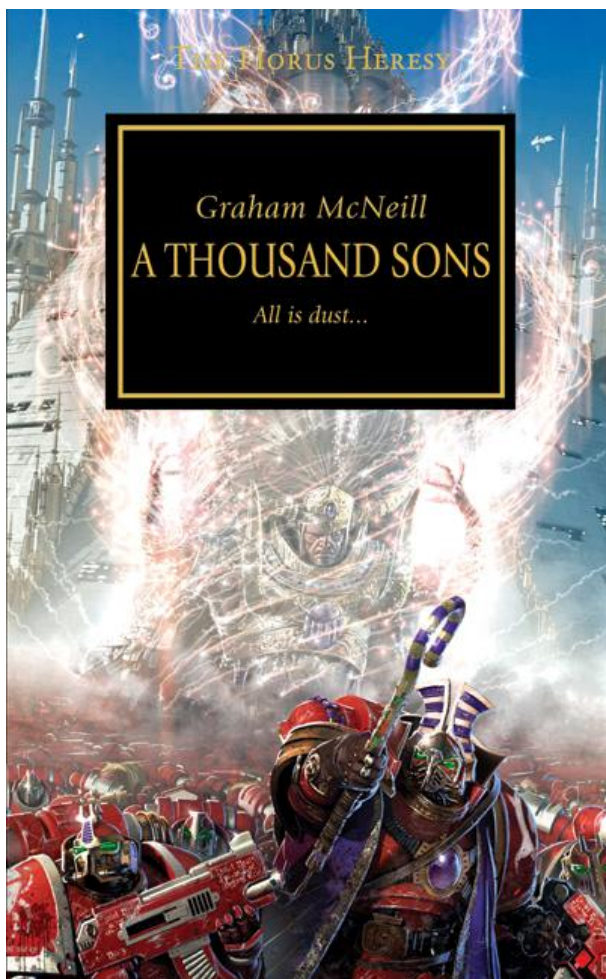




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A THOUSAND SONS

A Horus Heresy novel

By Graham McNeill

Censured at the Council of Nikaea for his flagrant use of sorcery, Magnus the Red and his Thousand Sons Legion retreat to their homeworld of Prospero to continue their use of the arcane arts in secret. But when the ill-fated primarch foresees the treachery of Warmaster Horus and warns the Emperor with the very powers he was forbidden to use, the Master of Mankind dispatches fellow primarch Leman Russ to attack Prospero itself. But Magnus has seen more than the betrayal of Horus and the witnessed revelations will change the fate of his fallen Legion, and its primarch, forever.

About the Author

Hailing from Scotland, Graham McNeill worked for over six years as a Games Developer in Games Workshop's Design Studio before taking the plunge to become a full-time writer. In addition to many previous novels, Graham's written a host of SF and Fantasy novels and comics, as well as a number of side projects that keep him busy and (mostly) out of trouble. Graham lives and works in Nottingham and you can keep up to date with where he'll be and what he's working on by visiting his website.



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The following is an excerpt from *A Thousand Sons* by Graham McNeill.

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KNEELING ON THE sun disc of his glittering pyramid, Magnus closed his first eye and unshackled his body of light from his flesh. His captains and warriors required the Enumerations to achieve the separation from flesh, but Magnus had mastered spirit travel in the aether without being aware that such a thing might be considered difficult.

The Enumerations were philosophical and conceptual tools to allow a practitioner of the mysteries to sift through the myriad complexities involved in bending the universe to his will. Such was his gift, the ability to achieve the impossible without knowing it was beyond comprehension.

On a world such as Aghoru, that process was eased by the aetheric winds that blew invisibly across the planet's surface. The Great Ocean pressed in, as though around a precious and delicate bubble. Magnus plucked a thought from the third Enumeration to express the concept; this world was a perfect sphere, structurally impossible to improve upon, yet the Mountain was a flaw, a means by which that perfect balance might be upset. When he had entered the cave with Yatiri, he had observed all the formalities of the Aghoru ritual of the dead, but the pointless chanting and somatic posturing had amused him with its naivety.

The Aghoru truly believed they placated some dormant race of devils imprisoned beneath the earth, but the time was not yet right to disabuse them of that notion. Standing in the dark of the cave, he could feel the vast pressure of the Great Ocean far beneath his feet, leeching up through wards worn thin by uncounted aeons.

There were no devils beneath the Mountain, only the promise of something so incredible that it took Magnus's breath away. It was

too early to be certain, but if he was right, the benefit to the human race would be beyond imaging.

What lay beneath the Mountain was a gateway, an entrance to an indescribably vast and complex network of pathways through the Great Ocean, as though an unseen network of veins threaded the flesh of the universe. To gain control of that network would allow humanity free rein over the stars, the chance to step from one side of the galaxy to the other in the blink of an eye.

There was danger, of course there was. He could not simply open this gate without the Great Ocean spilling out with disastrous consequences. The secret to unlocking this world's great potential would be in careful study, meticulous research and gradual experimentation. As Yatiri intoned the meaningless rituals for the dead, Magnus had drawn a filament of that power upwards, and had tasted the vast potential of it. It was raw, this power, raw and vital. His flesh ached for its touch again.

The things he could do with such power.

Magnus rose up, leaving his corporeal body kneeling upon the sun disc. Freed from the limitations of flesh, his body truly came alive, a lattice of senses beyond the paltry few understood by those whose only life was that lived on the mundane realms of existence.

‘I will free you all from the cave,’ said Magnus, his voice unheard beyond the walls of the pyramid. His body of light shot through the pyramid's peak, rising into the night sky of Aghoru, and Magnus relished this chance to soar without company or protection.

The Mountain reared over him, its immense presence towering in its majesty.

He rose up thousands of metres, and still it dwarfed his presence.

Magnus shot higher into the sky, a brilliant missile that twisted, spun and wove glittering traceries of light in the sky. His dizzying flight was invisible to all, for Magnus desired to remain alone, and masked his presence from even his captains.

He flew as close to the Mountain as he could, feeling the black wall of null energy radiating from artfully fashioned rocks and peaks designed with but a single purpose: to contain the roiling, unpredictable energies trapped beneath it.

Magnus spun around the mountain, relishing the aetheric winds whipping around his body of light. Ancient mystics had known the body of light as the *linga sarira*, a double of the physical body they believed could be conjured into existence with time, effort and will,

essentially creating a means to live forever. Though untrue, it was a noble belief.

Onwards and upwards he flew. The atmosphere grew thin, yet the subtle body needed no oxygen or heat or light to sustain it. Will and energy were its currency, and Magnus had a limitless supply of both.

The sun was a fading disc of light above him, and he flew ever upwards, spreading his arms like wings as he bathed in the warmth of the invisible currents of energy that permeated every corner of this world. The world below was a distant memory, the encampment of the Thousand Sons a pinprick of light in the darkness.

He saw the vast swathe of the galaxy, the misty whiteness of the Milky Way, the gleam of distant stars and the impossible gulfs that separated them. Throughout history, men and women had looked up at these stars and dreamed of one day travelling between them. They had balked at distances so vast the human mind was incapable of conceiving them, and then bent their minds to overcoming the difficulties in doing so.

Now the chance to take those stars, to master the galaxy once and for all, was in their grasp. Magnus would be the architect of that mastery. The ships of the Thousand Sons hung motionless in the void above him, the Photep, the Scion of Prospero and the Ankhtowë. Together with Mechanicum forge vessels, Administratum craft and a host of bulk cruisers bearing army soldiers of the Prospero Spireguard, they made up this portion of the 28th Expedition.

Up here, bathed in light and energy, Magnus was free of his earthly limitations, self-imposed though many of them were. Here, he saw with perfect clarity, his form unbound by the laws and bargains made by both him and his creator. Unlike his brothers, Magnus remembered his conception and growth, recalling with perfect clarity the bond that existed between him and his father.

Even as he was forged in the white heat of genius, he spoke with his father, listening to his grand dreams, the colossal scale of his vision and his own place within it. As a mother might talk to the unborn babe in her womb, so did the Emperor speak with Magnus.

But where a growing child knows nothing of the world outside, Magnus knew everything.

He remembered, decades later, returning to the world of his birth to travel its forgotten highways and explore its lost mysteries with his father. The Emperor had taught him more of the secret powers of

the universe, imparting his wisdom while little realising that the student was on the verge of outstripping the teacher. They had walked the searing red deserts of Meganesia, travelling the invisible pathways once known as songlines by the first people to walk that land.

Other cultures knew them as ley lines or lung-mei, believing them to be the blood of the gods, the magnetic flow of mystical energy that circulated in the planet's veins. His father told him how the ancient shamans of Old Earth could tap into these currents and wield power beyond that of other mortals. Many had sought to become gods, raising empires and enslaving all men before them.

The Emperor spoke of how these men had brought ruin upon themselves and their people by trafficking with powers beyond their comprehension. Seeing Magnus's interest, his father warned him against flying too long and too high in the aether for selfish gain.

Magnus listened attentively, but in his secret heart he had dreamed of controlling the powers these mortals could not. He was a being of light so far removed from humanity that he barely considered himself related to his primordial ancestors. He was far above them, yes, but he did not allow himself to forget the legacy of evolution and sacrifice that had elevated him. It was his duty and his honour to speed the ascension of those who would come after him, to show them the light as his father had shown him.

In those early days, Terra was a changing world, a planet reborn in the image of its new master as shining cities and grand wonders were raised to mark this turn in humanity's fortunes. The crowning glory of this new age was his father's palace, a continent-sized monument to the unimaginable achievement of Unity. It took shape on the highest reaches of the world, a landmass of architecture to serve as an undeniable symbol of Terra's new role as a lodestar for humanity. It would be a shining beacon in a galaxy starved of illumination during the lightless ages.

Magnus had studied the ancient texts his father had assembled within the Librarius Terra, devouring them all with a hunger that bordered on obsession. He stared into the heavens from the Great Observatory, toppled mountaintops with his brothers upon the Martial Spires and, greatest of all, soared upon the aether with his father.

He had watched in amusement as Fulgrim and Ferrus Manus vied for supremacy in the Terrawatt forges beneath Mount Narodnya, debated the nature of the universe with Lorgar in the Hall

of Leng, and met ever more of his brothers as they travelled to the world that had birthed them.

He had felt a kinship with some, a brotherhood he had not known he craved until it was right in front of him. With others, he felt nothing; hostility even, but he had not returned that hostility. The future would vindicate him.

When the time had come to make his way in the stars, it was bittersweet. It had seen him parted from his beloved father, but could not have come soon enough for his warriors, as the gene-defects that plagued them were growing ever more severe.

Magnus had led his Legion to Prospero, and there he had
There he had done what needed to be done to save his sons.

Thinking of his Legion, he turned his gaze from the stars and remembered his father's warning of flying too high and too far on the aether. He turned his flight back to earth, dropping like a comet towards the surface of Aghoru. The dark ground raced up to meet him, the encampment of the Thousand Sons like a lone campfire on an empty prairie. The minds of his warriors were the flames, some gently wavering, others blazing with ambition.

Magnus slowed his descent, feeling the heat of one flame in particular.

Ahriman. Always it was Ahriman who burned brighter than the others.

His Chief Librarian stood before his pavilion with Sobek at his side. He was speaking with three mortals whose minds were little more than faded embers.

Magnus read them in an instant and knew them better than they knew themselves.

One was Lemuel Gaumon, Ahriman's new Probationer. The taller of the two women was Camille Shivani, a psychometric, while the slighter one was Kallista Eris, an asemic writer.

She carried a handful of papers, though her aura told Magnus she was unhappy to be holding them. Shivani stood behind Gaumon, who spoke with some force to Ahriman.

Ahriman stared at the page he had been handed.

Magnus floated closer to Ahriman, reading what was written.

Over and over and over again, the same phrase.

The Wolves are coming.

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