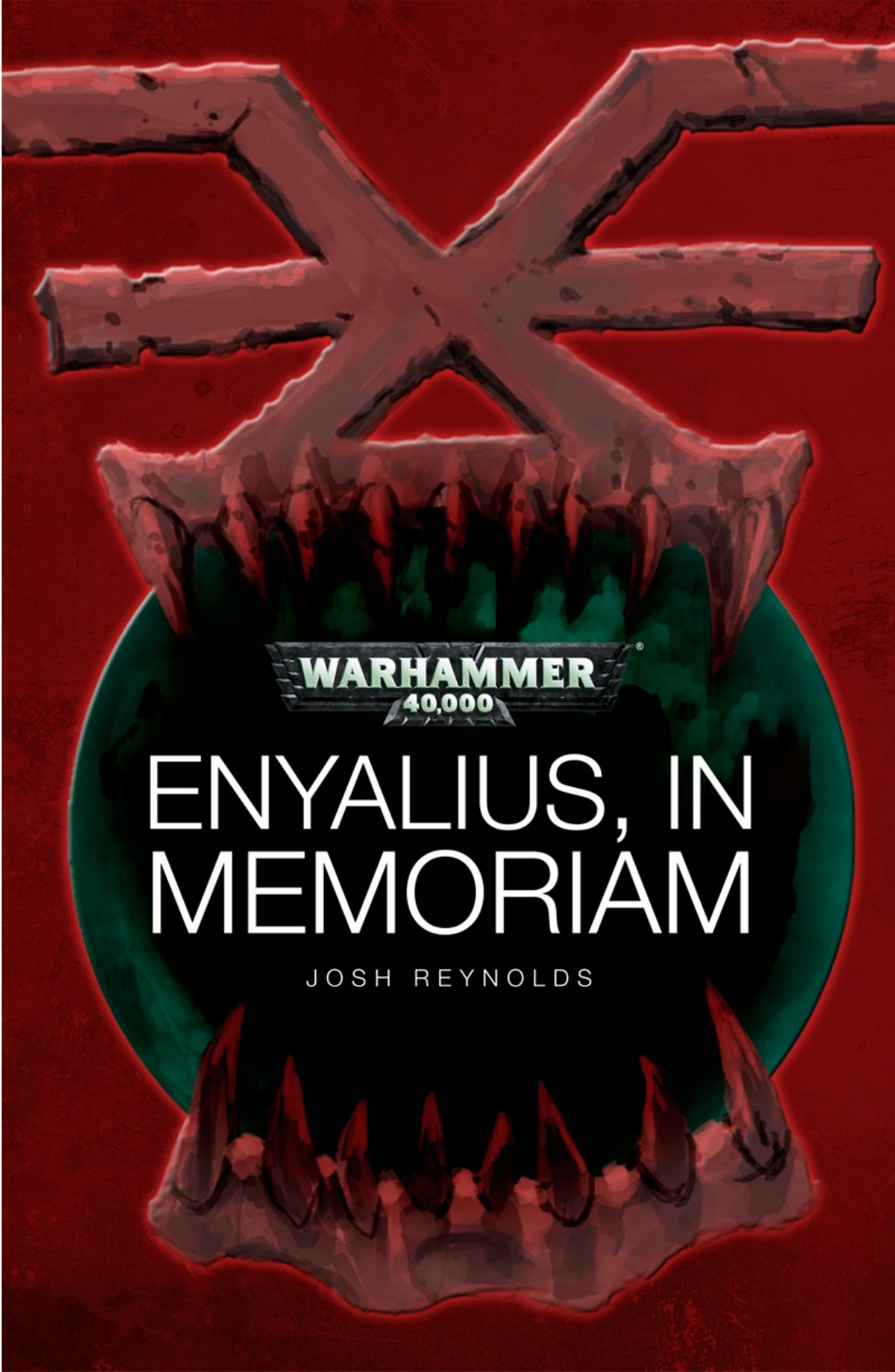




WARHAMMER
40,000

ENYALIUS, IN MEMORIAM

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Josh Reynolds

Marakitedes, *dimachurias* of Gladiator Group 685, drove the blade of his chainaxe into the hull of the Gladius frigate, anchoring himself and his burden as the wounded vessel succumbed to gravitational acceleration and began to turn in its death throes. Gouts of fire erupted from the ragged wounds that marked its blue and silver hide, and were quickly snuffed by the numbing void. There was no sound to accompany this surrender to inevitability; merely the silent quiver of distressed hull plating, which vibrated up through the soles of his boots and set off a ripple of pleasure in the red canyons of his mind.

Some sliver of the man he had once been, before Ariggata, before Isstvan, before Skalathrax, knew that there were at least twenty thousand crewmembers aboard the vessel he clung to, as well as a small contingent of Ultramarines. But all he could think of, with the gnawing agony of the Butcher's Nails biting into his jumbled thoughts, was that there were twenty thousand skulls waiting to be harvested, by axe or otherwise. Twenty thousand souls to lay at the feet of his friend and brother, Joyful Enyalius, so that he might not kneel before the Skull Throne empty-handed.

He reached up and stroked the bloody remains of that worthy – Joyful Enyalius, the Scarlet Laughter, now reduced to a mere lump of dead meat, a flayed and charred skull, torn raggedly free of its mooring and lashed to his chest-plate by its scalp and ligaments, and in most unworthy circumstances for one of Angron's chosen sons. The bridge of their own vessel, the frigate *Rawhead*, had been struck by a lucky shot, and the explosion that had torn through it as a result had carried Enyalius prematurely from the fields of slaughter. It had not been met, that death. It was not beautiful enough, not appropriate enough, not *right*. Enyalius had not even wetted his axe. It had been as if some unseen enemy were trying to keep him out of the battle, and that was

a travesty that could not be borne by his brothers in Gladiator Group 685.

The red shapes of the latter – those who were left, at any rate – clambered across the hull around him, drawing his attention. His slaughter-brothers were carrying out the last dying frenzy of a brotherhood that had carved a paean to massacre across the segmentum. They tore at the hull plating, seeking entrance, or trudged towards the gaping holes the *Rawhead* had managed to open in the unfeeling flesh of the enemy before the two frigates had collided above the grey world that turned slowly below them. Marakitedes did not know its name, or even why they had come. There was a war in heaven – battle cruisers and frigates duelled in silence all around them, and weapons batteries flickered, splitting the void with soundless thrusts of lightning.

Whose side were they on this time? Whose whims had brought them here? Enyalius had known – he had always known such trivialities. That had been his duty as their captain and brother, to know and remember the things they could not. All Marakitedes cared about was the fight before him. Nonetheless, the thoughts whirred at the back of his mind like the wings of a trapped bird, demanding attention. He shook them off, shedding his concerns with an ease born of practice. The nails helped with that. The pain gave him focus, like a docking light, showing him the path to take to reach his destination.

The ship shuddered beneath him. The engines, he thought. There was a flare of light, almost blinding in its intensity, and he felt the cruiser vent its guts into the void. *Rawhead* had died, but in its death it had done for its enemy. The crew had responded eagerly to his orders to drive forward and engage the enemy who had stolen Enyalius's glory. Too eagerly, in fact. They had rammed the enemy frigate. The explosions that had ripped through *Rawhead* had consumed the crew and most of Marakitedes's slaughter-brothers. Only a few of them had managed to make it to the boarding pods as their vessel came apart around them. Now, they were trapped on the hull of the enemy ship, as it fell, dragged to its doom by *Rawhead*'s carcass. There was no place they'd rather be, of course, but still – he could almost hear the chiding cluck of Enyalius's tongue.

Stars and burning attack ships wheeled about over Marakitedes's head in a silent gavotte. For a moment, some quiet part of him was reminded of a time long past, when he stood in the nave of a cathedral world beneath a fresco of indescribable beauty that spread for miles in every direction. They had listened to the words of fire and blood that thundered forth from the lips of the Red Angel's brother, Lorgar. Those words had sunk into their hearts and souls the way the nails had their brains, and they had roared and roared and roared until

Marakitedes's voice was spent.

They had been warring with the sons of Ultramar then, as well, and had burned their worlds and killed their kin so as to show them the depths of their contempt. He had fought side-by-side with Enyalius then for the first time, and they had become as brothers, shedding blood together on the sands of war. Joyful Enyalius, who laughed as he killed and took equal pleasure in the sound of an axe striking flesh and a joke told through bloodstained teeth.

Marakitedes howled with laughter as he caught sight of blue-armoured shapes advancing across the hull, weapons at the ready. The Ultramarines had come to stop them from gaining entrance to the ship, or maybe simply for a dram of vengeance for their inevitable death. It mattered not – all that was important was that they were here before him, a sure sign of Khorne's pleasure.

'They come to us, brother,' he said, tearing Enyalius's skull from the front of his cuirass. 'See how they come to give you the honour due to you.' He held the skull aloft by the dangling tubes and connection nodes of the Butcher's Nails, so that his brother might see the enemy with boiled and blind eyes. Marakitedes didn't care that the ability to see had fled along with Enyalius's life. 'Come, dogs of Macragge! Come, highriders! Come to us so that we might collect your offerings with all due haste. Joyful Enyalius waits, and Khorne grows impatient!'

Marakitedes gestured with his axe towards the Ultramarines. 'See them, brothers. See these puling princes of marble palaces and orchards,' he snarled into the seething crackle of the open vox channel. 'See how they sacrifice themselves to Enyalius's memory. Let us thank them properly!'

His brothers roared and snarled unintelligible agreement and, as one, the World Eaters charged forwards, towards the waiting Ultramarines, hurtling the communications nodes and sensor pods that beppled the ship's hull like wolves at the chase. Marakitedes thumbed the activator switch of his chainaxe as he closed with the enemy. The cruiser tilted and he smoothly compensated for the sudden shift of the hull beneath his feet, sliding slightly and barrelling forwards into an Ultramarine.

His chainaxe spat sparks as it crashed down on his opponent's shoulder-plate. The Ultramarine was armed with a chainsword and the whirring teeth of his blade bit into the corroded mass of hoses and power cables that stretched beneath Marakitedes's cuirass. Marakitedes stumbled back, and felt his power armour's secondary oxygen sources kick on. He twisted and drove his shoulder into the Ultramarine's chest, staggering him.

The Ultramarine took a step back, and readied himself for another blow. But

Marakitedes was already moving. His chainaxe smashed down, taking his enemy's sword-hand off at the wrist. Globules of blood floated through the emptiness as the hand and the chainsword it still held spun away. The Ultramarine, to his credit, did not falter. He rammed his stump into Marakitedes's helm, momentarily blinding him with the last dregs of blood that coursed from the wound before it sealed itself. Marakitedes stumbled, trying to clear his lenses of the red murk that coated them.

The Ultramarine tackled him, and Marakitedes was almost ripped from the hull. Even one-handed, the Space Marine was a worthy opponent. He had his wounded wrist pressed tight to Marakitedes's gorget and his free hand clawed at the haft of Marakitedes's chainaxe.

Marakitedes jerked back, and then lunged forward, smashing his helm into the Space Marine's faceplate. He ripped his chainaxe free of the other's grip and loosed a wide, arcing blow that took the Ultramarine in the neck, and sent his helm tumbling after his hand. 'That's for you, my brother,' he bellowed. 'A skull for you, Enyalius!' Marakitedes shoved the Ultramarine's body aside with a roar and whirled to face his next opponent.

A gladius, wreathed in the pale nimbus of a power field, swept towards Marakitedes's head. He ducked aside and swung the skull like a mace. Joyful Enyalius's warp-hardened cranium crashed against the enemy Space Marine's helm like a wrecking ball. Ceramite crumpled and hoses ruptured as the Ultramarine staggered. Marakitedes gave a yelp of triumph and swung the remains of the skull down again, driving the Ultramarine off of his feet.

Around him, his brothers wrestled and hacked at the enemy. He could hear them spitting prayers to the Lord of the Eightfold Path and dedicating their kills in Enyalius's name, offering up the skulls they took to pave his way to the Skull Throne. Enyalius had been their brother as much as he had been Marakitedes's, and he had shepherded them and guided them in their harvest of skulls since the day they had met. Enyalius had provided them the means to gain glory in the eyes of their god and they would not fail to do so for him, now.

He let go of his axe and clutched his brother's skull in both hands. 'For you, Enyalius,' he rasped as he dropped down to straddle his dazed opponent. With a roar worthy of the man in whose memory they had dedicated the slaughter to come, he raised Enyalius's skull over his head and brought it down again and again on the Ultramarine's head, until the latter was a mangled ruin and the former had been reduced to shattered fragments in his grip.

'Ha! There you go, brother,' Marakitedes said. 'Two kills for you, at least.' He

stumbled to his feet and looked around. Both blue bodies and red hovered close or drifted away, leaving behind contrails of scarlet to mark their paths. More than two, then. He looked down. Enyalius's head had come apart in his hand. He felt a pang of something that might have been sadness beneath the battle-rage that still boiled within him.

The frigate was turning slowly end over end, and the brown and grey orb of the world it had sought to defend was growing larger. Pieces of the hull were being peeled off by the descent. Whatever was left of the two frigates when they got through the atmosphere would strike the surface of the planet like the fist of Khorne himself, shattering cities and rupturing continents. Twenty thousand skulls was good, but the number they would take from that would surely see Enyalius off in a befitting fashion.

He found his axe wedged in a sensor node and uprooted it in a spray of sparks. There were no enemies within reach. His brothers were dead. Gladiator Group 685 was gone. That they had died merely to ensure Enyalius was welcomed by the Blood God seemed right to Marakitedes. It was their duty – the one duty left to them, the one duty that still made sense, in a universe long since gone mad.

Marakitedes held the skull fragments of his brother up and let them go. He watched as the last bits of Enyalius were caught by the cosmic wind and departed his palm, carried away by the movement of the frigate. He stood content, his feet braced on the hull of the falling ship, his axe in hand and his arms spread, awaiting the impact that would come in hours or minutes, he could not say and did not care. He would gladly ride the vessel into obliteration to claim a billion souls for his brother.

Enyalius would laugh no more.

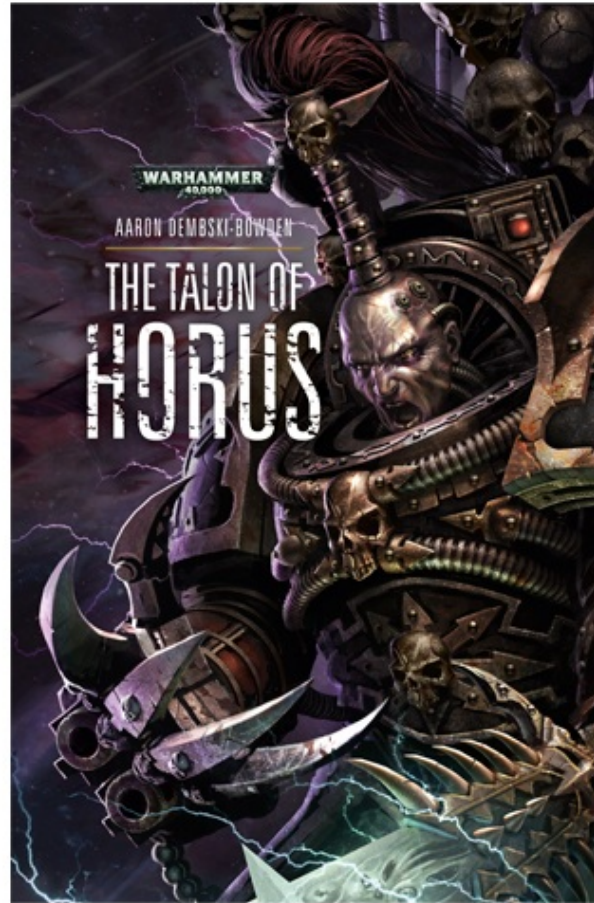
But Marakitedes would laugh for him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josh Reynolds is the author of the Warhammer 40,000 novellas *Hunter's Snare* and *Dante's Canyon*, along with the audio drama *Master of the Hunt*, all three featuring the White Scars, and the Blood Angels novel *Deathstorm*. In the Warhammer World, he has written *The End Times: The Return of Nagash*, the Gotrek & Felix tales *Charnel Congress*, *Road of Skulls* and *The Serpent Queen*, and the novels *Neferata*, *Master of Death* and *Knight of the Blazing Sun*. He lives and works in Sheffield.

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