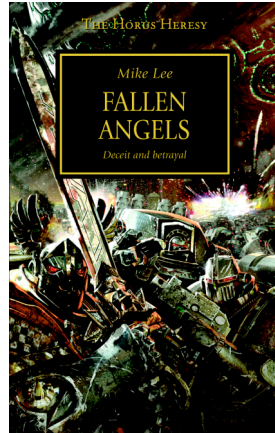


# ***FALLEN ANGELS***

*A Horus Heresy novel*

*By Mike Lee*

As news of Horus's treachery spreads, the Great Crusade grinds to a halt as the primarchs and their Legions decide where their loyalty lies – with the Emperor, or the rebel Warmaster Horus. In this sequel to *Descent of Angels*, the Dark Angels too face a time of testing, both in the stars, and on their home world, Caliban.



## **About the Author**

Mike Lee was the principal creator and developer for White Wolf Game Studio's *Demon: The Fallen*. Over the last eight years he has contributed to almost two dozen role-playing games and supplements. An avid wargamer and devoted fan of pulp adventure, Mike lives in the United States.

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TALES OF HERESY

Edited by Kyme and Priestley

The following is an excerpt from *Fallen Angels* by Mike Lee.  
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There were no trumpets to announce their arrival, no cheering crowds to welcome them home. They returned to Caliban in the dead of night, dropping down through the sullen clouds of a late autumn storm.

One by one the drop ships broke through the heavy overcast, their white undercarriage lights knifing through the gloom as they swept down to the landing field below. For a few moments the black hulls of the Stormbirds were highlighted by the harsh yellow glow of the space port lights, picking out the winged sword insignia of the Emperor's First Legion on the transports' broad wings. The assault ships flared their thrusters and settled onto the landing pad amid billowing clouds of hissing steam. Moments later came the iron clang of assault ramps striking permacrete, followed by the heavy tread of armoured feet; huge, broad-shouldered giants emerged from the roiling mists. Rain lashed at the curved plates of the Dark Angels' black power armour and soaked the white surplises of the warrior-initiates. Here and there, orbs of blurry crimson light leaked from the oculars of battle helms, but for the most part the Astartes had bared their faces to the storm. Water beaded on heavy brows and blunt cheekbones, on gleaming data plugs and shaven pates. To a man, their expressions were as stern and impassive as stone.

The Astartes marched to the far end of the permacrete and formed into silent ranks facing the Stormbirds, their boltguns held at port arms. There were no proud banners to raise above the serried lines, nor bold champions to anchor the files with their ceremonial harness and master-crafted blades. All those honours had been left behind with their parent chapters, still fighting with the primarch and the Fourth Expeditionary Fleet at Sarosh. Their armour was polished and unadorned; only a few bore the traces of battle scars mended during the long journey. Since leaving Caliban to join the Emperor's Crusade they had participated in just a single campaign; few of them had seen any combat at all before receiving the order to return home.

Thrusters roared as empty Stormbirds lifted ponderously into the air, making room for still more drop ships descending through the iron-grey cloud cover. The ranks of the returning warriors swelled, rapidly filling the northern edge of the landing field. It took more than four hours to transport the entire contingent to the planet's surface, with the assault ships working in steady rotation; the assembled warriors waited and watched in complete silence, stolid and immovable as statues while the wind howled and the storm raged about them.

Two hours before dawn, the last of the transport flights touched down. The ranks of Astartes stirred slightly as warriors roused themselves from meditative rotes and came to full attention as the last four Stormbirds lowered their ramps and their passengers disembarked.

First came the wounded; Astartes who had suffered grievous injuries during the combat landings at Sarosh, their comatose forms borne on grav-sleds and watched over by attentive Legion Apothecaries. Next was the guard of honour, comprised of the most senior warrior-

initiates in the cadre. In the lead marched Brother-Librarian Israfael, his dour face hidden within the depths of a wide samite hood. Each of the Astartes in the guard of honour wore surplices hemmed with ruby, sapphire, emerald, adamantine or gold, signifying their devotion to one of the Higher Mysteries. All, that is, except one. Zahariel marched ten steps behind Brother Israfael, his head hooded like that of his mentor and his armoured hands tucked into the broad sleeves of his plain surplice. He felt self-conscious and out of place among the champions and senior initiates, but Israfael had been adamant.

‘You saved everyone on Sarosh,’ the Librarian had declared, back aboard the Wrath of Caliban, ‘including the primarch himself. And you spend more time at Luther’s side these days than all the rest of us combined. If you don’t deserve to stand in the honour guard, none of us do.’

The guard of honour followed at a measured pace behind their wounded brothers, who passed slowly by the waiting ranks of Dark Angels and then took their leave, headed for Aldurukh’s extensive medicae wards. Israfael halted the guard of honour before the assembled Astartes and with a murmured command ordered a sharp about-face. Twelve boots crashed down in unison on the rain-slick permacrete and every warrior stiffened to attention. Rain drummed against Zahariel’s hood, plastering it slowly to the top of his shaved head.

Across the landing field the assault ramp on the Stormbird lowered with a faint hiss of hydraulics. Ruddy light spilled down the ramp, casting a long, martial shadow onto the scorched pavement as a single, armoured figure emerged into the stormy night.

At just that moment, the driving rain slackened and the howling wind receded like an indrawn breath as Luther set foot on Caliban once more. The former knight was clad in gleaming armour of black and gold, forged in the close-fitting Calibanite fashion rather than the larger, bulkier Crusader-pattern suits favoured by the Astartes. A curved adamantine combat shield bearing the insignia of a Calibanite wyrm was strapped to the knight's upper left arm, while his right pauldron bore the winged sword insignia of the Emperor's First Legion on a dark green field. On Luther's left hip rode Nightfall, the fearsome hand-and-a-half power sword gifted to him in happier days by Lion El'Jonson himself; in a holster on his right sat an old and well-worn pistol that had seen much use in the monster-haunted forests of Caliban. A winged great helm concealed the knight's features and a heavy black cloak swirled about his feet as he strode swiftly to the assembled warriors.

Every eye was upon Luther as he came to a halt precisely twenty paces from the Astartes and surveyed their ranks with glowing, implacable eyes. Though he had been given many of the same physical augmentations as Zahariel and the rest, Luther had been too old to receive the gene-seed as they had. They towered head and shoulders over him, and yet his sheer physical presence seemed to fill the space around him, making him seem far larger than he actually was. Even Israfael, a Terran by birth, seemed slightly awed by Jonson's second-in-command. He was the sort of man that came along once in a thousand years, a man who might have united all of Caliban but for the appearance of another, even greater figure: Lion El'Jonson himself.

Luther surveyed the Astartes for a moment longer, then reached up and drew off his helm. He had a handsome,

square-jawed face, with strong cheekbones and an aquiline nose. His eyes were dark and piercing, like chips of polished obsidian. His hair was black as jet and cropped close to his skull.

Thunder rumbled off to the south and the wind began to pick up again, blowing a curtain of cold rain across the landing field. Luther turned his face to the heavens and closed his eyes, and Zahariel thought he saw the ghost of a smile play across his face as the drops struck his cheeks. The precipitation grew into a steady, pelting shower once more.

Zahariel watched as Luther took a deep breath and glanced back at the assembled troops. This time his grin was broad and comradely, but Zahariel saw that the smile didn't reach all the way to Luther's eyes.

'Welcome home, brothers,' Luther said, his powerful speaking voice carrying easily over the rain and the wind, and eliciting rueful chuckles from the Astartes in the front ranks. 'I regret that I can't promise you a grand feast, such as welcomed the questing knights of old. If we're lucky and we're bold, perhaps we can stage a quick raid on Master Luwin's kitchen and make off with some fresh victuals before the day's work begins.'

Many of the Dark Angels laughed at the thought, remembering Luwin, the roaring tyrant of the kitchens at old Aldurukh. Zahariel chuckled in spite of himself, thinking back to his days as an aspirant and remembering fondly the halls and courtyards of the fortress. For the first time since leaving Sarosh, he found himself looking forward to seeing Aldurukh again.

Before the laughter could entirely subside, Luther tucked his helmet under his right arm and nodded to his honour guard. 'All right,' he said. 'Let's go see how much the old rock has changed in our absence.'

Without another word, Luther turned on his heel and set off for the landing field's access road, his shoulders straight and his head held high. Immediately his honour guard fell into step behind him, and then moments later the pavement resounded with the thunder of hundreds of armoured feet as the rest of the cadre began the march to the distant fortress.

Luther marched at the head of the column like a conquering hero, returning to Caliban in glory rather than exile. It was an impressive performance, Zahariel thought, but he wondered if any of his brothers were fooled by it.

Officially, they had been ordered back to Caliban because the Great Crusade was about to enter a new operational phase, and the First Legion was in dire need of new recruits to meet the tasks the Emperor had planned for them. The Lion declared that experienced warriors were needed at home to speed up the training process, and a list of names was drawn up and circulated throughout the fleet. Little more than a week after being deployed on their first campaign, Zahariel and more than five hundred of his brothers – over half a chapter – discovered they had been dismissed.

The news had stunned them all. Zahariel had seen it in the eyes of his battle brothers as they'd mustered on the embarkation deck to begin the long trip back to Caliban. If the Legion needed warriors so badly, why were they being pulled from the front lines? Training recruits was a job for elders, men who were full of wisdom but past their physical prime. That was the way it had been on their homeworld for generations – and it had escaped no one that virtually all of the Astartes being sent home were from Caliban rather than Terra.



Ironically, it was the announcement that Luther himself would take charge of the recruitment effort that convinced them something was wrong. Luther, the man who had been Jonson's right hand for decades, and who had risen to become the Legion's second-in-command despite not being an Astartes himself, had no business leaving the Crusade to train young recruits at Aldurukh. He was being sent as far from the Lion as possible, and the rest of the cadre were being exiled along with him. They followed their orders to the letter, without question or hesitation, as they had been trained to do. But Zahariel could see the doubts that had taken root inside each of his battle brothers. What did we do? How have we failed him? But Luther gave the Astartes little opportunity to speculate; once the Wrath of Caliban entered the warp he established a rigorous regimen of equipment maintenance, combat training and readiness drills that kept idle time to an absolute minimum. To all intents and purposes, it appeared that the Legion's second-in-command took the primarch at his word and intended to fulfil his assigned task to the best of his ability. When he wasn't taking an active role inspecting wargear or supervising combat exercises, Luther spent the rest of his time secluded in his quarters, drafting plans for overhauling the training practices at Aldurukh. Zahariel was kept as busy as the rest, although he quickly found himself exempted from the more mundane aspects of the shipboard inspections and readiness drills in favour of training his psychic powers under the tutelage of Brother-Librarian Israfael – and acting as Luther's unofficial aide-de-camp. The order had come down shortly after the voyage began. Luther required an assistant to help draft the orders for the new training scheme and organise the

ongoing activities aboard ship. He had chosen Zahariel personally for the job. Most assumed that he'd chosen the young Astartes because of their shared exploits during the Saroshi assassination attempt aboard the primarch's flagship, the Invincible Reason. They were correct in their assumption, but not for the reasons they imagined.

The Saroshi had been a highly cultured people who hid a terrible canker at the heart of their civilization. Sometime during the nightmare known as the Age of Strife they had sealed a pact with a horrific entity in exchange for their survival. When the Dark Angels had assumed the task of formalising Saroshi compliance, the Saroshi leaders had attempted to assassinate their primarch by smuggling an atomic warhead onto the flagship. Had the bomb not been discovered and dealt with by Luther and Zahariel, the Legion would have been dealt a catastrophic blow – or so the story went.

Luther never brought up the incident during the length of the voyage back to Caliban, but the question hung in the air between them. Had Jonson suspected the truth? Was that why Luther had been sent away, and was Zahariel being punished by virtue of his association to the event? There was no way to know.

The space port was one of five within a two-hundred-square-kilometre perimeter around the Legion fortress of Aldurukh. Zahariel could remember a time when the land had been covered in dense forest that teemed with deadly plant and animal life. Caliban was considered by Imperial planetologists to be a 'death world' – a planet that wasn't merely dangerous but actively inimical to human life. Every day had been a struggle for survival, and life was both brutal and often very short. It was only

through the courage and sacrifice of the planet's knightly orders that humanity survived at all.

Lion El'Jonson had united all the knightly orders under his leadership and had led a successful campaign to eradicate the deadliest of Caliban's monsters, but the final blow had come in the form of the Imperium. The Emperor's servants had descended on the planet with enormous machines that cleared dozens of kilometres of forest a day and left flat, lifeless earth in their wake. Mines, refineries and manufactorums had followed, ready to transform the planet's abundant resources into vital war materiel for the Emperor's Crusade. Cities were built to supply the sprawling industrial sites, growing upwards and outwards with each passing year as villages and towns were emptied and their citizens relocated to better serve the Imperium.

In the past, more than two dozen villages and settlements had supported the fortress of Aldurukh, providing everything from food to clothing, metal ore and medicines so that the knights were free to hone their skills and defend the land from the beasts. All of them were gone now; the land surrounding the fortress had been levelled and transformed into a vast military and logistical complex. Zahariel would have been hard-put to recall where any of the villages had once stood. Now, in addition to the space ports, there were training centres, barracks, arsenals, storehouses and maintenance yards stretching as far as the eye could see, all dedicated to supplying the Legion with the men and equipment it needed to fulfil its role in the Great Crusade.

Even at such a late hour, the cadre went almost unnoticed in the bustling activity surrounding the fortress. Cargo lifters and shuttles came and went between the space ports and the harbours in high orbit,

ferrying supplies and personnel destined for the front lines. The Dark Angels passed long convoys of ordnance haulers and supply trucks on their way to and from the landing fields. Platoons of armoured vehicles roared past, heading for the marshalling yards south of the fortress or to the training grounds for the Legion's auxiliary Imperial Army units. Once, a regiment of new Army recruits stopped in its tracks and shuffled quickly off the road to let the Astartes pass. The young men and women in their crisp new battle-dress stared open-mouthed at the marching giants and the golden-armoured figure who led them.

They marched through the rain and the wind for ten kilometres, passing through curtain walls made from permacrete and studded with defensive shield projectors and automated weapon emplacements. The closer they drew to Aldurukh, the denser and higher the structures grew, until finally the Astartes found themselves marching down man-made canyons lit solely by globes of artificial light.

Yet Aldurukh rose above all else, a bastion of strength and tradition surrounded by a sea of constant change. Its granite flanks had been scraped bare by Imperial construction machines; even now, titanic excavators scaled its sheer sides, carving out ledges and boring tunnels deep into the rock as the fortress continued to expand into the heart of the mountain itself. Zahariel had heard of plans to one day create a series of gates at the foot of the mountain that would provide access to the fortress's subterranean levels as well as lifts that would carry passengers up into the centre of the fortress within seconds. For all its efficiency, the notion seemed vaguely offensive to him; the path up the Errant's Road to the castle gates had been trod by the knights of the Order for

centuries, and had taken on great spiritual significance in their legends and lore. His brothers could ride the lifts if they preferred; he intended to walk the path built by his elders for as long as he was able.

To his relief, the fortress hadn't yet changed so much in the years he'd been away. At the base of the mountain, rising incongruously to either side of a narrow, paved lane that passed between two towering barracks facilities, stood the ancient, weathered menhirs that marked the foot of the old road. The old stones depicted the beginning and ending stages of a knight's journey: the left menhir was carved in the likeness of a proud knight striding forth into the world, pistol and chainsword in hand; the one on the right showed a battered and weary warrior, his armour splintered and his weapons broken, kneeling wearily but with head held high as he contemplated his return home. Zahariel smiled to see Luther brush his fingertips lightly against the right-hand menhir as he passed by, a tradition that reached back to the earliest days of their brotherhood. He repeated the gesture, feeling the smooth stone beneath his fingertips and thinking of the generations of his forbears who had done the same, stretching back for millennia.

The storm broke as they trod the narrow, winding road, though the wind still tangled their surplices and tugged at their hoods as the clouds paled with the first light of dawn. The climb, though long, passed quicker than Zahariel expected. After what seemed like only a couple of hours he found himself upon a broad, paved square that in times past had been a forested clearing, where aspirants to the Order once spent a long and harrowing night before the castle gates.

Now those gates were thrown wide open as the Dark Angels approached, and Zahariel saw with surprise that the courtyard beyond was filled with ranks of young recruits, arrayed to create a procession that led to the feet of the castle's outer citadel. The recruits had been assembled in haste; many of them stared at the new arrivals with an equal mix of curiosity and surprise. Luther led his warriors down the length of the procession as though he'd expected the impromptu assembly all along. At the far end of the long line of recruits waited two figures: one wasted and bent with age, the other clad in dark armour and a surplice hemmed with gold. He stopped at a respectful distance from the two, and behind him the cadre of Astartes came to a thundering halt.

As if on cue, the assembled recruits sank to one knee and bowed their heads to the golden knight. A trumpet pealed from the castle gatehouse, the traditional signal for a knight home from a long and dangerous quest. Master Remiel, of late the Castellan of Aldurukh, knelt before Luther as well. Behind Remiel, Lord Cypher inclined his head respectfully to the Legion's second-in-command, though Zahariel could not help but notice a faint glitter of amusement in the warrior's eyes. Cypher was not a name, but a title; one that went back to the earliest days of the Order. His role was to maintain the traditions, customs and history of the brotherhood, as well as maintaining the integrity of the Higher Mysteries – the advanced tactics and teachings shared with the senior initiates. Because he was the literal personification of the Order and its beliefs, once a man took the role of Cypher he gave up his proper name from that moment forward. He was the brotherhood's touchstone, a knight of great experience and wisdom

who held little real power but wielded enormous influence within the organisation.

The current Lord Cypher was even more of an enigma than most, not least because of his youth and lack of seniority within the brotherhood. When Lion El'Jonson became Grand Master of the Order it had been expected that he would name Master Remiel to the position; instead, he raised up a little-known knight younger than Luther or many other high-ranking peers. It was said that the new Cypher had been trained at one of the Order's lesser fortresses, near the beast-haunted Northwolds, but even that was little more than rumour. No one could fathom Jonson's decision, but no one had found cause to complain about it, either. By all accounts, the current Cypher was more of a reclusive, scholarly figure than previous bearers of the title, spending long hours poring through the libraries and record vaults hidden within the castle – though the paired pistols at his belt hinted that he was as capable a fighter as anyone else in the brotherhood.

Luther seemed genuinely surprised by Master Remiel's gesture of fealty. He stepped forward quickly, extending his hand. 'Do your knees trouble you, Master?' he said. 'Please, let me help you up.' He looked left and right, taking in the ranks of kneeling recruits. 'Rise, all of you, in the Lion's name,' he said, his voice ringing from the walls of the citadel. 'We are all brothers here, with no man set above another. Is that not so, Lord Cypher?' Cypher inclined his head to Luther once more. 'It is indeed,' he replied in a quiet voice. The faintest of smiles played across Cypher's face. 'Something we would all do well to remember.'

Master Remiel stared at Luther's outstretched hand for a moment. Reluctantly, he accepted the offer and rose

stiffly to his feet. He had aged a great deal in the past few years, Zahariel saw, and seemed almost diminutive between the towering figure of Cypher and Luther's enhanced stature. Like most of the senior members of the Order, Remiel had been accepted into the Legion, but was far too old to receive the Dark Angels' gene-seed. Strangely, he had also refused even the basic physical augmentation and rejuvenation that men such as Luther had received. He remained a product of a bygone age, one fading quickly into the mists of time.

'Aldurukh welcomes you, brother,' Remiel said to Luther. His voice was hoarse with age, which made his tone all the more stern and forbidding. 'The captain aboard the Wrath of Caliban informed us of your impending arrival, but there wasn't enough time to arrange a proper welcome.' He stared up at Luther, his pointed chin thrust out in a proud, almost defiant pose. 'The recruits stand ready for inspection. I look forward to hearing your appraisal.'

For the first time Zahariel noted the faint air of tension in the courtyard; from the slight straightening of Luther's shoulders, it was clear he sensed it as well. The young Astartes surveyed the assembly carefully, and realised that Remiel's impromptu welcome might be designed to send a message to the cadre as well.

Master Remiel thinks the Lion has lost faith in him as well, Zahariel thought. Why else send Luther and half a chapter of Astartes all the way back to Caliban to take over the training of recruits?

Never before had Zahariel questioned the orders of his primarch. The very idea that Jonson could make a mistake seemed inconceivable. But now, a cold sense of foreboding sent a shiver along his spine.



Luther, however, seemed unaffected by Remiel's tone. He chuckled, gripping the master's arm warmly. 'You have forgotten more about the training of fighting men than I will ever know, Master,' he said, loud enough for everyone to hear. 'We're here to help train more recruits, not train them better.' Luther turned to the assembled men and smiled proudly. 'The Emperor himself has spoken, brothers! He expects great things from our Legion, and we will show him that the men of Caliban are worthy of his esteem! Glory awaits you, brothers; have you the loyalty and honour to earn it?'

'Aye!' the recruits answered in a ragged shout.

Luther nodded proudly. 'I expected no less from Master Remiel's students,' he said. 'But time is short, and there's much work still to be done. The Great Crusade waits on no man, and before long I and my brothers here will be called back to the thick of the fighting. We intend to bring as many of you with us as we can. The Lion needs you. We need you. And starting today you will be tested as you never have before.'

A stir went through the assembly – not just the recruits, but the Dark Angels surrounding Zahariel as well.

Everywhere he looked, he saw expressions of determination and pride. Luther's challenge had transformed the atmosphere of the courtyard in a single instant; even Master Remiel seemed moved by the conviction in Luther's voice. The cadre felt it, too. For the first time, they saw a noble purpose in what they'd been sent to do. They hadn't been forgotten. Rather they would soon return to their brothers out among the stars at the head of an army that they'd helped create, one that would propel the First Legion into the annals of legend.

Luther spoke again, this time with an iron tone of command in his voice. 'Brothers, you are dismissed,' he

ordered. 'Return to your morning meditations and prepare yourselves for the today's training cycle. You can expect to encounter a host of new challenges as the day progresses, so be prepared for anything.'

Under Master Remiel's watchful eye, the recruits dispersed quickly and quietly from the courtyard. The Astartes of the training cadre remained in ranks, awaiting word from Luther. Zahariel watched him speak a few quiet words to Remiel after the last of the recruits had left. Lord Cypher had vanished at some point during Luther's short speech; Zahariel couldn't say how or when he'd left.

After a few moments, Remiel bowed to Luther and took his leave. Luther turned to the waiting Astartes, his expression businesslike. 'All right, brothers, now you can see the challenge that lies before us,' he said with a faint grin. 'The sooner we're done here, the sooner we can return to the fight, so I don't plan on wasting a single minute. Report to the training grounds at once. We're going to put these young ones through their paces.' Luther's honour guard bowed their heads and broke ranks, and the rest of the cadre followed in quick succession. Zahariel was turning to go when Luther caught his eye. 'A word, brother,' the knight said, beckoning to him.

Zahariel joined Luther as the cadre filed from the courtyard. Speaking quickly, Luther summarised the parts of his training plan that he intended to implement over the course of the day. 'Coordinate with Master Remiel to ensure that all of the instructors are informed of the changes,' he said. 'I'm going to have to leave matters of implementation entirely in your hands, brother. For the time being I'm going to have my hands

full reviewing everything that's happened here at the fortress in our absence.'

'I'll see to it,' Zahariel said, both surprised and honoured that Luther would place so much trust in him. Despite the responsibility that had been placed on his shoulders, he was surprised to find that his spirits were lighter than they had been since the battle at Sarosh.

For the moment, the two were alone in the vast courtyard. Luther was gazing across the empty space, his mind turning to other matters. On impulse, Zahariel said, 'That was well done, brother.'

Luther glanced quizzically at the young Astartes. 'What do you mean?'

'What you said a moment ago,' Zahariel replied. 'It was inspiring. To tell the truth, many of us have been in low spirits since we left the fleet. We... well, it's good to know that we won't be here for long. All of us are eager to get back to the Crusade.'

As Zahariel spoke, the light seemed to go out of Luther's eyes. 'Ah, that,' he said, his voice strangely subdued. To Zahariel's surprise, Luther turned away, glancing up at the cloudy sky. 'That was all a lie, brother,' he said with a sigh. 'We've fallen from grace, and nothing we do here will change that. For us, the Great Crusade is over.'

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