

DEAD SKY, BLACK SUN

Ultramarines • Book Three

A Warhammer 40,000 novel by Graham McNeill

EXILED FROM THE Ultramarines Chapter by Marneus Calgar, Captain Uriel Ventris ventures deep into the dreaded Eye of Terror to atone for his disgrace. There, Uriel must unleash the Emperor's vengeance upon the followers of the Dark Gods and bring His divine light to this area of darkness. But a far more terrible foe dwells within these worlds of insanity – the ancient Chaos Space Marine Legions! With dishonour behind him and certain death ahead, Uriel must gather every ounce of courage if he is to survive and regain his honour!



Graham McNeill hails from Scotland and narrowly escaped a career in surveying nearly five years ago to join Games Workshop's Games Development team, which, let's face it, sounds much more exciting. He's worked on loads of codexes since then, the most recent being Codex: Space Marines. As well as six novels, he's also written a host of short stories for Inferno! and takes on too much freelance work than can be healthy.

Dead Sky, Black Sun can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

Price £6.99 (UK) / \$7.99 (US)

Bookshops: Distributed in the UK by Hodder. Distributed in the US by Simon & Schuster Books.

Games & hobby stores: Distributed in the UK and US by Games Workshop.

UK mail order: 0115-91 40 000

US mail order: 1-800-394-GAME

Online: Buy direct care of Games Workshop's web store by going to www.blacklibrary.co.uk/store or www.games-workshop.com

PUBLISHED BY THE BLACK LIBRARY

Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK

© Games Workshop Limited 2004. All rights reserved.

Reproduction prohibited, in any form, including on the internet.

ISBN: 1 84416 148 x



*This is an excerpt from Dead Sky, Black Sun by Graham McNeill
published by BL Publishing, 2004.*

© Games Workshop Ltd, 2004. All rights reserved.

Reproduction prohibited, in any form, including on the internet.

*For more details email publishing@games-workshop.co.uk or go to the
Black Library website www.blacklibrary.com*

from DEAD SKY, BLACK SUN

URIEL KEPT HIS breathing smooth as he stepped through the last moves of his attack routine, every action in perfect balance and focus, his body and mind acting in absolute synchronicity. Slowly and deliberately, he performed the strikes, first his elbow then his fist striking an imaginary foe, keeping his movements precise. He kept his eyes closed, his stance light and balanced, with all parts of his body starting and ending their movements at the same time.

Completing his steps, Uriel took an intake of breath as his fists crossed before him, then exhaled, maintaining his concentration as he returned his arms smoothly to his sides, centring his power within himself.

He could feel the potentiality of the lethal force in his limbs, sensing the strength grow within him and feeling a calmness he had not felt in many weeks enfold him as he completed the last of the prescribed movements.

'Ready?' asked Pasanus.

Uriel nodded and shook his limbs loose as he dropped into a fighting crouch, fists raised before him. His former sergeant was much larger than him, hugely muscled and wearing a sparring chiton of blue cotton that left his legs and arms bare. Even though it had been nearly two years since Pasanus had lost his arm fighting beneath the world against an ancient star-god, Uriel still found his eyes drawn to the gleaming, silver-smooth augmetic arm that replaced his lost limb.

Pasanus wore his blond hair tight into his skull and though his face was capable of great warmth and humour, it was set in a deathly serious expression as they prepared to fight. Pasanus launched a slashing right cross towards his head and

Uriel swayed aside to avoid the blow. He deflected Pasanus's follow-up punch and spun inside his guard, hammering his elbow towards his opponent's throat. But the big man pivoted smoothly away and deflected Uriel's strike, pulling him off balance.

Uriel ducked beneath a scything punch and leapt backwards in time to dodge a thunderous kick to his groin. Despite his speed, the heel of Pasanus's foot still hammered into his side, and he grunted in pain as the breath was driven from him.

Uriel dodged away from the next blow, bouncing lightly on the balls of his feet as his opponent came at him again, blocking and countering everything Pasanus threw at him. The big man was faster than he looked and Uriel knew he could not avoid being hit forever. And when Pasanus landed a clean blow, very few got back up.

He threw murderous punches towards Pasanus, pivoting his hips and shoulders to get his full weight behind his blows, while ducking in to deliver rapid-fire punches to his opponent's ribs. Pasanus stepped back, untroubled by such strikes, and Uriel swiftly followed him, throwing a hooking punch at his head. It was a risky gambit and easily blocked, but instead of Pasanus's gleaming forearm coming up to block the blow, Uriel's fist smashed home against his right temple.

Pasanus stumbled and dropped to one knee, bright blood weeping from where the skin had split above his right eye. Uriel stepped away from Pasanus, dropping his fists and easing his breathing as he stared in puzzlement at the gash on his former sergeant's forehead.

'Are you all right?' asked Uriel. 'What happened? You could easily have blocked that.'

'You just caught me by surprise,' said Pasanus, wiping away the already clotted blood with his fleshy hand. 'I expected you to go for the legs again.'

Uriel replayed the last few seconds of their bout again in his mind, seeing again his and Pasanus's positions and movements as they sparred.

'The legs? I wasn't in a strong position to attack your legs,' said Uriel. 'If I wanted to attack from that position, I had to go for the head.'

Pasanius shrugged. 'I just didn't get my block up in time.'

'You didn't even try, not even with the other arm.'

'You won. What are you complaining about?'

'It's just that I've never seen you miss such an easy block, that's all.'

Pasanius turned away, picking up a towel from where it hung on the brass rail that ran around the circumference of the geodesic viewing dome Captain Laskaris had given over to them for sparring and training. The blackness of space filled the view from the dome: stars spread across it like diamond dust on sable. Reflected light from the distant star of Macragge glittered on the dome's many facets and cast a soft pall of ghostly light throughout the viewing bay.

'I'm sorry, Uriel, this whole situation has me a little... off balance,' said Pasanius, draping his towel over his augmetic arm. 'To be exiled from the Chapter...'

'I know, Pasanius, I know,' said Uriel, joining his sergeant at the edge of the dome. He gripped the rail as he stared through the toughened armaglass at what lay beyond.

The gothic, cliff-like hull of the bulk-transporter, *Calth's Pride*, stretched away into the darkness of space and beyond sight as the vessel journeyed from Macragge towards the Masali jump point.

URIEL STEPPED INTO his quarters, throwing his towel onto the gunmetal grey footlocker at the foot of his bed and walking into the small ablutions cubicle set into the steel bulkhead. He pulled off his sweat-stained chiton and hung it from a chrome rail, turning the burnished lever above the chipped ceramic basin and waiting for it to fill. He scooped up a handful of ice-cold water, splashing it over his face and letting it drip from his craggy features.

Uriel stared at the foaming water in the basin, its spray reminding him of his last morning on Macragge, kneeling on Gallan's Rock and watching the glittering spume in the rocky pool at the base of the Falls of Hera. He closed his eyes, picturing again the distant seas, shimmering like a blanket of sapphires beyond the rocky white peaks of the western mountains, themselves sprinkled with scraps of green high-

land fir. The sun was setting, casting blood-red fingers of dying light and bathing the mountains in gold. It had felt as though the homeworld of his Chapter had been granting him one last vision of its majesty before it was denied to him forever.

He would hold onto that vision each night as he lay down on his simple cot bed, recalling its every nuance of colour, sight and smell, anxious that it should not fade from his memories. The stale, recycled taste to the air made the memory all the more poignant, and the harsh, spartanly furnished quarters he had been allocated aboard the *Pride* were a fond reminder of his captain's chambers back on Macragge.

Uriel lifted his head and stared at the polished steel mirror, watching as droplets trickled like tears down his reflection's cheek. He wiped the last of the water from his face, the grey eyes of his twin watching him, set beneath a heavy, brooding brow and close-cropped black hair. Two golden studs were set upon his brow and his jawline was angular and patrician. His physique dwarfed that of the ordinary human soldiers who filled this enormous starship, genetically enhanced by long-forgotten technologies and honed to the peak of physical perfection by a lifetime of training, discipline and war. His arms and chest were criss-crossed with scars, but greater than them all combined was a mass of pale, discoloured flesh across his stomach where a tyranid Norn-queen had almost slain him on Tarsis Ultra.

He shuddered at the memory, turning and sitting on the edge of his bed, remembering his last sight of Macragge as the shuttle had lifted off from the port facility at the end of the Valley of Laponis. He had watched his adopted homeworld shrink away, becoming a patchwork of glittering, quartz-rich mountains and vast oceans that were soon obscured as the shuttle rose into the lower atmosphere.

Slowly the curve of the world had become visible, together with the pale haze that marked the divide between the planet and the hard vacuum of space. Ahead, *Calth's Pride* had been an ugly, metallic oblong hanging in space above the planet's northern polar reaches.

He had reached out and placed a gauntleted hand against the shuttle's thick viewing block, wondering if he would ever set foot on Macragge again.

'Take a good look, captain,' Pasanius had said gloomily, following Uriel's gaze through the viewing block. 'It's the last time we'll see her.'

'I hope you're wrong, Pasanius,' said Uriel. 'I don't know where our journey will take us, but we may yet see the world of our Chapter again.'

Pasanius shrugged, his massive armoured form dwarfing his former captain. The late Techmarine Sevano Tomasin had forged the armour upon Pasanius's elevation to a full Space Marine, its armoured plates composed of parts scavenged from suits of tactical dreadnought armour that had been irreparably damaged in battle.

'Perhaps, captain, but I know that I'll never lay eyes on Macragge again.'

'What makes you so sure? And you don't need to call me "captain" any more, remember?'

'Of course, captain, but I just know I will not return here,' replied Pasanius. 'It's just a feeling I have.'

Uriel shook his head. 'No, I do not believe that Lord Calgar would have placed this death oath upon us if he thought we could not honour it,' he said. 'It may take many years, but there is always hope.'

Uriel had watched his former sergeant, understanding his grim mood as his eyes drifted to the huge shoulder guard where the symbol of the Ultramarines had once been emblazoned. Like his own armour, all insignia of the Ultramarines had been removed following their castigation by a conclave of their peers for breaches of the *Codex Astartes* on Tarsis Ultra and they had taken the March of Shame from the Fortress of Hera.

Uriel sighed as he thought of all that had happened since he had first taken up his former captain's sword to take command of the Ultramarines Fourth Company; so much death and battle that was a Space Marine's lot. Battle-brothers, allies and friends had died fighting renegades, xenos creatures and entire splinter fleets of tyranids.

He sat back against the bulkhead, casting his mind back to the carnage the tyranids had wreaked on Tarsis Ultra. He still had perfect recall of the horrific battles fought on that ice-locked industrial world, the fury of the extra-galactic predators' invasion indelibly etched on his memories. The battles on Ichar IV – another world ravaged by the tyranids – had been terrible, but the gathering of Imperial forces there had been magnificent, whereas those assembled on Tarsis Ultra had been horrifically outnumbered, and only desperate heroism and the intervention of the legendary Inquisitor Lord Kryptman had brought them victory.

But it was a victory won at a cost.

To save the planet, Uriel had taken command of an Ordo Xenos Deathwatch squad – in defiance of his duty to his warriors and the tenets of his primarch's holy tome, the *Codex Astartes* – and fought his way to the heart of a tyranid hive ship. Upon the company's return to Macragge, Learchus, one of his most courageous sergeants, had reported Uriel's flagrant breaches of the *Codex's* teachings to the High Masters of the Chapter.

Tried before the great and good of the Ultramarines, Uriel and Pasanius had waived their right to defend themselves, instead accepting the judgement of Marneus Calgar to prevent their example passing down the chain of command. The penalty for such heresy could only be death, but rather than waste the lives of two courageous warriors who might yet bring ruin to the enemies of the Emperor, the Chapter Master had bound them to a death oath.

Uriel could vividly remember the evening they had set out from the Fortress of Hera, accepting the judgement of Lord Calgar and showing the Chapter that the way chosen by the Ultramarines was true. They were bound to the death oath that the Chapter might live on as it always had.

Chaplain Clausel had read verses from the Book of Dishonour and averted his eyes as Uriel and Pasanius marched past him towards the doors of the gatehouse.

'Uriel, Pasanius,' 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 huge doors swung open. He and Pasanus had stepped into the purple twilight of evening. Birds were singing and torchlight flickered from the high towers of the outermost wall of the fortress.

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

'Librarian Tigurius spoke with me last night,' he began, 'of a world that tasted of dark iron, with great womb factories of daemonic flesh rippling with monstrous, unnatural life. Tigurius told me that savage morticians – like monsters themselves – hacked at these creatures 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 as he had walked into the night.

The chilling vision of Librarian Tigurius could be anywhere in the galaxy, and though the thought of venturing into such a hideous place filled Uriel's soul with dread, part of him also relished the chance to bring death to such vile monsters.

It had been five days since the bulk lifter had broken orbit with Macragge and used its conventional plasma drives to journey to the Masali jump point.

All Uriel's enemies had been met blade-to-blade and defeated, yet here he and Pasanus were, aboard a vessel rammed to the gunwales with regiments of Imperial Guard bound for Segmentum Obscurus and the wars that had erupted in the wake of the Despoiler's invasion of Imperial space.

'Courage and honour,' he whispered bitterly, but there was no reply.

PASANIUS PRESSED THE point of his knife into the centre of his chest, the skin dimpling under its razor-sharp tip. The skin broke and blood welled from the cut, dripping down his chest before swiftly clotting. Pasanus pushed the blade deeper,

dragging the knife across the bulging pectoral muscle on the left side of his chest and cutting a long, horizontal slice in his skin.

He ignored the pain, altering the angle of the blade and cutting diagonally down towards his solar plexus, forming a mirror image of the cuts on the opposite side of his chest. Quick slashes between the heavy cuts formed the final part of his carving and Pasanus dropped the knife onto his bed, falling to his knees before the makeshift shrine set up on the floor beside his bed.

Candles burned with a scented, smoky aroma, flickering in the breeze wafting from the recyc-units and long strips of prayer papers covered in Pasanus's spidery handwriting lay curled at their bases. Pasanus lifted a strip of gilt-edged paper with bloody fingertips, reading the words of penance and confession written there, though he knew them by heart. He raised his gleaming bionic hand, spreading his fingers and placing it palm-down upon his bloody chest, cut with the form of an eagle with outstretched wings.

Pasanus dragged his hand down his chest, smearing the congealed blood across its gleaming metal while mouthing the confessional words written on the paper. As he finished the words, he lowered the paper into the wavering flame of the candle and held it there until it caught light. Hungry flames licked up the length of the prayer paper, greedily consuming the words written there and scorching the tips of his fingers black.

The paper crumbled to flaking, orange-limned embers, disintegrating in his hands and drifting gently to the floor. The last ember fell from his hand and Pasanus slammed his clenched silver fist into the wall of his quarters, punching a deep crater in the bulkhead.

He brought his hand up in front of his face to stare at the terrible damage. His metal fingers were cracked and bent by the force of the impact, but Pasanus wept bitter tears of disgust and self-loathing as he watched the tips of his fingers shimmer and straighten until not so much as a single scratch remained.

'Forgive me...' he whispered.

• • •

URIEL EJECTED A spent magazine from his bolter and smoothly slapped a fresh one into the weapon as another enemy came at him from the doorway of the building before him. He rolled aside as a flurry of lasbolts kicked up the sand and rose to a shooting position beside a pile of discarded ammo crates. The movement so natural he was barely conscious of making it, he sighted along the top of his bolter and squeezed off a single round, blasting his target's head off with one well-aimed shot.

Another shooter snapped into view on the building's parapet and he adjusted his aim and put another shell squarely through the chest of this latest threat. Pasanius ran for the building's door as Uriel scanned the upper windows and surrounding rooftops for fresh targets. None presented themselves and he returned his attention to the main door as Pasanius smashed it from its hinges in a shower of splinters.

Uriel broke cover and ran for the building as Pasanius gave him covering fire, hearing the distinctive snap of lasgun shots and the answering roar of a bolter. As he reached the building, he slammed into the wall. Pasanius hurled a grenade through the door before ducking back as the thunder of the explosion blasted from within.

'Go!' shouted Pasanius. Uriel rolled from his position beside the door and plunged within the smoke-filled hell of the room. Bodies littered the floor and acrid smoke billowed from the explosion, but Uriel's armour's auto-senses penetrated the blinding fog with ease, showing him two enemies still standing. He put the first one down and Pasanius shot the second in the head.

Room by room, floor by floor, the two Ultramarines swept through the building, killing another thirty targets before declaring it clear. Since the door had been broken down, all of four minutes had passed.

Uriel removed his helmet and ran a hand across his scalp, his breathing even and regular, despite a training exercise that would have had even the fittest human warrior gulping great draughts of air into their lungs.

'Four minutes,' he said. 'Not good. Chaplain Clausel would have had us fasting for a week after a performance like that.'

'Aye,' agreed Pasanius, also removing his helm. 'It is not the same without his hymnals while we train. We are losing our edge. I do not feel the necessity to excel here.'

'I know what you mean, but it is an honour to have the skills we do and it is our duty to the Chapter to hone them to the highest levels,' said Uriel, checking the action of his bolter and whispering the words of prayer that honoured the weapon's war spirit. Both men had offered prayers, applying the correct oils and rites of firing before even loading them. Such devotion to a weapon was common among the fighting men and women of the Imperium, but to a Space Marine his boltgun was much more than simply a weapon. It was a divine instrument of the Emperor's will, the means by which His wrath was brought to bear upon those who would defy the Imperium.

Despite his words, Uriel knew that Pasanius spoke true when he talked of losing their edge. Four minutes to clear a building of such size was nothing short of amazing, but he knew they could have done it faster, more efficiently, and the idea of not performing as well as he knew he could was galling to him.

Since he had been six years old and inducted to the Agiselus Barracks, he had been the best at everything he had turned his hand to. Only Learchus had equalled him in his achievements and the possibility that he was not the best he could be was a deeply disturbing notion. Pasanius was right – without the constant drilling and training they were used to as part of a Space Marine Chapter, Uriel could feel his skill diminish with every passing day they travelled from Macragge.

'Still,' continued Pasanius. 'Perhaps we need not be the best any more, perhaps we no longer owe the Chapter anything at all.'

Uriel's head snapped up, shocked at the very idea and shocked at the ease with which Pasanius had voiced it.

'What are you talking about?'

'Do you still feel that we are Space Marines of the Emperor?' asked Pasanius.

'Of course I do. Why should we not?'

'Well, we were cast out, disgraced, and are no longer Ultramarines,' continued Pasanus, staring vacantly into space, his voice wavering and unsure. 'But are we still Space Marines? Do we still need to train like this? If we are not Space Marines, then what are we?'

Pasanus lifted his head and met his gaze, and Uriel was surprised at the depths of anguish he saw. His former sergeant's soul was bared and Uriel could see the terrible hurt it bore at their expulsion from the Chapter. He reached out and placed his hand on Pasanus's unadorned shoulder guard.

Uriel could understand his friend's pain, once again feeling guilty that Pasanus shared the disgrace that should have been his and his alone.

'We will always be Space Marines, my friend,' affirmed Uriel. 'And no matter what occurs, we will continue to observe the battle rituals of our Chapter. Wherever we are or whatever we do, we will always be warriors of the Emperor.'

Pasanus nodded. 'I know that,' he said at last. 'But at night, terrible doubts plague me and there is no one aboard this vessel I can confess to. Chaplain Clausel is not here and I cannot go to the shrine of the primarch and pray for guidance.'

'You can talk to me, Pasanus, always. Are we not comrades in arms, battle-brothers and friends?'

'Aye, Uriel, we will always be that, but you too are condemned alongside me. We are outcast and your words are like dust in the wind to me. I crave the spiritual guidance of one who is pure and unsullied by disgrace. I am sorry.'

Uriel turned away from his friend, wishing he knew what to say, but he was no Chaplain and did not know the right words to bring Pasanus the solace he so obviously yearned for.

But even as he struggled for words of reassurance, a treacherous voice within him wondered if Pasanus might be right.

URIEL AND PASANIUS made their way back down through the bullet-riddled training building and the mangled remains of thirty-seven servitor-controlled opponents, their plastic and mesh bodies torn apart by the Space Marines' mass-reactive bolter shells. Exiting the training building, they made their way through the packed gymnasium, heading towards one of

the vessel's many chapels of veneration. With their firing rites complete, their rigidly maintained routine now called for them to make obeisances to their primarch and the Emperor.

The lights in the gymnasium began to dim, telling Uriel that the starship was close to entering its night-cycle, though true night and day were meaningless concepts aboard a starship. Despite that, Captain Laskaris enforced strictly timetabled lights out and reveille calls to more quickly acclimatise the passengers of *Calth's Pride* to the onboard ship time. It was a common phenomenon that many soldiers had trouble adjusting to life aboard a space-faring vessel; the enforced claustrophobia along with dozens of other privations caused by ship-board life resulting in vastly increased instances of violence and disorder.

But the regiments currently being transported within the ship's gargantuan hull had been raised in Ultramar, and those trained within the military barracks of the Ultramarines' realm were used to a far harsher discipline than that enforced by the ship's crew and armsmen.

The gymnasium was a vast, stone columned chamber, fully ninety metres from sanded floor to arched ceiling and at least a thousand wide. An entire regiment or more could comfortably train in shooting, close-quarter combat, infiltration, fighting in jungle terrain or the nightmare of city-fighting. These dedicated arenas were sectioned off throughout the gymnasium, fully realised environments where thousands of soldiers were receiving further training before reaching their intended warzone far in the galactic north-west. Row upon row of battle-flags hung from the ceiling, and huge anthracene statues of great heroes of Ultramar lined the walls. Stained-glass windows, lit from behind by flickering glow-globes, depicted the life of Roboute Guilliman as looped prayers in High Gothic echoed from flaring trumpets blown by alabaster angels mounted on every column.

'Good men and women,' noted Uriel as he watched a group of soldiers practising bayonet drills against one another.

Despite their discipline, Uriel could see many of the training soldiers casting confused glances their way. He knew that their armour, bereft of the insignia of the Ultramarines, would

no doubt be causing endless speculation amongst the regiments billeted within the ship.

'Aye,' nodded Pasanus. 'The Macragge 808th. Most will have come from Agiselus.'

'Then they will fight well,' said Uriel. 'A shame we cannot train with them. There is much they could learn and it would have been an honour for us to pass on our experience.'

'Perhaps,' said Pasanus. 'Though I do not believe their officers would have counted it as such. I feel we may be a disappointment to many of them. A disgraced Space Marine is no hero; he is worthless, less than nothing.'

Uriel glanced round at Pasanus, surprised by the venom in his tone.

'Pasanus?' he said.

Pasanus shook his head, as though loosing a quiet unease, and smiled, though Uriel could see the falsity of it. 'I am sorry, Uriel, my sleep was troubled. I'm not used to having so much of it. I keep waiting for a bellowing Chaplain Clausel to sound reveille.'

'Aye,' agreed Uriel, forcing a smile. 'More than three hours of sleep a night is a luxury. Be careful you do not get too used to it, my friend.'

'Not likely,' said Pasanus, gloomily.

URIEL KNELT BEFORE the dark marble statue of the Emperor, the flickering light from the hundreds of candles that filled the chapel reflecting a hundredfold on its smooth-finished surface. A fug of heavily scented smoke filled the upper reaches of the chapel from the many burners that lined the nave, smelling of nalwood and sandarac. Chanting priests, clutching prayer beads and burning tapers, paced the length of the chapel, muttering and raving silently to themselves while albino-skinned cherubs with flickering golden wings and cobalt-blue hair bobbed in the air above them, long lengths of prayer paper trailing from dispensers in their bellies.

Uriel ignored them, holding the wire-wound hilt of his power sword in a two-handed grip while resting his hands on the gold quillons. The sword was unsheathed, point

down on the floor, and Uriel rested his forehead on the carved skull of its pommel as he prayed.

The sword was the last gift to him from Captain Idaeus, his former mentor, and though it had been broken on Pavonis – a lifetime ago it seemed now – Uriel had forged a new blade of his own before departing on the crusade to Tarsis Ultra and his eventual disgrace. He wondered what Idaeus would have made of his current situation and gave thanks that he was not here to see what had become of his protégé.

Pasanus knelt beside him, eyes shut and lips moving in a silent benediction. Uriel found it hard to countenance the dark, brooding figure Pasanus had become since leaving the Fortress of Hera. True, they had been cast from the Chapter, their homeworld and battle-brothers, but they still had a duty to perform, an oath to fulfil, and a Space Marine never turned his back on such obligations, especially not an Ultramarine.

Uriel knew that Pasanus was a warrior of courage and honour and just hoped that he had the strength of character to lift himself from this ill disposition, remembering sitting in a chapel not dissimilar to this in one of the medicae buildings on Tarsis Ultra, vexed by torments of his own. He also recalled the beautiful face of the Sister of the Order Hospitaller he had met there. Sister Joaniel Ledoyen she had been called, and she had spoken to him with a wisdom and clarity that had cut through his pain.

Uriel had meant to return to the medicae building after the fighting, but had been too badly injured in the final assault on the hive ship to do anything other than rest as Apothecary Selenus struggled to remove the last traces of the tyrantid phage-cell poisoning from his bloodstream.

When he had been well enough to move, it was already time to depart for Macragge, and he had not had the time to thank her for her simple kindness. He wondered what had become of her and how she had fared in the aftermath of the alien invasion. Wherever she was, Uriel wished her well.

He finished his prayers, standing and kissing the blade of his sword before sheathing it in one economical motion. He bowed to the statue of the Emperor and made the sign of the

aquila across his chest, glancing down at Pasanus as he continued to pray.

He frowned as he noticed some odd marks protruding from the gorget of Pasanus's armour. Standing above him, Uriel could see that the marks began at the nape of Pasanus's neck before disappearing out of sight beneath his armour. The crusting of scar tissue told Uriel that they were wounds, recent wounds, instantly clotted by the Larraman cells within their bloodstream.

But how had he come by such marks?

Before Uriel could ask, he felt a presence behind him and turned to see one of the priests, a youngish man with haunted eyes, staring at him in rapt fascination.

'Preacher,' said Uriel, respectfully.

'No, not yet!' yelled the priest, twisting his prayer beads round and around his wrists in ever tighter loops. 'No, no preacher am I. A poor cenobite, only, my angel of death.'

Uriel could see the man's palms were slick with blood and wondered what manner of order he belonged to. There were thousands of recognised sects within the Imperium and this man could belong to any one of them. He scanned the man's robes for some clue, but his deep blue chasuble and scapular were unadorned save for their silver fastenings.

'Can I help you with something?' pressed Uriel as Pasanus rose to his feet and stood by his side.

The man shook his head. 'No,' he cackled with a lopsided grin. 'Already dead am I. The Omphalos Daemonium comes! I feel it pushing out from the inside of my skull. He will take me and everyone else for his infernal engine. Deadmorsels for his furnace, flesh for his table and blood for his chalice.'

Uriel shared a sidelong glance at Pasanus and rolled his eyes, realising that the cenobite was utterly insane, a common complaint amongst the more zealous of the Emperor's followers. Such unfortunates were deemed to exist on a level closer to the divine Emperor and allowed to roam free that their ravings might be grant some clue to the will of the Immortal Master of Mankind.

'I thank you for your words, preacher,' said Uriel, 'but we have completed our devotions and must take our leave.'

'No,' said the cenobite emphatically.

'No? What are you talking about?' asked Uriel, beginning to lose patience with the lunatic priest. Like most of the Adeptus Astartes, the Ultramarines had a strained relationship with the priests of the Ministorum; the Space Marines' belief that the Emperor was the mightiest mortal to bestride the galaxy, but a mortal nonetheless, diametrically opposed to the teachings of their Ecclesiarch.

'Can you not hear it, son of Calth? Juddering along the bloodtracks, its hateful boxcars jolting along behind it?'

'I don't hear anything,' said Uriel, stepping around the cenobite and marching towards the chapel's iron door.

'You will,' promised the man.

Uriel turned as a monotonous servitor's voice crackled from the electrum-plated vox-units mounted in the shadows of the arched ceiling, announcing: 'All hands prepare for warp translation. Warp translation in thirty seconds.'

The cenobite laughed, spittle frothing at the corners of his mouth as he raised his torn forearms above his head. Blood ran from his opened wrists and splattered his face before rolling down his cheeks like ruby tears.

He dropped to his knees and whispered, 'Too late... the Lord of Skulls comes.'

A spasm of sickness sheared along Uriel's spine as the last words left the cenobite's mouth and he stepped towards the man, ready to chastise him for uttering such blasphemies in this sanctified place.

The lights in the chapel dimmed as the ship prepared for warp translation.

Uriel dragged the young preacher to his feet.

And the cenobite's head exploded.

**What dangers lie ahead of Uriel to prevent him from fulfilling his death oath and returning to his chapter? Find out in:
DEAD SKY, BLACK SUN**

Also by Graham McNeill

NIGHTBRINGER

Ultramarines • Book One

NEWLY PROMOTED Ultramarines Captain Uriel Ventris is assigned to investigate Pavonis, an Imperial planet plagued by civil disorder and renegade eldar raiders. But nothing is as straightforward as it appears, and wheels are turning within wheels. Uriel and his allies are forced into a deadly race against time to destroy their shadowy enemy – or the whole planet must be sacrificed for the good of humanity.



WARRIORS OF ULTRAMAR

Ultramarines • Book Two

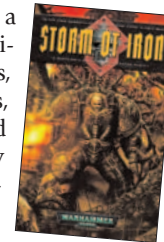


IN THE COLD darkness of space, the tyrannids travel from world to world, consuming all in a futile attempt to slake their hunger for bio-matter. Lying directly in their path is the industrial planet Tarsis Ultra, where Captain Uriel Ventris and the Ultramarines stand shoulder to shoulder with brother Marines from the Mortifactors Chapter. Uriel must accept the barbaric traditions of his allies and act against the ancient tactics laid down in the holy Codex Astartes in order to destroy the alien menace!

STORM OF IRON

A Warhammer 40,000 novel

IN A DARK and gothic future, humanity fights a constant battle for survival in a hostile universe. Now hell has come to Hydra Cordatus, for a massive force of terrifying Iron Warriors, brutal assault troops of Chaos, have invaded the planet and lain siege to its mighty Imperial citadel. But what prize could possibly be worth so much savage bloodshed and destruction?



— www.blacklibrary.com —