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# ***SWORD OF JUSTICE***

*A Warhammer Heroes novel*

*By Chris Wraight*

Fresh from the slaughter of the Emperor's enemies in the north, Ludwig Schwarzhelm, Emperor's Champion, is sent to Averland to oversee the inauguration of a new elector count. Beset by greenskins, and hampered on all sides by the ambitions of rival magnates, he is soon fighting to keep the province together. But the rot runs deep. Powerful forces in Altdorf seem determined to see him fail, and suspicion falls on even his most trusted allies. When all is at its bleakest, the mark of Chaos and the full horror of his task is finally revealed. Alone, doubted by those closest to him, this will be Schwarzhelm's greatest ever challenge, one on which the destiny of the Empire itself depends.

## **About the Author**

Chris Wraight is a freelance writer currently living and working in Oxford. A long time fan of Games Workshop background art and fiction, Chris is also into the novels of Patrick O'Brian, Philip Pullman and William Golding. He helps look after two cats, and can occasionally be spotted running through the muddier bits of Oxfordshire in training for some race or other.



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The following is an excerpt from *Sword of Justice* by Chris Wraight.

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SCHWARZHELM READIED HIMSELF as Raghram came at him. The doombull was massive. The musk around him was thick and cloying. Beneath his hooves, spoor clung to the rock, stinking. The wide bull-mouth bellowed. The axe swung, spraying rain. On either side of him, the Knights Panther took up their positions against the doombull's entourage of gors. The elite troops of the two armies came together on the slopes of the Bastion, and the fury of the storm above was but an echo of the savagery of their encounter.

Schwarzhelm met the onslaught full on, blunting the full force of the charge. Coarse iron clashed with pure steel, sending sparks spinning into the shadows. The blow was heavy, far heavier than that of a man. Schwarzhelm judged it carefully, dousing the momentum without aiming to stop it. When the moment was right, he withdrew the blade, sprang aside and plunged a stabbing blow at the monster's flank. It connected, and black blood pumped down the beast's twisted legs.

On either side of him, Schwarzhelm could sense the presence of the knights. They were locked in combat with the gors. Dimly, right at the edge of his vision, he could see the ebb and flow of battle. A knight would fall, pierced with a cruel horn-tip. Or a beast would stumble, its chest opened by an Imperial blade. It was finely balanced.

But these were just the ghosts of images, flitting at the periphery. Ahead of him, roaring its rage, the doombull came again. Again the axe fell, again it was parried. Schwarzhelm

wielded the sword expertly, making play of its speed and keenness. As it worked, the failing light flashed from the steel.

Schwarzhelm let the Rechtstahl guide his hand. He was a master swordsman, second only to one other in the entire Empire, but you could not wield a holy blade as if you owned it. The sword was its own master, and he was but the most recent of its stewards. Only after half a lifetime of wielding it did he understand some of its secrets. Most would never be uncovered.

Raghrum maintained the charge and the axe swung like a blacksmith's hammer. In the massive, bunched arms of the doombull, it looked like a child's toy. Schwarzhelm saw the feint coming and angled the sword to parry. At the last moment, he shifted his weight. The blades clashed once more. Feeling the camber of the slope beneath his feet, adjusting for the force of the attack, he pushed back.

His arms took the full momentum of the doombull's weight. For an instant, Schwarzhelm was right up against the monster. The ruined face was above his. The eyes, kindled with a deep-delved fire, blazed at him. Strings of saliva drooled down from the tooth-filled jaw. Raghrum wanted to feast. He was drunk on bloodlust.

Then Schwarzhelm's foot slipped. The rock was icy with surface water and he felt his armoured sabaton slide on the stone. The axe weighed down, the blade-edge hovering over his torso.

Schwarzhelm gritted his teeth, pushing against the weight. The power of the doombull was crushing, suffocating. But Schwarzhelm was no ordinary man. Tempered by a lifetime of war, his sinews had been hardened against the full range of horrors in the Old World. He'd stared into the rage-addled faces of greenskin warlords, the horror-drenched gaze of Chaos champions, the cruel and inscrutable eyes of the elves. All had met the same fate. This would be no different.

He twisted out of the encounter, arching his body to deflect the secondary blow, using the power of the beast to drag it forward. He could still sense the battle raging around him.

There was no way of telling who was winning. All his attention was bent on the monster before him. This was the fulcrum of the battle. If he failed now, then they all died.

He pulled back, but Raghram was upon him. The axe swung down again. The obvious choice was to step back, evade the curve. But the Rechtstahl seemed to draw him on. Inured to hesitation, Schwarzhelm plunged inside the arc of the axe, crouching low. He was within the grasp of the beast. Twisting the blade in both hands, he brought the tip up. With a savage lunge, he thrust it upwards, aiming beneath the doombull's ribcage.

The tip pierced its flesh, driving deep. Fresh blood coursed over his face, hot and rancid. The doombull roared afresh and pulled back. Schwarzhelm withdrew the blade, ducking under flailing fingers, feeling the monster nearly grasp him. He pulled back again, feeling his breathing become more rapid. There was no fatigue, no weariness, but the sheer power of the beast was impressive. He would need to do more than stab at it. From somewhere, the killing blow would need to be found.

Now the creature was wary. It lowered its head. The horns dripped with rain. The axe hung low against the ground. When it growled, the earth seemed to reverberate in warped sympathy. Schwarzhelm held his position, sword raised. His eyes shone in the dark. Every movement his opponent made, every inflection, needed to be observed. He would wait. The Rechtstahl felt light in his hands. On either side, the savage cries of battle still raged. His knights were holding their ground. No gor would get to him while any of them could still wield a blade. The duel would be undisturbed.

Raghram charged again. Even as the hooves pushed against the rock, Schwarzhelm could see the energy exerted. The muscles in the goat-shaped thighs bunched, powering the massive creature forward. The head stayed low, trailing long lines of blood-flecked drool. As the doombull moved, its horns swayed.

Schwarzhelm adjusted his stance. His armour suddenly felt like scant protection. Keeping his eyes on the swaying axe-blade, he braced for impact.

It was like being hit by a storm. A human, however strong, had no chance of halting such a monster. It was all Schwarzhelm could do not to get knocked from his feet. Bringing all the power he could to bear, he traded vicious blows from the axe with the Rechtstahl, giving ground with every one. Raghram let slip a crooked smile as it advanced. Deep within that deranged face, something like amusement had emerged. He was being toyed with.

Schwarzhelm leaped back, clearing half a yard of space, and let the Rechtstahl fly back in a savage backhanded arc. If it had connected, it would have spilled the monster's guts across the Bastion floor. But Raghram was too old and wily for that. With a deceptive grace, it evaded the stroke, its momentum unbroken.

This was dangerous. Schwarzhelm felt his balance compromised, but there was no room to retreat. The axe blade hammered down, and he barely parried it. His blade shivered as the full force of the axe landed on it, and he felt the power ripple through his body.

He gave ground again, losing the initiative. Raghram filled the void, hacking at his adversary even as it roared in triumph.

Then the axe got through. Whether it was skill or luck, the doombull's blade cut past Schwarzhelm's defence. It landed heavily against his right shoulder, driving deep into the metal of the pauldron. He felt the plate stove inwards. An instant later sharp pain bloomed out, and he staggered back from the blow.

Raghram leapt up. The axe was raised, and a look of scorn played across the bull-face. Schwarzhelm raised his sword in defence, watching the advance of the monster carefully. The doombull came on quickly. Too quickly. In its eagerness to land the killing blow, its axe blade was held too far out.

Schwarzhelm swept his sword up, twisting it in his hands as he did so. He left his torso unguarded. That was intended. The

manoeuvre was about speed. Raghram reacted, but slowly. The Rechtstahl cut a glittering path through the air. Its point sliced across the beast's face, pulling the flesh from the bone and throwing it high into the storm-tossed air.

Raghram staggered backwards, a lurid gash scored across its mighty cheek and forehead. The great creature lolled, stumbled and rocked backwards, blinded by its own blood.

Schwarzhelm recovered his footing. The Rechtstahl glistened eagerly. Taking the blade in both hands, he surged forward. The tip passed clean between the beast's protruding ribs, deep into the unholy torso and into the animal's heart.

Raghram screamed, and the last veils of shadow around it ripped away. The sudden lurch nearly wrenched the blade from Schwarzhelm's grip, but he hung on, twisting the sword further into the monster's innards. It bit deep, searing the tainted flesh like a branding iron on horsehide. The doombull attempted to respond, flailing its axe around, searching for the killer blow.

But its coordination was gone. Slowly, agonisingly, the pumping of the mighty heart ebbed. The light in its eyes went out. With its throat full of bubbling, foamy blood, Raghram, the master of the horde, sank down against the stone. The iron axe-head clattered against the rock uselessly.

Schwarzhelm pulled the Rechtstahl free at last. He stood back, lifted the blade to the heavens and roared his triumph.

'Sigmar!' he bellowed, and his mighty voice echoed from the stone terraces around him.

Even in the midst of their close-packed combat, the cry reached the ears of man and beast alike. The Knights Panther knew what it portended immediately and redoubled their efforts. Under Gruppen's grim leadership, they began to hammer the gors further down the slope. Raghram's body slumped down the dank stone, its rage silenced. Step by step, yard by bitter yard, the tide began to turn. Bereft of the guiding will of the doombull, the assault on the rock citadel foundered. The dark-armoured knights pursued them



ruthlessly, their longswords biting deep into the beastmen's hides.

Schwarzhelm sank back against the stone, his breathing heavy. For the moment, the counter-assault was conducted by others. The respite would be short, but after such a duel it was needed.

'Nice work,' came a voice from higher up the rock. Verstohlen emerged from the shadows, his pistol cocked ready to fire. 'I'm glad of it. Not sure this thing would have been much use against that.'

Schwarzhelm didn't smile. He never smiled.

'Its hand was forced. Something new has arrived.'

Verstohlen followed his gaze. Far off, beyond the sea of beastmen out on the Cauldron floor, there was a change. It was hard to make out in the failing light, but there were flashes of steel out in the gloom. Then, as the beastmen finally ceased their chanting, the sound gave it away. The clear horn blast of an Imperial host. There was no noise like it in all the Empire. After a hundred battlefields, it was as familiar to Schwarzhelm as the rain on a thatched roof.

'Reiksguard,' he said. 'Helborg. At last.'

Verstohlen gave an appreciative nod.

'That is welcome. We're still outnumbered. This will turn the balance.'

Schwarzhelm shot him a disdainful glance.

'Don't make excuses for him,' he snapped. 'He's overdue. And if he tries to claim the credit for this victory, I'll string him up myself. We did this, and paid the price in blood.'

Verstohlen raised an eyebrow. He looked genuinely taken aback by Schwarzhelm's vehemence. He started to reply, then seemed to think better of it.

Schwarzhelm finished wiping Raghram's gore from the Rechtstahl in silence, then drew himself up to his full height. Around them, the knights had regrouped and were beginning to pursue the remaining gors down the slope. The beastman advance was dissolving into confusion.

‘Go back to the summit,’ growled Schwarzhelm.  
‘Someone’ll be needed to keep the army together.’

‘If you wish. Where are you going?’

Schwarzhelm gave him a flat look. His expression was murderous.

‘Hunting.’

***SWORD OF JUSTICE*** can be purchased direct from this website and GW mail order, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, and better bookstores.

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