



VIGILUS ABLAZE

THE THRESHOLD OF DAMNATION

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The tyrant stood in his accustomed position on the bridge, his expression stony as he gazed out of the viewing arch at the planet below.

The Warmaster had come to Vigilus.

It was a sizeable world, and well defended. That much was obvious by the naval presence dotted around it and the ident runes of a score of loyalist Chapters scattered across the viewing arch's vintage interface.

They were in disarray, battered by the brutish xenos that had intuited the immense value of this planet as the waystation closest to the northern end of the Nachmund Gauntlet, one of the only known stable routes into the Imperium Nihilus.. But the Imperials would fight, and hard. He wouldn't have had it any other way. When he claimed Vigilus, he would do it in fire and splendour.

The hoarse breathing of his captive played on the cusp of hearing, disturbing his reverie. Abaddon cast a glance towards the fallen Space Marine, his ruined body impaled in a dozen places by the blades of the Possessed that had brought him. The Warmaster noted the smears of blood that had clotted in a dozen places across his broad, once-handsome face. Breaking loyalists – it never lost its charm.

His time would come, and soon.



The Warmaster looked around the bridge of the *Vengeful Spirit*, and bathed in its magnificence. Vaulted gunnery alcoves ranged its edges, many tall enough to fit an Imperial Knight inside, with the murderous servitors of the Dark Mechanicum flesh-melded into their cabled intestines. Sparks of warpflame wound through the air, exhaled by the mighty ship's gargoyle-mouthed venting pipes. The grille underfoot was stained rich brown with spilt blood.

They were marks of history, those fallen droplets. Some had come from the veins of the hated Emperor himself; the blood of a god, as some would have it. Yet more had come from the Angel Sanguinius. Rich, dark spurts of it, spattering in great measure. Abaddon smiled as he flexed the Talon of Horus, borrowing its memory of the Primarch kill, savouring it once more.

At his back, the Daemon sword Drach'nyen seethed, jealous of its rival weapon's prominence at that time, in that place. 'Rest easy,' snarled Abaddon. 'You will drink the blood of heroes soon enough.'

'You will destroy only yourself...' coughed his Space Marine captive, bright blood joining the dried gore on his chin and spattering his bright yellow armour. 'Dash yourself to pieces on the aegis of this world.'

'You amuse me,' said Abaddon, though his deep bass tone had not a shred of mirth. 'Every court has its jester.'

The Space Marine coughed once more, and fell silent, but Abaddon could feel his hatred boring into the back of his head. It was... invigorating.

The *Vengeful Spirit* would have his forces on the planet within the hour. The vessel was an ancient god of war, cast in the form of a Gloriana-class battleship – his battleship. After ten long millennia, he felt part of it, body and soul. The great ship had only been made more potent over the ages by the raw hatred of

the warp, the dark energy that coursed through its bilges. That other famous flagship of the Black Legion – the *Planet Killer* – had its uses, and he was using it well, even now. But he would rather die than abandon the *Spirit*.

Behind the flagship came a hundred macro-class vessels and more, contingents from the Stygius war zone and the infernal forges of Nemendghast joining it with every new day. It would be easy enough to overcome the battered naval presence before them. The *Spirit* alone was a broadsword matched against knives, and it would hack a bloody hole in the paltry defence before them.

The Warmaster revelled in the feeling of being on the threshold of victory. Did his predecessor Horus ever take a moment to relish his anticipation before launching a critical strike at the Emperor's false domain? Abaddon felt certain that he did. Oftentimes he had been there in person, so long ago.

But Horus had failed. Horus was weak. Where Terra had stood, Vigilus would fall, and soon. A full half of the galaxy would be cut off from the Emperor's Light. Then could begin the endgame. Then, with his prey crippled, he could make ready for the kill.

'Have the Worldclaimer attend me,' he said, turning to the beast-masked sorcerer already etching an octogrammatic rune of summonation upon the deck. 'I would hear of the promise he has made on my behalf.'

'As you will it, Warmaster,' said the sorcerer, bowing low. He was careful not to make eye contact, as ever. A coward, that one, but useful.



The scent of burning human bone wound through the bridge as the incense of communion was lit, and the rough syllables of the dark tongue growled out of the sorcerer's vox-plate, echoed by a dozen of its acolytes. The air above the octogram began to shimmer, as if in a heat haze, and then resolve.

The red eye lenses and distorted maw of the Worldclaimer swam into focus, lit from below by eight candles of flesh-tallow. The sorcerer bowed, and retreated into shadow.

‘Haarken,’ said the Warmaster. ‘Speak.’

‘We have brought fire and damnation in your name, my lord, but not conquest,’ said his herald, his voice overlaid with a dozen Daemon-echoes. ‘Not yet.’

‘I am conquest given form,’ said the Warmaster, opening his arms wide. ‘And here I am. Who stands against me?’

‘The Lord Macragge, four of his fellow masters, and their Chapters. The Ecclesiarchy and their Sororitas. The Knights of Dharrovar and Terryn. And the soldiery.’

Abaddon sighed, and looked away in disgust. ‘I am disappointed in Guilliman’s lack of foresight,’ he said. ‘The head of that pompous fool Calgar upon my bridge will have to do.’

‘Time runs short,’ said the herald. ‘I spoke of this planet’s doom two lunar months hence. The Helspear bit deep, as ever. The claim was made. Yet the planet’s defenders believe it to be an idle boast.’

‘It could not be more true,’ said Abaddon, his hand straying to Drach’nyen in its scabbard to reassure it that the slaughter was close at hand. He motioned for the greater teleportarium decks to be activated, and a clutch of servitors spasmed into sudden life. ‘This world will burn, that much is certain, and become that which it hates the most.’ He smiled, his pointed teeth the leer of a shark.

‘You will die to a man,’ said his Space Marine captive, venom under the agony in his voice. ‘Vigilus will not fall!’

‘Enough.’

Abaddon made a curt gesture, extinguishing the incense bowl and thus ending the communique with his herald. He strode over to the captive, drawing Drach’nyen from its scabbard. It made a slick, ugly sound, like that of a cinder drake licking its fangs. The Daemon sword screamed in hideous anticipation as its glowing tip was lowered towards the captive’s throat.

With a deft and practised flick, the Warmaster gouged out the fallen warrior’s

progenoid glands with the tip of his hateful blade. The captive spat at Abaddon, acidic spittle sizzling on the Warmaster's boot.

'Show him,' said Abaddon.

The Daemon sword Drach'nyen glowed as it let the Space Marine glimpse the full futility of his struggle before his death. His eyes went wide.

'No,' managed the loyalist.

'Yes,' said Abaddon, nodding sagely. 'Vigilus has already fallen.'

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Games Workshop Ltd, Willow Rd, Lenton, Nottingham, NG7 2WS
games-workshop.com