

# Silver Nails

A Warhammer novel by Jack Yeovil

VUKOTICH WENT TENSE again, and Genevieve put her hand on his chest, restraining him. She felt his heart beating fast and realized her nails were growing longer, turning to claws.

*She regained control and her fingerknives dwindled.*

*Vukotich was bleeding slightly, from the mouth. She had cut him when they kissed. A shudder of pleasure ran through her as she rolled the traces of his blood around her mouth. She swallowed, and felt warm.*

JACK YEOVIL IS a pseudonym for popular novelist Kim Newman. Set in the dark and dangerous Warhammer world, this adventure reunites some of his most popular characters including 'Filthy' Harald Kleindeinst and the sryer Rosanna Ophuls, Baron Johann von Mecklenberg, playwright and self-confessed genius Detlef Sierck and of course the vampire Genevieve.



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*from SILVER NAILS*

THE GROUND WAS his enemy, his prison. All his life, Warhawk had tried to escape its dreary pull. He was more comfortable up here on the rooftops than down below on the grimy cobbles, but his aim was higher still, in the freedom of the skies. On his wrist, Belle shifted slightly, hooded head bobbing. He envied her wings, her flight. But soon, when the Device was complete, he would share her life, would truly be able to take her for his mistress and mate.

When, as the Device decreed, thirteen had died, he too would be able to soar above the dirt, plunge through the clouds, battle the cross-currents of the winds. Nine were dead already. And Number Ten was down below, an insectile speck crawling through cramped streets, never raising eyes from their boots, never dreaming of the wonders above. He did not know him or her yet, but they were already marked for death.

Warhawk had been capricious so far, choosing some of the sacrifices carefully, but picking others entirely at random. One of the most distinguished he had come upon by chance. It had never been explained satisfactorily why a Cleric of Solkan, supposedly engaged in important archaeological work in the Grey Mountains, should be disguised as a ragged beggar in the streets of Altdorf, importuning the crowds outside the Vargr Breughel Memorial Playhouse. But that was precisely the activity in which Professor Bernabe Scheydt had been engaged when Belle took him. Warhawk knew all men led iceberg lives, four-fifths submerged in the dark. Death sometimes brought submerged things to the surface.

Balancing carefully, leaning to one side to counter Belle's weight, he walked along the knife-point roof-prow of the Temple of Shallya. He strode without fear across the gap between the temple and the Imperial Bank, scaled the gabled cone of the bank's upper cupola, and finally reached his chosen perch for the night – the service platform just below the great clock. Inside the cupola, machinery ground together, time relentlessly marching forward with the hands on the clockface. In a world slowly eaten away by Chaos, time was a certainty, and the bank clock was a byword for reliability. It was accurate to a quarter-hour, probably the most sophisticated timepiece in the Empire.

Down below, as the night people emerged, the Konigplatz became busy, crowded. It was chilly, but Warhawk, wrapped in his padded leather armour, felt nothing. His body bruised by too many falls, he had been careful in stitching together his black protective suit. A close-fitting hood covered his face, stylised hawk's beak picked out on the leather, feathery swirls around the eyeholes. The few who had seen him swore he was a ghost, or a bird-headed altered.

He looked across the Konigplatz, the Place of Kings, at the cluster of Imperial statues forming a crowd of their own, jostling around the great form of hammer-wielding Sigmar, the earliest emperors faceless lumps of stone, the most recent vulgar caricatures, each vying for a better position. It was the tradition for a new-elected emperor to commission his own statue to add to those of his predecessors. After two and a half thousand years, it proved politic to let the oldest statues crumble away to make room. Still, another period like the Year of the Seven Emperors, which followed the death of the Emperor Carolus twelve hundred years ago, would require the demolition of one of the buildings abutting the Konigplatz to make space for the figures.

Belle's talons were tight on his wrist, razored extensions snug in the grooves of his thick, reinforced glove. She was a good bird, the best he had ever trained – schooled almost from the egg to be a huntress, a weapon – and she would be the greatest of her age. His father would have been proud of Belle. She was easily the equal of the famous Sebastian or Boris the Ferocious, and, in time, she might be as fearsome as Minya, the huge she-hawk who had turned the Battle of Axe-Bite Pass, taking out the

eye of Cervello the Traitor, and dying to save his father on the upper slopes of the Fastness of Jagrandhra Dane.

He looked down, scanning the crowds for a sign. From a full five storeys above, they were all tiny, insignificant creatures. His sacrifice was down there somewhere, waiting for a death that was the next movement of the Device. Some gesture, some colour, some sound drifting up. Something would call out. It always did. Meanwhile, Belle was patient. With Belle, the Warhawk had no need of jesses to restrain her ankles or hood to cover her eyes. She would not take to the air until he signalled.

The watchman, Kleindeinst, reminded Warhawk of his father. They had the same hard eyes, the same scarred determination. He had seen Harald Kleindeinst in public several times, even attended a citizens' meeting where angry questions had been directed ceaselessly at the captain. Kleindeinst swore he would clip Warhawk's wings, but had accomplished nothing. At first, the Warhawk thought Kleindeinst might prove a worthy adversary. The copper had brought down the Beast Yefimovich last year, ending the series of murders that had shaken the city during the fog riots. The palace itself had requested the watchman be given charge of the current investigation. Warhawk had sat with the broadsheet writers and concerned businessman, and watched Kleindeinst reel as he was angrily denounced by speaker after speaker. The people of Altdorf wanted decisive action, and couldn't see how powerless the watchman truly was. Kleindeinst would never understand the Device, much less impede its workings. Before the meeting's scheduled end, Captain Kleindeinst had left the room and stalked out alone, renewing his vow, striding from the watch station ahead of the crowd's jeers.

Down below, small knots of people were assembling around the empty bases of the oldest statues. In the evenings, speakers would take advantage of these ready-made platforms to address the crowds, preaching the worship of a lesser god, advocating the institution of an unheard-of political system, spreading gossip and sedition, or making public some commercial venture. In the past, Warhawk had himself spoken in that manner, declaring his intention to conquer the skies, ignoring the laughter of the unwashed mob and the sneers of the wizards. A Brustellinite revolutionist occupied his old pedestal. He was calling for a

general uprising against the Emperor, and his audience, loyalists to a man, were getting restless. A strolling watchman, club already out, was moving in on the speaker, doubtless ready to make an arrest, and give the revolutionist a chance to get acquainted with the worthies he decreed should be free by spending a few nights in a straw-and-dung-floored cell with pick-pockets, beggars and cutpurses.

Harald Kleindeinst had been a disappointment. Warhawk was almost sorry for the copper. With each sacrifice, Kleindeinst's position became more dangerous. By the time the Device was complete, the captain would be lucky to escape the wrath of the people he served. His body would hang on the docks for the river-birds. While he was rotting, Warhawk would be learning the ways of the air, striving ever higher, released at last from the tyranny of mud and stone. Still, Kleindeinst was as much a part of the Device as he was himself. He remembered his father saying that you should choose your enemies as carefully as you pick your friends.

It was his father who first told him of the Device, who had explained its workings. It was not magic, but alchemy, a true science. Magic only worked for wizards, but alchemy was for all who followed the steps. Wizards were arrogant, conjuring fire from the phlogiston in the air and sneering at ordinary men with their sulphur-sticks. But eventually magic would be swept away, and the Warhawk would fly, not through clouds of mystery and superstition, but upon solid principles of logic and balance. In the mean time, blood sacrifice must be made.

The watchman shouldered through the crowd and laid a hand on the revolutionist's leg. Everyone was shouting. The unkempt Brustellinite jumped upwards, making a grab for the outstretched arm of the statue of the Empress Magritta, and swung like an ape. The copper scrambled up after the fire-breather, egged on by the crowd.

Warhawk knew.

He pointed leisurely, shrugging with his wrist. Belle's wings spread elegantly and flapped. The bird rose from her perch, and swayed into the air, almost floating, beating her wings only when absolutely necessary. That was one of his father's tricks: teaching the bird to glide silently towards the victim.

The empress's arm broke at the shoulder and the revolutionist fell into the hostile crowd, who set about pummelling and

kicking him. The watchman, sweating from his exertions, looked down. He removed his cap and used it to wipe his forehead.

Belle brought her feet down like a diver executing a back-flip and settled, claws-first, around the copper's head, her beak digging into the back of his neck, her knife-ended claws rending his cheeks and throat. The crowd were too busy with the Brustellinite to notice the sacrifice. Warhawk felt the thrill of his kill, knowing the Device was one death closer to completion. He already heard the clouds calling to him and could feel the magnetic pull of the stars.

Belle let the watchman fall and his body tumbled into the crowd. Shrieks and screams rose into the night and his bird spiralled up away from the sacrifice.

He heard his name, repeated over and over, and stretched out his wrist for his faithful servant.

People were pointing up at him. He took care to be silhouetted against the clockface. He was not like the Beast, skulking in shadows and fogs. He was a clean predator of the skies and his daring was a message. A message to the ground-crawlers he despised, to the watchman who could never catch him, to the spirit of his departed father.

He was the Warhawk!

Belle landed on his wrist and he brought her close to his leather-covered mouth. He kissed her bloodied beak, feeling the warm wetness through his mask.

Climbers were already attempting to scale the bank. But by the time they reached his perch, he would have long since flown. With the song of the air in his heart, his devoted bird on his wrist, he disappeared from the clock platform. A touch of disappointment leapt inside him – disappointment that this was not the thirteenth sacrifice, that feet and hands not wings were the instruments of his escape... He began to make his pre-planned way down to the hated ground.

EVERY TIME THIS happened, more people found an excuse to loiter around the abused corpse and get in the way. All of them had shit they wanted to dump on Harald, but none of them were prepared to get in an orderly queue and take their turn. Standing by the dead watchman – undisturbed since the killing – was like being in the middle of a group of squawking vultures.

They all shouted at him at once, protesting, abusing, questioning.

Captain Harald Kleindeinst – ‘Filthy Harald’ to some – tried to block out the noise and concentrate on the job. This time, his job was Klaus-Ulric Stahlman, forty-three, constable of the watch, Altdorf-born, wife and three children, dead in the Konigplatz gutter. A twenty-year flatfoot, his life had been spent walking the streets, clubbing trouble-makers, warming his swelling guts in defiance of regulations with peach schnapps, hauling in the more obvious drunks and whores, chasing fleet-foot pick-pockets and hanging around bored in the drizzle waiting for his shift to end. His record showed no promotions, no commendations, no complaints, nothing. The station captain, Katz, could barely remember him.

Stahlman had to be identified from his badge number. The bird had lifted the scalp and skin off his skull as if removing a hood. The collar of his uniform and the front of his tabard were stained with his blood, and there were vertical slashes where scabbling claws – augmented by sharpened metal attachments – had torn. Harald was long past losing his lunch over such things, but these mutilations were becoming monotonously familiar. The Warhawk was a great leveller; grand duchess or scrubwoman, great general or fat old copper: all were equal with their faces off.

Ignoring the ghoulish sensation-seekers, the crowd consisted of six ordinary watchmen, four from the Konigplatz district and two from Harald’s own Atrocities Commission: Captain Katz of the Konigplatz, greatcoat over his nightshirt; three pests from competing broadsheets, scratching nasty details on little tablets; a pale-looking physician from the Temple of Shallya, who had been passing and was drafted in to give the gory details; Ehrich Viereck, former commandant of the Commission, still gnawing away at the edges of the case; and Rasselas, supposedly an official of the Imperial Bank, actually a spy in the pay of Chancellor Mornan Tybalt. Within minutes of the murder, the news was all over the city, and the vultures were gathering in the place where the hawk had been.

Harald nodded and one of his watchmen draped a canvas sheet over Stahlman. That made the bloodthirsters lose interest and drift away. Katz and Viereck were muttering together, hatching a scheme to haul Harald off the case. After nine – no, ten –

corpses, Harald would not ordinarily have minded. Only he couldn't live with the idea of the Warhawk walking, or flapping, away free. These killings were a personal affront now, each corpse another bleeding wound. Harald would end them or be ended himself.

Rasselas was concerned that the men Harald had sent up to the cupola be careful not to disturb the delicate machine. He was being explicit on the point. Harald wondered whether the Warhawk had selected his perch on purpose, to involve Tybalt and the Imperial counting house in the investigation. Few things were as guaranteed to hinder the path of a watchman as the helpful hand of that olive-eyed, sallow-skinned, one-thumbed schemer. Harald had met Tybalt briefly during the Great Fog Riots, while in pursuit of the Beast, the last pattern-killer to plague the city.

'Well,' Viereck snapped, chewing at the wounds, 'this is what your "softly, softly" methods achieved, Kleindeinst. A watchman dead and the whole city laughing at us.'

'Feel free to apprehend and execute the Warhawk again, Ehrich,' Harald said, calmly, shutting Viereck up.

When the Warhawk had first struck, no one had believed there was a human agency involved in the killings, and the militia had gone around with crossbows skewering every pigeon and duck in the skies. Someone took it into his head to slaughter the ravens that traditionally flocked around the west tower of the Emperor's palace. Street-dwellers and hovel-huddlers who hadn't tasted meat in their lives were suddenly able to eat fowl every night. Then, when the black-hooded Warhawk had been seen with his bird, Viereck had taken over. His investigative methods were simple, brutal and grossly ineffective.

After each killing, he found a vaguely likely suspect – a commercial falconer, an unliked ornithologist, a rat-catcher who used a hawk – and made an arrest, announcing that he would put them to the torture until the case was solved. After a few days in Mundsens Keep with Viereck and some expensive equipment, the suspect would confess and be hanged, whereupon there would be jubilation in the street, Viereck would be declared the hero of the day, and the Warhawk would strike again, leaving another clawed corpse in the street and an Atrocities Commission in search of a new suspect.

'At least the investigation was making progress when I was in charge, Kleindeinst,' Viereck blustered.

Harald looked at the man, fixing him with his eyes, and Viereck looked away, sweating.

After three hangings, Viereck had been removed from his position – it was rumoured at the insistence of the Emperor himself – and Harald Kleindeinst had been seconded from the Dock Watch to head the investigation of the killings. Now, three months and four victims later, he knew no more than the day he had first heard of the murders.

'This cannot go on,' Rasselas insisted, stating the obvious, 'business is suffering. People are withdrawing funds from the bank and leaving the city. There'll be a crisis.'

The first to leave the city – as usual, Harald reflected – had been the Imperial family. Officially, they were spending the summer on the Ostland estates of the Grand Prince Hals von Tasseninck, another green velvet-set jewel among mankind, so the young Prince Luitpold could gain some experience of life in the provinces. Harald guessed the House of the Second Wilhelm was actually scared of the caress of claws that held no respect for lineage and breeding.

These were not like the Beast's killings, when only street drabs had suffered. Thus far, clerics, militiamen, titled ladies, green-grocers and street urchins had fallen alike under the talons. Everyone was in danger, and those who could afford it were removing themselves.

'The shipping lines are taking all their business to Marienburg,' Rasselas prattled on. 'It's beyond reason.'

Baron Joachim von Unheimlich, patron of the ultra-aristocratic League of Karl-Franz, was advocating Altdorf be placed under martial law, and that troops quell the uprising obviously being fomented by the Warhawk. It was the Beast scenario all over again, the killings were being used by every faction to their own ends. It was Harald's job to set all these distractions aside and to home in on the killer himself. Or herself. In all probability, these were not political crimes, crimes for gain, or even crimes for sport.

These were pattern killings, the work of a clever madman who made his own rules and stuck to them. If he could understand the Warhawk's rules, then he had a chance of catching him.

'The Konigplatz Watch Widows and Orphans Society will place an additional reward,' Katz of the 'platz announced to the scribblers, 'of one hundred crowns. Our fallen brother, Schlieman, will be avenged.'

'Stahlman?' asked an ink-fingered writer, only to be ignored.

Another broadsheet character had bribed a copper to lift the canvas and was sketching the dead man's red-covered skull.

Harald realised he was in danger of losing control of the investigation. The Atrocities Commission was not what he was used to. It had too many men, too many ledgers, too many conventions. The resources should have helped, but he was hobbled by them. He missed the days when he was a lone hunter, just him and the quarry, stalking the streets until the chase was over.

Viereck knelt by the corpse, and began praying loudly to Ulric and Sigmar, calling their wrath down upon the foul murderer, then turning his profile so the sketch artist could include him in his picture. Noticing this, Katz too bent over, thrusting his studiously grim face into the area the man was sketching, trying to look resolute. The two watchmen seemed more than ever like ghouls, lurching on the dead man's entrails.

'Captain Kleindeinst,' asked another of the reporters, 'how do you react to suggestions that your lax approach to wrong-doers has proved an encouragement to the Warhawk murderer?'

Years ago, when he had killed an elector's nephew who was on the point of raping and murdering a servant, this reporter's sheet had branded him a monstrous thug whose excesses should be curbed with the lash.

'I react by feeding the suggester his own boots and kicking him off the docks.'

The reporter made a great show of writing that down.

A fly coach trundled into the 'platz, and Harald felt almost relieved. With her around, things might start moving again. One of his watchmen opened the carriage door and a slim young woman with red hair stepped out. She didn't look like much, but she was the best hope Harald had of snaring the Warhawk.

'Let me through,' Rosanna Ophuls told the crowds, 'I'm a scryer.'

Can Harald Kleindeinst end the Warhawk's reign of terror? Read the conclusion of this blood-soaked tale in [SILVERNAILS](#).



### Also by Jack Yeovil

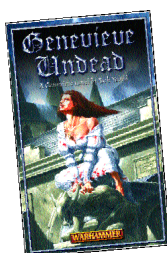
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