**Muster 6.2**

**Pirates and Assassins**

*While uncountable heroes and heroines received the praise and the honour they deserved after the official end of Operation Caribbean, a key figure which often tends to be forgotten is Magos-Draco Dragon Richter, Minister of Industry for the Lady Basileia of Nyx.*

*No one of course can doubt that the General-Saint was both the beating heart and the leadership of the offensive against the lair of pirates known as the Pavia System.*

*But without Dragon Richter, the Army Group mustering between 292 and 295M35 would have experienced far more supply difficulties and in all likelihood, its vehicle and armour effectives would have been far smaller.*

*The Imperial Guard had one million four hundred and thirty-one thousand frontline guardsmen assembled in one hundred forty-four regiments. Aside from the hundreds of thousand carapace armour, the medi-packs, the vox-casters, the Larkine lasguns and thousands of other weapons and objects necessary to keep men and women in fighting condition, the Mechanicus chains of production across the Sector delivered fifty-three thousand eight hundred and twenty-six artillery pieces.*

*This number, already far larger than certain Guard forces ever achieved to requisition over several years of campaign, was made even more impressive by the wide-scale effort of unification imposed by the Magos-Draco. By 294M35, Army Group Caribbean had only six types of artillery pieces in its arsenal: Basilisk, Hydra, Medusa, Griffon and Manticore. On average, there were no more than three different patterns which could be found in the three field armies. Delivery errors and artillery shells’ issues were divided by six and none of the disasters reported in previous wars against the greenskins occurred again.*

*The artillery regiments were not the exception, but the rule. Armoured regiments discarded their second-rate tanks and the obsolete rear-line equipment. Contrary to rumours that the Jaghatai Battle-Tank was introduced in mass from the get-go, this wasn’t the case. The tank drivers and gunners received thousands of brand-new Leman Russ Battle-Tanks. The Cataphracts, the Khan Battle-Tanks, and the Hellhounds were assigned to elite dedicated regiments. Overall, the official declassified documents report twenty-one thousand one hundred and fifty-three tanks transferred to Army Group Caribbean, with more than ninety percent Leman Russ variants.*

*And then there were the vehicles. When added the armoured carriers like the venerable Chimera, the support vehicles, the repair units and the light transports, the twenty-four divisions had two hundred and sixty thousand-plus motorised vehicles, not counting the bikes.*

*This was already an extraordinary accomplishment, and yet it was merely the beginning. The Munitorum request for regimental tithes started to be delivered by 294M35. The Nyx manufactorums were also the main builder of fighters, bombers and all types of flyers for the Aeronautica Imperialis, sixty percent of the total Sector’s output coming from the Nyx forges. Hull construction in the shipyards for the Imperial Navy and the trade cartels continued according to schedule. Even the promethium production was not neglected; by 050.291M35, Executive Industrial Order Number One officially gave Promethium 3-Refined 95 Rating – more commonly known as P3 Super 95 - the status of ‘war fuel’ and increased both daily production and the strategic fuel reserve.*

*The economy of the Nyx Sector, far from collapsing to meet all its requirements, magnificently rose to the challenge, paving the way to a new age of prosperity...*

Extract from *Logistics of Operation Caribbean* by Christian Cicero, 990M36.

**Ultima Segmentum**

**Nyx Sector**

**Neptunia Reach Sub-Sector**

**Nyx System**

**Nyx III**

**7.158.291M35**

Thought for the day: A weapon cannot substitute for zeal.

**Chancellor Friar Achelieux**

As far as official audiences went, everything was unconventional. The choice of location was the most striking example.

Obviously, it took more than that to destabilise the emissary of a Magisterial Navigator House. And frankly, the declining wealth and status of House Achelieux had the problematic consequence he was forced to meet important figures he would have preferred not to meet under any circumstance.

Friar had been forced to walk interminable throne rooms for the sick amusement of obese Governors more times he could honestly remember, and his memory was excellent. Five times in the last decade he had been invited to ‘great hunts’ where aristocrats massacred with baroque priceless weaponry the fauna of the world they reigned upon.

The Governor of New Tripoli had been so in love with gladiatorial blood-sports he considered any agreement not discussed in front of a mass killing on the sands of arena devoid of value. On the Pleasure World of Lesser Monaco, the cartel heads he had come to negotiate with had refused to open their mouth until he won one billion in one of the most complicated card games he ever had the bad luck to play. The Archbishops of Shrine Desdemona did not accept foreigners six day out of seven and refused to admit a mutant in their presence until he bathed ten times in their ‘holy’ – and ridiculously expensive – water.

And the most disagreeable audience of all, the audience Lord Admiral Custer had granted him. It had taken him ten seconds the Imperial Navy had made a great mistake by promoting this man to his current rank. The first clue had been the insults he had vociferated towards his House and navigators in general. That was a monumental mistake, clearly. Did the idiot really think his words wouldn’t be repeated to the other Houses? The second clue the ‘His Supreme Excellency’ was out of his domain of competence – assuming he had one – was the little fact that at the moment he was speaking, the ‘totally defeated’ Orks had decided to mount a counter-attack. Friar had escaped the flagship mere minutes before the green xenos rammed it and ended in a large explosion the career of the Lord Admiral.

As a result, the Chancellor believed it was difficult to surprise him. Still, the spectacle of over two dozen Astartes trying to neutralise giant centipedes and spiders on a training ground successfully achieved a rise of the eyebrows from him. It wasn’t every day you saw a transhuman giant striking with his bare fists the black chitin of an insect twice his side while his comrades were struggling to hold bone blades no baseline human could hope to wield.

Since apparently no one was dying and the Astartes were shouting their battle-cries with eagerness and no sign they were in danger of death, Friar Achelieux decided it was best, in the interest of his sanity, to pretend that everything was normal, and marched in direction of a little group of guards in dark blue uniform surrounding a woman in golden power armour.

Or at least he tried. Past the first couple of seconds, every step came slower. Not because he had a heart attack or he was in bad health, but because his eyes flinched against the light coming from the very person he had come to meet.

Why? His third eye was covered perfectly, there should be no side-effect here in the middle of a Hive World...and yet his eyes were burning like when he watched too close and too long the light of the Astronomican.

As he stopped ten metres away from the source of the light and bowed his head, unable to tolerate more, Friar amended his thoughts in the privacy of his own head. It was not like the Astronomican. It had a completely different ‘taste’, so to speak. The Beacon of the God-Emperor was purified energy of the Immaterium in its most holy brilliance, but this...it was different. Low and High Gothic were inappropriate languages to describe it...but it was like he was facing a spider web bathed in light. It did not belong to this dimension, and yet it was not the Warp either. It was...different.

A soldier approached with a box containing an unfamiliar model of glasses, and the Chancellor accepted it with a pained expression of gratitude.

Thankfully, once they were on his eyes, the light effect instantly dissipated. On the downside, Friar Achelieux was as blind as any non-Navigator representative in this Hive.

“My apologies, Lady Basileia, I’m afraid your brilliance and my eyes don’t agree with each other...”

The answer he received was not the one he had awaited for.

“Think nothing of it. Until I met you, every Navigator who was introduced in my presence fell on his knees and turned unconscious for at least a few seconds. You are doing better than them.” The Planetary Governor’s voice turned whimsical. “I thought House Orion and their allies would have warned you beforehand, to be honest.”

A genuine apology or compliment was always welcome, of course. But no, House Orion, House Boyle, or House Curtis would not have warned him unless they could somehow profit from the release of said information. And since there was a high likelihood he would have been as ridiculous as them once he met the Planetary Governor, the local Navis Nobilite had obviously decided to let him win or fail on his own. Certainly, Friar wasn’t going to organise a bet pool on the outcome the jealous Navigators had expected from this audience.

“I’m sure they had more important things on their mind,” the Achelieux Navigator replied neutrally. The ‘more important thing’ was of course ensuring his House signed agreements that their presence in this Sector and the neighbouring regions of space lasted less than a standard month, and if he could remove a few days as a bonus from this duration, it would be splendid.

“Oh yes,” the young woman didn’t roll her eyes, but alas for her entourage was a bit more loose-lipped and at least two men chuckled. “Did you know the most important diplomat of House Orion tried to get an audience the moment the Navy contacted me to report your arrival was imminent?”

“Surely this was nothing but an unfortunate coincidence,” Friar was not going to confess it in public, but he was rather curious how deep House Orion had dug its grave in the last days.

The hint was not sufficient to get an accurate picture, but between the information he had been able to collect in the last days and his knowledge of Navigator internal market competition, he could make a few guesses. And one he felt reasonably accurate was House Orion and its local affiliates had tried to under-evaluate the number of Navigators it had available. In normal circumstances, this was a simple butt terribly effective strategy: Orion, Curtis and Boyle together had ninety-nine point six percent of all Navigators present in the Nyx Sector, giving them a true monopoly.

Yes, this was an excellent...one might almost call it...saintly.

“Leave us.”

Save two Space Marines who weren’t participating in the violent struggle against the insects – that one had obviously lost since he was imprisoned in a cocoon of spider silk – the troopers obeyed and retreated near the gates out of hearing range.

It allowed him to do a full observation of his host, Lady Taylor Hebert, Basileia of Nyx. Even without his sight lessened, Friar could tell this was not a woman to take lightly. People who managed to grab a Planetary Governorship while less than a hundred years old and remain by some legal loopholes in the Imperial Guard were dangerous.

No, dangerous was perhaps too weak a word. The insects joyously beating the Space Marines on the training field were dangerous. Their mistress was...something more.

Physically, she was a pretty black-haired girl. Absolutely not his type, but he had met thousands of far uglier women who were consorts to a Planetary Governor or a high-ranked Adept.

“I presume we can speak freely without our words arriving to unfriendly ears?”

The Space Marines had a reputation of honour, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

“The Dawnbreaker Guard only answers to me. If something out of this conversation arrives to the ear of nobles or people not in confidence, I think this will be the sign we will need to reassess all our security measures...again.”

Friar Achelieux nodded and did not press. Navigators were powerful, but the authority of a Sector Lady largely surpassed his...and that was not counting on the unwritten influence a Saint could use. And this young woman certainly was one.

“That aside, the conditions have slightly changed since I commanded my Astropaths to contact your House. As you have no doubt noticed, the war against the greenskins is over, and the need for interstellar trade ships is greater than ever. I am as a result increasing the production of military and civilian fuel. Commercially, this means new fuel tankers. Therefore I am willing to contract your House for its services in crewing five promethium tankers for a strict Sector-wide usage, in addition to the initial demand of four Navigators.”

The Chancellor did his best not to gape. This was...incredibly generous. And House Orion must have exasperated the Basileia far more than the most pessimistic rumours had speculated, to be deprived of what was for all intent and purposes an above-average prize.

Promethium tanker was a ship category which was always capable to generate benefits. Every world which was not Feral or Feudal used vast quantities of fuel. And each of these tankers would require a Secundus senior Navigator and a Tertius substitute. This was not a contract for five Navigators; it was a negotiation for fifteen!

The rest of the proposal was not of a nature to discourage him from signing. The two billion contract for the battleship *Enterprise* – and since it was her flagship, this guaranteed a formidable endorsement of Achelieux Warp-mastery – would be the first stone, and the second was the four billion Throne Gelts contract for the tankers. There was also an open invitation to buy a palace in the upper quarters of the capital Hive and a one point five percent of the benefits acquired by said ships once the time arrived for all investors to get his share.

This changed...everything.

“My Lady, House Achelieux is deeply in your debt for such generous terms, and I will be more than happy to sign at the bottom of the contract. However, I would be betraying my obligations of Chancellor if I don’t inform you House Achelieux has enemies, vultures which have stopped at nothing to see its power and influence broken.”

Of course, most of the former protectors of House Achelieux had lacked Space Marines of their own. The masters of Lesser Monaco had soiled their undergarments at the first sight of a Space Wolf.

“I am aware of the...violent disagreements you have been subjected by Houses Belisarius and Ferraci. Rest assured that if they try something similar in my Sector, they will regret it. Assuming they survive the first encounter with the Iron Drakes and the Brothers of the Red patrolling across the Sector, of course.”

“In this case, House Achelieux is deeply in your debt...”

A Space Marine trying to ride a centipede without a saddle passed three metres on their right and broke the solemnity of the instant.