

THE SOUL DRINKERS OMNIBUS

By Ben Counter

Genetically engineered superhumans, the Space Marines stand foremost among the warriors who protect the Imperium of Man. The Soul Drinkers have served the Emperor loyally for thousands of years, but their obsessive desire to retrieve an ancient relic throws them into conflict with those they are honour-bound to obey. Faced with an impossible choice, will this proud and noble Chapter back down, or rebel to forge a new destiny for themselves among the stars?



The Soul Drinkers Omnibus collects together the novels *Soul Drinker*, *The Bleeding Chalice* and *Crimson Tears* into one action-packed edition!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Counter is fast becoming one of Black Library's most popular authors. An Ancient History graduate and avid miniature painter, he lives near Portsmouth, England.

His other novels include *Galaxy in Flames* and *Daemonworld*.

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IN THE SILENCE of the vacuum the corvus assault pod tumbled towards the star fort, the curved metal of its hull studded with directional jets that fired once, steadying the descent. The pod had been fired on a trajectory that took it halfway across the orbit of the planet Lakonia, which hung bright and cold below. The battle cruiser which had housed it, along with the half-dozen other pods glinting against the blackness of space, was on the other side of the planet. No one in the star fort would have any idea they were coming. And that was just how the Soul Drinkers preferred it.

Inside the drop-pod, Sarpedon could hear only the soft song of the servitor choir and the gentle hum of armour. The battle-brothers were quiet, contemplating the fight to come and the many years of warfare that had forged them into the pinnacle of humanity.

They were thinking of Primarch Rogal Dorn, the father of their Chapter literally as well as figuratively, and his noble example they strove to follow. They thought of the favour the Emperor had bestowed upon them, that they might travel the stars and play their part in a grand plan that was too fragile and vital to place in the hands of lesser men. They had thought such things a thousand times or more, readying their minds for the sharp intensity of combat, banishing the doubt that afflicted soldiers falling below the standard of the Space Marines; of the Soul Drinkers.

Sarpedon knew this, for he felt the same. And yet this time it was different. This time the weight of history, which refined the Soul Drinkers' conduct into a paragon of honour and dignity, was a little heavier. For there was more at stake than a battle won or lost. Soon, when the fight was over, they would have reserved a place in the legends that were taught to

novices and recited on feasting nights.

The choir's delicate faces, mounted on brass armatures, turned to the ceiling of the corvus pod as the note from their once-human vocal chords rose. The Soul Drinkers Chapter used the mindless, partly-human servitors for all menial and non-skilled labour – those making up the choir were little more than faces and vox-projectors hardwired to the pod. Their presence was a tradition of the Chapter, and helped focus the thoughts of the battle-brothers on the battle to come.

They were close. They were ready. Sarpedon could feel the brothers' eagerness for battle, their concern for proper conduct and their scorn for cowardice, mixed and tempered into a warrior's soul. It shone at the back of his mind, so strong and unifying that he could receive it without trying.

The pod juddered as it encountered the first wisps of Lakonia's atmosphere, but the thirty battle-brothers – two tactical and one assault squad strapped into grav-ram seats, resplendent in their dark purple power armour and with weapons gleaming – did not allow their reverie to waver.

His brothers. The select band that lay between mankind's destiny and its destruction. The tune of the choir changed as the pod entered the final phase, almost drowning out the hiss of the braking jets. Sarpedon took his helmet from beside his seat and put it on, feeling the seal snaking shut around his throat. New runes on his retinal display confirmed the vacuum integrity of his massive armour. Every Space Marine had spent many hours on the strike cruiser observing the strictest wargear discipline, for they could be fighting in a near-vacuum before entry points were secured. He activated a rune on the retinal-projected display and his aegis hood thrummed into life. Handed down the line of senior Librarians of the Soul Drinkers, its lost technology warmed up to protect Sarpedon as he led his brother Space Marines into Chapter history.

Close. Closer. Even if the choir and the corvus pod's alert systems had not told him, he could have felt it. He could feel the star fort's bulk rearing out of the darkness, its bloated

shape creeping across Lakonia's green-brown disk as they approached. The braking jets entered second phase, and the grav-rams flexed to cushion the Marines' weight against the deceleration.

'Soul Drinkers,' came Commander Caeon's voice over the vox-channel, clear and proud. 'I need not tell you why you are here, or what is expected of you, or how you will fight. These are things you will never doubt.

'But know now that when the youngest novices or the most scarred of veterans ask you how you spent your time serving this Chapter, it will be enough to tell them that you were there the day your Chapter proved it never forgets a matter of honour. The day the Soulspear was returned.'

Good words. Caeon could tap into the hearts of his men, use the power of those traditions they held sacred to will them on to superhuman feats.

Lights flashed inside the corvus pod. The noise grew, the servitor choir matching its harmonies, a wall of sound growing, inspiring. The metallic slamming that rippled through the hull was the sound of the docking clamps forced out of their cowlings, ceramite-edged claws primed to rip through metal. Sarpedon could see the star fort fresh in his mind, planted there by the repeated mission briefings – it was ugly and misshapen, probably once spherical but now deformed. Docking corridors would be stabbing out from its tarnished surface, but the attack had been carefully timed.

There was no cargo on the star fort and no ships docked – no way out for defenders. The Van Skorvold cartel and its rumoured private army believed their star fort to be a bastion of defence, its weapon systems and labyrinthine interior protecting them from any attack. It was the Soul Drinkers' intent to turn the place into a deathtrap.

Long-range scans had only penetrated through the first few layers of the star fort. It had been difficult to plan an assault route when there could only be guesswork about what form the inside of the fort might take, so the mission was simple in principle. Go in, eliminate any opposition,

and find the objectives. Where the objectives were, or what that opposition might be, would be discovered as the mission unfolded by the leaders of the individual assault teams. In the case of Sarpedon's squads, that was Sarpedon himself.

There were three objectives. Primary objectives one and two were means to an end – that end was Objective Ultima, and its recovery would emblazon the names of every Space Marine here on the pages of Chapter history.

Sarpedon checked his bolter one last time, and clasped a hand round the grip of his force staff, the psyk-attuned arunwood haft warm to the touch. Faint energy crackled over its surface. The other Space Marines were making a last symbolic check of their wargear, too – helmet and joint seals, bolters. The plasma gun of Givrellian's squad was primed, its power coils glowing. Sergeant Tellos's assault squad, stripped of their jump packs for the star fort environment, unsheathed their chainswords as one. Sarpedon could feel Tellos's face behind his snarl-nosed helmet, calm and untroubled, with a hint of a smile. All Soul Drinkers were born to fight – Tellos was born to do so with the enemy surrounding him at sword-thrust range, daring to take up arms against the Emperor's chosen. Tellos was marked for great things, the upper echelons of Chapter command had said. Sarpedon agreed.

The choir suddenly fell silent, and there was nothing in the Space Marines' minds but battle. The docking charges roared in unison, and they hit.

THE CORVUS POD'S doors blew open and the air rushed out with a scream. The flesh on the servitor choir's faces blistered and cracked with the sudden cold. There was silence all around, save for the hum of the power plant in his armour's backpack and the almost-real sound of his brothers' minds, washing back and forth like a tide as they snapped through the orientation/comprehension routines that had been implanted on their minds during psycho-doc-trination.

Sight – the swirling smoke through the blast doors, fragments of ice and metal spinning. Sound – nothing, no air. Movement – none.

The Space Marines unbuckled their harnesses, ready to rush the breach. Tellos would lead them in, his men's chainswords primed to rip through the first line of defenders. Sarpedon would be in the middle of the tactical squads on their heels, ready to unleash the weapon that boiled within his mind.

Sarpedon only had to nod, and Tellos bolted through the breach.

'Go! Go! With me!' Tellos's young, eager voice broke the silence like a gunshot as his squad followed. Then the sergeant's breath was the only sound. Every Space Marine listened with augmented ears for the first contact with the enemy.

The tactical squads were unbuckled.

'Clear!' called Tellos.

The Tactical Marines plunged into the smoky breach, their power armoured bulks dropping through into the darkness. Givillian was in the lead, Brother Thax with the plasma gun at his shoulder. Sarpedon followed, bolter ready, force staff holstered behind his armour's backpack. As he ducked into the breach he caught sight of Lakonia, a glowing sliver of a world framed in the gap between the pod's docking gear and the star fort's hull. The pod had come in askant and the docking seal had not adhered, the atmosphere within the pod and immediate environment beyond venting out into the thin near-void.

An assault craft of lesser forces would have been forced to disengage then and there, its blast doors clamped shut, to drift vulnerable and impotent until second wave craft picked it up. But the Soul Drinkers cared nothing for such things – power armour's sealable environment made a mockery of the dangers of vacuum. And there would be no second wave.

The smoke cleared and Sarpedon got his first look at the star fort's interior. It was low-ceilinged to a warrior of his

superhuman height, dirty and ill-maintained – they had hit a derelict section, of which there were probably a great many in the fort. Oil and sludge had frozen on the pipes that snaked the ceilings and walls. They were at the junction of two corridors – one way was blocked by a lump of rusting machinery, but there were still three exits to cover or exploit. Two curved away into the dimness and one ended in a solid bulkhead door, guarded by half of Tellos's assault squad, ready to blow it with melta-bombs.

The lack of immediate resistance was explained by the two bodies. Probably maintenance workers, they were unprotected when the local atmosphere blew out. One had been thrown against a stanchion by the explosive decompression and had burst like a ripe seed pod, his blood bright like jewels of red ice on the floor and walls. The other was stretched pathetically along the corridor floor, mouth frozen mid-gasp, staring madly up at the breach with eyes red from burst blood vessels. Sarpedon's keen eyes caught the glint of an insignia badge on the body's grease-streaked grey overalls, a retinal rune flashing as the image zoomed in.

Stylised human figures, twins, flanking a golden planet.

The Van Skorvold crest.

The Tactical Marines fanned out around him, bolters ready, enhanced senses scanning for movement.

'Breach the bulkhead, sir?' Tellos voxed.

'Not yet. Flight crew, get that seal intact. I don't want any decompressions throwing our aim.'

'Acknowledged,' came the serf-pilot's metallic voice from within the corvus cockpit. Vibrations ran through the dull metal grating of the floor as the clamps edged the docking seal true to the breached hull.

Sarpedon contracted a throat muscle to broaden the frequency of his vox-bead. 'This is Sarpedon. Squads Tellos, Givillian and Dreo deployed. Nil contact.'

'Received, Sarpedon. Confirm location and move on mark.' The voice was Commander Caeon's from his position some way across the bloated bulk of the star fort. Along with Caeon, Sarpedon and their squads, six more corvus

ship-to-orbital assault pods had impacted on the spaceward side of the star fort and disorganized their elite Soul Drinkers complements. Three more were following carrying the remaining apothecaries and Tech-Marines, along with a platoon of serf-labourers kitted out for combat construction duty, ready to support their brethren and consolidate the landing site bridgeheads.

Three whole companies of Soul Drinkers. A battlezone's worth of the Emperor's chosen soldiers, enough to face any threat the galaxy might throw at them. But for the prize that shone deep within the star fort, it was worth it.

Sarpedon pulled a holoslate from a waist pouch and flicked it on. A sketchy green image of the corridors immediately surrounding his position flickered above the slate, with lines of data circling it. The star fort was based on a very old orbital defence platform, and the platform's schematics had been supplied in case any of the assault pods hit a section of the original platform.

'Subsection delta thirty-nine,' he voxed. 'Redundant cargo and personnel route.'

'Received. Consolidate.'

Sarpedon's fingers, dextrous even within the gauntlet of purple ceramite, touched runes along the holoslate's side and the corridor system was divided into blocks of colour, marking the different routes out of their position. Crosshairs centred on a point that flashed red, indicating the convergence of the three routes two hundred metres further into the fort. Barring enemy concentrations elsewhere, their immediate objective was the primary environmental shaft head, a grainy green curve at the edge of the display. Once taken, it gave the Marines an option for a larger thrust into the oxygen pumps and recycling turbines, and then through the mid-level habs into the armoured core that surrounded primary objective two. A messenger rune flickered on his retinal display, indicating the docking seal had achieved integrity.

'By sections!' he ordered on the squad-level frequency, indicating the holo to his squad sergeants. 'Tellos, the bulkhead. Dreo, left, Givrillian right, with me. Cold and fast, Soul

Drinkers!

The squads peeled off into the darkness, leaving two Space Marines from each of the tactical squads to hold the bridge-head and cover the arriving specialists assigned to Sarpedon's cordon. There was the thud of melta-bomb detonations and the whump of air re-entering the area as the bulkhead fell.

Sarpedon led Givrillian's unit through the side corridor into a cargo duct, broad and square, with a heavy rail running down the centre for crate-carts or worker transports. Thax swept beyond the entrance.

'Nothing,' he said.

'Unsurprising,' said Sarpedon. 'They weren't expecting us.'

No one ever did. That was how the Soul Drinkers worked. Cold and fast.

They felt the faint report of bolter-shots in the thinned air. 'Contact!' came Dreo's voice.

Sarpedon waited, just a moment.

'Enemy down,' said Dreo. 'Half-dozen, security patrol. Autoguns and flak armour, uniforms.'

'Received, Sergeant Dreo. Proceed to rendezvous junction.'

'Mutants, sir.'

Sarpedon's skin crawled at the mere concept, and he could feel the disgust of his brothers. The evidence of illegal mutant dealing had been damning enough, but there had been stories that the Van Skorvold cartel had skimmed off the most useful of their illicit cargo and formed them into a private army. Now it was certain.

'Move the flamer to the rear and burn them. Squads, be aware, mutations include enhanced sensory organs. Some of those things might see as well as you. And there will be more.'

Degenerate, dangerous individuals but cowardly at heart. His powers would work well on such foes. But first they had to find them.

'Heavy contact, cargo hub seven!' Luko's callsign flickered. Luko's squad was part of the strikeforce from another corvus pod, one which had come down nearby and just before Sarpedon's. Sarpedon knew Luko would be itching to tear into some miscreant flesh with his power claws, and it was right that

he should the first into the bulk of the enemy.

'Sarpedon here, do you request support?'

'Greetings, Librarian! Come on over, the hunting is good!' Luko always had a laugh in his voice, never more so than when the foe dared show its face.

Givrellian led them down a side-duct, cutting across the unassigned sectors delta thirty-eight and thirty-seven. A flash of the holoplate showed Luko's auspex data – red triangles, unknown signals, skittering across the edge of delta thirty-five.

'Dozens, sir,' said Givrellian.

'I can see that, sergeant. Suggestion?'

'Tellos'll be there first, so their first line will be engaged. We go in with light engagement fire pattern, get in right amongst them. Don't let them get dug in.'

'Good. Do it.'

They all heard Tellos as he called upon his brother assault troopers to slay for the Emperor and for Dorn, and the familiar sound of chainblade into flesh. The bolter-fire from Luko's squad stitched a pattern of sound into the air every Marine had heard a million times before. Givrellian burst through an open hatchway into the cargo hub that made up sector delta thirty-five, picked a target and loosed off a handful of shots from his bolter. Thax was a footstep behind and a pulse of liquid plasma-fire burst white hot from the muzzle of his gun, power coils shimmering.

Sarpedon cocked his bolter and followed, and saw the enemy for the first time.

The hub had once been dominated by the tracks at ceiling-level, which moved huge crates of cargo around the immense room between the duct entrances and pneumo-lifters. The forest of uprights which had held up the system had mostly collapsed or fallen askew with age and poor maintenance, and it was these that the mutants were using for cover.

In that split-second Sarpedon picked out a hundred unclean deformities – hands that were claws, facial features missing or multiplied or rearranged, spines cruelly twisted out of shape, scales and feathers and skin sheened with ooze.

They had autoguns, some las weapons, crude shotguns. There were implanted industrial cutters and saws, and some with just brute strength, all in ragged stained coveralls in the uniform dark green bearing the Van Skorvold crest.

There must have been a thousand of them in there, crowds of baying mutants behind their makeshift defences. Their leaders – those with the most horrific mutations, some with massive chitinous talons or vast muscle growth – had either communicators or slits at their throats that indicated crude vox-bead implants. This was an organised foe.

Tellos's men were vaulting the first barricades and laying in with chainswords – limbs lopped off, heads falling. The sergeant himself was duelling with something hulking and ugly that wielded a recycler unit's harvester blade like a longsword. If it wasn't the leader the creature would at least form a lynchpin of morale for the degenerates that crowded around it – Tellos was good, seeking out the target that would damage the enemy most if eliminated, using his duelling skill to the maximum. If he took a fine trophy from the beast, Sarpedon would put in a word for him to keep it.

It took Sarpedon half a second to appreciate the situation and decide on his plan of action. The enemy had overwhelming strength and the Soul Drinkers had to neutralise the threat before a proper line of defence could form. Therefore they would attack the enemy's prime weaknesses relentlessly until they broke.

He loosed a couple of shots into a crowd of mutants and workers that were sheltering behind mouldering cargo crates from Luko's pinning fire. The bolter's kick in his hand felt good and heavy, and somewhere in the heart of the enemy two red blooms burst – a stream of autogun fire crackled towards him and he ducked back into cover.

First blood. Sarpedon had made his mark on the battle and could join with his brothers in pride at its execution, according to the Chapter traditions.

'Givrillian, sweep forward and engage. Watch for Luko's crossfire. I will follow.'

'Yes, sir.' Sarpedon could hear the smile in the sergeant's

voice. He knew what was coming.

Sarpedon slammed back-first against an upright stanchion for cover while he focused. The enemy's weakness was moral – there might be many hundreds of them but they were degenerates and weak in mind, not least those untainted by mutation's stain but who nevertheless stooped to associate themselves with the unclean. His augmented hearing picked out the grind of chainblade against bone above the gunfire, as Tellos wore down the mutant he had sought out. The beast's death would weaken the enemy's capacity to fight. Sarpedon would finish it off.

Givrellian's squad flowed around him and he heard the plasma gun belch a wave of ultraheated liquid into the enemy flank, skin crackling, limbs melting.

What did they fear? They would fear authority, power, punishment. That was enough. He shifted the grip on his bolter so he had a hand free to draw the arunwood force staff from its leather scabbard. Its eagle-icon tip glowed as its thaumocapacitor core flooded with psychic energy. He concentrated, forming the images in his mind, piling them up behind a mental dam that would burst and send them flooding out into reality. He removed his helmet and set it on a clasp at his waist, taking a breath of the air – greasy, sour, recycled.

He stepped out into the battlezone. Givrellian's squad had torn the first rank of mutants apart, and they were now crouched in firepoints slick with deviant blood as return fire sheeted over their heads. Mutant gangs were scuttling and slithering through the debris, moving to outflank and surround them. Tellos had the beast-mutant on its knees, one horn gone, huge blade chipped and scarred by the assault sergeant's lightning-quick chainsword parries.

Sarpedon strode through it all, ignoring the autoshells and las-blasts spattering across the shadowy interior of the hub.

He spread his arms, and felt the coil of the aegis circuits light up and flow around his armoured body. He forced the images in his head to screaming intensity – and let them go.

The Hell began.

The closest mutants, at least two hundred strong, were thirty metres away, firefighting with Givrillian's Marines. Their firing stopped as they stared around them as tall shrouded figures rose from the floor, carrying swords of justice and great gleaming scythes to reap the guilty. Some bolted, to see hands clawing from the shadows, hungry for sinners to crush.

Bat-winged things swooped down at them and the mutants ran screaming, knowing their doom had come to punish their corruption at last. They heard a deep, sonorous laughter boom from somewhere high above, mocking their attempts to flee. The waves of fire broke as the mutants fled back through their own ranks, sowing disruption amongst their own for a few fatal seconds.

Sarpedon leapt the barricade with the nearest of Givrillian's Marines and stormed across to the mutant strongpoint. Most of the enemy still gawped at the apparitions boiling out of the darkness. A swing of his force staff clove through the closest two at shoulder height – he could feel their feeble lifeforces driven out of their bodies even as the staff tore through their upper bodies with a flash of discharging energy. The burst of psychic power knocked three more off their feet and they landed hard, weapons dropped.

The Hell. A weapon subtle but devastating, striking at the minds of his enemies while his brother Marines struck their bodies. In the swift storming actions that the Soul Drinkers had made their own, it bought the seconds essential to press home the assault. It worked up-close, in the guts of the fight, where a Soul Drinker delighted to serve his Emperor.

Three of Givrillian's Marines, more than used to Sarpedon's conjurations after years of training and live exercises, pointed bolter muzzles over the mutants' makeshift barricade and pumped shells into the fallen, blasting fist-sized holes in torsos. Several more Space Marines knelt to draw beads on the hordes of mutants thrown into confusion by the sudden collapse of their front line. Shots barked out, bodies dropped.

A tentacle flailed as its owner fell. Something with skeletal wings jutting from its back was flipped into a somersault as a

shell blew its upper chest apart.

Sarpedon stepped over the defences and swung again, swiping a worker/soldier in two at the waist as he tried to scramble away. Givrillian appeared at Sarpedon's shoulder, his bolter cracking shots into the backs of fleeing enemies. Assault Marines leapt past them and sprinted towards the mutants ranged towards the back of the hub. Tellos's armour was slick with black-red gore.

A hand clapped Givrillian's shoulder pad – it was Luko. In an instant the two tactical squads had joined up to form a fire line and chains of white-hot bolter fire raked around the Assault Marines, covering them as they did their brutal work. Some mutants survived to flee – most died beneath the blades of Tellos and his squad, or hammered by the fire from Givrillian and Luko. Their screams filled the hub with the echoes of the dying.

The enemy had broken completely and the spectres of the Hell strode amongst the panicking mutants as the Marines slaughtered them in their hundreds.

It was how the Soul Drinkers always won. Break an enemy utterly, rob him of his ability to fight, and the rest was just discipline and righteous brutality.

Givrillian caught Luko's hand in a warrior's handshake. 'Well met,' he said. 'I trust your men are blooded?'

Givrillian removed his helmet, glancing around. 'Every one, Luko. A good day.' Givrillian had lost half his jaw to shell fragments covering the advance on the walls of Oderic, and he scratched at the swathe of scar tissue from cheek to chin. 'A good day.' He looked out to where Tellos's Marines were picking their way across the heaps of mangled dead. The kill had been immense. But now, of course, the whole star fort would know they were here.

'Sergeants, your men have done well thus far,' said Sarpedon. 'We must not give the enemy pause to recover. How are we for an advance on objective two?'

'The cargo ducts to port look better-maintained,' replied Luko, gesturing with his clawed hand. 'Enemy forces will be using them soon. If we bear to starboard we'll avoid contact

and give them less time to form a defence around the shell.'

Sarpedon nodded, and consulted the holoslate on the speediest route to the sphere. As the other Soul Drinker units thrust deeper into the star fort their hand-held auspex scanners were piping information about the environment to one another, so each leader had a gradually sharpening picture of the star fort's interior. The holoslate display now showed a wider slice of the star fort, and several paths through the tangle of corridors and ducts were tagged as potential assault routes towards primary objective two.

Intelligence on the objective was slim. Its most likely location was a shell, an armoured sphere suspended in the heart of the station, two kilometres from their position. The star fort had once been an orbital defence platform, and the shell had protected its command centre – barely large enough for one man, the Van Skorvolds were probably using it as an emergency shelter.

Primary objective one was being dealt with by forces under Commander Caeon himself – responsibility for objective two fell to Sarpedon. This was to enable him to make command decisions regarding the use of his psychic powers, which were considered essential in an environment such as the star fort. Sarpedon absolutely would not countenance a failure to take objective two, not when the prize was so great. Nor when Commander Caeon had given the responsibility to the Librarian when he could easily have picked a company captain or Chaplain for the role.

Once the two primary objectives had been taken, the information gleaned from them should be enough to allow for the final thrust on to the Objective Ultima.

And if it was Sarpedon who took the prize... He fought here for the Chapter, for the grand plan of the Emperor of Mankind, and not for himself. But he would be lying if he told himself that he did not relish the chance to see the true object of their attack first, to take off his gauntlet and hold it as Primarch Dorn had done.

The Soulspear. For the moment, it was everything.

'We pull Dreo's squad back from the environment shaft,' he

began, red lines indicating paths of movement on the holoslate's projection. 'They are our rearguard. Tellos takes the lead into the starboard ducts and through the habs.' The holoslate indicated a series of jerry-built partitions, possibly quarters for lower-grade workers, possibly workshops. 'There's a channel leading further in, probably for a mag-level personnel train.'

'We could take it on foot if we blow the motive systems,' added Givrellian.

'Indeed. There's a terminus a kilometre and a half in. Our data thins out there, so we'll meet up with the rest of the secondary force and work out a route from there. Questions?'

'Any more of those?' asked Tellos, jerking a thumb at the steaming, bleeding hulk that he had left of the mutant-beast.

'With luck,' said Sarpedon. 'Move out.'

The secondary elements – an apothecary, Tech-Marine and dozen-strong serf-labour squad – were already arriving at the beachhead near the hull. Sarpedon voxed the Space Marines left stationed there to join up with Dreo at the rendezvous point and follow his advance.

The Space Marine spearhead moved out of the cargo hub at a jog, leaving thousands of mutant corpses gradually bleeding a lake of blood across the floor. It had been slightly over eight minutes since the attack began.

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