

# LORD OF THE NIGHT

A Warhammer 40,000 novel by Simon Spurrier

YOUNG INTERROGATOR MITA Ashyn struggles to prove herself worthy to her master despite her growing feelings of unease at the hypocrisy within the Inquisition. When they visit the remote and sunless hive-world of Equixus, she suspects nothing more than minor corruption and heresy.

Night Lords Commander Sahaal has been in exile for ten thousand years, plotting to defeat his treacherous rival Acerbus and once again rule over his dark army. To do this he must find an ancient artefact that was stolen from him, and nothing – not even the Inquisition – will stand in his way.



*Simon Spurrier* has been writing since an early age, successfully having his work published first in the form of comics and latterly in prose fiction. Since earning a degree in Film Production and a bursary to attend the inaugural Screenwriting class of the National Academy of Writing, he has become a frequent contributor to titles such as *2000AD*, the *Warhammer Comic* and the *Megazine*. His prose work includes several short stories for *Inferno!* magazine and, to date, three novels.

*Lord of the Night* can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

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### *from LORD OF THE NIGHT*

IT WAS NOT a gentle awakening.

In the dark, in the spine of the great shattered vessel that had delivered him, the hunter surfaced from his slumber with a hiss. He gagged on dust-dry lungs, pulled a rattling breath through parched lips, tipped back his head, and screamed.

He had been human, once. Even now, through a haze of time and trauma, he recalled how it had been to awake as a mere man: senses flickering to life, memories accreting, dreams receding like echoes. And all of it without panic, without horror; a shadow-gallery of clumsy, flawed processes for clumsy, flawed creatures.

Not so now. Here in the dark, in the smoke and filth and dirtied snow, such gentle comforts seemed an alien indulgence.

The hunter tore his way to alertness with a feral shriek, and his first thought was this:

*It has gone.*

*Someone has taken it.*

THE HULL WAS cracked.

Blasted apart where tectonic forces had played along its seams, its frescoed surfaces lay lacerated; ragged edges gathering forests of icicles. Beyond the fissures the night swarmed with snow: thick eddies undulating like the surface of an inverted ocean. Lightning flickered in the distance, shooting long shadows across the huge vessel's broken corridors.

The hunter scrambled from the crippled hull without pause, casting out his senses, seeking movement. To his nocturnal

eyes the ship was an empty city: a landscape of broken towers and plateaux brimming with snow, cocooned by a curtain of ice

Locating the thieves required little effort. Picking their cautious way along the ship's surface, each inelegant footstep was a thunder-strike in his ears. Protected from the weather by shaggy overcoats, eyes made beady and black by crude snow-goggles, they seemed to the hunter reminiscent of ancient primates: grizzled ape-things investigating a hulk from the stars. He, then, was a demigod hunting monkeys.

The fools. The *thieves*.

They had *taken* it.

They were hurrying, he saw. Perhaps they'd heard his waking scream; perhaps they recognised they were not alone on the ship carcass they'd plundered. Their terror was gratifying, and as he stalked them the hunter ululated once more: a whoop of mingled anger and excitement. He soared across the uneven sprawl of the forward decks with disdainful ease, spring-locked feet barely touching the pitted hull, and swooped to find cover in the shadows of a collapsed buttress. From there, shielded, he could watch his prey, slipping and stumbling, reacting with comical horror to the wind-borne screech.

There were twelve. Ten carried weapons: spindly rifles with torches slung underneath; puddles of light that picked their way down the craft's broken flanks.

The hunter needed no torch.

The remaining two, he saw, carried the group's prize: a sheet of shrapnel forming an improvised stretcher, piled high with plunder. Useless gewgaws, mostly, handfuls of intestinal cabling, chunks of technology ripped from rune-daubed panels. He was too distant to make out the blocky shape he'd been seeking amongst the haul – that sacred item whose theft he would sooner die than permit – but it was certainly there, in amongst the loot. He could *feel* it...

He scuttled vertically like some great spider, rising along the filigree of a command tower, blue-black limbs impelled by silent streams of heated air; oozing from his back in shimmering ribbons. A single bound – legs pulled up close to his

chest, arms outstretched – and he sailed above his oblivious quarry, landing upon the barrel of a crippled cannon, its segments arching in rib-like curves above the broken deck. Settling, glutted with the exhilaration of flight, he hunched on all fours and threw back his head to howl once again, a gargoyle wreathed in snow and night.

To the preythings, the clumsy thieves with their guns and lights, the cry must have seemed to have come from everywhere at once; a voice on the cusp of the snowstorm.

Their careful progress collapsed.

Several dropped their weapons and started to run, voices swallowed by the wind. Slipping on icy metal, they went bolting and crying into the dark, scattering across the endless contours of the vast wreckage.

The hunter smiled, enjoying their disarray. Deep within ornate greaves and spine-tipped segments of armour his muscles bunched and flexed, legs propelling him out into the swirling void, ancient technology holding him aloft.

He took the first two – stragglers – as they stumbled along the crest of a propulsion exhaust, hooking his talons through the first's shoulders. Pinned against the splintered metal of a vertical plate, eyes bulging, the thief barely had time to moan before a casual flick removed head from body, arterial paste bright against the ruffled white of his furs.

The second man cast a curious glance over his shoulder and tripped; gagging at the shape picked out in his torchlight. Hunched over his first victim's body, the hunter cocked his head like an eagle, baleful eyes glowing, and scissored his claws together.

'E-emperor...' the thief gurgled, feet skidding on the icy hull, gun tumbling from his grip. 'Emperor preserve...'

The hunter was on him without appearing to move: long blades punching through the man's arms, pinioning him like a butterfly to a page. And slowly, revelling in his captive's panicked moans, the hunter brought his face down and whispered through the settling snow, voice cracked and distorted by voxcaster static.

'Scream for me.'

The others were simple, after that.

Haunted by their comrade's dying shrieks, any vestiges of an orderly retreat were extinguished. Fighting to flee whatever nightmare stalked them, they barely noticed that they were separating out, losing their way. He picked them off one by one with impunity – these panicking fools, these nothing-men – eagerly acquainting them with the force of his anger.

They had *stolen* it. Stolen from *him*.

He cut them and gloried in their screams. He prolonged their punishments with musical control: a chorus of shrieks to further horrify their comrades. Some he toyed with, slashing sinews and joints; others he ripped apart, snatching up their heads in razor claws and pitching them at the survivors, knocking them down like players in some grisly sport. He was a whirlwind of vengeance, a dervish-fury that cut through the scum with the contempt their theft deserved.

Unseen, unheard, he sculpted their fears and stoked their imaginations. With no idea what monster was amongst them their minds conjured possibilities more horrific than even *he* could hope to inflict.

And then only three remained – those that had kept their senses about them – and he clawed his way along the outcroppings of a shattered bulkhead to watch them from above, to decide how they would die.

Two were the litter carriers, he saw, still struggling to bear their plunder. The third – a larger figure with a malformed bulge on his shoulders – guided them, his gun trained on their backs, supplanting their fear with the far more immediate threat of extinction. A large electoo – a spiral dissected by a stylised bolt of lightning – shimmered at the centre of his forehead: a crude symbol of authority.

A leader, then. Some avarice-riddled fool, more intent on preserving the fortune he'd looted than on preserving his own life. The hunter hissed to himself, happy to oblige.

He cast his nocturnal gaze through the morass of broken hullplates and smoking wreckage, sighting along the path his prey were taking, pondering the possibilities of an ambush. And then panic assailed him.

From here the full extent of the massive vessel's calamitous impact was clear to see. At its beak-like prow, now blunted and

smoothed to a sheen by the heat of its descent, it had clawed a scarred wedge of rock from the ground; an ethereal fist lashing at the earth. And there, hidden by curtains of dirty smoke at the edge of the crater, waited a transport. Old and decrepit-looking, for sure, striated with rusty lesions and labelled, bewilderingly, 'TEQO' in patchy glopaint, it was sleekly built nonetheless. If the thieves could reach it they would escape beyond even the hunter's ability to pursue.

Fighting nascent anxiety, digging talons into the buckled metal of his perch, the hunter howled into the shadows and leapt again. His leaps carried him in graceful arcs from roost to roost, gripping verticals and platforms for instants before relaunching, clawing his way along the spires and toppled towers of the ruined craft. For a moment the storm intensified, thick flurries masking the prey's clumsy progress, and the hunter worked his way through the squall with reckless abandon: body flattened, gracile armour cutting the air, jump pack spluttering. When at last the whiteout cleared he sought a vantage point, racing along the promontory of a collapsed sensor turret, and glared out towards the transport.

They were almost there. Clambering down from the edge of the prow, the thieves stood scant metres from their salvation, lifting their loot-stretcher with renewed vigour. The hunch-backed leader outpaced the two carriers and scrambled up the crater wall, swinging himself into the waiting vehicle's cockpit to start its engine. Even through the storm the hunter could hear the machine's growl, could taste the stink of its fuel. He launched himself one final time, overexerted muscles triggering cunning devices within his armour, pumping a slick of combat-stimms into his blood. He shivered with the rush of adrenaline that followed, watching the ground streak past below: a forest of crippled decks giving way to deep, endless grey. Snow by night.

The litter-bearers reached the crater-edge and hefted their burden onto their backs, steeling themselves for the awkward climb. The first hooked a glove into the broken rock and turned, nodding at his comrade, then scowled with a grunt of surprise as something tugged at his arm...

...which was no longer there.

Blood geysered across virgin snow and the stretcher collapsed to the floor, stolen treasures tumbling across the frost. Behind the man, steam rising from leering grille-ventilator, the hunter hissed and brandished the severed arm. He relished the growing fear, exulting in the horror written across these two fools' faces. The merest shrug and the first's heart was punctured, ribs incised like butter. The other ran; blindly, stupidly, away from the crater edge and into heavy snow, stumbling on a drift. The hunter hopped, vulture-like, onto his back, claws plucking at his flesh, and placed a taloned foot upon his head.

There was something pleasantly percussive in the crackling that followed.

Above him, beyond the caldera of the crash site, the transport pulled away. The hunter tensed to pursue – the stim boiling in his blood; crying out for more carnage, more terminal justice for the insult of the theft – but paused to reconsider. The haul of stolen goods had been reclaimed – scattered across the snow between its bearers' bodies – and he could not simply leave it where it lay on the flimsy promise of one last kill.

Breathing heavily, trying his best to regain calmness in spite of the stim, he turned to the discarded loot and began to search. The claws of his fists – sabre-like protrusions that dripped whorls of vibrant scarlet across the snow – retracted into patterned grooves with a silken rasp, pulling back to reveal gloved fingers beneath. On his knees, flicking aside the crumpled items of useless technology that had caught the thieves' eyes, he rummaged first in the weapons crates, fingering ornate bolters and shell clips, tapping at grenades, scavenging through packaging with increasing frustration. His search intensified: overturning crates, emptying priceless baubles and ancient technologies across the ice, breath accelerating with each moment.

The suspicion stole over him by degrees – a protracted wave of horror and shame – and he suppressed it over and over, pushing it down into his guts.

He couldn't fool himself forever.

'No!' he roared, claws snickering from their sockets like lightning, slicing through crates and gunmetal barrels, weaving a

flickering storm across snow and earth. 'It's not here! It's not here!'

The quickening effects of the stimm lasted half an hour, and when his rages and screams were all spent, when the bodies of the men he'd killed could be diced no further, when his claws steamed with bloody red vapour, when finally his mind cleared of the drughaze and began – at last – to awaken fully, only *then* did he think of the thieves' leader. The one that he had allowed to escape. The hunchback.

Or perhaps not a hunchback at all. Perhaps a man carrying a package securely beneath his furs, strapped across his broad shoulders.

Cheated, the hunter slumped to the snow and breathed icy air. Recollections filtered into him, delayed consciousness worked its bitter way through the dying embers of the rage, and piece by piece he accumulated the fragments of who he was. This second stirring, this fattening package of personality and past, stole over him in quiet degrees: a far more *human* awakening than the first.

His name was Zso Sahaal, the Talonmaster, the heir to the Corona Nox, and he had rescinded his humanity a long time before.

MEMORIES ASSAILED HIM: fragmentary and nonsensical. He gripped them as they rushed by, struggling to remember.

There had been a death.

That was how it began: an assassination and a power vacuum.

He remembered the promise that had been made to him: the legacy he was granted, the sacred vows he swore. He'd accepted a holy duty without hesitation, and at the moment of his ascension had stretched out a willing hand to receive it.

The Corona Nox had been his. Briefly.

There had been complications. There had been interventions. *Alien* interventions.

He remembered, through the riot of chattering bolters and screaming voices, in the rush of a psychic storm, the xenos. He remembered the pain and the confusion. He remembered the burning enemy, that brittle fiend, bright helm arched and antlered, staff banishing every shadow to extinction.

He remembered fleeing. He remembered the trap. He remembered the fissure in the fabric of nothing, sucking him down, swallowing him whole.

He had been caged within a timeless prison, and without hope of escape he had emptied his mind and slept. He'd stumbled through endless dreams, grappled with nightmares, and–

–and had awoken to discover the Corona gone.

The leader, yes. The so-called hunchback. *He* had taken it.

AN HOUR LATER, Zso Sahaal stood at the edge of the wreckage and regarded his vessel, the *Umbrea Insidior*, with a wistful eye.

The last time he'd admired her exterior had been from the cramped cockpit of a shuttle, rising towards her from the surface of Tsagualsa, on the eve of his final mission. Even then, gnawed at by impatience, he'd paused to admire her savage form. Artfully decorated in banks of ebony and blue, picked-through with bronze, her towers and minarets endowed upon her an almost ornate fragility.

It was, of course, an illusion.

Vulture-beaked and weapon-pocked, her generariums hulked from her stern like the head of a mallet, cannons decorating the hammer's grip with all the organic tenacity of barnacles upon a whale. Here and there her changing fortunes were transcribed in scars and healed abrasions; all the arts of the Adeptus Mechanicus focused upon improvement, strength, power. More obvious still were the revisions to her structure made by her latest masters: blades and icons arching from her pitted hull, intricate designs dappling her iron snout, stylised arcs of gauss lightning painted in harsh whorls across the darkness of her intricate surfaces.

She had been a strike cruiser, once. Fast and vicious, a fitting chariot for the mission he'd boarded her to fulfil. A vessel worthy of his captaincy.

And now?

Now she was a broken hag. Crooked ribs slumped from fractured expanses. Crevices gaped like whip-wounds where conflicting pressures had buckled and pierced her hull. Her great spine was broken, crumpled across half a kilometre of

steaming waste. Her beak had been thrust with such violence into the earth that her flanks had snapped, reactors sagging then pitching up and outwards, shearing vicious rents before detonating; their colossal energies vaporising what little substance had survived the atmosphere's passage.

Sahaal could barely imagine the calamitous impact. Were it not for the evidence of his own eyes – this pitiful thing smeared like metal paste across the ice – he would have doubted that such a vessel as the *Umbrea Insidior* could be brought so low.

*Oh, how the mighty are fallen...* Where had he heard that before?

It hardly mattered, now. There were more important things to consider. Priorities.

Pursuits.

There were no other survivors – of that he was certain. His inspection of the central corridors revealed nothing but dry bones and ancient fabrics: all that remained of the vassals that had crewed this once-proud ship. Now all as dead as she, and for a good deal longer. Sifting through storerooms, kicking aside mournful skulls, Sahaal began to wonder just how long had passed since his imprisonment began. Had his servants withered and grown old as he slept, as ageless as gold? Had they fallen to dust and ash around him, mayflies around a statue, or had they perhaps taken their own lives, forgoing the tedium of confinement for a swift, bloody release?

Again, he diverted his wondering mind. There would be time for speculation later, once his prize was reclaimed.

In the end his salvage was little better than had been the thieves'. Into a crate he upended as many ammunition clips as he could find, laying an ornate bolter reverentially on top. The looters had missed it when they'd raided the shattered remains of the armoury; never thinking to prise away the mangled sides of the strongbox at the armoury's core, where he had placed it.

It was named *Mordax Tenebrae* – the Dark's Bite. It had been hand crafted on *Nostromo Quintus* and was, in any material sense, priceless. As Sahaal ran an eye across its

familiar stock, its elaborately decorated chambers and skull-mouthed barrel, he found himself wishing that they *had* found it, that they'd stolen *it* in exchange for the one item that he could *not* abide to lose – the very item that had been taken.

It was an impressive weapon, certainly, and he'd maintained it with the respect its magnificence demanded. It had been a gift from his master, and such was his devotion that had it been a knife or a book or a lump of rock, he would have cherished it with an equal fervour. But still, but still...

Like any gun, like any crude projectile-vomiting apparatus, he thought it a clumsy tool: a thing of noise and desperation, of smoke and flame. For all its complexity, for all the care and artistry lavished upon it, it would never rival the purity of a blade.

It would never be as vital to him as the *Corona Nox*.

Into the crate it went, and along with a scattering of what random munitions and grenades he could find, and a rack of fuelcells for his armour, he took just one last item: a heavy rectangular package, stolen from the wreck's remaining generarium, glowing with a pestilent green tinge. This he loaded carefully between layers of foam, acknowledging that sometimes the precision of a blade would never be enough.

The crate hissed as he depressed its sealing rune, and as he gripped its iron handle he reflected that in another time such an ignoble thing as carrying luggage would have been unthinkable; the remit of the numberless slaves that tended to his every desire.

*How the mighty are fallen...* A simple phrase, whispering through his mind for a second time, like the ghost of an echo. He realised with a start that it was his master's voice he'd remembered, and with crystal clarity recalled the time, the circumstance, the sentiment.

It had been on *Tsagualsa*. On *Tsagualsa*, before the killer came. Gazing into the night, brows beetling together, ancient eyes clouded, Sahaal's lord had turned to him and smiled, and said those words, and in his voice Sahaal could taste his disposition.

Troubled. Bitter. Betrayed. *Haunted*.

'We shall be mighty yet,' Sahaal promised, words lost to the driving snow, fist clenched against his heart.

Lifting the crate to his side, he set his sights upon the faint shadows of the transporter's tracks, took one last glance at the *Umbrea Insidior*, and leapt into the night.

What terrible vengeance will the Lord of the  
Night wreak upon the hive-world of Equixus  
of ? Find out in:  
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