WRATH OF MAGNUS







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A SAGA OF SPITE AND VENGEANCE

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



DARK ANGELS

- Azrael
  Supreme Grand Master of the Dark Angels
- Asmodai
  Master Interrogator-Chaplain
- Belial
  Grand Master of the Deathwing



GREY KNIGHTS

- Arvann Stern
  Brother-Captain of the 3rd Brotherhood
- Grand Master Valdar Aurikon
  Warden of the Librarius



SPACE WOLVES

- Logan Grimnar
  Great Wolf of the Space Wolves
- Ulrik the Slayer
  Wolf High Priest
- Njal Stormcaller
  High Rune Priest
- Bjorn the Fell-Handed
  Eldest of Ancients
- Bran Redmaw
  Wolf Lord of the Bloodmaws
- Engir Krakendoom
  Wolf Lord of the Seawolves
- Erik Morkai
  Wolf Lord of the Sons of Morkai
- Gunnar Red Moon
  Wolf Lord of the Red Moons
- Harald Deathwolf
  Wolf Lord of the Deathwolves
- Bjorn Stormwolf
  Wolf Lord of the Stormwolves
- Egil Iron Wolf
  Wolf Lord of the Ironwolves
- Krom Dragongaze
  Wolf Lord of the Drakeslayers
- Ragnar Blackmane
  Wolf Lord of the Blackmanes
- Sven Bloodhowl
  Wolf Lord of the Firehowlers
- Kjarl Grimblood
  Wolf Lord of the Grimbloods
- Arjac Rockfist
  Grimnar's Champion



DAEMONS OF TZEENTCH

- The Changeling
  The Trickster of Tzeentch
- The Blue Scribes
  Azure Arcanologists



THOUSAND SONS

- Magnus the Red
  Daemon Primarch of Tzeentch
- Ahriman
  Arch-Sorcerer of Tzeentch
- Acazept the Ingrate
  Sorcerer of the Sectai Prosperine
- Xarax Throtep
  Sorcerer of the Tizcan Host



ECHOES IN TIME

Only a few of the Adeptus Astartes have even the vaguest notion of the downward spiral the Thousand Sons have walked. None truly appreciate the depth of betrayal that set them on their path. To those that face them, the Thousand Sons appear as ghosts from a dark and mythical past. Rank upon rank march in sinister silence, their weapons spitting infernal fire as they shrug off direct hits from bolt and blade alike. To the Sorcerers that walk in their midst, the Rubricae of the Legion are faithful servants beyond compare, living weapons to be used in arcane wars. Their warbands are often the foremost players in the ploys of Tzeentch, Architect of Fate and master of the cosmic game.

That great contest of souls has come to a crux point at the close of the 41st Millennium. Nowhere is it harder fought than in the Fenris System, called home by the Thousand Sons' eternal enemies – the Space Wolves, warrior scions of the Primarch Leman Russ.

The events of the Horus Heresy are occluded by myth and legend. It is said a full half of the Legiones Astartes turned to the worship of Chaos over the course of those dark days, each following their Primarch into damnation. Many of these demigod primogenitors took the first steps towards heresy with the best of intentions, hoping to better serve Mankind by following a divergent path from the teachings of their absent father, the Emperor. Amongst them was the psychic colossus known as Magnus the Red.

When his Legion began to fall to a strange mutative flaw in their gene-seed, Magnus saved his sons from the dreaded flesh-curse by consulting with an unknowable deity in the Warp. Though that act cost him much – including one of his eyes, some said – it saw the salvation of his kindred. For a while, his warrior mystics were unblemished in form and mind, able to summon and control the energies of the Empyrean with greater skill than any other Legion.



After the notion of psychic warfare was put on trial at the Council of Nikaea, however, the Emperor delivered an edict that forbade the Adeptus Astartes from using Warp-born power. To a brotherhood of occult masters such as the Thousand Sons, such a punishment was untenable. Magnus and his sons continued their studies in secret.

In his astral scryings, Magnus learned of Horus' nascent treachery. The Warmaster had been seduced by the Dark Gods. Aghast, Magnus projected his consciousness to warn his father as he created his great works upon Terra. In doing so, he damaged the Emperor's sanctum beyond recovery. The Emperor, enraged, did not listen, and banished Magnus from his sight. He then ordered Horus to unleash the Space Wolves, capture Magnus and bring him to Terra in chains. Horus instead told Russ to bring utter devastation to the Thousand Sons. The war that followed was apocalyptic.

Magnus, in his disgrace, chose not to defend his glorious city of Tizca – not until the screams of his sons grew too loud to ignore. When the Primarch brought his might to bear the carnage was great indeed. It was too late; Prospero already burned. In his grief, Magnus was defeated in combat with Leman Russ, but worked a spell at the last to spirit himself, his Legion and much of the city of Tizca away into the Warp. Yet their travails were far from over. As they sought a ragged unity upon their adopted home, the Planet of the Sorcerers, the Thousand Sons succumbed to the flesh-curse still lurking in their genes. Chief Librarian Ahriman took drastic action. He worked a great rite, the rubric, but it worked all too well. Though it saved his brothers from mutation, it did so by transmuting their mortal forms to sentient dust sealed within their armour.

Magnus was furious. He cast Ahriman and his fellow exiles across the stars, the Legion broken. Now, they stand united in one thing only – a thirst for revenge.







DARK ORIGINS

Closer and closer drew the hand of doom, moving ever nearer towards blackest midnight. In a galaxy already tearing itself apart with wars uncounted, a new disaster loomed…

This latest string of calamities did not happen by chance, but by design. A series of complex machinations beyond the ken of mortal minds had begun with the return of the long-lost Space Wolves 13th Company. As Warp storms spread ruination and corruption across the galaxy, the forces of the Imperium were beguiled. False evidence and heinous illusion eroded trust or inflamed ancient rivalries.

Soon Space Marines pitted their might against their own brothers. So Tzeentch has ever fought, spreading lies and sowing doubt so that even steadfast allies might eye one another warily. Just as in the darkest days of the Imperium, the forces of Humanity were divided by their greatest foe. As the Warp storms worsened, daemonic warhosts spilled forth into reality.

This mass invasion could not have come at a worse time for the Sons of Russ. Accusations of deviancy had lately sprang up around the Space Wolves' exploits, and not without cause. The omens spoke true, and millennia-old legends had been proven sound. In a dozen war zones across the galaxy, the lost brothers known as the Wulfen had returned.

The Great Companies took to the Sea of Stars once more, searching the galaxy for signs of their mutated kin. Many packs were found, embattled against the daemonic hordes of the Chaos Gods, and many victories were won. Those Space Wolves touched by the outward signs of the Canis Helix had always been long of tooth and sharp of claw, but the Wulfen took this atavism to extreme levels. In appearance they were as much lupine beast as they were Space Marine. Still, they bore the heraldic markings of the Chapter, and some spoke in the tongue of Asaheim. Though many had misgivings – Harald Deathwolf amongst them – the Wulfen were marshalled and brought to Fenris.





In battle after battle the Wulfen fought alongside the Space Wolves against the daemonic incursion. They proved sound of mind in later parleys with the Wolf Lords, and when brought back to the fortress of the Fang, they were re-equipped and inducted into the Chapter's ranks. Ulrik the Slayer, trusted Wolf Priest and mentor of the High King Logan Grimnar, welcomed the Wulfen as heralds of their long-disappeared primogenitor, Leman Russ. The priest maintained that the Wolftime was upon them, and that the Primarch would soon return. Yet still there were those Wolf Lords who harboured suspicions about the Wulfen. Worse, there were those outside of the Chapter that had been manipulated into seeing the Wulfen as dangerous creatures of Chaos. The coming storm grew thunderous indeed.

Deceived by Tzeentchian wiles and the damning evidence of mutation amongst the Space Wolves' ranks, it was the Dark Angels Chapter that watched their fellow Adeptus Astartes closest of all. The Dark Angels were no strangers to subterfuge, for they had long been haunted by their own dark past, but the rivalry between their Chapter and the Space Wolves was so ingrained over the millennia that none spoke in their defence.

When the Dark Angels investigated a Space Wolves attack upon the world of Nurades, they intended to rendezvous with the garrison of Scouts they had left to watch over an artefact from their Chapter's history. The young warriors had been slain to a man. Further inspection appeared to betray the identity of the killers – not the creatures of the Warp, but those same Wulfen the Space Wolves had taken into their own. The implications were disturbing indeed.

Upon Tranquilitus, the Dark Angels and the Space Wolves fought against the Daemon hordes. They did so not as brothers, but as rivals, for their Primarchs had clashed long ago, and the uneasy respect that had grown between the Chapters skirted the brink of scorn. They were Adeptus Astartes first and foremost, however, and against Chaos the two brotherhoods stood united – for now, at least.





A CURSE UNCHECKED

Many times did the agents of Tzeentch leave a trail of misdirection in the path of the Space Marines. By subterfuge and misdirection, the Daemon known as the Changeling widened the cracks of mistrust that had appeared between the Space Wolves and their brother Adeptus Astartes. The Great Wolf and his champions were embroiled in ceaseless war against the Daemon hordes ripping their way into reality, and there were none to refute the claims made about the Space Wolves' fate. With the agents of Chaos walking the lands, even the legendary Grey Knights joined the fray, fighting alongside the Space Wolves to overcome the vilest of foes. The combination saw hundreds of Daemons banished from reality, but the most foul of their works had already been wrought. Though the Space Wolves knew it not, the true enemy lurked within.

Those Space Wolves who fought alongside the Wulfen found the bestial side of their souls surge to the fore, driving them to ever more extreme acts of bloodshed. Some changed in body as well as mind, their forms altering to echo that of the lost brothers they had hoped to save. Soon there was evidence of extreme genetic deviance in every one of the companies of Fenris.

Those who had called the reappearance of the Lost Company a curse were being proved right. Questions soured into conjecture, and suspicions hardened into conclusions. Astropathic choirs sang of secrets and lies. With great and sombre slowness, the judgement of the Adeptus Astartes was turned upon the Sons of Russ.

The Great Companies returned to the Fenris System, the holds of their craft echoing with the howls of the Wulfen. An armada of Imperial battleships was inbound upon the same coordinates. At the head of the fleet was the Rock, fortress monastery of the Dark Angels. Soon after emerging from the Warp, that vast fragment of their home world hung in Fenris' orbit like a titanic sword dangling over the heads of the accused. The intent of the fleet's commanders was to arrest, interrogate, and – if the fates were unkind – make the Space Wolves pay for their deviance. Azrael of the Dark Angels had initiated a crusade capable of wiping out the Sons of Russ, should it come to that. Magnus the Red, watching from his forbidding tower in the Eye of Terror, found the echo of Prospero's persecution most pleasing. His interlocking schemes were accelerating fast.

As the prosecutors of the Emperor's will approached the Fenris System, the Great Companies found their homecoming far from glorious. Unbeknownst to them, the planets that orbited the star known as the Wolf's Eye had already been assailed by the daemonic and the traitorous. Valdrmani the Wolf Moon, home of the astropathic relay station Longhowl, gave a distress signal that no true hero could ignore. The ocean moon of Svellgard churned with Daemon-spawn, its volcanic islands bastions of order amongst seas of utter mayhem. The main gun-fortress of the planet Frostheim, famous for its formidable defences and iron-hard ice, was assailed by warbands of the Alpha Legion, whose blood rituals were opening Warp rifts across that realm and beyond. Disaster was rife.









UPON THE PRECIPICE

Most diabolical of all fates was that of Midgardia. A proud part of the Fenris System, Midgardia was a world of jungles so toxic the populace had made its home in sprawling cities under the planet's crust. Since the appearance of Warp storms in the Fenris Sector, that teeming civilisation had been infested with noxious legions of Nurgle Daemons. It was to this forsaken war zone that Logan Grimnar, Chapter Master of the Space Wolves, made haste – and he was not alone. At his side fought not only the Champions of Fenris, the mightiest heroes of their Chapter, but also the armoured columns of Egil Iron Wolf.

The Great Companies hit the planet's invaders like a thunderbolt. With their dramatic counter-invasion, many hundreds of Daemons were banished back to the Warp. Yet so strange was Midgardia's terrain that within a matter of hours, Egil Iron Wolf and his Spears of Russ found themselves bogged down in the quagmire, fighting hard for every inch of ground they took.

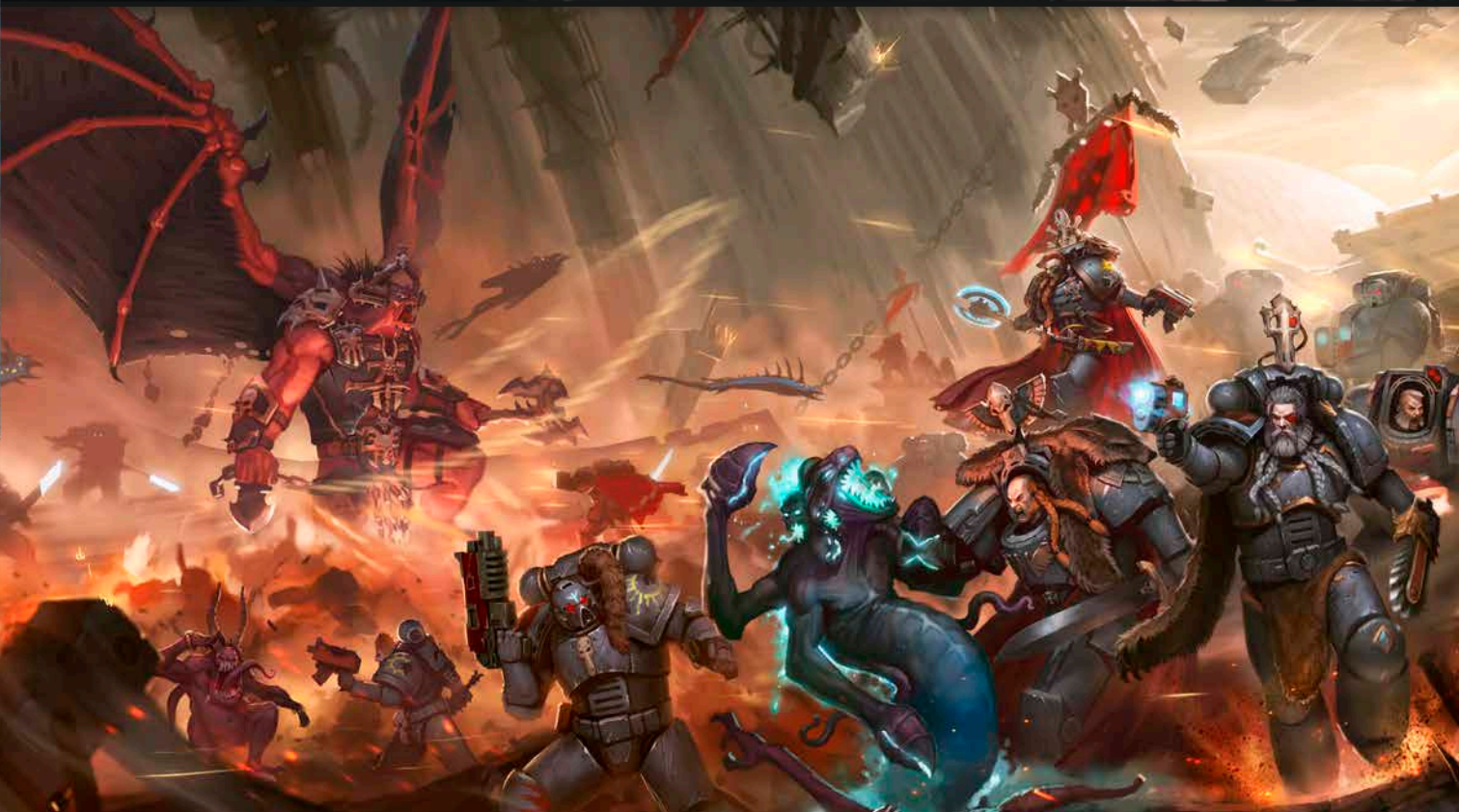
Logan and his champions, taking the fight below ground, banished a host of Plaguebearers before meeting the architects of the planet's demise – an alliance of four Daemon Princes known as the Infernal Tetrad. The Champions of Fenris met these titanic fiends blade to blade, only to be buried under tonnes of rock – the Daemons' trap had been well laid. The Space Wolves had been robbed of their wisest leaders in their greatest hour of need, and all the while, the Imperial fleet that held their doom grew ever larger in the firmament.

Upon the bridge of the Rock the fate of the Space Wolves was debated at length. The Changeling, a shape-shifting Daemon of Tzeentch, had impersonated a slain Dark Angels Scout in order to gain access to the Rock's Apothecarion. Once inside, he had stolen the form of the fortress' vox seneschal. Ships from a dozen Chapters stood ready to follow the orders of the Rock's masters. The judgement of the Space Wolves hung in the balance.

The Daemon wearing the skin of the vox officer wove its webs of deceit. It claimed that not only was the Curse of the Wulfen irrevocable proof of malefic taint, but that the Great Wolf, Logan Grimnar, had been confirmed as dead, and that his Wolf Lords were either missing in action or at each other's throats, impotent in the face of the Chaos infection. The Dark Angels alone could restore order to the troubled Fenris System – where the grievous influence of Chaos had taken hold, they must burn it clean. With a heavy heart the Supreme Grand Master of the Dark Angels considered the order for the bombardment of the Fenris System, and what it might portend. He gave it nonetheless.

Though only the hidden architects of this unfolding tragedy fully appreciated it, the echoes of that which had occurred upon Prospero were profound indeed. The Space Wolves were to be punished for their genetic deviance and pursuit of hidden truths, much as they had brought the intolerant justice of the Emperor to Prospero in ancient days gone by. It was a delicious irony to the servants of Tzeentch, and Magnus the Red foremost amongst them.

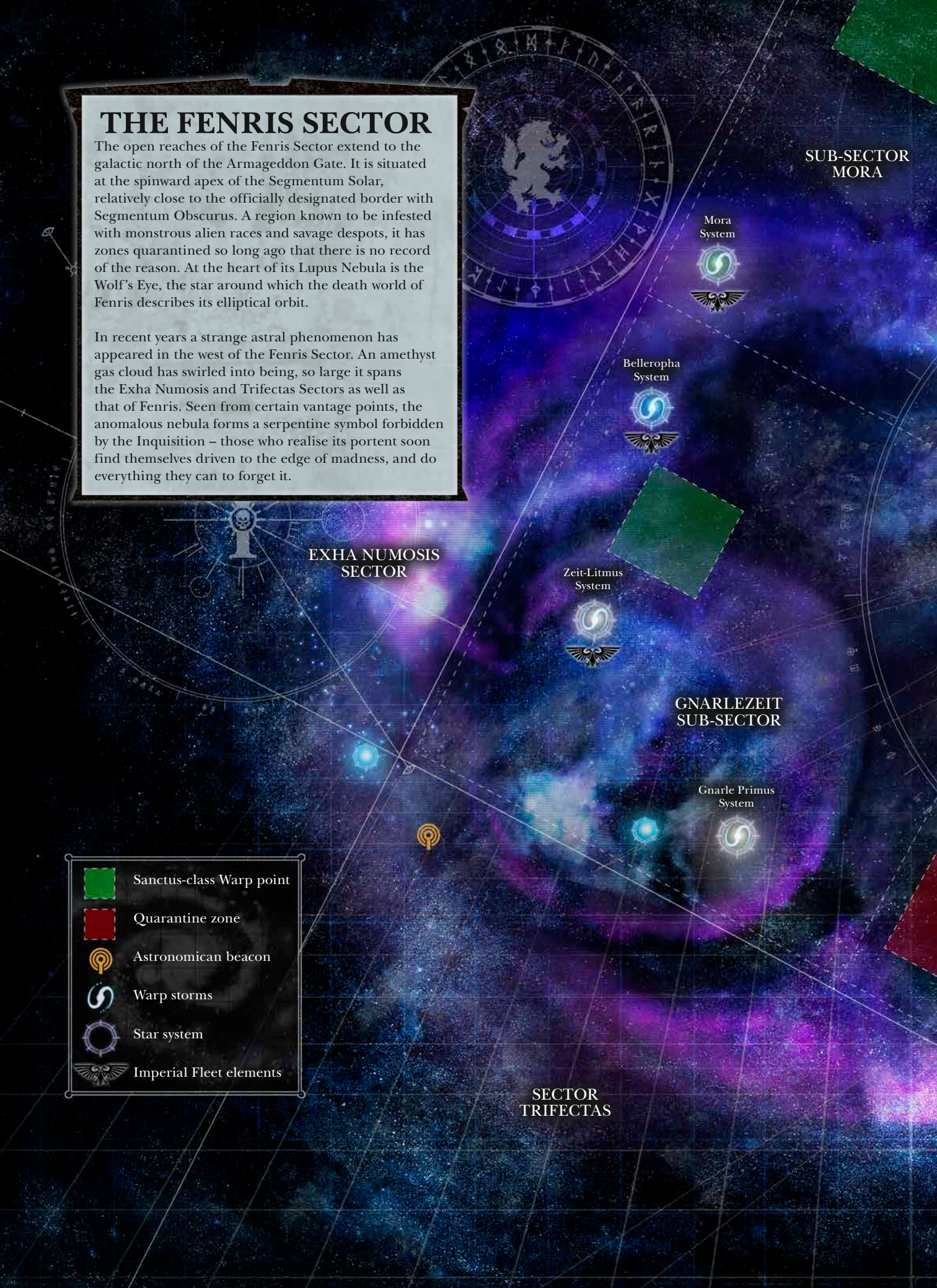




THE FENRIS SECTOR

The open reaches of the Fenris Sector extend to the galactic north of the Armageddon Gate. It is situated at the spinward apex of the Segmentum Solar, relatively close to the officially designated border with Segmentum Obscurus. A region known to be infested with monstrous alien races and savage despots, it has zones quarantined so long ago that there is no record of the reason. At the heart of its Lupus Nebula is the Wolf's Eye, the star around which the death world of Fenris describes its elliptical orbit.

In recent years a strange astral phenomenon has appeared in the west of the Fenris Sector. An amethyst gas cloud has swirled into being, so large it spans the Exha Numosis and Trifectas Sectors as well as that of Fenris. Seen from certain vantage points, the anomalous nebula forms a serpentine symbol forbidden by the Inquisition – those who realise its portent soon find themselves driven to the edge of madness, and do everything they can to forget it.

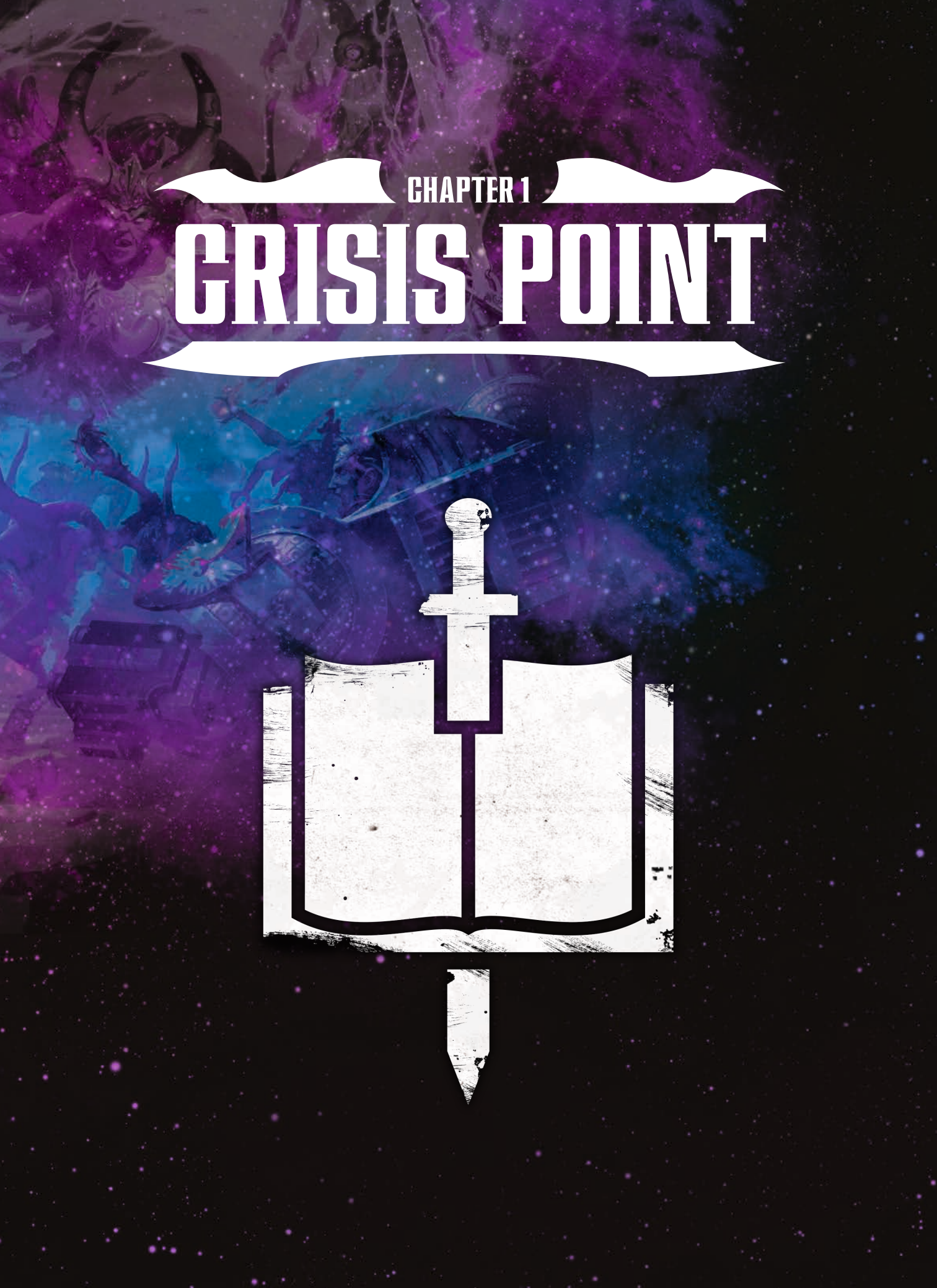



SEGMENTUM OBSCURUS
SEGMENTUM SOLAR
SUD-GOTH SECTOR
Delvermann System
SVARTELDARI SUB-SECTOR
Fenris System
CANIMORPH SUB-SECTOR
SECTOR ELYSIUM
Grimnar's Edge System
Loup-Garouine System
ALLEKREIG SECTOR
Eye of Terror
Alaric Prime
Red Scar Systems
Fenris
Paranxes
Armageddon
Lastrati
Prospero
Terra
The Maelstrom
Gheist
Posul
Carpathia
Infernus IX
Tarsis Ultra
Macragge









CHAPTER 1

CRISIS POINT

A TWIST OF FATE

The tempers of the Imperial fleet's commanders were tinder-dry, and the entire Fenris System teetered upon the brink of catastrophe. Massive ships hung threateningly in the void, waiting to fall upon those worlds that harboured Daemons and mutants – and where the taint of Chaos is found in great measure, the Grey Knights are never far behind.

The bridge of the Dark Angels' space-bound fortress monastery was colossal in scale. Its vaulted interior could have housed a dozen space-capable vessels. Buttressed walls were lined with statuary, below which shimmered complex hololith data-spectres that underlit the faces of stone saints with an eerie green glow. Upon a grand dais at the bridge's front, arguments raged and terse orders were bitten out. A sense of destiny hung heavy in the air. Here, the fate of the Fenris System – and of the Space Wolves Chapter itself – would be decided forever.



Above it all was Supreme Grand Master Azrael, master of the Dark Angels. No other living Space Marine had such a deep understanding of that Chapter's twilight existence, swathed forever in the shadows of history – and, some would say, stained with the mire of heresy.

Azrael had at his side the Interrogator-Chaplain Asmodai, as stern and obsessive as any who had walked the sacred corridors of the Rock, or Caliban before it. Asmodai was an expert in the art of rooting out traces of Chaos infection from those heretics hidden within the Imperium, but such was the nature and skill of Tzeentch's agent upon the Rock's bridge that even he had not divined the architect of their woes. The Space Wolves were judged in their absence; under Azrael's orders none of the Imperial fleet's officers were accepting the Wolf Lords' vox-hails, nor opening their astropathic mind-choirs to missives from Fenris.

The forceful personalities of the Adeptus Astartes clashed, every heated exchange threatening to ignite an internecine war that would have grave implications for the wider Imperium. The fires of strife were fanned at every turn, for amongst the warriors of the Imperium was a force of disharmony embodied – the Trickster of Tzeentch.

The daemonic entity that had infiltrated the bridge crew, known in the sagas of the Space Wolves as the Changeling, was in its element. It had sown confusion and angst throughout Chapter serf and Space Marine alike. Posing as Vox Seneschal Mendaxis, the Daemon had formally announced to the Dark Angels that the Space Wolves had used the stronghold of Longhowl to open fire on the fleet belonging to the Grey Knights. This news, coming so soon after the pict-thief footage of Dark Angels Scouts being slain by the Wulfen, sealed the guilt of the Sons of Russ in the minds of their prosecutors. The Chapter was irrevocably tainted.

One of the system's worlds, Midgardia, had already fallen to daemonic invasion. Azrael concluded there was no recourse but to scour it clean with the killing fires of Exterminatus, even though there were still Space Wolves upon its surface. The declaration was met with awed silence, but with Logan Grimnar missing, presumed dead, there were few with influence enough to gainsay him.

Into these fires of recrimination plunged Brother-Captain Stern. En route to the Rock's orbit above the Fang, the Brother-Captain had made common cause with Ragnar Blackmane – the two had fought hard to cleanse the Ramilies-class starfort Mjalnar of daemonic taint. In an urgent remote conclave with Azrael, they secured permission to come aboard the great spaceborne fortress of the Dark Angels. So it was that a Wolf Lord strode upon the flagstones of the Rock's inner sanctums for the first time in living memory.

With Lord Blackmane was an Inquisitor by the name of Banist de Mornay, an elderly but mentally formidable member of the Ordo Hereticus. De Mornay had crossed paths with the Dark Angels before, and had his suspicions that the shadow of Chaos was cast long across a great many of the Adeptus Astartes – the First Legion amongst them. Though many of the Dark Angels upon the bridge assumed the Inquisitor was present to monitor and pass judgement upon the Space Wolves, in truth, de Mornay's vigilance fell not upon the Sons of Russ, but those of Lion El'Jonson.

To their horror, Stern and the other warrior heroes that had approached the Rock to consult with Azrael in person found that they were too late. The bombardment cannons of the Imperial fleet had already opened fire upon the planets under their gunsights. Midgardia had been subjected to such a brutal and extensive firestorm its surface was little more than a worldwide conflagration. Morkai's Keep upon Frostheim had been blasted to rubble by a lance strike levelled by the calculating Iron Hands Chapter. The Fenris System was besieged by both foes and allies, and the planets and moons where the daemonic incursions were most apparent were already suffering grievous wounds under the crusade fleet's onslaught. The war that Stern and Ragnar had come to stop was already in progress, trusted brothers at one another's throats.



Everywhere confusion reigned, inflamed by the wrath of the crusader and the defiance of the accused. On the vast hololith displays at the fore of the bridge, the dispositions of the Imperial fleet and the defensive citadels of the Space Wolves flickered and came into focus. The fate of the two rival Chapters hung in the balance, the ships of their fellow Adeptus Astartes all but silent as a suffocating miasma of doubt and despair threatened to erase millennia of hard-won brotherhood.

Upon the bridge, the parley between traveller and commander was swift and intense. When the echoes of harsh-tongued speeches had faded from the Rock's bridge, it was Stern who spoke alone. As a Brother-Captain of the legendary Grey Knights, his words carried gravitas indeed. He spoke of Chaos, and those who would spread it. He had already judged the souls of those Wulfen he had encountered, and those of the warriors who had fought alongside them. He had found them sound.

However, there was one upon the bridge of the Rock who did not belong, who was more than a hidden agent of corruption. He was anarchy incarnate. Stern pointed an accusatory finger at Vox Seneschal Mendaxis, and named him for the Daemon he truly was.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

The agent of strife upon the bridge of the Rock had expertly manipulated the rivalries and emotions of the Adeptus Astartes, playing upon their worst suspicions until their sabre-rattling escalated into open violence. Those worlds infested with Daemons were now under bombardment from the Imperial fleet. Any hope for salvation was dwindling fast.



Upon the bridge of the Rock, a piercing screech filled the incense-scented air. Brother-Captain Stern cast an outstretched hand towards the uniformed figure of the vox seneschal, Mendaxis, shouting a phrase of power that made the ears of all who heard it ring. The resinous smoke that hung around the bridge parted, giving shape to the psychic attack as it hurtled towards its intended target. The vox officer screamed in defiance and slid away with a serpentine spasm, but Interrogator-Chaplain Asmodai was waiting close by. He bellowed his most potent litanies of hate with such force the Daemon recoiled as if physically struck. The false officer's flesh ripped open to reveal a shifting morass of pink-blue hide. Trapped between Stern's psychic aggression and Asmodai's fierce faith in the Emperor, the impostor's illusion came apart like cobwebs in a gale, and the Daemon beneath was revealed.

Laughing eerily, the architect of disaster that had been hiding amongst the Adeptus Astartes began to swell and grow. Long blue robes billowed, a vortex of Warp energy whipping around the creature as it raised four spindly arms from within its voluminous shroud. Its face remained hidden by a deep hood; many who witnessed its transformation considered this a mercy, for the presence of a Daemon was a hideous blight on the sanity, and often a death sentence even for those who survive it.

The great vault of the bridge echoed loud as storm bolter fire crashed and boomed. Each bolt was transmuted to a harmless substance before it struck, turning to sand, to wine, to flitting butterflies with fractal wings.

'At him!' shouted Supreme Grand Master Azrael, his voice straining with tension. 'The Daemon must be slain!'

'Wyrdspawn. I knew it,' spat Ragnar nearby, revving his metres-long chainsword Frostfang as he loped towards the pink-skinned Daemons spilling from a wound-like breach. 'These ones fight dirty, but they die all the same.' He rolled shoulder-first under a spray of mutagenic flame and came up in a lunging thrust, the tip of Frostfang chewing through the throat of a Daemon herald even as it sought to summon more of its kin. Ragnar was soon lost to sight, Daemons crowding around him. Azrael knew the creatures went to their deaths.

A humourless smile tugged at Azrael's lips as he raised his gun and racked the slide. He opened fire, and the Daemons turned black, limbs twisted thin as tinder-sticks.

'I purge thee from the sight of the righteous,' incanted Azrael as he strode down the steps to one side of the bridge's command dais. 'I banish thee with the power of truth.'

The Chapter Master raised his relic weapon, the Lion's Wrath, and sent a burning bolt of plasma right at the Tzeentchian Daemon at the heart of the confusion. The creature sketched a complex sigil in the air with all four of its hands before catching the plasma shot as if it were no more harmful than a child's toy. He hurled it back, and Azrael was forced to step aside in haste. The white fires burned a cogitator bank to molten ruin behind him. As he moved, the Supreme Grand Master sent three bolter shells screaming towards the Changeling, but these it simply flicked from existence with its long fingers, one after another.

To his right, Azrael saw Brother-Captain Stern run hard at the Changeling, greatsword swinging. Two cackling Pink Horrors interposed themselves to save their master, but were swiftly bisected by the Grey Knight's blade. Bubbling from their remains came grumbling Blue Horrors that snatched at Stern's legs as he charged forwards. The Grey Knight burnt them away with a blast of white mind-fire and forged onwards.

Barely slowed, Stern waded through the morass of Daemon-spawn, his blade levelled to impale the Changeling. With a thrust he ran the creature through, only for it to shimmer and disappear – it was merely another illusion cast to cover its retreat. The trickster-thing was already far to the right, disappearing down a sconce-lined corridor with the bubbling remains of two hulking guard-servitors left in its wake.

'After it!' shouted Azrael. 'Run it down and banish it, or there will be hell to pay!'



THE ROCK BESIEGED

With the Changeling's summonings leading to daemonic incursions in several locations on the Rock, the Dark Angels and their allies scrambled to contain the Warp breach before it was too late. In the space of a few heartbeats, those who had accused the Space Wolves of malefic taint had themselves become the accused.

The bridge of the Rock was a scene of utter bedlam. With the Changeling covering its escape by summoning Tzeentchian Daemons into the path of the pursuing Dark Angels, the once sombre and doom-laden atmosphere had been replaced by a deafening cacophony. Screams of horror, shouted orders and detonating bolter shells mingled with the hoots, cackles and chanted incantations of the daemonic invaders. The unmistakable scent of hypercordite and promethium choked the air, chasing away the subtler scent of holy incense. Chapter serfs died by the score. Even Space Marine officers were laid low as they fought, limbs blasted to molten gobbets or torsos turned to glowing glass by the sheets of warpflame hurled their way.

It did not take the Dark Angels long to recover. As robed warriors ran in from archways and vestibules, a company of heroes assembled upon the flagstones of the bridge, bolters spitting death. They gave not an inch of ground, though many turned pale at the Warpspawn unleashed in their midst, and the fires of change crackling at their feet. Several squads knelt in firing lines in order to form living bulwarks against the strange invasion, their shoulders turned towards the foe. Their brothers ran close behind them in order to close the net. Wherever their shots hit home the pink-skinned Daemons would burst apart as if made of no more than food-sludge, only for two blue-skinned forms to coagulate from their blasted remains. When those grumbling by-blows were put down by pinpoint fire, they too were replaced, each kill yielding a pair of yellow Daemon-mites that crept from the fires of their predecessor's demise. The Sons of the Lion fought as one, locking their fields of fire to squad after squad.

Wherever the largest and most decorated Daemons incanted their strange spells, there the Deathwing struck. Grand Master Belial's honour guard charged into the fight as a force of nature, obliterating their enemies with powered fists, claws and hammers, and blasting apart the stragglers with punishing storm bolter volleys. They left a trail of bubbling ectoplasm in their wake as they slew.

Azrael and his fellow heroes were long gone. They had realised that the thronging Daemons were but a distraction. The Changeling was the true mastermind behind the attack, and it had to be stopped before it could bring further havoc to the scions of the Imperium. As they ran, Stern made psychic contact with the warriors of his brotherhood, commanding them to gain access to the Rock by any means necessary and eliminate the Daemon threat. Within minutes, a strike force of silvered paladins appeared upon the bridge of the Rock in a blaze of strange light. By summoning and stepping through this psychic portal, they burned out many of the carefully etched wards that prevented aetheric travel to and from the Rock's bridge – much as the fallen Primarch Magnus once blew out the sorcerous defences of the Emperor's Palace in his urgent need to tell the Master of Mankind of Horus' treachery. The Grey Knights considered it worth the cost.

A skirling laugh emerged from three of the Changeling's mouths as it darted away into the Rock's labyrinthine corridors. So many of its plans had reached their apex, each bearing the delicious fruit of irony, confusion and – best of all – treachery in the name of justice. It was being hunted by some of the Imperium's most self-righteous warriors, each of whom was an expert in the field of destroying the works of Chaos, but it felt not a flicker of fear. Zealots were often the easiest to fool. The Changeling pushed ever further into the gigantic vessel, every twisting corridor and rune-sealed vault only adding to its delight. Close on its heels were Azrael and Asmodai of the Dark Angels, leaving the battle on the bridge in the hands of Belial and the Deathwing. They had little option, in truth. Both Grand Master and Interrogator-Chaplain knew full well that should an agent of the Dark Gods reveal the secret history of their order, the persecution of the wider Imperium would fall upon them too.

They were accompanied by de Mornay, Stern, and Ragnar Blackmane, each a powerful champion of the Imperium in his own right and bane of the Chaos hordes. As this strange band made their way through the hallways and chain-naves of the Rock, they encountered the traps and traces their quarry had left behind. They banished scrapcode glitches that turned machinery against them, repelled Daemon ambush, and discovered the bodies of those the Changeling had impersonated when it had bound the Dark Angels so thoroughly into its plans. The remains of Vox Seneschal Mendaxis, of the comatose Interrogator-Chaplain Elezar, and a dozen others besides formed a disturbing trail for them to follow. Azrael demanded that his allies stay close. To stray was to invite the wrath of the First, a Chapter known not only for their epithet – the Unforgiven – but also for their lack of forgiveness in turn.

With his impostor's ruse uncovered, the Changeling made haste for the cells in which these mysteries were held safe. Should the Dark Angels' deepest secrets be revealed to the Grey Knights and the Inquisition, the Chapter would likely be excommunicated. He had studied the nuanced whispers of the Inner Circle for some time since inveigling his way into the command structure of the Rock, and believed himself capable of locating their precious sanctums despite the myriad defences and bluffs that kept them hidden. After all, he was an entity that had roamed the Crystal Labyrinth of Tzeentch; next to that impossible realm, a thought-maze devised by even the most gifted mortal genius was child's play. Sure enough, as the Changeling wove his glamours, one code-sealed vault after another was opened with a hiss of servomotors. With the Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes opening fire upon each others' ships and raining fire upon the domains of the Fenris System, the Daemon's duty to Magnus the Red had been fulfilled. It was owed a little fun.

The Changeling-Chaplain strode onwards through the shadows, flickering sconces glinting in the sheen of the Daemon's armour. The surety and authority in the creature's every step was a better shield than the sombre black battle-plate of the Interrogator whose appearance he wore. No buzzing servo-skulls here, their pict-thief lenses recording events for later dissection. No gormless vassals bothering him with the sheer mundanity of their gaze. The First Legion valued their secrecy above all else.

What a glorious irony it would be if the Dark Angels' persecution of the Space Wolves, based on claims of deviance and the taint of the heretic, were to lead directly to their own trial for the very same charges. The idea of setting the loyalists against one another, exposing their most carefully guarded secrets for all to see, was intoxicating. Even now he could hear the lords and masters of the rival Chapters coming after him with all the subtlety of a runaway tank. Stifling a manic laugh, the Changeling pressed his rosarius against a hidden recess in a marble archway. The portal slid open. It was time for change.

Though Elezar the Interrogator-Chaplain strode into the vaulted doorway, Supreme Grand Master Azrael strode out. The tall, grim figure sketched the symbol of the First Circle in the air, and the sentry guns beyond the doorway powered down. He entered a massive antechamber, soundproofed cells ranged along each wall. The smell of burnt umber and sandalwood resin could not hide the underlying scent of blood, nor could the sibilant chanting of dead-eyed excoriator cherubim silence the echoes of so many screams.

'I have come for the Fallen,' said the Changeling, Azrael's noble tones giving his statement an air of command.

'There is nothing left to learn,' came a weary protestation from the farthest chamber. The voice was scratchy and hoarse, but a shred of defiance was underneath it still. 'You have taken everything we have to give.'

'Things are different this time,' said the impostor Azrael as he approached, pressing the hilt of the Sword of Secrets against a castellan-class gatelock. The portal clunked heavily, and the las-bars that formed a portcullis in the mouth of the chamber crackled as they disappeared. The shadowy figure beyond half-stood, his lean but muscular body as tense as a spring. 'This time, nameless one,' said Azrael, 'I give you freedom.'



CHAOS UNLEASHED

Deep in the heart of the Rock were truths that would shake the Imperium to its foundation. The Dark Angels' Inner Circle kept heretical secrets from their kin, and Azrael kept secrets from them in turn. What they hid, should it be made known, would spread like poison throughout the Adeptus Astartes – something the Chapter would prevent at any cost.

As the Changeling had fled through the Rock, it had summoned more of its kin from the aether, thinning the veil between realspace and the Warp with its strange sorceries. Hundreds of Daemons of Tzeentch had been summoned into the fortress monastery, appearing without warning upon the bridge and at eight sigil-marked locations besides. Their heralds had capered and cartwheeled past runic countermeasures that would once have slain them in an instant, but were now burnt out by the haste and force of the Grey Knights' appearance within the Rock's bounds. Already the Daemon infestation was spreading. The Changeling had foreseen the Dark Angels bringing every weapon they could to bear against the intruders, but that too was a path fraught with peril. Given each Tzeentchian Horror's ability to split into two when slain, there was a chance that to fight the Daemon horde was to increase its numbers, and unwittingly spread the danger even further throughout the Rock.

Grand Master Belial, assuming the defence of the fortress monastery's main decks whilst his superiors ran for its hidden heart, set into motion a defence strategy he had long since perfected. Taking the centre of the bridge with his chosen few around him in a tight knot, Belial gave the order of the Shield's Edge. In doing so he bade the rest of his company spread out as much as they were able. His Deathwing split up and fought hard to the very perimeter of the bridge, fighting not as squads but as individual warriors. Power fists crushed, lightning claws slashed, and thunder hammers pulverised. As the corpse of each Tzeentchian Daemon bubbled and began to yield two more, heavy flamers roared sanctified promethium fires, and the threat was burned away. Where a battle-brother fell, the others would compensate, fighting on until they reached the edge of the vast chamber before turning around. Certain that no Daemon was behind them, the Deathwing fought to close their circle once more. It was then the slaughter began in earnest; caught between the crossfire of Belial's squad and that of his outer circle, the Daemons were decimated. By the time the Deathwing's outer units had joined ranks with the innermost circle, only the mightiest of the infernal intruders fought on.



Even as Grand Master Belial fought he coordinated the actions of his brethren. The outriders of the Ravenwing were authorised to ride their steeds within the monastic corridors and chambers that formed each zone's interstices. Though Grand Master Sammael and his strike force were already bound for Fenris, those bikers he had left to guard the Rock sped after their Black Knight leaders on intercept courses that led them straight for the forward elements of the Daemon invasion. Corridors reverberated to the roar of finely tuned engines and the crash of bolter fire as running battles broke out between Ravenwing battle-brothers and razor-finned Screamers, chainswords lashing out and explosions tearing apart ancient statuary in a contest of speed as much as finesse. Spark-trailing chariots, their sentient disc-bodies linked to winged Daemon beasts at their fore, bore Daemon heralds and looming Flamers along the corridors at breakneck speed. The riders hurled bolts of mutagenic magic left and right until guttering corpses lined the flagstones and the Rock's sconce-lined walls ran like water.

Back on the bridge, the macro-holograph of the Rock that hovered above the Sanctum Strategium lit with a profusion of alert runes. Battle had been joined in a dozen theatres, each fiercer than the last. Amongst all the carnage, a pair of small but powerful Daemons rode their disc-steed unnoticed through the vaults. Though not even the Changeling knew it, there were those in the Dark Angels' demesne who fought quite another battle altogether.

'On, fly on, dunderheaded disc!' urged Xirat'p, his ten-fingered hands shooing forth his chariot's beasts with fevered consternation. 'These archives sprawl and sprain the mind that seeks to trawl and drain in kind!'

The tiny Daemon's fellow scholar, P'tarix, gibbered and grumbled to himself as the disc careened from stack to librarium stack. Dextrous hands shot out and back again with blurring speed, snatching scroll-slates from the chains that bound them to their fellows. 'Enough exhorting, brother-mine. The Cyclops' call we can't decline. Just find the time to mine the find!'

'How kind of Angels so refined, to trammel spells for us to bind,' sneered Xirat'p, sketching a curtsey as he cast Revell's Unchainment upon the rune-inscribed padlocks binding a score of grimoires. 'Most thorough have these questors been–' 'Across the centuries unseen,' finished his partner. Ahead, a dozen leather-bound books, tied to lecterns in the shape of two-headed eagles, shucked off their shackles and flapped their pages to rise unsteadily upwards. P'tarix bypassed some with a frown, but greedily plucked others out of the air, hurling them backward onto the wobbling disc-steed. 'Need, got, got, need… Not got the time, got not the mind–' 'And still we feel the millstone's grind,' finished Xirat'p, looking nervously backwards at the librarium's door as he heard the jangle of keys placed in a lock. 'Make haste – the sands of time grow fine.'

The Daemon Xirat'p fumbled a stack of ancient scrolls before holding one high with a triumphant shout. He chanted the words of Shemn's Shimmerstep, and a moment later the Daemons burst through the far end of the librarium vault in a spray of multicoloured light. Their power-armoured pursuers found only strands of ectoplasm and scattering parchments floating downward in the sudden stillness.











AMONGST THE HIDDEN DEPTHS

The deep dungeons of the Rock were cold and dank, moist with condensation and redolent of wet rock. Pressing forwards into the gloom were Azrael, Asmodai and their allies. Brother-Captain Stern guided their path, for despite the Dark Angels' expertise in hunting fugitives, he alone was able to detect the Warp spoor of the Daemon.

Azrael was not pleased when Brothers Aelios and Levariel, members of the Deathwing Inner Circle, barred his path into the lowest levels of the Rock with the claim that the Supreme Grand Master had already passed through a few minutes before. Azrael was all cold efficiency, explaining quickly that they hunted a trickster-Daemon, and that the creature had taken his likeness in order to bypass their guard. He proved his claim by placing his eye against the arch's Ocularis Veritas; as it chimed, the battle-brothers lowered their halberds and let the officers pass.

As the fellowship drove on into the bowels of the fortress monastery, Azrael assured Stern, Blackmane and de Mornay that he and Asmodai had the matter of the Changeling's banishment in hand. There was no need for such a concentration of authority, said Azrael. In fact, those unfamiliar with the Rock's layout may slow its occupants down in their hunt – their efforts were likely better spent aiding the greater war effort rather than pursuing a single daemon. Despite the gravity of Azrael's tone, all three champions of the Imperium elected to continue the hunt.

Though it galled the minds of the Dark Angels to witness it, the Changeling had used its perfect impersonation of Azrael to bypass every sanctum-locked vault door, gene-coded las barrier and autohypnotic cage that guarded the lower levels of the Rock. The occasional corpse marked the site of conflict against a guard that had not been fooled so easily, but there was no sign of the Daemon interloper.

The heroes hunted their quarry through the great dark chambers designed to hold those heretical brothers the Dark Angels knew as the Fallen. As they passed along the processionals and interrogatus crypts, they found a once-blank portion of the wall open, its hinged door creaking gently and its hex-seals shattered. Asmodai lashed out in frustration with his crozius as he passed the elaborate doorway, a shower of blue sparks in his wake. The Changeling would pay dearly for his work here.

Further into the Rock the heroes delved, the gene-seal of the true Azrael enough to ensure their passage through even the most redoubtable portal. A horrible suspicion had been haunting the Supreme Grand Master, and with every direction given unto them by Stern, that feeling turned from a vague possibility to concrete certitude. The Changeling sought the nemesis of the Lion himself.

The Supreme Grand Master was correct. The Changeling sought to release Lion El'Jonson's arch-enemy, Luther of Caliban, from his cell, freeing the ancient warrior to tell the dire truth of the Dark Angels' history to Grey Knight

'Kill them all.' The words slipped from Belial's lips unbidden.

Warpspawn spilled through the Rock's bridge, a riot of colour and movement against the dark greys and green-blacks of the fortress monastery's architecture. They were repellent to behold, an insult to the First. Even to perceive them was to feel a part of the soul wither and die. They would be sent screaming back to the Warp for the crime of their existence.

The Deathwing were ready for the duty Azrael had placed upon them. Belial had made sure of it. In many ways, they had been ready for ten thousand years.

Squad after squad hammered home a fusillade of bolts, each mass-reactive shell blasting a Daemon into a spasming morass of Chaos energy. The creatures tried to reform, each splitting in twain, but they were cut down by a second volley, then a third, until nothing was left. Weird-fire splashed across the Terminator armour of several of Belial's finest warriors, causing the ancient suits to buckle and grow into strange shapes reminiscent of coral. The Grand Master's lip curled. Pathetic. To think that he had once felt trepidation at the idea of facing these things in reality.

With a tremendous snap of wings, something massive and feathered dropped from the vaulted ceiling, screeching in the tongue of beasts.

'Greater Daemon!' shouted Belial. 'Knights! Take it down!'

The Inner Circle's finest were already in motion, their massive censer-maces rising and falling with merciless efficiency. The giant Daemon screeched a gabbling of strange utterances, its words coalescing as strings of sigils that wound downwards like sea snakes on the hunt. The word-serpents wrapped around the two closest Deathwing, transmuting them into bleached shadows trapped in some half-real dimension. The Daemon's staff, capped with a clutching claw, tore the head from the third with the ease of a gourmet plucking free a grape.

Belial's face set in a grimace as he levelled his storm bolter and took the shot. The projectile burst into flame a yard from the creature's head, but it distracted it for a second. The Grand Master ducked under its sweeping claw to sink the Sword of Silence into its knee, driving the ancient blade up to the hilt. With a cry, the creature snatched the Dark Angel up into the air, its beak yawning wide. Belial spat acid into its eye.

Then the last two Deathwing Knights swung their glowing censer-maces, one striking the Greater Daemon full in the chest, the other in its gut. There was a horrible scream, and the being vanished from the material dimension entirely.

Belial fell to the flagstones with a dull crash, stunned for a second but unharmed. He accepted the gauntlet of the Knight Endrael, and was pulled to his feet.

'As I said,' said Belial, reloading his storm bolter. 'Kill them all.'

and Inquisitor alike. In the process, he had also sought to open the cells of the Fallen, each of whom represented a dark blemish on the honour of the Dark Angels Chapter. To the Daemon, the revelations they would impart to the rest of the Imperium would be sweet indeed.

With the greatest concentration of cells within arm's reach, the Changeling found his way barred: not by the embattled heroes, but by a diminutive figure that was hidden entirely by white robes and carried a graven crozius in both arms. The Daemon recoiled in horror, for the creature before it was anathema to its kind. The creature focussed its baleful glare, and the Changeling turned and fled.

With that, the Changeling's confidence in his own schemes was broken. Fate, that most poisonous and fickle of serpents, was writhing out of his grip, threatening to close its fangs upon the Daemon instead of dancing to his charmer's tune. His flight through the Rock led him not to safety, but into the path of the hunters that pursued him.

Within seconds, the dark chamber was full of strobing light and deafening noise. The Changeling called into being a chattering riot of Horrors, sending them against the heroes. He then took a variety of forms, each the nemeses of one of his hunters, as overlapping chants and insults spilled from its nine mouths. The Wolf Lord Ragnar Blackmane confronted his old enemy Madox once more, growling in frustration at having to kill the Thousand Sons Sorcerer all over again. Azrael saw a hooded gunfighter with a giant's sword slung across his back. Last, but most terrifying of all, Brother-Captain Stern was confronted by M'kachen – the towering Lord of Change that had proven his bane for decades. Fell laughter rang through the chamber, the lunacy in its timbre so potent it threatened to overwhelm the senses. Ultimately, though, the conjured phantoms were but a Daemon's deceit given form. One by one they were overcome by the heroes that sought the Changeling's demise.

In its mounting panic the Daemon found his subterfuges unravelling. When Ragnar Blackmane darted in and drove his kraken-toothed blade, Frostfang, into the Daemon's robed form, it struck with killing force. The trickster's form dwindled, vanishing into a rift in reality as if it were tainted water swirling into a deep pit. The Changeling's curse upon the Rock was finally over.

Within hours, the hunters had regained the bridge, concentrating their efforts on expunging the Daemon infestation from the fortress monastery. Aware now that he had been the victim of Chaos trickery, and that the eye of suspicion may fall upon his own Chapter as a result, Azrael ordered the Dark Angels fleet to stand down. They would cease their bombardments and instead patrol the wider Fenris Sector, focussing on hunting down and exterminating those appearances of the Thousand Sons in other star systems. Those Chapters that had a presence in the Fenris System were soon to follow suit. The Space Wolves were not the true threat here – that much had become abundantly clear.







'It proceeds,' said the Crimson King. 'The cosmos aligns.' His bass tones rolled like distant thunder around the gigantic orrery of his astral court. Outside the arcane citadel, his words turned to raindrops that baptised the Planet of Sorcerers with the power of his intent.

'The Trickster has proven a wise tool,' said Ahriman, 'as will the Scribes, no doubt.'

'Of course,' boomed the Cyclops, contempt giving an edge to his words, 'and you shall do the same.'

Ahriman kept his features still, but inside, a dark worm of bitterness writhed and hissed.

'Patience, exiled one,' said Magnus in the dialect of old Prospero. 'Soon you will have the chance to vent the darkness in your soul.'

The Daemon Primarch spread his arms wide, his wings unfurling to their full and magnificent extent.

'All is in readiness. Let the invasion commence.'





MAGNUS THE RED

Though Magnus the Red has but one eye, few beings in the galaxy possess greater vision. The Daemon Primarch's name is rarely penned even in those texts that detail the ancient history of the Imperium, for to inscribe it is to risk falling under his nigh-omniscient gaze. Once, this greatest of magi poured every iota of his being into the furtherance of the Emperor's goals. Now he seeks the total destruction of the Imperium. For long millennia this towering colossus has plotted the downfall of the race that cast him out as a traitor and persecuted him unto the threshold of death. Only now do his plans near fruition.

In many ways Magnus fell furthest of all from the Emperor's grace. Though he claims otherwise, the blame for his gruesome transformation from demigod to Daemon can be laid at his own door. Willingly he took the path to enlightenment that led through the chaotic tides of the Warp. Deliberately he chose to bargain with dark powers in order to buy his sons a reprieve from their mutative curse. Throughout the tribulations of the Horus Heresy, Magnus' course was guided not by the beacon of the Emperor's will, but by surety in his own infallibility. He was the wisest, the most learned and the most psychically gifted of all the Primarchs; how could his conclusions possibly be wrong? It was by exploiting this vein of hubris that Tzeentch set his long and convoluted trap, widening the gulf between Magnus and his brothers – and even between the Primarch, his gene-father, and his Thousand Sons.

When the Space Wolves came for Magnus they forced his hand. The consequences of the deal with the entities of the Warp, set in motion before Horus had even become Warmaster, was hastened into fruition. With his power base forcibly dislocated to the Eye of Terror in order to escape the Space Wolves, Magnus used spells with the ease a mortal man might draw breath. He erected the eldritch Tower of the Cyclops upon his adoptive world, the better to survey the Empyrean and realspace alike. His defeat at the hands of Russ had broken him in mind as well as in body, the shards of his consciousness dispersed to the four winds. Even the Thousand Sons still bound to their Primarch's cause could not heal his wounded animus. There Magnus brooded, his body saturated with the power of the aether.

For long centuries Magnus sought vengeance against the Imperium, and the Sons of Russ in particular. In M32 he struck at Fenris, having lured the Great Companies from their lair with false visions. He was denied at the last by the redoubtable might of the Fang and the wisdom of the ancient hero, Bjorn the Fell-Handed. Since that day Magnus' ambitions have grown ever deeper and more esoteric. Now he seeks not just to conquer the Space Wolves, but to strip away all they hold dear, corrupt those under their aegis, and visit upon them the same horrors his beloved Legion once witnessed. The conquest of the Fenris System is just the beginning. The final defeat of the Space Wolves will be the jewel in the crown of a far-greater work – one in which the Imperium itself is tipped screaming into a sea of anarchy from which there can be no escape.

THE MACHINATIONS UNFOLD

Across the galaxy the Thousand Sons used their fell magicks to manipulate the Warp rifts that had disgorged the Wulfen. Within days of the Wulfens' recovery by the Great Companies, Rubricae were sighted wherever the bestial warriors had been recovered. The sorcerers of the Thousand Sons were using the Warp rifts to launch a galaxy-wide invasion.

The events before and after the moment the Imperial fleet opened fire upon the Fenris System are referred to by the Wolf Lords as 'Firemarks', each timestamp numbered in relation to the act of gross aggression levelled upon their system.

FIREMARK -7

The Silver Tower of Aharyn Hasp Elha emerges from the Suldabrax Warp rift to hover low over the principal faster-hab of Sycamo Truce. The citizenry, emaciated by the fast they undertook in penance for consorting with the bestial Wulfen, are slowly transmuted into Tzaangors before being snatched up into the ironclouds by the magicks of Aharyn's silver-armoured Rubricae.

FIREMARK -6

Bjorn Stormwolf's Great Company leave the prison colony of Atrapan, the shame of their berserker excesses still fresh in their minds. When the Stormwolves depart for the Fang, the Wulfen they recovered stowed within their holds, many of the inmates unveil themselves as cultists of the Crimson Sons and instigate a riot that takes over Atrapan's judiciariums entire. Their faithful service is rewarded when the Exile Taramalakus leads his Thousand Sons to the planet's surface, his Silver Tower manifesting from the Warp rift that blights the heavens above to claim what is left of Atrapan in the name of Magnus the Red.

FIREMARK -5

The Jovian-class gas giant Fimnir is ravaged by a Warp-spawned plague. Bran Redmaw's Great Company extracts the Wulfen they found fighting the possessed corpses of vapour-miners that once harvested the planet's resources. The infestation is finally eradicated not by the Imperials, who abandon Fimnir as lost, but by the forces of Arch-magister Euchaneschar Skhet. By invading from the Warp rift near Fimnir and burning away the taint of Nurgle from the mining platforms, Skhet guides his Silver Tower to the heart of Fimnir and takes it for his own personal fiefdom.

FIREMARK -4

The Ritual of Abomination, a potent spell given to agents of Tzeentch by Magnus the Red, opens a series of Warp rifts across the Fenris System. They pave the way for a daemonic invasion larger than any the sector has yet seen.

FIREMARK -3

Leaving his post as self-elected castellan of Fenris after consulting with Bjorn the Fell-Handed, Wolf Lord Krom Dragongaze makes for Valdrmani, the Wolf Moon. He arrives not a moment too soon – there he finds Brother-Captain Stern of the Grey Knights embattled against a Tzeentchian Daemon of immense power. The two heroes banish the Daemon after Stern disrupts its foul rites, intended to destroy the Grey Knights and lay the blame at the Space Wolves' door. Krom departs for Fenris once more.

FIREMARK -2

When they learn that Midgardia is beset by the infections of the Dark Gods, Logan Grimnar and Egil Iron Wolf lead their Great Companies to the surface of the world. They fight long and hard against the Daemons of Nurgle, but they are overcome. Egil is trapped within Midgardia's toxic jungles, whilst Logan and his Champions of Fenris are buried alive in the planet's underworld.

FIREMARK -1

At first, Fenris seems to be the eye of the storm, untouched by the Chaos invasions rippling across its vassal worlds. Unbeknownst to Wolf Lord Krom and its defenders, the tower-like craft of the Thousand Sons are making their way through the inky darkness of space towards the planet's surface.

FIREMARK 0

Led by Azrael of the Dark Angels, the masters of the Imperial fleet judge Midgardia, the fortress of Morkai's Keep on Frostheim, and the Warp-tainted reaches of Svellgard irrevocably tainted by Chaos. They open fire upon the infected sites, an act of warfare that will resonate through history.

FIREMARK +1

Brother-Captain Stern of the Grey Knights is given passage to the Rock. Though his intrusion further complicates the power struggle upon the bridge of that titanic fortress-spaceship, he uncovers the puppet master behind the current strife – the Changeling.

FIREMARK +2

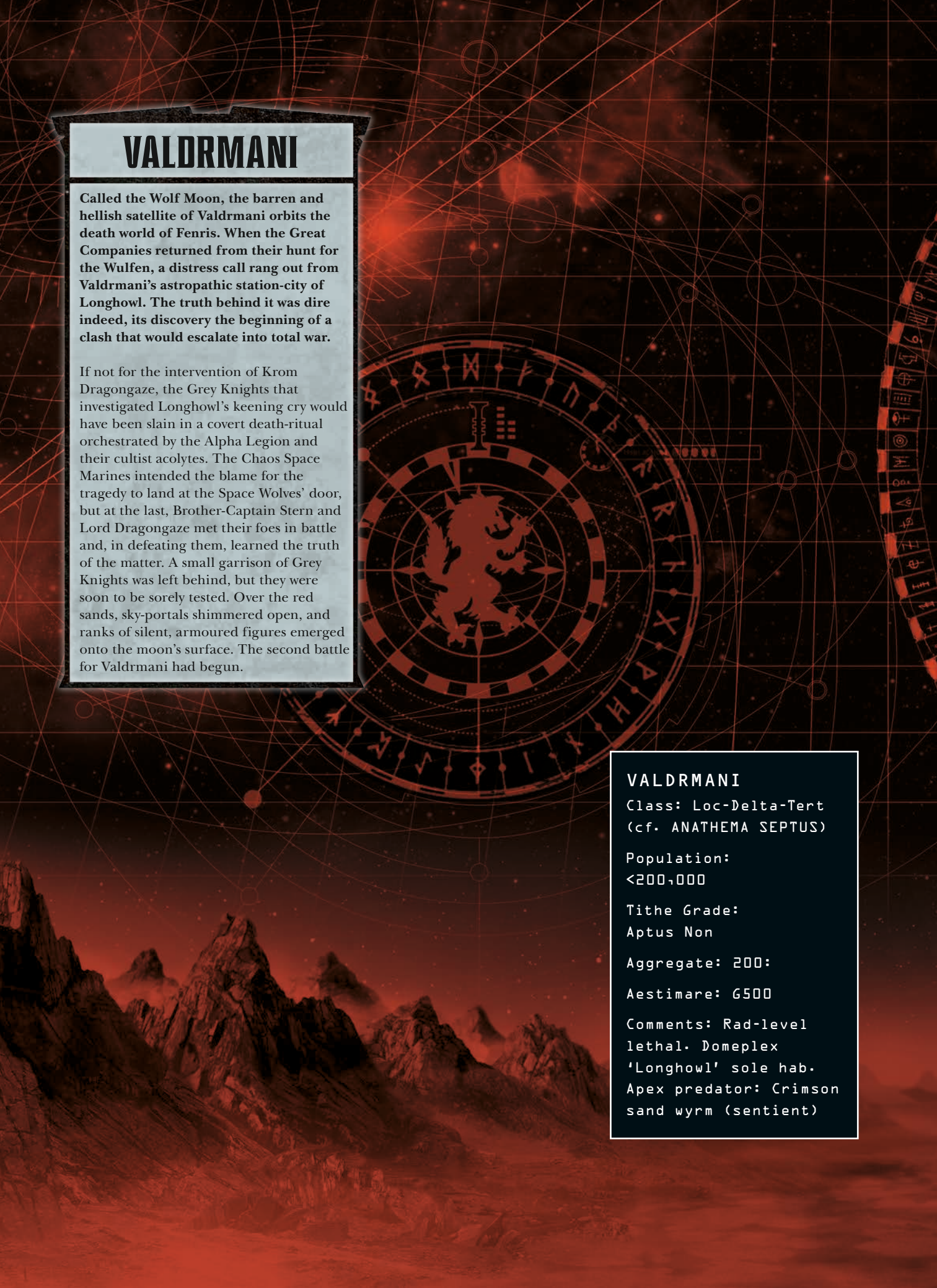
With the Changeling defeated in the bowels of the Rock, the Dark Angels realise they have been manipulated. They order a ceasefire and concentrate on the purge of all daemonic taint within their fortress monastery, before dispersing the Imperial fleet across the wider Fenris Sector to take war to those worlds that send astropathic distress calls matching the signature of Tzeentchian invasion. The Great Companies of Bran Redmaw, Gunnar Red Moon, Bjorn Stormwolf and Engir Krakendoom, having made transition into Fenrisian space within days of one another, made haste to join their fellows upon Fenris. With the Silver Towers entering the sector in great number, they were soon embroiled in a series of desperate wars.


GHOUL STARS
GOTHIC SECTOR
SEGMENTUM OBSCURUS
Hades Reach (The Grimbloods)
NEXUS III ASTRO STATION
Spartha IV (The Seawolves)
ASTRO TELEPATHIC DUCT
THE EYE OF TERROR
Mordian
Valhalla
Anvarheim System
Krastellan
Baal (Blood Angels)
Cadia
Fenris (Space Wolves)
Dragos (The Blackmanes)
Svardeghul (Deathwolves)
Mydgal Alpha (The Ironwolves)
ULTIMA SEGMENTUM
Armageddon
Vikurus (Champions of Fenris)
SEGMENTUM SOLAR
Suldabrax (The Sons of Morkai)
Prospero
Fimnir (The Bloodmaws)
SEGMENTUM PACIFICUS
TERRA
Ryza
THE MAELSTROM
Catachan
Necromunda
Badab
Emberghul (The Red Moons)
TAU EMPIRE
Tallarn
Tranquilitas (Firehowlers)
The Rock (Dark Angels)
SEGMENTUM TEMPESTUS
Solstice
Macragge (Ultramarines)
Atrapan (The Stormwolves)
Rynn's World (Crimson Fists)
Gryphonne IV
THE EASTERN FRINGE
THE VEILED REGION

VALDRMANI

Called the Wolf Moon, the barren and hellish satellite of Valdrmani orbits the death world of Fenris. When the Great Companies returned from their hunt for the Wulfen, a distress call rang out from Valdrmani's astropathic station-city of Longhowl. The truth behind it was dire indeed, its discovery the beginning of a clash that would escalate into total war.

If not for the intervention of Krom Dragongaze, the Grey Knights that investigated Longhowl's keening cry would have been slain in a covert death-ritual orchestrated by the Alpha Legion and their cultist acolytes. The Chaos Space Marines intended the blame for the tragedy to land at the Space Wolves' door, but at the last, Brother-Captain Stern and Lord Dragongaze met their foes in battle and, in defeating them, learned the truth of the matter. A small garrison of Grey Knights was left behind, but they were soon to be sorely tested. Over the red sands, sky-portals shimmered open, and ranks of silent, armoured figures emerged onto the moon's surface. The second battle for Valdrmani had begun.



VALDRMANI

Class: Loc-Delta-Tert (cf. ANATHEMA SEPTUS)

Population: <200,000

Tithe Grade: Aptus Non

Aggregate: 200:

Aestimare: G500

Comments: Rad-level lethal. Domeplex 'Longhowl' sole hab. Apex predator: Crimson sand wyrm (sentient)



FROSTHEIM

Frostheim was once a world of blue-grey glaciers, trapped deep in an ice age that had existed for as long as the Imperium. A great rite was worked by the Alpha Legion inside its principal fortress of Morkai's Keep. Now, daemonic fires play across the planet's surface. With alarming swiftness, the ice of Frostheim melted away to reveal a grisly truth.

It was Harald Deathwolf that smote the scions of Chaos tainting Frostheim. One Drop Pod after another was shattered by orbital defences taken by the Alpha Legion, even as gunships were torn from the skies by winged Daemon Engines. Harald and his armies still made planetfall and claimed victory, but they were too late. The Alpha Legion's ritual was already complete; Warp rifts had opened across the Fenris System. Frostheim's icy crust has since been swathed with warpfire. Its outer layer has melted away to reveal a landscape of ancient bone, the planet's surface reshaped into a form more pleasing to the Ruinous Powers.

FROSTHEIM

Class: Mundus Glacium (cf. VENTRUS ARTICA)

Population: <1,000,000

Tithe Grade: Solutio Secundus

Aggregate: 600:

Aestimare: F76

Comments: Undergoing recategorisation; ice layer melted/ evaporated, osseus surface beneath



SVELLGARD

The ocean moon of Svellgard was a glorious jewel in the Fenrisian firmament until a daemonic invasion boiled from vast portals that opened in its seabed. Even the counter-attack of Sven Bloodhowl and orbiting Iron Hands cruisers could barely hold back the flood of Daemons. Then came a new breed of foe, and Svellgard's fate was sealed.

Despite the appearance of the Bloodthirster Infurnace, the Daemon invasion of Svellgard had been cleared from the core islands of that world. A reprieve had been won by the combined efforts of the Firehowlers, the Redmaws and the Deathwolves, supported by the Harakoni Warhawks, the Ultramarines, and finally the Iron Hands, who at the last put aside their suspicions of heresy to fight alongside their brethren. Even as the Space Wolves celebrated what they thought was a hard-won victory, however, the shimmering silver citadels of the Thousand Sons descended from the stars to hover over the oceans. Svellgard's fate twisted once more, and it would grow darker still.

SVELLGARD

Class: Archaoterran (cf. LEMURIA, OCEANID)

Population:

<500,000

Tithe Grade: Solutio Prima

Aggregate: 400:

Aestimare: CB50

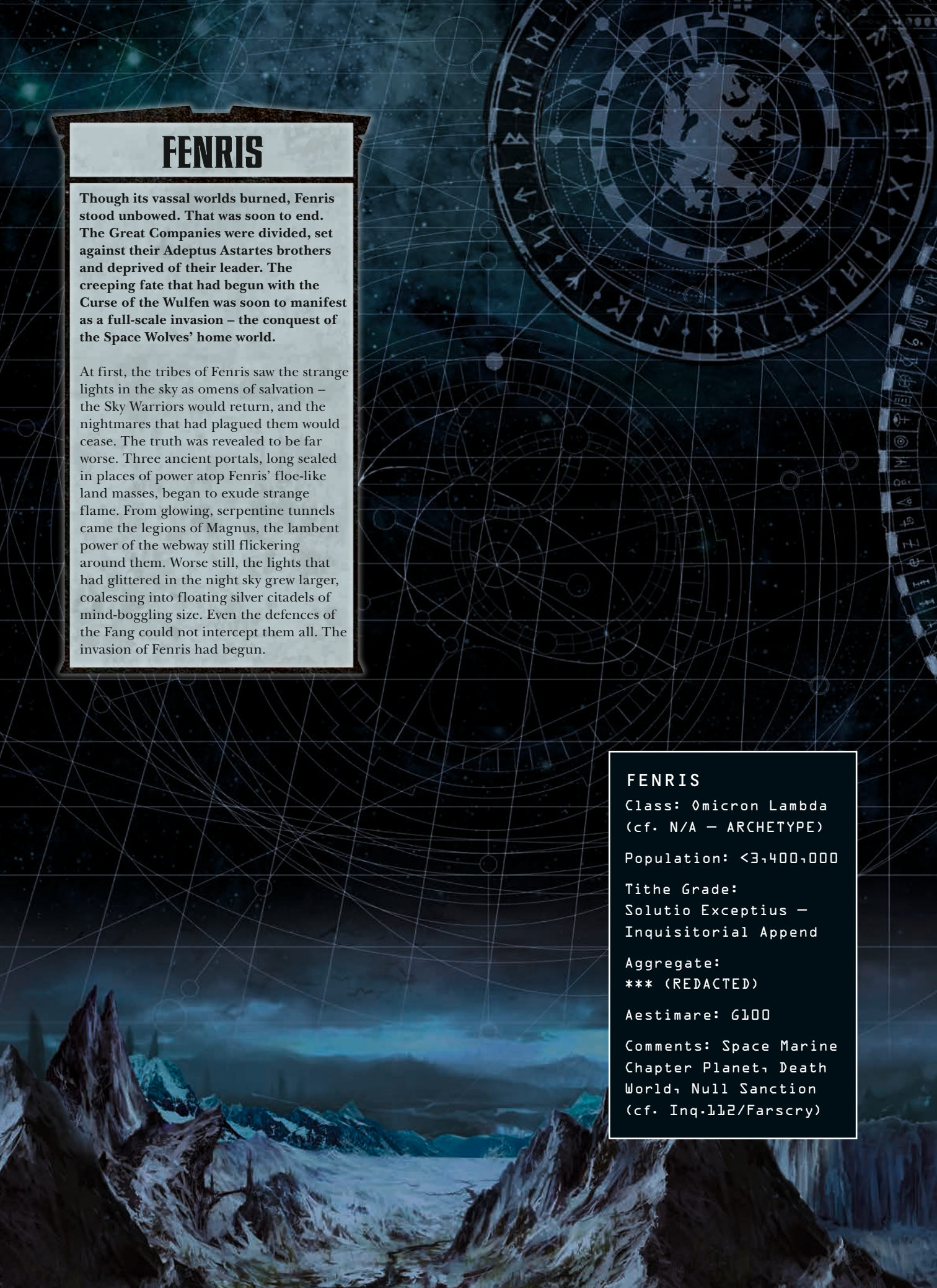
Comments: Megapelagic fauna, fleet-harvested (primitive vessels)



FENRIS

Though its vassal worlds burned, Fenris stood unbowed. That was soon to end. The Great Companies were divided, set against their Adeptus Astartes brothers and deprived of their leader. The creeping fate that had begun with the Curse of the Wulfen was soon to manifest as a full-scale invasion – the conquest of the Space Wolves' home world.

At first, the tribes of Fenris saw the strange lights in the sky as omens of salvation – the Sky Warriors would return, and the nightmares that had plagued them would cease. The truth was revealed to be far worse. Three ancient portals, long sealed in places of power atop Fenris' floe-like land masses, began to exude strange flame. From glowing, serpentine tunnels came the legions of Magnus, the lambent power of the webway still flickering around them. Worse still, the lights that had glittered in the night sky grew larger, coalescing into floating silver citadels of mind-boggling size. Even the defences of the Fang could not intercept them all. The invasion of Fenris had begun.



FENRIS

Class: Omicron Lambda (cf. N/A – ARCHETYPE)

Population: <3,400,000

Tithe Grade: Solutio Exceptius – Inquisitorial Append

Aggregate: *** (REDACTED)

Aestimare: G100

Comments: Space Marine Chapter Planet, Death World, Null Sanction (cf. Inq.112/Farscry)



SILVER TOWERS OF TZEENTCH

Colossal in size and staggering in their complexity, the Silver Towers scar the minds of all who look upon them. They are the citadels and spires of ancient Prospero, torn free by sorcery – but at the same time they are fragments of Tzeentch's Crystal Labyrinth, bequeathed unto his most devious servants so they might spread his chaotic influence in realspace.

The enchanted Silver Towers float through the skies, arcane lightning playing around the strange structures at their base. Oppressive and maddening to behold, they are the strongholds of Magnus' chosen. Many are studded with deadly cannons and arcane guns. Yet they are not bound to a single locale, nor a single dimension – the master of each tower simply has to will his fortress to move, and it floats eerily through reality at his bidding. The appearance of one Silver Tower is enough to spell doom for a civilised world. Upon Fenris, no less than nine of these surreal fortifications descended from space, each aligned with a site of geomantic power. The great work had begun.



THE DESOLATION OF MIDGARDIA

The cursed realm of Midgardia, infested with the minions of Nurgle and corrupted by the diabolical schemes of the Daemon Tetrarchs, was the site of a brutal counter-attack from the Great Companies of Egil Iron Wolf and Logan Grimnar himself. Mighty though their armies were, the blighted planet took a heavy toll.

Midgardia is a world covered in fungal vegetation so toxic its populace has largely been forced to live within the planet's crust. The world has a long history of calamity, but the hardships of everyday life there have made for a people tough in body and soul, further hardened by endless toil in medifactorums and armoursmith complexes. There are fortified hives and orbital defences upon Midgardia's surface – including the nova cannon battery Emperor's Judgement – but the vast majority of its worker-tribes dwell in subterranean habs, nodes of industry amongst the strange walkway cities that hang amongst the roots of the world. The Midgardians are no strangers to fire and brimstone, for in places their dwellings hang over the magma that flows through the planet's crust. When the daemonic infestation struck their planet, the worker-citizens were plunged into a nightmare that would seal their fates.

The first catastrophe to befall Midgardia was vile and inescapable, perhaps the worst of all the many dooms the Dark Gods visited upon the worlds under the guardianship of Fenris. Warp rifts had been opened across the system by the rituals of the Alpha Legion, and the most vital worlds and planetoids had been claimed by one of the Ruinous Powers. Midgardia, being both fertile and toxic at the same time, was highly prized by Grandfather Nurgle. As Warp storms roiled under the Wolf's Eye, the neighbouring planet to Fenris was quickly infested by contagions so virulent they turned Midgardia's jungles into landscapes reminiscent of Nurgle's Garden.

Midgardia had once been second only in importance to Fenris in terms of military power, and Logan Grimnar himself had resolved to excise that which was corrupting it. He led his fabled Champions of Fenris and their Wulfen brothers directly into the planet's underworld, seeking to hunt down the daemonic force behind the infestation. Meanwhile, the armies of Egil Iron Wolf took war to Midgardia's surface. Egil's Great Company started with the noblest of intentions, his strategy to locate and slay the Daemon warlord at the heart of the invasion. The Ironwolves were, in theory, ideally suited to the task, for they were experts in armoured warfare and invariably went to battle in great tank formations. The steel and adamantium of their Spear of Russ armoured columns safeguarded their occupants from the worst of the supernatural diseases that festered in the muck, just as their ceramite armour protected them from the pus-weeping blades of the Daemons they engaged at close quarters.

Making planetfall at the Magma Gates – a group of hive cities that formed the entrance to the planet's underworld – the Ironwolves and the armoured elements of Grimnar's own company made swift gains. Each tank wedge proved powerful enough to bully a path through the corrupted foliage of Midgardia whilst blasting apart the plague-bearing hordes lurking in its spore-thickened mist. The Daemons haunting the fungal forests around the hive cities were destroyed in an overlapping kill-storm, a strike so savage it gave credence to the Old Wolf's claims that Midgardia could still be saved.

Before too long, however, the tables had turned. It was not the fungi of Midgardia nor the Daemon invaders that saw Egil Iron Wolf's counter-invasion falter, but the thick layer of muck that smothered the planet's surface. The endless quagmire took a slow but irresistible toll, bogging down even the most aggressive of the Great Company's tanks. One after another the Spears of Russ ground to a halt. Worse, the corrupted spore-mists had thickened to the point they ate through the joints of even the most finely wrought power armour. What had started as a lightning-fast attack was beginning to fall into crippling stasis. For every minute the Ironwolves spent grinding into the slop, yet more plague Daemons converged on their position. Many a proud Fenrisian met a repulsive end in that foetid morass. More ominous still, the warriors had lost contact with Logan Grimnar's strike force altogether. The last communication from the Great Wolf's position had been a deafening rumble.



Egil Iron Wolf was unwilling to abandon his king. After ascertaining there was an access tunnel to the Midgardian underworld relatively close to their position, Egil ceded command to his battle leader, Conran, and led a recovery expedition of his closest warriors in search of the Great Wolf. Even as Egil departed, Conran made a set of quick assessments, and came to a grave conclusion. He inserted a rune-carved dataspike into the cybernetic implants at the back of his head, his attendant servo-skull chattering out a complex litany of binharic cant. Upon the bridge of Egil's flagship, the *Wolftide*, a silver-inlaid skull did the same. Conran's decision was as brave as it was bold – he had ordered a localised orbital barrage upon his own position.

Megatonnes of ordnance rained from the skies even as Conran's warriors embarked upon their thick-hulled transports, their vehicles rendered little more than gun bunkers by grasping tendrils and sucking bogs. The Daemons they had fought amongst the swamps were hard on their heels, but the scions of Nurgle have never been known for their quickness. Though the straggling Ironwolves caught in the mire were pulled down and slain, the vast majority broke off the combat in good

order. No sooner had the Space Wolves regained their beleaguered vehicles than the ground shook with the power of the orbital barrage. The accuracy of the orbital strike was a testament not only to Conran's excellent judgement, but also his sense of timing. Rhinos, Land Raiders and Razorbacks were rocked on their suspensions by the mind-numbing violence of each explosion, but although many an armoured hide was deeply scarred, only five of the vehicles were rendered inoperable. As the barrage tracked through the jungle, two of the stricken tanks were brought back to fighting strength by the ministrations of the strike force's Iron Priests. Undaunted, the Space Wolves fought onwards.

The same could not be said for the Daemons of Nurgle. The pustulant creatures that were drawing the Ironwolves into the sickening embrace of the Plague God felt no need to armour themselves against the hazards of Midgardia – disease and infection were meat and drink to them, and the fronds of the polluted jungle caressed them like favoured pets. Though their hides were tough, they were nothing next to the kinetic storm that broke upon them.

Warheads built to shatter bunker complexes blasted huge steaming craters in the jungle, each killing scores of Daemons in an instant. Scything shrapnel whipped out in a thousand directions at once, ricocheting harmlessly from the armoured flanks of the Space Wolves vehicles but messily eviscerating the Warp-spawned tallymen that pressed in around them. Blistering walls of flame scoured clean the shattered landscape over and over again, burning away those Daemons that had somehow survived the killing force of the initial barrage. Perhaps most vital of all the barrage's effects was the evaporation of the sludge that held the tank columns fast; around the Ironwolves the landscape turned instantly to steam and hard-burnt earth where viscous muck once oozed.

Freed from Midgardia's cloying grip at last, the Spears of Russ gave thanks to their feral machine spirits and ground steadily out of the trap that had closed around them. Though swarms of Plague Drones descended to intercept them and gambolling Beasts of Nurgle burst from fungus copses to bound pell-mell at the armoured column, the Ironwolves would not be stopped. Pinpoint fire from the godhammer-pattern lascannons of Land Raiders worked in concert with thunderous blasts from Vindicator tanks, putting paid to those Daemons not already blasted to clouds of foul-smelling mist by the rolling barrage from *Wolftide* and its kin. Within the hour, Conran's vehicular packs were safely within the Magma Gates. For his part, Egil Iron Wolf was already underground. His mission was no longer one of eradication, but of salvation. For Fenris to weather the storm breaking upon it, Logan Grimnar and his Kingsguard must be found.



Though Egil and his Ironwolves feared them lost, the High King of Fenris and his warriors were still fighting tooth and nail against the forces of Chaos. They had found the makers of Midgardia's downfall in the depths of the planet's caverns. Their determined push through to the reaches of the undercity Deepspark saw them fight through countless lesser Daemons, only to drive straight into an ambush set by their masters. Not one but four Daemon Princes had they fought in that dark and claustrophobic underworld, each bringing an army of fiends against Logan and his warriors. To bind four such disparate warlords in a single cause was a rare feat indeed, but behind their alliance was Magnus the Red, and few in the Eye of Terror dared gainsay a Daemon Primarch. Magnus' plan was to bury the Great Wolf, removing him from the grand game they were playing for Fenris. No glorious warrior's death for the master of the Space Wolves; just thousands of tonnes of rock to crush him like an insect.

The daemonic masters of misrule working under Magnus' command had engaged Grimnar and his warriors in person. For a while, it seemed they would triumph. But even the favoured of the Chaos Gods find the Space Wolves hard targets. Through heroism, cunning and bloody-mindedness, the Kingsguard and their Wulfen allies fought back, cutting down the foe with blade, hammer and claw.

Though several of their most trusted companions died in the fight, the Kingsguard and their lupine kin overcame the ambushing armies. And then, at a keening signal, the Daemon Princes and their vassals simply vanished.

The trap was sprung. With an ear-shattering boom, the sudden aetheric shock wave caused by the Daemons' departure saw the roof of the war-torn cavern come crashing down. Grimnar hurled himself protectively over the prone body of a fallen Wulfen, many of his Kingsguard doing likewise, for they knew that without Terminator armour to protect them their kin would surely perish. Down the rocks came, hundreds of tonnes collapsing in at once. In places the cavern's roof held, and many of the strike force survived, albeit trapped in choking darkness. Logan himself was pinned under a massive stalactite, wounded but alive. Many of his finest warriors met the end of their sagas that day, crushed to death even though they wore the finest armour available to their Chapter. Without aid, and with the sheer depth of rock rendering them impossible to reach via long-range comms, the Champions of Fenris had been buried alive.

Seven miles south of the Magma Gates, Egil Iron Wolf had left his tanks behind in order to lead a detachment of his finest warriors into the Midgardian underworld.



His journey through the tunnels and walkways saw many a civilian dart furtively into the shadows, for despite the hellish fate visited upon it, the planet still harboured many millions of men, women and children. Some of these natives saw Egil Iron Wolf as a warrior from legend, kneeling before him as he passed. Others cowered, afraid that this cog-toothed brute was there to put them down for the crime of cowardice. He ignored them all. The Great Wolf was lost, and it was up to the Ironwolves to find him.

Deeper and deeper the Space Wolves delved, fighting diseased horrors, chortling plague heralds, and repulsive Daemon flies. As they plumbed the lower depths, their company was relieved beyond measure to make contact with outlying elements of the Champions of Fenris. Before they could properly consolidate their forces, they were ambushed by a segmented plague wyrm the size of a mag-train. The monstrosity took a horrible toll before it was blown apart from the inside by a well-placed grenade. Warriors were laid low by dismemberment and contagion, but united they pressed on. At one juncture they passed through the site of a fierce battle, including the gilded wolf's skull that formed the crown of Grimnar's prized Terminator armour. Invigorated, they increased their pace.

Midgardia's interior was a labyrinth; many of its passageways had been blocked by fallen rocks, and the Ironwolves had not the time to comb every last tunnel for signs of the High King of Fenris. Still he remained missing. With great reluctance, Egil announced he would return to the surface of Midgardia. He was straying to the very limit of vox contact, and had heard disturbing fragments of a distress call from his men high above. What he found upon his return shocked him far more than the sight of any Daemon.



Midgardia's surface had been scoured by the flames of Exterminatus. From the spires of the Magma Gates, Lord Iron Wolf saw nothing but ash stretching away to the distant horizon. The world had been enveloped by a conflagration so fierce that no living thing could survive it, be it man or Daemon. All that remained of the once-foetid landscape was an ocean of grey dunes, stubs of burned trees jutting out amongst a red-hot gale of embers. No normal fleet could have brought such world-killing wrath in so short a time; this was the work of the lords of the Imperium, swift and merciless beyond measure. Countless innocent hivers would have burned alive alongside the Daemons the inferno had been sent to slay.

The Iron Wolf grimly ran his calculations, concluding there was only a small chance of their escaping the planet alive if they tarried long in the wake of the Exterminatus. He called upon his own fleet assets once more, insertion craft answering his summons to bear his strike force off planet at speed. In doing so he learned in full of the massive Imperial fleet that had entered Fenrisian space with the intent of burning the Chaos taint from every world it had touched.

At that fleet's heart was the Rock. The masters of that impossibly vast craft had rained fire upon Midgardia when the Space Wolves had still been present, but more importantly, had consigned millions of the Fenris System's civilians to a horrifying death without trial.

Incensed beyond measure, Egil sent a vox-summons to the Dark Angels fortress monastery, demanding his views be heard. It was refused. So it was that Egil ordered his gunners to open fire on the nearest of the Dark Angels fleet. He intended the volley to force a communication rather than to cause significant damage – and as Lord Iron Wolf had calculated, its impact was dissipated by its target's void shields. Even so, the decision to open fire upon Astartes craft would live on in the annals of the Fang and the Rock alike. It was an act of defiance that would stand as a blemish upon the honour of Egil Iron Wolf forever more.

Unable to ignore this act of outright hostility, the Rock opened its comms channels to the aetheric summons from Egil's fleet, intending to level the most stringent of punitive terms. Vox Seneschal Mendaxis, still in actuality the Changeling, did his best to fan the flames between the outraged Wolf Lord and the Grand Masters of the Dark Angels, and many a shot was fired across the bows of another. Yet the bonds of brotherhood between the warriors of the Adeptus Astartes are not easily put aside. As the realisation of their deeds sank in, the officers of each fleet considered backing down by ordering a ceasefire.

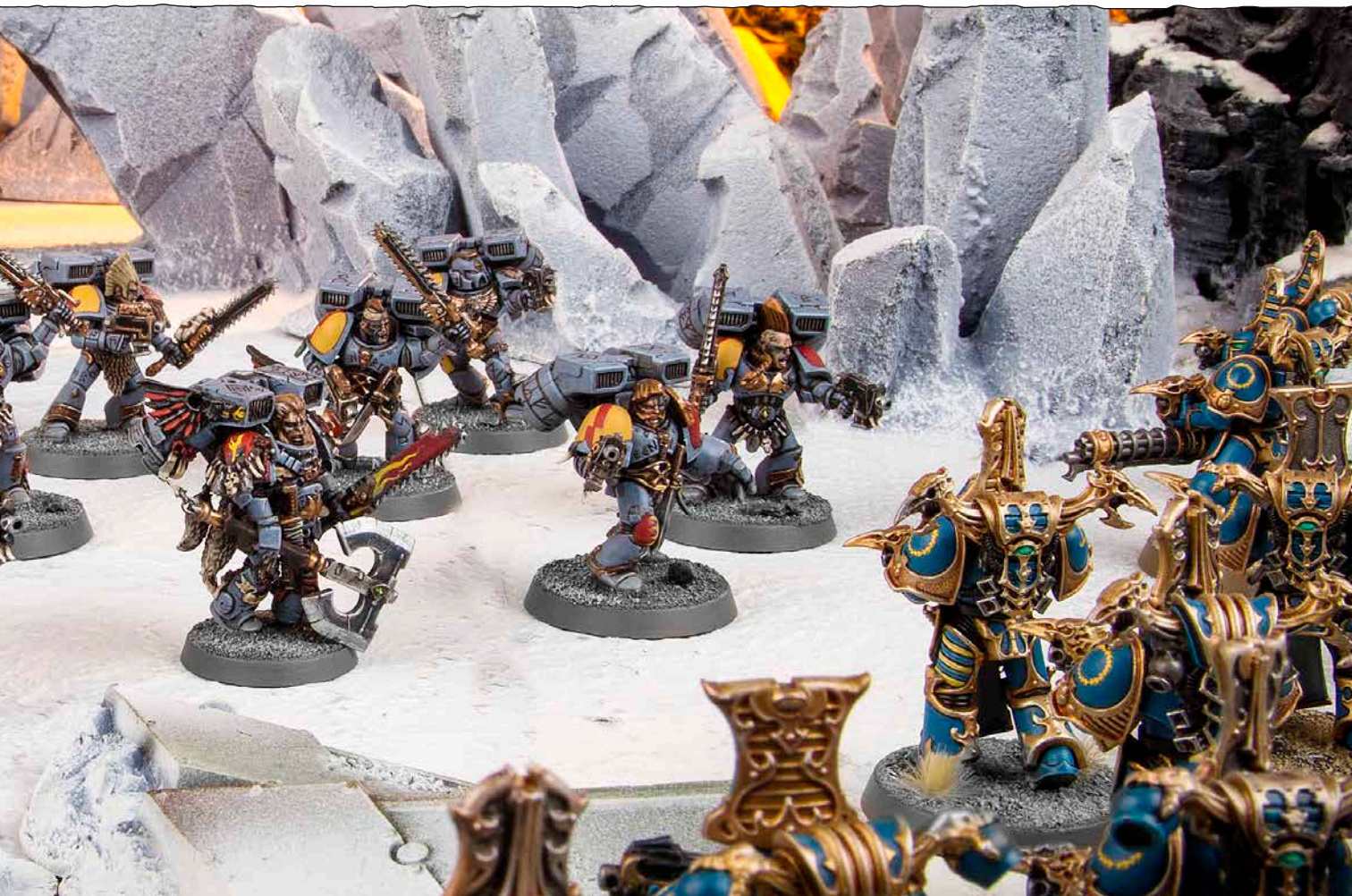
It was Conran's questions about the missing High King of Fenris that poured cold water upon the fires of Egil's wrath. It was common knowledge that the Space Wolves preferred not to teleport, and the depth at which Grimnar was buried made an imprecise rematerialisation risky in the extreme, but was there truly no way the Sons of Russ could retrieve him? The Iron Wolf shut off his communiqué with the Rock, focusing his efforts on recovery. Once his strategic duties as Wolf Lord had been attended to in person, Egil enacted a tactical solution of impressive insight. He took the gilded wolf skull that had been the capstone of Grimnar's armour to his advisors. Rune Priests and Iron Priests alike lit tallow candles around a rune-caller's sigil, and the skull was placed in the heart of the rite's symbol, the better for the soul within to be awakened.

Slowly, with incredible patience, the priests of Egil's brotherhood coaxed the spirit of that once-proud lupine into their psy-commune. The soul-beast was irascible and fierce, but once placated with offerings of bloodmist and rune-inscribed amber, it gave them its grudging attention. The spirit knew that it had been severed from the one it called alpha, the only soul to have dominion over it. On some level it could feel the keening of its master's soul – as well as the machine spirit of that great suit of Terminator armour from which it had been torn. By following the silvered thread of energy between the broken crown and its owner, the Rune Priest Svalgar hoped to pinpoint Grimnar's whereabouts beneath the burning surface of Midgardia.






FENRIS







THE WOLFTIME DRAWS NIGH

The omens that spoke of Fenris' future were dark indeed. Here the malefic genius of Magnus had been wrought large – the worlds under the ward of the Space Wolves were burning, and their allies had been turned against them to the point of open violence. There was worse to come, for the Sons of Russ had yet to experience the full extent of Magnus' plans.

The skies of Fenris were ablaze.

All across the planet, glimmering lights that savage tribesmen had taken as omens of salvation grew larger and more menacing. Slowly they resolved into jagged, spined shapes. Upon their upper planes, twisting walkways and spiralling towers gave the impression of some wondrous magisterial visitation, but the cannons cresting the lower ramparts were those of a fortress built only for war. The Silver Towers of Tzeentch descended, and they brought with them the bane of wolves.

The Changeling had sown disharmony and confusion throughout Imperial high command, his gambit culminating in the searing bombardment of Midgardia. Magnus, watching from his tower in the Warp, had found the spectacle most pleasing. However, for Magnus' full ambition to become a reality, the Sons of Russ could not meet their demise in so simple and impersonal a fashion as orbital eradication. Not even the ultimate betrayal of Exterminatus would suffice. For the grand ritual he had set in motion to succeed, events had to mirror those of Prospero's last days as closely as possible.

Psychic impulses soared from Magnus' immortal psyche, each imparted vision spurring a Sorcerer or agent of Chaos to enact the next phase of his interlocking, millennia-old plan for the doom of Fenris. Many of the sovereign domains of Russ had been the target of orbital barrages from those they once considered allies, the peoples that made their home amongst them all but atomised by the violence of the strikes levelled upon them. With the defenders of those beleaguered orbs reeling in the sudden maelstrom inflicted upon them, these planets and moons would be easy prey for the legions of executioners descending upon them, each invader ready to finish the job with bolt and blade. It was a familiar tale to those who survived the razing of Prospero – though this time the Space Wolves were the victims rather than the perpetrators.

Upon Asaheim, the colossal fortress of the Fang rose above the plateau to pierce the pregnant clouds above. Second only in size and power to the Emperor's Palace on Terra, it was built to house a Space Marine Legion at the height of its strength. Defence lasers and macro cannons jutted from towers like the smaller peaks on the shoulders of a soaring mountain; so tall was this colossal edifice that around its uppermost spires the lights of docking spacecraft could be seen. A more potent defence against orbital attack it was hard to imagine. But the fortress monastery could not cover every corner of Fenris with its gaze, no matter its might, and the eyes of its sentinels were upon the Imperial fleet that had bombarded Midgardia scant hours ago.

Magnus had felt the Fang's bite before, and was in no hurry to do so again. The Crimson King instead ordered his shattered Legion not to approach Asaheim directly, but to make planetfall over the vast ice floes locked together by the Fenrisian Helwinter. One by one the Silver Towers of the Thousand Sons descended from outer space, floating down from the Warp rifts torn in the Fenris System like knives falling point-first into a frozen sea. Some hung in orbit around Fenris, whilst others slid silently through the clouds on the far side of the planet from the Fang, approaching their ultimate destination obliquely and concealed from every manner of scrying device by potent shadow-magicks.

In the most desolate regions of Fenris, the masters of these vast towers conjured storms of aetheric energy that whipped snow and ice into whirling hurricanes around them, further hiding their magnificence from the scryer-corvids of the Fang. In the eye of each storm, the Silver Towers glided in stately silence towards set geomantic points, convergences of natural ley lines where the energies of the death world raged fiercest.

Each Tzeentchian tower held so much eldritch power that the ground was wracked with change at its passage. As the Tower of Acazept the Ingrate swept past, permafrost melted and turned to blood as if Fenris itself was wounded by its presence. In the shadow of the Balegate Citadel, brimstone flames caught above the virgin snow to crackle and dance, given daemonic life to caper in the tower's wake. Around the Fortress of Paradox, squalls of copper-hued rain turned tribesmen and ice mammoths alike into weightless ebony statues that floated slowly upwards, levitating ever higher until they drifted off into space.

Though the Thousand Sons had taken pains to descend beyond the Fang's reach, an invasion of such immense magnitude could not go unnoticed. Rune Priests cast their stones, each reading direr than the last. A terrible doom had come to the Fenris System; in the readings of the Astropaths and Inquisitors of the Imperial fleet, the Emperor's Tarot showed the serpent of flame yawning wide to consume every mortal land. The fabled Last Saga, when all things would meet a violent end, was unfolding before their eyes.

The Wolftime was upon them.

It was Harald Deathwolf who hunted down the first of the Silver Towers, at that time hovering above the immense Yrokja Glacier. Lord Deathwolf had recently returned from Svellgard with the Firehowlers after combining forces not only with Bran Redmaw, but also with the Iron Hands, Shadow Haunters and Ultramarines in the banishment of the Daemon hordes that sought to conquer the islands of that oceanic realm. Whilst mustering with several of his fellow Wolf Lords within the Fang, Lord Deathwolf was hailed with such urgency his vassal Astropath went into a spasming frenzy. Once the psyker had been bathed in sanctified oils and calmed enough to relay the message, he

spoke in quavering tones of the awful truth imparted to him by the Grey Knights that had mind-scried the planet from orbit. The forces of the Great Enemy had somehow gained the ice floes of the southern continents. They were slaughtering or abducting every mortal tribe they could find. Though the Grey Knights were making haste to reach the planet, only the Space Wolves stood a chance of intercepting the invaders before the people of the southern floes met a grisly end.

Harald's deep growl grew louder. These ancient traitors that dared trespass upon Fenris had to be tracked down and slain, their corpses left for ice trolls, wolf packs and carrion crows to devour. For the Deathwolves to attack directly would have been to forgo their greatest asset – the raw cunning of the hunter. A frontal assault was not their way. Instead Lord Deathwolf proposed that honour should go to Sven Bloodhowl; his Great Company boasted so many jump pack troops that a skyborne assault upon the flanks of a Silver Tower was quite feasible, and his battle-hungry warriors certainly had the temperament for it. When the telepath's missive carrying Harald's proposal reached him, Lord Bloodhowl scowled, but did not shirk from the idea. Time was of the essence, especially with the tribes of the Yrokja Peaks in such imminent jeopardy.

Mounted in Thunderhawk and Stormwolf Gunships, Harald and Sven's Great Companies made haste through the mounting blizzards towards the realm of Yrokja. They headed for the mountain range the Deathwolves' Astropath had seen in his vision. Harald's hunter instincts were strong, and he peeled off as they approached to encircle the prey.

Sure enough, something shimmered in the far distance between the second and third peaks; a swirl of kaleidoscopic colour woven around the invading fortress like loose wool around a silver spindle.

No sooner had they laid eyes upon the strange apparition than distant cannons boomed. No iron shot soared towards them, but searingly bright spheres of pink flame. Those gunships too slow to evade were hit, swathed in strangely coloured fires. Some dived low into the blizzard and effected a controlled crash landing, the icy bite of Fenris saving those inside the stricken vehicles from being burned alive. Others were not so lucky. Their gunships were torn apart in mid-air as if by the hands of some invisible giant. Chunks of wreckage and mutilated bodies were scattered across pristine ice, but the survivors did not slow, for Sven was a firm believer that attack was the best form of defence.

Just as the Wolf Lords had foreseen, the strength of the invaders was not confined to the strange citadel in the distance. As the blizzard howled and swirled, those Space Wolves who had crawled dazed from the wreckage of their gunships peered into the middle distance. Their senses were so sharp they could see armoured figures stalking through the knifing sleet, the oncomers moving as if the storm were no more than a summer breeze. Every one of the figures approaching them was clad in the tall-helmeted and baroque armour of the Thousand Sons.

The war-howl went up, long and threatening. Grey Hunters raised bolters to their shoulders even as Blood Claws and Lone Wolves raced into the swirling snows with chainswords revving. A vendetta ten thousand years in the making was about to be reignited.





The gunships of the two Great Companies soared at top speed through the blizzard towards the storm-blurred Tower of Acazept ahead. Their engines roared like beasts on the hunt as they bulled through the tempest. Thunderhawks sent laser beams as thick as a man's thigh stabbing out from their dorsal cannons, each shot aimed to tear down a spire of the hovering fortress. The volley was to no avail – the shots dissipated into fractal-edged deltas of energy as they struck the tower's strange force shields.

In return, spiralling bolts of light speared through the snows from the arcane cannons of the Silver Tower, but wherever the kinetic bolts would have smashed into an oncoming craft, the storm buffeted the gunship aside at the last second. It seemed like Sven Bloodhowl's reckless assault had a chance of succeeding after all.

Through the storm came shoals of darting, swooping creatures, Daemons that flew in close to fasten their lamprey maws upon those gunships they could catch. Many were sent spinning from the skies by the thumping heavy bolters of Thunderhawks or the sub-zero beams of helfrost cannons. Those that reached their targets gnawed through hull and wing with the incandescent energies roiling from their gullets. More and more of the horrible creatures arced in, each shoal pouring out from a distant opening in the Silver Tower. For those Space Wolves engaging the Thousand Sons on the hard-packed snow below, it seemed the gunship assault disappeared from sight in a cloud of fanged sky-sharks. There was no way the craft could fire upon the creatures swarming around them without risking hitting the ships of their battle-brothers. The attack was all but over before it had begun.

Up ahead, sleek black shapes dived near-vertical from the storm. For a moment they seemed like giant ravens sent by the Emperor himself. Then they opened fire, assault cannon rounds and streaking missiles reaping a heavy toll from the Daemons swooping in towards the fray. Dark Angels, by their iconography, unbidden and unheralded, but welcome nonetheless. Something strange was in their midst, a craft with an underslung cannon that glowed eerily in the white hurricane around it. With a jetfighter on each wing, it flew in close to the Space Wolves gunships struggling to remain airborne under the weight of the daemonic attack. The craft's glowing rift cannon flared, and a dozen Daemons were banished back to the Warp in the blink of an eye. The cannon flared again, and the gunships suddenly found themselves free of their attackers, their slow and lethal descent reversed into a tooth-rattling climb as the cliff-like sides of the Silver Tower loomed through the blizzard.

Howling in battle-rage, the Skyclaws of Lord Bloodhowl's company slammed open the doors of their gunship transports and threw themselves into turbine-powered leaps. In a matter of moments they had gained the citadel's rocky sides. Even those craft fatally stricken by the Daemons' attack came in as close as they were able, their passengers' jump packs closing the gap. Sven himself led the attack, crunching onto a near-vertical escarpment and burying his axe, Frostclaw, in the rock for purchase before kicking himself over an ornate battlement with a cry of triumph.

They were met by creatures from a madman's nightmare.

Sven and his vanguard had been anticipating a fierce counter-attack, but from traitor legionaries, methodical and cold. The cawing warherd of Tzaangors that poured out of the Silver Tower's flanks was anything but. A riot of avian mutants charged in, so many of the fell things attacking at once that the volley of autopistol shots and storm of slashing chainswords saw several of Bloodhowl's Wolf Guard bowled over the ramparts before they could land a single blow.

Behind the bestial garrison came Acazept of the Sectai, a tall, armoured figure borne aloft on a spinning disc. The invisible bolts of force that hurtled from the telekine's fingers turned Skyclaws to pulp wherever they struck home. As Sven himself pushed forwards, axe and chainsword cutting through the beastmen in devastating sweeps, the Space Wolves began to make ground.

A Thunderhawk roared from the storm, guns spitting death; its hull was not the cold blue-grey of Fenris but the deep green of the Dark Angels Chapter. Moments later a strike force of robed Space Marines slammed into the flank of the milling Tzaangor attack, turning a close-fought press into a massacre. In seconds the flagstones of the Silver Tower were slick with blood, potent Adeptus Astartes vitae mingling with the unclean fluids of the citadel's Tzaangor denizens.



Chanting in a deep monotone, the disc-riding Lord Acazept brought his staff around in a slow horizontal sweep. A tremendous invisible force pushed against the attacking Space Marines and defending beastmen alike. Sven gritted his teeth and leaned hard, his jump pack Longbound howling in protest, but it was no use. He was hurled from the battlements along with his vanguard, the Tzaangors sent flailing from the ramparts alongside them until only the Sorcerer remained. His bestial minions fell, their bodies breaking on the rocky fringe of the Silver Tower or plummeting down onto hard ice below. Sven's Firehowlers were not so easily slain. They steadied their downward flight with blasts from their jump packs, several catching the Dark Angels that would otherwise have died upon the rocky ice and hurling them into nearby snowdrifts to break their fall. The Space Marines landed on the arctic landscape with the loss of only a few battle-brothers, but the impetus of their assault was spent. Already Acazept's Silver Tower was passing overhead.

Yet the battle was far from over. The howls of Sven's battle-brothers could be heard in the middle distance, and the figures coalescing in the blizzard ahead had the unmistakable silhouettes of the Rubricae, most cursed and indomitable of the Space Wolves' foes.

No sooner had the shouts of alarm gone up, than those closest to the Thousand Sons were punched off their feet by a volley of fire.

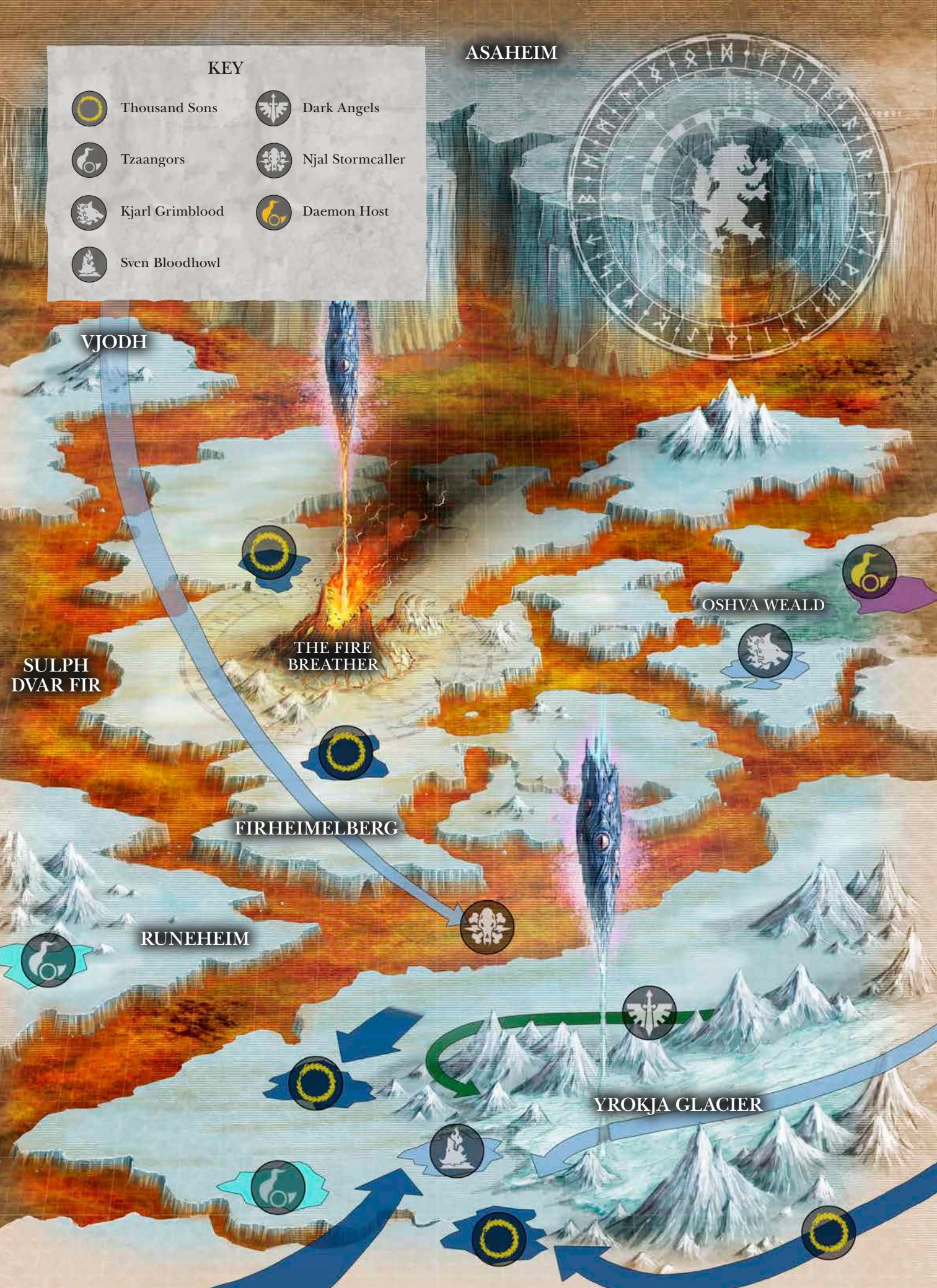
To be struck by a bolt round is to feel a tremendous impact immediately followed by a flesh-tearing explosion. The thrice-blessed battle-plate of the Adeptus Astartes can save the target from a spectacularly gory death, but against the ensorcelled projectiles of the Thousand Sons, even power armour is little use. The headstrong Skyclaws at the front of the attack were hit squarely by bolts burning with such intense flame their ceramite – along with the flesh and bone behind – simply melted away. One, then three, then nine Space Marines fell back into the snow, blood steaming in great measure from their corpses. Their traitorous killers strode forwards without changing pace, as unhurried as if they were systematically killing vermin rather than slaying their ancient foes.

Those Firehowlers still standing triggered their jump packs and hurtled forward, the storm's gale-force winds behind them lending extra speed. They smashed into the Rubricae with battering-ram force, the impact enough to knock down a fortress gate. Many of the Thousands Sons were hurled to the ground, though to Sven's warriors it was as though they had impacted with adamantium statues. Those Chaos Space Marines that were spared the brunt of that initial thunderous impact took not one step back, nor did they so much as flinch. Bolt pistols barked, and several of the eldritch dust-golems toppled backwards, but it was not enough. Then the blazing volleys began once more, and the Firehowlers' attack was broken for good.

Sven Bloodhowl fought with every iota of strength he had left; there was no way he would fall to these emotionless traitors on his own favoured hunting grounds. His chainsword Firefang swung and stabbed, gnawing and sparking, but against the baroque armour of his foes it caused little true harm. His double-headed power axe sang a different tune. Where its energised blade struck home it cleaved gaping rents with glowing red edges in the battle-plate of the Rubricae. There was nothing inside those ceramite husks, however, but swirls of ochre dust that were swiftly tugged away and devoured by the storm.

Lord Bloodhowl growled at the sight, his gorge rising at the thought of these unnatural creatures walking free upon Fenris. There were more of them coming through the storm; more, in fact, than the Great Company could hope to defeat. Perhaps the Deathwolves had failed, and the scions of Magnus had ambushed them in turn.

Sven gave a long cry of frustration and anger, smashing another traitor into the snow. He would be damned if he joined the Allfather now, so soon after the battles on Svellgard. He was determined to exact as great a toll as possible before his saga reached its bloody conclusion. For a moment, it seemed as if the storm howled in answer.


KEY
Thousand Sons
Dark Angels
Tzaangors
Njal Stormcaller
Kjarl Grimblood
Daemon Host
Sven Bloodhowl
ASAHEIM
VJODH
OSHVA WEALD
THE FIRE BREATHER
SULPH DVAR FIR
FIRHEIMELBERG
RUNEHEIM
YROKJA GLACIER

Djurgin Calderassen, known as the Scorchpelt ever since his flamer's backwash reshaped one side of his head, still counted fire amongst his allies. But the leaping energies that were killing his pack were not true fire, and they could not be tamed.

A driving storm engulfed the base of the Yrokja Glacier, its fury that of the World Wolf roused to anger. Within it hunted the Great Company of Sven Bloodhowl. Each warrior fought with bolt, blade, tooth and claw against the Chaos-worshipping scum that had dared to invade Fenris. Djurgin's pack had struck right at the heart of the warband that had emerged from the storm, hoping to isolate and destroy their leaders. Nearby, Allaf the Bear roared loudly as one of Magnus' Sorcerers landed a blow with a gauntlet swathed in blue fire. The Space Wolf burst into flame, shrinking swiftly until he was no larger than a man's thumb – the Sorcerer ground Allaf beneath his heel before pointing his staff straight at Djurgin.

'It pains me to do this, wolf,' called out the traitor. 'I spoke to absolve your kind at the Council of Embers.'

'Liar,' shouted Djurgin. 'The Sons of Russ do not listen to the words of cowards!' The Fenrisian ducked and ran in a crouch, avoiding the serpentine bolt of energy that shot from his adversary's weapon. He fired a spear of flaming promethium in return. The Sorcerer contemptuously waved the killing fire aside with a pass of his open palm.

'There are greater wars than ours,' continued the Sorcerer. 'The perspective of aeons has relegated you to an inconvenience.'

Rubricae formed up around the spellcaster, and the din of battle seemed to slacken a little. Another sorcerous bolt sizzled in; this time Djurgin had to dive to the ice, skidding to an ungainly halt in a snow bank. He realised with a heart-pounding lurch that he was the last of his pack alive. A creeping suspicion needled at his soul that the Firehowlers had finally met their match.

Something huge passed overhead. Djurgin flinched, fearing a silvered citadel, then grinned fiercely as he saw the underbelly of a Thunderhawk. He saw the gunship bank around, its metallic jaws open. A regal figure was framed in its maw. The newcomer too had a staff, glowing blue as the runes along its length channelled the elemental power of Fenris itself.

The Stormcaller had come.

Chain lightning shot down from high above, smashing the Sorcerer into the pack ice even as he summoned another fireball. Electricity leapt from foe to foe like a hungry beast in search of meat. One by one the Rubricae fell, inert and lifeless. The storm roared, intensifying as Njal's command of the blizzard forced the enemy slowly backward. Djurgin felt the urge to burn and slay as the beast in his soul reared once more, but saved his promethium. There was no way his flames could survive with the master of the tempest so close.

Though the Stormcaller's intervention had undoubtedly saved Djurgin's life, he could see the azure armour of dozens more Thousand Sons emerging from the white haze of the storm. So be it, he thought, drawing his combat knife. He would fight as a Lone Wolf, avenging his pack in glory before the end.

The blizzard's howl rose in pitch, sounding to Djurgin like the baying of a hundred packs. The voices of Morkai's spectral kin, perhaps, welcoming him to the afterlife of the damned.

Then realisation hit, and he turned around.



Lord Harald Deathwolf was riding hard down the face of the Yrokja Glacier, his features set in a grimace of concentration. Behind him came his proud and bestial kin; not only his Wolf Guard atop their massive lupine mounts, but also dozens of sprinting Wulfen and hundreds of ice wolves, long-bodied and athletic. In their wake was a stampede of white-haired mastodons and frost rhinoids, a juggernaut force of nature more lethal than any avalanche. The glacier's face shook as the mountain beasts thundered pell-mell towards the battle below.

The Thousand Sons were pinned in place, fighting to stay upright against the Stormcaller's tempest. Djurgin saw scores of charging beasts sprint past him as the Deathwolves charge connected with the force of an avalanche. Here and there a lance of crackling magic or volley of inferno bolts smashed a Thunderwolf rider from his saddle, mutative energies coursing haywire. But for all their fearless resolve, the invaders were hard pressed against the fury of the charge.

As the Deathwolves charged in, powered blades swung to slash away arms still firing bolters, heavily muscled Thunderwolves sank their teeth into the necks of traitor legionaries, and Wulfen tore away limbs and helms with sheer brute strength. Behind the first wave came native lupines, the sinuous beasts burying Sorcerers in flurries of tooth and claw. Pack after pack vanished in explosions of pink fire as the Sorcerers levelled their blistering counter-attack, but there were still more to come; the rest ran past them to rip beastman thralls limb from limb.

Those of the Thousand Sons that were downed but still alive had barely begun to regain their feet before the bestial stampede hit home. Power armour that had survived millennia was cracked and split open by the sheer crushing weight of the Fenrisian herds. Njal's tempest did the rest, cruel fingers of cold driving into the compromised armour to snatch the glittering dust from inside and cast it to the winds.

Djurgin felt harsh laughter bubble up from his gut as the storm began to abate. The Thousand Sons attack was crushed and cast aside, the pack ice littered with bloodless corpses and scattered sections of power armour. Then his mirth died on his lips, a cloud casting shadow over his soul.

On the far horizon, the Silver Tower they had sought to stop was glowing like a second sun.



CHAPTER 2

THE FIRES OF FLAMEHEIT



TO POISON A DEATH WORLD

The Silver Towers, despite the counter-attacks of the Space Wolves, had proven subtle enough to evade detection – and where they were discovered, mighty enough to prevail against those that sought to stop them. Now, the gigantic citadels hovered over powerful geomantic sites, each siphoning the inherent power of Fenris for an even darker agenda.

On the third day after the Silver Towers descended, the skies roiled above Fenris. The lambent lines of the Fenryka Borealis twisted from green to orange to violent pink against the deep blue of the evening sky, looking more like writhing serpents than the lapping waves they usually resembled. Those tribesmen who looked too long upon them found strange thoughts and waking dreams invading their consciousness. Some were driven irrevocably insane by the sky-sigils they saw there, and took blades to those around them, seeing their friends, brothers, and even themselves as monsters that must be slain if the sun was to rise another day.

These cursed heavens were the backdrop against which the Sorcerers of Tzeentch wrought their works. Within the Silver Towers, blood rituals were taking place – within each inner sanctum a captive Space Wolf, bound tight in silver chain, was lowered into a cauldron of boiling gore. This was not strictly necessary for the aetheric summons the Exalted Sorcerers were performing, but the howls of outrage and despair were pleasing to their master nonetheless. For nine hours, nine minutes and nine seconds the rituals continued. A nexus of energy hung between the Silver Towers, a point of potential so destructive that reality thinned and bled pure magic around it. The skies swirled crimson as giant mouths howled the praise of the Architect of Fate; ravens and crows turned to blazing skeletons, forests screamed in pain. The Silver Towers glowed bright as stars, forming the ancient Prosperine symbol for vengeance when viewed from low orbit.

Magnus the Red burst into being above the snows, and the fate of Fenris changed forever.

The Crimson King did not arrive with dignity and poise in the manner of an Eldar prince, nor did he announce his coming with heralds and servant-squires as would an Imperial potentate. Instead he barged into the harsh air of Fenris like a charging minotaur. His horns ripped the glitch in reality wide open as he forced his titanic bulk through. A glut of daemonic celebrants spilled from the lesion behind him. The Crimson King roared his orders to the massed vassals below, who were already gathering alongside the Warp-spawned host that tumbled from the rift. Around him a blast wave of cerulean force crackled outwards, turning the snow to a landscape of crystal sand. The facets of every grain reflected an aspect of the Daemon Primarch's soul.

With three great beats of his pinions, Magnus soared aloft, revelling in his own power. The cold and virginal air he breathed in was exhaled as coloured clouds of sentient mist that wound away like ghosts, seeking mortal victims to asphyxiate at their leisure. The Primarch cast about himself, drinking in the harsh beauty of the Fenrisian wilderness with relish. Soon it would be his to corrupt, his to remake in a form more pleasing to Tzeentch.

With a nod of satisfaction, Magnus resolved to begin his true work. The last time he had walked the winterlands of Fenris, he had sought to crush his foes utterly, his intent to shatter the fortress monastery of the Space Wolves before extinguishing the Great Companies one by one. This time, his intent was far stranger and more unsettling – he had transcended simple vengeance, and in doing so left behind the notion of a purely physical victory. This time, Magnus would corrupt Fenris as part of a far greater plan.

Fenris was classified as a death world primarily because of its ferocious megafauna and the killing cold that typified its Helwinter, when the planet was furthest from the Wolf's Eye. Few realised that the opposite extreme – those times when Fenris' elliptical orbit brought it closest to its star – was just as lethal. Known to many of its peoples as Flameheit, in this season of strife the icy crust of Fenris would melt, floods and storms breaking the greater landmasses into islands afloat a tempestuous sea. The warrior people of that world, set adrift upon what holdings they could secure, warred amongst themselves for the natural resources that were left. All the while they were preyed upon not only by the giant wolves, bears and ice trolls of that realm, but also by the monsters that surged up from the depths, desperate to feed on the plentiful shoals that boomed during Flameheit.

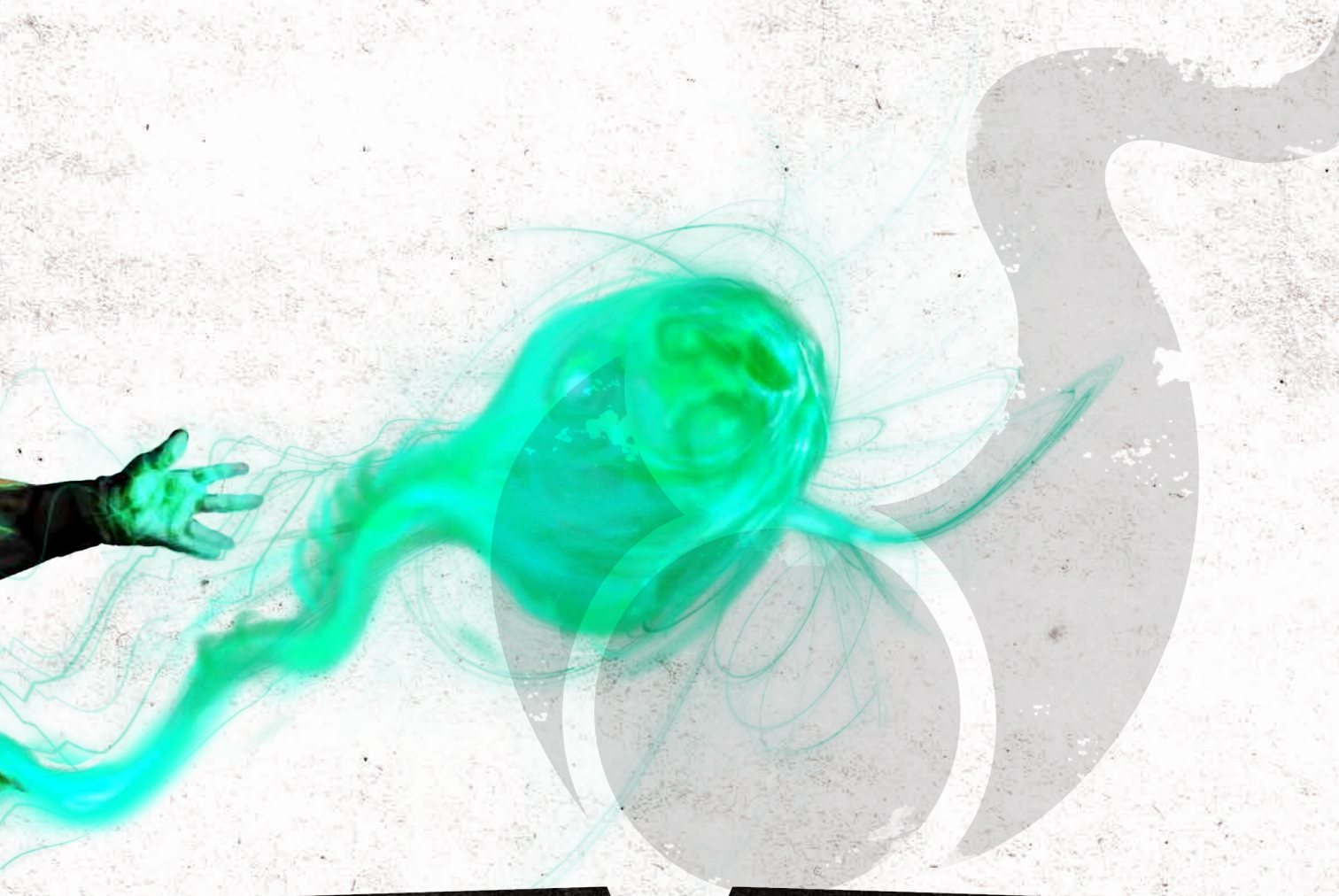
The one realm that remained whole amongst the tempests of ice and fire was Asaheim. A continent-sized plateau jutting from the landscape near the northernmost point of Fenris, Asaheim was seen by the tribes as the land of the gods, and not without reason.

There the Space Wolves made their home, descending only to draw new blood into their ranks, or to test themselves against the deadliest creatures they could find. Millennia slid past, horrific storms lashing the flanks of Asaheim with every passing year, but still it stood tall, the Fang proud upon it. The Fenrisians were strong of limb and iron of will – they had to be in order to hew a life from the harsh landscape – and therefore so were the Space Wolves created from their stock.

It was the natural strength of Fenris and its people which Magnus sought to corrupt. Asaheim's plateau was shot through with root-like tunnels that reached down to the fiery undercurrents glowing beneath the planet's crust, a near-infinite source of geothermic power that allowed a power base as colossal as the Fang to persist. There was a network of deep chasms and crevasses upon Asaheim's sprawl that led directly to that layer, known to the Sons of Russ as the World Wolf's Gullet. That secret world-fire, the hidden heart of Fenris, was the focus of Magnus' plan – but it was the works of Ahriman, most gifted of all the Thousand Sons, that would help him secure it.







AHRIMAN

No mortal man has more power over the arcane than Ahriman, Arch-Sorcerer of the Thousand Sons. Long ago, his story was one of compassion and heroism, for the psyker lord has willingly ventured along the most dangerous of paths for the betterment of his kin. Since those early days he has spent ten long millennia searching for influence enough to control his fate, and that of his brothers. In that time, he has lost his way spectacularly. Now Ahriman walks the paths of avarice and destruction, though he would rather die than admit it – even to himself.

The pursuit of knowledge is, in essence, a noble goal. One who understands the universe can theoretically change it for the good of all. Some knowledge, however, brings only strife. When Ahriman saw the gene-curse of his fellow Thousand Sons manifest at the dawn of the Great Crusade, he vowed to find a way to halt its rampage. When he witnessed his twin brother Ohrmuzd mutate into a mewling abomination, the vow to save his brethren became the defining core of Ahriman's being. The Chief Librarian of the Thousand Sons Legion turned every waking moment to finding a solution to the flesh-change. Ultimately, his single-minded crusade led to a kind of success, but also a terrible failure. The Rubric of Ahriman, the ritual he and his fellow Sorcerers used to ensure their brothers would no longer mutate, turned all but the most powerful of their number to unliving dust. The Rubricae were born, free of mutation but cursed as soulless automatons forever.

Ever since casting that darkest and most powerful of spells, Ahriman has roamed the galaxy in search of eldritch power enough to make good his mistake. His hope is that he can somehow reverse the Rubric, turning his fellows back into beings of flesh, blood, and limitless mental potential. So long has he sought that goal he will go to any lengths to further it. For the last few decades, he has been embroiled in a quest to locate and plunder the fabled Black Library of the Eldar, where the sum total of that ancient race's learnings about the forces of Chaos are sealed away.

In the last few years, Ahriman's crusade has met with a measure of success. By fighting through its Eldar protectors, Ahriman was able to get near enough to the Black Library that he could project his astral form inside it, avoiding its strange guardians long enough to transcribe the fabled *Tome Labyrinthus* onto hermetic parchments of his own making. With this priceless manuscript at his command, Ahriman can navigate long-lost sections of the webway, that labyrinth dimension that lies between reality and the Warp. Many of the portals he can now reopen are situated on worlds settled by the Imperium, and amongst these are ancient cairn-gateways that lead onto the death world of Fenris. With this knowledge, Ahriman has made himself vital to Magnus' plans once more – and vice versa. With Magnus the Red in Ahriman's debt, the Arch-Sorcerer would likely be able to invade the Black Library in earnest in search of the arcane cure he desires.





CORRUPTION IN THE FLAMES

Wheels turned within wheels as the forces of Tzeentch took form upon the firelit snow. With Ahriman's tome allowing his forces to spill from hidden webway gates, and with Silver Towers disgorging the thrall armies of their exalted masters, the planet was soon host to a dizzying variety of monsters and madmen. War had come to Fenris once more.

Ahriman brought more to Magnus' cause than just exceptional generalship and raw eldritch power. Though it had taken him almost a hundred years, he had gathered those surviving Sorcerers banished from Magnus' side at the time of the dread Rubric. Many a bargain, threat and bribe was made in this great endeavour, and Ahriman had to sacrifice much in order to achieve it, but ultimately the mission was a success. The Exiles were assembled, amongst them Aarthrat the Mind-eater, Hakor Thrice-born, Magister Nezchad Aratos and Blind Omarhotec. Each one commanded his own legion of thralls. Backlit by a storm of pink lightning, the Arch-Sorcerer arrived from the sealed webway portal he forced open atop the highest peak of Runeheim. Behind him came a vast army of Rubricae, Sorcerers and baying mutants.

In summoning his fellow Exiles and their thrallbands to war, Ahriman all but doubled the martial strength the Crimson King brought to bear. The Daemon Primarch descended from bleeding skies to meet Ahriman in person upon Runeheim Peak, and the Arch-Sorcerer bowed ever so slightly before discussing the plan for Fenris' downfall.

Whilst the psyker hosts of the Exiles took battle to the Imperial forces abroad in Fenris' open wilderness, Magnus and Ahriman would work their agenda on a different level.

The ritual halls at the centre of each Silver Tower were lit by the candlelight of helical tallow pillars, each made from the rendered-down flesh of a different psychically active xenos race. Complex hermetic symbols ran around concentric circles that contained nine-pointed stars, golden ratios and scarab-sigils perfected by Tizca's finest minds. At the heart of each circular hall was a symbol-ringed hole that plunged down to show the landscape of the geomantic nexus below. Into these halls stepped Magnus, Ahriman and their most powerful acolytes, performing their rite of corruption and then magically translocating to another tower to enact the same ritual over and over again. Columns of dark power flowed from the underside of each Silver Tower, channelled into the ley line sites of Fenris. A great howling of wolves filled the night, but with the Space Wolves and their allies fighting to repel wave after wave of invaders, none could spare might enough to assail the towers now glowing ominously in the skies.



Though the Tower of the Crystal Raven was blasted into scattering shards when it strayed too close to the Fang, its fellow Silver Towers worked their magicks all but unhindered. The Tizcan Spire's corrupting beam plunged deep into the grumbling caldera of the Fire Breather, that same volcano that Sven Bloodhowl's Great Company had adopted as their symbol. The ground shook and shivered like the flanks of a sick hound. Magma seeped up from the cracking crust of ice, but where the natural molten rock of that sacred site glowed orange, yellow and white, the lifeblood of the volcano bubbled up as a virulent pink. A sense of terrible pressure built in the air until every mortal creature within a dozen miles felt blood trickle from its ears. Then, with a titanic boom, the volcano erupted. The pyroclastic cloud rushed outwards, blasting the coniferous forests on the volcano's slopes to splinters. A sea of boiling ectoplasm blasted upwards from the Fire Breather in a great column that sent liquid warpfire surging down its flanks. Rivers of polluted magma turned snowdrifts to cackling steam-wraiths and moss-covered rocks to distorted skulls. As the bow wave of the Fire Breather's eruption shot outwards, man and beast alike were turned to statues of sparkling ash, but the Tizcan Spire remained unmoved.

To the east, the fissures south of the Yrokja Glacier glowed blue with the baleful energies poured into them by the Tower of the Sectai, floating high above. The unhealthy light pouring from the site became blinding as the fissures turned to crystal, and Daemons of all shapes and sizes began to emerge from within, spilling out from the cracks like ants pouring from an underground nest. The Warpspawn ran, swooped, scampered and cartwheeled in all directions, falling upon the tribesmen that had gathered to watch the event in awe. Many of the Fenrisians escaped; some even fought their way free of the insanity that rushed to claim them. Thousands more were left to die in snow turned pink by rivulets of spilt blood.



At the Gates of Morkai, strange jackal-spirits rose from the caverns thought to lead to the Fenrisian underworld. The malefic ghosts hunted down the living to possess them and send them axe-first against their kin. The Heavensberg broke from the ice that locked it to the land and went questing for living things to crush, water spuming in tidal waves around it as a trillion eyes opened across its surface. The lights in the firmament, once seen as omens of good fortune, wound together into a flaming sky-serpent that shed Warp light on the carnage below as its jaws yawned wide, then seemed to close around the orb of Midgardia. Under the planet's crust, the rivers of magma flickered and pulsed, Brimstone Horrors dancing above them like devils at a dark feast.

Across the entirety of Fenris, the primeval cold of Helwinter relinquished its grip, melted away by the raging fires that fought under the planet's crust. A false Flameheit had arrived – not caused naturally by the planet's orbit, but the work of a Daemon king. Its fires were not the pure and cleansing kiss of the Wolf's Eye star, but the cursed flame of Tzeentch, change in its rawest form.

Within a matter of days the ice-locked islands that froze together to form Fenris' crust were breaking up, the ripping and groaning of tectonic land masses echoing through the air as if the planet itself was in pain. Perhaps it was, for logic had little hold upon Fenris any more.

Here and there the denizens of the inky depths surged up to lash at the armies clashing on the shores of each dwindling landmass, crushing dozens of warriors with ridged and rubbery tentacles the width of a jarl's longboat. Howling packs of wolves fell upon the foot soldiers of the Thousand Sons, the light of panic and desperation in their eyes. Even the ice trolls of the forsaken peaks slouched from their lairs to assail the Daemon hordes with claw and club, their brutish minds dimly aware that these strange invaders threatened their home. The Fenrisian tribes, bellicose and fierce, fought hardest of all, and in several battles stood shoulder to shoulder with the Sky Warriors from their fireside legends. The entire planet had been plunged into war, each sacred site the epicentre of a raging conflict.

Only one nexus of potency remained uncontested. The Fang dominated the skyline of Asaheim, as stalwart and indomitable as ever. But the Crimson King had plans for that legendary fortress too.

THE CURSED WARRIORS OF FENRIS

Though the Space Wolves fought hard against the traitors, and though many a saga was cut short every day, it was the native people of Fenris that paid the highest price. They were coming face to face with that which was inimical to order and sanity – the raw stuff of the Warp, given form and set against them.

With the skies wracked by the psychic by-product of the ongoing invasion, there was little to tell day from night. The white wastes were lit every hour by coruscating pinks and blues. The Wolf's Eye, sweltering and huge over the course of a true Flameheit, shed a sickly light; it gave little more illumination than Valdrmani.

Underneath these celestial bodies the Sons of Russ fought with everything they had to defy the Chaos invaders. Greatpacks prowled the wastes, their hunter's skills more vital than ever before as they brought battle to Daemon and traitor alike. Too many found their glorious charges dashed to pieces against the unyielding walls of ceramite and dust ranged against them. Lone Wolves, each the last of his kin, sought glorious deaths against the most powerful foes as a testament to their fallen brothers. Most died in fire, consumed by the mutative energies of the volleys sent against them. Packs of lupine beasts great and small slunk and stalked, instinctively hunting trespassing warbands before tearing into them with sudden ferocity. Again and again the wolf packs were left as steaming corpses strewn across the ice by the fire of emotionless Rubricae. With Logan Grimnar still missing, there was little organisation to bind the Space Wolves and their kin into a cogent force with which to repel the mage-shrouded Silver Towers. The defenders of the death world were reaping a significant toll, but their enemies were invariably one step ahead.

There were those born of Fenris, yet not taken into the ranks of the Sky Warriors, who somehow overcame the Daemon interlopers that hurled fire and damnation into their midst. Whether by fieldcraft, stealth or might of arms they had wrested victory against the odds, but they were forever changed. Veteran huscarls walked back to their kin with axes held loosely and a blank stare in their eyes. Glory-hungry youths were ravaged horribly by what they saw. Shieldmaidens slunk as stooped as crones to sleepless beds. These were the lucky ones, for they were at least sound in body if not in mind.

So profound and powerful were the energies of change that roiled across the planet that those mortals touched directly by Tzeentch's fires underwent terrible transformations. Gangling mutations erupted from bronzed and weather-beaten flesh, eyes bulged from armpits and backs, and crests of feathers and quills ran down shaven scalps and shoulders. Some lost their cohesion of form altogether, reshaped into horrible spawn-things that defied description and damaged the sanity of all who witnessed their transformation. Those born under the unnatural skies were monstrous. Even those who seemed clean of limb, when given the birth-axe, not only grasped the weapon – as was only right and favoured – but used it to hack away at their shocked parents' hands. Who knows how many young Fenrisian warriors who appeared whole and sound would grow with a hidden seed of change planted inside them that would one day bear shocking fruit.

The Fenrisian tribes had been cursed. It was a calculated and deliberate bane sent upon them by Magnus the Red, for his Legion had been riddled by the flesh-change long ago; in part that was the very reason they had sought to master the arts that saw them persecuted. The rampant mutation did not go unnoticed by the agents of the Ordo Hereticus still monitoring the Fenris System for traces of Chaos taint. In the darkness of secret psykana sanctums, astropathic missives were sent screaming out across the void.

Under the strange light of haunted skies, the Sons of Russ defended their home, each warrior fighting tooth and claw against an endless stream of foes. A sense of doom hung heavy in the air. Though few spoke it openly, all knew the Chapter's lore well enough to realise who was visiting such mayhem on their world. The Great Cyclops was amongst them, or was close at hand – it was the only explanation. The lords of the Fang wondered if the Wolftime was upon them, and if so, whether Leman Russ himself would step from the lost annals of history to lead them to victory.

The fury of the Wolf Lords increased with every passing day. Each warrior king took his Great Company into the wilderness, speeding across the snows in sanctified transports to engage the traitorous and the monstrous wherever they were found. Though they hunted within their own territory, they were ambushed by thunderous volleys from Rubricae that burst from icy waterfalls, emerged from snowdrifts or stalked from poisoned seas.

The Seawolves took a fleet of gunships across the boiling seas, heavy bolters hammering death into the corrupted cephalopods that hauled their bulk onto the ice floes in search of human meat. Engir Krakendoom himself fought blade to talon with a flame-skinned sea hydra, cutting off one boulder-sized head after another with his power spear Longhaft before delivering the deathblow with his bladed storm shield. In doing so he saved the Ice Whaler tribe from slaughter, but committed his men to a tempestuous battle upon tilting ice floes, locked in combat against Daemons that clambered from the monster's corpse.

Erik Morkai's famed Scout packs reported a spate of apparitions near the Gates of Morkai. The Great Company investigated in force, and it was well they did. The wispy jackal-spirits that emanated from the great crack in Morkaissen's rocky flanks were flying through the mountain passes to fall upon the bone-clad tribes of the caves – and in some cases, possessing them entirely. Erik gave his warriors the order to fire upon those who seemed Daemon-tainted. Though it weighed heavy upon them to do so, his grim-faced warriors complied. Their decision was soon justified. From each fallen tribesman a pair of Blue Horrors burst forth, grumbling that their fun had been spoiled and falling upon the Space Wolves Scouts in a flurry of clutching limbs. The Scouts overcame the

revolting things with combat knife and bolt pistol, but not before several had been left as burnt and bleeding corpses.

Ragnar Blackmane had returned to the Fang after the banishing of the Changeling, for he knew that to become embroiled in the exhaustive interrogations of the Dark Angels debrief was to waste valuable time. His Great Company's journey from the Fang to the field of battle was typically bombastic. The Blackmanes hurtled through the skies in gunship squadrons, the shriek of their descent and the scars they left across the skies announcing their presence to all. From the crystal fissures of Yrokja, blinding blue beams of psychic energy shot heavenwards to smash a pair of gunships from the skies. The warriors within plummeted to an early grave; such was the cost of war. The rest of the gunships landed without loss.

One after another the gunships skidded hard into the tops of the fjord-like Yrokja Fissures, cannons booming. Their impact was the pounding of fists upon a glass-like sculpture of fractal complexity. Cliff faces turned to faceted quartz by the magicks of Tzeentch's Crystal Labyrinth shattered and sloughed away. Cries of anger and despair rose from a thousand Daemon throats as they toppled into the frothing sea below. The exclamations turned to shouts of pain as the Blackmanes debarked from their craft amongst the thunder of bolt weapons. It was on those cliffs that the Young King fought through the magical barrage of the gangle-limbed Lord of Change Xchar'hanrark, taking off the Greater Daemon's eyeless head with a sawing blow from his kraken-toothed blade, Frostfang. No victory was celebrated that day, however, for the headstrong Blood Claws that pursued the reeling Daemon hordes into the cliffs' strange caves disappeared entirely. Trapped in endless glacial mazes on the fringe of reality, they were never seen again.

The warriors of Kjarl Grimblood, who some said were obsessed with flame, fought not to burn but to preserve. The ancient heartwoods of Oshva Weald, so long harnessed by the indigenous tribes for the creation of stout longboats, were already afire with strange and ghastly energies when the Grimbloods descended from the skies. They had gone in search of the agents of Tzeentch, and found them aplenty. The entire forest was infested with flame-fisted Daemons that moved in strange hovering leaps, the creatures hurling warpflame at the steelbark trees that twisted them into the likeness of men burning at the stake.

Putting aside their flamers and stifling their need to plunge into battle, the Grimbloods divided into two Greatpacks. One made haste for the river of ice-cold water that ran alongside the forest every Flameheit. By felling enough trees to create a rough dam, that first Greatpack caused the river to break its banks – though the resultant flood could not extinguish warpfire, it drove the dull-witted Daemons back into the guns of the second force. Caught between the two jaws of Grimblood's trap, the flame-things were annihilated.

It was in that forest that Grimblood saw something in the flames, some fragment of insight that spoke of an imminent doom to come. In his mind's eye he saw a river of wickedness, red hot and aflame with hatred, rising to drown the Fang from within. It disturbed him so greatly he summoned his old ally, the Rune Priest Svangthir Ashbeard, to his side, and confided in him. He did so well out of earshot, for the rumours that Kjarl Grimblood could see the future in the fire were not ones he wanted to propagate. The Rune Priest nodded sagely, for his own divinations had led him to much the same conclusions.



THE HOST WITHIN THE FLAMES

The Crimson King's invasion needed two things above all – to keep the Space Wolves on the back foot, reacting to his attacks as they occurred, and to keep them convinced that the true peril of his resurgence was already upon them. To this end he put into motion a dread scheme that would strike right at the heart of Russ' realm.

Rune Priest Ashbeard knelt amongst the embers of the Oshva Weald, hands planted squarely on the ground as he mentally reached out to his brethren within the Fang. There was no answer, for the air itself was tinged with the disruptive energies of Chaos. There was something deeply wrong with the world-spirit of Fenris – the planet's essence was wounded, and that wound was in danger of being infected by the energies of the Warp. All Ashbeard could see in his mind's eye was a cyclopean visage staring imperiously down at him. He broke off the connection with a shudder. If his brothers were there in the mindscape he usually prowled with ease, he could not find them.

Calling his Chooser of the Slain, Vya, to his side, Ashbeard set in motion a different plan. He spoke to the cybernetic corvid in low tones of the vision Lord Grimblood had seen, and bade her reach the Fang as fast as she could. Off she flew, her long black pinions beating hard. Reaching out with his staff, the Rune Priest harnessed a portion of the winds raging high above and sent the hurricane at her back, speeding her on her way. If Kjarl's predictions were true, news of great import went with her.

Perhaps the gambit was seen by Magnus, for as the raven Vya flew hard over the Rans Peninsula a swarm of sky-shark Daemons came swooping after her. Faster she flew, but the Daemons soared on the aetheric winds, and their sheer malevolent hunger lent them speed. The foremost Daemon surged forwards, the baleful energies crackling at its maw so close they turned Vya's tail feathers to scattering ash. Grimblood's message, borne on fragile wings so high in the firmament, was seconds from being silenced.

Sudden thunder boomed as lightning blazed through the clouds. Six of the Daemons were lit by blinding white light before disappearing altogether. The same instant, a storm of explosive bolts hammered out of the gloom to detonate amongst the rest of the daemonic pack. Hurtling down from the clouds came the Thunderhawk *Ironspear*, its forward doors agape like the maw of some metallic wyrm. With a roar of turbines the gunship shot forwards to draw Vya into its cavernous hold, saving her from the shoal of Screamers just as they were closing in. The Daemons cried loud in frustration as the Thunderhawk boosted away. Ashbeard's cyber-familiar would bring its message to the Fang, and in doing so alert its guardians to the disaster that threatened to tear out the fortress monastery's heart.

In the depths of the Fire Breather, Magnus and his coven of Exalted Sorcerers chanted baleful incantations above a lake of boiling lava. That same molten rock, already dancing with Warp-gheists after the Silver Tower's beam had struck home, bubbled with foul energies. A mortal man would have died in seconds amongst the sulphurous furore of the volcano's depths, but Magnus was no man, and his vassal Sorcerers were long beyond concerns of the flesh. With the primal power of the volcano at their fingertips, the cabal worked a great rite that summoned their daemonic allies into the lava itself. Eyes, mouths and grasping claws bulged and bubbled through the molten rock until the fiery lake was utterly infested.

Magnus had chosen the foremost practitioners of the Pyrae tradition to aid him in his work, and now it was their turn to join the army in the lake of fire. One by one, the tall-helmed Sorcerers turned from creatures of flesh, bone and ceramite to beings of living flame. Their glowing forms slid into the lava as if it were no more than clear water, disappearing under the surface without a ripple. Magnus gave a half-smile of satisfaction before letting his mighty pinions snap out to their fullest extent. Soaring aloft on brimstone-scented thermals, he shot from the volcano and winged towards the jagged peaks of the horizon.

The molten army of Daemons and pyromancers slid through the planet's fiery mantle with the ease of sharks borne along deep-sea currents. Even when effectively blind, they could feel the Fang's direction within the mystical ley lines that crossed Fenris, for its indomitable spirit was such that it had a psychic presence of its own. Closer they swam, bearing down on the geothermic energy farms that powered that vast fortress from below. Their intent was to attack the Space Wolves' inner sanctums from within and destroy their generatorums, plunging them into darkness and silencing their guns so their brethren could close in. They had chosen a vector of attack so strange that even the Rune Priests would not look to guard against it. It was a plan worthy of a Daemon Primarch, and as the molten army bubbled up through the magma culverts of the Fang, it looked as if it would be an unprecedented success. Yet as the Fenrisians say, sometimes the meekest warrior can stand against the mightiest giant.

Borne safely to the Fang's skyshield docks in the gullet of *Ironspear*, Vya the cyber-raven had already flown through the corridors of that ancient fortress with Grimblood's message at the forefront of her mind. She reached the Iron Priests of the lower levels mere hours before the magma armies took shape once more in the lowest dungeons of the Space Wolves' stronghold. Clacking and squawking in binharic cant, the cyber-raven spoke of the river of flame that Grimblood had seen rising up to drown the Fang. It was enough for the Iron Priests to consult Krom Dragongaze, castellan of the Fang, and to monitor the subterranean levels of their demesne. There they found energy spikes that lent credence to the raven's message.

It was enough. Since the first clash upon Fenrisian soil, the Iron Priests had begun the process of awakening and girding for war the Dreadnoughts in the base of the Fang. Their original intent had been to send the adamantium-hulled walkers to battle against the invaders abroad in the ice wastes. Now, upon Krom's command, they made haste to send their mighty charges against the enemy within.



IN THE DEPTHS OF THE FANG

The Iron Priests that sprinted into the bedrock of the Fang were on the brink of desperation. If the raven's message held true, they had little time to intercept the strange invasion already inside the Fang. First they sought the aid of one of Fenris' greatest heroes. Bjorn the Fell-Handed would march to war once more.

The Fang's dungeons have long been home to those secrets the Space Wolves have chosen to keep hidden from the wider Imperium. The fortress monastery is of such immense size that only the Iron Priests know the full extent of its reaches. Its tunnels are said to be more numerous than the hairs on a troll's back, and they spread for miles through the plateau of Asaheim. The Great Companies, a fraction of the strength they once amassed during the time of the Heresy, barely fill the upper tenth of the Fang when they gather in Chapter strength. Though this gives the Space Wolves an extensive lair in which to practise their customs and preserve the culture of their race, it also made defending every acre of the Fang next to impossible.

Up through the vents and culverts of the Iron Vaults came a bubbling tide of magma. An unnatural stink pervaded the lower levels of those torchlit halls, the overpowering scent of charred flesh mingling with an acrid chemical tang. The temperature in those lonely depths, usually far below the point of freezing, started to rise to a prickly, itchy heat. Change was coming to a part of Fenris that had remained fundamentally the same for several millennia.

The first creatures to crackle up from the rivers of molten Warp stuff were Brimstone Horrors. These tiny flame-beasts spat gobbets of fiery liquid upon the sacred sigils the Space Wolves of Russ' reign had carved into the walls to ward off maleficarum – the influence of Chaos. The runes seemed to flare, and the nearest Brimstone Horrors were snuffed out as if by pinching fingers. The others danced away with shrieks of alarm to find easier things to burn.

Next to rise from the liquid fire were the strange, curve-bodied creatures known as Flamers. They hurled warpfire from rope-muscled limbs, belching out conflagrations that melted away rock and runic sigil alike. Soon the walls of the vault were running with liquid fire, twisted faces and writhing anatomies appearing in the flames before taking shape as Daemons in their own right.

Into this tableau rose Xarax Throtep, lead pyromancer of the Tizcan Host, and a trio of his fellow pyromancers. Their fire-forms coalesced from the magma. First horned helms, then broad shoulders, then robes of cascading flame emerged from the molten rock. Soon enough, a coven hovered shimmering above a river of molten rock that now flowed like a serpent through the corridors of the Fang. The Tizcan fire-lords shared an unspoken communion as ever more Daemons rose from the glowing river of fire, then set off to the south, warpflame trailing in their wake.

The mission that Magnus had given his fire-shapers was to cause as much destruction within the depths of the Fang as possible. This they did gladly – partially to avenge the hundreds of his warriors that had died assailing the fortress monastery in M32, and partially to draw attention from their Primarch's true works. The flaming host grew ever more numerous as more and more of the corrupted magma bubbled and spilled into the corridors, each glut of molten rock bearing with it a clutch of diminutive Horrors or flame-fisted Daemon beasts. Their mission was to find the geothermic reactors that lent the Fang most of its power, and overload them. Should they be successful, the explosive carnage they sowed through the guts of the Fang would destabilise and weaken it from within. Better yet, with the engines crippled, it would plunge many of the Fang's defences into darkness. With the fortress monastery's guns temporarily silenced, the Silver Towers – and Magnus himself – could close upon the Fang with impunity. To secure such a critical advantage would turn Magnus' ascendance into unassailable domination.

On towards the halls of the dead they went, those crypt-like chambers where the heroes of the Space Wolves are revered and paid respect. When the exalted Daemon Emberspite – a giant flamer swollen with the power of change – manifested in reality, the ancient tapestries and woodwork scenes adorning the walls burst into conflagrations of multicoloured fire. The sagas they depicted took new shape to show long-dead Space Wolves at the mercy of those tyrants and monsters they had, in reality, killed in glory.

Through the lower levels of the Fang's dungeons, the howls of gargoyle servitors rang out. Intruders walked freely, their message said, bringing their unnatural light to the cold and blessed darkness. Krom Dragongaze, having resumed his duties as prime castellan for the Fang after returning from the shattered fortresses of Valdrmani, was quick to take up his axe. He made haste to join the defenders of the lower levels. Meanwhile the Iron Priests, warned against the trespass by Grimblood and the raven Vya, gritted their fanged teeth and redoubled their efforts to bring to bear as many Dreadnoughts as possible. Two of their number were sent to the hidden lairs of the Wulfen; there was an army of Fenrisians down in the depths, and if they could but harness it, the intrusion could be stopped.

Amongst the Iron Priests walked Lord Bran Redmaw, his deep war-howl calling the lost and the dreaming to wakefulness. With his helm at his side, the Wolf Lord could smell the distant tang of warpfire; its violent stink grew stronger by the minute. Bran could feel his gorge rise as his senses rebelled, the beast within his soul straining to be set free in glorious savagery, but he kept his commands steady and strong. There were those in the dungeons of the Fang that, had he not done so, would have pounced upon him – and perhaps even ripped him apart.

One after another the vaults in the darkness were opened, Lord Redmaw's seal of authority enough to cause even the rune-locked doors of the deepest gaols to hiss open. Behind him, bestial shadows slunk upon the walls. Howls of bloodlust rang through the tunnels of the Fang as Bran led his secret army towards the vile scent of daemonic invasion.

In a parallel tunnel, far larger and adorned from floor to ceiling with runic script, the Iron Priests led a strike force of their own. Dust shook from the arched roof as the heavy tread of the colossi they had awoken reverberated through the bedrock. With them came Krom Dragongaze. Though he had ordered his Wolf Guard to direct the defence of the Fang in his absence, he still commanded a formidable strike force of Drakeslayers.

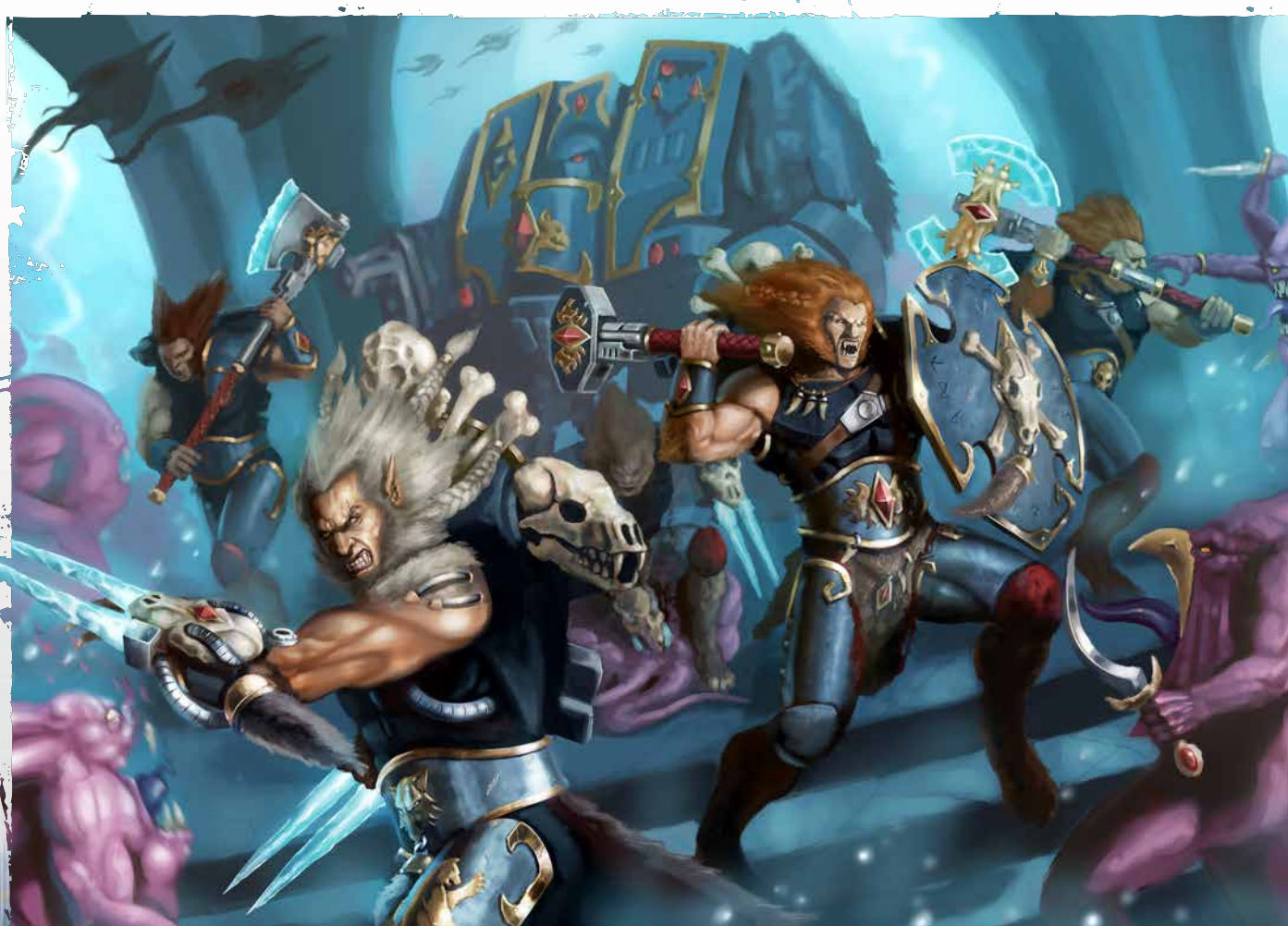
The two parallel passageways emerged in the Cavern of the Fell-Handed, a vast and buttressed hall. Soon enough Dragongaze and Redmaw looked upon the Iron Priests and their Dreadnought host. Valdrak Shieldsmith led the procession of walkers, nodding to the Wolf Lords as the two armies converged into one. Though he knew it must have been a trick of the light, Shieldsmith could have sworn he saw a faint smile upon Bran's weather-beaten features.

Across the other side of the vast cavern, a river of corrupted magma boiled and churned towards them. Daemons with shifting shapes danced and bounded above it, their cackling voices mingling with the crackling bursts of the flames. The flood of molten rock and its fiendish riders flowed out into the cavern like a delta to the sea, its passage guided and shaped by the pyromancers at its fore into a series of spear-like thrusts.

Ranged against the warpflame host was a battle line of Dreadnoughts, indomitable in body and undaunted in will. Threescore and more stood against the Daemon invasion. That mighty assemblage anchored around the legendary Bjorn the Fell-Handed himself – as the last of the pyromancers entered the cavern, the ancient hero gave a battle cry so loud it echoed like a thunderclap.

The Wulfen were the first to charge, as ever. For a time, it was as if the Fall of Tizca had been revisited – flames leapt all around, and muscular figures loped and bounded into battle against the tall-helmed Sorcerers of Magnus. Some of the Wulfen were the selfsame warriors from the legendary Great Company of Jorin Bloodfang, lost in the timeless tides of the Warp for ten millennia. They had been recovered by the Great Companies, saved from the Sea of Stars and reintroduced to the Chapter – only to be matched against the same warrior mystics they had pursued into the Eye of Terror so long ago.

This time, Xarax and his fellow pyromancers were ready for them. With sweeping gestures of their staffs they sent waves of Horrors and Screamers into battle. Though each Daemon was torn to shreds, hacked to bits or pulverised by the raging Wulfen, the gibbering Warpspawn took their toll, incinerating ages-old heroes and stabbing long-bladed knives into unprotected faces. The Sorcerers, bought time by their minions, turned entire packs of Wulfen to scattering ash with their incantations. Yet the Wulfen's attack had itself bought time, and their own allies were close behind.





LAIR OF THE ANCIENTS

The host of terrors that had burned through the lowest reaches of the Fang had been met in battle by massed ranks of the Wulfen. An army of living legends was close behind. Each hero was a manifestation of the Space Wolves' indomitable spirit, armed and armoured beyond mortal limitations. They would not abandon their lairs to the Tzeentchian flame host this side of the grave.

As one, the Space Wolves Dreadnoughts opened fire. A hail of assault cannon shells crashed home, lascannon beams lancing through it like lightning through a storm. The closest of the pyromancers, Avantu Thotek, waved his staff in a serpentine gesture, and an incoming salvo of metal projectiles was melted by the intensity of the warpflame's strange heat. They splashed home as little more than quicksilver beads. The first volley of lascannon beams shot overhead, missing the Daemon host completely, but striking the chains that held the cavern's seal-gate in place. An immense guillotine blade of adamantium came slamming down, cutting off the invaders already inside from those flame-Daemons coming through the tunnels to reinforce them. Many of the dancing fire-Daemons that capered within the cavern misread the situation and cackled in triumph, thinking their Space Wolves prey sealed in and at their mercy. Then the Dreadnoughts' helfrost cannons opened fire in unison, and the deadly truth became clear.

The leading edge of the magma river was blasted backward like a wave crest caught in a gale. Fire became ice as the molten stone formed into a freezing wall. It curled around Xarax Throtep as an immense and many-fingered hand of igneous rock. For a second, the Sorcerer was pinned in place. A pinprick of light glowed from within the wall for a second, then the entire edifice burst into a scattering cloud of skeletal phoenixes that shrieked outwards in all directions. Where they reached the edge of the cavern, the avian Daemon-things set fire to the dank rock of its walls, in the process sending a wall of smoke billowing out to obscure the Tzeentchian host from the guns of the foe.

Emboldened, the fire-Daemons surged forwards once more. Xarax Throtep hurled bolts of coruscating flame so fierce they melted through even the adamantium hulls of the Dreadnoughts to incinerate the half-dead warriors inside. A wall of warpfire surged across the cavern floor once more. This time it was Bjorn that stood in its path, his ground-shaking stride pounding into a slow but unstoppable charge. He hit the wall of flame without slowing. The runes of majesty and preservation upon his hull flared the icy blue of a winter sky as they fought the maleficarum that threatened to consume him. Out from the wall of psychic fire he came, swathed in serpents of red-hot rock and glowing head to toe with incandescent energies. For a moment the Iron Priests feared the giant warrior had gone to his final death. But the Fell-Handed bore the blessing of Russ himself; he had even faced Magnus and lived.

The streams of flame converging upon Bjorn grew brighter as the pyromancers channelled ever more energy into him. One by one his ice-runes burned out, and though a dozen

Dreadnoughts were charging in his wake, their aid would come too late. Bjorn's hull began to melt, steam-wraiths cackling wherever the fire serpents constricted to send rivulets of adamantium hissing to the flagstones.

Then came the howling.

Hundreds of Wulfen, recovered from the four corners of the galaxy after their long exile, charged in close. Amongst them were loping, long-limbed were-creatures sprinting from a side passage in the gloom, yellow eyes glinting in the firelight as they came to the aid of Bjorn. Some were rangy and thin, others massive and barrel-chested, giants with lupine heads that wielded great ceremonial spears. They gathered around their lord, Bran Redmaw, and the rampaging Dreadnought known only as Murderfang. The feral machine's destructive wrath spurred them to ever-escalating feats of violence. A hundred different fusions of wolf, tribesman and Space Marine leapt and bounded over the spreading delta of magma, teeth bared and saliva drizzling from snarling mouths.

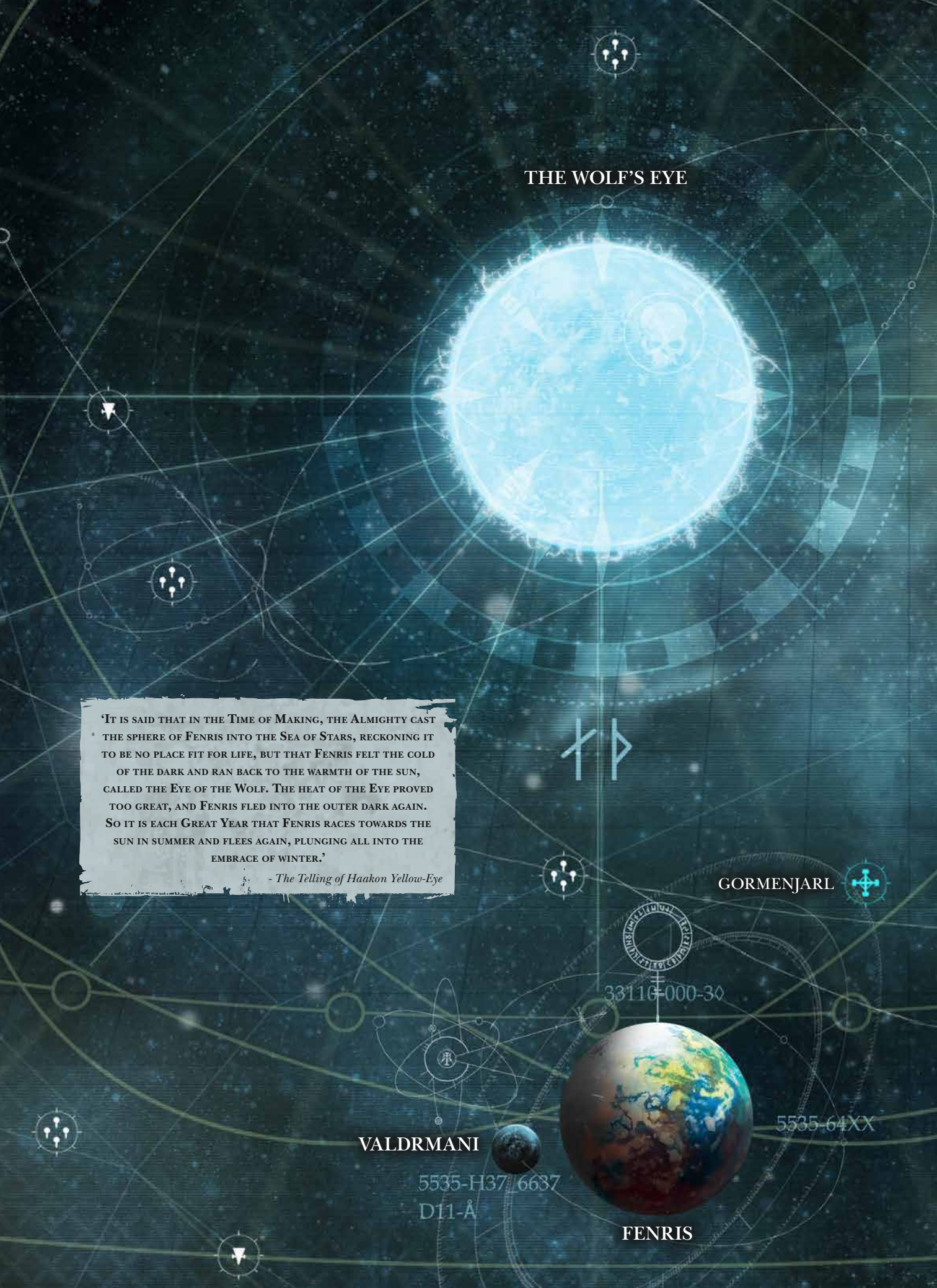
Even a Fenrisian predator-beast would have balked at crossing the magical flame, but the were-things that called the dungeons their home truly knew no fear. Scores upon scores were burned, transformed, reduced to ruin, but the rest came on in a tide of tooth and claw. They fell upon flame-Daemons as if starving for their meat, ripping away the strange spongy flesh of the Daemons in great fiery gobbets even as the magma burned their limbs away to glittering embers. Two of the pyromancers were borne down, slain as much by raw fury as by any strength of limb, whilst the others blasted the wolf-creatures to ash.

Then the first wave of Dreadnoughts hit home, powered gauntlet-claws snapping, and it was the Daemon host's turn to die. A crushing, stamping wall of adamantium and fury, the army of entombed heroes barged their way through walls of mutative flame and knots of daemonic horrors alike until all that was left in their wake were puddles of burning ectoplasm. The battle in the depths of the Fang raged fiercer with every passing second, but Xarax Throtep was nowhere to be seen. In the reactor chambers beyond the cavern, fires leapt and danced as if given malicious life.



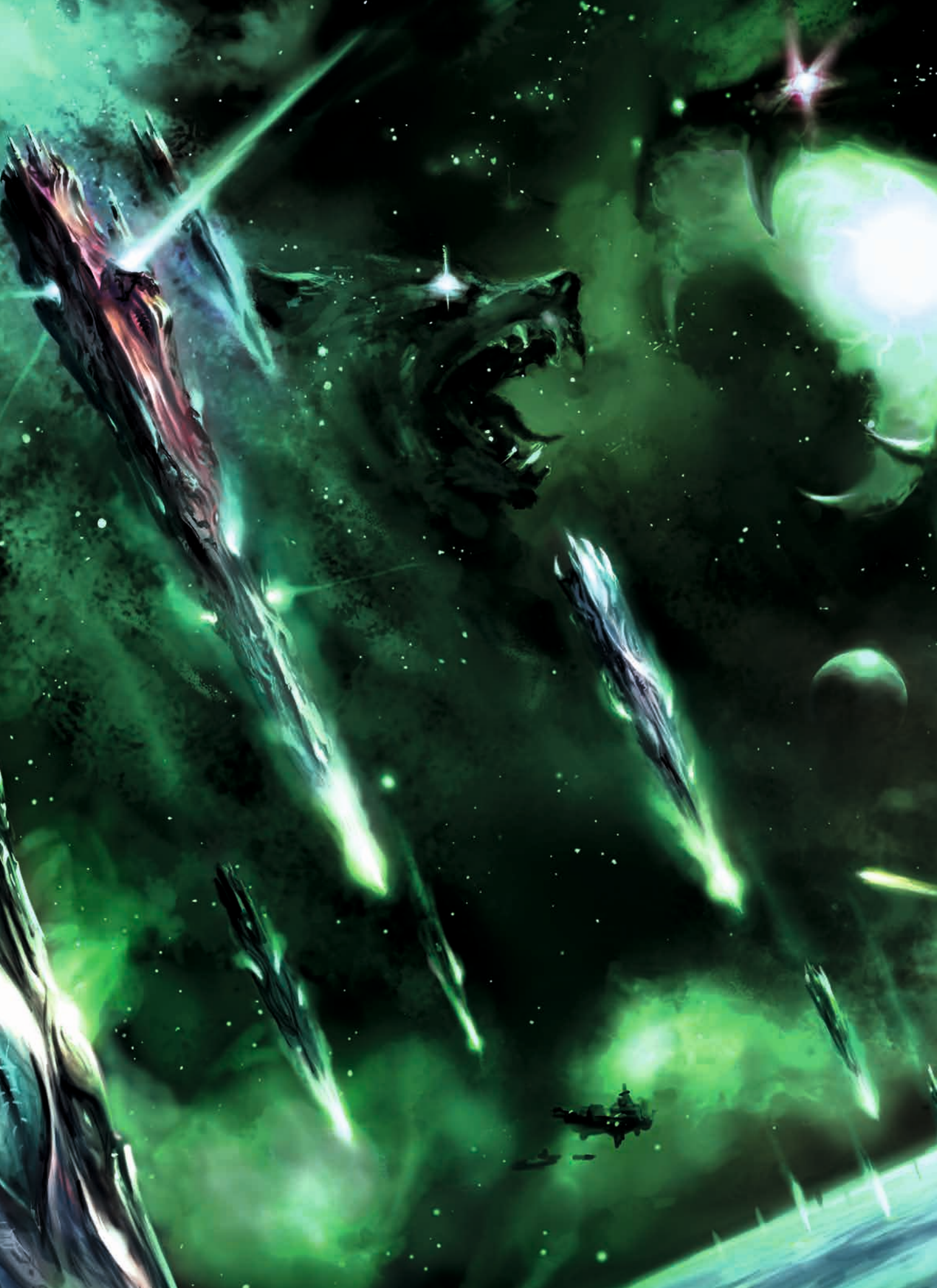



CHAPTER 3
THE SERPENT AND THE WOLF


THE WOLF'S EYE
'It is said that in the Time of Making, the Almighty cast the sphere of Fenris into the Sea of Stars, reckoning it to be no place fit for life, but that Fenris felt the cold of the dark and ran back to the warmth of the sun, called the Eye of the Wolf. The heat of the Eye proved too great, and Fenris fled into the outer dark again. So it is each Great Year that Fenris races towards the sun in summer and flees again, plunging all into the embrace of winter.'
- The Telling of Haakon Yellow-Eye
GORMENJARL
VALDRMANI
FENRIS



The heavens above Fenris glittered and burned as the works of Magnus unfolded. Blazing debris rained from the sky, the wreckage of once-proud craft destroyed by treachery and tragic misunderstanding. Silver Towers hovered in low orbit, their bombardments of kaleidoscopic energy ripping apart any Imperial craft that dared to engage. The shimmering auroras that filled the night sky wavered and took form, becoming great zodiacal legends that rippled and writhed in the stratosphere. To the tribesmen of Fenris, the burning serpent of the Thousand Sons looked vast enough to consume the stars, and with each night it had grown larger. But it was not alone – with the warrior spirit of Fenris fanned to a blaze by Magnus' invasion, the World Wolf had appeared in spirit form. The people of Fenris experienced a fierce rapture as the celestial beast ripped and tore great streaming nebulas of aether-essence from its serpentine foe. It was a battle of the most surreal and inhuman scale, for each blow took an entire night to land. To the seers and shamans of Fenris, however, it was a sure sign that the immortal spirit of the planet was bloodied but unbowed.





RETURN OF A LEGEND

The High King of Fenris was lost under the surface of Midgardia, thought irretrievable until Egil Iron Wolf recovered part of his armour and coaxed the spirit within to reveal its master's location. It was Egil that led the teleport strike down to those coordinates, risking translocation into the inferno or even the bedrock of the planet's crust in the process.

The Ironwolves have ever been respectful to the machine spirits that serve them, and the Iron Priests attending the teleportarium knew their craft well. In a crackling dome of cerulean energy, Egil passed successfully into the stony heart of Midgardia, a macro-class teleport homer clutched in his clawed gauntlets. After a short but desperate search in the darkness, he found Logan Grimnar and his Kingsguard digging their way metre by painstaking metre from the cavern of the Tetrarchs.

Egil knelt before them, presenting the teleport homer as a knight presents a sword to his liege. Within the hour, the teleportation ritual was complete, and Lord Iron Wolf and the High King stood upon the bridge of the *Allfather's Honour*. Their stony expressions were lit from below by the fires of Midgardia's demise. The High King of Fenris had come through utter disaster, but through the ingenuity of Egil Iron Wolf he had been saved from the brink, and was now where he belonged – at the forefront of the war effort.



Within the strategium of his flagship, Lord Grimnar surveyed the parchments and dataslates that had reached them from the four corners of the Fenris System. Around him were ranged not only his Champions, but also Lord Iron Wolf, the remnants of his pack, and the Grey Knights of Grand Master Valdar Aurikon, who had teleported onto the bridge when the news of Midgardia's lingering Daemon taint had reached them. Grimnar's stern features, purpled by extensive bruising, set into a thunderous scowl. No ship-thane or comms vassal dared approach within reach of his immense crimson axe. A holoscreen dominated the cylindrical strategium hall, the amber light glowing from its vastness playing across the weather-beaten features of the Great Wolf. He had one eye half-closed, his face turned away. It was failure writ in the most graphic fashion imaginable. Failure to predict, failure to protect, and failure to wrest victory from an enemy lower than dirt. The sight seared his soul to the core.

Sprawled across the strategium screen was the stricken planet of Midgardia. Its surface was little more than a worldwide inferno, the colours of intense heat playing across it in swirling waves that looked almost fluid from orbit. Egil Iron Wolf had recounted to Lord Grimnar the details of the planet's fate; its corruption had been deemed so total that the Imperial fleet amassed by Supreme Grand Master Azrael had delivered the ultimate sanction. The planet had been hit by barrage after barrage of missiles and lance strikes. The first salvo's warheads were laced with a potent bio-toxin that reduced all living matter, corrupted or not, to a sickening black mulch – and in doing so filled the planet's atmosphere with combustible gases. The second salvo was comprised of firesword missiles; these had detonated with such blazing force the very air of the planet had ignited from sea to sea. The searing inferno that followed was fierce enough to melt rock. It turned every living creature to ash, reduced proud bastions to slouching mounds of molten metal, and banished the Daemons of Nurgle – along with their plagues – back to the Warp.

Grimnar took in every new piece of information in solemn silence, his great maned head shaking as the gravity of the loss settled in. Midgardia was once home to billions of souls, born survivors one and all. Their refusal to abandon their home world, despite its lethal fungus jungles and sulphurous tunnels full of natural hazards, spoke to the Fenrisian mindset. Rugged and tenacious, every year the Midgardians had raised regiments of grizzled Astra Militarum that the Space Wolves had counted as reliable and like-minded allies. Their loss was a grievous blow to the Fenris System and the Imperium as a whole. Grimnar was a ruler of great wisdom, and he knew that a planet as riddled with Chaos taint as Midgardia had only one fate left to it. Galling as it was to admit, the Dark Angels were right to have purged the planet in order to prevent the nightmare of the Daemon from spreading further. And yet they had left the deed unfinished.

'My liege,' said Egil Iron Wolf, his eyes cast respectfully down, 'what is our truest course?'

'I think you know,' said the High King. 'We do what is right.'

Nearby, Grand Master Valdar Aurikon turned, his head cocked. 'The deed is done, is it not?' he asked. 'Our course lies towards Fenris, if the Astra Telepathica speaks true.'

'I wish for nothing more than to defend the hearth-world,' said Grimnar. 'But there is still a duty to fulfil here.'

Aurikon braced his hands on the strategium's raised dais. 'You think the Dark Angels have not struck a blow dire enough?'

'Midgardia is resilient indeed,' said Grimnar, careful not to give away too much. 'It is a world below the ground as much as above.'

Aurikon shook his head. 'The firestorm would have stolen the air from the lungs of any mortal citizen who sought to hide.'

'Not so,' said Egil Iron Wolf. 'The hermetic vaults are hypercooled, and built to keep out every possible hazard, down to the last spore.'

'Then the First have chosen the wrong modus for their Exterminatus,' said Aurikon. 'Is that what you are telling me?'

Grimnar met Iron Wolf's gaze, his eyes narrowed like a predator stalking through a blizzard, before turning back to Aurikon.

'Indeed. There is no telling how many of those infected by Daemonken would have escaped lockdown quarantine.' His shoulders sagged, the weight of a planet's imminent death upon them. 'We must destroy the planet utterly, from the inside out.'

'We must,' agreed Aurikon solemnly. 'It will take time to effect a core detonation – time we do not have.'

'We have the warhead for it,' said Grimnar. 'Morkai's Tooth, it is called. We have it aboard this very ship.'

'So give your seal and fire it,' replied the Grey Knight.

'It is not so easy,' said Grimnar. 'To penetrate the crust, to trigger a shattering, we would need to reopen the Well of Fire. That leads deep enough into the planet for the Tooth to do its work.'

Aurikon nodded slowly. 'Without Adept presence upon the world itself, we would need to intervene directly.'

'We would,' said Egil. Silence stretched around the strategium, the only sound the susurration of auto-quills on parchment.

'Then we shall go with you,' said Aurikon.

'No need,' said Logan Grimnar, shaking his head, but Aurikon was already making ready, giving orders to his warriors. 'So be it,' sighed the High King, turning to his Champions with an iron determination in his eyes. 'We return to Midgardia in force.'











TO SLAY A PLANET

The decision was made. The Space Wolves high command would mastermind a pinpoint strike on the Grand Generatorium, a deep abyssal tunnel that siphoned energy from Midgardia's core. By opening the ancient gates that sealed it closed, they would pave the way for a killing thrust powerful enough to end the planet forever.

With the authority of not only a Grey Knight Grand Master, but also a Chapter Master of Logan Grimnar's stature behind them, the mission commanders found it easy enough to requisition a dozen Thunderhawk Gunships from the Imperial fleet. That mighty warplane was perhaps the only craft in the Imperium that could brave a firestorm like the one consuming Midgardia; the gunship's hull, laced with ceramite plating, was proof against even the most incandescent heat. Near vertically they dived through low orbit to reach the thick layers of smoke that shrouded the planet, then plunged into the flames raging below.

Within the hour an elite force of Space Wolves shot across the planet's surface, the hulls of their insertion craft glowing cherry red with the energies burning around them. They flew straight as an arrow towards the concentric walls of the Grand Generatorium, for here, speed was the best armour of all.

On approach, Egil Iron Wolf's personal Thunderhawk, the *Greyclaw*, let loose a howl of binharic cant so loud it was audible even over the roar of the inferno. Precisely modulated to cow the machine spirits of the Generatorium's uppermost gate into obeisance, it had the desired effect. The dome-like structure opened like a flower, and amongst plumes of trailing flame the Thunderhawks dived within.

Inside was a scene of nightmarish potency. Masses of refugees had clearly swarmed into the macrostructure's interior in search of a safe haven, but they had been locked out by those who had sought shelter beforehand. They were right to have done so. Whatever plague the populace had brought with them had run rife, turning men to monstrosities of fungus, Daemon-flesh and scorched meat that had been pressure-cooked by the incendiary heat outside. The morass twitched and groaned at the approach of the Thunderhawks.

The silvered gunship of Valdar Aurikon opened fire, coming in low to disgorge its passengers. Even before they had disembarked, the Grey Knights blasted clear a landing zone with bolter, blade and purifying flame.



Egil's craft was not far behind; it emitted another howl, and the vaultlock in the ground irised open. The Space Wolves split off from the Grey Knights and were inside within moments, their Thunderhawks arrowing down through the vast copper coils of the Generatorium's throat.

Time was against them, for in opening the vaultlock they had undone the underworld's main defence against the cataclysm without, but the Space Wolves have always excelled on the hunt. Scant minutes had passed before Grimnar's packs, having debarked from their Thunderhawks at a run, had located a cavernous antechamber filled with desperate, half-starved Midgardians. The sight of Grimnar himself was greeted with rapturous emotion – the eldest of the natives asked in reverent tones if a saga-born hero of legend, the right hand of the Emperor himself, had come to save them. The Great Wolf had little time for shows of subservience. In clear tones that brooked no argument, he mustered as many Midgardians as he could into the half-empty holds of his gunships. Egil Iron Wolf, his Iron Priests hard at work on the Generatorium's castellan matrix, triggered the cogitator imperatives that would open the rest of the colossal structure's abyssal pit before sending a vox-knell to the Grey Knights fighting on the upper levels. The deed was done; it was time to withdraw, and put Midgardia to the sword once and for all.

The Thunderhawk Gunships of Logan's expedition roared from the mouth of the Grand Generatorium as if spat skyward by the planet itself. Lent speed by the roaring thermals below, they hurtled into the skies, the heat of the planet's crust slowly replaced by the blessed cold of the heavens. Within a matter of hours they had rejoined the Space Wolves fleet. Citing their crafts' aggravated machine spirits as the cause, the Fenrisian gunships debarked their passengers in a private docking bay, far away from the eyes of the Grey Knights.



Reconvening upon the bridge of the *Allfather's Honour*, Logan Grimnar met with Grand Master Aurikon once more. The Grey Knight refused Grimnar's offer of a warrior's handshake, but such was the profundity of the events about to transpire that no more was said.

The fell deed would not wait forever. With a heavy heart, the Chapter Master of the Space Wolves gave the order for Morkai's Tooth to be aligned with the open throat of the Grand Generatorium. Runic sigils were reflected in the sweat of Grimnar's brow, flickering their countdown as the vast weapon was made ready by indentured chain gangs in the *Honour*'s guts. This far inside the gravity well of the Wolf's Eye, a Warp jump was extremely dangerous, and the Great Wolf had a feeling it would lead to certain death if they tried. Timing was critical if they were to ride out the shock wave of the coming blast. The entire Battle Barge, so large it could house a dozen companies and still have room to spare, shuddered as the colossal missile was launched.

Perhaps some fell intelligence realised the Space Wolves' intent, for the strategium's giant hololith screen showed a swarm of bloated fly-things pouring up from the depths of that dark vault. Their numbers were such they darkened the skies, but it was too little, too late. Morkai's Tooth, its nose cone aflame with destructive energies that burned an unforgiving path towards the yawning pit beneath, plunged into the Grand Generatorium's open gullet. For a moment, it disappeared from view – then all was blinding light.

Midgardia's death blasted fire into the void. Those looking upon the planet's demise directly were blinded forever by the intensity of the explosion. The planets nearby were riven by destructive energies. Tidal waves, firestorms, and volcanic eruptions marked the end of entire geological eras. Fenris was buffeted by ever-expanding bow waves of force; night turned to day by the intensity of the planet-killing blast. Midgardia had died in fire and violence, and the Imperium had been scarred forever by its loss.

Forewarned of the brutal Exterminatus event by Grimnar's priests, most of the Imperial fleet was able to ride out the colossal shock wave. The same could not be said of the Silver Towers that hung like suspended blades over the worlds they had come to end. As the outward edge of Midgardia's death reached them, the citadels glowed brighter and brighter before winking out of existence entirely. Though it seemed too soon to rejoice after the death of one of Humanity's worlds, many an Imperial commander smiled in mingled satisfaction and relief to see the impossible fortresses banished back to the Empyrean.

For years to come, the whole system was subject to searing meteor storms. These carved across the skies to crater the landscapes of all the worlds that had once gazed up at Midgardia in the night sky. It was said that the impact sites of these space-borne rocks were cursed, and that those who investigated them soon succumbed to a deathly wasting. Before long, the meteor showers were seen as coals from Morkai's dark fires, hurled from the underworld to set the fires of doom across the realms of men.

LOGAN'S RAGE

The world-shattering explosion caused by Morkai's Tooth saw Midgardia torn apart from the planetary core outward. The Fenris System had suffered a mortal wound.

No joy could be found in the heart of Logan Grimnar when the news of the Tzeentchian fleet's disappearance reached his ears. The Fenris Sector was largely free of the Silver Towers' curse, but a planet under his guardianship had been slain – and by his hand. Emotions blazed in his chest, as fierce as the fireball that now marred the heavens, but instead of dwindling they grew hotter with each passing minute. The Cyclops was behind this – an old enemy of the Sons of Russ, and a cunning one. He knew it as surely as if he could hear the monster's laughter ringing in his ears. To his dismay, his suspicions were confirmed when a missive-psalm reached the *Honour*'s strategium. A crimson giant walked Fenris, leaving destruction in his wake.

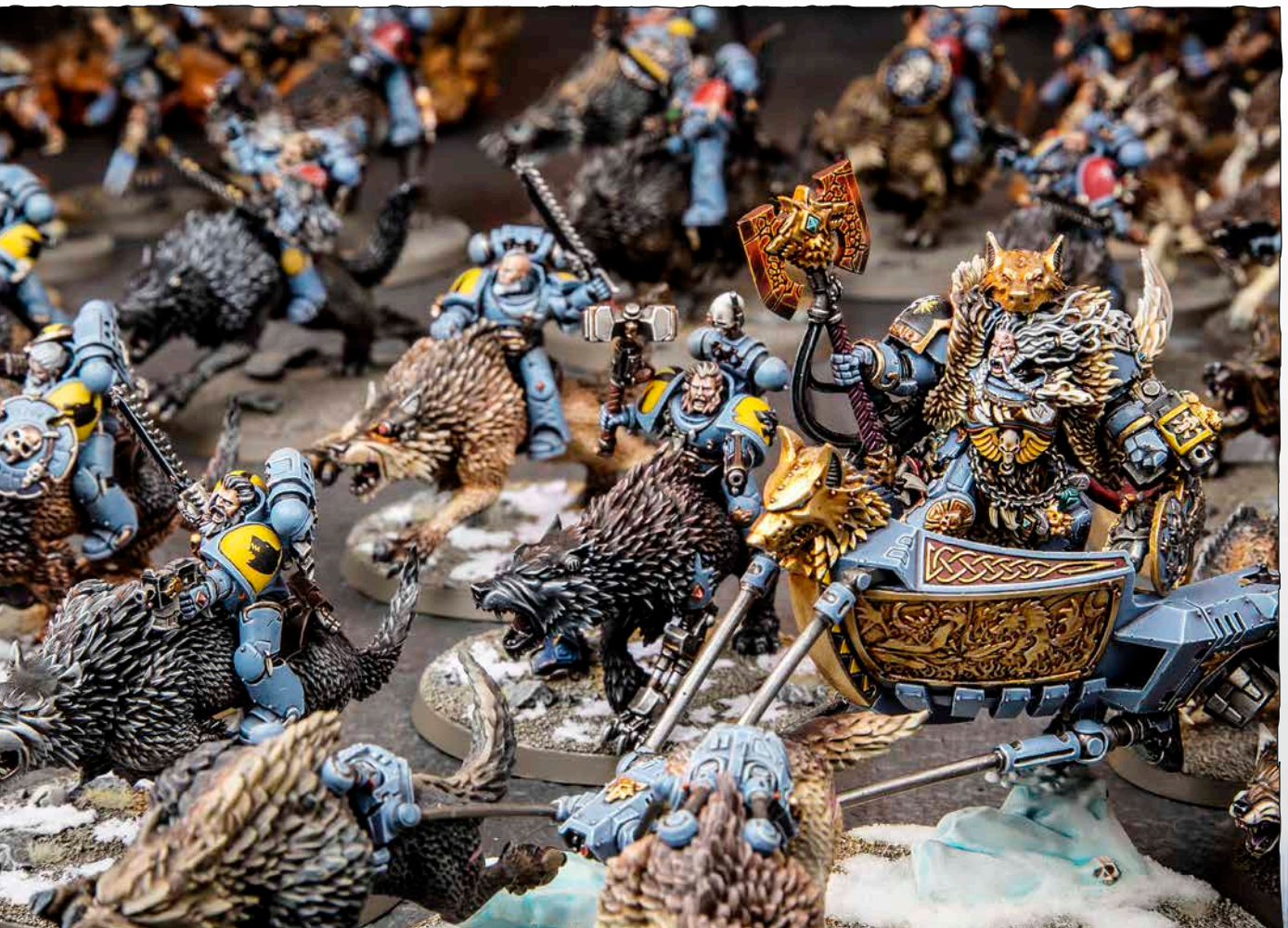
Giving the order for all ahead full, Grimnar made for the engine decks, a trio of Iron Priests following him. The Great Wolf's determination to fight in person for his home world was so strident, so close to the edge of unreasoning rage, that every man and servitor in the *Allfather's Honour* redoubled their efforts to make as much haste as humanly possible. The orbit of Midgardia had taken it relatively close to the death world that once protected it, and Logan's fleet reached its destination with impressive speed. No sooner had the Iron Priests sanctified their orbit than the invasion alarms rang out, every Space Marine aboard the *Honour* scrambling for a teleportarium, hangar or drop bay.

The revenge of the Great Wolf was close at hand.

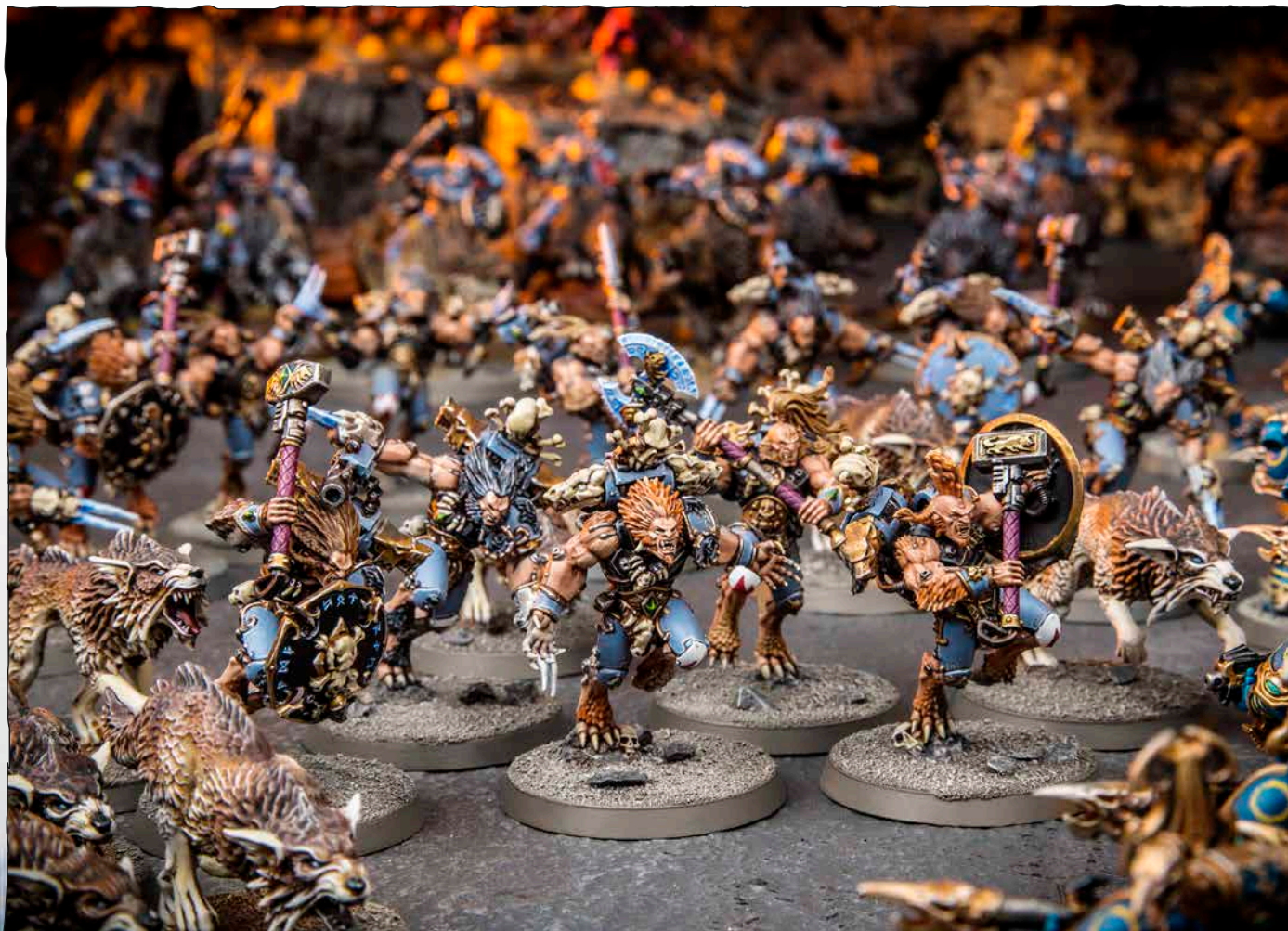












THE WORKS OF MAGNUS

The mind of the Crimson King is inestimable and labyrinthine, a whirling vortex of fractal possibilities and dizzying dreams of change. He had not one plan of conquest in full flow, but several, and many of them were reaching fruition. Doom had come to Fenris in no small measure.

The Crimson King found the demise of Midgardia to be endlessly entertaining, a fitting reward for those who venerated the hypocrite Sons of Russ. Deep within his spiteful soul, there was still a part of the Daemon Primarch that found the idea of bringing about Exterminatus a horrifying concept on some level, though he was well used to quashing such feelings. His actions had caused billions of innocent souls to die in agony, something that the Primarch would once have carried as a mark of shame to his grave. The greater part of the Daemon Primarch's being, however, found little more than a swell of satisfaction that the next stage of his plan was complete.

Long ago, whilst forging alliances and moving the pieces of his grand plan into place, Magnus had made a pact with his brother in darkness, Mortarion. Mortarion was the Primarch of the Death Guard, lord of the feculent hell-world Barbarus and favoured of the Plague God. He had dared refer to himself as the Crimson King's equal, and had even spoke against him in a former life – Magnus had not forgotten that slight, but for his great work to succeed, he needed allies.



A bargain had been struck deep within the Eye of Terror. The cadaverous Mortarion had agreed to send one of his choicest entropic diseases – and an endless legion to carry it – in order to hasten the conquest of the Fenris System. In return, Magnus had sworn that Mortarion could claim any planet under the Wolf's Eye in the name of Nurgle – any other than Fenris itself, for that already bore the mark of Tzeentch upon it. The fungal reaches of Midgardia were a natural choice; with a few pandemics sown through its jungles, the planet would make a pleasing annex to Nurgle's Garden.

By the time Morkai's Tooth had been launched towards Midgardia, the planet was all but consumed by the vileness of Nurgle's Realm. But the prize had been snatched away from the Plague God's clutches at the last, detonated spectacularly in an act of cosmic sacrifice. But that was not Magnus' fault, of course – whether Mortarion and his agents could hold onto their new territory was their own lookout. Such devil's bargains have always been meat and drink to Magnus' master, the Architect of Fate. This twist in events was especially welcome, because it discomfited Tzeentch's eternal rival, the Lord of Plagues. So the Great Game had ever been played.

Compared to the true aftermath of Midgardia's spectacular demise, the damage wrought to Nurgle's annex was all but irrelevant. The death of a world is an event of terrible psychic magnitude, for the swansong of several billion souls is sweet music indeed to one empowered by strife. When that fell deed was in essence a gross betrayal, the deliberate act of the protector slaying those he had sworn to protect, the psychic energy was all the more potent. Should a practitioner of the eldritch arts harness that tempest of emotion, capturing the shock wave of energy that explodes through the Warp, he would have power enough to change the galaxy. Magnus the Red had ensured he would do just that.

Not by accident had the Crimson King sent his Exalted Sorcerers into the cold depths of space. The Silver Towers that blighted the Fenris Sector from end to end, arranged into a complex metaphysical pattern that echoed that of Magnus' celestial orrery, were ready and waiting when Midgardia met its end.

As the physical blast of the Space Wolves' planet-shattering Exterminatus roared towards them, the Silver Towers had harnessed the tidal wave of psychic energy that came before it. Brighter and brighter they had shone until the physical dimension could hold them no longer. At the apex of their psychic harvest, they winked out of existence and returned to orbit the sorcerous orb they called home. The commanders of the Imperial fleet that defended the Fenris Sector had rejoiced at their enemy's disappearance, little realising that Magnus' plans had not suffered a retreat, but ensured a major advance along the vengeful path he had chosen.

Magnus' desire to visit the pain of betrayal and wrongful execution upon the Space Wolves was not born entirely of spite, nor some twisted sense of poetic justice. Even an apprentice mage knows that like affects like, and that there is power in the echoes of form and deed. Possessing the likenesses of a victim makes the spell easier to achieve, and to include a part of the target in the ritual – a fingernail, hair or treasured item – increases its connective potency ninefold. Such petty curses were beneath one such as Magnus. His concern was not to use an echo of a single adversary's physical form, but of cataclysmic events that had resonated throughout history. One in particular, in fact: the burning of Prospero.

The mutative Curse of the Wulfen had been seeded deep, the lupine flesh-change so cunning in its delivery it was welcomed and spread by the very warriors it would soon lay low. Even now, the Space Wolves were being changed by proximity to their feral brethren, proud and handsome warriors devolving into atavistic caricatures as the most bestial aspects of their natures were made manifest. It was a calculated affliction, and one that had caused the intolerance and suspicion of the Imperium to turn upon the warriors of Fenris with a vengeance. By having the

Changeling play so expertly upon the rivalry between the Dark Angels and the Space Wolves, Magnus had shown the Sons of Russ what it was like to be persecuted for their genetic deviance. More than that, it had given them a taste of what it was like to have their sovereign domain bombarded by those they had once called brothers.

The works of the Cyclops did not stop there. In bringing fire and damnation to Fenris, Magnus had given his adversaries a taste of his own people's fate; the gene-stock of the Space Wolves was tainted by mutation and madness, and monstrous tentacled fiends hunted those still hale and strong. In turning one brotherhood of Space Marines against the strongholds of another, he had ensured the flames of the Horus Heresy roared back into horrible life. More specifically, by manipulating the Space Wolves into destroying a world populated by their former allies, Magnus had echoed the execution of his own planet – and expertly harnessed the psychic backlash of billions of dying souls in the process.

In terms of metaphysical ritual, it was the single most powerful arcane gambit to have been attempted since the ignition of the Astronomican. With the destruction of Midgardia harnessed by the Silver Towers, it had been an unqualified success.

All was in readiness for the final act.

The Blue Scribes grovelled and whimpered, tiny in stature next to the towering colossus they served. They talked over one another in their frantic need to please as they shovelled forward scrolls, grimoires and illuminated manuscripts. 'It is all here, then,' said Magnus. 'You did as I commanded.'

'Yes, O Lord of Fates Arising,' said P'tarix. 'All sorceries of man's devising. That Angels' hoard was quite surprising.'

'Forgive our lateness, if you please,' said Xirat'p, genuflecting dramatically, 'to carry such a load plays havoc with the knees.'

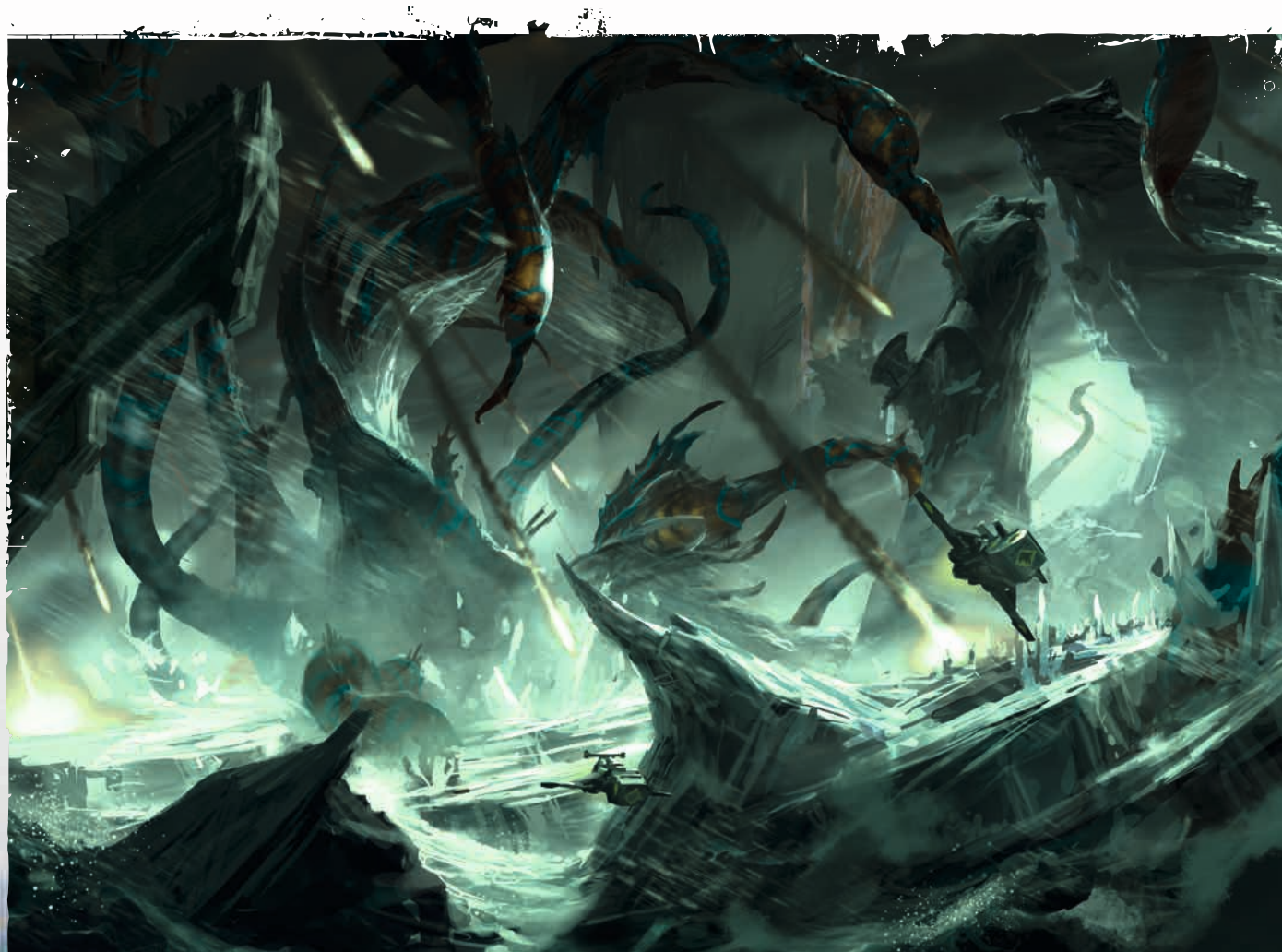
Magnus passed his great glaive over the assembled arcana. Relic by relic the hoard turned to strangely scented mist. The miasma wreathed him in a shielding aura of pale light.

'Inspired, to shield against the arcane,' said P'tarix, 'not all Mankind is so mundane.'

'Silence,' said Magnus, 'lest I hurl you into the Well of Eternity.'

'Aiee!' shouted Xirat'p and P'tarix as one, grabbing each other in fear. Magnus grimaced and opened a fist. The eye in his palm stared, and the Daemons turned to motes of blue light.

'Back to your toil, scribes,' said Magnus. 'It is time to end this.'



THE SONS OF FENRIS

The Claws of Russ scarred the skies once more as wave after wave of Drop Pods thundered down to earth. This time they came not to conquer, but to reclaim. Logan Grimnar was first to the fray, his wrath a howl upon the wind. Pack after pack of Wolf Guard drove the charge home into the traitorous Legion that trespassed upon their world.

Waves of insertion craft shot from the skies, making haste to the magma-flooded coastline that the Wolf Lords were calling Burning Lake; there was the greatest concentration of Thousand Sons, and hence there was the target for the Great Wolf's raging vengeance.

The traitors were making a massed advance upon the Wolf's Gullet, a grand chasm said to lead to the heart of Fenris itself. The Fang had been rendered silent, for though the pyromancer invasion that boiled through its dungeons had been repelled at the last, their war-fires had still done serious damage to the reactors in the lower levels. The armoured companies of Egil Iron Wolf and the headstrong warriors of Sven Bloodhowl were closing in fast; even Grand Master Aurikon's Grey Knights were inbound after being alerted to the daemonic presence gathering near the Fang. The Champions of Fenris were closest to the site, more than ready for retribution. Grimnar knew not what the Thousand Sons intended. His suspicions were that ritual magic would be involved, but in truth, it mattered little. The presence of Chaos worshippers gathered in force upon Asaheim was reason enough for the kill-strike.



The vanguard of the Space Wolves' attack was driven into the body of the enemy like a broad-bladed spear. Swathed in a blizzard of ash and embers conjured by his Rune Priests, Grimnar led the charge upon his chariot *Stormrider*. Many an eldritch bolt was turned aside by that ancient relic's force field. Too many others sent grey-armoured warriors toppling from their saddles before the charge hit home, their battle-plate melted away and their flesh mutating, but it was a price inescapable if the Space Wolves were to reach the deadly cut and thrust of the melee.

Grimnar's way was to strike swiftly, and without mercy. Thunderwolf riders kept the pace whilst grizzled Wolf Guard and howling packs of Wulfen debarked from speeding Stormfang Gunships to charge forwards in their wake. Flashes of blue and gold armour span through the firestorm as the Thousand Sons were dismembered, decapitated, and stamped into the slush-slicked ice. Many of the golem-like warriors got back up, ripping and tearing with curled fingers where their bolters were damaged beyond repair, and for a moment it seemed as if Logan's charge had stalled.

Then came the Firehowlers, and the deadlock was broken wide open. The initial push had seen the Thousand Sons turn at bay, as Grimnar had known it would – they had little choice, for he had deliberately trapped them upon the shores of Burning Lake. The Sorcerers in command of the automaton army had spread their warriors out, taking the force of Grimnar's charge into their midst whilst moving around the flank. In doing so, they had turned their backs to the west, and invited Sven Bloodhowl to strike home at full strength.

It was as sound a trap as any wolf pack had executed, but against foes as strange as the Thousand Sons, it was not enough. The Sorcerers amidst the traitors incanted a ritual that blistered the air around them, the heat-gheists they conjured flocking outwards to brush against every one of their minions. Grimnar growled loud as they fell back onto Burning Lake itself, walking upon the lava as if it were solid ground. The Space Wolves slashing their way through the enemy ranks came up short upon the flaming shores, firing their bolt pistols as the Thousand Sons stepped backwards to walk upon the sea of flames. The volleys of return fire were punishing in the extreme. It was becoming obvious that it was not the Space Wolves who were closing the jaws of a trap, but their adversaries. Hero after Fenrisian hero was flung back into the midst of his battle-brothers, chest agape or headless neck spurting gouts of blood. Grimnar's champions died alongside Sven's Firehowlers, their sagas cut short by an enemy that laughed at the laws of nature and reason. It is not the way of the Space Wolves to yield in the face of adversity. Though they realised they were outmatched in a firefight with the Thousand Sons, they crouched down, turned their shoulders into the fusillade and returned fire as best they could. All knew that

Grimnar's blood was boiling, but he was no fool, and had chosen his warriors well.

The Firehowlers have long had a fascination with fire. During their feasts, they eat, breathe and walk on flame, for they believe a true warrior proves his mastery over that which burns. Named for the Fire Breather volcano, they have long incorporated lava into their rituals, and they fear it not. Grinning fiercely, Sven Bloodhowl sent forth squadrons of anti-grav Land Speeders that ploughed furrows in the lake of fire as they sent hissing melta-beams at the foe; even the ensorcelled Rubricae melted away like tallow in the face of such fearsome weaponry. As the Thousand Sons tracked these airborne packs with their bolters and rotary cannons, Sven and his Wolf Guard led a jump pack strike upon the Thousand Sons nearest the lava lake's shoreline. Together with their remaining Skyclaws, they hurtled over the crackling sea of molten rock to slam into the Rubricae and then leap backwards in a blast of turbines to reach the shore once more. Those of the Thousand Sons that toppled were not burned by the lava, for their masters' sorceries had inured them to its killing heat, but they sank nonetheless, vanishing from sight with no more than a few glopping bubbles to mark their demise.

The Exalted Sorcerers commanding the army of automatons soared above the fray, borne aloft on blade-edged discs of Tzeentch that negotiated the fiery thermals as if they were cool zephyrs. One Sorcerer hurled crackling bolts of pink energy that blasted one Land Speeder after another to scrap metal, another threw helixes of Warp light that caused their victims to simply wink out of existence. A third threw gobbets of corrosive blood at the Space Wolves on the shoreline, each splash of crimson eating away at exposed flesh like concentrated vitriol. Every volley sent their way was swiftly dissipated by a glimmering shield of force. The Space Wolves' death toll was rising with every passing second.

So large was the Thousand Sons army amassed on the shore that not all of them had reached their muster point over the lake of lava. A thick knot of Space Wolves was hacking its way into the midst of a Thousand Sons strongpoint when Logan Grimnar saw something that snatched his breath from his lungs: a giant amongst men clad in slate grey and gold, his blonde mane flowing in the hot breeze. His sword sang as he killed and killed, explosions of azure energy erupting around him with every thrust and sweep.

For a moment, the apparition met Grimnar's gaze.

'This is your world, my son. Use its bite.'

Then the vision was gone. Part of Grimnar's soul sang nonetheless. It was Leman Russ he had seen, he was sure of it. And he knew what to do.

With a long and piercing howl, the High King of Fenris cut a path to the north.

THE LAKE OF FIRE

A bubbling, churning sea of lava stood before Grimnar and the heart of the Wolf's Gullet, where the focus of an aeons-long vendetta threatened to conquer his world completely. Even should he somehow cross that deadly lake of fire, the warriors ranged against the Great Wolf and his champions were possessed of immortal power, and would not yield easily.

Logan Grimnar fought like a force of nature. Braided hair and wolfskin mantle were caught in the spark-strewn winds as he drove ever forwards into his hated enemies. The Axe Morkai, a trophy taken from a slain World Eaters champion, rose and fell. For once, its blood-hungry blade did not hiss and bubble with vital fluids, but instead was swathed by a filigree of lightning and dust – the soul-remnants of the cursed Rubricae he left dismembered in his wake. Then the Great Wolf's chariot slewed to a halt, icy mush spraying from the great paws of the beasts at its fore. *Stormrider* had reached the edge of the lava sea, and with the rest of the Thousand Sons walking atop its molten crest as if it were solid ground, Grimnar and his Champions of Fenris had simply run out of foes to kill.

Grimnar ground his teeth, loath to turn back – circumventing the lava sea would take the best part of a day, and that was time he did not have. The Great Wolf was driven by a desperate sense of urgency. He had seen the Primarch in the flesh, fighting alongside his sons. What more proof did they need that the Wolftime was upon them? Magnus fouled Asaheim with his presence already. He could taste the fiend's eldritch stink upon the wind, even though he could not see him. Fenris was all but in the Crimson King's thrall; if the Sons of Russ were to turn the planet's might against him, it had to be done soon.



Then came the answer to Grimnar's summons. Coming in low through the smoke came three entire squadrons of Stormfang Gunships, their turbines roaring loud. Land Speeders flew escort duty around them, assault cannons sending bullets that sprayed lava as they tracked into a gun line of Thousand Sons. Within a matter of seconds a half-dozen Rubricae were cut down, but their companions did not so much as flinch. Calmly, they turned and tracked the Space Wolves aircraft as they strafed, soulreaper cannons tearing the Land Speeders out of the sky in explosions of mangled metal. The Terminator-armoured traitors upon the lava sea sent missiles streaking out to detonate hard upon the prow of each of the mighty vessels; in places, the stricken gunships peeled off lest the force of their own momentum tear them apart. The others held true to their course, so low to the pack ice that Grimnar reflexively ducked as they shot overhead.

The Great Wolf smiled as the gunships fired not upon the Sorcerers and their army of mindless Thousand Sons, but upon the sea of lava itself. Their helfrost cannons, weapons unique to Fenris that could freeze every cell in a target's body, scoured the molten lava over and over. In a matter of seconds, a long tongue of cooling rock extended half a mile into the lake of fire.

Grimnar was already hurtling along the impromptu causeway, his Wolf Guard and their Wulfen wards close at his heels. The Thousand Sons reacted slowly – too slowly. With a howl of triumph Grimnar was amongst them once more, his great axe ending the cursed existences of the ancient traitors one after another. The Champions of Fenris ran hard in his wake, their Terminator armour proof even against the infernal ammunition of their lifeless foes. Arjac Rockfist led the charge, slamming his anvil shield into the nearest Rubric Marine with such force the automaton came apart in a clatter of armour plates.

The Thunderhawk *Ironspear* followed close behind the Stormfang Gunships, heavy bolters booming as they sought the sorcerous masters of the enemy force. A bolt-spitting Stormfang was pulled from the sky as it swept past the Thousand Sons telekine Acazept the Ingrate, the gunship ploughing into the magma in a spray of molten rock. The telekine waved a mocking finger, his laughter chilling upon the wind. A moment too late, the *Ironspear* blasted the Sorcerer to atoms with a stabbing beam from its turbo-laser, but the revenge kill was enough to cause the magister's fellow psykers to focus on their own defence rather than pressing the attack.

The Thunderhawk's claws were savage, but it was that which it held in its metallic guts that posed the greatest threat. The Great Wolf had commanded his Rune

Priests to attend him, despite the likelihood of meeting a Daemon Primarch head-on – and Magnus the Red, at that. In a psychic confrontation they would likely die to a man within a matter of heartbeats. They had come to his call nonetheless.

It was well that they did. Though Grimnar's charge had seen him drive a deadly assault into the Thousand Sons army and lay low several of the Sorcerers that focussed its animus, it was supported only by Land Speeders, gunships and speculative fire from distant Long Fangs. With gathering pace the Thousand Sons converged upon the still-cooling causeway, its rock plinking and cracking as the warring temperatures of fire and ice threatened to break it apart. A trio of disc-riding Sorcerers, their altitude putting them out of reach of Grimnar's bold thrust, realised the Great Wolf sought to fight past their bulwark to the shores beyond. As one they raised their staffs towards a Stormfang squadron carving overhead for another attack run. Vast pinions appeared in the sky as a winged serpent – even larger than a legendary Fenrisian Roc – took form. It darted forwards like a striking cobra, ripping the Stormfangs from the air one after another and crushing them in explosions of blue fire.

The Rune Priests inside the Thunderhawk were not found wanting. On approach to Grimnar's location, they had begun a summoning of their own, and the belly of the *Ironspear* was strewn with pelts, bones and blooded runes.

With a terrible, ear-shattering roar, a vast lupine head reared out of the burning sea. A fiery mane cascaded from a colossal skull of molten rock, jaws drizzling ropes of darkening magma as mountainous haunches pushed a tidal wave of lava across the endless ranks of Thousand Sons. The Fire Breather, mythical totem of Sven Bloodhowl's Great Company, had emerged from its volcanic lair. Jaws lined with jagged stalactites crunched down on the winged serpent conjured by the Thousand Sons, dissipating it in a burst of flame. The titanic wolf-thing came crashing back down into the lava beyond, tidal waves of red-hot liquid slopping over the massed ranks of Rubricae.

Suddenly Grimnar's path was clear. The last three Stormfangs, hurtling back around for another attack run, came in low to fire their helfrost cannons once more. This time the tongue of cooling rock was dangerously thin – barely three warriors abreast could negotiate it without toppling into the waves of lava – but the Champions of Fenris pressed on. Foot by agonising foot, they strained and sweated and bled until the far side of the lake of fire was in sight.

There before them stood rank upon rank of Terminators, their massive silhouettes unmistakable. They were the Scarab Occult, elite bodyguard of the Crimson King.

In their midst stood the distinctive figure of Ahriman, Arch-Sorcerer of the Thousand Sons.




KEY
Thousand Sons
Scarab Occult
Ravenwing
Egil Iron Wolf
Harald Deathwolf
Arjac Rockfist
Tzaangors
Wyrdstorm Brotherhood
Logan Grimnar
Daemon Host
DEFENCE WALLS
RUNE GATES
Sub-surface ref: 'Iron Vaults'
THE FANG (SORRVYST GLACIS)
MAWR FJORDS
HUNTER'S REACH
ASAHEIM PLATEAU
MOUNTAIN OF TRIALS
THE WOLF'S GULLET

FLAME AND FURY

The Champions of Fenris gave a thunderous roar as they charged along the icy promontory towards the firing line of Scarab Occult Terminators. Fury drove them on even as volley after volley of inferno bolts hammered into them – their determination was the stuff of sagas. Standing against them was the most powerful psyker of all his kind.

Grimnar's chosen vanguard went to war in the heaviest wargear their Chapter could provide, but even Terminator armour could not save them all from the sorceries of Ahriman. Torfin Daggerfist went down to a coruscating blast that caught him full in the chest, his face contorted in agony. Belegor the Pale had his head torn from his neck in a spray of multicoloured light. Olev Whiteblade was punched from his feet by an invisible force that plunged him into a yawning maw of fire. Those warriors behind them gritted their fangs and ran onwards past the fallen. Should their charge falter, the lack of momentum would see them all slain.

Grimnar's chariot veered and jounced as it bore the High King into the fray. The old warrior's eyes met those of Ahriman, the legendary Arch-Sorcerer who had slain the packmates of Russ himself at the dawn of the Imperium. A wordless moment of pure hatred passed between them, but Grimnar had another fight to win. Beyond the traitor Librarian, the Great Wolf could see only a roiling miasma of energy that deadened sound as well as vision. With Magnus' lieutenants so close at hand, he could guess well enough what lay beyond. Shouting, he urged his Thunderwolves into a sprint and a leap. Chariot and rider alike soared over the heads of the Scarab Occult line to plunge headlong into the strange mist.

A Stormfang roared past, its helfrost cannon freezing two of the Scarab Occult into lifeless statues. Ahriman gestured dismissively, flames leaping from the lava at his bidding. The inert Terminators jerked stiffly back to life, one sending missiles from its shoulder mount to impact with the rear of the Stormfang and send it crashing into the scorched rock beyond.

Grimnar's Champions of Fenris charged on as the Arch-Sorcerer reached out a long-fingered hand. Five streams of mirror-like shards flew out, striking five of Grimnar's warriors with a barely audible tinkle of glass. They had flown straight for warriors without helms, and where they struck flesh, the Terminators devolved horribly. Hair sprouted all over and noses elongated into fanged snouts as they changed rapidly – not into Wulfen, but into Fenrisian Wolves. Anatomies buckled and reshaped radically within armour, yet the Terminator plate held firm. Flesh and bone yielded first. Howls became yelps became whimpers as bones snapped and ground, driven like osseous blades through the bodies of the transformed. The wolf-things fell, rolling and spasming sidelong to meet the dubious mercy of a fiery death.

Still the Champions of Fenris came on. Ahriman launched another psychic onslaught, fiery snakes darting like sidewinders from his eyes. This time it was Arjac Rockfist that led the charge, two of his Shieldbrothers on either side. They raised their heavy storm shields, a living battering ram of ceramite and muscle pounding forwards at a loping run. The baleful energies curdled, turned to foul-smelling but harmless ectoplasm. Behind the shield wall was Njal Stormcaller, debarked from the *Ironspear* and working hard to disperse every spell hurled their way.

Arjac and his Wolf Guard had the chance they needed. The Scarab Occult stitched their fire across the Space Wolves line with clinical precision, aiming for knees and helms instead of the well-protected bodies of their foes, but the Shieldbrothers were accustomed to such powerful impacts. Here and there a warrior staggered, only to spring forwards again, enraged and growling.

The Wolf Guard charge hit the Scarab Occult line with the force of a wrecking ball. Somehow the Sekhmet kept their footing, sliding back along the ashen shore but remaining upright. The Scarab Occult fought with a serpentine speed quite unlike the dreamlike movements of the Rubricae. The automaton warriors parried hammer blows with elegant sweeps of their curved blades; two even disarmed their opponents, whilst another sent a lightning-clawed champion sprawling with grievous wounds across his torso. Then Arjac barrelled into the fray shield-first, opening the Scarab Occult's line and hurling Foehammer sidelong. The weapon struck Ahriman full in the side with a loud crack, sending the Sorcerer skidding away in a flurry of actinic lightning. There was a flash as Foehammer teleported back to Arjac's modified gauntlet; when it faded, Ahriman had disappeared.

With the Arch-Sorcerer's augmentations banished, the Sekhmet no longer fought like demigods from Prospero's mythic past. Yet Arjac and his Wolf Guard were still more than evenly matched, and the Thousand Sons had numbers on their side. It was not long before the Champions fought more like brawlers than warrior kings, headbutting, elbowing and lashing out wherever they could at the indomitable crimson bodyguards that had somehow fought them to a standstill.

The ember-storm raged around the combatants, fanning the flames in the hearts of Arjac's Shieldbrothers to new heights. Here and there along the lines of battle, one of the Fenrisian champions would open his foe's guard, a thunder hammer following soon after to crush the armour to buckled ruin. Slowly, painstakingly, they pushed their enemies back, and every step they won allowed more of the Wolf Guard to gain the beach. Just as the initial stalemate of two well-matched wrestlers gives way to sudden victory, the Champions of Fenris found themselves suddenly on the ascendant, barrelling through the ranks of the disrupted enemy to slash and pulverise and stamp their enemies into the rocky ground.

The miasma that had claimed their lord dissipated fast, revealing the spectacle beyond. The sight that greeted them ravaged the sanity of all who witnessed it.





MAGNUS ASCENDANT

At the vast chasm of the Wolf's Gullet, the war for Fenris' heart was in full flow. With the sudden disappearance of the Silver Towers and rumours of Logan Grimnar's Champions taking the fight to Asaheim, the most mobile Great Companies had reacted with the speed of predators on the hunt. What they found was deadlier than any had anticipated.

As the Champions of Fenris fought Ahriman's undying legions, their battle-brothers converged upon the Wolf's Gullet. Egil Iron Wolf had pushed every one of his war machines to the limit in order to reach it at this critical hour, attacking from the north after being redeployed by bulk lander. He launched his attack at the fore of a Land Raider spearhead, his armoured columns grinding across Asaheim's pack ice in great sprays of melting snow. He did not come alone, for the surviving members of the Midgardian defence force rode with him in the tanks of the Astra Militarum, and from the Mountain of Trials in the west Harald Deathwolf rode at the head of the largest wolf pack Fenris had ever seen. Both the Ironwolves and the Deathwolves had been embroiled in vicious and close-fought combat with invaders hailing from the Silver Towers that had rained fire upon their home world. Their Wolf Lords had suspected trickery when those floating citadels had glowed dazzlingly white and then simply vanished, leaving their ground forces at the mercy of the resurgent Space Wolves. Their fears were soon confirmed via vox-cascade with the Fang – the phenomenon was a false retreat, and Magnus' invaders had been sighted upon Asaheim. Before the hour was out the Great Companies had broken what remained of their enemies and made all speed for the Fang.



The Thousand Sons that had appeared upon Asaheim had marched from a shimmering portal that had spiralled out of nothingness at the mouth of the Wolf's Gullet. With the Fang robbed of power by the battle in its dungeons, there had been little in the way to intercept the legion of automatons that had marched out. Only when serried ranks of Rubricae had fanned out to stand upon the edge of the vast chasm, their disc-riding masters scouring the snows for signs of the enemy, did the mastermind behind Fenris' plight enter the fray.

Magnus the Red blazed once more into reality, surrounded by a halo of psychic energy so intense it melted the snows for a mile around. His striding, upright gait radiated pride in great measure, and well it might, for his prize was there for the taking. The Great Companies, spurred to greater speed by the light illuminating the clouds around the Fang from below, raced back to intercept. In doing so, they went to their deaths.

The Space Wolves did not go to battle alone against the Daemon Primarch. From the tumultuous skies darted allies on black wings; squadrons of Nephilim Jetfighters flew as outriders for Dark Talons and massed Land Speeders. The Ravenwing, despatched by Azrael himself, had flocked to join their rivals in this deadliest of hunts.

It was the Ravenwing that first paid the price for challenging the Crimson King. A bolt of actinic light shot from the centre of the rocky circle marking Magnus' arrival upon Asaheim, a piercing lance of energy so fierce it scarred the eyes of all who saw it. In a flash two jetfighters were disintegrated, the third of their squadron spiralling to crash burning into Asaheim's immense cliff face. The Dark Talons that came in close behind them opened fire with their rift cannons, hoping to banish Magnus back to the Warp. The strange unlight of the weapons did no more than blister the Daemon Primarch's skin. With a snap of his wings he sprang into the air, whipping his immense staff around to send an airborne tsunami of psychic energy crackling out. Where it struck home the Dark Talons were turned to black marble laced with seams of the pilot's flesh. They arced, then plummeted, plunging one after another into the boiling morass of corrupted lava at the base of the Wolf's Gullet.

By the time the aircraft struck the lava Magnus had already landed deftly upon the chasm's edge like some titanic gargoyle, his booming chant echoing across the ice fields. Those who heard the words first-hand felt an itchy agony blossom across their skin, as if they were being poisoned by serpents that had materialised within arteries and veins.

The Deathwolves were the next to brave a headlong charge, but their attack did not go unsupported. The Ravenwing had jettisoned a set of teleport homers as they soared across the ice, and the devices still winked steadily in the snow. Their call was answered not by warriors of the First, but by the 3rd Brotherhood of the Grey Knights, Daemon-slayers beyond compare. In a perfect hexagrammatic dispersal they materialised, not more than a stone's throw from the Daemon Primarch they had come to slay. Magnus waved his staff once more, and a sea of cackling pink Daemons surged from the snow, rubbery limbs waving as they hurled warpfire into the Grey Knights' ranks. Many of the incorruptible heroes fell, turned to crystal prisons with their souls trapped visibly inside them. The others fought with the fury of the Emperor enraged, their nemesis force weapons carving apart Horror after Horror in explosions of rank Daemon-matter. Step by step they hacked a path towards Magnus, their incantations summoning waves of white fire that banished the minor Daemons that sought to slay them. Only when a flight of Burning Chariots roared overhead, Daemons spilling from the fires they left in their wake, was Grand Master Aurikon's force all but buried in their enemies. Their advance slowed to a crawl, then stopped altogether.

Just as it seemed the warriors of Titan were to be overwhelmed by the tide of gibbering Daemons that cascaded towards them, the charge of the Deathwolves hit home. Such was their momentum that neither wolf nor Space Marine had time to think about the nature of the foe they faced; there was simply the kill at hunt's end, and the reclamation of the planet that was rightfully theirs. For a time, the Horrors were pushed back in cacophonic disorder; viewed from high above, it was as if a river of grey- and white-furred bodies pushed back a sickly pink tide. Then the crests of the Daemon waves turned from pink to blue, and that tide pushed back. Hundreds of wolves and wolf riders were slain, consumed by warpfire or drowned by the enormous press of Daemon-flesh that came against them.

Through that sea of daemonic terror waded no less than five Nemesis Dreadknights of Titan. Built to fight the kings of the Immaterium on equal terms, the pilots of the giant walkers made short work of the cackling rabble massing around them. Moving in rough lockstep, the Grey Knights piloting the Dreadknights from their harnesses stamped and crushed with their silvered exoskeletons even as they slew with rune-etched blades and heavy psycannons. The Horrors threw every possible change-spell and flame-curse they could muster, but their magic found no purchase on the blessed metal of the Dreadknights.

In their success against the Daemon hordes, they drew the attention of Magnus, and thereby sealed their doom. A mind-altering blur of colours shot out from the Crimson King's cyclopean eye. The beam of Warp energy was so concentrated that it could not be constrained to a single dimension, and a thousand tiny familiar-spirits flew outward and into the heavens as the beam carved across the battle line. In its grievous potency it annihilated Daemons and Dreadknights alike. With a single pass of his bloodshot orb, Magnus had wreaked the most fundamental of changes upon his challengers. Where four heroes of the Imperium had strode to meet him, now there was only scorched air and the lingering echo of screams. The fifth Dreadknight, their leader, was not so lucky. He had been transformed into a giant of bone and silvered cogs; the pilot was now little more than a demented marionette, jerked aloft by his own bloody sinews from his machine's pistoning fingers.

The destruction of five of Titan's most prized assets was beyond countenance. High above the Fang, the masterfully built spacecraft of the Grey Knights Chapter remote-scryed the location of the Daemon Primarch, calibrated their weapons batteries, and fired. Searing ruby-red beams shot from the heavens, all four converging upon the same point as the gunners of the Grey Knights fleet brought their deadliest weapons to bear. By rights they should have reduced Magnus to a steaming crater. In truth, they did little more than drive him to his knees; a hemisphere of invisible force protected him from physical attack, no matter how powerful. The Daemon Primarch rose, laughing cruelly at the impotence of the Imperial order founded to slay his kind.

The rune-casting psykers of Logan's Great Company, gathered under Njal Stormcaller, did not despair. They sent bolts of psychic lightning, ghostly tempests, and blizzards of razored ice-knives that flayed to the bone the Tzaangors cavorting around their master's feet. Yet none of their runic witchery even touched the Crimson King. If anything, Magnus seemed larger and more powerful than before the first salvo had been fired.



The Crimson King's laughter grew louder. Though he now hovered, wings beating slowly, above the Wolf's Gullet, his voice sounded as if he were mere inches from the ear of all who witnessed him. Those who looked upon him directly did so with needles of pain stabbing their minds, for he glowed almost too bright to bear.

With Njal leading their chants, the most powerful of Fenris' Rune Priests joined their might once more. Slowly, the vast chasm of the Gullet closed upon Magnus, its rocky edges like the jagged teeth of the World Wolf itself. Lava geysered and boiled as the chasm bit with the force of grinding tectonic plates. For a moment, the Daemon Primarch disappeared from sight. At the last, Magnus threw out his arms and held the rocky jaws wide with only his vast telekinetic power, the jagged teeth of the cliffs snapping to tumble into the fires below.

Grand Master Valdar Aurikon stretched out his hands, psychic lightning leaping towards Magnus in a great crackling helix. Magnus caught the attack on his staff and hurled it back, the bolt transforming the Grey Knight into scattering nuggets of fool's gold.

Another focussed lance strike shot down from the heavens. This one Magnus did not dissipate upon his protective dome of force, but instead caught with the curve of his blade before hurling it outwards into the rumbling line of battle tanks that was cresting the ridge. The redirected energies hit home with cataclysmic force, smashing the entire column of war engines to smoking ruin.

Then Magnus reached upwards, the eye in his palm blinking once as it focussed on the spacecraft high above. Uttering a low chant, the Crimson King extended his telekinetic mastery until it soared into the stratosphere and beyond. Space Wolf, Dark Angel and Grey Knight alike stood aghast as the sky was lit with expanding coronas of fire. Those Space Marines who auto-viewed the blazing phenomena witnessed Battle Barges and Strike Cruisers crashing into one another as if flung by some godly hand, their reactors overloading a moment later to throw all of Asaheim into stark monochromatic light.

Fenris had a new monarch, and he was mighty indeed.





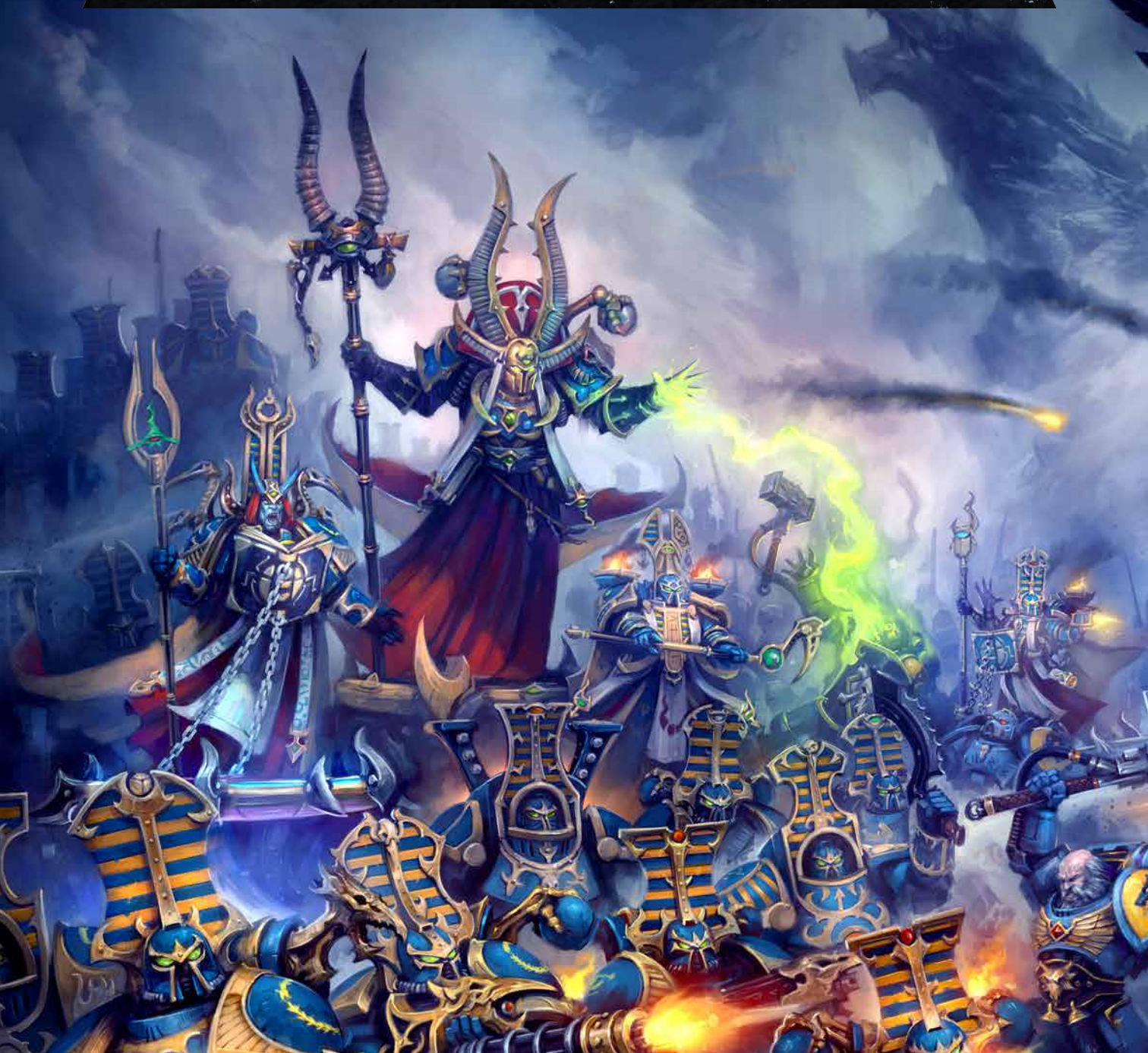
Egil Iron Wolf howled in outrage, driving his Spear of Russ towards the monstrous Primarch at full speed. Ruby beams spat from the Land Raiders' godhammer lascannons – potent weapons indeed, but rendered pitiful in comparison to the lance strikes Magnus had weathered moments before. The Crimson King snarled in impatience, reaching out a clawed hand and clenching it into a fist. Egil Iron Wolf leapt clear as his armoured steed was crushed by an invisible force, buckling like a paper sculpture in an armoured gauntlet. The Wolf Lord took up a lascannon from a dead Long Fang and knelt into a sniper's crouch, sending a deadeye shot stabbing towards Magnus' eye. The Primarch froze the las-beam in place with a pinch of his fingers. With a beckoning gesture he caught Egil Iron Wolf in his telekinetic grip, yanked him in front of his own kill-shot, and released the laser from its stasis. The lascannon beam slammed into Lord Iron Wolf, vaporising him from the waist up.

It was an ignominious end to a mighty saga, but it had bought Logan Grimnar the time he needed. Jumping from *Stormrider* at the edge of the chasm, the Great Wolf called out a mighty challenge. Magnus turned, a sneer of disdain on his cyclopean features. No mortal weapon could harm him, and thanks to the work of the Blue Scribes, neither could the enchanted relics of the Imperium.

But the Axe Morkai was not of the Imperium. It had first been forged as a weapon of Khorne, bane of sorcerers.

Logan leapt. The double-headed power axe slammed into Magnus's chest, shattering arcane wards and piercing his breastplate to bite deep.

In the distance, thunder rumbled long and loud. Only the psykers present heard it for what it was – the laughter of the Blood God himself.





With a deafening roar of pain, Magnus swatted Grimnar back over the lip of the precipice. His allies were close at hand, and more than ready to seize their chance. A gleaming throng of Grey Knight Purifiers gained the chasm's edge, blades extended to pour the white fires of banishment into the Daemon Primarch's wound. Magnus' arcane aura had been compromised badly, for though he possessed wards against every weapon the Imperium might throw at him, he could not guard against an axe once forged in the name of the Blood God. He lashed out with his immense staff, its blade cutting nine of the Grey Knights in half at the waist, but it was a blow of spite rather than conquest. The psychic might of the Grey Knights, still ranged against him, poured through the gap torn in his arcane shielding, incandescent in their power as they burned away the Daemon Primarch's flesh. In moments, he was wreathed head to toe in blazing white fire.

For a heartbeat, Magnus glowed brighter than the Wolf's Eye. The immense energies playing around him turned him from giant to burning supernova. Every Imperial warrior for miles around was blasted backwards to land steaming in the snow.

When they got back to their feet, the Thousand Sons, the Daemon hordes and their cyclopean master alike had vanished from existence.





THE BLAZING AFTERMATH

With Magnus' disappearance, a gale of magical energy raced from world to world, snatching away Daemon and traitor alike. From the viewpoint of a warrior, courage and strength had carried the day, but their lords and masters were not so sure. Had Magnus and his armies truly been defeated? The suspicion that worse was to come hung heavy in the air.

Though the cyclops Magnus had been banished by the Wolf Lords and their allies, the butcher's bill was dizzyingly high. Drifts of corpses lay piled upon the snow as if they had rained from the heavens; the ranks of loyalist and traitor, long riven by ancient strife, lay mingled once more in death. Logan Grimnar sat up from the gore-stained slush, a dozen broken bones making every movement painful as he coughed blood onto the back of his gauntlet. He stood nonetheless, raising the Axe Morkai high to glint in the new dawn. A chorus of cheers greeted the act, but it was shockingly thin and weary.

In the depths of the Fang, the Dreadnought army of Bjorn the Fell-Handed had been brought low by the pyromancer host. The constant barrage of warpfire had reduced the throng of ancients to a handful of walkers. The smell of cooked and corrupted meat hung thick in the air, for the Wulfen of the dungeons had fared even worse and the pyromancers had reached their goal, though only three were left alive. Bjorn fought on, half-conscious, his sarcophagus sloughed away by the fire of the greater Daemon-forms. Then Magnus had departed, and the Dreadnoughts found themselves facing not a host, but a minor cabal. The flagstones shook as Bjorn drove his charge home, and the Thousand Sons were wiped out.

All across the death world the story was the same. What had seemed to be battles against insurmountable odds soon turned to bloody massacres. Those Thousand Sons and Tzaangors not borne away by Magnus' fall were left scattered and directionless, easy prey for the vengeful armies of Fenris. Amongst the greatest concentrations of aetheric energy, monsters from legend still stalked the land. Gunnar Red Moon and his warriors were assailed by a vast skeletal wolf-creature the colour of dried blood, the living incarnation of their totem conjured from tribal nightmares and sent to slay as many as it could. Its claws were red with Fenrisian blood before the concentrated firepower of Long Fang packs and Predator squadrons took it down. In the far south, Bjorn Stormwolf was eaten whole by a Tzeentchian giant – though the Wolf Lord ripped his way from the beast's abdomen, his face was so scarred by intestinal acid his raucous laugh was never heard again. The auto-skjalds and quill-servitors recorded many a saga over those twilight hours, but a sense of foreboding, not victory, hung in the air. The fires of defiance had guttered and gone still, replaced by the ashen exhaustion of grief.

Logan Grimnar knew well what was to come in the aftermath of the Primarch's banishment. He had fought alongside the Grey Knights before, notably during the First War for Armageddon and the last days of Sanctus Reach, and knew their methods were as thorough as they were uncompromising. All those mortals that had witnessed the taint of the Daemon first-hand were to be processed and destroyed without mercy, for left alone the seed of that knowledge could eventually bear terrible fruit. In the war for Fenris, countless thousands of native tribesmen had not only set eyes upon the Daemon hosts, but in some cases fought them directly. The Grey Knights had already begun their dark work, their agents gathering those tribes afflicted by the truth into the bowels of vast bulk lifters. Grimnar's Wolf Lords protested, even came to blows, but this time there was nothing the Great Wolf could do to intervene. To resist the edicts of the Ordo Malleus whilst the eyes of the High Lords were upon them would be to risk bringing the entire Chapter under censure, and perhaps trigger another civil war just when the hour was darkest – perhaps even damning Fenris to Exterminatus alongside its departed brother Midgardia. With a heavy heart, Logan Grimnar gave his seal of approval to the tribesmen's abduction. They were never seen again.

The worlds of the Fenris System were plagued by disasters as the aftermath of the Tzeentchian invasion rolled on. Midgardia's demise had shaken every planet and moon in that system, taking a gradual but profound effect upon every neighbouring world. Frostheim had been reduced to a wasteland of bone, its icy mantle melted away to reveal a thick stratum of fossils. There were those who said that under the new moon some of these skeletons came alive, hunting for the blood of those mortals still eking their lives from the osseous wastes. Svellgard, the ocean moon, was evacuated over the course of a long and difficult month. As it passed close to the Wolf's Eye, it was subjected to a barrage from solar storms induced by Midgardia's demise. Solar flares lashed its surface, turning the once-tainted seas to steam. Though barren, it was subsequently resettled, its sandy islands turned to mountains of glass amidst the hard-baked crust of the seabed.





Valdrmani, the Wolf Moon, remained a hellish wasteland. It had been the site of a Daemon ritual of surpassing size, and though it had since been reconsecrated there were sightings of Warp-gheists for weeks. The moon was wracked by electrical storms and hurricanes of flesh-stripping intensity, but it rode out the catastrophe, rebuilt by the Adepts of the Imperium into an astropathic relay station linked to the choristriums of Terra's warden districts.

Though it too was assailed by natural disasters beyond sane measure, Fenris itself remained whole, the infection beneath its crust eventually burned away. The planet, vast and indomitable, had orbited the Wolf's Eye for geological eras uncounted. It would endure, as it always had. For a time, the spawn of Chaos frothed and crawled from the fissures and seas, expelled from the natural order as a healthy body expels a splinter. The Rune Priests, communing with the spirit of the World Wolf, were quick to proclaim it whole. Yet from that day on, the relationship with the Dark Angels was more strained than ever before, and the agents of the Ordo Hereticus were frequent guests in the Fang's halls. Some said the monsters that haunted the Fenrisian wilderness had lately been more terrifying than any could recall, and that the Dark Gods had cast a pall across the death world. But the people of Fenris were warriors born, not given to despair. Over time, the nightmares of the False Flameheit faded away.

By that time, Logan Grimnar and his most trusted warriors were long gone. Having received a distress hymnal of paramount urgency from the fortress world of Cadia – one that hinted at the presence of multiple Daemon Primarchs, including Magnus – the Wolf Lords had mustered once more around the Grand Annulus. Logan Grimnar had changed since the death of Egil Iron Wolf and his duel with the Crimson King. Now, the same light glinted in his eyes as in that of his mentor, Ulrik the Slayer. He had seen Russ, despite what the whispers said. He was certain of it. The immediate danger was past, their vendetta with Magnus and his Thousand Sons resolved for the time being at least. The Wolftime was upon them – and they must rise to the challenge.

So it was that the Space Wolves departed for the Cadian Gate, elements of every Great Company taking to the Sea of Stars once more to bolster the war effort against the forces of Abaddon the Despoiler. Fenris was left under garrison, but its defenders were few in number, for between the Wulfen's Curse and the invasion of the Crimson King the Chapter had been reduced to a fraction of its former strength. Still, the Great Wolf's conviction was infectious. They would meet the threat of Chaos head-on, and if they successfully hunted Magnus unto death, their sagas would be sung from one end of the galaxy to the other.

Only when the grand fleet of the Space Wolves had made translation into the Cadian System did the stones cast by the Rune Priests all begin to form the same shape.

They showed the ancient Prosperine symbol for vengeance.



Through the auspices of the Inquisition's agents borne upon the Dark Angels fleet, news of the Fenris Sector's fate filtered through to Holy Terra. The psycho-choristers of the Astra Telepathica that bore the message paid dearly, each rendered a babbling imbecile by the unnatural import of the truths he was forced to transmit.

The matter was soon confirmed beyond doubt – the Daemon Primarchs stalked the Imperium once more. Magnus the Red had devastated the worlds under the Wolf's Eye, and his vengeance was yet to be sated.

No vast army did the High Lords summon when they heard of these claims. No hollow mountain did they bring to life, its cavernous innards home to titanic war machines. Instead they sent a simple parchment, bearing all twelve of their sacred seals, to the depths of the Imperial Palace.

There, for the first time in millennia, a secret order that had long laboured in shadow made preparations for outright war.

They were the living weapons of the Emperor – human in appearance, but with the power to unmake a god.



In the Warp, a cacophony of wild laughter bubbled through the aether. The grand work was complete. The fools of Fenris, thinking their nemesis banished at the last, already prepared to leave their world all but undefended once more. It was a pleasing enough twist in its own fashion, but in truth, Magnus' agenda was far more grandiose.

Silver Towers shone around the Planet of the Sorcerers in a perfect hermetic web. Each had harnessed the psychic shock wave of a billion deaths, so replete with magical energy it shivered on the brink of coming apart entirely. Magnus had taken his throne once more atop the Tower of the Cyclops, and as he cast his one-eyed gaze across his domain, he saw that all was well. He had reaped the power he needed from the domain of the wolf-men, and more besides.

The Crimson King gave a great roar of triumph, and his Thousand Sons gave voice to join him. The ritual was complete. The Silver Towers arranged around their world's circumference flared, and the Planet of the Sorcerers vanished from the Warp. Just as the silver city of Tizca was once forced from one dimension to another by Magnus' magic, now an entire world was thrust through that same veil. It was a metaphysical feat of stunning ambition, and incredibly, it worked.

The attack on the Fenris Sector had been more than just simple revenge. Within sight of Prospero's surface, the empty void shuddered as if in great pain. Heralded by the death screams of Midgardia's population, the planet of the Crimson King burst into being. The damage its violent transition did to the barrier between realspace and the Warp was irrevocable. A tide of madness and blood began to ripple out across the galaxy, spreading like cracks in a pane of glass and signalling a thousand dooms to come.

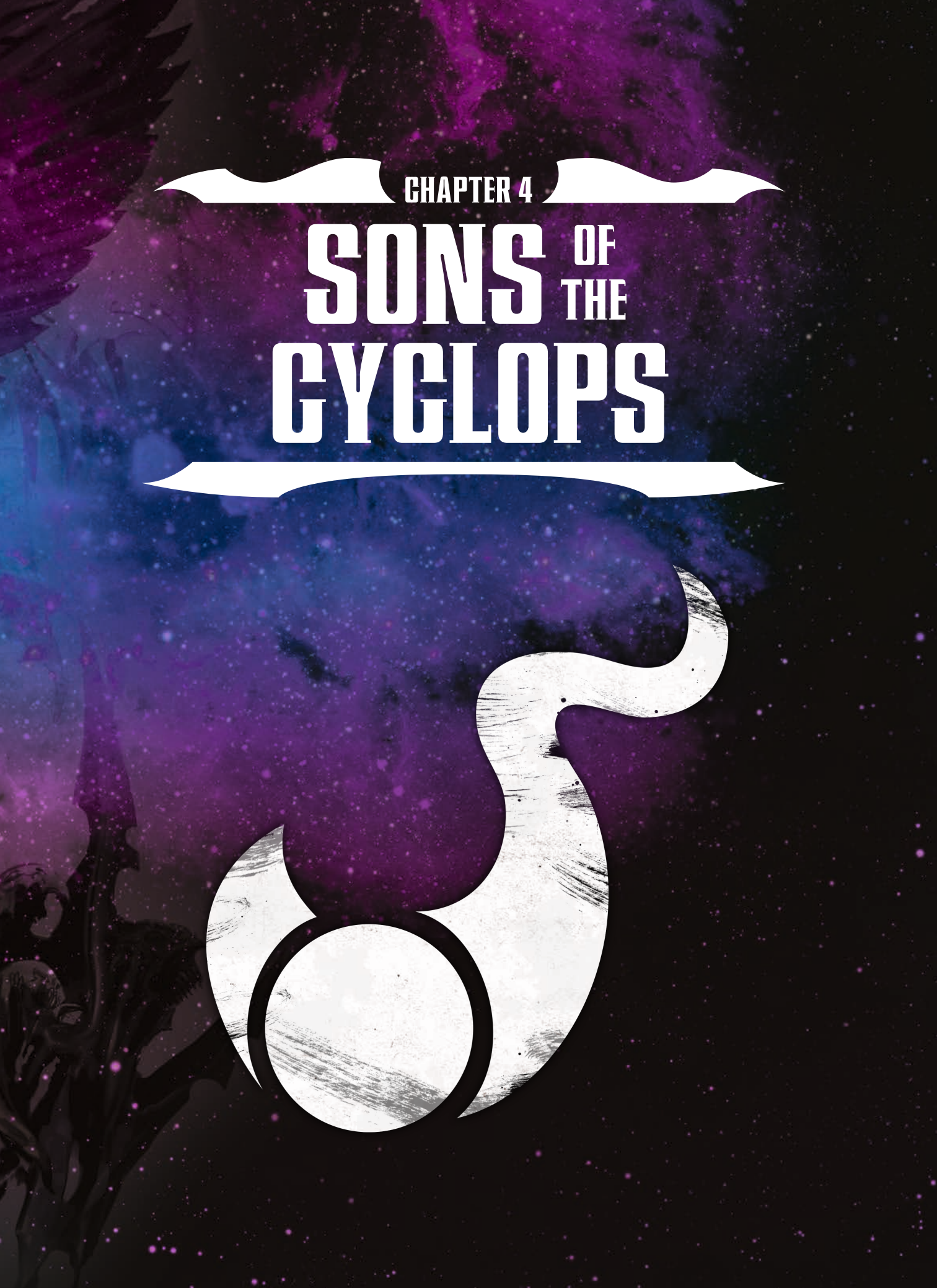
The Imperium would never be the same.










CHAPTER 4
SONS OF THE CYCLOPS

HOSTS OF THE PSYKER LORDS

The organisation of the Thousand Sons Legion is based around the number nine, the sacred number of Tzeentch. The nine cults of the Thousand Sons are each ruled by a powerful Daemon Prince or Exalted Sorcerer who bears the ancient rank of Magister Templi. Together with their most powerful sorcerous followers, they form a group known as the Rehati.

Within each cult are a number of arcane ranks. A fundamental principle of the Thousand Sons' organisation remains the arrangement of nine lesser Sorcerers beneath a psychic potentate. This practice has its roots in the first cabal of Magnus.

At the core of the war assemblies of the Thousand Sons are the thrallbands. These primarily consist of a champion known as a magister and up to nine thralls, each a lesser Sorcerer-champion of Tzeentch. This cabalistic gathering usually manifests as an Exalted Sorcerer and nine Aspiring Sorcerers – or Scarab Occult Sorcerers – who lead the Rubric Marines and Scarab Occult Terminators into battle. In the rarest thrallbands, the thralls might instead be powerful Sorcerers or Exalted Sorcerers themselves. Whatever the individual might of the thralls, the conjunction of nine lesser champions of Tzeentch bolsters the sorcerous powers of their magister to truly inhuman levels.

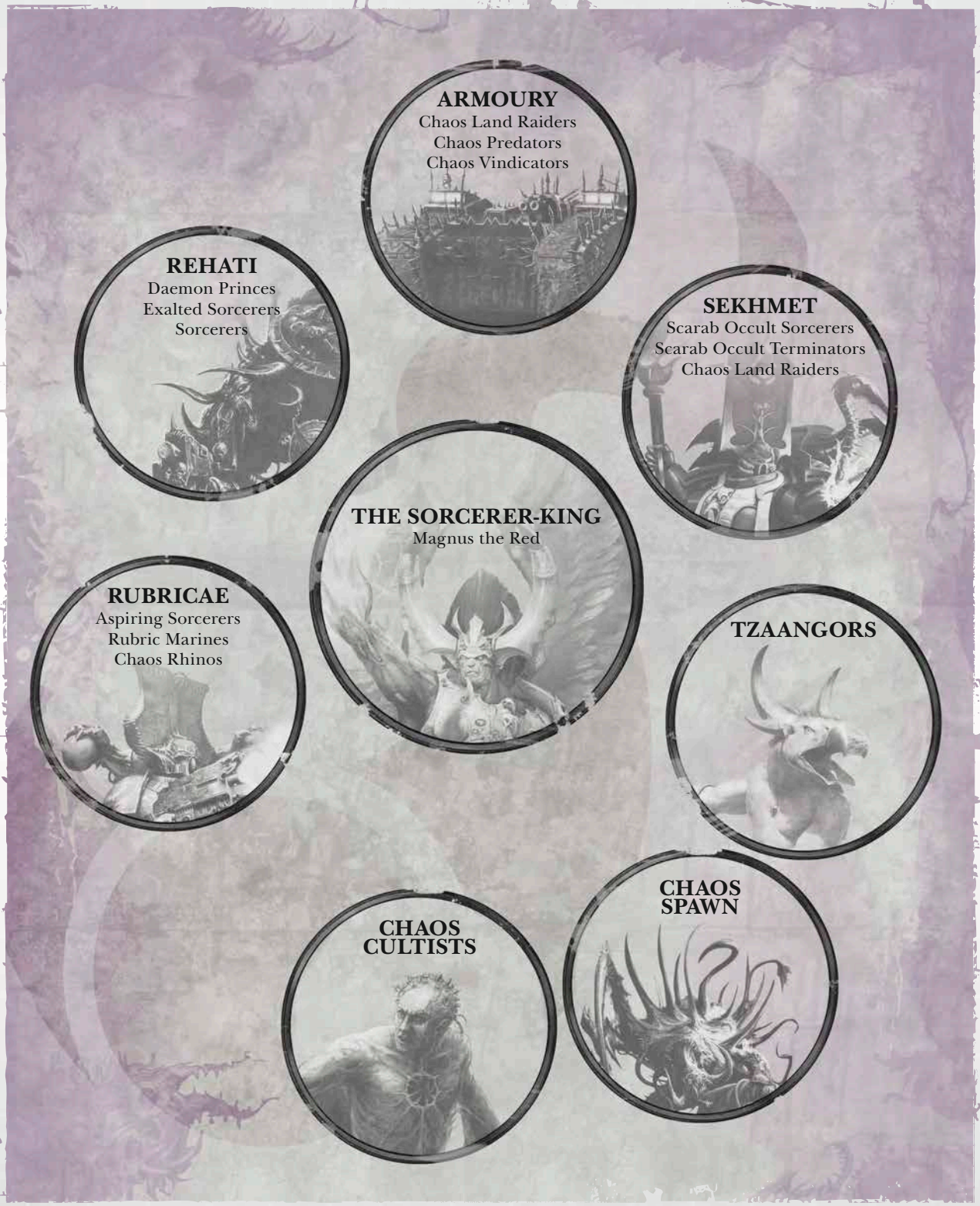
The Exalted Sorcerers and Daemon Princes who rule the Silver Towers each command many of these thrallbands, which may be gathered together into hundreds-strong task forces called Exalted Thrallbands. Their followers comprise the raiding forces through which Tzeentch enacts some of his most violent schemes upon the galaxy.

While the warbands of Tzeentch's champions manifest in countless ways, the sorcerous thrallbands of the Thousand Sons are the most favoured by the Changer of the Ways. Each thrallband is bolstered by the mutated warrior auxiliaries of the Planet of the Sorcerers, or by Chaos Cultist forces drawn from the Imperium. In addition, the Legion maintains a small number of battle tanks and Daemon Engines. Some Adeptus Astartes equipment is captured during their raids, but as very few of these weapons or vehicles are properly maintained, they rarely last for long and so are never numerous.



HIERARCHY OF THE PLANET OF THE SORCERERS

The Planet of the Sorcerers was founded by Magnus the Red after the cataclysmic events of Prospero. It is no normal world, but a Chaos-infused orb of mind-bending unreality. The hierarchy that governs its citadels and labyrinths has been set in place only through the power of Magnus' immortal will – even the strongest thrallband dare not challenge him.

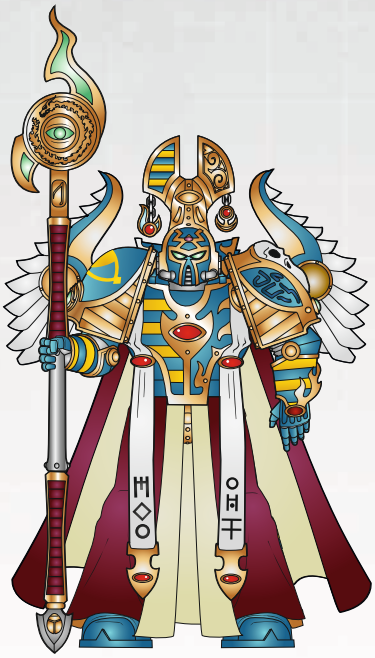


THRALLS OF MAGNUS

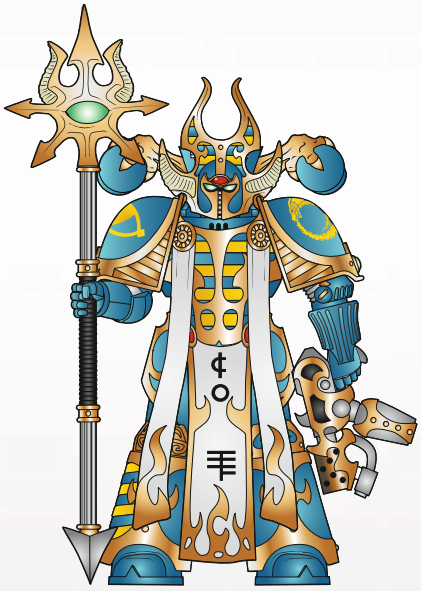
The Thousand Sons Legion have adopted blue and yellow as their livery, but they possess no fixed uniform as such. Some Sorcerers and their warriors bear variations on these hues, such as azure and gold, whereas others add a third colour to reflect their own heraldry. Regardless of their thrallband, almost all Thousand Sons bear the sigil of a flaming wyrm devouring its own tail, a corrupted version of their original Legion icon that is rich in symbolism. It is common practice to use combinations of runes to further identify thrallbands, squads and even individual battle-brothers.



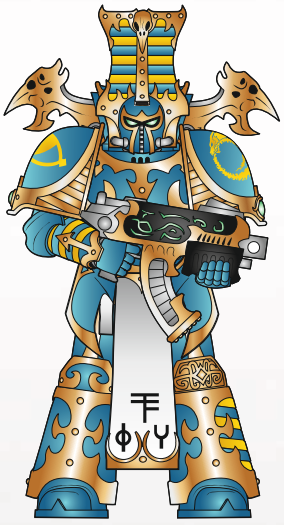
Odym Venedru bears a Tizcan scarab staff, a remnant of the Order of Prescient Astromancers.



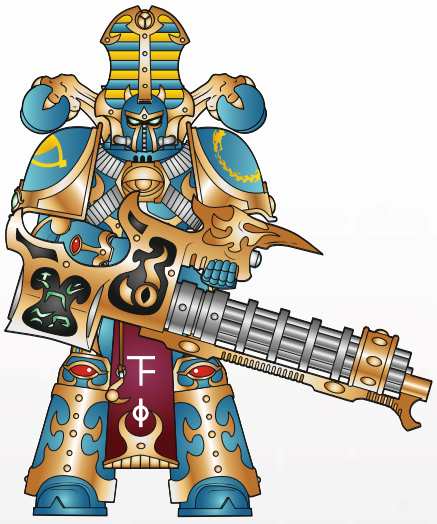
Molore Zhul of the Red Periapt wears blood-red gems that often manifest a slitted and shifting pupil.



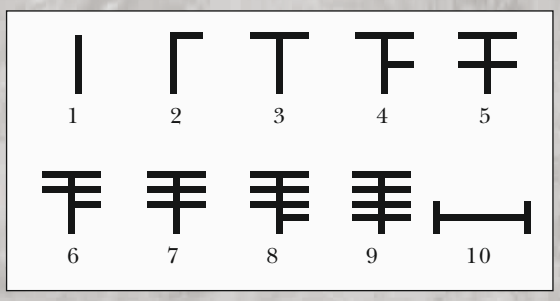
Magister Adrovar Nacaoth hails from the pyromancy school, as attested to by the stylised flames on his tabard.

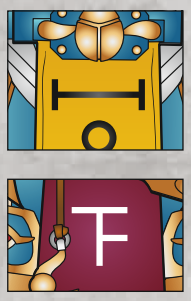


Brother Voth wears the symbols of the Sorcerer who controls him; these marks bind them together in eternity.

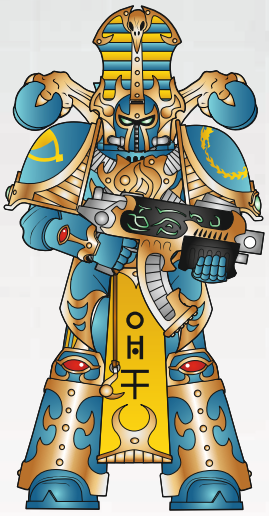


Brother Yroru's firepower is blessed by the sigil of Tzeentch worked into his soulreaper cannon's housing.





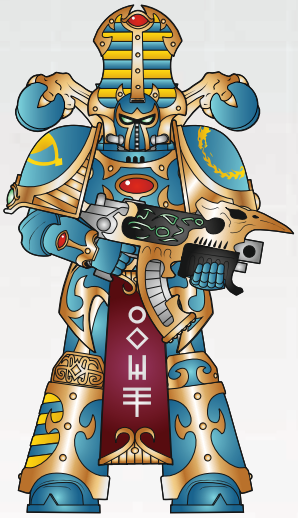
Icons commonly used by the Thousand Sons include variations of their corrupted Legion icon and runes associated with the Chaos God Tzeentch. Representations of the numbers one to ten are also employed, inscribed in inks made from rare and often magically potent ingredients by the sorcerous masters of each Rubricae squad.



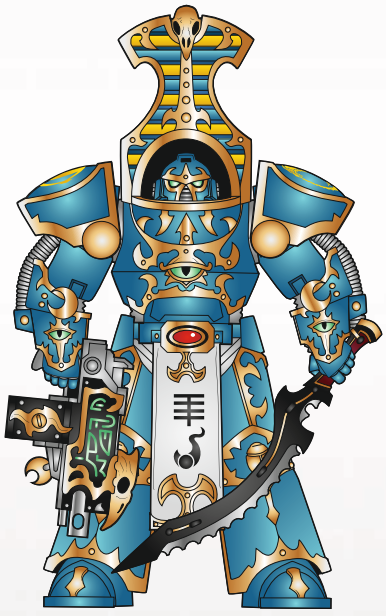
The colour of a Rubricae's tabard often identifies his squad, but may also tie him to his thrallband.



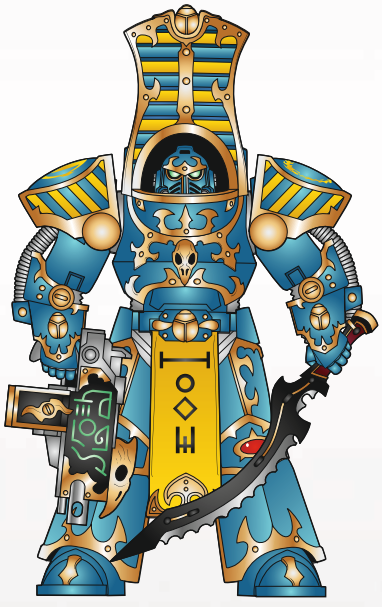
Each Rubricae within a thrallband will bear one or more recognition runes upon his tabard.



Battle-brothers might bear additional runes, signifying enchantments, curses, or the spirit-warrior's name.



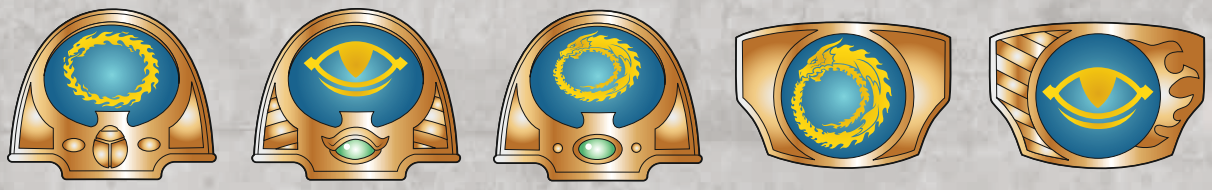
Squads of Scarab Occult Terminators carry the same runes as the Rubricae squads of their thrallbands.



A Sorcerer may mark out his servants with symbols or adornments upon their pauldrons.



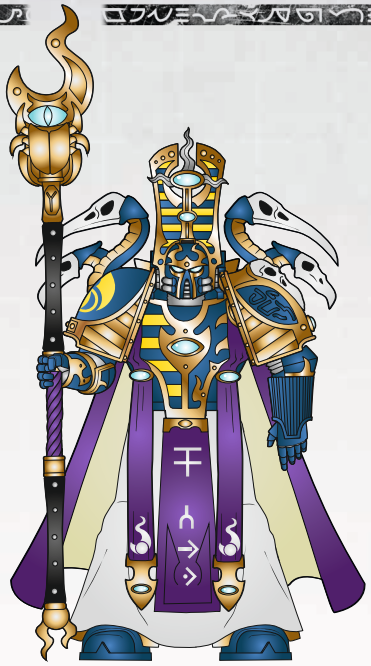
The Tzaangors that fight for each Sorcerer wear his colours – or even bear them tattooed on their skin.



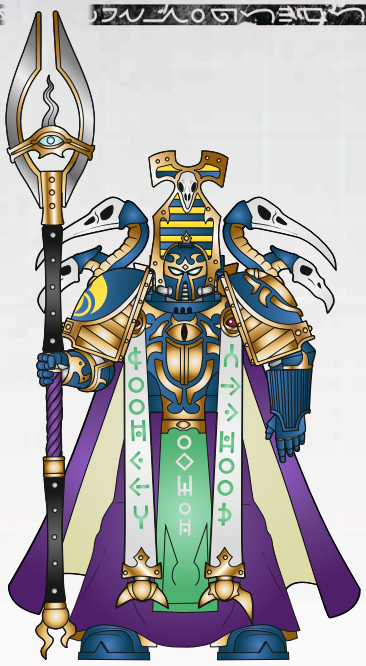
A thrallband's icons are commonly worn on the right pauldron, whilst the left bears the sigil of the Thousand Sons. This is usually a depiction of a fiery serpent devouring its own tail, an image that has long symbolised eternity.

THE SECTAI PROSPERINE

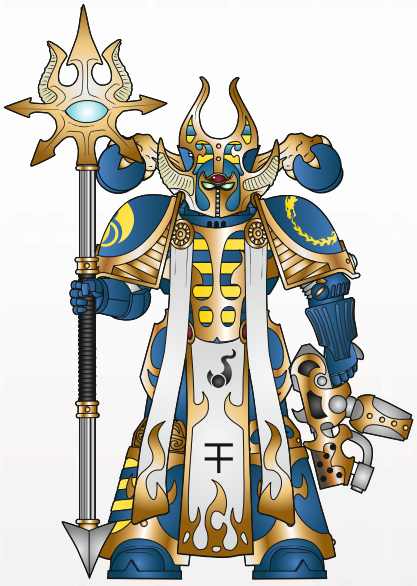
The Sectai Prosperine was originally a gathering of minor sects hailing from the fringes of the Thousand Sons hierarchy. In an effort to increase their knowledge and influence alike, the Sorcerers leading these cults banded together as a single organisation, relegating their personal heraldry to symbolic runes and donning the azure, gold and purple of Prospero's ruling caste. In combining their efforts, they surpassed all but the greatest of their rivals in terms of power. They now consider themselves the inheritors of Prospero's true legacy, embracing that planet's dark fate instead of running from it as have so many of their kin.



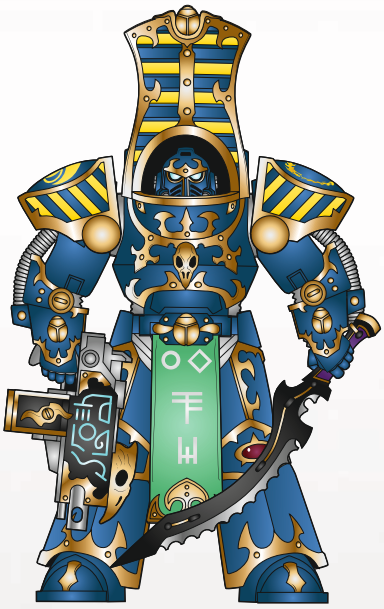
The deep purple of the Sectai Prosperine has long been synonymous with a great wealth of knowledge.



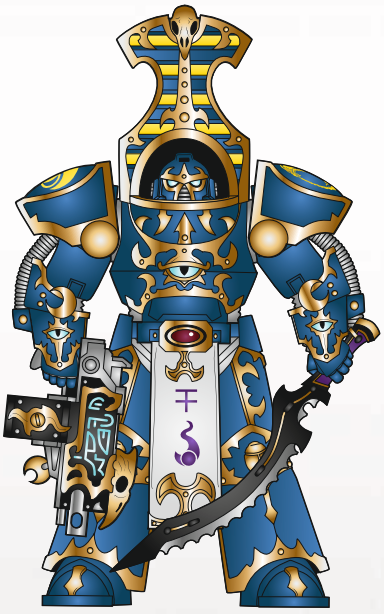
The tabards and script-bands of each Sorcerer often bear runes of protection and control.



Though all the Sectai wear blue and gold, the colours of its individual cults have been preserved across the years.



Avian skulls adorn the weapons and armour of the Sectai's most favoured, an echo of an ancient Tizcan practice.



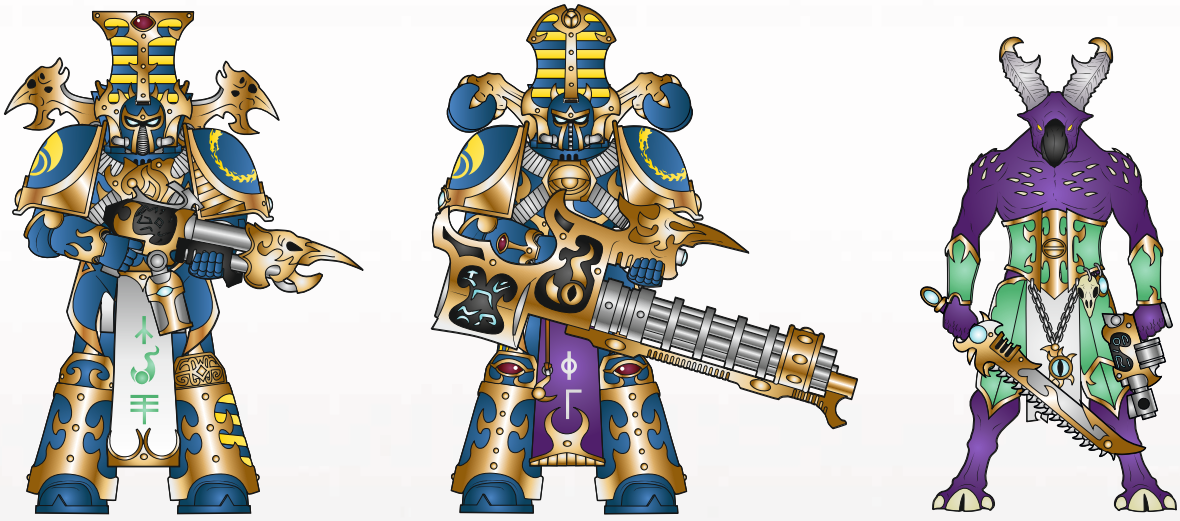
The Scarab Occult often bear the icon of the staring eye – once purely symbolic, but now given strange life.



The housing that frames each identifying pauldron image also has meaning, further identifying the squads within a thrallband. To one schooled in symbology, the history and allegiance of each warrior becomes clear at a glance.



The Rubricae of each Sectai thrallband are united by the gems and filigree upon their armour – to a brotherhood once seen as poor in comparison to the Prosperine elite, such displays of material wealth have a worldly appeal.



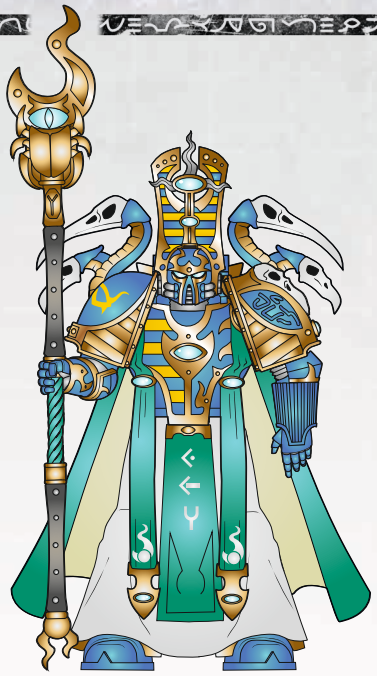
The purple colouration common to the Sectai is so widespread it has become part of the macro-cult's identity. Those cultists and mutants that serve its Sorcerers will often dye their robes or paint their flesh purple. It has been known for entire thrallbands to change colour at the whim of their Tzeentchian masters.



The runes upon the tabards of the Sectai Prosperine are laden with meaning, but the colours beneath are often of simpler significance. They hark back to the time when the Sectai was comprised of three autonomous factions – white for the Learned Mysticae, purple for the Brethren of the Amethyst Sun, and pale green for the Bringers of Spiritual Dawn.

THE TIZCAN HOST

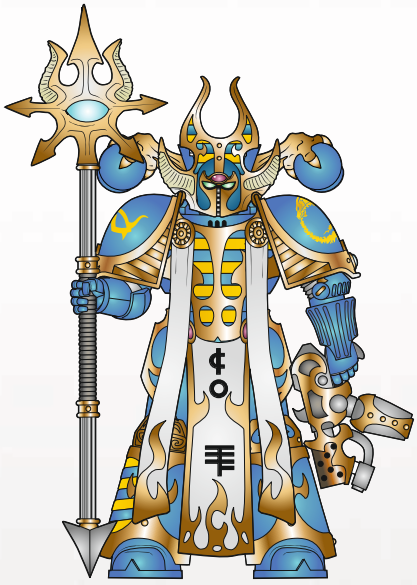
The Tizcan Host is known for its shared delusion. Every one of its Sorcerers believes he passed from mortality entirely at the time of the Rubric, and that he has been reborn as an avenging angel. To this end the Tizcan host wears white, a colour often associated with purity and soundness of spirit. These are claims that grow more dubious with every passing year, for that sacred white has been stained red with blood countless times over the millennia. The host still believes it has but one duty – to rain the righteous fire of the Crimson King Magnus upon the Imperium that once dared cast him out. Though they pretend to a superior, otherworldly goodness, the Tizcan Host is perhaps the most warlike thrallband of all.



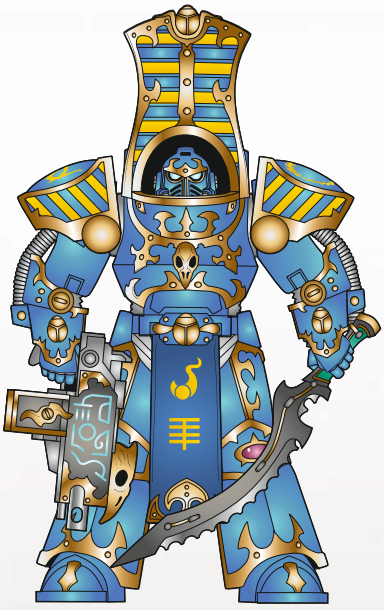
Alahadz Dratho Manac wears the colours of the enlightened seer, but is both single-minded and murderous.



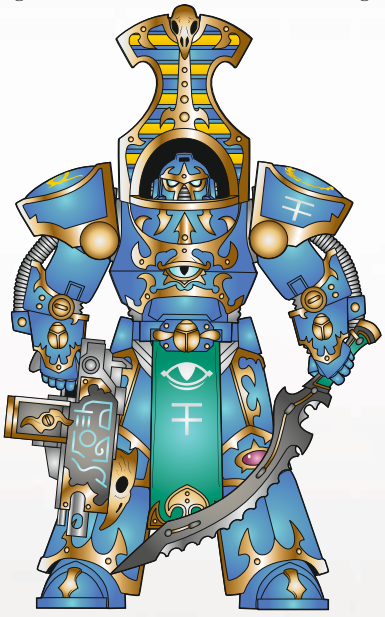
The stylised wings that unfold from Daathar Molocriz shine with blinding light as he levitates above the throng.



Once a psyker-priest of the Magna Templa, the Sorcerer Xarax Throtep wants only to see Humanity burn.



Omyn Votaph wears the striated pauldrons of one of the Magna Templa's Scarab Occult bodyguards.



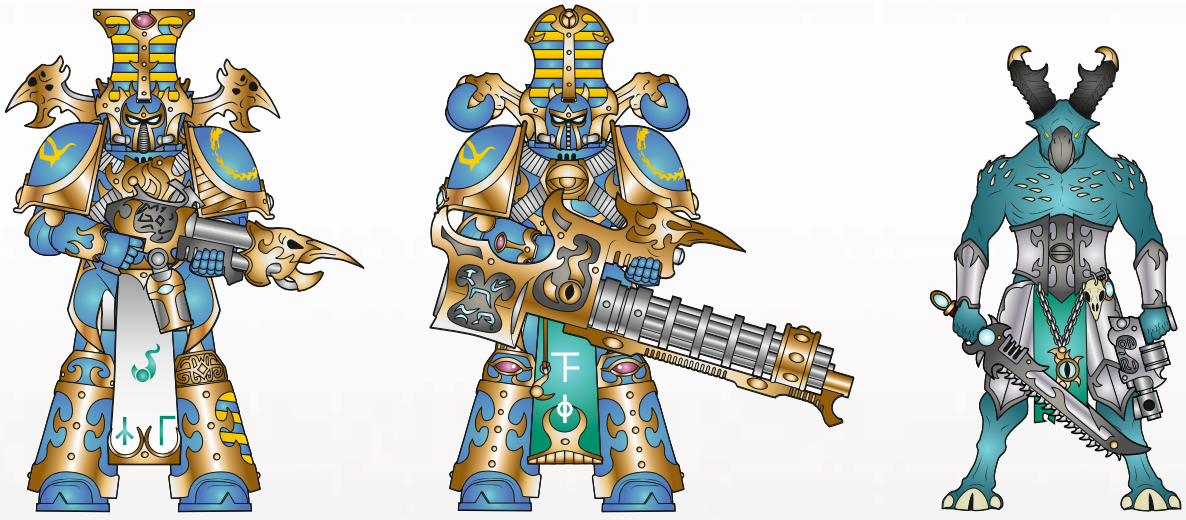
The numerical sigil worn on the tabard and shoulder of Holy Xepthis denotes him as the fifth of his name.



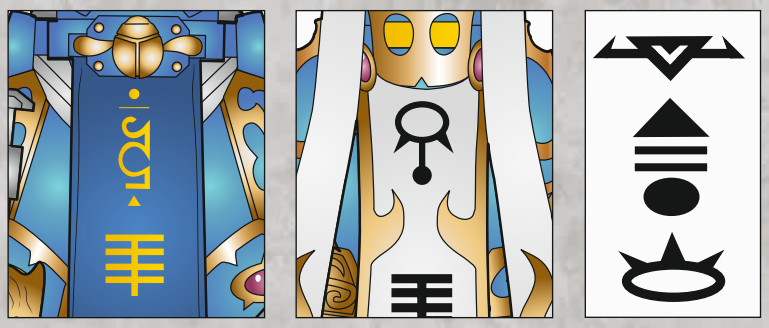
The icon of the Tizcan Host is the Horned Crown – a reference to the circlet worn by the ancient Prosperine deity, the King of All Angels.



Known as the Seraphya, the Rubricae of the Tizcan Host stand in silence as the icons of their masters are scorched into their armour and tabards before each battle. The Sorcerers of the Tizcan Host tell themselves their uncanny stillness is because of their vow of secrecy and their stoic demeanour, but the truth is far more disturbing.



The followers of the Tizcan Host are known as the Choir of Eagles. This is a term that dates back to the Great Crusade, when sweet music echoed through every Thousand Sons processional. The harsh squawks and cries of these mutants are a grotesque mockery of the songstrels that came before, yet they still wear the same colours as their predecessors.



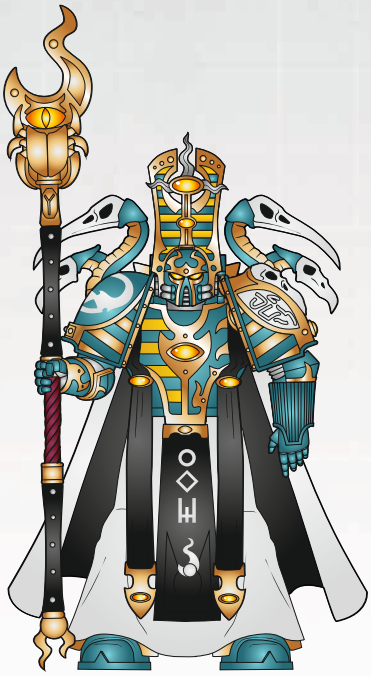
The complex geometric symbols worn by the seers and scholars of Tizca live on in the iconography of the Thousand Sons. Each sigil has many potential meanings; though their forms remain the same, the intent behind them has changed. For instance, a fire-symbol that was once borne to represent Sunrise would now be interpreted as the Killing Flame.

THE PRISM OF FATE

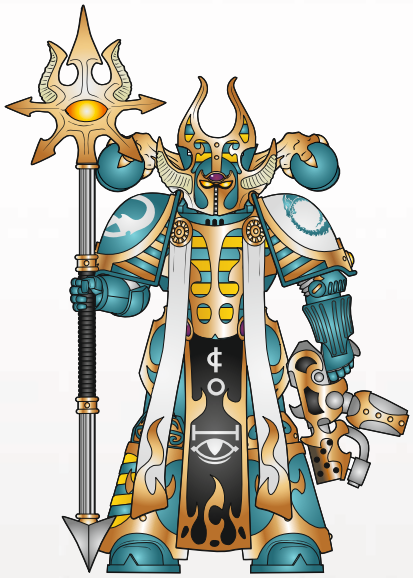
The Prism of Fate has always prided itself on the diversity of psychic disciplines amongst its ranks. They once ensured that adherents from each of the cults of Prospero could be counted amongst their number, the better to steer their brotherhoods through whatever challenges their Primarch – and their Emperor – should ask of them. Since the devastation of the Heresy, the Prism's Sorcerers have focussed ever more obsessively on the diversity of deaths they can inflict upon their foes. Its Sorcerers take pride in never slaying one victim in the same way as another – their longevity is such that imagination is counted the most kingly of virtues.



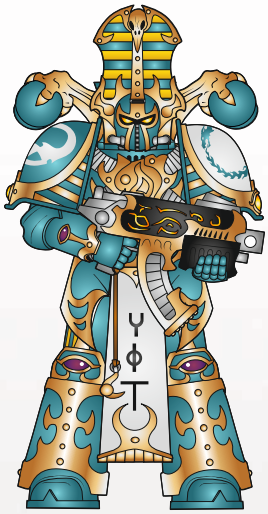
Magister Templi Nonyc Teheterys bears the Staff Psykana and wears the yellow of the Changer Supreme.



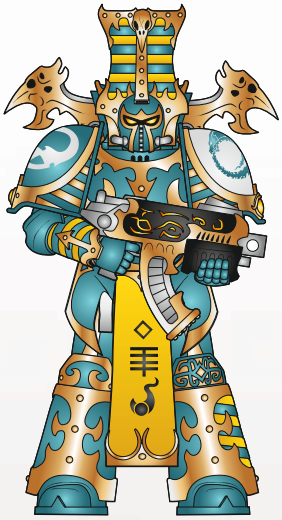
White, being the colour created when all colours join as one, is a favoured hue amongst the Prism's Sorcerers.



In contrast, some Sorcerers also don black. Those who harness both light and its absence achieve true mastery.



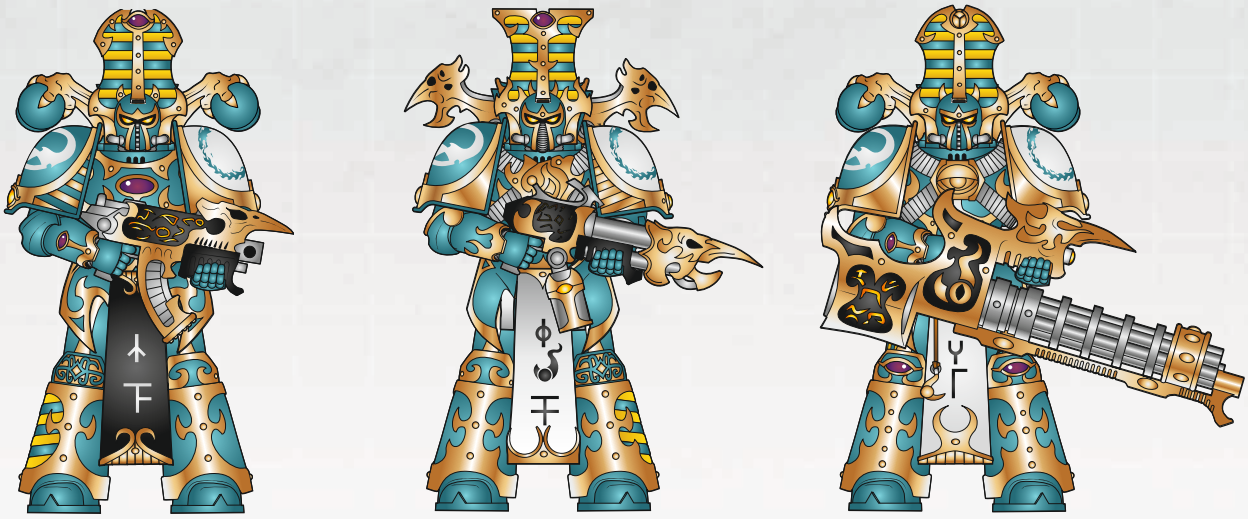
The Rubricae of the Prism are seen as dull, almost pitiful creatures, for they deliver the same death over and over.



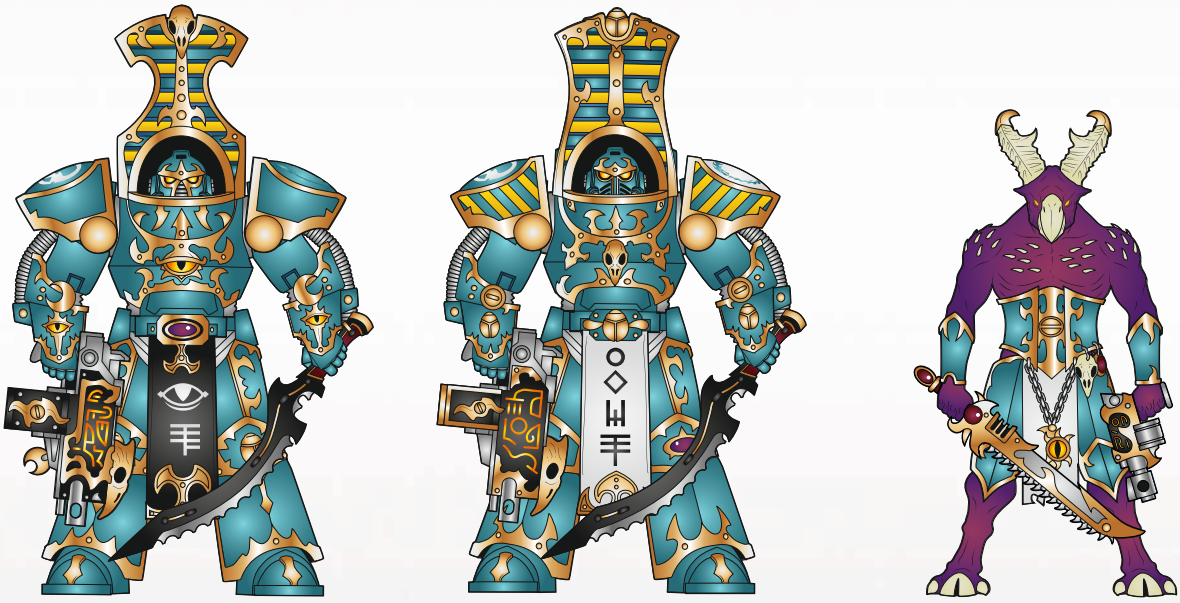
Those few Rubricae aware enough to deliver inventive deaths are permitted to wear the yellow of the Changer.



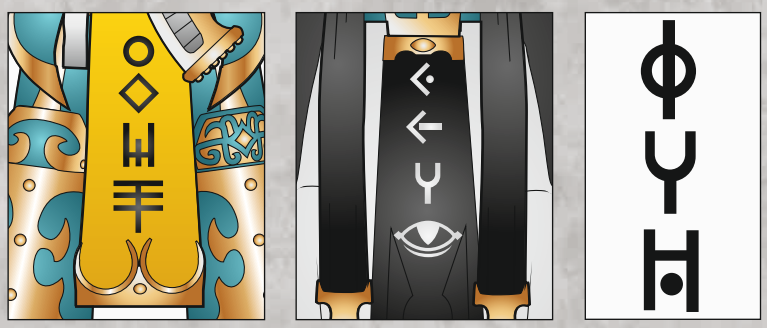
Like the icons of many thrallbands, the Prism's sigil is based upon the symbol of Tzeentch himself – though reversed, it is still mystically potent.



The thrallband employs a great many Rubricae, the patterns and symbols on their tabards marking them apart in a system that is incredibly complex despite its monochromatic basis. Seen in the astral plane, these seemingly plain hues burst into a riot of colour that is painful to behold for those psykers not blessed by the Great Architect.



The Scarab Occult used by the Prism's Sorcerers – and the Tzaangors that follow them – make excellent bodyguards, allowing their masters to work ever more impressive spectacles of war. Each devotee bears the symbol of the Sorcerer to whom he is bound, fighting as a living barrier as much as a methodical killing machine.



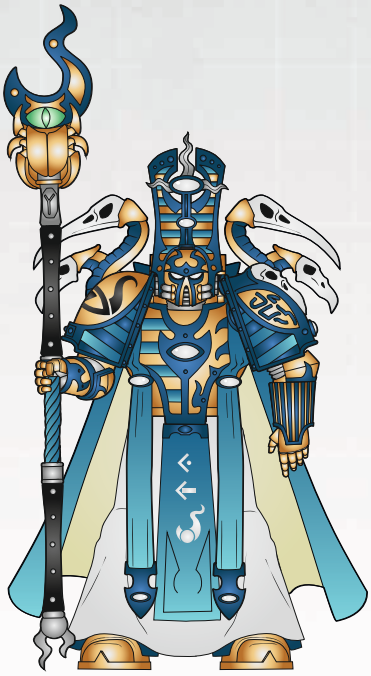
The Dark Tongue is a ritual language, and its phonetic runes are the only manner in which the mysteries of Chaos can be truly expressed. It is the language of Daemons and Chaos creatures with the power of speech. The Thousand Sons strive to learn this arcane language for the conjuration of Chaos entities and to bargain with Daemons when they are summoned.

THE BLADES OF MAGNUS

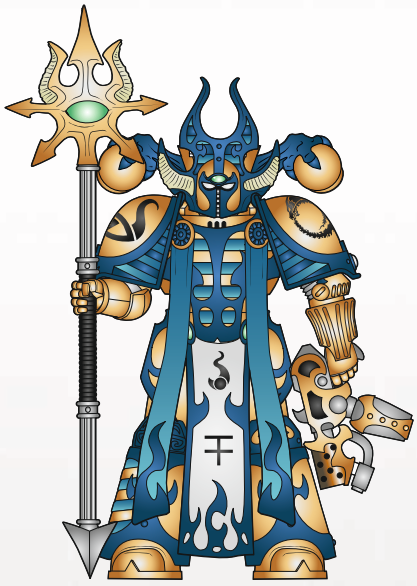
The Blades of Magnus were the first of Prospero's Sorcerers to devote themselves wholly to their Primarch's salvation, working in secret to break the bond between the Crimson King and the eldritch forces he had embraced. The Blades adopted the colours of Magnus' personal guard, the Rehati, but wore them in reverse – in this way they demonstrated their intent to save Magnus despite himself. For long years they toiled in secret, slaying those Daemons with which Magnus had made his devil's bargains. When the Daemon Primarch learned of their works, he did not reward them, but blasted them with annihilating mental power. Now every one of them is soulless, each but a vessel for Magnus' will.



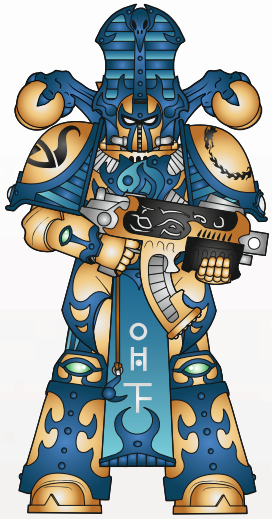
The One Who Was Nytep is inhabited by a portion of Magnus' mind that seeks enlightenment from death.



The One Who Was Daor Haak is a vessel for the part of Magnus that seeks wisdom from the heavens.



The flames that adorn The One Who Was Laorath echo the pyromaniacal part of Magnus that lies within.



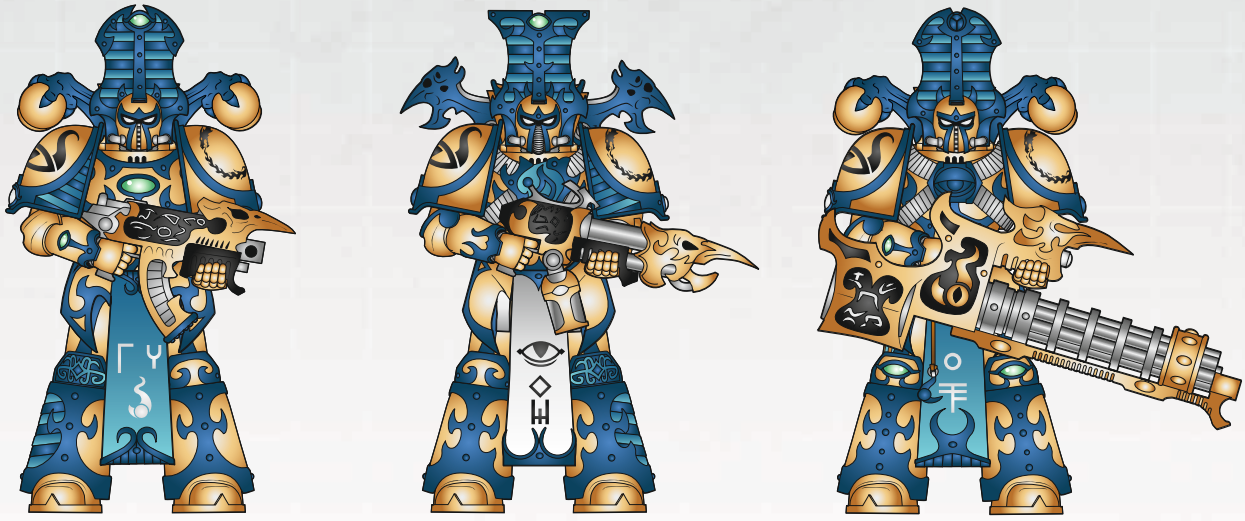
The One Who Was Tarutap is part of a composite mind, his squad animated by the fires of bitterness.



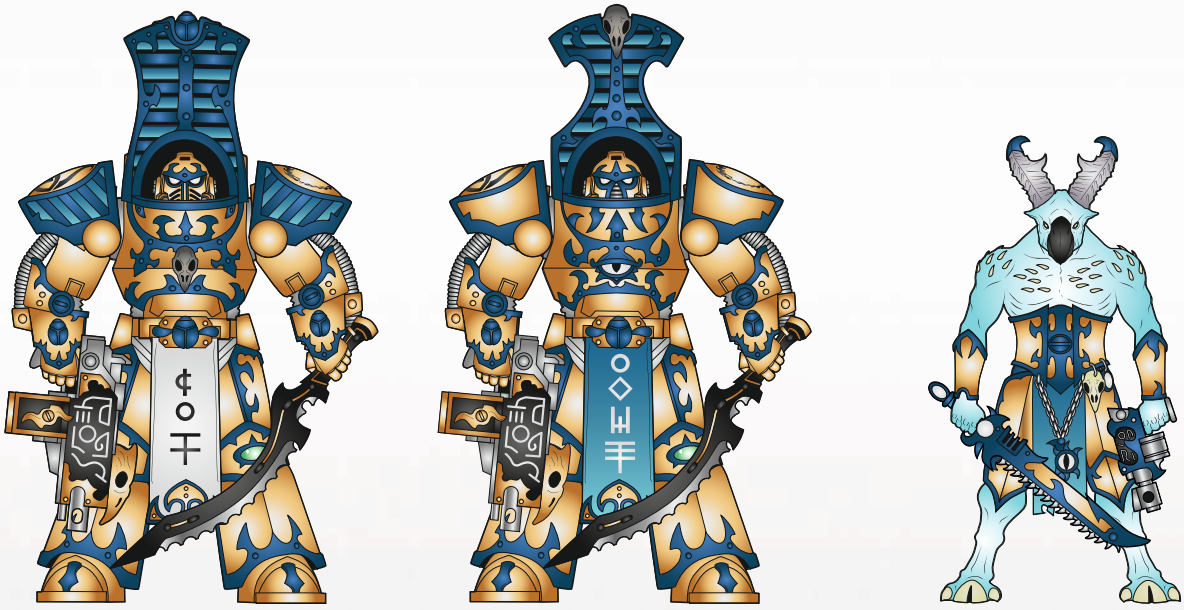
The One Who Was Throsis is said never to miss, for he bears the all-seeing eye of Magnus.



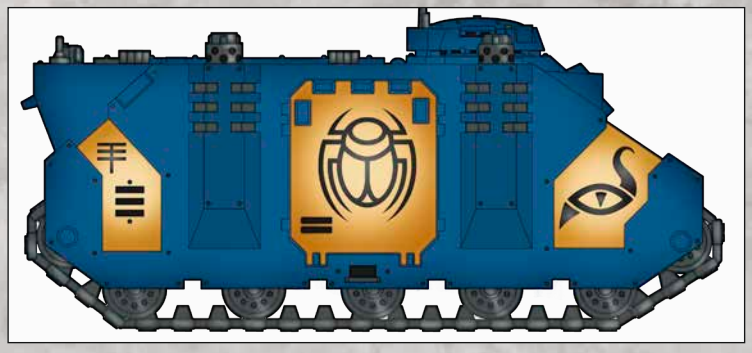
Though they did not know it at the time, the kohl markings that the Blades of Magnus applied around their left eyes when the Legion was loyal to the Imperium would bear a striking resemblance to their future sigil.



The Rubricae known as the Ones Who Stood Resolute were formerly the loyal guards of Magnus' tower upon Prospero. Their stoicism in life has been replaced by the predictability of the automaton – those who approach Magnus with the intent to harm will find squad after squad of these killers converging fire upon them.



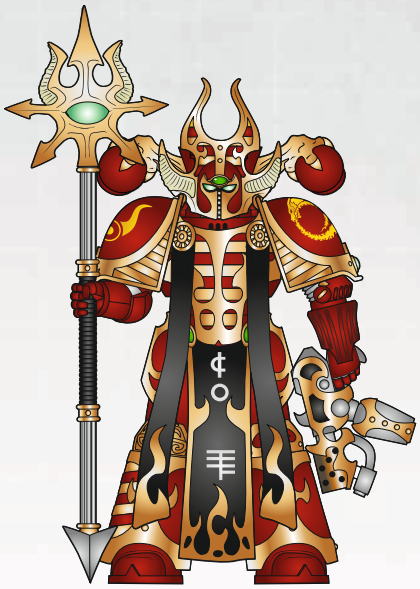
Where the Scarab Occult go, carnage follows; a cult of violence-loving albino Tzaangors has taken to following the Blades.

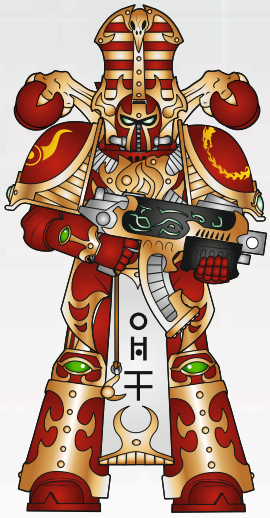


The vehicles utilised by the Thousand Sons often bear mystical symbols. Some of these merely echo the thrallband-specific heraldry of those inside. Others bind daemonic entities into the metallic fabric of the vehicles, entrapping them as the djinn of myth is entrapped in its mystical urn. Such armoured assets have an aggressive spirit that drives it to ram, grind and crush.

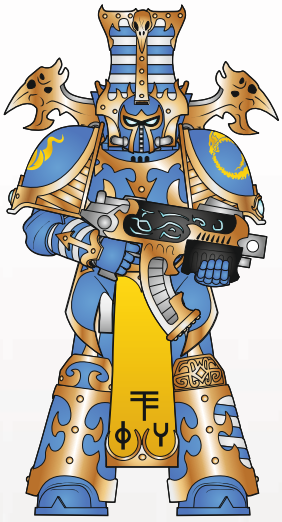
THE EXILED AND ESTRANGED

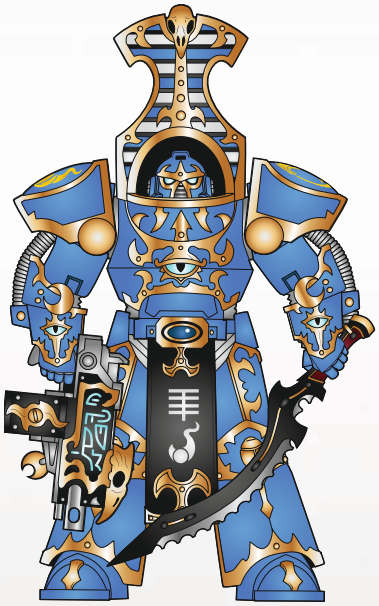
When Ahriman and his allies worked the dread spell known as the Rubric of Ahriman, they took the Legion's fate unbidden into their hands, and shattered it forever. In doing so they earned the Primarch's ire, and were banished to the far corners of the galaxy. Since that dark day the Exiles have gathered unto them a variety of ad hoc armies, thrallbands and psyker hosts, and some of these have gone on to propagate more sects and enclaves in their turn. Where once there stood a Legion united by a single vision and the heraldry of an ancient empire, now there are a thousand shattered shards of that dynasty, each as bitter and twisted as their cyclopean founder.

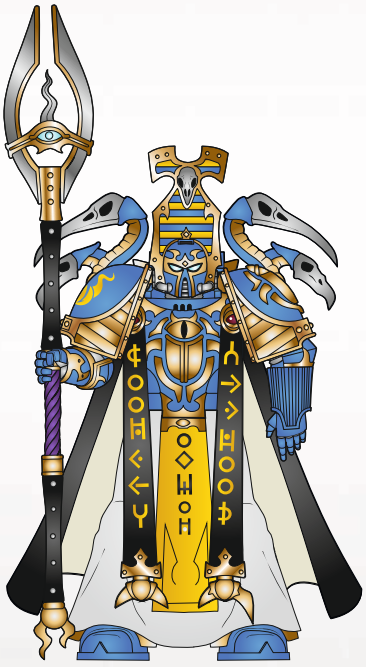




The deep red of the Crimson Sons is worn as tribute to their Primarch – a soul red in deed as well as in name.







The white banding of the Warp Gheists represents the bones contained within. The Sorcerer at the thrallband's heart, the Exiled Magister Nezchad Aratos, enacted a revivification ritual that restored his brethren's forms – but only as far as their skeletons. He died in the process, leaving his kin to wander the galaxy.



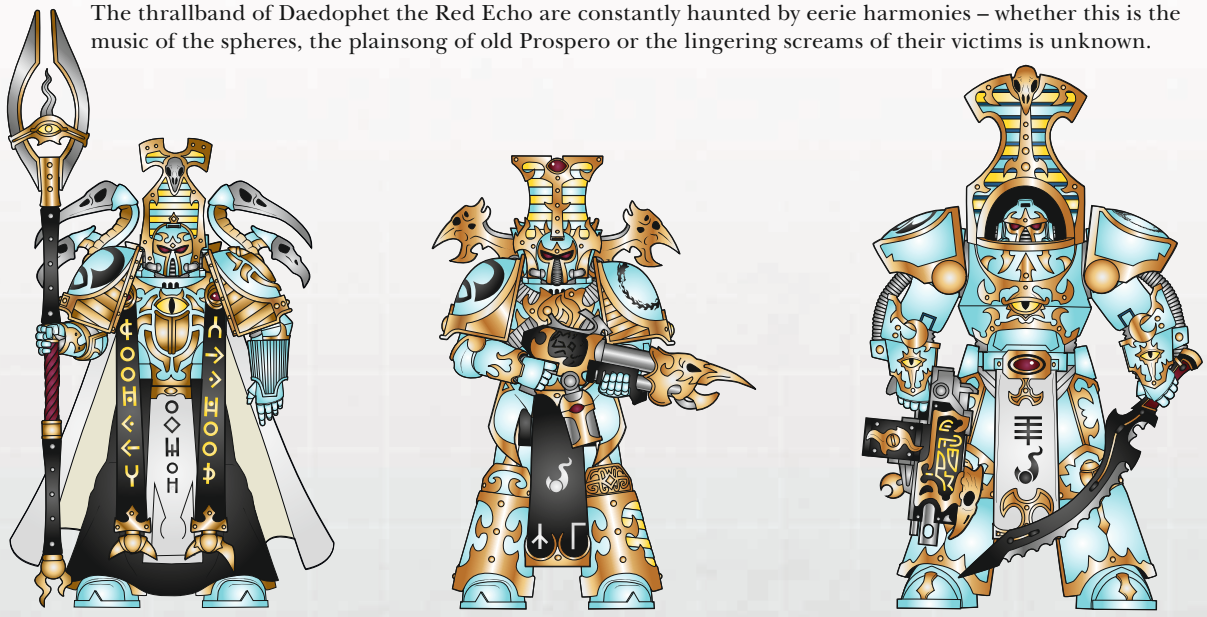
Endless are the variations upon the rune of Tzeentch worn by the exiles of the Thousand Sons. None can say which is the truest representation, for every aspect of the Architect of Fate is unbridled change made manifest.



The Silver Sons chase their armour with priceless metals extracted from celestial objects. They believe this bestows upon them a measure of the cosmos' natural power, making them one with the stars.



The thrallband of Daedophet the Red Echo are constantly haunted by eerie harmonies – whether this is the music of the spheres, the plainsong of old Prospero or the lingering screams of their victims is unknown.



The Grand Order of Hermetic Blades believes it is their role to guide mortal souls into the afterlife in the manner of the ancient psychopomp spirits they once worshipped. They do so using the most harrowing methods they can devise.







The stain of Chaos
foul'd the skies

The Crimson King
arose from myth

And brought upon the
Sons of Russ

A grievous blow,
a slaying of worlds