

The Bird Empire

By Szabo Eduard Dragomir

Political trivialities

“How have the prideful fallen...”

Those were the words that resonated throughout the mind of King Kargeier the Third as the light of his eyes hovered aimlessly out of his one of the many palace’s windows he gazed from, sighting various ships of different shapes, all coated in glimmering marble-white, coming and going from the numerous docking platforms that the city of Mündler displayed as his mind drowned in deep contemplation while the body remained frozen in his palace’s royal chamber, adorned with blue ornate stones engraved with exorbitant forms and silhouettes depicting the history of his dynasty as they slowly united the planet, all while this beautiful façade bewitched the eye, moving it from the electrical components and other parts idiosyncratic to a civilization familiarized with space travel.

Ever since he had signed the peace treaty, he fell into a state of bitterness and depression, his mind turned gray while his body barely clung to the colours of his feathers seared by a fiery nuance of red, passionate and powerful.

He continued ambitiously the plans of his father, and his grandfather, to colonize the far-scape of space, to expand the unified Vagelauchen Kingdom, but in this rushed pursuit of greatness and expansion, they have met against an Empire much, much greater than theirs whose soldiers now walk the Vagelauchen streets and whose people now colonize their own planet just like they colonized others’. But was he wrong to sign that treaty? Did he condemn his country to a millennium of humiliation or oppression, or could this be a new age of promising glory as the Vagelauchen will now be part of a galactic Empire?

Such transient thoughts are but delusional attempts at washing away regret, and the King knew that. His kingdom was seduced by the beauty of the virgin void like a flying creature drew to the beauty of a carnivorous plant perching solitarily over mountainous stones, spreading its deceitful allure.

One thing remains certain: The infinity of the Universe, and if it is truly as grand, then who knows what other threats could lie hidden in its veils, threats that not even the Empire could be a match against.

His main chamber’s doors burst open, waking him from his poignant contemplation. Two legionaries of the Praetoriani walked in, bearing plasma rifles. Kargeier never ceased to find himself moved by these soldiers’ deathly appearance who wore black coloured segmented

armour with a golden scorpion engraved on their right shoulder, and their unit number on the left. The head was completely covered under a white helmet mimicking the intimidating appearance of what would appear to be their species' cranium, a skull. He discovered that they were quaintly regarded, and revered, among their own brethren too as they adopted a reputation akin to their Emperor's Iron Fist, much like his own Grenadier Guard, personal guard and Special Forces.

After them came two intriguing individuals of origins unknown to this realm: One had the alien characteristics of the rest of the invaders, with notable individual traits however: a skin coated in the colour of olive and a pair of deep, brown eyes hidden by rich and black eyebrows. His hair was short and black, and his height was inversely proportional to his vulpine demeanour. Behind him there was an individual most uncanny: A tall and robust character who bore traits unlike that of any other of the Imperial invaders: His body possessed little resemblance to his companion except for the outlining morphology, but beyond that, the skin was predominantly rendered inconspicuous by a layer of fur which so accurately mimicked the colour of coal, contrasting with a pair of piercing green eyes that shined as emeralds. There was something also predatory about him, considering his protruding horns, round ears, and long fangs that prompted out of his elongated jaws like bestial knives. From his blackened uniform bearing the golden scorpion mark, among countless others symbols of whose meaning remained blurred by mystery to Kargeier, there was no doubt that this was another Praetorian.

"Good day, King Kargeier." The olive-skinned individual spoke, expressing an obfuscating and natural indifference towards the kingly title. "My name is Marcus Verus Fabianus, and I have been designated the proconsul of this planet. As you may know, since the signing of the peace treaty, all of the territories retained by the Vagelauchen Kingdom were annexed by the Empire, is that correct?"

The impoverished king scratched the base of his throat as a certain irritation gripped him. To be faced by the realization of losing his kingdom in such a manner is truly unnerving to him.

"Is it actually necessary to add salt to an already gashing wound, proconsul?" The King asked, irritated.

"Under particular circumstances, yes." The proconsul replied in a stoic manner. "However, you will find that you are deprived of this privilege. The reason why your presence is still required is due to the fact that I have decided to grant you representative authority and appoint you as my advisor in order to assist me in the effective integration of this planet."

"How... benevolent of you..." Kargeier remarked emptily.

"You cannot even imagine." Marcus replied. "The success of my career relies in my administrative efficiency, if I may be so honest. Your people are now mine, and like a caring adoptive father, I shall nurture them as if they were my own. Now, are you willing to accept this duty I offer you?"

"It would seem I have little choice, now do I?"

“There is always a choice, and we always have complete freedom in making whatever choice we want to. It just so happens that every choice presents consequences, good or negative, that we may find ourselves reluctant or not in accepting them. You are entirely free to choose to accept this proposition, as you are free to choose not to accept it. I would only ask you to have the sensibility to consider the fact that each of the two choices may have certain consequences that may or may not be to your liking.”

A rich smile carved the proconsul's olive skin as his lips opened, revealing white battalions of teeth, while his eyes were covered in deceitfully welcoming warmth.

Kargeier rolled his eyes contentiously as he fell into a brief meditation. “*How have the prideful fallen.*” Those very words echoed repeatedly into his mind like a choir of haunting poltergeists, striking him with grief and bitterness.

“Freedom of choice, eh?” He asked rhetorically. “All right, I choose... to accept.”

Marcus burst into a short laughter, obviously pleased. “You see?” He asked, glancing over his taller companion. “This is why I love Democracy! Men have the liberty to make the right choices on their own!” He said, continuing to laugh right afterwards under Kargeier's bewildered and un-amused gaze.

“That settles it.” He said, resuming his serious composure. “You will be granted the social status of the patrician and all the ensuing privileges, and I will assure that the necessary formalities are taken care of. But now... on to other tasks.” He said. “I have noticed that your culture presents a rather barbaric element in the organization of your society.”

“Which would that be?” The king curiously asked.

“Something described as serfdom.” Marcus replied sternly. “There is no room for its existence in our society, therefore I want it abolished. The liberated citizens will be hired as convenient manpower in the efforts to develop the planet's mining industry where they will receive adequate pay and services.”

“That will anger the nobility...” Kargeier spoke.

“...Which will be adopted into the Patrician class, should they fulfill the required criteria.” Marcus interrupted him. “Furthermore, as a compromise, they will receive a discount over the Slave Market and Robotic Facilities in making up for the serfs they have been deprived of.”

“Slaves?!” Kargeier exploded. “And you call us barbaric?”

“Hmm, you seem not to have learned that the days where you could express authority are gone. But, to honour your question: They are a luxury, employed by the rich there were the coldness of metallic automatons offers no gratification. I am talking personal teachers, babysitters, bodyguards, travel companions, advisors, and other such professions that one would find fitting for his household.” Marcus replied. “I must say that there is a strong legislation that protects their integrity, as, after all, they are a resource, an expensive one at that, and we cannot permit the unnecessary harm of one just as we cannot permit the

unnecessary damage of industrial machinery. But tell me, how would the serfs feel to know that there exist slaves with more rights than them? It is simply barbaric to be deprived of the liberty to own property, would you not think?"

"But slaves do not own property either..." Kargeier retorted.

"Slaves ARE property, which renders your argument invalid!" Marcus evoked. "Anyway, I am certain that the nobles, the patricians, who could not afford the means to fully adopt an automatized labour force may now have the freedom to choose so... thanks to the discount."

The Vagelauchen took a deep breath. "Anything else...?"

"Yes, the infrastructure, and the digital servers will have to be connected to the Empire's, in order to assure that the inhabitants of this planet are connected to the rest of the world they are now part of. Furthermore, a census will have to be formed, and I would like a list of all the individuals died or lost in the war and their properties, especially land properties, as they will be reorganized and offered to the retired legionaries. That would be all for now. I will assure that these meticulous activities are executed accordingly. I only need you to assure the populace's cooperation. I am certain that there is no doubt that I can rest this matter upon your shoulders, yes?"

"Only if you choose to." The deposed king replied, raising his beak and widening his eyes amicably while satire was at play here.

The proconsul giggled. "Good! Well, then, I will leave you with the Legatus of the Legio Secunda Praetoriani, Cornelius Rufus here." he said, gesturing towards the alien silhouette behind him.

Marcus made way for the door, but the moment he found himself right between the two guards, he turned back towards the deposed king, and with prideful raise of his hand he shouted:

"Roma Invicta!"

And with those two words echoing inside the chamber room, he made his disappearance.