

Pontus meets the Tyranid

By Mike R

Sergeant Major Pontus wrapped his hands gratefully around the hot cup. He loved the smell of recaff in the morning but at the moment its heat was more important. It was a cold morning; correction... it was a very cold morning. His reconnaissance patrol was 2 days out from HQ, probing into abandoned farmland in search of a tyranid incursion. Three weeks ago, the Imperial Navy had intercepted a small 'nid fleet, a remnant of Hive Fleet Behemoth. However, some of the ships had dispersed before the Navy could destroy them and so the whole sub-sector was on alert.

A week ago, some farmers up-country had reported a strange-coloured meteor shower. Pontus' regiment, displaying really bad timing, was on furlough on the planet and had been recalled to duty to support a panicky PDF commander. It was Autumn here; the days were lovely, the nights were freezing.

Pontus sipped his recaff and glanced around. His squads were packing away their tents, bedding and breakfast kit into their 2 chimeras. The chimera engines were idling, providing some warmth and his small Ratling squad, Corporal Maxentius and 2 colleagues, were already slipping out to the north to scout a ruined village a couple of miles away.

There was no urgency and at least the re-packing activity had succeeded in warming up the men. So it was not until about 40 minutes later that the 2 chimera were packed and ready to go. Pontus gave the signal and the two vehicles lurched into movement. After about 10 minutes travel, the vox unit squawked into life. A worried Corporal Maxentius reported movement about a mile north of his position, a strange chittering sound and a very peculiar smell. With a sinking feeling, Pontus recognised the characteristic signs of a tyranid swarm. But how big was it? He was going to have to find out – even if it proved to be a fatally bad decision.

After relaying the details back to HQ, he called up Sergeant Milvio in the other chimera. "Pat, we've got a possible 'nid sighting beyond the village ahead." The only answer was a grunt. "Take your squad across the river and into the village; I'll pick up Maxentius' bunch and meet you there." Both chimera picked up speed, the guardsmen checking their equipment and lasrifles. Pontus settled himself in his chimera's

turret, looking out for the Ratlings. He was following the right-hand bank of a fast-flowing river. Ahead was a small plank bridge and on the left hand bank, opposite the bridge, a walled, ruined village with crop fields beyond. The noise level dropped slightly and Pontus saw Milvio's vehicle, on the left bank, slow to a halt just beside the village walls. The back hatch clanged down and the squad moved out to their left, heading for an open gateway.

Pontus turned his gaze ahead and saw Maxentius, tucked into cover in the boulder-strewn river bank ahead, frantically signalling for quiet. At Pontus' signal, his chimera slid to a halt and the engines of both vehicles juddered to a stop. Silence.

Well, not quite. For a start there was the sound of the river, which was quite an effective mask for other noises. And then, behind the river's rushing and gurgling, a faint sound like a roomfull of seashell wind chimes in a stiff breeze.

Milvio cursed, "I can't see a gaking thing from here, the ruins are blocking our sight lines. We'll move in as far as the first building. I'm not going too far, as I want to get too close to whatever is in that field." Pontus agreed and stood up in the turret seat to gain an extra 18 inches of height. He peered forwards but could see nothing beyond the bridge, then looked left and ahead through the ruins to the crop fields beyond. Then he saw them. Gaunts - a horde of gaunts emerging from the fields to the left of the village. Three new black shapes appeared from the crops and Pontus' mouth went dry. Tyranid warriors. Winged warriors too. That meant they could be on him in a matter of moments! He swung the turret to face them but they were obscured by the ruins at the far side of the village and he couldn't get clear shot.

Pontus swore, then remembered his Ratlings. He reached inside the chimera and grabbed the voxcaster. Calling all units he reported the gaunts, told Milvio to hold his position and directed Maxentius to snipe at the warriors. Maxentius came back: "Will do. Also, I think something's just slipped over the left bank into the river, about 100 yards beyond the bridge." In confirmation, a thrashing black shape swept under the bridge and past him down the river. Genestealer! Fortunately, the river had proved too fast and deep for it. But how many more where there? Ducking back into the chimera he called across to his squad "Balchin, open the top hatch and get up there with your launcher; we've got warriors and gaunts out here."

From across the river came gunfire, as Milvio's chimera opened up on the gaunts. Moments later, from his own bank, Pontus heard las fire as Maxentius' squad sniped at the warriors. Finally, his own chimera opened fire as the warriors stepped into a gap in the ruins and opened their wings ready for flight. Pontus grabbed the turret's heavy stubber and sent a stream of bullets towards the winged beasts. As he fired he noted another 3 genestealers in the river, 2 drowned but one still struggling. From behind him was a roar as the launcher fired at the warriors. In all the noise, he didn't hear his driver's frantic, unsuccessful, attempts to restart his engines.

Across the river, the gaunts had taken some casualties but three times more had scuttled out of the crops and headed for the ruins. The good news was that the warriors, without getting airborne, had crumpled under the combined fire from his chimera and the snipers. Pontus switched his attention to the gaunts, turning his turret and unleashing a long-range burst of fire as they hesitated, robbed of synapse control by the death of the warriors. The multilaser also opened up, bursting open two of the black horrors. Across the river Milvio, realising that his squad had no useable field of fire, was leading them at the run back into his chimera.

Across the vox there came a sudden shout from Maxentius. Pontus turned and saw 4 very wet, very angry genestealers hauling themselves over the river bank by the bridge. He shouted a warning down to his gunner and driver and swung his stubber round. It was too late. As Maxentius and his team tried to decide between firing or running back to the chimera, the genestealers were on them. In seconds, mercifully, the 'stealers rending claws had reduced the Ratlings to a bleeding mess. Without pausing, they leapt straight for the chimera. "Reverse!" screamed Pontus to his driver. "Frakking thing won't start!" he shouted back and Pontus watched, frozen, as the four genestealers launched themselves at the front of his chimera.

Their vicious rending claws hacked at the front armour, tearing great gouges into it and Pontus couldn't depress the stubber low enough to be able to fire at them. However, his efforts attracted their attention and they gathered themselves to jump up at him. In that moment, as Pontus stared bloody death in the face, the engine roared into life and the chimera jerked rapidly backwards. The stealers were left standing and every weapon on the chimera opened up. In seconds, they were reduced to a pile of steaming chitin.

Pontus breathed a small prayer of gratitude to the Emperor, then

called down to his driver. "Pull forward about 20 yards to give us a clear line of sight on those gaunts." Milvio had already advanced his chimera along the river bank and was spraying the gaunts with multilaser and stubber fire. Pontus' chimera moved also forwards, crushing the genestealers' remains under its tracks and its turret weapons opened fire. Without synapse control and under heavy fire, the gaunts turned and fled for cover back into the crop fields. The chimeras pursued them until there were none left alive.

Later that day, what was left of Maxentius and his 2 teammates was shovelled into a shallow grave beside the river. Pontus recited the Litany of Rest whilst his troops stood bareheaded. After a lasrifle volley over the graves, they dispersed to their vehicles and left. They had lost friends before, they would lose friends in the future. It was part of being Imperial Guard.

The Emperor Protects.