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Finnvid limped over to the fire circle, feeling the blood on his skin scab over. He was bone-weary, just like they all were, but the feeling was a good one. The fighting had been the way he liked it and the outcome had given honour to the Chapter.

His snow-grey armour was covered in salt-dust from Moreal's Great Flat. All his brothers were crusted with it too, caked in a sparkling rime that caught the dying light of a red giant sun. As the battle had gone on, hour after hour, the crystals had turned into bloody rubies, kicked up by armoured boots and trodden back into the mire below.

They were singing now, celebrating their victory with weary, cracking voices. The banner of Russ was hoisted over the flat, hanging stiffly in a weak breeze. Landers bearing the livery of the Great Companies thundered down from orbit to carry the fallen back to Fenris and resupply those still on the surface. A hundred fires had been lit amidst the emptiness, each one a home to tight huddles of warriors just as weary as Finnvid.

He sank to the ground, feeling his armour-joints resist. He'd taken a battering – they all had. Daemon-kind had been among the fallen hordes, as foul and hard-dying as ever. Grimnar had sent a quarter-strength of the Chapter to expunge the taint from Moreal, and even that had barely sufficed.

One warrior had made the difference in the end. Just one amidst so many.

'Skjald,' acknowledged Guthorm.

Finnvid nodded, twisting his helm from his head and running his gauntlet through sweat-slicked hair. 'Hel,' he said. 'Hard work.'

Guthorm grinned, exposing bloody fangs. He'd taken a deep wound across the forehead, bisecting his helm and driving deep into his scalp. He'd stitched it up himself before going back into battle, helm-less and raging with black wire still hanging from the tattered edges.

‘Tell us, then,’ Guthorm said.

‘Now?’

The rest of the warriors around the fire-pit nodded. They were all carrying wounds. The packs had been thinned, and empty spaces stood around the flames like gaps in a jawline.

‘You were there,’ said Guthorm.

‘I was,’ said Finnvid.

‘Then tell us.’

Finnvid looked at the faces. They were drawn, fatigued, heady with the fast-fading flush of victory. Daemon-kind were a strenuous test even for Sky Warriors. They deserved a saga, a tale to get their blood flowing again.

‘He was dropped into the heart of it,’ Finnvid said, trying his best to set it up. ‘His pod was so big I thought he’d crack the world’s crust.’

A ripple of hoarse chuckling. They’d all seen it come down too, hurled like a fiery spear into the heart of the fighting. They’d all cheered then, knowing the end would come swiftly.

‘I was up on the front, readying to storm into the core, lined up with Thrordric’s warriors. We’d spat our vows out and readied for death. My hearts were pumping. You all saw how big the beast was. All I wished for was to bury my axe into its chest before it ended me. I tensed for the order. It would have been a good way to go.’

Finnvid reflected for a moment. It *would* have been glorious. The daemon had been colossal, a prize worth a hundred deaths to bring down.

‘Blood-red skin,’ he said, remembering the way it had looked. ‘Horns in a crown, an axe of burning iron, wings like a shroud of Morkai.’ He drew in a wry breath. ‘It was good that the Fell-Handed came when he did. No other could have stood against it.’

For once, there were no smirks of dissension from the others, no one claiming they would have hurled it to the ground quicker.

‘How did he fight?’ came the question, spilling from more than one mouth.

Finnvid hadn’t enjoyed witnessing it. A Dreadnought was a strange thing in battle – slow, brutal, grinding, wreathed in smoke and smog, a mockery of post-human splendour.

‘Like the Fang,’ he said, thoughtfully. ‘Like the Mountain. He endured it all. Such... punishment.’ He felt himself getting maudlin and forced a smile.

‘Indestructible. By the end, he was just clawing it open.’

The others liked that. They liked to hear that Bjorn had dominated, just as he

always had. There were some certainties in the universe worth clinging to – that was one of them.

‘Tell us more,’ they said.

Finnvid shook his head. ‘There isn’t any more.’

‘Tell us.’

‘I don’t remember.’

Guthorm looked at him darkly. ‘You’re the skjald. Tell us.’

It was hard to resist an order from Guthorm. In any case, why should they not know? Perhaps it was best shared.

‘I was close by then,’ Finnvid said eventually. ‘When the creature was killed. I heard them speaking.’

‘They... *spoke?*’ asked Guthorm.

‘They knew each other.’

That silenced them. Finnvid shook his head. It sounded incredible to him now, but it was the truth. He always spoke the truth.

‘Right at the kill, it was laughing,’ he said. ‘The Fell-Handed was tearing it apart, and it was just laughing. It said: *I know you. I fought you when you were the fastest of your kind. I fought you when your mortal claw could reach around my throat. Do you remember? What remains of that claw now?*’

The warriors stayed silent. They were rapt, hanging on Finnvid’s words.

‘The Fell-Handed did not reply. The creature kept talking. *We are eternal. You know that now? Has the lesson finally been hammered home? We come back. We are unchanged. Your triumphs are temporary. A little pain, a flash of time, but we return. Look at you now!*’

Finnvid had no trouble recalling the words. It was like they had been seared onto his mind.

‘*You called out names the last time. Do you remember them? I do. Tell them to me again. Tell me the names of those I killed.*’

Guthorm stared at him through the flames, his wound looking black and angry. ‘Did he?’

Finnvid nodded. ‘The Fell-Handed spoke. He was still fighting, and he spoke. Russ, but that *voice*. Like something out of the sagas. I could barely understand the accent. It was like a dream coming alive. He reeled off a name every time he struck a blow. Alvi. Byrnjolf. Eirik. Gunnald Shieldbearer. Hiorvard.’

‘Who are they?’

‘I don’t know. But then came the strange thing.’ Finnvid hesitated. ‘He couldn’t remember the last one. There was one more, but he couldn’t get it. The

daemon laughed at him. *I remember*, it said. *I will always remember. And when you are gone, I will be the only one who remembers. Think on that.* If the Fell-Handed had been angry before, he fought like a baresark after that. He just piled on the pain. *Hjolda*, but I've never seen anything like it. The thing was still laughing when it died. Bjorn didn't stop. He burned the whole carcass to ashes. He was still burning it when the battle fell away and we were given the order to stand down. Who was going to tell him to stop?

Finnvid tried to smile at the others, to lift their spirits, but the story had made them uneasy, just as he'd feared it would.

'How did it finish?' asked Guthorm.

'I saw him leave,' said Finnvid. 'The lander came down with its escorts. They had six priests waiting to usher him back. He stomped right past me, close as you are, covered in blood. Everyone fell back.'

Finnvid clasped his hands before him, slumping forward on his elbows. The fire didn't do much to warm him.

'He was still trying to get it. I heard him. He couldn't remember. They took him up into the hold and he ignored them all.'

The fire crackled away, spitting into the gathering night.

'He's gone now,' said Finnvid. 'Back to the Mountain. Perhaps he'll remember in there.' As he spoke, he thought of it – the vaults in the deep core of Fenris, silent and frozen, lined with the tombs of the Revered Fallen. He didn't like to think of the ancient warrior being hoisted down into the dark, still muttering over old memories that faded like the light in midwinter. He raised a smile again, a cracked one that exposed his fangs. 'But he won! That's the main thing. The Rout victorious. *Heidur Rus!*'

They all echoed the cry, but after that they didn't ask him to tell them any more. Guthorm looked preoccupied.

Finnvid stared into the fire again. The flames were beginning to ebb but no one reached for more fuel. He wondered if he'd done the right thing. It suited them all to believe that the Fell-Handed would go on forever. Perhaps they needed to believe it.

What must it be like? he thought. *He has seen the stars themselves grow old. He has walked with the Allfather. He can be forgiven a lapse after ten thousand years.*

A cold wind moaned across the flat, skirling over the huddled groups of armoured warriors. The songs of victory sounded thinner as their muscles cooled.

But he will remember. The memory will return.

Far to the north, the corpse of the daemon crisped and spat, consumed by the stacked pyre and rendered down to ashes.

He will remember.

Then the last of the flames flickered out, leaving only coils of drifting smoke above the coals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CHRIS WRAIGHT is the author of the Horus Heresy novel *Scars* and the Space Wolves novels *Battle of the Fang* and *Blood of Asaheim*. He has also written the Space Marine Battles novel *Wrath of Iron*, along with *Schwarzhelm & Helborg: Swords of the Emperor* and *Luthor Huss* in the Warhammer universe. He's based in a leafy bit of south-west England, and when not struggling to meet deadlines enjoys running through scenic parts of it.



Even as Great Wolf Harek Ironhelm closes on his ancient enemy, Magnus the Red, the Fang on the Space Wolves home world is besieged by a massive force of Thousand Sons.

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