



WARHAMMER
40,000



FABIUS BILE

A MEMORY OF THARSIS

JOSH REYNOLDS



WARHAMMER
40,000

FABIUS BILE

A MEMORY OF THARSIS

JOSH REYNOLDS

CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[A Memory of Tharsis – Josh Reynolds](#)

[About the Author](#)

[A Black Library Publication](#)

[eBook license](#)

A MEMORY OF THARSIS

Josh Reynolds

The black mills of Quir never slept.

Volcanic furnaces constantly vomited clouds of grey ash up through sky-scraping chimneys. The thunder of mining equipment echoed forever up from abyssal quarries. Everywhere was the cacophony of industry run wild. It echoed even unto the uppermost reaches of the stratosphere, and the half-finished orbital docking ring that girdled Quir like a halo of metal. But it wasn't merely that hellish clamour which caused Fabius Bile to wince in discomfort as he descended the ramp to the landing platform.

Rather, it was the sound of raw voices, raised in song. The atonal din caused the thin air to reverberate, and made Bile's remaining teeth itch down to their cancerous roots. His fingers clenched about the skull of brass that topped the sceptre he leaned on. It glowed faintly with an unnatural sheen. Power thrummed through it, menacing and covetous. There was an intelligence there, if rudimentary, and it desired to be put to use. The sceptre was an amplifier, and its slightest touch could elicit a raging torrent of agony in even the strongest subject. He'd named it Torment, in a fit of whimsy.

Bile had no doubt that a similar compulsion had motivated this unwelcome display. Hunched, malformed shapes clad in the ragged remnants of ancestral hazard suits stood on the rust-riddled landing platform before him. No two of the factory workers were alike. Some were mostly human, save for an unsightly deformity, while others were barely bipedal. A few sported feathers or scales. Many had coiling, cephalopod-like tentacles rather than hands. One lumbering brute bore a rack of antlers that would have put a Fenrisian elk to shame. They were arrayed in two rows to either side of the disembarkation ramp, like soldiers awaiting the arrival of a visiting dignitary.

The mutants swayed in time to the orchestral piece echoing down from the gargoyle-shaped vox-casters mounted high above the landing platform. The bursts of music drew forth a crude hymn from the ravaged throats of the gathered workers. Cybernetic cherubs swooped overhead, brass-and-steel wings hissing. The tiny creatures shrilled at one another in corrupted binary as they swept incense-spewing censers back and forth above the gathering, further adding to the baroque ridiculousness of it all.

Bile stood for a moment, taking it all in. Hololithic readouts shimmered into view before his eyes as his power armour's sensors scanned his immediate surroundings. Familiar genetic patterns sprawled lazily across the data, each one marked with the telltale spiral of his signature. His lips stretched in a thin smile.

These creatures were his children, in all the ways that mattered. He had grown their ancestors in vats, pulled them screaming from the darkness and delivered them up to their destiny. To see their descendants now evoked in him a rare flicker of pity, if only for the squandered potential. And yet, they thrived. They were strong, in their way. Durable. Adaptable, if lacking in the ability to carry a tune. Fit for purpose. That was all the Lady Spohr, Magos-Queen of Quir, asked of them.

Spohr was a strange one, even by the standards of renegade Mechanicus adepts. Like all queens, she demanded fitting tribute from her supplicants. If she was displeased with her gift, things could get out of hand very quickly. The rotting remains of those who'd disappointed her hung from the chimneys of her factories. No one lived to repeat such foolishness.

Each time he came to Quir looking for repairs to his ancient and dilapidated medicae equipment, he had to bring something new and utterly unique. Things that no other supplicant could offer her. It was almost a game. He had crafted her workers, woven a fleshweave, even cloned her original organic form, for purposes she had not divulged. But she had been growing bored with his arts even then. Still, he would persevere. He had a responsibility.

That was his work. To improve upon the flawed designs of those who had come before, and seed the stars with a New Man – one adapted to the grim darkness of the current millennium. The weight of such a destiny threatened to crush him, at times. But he would press on, whatever the cost. The task must be completed.

He sighed and started down the ramp. The ancient servos in his armour whined in protest, and the stretched faces of his skin-coat moaned softly. Securing Spohr's services was imperative. And for that, he needed to keep her engaged. Once she had her tribute, she would inevitably lose interest. During their

previous interactions, it was only by holding her attention, by engaging her organic half, that he had been able to ensure that he got what he needed, afterwards. Like the queens of old, Spohr had little interest in fair bargains.

An honour guard of cybernetic soldiers waited at the foot of the ramp. They were clad in shell-like ceramite beneath thick coats and cowls, and clutched antique radium carbines. Strange sigils had been carved into the ceramite, and their coats, like his own, were made from a patchwork of stolen flesh. Some wore grotesque masks beneath their cowls, while others had exposed faces that were more metal than meat. They watched his approach warily, targeting lenses whirring as they took stock of him. His own targeting systems returned the favour, intercepting and meshing with the foreign systems, albeit briefly. His armour, like many things exposed to the persistent environmental uncertainties of warp space, had developed something akin to a rudimentary sentience. Its curiosity, like his own, was insatiable.

For an instant, he saw himself through the artificial optics of the cybernetic warriors. A helmet, pockmarked by impact craters, its colouring scraped away to reveal bare grey ceramite in places. Metallic arachnid limbs, topped by blades, saws and glistening syringes, rose over his bent frame, twitching in time to some faint, internal modulation. Like his armour and Torment, the surgeon had a mind of its own. Bile smiled. At times, he fancied that he wasn't so much a singular being as a colony of like-minded symbiotes – each of them feeding off and being fed on in turn by the others. They were as much a part of him as the blight that gnawed at his vitals like an all-consuming fire. He grimaced. Thinking of it made the pain worse. The blight was eating him hollow. Soon, he would be gone entirely.

The surgeon hissed, and a syringe jabbed his neck. A cool flush filled his system, burying the pain beneath a chemical balm. There were more important matters to attend to than his own inevitable slide into dissolution. Only his work mattered. Work that would stutter to a halt unless he secured the services of his hostess.

An enclosed mechanised palanquin wheezed its way across the loading platform on six pneumatic limbs. It was an ornate monstrosity, dripping with unnecessary gilt and machine-carved grotesquery. Its curtains were made from a chromatic fleshweave of his own design, which shifted hues with every step of its heavy, clawed feet. It was one of his more recent gifts to the mistress of this world, and one he took no little pride in. Though he often preferred to err on the side of function over form, it was nonetheless a rare pleasure in these fraught

times to indulge his creativity.

More of the cybernetic soldiers followed the palanquin at a disciplined lope, their radium carbines held at the ready. These were more heavily armoured than the others, less meat and more machine, sealed in crustacean-like shells of almost organic-looking metal. They wore masks that had been wrought in the shape of daemonic faces, and their coats were branded with the runes of the four Ruinous Powers. They steamed with unnatural heat in the open air, as if whatever passed for their blood was on the cusp of boiling over.

Bile could feel a familiar quiver in the air that had nothing to do with the off-key singing of the assembled workers. The warriors were conversing with one another, and with their mistress, through a neural node-link. He smiled politely, awaiting her arrival. The palanquin slowed as it approached, and its limbs bent with a querulous groan. It lowered itself to the ground. The curtains curled aside with a somnolent murmur as the Magos-Queen of Quir rose and stepped down onto the platform.

The Lady Spohr was a work of art destined never to be completed. She was tall and heavy, built for war rather than idle contemplation. Thick robes, intricately woven with scenes from Martian legend, hid her lower half, and her upper was encased in a heavy golden cuirass bulging with bundles of cables, pumps, hoses and sensory nodes. Smoke issued from vents on her armour, filling the air around her with a cloying miasma.

Thin sensor-filaments extended outwards from her chest and shoulders, their tips pulsing in time to a silent rhythm. Her arms were folded before her, loose sleeves dangling. Her cowl was thrown back, revealing a skull of gold, etched in binary, and a profusion of isolated power cables, which spilled across her shoulders like the mane of some veldt-born felinoid. She wore a loose belt of silver-plated skulls about the swell where her hips might once have been. Each of the silver skulls was marked with a different cogwheel rune.

Her eyes clicked, focusing on him. She moved forwards smoothly, with artificial grace. Bile bowed as low as he was able, and said, 'You are truly a most welcome sight for this weary traveller, my lady. A beacon in the eternal night of our exile.'

Spohr paused. 'Flattery. A sure sign you have come to bargain, Fabius.' Her voice was not the rasp one might expect. Instead, her words clicked like well-oiled gears. 'I hope you have brought a suitable tribute.' She glanced up at the gunship. 'A sensor sweep of your vessel revealed nothing of interest.' There was a warning note in her voice. 'I considered destroying you as you descended, as a

warning to others. It is not wise to come here empty-handed.'

It was Bile's turn to hesitate. This was always the most dangerous part of the negotiations. She might decide to kill him out of hand, if he didn't prick her curiosity. He made a show of glancing around, and gestured to the singing workers with Torment.

'Was this gathering your idea?'

'They sing your praises. A hymn to Pater Mutatis, Changemaster of the Sixfold Helix. Your creations love you, even when they belong to another.' Her tone told him nothing of how she might feel about that. Nor, in truth, did he particularly care. That his creations were designed to venerate him seemed only sensible. A tool that could turn on its creator was of little use, and love was a stronger chain than fear.

But these were not his creations, only their descendants. Like the fleshweave curtains of her palanquin, the ancestors of her workers had been a gift. They had been designed to her specifications, and grown in his few remaining flesh-vats, in the aftermath of his expulsion from Canticle City and the destruction of his facilities there. An expenditure of dwindling resources, in those days. That they had survived at all was impressive. That they had bred true was nothing short of a miracle. Bile looked at Spohr.

'A fine gift, their ancestors. Don't you agree?'

Spohr turned. 'Come.'

Her manner was as terse as ever. He took no offence. Spohr's mind was a vast web, stretched between every node and cogitator on the forge world. Her attentions were split between a thousand different tasks. The sheer amount of raw data would drive a lesser mind insane. Bile had often thought that his own work would be easier if he could approach it from multiple angles simultaneously. Perhaps one day such a thing might be possible. Until then, he would have to settle for his own two hands, and the aid of his surgeon.

He walked with her across the platform, followed at a discreet distance by her maniple of guards. An itch at the nape of his neck told him that there were others he couldn't see, watching him through targeting scopes. It was to be expected. Anything less, and he might have been insulted.

'It has been seventy-five point eight rotations of the seasonal cycle since your last visit. On average, your visits occur every one hundred rotations. You are early.' She paused, listening to something only she could hear. Her attentions snapped back into focus a moment later. 'Explain.'

'Perhaps I missed you.'

Spohr looked at him. ‘Your attempts at humour have not improved in the intervening rotations.’ Cylindrical gibbet cages hung here and there from the uppermost reaches of the facility, to dangle over the platform. Inside several of them, mutants crouched, groaning. As Spohr led him past several cages, one of the prisoners reached through the bars towards Bile, slurring a plea for mercy.

He batted its groping claw aside and laughed as the cage spun in a lazy circle. ‘It has never been a strength of mine, I admit.’

‘Prevarication. Why are you early?’

‘Necessity.’ Bile coughed. He felt the surgeon tense, pulling tight against his spine, and internal readouts flashed across the inside of his helmet. He dismissed them. ‘My requirements are simple, but urgent. I am at a... delicate stage in my work. I cannot afford any delay.’

They left the cages behind and continued on to the edge of the platform. A heavy rail, decorated with machine-precise carvings of an obscene nature, separated them from the smog-choked skies. Bile looked out over the horizon, bracing himself against the high winds that tore at the edges of the platform. Below, a massive ore-hauler, its hull dotted with tumorous malformations, surfaced from the smog-bank with a rumble of engines and rose towards the ring of atmospheric processing centres. It was accompanied in its flight by a flock of smaller bat-like shapes, which shrieked and spun almost playfully through the air. The strange flock dispersed and swept back down into the smog as the ore-hauler gained altitude.

The processed and refined ore it carried would be transported out of the upper atmosphere and to the ever-growing circumference of the orbital docking ring. Quir, like its mistress, was a work in progress.

That urge to tinker was a familiar one. He felt it himself, whenever he considered his own physiology. Unlike Spohr, however, his efforts yielded precious few improvements. At best, they held things in stasis. For now, that would have to do. His obsolescence could not be avoided, but his work would live on. That was all that mattered.

‘Your heart rate has elevated by a percentile of point nine nine nine. Are you ill?’

Bile coughed into his fist. Blood speckled his gauntlet. He could feel his hearts straining in their traces, and the weight of something cancerous growing in his abdomen. ‘No more so than usual,’ he said. He peered at her. ‘Do you ever wonder what might have been?’

‘I endeavour to weigh all potentialities microsecond to microsecond.’ She

paused, head cocked. He felt an itch in his cortex, and knew she was initiating a neural congress with a node somewhere on the planet below. A hiss of binary slipped from behind the golden rictus, pattering across his ears like the whisper of rain. The moment passed as swiftly as it had come. ‘That which cannot be calculated is irrelevant. That which cannot aid in calculation is also irrelevant.’

‘And are those the same calculations that led you to abandon Mars all those long centuries ago?’ A careful question, designed to prick her curiosity. He turned, watching something that might have been a shadow stagger-dance across the platform. More of the shadow-things whirled and twitched in the corners or among the gathered mutants. He’d seen such things before, in transit through the warp. Echoes of the dead, flickering across the perceptions of the living. The flotsam and jetsam of the great Sea of Souls.

Spohr glanced at him as his words registered. An inadvertent, almost human, gesture. She hesitated. It was a small thing. A twitch of lenses, a brief series of clicks, but Bile saw it and congratulated himself. She was intrigued.

‘I do not remember Mars,’ she said, finally. ‘Memories serve no useful purpose. They are—’

‘Irrelevant, yes,’ he said, pretending to watch the shadows creep and dance. ‘You know, from orbit, the landmass your facilities inhabit quite resembles those on the slopes of Tharsis Tholus. I thought you’d chosen it knowingly.’

Another hesitation. So brief as to be unnoticed save by one alert for it. ‘The resemblance is irrelevant. I chose it because it best serves my needs.’

Bile turned away from the shadows. Below, a flock of the flapping, bat-like things took flight from beneath the platform. They spiralled up into the air, shrieking a strange, sad song. He watched them for a moment, before replying.

‘I noted signs of ongoing terraforming efforts as I entered orbit. Almost as if someone were attempting to incite the formation and eruption of volcanic activity. Tharsis Tholus was built into a volcano, was it not?’

‘It is for thermal harvesting purposes. I grow weary of this discussion. Where is my tribute?’ The question was delivered sharply. Her optic lenses clicked in irritation. He had her. Anger was one of the few emotions left to her.

Bile smiled and pressed his advantage. ‘Still, it was beautiful, in its way.’

‘Beauty is irrelevant. Irrelevancies are purged from the dataflow. Mars – Tharsis – was – is – irrelevant to current operating parameters. Quir is my home, now.’ There was a certain finality to that statement. An irrevocable implication. Nonetheless, he continued.

‘Irrelevance is a matter of perception, I suppose. What is a person but the sum

of their experiences, good and bad? All things contribute to the whole, even the most insignificant of occurrences. Weigh them, pare them away, and soon you will be left with nothing.'

'Not nothing. Something better.'

Bile shrugged. 'There are too many fools in Eyespace who seek to divest themselves of past failures. They yearn to rewrite history, as if by doing so they might erase the sins of history. What is done is done. One must build on a foundation of regrets, mistakes and frustrations if one is to ascend properly. One must always look forward, not backward.'

'Nothing of value can be built on weakness.'

'Weakness is the soil in which the seeds of future strength are sown.' He gestured to himself. 'Weakness of flesh, of body and mind, compels me to heights undreamt of by my former peers. I have remade demigods in my image, and drawn from the wellspring of life itself. If I were certain in my strength, pure of function, I would not have achieved half of those deeds which see my signature writ in the blood and marrow of innumerable peoples.'

Spohr studied him. 'By my estimates, your biological functions will cease in—'

Bile gestured sharply. 'Spare me, I beg you. I have my own hourglass, and enough sand to fill it.'

'Elevated pulse. You are frightened. Have you forgotten my tribute, Fabius? Is that why we are discussing irrelevant things?'

'Annoyed, not frightened,' he corrected, ignoring her question. 'Death comes for all things, in one way or another. Ships rust, planetary cores collapse, suns go cold and even demigods die. My only fear is that I will pass on unfulfilled, and my work uncompleted.' He looked at her. 'Hence, I come to you. I am in need of some equipment.'

Spohr waited, in silence. Bile gestured airily. 'Specialised equipment. I have designs. I lack the ability to make those designs a reality.'

'Admittance of weakness. Unexpected.'

'There inevitably comes a point when aid is required, regardless of one's wishes,' Bile said, leaning on Torment. 'I am no engineer. Machinery is as alien to me as the inner workings of the limbic system are to you.'

'I am well aware of the purpose of that biological network.'

'Of course, forgive me.' Bile smiled thinly. 'I should have guessed that one who has shed so much of it would understand its intricacies.'

For a moment, the only sound was the whirr-click of Spohr's internal augurs. Then, 'Condescension. You are being tedious, Fabius.'

He laughed. ‘Yes. Again, my apologies. One does grow used to being the most adept mind in the room.’ He bowed, slightly. ‘But your cognitive processes were legend among the servants of the Omnissiah, even before it all went wrong.’

She looked at him. ‘It did not go wrong. The plan was flawed from conception.’

‘Then why follow it – follow us – into damnation? Why abandon Tharsis for this smog-laced hell, at the behest of the Warmaster?’

Spohr was silent. He could hear the machinery within her chugging along, like a cogitator long past its prime. Calculating.

‘The reason is irrelevant,’ she said. ‘It was done. That is all that matters.’

Bile looked away. ‘As you say. Only one question remains – will you do as I ask?’

‘Others have enquired much the same, of late,’ Spohr said. The wind whipped at her robes, momentarily revealing the anarchic configuration beneath. Neither legs nor serpentine coils, but some juddering mixture of both. ‘They say to me – do this thing, and we shall repay you tenfold. Do this thing, and our lord will be grateful.’

Bile frowned, suddenly wary. ‘And what thing was this, that they wished of you, dear lady?’ he asked, carefully.

Spohr laughed. An artificial, staccato sound, the approximation of humour by one who had forgotten what it means. ‘They wish me to cage you, Fabius. To seal you in iron, until such time as they require your services. You are a tool which has exceeded its function, and that cannot be borne.’

‘The same might be said of you.’ An unexpected – and unwelcome – development. This was no longer the old, familiar game. He had many enemies. He wondered which of them were responsible for this, out of those who considered him to be too useful to dispose of. Lorgar’s sons had tried more than once to bind him, as if he were one of their wretched daemons. Even his own Legion had sought to enslave him, in a way.

‘No,’ Spohr said. ‘I perform my function. I mine ore. I smelt metal. I construct engines of war. As has always been my task.’

‘But no longer in the service of the Red Planet. No longer for the glory of Tharsis Tholus, with its great dome of ochre and crimson.’ He glanced around. Was this nothing more than a distraction? He ground his teeth, frustrated. He was close to a breakthrough. He needed the equipment Spohr could provide. He had no time for this.

‘Irrelevant. I perform my function. I do not exceed it. All is in balance.’ She turned, power cables rustling like agitated serpents. ‘You are not. You exceed

your parameters. You distort your purpose. You must be stripped from the mechanism, so that it runs smoothly.'

'So it has been said.' Bile stepped back. His augurs were being jammed. Hololithic overlays showed only static. It might simply be atmospheric interference, but he doubted it. This was a trap. And he had walked right into it, blindly. He bared rotten teeth in a grimace. It wasn't the first time, and it certainly wouldn't be the last. It was becoming clear to him that someone wanted to stop him. To stop his work, to prevent him from achieving his destiny. This was simply the latest in a string of attempts.

'That has always been the difference between us, my lady,' he said. 'I have chosen my function, and it is to ensure my obsolescence, while you – and those you speak of – seek only to preserve your antiquated purpose in the crumbling husk of the universal machine.' He shook his head. 'Strip me out? There is no need. I have removed myself.'

'And yet your function impedes the whole.' The accusation was delivered with mild force. Her mind was elsewhere again, racing along strands of caged lightning. He was unimportant, in the greater scheme of things. An item to be crossed off a list of duties. He admired her efficiency. 'You must cease.'

'On whose authority?' Bile looked around. 'I see no familiar faces here, save your own. My enemies leave the burden to you. Why is that, I wonder?'

Spohr gestured.

There was a blurt of static, as if in response. The proximity augurs of Bile's armour spat a warning and he turned, eyes narrowing in consternation. A telltale flicker alerted him a half-second before the blow landed. Combat stimulants automatically flooded his system. He ducked aside, avoiding a blow that would have flattened him, if not snapped his spine. His hand dropped to the Xyclos needler holstered on his hip. He drew it smoothly and fired. Even the smallest scratch from one of the needler's thin darts could induce madness or death.

Providing that the target was organic, of course.

This one, unfortunately, was not.

Colours ran like condensation, revealing the hulking form of what had once been a Kastelan robot. The machine was almost three times his size. Its oil-black carapace was draped in a shroud of writhing fleshweave, which had camouflaged the machine. Bile frowned, annoyed at himself. Spohr had reverse-engineered his gift, making it over into something more useful.

'Ingenious,' he muttered, lowering his needler. It would do him no good against a foe such as this. Between the omnipresent din and the fleshweave, he'd been

blind to its presence.

Nerve-like tendril webs had spread and become bloated, bursting through the armour plating like roots through stone. Steaming runes marked its chassis, and clusters of tiny, inhuman faces sprouted like barnacles from the seals of its joints. The ancient war machine panted like a hungry beast as it paced towards him, powerful claws flexing. Its dome-like cranium was twisted, the metal reshaped into an approximation of a bestial leer. The steaming barrel of the combustor weapon mounted on its carapace swung towards him, the air wavering from the heat.

He stepped back, and the weapon tracked him. He glanced towards her. ‘They have offered you nothing for your efforts, my lady.’

‘As you offer me nothing. Where is my tribute, Fabius? You come empty-handed to my world, and try to bargain with me? Insult. Condescension. Arrogance.’ The power cables about her golden skull sparked with sudden life, and the lenses of her eyes flashed. ‘They are right. You must be chained. This is my world, and I will not be insulted.’

Bile twisted aside as the Kastelan’s claw sprang towards him. It clanked shut, shearing off a piece of his coat. Bile swung Torment towards the back of its knee, hoping to slow it down. The sceptre screamed in frustration as it struck the unfeeling metal. There were no nerves to enflame. The robot’s arm swept backwards, nearly taking Bile’s head off.

A glancing blow caught the machine on one of the root-like tendril webs. It retreated with a growl of static. Bile smiled. It did have nerves of a sort, after all. That was promising. He backed away, drawing it after him. The combustor mounted on its shoulder spat molten death, and he ducked away. The heat of it blackened the skin of his cheek, but there was no pain. Not yet. Later, if he survived.

A half-step took him inside its reach, and he slammed Torment against the largest fibrous bundle of quasi-flesh. The Kastelan reacted with alacrity, emitting a screech of binary. It swung wildly and its combustor vomited heat. The stimulants in Bile’s system carried him swiftly around the frenzied machine. He leapt for its back, hooking his fingers into a buckled plate. He nearly lost his grip as the robot turned, still shrieking an inarticulate stream of zeroes and ones, but managed to haul himself up. His power armour’s ancient servos groaned from the strain as he perched on the war machine’s shoulder and smashed the combustor from its housing.

The robot groped blindly for him, its claws snapping at his legs. He rose to a

crouch and lifted Torment over his head, the skull-top facing down. He drove it downwards with piston-like force, crumpling the black metal and releasing a storm of sparks. The Kastelan staggered and its shrieks sputtered into silence. A second blow sent it to one knee. A third obliterated the bestial leer. Smoke spewed upwards, enveloping Bile as the robot toppled forwards. He slid off the robot's chassis a moment before impact, and crouched on one knee, hearts thundering.

Beneath the balm of stimulants, he could feel his overtaxed systems attempting to compensate for his efforts. He coughed, and blood speckled his chin. Spohr's cybernetic guards paced towards him out of the smoke, radium carbines at the ready. Balancing himself with Torment, he drew his needler.

'For shame, my lady.' He tracked the stalking shapes as targeting overlays filled his vision. They would be more vulnerable to his concoctions than the robot, but not by much. 'What offence have I given, that warrants such treatment? Will you turn a friend over to his enemies without a second thought?'

'You have no friends. You demand, without giving.' Spohr raised her claw. 'You bring no tribute. Therefore, I will make one of you.'

'No tribute? I never said that.' He laughed. 'Indeed, had you given me the chance, I would have offered it up to you.'

Spohr studied him for a moment. Calculating. He felt a tremor in the air, and her warriors lowered their weapons. They sank to their haunches, weapons braced across their knees, and fixed him with a communal watchfulness.

'What can you offer me that is more precious than the satisfaction of your imprisonment?' she asked.

A hidden slot opened on his gauntlet, revealing an innocuous data-spike. He extracted it and extended it to her. 'Judge for yourself.'

Spohr took the spike and examined it. 'Explain.'

'It is a data-spike. Rather self-explanatory, don't you agree?'

'I have data-spikes.'

Bile peered at her. 'Humour?'

'An observation. What is on it?'

Bile's thin features split in a wide smile. 'Why, a memory, my lady.'

Spohr hesitated. 'A memory?'

'A single moment in time, dredged from the consciousness of an unfortunate archmagos and preserved in electronic amber.'

'What time? What memory?'

Bile gestured. 'See for yourself.'

Still, the hesitation. She was wary. Ready for treachery, though he had never dealt any less than fairly with her. Spohr had not become queen by being trusting of strange men bearing gifts. She inserted the data-spike into a port on her cuirass. The lenses of her eyes clicked. A soft hum filled the air as it shimmered and turned red. Hololithic images hazed into being, springing from in-built emitters.

‘Oh,’ Spohr said, softly.

Bile rose to his feet, his coat rippling in the memory of a Martian wind. They stood in the shadow of Tharsis, lit by the setting sun. The air was the colour of rust, and filled with loose sand. Ancient structures dotted the slope of an immense volcano, and bipedal machines bounded across the plains below, their riders bearing the pale colours of Tharsis Tholus. The memory was strong. Bile could almost smell the acrid Martian air, almost feel the grit on his face. Fine work, even if he did say so himself. He looked at Spohr.

‘Mars. As it was before the Schism.’

Spohr stood silent and unmoving. Basking in the glow of better days.

Bile continued. ‘A weakness. A bit of grit, stuck in the cogs of calculation.’

Spohr reached up, towards the red sun, as it slipped behind the dome of the volcano. ‘I forgot the way the light caught the thermal resonators,’ she said. ‘And the sound of the pyroclastic sifters, as the temperatures dropped...’ Her hand fell. She looked at him.

‘Irrelevant,’ Bile said again.

‘Humour,’ she said.

He smiled. ‘An observation. Is it acceptable?’

Spohr turned away. ‘Yes. I will consider your request.’ She paused. ‘And I will tell you the names of your enemies, if you wish. Your tribute is worth that much, at least.’

Bile considered her offer, but only for a moment. He waved a hand. ‘No. Their identities are irrelevant.’

His enemies were legion. The galaxy was in flames, and crowded with pyromaniacs, eager to claim possession of the ashes. Bile had no interest in the conflagration, its cause or its celebrants. Only in what came after. Let the galaxy burn. From its ashes would rise a new future.

One created by him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josh Reynolds is the author of the Warhammer 40,000 novels *Fabius Bile: Primogenitor* and *Deathstorm*, and the novellas *Hunter's Snare* and *Dante's Canyon*, along with the audio drama *Master of the Hunt*. In the Warhammer World, he has written the End Times novels *The Return of Nagash* and *The Lord of the End Times*, the Gotrek & Felix tales *Charnel Congress*, *Road of Skulls* and *The Serpent Queen*. He has also written many stories set in the Age of Sigmar, including the novels *Nagash: The Undying King*, *Fury of Gork*, *Black Rift* and *Skaven Pestilens*. He lives and works in Northampton.

Exiled into the depths of the Eye of Terror for his dark deeds, former Emperor's Children Apothecary Fabius is drawn back to the Imperium in search of a secret that could be the key to saving his misbegotten life...



BUY NOW



READ IT FIRST

EXCLUSIVE PRODUCTS | EARLY RELEASES | FREE DELIVERY

blacklibrary.com

THE BLACK LIBRARY NEWSLETTER



Sign up today for regular updates on the
latest Black Library news and releases

[SIGN UP NOW](#)

A BLACK LIBRARY PUBLICATION

First published in Black Library Live! 2016 Chapbook.
This eBook edition published in 2017 by Black Library, Games Workshop
Ltd,
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Produced by Games Workshop in Nottingham.
Original illustration by Mark Gibbons.

A Memory of Tharsis © Copyright Games Workshop Limited 2017. A Memory of Tharsis, GW, Games Workshop, Black Library, The Horus Heresy, The Horus Heresy Eye logo, Space Marine, 40K, Warhammer, Warhammer 40,000, the 'Aquila' Double-headed Eagle logo, and all associated logos, illustrations, images, names, creatures, races, vehicles, locations, weapons, characters, and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are either ® or TM, and/or © Games Workshop Limited, variably registered around the world.
All Rights Reserved.

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-78572-682-8

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

See Black Library on the internet at
blacklibrary.com

Find out more about Games Workshop's world of Warhammer and the Warhammer 40,000 universe at
games-workshop.com

eBook license

This license is made between:

Games Workshop Limited t/a Black Library, Willow Road, Lenton, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, United Kingdom (“Black Library”); and

(2) the purchaser of an e-book product from Black Library website (“You/you/Your/your”)

(jointly, “the parties”)

These are the terms and conditions that apply when you purchase an e-book (“e-book”) from Black Library. The parties agree that in consideration of the fee paid by you, Black Library grants you a license to use the e-book on the following terms:

* 1. Black Library grants to you a personal, non-exclusive, non-transferable, royalty-free license to use the e-book in the following ways:

o 1.1 to store the e-book on any number of electronic devices and/or storage media (including, by way of example only, personal computers, e-book readers, mobile phones, portable hard drives, USB flash drives, CDs or DVDs) which are personally owned by you;

o 1.2 to access the e-book using an appropriate electronic device and/or through any appropriate storage media; and

* 2. For the avoidance of doubt, you are ONLY licensed to use the e-book as described in paragraph 1 above. You may NOT use or store the e-book in any other way. If you do, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license.

* 3. Further to the general restriction at paragraph 2, Black Library shall be entitled to terminate this license in the event that you use or store the e-book (or any part of it) in any way not expressly licensed. This includes (but is by no means limited to) the following circumstances:

o 3.1 you provide the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.2 you make the e-book available on bit-torrent sites, or are otherwise complicit in ‘seeding’ or sharing the e-book with any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.3 you print and distribute hard copies of the e-book to any company, individual or other legal person who does not possess a license to use or store it;

o 3.4 you attempt to reverse engineer, bypass, alter, amend, remove or otherwise make any change to any copy protection technology which may be applied to the e-book.

* 4. By purchasing an e-book, you agree for the purposes of the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 that Black Library may commence the service (of provision of the e-book to you) prior to your ordinary cancellation period coming to an end, and that by purchasing an e-book, your cancellation rights shall end immediately upon receipt of the e-book.

* 5. You acknowledge that all copyright, trademark and other intellectual property rights in the e-book are, shall remain, the sole property of Black Library.

* 6. On termination of this license, howsoever effected, you shall immediately and permanently delete all copies of the e-book from your computers and storage media, and shall destroy all hard copies of the e-book which you have derived from the e-book.

* 7. Black Library shall be entitled to amend these terms and conditions from time to time by written notice to you.

* 8. These terms and conditions shall be governed by English law, and shall be subject only to the jurisdiction of the Courts in England and Wales.

* 9. If any part of this license is illegal, or becomes illegal as a result of any change in the law, then that part shall be deleted, and replaced with wording that is as close to the original meaning as possible without being illegal.

* 10. Any failure by Black Library to exercise its rights under this license for whatever reason shall not be in any way deemed to be a waiver of its rights, and in particular, Black Library reserves the right at all times to terminate this license in the event that you breach clause 2 or clause 3.