

# WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LOST PRIMARCHS? OR, A CASE OF INVITATIONAL INCOMPLETENESS



Nathan Wildman  
[nwwildman.wordpress.com](http://nwwildman.wordpress.com)  
[n.w.wildman@uvt.nl](mailto:n.w.wildman@uvt.nl)

# WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

- Confession: this is a philosophy of fiction talk using WH40k as it's main example...
- Aim: explore a specific kind of *fictional incompleteness* that 40k is rife with
  - Invitational Incompleteness
  - Going to treat *40K Lore* as a (gigantic) fiction



# THE PLAN

1. Fictional Incompleteness
2. Types of Incompleteness
3. The Lost Primarchs & Invitational Incompleteness
4. Where to go from here?



# FICTIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- Fictions (novels, movies, etc.) are representational media
  - They represent fictional worlds, characters, & events
- Walton (1990): fictions are *props* – objects that prescribe their audience imagine certain propositions
  - *Pharos* prescribes that readers imagine Mount Pharos is located on the planet of Sotha, that Barabas Dantioch is a Warsmith, etc.
- What is true in a given fiction is what readers of it are prescribed to imagine
  - So, it's true-in-*Pharos* that Mt. Pharos is on Sotha, that Dantioch is a Warsmith, etc.

# FICTIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- Fictions (media)
  - They represent
- Walton (1984) (audience)
  - *Pharos* is located on the
- What is the prescribed
- So, it's a Warhammer



media

scribe their

s is located  
rsmith, etc.

re

at Dantioch

# FICTIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- Fictions (novels, movies, etc.) are representational media
  - They represent fictional worlds, characters, & events
- Walton (1990): fictions are *props* – objects that prescribe their audience imagine certain states of affairs
  - *Pharos* prescribes that readers imagine Mount Pharos is located on the planet of Sotha, that Barabas Dantioch is a Warsmith, etc.
- What is true in a given fiction is what readers of it are prescribed to imagine
  - So, it's true-in-*Pharos* that Mt. Pharos is on Sotha, that Dantioch is a Warsmith, etc.



# FICTIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- Classical Logic assumes that the world is truth-complete
  - For all P, either P or Not-P is true (whether we know it or not!)
- Fictions are (nearly) always gappy (c.f. “universal” fictions)
  - Some things are neither true nor false in a given fiction
    - Neither true nor false in 40k Fic that Dorn has a mole on his shoulder
- In other words: fictions are *incomplete*
  - Finished vs. Truth-value incomplete
    - "Complete Work" (see e.g. Breadsley 1965, Hick 2008, Livingston & Archer 2010, Trognon & Livingston 2014, Corsa 2020)

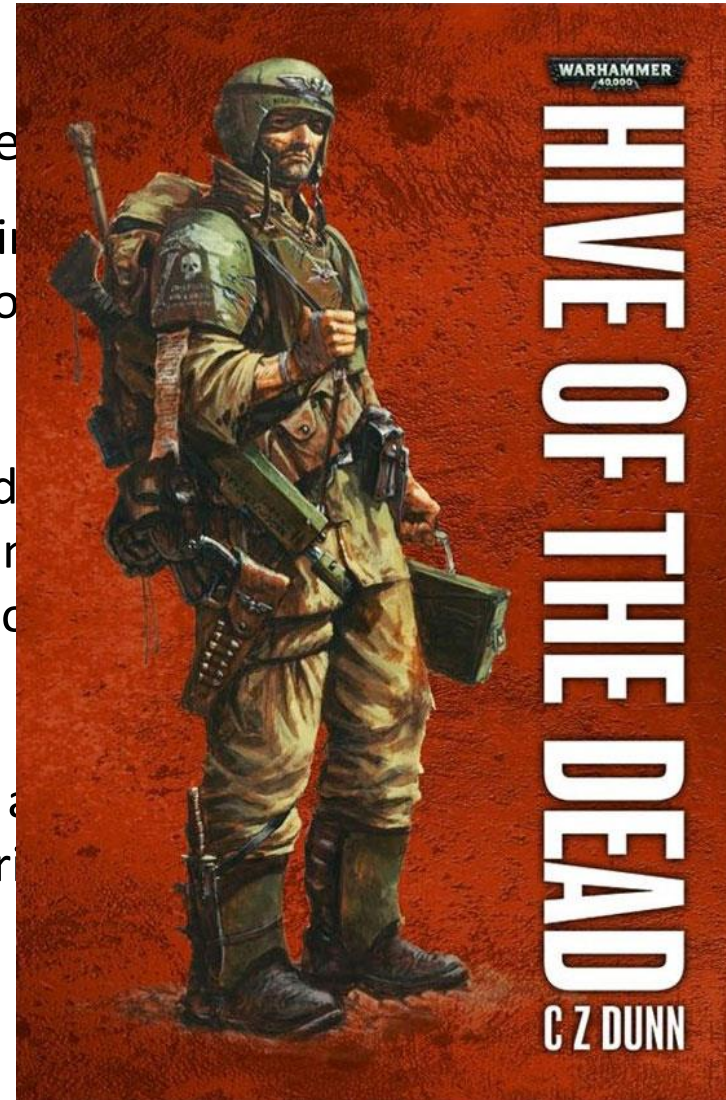
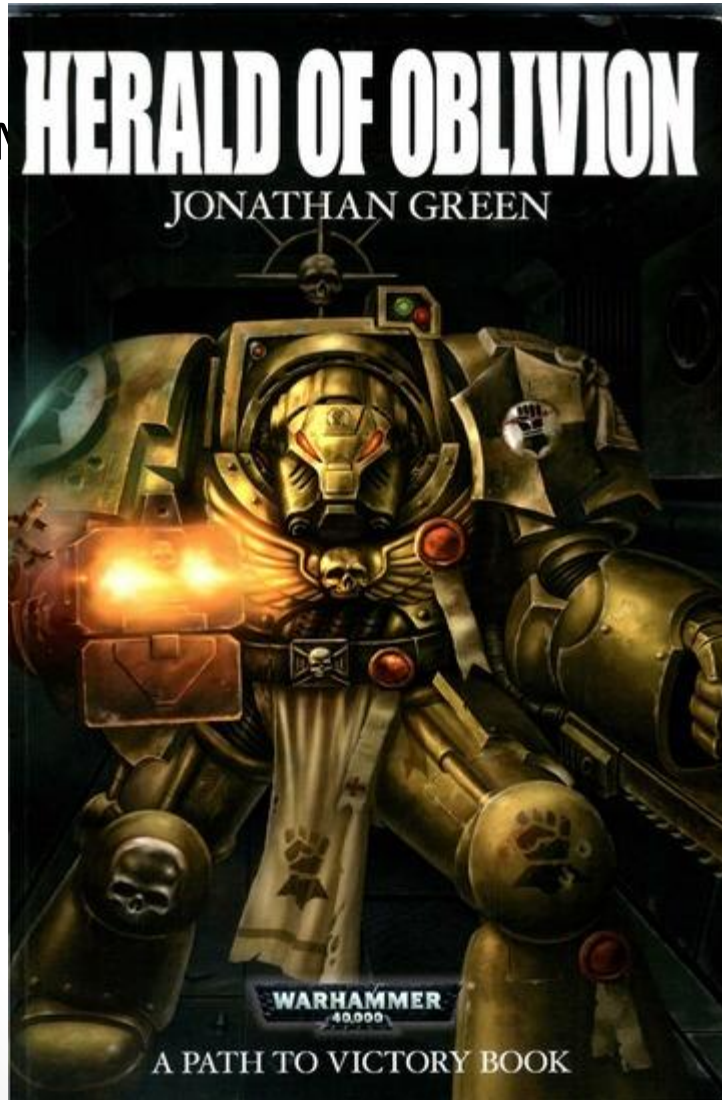
# FICTIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- Many types of fictional incompleteness
  - Permissive Incompleteness: ‘fill in’ gaps however you like, the fiction “doesn’t care” ---- e.g., Dorn’s mole
  - Prohibitive Incompleteness: readers are *not* permitted to fill in gaps as the imaginative uncertainty is the point --- e.g. Deckard’s humanity/replicant-hood in the original *Blade Runner*
  - Choice Incompleteness: readers are prescribed to fill in gaps, but there no specific option is prescribed



# FICTIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- M
- le
- in
- Do
- ad
- air
- e c
- s a
- cr



# FICTIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- Many types of fictional incompleteness
  - Permissive Incompleteness: ‘fill in’ gaps however you like, the fiction “doesn’t care” ---- e.g., Dorn’s mole
  - Prohibitive Incompleteness: readers are *not* permitted to fill in gaps as the imaginative uncertainty is the point --- e.g. Deckard’s humanity/replicant-hood in the original *Blade Runner*
  - Choice Incompleteness: readers are prescribed to fill in gaps, but there no specific option is prescribed
    - If readers don’t make a choice, then the fiction fizzles out – story doesn’t conclude, rather *storytelling* fails!

# INVITATIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- What happened to the ‘forgotten and the purged’ is an instance of fictional incompleteness in The 40k Fiction
  - The 40k Fic doesn’t prescribe imagining any *particular* event, though it does prescribe that some event(s) occurred...
- Not instance of the above incompleteness types
  - Fiction doesn’t settle matter & it is meant to remain a mystery
    - PRIESTLEY: ...it was always intended to be something unknown ... stuff that begs questions for which there could be no answer.  
(<https://shorturl.at/NTJmr>)
  - Readers aren’t required to fill in for storytelling to progress

# INVITATIONAL INCOMPLETENESS



Aaron\_Dembski-Bowden · 6y ago · Edited 6y ago ·

*"It seems to me the SW were designed to face dangers that would psychologically damage even a Space Marine. In Inferno they expressly say that the mimetic conditioning allowed the SW to retain knowledge about foes that would otherwise drive men mad. The SW were the primary legion in both the disappearance of the other two legions and the Rangdan Genocides."*

In all honestly, they weren't involved with the Lost Legions. There's no answer to what happened to the Lost Legions, so whenever there's a suggestion or a hint, you can take in the spirit it's intended. Even on the HH team we know there's no answer, so we know the Wolves didn't do it. They can't have done - because if they did, that would be an answer.

To be clear: It's not a case of "We know the answer and we're not allowed to say except in hints." It's a case of "There is no answer, at all, and there's not allowed to be an answer."

The rest of the quoted section there is, to some degree, what we've been dialling back a little since *Prospero Burns*. I think that's a masterful book, and easily one of the best-written, but if you look at the tone and detail of pretty much every mention of the Space Wolves since then, it's been a concerted effort across the novel series (and especially the Forge World books) of essentially bringing them back into parity with the other Legions.



116



Reply



Award



Share



# INVITATIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- What happened to the ‘forgotten and the purged’ is an instance of fictional incompleteness in The 40k Fiction
  - The 40k Fic doesn’t prescribe imagining any *particular* event, though it does prescribe that some event(s) occurred...
- Not instance of the above incompleteness types
  - Fiction doesn’t settle matter & it is meant to remain a mystery
    - PRIESTLEY: ...it was always intended to be something unknown ... stuff that begs questions for which there could be no answer.  
(<https://shorturl.at/NTJmr>)
  - Readers aren’t required to fill in for storytelling to progress

# INVITATIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- Invitational Incompleteness
  - Readers are prescribed to not imagine any particular answer – don't fill in the gap within the fiction itself
  - Instead, readers are invited to construct gap filling *paratexts*
    - Paratext (Genette 1991) – 'text' that surrounds a primary work that impacts how audience engages with primary work
  - These paratexts can take many forms...
    - Headcannons, theory-crafting videos, (long) reddit posts...

# INVITATIONAL INCOMPLETENESS

- ...even forms relevant to associated *extra*-fictional matters
  - E.g., the associated table-top game and modelling hobby
- The 40k fiction is *rife* with invitational incompleteness
  - Mysteries that the fiction itself refuses to answer, but which readers are invited to fill in for themselves in paratexts
    - What's the genetic heritage of the *Minotaurs*?
    - Is Endryd Haar a former Thunder Warrior?
    - Who's Subject XI in the vaults of Terra?





# WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

- OB1: Requires a non/canon distinction & “there is no cannon”
  - There’s *enough* of a sense of canonicity to demarcate?
- OB2: Invited paratexts could *become* canonical?
  - The relational between incompleteness & seriality is complex, but I’m confident that we can still draw out notion (at a time?)
- *OB3*: Does invitational incompleteness require extra-fictional elements to distinguish it from interpretation?
  - Not sure! Seems feasible that could occur in fictions that don’t have associated extra-fictional bits?

# WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

- Fictional incompleteness comes in many forms
- The 40K fiction is an *excellent* example of one specific form: invitational incompleteness
  - Distinct from permissive, prohibitive, and choice incompleteness
  - Invites readers to fill in gaps via (non-canonical) paratexts

THANK YOU!

“A DUTY HONOURABLY  
DISCHARGED”



RIP BOXNOUGHT 1994-2023