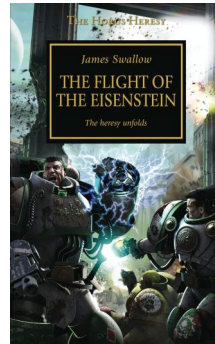


# ***THE FLIGHT OF THE EISENSTEIN***

*A Warhammer 40,000 Horus Heresy novel*

*By James Swallow*

*Having witnessed the terrible massacre of Imperial forces on Isstvan III, Death Guard Captain Nathaniel Garro seizes a ship and sets a course to Terra to warn the Emperor of Horus's treachery. But when the fleeing Eisenstein is damaged by enemy fire, it becomes stranded in the warp – the realm of the Dark Powers. Can Garro and his men survive the depredations of Chaos and get his warning to the Emperor before Horus's plans reach fruition?*



## **About the Author**

James Swallow's stories from the dark worlds of Warhammer 40,000 include *Faith & Fire*, the Blood Angels books *Deus Encarmine* and *Deus Sanguinius*, as well as short fiction for *Inferno!* and *What Price Victory*.

## ***More Horus Heresy from the Black Library***

**HORUS RISING**

By Dan Abnett

**FALSE GODS**

By Graham McNeill

**GALAXY IN FLAMES**

By Ben Counter

The following is an excerpt from *The Flight of the Eisenstein* by James Swallow.

Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Copyright © Games Workshop Ltd, 2007. All rights reserved. Reproduction prohibited, in any form, including on the internet.

For more details email [publishing@games-workshop.co.uk](mailto:publishing@games-workshop.co.uk) or visit the Black Library website [www.blacklibrary.com](http://www.blacklibrary.com)

THE ASSEMBLY HALL was an unremarkable space. It was nothing more than a void in the Endurance's forward hull, rectangular in aspect, open at the far end to the stars through two oval panes of armoured glass holding out the killing vacuum. There were louvred shutters half-closed across the windows, casting patterns of dim white light in bars where the glow from a nearby nebula reached the vessel.

The ceiling was an arch, formed from the primary spars of the warship's iron ribcage where they met and meshed in steel riveted plate. There were no chairs or places where one might rest. There was no use for them. This was not a hall in which lengthy debate and plots would be hatched, but a place where blunt orders would be given, directives made and battle plans drawn in swift order. The only adornments were a few combat banners hanging down from the metal beams.

The room was littered with shadows. Alcoves formed from the spaces between the girder ribs went deep and ink-black. Illumination fell in pools, tuned to the same yellow-white of high sun on Barbarus. In the centre of the chamber, a hololithic tank turned on a lazy axis, a ghostly cube of blue drifting there. Mechanicum adepts ticked and skittered around the disc-shaped projector device below it, moving in orbits around each other, but never straying more than a hand's length away. Perhaps, Garro mused, they were afraid to venture out among the assembled warriors.

The battle-captain cast around, taking in the faces of ranking naval officers and designated representatives from all of the

starships in the flotilla. *Endurance's* commander, a whipcord woman with a severe face, caught his eye and gave him a respectful nod. Garro returned the greeting and moved past her. At his shoulder, Temeter whispered. 'Where's Grulgor?'

'There,' Garro indicated with the jut of his chin, 'with Typhon.'

'Ah,' Temeter said sagely, 'I should not be surprised.'

The captains of the Death Guard's First and Second Companies were in close consultation, the murmur of their words pitched low enough so that even the acute senses of another Astartes were not enough to divine their meaning. Garro saw that Grulgor had noticed their arrival, and, as was his usual manner, he ignored it, despite the lapse in protocol a failure to greet them represented.

'He's never going to be a friend to you, is he?' ventured Temeter, who saw it too. 'Not even for a moment.'

Garro gave the slightest of shrugs. 'It's not something I dwell on. We don't rise to our ranks because of how well-liked we are. This is a crusade we are winning, not a popularity contest.'

Temeter sniffed. 'Speak for yourself. I am extremely popular.'

'I have no doubt you believe that.'

Typhon and Grulgor abruptly disengaged and turned to meet their cohorts as they came closer. The First Captain of the Death Guard, master of the prime company and right hand of the primarch, was a formidable sight in his iron-hued Terminator armour. A dark tail of hair spilled over his shoulders and the man's bearded face was framed by the heavy square hood of the wargear. His helmet nestled in the crook of his arm, a single horn protruding from the brow. Whatever emotions dwelt inside him were well masked, but not so well that the lines of annoyance around his eyes could be completely hidden.

'Temeter. Garro.' Typhon gave both men a level, measuring stare, his voice a low growl.

At once the easy air that Temeter had brought with him was gone, evaporating beneath the first captain's piercing gaze. Garro could only wonder at the anger behind those dark eyes, still smarting

at the slight of being usurped from leading the jorgall attack at the eleventh hour.

‘Grulgor and I were discussing the changes in the engagement plan,’ Typhon continued.

‘Changes?’ repeated Temeter. ‘I was not aware—’

‘You are being *made* aware,’ said Grulgor, with a hint of a sneer. Despite having been born on a world on the opposite side of the galaxy, Ignatius Grulgor shared a similar bearing and physicality with Garro, even down to the hairless head and a collection of trophy scars; but where Garro was stoic and metered, Grulgor was forever on the edge of arrogance, snarling instead of speaking, judgemental instead of considering. ‘The Fourth Company is to be re-tasked, to conduct boarding operations among the bottle world’s picket force.’

Temeter bowed, hiding the irritation that Garro was sure his comrade felt at being denied a share of the mission’s greater glories. ‘As the primarch wills.’ He looked up and met Grulgor’s gaze. ‘Thank you for preparing me, captain.’

‘*Commander*,’ Grulgor spat out the word. ‘You will address me by my rank, Captain Temeter.’

Temeter frowned. ‘My error, commander, of course. The traditions sometimes slip my mind when my thoughts are otherwise occupied.’

Garro watched Grulgor’s jaw harden. Like all of the Legiones Astartes, they had quirks and customs that were unique to them. The Death Guard differed from many of their brother Legions in the manner of the command structure and ranking, for instance. Tradition had it that the XIV would never number more than seven great companies, although those divisions held far more men than those of other Astartes cohorts like the Space Wolves or the Blood Angels; and while many Legions had the tradition of giving the honorific of ‘first captain’ to the commander of the prime company, the Death Guard also held two more privileged titles, to be bestowed upon the leaders of the Second and Seventh Companies respectively. Thus, although they held no actual seniority over one another,

Grulgor could carry the rank of ‘commander’ if he so wished, just as Garro was known as ‘battle-captain’. It was Garro’s understanding that his particular honorific dated back to the Wars of Unification, to a moment when the mark of distinction had been handed to a XIV officer by the Emperor himself. He was proud to bear it all these centuries later.

‘Our traditions are what make us who we are,’ Garro offered quietly. ‘It’s right and correct that we hold to them.’

‘In moderation, perhaps,’ Typhon corrected. ‘We should not allow ourselves to become hidebound by rules from a past that is dust to us now.’

‘Indeed,’ added Grulgor.

‘Ah,’ said Temeter. ‘So, Ignatius, you hold on to tradition with one hand and push it away with the other?’

‘The old ways are right and correct so long as they serve a purpose.’ Grulgor threw Garro a cold look. ‘That pet helot you keep is “a tradition” and yet there is no point to it. There is a custom that has no value.’

‘I beg to differ, commander,’ Garro replied. ‘The housecarl performs flawlessly as my equerry—’

Grulgor snorted. ‘Huh. I had one of those once. I think I lost it on an ice moon somewhere. It froze to death, weak little thing.’ He looked away. ‘It smacks to me of sentiment, Garro.’

‘As ever, Grulgor, I will give your comments the due attention they deserve,’ said Garro. He broke off as a figure in gold caught his eye moving through a shaft of light.

Temeter saw where Garro was looking and tapped twice on the shoulder plate of his armour. ‘I told you Mortarion had brought company.’

KALEB BUSIED HIMSELF with the sword cloth, folding the green velvet mantle into a neat square. In the alcove of the arming pit, Captain Garro’s weapons and battle equipment were arrayed around him on hooks and wire-frame racks. Upon one wall, resting on steel spikes, lay the heavy silver ingot of his master’s bolter. It was

polished to a matt sheen, the brass detail glittering under the wan light of biolumine glow-globes.

The housecarl replaced the cloth and wrung his hands, thinking. It was hard for him to maintain a clear focus, with the idea gnawing at his mind that the primarch was only a few tiers above him, up on the high decks. Kaleb looked up at the steel ceiling and imagined what he might see if the Endurance were made of glass. Would Mortarion radiate dark and cold as some said he did? Would it be possible for a mere man such as himself to actually look the Death Lord in the eye, and not feel his heart stop in his chest? The serf took a deep breath to steady his nerve. It was a lot for him to handle, and the distraction made performing his normal tasks difficult. Mortarion was a son of the Emperor Himself, and the Emperor... the Emperor was...

‘Kaleb.’

He turned to face Hakur. The seasoned veteran was one of the few Astartes who called the housecarl by his given name. ‘Yes, lord?’

‘Mind your work.’ He nodded at the ceiling, at the place where Kaleb had been staring. ‘Sees through steel, the primarch does.’

The serf managed a weak grin and bowed, gathering up a cleaning cloth and a tin of waxy polish. Under Hakur’s neutral gaze he moved to the centre of the alcove and set to work on the heavy ceramite and brass cuirass that rested there. This was a ceremonial piece that Garro wore only in combat or upon formal occasions. In tandem with the honour-rank of battle-captain, the decorative overshield sported an eagle, wings spread and beak arched, sculpted from brass as if about to take flight from the chest plate. Similarly, the rear of the cuirass had a second eagle as a head-guard that emerged from the shoulders when worn over the backpack of Astartes armour.

What made this piece unique was that its eagles differed from the Emperor’s aquila. While the symbol of the Imperium of Man had two heads, one blinded to look at the past, one sighted to see to the future, the battle-captain’s eagles were singular. Kaleb fancied

this meant that they only saw into the time yet to pass, that perhaps they were a kind of charm that could know the advance of a killing shot or deadly blade before it arrived. Once he had voiced that thought aloud and received derision and scorn from Garro's men. Such thoughts, Sergeant Hakur had later said, were superstitions that had no place on a ship of the Emperor's Crusade. 'Ours is a war to dispel fable and falsehood with the cold light of truth, not to propagate myth.' The veteran had tapped the eagles with a finger. 'These are inanimate brass and no more, just as we are all flesh and bone.'

Still, Kaleb's hand could not help but drift to a brass icon on a chain around his neck, hidden inside the folds of his tunic where none could see it.

THE FIGURE WAS MOST assuredly female, lithe and poised, clad in a shimmering snakeskin over-suit of dense chainmail and a sweep of golden armour plate that resembled a bodice. A half-mask lay open at her neck, revealing an elegant face. Garro sometimes found it hard to determine the age of non-Astartes, but he estimated she could be no more than thirty solar years. Purple-black hair rose in a topknot from a seamless scalp, bare but for a blood-red aquila tattoo. She was quite beautiful, but what locked his attention on her was the way she moved noiselessly across the iron decks of the chamber. Had he not seen her emerge from the shadows, the Astartes might have thought the woman to be a holo-ghost, some finely detailed image cast from the projector.

'Amendera Kendel,' noted Typhon, with a hint of distaste. 'A witchseeker.'

Temeter nodded. 'From the Storm Dagger cadre. She is here with a deputation of the Silent Sisterhood, apparently on the orders of the Sigillite himself.'

Grulgor's lip curled. 'There are no psykers here. What purpose could those women serve in the coming battle?'

'The Regent of Terra must have his reasons,' Typhon suggested, but his tone made it clear he thought little of what they might be.

Garro watched the witchseeker orbit the room. Her tradecraft was commendable. She moved in stealth even as she was obvious to the eye, passing around the naval officers in a way that appeared to be random, even as Garro's trained sense understood it was not.

Kendel was observing. She was cataloguing the reactions of the people in the assembly hall, filing them away for later review. It made the Astartes think of a scout, surveying the land before a battle, seeking weak points and targets. He had never encountered a Sister of Silence before, only heard of their exploits in service to the Imperium.

Their name was well deserved, he considered. Kendel *was* silent, like the wind across a grave, and in her passing, he noticed that some would shiver without being aware of it, or become distracted for a moment. It was as if the witchseeker cast an invisible aura around herself that gave mortal men pause.

Garro watched her pass by the entrance to the assembly hall and his gaze was hooked by the shine of brass and steel upon two grand figures that stood either side of the hatch. Barrel-chested in highly artificed armour, taller than Typhon, the identical sentinels blocked the steel door with crossed battle-scythes, the signature weapon of the Death Guard's elite warriors. Only the few personally favoured by the primarch were permitted to carry such artefacts. They were known as manreapers, forged in echo of the common farmer's harvesting scythe that it was said Mortarion had fought with in his youth. The first captain wielded one, but Garro recognised these twin blades immediately.

'Deathshroud,' he whispered. These two Astartes were the personal honour guards of the primarch, fated never to reveal their faces to anyone but Mortarion, even to the end of their lives. So it was said, the warriors of the Deathshroud were chosen by the primarch from the rank and file men of the Legion in secret, and then listed as killed in action. They were his nameless guardians, never allowed to venture more than forty-nine paces from their lord's side. Garro felt a chill when he realised that he hadn't even been aware that the Deathshroud had entered the chamber.



‘If they are here, then where is our master?’ asked Grulgor.

A cold smile of understanding flickered over Typhon’s lips. ‘He has been here all along.’

At the far end of the chamber, a towering shadow detached itself from the dimness beside the oval windows. Steady footsteps brought silence to the room as they crossed the deck plates. With every other footfall there came a heavy metallic report as the base of an iron shaft tapped out the distance. Garro’s muscles tensed as the sound made several of the common naval officers back away from the hololith.

In the dusty Terran legends that survived from the histories of nation states like Merica, Old Ursh and Oseania there was the myth of a walker in the darkness who came to claim the freshly dead, a skeletal individual, an incarnation that threshed souls from flesh as keenly as wheat in the fields. These were just stories, though, the speculations of the superstitious and fearful, and yet, here and now, a billion light-years from the birthplace of that folklore, the very mirror of that figure rose into the half-light aboard *Endurance*, tall and gaunt beneath a cloak as grey as sea-ice.

Mortarion halted and touched the deck plates with the hilt of his manreaper, the scythe as tall as the primarch and a head again. Only the Deathshroud stayed on their feet. Every other person in the room, human or Astartes, was on his knees. Mortarion’s cloak parted as he raised his free hand, palm upwards. ‘Rise,’ he said.

The primarch’s voice was low and firm, at odds with the ashen, hairless face that emerged from the heavy collar surrounding his throat. Wisps of white gas curled from the neck brace of Mortarion’s wargear, captured philtres of fumes from the air of Barbarus. Garro caught the scent of them and for an instant his sense memory took him back to the grim, clouded planet with its lethal skies.

The assemblage came to its feet, and still the primarch dominated the room. Beneath the grey cloak, he was a knight in shining brass and bare steel. The ornamental skull and star device of the Death Guard grimaced out from his breastplate and at his waist, level with the chest of a file Astartes, Garro saw the drum-shaped

holster that carried the Lantern, a hand-crafted energy pistol of unique Shenlongi design.

Mortarion's only other adornments were a string of globe-shaped censers in brass. These too contained elements from the poisonous high atmosphere of the primarch's adoptive home world. Garro had heard it said that Mortarion would sometimes sample them, like a connoisseur tasting fine wines, or by turns pitch them into battle as grenades to send an enemy choking and dying.

The battle-captain realised he had been holding in his breath and released it as Mortarion's amber eyes took in the room. Silence fell as his lord commander began to speak.

'XENOS.' PYR RAHL made the word into a curse without effort, drumming his fingers across the stubby barrel of his bolter. 'I wonder what colour these will bleed. White? Purple? Green?' He glanced around and ran a hand through the close-cut hair on his head. 'Come, who'll make a wager with me?'

'No one will, Pyr,' answered Hakur, shaking his head. 'We're all tired of your trivial gambling.' He threw a glance back to the arming pit where Garro's housecarl was hard at work.

'What currency is there to wager between us, anyway?' added Voyen, joining Hakur at the blade racks. The two veterans were quite unlike in physical aspect, Voyen ample in frame where Hakur was wiry, and yet they were together on most things that affected the squad. 'We're not swabs or soldiers grubbing over scrip and coinage!'

Rahl frowned. 'It's not a game of money, Apothecary, nothing as crude as that. Those things are just a way to keep score. We play for the right to be right.'

Solun Decius, the youngest member of the command squad, came closer, rubbing a towel over his face to wipe away the sweat from his exertions in the sparring cages. He had a hard look to him that seemed out of place on a youth of his age. His eyes were alight with energy barely held in check, enthused by the sudden possibilities of glory that the arrival of the primarch had brought.

‘I’ll take your wager, if it will quiet you.’ Decius glanced at Hakur and Voyen, but his elders gave him no support. ‘I’ll say red, like the orks.’

Rahl sniffed. ‘White as milk, like the megarachnid.’

‘You are both wrong.’ From behind Rahl, his face buried in a data-slate festooned with tactical maps, Tollen Sendek’s flat monotone issued out. ‘The blood of the jorgall is a dark crimson.’ The warrior had a heavy brow and hooded eyes that gave him a permanently sleepy expression.

‘And this knowledge is yours how?’ demanded Decius.

Sendek waved the data-slate in the air. ‘I am well-read, Solun. While you batter your chainsword’s teeth blunt in the cages, I study the foe. These dissection texts of the Magos Biologis are fascinating.’

Decius snorted. ‘All I need to know is how to kill them. Does your text tell you that, Tollen?’

Sendek gave a heavy nod. ‘It does.’

‘Well, come, come.’ Voyen beckoned the dour Astartes to his feet. ‘Don’t keep such information to yourself.’

Sendek sighed and stood, his perpetually morose features lit by the glow of the data-slate’s display. He tapped his chest. ‘The jorgall favour mechanical enhancements to improve their physical form. They have some humanoid traits – a head, neck, eyes and mouth – but it appears their brains and central nervous systems are situated not here,’ and he tapped his brow, ‘but here.’ Tollen’s hand lay flat on his chest.

‘To kill would need a heart shot, then?’ Rahl noted, accepting a nod in return.

‘Ah,’ said Decius, ‘like this?’ In a flash, the Astartes had spun in place and drawn his bolter. A single round exploded from the muzzle and ripped into the torso of a dormant practice dummy less than a few metres from Garro’s arming pit. The captain’s housecarl flinched at the sound of the shot, drawing a tut from Hakur.

Decius turned away, amused with himself. Meric Voyer threw Hakur a look. ‘Arrogant whelp. I don’t understand what the captain sees in him.’

‘I once said the same thing about you, Meric.’

‘Speed and skill are nothing without control,’ the Apothecary retorted tersely. ‘Displays like that are better suited to fops like the Emperor’s Children.’

The other man’s words drew a thin smile from Hakur. ‘We’re all Astartes under the skin, brothers and kindred all.’

Voyer’s humour dropped away suddenly. ‘That, my brother, is as much a lie as it is the truth.’

IN THE HOLOLITH cube, the shape of the jorgalli construct became visible. It was a fat cylinder several kilometres long, bulbous at one end with drive clusters, thinning at the other to a stubby prow. Huge petal-shaped vanes coated with shimmering panels emerged from the stern of the thing, catching sunlight and bouncing it through massive windows as big as inland seas.

Mortarion gestured with a finger. ‘A cylinder world. This one has twice the mass of the similar constructs found and eliminated in orbits around the planets Tasak Beta and Fallon, but unlike those, our target is the first jorgall craft to be found under power in deep space.’ One of the adepts tickled switches with his worm-like mechadendrites and the image receded, revealing a halo of teardrop-shaped ships in close formation nearby.

‘A substantial picket fleet travels ahead of the craft. Captain Temeter will lead the engagement to disrupt these ships and break their lines of communication.’

The primarch accepted a salute from Temeter. ‘Elements of the First, Second and Seventh Great Companies will stand with me as I take the spear tip into the bottle itself. This battleground is suited to our unique talents. The jorgall breathe a mixture of oxygen and nitrogen with heavy concentrations of chlorine, a weak poison that our lungs will resist with little effort.’

As if to underline the point, Mortarion sniffed at a puff of gas from his half-mask. ‘First Captain Typhon will be my support. Commander Grulgor will penetrate the drive cluster and take control of the cylinder’s motive power centre. Battle-Captain Garro will neutralise the construct’s hatcheries.’

Garro saluted firmly, mirroring Grulgor and Typhon’s gestures. He held off his disappointment at his assigned target, far down the cylinder from the primarch’s attack point, and instead began to consider the first elements of his battle plan.

Mortarion hesitated a moment, and Garro could swear he heard the hint of a smile in the primarch’s voice. ‘As some of you have deduced, this fight will not be the Death Guard’s alone. I have, on the request of Malcador the Sigillite, brought a cadre of investigators from the Divisio Astra Telepathica here, led by the Oblivion Knight Sister Amendera.’ The primarch inclined his head and Garro saw the Sister of Silence bow low in return. She gestured in sign language, quick little motions of finger and wrist.

‘The honoured Sisters will join us to seek out a psyker trace that has led to this bottle-world.’

Garro stiffened. *Psykers?* This was the first he had heard of such a threat on the jorgalli ship, and he noted that only Typhon did not seem surprised at such news.

‘I trust that the full importance of this endeavour is impressed upon each of you,’ continued the Death Lord, his low tones strong. ‘These jorgall repeatedly enter our space in their generation ships, intent on spawning over worlds that belong to the Emperor. They must not be allowed to gain a foothold.’ He turned away, his face disappearing into his cloak. ‘In time, the Astartes will erase these creatures from humanity’s skies, and today will be a step along that path.’

Garro and his battle-brothers saluted once more as Mortarion turned his back on them and moved away towards the welcoming shadows. They did not chorus in a battle cry or mark the moment with raised pronouncements. The primarch had spoken, and his was voice enough.

*The Flight of the Eisenstein* can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

Price: £6.99 (UK) / \$7.99 (US) / \$9.99 (CAN)

ISBN 10: 1 84416 459 4

ISBN 13: 978 1 84416 459 2

Bookshops: Distributed in the UK by Hodder. Distributed in the US by Simon & Schuster Books.

Games & hobby stores: Distributed in UK and US by Games Workshop.

UK mail order: 0115-91 40 000

US mail order: 1-800-394-GAME

Online: Buy direct care of Games Workshop's web store by going to [www.blacklibrary.com/store](http://www.blacklibrary.com/store) or [www.games-workshop.com](http://www.games-workshop.com).