

STORM OF IRON

A Warhammer 40,000 novel

By Graham McNeill

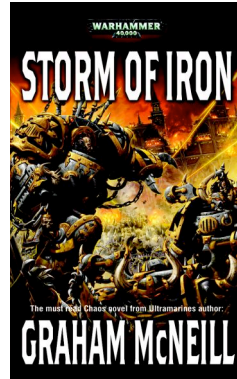
Chaos Space Marines are merciless, intent upon slaughter and pillage. From shadowy strongholds in the Eye of Terror the superhuman soldiers of Traitor Legions and renegade warbands wage constant and bloody battle against the Imperium.

When a massive force of Iron Warriors invades the planet Hydra Cordatus, and lays siege to the Imperial citadel, how long can the defenders possibly hold out, and what do their enemies truly seek?

Storm of Iron is the essential Chaos Space Marines novel by Graham McNeill, author of the highly popular Ultramarines series.

About the Author

Hailing from Scotland, Graham McNeill worked for over six years as a Games Developer in Games Workshop's Design Studio before taking the plunge to become a full-time writer. In addition to a number of novels, Graham has written a host of SF and Fantasy stories and comics. He lives and works in Nottingham.



More Graham McNeill from the Black Library:

Warhammer 40,000 Novels

ULTRAMARINES

THE ULTRAMARINES OMNIBUS

(Omnibus edition containing books 1-3: *Nightbringer*, *Warriors of Ultramar* and *Dead Sky*, *Black Sun*)

Book 4 – THE KILLING GROUND

HORUS HERESY

FALSE GOD

FULGRIM

The following is an excerpt from *Storm of Iron* by Graham McNeill. Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Copyright © Games Workshop Ltd, 2008. All rights reserved. Reproduction prohibited, in any form, including on the internet.

For more details email publishing@games-workshop.co.uk or visit the Black Library website www.blacklibrary.com

JERICHO FALLS SPACEPORT squatted at the foot of the mountains, a glowing beacon of light in the greyness of the dust storm. Such storms were not uncommon on Hydra Cordatus, and were just one of the unpleasant phenomenon that simply had to be endured. A typical Imperial military establishment, it boasted a collection of three dozen buildings, ranging from armoured hangars for Marauder and Lightning aircraft, fuel stations and mess halls to barracks and maintenance sheds. The landing strips and hardened runways covered over eighty per cent of the ground enclosed by the three metre high perimeter walls, enough to land or launch an entire attack wing of aircraft in under five minutes. Vast supply shuttles, each capable of landing a Battle Titan, could be handled by the base, though it had been many years since anything larger than a Thunderhawk gunship had availed itself of the facilities.

The command post of the spaceport was housed in what was known by the soldiers as ‘The Hope’, due to an oft-repeated mantra amongst the Guardsmen stationed on Hydra Cordatus that they hoped not to pull duty at Jericho Falls. A thick, armoured tower with a flattened disc on top, set on the northern edge of the landing fields, the Hope was protected by reinforced rockcrete walls, which in turn were plated in sheets of adamantium specially commissioned from the shipyards of Calth. Howling winds swept across the open ground of the base, whipping the abrasive dust into every fold and crease of a soldier’s uniform, getting into mouths and behind goggles to choke and blind.

The only way in or out of the Hope was through an adamantium door that required four gigantic pistons to open.

Five companies of the Jouran Dragoons were stationed here, housed in reinforced barracks and a hardened hangar. Green and red lights winked on the numerous landing platforms and runways, and powerful arc lights fought to penetrate the swirling dust and illuminate the outer perimeter of the base. Patrol vehicles, their engines modified to resist the intake of dust, circled the base, their headlights feebly piercing the gloom.

THE ATMOSPHERE WITHIN the Hope was subdued. This close to dawn was always slow, no different from any other time of the day. An hour before the shift change, the staff were tired and restless. The soft ticking of logic engines and hushed conversations with patrolling vehicles and soldiers were the only sounds.

Operator Three, Koval Peronus, rubbed his grainy eyes and took a hit of caffeine. It was cold, but did the job. Once again he leaned towards the vox-panel.

‘Listening post Sigma IV, come in please,’ he said. A burst of static was his only answer. He checked the time. It had been two hours and ten minutes since Hawke’s last check-in. He was late. Again.

‘Listening post Sigma IV, come in. Hawke, I know you’re there, so pick up the damn vox!’

Disgusted, Koval dropped the vox-handset and took another gulp of caffeine. Trust bloody Hawke to put a spanner in the works.

He’d try once more and if he couldn’t get an answer then he’d have to kick it higher and tough luck to Hawke.

He called again. Nothing.

‘Okay, Hawke. It’s your butt if you want to sleep on the job again,’ he whispered and thumbed the vox-link connecting his panel to the adept’s station.

‘Yes, Operator Three?’ answered Adept Cycerin.

‘Sorry to disturb you, adept, but we may have a problem. One of the surveyor stations has not checked in and I can’t raise them.’

‘Very well, I shall be there directly.’

‘Yes, adept,’ replied Koval, lounging back and waiting for his superior.

Hawke was for it this time. He’d already been busted onto report, ending up in the mountains and if this was another of his classic screw-ups, then he was finished as a Guardsman.

Adept Cycerin appeared at his shoulder and leaned over the panel, the rasping static of his vox-amp in his throat hissing in displeasure. He smelt of incense and oil.

‘Who is stationed at Sigma IV?’ he asked.

‘Hawke, Charedo and Hitch.’

The adept’s vox-amp crackled in what Koval took to be a sigh of frustration; apparently Hawke’s reputation had spread even to the priests of the Machine God.

‘I’ve tried them three times, adept. I can’t even get the standby signal.’

‘Very well. Keep trying, but if you still can’t raise them after another ten minutes, send a flight of ornithopters to investigate. Keep me informed.’

‘Yes, adept.’

There would be no saving Hawke this time.

HONSOU COULD SEE the hazy glow of the spaceport just ahead. The bobbing lights of a vehicle wove their way through the gloom, a pair of sweeping beams swinging in their direction. He dropped to his knees and raised his fist. Behind him, thirty armoured figures dropped to their knees, bolters at the ready. It was unlikely that the vehicle’s beams could penetrate the thick, dusty air as far as their position, but there was no sense in being reckless.

The lights moved on and Honsou relaxed a fraction. Routine had made the Imperial troops careless. These last few months had allowed him to study the circuits made by the patrol vehicles and plot their routes and timings. The warp alone knew how long these particular soldiers had been stationed on this planet, but it must have been a long time. It was only natural that their alertness would drop and patrol patterns would become predictable. It was an inevitable price for long tours of duty and it would soon see them dead.

Satisfied the patrol vehicle had moved on, he extended his fist once again, opening and shutting it three times in rapid succession. They were too close to the spaceport to risk any form of vox communication. Honsou heard muffled footfalls behind him and turned as a figure in steeldust armour, chevroned with yellow and black, crept towards him. Goran Delau, his second-in-command, knelt beside him and nodded. The newcomer's power armour was heavily modified and ornamented with skull-faced rivets and brass mouldings of writhing faces cunningly worked into the edging of his shoulder guards. A whining servo limb, like a clawed digger arm, lolled over Delau's right shoulder, the ribbed grip sighing open and closed as though with breath of its own.

Honsou pointed to the sky then clenched his gauntleted fist again, hammering it into his palm. Delau nodded and removed a crude looking slate from the side of his bulky backpack, adjusting a brass dial on its front. A red light flashed on the otherwise featureless front panel, flickering for a second before becoming a steady, blood-red glow.

Delau raised his hands to the sky, the servo arm mimicking his movements. Honsou could not hear his words, but knew that Delau was offering his thanks that the Dark Gods had again given them a chance to strike back against the ancient enemy.

Honsou watched the red light on Goran's slate and marked this moment in his memory. The targeting beacons they had spent the last three months planting around the spaceport on this barren rock were all now active, shrieking their locations into space.

This was the most dangerous part of their mission. The Imperials within the spaceport would now know that there were enemies close.

If the favour of their Lords deserted them then they would all be dead soon. He shrugged, the servo muscles in his armour whining as they tried to match the gesture. If it was the will of the gods that he should die here, then so be it. He had asked nothing of them and expected nothing in return.

He just hoped that if he was to die on this barren world it would be by the will of the gods, and not because of that madman Kroeger.

PIERCING SHRIEKS FILLED the command centre of the Hope as Honsou's signal locators screamed into the sky. Technicians wrenched headsets from their ears at the din, and alarm sirens began wailing.

Adept Cycerin stared, ashen faced, at the runic display. Bright dots of light pulsed on the map projected before him. Each dot indicated one of the orbital torpedo silos or air defence batteries, and operators hurriedly tried to contact the men stationed there to ascertain what was happening.

Were they broadcasting? Were they under attack? What in the name of the Emperor was going on?

Cycerin returned to his monitoring station, placing his hands on the ridged, metal fixtures of the armrests. Thin, wiry tendrils of silver metal slithered from beneath his fingernails like gleaming worms and clicked into brass sockets on the ridges. The adept sighed, and his organic eye flickered behind a pale lid as information relayed from the multitude of surveyors and augurs positioned around the spaceport flooded his senses through the technology of his mechadendrites.

Awareness flooded him, his mind-sense perceiving space and distance as vectors, ranges and coverage of ground. His senses reached into space, following the sweeps of the orbital augurs. Information flowed through him, processed and compartmentalised in the synthetic logic stacks of his augmented brain. Even with his machine affinity, he could barely keep pace with the barrage of sensory data.

There had to be something, this couldn't be happening without reason. Logic dictated that there was a cause for this effect. Something must be out of place...

There, in the north sector! He narrowed his perceptions, shutting off areas of sensory retrieval that were extraneous to his search and closing in on the anomaly. Where there should have been washes of energy sweeping down from the mountains, there was only black emptiness. The surveyor stations on the northern slopes were silent, their auguries no longer active. He immediately saw that this left an

open corridor, through which an enemy could approach undetected to the very perimeter of the base.

How had this not been seen? Why had the operators here not reported such an unforgivable lapse in security? The identity of the surveyor station flashed up.

Sigma IV.

He cursed as he realised that the anomaly had been seen, but that the surveyor station's failure to report had been put down to human error on the part of those within. He swore again, uncharacteristically letting slip his emotionless demeanour, as yet more sirens screeched around the control room.

Startled, Cycerin reopened his mind to other portions of his awareness and his breath caught in his throat as he felt the presence of dozens of starships in orbit above Hydra Cordatus. Inconceivable! Where had these ships come from and why had they not been detected before now? Nothing should be able to enter even the outer edges of the system without them being aware of it... could it? Or was this another example of human error? No, the logic engines would have screamed the place down many days ago if it had detected this size of fleet approaching. Somehow these starships had avoided detection by some of the rarest and most precious equipment available to the Adeptus Mechanicus.

Briefly he wondered what technologies these ships had and how it worked, but shook his head at such irrelevance. He had more important things to worry about. The defenders at the citadel must be warned that an invasion was imminent. He opened the mind-link to Arch Magos Amaethon's Machine Temple in the citadel and sent the psychic alert code. The astropaths stationed there would detect it and send a more powerful psychic distress call for aid to Hydra Cordatus.

Hurriedly he closed off his mind-link and withdrew his digital mechadendrites from the monitoring station, opening his eyes on a scene of controlled efficiency. System operators called to the torpedo outstations, authenticating launch codes and feeding their operators firing solutions towards the collection of starships in orbit.

Time was of the essence now and they had to get the torpedoes in the air.

Alert sirens would be ringing out in the pilots' barracks by now and soon there would be a swarm of aircraft in the air, ready to meet whatever threat was approaching, and soldiers from the Jouran Dragoons were mustering even now to repel the attackers.

He had drilled the operators here for this eventuality time and time again, and now that it was happening for real, he was pleased to note the calmness evinced by his staff.

'Adept Cycerin!' shouted one of the orbital monitoring operators. 'We have multiple signals detaching from several contacts in orbit.'

'Identify them!' barked Cycerin.

The operator nodded, bowing his head to his station, running his finger down the slate beside his display.

'They're too fast for landing craft, I believe they are inbound orbital munitions.'

'Plot their vectors! Quickly, man!' hissed Cycerin, though he feared he knew the answer already.

The man's hands danced across his slate, and green lines extended from the rapidly moving blips, reaching out to the representation of the planet's surface. Cycerin's vox-amp crackled in sudden fear as he saw the approach vectors of the incoming bombs matched almost exactly the locator signals being broadcast from the torpedo launch silos.

'How...?' whispered the operator, his face ashen.

Cycerin lifted his eyes to the armoured glass windows of the Hope.

'There's someone out there...'

NEARLY A THOUSAND men died in the first seconds of the Iron Warriors' initial bombardment of Jericho Falls spaceport. The battle barge Stonebreaker fired three salvos of magma bombs into the desolate rocky slopes surrounding the spaceport, blasting vast chunks of rock hundreds of metres into the air and flattening almost all the torpedo silos in the mountains with unerring accuracy.

Alarm sirens screamed and the spaceport's weapon batteries rumbled into firing positions as their gunners desperately sought to acquire targets before being annihilated. A few hastily blessed torpedoes roared upwards through the orange sky on pillars of fiery smoke and powerful beams of laser energy stabbed through the perpetually cloudless heavens.

More bombs fell, this time within the perimeter of Jericho Falls, demolishing buildings, gouging great craters and hurling enormous clouds of ember ash into the atmosphere. Flames from burning structures lit the smoke from within and bodies lay aflame in the wreckage of the shattered spaceport. Smashed aircraft littered the ground and more exploded as the heat from the fires cooked off their weapons and fuel tanks.

Bombs slammed into the rockcrete, scything lethal fragments everywhere. Others smashed into the runways, cratering them and melting the honeycombed adamantium with the heat of a star.

The Marauders and Lightnings out in the open took the worst of the barrage, pulverised by the force of the explosions.

The noise and confusion were unbelievable; the sky was red with flames and black with smoke. Heavy las-fire blasted upwards.

A number of shells impacted on the main hangar's roof. Its armoured structure had absorbed the damage so far, though vast cracks now zigzagged across the reinforced walls and roof.

The main runway was engulfed in flames, burning pools of jet fuel spewing thick black smoke that turned day into night.

Hell had come to Hydra Cordatus.

Storm of Iron 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 13: 978 1 84416 571 1

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