



TYPHUS:

HERALD OF THE PLAGUE GOD

A short story by David Annandale



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Annunciation had called to Typhus with its purity. It was a world of exemplary faith, of utter unity of purpose, and of perfect commitment in every thought, word and deed to the false god. The god who would not even accept the reality of his own decay. How could Typhus reject such an invitation? Especially when he heard the voice that issued it.

A matchless world deserved a matchless doom.

While the *Terminus Est* laid waste to Annunciation's orbital defences, Typhus descended to the surface in the Thunderhawk *Copia Morbi*. He came down from the clouds on wings of blackened green. The target was the spire of Hive Troparion, the planet's seat of power. At the peak, looking down on the lives of two billion inhabitants, was the Cathedral of the Gaze. It was the point of intersection between the divine and the subject. This was the point to which even the most miserable denizens of the underhive turned their eyes. And it was the point from which the Ecclesiarchy disseminated the Emperor's Will.

'Drop me at the top,' Typhus ordered.

'Alone, lord?' Pilot Uredo asked.

'Alone, as an emissary should be.' He smiled as he stood by the side door, holding the scythe *Manreaper*. Insects crawled between his teeth. 'I won't be alone for long.'

There was a landing pad between four of the cathedral's needle spires. As Uredo brought the gunship in, turrets at the top of the towers opened fire. Heavy stubber rounds stitched the fuselage of the *Copia Morbi*.

Typhus pulled back the door. 'I leave you to silence those guns,' he said, and jumped.

He dropped ten metres and hit the rooftop like a ceramite meteor. The rockcrete cracked beneath his boots. The insects of his hive whirred with anticipation. Beyond the pad was a fifth spire, much wider. It was the tallest. It

was the peak of Annunciation. Typhus strode towards it. In his way were the mortal defenders of the cathedral. They were many, standing before a door to the interior of the building. The Frateris Militia of Annunciation had a higher proportion of trained members and former Guardsmen in its ranks than on most worlds, and its numbers were in the millions, at least. Typhus chose to think that the entire population of this globe could give itself mindlessly to the cause. That would make his actions here all the more satisfying.

The humans shrank back at his coming. They were small things, unworthy even of the deaths that he brought. Many screamed in fear. Still, they fought. Las-fire struck Typhus, the gesture meaningless. Then, when he was a handful of steps away, a large man in a faded uniform of the Annunciation Defence Militia fired a grenade launcher. The explosive hit Typhus at the waist. It blew a hole in his armour and almost made him break his stride. From the gap came a dark cloud of buzzing wings. The swarm launched itself at the defenders.

‘No,’ Typhus said. His will pulled the insects back to him. ‘Not yet.’ They flew around him, a boiling wealth of disease, as he waded into the militia and swung *Manreaper*. Within a few strokes, he had killed dozens. The blade swept through muscle and bone as if through air. It cut bodies in half, and not one of the deaths was clean or short. The eviscerated and the severed crawled over the rooftop, dragging organs and blood, corruption racing against death to intensify the torture of their final moments.

Typhus killed them all. He surrounded himself with putrefying death. Then, at the entrance, he raised his fist and smashed the door to splinters.

He moved along a gallery that spiralled up the interior of the spire. From far below came the sound of resistance. Congregation and choir sang hymns to the Emperor. Their faith climbed the marble pillars. It was reflected in the lustre of gold leaf on the statuary of saints and the roof of the vault. Typhus paused to look down at the faithful. He saw tens of thousands of faces upraised. There was real strength there, strong enough to stir his hatred even further. He lingered, savouring rage, his presence casting a shadow that spread through the cathedral like an oil slick. He had words for the vermin below, words and truth.

But not yet. Not just yet.

Intertwined with the hymns, emerging from hundreds of vox-casters, exhorting the singers to greater heights, was another voice. It wasn't singing. It was preaching. It was the voice that, more than any other, created the perfection of faith on Annunciation. Its sanctity stabbed at Typhus, reaching though his armour, though the roiling multiplicity that his body had become, to stab at his

being. The voice caused him pain. He had come to silence it. He would give the cathedral a new, truer voice.

The gallery ended at steps that took him to the roof. There, in the wind and the night, standing at his lectern at the highest point on Annuciation, was the Arch Exorcist Vandis. He was an old man, though strong with juvenat treaments, and even stronger with faith. His face was lined with the spiritual scars of his wars, and young with beatitude. He looked at Typhus without flinching and without pausing in his sermon. Heard without amplification, his voice was even more powerful. Typhus moved against the jabbing, stiletto light of the words. He came within striking distance.

Vandis did not flinch.

Typhus did not use the scythe. He grabbed the mortal by the throat and lifted him high. Vandis's words choked off. 'No,' Typhus snarled. 'Don't be silent. I bring great tidings. You must spread them.' And he thought, *now*.

The insect swarm hit Vandis's mouth in a concentrated stream. He tried to keep them out. He could not. They forced their way past his lips. Typhus loosened his grasp, and the flies rushed down Vandis's throat. They filled the priest until his body was distended. It strained against his robes. It rippled.

Typhus placed Vandis down at the lectern again. His flesh was mottling as the plague assumed its definite form. His eyes were already putrefying. But he stood.

'Speak,' Typhus told him. 'Speak the truth of Father Nurgle.' He used the tip of *Manreaper* to slit Vandis's throat.

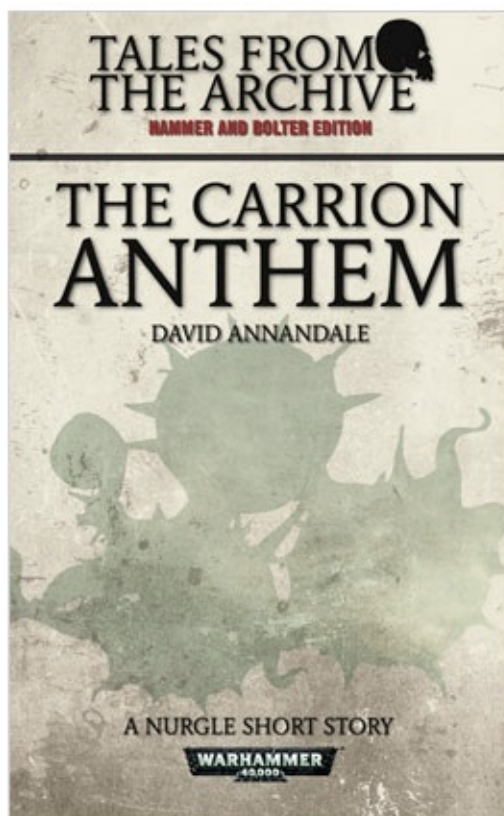
The flies erupted in an unending fountain. Its arc spread wide, kept spreading, did not stop until it encompassed the full radius of Troparion. Death fell upon the streets and habs, death that scrabbled and fluttered and choked. Death that was not peace.

'Unity is preserved,' Typhus pronounced.

Obedying his voice, obeying the eternal truth of their world, the dead of Annuciation rose again to convert the living.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The dark forces of Chaos come to the Imperial world of Ligeta. A deadly plague, spread by music, sweeps the embattled planet, and the forces of Typhus, an ancient horror and the Herald of Nurgle, land to lay waste to the survivors.

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