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FALL OF DAMNOS

NICK KYME



FALL OF DAMNOS

A Space Marine Battles novel

By Nick Kyme

++ASTROPATHIC CHOIR INTERCEPT XC114, VALIN'S REVENGE
965.973.M41++
++MESSAGE FRAGMENT RECOVERED BY CHOIRMASTER++
++TRANSCRIPT FOLLOWS:++
++... ALL IS LOST, CASUALTIES PRESUMED NEAR TOTAL. ONLY
KELLENPORT REMAINS.
AS LORD-GOVERNOR, RECOGNISED BY THE HIGH LORDS OF
TERRA, I BESEECH ALL IMPERIAL SERVANTS RECEIVING THIS
MESSAGE TO COME TO OUR AID WITH ALL HASTE.
MAY THE EMPEROR SHIELD US.
SCANT INFORMATION EXISTS ON THE INVADING FORCE SAVE FOR
A BINARIC DATA-BURST. TRANSLITERATION FOLLOWS:
'WE ARE THE NECRONTYR. WE ARE LEGION. WE CLAIM DOMINION
OF THIS WORLD... SURRENDER AND DIE.'++

++DATA-SEAL OF LORD-GOVERNOR ARXIS VERIFIED IN
ASTROPATHIC ROUTING MEME...++
++MESSAGE ORIGIN CONFIRMED AS DAMNOS, MINING WORLD,
ULTIMA SEGMENTUM++
++TRANSCRIPT FORWARDED TO THE BRIDGE FOR ATTENTION OF
CAPTAIN SICARIUS++
++MARK MOST URGENT++

About the Author

Nick Kyme is a writer and editor. He lives in Nottingham where he began a career at Games Workshop on White Dwarf magazine. Now Black Library's Senior Range Editor, Nick's writing credits include the Warhammer 40,000 Tome of Fire trilogy featuring the Salamanders, his Warhammer Fantasy-based dwarf novels and several short stories. Read his blog at www.nickkyme.com

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IT WAS GOOD fortune that placed the Ultramarines within the vicinity of Damnos. Although it would later be questioned what exactly was good about it. The desperate astropathic message delivered with Lord Governor Arxis's seal of verification was deciphered quickly by the sightless adepts aboard the Valin's Revenge.

Its captain, the dauntless Sicarius, had no compunction about ordering the vessel and his vaunted 2nd Company to the beleaguered world with the utmost haste.

The strike cruiser translated in-system amidst a debris field. Tracking augurs identified the stricken shell of the Nobilis, a vast Navy capital ship. The Valin's Revenge was undoubtedly smaller and lacking the same level of firepower, but it was also more manoeuvrable and boasted one of the most lethal payloads known to the galaxy.

Helmsman Lodus, long-serving of the Chapter, drew the vessel in close. In the void, the engine surges, the slight amendments to heading and bearing, might have seemed glacially slow but they were not. Whickering gauss-beams from the necron arc-obliterators on the ground, many kilometres long, tried time and again to skewer the strike cruiser. Each time Brother Lodus manoeuvred the Valin's Revenge out of harm's way or used the debris to ward them. Shields flickered with the glancing impacts, several minor hits were confirmed by

the damage crews but still the ship drew closer, coming in line with Sicarius's perfect assault vector.

Hunks of the Nobilis, floating listlessly through the void, presented a serious threat to the strike cruiser's integrity. Volleys from the vessel's laser batteries sheared the larger sections in half. The lesser pieces of debris merely rebounded off the Valin's Revenge's armour.

It was a feat of bravura that finally allowed the exact attack point to be reached. Ventral drop pod bays vented in seconds, like tiny arrowheads launched from an unseen bow. They sped towards Damnos in formation, bearing Angels of Death and slim hope to the populace.

Finally capitulating under the necron gauss barrage, the shields broke down and the Valin's Revenge sustained a critical blow. Its payload delivered, Helmsman Lodis was content to retreat into the void, beyond the range of the guns, and lick his wounds.

For now, at least, Sicarius and his brothers were on their own.

DEEP PERCUSSIONS SHUDDERED through the walls of the drop pod.

The gauss-streams were getting closer. Warning runes flickered across the control console, urgent and red. Despite the thickness of the ceramite arrowhead in which the Space Marines were cocooned, the internal temperature was rising, not just with the heat of re-entry but from the proximity of the necron's anti-aircraft cannonade.

Sicarius was unmoved.

'Hold to your purpose, Lions,' he addressed his command squad. Except for Veteran-Sergeant Daceus,

the rest of the nine-man retinue was masked by their cobalt-blue battle helms. ‘We roar!’

The engine drone forced his shout into a bellow. The captain’s retainers voiced a reverberant war cry as one. It was a sound to stir Sicarius’s Talassari blood.

None would ever eclipse the Second, they were preeminent amongst the Ultramarines. Even Aageman’s First were looking over their heavy-armoured shoulders.

His wide eyes flashed like stars as he roared again. ‘Victoris Ultra!’

The reply was in mid-repeat when the gauss-beam clipped them, shearing away a portion of drop pod. Part of Brother Argonan went with it, most of his right shoulder and a chunk of torso. The blood vacating his body in the high-velocity pressure release of the pod vented like red streamers through the breach.

‘Apothecary,’ said Sicarius, donning his helmet and nodding to the only one of the squad armoured in white.

Brother Venatio leaned over to the stricken Argonan, unclasping one of his grav restraints to do so. Situated alongside him, Veteran-Sergeant Daceus instinctively seized the Apothecary’s cuirass to steady him.

Punching a hole through Brother Argonan’s gorget and chestplate with his reductor drill, Venatio quickly removed the sacred progenoids within and secured them in an ampoule-chamber mag-locked to his belt.

‘Remember him,’ Sicarius told his warriors. The wind had built to a shriek inside the compromised drop pod. Outside, visible only through the ragged trench in the hull, the world blurred like smeared paint. ‘Avenge him,’ the captain concluded.

His gaze flicked to a series of read-outs on the control console. Their trajectory was still sound. The metres to

planetfall clicked past on electronic tumblers at a fearsome rate.

‘Twenty-eight seconds and counting, High Suzerain,’ Veteran-Sergeant Daceus announced, using one of Sicarius’s many honorifics.

The physical testament to his many deeds was plain for all to see in the medals and laurels that bedecked his armour. Sicarius was a warrior born but he was also not one to shy from ostentation.

‘Bolters and blades ready, sergeant,’ he growled, gripping the hilt of the sword of Talassar. Tempest Blade was its name. Even Sicarius’s weapons had laudations.

‘Hot hands and ready swords!’ barked Daceus to the rest.

Snap-slides from bolters being primed filled the noisy drop pod interior. Flames were tearing off the point where the gauss-beam had glanced them and ended Argonan’s life. None aboard gave them notice. All eyes were on the embarkation hatch.

LIKE THE THUNDER-SMITE of a storm god, the drop pod touched down and sent impact cracks webbing across the surface of Damnos. It was one wound amongst many the planet had suffered.

A pneumatic pressure hiss preceded the exit ramp slamming down. Seconds later Sicarius was bounding through it, cape flaring, Guilliman’s name on his lips.

He speared a necron warrior, half-cooked by the drop pod’s incendiary flare. Another nearby had rapidly self-repaired and was advancing with automaton-like implacability. Sicarius pummelled its torso with a blast from his plasma pistol. Breaking into a run, he got close enough to behead it. The green bale-fires in its eyes guttered and died.

Behind him, the hard chank-rattle of bolters sounded as Daceus and the others opened up. Energy beams, viperous and emerald green, streaked through the smoke before Sicarius's retinal scanners could resolve a better view. A gauss-beam scudded over his pauldron, stripping it back to naked ceramite with the barest touch.

The necrons' bale-fire eyes appeared in the gloom like dead stars. The few they'd destroyed around the drop pod were just part of the vanguard.

More were coming.

THE THANATOS FOOTHILLS loomed in the distance like bad omens. The drop pods had got them as close as they could.

The ground running up to the snow-crested mounds was over three kilometres of debris-choked mire. Fanged by ice shards and dotted with arctic sink-holes, it was treacherous.

Scipio Vorolanus ate up the metres eagerly, his 'Thunderbolts' keeping pace alongside him and in spread formation. He checked the dispersal on his retinal display. A series of ident-runes showed good separation and fire-arc discipline.

'Move!' he said into the comm-feed, spurring his warriors as one.

Through the smoke-fog and the dust palls from the sundered refinery complex, shapes were moving ahead of them. They strode, slow and purposeful. Whickering emerald gauss-beams preceded them.

A grunt of pain, an armoured silhouette crumpling to Scipio's extreme right signalled a hit. Brother Largo's rune went to amber as the tac-display in Scipio's helmet registered a serious injury.

Just a few more metres...

A long line of silver-grey, flecked with pieces of ceramic, opposed them. The necron fire was a relentless barrage now. Another Ultramarine battle-brother fell to its fury.

+Halt!+

Scipio was stunned into obedience by the figure running just ahead of him. The word resolved in his mind rather than his comm-feed, a psychic impulsion that could only be defied by one with sufficient will.

Varro Tigurius dropped into a crouch, gauss-beams flashing against a kine-shield the Chief Librarian had raised around him.

‘Get to cover. Hunker down!’ Scipio ordered, slamming behind a shattered wall in the gutted remains of the half-destroyed refinery.

The place was a grim mortuary, littered with the bodies of Damnosian labourers and indentured Imperial Guard troopers. There’d been a battle here, a hard-fought one that had ended badly for the human natives.

Scipio barely gave them a second glance. It had not always been so. Black Reach and the many hard years that followed had changed him.

Fifty metres of spar-studded, wire-drenched courtyard stood between the Ultramarines and the necron firing line. Tigurius had brought the Space Marines to a sudden stop behind a ragged barricade before the final charge.

Peering through the gauss-laced haze, Scipio engaged the comm-feed. ‘Specialists to point, on Vorolanus.’

Brothers Cator and Brakkus moved up, crouch-running, a few seconds later. Scipio clapped Cator on his shoulder guard. ‘Plasma and meltagun at either end, brothers.’ Both nodded as one, taking position at the edges of the wall.

Chips of rockcrete and semi-flayed plasteel slivers forced Scipio to duck.

‘What are we waiting for, brother-sergeant?’ asked Naceon.

Scipio had his eyes on the courtyard – there was more than merely war-churned earth beneath its shattered flagstones – and didn’t look back.

‘For thunder and lightning.’

Telion had taught him when to wait and when to strike; the Master Scout’s expert tutelage and influence, presently engaged in other war zones, would be missed on Damnos. Scipio gestured towards Tigurius, a couple of metres ahead of them. ‘Watch and be ready.’

A coruscation of electricity suddenly wreathed the Librarian’s ornate battle armour and he pressed one gauntleted palm to the ground. Instantly, the azure energy banding him leapt into the earth and ripples of psychic force went searching through the no-man’s-land.

Like gruesome marionettes jerking to horrific un-life, the necron ‘flayed ones’ sprang from their ambushade. They’d been buried just beneath the surface of the earth, poised to attack the Ultramarines as they charged. A minefield of sorts, but one littered with an animate and deadly enemy rather than merely explosives.

Two of the ghoulish creatures juddered and expired from Tigurius’s lightning arcs, the flayed human skin draped across them like cloaks and cowls burning off in a noisome flesh-smoke. Several more came on, having lost the element of surprise, but slashing with razored finger-talons anyway.

Scipio roared, ‘Space Marines – unleash death!’ The flare of his bolt pistol framed the hard edges of his crimson battle helm in jagged monochrome.

A plasma bolt took one of the flayed ones in the chest, annihilating mechanical organs and processors. The necron collapsed in a heap, quivered and then phased from existence as if it had never even been there.

Another sloughed away under the beam of Cator's meltagun. Despite the rapid self-repair engines of the necron's advanced mechorganics, the damage was critical and it too was teleported away.

Naceon had leapt the barricade, full-auto adding thrust to his battle cry. 'Ultramar and the Thunderbolts!'

Impact sparks riddled the onrushing necron, jarring but not stopping it. Naceon saw the danger, bringing his bolter's combat-bayonet low to block, but was too late. Finding the weak points of Naceon's armour joints, the flayed one punched several fatal wounds into the Ultramarine before slicing open his gorget.

Naceon's head rolled like a dud-grenade into the dirt.

'Guilliman and the Temple of Hera!' Scipio invoked a blessing as he cut into the metal clavicle of Naceon's killer. The chainsword bit deep and jammed.

An expressionless silver rictus, stained with blood, reared towards the sergeant. A bolt pistol burst took off the necron's left claw-hand before it could slash him. Scipio then butted it, snapping the creature's neck so its head lolled at an unnatural angle. He thumped his chainsword's activation stud again, muttering a quick litany to the machine-spirit within, and it churned to life. Dropping his pistol, Scipio drove the blade two-handed clean through the flayed one's body and out the other side. As he stepped back, ready to strike again, the two mechanical halves slid diagonally and fell in opposite directions.

Scipio had barely recovered when a second necron was advancing upon him. Without his bolt pistol, he adopted a rapid defensive stance.

The flayed one exploded before it could engage, sparks and machine-parts flying like frag.

A pair of hard eyes, glowing with power and set in an ice-carved face, regarded him.

+Take up your arms+

Scipio gave a curt nod of thanks to Tigurius, his soul ever so slightly chilled by the Librarian's gaze, and retrieved his bolt pistol.

There was little time. The flayed ones were vanquished, Brakkius and Cator were finishing the wounded at close range, but the line of gauss-flayers remained.

Scipio waved his squad forwards after Tigurius. Catching the Librarian's battle-signal on his retinal display, he opened up the comm-feed again.

'Squad Strabo. Bring fire from heaven.'

Hidden behind the wreckage of a refinery tower, ten bulky figures arrowed into the air on plumes of fire. The roar of their ascent jets made the necrons look skywards. Half of the creatures switched their aim, but the gauss-stream was too late and not nearly enough.

Hit from the front by Tigurius and Squad Vorolanus, and from above by Assault Squad Strabo, the necron firing line disintegrated leaving the Ultramarines the victors.

In the aftermath, Tigurius eyed the distant Thanatos foothills. The forbidding arc of necron pylons and the long noses of gauss siege cannon blighted the horizon line. Sustained particle whips and focussed energy beams bombarded the city of Kellenport relentlessly.

‘They will be well guarded,’ counselled the Librarian, without acknowledging Scipio’s presence but answering his question before he’d even asked it.

‘We’ll need a way to breach their defences,’ Scipio replied. Behind him, his squad and that of Sergeant Strabo secured the battle-site.

‘A dagger rather than a hammer,’ said Tigurius. ‘But not one wielded by the hand of a Space Marine,’ he added cryptically, turning his attention onto the sergeant. ‘Does something trouble you, Brother Vorolanus?’

Scipio shifted uncomfortably in his armour, wishing he hadn’t removed his battle helm.

‘No, my lord,’ he answered, truthfully. Nothing, except your psyker’s interrogation.

Tigurius smiled and it was, at once, a deeply incongruous and unsettling gesture.

‘Perhaps it should be,’ he said, and left Scipio to plan the next stage of the assault.

Brother Orin was at the sergeant’s shoulder before he could reply.

‘We’ve secured the battle-site, my lord.’

Scipio re-donned his helmet. ‘Retrieve Naceon’s body and replenish ammo. We advance,’ he replied, left to wonder at Tigurius’s meaning.

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