

THE HORUS HERESY®

GUARDIAN OF
ORDER

Gav Thorpe



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**SCENE 1: INT. ABANDONED DIGGING
WORKS - DAY**

[ATMOS: ruined settlement; breeze stirs hanging tarpaulins; corrugated metal creaks]

Taking a deep breath to ease the tension that tightened his chest, Zahariel peered down into the opening. He pushed back memories of the last time he had been here, beneath the Northwolds arcology, and of the terrible things that he had witnessed. He was not sure if it was the emptiness of this primitive new settlement or some reflection from a deeper, less physical sense that caused him to balk at the threshold.

[ATMOS: tunnel yawns; slight echo to dialogue]

He turned to his companion and gestured towards the rock surrounding them, carved by drill and laser pick.

ZAHARIEL: Someone dug this recently.

Like Zahariel, the other Space Marine was unarmoured, dressed instead in the heavy robes of the Order. He bore no symbols of rank or title; he was an enigma, the Lord Cypher, and guardian of their secretive traditions. He glanced around and shrugged.

CYPHER: Scavengers?

ZAHARIEL: After so many years? Why would they run from us? Flight suggests guilt.

Cypher turned back. It was not the first reluctance that he had shown since Zahariel had joined him.

CYPHER: The Order razed this place. It is natural that the inhabitants might think they are breaking our laws simply by returning. **[pause]** There is nothing of importance here.

ZAHARIEL: I think it bears further investigation. It was you, after all, who wanted to come to the Northwolds. I am only here as... an 'interested party'.

It was Luther that had ordered Zahariel to accompany the Lord Cypher in his many secretive comings and goings of late, though Cypher himself had been

hesitant to oblige. This was merely the first chance that had presented itself for them to travel together.

ZAHARIEL (cont'd, insistent): I do not wish to return to the Grand Master without a full report.

CYPHER (doubtful): What is there to report?

He waved an arm to encompass the deserted settlement behind them.

CYPHER (cont'd): Some vagrants have raised their slum here. That is all.

ZAHARIEL: We have only seen the surface. We should look a little deeper, if only to assure ourselves that there is not another rebellion growing in these decayed tunnels.

Lord Cypher looked uncomfortable.

CYPHER: Did Master Luther share the circumstance that prompted his sudden interest in this region?

Zahariel did not have to lie.

ZAHARIEL: Briefly. The number of recruits raised has almost outstripped the facilities at Aldurukh. He is thinking of raising a new fortress here.

CYPHER (thoughtful): An odd choice, considering its history...

ZAHARIEL: I disagree. It is the most obvious choice - a sign that the

Order has returned to mark the lands
with its presence.

**[SFX: they enter the tunnel, boot-falls
on dirty metal]**

SCENE 2: INT. THE TUNNEL - DAY

[ATMOS: walking carefully down the metal corridor, echoes growing steadily; a sense of foreboding]

They passed down tunnels that had once been gleaming metal, now marked by stains and corrosion. The air turned acrid, tainted by some unidentified source.

[SFX: Zahariel halts, listening; Cypher halts too]

[ATMOS: narration becomes 'close' for this paragraph]

Zahariel paused for a moment, one hand to the side of his head. He felt something stirring beneath them. Something that he had not felt for a long time, but familiar all the same...

[SFX: they continue]

After a few seconds, he plunged into the darkness once more, the lamps of his armour springing into life.

They followed the tunnel for some distance, encountering more signs of recent excavation and construction where toppled walls had been dug away, and bulkheads erected to improve the structure. As they descended, the air grew hotter, becoming almost stifling. The stench grew with it, though there seemed no cause for the reek; the passageways and chambers that they passed were free of filth and spoil. Lord Cypher made no remark on this fact, though he continually glanced back at Zahariel.

[ATMOS: wind begins to pick up; distant echoing sounds of movement, maybe even faint rumbling]

With the heat and stench also came an oppressive sensation. Zahariel could not shake the feeling that each step was taking him closer to a ghastly fate indeed. The feeling grew the further they delved, though Cypher seemed unaffected.

Or perhaps, a suspicious part of Zahariel realised, *forewarned*.

ZAHARIEL: Wait!

[SFX: sense of evil rushing up from the depths, on the wind]

Zahariel's warning caused the Lord

Cypher to stop in his tracks, hand moving to the bolt pistol at his belt. A moment later a long, low breath resonated up the tunnel, issuing from a distance, the rank air stirring with hot breeze every few seconds.

[ATMOS: growing sense of evil; eerie whispering at the edge of perception; a deep regular breathing echoing in the depths; the slither of slugs over stone and gritty pebbles]

CYPHER (harsh whisper): *Do you feel it?*

An unnatural dread began to seep through Zahariel's body, a chill spreading up his spine. Zahariel extended his will, motes of psychic energy dancing in the pupils of his eyes, and he reached out a hand, fingers splayed, as though probing an invisible wall. Cypher drew his weapon.

[SFX: pistol drawn from holster, urgently]

[ATMOS: the moment draws out, a pause in the narration]

It was better not to speak of what had happened before, so the Librarian lied.

ZAHARIEL (lying badly): An after-echo. Nothing more. **[pause]** You look... uncomfortable. What is wrong?

CYPHER (vague): I... I cannot go... I must...

[SFX: Cypher starts to retreat]

[ATMOS: sense of evil grows very close]

The Lord Cypher shook uncontrollably, eyes darting to the left and right, seeking the doom that was coming for him. He started to retreat up the corridor.

[SFX: loose rocks clatter just out of sight, as though something is creeping up on them]

CYPHER (covering his fear, retreating): We have to go back. This was a mistake.

ZAHARIEL (whisper, speculating):
Ghosts of the past.

Zahariel's words were as much for his own benefit as his companion's. He had never seen another legionary act in such a manner, but then Cypher had not faced the terrible thing in the depths of the Northwolds as Zahariel had.

ZAHARIEL (false confidence): There is nothing here to be afraid of. Just memories.

[SFX: Cypher flees, panicking quietly]

Shuddering, Cypher staggered away. Zahariel did not go after him, the dull thud of his boots fading back up the tunnel.

[ATMOS: faint psychic echoes of battle; screams of dying legionaries; cries

for help; all underpinned by the encroaching evil]

Zahariel had grave misgivings, his memories crowded with visions of voracious worms and *something* terrible and unnatural, but he pushed on. Luther had sent him here, and the Lord Cypher had been drawn to this place too. Zahariel did not need his psychic sense to feel the waves of strangeness emanating from the passages ahead.

[SFX: ghostly whispers of 'Zahariel' grow more distinct]

There was familiarity here: a voice, a presence to which Zahariel was no stranger. The foulness around him did not feel like a warning - though Lord Cypher had taken it as such - but more like a *welcome*.

But why now? Had the settlers unearthed something that had been missed by the purge? It seemed unlikely that they would have remained, had that horrific, pervading aura been noticed when they chose this place.

Was it *really* the two Space Marines that had caused them to depart their homes with such haste? *Why* had Lord Cypher come here...?

Too many questions without answers.

Cypher. He had to have known what was happening here. Perhaps he had been warned that Zahariel was watching him,

and lured the Librarian to this place.

[SFX: back on the surface, turbine engines start up]

Zahariel's superhuman hearing picked up the sharp echo of their shuttlecraft's engines firing.

[ATMOS: sense of evil builds to the end of the scene; the breathing, whispers of 'Zahariel', and cries of fear]

[SFX: Zahariel flees]

Zahariel broke into a run, heading back towards the surface.

[SFX: the shuttlecraft takes off, leaving him behind]

Something was coming. He could feel it now, like foetid breath on the back of his neck. The others had to be told. He had to raise the alarm.

The ouroboros was returning.

[ATMOS: horrible sounds end with final music cue]

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