

DEATHWATCH

THE NEMESIS INCIDENT



DEATHWATCH
CHAPTER MYSTERIES

WARHAMMER
40,000
ROLEPLAY

THE NEMESIS INCIDENT

"The awkward question; the wise know when to remain silent."

—Chaplain Glaw of the Storm Wardens

Every Chapter of the Adeptus Astartes has its legends, many recounting glorious victories and noble deeds, others serving as warnings against hubris or the perfidy of traitors or aliens. The Storm Wardens hold many battle honours, yet the defining campaign in their history is shrouded in mystery, its true details unknown even to those brethren now interred within the sarcophagi of mighty Dreadnoughts, some of whom may actually have been serving the Chapter at the time.

The only details of the event that would later become known as the 'Nemesis Incident' are to be found within the pages of the *Liber Tempest*, a seventy seven-volume tome describing the deeds of the Chapter and the lives of its heroes throughout the turbulent years of the Age of Apostasy in the late 36th Millennium. This mighty book was authored by Chief Librarian Brin Maxen, who had himself become so crippled in body during the fighting that he was capable of no more service to his Chapter than committing his wisdom to parchment before his wounds eventually claimed his life. It is said that Maxen held death at bay for almost twelve years as he recited the *Liber Tempest* to his disciples of the Librarius, each of his followers transcribing his words faithfully.

Yet, the very fact that several versions of the *Liber Tempest* were written simultaneously led to a near schism within the Librarius after Maxen's death. When the texts were studied in detail it was discovered that they differed from one another in several major details. The differences were not mere errors of transcription, but were so great that Maxen's successor came to suspect some outside agency of deliberately corrupting the transcription process, or of interfering with the archives at some later point. Yet, the Librarius of a Space Marine Chapter should be one of the most secure and sealed places in the

entire galaxy, and surely nothing short of the supernatural could have altered Maxen's words once they were committed to record.

Following the discovery of the divergent accounts of the Nemesis Incident, the senior members of the Librarius undertook a process of determining which of them, if any, was truthful. This process took the best part of a century, and was made all but impossible by the facts of the incident itself. Eventually, one single version of Maxen's account was declared the truth, and the others labelled apocryphal and locked away deep inside the inner repository of the Storm Wardens' librarium. Each of these divergent tomes became known by the name of the Librarian that had compiled it, such as the *Apocrypha of Yorath*, the *Book of Einion*, and the *Liber Esoterica Cadfanus*.

The *Liber Tempest* details the calamitous events of the Age of Apostasy, as experienced by the Storm Wardens Chapter. The Nemesis Incident represents a brief but dramatic period within this turbulent epoch, and the *Liber* presents very few details of it. The roots of the incident are to be found in the general increase in Warp storm activity that afflicted the Imperium in the run up to and during the Age of Apostasy. Trade routes the length and breadth of the galaxy became all but impassable as the Warp boiled with tumultuous etheric storm fronts. Entire war fleets and crusading armies were lost as the Warp routes they travelled were overcome with impossible energies. In many areas the raw stuff of the

Warp bled through the thin skein of reality and engulfed settled worlds or entire systems. The more fortunate were simply cut off from all outside contact; the less fortunate were saturated in the terrible unreality of the Warp, entire populations spontaneously mutating or falling victim to apocalyptic Daemonic Incursion.

Aside from aetheric overbleed, genetic mutation and Daemonic incursion, Warp storms sometimes bring with them the risk of another, thankfully rare but utterly devastating threat. There exist in the depths of the Warp things other than what men call Daemons.

Enslavers are one such form, a nightmarish hybrid of the xenos and the daemonic that exists for most of its life cycle within the Empyrean but breeds and multiplies



in the Materium. Enslavers utilise the minds of untrained or latent psykers, transforming their victim's bodies into vast, distended gateways through which the Enslavers themselves pour from the Warp. Furthermore, they are able to take control of the bodies or their foes, turning them into drooling mind-slaves that fight until overcome by their wounds, exposure or malnutrition. When Warp storm activity increases, so too do the rates of psyker births, and so the Age of Apostasy was underpinned by a second horror – that of Enslaver infestation.

This much the various versions of the *Liber Tempest* all agree upon, but the accounts begin to diverge at the point when the Chapter is committed to a region of space known as the Steropes Cluster. For the Space Marines, the Age of Apostasy was an extended period of retrenchment during which the pronouncements of the Senatorum Imperialis were replaced with the irrational dictates of the High Lord Vandire. The vast majority of Chapter Masters became so distrustful of Vandire's pronouncements that they were forced to pursue their duties without recourse to the central authority once provided by the council of the High Lords of Terra. Where Warp conditions allowed, Chapters coordinated their actions with brother Chapters or occasionally with the forces of the Inquisition, yet very few answered the commands or demands of High Lord Vandire. Most versions of the *Liber Tempest* agree that the Storm Wardens Chapter Master, Owain Glendwyr took his force to the Steropes Cluster in response to a reading of the Emperor's Tarot made by his Chief Librarian, but some texts call this into question, insinuating that the deployment may have been carried out at the behest of the Inquisition or some other faction within the Imperium's shattered structure.

Having reached the Steropes Cluster, it is said that the Storm Wardens discovered a swathe of worlds entirely consumed by the roiling energies of the Warp. Those worlds lying on the outskirts of the storm had come under the dominion of the largest Enslaver plague the segmentum had ever witnessed, and Chapter Master Glendwyr was faced with a terrible choice—deploy his warriors in a battle that would undoubtedly prove costly in the lives of his warriors, or grant the doomed and enslaved populations the Emperor's mercy and scour the worlds' surfaces with nucleonic fire.

Once more, the various accounts of the war differ in their descriptions of what followed. The *Liber Esoterica Cadfanus* contains a detailed account of Glendwyr and an unnamed Inquisitor Lord exploring a series of ruins across several of the cluster's worlds, and this is corroborated by the *Liber Tempest* itself. No account of the ruins gives any suggestion as to which species may have built them, but all describe their halls as black and oppressive, and completely dwarfing even the mighty Space Marines. At some point during the exploration of these ruins, it appears that the Storm Wardens and an allied Inquisitorial force came under attack, first by a horde of enslaved human meat-puppets, and then by Enslaver Behemoths. The Chapter Master and the First Company fought a series of desperate battles against the Enslavers, during which many heroic Battle-Brothers were lost. Three entire worlds were cleansed of the xenos presence, but ultimately the Inquisitor Lord declared the Writ of Exterminatus on seven more before the cluster was declared purged of the Enslaver Plague.

In the aftermath of the Steropes Cluster campaign, the Storm Wardens returned to their home world of Sacris. Yet, by a reading of a number of the Apocrypha, it appears that the taint had not been entirely eradicated and that the First Company had in fact brought it back to the Calixis Sector.

According to the Book of Einion, a number of First Company Veterans had become corrupted by some form of psychic taint, which was only uncovered during post-battle cleansing protocols.

The Chapter's most senior Apothecaries, Chaplains and Librarians turned their efforts to purging this taint, but, according to Einion's account, the taint was too ingrained and presented a dire threat to the survival of the entire Chapter. Initially, the Inquisitor Lord was of the view that those infected should submit to voluntary liquidation, yet the Storm Warden's senior officers argued vehemently against such a drastic sanction, and Glendwyr proposed a compromise. Having convinced the Inquisitor Lord of the viability of his plan, the Chapter Master ordered that he and the entire First Company would be interred within stasis sarcophagi in the vaults



far below the Chapter's Fortress-Monastery, which would not be opened until such time as a definite cure for the Enslaver taint was discovered. The Inquisition placed a condition on their acquiescence, demanding that the Chapter's home world be isolated from the greater Imperium and all knowledge of the Nemesis Incident be purged from the annals of the Imperium's history. Aside from those often contradictory accounts presented in the various Apocrypha, which are accessible only to the most senior officers of the Chapter, none outside of the Storm Wardens have any inkling of the tragic events of the Steropes Cluster campaign.

There were a number of side effects to the sealing of the stasis vaults and the isolation of Sacris. Firstly, many of the Chapter's oldest archives were sealed along with the First Company, so that millennia later the Storm Wardens remain ignorant as to many details of their founding and earliest histories. Furthermore, a number of legends have evolved around the incident, which form the basis of some of the Chapter's most cherished rituals. One such legend states that the long lost Brethren of the First Company will some day return, when the very existence of the Chapter and indeed the Imperium is threatened. The Chapter's beliefs call upon its members to be ever vigilant for such a time and to meet with honour and stoicism every challenge the galaxy can throw at them. The Storm Wardens maintain their traditions to this day, seeking every chance to prove themselves in the eyes of those who they believe will one day return and judge them worthy of standing at their sides in the final battle against the myriad foes of Mankind.

LIES, DAMNED LIES, AND APOCRYPHA

The truth behind the events of the Nemesis Incident has been left deliberately open, so that players of Storm Wardens characters can exercise their creativity in deciding what they think might have happened, and furthermore how it might affect the way they play their own Battle-Brother. Whether or not the GM allows the players to read the details presented here for the Nemesis Incident is up to him, but he should make it clear to the player that they are apocryphal and might be entirely wrong. Ultimately, the truth is up to the GM, and the incident is there for GMs and players to utilise as they see fit.



CHAPTER MYSTERIES

As well as an intriguing mystery for players to mull over, the Nemesis Incident is a great example of a “Chapter Mystery,” examples of which can be found or invented for most if not all Chapters a player might decide to draw his character from. The best thing about these mysteries is that they can be made into so much more than background texture by bringing them into the “here and now” of an ongoing campaign. What if, for example, a Storm Wardens Battle-Brother finds some hint of the incident in an intercepted transmission or ancient text, or perhaps some enemy leader engaged in a valedictory rant makes reference to it moments before his escape or death? Will the player decide to follow this narrative strand and be led off in another direction entirely? As GM, the choice is yours.

ENIGMAS OF THE ADEPTUS ASTARTES

In **rites of Battle**, guidelines are presented to create your own, personalised Chapter of Space Marines. Similarly, presented below are some options to create a particular mystery for such a Chapter. Additionally, the following concepts can serve admirably as inspiration for a GM to create a story element or even an entire campaign for the **DEATHWATCH** RPG.

A LOST RELIC

Space Marine Chapters have a number of items, devices, and relics that are particularly honoured. Such relics may vary wildly from Chapter to Chapter—a particular weapon of a long-dead Chapter Hero (such as the Chapter’s Primarch, Chapter Master, Librarian, or other such celebrated leader), a vehicle or station (such as a Land Raider dating back to the time of the Horus Heresy), a tome of ancient lore, a Dreadnought (such as Bjorn the Fell-Handed of the Space Wolves), or even up to an entire Space Marine Battle-Barge or unique voidship (such as the *Phalanx* of the Imperial Fists). If any of these items were to be lost, captured by the enemy, damaged beyond repair, or similarly placed into an untenable position, it would definitely be cause for the Chapter to have great concern.

Where the “mystery” comes in with these relics or items revolves around what may have happened to them; are they languishing in a vault somewhere, held by forces inimical to the Chapter? Are they perhaps in the hands of a crusading force of Space Marines that vanished into an unknown region of the galaxy? A quest to recover, repair, or otherwise restore such an item becomes the object of the Chapter’s goals, passed on to members of that Chapter who join the Deathwatch. Among the number of those sworn to the Vigil, these Space Marines have unique opportunities to uncover clues as to the whereabouts of these lost relics, or discover information that leads to a deeper understanding of why the relic was lost in the first place.

NEW MISSION COMPLICATION: CHAPTER MYSTERY

During any **DEATHWATCH** mission, there is a possibility that things do not go according to plan (even for the mighty Space Marines!). When this occurs, it is known as a **Complication** (see page 231 in the **DEATHWATCH** Rulebook), and it is a tool for the GM to use to alter the nature of the mission and add additional layers of challenge and uniqueness to the story.

At the GM’s discretion, he may either select Chapter Mystery as the Mission’s **Complication** or he may replace the “A Bad Beginning” result from **Table 7–17** on page 231 in the **DEATHWATCH** Rulebook. If this **Complication** is selected for the Mission, at the GM’s discretion, the Kill-team’s cohesion is reduced by 2 (or even more, at the GM’s discretion). This represents mistrust, misunderstandings, secrecy, and perhaps even some abrupt disappearances of a particular Space Marine during the Mission. The GM is encouraged to add additional **Cohesion** rewards, however, if the Kill-team successfully resolves any of these issues along the way.

AN ENIGMA OF THE FLESH

There are some Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes that possess particular irregularities in their gene-seed; the Blood Angels and the Space Wolves being two of the most well-known. The Chapter’s gene-seed is its future; the function of the Apothecary is centred around the recovery of the sacred progrenoid glands to ensure the Chapter’s gene-seed may continue to create Space Marines. Thus, the importance of gene-seed to a Chapter cannot be overstated—meaning that any mysteries arising from the Chapter’s gene-seed gain similar gravitas.

Any impurity or genetic deficiency arising in a Chapter’s gene-seed is cause for grave concern. Naturally, any Space Marine Chapter faced with such a challenge would spare little effort to discover both the cause of these impurities and any possible resolution to the problem. Perhaps the agents of the Traitor Legions are to blame, or the corruptive effects of being exposed to the Immaterium and the presence of daemons. It is also possible that the Chapter may have lost precious knowledge of how to maintain their gene-seed through the vicissitudes of battle or a particularly barbaric and crude method of implanting a Neophyte. The impurity or damage to the Chapter’s gene-seed may be a recent event, or it may have occurred at some point in the distant past, its origins shrouded in lies and legends. This motivation may even be responsible for the Space Marine’s presence in the Deathwatch, there to try and confer with Apothecaries from a dozen or more other Chapters, hoping to find or engineer a way to reverse the damage.

MISSING TIME

Travel through the warp is inherently very dangerous, and it is nearly impossible to precisely foresee the safe passage of any particular journey. Some voidships emerge from the warp decades or even centuries after they had set out, and there are legends of ships that re-appear full millennia later than the predicted date of arrival. The mighty vessels of the Space Marines are not immune to such phenomena, although it is thankfully very rare for a Strike Cruiser or Battle-Barge to vanish in this manner.

In addition, Space Marine vessels are more likely than most voidships to travel beyond the limits of the astronomican, perhaps in pursuit of a vile xenos threat or acting to safeguard and expand the Imperium's border regions. Often, such journeys can take the Space Marines far out of range of any communication, making even astropathic messages difficult or even impossible to manage with Imperial forces (it is even possible that the recipient of any messages may have been wiped out by an enemy force, relocated, or similarly become unavailable during the time the Chapter was travelling through the warp!).

The idea of such a significant amount of Space Marines and materiel (such as the extremely valuable voidships themselves!) going missing is an excellent place to use a Chapter mystery in a **DEATHWATCH** campaign. Perhaps a long-lost Strike Cruiser has suddenly reappeared, empty and adrift. Alternatively, a strike force dispatched upon an urgent mission vanishes en-route, and the Deathwatch are called in as the closest available force to try and discover what has transpired. In addition, the data-vaults of the Deathwatch are quite extensive, and there may be some fragment of lore or scrap of data that can shed vital light upon the nature of such a disappearance, although the revelation itself may be cause for great concern... especially if another Imperial force (such as a rival Space Marine Chapter or the Inquisition itself) were to be implicated.

PACTS AND DEBTS

Space Marine Chapters are extremely self-sufficient and autonomous, rarely dependent upon any outside agency in order to wage war for the Imperium. However, most Space Marine Chapters have entered into agreements with particular groups from time to time in return for special services or as payment for a particular debt of honour. Among the most well-known of such groups is the Adeptus Mechanicus. The Tech-Adepts of Mars have sealed pacts with a large number of Space Marine Chapters, and it is the Tech-Priesthood of the Adeptus Mechanicus that instructs specially-chosen Space Marines known as Techmarines into the proper ways of the Omnissiah.

There are also more than a few Rogue Traders who have gained the favour of a Space Marine Chapter from time to time. There are a handful of such Rogue Traders who have been granted the assistance of Space Marines in various endeavours, such as exploring a particularly dangerous region of space or persecuting war against the enemies of the Imperium. The Marines Errant Chapter is one Chapter who has greatly benefited from ongoing associations with Rogue Traders.

Some Chapters make agreements with Imperial Governors and other agents of the High Lords of Terra, the Officio Assassinorum, the Inquisition, and even (far more rarely) the Ministorum.

The nature and origin of such a debt or pact between the Chapter and another group makes a good foundation for a Chapter mystery. Many such pacts or debts involve secrets or may only be known by those that are sworn to silence on the subject. Perhaps the nature of the pact or debt has recently become troublesome for the Chapter or the other party, or perhaps an ancient debt has suddenly caught the Chapter between two responsibilities. Space Marines seconded to the Deathwatch are more likely than most to encounter outside agencies during their vigil, and it is possible that the Space Marine could be faced with a most difficult choice—either to uphold the honour of his Chapter's debt or to instead follow the strictures of his oath to the Deathwatch.

TRAIL OF THE PRIMARCHS

More than ten thousand years ago, the Emperor of Mankind still walked amongst his subjects. In those days, the Emperor created the Primarchs—twenty immortal superbeings, made to be his generals and comrades during the Great Crusade to reunite Humanity's scattered and long-isolated colonies. The first Space Marines of the nascent Imperium were created using the genetic inheritance of one of the Primarchs, albeit diluted a hundredfold. Each Primarch led a Legion of Space Marines, a formation considerably larger than the later Chapters. Thus, the Space Marines of the current era are all descendants of one of these mighty beings, and among the most pre-eminent portions of a Chapter's history and pride centre around their Primarch.

After the events of the Horus Heresy, the Primarchs have all but vanished from the galaxy; some were slain, others turned to treachery and daemonhood, whilst still others have simply gone missing, endlessly questing for some unknown goal.

The significance of the Primarch's actions is so great that even a hint that a Primarch took a particular interest in an event, place, or person is enough to gain great attention from a Space Marine Chapter descended from that Primarch. A Space Marine seconded to the Deathwatch would be in a position to encounter a wide variety of situations, including encountering traces of a Primarch's passage. Perhaps there are clues as to the Primarch's location, or hints about the Primarch's last commands... or even possibly a revelation about the Primarch's ultimate fate.

EXAMPLE MYSTERIES

Here are a few more examples of Chapter Mysteries that apply to other Space Marine Chapters, which can be expanded on and used as adventure seeds in **DEATHWATCH** campaigns. Warhammer 40,000 codex army books as well as the novels of the Black Library are great sources of further information and mystery that the GM can exploit when concocting new adventure seeds for his players.

NEW SKILL GROUP: FORBIDDEN LORE (CHAPTER)

Forbidden Lore skills represent knowledge usually kept under the highest secrecy, veiled beneath layers of ciphers and requiring great authority to reveal (see page 100 in the *DEATHWATCH Rulebook*). The Skill Group Forbidden Lore (Chapter) provides extensive knowledge about a single Space Marine Chapter, including that Chapter's battles, defeats, enemies, and heroes. This Skill Group also encompasses specific knowledge of the Chapter's mysteries, rituals, observances, core philosophies, and hidden truths.

At the GM's discretion, the Forbidden Lore (Chapter) Skill may be made available as an elite advance for 100 xp to any Space Marines involved in a Chapter Mystery as described in this supplement.

Note: For record-keeping purposes on the character sheet, this Skill Group should replace "Chapter" with the name of the specific Chapter to which it applies.

SPACE WOLVES

The name of a Battle-Brother known to belong to one of the Space Wolves' "Lost Company" is recorded in the logs of one of the region's Watch-Stations. How will a Space Wolves character react?

BLOOD ANGELS

The Blood Angels have spawned many Successors, more even than are recorded in the annals of the Chapter's Librarium. Intercepted gun-cam footage has revealed the presence of Battle-Brothers giving every appearance of belonging to an unknown Blood Angels Successor perpetrating unspeakable atrocities against the subjects of the Reach. A Blood Angels PC may feel compelled to ascertain the criminals' identity and, if necessary, punish them for the slight against the honour of his Chapter.

ULTRAMARINES

The Ultramarines suffered grievously in the defence of their home world of Macragge against Hive Fleet Behemoth, and the Chapter's First Company has yet to be rebuilt following the losses it sustained in the defence of the polar fortresses. During the battles to defend the Realm of Ultramar, the Chapter and its allies encountered many unique and horrific Tyranid monstrosities, some of which may have survived the Hive Fleet's defeat and gone on to join the swarms of Hive Fleet Dagon, which is thought to be an off-shoot of the first wave of Tyranid invasion. Such beasts are engraved in the consciousness of many Ultramarines, especially those who served at Macragge and any report linking the beasts of Hive Fleet Dagon to those at Macragge are likely to rouse the fury of any Ultramarines characters.

BLACK TEMPLARS

The Black Templars are known as one of the most zealous of all crusading Chapters and they have defeated many demagogues and tyrants throughout their long and glorious history. One such tyrant, thought defeated decades ago, has reappeared at the head of a pocket empire in the Outer Reach. Any Black Templars PC will be keen to deliver justice to such a vile enemy of his Chapter, perhaps even to detriment of the mission.

DARK ANGELS

The most obvious Chapter Mystery with which to tempt and distract players of Dark Angels characters is that of the notorious Fallen. GMs should be aware that players are likely to know more about this subject than their characters however, who may only be inducted into the outer tiers of the Inner Circle, if even that. Some Dark Angels players are likely to look for Fallen wherever they go and may be especially suspicious of any 'Black Shield' characters they cross paths with. GMs should feel free to exploit their players' paranoia to the fullest extent!

IMPERIAL FISTS

The Imperial Fists are known to harbour a special hatred of the Iron Warriors Traitor Legion, and the erstwhile brothers in arms have fought one another on numerous occasions since the Horus Heresy. Should the Player Characters encounter a band of Iron Warriors, the enemy will assail the Imperial Fist PC with a tirade of bitter invective, recalling the Chapter's defeat in the battle known as the Iron Cage. While the PC may know little of the events of that battle, he may nonetheless feel compelled to avenge his fallen kin, even against his better tactical judgement.



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