



WARHAMMER
40,000

WRAITHLIGHT

GUY HALEY



SHIELD OF
BAAL

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The wayseers sang their songs; songs that remembered days of glory and days of beauty. Sad songs that were never intended to be so, glad songs made sorrowful by their singing in these terrible times. The webway responded to these paeans of glory still, though the singers were of a diminished people. The membrane of reality split. The gold of the webway changed to the black of space. The Great Wheel's cold embrace awaited the Iyandeni.

Iyanna Arienal reached out to the dead around her. To those within the infinity core of her ship, *Ynnead's Herald*. To those in the Hemlock fighters, and in the cores of the battleships. To the ghost warriors crewing the ships of the Wraithborne squadron, to the spirits guiding the wraithbombers. There were many. In the fleet of Iyanden, the dead outnumbered the living.

+We go again to war,+ she told them.

The unliving shifted, their attentions turned from the things of the dead. The urge for revenge kindled in their slow thoughts. The escort of *Ynnead's Herald* formed up about the cruiser, awaiting further direction, the Aconites of the Wraithborne, House Haladesh's undying navy. Dozens of fighters waited behind.

The webway opened like a mouth and disgorged the fleet of Iyanden from its golden throat. On swift wings, craft after craft sped into real space, their yellow and blue livery bright against the black.

Before them was the world the humans called Krokengard, an ugly name for an ugly planet. An ash-grey atmosphere marbled with pollutant cloud obscured the surface. A dying world, infested with the human plague. And yet even this poisoned morsel appealed to the Great Dragon. The tyranids of Starving Dragon, that which the humans called Leviathan, attacked. Human ships fought them, desperate to keep their soiled den safe.

At the back of the bridge of *Ynnead's Herald*, Iyanna Arienal lay upon a

couch. She was surrounded by other spiritseers. The Angel of Iyanden was curled at the centre, the other seven arrayed about her like petals around the heart of the most perfect of flowers. From the point of view of those piloting the ship, the spiritseers were arranged on the vertical plane, but gravity's constraints meant little to the eldar. Three living crew manned the *Ynnead's Herald*: two steersmen and their captain. Behind the spiritseers' station stood wraithguard. A crescent of a dozen of them, still as tombstones, watched over the Angel of Iyanden. Many more of the dead passed as bright lights through the exposed infinity core of the ship, lending their power to the vessel, working its systems. Among them were mighty dead, those that had carried their strength and purpose with them through the gates of Morai-heg.

The helmets of the spiritseers were off. Their eyes were shut. Their breathing was steady. To an observer, Iyanna might appear to be a sleeper, albeit one with troubled dreams. A frown creased her perfect brow. Her eyes were agitated behind lids tinted a delicate blue.

She was not alone in her disquiet. The hive mind hurt the eldar. As the ships left the webway, a sudden weight that descended and threatened to crush their souls. Snared in the hive mind's psychic shadow, their minds became as sluggish as those of the dead. So far out from the tyrannid ships, and yet dread insinuated itself into their hearts. The hive mind had adapted. The roar of its composite soul had increased twentyfold since the battle of Duriel. Where before it had brought pain and despair, to draw close now spelled death for sensitive eldar psyches.

Lesser eldar might quail and flee at this intimate violation, the Iyandeni did not. Bitter experience made them strong. Their anger outweighed their fear. The Great Dragon was not the only being capable of adaptation. The Great Dragon was not the only being that made use of the dead.

+Forwards,+ Iyanna sent.

The sails of the battlegroup filled, the engines of the attack craft flared blue. They picked up speed, and moved away from the main battlefleet of Iyanden.

The hive fleet of Starving Dragon stretched out in an elongated teardrop billions of lengths long. The vanguard was close to the planet. Beaked monstrosities and tentacled assault beasts were only several hundred thousand lengths from Krokengard. This front wave was being pounded by a line of human ships and orbital defences. A mist of organic detritus clouded the stars. But the humans could not win. Every living ship destroyed saw the Great Dragon gain on the human's position. Every one killed had a dozen replacements. More were coasting into the system with each passing cycle.

Iyanna had seen examples of artifice from many human cultures. At the height of their art, humanity had made ugly things, and in this age of the Corpse-Emperor they were far from their height. Their ships were an offence to the eye.

There were those philosophers who took grim delight in pointing out how the humans' fate was unfolding as a cruder version of the Fall. Iyanna did not agree. Their fate was an inverse of the eldar's. The humans' god had been alive, and was dying a slow death. He could not save them. Her goddess Ynnead was yet to be, and undergoing a long birth. Her advent would restore the eldar. Yet the humans thought themselves masters of the galaxy.

The time of humanity was ending. In future ages historians would look back upon this interruption of eldar dominance and note the passing of mankind with disinterested diligence. For sixty million arcs the eldar had ruled the stars. They would do so again, and soon. What was ten thousand arcs of despair in the face of sixty million? This was an era of renewal. Humans were vermin infesting a closed-up home, unaware that the true owners would soon return.

The human ships, though unlovely, were holding their own. Iyanna was forced to admit that. But their defiance would not last; the teardrop was flattening, growing denser. Soon, all the voidspawn would arrive at the battlefield and the human fleet would be smashed, the world they protected devoured.

That could not happen.

Ynnead's Herald rolled and swept from side to side, her steersmen making the ship dance for the joy of it. Behind her came dozens of eldar fighter craft. Nightwings and the Nightshade interceptors of Crimson Hunters, all piloted by living eldar, fanned out in three crescent-shaped attack wings. These split further into two squadrons of six each, each squadron guarding a similar number of Hemlock wraithfighters.

The ships of the living spun and jinked, surging ahead of one another as eager as dolphins in spray. In marked contrast, the craft directly behind *Ynnead's Herald* flew steady on courses so straight they did not appear to be moving at all. These were wraithbombers, piloted solely by the dead. Through the tumult of the warp, they looked to Iyanna, lidless eyes fixed upon the glimmer of her soul. She was the beacon guiding them to their duty. Her mind was joined to them via the infinity core of *Ynnead's Herald*; she was with them. A slender thread of fate separated her from them, and it could so easily be cut.

+Lord Admiral Kelemar, I am moving to engage.+ Her message was hard to send and harder to hear, a weak shout against the psychic roar of the hive mind. Only the large number of ghosts within her ship enabled it to be heard at all.

Their energy impelled her thoughts, boosting the machines that conveyed her sendings. She considered switching to simpler technology, but the hive mind assaulted them on every level, and the electromagnetic interference was as bad as the psychic.

Kelemar responded. +The Great Dragon sees you through a billion eyes, and adjusts his coils. Be wary, spiritseer.+

Iyanna followed Kelemar's mental impulse. Parts of the fleet were breaking away from the main swarm, setting themselves a defensive perimeter.

+Sweep them from the stars. Allow us safe passage through.+

+Shatter the web, and we will follow,+ responded Kelemar.

For the moment, the main body of the Iyanden fleet hung back away from the tyranids, at the edge of the hive mind's well of pain. They could approach no closer. From this relatively safe distance, delicate war barques and sinuous battleships sent invisible blasts of energy into the tyranid vessels manoeuvring to block Iyanna's attack. Shattered shells leaked lakes' worth of fluid into the path of her battlegroup that froze or boiled away into clouds of icy gasses.

The strength of the hive mind grew and grew as *Ynnead's Herald* pressed on. The pressure was immense, even though Iyanna and her group were shielded from the worst of it. Her contact with Kelemar slipped away. She became apprehensive. Like all their encounters with the Great Dragon, there was an element of desperation to this gambit. Every battle brought new perils and new evolutions. Iyanna forced herself to relax. She must keep her mind clear so as not to confuse the wraithkind. They would win as they had won all their recent battles. It was preordained.

She pushed herself into deeper communion with the wraith pilots. The scales of mortality fell away from her second sense and she saw the world as the deceased did. The glittering shield projected by the multitudinous dead of *Ynnead's Herald* extended before the cruiser, sheltering her attack group from the full power of the hive mind. The dead protected the living.

Beyond the shield she saw the Great Dragon's true form. Not the hideous intrusions into the mortal realm that swam the black star sea, nor as a Farseer might see it, as a great and braided cable of malicious fate dominating all the skein. The first was merely a part of the whole, the second psychic abstraction. What Iyanna instead saw was the reality of its soul.

It was a great shadow when seen from afar, a wave of dread and psychic blindness that preceded the hive fleet's arrival. But the greatest shadows are cast by the brightest lights, and seen closely, the soul of the hive mind shone brighter

than any sun.

She was so close now that she perceived the ridged topography of its mind, larger than star systems, an entity bigger than a god. It contemplated thoughts as large as continents, and spun plans more complex than worlds. It dreamed dreams that could not be fathomed. She felt small and afraid before it, but she did not let her fear cow her defiance.

Against this vista flickered the souls of eldar, their jewel-brightness dimmed by the incomparable glare of the Great Dragon. And this was but a tendril of the creature. The bulk of it stretched away, coils wrapped tight about the higher dimensions, joining in the distance to others, and then others again, until at a great confluence of the parts sat the terrible truth of the whole. She stared at its brilliance. Unlike her passionless dead warriors, who felt nought but the echoes of wrath at the sight, she was fascinated by the beauty on display. She thought, if only such a thing could be tamed it would drive out She Who Thirsts forever. If only its hunger was for things other than the meat and blood of worlds...

She ceased her speculation. Such an entity was entirely other, inimical to all life but its own, a giant animal intent only on its prey. There was no thought to its doings, no intellect. It was cunning. It exhibited signs of an emergent, mechanical intelligence, as evolution might appear to possess if sped to the rate of change the hive mind evinced. But there was no true intelligence to it. The hive mind was non-sentient.

As they came closer to the battle human psychic sendings, crude and ill-formed as their craft, teased at her higher senses. She doubted another human could have caught these missives, overwhelmed by the roar of the Great Dragon. But she felt them, although to extend herself past the ghost shield to find them exposed her to the raw power of the hive mind and seared her inner being. She read the messages' sense, and snatched herself back to safety.

They were inelegant poems, messages sketched in dull metaphor.

All were horrified pleas for help.

The infinity core of *Ynnead's Herald* pulsed. Her captain spoke.

'Lady Iyanna, the humans are attempting to hail us.'

+I know+ she sent. Her mind voice echoed from the fabric of the bridge. She thought a moment, wishing she had a Farseer's prescience. +Allow their transmission.+

A frantic human voice crackled into life. Their technology was no match for the fury of the swarm, and much fine tuning was required by *Ynnead's Herald* before the words became discernable. 'Eldar craft, please identify yourselves.

Eldar craft, are you friend or foe?’ Whether this made any material difference was doubtful – her ships were too distant and swift for the humans to draw firing solutions even had they not been battling the Great Dragon.

Iyanna found humans disgusting and fascinating. The words were little better than the grunts of animals, slopped out of skillless lips, but the emotions behind them were pure if weak, and they betrayed something higher. Iyanden remembered them from before their first fall, when they had been something better. She could not truly hate them because of that.

‘Have you replied, Yethelminir?’ She spoke aloud, an alien and uncomfortable sensation while she lay in communion. Half-wrenched from the perfect wrath of the dead, she was repulsed by her own flesh. Her body was a thing of clotted clay, her teeth rough stones set into it, her tongue a corpse-worm that writhed between the stones.

‘No. The humans are still requesting an audience,’ said Captain Yethelminir dreamily. He was also half-lost to the craft’s infinity core, drowning in the comfort of the dead as she did. He was tall, beautiful, his robes as colourful as a rainbow, but his face was as grim and shaped by sorrow as that of any Iyandeni. ‘Shall we speak with them? They may be useful.’

Iyanna considered. She agreed.

‘I will speak with them.’ A channel was opened, attuned to the crass technology of the mon-keigh.

‘I am Iyanna Ariennal, spiritseer of Iyanden,’ she said. Human speech was so limited, incapable of conveying subtlety other than at great length. She was thankful for that. They would take what she said at face value. ‘We come to offer aid.’

There was a delay, messages restricted to the speed of light. A psychic impression came long before their reply. The sense of relief was palpable. These were creatures who would burn her alive simply for being what she was. How things were different when they were alone and afraid. The minds of the mon-keigh were blunt as pebbles.

Presently, a human male appeared in a vision bubble. The machines of *Ynnead’s Herald* perfectly reproduced his ugliness. His face and voice betrayed his suspicion.

‘I am Captain Hortense of the *Glorious Conquest*. We should consider coordinating our efforts. What are your intentions?’

Iyanna opened her eyes, and allowed her image to appear to him. ‘We kill their mind ships, then their mother.’

Another pause.

‘The great vessel at the heart of the fleet?’

Iyanna inclined her head slightly. To an eldar, this would have indicated an affirmative, although one layered with sarcastic approval at the other so obviously stating the correct option. Then she remembered with whom she was speaking. ‘Yes,’ she said.

‘We are close. Your disruption of their flank will allow us to penetrate deep into the swarm. We will press forward and destroy them! We fight together?’

Iyanna winced at the rough barking of the human’s speech. Spit flew when he spoke. Eldar children had more control of themselves. ‘Yes. Together.’ She said it slowly, lest the human not understand. ‘Hold them from turning back, until we have disrupted their psychic network. Then you must press forwards without delay.’

He stared at her dumbly while her message winged itself on artless wave forms to his craft. Then he nodded, invigorated. She was help unlooked for. Relief ran with the sweat from his face.

‘Perhaps we might...’

‘I have spoken.’

She cut their chatter with a thought. The humans were tiring to listen to. She had deeds that must be done. Her attack group neared the outer limits of the swarm.

‘We approach our target, Lady Iyanna,’ said Yethelminir. ‘The psychic shielding is holding. The dead perform their task and shield us well.’

Iyanna was sorrowful at this news. The wraithkind expended much of themselves to protect her. They would be lesser because of it. Some would fade away, consumed.

‘In one half-tenth cycle we will be among their picket ships,’ continued Yethelminir. His eyes flicked back and forward, viewing some machine-projected display only he could see.

In the eyes of the dead, their target resolved itself from the glare of the Great Dragon as a knot in its complex being-web. One of the great hive ships, not the largest, but important nonetheless. The oppression of the hive mind was great so close to such a thing, and would grow worse the nearer they went. The dead had no such issues. There was no physical form their souls could be driven from. Iyanna led the ghosts of Iyanden to their vengeance so that the living might follow.

The shattered bodies of tyranid ships floated by. More were moving up to plug

the gap. Already Nightwings and Crimson Hunters were engaged in quick battles with vermicular torpedoes and serpentine hunter-killer creatures that chased them on tails of bright green bio-plasma.

First the way must be cleared.

+Cut the crone's cord,+ sent Iyanna.

At her command the Hemlocks raced forward, the escorts blasting away the anti-ship spines and grubs that came at them. They tore towards their targets, bringing their weapons to near range. Grappling tentacles on closing kraken ships waved in anticipation. Anti-laser ice fields puffed from spiracles. Flesh chaff belched from subsidiary mouths.

This kind of defence was useless against the weapons of the Hemlocks.

A howl built in the othersea, the outraged wailing and pain of the dead. It set Iyanna's teeth on edge to hear it, and she was one well accustomed. She felt the anguish of the warlock pilots as they guided the fury of the dead into the weapons pods of their craft. These fashioned the essence of the dead into a scythe whose screaming edge cut the soul. Pain spiked every eldar mind within range, followed instantly by relief as the psychic weapon swept through the warp, severing the souls of the hive ships from the hive mind. Their pseudopods and chelae ceased to writhe, and their propulsion systems' emissions pattered out. Bioluminescence flickered.

Dead shells were all that remained.

The minds of the ships guarding the psychic node vessel were gone. They floated lifeless upon the tides of battle. The oppressive pressure of the hive mind lessened a little. Iyanna grinned savagely.

+On! On!+ she sent, her triumph goading the dead further. They drew closer to the hive ship.

The firing tubes of unaffected tyranid craft spasmed, bursts of gas venting from their weapons exhausts. A shoal of anti-aircraft worms sped towards the Hemlocks.

The hemlocks peeled aside in perfect formation. One was hit by a worm that ripped into its wing as straight as a spear. With the target reached, the worm lost its stiffness. It flailed loose then wrapped itself around the ship and squeezed hard. The fighter exploded in shards of glittering wraithbone. The psychic screams of its warlock pilot and wraith co-pilots were keen against the dull roar of the hive mind. Even there, in this space of light and shadow dominated by the fires of the dragon, Iyanna heard the distant, insane laughter of She Who Thirsts.

Another craft exploded, smashed by a missile of bloody raw bone. A third ran

foul of a cloud of tiny beetles who came alive upon its skin and chewed their way down in a frenzy. A fourth then a fifth exploded, consumed in plumes of plasma.

‘The Dragon is targeting the Hemlocks,’ said Yethelminir.

+Of course it is,+ sent Iyanna.

But the others were past, the Crimson Hunters escorting them weaving through the worms and serpents and tentacled things. They rendered them to pieces with their bright lances. Others performed high speed flicks of their wings to cast the worms off for their following squadron mates to eviscerate with laser fire.

It was done. An empty funnel of space lined by the soulless husks of defence creatures led directly to the node ship. Iyanna focused her witchsight upon it, imparting urgency to the wraithbombers that flew in her wake. She dwelt upon her own memories of the Triple Woe, recalling the invasion of Iyanden by the tyranids. Domes shattered by organic weapons, gardens consumed by mindless beasts to make more mindless beasts with no thought for the sublimity of being. Eldar, quick and beguiling in life, ground to paste under the hooves of living tanks. Her own anger burned hot as a flame.

+Now,+ she thought to them.

The minds of the spirits were quickened by Iyanna’s memories. Their lust for vengeance dragged them out of their dreamworld and back, for a time, into the material realm. Howling with grief, the eldar wraithcraft sped at the hive ship, curving elegantly around the drifting bodies of its dead escorts.

Iyanna watched through the eyes of *Ynnead’s Herald*, temporal and psychic. In the Great Wheel, the ships cut across the blackness strewn with flesh chunks towards the slug-like hive ship. The size of it was impressive, as big as a large world dome upon Iyanden. It was too strongly linked to the greater part of the hive mind to be excised from it by the disruption scythes of the Hemlocks, and too invested with the Dragon’s might for the living to come close to. Physical destruction was the only option. Frost sparkled on gnarled skin pockmarked by aeons of void travel. A tentacled head, tiny in comparison to the astronomical bulk of its thorax and abdomen, writhed at the front. The other end terminated in a flat leech-like tail. Lesser creatures scuttled over its body, seeking firing positions for the enormous cannons grafted into their backs. Shell-plaques slipped open over firing orifices along the lateral line of the ship.

Glistening weapons ports emptied munitions into space. The hive ship quivered as it opened fire. The weapons beasts dwelling upon its carapace trained their parasitic cannons on the wraithbombers and vomited glowing

plasmas.

Iyanna gritted her teeth. The wraiths were too slow to avoid the fusillade on their own. The ghost ships of the wraithborne supported their smaller brethren. Pulsar and plasma cannon fire annihilated swathes of the living missiles, but there were so many. Iyanna and her fellow spiritseers guided the wraithcraft as best they could. An agony of choices. There were too few spiritseers to guide them all, too many souls to save. Which vessel would it be that had their guidance? Which vessel would then be unguided, and blindly crash into the anti-ship fire? Iyanna chose which souls would return to the infinity circuit of Iyanden and which would suffer the worst of all fates without thinking. After the battle, she would be horrified by her choices, whatever they were. She had no time for that now. She put the anticipation of grief from her mind.

The wraithbombers closed on the head and the flank, those going aft seeking out the great ship-birthing canals on the underside. The wraithborne raked the hive ship with punishing pulsar fire.

+Release your revenge, dead of Iyanden,+ Iyanna thought. Her mind-sending was repeated seven times by her servants.

Missiles streaked from swept-forward wings. They swam the void sea as things born to it, swerving elegantly past anti-ordnance spines spat from the hive ship.

The missiles had been adapted, taking inspiration from the burrowing creatures of the hive fleet. They plunged into the surface of the vessel, fusion generators at their tips melting deep into the creature's body. Seconds later, unlight bloomed. Iyanna looked away. She made the dead look away. Perfect globes opened a way into the warp, and for the briefest fraction of time, Slaanesh looked at them directly with ravenous eyes. How terrible, to be caught between two insatiable appetites.

The portals shut. The hive ship's flesh was riddled with vast spherical spaces. It writhed in agony, its death scream horrible. As it faded, another built. The Great Dragon roared with fury as a part of its limitless spirit was obliterated. A black space appeared in the light of the Dragon's soulfire. The pressure in the minds of the eldar lessened further.

Outside the cordon of living ships, Admiral Kelemar continued his bombardment. The hive fleet, still stretched thin as it entered the system, was engaged on three fronts. It bulged outwards towards the main body of the Iyanden fleet. They flitted away, pulsars sounding their invisible, soundless songs of death.

To the front, the Imperial fleet pushed forward towards the chief vessel of the Dragon, the norn ship. Several of their ships drifted, the beaks of tentacled kraken ships buried deep in their hulls. The remainder attempted to lumber into advantageous firing positions. They were heavily beset, but Iyanna's strike near the core of the hive fleet was drawing away reinforcements from the front, and they were coming close to their prize.

Iyanna selected another vessel, a bloated thing like a leathery jellyfish surrounded by darting shoals of fighter craft. This was much smaller, not a main-line hive vessel, but a potent node nonetheless.

+Target the second,+ she sent.

Again the hemlocks cleared the way, and again the wraithbombers delivered their deadly cargo. As the synapses were severed and the hive mind dwindled in potency, Kelemar brought his fleet in closer, sweeping over the swarm and raking it with deadly fire.

So it went, again and again, until a seventh great ship died under Iyanna's attack.

The humans had penetrated into the heart of the swarm, where they pounded the great norn ship, where the tyranids' terrible queen dwelt. The battle was won for the eldar.

+That is the last of them. Withdraw,+ Iyanna ordered. Instantly, her ships came about, and headed through the debris field they had created, back towards clear space.

+Casualties are light in the living and the dead. You are to be congratulated, my lady,+ sent Kelemar. With the synapses of the swarm destroyed, the hive mind was reduced to a background hiss, and they could communicate freely again.

+It is fated,+ sent Iyanna.

She began to ease her mind from the world of the dead. Before she was done, she sat up and stretched, letting her soul sit in two worlds. The sensation of her own body went from disgusting to glorious as she slid back fully into her physical being. The stretch of her muscles delighted her, and she smiled.

'The humans signal us again,' said Yethelminir.

Iyanna shrugged. Allow them to speak, the shrug said, but I do not care what they will say.

Captain Hortense's face appeared again. It was clouded, his lumpen human features exhibited dismay, or some simple human feeling kin to it. 'What are you doing?'

‘We have accomplished our task,’ said Iyanna. ‘The skein has shifted in our favour. The future conforms to our design.’

The pressure of the hive mind, already broken by their extermination of the hive ships, diminished further as *Ynnead’s Herald* sped back towards the webway gate.

‘You are leaving us to die! You are leaving our world to be consumed.’

‘Not so,’ said Iyanna. ‘Look.’

Upon the grey marble of Krokengard a flame was lit.

Hortense was distracted for a moment, his crew delivering information. Iyanna knew what it must be. Hortense’s face hardened.

‘This, it was all a ruse. You came to attack us!’ His mouth twisted.

‘Exterminatus! You have destroyed our world. “Perfidious are the eldar, trust them not!”’ He quoted some human religious text. ‘I should have known no kindness would come from you.’

Iyanna could have cut the feed, but she did not. Some feeling crept into her for this lesser creature. He had fought bravely. ‘A Fireheart,’ she explained. ‘A device to destroy this world so that the Great Dragon may not feast upon it. We kill you, yes, but it is better we do than the Great Dragon draw sustenance from your world.’ She paused. ‘You have my apologies.’

She surveyed the battle. The hive fleet remnants fought on, disunited but deadly still.

‘To attack these creatures and aid you further would result in unacceptable losses to my people,’ she said. ‘There are times coming when we will fight by your side. Today is not one of those occasions. The ship of their swarm-queen is dying. This world is dead. There is nothing for them to feed on but their own dead, and nothing to reconstitute them if consumed. This tendril is destroyed, and the way through here will offer no sustenance should the Great Dragon choose to force it in future. Surely this is worth your sacrifice? One world for many?’

She blinked, examined the human curiously. She pitied him. His own kind did the same elsewhere, and yet he was still appalled. How many others had he thoughtlessly condemned himself? One’s own extinction always seemed to matter more.

‘If you withdraw now you might save some of your ships,’ she continued. ‘You have, after all, nothing left to defend here.’

Hortense spluttered. She hoped he would heed her.

‘This is an ou—’

Her psychic impulse ended their conversation.

‘Take us home, Captain Yethelminir,’ she said. The captain bowed.

‘Yes, my lady.’

The webway gaped wide, and *Ynnead’s Herald* accelerated towards it. Behind them, the pyre of Krokengard’s destruction shone brightly.

Iyanna was triumphant again. Fifteen worlds had been denied the ravening hunger of the Starving Dragon by the deployment of the Firehearts, funnelling it away from the eldar towards...

Something was wrong. A sensation at the back of her mind. The sensation grew teeth, became pain.

Her soul was gripped by agony.

Iyanna screamed, falling from the edge of the couch. The pain abated, then squeezed her anew. She vomited.

The dead were dismayed. The blow against her raced out across her attack group, leaping from mind to mind. Wraithbomber engines guttered out. The Wraithborne’s sleek cruisers turned viciously, wallowing in psychic swell.

Bright light burned at Iyanna’s soul. A long tunnel telescoped away, encompassing infinite distance. A tube stabbed through the fabric of the world. She felt its ripples in the warp. She felt its ripples in the webway.

She had the sense of an eye, slave to a great power. An intellect that dwarfed the Great Wheel of the galaxy. She opened her second sense, to find the Dragon looking at her with terrible regard.

For aeons it seemed it held her in its gaze. And there was fury in that examination.

The Dragon was angry, and it was angry with her. Not with the galaxy, or this sector, or her species. But with her *personally*. The promise of endless torment came from it, her very being enslaved to its ends and used against others, her body rebuilt over and again so that it might suffer the Dragon’s revenge.

Terror of a kind she could not have conceived of flooded her mind. She screamed again, and this time every eldar in the fleet screamed with her.

When she awoke later, *Ynnead’s Herald* was dark. She exhaled brokenly. Her legs were weak. She hauled herself to her feet by grabbing at a couch’s cocoon. Her fingers had no strength to them. The other spiritseers lay limp in their cots. Two, she was sure, were dead.

The steersmen were slumped over their control jewels and the captain was a crumpled peacock on the floor. The main viewing bubble glowed still. Through

it she saw the eldar fleet was in disarray, drifting powerless. The humans fought on however. The norn ship burned fiercely. Was this what had severed the connection between her and the Great Dragon?

Thinking of the contact made her nauseous.

As her mind reached out to the ship, the dead of *Ynnead's Herald* woke too, creeping from their hiding places in the infinity core, shocked and timorous.

The lights came back on. A dull glow from the walls that grew until the ship looked as it should. Yethelminir groaned and rolled over. He stood shakily, struggling with his iridescent cape to free his arms. The steersmen and other crew came to groggily.

'My lady?'

'I am well, Yethelminir,' she said. Her eyes were fixed on the desperate battle. The hive fleet was shattered. Even bereft of direction, the individual ship-beasts were still deadly, and the humans were outnumbered twenty times to one.

She watched as one of their light cruisers was snagged by a trio of kraken ships. It broke apart, its reactor dying with a bright plasma flare.

She came to a decision.

'Lord Admiral?' She spoke aloud.

There was a long pause before Kelemar answered.

'My lady?' His voice was weak.

'What is the status of your ship? Your fleet?'

'They are undamaged. My crew are distressed. Some are dead.'

'Rouse them.'

'What was that?'

'The Great Dragon,' she said. She kept her voice cold, frightened her fear would creep into her voice. If it did, she was sure she would lose her mind.

'Bring your ships back into battle order.'

'We do not return to Iyanden?'

'We do not return to Iyanden. We remain to help the mon-keigh.'

'That was not in the plan.'

'Plans change,' she said. 'Every weapon will be needed in the coming fight.'

Slowly, the eldar fleet regained its prior order, and drove on back at the tyranids.

'Tell the humans we are coming,' she said.

Yethelminir nodded. His face bore lines it had not had before.

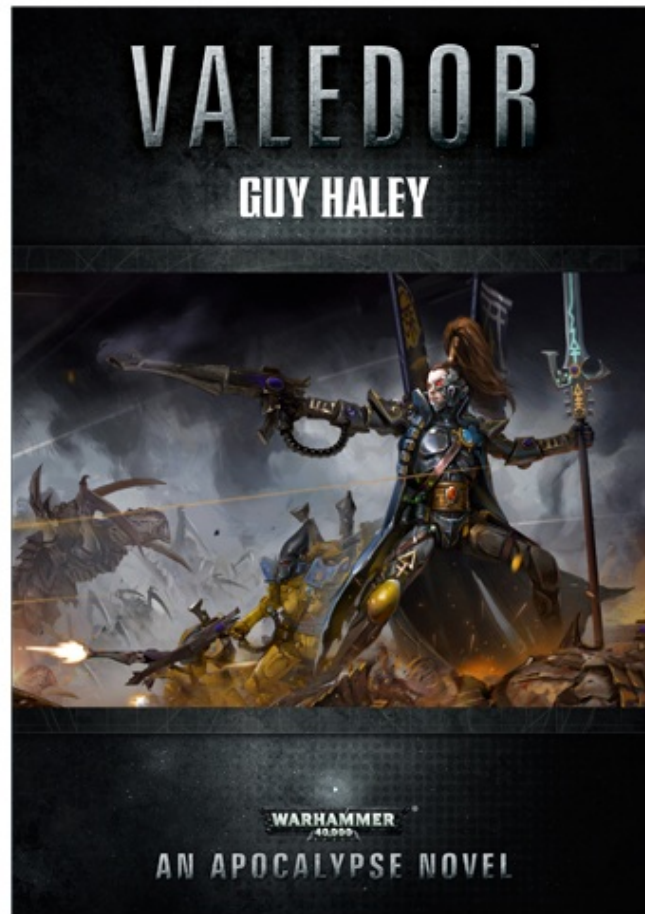
Iyanna slipped back into her couch and reconnected with the dead pilots of the wraithbombers, informing them of their new task.

They welcomed it gladly, for the vengeance of the dead knows no bounds.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A prolific freelance author and journalist, **Guy Haley** is the author of *Space Marine Battles: Death of Integrity*, the Warhammer 40,000 novels *Valedor* and *Baneblade*, and the novellas *The Eternal Crusader*, *The Last Days of Ector* and 'Broken Sword', for *Damocles*. His enthusiasm for all things greenskin has also led him to pen the eponymous Warhammer novel *Skarsnik*. He lives in Yorkshire with his wife and son.

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