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40,000

ROLEPLAY

WRATH & GLORY

AELDARI

INHERITANCE OF EMBERS



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AN ANCIENT SYSTEM

The Gilead System has long been intertwined with the collective destiny of the Aeldari, from their very primordial origins through to the present age.

In the ancient past, what would come to be known as the Gilead System was once a Necron dominion during the devastating conflict known as the War in Heaven. Untold destruction scoured the galaxy, unleashing weapons of war so terrible they extinguished stars and rent the very firmament asunder.

Gilead was not spared this devastation. When the Necrons threw down their C'tan masters and brought the war to a close, the Lezektekhan dynasty chose one of the blasted planets that remained as their resting place. In due course, even that tomb world would be shattered, and Gilead was all but abandoned.

In the wake of the War in Heaven, the stars were inherited by those species created by the Old Ones. Among them were the Aeldari. Powerfully psychic and technologically adept, they came to dominate the galaxy. At the peak of their might nothing was beyond their reach, their powers were godlike and their armies were nigh on undefeatable.

Advanced bio-engineering techniques were used to mould barren planets into virtual paradises — one wonder among countless others. Slowly, their dominion grew in power, in brilliance, and in arrogance.

The system that would one day be named Gilead has seen countless beings traverse its breadth, the Aeldari included, whose scholars were interested in unravelling the fate of the vanished Necron tomb world. Later, they turned their attention to a barren and lifeless planet and determined that it should become a paradise, a maiden world, a monument to their civilisation and their gods. It was named Aral'dha, an auspicious moniker meaning 'flower of dawn' in one dialect of the Aeldari lexicon. Desolate rock became verdant earth, lush and abundant, and the world they created was worthy of its name.

Their work done, the scholars and artisans who had made Aral'dha returned to the heart of the Aeldari empire. There they found that much they had once thought pleasant now seemed crass by comparison. A few began to suspect something was amiss among their kin, but for the most part they kept these fears to themselves. None guessed at just how dire the situation had become.

Not unlike the seasonal flowers so carefully engineered to grow across Aral'dha's many biomes, the Aeldari civilisation had blossomed, and so too would it wilt.

Having long wanted for nothing, each Aeldari could spend their long life sating every passing whim. Some, such as those who crafted Aral'dha, spent their years in noble pursuits. Others surrendered to their most depraved impulses, and many exotic cults dedicated to obsessive excess and esoteric knowledge sprung up. Over time, whole worlds became consumed by terrible passions.

In time the path became clear — to remain amidst such corruption was to invite it into one's own soul. Many departed upon great world-vessels known as craftworlds and leaving the Aeldari empire behind them. Those who had made Aral'dha beautiful gathered together once more and did the same, but where others merely fled away and into the dark, they had a destination in mind. They named their craftworld 'Ul-Khari,' meaning 'a promise fulfilled,' and made for the Gilead System.

UNINVITED GUESTS

While they had once held dominion over the entire galaxy, the Aeldari empire had turned inwards as it approached the precipice of ruin. As a result, other species had spread widely among the stars. When Craftworld Ul-Khari made its way to Gilead, they found their intended home occupied by Humanity.

Ul-Khari knew little of Humanity save that they marshalled powers far beyond their limited foresight. Aghast at being denied sanctuary on Aral'dha, but uncertain if the Mon-Keigh could be successfully negotiated with or defeated in battle, the craftworld chose a subtler path and withdrew from Gilead. Then came the Fall, the catastrophe that ripped the once mighty Aeldari empire asunder. The birth of She Who Thirsts was felt across the galaxy, and even aboard isolated Ul-Khari, it was known that the end had come.

In the absence of any challengers, Humanity cemented its hold over the Gilead system. Their boots defiled the fertile soil, and they built atop razed monuments to ancient gods they could not name. They dubbed Aral'dha 'Ostia', a name with neither poetry nor meaning, and when they were done erasing every noteworthy trace of its former masters, they set upon themselves.

MORTAL RUINATION

While the Aeldari attempted to save what they could of their civilisation, the Humans of the Gilead System found troubles of their own. The system reconnected with the rest of Humanity during the Great Crusade, mostly without bloodshed, but this peace was not to last. The Emperor's nascent Imperium soon burned in the fires of Horus's ambition, and Gilead was not spared from devastation. A battle group of the Emperor's Children on its way to lay siege to Terra, almost as an afterthought, all but scoured the Gilead System of life.

In the centuries that followed Horus's defeat and the confinement of the Emperor to the Golden Throne, Humanity struggled to rebuild. The Imperium would lay claim to Gilead yet again, but this state of affairs would not last. When the Emperor's Children had laid waste to the Gilead System, it had drawn the eye of dark powers, and Gilead had been marked for desecration.

THE HAND OF CHAOS

Craftworld Ul-Khari had yet to return from its long sojourn, and a millennium of mourning was still to be undertaken. In this time they learned the art of preserving souls, a practice so sacred and necessary to what was left of their people, to keep them from the grasp of She Who Thirsts. Chiefly, however, the denizens of Ul-Khari considered how they might retake the lost maiden world of Aral'dha. While some were adapting to their lives aboard the craftworld, many wished to return to a true planet.

Ul-Khari by now was home to a number of gifted and powerful seers, some born after the Fall. Among these was a talented Farseer, Idril, Born of Twilight. Idril had foreseen that the Imperium would not be able to hold Gilead. She had travelled there via the ancient paths of the webway and felt malevolent stirrings, and knew that the Dark Gods and their servants would return. If ever the system was to welcome its true people, to become the haven the shattered Aeldari so badly needed, she would have to set one enemy upon another. Idril began to make her preparations.

By M.34 of the Imperial Calendar, Idril had been proven correct. The Gilead System had become a bastion of Chaos, as devotees of She Who Thirsts made terrible sport of whatever remaining citizens of the Imperium they had not already slain.



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To the craftworlders of Ul-Khari, which now lurked on the fringe of the Gilead System, it seemed the fate that had befallen so many of their kind played out once more before them.

Rangers were sent from Ul-Khari to learn more about their foe and returned with tales of twisted figures visiting depraved cruelty on the dwindling populace who prayed daily to their Emperor for salvation. News also came of the enemy's military strength — more than enough to make the system unassailable. Despair gripped the craftworlders but, having accompanied the scouts herself, Idril had at last acquired the evidence she required to rally all of Ul-Khari to her cause.

Even as Ul-Khari despaired at the depredations visited upon the Gilead system by the forces of Chaos, the Imperium was slowly awakening to the threat. Incursions of heretics, daemons, and traitorous Space Marines had been noted across the sector, and slowly but surely, the might of the Imperium was marshalled to oppose them.

Under Idril's stewardship, Ul-Khari's forces began to probe the Imperium's preparations, intent on finding a suitable subject for a daring plan. Julyanna Gilead, a woman of great faith and possessed of an iron will, had been a fitting choice. Gilead had raised a mighty fleet intent on visiting the Emperor's wrath on the enemies of the Imperium. However, the tides of the warp had played their own part in the destiny of the crusade; targets and plans were made only to be forced to shift and adapt to the constantly changing theatre of war.

By careful manipulations of the Human fleet's Navigators, Astropaths, and officers, the Seers of Ul-Khari were able to draw this devastating assault towards the Gilead System. If their psychic incursions were ever noticed, they were not questioned — perhaps inspired by their leader's unshakeable faith in the Emperor, many all but expected to receive the Emperor's guidance in lighting the path before them.

Some craftworlders had opposed the plan, seeing it as simply trading one insurmountable foe for another, but Idril's will held sway long enough to see the Imperium's forces descend on Gilead. In private, the Farseer must surely have wondered if it was fate or folly that drove her to guide such a force of destruction down upon her people and the home they aspired to claim.

THE JULYANNA CRUSADE

The leadership of Ul-Khari intended for a modest force to weaken or even rout the Chaos presence in Gilead. The Aeldari believed that the crusade, even in victory, would be greatly diminished. If not, then Imperial forces would certainly move swiftly on to other systems, leaving behind only a small holding force ready to be swept aside. Instead the Gilead System became the unassailable bastion at the heart of a military campaign that won victory after victory, going on to conquer a whole swathe of worlds. The Aeldari could only watch as the Mon-Keigh made the Gilead System a beacon of Imperial might.

In the early days of the war, before they realised their mistake, Ul-Khari lent its aid to the crusade. This was done secretly. Careful use of strike teams comprised of Aspect Warriors devastated important targets, while hidden Aeldari Rangers lent subtle aid amid more significant battles. Among the ranks of the *Astra Militarum*, many of these 'miraculous' interventions added to a growing sense that their crusade was blessed and its leader favoured by the Emperor himself.

Long hidden away in the webway and preserved from the Fall, the first of Cegorach's chosen faithful had finally returned to the galaxy. These Harlequins weaved their lethal performances across the battlefields of Gilead, only adding to the growing mythos of those early days of the crusade. One among them, a figure of horror for the craftworlders, was an *Arebennian*, a Harlequin Solitaire, who walked the Path of Damnation.

In a meeting with the leadership of Ul-Khari — one that would prove lethal for all but one of their number — the Solitaire explained the Laughing God's interest in the Gilead System. In a ritual dance of death, he demonstrated that a great jest was to play itself out there, and it was vital that Ul-Khari find a way to make itself one with a world in the system.

Keen to limit their own losses, and with an Imperial victory looking increasingly certain, Ul-Khari forces withdrew to the edge of the system. As the war drew to a close and the outcome became clear, there were few celebrations. Though the forces of Chaos were routed, the Imperium only reinforced its gains, and Gilead had never been further from Aeldari control.