

# Sanguine

By Dirk Wehner

They say a Space Marine knows no fear.

Brother Achilleo thinks about this as he kneels in the mud while torrents of acidic rain pour down on him, tarnishing his golden armour. He thinks about this, breathing heavily, not only due to the wounds he suffered, but also because his lungs are clotting with alien spores and toxins. Both will prove too much, even for his advanced metabolism.

He will die, he knows he will, and he thinks about fear. He also knows the xenos are watching him from the shadows. Thousands upon thousands of eyes are glinting between the broken columns of the ruined Imperial cathedrum, fixating upon the Sanguinary Guard with a single mind.

Sanguinary Guard... as exalted compared to his lesser battle-brothers as they are to normal Humans. Achilleo has witnessed the two cataclysmic wars on Armageddon and watched the great Erasmus Tycho die. He has fought the treacherous Alpha Legion in the depths of the Sinfall Nebula and tested his blade

against the Necron menace on Galterian Prime. He was there when the Tyranids fell upon the Baal system, saw hope almost die and then rekindle when Lord Guilliman gifted the Blood Angels with their new Primaris battle-brothers.

And yet, here he is, on his knees. Hundreds of years of service are about to end. His jump pack malfunctioned days ago. Its magnificent wings now lie in the dirt next to him, mangled, spattered with xenos blood from his latest encounter. His encarmine blade, an artisan's work forged thousands of years ago on Baal Secundus, is broken. The top half of the blade is missing. His bolter, the signature weapon of a Space Marine, has run dry, and is nothing but a useless weight to him now. His artificer armour is rent. His poisoned blood runs from dozens of wounds.

This is the end. The creatures are all around him, closing in, eager for the last kill. He knows it. He can hear the rain running over thousands of chitinous carapaces, dripping from bared teeth. Achilleo thinks about fear and closes his eyes.



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Purplish-black clouds darkened the sky over Calata VI. The once beautiful Imperial paradise world was in its death throes. This had been a peaceful place, an oasis in a galaxy of madness – for those few Imperial citizens who could afford to come here. But when the swarm had descended, the world had quickly become a death trap. The planetary defence forces had been wiped out within days as the carefully tended parks and pleasure gardens that spanned the planet became battlefields overrun with nightmarish creatures. The Blood Angels had answered the call for help, although they had already been spread thin, trying to fend off Tyranids on more fronts than ever before. They too could not stop the tidal wave of many-limbed horrors that rampaged over the lush green world.

So many battle-brothers had fallen, yet Achilleo and his men still fought on. They were all that was left from the Blood Angels' strike force – brother Gianluca, brother Vasco and himself. Three men of the Sanguinary Guard, the finest warriors the Blood Angels had to offer. They would not yield.

'This world is dying, and we will die with it, brothers.' Gianluca flexed his power fist as he stared into the roiling clouds in the far distance. Occasionally a sickening green flash would light up the scene, sharply outlining uncountable winged shapes and the capillary towers of the Tyranids. They sucked every bit of nutritional life force from this world to feed the gigantic living ships in the orbit.

'True,' answered Achilleo, 'but every creature we slay still costs the swarm. Every citizen we might yet manage to evacuate does even more so.'

Gianluca snorted. He always had been out of character for a warrior of the Sanguinary Guard. 'Look around you, brother. There are no citizens left to evacuate. There is only us.'

'Multiple contacts,' Vasco said, his quiet tone interrupting his brothers. 'They are closing in from the cathedrum south of here.' He looked up. His face did not reveal his thoughts. It didn't have to. 'By multiple, I mean thousands. I guess it is a feeding swarm.'

Achilleo nodded. This was it then. 'How long until they arrive?'

'One hour. Maybe less.'

Gianluca once more flexed his power fist. The gears and servos were whining, clogged with alien blood and viscera from days of near-constant fighting. 'Alright then. A feeding swarm,' he said. 'I always wanted to hunt down one of those Haruspexes.'

Vasco was about to answer when a shape exploded from the slimy water of a once delicate fountain behind him. Huge talons lashed out and grabbed the Space Marine by his arms. Wet tentacles wrapped around his head and violently forced their way into every opening. It all happened in a fraction of a second.

'Lictor!' Gianluca dashed forward to aide his brother, but Vasco's muffles had already ceased. The Lictor cast the dead body of the proud warrior aside and hissed as Gianluca came closer, its blood-smeared talons high above its head, opening and closing in anticipation.

Achilleo crashed into the flank of the beast, knocking it over. His sword came down in a devastating blow, but the creature was too fast, leaping out of the way and striking him with one of its claws. The sharp chitin bit deep into his chest plate and sent him flying.

As Achilleo tumbled against the fountain he saw the Lictor whirl around to welcome Gianluca. The talons of the snarling beast lashed out, but struck thin air as Gianluca used the last bit of fuel in his jump pack to propel himself upwards. The Sanguinary Guard clenched his power fist, roaring in anger as he descended upon the Tyranid. Like a golden comet he crashed into the beast, the force of his impact momentarily drowning out the distant thunder.

The Lictor was ready for him, already knowing his every move from the information sucked from Vasco's skull. Moments before the power fist could hit home, the xenos hunting beast sidestepped. What should have been a lethal hit crashed instead into the ground, the fist's disruption field blasting a blackened crater. Hissing, the beast grabbed Gianluca by his jump pack and decapitated him with a wide swing of a huge talon.

Achilleo watched as the golden helmet of his battle-brother fell. With a soft thud it landed on the muddy floor and rolled towards him. The Lictor growled and let go of the Space Marine's body while blood was still pumping from the severed neck.

Within seconds, two heroes of the Imperium had died, but the third one was still breathing. Achilleo came to his feet, ignoring the pain in his chest wound. He lifted his Angelus bolter and fired a quick salvo of rounds, but hit nothing. The injured creature had fled. With a sinking feeling, Achilleo realised that he was alone. As he looked upon the mutilated bodies of his battle-brothers, another clap of thunder resounded from above.

His hearts were pounding as he fought down the anger rising inside him. Slowly, he walked to the last spot where he had seen the Lictor before it had vanished. Thick puddles of xenos blood trailed into the shadows. South. Achilleo's eyes narrowed. 'You will atone for this,' he whispered, making for the cathedrum in the distance that he suspected was the creature's den.

A half hour later, the golden warrior stepped through a towering gate into the damp darkness of the cathedrum. It might have been day or night, it made no difference anymore; the roof of the building had been torn apart by continuous Spore Mine bombardment, but the sky was filled with huge shadows and horror, blotting out any sunlight.

Achilleo coughed as he looked around. His wound wasn't closing properly, and strange spores and poisons of the Tyranids filled the air, changing and weakening every life form on the planet for final absorption. Achilleo estimated that the planet would be dead within hours.

Clicking and clattering noises surrounded him. He had seen carpets of Ripper swarms on his way here, the vanguard organisms of the feeding swarm. They ignored him, possessed with the need to devour and absorb, stripping from the land every bit of organic material that would not struggle. Achilleo thought of his battle-brothers' bodies and swallowed. Lost forever.

There were hundreds of creatures in the darkness surrounding him, amassing with every passing second, watching and waiting. As he had hoped it would, the Hive Mind tried to minimise casualties. Perhaps it did not want to waste valuable resources, which is why it sent forth the one beast that knew exactly how Achilleo would fight. It was the creature he had followed here. The one he had come to kill.

The Lictor burst from the shadows between a row of ornate columns above Achilleo, trying to snatch him like it had Vasco. But he too had learned.

Achilleo spun around to parry the blow of the scything talons, his encarmine blade resonating with

the sheer power of the strike. He stepped back and fired a burst of bolt rounds that struck the Lictor's left leg. One hit, two hits, click, click, click... the weapon's machine spirit was exhausted.

Still, huge chunks of flesh exploded from the Lictor's leg as the bolt rounds detonated. The beast roared and propelled itself towards Achilleo. Its rending claws caught hold of the wings emblazing his armour and ripped them away in an angry flurry of sparks. As Achilleo and the Lictor tumbled, he thrust his blade deep into the beast's injured chest, widening the wound his brother had torn.

As both warriors fell, the sword slid into the Tyranid's flesh, burying itself to the hilt. Still the monster fought on. One of its claws tore off Achilleo's helmet and twisting tentacles groped his face, their bony outgrowths tearing at his flesh.

Achilleo struggled, pressing against the weight of the xenos and trying to free his blade. His elbow smashed against the Lictor's skull while he tore hard with his other hand. The sword twisted and tilted in the Lictor's exoskeleton, then finally broke free with a burst of energy as it splintered in the middle. The Lictor hissed and let go of Achilleo, and he was free once more.

'Come now, let us end this,' the Space Marine growled.

Their steps unsteady, the two bleeding fighters staggered towards each other. A streak of lightning tore apart the sky above them, illuminating the scene for a split second. The ruins around them crawled and teemed with thousands upon thousands of Tyranid creatures.

As Achilleo and the Lictor met, a clap of thunder followed the lightning and rain began to pour down.

They say a Space Marine knows no fear.

They are right.



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Achilleo opens his eyes. The motionless Lictor lies next to him. Defeated. Dead.

Using his broken blade as support, Achilleo rises to his feet one last time. His bloodied lips split into a defiant smile as he raises his head to watch the approaching swarm of creatures pouring from the shadows, screeching with alien hate. His eyes meet those of a huge Tyranid Warrior, and he feels the Hive Mind staring back at him, deep into his soul. If it was hoping to see fear, it is disappointed.

It sees only darkness.

As the end draws near, Achilleo welcomes the utter blackness stirring his blood, the terrible rage he has held back all his life. In his last moment, the curse of Sanguinius will give him the strength to die upright.

The Tyranid Warrior gives a predatory screech and beckons its host of chitinous horrors to attack. Achilleo laughs as they come, readying his broken sword. He laughs because he knows what his inhuman enemy sees.

A Space Marine knows no fear. The Tyranids shall learn it today, or as close an approximation as they can know, and they will find no victory in his death.

