

Chapter 368: Boring Daily Life

Judging by the freshness of the ingredients supplied by the Emperor Somnium's cafeteria, Hades concluded that the voyage was most likely already more than halfway complete. The Emperor was sharpening his knives for the Thousand Sons—he was far too angry now, and no one could stop a wrathful monarch.

The Council of Nikaea had dispersed in haste. After such an incident, it was obvious that no one could sit down calmly for tea, exchange pleasantries, or pretend at cordiality. Most of them left the planet immediately, as if afraid of being tainted by some ill omen.

Hades seriously doubted whether the Emperor's actions wouldn't push his "good" sons even farther away from him—but the Emperor seemed as though he never worried about such things. Malcador, on the other hand, paid special attention to the states of the Primarchs.

Ever since Hades told Malcador what he knew, the Regent of the Imperium had been extremely busy. Though he verbally dismissed Hades's information as useless nonsense, his body was far more honest than his mouth.

First, he sent people to keep a close watch on whether Fulgrim obtained that sword. Then he issued several commendations to the Iron Warriors. After that, he dispatched several divination psykers to assist—or rather, monitor—Curze. As for Lorgar, he was now accompanied by a full squad of Custodians.

Hades applauded Malcador silently in his heart. What a diligent Imperial Regent—truly a hero.

In response, Malcador shot him a look that said he wanted to kill him.

“If you want me to feel better,” the old man frowned, “then shut your mouth, Hades.”

The mortal agents he had planted in the Third Legion were on the verge of being discovered, and he had no choice but to withdraw them.

Hades responded with frantic nodding and the gesture of zipping his lips shut.

“So... Malcador, can I take a few books to pass the time?”

“Yes!” Malcador shouted. “Take them—and then get the hell out of my library!”

By the Throne, what kind of person reads while guarding a Primarch?!

And so Hades successfully acquired books aboard the Imperator Somnium. After that conversation, Magnus was clearly less restrained—though this manifested as periodic breakdowns, depression, muttering to himself, and bursts of laughter.

Hades was genuinely afraid that one day Magnus would overthink himself into madness and decide to blow himself up.

So now, every day, Hades read aloud to Magnus—to torture him—no, to help distract his mind.

“What do you want to hear today?”

Hades casually pulled out several books from the very bottom of the stack on the table. Those hadn't been read yet. Because of his rough movement, the pile collapsed, producing a dull thud as the books knocked into each other.

Out of the corner of his eye, Hades saw a slight twitch on Magnus's face. He looked like he was about to charge out and loudly denounce Hades's barbaric behavior—but in the end, he didn't.

Hades opened to the first page and began to read:

“MS/F 14689—M296 is the standard designation for drawing sheet size and format. ‘MS/F’ is the High Gothic initialism for ‘Mars Standard / First Consideration.’ ‘14689’ is the sequential number of the standard, and ‘M296’ indicates the year in which the standard was promulgated—”

"Do you only read maintenance manuals and cookbooks?"

Magnus's listless voice rang out. This was the thirty-fifth day. From the beginning, when Hades read aloud on his own, to Magnus asking him to stop, to Magnus becoming numb, and finally to Magnus managing to negotiate some right to change the books—

Thirty-five days had passed in total.

All Magnus wanted was a quiet place to think. He needed to come to terms with this bitter reality on his own. He needed to realize just how far he had fallen—

But Hades would not allow it.

Every day, aside from eating, Magnus was forced to listen to Hades's reading. This warden didn't even sleep or rest—more than once, when Magnus awoke from despair-filled unconsciousness, he could still hear Hades reading aloud from a cookbook.

In despair, Magnus realized that he was gradually becoming desensitized to Hades's presence.

Hades, who was reading with great relish, lifted his head. He pondered briefly.

"Alright—by the way, most forge worlds now use drawing standards starting with the US/FM series. Translated, that's 'Ultima Segmentum / Fuck Mars.' So, would you like to hear One Hundred Everyday Hive-City Dishes from the Lower Spire, Magnus?"

In truth, Hades wanted to read it himself. He reached out, ready to change books.

"Why don't you go seek other, truly profound wisdom?!"

Magnus raised his voice slightly.

"You are—you are the Head of the Silent Sisterhood, Hades. Shouldn't you be reading books on mysticism or philosophy?"

Please stop torturing him with maintenance manuals and cookbooks!

Hades paused, thought for a moment, then spoke.

“Never heard of them. The psykers I know aren’t close to me. How would I know what books to read?”

Visibly, Magnus—who had alternated between lethargy and manic rage—suddenly perked up. He instinctively reached out and adjusted the dull, dust-covered ornaments on his arm, then spoke with grave seriousness.

"If you have never touched such knowledge, then I suggest you begin with Three Hundred Questions of Ancient Terra—but only read the first three hundred and sixty-eight pages. Everything after that is complete nonsense. After that, you may read The Grand Design of the Sages. Though it carries a strong xenos flavor, that is no reason for it to be neglected. Then you may choose your next studies according to the radiance of your psychic light. If your light manifests as—"

Magnus suddenly stopped. As if abruptly awakening, he cried out:

"You're a damned pariah! You have no psychic radiance!"

Hades rested his chin on his hand. Magnus was very much like an intellectual locked in a prison cell, still discoursing at length—because that was exactly what he was.

“Yes,” Hades naturally picked up where Magnus left off.

“So I never read those books. I only read cookbooks and maintenance manuals.”

He watched as Magnus turned pale again, sinking back into listlessness.

"You... what do you actually want, Hades? Stop reading that stuff already!"

Hades put the book back.

"I'm just bored." He said, watching the angry red glow flare up again around Magnus's head.

"Bored? For thirty-five days you've been reading nonstop—you just want to—you just want to—"

Magnus clenched his teeth.

"You just want to torment me for your own amusement!"

Hades propped up his chin and released the null field.

"If I really wanted to torment you, Magnus," Hades said calmly, "then I think the pain you'd feel wouldn't be limited to this."

He watched Magnus open his mouth, but in the end, no properly aggressive retort came out.

"Then what do you want, exactly?! Hades!"

"Relieve my boredom," Hades replied evenly. "Or you can choose to say something entertaining yourself, to help pass the time."

Magnus screamed, "This is a new kind of interrogation technique! Hades—you're doing this on purpose!"

"When did I ever force you to speak?" Hades said impatiently, reaching back into the pile of books again.

“Then we’ll continue with The Martian Drafting Standards Guide.”

"I'll talk! I'll talk! What do you want to hear, Hades?!"

“Anything’s fine,” Hades said.