



IN PURSUIT OF PERFECTION: THE EMPEROR'S CHILDREN IN THE AGE OF DARKNESS

'Hubris is an excuse by which those of an irresolute nature and inferior temper justify their mediocrity.
Greatness requires no justification and exacts no hidden toll, it demands only excellence in all things.'

- Attr. Lord Commander Cyrius of the Emperor's Children.

In Pursuit of Perfection

Among all the Legions bound to Horus by treachery the Emperor's Children were motivated neither by hatred nor by a lust for power, but instead by a simple flaw that had long festered, one oft remarked upon by those they had once called brothers – pride. The pursuit of excellence in all things was the single and consuming goal of Fulgrim's sons, an obsession born from the ancient traditions of its recruitment, for even the lowliest warrior among them had once been a prince of men, their status sustained by the hand of the Emperor and the many honours he would bestow upon them. Over the course of the Great Crusade it would shift from a drive to master all the diverse techniques of war to an assumption of superiority on the part of the Emperor's Children, to the collection of laurels and victory wreaths over the honing of skill. What had once driven them to excel in the service of the Emperor came to chain them to the promulgation of what the warriors of the Emperor's Children saw as an innate superiority over their brethren, despite the honours won by each of the Emperor's Legions in the long war to reclaim mankind's birthright. Each of the wars to which Fulgrim deigned to commit his immaculate Legion were carefully chosen to display their superiority to those they called brother as much as to those they named enemy.

Despite this the Emperor's Children had always been considered loyal beyond reproach, indeed many would have seen

them as overly fanatical in their devotion to the Emperor, and yet they would be among the first to throw off that loyalty and pledge themselves to the banner of Horus and rebellion. Though it can never be truly known what caused Fulgrim and his sons to turn their coats in such an unexpected betrayal, it is likely that the overweening pride that had come to dominate many of the Legion's most senior commanders forced them to walk the path of the Traitor rather than to accept the role of servant to a unified and peaceful Imperium. The Emperor's dream of a golden age that required no martial champions, no gaudy triumphs to mark its success, but only the rituals of innocence, was a world in which the Emperor's Children were reduced to one amongst many. A fate that their pride could not endure.

The Perfect Legion

The pride that had overtaken Fulgrim's Legion was not entirely misplaced, for among all the Legions the Emperor's Children maintained a record of martial excellence that could not be ignored. It was a record upheld by the constant efforts of the Legion and its masters, a never-ending regime of training and war that had honed the Legion to a fine edge that was made brittle only by the stubborn refusal to mark any as their equal. At Iststvan this deadly skill was proven by the red toll of the Loyalist dead left to carpet the black plains of the dropzones and in the headless corpse of Ferrus Manus, a singular trophy the like

of which no other Legion could boast. In the months that followed that infamous confrontation it would be proven many more times in battle all across the Coronid Deep and the other sectors of the northern Imperium, the Lord Commanders of the IIIrd Legion planning and executing the complex set-piece battles for which they were famous. The Emperor's Children were the backbone of Horus' army, neither berserker horde like Angron's sons, nor indiscriminate destroyers like the warriors of the Death Guard, but a disciplined host leashed to the keen insight of its commanders. On world after world they put Loyalist garrisons to the sword with precise and lethal skill, leaving pristine industrial hubs for the Traitor war effort, and set surviving Legiones Astartes holdouts from Iststvan to flight without suffering debilitating casualties in return. For while it would be the crude massacres perpetrated by Horus' more brutal servants that held the gaze of history, it would be these conquests of the Emperor's Children that formed the foundation of the Warmaster's rebellion, providing him a base from which to prosecute the long and arduous struggle against the Emperor.

Yet, the practised excellence of the Emperor's Children's campaign was a brittle facade that concealed a swiftly growing canker. For at the heart of the IIIrd Legion Fulgrim and his Lord Commanders took to sequestering themselves for months at a time aboard the flagship of his fleet, the *Pride of the Emperor* there to sample the finest entertainments and treasures the Imperium could offer,

A Serpent at its Heart

Of the final fate of Fulgrim, his horrific transfiguration and utter damnation in the dark years of the Horus Heresy, much has been said elsewhere. Yet some few accounts, including some from within his own Legion, whisper that the curse of the daemon and the influence of the Warp was upon him long before that hideous reckoning. It is claimed in some accounts, both those of warriors that met him in battle and survived and in the personal logs of several command staff in the IIIrd Legion itself, that the Primarch of the Emperor's Children had been consumed and replaced by some daemon at the height of the infamous Dropsite Massacre, long before the later events surrounding the so-called Angel Exterminatus. Such accounts make much of the legendary

the reward they felt was deserved for the long years of their service and the blood spilt in the creation of that domain. This would be the corruption for which pride had opened a crack in the Legion's spirit, an all-consuming passion for the pleasures they had long abstained from while bound to the harsh rules of the Emperor and his arduous crusade. What would begin with a sudden interest in the arts, of the epic poetry commissioned to laud the Great Crusade, the fine symphonies written in Fulgrim's honour and the artistic masterpieces inspired by the IIIrd Legion, would eventually become a taste for more base forms of indulgence that defied the good order that had once ruled the Legiones Astartes. For a time such excesses would be limited to the highest echelons of the Legion, with the bulk of its warriors and line officers pursuing the goals of the Warmaster's rebellion with the elan and practised skill expected of the IIIrd Legion, but bereft of the oversight of most of the Lord Commanders and most notably of the Primarch himself. Yet it would not remain so contained for long, and within the space of a few months the selfsame corruption began to spread from the Legion's heart to every cohort of its warriors, with only the most remote or staunchly traditional companies resisting its lure.

During the assault on Epsilon-stranivar IX, known as Fortress Stranivar, the Loyalist defenders would ruthlessly exploit this sudden malaise among the Emperor's Children that accompanied the Traitor host. Though each individual unit fought with superlative skill, they lacked the co-ordination and flexibility to react to the improvised tactics of the sundered host of Loyalist survivors without the oversight of their now absent Lord Commanders, victims of the strict regimentation that had once been the secret of the IIIrd Legion's success. Of all the Traitor forces deployed in the first assault on Fortress Stranivar the Emperor's Children would still tally the finest kill-ratio and the most impressive trophies of war, scorning the infighting that blunted the efforts of the Alpha Legion and Iron Warriors, but allowed their martial pride to blind them to strategic advantage. Several key weaknesses in the Loyalist lines would be ignored by vainglorious Emperor's Children centurions who instead chose to direct their assaults against obvious diversionary forces, more eager to claim gaudy trophies than dull points on a map. The taint, now freed from the upper echelons of the Legion, would quickly spread and more victories would bear the blight of imperfection, the once flawless reputation of the Emperor's Children scarred by the actions of its warriors.

friendship that Fulgrim had held for his brother Ferrus Manus, that such a bond could only have been sundered by the malevolent interference of forces beyond mortal ken. In that final moment as Fulgrim stood victorious in combat over the Gorgon he could not strike the final blow, and that another presence did so for him and claimed control of the Primarch's broken soul. Though such tales hold a certain dramatic charm, there is little evidence to support them beside the writings of Traitors and the imaginings of the haunted survivors of failed battles. Ultimately the truth of such tales remains immaterial to the fall of the Emperor's Children, for the source of their corruption, be it some warp-spawned doppelganger or merely the hubris of a Primarch, does not excuse the path they chose to walk.

Of all the battles fought during the early years of Horus' rebellion it would be the brief siege of the Perfect Fortress on Narsis that wounded this reputation most grievously. The Perfect Fortress had been designed by Fulgrim himself, with some small aid from his brother Perturabo, and intended to resist any onslaught without falling. Fulgrim would often boast of its impregnable defences and elegant form, citing it as one more example of both his own and his Legion's preeminence. Yet it would fall to the fragmented forces of the Raven Guard after only a short conflict, the bulk of the defending garrison of the Emperor's Children abandoning their positions after turning back an initial attack by Loyalist elements of the Imperial Army in order to run down the fleeing troops. As the Emperor's Children engaged in empty heroics and pointless duels, the Raven Guard infiltrated the all but abandoned fortress, dispatched the few warriors of the IIIrd Legion that had held to discipline and made a prize of Fulgrim's pride.

Though few could doubt the sheer skill at arms of the Emperor's Children, which had if anything improved as the prideful mania swept through its ranks and drove each warrior to perfect his craft, the Warmaster came to doubt their value as his prime tool of strategy. Killers he had aplenty within

the ranks of his host, but soldiers were becoming a rarer resource by the moment as each of the Traitor Primarchs led their Legions down strange and terrible paths. As Fulgrim sank further into madness the Legion bound to him followed willingly and made of themselves something more brazen and fearsome, but of less use to the ambitions of Horus save as shock troops and weapons of terror. Where once the Legiones Astartes, both Loyalist and Traitor, had been sent into battle to secure the bounty of the galaxy for the cause they served, those in service to Horus began to care less for such matters and sought only the glory of killing artfully accomplished, the joy of battle and the satisfaction of utter and total destruction. It was the first sign of what was to come, of the war Horus had unleashed upon an unsuspecting Imperium and of the hungers that drove it onwards to its dark conclusion.

Hubris Made Flesh

These battles would end in a victory for the Loyalists which, while little more than pyrrhic in terms of their strategic value, would deliver a humiliating blow to the pride of the Emperor's Children. However, rather than serving to spur the warriors of Fulgrim to reconsider the folly of pride it instead turned the Legion further in upon itself, with many of the Lord Commanders blaming such failures on a lack of perfection

in the methods the Emperor had forced upon them. These warriors sought new paths to lead them to a perfection of both form and action, bizarre new training regimes, exotic wargear that defied the military logic of the Principia Belicosa and even attempts to subvert or alter the gene-code forged by the Emperor to create the Legiones Astartes. Such experiments would lead to a profusion of chimaeric changes among the Emperor's Children, from strange and self-destructive new gene-forged abilities that enhanced the deadly skills of its warriors at the cost of their longevity and sanity, to entirely new formations of troops like the Kakophoni. The finest work of these apothecary-genetors was invisible to the eye, subtly enhanced strength or artfully boosted reaction speeds, all granting a deadly edge in battle, but the worst excesses of their research left the subjects mutilated and freakish, sporting horrific bone spikes or grossly distended fanged maws and other brutally effective alterations. With the blessing of Fulgrim and his chief apothecary there was little that was deemed taboo for these gene-crafters, who each pursued their own vision of martial perfection on the flesh of their brothers.

Such augmentations, though often bizarre in form, proved to be lethally effective. Shepherded into combat by officers of the IIIrd Legion's apothecarion, augmented

Legiones Astartes operated as shock troops and line-breakers on several campaigns led by the Emperor's Children, reaping a bloody toll of the enemy at a cost of their own near total destruction. Despite the risks involved in such augmentation and the horrific rate of attrition in such units many would volunteer for the procedures conducted by Chief Apothecary Fabius and his ilk in order to court favour with Fulgrim and gain glory on the field of battle. Only a few echelons of the Legion remained untouched by the mania that had taken control of the Primarch and his Legion, those assigned to the farthest and most remote posts and the staunchest of traditionalists among the few surviving Terran contingents to have chosen their oaths to Fulgrim over those sworn to the Emperor. These abstainers would soon find themselves assigned to the most brutal warzones where the guns of the Loyalists would soon rid Fulgrim of their doomsaying, or dispatched to the furthest edges of the galaxy to be forgotten. Little by little the Emperor's Children were being reborn as something that no sane mind could have imagined in the years before Horus threw the galaxy into chaos, something of terrible beauty and dangerous power.

It would be the actions of Fulgrim himself that exemplified this descent into madness and damnation, guiding both his own Legion

and that of Perturabo in the search for an artifact known as the Angel Exterminatus. The campaign that followed would blaze a trail of destruction across the Imperium and beyond, as well as remove significant forces from the front-lines of Horus' push towards Terra, a struggle for which Fulgrim had seemingly lost all interest despite the orders of the Warmaster. Fulgrim claimed the relic he sought was a weapon to change the course of the war, but in the end he would betray Perturabo to claim it and use it not to further the war against the Emperor, but to transfigure himself into a grotesque parody of the form the Emperor had forged for him. Fulgrim was the exemplar of the doom that would overtake his Legion, both the genesis of its mania and the most ardent slave to that madness, no longer beholden to the whims of Horus or the old duties of the Legiones Astartes. In the aftermath of the Angel Exterminatus campaign the Primarch of the Emperor's Children would vanish altogether, forsaking the Horus Heresy for a time as well as abandoning his Legion to the throes of the madness he had spawned. Many rumours have been spread to attest to the whereabouts of Fulgrim during this critical period of the Horus Heresy, from such absurdities as the tale that ventured into the heart of the Empryeon to carouse in the court of dark primordial gods, to various sightings of him in warzones across the galaxy laying waste to the loyal warriors of the Emperor with abandon. Whatever the truth of such rumours it is fact that Fulgrim would play little role in the leadership of the Horus Heresy or the Emperor's Children Legion during the so-called Age of Darkness, but it is unlikely that such a driven warrior would absent himself entirely from the war that would come to define humanity.

Fragments of a Broken Vision

Bereft of their Primarch the Emperor's Children became fractured, the last vestiges of the old Legiones Astartes organisation falling away as they sundered and split. Where once there had been ordered millennials and companies, now there were only irregular warbands bound to the most charismatic and potent warlords of the old Legion, contingents of warriors that only partly resembled the old IIIrd Legion that had once served the Emperor. These warrior brotherhoods were each dedicated to what they considered the most perfect application of the warrior's skills, seeking both to hone their skills without regard to other considerations and to prove themselves superior not only to the enemy but among their own brotherhood.

Within the ranks of such companies were to be found a profusion of grandiose titles and equally opulent armourial displays to signal the skill and honour of that warrior, a display of martial pride that eclipsed even the grand banners and insignia of the Emperor's Legio Custodes themselves. Yet such displays were not simple bluster and pomp, for among the scattered companies of the Emperor's Children in the dark age of the Horus Heresy were to be found some of the most skilled individual warriors among all of the Legions, Loyalist or Traitor. Lucius the Undefeated was accounted among the greatest swordsman of the Legiones Astartes, while Grand Captain Solaire's feats of long range marksmanship were legendary and the piloting skills of Consul-Caelum Primus Aeolanus, the sky-baron, had reaped a tally of kills to shame any other warrior that had lived. Lord-Commander Iolaus too, before his demise, was recognised for valorous command by no less than Horus himself – his millennial granted great honours and destined to shape the wars of the southern Imperium had he not been ill-swayed by his advisors. Had it not been for the fact that these superlative warriors made little attempt to operate as a cohesive force, seeking only to outdo each other on the field of battle and to seize glory in combat with the most talented of the enemy's leaders, then they might have tipped the scales of the war decisively in the favour of Horus. Yet it was not to be, for the goals of the warlords that now led the Emperor's Children aligned only in the loosest sense.

The key battles of this Age of Darkness were fought so that Horus might bring the industrial might of the galaxy to heel and to force a break in the wall of stone that Dorn had thrown around the Terran system, all the forces of the Warmaster were bent to this goal with a single-minded obsession that ignored the destruction it wrought on those that had sworn to serve Horus' aims. Yet, the Emperor's Children paid only lip-service to the orders of the Warmaster and his Sons of Horus marshals, scorning the grinding battles of attrition as dull and unimaginative, a theatre not worthy of their skills. Instead they sought out battles that best suited their pride and perfectly honed skill, striking at Loyalist garrisons at the edges of the conflict zones or penetrating deep behind the main lines of Horus' advance to strike at command centres and as yet uncompromised fortresses. Such disregard for good order was tolerated by the Warmaster, for though it did not directly aid the push on Terra such an unpredictable onslaught kept the

Loyalists confused and scattered, stopping them from marshalling all their forces to oppose him directly. Also, some among the warriors of the Emperor's Children still fought in his vanguard, those that wished to earn the favour of the Warmaster and gain rank within his court and inner circle, as well as those who had given themselves over to the perverse pleasures of the pain and destruction to be found amid the apocalyptic clashes that marked that age of war. Some would earn high praise from the Warmaster, lavished with gaudy decorations to salve their egos and then unleashed on the worst of his enemies, though among their own they would be disdained as mere lackeys of the Warmaster.

Scattered across a hundred warzones across the galaxy, the Age of Darkness would see the Emperor's Children whetted to a fine, but brittle, edge. Their warriors had attained a level of perfection that surpassed anything that they could have achieved before the Horus Heresy, before they had broken the constraints of the Principia Belicosa and the Emperor's ban on gene-manipulation. They were killers beyond compare, the ultimate expression of death in human form and garbed now in finery suitable to the high status they felt they had achieved. Yet, they were slowly dwindling as the rigours of war, the infighting and duelling within the Legion and the deadly experiments they wrought upon themselves took a toll of their numbers. The cloning procedures and rapid growth treatments of the apothecary-genetors could only do so much to counteract this decline, for the creations of the cloning galleries were often twisted and flawed creatures, suitable only to serve as fodder for the guns of the Loyalists. Had the Legion kept to that course it would eventually be ground down to little more than a handful of truly exceptional warriors, purest and most perfect of their kind – a fate that held some amount of appeal to many among the ranks of the Emperor's Children for each secretly believed that he would be among such a rarefied brotherhood. The course of the war and the machinations of Primarchs and warlords would divert them from this fate, to one that some might consider far darker and more damning than simple oblivion.

For in the waning years of the Age of Darkness death would come to the world of Chemos as the balance of power in the Horus Heresy was shattered and Fulgrim would return to the head of his Legion.

An Oath Fulfilled
In the wake of the failed assault on Terra the vast majority of the Emperor's Children would flee into the dubious refuge of the Eye of Terror, there to become something lesser and more terrible than they had once been, to plague the Imperium as it fumbled at rebuilding without the guidance of the Emperor. However, among the many lost tales of the centuries-long Scouring campaigns there is one brief remembrance of the shining IIIrd Legion of old, a tale not of horror and betrayal, but of honour and fealty past the demands of duty.

A squadron of Imperial Fist cruisers led by the *Sempiterna* translated from the warp at the very edge of the Imperium's old borders, the last worlds to receive Compliance before Horus ended the Emperor's dream of unity, at a cold and remote planet named Terunir IV. Here they found a world that still flew the flags of treachery, the Eye of Horus and the taloned wing of the Emperor's Children, a world whose many cities teemed with life and industry and also with daunting fortifications and batteries of immense defence lasers and orbit-capable atomics. In battle Terunir IV could have exacted a disastrous toll on the Imperial Fists before it fell, but as the squadron approached it was met not with laser blasts but by a wide-cast vox hail seeking parlay before the commencement of hostilities. Aboard a lone destroyer, allowed to assume orbit under the eyes of the Emperor's Children gunners in the defence laser silos below, the Praetors of both sides met.

Expecting the same grotesque warriors that had fought at Terra under the banner of Fulgrim, the Imperial Fists were surprised to find a Terran veteran in the sombre but elegant colours of the old Emperor's Children in command of the enemy. Yet any hope that he might seek mercy and surrender were quickly quashed, the Emperor's Children flatly refused any surrender and offered the Imperial Fists a simple ultimatum. The warriors of Fulgrim would occupy a single fortress in the hinterlands of Terunir IV, there to meet the Imperial Fists in open and fair battle to fulfil the oaths they had sworn to the Primarch that had once saved them, and in return the Imperial Fists would lay them to rest with honour and spare the world they guarded from the fires of exterminatus. They had chosen one betrayal out of loyalty to Fulgrim and their honour would not allow a second such betrayal, but as they had not been able to follow their master into damnation they found themselves unwilling to mar the corpse Horus had made of the Imperium.

No record of the battle for Terunir IV is to be found in the annals of the Imperial Fists, nor any mention of the fate of the Emperor's Children stationed there, for no officer of the Terran court would sanction a bargain with Traitors. Yet, the 95th Chapter of the Imperial Fists would maintain an honour guard of four Legiones Astartes at a facility buried beneath a lone fortress in the southern polar region, a facility to which they barred all entry to those not of the Legion. That facility still endures and so too does the memory of those warriors that once conquered a galaxy in the name of Unity.

WAR MACHINES OF THE IIIRD LEGION IN THE LATTER YEARS OF THE AGE OF DARKNESS

Where once the IIIrd Legion had adhered to an orderly hierarchy centred largely on the Millennial (referred to as the Chapter in the Principia Belicosa), as the Warmaster's galactic civil war progressed many of these large formations fractured into smaller and less well-ordered bodies more akin to Company or Battalion Strike Forces in size and composition. The Legion's vast stocks of

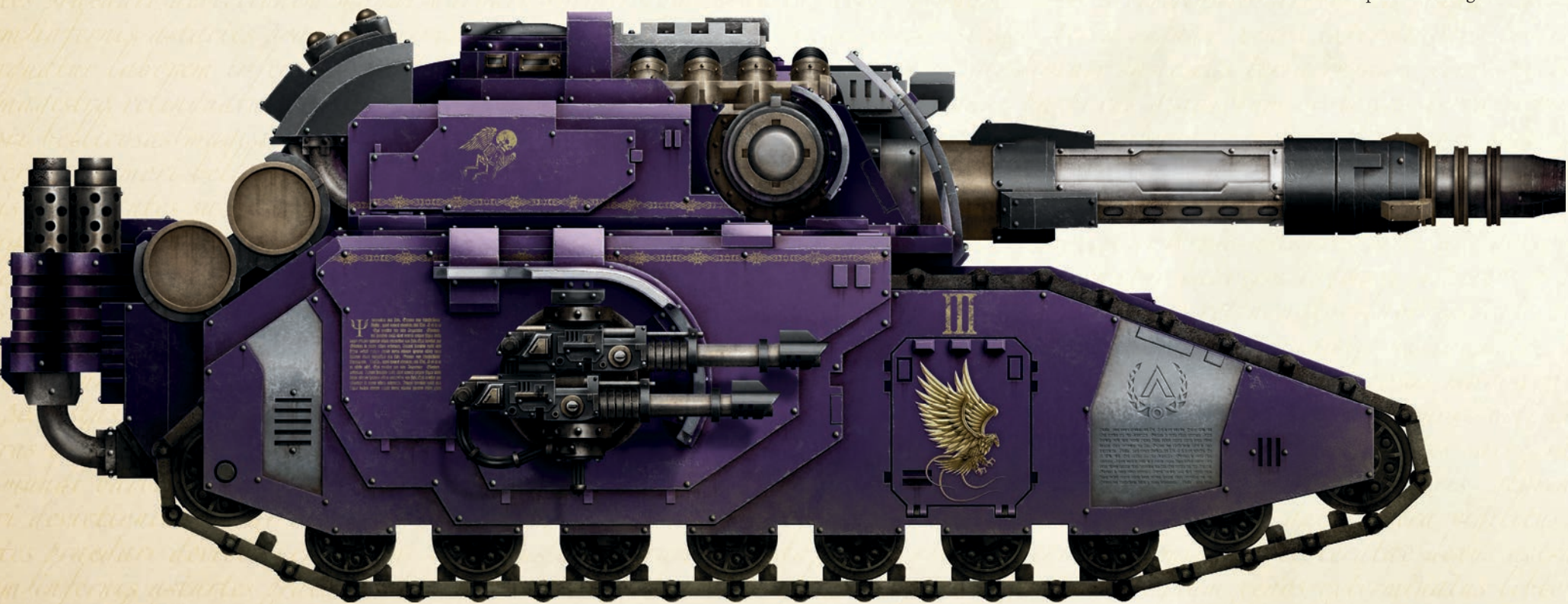
war machines, which encompassed the entire canon of Legiones Astartes instrumentalities from jetbikes to super-heavy tanks, became scattered throughout the ranks of these smaller, semi-autonomous warbands and often employed piecemeal in supporting roles. A small number of specialised vehicle-based formations were able to remain whole however, such as the dashing Land

Raider-born Veteran Squads of the 150th ('Phoenician's Own') Armoured Assault Company, the daring jetbike riders of the Raelichus Sky-hunter Wing and the ruthless Land Speeder squadrons of Rapid Strike Group Borvinas, all of which were reported as active throughout the civil war up to, and possibly beyond, the Siege of Terra.



THE PALATINE AQUILA
The double-headed eagle sigil of the Imperium was worn with pride by countless warriors and adorned the sides of numerous war machines throughout the Great Crusade and into the Horus Heresy, yet its meaning changed throughout those years, and there existed numerous variations of it, some of which have been known to confound the untrained eye.

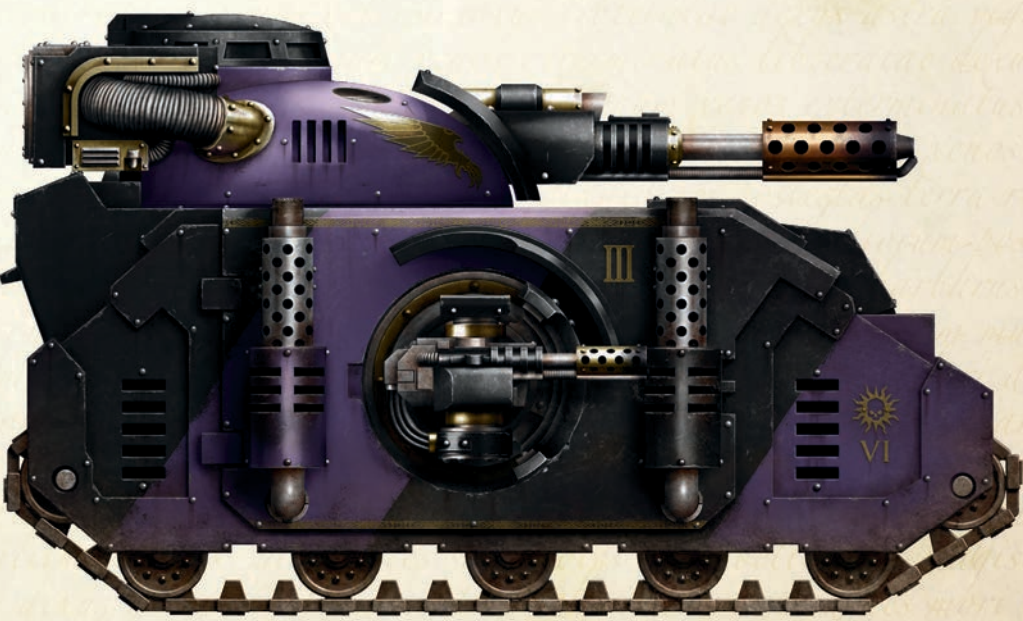
The Palatine Aquila shown here is the sigil of the Imperial Household, and it adorns the banners and panoply of the holdings and most elevated servants of the Emperor himself. During the Great Crusade the Emperor's Children were awarded what at the time was a unique honour – the right to bear the icon of the Imperial Household as a Legion entire. While history does not record if this honour was formally revoked following the Legion's treachery, the sons of Fulgrim are known to have continued to use it, along with their Legion cognomen, in brazen scorn and spiteful mockery of the standing they once enjoyed in the ranks of the Emperor's servants.



FALCHION SUPER-HEAVY TANK DESTROYER
'Eurymedon II'
Sole remnant of 199th (Super-heavy Titan Hunter) Company
Siege of Inwit



DEREDEO DREADNOUGHT
'Palatine-Legate Maximal Gaius Phronius'
Companions of Erginus 'the Ascended' (formerly XIIth Millennial Manoeuvre Support Group)
Battle of Lazarene



DEIMOS PATTERN PREDATOR SUPPORT TANK
'Scintilla Sextus'
Detached from now defunct Legion Assault Reserve Battalion to support 'Sun Killer detachment Asceton'
Fall of Baztel III

THE TRAITORS SUNDERED
It was in the closing days of the final battle for the Throneworld that certain elements of the Traitor host would coalesce to form a corps distinctly 'old Legion' in its outlook, many of its adherents veterans of the Great Crusade who despite their cleaving to the Warmaster's strategic vision believed the way to achieve it was to honour and uphold the traditions of old instead of surrendering to the unbridled and frequently dubious 'gifts' of the Warmaster's diabolic patrons. While some of the Traitor Legions were sundered neatly in twain between such extremes, the Emperor's Children had already travelled too far to easily return to the old ways, yet nonetheless, some traditionalists held out, coming to blows with their Loyalist foes as well as their zealous compatriots. Both Traitor factions would ultimately come to the same end – to be driven unwillingly by the vengeful Loyalist hosts into the Eye of Terror in the case of the traditionalist old guard, and to take willing refuge in its roiling depths in the case of the warp-enamoured zealots.

The Death of Chemos

Having been foreshadowed by the Sack of Chemos at the hands of the Legio Custodes in 009.M31, the final judgement on the homeworld of the IIIrd Legion would be pronounced in 012.M31 and enacted by the hand of the vengeful Primarch of the Ist Legion during the campaign latterly known as the Passage of the Angel of Death.

The Dark Angels' assault on Chemos in 012.M31 was as unexpected as it was deadly, for few among the Traitor horde truly believed the scattered ranks of the Loyalists could do more than simply delay their inevitable victory, and while the world's capital had suffered attack and despoilment by the Legio Custodes some three years prior, the sack of Phoenicia had wrought little ill upon the planet as a whole. Chemos itself had long been forgotten by the Legion that called it home, host only to a small garrison that served as more of an honour guard than a true defence force and the old fortresses of the IIIrd Legion that had fallen into disuse after the changes wrought upon it in the aftermath of Isttvan. Fulgrim had once decreed it should remain as it was in the heyday of his rule and untouched by the hardships of war and his sons honoured this order, even though the Primarch that had issued it had long since ceased to care for its promulgation. As such the world remained unscarred by the hastily commissioned fortifications and defences that marked most worlds in the Imperium by this stage of the Horus Heresy. It retained the sophisticated batteries of defence lasers and macro cannon built into hidden silos in the years before the return of the Emperor, as well as the orbital fortresses that had once served as the docks of the IIIrd Legion's vast fleets, formidable defences to any but the largest of attack fleets and more than sufficient to ward off the surviving fleets of the Shattered Legions that had escaped Isttvan. Yet, the foe that came for them was one that no defence could fully deny, nor one that the Emperor's Children had ever thought to face in the skies of their isolated homeworld, for it was the ebon-hulled craft of the Dark Angels that arrived to signal the end of an era for the Emperor's Children.

Attacking without warning the Dark Angels struck en masse at the outer stations of the Chemos system, systematically destroying any facility capable of sustaining life with meticulous cruelty that left no soul alive in the passing of those grim ships. Paragon Station, at the furthest extreme of the system and guarded by little more than a reinforced

company of Emperor's Children fell to the onslaught of three full chapters of Dark Angels, and when the handful of survivors fell back to the sealed command decks to make their final stand the Dark Angels withdrew and blasted the station apart section by section with the heavy cannon of their fleet. It was less an invasion and more an object lesson in the cost of treachery, a brutal and drawn out death sentence pronounced by Lion El'Jonson and executed by his Dark Angels with a zeal that exceeded the needs of justice. Such was the bitter fury of the Dark Angels that by the end of the initial stages of their campaign there was little left in the void around Chemos itself but the corpses of dead stations and the ruins of sundered habitats on the surface of the outer planets. Few of the Emperor's Children met their end in these battles though, most choosing to withdraw in the face of the overwhelming enemy force after brief and skilfully executed delaying engagements and feints that only enrage the Loyalists further.

Penned and at bay on the surface of Chemos, the surviving Emperor's Children were no more than five thousand strong and outnumbered six to one by the Loyalist warriors arrayed against them. Rather than gather together as a single host, easy prey for the massed ranks of the Dark Angels or the guns of their orbiting craft, the Emperor's Children chose to disperse their few companies across a number of key planetary defence facilities. The Dark Angels could not take the planet without taking each such fortress by storm, and while their numbers made a Loyalist victory all but inevitable, the Emperor's Children's strategy would deny them a quick and decisive victory. Hindered by spoiling attacks made by the IIIrd Legion and by the stubborn resistance of each of the proud companies of the Emperor's Children, the Dark Angels would be delayed for weeks in the final conquest of Chemos, unwilling to allow any to survive and cheat the Lion of his retribution. Presented with the corruption that had taken heart in the IIIrd Legion, the Dark Angels offered no mercy to those that had once been their brothers, purging each fortress in its entirety and leaving no stone upon stone. Yet, for all their disdain they could not deny the toll that the Emperor's Children demanded for their doom, Fulgrim's augmented warriors now more than a match for the Ist Legion and claiming a blood price from the sons of the Lion that the loyal Legion could ill-afford.

The final battle would be played out at the fortress of Zenith Capitas, buried beneath the largest of Chemos' ancient cities, where the Lion, his chosen Companions and a detachment of Dreadwing warriors took the field against a full brotherhood of the Palatine Blades. The Lion, driven to open anger by the skilfully prosecuted delaying tactics of his foe and the deaths inflicted upon his Legion, led a furious but ill-judged assault into the heart of the fortress, only to find his forces encircled by an enemy that had waited in perfectly organised ambush to strike. Trading any semblance of true defence in order to bring the majority of their forces to bear on the Primarch himself, the Emperor's Children threw themselves at the Lion, each eager to claim the honour of having inflicted even a single wound on the legendary warlord of the Ist Legion. After five hours of battle, the Dark Angels forces outside the fortress making a desperate assault to reinforce the trapped Primarch, the Lion would finally walk free of Zenith Capitas, his face an unreadable mask and the ranks of his Companions in tatters.

Of the three wounds he bore the Lion did not speak, giving no victory speech at the fall of Chemos and departing to brood in his private sanctum on the lives his Companions had given to hold the hungry blades of the Emperor's Children at bay. There remained no living warrior of the IIIrd Legion on Chemos, but the people that dwelt in its remaining cities and worked its factories still lived and in the eyes of many bore the sins of the Traitor Legion they had supported as their own. Yet, with no orders from the Lion, who remained secluded aboard his flagship, the Dark Angels would not initiate the Eskaton Protocols and see the planet cleansed of all life. Instead they left it broken, the wreckage of its shattered orbital stations raining down upon the surface and the cities beneath ruined by the battles the Emperor's Children had fought to spite the Dark Angels. This was the end that the Emperor's Children now faced, to be hunted down piecemeal by their foes and obliterated, only the roll of the fallen among their foes to mark the perfection they had achieved in their craft. For should the Horus Heresy fail in its aims, should Horus fall and his rebellion end in ignominy, then the Loyalist Legions would leave no trace of their fallen brothers to mar the history of the Imperium, a fate that the Emperor's Children's pride held worse than any simple death.

In Victory there is no Hubris

In the closing years of the Age of Darkness, as 013.M41 drew to a close and the Traitors stood poised to strike at Terra, Fulgrim would return from the hidden travels that had occupied him since the campaign for the Angel Exterminatus. The means by which he would do so and the reason for his return remain uncertain to the chronicles of Imperial scholars, but are most often linked to the activities of Lorgar and a brief period of internal strife within the court of the Traitor Warmaster. This hidden battle for control of the rebellion would see Lorgar cast out and Fulgrim returned to his position among the Warmaster's generals. Though he was said to shift between his Emperor-given appearance and that bestowed upon him by the powers of the dark gods, he often chose to display his transcended form, one much changed from the elegant warlord that had once sat in council with the other Primarchs. Now he ever more frequently bore the marks of damnation openly, the fel corruption of the Warp that twisted and moulded his flesh into

a mockery of the proud form bequeathed him by the Emperor, and gloried in the change that had overcome him.

From his place at Horus' right hand he sent forth word to the scattered companies and millennials of his Legion to gather on the world of Ullanor, a summons that was issued by means both technological and sorcerous, reaching even the furthest and most remote of the crusading warbands of the Emperor's Children and compelling them to obey. Within days the first of the Emperor's Children would begin to assemble on the broken plains of Ullanor and Fulgrim found the new aspect of his Legion, its vainglorious pride and twisted form, much to his liking. By the time Horus pronounced the final assault begun and gave word to take ship for Terra the bulk of the Emperor's Children had heeded the call of their Primarch and made their way to Ullanor, there to hear his words and bask in his approval. This was not a grim reunion, for despite the doom that might yet wait for them the warriors of Fulgrim hung

upon the last promise of their Primarch to his Legion:

“The Emperor brands us rebels, his sons brand us deviants and fools. It is said in the halls of Terra that we have erred and that our end will be the price of our hubris. Yet, here we stand on the threshold of Terra and the final bolthole of the Emperor, at the beginning of the final battle still undefeated and unbroken. Our pride will not allow us to accept defeat and in victory there can be no hubris, only vindication. Onwards, to Terra and victory!”





LEGIONARY OBERON HYTH

'Psitha' Tactical Formation

Production MkV power armour (latterly codified 'Heresy' pattern), showing the suit's mixed heritage, combining as it does elements of numerous other technologies melded together into this stopgap armour pattern. The MkV helm is an otherwise unused offshoot of the Indomitus Terminator development programme, while the power pack and pauldrons are based on early designs intended for MkVI plate. Other components foreshadow patterns yet to be fully realised, such as a greave and articulated knee joint arrangement similar to that later utilised in MkVII pattern armour.



PALATINE PREFECTOR IXATHE

Prefector of the Epiette Decemvirate of the Palatine Blades, Champion of the Cohort.

Artificer-wrought MkIV 'Maximus' power armour adorned with heavily customised personal livery. An elaborately decorated left pauldron and the crimson plume signifies Ixathe's role in the Palatine Blade's duelling hierarchy.

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