This is not a teaser – 28 October 2022

**Extinction 11-5**

**Avengers**

*I will arrive too late.*

*I know it.*

*The practical, now that my forces have broke through the first fortresses, is obvious.*

*The Iron Warrior rear-guards have fortified hundreds of worlds, and the Word Bearers have added their strength to theirs by preparing countless traps with their never-cursed enough daemonancy.*

*We are crushing these Astartes and the Traitors gathering behind them.*

*We are destroying dozens of capital ships, liberating the enslaved populations forced to work to the death in many major shipyards, and as the rumours of the victories spread, compensating our losses with ships long-believed lost in the Ruinstorm.*

*Providing we can keep this momentum, I can make the theoretical that we will have liberated over two-thirds of Ultima Segmentum in the next ten standard months.*

*It should be welcome news.*

*It really isn’t.*

*Time, this force even our genitor is powerless against, is slipping through my fingers and working for Horus and his Traitors.*

*It should not be so.*

*I have studied the moves of the Traitor I won’t call brother any longer.*

*For all the immediate advantages given to him by the victories in the Isstvan System, Horus failed to exploit them by the conquest of many important Clusters and sub-fractions of the Imperium, instead throwing everyone who fell for his lies against the walls of Segmentum Solar and the Imperial Fists defending them.*

*As a result, even Obscurus, the Segmentum who has most suffered from his treacherous deeds, has only a limited number of nodes under its control.*

*All of them can be lost within a decade if my theoretical about the losses they took at Beta-Garmon before pushing for Terra is true.*

*Horus has lost the war.*

*His actions are madness incarnate.*

*And none of it provide any reason to rejoice, for if ultimate victory is denied to him, the treacherous Warmaster still has the will and the strength to destroy the homeworld of our species before I arrive.*

*Sometimes as I retire after a day of battle, I dare to hope.*

*But the numbers don’t lie.*

*It is three loyal Legions against nine, and in warships and other military forces, the calculus is even worse for my brothers.*

*Dorn is a master of defence. The Khan can strike like the lightning itself. And Sanguinius is Sanguinius.*

*They have billions of valiant soldiers under their command, and years to fortify Terra.*

*But the Traitors have committed over ninety percent of their theoretical remaining order of battle to besiege the Cradle of Mankind.*

*They have emptied whole Fortress Worlds to the last man and woman. Whole fronts have collapsed after only a show of force because entire Divisions have been recalled by Perturabo and Mortarion.*

*And for all its madness, their strategy is proving effective.*

*I will arrive too late.*

*I hope I’m wrong.*

*I hope somehow, Dorn has been able to think of something that will decimate the might of the Sixteenth and the Fourth Legion before they can land on the soil of Terra.*

*But each time I calculate the numbers, these hopes are dying.*

*The muster which destroyed the Ork threat on Ullanor was small compared to the one the Traitor Warmaster has rallied around him to accomplish this perfidy.*

*I may arrive too late.*

*But if I can’t arrive in time brothers...*

*I swear it, on everything I’ve ever held dear.*

*If I can’t arrive in time to save you, Terra, and father...I will avenge you.*

*I, Roboute Guilliman, Primarch of the Ultramarines, Lord of Macragge, Master of whatever remains of the Five Hundred Worlds...*

*I will avenge you.*

*No matter what it takes.*

**Somewhere in the Eye of Terror**

**Gloriana Battleship *Vengeful Spirit***

Thought for the day: Follow the Emperor, and the glory of victory shall be yours.

**Lord Vigilator Iskandar Khayon**

Iskandar had never believed himself to be a very sentimental warrior, but he couldn’t help but grimace slightly when walking next to the debris which had a while ago been rare minor xenos artefacts decorating one of the avenues leading to the main bridge. The items had been seized by pure chance in the collections of an Imperial world during one of their campaigns out of the Eye of Terror, and though their importance was minor, there had been some hidden potential that waited to be revealed under the right circumstances. Since these trophies weren’t dangerous per se, they had been placed under secure wards here, waiting for their most interesting aspects to be activated.

Apparently, this moment would never come.

Iskandar didn’t know if it was the agony of Khaine, the power of Sacrifice, or some other overwhelming and destructive being that was responsible, but the artefacts were reduced to tiny fragments, utterly devoid of any trace of psychic activity.

It was a real waste, and not just because it was one more secret denied to his curiosity.

Wordlessly, the Lord Vigilator indicated to the three-armed overseer that his mutants and he could remove the mess. There was nothing to save, and the danger was minimal that even one of the wretches he could see trying to hide away from his eyes wouldn’t provoke something disastrous.

Sighing softly, Iskandar returned to the bridge, where the damage had already been made good, though of course the wards and some of the most...esoteric protections still needed to be replaced. And they would, though it likely would take a lot of efforts.

Ezekyle, however, had not moved a single step since his departure.

His brother was still examining the severed head of what had been an Eldar God.

An examination which was conducted silently and without touching, a frown of concentration on his face.

“Quite an interesting piece of evidence, isn’t it?” The Lord of the Black Legion asked rhetorically once he was by his side. “We have before our eyes the proof a God can indeed die...”

“Honestly, Ezekyle...I would prefer not to have experienced such an *interesting event*.” Iskandar cleared his throat to manifest his disapproval. “We have several bridges which were consumed by the aura of murder of this xenos deity. The clean-up of this mess is going to take a long time, and I’m not speaking of the rivers of blood the bolter-fodder made. In fact, the more I think about it, the more I preferred crystalline statues and angel-themed apparitions. They were a bitter reminder of our failure during the Siege, but at least they didn’t push our slaves and the rest of our servants to go into a frenzy of murder.”

The damage to the Vengeful Spirit had been relatively light, given how bad the intervention of the Gods and their enemies had been. But at least it was over now. The apparitions of blood and mayhem inciting the foolish mortals to experience war and murder? It was going to be way harder to remove from the Gloriana Battleship...assuming it could be removed.

“True,” his brother kept his eyes on the decapitated head of Khaine, who, even in death, was scowling. “But you haven’t returned to ask me this question.”

“Why didn’t you kill her?”

A chuckle escaped the lips of the Warmaster.

“What makes you think that I have this power?”

“Please, brother...I have seen you fight things way more dangerous than that...angelic alteration of the Ninth Primarch. You could have, and you should.”

“Totally incorrect for the latter, and partially true for the former,” Ezekyle Abaddon answered with an amused expression. “Could I have killed Weaver? Yes, but not permanently. Be it in a year or a hundred by the entropy governing the galaxy outside our prison, she would have come back. And then the trap would be sealed.”

“The trap?”

“Think about the symbolism, brother. I was, no matter how much I have walked away from it, a warrior of the Sixteenth Legion. I waited until it died before the Black Legion rose to wage the Long War, but I was a son of Horus...and our father, in the end, slew Sanguinius. And Weaver is the inheritor of the Blood Angels’ legacy...and *Sacrifice*.”

Now that it was said, Iskandar Khayon wanted to kick himself in the head for not noticing it himself.

“Should you have fought her seriously...” his knowledge and his experience were largely enough to have a very bad feeling where it would lead to. “I suppose it would be an eternal cycle of conflict between the Black Legion and the Successors of the Ninth? Though there isn’t a Ninth Legion anymore, so the symbolism is weakened...”

“Brother, the key word is that there’s not a rebirth of the Ninth Legion *yet*.”

The Lord Vigilator of the Black Legion didn’t like the sound of that at all. When it was analysed in strategic terms, there was no doubt that the breaking of the Legions which had remain loyal to the False Emperor had been an enormous boon to the Black Legion and all warbands committed to fight the Long War.

“There will be more questions, and I will answer them when the Ezekarion will be here to hear my words...but I will answer truthfully and without evasion your first question now.”

“Oh?”

That was certainly going to be good.

“The first and most important reason I didn’t attempt to kill Weaver is because she is going to rid us of *Lorgar*.”

Iskandar Khayon had excellent self-control, but even he, hearing this, couldn’t hide his stupefaction.

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*Our cousins are in dire need of a history lesson.*

*And who better than I, the magnificent Duke Sliscus, to give it to them?*

*Yes, yes. If you’ve found this treatise, I’m most likely dead.*

*What is the problem?*

*The Craftworld holy and pretentious Farseers often lead cohorts of dead warriors onto the battlefields of this boring galaxy.*

*Why wouldn’t I let you profit from my vast and superior knowledge before I return to more pleasurable activities like getting several Princesses pregnant with my seed?*

*Let’s begin with the most important lesson.*

*Our history is dreadfully incomplete, and the Gods of our Pantheon – most are dead by now, if you were sleeping in the last millennia – are not and were never our friends.*

*All the Aeldari Gods were created for one sole purpose, and this purpose is War.*

*Yes, all of them.*

*Vaul was created for forge the weapons the Aeldari armies would need to win impossible battles. Asuryan was the God-King and Supreme General of our race’s Hosts. Morai-Heg would make sure the life-energy of our souls wouldn’t go straight into the belly of a C’Tan.*

*Millions of years and uncountable prayers couldn’t change that fact.*

*At their heart, the Gods remained as the Old Ones wanted them to be. A thin veneer of honour and boredom was over their divine essences, but that was all.*

*Ultimately, the Gods should have reminded us who and what we were.*

*But there was only Khaine who stayed true to its purpose.*

*It was corrupted by the Nightbringer at several dark moments of the legendary first conflict, yes.*

*But in the end, Khaine always reject corruption, sooner or later.*

*Do you know why, my dears?*

*Because Khaine is a marvellous, crazy, bloodthirsty warmonger.*

*And if the Last Emperor and his mother had had any pride, they would have worshipped the Bloody-Handed God.*

*They would have made us the children of Khaine.*

*We would have made the fall of the Empire a truly bloody spectacle, one dooming us to acknowledging this truth: there is only war.*

*But they chose Excess.*

*And so from the luminous balconies of Craftworld palaces to the dark pits of Commorragh, we are the children of Isha.*

*And we forgot everything about our past.*

*Children of Isha...it is a truth. But it also proves they ignore* the *truth.*

*Isha is a many-faced Goddess. Yes, she is, in many ways, the Mother. She is the deity of Fertility, Harvest, and Healing.*

*But does anyone today really pause and consider WHY she was made so?*

*It wasn’t because the Old Ones loved our cheerful personalities, I assure you.*

*No, Isha was like this because it was her role to maintain enormous numbers for our elite armies. The more Aeldari warriors to send to the battlefield, the better. The faster one Aeldari fighter was healed, the quicker he or she returned to the battlefield.*

*But even that wasn’t enough.*

*When the Yngir began to overwhelm the Old Ones’ fortress-refuges no matter how ingenious the stratagems put in place to stop them, Isha was used for a far more direct role.*

*Aeldari female warriors, after all, were far too valuable to consider taking them away from a battlefield the time it took them to live through their pregnancy.*

*It was far better to use artificial methods under Isha’s guidance.*

*Ha! Ha! Ha! I can almost hear your revulsion now. Yes, the vat-grown Drukhari of today are the legacy of the Aeldari Empire in its first iterations.*

*Yes, yes, your denials, though I can’t see it, are...simply delicious.*

*But yes, the technologies many Haemonculi of Commorragh are using in this troubled times were invented and taught by Isha.*

*There are many differences, of course. The Priesthood of the three-faced Goddess could create perfect Aeldari, beings who boast the same psychic potential and skill as their trueborn cousins. Such is no longer the case today.*

*For all our claims, we have lost as much if not more as the Craftworlds during the Fall.*

*Where was I going before feeling this urge to mutilate your body? Oh, yes.*

*Isha.*

*Isha and why no one of today should call himself or herself a child of Hers.*

*It isn’t sufficient to acknowledge her Aspect of Mother. You have to embrace the analytical mind to improve the materials, be they made of flesh or of wraithbone, the cold-blooded Creator.*

*And you have to burn with the fires of vengeance.*

*Because, yes, when the cycles of life and death came in quick succession during the War Which Tore the Heavens Apart, the only thing to pray for was not for Hope, Love, or any of these naive delusions.*

*Our ancestors needed the passion to continue past any faint dream of victory the Phoenix Throne may have had.*

*This is why, I, Sliscus, doubt we will see any child born in this day and age rise to the name many fools have embraced in the depths of their ignorance.*

*They are simpletons yearning for the love of a mother.*

*But what their long-missing Goddess would likely deliver them, upon returning, would be the wrath of a long-denied Avenger.*

**Somewhere in the Eye of Terror**

**Lady General Taylor Hebert**

Aurelia Malys was gone, in a flash of fuchsia and green.

Taylor was alone.

The purification of the crystal, now with the experience gained in the last hours, was simplicity itself.

Her fingers touched the crystal.

*She is the High Priestess of Isha*.

*Of all the Muses, save perhaps the Queen of Blades, she was the one to see the peril hedonism and decadence represented for the Phoenix Court and the Empire as a whole.*

*She is the second oldest Muse, and her network of informants is proportional to her age. Nothing unexpected when as part of her vows to Isha, she has served in thousands of roles, from Wraithbone-singer to Supreme Autarch of the Vengeance Fleet. She was and still is a mother, and her children and grandchildren are legion.*

*Unlike the servants of Kurnous, who believe waiting in their sacred woods for the storm to past, the Muse is far more willing to take direct political action.*

*But her efforts are in vain.*

*Indolence has already won, and when vibrant speeches are made, it is often done in front of a sleeping assembly...when there is an assembly at all.*

*Abandoning at the first try is not a flaw of the Priestesses of Isha, however.*

*And so there is a succession of unconventional attempts to stop the drops of madness contaminating Aeldari society.*

*Great rituals are made to summon the Goddess into existence, to break Asuryan’s edict and force the Phoenix Court to realise the ongoing disaster.*

*The Gods don’t answer. And the other plans fail one after another.*

*Cycle after cycle, the ranks of Isha’s Priestesses begin their descent into oblivion.*

*When Malekith ascends to the Phoenix Throne, the High Priestess knows the time for peaceful measures is over.*

*The Uldanesh noble is the symbol of everything that is wrong with the Aeldari Empire of these times...but approaching him is impossible, even for someone of her talents.*

*She will need an army.*

*Fortunately, part of her duties of High Priestess is to know where some of the most dangerous and vital weapons for the defence of the Empire are.*

*Hyper-sophisticated vats have been stored in prevision of another titanic conflict with the Yngir, so that under Isha’s guidance, the Aeldari may have a chance against the star-devourers and their phalanxes of undying automatons.*

*And so the High Priestess travel to Commorragh, with her last loyal subordinates.*

*Though the city is on its way to become a succession of hedonistic nightmares, it is not yet there...and it isn’t the problem.*

*The problem is that for all the precautions made by the High Priesthood to keep these treasures of the War in Heaven, a sybarite noble has been able to locate them, and using dark prayers, to break through the antique protections.*

*To regain what belongs rightfully to Isha, the High Priestess and her followers have no choice but to slaughter the thieves.*

*At long last, the first vat-grown Aeldari are born. But those are imperfect once decanted.*

*Something is deeply wrong. Many of these Aeldari succumb faster to hedonism and corruption than those who were born from an Aeldari womb.*

*The High Priestess, trying not to succumb to despair, notices that there are many psy-relics who have been stolen from the original vaults. Maybe recovering them is the key.*

*There are many thieves in Commorragh, and once against the ever-dwindling Priesthood of Isha goes to war.*

*Sometimes they use their own blades; sometimes they unleash the flawed creations which came out of the vats.*

*But once they return to the labs, the results are always unsatisfactory.*

*Each attempt generates know its lot of malformed horrors, and the ‘Aeldari’ born this way...there are a few gems, Aeldari who understand how important it is to live while respecting the Gods. But most are not that way.*

*The High Priestess can only despair when after cycle after cycle, tens of thousands of vat-born Aeldari join the ranks of Commorragh denizens...and encourage, not diminish the hedonistic behaviour of the nobility ruling the Webway city.*

*It is a vicious cycle.*

*It is one which leads to damnation.*

*Unlike some other Muses, there is no obvious moment where the High Priestess snaps.*

*But when many cycles later, the summons come from the Phoenix Court, there is no denying that Ynesth, the High Priestess of Isha, has embraced Excess.*

*And the Dark Gods laugh, for unable to understand how far she has fallen, the Muse still believes she is the best solution to end Malekith’s reign.*

*How much this is madness and how much it is her own arrogance will never be fully determined.*

*The only thing certain is that Ynesth is the one to volunteer to fight the Queen of Blades first.*

*As much as she has honed her skills during her tenure as High Priestess, this is a fight she can’t win.*

*Ynesth is dying on the black sands of the arena before anyone in the public can ask out loud how much one is willing to gamble on the outcome.*

*But when the Queen of Blades is banished after the last lesson handed out to Hekatii, Ynesth is not dead for long.*

*And Morathi, as a final mockery, decides to use some of the same machinery dating from the War in Heaven to reincarnate her a final time...all for the laughter of Slaanesh, of course.*

*Corrupted beyond redemption, the twisted resurrection arcane does its work...and when the cocoon-shaped vat opens once more, it is to welcome the arrival of a true monster into this galaxy.*

*Ynesth the Dark Genesis is born, and the living races of this galaxy will have a trillion reasons to curse the legacy of the Aeldari Empire.*

To say watching and listening to this story of an Aeldari fall to Chaos had been pleasant would be a lie.

On the one hand, the High Priestess had clearly tried to prevent her race from falling to Chaos.

Something that even Aenaria Eldanesh had failed to do, when it came down to it. It was true the Queen of Blades had saved her fellow long-ears too many times for her to be blamed for it; after all, one being couldn’t prevent billions or trillions of individuals from doing stupid choices except by killing them.

On the other hand, at no point the High Priestess had realised Slaanesh was toying with her. That her last attempt to undo the damage was damnation-in-the-making, not salvation. That everything in the vaults of Commorragh had already been corrupted and should be put to the torch, not used.

There weren’t a lot of choices left now that Aurelia was gone. Trying to locate the Astronomican here would be like ringing the dinner bell for all the predators of the Eye of Terror and-

“You are hesitating.”

The crystal became transparent before exploding, revealing Ynesth in all her glory. This was the High Priestess of Isha as she had been before being corrupted: long red hair the colour of a young fire, black eyes seemingly containing the light of old stars themselves, and a body which was clearly belonging to a warrior. Her skin was not ivory or silvery; it was as if it had merged with Auramite.

And yes, obviously, she was naked.

For once, it didn’t bother Taylor. In her memories, she had seen what the Dark Genesis looked like, and the best thing one could say was that there had been uglier Haemonculi killed at Commorragh. Everything was preferable to something like that.

“I am. Forgive me for my bluntness, Muse...but I was far more sympathetic to some parts of the story of Lhilitu. The beginning of your tale, I could approve. But after you arrived to Commorragh, your actions weren’t a cure. They were the disease.”

And the symbolism was incredibly evident. Ynesth had participated in making Commorragh an irredeemable pit of monsters. And millennia later, the insect-mistress had played a major role where the annihilation of the Dark City was concerned.

“I realise that now.” Ynesth surprisingly approved before stepping forwards. “I was...I was arrogant. We were all arrogant. We were the Priestesses of Isha, weren’t we? We were convinced our Goddess was still protecting us. That she was smiling upon our actions. We believed our sacrifices would be vindicated in the end. But they weren’t.”

“Well, she paid a terrible price for it.” And that was likely the understatement of the century, bravo Taylor.

“She continues to pay for it,” Ynesth corrected. “While most of what I learned after my penultimate death is vague or absent, the Princess of Excess took great pleasure to inform me that Isha took refuge in the Garden of Decay so that the Doom of the Aeldari could not devour her too.”

“I see.” That was an interesting piece of information to have. Unfortunately, it wasn’t likely anyone would ever be in position to exploit it. Hell, in many ways, it made things more complicated. If Isha had been ‘kidnapped’ by Nurgle, her order to ‘give back everything’ would likely have been enough to free the Goddess Ynesth worshipped long ago. But since she had ran into the Domain of Nurgle voluntarily...

“I see.” The Lady General repeated. No wonder the clowns of Cegorach were so prompt to replay the tragedies of their own race. They really screwed up like no other race had ever done before them. “And I suppose you have a proposal?”

“Let me atone for my mistakes.” The Muse said. “I will sacrifice my life and the power gained from it will lead you where you need to go once you will have escaped this Warp prison. This world where you have landed? There are ruins nearby of a Temple dedicated to Isha. There were many loyal souls there before...before I betrayed them all.”

“And the drawbacks of that method?”

“You will gain...a new Aspect.”

“By Aspect, you mean I will be able to gain your craft in rejuvenating and giving birth to your species?”

“More than that...far more than that, my Empress. You will gain my essence and the memories I will duplicate of my time before everything turned to ash...only unlike the young High Priestess you just imbued Lhilitu’s essence with, you are a Demigoddess. Your appearance is not so limited compared to her anymore. You will become...something new.”

“That still sounds too simple.”

“If you weren’t Empress and you hadn’t something to assimilate me inside you, it wouldn’t work. For best or worse, I am an Aeldari. You were not. But the rules, thanks to the abnormalities of recent events have proven...surprisingly flexible.”

“I understand.” She curtly nodded as the ancient being came so close to her their bodies almost touched. “Your Sacrifice...should the impossible become indeed possible, I will tell the tale I know to your people so that they may remember it. Do you have anything to add?”

“A last request, actually,” Ynesth bared her teeth.

“What sort of request?” A mischievous Eldar was rumoured to be a headache, and this one had been far more powerful than the average monster...

The Muse was incredibly fast; before she could try to stop her, Taylor found that her hands were touching in a very intimate manner the Auramite perfection of Ynesth’s body.

And it felt...right.

“Oh, I just want, the first time you use your new Aspect, to show it to the Queen of Blades...and make sure a lot of people are there to enjoy her surprise.”

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**Cataclysm of Macragge**

**68 hours after the Mark of Oblivion**

**Magna Macragge Theatre**

**Surviving Word Bearers: 4,777**

**Living Primarchs: 2**

**Chaos Spawns: 0**

**Surviving numbers of the Lost and the Damned: approximately 666,000**

**Chaos Knights: 15**

**Surviving Ultramarines and Successors Present: 302**

**Other Loyalist Space Marines: 713**

**Surviving Ultramar Auxilia: approximately 830,000**

**Imperial Guard reinforcements: approximately 27,000,000 (first wave, second wave, and third wave)**

**Loyalist Imperial Knights: 90**

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**Ultima Segmentum**

**Realm of Ultramar**

**Macragge System**

**Macragge**

**Magna Macragge Military District**

**Fortress of Hera**

**68 hours after the Mark of Oblivion**

**Optio Septimus Gracchus**

“*Not today*.”

For several seconds, the Angel and the Arch-Traitor stayed immobile.

They were like statues as the Traitors died under the relentless spider and Space Marines’ assault.

It was like watching a huge pillar of evil towering over a fire of gold and red.

The heretical mace and the holy crystalline sword were stalemated.

It was difficult to breathe.

And then they moved.

The first clash shook the shrine, and Septimus Gracchus felt himself being thrown back.

But as he was cast aside like a twig in one of Macragge’s storms, his eyes remained upon the duel.

Or rather, what his eyes could perceive of it.

The weapon of the Living Saint was so fast it was only really visible when it met the Arch-Heretic’s weapon, and even then...there was flashes of crystal which made it seem like an illusion.

All the while, neither the gold-and-ruby shining Angel nor the fiend had moved a single finger away from their original positions.

It brutally changed without warning.

There was an enormous shockwave, and then the Optio of the Ultramar Auxilia realised they hadn’t *seriously* begun to fight.

An entire wall of darkness materialised behind the Arch-Heretic. The loyal servant of the God-Emperor created an army of crystal insects without any gesture. Flames of gold burned, forbidding the Damned One to advance further towards the Shrine.

The two enemies had evaluated each other.

And now they escalated.

Septimus believed himself courageous and brave.

But when the storms of the light and heresy clashed, he, like every Auxilia survivor, ran to take cover behind one of the intact statues.

They had sworn an oath, but at the moment, they were more useless than the stupid speeches of the Prefects after the military parades they had endured in the last months.

There was another powerful explosion, one which again made him fear for the solidity of the entire structure, as the damaged ceiling began to lose more and more marble parts, and some of them were quite massive.

And in the middle of this devastation, the Living Saint and the Arch-Heretic began to soar.

The Angel of the God-Emperor was flying on her golden-red wings.

The Arch-Heretic was...the Damned was flying too, Septimus guessed, but it more as if it was swimming in a sort of black miasma...and the Optio rapidly looked away, because there were *things*, in that darkness, *things* that made him really afraid.

The duel accelerated and grew more violent as they gained height.

There were no more insults or challenges. Save the explosions and the noise of the weapons meeting each other, they were fighting in silence.

It was both terrible and beautiful.

The clashes were shaking the very foundations of the Fortress of Hera.

And the moment the Angel went over the ceiling level, it was like looking at a pyre of golden flames and crystals.