



THE EDGE OF RUIN

'All empires must fall to ruin and despair, just as mine has done. Yet, when your own wars are won and you stand amid your triumphs, remember that the fate which has befallen me will in turn be your own. Look for me then, for at the edge of ruin I shall return to remind you of the fate of empires.'

Apocryphal, attributed to the Unspeakable King on the eve of his defeat during Old Night

THE WARMASTER'S REBELLION

In the fifth year of the 31st Millennium Horus Lupercal, Warmaster, favoured son of the Emperor and hero of the Great Crusade, plunged the Imperium of Mankind into a war from which it would never truly recover. Amid the shattered cities of the lonely and distant world of Istvan III, he set the warriors of the Legiones Astartes against their brothers, raising the banner of rebellion and drowned his oaths of loyalty in blood. Those of his brothers that held true to their oaths would come to face him at Istvan V, only to find that Horus had laid well his plans of treason. Fully half of the Emperor's Primarchs and Space Marine Legions were already secretly sworn to Horus' side and they turned their guns upon their kin with abandon, leaving the pride of the Imperium broken upon the black sands of that once insignificant world. Worse yet, the Primarch Ferrus Manus would be slain outright, his head made a trophy for the traitor Warmaster, and Corvus Corax and Vulkan lost to their sons. At a stroke Horus had shattered the Legions that had all but conquered the galaxy, cleaved apart the heart of the Imperium and laid clear his path to the throne.

That would be his ultimate goal, Terra, the Throne World of the Imperium, that he might cast down his own father and take His place. In his way stood Rogal Dorn and the few remaining steadfast armies of the Imperium, the other loyal Primarchs scattered to the far corners of the Imperium and unable to come to the Emperor's aid. A narrow belt of worlds held the main route from the far north and Istvan to Terra, the fortresses of Paramar, Beta-Garmon and Lorin Alpha. Here would be fought a desperate holding action, Rogal Dorn spending all his resources and committing all those warriors at his command to slowing the advance of the Traitor hordes. For two long years they would hold the line, keeping Horus at bay at the cost of millions of lives in a series of bitter sieges and desperate battles, a conflict that would spawn legends to last 10,000 years. Yet even as they fought, the flame of rebellion spread and took root in all the worlds of the wider Imperium, the war no longer a simple matter of overthrowing Terra and claiming the throne, but a sprawling morass of old grudges and feuds now ignited into open battle.

IMPERIUM GALACTUS
1103/Circa 986010.M31

INDEX: 44932OMEGA

PROVENANCE:
ALPHA/PRIME

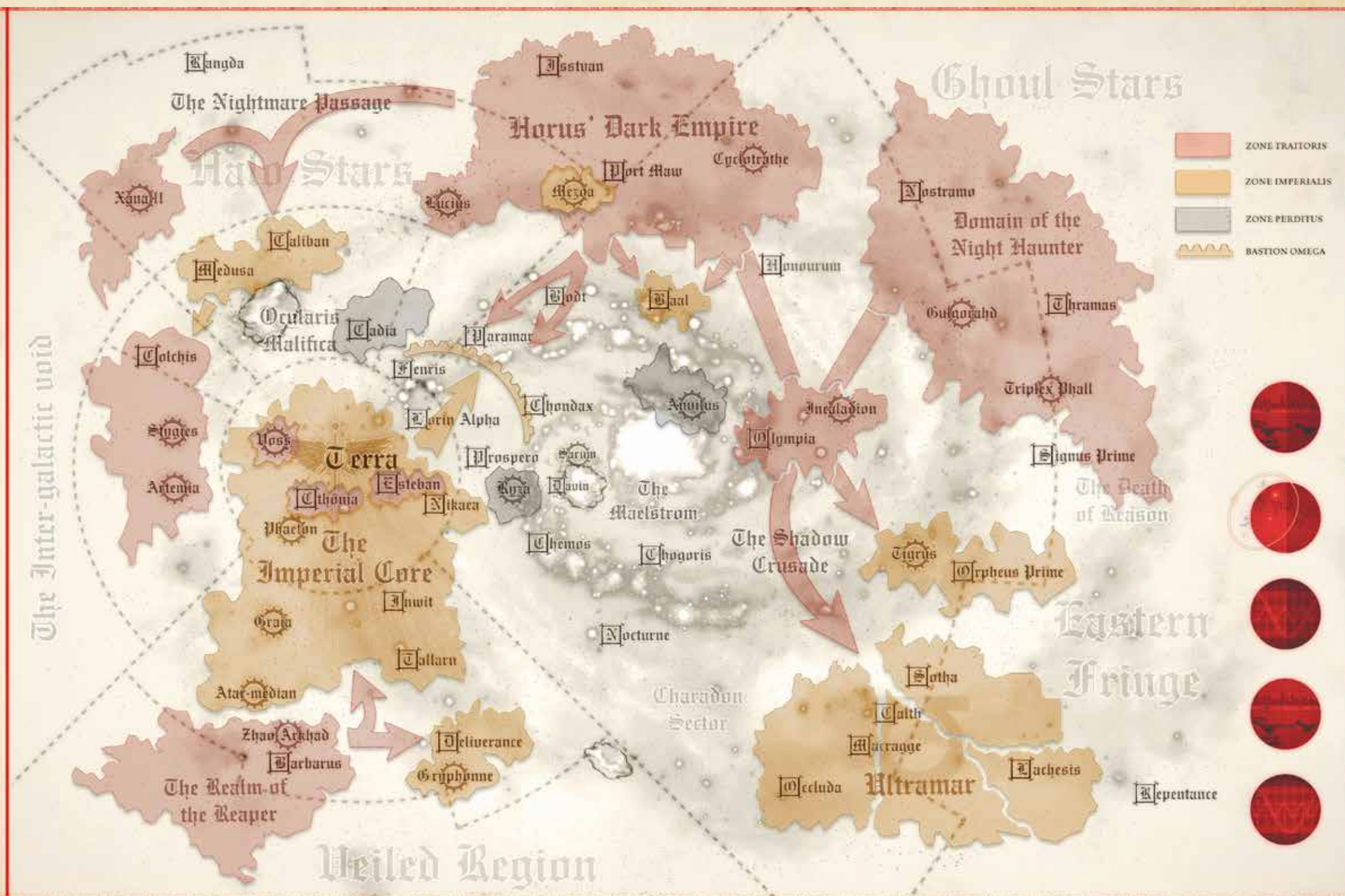
IMPERIUM SCINDO

CARTOGRAPHICA
TACTICUS
[Sable/black clearance
required]
[Input cipher...]

DATA.SET
773.593.992.015
COLLATED

VALIDATION.IDENT
AQUILA/OMEGA/606

WARNING:
DATA-LOCK FIXED
SEALED 015.M31
ACCESS RECORDED
LOGGED: 067.M31



The End of Empire

The short and decisive war that Horus had planned for had not come to pass, his triumphant advance on Terra stymied in years of grinding conflict, all while the Imperium bled and suffered. Those few loyal Legions that retained the force of arms to resist the Traitors in open war were penned in small enclaves, unable to halt the chaos that now spread to engulf the realm they had fought to create. The Imperial Fists were arrayed defiantly about Terra, their strength the only remaining bar to the Warmaster's

onslaught. Distant Ultramar, the rich domain of the Ultramarines where the largest army in all the Imperium waited for the call to arms, was in ruins and cut off from all contact with Terra, which they presumed had now fallen to the enemy. Even the fortress system of Baal and the proud warriors of the Blood Angels sat within a cage of the Warmaster's making, paralysed by the absence of their master and inundated with the broken survivors of Istvan V and the terrible doubt those broken warriors carried with them.

Yet, despite their hardships these disparate forces had managed to slow the Traitors with their stubborn refusal to fall before the might of their treasonous brothers, keeping alive the embers of the Loyalist cause as they fought.

Defeat loomed dark and grim on the horizon for the forces of the Emperor, for though they could delay the Warmaster and his hordes, they could strike no decisive blow to end his onslaught. It would simply be a

matter of bitter time and gruesome sacrifice before Horus tightened his grip around Terra and took the throne for himself. Those that still remained loyal would not make this task easy, they would fight to their last drop of blood to oppose the Warmaster and those of their brothers that had forsaken their oaths in order to serve him, fighting a series of grim sieges and bitter raiding campaigns to hold them at bay. The fortress of Paramar would change hands many times, the three major assaults upon it consuming millions of

lives and costing Horus many long months of battle, while the daring assaults of the Raven Guard and White Scars would slow the passage of men and munitions from Horus' northern strongholds to a crawl. Yet, even this bravery would last only so long, and in return Horus would claim dominion over all the northern worlds; from the dark machine-vaults of Xana to the shining spires of Angelis, the Eye of Horus flew triumphant and the isolated pockets of resistance were crushed beneath the heel of his vast army.

A Betrayal Long in the Making

Horus' betrayal was no sudden whim, nor forced entirely upon him by the intervention of outside forces. The preparation required to undertake a war on the scale of the Horus Heresy, involving millions of warriors across hundreds of star systems along with all the materials required to fuel their onslaught, is no small thing but rather a task to challenge even the greatest of military minds. To achieve such a feat in secret and in the space of a few short months is simply not possible, even for such a renowned strategic genius as Horus Lupercal. His grand rebellion, one that had suborned half of the Legiones Astartes, dozens of Forge Worlds and many millions of warriors in the Imperial Militia, was a work of logistical and strategic genius and one that had taken form over long years. The Horus Heresy was a dagger long prepared and sharpened before it was plunged into the Emperor's back.

That his intent was always open rebellion may be in doubt, but that Horus had long set plans and contingencies to allow him to quickly place large bodies of warriors into the field and that he worked to bind certain of his brothers in loyalty to him over the distant Emperor is beyond doubt. Perhaps he had at first rationalised his actions as a preventative measure should the Imperium face an overwhelming onslaught from beyond its borders. Indeed, it is likely that some of his preparations saw use during such crises as the Rangdan Crusades and the Sorthali Incursion, troops held in abeyance committed and old favours called due. Yet these would be but tests of the hidden network of warrior lodges, bound retainers and client Forge Worlds, a taste of the true power that Horus had accumulated over the long years of the Great Crusade. These hidden works were never disclosed to the Emperor or those Primarchs most loyal to him, but kept as Horus' last resort, the reflex of a deeply paranoid warrior and, in retrospect, an action that did not speak of loyalty but only of self-interest. It would take only a spark to ignite the flames of his ambition, to see these carefully prepared resources turned not to the cause of protecting the Imperium, but to that of its destruction.

new war, consumed not by the wrath of the xenos scourge that had once terrorised them but by those they had once called brother. Old allies who had gone to war under the eagle banner of the Emperor would fall upon each other in red abandon, while those that had once been rivals for glory in the Great Crusade now found themselves desperate allies against the traitorous hordes. All that had once seemed right and good, all the ceremonies of innocence and loyalty, were drowned in blood and none could see where the death would end.

The Razor's Edge

The galaxy-wide empire that had been built during the Great Crusade began to tear itself apart, a final fall of darkness upon the grand dreams of unity and empire that the Emperor had kindled in Mankind's collective soul. The fragile web of courier frigates and astropathic relays that bound its worlds together began to fray as war and madness took its toll, the remaining fragments singing a grim dirge of terror and destruction, word of the Warmaster's bloody march on Terra and the fall of Loyalist strongholds. Fear ruled in almost every sector of that wide realm that the Legiones Astartes had forged, a fickle master that goaded its subjects to unwise war and futile battle, to abandon their neighbour and offer up the weak in the hope of their own salvation. In those savage years there were but few lights in the darkness, a few fleeting tales of bravery and respite that passed like whispers through the tattered remnants of the astropathic network. They spoke of the return of Corvus Corax from

the grave of Isstvan V, of the valiant defence of Baal and the gathering might of Ultramar waiting to be unleashed. Few believed such tales, for all about them was now blood and ruin, death and terror. Such was the fragile nature of civilisation in those years that each rumour of doom held more power than any loudly broadcast litany of hope.

All it would take was one final blow to the structure of the Imperium, one more strike to the heart of that fragile empire and it would crumble to dust and ashes. Once again it would plunge into the abyss of chaos and isolation that had sought to swallow it once before, and Horus would be left with only the broken fragments of the Emperor's glorious vision. As the seventh year of the 31st Millennium began, the second year of the war for the Imperium, there were few parts of that wide realm that had not given themselves over to bloodshed and madness, few worlds of import not invested by the warriors of one side or another. Of those, lost amid the darkness at the far eastern fringe of the Imperium, Thramas seemed an unlikely fulcrum upon which to lever the course of history, but this oft-forgotten outpost of the Great Crusade was now to take its place in the annals of the Horus Heresy. Here would the fate of emperors and empires be sealed, here would the last of the great warlords of the Age of Darkness take their place upon the stage.

Broken, Blinded and Bound

Among the many plans set in place by Horus, before even the first bombs fell on the ruined worlds of Isstvan, were those intended to see the most potent threats to his supremacy removed from contention. For though the Warmaster would acknowledge no public rival, in private he held several of his brothers as objects of no little discomfort, warriors that he would prefer not to meet on the field of battle. For these paragons amongst the Primarchs would not bow to the skill at arms or the might of Horus' armies, but the subtle skills that had earned him his title of Warmaster would see them neutered and rendered powerless before they could even raise their hands against him.

There were three among the Primarchs that stood as the most dire threats to the Warmaster and his nascent schemes. Lion El'Jonson was a warrior without equal whose loyalty to the Imperium could not be subverted, Sanguinius held the awe and trust of all his brothers which Horus had long envied, and Guilliman possessed an army and strategic genius that could doom any rebellion if left unchecked. Horus laid plans to remove each of these from his path, the preparations in place long years before he would reveal his desire to rule and standing as the signposts to the Horus Heresy visible only to us now through the clarity of hindsight.

Once confirmed in his position as Warmaster, the ultimate authority barring only the Emperor Himself over the armies of the Great Crusade, Horus was granted the most effective of tools for dealing with these formidable threats. By official writ and warrant of the Warmaster, the Lion and the great majority of his forces were sent out beyond the borders of the Imperium, there to wage war in the darkness where little news of the Imperium could reach. Ever isolated from his peers, Lion El'Jonson made little complaint at such a task, accepting the grim duty as if it was his due and granted Horus the time he would need to set in motion his plans. Sanguinius and his Blood Angels would likewise see orders from their new Warmaster send them to the far corners of the Imperium, not simply led astray but trapped by secrets the Warmaster had long kept in readiness. Here he sought to dispose of the troublesome Angel and suborn his Legion to the service of his rebellion in a space where none could come to their aid. The system of Signus had been crafted into a killing ground in which the Blood Angels would fight and die alone or pledge their very souls to the Warmaster.

Guilliman and the serried ranks of his Ultramarines were more troublesome, for they were such a force that they could not be dispatched to chase after some petty threat on the edges of space. Instead, the Warmaster's orders would bring them to a battlefield of Horus' choosing, the industrial stronghold of Calth at the borders of Ultramar itself. There, lured by the promise of glory and put at ease by the seal of the Warmaster, the Ultramarines would fall to treachery and deceit, their numbers decimated by those they had thought to be allies. Last of those to be led astray by the Warmaster and his subtle strategies was the Khan and his White Scars, though unlike the others Horus would seek not to kill his old friend but rather to keep him isolated at Chondax by his order until he could be convinced of the justice of Horus' cause. It would only be the interference of the Alpha Legion that would set these plans awry and spoil the carefully set snare that the Khan had been lured into.

