



CATO SICARIUS:  
MASTER OF THE WATCH

*A short story by Nick Kyme*



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Nick Kyme

There was life in this place once.

Once.

Before the skies grew dark, before the warp fell silent, before the Great Devourer began its feast of worlds.

Now there was barren rock, a desert where there used to be a forest, a husk where once stood a city. Here, the alien tyranid had left its mark and no survivors.

Save one.

Cato Sicarius walked alone in a wasteland. Injured, he dragged his left leg where a spur of metal had pierced it during the crash. His battle-helm had split in half and been discarded. Bareheaded, there was no way to mask the smell, the reek of dust and emptiness.

The broken drop pod was far behind him, as were the corpses of the Vanguard veterans he had been accompanying. Agemann would have something to say about that. He would bring up the ice world again.

Even Daceus had advised Sicarius not to go, especially without his Lions, but the sergeant went unheeded. Damnos had made Sicarius reckless, more so than before. When he had looked into his sergeant's eyes, Sicarius suspected Daceus thought the same. It had not changed his mind. Sicarius had to know if he still had his edge. The Lions would stay with the main army and maintain a command presence, whilst he would infiltrate with a small squad. Their mission: assassinate the node creature that maintained the link to the hive. That plan had gone awry when a spore mine had exploded in their airspace during insertion, even if the means to enact that plan had not.

The device was still hooked to his weapons belt, a dull orb about the size of his fist. Praise the Throne *that* was still intact.

The rest was all fire, smoke and blood.

At least without his trappings, he was light. He wore stripped down power armour, not his Mantle of the Suzerain. Such finery did not befit this kind of work, and Sicarius was glad of it. Even his Tempest Blade was absent, a sheathed gladius strapped to his hip instead. He kept his plasma pistol, which sat snug in its holster and was, as of yet, unused. But as Sicarius approached the ghostly ruin of a settlement, that fact was about to change.

Shadows lurked here. They also *chittered*, perhaps in some crude approximation of speech. To the Master of the Watch, it sounded like laughter.

They had been drawn to him, these hunter-slayers, drawn to his living biology. A need drove them that went beyond hunger. Consumption was to the tyranid as war was to a Space Marine. The two could not be separated.

By Sicarius's reckoning, the farthest Ultramarine outpost was still several kilometres away. He would have to fight through the husk of the dead city, and its new xenos tenants, if he were to reach his brothers.

He made for the ruins, mindful as the shadows drew closer with his every step and began to grow claws.

Sicarius had barely crossed the threshold of some former municipal district, its lonely barricades and toothless defences still standing but empty, when the first of the hunter-slayers emerged from darkness.

Slipping the plasma pistol from his holster, he aimed and fired. The tyranid was vaporised by the superheated bolt, but Sicarius's triumph only lasted until the moment his sidearm red-lined and refused to function.

'Guilliman's blood...' he said beneath his breath, cursing the crash that had obviously damaged the pistol.

Now there were more hunter-slayers, drawn by the demise of their brood-mate, and cautiously scenting easy prey.

Sicarius spat, 'Ugly little bastards,' as the ochre-skinned, canine-like aliens began to scurry towards him. He had made it far enough that he could peel off the main concourse and head down one of the lifeless streets. Limping badly, Sicarius grimaced and cursed with every step, but was determined not to submit. He needed a better vantage, somewhere the diminutive aliens' numerical superiority would count for less.

He found a lexicographer's office. Kicking in the door, ignoring the pain from his leg, he found a small chamber with a narrow corridor leading off into an even smaller domicile at the back.

Sicarius was heading for the corridor when the hunter-slayers burst through

the doorway. Savage teeth sank into his back, armour screeching as razor-sharp incisors bit hard. With a roar, he shrugged the creature off and heard it strike the wall. A second clamped to his wounded leg. Now he screamed. Agony gave way to wrath, as Sicarius wrenched out his gladius and pierced the tyranid through its skull. It squealed once and fell limp.

Three more barrelled into him, their combined weight nearby taking over him. The close confines of the clerk's office made for a tight battlefield. Using his forearm, Sicarius crushed one alien against the wall, the second he stomped using the foot of his good leg, the third he decapitated.

Gore washed over his face and torso. It burned a little, and he smelled his own seared skin.

More were coming. He could hear them further down the street, chattering like jackals. The spilled blood of their kin had drawn them.

His own blood leaking from a dozen minor wounds, Sicarius headed down the corridor as he had originally intended, but instead of looking for a place to make a stand he sought an exit as a fresh strategy superseded his previous plan – escape and get to higher ground. With a decent vantage point, he could chart a route through this ghost city and possibly signal his company.

Damnus returned again, taunting him with its bitter memory. Failure was no easy pill for Sicarius to swallow. Even here, wounded and outnumbered, Sicarius refused to yield.

‘I still have the edge,’ he snarled through clenched teeth as he found what he was looking for.

A ladder in the rear domicile led to the roof. He took it, the metal groaning against his power armoured weight. Punching through the hatch, he emerged into dismal half-light and onto the roof.

It was a good vantage point. Higher up, he looked out across the city...  
...and beheld a horde.

Emerging from drains and sewer pipes, from every crack and alcove, were hundreds of tyranids. The hunter-slayers were in the numerical ascendency but there were larger forms too that scuttled, stomped and champed.

It was impossible, even for one such as he.

‘No way through...’ Sicarius almost laughed at the senselessness of it all as he unclipped the fist-sized orb at his belt. Pride had brought him to this place. Not here, in this city, but this moment. It was a little late for a realisation, though. Resolve forced him into a different direction, the recognition and acceptance of a final duty.

The vortex grenade was intended for the node creature, but Sicarius would have to settle for a host of its minions instead. It wasn't the end he had imagined for himself. Fate had dealt him a cruel hand with that crash. It was merely chance... or was it?

Sicarius had the grenade out in front of him. It was ready, primed and only needed to be activated.

'Fortune favours the bold... Perhaps I have become too bold.'

Ever since Damnos. Ever since he fell. He had been trying to prove something... To his Chapter, to himself.

Such thoughts were the province of fools. Until now, Sicarius had never considered himself amongst such men.

Creeping towards him, the sea of tooth, claw and chitin reached the edge of the building.

One hand on the vortex grenade, the other clamped around his gladius, Sicarius prepared for his duty to finally end. He was about to shout a challenge when something stopped him.

There, at the edge of the ruins, a pale mist was rolling in. It came on fast, thick, and engulfed the horde in a matter of seconds. As if reacting to a threat, the aliens began to snarl and snap at each other. Soon even that was lost to the mist.

Sicarius's grip on his weapons tightened as an unearthly chill went through him like a jolt of electricity.

To his left a muzzle flash erupted, partially smothered by the mist. Then another, and another until the pale obfuscating cloud was awash with weapons fire. He heard blades, first unsheathed and then cutting. The alien screams came next. He half-glimpsed a figure moving in the white miasma below. It looked familiar, definitely Adeptus Astartes, but belonging to no Chapter Sicarius had ever encountered. At first he thought they might be Deathwatch – an operation on this world would suit their tactical predilections – but the warriors in the mist moved too fast to be Space Marines. No warrior in power armour could move like that.

Sicarius had no time to wonder further. In a few minutes, silence returned, the mist evaporated as swiftly as it had appeared and nothing else remained. Nothing. Not even the dead.

Reattaching the vortex grenade and sheathing his sword, Sicarius rubbed his eyes. He *was* wounded. Perhaps the blood loss... no, he dismissed that as he heard a low thrum overhead become a dull roar. It had been there for a while but

Sicarius put the throbbing down to his injuries. It was actually a turbo-fan.

Overhead, the bulky outline of an Ultramarines Stormraven loomed.

As the gunship drew close, its assault cannons cycling down when no targets presented themselves, it turned. Standing on the rear ramp, Daceus waved his captain aboard.

‘When we found the downed drop pod, we thought you might be dead,’ said the sergeant.

‘I nearly was,’ said Sicarius.

‘This area is crawling with xeno-forms. How did you avoid them?’ Daceus sounded genuinely incredulous.

‘I didn’t.’

Daceus cocked his head asking an unspoken question.

‘I did have help though,’ Sicarius answered.

‘From whom?’

‘An unexpected quarter.’ Sicarius said nothing further on the subject.

Daceus called behind him, ‘Apothecary.’

‘No,’ said Sicarius, holding up a hand and prompting the medic to shrink back into the gloom. ‘Bring me my armour. This war is far from over, but I suspect the scales have been tipped in our favour.’

Daceus didn’t ask, for Sicarius showed no sign of providing an answer.

In truth, he couldn’t but knew that he was right.

The ramp closed, the gunship peeled away, headed back to the Ultramarines lines.

In the darkness of the hold, Sicarius remembered the mist and the warriors within it. He remembered something else too, a detail of their war-plate. Bone, it was bone. They were covered in it.

A debt was owed, his life preserved for some greater fate, and Sicarius wondered when it would have to be paid.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NICK KYME is the author of the Tome of Fire trilogy featuring the Salamanders. He has also written for the Horus Heresy, Space Marine Battles and Time of Legends series with the novels *Vulkan Lives*, *Fall of Damnos* and *The Great Betrayal*. In addition, he has penned a host of short stories and several novellas, including 'Feat of Iron' which was a New York Times bestseller in the Horus Heresy collection *The Primarchs*. He lives and works in Nottingham.



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