

**WARHAMMER**  
40,000



AN ULTRAMARINES SHORT STORY

# LEVIATHAN

GRAHAM McNEILL

**WARHAMMER**  
40,000



AN ULTRAMARINES SHORT STORY

# LEVIATHAN

GRAHAM McNEILL

## **Table of Contents**

[Cover](#)

[Leviathan](#)

[About The Author](#)

[Legal](#)

[eBook license](#)

# LEVIATHAN

**Graham McNeill**

The forge echoed to the sound of iron on steel. Sweltering heat rippled the air and Uriel sweated as he worked the narrow, flat-headed hammer along a length of orange-red metal, rounding off the edges to prevent them from folding when it came time to draw out the blade of his new sword.

He worked the hammer up and down the blade, keeping the temperature of the steel as constant as possible. Working it too hot could cause it to burn, resulting in impurities within the metal rising to the surface of the blade and making the weapon brittle. Conversely, working the metal too cold would ‘work-harden’ the steel, resulting in fine cracks that would greatly weaken the blade.

Satisfied the metal was ready for drawing, Uriel placed it at the correct angle on the anvil and began hammering one edge. He flattened and straightened the resulting twist in the metal, turning the blade over and repeating the process.

His muscles ached from the long day and hot steam burned in his lungs with every breath. The stars glittered through the open roof and a warm breeze sighed in from across the mountains, carrying the scent of evergreen highland pines. He had not slept in six days, his time on Macragge as full as he could ever remember it being. The majority of this time had been spent reorganising the Fourth Company after the Pavonis expedition and inducting its newest members from the reserve companies, but he had made sure to set aside time for this work in the Artificers’ forge chambers.

Uriel had until morning to finish the blade. The Fourth Company had been called to action once more, this time in the far-away system of Tarsis Ultra, and he was determined to finish the weapon before departing.

Upon his return from Pavonis he had immediately cast the metal icon taken from the Nightbringer’s tomb into the deepest vault below the Fortress of Hera.

Once removed from the C'tan's tomb, the metal had become utterly inert, dead to every form of auspex Techmarine Harkus had at his disposal. It was resistant to every weapon, furnace heat or any other form of attack and resembled nothing so much as a simple piece of carved silver. With the disappearance of its diabolical master, it had become just a simple trophy of war. But such an artefact was too dangerous to be allowed to remain unguarded and sealed away forever in the depths of the Fortress of Hera, it was as secure as anything could be.

With the Nightbringer's icon secured, Uriel had then taken the broken blade of Captain Idaeus's sword and placed it in the Chapter's most sacred reliquary.

He thought back to his former captain and though he still mourned his friend and mentor's passing, he had now grown into his role as captain of the Fourth Company.

Idaeus had taught him well and shown him the value of thinking beyond the strictures of the Codex Astartes, the holy tome penned by the primarch of the Ultramarines himself, Roboute Guilliman. Uriel would never consider abandoning the teachings of the codex, but it was clear to him now that there had to be some way of following the spirit of the codex, if not the letter.

Pasanius, his oldest and most trusted friend, had accepted Uriel's leadership without question, having been his only comrade through their training and already well-used to the less conventional command style of Captain Idaeus. With the practical mindset of a sergeant, Pasanius had understood the need to adapt to a continually changing battlefield. Learchus, Uriel's other veteran sergeant, had made no secret of his disapproval for such methods and, while he followed his new captain in the manner the Codex Astartes prescribed, he had never accepted the need to deviate from the sacred teachings of their primarch.

So ingrained was the concept of following the words of the codex without question that Uriel still wondered at his breaches of its teachings. Had he made the right decisions on Pavonis? Would there have been more lives saved if he had not taken his own initiative? No, he decided. The world of Pavonis would have burned in the fires of Inquisitor Barzano's Exterminatus if Uriel had not intervened, and he could not bring himself to believe that such an act of humanity was wrong.

But where would such small steps, on what many Ultramarines would consider the path to heresy, lead? Had those Space Marines who had turned from the light of the Emperor and followed the Great Betrayer into war so many millennia ago taken these same steps, still believing themselves acting for the best? How many had fallen without even realising it?

Surely there had to be some middle ground. And if there was, he resolved that he would find it. He owed the memory of Idaeus that much at least.

Shaking himself from such weighty thoughts, Uriel lifted the glowing blade, checking that the sword was the correct length and that it was accurately balanced. He nodded to himself and selected a smaller hammer from a table bearing all manner of tongs, fullers, punches, hammers, files and grindstones.

He began the relatively simple, but time-consuming, task of hammering the edges of the blade. Moisture dripped from his brow, hissing on the heated metal of the blade, and Uriel thought it appropriate that a measure of his own sweat be part of its forging. He worked the hammer backwards along the length of the blade, periodically turning the metal to keep it straight.

The Artificers had metriculators for measuring the exact line of a blade, but Uriel preferred the honest feel of a blade worked by hand and eye.

Finally, he lifted the sword from the anvil and held it before him, checking for any bends or twists in the metal. Finding none, he turned to the roaring forge coals and thrust the blade deep within.

Uriel left the sword to heat and wiped his brow, walking back to the entrance of the forge and lifting a clay jug of mountain water from a battered workbench. He raised the jug to his lips and drank deeply. The water was a day old and had warmed in the forge's heat, but was gloriously refreshing nonetheless. Uriel drained the jug in one long draught and set it back on the workbench. He stared up into the star-filled sky, shutting out the ring of hammers and ritual chants of the Artificers in other parts of the forge.

Working in the forge, with the heat of toil burning in his muscles and the scent of the wilds of Macragge in his nostrils, he was as close to content as he had been following his confrontation with the Nightbringer. Uriel closed his eyes, trying to shut out the image of the deathly apparition of the monstrous alien. He still woke from sleep with the taste of blood in his mouth, visions of death filling his senses and the lingering filth of its diabolical thoughts staining his dreams.

Each time he lay down on the simple bed in his cell, the scent of scorched flesh and burning blood would fill his nostrils. When he closed his eyes he saw severed limbs, spilled entrails and dismembered corpses. But though each body was mutilated with lunatic passion, their bloody eyes stared at him with hateful recognition.

You did this to us, they seemed to say. You and all your kind butchered us and left us to rot on a thousand times a thousand battlefields. Hundreds, then

thousands surrounded him, and his superhuman strength was no defence against them. Eagerly they closed in, clawing and tearing at his flesh until his body ran with blood. Only as they reached with grave-dirt-encrusted fingernails for his eyes did he wake, hurled into consciousness with a cry of anguish stillborn on his lips.

He shivered and tried to push all memory of the ancient star-god from his mind as he returned to the forge coals and lifted the sword from the fires.

The blade glowed a fierce red-orange and Uriel knew it was ready. He plunged it into a trough of water and oil, steam hissing angrily from the cooling metal.

He pulled the sword from the water and smiled as he turned his gaze to a velvet wrapped object on his workbench. As the sword blade cooled, he unwrapped the bundle, revealing the golden sword hilt that had once held the blade of Captain Idaeus's power sword. As he began the tempering process, he nodded to himself as he felt his former captain's silent approval. The hilt had remained in the Chapter's reliquary until Marneus Calgar, lord of the Ultramarines, had presented it to him as a mark of respect for his success on Pavonis. Uriel no longer needed the sword of his former captain to symbolise his authority over the Fourth Company, but Calgar had understood that Uriel well deserved to carry such a precious relic of the Ultramarines.

By morning he would have the weapon finished, its blade polished and sharp. Then he would take it to the chapel of the venerable Chaplain Cassius and have it anointed with clear water he had collected from the pool at the base of Hera's Falls, at the end of the Valley of Laponis. The Chaplain would sanctify the blade and entreat the spirits of war and battle to impart a measure of their wrath within the weapon.

Uriel could feel the sword's weight in his hand and it felt good, it felt natural.

It was impossible to tell what manner of aliens had constructed the original starship at the heart of the space hulk. Blue-frosted glaciers and aeons of space-borne detritus had agglomerated across its surface to the extent that it was now buried beneath thousands of metres of ice and metal, grafted in sedimentary layers upon its surface. What *was* obvious was that at some point in its recent history it had been taken over by orks, customised and added to with whatever junk and debris that the green-skinned savages could lay their hands on.

Rusted iron girders formed a tangled lattice across the ice and steel, crude, airtight iron boxes bolted to the ice and rock in a jumble of metal. The hulk was

perhaps seven kilometres in length, spinning pieces of debris rippling from the ungainly structures like entrails from a torn belly. In a way, the orkish engineering was a marvel of unwitting skill, luck and blind lunacy, though no member of the Adeptus Mechanicus would ever admit to such a thing.

Its age was impossible to divinate with any degree of certainty. Perhaps it had plied the depths of space for tens of thousands of years before the orks had discovered it – or it had discovered them. Quite how such barbaric and warlike savages had the wherewithal to even get into space, let alone commandeer something so inherently dangerous, was a mystery that continued to baffle the priests of the Machine God. That the orks had ever managed to get their monstrosously deformed contraptions space-worthy defied their every theorem.

Regardless of such apparent impossibility, once the orks deemed the hulk ready, it would be crammed full of warriors, with a vast power field bubble trapping the necessary oxygen and then hurled through space on a random course through the stars.

The hulk would ply the depths of space for an indeterminate time, sometimes dropping into the fluid medium of warp space as the ebb and flow of long-forgotten power sources surged and hurled the craft through the galaxy. Where and when such ships would emerge back into realspace – if they ever did – was a mystery to which no one could predict the answer.

If the orks were fortunate, the hulk would emerge in an inhabited system and if they were even luckier, crash on an inhabited planet. The strongest warlord who survived the crash landing would emerge to lead the others in an ork crusade known as a Waaagh!

To say it was a haphazard form of travel was an understatement of colossal proportions.

The arrival of a space hulk in an inhabited system was a portent of great ill-omen and wherever they were encountered, their destruction was given immediate priority. It was a duty that often fell to the Adeptus Astartes, humanity's greatest warriors, who would board the hulk and destroy it from within.

And this space hulk, codified the *Death of Virtue*, was no exception. As it crossed the orbital path of Barbarus Prime, the ninth planet of the Tarsis Ultra system, a ship with crenellated weapon turrets and a cathedral-like command section emerged from the corona of the system's star and moved gracefully into a shadowing position. Beside her, the three smaller vessels of Arx Praetora squadron gathered in her shadow, ready to defend her against any attack.

Scarred with the fires of war, the Ultramarines' strike cruiser, *Vae Victus*, stood ready to send her warriors into battle once more.

Lord Admiral Lazlo Tiberius, captain of the *Vae Victus*, looked up from the pict-slate on his command pulpit and asked, 'Philotas, do you have a firing solution locked in on the close-in surveyors yet?'

'Yes, sir,' answered Philotas. 'Shall I order battle stations?'

'Aye, battle stations,' confirmed Tiberius, descending from the pulpit and striding to the stone-rimmed command plotter where Captain Uriel Ventris and his Master of Surveyors awaited him. The admiral rubbed a hand over his scarred and hairless skull, staring at the new tactical plot that now displayed the exact position, course and speed of the intruder.

'Opinions?' demanded Tiberius.

'Well, it's drifting now,' said Philotas. 'That much we can tell from its speed. It's not travelling under its own power and it's a big one, that's for sure. It's no wonder the Tarsis Ultra system defence ships couldn't handle it. As to its course, it appears to be heading roughly towards the planet Chordelis. On its present heading it should pass out of the system without incident.'

'But we can't take that chance. We must treat it as a hostile contact until proven otherwise,' added Uriel.

'Agreed,' said Tiberius. 'How did it arrive in-system? A jump, or did it just drift in?'

'It just drifted in,' said Philotas. 'It appeared on the outer rim surveyors about five months ago, coming from below the galactic plane, but they are unmanned and the hulk did not pass close enough for a pict-capture. However, it passed close enough to listening post Trajen for the adepts there to get a more precise fix on its position.'

'Damn,' hissed Tiberius. 'Can they estimate where it came from?'

'The senior magos believes it came from the regions of space we know to be controlled by an ork warlord known as the Arch Fiend of Octarius,' replied Philotas.

'What do you think, lord admiral?' asked Uriel. 'Is this the vanguard of an ork invasion?'

'No, I do not believe so,' said Tiberius.

'Why not?'

'Well, we would be seeing a lot more hulks if this was an invasion, Uriel. Orks don't come singly; they come en masse, in a green tide that smashes

through anything in its way. You remember the reports we received following the invasion of Armageddon?’

Uriel and Philotas both nodded as the venerable admiral continued.

‘Segmentum command at Bakka has issued several warnings of increased incidences of ork migrations from the realm of the Arch Fiend, but the strategos feel they are too fragmentary and disparate to be an invasion, and I agree.’

‘Then if not an invasion, what is causing this migration?’ asked Uriel.

‘I do not know, but then you can never tell with the damned greenskins. Sector command seems to think that the orks are fleeing from something, as unlikely as that sounds.’

‘But you think there are orks on board?’

‘Aye,’ said Tiberus pointing at a fluctuating set of numerals at the side of the display, ‘but I do not think they will be alive. The mass readings look about right, but the mean internal temperature is probably too low and there does not appear to be enough interior oxygen voids for anything to survive – even orks. I think we are just looking at something that has split from an even larger ship, but we need to know for sure.’

‘Are the auguries picking up any anomalous readings?’ Uriel asked Philotas.

‘None, but I wouldn’t necessarily expect any just yet.’

Tiberus nodded. ‘Continue monitoring anyway, I want to be ready for anything unexpected.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Range to target?’

‘Nine thousand kilometres, lord admiral.’

A green icon winked into life on the display before Tiberus, indicating that the Thunderhawks in the prow flight-bays were now prepped and ready for launch. The damage to the launch bays caused by an eldar ship en route to Pavonis had been repaired in the shipyards orbiting Calth and the *Vae Victus* was once again operating at full readiness. He pressed the flashing icon, acknowledging the information.

‘Uriel, I want you and your men ready to launch within the hour.’

‘We will be, lord admiral.’

‘Plant those demolition charges quickly and get your men out of there, Uriel,’ ordered Tiberus. ‘You are not on the hunt for archaeotech here. I just want this thing destroyed.’

‘Understood, lord admiral. From the sound of things, I don’t expect to find anything troublesome over there, but if we do we’ll be ready for it,’ assured

Uriel.

Massive stone arches supported the groined stone ceiling of the launch bay and the air reeked of fuel and incense. Three Thunderhawks sat idling on the ready line, their engines growling as the crews built up power before take off.

Techmarines circled them, anointing their armoured sides with sacred unguents and removing the arming pins from the missiles slung under the wings in time with the Words of Ordnance.

The armoured deck rang with booted steps as the Ultramarines prepared to take the light of the Emperor into the dark places once more. Techmarines accompanied by engineering servitors chanted mantras of ire to the gunships and cast the runes of war to rouse the battle spirits of each craft.

The crew ramps were lowered, and tracked lifter-servitors loaded cylindrical ammunition crates, supply boxes and the demolition charges that would blow the hulk to pieces into the hold. The pilots and Techmarines walked around the exterior of the gunship, ensuring every access panel was properly sealed. Uriel watched the scene of controlled efficiency before him with pride. Once more his company was going into battle and he relished the thought. It had been too long since Pavonis, and both he and his men were eager to prove themselves once more.

He gripped the hilt of his new power sword. The weapon was yet to be blooded and, despite his belief that the hulk they were to board was lifeless, he hoped that there might be enemies as yet undiscovered aboard that might satisfy his blade. Uriel felt the onset of his lust for battle kindle in his belly and was surprised at its nascent ferocity. He suppressed it for now. Too often had it surged to fiery life at the thought of battle since his encounter with the Nightbringer, images of war and death filling his mind with the desire to shed blood.

The armoured blast door to the launch bay rumbled open and two squads of Space Marines led by sergeants Pasanius and Learchus entered, their bolters held at parade rest.

Uriel marched quickly to where his men had begun performing final checks on their equipment and running through their devotional prayers.

‘Officer on deck!’ bawled Pasanius and the Space Marines snapped to attention.

‘As you were,’ said Uriel, raising his hand. The armoured warriors returned to their pre-battle drills as he shook hands with Pasanius and Learchus. Even

now, almost a year after the Pavonis expedition, Uriel found it hard to adjust to the idea of Pasanius having a bionic replacement for the limb he had lost fighting the Nightbringer thousands of metres below the planet's surface. The arm shone like silver, its surface smooth and brilliantly reflective. Truly the artificers of Pavonis had excelled themselves.

'Everything is in order?' he asked needlessly. He already knew his sergeants would have everything prepared and trusted them implicitly, but as any commander worthy of the name would say: you could never be too prepared before going into battle.

'Of course,' affirmed Pasanius.

'Do we make for Tarsis Ultra after destroying this hulk?' asked Learchus, unable to mask the anticipation in his voice.

'Possibly,' replied Uriel. 'Admiral de Corte has despatched system defence ships to join us should our charges prove insufficient to destroy it. We will return to the docks around Chordelis to re-arm, but I dare say we will journey to Tarsis Ultra before long.'

Learchus smiled. 'I have heard great things of Tarsis Ultra. The tale of the Warrior's Debt was always my favourite at Agiselus, it will be good to see a planet's populace upholding the ideals of the primarch so far from Ultramar.'

'Ten thousand years is a long time, Learchus,' said Pasanius. 'I doubt many will even remember who Roboute Guilliman was, let alone follow his teachings.'

'What? The worlds of Ultramar prosper under his teachings. Why then should a world choose to abandon such notions of courage and honour? It makes no sense.'

Uriel smiled, hearing the inflexibility of Learchus's argument in every syllable. Learchus could see no benefit in turning from the teachings of the primarch and simply assumed that everyone else shared his view. Any other possibility was unthinkable.

Pasanius pointed to where a Techmarine was giving the thumbs up to the pilot in the cockpit of the Thunderhawk.

'Looks like our chariot is prepared, captain.'

'Gather the men, we depart in five minutes.'

'Aye, captain,' saluted his sergeants.

Uriel's boltgun nestled in the rack beside him, its dull sheen gleaming with sacred oils in the red-lit crew compartment. He had honoured the battle spirit

within the weapon before boarding the gunship and his armour was a fresh, brilliant blue, its surfaces smooth and untarnished. The Chapter's artificers on Macragge had repaired its fabric after the damage it had suffered on Pavonis, though the scar where the C'tan's infernal metal had scorched the backplate had resisted their every effort to remove it.

A Space Marine always honoured the battle gear that protected him and the weapons that were the instruments of the Emperor's will. To do any less would be to arouse the wrath of the war spirits that empowered such holy artefacts and no warrior would dare run such a risk.

Uriel gripped the hilt of his power sword and offered a prayer to Roboute Guilliman that he would prove worthy of his Chapter. He had not failed in his duty before this and vowed that he would not do so now.

For this present duty was entrusted to him by no less a person than the primarch himself.

The defence of the Tarsis Ultra system was a sacred task to the Ultramarines, the result of an ancient oath sworn by Roboute Guilliman during the days of the Great Crusade. It had been a time of heroes, when the Emperor's own progeny, the primarchs, had stood shoulder to shoulder and carved His realm from the flesh of the galaxy, wresting His worlds back from the domination of vile aliens and heretics.

Tarsis III had been one such world, liberated from the lies of heretic secessionists by Roboute Guilliman at the head of the Ultramarines Legion. The battles fought to reclaim this world of the Emperor were the stuff of fireside legend on Macragge, taught at every one of the many training barracks throughout Ultramar, as was the courage and discipline shown by the inhabitants in rising to fight alongside the Ultramarines. It was said that a lowly trooper of Tarsis III had saved the life of Guilliman in the last battle and such was the primarch's gratitude that, at its end, he had dropped to one knee and sworn to a mighty oath of brotherhood with the soldier, declaring that should Tarsis III ever be threatened, the Ultramarines would return to fight by their side.

The victory was commemorated in a legendary work that adorned the walls of a giant room in the heart of the Imperial governor's palace. Named the Tarsis Fresco, it was said to be a gargantuan mosaic that covered the walls and ceiling of the palace's inner sanctum. Tales spoke of a work of unsurpassed majesty and Uriel greatly looked forward to seeing this spectacular mosaic.

Instead of the wastelands many of his brother primarchs left in the wake of their victories, Guilliman left those who could help rebuild the world in the

image of his homeworld. The grateful populace eagerly took up the challenges laid before them by the primarch and renamed their world Tarsis Ultra, that they might always remember their liberators.

Once more entrusted with the honour of the Chapter, Uriel knew that his victory on Pavonis had earned him this sacred duty and, though the oath sworn by the primarch was almost ten thousand years past, it was no less binding. He would see that the ancient debt was fulfilled.

This he swore by the spirit of the weapon he now held. He could sense the intensity around him and knew that his men felt the same. He felt the courage of his seasoned veterans, those he had fought beside in the Mereneas Core, on Black Bone Road, on Ichar IV, Thracia and Pavonis. In counterpoint to the calm courage of the veterans, he saw the eagerness of those warriors newly elevated to the Fourth Company. Though they had fought in many battles already, this would be their first engagement as full battle-brothers and the desire not to let their brethren down was palpable.

He felt the motion of the Thunderhawk change as the craft pitched upwards towards the location the auguries had pinpointed as the most favourable location for the gunship to enter the hulk. Uriel watched as the vast shape of the *Vae Victus* yawed from sight through the thick vision blocks, and the screaming of the engines changed in pitch, the pilot making his final approach on manoeuvring thrusters alone. He caught a brief glimpse of the other two Thunderhawks, similarly laden with Ultramarines, making their way to their own designated entry points.

Slowly, the vision port was filled with the undulating flank of the space hulk, frosted metal caked with the residue of its voyage through space and cratered with asteroid impacts. A shiver rippled up Uriel's spine as he wondered where this vessel had been, where it had come from and what calamitous fate had seen it consigned to the icy graveyard of space. The thought of entering the craft filled him with a cold dread, and though he told himself it was simply the unclean nature of the vessel, he wasn't sure he believed himself. During his service in the Deathwatch, the Chamber Militant of the Ordo Xenos, he had cleansed many such abominable places, part of a kill-team whose sole aim was to eradicate alien creatures. He had felt the same sense of trepidation as he felt now and no matter how many times he had boarded one of these hateful vessels, the same primal loathing remained.

Something had once made its home on this ghost ship and Uriel knew full well that none of the things that might do so would be friendly.

He saw a yawning chasm torn in the side of the gargantuan vessel, the twisted metal ringing it looking for all the world like fangs in some alien predator's gaping jaws. The thought was not a comforting one. The view through the block slid from sight as the pilot gently rolled the gunship, matching his speed of rotation to that of the hulk, and turned the ship to face the fanged maw they would fly into. Uriel watched as what little light filtered through the vision block was snuffed out as they flew inside the structure of the ancient leviathan.

The ready light above Uriel's head changed from a baleful red to a gently flashing amber and he knew they were almost in place.

The pilot's voice cracked over the vox. 'Depressurising in ten seconds. All crew go to internal air supply.'

Uriel disconnected his backpack from the gunship's own air tanks and sealed the valve, whispering the prayer of thanks to his armour's spirit as an icon flashed up on his visor, indicating that its integrity was intact. He checked that the air level in his armour's tanks was full and watched as his warriors followed suit.

The thin, engraved purity scrolls affixed to the gunship's venting systems fluttered as the pilot gradually depressurised the crew compartment, readying it for opening into the hard vacuum of the hulk's interior.

Uriel released the harness restraints and slammed a magazine into his bolter as he rose to his feet. The motion of the Thunderhawk shifted again, the engines rumbling and the deck vibrating with the tonal shift. The ready light flickered from amber to green.

Then, with a thump and groan of landing gear, they were down and the frontal boarding ramp dropped, slamming into a pile of twisted wreckage. Uriel nodded to Pasanius and together the two Ultramarines swiftly descended the ramp, weapons at the ready. Surprisingly, Uriel felt the weight of his armour and realised that there was gravity within the space hulk. It could not have been generated naturally, which told him that even if there were no inhabitants on board, then at least some remainder of their technology was still functional. The rest of the gunship's passengers debarked and formed a protective cordon around their leaders as Uriel surveyed the interior of the space hulk. Bright beams of light speared from the frontal section of the gunship, illuminating their landing zone.

The chamber was a vast, echoing cavern of twisted, glittering girders bolted and welded to what must have been the flank of another starship in a random fashion, forming a groaning latticework roof some hundred metres above them.

Stalactites of ice drooped from the ceiling and jagged pillars of glistening blue rose to meet them. Steam feathered from the Space Marines' backpacks as they spread out through the frosted chamber, ice crystals crunching underfoot as they moved off into the hulk.

A multitude of beams from the Ultramarines' armour lights criss-crossed through the spectral twilight as Uriel stabbed his hand in the direction of a yawning slash torn through the wall two hundred metres before them.

'All squads check in,' ordered Uriel.

The vox bead in his helmet clicked and hissed with white noise. Crackling voices stuttered through his helmet.

'Squad Brigantus in place and moving inside.'

'Squad Learch... in pla... and... movi... in...'

'Sq...d... arin in p...ce.'

'S...a... terion...'

Uriel cursed as the last transmission faded from his headset, blocked either by the sheer mass of the hulk or some failing of their vox units. Techmarine Harkus had warned him that they tended to fare badly in the depths of hulks. Well, Uriel had personally briefed each of his squad leaders and there was nothing more he could do. He was now beginning to understand something Marneus Calgar had said to him before departing on the long journey towards Segmentum Tempestus and Tarsis Ultra: that there was a world of difference between leadership and command.

He approached the opening in the wall, his shoulder-mounted illuminator revealing a wide, ribbed corridor of glistening, pustule-like growths that stretched off into the darkness. Thin scraps of mist clung to the floor and soft, puffs of gas soughed from sphincter-like orifices in the pustules. Water dripped in a fine rain around the opening from melting ice above, and condensing air gusted around it. Uriel stepped through the opening, feeling his boot connect with something hard and metallic.

Lying on the floor, partially covered in the clinging moisture was a flattened sheet of iron, hammered into a crude representation of a horned skull. The jaw was sawn with elongated fangs, and despite the crudity of the work, it was recognisable as a totemistic ork head.

Pasanius knelt beside the ork head, keeping the hissing nozzle of his enormous flamer pointed down the corridor.

'So it looks like there are greenskins on this vessel after all,' he said.

'Aye, so it would seem,' agreed Uriel. 'But where are they?'

Both Space Marines looked up as the click of something moving from ahead sounded from the oddly shaped walls, throwing the echoes around them. Uriel pressed himself against the undulating wall, raising his bolter as Pasanus motioned the warriors of his squad forward. The Ultramarines moved in two-man fire teams down the corridor in disciplined groups as the noise came again.

Uriel followed his men, his footsteps sucking from the gelatinous, spongy floor. A soft, chittering sound rippled through the walls, the puffs of gas from the pustules feeling like the breath of some disgusting sea beast. If that were the case, then truly they were in the belly of that beast.

The corridor rounded a bend, the wet, organic walls of the corridor abruptly changing to the armoured bulkheads and the rigid mesh of an internal floor so common on Imperial vessels. The walls were scorched black, pocked with fist-sized craters and Uriel knew immediately that they were weapon impacts; too large for most small arms fire and too shallow for heavy weapons.

Human ones at least.

He'd fought orks often enough to know that their weapons were easily capable of these kinds of impacts and opened a channel on the vox.

'Brother Flavian, front and centre, we need your auspex.'

Seconds later a Space Marine with his bolter slung and carrying a hand-held device with a gently glowing plate joined him. A soft chime sounded regularly from the device as the spirit caged within the machine swept the architecture before them with an array of surveyors.

'Brother-captain,' said Flavian, keeping his eyes trained on the device.

'How far to the first waypoint?' asked Uriel.

Flavian consulted the auspex, scrolling through the display and said, 'Two hundred metres, brother-captain. Along this corridor and right.'

'Very well. Let's go, and stay alert.'

Harkus nodded, indicating that the first charge was set and Uriel led his squad onwards, following the chiming auspex of Brother Flavian. The corridors echoed to the heavy, armoured footfalls of the Ultramarines, throwing their steps back at them in ringing metallic waves. Uriel saw a riot of interiors butted against one another in a chaotic jumble of accidental architecture. Girders stamped with faded Imperial eagles abutted rusted metal structures that were plainly of ork construction, which in turn were welded to portions of ships that Uriel did not recognise at all. Vessels too numerous and strange to guess at had unwittingly supplied the material required to construct this space-borne leviathan; yet

another reason to see it utterly destroyed.

Uriel stepped across a frost-lined stanchion, feeling his steps lighten the further he travelled down this particular section of corridor. He raised his fist and halted the advance.

Ahead, the corridor widened into a high ceilinged chamber of blue ice and swirling mist. Glittering shards of ice tumbled lazily through the air, catching the light from his armour's illuminator. Sparkling like miniature suns, Uriel realised that the crystals were floating in a zero-gravity environment. Whatever arcane devices or alien archaeotech had kept gravity functioning in other portions of the hulk was plainly not at work here.

'There is an area of weightlessness ahead,' he voxed to the rest of his squad. 'Engage boot magnets and switch to auto-senses; there is a great deal of airborne debris.'

He stepped onwards, feeling the powerful grip his boots now had on the mesh of the deck beneath him. As he entered the chamber, he felt a lurch in his stomach as he suddenly became weightless. There had been no gradual change in environment, simply a switching from one state to another. Ice brushed against him and a spinning bar of metal rang against his thigh armour. His grip on the deck did not feel as secure as he would have liked, the thick ice on the floor preventing the magnetised soles of his boots from gaining a better purchase.

'Be on your guard, the ice is distorting my auto-senses. Pasanus, clear us a path through this mist.'

'Aye, captain,' said Pasanus, hefting his bulky flamer unit as easily as another Space Marine might carry a boltgun. The veteran sergeant unleashed a whooshing tongue of flame into the mist, a hiss of ice flashing to steam and liquid droplets exploded away from the fires.

But rather than simply dissipating, the liquid promethium rolled in the air, miniature infernos spinning through the chamber as the fire revelled in the sensation of weightlessness. Removed from the tyranny of gravity, the flames slid like liquid through the air, rippling in strangely lifelike ways. Adhering to icy pieces of tumbling refuse, the splintered fire lit the chamber with the glow of a million dancing fireflies.

Uriel shook his head, entranced by the myriad patterns of liquid fire twisting before him and said, 'We should expect to find many more places like this.'

He pushed on through the icy mist, his senses stretched out before him for any foe that might be lurking in the swirling fog ahead. He saw hummocks of ice

on the ground and knelt beside one. Its skin a deathly pale, the ork lay immobile, its limbs welded to the deck by the cold. Uriel saw that the other hummocks were also dead bodies.

‘This place is a tomb,’ he whispered to himself.

The huge body before him was frozen utterly solid, its wide fanged mouth twisted in a last roar of aggression. Its torso was ripped open in a dozen places and glistening entrails, frozen as they spilled from its belly, coiled around its meaty fists.

‘It froze to death while trying to push its guts back inside,’ said Pasanus.

Uriel nodded. ‘And I just bet it would have survived had the cold not killed it. Obviously the chamber froze before the gravity failed.’

Apothecary Selenus knelt by the body, extending a forceps probe from his wrist-mounted narthecium. The dextrous callipers gripped something wedged in the ork’s belly, cracking free a long, chitin-sheathed claw. Its surface was black and reflective, its edge lethally sharp.

‘What is it?’

‘A claw, and not an orkish one,’ said the Apothecary. ‘It obviously belongs to whatever killed this brute.’

‘You mean something killed an ork with its bare hands?’ said Pasanus.

‘It would certainly appear so,’ nodded Selenus.

Uriel stood and pushed the dead orks from his mind. They had a mission to perform and as diverting as this mystery was, it was delaying them from completing it.

‘Leave it,’ he ordered. ‘We are behind schedule already.’

He waved his men forward and they carried on, passing more stiff, frozen corpses of orks. Eventually the icy mist cleared and Uriel stepped from the glacial sepulchre onto a dripping gantry high above a cavernous drop into darkness. Chains jangled from an unseen ceiling and melting water poured in runnels from innumerable passageways all around them. The weight of his armour settled on his frame and he realised that they had once again entered a gravity pocket.

Brother Flavian joined Uriel and pointed his auspex down the length of the gantry.

‘It’s this way to the next waypoint,’ he said.

Uriel acknowledged him with a nod of his head as he scanned the blurred darkness above him. Shadows and mist coiled high above and rippled with motion.

There was something else on this ship besides the orks.

He just hoped they could complete their mission before they found out what.

Uriel panned his shoulder-mounted illuminator around the columned chamber, noting the reading of his heartbeat in the lower left corner of his visor display. Higher than normal, he saw, though he wasn't surprised. This place was damned, cursed, and reeked of death. He looked up at the groaning structure above him. Hundreds of bowing columns supported a sagging roof of ice, the soft jingle of dangling chains and dripping moisture masking the sound of his breathing.

For another four hours, the Ultramarines had crept through the baroque interiors of the hulk, ghosting from waypoint to waypoint, planting explosive charges and following the soft, regular chiming of Brother Flavian's auspex. Patchy communications had been re-established with the other squads throughout the hulk, but each sergeant's reports were fragmentary. It appeared, though, that the mission was going well and the remainder of his squads were progressing unopposed.

A circle of light from the Ultramarines' armour lights surrounded the kneeling Techmarine Harkus, who set the last of the demolition charges Uriel's squads were to place. Silently, Uriel willed him to hurry up.

The longer they stayed here, the more his sense of trepidation grew and the greater the threat of encountering something hostile. The lord admiral believed the hulk to be abandoned and, aboard the *Vae Victus*, Uriel had agreed, but now, standing in the twisted, desolate interior, he wasn't quite so sure. The groaning darkness of the hulk was an unsettling place, and Uriel had the constant sensation of being watched.

The hulk creaked, though it was impossible to pinpoint from where the noises came.

'By Guilliman, I'll be glad to see the back of this place,' mused Pasanus, flexing his silver fingers on the grip of his flamer, the blue flame hissing at the weapon's nozzle.

'Aye,' agreed Uriel, glancing upwards as he thought he caught a glimpse of furtive movement. 'It is unnatural.'

Pasanus nodded grimly in agreement. 'It reminds me too much of the darkness below the mountains on Pavonis.'

'In what way?'

'I fear we may meet something as monstrous as the Bringer of Darkness, because this place is a tomb as well. People died on this ship and there are evil

echoes here.’

‘Evil echoes? That doesn’t sound like you, my friend.’

‘Aye,’ said Pasanus with a shrug. ‘Well, I don’t like places like this, they bring out the superstitious in me.’

Uriel said nothing, but agreed with his old friend’s belief. He had seen enough horrors in his time serving in the Deathwatch to know that places of ill-omen could indeed resonate with ancient evils. The battle with the Nightbringer only reinforced that belief and was another reason to be done with this place.

There were creatures known to dwell on hulks like this and he did not relish meeting any of them.

He watched as Harkus flipped open the glass lens covering a brass dial on the face of the demolition charge and turned the delicate arms of the timer mechanism. A red light winked into life beside the timer and the Techmarine intoned the words of arming.

‘Holy Father of Machines, I ask thee to invest this blessed machine with a fragment of your divine wrath and beg your forgiveness for its destruction. *Destructus et abominatus, Omnis mortis justicus.*’

Harkus made the sign of the machine and nodded to Uriel.

‘The demolition charges are now set, brother-captain. Within the hour, this hulk will be nothing more than wreckage.’

‘That thought fills me with nothing but relief, Brother Harkus. Now let us be on our way.’

Harkus concealed the demolition charge beneath a handful of ice shards and thin sheets of metal as the vox-bead in Uriel’s helmet clicked and Brother Covius, his northern perimeter sentry reported.

‘Brother-Captain, I have movement before me. I can hear the sounds of many enemies approaching,’ said Covius.

‘What kind of enemies?’ hissed Uriel.

‘I do not yet know, brother-captain, I can see nothing beyond the edge of the chamber, but from the noise I believe there are a great many. And they are heading this way.’

‘Brother Covius, remain in place until you can give me more information, then get back and join the rest of us,’ ordered Uriel.

‘Understood.’

Uriel circled his hand above his head and the Ultramarines closed the circle around him. Even as they did so, Uriel could hear the sound of battle erupt in the distance. Gunfire and the crump of an explosion echoed from the chamber walls.

He opened a channel to Covius as the vox crackled with reports from the other squads scattered throughout the space hulk.

‘Contact!’ bellowed Sergeant Learchus over the vox-net.

‘Enemies!’ shouted Sergeant Brigantus.

Uriel was about to demand confirmation on who exactly was attacking when the answer came in a shout from Brother Covius.

‘Brother-Captain, they’re coming!’

‘Who, Covius? I need better information than that!’ yelled Uriel.

But before Covius could reply, the signal was suddenly cut off as a fiery explosion blossomed at the far edge of the chamber and half a dozen stalactites crashed down from the ceiling.

Then through the flames came a wave of screaming foes, their bestial faces twisted in alien hate and their powerful bodies rippling with bulging muscle.

Orks. Hundreds of them.

The Ultramarines were ready for them. Bolters levelled, they unleashed a deadly volley of mass-reactive shells into the mass of charging orks. A dozen fell to the first volley and a dozen more to the next.

The charge faltered in the face of such devastating firepower and Uriel could see an expression that might have been surprise cross the thick features of the closest ork as a bolt detonated within its ribcage and exploded its alien heart.

Pasanius’s flamer roared, hurling a liquid sheet of promethium into the mass of aliens. Orks bellowed as the fires consumed them, igniting others as they flailed in their death throes.

Bolter fire shredded the closest orks, but there were simply too many to kill before they reached the Ultramarines line. Uriel slung his bolter and drew his power sword as a massive, iron-jawed ork charged him, swinging a gigantic cleaver with a howling chainsaw blade. Thick sheets of metal were strapped over its shoulders and chest and Uriel leapt to meet the ork, lunging for its unprotected midriff. His sword plunged effortlessly through its flesh, sliding clear with a burning hiss.

The beast roared and bellowed something incomprehensible before swinging its cleaver at his head. Uriel almost failed to dodge, such was his surprise at the beast still being alive. He knew orks could withstand terrible damage, but he had practically cut this one in two!

He leapt to one side as the motorised cleaver hacked a wide gouge in the deck, shrieking in a flare of sparks as it passed through the metal. Uriel turned

and swung wide and low, severing the ork's arms below the elbow.

All tactics were gone now; as he spun on his heel and beheaded the brute with one stroke. Another ork barrelled into him, slamming its hard-boned elbow against his head.

He fell, twisting out of the way of an axe blade as it swung towards his neck. He dodged as the axe descended again, kicking out and rolling to his feet as the ork struggled to free the axe from the ground. He stabbed his enemy through the head and kicked it from the blade as he tried to gauge the ebb and flow of the battle.

Scores of the orks were dead, cut down in the initial volleys of bolter fire or hacked down by his warriors. The orks fought with a dreadful ferocity, but Uriel could see that there was a desperation to their fighting. He watched Pasanius smash an ork to the ground with his flamer, hammering his boot down on its neck with a sharp crack. Another reared up behind him, chopping downwards with a huge, broad-bladed chainsword.

Uriel shouted a warning, but the veteran sergeant was already aware of the danger, spinning around and catching the blow on his bionic arm. Sparks flew as the rusted teeth bit into the metal of his arm and even the massive form of Pasanius was driven to his knees by its force.

Uriel leapt forwards, slamming feet-first into the ork's face. Yellow fangs snapped under his boot heels and the creature fell back, blood spraying from its mouth. Uriel rolled as he landed and readied his sword as he sprang to his feet. He drove the weapon through the ork's neck, almost severing its head completely.

In the midst of the furious combat, Uriel saw a hulking ork with a massive, piston-driven claw powering his way through the Ultramarines. Blue-armoured bodies were hurled through the air by the ork, black smoke belching from its rusted weapon and a bellowing roar of fury echoing from the walls.

Armoured in rusted plates of metal that would have taken four strong men to lift, the ork was a powerhouse of primal brutality. Thick, corded muscles bulged on its upper limbs and great slabs of meat layered its chest. A black, horned helm crowned a monstrous, scarred face and burning red eyes. Viscous spittle sprayed from between yellowed tusks, each the length of Uriel's forearm. Bigger than all the others, Uriel knew it must be the war-leader of this particular band of orks and pushed his way through the melee towards it.

The creature turned to face him as he swung his sword for its head, bringing the wheezing claw around to block the blow. Orange sparks flew as the two

weapons met and with a speed surprising for such a gigantic beast, it lashed out with its sledgehammer fist. Uriel ducked and threw his sword up as the reverse stroke of the giant claw came at him. An iron-shod boot hammered his armour and even through the ceramite plates, he could feel the strength behind the blow.

He rolled to his feet and spun inside a clumsy thrust of the power claw. He lunged and thrust his sword into the ork's chest. The blade hissed as it penetrated the sheets of iron and the stench of charred alien flesh assailed him.

Uriel grunted as he forced the blade deeper into the ork's body. Its powerfully muscled arms gripped him in a crushing bear hug and pulled him from his feet. Too close to use its power claw without decapitating itself, the ork had settled for merely crushing him to death. He felt the creaking of his armour as it fought against the pressure of the ork's muscles.

The ork's face was a hand's breadth in front of his own, its spittle coating his helmet in slimy mucus as it uttered something in its barbaric, guttural tongue. Its chest heaved and its shoulders shook as Uriel twisted the sword in the wound. Blood so dark it was almost black spurting, but Uriel realised the beast was laughing at him.

Even as his armour began to buckle, Uriel felt his fury build at this alien's mockery and released his grip on his sword, leaving it buried in its flesh. The ork's coal-red eyes glared at him and he gripped the meaty flesh of its shoulders, bracing his feet against the tops of its thighs.

With all his might, he lowered his head and slammed his helmet into the centre of the ork's face. He felt its nose break, smashed to splinters by the force of Uriel's head-butt. The iron grip on his body lessened for a second and he hammered his helmet against the ork's face again, feeling more bones of its skull break as it twisted its head in a vain attempt to avoid his blows.

Its grip continued to loosen and Uriel ripped his sword free from the beast's chest in a dark arc of blood. The ork roared as he dropped to the deck, reaching to tear him in two. With a roar of hatred, Uriel hacked the descending claw from the ork's body in one upward sweep. Sparking cables and spurting fluids bathed him as the claw dropped to the deck with an almighty clang.

Uriel did not give the wounded beast time to recover, stepping close and hacking at its flesh like a butcher. Each blow sheared slabs of alien flesh from his foe and even after the brutish monster fell dead at his feet, he chopped in a killing frenzy until the ork was little more than sizzling chunks of scorched meat.

Breathless and immersed in the fury of battle, he turned and thrust with his blade as he caught sight of another giant figure in his peripheral vision. He

diverted the stroke at the last minute when he saw that it was Pasanus, skewering a charging ork as it came up behind the veteran sergeant.

Orks swirled around them, and both he and Pasanus hacked all about themselves with great disembowelling strokes of their swords. The chamber rang to the sounds of battle, but within moments, it became clear that the orks did not have fighting on whatever passed for their minds any more.

The few survivors of the charge swept past the stunned Ultramarines, departing the chamber from the opposite side as fast as they had entered it.

Blood ran red from the ork's back where it had been laid open to the bone by Uriel's power sword. Apothecary Selenus knelt beside the mutilated body of the dead ork leader and looked up at Uriel.

'What exactly am I looking for?' he asked.

'Look at the wounds this creature has suffered and tell me what you see,' said Uriel.

Pasanus nodded towards the hulking corpse. 'What are you looking for?'

'I want to know if these orks were attacked by the same things that killed the ones we found earlier in the frozen tomb. I want to know why we beat them so easily and why they didn't stay to fight. Have you ever known orks to run from a battle?'

'No,' said Pasanus, 'but you killed their leader. Orks don't do well seeing the strongest amongst them defeated.'

'I know, but there was more to it than that.'

'Maybe,' shrugged Pasanus as Selenus gave a grunt of recognition. Both Uriel and Pasanus squatted beside the Apothecary, watching as he pulled apart two slabs of skin and muscle from the ork's chest.

'Look here,' began Selenus. 'Brother-Captain, this is where your power blade cut the xenos. As you can see, the edges of the wound are smooth and cauterised from the heat of your weapon.'

The Apothecary then rolled the ork onto its side and pointed to a wound running from its left shoulder to the base of its ribs on the right hand side of its torso.

'So what are we looking at here, Selenus?' asked Pasanus.

'The blow that caused this wound cut through the creature's armour plating on its shoulders and sheared through the thickly ossified bone of its ribs with something incredibly sharp.'

'Another power weapon?' suggested Pasanus.

Selenus shook his head. ‘No, the edges of this wound have not sealed or been seared as the wounds on its front have been. This was done by something so sharp it was able to cut through iron and ork flesh with almost no effort at all.’

‘Greenskins fight each other almost as much as they fight us,’ pointed out Pasanus. ‘Maybe another ork did it or it’s an old wound?’

‘No,’ said Selenus. ‘The wound is too clean. An ork weapon would have torn the flesh around the wound much more thoroughly than this.’

‘Do you know of any weapons that could have inflicted such a wound?’ asked Uriel, already fearing he knew the answer and what the orks had fled from.

‘Not many,’ admitted Selenus, ‘but here on a space hulk, there is one thing I know could have inflicted it.’

‘Genestealers,’ spat Pasanus.

‘We need to get out of here,’ said Uriel, ‘and quickly.’

Selenus nodded as the soft, regular chiming of Brother Flavian’s auspex suddenly sounded with greater urgency.

Uriel and Pasanus looked up as the walls seethed and hissed and chattered with sudden movement all around them. Shadows darted across the ceiling, the clatter of claws scraping on metal echoing from the glistening walls.

‘Too late,’ whispered Uriel, ‘they’re coming.’

The walls churned with movement, the screeching hiss of aliens seeming to come from everywhere at once. As one, the Ultramarines assumed a defensive formation and began falling back to the entrance of the chamber, bolters pointed outwards at the walls.

Uriel edged closer to Brother Flavian, all the time keeping his eyes trained on the hissing darkness around them. He gripped Flavian’s wrist and raised the auspex, watching the sweep of the spirit across the pict-slate as it pierced the gloom with its all-seeing eye.

Distance and direction vectors glowed, and at the edge of the auspex, a blur of movement rippled, expanding and contracting slowly.

The soft chime sounded again, and again, and again. The gap between each chime shrinking each time.

‘They’re all around us,’ whispered Flavian, and Uriel could detect a hint of nervousness in the young Space Marine. Flavian was one of the many new recruits he had inducted into the Fourth Company to replenish their numbers after the Pavonis campaign and, though he was brave, he was less experienced

than the majority of the company. Uriel hoped this would not prove to be both his first and last campaign.

Slowly, step by step, the Ultramarines edged back the way they had come.

Then, without warning, their unseen enemy attacked.

Brother Travion was the first to die, four clawed arms reaching from the darkness of the wall and dragging him backwards, ripping through his armoured breastplate in a welter of blood.

Pasanius turned and bathed the wall with liquid fire, lighting up the darkness with a brilliant orange glow.

Firelight glittered from alien eyes and bared fangs as the creatures attacked.

Directed by a single, monstrous imperative, the genestealers boiled from the walls, ceilings and ducts. They were everywhere.

'Fall back! Get back to the entrance!' shouted Uriel.

Bolters chattered and Pasanius's flamer roared as the Ultramarines ran for the exit of the giant chamber. Uriel fired his bolter from the hip, cutting down more of the alien horrors with each salvo.

As more and more of the chamber caught light and pools of promethium burned, Uriel saw the creatures attacking them in all their horrifying glory.

Hunched over, with a grotesque, beetle-like carapace, the genestealers were monstrous, six-limbed creatures, sprinting forward on powerful hind legs. Their upper limbs ended in vicious, tearing claws, and Uriel could see how easily these would rip through ork armour.

Space Marine armour too, were they to get close enough.

But it was the faces of the creatures that horrified Uriel the most.

Bestial and filled with hundreds of lethally sharp teeth, the genestealer's maw was spread wide in a hissing screech, its eyes utterly black and filled with alien malevolence.

Black and impenetrable, they could express nothing beyond the desire to kill.

Uriel shot down three of the creatures as they raced towards him, inhumanly fast. Another three hurdled the corpses, coming at him with clawed arms outstretched. He ducked the first creature, grunting in pain as the claws of the second tore across his shoulder guard and cut through it like paper. Blood welled briefly in the cut, before the Larraman cells in his enhanced bloodstream sealed the wound.

He swept his sword out, hacking the legs from the third and rolled upright, raising his weapon before him as the first creature came at him again. It leapt, impaling itself on the crackling blue point of the weapon, purple ichor bursting

from its jaws as the blade pierced its heart.

Uriel dragged the sword from the beast as the second genestealer leapt upon him from behind, tearing at the eagle on his breastplate with frenzied claws. Preternaturally sharp, they tore through the eagle and scored a deep groove in the ceramite plate. Uriel dived forwards, tucking his head and landing on his back, allowing his heavy weight to crush the beast below him.

It refused to die, kicking spastically with its legs and biting the back of his helmet.

He hammered his elbow downwards into its face, cracking open its skull and spilling its brains across the icy deck.

Alien screams and gunfire filled the chamber. Pasanius's flamer lit up the darkness, drawing shrieks of agony from burning genestealers. Uriel pushed himself to his feet and staggered in the direction of the bunched Ultramarines. Pasanius had cleared a path through the genestealers with his flamer and the blazing exit was now clear of enemies.

Uriel rejoined his warriors, the pain from his lacerated shoulder flaring bright and hot. Three of his men were down and perhaps double that were injured, but none of those wounded were ready to give up the fight. Together they helped carry the bodies of the dead. No Ultramarine would allow one of his fallen battle-brothers to remain in this cursed place.

Uriel was pleased to see that Flavian was not amongst the dead.

Despite the horrendous losses the tide of genestealers had suffered, they were unwilling, or unable, to retreat. Time and time again, they threw themselves at the Ultramarines' ring of firepower and time and time again they were hurled back, but each time reaching a little closer to the Space Marines.

Pasanius backed from the chamber, hosing the aliens with fire and Uriel could see that the flaming spout drooped a little shorter than before. Pasanius saw this too and shared a look with Uriel.

'We can't go on like this!' shouted Uriel. 'We'll be out of ammunition soon.'

Pasanius nodded curtly. 'I've less than a quarter load left in the canister. I doubt it will see us back to the gunship.'

The Ultramarines fell back from the chamber's entrance, firing through at the genestealers that gathered beyond. Already, Uriel could hear the clatter of claws and talons through the walls as the voracious alien predators sought to encircle them. Could the genestealers know their ultimate destination? Would they be able to cut them off before they reached the Thunderhawk? They might be aliens, but that did not mean they were without cunning.

‘Back to the gunship, double time!’ commanded Uriel. ‘We don’t have time to waste, those charges will be detonating soon!’

As the last of his squad fell back through the chamber’s exit, Uriel turned and followed his warriors, praying that they would be able to fight their way clear in time.

Uriel moved to the head of their advance, keeping the pace fast, but always watching for alien attacks. Flavian’s auspex kept them on course, and despite their haste, the pace was nowhere near as fast as he would have liked. Every corner had to be checked by two-man teams, covering the transverse approaches for any sign of a trap.

Chambers and corridors that had seemed simply alien as the Ultramarines had penetrated the space hulk now assumed monstrous dimensions, with every shadow and weirdly angled fixture potentially concealing a deadly killer.

Uriel opened a channel to his other squad leaders and said, ‘Ventris to all squads. We are under attack from unknown numbers of genestealers and are falling back to our gunship. Secure your perimeters and make best speed for your own extraction points.’

One by one, his sergeants acknowledged his report.

A crackling voice that Uriel recognised as belonging to Learchus said, ‘Brother-Captain, our auspex reads that we are less than three kilometres from your current position. We can come to your assistance.’

‘No,’ ordered Uriel, ‘continue on towards your evacuation point.’

‘But captain, proper procedure dictates that all squad members should be—’

‘Damn it, Learchus, I don’t have time for this now. These charges are set to blow soon and I want you off this hulk before that happens. Ventris out.’

Uriel snapped off the vox-link before Learchus could argue further, knowing that he would obey Uriel’s order, though he wouldn’t like it.

Pasanius took the lead of their continuing retreat through the hulk, periodically filling the corridors before them with flaming death as they made their way back to the gunship in good order. Every junction and every bend in their route had to be scouted quickly but thoroughly, lest there be alien killers lurking in wait.

The walls echoed with the sounds of pursuit. Every open duct or ragged pipe became a potential avenue of attack. Most proved empty, but many others did not, shrieking genestealers bursting through as a tide of chitin-armoured monsters attacked in concert from either side.

Uriel could sense a fearsome cunning in the timing and co ordination of the attacks. In any military operation, the greatest enemy was confusion and the greatest leaders were those who could effectively co ordinate their forces. The genestealers attacked with perfect synchronicity, forcing the Ultramarines to fall back at a much slower pace and Uriel knew that they were running out of time. He checked the chronometer in his visor.

The demolition charges would detonate in less than twenty minutes.

‘Come on, we have to move faster!’ he ordered.

Something heavy dropped from the ceiling, smashing into his back and driving him to the mesh decking.

He lost his grip on his sword, the blade skittering away from him and its energised edge deactivating. Clawed fingers gripped his shoulder guards and pulled. Uriel felt his back creak under the pressure as his spinal column bent backwards. He felt muscles tear and his strengthened bone begin to crack. He twisted his head and, in the flickering shadows cast by the flames of battle, could see the genestealer’s talons rise, ready to plunge through his helmet and into his brain.

Uriel twisted desperately, bucking and thrashing in an attempt to dislodge the creature, but its grip was too strong.

He roared with a last show of defiance as a blur of blue armour entered his vision.

Pasanius said, ‘Steal this,’ and thundered his gleaming bionic fist through the genestealer’s skull, smashing it to bloody splinters. He followed up with a vicious kick, spinning the twitching corpse from Uriel’s body.

Uriel lurched to his feet, wincing at the strain in his back and torn muscles. He gathered up his sword and rejoined his men with a nod of grateful thanks to his oldest friend as they continued their retreat to the Thunderhawk.

Another tense quarter of an hour passed and as Uriel felt the weight of his armour lessening, he knew they were approaching the ice chamber with no gravity.

He plunged into the chamber, the magnetic soles of his boots keeping him anchored to the deck as gravity was withdrawn. They had travelled perhaps ten metres through the corpse filled cavern when Uriel noticed that something was different. It took him a few seconds to realise what it was.

The mist had thinned and where once the chamber had been filled with spinning crystals of ice, now it was filled with wobbling droplets of water. Uriel checked the temperature reading on his visor and saw that the temperature had

leapt by thirty degrees and was still rising. Instead of a fog of chill mist, a rippling curtain of water droplets filled the chamber.

The ork corpses lay revealed without their frosty coating, their exposed viscera stinking in the warming chamber. Now able to see the far edges of the chamber, Uriel could see the glistening, mucus-wreathed walls were honeycombed with rippling egg sacs. Translucent membranes strained as creatures that had spent unknown centuries in hibernation struggled to break free of the organic stasis chambers that had kept them alive.

Long claws sliced through drooling cocoons whose amniotic fluids spilled from the tears like thick, floating ropes. Hissing monsters with long, bone-ridged heads pushed themselves free from their chitinous slumber. Uriel recognised them with a snarl of revulsion.

Tyranids.

Alien predators from beyond the galaxy, bent on devouring all before them with an insatiable appetite for bio-mass. Uriel had fought this abominable alien race before on Ichar IV and knew how deadly they could be. The Ultramarines' arrival on the space hulk must have triggered the aliens' revivification and Uriel knew they did not have long to escape this place.

Hundreds of rupturing egg sacs lined the ribbed walls of the chamber and though no more than a handful had thus far broken clear, it would only be a matter of time until there were more.

'Run!' shouted Uriel as he heard a growing rush of claws on steel and a boiling tide of genestealers poured into the cavern from behind them.

But here the Ultramarines had the advantage, as their magnetic boots held them to the deck, while the alien creatures had no such ability. Violent hisses of frustration and rage filled the chamber as the genestealers suddenly became aware of this handicap.

Despite the zero-gravity, the momentum of the genestealers carried them through the air towards the Ultramarines. Pasanus turned and unleashed a stream of burning promethium, the weightless streams of fire filling the air with molten liquid. Aliens howled as they were powerless to evade the floating flames and caught light.

The cavern walls gleamed in the sudden burst of light, and Uriel saw a host of scythe-taloned monsters hauling themselves from their lairs to either side. Many were drifting into the air as they tore free of the mucus-like streamers holding them down. Others, quicker to realise the nature of the environment, clamped their claws onto the deck, razor-sharp chitin gouging into the metal

floor and holding them fast.

The curtain of drifting water droplets parted and Uriel could see a trio of tall, armoured warrior organisms stalking cautiously through the chamber to block their escape route. Upper limbs sheathed in reflective black chitin twitched above their heads and grasping, taloned hands clenched and unclenched in time with their breathing. Slathered with glistening birth-fluids, the tall aliens bellowed as the Ultramarines approached.

Bolters fired, cutting down pursuing genestealers in droves as they thrashed impotently in the air, frenziedly clawing at their escaping prey. Uriel charged towards the warrior aliens guarding the exit and drew his sword, shouting, 'Courage and honour!'

He swung low at the closest organism, hacking his sword through its ankles and drawing a bestial howl of pain from its throat. Its clawed hooves remained clamped to the deck while its body drifted into the air, spurts of coloured ichor pumping from the stumps of its legs.

The second and third beasts came at him from both sides and he swayed aside as a set of black claws slashed past his head from the left. But the attack was no more than a feint and as he turned to face the creature on his right, its claws closed on his waist with an iron grip and wrenched him from his feet. Uriel raised his sword in time to block a downward sweep of its claws, but he could not prevent himself from being hurled into the air.

The first beast struck him again, its claws punching into his armour, but sliding clear as he was pushed higher. Uriel spun in the weightless chamber, desperately trying to orient himself as he saw the warrior aliens bound into the air after him.

A glutinous stream of ichor coated his helmet as he passed through a floating pool of blood and Uriel quickly wiped it clear as the tyrannid creatures closed on him.

He tried to halt his spin as he suddenly realised the import of the blood he had just floated through. Desperately he spun in the air, sweeping his sword out in a wide arc as the tyrannid creature whose legs he had cut off at the ankles closed on him from above.

More ichor sprayed over him as his crackling sword chopped through its thorax. The two halves spun off towards the chamber walls.

A swirling layer of water rippled above him and Uriel realised he had floated all the way to the chamber's roof. He twisted his head, seeing the two warrior beasts rising towards him with their claws outstretched and fangs bared. He

rolled, bringing his knees up to his waist as his feet impacted on the roof, sending droplets of icy water spraying in all directions.

As Uriel's feet touched the roof he pushed out with all his strength, powering down towards the two tyrannids, his sword extended before him. The tip of the glowing blade sliced through the hard carapace of the closest beast's skull and it screeched in pain, wrenching its head to the side and tearing free of Uriel's sword. Its mantis-like claws scythed the air, but Uriel twisted aside and beheaded it with a broad sweep of the power sword.

But his wild stroke had left him spinning and dangerously exposed. He grunted in pain as the last beast's claws stabbed through the back of his thigh armour and pulled him around. He swung his sword in a downward arc, but a massive, clawed fist seized his wrist and twisted. Uriel felt his armour give way and the bones in his wrist crack, losing his grip on his sword, which continued on its downward trajectory and buried itself in the deck.

Uriel rammed his knee into the tyrannid's chest, but its chitinous exo-skeleton was like iron. Its jaws snapped against his chest, scoring slimy grooves in the ceramite. Wrapped together in a desperate fight to the death, the two foes spun back down to the chamber's floor. Uriel slammed his armoured elbow into the monster's face, tearing its lower jaw free in a wash of sticky blood.

Still the beast tried to bite him and Uriel pistoned his fist through the ruin of its jaw, pushing through the gory ruin of its neck. Alien flesh closed around his fist as he ripped through hide, cartilage and sinew to grip its ridged spinal column. Alien digestive fluids poured down his arm, hissing as they ate away the top layers of his armour.

Uriel closed his fist on the tyrannid's spine and with a roar of hatred wrenched it around, feeling the hard bone bend then snap under the power of his grip.

A froth of bloody matter sprayed his chest as the beast died and its claws released him. Uriel kicked away its corpse and spun his body in the air as he saw the ground rushing to meet him. He rolled his feet around and slammed onto the deck, engaging the magnetic clamps on his boots once more and sweeping up his sword.

The genestealers still spun and twisted through the air and more and more tyrannid warrior organisms were pushing their way clear of their cocoons. Most of his warriors were already at the chamber's exit and Uriel hurried to join them as the alien pursuers attempted in vain to follow them.

Eventually they emerged into the organic, pustule-encrusted corridor that led towards the gigantic ice cavern they had landed in, and Uriel had never been so

glad to see such a desolate place in his life.

It was then he noticed the decreasing counter in the corner of his visor.

0:06... 0:05... 0:04... 0:03... 0:02... 0:01...

‘No...’ whispered Uriel.

0:00

As the Ultramarines neared their escape, the devices planted throughout the hulk by the Techmarines finally detonated. Each boxy device was fitted with six kilos of a high explosive compound developed specifically for the destruction of space hulks.

The demolition charges had a wide blast area, and the destructive power unleashed within that area was an order of magnitude greater than almost any other explosive of similar size.

The timer mechanisms had all been calibrated from a single master unit aboard the *Vae Victus* and thus every single bomb detonated within a nanosecond of each other.

As each bomb exploded it instantly vaporised an area one hundred metres in diameter with a huge, reverberating thunderclap. The sounds of the massive explosions spread throughout the hulk, and positioned throughout the ship at key structural points, the effects were devastating.

Agglomerated structures tore free from the hulk’s side as their supports were blasted clear, ripping gantries and beams with them. All across the *Death of Virtue*, the structural integrity of the hulk collapsed at an exponential rate as the explosive echoes died.

The explosion from each demolition charge roared into a seething ball of plasma energy, burning with the heat of a star. Those charges closer to the centre of the hulk, where the internal gravity field was strongest, dropped through the deck, turning the core of the hulk molten as they fell.

Slowly at first, but at a hugely accelerating rate, the hulk began to break apart.

Uriel felt the deck shift under his feet and heard the shriek of tearing metal as the corridor began wrenching free from the main body of the hulk. The ceiling split and vile fluids poured from the ruptured pustules on the wall, drenching the Ultramarines in noxious slime.

The screech of metal on metal squealed deafeningly and Uriel was thrown to the floor as the deck rolled sickeningly, ripping from its crudely bolted

moorings. The door they had first come through appeared to lurch upwards as the decking dropped away and Uriel saw that they had seconds before it was ripped from the side of the hulk.

‘Come on!’ bellowed Pasanus, hauling fallen Space Marines upright. ‘On your feet and get moving. That Thunderhawk isn’t going to wait forever! Come on!’

The Space Marines quickly vaulted through the doorway, each warrior turning as he went through to reach back and help the battle-brother behind him.

Uriel backed towards the door, casting furtive glances over his shoulder as he kept watch for anything that might attack them from behind. His nerves were stretched taut.

It was impossible to tell whether anything was approaching over the screech of tearing metal and the distant groaning of the dying hulk.

A hand slapped on his shoulder guard and he turned to see Pasanus reaching down towards him with his gleaming and unblemished silver hand. Uriel slung his bolter and reached for the smooth metal of his sergeant’s arm as the deck screeched and dropped from beneath him.

He stumbled as the mesh decking canted to one side, ice and debris spilling down spreading cracks in the metal. Uriel pushed himself upright and looked up to see how far he had fallen. Some three metres separated him from the doorway and escape.

Metal scraped on metal as the deck gradually slid down the inner surface of the hulk, sparks flaring in the darkness as it tore free of the wall.

‘Captain!’ shouted Pasanus. ‘Come on, jump!’

Uriel launched himself upwards, gripping Pasanus’s hand and scrambling for purchase as the deck finally broke from the wall and tumbled down into darkness. His fingers slid down the metal of his sergeant’s arm and he reached up with his other hand as Pasanus reached down with his free arm and hauled him through the door. The cracked bones in Uriel’s wrist flared in pain.

He rolled upright, grateful beyond words to hear the whine of the Thunderhawk’s engines spooling up.

‘Time to get going, Uriel,’ shouted Pasanus over the din.

Uriel nodded as Pasanus turned and jogged through the cavern towards the gunship.

The deck rumbled and heaved, shuddering as though in the grip of a powerful earthquake. Ice cracked, raining fine white crystals into the chamber and stalactites separated from the roof with the crack of gunshots, dropping

gracefully to the floor to explode into lethally sharp splinters.

Ultramarines were already boarding the gunship as a yawning chasm split the floor of the ice chamber and gouting jets of steam spewed through the cavern. The buckling floor ahead of Uriel heaved upwards and he was pitched to the ground. He skidded across the deck, fingers scraping a furrow in the icy floor as he fought to arrest his slide. A stalactite hit the floor nearby, showering him with fragments. Hot steam blinded him as he felt the deck tip downwards. He rolled aside, seeing the flare of distant infernos far below him. Roiling clouds of smoke and venting gasses geysered towards him.

With the last reserves of his strength, Uriel hauled himself upwards, desperately clawing his way up the ice-slick floor. Hand over hand he climbed, rolling clear as the deck section plunged downwards into oblivion. The cavern bucked in the hulk's death throes, falling ice and billowing clouds of steam obscuring everything in a grey haze.

Uriel staggered in the direction of the roaring engines of the gunship as he saw shadowy figures racing alongside him, also heading towards the beacon of noise.

At first he thought they were fellow Space Marines.

Then one leapt at him, scything claws reaching for his throat.

The genestealer's bestial screech was drowned in the howling gale of the jetwash from the gunship that emerged from the smoke. Uriel raised his arm to ward off the blow, feeling the monster's claws tear through his armour and gash his upper arm. Its mid-section arms closed around his waist, and the two foes fell to the deck in a tangle of limbs.

The genestealer's jaws fastened on his helm.

The Thunderhawk's landing gear was up, but Uriel saw the forward ramp was still lowered. The heavy bolters mounted on either side of the gunship's frontal section roared, the noise deafening as heavy calibre shells ripped up the chamber. Genestealers, ice and steel disintegrated under the devastating fusillade as the pilot swung the nose of the gunship left and right.

The creature's hot breath fogged Uriel's visor, thick ropes of saliva spattering him as its jaws snapped shut. Uriel twisted his head and the teeth slid clear, scraping parallel furrows down the side of his helmet.

He rolled atop the thrashing genestealer and gripped its shoulders, using his formidable strength and weight to hold it pinned. Its legs kicked and its upper arms slashed at his armour, ripping one of the shoulder guards clear and raking his flesh.

Uriel fought to hold the creature at bay, but it was like trying to wrestle a snake and it squirmed free of his grip, twisting him around and slamming him back into the deck.

The Thunderhawk swayed in the air behind him. The pilot fought to hold the craft level in the chaos of the collapsing hulk, its frontal illuminator beams stabbing erratically through the smoke. The gunship's bolter shells sawed the air, a curtain of explosive bullets ripping through the chamber at thigh level.

The genestealer's claws raked his sides again, and with a last roar of desperation, Uriel locked his hands around the alien's neck and pushed its head upwards.

His muscles screamed in protest as he fought to hold the creature steady.

The roaring of the guns grew in volume as the gunship swung around again.

He felt his muscles giving. But then the genestealer's head exploded as bolter shells ripped it from its body. Blood and brains spilled over Uriel's armour and he threw the creature's corpse aside in disgust.

Uriel flipped over onto his front, careful to make sure the heavy bolters were not firing in his direction before pushing himself to his feet and scrambling towards the lowered crew ramp. He leapt into the gunship, digging his fingers into the mesh of the decking. Hands gripped his armour and pulled him inside and he rolled onto his back as he saw Pasanius hammer the door closing mechanism.

'Go! Go! Go!' he yelled at the intercom.

The craft rolled wildly, spilling Ultramarines to the floor as the pilot violently swung the gunship around on its axis and hit the main engines.

Uriel slid backwards, the powerful acceleration hurling the Thunderhawk forwards. He gripped onto a stanchion, the deck rolling and bucking madly as the pilot flew them from the disintegrating hulk. Something hard smashed into the gunship and Uriel heard a tortured scream of metal as it swayed drunkenly to one side. Fire burst from a shattered conduit and sparks filled the compartment.

Steam vented and emergency lights flashed.

But then they were clear and the gunship roared away from the hulk, its flight finally becoming level.

Uriel pulled himself upright with a groan and slumped into the captain's chair.

He rested his head against the vision block and stared at the destruction of the hulk. Tongues of flame consumed the massive vessel from within, its structure collapsing as the demolition charges did their work. He saw streaks of

light powering away from the hulk and recognised them as the other two Thunderhawks. He wondered how the warriors aboard them had fared and if the people of Chordelis and the Tarsis Ultra system knew how dearly their survival had been bought.

He turned away, satisfied that the ungodly vessel had been destroyed and that they had accomplished their mission.

Not exactly how they had planned, but accomplished nonetheless.

The mood aboard the *Vae Victus* was sombre as Uriel stood at the tactical plotter with Lord Admiral Tiberius and two frail, green-robed Astropaths. Both carried simple ebony staffs and both were blind, their eye sockets sealed with black, plasflex hemispheres that just failed to conceal the puckered scar tissue at their edges. The massive viewing bay at the end of the command bridge's nave was still filled with the image of the dying hulk, but none of the strike cruiser's bridge staff paid it any mind.

They had greater concerns now.

'Are you sure?' asked Uriel.

'As sure as we can be, my lord,' answered the oldest of the pair, though it was difficult to judge the age of a psyker accurately. 'Just below the galactic plane, at the edge of perception, a wall of white noise in the ether encroaches. A smothering blanket of psychic interference lurks below us. But it is moving, and it is moving this way.'

Uriel locked eyes with Tiberius and felt a cold dread settle in his soul as he realised the import of the Astropath's words.

'The Shadow in the Warp,' said Tiberius tonelessly.

Uriel nodded slowly.

And that could mean only one thing.

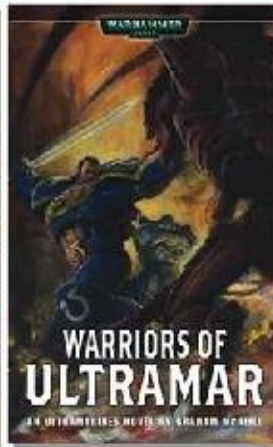
'The tyranids are coming.'

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

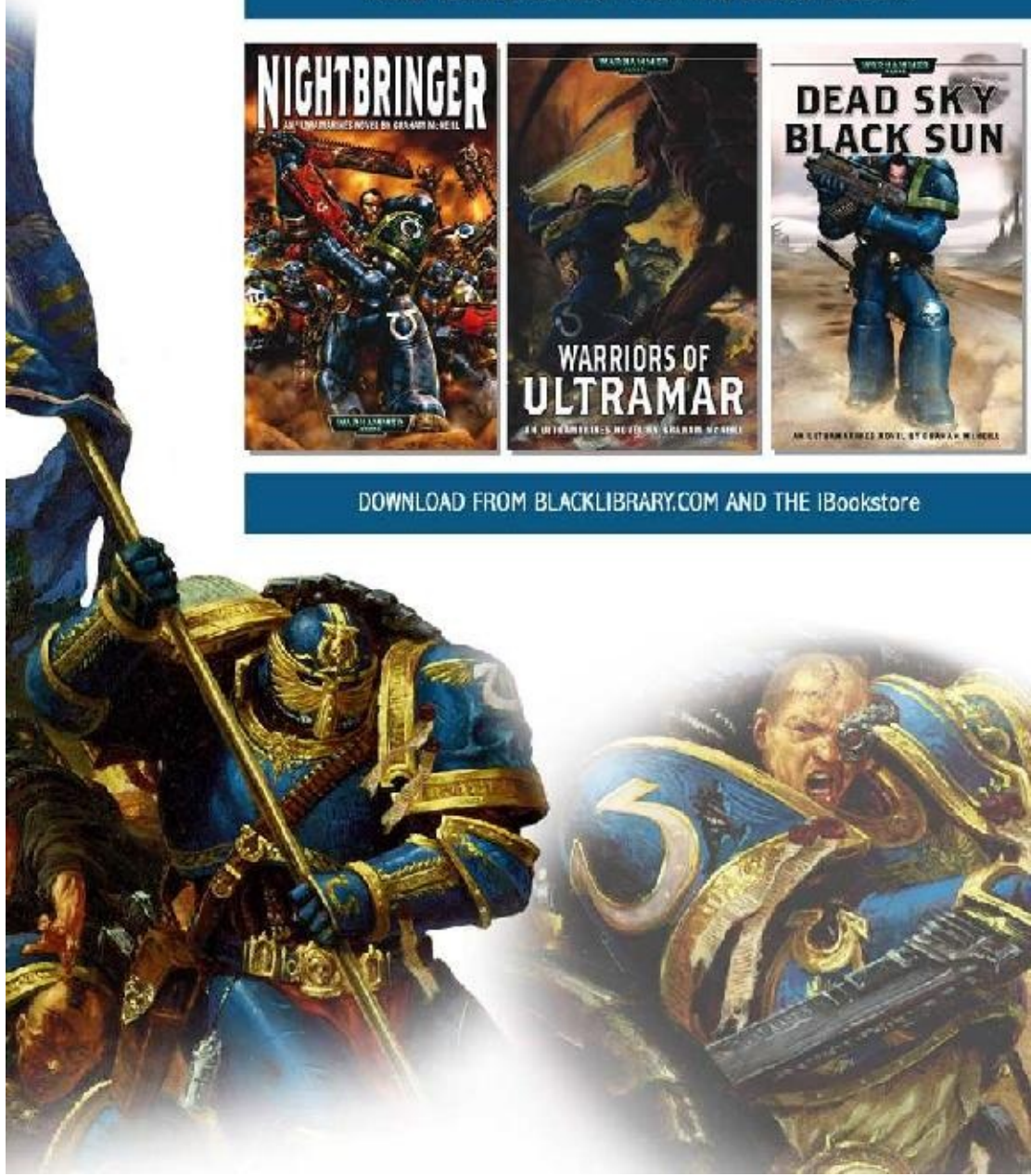
Hailing from Scotland, Graham McNeill worked for over six years as a Games Developer in Games Workshop's Design Studio before taking the plunge to become a full-time writer. Graham's written a host of SF and Fantasy novels and comics, as well as a number of side projects that keep him busy and (mostly) out of trouble. His Horus Heresy novel, *A Thousand Sons*, was a New York Times bestseller and his *Time of Legends* novel, *Empire*, won the 2010 David Gemmell Legend Award. Graham lives and works in Nottingham and you can keep up to date with where he'll be and what he's working on by visiting his website.

Join the ranks of the 4th Company at [www.graham-mcneill.com](http://www.graham-mcneill.com)

MORE ULTRAMARINES FROM THE BLACK LIBRARY



DOWNLOAD FROM [BLACKLIBRARY.COM](http://BLACKLIBRARY.COM) AND THE [iBookstore](http://iBookstore)



**A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION**

**Published in 2011 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd.,  
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK**

**Cover illustration by Karl Kopinski**

**© Games Workshop Limited 2011. All rights reserved.**

**Black Library, the Black Library logo, Games Workshop, the Games Workshop logo and all associated marks, names, characters, illustrations and images from the Warhammer universe are either ®, TM and/or © Games Workshop Ltd 2011, variably registered in the UK and other countries around the world. All rights reserved.**

**A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.**

**ISBN 978-0-85787-498-6**

**No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise except as expressly permitted under license from the publisher.**

**This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.**

**See the Black Library on the internet at**

**[blacklibrary.com](http://blacklibrary.com)**

**Find out more about Games Workshop's world of Warhammer  
and the Warhammer 40,000 universe at**

**[www.games-workshop.com](http://www.games-workshop.com)**

## **eBook license**

This license is made between:

Games Workshop Limited t/a Black Library, Willow Road, Lenton, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, United Kingdom (“Black Library”); and

(2) the purchaser of an e-book product from Black Library website (“You/you/Your/your”)

(jointly, “the parties”)

These are the terms and conditions that apply when you purchase an e-book (“e-book”) from Black Library. The parties agree that in consideration of the fee paid by you, Black Library grants you a license to use the e-book on the following terms:

\* 1. Black Library grants to you a personal, non-exclusive, non-transferable, royalty-free license to use the e-book in the following ways:

o 1.1 to store the e-book on any number of electronic devices and/or storage media (including, by way of example only, personal computers, e-book readers, mobile phones, portable hard drives, USB flash drives, CDs or DVDs) which are personally owned by you;

o 1.2 to access the e-book using an appropriate electronic device and/or through any appropriate storage media; and

\* 2. For the avoidance of doubt, you are ONLY licensed to use the e-book as described in paragraph 1 above. You may NOT use or store the e-book in any other way. If you do, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license.

\* 3. Further to the general restriction at paragraph 2, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license in the event that you use or store the e-book (or any part of it) in any way not expressly licensed. This includes (but is by no means limited to) the following circumstances:

o 3.1 you provide the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.2 you make the e-book available on bit-torrent sites, or are otherwise complicit in 'seeding' or sharing the e-book with any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.3 you print and distribute hard copies of the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.4 You attempt to reverse engineer, bypass, alter, amend, remove or otherwise make any change to any copy protection technology which may be applied to the e-book.

\* 4. By purchasing an e-book, you agree for the purposes of the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 that Black Library may commence the service (of provision of the e-book to you) prior to your ordinary cancellation period coming to an end, and that by purchasing an e-book, your cancellation rights shall end immediately upon receipt of the e-book.

\* 5. You acknowledge that all copyright, trademark and other intellectual property rights in the e-book are, shall remain, the sole property of Black Library.

\* 6. On termination of this license, howsoever effected, you shall immediately and permanently delete all copies of the e-book from your computers and storage media, and shall destroy all hard copies of the e-book which you have derived from the e-book.

\* 7. Black Library shall be entitled to amend these terms and conditions from time to time by written notice to you.

\* 8. These terms and conditions shall be governed by English law, and shall be subject only to the jurisdiction of the Courts in England and Wales.

\* 9. If any part of this license is illegal, or becomes illegal as a result of any change in the law, then that part shall be deleted, and replaced with wording that is as close to the original meaning as possible without being illegal.

\* 10. Any failure by Black Library to exercise its rights under this license for whatever reason shall not be in any way deemed to be a waiver of its rights, and in particular, Black Library reserves the right at all times to terminate this license in the event that you breach clause 2 or clause 3.