



Documents pertaining to *Operation: Byzantine Shield*, collected by Inquisitor Cassandra Royce of the Ordo Originatus (3I4520I.M4I):

Excerpt from the journal of Lady Commissar Ariadne:

Entry Primus:

It is the fate of every guardsman to one day leave her home, never to return.

We of the Ixion 12th Dragoon Corps considered ourselves lucky to fight solely in defense of our homeworld. Not long ago, our luck ran out. For some time now, I have fought alongside one Inquisitor Cassandra Royce, a woman I am proud to call a friend, seeing to it that all manner of xenos incursions are kept back from the warm shores of Ixion. However, she has since called for my Dragoon Corps to accompany her on a crusade that will march forth from the faraway Byzantium system, a demand I cannot refuse. My men and I have since made our peace, knowing that our chances of surviving this offensive are poor, at best.

Our flotilla arrived in Byzantium earlier this week. Six worlds, and not a single hive city among them, thank the Emperor. Naxos, Rhodos, Lesbos, and Chios are the habitable ones, although, from what I hear, our enemies have been doing their best to reduce that number. On our way to the mustering point on Naxos, the Inquisitor made stops on the other three planets and met with their governors, all of whom were eager to describe how loyally their worlds had upheld their tithes for millennia. Despite their sycophantic affect, it was readily apparent that this system has suffered in recent history – word from Inquisitor Cassandra was that fully one-third of the crops on the agri-world, Lesbos, had to be burned because of a Chaos-inflicted plague. She assured me that I had not seen anything yet. I can't say I'm looking forward to what is to come.

Cassandra tells me that she requisitioned the Ixion Dragoon Corps specifically because of our history together and because of my skills as a commander, but, judging by some of the others I see around me, I have begun to suspect that she



is calling in every favor she can and making the utmost use of her inquisitorial authority. Mechanicus, Navy, Guard, hive gangers from across the sector, and allegedly even Astartes forces are being concentrated on Naxos to support her endeavor. Perhaps some of our more questionable allies will yet surprise me, but that remains to be seen.

She always was a strange one. She told me before that her Polypsykanan tutelage led her to seek out Eldar knowledge more than once, and she won't even tell me which Ordo she associates with (other than that it's not one of the major ones, and so I doubt I'd have heard of it even if she told me), so perhaps hive gangers aren't *that* outlandish in comparison.

Would that she had called upon my regiment before we took such staggering losses! I have enough bolter fodder, but my veteran sections are sorely depleted. Nausicäa and Telemachus' squads stand ready to lay waste to enemy armor, and Arcturus' flamers are as hot as ever. With luck, they will be enough to bring down what a fusillade of lasgun fire cannot.

At present we are on approach to the Naxian Scarlands, where I will meet the other regiments and their commanders who will be taking part in Cassandra's pet project. It will be a welcome change from the cramped halls of this transport. At the very least, I can distance myself from Hestia and Pandarus' bickering – I've begun to suspect that they may have some kind of affection for each other, which I suppose may be a good thing if they are to work the autocannon together. That said, some of my more zealous peers would have executed them already for their behavior, and I cannot deny that I have been tempted to do the same from time to time.

Entry Secundus:

It makes sense now why my regiment was conscripted despite being so vastly under strength. The Ixion 12th Dragoon Corps is being bolstered by the



remnants of another regiment, the Naxian Scarlands' 101st, known informally as the White Ravens of Naxos. With their troops added onto ours, the 12th has been restored to a combat-worthy regiment once more. Cassandra has put together three other conglomerations as well, vivisected monstrosities composed of shattered regiments from across the sector.

Of course, some of the other offerings are actually laughable. In the case of one regiment here, its strength is a single commissar. *One* commissar, an older man called Hephaestus. Supposedly, he and a single guardsman survived the regiment's last battle, but the latter was executed by the former for cowardice. Cassandra simply attached the commissar to the Ixion 12th and promised that he would be as much an asset as another Leman Russ tank. I will concede that he certainly looks fearsome, and he must be a tough one if he's survived to be as old as he is.

The White Ravens specialize in fast attack, by the looks of it, and they're led by yet another Commissar. This time a man called Perseus. Of our little triumvirate, I appear to be the youngest, but Cassandra suggested that, between me and Perseus at least, I am the more skilled. No doubt she is simply flattering me, but there will be no way to tell until the crusade begins in earnest.

In any case, the strength Perseus' troops bring to the table is truly frightening. I believe he places too much faith in his plasma guns, and I, for one, will be keeping my distance from his forces on the battlefield. Cassandra went so far as to call the women under his command (I do wonder how a man did come to lead an otherwise exclusively female regiment?) insane, preferring spectacle and sheer firepower over any semblance of self-preservation. As long as they can bring the fight to the enemy, I can't complain, but I am quite content remaining with my troops, thank you very much.

However, I must say that I am jealous of some of his vehicles. I had expected that my personal conveyance, the *Fiend Fury* would be the only super-heavy, but Perseus has brought a Baneblade alongside his forces, the *Manu Imperator*. The



vehicle seems a liability compared to the fast, agile units the White Ravens favor, although Perseus informed me that it was a gift from the Mechanicus adepts on Rhodos, which may explain why he keeps it around.

The last and most impressive new ally of mine is a freeblade knight scion. She is known as Artemis and she hails from Ixion, just like the inquisitor and myself. Cassandra described her as a childhood friend. That caught me off guard. I suspect that she is concealing something, since she also mentioned that she graduated from the Schola Progenium, and I know from experience that they destroy any memories of your past and discourage frivolous friendships during a stay there. If Cassandra befriended Artemis more recently, as she did me, then why lie and claim to have known her from childhood?

Entry Tertius:

The Ixion 12th is as big as it's going to be, now. It is a truly magnificent sight, a fighting force worthy of the Emperor. The dragoon corps represents the bulk of it with our mechanized infantry and artillery. Our deathstrike missiles have been restored to working order by Polyphemos, our resident engineer. The risk of having such a weapon dropped on them should be enough to make even a daemon think twice, but we shall see – I've watched regiments with more firepower than us get wiped out by things I could scarcely comprehend.

Despite his repairs to our big guns, Polyphemos refused to fix the suspension on Telemachus' chimera, the *Bellerophon*. When I asked about it, he said that the machine spirit was experiencing a bout of distress and could not be disturbed, but I suspect that he only refused because he finds it amusing.

(Can a tech-priest even find anything amusing?)

That is beside the point. The *Bellerophon* works well enough, as much as Nausicäa taunts Telemachus about the fact that her *Pegasus* works fine and that



her squad doesn't have to deal with a bad suspension. As long as they will ferry the troops into battle, I am satisfied.

With regards to Polyphemos, he joined our regiment today alongside a primaris psyker, a strange girl going by the name Circe. Another one of Cassandra's "childhood friends." By this point I am convinced she's hiding something, but it is most definitely not my place to call her out on it.

Besides, I would wager that hiding things is literally in an inquisitor's job description. I hear there's whole ordos dedicated to obscuring information. Knowledge is power, as the tech-priests like to say.

Speaking of which, I read a page from one of Polyphemos' texts today, which I have reproduced in part below:

"Should a machine not function upon striking the panel marked "on" this is an omen of great ill...the operator must repeat the ritual from the beginning, re-purifying himself, enscribing the runes, intoning the incantations, and striking the panel marked 'on'. An accompanying oath may be made. Should this procedure fail, the operator must recourse to consulting the instruction manual. (Book of the Astronomican, p. 18 – Naval Flight Manual W110E)

How many more words do you need to tell us to turn it off and back on again?

Entry Quartus:

As of today, the crusade is on. There are rumors that we will have Eldar allies from a nearby craftworld who believe that the enemy we face has kidnapped their god. Many of the troops have been executed or given lashes for spreading misinformation, but, if these stories are true then, despite my reservations...well, if the inquisitor says the xenos are our allies, then our allies they will have to be. Remind me to keep one eye open when I sleep.



Cassandra is playing a dangerous game if the rumors are true. I hope she doesn't place too much faith in them.

Entry Quintus:

Today was the most surreal day of my life. There can be no denying the truth now – there are Eldar warriors accompanying us on our crusade. A fleet of plague ships attempted to intercept our armada, and, while we could have held our own, it was the intervention of several Eldar starships that kept our casualties to a minimum, with only one Ark Mechanicus taking any notable damage. It's not even worth trying to stem the tide of rumor anymore.

After the fight, Cassandra called a meeting of the commanding officers to discuss our goal. The triumvirate of the Ixion 12th was there, as were the commanders of the 9th, 10th, and 11th. Some Imperial Navy officers, Rogue Traders, and a Magos Biologis who kept ranting about something called the Panacea were the ones I was most comfortable with. This was where it became strange. At the meeting were three actual space marines. I dared not ask their captain's name, and Cassandra never referred to him by one, but he was a man of the Charioteers chapter in full regalia. Most guardsmen will never see a space marine in their lives, but I don't know whether the Captain's presence is an omen of good or ill.

Of course, the day only became stranger once the Eldar representatives arrived. They were led by an Aurtach and a Farseer, both as arrogant as I expected. They claimed that the three score warriors of their warhost amounted to the same strength as the entire Imperial fleet, though, since our number includes a quarter that many space marines, I find their claim dubious, at best.

In one day I have seen two examples of things most Imperial citizens have scarcely dreamed of. On account of this, I was stunned during the meeting, but Cassandra could not have been less so. She spoke with clarity, decisiveness, and



determination, even commanding a certain amount of acceptance, if not respect, from the Eldar. She spoke about how we would bring judgement to our enemies in every aspect, noticeably leaving out any references to Imperial or Eldar faith so that we might continue to find common ground through our mutual foe. Smart of her. Perhaps it would not please the more puritanical members of the priesthood, but I must commend her on her clever speechcraft if it gets the job done.

I have overheard many guardsmen who believe me out of earshot comment on the attractiveness of the Eldar. As heretical as it may be, they are not wrong – the xenos seem to place great value on elegance and beauty. It unsurprising that their pride spawned a Chaos god, and one wonders if they have truly learned their lesson.

Entry Sextus:

After a few brief skirmishes with Chaos forces and the occasional Ork freebooter, we are closing in on our goal, and Cassandra finally described to me why we are so engaged. Evidently, the planet she intends to attack is the hiding place of a warband affiliated with one of the old traitor legions. Their leader, a sorcerer she calls Galliphus, has orchestrated countless raids upon the Byzantium star system because he and the plague marines under his command take offense to the medical research conducted on Naxos and Chios. She hopes to end these attacks permanently by cutting them at their roots.

When I inquired as to why she specifically had travelled so far to lead this crusade, she simply responded that she had been tasked to do so by a superior. While I know that no inquisitor outranks any other on paper, there is also a *de facto* hierarchy based on experience and prestige, so her reasoning is as good as any, I suppose.



We are going to lay siege to Galliphus' base of operations on the morrow. There is a substantial civilian population on the planet as well, supposedly unaware of the Chaos presence, but, if we succeed in destroying the warband they will doubtless need to be vetted by the Inquisition.

The psyker, Circe, is going to accompany Engineer Polyphemos inside the *Fiend Fury*, but I was made aware of the fact that the two of them are not on the best terms. She sees him as cold and emotionless, and he sees her as unpredictable and dangerous. I hope that they can cooperate for long enough to lay waste to our enemies. They must, for everyone's sake – *Fiend Fury's* firepower is the linchpin of my battle plan.

Entry Septimus:

This is my final entry for the crusade, and I regret that I have no good news to report, should anybody read this. The attack ended in disaster, although I suppose I might be thankful that we escaped total annihilation because of the valor of the late Captain Tarak (as I learned he is called) of the Charioteers. An inspiration and a hero if I ever saw one, I cannot praise the efforts of him and his men highly enough.

We should have known we were walking into a trap when the Eldar abandoned the chase at the last minute. I knew that Cassandra was wrong to put any faith in them, and she paid the ultimate price for that mistake.

The Death Guard put up heavy resistance, but we had managed to push them back from their spaceport to their citadel and were preparing our siege engines for the final assault when Galliphus revealed his ace in the hole. Another plague fleet appeared and began to drop troops all over our battle lines, spreading chaos (in both senses of the word) throughout our ranks. The 10th and 11th were annihilated in minutes and the 9th took heavy losses. Worse, one of the Rogue



Trader fleets reported the presence of the *Terminus Est* of all things, shortly before losing contact entirely. If that monster was in orbit, it meant that the planet would surely fall soon after.

We had little choice but to fall back. Cassandra ordered a general retreat across all fronts, recalling every army she had back to the spaceport, hoping to evacuate the troops before the *Terminus Est* got in range to destroy our transports.

This is where the 12th and the Charioteers made our stand. We received a desperate message over the vox channels that the survivors from the front lines were delayed, returning from the front with the city's civilian population, and that they would need support to cover their retreat. Captain Tarak committed his marines alongside my mostly intact 12th regiment to be that support, and we held the line until the civilians and wounded had made it back to the spaceport.

It was then that we learned about a plague weapon ready to be deployed by the Death Guard. Now, we had destroyed their artillery and rocket systems during the siege, so it lacked a delivery mechanism, but the heretics were crafty and sent thousands of runners charging towards our lines carrying canisters full of contagion. If even one made it to the spaceport, the entire armada would need to be quarantined, and so it fell to us to destroy them before that could happen.

Many of my guardsmen gave their lives towards this end, alongside several of the space marines. The deathstrike missile was never launched – too much risk that it would miss its mark. Instead, Tarak took three marines and escorted the vehicle towards the enemy until their squad was surrounded, at which point the missile was detonated on the launcher, destroying most of the plague runners. After that point, cleaning up the attack was easy, but this “victory” had been earned at too high a cost, and Galliphus remains alive to this day.

When the survivors were under way to Byzantium, Cassandra summoned me to her quarters. She confided in me that she had been wounded by a daemon weapon during the battle and that she would soon die a painful death, though she made it clear that she was not infected with plague. Before she bid me put an



end to her misery, however, Cassandra finally revealed to me her secret: For the purposes of record-keeping, I shall quote her verbatim:

“I lied to you when I said that I was a fellow graduate of the Schola Progenium. Shamefully, my parents were denizens of one of Ixion’s hive cities, just like many of the men and women I so relentlessly threw into the fray during the siege. That’s how I was aware of certain talented individuals, yes? They were friends, acquaintances, or legends from the underhive around whom I grew up until a passing inquisitor enlisted my talents to root out a genestealer cult. People like Circe and Artemis were also members of Inquisitor Oreandre’s retinue, people he had picked up along the way, and we quickly became friends out of necessity.

Before long, I had gained the Inquisitor’s trust, so much so that, when he himself had been mortally wounded, he gave his Rosette to me that I may persecute the enemies of the Emperor as he did. Specifically, he bid me chase down an ancient enemy of his who had yet escaped his grasp – the sorcerer, Galliphus. For years he eluded me, those years you and I spent in defense of Ixion, but, when I learned that he was responsible for the attacks on Byzantium. . .you know the rest. That’s it. We’ve cleared the air, now, I beg you, grant me the Emperor’s Peace before the archenemy takes me.”

That was all she said. I felt nothing when I took her life. It was better for her to die by my hand than by the hand of a heretic.

If I am to be honest, on account of her wording, I half expected for her to pass the Rosette to me, but she did not. Less insulting than it was disappointing, but the standards for an inquisitor are immeasurably high, and perhaps it is better that I retain my current station. What I have since learned, however, is that her last act was to declare the union of the White Ravens and the Dragoon Corps permanent and to task us with the pursuit and persecution of Galliphus. The



Munitorum has passed her many assets onto us. Her mentor's legacy can now live on through my actions, not through a badge of office.

Rather than return to Ixion as I had hoped, we have been garrisoned on the icy world of Albenstadt. The local regiment, the Albenstadt Fusiliers, recruits only from the nobility. In their blue-blooded arrogance, they seem distrustful of us 'common folk.' Furthermore, we are, in fact, the only mixed-sex regiment on the planet, which only further alienates my troops. The conservative elite of Albenstadt think us morally dubious for this distinction. Perseus advised me to separate the 12th into two gender-segregated companies, which we have since done, but the stigma remains. We are pure in the eyes of the Emperor, however, and that is all that matters.

To compound our violation of Albenstadt orthodoxy, Artemis has been adopted into the largest of the planet's knightly houses. The knights of House Aucoin traditionally inherit their titles and titles through a cognatic elective system, but the late Inquisitor's word was enough to ensure Artemis a place amongst their ranks. There is no precedent for an outsider receiving rank within the house, but they have nonetheless granted her a minor demesne and title. She is no longer a mere freeblade, she is Scion Martial Aretmis Aucoin, an impressive title to be sure.

Another young knight, Scion Arbalester Juniper Aucoin, has taken a liking to her adopted sister. This is a good thing – the loss of Cassandra hit Artemis hard, so she could use a friend. What's more, Juniper is the daughter of the house's Seneschal, the niece of its Preceptor, and the sister of several young barons. Befriending one with so many powerful connections grants my ally a modicum of legitimacy going forward.

It is clear why we must now call Albenstadt our home. The other surviving regiments from the crusade have been stationed on nearby worlds, all sharing one common neighbor: Galliphus' stronghold. Our additional strength is intended to put pressure on the sorcerer and deter future attacks against



Byzantium, eventually setting the stage for another offensive. Although what is to come is not clear, Cassandra's wishes are, and we will hold the line until they are fulfilled.

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Entry Octavus - Postscript:

That sly firebrand of an inquisitor! The person I killed was, in fact, an agent taking her form through the use of polymorphine. For whatever reason, she needed me and her former acolytes to believe her dead, meaning that she has a separate agenda she must pursue alone while we carry out her previous task. I know this only because, when we went to entomb the "inquisitor's" corpse, it had changed form. I suspect this was a mistake – she should have been given a burial into the void before the drug wore off, but we were delayed due to a lack of crew. Very few of us know the truth – Artemis, Circe, and Polyphemos are aware, as am I, of course. This information must not spread, and I have done what I can to stop it from doing so.

Why Cassandra did this, I cannot say. Perhaps she knows I will fight more zealously if I believe myself fulfilling a friend's last wish? I am relieved to know that she trusts me to fulfill Inquisitor Oriandre's legacy, though I must now question the truth of her tale and whether this "Oriandre" ever existed at all. The machinations of the inquisition remain a mystery; the pieces are in play, but I suppose it is not the place of the pawns to know what the queen is planning.



Conversation recorded pertaining to Subject I6I – the witch, Circe:

“Why don’t you trust her?”

“Why should anyone trust the warp? The realm of Chaos, of daemons? What’s more, she is not even sanctioned by the Scholastica Psykana! She was a witch that Oriandre plucked from the depths of an Ixion underhive. Everything that Circe represents is anathema to the Mechanicum – she acts without reason, and so she is unpredictable; she cannot be controlled, and so she is dangerous. I am alarmed that you do not see this as clearly as I do.”

“And the cold rationality of the machine cult is not possessed of its own weaknesses?”

“I fail to see your point.”

“Did your precious calculations not see half of your cult’s number stray from the light of the Emperor so long ago? Was it not Koriel Zeth, an adept toying with the warp, who remained loyal and spearheaded the resistance against tech-heresy during the Death of Innocence?”

“Those stories are exaggerations at best and malicious falsehoods at worst.”

“Tsk. So many remain so ignorant of their own past.”

~ Dialogue between Inquisitor Cassandra Royce and Enginseer Polyphemos.

Re-creation of events based on interrogation of Lord Commissar Perseus –
Encounter with Eldar scouts after the defeat of Galliphus:

“Begone, alien. You’ve got no right to be here.”

“This is what it has come to? Now that Galliphus’ death has been purchased with Eldar blood, you see fit to pick at his bones? You had your chance, and you failed. You gave up your own ‘right to be here’ long ago. And now, as we



stand alone in this crumbling chamber wrought of ancient marble, you dare to level accusations at my people?”

“Lady Cassandra did not fail. You betrayed her. We could have taken Galliphus’ stronghold on our first go if you hadn’t buggered off and left us to burn. Her only error was trusting anything that wasn’t human.”

“Your beloved inquisitor was wrong. She would have marched us to our deaths. Are we to be blamed for abandoning a foolhardy crusade before it brought us to ruin? Do not tell me that you would not have done the same were you in our position.”

“You’re right about that. Many of us expected your betrayal and warned Cassandra against counting on your help. Whether or not she had contingencies for your abandonment, we don’t know, but we of the Ixion 12th saw this coming. An expected treachery is still treachery, and it’s time for you to die for your transgression. This stronghold, what’s left of it, belongs to us. It always has.”

~ Dialogue between Lord Commissar Perseus and Farseer Anaïs of Craftworld Xiyaeci

Personal Record – Confrontation with and prompt destruction of Slaaneshi greater daemon:

“You cannot stop me now, daemon. You only delay the inevitable.”

“You speak to me about inevitability? I, an ancient, immortal agent of the warp, find myself spurned by the ephemeral spirit of a human?”

“Such ephemeral spirits have felled your armies and toppled your walls.”

“Galliphus’ armies were not mine. I am here for the same reason you are here. For the same reason the Eldar scavengers are here. They do not even know that you are alive, do they? The bold few who deigned to set foot upon this accursed



world squabble over trinkets not far from here, ignorant of us both. But now that the real treasures of the sorcerer's stronghold are ripe for the taking, I have come to claim something that I desire. So many Eldar souls who escaped She Who Thirsts gathered together to be harvested at my leisure."

"You will find that they are not collected so easily."

"I can look at your face and know that you feel the guilt of your mistake, Inquisitor. Your alien 'friends' will suffer an eternity of pain because you led them here. Your destruction of Galliphus has brought my prize to me. Should that not be rewarded? Do you not deserve a prize of your own? I can satisfy your most intimate, carnal, scandalous desires. What is it that you would prefer? Men? Women? Children? Beasts? I already know the answer – just say the word, and I can give it to you, Cassandra."

"I...I..."

"Go on, Cassandra. You can be honest with me."

"I would like to better know the Emperor of Mankind. To experience his glory personally, to know what nobody alive today has known. I want to be blinded by his light, that legendary radiance."

"Blinded, you say? That can be arranged, my dear."

~ Dialogue between Cassandra Royce and [REDACTED]¹.

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"Look at that light. Lady Cassandra wasn't lying when she said there'd be a beacon. No hiding under the cover of darkness and smog anymore, daemon. All hands, you have your target. Fire when ready."

~ Captain Rian Pike of inquisitorial battlecruiser *In Excelsis Imperator*.

¹ *Admittedly, I may have included this out of my own vanity, to record my finest hour. I maintain that the exact sequence of events is relevant to the conclave's line of inquiry, however, and hence should be recorded for posterity.*