



The Gavyn Kyle FILES

BY JOSH COLON • ART BY OSCAR CARFARO, MIKE VAILLANCOURT, AND MATTHEW D. WILSON

PYRRHUS

Out of the many covert intelligence gathering operations I have performed on various members of the Protectorate, several recently funded by your organization's coin, I must admit that at first, I was perplexed as to why this individual had been chosen for my next assignment. On the surface, Flameguard Captain Pyrrhus holds no major authority within his martial order or within the rest of the temple as a whole. His actual battlefield experience only stretches back to the last few years, and by all practical measuring, he doesn't appear to have the warcaster talent.

Still, ever the consummate professional, I set about gathering information on this young Flameguard, and I have to admit, even I was surprised by what I uncovered. For such a single-minded soldier of the faith, there is a profound amount of controversy, intrigue, and outright secrecy surrounding him. But above all, I found the life of Pyrrhus to be one of self-sacrifice and asceticism fueled by a tremendous amount of faith—the kind that is found only in conjunction with an equal amount of tragedy and loss.

Simply put, Pyrrhus views this life as merely grounds for training and testing to develop his skills to their highest levels, so that when he passes on to Urcaen, he can be of better service to the Creator. This simple and earnest motivation is contrasted by virtually every authority figure in Pyrrhus' life and career—some believe him to be a tainted vessel of heresy, while others believe he has been chosen by Menoth for some higher purpose.

— Gavyn Kyle

Pyrrhus was born in the village of Seniza to Martus and Nuria. I found little information on Pyrrhus' parents, as official mention of them had been stricken from government records. From some cursory interviews with people in other



nearby villages, the town of Seniza seemed to be a quiet and peaceful place filled with pious and hardworking families; however, in the summer of 580 AR, the regional sovereign declared Seniza a haven for heresy and had the whole town and its citizens purified by flames.

Oddly, I could find no official record of this event, but after some digging, I managed to piece together a probable root of these events. Apparently, one of the local children showed signs of aggressive and wild behavior traditionally associated with a tainted connection to the Devourer Wurm. Rather than consulting their priest, several of the townsfolk allegedly allowed the feral child to be secreted out of the Protectorate. While I do not know if Pyrrhus' parents were among those who protected the child, this event was apparently enough to punish the entire population. These purification operations are always swift and thorough. No one ever escapes judgment. But as the following letter from one of the Cleansers to a superior indicates, this operation was different. — GK

PYRRHUS TIMELINE

580 AR - Pyrrhus is born in the village of Seniza to Martus and Nuria.

Summer 583 AR - The village of Seniza is declared a haven of heresy and sentenced to purification by flame. The boy Pyrrhus survives the fires unscathed and is briefly cared for while in the custody of the Flameguard until a permanent guardian can be located.

Fall 583 AR - Pyrrhus is left in the guardianship of his grandfather Calur, his only remaining relative.

587 AR - Pyrrhus begins a strict self-training regimen.

596 AR - Pyrrhus enlists in the Flameguard and begins standard and advanced training.

598 AR - Pyrrhus completes Flameguard training and graduates to full member of the Order.

601 AR - Promoted to Arms master, Pyrrhus is assigned as a special instructor.

607 AR - After leading an elite unit of Flameguard in the defense of the Great Temple and on the offensive at Caspia, Pyrrhus is promoted to Preceptor.

Late 607-608 AR - Pyrrhus is assigned to border patrols that protect supply caravans to the Northern Crusade. Promoted to Captain.

Late 608 AR to Present - Attached to several prominent Northern Crusade Interdictions, Pyrrhus takes part in several major battles, including the second assault on the Thornwood necrofactorium.

Preceptor Mathis,

As you have certainly heard from others in the detachment, the ordered cleansing of Seniza proceeded with the high standards of precision and excellence that our unit is known for. My soldiers methodically scoured the village, burning every structure and living occupant of the town. Afterward, we encircled the perimeter of the burning village. A few survivors attempted to get past us, but we merely wounded them with our blades and threw them back into the flames to carry out Scrutator Rugal's sentence. After a full day and night standing watch over the flames, we did a final sweep of the ruins and discovered, to our shock, a lone survivor: a young boy of no more than three years. His clothes had burned and his body was covered in soot and ash, but he was otherwise completely unscathed. There is no way this child escaped our flames, yet he survived. I must confess that even now, I feel emotion swelling as I write this. Every soldier present could only stare in amazement at this little form who was wrapped in my very own tabard, and we knew then what even Scrutator Rugal later declared—this child had been spared by the very hand of Menoth himself. He has been under our care for several weeks, but we believe we have located the boy's grandfather, who will be granted custody soon. Preceptor Mathis, I know I may speak out of turn, but I truly believe I witnessed a miracle of the Creator, and if you still have your doubts, wait until we have confirmed who we believe the grandfather is. I tell you, the hand of the Lawbringer moves in mysterious ways.

Cleanser Arms Master Elios Joriah

While the above story may seem unbelievable, I have over a dozen letters from the other members

of the Flameguard who were present at Seniza, and they all make the same claim that this boy, later identified as Pyrrhus, miraculously survived the fires that burned down his village. As for the boy's grandfather, he was confirmed to be Calur, a renowned and respected Flameguard who rose to the rank of commander and was awarded several commendations before honorably retiring after losing an arm and left eye in battle. —GK

As a retired Flameguard commander, Calur was issued a respectable stipend that allowed him and his grandson to live in the city of Sul in relative comfort. What I could gather of Pyrrhus' upbringing under Calur came mostly from teachers and former schoolmates who described the boy as bright but distant and aloof. All of the children of his neighborhood remembered Pyrrhus as a quiet boy, always preferring to practice drills and forms on his wooden staff over making friends with his peers. This odd behavior began to make sense once I got hold of Calur's private journal.

Starting at the age of seven, the young boy began a strict training regimen under his grandfather's guidance, learning both the martial skills and code of conduct of the Flameguard. This training came at the cost of making friends or having any sort of normal childhood. At first, I assumed the grandfather forced this on young Pyrrhus, but as the following journal entry illustrates, this was not the case. —GK

I have been telling Pyrrhus stories about the life and piety of his mother and father, of their bravery in the face of adversity, and of their service to the temple before they settled down in a small village to give birth to their son. I have even been telling him a bit of my own adventures,

all in the hopes of giving some semblance of comfort and strengthening the faith of the boy. It appears I have been far too successful in that endeavor. In recent weeks, a fire has sparked in the eyes of my grandson. He has taken to swinging a small tree branch around as a training staff and has even attempted to memorize the Rites of Vigilance. When I asked him if he wouldn't rather play with the other children, he looked me straight in the eye and said, "I want to be strong for Menoth, so he'll let me fight alongside mother and father in Urcaen." All I could do was embrace my beloved grandson and tell him how proud I was. We will begin his training tomorrow morning before first prayer.

From what I can tell, Pyrrhus' tutelage under his grandfather was rigorous and intensive; at the age of eleven, Pyrrhus began making prolonged training excursions with his grandfather in the desert outside of the city, using the harsh elements and the wild desert creatures to further test the boy's resolve. These trips would typically last days, but on a few occasions some were as long as a couple of weeks. The following journal entry takes place when Pyrrhus was about fifteen years old. It details a particularly eventful trip, one that illustrates the lad's growing skill and resolve. —GK

We had been following the trails near the northeastern border when, just as we crested a rocky hill, Pyrrhus and I came across a family of pilgrims beset by three bandits. Before I knew it, Pyrrhus charged at the heathens. I could not help but wish I wasn't so old and crippled, so I could aid my grandson, but I had complete faith in him and the Creator. Pyrrhus made short work of the first two, even though he only had a wooden shield and staff to combat their steel weapons. Their leader was surprisingly strong, and Pyrrhus'

staff shattered on the enemy's forearm. But my grandson continued to fight on, using only his shield. After a few intense minutes, Pyrrhus stood over the bandit leader, victorious. After the battle, the family offered us food and a night in their tent as gratitude. I must admit, my old bones desired the comfort of their hospitality, but Pyrrhus was too eager to continue his training. So, we agreed I would stay and rest with the family for a night and then meet him at Sul's gates in a few days. Without a backward glance, Pyrrhus set off to train with nothing but his shield, my prayers, and his faith against the oncoming desert darkness.

A year later, at sixteen, Pyrrhus was of age to test as a recruit for the Flameguard. By all accounts, he passed each test with ease. I decided to investigate whether anyone at the Order remembered the young man's past. Upon further examination, as the following correspondence between two senior instructors suggests, it seemed to be a source of contention among the Order.

The following are a handful of letters (and excerpts from letters). —GK



Preceptor Gilroy,

I must confess my confusion as to your attempt to reverse recruit Pyrrhus' acceptance into our Order as a trainee. Not only did the boy receive a perfect grade on all six tests, but his grandfather's great service to our Order surely means potential through heritage as well. Furthermore, and I do not bring this up lightly, I was at Seniza when the boy was found among the burning rubble, and while I am not a priest, I do believe the Creator saved that boy for some special purpose. It is in the best interest of the Flameguard to assist in strengthening Pyrrhus toward that destiny.

Arms-Master Instructor Layla Ruthani

Arms Master Ruthani,

You mention the boy's heritage, and that is precisely what I am trying to save our order from. The young man's parents were heretics, and thus, heretical blood flows through his veins. Even if he joins our order out of pure intent, it is as the Canon of the True Law states, "The sins of the father live on through his son." I am not the only one who sees the danger this Pyrrhus poses to the Flameguard, and even if he is allowed to join, nothing will convince me otherwise. Not even this purported deliverance from judgment.

Senior Preceptor Heremon Gilroy

Despite Gilroy's suspicions, Pyrrhus' training was allowed to continue, and after two years of training as an infantry soldier, Pyrrhus was inducted as a full member of the Flameguard in 598 AR at the age of eighteen. The following brief portion of a letter by one of Pyrrhus' main instructors illustrates the young man's last few months in training. -GK

...In regards to Pyrrhus, he continues to demonstrate excellence in skill and is currently receiving special tactical training. The only concern I have is that the other recruits misunderstand his dedication. The boy has no close friends and does not commiserate with his peers during assigned rest hours. I know that Preceptor Gilroy and others continue to view the young man with suspicion, but I believe Pyrrhus will be a boon to our order.

Arms Master Layla Ruthani

Unfortunately, Pyrrhus' skeptics refused to sit idly by and watch him—a child born from heretics—become a full Flameguard. As first in his class, Pyrrhus was elected to participate in

a sparring session against multiple opponents to demonstrate the graduating class' skill to the observing members of the Incendium. I believe this was nothing but a guise by Gilroy and the leading council of the Flameguard, whose true intentions were for Pyrrhus to suffer at the very least embarrassment and at worst a career-ending injury. The following is an eyewitness account of the demonstration. -GK

First, they came at him in pairs with flame spear strikes no less fast and sure as those done with the intent to kill. Pyrrhus dodged each attack and countered with great skill for a new graduate, defeating opponent after opponent. Once they began coming at him in teams of three, his shield broke, and for a time, he wielded a pair of flame spears. After those broke, it was a pair of shields. Each new weapon had been taken from a defeated opponent. The demonstration was halted after Pyrrhus stood over his thirty-third opponent, I believe. All of them knocked down but none suffering any serious injury. On a personal note, while I suspect Preceptor Gilroy and the others are correct about the danger of the boy's heretical legacy, after watching Pyrrhus' skill firsthand, I am left to wonder if the others who believe he is guided by Menoth don't have the truth of it.

Preceptor Aulon Sanders

After his induction into the Flameguard, Pyrrhus was assigned to standard patrol regiments at the main temple in Sul. While his superiors took note of the young soldier's dedication and talent, Pyrrhus seemed dissatisfied; having spent his whole life constantly pushing his skills, the standard battle-readiness drills and sparring seemed inadequate. In Pyrrhus' few spare hours off-duty, he sought out noteworthy warriors from his and other martial orders and challenged them to friendly but fierce matches. Some of his notable victories included Exemplar Seneschal Rixus and Lorden, an abbot of the Order of the Fist. The following is a surveillance report of Pyrrhus' duel with Steelhead Captain Armond Dukain, as seen by a monk of the Order of the Fist. -GK

Their fight took place in an alley just south of Providence Street. Several onlookers were there, including two patrolling Flameguard and a few Steelheads from the captain's division. By my reckoning, Steelhead halberdiers are impressive when fighting cohesively, but rarely did one stand out as a singular fighter. Dukain was different. His speed and precision with the polearm was almost elegant in its own way. By the speed with which he could change his angle of attack, with a long weapon in a narrow alleyway no less, I could tell that the Flameguard had chosen

his opponent well. Their battle was fierce, and both men seemed evenly matched, that is, until Pyrrhus went on the offensive. Using both spear and shield in offensive and countering strikes, he eventually found an opening, leaving the tip of his spear mere inches from Dukain's throat. Once both men were satisfied, the crowd quickly dispersed. No further incident from Pyrrhus to report that day.

Adara, of the Order of the Fist

These duels went on for over two years until a superior, perhaps under pressure from the other martial orders seeking to avoid further embarrassing losses, lightly reprimanded Pyrrhus. By all accounts, each progressive duel developed Pyrrhus' style and ability, likely contributing to his considerable fighting prowess today. This unorthodox path for personal development bears a passing similarity to High Paladin Dartan Vilmon, perhaps the most renowned swordsman currently serving the Protectorate, who is said to have trained under several accomplished sword masters outside of his order. An additional consequence of these matches was that each victory also furthered Pyrrhus' reputation across the Protectorate as a great warrior. Even today, stories of Pyrrhus' duels are shared among the Flameguard. -GK

Pyrrhus proved himself an exemplary Flameguard, and in 601 AR, he was granted the rank of Arms Master, just three years after completing his training—an unprecedented speed for such a promotion. Instead of receiving command of a unit, he was made an instructor to the most promising recruits. During this time, it seems Pyrrhus continued his self-imposed training regimen, pushing himself far beyond the expectations of his martial order.

While I don't have definitive proof, certain unofficial documents have led me to suspect the hand of Preceptor Heremon Gilroy was once again attempting to sabotage Pyrrhus' path to command. Still, Pyrrhus proved to be a harsh, demanding, but excellent instructor, as shown by this excerpt from a recruit's letter to his family. -GK

After our first month in the advanced class, my friend Kastor and I fell behind. We were not executing the second spear form to Instructor Pyrrhus' liking, despite our progress under the previous instructor. So Arms Master Pyrrhus had Kastor and me practice the form on training mannequins, first at one-quarter speed and then switching between half- and full-speed, all day. He made us practice while the rest of our group trained normally and ate the midday meal and had us continue even hours after sunset. The next day, it was the same thing. And the next day. And the next. For over two weeks it was like this, our

shoulders burning and our minds losing track of where our arms ended and our spears began. Finally, he had us spar trainees from another group, commanding us to use only the principles of the second form. I could hardly believe how fast my body responded to my opponent's unnecessarily complex movements. After Kastor and I easily won our matches, Instructor Pyrrhus offered us a slight nod and ordered us to return to drilling with our classmates. If you knew Pyrrhus, you'd understand why that simple nod filled us with pride.

Flameguard Initiate Orius Kingston

Five years after Pyrrhus began instructing, the Cygnarans besieged the city of Sul. While Pyrrhus yearned to take his place in battle, he was tasked with continuing the training of recruits, as the Protectorate needed well-trained Flameguard more than ever. Pyrrhus obeyed and was placed in a special instructor committee to develop a new, abridged training regimen that would see fully trained Flameguard in six months rather than the traditional two years.

In the last days of the war, however, Pyrrhus was finally given his chance to command, leading a special unit of his former top students in the defense of the Great Temple. During these final battles, Pyrrhus' unit faced the renowned 37th Storm Knight company, known as Morrow's Thunder. The knights of this unit had fought in some of the bloodiest battles in the Sulese theater and had never been routed. Attached is an excerpt from a former student who was under Pyrrhus' command during this engagement. -GK



We had been fighting for what seemed like several hours, the sound of their lightning racking our armor and shaking our shields was deafening, but under the command of Instructor Pyrrhus, we held. At times I lost sight of him, since he chose to don the curved helmet of a standard Flameguard rather than the crowned helm his authority allowed. Before we left the temple, he said it was to remind him and us that no authority is greater than Menoth's. With our leader's skill and our faith, we managed to drive those Morrowan knights back, cutting down over a dozen of them and not losing a single of our own. After the battle, we celebrated in the Creator's name while Arms Master Pyrrhus only kept his eyes fixed on where the enemy had fled, ever vigilant, looking for another attack that never came.

Flameguard Kastor Everett

After the end of the war, the Incendium promoted Pyrrhus to Preceptor and gave him permanent command of his own elite unit, who were referred to by the others in their order as the Flamespear Votary. This decision did not sit well with those who questioned Pyrrhus' lineage, and as the next document shows, they decided not to be quiet about it. -GK

Official Writ of Objection

Cause of Grievance: The assignment of Flameguard soldiers under the command of Preceptor Pyrrhus

Date of Grievance: Golovus 12, 607 AR

Additional notes: Many loyal and veteran members of our Order are not comfortable placing the lives of soldiers we helped train in the hands of a man sired by heretics. Pyrrhus needs to remain under close scrutiny as an instructor. We cannot allow someone of his dubious origins to lead our Flameguard to ruin, death, or worse.

Signatures of leading objectant(s):
Preceptor Heremon Gilroy, Preceptor Lucius Moore, Arms Master Miles Clayden

After the swift and complete denial of the motion, Preceptor Pyrrhus and his unit were first assigned to Tower Judgment to conduct border patrols, but in the spring of 608 AR, they

were reassigned to guard supply and armament caravans to and from the Northern Crusade. During one of these trips, the caravan was attacked by a sizable contingent of skorne just a few days north of the Protectorate border. I have attached a section from the leading seneschal's after-action report that highlights his unit's role in the defense of the caravan. -GK

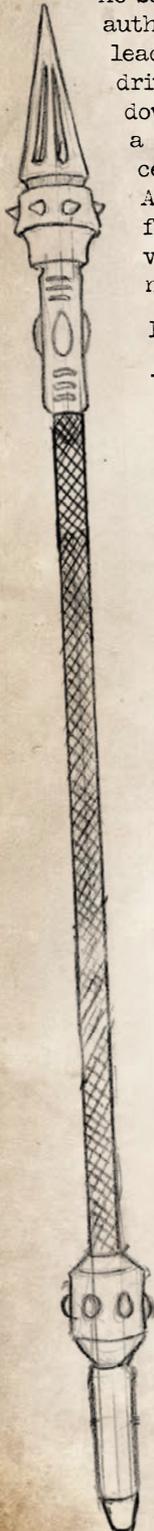
While my exemplars were forcing a counterassault against the skorne forces, it was the Flameguard that held our most exposed flank and kept all of our supply cargo safe. At one point, it appeared as if the Flameguard were beset by a tidal wave of red armor and flashing swords, and I feared they would not hold. But then I saw the commanding preceptor, Pyrrhus, move through the skorne line at an angle, as if he had no regard for his own safety. He pierced through the skorne with swift strikes of his flame spear until he stood in front of his men's shield wall and with a booming voice ordered them to advance, driving the attackers back. While it may hurt my pride as an exemplar to admit, I say that we owe the success of this supply run to Pyrrhus' Flameguard.

Seneschal Elena Talbot

After his last caravan mission in the fall of 608 AR, Pyrrhus was once again promoted, this time to the rank of captain, and he and his unit were assigned to a prestigious interdiction that took part in several noted battles, not the least of which was the final assault on the Thornwood necrofactorium in early 609 AR. Here is another part of a letter from one of Pyrrhus' former students who survived that particular conflict. It describes a story that, from what I can tell, had begun to spread through the Flameguard order. The following letter is the least-embellished version of the event that I was able to locate. -GK

It was a nightmare, brother. The bodies of fallen Menites, Cygnarans, and Khadorans littered the field alongside bits of broken armor and mechanika. All around us, the undead swarmed like locusts bringing unimaginable death. Then came the bane knights whose darkness surrounded my men and me like a choking fog. I heard several of us fall, but I could do nothing but hold my shield up and strike at the darkness with my pike.

And then the world burned with Menoth's fire as Captain Pyrrhus, the flames of his spear glowing brighter than I had ever seen, charged headlong into the tide of death. Again and again, he laid low the bane knights, knocking aside their own polearms and thrusting his spear through their armor. Eventually, he crossed weapons with the



knights' lieutenant, and after an incredible battle, he brought the lieutenant down and broke its fell standard over his knee like kindling. I owe him my life, as do many others who serve under our captain. I hope that the Lawbringer blesses us with many years in service to the faith under Captain Pyrrhus.

Arms Master Orius Kingston

This final letter proved to be the most difficult to procure, mostly due to the fact that I had to copy it and reseal it before it was delivered to its intended reader, who promptly burned it after reading its contents. Though it may seem benign on the surface, I will explain shortly how this letter, which I suspect was written by a senior member of the Incendium to a ranking captain, might be the final piece to a puzzle that is of interest to you. -GK

Tales of Pyrrhus' blessed achievements are spreading through the ranks like wildfire, though I do not believe *she* is aware of this flame, yet. Many who doubted before now believe he was blessed by the Creator. This may be beneficial to the Order in the months and years ahead, as difficult actions will be taken for the good of the Flameguard. The scrutator supports us.

After stumbling into several seemingly unrelated documents, as well as mostly circumstantial evidence, this last letter has allowed me to piece together evidence of a mounting conspiracy within the leadership of the Flameguard. Evidence suggests between six and nine high-ranking members of the Flameguard leadership are involved. What the exact goals of this cabal are, I regrettably do not know. Their diligence in destroying written accounts of their meetings borders on paranoia. While I could speculate as to their intent based on the aforementioned scattered documents as well as my refined instincts for conspiracy, I will refrain from doing so, as that is not what you have paid me to do. I was hired to provide you with facts, and I will give you all I have, regardless of how few they are.

Firstly, it appears that Feora, Priestess of the Flame and leader of the Flameguard, does not seem aware of this group's actions, but I do not know if that is the direct intention of the conspirators. Secondly, if this group's intentions do involve the higher politics of the Protectorate, they do seem to have support from unknown influential individuals outside of the Flameguard. Finally

and most concretely of all, whatever plans they have for Pyrrhus, I can say with absolute certainty that the young captain will have no interest in participating. Pyrrhus is a single-minded and focused man who only desires to be of service in this life and the next, with no regard for agendas or political positioning.

Nevertheless, I do believe Pyrrhus will continue to rise in rank and authority in the years ahead. His actions have served to inadvertently silence and discredit the dwindling number within the Flameguard who still believe him to be a child of heresy, and while I was never able to uncover the truth behind his parents' actions, it does not appear that Pyrrhus' past will affect his future.

In fact, by his example and growing list of deeds, I believe Captain Pyrrhus will be seen as a hero to the coming generations of Protectorate Flameguard as well as loyal Menites. Still, if there has been one underlying truth in my investigation into this young man, it is this: by all accounts, Pyrrhus' flame, while bright, is destined to burn out far too soon. The young Flameguard captain fights too hard and too brazenly. I believe all of this sacrifice is done out of a man's devotion to his god as well as a child's wish to be reunited with the parents that were taken from him so long ago. I am no priest and have no knowledge of the afterlife, but I believe if there was ever anyone destined to fight alongside his fallen Menite brothers and sisters in the City of Man, it is Captain Pyrrhus, hero of the Flameguard.

- GK

