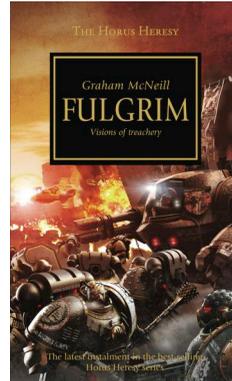


FULGRIM

A Warhammer 40,000 Horus Heresy novel

By Graham McNeill

It is the 31st millennium, and humanity is at the peak of its powers. As the Great Crusade, led by Warmaster Horus, continues to conquer the galaxy, Fulgrim, Primarch of the Emperor's Children, leads his warriors into battle against a vile alien foe. From the blood of this campaign are sown the seeds that will lead this proud Legion to treachery, taking them down the darkest of paths of corruption. Leading up to the carnage of the Dropsite Massacre on Istvan V, this is the tale of Fulgrim's tragic fall from grace.



About the Author

Hailing from Scotland, Graham McNeill narrowly escaped a career in surveying to join Games Workshop, where he worked for six years as a games developer. As well as nine novels, Graham has written a host of sf and fantasy short stories. He lives in Nottingham, UK.

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THE BATTLE ON Atoll 19 would later be described as a minor, opening skirmish in the Cleansing of Laeran; a footnote to the fighting that was yet to come, but to the warriors in the spear tip of Solomon Demeter's Second Company of Emperor's Children, it felt considerably more intense than a skirmish.

Shrieking bolts of hot, green energy flashed down the curving thoroughfare, melting portions of the angled walls and dissolving Astartes battle plate whenever they struck one of the advancing Space Marines. The hungry crackle of fires and the whoosh of missiles mingled with the hard bangs of bolter fire and the shrieking horns from the coral towers as Solomon's Astartes fought their way up the serpentine street to link with Marius Vairosean's squads.

Coiled towers of glittering crystal coral reared above him like the gnarled conch shells of some great sea creature, with smooth rimmed burrow holes piercing the spires like the touch holes of a musical instrument. The entire atoll was formed from the same lightweight, but incredibly tough material, though how these structures floated above the vast oceans was a mystery the Mechanicum adepts were eager to solve.

Screeching cries echoed from the disturbingly alien architecture, as though the spires themselves were screaming, and the damnable metallic slither of the aliens' movement seemed to come from all around them.

He ducked back behind a sinuous column of pink veined coral and slammed another magazine into his customised bolter, its every

surface and internal working hand-finished by his own artifice. Its rate of fire was only marginally faster than a regular issue bolter, but it had never once jammed, and Solomon Demeter wasn't the kind of man to trust his life to anything he hadn't worked towards perfection.

'Gaius!' he shouted to his second in command, Gaius Caphen, 'Where in the name of the Phoenician is Tantearon squadron?'

His lieutenant shook his head, and Solomon cursed, knowing that the Laer had probably intercepted the Land Speeder squadron en route to them. Damn, these aliens were clever, he thought, remembering the grievous loss of Captain Aeson's flanking force, which had revealed that the Laer had somehow managed to compromise their vox-net. The idea of a xenos species with the ability to wreak such a violation on a Legion of the Astartes was unthinkable, and had only spurred Fulgrim's warriors to greater heights of wrath in their extermination.

Solomon Demeter was the very image of an Astartes, his short dark hair kept shaved close to his scalp, his skin tanned from the light of a score of suns, and his animated features rounded and wide spread on thick cheekbones. He disdained the wearing of a helmet to prevent the Laer from deciphering his orders over the vox-network, and because he knew that if he were hit in the head by one of the Laer weapons, he was as good as dead, helmet or not.

Knowing he could not expect any immediate help from the aerial units, he knew they were going to have to do this the hard way. Though it railed against his sense of order and perfection to undertake this assault without the proper support in place, he couldn't deny that there was something exhilarating about making things up as he went along. Some commanders said that it was an inevitable fact that they would often fight without the forces they wanted, but such a belief was anathema to most of the Emperor's Children.

'Gaius, we're going to have to do this ourselves!' he shouted. 'Make sure we've plenty of fire keeping those xenos heads down!'

Caphen nodded and began issuing curt, concise orders, with sharp chops of his hand, to the squads spread through the rubble of what could laughingly be called their landing zone.

Behind them, the wrecked Stormbird still burned from where the alien missile had blown off its wing, and Solomon knew that it was a miracle the pilot had managed to coax the stricken aircraft to stay in the air long enough to reach the floating atoll. He shuddered to imagine their fate had they plunged to the vast planetary ocean below, lost forever amid the sunken ruins of the Laer's ancient civilisation.

The Laer had been waiting for them, and now at least seven warriors were down and would never fight again. Solomon had no idea how the other assault units had fared, but couldn't imagine they had suffered any less. He risked a glance around the column, its height oddly distorted by the eye-watering curves and subtly wrong dimensions. Everything on this atoll jarred upon his sensibilities, a riotous excess of colour, form and noise that offended the senses with their sheer frenzy.

He could see a wide plaza ahead, in which a flaring plume of searing energy was enclosed by a ring of bright coral that shone with a dazzling light. Dozens of such strange plumes were spread throughout the atolls, and the Mechanicum adepts believed that it was these peculiar devices that prevented the atolls from falling from the sky.

With no major landmasses on Laeran, capturing the atolls intact was deemed integral to the success of the coming campaign. The atolls would serve as bridgeheads and staging areas for all further assaults, and Fulgrim himself had declared that the energy plumes keeping the atolls in the air were to be captured at any cost.

Solomon caught glimpses of Laer warriors slithering around the base of the energy plume, their movements sinuous and inhumanly quick. First Captain Kaesoron had personally tasked the Second with securing the plaza, and Solomon had sworn an oath in the fire that he would not fail.

‘Gaius, take your men right and work your way through cover towards the plaza. Keep your head down. They’re sure to have warriors positioned to stop you. Send Thelonus on the left.’

‘What about you?’ Caphen shouted back over the din of gunfire, ‘Where are you going?’

Solomon smiled. ‘Where else but the centre? I’m going to take Charosian’s lot, but make sure Goldoara are in position before I move. I don’t want anyone moving before we’ve set down a weight of fire so heavy I could walk on it.’

‘Sir,’ said Caphen, ‘without wishing to appear impertinent, are you sure that’s the right choice?’

Solomon racked the slide on his bolter and said, ‘You fuss too much over making the “right” choice, Gaius. All we need do is make a good choice, see it through and accept the consequences.’

‘If you say so, sir,’ said Caphen.

‘I do!’ shouted Solomon. ‘We may not be able to do it by the book this time, but by Chemos, we’ll do it well! Now pass the word.’

Solomon waited as his orders were issued to the warriors under his command, and felt the familiar thrill of excitement as he prepared to take the fight to the enemy once more. He knew that Caphen disapproved of his cavalier attitude, but Solomon firmly believed that only through such testing circumstances could warriors better themselves and so more closely approach the perfection embodied by their primarch.

Sergeant Charosian edged up behind him, his veteran warriors gathered around him in the shadow of a Laer burrow complex.

‘Ready, sergeant?’ asked Solomon.

‘Indeed, sir,’ replied Charosian.

‘Then let’s go!’ shouted Solomon as he heard Goldoara squad open up with their support weapons. The bark and thump of heavy calibre shells thundering up the road was the sound he’d been waiting for, and he slid from the cover of the pillar and charged up the centre of the street towards the crackling energy tower.

Bolts of deadly green energy flashed past him, but he could tell they were not aimed, the weight of suppressing fire keeping the aliens from showing themselves. He heard gunfire from either side of him and knew that Caphen and Thelonus were having to fight their way towards the tower. The veteran Space Marines of Charosian followed him, firing from the hip and adding to the weight of fire provided by Goldoara.

Just as he thought they might reach the spire unmolested, the Laer attacked.

GATHERED TOGETHER IN A single system, the Laer had been one of the first species encountered by the Emperor's Children after taking their leave from the Luna Wolves and the great triumph on Ullanor. The cheers of that momentous day still rang in their ears, and the sight of so many primarchs gathered together remained a vivid, joyous memory in the minds of the Emperor's Children.

As Horus had said when he and Fulgrim had shared a heartfelt farewell, it was an end of things and a beginning of things, for Horus was now the Emperor's Regent, Warmaster of all the Imperium's armies. Now that the Emperor had returned to Terra, entire fleets, billions of warriors and the power to destroy worlds were his to command.

Warmaster...

The title was a new one, created for Horus, and its unveiling had yet to find its fit in the minds of the primarchs, who found themselves subject to the command of one who had, until then, been their equal.

The Emperor's Children had welcomed the appointment, for they counted the warriors of the Luna Wolves as their closest brothers. A terrible accident at the inception of the Emperor's Children had almost destroyed them, but Fulgrim and his Legion had risen, phoenix-like, from the disaster with greater resolve and strength. In the process Fulgrim had earned the affectionate sobriquet of "the Phoenician". During this time, while Fulgrim

rebuilt his shattered Legion, he and his few warriors had fought alongside the Luna Wolves for almost a century.

With a stream of fresh recruits drawn from Terra and Fulgrim's home of Chemos, the Legion had grown rapidly and, under the aegis of the Warmaster, become one of the deadliest fighting forces in the galaxy.

Horus himself had praised Fulgrim's Legion as one of the best he had fought alongside.

Now, with decades of war behind them, the Emperor's Children had the numbers to embark on crusades of their own, to make their own way in the galaxy, battling alone for the first time in over a century.

The Legion was hungry to prove itself, and Fulgrim had thrown his all into making up for the time lost while he had rebuilt his Legion, seeking to push the boundaries of the Imperium yet further and prove the courage and worth of his Legion.

First contact with the Laer had come about when one of the 28th Expedition's forward scout ships had discovered evidence of civilisation in a nearby binary cluster and determined that it was a culture of some sophistication. Though initially not hostile to the Imperial forces, this alien race had reacted violently when one of the 28th Expedition's scout forces had been sent towards their home world. A small, but powerful alien war fleet had attacked the Imperial vessels as they approached the system's core world, destroying every one of them without the loss of a single vessel.

From what little information had been gathered before the scout force's destruction, the Mechanicum adepts had discovered that the aliens called themselves the Laer and that their technology was capable of matching and, in many cases, exceeding that of the Imperium.

The bulk of Laer society appeared to exist on numerous, city-sized atolls of floating coral that plied the skies of Laeran, an oceanic planet that bore all the hallmarks of a world submerged by the melting of its ice caps. Only the peaks of what had once been its

tallest mountains and structures protruded from the mighty seas that covered its entire surface.

Administrators from the Council of Terra had postulated that perhaps the Laer could be made a protectorate of the Imperium, since conquering such an advanced race could prove a long and costly endeavour.

Fulgrim had rejected such a notion out of hand, famously saying, 'Only humanity is perfect and for an alien race to hold its own ideals and technology as comparable to ours is profane. No, the Laer deserve only extinction.'

And so the Cleansing of Laeran was begun.

Fulgrim can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

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