

# Prelude to Apocalypse

The precise start to the conflict in the Graven Reach is the Coup at Asphodel. Well equipped and gene-hanced militia overran the station itself, and initially it seemed as though the Magos Ma'Ta had perfectly decapitated the entire leadership of the Mechanicum.

The Coup itself was a remarkable operation, obviously done with insider help. The entire Mercenary force was inside the stations defences before any alerts were raised, some combat servitors failed to awaken from their patrol patterns, and several of the Astartes forces that were operating with Mechanicum sponsorship – including the World Eaters of Vehemantus and the Iron Hands of Atrax – were sent out on operations with information that either sent them way into the distant areas of the Nebula, or (in the case of the Iron Hands) put them in a conflict with measurably superior resources, nearly resulting in their annihilation.

However, three Magos' from the command council escaped, and were able to contact other groups operating in the area, who reacted with whip like speed to the news, and this frustrated the coup leaders, leaving them in a weak position.

Instead of an operation tied up neatly, where Ma'Ta could approach the factions present in the Reach and dictate terms, they were forced to reach out for allies. This would prove decisive in the months ahead, as relying on allies was a questionable proposition all through the war.

As the war began there were, apparently, three major groupings of aims, though these forces were not necessarily conscious allies – the alliance of Unification, the Warmaster's Hunt, and the unaligned.

## **The Alliance of Unification.**

This coalition, led by Solar Auxilia and Luna Wolves officers, sought to establish a traditional and ordered resistance, with a command hierarchy and flying very clearly Imperial colours. In this aim they were hampered by their lack of heavy equipment, and with forces unsuited to a traditional campaign they were bounced out of a number of operating bases to their evident frustrations. The Dune Lions and The First and Last nonetheless provided a ready haven for Loyalist forces, and it appears at least one of the escaped Magos' from Asphodel was able to provide valuable intelligence for this alliance's hunt for resources.

Their major advantage in this phase was their intelligence gathering – they maintained an astropathic network and were able to draw on the Mechanicum's resources to ensure their enemies never had a chance to land a decisive blow.

The Blood Angels arrived a little later into the area, pursuing traitor forces.

*"On learning of the approach of the renowned traitorous warband of Le'Veag Oshen, K'Lian donned his armour and descended upon the traitors in full might, leading a great portion of the noble defenders of the Neikea.*

*The foul traitors had built a great stronghold, defended by many strong towers. But these defences were as nothing to the defenders, and leading his forces through the gates, K'Lian shouted out a great challenge. The leader of the rebels came to face him, and with a voice of great steel, leavened with all the wisdom and compassion of the Salamanders, K'Lian spoke. "Who are you to turn from the ways of the Emperor's Truth? He is mighty, and we are but his humble servants. Without him we are nothing. You, are nothing. I give you this one chance to live and redeem yourselves. Leave this place to it's people, for they deserve peace, and turn on your masters, for it is only by death in battle against them that you might redeem yourselves."*

*And Oshen heard these words, and knew them to be true. Penitent, he ordered his forces leave, and the warband of the First and Last ravaged the traitors lines for many months afterwards."*

*Extract from Chapter VII of  
'The Angels of the Reach' by Veraliust Witt*



### **The Warmaster's Hunt**

In contrast to this, the Death Guard and Alpha Legion began the conflict with significant resources, though less unity. Traditionally scholars believe that that Alpha Legion was sent ahead of the main Death Guard invasion force in order to sow confusion and allow the pacification of the centre more easily. However, there is a lack of evident cohesion to the early invasion. The Alpha Legion failed to clear out some of the more obvious elements standing in the way of the Death Guard, and the Death Guard diverted their forces inexplicably, a move that nearly resulted in disaster.

In fact, we can almost see a total disconnection between these forces operations, whether caused by poor relationships between the commanders, or unreliable communications webs, or simple ignorance.

Potentially we can also assign the mercenaries of Ma'Ta loosely into this camp. In their weakened but still influential state they had much to offer an invader, but would be a huge obstacle, so they reached out to the Heretic forces and formed a tenuous alliance. The Death Guard and Alpha Legion were both able to use their superior heavy equipment to deny operations bases to the Unification armies, and Ma'Ta was able to funnel enough resources towards the warmaster to satisfy the Heretic commanders that the region was tributary.

### **The unaligned.**

Controversially, I believe that the main force in this camp are the Neikea. They barely reacted to the Coup at all – seeming to believe this was not a play for dominance by an outside faction. They fought in the first major engagement of the post Coup war, The Ambush at Darkwall Reef, a fully mechanised and powerful expedition, but the Death Guard were an old grudge, and afterwards the Salamanders withdrew to their previous positions, and did not take an active position in the war.

The World Eaters and Iron Hands, drifting without the council of Asphodel, remained free-agents, and they would potentially swing the balance of the conflict. The World Eaters conducted several raids on stations and settlements, but without any obvious overarching objective.

The Iron Hands faced an isolated position, shorn of backup and supplies, as well as political direction.

Magos Tyrell represents a fascinating wild card in this period. He reacted with huge speed to the coup. It's believed that one of the false trails that led defenders away from Asphodel was intended to strike two targets with a single shot, crippling the Iron Hands Astartes and driving the forward operating bases of Magos Tyrell's powerful forces away from the centre of the Reach.

