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# UNBROKEN

CHRIS WRAIGHT



A THIRD WAR FOR  
ARMAGEDDON STORY



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He runs, head low, bolter held loosely one-handed, loping over terrain broken by a mortal generation of war.

He moves faster than should be possible, his steel-grey armour a blur in the desert sand, whining from servo-strain, driven to its limits by the hunter's mind encased within. He is a dust-cloud, a djinn of vengeance launched across the parched wastes.

The world around him howls its outrage. The skies crack with flame, throbbing amid tumbling amber cloudbanks. Every footfall is a violation, an imposition of alien matter on tortured soil.

This world hates him. It hates his armour, forged on a planet of relentless cold. It hates the angular runes on his shoulderguards, carved in black and choked with the dust that fouls all things here. It hates the fact that he is alone, for Armageddon is a world of limitless hosts, of Legions stretching from lightning-scored horizon to horizon. As he runs, this world tries to throttle him, to snatch away his breath, to seize him up.

He feeds from the hatred. He looks up at the ember-glowing skies and laughs. He feels the beating heat on his back and snarls for more. Blood-red flickers dance across the western desert-edge, and the incipient storm-rumble makes the dust shiver.

He is panting now, his saliva viscous. He has been running for hours, a constant rhythm since being dropped into the deep desert by the lifter. Ahead of him squats the ridge, carved like bone from the desert, crested, wave-like and dominating the surrounding flatlands. It rises two hundred metres, jagged and earth-dry, scored by gulches that will never gush with water again.

He sees the summit, zoomed through his helm's ocular augmenters, beaten flat and crested with withered scrub. The peak is the target. It is the stronghold, a

citadel, a natural fortress of bare stone and wind-flayed columns amid the baking expanse of desert. Xenos-cattle would break against that rock like spilled blood, foaming back into the gasping earth in their anger. He intends to make them.

He grins and pants harder, dog-like. He can hear them coming for him now. They have picked up his spoor, and they are breaking away from their pits and towers along the river's edge, a kilometre to the east. He can already see them in his mind's eye – roaring, stamping, furious. They will come for him, racing across the sands, desperate to bring him down, to crush his spine and trample his lifeless body into the red soil.

The thought of it makes his battle-spirit sing. He feels his axe clatter against his thigh as he runs and burns to pull it free.

Not yet, he thinks. Not until they are on him, piling in around him, bellowing with tusked mouths gaping and spittle flying into his face.

He runs. He keeps running. But though he is the prey, he is not running from them. He has never run from an enemy in his life.

The dust flares around him, curling like a cloak. The skies burn, the heat shimmers.

Ahead of him, the summit nears. It looks, for a moment, like a cairn on the peaks of Asaheim.

‘What was his name?’

Regimental Commander Holth vol Vergion is not good with names. He is capable of recalling and deploying complex deployment orders with precision, but names pass over him now – the living and the dead, for there have been so many.

Commissar Ferd Naghro does not miss a beat, staring through the aperture of his long-range magnoculars with the squint that always marks his jowly face. ‘Svein,’ says Naghro. ‘He called himself Svein Last-of-Eight.’

Vergion grunts. His narrow chin is lined with sweat already, and it is less than an hour after the red-glow dawn. He can feel the dust rising, settling, filtering, worming its way into every crevice. ‘What does it mean?’

Naghro puts the magnoculars down. ‘His squad is gone,’ he says. ‘He is the remaining warrior.’

‘They could reinforce him?’

‘They won’t.’ Naghro looks sourly approving.

All around the two men, fumes churn into the toxic sludge of Armageddon's atmosphere. Columns of Chimera transports sway through the dust, gouging out

long track-lines as their smoke-stacks belch soot. A flight of Valkyrie gunships powers overhead, hanging low, their hunched wings heavy with weaponry. Ranks of mustard-yellow troopers trudge through the swirling dust-clouds, wet cloths draped over their rebreather masks, all heading for the remaining transports that will take them, once again, over the killing grounds of the inter-hive badlands.

The regiment's command group has pulled up ahead of the mustering vanguard, positioned on a scrubby rise to watch the muster complete. The 172nd are getting good at it now. They have been on the move on and off for seven months, and it is hard to remember sleeping on something that isn't mobile. Naghro's Salamander transport idles halfway down the slope, a little lower than Vergion's Crassus super-heavy command vehicle. The company commanders have already taken their positions at the head of the columns – Kallack leading the Tauros and attack-bike flanking squads; Vervis, Helt, Celif and Llom commanding the main mechanised infantry battalions; Jeherren and Gorghri leading the pure tank columns – Leman Russ, Hellhounds and a few surviving Wyvern suppression units, though those units have taken a beating on the crossing from Acheron into the contested zones.

Vergion notes, with some satisfaction, that Naghro seems content with progress. He hasn't launched into one of his frothing rages, nor has he dragged his Commissariat staff down the front line to berate the men for slovenliness. For once, he seems to be in accord with the spirit of the regiment.

For his own part, Vergion feels that mix of trepidation and enthusiasm he always does before a major action. This is a significant push, one that holds the promise of securing the desert south of the last remaining rok fortress and cutting off reinforcements to the beleaguered ork offensive positions. It has been weeks in the preparation, and resources have been pulled from five other fronts to lend it heft. Get it right, and they will blood the greenskins badly. Get it wrong, and they'll be hauling burned-out tank carcasses from the sand for years. It all depends on taking the objective and holding it.

He feels the dust on his lips, and licks them. Everything tastes of grit, oil and blood.

'How far away is he?' Vergion asks.

'Already close,' says Naghro, snapping his magnocular case closed. 'I should take my place now, commander.'

Vergion takes a final look around him, and at the multiple ranks of armour, all gouging its way into the desert, overflowed by Valkyries and Avengers. It is a

formidable battle-group, war-hardened and brutally drilled. He thinks of Svein Last-of-Eight, out in the deep desert, alone.

‘Then we are being outpaced,’ Vergion replies, trudging to the open crew-hatch of his Crassus command vehicle. ‘That will be rectified. Now move out.’

He smells them before he sees them. The ridge is still three kilometres to the north, and unprotected. They burn up from the east, out of the river’s jagged gulch, aiming to cut him off. Their stench rolls ahead of them – a fungal fog, hot and clotted with sweat-wet dust. Next come the clouds, kicked up by hundreds of trampling boots, churning like frothing *mjod* in the barrel. They are panting, bawling, jostling like the animals they are, latching onto his own scent and seeking him out.

Svein keeps running. He wants to make the first broken rock-edge before they reach him, and that will be tight.

Lactic acid is already burning in his thighs, and the pain spurs him on. Both hearts are thudding in a tight rhythm; his lungs are straining and his skin is tight with sweat under his armour. His whole body is a machine now, speeding, locked to the drumbeat of the chase, tight as cured hide.

He remembers running through the snowdrifts on his home world, hunting down prey in the years before he’d been taken, his skin open to the cut of the wind and his nostrils flaring with the unfiltered scents of pine and stone. He remembers the old pains of his body before the changes were wrought, and they are much the same now. He remembers how he would use his mind’s eye to chart the course of the prey before him, placing himself in its position, judging where it would run and angling his pursuit in order to cut it off. He wonders if the xenos can do the same. They have been cunning in the past. They have laid low hive-spires and brought ruin to whole tracts of this world.

They are only here to slaughter. On the one hand, he despises that – he cannot help it, it is bred into him, and he loathes the greenskin more than he loathes any other living thing he has fought. On the other, he recognises the purity in it. They are the same as him – made to kill, bled clean of remorse or fear, their minds set on the target as tight as docking clamps.

He sees the first of them, clear of the river now, charging across the flat-beaten earth. Those are the fastest, not the biggest, and they will die quickly. They know this too, but they sprint after him nevertheless, blind with their species-rage, seeing only his blood-trampled demise in their stumm-flared brains.

You will have to fight for it, he thinks, opening fire with his bolter, sending the

shells streaking out across the desert. The first xenos fall, crashing to the ground, rolling over and over with momentum, leapt over by those behind.

It is a plunging wave – a tsunami of bodies, crashing across the gasping, forge-hot land. It will overtake him.

Svein looks up. The rise is close now. He tears towards it, firing all the while. The ammo-counter clicks down to empty, and he slams another clip home, never breaking stride. They are sending runners to outflank him, bringing up the heavy warriors through the centre of the horde. They disregard the mass-reactive shells that slam into them, wrenching and catapulting them from their feet. Some get back up, carrying huge wounds but still roaring their fury, powering awkwardly back into the hunt.

He admires that. He wishes to kill those ones cleanly.

How many are after him now? Two hundred? Five hundred? A thousand?

Vergion, positioned further still to the east, between the orks and Acheron, will be on the move now. His tanks will already be rumbling across the wastes. Svein remembers Vergion. He liked the mortal commander, and he liked his commissar even more. They both looked him in the eye and did not insult him with honorifics. They treated him like a soldier, which is what he is, and he hopes he did the same. It can be hard not to belittle the mortals, despite all they have done. He hopes he did not do that.

He hopes, too, they will be on time. Vergion had the look of a man who would keep his promises.

The xenos keep closing, spilling over the ash like rats. Their guttural language is audible now, hurling out bestial hatreds. He admires that, likes the spirit it shows, but he keeps his own mouth closed. His own death-curses can wait.

He keeps firing, running down another clip until it clangs empty and replaces it again. He keeps running.

Ahead of him, the ridge looms up, blocking the light of the sun.

The 172nd surges across the badlands, all men now encased in their vehicles. Vergion's command group manoeuvres into the centre of the formation, flanked by two mechanised infantry divisions. They spread out across the burning earth, adopting the standard Astra Militarum convoy pattern: heavy armour in the centre, artillery pieces at the rear, light units on the flanks and scout bikes up ahead.

Vergion holds on to the shuddering chassis of the Crassus, peering into the tactical picter. All around him his crew shout and sweat and work, keeping the

armoured behemoth on the route. The whole structure shakes as the tracks labour. Armageddon is a hateful world to wage war on – the soils crumble under weight, the heat is crushing and the electric storms scramble the augurs. The planet is an enemy just as formidable as the hated xenos.

The carrier jolts, slamming Vergion into the inner wall of his command chamber. He curses and rights himself, feeling the hot trickle of blood down his temple.

The Space Wolf has covered so much ground that Vergion's columns will have to work hard to meet the schedule. That is absurd – a whole regiment, powered by huge promethium and diesel engines, struggling to match the pace set by a single warrior. But then Vergion has seen the Space Marines fight, and knows what they are capable of. He has seen lone members of the Adeptus Astartes cut their way through whole mobs of heavy-armoured xenos, fighting with such speed and discipline that it has lifted the populaces of the spires to new heights of heroism.

He cannot be cynical about them, not like some of his envious peers. Vergion knows he has done his duty by the Emperor, but also knows that it will never compare to that performed by the lowliest of the Angels on Armageddon. How could it? Within their sacred bodies they carry a fractional spark of the Emperor's own essence.

'They are like unto the gods themselves,' Vergion mouths to himself, watching the kilometres click by. 'They are the instruments of our Protector. They are perfect, unwearied and unsullied.'

In the west, he sees the first signs of the xenos horde on the scopes. Its size does not surprise him – the greenskins know the value of the objective and are there in force. He sees the first flickers of the augur readings, signifying movements and deployments. As usual, it is a scattered mess.

But they are already charging. They are already making for the target. It is all happening so fast.

'Signal the forward units,' voxes Vergion, glancing at the chrono and not liking what he sees. 'Break two points south – we are coming in high.'

He can adjust, he can nudge, but in truth all has been set in train now. He will have to hope, and trust, that it has been enough.

Vergion looks back into the scopes, his fingers turning white with tension where they clutch the metal housing.

The ridge beckons. It rears up, veined with ochre, a great fold in the cracked

earth, worn down by fire-laced winds into folds of sandstone. He vaults up the first boulders, leaping from one to another, but then they are on him.

They clutch at his ankles, still scrabbling as he blasts at them. Blood splatters up his greaves, but still they come. He climbs faster, racing up the crooked defile, using his free hand to power between the steepening rockfaces. They adopt the same tactic, grabbing any handhold, hauling their stinking bodies after his. The scrawniest of them scampers ahead, trying to power past him before he reaches the summit. The brawniest are still far behind, hampered by iron-plate armour, but now catching fast.

Svein pushes on. Solid rounds explode around him, showering his shoulders with rubble. The gun-carriers are close enough to fire now, and the heavy ammunition pulverises the stone. He darts and weaves, belying his ceramite bulk to power upwards, defying gravity, using every handgrip and foothold.

He reaches a ledge and half turns, emptying his bolter into the oncoming herds. In that moment, he sees them all before him, streaming up from the desert floor, and his hearts spike with exhilaration. They are *massive*. They are *unending*. They clamber over their own dead, low-slung jaws dribbling with gore-flecked saliva. He sees the greater xenos-beasts lumbering towards him, shoving lesser creatures aside with claws of rusting steel. He sees goggled fanatics lowering flamers, and augmetic pistoned horrors limping unsteadily into range.

‘*Fenrys!*’ he roars, as the last shell cracks from his bolter’s barrel.

He has already carved a swathe of blood, and it makes him savagely glad. The same xenos-breed took his pack down, one by one, during the months of relentless fighting on Armageddon – in Acheron, in the wastes and in the void above the fiery curve of the cursed planet’s atmosphere. Each of his brothers slaughtered hundreds before the end, and Svein is honour-bound to exact the same tally.

He starts moving again and mag-locks his empty bolter, for this is no place to make a stand. The bullets whizz past him, scraping the edges of his armour. He is struck, and his armour takes the impact. They almost catch his trailing leg, but he surges up faster. As he climbs, he reaches for his axe and pulls it clear. He is leading them up, up, up – pulling the whole horde from the plains and into the heights.

They hit him again, and he stumbles. His footing slips, and he slashes down hard with the axe, taking off a xenos’s claws at the wrist. It is the first blade-kill, and he grunts with the release. He crests a rock-shelf, no more than a metre

wide, and plants his boots firmly for the first time in hours.

They clamber up to fight him and he obliges. He exchanges blows with inch-thick metal cleavers, whirring chainswords, mauls, flails and snub-barrelled rifles. They crash against him, and he kicks them back to the desert floor. The blows are vicious, heavy as pig-iron. The sandstone explodes into clouds around them, wreathing the furious combat in a cloak of swirling translucence. He takes wounds, for they are warrior-born just as he is. His armour is dented and scored, and he is knocked against the stone wall at his back, but his vision is better than theirs and he is still faster and more skilful, and he uses those advantages. His axe flies a fraction faster, a fraction tighter and a fraction harder. He kills dozens, then dozens more, and their bodies crunch and break away from him. Black blood paints the stone in streaks, staining like engine oil.

They waver. The momentum of the tide flickers, and he sees the damage he has already done.

He angles his axe down at them, fangs bared under the death-snarl of his helm.

‘One-of-Eight!’ he roars in Fenrisian, not caring that they will not understand him. He is not speaking to them anyway. They roar back, goaded, and surge up the slope again, galloping on all-fours now. He sees more greenskins rumbling across the dust-filmed desert below, disgorged by juggernauts and half-tracks.

Then he springs back up the cliff-face, climbing rapidly. He looks up and sees the furnace of the sky sweep across his visual field. It is scored with the dirty trails of mortars, and that gives him satisfaction.

Vergion must be close. The beat of engines is on the edge of his hearing.

He keeps moving. They come after him. There is nowhere left to go, and ahead of him the summit rises.

Vergion gives the order. The tanks grind to a halt, churning up sand, rocking with inertia even as their gunners angle the long barrels. They are performing the calculations quickly, for much has already been pre-cogitated. The ork defence lines of the river-course are less than a kilometre ahead now. The xenos themselves are massed and out in the open, vulnerable to close-packed fire. The summit of the ridge looms beyond them, hazy from dust.

The tanks shoot high, sending cluster-bombs, mortars and infantry-shredding shrapnel charges arcing into the greenskin positions. The sky goes black with discharge, masking the red light of Armageddon’s angry star. More tank formations reach their coordinates, and the punishment becomes withering. Shells slam from the sky, pounding the desert, annihilating all under its

devastating curtain.

The troop transports advance under the cover of the tank-barrage, trusting in the spotters to keep the cascade well ahead of them. Vergion orders the Crassus to follow them in. He climbs the ladder to the observation hatch, unlocks it and pushes out into the open. Even though he wears a full-face helm and rebreather, the heat and the noise hit him hard. He reels, gripping the circular rim, gaining his bearings.

Everything stinks of cordite and promethium. The sky has gone, replaced by the roaring trails of projectile fire. The shells hammer along the route of the dry river, still a long way from the high-point and sweeping west in a grinding, disciplined movement.

Vergion spies Naghro's Salamander powering its way towards the very front, and smiles – the commissar would not be anywhere else. Behind the black-clad vehicle are the lead Chimeras, already reaching their deployment coordinates. Vergion sees them skid to a halt, their crew-doors slamming open and troopers spilling from the interior onto the sand. They form into squads – the lasgun-bearing main assault squads moving forward and supported moments later by the heavy-weapons teams. Vergion sees the mortars being unloaded, assembled and loaded, ready to add to the barrage from the battle tanks.

It is assault in the best tradition of the Legion – fast, overwhelming, rapidly escalating as the forces are delivered to the pre-arranged fire-bases. Ranks of unloaded troopers advance through the smoke-filled landscape, firing whicker-sharp volleys of lasbeams through the murk, their helm-lumens glowing in the artificial dusk.

The orks come back at them – of course they do – for even the opening barrage has not killed all of them. They stumble out of the nerve-shredding hellstorm, half-blinded. The counter-strike is furious. Vergion sees huge greenskin warriors blasted apart by grenade-strikes, sliced into blood-whirl shards by concentrated lasfire and pulverised by mortar-fall. Still, more crash into contact. They are bewildered now, shocked into a kind of feral rage by the hammer blow of the assault, but still they do what comes naturally to them – fight, fight, fight.

The second wave of infantry carriers pushes on, aiming to reach the river-course before resistance can be fully organised. The rain of artillery sweeps ahead of them, smashing apart trench lines and barricades in a rolling fire-tide.

‘Where is he?’ demands Vergion, speaking to his augur-operator.

The reply comes back over the unit-comm, crackly and distorted. ‘Tracking

movement toward the summit. He's still fighting.'

'Throne of Earth,' breathes Vergion, relieved. 'Push on, then. Push *on*.'

The air around him burns, igniting with the tang of spilled promethium. Everything is a death-marker – the smells, the sounds and the throbbing earth. He is at the epicentre now, orchestrating the close-packed fury of his regiment.

They approach the river. To the west, partly hidden by the clouds of smoke, the summit still stands, sundered and raging in visual range.

He is nearly ended before making the horn-curve peak. They are firing again, launching crude explosives from shoulder-mounted tubes, trying to blast him clear from the rock, to drag him down where they can hack him to slivers.

He darts to one side, warned by preternatural hunt-sense. The cliff-face he had been aiming for disappears in a riot of falling stone; flying boulders smash against his armour. He reels, nearly losing his grip, but manages to keep climbing. More projectiles strike his back, punching into the ravaged ceramite.

He reaches the lip of stone before the summit and grabs it with both fists, hauling himself over the edge. The flat of the peak runs away before him, the high-point amidst the flatness, its red-brown surface scoured by dust-winds.

They follow him over like rats up a hawser and crash into him – a solid mass of green flesh, encased in motley armour and bearing improvised weapons. A dozen, then two dozen, then more, throwing themselves wildly.

He fights back, matching their savagery. His axe is wielded two-handed, hurled around in baresark curves. He decapitates a broken-toothed monster and bisects the chest of a roaring opponent. Blood flecks, spurts and swings around him in hanging trails. He kicks out, breaking bones. One xenos gets close, and he head-butts it, snapping the thick fore-skull, before finishing it with the axe-edge.

They land their own blows. His greaves are cracked now, half-shattered by the solid rounds that slam in all the time. His right hand leaks hot blood under its gauntlet, and there is no time to heal it. His breastplate is dented, pressed against his labouring chest, and his arms burn with the raw pain of overexertion. Every indicator in his helm flashes blood-red, screaming at him to stop, to pull out, to get away.

He cannot. He will not. He is Svein, Last-of-Eight, a Lone Wolf. He has a task to fulfil.

They come again. The axe bites, tearing up alien flesh in hot slices. He makes the killing-edge fly, propelling it one-handed again and punching with his free fist, cracking bone and ripping muscle. The xenos blur into a screen of blood and

fury, surrounding and rearing over him, poised like a wave of the grey-white seas of home, ready to tear him from the ridge and cast him into oblivion.

He forgets everything but the combat. He forgets his old pack, his old missions, the orders that brought him to Armageddon. All he has is the physical test – pitiless, furious, pure. If he had any spare breath in his lungs he would cry out for the pleasure and glory of it, for this is *fighting*, as elemental and unrestrained as he has always dreamed of. He is no longer an individual, but a force, as torrential as the Helwinter.

He swings round, clearing a space ahead of him. A red-eyed xenos collapses back in its agony, knocking others down, breaking the unity of the tide before him. In a fraction of a second, he looks up, out across the plains, aware again of a world outside the circuit of his axe-strikes.

He sees the dry river far below, skirting around the eastern edge of the ridge and snaking out into the ash-wastes. He sees the smoke rising from the artillery bombardment, and the vehicles tearing across the divide. Vergion is on schedule. The mortal has kept his promise.

Svein smiles, but there is no time for that any more. In that fraction of a pause, he realises how damaged he is. Every muscle of his augmented body is shrieking at him. His carapace is broken in three places. The bones of his left hand are broken. He has a fractured skull, the flesh over his ribcage is torn, and his right boot is filling with blood.

Then they run at him again, thundering in their fractured, overlapping mania. He grips his axe, judges where to hit first, and strikes back hard.

The 172nd charges through the greenskin positions on the far side of the riverbank, storming them in waves of tight, ordered violence. They take the dens one by one, hurling in grenades, launching flamers through the sight-holes, then blasting the doors open and sending troopers in. These positions have been occupied for a long time, and the xenos are dug-in, but it does not help them. The assault is overwhelming, the numbers telling, the speed more than they can handle.

Valkyries swoop in low, engines whining, launching their attack runs and strafing the guntowers and the greenskins that are still above ground. The artillery barrage has now moved on, freeing up the infantry to tear through the heart of the xenos strongholds along the banks. They place charges against the tangled walls of scrap and looted masonry, and blow the defence-lines into rubble. Then they storm the smouldering remnants, bringing pain to the enemy

that has given them so much pain of its own.

It feels good to return it. It feels good to torch their lairs and make them squeal.

Vergion's Crassus smashes through a half-severed line of razorwire, and thunders to a shuddering halt. The commander adjusts his rebreather, slams open the hatch, and steps out on the earth again, flanked by his bodyguards. As his boots touch down on the ash, he takes in the situation with his own eyes.

They have taken the shoreline positions. They have driven the greenskins from their defensive redoubts and now occupy in force. With the xenos artillery points negated, they will be able to send in landers within the hour. Aegis lines will be constructed, making the dry river-course into a fortress. The orks will be denied passage towards Acheron along the protected way, leaving them only the open desert, where they will be vulnerable to airstrikes and detectable by the hive's functioning augur arrays.

Objective achieved.

He allows himself a twinge of guilt, though he knows none should be forthcoming. Naghro would have chastised him for it. The plan was the Space Wolf's – he had proposed it, back in the bunker with his thick finger jabbing at points on the tactical hololith.

'I draw them out,' he'd said in his accented Gothic. 'I pull them from the river. Then you take it.'

Vergion had hesitated. Even the commissar had hesitated.

'And then?' he had asked.

The Space Wolf had never replied, but the smile he'd given had made Vergion shiver.

Vergion looks up, westward. He can see the summit before him, bordering the deep wastes. It is crawling with greenskins, all surging up the precipitous cliffs, seemingly oblivious to the destruction wrought on their stronghold. They have been goaded and they have responded, pursuing their prey with such single-minded obsession that they have allowed themselves to be destroyed by it.

Even now, Vergion wonders if he can alter the arrangement. Perhaps the Valkyries could be re-routed, clearing the summit of xenos. He could call in assault-troops, delivered in airborne carriers, and try to pull the Space Wolf back before he is lost. The value of one such warrior is beyond price – as he has shown by dragging the orks out of their entrenched positions and enabling the 172nd to overrun them with such crushing speed.

As he looks up at the summit, Naghro's Salamander draws up alongside him.

The commissar dismounts and limps over.

‘Do not think about it,’ he says. ‘This is the priority.’

Vergion smiles coldly. ‘You’re right,’ he says. ‘Though I regret it.’

‘I think he wished for it.’

Vergion does not believe that. He stands up straight, guessing the gesture will never be seen, but some things have to be marked.

He salutes, slamming his clenched fist against his chest, acknowledging the lone warrior on the ridge who has pulled the greenskins from their lairs and given him his victory. He will not cheapen that sacrifice by altering the plans now. He will hammer the remainder into the dust, and fortify the lines, making them so strong that when the xenos on the summit limp back with blood on their claws they will be cut to pieces by his newly-fixed guns.

This is his stronghold now. He will make it unbreakable.

Svein sees the salute. Before the horde closes around him again, he sees the tiny outline of Vergion against the sand, marking the sacrifice.

Then the blows come in again, harder now that the xenos are on the flat, pressing in, frustrated by his survival. If they have realised what their hunt has cost them, they give no sign – they are obsessed, focused only on the kill, roused to a frenzy. Their bloodlust has damned them, just as he promised the mortal commander it would.

He fights again, knowing that this will be the end. There are dozens already pressing on him. Soon there will be hundreds and he will kill until the sun turns black. But it will not be enough – a blade will find its way through, a claw will penetrate, a shell will find its mark.

He does not grieve. He has slain more this day than ever before, and this is the manner of a warrior’s passing – surrounded by heaps of the slain, his axe-blade red, his voice hoarse from death-curses. This is how he has always envisioned it.

He fights on. In his mind’s eye, he hears the laughter of Russ at his back.

He fights on. He feels the ice-wind in his plaited hair, the cold edge that stirs his hearts to fervour.

He fights on. In his amber eyes there is something like ecstasy.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Chris Wraight** is the author of the Horus Heresy novel *Scars*, the novella *Brotherhood of Storm* and the audio drama *The Sigillite*. For Warhammer 40,000 he has written the Space Wolves novels *Blood of Asaheim* and *Stormcaller*, and the short story collection *Wolves of Fenris*, as well as the Space Marine Battles novels *Wrath of Iron* and *Battle of the Fang*. Additionally, he has many Warhammer novels to his name, including the Time of Legends novel *Master of Dragons*, which forms part of the War of Vengeance series. Chris lives and works near Bristol, in south-west England.

[Wolves of Fenris](#) is a collection of Space Wolves short stories by Chris Wraight that spans the Horus Heresy and Warhammer 40,000.



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