

SPACE HULK

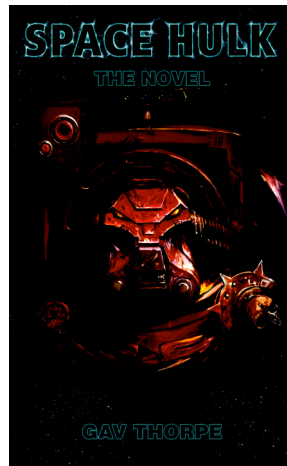
A Warhammer 40,000 novel

By Gav Thorpe

In the darkness of a derelict space hulk, the faith and fury of the Blood Angels are tested to the limit.

In this companion novel to the Space Hulk game, a battle is raging between Terminators of the Blood Angels Space Marines and a macabre alien race. But their resolve and skill is pitted against something that haunts their past – the thousands of foes they face are the same creatures that six centuries ago nearly decimated the Chapter.

As a survivor of the earlier massacre, Sergeant Lorenzo has more to prove than any other. Carrying the stigma of the failure, he now fights for personal deliverance and to redeem the Chapter's honour.



About the Author

Prior to becoming a freelance writer, Gav Thorpe worked for Games Workshop as lead background designer, overseeing and contributing to the Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 worlds. He has written numerous novels and short stories set in the fictional worlds of Games Workshop, including the Time of Legends 'The Sundering' series, the seminal Dark Angels novel *Angels of Darkness*, and the Last Chancers omnibus. He lives in Nottingham, UK, with his mechanical hamster, Dennis.

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The following is an excerpt from *Space Hulk: The Novel* by Gav Thorpe. Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

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Mission Time Post-Impact: 00.04.36

Darkness clung to the corroding bulkheads, thick and heavy with menace. Creaks and groans of contorting metal vied with the hiss of ancient pneumatics and drips from broken pipes. Something new and harsh broke the gloom and quiet of distant millennia: the metallic clump of heavy boots and star-bright rays of suit lamps.

Five huge figures strode purposefully through the confines of the derelict space hulk; Squad Lorenzo of the Blood Angels First Company. They were Terminators, the best of the elite Space Marines. All of them were giants, standing more than eight feet tall in their armour. Each prized artefact, these armoured suits were the heaviest worn by any soldier of the Imperium, made of layers of titanium and ceramite capable of withstanding the most punishing damage. In the freezing vacuum of space or the boiling depths of a volcano, the Terminators were the deadliest warriors of the Adeptus Astartes, their skill and courage proven over centuries of battle. They came expecting victory.

‘Containment underway,’ Sergeant Lorenzo reported. The idle chatter of the squad had died away as they had neared the enemy. All were now intent upon the mission.

‘The Blood Angels have returned,’ Captain Raphael’s voice crackled in Lorenzo’s ear. The signal was somewhat distorted, having been broadcast more than a thousand kilometres, from where the force commander monitored events aboard the orbiting strike cruiser Angel’s Sword. ‘For six centuries we have carried the burden of defeat, the stigma of failure. Now we redeem ourselves.’

Eighty Terminators of the Blood Angels were establishing a foothold aboard the space hulk. Their mission was simple: eradicate the alien threat. Several hundred metres behind Squad Lorenzo a cordon of veteran warriors guarded the impact site, where Techmarines and other support was being established. When all was ready they would advance on their foes. For the moment, however, Lorenzo and his warriors were out on their own.

The squad had been tasked with destroying the controls of a still-active bank of saviour pods. If the enemy were allowed to escape the space hulk aboard the lifeboats their infection could spread to other ships and distant worlds. That could not be allowed to happen. Such was the importance of containment, Lorenzo’s squad were considered expendable.

Heralded by the glare of their armour lights, the Space Marines advanced in single file along a winding concourse. The warriors’ suits of Tactical Dreadnought armour filled the narrow corridor, their massive shoulder pads occasionally scraping the metal walls. Their red livery shone bright in the light of the lamps, a

declaration of fearlessness and determination. The Blood Angels did not fight in the shadows.

The Terminators stomped forwards accompanied by the growl of servos and wheezing of fibre-bundles from their suits. At their head, Lorenzo's sensorium showed that the maze of corridors ahead was deserted. He adjusted the range to three hundred metres and caught his breath when the glowing image on his auto-senses tinged with a smudge of green at the limit of the sensor's range. He waited several seconds, but the image did not resolve into movement. The enemy were dormant.

'Section secure, pattern thetos,' the sergeant said, thumbing the activation stud on his sword.

The blade hummed into life, the actinic blue of its power field bathing the corridor with flickering light. In the double-circle glare of Lorenzo's armour lamps, the corridor was laid bare. The latticed decking was warped in places but unbroken, while the walls that lined the narrow passageway were made of bolted metal sheets corroded and pitted with decay. The only sound was the buzz of the power weapon, tramping boots and the wheeze of powered armour as the rest of the squad moved up into position behind their sergeant.

The sensorium signal still had not changed and Lorenzo advanced, bringing his storm bolter up to the firing position. He checked the magazine readout in his display: thirty-two rounds.

'Detecting an energy wave from starboard, brother-sergeant,' Valencio announced. 'Indeterminate distance. Possibly a cable or generator.'

‘Not of mission significance,’ said Lorenzo, slowing as he approached a junction with another corridor coming from the right. ‘Continue to advance.’

Swinging around, the beams of his lamps swaying across the walls, Lorenzo stared down the corridor and took two steps forward. Even with the suit lights, visibility was poor. Motes of rust and flaking paint drifted down from the ceiling and the contorted walls of the passage created strange shadows. Lorenzo scanned the scene looking for openings, his breathing calm, his mind focussed. The new passageway had two doors ahead: one on the right a dozen metres forward, another on the left thirty metres away. Deino strode across the junction behind the sergeant, his weapon covering the other approach.

‘Command deck, update on tactical mapping,’ Lorenzo said.

The comm buzzed for several seconds before the voice of one of the strike cruiser’s bridge technicians arrived in Lorenzo’s ear.

‘Nearly complete,’ the crewman said. ‘Transmitting data over link now.’

Lorenzo’s helmet display fuzzed blue for a second and then resolved into a clearer image as the scan data from the strike cruiser fused with the auto-senses of his armoured suit. A wire frame schematic was imposed over his vision and at a sub-vocal command an independent map appeared in his right eye. In places the map was indistinct or absent, the scanners of the strike cruiser unable to penetrate for some as-yet unknown reason. Lorenzo looked over the

layout of the surrounding rooms and corridors, whilst maintaining a vigilant gaze on the sensorium data with his other eye. The contact echoes still had not moved. The energy spike reported by Valencio was some distance away and of no importance.

‘Egress location now marked,’ a serf aboard the strike cruiser reported. Moments later the head-up display flickered as it updated itself. A blinking icon of a skull drew Lorenzo’s attention to a room some eighty metres ahead. This was the saviour pod control room, the squad’s objective. Lorenzo had been tasked with destroying the launch mechanisms, ensuring that their alien prey could not escape the hulk. It was standard combat doctrine: contain and annihilate.

From the map, Lorenzo could also see that the branch he was on led to a subset of rooms isolated from the main thoroughfare they were following. Sensorium data was blank and Lorenzo needed to know if there was an ingress route on their flank. Dozens of metres behind the squad more Terminators were setting up a defensive cordon around the breaching zone, but out here beyond the perimeter there were any number of ways the squad might be surrounded.

‘Valencio and Zael, with me,’ Lorenzo commanded.
‘Search and secure. Deino and Goriel, flank protection.’

Lorenzo strode forwards once more. Zael fell in behind the sergeant, the igniter of his heavy flamer sparking and stuttering. Valencio brought up the rear, keeping the standard five metre clearance.

Stopping two metres beyond the first door, Lorenzo settled into overwatch stance, legs braced, targeter set to wide focus. Behind him Zael turned and faced the door. Deactivating the field on his power fist, the Terminator flicked the door lever. With a screech, the door shuddered open halfway and then squealed to a stop. Zael grabbed the door's edge and hauled it sideways, his powered actuators pushing the door into its wall cavity with more shrieking protests from the ancient metal. Inside his helmet, the Terminator grimaced at the sound.

The room beyond was square, less than ten metres to a wall, and a further door lay open on the opposite side. Cracked tiles paved the floor, thick with grime. The walls had been crudely whitewashed at some point in the distant centuries but were now bare metal except for the odd patch of peeling paint.

'Movement!' Goriel's sharp warning echoed in everyone's ear.

00.05.97

The greenish fuzz on the sensorium net was shifting, resolving into individual signatures. They were rapidly closing in on the Terminators' position. The clump split into two groups, spreading out to the left and right. Lorenzo counted seven distinct movements heading towards him and five others circling to the other side of Deino and Goriel. Neither group's course seemed to comply with the schematic data.

‘Secure main corridor, continue sweep,’ Lorenzo barked.
‘Watch for entry points. Look for super- and sub-layer approaches.’

The sergeant pressed ahead towards the next door. Behind him Valencio followed, his gaze scanning left and right for breaches in the walls, floor and ceiling, checking that his sergeant’s rear quarter was protected. At the back, Zael clumped across the room and stopped at the open doorway, his heavy flamer directed down the corridor beyond.

‘Ceiling breach,’ Zael reported as he caught sight of a gaping crack in a heavy pipe that ran half the length of the fifty-metre corridor before turning sharply into a bulkhead.

The contacts on the sensorium were less than seventy-five metres away from Lorenzo, and within fifty metres of Deino.

‘Brothers, the enemy are at hand. Summon all of your resolve, and your animosity,’ Lorenzo told his squad.

The sergeant reached the door and swung around to face it. It was also activated by the pull of a lever and hissed out of sight with less effort than the previous one. Lorenzo stepped forwards as soon as the door was open, allowing Valencio to continue his advance along the corridor.

From a corroded grating in the floor ahead of Deino something fast and agile sprang into the corridor. It leapt towards the Terminator on bounding legs, four whip-muscled arms clawing at the passage wall as it righted itself. It had a bulbous, purple head. The rest of its body was covered in a dark blue chitin. Its eyes glittered in the lamps of Deino’s suit.

‘Visual contact!’ said Deino. ‘Confirm contact: genestealer.’

The creature had taken only three strides along the corridor when Deino opened fire. The passage rang with the clamour of the storm bolter’s roar. With alien quickness the thing leapt from one wall to the other, the Terminator’s initial burst of fire ripping a trail of detonations across bare metal. Another shape emerged from the darkness as the first hurtled forward with a lithe gait, digging the claws of its upper arms into the floor to increase momentum.

Deino’s second salvo caught the creature across the head and back, tearing bloody chunks from it. Thick blood splashed across the wall and floors. The second creature leapt over its fallen companion without hesitation and Deino fired again.

‘Confirmed kill, multiple targets approaching,’ Deino said calmly. He fired once more. ‘Threat minimal.’

00.06.18

‘Ingress!’ announced Zael, squeezing the trigger on his heavy flamer. A sheet of fire roared along the corridor, bathing the ceiling and the pipe with promethium fury. Something flailed in the inferno, soundlessly spasming as the cleansing fires melted through its carapace, flesh and bones. Charred bodies fell from the destroyed pipework. The adhesive promethium clung to the walls, coating the corridor with white-hot flames.

‘Cleanse and burn!’ Zael’s spirits soared as he saw the creatures incinerated.

‘Hold stance!’ ordered Lorenzo.

The staccato rhythm of Deino’s storm bolter rang through the corridors as he unloaded his weapon’s magazine into the onrushing tide of creatures boiling up from a crawlspace beneath the decking. The crackle of Zael’s heavy flamer sounded again as more creatures emerged in front of him.

The room Lorenzo found himself in was long and thin, with stone-lined walls carved with faint patterns. A vent in the far corner to his right blew out a steady stream of dust, which swirled through the beams of the sergeant’s lights as he stepped forward. There were no other doors.

Lorenzo was about to turn away when he noticed that the dust from the vent had stopped.

00.06.25

A warning tone sounded and one of the signals on the sensorium flashed red: imminent threat. A moment later the vent cover was smashed out and one of the aliens was propelling itself through the air towards Lorenzo. With no time to fire, the sergeant brought his power sword up to a parry position, slicing through an outstretched claw. The genestealer’s three other clawed hands gouged furrows across Lorenzo’s helmet and right shoulder guard, knocking him backwards a step.

‘Blood of Baal!’ spat Lorenzo as he lashed the power sword into the creature’s head, splitting it from cheek to neck in a fountain of gore.

A reflexive paroxysm caused the creature to snap its arms shut, clamping onto Lorenzo’s right arm, talons scratching at the outer ceramite layer of the sergeant’s armour. With a grunt, he smashed the body away with his storm bolter.

He looked down at the bloodied thing sprawled on the floor. It twitched with some vestigial remnants of life, despite its grievous wounds. Memories six hundred years old surfaced in the sergeant’s mind, images of the Blood Angels aboard another space hulk in a time that seemed an age ago. The beasts had taken a bloody toll in that campaign and the Blood Angels had teetered upon the precipice of annihilation. Lorenzo had been one of only fifty battle-brothers to survive the encounter. Those ashamed few had returned to Baal to lick their wounds like scolded curs.

Looking at the fanged monstrosity at his feet, Lorenzo felt a mixture of revulsion and shame, tinged with an almost unknown sensation: anxiety. Though he had fought gloriously for the Emperor for more than half a dozen centuries and across countless battle zones, the alien at his feet reminded Lorenzo of a time when he had been alone in the darkness. The Blood Angels had failed on that day and the stain of defeat hung heavily in Lorenzo’s mind.

There was only one response to the emotions vying for control of Lorenzo’s thoughts. Anger welled up inside him, a righteous ire fuelled by self-loathing and a deep hatred of the creatures he faced. The Blood Angels had been bloodied but not

destroyed. They had taken the shame of failure into their hearts and nurtured it. Over the long years and decades they took the rough ore of weakness and beat upon it with faith and resolve, honing it into a bright sword of admonition. From weakness came strength and from adversity came the desire to prevail. The sergeant raised an armoured boot and brought it down on the genestealer's head, crushing it to a pulp upon the floor. Thick blood oozed from under the Space Marine's magnetized sole and dribbled into the cracks between the tiles.

This time there would be no defeat, no retreat.

SPACE HULK: THE NOVEL can be purchased in all Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

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