



FAITH & FIRE

JAMES SWALLOW

From the *New York Times*
bestselling author of *Nemesis*

WARHAMMER
40,000

By the same author

• **SISTERS OF BATTLE** •

Book 1: FAITH & FIRE

Book 2: HAMMER & ANVIL

RED & BLACK

An audio drama

• **BLOOD ANGELS** •

THE BLOOD ANGELS OMNIBUS

(Contains books 1&2 in the series: *Deus Encarmine*
and *Deus Sanguinius*)

BLOOD ANGELS: THE SECOND OMNIBUS

(Contains books 3&4 in the series:
Red Fury and *Black Tide*)

HEART OF RAGE

An audio drama

• **THE HORUS HERESY** •

FLIGHT OF THE EISENSTEIN

NEMESIS

GARRO: OATH OF MOMENT

An audio drama

GARRO: LEGION OF ONE

An audio drama

Short fiction by James Swallow appears in

LEGENDS OF THE SPACE MARINES

A Warhammer 40,000 anthology

VICTORIES OF THE SPACE MARINES

A Warhammer 40,000 anthology

TALES OF HERESY

A Horus Heresy anthology

AGE OF DARKNESS

A Horus Heresy anthology

FAITH & FIRE

James Swallow

In the grim nightmare future of the 41st millennium, the Sisters of Battle stand between humanity and damnation. From the elite Seraphim warriors to the berserk Sisters Repentia, they are the strong arm of the Ecclesiarchy, bringing the Emperor's justice to the enemies of mankind. When dangerous psychic heretic Torris Vaun escapes from her custody, Celestian Miriya is disgraced in the eyes of her fellow sisters and superiors. Following Vaun's trail to the planet Neva, Miriya takes her sisters in pursuit and, along with Hospitaller Sister Verity, starts her investigations. When they uncover a terrifying plot that could threaten the future of the Imperium, is Miriya's and Verity's faith strong enough for them to triumph?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Swallow is an award-winning *New York Times* bestselling author, who lives in London. His fiction from the dark future of Warhammer 40,000 includes the Horus Heresy novels *Nemesis* and *The Flight of the Eisenstein*; *Faith & Fire*; *Black Tide*, *Red Fury*; *Deus Encarmine* and *Deus Sanguinius* (collected as *The Blood Angels Omnibus*); the audio books *Red & Black*, *Heart of Rage*, *Oath of Moment* and *Legion of One*; and short stories for *Inferno!*, *What Price Victory*, *Tales of Heresy*, *Legends of the Space Marines*, *The Book of Blood*, *Age of Darkness* and *Victories of the Space Marines*.

His other credits include the non-fiction book *Dark Eye: The Films of David Fincher*, writing for *Star Trek Voyager*, scripts for videogames and audio dramas.

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

In the UK: Price £7.99 ISBN: 978-1-84416-289-5

In the US: Price \$8.99 (\$10.99 Canada) ISBN: 978-1-84416-422-6

Online

Buy direct care of Games Workshop's webstore by going to www.blacklibrary.com or www.games-workshop.com.

Bookshops

Distributed in the UK and 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

The following is an excerpt from *Faith & Fire* by James Swallow. First published in 2006 by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK. Copyright © Games Workshop Ltd 2006, 2011. All rights reserved. Reproduction prohibited, in any form, including on the internet. For more details or to contact us visit the Black Library website: www.blacklibrary.com.

FROM HIS HIGH vantage point, the Emperor of Mankind looked down upon Miriya where she knelt. His unchanging gaze took in all of her, the woman's bowed form shrouded in blood-coloured robes. In places, armour dark as obsidian emerged from the folds of the crimson cloth. It framed her against the tan stonework of the chapel floor. She was defined by the light that reflected upon her from the Emperor's eternal visage; all that she was, she was only by His decree.

Miriya's lips moved in whispers. The Litany of Divine Guidance spilled from her in a cascading hush. The words were such a part of her that they came as quickly and effortlessly as breathing. As the climax of the declaration came, she felt a warm core of righteousness establish itself in her heart, as it always did, as it always had since the day she had discarded her novice cloak and taken the oath.

She allowed herself to look up at Him. Miriya granted herself this small gesture as a reward. Her gaze travelled up the altar, drinking in the majesty of the towering golden idol. The Emperor watched her over folded arms, across the inverted hilt of a great burning sword. At His left shoulder stood Saint Celestine, her hands cupped to hold two stone doves as if she were offering them up. At His right was Saint Katherine, the Daughter of the Emperor who had founded the order that Miriya now served.

She lingered on Katherine's face for a moment: the statue's hair fell down over her temple and across the fleur-de-lys carved beneath her left eye. Miriya unconsciously brushed her black tresses back over her ear, revealing her own fleur tattoo in dark red ink.

The armour the stone saint wore differed from Miriya's in form but not function. Katherine was clad in an ancient type of wargear, and she bore the symbol of a burning heart where Miriya wore a holy cross crested with a skull. When the saint had been mistress of her sect, they had been known as the Order of the Fiery Heart – but that had been decades before Katherine's brutal ending on Mnestheus. Since that date, for over two millennia they had called themselves the Order of our Martyred Lady. It was part of a legacy of duty to the Emperor that Sister Miriya of the Adepta Sororitas had been fortunate to continue.

With that thought, she looked upon the effigy of Him. She met the stone eyes and imagined that on far distant Terra, the Lord of Humanity was granting her some infinitely small fraction of His divine attention, willing her to carry out her latest mission with His blessing. Miriya's hands came to her chest and crossed one another, making the sign of the Imperial aquila.

'In Your name,' she said aloud. 'In service to Your Light, grant me guidance and strength. Let me know the witch and the heretic, show them to me.' She bowed once again. 'Let me do Your bidding and rid the galaxy of man's foe.'

Miriya drew herself up from where she knelt and moved to the font servitor, presenting the slave-thing with her ornate plasma pistol. The hybrid produced a brass cup apparatus in place of a hand and let a brief mist of holy water sprinkle over the weapon. Tapes of sanctified parchment stuttered from its lipless mouth with metallic ticks of sound.

She turned away, and there in the shadows was Sister Iona.

Silent, morose Iona, the patterned hood of her red robe forever deepening the hollows of her eyes. Some of the Battle Sisters disliked the woman. Iona rarely showed emotion, never allowed herself to cry out in pain when combat brought her wounds, never raised her voice

in joyous elation during the daily hymnals. Many considered her flawed, her mind so cold that it was little more than the demi-machine inside the skull of the servitor at the font. Miriya had once sent two novice girls to chastisement for daring to voice such thoughts aloud. But those who said these things did not know Iona's true worth. She was as devout a Sororitas as any other, and if her manner made some Sister Superiors reluctant to have her in their units, then so be it. Their loss was Miriya's gain.

'Iona,' she said, approaching. 'Speak to me.'

'It is time, Sister,' said the other woman, her milk-pale face set in a frown. 'The witch ship comes.'

In spite of herself, Miriya's hand tensed around the grip of her plasma pistol. She nodded. 'I am prepared.'

Iona returned the gesture. 'As are we all.' The Sister clasped a small fetish in her gloved grip, a sliver icon of the Convent Sanctorum's Hallowed Spire on Ophelia VII. The small tell was enough to let Miriya know the woman was concerned.

'I am as troubled as you,' she admitted as they crossed the chancel back towards the steel hatch in the chapel wall.

Iona opened it and they stepped through, emerging into the echoing corridor beyond. Where the stone of the church ended, the iron bones of the starship around it began. Once, the chapel had been earthbound, built into a hill on a world in the Vitus system now it existed as a strange transplanted organ inside the metal body of the Imperial Naval frigate *Mercutio*.

'This vexes me, Sister Superior,' said Iona, her frown deepening beneath her hood. 'What is our cause if not to take the psyker to task for his witchery, to show the Emperor's displeasure?' She looked as if she wanted to spit. 'That we are called upon to... to associate with this mutant is enough to make my stomach turn. There is a part of me that wants to contact the captain and order him to take that abomination from the Emperor's sky.'

Miriya gave her a sharp look. 'Have a care, Sister. You and I may detest these creatures, but in their wisdom, the servants of the Throne see fit to use these pitiful wretches in His name. As much as that may sicken us, we cannot refuse a command that comes from the highest levels of the Ecclesiarchy.'

The answer was not nearly enough to satisfy Iona's disquiet.

'How can such things go on, I ask you? The psyker is our mortal enemy--'

Iona's commander silenced her with a raised hand. 'The witch is our enemy, Sister. The psyker is a tool. Only the untrained and the wild are a threat to the Imperium.' Miriya's eyes narrowed. 'You have never served as I have, Iona. For two full years I was a warden aboard one of those blighted vessels. On the darkest nights, the things I saw there still haunt me so...' She forced the memories away. 'This is how the God-Emperor tests the faithful, Sister. He shows us our greatest fears and has us overcome them.' They walked in silence for a few moments before Iona spoke again. 'We are taught in the earliest days of our indoctrination that those cursed with the psychic mark in their blood are living gateways to Chaos. All of them, Sister Superior, not just the ones who eschew the worship of the Golden Throne. One single slip and even the most devout will fall, and open the way to the warp!'

Miriya raised an eyebrow. It was perhaps the most passion she had ever seen the dour woman display. 'That is why we are here. Since the Age of Apostasy, we and all our Sister Sororitas have stood at the gates to hell and barred the witchkin. As the mutant falls, so does the traitor, so does the witch.' She placed a hand on Iona's shoulder. 'Ask yourself this, Sister. Who else could be called forth to accomplish what we shall do today?' Miriya's face split in a wry smile. 'The men of the Imperial Navy or the Guard? They would be dead in moments from the shock. The Adeptus Astartes? Those abhumans willingly welcome psykers into their

own ranks.' She shook her head ruefully. 'No, Iona, only we, the Sisters of Battle, can stand sentinel here.' The woman patted her pistol holster. 'And mark me well, if but one of those misbegotten wretches steps out of line, then we will show them the burning purity of our censure.'

The sound of her voice drew the attention of Miriya's squad as she approached. They did not exchange the curt bows or salutes that were mandatory in other Sororitas units. Sister Miriya kept a relaxed hand on her warriors, preferring to keep them sharp in matters of battle prowess rather than parade ground niceties.

'Report,' she demanded.

Her second-in-command Sister Lethe cleared her throat. 'We are ready, Sister Superior, as per your command.'

'Good,' Miriya snapped, forestalling any questions about their orders before they could be uttered. 'This will be a simple matter of boarding the ship and securing the prisoner.'

Lethe threw a look at the other members of the Celestian squad. Usually deployed for front line combat operations, the Celestians were known as the elite troops of the Adepta Sororitas and such a simple duty as a prisoner escort could easily be considered beneath them. Celestians were used to fighting at the heart of heretic confrontations and mutant uprisings, not acting like mere line officer enforcer.

Miriya saw these thoughts in the eyes of Lethe and the other Sisters. She knew the misgivings well, as they had been her own after the orders had first been delivered by astropathic transfer from Canoness Galatea's adjutant. 'Any duty in the Emperor's name is glorious,' she told them, a stern edge to her words, 'and we would do well to remember that.'

'Of course,' said Lethe, her expression contrite. 'We obey.'

'I share your concern,' Miriya admitted, her voice lowered. 'Our squad has never been the most favoured of units-' and with that the other women shared a moment of grim amusement, '-but we will do as we must.'

'There,' Sister Cassandra called, observing through one of the crystalline portholes in the corridor wall. 'I see it!'

Miriya drew closer and peered through the thick lens. For a moment, she thought her Battle Sister had been mistaken, but then she realised that the darkness she saw beyond the hull of the *Mercutio* as not the void of interstellar space at all, but the flank of another craft. It gave off no light, showed no signals or pennants. Only the faint glow of the frigate's own portholes and beacons illuminated it - and then, not the whole vessel but only thin slivers of it caught in the radiance.

'A Black Ship,' breathed Iona. 'Emperor protect us.'

IN TWO BY TWO overwatch formation, their bolters at the ready, Miriya's squad made their way up the corded flex-tube that had extended itself from one of the *Mercutio*'s outer airlocks. At their head, the Sister Superior walked with her own weapon holstered, but her open hand lay flat atop the knurled wood grip. The memories spiked her thoughts again, taking her back to the first time she had stepped into the dark iron heart of an Adeptus Telepathica vessel.

No one knew how many craft there were in the fleets of the Black Ships. Some spoke of a secret base on Terra, sending out droves of ebon vessels to scour the galaxy for psykers. Others said that the ships worked in isolation from one another, venturing back and forth under psychic directives sent by the Emperor himself. Miriya did not know the truth, and she did not want to.

Whenever a potent psyker was discovered, the Black Ships would come for them. Some, those with pure hearts and wills strong enough to survive the tests the adepts forced upon them, might live to become servants to the Inquisition or the astropathic colleges.

Most would be put to death in one manner or another, or granted in sacrifice to the Emperor so that he might keep alight the great psychic beacon of the Astronomicon.

The Battle Sisters entered an elliptical reception chamber carved from iron and whorled with hexagrammic wards. Strips of bioluminescence cast weak yellow light into the centre of the space and hooded figures lingered at the edges, orbiting the room with silent footsteps. Lethe and the others automatically fell into a combat wheel formation, guns covering every possible angle of attack. Miriya watched the shrouded shapes moving around them. The Adeptus Telepathica had their own operatives but by Imperial edict they were not allowed to serve as warders upon their own vessels; it was too easy for a malignant psyker to coerce another telepath. Instead, Sisters of Battle or Inquisitorial Storm Troopers served in the role of custodian aboard the Black Ships, their adamantine faith protecting them from the predations of the mind-witches they guarded.

Footsteps approached from the gloomy perimeter of the chamber. Her eyes had grown accustomed to the dimness now, and she quickly picked out the figures filing from an iris hatch on the far wall. Two of them were Sister Retributors, armed with heavy multimeltas, and another a Celestian like herself. The other Battle Sisters wore gunmetal silver armour and white robes, with the sigil of a haloed black skull on their shoulder pauldrons. There were more behind them, but they remained in the shadows for now.

The Celestian saluted Miriya and she returned the gesture. 'Miriya of the Order of our Martyred Lady. Well met, Sister.'

'Dione of the Order of the Argent Shroud,' said the other woman. 'Well met, Sister.' Miriya was instantly struck by the look of fatigue on Dione's face, the tension etched into the lines about her eyes. Her fellow Sororitas met her gaze and a moment of silent communication passed between them. 'The prisoner is ready. It is my pleasure to have rid of him.' She beckoned forward hooded men and the two Retributors turned their guns to draw a bead on them.

The adepts brought a rack in the shape of a skeletal cube, within which sat a large drum made of green glass. There was a man inside it, naked and pale in the yellow illumination. His head was concealed beneath a metal mask festooned with spikes and probes. 'Torriss Vaun,' Miriya said his name, and the masked man twitched a little as if he had heard her. 'A fine catch, Sister Dione.'

'He did not go easily, of that you can be sure. He killed six of my kith before we were able to subdue him.'

'And yet he still draws breath.' Miriya studied the huge jar, aware that the man inside was scrutinising her just as intently with other, preternatural senses. 'Had the choice been mine, this witch would have been shot into the heart of a star.'

Dione managed a stiff nod. 'We are in agreement, Sister. Alas, we must obey the Ministorum's orders. You are to deliver this criminal to Lord Viktor LaHayn at the Noroc Lunar Cathedral on the planet Neva.' A hobbling servitor approached clutching a roll of parchment and a waxy stick of data-sealant. Dione took the paper and made her mark upon it. 'So ordered this day, by the authority of the Ecclesiarchy.'

Miriya followed suit, using the sealant to press her squad commander signet into the document. From behind her, she heard Lethe think aloud.

'He seems such a frail thing. What crime could a man like this commit that would warrant our stewardship?'

Dione took a sharp breath. Clearly she did not allow her troops to speak without permission as Miriya did. 'The six he murdered were only the latest victims of his violence. This man has sown terror and mayhem on a dozen worlds across this sector, all in the name of sating his base appetites. Vaun is an animal, Sister, a ruthless opportunist and a pirate. To him, cruelty is its own reward.' Her face soured. 'It disgusts me to share a room with such an aberrance.'

Miriya shot Lethe a look. 'Your candour is appreciated, Sister Dione. We will ensure the criminal reaches Neva without delay.'

More servitors took up the confinement capsule and marched into the tunnel back to the Mercurio. As Vaun was taken away, Dione relaxed a little. 'Lord LaHayn was most insistent that this

witch be brought to his court for execution. It is my understanding the honoured deacon called in several favours with the Adeptus Terra to ensure it was so.'

Miriya nodded, recalling the message from Galatea. The Canoness would be waiting in Noroc City for their arrival with the criminal. 'Vaun is a Nevan himself, correct? One might consider it just that he be put to the sword on the soil of his birthworld, given that he created so much anarchy there.' She threw a glance at Lethe, and her second marshalled the rest of the Celestians to flank the prisoner as he vanished into the docking tube. Miriya turned to follow. 'Ave Imperator, Sister.'

Dione's armoured gauntlet clasped Miriya's wrist and held her for a moment. 'Don't underestimate him,' she hissed, her eyes glittering in the murkiness. 'I did, and six good women paid the price.'

'Of course.'

Dione released her grip and faded back into the blackness.

FROM THE RENDEZVOUS point, the Mercutio came about and made space for the Neva system. The Black Ship vanished from her sensorium screen like a lost dream, so quickly and so completely that it seemed as if the dark vessel had never been there.

The frigate's entry to the empyrean went poorly, and a momentary spasm in the warship's Geller Field killed a handful of deckhands on the gunnery platforms. The crew spoke in hushed tones behind guarded expressions, never within earshot of the Battle Sisters. None of them knew what it was that Miriya's squad had brought back from the Black Ship, but all of them were afraid of it.

Over the days that followed, prayer meetings in the frigate's sparse chapel had a sudden increase in attendance and there were more hymns being played over the vox nets on the lower decks. Most of the crew had never seen Battle Sisters in the flesh before. In dozens of ports across the sector they had heard the stories about them, just like every other Navy swab. There were things that men of low character would think of women such as these, thoughts that ran the spectrum from lustful fantasy to violent distrust. Some said they lived off the flesh of the males they killed, like a jungle mantis. Others swore they were as much concubines as they were soldiers, able to bring pleasure and damnation to the unwary in equal measure. The crewmen were as scared by the Sororitas as they were fascinated by them, but there were some who watched the women wherever they went, compelled by something deeper and darker.