This is not a teaser (3)

**Macragge**

**Magna Macragge Military District**

**Fortress of Hera**

**Shrine of the Primarch**

**Primarch Roboute Guilliman**

He was alive.

This was...very much a relief.

He was alive.

He was alive...and Lorgar was not. Not anymore.

Roboute Guilliman watched everywhere but the decapitated head of the Traitor, wondering what had been in his head to attempt such a gamble.

And it had been a dangerous and reckless attack, even for a Primarch supported by the same abominations Fulgrim and the others had fell into damnation with.

The Lord of Ultramar had never doubted Lorgar would try to kill him for good if he had the chance. But there were less than thirty corpses of Word Bearers with him.

Given the forces defending this hall, it should have warranted at least four times that number...so either the Seventeenth Legion was for some reason not available to lead a direct assault on Macragge...or the Legionnaires were already busy elsewhere.

But before that, there was something Roboute needed to know. Something that burned his tongue, as he watched the changes in the weapons and the organisation the Martian Skitarii sprouted. Something that was giving him more and more a bad feeling as he saw Auxilia men crying and prostrating themselves.

“How long?”

Now that he knew he wasn’t dreaming...the devices of Cawl hadn’t been malfunctioning. There was indeed a woman in golden armour next to him. And she burned in the golden light of his father. Somehow rubies were shining on these impossible appendages, and-

No, it was not important. He would have to ask the questions later...one of which would be why three large golden spiders were surrounding her like bodyguards.

“Lord Guilliman,” the woman’s voice was respectful, but at least in what was a splendid contrast, she didn’t show any sign of awe. “By the Imperial calendar, it is the year three hundred and ten of the thirty-fifth millennium.”

More than four thousand years.

Roboute had had a feeling it was going to be bad, but...four thousand years.

No wonder so many, including his own sons were kneeling in awe. After so long...his own life had to be an old legend from the time of the Great Crusade.

But that could wait. The war, as always, took priority.

“You know who I am. May I know your name and rank...to thank the one who has healed me from my lethal injuries?”

“Lady General Taylor Hebert, Imperial Guard,” the woman presented herself, removing her helmet and with one hand and revealing a rather attractive visage with long black hair. The only really thing out of the ordinary was her eyes...there were black, filled with stars, and it wasn’t an exaggeration. “And I’m afraid I didn’t heal you, Lord Guilliman.”

“It certainly feel like you did,” usually, he wouldn’t disagree with someone so readily, but save the shadow of a hindrance, the pain was gone, and the wounds from the serpentine bastard had stopped hurting. “Unless you mean Cawl did all the work?”

“What I did do, and I am still doing, is preventing you from dying,” the angel-winged General explained. “Your son, Chapter Master Cato Valens, chose on his own will to sacrifice himself to give you time. I transferred his life-energy to you...and that in turn allowed Cawl to put you in this new great armour boosting your regeneration and to inject you the antidote to the Naga’s poison.”

“I see...” Guilliman gave a remorseful glance to the immobile blue armour of his son that two Ultramarine Successors had taken to guard. His face was at peace, though given the strain inflicted in on his body...it had not been an easy death. “And when your power is gone?”

“You are going to be in pain.” Lady General Taylor Hebert gave him a sympathetic expression, but the words were blunt and rang with truth. “Your body will only be able to operate within a fraction of your capabilities for years. I can see the damage the poison did to your body and your soul, Lord Primarch, and...you will need serious medical help for the next years, assuming the pain is tolerable, which it might very well not be.”

“I may find a situation before then,” the Radical Archmagos he had hired so many millennia ago intervened. “After all, Lady Nyx, we clearly found a loophole where there was supposed to be none to give and-“

“Ah, Archmagos Dominus Belisarius Cawl,” this time it was not difficult to recognise the emotions of the woman who had been empowered by his father. There was some amusement...and a far greater amount of irritation. “First, you have not years before it begins, but...approximately nine hours. **Sacrifice** is a harsh mistress, for it is unique and non-renewable. And more importantly, if you think about disobeying my orders again, I will drag you myself before the Fabricator-General of Mars so he can judge you for your fascinating interpretations of tech-law!”

“But clearly you anticipated me coming here!” Cawl was clearly as unrepentant as the first time Guilliman had caught him...”Why else would you send your sneaky Dreadnought and your spiders?”

A Dreadnought? Guilliman didn’t see...in fact yes, there was one, almost hidden by the debris and the pillar.

“I sent them as a contingency if the heretics were to reach the Shrine.” The Lady General breathed out, clearly exasperated. “Anyway, you are very lucky to have proven yourself useful and allowed me to arrive in time. So I will not send a message to my Archmagi that you are in need of thorough punishment.”

“I am grateful, really...your Celestial Highness.”

Given that Cawl had used the title now and not before, Roboute knew it wasn’t used by the Archmagos for its deep respect of Imperial protocol.

And they were wasting too much time as it was.

“I have nine hours, then.” That required a focus on practical issues. “The war?”

“The war is almost over on Macragge,” Lady Taylor Hebert informed him as thousands of footsteps climbing marble stairs echoed in the distance. “The Traitor Seventeenth committed most of its remaining strength to the battle in the streets of Macragge City, but it is now encircled and quickly annihilated. The forces they deployed in the Pharsalus Military District caused a great amount of carnage, but all the Traitor Titans have been slain, and the death of their Primarch is accelerating the rout. Illyrium Military District is gone, but with the sorcery fading, the warships in orbit can destroy everything at a safe distance. A few elements of the Seventeenth have been able to escape, but between here and Laphis, the Word Bearers have for all intents and purpose ceased to exist.”

Calth...Calth was finally avenged? The very thought astonished him for several seconds. Though it brought him immediately a question.

“How can you possibly know this without a full strategium to relay your orders?”

“Who needs a strategium, when I have my loyal Adjutants to relay my orders and give me their reports?”

“We only did our best, Webmistress.”

Roboute Guilliman, Avenging Son and Lord of Ultramar...stared open-mouthed.

“Your spiders...speak.”

“They speak all the time, and their talents go beyond that,” the Thirteenth Primarch had really no idea what to answer...he didn’t even need to go beyond the doors of the Fortress to drown under the surprises?

“The military situation is resolved, then?”

“Not exactly,” the Lady General admitted, her wings getting agitated and hinting the problems had not finished coming this way. “There’s a dangerous xenos infestation on the Hive World of Ardium. I need to return-“

Her voice was not able to continue as hundreds of Space Marines rushed into the hall where his sons had let him rest in peace for thousand years.

The sight was...it warmed his heart, to see that for all his millennia, the Adeptus Astartes had involved. The colours had sometimes changed, but more remained the same. His own Ultramarines. The Genesis Chapter. Brazen Consuls. Praetors of Orpheus. Iron Hounds.

And some which weren’t of his line at all, but more than welcome all the same. Those who had decided to begin the pursuit of the Traitor for eternity, the Black Templars of Sigismund. And many other sons of Dorn from the Second Founding.

One by one, they knelt.

The woman who had helped – and continued to, at this hour – to let him return among the living raised her long sword which looked to be similar to his own when it came to the style.

“ALL HAIL THE FIRST LORD OF ULTRAMAR!”

“ALL HAIL LORD ROBOUTE GUILLIMAN!”

“IMPERIAM VICTORIAM!”

“WE MARCH FOR MACRAGGE!”

**Fortress of Hera**

**Hall of Fidelity**

**69 hours after the Mark of Oblivion**

**Captain Gaius Pompeius**

Gaius couldn’t move, given how many devices the Apothecaries had tied to him.

But he could cry.

And cry he did, massive tears falling on his cheeks and his armour.

“Father,” he managed to say, for all he knew he knew the pain would be unpleasant from the effort.

“My son.”

Their father walked. Their father was alive and here to command them.

Everything...everything they had fought for had not been in vain.

“Chapter Master Cato Valens has given his life for me.”

Gaius nodded, and this time his inability to speak had nothing with the frailties of his wounded flesh.

“Under the circumstances, you are now the highest-ranked officer of the Ultramarines Chapter.”

“Yes.” Gaius winced. “Theoretical: Captain Thiel has far more seniority than I will ever have...but I am indeed nominally in command with the Chapter Master’s death.”

But even if Thiel had been higher in rank, he was still on Laphis.

For the next hours, the veteran of Calth would not be available.

“Will you relinquish your authority to me, First Captain?”

“I will...father. You are reinstated and acknowledged as the Lord of Macragge....effective immediately.”

“Thank you...my son.”

Roboute Guilliman stayed silent for several seconds. All the while Gaius stared at him. Their father...the Primarch...he was blinding. It was as if he was bathed in the light of the Emperor himself.

“The Apothecaries informed me you were alive because of...Bacta?”

“Yes. This is the healing substance Lady Weaver is providing for the Space Marines.” The pain increased, and Gaius decided to not bother his Primarch for their...less than glorious role in certain negotiations where the near-miraculous substance had been concerned. “Without it, I would not be alive. The Traitor Primarch...nearly killed me.”

Gaius hissed between his teeth as the suffering grew difficult to keep away, even with mental exercises.

“They say you killed him.”

“The Lady General helped, but yes, I gave the killing blow, my son.”

“Good,” Gaius Pompeius breathed out as the Apothecaries approached to put him to sleep. “Good...”

**Hall of Maxellus**

**Lady General Taylor Hebert**

If there was something Taylor had learned in the last hour, it was that each Primarch was very different in its own right.

Of course, it was more a confirmation than a true discovery.

The writings of the Blood Angels she had read insisted Sanguinius was unique.

Rogal Dorn had been a being where the wall and the human had coexisted.

Lorgar was a dangerous fanatic who should have been imprisoned before he could cause significant damage.

Hanzo Hattori had not lived long enough to be really ‘studied’ – though releasing the last part of him on Macragge had likely led to the favourable circumstances the Imperium had benefitted from – but with Isley’s incomplete information, Taylor could safely say he was representative of a different culture and philosophy too.

Roboute Guilliman was different from all of those brothers, both in looks, culture, and methods.

Now that the Lord of Ultramar had removed his helmet – the only part Cawl was willing to remove given the circumstances – this was all the more evident.

Roboute Guilliman was human.

That was...much of relief, to be honest, given how much the Ultramarines had been venerating his memory when she hosted the Bacta Conference. The Howling Griffons had been very respectful of his memories, and that was one of the mildest reactions...

But yes, the Primarch had definitely a human-like behaviour.

He wasn’t angelic. The best word to describe him was likely handsome, though the paleness of his face was diminishing it a bit. Otherwise, his blonde hair and his blue eyes, while benefitting from transhuman vitality, remained handsome.

As for the aura around him...the Primarch of the Thirteenth Legion was not exactly subtle. Or rather, the Emperor had not created him to be subtle.

Roboute Guilliman was **Order**.

The Primarch supposed to impose order on a battlefield where it wasn’t supposed to be possible.

Behind the lines, the order to keep the ammunition flowing to the frontline troops, no matter how many enemies stood in the way.

When it comes to the internal affairs being imperilled or the rule of law collapsing, this was a being which would restore Order.

He was the ideal’s Emperor adviser, the chief of staff, the commander-in-chief of a military force, the logistician, and the crowned head in one.

He was both Julius Caesar and his nephew Augustus in one.

And perhaps one of the greatest hopes to reform the Imperium...or one of its greatest threats.

The Angel of Sacrifice knew the political equilibrium on Terra was fragile, and the miraculous rebirth of one Primarch was going to bring a lot of earthquakes, no matter what she did. Three Primarchs?

Taylor couldn’t even imagine a third of the consequences they were going to have to deal with.

Maybe if it had been Russ alone...but no, there was Leman Russ, Corvus Corax, *and Roboute Guilliman*.

Maybe Xerxes Vandire would do her a favour and die when hearing the news? It would certainly simplify a few things...

“I am going to return to Ardium,” the insect-mistress told the reawakened Lord Macragge the moment the courtesies and the protocol were out of the way.

“Theoretical: you don’t need a spaceship.”

“I don’t need a spaceship anymore,” given how many people had seen her arrive in the Shrine, this new skill was perhaps the worst kept secret of the Fortress now. “And no, before you ask, I can’t bring anyone with me.”

What Taylor had gone through on the *Vengeful Spirit* had made her *complete*, and in many ways, more powerful than she’d ever been.

But in some ways, certain paths that had been opened to her were now closed. She could cross the void in certain places, walk where no human should be able to walk.

But she had to do it as the Angel of Sacrifice, and she had to do it *alone*.

No Space Marine would survive...even the Adjutant-Spiders were not powerful enough to endure the pressure of a small journey.

“This is a bad practical.” Roboute Guilliman replied serenely. “Your fleet is still some five hours away from Ardium, and full deployment will require a few more hours, even if the Space Marines here aboard it deploy with Drop Pods right on top of the enemy.”

“Yes, but it isn’t like we have the choice. My Honour Guard, your sons, and your brothers are here, fighting xenos horrors.”

Judging by the lack of surprise, someone had already told Roboute Guilliman Russ and Corax had returned.

“I am going to order the three Strike Cruisers which have already translated in-system to make a tactical Warp jump so that they can support your fleet,” the blonde Primarch said. “But the theoretical problem does not lie in the amount of firepower available, but the time to-“

There was a flash at the edge of her vision...and suddenly to her left, one Eldar made his entrance.

Of course, with her luck, it was not Aurelia Malys, one Ulthwé Farseer, or an envoy from the Queen of Blades.

It was a Harlequin. It was a clown.

“Don’t shoot,” she ordered as the sons of Guilliman were readying their Bolters. “He didn’t come here to fight. Right?”

“Indeed not! Ha! Ha! Ha!” The acrobatic moves were both buffoonery, dance, and some kind of exaggerated reference which, even with Yneth’s knowledge, went far above her head. “All hail the Empress. What a fantastic tale you wrote, Mistress of Spiders! We will sing it in the heart of a thousand Craftworlds!”

“I would prefer you didn’t.” Taylor replied honestly...and very sincerely.

“Master Cegorach insists.”

The winged parahuman huffed.

“You aren’t going to obey my commands unless I give you my approval. Correct?”

“Yes, yes, yes! YES!” Were all those Harlequins on drugs? “We are here to help...to provide a once-a-lifetime-help. The Great Harlequin wills it.”

Taylor was not naive enough to believe that, even as Empress of Aeldari, Cegorach was that fond of her.

“What do you want?”

“The Great Harlequin wants an audience.”

The commander of the entire Stalingrad Operation raised an eyebrow.

“I would likely have given him one after I dealt with the Tyranids.”

“Perhaps or perhaps not,” the poor Macraggian chair would never be the same after what the Harlequin did to it...whatever he...she...damn, Taylor wasn’t even able to guess the sex of this Eldar clown. “Your reinforcements may not agree. Best to be on our best behaviour.”

The last part was ignored, obviously. She wasn’t going to fall into this enormous trap doubled with a provocation.

“You will have to be a bit more precise than that,” the Lady General began, “the moment the Shadow of the Tyranids was no longer active, I gave the order to summon a lot of reinforcements.”

“That you did! Yes, my Empress! But those we are the most concerned about will make their grand entrance in a few minutes of your counter! And they are the ones we have the more reason to be afraid of.”

“Ah,” Taylor could very well understand why any Eldar would be...extremely nervous. She smiled. “Those reinforcements.”

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*And so the last battle of this campaign begins.*

*The Lords of Chaos have retreated behind the Veil, leaving their slaves perish in the hundreds of thousands under their uncaring eyes.*

*The promised Age of Darkness will not come soon.*

*In the shadows, a new game is prepared. New pawns will be forged to replace those who failed on the battlefields of Cadia, Fenris, and Macragge.*

*But tomorrow will arrive in due time.*

*For now, the only enemy who matters is the Great Devourer.*

*Unfortunately for that maw cursed to always hunger, the young and old races of this galaxy have realised the danger.*

*It is time for a last battle.*

*It is time for heroism and war.*

*There will be no mercy, no negotiated surrender.*

*For extinction is oblivion, and there is no peace among the stars.*

**Macragge System**

**Region of space near Macragge’s sun**

**Necron Battleship *Sceptre of Discoveries***

**Phaerakh-Cryptek Neferten**

The number of warships revealed to be destroyed in the Macragge System was not concerning to the mind of Phaerakh-Cryptek Neferten, but it was not amusing either.

While the scale of the devastation was far below what a *real battle* of the War in Heaven would have looked like – the C’Tan in general made sure bombarding the planets with thousands of asteroids as an opening gambit – it had nonetheless involved hundreds of human capital ships.

And then there were these bio-psychic spores trying to escape the gravity well.

“My Phaerakh, I have bad news.”

If she had been a being of flesh, this would have been the moment to make a noise of disgust.

“Speak.”

“We have made a preliminary scan of the system, and we have confirmation of a minimum of twenty-one Eldar warships...warships by the standards we saw at Commorragh, I should say.”

So the long-ears couldn’t refrain from meddling in the affairs of other races when massive battles were fought.

Who would have thought it?

As the machines of the *Sceptre of Discoveries* displayed the information obtained in a three-dimensional star map, the view obtained was not one of imminent battle with the fleet she had brought to this theatre of operations.

“They are dispersed all across the system.”

“Yes, my Phaerakh. And the signatures...” The Nemesor muttered a curse particularly insulting to the Nightbringer. “The signatures are consistent with some psychic micro-tunnels our ancient enemies sometimes used to imitate their instantaneous deployment arrays during the War in Heaven. Which is...surprising. After neither our human allies nor our warriors had seen them anywhere, all Nemesors who fought at Commorragh were sure the long-ears didn’t possess that technology anymore.”

“Clearly, this was an error.” Neferten replied. “It will be something to not forget in the future. We aren’t dealing with the so-called ‘Aeldari Empire’, Herald. We are dealing with a multitude of factions that might have recovered the last artefacts of their doomed civilisation when it was busy collapsing under their Chaos-tainted hedonism and decadence.”

“Yes, my Phaerakh. The closest long-ears’ warship is just outside the extreme range of the Sceptre’s long-range main weapons. And...the shape, the signatures and the technology...it belongs to the Harlequins.”

“It is good for them they are outside our range,” the supreme ruler of the Nerushlatset Dynasty remarked without a trace of irony in her voice. “I would have disintegrated them first and asked questions later, if we had the ability to destroy them immediately. Let’s ignore this for the moment. What can you give me in information about the fighting on the planet the humans call ‘Ardium’?”

“The humans appear to have found some very interesting things to serve as starships. One hull is clearly bigger than anything we have seen the Imperium use so far. And the other...seems to be a mountain they strapped some engines to.”

Neferten wished her engrams could dismiss this amount of ridiculousness, but alas the data flowing confirmed her subordinate’s words.

“How is such a thing possibly not breaking under the effect of the gravity well? How can it fly without tearing itself apart?”

“As far as flying is concerned, it seems it won’t fly for long. Our projections signal it has already lost a lot of altitude compared to the high orbit it arrived onto.”

“True. The biologic-psychic signatures?”

“Extremely dangerous, my Phaerakh. We don’t have them anywhere in our engram-bases and the Dynasty-Intelligences don’t remember them...which doesn’t mean we haven’t met them, alas, just that we don’t remember them.”

“Yes...” the more they reawakened advisors and old commanders of the War in Heaven, the more inconsistent the memories of the War in Heaven proved to be. Apparently Szarekh – or more likely, the minions he had used to alter the Nerushlatset memories-repositories – had not been too concerned about coherence and synchronisation. Some entire Phalanxes which had fought side by side with others remembered all their campaigns when others barely could recount a few skirmishes.

The more analyses came, the more it felt amateurish, rushed, and stupid.

But it still left enormous gaps in their engrams.

“The human main fleet is on its way to deal with this biologic-psychic infestation, is it not?”

“It is, my Phaerakh. The humans may arrive too late to erect a proper blockade of the planet, however. And this meant some of the spores may have to be hunted through the void, a...difficult proposition, even for our technology, especially if they go silent in short order.”

“Then we will have to use chrono-dilatation on both our ships and the human ones.” Neferten declared. “We will discuss the compensations later, for now, these signatures reek to me of the biological super-weapons the Old Ones were throwing by the thousands at the end of the War.”

“Yes, my Phaerakh. By your command.”

“Glorious Phaerakh! The trickster-ship is trying to communicate with us!”

The long-ears really didn’t know how to quit, didn’t they? At least their predecessors had a brain between these two long-ears, enough to know when they were beaten, at any rate.

“Open a communication channel. And prepare to engage if any of their void units jump into our fleet’s efficient range.”

The moment the hyper-communicator activated, Neferten already regretted it. The interlocutor was indeed one of the crazy followers of the ancient Clown God.

Then it got worse.

“Greetings, oh Cold Sovereign of the Nebula. We have all become sovereigns under Empress Weaver, and as such, request a temporary cease-fire to discuss all the ramifications of the Nerushlatset-Nyx Treaty’s Article Six.”

Silence reigned on the *Sceptre of Discoveries*.

It took fifteen seconds for one of her Overlords to speak.

“We should have exterminated all the long-ears before the Great Sleep.”

**Orbit above Ardium**

**Newly created ‘Star Mountain Fortress’ *the Fang***

**70 hours after the Mark of Oblivion**

**Warmaster Ender Trevayne**

*The Fang* shook again.

Violently.

It wasn’t the first time, and it wasn’t the last.

The worst news was that very few orange lights lit up.

So whatever had been knocked out this time, it had taken at least a damage control node, because there was no way the explosive barrage they were targeted with had not touched something critical.

 “We will hold,” one of the few Space Wolves to have remained in the unconventional space base growled. “The *Aett* is a tough mountain. Only three more hours and the reinforcements are there.”

Ender Trevayne grimaced internally.

For the sake of the troops’ morale, he wasn’t going to reply with the truth.

Yes, the mountain the Primarch of the Space Wolves had been equipped with little-understood and marvellous technologies from an Age which was now more myth than historical fact.

But a lot of these technologies had never been checked in the last millennia, for the sake of secrecy and many other – understandable – reasons.

The mountain was ‘tough’, yes, but natural landscape was not something created by a planet with the goal to throw it into high orbit.

“We’re losing altitude again,” Rogue Trader Griffith murmured to his ear. “Whatever the xenos launchers hit this time, it has negated our effort of the last hour.”

So they hadn’t three hours.

Ender wished he could say it surprised him, but it didn’t.

“And with our large companion standing by our side, we aren’t even able to enforce a blockade of Ardium.”

The fighting on the planet was ferocious, by all reports, and the Auxilia regiments were selling dearly their lives...but they couldn’t hit the xenos’ improvised launching bases, and in the last thirty minutes, the Tyranids had begun repurposing their spores as building materials for Destroyers.

It was, when you said it like that, something ridiculously impossible.

Even the greatest shipyards of Mars would struggle to make this kind of infernal hull-building possible.

But the Tyranids were indeed assembling several ships as they spoke.

And that was something giving him nightmares, because if these genocidal xenos could do that, what else could they do?

“There are other fleets in the system. Including a xenos one which translated near the sun. Necrons, they are apparently called.”

“The metallic beings the Living Saint allied with at Commorragh,” with his clearance level, Ender was aware of this reality, which had largely been kept secret to the citizens of the Imperium. “Whether or not I approve in this case, I’m afraid it won’t change anything where we are concerned. Their acceleration is way too slow to begin with; we don’t expect them to arrive within the next forty-eight hours, and everything will be over before-“

All the hololiths and working devices currently activated inside the command centre to show them the space battlefield suddenly fizzled out in countless flashes of green.

For three seconds, there was only blindness and incomprehension...and then the ‘eyes’ of the Star Fortress were restored.

“By all the blades of Fenris! They’re here!”

Ender Trevayne gaped like everyone else, for this was impossible. They had seen the Battleships and massive squadrons of Battle Group Stalingrad slowly advance to reinforce them, and they were still too far away to give proper support, much less visible to the Imperial auspexes *the Fang* boasted.

But they were here.

Before his very eyes, he saw the *Eternal Crusader* receiving the honour of drawing first blood, and the first half-completed Tyranid Destroyer in orbit was annihilated by a pin-point bombardment.

The no less legendary *Flamewrought* followed, its enormous Plasma Cannons unleashing a destruction on such a scale that the destruction incarnate they visited upon their xenos’ foes had to be visible from every world of Macragge.

One by one the Imperial Battleships entered the fray, and on their left flank, the big Battleships of the Necrons he had been busy negating the use seconds before were there, restoring the orbital blockade of Ardium.

“Lord Admiral Müller,” Ender gave a respectful nod when the lithocast lit up to reveal a grey-haired officer with the splendid blue uniform of the Imperial Navy. “Your timing is impeccable.”

“I can’t claim credit for it, unfortunately. All praises belong to her Celestial Highness’; I certainly don’t have the renown to make sure xenos are fulfilling the spirit of the treaties they sign.”

“I will not forget it,” the Warmaster smiled before frowning. “I advise you to keep your Void Shields at maximum power no matter how unthreatening the xenos prove to be in orbit. This foe...I have never seen anything like it, even when fighting the hordes of the Arch-Enemy.”

**Ardium**

**Ruins of Hive Quartus**

**Last main relay for Hive Mind Behemoth**

The overwhelming majority of Generals or whatever equivalent existed among star-faring species would have experienced a great deal of fear when they realised orbital superiority had been entirely seized by their enemy.

The Tyranids, as their opponents would learn time and time again in the millennia to come, did not have the ability to experience fear. Or at least the Hive Mind, the quintillions and more of synapse creatures waiting in the galactic void, could not experience something similar to fear. Individual units could, in exceptional circumstances, return to a feral state when the mind-control of the Great Devourer collapsed. And when experiencing such an animalistic behaviour, it was true that lesser warrior-forms could succumb to a sort of prey defensive mindset.

But those occasions were rare, required an alpha predator to kick in the first place, and the Hive Mind remained undaunted, out of reach of its enemies.

Losing all the assets that had been launched into orbit, in any case, did not make the Hive Mind of Hive Fleet Behemoth afraid.

No, if an emotion was to be ascribed to the hungering tumour that was directing the hundreds of millions of Tyranids feasting upon the deadhumans of Hive Quartus, it would be frustration.

Ever since the Ancient Beast had been woken up from its long hibernation at the bottom of the cold ocean, it had met reverse after reverse, be it from unexplained psychic phenomena to bothersome prey.

Part of it was undoubtedly the Hive Mind’s fault. The Hive Queens were only the brain cells of this nightmarish ‘brain’, but they could recognise mistakes had been made. Attacking this planet when in the presence of preys able to strike back had been a reckless short-term initiative.

The psychic potential of the ship had been more important than alleviating temporarily the hunger. What good did it do to devour prey in great numbers if the scouting elements could not be assimilated into the Greater Hive Fleet for further predation feasts?

The successive battles had not been a waste of time. The Hive Mind had learned much about the prey it would fight against when the Fleets would reach this galaxy. But the biomass and the genetic sequences would be sorely missed.

The monstrous intelligence awaiting in the galactic void dismissed these calculations as fast as they had been made.

What had been ordered couldn’t be changed. And now with the enemy finishing the spores in orbit, there was only one course of action left, since the assets available had no chance to hide for long against the capabilities of these tenacious preys.

They had to engage the armies of the prey at close-quarters with every asset left. The devouring here and on every hub conquered was irrelevant when fire would rain down from the sky and obliterate this temporary biomass gathering point.

The last army had to be committed at once.

And the new Prime Commander created had to lead them in person.

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**Mark of Oblivion: 70 hours after Mark Zero**

**Number of Tyranid synapse organisms remaining in space: 0**

**Number of Tyranid organisms remaining on Ardium: approximately 1,300,000,000**

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**Asculum Military District**

**Hive Asculum**

**Industrial Levels**

**70 hours after the Mark of Oblivion**

**Seraph Gamaliel**

They were fortunate to have lost no Dawnbreaker Astartes in the fall of the Industrial Wall. Though in the after-campaign record, assuming they ever were in a position to write it, many thanks would be given to the Blue Bacta, as always. Rahab, Midas, Ximenes, Boulc’h, and Forman would surely not be among them now if they hadn’t been healed by their Lady’s healing substance.

Gamaliel fired again.

Six rounds.

Six targets.

All found their mark.

All the Tyranids’ heads exploded.

And it didn’t matter at all, for these had been the last Bolter shells he had, and there were far more Tyranids than six.

“For the Emperor, Sanguinius, and our Lady!” Puriel shouted, crushing the skulls of the Tyranid warriors with his improved Power Axe.

“FOR THE EMPEROR!” Sigenandus screamed, seemingly having not abandoned his contest with Kratos and the others to claim the greatest number of kills of the battle.

They fought.

They killed hundreds of Tyranids per minute with nothing but their blades and fury, the ranged weapons being desperately empty of the appropriate ammunition, and since they were abandoning the Industrial Sector step after step, this issue wasn’t going to be resolved.

They fought and yet they were forced to retreat.

They were not enough of them to hold more than a short line, and selling their lives when it wouldn’t make a difference was not something members of the Adeptus Astartes could afford. They weren’t enough of them and-

Metallic scarabs smashed a Gaunt which had tried to play dead under the corpses until it was time to attack him in a very underhanded manner.

“Thank you, Artemis.”

“Thank...but I didn’t do it!” What was the Adjutant-spider saying? Of course she did it now that- “They are not...PRAISE THE WEBMISTRESS!”

Gamaliel had not even the time to react that a circular portal bathed in light opened in the middle of the battlefield, and thousands of razorbeetles and plenty of other ‘lesser’ insects came forth by the thousands.

The Tyranid attack, that had been numbering in the hundreds of thousands and crawling ever closer to the last wall separating them from the civilians, abruptly stopped.

Four Carnifexes which had stayed in reserve immediately charged, but the beetles went on to kill two.

Then before Kratos could defend himself against the monster on the left, a colony of Ambulls dug up under the enormous organism and tore its leg apart.

As for the last one, it was suddenly bombarded with stings of bone colour by enormous bees.

The Carnifexes raged and screamed...but they died.

The Hormagaunts and Termagaunts were shattered as if they were leaves in a storm.

More portals opened, but what came forwards were not insects anymore; instead it was the eminently recognisable Tanks of the Imperial Guard, accompanied by Chimeras, Basilisks and other war equipment made by Mankind to pulverise its foes.

There was heavy infantry of Nyx, Mechanised formations of Wuhan, and one or two regiments from Fay among others...and as such, despite the clear xenos architecture of the mobile portals, Gamaliel knew who had organised this deployment well before she came through.

When she did...Gamaliel had to fight the *pull*.

There had always been...calling it a connection seemed too weak a word, the gene-sire authority of Sanguinius too weak...there had always been a deep link with her since the Battle of the Death Star, but now it had been magnified into something else.

Her armour had slightly changed. There were more rubies burning on her armour and her wings, and some carvings were clearly improved, as if a sculptor had been able to carve them into the fabric of reality.

“My Lady, welcome home!”

“The Webmistress is back! Webmistress! We held the Swarm in your absence! We are sorry, we couldn’t do more-“

“You have done well, all of you. I’m very lucky to have you in my service.”

The words, the Herald of Sanguinius, had been intended to be simple and truthful, but now there was more power than they would have had before.

Lady Weaver had truly become changed...and yet some things had not changed.

“The vote of confidence is appreciated,” Gavreel Forcas tried to joke, and even though the Sergeant might not feel the connection of the Blood, he wasn’t so able to hide his emotions, even if everyone –save the spiders – had a helmet on. “Though I suppose the full tale of our respective battles will have to wait?”

“You might say so,” the Shield of Angels stepped forwards, bringing the Light to Ardium...as well as many insects, which were now falling from the skies, not coming by the portals. “We have exterminated the Traitors at Macragge City. Now it’s time for the Tyranids to be taught a lesson they won’t forget.”

“We?” Diamantis repeated as all the Guards of the Blood tried to be as close to their Lady as possible. “Knowing you, my Lady, it isn’t to imitate certain Governors’ arrogance...and you don’t use it lightly otherwise.”

“Oh no, I don’t.”

**Captain Falco Tullius**

“Oh no, I don’t.”

Falco shook his head in disbelief.

That made the second time in less than a week that Lady Weaver had saved the entire population of Ardium.

“Better call the two Primarchs and the other Astartes here,” the Ultramarine told his second. “Our plans of retreat are just getting scrapped, and I think we need to be briefed on our new strategy.”

Because yes, in a mere minute, every belief they had had been utterly demolished with a thunderhammer.

The Tyranids were infinite in numbers? Well, the swarm of insects which was counter-attacking was doing a very good job of proving them wrong.

The psychic Carnifexes needed enormous amount of firepower to be brought down? There were spiders and flying insects that proved they could not be more wrong about that, making them losing their equilibrium before decapitation, or decimating them from the skies.

And this was not done on a few streets, on one Wall section, or several hundreds of metres.

It was a splendid and well-coordinated *Hive-sized counter-offensive*.

It was...humbling.

Falco had fought with Lady Weaver hours ago, so he knew better to think than she had gained her current rank by nepotism or ‘just’ because of her insect-controlling powers, but this new demonstration of strength wrapped inside a layer of operational art was something to be taught to every Space Marine.

“You were saying something about Traitors inside Macragge City, I believe, Lady General?”

“Yes. But you don’t have to worry about them anymore, Captain. Their strategic skills were incomparably weaker than the Tyranids you faced. The only ones who didn’t get exterminated are the ones which were teleported away by the Arch-Enemy. The Battle of Macragge is over, and the Imperium is victorious.”

That was excellent news, though the fact some had escaped was a source of disappointment. Truly, the Word Bearers were like cockroaches...no offense to the part of the Swarm helping them which were cockroaches.

“Did their bastard of a Primarch manage to flee?”

“I think,” and for a second, Falco didn’t understand why there was suddenly so much amusement in the Swarm Mistress’ voice, nor why she turned towards the glowing portal, “I will let someone answer in my stead.”

The Guard regiments had stopped coming seconds ago, and the reason why was evident as a large shadow became visible, becoming clearer and clearer with every second.

Falco at first believed it was a Venerable Ancient, but he was rapidly proven wrong, it was the wrong shape, and-

No.

No, this couldn’t be.

He was...

He was...he couldn’t be healed...

“Father?”

“My son.”

The words which were shouted by a Terminator of the Dawnbreaker Guard didn’t really register...the turmoil of emotion was too great.

“ALL HAIL THE LORD OF ULTRAMAR! ALL HAIL ROBOUTE GUILLIMAN!”

At least the Auxilia and the other Space Marines knew how to answer those calls.

“WE MARCH FOR MACRAGGE!”

**Sergeant Gavreel Forcas**

Watching the Ultramarines cry and joyously celebrate the return of their Primarch was certainly something you didn’t see every day.

The sons of Ultramar were many things, but undisciplined and prompt to regular emotional outbursts where everyone could see was not something they were generally accused of. Yet the 9th Company of the Ultramarines Chapter was doing exactly that.

Granted, they had a lot of reasons to behave that way. If the reinforcements hadn’t arrived in time, they would all likely have died, along with the civilians they had sworn to protect here and in the other Hives.

The return of a Primarch was one more astonishing revelation in a sea which counted already plenty.

That said...

Gavreel could not help but wonder if the Dark Angels and every Chapter born from their gene-line would be that happy should the Lion return.

Part of him wanted to say yes, of course, every Legion should be ecstatic their gene-sire came back from wherever he was...but a little part of him doubted.

Anyway, this was just an idle thought. This was Guilliman who was back, not his brother.

And he had a report to give to his Lady.

“The Bacta stocks have preserved us from suffering any permanent loss, my Lady. Though as your Swarm undoubtedly told you, the healing process has made sure that we suffered from the same problems the Ultramarines met after their void battle against the Traitors of the Seventeenth. We had plenty of Bacta, and too few replacement armours.”

“And so some of you went on to seize the old museum exhibits and almost forgotten depots of the Hive,” Taylor Hebert told in a very amused tone. “Well, I approve the initiative, it’s better to have some armours repaired than none. We will of course arrange something with the Ultramarines in the aftermath...and likely return the old armours, if they’re not transformed into something unfitting for a museum.”

“We will try our best,” Gavreel assured her before wincing at the efforts the poor Techmarines would no doubt have to make to refurbish Mark II and Mark III power armours once it was over. “Practically, I don’t want to repeat the evidence, my Lady, but I humbly suggest it is going to be a necessity to raise the production of power armours in the Nyx Sector.”

“I know.” Several Adjutant-spiders began to relay telepathic orders, as they moved away from the Lady General, and the heavy Landers which touched ground disgorged tens of thousands more insects so that the regiments coming right behind them were not ambushed by Tyranids lying in wait. “But this is something I must return to Nyx to deal with. We produce Mark VII sets of armour in considerable numbers, but though the Mark VII has proved its worth for several millennia and can be useful when one is only fighting non-corrupted rebels and third-rate opponents...those are not the enemies the Adeptus Astartes’ talents are badly needed by the Imperium.”

“Mass-production of the Mark IX?”

“Gavreel, your face alone tells how little you believe in the Mark IX.” The angelic-winged General snorted. “We could mass produce it, I suppose, but the more battles we fight the more I realise why some Tech-Priests were concerned. We needed the Ion Shields integrated with Astartes Power Armours, and I would give the same order with the benefit of hindsight...but the Mark IX as it stands is an incomplete project. I am not arrogant enough to believe it is something suitable to equip the Chapters fighting from Pacificus to the Eastern Fringe. We need a new project of Astartes Power Armour...preferably yesterday, but in practise, the order to implement it will begin right after that battle.”

The tone employed could have been matched with a grimace, he knew.

“This sounds somehow fitting...”

“Gavreel, no need to walk upon eggs. You can ask why.”

“Why?”

“You do realise the power armours you go to war with are not exactly cheap?”

Oh. Oh, yes, that explained the...lack of enthusiasm.

“Well,” he tried to be cheerful, “let’s see the positive side of things. There are Primarchs here, they will certainly be eager to support this project.”

“One can always hope, one can always hope...next question. Where is the Queen of Blades?”

Just as someone was waiting for those words to be heard, right outside the ruined outer walls which were crawling with Tyranids, a large silver flash appeared to sever reality in two.

“Never mind. Let’s go, Dawnbreaker Guard. We have a battle to win.”

“WE BRING THE DAWN! FOR SANGUINIUS AND THE EMPEROR!”

**Battleship *Enterprise***

**General Werner Groener**

Many guardsmen had long wondered if it was going to make a big difference that Artemis, the now well-known ‘Adjutant-General’ of the Swarm, had been replaced by another golden spider.

In Werner’s opinion, no, it didn’t.

“The Webmistress is back! Rejoice everyone! Except you xenos, you don’t have a reason to rejoice!”

“Indeed,” the Cadian officer coughed, “I am waiting for this ammunition distribution’s data-slate, Adjutant-Colonel Ishtar.”

“You will have it in one minute, General! Praise the Webmistress!”

“Don’t be too hard on her,” Rogue Trader Wolfgang Back smirked as the arachnid moved as discreetly as possible – which wasn’t subtle at all – to the other end of the bridge. “The officers have a hard time to maintain discipline among the crew too now that the secret is out.”

“I don’t care,” Werner replied bluntly. “The battle is not yet won. Yes, it is formidable Her Celestial Highness has returned and found us some xenos support so that we could arrive faster at Ardium, but it has made a mess of our logistical planning, and now we have to solve it. Though the Adjutant-Spiders can at least cheer and work at the same time. I am less confident our men can do the same.”

“I wish I could say you’re wrong, but-” plenty of auspex alarms shrieked and the hololith flashed as an uncountable number of enemy dots materialised. And when Werner said uncountable, he meant it.

“The Tyranids are committing everything they have in term of aerial monsters,” the blonde Rogue Trader grunted. “We will have to commit all the squadrons of the Aeronautica Imperialis at our disposal. The Astartes are launching?”

“They’re on their way as we speak,” dozens of Drop Pods were expelled from the *Flamewrought* and the *Eternal Crusader*, but the principal flow of Space Marines deploying was coming from the Chapters hailing from the gene-line of Sanguinius the Great Angel.

“Holy Golden Throne, there must be-“

“All in all, six thousand of them,” Werner finished. “And thanks to the work of the Star Forge Galleons and the Bacta healing, most of them are in perfect health despite the battles of the Ymga Monolith, Mandragora, and the other brutal battles these Battle Groups had fought.”

Normally, such a colossal spear of Space Marines would have launched first. Sign how efficient the Swarm of Lady General Taylor Weaver was, they would only be committed in the second wave.

“Admiral Müller agrees with our suggestion. All Navy starfighters and Aeronautica Imperialis squadrons are launching as fast as they can, minus the ones we need to protect our wall of battle.”

“Orbital strikes?”

“Beginning in twenty seconds. The priority target is the carcass of the Behemoth bio-ship and the ruins of Hive Quartus and-“

The vid transmitted from a Mechanicus scout ship interrupted this situation overview.

In fact, everyone able to watch the hololith stopped what he was doing, including the administrative-working arachnid who was coming back to give him her report.

“By The God-Emperor...this is coming out of Hive Quartus?”

It was not an army. It was an encroaching ocean of monsters. And for the things in their core to register that powerfully on the auspexes, they had to be Titans or the xenos equivalent...

“Inform immediately Her Celestial Highness that the Tyranids are sending an entire new army to Hive Asculum!” Werner commanded, all thoughts of the previous timetable being discarded. “Adjutant-Colonel Ishtar! How long until we can commit the first regiments of the Imperial Guard?”

“Twenty-three minutes, General! But I can send the Templar Sororitas and the Fay 20th ten minutes before them!”

Werner hesitated for a single before nodding.

“Do it.”

“At once, General! Praise the Webmistress!”