



KOR'SARRO KHAN:
HUNTMASTER

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The air is foul, yet still I ride bare-headed. It is my way.

The plague came to Gehöft months ago, brought by once-loyal Space Marines now pledged to the Ruinous Powers. It spread across the quiet agri-world in days, turning crops to sludge and killing livestock... and people. The animals stayed dead. The people did not. They rose again as mindless zombies shambling alongside the corrupted armoured forms of the traitors, tearing apart any of the populace who had been spared the contagion's embrace.

This world is beyond saving. I know this. I came anyway.

I have tracked my prey across half a segmentum to this world and I will not leave while the fiend still draws breath. This Great Hunt *will* end here. Paramyx, once the Chapter Master of the Sanctors of Terra, now the twisted Plaguelord of the Blighted Claw, will fall.

We have allies in this hunt, though I like them not. The Dark Angels hide themselves behind robes and masks, rarely showing their true faces. I slow *Moondrakkan* as I approach them and salute my opposite number.

'What a pretty steed!' I say, gentle mockery in my tone. If there is any from amongst the Lion's sons that I respect, it is he who sits before me on a relic from a lost age, the mighty jetbike *Corvex*.

'Khan,' replies Sammael, his face stoic.

I smile, wondering what it would take to get the dour Dark Angel to do likewise.

'Do you not feel isolated from the battle up there, my friend?' I ask, though I feel a pang of envy. To ride a jetbike like the Great Khan did when we were Legion still... 'You must decide, Master Sammael, whether you are a warrior, or a man who does not want to feel the dirt on his face!'

There is no greater joy in the hunt than to feel yourself at one with the world

around you. Wind blowing through my hair and churned mud splattering my face and armour... That is when I feel truly alive. What makes the Dark Angels feel alive, I wonder?

‘What kind of man are you, Sammael?’ I ask.

The Dark Angel will not be drawn. ‘You have your targets, Lord Kor’sarro?’ he asks, still stony-faced.

‘We have,’ I say. ‘And there is no time to begin but the present. I shall see you at the victory feast if you have the stomach, Dark Angel!’

The Grand Master gives a terse nod. I turn *Moondrakkan* and, with my warriors spreading out behind me, begin the hunt.

A cloud of pestilence swathes the battlefield. It is too much for our allies from the Brindelweld Seventeenth Imperial Guard regiment. Even we Space Marines, with our enhanced physiologies, need our helms to breathe safely, lest we sicken. I feel enclosed, cut off from the primal forces of the hunt, the wind and the earth. But even though my senses are dulled by the metal and ceramite, I know my prey is near. I always know. It is my way.

My White Scars and I weave our bikes through the mayhem, seeing snatches of horror – shambling once-men tearing out the throats of brave Brindelweld Guardsmen; green-armoured Dark Angels pouring bolter fire into a monstrous, many-limbed engine of destruction; swarms of tiny plague-daemons clambering onto a battle tank, intent on getting inside to the vulnerable crew. I ignore them all. Were I able to save them, I would, but the hunt takes precedence. It must.

‘My Khan, we have him.’ It is Khemru, sharp-eyed even when helmed. Coordinates flash on my display and I bring *Moondrakkan* around, gunning the engines and–

They come as if from nowhere, vile constructs of rotting flesh and corroded metal, hovering above us. They look like giant, bloated flies, held aloft by buzzing engines in place of wings. Fleshy sacs sprout filth-encrusted weapons that open up on us. I jink to the left, bolters firing, but though the shells detonate in the flesh of one of the drones, it is to no effect.

I see Khemru knocked from the saddle, his bike slewing away as he hits the dirt, his neck twisted at an unnatural angle. I will mourn him later.

‘Break up. Evade their fire,’ I order. I look around and see black-armoured shapes speeding towards us, *Corvex* at their head. They will aid us and together, Sammael and I will end Paramyx. We cannot save this world, but we can avenge it.

I turn back to the Emperor-forsaken creatures before me and loose my tulwar from its scabbard. Where bolt shells fail, the Chogorian steel of Moonfang usually succeeds. I speed forward and slice through the flesh-sac of one of the drones. Rotten and stinking viscera spills to the earth. I drive Moonfang up and hit something vital, killing the foul abomination. I do not exult, not yet, not until the killing is done. It is my way.

Around me, more White Scars fall. Marcha's helm is ripped away and a cut across his forehead becomes infected in a heartbeat. I see his expression of confusion and revulsion as poison fills his veins, and I see the life leave him. Another soul to add to Paramyx's tally. He will suffer greatly before the end.

The Dark Angels should be with us now, but they are not. I look around again even as I cut through the engine of a hovering blight-beast and send it crashing to the ground. Our allies are gone. Where, I do not know. Cold fury floods me, but I push it aside. Anger is not useful. Anger causes mistakes. I cannot see any of my squad now. I open the vox to them.

'Brothers, to me!'

There is no response. The unnatural fog clears and for a moment, I see them – the shattered and burning remnants of half a dozen bikes and the broken corpses of my brothers. I am alone now, and I cannot win this fight. I cannot complete this hunt. With heavy heart, I turn and speed away, faster than the drones can follow. Mud splatters my helm, but do not feel it. I do not feel anything.

The battle is over. We White Scars were not the only Imperial forces for whom it went badly. The Imperial Guard are in full retreat, the Dark Angels are withdrawing and there are rumours that the world is to be denied to the foe with the final sanction – exterminatus. Paramyx, I know, will already be gone, moving to another world, spreading more disease, more death. My search for him will go on. A year from now, or a century, I will have him, and he will pay for every White Scar lost this day.

I approach the Dark Angels. My anger is gone, but I would know why they did not aid us.

'Sammael!' I shout up at the Grand Master astride his jetbike. The Thunderhawk gunship that will carry him from this world is already preparing to lift away, the ramp closing. 'Whatever you abandoned us for, was it worth it?'

'I know not yet,' says the Dark Angel, his voice and face steady.

'I asked what kind of man you were,' I say to him, just loud enough for him to hear over the roar of the gunship's engines. 'And I will ask it again, Dark

Angel.’

Sammael looks down at something strapped to *Corvex*’s saddle. A book, I think. I think, also, that he shows the first emotion I have seen from him.

‘I do not know that yet, either,’ he replies as the ramp closes and I lose sight of him. I wonder at that for a moment, then shake it off. Perhaps I will have the chance to fight alongside him on another world and take his measure. For now, I must leave this one while I still can. I must return to my waiting ship and continue the hunt for the Plaguelord.

It is my way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hailing from East Kilbride in Scotland, GRAEME LYON moved to Nottingham in 2011 to join the ranks of the Black Library where he nows works as a Commissioning Editor. His published short stories include, 'The Hunter' and 'Sky Hunters'. It is well documented that Graeme has a deep loathing of cheese, likes dogs but fears cats. He also makes a mean chocolate chip cookie.



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