

THE LIBRARIUM

Exclusive Short



THE LIBRARIAN'S ACOLYTE

An exclusive short story for members of the Librarium

Graeme Lyon

The cover art depicts a Librarian in ornate, dark armor with a glowing blue gem on his chest, holding a sword. To his right, a Librarian's Acolyte is shown in a similar but more rugged armor, with bright blue lightning bolts striking his face. The background is a dark, stormy sky with lightning. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and bright cyan highlights.

WARHAMMER
40,000

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‘Your time as a battle-brother of the Ultramarines is at an end.’

Chief Librarian Tigurius’ voice echoed through the vaulted stone chamber of the Librarium. He walked around Acolyte Loraeus, who turned to keep his new master in sight. He started slightly at the sight of his own shoulder plate, no longer in the vibrant hue of the Chapter, but now the lighter, more vivid electric blue of the Librarius, glowing in the light that streamed through the great glass dome that topped the chamber.

‘No longer will you go to battle as part of a squad, relying on the bonds of brotherhood to protect you as much as on your armour.’ Tigurius stopped pacing and swung up his rune-marked staff, tapping the horned skull that adorned it against Loraeus’ chestplate. ‘From this day, you will stand alone. And when next you walk a battlefield, it will be as a Librarian.’

The Chief Librarian paused, his back to the acolyte. There had been no signs that Loraeus was a latent psyker until very recently, when his powers had erupted under the stress of battle in a sheet of flame that had devastated a squad of greenskinned xenos. None of his brother Scouts had been harmed by the inadvertent inferno, but Loraeus had felt their suspicions about him straight away.

‘Your power comes from the warp, young brother, from the wellspring of immaterial energy that men call Chaos. And over time, you will learn to harness that energy and use it for the good of the Chapter and the Imperium. You will learn to channel your power through different disciplines, to divine the future, manipulate matter with your mind, wield the power of flame as your weapon – and more.’

Again, Tigurius paused, this time facing Loraeus. His eyes flickered with energy, and the young Librarian wondered if his master was using his own prodigious power to look inside his mind. As he thought this, Tigurius smiled grimly.

‘Perhaps I am,’ he said, ‘or maybe I just know how new acolytes think. Do you have any questions, brother? Any other questions, that is.’

Loraeus hesitated for a moment before asking what had been preying upon his mind since his power had manifested.

‘The Chaplains tell us that psychic power is to be feared and reviled,’ he began, his eyes locked on Tigurius. ‘That all psykers are a danger, that creatures of the warp can use them as a foothold into this reality. What if that happens? What if I endanger my brothers? The Chapter?’

Tigurius nodded slowly, as if considering his answer. Then he slowly turned, raising his arms and staff to take in the immense chamber.

‘You see the gold lines running through the stone, brother?’ he asked. Loraeus nodded, and the Chief Librarian continued. ‘They have a core of psychically warded electrum and entwine throughout the Librarium’s structure in a very precise geomantic pattern. They channel energy in such a way that no matter the severity of the... accident that occurs within these walls, there will be no pathway for the Ruinous Powers to enter the Fortress of Hera. Simply put – they stop daemons getting in.’

Tigurius took another step forward and pointed his staff at Loraeus’ head.

‘And the psychic hood you wear will also help, as will your force weapon, when you construct it.’ Loraeus couldn’t prevent excitement from crossing his face, and Tigurius smiled once more. ‘Which you won’t be doing for a while. There is much training you must undergo before you will be ready to wield your power. And it begins...’ – he paused for a moment – ‘tomorrow.’

‘Tomorrow? Then what is to be done with the remains of this day, Chief Librarian?’

‘Today, you will begin with one of the more... mundane tasks that are our duty.’ Tigurius gestured to a large pile of books and scrolls stacked on and around a nearby cluster of tables. ‘These must be sorted and restored to their proper places on the shelves. Consider this a good opportunity to discover how the Librarium is organised.’ Tigurius clapped Loraeus on the shoulder plate and made to stride from the chamber. He paused at the stone portal with a wry look.

‘We are *Librarians*, after all.’

The work went slowly, as Loraeus struggled to decipher the arcane system used to organise the volumes in the Librarium. Slowly the pile of books and scrolls diminished, as did the daylight, until the immense chamber was lit only by the light reflected from Formaska, Macragge’s second moon. Sometimes a tome or

paper caught the acolyte's eye and he spent some minutes leafing through pages, taking in details of an after-action report from a long-ago battle, or a sergeant's ruminations on the Doctrines of Aeonid Thiel from the *Codex Astartes*. Much of it was fascinating, and he made a mental note to go back and read more when time allowed. Some was so dry that he wondered why it had been taken out and read in the first place.

Shifting a stack of books that seemed to be seven volumes of a long-dead inquisitor's treatise on the movements of an eldar craftworld, Loraeus knocked a scroll to the floor. He knelt to pick it up, and as soon as his gauntleted hands touched the dry and aged parchment, he could feel the power in the scroll.

'What is this...?' he wondered aloud, and unrolled it. It was written in a language he didn't recognise. He read a few syllables aloud.

'Bar-frell-thrum-kala-mensh-tu...'

Though a tiny voice in his subconscious told him it was foolish, Loraeus read on. As he did, he felt power shift in the room. Energy flowed through the words, through him, and into the air, which began to feel greasy. He tasted copper and spat, a wad of bloody acidic phlegm hitting the floor and eating into the smooth flagstone. Alarmed, he stopped chanting and threw down the scroll, but the words continued. They were in another voice now, one that seemed to come from all around him. It was deep, low and resonant, and it echoed wrongly, as if it were warping reality with every syllable.

'I need to find Tigurius,' Loraeus muttered. He made for the exit from the chamber, but the heavy darkwood doors slammed shut as he approached them. He reached for the handle, and yanked his hand back as aetheric sparks danced from the metal handle to his gauntlet, shorting circuits and servos. He flexed his fingers and looked around. There were sparks in the air as well and as he watched in horror, one of them split apart, revealing an indescribable void, like a view onto perfect nothingness.

And then, suddenly, where there had been nothing, there was... something. A creature. It was no larger than Loraeus' torso, and its skin, if it could be called that, was a greenish-brown. A mixture of blood and pus oozed from sores in the creature's body, and malevolent yellow eyes glowed out from above a fang-filled maw. Above that sat a pair of antler-like horns. As Loraeus watched, a forked tongue shot out from between rows of broken and darkened fangs and licked the air.

The creature gibbered something in a high-pitched squeal, and others of its kind appeared from more cracks in reality and began dancing and capering amongst

the towering shelves. They were in a variety of hues, but each had the same suppurating wounds. Some had internal organs uncoiling from their bodies, dripping viscous fluids onto the stone floor. One had a gaping mouth in its stomach, with an oversized tongue licking thin, cracked lips. Another had a single huge eye set into its head... and it was looking at Loraeus. It squeaked something and the others all ceased their capering and turned towards him.

He froze, and his training kicked in. He may not have been a Librarian yet, but he was an Ultramarine. He assessed the situation in a heartbeat. Multiple hostile creatures, their nature unknown. An enclosed space. No weapons apart from his gladius, sheathed at his belt. There was only one course of action.

Kill them all.

He sprang towards the nearest creature, drawing his sword from its scabbard and swinging it to bisect the thing with one smooth stroke. It screamed as it died, and its fellows echoed the sound. And as they did, more emerged from the air itself, and they leapt at Loraeus. He hacked and slashed at them, each blow punching through diseased guts, slicing off gnarled horns and cutting creatures in two. But for each one that fell, disincorporating into foul-smelling vapour, a handful took its place. Might alone would not defeat this foe.

Letting instinct and muscle memory take over, Loraeus considered the problem. As his body cut and spun, his mind worked on a solution. He looked around, at the growing rifts, the clamouring creatures, and in the centre of it all...

'The scroll,' he said aloud. It was the key. He started to move towards it, ducking away from clumsy swipes of small but vicious claws and lashing out at the scrofulous, gibbering beasts. They obviously sensed his destination, because they made for the scroll as well, forming a mountain of slimy flesh and dripping fluids as they climbed towards the table at the heart of the chamber. More emerged from the rifts, adding to the wall of diseased bodies between Loraeus and his goal. There was no way to reach it without being overwhelmed.

He stopped and opened his hand, letting his gladius clatter to the ground. He took a deep breath and reached out with his thoughts, feeling the flow of energy through the room and pulling a portion of it into himself. In his mind's eye, he pictured fire, hot and bright, and with an effort of will and a thrust of his arms, he turned that image into real flames.

His armour blared with heat alarms as a blast of searing fire shot from him and towards the creatures. They squealed and tried to scatter, but it was too late. They superheated and popped like lanced boils, dissipating into a stream of rancid pus and foul-smelling gas. Behind them, the table caught fire, and the

tomes with it... and the scroll. It caught light and the aged parchment went up like tinder. As it disappeared, so did the rifts, reality asserting itself over the otherworldly nothingness in an instant.

All was silent, save for the crackling of flames. Then the Librarium's fire control system activated, dousing the area in flame-retardant chemicals while an alarm blared.

Loraeus stood there, breathing hard, utterly spent by the effort of channelling the power into fire. Behind him, he heard the heavy doors creak open, then there was the sound of a pair of gauntleted hands clapping. He turned, to see Tigurius beaming at him.

'Lord Tigurius, I—'

The Chief Librarian raised a hand to silence Loraeus.

'Hush, acolyte. There is no need to explain. I was watching the entire time.'

'You were... watching?' Confusion flooded Loraeus. 'How? And why didn't you help?'

'Why do *you* think I didn't come to your aid, Loraeus?' Tigurius asked.

An answer sprang immediately to mind. 'It was a test,' he said quietly.

Tigurius nodded affirmation.

'And I failed,' Loraeus continued.

'Failed? Oh no,' said Tigurius. 'You passed, Loraeus, and rather well. Aside from some... collateral damage.' The Chief Librarian walked over to the table and picked up one of the half-burned volumes, now wet with foam. 'Captain Antigone's *Celestial Bodies of Ultramar*, volume twelve. Perhaps not such a loss.' He turned to face the thoroughly confused Loraeus. 'You were in no danger, acolyte. Think on what I told you earlier today.' He gestured around the chamber, and Loraeus' eyes took in the immense stone walls, the dome of hardened glassaic, the golden threads running through it all.

'The wards,' he said. 'How did the creatures pass the wards?'

'They didn't, Loraeus,' said Tigurius. 'They were an illusion, an apparition conjured by one of your brother Librarians. A very convincing one, I must say.' He sniffed the fouled air with a grimace. 'This was a test of initiative, and of how well you harness your power under pressure. And you comported yourself more than adequately. I am satisfied that you are ready to begin training as a Librarian, Brother Loraeus.'

Loraeus' hearts swelled with pride.

'But first, brother,' said Tigurius, smiling again with a look at the foam-covered books, 'you'll need to set the Librarius back in order.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graeme Lyon is the author of the Space Marine Battles novella *Armour of Faith* and a host of Warhammer 40,000, Warhammer Age of Sigmar and Warhammer short stories including 'The Carnac Campaign: Sky Hunter', 'Kor'sarro Khan: Huntmaster', 'Black Iron', 'The Eighth Victory', 'The Sacrifice' and 'Bride of Khaine'. He hails from East Kilbride in Scotland, but lives and works in Nottingham.

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