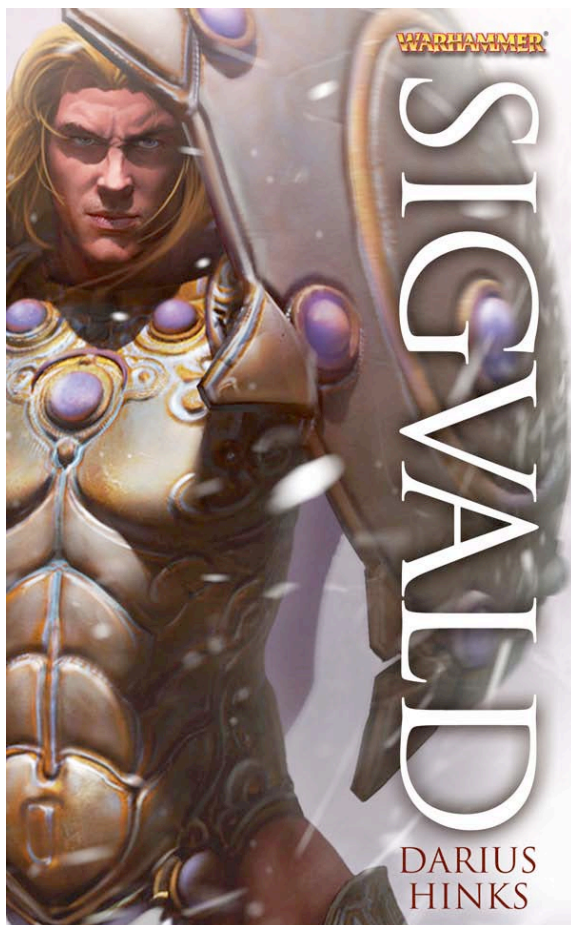




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# SIGVALD

*A Warhammer Heroes novel*

*By Darius Hinks*

**Prince Sigvald the Magnificent** has struck a pact with his Slaaneshi masters that bestows incredible power and beauty, but drives him to ever greater acts of hedonism. Despite his pre-eminence, the champion of Chaos is tricked into an impossible war with the promise of a powerful artefact to slake his dark desires. After centuries of debauchery, Sigvald rouses his army and leads them to battle against the legions of the Blood God Khorne. Obsessed with the Brass Skull, the object of his misguided yearnings, Sigvald is unaware his enemies are closing in around him. In a hellish quest that drives him across the twisted landscape of the Chaos Wastes and culminates in an epic confrontation, he realises that the lures of Slaanesh can never be sated.

## **About the Author**

After a music career so disastrous it landed him in court, **Darius Hinks** decided a job in publishing might be safer. His fiction for the Black Library includes *The Witch Hunter's Handbook*, *The Island of Blood* and *Warrior Priest*. Rumours that he still has a banjo hidden in his loft are fiercely refuted by his lawyers.

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SIGVALD HACKED WILDLY with a borrowed axe, driven into a frenzy by his lack of progress. He and his men had butchered the dwarfs and destroyed the guns, but as soon as they made it down into the courtyard they ground to a halt. Crowds of warriors blocked their way, clad in thick, serrated armour and snarling canine helmets. Sigvald slipped through them like a zephyr, easily dodging their brutal axes and slow, lumbering blows, but however quickly he sliced them apart, more rushed to replace them, trapping his knights in the corner of the courtyard. He could see Víga-Barói and the baron by the gates, surrounded by the same horde. The warriors' armour was blood-red and edged with twisted, brass spikes and as they hacked off the heads of Sigvald's men they roared with pleasure. It was rare that Mord Huk's guns allowed them such sport.

'To the next circle!' cried Sigvald. 'Find Mord Huk!' He levelled his axe at a second pair of brass gates and began hacking his way towards them.

More of Sigvald's personal honour guard were rushing down from the wall behind him and at the sight of their heroic prince they slammed into Mord Huk's warriors with such force that they finally began to shove them back.

Over by the gates, Víga-Barói's men saw what was happening and tried to follow. As the defenders struggled to protect themselves from Sigvald's frenzied attack, Víga-Barói and his men charged into their backs, attempting to make some progress of their own.

Sigvald swung his axe down into the warrior below him. The blade bit deep through the man's gorget and embedded itself in his thick neck. The brute toppled to the ground in a spray of

blood, bellowing with rage as Sigvald rolled clear, leaving the axe in his shattered armour.

As the prince clambered to his feet, several of his own men finally caught up with him and formed a defensive circle.

As they raised their mirrored shields to protect him, Sigvald let out a gasp of horror. 'Look at me,' he cried, seeing his reflection and clutching his face in shock. The man's blood had drenched Sigvald's head and shoulders, staining his blond locks with thick, red gore. His usually perfect mane was clotted and matted with the stuff, giving Sigvald the look of a deranged prophet. As his men fought desperately to protect him, the prince tried to wipe himself clean, staring into the polished metal and moaning in horror at his bedraggled appearance. 'I'm hideous,' he cried, unable to pull the muck from his hair. 'Someone clean me.' He whirled around, his face purple with rage as he scanned the courtyard. 'Oddrún? Where are you?'

The chancellor was trapped at the foot of the outer wall, looming awkwardly over the battling figures and still clutching the gold casket to his chest. The prince let out an incoherent howl as he launched himself at the dog-helmed warriors. His own guards struggled to follow him as he charged back into the melee, flooring one of the warriors with a single punch and grabbing the axe that slipped from his grip. Grasping the brutal weapon in both hands, he began hacking his way through the enemy, cursing them for making him so ugly. Mord Huk's men were all towering brutes and clad in thick plate armour, but the slender figure of Sigvald sliced through them with incredible ease. None of them had ever faced an opponent who fought with such easy grace. A shower of heads and limbs surrounded the youth as he powered his way towards the second set of gates. It was only when he was almost halfway across the courtyard that Sigvald realised that none of his men had managed to follow him. Dozens of the crude, bestial helmets surrounded him as he saw that Víga-Barói and the others were still trapped at the foot of the outer wall, fighting for their lives as more of the red and brass warriors clattered into the courtyard.

Sigvald let out another howl of frustration as he saw that his entire army was on the brink of collapse. The press of bodies was too great for them to reach him and every minute they spent in the courtyard saw more of them dropping to the

ground. 'Where's Mord Huk?' he said through gritted teeth. 'I *will* have that helmet.' However many knights he felled though, he was unable to progress any further. The warriors' laughter echoed harshly in the snouts of their grotesque helmets as they began to gradually wear him down.

As the prince felt his arms beginning to weaken, he finally realised the danger of his position. Even he could not survive alone for long against such determined foes and there was still no sign of the brass helmet. 'I must have it,' he hissed, booting one warrior in the groin and hammering his axe down into the head of another, but it was useless: the crush of bodies was too great. Sigvald found himself being forced slowly back towards his own men. He howled and threw the axe down in disgust. Then he collapsed backwards in a faint, causing his attackers to clash into each other in confusion. As the tightly packed ranks of warriors stumbled and crashed to the ground, Sigvald span away with an acrobatic roll, landing on his feet and dashing back towards the gates.

His men had banded together beneath the billowing silk curtains to make a desperate last stand. As Sigvald approached them, his blood-splattered face was furious. 'Pathetic!' he screamed, punching the first man he reached. 'You can't even kill this pack of morons.'

There was a clatter of metal as Víga-Barói and Baron Schüler shouldered their way towards him.

'My prince,' said Víga-Barói with a low bow. 'We're outnumbered. It's impossible.'

Baron Schüler shook his head wildly, his eyes wide with shock and his sword hanging limply in his hand.

Sigvald clutched his long hair in his fists and howled again. '*Nothing* is impossible,' he roared, yanking his own head from side to side. Then he loosed his hair and grabbed Víga-Barói by the throat, pressing their faces together. 'We need to conquer that citadel. Do you understand? We *need* to.'

Víga-Barói dropped to his knees and shook his head. 'We can't do it, prince, not without more help.'

'You can't stop now, prince,' gasped Schüler.

Sigvald dealt Víga-Barói a fierce backhanded blow that sent him sprawling across the skull-covered ground. 'Idiot,' he spat, looking down at him in disgust. The prince's cheeks grew even darker as

his head continued to twitch and shake. He clamped his hands over his head again, trying to hold it steady. 'Very well,' he said, nodding briefly at Schüler and then looking back out along the bridge. 'More help he says. So be it.' He stepped over the fawning knight at his feet and strode from the courtyard.

'My prince,' gasped Baron Schüler, racing after him. An explosion of grinding metal drew his gaze back to the battle. The full force of Mord Huk's army was now piling into them and, as he watched in horror, Sigvald's army buckled and collapsed in the face of the onslaught.

'Pull back,' cried Víga-Barói, lurching to his feet and staggering back towards the curtains.

Sigvald did not look back as he stormed across the bridge with Oddrún hurrying after him. He seemed to have lost all interest in the battle and muttered curses under his breath as he pulled at his tangled hair.

'Énka,' roared Víga-Barói as he fought desperately to defend himself and stumbled back out onto the bridge. 'The gates!'

The tiny hooded figure was still clutching onto the billowing material, but he had dropped to his knees and his head was lolling weakly on his shoulders.

'Let go!' snapped Víga-Barói as a red and brass wave rushed towards them. Énka gave no response and seemed to be in some kind of trance.

'Let go!' repeated Víga-Barói, booting Énka away from the curtains and sending him sprawling across the bridge.

Barely half of Sigvald's army made it out of the courtyard before the gates reassumed their solid, brass reality. Several knights were trapped, their organs enveloped by the metal, and even more remained on the other side, moaning with pleasure as they were hacked apart by the victorious defenders.

'Prince, your men are being massacred,' cried Oddrún, struggling to keep up with the gold-clad figure.

Sigvald gave no reply but after a few minutes he stumbled to a halt, noticing an arc of delicate silverwork beneath the corpses. He dropped to his knees and began flinging bodies aside, still muttering to himself as he uncovered one of the chariots he had used to assault the wall. 'Wake up!' he howled, lifting a broken bird from the bodies and shaking it violently in both hands, surrounding himself in a cloud of white feathers. The eagle was

clearly dead and he threw it back down in disgust. Then he grabbed another one and began shaking that, screaming in frustration as its head flopped about in his grip. 'Fly, you wretched bird,' he howled, throwing it up in the air. It slammed back down a few feet away and the prince dropped to his knees with a groan of despair. He was covered in drying blood and as the feathers settled over him, they lodged in his matted hair and stuck to his tacky armour. 'Look at me,' he spat, holding up his feathered arms to Oddrún. 'I look ridiculous.'

Oddrún stooped down and grabbed Sigvald by the shoulders, dragging him up from the bodies. 'You have to save them,' he said, turning the prince to face the knights clambering back across the bridge. 'When Mord Huk learns of this he will head straight for the Gilded Palace. What's to stop him now? You've broken all the old accords. He's free to do as he pleases. You have to keep your army alive, Sigvald. How else can you prepare any kind of defence? You have to lead them home.'

Sigvald shoved Oddrún away with a sneer. '*Have to?*' He lifted his chin disdainfully and attempted to flatten his knotted, sticky mane of hair. 'I think not, old friend. Sigvald the Magnificent doesn't *have* to do anything.' He waved at the twitching limbs that surrounded them. 'I've indulged these indolent brats for far too long. They're too soft. Too pampered.' He leant closer to Oddrún and lowered his voice. 'But I *will* have that brass skull, Oddrún, make no mistake about it.' He pointed north, beyond the glinting peaks of the mountains. 'If no one else can help me, I'm sure our patron will.'

Oddrún struggled to control his disjointed limbs for a second, holding up his long arms to steady himself. Then he shook his head. 'What are you saying? You've already given Belus Pül your soul. What else can you bargain with?'

Sigvald laughed bitterly. 'Daemons are rarely lacking in imagination. I'm sure there will be something I can offer in return for such a small favour.' His cheeks flushed purple and he jabbed a finger at the fortress. 'I will *not* be denied my prize. Not by a dog-brained oaf and a bunch of witless apes.'

Oddrún shook his head again. 'Don't do this,' he said, with mounting panic in his voice. 'Think about what you're suggesting.'

'Pah!' said Sigvald, nodding at Oddrún's trembling, hunched



body. 'Look where thinking got you.'

Oddrún lowered his head.

The prince looked pained for a second, seeming to regret his words, then he waved his hand dismissively and stormed off across the bridge. 'I'll be back in a day or two and then I'll level this place to the ground.'

Oddrún stood in silence for a few minutes, rubbing his hands together and shaking his head, then he lurched after the receding figure of the prince, swinging his legs in great swooping strides.

As the two figures disappeared into the whirling banks of snow, still bickering, a column of survivors trailed after them, led by Víga-Barói, wearing his perpetual sneer as he waved his men on through the drifts. Every now and then he turned to look back at one of the knights and laugh at his haunted, anguished expression. 'Keep up, baron,' he called, holding his sword aloft. 'They're headed north. Looks like the fun's just beginning.'

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

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