

WARHAMMER  
40,000

# TORMENT

A WORD BEARERS SHORT STORY



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Death was nothing to be feared. Death he would have welcomed. It was the in-between place that that filled him with dread.

To some it was the Undercroft, Tartarus, or Limbo; to others it was Sheyole, the Shadowlands, or Despair. On old Colchis it was known as *Bharzek*.

Translated literally, its meaning was simple and direct – Torment.

Those condemned to wander its ashen fields were said to be cursed above all others. They lingered there, haunted, confused and lost, suffused with impotent rage, longing and regret. Unable to move on, yet equally unable to move back to the lives they had left behind, they were trapped in that empty, grey wasteland, doomed to an eternity of emptiness.

He knew now that the old stories were wrong, however.

It *was* possible to come back...

'*Burias*.' That voice was not welcome here. It was an intrusion. He tried to ignore it, but it was insistent.

'*Burias-Drak'shal*.'

He awoke to pain. It blossomed within him, building, compounding, multiplying, until every inch of his body was awash with fire. He was blinded by agony, yet he grinned, bloodied lips drawn back in a leering grimace.

Pain was good. Pain he could endure. He was alive, and not yet confined to the hell that the Dark Apostle had promised him. *Burias* embraced his pain, letting it draw him back from the brink of oblivion.

He knew where he was – deep within the Basilica of Torment, on Sicarus, adopted homeworld of the XVII Legion. He'd been dragged here in chains by his former brothers, but he had no concept of how long ago that had been. It felt like an eternity.

Gradually his senses returned.

The smell hit him first. Hot, cloying and repellent, it was the stink of a dying animal. It hung in the unbearably humid air like a fog, something that could be felt on the skin, oily, clinging and foul. He could taste it. Sickly stale sweat, charred meat and burnt hair; none of it could quite mask the stench of bile and necrotising flesh.

But more than anything else, he could smell blood. The room reeked of it.

He discerned low whispers and chanting, and the hushed shuffle of feet on a hard stone floor as his hearing returned. He heard the clank of chains, the hiss of venting steam, and the mechanical grind of gears and pistons.

*This is not your fate.*

The words were spoken with the confidence of one who does not need to raise its voice in order to make itself heard. It was familiar, but he could not place it. He tried to answer, but his lips were dry, cracked and bleeding, his throat raw and painful. He swallowed, tasting blood, and tried again.

‘Who are you?’ he managed.

*I am the Word and the Truth.*

‘Your voice... is inside my head,’ said Burias, wondering if his torture had driven him to insanity. ‘Are you real? Are you a spirit? A daemon?’

*I am your saviour, Burias.*

The haze of his surroundings was slowly coming into focus. He was staring straight up at an octagonal, vaulted ceiling. It was shrouded in darkness, lit only by a handful of low-burning sconces mounted upon the eight pillars surrounding him. Oily smoke coiled from these fittings, rising languorously.

He lay spread-eagled upon a low stone slab, bound in heavy chains bolted to the floor. The links that bound him were each the size of a Space Marine’s fist and heavy manacles were clamped around his ankles, wrists, and neck. The flesh around these bindings was blackened, raw and weeping, burnt almost to the bone.

The manacles were inscribed with ancient Colchisian cuneiform.

Painstakingly replicated from the Book of Lorgar, the potent runic script glowed like molten rock, and the infernal heat radiating from them made the air shimmer. Yet more of the angular ideograms were carved directly into Burias’s tortured flesh, and these too smouldered with burning heat.

His body was a ruin of raw scar tissue, burns, cuts, abrasions and welts. His sacred warplate had been torn away piece by piece, with all the eagerness and hunger of feeding vultures. Where over the years it had become fused to his superhuman frame, it had been crudely hacked off with cleavers and blades that

he suspected had been purposefully dulled to make the work longer and bloodier.

Every conceivable torture had been inflicted on him. But he had not been broken.

*You are already broken, yet your mind refuses to accept it.*

‘You lie,’ Burias gasped.

*I do not. I am here to help you.*

‘Then help me!’

*Look to your left. That is your way out.*

With some difficulty, his movement painfully restricted, Burias turned his head. Before him was the reinforced door of his cell. It was closed and bolted, and rust and corrosion was sloughing off its surface like dead skin. The door was massive, thick and solid, and the stonework around the lintel was carved with runic wards.

A pair of hulking executors were slumped in shadowed niches to either side of the door. Huge even compared to a Space Marine and vaguely simian in appearance, these mecha-daemon sentinels appeared completely lifeless except for their eye-sensors which blinked unceasingly in the darkness. They were behemoths of armour and barely-checked fury, mechanical constructs built around a brain and nervous system that had once been human, though daemonic entities had long since been bound within their steel bodies.

When roused, they were easily capable of ripping him in half with their immense powered mitts. Even in his weakened state, chained, tortured and stripped of his armour, Burias stared at them with eyes narrowed; an apex predator sizing up its rivals.

His muscles tensed as his body responded to his desire to fight, yet he was bound securely and he knew that any attempt to break his bonds was futile. There was no hope of escape.

*All that imprisons you is your own perception, Burias, and nothing more. You believe that there is no escape, and so there is none.*

‘You can hear my thoughts,’ said Burias.

*Yes. You are not speaking aloud now, you realise?*

‘Who are you?’

Burias’s question was met with silence.

‘Are you Drak’shal?’

Again, silence.

His view of the dormant executors was abruptly blocked as a dark figure shuffled in front of him, chattering incoherently. More of these robed figures

moved around him, attentive and whispering, their faces hidden in the shadow of deep cowls. They were loathsome creatures, emaciated and hunched, the definition of their ribs and vertebrae clearly visible through their black robes. Their arms were corpse-thin and grey. Rusting cables and tubes that leaked milky fluids protruded from their flesh, and their bony fingers were tipped with a plethora of needles, hooks, blades and callipers. All were stained with blood. *His* blood.

Lobotomised cantors were hard-wired into hooded alcoves positioned half way up the chamber's eight pillars. They chanted litanies of binding and containment in long, monotonous streams, their entire existence focused solely on this duty. Their eyes were wired open, and their grossly obese bodies were the pallid shade of a creature that had never seen daylight. Reams of parchment unfolded endlessly before them, and their mouths bled from the potency of the words they read aloud.

Everything about the cell, from the runic chains to the inscriptions upon the cell door and the drone of the cantors, had been designed with a singular purpose – to ensure that the daemon Drak'shal remained tightly bound, suppressed and quiescent.

With the daemon dormant within him, Burias was as any other warrior-brother within the Host; a demi-god of war in comparison to lesser, unaugmented beings, yes, but nothing more than a shadow of his former self. He could hardly feel the daemon's presence at all, and this cut him more deeply than any physical torture. It felt like he was missing a part of himself, something so integral to his being that he felt like he had been hacked in two.

The daemon had been bound to his flesh in the early days of his induction into the Legion. He had been one of the special few, chosen for this path with great ceremony and care. Few warrior-brothers were able to survive the rituals of possession. Fewer still were able to master the daemon once joined.

There had been a period of struggle when Drak'shal had fought to gain ascendancy, of course, but Burias had won out, asserting his dominance. He had been reborn. Everything of his former life was forgotten.

Drak'shal had given him strength – great strength – as well as speed, cunning, and rapidly accelerated healing that had seem him walk away from injuries that would have killed any other Space Marine. He'd fought in wars across a thousand battlefronts, and yet he bore not a single scar to show for all the countless wounds he had sustained – until now.

Fused with the daemon, his every sense had been heightened beyond

anything he could ever have imagined. He could see in total darkness without the aid of his helmet's optic augmentations. He could taste a drop of blood in the air at a hundred metres. He could run as fast as a Rhino APC and maintain his pace for days on end. His strength was easily that of five of his Word Bearer brothers.

*'You are nothing without Drak'shal,'* Marduk had said, standing over him as the manacles that now held him had been welded shut. Burias and Drak'shal had roared as one, knowing what was to come, but powerless to prevent it. The Dark Apostle had smiled as the runes had burst into flame, pushing the daemon back into enforced dormancy. *'This is the punishment for your treachery, Burias.'*

His muscles tensed at the memory, his lips curling back in a snarl.

*It is your choice what path you take, Burias. To your left lies freedom; to your right, slavery.*

Somehow Burias knew what he would see to his right, but he was still compelled to look.

For a moment the horror of the sight carried him somewhere else entirely; drowning, blinded, screaming.

The moment passed as quickly as it had come, and he was staring into a cavernous alcove, like the lair of some great beast. Slumped motionless in the shadow was the mechanical prison that would be Burias's tomb for all eternity.

A Dreadnought.

War machines of colossal power, with a chassis of heavy ablative armour and toting weaponry comparable to that of a front line battle tank, the Dreadnoughts had been conceived early in the Great Crusade. Every time a Legion lost a battle-brother, particularly a captain or veteran, a wealth of hard-won knowledge and wisdom was lost along with them. The Dreadnought was designed to ensure that the greatest warriors and heroes of a Legion might live on even after suffering fatal wounds.

It had been a noble aim, one that seemed to hold great merit, but the machine's creators on Mars had not foreseen the terrible, tortured existence that those interred within were forced to endure. Denied physical sensation, their existence was hollow, empty, and without end. They were cursed never again to experience physical sensation, and were cut off from everything and everyone.

To these poor unfortunates, the one thing that they had been gene-bred and trained for – war – was now a soulless and dissatisfying experience. They had become living war machines capable of laying waste to entire battlefields, and yet cruelly they were not able to elicit any satisfaction from doing so. Never again would they experience the rush of adrenaline that came from combat, nor

feel the kick of a bolter in their hands, or watch the life leave a worthy enemy's eyes as the shuddering kill thrust was administered.

As years turned to decades, decades rolled into centuries, and centuries became millennia, those pitiful souls condemned to that horrid half-life were driven slowly and inexorably to madness, filled with longing for all that they had lost, and bitterness towards those who had imprisoned them.

It was therefore in an act of pure malice and barbarity that Marduk intended to take Burias, a healthy, living warrior of the Host, and forcibly inter him. It spoke of the Dark Apostle's vindictiveness that he would rather see Burias suffer for all eternity than have a fatally wounded warrior-brother saved from death's grasp.

Burias stared at the immense, motionless machine with rising terror.

It stood upon squat, armoured legs, and its massive torso was almost as wide as the machine was tall. Both of its arms ended in immense power talons that hung dormant at its sides. A helmet – one of the early Mark II helms, brutal and archaic – was half-hidden behind a gorget of reinforced adamantium. The lenses of the Dreadnought were dark.

The machine was an ancient relic, a shrine to the dark gods, and its armour plating was a work of peerless artifice. Every centimetre of its deep crimson hide was covered in intricately carved scripture, and barbed metal bands edged each individual plate. Strips of vellum hung from wax seals, each covered in long tracts of illuminated text.

The chest of the Dreadnought was a gaping cavity. That was where the sarcophagus would be secured. That was where Burias would be entombed, and not as a glorious martyr of the Legion – the only injuries he bore were the result of his torture at the hands of the Host's chirumeks. No, he was being interred within the Dreadnought as punishment for having dared turn against his sworn master Marduk.

Located behind his own was a second altar, mirroring the slab to which he was chained. Upon it rested a sarcophagus. *His* sarcophagus.

It was filled to the brim with liquid and ribbed pipes, cables and tubes spilled over its edges. Some of them connected into tall glass cylinders filled with murky amniotic fluid; others hung limp and lifeless, like parasites waiting to be affixed to a host.

The casket was not large – his arms and legs would be amputated in order for him to fit within. Cables and wires would be rammed into his nervous system, impulse-needles pushed into his cortex. Feed-tubes, ribbed-pipes and cables

would be inserted into him, and oxygen-rich liquid would fill his lungs. Once sealed, his tomb could never be re-opened.

In times of war he would be interred within the Dreadnought and unleashed upon the foe, but at all other times his sarcophagus would lie dormant, collecting dust in the undercroft of the *Infidus Diabolus*. Denied outside stimuli, he would yet remain conscious, trapped in Torment...

*Nothing is real but what you've chosen to accept.*

'You speak nothing but riddles!' Burias snapped. 'You said you were here to help me.'

*I am.*

'Then tell me how to be free of his prison.'

*Break your bonds.*

Burias paused. 'What?'

*Break your bonds, and you will be free.*

*As simple as that,* thought Burias, mockingly.

*As simple as that.*

Burias smirked, and shook his head slightly. Humouring the disembodied voice, he pulled against the chains binding him. He gritted his teeth and groaned with the effort, but there was no give in the metal links at all. He gave up. They were too strong.

*They are not too strong, Burias. Belief is the path to freedom. Believe that you can break them, and you will.*

Burias breathed in deeply, gathering himself. '*Break, you bastards,*' he whispered, then hauled on the chains with all his prodigious, gene-enhanced strength. His abused, flayed musculature strained, veins protruding monstrously, like bloodworm parasites burrowing beneath the skin. He roared, pulling against his chains with reserves of strength that he did not know he had left.

He felt something stir within him.

The cuneiform runes carved upon his manacles burst into flame, their smouldering power surging. The droning intonation of the cantors lifted a pitch, becoming more strained, and the pair of slumbering mecha-daemon executors set to guard over him were roused, leaning forward on immense metal knuckles, emitting snuffling clicks from their vox-registers.

Burias's vision was red, and the sound of his blood pumping in his ears drowned out all else. He could not hear himself roaring, though he knew that he still was. The runic wards turned white hot, and Burias dimly registered the smell of burning flesh – his skin around the manacles being seared anew by the

heat of the metal. He barely felt it.

The executors were advancing, the rotary-barrelled autocannons mounted in their forearms clicking and ratcheting as they moved towards him. He lifted himself up off the slab, his back arching with the strain.

The first weakening in the wards came when one of the cantors began to spasm, its words faltering as it began to convulse. Blood burst from its nostrils and ears.

Whatever affliction had struck the cantor down was evidently contagious, as those adjacent to it began to shake and stammer. The chant lost all coherence and was suddenly a confused mess of conflicting, stuttering voices. The burning runes that bound Burias flared erratically, and the executor's rotator cannons began to whine and spin.

With a scream that made reality shimmer, the daemon within Burias surged to the surface, rising like a monster from the deep. The warding runes exploded into blinding, glittering shards, and the chanting cantors' brains burst in one mass collective haemorrhage.

Drak'shal was unleashed.

The change came over him quickly. Burias's form shimmered and distorted like the display of a faulty pict-viewer, flicking back and forth between two incompatible images. It was as if two beings of vastly differing physiology were fighting to share the same location and the laws of reality did not know which to give precedence. Instead of a decision being made, the two images blurred together to become one.

Curving horns rose from Burias-Drak'shal's brow, and his shoulders were suddenly bulging with additional musculature, flesh remoulding like wax. Barbed spines pushed from his elbows and down his spine, and ridges of bone sprouted down the blade of his forearms. His fingers fused to form thick talons, each as long as a mortal man's thigh. Crimson hellfire burnt in eyes which were suddenly elongated slashes carved into a bestial visage, and thin lips drew back to expose the serrated teeth of a predator.

The whole change occurred within the space of a millisecond, faster than the time it took the guardian mecha-daemons to register the danger and open fire.

With a brutal surge of warp-spawned power, Burias-Drak'shal hauled himself upright. His arms and neck ripped free of the chains binding him, tearing the thick links effortlessly. One of the chain lengths held, and the heavy bracket securing it was instead ripped from the floor, bringing with it a torso-sized chunk of rockcrete.

With his legs still shackled, Burias-Drak'shal swung the chain around like a flail as the executors fired. The swinging rockcrete lump took the first in the side of the head, splattering blood and cancer-ridden brain matter as its armoured cranium crumpled.

The sheer brutal force of the blow almost tore the construct's head from its servo-thick neck. Knocked off balance, its autocannon sprayed a burst of heavy-bore shells across the room, ripping through the bodies of black-robed attendants and tearing gouges along the far wall. A rain of expelled shell cartridges fell to the floor.

The second executor was spraying wild gunfire at Burias-Drak'shal, but the possessed Word Bearer was already moving, too fast for mortal eyes to follow. He used his momentum to wheel himself off the blood-stained stone slab, ripping the chains that bound his legs free. Detonations chased him as he spun away from the shots.

With a casual shove Burias-Drak'shal sent one of his craven, black-cowled tormentors flying backwards, hurling it ten metres through the air to strike one of the pillars with a sickening wet crack. With the same movement, he brought the weighted chain swinging around towards the executor that still stood.

The mecha-daemon ceased firing and reached up to grab the chain early in its swing. The heavy links encircled the armoured gauntlet of its fist three times, and the rockcrete lump crashed against its armoured forearm and shattered. With a savage yank, the executor snapped the chain, and Burias-Drak'shal stumbled to his knees.

The bestial construct bellowed in triumph and surged forward on all fours, moving with surprising swiftness. It lifted one immense fist high and brought it down hard, intending to pound Burias-Drak'shal into the floor.

The possessed warrior rolled, and the executor's blow struck the flagstones, sending cracks rippling out from the impact and making the whole room shudder. Burias-Drak'shal scrambled to get away, but the executor managed to grab the short length of chain still attached to his left leg. With a triumphant roar that reverberated deafeningly in the confined space of the chamber, it hoisted him off the ground and swung him first into one of the stone pillars, then into the opposite wall.

Rock crumbled and dust fell as Burias-Drak'shal was pounded from side to side. One of the black-robed attendants cowering in a corner was crushed, brittle bones pulverised under the possessed warrior's weight as it was caught up in the executor's wild fury.

Then the Word Bearer was hurled violently across the chamber. He slammed against the far wall, which cracked under the impact, and fell to the floor. He spat blood as he pushed himself to one knee, momentarily blinded by pain.

The executor bellowed and came at him again.

*Move. Leap to the right.*

Burias-Drak'shal hurled himself aside as the voice commanded, and the executor thundered into the wall with tremendous force. Masonry dust fell from the ceiling, and cracks spread across the wall like veins. The monstrous executor's shoulder was embedded half a metre into the stonework, and it appeared momentarily stunned by the colossal force of impact.

*Kill it.*

With a snarl, Burias-Drak'shal scrambled up the executor's armoured body, climbing onto its hunched shoulders as it struggled to pull itself free of the crumbling wall. An outraged growl of scrap-code burst from its vox-grille and it whirled around, seeking to dislodge him, but Burias-Drak'shal clung on, holding tight to the edge of its armoured shell with one hand, claws digging deep into ceramite.

The executor's armoured hide was as thick as the frontal glacis of a predator battle tank, but its joints were comparatively vulnerable. Its design compensated for this deficiency with overlapping, sheathed plating and a high gorget to shield its neck, but while this was powerful defence against an enemy facing it, there was little to protect against an enemy standing upon its shoulders.

With his free hand, Burias-Drak'shal began punching his talons into the executor's exposed neck, hacking into the thickly bunched mass of fibre-bundles, servos and ribbed cables. Oil, milky fluid and stinking synth-blood sprayed outwards, splattering across Burias-Drak'shal's face. Sparking electrical discharge arced from the wounds, and the executor went wild.

Spinning dementedly, roaring and bellowing, it sought desperately to throw off its smaller foe. It tried to slam him into one of the pillars, driving itself backwards at full force, but he clung on, hacking into its neck, ripping away cables and synthetic muscle-fibres, digging towards the vulnerable neural wiring deeper within.

The mecha-daemon's data-roars become a pitiful, crackling whine, and it stumbled as its nervous system began to fail. It collapsed to the floor, twitching as its life-fluid pooled beneath it, running freely from its savaged neck. It clung to life, trying vainly to push itself upright, but it had lost all coordination and was unable to rise.

Burias-Drak'shal finished it off by driving one of his talons through the back of its armoured cranium, then turned his feral gaze towards the cluster of lesser creatures cowering in the corners of the chamber, determined to vent his fury on their flesh.

*Go now. The others are coming for you.*

Snarling, he advanced towards the terrified acolytes.

The immense cell door exploded outwards, wrenched out of shape and torn from its hinges. It slammed against the opposite wall, and Burias-Drak'shal sprang through the gaping doorway into a wide shadowed corridor. Gore caked his arms from talon to elbow, and bright blood was splashed across his chin.

There were four sentinels on guard outside his cell. Burias-Drak'shal did not stop to think why they had not entered his cell at the cacophony of mayhem that had been unleashed within, though if he had he might have guessed that in this place such sounds were not unusual. They came at him with falchion blades that hummed with power, and they died with those weapons still in their hands.

When his flesh was his own, Burias was a consummate and graceful warrior, elegant and poised. When he was one with the daemon, he was pure bestial rage.

He tore the head from one of the sentinels and ripped the throat out of the next with his teeth. The third died with the daemon-talons of his fist through its armoured chest, and the last was hurled away with a backhand blow, its spine shattered by the force of it.

Without pausing, Burias-Drak'shal swung his heavy head from side to side, tasting the air.

The ceiling was high and arched. Katharte daemons crouched high up along spiked buttresses like gargoyles, watching over him indifferently. The darkness hid their skinless forms from mortal eyes, though Burias-Drak'shal saw them clearly, and acknowledged them with a snarl.

Clusters of robed curators and indentured servants fled before him, wailing and falling over themselves in their haste. Penitents, their flesh criss-crossed with self-inflicted wounds, dropped to their knees in worship, crying out to him, skeletally thin arms raised in supplication. He ignored them, cocking his head to one side and listening intently.

Mournful bells of alarm were echoing up through the halls. He could hear raised voices barking orders in the war-cant of Colchis, and the stamp of heavy nailed boots on stone, coming in his direction. The sound reached him of weapons powering up – he discerned the unmistakable hum of plasma

weaponry; the electric crackle of submission whips.

With a snarl Burias-Drak'shal launched into motion, bounding down the hall towards the sounds. Each leap tore up the stonework as his talons dug deep, propelling him onwards, urgency and rage lending him speed. He rounded a corridor at full tilt, his momentum forcing him up onto the wall. Rather than slowing, his pace increased.

He hit the approaching warriors with all the elemental force of a thunder strike, leaping in amongst them and starting to kill before they had even registered his presence or thought to raise a weapon.

They were indentured Sicarus warrior-clan, enhanced post-humans bred by the XVII Legion for devotional combat. Their faces were obscured by clockwork rebreather masks and external optical targeting arrays, and hyper-stimms flooded their nervous systems. Though they could never have matched one of the Legion, they were a highly trained, elite force that was worthy of respect.

Nevertheless, there were children next to the fury of Burias-Drak'shal. Three of them were dead without even raising a hand in defence.

Burias-Drak'shal towered head and shoulders over them and ploughed through their ranks, ripping and killing. He smashed gun barrels aside as they were swung up towards him, and warrior-clansmen inadvertently slew their own brethren with high-powered hellguns and plasma blasts in the frenzied mayhem. He punched heads from shoulders, and ripped arms from sockets. He crushed skulls against the passage walls, and slashed throats with his blood-slick talons.

Writhing submission whips sought to ensnare him, but he was too fast for their touch, and those wielding them died, their hot blood splattering up the walls.

All the while, Burias-Drak'shal kept focussed on one figure at the back of the regiment, the hulking warrior whom he had heard barking orders in the language of dead Colchis. He was one of the Host, a brother Word Bearer that Burias had fought alongside for countless years. His name was Eshmun, and he was of the 16th Cohort.

A respected veteran, Eshmun was a stoic and capable warrior who, Burias-Drak'shal recalled, had been marked out for greater things after butchering three White Consuls, bastard gene-descendants of the Ultramarines primarch Guilliman, in close combat on the Imperial world of Boros Prime. In a hundred wars they had been comrades, fighting across innumerable worlds against all manner of foes. But here in these dark, sweltering corridors those bonds of brotherhood were forgotten.

Eshmun unslung his chainsword as Burias-Drak'shal leapt through the crush towards him, holding the weapon in a two-handed grasp. The blade's engines roared, adamantium teeth a blur of motion as they spun in combat readiness. 'Time to die, whoreson,' growled Eshmun, his voice wet and throaty.

Eshmun was fully armoured in battle plate, yet even it proved unable to withstand Buras-Drak'shal's fury. The possessed warrior took the swing of Eshmun's chainsword in his forearm, allowing the whirring blades to rip into his flesh. It bit deep, screaming and spraying gobbets of blood and shards of bone, and then stuck fast.

With his weapon effectively disabled, the warrior was unable to deflect Burias-Drak'shal's return strike, which punched straight through the front of his horned helmet and drove a half-metre long talon through his skull.

Eshmun died instantly but remained standing until Burias-Drak'shal withdrew, at which point the Word Bearer collapsed to the floor like a puppet with its strings cut.

Burias thought that killing one of his own Legion would have resonated powerfully within him... but it did not. It was merely another kill.

More of his kinsmen were closing in. He could taste their scent on the air.

*It is the Anointed.*

A part of him wanted to fight, but it was not a battle that he could win, and he knew that oblivion would not be granted to him; the Dark Apostle was too spiteful for that. He would fight, and a good number of them would die at his hands – Kol Badar included, if the Coryphaeus dared face him – but Burias-Drak'shal would eventually fall.

Bloodied and broken, he would be dragged back to the cell, and once again he would be bound and shackled with wards and runes. The cantors would be replaced, their droning intonation would begin anew. Once Marduk grew bored, he would be torn limb from limb and sealed within the armoured sarcophagus that had been chosen for him.

Eternity in a box, going slowly and inexorably mad, was not a fate that he would welcome.

*You must move quickly.*

He stepped over the corpse of Eshmun and slaughtered a path free of the remaining clan warriors without a second thought.

Then he ran, the voice in his head guiding his every step.

Countless side corridors, hallways and tunnels branched off the main

thoroughfares, like so many capillaries, veins and arteries. Each turn revealed ever more; thousands of passages spreading out in a bewildering, interconnected maze like an intricate spider-web.

Always, the voice guided him on.

It was impossible to fathom how many individuals were locked away down here, suffering, tortured and brutalised for all eternity. Still, he gave the matter just the barest moment of thought. What did he care? He was free – everything else was an irrelevance.

He passed by hundreds of heavy doors and cells, most of which were locked and barred. Agonised screams, wails and cries echoed from many. The curators of this hellish place knew their art well.

The corridors seemed to stretch out forever. It would have been possible to wander lost for a dozen lifetimes on any one level and never see the same corridor twice, and there were many hundreds of levels below ground, dug deep into the stifling, burning core of the daemon planet, and yet more were being excavated all the time.

Chained bondsmen, their eyes and mouths sutured shut, paused and raised their pallid heads blindly as he surged past them. Black-clad cenobites whipped them back into subservience, their faces obscured by masks of dead flesh.

Malforms with braziers surgically sculpted into their fleshy backs wandered the darkest corridors, existing merely to bring light where shadow lingered. In hidden alcoves, grinning chasteners scourged the bodies of proselytes, lashing them with barbed whips that grew from their wrist-stumps.

Tens of thousands of penitents shuffled along in endless lines, patiently and willingly awaiting ritual sacrifice, their minds turned to palsied mush by the blaring incoherence of floating Discords. Many of them had been standing in line for weeks on end. Flesh-eating cherubs circled around the weak and the sick, waiting for them to fall.

Burias-Drak'shal met his captors in battle once again at the foot of a majestic, sweeping staircase that spiralled up into pure darkness. Strobing lasfire puckered the air, and autocannons wielded by mono-tasked guardian-slaves tore apart the ornate, frescoed walls as they tried to lock onto his rapidly moving shadow.

He slaughtered everything that stood in his path, and bounded up the great stairs, taking them eight at a time. Up into the higher levels of the Basilica of Torment, Burias-Drak'shal climbed.

The scent-traces of the Anointed pursued him always.

He didn't know how long he'd been running. Drak'shal had departed for now, receding back within, leaving him drained and aching.

Time was always difficult to judge on Sicarus. It was not a reliable measure here, its flow dictated by the tidal flow of the ether. It ran slower within the basilica than elsewhere on the daemon-world, the winds eddying around its buttressed flanks becoming torpid and slothful. This was no accident – the edifice's location had been carefully chosen so as to maximise and extend the torment of those within.

Nevertheless, Burias had never been as disoriented as he was now. He might have been running for minutes, or it may have been weeks. Everything that had occurred since his escape from his cell had melded together into one confusing blur.

He vaguely recalled a restless urgency that had driven him up through the basilica. Sometimes he had ascended narrow, spiralling staircases echoing with ethereal wails and screams. At other times he hauled himself up yawning elevator shafts, climbing hand over hand up chains slick with grease and oily grime; he crawled through pipes gushing with liquid foulness, and shimmied up vertical chimneys where corpses were routinely dumped, broken bodies tumbling down into the bowels of the planet. He had fought and killed everything that sought to halt his progress.

Was any of that real? It seemed like a dream.

He tried to focus on his elusive, deceptive memories, but they were as insubstantial as smoke, dissipating like ghosts as he sought to grasp them. It felt like knives were twisting in his mind as he struggled to comprehend what was going on.

He rubbed his shoulders, feeling a ghost-ache there – residual pain from his torture, he guessed – along with a disconcerting recurring numbness in his arms and legs.

There was a heavy, wet feeling in his lungs, making his breathing painful and laboured. He could hear a dull repetitive thumping sound from somewhere nearby, as of metal striking stone. He dropped to his knees, an intense nausea threatening to overwhelm him.

Shaking his head, he struggled to focus on what was real – what he could see, hear, touch and feel. He could not allow himself to slip. Not now.

'Are you still there, spirit?' he growled.

*I am no spirit. But I am here.*

'What is going on?' he breathed. 'What is happening to me?'

*You teeter on the edge of Torment. You must keep moving, lest you succumb.*

‘I cannot bear this,’ Burias said. ‘How can I know-’

*Focus on what you feel. The stone beneath your hands, the ache of your muscles. The blood in your mouth.*

Burias did as the voice bade him, and the nausea and throbbing pain in his head receded, along with the metallic pounding.

His strength slowly returning, he rose back to his feet.

*Your pursuers are closing in on you once more.*

‘Then guide me away from here,’ Burias replied.

After what seemed a lifetime he emerged, blinking, from the darkness.

He found himself upon a section of spiked battlement, high up on the basilica. Immense spires, turrets, towers, and domes soared above him, kilometres high, reaching up into the burning sky. Twin obsidian moons wreathed in hellfire stared down like the unblinking eyes of gods. Kathartes rode the heat-currents and swirling updrafts, circling lazily, descending occasionally to feast upon the twitching bodies of sacrifices.

He’d been guided up into the giant cathedral, driven ever higher by his relentless pursuers. The exits on the lower levels had been heavily guarded by warrior clans, sentry guns, and battle-brothers of the 34th Host. There had been no chance of escape there.

He allowed himself a moment, gazing across the surface of Sicarus, the adopted homeworld of the Word Bearers. Vast cathedrals, temples, fanes, and gehemahnet towers stretched out across the scorched world, tightly clustered as far as the eye could see. Many of these grand structures were a dozen kilometres or more in height, yet the Basilica of Torment reared up over them all.

The surface of Sicarus was always changing, climbing ever higher into the heavens and the realms of the gods. Larger and more extravagant temples of worship were constantly being raised, constructed on top of the older, crumbling structures like the trees of a forest straining up to the sun and strangling out their rivals.

Ancient battleships, many of which had served the Legion since the Great Crusade, hung in low orbit like circling void sharks. Beyond them, the maddening heavens whirled.

The warp was alive with burning incandescence and surging, ethereal power. Semi-divine entities that defied description could be half-seen in the roiling fire out there, immense forms coiling and writhing, dwarfing the battleships below

them. Their grasping tentacles reached down low in places, stretching toward the rising structures of Sicarus.

Burias leaned out over the battlements, gazing down. Cloying yellow cloud hugged the towers and flying buttresses below, obscuring the firmament and lower structures completely. Immense daemonic faces materialised within the fog, snarling and roaring in soundless fury. They seemed to be straining to rise and devour him, but they could not break free of the cloud bank. He found himself mesmerised by their languid, malevolent shapes.

*The Anointed are upon you.*

A whickering bolter shot whipped past Burias's head, and he hurled himself to one side, ducking for cover. The concussive thump of impact reached him a fraction of a second after the self-propelled shell had passed him by.

He cursed himself for not having sensed how close his pursuers had come.

Stealing a glance around the edge of the archway, he saw the Anointed – hulking Terminator armoured Word Bearers looming out of the gloom, striding belligerently toward his position with weapons raised. The lenses of their helms shone red as their auto-targeters locked onto him.

He ducked back behind the corner of the balcony, cursing. A crackling melta blast struck, liquefying the rockcrete and making it drip like syrup.

'You've led me to a dead end, spirit,' he snapped.

*Death is no end for us, Burias.*

More gunfire struck the corner at his back, ripping at the stonework.

'Where now, then?'

*Up.*

Drak'shal returned in an instant and Burias sprang vertically, talons latching onto a jutting ledge six metres above the balcony. The ledge began to crumble beneath his talons, and he scrabbled for purchase, feeling the dizzying pull of the void below...

Finding a foothold, he leapt powerfully upwards again, and latched onto the underside of a horned statue with one hand. As he hung there, he glimpsed the Anointed emerging onto the balcony below. He hauled himself up the daemonic stone figure as they raised their weapons and unleashed a torrent of fire towards him.

The statue fractured beneath the withering fusillade. Bolter rounds and splinters of rock sliced the thin air around him. He snarled as his blood was drawn.

Burias-Drak'shal pushed off from the head of the statue as it shattered,

grabbing onto a jutting plinth and continuing his rapid ascent, bounding up the exterior of the basilica, leaping from handhold to handhold.

He swung out over a deep overhang, climbing hand over hand along stone ribs that formed arches supporting the underside of a protruding wing of the basilica. He could no longer see the Anointed or the balcony he had left below – both had been inexplicably swallowed up by the thick cloudbank that hung beneath him.

With a grunt of effort, he hauled himself up onto a ledge, disturbing a roosting Katharte. The daemon beared its teeth at him and dived off the ledge, drawing its skinless wings tightly in to its body.

Moving swiftly and silently, Burias-Drak'shal slid in through an arched window and found himself in a long shadowed corridor. There was no living soul to be seen, though flayed human flesh was pinned to the walls, hair and fingernails still attached.

As he drew near, fresh ruinous symbols carved by unseen hands were cut into these skins. Blood ran from the wounds, dripping down the walls. The flesh began to ripple and twitch, and a large milky eye slid open to regard him impassively. Mouths tore open, and the dead flesh began to wail and gibber, flapping and twitching spasmodically.

Burias-Drak'shal picked up his pace, loping quickly along the corridor as more mouths opened, adding to the toneless wail.

Outside, a floating Discord descended, drawn to the sound, and hovered several metres beyond the portico's windows. It turned its brazen vox-grille toward him, a tangle of mechanised tendrils trailing behind it. A deafening blare of sound burst from the thing, a cacophonous wall of sound that made his eardrums vibrate painfully. It was the sound of Chaos itself, filled with ungodly screams, wailing children, pounding industry, and the beating of the dark gods' hearts.

Amongst the din, a familiar voice spoke his name. *'Burias.'*

In confusion, Burias-Drak'shal stared at the hovering Discord.

'Marduk?' he said.

*Do not listen. It will speak only lies and falsehoods. The deceiver seeks to draw you back to Torment.*

A second blast of noise rolled over him, and he reeled as if struck a physical blow. Blood dripped from his ears. Again he heard the voice of his former lord and master, coaxing him back to... where...?

The choking, drowning sensation rose within his throat once more,

threatening to engulf him.

*Focus, Burias. All that is real is here.*

Stumbling blindly away from the aural assault, Burias staggered through an archway into shadow. It was cooler here in the cloistered darkness, and a rasping wind seemed to pull him eagerly along. Within moments, the blare of the Discord faded away.

He paused in his flight, breathing heavily, until he was back in control of his senses. His ears were ringing from the din.

A familiar scent reached his nostrils, and his lips pulled back in a snarl, exposing his serrated teeth. He spun, lashing out... but too late.

His strike was knocked aside contemptuously, and powered talons clamped around his neck.

‘Hello, Burias,’ snarled Kol Badar.

Burias-Drak’shal was hoisted half a metre off the ground to match Kol Badar’s height, and his feet kicked futilely beneath him. The Coryphaeus was wearing his quad-tusked Terminator helm, and his voice was a low, mechanised growl.

‘It is time to go back, Burias,’ said Kol Badar. ‘You cannot keep running forever.’

Burias’s windpipe was being crushed and his arteries compressed, stemming the flow of blood to his brain. Dimly he saw a distorted reflection in the elliptical lenses of Kol Badar’s helmet, but it was not his own face that stared back at him – what he saw was a wasted, grimacing cadaver. Tubes and ribbed pipes emerged from its nostrils and mouth, and its hairless scalp was pitted with plugs, cables and wires. Blood, oil and dark mucus leaked from the crudely drilled holes in its skull.

Burias-Drak’shal cried out, thrashing and striking out wildly, but he could not break the Coryphaeus’s crushing grip. Kol Badar laughed at his frantic struggle.

His vision grew hazy and indistinct, his brain starved of blood and oxygen. Whispering shadows danced around the periphery of his vision, like grim spectres awaiting his death. His surroundings faded, the walls melting away, and flames erupted all around him. He gripped the Coryphaeus’s talons, straining to loosen them, but his strength was fading, along with his consciousness.

With a sickly crack, a vertical slit opened Kol Badar’s helmet from chin to crown, yawning into a gaping, daemoniac maw filled with rows of ceramite teeth. The jaws of this mouth distended impossibly, and Burias was dragged in towards it. Wriggling black worms emerged from deep in the monster’s throat, straining

toward his face.

*If you surrender now, you will be lost to Torment forever.*

‘No!’ roared Burias, straining to turn away. Surging with a last burst of desperate strength, he managed to wrench apart the daemon’s talons, and he fell to the ground at its feet.

He rose fast, lashing out, but he hit nothing. He was alone.

The corridor was empty.

Still gasping for breath, Burias staggered down a narrow side tunnel and into an antechamber crowded with robed proselytes. Their heads were bowed as they hurried on their way, paying him no attention at all. The air was thick and cloying with smoke and incense, and the walls seemed to be closing in on him.

At the far end of the chamber, he could see the hellfire glow of the open sky, and he pushed his way towards it. He was battling against the flow of proselytes, and he roughly barged his way through the stinking press of bodies. Still they paid him no mind, not even complaining as he shoved them out of his path. Several fell to the ground and were instantly lost beneath the living tide.

Burias realised he was getting no closer to his goal, and he began to lay around him more forcefully, battering aside those in his path, breaking bones and limbs with sickening cracks. He trampled over those that fell and crushed them with his heavy steps.

At last he emerged into the light to find himself upon a wide bridge spanning the gap between two cathedral spires of the basilica. Statues of Word Bearers, each more than five metres tall, lined the bridge, each with hundreds of prayer papers fixed to their armour. Doleful bells sounded, reverberating across the maddening cityscape of Sicarus.

The flow of the faithful broke upon him, streaming around him like liquid. He was an island, a lone motionless figure in the midst of a migration as the bells called the faithful to worship.

*‘Burias.’*

Again he heard someone speaking his name and he turned, scanning the sea of downcast faces for its source.

His legs gave way beneath him. They were completely numb, and the same loss of sensation was tingling up his arms. He felt suddenly confined, claustrophobic and trapped in the midst of the crowd. *‘Burias-Drak’shal.’*

*Shut it out.*

Burias clutched his head, confused and disoriented. ‘What is happening to

me?’ Bodies pressed in around him, bustling past.

*You are being called back.*

‘Back to where?’

*Torment.*

The immense Word Bearer statues began to move, stepping off their plinths with stonework crumbling away from their forms to reveal blood-red armour beneath. They strode through the crowd, moving toward Burias in step with the pealing of the distant bells, giant bolters clasped across their chests.

‘This cannot be real,’ he whispered, dragging himself to his feet.

The crowd turned, as if seeing him for the first time. In a rush they surged forwards, babbling and speaking in tongues. They crowded around him, their eyes burning hot with faith and fever, reaching out to touch him.

‘Bless us, great one,’ a scrawny proselyte begged, clutching at his leg. Burias kicked the wretch away, snapping the man’s bones.

‘This cannot be real!’ he said again, pushing away from the crowd, making his way to the edge of the bridge.

*This is all that is real, Burias. Everything else is Torment.*

The giant Word Bearers were closing, making the bridge shudder with every footfall, crushing any who did not get out of their way quick enough.

*Run. Fight. Kill. Do this, and you can live on here, forever.*

Burias laughed at the absurdity of it all, and climbed up onto the edge of the soaring bridge’s low wall and glanced down. The sickly cloud bank below was impenetrable even to his daemon-sight.

‘To hell with this,’ snarled Burias.

‘*Burias-Drak’shal,*’ said every proselyte in unison, speaking with the Dark Apostle Marduk’s voice. ‘*Come to me.*’

The immense statues hefted their bolters, closing in all around him. The voice cut through Burias’s mind, tinged with desperation.

*Do not do this!*

‘And to hell with both of you,’ said Burias, speaking to both the spirit-voice and the voice of his master. He turned away from the crowd of believers.

With his head held high, he extended his arms out to either side. He closed his eyes, and breathed in deeply.

The thunderous fire of gigantic bolters echoed all around, but Burias had already let himself topple forwards.

The proselytes screamed as one. ‘*No!*’

*No!*

Burias pushed off hard, and holding his cruciform pose, he plummeted down into the fog. The air rushed past him, yet he kept his eyes shut, giving himself over to the Ruinous Powers.

It felt as though he were flying, soaring the ether with the kathartes. Not the foul, skinless harpies that filled the skies of Sicarus and frequented the *Infidus Diabolus*, but the beautiful angelic beings of pure light that those daemons became in the deep flow of the warp.

*He was drowning.*

*Thick, viscous fluid filled his lungs, lukewarm and repulsive. He coughed and spluttered, crying out in shock and anger. The sound was muffled by the thick bundles of tubes and pipes that filled his throat and nostrils. All he achieved was to expel what little air he-*

‘No!’ roared Burias, kicking and thrashing against his confinement, and then he was falling through the void once more.

Abruptly, the cloud bank parted and he smashed through a great dome of coloured glass. Coming down fast, he rolled and skidded along the length of a flying buttress to rob the fall of its impact, tumbling to the floor and ending the movement on one knee. Shards of coloured glass studded his flesh, and more showered down around him, filling the air with its tinkling music.

He found himself in a tiny chapel. It was a humble, ascetic space, a simple shrine to the dark gods that lacked the grandeur and ceremony that infested the rest of Sicarus. A plain altar was carved into one wall, atop which sat a skull with a simple eight-pointed star of Chaos burnt into its forehead.

Beneath a shadowed arch stood the lifeless, immense form of the Warmonger. Burias’s skin began to itch as he looked upon the Dreadnought, his arms and legs tingling.

‘You should not be here,’ said a woman’s voice, and Burias-Drak’shal snarled, turning sharply. He had not sensed a presence in the room.

He could tell by her manner of garb and bearing that she was a seer. She stood in the shadows, bedecked in robes the colour of congealed blood. Her hood was down, revealing an angular, pale face. Gaping, empty hollows were located where her eyes should have been, yet she seemed to stare at him unerringly. ‘You have gone too deep.’

Drak’shal was raging within him, urging him to attack, to brutalise this witch and be away, but he resisted. He forced the daemon back. It struggled,

attempting to gain ascendancy, but it was an old battle, and one that Burias had won long ago. Resentfully, Drak'shal receded, sinking within.

The daemon's presence had ensured that the wounds of his torture had now healed. All that remained was his dried blood upon his skin. No scars marred his flesh.

For a moment he thought he heard a distant voice speaking his name. He shook his head, clearing it of these errant distractions.

'There is someone waiting here for me,' he said. 'Who is it?'

'You do not need me to answer that question,' said the seer. 'You already know the answer.'

'I do not have time for riddles,' muttered Burias, turning to leave.

'Time is meaningless here,' she replied. 'You know this.'

'Speak plainly, witch, or do not speak at all.'

'It was he who released you from your bondage,' she said, her words giving him pause. 'It was he who brought you here.'

'Released me?' Burias snarled over his shoulder. 'I released myself!'

'No,' said the seer, shaking her head. 'He burnt away the wards holding you, opening the door for you to come here, to come to him. But I see that your mind refuses to accept what your heart already knows is true. You need to *see* in order to believe.'

The seer stepped away from a simple wooden door, and gestured towards it.

Burias frowned, his anger piquing, but he stepped past her and placed a hand upon the door's rough hewn panels. It swung inwards easily, revealing a narrow passage. Lowering his head, he stepped within.

He moved up the narrow passage until he came to a circular, windowless prayer-room lit by a single candle in an arched alcove. It was small, the kind of room used by fasting penitents or hermetic recluses. The walls were covered in tiny neat script-work. He recognised the hand-writing. He had seen its like before.

'*Burias. Burias-Drak'shal.*' That voice again...

Burias's twin hearts began to pound. He could not breathe. He heard metallic pounding in the distance, beating in time to his hearts.

His gaze fell upon a figure kneeling in the centre of the room. Its back was turned to him, and it wore a plain robe of undyed, coarse fabric. Its head was smooth and hairless, the bare scalp glinting like gold in the candlelight.

The figure rose to its feet. It seemed to expand to fill the circular room, as if it were magnifying in volume to gigantic proportions. Then the illusion passed,

and Burias realised that the figure stood no taller than he.

As the figure turned, Burias looked upon the golden face of a demi-god.

His eyes began to bleed and his mind rebelled. His soul lurched, and he was driven to his knees, breathless and suffocating.

A veil seemed to be ripped aside, and the walls of the shrine disappeared, replaced with roaring flames and darkness. A maddening cacophony of screams and roars assaulted him from all sides.

‘Urizen? Lord?’ he breathed.

The flames seared his lungs, but he did not care. His mind was reeling. He did not understand. The primarch of the XVIIth had been locked in self-imposed isolation within the *Templum Inficio* since long before Burias’s creation. How could he be here? Where, in fact, were they?

Burias’s hearts were thundering, beating erratically and dangerously fast. He couldn’t breathe. He was drowning. He was blind.

*Look.*

The voice was velveteen and smooth, once again calm and measured. It was the same voice that had guided him to freedom, yet it seemed more potent, more vital. There was a controlled intensity to it that was almost painful.

*LOOK.*

He opened his eyes. The figure that stood before him was not the holy primarch of the XVII Legion. He was staring at himself.

He jolted, and the vision was gone. He was alone in the cold darkness.

‘*Burias.*’

*That* voice was not welcome here. It was an intrusion. He tried to ignore it, but its power was impossible to resist. He rebelled against it, but it dragged him back towards consciousness.

‘*Burias-Drak’shal.*’

*He was drowning.*

*Thick, viscous fluid filled his lungs, lukewarm and repulsive. He coughed and spluttered, crying out in shock and anger. The sound was muffled by the thick bundles of tubes and pipes that filled his throat and nostrils. All he achieved was to expel what little air he had left.*

*In panic, he registered that he was completely submerged, and as he struggled to rise he struck a hard, unyielding metal surface. He thrashed wildly, smashing against the sides of his containment, desperately seeking escape. There was none to be had. He was sealed in and drowning.*

*His hands refused to respond to his commands, and he could not move his arms. He could see nothing but darkness. He tasted oil and blood, battery acid and bile. He vomited violently, but the acidic foulness had nowhere to go.*

*His strength was fading, along with his consciousness. Metallic clangs, hammering and the whine of engines echoed loudly around him. Behind it, he heard the muffled murmur of voices, but could make no sense of the words.*

*The end was close now, and his struggles weakened. His lungs rebelled against him, causing him to reflexively suck in a deep breath of liquid and his own vomit. He began to convulse, shuddering and jerking violently.*

*Oblivion came for him then. But it was not to last.*

He awoke to darkness. There was no pain. There was nothing at all, and he knew then that he was in hell.

He roared in a voice that was not his voice. He heard that mechanical, grinding, anguished bellow with ears that were not his ears; external sensors translated what they heard into electrical impulses and were transmitted directly into his cortex.

He clenched a hand that was not his hand into a fist, and an immense, blade-fingered power talon clenched. He pounded this great fist into the stone walls of his prison once again. It made a dull sound, metal on stone. *That sound...*

‘Burias,’ said a voice. ‘Burias-Drak’shal.’

It was the voice that had called him back. It was the voice that had brought him into this hell. He swung towards it, servos whining.

‘Back in the land of the living, finally. In a manner of speaking, at least.’

Optic sensors interpreted what they saw. A figure stood nearby, one that he recognised.

‘You were in deep this time,’ said the figure. ‘I was not sure you were coming out. You resisted my call for the longest time yet. I am impressed.’

Burias lunged at the figure, pneumatic piston-driven legs driving him forward and giant claws reaching out to crush it, but immense chains bound with burning runes held him fast, restraining his mechanical strength.

Dark Apostle Marduk laughed. ‘Now, now, Burias. Mind that temper.’

Hatred surged through what was left of Burias’s body – amputated, rotten and curled foetus-like in the amniotic fluid sloshing within the sarcophagus implanted at the heart of the machine.

Hatred. *That* was something he was still capable of feeling. His mighty fists were clenching and unclenching unconsciously. With every last remaining fibre

of his being he wanted to smash the author of his torment to paste.

‘How long this time?’ Burias managed, his voice deep and sepulchral, the sound of immense rocks grinding together.

‘Not long. Ninety-seven years, unadjusted.’

To Burias it had felt like an eternity. He wondered how he could possibly endure.

‘Why do you rouse me now?’ he growled. ‘There is no torment that you can unleash upon me that would make my suffering any more complete.’

‘Torment, old friend? No, you mistake my purpose,’ said Marduk. ‘I come to you because the Host marshals for war. I am, for now, *releasing* you from torment. It is time you killed again for the Legion.’

Death was nothing to be feared. Death he would have welcomed. But denied that, the next best thing was the chance to kill once more. Burias ceased his struggles.

‘War?’ he boomed, unable to keep the eagerness from his grating, mechanical voice.

‘War,’ agreed the Dark Apostle.

A silken voice spoke in Burias’s mind.

*None of this is real.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After finishing university Anthony Reynolds set sail from his homeland Australia and ventured forth to foreign climes. He ended up settling in the UK, and managed to blag his way into Games Workshop's hallowed design studio. There he worked for four years as a games developer and two years as part of the management team. He now resides back in his hometown of Sydney, overlooking the beach and enjoying the sun and the surf, though he finds that to capture the true darkness and horror of Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 he has taken to writing in what could be described as a darkened cave.

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or you can follow him on Twitter @\_AntReynolds\_



Driven on by dark visions, Dark Apostle Jarulek of the Word Bearers Chaos Space Marine legion and his force lay waste to the imperial planet of Tanakreg.

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