Weaver Option Teaser 12 August 2020

**Extermination Interlude 2**

**Victory Councils**

*As we have now many cycles to make our judgement on the issue, it is clear the Battle of Commorragh’s consequences, whether good or ill, favoured the Asuryani in short and long-term views.*

*The death of She-Who-Thirsts was the first crushing defeat the Primordial Annihilator suffered in its endless war to sunder the barrier protecting reality from its horrors, and it was far more total than any save maybe the human Great Seer had planned for.*

*The damnation of the number six was purged everywhere, which would have already been a great victory for it was the former sacred number of our ancestors.*

*But the symbolism went deeper than that. Several expeditions of Ulthwé gathered back many documents from the era of the War in Heaven, and several cycles after the Mark, we had enough evidence to verify some very old hypotheses.*

*Yes, the majestic Old Ones had created a proto-deity of Change first, breaking their own rules when confronted by the Yngir onslaught.*

*With this information, it was not difficult to see the horrible tendency leading us to the End of Times.*

*The Corrupted Change had become the Death of Truth, Wielder of Lies, and the Holder of Nine.*

*Then Corrupted War emerged from the oceans of blood and turned out to be more powerful than its predecessor, for the galaxy was burning and armies destroyed stellar systems with weapons that should never have been invented. It won long enough to become the Holder of Eight.*

*As starvation and the Yngir inflicted more and more damage to the psyche and the bodies of the children of the Old Ones, Despair and Decay were everywhere. They coalesced and formed the Holder of Seven.*

*And our people, in a folly of self-indulgence, betrayals and Excess, had given birth to the Holder of Six.*

*Maybe the humans would have created the Holder of Five at the end of their era. Maybe not. There are plenty of species in this galaxy which use inconsiderately their gifts, and the victors of Commorragh are not by far the worst of them, only the most numerous.*

*But whether it would have been a perversion of obedience, order, pollution, dark weaponry, or unrelenting destruction which was supposed to be created, it didn’t happen.*

*Instead it was the Beast of Anarchy’s turn to usurp a throne. It was the Holder of Eleven, and it was not the fifth aspect of the Primordial Annihilator, but the fourth.*

*The cycle of chaos, that many Farseers had believed impossible to oppose, was broken, possibly forever.*

*Each tendril of the Eternal Abyss wanted to prey on a different population of mortals. Instead it had to suddenly adapt to a thing practising spiritual and symbolic cannibalism.*

*A battle was won, perhaps the most important one, for without hope, many souls would not have found in them the courage and the defiance to rise and oppose the plans of the Primordial Annihilator.*

*But as everyone having military experience knows, a battle is not a war.*

*The Enemy’s reverse was temporary. Its hordes would come back.*

*I am Aurelia Malys of Craftworld Ulthwé. We are ready to fight them.*

\*\*\*\*

*The Weaverian Pilgrimage was officially recognised by this name after the 410M35 proclamation of Ecclesiarch Pelagius II, but obviously, the pilgrimages had not waited this date to pose the foundations of what was going to be one of the most prestigious religious journeys across the entire Imperium.*

*The Age of Silk and Hope, the First Age, had ended by then, but the Weaverian Marvels were still there, each commemorating the victories of Her Celestial Highness Taylor Hebert, Lady Weaver, Basileia of Nyx, Living Saint of the Emperor.*

*Due to the symbolism and the events of the Grand Victory of Commorragh, the decision rapidly imposed itself to the myriad of pilgrims to begin their holy visit in the Pavia System and its Shrine World.*

*The presence of the Second Weaverian Marvel, the Fountain of Light, confirmed this evidence. This Marvel was thrice-blessed, for it was one of the most famous victory monuments of the Battle of Commorragh, the first location where a jewel of Aethergold was enshrined by the Living Saint, and at its heart the Tomb of Constantin Valdor the Hero was built for the Faithful souls of the Imperium to mourn the loss of such a worthy Champion.*

*By itself it would already be an opportunity to contemplate magnificence incarnate, but the Fountain of Light was surrounded mere years later by the Holy City of Constantinople. The rumours, in this case, are completely true: one could spend a life there, and still fail to watch many artwork and fascinating relics of the First Age.*

*After seeing such spectacular displays of saintly beauty, millions of voices pressed for the next part of the journey to include other parts of the Commorragh Ovation’s monuments, but the Ecclesiarch remained firm. As such, the Gaius Mausoleum, the Arena of Blades, the Grand Reliquary, and the Commorragh Museum will be memorable parts of one’s pilgrimage, but their visit will come after many other Marvels...*

Extract from *Weaverian Marvels*, written by retired Cardinal Greyer, 126M41.

\*\*\*\*

Transmitted: Holy Terra

Received: Astropath 10-XA-03 ‘Long-sight’

Destination: Kar Duniash

Mission time: [CLASSIFIED]

Telepathic Duct: [CLASSIFIED]

Reference: [CLASSIFIED]

Author: [CLASSIFIED]

Priority: Vermillion

*In the name of the High Lords of Terra and His Most Holy Majesty, the Primus decorations rewarded for the Xenocide of the Eldar during the Battle of Commorragh are:*

*Star of Terra, General Taylor Hebert, Nyx, Army Group Caribbean commanding officer*

*Star of Terra, Major-General Helmut de Villiers, Cadia, 9th Division commanding officer, posthumous*

*Star of Terra, Major-General Honorius VII Weiss, Cadia, 12th Division commanding officer, posthumous*

*Star of Terra, Major-General Cassander Gorgias, Donia, 21st Division commanding officer, posthumous*

*Star of Terra, Brigadier-General Steele, Portsmouth, 43rd Brigade commanding officer, posthumous*

*Star of Terra, Colonel Alanes, Nyx, Nyx 31st Siege Infantry Regiment commanding officer, posthumous*

*Star of Terra, Captain Peter Tchuikov, Fay, Fay 26th Mechanised Infantry company commander, posthumous*

*Lion of Terra, Vice-Admiral Maximillian von Schafer, 17634th Ultima Battlegroup commanding officer*

*Lion of Terra, Third Lieutenant Freya Brasidas, Aeronautica Imperialis Tenth Wing*

Praise the Martyrs, for their blood is the foundation of the Imperium.

\*\*\*\*

“*To say the title of Peer of Terra is highly desired is a vast understatement. Of course, so is mentioning it is difficult to acquire. To my best knowledge, there are only two ways to obtain it: convince ten out of twelve of the High Lords Primus of the Senatorum Imperialis to vote it in your favour, or receive it from the hands of an Emissary Custodes. The former is always a daunting task. The latter never give it without the express consent of His Most Holy Majesty.*

*This regulation isn’t without good reason, obviously. The title of Peer of Terra automatically gives its holder, whoever he or she is, the precedence over the entire Imperial aristocracy and Adepts in status, save the members of the Senatorum Imperialis. It also provides significant taxes’ exemptions over a Hive-high list of commodities, authorisations to buy and sell top military-grade supplies, and many, many privileges most citizens of the Imperium only imagine in their wildest dreams.*

*Should the High Twelve or His Most Holy Majesty decide to add further titles, the names of the locations added will more likely than not have other tax exemptions, land privileges, and wealth-generating measures added to what is already a divine favour.*

*You will understand, evidently, that being a Peer of Terra far outweighs the consequences of attracting the jealousy and the interested gazes of trillions of souls. Even if it is not inheritable. Even if it the creator – or the creators – of the Peerage can rescind it when they –or He - want.*

*But I will be of no help on this quest. This is something I’ve failed to achieve*.” Attributed to Star Marshal Alexander Macharius, 670M41.

\*\*\*\*

“*OF COURSE WE ARE GOING TO PUT A BOUNTY OF THIS LACKEY OF THE FALSE-EMPEROR! SPREAD THE WORD! SPREAD THE WORD WE ARE OFFERING EIGHT HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-EIGHT PACTS, EIGHT TRILLION AURELIUS, EIGHT LEGION FAVOURS, AND EIGHT PLANETS TO TERMINATE HER LIFE! ALL METHODS ARE ACCEPTABLE! WEAVER! MUST! DIE*!” Words attributed to Hand of Destiny and Grand Dark Apostle Erebus, shortly after the Battle of Commorragh.

\*\*\*\*

**Beyond the Light of the Astronomican**

**Eastern Fringe**

**‘Scrapzard Moardakka’**

**One hundred and fifty hours after the Mark of Commorragh**

Thought for the day: The Alien dream is to dance on the grave of Mankind.

**Warboss Arrgard**

“LATZD NIGHTZ BOYZ, I HADZ A DREAMZ.”

“We wotz attack-dakka Tigruz, sot Warboss?”

Arrgard glared at the tiny boyz who had dared interrupting him. He was the Chosen of Mork and Gork! No one interrupted him. Fortunately, his favourite Big Shoota was close to his right fist.

BLAM!

“I HADZ A DREAMZ!” the most powerful Warboss of the Eastern Fringe shouted. “MORK TADZ ME DA SWARM BRINGA WIDZ PREPARDZ A GREZA BATTLEZ FOR UZ!”

This announcement was welcomes by thousands of roars and screams of joy by his warband.

“COMMORAGAZ WAT A CHALLENGZ FROM HUMIES!” Arrgard told his troops. “GORK HEARDZ THEP TALKINZ AND THEYZ BELIEVOR THEYZ MASTERZ OF THE GREATESZ SCRAPZ EVERZ!”

“Bah whas aboutz Tigruz, Boss Gruffjaw haz gone to attackz iz!”

BLAM!

“FORGIZ TIGRUZ AND THE RED ZARBIES!” Mork’s Defiler ordered in a thunderous growl. “FORGIZ TIGRUZ AND THE WEAKLINGZ HUMIES! WE MUSTZ PREPAR’ FOR DA SWARM BRINGA!”

Arrgard’s visions had never been wrong. The Warboss of the Eastern Fringe had killed all those who protested against them.

“WE WITZ GATHERZ TRAKK! SQUIGGOTHS! MEGA KANNONZ! BOMBA! SHOOTA! STOMPA! GARGANT! I WANTZ DA BIGGEST WAAGH EVERZ TO FIGHTZ DA SWARM BRINGA! AND WEZ’ WITZ WINZ, BECAUZ ORKS ARE DA BEST! WAAAGH!”

“WAAAAAGGH!”

“LOUDERZ!” Arrgard commanded, shooting several of his boyz closest to him who hadn’t shouted hard enough. “LOUDERZ! THIS WITZ BE THO BIGGETZ SCRAPZ EVERZ! DA WARZ OFZ AL’ WARZ! WAAAAAAGH!”

This time millions of his troops answered the call about their headquarters-scrap planet. It was an expression of ferocity and joy all space-faring races had learned to fear the moment they saw a greenskin.

And it had never presaged anything good for them.

“WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!”

**Acacia Expanse**

**Pavia**

**Battleship *Enterprise***

**One hundred and fifty-six hours after the Mark of Commorragh**

**Champion Kratos**

One more time, Kratos had to repress his urge to shout and let the flow of pilgrims touch his red power armour before they allowed him to go through the corridor.

It was...incredibly annoying. By the Blood, Kratos was just a member of the Dawnbreaker Guard, he was not Lady Weaver. He was not Sanguinius Reborn! He was a Champion of the Flesh Tearers, a proud son of Cretacia, a proud warrior of the Adeptus Astartes and no divine being...but try to convince all these men and women of that!

At last the effusions and the prayers’ time were over, and he was able to enter the main bridge of the *Enterprise*, where silence and cold professionalism reigned. Near the empty throne of their Lady, First Secretary Bach and Archmagos Sagami were talking with several Navy officers. Kratos removed his helmet and breathed loudly in relief.

“I see the pilgrims tested your temper too,” Thermoses said conversationally. The twitching of the lips of the Red Legion’s Space Marine couldn’t qualify as a smirk, but the intention was there.

“We will see if you still laugh when your return to Lady Weaver’s side,” the Flesh Tearer Champion replied. “The pilgrims and the other religious devotees are out in force in the corridors. Remind me why we think we are a purpose-built warship?”

“Kratos, I will remind you we are allowing only the smallest trickle of religious representatives on the *Enterprise*. That way, the millions of Frateris Templars, pilgrims and priests present in this system are compliant and satisfied.”

Kratos shrugged. This stuff reeking of politics and religion had always bored or disgusted him. The more distance there was between him and these ridiculous mortals, the better it was for him...and certainly for everyone.

“Our Lady orders and I obey,” the Champion of the Dawnbreaker Guard muttered. “But I would prefer if we could keep them on their pilgrim ships and avoid their presence here on the *Enterprise*. I don’t feel comfortable with them here.”

“Use some of your rest hours to find an artistic purpose,” the Devastator Marine suggested. “I know part of the reason my serenity isn’t so troubled is because I have my glassware projects for the Hagia Sanguinala and the Nyx palaces. You should try it, it’s mind-refreshing.”

Kratos grimaced internally. Several years ago, he had confessed to Gamaliel that, unlike the overwhelming majority of the Dawnbreaker Guard, the Flesh Tearers had never entertained artistic goals whatsoever. Before that point, it had hardly bothered him, but as he saw Midas playing with jewellery and medals, Sterzing sculpting his statues, and the others frequenting ateliers and artists’ lairs during their spare time...well, it put him ill-at-ease, because it appeared the accusations of several Chapters that the Flesh Tearers were barbarians was hitting closer than he wanted.

“I will...think about it,” the Champion said noncommittally. “Any notable changes since the last report?”

“A new Mechanicus fleet from Stygies VIII has arrived. Though judging by the reports of Archmagos Lankovar, it looks like we have three or four Explorator Magi who gathered their forces and rushed to meet us as fast as their engines could mechanically travel across the stars. This adds six Cruisers and over seventy lighter Warp-capable hulls to the Mechanicus presence.”

Days ago, this would have been a respectable amount of reinforcements. Now? Not so much. The space around the planet of Pavia, the ruined carcass of the *Empire of Sin*, the two Malta Starforts and the surviving fleet which had destroyed Commorragh was crowded with thousands of starships, both war and civilian-built. All the Adeptuses had come, from the mighty Battle-Barges of the Adeptus Astartes to the cathedrals of the Ministorum, from merchant conveyors of the Chartist Captains to the large cruiser squadrons of the Imperial Navy. There were even two golden hulls of the Custodes, surrounded by Ark Mechanicus, War-Arks and gigantic red and black Forge-ships of Mars.

“I suppose our Lady will want them to sign treatises of cooperation and technology exchange as soon as possible,” Thermoses continued. “The Tech-Priests of Stygies have a reputation, after all.”

And in many ways, Lankovar was a moderate for the breed of cogboys which went out in the stars from this specific Forge-World.

“You know my thoughts on this subject,” Kratos commented drily before frowning as several sections of the bridge began to take life and many men and women sworn personally to the Basileia began to rapidly update their data-streams and the tactical hololith.

“Alpha-plus Warp Translation on Mandeville T-3! Alpha-plus Warp Translation on Mandeville T-3! Tell all Mechanicus ships to abandon their explorations in this zone!”

“By the Blood!”

The exclamation escaped his lips, but Kratos knew one second later no one would comment upon it.

A fleet-sized translation was not an untold phenomenon to observe. Watching an Astartes fleet emerge from the Warp, on the other hand, remained something reserved to a far shorter number of souls, and in general the enemies of the Golden Throne, who often had little time to marvel at the retribution the Space Marines had gathered in a single location.

But even for a veteran Champion, the might of the armada materialising into reality was awe-striking.

“Soul Drinkers Battle-Barges identified: *Sanctifier*, *Carnivore*, and *Glory*. Five Strike Cruisers and ten lighter ships of their Chapter are accompanying them. Executioners Chapter Fleet identified. They have the Battle-Barges *Blade of Perdition* and *Fist of Aquilon*, supported by four Strike Cruisers and eight Frigates.”

The list went on and on. Even when the Chapters of the Blood had mustered during the post-council of the Battle of the Death Star, there had not been so many Battle-Barges and capital ships present. Of course, the Ninth Legion had never possessed the greatest fleet of the Legions Astartes before its dissolution.

But the Seventh Legion, the sons of Dorn, had always loved their walls, be they on the ground or in space.

And at this moment, it appeared they had all come. The identifications codes of the Venom Thorns blazed bright next to the Fists of Wrath. Cross-painted Battle-Barges of the White Templars followed heavily armoured vessels of the Iron Champions. The Invaders had joined the Emperor’s Havoc, and the Night Swords were sailing with the Fire Lords.

Dozens upon dozens of Battle-Barges and Strike Cruisers had already left the Immaterium when the Excoriators’ Battle-Barge *Rampart of Terra* accelerated and the reason became all too evident as gargantuan masses crushing the largest battleships of the Adeptus Astartes by their simple existence arrived at Pavia.

“By the Primarch, this is-“ Thermoses’ mouth failed him, and ironically this was the Tech-Priest in charge of the long-range auspexes who finished the sentence.

“Crimson Fists’ Starfort *Rutilus Tyrannus* identified. Imperial Fists’ Starfort *Dawn of Crusade* identified.” Even an emotionless cogboy, however, needed to take a few seconds as a huge leviathan of the void arrived on the hololithic displays of the Enterprise. “Gloriana Battleship *Eternal Crusader*, Black Templars’ flagship, identified.”

After this titanic arrival, the presence of two Imperial Fists’ Battle-Barges in the rear-guard, the *Storm of Wrath* and the *Spear of Vengeance*, were almost ignored.

“And here I was wondering why we had seen so few of them until now,” Wolfgang Bach, by the looks of it, had recovered faster than anyone from this ‘surprise’. “Final count?”

“Two Starforts, one Gloriana Super-Battleship, fifty-four Battle-Barges, one hundred and seventy-two Strike Cruisers, and four hundred and twenty lesser warships have translated, First Secretary. We have thirty-six different Chapters demanding permission to enter the system.”

“Permission granted,” the young blonde-haired man turned towards Kratos and Thermoses. “Please inform Lady Weaver the Imperial Fists and their Successors are there.”

**Segmentum Obscurus**

**Scelus Sector**

**Craftworld Ulthwé**

**One hundred and sixty hours after the Mark of Commorragh**

**Farseer Filgonilth Sirethmoren**

Of all the things amusing him since he arrived at Ulthwé, Filgonilth had not expected the less-than-perfect appearance of Eldrad Ulthran to be the one he would place at the top.

But it was.

“Not a word,” the older Farseer told him, threatening him with a half-hearted glare. Alas for him, the fact he wore a bright yellow robe and not his usual black armour rendered the command a bit less impressive than it should have been.

“I haven’t said anything!” the last of the Sirethmoren declared in a deliciously innocent tone before succumbing to the temptation right after. “Will I be invited to the marriage?”

A book was levitated and missed his head by inches.

“If you have come to discuss my private life, I have one piece of advice for you: don’t.”

“Fine, fine,” the exiled Farseer smiled. “Did she pledge her allegiance to Ulthwé?”

“Yes, she did it last dawn. Already two thousand of her fellow refugees have followed her example and taken the Carnality stones to protect their souls.”

“In this case,” Filgonilth said very seriously, “you’d better prepare for regular visits of new Drukhari refugees. The Second Fall and the utter destruction of the Commorragh nobility have left most of our dark cousins leaderless and searching for salvation. A nascent power which is stricter but leaves some leeway is far more acceptable in the Webway than it was a few cycles ago.”

“I know,” Eldrad confessed. “Though Ulthwé can’t and won’t absorb so many refugees in so little time. Aurelia’s capacity to create the new Carnality stones of Atharti is unique, but once the oaths are given, we will spread the next wave of refugees across the coalition our Councils are preparing.”

“That way you will have this new class of Aspect Warriors becoming a familiar sight across several Craftworlds and increasing the assimilation process without straining the resources of Ulthwé, clever.”

“I don’t know if I would describe Aurelia and the new converts of Carnality as Aspect Warriors,” Eldrad declared thoughtfully, not seemingly realised he had called the High Emissary by her first name. “As far as we have tested so far, they have certainly military skills and talent in the Art like our Seers, but many of their foundations do not lie in the domain of Khaine. But we are still experimenting, this is a subject with a lot of fields to study.”

Filgonilth considered a true triumph of self-control that he didn’t ask what sort of ‘studies’ were done in the beds of Ulthwé at night.

“You spoke of a coalition of Craftworlds. Furta-Rith is among them, I suppose?” This Craftworld was a vassal of Ulthwé in all but name.

“Evidently,” confirmed Eldrad. “We have also been able to add II-Kaithe, Iybraesil, and Mynathensar. The word of the Storm of Silence carries weigh, and of course the significance of our Doom being vanquished has bolstered the factions pushing for a common front against the menace of the Primordial Annihilator.”

“Iyanden?”

“First contacts have been promising, but there’s no formal agreement...yet.”

“Pity,” at this moment, Iyanden was unquestionably the largest and most populated Craftworld in existence, and their influence carried far and wide. If Ulthwé and Iyanden allied, true unity of purpose and minds might very well become a reality. “I’m afraid my visit to Alaitoc did not meet a sixth of these goals. Autarchs and Farseers are all terrified by the rise of a Necron Dynasty, and fear more are going to activate their tombs and begin a genocide of Asuryani. I think that if the worlds weren’t so close to the Angel of Death’s dominion, they would already be in the process of striking them.”

“Disappointing, but not unexpected. Thousands of cycles spent warning the new generations against the Yngir and their metallic servants can’t be overturned in a cycle or two. I’m more interested in what Saim-Hann is up to.”

“So far, I think they’re still partying,” Filgonilth raised his eyebrows and made a few very suggestive gestures with both hands, gaining an offended glare from Eldrad. “And if you think your party went beyond the usual limits, let me tell you that you’ve not reached the prelude of what the Saim-Hann families have done.”

“Yes, I’m aware Saim-Hann was...wilder than our culture, even before the destruction of the Dark City. As long as they do not make too much a habit of it, I can close my eyes and ignore it. What is more important at the moment is showing off our strength and presenting a pro-human position. Of all the trillions of Imperial star-farers, there are many who believe war between our two species does nothing but hurt us and advance the plans of the Primordial Annihilator.”

“The corsair fleets are going to be a problem in this regard,” the exiled Farseer commented. “Some may be tempted to go to Biel-Tan when the human’s hammer is going to come down.”

“If they do, we will bury the connections which exist between our coalition and them,” Eldrad coldly said. “At this moment, the last thing we need is to attract the attention of the Queen of the Swarm upon Ulthwé. Unless we could pay for the Queen of Blades’ services, an attack upon any Craftworld involving her would result in the same carnage wrecked upon Commorragh. I’m sorry Filgonilth, but I won’t sacrifice my hope for the lives of Biel-Tan and the allies it convinced to march to their doom.”

“I know, and I wasn’t going to convince you to,” frankly, there was probably nothing that could be done for the four Craftworlds which had participated in this disaster. Nothing but evacuating the maximum of civilians, children, and protect the Infinity Circuits if it was at all possible. This was a very dangerous galaxy, and weakness always attracted predators, not only the Primordial Annihilator and the humans. “I heard Asurmen and Amon Harakht went in person to Nacretimeï?”

“And they only killed twenty-one senior commanders on their way out.” Eldrad confirmed. “Truly a great amount of restraint on their part.”

“Assuredly,” his Farseer counterpart agreed. “So...how interesting is a sexual relationship with a refugee of Commorragh?”

Eldrad glared again, but Filgonilth regretted nothing.

**Acacia Expanse**

**Pavia System**

**Battleship *Will of Hoth***

**One hundred and sixty-three hours after the Mark of Commorragh**

**Sister Brunhilda Decker**

The purification of the Battleship was a one-sided battle Brunhilda loved to watch. The giant moth was sending orbs of pure golden light in every direction, and each second she and the rest of the audience were hearing more shrieks of corrupt things being disintegrated.

If only she wasn’t forced to stand in a parade stance decorated with so many medals the colour of her red armour was disappearing under them, the day would be perfect. Brunhilda was among the privileged soldiers invited to witness the creation of Holy Aethergold and the exorcism of evil forces, it was not something one refused! But between the fact she hadn’t fully mastered her new red power armour and the storms of servo-owls turning around her, the new Templar Sororitas wished there were fewer souls – like a number under ten billion – watching each and every one of her moves.

“No, I don’t think I will keep the Battleship, Magos,” her Celestial Highness the Basileia replied nonchalantly to the cogboy who had brought the Noctilith crystals out of the Blackstone Fortress. “I will rename it, of course. The *Will of Hoth* is a really stupid and heretical name. Better calling it *Hope of Light* or *Power of the Moth*.”

“My preferences would go towards *Hope of Light*, Chosen of the Omnissiah,” the Tech-Priest told her respectfully. “Are there more reasons apart from its corrupted past why it is not your desire to keep this hull in your service?”

“Yes,” the Living Saint’s answer was sufficiently loud to be heard by dozens of people, not just Brunhilda. “First above all is that this starship is going to need years of repairs. Lisa is purging the chaotic taint from it, and it’s a very good thing. What Aethergold is not capable of, alas, is to remove decades of lack of maintenance. The heretic commanding this warship believed his fell patron would prevent engineering problems from surfacing, but he was wrong in this like on many other things. Give it twenty more years and half a hundred more translations, and the hull would have begin experiencing major integrity flaws. Adding to this problem, most of my naval advisors think the Zion-class is an inferior template compared to the Emperor, Apocalypse or Retribution classes. It may be cheaper to build one, but it is also under-gunned and under-protected. Its Void Shields are clearly two or three orders below a Navy’s command flagship, and there are a series of infrastructure and technological flaws which must be resolved. As a consequence, I prefer to let other potential buyers have it. Tell the Ecclesiarchy representatives they can participate in this auction too.”

“It will be done, Chosen of the Omnissiah.”

The red robes saluted and departed, taking with them the big crystals of Aethergold that they had saved from the destruction of the Blackstone Fortress and which were promised to the Nyx Sector. Now that two had been descended on the world of Pavia, there were ten of them, and all shone like miniature suns filled with the God-Emperor’s radiance.

The purification of the warship also appeared to be ending, as large cargo-haulers servitors were bringing a procession of moth-edible food and drinks, which were welcomed joyously by the gluttonous insect.

“Sugar, fruits, and other delicacies,” Lady Weaver commented as the largest insect in her possession began her feasting, and ordering Brunhilda to approach. “Like the first Lisa, the second drives expensive bargains for her services.”

“I haven’t met the first Lisa, your Celestial Highness, so I will take you at your word.”

The red-armoured woman received a sigh in return.

“The high honorific can be left out if we’re not in formal ceremonies, Sister,” the golden-armoured Living Saint told her. “I did not create the Templar Sororitas to kiss my armour and spend hundreds of hours singing my praises.”

As the servo-owls flew away and the gap between them and the Dawnbreaker Guard widened, Brunhilda felt the question burn her lips. And then she decided to ask it. What was the worst that could happen?

“If you will forgive my curiosity, Lady Basileia, why have you chosen to let us stand apart? I am particularly grateful to you, but an Order within the Frateris Templar would not have attracted so much attention...”

“Honestly?” The black eyes burning with divine will went straight into her soul. “As a General of the Imperial Guard, I find the principle of the Frateris Templar against the laws and the fragile equilibrium of power of the Imperium Adeptuses. The Adeptus Ministorum was not part of His plan, but there’s no practical reason why the Ecclesiarchy should have large ground and space forces answering to their authority. There is one army, the Imperial Guard. There is one navy, the Imperial Navy. The Frateris Templar are trampling and seizing prerogatives and privileges which were never supposed to be theirs.”

This answer shocked her beyond belief.

“But...the Frateris Templar are doing a lot of good!”

“And the Templar Sororitas, I hope, will do far better than them,” Lady Weaver told her with an apologetic expression. “But I prefer to have a smaller and specialised elite force answering to a core of precepts I have established than the religious cousin of the Astra Militarum. I will give you power armours. I will allow you to train and become the best Medicae and hospital wardens of the Segmentum. If the plan is successful, you will become the female equivalent of the Space Marines, only with faith and training, not transhuman transformation. But I do not want the kind of army-processions certain Cardinals are mustering through legal loopholes.”

“In this case...will we be allowed to recruit new aspirants through the Sanguinala Games?

“I see no reason not to,” the Living Saint replied. “But let your Legate know that she may found competitors in the Holy Ordos of the Inquisition. Oh, and we must speak about your rewards.”

“My rewards?” her voice was not exactly dignified as she repeated the two words, and a smirk appeared on Lady Weaver’s lips.

“Sister, I was really touched you gave up the global rights of your STC template to me, but for all the luck which allowed you to find it, you deserve proper rewards, in addition to the billions of Throne Gelts for your bank account and the Order of the Ancients. I was thinking about several more medals and a nobility title, and several lands and funding rights on Claire 47...”

Brunhilda suddenly realised she was going to become even more well-known and surrounded by ecstatic crowds in the future. Receive more medals. And be present in more grand parades along the Living Saint. This...why couldn’t she return shooting some Eldar skulls?

**Starfort *Dawn of Crusade***

**Chapter Master Flavius Sextus Jovius**

Aside from the Feast of Blades, the number of occasions when the Chapter Masters of the five original Chapters of the Seventh Legion created by the Second Founding gathered together was equal to zero.

As such, the fact Flavius Sextus Jovius was able to converse with his four peers today was literally unprecedented. But then, so was the reason of their coming at Pavia.

“Our father lives.”

Three words no Chapter Master of the Imperial Fists had ever thought the sons of the Seventh would ever have the opportunity to say again.

“Our father lives.” High Marshal Gerlach Barbarossa repeated. “No doubt is possible.”

The three other Chapter Masters nodded in the next two seconds. Like them, they had seen the analysis of the blood vial, watched the vid-recordings an uncountable number of times, and interrogated several witnesses, both Malberg’s surviving battle-brothers and other non-Astartes. As the supreme commander of the Black Templars had so justly said, no doubt was possible.

“We can only pray we will live long enough to see his return from the Webway,” Chapter Master Ruy Guzman expressed in an expression close to crying.

“Have faith, brother!” the High Marshal exclaimed. “Our liege has promised to stand with us against the traitors, the mutants, the heretics and the xenos. He will return to lead us again. The oath has been given. Our line will stand together with him once more.”

A flicker of amusement was seen on the stern face of Chapter Master Padilla Garcia of the Excoriators. Assuredly, the venerable warrior was thinking the same thing as Flavius; that the ‘faith’ of the Black Templars had not been welcomed by their gene-sire as the grand idea the heirs of Sigismund wanted it to be.

“We can only hope your words will be true,” Chapter Master Felipe Alcantara of the Soul Drinkers replied. “But while we await his return, there are many decisions to be made. First of all, I think we have to rebuild the Huscarls.”

The other four Chapter Masters approved unanimously. The Huscarls had been the personal bodyguards of the Praetorian, although like with many things, the exact details had been forgotten century after century, with only a few Ancients remembering this epoch of legend. The Fists and their Successors remembered enough however to know these Chosen were as much guards as advisors, given authority over mere Captains, and grand defenders of the Imperium in their own right.

“I think that if each of the Successors select one or two Champions to join the Huscarls, we will rapidly fill a Company worthy of our father,” Ruy Guzman began before grimacing. “The High Lords may not like it, though. Everything which forces them to remember the days of Last Wall protocol is not going to meet their approval.”

“Who cares what these useless bureaucrats think?” Padilla Garcia rhetorically asked. “We are the sons of Dorn, and I don’t think the Salamanders or the Blood Angels are going to say we are in the wrong this time!”

“They will not, brother,” Felipe Alcantara’s tone remained friendly and serene despite the amazing era they had just entered into. “But you know as well as I do that the Adeptus Astartes does not represent the Imperium as a whole. Study the moves of the woman who spoke with our father. It is not because you have the power and the leeway to do something that it is a good idea to do so.”

“As much as it pains me to admit it,” Gerlach Barbarossa intervened, “I think Felipe is right in this instance. We will rebuild the Huscarls, but we keep them separated in platoon-sized groups and out of sight.”

“I was thinking about detaching one of my own to the Dawnbreaker Guard,” Flavius revealed to his peers. “Since the Huscarls were always equipped with Tactical Dreadnought Armour, it would be a worthwhile addition to the ranks of the Blood Angels and their Successors.”

“Fitting,” approved the Excoriators’ Chapter Master. “And I will definitely choose a true Champion to join them. But I think there’s a simpler option to rebuild the Huscarls: we simply form them to be the cadre of the new Chapter which will be created with our father’s blood.”

Flavius Sextus Jovius knew there was going to be a protestation from Ruy Guzman well before the Crimson Fist opened his mouth.

“This is dangerous,” the tall Chapter Master warned them. “I would far prefer to owe a favour to General Weaver, including and up to the military support of the *Rutilus Tyrannus* and our entire fleet.”

“These proposals aren’t exclusive,” the High Marshal remarked. “But yes, I agree hiding the Huscarls inside a newly-founded Chapter is not adequate. If nothing else, because at some point, these Huscarls will leave with our gene-sire, and then said Chapter will be deprived of the core of its veterans. The cadre of this Chapter may be recruited from all our Successors, however. We should be able to detach a demi-Company and give out several relics without problem. Besides, the support of the Mechanicus in this endeavour is all but guaranteed.”

“Yes, I don’t think the Fabricator-General and his senior Archmagi and Fabricators are going to create difficulties now,” if they did, truly honour was dead and the cogboys would never be trusted again. “This new Chapter should obtain without difficulties the Battle-Barges and the Techmarines to satisfy the most stringent requirements of any Chapter Master.”

“We have yet to choose a name for this Chapter,” Felipe Alcantara said.

“This will be one of Lady Weaver’s prerogatives,” the Imperial Fists said in a voice which would tolerate no dissention. “And speaking of the General who helped our father crush the Naga like we wanted to for more than four thousand years, I await your proposals for the rewards we will propose once we meet her in a formal audience. I suggest,” a sardonic expression found its way on his visage, “to not think small in this instance.”

**The Eye of Terror**

**Gloriana Battleship *Vengeful Spirit***

**Lord of the Black Lions Vortigern**

Fortunately, Vortigern wasn’t Iskandar. He didn’t even want to imagine what sort of agony the Lord Vigilator would have felt when entering Lupercal’s Court. The spectacle of the daemon sword feasting on several souls, red to the hilt with their blood and viscera, would have been hell no matter how skilled the sorcerer. As it stood, the Fallen Angel serving as ninth in the Ezekarion of the Black Legion could feel the hatred and the malice of the weapon, and he wasn’t a psyker at all. This, in his humble opinion, said volumes about the power of the greatest artefact they had acquired during their first campaign against the Imperium.

The Lord of the Black Lions dreamed of the day they would read of this abominable weapon. Vortigern had committed some truly disturbing signs in the name of survival, but Drach’nyen the Ever-Thirsty was something even a veteran of the Long War like him was deeply unnerved by.

The daemon sword was just wrong. Iskandar having told him the ‘sword’ was merely an illusion of the senses had only increased his concerns.

But raising old concerns again today would not change the fact the Black Legion needed the power of Drach’nyen if they ever wanted a victory and topple the False-Emperor from his throne.

“Moriana will live,” he announced before falling into his comfortable seat, the furs of the great beasts he had adorned it with providing superior comfort. “The destruction of Excess and the changes in the future threads have done a lot of damage, but the Seers are unanimous she will survive. They refuse to speculate how long it will take her to be brought back to her full potential, however.”

“I will visit her later. The others members of the Ezekarion?”

Vortigern shrugged.

“Iskandar, Lheorvine and Ceraxia are conquering the planets of the Third Legion one by one, as you instructed them too. For the moment, resistance is minimal. The biggest problem is how few true Astartes and gene-seed materials remain. The aftershocks of the Battle of Commorragh are still felt thorough the Eye, but I doubt that more than ten percent of the Third survived this butchery, and I’m counting our emotion-crippled recruits with it. Overall, I think we will be the Legion which will profit the most from the Third’s destruction.”

It was not a sure thing, of course. Nobody knew what the elements of the Twentieth and the Eighth were truly up to in the Eye of Terror, and what they stole or conquered, few witnesses were there to report it to Black Legion commanders.

“Good.”

Ezekyle Abaddon – known to the entire galaxy as the Despoiler and the Warmaster of Chaos – seized Drach’nyen again and put it back in its scabbard...for now.

“I think it’s all the good we will have for a long while, Ezekyle.”

“And I agree with you,” the Lord of the Black Legion replied, before taking his own seat with an expression of exhaustion Vortigern had rarely seen him harbour. “Despite not having involved in this fiasco, the Battle of Commorragh has cost us deeply and I’m not speaking of our two hundred Slaaneshi who fell dead during the Death of Excess. Militarily, the Imperium has only eight Legions to care about now. I don’t care what sort of shenanigans Fabius Bile is concocting in his labs, there’s zero chance he will be able to rebuild the Third without immense stocks of untainted gene-seed. Strategically, the light-pyre of the Astronomican can hurt us in our most secure bases.”

“The Gods for the moment seem to be able to stem its fury, if what happened at Sha’are Mavet is any indication. And the Beacon remains a slow phenomenon. All warships, even a Gloriana, will be able to translate out before it can hurt us.”

“I don’t share your optimistic view, brother,” the former First Captain said in a bitter tone absolutely devoid of confidence. “The moral effect on our allies of the Dark Mechanicus is catastrophic, and the non-Astartes Auxilia have suffered worse than the exiles of Mars. At the same time, the motivation of our enemies will be significantly bolstered. The Astronomican already shines brighter, and it’s going to be worse when the replacement parts of the Astronomican parts reach Terra.”

“I suppose there’s no way to intercept them before they reach the Throneworld?”

“None whatsoever,” confirmed the Master of the Black Legion. “Our fleet is totally dispersed across the Eye, Cadia still stands strong, and the Three are fighting each other for the spoils of Fallen Excess. The Custodes and the Tech-Priests won’t make the error to go near a Warp Storm, and there are no fleets out there in real space – or any combination of fleets, really – to attack them.”

Vortigern grimaced. To sum-up, another defeat, and they would have to stand here like powerless idiots and acknowledge it. The fact that this was a superb strategic victory which had been executed flawlessly was not a consolation.

“Weaver hurt us very badly.”

Ezekyle laughed.

“Oh come on Vortigern! If Weaver was so successful, it’s because Slaanesh’s arrogance did half of the job for her! The Legions of Excess left a door wide open, and the Custodes had only to give her the key of the Gates to kick the entire edifice down and burn the foundations until nothing remained. Arrogance. This is what led to the defeat of the Gods in the Battle of Commorragh. The Naga proved beyond question that not only it was a mediocre usurper, it was also a slithering tactical and strategically mass of blunders and mistakes. Slaanesh was narcissistic enough to believe no one would ever dare exploit the large weakness its overreliance on Eldar souls represented, and it paid the ultimate price for it.”

Vortigern couldn’t say anything against this opinion. Everyone knew the servants of Slaanesh were monsters of arrogance and depravity. It was just...they had always been there, and seeing them erased from the Eye was something truly frightening, even for an Astartes mind.

“I agree overconfidence and arrogance led to this disaster. But I don’t think we can afford to let Weaver continue her military career against us. She already destroyed Commorragh and was one of the key pieces in killing a God, Ezekyle. Give her enough time to train new armies and gather a brand-new Battlefleet, and even the Three are not going to laugh when she unveils her next goals.”

“You make several accurate points,” the Warmaster told him appreciatively. “But as much as I want to eliminate this trouble-maker who acts more and more like Sanguinius did, her powerbase is too far away from Obscurus to risk even a moderate raid. The logistical challenges are extremely daunting for such an endeavour, and I don’t even speak of all the Battlefleets which would be able to engage us at will between the Eye and Ultima Segmentum! Moreover, Weaver has already gathered around her powerful allies, including something I would have preferred asleep for several more millennia. No, brother, attacking the Nyx Sector at this time would be, I fear, the most colossal mistake since this Legion’s creation. Any damage caused would be more than compensated by the near-total annihilation of our forces, deprived of any support base and safe haven.”

“It’s ugly news, Ezekyle. This Sector’s defences won’t get lighter with time, and the more we wait, the more we run the risk to face a second edition of the Five Hundred Worlds of Ultramar...except of course this time the treachery of the Word Bearers won’t open the gates.”

“And there are other problems which are going to make it worse. Like this little upstart of Malicia, Weaver is a parahuman, and she controls insects. All insects. This gives her an endless pharmacopeia of substances, including it seems something called ‘Bacta’, a super-healing fluid which will save tens of thousands guardsmen and Astartes if we fail to permanently put them down on the field of battle.”

“I don’t even want to know how it’s possible to get worse.”

“I can see one or two possibilities,” these words really, really didn’t reassure Vortigern. “Does the name Gavreel Forcas ring a bell?”

Thanks to an eidetic memory, finding the name didn’t last long.

“Sergeant of the Calibanite Independent Force, Sixth Company, First Squad,” the Lord of the Black Lions automatically announced before frowning. “Wait you mean-“

“That the woman who destroyed Commorragh has a survivor of Caliban in her entourage? Yes, you gave the last confirmation I needed.”

“This is really problematic,” Vortigern murmured, unhappily aware he was beginning to somewhat repeat himself. There were a lot of things done on Caliban he would prefer to perish forgotten by all with the ghosts of this dead world. “Bright news, if the Interrogators of the First Legion become aware of this, they won’t be pleased either. Any chance you reconsider your orders and command our fleet to sail against this deicide, brother?”

“No,” Ezekyle answered, showing a hint of amusement. “I will not throw this Legion to its doom in a desperate gamble. The Siege of Terra is an excellent demonstrator of what happens when time is running out and enemies destroy your supply lines.”

**Segmentum Tempestus**

**Caradryad Sector**

**One hundred and seventy-one hours after the Mark of Commorragh**

**Gloriana Battleship *Beta***

**First Harrowmaster Machiavelli Gonzaga**

Machiavelli had heard uncountable times that the Ultramarines and their blue-blooded descendants loved being invited to contemplate the near-dead body of their Primarch. Maybe the rumour was true. Maybe the Ultramarines considered it an honour, but his training as an Alpha Legionnaire didn’t bring him any joy when circumstances forced him to visit his superior.

The First Harrowmaster gave a series of order, and the multitude of indentured Medicae assigned to this extremely expensive Apothecarium – all of them serving here like their parents and their grandparents before them – left the room. What was going to be discussed was not for their ears, even if the chances of them to discuss it with an enemy of the Twentieth Legion was as close to zero as humanly possible.

Still, Machiavelli and the rest of the *Beta*’s crew had not survived by being lax and unprofessional these last centuries.

Several procedures were activated when he pressed the big yellow button standing in evidence in the middle of the room. Several huge data-transfer mechadendrites emerged from behind it, and with the ease of long practise the Harrowmaster connected a large databank where the totality of the information his agents had been able to acquire about Commorragh and its consequences was stored. As much as he wanted to deliver an oral report, this was a method the crippling injuries of the Primarch made impractical.

No stasis field switched off. There were emergency ones in the room, just in case, but they were rarely used, generally when a new phase of treatment started. This didn’t mean there wasn’t change. Several tubes began to pour new healing solutions into the central tank, making its colour shift from red to blue. Dozens of lights lit on everywhere in the room. To his relief, each and every one was a soft green.

Machines shifted position and more mechadendrites and tubes deployed, giving the infrastructure the appearance of a strange arachnid, with the tank in the centre representing the ‘body’ and the rest of the objects strange ‘legs’.

And as the nutrient bath turned blue to a pale grey, the body of Lord Omegon, last surviving Primarch was finally revealed. As always, Machiavelli couldn’t repress a shudder at the ghastly sight the injuries of his gene-father were to his eyes.

The Ultramarines and their Primarch had believed they had decapitated the Alpha Legion at Eskrador. In reality, while Guilliman had failed, the Lord of Macragge had been very close to win the day. During their retreat, the sons of Ultramar had detonated several phosphex warheads, and Lord Omegon had been in the outer blast zone of one. Only his Primarch’s constitution and an emergency teleportation at the last minute had prevented him from sharing the fate of thousands of Legionnaires.

Nonetheless, the Thirteenth Legion had won a great victory; there was no Primarch to keep the Twentieth true to its original purpose, and the more years passed, the more cells ignored the *Beta*’s orders and swore their souls to Chaos.

“Machiavelli.” The voice came out of a synthetic voice-caster, and as such sounded like a Techmarine’s. “It looks like our plans have been set afire by my father.”

“Yes, my Lord. With Commorragh and Slaanesh no more, the faith of Inquisitors and high-ranked military officers in the Imperium’s ultimate victory will rise to new heights. Inversely, I fear the discontent is rising among cell leaders and certain of our most loyal support bases.”

“Regroup. Protect our core assets. Make your utmost to ensure as little equipment and manpower fall in the hands of the Eight Traitor Legions. And activate our scorched earth’s plans for the Emperor’s Children. These hedonists are of no use anymore, better wipe out the board clean.”

“I understand, my Lord. Though I have to warn you, Bile is certainly going to survive every plan we target him with. He has so many clones I doubt we can inconvenience him for a few days.”

No one had managed to put down the Clonelord in millennia, and this included certain of the best assassins of the Twentieth.

“The Bacta?”

“As far as our rare agents in the Caribbean’s fleet have been able to be discover before being pummelled to death by Isley and Pierre, Bacta doesn’t work on any psyker, be they latent or active. If an opportunity to steal some comes, I will certainly not refuse to act, but I fear there’s decades of research before an eventual cure...if we had Weaver on our side.”

And as the events of Pavia and Commorragh had proved, the new Emperor-empowered parahuman was not going to tolerate the goals and the deeds the Alpha Legion committed every standard year.

“I will wait.” There was a pause of three seconds before Lord Omegon spoke again. “Prepare the creation of a new Chapter-sized Harrowing. We may have to intervene directly in the coming years. Activate Plan Mamba. Send some agents to the Nyx Sector. Avoid the capital system and every planet where Isley and his agents are regularly sent. And prepare some cells for exploration purposes. We must know more about the ‘Necron’ xenos.”

“You will be done.”

The healing tank turned blue again, and the voice of his Primarch faded away. Machiavelli didn’t utter one more word as the hundreds of men and women returned in the room and began to return the machines to their day-per-day functioning.

The First Harrowmaster left the Apothecarium as fast as his legs allowed him to. There was much to do, and little time to enforce his gene-sire’s commands.

**Acacia Expanse**

**Pavia System**

**One hundred and seventy-two hours after the Mark of Commorragh**

**Battleship *Enterprise***

**Captain Gabriela Jordan**

Tziz had dined in some ‘private’ dinners – which had only of private the name, as sometimes they reached over five thousand participants - of the most powerful clans and Adept families of Holy Terra. As such, the three-meals-course proposed for this particular lunch was not exactly impressive for her. The food was varied and fresh though, and far better than the rations served on the battlefield. And she could fill her plate herself without offending a small army of servants and creating half a dozen political conspiracies.

There were drawbacks, obviously. And the biggest one was always to be on her guard, as the presence of gigantic spiders and beetles everywhere in the room gave her shivers the former Callidus did her best to hide.

“You have quite an appetite,” the Living Saint commented as she finished her own plate.

“I’m burning a lot of energy in the training fields,” Tziz replied modestly.

“Only the training fields? Not during the nights?”

To her relief, the two questions had been voiced in an amused tone.

“Err...yes. How long-”

“If you wanted to escape my attention, don’t leave Dennis’ room when there’s one of my beetles in the corridors. And maybe don’t shout when there are a few other officers in nearby room able to hear your frolics.”

“I will keep this in mind,” Tziz assured the insect-mistress. “You’re not against our...liaison?”

The Basileia of Nyx played with her silver fork, something that somehow appeared to emphasize the long brilliant golden wings behind her.

“What Dennis does outside his hours of duty is his problem, not mine,” the victorious General told her. “If on the other hand you try to hurt him, physically or emotionally, I will intervene and you won’t like it. Am I sufficiently clear?”

“You are, your Celestial Highness.”

There was a visible flicker of annoyance in the challenging eyes, before it disappeared like it had never existed.

“Good. Now that is said, we can move to the real subjects of importance. First off, you are officially forgiven for your attempt on my life. Congratulations, and the data-slates confirming it are awaiting you on your working desk.”

The Captain groaned. Would there be no end to this cursed paperwork?

“Thank you,” Gabriela answered, thinking that insulting a General may not be the best move she could make to get a promotion. “Do you want me to continue serving in the half-destroyed Wuhanese regiment about to be sent home?”

“This is an option available to you, should you desire it,” Lady Weaver informed her. “I suppose you’re somewhat aware of what happened at Wuhan while we were fighting this campaign?”

The yellow-eyed officer nodded immediately. Gabriela didn’t know all the details, it was possible only the Basileia in front of them had them, but she knew enough. A cult of Slaaneshi nobles had killed the Governor of the Hive World and a good part of the ruling nobility, and between this and the lacklustre performance of the regiments hailing from the planet, it did not take a lot of intelligence to know the Weaver’s hammer was going to fall upon a lot of heads.

“I am going to need a lot of competent officers to replace the dead idiots, including some experienced veterans to arrest and create new Penal Legions. If you want it, I can arrange a promotion to Colonel and give you command of several cadres of veterans which will tour the Hives and remove troublemakers before sending them to the battlefields of Ultima Segmentum.”

Before meeting the Living Saint, Tziz Jarek would have likely given her assent to this...assuming it was part of her mission as a member of the Officio Assassinorum, of course. Now? After surviving Commorragh, Gabriela was not so much in a hurry to return to the battlefields. While she had suffered no major injuries, several times her life had been very close from ending. Plus it had not escaped her that the ‘simple’ missions given by Weaver tended to result in apocalyptic events which left the galaxy reeling in pain.

“You have other options, your Celestial Highness?”

“If you continue to call me like this in private, I may assign you as assistant to Pierre,” Lady Weaver began before drinking pure water in a crystal glass. Gabriela struggled but could not disguise her expression of horror in time.

“NO! Do you have any idea how close I was from murdering this brute after his fraternisation remarks?”

“I have an idea, yes,” and the ex-Callidus apprentice knew for sure the Living Saint was taking great fun of her emotions. “And now that we have established you don’t like the Dreadnought and his pirate tricorn, we can go to the option you’re most likely to accept. While I didn’t think much about it before Operation Caribbean, Dennis is going to be in need of a Seneschal when he takes his Warrant and begins his career as a Rogue Trader. Initially, the intention was to push a SDF officer in this role, but given your...bedroom indiscretions...you may be the best candidate for the job.”

One more time, Gabriela was deeply surprised by the insect-mistress. It was a good reminder to never underestimate the Living Saint again.

“Before I answer yes or no...what are his Warrant prerequisites? I sincerely doubt you and the High Lord sponsoring the Warrants are so naive to let Dennis go out in the unknown without some duties and obligations.”

“Dennis and the ships under his command will be responsible for the ‘special’ commercial exchanges between Nocturne and Nyx,” the Basileia revealed as several servants removed the plates and the remaining food from the table. “My Hive World and the nearby planets will naturally be the bases for his Rogue Trader dynasty, though I will give him some taxes incentives in exchange. For the more risky tasks, they will likely involve helping the Salamanders finding more Artefacts of Vulkan across the galaxy.”

“Dangerous,” the Captain whispered, “but profitable.” Nocturne was rather famous for exchanging the very precious ore and items discovered once their planet stopped being an inhospitable hellhole with the Adeptus Mechanicus. That the Sons of Vulkan were willing to add an exception to this millennia-old situation was an enormous change...and evidence of the high praise the Nocturne Space Marines had for the Basileia. “Can I have a few days to think about it? I want to know where my...relationship with Dennis is going to lead to.”

“Take your time,” the golden-winged Chosen of the Emperor replied. “But I will want an answer before we reach Nyx. Once we do, I will have a lot of other issues to handle...”

**Leet**

“Why wasn’t invited to eat lobster with Dennis’ assassin?”

One look at the very empty table was enough for Leet to know he wasn’t going to fill his stomach here. The plates and everything edible had disappeared, the only indications Taylor had even eaten here were the glasses and the bottles of water and wine.

The Skitter-powered glare the angel-looking parahuman sent him told him he had asked the wrong question at the wrong time.

“What the hell were you thinking?” the Lady of Nyx asked after a long interlude of silence.

“If it’s about the parties of Borek with the Space Marines-“

“I don’t care about the parties as long as they don’t do anything proscribed and everyone is involved in the cleaning afterwards,” the retort came as several beetles flew with data-slates outside of the room. “I was referring about your atrocious behaviour every time the Tech-Priests are not here to keep both eyes and their mechadendrites on you.”

“I don’t know what they’ve been reporting, but I’m sure they are lying.”

When the single word ‘innovate’ was enough to convince them you were an arch-heretek, was it really that surprising?

“I’m rather sure of the contrary, actually.” Taylor designated an untouched pile on the right part of her table. It was a...very tall and wide pile of data-slates, vellum rolls, and other data-repositories. “This is the sum of complaints concerning your deeds which were brought back to me, including Commissar’s reports and Administratum protestations.”

“They’re just jealous about Cthulhu.”

“Cthulhu,” an icy-cold voice made him shiver, “was the only positive contribution you made to the Battle of Commorragh. It doesn’t erase the multiple insubordinations, the requisitions breaking the chain of command, insults to several low and high-ranking Tech-Priests, and a few thousand other rules broken for posterity. If Zuhev had his way, you would already be in front of a court-martial, and given the magnitude of the problems you’ve caused, I’ve no doubt the judge would already be gathering men for the firing squad.”

“But you aren’t going to let him? We are the only parahumans-“

“You can thank the fact this is true,” the Warlord-turned-General said so conversationally it was more threatening than a thousand screams. “I’m rather sick of your behaviour. Fortunately, you have been kind enough to give me a proper stick.”

 “First I should hear what the carrot is.”

The new glare was truly withering.

“The carrot, in this instance, will be Dragon and myself overseeing the development of your video game entertainment facilities while you’re away and part of the income generated by it going to your bank account. It was your idea, after all.”

Leet smiled...and the next words were like a cold shower.

“Obviously this relies on your ideas being a success. I wasn’t going to waste my astropaths’ time on such a trivial subject, so I don’t know if the opening in our absence was a success or not. If debts accumulate and the project isn’t viable, I will not hesitate to close it.”

“And the stick?”

“The Mechanicus is very interested in re-establishing contact with the lost Squat Worlds. In a few months, when the ships assigned to the expedition will be ready in orbit around Nyx, you will go with them.”

“You’re not serious!” Terror gripped his poor Tinker’s heart. “This Squat is completely crazy! He sings like a deranged bard having boar ancestors!”

To his consternation, this barely managed to make his golden leader blink for an instant.

“If Slayer Borek is so crazy, why did you think swearing an oath to him was such a good idea?”

“I wasn’t thinking straight,” Leet admitted. He was not going to reveal he had descended half a bottle of amasec after the ground evacuation from the Port of Lost Souls. And when the demons had materialised, he had panicked! This could happen to everyone! “But I’m sure there’s a way to make this oath null!”

“You could die,” Weaver replied unsympathetically. “Whether they are called Duardin or Squats, the few archives we have left from the Age where these abhumans were part of the Imperium all insisted their culture was founded on oaths and the respect of one’s word. I don’t know if they are functionally able of lying. So you are going to do what you promised, and follow this Slayer for as long as you need to repay your debt. I am not going to hurt Imperial-Squat diplomatic efforts before they have a chance to start.”

“But...you need me for certain projects!”

“You will be aboard a Mechanicus fleet, with direct astropathic connection to Nyx and Dragon. You researches will continue...under close supervision.” Leet shivered again, having a very good idea what sort of supervision the new ‘Living Saint’ had in mind.

“At least make me a Rogue Trader like Wolfgang and Dennis!”

The brightness almost blinded him one second later.

“GET OUT!”