This is not a teaser – 29 August 2023

**Tyranny 12-4**

**Ashes of Victory**

*Congratulations, Weaver, you won this campaign.*

*You played a key role in the elimination of Lorgar. By your command, the Armada survivors of the Seventeenth Legion perished.*

*In the ruins of the xenos city, it was your blade which ended the Master of Shadows’ existence.*

*It was your prompt intervention which ensured the Chosen of Tzeentch would not be able to claim enough Transmutational Changestone to do more than secure her chief powerbase.*

*I could continue like this for a long time, but the conquests wait for no one.*

*So let’s end it here and now.*

*You broke the King in Yellow without bothering to raise your sword once.*

*A part of me, the slivers which remain of my mortal self, hate you for that.*

*You watched us bleed and be destroyed, Weaver. By supporting the rise of Anarchy, you and the Anathema guaranteed the Second Battle of the Tyrant Star would be inefficient, cataclysmic, and a loss for every side which committed a fleet to this butchery.*

*But I am mortal no longer.*

*The slaughter you were ready to let us accomplish in order to satisfy your strategic goals...it was impressive.*

*It was* ***War****.*

*Glorious, limitless war.*

*And with a few stones of your own, you changed the course of the battle.*

*You broke the ambitions and the might of the King in Yellow.*

*And you didn’t strike when it was within your ability to kill me.*

*I knew it before, and I am certain of it now as I am knee-deep into the ashes.*

*You won, and with your victories, you gave us the ashes of your triumphs.*

*Again, I give you my congratulations.*

*You will have what you seek in the first place.*

*For a few years, you have earned a lull in the Eternal War.*

*However.*

*Don’t think this is a prelude to this absurdity you call ‘peace’.*

*By killing Lorgar and his Legion of blind fools, you removed a major weakness from the Gods’ order of battle. By breaking the former status quo, you convinced my Master will let me forge a Legion which has the potential to drown thousands of worlds into an ocean of blood. We may yet erect more mountains of skulls than the Twelfth Primarch would ever have built.*

*I am the Red Angel, Weaver.*

*And I know that for all your efforts to avoid it,* ***War*** *is coming again.*

*The Bloodthirsters have smelled it. The Angel’s Bane is preparing for it.*

*You feel it coming too, I think.*

*Not a skirmish, not a vibrant but short inferno like the one you made when you set aflame Commorragh.*

*It won’t be a failed campaign of destruction like the owners of the Ymga Monolith tried.*

*It won’t be a ridiculous and predictable assault made by the Seventeenth Legion.*

*The key players won’t be content to stay idle and play the role of spectators.*

*This time, entire stellar systems will be ravaged.*

*Starforts will fall.*

*Citadels will be sacked and plundered.*

*Armies will perish.*

*Legions will assemble before the storm of darkness.*

*This is why I will raise a Blood Host unlike those which have come before within my new kingdom of the Calyx Hell Stars.*

*This is why you are going to assemble a new Crusade Fleet, one worth of the Great Crusade itself.*

*For we know what is coming, Weaver.*

*The Galaxy is going to burn.*

*You won this campaign, Golden Angel.*

*But a campaign is not the* ***War****.*

**Segmentum Solar**

**Sol System**

**Holy Terra**

**The Imperium Palace**

**The Forgotten Library**

Thought for the day**:** Drink deep of victory, and remember the fallen.

**0.965.311M35**

**Primarch Magnus the Red**

For a few seconds, Magnus lamented at the exact sequence of events which had led him to this moment. At the same time, he had a mission. And this horrible rodent was an obstacle.

“You will not have these shelves to sharpen your teeth, horrible rodent! Return to whatever dimension you came from!”

The ‘Atemporal Beaver’ – that the Custodes had nicknamed for its curious resemblance to the animal of Old Earth – sniffed loudly...and then teleported out of existence.

Magnus breathed out in relief. No battle with this...with the *Atemporal Beaver* today. It was a relief, because this psychic anomaly was incredibly quick, in addition to having an urge to gnaw the shelves and all wooden parts of his father’s library. Forcing it to teleport away when it didn’t want to was the kind of ridiculous quest that took hours to complete.

And no, Magnus didn’t know how the ‘Atemporal Beaver’ was managing to enter and leave the library. Teleportation, psychic or purely technological, did not work here. There were Custodes guarding the only entrance.

Of course, this was not the only strange happening in the library. In no less than four occasions, Magnus had been able to surprise an Adjutant-Spider of Weaver tidying up some shelves and reorganising some book collections. And this despite the minor problem that all the arachnids present on Terra had long left to go back to their mistress’ side.

The number of anomalies running in the library had in fact led him to make the theory that one way or another, these animal manifestations were the companions of the ‘Living Saints’ his father had imbued with his power.

If the theory was correct, the flow of time in this domain of knowledge had been seriously altered, to not say damaged.

It also meant his task to tidy up the entire library was doomed to failure.

But it would take more than a theory to stop him.

He was Magnus the Red of Prospero. He was-

An enormous pile of books, about five metres tall, chose this instant to try to kill him.

Only a Primarch’s reflexes prevented him from being buried under a mountain of books...again.

“Magnus! Magnus! Where are you?”

“I’m here, Leman!”

Two more instable piles chose this moment to thunderously crash.

Magnus sighed.

Had he mentioned that his father was an avid reader, but a horrible library-user who couldn’t return the books where he had taken them?

Well, the Fifteenth Primarch mentioned it now.

“The reconquest of the Imperial Library goes well, I see,” his brother guffawed when he arrived to see what the ‘carnage’ was about.

“Oh, shut up, Leman,” the crimson-skinned Primarch rolled his only eye. “I felt it took me a year or two to clean up the mess you left on the eastern wings where the Gene-Alchemy books were hidden.”

“Magnus, that was three days ago.”

It didn’t look like a joke was played...

“Really?”

“Really.”

Magnus grimaced.

“This would support my theory this library is a time anomaly or has been the target of some sorcery which resulted in it being plagued by time anomalies.”

“An interesting theory,” Leman replied...before shrugging and taking it as an unfortunate of life. Often, Magnus didn’t know if was to be frustrated or relieved by his brother’s ability to let go of his curiosity. “But this isn’t what I came here for. First, I’ve heard news of your sons.”

The total lack of smile or any positive emotions were a good hint the good news were not going to muster in large numbers.

“Ahzek?”

“As the first messages from father suggested, your First Captain sacrificed himself to make sure ten thousand of your sons could escape. The greater abominations of your former slave-master are busy torturing them so they can enslave again the Fifteenth Legion’s survivors.”

Knowing Ahzek...Magnus wasn’t surprised. His exiled son had done exactly what he had done millennia ago.

“If they can escape the Eye of Terror, they have a chance.”

“Yes.” Leman grunted in approval. “And the problem is that this vile mass of malevolent sorcery knows it. Now that the devastating war of the Calyx Hell Stars is over, the majority of the Malfian sorcerers have been committed to hunt them down. Something called the Mirror Cage has apparently been cast.”

Magnus scowled angrily. He had been more than familiar with that cursed ritual...it was really something bad.

“If they are determined and skilled enough...they may be able to escape.”

But it was going to be a harrowing race against Tzeentch and all the Hosts sent in pursuit.

“Yes. And that’s why Inquisitors in the Cadian Sector report an increase of agitators proclaiming some red-armoured and blue-armoured Traitors will be the next assault wave against the Imperium.”

Damn you, Tzeentch...

“Thank you for the unpleasant news. I will just have to hope the patrols the escapees meet doesn’t fire without giving them first the chance to surrender. Any other problems I should be aware of?”

“I am going to leave, Magnus.”

This at least pushed a chuckle out of his lips.

“Punishment time is over for you?”

Leman growled, an amusing sight as always when he was grumpy like this.

“No. It’s just that the Captain-General feels I have to return in time for the Conference which will take place there.”

“Will take place there? Isn’t it already over? I was under the impression it had to take place as fast as the Warp vagaries and delegations’ arrivals allowed. Or do you intend to arrive fashionably late?”

“If everything had gone according to plan, I would have arrived late,” his brother admitted. “Negotiating everything for the repairs of my sons’ naval assets and then the military requirements of transforming each Great Company into a Chapter took more time than I thought, and I had to oversee each of the squadrons leaving for Macragge. In addition to that, I had to be...very vocal about some things in what was the Fenris Sector. This was a big mess, and some of it predated the last war.”

“Ah.” Leman must have really, really hated all of it, as the equivalent of a pile of books, but in the political field, was dropped upon him.

“Yes, ah. Fortunately for me, Weaver was delayed too. Some imbecile of Governor decided that after everything had happened, it was the right time to rebel, and since he controlled a key system in the Eastern Fringe, someone skilled had to teach him the error of his ways. As she was close, the Imperial Guard sent our good Mistress of Spiders.”

“The stupidity of these Imperial Nobles is truly something astounding,” Magnus shook his head, before watching again the book-covered floor in front of him...it was going to take him hours to remove the result of three piles’ collapse, that was sure.

His gaze went further away. Piles after piles of books were waiting for him, a chaotic mess that no sane librarian would have tolerated for long. There were books everywhere. And since there were several levels offering themselves to his eyes from this observation point, Magnus had an excellent view on different sections, which had to contain tens of thousands of books and other works where human authors had distilled their wisdom and their knowledge.

All of it was priceless. Most of them weren’t unique, but they on average could be described as ‘incredibly rare’.

And they were piled up in a library like it was a bazaar of no importance.

Had Magnus mentioned his father was a horrible librarian?

“What is the name of the planet, for the sake of my curiosity?”

“Ichar IV,” his brother answered. “Hive World, important population and industrial centre, not far from the Imperium’s borders in the region.”

“Never heard of it before today,” Magnus honestly said. “But I almost pity the rebels. They really don’t have a clue of the blade about to sever their fingers...”

**Ultima Segmentum**

**Goryeo Sector**

**Ichar System**

**Ichar IV**

**Hive Incheon**

**Holy Basilica of Martyrs**

**4.967.311M35**

**Lord Inquisitor Terran Berlin Chimera**

When Berlin landed, the rebellion was already over.

The Lord Inquisitor Terran couldn’t say he was surprised.

If the shocked expressions of the PDF soldiers now being escorted towards prisoner camps were any indication, the majority of Ichar IV rebels couldn’t say the same.

“Our Acolytes report Supreme Marshal Kim surrendered with close to forty million men when the Baalite Scorpions broke through his command bastion,” Katharina Greyfax told him, her distaste obvious when she uttered the name of the treacherous PDF commander. “Though many of his men had already begun throwing their arms down when the spiders encircled his elite armoured battalions.”

“And Governor Pak?”

“Dead. He apparently decided to take his own life before the Space Marines reached him.”

“Good.” Berlin replied impassively. “I would have preferred this traitor to be executed in public, but the speed this rebellion was crushed and the purge of treacherous elements is an adequate substitute.”

And in the end, the Traitor Governor was dead. Lady Weaver had shown in a clear and non-ambiguous manner that breaking your oaths to His Most Divine Majesty carried fatal consequences for all who tried.

“I almost can’t believe she destroyed this entire rebellion in a single Terran month,” the younger Inquisitor whispered.

“Technically, by the Terran standard, she did it in twenty-six days,” Berlin allowed himself this small touch of humour before frowning, “but I know what you think.”

Ichar IV was so vital in the Sectors of the Eastern Fringe because it was rare: a true Hive World which provided both the manpower and the equipment for several Sectors. It was a key industrial sector, one which provided civilian and military parts for an uncountable number of Imperial souls. It had a population of over three hundred and fifty billion...or so the latest census of the Administratum said. From what he had seen, the Lord Inquisitor was more inclined to think the real number was about four hundred billion.

It was an ugly world, no doubt about it. The skies were filled with acidic smoke, and the hundreds of Hives were visible from orbit, separated by the desert that many centuries of endless exploitation had made. Rebellion had added battle-scars to the problem, of course.

A world like Ichar IV, with the sheer defences it was able to maintain, the endless amount of manpower at its disposal, and the gigantic Hive-fortresses themselves, could hold on for centuries if you couldn’t starve it out. And even if you did starve it, what waited you was still a ferocious amount of fighting.

The rebellion of such an important world ending in days bordered on the miraculous...which to be fair, was exactly what had happened.

As their footsteps led them to the entrance of the Basilica, the flow of captured soldiers faded before vanishing entirely, replaced soon by the more familiar sight of red power armours and silver banners.

The Templar Sororitas were patrolling, escorting tank-sized spiders...unless it was the contrary, and the giant arachnids escorted the female warriors of the Ecclesiarchy.

“But it is the Lord Inquisitor!” One of the eight-legged insects immediately rushed forwards. “I presume you want to meet the Webmistress?”

“I do.”

The next minutes were spent confirming Katharina and himself were indeed who they claimed to be, being politely escorted from checkpoint to checkpoint inside the Basilica. While at first it was the Templar Sororitas who did the screening, the troops slowly began to include more and more guardsmen, with many armours and banners belonging to regiments of the Nyx Sector.

A few minutes later, it was their turn to be scarcer on the ground, though the Fay guardsmen remained...but now they were accompanied by Space Marines.

It took fifteen more minutes and an adventure into a maze of narrow corridors, but Berlin Chimera soon arrived into one of the vast halls of the Basilica. The Lord Inquisitor could immediately say he didn’t like the decoration.

It was...obscenely outrageous, decadent, and gaudy...everything looked like the decorators had decided to add more and more wealth until they decided it could be some ‘artwork’.

“Disgusting,” Katharina said out loud.

“I am in the mood to raze the Basilica, personally. It is an insult to the God-Emperor,” an amused voice answered.

The Living Saint was waiting for them, seated on a rather monastic wooden bench. As the neighbouring objects were covered in precious metals, incredibly expensive neo-leather and all sort of luxury items, finding this one must have been difficult.

There were many spiders and Space Marines around her, though an honour guard of guardsmen and sisters leaned against the walls, ready to intervene should she give the order.

“Razing the Basilica? Really?”

The black-haired agent of the God-Emperor huffed.

“Governor Pak was so humble most of the statues supposed to represent the God-Emperor have his face on them.”

“These are statues which are supposed to represent the God-Emperor?” Katharina Greyfax said aghast. “I thought they were gargoyles!”

The Victor of Macragge coughed violently...as did several Space Marines. Other people cleared their throats.

“Anyway, the rebellion is over, what is left is to find the last supporters of the defunct Governor. A new Governor will be named soon, and Ichar IV will once again be a loyal and prosperous world of the Imperium.”

“You are the planetary commander in charge of crushing the rebellion,” Berlin Chimera answered. “Since you discharged your duties in such an excellent fashion, I see no reason to change anything you have decided so far.”

“Thank you for the confidence,” the Living Saint smiled, “of course, since you’ve done this no doubt long journey to meet me again, I don’t think you came here just to say ‘well done’.”

“I didn’t,” Berlin admitted easily. “It is about...our mutual friends which played a decisive role in a recent critical affair. They reported success, but so far, they are really, really tight-lipped on the details. And the post-battle report has yet to be written.”

“I understand. Gamaliel, Gavreel, you stay. Everyone else, leave us.”

The hall of the Basilica emptied rather fast, all things considered. Berlin knew that on Terra, this celerity would have never happened. The military forces of Weaver were efficient...and dedicated to their Lady, one could easily see the protectiveness in their eyes.

Once the golden doors closed, the star-eyed Angel didn’t waste any time.

“We were extremely lucky the King in Yellow’s plans were discovered too soon, forcing this hellish bag of bones to bet everything on a single cataclysmic battle.”

Cataclysmic was truly accurate. The Inquisition had seen what was left of the Granithor System. It was nothing more than ruined planet after ruined planet, and debris clouds after debris clouds.

Berlin would love to say it was a graveyard, but all the corpses had been burned, ground to dust, or cast away by sorcery.

“We were. Yet the danger is not completely over. And other threats have been created by this battle.”

“Yes. I would have preferred for there to be no Red Angel at all...or saving that, for the Traitor Primarch to keep its title.”

“But you didn’t kill her.” On that, the Grey Knights had not been tight-lipped. They had also told him it was necessary...but had stopped short of a true explanation.

“Someone had to destroy the ambitions of the King in Yellow,” the golden-armoured servant of the God-Emperor said with her eyes closed, “and it couldn’t be me. It couldn’t be any loyal Primarch, or anyone with a loyal soul. The risks were too great, our...friends of Titan...were very clear about that. That left two outcomes: either I let a second Red Angel rise, or it was her rival the sorceress who emerged the great victor. The latter option was judged to be far worse than the former.”

There were a few seconds of silence...and then the ruler of the Nyx Sector began to calmly give a retelling of the Exterminatus-level battle which had decided the fate of the Calyx Hell Stars.

It was a tale of horrors and abominations.

It was a tale of evil against evil, with the Imperium giving only nudges here and there to make sure the King in Yellow didn’t achieve his unholy ambitions.

It was a warning the Ruinous Powers, disunited and weakened for now, still represented the greatest moral and spiritual threat when it came to the Imperium’s survival.

“They will come back.”

“Yes. They are chest-deep in the ashes of their so-called victory, with the Calyx Hell Stars only a fraction of the kingdom they hoped to conquer...and most of the survivors had to retreat in catastrophe to the Eye of Terror to save their skins. But they’ve learned. They will return. And this time, they won’t do it the stupid way like the Traitor Seventeenth did.”

“Agreed. How soon do you intend to return to Macragge?”

**Ultima Segmentum**

**Realm of Ultramar**

**Macragge System**

**Macragge**

**Magna Macragge Civitas**

**The Latium Plaza**

**2.200.312M35**

**Chapter Master Aeonid Thiel**

“The tales about Macragge regularly praise its beauty. They don’t mention the cold, though.”

Aeonid smiled at the words of High Marshal Barbarossa.

“Our winters, as some of my predecessors said, are excellent to forge the heart and the courage of a true Ultramarine.”

“No true Space Marine will disagree,” the Chapter Master of the Black Templars assured him. “Though I think a few of Her Celestial Highness’ spiders and insects might.”

This time, the Ultramarine veteran had to control himself to not laugh.

The Adjutant-Spiders and the various insect species present in Magna Macragge Civitas had answered the call, of course...but they had come with a lot of blankets, furs, and winter clothes they had somehow managed to acquire. One could say a lot of things about Weaver’s servants, but they were quite resourceful.

A resourcefulness which apparently applied to their willingness to avoid the cold too. Their highest and biggest ‘emissary of the Swarm’, Lisa, had gone even further and ordered the arachnid auxiliaries to transport her to Laphis...and her ‘insistence’ had been crowned with success.

“No military force can be eager to fight in every weather condition this galaxy can throw at us,” Heinrich Barbarossa stated philosophically. “And I will admit, without our Power Armours, the waiting period would likely not pleasant for us. Her Celestial Highness’ campaign of Ichar IV unfortunately made sure the Bacta Conference will take place in the middle of winter.”

“It’s not as bad as it could have been, since we are welcoming only a warrior or two per Chapter, save a few exceptions,” Aeonid reminded the son of Dorn. The Black Templars, of course, were among them, as there had to be around four hundred Astartes of them here. They had just finished an Ork purge, tracking the remnants of the greenskins which had survived Stalingrad, annihilating their shipyards and their secondary bases. “And it gave Lord Russ the time to return.”

Heinrich Barbarossa grumbled.

Aeonid smiled again.

There had been more and more ships of the Wolves arriving around Ardium...no, Nova Fenrisia, he was going to have to take the habit. There were hundreds of Astartes who could boast descending from the Great Wolf, and unfortunately, the Black Templars were not exactly looking at them with a pleased eye. The customs and ways of life of the sons of Russ weren’t exactly anathema to the religious credo of Sigismund’s swords, but the cultural clash was definitely important.

“And Her Celestial Highness didn’t ‘say why she ‘requested’ so many of us to be present today?” The High Marshal asked for the tenth time.

“No,” Aeonid replied patiently. “She didn’t say.”

Aeonid, however, could make an educated guess. While all the Chapters the Lady of Nyx was aware of had received an invitation to attend the Bacta Conference, the Imperial Fists had received a private request to attend in Company numbers, and so had the White Scars. And there had been certain events at Commorragh...

But he wasn’t going to spoil the surprise, assuming he had guessed correctly.

The next minutes were spent in relative silence, before at last, the roars of aerial engines was heard.

Unsurprisingly, several Thunderhawks and Guard Landers disgorged first a consequent Honour Guard, which went to stand by the side of the hundreds of Astartes already present. The second wave included the red-clad Sororitas, with some jumping hundreds of metres high and activating their jump packs to finish the descent.

After that, there were many enormous beetles, all of them presenting a shade of blue-white. They certainly were a new asset to deploy in winter conditions.

And finally, the core of the Dawnbreaker Guard landed, and the Light of the Emperor shone again on Macragge.

Out of the golden-painted Thunderhawk – the paint and all the decorations looked brand-new, Aeonid noted – Lady General Militant Taylor Hebert, Lady of the Nyx Sector, Destroyer of Commorragh, Saviour of Macragge, and many other titles that would take a full day to recite, walked out and breathed out the freezing air of Macragge.

The sound made when hundreds of Space Marines struck their fists in salute felt like it resonated over and over from the streets of Macragge Magna Civitas to the highest peaks of their Mountain World.

And then after a couple of steps, Lady Weaver sidestepped to the right and paused.

Aeonid stopped breathing, all the while he listened to murmurs of surprise.

And then one of the other Thunderhawks which had landed opened, and a giant came out.

The Ultramarine Chapter Master recognised him, of course.

There were far more scars on his face than there had been the last time, and a lot more flesh looked like it had been recently healed, but the presence was unmistakably the same.

“FOR THE KHAN AND THE EMPEROR!”

The White Scars had been caught by surprised, but only for an instant. Now they were raising their fists and roared their battle-cry.

The enthusiasm was...contagious. Soon enough most of the Space Marines here were proclaiming their joy, striking their fists against their armour...or outright taking mugs filled with some alcoholic beverage proposed by the Adjutant-Spiders, in the case of the sons of Russ.

Jaghatai Khan, returned from the dead, tried to speak, but no matter how healed he had been, his voice was evidently a bit too weak...and the ruckus the Space Marines and all the troops were making on the Latium Plaza was simply too much for anyone to be heard.

“I admit,” High Marshal Barbarossa shouted next to him to be heard, “that the request was well-deserved-“

The words of Sigismund’s spiritual successor died in his mouth, for another giant came out of the same Thunderhawk.

But this one wasn’t in a white armour painted according to the traditions of Chogoris and respecting the traditions of the steppes. It was not a flowing sensation making you believe the owner was going to ride the winds themselves.

No, the new Primarch was in a magnificent and indomitable golden armour, standing like a rock...or a wall. He was like a fortress, an elemental force which would not get out of the way if a hurricane slammed into him.

“DORN LIVES!”

The Imperial Fists stopped gaping first, while the Black Templars were still in shock and most of the Seventh Legion’s Successors were still trying to shake themselves out of their stupor. “DORN LIVES!”

The sons of Vulkan were perhaps going to be a bit miffed their battle-cry had been so shamelessly copied...

Aeonid turned his head...

Nah, they were already beginning to party with the rest of the Astartes Companies assembled here.

“For a surprise, it’s a surprise.” Aeonid gave a sardonic grin to the Living Saint as the discipline of the parade broke up, the sons of Jaghatai and Dorn unable to stand in line for a single second longer.

“My latest message did say I would not come empty-handed to this Conference.” The mischievousness was definitely not the fruit of his imagination here and now. “And besides, everyone tries the game of ‘let’s surprise Weaver’. I thought I could turn the tables, just for today.”

“I have to say...you did.” Aeonid cleared his throat. “I hope you have brought a lot of supplies, because I think the celebration-parties are going to last a long time tonight.”

“I did...though I will say you’re very optimistic, thinking certain Astartes will stop feasting and partying in less than twenty-four hours.”

It was...an incredible accurate statement, and the future would confirm it.

**Fortress of Hera**

**Library of Ptolemy**

**2.209.312M35**

**Lady General Militant Taylor Hebert**

“I was told the wolfish sons of my brother were horribly disappointed your spiders filled their mugs with a non-alcoholic beverage.”

Taylor decided an innocent expression was the best gamble before Guilliman’s gaze.

Which had gained some strength, since they had seen each other in the last time. Obviously, there hadn’t been time to test on him the same medicines her Hospitallers and Magi Biologis had tested on the Khan, but the Lord of the Ultramarines was looking far better than he did when she left Macragge the last time.

This had resulted in him being ‘only’ having his Power Armour today.

It was still a little weird, for the library around them was an oasis of calm and peace, isolated from the outside galaxy, with no chance to hear the multiple fireworks being launched or the other celebrations happening.

“My spiders thought, with my express approval, that the hot chocolate we recently began to brew would be perfect for the freezing conditions we’re ‘enjoying’ on Macragge.”

“Hmm...and where did you find this delicacy?”

“It was part of a batch of plants that were supposed to be all giving medicinal supplies, but with the quirk that outside of the world, said plants couldn’t be cultivated without turning toxic for human life.” Taylor shrugged. “In the case of the cocoa plant, which gives us chocolate in the end, I think the nobles were simply too selfish to share with others their favourite delicacies.”

“I see.” Roboute Guilliman nodded. “But when Russ-“

Loud footsteps echoed, as if an army of giants was on the march in the library...which was somewhat accurate, when you thought about it.

One by one, the Primarchs arrived and took their seats around the round table which had been there for countless centuries.

Taylor knew diplomacy wasn’t her strong point...but given the large missing intervals, she could easily guess this table had been meant for twenty Primarch-sized seats once upon a time.

There were only ten of them today, and three were several metres away from the table, all draped in austere shrouds of black.

Sanguinius, Hanzo Hattori, and Ferrus Manus had perished, and unless the Emperor was somehow able to resurrect them, they would never set foot upon Macraggian soil ever again.

There was another large seat, one which was almost disappearing under the columns of books placed upon it. This felt like a joke at the expense of the Thousand Sons’ Primarch, and the insect-mistress decided, wisely in her opinion, to not comment about it.

Her own seat around the table was a new addition, obviously. A bit higher, and she would have to use her wings...and it wasn’t a joke.

Fine, it was a joke, Guilliman hadn’t created a table and chairs *that* high.

The result, ultimately, was a table where the chair to her immediate right was empty, as the Salamander seat remained unoccupied and would stay that way today.

And to Guilliman’s left, the same was true for the seating arrangement which had been reserved to Lion El’Jonson, Primarch of the Dark Angels.

It was Jaghatai Khan who opened the meeting. As always, Taylor did her best not to stare. No matter how many scars she had removed, it always felt astounding the Fifth Primarch had managed to survive the tortures of the Drukhari in the murder-arenas of the Webway.

“Hanzo stayed loyal, and I went to pay him my respects. May his memory be preserved for all the sacrifices his son and him did.”

One by one, the Primarchs and Taylor repeated the words, followed by the Space Marines chosen to be their security detail here.

“But while our brother stayed loyal and true, only being forgotten due to the abominable consequences of his defeat, the same can’t be said about someone else. *Nagash* is back.”

The name was uttered like an insult...and to be fair, it was perfectly justified. There wasn’t any power behind it. The Veil between the realities didn’t shiver. There were no dark omens to make the ground shake.

And yet, the name tasted like poison.

Taylor cleared her throat.

“He’s going to be a problem in the years to come.” The Lady of Nyx admitted honestly. “But we can’t exactly hunt him and slay him like he deserves. Unless I am reading it badly, the King in Yellow abandoned the demonic sword he had stolen and many other prizes before fleeing so he could not be tracked by conventional or sorcerous means.”

“There are other ways,” Leman Russ bared his teeth, “to hunt someone.”

And Taylor didn’t want to learn of them, for her peace of mind if nothing else.

“Perhaps,” the golden-winged Lady General Militant conceded. “But I am very wary about the idea of cornering someone that managed to bleed and cripple between seventy and eighty percent of the forces the Ruinous Powers arrayed against him. Yes, he lost most of his forces in the process. But most of them were built with expendable skeletons. Those he will rebuild easily.”

The galaxy, alas, had hardly a shortage of ancient battlefields where millions of skeletons could be collected.

“I agree with Lady Weaver here,” Corvus Corax had arrived during the party...when exactly, she couldn’t say. Today he had chosen to attend in a very simple black toga with the silver raven of the Raven Guard for sole ornamentation. “The traitor has fled somewhere he will feel safe to plot and regain his strength. Cornering him there could lead to a great victory, but more likely it will result in the forces committed trapped and killed, before being raised to serve in death when they refused to serve in life. And let’s not forget that while some of his Space Marines were permanently dealt with, some of his lieutenants were dispersed, not eliminated.”

“The theoretical is still we will have to face the King in Yellow once more,” Guilliman said at last, before looking at her. “Unless the other Traitors will do us a favour and get rid us of him while we watch the spectacle?”

Taylor shook her head regretfully.

“I would love to believe they can, and the Four Ruinous Powers and their slaves have certainly the motivation. Alas, I don’t believe it prudent to base any plan on their ability to do it. I must note that the Traitors needed several times indirect assistance to prevent the rise of the King in Yellow as an ungodly abomination of Eternity. They could have failed. Wisdom suggests we prepare for the worst: that they will fail to stop the undead Lord...or that they won’t bother, if his next plan doesn’t threaten Chaos directly.”

“Then I will lead the Extermination Force the next time,” Leman Russ growled. “He managed to trick me once, I will make sure he won’t walk out of the second engagement.”

“I advise you,” Rogal Dorn spoke, his tone akin to a block of granite being granted sentience, “to not make the mistake to think Nagash will be the same opponent as before. While he is not Magnus, his sorcery and his vicious schemes make him incredibly redoubtable.”

“I will bring the Anathema Psykana with me, brother. I am eager to sever his skeletal head from the rest of his bones; I am not going to do it in a stupid way.”

“Good.” The Primarch of the Imperial Fists said bluntly.

“Or not so good, given the old and new enemies we’re now facing,” Jaghatai Khan of Chogoris commented with a slight smile. “The Tyranid. The Necrons. It seems we were really optimistic at the Triumph of Ullanor saying we would not fight against anything more dangerous than the Rangdan and the Orks.”

“We were extremely lucky,” Dorn told them, as always in a voice devoid of nonsense. “If the Necron Dynasties had risen up in large numbers while the Legions were busy with the Orks, be it during the last years of the thirtieth millennium or the War of the Beast, the Imperium would have lost extremely badly.”

“You are right,” Corax approved. “And let’s not speak of the devouring the Tyranids could have done while we were distracted by Horus’ treachery or some other conflict.”

“The Eastern Fringe would have fallen,” Roboute Guilliman declared, “and then they would have launched their attacks deep inside Ultima Segmentum, opening a war on a thousand fronts.”

Assuming the Great Devourer didn’t try to bypass all their major strongholds and rush towards Terra for a decisive battle, of course...Taylor winced internally. Still, it was better to not overestimate the enemy, so far the Tyranids didn’t show macro-strategy on a galactic scale, or a skill to make traps involving thousands of fleets dispersed across a hundred thousand light-years.

“This is why I defend the idea we must remove the poisons that are slowly but surely killing the Imperium from the inside.” Taylor began to develop her point of view. “My new economic advisor gave me a long and detailed financial analysis of the Imperium in general terms, and the reality is that Terra is bleeding us dry. It is a black hole in terms of food, military firepower, and so many things I can’t possibly count them in a single meeting. At the same time, the Imperium has to guard the frontiers of the Eye of Terror, the Maelstrom, and maintain its vigilance on other quarantined zones. No matter how many Battles of Macragge we win, we’re slowly reaching the limits of the Imperium’s logistical abilities when it comes to wage war against a greater threat.”

“And what kind of military operation would you have in mind, if the means were available?” Corax asked her politely.

“The Maelstrom,” the stars-filled-eyed parahuman replied. “I want to close the Maelstrom, and erase the threat it represents to the trade and military logistical lines of the Imperium forever.”