Weaver Option Teaser 27 September 2020

**Ovation 9.1**

**Deus Ex Mechanicus**

*The majority of the Nyxians in age to live through the immediate post-Commorragh era was prompt to name the late years of the 290s and the beginning of the 300s the ‘Auramite Age’. Little did they know that their children and grandchildren would speak of giving the same name to different decades of the 35th millennium.*

*All things considered, I prefer the term ‘Auramite Age’ to ‘the Prelude to Operation Stalingrad’. I think Taylor prefers it that way too. For all the military successes won by the forces of the Nyx Sector on the battlefield and the enthusiasm they generated across the galaxy, I have never forgotten that every battle, every piece of archeotech, and every boon were too often conquered atop a mountain of corpses from courageous and loyal men and women.*

*The Battle of Commorragh brought immense benefits to the Nyx Sector. And the worst part was that it cost at the same time so much to Army Group Caribbean and yet so little to the Imperium. I knew it before the first ship departed through the Warp for Pavia, the hulls and the regiments mustered for the anti-pirate hunt were insignificant compared to certain Crusades and wide-scale operations launched on the Eastern Fringe. By the theory of the twelfth-dimensional equations, the military tithe sent to Tigrus was far, far more powerful than the Army Group, at least where its ground component was concerned. But so many of these men and women were known to us, we had seen them walk in the streets of Nyx, dance with certain Ladies, and salute the crowds before boarding their transport which would transport them across the stars. Knowing they had been cut down by the Eldar, for all the theoretical risks, was a pain which never truly healed, and would return back with a vengeance during Operation Stalingrad.*

*Sometimes, I just wish Taylor had not this damnable luck following her everywhere. It can’t be only the power of the Emperor gifted to her. The old Chinese curse ‘may you live in interesting times’ is so perfect to describe her it failed to be funny after Commorragh and many comments of Missy on the question.*

*Commorragh. Even decades after Captain-General Anubis Excelsor placed the flag of the Matapan 1st in front of the Eternity Gate, I don’t think that I’ve been able to study completely how much it changed things.*

*People will rightfully remember the dozens of Ovation ceremonies celebrated for the Basileia, the living, and the dead. Or they will marvel at the Gaius Mausoleum, Cyrene Versailles’ successful attempt at resurrecting the Taj Mahal and the Terracotta Army, and add their prayers to the ones uttered by billions of pilgrims.*

*In my draconic opinion, it was the opportunity to remember so many ancient technologies thought out of humanity’s reach which was the greatest triumph of the expeditionary force. The space elevator, to give one of the most visible templates, was still something the Mechanicus Tech-Priests built when they were commissioned to, but in reality their creations were inferior and crude versions of the human engineers who had worked on this project millennia ago. This wasn’t by incompetence or by malice. The metallic men and women I am charged to oversee – even if sometimes the verb ‘babysit’ describes the problems better – just lacked the comprehension of certain scientific and industrial processes, because the ancients left no traces of it. Therefore before Commorragh, the ancient space elevators having survived the Age of Strife, the Great Crusade, and the Horus Heresy had better continue working to their usual performance, because the Adepts of Mars wouldn’t be able to repair them if they failed. Finding the STC template of this gateway to the stars broke many limits which had chained worlds bound to Terra and Mars. Numerous alloys could be mass-produced again. Malfunctioning elevators returned to peak performance. New titanic projects of engineer could be authorised every year. And the number of accidents fell massively month after month.*

*And yes, as Dennis sufficiently teased me, this victory gave me a promotion and the time to tinker on new Dragon Armours with a budget that anyone humble could only call fantastic. Salamanders, White Scars, and their Successors instantly gained my favours. They had recognised the greatness of the draconic machine, and I never forgot it. Some engines may have more acceleration, some jetbikes might evade enemy fire more swiftly, and some Knights have more firepower at their disposal, but a Dragon Armour concentrates dozens of qualities and gives out none of the weaknesses.*

*Of course, even during these times of Ovations and parties, there were more problems piling up.*

*At the top of them were the Noosphere bureaucratic data-reports, an insidious threat I was not able to appreciate the full magnitude of until it was too late...*

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“*The problem, to be bluntly honest, is that we need more information than a list of names and some spatial coordinates. We have Necron Dynasties’ names like Atun, Mephrit, Thebekh, Maynarkh, Charnovokh, Sautekh, Hyrekh, Nihilakh, Sarnekh, Thokt and their equivalent of glyph-banners and general appearance. But this isn’t enough. The firepower a World Engine and its ground-based garrisons is capable of overwhelming in short order a Battlefleet and the greatest defences emplaced to protect critical worlds. Going after a Necron Tomb-World and failing to destroy it in less than a few days would be synonym of disaster, and not just for planet where the metallic xenos are lying dormant. If the Imperium leaves the attacked Dynasty the time, nothing save Him on Earth would be able to protect the local Sector from the sheer amount of destruction unleashed by the Necrons*.” Extract of a conversation between Rogue Trader Wolfgang Bach and Admiral Oskar von Reuenthal, 296M35.

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“When I said I wanted an unlimited budget for my pet projects Taylor, I did not expect you to take me so literally.” Magos-Draco Dogma Dragon Richter to Basileia Taylor Hebert, late 296M35.

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“Yes Missy, you’ve point has been made. Now stop bringing me these ‘I told you so’ sculptures. It’s not funny anymore.” Basileia Taylor Hebert during one of her Council of Ministers, 297M35.

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Transmitted: Holy Terra

Received: Astropath-Ultima ‘Mirabilis’

Destination: Kar Duniash

Mission time: 1.243.296M35

Telepathic Duct: SA-TT-1012101012

Reference: [CLASSIFIED]

Author: Fabricator Locum Decimus Osmium-Five-1111

Priority: Vermillion

*Chosen of the Omnissiah*,

*The final votes and deliberations about the future Thirteenth Founding have ended, and the news are excellent, with each of the twelve new Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes will receive the war assets and the genetic facilities their Founding deserves. Unfortunately, given the rapport of strength in the Senatorum Imperialis, the Adeptus Mechanicus was unable to sway a majority of the High Twelve into authorising a new Successor Chapter of the Blood Angels. The presence of every chapter descended from the Ninth Legion into your Dawnbreaker Guard proved a political drawback and only patience will allow us to abate the illogical obstacles on this path.*

*Out of the twelve new Chapters, eleven are nothing for you to worry about, although the choice of privileging the Ultramarines’ gene-line again so fast after the Twelfth Founding is raising some queries in Mars’ forges and Jupiter’s shipyards. The Magma Spiders, the Fists of Roma, and your yet-unnamed Successor of the gene-seed recovered will be based on the Nyx Sector, charged to defend the southern frontier of Ultima Segmentum, and the Eastern Fringe if the situation in this direction worsens. The Death Spectres – Raven Guard gene-line - and the Ebon Knights – Dark Angels’ gene-line - have been chosen to defend the Imperium against the threats coming from the Extremis-level region known as the ‘Ghoul Stars’. The Solar Hawks is a Chapter of White Scars’ Successor which has accepted the noble duty of reinforcing the defences existing north-west of Medusa in Segmentum Obscurus.*

*The four Successors to the Lord of Macragge’s legacy are the Thunder Barons, the Cerulean Guard, the Praetor Watch, and the Blue Panthers. For the present time, these Chapters have been assigned to reinforcing several war zones in Segmentum Pacificus, where the collapse of Nova-Terra demands a firm cog to restore productivity and loyalty.*

*The only Successor Chapter of the Iron Hands, the Angels of Iron, will be deployed in western Segmentum Tempestus to secure former space lanes which until recently were made unusable by Eldar pirates.*

*As for the twelfth chapter, we ignore everything about it save its name: the Exorcists. The Holy Inquisition blocked every investigation and query to learn the gene-line used to forge the new Astartes, their homeworld’s location and every other information regularly communicated to our Forge World in order to give the best adapted weapons to a Space Marine Chapter. All assistance to help us understanding this mystery – the Inquisitorial Representative went so far as to declare the servitors sent to deliver the supplies would suffer complete erasure of data-banks – will be welcomed.*

*To return to the status of your Space Marine Chapters, as you so logically pointed out, it is mechanically advantageous the Magma Spiders are given the priority in warships and infrastructure building. Logically, the Fists of Roma and the other Chapter will need several years to be built to operational strength before needing starships and the most expensive assets anyway.*

*Glory to the Omnissiah and may the Quest for Knowledge be once more in your favour.*

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“No, the planetary government of Nyx isn’t using the hololithic game ‘Call of Duty’ to boost massively the recruitment rates of the Imperial Guard and the Planetary Defence Forces. No, we aren’t using more propaganda than the rules given in File BB-5. And no, the rumours of our next game being a potential source of recruits for the Inquisition and the Assassinorum are just that, rumours.” Extract from a conversation between an angry noble and Lady Missy Byron, 296M35.

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**Ultima Segmentum**

**Acacia Sub-Sector**

**Pavia System**

**Battleship *Enterprise***

**1.250.296M35 (Approximately three hundred and thirty hours after the Mark of Commorragh)**

Thought for the day: The industrious may escape death.

**Lady General Taylor Hebert**

“I had not truly understood how many archeotech weapons and relics the Adeptus Mechanicus had managed to recover from Commorragh,” Master of Siege Saul Agamemnon said as he re-read the data on his data-slate, his tanned near-black skin and his dark green eyes accenting his serious expression.

“When the Skitarii squads and their Tech-Priests realised how many ancient weapons and precious metals and resources they could retake from the Commorragh’s vaults, their raiding knew no end,” Taylor replied without raising her eyes from the documents she was busy affixing her seal to. “The biggest surprise in this affair was that the Tech-Priests of Gryphonne IV were the worst, not that the Adepts of Mars pillaged so many vaults.”

The worst offenders had been punished severely after the battle. Like she had repeated endlessly before the bloodshed started at Pavia, the black-haired General could accept the Mechanicus attempted to save precious archeotech, but not at the cost of weakening the defensive lines or withdrawing military support when other, more important goals were achievable.

“Tech-Priests will always stay Tech-Priests,” Epistolary Forman of the Emperor’s Swords agreed immediately. “At least they are happy with you for the abundance of archeotech, my Lady.”

“Yes, and they continue to debate endlessly on the divide of the spoils.”

And like for the arguments said before, there wasn’t much surprise about that. The Guard’s saying about two Tech-Priests quarrelling for a rusted cog was maybe a bit exaggerated, but it had been created from serious incidents. And there was more than a rusted bolt. Thanks to her excellent memory – which she had a feeling was becoming better and better as Commorragh was over and the golden wings shone on her back – the newly promoted Lady General had the complete list, and it was impressive. By category of weapons, the Mechanicus had salvaged from the Dark City’s utter destruction over ninety thousand projectile samples, fourteen thousand-plus missile and ordnance archeotech, one hundred and sixty thousand lasguns and variants, twenty-six thousand plasma guns, forty-five thousand flamers and the list went on and on.

And these were the firm numbers confirmed that the Mechanicus negotiated and bargained with Astartes supervising them. Despite her best efforts, the commander of Army Group Caribbean was sadly certain some ‘interesting pieces’ had disappeared in the secret vaults of the red robes the moment there wasn’t one of her insects to keep them honest.

At least Lankovar and the other subordinates acting in Nyx’s name had been able to secure sixteen Volkite relics and many plasma and exotic technology items. Dragon and the rest of the Mechanicus Council were going to have fun studying and experimenting for the next decade with all the data and archeotech she was bringing back. As long the debates didn’t spiral into violence and the most dangerous toys had been relinquished to Inquisitorial and Custodes’ representatives, this would be good enough for her.

If only this didn’t generate so many data-slates and other bureaucratic nonsense, this would truly be a perfect world.

“My Lady, forgive me, but Ancient Pierre and Lieutenant-General Paul Dundee await your pleasure in the waiting room,” Sergeant Wilbert Loris of the Iron Drakes informed her returning from his patrol.

A look at the ruby-gold clock of her working office in the Enterprise, and Taylor groaned realising that one more time and despite her best shot at it, the boring and unattractive part of her Guard duties wasn’t going to be finished in time.

“Escort them in.”

Thankfully for one of her visitors, the *Enterprise*’s inner plans had been built large, and as such the large war machine in the colour of the Heracles Wardens could come here without smashing everything in its way, as long as the Astartes surviving in the Dreadnought’s sarcophagus was careful. The Space Marines present and herself obviously heard him coming long before he came into view.

Pierre had obviously not much changed; save the change of emblem to reflect his current service in the Dawnbreaker Guard, a Dreadnought was a Dreadnought. The appearance of the Indigan officer was more altered: the 7th Division had ‘convinced’ several Drukhari to relinquish in their custody several old human armours, and the Australian-looking man wore one, a rather spectacular work of emerald and sapphire decorated by the dozens of medals the newly promoted Lieutenant-General had won.

The customary greetings and offer for refreshments were quickly expedited, the non-Dreadnought was given a chair, and Taylor could give the reason she had summoned the light brown-haired officer here.

“Your performance in the Port of Lost Souls and the other battlefields of Commorragh was excellent, General, and I have read your recommendations on the anti-xenos training warfare you proposed with the greatest attention.” This was not hyperbolic congratulations or useless flattery; Paul Dundee was really one of the officers having made the smallest amount of mistakes during Operation Caribbean, and while the 7th Division‘s losses had been severe, they had been caught twice in full demonic onslaughts and dozens of times on open ground by Eldar ambushes, managing to fight their way through and inflict crippling casualties on their enemies every time. “I can assure you many will be adopted. Unfortunately, while I would love to give you the duties of a senior training officer for the Nyx replacements awaiting instruction, I have need of you elsewhere.”

“I understand, Lady General.” And the calm and slightly amused voice was an excellent indicator the former Major-General had seen it coming. “Indiga?”

Was she really that predictable? Taylor banished the thought from her head a few seconds after it burst in. In the end, this was cutting the time on the explanations and she wasn’t going to complain.

“Yes, Indiga.” The ruler of the Nyx Sector confirmed. “As the latest cataclysm proved, my swarm while powerful can be reinforced by new breeds from all over the galaxy. And since one of my best officers was born on this world, I thought I might as well use his contacts to provide me more weapons in my arsenal.”

“I appreciate the confidence you’ve invested in me,” and behind the smirk, Taylor could feel the Indigan officer was really honoured by the recognition she had given where his military skills and talents were involved. “And I’m willing to return to my homeworld. However, I will need several accreditation letters for the current Governor.”

A grimace appeared on Paul’s face, just as her Fay butler was placing in front of him a glass of his favourite amasec.

“While you are certainly the first person I know to have the power of controlling a large swarm of insects, General, there have been many attempts by intrepid Rogue Traders to capture and transport to other worlds the famous super-predators of Indiga. Most of the time, these attempts ended in tragedy, and after a few more disastrous incidents, new laws were passed to forbid the capture and exportation of the breeds which make our homeworld famous. Now if a hunting-addict Governor or another big name wants to kill a hyperraptor or a pyre-porcupine, he must come to Indiga and hunt himself or herself.”

“I’m sure hunting tourism must be booming,” Taylor could not help but give her interlocutor a thin smile.

“Before I left on the Guard transports, I understand it had become a very profitable part of our planetary economy,” Dundee smirked. “Of course, the experts we provide always insist our tourists paying first before going hunting.”

Six years ago, Taylor would have been left with her mouth wide opened and likely been aghast for several minutes that there were people ready to travel thousands of light-years to satisfy their hunting hobby. Now, it wasn’t something that deserved more than the raise of an eyebrow.

Besides, the ‘tourists’ were certainly nobles for more than ninety-nine percent of them, so if a few were devoured, this would hardly result in an efficiency loss for the Imperium.

“You will have the letters and the authorisations signed at the highest level,” the Baroness of Pavia promised. “A couple of Astropaths will be sent with you, just in case the Governor or certain politicians decide to be difficult.”

“This should be more than sufficient,” Paul Dundee nodded. “Now I must clarify a point. Do you want me to hunt and capture psychic insects, or should I exclude them from the list of targets?”

This Taylor hadn’t expected, though in hindsight, given how many failures the Menelaus Dynasty had buried deep in the hope no one would find about them, knowing it had happened on another planet was a sad confirmation there wasn’t exactly a limit to human idiocy.

“The Governor at the origin of this mess imported psychic breeds?” the Basileia asked just to be sure she hadn’t a hearing problem.

“Lady Constantine Principa Argoy, may her soul rot in the darkest pits of Commorragh, wanted the greatest and most complete zoo of the Imperium,” behind the veneer of amusement, it didn’t take a genius to know the Lieutenant-General was not amused by the ambition of Argoy. “So yes, it involved psychic species. And while the Praefects of the time launched a gigantic hunting campaign after the Judgement’s earthquake, they have proven impossible to eradicate.”

Taylor paused a few seconds to consider her options. Until now, her only psychic insects were Lisa the Giant Moth and the Catachan Ants. Both served critical needs. The former allowed her to use what could be described as psychic purification with the Emperor’s Light and the transmutation of Noctilith into Aethergold. The latter were relays for her swarm, extending her already huge range to greater distances, and providing the priceless Bacta.

These two breeds were her greatest assets. But it had been dangerous to make the Queen-ant submit to her will, and a lot of preparations needed to be made every time they were to be transported or studied.

A large part of her mind wanted to say it was too dangerous, that even with the greatest safety measures imagined or recovered by the Mechanicus, there was no need to increase the lethality of her swarm and the assets she could wield on the battlefield.

The other part of her brain told her she was stupid and that her enemies after Commorragh would be out for her blood before long, with a good idea of what she could deploy into a war zone. Nocturne’s insects, while individually powerful, would not overturn a battle’s outcome during a Commorragh-level disaster. But the psychic breeds of Indiga, coordinated with her power, just might provide an insurmountable advantage and destroy heretics and demons before they had the opportunity to inflict tens of thousands casualties to the Guard and ravage her swarm again.

“The psychic insects and arthropods are included on your list of hunt-and-capture list, provided of course you can transport them safely according to the regulations the Tech-Priests have for you.”

The eyes of the Indigan narrowed thoughtfully at ‘arthropod’. Interesting, it wasn’t exactly a secret in Hive Athena that breeds of crabs and other species of crustaceans answered to her will, but the rumours hadn’t had the time to spread to the ears of the Munitorum-selected officers.

“Pierre you will go with him.” The Lady General spoke to the Dreadnought for the first time of the meeting.

“WITH PLEASURE, LADY WEAVER!

“As a member of the Dawnbreaker Guard, you will be an additional insurance the mission of the good Lieutenant-General is taken seriously. But your main mission will be to assess the danger and the aptitudes of the insects and arthropods of the wildlife of Indiga. Kill as many of the species as you want to have an opinion of them, I give you a veto vote to exert if a species or several are unsuitable for my swarm.”

“I WILL NOT DISAPPOINTING YOU. THE INDIGAN INSECTS WILL BE THOROUGHLY TESTED.”

Nodding and cringing a bit at the sheer massacre of fauna which was able to occur, Taylor stopped watching the Dreadnought, wishing that he could stop wearing one of the numerous pirate hats ‘requisitioned’ at Pavia and Commorragh. Alas, even Isley had not discovered where the pieces of cloths were hidden when they weren’t worn.

“Pick between two hundred and four hundred veterans who have been declared untainted by the Inquisition after meeting Lisa,” the insect-mistress commanded her Guard subordinate. “The five thousand Tech-Priests and the Grand Cruiser of Stygies VIII which will be your transport to Indiga before your return to Nyx have already been pledged by the Mechanicus.”

“Plenty of firepower for the hunting operations I have in mind,” the Indigan officer assured her. “Will that be all, Lady General?”

“Not quite,” Taylor hesitated, before deciding the move was not illegal and it was preparing for the future, much like the gathering of new insects. “When you meet the highest planetary authorities of your world, please raise the possibility with them of providing a new Army Group for a future campaign.”

“I can certainly transmit the message,” the Lieutenant-General told her. “I don’t know if the reaction will be positive or negative, I have been away for too long, and I was hardly living in that kind of circles to begin with.”

This was more or less what was expected given how long guardsmen fought away from the planet they had been born unto. Taylor would just have to hope the Administratum and the Munitorum had not had a heavy hand around Indiga. At least for the Dundee-Pierre’s mission, the Lady General would have an answer rather quickly: Indiga’s Sector was in a straight line between Pavia and Nyx, so in less than a year, provided the Warp wasn’t too turbulent, there would be answers one way or another.

“CAN I USE MY FUNDS TO BUY AUTHENTIC INDIGAN HATS?”

Taylor did not facepalm, groan or express her contrariety, but God it was hard.

“Don’t push your luck, Pierre, if you don’t want to return to a stasis vault.” Though at least it would be a way to avoid a fateful meeting one of her Astropaths had warned her about a few hours ago.

And this meeting, the first of a long series, ended there. General Groener would be next, presenting his conclusions about the logistics of Operation Caribbean in his personal of Quartermaster-General of her brand-new staff. Then there would be Commissar Zuhev, with he and she had having to decide who would be the first Director or the new Nyxian Schola Progenium, the process of recruiting and training many new Commissars, and the coordination with the incoming Catachan ‘trainers’. And there were all the others.

Suddenly having a good memory of the endless list of things awaiting to pounce on her was more discouraging than anything...and more data-slates and other forms of paperwork continued to arrive.

“Bureaucracy sucks all the fun of power and privileges,” the Basileia of Nyx said gravely to her Dawnbreaker Guards. By a strange coincidence, none of them disagreed, though a few of the transhumans had the gall to chuckle.

**Rogue Trader Wolfgang Bach**

The Saint was watching the stars projected on the walls of the bridge when they entered. But then again, when a small army of insects answered the data-slates in your stead, conversed with several Tech-Priests and gave new orders to the various guardsmen several metres away, Wolfgang figured one could enjoy the view of the Pavia Systems and the other stellar phenomena.

Evidently, their walk in the chamber that was the heart of the *Enterprise* was anticipated long before the first foot touched ground inside, and the Lady General turned to watch them approach long before they had passed the last wall of Space Marines guarding her. Or was it the contrary? While it was true there were many instances during the Battle of Commorragh where Lady Weaver had survived thanks to the intervention of Space Marines – one of the two deaths suffered by the Dawnbreaker Guard was a direct consequence of it – the Basileia of Nyx had also saved many, many times the lives of her bodyguards.

Maybe it was a symbiotic relationship, like the one the Imperial Army and the Legions had been supposed to entertain before the Great Treason. If so, Wolfgang knew it was going to make a lot of politicians very unhappy.

“Ah, Wolfgang. Perfectly on time. How is the Grand Cruiser *Golden Sword*?” Today the Baroness of Pavia was in a red armour, which for all the splendour and the magnificence did not look inferior to the one she had fought the Battle of Commorragh with.

“It is a promising exploratory ship, my Lady.” The new Rogue Trader thanked his benefactor deep inside once more. For all her astronomical gains, Lady Weaver had abandoned her claims on a lot of money when she sold the Grand Cruiser to him. “There are of course plenty of issues to tackle, but they will be solved in time. I have however decided to rename it *Pavian Victory*. Hopefully, the name will inspire a new crew to erase the shame of having served a treacherous Rogue Trader for several decades.”

This wasn’t the first ship of the Rogue Traders which found itself renamed. The Orion-class Star Clipper *Law of Profit* was now the *Law of Nyx*, and the Ambition-class Cruiser *Manifest Destiny* would begin a new and more respectable career as the *Ovation Destiny*.

Together these three warships formed a very powerful squadron, and once the other Ambition-class built by the shipyards of Mars arrived, Wolfgang knew he would have an armada surpassing in size many local Navy flotillas. This was all thanks to the patronage of the Basileia, of course. Without her help, Wolfgang would not have been taken seriously had he tried to make a move for the command of a Star Clipper, ever mind a Cruiser. By the hierarchy of the Imperial Navy, the ex-First Secretary was after all an Ensign in half-pay, and one who had not found a warship to complete his Academy graduation.

“Yes, hopefully,” the Lady General’s eyes looked at the two Navy officers accompanying him. “Admiral Oskar von Reuenthal. Rear-Admiral Fujiko Yamamoto. You have kicked a hornet’s nest of politics when you pushed to be transferred to Battlefleet Nyx.”

“And I regret nothing, your Celestial Highness,” the young Admiral – Reuenthal was merely forty-five, and looked as young as himself – bowed so low it was impressive he didn’t lose his equilibrium.

“No, I don’t suppose you don’t. Rear-Admiral?”

The Basileia had told him in confidence that for a woman having a M32 ‘Japanese’ name, Fujiko Yamamoto didn’t have the traits associated with Japanese people. Wolfgang could certain agree with her point. Middle-aged, red hair, blue-eyed, thin but with an extremely developed pair of breasts, the Rear-Admiral was a striking woman in looks, but had nothing in common with the looks of Wuhanese and other women sharing this type across the Nyx Sector.

“Your Celestial Highness is certainly aware that my future at Kar Duniash and other Segmentum fortresses is heavily compromised,” Fujiko Yamamoto spoke with assurance, but there was a weakness in her voice. “I am the highest officer to have survived of what was Augustus von Kisher’s command. No blame has fallen on my shoulders, but unless I and the other officers found quickly a Battlefleet to welcome us, my career and those of my subordinates are over.”

“And you think Battlefleet Nyx is your anchor of survival in the rising political storm.” The Rear-Admiral nodded silently. “Your performance in the cataclysmic final battle of the Port of Lost Souls was above the acceptable His Holy Majesty demands of his officers, according to all the naval experts I have spoken with. And I won’t deny you were dealt a bad hand when being placed under Kisher’s command. These ‘Fast Battleships’ were a disaster-in-waiting.”

The young Rogue Trader could only grimace internally. While the long investigation launched immediately by the Mechanicus was far from over – it was likely going to take years, really – Archmagos Sagami and Cawl had each on their own published long and coherent analyses that at least three major plasma conduits had been emplaced near compartments where they definitely shouldn’t have been. Devoid of capital-grade armour and too close from certain ammunition stores, the *Invincible* and its consorts were one reaction in chain away from death.

In the end, it wasn’t a surprise so many Fast Battleships were lost. The surprise was more there was one which managed to stay intact in the fires of war.

“There is one point however that I think that is particularly interesting and that you haven’t mentioned so far,” Wolfgang raised an eyebrow. If it was the case, he had missed it too. “You were born from one of the Houses of the Samarkand Sector regularly sending its heirs and heiresses to Kar Duniash.”

“It has been a long time I haven’t returned home,” Fujiko Yamamoto confessed. “I am seventy-two now, your Celestial Highness. If these are contacts among the Zaibatsu you require, I am not the woman you need.”

“Your honesty goes to your credit, Rear-Admiral,” Wolfgang noticed easily Lady Weaver didn’t look a single second disappointed. “But you misunderstand my intentions. The Samarkand Sector ignored me for years, as most of its Houses were feuding with each other, and they limited themselves to sending me envoys with no power to negotiate anything important when I wanted to discuss industrial expansion with them, and by their fault there was a Munitorum tithe levied at the worst moment possible. I want to send a message to Samarkand their days of being the privileged interlocutor of Kar Duniash are truly over. What I want to know is if you’re willing to help me do it.”

“Yes, your Celestial Highness,” the Yamamoto Zaibatsu mustn’t have sponsored the career of their female Admiral very hard, Wolfgang mused. Not with her being a Rear-Admiral at the age of seventy when she had the talent to command a Battlefleet, and not with the devoted expression she gave to the black-haired Lady General. “The *Champion of Kar Duniash*, the *Domination’s Pride*, and the *Lion* will join Battlefleet Nyx and will carry out the duties you want them to accomplish.”

“In this case prepare these three warships for a Warp travel to the Nyx Sector.” The smile disappeared when the insect-mistress spoke to the other Navy officer on the bridge. “Admiral Oskar von Reuenthal. You are talented, that much is undeniable. Your naval tactics have proved their worth at Commorragh and during many naval battles you fought before this year. When I asked Bakka to give me a list of their most brilliant commanders, you were at the top.”

Golden energy danced around red armours, but the expression of Lady Nyx didn’t soften.

“What I seriously fail to understand, is how an experienced Battlefleet commander like you can behave like an evil grox around women.” Ah. Yes, in hindsight, Wolfgang should have known it had already arrived to her ears.

“With due respect...”

“Yes, Admiral, I know what you are going to say. Guard and Navy aren’t in the same chain of command, and even if they were, what you do in your personal life isn’t any concern of mine.”

At this moment, the golden pressure increased, and all the transhumans, Skitarii and humans on the bridge could verify that yes, in front of them truly stood the Saint of the God-Emperor who on his command, had charged into Commorragh and delivered death to billions of long-ears.

“All of this is true. But I want to trust the commanders I place in important positions completely and without reservation. For all my powers, I cannot afford looking behind me every minute. And right now, Admiral von Reuenthal, the fact you use your sexual partners like one use handkerchiefs does not exactly encourage me to trust you unconditionally. So let me clear, Admiral. I will accept you in Battlefleet Nyx, but I want improvements in your lifestyle and no more complaints and rumours coming to my ears. Because I can swear to you, once deeds have reached a certain threshold, I give no second chance and the officers who fail to uphold the standards of His Most Holy Majesty’s Navy will have all eternity to explain themselves to him. Am I clear?”

Oskar von Reuenthal must have nerves of steel, because there wasn’t even a flicker of fear and shaking in his limbs when he answered.

“Yes, your Celestial Highness. You have made yourself totally clear on the subject.”

“Excellent,” sometimes, Wolfgang wondered why the Emperor hadn’t given powers to control felines or carnivorous fishes to His Living Saint. In hindsight, the answer was all too evident. The insect-mistress was already too versatile and powerful with her swarm! “Now your report on the capital warships which are going to be transferred to Nyx.”

The golden power diminished, and everyone could breathe more easily.

“My Victory-class flagship, the *Son of Victory*, is ready to depart the moment to give the order. The Emperor-class *Aquila Eternal* is also Warp-capable again, as the Ryza enginseers have beaten their records to repair the battle-damage. The Retribution-class *Crusade of Defiance* is not ready, and I fear there’s no way its engines will be declared fit for duty in less than three standard weeks. As for the Cruisers...”

**Pavia**

**Shadow Warden Kalyan Gowtham**

Kalyan had stayed in the shadows while the woman he had sworn to protect worked on the immense pillar of white marble.

It was not a sight, the Legionnaire recognised, you saw every day unless you lived next to someone having the capacity of controlling insects. Thousands of termites and ants were working like a small army of builders, carving stone with a precision the average sculptor of the Great Crusade would have died to possess. Even the coterie of artists the Emperor’s Children were keeping close to them would have found no work with this work.

The son of Corax amended his thoughts a moment later. No, while this wasn’t completely wrong, it wasn’t totally accurate either. Sculptures and other artistic creations of the Third Legion had always been flamboyant for lack of any other adjective, and this decades before treachery replaced trust and brotherhood.

The first stone – metaphorically and literally – Taylor Hebert had emplaced was simple and modest. The Aquila at the top looked like it was about to fly, but it had not been painted in gold. The marble stayed as it was, and he had heard the insect-mistress order the architects regularly presenting their plans for the Fountain of Light be commanded to not modify in any way the inscription and the double-headed bird.

Kalyan hadn’t known personally any Custodes, but he thought the words now carved forever in the white stone would please them. At the light of the Aethergold Crystal, the Sunworms and the lone Catachan Queen-ant the Lady General had brought with her, the following letters could be read in High and Low Gothic.

**HE PROTECTS**

**BECAUSE SACRIFICE FOR MANKIND IS HONOUR**

**HE EXPECTS**

**BECAUSE HUMANITY MUST BE FREE**

**HE FIGHTS**

**BECAUSE LOYALTY IS ITS OWN REWARD**

**HERE RESTS THE INDOMITABLE SPIRIT OF CONSTANTIN VALDOR**

**CAPTAIN-GENERAL OF THE ADEPTUS CUSTODES**

**STRANGER, IF YOU TURN TO YOUR HEART TOWARDS TERRA**

**YOU KNOW HE WAITS BY HIS SIDE**

Kalyan felt the inspiration from many Primarch’s speeches made during the Great Crusade. But then it wasn’t going to raise eyebrows, since Lady Weaver had access to several libraries of the Blood, which for all their holes, were more accurate than the ‘history’ the Imperium tried to force the people of the Imperium to swallow.

But with this inscription, hope remained. The ideals they had fought for were not totally forgotten. Oppression, in all its forms, could be broken. The legacy of Deliverance could be reawakened from the shadows. And maybe, just maybe, the new lights which began to burn after Commorragh’s destruction could lead Corax himself to return one day.

Their father had survived Isstvan V and the Drop Site Massacre. The Raven Guard had survived the Heresy, for all the terrible sacrifices and daunting barricades trying to drown them into a sea of damnation and betrayal. And Dorn and the Khan still lived. If two Primarchs could withstand everything the Webway threw at them, their own gene-sire could survive legions of the Arch-Enemy and return.

The Nineteenth Legion had perished, but the fight would continue. It would, as long as a single Raven Guard Astartes remained alive.

With the arrival of dawn, the sculpture effort ended and the insects left the site. Kalyan Gowtham and the other battle-brothers of the Dawnbreaker Guard left the heart of the newly-created city of Constantinople into several columns, and they were sorely needed, for several tens of thousands of pilgrims and Imperial citizens had come to see the Baroness of Pavia a last time before she left the planet and the stellar system.

Somehow, before they boarded the Thunderhawk, the Shadow Warden instinctively knew they would not come back to Pavia before a very long time.