



SAMMAEL:

# LORD OF THE ETERNAL HUNT

*A short story by Ben Counter*



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The horizon was discoloured by a mass of noisome cloud, a churning green-black mass leering down at the once-fertile plains of this world. Now the landscape was torn and rotted, its fields of crops turned to foul sludge. Corruption had come to this agri-world. Decay had crept like the onset of night across the land.

Sammael guided his jetbike out of the Thunderhawk gunship. Once whole companies had taken to the field on such jetbikes, but now only *Corvex* remained. The rest of the Dark Angels Second Company, the Ravenwing, rode to war on rugged combat bikes – thirty of them disembarked around Sammael, engines thrumming.

A white-painted band of bikers roared past. Their hair was woven into braids that whipped as they rode. Their leader had a battered, tanned face and a two-handed power tulwar strapped to his bike.

‘What a pretty steed!’ exclaimed their leader.

‘Khan,’ said Sammael, not rising to the White Scar’s mockery.

‘Do you not feel isolated from the battle up there, my friend?’ said Kor’sarro Khan. ‘You must decide, Master Sammael, whether you are a warrior, or a man who does not want to feel the dirt on his face! What kind of man are you, Sammael?’

Every Chapter was different. The Dark Angels saw war as a solemn business of duty and sacrifice. The White Scars, on this evidence, saw it as a test of manhood and a contest of wills.

‘You have your targets, Lord Kor’sarro?’ asked Sammael.

‘We have,’ said the Khan. ‘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!’ Kor’sarro and his bikers roared off.

Sammael agreed with the Khan in one thing. There was no reason to wait.

‘Ravenwing!’ he ordered over the vox-net. ‘Honour demands, and speed kills. Let both do their work.’

In a thunder of engines, the Ravenwing streaked off across the tormented plain.

The Imperial Guard gunners knew the enemy war engines were somewhere in the cloud of pestilence, but could not sight their guns through the fog. So the Ravenwing and the White Scars had been summoned to enter the cloud, protected by their power armour’s respirators, and report back with targets for the big guns.

Sammael guided *Corvex* through the darkness. Beside him the rest of the Ravenwing were doing the same, bike-mounted bolters rattling shots at the cultists caught out in the open.

Gun emplacements blazed at the Ravenwing as they streaked past the closest war engine, a gargantuan machine on enormous tracks crowned with a gun fed by vats of bubbling filth. Sammael’s bikers ducked and wove between the chains of fire. Ahead a sally port opened and twenty or thirty horsemen galloped out. They wore carapace plate, bare metal stained and rusted, their faces and those of their horses hidden by gas masks hooked up to respirators on their backs. They carried lances with scythe-shaped blades, perfect for riding down the fleeing homesteaders who had borne the brunt of this rebellion.

Sammael drew the Raven Sword. The riders galloped straight at the approaching Ravenwing, and the first Dark Angels gunfire knocked them from their saddles.

Sammael pushed down on a pedal and *Corvex* leapt forwards. He barely felt the Raven Sword sever the head of the closest steed, continuing through the upper body of its rider. Sammael wrenched the yoke to one side and *Corvex* slewed around – on the ground it would have been a skid but hovering just above the ground it was an elegant arc, sweeping through the riders as Sammael swung the Raven Sword. A head came away, an arm. A scythe-lance arced at him but *Corvex* tilted and shattered the lance with its prow before the Raven Sword finished its journey with a thrust through the rider’s throat.

A gust of wind lifted the fog for a moment, revealing the shape of the next war machine. Sammael recognised the White Scars circling it. Hovering machines, like enormous bloated flies held aloft by twin rotors, were pouring fire into them from automated guns. One White Scar was blasted off the saddle, and through the vox-net Sammael could hear Kor’sarro ordering his men to break up and

evade.

‘Ravenwing, we must assist!’ ordered Sammael. ‘Sergeant Ryvor, bring your men in from the north. Sergeant Kess, approach from...’

‘Throne alive!’ exclaimed Ryvor, the plasma pistol still glowing in his hand. ‘The Threefold Serpent!’

Sammael followed Ryvor’s gaze and saw a banner hanging on a war engine far ahead. It bore the sigil of a serpent with three heads, tied in a knot and on a dark green field.

‘Brother Skethon,’ hissed Sammael. ‘The Fallen. He lives. Ravenwing, follow me.’

‘Master Sammael,’ replied Ryvor. ‘The White Scars...’

Sammael glanced at Ryvor. Even through the eyepieces of his helmet, a look was all it took.

The Ravenwing roared off towards the distant banner as the drones closed in on the White Scars.

War engine fire was falling like pestilential comets among the tank parks and trenchworks of the Imperial line.

The assault had not yielded Brother Skethon, but then Sammael had known it would not. Instead he had brought back a book, enshrined in a chapel inside the war machine, that at first glance seemed to be the journal of Skethor’s journeys since abandoning his Chapter. Sammael’s duty now was to return it to the Chapter’s Inner Circle. He strapped the book to the saddle of *Corvex* and led it up into the Thunderhawk. The gunship’s engines were already warming up and the Ravenwing had embarked, ready to leave.

A lone bike approached. Kor’sarro Khan, his armour smeared and corroded with filth, skidded to a halt behind the Thunderhawk.

‘Sammael!’ shouted the Khan. ‘Whatever you abandoned us for, was it worth it?’

The ramp began to close. ‘I know not yet,’ said Sammael levelly.

‘I asked what kind of man you were,’ said Kor’sarro. ‘And I will ask it again, Dark Angel!’

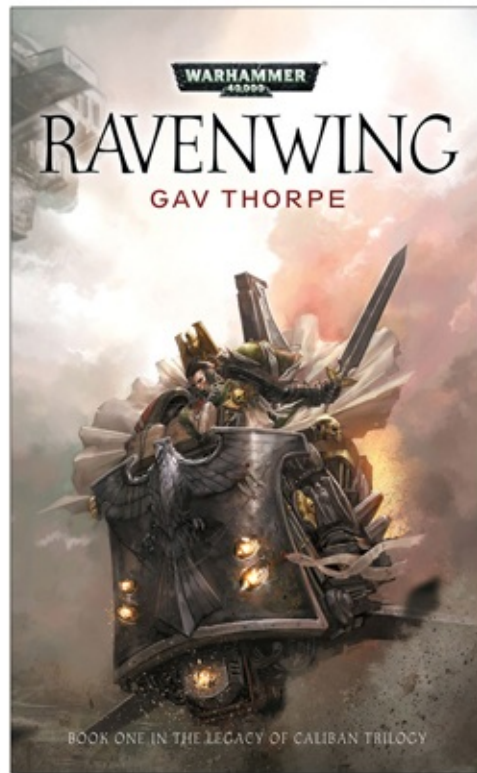
Sammael looked down at the book. The Dark Angels had a purpose greater than any war objective in the Imperium – the hunt for the Fallen, the redemption of their whole Chapter and atonement for their sins. And it took precedence over everything. Everything.

‘I do not know that yet, either,’ replied Sammael.

The ramp ground closed, and the Ravenwing left that world forever.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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