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# BLOOD ANGELS: THE SECOND OMNIBUS James Swallow

The Blood Angels stand apart from the other Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes, descending from the skies on wings of flame. While they are renowned for their ten-thousand-year history of glorious battle and honourable deeds, these secretive Space Marines seek to hide the dark flaws at the core of their being – the Red Thirst and the Black Rage – from the rest of the Imperium. Do they fight any longer for the protection of mankind, or merely for their own salvation? This omnibus edition continues the saga of the Blood Angels, featuring the novels *Red Fury* and *Black Tide*, as well as brand new short stories and background material from *New York Times* bestselling author James Swallow.



#### 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; 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.

*Blood Angels: The Second Omnibus* can be purchased direct from this website and GW mail order, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, and better bookstores.

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EMATHIA'S ORNATE BRIDGE was a vaulted oval cut from planes of brass and steel, dominated by great lenses of crystal ranging down towards the frigate's bow. Below the deck, in work-pits among the ship's cogitators, hunchbacked servitors hissed to one another, busying themselves with the running of the vessel. Officers in blue-black tunics walked back and forth, overseeing their work.

The ship's commander, resplendent in a red-trimmed duty jacket, turned from a gas-lens viewer and gave the Astartes a bow.

'Sergeant Kale, Brother Nord. We're very close now. Come.' Captain Hyban Gorolev beckoned them towards him.

Nord liked the man; Gorolev had impressed him early on with his grasp of Adeptus Astartes protocol and the careful generosity with which he commanded *Emathia*'s crew. Nord had encountered Navy men who ruled their ships through fear and intimidation. Gorolev was quite unlike that; he had a fatherly way to him, a mixture of sternness tempered by sincerity that bonded his crew through mutual loyalty. Nord saw in the captain the mirror of brotherhood with *his* kindred.

'The derelict is near,' he was saying. Gorolev's sandy-coloured face was fixed in a frown. 'Interference continues to defeat the scrying of our sensors, however. There is wreckage. Evidence of plasma fire...' He trailed off.

Nord sensed the man's apprehension but said nothing, catching sight of a readout thick with lines of text in Gothic script. He saw recitations that suggested organic matter out there in the void. Unbidden, the Codicier's gaze snapped up and he stared out through the viewports. The ghost of a cold, undefined emotion began to gather at the base of his thoughts.

'Adeptus Astartes.' The voice had all the tonality of a command, a summons, a demand to be given fealty.

Filtered and machine-altered, the word emitted from a speaker embedded in a face where a mouth had once been. Eyes of titanium clockwork measured the Blood Angels coldly. Flesh, what there was of it, was subsumed into carbide plates that disappeared beneath a hood. A great gale of black robes hung loose to pool upon the decking, concealing a form that was a collection of sharp angles; the silhouette of a body that bore little resemblance to anything natural-born. Antennae blossomed from tailored holes in the habit, and out of hidden pockets, manipulators and snake-like mechadendrites moved, apparently of independent thought and action.

This thing that stood before them at the edge of the frigate's tacticarium, this not-quite-man seemingly built from human pieces and scrapyard leavings... This was Xeren.

'Your mission will commence momentarily,' said the tech-priest. He shifted slightly, and Nord heard the working of pistons. 'You are ready?'

'We are Adeptus Astartes,' Kale replied, with a grimace. The words were answer enough.

'Quite.' Xeren inclined his head towards the hololithic display, which showed flickers of hazy light. 'This zone is filthy with expended radiation. It may trouble even your iron constitution, Blood Angel.'

'Doubtful.' Kale's annoyance was building. 'Your concern is noted, magos. But now we are here, I am more interested in learning the identity of this hulk you have tasked us to secure for you. We cannot prosecute a mission to the best of our abilities without knowing what we will face.'

'But you are Adeptus Astartes,' said Xeren, making little effort to hide his mocking tone.

Before Kale could respond, the tech-priest's head bobbed. 'You are quite right, brother-sergeant,' he demurred, 'I have been secretive with the specifics of this operation. But once you see your target, you will understand the need for such security.'

There was a clicking sound from Xeren's chest; Nord wondered if it might be the Mechanicum cyborg's equivalent of a gasp.

'Sensors are clearing,' noted Gorolev. 'We have a clean return.'

'Show me,' snapped Kale.

Earlier during the voyage, just to satisfy his mild interest, Nord had allowed his psychic senses to brush the surface of Xeren's mind. What he had sensed there was unreadable; not shrouded, but simply *inhuman*. Nothing that he could interpret as emotions, only a coldly logical chain of processes with all the nuance of a cogitator program. And yet, as the holo-lith stuttered and grew distinct, for the briefest of moments Nord was certain he felt the echo of a covetous thrill from the tech-priest.

'Here is your target,' said Xeren.

'Throne of Terra...' The curse slipped from Gorolev's lips as the image solidified. 'Xenos!'

It resembled a whorled shell, a tight spiral of shimmering bone curved in on itself. Coils of fibrous matter that suggested sinew webbed it, and from one vast orifice along the ventral plane, a nest of pasty tenticular forms issued outwards, grasping at nothing.

It lay among a drift of broken chitin and flash-frozen fluids, listing. Great scars marked the flanks of the alien construct, and in places there were craters, huge pockmarks that had exploded outwards like city-sized pustules.

There seemed to be no life to it. It was a gargantuan, bilious corpse. A dead horror, there in the starless night.

'This is what you brought us to find?' Kale's voice was loaded with menace. 'A *tyranid* craft?'

'A hive ship,' Xeren corrected. The tech-priest ignored the silence that had descended on the *Emathia*'s bridge, the mute shock upon the faces of Gorolev's officers.

'A vessel of this tonnage is no match for a tyranid hive,' said Nord. 'Their craft have defeated entire fleets and pillaged the crews for raw bio-mass to feast upon!'

'It is dead,' said the priest. 'Have no fear.'

'I am not afraid,' Nord retorted, 'but neither am I a fool! The tyranids are not known as "the Great Devourer" without reason. They are a plague, organisms that exist solely to consume and replicate. To destroy all life unlike them.'

'You forget yourself.' Xeren's tone hardened. 'The authority here is mine. I have brought you to this place for good reason. Look to the hive-ship. It is dead,' he repeated.

NORD STUDIED THE image. The xenos craft exhibited signs of heavy damage, and its motion and course suggested it was unguided.

'My orders come from the highest echelons of the Adeptus Mechanicus,' continued the tech-priest. 'I am here to oversee the capture of this derelict, in the name of the God-Emperor and Omnissiah!'

'Capture...' Kale echoed the word. Nord saw the veteran's sword-hand twitch as he weighed the command.

'Consider the bounty within that monstrosity,' Xeren addressed them, Adeptus Astartes and officers all. 'Nord is quite correct. The tyranids are a scourge upon the stars, a virus writ large. But like any virus, it must be studied if a cure is to be found.' A spindly machine-arm whirred, moving to point at the image. 'This represents an unparalleled opportunity. This hive ship is a treasure trove of biological data. If we take it, learn its secrets...' He gave a clicking rasp. 'We might turn the xenos against themselves. Perhaps even tame them...'

'How did you know this thing was here?' Nord tore his gaze from the display.

Xeren answered after a moment. 'The first attempt to take the hive was not a success. There were complications.'

'You will tell us what transpired,' said Kale. 'Or we will go no further.'

'Aye,' rasped Gorolev. The captain had turned pale and sweaty, his fingers kneading the grip of his holstered laspistol.

Xeren gave another clicking sigh, and inclined his head on whining motors. 'A scouting party of Archeo-Technologists boarded the craft under the command of an adept named Indus. We believe that a splinter force from a larger hive fleet left this ship behind after it suffered some malfunction. Evidence suggests-'

'This Adept Indus,' Kale broke in. 'Where is he?'

Xeren looked away. 'The scouting party did not return. Their fate is unknown to me.'

'Consumed!' grated Gorolev. 'Throne and Blood! Any man that ventures in there would be torn apart!'

'*Captain*,' warned the brother-sergeant.

The tech-priest paid no attention to the officer's outburst. 'It is my firm belief that the hive ship, although not without hazards, is dormant. For the moment, at least.' He came closer on iron-clawed feet. 'You understand now why the Adeptus Mechanicus wish to move with alacrity, Blood Angel?'

'I understand,' Kale replied, and Nord saw the tightening of his jaw. Without another word, the veteran turned on his heel and strode away. Nord moved with him, and they were into the corridor before the Space Marine felt a hand upon his forearm.

'LORDS.' GOROLEV SHOT a look back towards the bridge as the hatch slammed shut, his eyes narrowing. 'A word?' Suspicion flared black in the man's aura.

'Speak,' Kale replied.

'I've made no secret of my reservations about the esteemed tech-priest's motive and manner,' said the captain. 'I cannot let this pass without comment.' His face took on the cast of anger and old fear. 'By the Emperor's grace, I am a veteran of many conflicts with the xenos, those tyranid abominations among them.' Gorolev's words brimmed with venom. 'Those... *things*. I've seen them rape worlds and leave nothing but ashen husks in their wake.' He leaned closer. 'That hive ship should not be studied like some curiosity. It should be *atomised*!'

Kale held up a hand and Gorolev fell silent. 'There is nothing you have said I disagree with, ship-master. But we are servants of the God-Emperor, Nord and I, you and your crew, even Xeren. And we have our duty.'

For a moment, it seemed as if Gorolev was about to argue; but then he nodded grimly, resigned to fulfilling his orders. 'Duty, then. In the Emperor's name.'

'In the Emperor's name,' said Kale.

Nord opened his mouth to repeat the oath, but he found his voice silenced.

So fleeting, so mercurial and indistinct that it was gone even as he turned his senses towards it, Nord felt... *Something*.

A gloom, stygian-deep and ominous, passing over him as a storm cloud might obscure the sun. There, and gone. A presence. A mind?

The sense of black and red clouds pressed in on the edges of his thoughts and he pushed them away.

'Nord?' He found Kale studying him with a careful gaze.

He cleared his thoughts with a moment's effort. 'Brother-Sergeant,' he replied. 'The mission, then?'

Kale nodded. 'The mission, aye.'