**Teaser 09/11/2019**

*It is incredibly ironic in hindsight that until I was twelve, the name of Taylor Hebert meant nothing to me.*

*Oh, I knew the name of Weaver, Saint of the Emperor. I may not have gone to the church every day, but I attended enough sermons to know the name of all the Great Living Saints.*

*But on Donia, our saint patron is Saint Sabbat. The Saint of Nyx is venerated and has over sixty churches under Her protection, but it is the Angel of Healing who is the most respected holy figure. Thus Saint Sabbat has given her name to the great cathedral of Pella.*

*Logically, my first military lectures were oriented by the culture of my homeworld. At age ten, I had read the first three tomes of the* Memories of theHagia Crusade *written by Lord General Faltornus.*

*It was pure luck and the Emperor’s Will I had the opportunity to read a sixth edition-text of the* Requiem for the Pirates*. My father received a delegation of Templar Sororitas, and one way or another, my interest in past exploits of the Living Saints was mentioned. Now, the Order of the Silver Rose had few books or information available about Saint Sabbat save some known-to-all data-banks on the Conclave of Saints. On the other hand, the Templar Sisters had many, many books and reports on Saint Weaver. She is after all their Patron and their Founder.*

*As soon as I finished the Requiem masterwork, I knew I wanted to read everything about the woman who led the Imperial Guard and the Imperium forces from triumphs to triumphs.*

*My childish desires weren’t satisfied immediately, of course. Son of a Planetary Governor or not, I had nowhere near the clearance level to read more than the public texts the Order of the Silver Rose authorises non-members to study and copy.*

*Ultimately, it was on my twenty-fourth birthday and my promotion to full General I was offered by Mordian General Houston a copy of* The Fires of Operation Caribbean*. To say this was an illuminating read was greatly understating the truth. Being older and wiser, I could understand far better the logistic difficulties in mustering an Army Group and the issues which come with the command of a coalition of disparate commands. I also had a far better idea why many victories of the Saints are treated as miraculous.*

*The Basileia-Saint was not the first General or Admiral to make methodical preparations before launching a military campaign. She hadn’t the monopoly of ruthlessness, nor was she an exception in her capacities of improvisation, her charisma or her skills to surround herself with talented subordinates. But the Lady of Nyx had all of that and absolutely no compunction to ignore the opinions of the slow and rusty Adeptus Administratum. A will of adamantium saw an obscure young man ignored by the Imperial Navy in charge of a plan involving millions of men because Weaver believed in him and imperturbably absorbed the critics.*

*We know what happened next. Operation Caribbean and the two battles waged within its cadre are still written carved in golden letters within the Hall of Victories and one single banner was transported in front of the Eternity Gate where, as far as I am aware, it remains to this day.*

*From an overall perspective, the tactics and strategies favoured by Lady Taylor Hebert, Saint of the God-Emperor, Heiress to Sanguinius’ Legacy and Star Marshal of the Imperial Guard seem to lack the elegance and the cleverness of Saint Sabbat’s moves.*

*But as I often remark to my Generals, when you have a swarm, an army and the Emperor’s Grace, victory is often all that matters.*

*And at this game, Lady Weaver rarely loses.*

Extract from *Of Saints and Campaigns* by Star Marshal Alexander Macharius, 670M41.

**Ultima Segmentum**

**Nyx Sector**

**Neptunia Reach Sub-Sector**

**Nyx System**

**Nyx III**

**Hive Athena**

**7.448.295M35**

Thought for the day: Carry the Emperor’s will as your torch, with it destroy the shadows.

**Sergeant Gavreel Forcas**

It was always a pleasure to watch the Basileia say ‘no’ to a crowd of Munitorum, Administratum, Navy parasites.

They squealed. They protested. They shouted. They agitated with massive scrolls and hololithic devices the symbols of their authority.

The second ‘no’ forced them to stay silent for about ten seconds.

They protested again. Obese bureaucrats who had never commanded anything bigger than a scribe room suddenly pretended to have the strategic wisdom of a high-ranked Guard officer.

The third ‘no’, supported by a threatening sound of over six hundred insects, finally achieved what Gavreel had thought impossible: the useless delegation wised up, hundreds of arrogant mouths closed, and in the next ten minutes the throne room where the council had taken place was emptied of the incompetents and the imbeciles.

It didn’t leave a lot of people. Save the Dawnbreaker Guard and the bodyguards leaning against the walls, the participants were limited to the young Wolfgang Bach, six younger men and women who served in the Caribbean General Staff – none of them above the rank of Lieutenant – and of course Lady Taylor Hebert herself.

And it was her voice which broke the silence who had accompanied the outraged dismissal of the bureaucrats and the armchair Generals.

“I think we will keep our Guard and Navy staff as it currently stands, Wolfgang.”

The elite starfighter pilot nodded. Sign of how serious the situation was, there no sign of his usual good humour in his expression.

“I can’t say it is a bad situation, my Lady.” The First Naval Secretary grimaced. “Still, I would have preferred we had some additional experienced personnel. Your staff, whether we’re speaking of the ground or the naval affairs, is going to be terribly young. They won’t be without experience, hundreds have fought the Battle of the Death Star or gained experience fighting the greenskins in the neighbouring Sectors in the last years, but I would have preferred adding some senior commanders to the trained cadre we have here.”

“It was a good idea.” Coming from the mistress of insects, this was high praise because Weaver was not shy pointing the flaws of someone’s reasoning. “But like the high-ranked officers we have not yet received, I think a General Staff for Operation Caribbean is only useful if we have dedicated and competent women and men to give sound advice and propose the commanders of each branch realistic options. If I listened to these grox-bureaucrats...let’s agree it would be better not to launch Operation Caribbean at all.”

Wolfgang slightly inclined his head to show these words were not presenting an opinion he hadn’t thought at least a few hundred times.

“Still...I must thank you for the unconditional support, my Lady.”

“Wolfgang.” The voice had no effect whatsoever on Gavreel, but he was hearing it every week and it took a lot to impress a Space Marine. But as he saw the charismatic consequences on the First Naval Secretary, the former Dark Angel Legionary acknowledged that in five years, the young woman had mastered the ‘imperious Basileia’ role nearly perfectly. “Unlike too many Navy officers, you give me a lot of space fighting-expertise, you don’t lie to me and except for your jokes with Dennis, you don’t waste my time.”

The Lady of Nyx shrugged in a gesture which managed to remind everyone in the room she was very much a human of flesh and blood.

“As long as you continue to serve in an excellent manner, my support will continue. Don’t give me a reason to change this.”

Even with his limited experience on the battlefields of the 35th millennium, Gavreel knew this was a very ‘innovative’ view to do things in the Imperium, and it didn’t matter if the one speaking was a General of the Imperial Guard, a Sector Lord governing a hundred planets or a popular figure. Too often politics drowned every other concern and recently two Sectors away several defeated Generals had been on the receiving end of several court-martials that had been more purges and scapegoat-hunting than a true accounting of the campaign’s failures.

“But we have lost enough time listening to the ‘advice’ of these ‘councillors’.” The disgust was palpable in her tone. Gavreel would not be surprised if the majority of these men and women who had just left were encouraged to leave Nyx in a few days and never return without a very pressing return. “Was there any particular important point left to debate upon?”

The de jure Rogue Trader watched at his data-slate for a couple of heartbeats before shaking his head.

“There a few precisions I want, now that we have renamed the battle-plan War Plan Leyte Gulf.”

Taylor Hebert groaned theatrically. For some reason, the Basileia had been really disappointed at the idea she couldn’t made official ‘Plan Collateral Damage’. Though frankly, it was a bit childish in this instance. The replacement name, initially introduced by Minister of Industry Dragon Richter, was far better in his opinion, and all the Dawnbreaker Guard had agreed with him once they were explained the context.

“Precisions?”

“Yes, I know the existing plan takes great care to limit the number of Rashan casualties for...technological and propaganda reasons. And yes, I know there will be a large amount of chance to factor into the first hours of battle. The pirate fleets we slaughter in the first salvoes won’t have the time to do anything save die. But when I studied the means to increase the demoralising power of the first attack, I had an idea that could make everything worse for the pirates.”

Gavreel had to admit, the young man was *good*. Most of the people in the throne room, and yes, it was including a lot of Space Marines, were openly smiling. Why Kar Duniash had ever thought it was a good idea to tell him ‘we have found no ship for you to serve’ with his incredible skills, the member of the Dawnbreaker had few motives that didn’t fall in the category ‘there are arrogant and inbred nobles’.

“And that idea is?” the parahuman asked.

“Why not sow dissension a bit in their ranks?” Wolfgang’s words were shaped like a funny question, but in his eyes the unyielding metal was strong. “When we will have finished hammering their defences in about seven or eight hours, the pirates will have lost something between three and five fleets. I don’t care if they are xenos or humans, their confidence will be shot to the Warp and back. All these scum and traitors will look at each other and watch for the first sign of retreat. If the sub-plans involving the Rashan are successful, we will break their confidence further.”

“We want them to instigate a pirate civil war before they have the opportunity to mount an effective counter-attack,” there was an almost appreciative tonality in the deduction of the Basileia.

“I do.” Wolfgang confirmed. “That’s why I wanted to ask if there’s one or two pirates you’re willing to spare. If one fleet commander betrays the others because we offer him lenient terms, it will be like agitating a battle in sight of greenskins. They will be disorganised, furious...and ready to do anything to avoid the guns pointed to their heads.”

This time, it was the turn of the Sector Lady to show her contrariety.

“You ask me a lot, Wolfgang. I have already spent many, many meetings with the Tech-Priests convincing them the ‘Rashan issue’ must not be solved by genocide.”

“I know, my Lady. But I would not ask you if I didn’t believe it was important.”

“You’re right about that,” Gavreel had no idea if the muttering was supposed to be heard by everyone, but the throne room and the dispersed sound devices made sure the voice of the mistress of Hive Athena could not be misunderstood.

The commander of Army group Caribbean stayed thoughtful and immobile for a couple of minutes. Based on his intuition and his knowledge of the woman he was guarding, it was likely there were many spiders and large insects re-reading top-secret reports somewhere in the Spire.

“I won’t spare the human pirates.” Weaver mercilessly announced and it was something Gavreel could tell she would not change her opinion about. “They are exactly the sort of scum we must wipe out from this galaxy, and even if I was inclined to spare one, they are more useful dead than alive. Jaeger is a Navy deserter, the Administratum is really, really eager to kill Kalmar. The Abbess-Crusader has confided to me most of warships’ reinforcements are there because the elimination of Hoth is a holy deed for many Cardinals. And Tanaka is hardly proper redemption material. They all must die.”

Her minister winced.

“That rather limits the range of my options. The Ork and the Sheed can’t be trusted and their...volatile behaviours are everything the Imperium hates in xenos. They must be eliminated with extreme prejudice. Moonblitz and Bloodweaver are out of the question. The Kroot is a man-eater and will break his word before ten days have passed...”

“Prepare your ‘sowing discord tactic’ for the Eldar ‘King of Ransoms’ and the Siren,” Weaver said with reluctance. “They’re the only two great bounties I can stomach not collecting if we’re excluding the Rashan Calico from the list.”

A spider landed in her hand and in three or four seconds created a purple glove of silk with an inhuman dexterity. The ‘ameliorations’ of the Biologis labs had been put into effect, it seemed.

“As for lenient terms, I see no need to be overly gentle. Assuming one pirate accepts our terms of surrender, we will safeguard the lives and the physical health of these xenos, but they will have to return all the goods and loot they stole from Imperial citizens and organisations. A wealthy pirate who escapes Pavia may seek revenge in a few years or decades. A poor pirate will be more concerned with the day-to-day survival of his fleet, feeding his crew and reimbursing his debts to bother the Nyx Sector.

“I see no problem with this,” the young blonde-haired man replied. “It is going to be a bit difficult to have a full holo-pict of exactly what exactly these two pirates might have stolen during their lengthy careers, but I think I can divert a SDF Archivist group to look at it for a few months.”

“Please do this. However, I must warn you I will inform some of the upper commanders of this sub-strategy in our plans. And if I face massive opposition from them, I will be forced to cancel the move. As I said before, the ‘Rashan issue’ takes priority, I know for example the Inquisition and a few other organisations really want to capture the Siren for their own purposes. You can return to your duties.”

Wolfgang Bach bowed and marched out the room. Gavreel was honestly a bit surprised by the suddenness of the dismissal, especially as there were no urgent meetings behind. Taylor Hebert enjoyed discussing some of her political ideas and reforms with the members of her government, and before breakfast today had mentioned there were some things she wanted to pick his brains for. This was not...

“Gavreel. Remind me what we know of this Officio Assassinorum public disaster of last year.”

Astartes had impressive memories and were able to adapt to every circumstance, but this time the black-armoured Astartes needed three seconds to present a full report.

“There is not much to say, I’m afraid. The Heracles Wardens have done a lot of searches, and they think there were two shape-shifter Assassins in the first place. One was on a Ferraci cruiser crippled by a surprise strike of the Brothers of the Red, but the bridge received a lance strike in the first salvo and was a total loss. Chapter Master Isley had to requisition many Tech-Priests, and even then if I recall the study of the partially intact cogitators only gave a fifty percent likelihood of a Callidus presence aboard the *Uranus’ Dominion*.”

It was galling to admit, but no one had seen the need to investigate the events on the bridge of these treacherous mutants. The Ferraci had rapidly abandoned their vendetta-raids when they realised hunting House Achelieux was likely to put them into conflict with the Adeptus Astartes and the local Sector authorities.

“The second incident was far more documented, since it happened in the middle of a spaceport, but Veteran Battle-Brother Sowell had previous experiences with the Officio Assassinorum, and his first reaction was to...neutralise permanently the threat, which was done quickly and efficiently.”

The vid-cast had been sighted billions of times across Nyx and Sowell had been a very popular figure for a few months. In hindsight though, this had been nothing more than execution. The Assassin was obviously a novice, and Sowell was a very, very dangerous veteran of the Heracles Wardens who had supervised infiltration training sessions.

And so everyone had more questions than answers, for after a few seconds the insides of the Assassin had dissolved into goo, rendering any post-mortem analysis a complete impossibility.

“The Inquisition was very tight-lipped as usual,” the former Legionary continued. “They were unwilling or unable to tell us who was the prime target of the Assassinorum, and the best we had was the vague hint there may be one or more Assassins on their way. And we already knew that, because the Heracles Wardens’ experiences have many instances of the executors of the High Lords sending multiple agents to end a life.”

Weaver stood from her golden throne with a sardonic smile.

“Well, the Wardens were definitely right about the last part. Call Isley or whoever he left in command if he’s away in patrol. My Catachan ants and my spiders have caught a third assassin trying to stab them approximately two hundred metres below our feet.”

This was...not good. Granted these shape-shifter killers were always a monumental headache to intercept, but it was still far too close for comfort.

“Reinforce the security and raise the alert to Black!” Gavreel instinctively barked. “Is the Assassin neutralised?”

The insect-mistress chuckled.

“Yes, I think you can say that.” The smile turned vindictive. “I have disarmed her, removed all the suicide implants I could find and coated her in so much spider silk she will never able to move. Oh, and she is hanged by the feet above a spider’s lair.”

Gavreel had a brief moment of pity for the unfortunate Assassinorum agent.

Someone else was going to suffer from arachnophobia tonight.