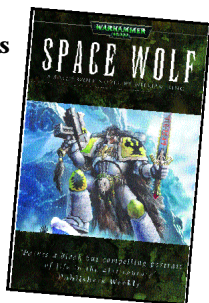


SPACE WOLF

A Space Wolf novel by William King

ON THE GRIM death-world of Fenris, young Ragnar of the Thunderfist tribe finds his destiny changed forever when he is chosen to become a warrior of the gods. He is recruited in to the mighty Space Wolves Chapter of the Space Marines and thrown in to the galactic war against the dark forces of Chaos. But the implanting of the canis helix unleashes his primal instincts and Ragnar must fight to control the beast within before it consumes him forever!



William King is the author of seven Gotrek & Felix novels and four volumes chronicling the adventures of the Space Marine warrior, Ragnar. He has travelled extensively throughout Europe and Asia, and currently lives in Prague.

Space Wolf can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

Price £5.99 (UK) / \$6.99 (US)

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PUBLISHED BY THE BLACKLIBRARY

Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK

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ISBN: 1-84416-022-x



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published by BL Publishing, 2003.
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from SPACE WOLF

ALL AROUND THE buildings burned. Ragnar strode through the maelstrom of battle, shouting commands to his men.

‘Brother Hrolf – I want two krak missiles into that forward emplacement now! The rest of you form up and prepare to storm in as soon as the door is blown.’

Acknowledgements filled the earbead linking him to the comm-net. He raced from the doorway where he’d been sheltering to a huge block of fallen masonry some twenty metres closer to his objective. Enemy laser blasts melted the concrete behind his heels but, even in his powered armour, he moved too quickly for the heretics to get a bead on him. He threw himself into a crouch behind the rubble and waited for a moment.

The thunder of heavy ordnance filled the air. Somewhere off in the distance he could hear the howl of Thunderhawk engines and the multiple sonic booms as they slowed their speed down from the sub-orbital. Even as he watched, bright yellow contrails pierced the leaden clouds and the gunships hove into view. Missile clusters detached themselves from their wings and hurtled groundwards to smash into the heretics’ positions. He checked his weapons with the precision born of a century of experience, took a deep breath, intoned a prayer to the Emperor and waited.

He was aware of everything. The beat of his primary heart was regular. His body was already healing the minor cuts and grazes he had taken from shrapnel. He could feel a slight nick on his face closing itself. His senses, far sharper than those of the human he had once been, kept up a steady flow of information on the battlefield around him. From nearby he could smell the comforting presence of his battle-brothers, a compound of hardened ceramite, oil, the flesh of Fenris and the

subtle markers which told they were not quite human. More than that, he could pick out the faint pheromone traces of anger, pain and well-controlled fear.

He checked his armour to ensure the integrity had not been breached. Here and there were a few scuffs where shrapnel had bounced from the hardened ceramite of the carapace. In two spots he found blisters on the paintwork that told of the fleeting kiss of a lasgun beam. In one spot there was a distinct chip on the shoulder pad where a bolt pistol shell had torn through the raised rim. Nothing serious. The servo-motors that powered the mighty combat suit were currently operating at 75% efficiency, idling on most systems to save power. The suit's built-in auto-sensors informed him of faint traces of pollutants, contaminants and a residue of the neurotoxins that the heretics had used in their surprise attack on the loyalist forces when they began their rebellion.

Nothing much to worry about, praise Russ. His body's ability to metabolise poison was barely needed to deal with them. He had known poisons strong enough to give him headaches and muscle spasms and dizziness while his body adapted to their presence. These ones were nowhere close to that potency. All in all then, things did not look too bad. If truth be told, he was enjoying the situation. After a month of meditation in his cell back in the Fang and a week cooped up onboard one of the great Imperium starcruisers en route to this minor war, he relished the action. It was hardly surprising really: it was what he had been born to do, and what he had trained for. His entire life had been a preparation for this moment. He was, after all, an Imperial Space Marine of the Space Wolves Chapter. What more could he possibly ask from life than this? He had a loaded bolt-gun in his hand and the Emperor's enemies before him. In this life, there was no greater pleasure to be found than performing his duty and ending the lives of those sorry heretics.

The masonry at his back shuddered. Chunks of stone clattered off his armour. Someone had hit his cover with something heavy, a rocket perhaps or a very heavy bolter shell. Not that it mattered. He knew from long experience that the metal-reinforced concrete could take it. He studied the chronometer readout superimposed on his field of vision. A minute and four seconds had passed since he had given his

orders to Brother Hrolf. He guessed that it would take two minutes for Hrolf to get into position, and another ten seconds for him to line up his shot. That was more than enough time for the rest of his force to get themselves into position. In that time, it was impossible for the heretics to chip away at his cover unless they brought far more firepower to bear than they were currently using.

It was a thought that had apparently occurred to the enemy commander too. Ragnar could hear the sound of monstrous tracks coming closer. He knew that they must belong to an enemy vehicle. The Imperial forces had just begun their drop from orbit with the Space Wolves as a spearhead. It was far too early for any Imperial armour to be on the ground. The logical conclusion was simple. Whatever was approaching was not friendly. A call on the comm-link soon confirmed this.

+Force Ragnar. Enemy Predator tank approaching your position. Do you wish assistance? Over.+

Ragnar considered for an instant. At this point, the Thunderhawks' air-cover was needed more elsewhere, to support troops still in the critical stage of landing under enemy guns. He did not want to draw their help away from his battle-brothers. Particularly not to deal with a single enemy tank.

+Ragnar here. Negative. We will deal with the Predator ourselves. Over.+

+Message received and understood. The Emperor watch over you. Over.+

Ragnar considered his options. He could hear the tank's approach, smell the acrid chemical fumes of its exhaust. Concrete was crushed under its treads as it moved. He could request Brother Hrolf with the squad's heavy support weapon to blast the tank but that would mean cancelling the attack on the bunker while Hrolf moved into a new position, and Ragnar doubted that there was any need for that, certainly not when he could deal with the tank himself.

He checked his belt compartments. Everything was in place. Healing drug syrettes, grenade dispensers, repair patches. He tapped the grenade dispenser and a krak grenade dropped into his hand. That would do. He glanced out of his cover and saw the long snout of the Predator's gun barrel coming around the corner. Moments later the whole tank hove into view. It was a

standard design for an Imperial tank but instead of the neat patterns of the Imperially aligned planetary armies it had been hastily sprayed blood red, and a crude eight-armed Chaos symbol had been painted on the side in yellow. Ragnar bared his teeth in a snarl at the sight of that hated emblem. It was the sign of daemon worshippers sworn to overthrow everything Ragnar had fought to uphold his whole long life, and just the sight of it brought the animal ferocity that was so much a part of his Space Wolf nature bubbling to the fore.

He raised himself to his feet, measuring the distance between himself and the tank with a practised eye. No more than a hundred strides, he guessed. The distance was closing fast as the tank rumbled forward. He could see that the turret-mounted bolters were already swivelling to bear on him. His position had been flanked. It was just as well that he had decided to abandon it anyway.

The servo-motors of his armour whined as he raced across the open ground towards the tank. Once again lasgun fire dogged his heels, but as he had counted on, the gunners were too surprised by his sudden break from cover in the direction of the tank to target him swiftly. The tank's gunners obviously couldn't believe their eyes either. Tracer fire ripped the air over his head targeted on a spot behind him. The gunners' efforts were half-hearted. They seemed to have reckoned that he was going to be ground to pieces beneath their onrushing vehicle. Ragnar intended to swiftly prove them wrong. They would pay for underestimating one of the sons of Lemman Russ.

He rushed directly at the tank. It swelled swiftly in his view. Even though he had often marched beside such vehicles or clung to their side as they carried himself and his battle-brothers into the fray he was surprised by how big this one looked now. He smiled. It was always different when you actually had to fight with one of these things. The gap between him and the Predator closed quickly. The air thrummed with the vibration of its engine. The exhaust stink became near-overpowering to his nostrils. The flickering lasgun fire came ever closer to his heels.

At the last second he threw himself to the right, putting the Predator between himself and the fire from the enemy bunker. He reached out and lobbed the first Krak grenade between the

drive cogs and the tracks they were linked with. The charge was shaped and the fuse was set for three seconds. Plenty of time for Ragnar to set another charge.

When they exploded, whole sections of tread were blasted away and drive cogs began to grind to a halt as the power train failed. A huge section of track flapped free and almost hit Ragnar. Only his lightning-swift reflexes, keyed to superhuman keenness by the stress of battle, enabled him to duck beneath it. Just as well, really, since he guessed the sheer force with which the articulated metal segments were moving would be enough to take his head clean off.

Robbed of the power of one set of treads, the Predator began to rotate slowly on the spot. The tracks on the other side were still working and pushing it forward but it was not going to go anywhere except in circles. Ragnar was glad of that. Since the turret was already beginning to swivel in the direction of his squad it was time to move to the next phase of his plan.

With a mighty leap Ragnar sprang onto the side of the Predator just above the track guard. He landed easily, ceramite boots ringing against the hull, and raced forward, hoping to Russ that no one inside the tank had yet realised what was going on. He could hear the muffled bellowing of orders and confused shrieks from within so he guessed they had not. Good. They would never realise what hit them. He raced forward to the turret and saw that the hatch was closed. A pity, Ragnar thought, but nonetheless it was what he had expected. In the close quarters combat of a city fight no tank commander was going to go around with his head exposed. Still, it was foolish for them to have advanced so far without close infantry support. It would have been far more difficult for him to do what he planned in the presence of armed warriors. He guessed that the tank had come as quickly as possible in response to a desperate plea for help from the bunker. Well, he would make sure the heretics paid for that mistake.

He reached down and grasped the handle on the top of the turret with both hands then braced himself. He strained with all the strength of his enhanced muscles and tugged. Nothing happened. He threw more and more power into the servomotors of his armour until the muscle fibres were almost overloaded and the maintenance readouts superimposed on

his field of vision were far into the red. Slowly at first, with an awful grinding sound, the hatch began to come away from its hinges. Ceramite buckled under the terrible strength of the Space Wolf. Ragnar almost overbalanced as the hatch cover came free in his hands.

There was a rush of foul air from within the tank, and Ragnar recognised the stink of mutation. Truly these heretics had paid the price of swearing allegiance to their dark masters. He tossed the hatch cover away and grabbed a frag grenade from his belt dispenser. He looked down into the interior of the tank. A quick glance showed him hideously altered mutant faces looking up at him. One was blotched with monstrous red warts each ending in an eye. The other had melted and run as if made of candle wax. The mark of their evil was plain upon them, their exterior selves had been altered to match their inner corruption by the evil powers they worshipped.

One of the mutants reached for his holstered pistol. By the look of blind panic on its face, Ragnar knew that the creature had worked out what was going to happen next. Nor was it wrong. Ragnar dropped the grenade into the open hatch and leaped away. Even as he did so he grasped another grenade and lobbed it with unerring accuracy back into the opening on the turret's top. It was just possible that the mutants might be able to find one grenade as it rolled about within and lob it clear. He knew they would not be able to get both.

The tank was still between him and the bunker. He whipped out his weapons. In the side of the Predator a hatch had half opened. One of the crew, realising what was happening, was trying to get clear. Ragnar kicked the hatch closed and sprang away again just as two enormous blasts shook the tank. A fountain of blood and flesh jetted up through the turret top. Ragnar moved quickly now for cover, knowing that it was all too possible that the drive systems of the tank would go up in the explosion.

Fortunately the inhabitants of the bunker were distracted by the fate of their support vehicle and he dived into the cover of the rubble in which he had previously crouched just as a wracking explosion tore the mighty vehicle to pieces. Huge chunks of metal armour were twisted outward by the blast of the exploding power plant. Oily black smoke twisted skywards from the remains.

Just at that moment the sound of another explosion assaulted Ragnar's ears. He knew that Brother Hrolf had hit the door of the bunker with the missile launcher. Ragnar sprang up, noting with satisfaction that the plasteel entrance had been blasted completely off its hinges by the force of the explosion and that the flanking force of Space Wolves was already moving into position from either side. Even as Ragnar watched Brother Snagga throw himself flat, wriggled on his belly under the firing slot of the bunker and lobbed a handful of microgrenades through the entrance. Explosions and screams of pain were his reward. Within seconds two Space Wolves had entered the bunker. Shots rang out as they finished off the survivors.

Ragnar smiled revealing two huge wolfish fangs. The gleam of triumph appeared in his yellowish dog-like eyes. Another victory was his. At that moment, he caught the faint gleam of sunlight hitting glass somewhere off to his right. Instinct told him to throw himself flat but he was already too late. Even as he sprang, the sniper's bolter shell, rocket-powered and armour piercing, was ripping towards him too quickly to be avoided. All his leap did was get his body partially out of the way. The shell which had been aimed directly at his heart exploded instead within his chest. Pain blasted through his body. Messengers of agony raced along his nerve endings. He fell forward into a molten lava pit of torment.

'DON'T WORRY, Brother Ragnar,' he heard a voice from the far distance say. 'We have you.'

Ragnar wondered about that, wondered if they were not too late. Already the voices sounded as if they were coming from the top of a huge well. It seemed to him that he was falling downwards, towards the cold hell of his people, there to be greeted by all his family and his friends, and all the old enemies he had sent there himself. It was odd, he thought, that he should be dying so far from home, so long after he had expected to die. There was something comforting about this strange sensation. He knew what to expect. He ought to. After all, he had died before.

Icy clarity possessed his spirit. His memory flooded back. His soul ventured back through the centuries. Remembering.

THE SPACE WOLF NOVELS

by **William King**

From the death-world of Fenris come the Space Wolves, the most savage of the Emperor's Space Marines. Follow the adventures of Ragnar, from his recruitment and training as he matures into a ferocious and deadly fighter, scourge of the enemies of humanity.

SPACE WOLF

On the planet Fenris, young Ragnar is chosen to be inducted into the noble yet savage Space Wolves Chapter. But with his ancient primal instincts unleashed, Ragnar must learn to control the beast within and fight for the greater good of the wolf pack.

RAGNAR'S CLAW

As young Blood Claws, Ragnar and his companions go on their first off-world mission – from the jungle hell of Galt to the polluted hive-cities of hive world Venam, they must travel across the galaxy to face the very heart of evil.

GREY HUNTER

When one of their Chapter's most holy artefacts is seized by the forces of Chaos, Space Wolf Ragnar and his comrades are plunged into a desperate battle to retrieve it before a most terrible and ancient foe is set free.

WOLFBLADE

When Ragnar takes up his duties on ancient Terra, he soon becomes embroiled in an assassination plot that reaches into the very depths of Imperium!

