



NAXOS

AudioBooks

CLASSIC  
FICTION

MAEVE GILMORE

BASED ON A FRAGMENT BY  
MERVYN PEAKE

# TITUS AWAKES

Read by Rupert Degas

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[1]	July 1960	5:50
[2]	Titus awoke from a haunted sleep.	6:31
[3]	A warmth of body lit up his whole spirit.	4:30
[4]	He pushed all the bed coverings away from him...	4:24
[5]	The door was wide open.	5:52
[6]	As the elements became more clement...	4:55
[7]	Darkness came earlier now.	3:10
[8]	As he left the hut he heard breathing behind him.	5:58
[9]	As the mist descended on the hut...	7:59
[10]	A boat picked him up.	5:35
[11]	Titus and his dog ran away from the viciousness...	4:11
[12]	So fire had been learned – skinning had been learned...	3:57
[13]	Titus awoke as the sun cooled...	5:12
[14]	Suddenly the flares picked out a body...	4:08

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15	Dawn was breaking as the party entered the clearing.	6:56
16	Later that night, the fitful sleep...	4:19
17	As Titus lifted the wine to swallow at a gulp...	6:17
18	Titus and Dog found themselves on a narrow road...	4:56
19	As they talked, Titus had time to look...	6:53
20	When Titus awoke, he slowly remembered where he was...	3:50
21	Titus saw his anchorage in daylight.	7:50
22	It was time to go to Herbert Drumm's...	4:20
23	Although Titus had made little effort to be still...	5:22
24	As Titus and Dog walked back to Ruth's studio...	6:52
25	They slept deeply and innocently.	3:04
26	Titus joined Herbert on the outside steps...	5:09
27	'Do pour the tea, Titus...'	5:37

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28	As he left the house, Titus thought of returning...	6:06
29	Titus was pushed beside Mick into the back of the car.	4:22
30	Titus awoke early in a rather drab little room...	4:09
31	Peregrine showed him what his tasks would be...	4:53
32	And so the days wore on, the nights wore out...	5:39
33	His feet led him along the road.	5:11
34	Once more he walked, and after some time...	6:03
35	They crossed the hall once more...	4:34
36	Titus could no longer stay.	3:28
37	Titus left the way he had come...	6:15
38	Titus was left alone with the woman and child.	4:34
39	They returned towards the back of the house...	4:49
40	As Titus walked he decided that whatever happened...	5:08
41	The ship moved slowly into harbour.	5:22

**Total time on CDs 1–3: 3:34:31**

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**Maeve Gilmore**  
(1917–1983)

**Mervyn Peake**  
(1911–1968)

In 1968, after a very long and painful illness, my father died at the age of 57 in a nursing home near Oxford. From the first intimations of the progressive disease that would eventually totally incapacitate him, my mother had been constantly at his side. Only when he became too ill to look after at home did she reluctantly agree that he should be cared for in hospital, and subsequently in the home run by her doctor's brother. I mention my father's sad demise from the vibrant, imaginative and handsome individual he was, to the shadow of the man he later became, as it sets this abridged adaptation of my mother's book in context.

Following my father's death, my mother wrote a memoir of their

life together, which soon became a best-seller and is still in print 40 years after first appearing. *A World Away* describes a marriage and artistic adventure that began at the Westminster School of Art. My mother, then a 17 year old on her very first day as a student, begins her powerful, poignant book, with the words, 'Into the sculpture room he came, quick and sudden and dark, and when he left the room they said, "that's Mervyn Peake"'.

My parents fell in love, married, and during the 20 or so years before Parkinson's struck, worked together constantly both as painters and writers. Commissioned by several publishers in the late 1940s to illustrate several classic English and

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foreign texts (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, *Treasure Island*, *The Hunting of the Snark*, *The Ancient Mariner*, *Grimm's Household Tales* and others) my father's name became synonymous with the cross-hatching technique he developed in his work. Later, when the *Titus* trilogy evolved from ideas dormant since his days as a boy in China into a world that would, from 1946, transfix generations of readers, my mother's part in its conception and reality became significant and essential.

A sense of intense emotional loss accompanied my mother's every move from late 1968, with echoes both physical and actual; my father's paintings and drawings, notebooks and illustrations were ubiquitous in our home, a daily reminder of his presence. Thus the determination, energy and control it took to write her book just a year and a half after her husband's death was at once

brave, but ultimately fruitful, in that it captured their life in simple language which never fails to touch the reader.

It was against this background that my mother took her first tentative steps, in 1971, towards concluding my father's trilogy, as both a homage to him and an attempt to assuage the pain of a broken heart. With just a few pages of text left by my father – a late, tragic attempt to sustain his former descriptive powers – my mother picked up from where he had left off. At first she was drawn to the idea of emulating the tone set in his previous novels, until suddenly, about 40 pages into the first of the four black exercise books she was using, she exclaimed: 'Eureka!' in the margin. She had realised that it was she who was writing *Titus Awakes*, not the ghost of Mervyn Peake, and from then on the narrative took on a new individualism. It was now her story that told of the wanderings of the eponymous hero of the tale. Released from the task of

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imitating the voice of someone else, however close they had been, it was my mother's ideas, imagination and plot, that now propelled the action and captured the imagination.

As Titus's many adventures take him erratically towards his ultimate goal: an island, where life is contained within a finite, limited space, and thus his ultimate home as he sees it, echoes of his former life follow him. Woven into the story are real-life reminders of my parents' former friends and acquaintances; homes and institutions where my father had been incarcerated at times. In one of the most powerful of the numerous vignettes that drive the narrative, we are dropped like voyeurs into one of the hospital wards where my father spent time as a patient. Here, the writer, patient and narrator become one, in a trinity of manifest tragedy.

Evocative and viscerally dramatic, Titus now comes face to face with his doppelganger, essentially his creator.

The device is sustained until the very end of the story when, Titus having discovered his nirvana, his boat sails into the harbour of a tiny island where, waiting to greet him at the top of the steps, is essentially himself:

*Titus had found his anchorage. He knew that his past and his future, his whole being, his reason, were here. As he began to walk away from the jetty, through the small tunnel hacked out of the rock, he was joined by the man and his children. Together they made their way up the steep hill. Titus no longer felt alone, but a part of someone who would shape his life to come.*

Finally, in a reminder of one of the last paragraphs in *Gormenghast* when Titus's mother reminds him of the pull of his home, *Titus Awakes* itself now ends with the words

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'There's not a road, not a track, but it will lead you home'. With this final Wagnerian flourish, *Titus Awakes* ends with a truth: that perhaps we are all searching for a place to call home – a sanctuary, a nest where we can feel safe, somewhere to live and to experience in one's own way the

happiness and warmth that is often so rare and fleeting, but is the essence of home. Confluence is reached by my mother as she ends her own novel in this paean of love to my father.

### Notes by Sebastian Peake



**Rupert Degas**, a versatile and charismatic audiobook reader, has read a substantial list of books for Naxos AudioBooks, notably Haruki Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase*, *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* and *Dance Dance Dance*, Kafka's *The Trial*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Rose Tremain's *Restoration*, Tom McNab's *Flanagan's Run*, and *The Adventures of Brigadier Gerard* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He is in considerable demand as a voice for cartoons, and is the voice of Pantalaimon in Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*; but he is also regularly seen in London's West End in plays as varied as *Stones in his Pockets* and *The 39 Steps*.



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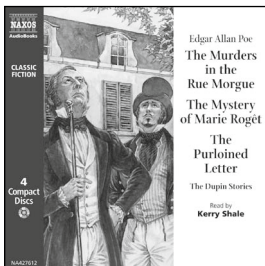
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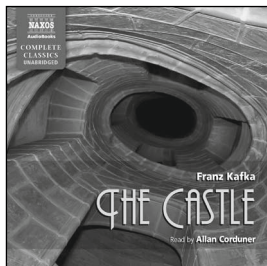
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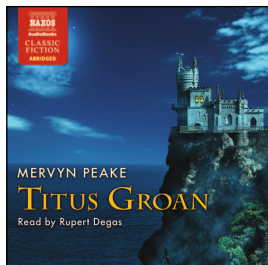
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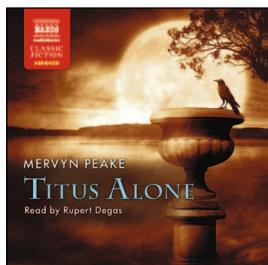
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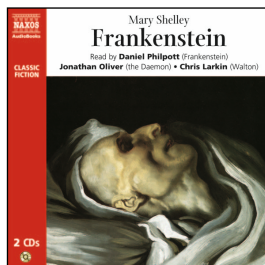
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**Maeve Gilmore**

Based on a fragment by Mervyn Peake

# TITUS AWAKES

*Titus Awakes* is the fourth and last novel in the *Gormenghast* series and was finished by Peake's widow, Maeve Gilmore. In this last novel, Titus has left the world of Gormenghast behind, but he remains haunted by memories of his former life. Journeying from snow-covered mountains to archipelagos strewn with coral reefs, he awakens his senses but fails to conquer his aching sense of solitude.

A mesmerising novel, *Titus Awakes* celebrates and mourns both the passing of Gormenghast Castle and the life of its creator.

**Accompanying notes written by Sebastian Peake**



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