This is not a Teaser – 28 April 2024

**Legacy Interlude**

**Hell Garden**

*Hell Garden.*

*Of all military operations of the First Age, this is certainly one of the campaigns shrouded the most in an aura of mystery on Nyx.*

*There is no Weaverian Marvel dedicated to it, though the names of the fallen, both Nyxian and non-Nyxian, are carved forever on the third floor of the Hagia Sanguinala.*

*Evidently, part of the reason why it stayed as close to a near-anonymous war was the relatively low number of troops engaged in the conflict. And most of the human veterans were Catachan Jungle Fighters, who are not exactly known for their prose and the quality of their memoirs.*

*In addition to these points, a lot of the information was classified by Her Celestial Highness herself, and it remained so until Hive Fleet Behemoth ushered the Tyranid Wars.*

*One must also point out that although three Stars of Terra were earned, all of them were given posthumously to the heroic guardsmen.*

*And last but not least, it was Catachan.*

*Operation Hell Garden was in the third century of M35, millennia ago, and it remains to this day the only moment an Imperial force truly tried what one can qualify of ‘invasion’ where this infamous Death World is concerned.*

*And for good reason.*

*Though all the reports written after conceded the logic of the operation was sound, the after-battle reports of the surviving Space Marines and the Adjutant-Spiders mean grim reading.*

*Worst of all, even today, the Swarm of Her Celestial Highness is forced to acknowledge that the rapid reaction of the Imperium after the end of the operations in the Eastern Fringe took the Tyranids by surprise.*

*There was no counterpart to the ‘Zoanlord’ ready to annihilate armies, tides of billions of Hormagaunts, or the insidious poison of the Genestealer infiltrators.*

*Unfortunately, this didn’t mean the Hive Mind of the Endless Devourer was defenceless.*

*And the strategists had missed a very dangerous problem.*

*On the battlefields of the world that had still been called Ardium then, the regiments of Nyx, Fay, and hundreds of other famous recruitment worlds had learned to their sorrow how dangerous it was for your health when Behemoth unleashed its unrelenting offensive power.*

*No one, sadly, had thought to predict what it would mean if a Tyranid Hive Fleet turned its malevolent instincts to a defensive strategy.*

*The answers would be horrifying, both by the numbers of casualties they generated, and by the implications they brought into the minds of every senior military commander of Mankind.*

*Now with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear Operation Hell Garden was the first encounter between the Imperium and Hive Fleet Python.*

*And it was indeed a hellish experience none of the protagonists would remember fondly for as long as they lived.*

Extract from *Bloody Hell – the First and Last Invasion of Catachan*, by retired Admiral Roxana Brasidas-Groener, 900M41.

**Catachan System**

**High Orbit over Catachan**

**Mars-class Battlecruiser *Pax Imperium***

**5.503.313M35**

Thought for the day: Her will be done.

**Sister Kyra**

There were things the harsh training regimen had tried to prepare for.

Unfortunately, Kyra was sure trying to comfort one of the Adjutant-Spiders of Her Celestial Highness was not one of them.

“What was wrong with the title I chose?” Adjutant-Colonel Bellona sobbed. “It is a perfectly fine name! I didn’t have the time to send it to the Webmistress, but I’m sure she would have approved!”

The young battle-sister of the Order of the Silver Rose begged silently for help. Alas, all the older girls smirked and didn’t intervene. What had happened to the bonds of sisterhood?

Suddenly, just because she was the youngest oath-sworn warrior-

This would not be forgotten.

Of course, this also meant that for the next ten minutes, Kyra had to apologise again and again.

Because the Catachan officers and some other ‘ruffians’ had dared renaming the work of the Adjutant-Spider by the offending name of *Codex Tyranids*.

“They aren’t able to recognise the greatness the Webmistress imbued in me!” Bellona mourned again before doing the human equivalent of changing the subject. “Please, I want some good news, any good news!”

“Err...” Kyra looked at her new data-slate. “We have possible Space Marine reinforcements incoming?”

“Oh?” The sorrow disappeared, replaced by excited curiosity. “How far away are they?”

“One standard month, I’m afraid, Adjutant-Colonel. One company-strong.”

“That’s too far away,” was the immediate and predictable reply. “The enemy knows we are there, and we have everything we need for the assault, since the latest weapon shipment from Ryza has been distributed to the troops two days ago. We can’t afford to wait for a month. Please send a message to...what is the name of the Chapter wishing to answer the call to arms, Sister Kyra?”

“The Blood Ravens,” the young woman answered before frowning. “I am not familiar with the name.”

“Neither I am,” Bellona shook her large head. And from the expressions of all the Sororitas present, it was evident everyone shared the same perplexity. “They certainly aren’t of the Blood, the Webmistress made sure we can recognise the colours and the sigils of every Chapter of the Beloved Sanguinius’ line! And I don’t think they were signatories of the Conference of Macragge. I could be mistaken, of course. I wasn’t here, and the Space Marines have not been my focus. Theresa! Access to my console, please!”

Obviously there was a small moment of rush to the devices installed nearby, which was over in a minute.

After that, it was just a question of time before the small spiders unlocked the highly-secure database reserved to the Adjutant-Colonel. A few more seconds and-

“Has someone placed Trazyn’s thefts in the wrong location?”

The question out of Bellona’s mouth made her raise both eyebrows in astonishment. If there was something everyone took great pride in when it came to serve Her Celestial Highness, it was to make as few mistakes as possible and-

“How in the name of Holy Bacta did they manage to steal a Fra’al Battlecruiser?”

What?

“And they used it as a Q-Ship to board and steal more xenos hulls! Oh, I bet the Inquisition loved that.”

What?

“They also earned five Penance Crusades in the last two millennia,” Bellona read aloud. “I’ve never heard of a single Chapter earning so many black marks and not being purged by the High Lords...save the High Lords, of course.”

“It could be a corruption of the data, as you said, Adjutant-Colonel,” Claire intervened. “The Inquisition can be tolerant of some...eccentricities when it is the Adeptus Astartes doing them, but there are limits.”

“I shall hope so, because it is said here,” an accusatory leg was pointed at the hololithic screen, “that these thieves stole a *Battle-Barge* of the Marines Malevolent, and a Lady Inquisitor sent them away with a ‘well-done’ message! I mean, which Chapter would be so mentally crippled as to name itself the *Marines Malevolent*! Even the Traitor Marines have far better sense than that!”

And this was the Adjutant-Spider who had thought using a variant of the Uplifting Primer’s name was a good idea for her book speaking...

“Anyway,” Bellona sighed loudly. “I suppose we can always accept the help. If the Tyranids are all dead before they arrive, I will apologise for the fact their services are not needed, and the Adeptus Mechanicus will offer them a few weapons, along with the gratitude of the Webmistress for their dedication.”

There was more frenetic tapping. No further remarks came out, however.

And as always, the elder sisters were of no help at all.

Kyra had to clear her throat...again.

“I suppose this means there is no reason to change the schedule of Operation Hell garden, Adjutant-Colonel?”

“No reason at all,” the answer came promptly and unflinchingly. “We localised the ancient crater where the World Spirit of Catachan is almost certainly hidden. And all the Space Marines deployed on the world below agree that the aggression levels of the fauna and the flora skyrocket the closer we push in this direction. On the subject of good news, Adjutant-Captain Kali had rallied many colonies of spiders to our cause. We are ready to execute the Webmistress’ orders.”

This was the positive view, yes. Yet there had been disappointments. Wherever the few Adjutant-Spiders went on Catachan, there was no denying the ant colonies fled like they were facing an invasion of the Arch-Enemy. Actually, would the insects of this Death World flee a daemonic invasion in the first place? Something to ponder at later.

“The approach still represents a...significant amount of risk,” Claire said in the names of everyone present.

“One must take risks when the Webmistress demands we do her utmost for her!” Bellona told them joyously. “And I have long analysed the threat represented by the Tyranids! We are going to surprised them by an insertion right on their doorstep! The variant ‘Toad’ has no precedent in Imperial history, and this will bring them on the defensive from the very beginning!”

Kyra saluted, trying to not let excitation take too much of her. This was it, then her first battle!

“Oh, and Sister Kyra?”

“Yes, Adjutant-Colonel!”

“Please inform the good Rear-Admiral I will be a bit late for the tea today...”

Yes, many of her sisters laughed. The young battle-sister swore there would be retribution one way or another before this campaign was over!

**Beyond the last star of the Eastern Fringe – the Galactic Void**

If the Hive Mind had been able to gather half of the resources expended on the world where the Golden Prey had prevented it from satisfying its hunger, victory would have been certain.

It was inconvenient that those resources did not exist.

This pantry-world had been acknowledged as critically important.

It was, after all, the only one where the Hive Mind knew for certain that the Golden Prey was aware of one of their scout’s existence.

There was never any question a counter-attack would come.

It was a pity the hive-vanguard’s presence was weak.

The Bio-Ship of the first expedition had underestimated some species of Prey, and it had crashed violently on the pantry-world.

The destruction created by this event had been assuredly sub-optimal for the Hive Mind’s plans.

By the time contact had been made to investigate if the Golden Prey was known to the synapse unit, the number of assets could be counted with one claw and spare.

Measures had been taken to remedy to it, but the process had been incredibly slow. After being left alone so long on its own, the synapse unit had grown stagnant, content to devour pitiful quantities of biomass and to pour its hunger into the gestalt-construct’s core.

It was an imperfect tool.

But it was the only one the Hive Mind had, and sending a replacement was not possible.

It would have to do.

Still, it was inconvenient.

The Hive Mind had to assign an entire Relay-Moon to take control of the synapse unit, and the entire process had taken more time than efficiency called for.

And then the lesser prey serving the Golden Prey had come, far faster than it had ever been estimated feasible.

This was not a major setback, for the Hive Mind was now aware that this all-too-cunning prey had greater faster-than-light deployment capabilities than initially thought of.

A cold intellect would always prefer losing as few assets as possible when discovering capacities of utmost importance, and the Hive Mind’s intelligence was very cold indeed.

It was still one more inconvenience the Hive Mind could have done without.

The reorganisation around the synapse unit was incomplete.

There was only one Brood Nest active, and its ability to create more than the most basic assets was negligible.

They would not be match for the prey armies, though the first screening indicated the Golden Prey was not present in person.

It had taken some calculations, but the Hive Mind had decided to offer the prey the battle it seemed to seek on this pantry-world.

While the assets were small compared to the far greater resources expended against the Golden Prey, the choice of this particular Relay-Moon to give orders had proven a strong advantage, for the Norn-units merged into it had evolved and mastered their hunger. On the offensive, they would not have been as strong as the Fleet which was on its way to devour this galaxy the pantry-world was part of.

But the circumstances were perfect to test the lesser organisms gravitating around the Golden Prey.

Yes, a defensive mindset had its use here, and it would be supported by the influence the synapse unit had over the gestalt-construct.

The calculations did not ascertain the Hive Mind would emerge victorious from the struggle.

But the lesser prey had settled this world. If the vigour it had defended the other one from the ancient asset’s assault was any inclination, the pantry would not be destroyed to deny the Hive Mind its due.

If the hunger was stopped once more, neither the Relay-Moon nor the Hive Mind would lose anything important.

Yes, the strategy was as efficient as the limited assets allowed for.

Much would be learned from this new battle with the lesser preys.

And if the organisms devoured resulted in a significant loss of capability for the Golden Prey, so much for the better.

The Hive Mind had been taught a very painful lesson, in addition to being denied.

It was going to be incredibly satisfying two types of hunger at the same time.

The Hive Mind readied its assets and waited for the preys to make the first move.

**Catachan System**

**Catachan**

**Somewhere in the Green Hell**

**5.504.313M35**

**Sergeant Javier Cortazar**

Contrary to what one might imagine, the Catachan guardsmen had a rich vocabulary to describe the different parts of their planet.

And like many Death Worlds, the reference points were the Redoubts, which were the closer thing you had to a safe haven on Catachan. The further away you were from one, the greater dangers you were likely to face.

The difference between Catachan and other Death Worlds of the Imperium, of course, was how fast the survivability chances dropped when you left a Redoubt. Modern artillery being modern artillery, on plenty of planets settled in the name of the Emperor, there were men and women who lived a couple of kilometres away from the great walls of a fortress without selling away their lives. The ‘safe zone’ was often close to twenty kilometres of radius, though it applied mostly to the less dangerous categories of ‘Death World’.

In this verdant wilderness the Jungle Fighters called home, anything beyond a kilometre of a Redoubt was best translated as ‘Green Hell’.

Simple deduction could tell you that the aforementioned ‘Hell’ of course covered most of the planet.

And Sergeant Javier Cortazar of the Raptors Space Marine Chapter had not been surprised that some local cants evocated the idea of travelling alone there as a particularly audacious form of suicide.

This was for reckless adventurers who tried to reach points twenty kilometres away from a Redoubt, mind you.

Javier had pushed far further than that; as the warships in orbit were able to calculate his coordinates with precision, he was some two hundred and ninety-seven kilometres away from the closest Catachan settlement.

Some bureaucrat idiots – the galaxy was filled with them, alas – had complained to Lady Weaver some months ago how it was possible in the first place that the Catachan garrisons had not noticed a Tyranid presence on their homeworld.

The Victor of Commorragh and Macragge had been perfectly right to lambast them and retort that it would have been way more surprising if the Catachan jungle-experts had been able to report the sign of a Tyranid presence in the first place.

The new communication relay installed in his Mark IX’s helmets buzzed, and the voice of his Captain arrived to his ears a second after that.

“Almost in position, brother?”

“’Almost’ is the key word,” Javier grunted, striking one of the big yellow-black snakes which had tried to attack from behind. Fortunately, the brand-new Nyx-pattern Power Sword severed the beast effortlessly, and his armour boot made sure the head was appropriately dealt with. “I am more and more convinced the pace of the offensive the Spiders want is deliberately optimistic.”

“I feel the same.” There was a pause. “The Mark IX?”

“The shields are down, permanently, as I feared. They have not been built in mind to deal with permanent attacks coming every minute.” Javier snorted. “This might be for the best. They were drawing too much power and the outcome wasn’t satisfying.”

“We can’t help but count the days separating us from the arrival of the Mark X, eh?”

The Raptors Sergeant had to slaughter a series of Strangleplants by blade and then send one of his last Bolter Shells inside a Venus Mantrap’s maw before saying one more word.

“With each footstep, I become more and more convinced the appropriate armour to deal with this Death World is a hover-tank with the firepower to incinerate entire square kilometres of jungle, brother.”

A chuckled was heard on the other end of the communication relay.

“I’m afraid that if Nyx or another Imperial world has armoured vehicles like the one you want, they are currently not selling them to any Chapter. And I see you are in position now.”

“Yes. I have a superb sight on a glorious piece of Green Hell.”

Some of his brothers may have even appreciated the beauty offered by the fangs, claws, and spikes of Catachan.

Javier had arrived on the ridge giving him a view of a massive valley flanked from north and south by moderately elevated peaks.

It was a landscape of lush green colours, and the roars of carnivorous predators – assuming *anything* wasn’t carnivorous here – accompanied with every step.

“The records were right. There must have been a Redoubt here built at some point not long after the first settlers arrived.”

Of course, by now, the Redoubt’s whole structure had been devoured by the jungle.

“Poor bastards,” his Captain voiced. “The Tyranids, you think?”

“I don’t think so, although maybe indirectly? The wildlife seems unusually aggressive in the last hour?”

“You have the coordinates?”

“I’m sending them. I’m playing it with a big margin: roughly three kilometres east of the Redoubt’s ruins. That should provide the army enough margin if something goes wrong.”

“Coordinates received and acknowledged, brother.” Javier had only to wait for ten seconds before the announcement which was in many ways the opening stage of Hell Garden arrived. “The Mechanicus Cruiser is launching the BX-T torpedo.”

In a void battle, the outcome would have required several minutes of patience.

Here, with the fleet in high orbit, the explosion arrived a second after ‘torpedo’ was uttered.

It was an enormous airburst explosion, several metres above the highest trees of the valley that for some long-forsaken reason, the Catachan had nicknamed ‘Devil’s Den’. And no, according to satellite imagery, the quantity of Catachan Devils here was not superior to any other region of the Death World.

Plenty of Flesh Tearers would clearly have been disappointed by the lack of devastation.

There was a small zone where the trees, plants, and animals had been blasted away, but things like that were erased by the jungle in ten minutes.

But razing the valley by orbital fire was far from the plan’s intention.

The purple smog that was now spreading was the true attack; the torpedo launched from a Cruiser’s tube had just been means of delivery.

And the effect was impressive.

In the distance, several croaking sounds resonated.

And the valley’s jungle began to fall silent.

The thunderous roars vacillated, the hisses of the myriads of snakes betrayed something like fear before ending.

The purple smog spread.

And the croaking symphony increased in potency, with thousands of ‘singers’ joining the ‘song’.

“The Toads are reacting as expected, Captain.” He said formally.

To be honest, Javier didn’t know who had this vicious idea of spreading Barking Toad pheromones over a single concentrated area, but he approved it with all his two hearts.

Because now, you had the equivalent of a small army of Greater and Lesser Barking Toads, the most dreaded animals of Catachan, all converging on the zone the Mechanicus ordnance had saturated with pheromones.

Understandably, all the fauna of the valley tried to flee this unanticipated migration, understanding what was to come.

One single Great Barking Toad could liquefy anything within a one-kilometre radius, and there were now hundreds, maybe thousands converging on a single location.

“I am taking cover in a cave nearby.” The place had most likely a drake or something equally nasty hiding in it, but it was better to ensure one more layer of protection, even if according to Mechanicus cogitators, he should be well outside the blast zone. “I recommend sending the second torpedo in ten seconds.”

“Recommendation sent...and accepted. Good luck, brother.”

“Who needs luck when the toads are providing a natural Exterminatus?”

Javier’s Power Sword was plunged into the neck of a Mountain Drake of a Catachan when the entire world became white behind him.

**Catachan System**

**High Orbit over Catachan**

**Mars-class Battlecruiser *Pax Imperium***

**5.504.313M35**

**Adjutant-Colonel Bellona**

“Ha! Ha! It worked! It worked!”

The Mechanicus Archmagos on her screen bowed.

“It is as you said, Adjutant-Colonel. The unconventional attack has resulted in a level of destruction that is not unlike one generated by decades of war, or by the glorious ordnance of the Exterminatus.”

“Radius?” she asked. Professionalism came before gleeful satisfaction.

“The auspexes estimate an imperfect circle of eight kilometres of radius. The mountains on the north and the south of the valley have attenuated the effects of the blast in these two cardinal directions.”

“Excellent! The variant ‘Toad’ has proven extremely effective! Praise the Webmistress!”

“I still recommend to execute it two more times, Adjutant-Colonel.”

“Really?”

“It is probable we missed quite a few Barking Toads of the Devil’s Den valley the first time. And we have produced six BX-T torpedoes in the last few days. A surfeit of prudence will not be a hindrance to the Chosen of the Omnissiah’s plans.”

Bellona thought about the idea for several seconds, concerted with two of her sisters, and decided the point may be overly cautious, but it wasn’t wrong.

“You have my permission to proceed, Archmagos. I give you four more minutes to deploy the pheromones for two more ‘Toad-blasts’, as the Jungle Fighters have already nicknamed them.”

The baby Ogryns were certainly as strong physically as they lacked originality in their naming conventions.

“I leave you to your duties, Archmagos. On my side, I am going to be very busy with Chapter Master Yarhibol and General Schwarz coordinating the first wave. We have our landing zone, and we deploy in twenty minutes!”

“You will have-“

At first, Bellona thought the representative of the Tech-Priests had a problem with his hololithic imagery, for he seemed to have frozen.

But no, everything was working fine on both hands.

So why-

“Adjutant-Colonel,” the red-robed cogboy told her, and his voice was shaken. “We are detecting a lot of energy signatures on Catachan that weren’t here before.”

“By a lot, you mean a few dozens?”

“Three, not four thousand, and they are rising...some are generating more energy than Theta-pattern Imperial cities?”

Bellona froze.

“What?”