

THE HORUS HERESY

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*by Rob Sanders*

Through the super-chilled methalon mist - a face.

It burns into my brain through the neural link. That face. A face I know...

I blunder through my nightmares. The realm of the half-remembered, a labyrinth of nonsensical gloom.

I am at once alone, a shanty urchin shivering in the squalor and shadow of the mighty primus hive. The chemical stench of the drosshill stings my nostrils, as once it did.

I snort and find myself a bag-of-bones youth, trampled in the crush of the Imperial Army recruitment drive amid whispers of a great war coming to Proxima Apocryphis. The Apocryphadi Hort will play its noble part. I wait three days in an unruly line, however, just to hear the caustic laughter of the subaltern and his watchdog sergeant. I turn to walk away.

I storm straight into the cacophony of gunfire. The underhive, running with the Thunderbloods. I taste the copper thrill of a firefight, the stub rounds flying and stiletto blades flashing amongst the rust-choked palisades. This is Tritus Falls. We're in Gundog territory – and by *we* I mean me and Fluke. I remember the hot passage of the betrayer's shot through my back-flesh and the scrape of his fleeing footsteps as he left me for dead. Left me to the Gundogs. To the brutality of Marshal Corquoran and his hive enforcers. To the solitary madness of a two-by-two standing-cell in the cramped incarceration. To bicep-building hard labour on the spire construction chain-crews.

From the nosebleed heights I am bagged, bought and dragged to a cell once more. A slave-cage. A holding pen for one of primus hive's many gladiatorial pits. I am an animal that lives only to bring death to others. An animal that catches the eye of one Baron Chravius Blumolotov – bloated nephew of the equally bloated primus and planetary Lord-Governor. He attends my cell at night

– when my bloody work is done - and runs his fat fingers through my gore-clotted hair. An inbreed's thanks. A fiend's mercy.

‘My loyal subject,’ he soothes.

But once more my blood finds its price. An offworlder's offer even the broken baron can't refuse.

A long, long darkness away, I re-discover my dread in agonies and desecrations of the flesh no pit fighter or ganger could ever dream of inflicting. I find... the Clade and their torturous gift of a new existence. My body becomes their work of dark art: a surgical sculpture of genetic and cybernetic augmentation. Hypertrophic muscular barbarism, draped across a broken, restructured, then reinforced endo-skeletal frame. I become for them a torrent of chemical warfare. My blood curdles and my veins broil with combat drugs and infusions of such enslaving potency that I am doomed never to know life without them. Psycho-indoctrination shatters whatever is left of me hiding within the Clade's monstrous creation. I am catastrophe. I am cold rage. I am wanton destruction – distilled and directed. A living weapon to be deployed.

I am Eversor.

Only then do I meet the architect of my deadly design. The one they call the Sigillite. He instils in my multi-hearts the depths of an Emperor's love and the abyssal hatred I must hold for his enemies. From his lips I hear my name spoken for the first time in a seeming eternity.

‘Ganimus...’

Through the neurolink he shows me that face. The face I know. ‘Ganimus...’ the Sigillite says. ‘This man is now counted amongst our enemies. He is the Warmaster's pawn. A faithless heretic. You must end this man, Ganimus – and all who stand with him.’

The super-chilled methalon mist clears.

Cryo-suspension is itself suspended. I hear the howl of atmospheric descent tearing at the pod plating as I drop like a bomb, like a thunderbolt, like the Emperor's vengeance through the lead-scorched skies. Impact jolts me from my mission-nightmare. The cortex downlink is complete. My assignment is a mind-crippling master that must be obeyed. My target is everything – he draws me with the irresistible gravity of a star. The unquenchable rage is all my own.

I rip my way out of the pod's plating as if it were a metal womb. My midnight bodyglove barely contains my gruesome potential. Pumped to monstrosity – a grotesque, hewn from flesh and hate – I step once more out onto the ash of Proxima Apocryphis. Out into the shadow of the primus hive and the chill gloom

I once called home. I draw my executioner pistol from my belt and extend the hypodermic fingertips of my toxin-primed neuro-gauntlet.

Through the optics of my skull helmet I see the Horusian banners flying from the palace spire. The Warmaster's single eye, watching my assassin's approach. One boot in front of the other – each stride growing with speed and fury – up through the drosshill slums. And then the killing begins. And it doesn't stop.

I feed on death. Hivers, factory menials and warring gangers – all die before my bloody path. I sate my appetite for destruction. Smoke stacks fall, factories collapse, infernos rage. Like a beast, I tear through the enforcers despatched to drop me before bringing battle to the traitor hortmen of the Apocryphadi 3rd. In the habs I become the great war they've got coming to them, slaughtering simple soldiers in their droves before ripping the heart out of their heretic command. I leave the Warmaster naught but dumbfounded youth and the craven dead. I explode up through the spire palaces like a rising monster of the deep. Awash with the blue blood of my betters, I tear the rich and powerful limb from limb, until finally I am granted a rare audience with the primus Lord-Governor.

That face. The face I know.

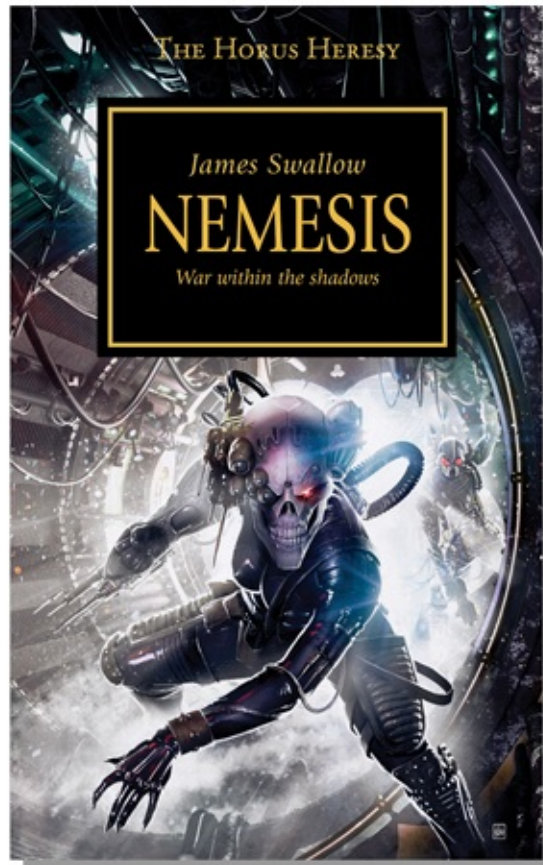
'I am the Emperor's loyal subject,' Chravius Blumolotov blubs, baron no more.

'No,' I whisper. 'But I am.'

My voice trembles. I am beyond words now. I can no longer contain the carnage I am about to wreak. I am Eversor. And I become vengeance.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROB SANDERS is a freelance writer, who spends his nights creating dark visions for regular visitors to the 41st millennium to relive in the privacy of their own nightmares, including the novels *Atlas Infernal* and *Legion of the Damned*. By contrast, as Head of English at a local secondary school, he spends his days beating (not literally) the same creativity out of the next generation in order to cripple any chance of future competition. He lives in the small city of Lincoln, UK.



A team of assassins is sent to execute the arch-traitor Horus and end the war for the galaxy of mankind before it's even begun. But what they cannot know is that another assassin is abroad already, with his sights set on killing the Emperor.

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