



MARNEUS CALGAR:
LORD OF ULTRAMAR

A short story by Graham McNeill



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The Temple of Correction was quiet. Well into the Veil Watch, Calgar saw only a handful of pilgrims and supplicants walking the slow circuit around the shimmering sepulchre of the Avenging Son.

It wasn't just the late hour that kept the Temple of Correction quiet. Visitors to Macragge were few and far between these days.

The war against the Bloodborn had seen to that. Scattered remnants of M'kar's ruinous host still infested the asteroid belts and the farthest corners of Ultramar, raiding and causing whatever spiteful havoc they could muster.

Lazlo Tiberius had the Chapter fleets rooting the traitors from their every bolthole, but Ultramar was thick with places to hide.

Upon seeing the Chapter Master of the Ultramarines, the pilgrims bowed or fell to their knees in adoration. A few even hesitantly approached, but a warning glance from the axe-bearing warriors of the Honour Guard soon dissuaded them from coming any closer.

Calgar wished Eryx's veterans did not have to be so inflexible, but the Decree of Protection was absolute and unbending. Bloodborn infiltrators had reached the surface of Macragge in the guise of pilgrims, and no-one wanted a repeat of what happened to Fabian of the Third at Evanestus.

Calgar recognised the specific gene-traits of men and women from Espandor and Quintarn. He heard dialects from those worlds closest to Macragge, even a man whispering in the dark vowels characteristic to Konor's eastern cities.

To reach the crown world of Ultramar, these people would have followed the Pilgrim Trail from Iax to Calth, from Calth to Espandor and then to Macragge. Those with means might once have diverted to Talassar to see the ancient walls of Castra Tanagra, but nobody went there now.

Castra Tanagra had seen too much death, too much suffering. Its wounds were too fresh to be gaped at, even respectfully. In time, the pilgrims would return to

its high valley, but Ultramar had tears yet to shed before then.

‘I like to come here when I need to restore my equilibrium,’ said a voice from a recessed reliquary. ‘I imagine it is the same for you, my lord.’

‘Were you waiting here for me?’ asked Calgar, as Varro Tigurius emerged from the reliquary, his skull-topped staff held loosely in his right hand.

‘Why would you think I might be?’

Calgar bit back his first response, in no mood for his Chief Librarian’s habit of answering a question with one of his own.

‘Because you have petitioned me for the last week with an audience, and you know I often come here when it’s quiet.’

‘Does it help coming here?’ asked Tigurius. ‘To lessen the burden upon you, I mean?’

‘Sometimes,’ admitted Calgar. ‘I look up at Lord Guilliman and I think of the times he lived through. It comforts me to know that what we face is a spit in the rain compared to what the Five Hundred Worlds faced then.’

‘Then I will pre-emptively offer an apology.’

‘For what?’

‘For adding to your burden.’

Calgar beckoned Tigurius forward. The Honour Guard parted to allow the Librarian within their armoured shieldwall.

‘The last year has been hard, yes?’ said Tigurius, taking Calgar’s proffered hand.

‘I don’t have time for this, Varro,’ said Calgar, and they set off on a circuit of the mighty primarch’s shimmering stasis tomb. ‘Just say what you have to say.’

‘The past year has been hard,’ repeated Tigurius. ‘The losses suffered in turning back the Bloodborn were grievous, and all efforts are bent to replenishing the ranks of the fighting companies. Few are the petitions from beyond our borders for aid to which you will grant an audience.’

‘Fewer still are those to whom I send my warriors.’

‘With good reason,’ said Tigurius. He paused as they came to the marble slab marked with the dead of the Veteran Company. ‘Our realm is weaker than it has been for centuries and, more and more, the burden of its defence falls to the mortals of Ultramar.’

Calgar’s huge gauntlets curled into fists. His temper had been a fraying thing of late, and the obliqueness of Tigurius’s approach was only making it worse.

‘Did you set this ambush just to depress me further or is there a point to all this?’ he asked.

Tigurius nodded and looked up at the list of names rendered in gold leaf on the pale marble. At the head of the list was the name of First Company's greatest hero in living memory, Saul Invictus.

Calgar reached out to touch it as he always did.

'The point, my lord,' continued Tigurius, 'is that a decision must be made concerning Agemman. I know you value his counsel and his sword arm, but this is not the time to allow past glories and a lifetime of honourable service to blind us to the fact that Castra Tanagra has changed him.'

'Severus Agemman is a hero of Ultramar,' said Calgar with a warning tone. 'A hero of the Imperium.'

'That he is,' agreed Tigurius. 'No question. I stood with him on the walls of Castra Tanagra. I watched the two of you face the daemon lord, but he is not the man he once was.'

'None of us are, Varro,' said Calgar, looking at the gaunt, drawn features of the librarian. 'Perhaps you most of all.'

Holding the daemons back from the walls of Castra Tanagra had drained Tigurius in ways Calgar could never know.

Tigurius smiled grimly. 'There's truth in that, my lord, but you know of what I speak. The First Company needs a warrior who can lead them in battle, and Severus has never fully recovered from the daemon lord's blow that struck him down. You know it, and I know it.'

'You would have me replace him?'

'I would,' said Tigurius.

'And who could replace him? Sicarius? Ventris? Galenus?'

'It is not my place to say.'

'Since when has *that* ever stopped you?'

'This decision must be yours and yours alone,' said Tigurius. 'Much depends upon you making the right choice.'

Calgar heard the subtext.

'Is there something I need to know?'

'Many things,' said Tigurius. 'But chief among them is that a new enemy gathers, an inhuman foe whose ancient mind is beyond anything we have faced before.'

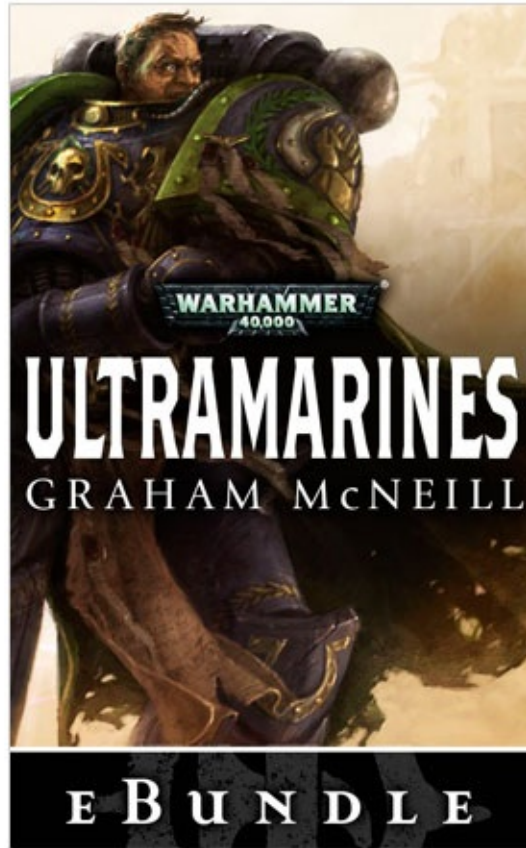
Tigurius looked up into the face of the Avenging Son.

'And we must be ready to face it.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GRAHAM MCNEILL has written a host of novels for Black Library, including the ever popular Ultramarines and Iron Warriors series. His

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