspex displays and the oculus visuals, expecting them to flare red and furious once more with interstellar ordnance. He felt the deck beneath him shudder with release as *Wolftide's* bombardment cannon fired again. The monitors, however, remained a sterile green.

'Lord,' said the vox huscarl. 'The Rock... is hailing us.'

'Order to all ships,' Egil said slowly. 'Ceasefire. And accept the link. Bridge speakers.'

The *Wolftide's* command deck was overlaid with static as the vox horns came online. After a moment a voice, hard and cold as a basilica's keystone, broke through the interference.

*'Do you want to die, Wolf?'*

'Supreme Grand Master Azrael,' Egil said. 'I see you've finally found the transmit button on your vox set.'

*'Choose your next words carefully. Why did you just open fire on an Imperial fleet?'*

'Why did you just fire-bomb one of the Allfather's worlds?'

*'I am not here to chase your tail, mongrel. You have two hours to withdraw your fleet from orbit and proceed to Fenris, where you shall await the Imperium's judgement for what you have done here.'*

'The Imperium's judgement, or the Lion's?' Egil demanded. 'Withdraw your forces from this system within the next two hours, and we will discuss your actions from a less fatal distance.'

Egil was aware that they were mirroring each other. Near annihilation would be mutual. The Iron Wolf had opened fire not just because Conran and the murdered citizens of Midgardia had been crying out for vengeance, not just because the Lions had violated their sovereign territory, and not just because they had put the Great Wolf in danger. He had done it to buy time. He had no idea how large the crusade fleet was, or whether it had engaged other Great Companies elsewhere in the system. Until Azrael had said it, he didn't even know that Fenris hadn't suffered the same fate as Midgardia.

The Iron Wolf, logical as ever, had seen the Wolves under attack, and he had responded. Now that he had checked them, the time had come to discover who the real traitors were.

The Lions, or the Wolves.

*Svellgard*

From the grey heavens, the weight of the Imperium's wrath fell upon Svellgard.

First it was firepower. The precise strike of *Iron Requiem* had been nothing next to the weight of ordnance unleashed by the combined fleets in Frostheim's uppermost orbit. Lance strikes, melta torpedoes, augur-guided macrocannon shells – they ripped and shredded Svellgard's clouds and shook its islands to their bedrock.

The bombardment was centred on three different sectors, around the edges of the warp rift anomalies pinpointed by the fleet's scans. There the corruption was at its worst, the sucking, swirling oceans seething with nightmares of blubbering flesh and grasping tentacle-limbs. Cohorts of lesser daemons pushed their way through the morass of submerged warp-flesh, all massing in the direction of the World Wolf's Lair. Until the orbital barrage began to annihilate them, splitting apart the ocean waves and flinging great pillars of evaporated water skywards.

As the great guns of the Imperium's fleets continued to hammer Svellgard's deformed deeps, more contrails filled the air. The objects fell with almost as much force as the macroshells, but their payloads were considerably more deadly. They struck in clusters near two of the three portals, hammering the exposed seabed close to where the receding waters still lashed and foamed.

Drop pods. Their flanks fell, armoured figures deploying from their cramped interiors with experienced ease. To the north of the World Wolf's Lair, the blue battleplate of the Ultramarines, to the east, the black and silver of the Iron Hands.

Thunderhawks followed the drop pod assault down, leaden with armour support. Bolters flashed and barked as the Space Marines secured their landing zones, the concentrated firepower more than enough to banish the daemons dragging themselves from the surf towards them.

The world the Adeptus Astartes found themselves fighting in was a strange one. Even as the oceans retreated they left behind hundreds of choppy micro-oceans in the lower depths of what had once been the seabed. An advance route was planned out across uplands of craggy exposed bedrock, thick with dripping growths and writhing aquatic life.

Few of the growths of life were without the hideous stigmata of Chaos.

The Space Marines cleansed as they went, the Ultramarines with a Codex-approved combination of pre-planned advances and individual unit flexibility, the Iron Hands with remorseless implacability. All the while, the capital ships maintained their bombardment from above, hammering the things crawling up out of the rips in reality, searing away Svellgard's seas with fiery wrath.

The Space Wolves were the last to join the assault. Harald and Sven waited. When Epathus asked why, Harald claimed they were giving Bran Redmaw more time. In truth, they wanted to ensure the crusade fleet deployed its strength to attack the warp portals, and not the World Wolf's Lair. Only when heavy Astra Militarum troop shuttles had started to plough through the lower atmosphere did the Wolf Lords give the signal.

'I'll see you afterwards, Deathwolf,' Sven said, clasping his brother's vambrace.

'Enjoy yourself, pup,' Harald replied, returning the warrior's grip. 'For Russ and the Allfather.'

The Wolves went on the offensive. The weight of daemonic attackers around the Lair's shores had slackened considerably as the wyrdspawn turned to protect the rifts. Harald and Sven led their packs from the defence networks and bunker tunnels with vengeful howls, thundering out into the cloying wet sand. Only then did the Wolves' ships in orbit join the bombardment, hammering the wyrdlings around their objectives – the largest portal, south of the Lair.

The Astra Militarum were joining the attack against the other two. Valkyrie airborne assault carriers picked up the Harakoni Warhawk detachments defending the islands around the Lair and deposited them via short grav-chute drops onto the new front lines. The Ultramarines and Iron Hands found their gradually ever-more exposed flanks bolstered by platoons of airborne infantry in black combat fatigues and tan-coloured carapace flakplate, salvos of semi-automatic lascarbine fire snapping out from the rugged shoals and dunes that had once been the seabed.

Heavier ground troops were landed behind the front, around the drop zones initially secured by the Angels of Death. To the north, the 443rd Adraxian Legion and the 15th Naimen Armoured, to the east, the 16th Kattak Grenadiers and the Sixth Virillion Steelborn. The Guardsmen followed in the wake of the Space Marines, burning and slaughtering remaining pockets of infestation with the application of massed, point-blank firepower.

Above them, the Imperial Navy added yet more weight to the fight. Thunderbolts and Lightnings screamed from the fire-scarred skies, peeling off from their squadrons one by one to strafe the never-ending hordes shuffling from the receding deeps. Higher up, wings of Marauder bombers rumbled, their payloads pockmarking the already-ragged landscape.

The Navy did not enjoy air superiority for long. The clouds soon played host to rippling shoals of blue and purple sky-screamers and flocks of black-fleshed

furies, as well as bigger, indefinable things with beating or buzzing pinions and darting talons. They latched themselves onto wings and fuselages, claws splitting open cockpits and hauling pilots, screaming, out into the air, to be devoured or thrown to their deaths. The fighters closed around their bombers in response, painting the sky with beams of las and thudding trails of autocannon rounds that bisected the daemonic flocks. The Adeptus Astartes joined the battle for Svellgard's skies as well, Thunderhawks and Stormtalons churning out bolter fire in support of the Navy formations.

Beneath, like reflections in a bloody river, the battle raged. Only in the south did the Wolves remain unsupported, fighting on with only the orbital strikes of their fleet to help clear the way. Sven led from the head of his Skyclaws, his face a rictus of ichor-splattered determination. Gone was the laughing warrior who thrilled at the roar of his chainsword and the crackling power of his frost axe. Gone was the young Wolf who staked a battle's success on the number of heads taken, and struggled to outdo the antics of his youngest, most savage pups. Now he killed in near silence, grunting with each powerful swing of Frostclaw, ignoring the ache of his split rib-plate or his useless left hand.

Olaf Blackstone fought at his side, lightning claws a blur of charged razor-steel, finishing anything his Wolf Lord didn't send screaming straight back to the immaterium. The Skyclaws pressed into the heart of the wyrdling legions, chainswords howling and flamers roaring, infected by the grim, killing fury of their jarl. The daemons parted before them.

*'Not too far, pup,'* Harald said over the vox. He was astride Icetooth once more, the huge thunderwolf slick with wyrdling gore, snapping and snarling through a clutch of wailing daemonettes. Around him the remainder of his Riders of Morkai had also mounted their Fenrisian war beasts, the savage fang at the tip of the attacking Deathwolves. The Firehowlers, however, were pulling ahead.

Sven didn't respond. He hit the turbo on Longleap, letting the jump pack slam him almost horizontally across the slime-slicked seabed. He struck a brace of horrors as they tried to summon their mutating flames to stop him, the things disintegrating beneath the impact of the power-armoured warrior. Frostclaw lashed out – a glittering, icy arc in the ichor-misted air – to reap more wyrdling un-lives. A moment later and Olaf was at his side once again, slamming down on his pack amidst the melee. Still the Firehowlers pressed on.

And around them, stronger than the rising tide, the daemons surged.

Terrek slammed his power fist into the snapping, living jaws of the skull

cannon's chassis, feeling the warp-forged steel buckle and split beneath his energy-wreathed gauntlet. The discharge of the disruptor field tore through the neverborn engine, blasting it apart in a blizzard of burning metal and shattered bone.

'Status,' the Iron Captain demanded as his squad pulled apart the screaming construct's remains.

*'The machine-spirit is in pain, brother-captain,'* came Morex's reply over the vox. *'I estimate the supplications will take five minutes more.'*

'You have them,' Terrek said, inputting the delay into his visor's combat matrix and switching to the Clan-wide channel.

'This is Terrek to all squads. Hold.'

The Iron Hands stopped as abruptly as deactivated servitors, before automatically taking up defensive positions along the exposed reef they found themselves straddling. Behind Terrek the Clan's Iron Father, Morex, was applying his cog glaive to the disabled tracks of Land Raider serial two-one-one-six-A, designate *Black Vengeance*. The blazing daemonic skulls fired by the living cannon just destroyed by Terrek had dented the tank's adamantium hull and shattered the links of one of its heavy tracks. Bolters and lascannons still blasting, it had slewed to a ponderous halt atop the reef's crest.

*'Captain, what of the humans?'* Sergeant Baalor voxed. *'They are still attempting to advance.'*

'Let them,' Terrek said after a split second's analysis. 'If they make headway now they may be able to keep pace with us when we resume the advance.'

*'Acknowledged, Clan Commander.'*

Terrek could well imagine the frantic vox calls inundating the Guard officers, and their uncertainty over whether to halt alongside the silent, black-armoured automata, or whether to press on unsupported. Terrek would not permit them to halt. Pausing to maintain the integrity of his Clan's advance was imperative, but stalling the entire offence against the eastmost warp portal would be wasteful.

While he waited, the Iron Hand reviewed the progress of the other counter-attacks. The Ultramarines were lagging, too focussed on maintaining contact with their supporting units. Epathus' squads had interspersed themselves among the Militarum, bolstering the width of their thrust towards the northern portal whilst weakening the tip of the spear, centred around Epathus and his Sternguard. That was the difference between Guilliman's offspring and those of the Gorgon – the former always engaged with at least two objectives: to win, and to minimise the losses of their allies. The machine-minds of Iron Captains like

Terrek were unhindered by such dangerously indulgent concerns. Without victory, the lightest losses were damning. With it, any losses were acceptable.

The Wolves were doing no better. Though their progress towards the southern portal was impressive, the sigils blinking across Terrek's visor were without any form of coherence. The savages were launching a blind, all-out charge towards the largest of the three warp rifts, plunging through a veritable sea of neverborn. Even the most favourable analysis had them being cut off, surrounded and annihilated long before they reached their objective.

'*Praise the Machine.*' Morex's monotone exaltation interrupted Terrek's assessment. '*The iron is willing, brother-captain.*'

Terrek glanced back to see *Black Vengeance* rolling forwards once more, greasy smoke churning from its rear exhaust ports.

'All squads, resume,' Terrek voxed. Like a pict feed that had been unpaused, the Iron Hands rose and went forward once more.

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

A world burning. Darkness.

Ragnar's eyes snapped open. There was a face above him, square-jawed, scarred, the eyes a stony grey-blue. The Wolf Lord's hand came up instinctively. It was intercepted by a fist of silver steel.

'Daemonhunter,' Ragnar said, snarling up at the Grey Knight kneeling over him. 'Where are my Wulfen?'

The Knight said nothing, but released his hand, and offered an open palm. Ragnar took it, and allowed himself to be pulled to his feet.

'Safe,' the Knight said. Ragnar gazed around, blinking. His packs were clustered around him – Blood Claws, Wulfen and the Blackpelts, watching their lord attentively. For the first time since boarding *Mjalnar* he realised his head was clear. The throbbing ache that had split his skull was gone.

As were the daemons.

'Where is Madox?' Ragnar demanded.

'Who?' the Grey Knight responded. Ragnar looked up at the control platform. The command deck was slashed with ichor and littered with Space Wolves dead, but of the Tzeentch wyrdlings there was no sign. The platform itself was deserted, the command throne empty, and only a livid scorch mark on the domed ceiling told of the former existence of the warp rift.

'What happened?' Ragnar asked.

‘When you stormed the platform you broke the daemon’s glamour,’ said the Grey Knight. ‘You fought and slew the Tzeentch Herald at the heart of the corruption. When you banished it the warp portal collapsed in on itself.’

‘I saw a vision,’ Ragnar said, staring up at the empty throne. ‘Someone I have not seen in a very long time.’

‘Lies and deceit,’ the Knight said. ‘Even more than his brothers, the Changer loves trickery and illusion.’

‘Madox said Midgardia is burning,’ Ragnar said. ‘I saw it. Fires set from orbit, eating up everything. He said a daemon is behind the Lion’s actions.’

The Grey Knight exchanged a glance with de Mornay. The inquisitor’s face was grim.

‘Regardless of the daemon’s trickery, we must press on to Midgardia,’ he said. ‘For all our sakes. Brother-Captain Stern, will you take passage on my vessel?’

‘Gladly, Lord Inquisitor,’ the Grey Knight said. ‘Once we have retrieved our two fallen brothers from *Star Drake*. Lord Blackmane may also wish to take custody of the Wulfen we’ve left locked in the brig.’

‘You truly mean my Murderpacks no harm?’ Ragnar asked, not bothering to mask his suspicion. The surrounding Wulfen watched with silent, rapt intensity, like children observing an Emperor’s Day ascension play.

‘There are more pressing matters at hand, Lord Blackmane,’ Stern said.

‘And when there aren’t?’

‘I cannot promise you won’t hear from me again.’

‘We can discuss such delicate matters en-route.’ De Mornay said. ‘*Mjalnar* is cleansed. I will set an Inquisitorial quarantine marker, and then we must be on our way. Before the situation in this system deteriorates even further.’

‘I fear it already has, witch hunter,’ Ragnar said, seeing again the fire-wreathed world the thing disguised as Madox had forced into his mind. ‘I fear it already has.’

### *Svellgard*

The Wolves died.

They did so in ones and twos. They did it well, fighting their way towards the southernmost warp rift with gore-streaked weapons in their fists and oaths on their lips. But they died all the same. Swordlings matched Blood Claws blade for blade, power armour little defence against the wicked edges of their scalding black weapons. Purple-skinned daemonettes danced between the packs, ducking

and weaving with preternatural grace around the clumsy swings of chainswords before darting in to slide claws and slender knives through the weak joints between ceramite plates. Limping Tallybands of rancid Nurgle wyrdspawn soaked up the thunderous firepower of Grey Hunters and Long Fangs, shuffling onwards even as bolt-rounds burst their necrotised flesh apart.

A trio of juggernaut-mounted swordlings hammered over a reef outcrop, shattering the exposed, growth-covered bedrock before slamming into the ranks of the Nightwolves. The Grey Hunters went down, innards pulped by the colossal impact of warp-forged steel or gored on the spikes and wicked blades covering the monstrous daemon machines. To their left, a pack of red-skinned Khornate hounds clashed with Harald's Fenrisian wolves. Iron-hard jaws locked around the frilled throats of the flesh hounds, while the daemons' savage claws raked through tough grey pelts. Yelps, snarls and howls ripped apart the ragged air of Svellgard.

Above the swirling pack battle, a burning, spinning bladed disc shackled to two undulating sky-screamers tore through the Stormbringers as the Skyclaws were mid-leap, bisecting a trio of the young Wolves. Their jump packs detonated, the burning remains plummeting back down to the exposed seabed. Floating a foot above the disc's spinning, sigil-etched surface, a Herald of Tzeentch cackled and wove its long, charm-hung arms in an indecipherably complex pattern, spitting pink and blue wyrdfire indiscriminately into the fight below.

The Space Wolves offensive buckled, but it did not break. It fought back. The melta and plasma guns of the Nightwolves hummed and spat, searing molten holes in the plate armour of the juggernauts and vaporising their red-scaled riders. Harald led his shock cavalry back to support their packmates, Space Marines and wolf-brothers fighting side by side, the thunderwolves snatching up Khornate death hounds in their great maws and savaging them. Bloodhowl's Ravens, Sven's twin Land Speeders, swooped in behind the flying Tzeentch chariot, rune-etched hulls glowing in the after-burn of the unnatural flames that trailed behind its spinning form. Their multi-meltas found a target lock, and the strange sky chariot and its daemoniac rider detonated like an exploding firework, punching a glittering cascade of colours across the battle-wrought sky.

'Deathwolves, rally!' Harald shouted, turning Icetooth in a tight circle and swinging his ichor-splattered frost axe above his head. Beside him Vygarr Helmfang hefted high the Great Company's Wolf Standard, the Ravening Jaw rampant on its rippling field of red silk. The Deathwolves fought their way to their lord, bolters hammering, chainblades a frenzy of ripping, cutting teeth as

they sawed their way through the wyrdflesh tide.

‘Pup, bring your packs together,’ Harald growled over the vox. ‘We need to consolidate before we—’ the Wolf Lord was interrupted by a hammering discharge. Something slammed into Rudr the Black’s thunderwolf, Stonejaw, blasting it apart in a shower of bloody meat and burning fur. As the Rider of Morkai scrambled to find his feet amidst the steaming viscera of his mount, another projectile slammed low overhead, nearly cutting the Wolf Standard in half. Harald’s keen eyes caught a split-second impression of it – a brass-plated skull, jaw agape, trailing wyrdfire.

‘Skull cannons,’ the Wolf Lord barked, following the missile’s trajectory. Atop a spine-studded shoal a hundred yards ahead, a battery of daemonic artillery had ground up from the surf, the maws of their bone barrels flaring with bloody light. Another of the living guns fired, smashing apart a shaft of barnacle-encrusted rock just to Harald’s right.

‘Grolf,’ Harald voxed. ‘Bring those things down.’

‘*No, lord,*’ came the response from the Long Fang Ancient. ‘*We’re too hard-pressed.*’ Harald spotted his two heavy weapons packs, the Stormbrows and the Icefangs, off to the right fighting hand to hand with a clutch of gibbering, mutated spawn. Grolf’s snow bear cloak picked him out at the centre of the melee, the white pelt matted black with ichor.

‘Ynvir!’ Harald bellowed. The huge Wulfen was at the head of his Murderpack, dripping with wyrdling viscera as he ripped into a fresh cohort of horrors. At the sound of his lord’s voice he turned, his pack thrusting past him with savage hunger. Harald pointed Glacius’ dripping head at the battery of cannons as they fired again, shattering the air around him with burning, cackling skulls.

‘Silence those engines!’ Harald shouted.

Ynvir moved off immediately, his pack moving to protect him with the feral instincts of bonded hunters.

‘Vygarr, Rudr, keep the company together,’ Harald ordered his two remaining Wolf Guard before urging Icetooth forward. The thunderwolf plunged through the combat, forcing its way to the Wulfen’s side as they ripped a path towards the skull cannon battery.

The hellish weapons fired again, their living, daemonic projectiles splitting apart a trio of Wulfen, splattering the rest of the Murderpack with their gore. Harald roared and swung Glacius again and again, cleaving apart the swordlings at the base of the shoal. Around him Wulfen fought and died, impaled on black hellswords even as they ripped open red, scaly flesh with claws and fangs. Ynvir

pushed the furthest, his frost claws a blur of primal fury. Again, with a shrieking discharge the cannons fired, and more Wolves died. Harald howled.

Then the shadows struck. They flickered from the darkness of what had once been an underwater cavern, bored into the shoal's flank. Silver steel flashed in the grey light, and the hissing swordlings manning the skull cannons died. The machines, sentient and savage, ground round on spiked wheels, maws snapping, but the shadows darted back out of reach. Melta bombs flared, and the daemon engines came apart, blasted to molten slag, the skulls embedded in them split and shattered.

The Wolves pressed forward. The swordlings around them shimmered and blinked like a faulty viewfeed, the dark will binding them to the material plane fading. As the Khornate cohort finally vanished Harald found the shadows at his side. He recognised them.

'Bloody work, Space Wolf,' said Scout Sergeant Arro. His camo cape, pulled close around him, was slick with steaming strings of gore, and his alabaster features were streaked red. Harald recalled the Shadow Haunter Scouts from outside Morkai's Keep.

'What are you doing here?' Harald demanded. Beneath him Icetooth growled, wary of the cloaked figures crouched around them.

'We were sent to track you,' Arro said. 'But Corax forgive me, I cannot stand by and watch brothers dying like that.'

'The Iron Hands sent you?'

'Crusade command sent us. But they don't understand the extent of the incursion here. Consider us at your disposal, for now.'

Harald grunted. Before he could respond, Sven's panting voice broke in over the link.

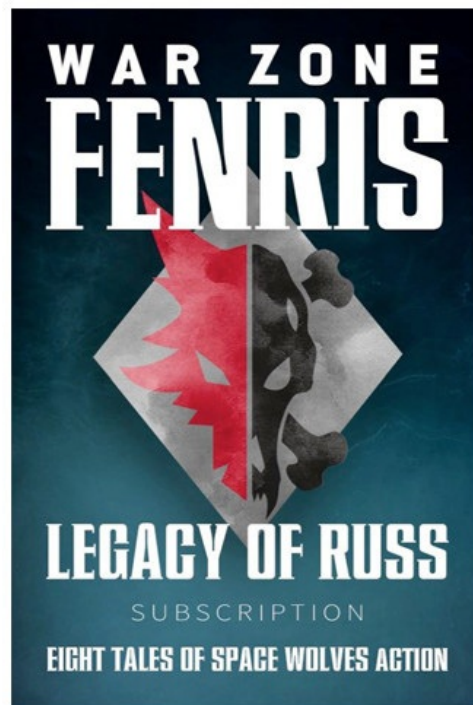
*'Deathwolf. They're behind us. Soul Grinders. We need you.'*

'Brothers,' Harald snarled. 'On me.'

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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