

ED of the Navigator



"Thunder and lightning and fire
Are guiding the trip of my life
Insatiable burning desire
As into the unknown I dive"

--Excerpt from Gamma Ray's Beyond the Black Hole

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Psyker; a loaded word in the Imperium of Mankind. There are many homonyms for psyker: mind reader, wyrd, wizard, sorcerer and, the most commonly employed, witch. The psychic mutation that creates psychic humans is regarded amongst the vast bulk of humanity with doubt. Some Inquisitors say it is the next step of human evolution; from Homo sapiens to Homo Psychana, but few listen to them and the witch-hunters continue their purges. It is true, most psykers found are not powerful enough to be trained as useful of their kin, and so they are eliminated from existence. Therefore, a weak psyker's life is mercilessly short, once discovered. And these weak psykers is often ordinary people, how've been born with great powers. They might be able to bend spoons and foresee the weather, but not much more, but the Inquisition roots them out, and deletes them anyway. The reason is given later.

Moderately powerful psykers are often taken into training for use in the Scholasta Psykana, should they be young enough, but even here, a great many are deleted by the Inquisition. A few promising are taken up as Inquisitor Acolytes, if worthy. Those moderately powerful psykers, who are discovered in the puberty or later, are however always deleted.

The most powerful psykers are the Space Marine Librarians. The lowest ranking of these psykers, Lexicanums, are easily capable of bending steel girders with their minds. They can call forth raging thunderstorms with a gesture. The Codicians are even more powerful, capable of perceiving the outcome of a battle, keeping things floating in the air for days by sheer force of will.

Next in line comes the Epistolaries, ranking only lower than the Chief Librarians (or the Master Lexicanums). The Epistolaries can see decades into the future, taking courses of action to make sure the outcome sees to their, or the Imperium's, needs. The most powerful Space Marine psykers, and therefore even human, are the Master Lexicanums, the Chief Librarians of the Space Marine legions. These individuals can perceive the future in the mesmerising web it is, and chose the right course. They can destroy lesser deamons with a single word of power, alter the weather with a flick of a wrist and even guide ships through the eddies of the Warp. Few Space Marine psykers are of true Master Lexicanum level, though. Not more than one per regiment.

There are two special kinds of psychic mutations, however, which humanity takes great care in protecting: the Navigators mutation and the mighty psykers Astropath.

We start with Astropaths. Astropath is an abbreviation of astro-telepath, and it describes a

psyker capable of sending a message through the Warp. As the great distances between the stars make all other means of communication worthless, the Astropaths are highly regarded. They are the only ones able to send and receive messages over the Warp. Nearly all people with the Astropath mutation are recruited in the Imperium's use, and countless are executed, because they are too dangerous to let live. 90 per cent of the Imperial psykers are Astropaths. And with this number, it means those in Imperial service. The untrained mass is probably three times as many as the Astropaths.

Navigators are different. Their mutation goes through families, just like the Space Marine mutation. However, the gene only shows up if both parents are Navigators. They have a strange 'third eye' which enables them to navigate through the eddies of the Warp. However, they have no other psychics than this ability, and this renders them almost immune to the inhabitants of the Warp.

Which brings us to the next subject: Deemons.

Deemons. Etherworlders. Warp beasts. Chaos spawn. They have many names. And they all differ greatly in size, power and looks. But they all have one in common; they reside in the Warp and they are our worst nightmares given form. They are the minions of a myriad of Gods, and the four most powerful Gods are brothers, and they control the most destructive deemons. These gods are (in power order) Khorne, Tzeentch, Nurgle and Slaanesh. Each god is very different from the other, as well as their minions. Khorne's warriors are powerfully set, muscular fighters; Tzeentch's wizards are very sly and intelligent beings, relying on guile instead of brute force; Nurgle's forces are bloated, rotting abominations, carrying horrendous contagions and lastly there's Slaanesh. His minions are trans-sexual creatures, both male and female at the same time, beautiful beyond mortal imagination as well as fanged and horned grotesques. The link these creatures known as deemons have with psykers is that a deamon can't materialize in the mortal realm, unless it does so through a psychic mortal of corresponding power. Thus, the most powerful deemons can only materialize through the most powerful psykers, and the most powerful psykers must therefore be trained and watched rigorously by the Imperial Inquisition. Lesser deemons can materialize through virtually any sort of psyker, whilst the deamon lords can't materialize through anything else than an Astropath or such powerful psyker. Many are however the occasions when Chaos cults have summoned greater deemons through rituals, and these greater deemons have then called forth lesser deemons. Without a psyker even featuring. Common are also the times when untrained psykers have been suddenly possessed by deemons, torn apart from the inside to give way to the beast.

Hence, this is why the Inquisition carries through with its purges of psykers. Although they know humanity is evolving to a psychic race, humans have not the knowledge to protect themselves from deemons as effectively as Eldar do. So for the time being, removing young psykers is considered the only way, and the Inquisition has forced this into the Imperial Religion as well. Psykers are abhorred by most Imperial citizens, as are the mutants. Not to word too much about mutants, but they are amongst all Imperials considered as deviants, marked by Chaos for some sin committed by their parents. They are either killed or used as slaves. End of story.

There has been many famous psykers through time, most of them Space Marine Master Lexicanums. The most powerful of these Space Marine Master psykers and most famous is without doubt Edward McKenzie. Though not born in Space Marine family, he was born with extraordinary psychic powers, and it is rumoured that he matches Eldar Farseers in his powers. He has proved judicious and wise in his use of his powers and like one would expect, he has never used them to achieve his own ends.

A famous non-Space Marine psyker was Lord Astropath Zebulon. He was a mighty psyker, one of the mightiest, capable of sending a message through the entire Imperium, without relay. He was lastly stationed on Armageddon, when the last war broke out. He remained there until the Siege, when the psychic scream of the Emperor's mortal death rippled through the Immaterium. As Zebulon was so close to Secundus, the force of the psychic ripple destroyed his brain.

A famous Inquisitor with psychic powers was Inquisitor Felix Rovannion. He was not as powerful as the before mentioned, but he was more than well capable of using his tricks. As an inquisitor, he had to use his powers to achieve his own ends. He is rumoured to have been closely involved in Rolf Yarrick's early days, but this is just hear-say.

These three form in a way a good example of the Imperium's finest psychic warriors, a breed shunned by its fellow humans, but regarded highly by the Emperor himself. And who is the Emperor if not the most powerful psychic entity in the Galaxy, rivaled only by the Hive Mind.

In the Imperium, people are split as to where the Emperor comes from and what he is. He is not human, that is for sure. There are those that whisper the word C'tan, but this is often dismissed as insane ramblings. There is only one person that knows, the Emperor himself, and he's not telling.

But it is in the Emperor's service one finds psykers and witch-hunters, Navigators and Space Marines, judicious Astropaths and zealous commissars.



The group of fourteen men and women stepped out of the large elevator and into a huge hall. Torches dimly lighted the hall, but sodium lamps glowed in the roof, high above their heads. All, except Tanya and Rolf, stopped dead before the sight that met them: two lanes of five metres tall marble or bronze statues, all depicting famous commissars in the glorious service of the Imperium. Charleston let out a low whistle.

"And here I've considered them religious lunatics all along..." McGranth whispered. He didn't want Tanya or Rolf hearing him.

The group moved down the line of commissars until Tanya stopped before two. One was tall and athletic; the other one was short and stocky.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Commissar Mischkin and Commissar General Timoschenko. Founders of the Imperial Commissariat."

The Terrans looked up at the two statues. The two men seemed very different, but Tanya explained. "They were best friends, united by chance but also a common goal, on the Industrial World Moskva. The statues are nearly half a million years old. Unbelievable, perhaps, but it is true."

McKenzie walked forward and read the inscription on Timoschenko's pedestal. "'Where Mischkin left, Timoschenko took over. The first Imperial Commissar General.' Doesn't seem like a fighter, does he?"

"Not quite," Nazz said, frowning. "But then again, he might be the type that's short and chunky, but really strong." She threw a side-ways glance at Eddy.

"Yes, I believe he was." Tanya replied.

"Timoschenko took over..." Edd repeated to himself. "What happened to Mischkin?"

"He died of cardiac-cancer." Tanya simply replied. "Before the Imperial Commissariat became what it is today."

"How did the Commissariat come to being then?" Marie asked, surprised at her own question.

Tanya explained. She told them about the crisis on Moskva, the Narkoms and the Siege of the Winter palace. As she spoke, Charleston, McGranth, McKenzie and Rolf slowly removed themselves from the group and walked down the line of statues. McKenzie stopped at a tall, powerful man. To scale, he would've almost been as tall as Charleston. He looked down on the inscription.

"Commissar General Delane Oktar..." he read. "Enormous guy..."

With that, he moved on.

Charleston had stopped at the man just next to Oktar. He read the name inscription, took a few steps back to look at the man's face, and then read the name again.

"What's the matter, commander?" McGranth asked, walking up behind his friend.

"This guy is almost a joke..." Charleston mumbled. He looked up at the man's face again.

McGranth did as Charleston had done; read the name, and then looked at the face.

"Oh..." McGranth said silently. "I see..."

They both stared up at the blade thin face of the tall and powerful colonel-commissar. Simultaneously, they raised an eyebrow and then looked at each other with dubious looks. Then spoke in unison. "Colonel-commissar Ibram... Gaunt?"

"Make's reason for his name..." Charleston said and scratched his nose, trying to suppress a smile.

"What a horror to be mocked by your own family name." McGranth said and moved on.

"Or the other way around." Charleston said smartly. "Having your family name mocked by your looks."

Rolf had stopped by the statue of Sebastian Yarrick. He was looking up at the statue of the old man with ork-designed battle claw and bionic eye, with tears welling in his eyes. McKenzie came up to him.

"Rolf, are you alright?"

"It's happening again, McKenzie..." Rolf silently mumbled.

"Memories?"

Rolf nodded. "I just feel pain when I see Sebastian. I know he was slain by Kharn. I've known it for the better part of two years now..."

"I know... Wait a second! Two years?"

Rolf nodded again. "Don't you remember, I told you so when you patched my arm up."

McKenzie looked taken aback. "I must've forgotten... Denied it, even..." He shook his head slightly. "So, these memories, what are they about?"

Rolf tried to gather himself enough to speak. The memories had scored deeper wounds than he'd thought or even dared to believe. "I just see a flash of bright light and I feel this stinging pain in my chest. Then I see Sebastian's face as a young lad, no older than I am now... wet with tears..."

McKenzie looked down on the ground. He knew what it was about. Not many others knew the true reason to Rolf Yarrick's death. Most Imperial citizens had believed he'd died of age. McKenzie knew that that was a lie, a lie necessary to protect the Imperium from anarchy. He put his hands on Rolf's shoulders and led him back to the rest of the group. Charleston and McGranth had already rejoined them, as Tanya finished her story.

She noticed the look in Rolf's eyes immediately. "Maybe we should go back up? You all seem in need of sleep, my friends." She tapped the vox-link attached to her head like a headset. "Tomas, darling, fix thirteen more beds for our friends. Yes, separate rooms for girls and boys, what did you think? Show some decency, man! All right... We'll be back up in 15 minutes. What we've been doing? I've showed them a piece of history. One, out."

She looked at the others. "He's really a nice guy, boring, but nice. So, off you go to the lift!" Tanya herded the group back into the lift and they went up. As they came back out up there, they split up in two directions, directed by junior officers of the Guard. Tanya stopped Rolf.

"I need to talk to you," she said simply.

The two removed themselves soundlessly and seamlessly from the others.

"Rolf, what happened down there? You were weeping."

"It's a really long story, Tanya. But you know I'm not the original Rolf Yarrick, right?"

"Yes, I know that, but how can you wield the sword then?"

"I don't know... But see, I still have your ancestor's spirit."

"Now I don't understand. What do you mean 'spirit'?"

Rolf sighed. "It's a bit hard to explain. But technically speaking, Rolf Yarrick is dead. Psychically, he's not. He lives within me..."

Tanya looked shocked. "How's that possible?"

"The Eldar had a technique of storing souls in gemstones. McKenzie managed to copy that technique, although crudely. But it was enough to spare the soul of damnation and to let him fight again. He lives on, in me... I believe that's why I can wield the sword..."

"And with his soul comes-"

"His memories. Yes, Tanya, that's right. And they hurt. They hurt very much. You can't imagine what pain he went through. A Hero of the Imperium, indeed, but he was almost constantly in physical or psychological pain."

"Deary me..."

Rolf nodded, silent. You need not words any more. Tanya understood perfectly. She was silent for a while, and then looked up in Rolf's eyes.

"Maybe you should get to bed." She kissed him lightly on the mouth. "Come, I'll show you to your quarters."

Rolf followed obediently, and soon enough, he was fast asleep, just as his friends.

Charleston, however, nudged McKenzie lightly, as the other boys were fast asleep. "Edward, wake up!" he whispered.

McKenzie groaned and looked round at Charleston. "What?"

"Ya know when that Gretchin said that Ghazghkull was killed by Metallix, and so did Tanya."

"Mmm, so what?"

"The Grot said that it had been on Ichar... But when Tanya spoke about it, it seemed to be on some central world that he got killed. This messes things up for me..."

McKenzie was suddenly wide-awake. When information got mismatched, he was soon awake. "You're absolutely right, Ed... Maybe Tanya tries to hide things from us? She didn't even mention that Necrons had gotten to Ichar..."

Charleston seemed ponderous for a while. "Maybe... Maybe there was a Necron pyramid under one of Ichar's hives? Armageddon had one in the middle of a jungle... And to a grot, everything is big, right? He could have taken the Necrons leader for Metallix and the Ork Warlords for Ghazghkull and Nazdreg. Easy to mix up, right?"

"Good explanation, Ed..." McKenzie mumbled. "But we'll never know the truth, will we. This is just a theory, right?" And a flawed one, McKenzie thought.

"Yeah."

"Good... Good. Go to sleep now, commander."

Charleston did as he was told and rolled over to his other side, and soon enough, he was sleeping too. McKenzie, however, contemplated what truly was the truth for a long while, until he fell asleep without noticing it...



The morning the next day, McKenzie had taken Johnny out of bed early, as he wanted to avoid problems. McKenzie had a pack with him, which he'd slung over his shoulder. It was full of food for Johnny and him and some other things that McKenzie deemed necessary for Johnny's psychic training. McKenzie was still pondering Charleston's comments from yesterday, when Johnny brought him back to reality on Secundus.

"Where are we going, McKenzie?" Johnny asked.

"It is time for some serious psyker training on your behalf. So, therefore, we are going a bit away from the base. I'd like it so, as there are rituals and such that blunts aren't meant to know of."

"Blunts?" Johnny asked.

"Psyker-slang for none-psychic minds. Don't voice it aloud in their presence, okay?"

"Sure thing."

McKenzie did want to voice that his real reason to conduct the training away from the base was if Johnny accidentally blew something up or, even worse, conjured a daemon.

"So," McKenzie said, showing the basket. "We'll be gone most of the day. Won't be back till afternoon. I have the grub, but are you prepared for this, Johnny?"

"Yep, all set!"

McKenzie smiled softly at the teenager. "Good. Follow me."

Johnny followed McKenzie to the motor pool of the big base. It was about a quarter the size of the Death Angel's Armoury, but still immense. There were tanks and other mechanical things strewn about, in pieces, everywhere. Tech priests in their murky red robes milled about. Most had at least some sort of mechanical implant. Johnny saw several chatting away with each other in Lingua Technis, their mechadendrites repairing the vehicles they stood by. Mechadendrites was what McKenzie called the octopus-like arms that were attached to the tech priests' bodies. They freaked Johnny out a bit, to say the least.

McKenzie moved between the down-mounted tanks and approached the magos in command of the tech priests. To McKenzie's dismay, Masterson was with the half-mechanical magos.

"Commissar Masterson, what are you doing here?" McKenzie asked, genuinely surprised at the short commissar's presence. He lost some of his potency next to the powerful magos.

"Tough times. We all do what we have to do, and thus I am the military arm supervising that Arilla here does things right." Masterson replied, gesturing to the tech magos. McKenzie greeted himself to the magos, exchanging courtesies in Lingua Technis.

"May I ask, Master Lexicanum," Masterson said, wiping sweat from his brow as it was a warm day. "What are you doing here?"

McKenzie indicated Johnny in his flowing Eldarain robes. "I'm taking Johnny here for some... training. I will request the use of a bike."

"Well, I can't see any..." Magos Arilla began, but was told to shut up by Masterson, who pointed a meaning finger at his brow, as to indicate that both McKenzie and Johnny were psykers. Masterson turned and stared poisonously at McKenzie a minute. Then he picked something up and stalked over to the Master Lexicanum. He held out his arm and pointed the large wrench in it towards McKenzie's chest, as if it was a blade. It almost touched the Marine's chest.

"You come back with that in one piece, witch." Masterson snarled. "Anything fall off that bike, I'll pull something off you and not even Arilla here will be able to replace it! Understand?"

McKenzie studied the wrench aimed at his chest and raised an eyebrow, before running a hand through his thick black hair. "Very well, then," he said in a calm voice.

As McKenzie led the bike out, under the watchful gaze of Masterson, Johnny glanced over his shoulder at the glaring commissar.

"Charming type, that Masterson," Johnny whispered.

McKenzie dared a glance over his shoulder as they came out, but a truck moved from one end of the machine shop, to the other, luckily obscured Masterson. "No kidding?" he said with a sigh.

McKenzie tucked their stuff onto the bike, produced a helmet for Johnny and clicked his own

Space Marine helmet in place. A few powerful kicks of the ignition and the twelve hundred cubic centimetre motor roared into life. McKenzie knew how to do things and soon the two were off at an alarming speed. McKenzie liked high speed. As they sped along, he couldn't help himself but to think of his BMW on Terra.

I miss the BMW, he thought. Wonder if it is possible to make a copy here? I miss the feeling it had. This bike, give its due, is fine, but it has no true... feeling.

McKenzie shook the thought away and concentrated on driving. They soon enough reached their destination, as McKenzie preferred to keep at a speed of a hundred kilometres per hour. McKenzie had studied several maps the night before, just before bed, and found the perfect spot, nearly twenty kilometres from the main base. It looked, from the air, like a shallow bowl about seven hundred metres across. There were several fair-sized boulders strewn about in the pit. At the northern part of the pit, the gentle slope of the pit became a steep wall from which a waterfall fell. The water from it collected at the bottom of the pit. A small stream ran from the pond, due south, and ran through the south slope of the pit where a small wooded area took the pit's place. As to compensate the cliff on the north, the south part had no slope upwards, though downwards.

"Perfect," McKenzie said silently to himself as he removed his helmet. He turned to Johnny. "We're here, Johnny. Unload your gear and we'll start."

Johnny did as he was told and was soon ready. McKenzie led Johnny to a clear area in the pit.

"The first thing every psyker has to learn is to ward off daemons. And the only way to learn that is to live through the real thing: possession." McKenzie put unnecessary stress on that last word, but he got the desired effect. Johnny winced slightly.

McKenzie sat down best he could in his power armour and made the sign of the Aquila as he intoned an Imperial Litany of protection upon himself. He then closed his eyes and started murmuring in a tongue Johnny did not like one bit. McKenzie suddenly made a sweeping gesture towards Johnny, as if pointing guilt to him. The young Terran suddenly felt he wasn't alone in his head anymore. There was another presence in it. It had a strange voice. Sugar sweet but hoarse at the same time.

"Hello there," it spoke. Johnny shuddered. It was cold, soulless.

"Sweet little Johnny," the voice whispered. *"I am prepared to give you whatever you want, just ask, and I will grant you that. Want money? I'll give you that. Want a longer life? I can grant that too."*

McKenzie suddenly brought Johnny from his reverie with the strange voice. "Fight the voice, Johnny. It is the voice of a Tzeentchian daemon. Fight it, Johnny!"

"Don't listen to him. What can he give you? What can he do?" the voice continued. *"He's afraid of you, Johnny. He's afraid you'll become a greater warrior than him. A greater psyker than him! He doesn't want that. But I can help you rid the world of such a coward. I can make you achieve whatever goals you want. I can wake your slumbering powers, but that fool McKenzie wants not to!"*

"Fight it, Johnny!" McKenzie's voice rang out to Johnny from an eternity away it seemed. "Fight it, Emperor damn it! Fight it!!"

"He claims to be your friend," the voice continued to whisper in Johnny's mind. *"He's not. He wants to stop your powers from evolving. But I am your friend, no? I want you to become powerful, but he doesn't."*

"Frekkfrekkfrekkfrekk!" McKenzie swore from somewhere. "Fight, damn it! You won't ever get a second chance if you fail, Johnny! He wants nothing but your soul!"

"He's not your true friend," the voice continued calmly, soothingly. *"But I, I am your true friend, isn't that so?"*

Johnny seemed to come to a conclusion in his ravaged mind. "No," he said quietly, but very firmly. "My true friend is not you! It is not you, daemon filth!!"

The presence in his mind recoiled a few seconds, but soon came back. It didn't speak soothingly now. It screamed, wordless screams mixed with a cursed language, and it tore and bit at Johnny's mind. Impossible pain, incorporeal pain, raged through Johnny's head as the daemon attacked again and again, trying to weaken the resolve of the human's mind. But Johnny endured; fighting the etherworlder back, knowing what awaited if he was to give in. He felt the daemon at the very borders of his mind as he fought it back. McKenzie's mind was suddenly there again, and he once again spoke in the cursed tongue of Tzeentch.

"**An'du ssa'ade Gzoag'gilph'ulfdyak!**" McKenzie roared and the daemon disappeared. Johnny fell to the ground, but McKenzie was soon beside him, pouring water into the young lad's mouth.

"Was that a real daemon?" Johnny whispered. He felt drained, worn and generally out of sorts.

"Yes, a lesser one. I am amazed that you were able to withstand its temptation without any training whatsoever."

"What was that you spoke?" Johnny asked as he regained somewhat.

"Tzeentchian..." McKenzie looked around. "It is always good to know some. Most Librarians shun it utmost, but I'm not so orthodox in my ways. Some Dark Tongue is always useful. I have banished many a daemon by uttering a banishment curse in the Dark Tongue and their true names."

"Was that name its real name?" Johnny asked astonished. "What did it mean?"

"I can't really tell you that, as there aren't human words for it. Though the name it hides behind in this realm is easier understood: Pain Wight."

Johnny nodded his assertion. The two sat silent for a long while.

"Now," McKenzie broke the silence between the two. "We shall go on to the next level. You have already shown you possess some knowledge in telekinesis. Let's see how it is in the reverse. To attack with psychic force."

"How do you do that?" Johnny asked interested.

"Like this," McKenzie said and without warning a large force swept Johnny off his feet and he landed several metres away from McKenzie. The tall, slender Marine walked over to the prone Terran. "That is what I mean with offensive psychics."

"Wow!" Johnny exclaimed. "What a ride! How did you do that?"

McKenzie just tapped his forehead. "I can perform such menial things as that with a nudge of my head, but you'll need words and moves, Johnny. Until you reach a higher degree of power, that is. Then you might just nudge your head to send your enemies sprawling."

"So, what's the word?" Johnny asked eagerly.

"Many Imperial psykers of lesser power use High Gothic, though I prefer Eldar, as it gives a better effect. And it is what I'll teach you. The word is '*ruuma*' and you must focus on the objective to be forced back."

"Alright," Johnny said and turned and held his hand out towards one of the smaller rocks. "*Ruuma!*" he shouted and the rock did move, though not far.

"Don't be disheartened, Johnny," McKenzie said happily. "No-one can do it the first time they try. It is always try, try, and try again. One more, and some more force into the word."

Johnny nodded sternly and focused all his will into his outstretched arm. "**RUUMA!**" he shouted and the rock flew backwards, knocking into another, larger rock and splitting in half.

"Not bad!" McKenzie said and grinned. "Not bad at all." McKenzie paused and Johnny saw how he fixated the large rock that had been banged. A few seconds later, it cracked open like an egg.

"Imagine that to be an enemy's skull, Johnny, and you will get some measure of what power

we possess," McKenzie said grimly. The Marine walked down to the pond and Johnny followed obediently. McKenzie stopped by the shore to the pond and extended a hand. What Johnny saw happening, he scarcely believed. The water in the pond suddenly raised upwards, turning and twisting in impossible forms. It took Johnny a while to realize, but McKenzie was forming a gigantic water-serpent with the fluid, like a sculpture. McKenzie turned to Johnny.

"Although we psykers are extreme warriors when put to it, most of us prefer to lead quiet lives and to develop other skills than those of war." McKenzie spoke softly, without strain. This didn't take much of his concentration it seemed. McKenzie suddenly pulled back his hand with a snap and raised the other hand. A ball of water came out of the pond. It hovered before the water-serpent a few moments, until McKenzie sent the ball flying straight into the serpent, shattering both in a cascade of water. The serpent sunk back into the water with a splash that made Johnny's robes wet all the way up to the knees.

"You try," McKenzie said simply.

Johnny nodded and focused. It was all a matter of focusing your will to one point. Johnny had realized that early on. But it was much harder than it seemed.

"Try whispering the words 'linque oro'," McKenzie whispered softly.

Johnny uttered the Eldarain words silently and the water began to rise. He could not form a serpent, but he made one big sphere of it. On McKenzie's command, he let it go and it fell back with a splash far greater than McKenzie's. It showered them both with water. Johnny found himself with robes soaked in water and that clung distressingly to his armour. McKenzie wiped his wet hair from his face.

"We might need to practice on that part a bit..." he said and smiled warmly. McKenzie walked a few paces away from the pond and sat down, cross-legged, wringing his hair of water. He motioned to Johnny to take a seat opposite to him.

"Now what?" Johnny asked eagerly. He wanted to know more.

"Telepathy and scanning," McKenzie said and grinned.



Back at the base at the same time, the rest of the group had gathered in a training area just a few hundred metres from the main billeting. Charleston wasn't present as he was off overseeing the flipping over and hauling of the Nighthawk, or whatever was left of it. So, that left McGranth, the Terrans and Commissar Colonel Demontfurt. They all walked into the training area.

McGranth and Demontfurt gathered the others in a ring to surround them. They faced the young Terrans. The only ones who seemed comfortable were the Eds and, peculiarly, Rolf.

"Listen up," McGranth spoke clearly. "If you lot are going to be of any use to us on the battlefield, it's time for a refresher course in the finer points of combat."

The Eds silently concluded that the Grand Commander mostly meant close combat.

"Alright," Demontfurt said and gestured over his shoulder. "First, we'll start with target practice, then we'll proceed to the finer parts of glorious close combat. But first, the target training."

The Terrans now firstly took in the training area. It was a barren place, except for a few wrecks of spent tanks and old buildings. They all stood in the centre of the area. Every one of them had left their weapons behind, except Rolf, whom stoically refused to leave the Yarrickian Sword behind.

A couple of Adeptus Mechanicus Techpriests came up. They all had servitors to help them. Most Terrans cringed at the sight of the mindless half-humans. One of the servitors was carrying a large crate. It put it down on the ground next to Demontfurt and the commissar took off the lid of the crate. He handed out a lasgun to each and every youngster along with a lasclip. They all knew how to mount the clips after the incident with Necrontyr on Armageddon.

One of the techpriests approached the group and showed what he was holding in his hands. Demontfurt explained what the curious little metal ball was.

"This here, my dear friends, is a target drone."

The techpriest pushed a button hid somewhere on its metal surface. It came to life and the techpriest let go of it. It floated up in the air and took in its surroundings, seemingly planning already. It hung there in the air, lazily.

Demontfurt didn't speak this time, the techpriest did. "They are held up with magnetic hover systems. I doubt you've encountered this technology before." There was tad contempt in the skinny man's voice. "We have primed several of these around here. They are programmed to randomly go online and take a course through the air over the area, not more than two metres above the ground." The techpriest fell silent and looked at the lone drone in front of the Terrans. "Yokor," he said softly and the little drone zoomed off to hide.

"You will attempt to shoot these suckers down," Demontfurt said. "Before they get out of range for your low charge las. The overall score is how many you take down minus the ones you miss. You have fifteen minutes each." Demontfurt took up one of his own laspistols and put the power setting low. "Lower your weapons power setting like this. If you hit someone by accident, it'll only sting a few second, so it won't be lethal."

"Unless," McGranthy said and smiled warmly. "Unless of course, you hit Commissar Demontfurt or me. Then it might prove lethal... for you."

The Terrans laughed nervously. Demontfurt smiled too.

"Okay," he said genially. "Who's first?"

Rolf stepped forward. "I am," he said curtly. With that, the others removed themselves from the centre of the area and Rolf pulled out the lasgun. He tensed, trying to sense where it would come. Some part of him had done this for fun hundreds of times before. It was so easy, it told him.

The drone came up behind him. Rolf spun around lightly and nailed it as if it was nothing. Not a single time did Rolf miss the target drone.

In time, they all had shots. Rolf and Eddy tied for the best, although Eddy admitted he felt slightly awkward without the kick that a storm bolter delivered. The target practice continued with them all. Demontfurt coached them, McGranthy coming with encouraging words. And with the two's coaching, everybody soon did fairly well, even Nazz, who had surprised them all with a good eye.

"My grandfather was a crack shot," she admitted when Demontfurt asked. "He taught me a little when I was a little child."

The only one, who didn't show up as a careful aim as the others, was Ed. This was no surprise to McGranthy, who'd lived through Charleston's sloppy aim for centuries. Demontfurt and McGranthy were just happy the powerful young man was wielding a low-power las and not the bolter that was his battlefield weapon.

After a while, Demontfurt informed them they were done. They handed back the lasguns to the techpriest. The robed man also called back all target drones with a single word in Lingua Technis. With that, he left the area.

"Okay," McGranthy said cheerfully. "After a bit of rest, we'll go on to unarmed hand to hand training."

The group gathered ten minutes later in a room with a floor covered in a fairly tough mat. It was obvious this was a training room of sorts. McGranthy ordered them to sit down by the long edge of the mat and stood himself in the middle of it. The tall, thin techpriest came back with a servitor following behind. The half-human seemed to be malfunctioning, because it seemed to have some sort of tics. The techpriest left the faulty servitor at the centre of the mat together with McGranthy and left hastily, ordering the servitor to stay with a single word.

Seeing the techpriest had left, McGranthy went into a fighting stance. Five swift blows later

the servitor lay leaking oil from a hole in its chest. The techpriest came back with two other, correctly functioning servitors and removed the wreck.

The Terrans stared at McGranth. It was not what he'd done with the servitor that shocked them so. It was how swiftly he'd moved to place and make those punches he'd thrown connect. Too swift for Tactical Dreadnought armour.

"That, my friends, is how we do it Ichar way," McGranth said with a wry smile. "However, the servitor didn't fight back, but an enemy will. Get up, and I'll show you some nice techniques. I'll teach you how to attack, evade and compensate for a larger enemy."

The group got up and stood before McGranth. He showed them a series of punches and swipes to copy. This kept on going for about twenty minutes. It appeared to the Terrans that what they were training in was something that seemed like a bastardisation of several martial arts.

After this, McGranth split them all up in fairly equal groups so they could practice against another human. The only one who had trouble at first was Nazz, but Demontfurt encouraged her best he could, being, after all, a commissar and there to oversee the morale of the troops. So it was that even Nazz got the hang of unarmed fighting. One well-aimed punch laid Kevin flat, wind knocked out of him.

Ed was doing best of all the boys it seemed, his incredible strength giving him an undeniable edge. However, much to McGranth's exasperation, he staunchly refused to fight Nazz or any of the Kankers. His mom didn't want him to fight girls and that was that.

Eddy and Kevin seemed evenly matched, and this bothered Eddy. He had after all seen more action than Kevin. Eddy had for crying out loud defeated a Khornate Berzerker Terminator squad and a daemon prince single-handedly. That Kevin matched him gave his ego a dent.

Edd, on the other hand, had an inner dilemma of mastodont proportions. He could easily predict the others' moves and avoid them and counter-attack, but he wanted this fight for himself as well. The end result was that he didn't do as well as McGranth had been hoping.

However, the Kankers easily dominated the whole scene, mixing brute force with technique. Even the wiry and agile Rolf was put to shame, who after all was second only to Ed amongst the boys. But one thing puzzled Demontfurt. The three sisters seemed very equal, too equal even for sisters. But he decided not to bother too much over this.

The group moved out of the training room again but not before Demontfurt demonstrated an elegant back flip, despite his late thirties. All the Terrans applauded this; except Rolf, who got something dark in his eyes.

They moved back to the area where they had tested their firing skills. Demontfurt lifted the lid off a box that the techpriests had left behind and picked up the long, silvery blade from it. He frowned at its apparent lack of perfect balance, but swung deftly with it in the air a few times to get used to the weight. Then he turned to the Terrans.

"As you can see, it is time for hand weapons training. You will each take a sword from the batch here-"

"Can't I use my lightning claw instead?" Eddy interrupted.

"No, and that's an order," McGranth snapped. "We'll all be equal in this fight. You'll all use the monomolecular edged swords in that crate."

"We'll hardly be equal in battle..." Eddy muttered.

McGranth didn't take notice of the remark. He was fixing Rolf with a hard stare. "That means that you won't be fighting with that sword, Rolf," McGranth said softly.

"Go ahead, make my day..." Rolf muttered sourly.

"You know, Rolf, it will hardly be fair towards the others if you use that blade," McGranth replied. "So be a nice boy and take a monomol-sword."

Muttering, Rolf put down his sword in its sheath in the crate and replaced it with a monomolecular sword instead.

Once again, McGranth split them into smaller groups and after a bit of instruction from Demontfurt's side, they began clashing blade to blade. Demontfurt had showed them how to blunt the edges mechanically so they wouldn't harm each other.

To everyone's surprise, Nazz did really well. With a slight blush on her cheeks, she told them that she'd begun with fencing lessons, much like Rolf. Although, with a bit of extra instruction from Demontfurt, who was a registered sword master, she soon held her own without problem. Once again, Eddy and Kevin came out equals. Ed came out a tad worse than Edd, who'd given in to the temptations and used his psychics, although barely at all. It came without questioning that Rolf was dominant in every aspect. Not a sword scratched his body. The Kankers, however, had a bit of trouble. They were masters at bare-hand brawling, but armed combat wasn't really their cup of tea. This disheartened them a tad, but Demontfurt promised to instruct them and coach them best he could, as he'd done with Nazz. At this, the three sisters cheered up considerably.

When all the monomolecular edged swords had been put back into the crate, Rolf approached Demontfurt. The powerful commissar looked quizzically at the young man.

"What if we try at each other, commissar?" Rolf asked calmly, almost chillingly.

"What?" Demontfurt said bewildered.

"You heard me perfectly clear," Rolf said softly.

Demontfurt shrugged. He didn't like where this was heading, for some reason.

"But this time," Rolf said with a wolfish smile on his lips. "We use our own weapons of choice." He drew the ancient daemon slayer blade and stood in a battle stance. Demontfurt, unable to resist a challenge and having a reputation to think of, took the bait and pulled out two silver gleaming swords from their sheathes by his waist.

"First blood?" Demontfurt asked.

"First, as you say, blood," Rolf replied.

The two flew at each other with a battle shout each and a split second later, the air was filled with the metal clang when steel meets steel. They whirled and parried each and every blow the other one delivered. When Demontfurt thrust forward, trying to use his superior momentum to bring the young man off guard, Rolf dodged and struck at Demontfurt from another angle. Demontfurt drew up his blade to parry the, to him, clumsy attack. Just before Rolf's sword would hit one of Demontfurt's, Rolf would twist it and bring it in from another angle. And so it went on. Rolf evaded every trick Demontfurt tried and Demontfurt parried every blow of Rolf's. Demontfurt was backed up by years of experience, skill and artisanship whilst Rolf was fighting through the spirit and memories of a true Imperial Hero. It looked long as the two were as good.

Then Demontfurt found an unguarded opening in Rolf's guard after one too clumsy swing. The colonel-commissar thrust forward with his both swords. Alas, Rolf saw the impetuosity of the move and took his chance. He deftly brought the sword up in a two-handed grip and thrust downwards, using his superior height to its maximum.

Their blades scratched each other's skins at the exact same time. Demontfurt felt the tip of the Yarrickian sword at his chest; something wet trickling down between his chest hairs. Rolf felt the cold steel of two single-edged swords at his throat and how they cut his skin slightly.

Equals.

"That birdie won't fly again," Charleston said with a nonchalant gesture as he walked up to the group of people in the area. He was referring to the Night Hawk. "The only things that still function as they should are the lasguns and one engine and why do everybody look like bird's houses?"

Charleston had noticed the shocked looks on everybody's faces. He got an eerie feeling they

were looking straight through him. He turned round and saw Demontfurt and young Rolf in a stance that suggested something of a fight had been happening.

"Oh, I see..." Charleston mumbled silently as he saw the two men locked in combat pose.



Johnny stood in the middle of the pit. His eyes were closed, Niire was held firmly in his right hand whilst his left hand was clenched tightly. A few of the runes on his armour glowed, the glow circling around from rune to rune in a pattern. Niire shone with a dull, blue light as well. It was silent, so silent. Johnny flexed his mind. Taking in the surroundings, he tried to 'see' his opponent. Nothing yet. The Master Lexicanum wasn't lazing around with him then.

Then, he spun round, a metallic clang resounding in the air of Secundus. McKenzie jumped backwards, raising his blade to charge again. McKenzie deftly parried a psychic charge on Johnny's behalf and countered with something very much alike. The psychic beam hit Johnny's blade full on, throwing him backwards through the air. Johnny never opened his eyes and with a simple mental command, he stopped in the air and landed on the ground again. With inhuman speed, the youngster sprung forth and attacked the seasoned psyker. McKenzie easily blocked Johnny's over-eager strokes and sent him flying backwards with a wrist-flick. Johnny was however soon back in close combat with McKenzie.

All the time, Johnny had his eyes closed. When McKenzie made a swipe that was to cut Johnny's head clear from his shoulders, Johnny raised a gloved hand and caught the force sword in his palm. McKenzie relaxed and Johnny opened his eyes.

"You're getting better," McKenzie said.

"You're still holding back," Johnny replied with a scowl. "You can go harder on me, y'know."

"I could, perhaps. But, had I gone all out, you'd be in pieces now, Johnny-boy. Besides, you're too eager. That blade, Ilsa Niire Hyandar, is no ordinary blade. It has been made by Eldar, remember that."

"But what makes it so special, eh?"

"Johnny, every thing that the Eldar create has a soul, know that. And if a thing has a soul, it has feelings and with feelings comes temper."

Johnny stared at the silvery blade in his hand. "You're kidding." He saw McKenzie's look and realised that McKenzie was dead serious.

"Now," McKenzie said after a moment of silence. "We shall go on to another kind of attack. I see you can perform some of it; alas you are far from a master. Can you guess?"

"Psychic beams and lightning and stuff, right?"

McKenzie nodded. He held out his right arm, palm open. "It is a simple matter; just focus the energy of the Warp into something tangible." He curled his fingers inwards slightly and a blue glowing energy ball appeared in his hand. "When it reaches something I call critical mass, you mustn't forget to release it."

McKenzie let the ball grow slightly and then seemingly tossed it towards a rock. The psychic ball seemed to go inside of the rock. A few seconds later, the rock exploded. "Now, I put a delay on it, so it exploded inside. Usually, the ball disintegrates as soon as it hits something physical."

McKenzie turned to Johnny. "You try now."

Johnny did as McKenzie had done. He held his arm out, palm open, curled his fingers inwards. It took slightly longer for Johnny's ball to start forming than McKenzie's, but it was formed, and that was the point. Johnny raised his hand and tossed the ball towards a rock. The ball exploded as it hit the rock, though it didn't cause more than a medium size hole in the rock.

McKenzie nodded. "Pretty good, pretty good. Don't be afraid to hold it longer, Johnny. I'm here to help, you know it."

Once again, Johnny repeated the process. The ball he threw this time was fairly larger and it flew faster as well. It shattered a smaller rock into pebbles.

"One more time, Johnny-boy, with even more power," McKenzie urged.

Johnny did as told once again, and a third time a ball of psychics showed up in his palm. However, it showed up much easier and it grew much larger than the other two.

"Don't forget to release, Johnny," McKenzie reminded, no feelings showing in his voice.

But Johnny didn't release. He remained in the stance of charging up and the psychic ball just grew bigger and bigger.

"Johnny, release!" McKenzie urged, concern showing in his voice. He stepped closer to the youngster.

"I can't move..." Johnny muttered forth. McKenzie shot the ball a glance and felt a headache creeping on him. It was far too big now. It had gone beyond critical mass.

"Oh dear..." McKenzie said silently and jumped without warning against the psychic ball in Johnny's hands. With an enormous amount of will and psychic force, McKenzie tore the ball from Johnny's hand and threw it far away. It flew with a speed McKenzie thought was impossible even for light.

He grabbed the young man around his waist and dove for cover.

The high-energy ball finally hit something and exploded. McKenzie felt his gut churn at the force of the shockwave. He could almost see the blue mushroom cloud the explosion had caused with his psychic vision. Then he felt the sudden silence and opened his eyes. He looked up from behind the rock he'd been crouching with Johnny and felt debris raining down on him. McKenzie also saw the destruction the explosion had caused.

"Okay," he said, raising an eyebrow. "We'll work on that one."

Johnny flopped down on his back, utterly exhausted.

"You alright?" McKenzie asked, looking down on him.

"I'm fine. Just tired," Johnny replied, trying to calm his breathing.

"Don't go anywhere, I'll be right back," McKenzie said but soon realised that this boy was going nowhere, as tired as he seemed.

McKenzie soon reached the crater that the explosion had caused. The earth was scorched black. McKenzie looked around, but couldn't find the bike anywhere.

"Frekk..." he mumbled. "Masterson is going to kill me..." He then saw Plank, resting against the tree where Johnny had put him. 'It,' McKenzie reminded himself. The wooden piece of... wood seemed unharmed, strangely enough, despite the enormous blast. He picked Plank up and walked back to Johnny.

"Well," McKenzie said, handing Plank over to Johnny. "Your friend is alright, but there's not a scrap left of the bike. The ball must've been magnetic, or something..." McKenzie saw Johnny's pained expression.

"I am cooked..." Johnny muttered silently.

"Don't worry about it, Johnny," McKenzie comforted. "I'll take the heat for you. Now, come on, we will be doing good in getting back."

McKenzie picked up the boy in his arms and turned towards where they had come from. This would take a fair amount of his power...

Then he started to run. Using his immense psychic force to augment his human body, McKenzie reached a speed that shouldn't be feasible for a human body. Jessie Owens would've reached it, but not kept it, so to speak.

After a few kilometres, McKenzie's attention was drawn to a Thunderhawk flying overhead. McKenzie saw easily that it was heading towards the same place as him. It was painted in Navy blue, with a golden Imperial Aquila on each side. However, the double eagle was surrounded by nine red dots, which formed a circle. The Master Lexicanum felt puzzled. He had never before seen this insignia.

He thrust on with his mind a little more, reducing friction around him, putting him at a speed that would give a thoroughbred horse a run for its money.



Back at the main camp, the Thunderhawk landed on its designated landing pad. Although not uninvited, it still attracted a large amount of attention. Tanya called up an Honour Guard of Guardsmen and was soon joined by McGranth, Charleston, Demontfurt and the Terrans. As the big transport settled down, Demontfurt called to attention amongst the troopers.

The ramp at the nose of the plane slowly lowered itself down, hydraulics hissing. There was a fair amount of steam blowing around it, revealing it had just left the upper and colder layers of the atmosphere.

A voice was suddenly heard from inside.

"Can't this darned thing open any faster?"

A man appeared at the top of the ramp, trying to squeeze out. The ramp had lowered a few centimetres further when he finally managed to squeeze his lean body through the gap and landed on the ground with a muffled thud. He easily picked himself up and dusted off his coat and the knees of his trousers and then proceeded to walk over to the group of men and women.

Now the Terrans got a good look of him. He was in his mid-twenties, a tad shorter than Tanya and had a slight uppish nose in his handsome face. His hair was light brown, but there was a strange, bluish hue underneath it. The young man was wearing a black tunic and trousers made of wool. On his feet were sturdy military boots, immaculately polished. Over all this he wore a brown long coat that he kept open, but still tied together at the waist.

"Emperor," he sighed, "it's about time I-"

He stopped abruptly the moment he caught sight of the sword in Rolf's hand. Rolf hadn't thought on putting it back after his face-off with Demontfurt. The newly arrived man walked over to Rolf and looked up into the Terran's eyes. Rolf saw that this man had emerald green eyes just like himself.

"So it is true..." the man mumbled and looked down from Rolf's eyes to the Yarrickian sword.

Then, he suddenly bent down on one knee, closed his eyes, took the sword blade in his hand and kissed it. Rolf looked bewildered, but dared not move as he could cut the man.

The young man opened his eyes, got up and walked over to Tanya. Tanya lovingly put both her hands on each side of the man's cheeks and kissed him a few times. It was fairly obvious that the young man didn't enjoy this treatment.

"I've missed you too," he said when Tanya had finished. "Honestly, mother, why couldn't you take two minutes and send me a message and tell me, eh?"

"M-Mother?" McGranth stammered. "Uh..."

Demontfurt saw what was about to happen and pulled himself together. "May I present; Bastion Yarrick, Head of the Civilian High Council."

Everyone present nodded his or her assertion of this mark of rank. Charleston, however, had been having his thoughts elsewhere.

"What are the nine dots around the Aquila for, eh?"

"Oh," Demontfurt said and turned to look at the huge Marine, "those symbolize the nine

members of the High Council. A bit like ministers of departments really... If you remember how Moskva was ruled?"

"Oh, believe me," Charleston replied, "I do."

A winded McKenzie jogging into the landing field, Johnny still on his back, interrupted the entire scene. Panting hard to catch his breath, McKenzie put Johnny down. The boy ran over to his cul-de-sac friends immediately, dying to tell them of his training. Rolf was the only one to shy away from him. McKenzie saw it clearly. A tiny feeling at the back of his head told him that McGranath was looking at him intently. McKenzie turned round and faced his commander.

"Do I even want to ask, McKenzie?" McGranath said and sighed.

McKenzie was just about to reply, when McGranath instead received his answer from another part of the compound. It came in the form of a loud yell that echoed against the buildings.

"WHERE IS HE!?"

Demontfurt looked towards where it had come from. He could discern it despite the echoes and he'd heard it before. "Uh oh," he mumbled and bit his lip slightly. "This is the part where you put yourself in safety in a bomb shelter, Master Lexicanum," Demontfurt said, turning to McKenzie.

However, it was too late for that. Masterson came storming up, the large wrench in his hand. McKenzie idly wondered if he'd ever put it down since they'd left. And thinking such idle thought was the only way for him to keep his composure as the burly little commissar walked up and stood with his legs wide apart just in front of McKenzie.

"YOU!" Masterson snarled and slapped the wrench in his hand. It made a wet, pulpy sound as it hit the palm, a sound that made Nazz flinch.

Masterson went out of the stance and stood one foot before the other and held out the wrench towards McKenzie again. The big difference was that this time it actually touched McKenzie's nose. The Master Lexicanum fought hard to keep his cool. Why in the God-Emperor's name was this little man frightening him so? He was himself a Space Marine. He was more than able to pulp his head with his bare hands. He could even do it with his mind only. But still...

"I give you an attack bike," Masterson said slowly, trying to suppress his rage, "and now somebody comes and tells me that you've come walking back into the camp."

"Well... not really walking..." McKenzie admitted.

"SHUT UP!" Masterson snarled. "All I want to know is..." The short commissar made a pause, drew breath and... "WHERE THE HELL IS MY BIKE?"

This sudden burst actually made McKenzie take a step back, losing his precious little composure. Tanya walked up to Masterson now and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Tomas, enough!" she said, softly but flatly. "One bike isn't that much, now, is it?"

Masterson turned and looked with flaring eyes on the commissar general. He did in fact lose some of his anger looking into her eyes, but soon regained it with a glance at McKenzie. "It does, to me..." he muttered and fixed McKenzie with a stare that was as warm and friendly as a target laser.

"W-well," McKenzie stammered slightly as he spoke, "you see, Commissar Masterson, there was this minor mishap-"

The Cadet Commissar named Jorun rudely cut off McKenzie's explanation. The gawky young man ran up to Tanya and ripped off a salute.

"Ma'am," he reported, "we've received a message from the monitoring stations. A Scythe class Harvester ship accompanied by several Jackal class escorts have entered system half an hour ago."

Tanya looked shocked. "Estimated power of land forces?"

"Most certainly around 500 warriors," Jorun said, looking extremely uncomfortable, "but that's excluding Immortals, Destroyers and Tomb Spydres, of course..."

"Of course," Masterson sneered. He hadn't much in stall for Jorun ever reaching commissar rank.

"Where are they heading?" Tanya asked, ignoring Masterson and gently removing the wrench from his hands.

"Callidus, ma'am," Jorun answered. "We only have a few companies of Battle Sisters and-"

"I know full well our forces on Callidus, Jorun!" Tanya snapped. She threw a quick side-ways glance at Bastion. "They could've been able to stand alone..." she muttered. "Colonel-commissar Masterson! Make yourself useful and order a red alert. All able-bodied men and women are to make themselves ready for embarkment within half an hour! We have ourselves a Necron raiding force!"

Masterson left at a jog, shouting order all around him.

Tanya turned to Jorun. "Jorun! ETA of the Necrontyr to Callidus?"

"Four hours, ma'am!" the twitchy cadet replied.

"It's gonna be a tight run, I believe..." Bastion muttered and Tanya nodded.

"Man..." Eddy sighed, "When it rains, it pours..."

Tanya looked up at the assembled men and women. "You should get ready too. There are Thunderhawks for you to board. We'll rendezvous on Mishkin's Pride." With that, the commissar general left them. Demontfurt was also gone, as well as Bastion.

"You'd better do as she orders," Jorun said and showed the thirteen away to another Thunderhawk."



Half an hour later, most of the PDF of Secundus had settled in on transport ships. The Eds and company gathered at the bridge of the huge Vanquisher class battleship; Mishkin's Pride. As promised, Tanya showed up on the battleship, as well as Masterson, Demontfurt and Bastion.

Mishkin's Pride was far from alone. Several small cruisers as well as groups of frigates and destroyers accompanied it. McKenzie looked out one of the many view ports and saw two of the cruisers. A Gothic class and a Tyrant class, he decided. He could even read the names of them. The many lances that distinguished the Gothic class one nearly obscured the name "Sword of Moskva". The Tyrant class was painted black, trimmed with gold, almost invisible against the space. However, the stubby barrels of its numerous plasma batteries glittered in the light from approaching Thunderhawks. But he could still see its name. "Timoschenko's Will".

"They are beautiful, aren't they not, Master Lexicanum?" a voice said suddenly. McKenzie turned round and saw a tall, powerful man. He was wearing an immaculate admiral's uniform, his red hair cut severe. He had a slightly too heavy nose, which spoiled his otherwise good looks. McKenzie also noticed the rich dialect with its rolling Rs. This man was a born Moskvanian.

"Of course they are, Admiral...?" McKenzie said as he took the man's hand and shook it. He felt a bionic's rigid structure underneath the white glove.

"Ourmnoff," he replied. "Admiral Ivan Ourmnoff."

"Admiral," Tanya said as she strolled up to him, "would mind taking us to Callidus? We have urgent matters there."

"I have heard," Ourmnoff replied. He blew a short, hard whistle, and a long-limbed young man ran up to him, saluting.

"Sir?"

"Lieutenant Romanov, order embarkment for Callidus. They seem to have a... situation there."

"Ay, sir!" The wiry lieutenant set off and gave his orders.

"Now," Ourmnoff turned to Tanya and McKenzie. "Shall we join the others in the briefing room?"

"Of course, my dear admiral," Tanya said and smiled and let the slightly pompous admiral escort her to the briefing room. McKenzie followed behind.

Once inside the briefing room, the eighteen men and women settled down. A servitor drone brought forth a hololithic display for Callidus and Tanya stood up. As she introduced Demontfurt to Ourmnoff, McKenzie was struck by a thought. He leant closer to Ourmnoff when Tanya had finished.

"Excuse me, admiral," he whispered, "that fleet out there is awfully small, for being commanded by an admiral. With all due respect."

"It was a much bigger fleet before the Necrons came. Now, this is what is left of Battle Fleet Moskva."

"*Mon Empereur...*" McKenzie blew out in a low whistle. He knew precious little low-Armageddonian, but relished in what he knew.

"Gentlemen," Tanya interrupted, "please listen up. We have a battle plan to prepare. We will only have one shot, as you all know."