

INFERNO!



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AN ULTRAMARINES SPECIAL

INFERNO!

ARE YOU sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin...

The idea for this Ultramarines special of *Inferno!* came about over a pint in Bugman's one evening (as a good many of my more bizarre ideas are wont to). I was chatting with Christian about an idea for a short story inspired by a particularly weird and disturbing dream I'd had the previous night. Or at least, given the subject matter of the dream, it should have been disturbing. Read *The Enemy of my Enemy* and you'll see what I mean! But the thing was...instead of being disturbed, the first thing I thought when I woke up was, 'That was great! How can I turn it into a story?'

And how did that, in turn, lead to this Ultramarines special you now hold in your hand? Well – to go back a bit – out of all the novels I've written (six and counting!) it's usually *Storm of Iron* that people tell me is their favourite... before demanding to know what happens to the (very few) characters who survived it. I know by now you're

probably thinking, 'When is he going to get to the fact that this is an Ultramarines special?' bear with me, I'm getting there...

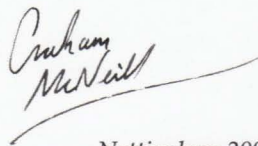
WHEN IT came time to plot out the third Uriel Ventris novel, I wanted to take the characters somewhere different, somewhere they hadn't been before and where they'd get to interact with characters other than the standard fare of Imperial warriors and officials. I'd had this in mind while I was finishing *Warriors of Ultramar*, and purposely killed off a goodly number of Uriel's Company so I had to do something different. At the same time in Games Development, we were working on the Chaos Space Marines codex, and Andy Hoare and I were talking about where baby Chaos Space Marines came from (it was a slow afternoon...) and from that came an idea of where I might take Uriel and Pasanus. Throw people's desire to know what happened after *Storm of Iron* – as well as that weird dream – into the mix and lightbulbs started appearing

above my head! Before long, the story was unfolding all by itself, the disparate plot strands weaving together to become the bloody insanity that is *Dead Sky, Black Sun*. Like I'd planned it all from the very first book. Which of course I did. Ahem...

When I chatted to Christian about how to tie all this together, he suggested an Ultramarines special and I think I agreed before he'd even finished his sentence. Pretty soon, we'd planned out what we wanted to do and I began writing the stories, articles and comic strip you're about to read.

I love writing about the Ultramarines and taking people to the darkest places in the gothic madness that is the Warhammer 40,000 universe, and if it all gets a little too dark for comfort sometimes, well, that's all part of the fun, isn't it?

But anyway, enough of my yakkin'. On with the mayhem, hope you enjoy it!



Nottingham 2004,
about teatime.

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Write to us

Inferno! • BL Publishing • Games Workshop Ltd • Willow Road • Lenton • Nottingham NG7 2WS • UK

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publishing@games-workshop.co.uk

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A BLACK LIBRARY™ PUBLICATION

PUBLISHER

Marc Gascoigne

EDITOR

Christian Dunn

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Matt Ralphs

PRODUCTION

Andy Walsh

Dan Drane

Darius Hinks

WRITERS

Graham McNeill

Matt Ralphs

ARTISTS

John Cadice

Neil Hodgson

Jonathan Standing

Andy Walsh

Jeff Wayne

ADMINISTRATION

Rik Cooper

INVALUABLE HELP

Kathryn Coxon

Dan Ebeck

Chris Jones

COVER

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Richard Wright

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CONSEQUENCES

THE COLD WATER pooled in a depression in the centre of the stone floor of the cell, before spilling through the cracked stonework to unknown destinations. This deep beneath the rock of the Fortress of Hera, water dripped from the rugged ceiling of the cell, leached through thousands of metres of hard granite from the river that thundered along the length of the Valley of Laponis high above.

Only the thinnest sliver of light from below the thick, iron door illuminated the cell, but it was enough for its occupant, due to enhanced vision that allowed him to see almost as well at night as in daylight. Not that there was anything to see within the cell's dank confines, merely an iron ring set into the wall where a prisoner could be kept chained until such time as he was removed for sentencing or punishment.

The cell's solitary occupant was not chained to the wall or restrained in any way. There would be little point in chaining one whose strength could easily break any such fetters, tear the iron ring from the wall or secrete an acidic saliva that, given time, would eat away at even the strongest of metals.

The prisoner had already sworn an oath that he would not attempt to escape or hamper his gaolers in any way and his word was accepted as truth.

He sat cross-legged, supporting his weight on his hands, holding his body an inch from the cold floor of the cell. An Aquila tattoo flexed on his right shoulder as he tensed and released his muscles and inscribed upon the flesh of his left, was a

number in the curling script of High Gothic.

He heard the clip of approaching footsteps over the steady drip-drip of the water from the ceiling and lowered himself to the floor, uncrossing his legs and standing in one smooth motion. His hair was dark and short, though longer than he kept it normally, and his thundercloud eyes smouldered with promised threat. Two golden studs glittered on his forehead and, though he was powerfully muscled, taller and broader than the mightiest of humans, he knew he was much weaker and leaner than he should be.

A knotted mass of scar tissue writhed across his flat stomach, paler than the rest of his tanned skin, but it was merely the largest of an impressive collection of scars; battle wounds and the like that criss-crossed his skin in a macabre web.

He heard the rattle of keys and the heavy door groaned open, spilling warm firelight into the cell. He squinted briefly, before his eyes quickly adjusted to the increased illumination and saw a blue-robed helot dressed in the garb of a gaoler with a dark hood covering his face.

Behind him, two giants in brightly polished Terminator armour stood with golden-bladed polearms carried across their chests. Their bulk filled the wide corridor, braziered torchlight flickering across the blue ceramite surfaces like fiery snakes. The prisoner bowed to his gaoler and said, 'Is it time?'



The helot nodded – it was forbidden for one such as he to address the prisoner – and indicated that he should leave the cell.

He bowed his head below the level of the stone lintel and stood before the Terminators, before marching through the fire-lit tunnels towards whatever fate the Master of the Ultramarines had decreed for him.

As he made his way up the rough-hewn steps of the detention level, Uriel Ventris wondered again at the path that had led him to this place.



SIX DAYS EARLIER, the battered and war-weary form of the Ultramarine Strike Cruiser, *Vae Victus*, limped towards the blue jewel of Macragge. Her armoured hide seemed to hang loose on her frame, like a beast starved of food and entering its dying days. The journey through the warp from Tarsis Ultra had taken the better part of six months, though upon re-entering realspace and calibrating the ship's chronometers against local celestial bodies, it was noted that a time dilation of a year and a half had passed. Such anomalies in the apparent flow of time while travelling through the fluid medium of warp space were not uncommon, rather, they were an accepted price to be paid for a method of travel that allowed a ship to cross the galaxy without spending generations in the journey.

Indeed, such a relatively minor time dilation was remarkable given the vast distance travelled by the *Vae Victus*. Tarsis Ultra lay to the north of Segmentum Tempestus, while Macragge orbited her star in the eastern reaches of Ultima Segmentum, half the galaxy away.

In the forward hangars of the ship, where three Thunderhawk gunships were securely tethered to the deck – though one was in dire need of the ministrations of a Techmarine and a team

of mono-tasked servitors before it would fly again, so stripped of its armaments and armour was it – a lone Space Marine knelt in prayer between two parallel rows of corpses covered in sky blue sheets. Another Space Marine, armoured in black, with a skull-faced helm, stood at the end of the rows of bodies, chanting a soft mantra to the fallen and calling upon the Emperor to guide each man to His side.

The bodies lined up on either side of him were the dead of the Fourth Company, the cost to the Ultramarines for honouring an ancient debt sworn by their Primarch to aid the people of Tarsis Ultra in times of need. Such a price was high, damnably high, but it was a price the Ultramarines willingly paid for the sake of honour.

The Space Marine kneeling between the corpses raised his head and smoothly rose to his feet. Captain Uriel Ventris hammered his fist twice into his breastplate in the warrior's Honour to the Fallen. These were his men, his warriors. They had followed him into battle on Pavonis against traitors and a monstrous alien star god and thence to Tarsis Ultra where they had fought with courage and honour against the terrifying threat of the extra-galactic predators known and feared as the tyranids. They had saved Tarsis Ultra, but had paid a heavy blood price for the victory.

There, Uriel had fought shoulder to shoulder with brother Space Marines, the Mortifactors, an honourable Chapter whose lineage could be traced back to the Blessed Guilliman, but whose doctrines and belief structure had changed so radically as to make them unrecognisable from their parent Chapter.

To the Mortifactors, death was venerated above all things, and the wisdom of the dead was sought through the visions of their Chaplains. Blood rites and the worship of those who had passed through this life in ages past was, for the Mortifactors, the norm, and, though initially horrified by such deviation from the pages of the Codex Astartes, Uriel had found that he had more in common with

the warriors of the Mortifactors than he cared to admit.

It was not a pleasing revelation.

Astador, the Chaplain of the Mortifactors, had said it best: 'You and I are both Angels of Death, Uriel.' But it had taken him many months of hard fighting and harder choices to realise the truth of this. Despite the protests and outrage of Sergeant Learchus, Uriel had followed Astador's vision quests and emerged triumphant, where a strict adherence to the Codex would have seen them defeated in the earliest stages of the war. Pulled between two opposing philosophies, Uriel had made his choice and had found the balance between following the spirit and the letter of the Codex. He knew such behaviour marked him out amongst his brethren, but his former captain, Idaeus, had taught him the value of such insights and he knew in his heart that he had done the right thing.

Uriel looked along the line of corpses and felt a great weight settle upon him.

He had almost died in the belly of the tyranid hive ship, an insidious alien poison causing his blood to clot on a bodily scale. Only the devotion of his oldest friend and comrade, Pasanius, had saved his life, the veteran sergeant almost bleeding himself dry to save his captain's life. The wounds he had suffered in the conflict had mostly healed, though the mass of plasflesh that sealed the gaping wound in his torso was a constant dull, throbbing ache. Techmarine Harkus and Apothecary Selenus had reconstructed his left shoulder and clavicular pectoralis major with augmetic sinews and muscle grafts following a battle with a tyranid guardian organism, and his blood still underwent regular transfusions to ensure its purity.

But he had not died, he had triumphed and through his and countless others' sacrifice, Tarsis Ultra had been saved, though it would never be the same again. Uriel had seen enough on Ichar IV to know that once a planet was infected with the taint of these vile xeno creatures, it would be forever impossible to remove.

The bodies had been prepared for transport to the crypts beneath the Fortress of Hera; Chaplain Clausel was performing the *Finis Rerum* and Selenus had reverently removed the Progenoid glands from the fallen. Upon their return to Macragge, each man would be interred in his own sepulchre and Uriel himself would go to the Shrine of the Primarch in the Temple of Correction and carve the names of the dead onto the bronze-edged slabs of smooth black marble that ran along the curved inner wall of the sanctum.

Clausel's chanting came to an abrupt end and Uriel turned to face the skull-visaged Chaplain, reflecting that perhaps the Mortifactors were not so different after all. For wasn't a Chaplain nothing more than a vision of Death incarnate? Frequently the last face a warrior saw before passing from this mortal coil was that of a Chaplain, the warrior who prepared his body before its journey to the halls of the dead.

He nodded to Clausel, feeling a tonal shift in the vibrations running through the hull as the ship's main engines powered down. The *Vae Victus* had achieved orbit and they were ready to descend to Macragge.



AWE. HUMILITY. A sense of history that stretched back ten thousand years. All these feelings and more flooded Uriel's body as he entered the Temple of Correction once more. He remembered the last time he had set foot in this mighty, marble edifice before he had set off for the world of Tarsis Ultra. Then he had been but a newly tested captain, with the weight of his next command heavy on his shoulders and a life of service before him. Everything had seemed simpler back then, before the burden of choice had entered his life.



As always, the Temple was thronged with pilgrims and the faithful, many of whom had journeyed further than he to be here. Many women carried babes in swaddling clothes and Uriel knew that a great many would have been both conceived and born during the pilgrimage to Macragge. Heads bowed as he passed and shouted blessings followed him. There were whispered prayers of thanks that one of the Emperor's chosen had come to this place to worship with them.

Uriel marched through the marble corridors, the dazzling white of the walls veined with thin traceries of gold and sepia and the floor paved with stone from the rocks at the base of Hera's Falls.

Finally, he entered the inner sanctum, beams of multicoloured light spearing from the gargantuan dome above. Refracted by cunning artifice through the crystals that made up its structure, each beam interwove with the others to create a dazzling internal rainbow. Hundreds of people knelt before the gently glowing sepulchre of the Primarch, their voices raised in songs of praise to his memory. The sense of wonderment and rapture in the chamber was palpable and Uriel dropped to one knee, feeling unworthy of gazing too long on the face of his Chapter's founding father.

Being in the presence of such a magnificent hero of the Imperium, even though his heart had ceased to pound nearly ten thousand years ago, was a humbling experience, made all the more so for his own sense of unworthiness after the battles on Tarsis Ultra. Had he not cast aside this legendary warrior's teachings in favour of his own initiative and the primitive rites of a death-worshipper? Such arrogance, such hubris. Who was he to second-guess the wisdom of this hero, who was the flesh and blood progeny of the Emperor himself?

'Forgive me, my Lord,' whispered Uriel, 'for I am unworthy of your love. I come before you to honour the names and deeds of your sons who fell in battle. They fought with courage and honour, and are deserving of a place at your side.

Grant them surcease of their sorrows until they are ready to be reborn in your image through the holy mysteries of their gene-seed.'

He stood and made his way to the marble slabs set into the inner circumference of the wall, finding the section designated for the members of the Fourth Company. So many slabs, so many names of those who had given their lives for the Chapter. He moved to the last slab with names upon it and, though he had seventy-eight names to carve, he needed neither list nor record to remember each warrior. Each face and name was indelibly etched on his memory and even if he lived to see out his days as one of the Chapter's masters, he would never forget those who had died under his command.

He fished out a small chisel and hammer from his belt and began delicately chipping the marble to fashion the first name. He smoothed the inner edges of each letter with a hard-edged sanding stone, ready for those more skilled than he to apply the gold leaf to each name.

Name followed name, and Uriel lost track of time as he relived each warrior's character and personality through the simple act of carving their name. Daylight dimmed: the dome's rainbow fading and vanishing before rising anew the following morning. Days passed, though Uriel stopped for neither food nor water. Helots tasked with the care and maintenance of the temple enquired if he wished for anything at regular intervals, but were dismissed with a curt shake of the head. After three days they stopped asking.

As the rainbow crept down through the air to the stone floor of the temple on the fifth day of Uriel's vigil, he smoothed the last edge of the final name. His arms ached from the precise and painstaking movements of carving, but he was pleased with the results. All seventy-eight warriors would now remain part of the Chapter's heritage for evermore and he felt their silent acceptance of his vigil as light and warmth filled the temple.



He pushed himself to his feet, pocketing his craftsman's tools, and made his way back to the centre of the temple. Though he had not eaten, drunk or slept these last days, he felt more refreshed than ever, as though a cool spring flowed through his veins, washing away the old Uriel and leaving only a dedicated warrior of the Emperor in his stead. The songs of the many pilgrims echoed in his skull and Uriel felt a great welcoming embrace.

Uriel closed his eyes and prayed, giving thanks for being afforded the chance to serve his Chapter and the Emperor. He joined in song with the pilgrims and many were the rapturous faces that beamed radiantly from the assembled congregation as his voice joined theirs.

They sang of duty, of courage and of sacrifice. They sang until they were hoarse and could raise their voices no more. They sang until tears spilled from their eyes and a swelling sense of brotherhood filled the temple. A choking tide of emotions welled up within Uriel's chest as more and more voices joined the choir of praise.

As the latest hymn came to a rousing climax, ending in an exhilarated round of exultation, Uriel saw a trio of Space Marines in burnished blue armour enter the temple. That in itself was nothing unusual, but then Uriel realised the leader of the group was none other than Captain Pythea of the Second Company, Commander of the Watch and Master of the Household. Uriel also saw that the Terminators who followed him were armed, something normally unheard of within the sanctum of the Primarch.

Pythea stopped before Uriel and said, 'Ventriss.'

Though both were captains, Pythea was still senior to him, and thus Uriel bowed his head, saying, 'Captain Pythea, it is good to see you again.'

Pythea's granite features were harder and colder than Uriel had ever known.

'Uriel Ventriss of Calth,' said Pythea formally. 'By the power invested in me by Lord Calgar and by the Emperor of

Mankind, you are to surrender yourself into my keeping, that I might render you into the custody of your peers and effect their judgement upon you.'

Uriel suspected he knew the answer already, but asked, 'On what charge?'

'Heresy,' spat Pythea, as though the word itself were repugnant to him. 'Do not offer any resistance, Ventriss, there are more warriors without and it will do no good to create discord before these people.'

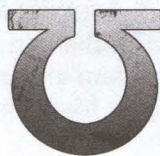
Uriel nodded and said, 'Thank you for letting me finish my work here. I know you could have come sooner.'

'That was for the dead, not for you,' snapped Pythea.

'Thank you anyway.'

Pythea nodded to the Terminators.

'Take him to the dungeons.'



THE HALLS OF Marneus Calgar, Master of the Ultramarines were set atop the highest peak of the mountains, amidst the golden domes and marble-pillared temples of the Fortress of Hera. Though the day was hot, the air here was temperate, a fine mist of water from the rumbling Hera's Falls sapping the worst of the heat. A perfectly symmetrical structure, the Chapter Master's chambers enclosed a central, sunken courtyard that was open to the azure sky above, its cloisters wrapped in cool shadows, its balconies draped in ancient, gold-stitched battle honours.

At its centre, a foaming fountain splashed. Carved in the likeness of Konor, the first Battle King of Macragge, it was surrounded by statuary depicting long-dead heroes of Macragge, artfully arranged so that they gave homage to their ancient king.

The last time Uriel had set foot here, it had been to receive his orders to depart for Pavonis and it had been a momentous occasion for him. Now, after a night in



the dungeons and stripped of his armour, it was the scene of his disgrace.

And worse, it was the scene of his oldest friend's disgrace.

Pasanius stood beside him, similarly manacled and dressed in a blue chiton.

His own fall from grace he would accept, but to see Pasanius dragged down with him was almost too much for him to bear.

Surrounding Lord Calgar were all the various Masters of the Chapter present on Macragge, in whose hands his ultimate fate lay. Captain Pythea, Master of the Household, sat to his left, next to Captain Sicarius, Master of the Marches, who in turn flanked Fennias Maxim, the Master of the Forge. Opposite them sat Captain Ixion, Chief Victualler, Captain Antilochus, Chief of Recruits and the heroic Captain Agemman of the First Company. The great and good of the Ultramarines sat in judgement of him and at their head sat Lord Calgar, his liege lord and Chapter Master.

Calgar looked older than Uriel remembered him, his piercing gaze sadder and his stern, patrician features more careworn than he remembered. The disappointment in his lord's eyes was too much and Uriel dropped his gaze, shame burning hot in his breast.

And last of all, seated beside Calgar, was Learchus.

Veteran sergeant of the Fourth Company, Learchus had fought beside Uriel and, though it broke his heart, he knew now the source of the accusations against Pasanius and himself.

He should have seen it coming. In the final hours of the war on Tarsis Ultra, Learchus had as good as told him that he would seek redress for Uriel's flagrant disregard the Codex Astartes. Much as he wanted to feel anger towards Learchus for this, Uriel could not bring himself to feel anything but pride in his sergeant. He was an Ultramarine through and through and had done nothing wrong. Indeed, had the circumstances been reversed, Uriel

might well have found himself where Learchus was now.

At some unseen signal, Captain Pythea rose from his seat, his long red cloak billowing around him as he stepped down into the sunken courtyard. He stared at Uriel and Pasanius with a look of loathing, pulling a wax-sealed vellum scroll from beneath his cloak.

He looked towards Calgar, who nodded solemnly.

'Uriel Ventris. Pasanius Lysane. On this, the nine hundredth and ninety-ninth year of the tenth millennium of his Imperial Majesty's rule, you are hereby charged with seventeen counts of the crime of heresy. Do you understand the gravity of these charges?'

'I do,' said Uriel.

'Aye,' said Pasanius, in a tone that made no secret of his contempt for this hearing. 'Though to drag us here after the great victory we won at Tarsis Ultra does nothing but shame the memories of those who died there. We fought the Great Devourer with courage, honour and faith. No man here can ask more than that!'

'Be silent!' thundered Pythea. 'You will answer only those questions I ask of you and you are to volunteer no more information than that. Do you understand me?'

Pasanius's lip curled, but he said nothing and merely nodded.

Apparently satisfied, Pythea circled the fountain and stood before Uriel, his gimlet gaze boring into him, as though he were attempting to force him to admit his guilt by sheer force of personality.

'You were a protégé of Captain Idaeus are you not?'

'You know I am, Captain Pythea,' answered Uriel evenly.

'Answer the question, Ventris,' retorted Pythea.

'My rank is captain, you have not found me guilty yet and will address me by my title until such time as I may be convicted by this body.'

Pythea pursed his lips, but knew it would do him no good to press the point and reluctantly conceded.



'Very well, captain, if we may proceed?'

'Yes, I served in the Fourth Company under Captain Idaeus for ninety years, before rising to its captaincy following his death on Thracia.'

'Could you describe the circumstances of his death for us?'

Uriel took a deep breath to calm his rising temper. The tale of Idaeus's final battle were well known to every man here and he could see no purpose in reiterating it.

'Captain Ventris?'

'Very well,' began Uriel. 'The world of Thracia was one of a number that had rebelled against the lawful rule of the Emperor's representatives in the Ulenta sector and it was rumoured that the uprising had been instigated by followers of the dark powers. We were attached to the crusade forces of Inquisitor Appolyon and had been tasked with several surgical strikes against key enemy positions to facilitate the advance of Imperial Guard units closing on the capital city of Mercia.'

'And what was your final mission in this crusade?' asked Pythea.

'Guard units were advancing along a narrow frontage, with one flank open to assault across a number of bridges. Squads of the Fourth Company were tasked with their destruction.'

'An easy task surely?'

'In theory, yes. Intelligence indicated that the bridges were lightly held by poor quality opposition.'

'But that proved not to be the case, did it not?' asked Pythea.

'No, bridge two-four was held by inferior troops, and we easily dealt with them without loss. Once the bridge was ours, we began rigging it for destruction, under the direction of Techmarine Tomasin.'

'May he always be remembered,' intoned Fennias Maxim from the edge of the courtyard.

'And then what happened?'

'As we prepared the bridge for destruction, the weather deteriorated markedly and we received fragmentary reports of the enemy moving in our

direction. Within minutes we were under attack from a battalion-sized force of enemy units intent on seizing the bridge.'

'A fearsome prospect,' observed Pythea.

'Not in this case,' said Uriel. 'Though this opposition was of a higher calibre than that tasked with holding the bridge, we were able to keep them at bay, though in the course of the fighting, our Thunderhawk gunship was shot down by enemy flak tanks.'

'So you were trapped,' stated Pythea. 'Truly a desperate situation. At what point did the enemy attack again?'

'Just before dawn we were attacked by warriors of the Night Lords Legion.'

A collective gasp went around the courtyard. Though every warrior knew of the fallen legions, to hear their name spoken so brazenly was still a shock. To mention such things was as unseemly as it was unbelievable.

'We were able to hold them off, but as the battle dragged on, it soon became clear that we would not be able to hold our position.'

'So what did you do?'

'The explosives were rigged, but Techmarine Tomasin had died in the initial attack and, without his detonator mechanism, we had no way of triggering the charges to destroy the bridge. During the night, Captain Idaeus had sent our assault squads to attempt to detonate the explosives manually using krak grenades. They were unsuccessful, but the principle was sound.'

'I'm sorry, Captain Ventris, I don't follow,' said Pythea, cocking his head to one side.

'Don't understand what?'

'This plan of Idaeus's, it is obviously one that does not refer to the tactics of the Codex Astartes. Are you sure it was his plan?'

Uriel was about to answer that of course it was, when he was seized by a sudden memory of the frantic battle on bridge two-four. Pythea smiled and Uriel saw how deftly he had been manoeuvred into this admission of guilt. Slowly he shook his head.



'No, it was not Captain Idaeus's plan,' he said. 'It was mine.'

Pythea stepped back, arms raised at his sides.

'It was your plan,' he said triumphantly.

'But it worked, damn it,' roared Pasanus. 'Don't you see that? The bridge was destroyed and the campaign won!'

'Irrelevant,' responded Pythea. 'A victory is not a victory unless it is won with the principles of the Primarch. We have all read of the Mortifactors in Captain Ventris's after action reports from Tarsis Ultra. We all see where the path of deviance from the Codex leads. Tell me, sergeant, would you have us become the Mortifactors?'

Pasanus shook his head. 'No, of course not.'

'But you would have us follow their methods?'

'No, that's not what I said,' growled Pasanus. 'I just meant that whatever breaches of the Codex we made, they were only small.'

'Sergeant,' said Pythea, as though speaking to a small child, 'our faith in the Codex is a fortress, and no crack in a fortress can be accounted small. If we take small steps down their path, each tiny indiscretion becomes that little bit easier doesn't it? After a hundred such breaches of the Codex's teachings, what matters another ten, or a hundred? That is why you must be punished, Captain Ventris, for where you tread, others follow. You are a captain of the Ultramarines and must comport yourself appropriately.'

Uriel glared as Pythea climbed the steps back to his seat and the Master of the Forges, Fennias Maxim descended to the courtyard. His leather-tough skin was the colour of aged oak and completely hairless. Dark, hooded eyes, one replaced with a blinking red metriculator augmetic, transfixed Uriel as Fennias circled them, his hands laced behind his back. A hissing servo-arm, folded into a recumbent position on his back, wheezed as it flexed in time with his breath and his heavy, metal legs thumped on the stonework of the courtyard.

'I have spoken to Techmarine Harkus,' he barked suddenly.

Uriel knew where Maxim was heading and said, 'I ordered him to strip the Thunderhawk down to its bare bones. He was only obeying my orders and no blame should be attached to him for his actions on Tarsis Ultra.'

Maxim stepped close and lowered his thunderous face into Uriel's.

'I know,' he hissed. 'Did you think I would not know that?'

'No,' replied Uriel, 'I merely wished to be clear on the subject.'

'Tell me why you desecrated such a holy machine, one that had seen honourable service for almost a millennium and had carried you into battle on occasions too numerous to count. How could you turn your back on such a noble spirit and treat it so cruelly?'

'I had no choice,' said Uriel simply.

'No choice?' scoffed Maxim. 'I find that hard to believe.'

'I do not lie, Master,' said Uriel darkly. 'To destroy one of the tyranid's hive ships we had to get the planet's defence lasers firing again, and the only way we could do it was to transport fresh energy capacitors to a site that had the best chance of killing it. The only craft available that stood any chance of reaching this site and making it back was the Thunderhawk. And even then I was forced to order the gunship stripped down to its minimum weight to ensure we would have enough fuel to get us there and back.'

'You angered its war-spirit. I have since ministered to it and great is its wrath. Were I you, I would not trust my life to it again until you have begged its forgiveness and performed the necessary rites of obeisance.'

Maxim turned his back on Uriel and returned to his seat as, one by one, each of the Chapter's Masters came forward to highlight an example of Uriel's disregard for the teachings of the Codex Astartes.

They knew everything from both the Pavonis and Tarsis Ultra campaigns, the events on the space hulk, *Death of Virtue*,



and the battle with the dark eldar on the return leg of the journey.

His frustration grew as example after example of his recklessness was paraded before him. While he could not deny the veracity of these claims, he could refute with reason and proof of their merit, but as the day wore on, he saw that the Chapter Masters were not interested in his truth. He had deviated from the Codex Astartes, the most heinous crime imaginable, and nothing could atone for such a breach of trust and faith.

As the sun dipped below the tiled roof of Lord Calgar's chambers, Uriel's temper was fraying and he knew he was in danger of losing it completely. These men did not want truth; they wanted a scapegoat for the dead of Tarsis Ultra and to set an example to the rest of the Chapter that there was no other way than the Codex.

He wanted to scream in frustration, but pursed his lips and bit down on his anger.

Purple shadows lengthened on the floor of the courtyard. Evening moths gathered around the torches that were hung from the balconies.

Marneus Calgar stood and swept his gaze around the assembled Masters before striding into the centre of the courtyard to face Uriel and Pasanus. He stared into Uriel's eyes and Uriel met his gaze unflinchingly. Whatever his fate, he would face it on his feet like the warrior he knew himself to be, and damn the consequences.

At last, Lord Calgar said, 'It saddens me to see what has become of you both. I saw greatness within you and hoped that one day you might have taken your place amongst this Chapter's mightiest heroes. But nothing in this life is set in stone and you stand before me accused of the darkest of crimes. Tomorrow you shall have your chance to refute your accusers and present your defence. Think well on what you wish to say. I urge you to spend this night in prayer. Look to the Emperor for guidance and remember your oaths of allegiance to this Chapter and all that once meant to you when next you stand before me.'

The first slivers of moonlight crested the roof as Uriel and Pasanus were led back to their cells.



THE CELL WAS dark and filled with a musty odour of damp and helplessness. A chain dangled from a ring set in the wall and water dripped from the ceiling to disappear down a crack in the stone floor.

'Do I need to chain you?' enquired one of the Terminators, his voice hissing through his helmet vox.

'No,' said Uriel. 'I will give you no trouble and you have my word I shall not attempt to escape.'

The Terminator nodded, as though he had expected as much and closed the cell's door, bolting and locking it with thick chains and mechanical wards.

Uriel bunched his fists and paced the cell like a caged animal. He would not try to escape, but tomorrow, he would hurl every one of the accusations levelled at him back at those who stood in judgement over him. They had not witnessed the circumstances that had driven him to this point.

Where were they on the walls of Tarsis Ultra? Where were they when he had stood defiant before the might of an ancient star god and allowed his vile xeno taint into his mind? Where were they when he had almost died in their name? He knew he was reacting with his heart and not his head, but couldn't help himself. The injustice of it all made him sick and he slumped on the floor of the cell, listening to the dripping water and framing what he would say.





SOME HOURS LATER, as he lay sprawled on the cold, damp floor, Uriel heard the soft pad of footsteps approach. Furtive steps, like those of a man who is afraid of being discovered, drew near, and even through the thickness of the stone walls and iron door, Uriel's enhanced hearing could tell that whoever was approaching his cell was a Space Marine.

He swivelled upright and sat with his back to the wall opposite the door. Keys rattled and the door swung inwards, a hooded figure blocking the light. The figure stepped into the cell and pulled back his hood.

'It is good to see you, Captain Ventris,' said a deep voice, rich with age and experience.

'Captain Agemman?' said Uriel, recognising the voice. Agemman was the Captain of the First Company; the veterans, the best and bravest of the Chapter. Amongst his titles was Regent of Ultramar, the man to whom the Master of the Ultramarines entrusted the safety of Macragge in his absence. After the death of Captain Invictus, hero of the First Company who had died fighting the tyrannids of hive fleet Behemoth, Agemman had taken on the role of rebuilding the destroyed company. Only now, two hundred and fifty years after its complete destruction, was it returned to full strength and the Banner of Macragge unfurled once more.

Agemman had been an inspiration to them all while training at Agiselus and all through their indoctrination at the Fortress of Hera. His noble bearing and courage of spirit were shining lights amid the darkness. What now could he want with Uriel?

'Aye,' replied Agemman, holding out his hand. 'Courage and honour.'

'Courage and honour,' said Uriel, accepting Agemman's hand.

Agemman folded his arms within his robe and glanced around him in distaste at the bleakness of the cell.

'It is galling to see a warrior of such courage treated so,' he said.

'You pick a strange time to come and see me, captain. What are you doing here?'

'I come on behalf of Lord Calgar, Captain Ventris.'

'Lord Calgar? I do not understand.'

'I know all about you, Uriel,' interrupted Agemman. 'I followed your progress all the way through Agiselus. I recognised your potential and I rejoiced when you were selected to come to the Fortress of Hera and become an Ultramarine. I gave thanks for the victory on Vorhn's World and mourned with you after Black Bone Road. I know all of what you did while serving with the Deathwatch and I know why you will never speak of it.'

'Why are you telling me this?' asked Uriel, suddenly wary.

'So that you will know that I speak true, Uriel Ventris,' explained Agemman. 'You stand accused of the gravest crime an Ultramarine can commit and your life hangs by the most slender of threads. You would do well to heed my words.'

Agemman closed the cell door.

'Much depends on it...'



DAWN BROKE CLEAR and bright over the mountains, casting long shadows over the pale rocks and highland forests. A cool breeze blew down the length of the Valley of Laponis, and Uriel felt a curious light-headedness as he marched up the smooth-worn steps carved into the rock that led to the chambers of Marneus Calgar. Despite the armed guards escorting them, his step was lighter and his heart unclouded by anger or resentment. He knew now what he had to do and, with the choice so clear before him, there was no more doubt or uncertainty.

He was saddened that Pasanius would be tarred with the same brush, but there was little he could do to prevent that now.



Captain Agemman had spoken simply and clearly for an hour and Uriel had been struck by his simple honesty and the force of his words. When he had finished, they had shaken hands in the warrior's grip, wrist to wrist, and said their farewells. Agemman had wished him well and departed, no doubt to take the same message to Pasanus. As they climbed the stairs to their fate, one glance at Pasanus's face told Uriel that he had accepted Agemman's words and chosen the same path. Uriel was humbled by his comrade's loyalty and managed a wan smile as they reached the esplanade at the top of the steps and approached the many-pillared portico that led to the chambers of Marneus Calgar.

They passed between the Terminator guards, into the shadowed vestibule before emerging once more into the sunlit courtyard. Though they had been taken from their cells at first light, the Masters of the Chapter were already gathered, their ceremonial cloaks of office draped around their shoulders and laurels of judgement wreathing their skulls.

They took their place before the statue of Konor, facing Lord Calgar and standing at parade rest, with their arms ramrod straight at their sides. The armed warriors retreated from the courtyard and not a soul moved until the echoing clang of the bronze doors rang out.

Marneus Calgar stepped down into the courtyard to stand before Uriel and Pasanus. His augmetic eye burned a steady red, his features unreadable. Uriel knew that Calgar had sent Agemman to their cells last night and, though he knew it meant his undoing, could find no anger in his heart for this act, just a simple understanding of what it meant to be a true Ultramarine.

The Lord of the Ultramarines strode around the fountain, addressing the assembled Masters.

'Brother Ultramarines, today is a day of judgement. We have heard much that condemns these warriors in the eyes of our brethren, but we are men of honour and would not think of deciding their fate without first giving them a chance to

refute these charges and answer the accusations against them.'

Calgar completed his circuit of the gurgling fountain and stood before Uriel, locking his gaze with him.

'Captain Ventris, you have the right to speak and defend yourself.'

Uriel took a deep breath and said, 'I waive that right and accept the judgement of my lords upon me.'

A ripple of surprise rose from the masters and hurried glances were exchanged as Lord Calgar gave an imperceptible nod of his head to Uriel. Calgar then asked Pasanus the same question and received the same answer. Uriel saw Learchus's face harden and knew that it pained the sergeant to have brought this upon him, but Uriel now knew that Learchus had no choice but to do so. He nodded to Learchus in a gesture of peace and respect between them.

Uriel faced the Master of the Ultramarines as he spoke again to him. 'You do not wish to give an account of yourself and enter a plea to your peers?'

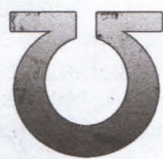
'No,' said Uriel. 'I willingly submit myself to your judgement.'

Lord Calgar turned from Uriel and ascended to his throne, arranging his cloak about him before addressing the assembled masters.

'These men have broken faith with the Codex Astartes, and by their own admission admit to abandoning its teachings,' began Calgar. 'Their fate is now in my hands and on the morrow I shall render my verdict. We shall convene again at dawn tomorrow at Gallan's Rock where judgement will be carried out.'

Though he had known they were to be punished, Uriel felt his heart sink as Calgar spoke.

Gallan's Rock was a place of execution.





THE NOISE OF Hera's Falls was deafening. Torrents of water fell hundreds of metres to the jagged rocks below, cascading into a spume-covered pool of glacially cold water. The sharp white rocks glistened and sparkled with quartz, and emerald green highland fir grew right up to the edge of the cliffs. Sunlight crept over the mountaintops and bathed everything in the glow of molten gold. It was, thought Uriel, one of the most beautiful vistas he had been privileged to lay his eyes upon, as though nature, realising that this might well be the last thing he saw, had striven to produce the most wondrous vision for him to take into the next life.

He and Pasanus marched in silence after the Chapter's Masters, their chains removed and armour stored in the Fourth Company's armorium. Both wore unadorned black chitons, their bare feet warmed by the sun-kissed earth.

No guards accompanied the sombre column. Though guilty, they were still Ultramarines and would meet their fate with courage and honour. The climb from the Fortress of Hera had taken two hours and they stood now before Gallan's Rock, an angular slab of black marble that speared out from the valley side.

In ancient times, convicted criminals had been hurled to their deaths on the rocks below and it had been on this very spot that the sword of Roboute Guilliman had cut the head from the traitor king, Gallan, who had murdered his adopted father with an envenomed blade and attempted to take control of Macragge.

The Masters gathered at the edge of the cliff, a fine mist of water soaking their armour and as he approached them, Uriel felt the fabric of his chiton cling to his skin as it became saturated.

Without any words being spoken, Uriel and Pasanus marched onto the rock and slowly inched their way towards the end. Uriel experienced a moment's vertigo as he lost sight of the cliff edge in his peripheral vision. The black rock was slippery underfoot, but he supposed it didn't much matter whether he fell now or not.

They reached the end of the rock and knelt, the stone hard and cold against their skin. Uriel looked over the edge, the drop dizzyingly high and the rocks below indelibly stained with the blood of the condemned. His own would soon join it and, strangely, the thought did not trouble him overmuch. Agemman had made it clear what was at stake and Uriel was Ultramarine enough to grasp the truth of his words and make the right decision.

He felt a hand grip his shoulder and glanced over at Pasanus. His friend and comrade in arms was stoic and stared across the valley, savouring the beauty of their surroundings.

'I regret nothing of what we have achieved,' said Pasanus. 'We acted with courage and honour and no man can ask more of us than that.'

Uriel felt his chest tighten and nodded, too overcome with admiration for his friend to speak. He nodded as he heard footsteps behind him, bowing his head and closing his eyes as he awaited the push that would send him plummeting to his death.

He felt armoured gauntlets take hold of his chiton as he heard the voice of Lord Calgar.

'A true judgement has been returned against you and the Codex Astartes has but one punishment for your crimes. Though you are warriors of courage and it pains me to lose such valiant fighters, I have no choice in my verdict.

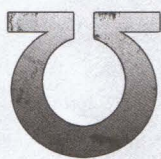
'Just as we all are, I too am bound by the Codex and must obey its teachings in sentencing you to death.'

The grip on Uriel's chiton tightened.

'There are many ways one can achieve death, many ways to meet your fate and to waste a life that may yet bring retribution to the enemies of the Emperor is a sin in and of itself. It is therefore my judgement that you be bound by a Death Oath and take the light of the Emperor into that abominable region of space where many a true warrior has met his end – the Eye of Terror. I bind you to take



your fire and steel into the dark places until such time as you meet your destiny.'



URIEL STOOD motionless in the torch-lit gatehouse as the Masters of the Chapter circled him. Fully clad in his armour, his golden-hilted sword sheathed at his side, he felt a lightness in his heart that he had not felt in many months. Though to journey into the Eye of Terror, that region of space where the madness and corruption of the Warp spilled into realspace, was as certain a death sentence as if had they been pushed from Gallan's Rock, Uriel knew that this was somehow right.

Pasanius stood beside him, also fully armoured, his customary flamer held tightly in his silver bionic arm. Chaplain Clausel read from an ancient leather-bound tome with gold edged pages and a musty aroma of a book that had sat unopened for many centuries.

Verses from the Book of Dishonour, words that had not been spoken in over six thousand years, were uttered in time with the Masters' footsteps as they removed everything that marked them as Ultramarines from their armour and weapons.

His company tattoo had been burned from the skin of his left shoulder and the Chapter symbols of the Ultramarines had been painted over, leaving his shoulder guards an unblemished blue. The golden eagles were removed from his breastplate and waist and the purity seals and honour badges were unclipped and placed in a sandarac reliquary box.

Learchus would lead the Fourth Company in his absence and Uriel could think of no-one he would rather have commanding his surviving warriors and rebuilding the company.

Marneus Calgar watched them having their insignia removed from their armour impassively and, though Uriel knew that he did not want to have to do this, he knew also that the Chapter Master had had no choice but to place the Death Oath upon them. It had been that or an ignominious end on the rocks at the foot of Hera's Falls.

He remembered Agemman's words, spoken in a calm and even voice in his cell as though they were being whispered in his ear even now. Agemman had spoken of the great and good name of the Ultramarines, a name that stood for truth, courage and faith in the Emperor. No truer Chapter of Space Marines existed and to plant any seeds of doubt of that in the minds of its own warriors was to damn it as surely as if it were to embrace the dark powers. A Chapter's strength came from its belief in itself, a power that devolved from the force of its Chapter Master and was embodied within those he appointed beneath him.

The Chapter was held together by such valour and to allow any one man to undermine that was to erode the very foundations of the Ultramarines. Each warrior looked up to his superiors as embodiments of the Codex and to see a captain flaunt that was to invite disaster.

The rot of dissent had to be cut out before it infected the entire Chapter and brought about the ruin of the Ultramarines. There could be no other way. The strength in Agemman's voice had cut through the bitterness and frustration that had been consuming Uriel, and he had seen beyond his own deeds and the ramifications should his methods and actions become widespread. The Ultramarines would become little more than roving bands of warriors, visiting such vengeance as they deemed appropriate upon whomever they chose. Before long, there would be little to distinguish them from the renegades who gave praise to the Ruinous Powers and Uriel was gripped by a horrifying vision of a future where blood-soaked



Ultramarines were as feared and reviled as those who trod the path of Chaos.

Agemman had not ordered either of them in what they must do, but had left them to choose the right path.

Uriel had known what that choice must be: accept the judgement of Lord Calgar and show the Chapter that the way chosen by the Ultramarines was true. They must accept the Death Oath so that the Chapter might live on as it always had.

At last, Clausel closed the book and bowed his head as Uriel and Pasanus marched past him towards the doors of the gatehouse.

'Uriel, Pasanus,' said Lord Calgar.

The two Space Marines stopped and bowed to their former master.

'The Emperor go with you. Die well.'

Uriel nodded as the doors swung open. He and Pasanus stepped into the purple twilight of evening. Birds sang and torchlight flickered from the high towers of the outermost wall of the Fortress of Hera.

Before the door closed, Calgar spoke again, his voice hesitant, as though unsure as to whether he should speak at all.

'Librarian Tigurius spoke with me last night,' he began. 'He told me that he had been granted a vision of you and Pasanus upon a world taken by the Dark Powers. A world that tasted of dark iron, with great wombs of daemonic flesh rippling with monstrous, unnatural life. As he watched, fell surgeons – like monsters themselves – hacked at them with blades and saws and pulled bloodstained figures from within. Though appearing more dead than alive, these figures lived and breathed, tall and strong, a dark mirror of our own glory. I know not what this means, Uriel, but its evil is plain. Seek this place out. Destroy it.'

'As you command,' said Uriel and walked into the night.

Ahead was a wide, cobbled esplanade, two parallel lines of Ultramarines lining the route they would take towards the

main gate of the Fortress. The entirety of the Chapter's strength on Macragge awaited them, over five hundred Space Marines, their weapons clasped across their chests and heads held high.

Uriel and Pasanus marched between the lines of fellow Space Marines, each warrior snapping to attention and smoothly turning his back on them as they passed. The outer wall of the Fortress towered above them and Uriel could not help but look over his shoulder at the glittering marvel of the Fortress of Hera as he strode from its majesty.

The hundred-metre high golden gate swung smoothly open, and Uriel felt a tremendous sense of stepping into the unknown seize him. Once they passed through that gate, they would no longer be Ultramarines, they would be stepping into the vastness of the galaxy to fulfil their Death Oath on their own, and the thought sent a realisation of what they had lost through him.

As the gateway drew closer, he saw Learchus in the line of Space Marines ahead of him. He reached his former sergeant and saw that Learchus was not turning his back as every other Ultramarine had.

Uriel stopped and said, 'Sergeant, you must turn your back.'

'No, captain, I will not, I will see you on your way.'


Uriel smiled and held out his hand to Learchus, who shook it proudly.

'I will look after the men of the Company in your absence,' promised Learchus.

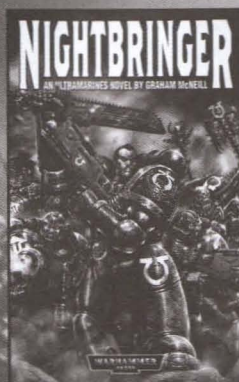
'I know you will, Learchus. I bid you farewell, but now you must turn from us.'

Learchus nodded slowly and saluted before turning his back on his former captain.

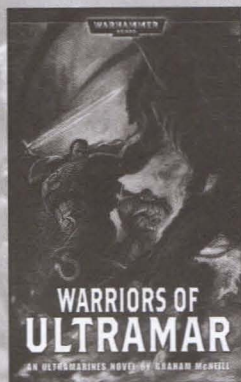
Uriel and Pasanus continued on their long walk, finally passing into the shadow of the massive wall and leaving the Fortress of Hera behind.

And the gates slammed shut. 

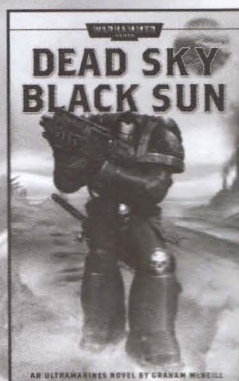




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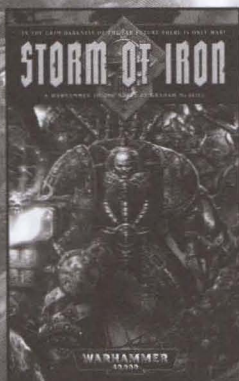


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AN INTERVIEW WITH GRAHAM MCNEILL

Graham McNeill is currently working hard on the third Uriel Ventris novel, *Dead Sky, Black Sun*, which is set for launch on an unsuspecting public at Games Day 2004. To honour this special occasion (and because this is, after all, an Ultramarines special edition of the *Inferno!*) we caught up with him for a chat about all things Space Marine.

Matt Ralphs: Hi Graham. How's it going?

Graham McNeill: I'm good thanks.

MR: Great. So, how does it feel to get an edition of *Inferno!* dedicated to one of your characters?

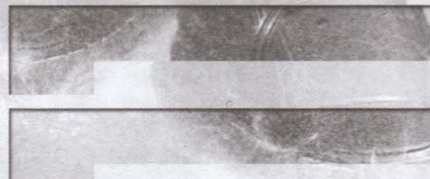
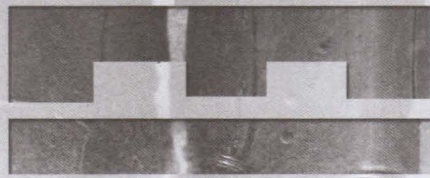
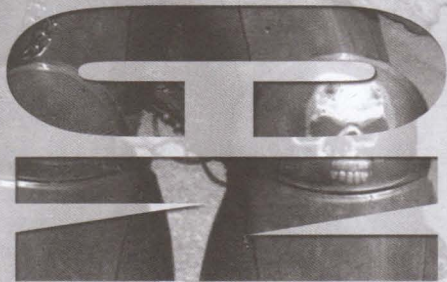
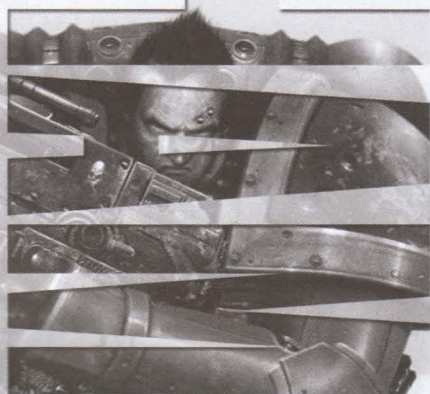
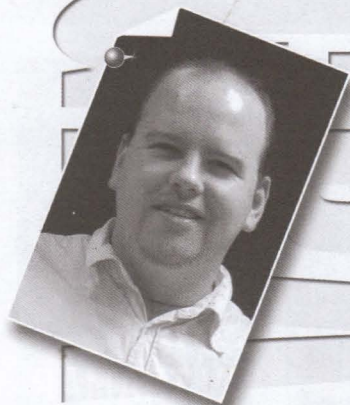
GM: Very weird. I remember reading *Inferno!* when it first came out, so to have a whole issue for Uriel is very strange, but also exceptionally cool. It shows people like my work. I write stuff that I enjoy, but if people don't like it as well, what's the point?

MR: Did you expect this sort of success when you first started writing?

GM: Oh, no. My one criteria for what I put in books is: is this cool? I wanted to write stories that were fun and full of action. I just hoped people would enjoy them. So the success was hoped for rather than expected.

MR: Each of your Ultramarines novels has lead on well into the next. Was that planned from the beginning, or do you take inspiration from your own stories?

GM: As I've written more books and got more confident with longer plot arcs, and now that people seem to have latched onto them, I feel that I can plan for the long term. I know that the series can continue, which allows me to plot out what will happen in the future. When I wrote *Nightbringer* it was very self-contained



because I didn't know if it would be picked up. But as, in my mind, I've got better at what I'm doing, and then I've gained the confidence to plan things beyond that. Things from *Nightbringer* have moved on into each subsequent book. They weren't planned for but as my confidence as a writer has grown they have become more of a series of linked books rather than one adventure after another.

MR: Do you think your writing has got stronger since your debut?

GM: I have a much better understanding of how many words to use for a scene. The first draft of *Nightbringer* was a 130,000-word monster that had to be viciously pruned down to about 90,000 words. Now I've learnt to budget my words scene by scene. The actual planning is becoming much easier. The work I do with the Black Library going through other prospective story ideas makes it a lot easier. It's like a training exercise. I'm hopefully helping other people with their ideas, but it's also teaching me about plot, character and so on. It's getting easier to come up with ideas now.

MR: So your role as a creative advisor to the Black Library is helping you with your own work?

GM: Oh, without a doubt. I can see mistakes that other people have made that I would make too. Because when it's not your work it's easier to spot. When your own plot is so anchored in your head, sometimes it's hard to spot obvious mistakes. But my work with the Black Library has helped me to spot mistakes in my own stuff.

MR: The next Uriel novel, *Dead Sky, Black Sun*, is due out in the autumn. Without giving too much away, what can we expect from this novel?

GM: Every event I ever go to, people say that they like the Ventriss novels, but when can they expect a sequel to *Storm of Iron*? And for a book that I never expected to be as popular as the others that always surprises me. I do keep saying that *Dead Sky, Black Sun* is the third in the Ultramarines series that just happens to have certain characters from *Storm of Iron* in it. There's a lot of down and dirty action, its set on a

daemon world so there's lots of disturbing gribbliness.

MR: I read the short story in this Inferno! issue, *The Enemy of my Enemy*, and it's totally out there! I heard that you got the inspiration from a dream. Is that true?

GM: Yes, that's true! The whole vision of the train with the wispy daemons coming out of it is all from this dream I had. When I was woken up by my radio there was a news item about the Soul Train awards in America, so I thought there's got to be a story there somewhere. So I wrote it all down as fast as I could and tried to figure out how I could work it into a story.

MR: A bit of serendipity there!

GM: Well, it's like I said about a sequel to *Storm of Iron*. It just so happens that the way I'd planned to continue the Ultramarines books works well by using existing characters. By accident, more or less, they mesh. And when I started thinking about how they might interact with each other, it all seemed to fit into place.

MR: So they met in the middle very well, then?

GM: In theory it would be great to plan all this from day one. The direction that the Ultramarines are going, I had that planned out from *Warriors of Ultramar*. *Nightbringer* was very much Uriel and the Fourth Company go off and fight a battle, *Warriors of Ultramar* was very much Uriel going off to fight a battle so I didn't want the third one to be the same. The dialogue at the end of *Warriors of Ultramar* is very much geared to setting up what happens in *Dead Sky, Black Sun*.

MR: You're really putting your characters through the ringer with this book, aren't you?

GM: Oh yes, I've cut them loose from everything they've ever known for the last hundred years or so.

MR: Were you confident that you'd be able to portray your characters well, considering the difficult circumstances they find themselves in?

GM: I think so. One of the themes of the book, played out by Uriel, is what happens when you are cast out of your

Chapter. Do you still owe them anything? Are you still a Space Marine doing the Emperor's will or can you do what you want? The two sides to that argument are shown through the various characters in the book and their actions.

MR: One of the themes I noticed when reading *Warriors of Ultramar* was that Uriel, being an Ultramarine, takes the Codex Astartes very seriously – as he should – but is not as conservative in his beliefs as his superiors demand. It's as if he falls between the Ultramarines and the Mortifactors.

GM: That was very deliberate. The Mortifactors are descended from Ultramarines genestock, but it shows that you can start from the same point but end up in very different places. They are the dark mirror showing where the Ultramarines could end up. *Nightbringer's* story is of Uriel earning the respect of his men and assuming the mantle of command. Then he has to interpret between the letter of the Codex and the spirit of the Codex. The Ultramarines and the Mortifactors exemplify one or the other. By the end of *Warriors of Ultramar* he has arrived at a point in the middle of the two viewpoints. But that doesn't work with the Ultramarines; it's got to be the letter.

MR: So Uriel is actually quite rebellious.

GM: As far as Ultramarines go yes, he's the black sheep. His mentor and former captain was very much cut from the same cloth, teaching him innovation under fire, and Uriel follows that. But given the chain of command, the Ultramarines cannot afford for a captain to do that. It would all trickle down: the sergeants will start behaving that way then the men will start behaving badly. And that would spell the end of the Ultramarines and their belief system. They need to cut out the rot before it spreads any further, which is why he's sent off on his death oath to either learn his lesson or die trying.

MR: But the question remains that if Uriel had acted by the letter of the Codex, would they have prevailed?

GM: Well, quite.

MR: Perhaps the ultra-conservatism of the Ultramarines may bring about their downfall anyway.

GM: That's part of the conflict within him in the third book. He can accept the judgement laid on him by his Chapter, but in the back of his mind is that dark voice saying that he won: I didn't do it the way of the Codex, but I still won. This is partly the chink in his armour that the bad guys exploit, he has this element in his core which says, 'Yes, I broke the rules, yes I'm being punished for it, but damn it, it worked.'

MR: Do you see yourself in that? Are you a rebellious person?

GM: Not really, certainly not to the point that I'd want to get thrown out of the bosom of my family. The character in *The Ambassador* books is the one I most identify with, although I didn't realise that until I was halfway through the second book, *Ursun's Teeth*. It was only when someone I knew was reading through a draft and got to one of the internal monologue parts that he said, 'That's you, isn't it?' I realised he was right. I identify more with Kaspar than I do with Uriel because he's far braver than I could hope to be. In this respect I find it easier to write fantasy books than 40K ones. I can more readily ask the question: What would I do in this situation? How would I react? I doubt if I'll ever be in the situation where I'm facing up to a tyrannid with a sword in one hand and a gun in the other. It's harder to get into a Space Marine's mindset.

MR: I think one of the reasons why the books are so successful is because Space Marines are so well known and popular, but it's a real challenge for a writer to make them human and personable.

GM: Well at the end of the day, although they are massively altered and enhanced genetically, at their core they are still men. Maybe they don't suffer emotions in the same way as you or I would, but they still feel desire, hate, pride. They are taught to suppress them and keep them at bay, but they are still there. The idea that these are emotionless shells is nonsense. They are perfectly capable of having interesting dialogue and personalities. Bill King has proved that plenty of times in the Space Wolf books, Dan Abnett's done it with the Iron Snakes. They are not characterless and bland, not a chance! It was great having

the renegade Space Marines in there. Usually Space Marines are either loyalists or mad Chaos worshippers. It was nice to explore characters who are Space Marines but aren't any of those things. They've been thrown out of their Chapters but aren't building idols to the dark gods; they're looking after number one. How does a Space Marine react to seeing other Space Marines who aren't in the same ballpark in terms of belief? It sets up a lot of conflicts of ideals.

MR: To go back to *The Ambassador* for a moment, did you write yourself in as Kaspar subconsciously?

GM: Quite possibly. Some of the things that were going on in my life at the time were coming out in the character, how he behaved, how he reacted to things. Your mood can dictate how you write. About halfway through *Ursun's Teeth* things take a very dark turn and don't really let up at all, and this came out of the way things were in my life at that point. The ending of the book was supposed to be very different from the way it actually turned out.

MR: But they were dark times in the Empire.

GM: There does seem to be a lot of serendipity in my writing, with plotting and the way things have ended up. I think to end *The Ambassador* books in any other way would have been a bit of a cheat. Given where the character ended up I felt it was the most complete ending for the book. It was a surprise to some people, and it's always good to turn people's expectations of their head. I don't think the original ending would have worked.

MR: You're not afraid to take on weighty subjects in your books. There's alcoholism, and adult trauma as a result of being abused as a child. Is that something you set out to do?

GM: One of the themes of the book is to say that monsters aren't born, they're made. You don't wake up one morning to become evil. Evil is a convenient tag that we give people to spare us the awkward question of why they behaved in a particular way. It doesn't explain anything. The subjects are in the book because I thought





it was appropriate given the setting and the grim situation. It felt right. Everything I've written for the Black Library I've pretty much written for me. With dark subjects I think it's best to push it as far as I can, beyond what I think I can get away with. Then it can be cut back to a level that's appropriate. But if you don't push far enough you can end up with something that's a bit bland or insipid.

MR: Did you have to reign in from the initial proposal?

GM: Actually no! A couple of bits were taken from *The Ambassador*, a rude word and something else which is still there but you have to read between the lines.

Lindsey did have some reservations about the grisly bits, but I can live with that. I think she'll get a shock when I deliver the next few chapters of *Dead Sky, Black Sun*.

MR: I've read the synopsis for *Dead Sky, Black Sun* and it's insane! It seems each novel goes further and further down a mad road. Do you think you're turning into a raving maniac?

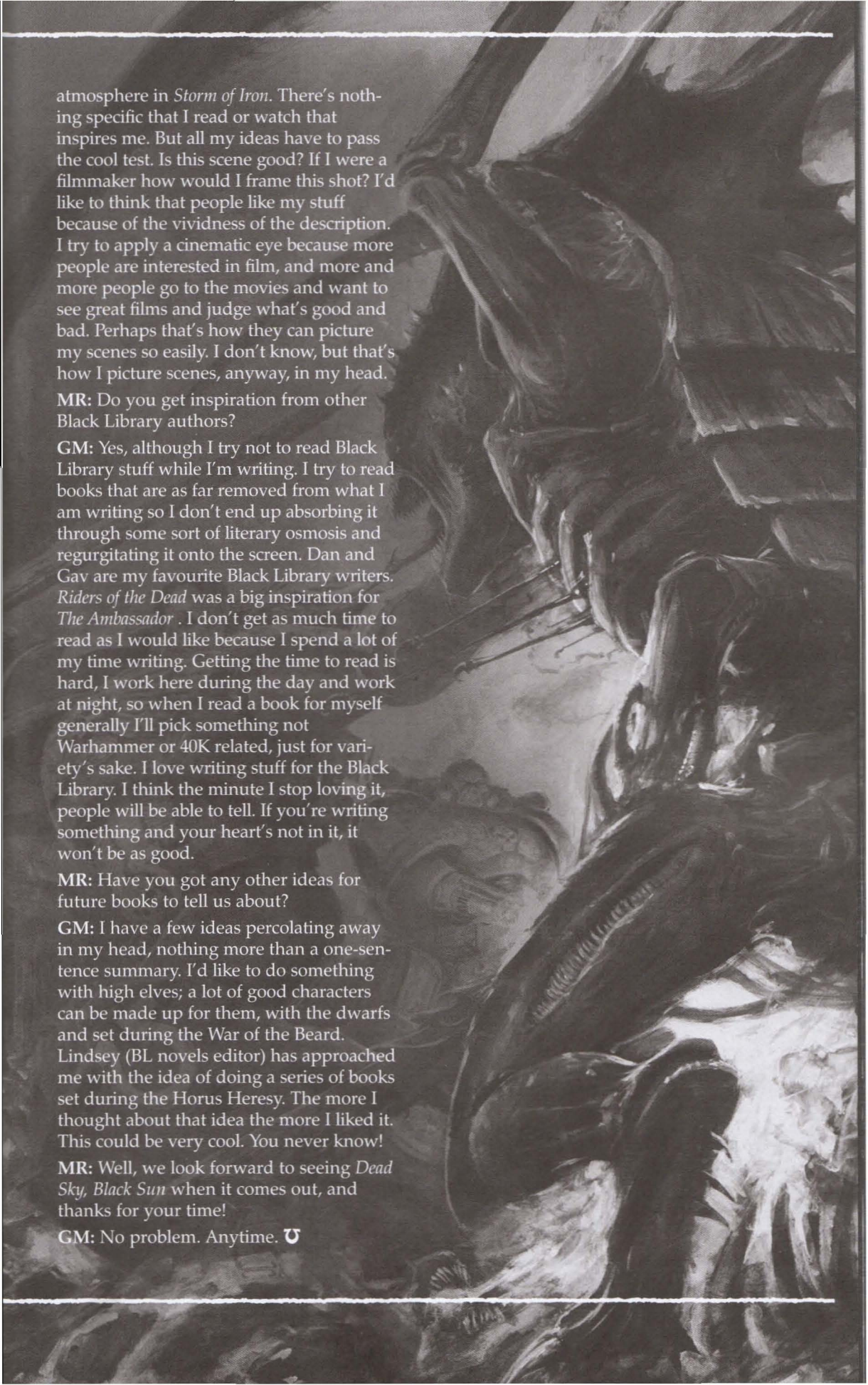
GM: No! Writing is cathartic. If I stop writing I'll become an insane raving maniac. Finding new ways to gross people out is always fun. The great thing about setting it on an Iron Warrior daemon world is not just bonkers weirdness for the sake of weirdness, it's the cold, unthinking logic and the harshness of the environment. It's the cruelty that's inflicted and the fact that no one really cares. It's not nutty, insane cruelty with someone capering around getting a kick out of it.

MR: The banality of cruelty.

GM: Yes, there's a detachment to it that makes it more horrifying. It's calculated and clinical, which to me is more chilling.

MR: So what inspires you to write such things?

GM: Before I wrote *Storm of Iron* I read a book called *Annals of a Fortress*, which is a fictional account of a castle's life throughout the ages. It follows it from when it was a wooden stockade to when it was a modern artillery outpost with palisades and so on. I already have a fair knowledge of architecture but this gave me a really good insight into the day-to-day life in a siege which as very useful in capturing the



atmosphere in *Storm of Iron*. There's nothing specific that I read or watch that inspires me. But all my ideas have to pass the cool test. Is this scene good? If I were a filmmaker how would I frame this shot? I'd like to think that people like my stuff because of the vividness of the description. I try to apply a cinematic eye because more people are interested in film, and more and more people go to the movies and want to see great films and judge what's good and bad. Perhaps that's how they can picture my scenes so easily. I don't know, but that's how I picture scenes, anyway, in my head.

MR: Do you get inspiration from other Black Library authors?

GM: Yes, although I try not to read Black Library stuff while I'm writing. I try to read books that are as far removed from what I am writing so I don't end up absorbing it through some sort of literary osmosis and regurgitating it onto the screen. Dan and Gav are my favourite Black Library writers. *Riders of the Dead* was a big inspiration for *The Ambassador*. I don't get as much time to read as I would like because I spend a lot of my time writing. Getting the time to read is hard, I work here during the day and work at night, so when I read a book for myself generally I'll pick something not Warhammer or 40K related, just for variety's sake. I love writing stuff for the Black Library. I think the minute I stop loving it, people will be able to tell. If you're writing something and your heart's not in it, it won't be as good.

MR: Have you got any other ideas for future books to tell us about?

GM: I have a few ideas percolating away in my head, nothing more than a one-sentence summary. I'd like to do something with high elves; a lot of good characters can be made up for them, with the dwarfs and set during the War of the Beard. Lindsey (BL novels editor) has approached me with the idea of doing a series of books set during the Horus Heresy. The more I thought about that idea the more I liked it. This could be very cool. You never know!

MR: Well, we look forward to seeing *Dead Sky*, *Black Sun* when it comes out, and thanks for your time!

GM: No problem. Anytime. ☺

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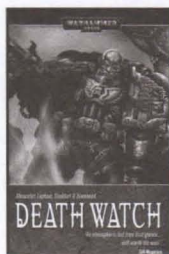
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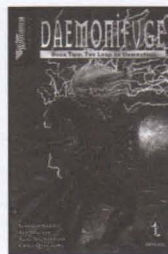
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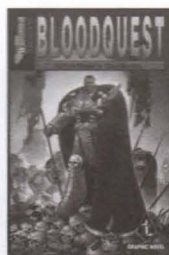
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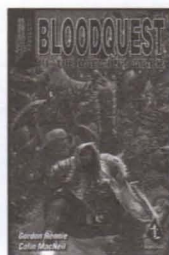
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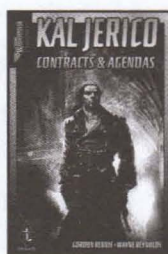
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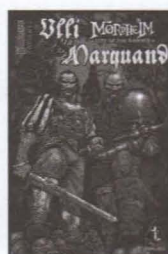
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THE WORLD OF EPSILON REGALIS, A CIVILISED WORLD, FAMED AMONGST THE WORLDS OF THE FORMOSA SECTOR FOR THE LOYALTY AND DEVOTION OF ITS SOLDIERS, NOW THROWN INTO REBELLION AND ANARCHY FOR UNKNOWN REASON.

THE ULTRAMARINES, A BYWORD FOR COURAGE AND HONOUR, DESCEND TO THE PLANET'S SURFACE ON A MISSION TO CAPTURE THE FIGUREHEAD OF THE REBELLION.

WHAT COULD TURN A ONCE LOYAL POPULACE FROM THE GOLDEN LIGHT OF THE EMPEROR?

WHAT INDEED?

FOOLS.
SO EASILY LED, SO
BANAL IN THEIR
DESIRES...

CRASH!

ABOARD THUNDERHAWK PRIMUS.

URIEL
ALL YOUR MEN
UNDERSTAND WHAT
TO DO?

AS THE
CODEX ASTARTES DICTATES,
I HAVE BRIEFED EACH MAN. WE
ALL KNOW OUR APPOINTED
TASKS.

VERY
WELL. ARE PASANIUS
AND LEARCHUS IN
PLACE?

'AYE...THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY
TO THE TARGET NOW. THEY WILL
BE READY FOR US.'

'TWENTY SECONDS TO DEBARKATION!'

INQUISITOR MARKHOV, WE ARE
ALMOST AT THE TARGET BUILDING.
DO YOU NOT THINK IT TIME YOU
TELL US THE NATURE OF THE
HERETIC WE ARE TO CAPTURE
FOR YOU?

THERE ARE
MANY KINDS OF HERETIC,
INQUISITOR, SOME REQUIRING A
DIFFERENT APPROACH THAN
OTHERS.

IT
IS A HERETIC. IS THAT
NOT ENOUGH FOR THE
ULTRAMARINES?

DO NOT
CONCERN YOURSELF
WITH THAT, SERGEANT VENTRIS,
I HAVE THE TOOLS TO DEAL WITH
THIS PARTICULAR
HERETIC.

HERETICUS PSYKANATE

'HAVE NO FEAR OF THAT.'



FIVE SECONDS TO DEBARKATION!



COURAGE AND HONOUR!



THE DEFENDERS OF THE HERETIC RUSH TO HIS DEFENCE...



BUT AGAINST SPACE MARINES THERE IS BUT ONE OUTCOME.



ONWARDS BROTHERS, THERE ARE ENEMIES OF THE EMPEROR TO SLAY!

THE ULTRAMARINES PENETRATE DEEPER INTO THE BASILICA.



BATTLE IS WELL AND TRULY JOINED.

URIEL, BEHIND YOU!




FACE THE EMPEROR'S WRATH, TRAITOR!




BUT A GREATER THREAT AWAITS THE EMPEROR'S WARRIORS.

YOU HAVE COME HERE ONLY TO DIE! FEEL THE POWER OF THE WARP AND DESPAIR!



THE FULL MIGHT OF AN UNLEASHED ROGUE PSYKER IS TRULY A POWER TO BE FEARED.

THE ROGUE PSYKER!
ARAKONI, READY THE DEVICE!




GULLIMAN'S OATH! MY BOLTS HIT HIM, BUT DID NOTHING!


THE FIEND IS PROTECTED BY THE POWERS OF THE WARP!



BUT THE POWER OF THE WARP COMES AT A PRICE.



FOUL SORCERY SHALL NOT LAY LOW TRUE SERVANTS OF THE EMPEROR!



THE POWER OF THE EMPEROR COMPELS THEE AND THE RADIANT LIGHT OF FAITH ABJURES THEE!



CAST
THYSELF BEFORE THE
EMPERORS MERCY THAT HE MIGHT
ABSOLVE YOU OF YOUR SINS, EVEN
AS HE DRAINS YOU OF YOUR
VERY SOUL!

THE ULTRAMARINES COLUMN OF RHINOS
ARRIVES TO CARRY THE TEAM TO SAFETY.

CAPTAIN IDAEUS, WE
ARE IN POSITION AND
AWAITING YOUR SQUADS.

UNDERSTOOD, PASANIUS,
ON OUR WAY.



THUNDERHAWK PRIMUS, WE
ARE MAKING OUR WAY OUT OF
THE CITY, PREPARE FOR
IMMEDIATE PICK-UP ONCE
WERE CLEAR.



THE PRISONER SECURED IN A
RHINO, THE ULTRAMARINES
MAKE THEIR ESCAPE FROM
THE WORSENING WARZONE.



THE PREDATOR SLEWS ITS
GUNS AROUND TO COVER
THE ESCAPE.

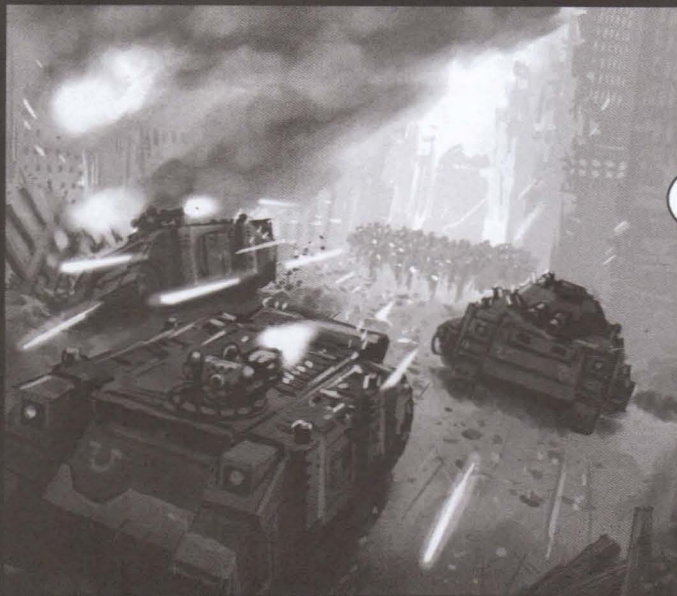


WHY
DO YOU
SMILE?

YOU HAVE
NOTHING TO SMILE
ABOUT, HERETIC, SOON
YOU WILL BE SUFFERING
THE TOMENTS OF THE
DAMNED

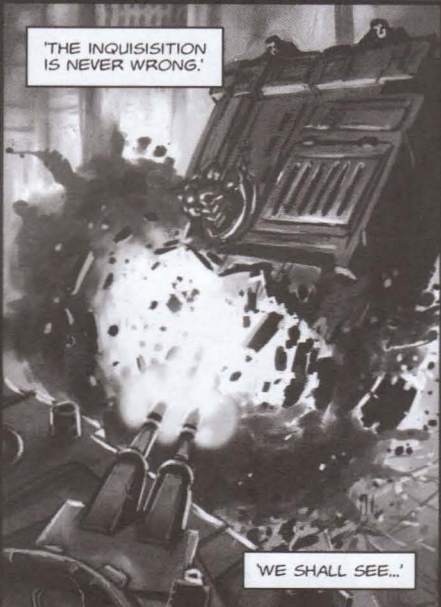
NO, I
WONT, BUT
YOU WILL
BE...

BROTHER JANTINE, MANNING
THE PREDATOR'S LASCANON...



ENJOY THESE LAST MOMENTS WITHOUT PAIN, FOR I PROMISE YOU THEY SHALL BE YOUR LAST.

YOU THINK YOU HAVE WON, THAT YOU HAVE DEFEATED ME? YOU ARE WRONG.



'THE INQUISITION IS NEVER WRONG.'

CONFUSION REIGNS AS THE SPACE MARINES ATTEMPT TO REGAIN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION.

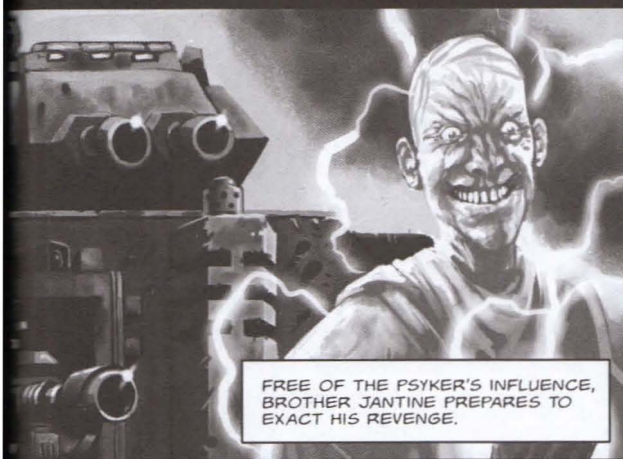
WE SHALL SEE...!



URIEL! HE'S LOOSE, THE DAMNED PSYKER IS LOOSE!

SPREAD OUT, WE CANNOT LET HIM ESCAPE!

I SAID THAT YOU WOULD BE SUFFERING THE TORMENTS OF THE DAMNED, DID I NOT?

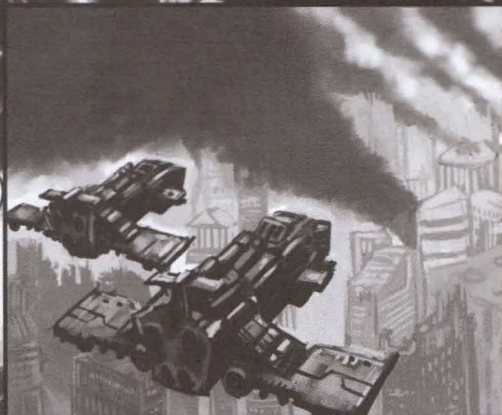


FREE OF THE PSYKER'S INFLUENCE, BROTHER JANTINE PREPARES TO EXACT HIS REVENGE.



WE CAN'T TOUCH HIM. WE DON'T HAVE POWERFUL ENOUGH WEAPONS TO DEFEAT HIS WARP MAGICK.

AND WE CANNOT HOLD OFF HIS FOLLOWERS FOR LONG. WE'RE GOING TO NEED SOME BIGGER GUNS...



ORBITING THUNDERHAWKS, THIS IS IDAEUS - COMMENCE ATTACK RUN NOW!

CAPTAIN! WE'RE TOO CLOSE TO THE ENEMY! THE CODEX-



WE DON'T HAVE A CHOICE, URIEL, THIS IS THE ONLY WAY!



WITH THE PSYKER DEAD, THE CITY'S POPULACE ARE FREE OF HIS MALIGN INFLUENCE.



MARKHOV SHOULD HAVE TOLD US WHAT WE WERE TO FACE, THAT WAS A CLOSE ONE, URIEL.

TOO CLOSE, CAPTAIN. ORDERING THAT THUNDERHAWK STRIKE...

I KNOW, BUT WHAT CHOICE DID WE HAVE?

BUT I KNOW OF NO PRECEDENT IN THE CODEX THAT ALLOWS SUCH AN ORDER. HOW IS IT THAT YOU THOUGHT TO GIVE IT?

SOMETIMES A COMMANDER MUST THINK BEYOND WHAT HE KNOWS AND TRY SOMETHING NEW.

I AM NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND THAT, CAPTAIN.

YOU WILL, URIEL. IF YOU ARE EVER TO COMMAND MEN IN BATTLE, THEN I'M SURE THAT ONE DAY YOU WILL.

THE END

A HISTORY OF THE FOURTH COMPANY OF THE ULTRAMARINES



The Ultramarines are a byword for courage and honour, and their warriors are justly held in the highest regard throughout the Imperium. Unlike many other Chapters, who control a single planet or fortress-monastery, the Ultramarines control no fewer than eight systems from their homeworld of Macragge, the stellar realm known as Ultramar. It is from these worlds that the Ultramarines recruit their newest members, administer Imperial Justice and rule Ultramar with a just and disciplined hand. The Ultramarines fortress monastery – known as the Fortress of Hera – is situated in the highest peaks of Macragge, and it is here that the best and bravest of the children selected from the many academies throughout Ultramar are brought to begin their training as Space Marines. Here, they will become the most feared fighting warriors of the Imperium – the Angels of Death, the Adeptus Astartes.

Roboute Guilliman, the Primarch of the Ultramarines, set down the foundations of the Imperium's fighting forces ten thousand years ago in a mighty tome known and revered as the Codex Astartes. This holy work embodied all the Primarch's military genius and set out precise guidelines for virtually every single aspect of war imaginable, everything from the correct conduct while marching to the precise execution of a planetary assault. But perhaps its most significant edict was the breaking up of the Space Marine Legions into the smaller Chapters that exist today. No longer would one man control a force as powerful as a Space Marine Legion. Each Chapter was broken up into a force of ten companies, roughly a thousand warriors strong. The Ultramarines have followed his teachings since those days and are strict adherents to the words of their Primarch's tome. The organisation and combat doctrines of the Ultramarines

of today are the same as those followed by the Ultramarines of ten thousand years ago. These tenets of belief have passed to the citizens of Ultramar and this stellar realm is as close to the ideal of a human Utopia as is imaginable in a galaxy of war.

Defenders of Ultramar

The Fourth Company of the Ultramarines has a long and glorious history, stretching back to the dark days of the Horus Heresy when brother Space Marines fell into the bloodiest civil war ever to tear at the Emperor's realm. They have fought and triumphed against traitors, fallen Space Marines and vile xeno creatures, bringing honour and glory to their Chapter. In most recent times, the Company has faced some of its greatest challenges and met some of the most powerful enemies. All of which its warriors have fought with courage and honour.

The Fourth Company are known as the 'Defenders of Ultramar' – an accolade won in the Chapter's earliest history, when Chaos Space Marines from the Word Bearers attacked the Ultramarines towards the end of the Horus Heresy and drove them back to the very heart of Ultramar. It was upon the world of Calth that the final battle took place. Famed for its orbital shipyards, Calth was a typical world of Ultramar. Its inhabitants were wealthy and generous, knowing little in the ways of want or fear. In many ways, theirs was a paradise, and as such it was not to last.

When the Word Bearers launched their attack against the Ultramarines, the strike against Calth was led by one of the Word Bearers' greatest champions, the former Master of the Faith, Kor Phaeron. This mighty champion swore to utterly destroy the planet, and

was very nearly successful. From his personal battle barge, he directed a full-scale invasion of the Calth system. Calth's three sister planets were all destroyed, massive geo-nuclear strikes ripping them apart at the core. Calth's once gentle sun was laced with deadly metals and substances that increased the star's radiation output tenfold. (Within a century after the battle's end, the final elements of Calth's atmosphere were burned off by its sun and the world left airless, its populace now dwelling in gigantic underground caverns.) Upon its surface, the Fourth Company fought the Word Bearers to a standstill. The traitors held superiority in numbers, weaponry, and brutality, but the Ultramarines would never give in. As driven as the warriors of Lord Kor Phaeron were, they could not dislodge the Ultramarines, many of whom had once called the planet home.

The war upon Calth was devastating and horrific. Ancient codes of warfare and martial conduct were broken and set aside by the Word Bearers as all manner of death and destruction was unleashed. The Ultramarines were stunned by the millions of cultists the Word Bearers used as human shields and cannon fodder. The Word Bearers, in turn, had underestimated the tenacity and resolve of their hated foe. In the end, Lord Kor Phaeron was defeated when reinforcements from Macragge drove the Word Bearers from the surface of Calth. Kor Phaeron retreated all the way to the Maelstrom, a turbulent region of the galaxy where the Immaterium of Chaos seeps through into the material realm of the universe. The Ultramarines were victorious, and the leader of the Fourth company, Brother Captain Ventanus, would one day set foot upon the shattered homeworld of the Word Bearers, symbolically capturing the abandoned homeworld of the Legion that had once threatened to enslave Ultramar.

Guardians of the Eastern Fringe

The Ultramarines have always held the eastern fringes against the forces of darkness that threaten the Imperium from beyond the halo stars, and the Fourth Company have a special hatred for the alien invaders known as the tyranids. Rapacious, extra-galactic predators, these relentless alien killers consume all before them in their quest for bio-matter to feed the ever-hungry bio-factories of their hive queens. The first tyranid hive fleet, codified as Behemoth, smashed into Imperial space in 745.M41 and descended upon Macragge in a flurry of talon and claw. Forewarned by Inquisitor Kryptman, the Chapter Master of the Ultramarines, Marneus Calgar, stood ready to face the deadly aliens, but nothing could prepare his warriors for the

and many great heroes met their end. The Ultramarines had won the first Tyrannic War, but Kryptman assured Calgar that the tyranids would be back.

With the destruction of Behemoth, the Ultramarines set about consolidating their hold on Ultramar. Many of their best and bravest warriors had fallen to the tyranids, and with their strength thus depleted, many other alien and piratical raiders took advantage of this lapse in security and launched their own raids throughout Ultramar to sack worlds previously unassailable. Thus it was that the Fourth Company - which had been at full strength when the tyranid fleet attacked - had come through the war with the fewest casualties, and were thus the first called upon to help liberate Vorhn's world, a Shrine world in a neighbouring sub-sector.



sheer horror of what was to come. Commanded at this time by Captain Idaeus, the Fourth Company fought at the forefront of the defence and were instrumental in the destruction of several of the larger tyranid vessels. At last the invasion of Behemoth was repulsed, but at terrible cost; the entirety of the First Company was wiped out defending the northern polar defences

The ork warlord known as the Arch Maniac of Cabela had seized the world, enslaving its population and defiling the holy temples of the Emperor. Such barbarity could not be countenanced on such a holy world and thus the Fourth Company was tasked with its liberation. Idaeus once more led his warriors into battle, using a combination of rigid adherence to the words of the Codex Astartes and an uncanny ability to adapt to rapidly changing battlefield



Brother Captain Uriel Ventris

Born on the cavern world of Calth in the year 876.M41, Uriel is an ancestor of the Ultramarine hero, Lucian Ventris (who died in the first Tyrannic War) and as such he was inducted into the prestigious Agiselus Barracks where Roboute Guilliman and Marneus Calgar trained. Uriel proved to be an excellent student and performed extremely well at Agiselus, graduating with honours at the top of his class and thus ensuring his selection by the Ultramarines for training at the Fortress of Hera that very day. He completed his training at the Fortress of Hera in 898.M41 whereupon he was inducted into the Scout Company, again performing exceptionally well before being elevated into the Fourth Company under the command of Captain Idaeus in 909.M41. He served under Idaeus for a further ninety years before his captain's death, when he assumed command of the company. Though he has served with courage and honour thus far, there are some who suggest that he may be rather too much Idaeus's prodigy in his attitudes to the Codex Astartes...

conditions to circumvent many of the ork strongpoints and destroy many vital elements of their defences. With much of their energies spent hunting down the raiders in their midst, the orks were unable to repulse the massed tank companies and regiments of the Jovian Hussars who overran the greenskins with a staggeringly low casualty rate. It was during the cleansing of Vorhn's World that a young Space Marine named Uriel Ventris came to

Idaeus's attention. Claiming Lucian Ventris as an ancestor, who had died fighting the tyranids of hive fleet Behemoth beneath the polar defence fortress one hundred and eighty years ago, Uriel displayed exemplary courage, even amongst warriors for whom heroic feats of bravery were the norm. Taking command of his squad when his sergeant was killed by an ork warlord, Uriel displayed the qualities that would one day lead him to command the Fourth Company itself.

Rebuilding

With the liberation of Vorhn's world, the task was now to secure the borders of Ultramar, and upon their return from the victorious campaign against the orks, Idaeus's company joined their Battle Brothers in securing the borders of Ultramar against further attack. For the next five years, the company patrolled the northern borders of their realm, running interdiction attacks and boarding actions against any and all raiders they encountered. Aboard the *Vae Victus*, an honourable ship commanded by Captain Lazlo Tiberius, himself a scarred veteran of the Tyrannic Wars, the Fourth company destroyed over three hundred vessels and achieved the highest number of kills to add to the banner in their company chapel.

Over the next few years, between occasional returns to Macragge for obeisances at the Temple of Correction, where the stasis-sealed corpse of Roboute Guilliman watches over his Chapter, the Fourth Company regained its strength and inducted many new members. Returned to full combat readiness, the company was once again fit for duties beyond the borders of Ultramar: in the Mereneas Core. The company was to earn the gratitude of



Lord Admiral Lazlo Tiberius

Tiberius fought as captain of the *Vae Victus* in the First Tyrannic War, helping to defeat hive fleet Behemoth, though he was terribly scarred during the final stages of the war when a tyranid bio-weapon penetrated his ship's defence screen. Schooled in the ways of war by the former Master of the Fleet, his skills in ship-to-ship combat are second to none and it was not long before he rose to the rank of Lord Admiral. Normally seconded to the Fourth Company, the *Vae Victus* has carried Uriel and his warriors into battle many times. Although Captain Ventris's title is Master of the Fleet, this is a task he has passed to Tiberius as being the more suitable man for the role.

the Adeptus Mechanicus when they boarded and destroyed the space hulk, *Flame of Iniquity*, an agglomerated structure of scores of derelict space-ships that threatened a number of their Forge Worlds - giant, factory planets where much of the armed might of the Imperium is produced.

Following this success, the determination and courage of the Fourth Company came to the attention of Inquisitor Markhov, who was in need of warriors of such great skill. He petitioned Marneus Calgar for the Ultramarines assistance in a matter of grave urgency. Calgar consented to allow the Fourth Company to be

seconded to the inquisitor's service and Idaeus's company was despatched to the world of Epsilon Regalis - a world later to be made infamous by Witch Hunter Tyrus. Precisely what occurred on this world has never been made known, the events subsequent to the Ultramarines deployment on Epsilon Regalis having been sealed by the Ordo Hereticus. Immediately following this mysterious mission, the Fourth Company were involved in the eradication of several indigenous life-forms on the world of Horranveth to allow colonisation by an Adeptus Mechanicus Explorer team. Many among the Ultramarines felt that this was beneath them, but none dared defy their Chapter Master's decree.

Following the purgation of Horranveth, the company was recalled to take part in the Balur Crusade, a mixed-Chapter force led by Marneus Calgar himself. A strong coalition of xeno creatures (identified as tau, kroot and tarellian) had launched an attack



into Imperial held space and demanded that the inhabitants of the captured worlds swear allegiance to their blasphemous empire. Naturally, such naked aggression could not go unanswered and together with warriors from the Blood Angels, Marines Malevolent and the taciturn remnants of the Scythes of the Emperor, Calgar led the combined army to swift victory, destroying the nascent colonies and re-establishing Imperial rule.

Return of the Tyranids

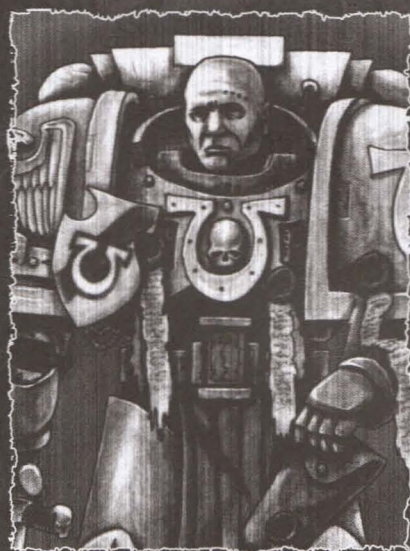
The Fourth Company were to fight the tyranids again on the world of Ichar IV when these xenos returned with yet another hive fleet, this time known as Kraken. Far from the battering ram of Behemoth, it appeared that the tyranids had somehow learned from their defeat centuries before and attacked in a series of smaller, yet no less lethal, splinter fleets – attacking across a much wider front. Many of these fleets were destroyed, driving the aliens to consolidate their attack on the industrial world of Ichar IV. Again, the tyranid threat was met with courage and steel, the men of the Ultramarines fighting alongside hundreds of Imperial Guard regiments and seven other Space Marine Chapters. The Fourth Company were again in the forefront of the fighting, with *Idaeus* and *Uriel* both awarded the Imperial Laurel for their heroism. Once more the aliens were repulsed, though the threat of Kraken remains strong. The tyranid fleet broke into a number of smaller fleets as it retreated from Ichar IV and it is known that many of these splinter fleets have penetrated deep into the galactic core. Some have even reached as far as Segmentum Solar, though the massed guns of the Imperial fleet have destroyed these without mercy. However, whether every one of these splinter fleets has been destroyed remains unclear.

Following the defeat of the tyranids at Ichar IV, the Fourth Company was despatched to the world of Thracia, where the rumoured involvement of the Night Lords Chaos Space Marines necessitated a force capable of meeting them blade-to-blade. Regiments of Imperial Guard pushed towards the planetary capital, meeting stiff resistance, but crushing all before it. As the campaign progressed, the Imperial lines became lengthy and strung out – all too easy to attack and destroy from

the flank. Realising this, the Fourth Company attacked the bridges that would allow such an attack, but in the process *Captain Idaeus* was lost, heroically sacrificing his own life to destroy the last bridge. Mourning its loss, the Fourth Company returned to Macragge to inter their fallen captain within the sacred soil of their homeworld, whereupon Veteran Sergeant *Uriel Ventriss* was elevated to the rank of captain.

New Beginnings

Together with the newly appointed *Captain Ventriss*, the Fourth company set off on their latest mission, to escort Adept *Barzano* of the Administratum to the



Brother Captain Idaeus

Idaeus commanded the Fourth Company from 627.M41 to 999.M41, earning a reputation as something of a maverick amongst the Ultramarines. His attitude was tolerated simply because he achieved victory with one of the lowest casualty figures in the entire Chapter. His penchant for thinking beyond the strictures of the Codex Astartes earned him some powerful detractors within the Chapter and some say it was this that led to his company being posted to some of the most dangerous warzones throughout the galaxy.



Veteran Sergeant Pasanius

Uriel's closest and most trusted friend. Pasanius is older than Uriel and is perhaps a little more worldly-wise than his captain. He is loved and respected by the men and his unflinching support for Uriel in the early days of his command helped cement his leadership. Pasanius is brusque and not afraid to speak his mind or voice doubts about a command decision, though once that decision has been made he will support it utterly. He is the embodiment of the spirit of the Codex Astartes. He lost his arm below the elbow to the Nightbringer on Pavonis and now sports one fashioned by the tech-adepts of that world.

troubled world of Pavonis. On the eastern fringes, Pavonis had been plagued by piratical raiders and civil insurrection and, upon the Ultramarines' arrival, the planet was very nearly plunged into a bloody civil war between its competing industrial cartels. Captain Ventriss and Adept Barzano (now revealed as an inquisitor of the Ordo Xenos) went on to discover that the planet's troubles were at the instigation of a madman named Kasimir de Valtos who desired the release of an ancient and powerful star god imprisoned beneath the surface of Pavonis for millions of years. De Valtos was thwarted, though the ancient being known as the Nightbringer was freed

from its aeons-long slumber and set loose amongst the stars. Only time will tell whether its escape will cost the Ultramarines and the galaxy dear.

With peace and Imperial rule restored to Pavonis, the Fourth Company journeyed to the northern reaches of Segmentum Tempestus to the world of Tarsis Ultra - a world liberated by Roboute Guilliman during the early days of the Great Crusade and with a proud history of upholding the traditions of the Ultramarines. Ancient oaths of brotherhood bound the fate of Tarsis Ultra to the Ultramarines and, when a gargantuan space hulk drifted in-system, Captain Ventriss led his men deep into its haunted depths to destroy it from within. Buried deep within its structure, the Ultramarines discovered nests of frenzied orks. And something much worse: genestealers. The fighting within the hulk was amongst the fiercest encountered by the Fourth Company, but its warriors were able to fight their way clear of the hulk and watch its destruction from the bridge of the *Vae Victus*. But the victory was tinged with dread, for the ship's



astropaths detected the forward edge of a bow wave of warp interference – a phenomenon known as the Shadow in the Warp – which could mean only one thing. The tyranids were approaching.

The Defence of Tarsis Ultra

With warning of the approaching Tyranid fleet given, Imperial response was unusually swift. The Ultramarines contacted the Mortifactors, a brother Chapter of Space Marines, though they had diverged considerably from the ideals of Roboute Guilliman – embracing a culture of death worship. A fleet led by Admiral Bregant de Corte aboard the *Argus* was assembled, including many ancient and noble ships of war: *Sword of Retribution*, *Kharloss Vincennes*, to name but two. Soldiers from the Death Korps of Krieg and the Logres Regiments were shipped in and the local defence forces trained by Sergeant Learchus using the methods of the Ultramarine training barracks. Inquisitor Lord Kryptman once again lent his expertise to the commanders of Tarsis Ultra as well as bringing an elite

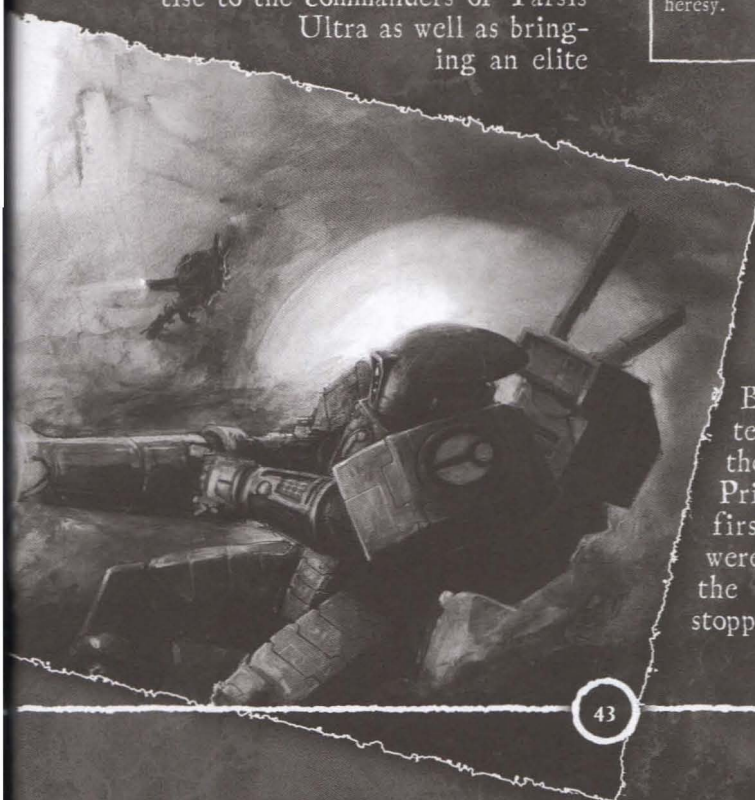


Veteran Sergeant Learchus

Once Uriel's nemesis when they trained together at Agiselus Barracks, Learchus grudgingly accepted Uriel as his company commander. They fought together on Pavonis and he has respect for his captain, though they are never going to be friends like Uriel and Pasanus. He is a typical Ultramarine, honourable and noble, though he tends to look down on those cultures not as enlightened as that of the Ultramarines. Learchus represents the letter of the law as laid down by the Primarch in the *Codex Astartes* and this is what has driven him to accuse his captain of heresy.

Deathwatch kill team led by the justly famous Captain Bannon. As far as any world could be defended, Tarsis Ultra was as secure as it could be given the time available to its defenders.

Battle was joined in the system's outer reaches and though the world of Barbarus Prime fell to the tyranids, the first elements of their fleet were defeated. The advance of the hive fleet could not be stopped and Kryptman was forced



to sacrifice the world of Chordelis – ordering the Mortifactors to virus bomb it from orbit before the tyranids could assimilate its biomass. Despite fractures appearing in the Imperial alliance, the Tyranid threat was met with courage and honour on the surface of Tarsis Ultra, though the defenders were hard pressed to stave off the relentless attacks of the aliens.

awaited its captain and with them, the potential to strip the company of its honour...

Though many thousands of lives were lost, and a huge proportion of the Fourth Company slain, the tyranids were once more defeated when Captain Ventris cast off the teachings of the Codex Astartes and took command of the Deathwatch kill team. He led them on a last, desperate mission to deliver a lethal gene-poison to the heart of the last remaining hive ship. Having once served with the Deathwatch, Captain Ventris knew that this was where he could do the most good and, despite the grim warning from Veteran Sergeant Learchus that Marneus Calgar would hear of his flouting of the Codex, set off on his mission. Through alien terrors and biological horror, the Deathwatch and Captain Ventris were successful and the gene poison was administered to the tyranid hive queen. Driven into spasms of uncontrolled mutation, the hive queen died and her death throes drove the slave organisms connected to it via the gestalt consciousness of the hive mind into paroxysms of self-destruction. The tyranids were defeated, but like Ichar IV before it, the taint of the alien invasion would forever be impossible to remove.

With Tarsis Ultra secured, the Fourth Company gathered its dead and returned to Macragge, the hearts of its warriors heavy as they contemplated the cost of honouring their ancient debt. But something worse was awaiting the Fourth Company upon their return to their homeworld. Allegations of heresy

AND THEY SHALL KNOW NO FEAR!

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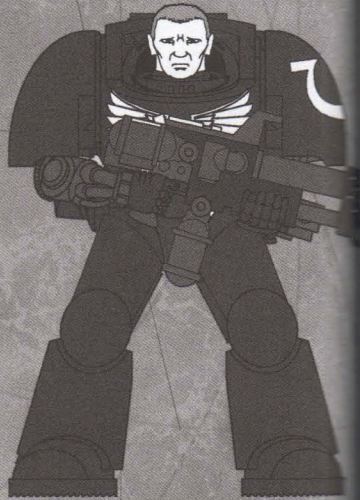


THE FOURTH COMPANY

COMMAND SQUAD OF URIEL VENTRIS



*Captain
Uriel Ventriss*



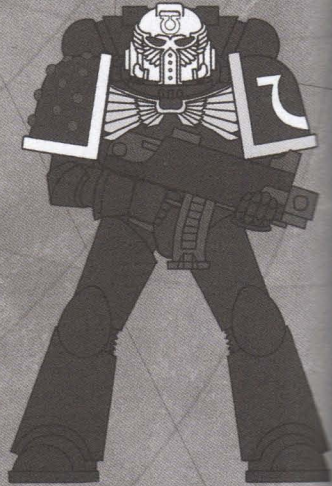
*Veteran Sergeant
Pannicus Lysane*



The Company Banner of the 4th Company (known as the 'Depository of Ultramar' depicts its many honours won in battle, including the Steel Gauntlet and Constellation. It now also bears the White Rose of Passaris.



*Battle Brother Pelcus,
Company Standard Bearer*



*Battle Brother Pelcus,
Company Standard Bearer*

The Sergeant may display his back banner. The banner displays the Chapter icon, the Sergeant's red skull mark badge and is trimmed in the company colour. The Standard Bearer's mark badge is the Imperial Laurel however, usually combined with a skull.



Veteran



Standard Bearer



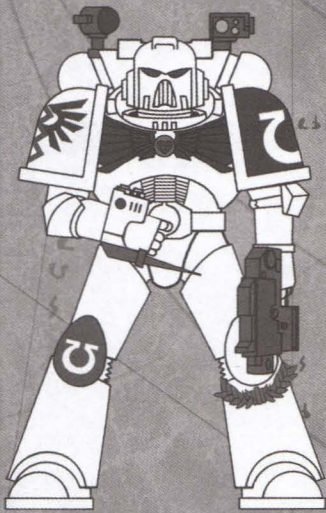
All Ranks



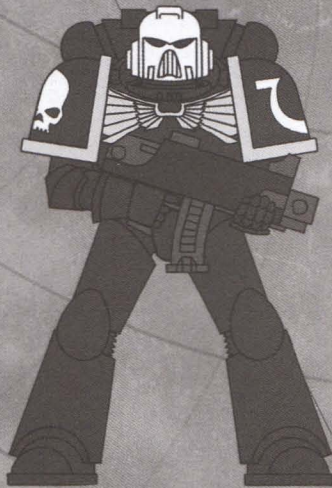
Sergeant Ventriss

Awarded by the cartels of Passaris (a world in the Eastern Fringe) to those individuals who have performed a great service for the Imperial Governor, this represents the flowering of hope in dark times and is a symbol of new beginnings. This was awarded to Uriel and the warriors of the 4th Company following the suppression of Kasmir de Valois' alien-bushed rebellion in 999.M41.





*Apothecary
Gaius Selenus*



Battle Brother Alketas



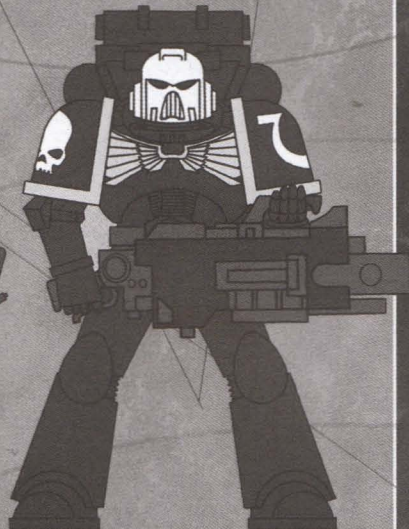
Battle Brother Mikas



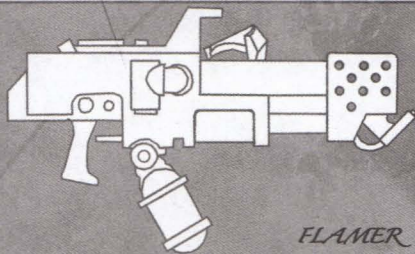
Battle Brother Ithens



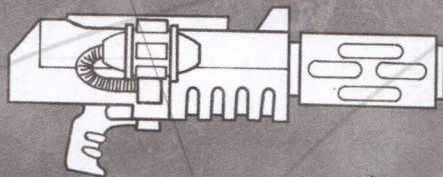
Battle Brother Ithens



Battle Brother Cheiron



FLAMER



MELTA GUN

INCOMING TRANSMISSION ...

WHILE A SPACE MARINE CHAPTER ONLY RARELY EMPLOYS THE MIGHT OF ITS BATTLE BARGES, ADEPTUS ASTARTES STRIKE CRUISERS ARE MORE COMMON, ALTHOUGH STILL RARE, SIGHT. OFTEN THE ARRIVAL OF A SPACE MARINE STRIKE CRUISER IS ENOUGH TO QUELL A REBELLIOUS SYSTEM. THE SPACE MARINES ARE QUICK TO ACT IF THEIR ENEMIES' SURRENDER IS NOT IMMEDIATELY FORTHCOMING.

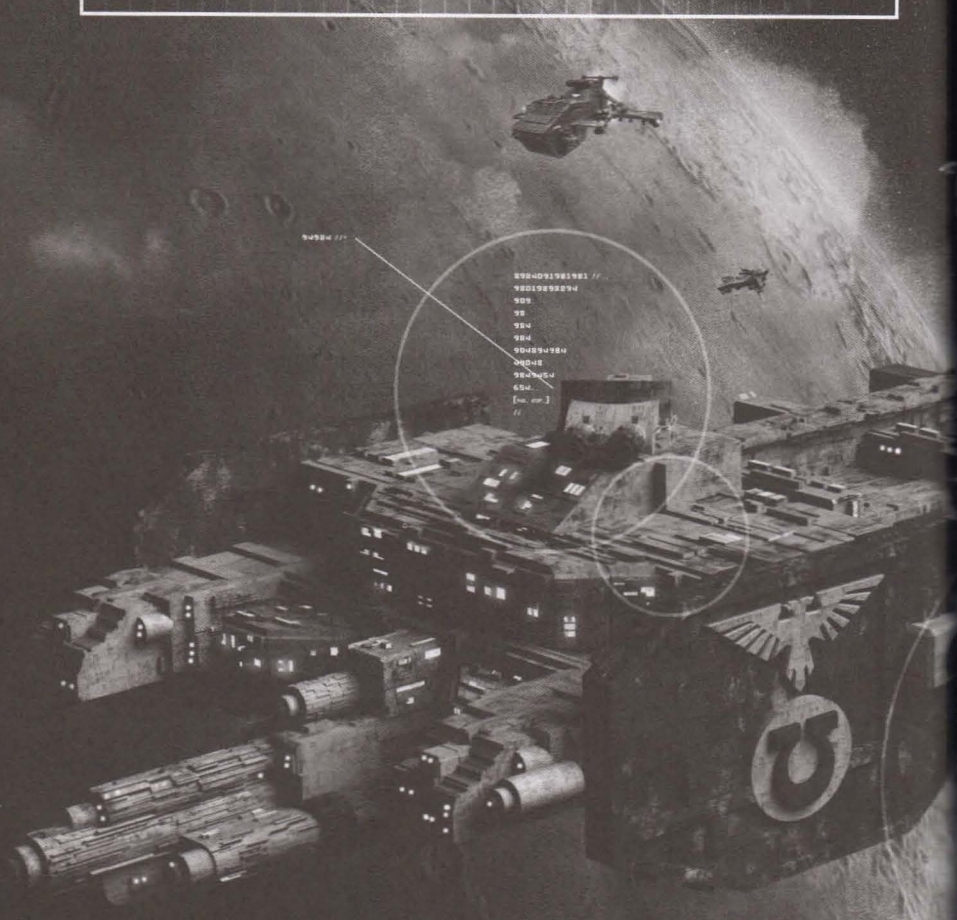
STRIKE CRUISERS ARE FAST, LIGHTLY-ARMED VESSELS WHICH MASS SLIGHTLY LESS THAN THE IMPERIAL NAVY'S DAUNTLESS CLASS LIGHT CRUISERS. THEIR PRIMARY FUNCTION SEEMS TO BE THAT OF RAPID RESPONSE. REPORTS INDICATING THAT THEY ARE INVARIABLY THE FIRST CRAFT TO ARRIVE AT A THREATENED PLANET.

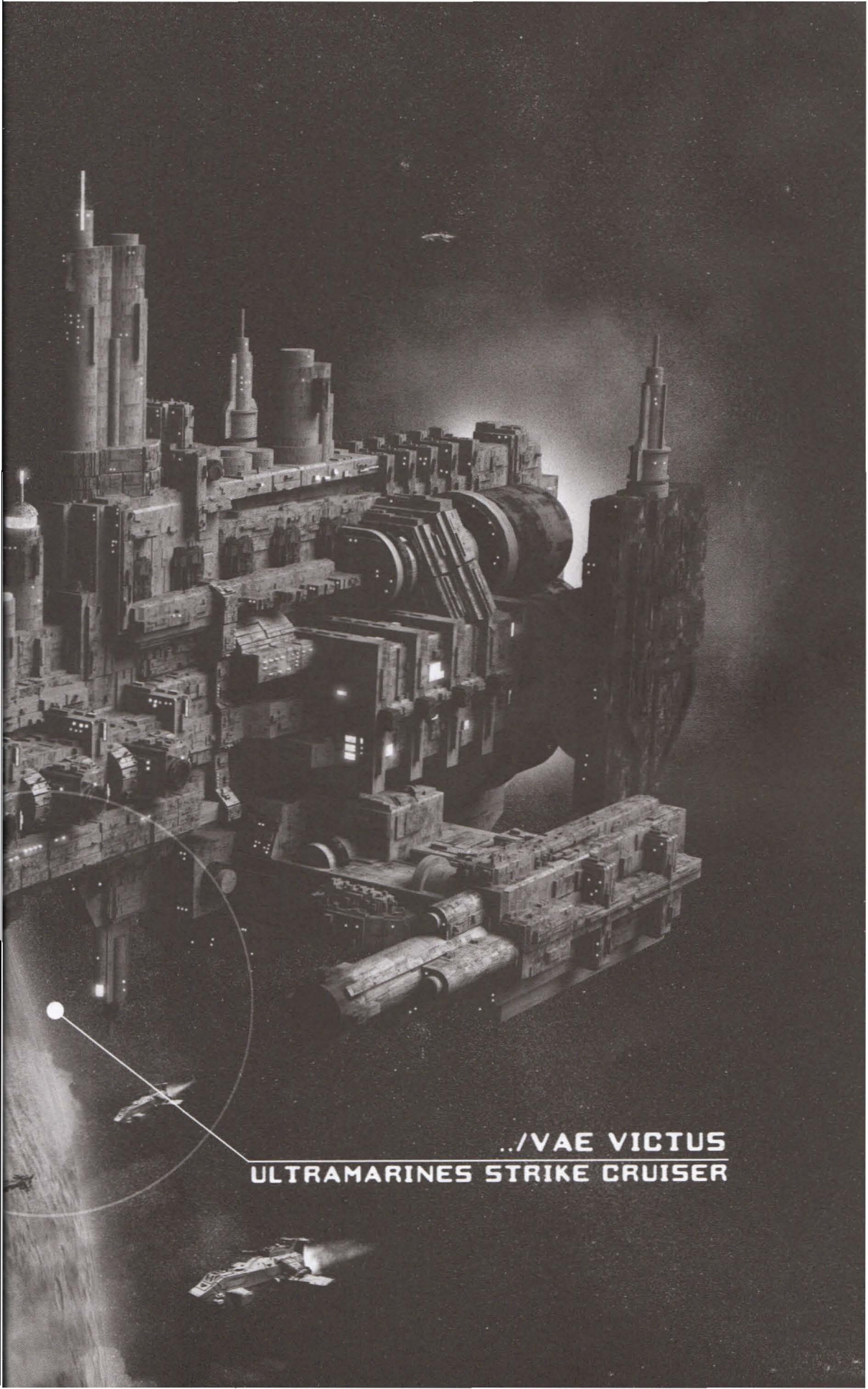
STRIKE CRUISERS APPEAR TO CARRY APPROXIMATELY ONE FULL COMPANY OF SPACE MARINES (INCLUDING SUPPORT VEHICLES) AND HAVE BEEN OBSERVED TO DEPLOY THEM WITHIN TWENTY MINUTES OF ARRIVAL IN ORBIT.

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../VAE VICTUS
ULTRAMARINES STRIKE CRUISER

THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY



THE MAN WAS too weak to scream as Obax Zakayo picked him up by the ankle and tossed him into the wide fanged jaws of the furnace. None of the other slaves looked up at this fresh atrocity. None dared to. The wrath of Obax Zakayo was a capricious thing; unpredictable and random and no-one in this sweltering hell could be counted safe from his spite.

The murderous giant took a lumbering step through the orange-lit nightmare of the forge temple, bellowed commands laced with grating static booming from the vox-amp built into his burnished iron shoulder guard. Yellow and black chevrons edged the plates of his power armour and hissing pipes wheezed from every joint, leaking stinking black fluids and venting puffs of steam with every step. He carried a screaming axe, its edge toothed and brutal, and a crackling energy whip writhed on the end of a mechanised claw attached to his back.

Billowing clouds of steam and exhaust gasses filled the forge, shot through with streaks of bright flames. Fat orange sparks flew from vast grinding machines and rivers of lava-hot metal streamed from colossal cauldrons – each larger than a titan's head – into grooved weapon moulds. Monstrous, debased creatures in vulcanised rubber masks with rounded glass eye sockets and ribbed piping running into tanks carried on their backs cracked barbed whips. They lurched with a twisted, mutated gait and gurgled monotone commands to the hundreds of slaves that filled the screaming forge.

That such malnourished, wretched specimens of humanity could still live and work in such a terrible place was testament to the indomitable spirit that had sustained them in the time since their capture. None amongst them knew how long it had been since they had been dragged in chains from the proud defence of an Imperial citadel to this nightmare world. A world where a black sun beat down from a sky that burned a retina-searing white and from which

smoky black threads poured into a cyclopean city of such insane proportions that men had been driven mad just by gazing upon its impossible geometries for too long.

Some three thousand men had been brought to this world, called Medrengard by its inhabitants, though less than a quarter of that number still lived. Whipped, beaten and fed barely enough to survive, their incarceration was little more than a slowly enacted death sentence. The grinning face at the end of the forge's nave roared and seethed, filling the air with a screeching howl of fury. Here, an incarcerated daemon's immaterial energies drove the ceaseless hammering of giant pistons while its anger heated the furnaces with the power of a star. Golden wards carved into the floor bound the daemon to its fate, and its red eyes blazed above the forge, driving men to madness and murder.

But such was a small price, and gladly paid by the masters of the forge. A hundred slaves or more died every day, but the Iron Warriors cared not.

Where a hundred died, a thousand more would be brought to work until death claimed them as well.



ATRIO OF TRACKED bulldozer engines hauled themselves into the forge, dragging rusted troughs behind them through the knee-deep ash. More of the rubber-masked mutants drove the dozers and, even before they stopped, slaves clustered around them, leaning over the edges of the troughs to scoop up handfuls of the thin, greyish gruel that slopped around their bases. Men who had once called each other brother and had fought the dark powers shoulder to shoulder, punched and kicked each other bloody



as they fought for the meagre scraps their captors allowed them.

Sergeant Ellard carefully made his way through the press of bodies to where a slumped figure sat exhausted, his head drooping between his knees. Unkempt, filth-encrusted hair that had once been blonde, but was now dull and grey covered most of the figure's ash-smeared face.

'Sir,' said Ellard, 'some food.'

The figure looked up, red-rimmed and bloodshot eyes stared at the sergeant through the lank rats' tails of his hair, but said nothing.

'Sir, you have to eat,'

'Why?'

'Because you'll get sick if you don't eat.'

'We're already dying, Ellard, remember? The Adeptus Mechanicus made sure of that with their damned cancers, so what's the point in postponing death?'

Ellard squatted on his haunches, still holding out his dripping hands, coolly regarding his commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Mikhail Leonid.

'Because we're soldiers of the 383rd Jouran Dragoons,' said Ellard. 'We don't give up until the last breath has been crushed from us.'

'Just like Corde,' said Leonid.

'What?'

'Never mind,' said Leonid, holding out his hands and allowing Ellard to pour what passed for nourishment into his hands. He looked at the grey liquid, oily patches of Emperor only knew what floating like a frothy scum on its surface. He raised his hands to his mouth and drank the foul broth, feeling the gristly lumps of meat catch in his throat. He didn't know what meat it was and didn't want to think too hard about the strongest possibility of its identity.

He felt his stomach cramp and fought the familiar urge to vomit its contents onto the ground. The carcinogens he and his regiment had been infected with were making their presence felt and

Leonid closed his eyes as a jagged spike of pain ripped through his gut.

But Ellard was right, they were soldiers of Jouran and the Emperor, and they did not give up, no matter that they were all dead men who refused to lie down. He forced down the last mouthful of the gruel and watched as the Iron Warrior bastard, Obax Zakayo, marched down the length of the forge, the loathsome claw on his back cracking the energy-wreathed whip into the huddled masses of slaves.

'On your feet, scum!' he bellowed. 'There's work to be done. I'll grind your bones to powder and feed you to the daemon of the forge! Up! Up!'

How could it have come to this? Though it seemed he had spent a lifetime toiling in this nightmare existence, he knew it could not have been long. A few scant months since the citadel of Hydra Cordatus had fallen to the Iron Warriors and they had been dragged off in chains to the echoing prison hulks in orbit.

His last sight of the citadel had been of its walls being cast down, its once-proud buildings in flames and the desecrated corpses of Captain Eshara's Imperial Fists scattered before the Valedictor Gate like offal. Herded like animals onto the darkened prison barges of the traitors, they had been kept chained and beaten until arriving at this terrifying place.

Leonid knew that the galaxy was a big place, with many strange and incredible sights, but this was something else entirely. Hoary old veterans told tales of worlds located in a horrifying place known as the Eye of Terror, where mighty daemons and the followers of the Ruinous Powers ruled supreme. They spoke of insane worlds where gods whose name could never be spoken held sway over all before them and who shaped their worlds to their lunatic whims. Like others, he had laughed at these tales, though there had always been an edge of fear to the laughter. What if they were true?

Now he knew they were.



The shadow of Obax Zakayo swallowed him, the monster in dark iron armour thrown into silhouette by the fires of the furnace.

'You. Slave. Stand up,' ordered the Iron Warrior.

Leonid rose to his feet. To disobey Obax Zakayo was to die and, as wretched as their lot was, he was damned if he'd die at this bastard's hands.

The Iron Warrior leaned down, the hot breath from his helmet's rebreather making Leonid gag and the yellow light from his visor bathing him in a sickly glow.

'Slaves bring you food. You are their leader?'

'I was,' nodded Leonid. 'Not now.'

Obax Zakayo laughed, the noise a harsh grating that scraped along Leonid's nerves like a rusty blade. He plucked at a tattered epaulette on Leonid's shoulder, wiping away a film of grease and ash to reveal the faded gold shoulder boards of a lieutenant colonel.

'You let yourself be captured,' said Obax Zakayo. 'The gods of battle will mock you for all eternity, slave.'

'Better that than be damned for all eternity,' snapped Leonid.

'Damned?' chuckled Obax Zakayo, as though hearing the word for the first time. 'Perhaps, but I am immortal. Powerful. What are you?'

Leonid said nothing, feeling his hatred swell, but keeping a tight grip on its power. Hot pain suffused his limbs and though he was weary beyond measure, he stood firm in the face of the taunting Iron Warrior.

From the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of furtive movement and heard a muffled cry over the heavy hammering of the forge and the roar of the imprisoned daemon. Obax Zakayo caught the motion and turned in time to catch a fleeting glimpse of a swinging iron bar before it hammered into his helmet.

Leonid ducked back as the traitor dropped to one knee.

A group of scrawny slaves clambered across the engine block of the lead trough-hauler, dragging the masked creatures from within and bludgeoning them with jagged lumps of hardened ore. The daemon forge howled in glee at the slaughter, its wailings rising to a screaming gale.

Gunshots filled the forge and a handful of slaves went down. Blood spurted, spilling into the hissing weapon moulds and filling the air with its stink. Mutants tried to reverse the remaining two trough-haulers, but the enraged slaves were upon them, tearing them apart with a fury borne from months and months of systematic abuse and torture.

Sergeant Ellard reacted first, running over to join the slaves clambering across the nearest trough-hauler.

'Turn it around!' he bellowed, pointing to the forge's main doors, which were being dragged shut by gangs of twisted mutants. Leonid grinned ferally, realising that this was their chance, when a powerful spasm tore through his stomach and doubled him up in pain. He dropped to his knees and vomited the putrid gruel he had eaten, feeling his stomach contract as it tried to expel his stomach lining.

A fierce madness seized the slaves as they beat their tormenters to bloody ruin, tears of released horror streaking their filth-encrusted faces. Giant cauldrons of molten metal passed overhead as one of the Jouran slaves finally managed to take control of the lumbering vehicle. The trough-hauler lurched forwards, its tracks spinning clouds of choking ash into the air.

Leonid watched as the cheering slaves clambered aboard, whooping in savage joy as it headed towards the exit and the burning white sky beyond.

Then Obax Zakayo regained his feet and raised his arm, a mass of twisting pipes, hissing vents and gun barrels. Leonid tried to shout a warning, but the



pain in his belly had stolen his voice. Foot-long tongues of flame blasted from Obax Zakayo's arm, explosive bolts ripping across the side of the trough-hauler, spilling slaves and blood to the ground. Screams and cries of pain echoed through the forge as the Iron Warrior worked the killing fire of his weapon over the slaves.

'No!' cried Leonid. 'Stop!'

Obax Zakayo laughed in the face of Leonid's protestations, reaching down to haul the former lieutenant colonel to his feet to better witness the slaughter. Blood and viscera coated the sides of the trough hauler as it slewed over to the side of the forge, the top of its driver's head blasted clear. Slaves scattered before the Iron Warrior's lethal retaliation, abandoning the trough-hauler to find cover.

Leonid twisted in his captor's grip, watching as the trough-hauler slammed into the stanchions supporting the greased rails carrying the vast cauldrons of molten metal. The vehicle wasn't moving quickly, but its sheer mass was enough to rip the stanchion from its moorings and crumple it with its momentum. The cauldron currently traversing the forge swayed in slow motion, tipping slowly to one side before toppling from the rails and dropping to the floor.

A wave of fiery liquid spilled out, magma-hot ore turning flesh, bone and metal to stinking clouds of vapour in a heartbeat. Scores of slaves perished in seconds, the trough-hauler dissolving into hissing molten slag. Rivers of red-hot metal rolled onwards in a deadly tide, the intricately carved runes of embossed gold on the floor flashing to steam under the heat.

As the river of molten metal rolled onwards to the forge mouth, yet more of the runes were obliterated and the roaring of the bound daemon in the forge rose to fresh heights of relish as more and more of the wards imprisoning it were destroyed.

Suddenly realising what must happen, Obax Zakayo dropped Leonid and ran for the forge's exit, leaving the gasping Jouran coughing and spluttering as the hissing metal began cooling and slowing its advance.

But by then the damage was done.

The last rune dissolved and the daemon broke free.

Imprisoned for millennia, the scion of the warp was in no mood to be merciful and lashed out in blind fury, a frothing miasma of black light with a swirling vortex of forms and geometries twisting through its nebulous matter. Those closest to the daemon drew breath to scream, but did not have time to do so the flesh sloughed from their bones.

Leonid rolled aside as a dark tendril slashed the ground, leaving a hissing residue in its wake. A whipping, octopoid form writhed in the dark light, feeding on the powerful energies of fear and hate swirling around the inside of the forge. Streamers of black, oily matter whiplashed around the forge, slicing men to bloody ribbons and lifting others high into the air.

Skeletal husks dropped to the floor, bled dry of their souls and Leonid scrambled onto a growling piece of machinery to escape the creeping tide of cooling – though still fearsomely hot – molten metal. Throughout the forge, slaves scrambled for high ground, fighting like animals to secure their safety. Men hurled one another into the fires in desperate attempts to prolong their own lives.

The darkness flailed like madness given form, expanding and solidifying tentacles of dark matter smashing through the walls and roof of the forge as easily as a man might destroy a doll's house. With a tortured shriek of shearing metal, the latticed girders of the roof and far wall buckled and tumbled to the floor. Leonid covered his head with his arms as smaller fragments and sheets of corrugated iron crashed down around him, praying to the God-Emperor that he might survive this carnage.



Long seconds passed before he realised that he was still alive and the screaming daemon was silent. He risked a glance through his fingers, seeing the burning white sky through the giant tear the vengeful daemon had ripped through the walls of the forge. Of the daemon itself, there was no sign, save a spot of darkness flaring into the sky.

Leonid grimaced in pain. Staring too long at that impossible sky was like staring directly into the sun, and he wrenched his gaze from its hateful brightness.

Little remained of the trough-haulers save hissing piles of molten metal. Here and there flames licked across the bones and charred limbs of slaves and mutants protruding from the hissing ore. The dull throbbing of the forge faded as the daemon-powered engines slowly ground to a halt, the hammers and pistons starved and useless.

As Leonid took stock of the devastation the escaped daemon had wreaked, he was relieved to see Sergeant Ellard pull himself from behind the ruins of a giant milling machine.

Scores had died in the abortive – and unplanned – escape attempt, and those who had survived were too stupefied to take advantage of the momentary lack of overseers.

Leonid knew he had seconds at best to capitalise on the situation when the forge doors crashed open and a dozen Iron Warriors were thrown into stark relief by the bone-white sky.

Whatever chance they might once have had vanished like ash on the wind.



L EONID KEPT HIS eyes glued to the bleak, grey rockcrete platform, whorls of dust and ash describing wind-blown spirals before him. He tried to shut out the hateful screams of the

sleepers as the burning sky blazed white above them, beating down with fierce brightness, the dark hole of the sun rippling like a baleful eye. Fellow slaves and Jourans were pressed tightly around him, the stench of unwashed bodies, blood and fear mingling to create a heady cocktail of aromas.

The former lieutenant colonel shivered as daemoniac scents gusted through them, expelled like corpse-breath from the newly formed tunnel mouths.

He risked a glance into its haunted blackness, feeling a splintering pain in his head as his limited senses tried to comprehend the shifting images of multiple realities intersecting with the sound of clashing blades and bells.

He felt every molecule in his body vibrate as the resonant frequencies of this dimensional abscess widened, rippling waves of sickness and filth spreading from this wound in space-time.

He could feel a terrible imminence, like the tension in the fabric of the sky before a storm. Something was coming. Something so dark and ancient that his mind could not even begin to comprehend the scope of its evil.

Then Obax Zakayo moved between him and the tunnel and its spell was broken.

'You sense it's coming intersection don't you, slave? The Omphalos Daemonium.'

Leonid did not answer, his guts clamping in pain at the sound of such damned syllables given voice and wishing again that he had died on the journey to this cursed place.

The failed escape attempt in the forge had been paid for in the blood of his former soldiers. Obax Zakayo strode through the cowering survivors of the daemon's escape, clubbing slaves to death with each sweep of his fist. Slaves were dragged from their hiding places and hurled onto spinning lathes, pressed into crushers or lowered into steaming vats of ore. Limbs were ground to gory stumps and bones crushed to powder



within the jellied ruin of their flesh. No pain went unexplored and no form of suffering was omitted from the Iron Warriors' retribution. Within minutes, hundreds were dead, slaughtered to sate the traitors' lust for pain and humiliation.

Obax Zakayo had lifted Leonid from the ground and held him before his battered visor.

'You are their leader.'

'No,' gasped Leonid. 'I told you, I don't'

'They still look at you as their leader,' interrupted the Iron Warrior. 'For this I will kill some of them now. Keep your men in line or I will kill all of them. Not you, though. Just them. All of them.'

'But'

'Silence,' snarled Obax Zakayo. 'Just do it. You are no use here now that the daemon has gone. You are to be taken to the Warsmith Honsou and put to work in his weapon-shops. Try and escape from him and you will not be dealt with so lightly.'

Marched from the devastated forge, those slaves not fed inch by inch to the machines had been driven out into a twisting labyrinth of fortifications crowned with blades and kilometres of deep trenches lined with corrugated sheets of metal. Forests of razorwire linked armoured blockhouses and pillboxes bristling with heavy artillery pieces and guns that defied all proportion and reason.

The rumble of artillery fire was a constant drone at the edge of hearing, but who was fighting and why was a mystery. Dozens of slaves died en route to whatever fate awaited them at the hands of the Warsmith Honsou, dropping in exhaustion or starvation or from the merciless beatings and random killings inflicted by Obax Zakayo.

The gruelling death march continued for days though on a world such as this, where the sun never set and the skies never darkened, time was an absurd notion. Each day brought fresh horrors

and new obscenities: roads lined with eviscerated bodies – human, alien and some so grossly misshapen as to defy any classification of form. Towers of skulls, harvest fields of billowing flesh and great monoliths raised with the scrimshawed bones of the dead.

Leonid saw that each step brought them closer to a range of brooding, smoke wreathed mountains, their topmost peaks lost in the brightness of the sky and obscured by a layer of dark clouds. Pillars of coiling, sentient smoke rose from the plains around the mountains, called by some nameless attraction to conceal whatever terrors and wonders lurked above in the darkness.

No matter their course, the sinister mountains always drew closer and Leonid knew with dreadful certainty that they were their destination. In the same realisation, he also knew that none of them would survive to reach the heights of those dreadful peaks.

Each glimpse of the desolate mountains through the twisting circumvallation simultaneously fascinated and repulsed him. The citadel of Hydra Cordatus had been constructed by an unknown genius of military architecture, though compared to the monstrous fortifications raised on this world, it was a mere trifle – a footnote to the dark grandeur of this world's defences. Leonid doubted that anything could penetrate these redoubts or that any foe could cast down its walls.

Finally, their march had come to an end. A barbed gate of bronze led into a rectangular, earthen arena, fully a kilometre wide and twice that in length. From somewhere nearby he could hear screaming; wails of the damned in torment that set his teeth on edge and seemed to pierce his skull with lancing, glass shards of pain. The ground underfoot was surprisingly soft and loamy, crimson liquid oozing from the water-logged earth. As Leonid looked more closely, he saw that the ground was not water-logged, but soaked in fresh-



spilled blood, bones and grinning skulls gleaming whitely through the red ground.

His mind reeled at the prospect. How many must have been drained of their lifeblood to irrigate such a vast space so thoroughly? How many arteries had been emptied to satiate the vile thirst of this dark, dark earth?

Leonid's stomach knotted in disgust, but he had nothing in his belly to expel and dry heaved as the awful stench of fresh blood filled his senses. Sergeant Ellard held him upright as they marched across thick, timber duckboards to the centre of this place, this killing ground.

Was that it? Was this a place of execution? Had they been brought here so that their blood might mingle with the thousands who had already been drained?

He shook off Ellard's hand, determined to meet whatever fate the Iron Warriors had planned for them on his feet and unaided. As they drew nearer to the centre of the arena, Leonid saw a long strip of rockcrete had been built atop the blood-soaked ground and dull, bloody rail tracks laid, running across the middle of the arena and ending at opposite walls. As they mounted the steps to the rockcrete platform, the source of the screaming was finally revealed to the Jouran slaves.

Each sleeper laid between the rail tracks writhed in agony; a jigsaw of bodies and limbs knotted together by some dark sorcery, screaming in lunatic fever-dreams, their cries like a choir of banshees. Eyes and mouths churning in the fluid matter of each sleeper gave piteous voice to their suffering before being forced from form to formlessness that another soul might vent its endless purgatory.

Men dropped to their knees, weeping at this fresh vileness, the frayed ends of their sanity unable to bear any more. Obax Zakayo hurled them from the platform, spinning the gibbering madmen to land in red splashes. No

sooner had they landed than fleshless, bony hands reached up through the dark earth, clawing and grasping at their bodies and dragging them below the surface to whatever fate awaited them beneath.

Leonid tried to shut out the gurgling cries of the doomed men who drowned in the bloody ground to feed the rapacious souls beneath.

He shut his eyes...

Splintering crystals of alternate existences clash and jangle, detaching from the walls of one plane and shifting their position to resonate at a different frequency. Echoes in time allow the planes to shift and change; altering the angles of reality to allow the dimensions to unlock, dancing in a ballet of all possibilities.

...and cried out, his eyes snapping open again, dizzy and disorientated. He reached out to grab Ellard, steadying himself on his sergeant.

'Sir?'

'Emperor's blood!' hissed Leonid, looking around the death arena. He felt a sickening vibration deep in his bones as a restlessness rippled through the ground. The jagged stumps of bone jutting through the ground retreated into its sanguineous depths and the screaming sleepers howled with renewed anguish.

Where the rail tracks vanished into the walls of this vast courtyard, streamers of multi-coloured matter were oozing from the stonework.

Rippling spirals of reflective light coiled from the mortar, twisting the image behind like a warped lens. The walls seemed to stretch, as though being sucked into an unseen vortex behind, until there was nothing left but a rippling veil of impenetrable darkness, a tunnel into madness ringed with screaming faces.

Warped realms, a universe and lifetimes distant, flow together, joining all points in time on the bronze bloodtracks. On a journey that leads everywhere and begins nowhere, the Omphalos Daemonium pushes itself from



nothingness to form. Snaking from its daemonic womb and leaving nothing but barren rape and death in its wake.

Obax Zakayo laughed, though Leonid could feel the fear that lurked beneath.

And the Omphalos Daemonium came.



THOUGH HIS screaming flesh had warned him of the might and power of its evil, it had been but the merest hints of the thing's diabolical majesty. Roaring from the tunnel mouth like a brazen juggernaut of the end times, the Omphalos Daemonium shrieked along the bloodtracks towards the horrified slaves.

Some tried to run: they were struck down. Some dropped dead with fright while others curled into foetal balls and soiled themselves like newborns.

Leonid dropped to his knees at the sight of the monstrous daemon engine.

'It is fitting that you give homage,' nodded Obax Zakayo.

Vast bone-pistons drove it forward, iron and steel flanks heaving with immaterial energies. Bloody steam leaked from every demented, skull-faced rivet as wheels of tortured souls ground the tracks beneath it to feast on the oozing blood of the dead earth.

Deep within its insane structure, it might have once resembled an ancient steam-driven locomotive, but unknown forces and warped energies had transformed it into something else entirely. The thunder of its arrival could be felt by senses beyond the pitiful five known to humankind, echoing through the planes of reality that existed and intersected within the Eye of Terror, where such things were the norm rather than the incredible.

Behind it came a tender of dark iron and a juddering procession of boxcars, their timbers stained with aeons of blood and ordure. Leonid knew somehow how that millions had been carried to their deaths in these hellish containers; carried to whatever loathsome destination this horrifying machine desired and then exterminated. The Omphalos Daemonium slowed, the sleepers driven beyond sound in their torment as the towering daemon engine halted at the edge of the platform.

Leonid wept tears of blood, his bladder and bowel voiding as the power and evil of the daemon engine swept through him. He thought he heard booming laughter and the grinding squeal of warped timber doors sliding open on runners rusted with blood.

He rolled onto his back, seeing gusts of blood-laced steam hiss from the armoured hide of the Omphalos Daemonium. Brazen laughter rippled through the tendrils of steam as they writhed on some evil business of their own. Each tendril thickened and became more solid as they wormed through the writhing forms of the slaves on the platform.

One lifted a sobbing man from the ground, wrapping itself around his body like a snake. Like quicksilver, the other tendrils whipped over, latching onto the body and attacking it like predators in a feeding frenzy until there was nothing left.

Leonid blinked, too numb with horror to react as he saw the tendrils of smoke vanish and eight figures appear standing in their place. They wore grey, featureless boiler-suits and knee-high boots with silver buckles along the shins. Each carried a fearsome array of knives, hooks and saws on their leather belts.

Their faces were human in proportion only, flensed of the disguise of skin and glistening with revealed musculature. Crude stitches crisscrossed their skulls and, as they turned their heads as though hunting by scent, Leonid saw



they were utterly featureless save for distended and fanged mouths. They had no eyes, nose or ears, only discoloured, cancerous swellings that bulged and rippled beneath their fleshless skulls.

The daemons circulated through the slaves, selecting men at random and lifting them from the ground to snap their spines and fasten fanged jaws to the blackened and swollen melanoma on their necks. Leonid pressed his hands to his ears as the daemons suckled on the cancers that grew and multiplied within the bodies of the Jouran slaves.

One passed within a metre of Leonid and he felt a suffocating fear rise up in him, though he could barely believe that his terror could rise to greater heights.

He saw its patchwork face swing towards him the tumourous tissue in its neck bulging with a horrid appetite as its blackened fingers reached for him, gripping his tattered uniform and hauling him upright. Its touch felt like rotted meat, wriggling with the suggestion of maggots and freshly hatched larvae. Its dead skin mask was inches from his face, its breath like a furnace of cadavers. It moved its undulating face around his, as though tasting his scent.

'The Sarcomata favour you,' hissed Obax Zakayo. 'Corruption of the flesh given form and purpose, the malignancies devouring your body are the choicest sweetmeats to them.'

Leonid waited for death, but the Omphalos Daemonium had greater purpose for him than mere murder, roaring in impatience as the Sarcomata's mouth descended to the swellings on his neck. The daemon hissed in submission before tossing him through the doors of the boxcar directly behind the Omphalos Daemonium. He landed on a carpet of decomposing matter that stank of excrement and blood.

Their loathsome hunger sated for the moment, the Sarcomata herded the rest of the slaves into the boxcars, packing them in tightly before shutting them in

the darkness with nothing but their terror for company.



'**W**HERE DO you think they're taking us?' said Ellard.

'I don't know, sergeant,' replied Leonid, 'but I heard that bastard Obax Zakayo mention a name. Honsou, I think.'

'Honsou?'

'Aye, that's what it sounded like.'

'I've heard that name before,' said Ellard.

'You have? Where?'

'On the prison hulks that brought us here. By the sound of it, I think he was their war leader on Hydra Cordatus.'

Leonid shivered, remembering the sight of the Iron Warriors' leader as he stood before the walls of the citadel. Captain Eshara had called him a Warsmith and Leonid remembered the blasted rune standard and the nauseous terror that settled in his belly at the sight of such an ancient and terrible warrior.

If they were truly to be delivered into the hands of such a monstrous being, then perhaps death at the hands of the Sarcomata would have been preferable to this stinking hell. Nearly a hundred men were packed tightly into a boxcar made to carry half that number, and the stench was an assault on the senses. So crammed were they that each man was forced to stand upright, pressed tightly against his comrades, unable to make more than the smallest movement. Men wept and wailed, slatted shafts of bright light dopplering through the warped timbers of the boxcar as the daemon engine rattled and clattered its way up into the mountains.

Leonid could taste smoke in the air and an acrid tang of electrical build-up, like he'd felt deep in the Machine Temple of the citadel. He pressed his face to a blade



of light, peering out into the bright day. Ash-stained rocks flashed past, green sparks flaring from the soul wheels as they carried the Omphalos Daemonium higher.

The dark layer of clouds drew nearer, parting every now and then to reveal a tantalising glimpse of a jagged spire, a bladed bastion or a gun-studded redoubt. As the daemon engine began turning in a long, lazy curve, Leonid saw that their route carried them across an impossible bridge of dizzying proportions. Thousands of girders and beams were laced together in a gravity-defying structural lattice that spanned a gorge of gargantuan proportions. Its bottom was lost to sight, roiling mists and screeching beasts swooping through in its lightning-filled depths.

'We have to get out of here, sergeant.'

'I know. But how?'

'I don't know yet, but we're all dead men if we stay.'

'Most of the men I know who would have been handy in a fight died in the forge temple. We don't have much in the way of forces.'

'You think I don't know that, Ellard?' snapped Leonid. 'Even if we die trying it's got to be better than what we're being taken to. The forge of Obax Zakayo was bad enough. I don't want to find out what this Honsou's going to be like.'

Ellard nodded and rested his head wearily against the wall of the boxcar, staring out into the desolate landscape. Deep lines ringed his eyes and Leonid noticed for the first time how haggard his sergeant had become. Like most officers, Leonid had relied heavily on his sergeants to run his company, and none more so than Ellard. To see a man of such formidable physical presence reduced to such a wasted creature was dispiriting in the extreme.

Leonid yawned, suddenly bone-deep tired and felt his eyelids drooping. Dimly he heard a series of dull cracks, like gunfire, but was too weary to react.

'Get down, sir!' called Ellard, leaping forward to drag Leonid to the floor of the boxcar. Tightly-packed bodies hampered his efforts, but the sergeant's strength, though diminished, was still prodigious, and he was able to bundle his commanding officer to the ground.

'What the hell are you doing?' asked Leonid.

'Stay down!'

Leonid rolled onto one elbow as the sides of the boxcar exploded inwards with fist-sized bullet impacts. Shafts of light speared in as the bullets stitched a path across the side of the boxcar, slashing bloody paths through the packed slaves. Blood and screams filled the air as men jerked like mad things under the fusillade.

Gunsmoke drifted through the bedlam-filled car. Dead men slumped against one another, held upright by the press of bodies. Blood pooled on the floor, swilling out the doors as Leonid heard a thunderous impact on the roof of the boxcar.

'What the hell's going on?'

'I think we're under attack, sir. Or being rescued. I'm not sure which.'

A crackling trio of blades punched through the bronze roof of the boxcar and a massive fist tore the sheet metal back as though it was no more than paper.

Silhouetted against the dazzling whiteness of the sky was a huge figure in midnight black power armour. A Space Marine...

Sudden hope flared as the figure shouted, 'Slaves! Rise up and fight! Fight the Iron Warriors!'

Leonid clambered to his feet, fresh energy filling his limbs at this answer to his prayers. The Space Marine looked up along the length of the train and said, 'Hurry. The Sarcomata will gather soon.'

Laughing hysterically in relief and released fear, Leonid began climbing to freedom, the splintered holes in the side of the boxcar providing ample hand and foot holds. He pushed his head above



the level of the roof, relishing the cleansing feeling of the wind whipping through his hair. He hauled himself through the hole the Space Marine had torn in the roof and pushed himself to his knees, reaching down to help Ellard.

The sky blazed white above them, the black sun beating down with greasy dark tendrils to somewhere beyond yet another range of mountains. Leonid forced his gaze from the sight as the energy claws retreated into the Space Marine's gauntlet.

Looking closer, Leonid saw that the warrior's armour was a far cry from the gleaming brilliance of the Imperial Fists he had seen on Hydra Cordatus; ravaged with dents, scarred and patched in dozens of places with crude grafts and filler. Hot vapours vented at his shoulders from the nozzles of a massive jump pack, and a white symbol – a bird of prey of some kind – had been painted over with a jagged red cross. His helmet bore a similar symbol across his visor.

Looking along the length of the boxcars, Leonid saw yet more of the Space Marines. Clad in an eclectic mix of colours and styles of armour, almost all of them bore a different Chapter symbol on their shoulder guards. They pulled slaves from captivity and herded them towards the rear of the daemon engine's boxcars and, glancing down into the filthy prison he had escaped from, Leonid saw that he and Ellard were the only two to follow the Space Marine's order to climb out. Perhaps forty men remained, staring up with terrified eyes at the armoured warrior.

'Who are you?' shouted Leonid over the roar of the wind.

'I am Ardaric Vaanes of the Red Corsairs,' said the warrior, drawing a pistol. 'Get behind me.'

Leonid and Ellard scrambled across the roof, hugging its rough surface closely. Leonid risked a glance over the edge of the roof and experienced a moment's sick vertigo as he stared down into the abyss the daemon engine was crossing. He rolled onto his back in time

to see Obax Zakayo clamber onto the roof, his lashing energy whip coiling above his helmeted head.

'Look out!' shouted Leonid as the whip cracked.

Vaanes brought up his arm to deflect the blow, the crackling lash ensnaring his limb and discharging a powerful corona of blue light. Ardaric Vaanes grunted in pain, his pistol clattering to the roof of the boxcar and skidding to the edge.

The Space Marine backed away from the giant Iron Warrior, risking a glance at Leonid and Ellard.

'Get to the front!' he shouted. 'You have to stop this daemon-thing before we reach the gatehouse. Go now!'

Obax Zakayo's whip lashed again, driving Vaanes to his knees as Leonid and Ellard scrambled along the roof to peer over the bladed front of the boxcar. The Iron Warrior took a ponderous step towards the convulsing Space Marine, his mechanised claw reaching out to snap his neck.

Vaanes roared and thrust with his lightning-sheathed blades. Obax Zakayo batted the blow aside with his axe as his mechanised claw clamped on Vaanes's gorget.

'You renegades dare try to steal the slaves of Warsmith Honsou?' snarled Obax Zakayo. 'For this you must die.'

The claw tightened on the Space Marine's neck, and Leonid heard the crack of ceramite over the rushing wind. White sunlight glinted off metal and he saw the Space Marine's pistol juddering at the edge of the boxcar's roof.

He reached over and dragged the heavy gun closer, amazed at its bulk and weight. Too heavy for him to fire one-handed, he rolled onto his back, cradling the gun to his chest and supporting its weight on his forearm.

He pulled the trigger, the recoil hurling the gun from his hands. He rolled and grabbed the pistol's oversized grip before the weapon could tumble into the abyss below.



But his shot was accurate, or at least accurate enough to matter. It struck the visor of Obax Zakayo's helmet and spun him around. The claw choking Ardaric Vaanes released its grip and the Space Marine leapt to his feet to face the Iron Warrior.

'Go! Quickly!' he bellowed, pointing further along the bloodtracks. 'I told you to stop this thing before we reach the gatehouse!'

Leonid turned and gazed through the dark smog ahead, not truly believing the sight before his eyes.

Emerging from the darkness ahead was a fortification built into the mountain from dark madness, standing in defiance of all reason. Its steeped towers wounded the sky, its massive gateway a snarling void that swallowed the tracks the Omphalos Daemonium travelled upon. Its walls were darkened, bloodstained stone, veined with unnatural colours that should not exist and which burned themselves upon the retina. Lightning leapt between its towers and the clanking of great engines and machines echoed like thunder from beyond its walls. And this was but a gatehouse?

'Blood of the saints!' whispered Ellard.

'I couldn't agree more,' said Leonid.

The clash of weapons behind them and the sight of the monolithic fortress drove them on and the two Jourans slithered forwards on their bellies to the end of the boxcar. A miasma of evil and uncounted aeons of torment pulsed from the howling daemon engine, and Leonid felt blood drip from his nose and ears the closer they crawled.

He pushed himself up, ready to make his way onto the daemon engine. A horrifying, bloodstained tender was coupled between it and the boxcars, filled with dismembered corpses. Red steam trailed from the thundering engine, spinning like bloody streamers as the Sarcomata feasted on the cadavers.

'We'll need to move quickly,' said Ellard.

Leonid nodded and swallowed his disgust, dropping into the oozing carpet of bodies. The tender lurched on the bloodtracks and he fell, throwing his arms out before him and sinking knee deep in gore and severed limbs. Ellard dropped next to him and pulled him upright. Together they waded unsteadily through the bodies, corpse gases and semi-coagulated blood misting the air with every step. The tendrils of bloody steam slithered around them, more solid than smoke had any business being.

'Emperor forgive us,' said Ellard as a slack, dead face rolled over under his boot.

Leonid gratefully reached the end of the tender, keeping an eye on the circling smoke.

He hauled himself over the lip of the tender, turning back to help his sergeant.

A ghostly face swam out of the smoke, a fleshless patchwork of musculature with no features save a fang-filled mouth.

'Hurry!' shouted Leonid, dropping Ardaric Vaanes' pistol behind him and dragging Ellard forward. Wraith-like arms wrapped themselves around the sergeant's shoulders and began pulling. Only partly formed, the Sarcomata's strength was not the equal of the two Jourans, and Leonid hauled Ellard from the tender with one last desperate heave.

The two men collapsed on the iron deck at the back of the Omphalos Daemonium, a bronze doorway rattling in its frame behind them. Leonid could see no handle, tasting ashes and the scent of burning flesh gusting through an iron grille at its top. Solidifying smoke-trail bodies of the Sarcomata began climbing from the tender, hissing with hunger at these fresh morsels.

The two Jourans backed into the door, Leonid dropping to one knee to recover the fallen pistol. One of the Sarcomata pounced towards him, clawed arms reaching for his neck.



The pistol boomed and ripped the top of the daemon's head off. Daemonic blood splashed the door, the metal undulating as the blood hissed and vanished like droplets on a hot skillet. The entire doorframe rippled and, as Leonid fell back against the door, it opened as though freshly unlocked.

He sprawled into a blisteringly hot engine room, Ellard wasting no time in following him inside and slamming the door shut behind him. The door buckled in its frame as the Sarcomata hurled themselves against it, desperate to feast on the cancers within them. Leonid could feel their hunger as a physical thing as he groggily pushed himself to his feet.

As he saw where their desperate flight had taken them, he wondered whether they might have been better off taking their chances with the Sarcomata. The interior of the daemon engine defied geometry, impossibly stretching beyond the limits of vision to either side, a sweltering, red-lit hell cavern, larger than the forge temple of Obax Zakayo. A wide-doored firebox roared and seethed, tended by a giant in a clanking, mechanical suit of riveted power armour and thick, vulcanised rubber. Over its ancient iron armour, it wore a blood-stiffened apron, and a crown of metal horns sprouted from a conical helmet with a raised visor.

Muttered doggerel and guttural curses spat from beneath the helmet as the figure approached a long line of dangling chains and pulleys, each with a limbless human torso skewered on a rusted hook. The figure stabbed a long billhook into a headless torso and thrust it into the firebox. He stoked the daemon engine with flesh and blood, and belching stacks spewed ashen bodies into the air.

'There...!' said the figure, its voice rasping and hoarse. 'What need I incantations or words? Word magic is poor man's sorcery; it is flesh magic that is strong. Flesh powers ye, blood sustains

ye and I bind thee.'

'What the hell is this?' said Leonid, casting uneasy glances over his shoulder at the rattling door.

Though his words were spoken in a whisper, the armoured giant stiffened and turned quickly to face them, its butcher's blade held out before it.

'Well then, what's this? The Sarcomata come knocking at my door and flesh comes to throw itself in the fires? Good flesh, helpful flesh. Much better than the deadmorsels we get...'

Leonid raised the pistol and said, 'Who are you?'

'Me?' said the giant, swinging his blade from side to side. 'I's the Slaughterman. Iron Warrior true. Cut and slice, cut and slice. Flesh for the machine. Blood for the cogs and flesh for the fires.'

The firebox growled, clawed tongues of flame slashing in vain at the giant's turned back. He chuckled, the sound sending shivers up the Jourans' spines, and shouted over his shoulder.

'No, no, no, you won't be eating my skin and bones, daemon. Thrash and struggle all you want. Bloodmeat for me, deadflesh for you.'

'You feed this thing bodies?' said Ellard, his revulsion plain.

'Yes, deadflesh feed the daemon, two hooks ready for you two. Fresh meat for me. I will cut you up nicely, dress your flesh with reverence, and sup your blood as it spills onto me. Now come here like good flesh so I can chop you.'

The Slaughterman beckoned with an encrusted gauntlet.

Leonid raised Vaanes's pistol and said, 'I don't think so. Just stop this thing and I won't kill you.'

The Slaughterman laughed, and shook his head as he advanced towards Leonid. 'You kill me? No, you are meat, nothing more. We will talk no more and you will die.'

Leonid fired the pistol, the bolt striking the Slaughterman square in the chest. Sparks flew and a frothing gruel of fluid and matter dribbled down his filthy



apron. The giant snarled, his blackened features twisted in rage.

'You shot me,' he said. 'I cut you to death slowly now. Cut your flesh screaming into morsels that I will feed you. I will feed you your feet, your legs and then your arms. And then I will give you to the Omphalos Daemonium and you will know true pain.'

Leonid fired again, but this time the bolt was smashed aside by the Slaughterman's billhook.

With a roar, the Slaughterman charged, his giant blade sweeping down to cleave Leonid in two. Leonid ducked and rolled aside, the billhook scraping a flaring gouge in the floor.

Ellard ran behind the Slaughterman, desperately searching for a weapon, as Leonid stood and fired again. The bullets went wide, smacking wetly into the hanging torsos and blowing them apart from the inside.

'No!' shouted the Slaughterman. 'Not the deadflesh. Bad flesh must stop. Needs to be chopped quick.'

The giant Iron Warrior turned as Leonid backed into the swaying cadavers, firing into the butcher's rack of meat, ripping them from their hooks in a hail of bullets.

The Slaughterman wailed and roared, his billhook slashing a path through the meat towards his prey. Leonid kept the trigger pulled until the hammer slammed down on an empty chamber. Bloody hooks swung and jangled before him, scraps of meat still sliding down the dark metal. One hook slid to the floor, a looping pile of chains rattling down from the winch above. As the Slaughterman pushed the last cadaver aside and stood face to face with Leonid, he saw Ellard standing beside the levers that controlled the chain pulley mechanism. The firebox seethed in hunger behind the Slaughterman.

Leonid reached down and grabbed the hook, holding it before him like a weapon.

'Bad flesh, you. No reverence for you now. Chop, chop, chop. Deadflesh.'

The Slaughterman leaned down, and Leonid could finally see his face beneath the conical, horned helmet. Vacant and puffy, his features were curiously child-like, with a rotten-toothed grin and rheumy eyes that spoke of an unthinking cruelty.

One meaty gauntlet reached down, scooping up Leonid before he could dodge aside and lifting him from the ground. He grunted in pain as the giant lifted him up.

'Bad flesh,' said the Slaughterman. 'Won't even wet my blade with you. Just bite you into pieces.'

The Slaughterman's jaws cracked as they opened, stretching and swelling as if to swallow him whole. Foetid breath, reeking of decomposing matter, wafted from the depths and Leonid gagged, kicking at the Slaughterman's gut in desperation.

As the Slaughterman's jaws reached down towards him, Leonid swung the butcher's hook upwards in a vicious arc.

Bone splintered as the iron point punched through the giant's jawbone before exploding through his eye-socket.

Leonid fell to the floor as the Slaughterman howled in pain, the chain attached to the end of the hook pulling taut as Ellard frantically cranked the winch. The Slaughterman dropped his weapon and scrambled at the barb, black blood spraying from the wound as he sought to pull some slack in the chain.

But Ellard was having none of it, reeling the Slaughterman in, winching the chain screechingly along its rails and dragging the wounded giant towards the firebox. His howls were piteous, but Leonid had no sympathy for the monstrous cannibal.

Daemonic flames leapt from the firebox, blazing claws slashing at the Slaughterman's back. He screamed, fighting to get clear, but the tormented daemon had him and was not about to release its grip. Incandescent flames



enveloped the Slaughterman and he was dragged into the inferno of the daemonic firebox. Soon he was lost to sight and the heavy iron door slammed shut behind him as the maniacal daemon within wreaked its terrible vengeance on its captor.

No sooner had the firebox's door shut than the vast bone-pistons slowed and the hissing machineries released scalding bursts of steam. The orange glow that pervaded the engine room faded and the impossible geometries of the chamber began returning to those dimensions that did not baffle the senses.

Leonid dropped to his knees, exhausted beyond words as the horror of the past few days threatened to overwhelm him. Ellard stumbled over to him and offered him his hand.

'I can't believe it. We got him.'

'Yes, sergeant, we did. Well done.'

'Now what do we do? Is this thing stopping?'

'Certainly feels like it.'

Leonid glanced over at the bronze door they had come through. Strangely, the thudding booms of the Sarcomata had ceased. Was their very existence somehow linked to the daemon within the firebox or even the Slaughterman himself? Even as he formed the thought, the door exploded inwards and Ardaric Vaanes stood framed in the white light of the sky.

'You did it,' he said, sounding surprised.

'Yes, we did,' agreed Leonid. 'Did you kill Obax Zakayo?'

'No, but he's gone. Gone with the rest of the boxcars.'

'What are you talking about?' said Leonid, limping towards the door.

As he and Ellard left the Slaughterman's domain, they saw that the tender was all that was left attached to the Omphalos Daemonium. Battered-looking Space Marines filled it, but the boxcars were nowhere in sight.

'What the hell did you do?' screamed Leonid. 'I thought you came to rescue us?'

'No,' said Ardaric Vaanes. 'We were never here to save you. We came to stop the Iron Warriors getting more slaves for their weapon shops. Without slaves they cannot make weapons to fight us.'

'You killed them,' said Ellard, looking down the tracks for any sign of the boxcars.

'Trust me, if they truly understood what awaited them in Honsou's citadel, they would thank me for my mercy.'

'Mercy! You bastard, those were my men,' shouted Leonid. 'I fought shoulder to shoulder with them and you betrayed their courage.'

'They were not the men you fought beside any more. You know this. They were broken. But you have steel in you, I can see it plain as day. If you wish, you may come with us and strike back against the Iron Warriors. But decide now; we are through the gatehouse, and its guards will be upon us soon if we are not away.'

Vaanes climbed into the tender and held his hand above the coupling mechanism.

'Are you with us?' he asked.

'Go with you? We don't even know what you are,' said Leonid.

'We were once Space Marines of the Adeptus Astartes and fought for the Emperor, but now our only allegiance is to each other,' said Vaanes. 'Our former battle-brothers would call us renegades, but right now we are the nearest thing you have to friends.'

Leonid started to reply, but felt Ellard's hand on his shoulder.

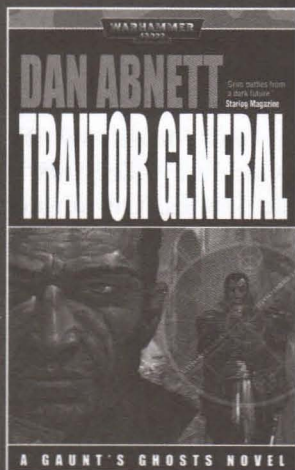
'Sir, he may be right.'

'He killed our men, sergeant!'

'I know, and we will never forget that, but as Castellan Vauban used to say "the enemy of my enemy..."'

'...is my friend,' finished Leonid.

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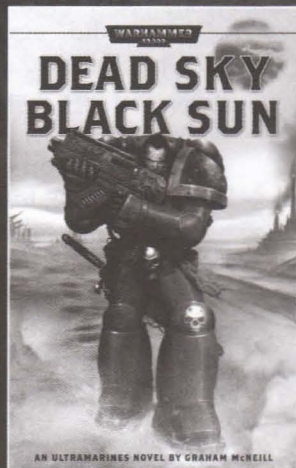
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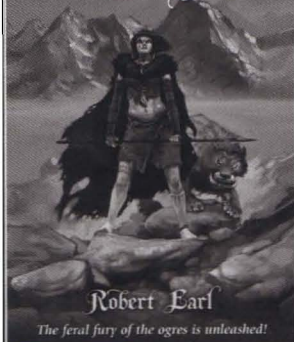
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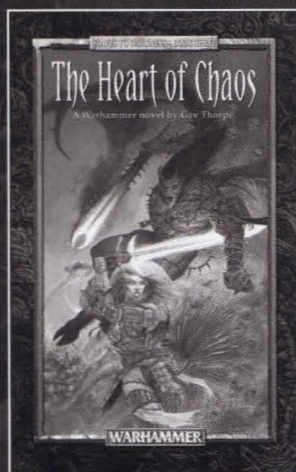
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'Emperor's blood!' hissed Leonid, looking around the death arena. He felt a sickening vibration deep in his bones as a restlessness rippled through the ground. The jagged stumps of bone jutting through the ground retreated into its sanguineous depths and the screaming sleepers howled with renewed anguish.

'If I stop writing I'll become an insane raving maniac.'

– Graham McNeill

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