

ENGAGE THE ENEMY

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THOKAR, WOLF PRIEST of Fenris, transmitted his acceptance of the wolf lord's command, although he didn't expect the wolf lord to give it more than a glance. The wolf lord demanded quick obedience and such formalities were not to his taste. Thokar surveyed the Space Marines around him. Grey power armour glinted under the bright lights of the battle barge. Contrasting their boltguns and grenades, pelts and skulls of Fenrisian Wolves hung from their chest plates, shoulder pads and anywhere else the Space Wolves could fit them. Beneath his helm, Thokar smiled.

'For Fenris! For Russ! For the Emperor!' shouted the Space Wolves, raising their fists. The wolf priest lowered his black gauntleted hand as the others moved to the Thunderhawk. For other Chapters, war cries might be ceremony, but those words echoed like thunder in the hearts of his Wolves.

Thokar watched each of his Marines, seeing not the armoured and invincible warriors of the Imperium, but the individual warriors that he had chosen. So many times he'd searched for the bravest warriors of Fenris. He remembered the reverence in the eyes of mortals as they looked upon the Space Wolves as armoured gods. Each of these Grey Hunters had once been a Fenrisian warrior, struggling to survive in a land of eternal danger. The skills, the loyalty and the heart of these few had proven them worthy of travel to the Fang, the fortress of the Space Wolves. Thokar had guided each one through the terrifying initiation process, implanting them with the gene-seed of the Chapter. Many warriors had not survived, but others accepted the gene-seed transformation into the Emperor's finest. Inside each one of them, the predator - the wolf within - stirred, awaiting the fight.

Thokar strode aboard the Thunderhawk, anticipating the descent to the war torn world below. Even the wolf priest in his long centuries had never seen a war like this one. The battles of Armageddon under the command of the Great Wolf, Logan Grimnar, paled in comparison to the massive conflict caused by the Black Crusade. Abbadon the Despoiler, most terrible living lord of Chaos, had led his

Traitor Legions out of the Eye of Terror in such numbers that they threatened to consume the Imperium. Not since the Horus Heresy had mankind seen such conflict.

The machine spirits within the Thunderhawk roared as the landing craft descended to the dark jungles. To the east, the wolf priest saw explosions as battle continued in a burning city. The jolts of the descent mimicked the excitement in his blood. He was ready for combat, and he could sense that his packs were ready as well. The Thunderhawk came down with a hard landing, bursts of promethium flame clearing the jungle around the vessel.

Thokar nodded to his Grey Hunters and loyal Wolf Guard. They knew their roles: one team of Grey Hunters would scout ahead. Wulfric, a member of the Wolf Guard and an old friend, loved the hunt. He led Pack Morkai, while Pack Ranulf kept close to Thokar. The wolf priest stepped onto the planet's surface. Behind him, the ramp to the Thunderhawk closed.

The Space Wolves moved with a singular purpose. Within instants, the first squad of Grey Hunters had vanished. Pack Morkai had to move quickly, minutes were precious. Although the wolf priest had every bit of faith in the crew of the Thunderhawk, he knew that this enemy might detect the landing of even a single Thunderhawk. Thokar only hoped that the Iron Warriors hadn't already entrenched and trapped the jungle floor. Long minutes passed as the Space Marines moved through the jungle. The wolf priest waited for the first call from Wulfric and his lead pack.

'My lord, we have discovered the aftermath of a battle. Someone has claimed a few of our kills,' said Wulfric, with a hint of a grin in his voice.

The wolf priest nodded to the Grey Hunters around him. 'The first of our enemies have fallen.'

'Hold your position.' The wolf priest gestured to Pack Ranulf. No words were spoken; none were needed. In the matter of Chaos, they could not take chances. Bolters at the ready, the wolf priest led Pack Ranulf cautiously through the jungle to Wulfric's position.

The wolf priest's senses sharpened, focusing on this new world. Of the hundreds of smells in the jungle air, Thokar picked out several that did not belong in this environment. The oily and metallic odours of machinery were

mixed with familiar scents, reminding him somehow of his own Wolves.

When Thokar reached the site, the jungle had already reclaimed most of the battlefield. Creeper vines, blood ferns and assorted insectoids covered the metallic and gold plated armour of the Traitor Marines. The smell of death permeated everything. Wulfric glanced at Thokar, then stepped back to allow the wolf priest's examination. The events of the battle unfolded in Thokar's mind as he pieced together the remains.

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'WE HAVE THE position covered. The plans for ambush are proceeding apace.' Champion Dalloc flexed his power claw, admiring the way the energy crackled and sizzled from his fingertips.

'Sir, we have motion in the undergrowth.' The squad raised their bolters.

'Assume fire pattern omega,' stated Dalloc calmly. 'Expect indigenous predators.' He never glanced at his men, thousands of years of training made their drill flawless.

'Sir, nothing in the north quadr...'

Something moved toward Dalloc, a blur of speed, fast enough that even his enhanced vision couldn't lock on it.

'Fire at will!' commanded Dalloc. In an instant, the jungle exploded with bolter fire. As the sound of the guns died, inhumanly strong claws tore apart the champion's helmet and fangs ripped off the front of his face.

The jungle cried out with growls and the sound of splintering metal. Dalloc's power claw lay on the ground, quiet and lifeless.

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THE WOLF PRIEST carefully picked up the power claw. Claw marks completely covered the armour which lay nearby. His sharp eyes picked up a strand of fur across the metal. He carefully picked it up, twisting it in his fingers. Thokar knew the scent. The hair was that of a Fenrisian wolf and yet, something wasn't right. There was a vaguely human scent mixed in as well. Strange, it reminded him of...

The wolf priest quickly activated his comm. 'Defender of Russ, a Space Wolf has succumbed to the curse of our gene-seed. All of my Wolves are present. Are any men missing, especially from the ranks of the Blood Claws or Wolf Guard?'

'Wolf Priest Thokar, we have no reports of anyone succumbing to the gene-seed. There are no Wulfen in your area. Are you certain of your findings?'

'Not entirely. I will report back when I know more.'

Thokar signaled his men to move forward. They spread out, vanishing from sight. Only the wolf priest's acute senses told him that the Grey Hunters maintained their formation.

As Thokar pushed his way through the jungle, the hairs on his neck rose. The smell of rot assailed him, overcoming the other smells of the planet.

'We've found the remains of a vehicle,' came a call over the vox.

A fallen Chaos dreadnought lay in a charred section of jungle, surrounded by dozens of small fires, as if part of a foul ritual. The sarcophagus was missing, the metal edges around it thin and flaking. Thokar knew a melta weapon at close range had vaporized the metal.

The wolf priest knelt down beside the remnants of the infernal machine. The hairs on the back of his neck remained standing as he examined the blasphemous runes etched across the dreadnought's metal surface. Small gargoyles, spikes and plated skulls hung from the fallen giant. He muttered a quick prayer to Russ. A single precise hit had destroyed the Dreadnought. Only the Emperor's finest, the Space Marines were so accurate. There were no Space Marines, assigned here... and a lone Wulfen couldn't have done this. This attack was recent, happening within moments of the first attack they had discovered.

A highly coordinated assault... even through this jungle. So fast that even these Chaos Marines were caught unprepared,' observed the wolf priest. The colours of the enemy were unmistakable. Though little could be certain about Chaos, the wolf priest knew his ancient lore. Before their fall, the Iron Warriors were master tacticians. Of all Space Marine Chapters from ancient times, the Iron Warriors had been unsurpassed in siege warfare. Now, ten thousand years later, after giving themselves to the powers of Chaos, no one knew the limits of their abilities. Yet, Thokar noted, someone had caught the enemy off guard.

Drawing on his decades of experience, Thokar paced over to the spot from which the melta shot should have come. The boot prints he found were unmistakable... power armour, a few different types, from different eras. They could be traitor Marines. Yet their scents reminded him of Fenris. However they had arrived, the Iron Warriors' attackers had left no trail. They had used teleporters. Space Wolves did not teleport, they had a healthy mistrust of such technology. Still, the scents of Fenris were unmistakable to Thokar. Space Wolves had been here.

Bolter shells illustrated where the Iron Warriors had returned fire against their attackers. Crushed plants indicated that some of their number fell during the initial attack, only to have bodies removed later. The wolf priest found an unusual shell, larger than the others. It was an autocannon round fired from another direction.

'Thokar, come see this,' Wulfric gestured. As Thokar strode through the undergrowth, he noted with approval that the Grey Hunters stayed watchful, instinctively creating a perimeter.

The remains of a massive Chaos war engine lay burned and crumpled in the creeper vines. At first, Thokar mistook the machine for another Dreadnought. Although it was obviously a walker, the infernal device had six legs and a turret mounted atop them, more akin to a tank. The scent of sulphur, and a sickly smell of decay mixed with the acrid aromas of spent shells and oil, hung around it.

'What in the frozen hells is it?' asked Wulfric.

The wolf priest raised a hand. An autocannon hung off the shattered turret. Even more impressively, the main gun appeared to be a battlecannon. Thokar had heard reports of such creations. This was a construct of daemons. The rear

armour of the turret showed signs of plasma blasts. Precise hits, obviously from close range. Yet these blasts weren't precise enough to destroy the war engine. A single strike, possibly from a power fist, had shattered the heart of the machine. The faintest scent of blood and... wolves came from the power claws found at the end of each of the Chaos machine's legs. Thokar noted the faintest flakes of grey ceramite on two of the claws, a slightly darker shade than his Wolves wore. The paint could have come from any of a number of Space Marine Chapters, but this colour meant something to Thokar.

'Space Wolves used to wear this colour,' whispered the wolf priest. 'Ten thousand years ago.'

Thokar felt his heart rate increase as the words left his mouth. He strode around the war machine, and then he found bootprints. No prints came or went, although autocannon shells and bolter rounds lay all around. He saw the impression of a power armour clad body in the soft earth, but there was no body. There had been two. One had fallen, but, it was as if both had vanished.

The thought that two men would have attempted to take on a tank-sized monstrosity like this one spoke of men pushing the limits of courage. What was more, the blast strikes suggested that they knew where to shoot the strange vehicle. They must have fought such things before.

Thokar felt a sense of religious awe flow through him. By Russ! How could he have ever guessed? If what he was seeing was true, there was only one explanation. The lost 13th Company had survived over ten thousand years in the Eye of Terror. What could sustain even the Emperor's finest for ten thousand years in pure Chaos, surrounded by enemies?

Thokar looked around at the Grey Hunters he could see, and scented the ones he could not. He felt the determination and the focus in each one. The wolf priest also felt the Wulfen growl deep within his own soul. It would not let him die or fail. What if the entire Chapter had given themselves to the Wulfen?

Icy sweat broke out on Thokar's brow. What sort of foe had the Iron Warriors faced?

Thokar nodded to his Wolf Guard. It was time to find the objective. Wilderness Outpost Delta was their mission, although it paled in comparison to what the wolf priest had discovered. If it were true... Thokar shuddered

inwardly, unsure whether to feel elation or fear. He had personally killed recruits on Fenris, lost to the Wulfen. Only the strongest Space Wolves, Wolf Guard or older could survive attaining the Mark of the Wulfen.

‘More bodies, sir. We’re very close,’ came Wulfric’s voice.

Thokar saw the blood drenched, torn remains. These were the ones he had seen evidence of earlier, the ones who had been near the dreadnought. He recognised the scents. They had fallen back into an ambush.

‘Let me see...’ Thokar knelt over the remains.

The attack had been different this time. Although the carnage was substantial, the claw and teeth marks were absent. This time, more conventional weapons had been brought to bear: power weapons, a power fist and something else. He carefully examined the cuts in the power armour. He could have identified an axe slash even before he had donned the mantle of Blood Claw, and the weapon had cleanly cut the armour, leaving the edges ice-cold. Only a Frostaxe, a sacred weapon of the Space Wolves, left these marks. The sacred weapon had struck with wild abandon in a frenzy, a definite sign of the Wulfen.

‘Sir,’ said the Wolf Guard. ‘There is no sign of the body of a champion. We are almost at the objective.’

‘Indeed. Move on,’ ordered Thokar, already piecing together what happened. He had a vision in his mind of what must have occurred, shortly before their arrival.

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CHAMPION KURNOS ordered the retreat. Adaric’s squad was not responding. These weren’t ordinary Space Wolves. There was only one explanation: the 13th Company, the Space Wolves who had followed them into the Eye of Terror itself.

Suddenly, the air shimmered around his squad. A Rune Priest appeared before

them, accompanied by a squad, clad in bits of power armour from a dozen Chaos Chapters. Before Kurnos could shout orders, his attackers launched a savage assault. The Rune Priest fought with unmatched fury. Kurnos felt strangely detached as claws severed his right arm. He closed his eyes and waited for death.

Death never came. Instead, strong hands wrestled his helm off and jerked back his head. A pair of bright, yellow eyes stared down. They were not the eyes of a man, but the eyes of a wolf.

‘Tell us, Iron Warrior, will your commanders come for you?’ growled the Marine. ‘Call them.’ Kurnos heard the hum of the power weapon as it sectioned off his knees. The attackers dragged him across the ground, writhing in agony.

‘Iron within, iron...’ Kurnos started the mantra of his Legion.

‘This is your emergency beacon. Live long enough to signal them, not to speak,’ growled his attacker. Razor claws sliced apart his tongue. Dimly aware of his shock, Kurnos realised that he lay on the floor in the outpost. The 13th Company had set an ambush. He was bait. As Kurnos heard his emergency beacon go off, the iron within him turned to rust.

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INCOMPLETE TRENCHES, half-used razor wire, unassembled gun emplacements and bodies of Iron Warriors littered the area around Wilderness Outpost Delta. The wolf scent was strong here. This was the site of a Wulfen attack.

‘Seize the objective,’ ordered Thokar in a tone that brooked nothing but obedience.

‘There are slain Iron Warrior Terminators scattered inside,’ called Uller, one of Pack Morkai’s Grey Hunters. The wolf priest was prepared for the carnage.

The exterior of Wilderness Outpost Delta was standard rockcrete, covered in camo netting to hide the communications array. Thokar had seen the same

building on half a hundred worlds. Inside lay the corpses of five Iron Warriors in Terminator armour, and a sixth in power armour. Wulfric led Pack Morkai back outside, while Pack Ranulf stayed with Thokar. Blood splatter decorated the interior of the room. Thokar knelt over one of the dead Terminators. The wiring attaching the corpse's backup power supply sparked.

'Something over here, sir,' said Bran. 'Looks like part of a skull.'

Thokar nodded to the Grey Hunter. This was the end of the story as he had seen it.

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THE AIR SHIMMERED as five of the Warsmith's Chosen materialised from the warp inside Wilderness Outpost Delta. The Terminators dwarfed other Space Marines. Their armour was the most ancient and ensorcelled of their Chapter. They had no equals, and only bent their knees to the Warsmith himself. They looked down on Kurnos' twitching form. He saw daemonic faces leering at him from within the glossy dark metal of their armour.

Kurnos struggled to warn the Chosen, but it was too late. The Wolves were inside, power fists smashing against the Terminators. A chill ran through Kurnos as the Frostaxe stole the heat from the room, then sliced open the sacred Terminator armour, as easily as it cut the flesh within. The Chosen of Chaos, the Warsmith's Terminators, were no more.

'A transport has landed,' said one of the Marines.

'You've earned this,' another of the bestial Marines growled to Kurnos.

Kurnos looked up and the claws took off the top of his head.

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WULFRIC AND PACK Morkai reacted as one. Somewhere high above the range of human hearing, they each heard a familiar sound, a sound that they had heard a thousand times before, on a hundred different worlds. In every case, on every world, it came with the same deadly result.

‘Incoming ordnance!’ howled Wulfric over the comm.

The wolf priest and Pack Ranulf disappeared in smoke, fire and debris as the first of the artillery rounds impacted dead centre on the Outpost. A geyser of dirt, rock, concrete and ceramite armour fragments erupted as the second round hit home. Ancient power armour failed to save two members of Pack Morkai as their remains rained down on their brothers. Shells struck all around them.

Wulfric triggered his comm. ‘Thokar... Thokar... please respond...’

Static answered the Wolf Guard. Wulfric’s anger built in his heart. His wolf priest should not die on this backwater world. He howled in rage.

Wulfric heard movement behind him. He spun, drawing his power sword. Thokar stood over him, dirt smeared across his black armour.

‘Wulfric, we have work to do. Control yourself until we can get to grips with them,’ Thokar said with a half grin.

Wulfric took the moment to control his own inner beast. Relief replaced rage on his face. ‘Russ be praised! I thought we’d lost you!’

The wolf priest spoke reassuringly. ‘It will take more than Iron Warrior artillery to kill me.’

‘Uller, establish a flanking position to the east. Keep Pack Morkai in the cover of the jungle, at the clearing’s edge. Wulfric, stay with me. They will come upwind from the north,’ ordered the wolf priest. ‘Wulfric, we’re the bait.’

The surviving Space Wolves took up positions among their fallen in the ruins of the Wilderness Outpost, making good use of the rockcrete as cover. They waited. The jungle fell silent.

Thokar mentally reviewed his plan. Iron Warriors bombarded their enemies to soften them before an assault. When the Chaos Marines broke cover, they would open fire. In that instant, Uller and Pack Morkai would return fire from the jungle, giving Thokar, Wulfric and the survivors of Pack Ranulf the opportunity to seize the initiative and take the fight to them.

A skirmish line of iron behemoths broke from the thick jungle. Stepping into the midday sun, they wore armour from a different time and place, holy relics from ten thousand years past, now polluted with Chaos symbols and unholy markings. It sickened Thokar that these gifts of the Emperor were now bastardised tools of Chaos.

Boltgun rounds exploded around Thokar and the Wolf Guard. The few surviving chunks of Wilderness Outpost Delta blew apart, sandblasting the Space Wolves hiding in cover. Brother Sven looked up, only to catch a bolter round in his helmet. Thokar cursed the young and bold.

Pack Morkai opened fire from the jungle. The Iron Warriors paused for a fraction of a moment, confused by the attack from an unexpected quarter. That fraction of a moment was enough of a signal for the Space Wolves to charge from the ruin.

Raising his plasma pistol, Thokar exploded from behind his cover. 'For Russ!' he shouted. Each Space Wolf in turn added their own battle-cry to Thokar's until 'For Russ' resounded above the bolter shots.

The Wolves tore into the Iron Warriors like predators on prey. Pack Morkai swiftly joined their brothers. Throughout the vastness of space, few could match the fury of a Space Wolf assault. Today, the Iron Warriors would learn this lesson. The Wolves asked no quarter and offered none. Bolt pistol rounds met ceramite and chainswords bit deep, first into armour and then into corrupted flesh. The Iron Warriors fell in droves.

Thokar briefly paused as the torn corpse of an Iron Warrior slipped from the grasp of his power fist. 'Regroup and prepare to move...' Thokar started, then realised that something was distinctly wrong.

'Russ protect us!' shouted Wulfric beside him.

Thokar knew the unmistakable scent. Whenever the Iron Priests evoked the

Holy Litanies of the Machine God, they anointed their great machines with oil. Trees crashed into the clearing from the south as twin abominations charged. The Iron Warriors had flanked them!

Thokar had underestimated his foes, perhaps lulled into false security by the carnage they had encountered earlier. The Chaos Dreadnoughts roared with madness as they lumbered toward the Space Wolves. Two squads of Iron Warriors followed, spraying bolter fire as they advanced.

‘Pull back. Use the cover of the jungle,’ Thokar ordered. The wolf priest hoped that the thick foliage might neutralise the Iron Warrior’s numbers and superior firepower.

A small ball of energy cut off the withdrawal, appearing in front of the treeline. The energy pulsed once, then expanded into a sphere several feet in diameter. Lightning swirled across the sphere’s surface, then the sphere vanished with a thunderclap. Iron Warrior Terminators stood in place of the energy. As the Space Wolves paused, twin bolters and reaper autocannons sent the souls of three members of Pack Morkai to their ancestors. The Iron Warriors had them surrounded.

One of the Terminators raised a hand and the firing stopped. His armour was far more ornate than the others, decorated with longer spikes holding many skulls and the helms of a dozen Chapters of Space Marines, including the Space Wolves. Faces twisted across the surfaces of his metal armour, like trapped souls trying to escape.

‘What do we have here? Pups of Leman Russ, pet dog of the False Emperor!’ the warsmith spat the words like venom. ‘You have a choice: renounce your failed Emperor or beg for a swift death!’

Before Thokar could retort, howls echoed from all around, faintly at first, then growing rapidly in volume and intensity. The warsmith paused and turned his head, trying to locate the source of the sounds.

‘Thokar, behind us!’ Wulfric warned.

Thokar glanced back at the Iron Warriors and their ancient war machines. Behind the forces of Chaos, the landscape distorted as a vortex of energy formed, flinging bolts of lightning in all directions. Shadowy figures

materialised.

Immediately, one Chaos Dreadnaught collapsed. A pack with the markings of Long Fangs, the most experienced Space Wolves, poured nuclear fire into the remaining Dreadnaught from meltaguns. The war machine exploded, engulfing several Iron Warriors in a blossom of destruction.

Thokar seized the moment. 'Pack Morkai, aid our reinforcements. Wulfric, everyone else, take the Terminators. The warsmith is mine!' shouted Thokar. The Space Wolves attacked.

Even as Thokar swung his power fist into a Terminator, new combatants joined the assault. A snarling mass of fangs and teeth leapt upon the enemy. The primal fury of the Wulfen amazed even the veteran wolf priest. His new allies were more beast than Marine, clad only in remnants of power armour. A few held weapons, but these were secondary to claws and teeth as they gouged out crimson chunks from beneath the pewter and gold Chaos Marines.

Distracted for a second, Thokar barely evaded an attack. It was the warsmith. Thokar cursed as a second blow caught him squarely in the chest, throwing him backward into a crater left from the bombardment. Pain seared through Thokar's ribs. The warsmith loomed over the wolf priest, glaring down at him from the crater's edge. Thokar slowly rose to his feet, growling with defiance as energy rippled from his power fist.

'Your time is over, Wolf!' declared the warsmith.

'Your pitiful existence is all that will end today, betrayer!' responded the wolf priest.

The ancient warriors collided. Thokar, filled with rage, deflected or dodged every one of the warsmith's attacks. The power fist was an ancient weapon, slow and cumbersome to wield. In lesser hands, that would have been a liability. Thokar used its weight to his advantage, holding back, luring the warsmith closer. The master of the Iron Warriors swung his power sword in a killing blow, overcome with confidence. Only as his weight shifted into the swing did he realise that Thokar had feinted, tricking him into overextending his attack. The wolf priest had an opening. His power fist only needed one. The warsmith's helmet exploded under the impact, and broken spikes rained helmets and skulls all around him. Victory belonged to the wolf priest.

Searing pain flooded through Thokar's left arm. Instinctively, Thokar ducked and twisted to his right and brought his power fist around. With a sickening crack, a Wulfen's chest splattered.

The 13th Company survivors surrounded the remaining Space Wolves. There was no question in Thokar's mind as to the fate of the 13th Great Company. Their time in the Eye of Terror had unleashed the beast within. The wolf priest saw no remaining humanity in their feral yellow eyes. The Space Wolves hesitantly leveled their weapons at the Wulfen. Each one had reached same conclusion. They faced fellow Sons of Russ. They didn't want to fire on their own, some even lowered their weapons, apparently choosing destruction over betraying their lost brothers.

'Hold, my brothers!' The command came in ancient Fenrisian.

Instantly, the Wulfen submitted and withdrew to the edge of the clearing. A grizzled ancient figure, tall even by Space Wolf standards, with a snow-white beard hanging from a cracked, weathered face stood at the tree line. The figure wore black armour from a time before the Great Betrayal, from the Time of Russ. He was a wolf priest.

The Wulfen disappeared into the jungle. When the last one had gone, the old priest slowly turned to face the Space Wolves.

'Lord priest...' Thokar began. If there were any words beyond that they were lost to him.

With a last glance to Thokar and a slight smile, the wolf priest disappeared as well. The silence within the clearing was deafening.

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THOKAR'S COMM crackled. 'Commissar Thaddeus Palentine at your service, lord Chaplain. We are your relief. Is the area secure for our landing?'

'This is Thokar, wolf priest of Russ,' stated Thokar, efficiently introducing

himself and correcting the commissar simultaneously.

‘I’m afraid we missed all the fun. Our intelligence indicates that you were horribly outnumbered,’ observed the commissar.

‘Russ was with us today,’ offered Thokar.

‘We’ve had scattered reports of bestial creatures wearing fragments of Space Marine power armour. We were hoping that maybe you and your men could shed some light on these matters,’ said Commissar Palentine.

‘Have you ever battled Chaos? They are all mindless beasts wearing power armour,’ Thokar spat. ‘We have Khorne Berzerkers in the area, frenzied, skull-rending killers. This area isn’t safe for your men. We’ll handle things. Go where you are needed. The Space Wolves will handle it from here.’

‘I see...’ replied the commissar. ‘Very well.’ The comm signal died.

‘Not that I would ever challenge you, wolf priest, but I’m not sure I understand what you said to the commissar,’ Wulfric stated.

Thokar sighed. ‘I lied, Wulfric. Our brothers have returned after centuries of existence within the Eye. You saw them. They can never return to Fenris. The Great Wolf can never welcome them back. However, we can ensure that they do not become hunted, hunted by those who they set out to defend ten thousand years ago. So, I gave the commissar what he was looking for: an answer.’

As the wolf priest and Wolf Guard walked back toward the ruins of the Outpost, the ancient yellow eyes of a predator tracked them.