



The Slab

Karen Traviss

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MARCUS FENIX. WAR HERO. LOYAL SON. TRAITOR. Ten years after Emergence Day, as the Locust Horde advances on humanity's last defended area—Ephyra—in a bloody war that has seen billions die, Marcus Fenix does the unthinkable: he defies orders and abandons his post during a critical battle in a bid to rescue his father, weapons scientist Adam Fenix. But Adam is buried in the rubble during a ferocious assault on the Fenix mansion, and Ephyra falls to the enemy. Marcus, grieving for a father everyone believes is dead, is court-martialed for dereliction of duty and sentenced to forty years in the Coalition of Ordered Government's brutal maximum security prison, known simply as the Slab.

But Adam is very much alive, snatched from the destruction by the elite Onyx Guard on Chairman Richard Prescott's orders. He's now a long way from home and in a prison of his own—a COG doomsday bunker on the tropical island of Azura, a place hidden from the rest of Sera since the Pendulum Wars. His own guilty secret has been exposed: Adam knew the Locust existed deep below the surface of Sera long before Emergence Day, and were being driven from their tunnels by a lethal parasite known as the Lambent. Now he has to find a way to destroy the Lambent while the dwindling COG forces fight to hold back a growing Locust army that's threatening to overrun the city.

As Adam struggles to find redemption in his comfortable island jail, Marcus seeks his own atonement in the squalid, closed world within the Slab's granite walls. While Dom Santiago and Anya Stroud fight to get him released, ready to make any sacrifice to free him, Marcus gradually finds unexpected kinship among Sera's most dangerous criminals—and a way to carry on his personal war against the Locust.

"Adam, you knew this day would come."

It was a familiar voice: silky, imperial, polished, and utterly human.

"Hello, Myrrah." Adam Fenix found himself thinking of the terrible Locust food again. "You got my message, then."

"And how right you were. We do need you. And we shall take you. I hope you're not planning anything foolish. You have responsibilities, Adam."

It would be a living death. The Locust Queen would never release him, even if he developed a countermeasure. But he didn't deserve any better.

"I also have my service pistol."

"And I can take your son at any time."

He had the measure of her, then, and she had his. "You leave Marcus out of this. It's a condition." He opened the desk drawer and took out the handgun, a 9mm officer's weapon. It made a distinctive clunk on the wooden desktop as he slammed it down. "If anything happens to him, I don't care what happens to the rest of Sera."

The Slab Details

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From Reader Review The Slab for online ebook

Brad Wheeler says

Call this 3.5 stars.

It took me awhile to decide how to rate this book. On the one hand, I'm a fan of Karen Traviss, and when it comes to military-style action there are few better writers (funny how the best military SF seems to be tie-in novels...). This book is no exception, and if it had been nothing but action and dudes being badass I would've rated it higher. Those sections were awesome.

But there's a *ton* of navel-gazing in between the action. The book is mostly about Marcus Fenix and what he did to get sent to the prison where he begins the *Gears of War* games, as well as his time there. But, Marcus isn't a viewpoint character, so we never really get what's going on in his head. Instead, we get tons of people thinking and speculating about what's going on in there, instead of actually doing stuff. A few characters (Hoffman in particular) do almost nothing but mentally flagellate themselves for putting Marcus in prison and making him suffer.

Still, most of the characters were well drawn, and the setting is properly dark and tragic. The prison was a lot more interesting than it could've been, since it was pretty much a colony of terrible people that was isolated but not really controlled by the prison warders. The interplay between the guards, the other prisoners, and Marcus were some of the book's best moments. And, of course, when the bullets inevitably started flying, it was un-put-downable.

I'd recommend this to anyone who liked the *Gears* games or likes military SF in general. Maybe buy the paper copy so you can skip past the navel-gazing, but definitely check it out.

Niki Rowland says

“Even the best of us do terrible things sometimes and we don’t even know why.”

Nick Raines says

This was not what I was expecting from a book based on a big dumb but fun video game series. It was a great read. The story revolves around the events leading up and during Marcus Fenix's (Main character from game series) stay at the lovely little prison nicknamed The Slab. This book is easily the best video game tie-in book I have read and there are a few decent ones (and one truly awful one, *Tomb Raider* and *The Ten Thousand Immortals*) that I have read. Even the narrative of the book is interesting, not once are we seeing anything from Marcus's point of view, we see him via other characters from a fellow prisoner to his BFF who calls him brother and even Hoffman (he's great). It was nice getting into the head of the supporting characters from the games and even a few who only exist in this book. This is not a quick read book, it is dense and full of ideas, in particular consequences for your actions. This is a way headier book than it needed to be and I really liked that. As to whether you can enjoy it with no knowledge of the games I am unsure and not qualified to answer that as I obviously have played all 4 games (*Judgement* is totally the 4th) and will

play the hell out of Gears 4 later this year (I hope Karen Traviss is writing a book with that one).

Bottom line for this poorly worded and meandering "review" is that I really enjoyed it, of course being a Gears of War fan made me the target audience.

Krystal says

I'm a massive GOW fan so I really enjoyed reading this book. The beginning was a bit slow but it picks up. The story jumps around between different perspectives and characters, but everything revolves around Marcus' incarceration in the Slab. If you've read the other books, like me, you may be expecting to FINALLY read the story from Marcus' perspective- but you won't. Travis writes from everyone's perspective EXCEPT his. However, out of all the books, Marcus opens up the most in this story and you do see and understand his personality better once he's in the Slab. My favorite sections were when he was in the Slab for those reasons. Without mentioning spoilers, you will discover why and how he was incarcerated, you get a bit of insight into his and Anya's relationship, you see Dom's devotion as his brother, and you see just what kind of effect Marcus has to those around him. You also find out how he got his scar. What I don't like is that the ending leaves a couple of things open or unanswered. A slight spoiler, for example, is in reference to GOW 1 when Dom releases Marcus from the Slab. Remember those bodies hanging from the ceiling? It's never mentioned in the story. I was really looking forward to learning why "you don't want to know" as Marcus said to Dom. Other than that though, I highly encourage GOW fans to read this if you love the video game and want to know more about the GOW universe.

Osiris says

Creo que cuando empecé este libro esperaba demasiado, considerando los anteriores libros de Traviss yo pensé que este iba a estar al mismo nivel, y lamentablemente no, no es malo como tal, de ahí que sean 3 estrellas, pero sin embargo, creo que le falta carnita.

A diferencia de los libros anteriores ahora no maneja dos líneas de tiempo, sino que se centra nada mas en los hechos que pasan entre los años 10 y 14 después del día E, más específicamente sobre que es lo que hace Marcus para terminar encarcelado, que es lo que (view spoiler) y que es lo que hacen Anya y Dom mientras que Marcus está en la carcel.

Aun pese a que la trama del libro no es tan buena, en algunas partes simplemente no pasa nada, lo mejor y lo más rescatable son pequeñas frases de diálogo que ayudan a entender mucho mejor algunas cosas que pasan después, por ejemplo toda la relación de Anya y Marcus, porqué es que Hoffman odia a Marcus cuando sale de la prisión, como es que Dom encuentra a Marcus, pero sobre todo creo que lo mejor es lo que tiene que ver con Presscot, donde principalmente muestra Traviss por primera vez como es que piensa el presidente de la COG.

No es malo el libro, pero creo que de todos, este es el que es más para fans de la serie.

Paul says

If you are a big fan of the GoW franchise--which I am--you will love the novels written by Karen Traviss. She is one of my favorite authors on the market today. An excellent blend of humor, detail, action, under-the-table politicking, and dying hope, this is a brutal rise to the beginning of the video game series as this book takes place right before the first game.

SLIGHT SPOILER WARNING

Dom Santiago, a Pendulum War special forces commando and best friend to Marcus Fenix, does what he can to create connections in the darkest, grittiest corners of a community who looks down on Gears (the Coalition of Ordered Governments' military) to get closer to springing his best friend and childhood and military brother Marcus from the Slab, a remote, disgusting prison that is run on a very respected, albeit shaky, common ground between the prison guards and the inmates. The Slab is slowly slipping into the background of the war, losing spotlight and support from the COG and a few of the prison guards as well as efforts are focused toward stopping the Locust Horde from annihilating the human race. Because of the lack of re-supply, the guards and the inmates have no choice but to survive on what little spread-thin rations they have, and an almost non-existent ammunition supply. Then tremors around The Slab become more and more apparent, signaling the omen of emerging Locust from underground...as if Marcus, the inmates, and the guards didn't have enough problems on their hands.

Greg says

Great book. One of the better stories in the series. Makes me want to go back and play all the games again.

Jasper says

i believe this is the fifth novel in the Gears of War book series and it was a decent read. for hardcore fans of the franchise, it offers a ton more insight into the relationships between Marcus and his father, Adam, as well as with Dom, Anya and Hoffman. the other concurrent storyline deals with Adam Fenix's relocation to Azura, the secret island facility housing Sera's best and brightest scientists and analysts.

the best parts of the book were about Chairman Prescott outsmarting everyone he comes in contact with AND when Dom/Anya/Hoffman would think about Marcus in The Slab. i thought the parts concerning Marcus in The Slab and Adam in Azura, respectfully, were a bit drab + dry--it's a shame really--everyone who has played the games knows what's going to happen in both stories, so it's natural that reading those parts aren't nearly as suspenseful as it's made out to be.

still, it's a delight once again to read Karen Traviss' work on the series as she simply understands the characters and how they interact with each other. my favorite book in the series is still the first, Aspho Fields (1) and i highly recommend it if you haven't read it already. the rest in order would be Anvil Gate (3), Coalition's End (4), The Slab (5) and then Jacinto's Remnant (2).

Charlene says

I've enjoyed all of Karen Traviss's *Gears of War* books so far, and *The Slab* is no exception. Covering the topic of Marcus's court-martial and incarceration, I knew it was going to be an intense story. I wasn't disappointed. As always, the characters she presented were multi-dimensional and believable, and I spent a great deal of the book breathlessly turning pages.

The sections of the book dealing with the Slab itself were quite believable to my mind, including how she chose to write her guards. How Marcus's incarceration affected his friends and colleagues was also spot on, as far as I'm concerned.

I only found myself thrown out of the narrative once or twice near the very end, where the book's timeline overlapped a little with the beginning of the original *Gears of War* game. I went into this book knowing that Ms. Traviss doesn't play the game, has been working with a world bible and the cinematic sequences, so I knew they weren't going to be precise to the game. But I've played the game several times, and the few places where her narrative didn't quite match up with the gameplay caused me a tiny bit of mental dissonance. It did nothing to lessen my enjoyment of the book, however.

If you're a *Gears of War* fan, or you just like gritty militaria that doesn't hold your hand, I highly recommend this book. Even someone who's never played the games will definitely enjoy it.

Adam says

Karen Traviss- Few years ago I had an unexpected trip to Europe with a 8 hr flight and I did not have any books to take with me and very little time to search for something I would like. I went to the library and quickly picked up a book, because I liked the cover. I did not even check the author. I put it into my carry on luggage and went to the airport. On the airplane I took out the book- it was "The Slab" by Karen Traviss. On one hand I was lucky because I had very good Sci-Fi book (I am big fan on futuristic novels but I am also very critical about them - there is a lot of crap out there in the sci-fi categories), but unlucky on the other hand because "The Slab" was the last part of the series *Gears of War*. At this point I had no choice, so I dug into the book. It was really great. This is a story set in the future where humans are losing a war against Locus Horde (a coalition of different species humanoid and bestial, big and small but always deadly). The main character Markus Fenix, super soldier was put in prison for disobeying an order. Markus was a war hero and did not belong in a locked up among criminals , especially when the war was almost lost and the human troops needed him. While Markus was adjusting to a life in prison, his friends desperately tried to find a way to get him released and his father was trying to keep him alive secretly working for the government.

The author did a great job creating the single minded, heroic soldier, with enough of "softness" beneath his armor that Markus was a tough but likable character. He was strong , dedicated soldier, never blamed anyone for his mistake that landed him in prison (if you call this a mistake -he was trying to save his father), his friends were willing to risk their lives for him, he was just the ideal soldier that I felt sympathy and admiration for. This book made an impression on me. It is not the typical "comic" superhero book, where the hero does impossible tasks (e.g. Captain America) or the bullet proof hero where he kills 100 soldiers while dodging thousands of bullets (e.g. Rambo). This is, in my opinion as realistic Sci-Fi books can be, with characters who could exist in the 21st century. The story lines are easy to follow, there are no long boring descriptions and the action is non-stop. If you like futuristic books try "The Slab" , but do not make the same

mistake I did. Read from the first book of the Gear of War , "Aspho Fields.
Here is a link to other books I read and reviewed: <http://adamvb67.wordpress.com/>

Relstuart says

This book is a prequal. It tells the story of how Marcus was/why was court-martialed. It has Traviss' typical character development skills at work. Overall I enjoyed it but it contained slightly less action than normal. The author was also constrained by the timeframe she had to place the story in so the characters could only progress and mature so much because this story had to fit in between two others. The prison life part was ok, it seemed to be lacking something. Maybe because most of the book was people observing the main character and their thoughts and reactions to him and the narrative was never from his inner perspective. This fragmented the prison part as we had perspective from two main people that were not fully developed tell the prison portion of the story.

Overall well done.

Alexandre Rotger Müller says

Loved every bit of this book. I'm a huge fan of the Gears of War saga, and always wondered about the years Marcus Fenix spent in jail, and what he was accused of. I replayed the original game right after finishing The Slab... man, that completely changed my perspective of the Marcus-Dom-Anya relationship.... those faces, those looks...

Karen Traviss did an awesome job with all five Gears novels, and beautifully extended the Gears of War universe beyond the original trilogy. I also loved the fact that Epic Games trusted her as the lead writer for Gears 3.

If there will be more novels extending the new Gears trilogy, I really hope Karen Traviss will be involved with them.

Robert says

I've finally hit my limit with Karen Traviss's oeuvre of books based on video game franchises with "The Slab". While previous Gears novels by Traviss provided some well-paced, much needed backstory (or even inter-story), "The Slab" serves as a collection of all of Traviss's worst traits as a writer wrapped inside the answer to a question that didn't need answering. Nothing interesting happens until the end? Check. Lots of soul-searching and hand wringing? Check. Awesome super protagonists with character slopes rather than arcs? Check.

I really liked Ms. Traviss's first few Gears books and am really enjoying her current "Batman: Arkham Unhinged" arc. But since her last Halo book, I've been wary of her tendency to spin plot wheels for a seeming eternity before ramping up to an exciting climax in the last 50 pages. And "The Slab" follows this

pattern as if this book were written with an editor standing behind the author's shoulder making frantic stretching motions in the hopes to prompt enough material for two or three more books.

Other than the general event-less story, readers get a lot of dull detail as to the solemnity of Marcus Fenix, the lovesickness of Anya Stroud, the gravitas of Dom Santiago, and all the boring melodrama that people play the Gears franchise for. Wait, that's not why you play that hit military shooter? Is it for hackneyed prison stories? No? More details of what Marcus's dad was up to on a secret science island? Yes, he was just doing science; would you like 30 more pages describing that science? No?

Hmmm...so the book is boring, dreadfully repetitive, and has little of what Gears fans want to read about (i.e., fights, world-building). Guess this one's for the sad completionists only. Curse you, personal obsessive tendencies!

Michael Alexander Henke says

When Gears of War first starts Marcus Fenix is in a prison cell, and we don't really know too much about why he's there. This book explains everything leading up to the start of the first game, why he's there, what he's been doing, and everything else that's been going on around him. While it is a prequel, the book also does make mention of some things that aren't revealed until Gears of War 3, so you should probably have played that before reading this.

All of the Gears of War novels have been really really good. They do a great job of developing characters, filling in backstory and history, and linking all the games together. This one ends right as the first game starts. I really can't recommend them enough for fans.

Andrew says

I believe that this is the first Gears book that is set entirely in the past without any jump into current events. So as a full prequel, it does a beautiful job of linking into the beginning of Gears of War (Xbox 360). The story perfectly fills in the little details between the events of the first game and what we've been reading in her past Gears' novels that were otherwise off or did not appear to line up. I couldn't help but smile whenever these things came up. As usual, Karen Travis excels at conveying the friendship, camaraderie, and love that her characters have for one another and the emotions that result from a time of war. The parts of the book dealing with The Slab itself were reminiscent of the types of distorted inmate-family dynamics portrayed in films and television shows like Prison Break. Very entertaining stuff! My one gripe with the book is that I could have done without the last chapter, as it's essentially a rehashing of the intro act of the game. The previous chapter had ended so perfectly with Hoffman and Anya. When the folks at Epic Games designed Gears, there's no way they could have possibly imagined the kind of fleshed out story and quality writing that Travis could give to a video game. The series has truly been a great read. I wish they would let her write one about the fallout of Gears 3.
