



**WARHAMMER**  
40,000

# LAST WATCH

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The creature had lain in wait for many days, such being the nature of its foul kind. Amongst the tangled flora of Phirus its lithe form was rendered as nothing more than a shadow, the pigmentation of its carapaced hide blending with the reddish hues of the undergrowth. Its alien metabolism slowed, concealing it from all but the most sophisticated of auspex scanners, yet its muscle and sinew remained coiled in preparation for that perfect, opportune whip-crack lunge.

Murderous instinct compelled it. That, and the need to feed.

Brother Felgir had been adamant that he would slay this last beast himself, and as befit the barbarous traditions of his Chapter, he had pledged to take its skull as a trophy. *Tyranicus Chameleo*. The lictor. A fine kill for one so keen to prove himself in the eyes of his absent battle-brothers.

His bare face daubed with runes of slaying, he had stalked the succulent forests by the light of the twin moons, with his long-handled axe gripped tightly in both hands. Skill born of a lifetime as a feral hunter carried him through the undergrowth with barely a sound, even in his night-black power armour – such had been his stealth that not even the birds nesting in the low fronds were startled by his passing. He had thumbed the wolf's head totem upon the haft of his weapon, and mouthed silent prayers to his ancestors.

But he was so much more than a mere tribal huntsman, more even than *just* a noble warrior of the Space Marines. He was Deathwatch. Xenos-slayer. Sworn defender of mankind against the enemy without.

Nonetheless, he had gravely underestimated his foe.

The attack came without warning as Felgir stooped beneath a cluster of scarlet inkvines. Cast in shadow, he spun reflexively just as the lictor reared up to its full height, its scything forelimbs lashing out with blinding speed. He tried to block with his axe while dropping down to evade, but the beast launched its spiny bulk forwards, gripping his armoured pauldrons with long, dextrous talons as it drew back for another strike.

Half-pinned on his knees, Felgir whirled the axe overhand into a single grip and brought the blade down hard on the creature's wrist. The lictor shrieked, its

twitching feeder tendrils flaring in agony for just a moment before pulling back into its maw, and Felgir struck again and again at the wounded joint.

With a sudden twist of its body, it hurled him away into the rubbery trunk of a large stem succulent. He crashed to the ground, great gouges dug into the ceramite of his shoulder plates where the beast had clawed at him, and a spattering of alien blood across his face and chest. Felgir rolled back to his feet, and spat.

The lictor was favouring its bloodied wrist, but it stalked sideways through the undergrowth with blade-limbs extended, never once taking its predatory eyes from its quarry. It chittered and huffed, and snorted in agitation as it flexed the wounded carpus, its barbed tail whipping back and forth like an enraged serpent.

Felgir dived in once more with a savage bellow, his axe held high, but the beast lashed out again with those scything limbs and cleaved through the adamantium haft as though it were a twig.

Caught off balance, Felgir stumbled for just a moment, but that was all that the beast needed; a spasm wracked its torso and a dozen fleshy barbs shot from chitinous sheaths between its ribs, piercing the softer seals of Felgir's armour and embedding in his exposed flesh. His stifled cry of pain was cut short by the bio-venom that coated their tips, though he still managed to plant a solid fist into the lictor's mandible before it hoisted him from his feet, and the creature roared its bestial triumph.

The hunter had in fact been the *hunted* all along, and the tyrannid monstrosity now dragged its stricken prey into a deadly embrace, feeder tendrils quivering in anticipation.

That was when I chose to put an end to the debacle.

The high angle afforded by my vantage point presented a relatively clear view of the beast's armoured nape. I had already identified the optimal kill-shot when it had first emerged from concealment –a single mass-reactive into either eye socket –but the flow of Felgir's combat had robbed me of all three subsequent opportunities. Instead I put the shell (mercury-slug Stalker pattern, single discharge) into the nerve cluster at the first branch of the lictor's spine.

The creature let out a single yelp, its forelimbs dropping slack while the rest of its body shuddered and buckled. As it fell forwards, I feared that Felgir would be crushed under the dead weight, but in his feverish state he continued to struggle and moan weakly from beneath the alien carcass as his transhuman physiology worked to neutralise the bio-toxins in his system.

Brothers Mettius and Hadrovar descended to ground level with me, securing

the perimeter and tending to Felgir. I should not have indulged him in his tribal pretensions, though in this instance I am glad to confirm that it did not affect the outcome of our original operation (all hostile xeno-forms purged).

Brother Felgir will wear the scars of his own hubris for the rest of his days, and in this I believe that the lesson has been learned.

My lords, submitted for your approval, I hereby present this full tactical report on the completed mission against the tyranids on Phirus. As the ranking Deathwatch officer, I, Brother-Sergeant Marek Angeloi – formerly of the Scythes of the Emperor Chapter, Adeptus Astartes – do declare my sacred oaths upheld and my part in this endeavour to be complete.

The xenos beasts of Hive Fleet Kraken are purged from the Veneros Sector, but the war rages on throughout the segmentum. With the permission of my esteemed and learned lords, I shall return to it now.

Not in the noble black livery of the order, but once again in the colours of my fallen Chapter brethren.

For the Emperor. For Sotha.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

L J GOULDING is the author of several short stories – ‘The Oberwald Ripper’, ‘The Shadow of the Beast’ and ‘The Great Maw’ among them. In his alter ego as a member of Black Library’s editorial team, he proves that an obsessive and encyclopaedic knowledge of the Horus Heresy can be a useful thing after all. He lives and works in Nottingham, UK.



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**Published in 2012 by Black Library, Games Workshop Ltd.,  
Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK**

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**ISBN 978-0-85787-904-2**

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