



BLACK LIBRARY



THE FIRST HERETIC

A Horus Heresy novel

By Aaron Dembski-Bowden

Amidst the galaxy-wide war of the Great Crusade, the Emperor castigates the Word Bearers for their worship. Distraught at this judgement, Lorgar and his Legion seek another path while devastating world after world, venting their fury and fervour on the battlefield. Their search for a new purpose leads them to the edge of the material universe, where they meet ancient forces far more powerful than they could have imagined. Having set out to illuminate the Imperium, the corruption of Chaos takes hold and their path to damnation begins. Unbeknownst to the Word Bearers, their quest for truth contains the very roots of heresy...

About the Author

Aaron Dembski-Bowden is a British author with his beginnings in the videogame and RPG industries. He's been a deeply entrenched fan of Warhammer 40,000 ever since he first ruined his copy of Space Crusade by painting the models with all the skill expected of an overexcited nine-year-old. He lives and works in Northern Ireland with his fiancée Katie, hiding from the world in the middle of nowhere. His hobbies generally revolve around reading anything within reach, and helping people spell his surname.



• **THE HORUS HERESY** •

HORUS RISING

Dan Abnett

FALSE GODS

Graham McNeill

GALAXY IN FLAMES

Ben Counter

FLIGHT OF THE EISENSTEIN

James Swallow

FULGRIM

Graham McNeill

DESCENT OF ANGELS

Mitchel Scanlon

LEGION

Dan Abnett

BATTLE FOR THE ABYSS

Ben Counter

MECHANICUM

Graham McNeill

TALES OF HERESY

Edited by Nick Kyme and Lindsey Priestley

FALLEN ANGELS

Mike Lee

A THOUSAND SONS

Graham McNeill

NEMESIS

James Swallow

THE FIRST HERETIC

Aaron Dembski-Bowden

PROSPERO BURNS

Dan Abnett

AGE OF DARKNESS

Edited by Christian Dunn

• **HORUS HERESY AUDIO DRAMAS** •

THE DARK KING AND THE LIGHTNING TOWER

Dan Abnett and Graham McNeill

RAVEN'S FLIGHT

Gav Thorpe

GARRO: OATH OF MOMENT

James Swallow

GARRO: LEGION OF ONE

James Swallow

The following is an excerpt from *The First Heretic* by Aaron Dembski-Bowden. Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Copyright © Games Workshop Ltd, 2010. 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.

THE SEVENTEENTH PRIMARCH was known to the emergent Imperium by many names. The worlds left in his Legion's triumphant wake knew him as the Anointed, the Seventeenth Son, or more elegantly, the Bearer of the Word.

To his primarch brothers he was simply Lorgar, the name given to him on his home world of Colchis during the years of turmoil before the Emperor's arrival.

Yet as with many primarchs, he also bore an informal title – a term of respect often used by the eighteen Legions. Where Fulgrim of the III Legion was known respectfully as the Phoenician, and Ferrus Manus of the X Legion carried the Gorgon as his title, the lord of the XVII Legion was the Urizen – a name pulled from the half-forgotten writings of ancient Terran myth.

None of the one hundred thousand warriors gathered spoke those names now. As the Word Bearers Legion stood at its full, unbelievable strength in perfectly ordered ranks, every one of his sons chanted his true name in sibilant whispers, as if the syllables were an invocation.

Aurelian, they breathed in unison. *Lorgar Aurelian*, Lorgar the Golden One. Thus was the father known to his chosen children.

The Seventeenth Primarch turned his gaze to the ocean of grey-armoured warriors bred to do his bidding.

He seemed to pause, just for a moment, at the immensity of what he was seeing. Those closest to him saw the fires of thought light up his eyes.

‘My sons,’ he said, colouring the words with a smile tainted by sorrow. ‘It lifts my heart to see you all.’

TO STARE AT one of the God-Emperor’s sons was to drink in a vision of avataric perfection. Human senses, even the laboratory-forged perceptions of an Astartes warrior, struggled to process what they were seeing. When Argel Tal first stood before Lorgar as a boy still shy of his eleventh birthday, he had suffered nightmares of confusion and pain for a month.

The Legion’s Apothecaries who watched over the infant recruits were prepared for this. Turyon, the Apothecary who oversaw Argel Tal’s implantation surgeries during his pubescent years, had explained the phenomena to him in one of the tiny isolation cells granted to all Legion acolytes during their training.

‘The nightmares are natural, and will fade in time. Your mind must come to terms with what you have seen.’

‘I am not sure what I saw,’ the boy admitted.

‘You saw the son of a god. Mortal minds and eyes were never meant to witness such things. It will take time to adjust.’

‘It hurts when I close my eyes. It hurts to remember him.’

‘It will not hurt forever.’

‘I want to serve him,’ the eleven-year-old boy had promised, still trembling from the night’s visions. ‘I will serve him, I swear.’

Turyon had nodded, going on to speak of the many lethal trials ahead before he could wear the mantle of an

Astartes. Argel Tal had listened to none of it – at least, not then, not that morning with the weak Colchisian sun bringing dawn to his single-windowed cell.

He still thought of Turyon. The Apothecary had died forty years before, and Argel Tal kept a memento of the battle. Even now, he could never hold the curved, broken alien blade without remembering Turyon's slashed throat.

In truth, that was why he kept it. Remembrance. A morbid habit, perhaps, and one the Chaplains had often chastised him for. It was the mark of an unhealthy mind to gather the weapons that slew one's brothers.

Argel Tal raised his eyes.

'Blood demands blood,' Lorgar said to the warriors gathered in Monarchia's cratered grave. 'Blood demands blood.'

As always when in his father's presence, Argel Tal rationed his gaze to focus upon individual details, rather than his gene-father's full manifestation.

Lorgar's eyes, the snowy grey of Colchis's winter skies, were ringed by kohl, setting them even brighter against the primarch's skin – skin that seemed golden to unvisored eyes.

Argel Tal's helm's eye lenses filtered everything to a world of dark-washed tactical readouts, but it stole none of the detail. He could make out the thousands of individual Colchisian glyphs gold-inked onto the primarch's white flesh. It was said the tattoos of cuneiform scripture covered most of Lorgar's body. Certainly, they trailed down his face in tight, perfect lines, from his shaved head to his jawline, each sentence a prayer of devotion, a prophetic hope for the future, or an invocation of strength from a higher power.

Where Lorgar's regalia hid his flesh, the writing continued over the golden plates of armour, acid-etched into the shining surfaces. Yet for all his majesty, the Seventeenth Primarch did not display his grandeur by ceremonial wargear. His armour may have been gold, but it was no more ornate than the Mark III plate worn by his captains. The oath papers and scrolls of scripture pinned to his breastplate and pauldrons told not of the primarch's own glory, but his vows to his father, and his devotion to serve the people of the Imperium.

'And so we come to this,' the primarch said, his voice never rising far above a whisper, because it never needed to. It reached the ears of his closest sons, and translated smoothly across the vox for the rear ranks.

'And so we come to this, yet still they make us wait for the answers we deserve.'

Human linguistics couldn't convey the fierce, soulful confidence Lorgar exuded. His slender lips were curled into the crooked half-smile of an impassioned poet, despite standing in the grave of his greatest achievement. In his gauntleted hands, clutched in gold fists that seemed reluctant to raise the weapon, was a crozius the height of an Astartes warrior.

Illuminarum was the primarch's one concession to grandeur. The weapon's haft was the cream of ivory, reinforced by a grip of black iron. Its head was an orb of adamantium, stained black through a forgemaster's touch and decorated with silver-leafed runes. Evenly-spaced spikes the length of human forearms projected from its outer edges, lending the mace a brutish air almost at odds with the philosophical seeker who carried it across the stars.

Despite the immense craftsmanship in its forging, Lorgar's crozius was ostentation utterly without beauty.

Entire worlds had been put to the flame by its bearer, while every Chaplain of the Word Bearers Legion wielded its lesser reflection.

None of Lorgar's sons, even those who had spent years from his side, were blind to their father's unease. The primarch cast glances back at the grounded Ultramarines Thunderhawks, waiting for any signs of emergence. Around his poet's smile was the faint suggestion of black stubble, something Argel Tal had never seen before on his meticulous primarch.

Lorgar turned away from his sons, now staring down at the impassive gunships. His whisper carried to the entire Legion.

'Guilliman, brother of my blood, if not my heart. Come to me and answer for your madness.'

In theatrical unity, the gunships' ramps began to lower. The Legion heard their father's last whisper, as the Ultramarines showed themselves at last.

'Bearers of the Word,' he murmured the warning, soft as snakeskin on silk. 'Stand ready, and watch for the first sign of treachery.'

A MERE HUNDRED warriors stood opposed to one hundred thousand. Facing an ocean of grey armour, a single company of Ultramarines had made planetfall with their primarch. Even in the gravity of the moment, Argel Tal wasn't sure whether to be mystified at this display, or insulted by it. He settled for both, his irritation rising all the while.

'The 19th Company,' Xaphen voxed, watching the Ultramarines banner waving in the gentle wind. It depicted a rearing white horse with a mane of fire, over a series of numerals. 'Intriguing.'

Argel Tal watched the white horse rippling in the wind, trying to discern some significance in the 19th's presence. The creature seemed in motion, the flames of its mane real and burning. Aethon Company, the Ultramarines 19th, was well-known to many outside Guilliman's Legion. Aethon himself commanded an entire Imperial Expedition away from his primarch, and was rumoured to be a stern ambassador and a shrewd diplomat. Whatever the truth, the captain was trusted with a great deal more responsibility and independence than most other Astartes could ever claim.

'They are named,' Xaphen said, 'for a fire-breathing horse, in ancient Macraggian mythology. Aethon was the name of a horse that pulled the sun-god's chariot across the sky.'

Argel Tal resisted the urge to shake his head. 'With the greatest respect, brother, I couldn't care less.'

'Knowledge is power,' the Chaplain replied.

'*Focus*,' the captain snapped back. 'You heard the primarch.'

Xaphen sent an acknowledgement chime across the vox – a single static buzz.

The final gunship ramp lowered on steam-venting pistons. Argel Tal remained still, his muscles locked tense, as the Thirteenth Primarch descended with his honour guard, followed by...

'No,' he said, shock stealing his breath.

'Blood of the God-Emperor,' Xaphen whispered.

Ahead of them, Lorgar watched with a viper's smile. 'Malcador the Sigillite.'

Next to the primarch armoured in battleplate of pearl and cerulean walked a slender figure in unassuming, plain robes. Human, utterly frail in Gulliman's massive

shadow, the First Lord of Terra clutched a staff of dark metal and rattling chains, topped by a twin-headed eagle.

Guilliman, by contrast, was hulking where the Sigillite was sparse. His warplate was the blue of Terra's long-burned oceans, an echo from an age of legend, and edged by gold and mother of pearl, glinting in the rising moonlight.

'What insanity is this?' snarled Kor Phaeron, his voice thickened by emotion too rancid to suppress.

'Peace, my friend,' Lorgar murmured, his gaze never leaving the opposing line of warriors. 'The answers we seek will soon be ours. Captains, step forward.'

At the command, one hundred captains advanced, bolters and blades held at ease in gauntlets of grey. One hundred Chaplains, their gold trimmings and crozius mauls marking them out from the ranks, remained a step behind. Behind the warrior-priests, a hundred thousand Word Bearers stood at the ready, holding ranks despite the uneven platform made by the pulverised ground.

Argel Tal tore his glance from Guilliman, the Lord of Macragge's noble features as difficult to look upon as his own father's. His eyes were the hardest part to take in. There was no doubt, no speculation, no curiosity – nothing that told of mortal emotion behind the deep-set eyes. The face could have been sculpted from suntanned stone. Dignity incarnate.

The Seventh Captain repressed a shiver, and turned his attention to the Sigillite. Too human to fear, yet too influential to ignore. The Emperor's right hand and closest confidant.

Here.

Here, and apparently supporting the Ultramarines in their destruction of the perfect city. Argel Tal's hand tightened on the bolter grip.

‘Brother,’ Lorgar spoke, his tones smooth on the surface, almost entirely hiding the tremble of grief his sons knew must be flowing through him. ‘And Malcador. *Welcome to Monarchia.*’ At these words, he gestured at the devastation, his handsome features lost to a sickened sneer.

‘Lorgar,’ Guilliman’s voice rumbled like distant thunder, and he said no more than his brother’s name.

Argel Tal narrowed his eyes at the absolute neutrality in the tone, not a ghost of emotion. He’d seen automatons in the Legio Cybernetica with more humanity than the Ultramarines primarch.

‘Primarch Lorgar,’ said Malcador, bowing by way of introduction. ‘It grieves us all to meet in these circumstances.’

The golden warrior took a step forward, his crozius resting on his shoulder. ‘Does it now? It grieves us all? You do not look grieved, my brother.’

Guilliman said nothing. Lorgar broke his stare after several moments, regarding the Sigillite.

‘Answers, Malcador.’ He took another step forward, now halfway between his Legion and the hundred Ultramarines. ‘I want answers. What happened here? What madness has been allowed to run unchecked?’

The Sigillite pulled back his hood, revealing a face so pale it bordered on grey unhealthiness. ‘You cannot guess, Lorgar?’ The human shook his head as if in sorrow. ‘Truly, this is a surprise to you?’

‘*Answer me!*’ the primarch screamed.

The Ultramarines flinched back, several raising weapons in hands that shook with surprise.

Lorgar threw his arms out to the sides, taking in the surrounding devastation a second time, and spit flew

from his lips as he roared. *‘Answer me for what you have done here! I demand it!’*

‘What do we do?’ Xaphen voxed. ‘What’s... what’s happening?’

Argel Tal didn’t answer. His blade and bolter were suddenly very heavy in his hands, and he stared at the Ultramarines displaying their own shock so openly. While they held ranks, it was clear they were uneasy. And rightly so.

‘What have you done to my city?’ Lorgar’s voice was a hissing whisper, spoken through a false smile.

‘It was not compliant,’ Malcador’s words were slowed by patience. ‘This culture, this world, was not comp—’

‘Liar! Blasphemer! It was the model of compliance!’

Several Ultramarines retreated a little now, and Argel Tal could see them looking to one another in doubt. A flutter of voices teased the vox-network as the Word Bearers picked up signals from the Ultramarines voxing each other in their unease. Only Guilliman appeared unmoved. Even Malcador was jarred, his eyes wide and his staff gripped tighter as he faced down the primarch’s anger.

‘Lorgar...’

‘They chanted my father’s name in the streets!’

‘Lorgar, they—’

‘They honoured him with each sunrise!’ Lorgar came closer, his eyes wild, focused like targeting reticules on his father’s advisor. *‘Answer me, human. Justify this, when statues of the Emperor adorned every place of gathering!’*

‘They worshipped him.’ Malcador raised his head, for he was half the height of both primarchs. ‘They revered him.’ He looked up at Lorgar, seeking some sign of comprehension in the giant’s golden face. Seeing none,

he drew breath again, and wiped a fleck of the primarch's spittle from his cheek. 'They worshipped him as a god.'

'You plead my case for me?' Lorgar dropped his crozius, letting it fall to the broken ground with a dull thud. He looked at his hands, fingers curled into claws as if he would tear out his own eyes. 'You... you stand in the ruin of perfection, and you say yourself this city was annihilated for nothing? Have you travelled the length of the galaxy to show me you have lost your fragile mortal mind?'

'Lorgar-' the Sigillite tried again, but the rest of his words never left his throat. Malcador fell in silence, smashed aside by Lorgar's backhanded strike. Every warrior nearby heard the wrenching snap of bones breaking, and Malcador crashed onto the rocky ground twenty metres away, tumbling to a halt in the dust.

Face to face with his brother, Lorgar bared his teeth into Guilliman's impassive features.

'Why. Did. You. Do. This.'

'I was ordered to.'

'By this worm?' Lorgar laughed, reaching out a hand towards the fallen figure of Malcador. 'By this maggot?' The Word Bearers' primarch shook his head and stalked back to his own warriors.

'I will take my Legion to Terra, and inform our father of this... this madness, myself.'

'He knows.'

The voice was Malcador's. He rose on unsteady limbs, his words strained and spoken through bleeding lips. Guilliman inclined his head, the barest movement enough to send two of his warriors to aid the Emperor's advisor. Malcador stood, still hunched from the pain, and ordered the approaching Ultramarines away. With his

arm outstretched, his staff leapt from the ground a dozen metres away and slapped neatly into his palm.

‘What?’ Lorgar said, uncertain he’d heard correctly. ‘What did you say?’

The wounded First Lord of Terra closed his eyes, using his staff of office as a crutch.

‘I said, he knows. Your father knows.’

‘You lie.’ Lorgar clenched his teeth again, his breath coming fast and shallow. ‘You lie, and you are fortunate I do not kill you for this blasphemy.’

Malcador didn’t argue. He closed his eyes, raised his head to the sky, and spoke without sound. Every Word Bearer, every Ultramarine, every living being in a ten-kilometre radius heard the man’s psychic voice pulsing through their minds, such was its power.

+He will not listen, my lord. Not to me+

Lorgar froze, his hands a hair’s breadth from retrieving his crozius on the ground. Guilliman’s most expansive movement since arriving was to turn from his golden brother, not in disgust as Argel Tal first thought, but without any expression at all. He was simply shielding his eyes.

Malcador’s eyes remained closed, his face angled up to the heavens. To the vessels in orbit.

Lorgar stepped back, voicelessly mouthing ‘No, no, no...’ as if whispered words could somehow alter fate.

The world around them exploded in light.

The displacement of air resulted in a bang not far from a sonic boom, but that wasn’t what sent Argel Tal reeling. He’d seen teleportation technology used before – had travelled via such rare means himself – but the noise was filtered to tolerable levels by his helm’s perceptive systems.

And it wasn't the light of a teleport flare that forced him to avert his eyes. This, too, would have been compensated for by his armour's internal sensors, dimming his eye lenses immediately.

But he was blind. Blinded by gold, burning like molten metal.

The vox shrieked with thousands of his brothers voicing the same malady, but the reports from his brethren were dull, half-lost in an assault of noise that shouldn't exist. It wasn't a fault with the vox; it was in his head – a crashing of waves loud enough to throw off his balance.

Blind and almost deafened, Argel Tal felt his bolter slip from his grip. It took all his strength to remain standing.

LORGAR AURELIAN SAW none of this.

No blinding golden light. No deafening psychic roar.

He saw six figures standing in unity, five of whom he did not recognise, and one he did. Behind them, the Ultramarines – not afflicted as his warriors were – were on their knees in an orderly display. Only Guilliman and the Sigillite remained standing.

Lorgar looked back to the six. The five ringed the familiar figure, and though the primarch did not know them by name, he knew their creed. Achingly elaborate armour of rich gold. Cloaks of royal scarlet draped from their shoulders. Long halberds topped by weighty silver blades, gripped in hands that would never tremble.

Custodians. The Emperor's guardians.

Lorgar looked to the sixth figure, who was just a man. Despite the vigour of youth, age lines showed time's tracks across features that were both stern and gentle, all at once. The man's appearance depended entirely on

which facet of his face one focused upon. He was a tired, ageing man, and a heroic statue immortalised in life's prime. He was a young, grimacing warlord with cold eyes, and a confused elder on the edge of weeping.

Lorgar focused on those eyes now, seeing the warmth of love within the benevolence of trust. The man blinked slowly, and as his eyes opened again, they were cold with the frigid touch of disappointment blending into the ice of disgust.

'Lorgar,' the man said. His voice was quiet but strong, lost in the indecipherable vista between hatred and kindness.

'Father,' Lorgar said to the Emperor of Mankind.

THE FIRST HERETIC 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: 978-1-84416-884-2

In the US: Price \$8.99 (\$11.99 Canada)

ISBN: 978-1-84416-885-9

- 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