



WAR ZONE FENRIS: VOX TENEBRIS (2016)

A War Zone Fenris audio drama

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List of characters:

- * Drenn Redblade – Old Wolf of the Space Wolves legion;
- * Zameon Gydrael - Deathwing Dark Angel Terminator;
- * Ober, Yarry, Sverry, Torbern, Wulf, Varran, Svensson – Space Wolves;
- * Mallech, Mika, Nezekiel, Lukius, Samarius, Balon – Dark Angels;
- * Krell – Tech-priest Primaris.

CHAPTER 01

In the frozen darkness the Wolves waited. Three packs, their fangs out, breath frosting in the chill air. The musk¹ of the tightly pressed brothers was a comfort, feeling the low wide tunnel with pack familiarity. Not like the Dark Angels. Their scent was alien, old, rotten vellum, burning tallow², bolter unguents³, bitterness. The lenses of their helmed visors glowed red in the subterranean shadows giving their dark green armor a faint bloody sheen.

Drenn Redblade was forced to crouch near them. As a Long Fang his pack of heavy weapons specialists was consigned to the rear of the Space Wolves advance column. Well placed to lay down fire support once the vanguard packs had engaged. But with the Dark Angels posted as the rear guard the Old Wolf suddenly found himself with his back to the Lion's sons. He growled into the vox addressing the young Blood Claws up ahead.

Drenn Redblade: "When we go, we go fast. No hesitating. Don't stop to fire if you can help it. Claws and blades are the surest way to deal with the wyrd spawn".

He spoke the words to calm his own thoughts as much as those of the younger Wolves. He was on battle edge, his senses sharpening everything around him. The hum of idling power armor, the click of intersquad vox, the intense cold of the ice-packed tunnels. His left thigh itched, the legacy of a wound he'd received long ago. He turned to Ober, one of his Long Fang pack mates.

Drenn Redblade: "Do you remember Melma and that damnable kraken mother?"

Ober: "You rarely cease to remind us. You speak of it as though you alone brought it down and I hadn't already cut its legs out from under it".

Drenn Redblade (laughing): "Ahahahah".

Redblade laughed softly, the bitterness in his saliva spoke of combat readiness. The byproduct of a potent mix of adrenalin and stims⁴ pumping through his veins. He had experienced it all a thousand times in his centuries of service, but he had crested⁵ the mountain years earlier. It had stopped getting easier and started getting harder.

Drenn Redblade (over vox): "Go! Go!"

The order was a whisper on the vox net, hard and urgent. The Wolf Scouts at the head of the column, Jarry's Quickpelts, rose silently and loped⁶ off into the darkness. They didn't look back and were soon gone from sight, as though they had never existed.

Sverry, pack leader of the Blood Claws, growled.

Sverry: "Remember, pups. Keep your eyes on me. Stay together, move as one and follow my damned orders this time". The young Wolves were restless, muttering under their breath and shifting in their unfamiliar battle plate. Redblade spoke softly to Torbern.

Drenn Redblade: "Keep tracking Yarry with your optics".

Of the five Long Fangs in the pack the plasma cannon gunner only still wore his helmet when on operation. He claimed its autosenses were better than the separate targeting scopes the other heavy weapon specialists wore over their right eyes. Like many things the Long Fangs did though, it was probably more due to personal habit than actual practicality. Redblade had always hated his own helmet. Even as a young Flame Hunter he'd fought without it wearing his red hair in a wicked crest⁷. That hair was now white and bound up in a topknot. The shade matched his thick forked beard, the outline of the facial hair distorted by the old melta back flash burn on his left cheek. Where was the youth who would send Orks tumbling from the skies on Theron or slaughtered the Genestealer cultists on Gosa Quintus.

Ober muttered to himself.

Ober: "They smell the worst".

Drenn Redblade: "Who?"

Ober: "The wyrd filth. Of all the damnable foes we faced down the centuries I hate their stink the most. Rotten or bittersweet and honeyed, it's always changing".

Drenn Redblade (disgusted): "Makes my stomachs clench⁸".

They both spat warding off evil. Redblade raised his voice to address the Blood Claws. He needed to help Sverry calm them. They were too agitated.

Drenn Redblade: "You, pups, were still unborn when we fought the rot demons on Sarnes. The hives of that world were awash in a sea of filth. We waded⁹ through it chest deep. Out of ammunition, killing the diseased wyrd scum with our claws and blades. That's where your pack leader Sverry lost his eye".

One of young Claws, Varran, turned to Sverry.

Varran: "You told us it was fighting xenos raiders on Markoth".

Sverry: "Old Redblade doesn't know what he's talking about. His mind is too addled¹⁰ these days. He drinks too much mjod".

Drenn Redblade (smiling): "One tank it is too much by your standards, Sverry. I'd wager you couldn't even outdrink the youngest pup in your pack".

Sverry nodded towards the wide-eyed Varran.

Sverry: "I'll take you up on that challenge, brother, if the pup survives".

Silence descended once more. The packs waited. Ober hawked¹¹ and spat again on the ice floor.

Ober: "These tunnels stink of corruption. They never used to be like this".

He was right. The taint of the wyrd suffused¹² the vaults beneath the ruins of Morkai's Keep. That was why they were here, Wolves and the Lion's sons both, hunting as one.

Demons had fallen upon the Fenrisian system infesting every planet, bar¹³ the homeworld itself. The Dark Angels had arrived initially with persecution in mind, planning to confront the Sons of Russ. Instead they now found themselves battling alongside their old rivals against the hordes of the wyrd. The assault on Morkai's Keep had been divided into two strike forces. The first would tear up through the lower tunnels before the second

followed above ground through an internal breach blown through the las-melted bastions. Between them the ancient Space Wolves' fortress would be reclaimed.

Ober: "The sooner we move, the better".

Redblade realized his hand had dropped to the hilt of his combat knife Fang. He had once striven to earn his deed name by forever drenching¹⁴ it in foe's blood hungry for the honor such an accolade¹⁵ would bring him. The title had now been earned many times over and Fang's monomolecular edge was nicked in half a dozen places, but still the Old Wolf found himself clutching at it whenever combat neared. When the screaming started and the blood flowed it paid to have good Fenrisian steel in his fist.

Torbern gazed ahead. Down the tunnel over the crouching forms of Sverry's Blood Claws darkness still reigned.

Torbern: "They are gone. I can't even catch their scent anymore".

Mika (over vox): "How long?"

Sergeant Mika, the Dark Angel squad leader, sounded impatient. None of the Wolves deigned¹⁶ to answer him. Seconds passed ticking into minutes in the shivering air. Eventually the vox clicked.

Yarry (over vox): "The tunnel is ours, brothers. The entrance to the lower vaults is secure".

Yarry and his Scouts had done their work well. The way was open and the assault could begin. As one the Wolves rose and started their advance, the Dark Angels prowling behind them. And as one the darkness swallowed them all.

CHAPTER 02 (08/20)

Tech-priest Krell: "Initiating final rites. May the Lion and the Emperor watch over you".

The machine voice of tech-priest Primaris Krell rang in Zameon Gydrael's ears competing with the crash and crackle of the chained lightning darting between the three displacement orbs overhead. Around the Deathwing Terminator squad the hexagrammatic wards burned bright as quicksilver, throbbing¹⁷ with the energy building within the teleportation chamber. The

air was pregnant with the static charge and thick with incense¹⁸. Ghost lights sparked and darted along the bone-white battle plate of the hulking warriors.

Gydrael shouted to be heard.

Zameon Gydrael: "Is the machine stable, priest?"

Krell didn't look up, still bent over his initiation lectern.

Tech-priest Krell: "As stable as it ever is, the noble Space Marine".

Zameon Gydrael: "That is hardly reassuring".

Gydrael reviewed the tactical upload via his helmet visor one last time. Master Belial's briefing had been succinct¹⁹. Teleport into the vaults of Morkai's Keep ahead of the first of the two strike forces and secure a beachhead²⁰ for them. Once they had linked up the Terminators would spearhead the attack up into the Keep proper, facilitating the access of the second strike force. It would be over in no more than an hour, Emperor willing.

Zameon Gydrael: "Brethren, sound off".

Mallech (over vox): "Mallech here".

Lukius (over vox): "Lukius".

Samarius (over vox): "Samarius ready".

Balon (over vox): "Balon here".

His Terminators responded in turn, their voices stoic.

Krell raised his ignition hammer, vice-hands clamped around its adamantium haft. Gydrael prepared himself, sealing his helmet in place.

Tech-priest Krell: "In the name of the Omnissiah".

Zameon Gydrael: "Fury and blood".

Krell struck the great activation rune.

(Deathwatch squad teleporting)

(Zameon Gydrael breathing hard as though choking)

Darkness, cold. Teleportation was instantaneous, yet in the depths of the warp such a concept did not exist. The bone bite of interstellar chill pierced him to his core. He felt something writhing over the ceramite of his left greave²¹, sticking and sucking. Inhuman laughter cackled in his ears and his stomachs churned²² with plunging sensations.

(Zameon emerging in the real world)

And then he was standing in a chamber of hard packed ice, a demon's horned skull grasped in his power fist.

Zameon Gydrael (regaining his breath): "Lion, preserve me!"

It was cold mind displacement and it was a rare and dangerous anomaly. Gydrael had heard Krell explain it once when he'd still been a young 10th Company initiate. Sometimes the mind lagged behind its body during teleportation returning to full consciousness a split second after the rematerialization of the physical form. It was an unusual and potentially fatal event, typically indicative of a teleport miscarriage. Some fragments of Gydrael's consciousness honed by over four centuries of war had reacted instinctively in the brief moment when his mind had been elsewhere.

(Gydrael breaking the demon's skull)

He clenched his fist, activating its disruptor field with a thought impulse. The demon skull disintegrated in a burst of ichor and its corporeal²³ form flickered from existence with a horrible wail²⁴. For a terrible moment as the demon vanished even the veteran Terminator hesitated. Of the brethren that should have flanked him there was no sign. The combat sigil on his visor display was alone, a solitary green blip²⁵ surrounded by flashing crimson.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Squad, come in! What is your current location, report!"

Nothing! He switched channels trying to establish a link back to the flagship.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Calling the Emperor's First, this is brother Sergeant Gydrael. Respond".

(screeching demonic voices approaching the Dark Angel)

Still nothing. He was alone. Around him a sea of twisted faces reared up out of the darkness screaming for his soul.

CHAPTER 03

The tunnel was not a tunnel at all, not anymore. Sections of the white ice undulated²⁶ and shimmered²⁷ as though viewed through a heat haze. Wyrdling sprang from the disturbances allowing their glamour to slip as they revealed themselves. The air was suddenly thick with their unnatural pervasive²⁸ stench.

Drenn Redblade (commanding): "Weapons!"

(Space Wolves training their weapons at the demons)

Redblade unclamped his multi-melta Forbane from its maglock harness²⁹ and triggered its reaction core. His heavy back pack began to throb as the pyrone³⁰ fuel compound within was forced into a submolecular state. The weapon's charge indicator flashed green.

(tunnel collapsing at the back of the Space Wolves)

A crash behind him signaled the closing of the trap. He turned in time to see the tunnel back the way they had come collapsing, tons of glacial ice slamming down without warning on the strike force's rear guard. Sergeant Mika and his Dark Angels simply disappeared without a sound, replaced by a tumbling wall of jagged white.

Sverry shout over the vox.

Sverry (over vox): "It's a trap! Into them, Blood Claws. Strike into them".

The first wyrdling spores wrecked off Redblade's pauldron, scarring his Company livery. The things were materializing from the very walls of the tunnel, sliding through the buckled reality of the Keep's depths with spiteful content. Redblade knew instinctively that they could not match them. Still he fought, a battle cry on his lips.

Drenn Redblade: "For the Grimbloods and the Allfather!"

(demon shrieking and attacking Drenn with sword-like claws)

The wyrd spawn was a she-monster, a thing of bared lilac flesh and crab-like talons. It moved like a dancer flickering through the air with scant gaff and natural walls. And when it struck Redblade it did so with a force that belied its slender shapely frame. Its claws tore the ceramite from Redblade's pauldron and punched all the way to his black carapace, splitting the crimson Fenrisian whinstone³¹ set into his breast plate.

The Daemonette hissed.

Daemonette (laughing in hi-pitch voice, barely understandable): "Ssss... How miracular Wolves bold and slow. Hehe... Your death prime us exactly the ending your pathetic misery! Ha!"

Drenn Redblade (fighting the demon): "Go back to your hell-pit, wyrd scum!"

The thing was so damn fast, he was forced to keep it at bay using Forbane's bulk with one hand, slipping his other down to Fang's frayed kraken-haft grip. It was trying to get at his exposed face, to tear the flesh from the skull so it could bring him down quickly and begin to feast. That was its only mistake. In more than three centuries of combat Drenn Redblade had learned how to defend himself.

Drenn Redblade: "Die, temptress³²!"

He kicked the wyrdling. It said much of the thing's nightmarish abilities that it was almost able to dodge the sudden move. Almost. Redblade's bionic left knee crashed into its thigh. There was an audible crack and the she-wyrd faltered. Fang took it in the throat sending it hissing back into nothingness. Sweet-smelling pink blood coated the blade running like syrup down the Long Fang's leg as he gripped Forbane once more. He clicked through the vox channels.

Drenn Redblade: "Command, this is Redblade. The tunnels are a trap. Repeat, the tunnels are a trap. The secondary strike force must not proceed".

There was no response.

Drenn Redblade (angrily clicking over vox): "Russ damn it!" Around him his brethren were dying. Svensson, saga hero of Molech, was already gone, two of the creatures pinning him against the ice wall while the third slipped a needle-like dagger through each of his armor seals, working up into his guts. Wulf and Torbern still fought, heavy weapons discarded in favor of their blades.

Ober (groaning and spilling blood): "No!"

Ober was on his knees, blood gouting³³ from where another wyrdling had clamped its crab-claws around his exposed throat.

Drenn Redblade: "Ober!"

Redblade threw himself at his brother's attacker, a snarl of rage on his lips. The wyrdling sensed his coming and darted back with preternatural gracefulness. Ober slumped forward, blood sleeking the ice red as Redblade punched Fang towards the wyrdling. It ducked and wove, claws flashing out to rake Redblade's plate and plank from Forbane's cover. The heavy multi-melta protected much of his torso, but it also impeded³⁴

him. The she-wyrd's claws drew blood punching through his left elbow seal, finding the weakness behind the vambrace³⁵.

Torbern (moaning): "Redblade, get back".

Torbern slammed into the thing shoulder first, all pretense of poise³⁶ gone. The creature tried to dodge but found itself pressed into the melee and snagged³⁷ by one of Torbern's outstretched arms. He slammed the creature into the ice with all his transhuman strength. There was a snap, the wyrdling struggled hissing. He slammed his body into it again and it finally went limp and flickered into oblivion. Redblade had unclamped Forbane again, hunting for clear targets. There were none.

Drenn Redblade (over vox): "Command, come in! Command, respond! Russ take you all".

The tunnel was packed with writhing stabbing struggling figures. Sverry's Claws had been set upon³⁸ by a cohort of red-scaled swordlings, their black hell blades parted the Space Wolves' battle plate as easily as razors slicing some parched vellum³⁹. The air was thick with bursts of blood and the steam of warm opened innards.

Drenn Redblade: "We can't stay here".

Sverry's reply came from somewhere in the press of bodies.

Sverry (over vox): "Can't go back".

He was right. The collapse that had crushed the Dark Angels had also sealed them in, closing off their route to the surface. Redblade turned Forbane towards the wall nearest to him and activated the multi-melta's fire count.

Drenn Redblade: "I will open a path".

He kept his finger on the trigger, letting the fusion reaction within build until the weapon was vibrating in his grasp. After a few seconds it spat its charge.

(Redblade firing the multi-melta)

A focused beam of infernal temperature struck the ice wall.

There was a roar before a flash of heat blasted down the tunnel, followed by a cloud of superheated steam. Redblade grunted and turned, shielding his face, feeling the outer layers of his power armor blister. Through the hissing clouds he picked

out a hole through the ice, its edges pouring with melt water. Beyond was darkness.

Drenn Redblade (entering the hole): “Torbern, Wulf!”

He turned to see both warriors grappling⁴⁰ with more wyrdlings. There was a cracking sound and a great chunk of ice fell from the ceiling, crunching down into the melee. More followed. Reblade spoke into the vox.

Drenn Redblade (over vox): “Sverry, we must go!”

There was no reply. Swordlings were butchering the last of the young Blood Claws, attacking them from all sides, skewering⁴¹ them with burning black steel. Torbern slammed his blade into a wyrdling’s throat.

Torbern (over vox): “You go, Drenn! Now!”

Drenn Redblade took half a step back towards his pack mates mouthing a curse. Before he could go further there was a crash. The wall immediately above Wulf and Torbern collapsed, the sheets of solid ice plunging down on the warriors and forcing Redblade back. More of the tunnel started to come down. The remaining wyrdlings clawed through the plummeting sheets, hissing at him. Redblade threw himself through the hole melted by Forbane. A moment later and the remains of the tunnel collapsed with the sound like thunder burying Wolves and wyrdlings alike.

A Long Fang kept his feet panting⁴², eyes seeking to pierce the darkness of his new surroundings. The reticules⁴³ of his head-mounted targeter blinked, but found nothing. The sudden silence seemed to amplify everything, leaving his hearts pounding thunderously and his breath rasping⁴⁴ in his throat.

Drenn Redblade (over vox): “Brothers, come in!”

He cycled through Sverry’s channel, Yarry’s, his pack mates’. All were empty.

Drenn Redblade (over vox): “Brothers? Anyone?”

He tried to switch to the command channel. No connection at all.

Drenn Redblade (angrily): “Allfather, dig this damned place!”

He activated his suite lamp and the focus beam picked out more glittering hard-packed ice. He was in a second tunnel lower and narrower than the first, barely large enough for an

armored warrior to pass through. There was no sign of anything else in either direction. For a moment he found himself unable to move.

Ober and Svennson, Wulf and Torbern. They had all been Grey Hunters together, serving side by side for two centuries. Yarry and the Quickpelts had been good Scouts as well. And Sverry had been tip for the Grimblood's personal Wolf Guard. They all deserved better than a tomb of crushing ice.

Eventually he found he could unclench his fists and his old instincts kicked in. He had to find a way back to the surface.

The second assault could not be allowed to walk into the same trap the first had. He recalled Yarry's words that the entrance to the lower vaults had been secured. It had definitely been Yarry's voice and yet something in the message sat uneasily with him.

Hackles45 raised Redblade set off.

CHAPTER 04

(Gydrael snarling while delivering blows)

Gydrael Killed as he had always done, with fury tempered by a deadly efficiency. He was alone in a chamber of sealed ice and the spawn of the dark gods surrounded him. He wielded46 his power fist in greater destructive arcs, moving constantly so as not to be caught from behind. Clad in tactical Dreadnought armor there was little opportunity for subtlety47 and no need for it with the demons throwing themselves upon him. His clenched gauntlet flared as he swept aside a brace of throbbing flesh spawn, the actinic lightning throwing strobing48, nightmare shadows across the chamber. Claws and blades rained down on him. Some had already found their mark, but he fought on, bloodied and wounded, still trying to establish contact over vox.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Squad, report! What is your location?"

(silence)

Something had gone horribly wrong with the teleportation process. None of his warriors showed on the short-range auspex. The visor overlay of the tunnels beneath Morkai's Keep showed him nothing but enemy contacts.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): “Emperor’s First, this is brother Sergeant Gydrael! Come in!”

Still nothing. He was going to die here, he realized. In the frozen darkness. Alone. The thought itself held no fear for the Dark Angel but it frustrated him. He had an objective to fulfill. A blade nicked⁴⁹ the flesh of his hip, sliding up beneath his left tasset⁵⁰ and breaking the joint seal above his thigh. The demon was obliterated a split second later by the strike of the Gydrael’s power fist. But even as its shriek was torn away the hell sword jabbed⁵¹ the battle plate along his lower back almost cutting straight through onto his spine. He spun, fist shattering the red swordling’s weapon in a burst of light.

Zameon Gydrael (crying out): “For the Lion! No pity, no remorse!”

And suddenly the Dark Angel was no longer alone. Another signifier⁵² appeared on his display flashing for his attention. It bore the snarling wolf’s head crest⁵³ of the sons of Russ. The schematics put it in a tunnel directly below him, thirty yards away and closing. Gydrael acted on impulse, his reflexes long ago honed to perfection. Even as demonic warp steel and claws battered at his buckling armor he dropped onto one knee and, disruptor field set to maximum, slammed his power fist down into the ice at his feet.

(floor of the tunnel trembling under Dark Angel’s blows)

The floor of the chamber split and cracked as Gydrael’s gauntlet pounded through it driven downwards with every ounce of strength in his fiber bundles and servos. He dragged his fist from the opening split and struck again and again. The ice beneath his magboots started to give way.

Zameon Gydrael (muttering while angrily crushing the ice): “Lion, give me strength!”

He smashed his fist down one last time and the floor collapsed beneath his weight. His stomachs twisted once more with the sense of dislocation.

(Dark Angel falling down)

It lasted only a second before he slammed into the mound of broken ice in the tunnel below. The impact nearly drove the wind from his lungs and crushed the demon caught beneath

him as he fell. He swung upwards blindly as he sought to regain his feet, pulverizing more of the demons that had tumbled through. Still more were already scrambling⁵⁴ through the hole on the tunnel's roof. Gydrael pushed himself up filling the corridor, servo straining and brought his storm bolter to bear. They were still coming, now however they couldn't get behind him.

CHAPTER 05 (26/22)

Drenn Redblade: "By the wolf's claws..."

Redblade was twenty paces away from the collapsed section of the tunnel roof. It had come down in front of him entirely without warning. A cascade of broken ice. At first he thought the wyrdlings were trying to crush him again. Then he had seen the Terminator rise like some primordial bone-white beast from the ocean's darkest most frigid⁵⁵ depths. It pulverized one of the creatures with its igniting power fist, then opened fire into the rest scrambling down through the hole after it.

(Dark Angel unleashing salvos of bolts from the storm bolter)

Drenn Redblade: "Brother, I am with you".

The Terminator didn't respond. In the tunnel's confines there was no way Redblade could get past him or angle a shot to help. He wasn't even sure if the hulking Dark Angel was aware of him. He turned and crouched scanning the tunnel back the way he had come, lest more of the devious weird spawn should approach him under the thunderous cover of the Terminator's storm bolter. Eventually the gunfire ceased, the last of its echoes rebounding sharply away down the tunnel.

(silence)

By then Redblade had caught the warrior's scent. It was buried beneath servo oil, purity seal wax and the metallic tang⁵⁶ of weapons discharge. But it was familiar all the same. The warrior turned, heavy pauldron scraping the tunnel's sides. For a moment he stood regarding Redblade, his claw-scarred visor unreadable. The lamp light glittering in its bloody crimson lenses.

Zameon Gydrael: "Drenn Redblade..."

Drenn Redblade: "Zameon Gydrael... It's been a long time".

(Dark Angel approaching the Space Wolf in a heavy tread)
They had first met during the purging of Gosa Quintus centuries earlier. Both had been requisitioned within the Deathwatch by Chaplain Ortan Cassius of the Ultramarines. He had placed the sons of the Wolf and the Lion in the vanguard of the operation against the Genestealer cult on the mining planet. Redblade had been at the height of youthful brashness⁵⁷, hungry to slay, desperate to carve out a reputation. Gydrael by contrast was already an experienced battle brother. His temperament clashed immediately with that of the young Wolf. He was stoic, thoughtful and secretive. He had been the perfect counterweight.

Gosa Quintus had been a success. In the years that followed Gydrael and Redblade continued to fight side by side. In the Deathwatch Redblade had slowly learned to curb⁵⁸ and channel his youthful aggression. He and Gydrael had been true battle brothers, always hunting together at the fore.

The last time Redblade had seen him had been on Ugluth, fighting the sheltarai, a vicious simian⁵⁹ xenos breed fallen under the thrall⁶⁰ of the demonic entity known as the Whisper. The operation had been a failure, three of the kill team's members – Clovis, Bray and Carrick – had fallen. Gydrael had never admitted his mistakes. Infuriated Redblade had challenged him to an honor duel, but Vorens, Redblade's first kill team leader, had intervened before it could take place. Even though centuries had passed Redblade was not surprised to find that Gydrael's still lived or that he now wore the tactical Dreadnought armor of his Chapter's first Company.

Zameon Gydrael: "You were with the first strike force".

Drenn Redblade: "Aye, we were ambushed. Damned maleficarum witchery".

Zameon Gydrael: "And you alone survived?"

Drenn Redblade: "I did. Where are your own brothers?"

Zameon Gydrael: "Lost. The officium solace has been distorted. I suspect warp craft. A teleport miscarriage and I have been able to raise no one on the vox. Nothing but static and whispers".

Drenn Redblade: “The vox net is compromised. We were trapped too easily. I suspect the wyrdlings have corrupted it somehow”.

Zameon Gydrael: “We must warn the primary strike force before they begin their assault across the surface. I also recommend we take necessary precautions to stop the demon’s vox trickery”.

Drenn Redblade: “Agreed, the Keep’s reserved vox relay station is in the second sub-control level, fifteen meters almost directly above us. There we can contact the strike force or scramble the equipment so they can’t be misled as we were”.

Zameon Gydrael: “What if the vox system has been damaged? These tunnels have been infested for weeks”.

Drenn Redblade: “The only other way to contact the strike force would be to go to them directly and that would mean fighting our way to the surface and then to the breaching point, presumably going through every damn wyrdling in this place along the way”.

Zameon Gydrael: “I am surprised that wasn’t your first suggestion, Redblade”.

For a moment the Space Wolf was silent, then he smiled. A grim fanged expression.

Drenn Redblade (laughing): “As I said, Gydrael, it has been a long time”.

Zameon Gydrael: “Save your idle chatter. Follow!”

Redblade let out a short sharp bark of laughter.

Drenn Redblade (laughing): “Oh, I missed you, Lion’s son”.

CHAPTER 06

It wasn’t long before they encountered resistance.

Zameon Gydrael: “Plague beast ahead”.

(demon groaning ahead)

A festering Nurgle monstrosity had made its nest in the entrance to the vault’s proper, the reinforced plasteel door rusting and coated with slime. The ice around it deformed with fleshy pustule⁶¹ growths that popped⁶² and filled in time with the creature’s diseased heartbeat.

Zameon Gydrael: “Terminating!”

(Gydrael unleashing a salvo of bolt shells from his heavy bolter)
He hammered it with explosive bolts and pulverized its rancid⁶³ remains with a single strike of his power fist, coating his white armor with the thick film of green mucus⁶⁴. The second blow parted the subterranean entrance to the Keep's vaults.

Redblade stepped forwards.

Drenn Redblade: "Let me lead from here".

Zameon Gydrael: "My armor was designed for this manner of engagement. It makes more sense for me".

Drenn Redblade: "I know Morkai's Keep better than whatever schematics you are going by, Dark Angel. I spent five years with the garrison here after returning from the Deathwatch".

After Ugluth he wanted to say. Gydrael was silent for a moment, the plague beast's remains dripping slowly from his armor. Then he nodded.

Zameon Gydrael: "Very well, lead on".

(Redblade walking forwards)

Redblade growled as he passed beyond the buckled doors. The lower corridors of the vaults showed the mark of the Immaterium's touch.

(flies buzzing in the air, as Space Marines go further)

Black blotches⁶⁵ had spread over the plasteel walls, ceiling and floor like mold, connected by vein-like tendons⁶⁶ of flesh that twitched as the Wolf stamped⁶⁷ down on them.

Drenn Redblade (disgusted): "This place stinks. Russ, preserve me!"

He spat to ward off the evil that tainted the place. The air was humid and moist and filled with the faint fly-like buzzing.

Redblade felt a headache beginning to throb⁶⁸ behind his eyes.

Gydrael scanned the pulsating walls.

Zameon Gydrael: "It's like the megavores we purged on Krux".

Drenn Redblade: "Knee deep in xenos filth, how could I forget? Fifty yards further, then we take the first left".

(demons attacking with shrieks)

That was when the demons struck again. They dropped from above, phasing through the solid ceiling as though it were nothing more than a figment⁶⁹ of Redblade's imagination. They shrieked as they came on leathery tattered wings, claws

outstretched. Furies, wyrdling predators, every bit as instinctive and vicious as a pack of Fenrisian wolves.

Zameon Gydrael (warning): “Redblade, above!”

Even as he shouted the warning Gydrael swung his fist up to meet the fury coming at him. It screeched⁷⁰ horribly, flesh and adamantium collided and the creature burst apart in a spray of blazing warp meat. Another landed behind the Terminator, its claws scraping impotently at his armor. He kept his fist raised so that he had enough room to half-turn, angling his storm bolter awkwardly back down the corridor. Two more of the green demons had come down in front of the Redblade, thumping⁷¹ as they hit the corridor floor. The Space Wolf fired his multi-melta without hesitation. There was a roar as the body mass of the demons was vaporized explosively filling the air with the mist of viscera.

Drenn Redblade: “Go back to hell!”

Zameon Gydrael: “They are still above us”.

The final fury fell upon the Redblade directly, claws scrabbling⁷² for purchase⁷³ on his heavy pack and pauldrons snatching at his topnet. Gydrael lunged forwards with a grunt grabbing onto one of its bat-like wings with his fist. He hold at it making Redblade stagger. The wing came apart in his powered grip, but the thing held on. It squealed and dug its claws in him drawing blood from the Wolf’s skull.

Drenn Redblade (moaning and struggling with the spawn):
“Ohhhh... Ahhhh... Gydrael!”

The Dark Angel fired. The thing burst splattering Redblade with its bolt blasted remains. The Wolf regained his balance with a snarl.

Drenn Redblade: “You could have just hit it”.

Zameon Gydrael: “Wait!”

CHAPTER 07

A scratching noise came off the vox, a squeal of transmission code. They were getting back into range. The vox bead was ticking again in Gydrael’s ear. The signal now solid.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): “Come in!”

Mallech (over vox): "Brother Sergeant, it's Mallech! It's good to see you on my scope again".

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Well met, brother. What's your location and status?"

Mallech (over vox): "According to the schematics armory corridor 55, but the whole place has been warped. I fear the demons sabotaged our teleportation strike".

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Agreed. Have you made contact with the rest of the squad?"

Mallech (over vox): "Negative, brother. We fight alone".

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Yet we shall prevail, stand by!"
(vox communication out)

Gydrael looked down at Redblade.

Zameon Gydrael: "I have made contact with another member of my squad".

Blood from the fury's talon wounds had clotted⁷⁴ across the Space Wolf's scalp and dried in long streaks down his face. His expression was grim.

Drenn Redblade: "Are you sure of that?"

Zameon Gydrael: "What do you mean?"

Drenn Redblade: "The ambush on our strike force came following some damn maleficarum. I suspect wyrdlings mimic the vox signal from our advancing Scouts right down to the transmission codes and identification tags".

Zameon Gydrael: "You believe they can do that?"

Drenn Redblade: "I know what I heard. One of my own brothers giving us the 'all clear' right before we were trapped. It could not have been him. He would have warned us and besides even if your brother has survived we are close to the lower vox relay. We should not deviate".

Gydrael keyed his channel to include Redblade.

Zameon Gydrael: "I will have him linked with us. (over vox) Brother Mallech?"

There was no response.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Brother Mallech, respond!"
(demons screaming over vox)

This time he got an answer. A shriek as though torn from the mouths of a thousand suffering innocents burning through every

one of the vox channels. Gydrael flinched and cut the link, his expression stony. Redblade shrugged.

Drenn Redblade: "Vox Tenebris then from here onwards. We will know the truth of it".

Zameon Gydrael: "Very well".

CHAPTER 08

It was not long before Gydrael spotted Redblade's misstep as he faltered⁷⁵ at a bend of the corridor.

Zameon Gydrael: "Focus!"

Drenn Redblade: "I am focused".

It was a lie. Memories of his pack mates' deaths, of their crushed breathless screaming flickered through his thoughts.

He drove the loss from his mind. They would be avenged.

Drenn Redblade: "We turn here. Then on for another thirty yards".

At the tunnel's end they went right through a set of blast doors and into the vox relay service corridor.

(doors closing behind them)

The corruption here was worse. The lumen strips flickered and twitched rhythmically. The temperature had risen again and the wall's metal surfaces were almost completely lost beneath the lattice⁷⁶ work with hideously pulsating veins. Redblade suppressed a shudder⁷⁷ of revulsion as his boots crushed the fleshy growths underfoot. The air stank of sour milk and the vibrations had grown more intense. The vox was starting to hiss with strange bursts of static, snapping⁷⁸ in the Wolf's ears like the jaws of some living creature.

Zameon Gydrael: "Halt!"

Gydrael's warning came too late. Distracted by the strange com's distortion Redblade only noticed the floor shifting beneath them when it yawned⁷⁹ open with the squeal of rending metal and the wet tearing of meat. His arms went out instinctively, the multi-melta dangling⁸⁰ by its twin fusion corners, but his gauntlets grasped nothing but air. The floor swallowed them up, the flesh and metal of it all mixed together. The stench of the warp was overpowering.

(Space Wolf and Dark Angel crying)

(sudden silence)

He was falling, falling farther than should have been possible. Reality itself distending⁸¹ around him. He saw visions whipping past. The frozen ice tunnels, Morkai's shattered bastion walls. The barrack props he had lived in so many decades before. A dark chamber filled with upright caskets⁸². The warp was trying to rip them away from Morkai's Keep, away into the depths of the wyrd realm. Desperately Redblade lunged at the last of the spinning apparitions, his other hand going out to grasp Gydrael's pauldron. And everything came crashing down around him.

(Space Wolf crying)

He hit the ground with a brutal thud, wielding with the impact as best his bulky pack could allow. The servos in his armor gripped and clenched arresting his slide and Redblade's gauntlets found the ground. Ice, not flesh, thanks be to Russ. He stood dragging Forbane up with him, tense and ready just as Gydrael tumbled down onto the ice next to him.

Zameon Gydrael (collapsing to the ground with a cry): "Oh!" He was once again in freezing darkness. The air was colder here, untainted by the noisome clawing humidity of the upper levels. They were back amidst the ice tunnels. The roof above was unblemished⁸³ and there was no sign of their entry through the physical form of it. It took a moment for Redblade's eyes to penetrate the shadows pressed to the edges of the chamber.

The ice wasn't simply bare, he realized. It had been carved. The whole circumference of the room inscribed with swirling⁸⁴ knot work patterns. The air throbbed with power as well, thick steaming pipes snaking their way through the hard-packed ice to the dozen upright heavy-looking caskets that lined the patterned ice walls. The only entrances visible were two wolf crest embossed⁸⁵ blast doors each at opposite ends of the chamber.

Redblade had no memory of such a place from his time serving in the Keep. He glanced over at Gydrael as the Terminator held himself awkwardly to his feet, servos protesting. He turned, storm bolter raised.

Zameon Gydrael: "What is this place?"

Redblade scented the air.

Drenn Redblade (sniffing the air): "I don't know, but there is no hint of the wyrdlings down here. Not yet anyway".

He approached one of the upright caskets. The light of the lumen strips filtering in from the collapsed tunnel above gleamed weakly from its metal surface. As he drew closer the Space Marine picked out more intricate knot work engravings covering the whole object in the same lupine saga patterns that decorated the walls. He reached up to touch the image of a Fenrisian wolf bent double, surrounded by what looked like shattered plates of power armor. The metal throbbed at his touch vibrating through the sensitive pads of his gauntlet. He snatched his hand away. He recognized what he was looking at.

Gydrael loomed behind him.

Zameon Gydrael: "It's a stasis casket".

Drenn Redblade: "I know".

Zameon Gydrael: "What does it contain?"

Redblade said nothing. He knew what it contained. The knot work spelled it out clearly enough. The saga of the lost, the heralds of Russ. Full talons beneath the wolf moon of Valdrmani. They had stumbled upon or been deliberately shown one of the chambers housing the victims of the Space Wolves' genetic curse. Hidden even from their battle brothers, locked away until the coming of the Wolf Time, when the final clash between gods and men would tear the galaxy asunder.

Gydrael disengaged his helmet seals revealing his gaunt86 features.

Zameon Gydrael: "Can you open it?"

Drenn Redblade: "I could if I wanted".

Zameon Gydrael (after a big pause): "I have not seen one yet".

Drenn Redblade: "What?"

Zameon Gydrael: "One of your mutant beasts. It's why we came to this system, to hunt them down. Yet I still haven't seen one".

Redblade bristled, rounding on the Dark Angel.

Drenn Redblade (angrily): "What do you know of them? You know nothing. They are not beasts".

Zameon Gydrael: "But they are mutants. And judging by this chamber your Chapter has been harboring them for far longer than you would like to admit. We believed they have only just begun to manifest, but that isn't true, is it? Your Chapter has always suffered from their genetic deviancy".

Redblade turned away and unseen by the Dark Angel unclamped his gauntlet seal. He drew Fang silently as Gydrael continued.

Zameon Gydrael: "They must have formed a brethren of this fact. Your guilt has been multiplied. You cannot expect such creatures not to draw the retribution of the Imperium. Whether us, the Inquisition or another Chapter. To permit such flagrant⁸⁷ genetic deviancy would be to undermine".

Redblade tensed. Then he slid his blade across the back of his forearm, a short sharp nick. He allowed a bead of the blood that welled up from his scarred flesh to collect on the finger of his other gauntlet. Then pressed it to the gene-rock set into the side of the upright sarcophagus.

The data pael blinked red, then green. There was a whirring⁸⁸ noise within the engraved metal followed by the thud of clamps⁸⁹ and the hiss of decompression at the grating of aged auto-finches. The stasis field within was still active. A gently fizzing static washed layer of translucent white energy. Beyond it frozen in time was a stricken⁹⁰ warrior of the Wulfen. It was even taller and broader than Redblade, the musculature beneath its archaic stripped down power armor clearly beset by rampant⁹¹ gene-enhancement overgrowth. The exposed flesh of its forearms bristled with fur while its lower limbs were hideously back-jointed and claw-toed like some sort of grotesque human parody of a Fenrisian wolf. Worst of all was its face locked into an eternal distorted snarl. Canines jutting⁹² from its jaw, nose splayed⁹³, hair wild and tangled, eyes staring with feral intensity. Even braced as he had been the lupine yellow glare made Redblade take a pace backwards. He felt Gydrael tense behind him.

Zameon Gydrael: "So it's true".

Drenn Redblade: "I will tell you what is true, Lion's son. The truth is that this warrior and others like him fought at the side of

gods and defied demons when the Imperium was still newborn. The truth is that for ten thousand years they have hunted the traitor, the mutant and the wyrdling without once pausing for respite, without ever counting the cost. Even here and now they were fighting across the system to stem⁹⁴ the tide of filth that's flooded it, before you ordered them away. I would rather have one of these brothers at my side than ten of your secretive shadow skulking⁹⁵ kind".

He hit the locking rune allowing the heavy lid⁹⁶ to grind and clamp back into place, plunging the stasis locked Wulfen back to its freezing tomb. Then the vox crackled.

Voice (over vox): "Brother Sergeant Nezekiel, this is Deathwing Sergeant Gydrael. The assault point has been secured. We are ready to beech at your command".

Gydrael stared at Redblade. Redblade stared back.

Drenn Redblade: "That was your voice".

Zameon Gydrael: "I didn't speak. You were looking right at me". But it had clearly been his voice crackling over their vox beads. A moment later the voice of Sergeant Nezekiel answered the phantom message.

Nezekiel (over vox): "Praise be to the Emperor and the Primarch, honored Sergeant. We will begin the surface assault. Nezekiel out".

Gydrael immediately hit his vox bead.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Nezekiel, this is Gydrael actual. Come in, Nezekiel!"

There was no response. The vox had gone dead. Gydrael turned on his heel moving towards the right hand blast door.

Zameon Gydrael: "I am going to the surface. Otherwise they will fall into the trap".

Drenn Redblade: "Impossible. We don't even know where we are. They tried to drag us through a warp maw. I barely managed to get us here. There is maleficarum at play".

Gydrael paused replacing his helmet and called up the tactical schematics.

Zameon Gydrael: "This chamber was buried north-west of the relay, the opposite way from which we were approaching.

Almost a kilometer. The surface point to be attacked by the second strike force is closer”.

Drenn Redblade: “But we need to end those false transmissions”.

Zameon Gydrael: “The vox is useless to us now. It has been tainted. We cannot know that any messages we send won’t be distorted. Even destroying the relay may not be enough. Our only hope is to try and reach the strike force before they are led into the trap”.

Drenn Redblade: “Going up and fighting every step of the way will take longer than the route to the relay. Our brothers will have been slaughtered by the time you get there. At least with the vox there is a chance to reach them directly”.

But Gydrael was moving again, following his new coordinates. Redblade snarled after him.

Drenn Redblade: “You are only going because you want to report the existence of these Wulfen. You are a fool, Zameon”.

Gydrael didn’t look back.

Zameon Gydrael: “And you have grown old, Drenn”.

CHAPTER 09

Even after all this time the memory of Ugluth still made Gydrael angry. He had known all along that the pup’s bloodthirsty arrogance would cost them someday. He told Cassius as much repeatedly, but the Ultramarine had valued Redblade’s fearsome killing power too highly. He’d believed Gydrael would always be able to rein⁹⁷ him in before he did something as destructive as it was foolish.

On Ugluth the Dark Angel had finally failed in that duty. Redblade had claimed he had been in holding position, when in reality he’d struck out into the sheltarai praters⁹⁸ killing with his usual mindless savagery. By the time they’d realized his true location the kill team had been exposed. What was worse the youth had refused to acknowledge his mistake afterwards. He’d even been arrogant enough to claim that the Dark Angel had been the one in the wrong. The warrior in Gydrael had yearned⁹⁹ to take up the pup’s boastful challenge, but he’d known his return to the Rock would be soon. He’d ignored

Redblade's yapping¹⁰⁰ and Cassius had overlooked that matter.

Gydrael spoke into the vox.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Do you remember Tyra Prime, Redblade?"

There was no reply. He continued anyway.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "You nearly lost an arm and I had to drag you by your ridiculous mane down that alleyway".

Redblade had clearly changed over the years. The young Sky Claw would have torn towards the surface with Gydrael damning the odds and tallying off every demonic head to add to the kill rune etchings inscribed on his vambraces. Not anymore. Despite that the anger and the pride were still there as well as the sharp tongue.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "Or Triplex Foul when you and I tore apart that harridan¹⁰¹ clipped with the flack cannons. I thought I was going to..."

The Dark Angel's words were interrupted by the sound of low guttural¹⁰² chanting. A vile stench reached his enhanced all-factored lens turning his stomachs. He rounded a corner in the fleshy corridors to find himself confronted by a tally band of stooped¹⁰³ plague bearers. The demons turned as one to stare at him, their cyclopean roomy eyes wide at the sudden disturbance of their counting.

Zameon Gydrael: "Contact!"

Gydrael charged. With one mighty blow after another the Dark Angel smashed the demons apart. Their jugged rusty blades jarring¹⁰⁴ off his scarred plate. Even their unfeeling necrotized flesh was no defense against his power fist. In a few moments the warp spawn were no more, leaving him splattered in their unraveling¹⁰⁵ remains. Gydrael forged upwards through rotting stairwells thick with wobbling flesh and blinking eyes that glared at him as he passed. Terminator armor was not built for speed but he pushed himself as hard as he was able breaking into a lumbering run as he reached the upper corridors.

Zameon Gydrael: "The surface is close. You were wrong to leave me, Redblade. Just as wrong as you were on Ugluth". More demons came at Gydrael.

Zameon Gydrael (crying): “By Lion! And the Emperor!”
He killed them all, snarling prayers to the Lion and the Emperor as he pulverized flesh and pounded bolts through flickering warp forms. They clawed at him battering his armor, dragging their talons into the body beneath, blooding the proud bone-white plate of the Deathwing. But the wounds were nothing. He pressed on unfaltering, his thoughts bent towards his brethren in the second strike force. He had to reach them.

A click in his ear arrested his implacable¹⁰⁶ advance. His stride faltered as Redblade’s voice crackled over the vox bead.

Drenn Redblade (over vox): “Brother, wait! You were right!”

Gydrael stopped. He was at the foot of the final stair shaft before he reached the remains of the Keep’s inner courtyard.

Drenn Redblade (over vox): “The vox relay is deserted and...

And Ugluth was a mistake, a terrible mistake. I was... simply too young and too bold¹⁰⁷ at the time to realize it”.

Gydrael growled.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): “Your actions cost the lives of three battle brothers”.

Drenn Redblade (over vox): “And for that I crave¹⁰⁸ forgiveness, brother. I am on my way back to the surface.

That’s the only way we can contact the strike force in time. If you wait we can break through to them together”.

Gydrael cut the link.

Zameon Gydrael: “Vox Tenebris”.

CHAPTER 10

(demons screaming in hi-pitch voices)

The relay chamber was set out in two tiers¹⁰⁹: a mesh grill deck bisecting the vox banks that lay at the walls of the room.

The whole space was overrun with demons.

(Redblade laughing)

Redblade’s melta blast vaporized the last of the wyrdling spawn packing the entrance to the fallen relay filling the air with the mist of demonic gore. He kicked the molten remains of the blast door in. More monsters awaited him inside. The communication’s chamber was packed with gibbering¹¹⁰ sightless¹¹¹ fleshy things that reached out with translucent

claws and sucking maw holes, changeling wyrd flame licking from their skin. Redblade fired again, multi-melta vibrating with fusion power. The proximity of the heat flash singed¹¹² his matted¹¹³ beard. He snarled and fired again.

Drenn Redblade: "Die, trickster filth!"

Part of the nearest wall collapsed, the pale parasitic blubber¹¹⁴ that had latched itself to the plasteel surface, slurping¹¹⁵ and burning off, the metal running and falling in on itself like melting wax. Something had infested the banks lining the upper tier of the communication's system. It was a great stinking throbbing¹¹⁶ boneless thing that had wormed its flesh into receiver nodes¹¹⁷ and horns, the static grills and electro sockets. It was amorphous, possessing no definable vital parts. The whole grotesque pulsating creation fractionally shifted its grip on the vox bank as it felt Redblade's attention. Nor was it alone.

(another demon growling)

Another figure stood amidst the slaughtered wyrd flesh on the bottom floor. It was tall and gangly¹¹⁸, a patchwork¹¹⁹ creature of sown together skin and scrawny¹²⁰ clawed limbs that bristled¹²¹ with blue feathers. Its eyes stared, a startling shade of pale purple. Its mouth was a yellow razor beak that clacked¹²² as Redblade thrust through the last of its disintegrating spore.

There was something else perching¹²³ on its shoulder, an impish blue skinned creature with short furled¹²⁴ wings. Its little limbs were clamped onto the meat of the bird beast's neck. A silver rune glowed brightly upon its brow. As Redblade stalked forwards it shrank back against the feathers of its master's neck.

Demon (snarling): "Welcome, brother".

Despite the beak¹²⁵ the larger demon somehow bore Ober's voice. Redblade halted abruptly.

Drenn Redblade: "What are you?"

Demon (snarling): "I am Sergeant Gydrael of the Deathwing". The impish familiar took off, fluttering¹²⁶ about its master's head and chittering¹²⁷ madly.

Demon (snarling): “And I am pack leader Sverry. And I am... Drenn Redblade. Long Fang, veteran of a hundred wars”.

Drenn Redblade: “Your lies end here, trickster”.

(Space Wolf shooting his multi-melta)

Redblade fired. The air across the relay chamber flared.

(demon groaning from pain)

The avian demon went down with a shriek, its back-jointed white leg atomized. Even the demon’s unnatural powers of protection not enough to fully shield it from the multi-melta’s closed range vaporizing wrath. The little imp familiar squawked¹²⁸ in panic as its master dropped writhing¹²⁹ in the demonic viscera¹³⁰ on the floor.

Redblade maglocked Forbane and unsheathed Fang.

(Space Wolf running up the chamber)

He took the corrupt stairs up to the higher tier of vox banks at a run, ignoring the skittering¹³¹ imp. He had to get to the monstrosity physically infesting the vox systems. He had to purge it before it could conduct any more of the trickster’s lies into the heads of his Wolf brothers. He stabbed into the nearest growth of flesh, cutting a tentacle and ripping it from a socket in a spray of stinking black blood.

(demon screaming in hi-pitch voice)

The thing reacted. Its flesh stretched and flexed lodging¹³² itself deeper into the systems. There was a squeal and grating¹³³ of static in Redblade’s ears and what sounded for all the world like screaming. Was he already too late? Was the second strike force already under attack?

Drenn Redblade (over vox): “Brethren, come in! This is Drenn Red... Ohhhh... Ahhhh... ”

Something struck him from behind. He stumbled, turned in time to take the second blow on his pauldron. Body braced and servos clenched. The feathered creature had returned, his leg reknitted by wyrd craft with pink new flesh and bodying feathers. The blue imp was perched atop its shoulder once more cackling. This time it was the familiar that spoke.

Familiar: “Your brothers are dying, Old Wolf. You cannot save them. I have made sure of that”.

It dug its claws again onto its perch on the bigger demon shoulder. The bird wyrd spawn spoke in Gydrael's voice. Familiar: "You will greet them all in the eternal torment of the warp, Drenn Redblade".

The big demon wasn't the trickster. It was the imp driving its will and words into its pet's skull. The monster lunged at him with a shriek, stinking of blood and filth. The force of the blow slammed him back against the fleshy abomination of vox banks. He felt it squirm¹³⁴ and slide behind him, wrapping around him, trying to pin him. The imp was cackling shrilly¹³⁵ once more. Redblade snarled and plowed Fang into the top of the big demon's feather crested skull.

Drenn Redblade (snarling): "Russ take you".

It grappled against his breast plate with its avian talons. Redblade stabbed again, a third time, and then a fourth, howl building in his throat. Then Torbern's voice crackled over the vox.

Torbern (over vox): "Drenn, help us! Wulf and I are buried. Please don't leave us here".

The memory of his pack brothers lying trapped and crushed beneath the ice clawed at him. The blue imp giggled madly pointing.

Drenn Redblade (snarling): "Ahhhh... No! You are not real!"

Redblade ripped Fang down through flesh and bone and cutting open the greater demon's beak. The voices on the other end of the vox degenerated into wails and screams that rose to unnatural inhuman pitches.

Then something struck the monster and its little blue master. Energy flared and cracked, the imp wailed with sudden terror a split second before their flesh disintegrated blown in greater gory gobbets¹³⁶ across the room. Redblade stumbled, released from the sucking embrace of the thing infesting the vox banks. He knew there were few weapons in the galaxy that could have obliterated the hulking spawn and the blue wyrdling with a single blow. And he knew the warrior wielding it.

Drenn Redblade (snarling): "You took your time, Lion's son".

Typically Gydrael didn't reply. He plunged his power fist into the nearest fleshy growth ripping clods¹³⁷ of the shuddering meat

and bursting black arteries from the choked machinery.

Redblade pitched in with Fang twisting and gouging, prizing the parasite away from its nest. He grunted as he stabbed at a tentacle lodged in a coolant fan.

Drenn Redblade: "Why did you come back?"

Zameon Gydrael: "Because you apologized... for Ugluth".

Redblade stopped with Fang thrust deep and rounded on Gydrael.

Drenn Redblade (suppressing laughter): "I did no such thing!"

Zameon Gydrael: "I know. Vox Tenebris, the technique we both learned from the Deathwatch. Maintaining vox transmissions at all times, but always testing who you speak with, probing their identity. You would never apologize. And it reminded me of Ugluth".

The memories returned. In that moment Redblade felt fury kindle and flare inside him in a way he hadn't experienced for almost a century. Suddenly he recalled what he had been like to be a young warrior: a feral killer quick of limb and bright of eye. The faces of Clovis, Bray and Carrick were clear in his thoughts, bloody and still in death. Torbern, Wulf, Svensson and Ober and Yarry and Sverry too.

Gydrael was with him now, his face a familiar mask of grim scarred determination, splattered and befouled¹³⁸ by monstrous viscera. The screaming in Redblade's ear shrilling over the vox net reached a painful pitch. Then as the last squirming tentacle was pulled free it cut off like a channel that had been closed. The thing was scattered and smeared¹³⁹ across the vox relay, twitching and steaming as it faded from reality. The communication banks dripping with slime were free. Gydrael locked his storm bolter and hit he overlay spike. The machinery shuddered and grated but the transmissions lights on the rune banks winked green. The Dark Angel snatched a vox horn.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): "This is brother Sergeant Gydrael to all Imperial forces in the vicinity¹⁴⁰ of the Morkai's Keep. Halt immediately! You are advancing into a trap! Repeat, it's a trap!" For a moment there was only silence, not even the phantom haunting of static disrupting the awful stillness.

Nezekiel (over vox): “Brother Sergeant Gydrael, please confirm!”

The voice was that of Nezekiel.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): “The demon spawn were in the vox system, brother. The first strike force has been all but annihilated. It was an ambush. We must regroup”.

Nezekiel (over vox): “We are approaching the outer bastion now, Gydrael. There is no sight of any contact”.

Zameon Gydrael (over vox): “If you proceed, you will all die. Halt while we attempt to break through to you. If you do not hear from us again, commend us to our Primarchs and the Emperor and consult with Master Belial”.

After a moment Nezekiel’s reply crackled back

Nezekiel (over vox): “Very well, honored Sergeant. Standing by”.

Redblade wiped the filth from his blade.

Drenn Redblade: “You want to fight your way to the strike force from here? Through the layers of filth that infect this place?”

Zameon Gydrael: “Isn’t that what you do? You really have grown old, Wolf”.

Drenn Redblade: “And you were old when I met you, Lion’s son. (changing mood) Given our state how can we hope to see our brethren ever again?”

For once Gydrael smiled. Redblade went on, his tone becoming grave.

Drenn Redblade: “You didn’t inform your brethren of the Wulfen”.

The Dark Angel hesitated but only for a moment.

Zameon Gydrael: “They will discover them soon enough, I suspect. We will cleanse this place with fury and blood. And your stasis chamber will be unearthed”.

Drenn Redblade: “You will not tell them of it beforehand?”

Zameon Gydrael: “I wear the honored plate of the Deathwing, Drenn Redblade. I am adept at keeping secrets. Come, let us hunt together one more time. Back to the surface. The sons of the Wolf and the Lion side by side”.

Redblade nodded unlocking Forbane and grinning.

Drenn Redblade: “In the name of Russ, El’Jonson and the Allfather! Just try to keep up, eh? Ahahahahaha!”