

## Chapter 33, A Wolf Returns to the Den

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### Tanya Russ

The battle for planet San Katos lasted a few more weeks after we took the capital but soon we had destroyed all major strongholds of the pirates, then every Eldar that had not died fighting or surrendered in hopes of being meted out some sort of real Justice was driven deep into the jungles where a little extra bombardment made sure that they would not be traveling any further.

It was a successful campaign. With that the planet was turned over to the humans who had been slaves and information was sent to the Administratum about where the planet was, how the population was doing, and what they could use to better make use of this world for the Imperium.

Once that was done Vulkan and I decided to travel together for a bit as we were still heading in the general direction of Fenris. I still wanted to go home and see what was going on there but I had to make a stop off at Nova to clear it up for the Mechanicus. We took some time to hit a few more pirate strongholds along the way, working together to clear out this sector of space and make the Trade Lanes safer.

Over the course of a year, we turned those Lanes into probably the safest in the entire Imperium. I could be wrong but we gave our best to make that true. Finally, after spending a large amount of time with my sibling, we went our separate ways. He went further to the galactic north, towards areas I did not know, and I went back along the route that would take me to Nova Borilia and then to my world of Fenris.

During this time though I was not completely focusing on the military aspects of my office. I was also paying attention to the scientific aspects, mainly the study of the Gretchen by my Mechanicus armorer. Adelheid apparently knew nothing about biology but was in communication with those in the Mechanicus that did and she had attempted several methods to try and get the captured Gretchen to be useful for the Imperium.

It had not gone well. Of the three original ones that I had taken prisoner, only the original one who'd woken up on the floor was still alive. The other two had exploded... Apparently, the anti-spore cream she originally was going to use on them had reacted *violently* to their skin and internal organs. I heard her complaining quite profusely about how this was not her fault, that this was an indication that the Orks were biological weapons and this was an anti-tamper feature. I didn't know if that would be true, I'd have to ask Emperor if he knew where Orks even came from when I got a chance to talk to him again.

Either way though the project to prevent their spores from being spawned had failed, at least for now. The remaining Gretchen was given a suit of clothing to wear permanently, with a closed helmet, and he was allowed to work as an aid to Miss Adelheid. Otherwise the project was currently dead, you couldn't put every Ork in the universe into a suit. Especially when Orks tended to grow the more fighting they got so they would soon outgrow any suit they were in, it would be a money sink and not worth it.

More likely than not we would find some way to use them for our benefits in the future but not likely as a permanent institution. That being said the last Gretchen, Gretchy as Adelheid had taken to calling him, did serve a use outside his lab role. On a few occasions we had used him as a translator to speak to a few of the Orks and, as a result, we had been able to negotiate a few situations to our advantage. The most notable situation had been when we'd come across a planet that had a population of just Orks but rather unadvanced ones, so instead of wasting resources destroying these primitive Orks we had created a deal with them: they stayed on their planet and, occasionally, we may be willing to take them to a good fight. I had no illusions that this deal would keep permanently but the ability to just send a ship to pick up an Ork army then drop it off on another Ork army and let them fight each other until they were both weakened, come in and aid the side that we favored, and then just ship those Orks back off to their original planet was somewhat beneficial in the long run. It might be something I could institute further on.

Granted I had not implemented this strategy yet but it was one I was playing around with. Could go absolutely wrong, of course. We might drop off an Ork army to attack another Ork army and come back a few days later to find out that they merged into a single Ork army after their leaders had sorted out the hierarchy in one-to-one combat.

I would need to make sure that a situation like that was unlikely to happen. I'd run the idea by the Mechanicus Adelheid and she'd suggested explosive collars which would be rather dark but I could see the use of them. If they betrayed me, well, pop goes the head of everyone who hadn't gotten theirs off yet.

Although I personally just disliked that idea on principle I could see its usefulness. After all, even though I would prefer the world to work more like what I'd known in the 21st century this was the 30th Millenium and things were much more terrible now. Also apparently the Orks had a god of trickery or cunning so I would need to keep some sort of control over them somehow, otherwise they would betray me. Trickster Gods always had a habit of doing that, and their followers weren't exactly likely to not take after their spiritual liege.

But that was a problem for when I attempted to use such a method of conquest, my men were more than willing just to fight it out on the enemy so I didn't need to bring the Orks in as auxiliary units or waves of meatshields for them.

Either way, as the year came to an end and Vulkan and I went our separate ways, I had to travel a few months before hitting Nova Borilia. I hated every aspect of that planet, a world that was done as a Hiveworld, a place known to have mega-cities that were built on top of each other. Not for economic synergies or as a planet completely covered in a city but just very big cities built on top of each other, creating a towering mess of metal where some aspects of the innermost cities and the lowest level never saw daylight. It was a dystopian nightmare on a good day, the day we arrived was a bad day for the city. It had been a bad day for the city for the last however long since they had been conquered by the Noman.

The Noman were, to put it quite clearly, aliens. Little gray man who drove around mechanized war machines. And what I say little gray men I mean they fit inside Space Marine's size Mechs and we had to fight them across the entire city up and down, it was nightmarish. As soon as we thought we had secured one block of the city it would turn out that we hadn't secured one basement that connected to a completely separate block of the city and we would have the enemy pop up behind us.

The campaign would go on for an entire year and we ended up basically having to demolish whole sections of the hive City to try and drive the menaces out of their hiding holes. It didn't help that, even though we did kill their mechanized machines, the pilots would often survive to fight another day. They thus gained skill or learned how to become assassins, sneaking up on us during our rest periods and attempting to slice some of our men while they slept.

And worst of all, the worst aspect of this whole campaign, was their human auxiliary. As far as I could tell they weren't enslaved in the sense that they had bomb collars or threats of violence put on them, they had just become accustomed to living under the Noman and were being conditioned to fight us by propaganda describing us as brain-eating monsters coming to take over.

It did not help that I had recently learned that, yes, if a Space Marine ate a brain he could learn knowledge from the enemy he had killed, which some of my Marines had been practicing to some extent. Apparently footage of this had leaked to the population of the city, which meant the city in total was against us.

It was a nightmare campaign that would have made me question if I was doing the right thing, if it wasn't for one little thing.

The population outside of the city was cheering as every single Tower fell. It seemed that this planet had developed in such a way that... Well if you didn't live in the city you had a crap life as a farmer, miner, or some other job that was needed to support the city. The rural people were

slaves and serfs to the people of the city, who were themselves technically slaves to the Noman but lived good comfortable lives. Meanwhile, their people outside the city lived in destitution and fear of reprisals.

Someone on this planet wanted us here, someone on this planet wanted the Noman gone, and if I had to get rid of some city folks who were more interested in using other humans as slaves so be it. I knew I'd probably set back the development of this planet quite a bit but sometimes you couldn't save a sick animal, sometimes you had to put it down in order to save the rest of the animals around it and this city was a sick place.

The war on Nova Borilia was progressing rather fine for the most part though, fighting our way to the lowest parts of the city and demolishing the supports tended to put an end to the conflict in that part of the city. Mainly because the entire section would collapse and maybe a few sections next to it. Slowly and steadily the ring of Wolves of Fenris had closed in around the core of the city, with most of what passed for suburbs on a Hiveworld having been destroyed.

By my estimations war would be over in the next 4 months at our current rate of demolition. We were holding the lines around the places held by my legion but the highest city was huge and I had to use a lot of my Valkyrie and other guard units that had been attached to my legion since leaving the Wheel of Fire to hold the openings in the line around the great City.

But things had gotten easier recently as Mechanicus forces had arrived to support us from nearby Forge worlds, they proved very useful and quite good at shooting. I was allowed to see some of the things that the Mechanicus did for the first time, the red robes sometimes even wore different colors, I noticed. Some of the forces had a lot of whatever they were but the Skitarii were quite notable as being cyborgs and I wasn't sure if they were Mechanicus proper, they seemed very robotic. It was hard to say what was setting me off when I looked at them but comparing them to Miss Adelheid aboard my ship they were very... *goal centered*. It could just be very good professionalism mixed with their mechanical limbs giving this impression but I was wondering if they were truly human. I knew about the use of servitors and I had to wonder if these Skitarii were like that. Without evidence to my suspicions and, with none of their leaders having said more than a few words on the matter, I couldn't make an assumption either way.

Things were so secure at this point I didn't even need to be on the front lines. I enjoyed a good fight and I enjoyed joining them on the good assaults but, between them, I could take the opportunity of moments of calm to come back up to my ship and relax for a bit, as I was doing now.

Currently, I was sitting on my throne, and that was pretty much the best word for it. I was overlooking a small get-together of some of the leadership of the legion as they enjoyed a rest before they were sent back down for the next assault on the southern parts of the city.

The Squats were around as well, as usual. If anything I actually had more Squat ships show up recently, apparently general Trorban Grimmark had requested a few more forces to aid in the expansion of the Imperium and it had been granted. I could have said no but more allies was not a bad thing... and it was rather entertaining watching a few of these Squats learn to ride wolves at the back of the hall, something that had sort of taken on a bit after I had drunkenly explained how I used to ride wolves in the early days of my arrival on Fenris.

The Squats that had been with me said that was impossible and I'd exclaimed: 'Well if I was not so big I'd show you how,' which somehow had resulted in them deciding that they had to prove me wrong. Proving me wrong had been an issue for the Squats as it had been quite easy to convince some of the wolves in my service to allow them to ride their back. Now they were wondering if they could purchase a stock of Fenrissian wolves to use as the seed of a Squat Wolf-Cavalry.

I had to give them an answer on that subject. It was an entertaining notion, though considering how intelligent the wolves were I was kind of not in favor of selling them like they were... well animals, or slaves as it was. So far I'd come up with a general idea that when I was asked about it again I would say if they could convince wolves to go away with them they could take them with them and raise their wolf Cavalry. That would give the wolves the decision on the matter but I would have to make it clear to the dwarves when I did that these were intelligent animals, that must be treated as well a brother species and not something dumb that needed to be forced to do something.

I think they'd figure it out. The few Squats that had figured out how to ride the wolves tended to be the ones who were good with animals, I'd seen lots of care and love given before and after mounting on their backs.

Besides the Squats there was also a couple representatives of several guard armies, a section of my Valkyries who were tending to bring it in and out the food and partying themselves, Adelheid of the Mechanicus and Forgemaster Thu Arcalosion of a nearby Forge World who had supplied the majority of the Skitarii. Those two were having some sort of chat in digital, or whatever they called that beeping noise they called a language. I knew it was most likely ones and zeros at accelerated rates but I had yet to master that particular language. Although I had the distinct feeling that if I put my mind to it I probably could learn the Mechanicus' language even if I couldn't speak it. After all it was something they could understand between each other quickly

because of their computers and my brain worked very computer like I found, being able to take in information and understand it rather quickly.

All in all it was a rather quiet and peaceful party with Turid and Helga to either side of me, rubbing my shoulders after a long battle down on the planet. It was going to be a good peaceful night.

And then the doors were thrown open at the end of the hall, drawing everyone's eyes to a pair of Marines covered in blood as they walked in.

I half expected, seeing the dramatic timing of it all, that this would be the start of news of a counterassault by the Noman after all Nova Borilia was not their homeworld, which meant they had to have a planet somewhere. They would probably send troops to reinforce the forces here if they wanted to prevent us from finding their planet or try and get their forces out, so it would make sense for them to do something to help their troops.

But what I heard was cheering and slaps on the back from the group of Marines marching forward, as the one in the lead carried a... a large cube-like item forward? He came to a stop before the table I was sitting at and, bowing to me, placed the item on the ground.

“My Primarch, I'm glad to report that while clearing out the southern side of the city of some mutant rabble that attempted to stage an uprising we have secured an item that appears of importance to the Imperium

“Oh?” I asked, leaning forward to look down at said item. It was long and indeed cube-like and I was quite unfamiliar with that device.

Though I may not have been familiar with it but the guests next to me were, as both the Forgemaster and Miss Adelheid began giving out sounds of absolute terror and mechanical screaming. They both got up and moved around the table to stare at the device in utter shock.

The Forgemaster, getting down on one knee, slowly moved it back and forth to see its condition before making what I guess were prayers to their machine god.

Miss Adelheid was doing the same, giving a hand signal that I think was their equivalent to the Aquila or possibly even just their equivalent to the sign of the cross. Either way the two were apparently very interested in the device, and if those two were interested I was interested.

Standing up and bowing over the table, glad that I was wearing none of my armor because the weight may have cracked it a bit, I asked. “Well, you two seem excited. Is this something

important I should know about or are you going to keep the secret of the magical item that I now own to yourself?”

The two stopped before exchanging a few screeches in rapid succession, obviously speaking their mechanical language, preventing me from understanding what they were saying. Finally the Forgemaster got up and said. “Primarch Russ, are you aware of what this is? Do you know what great technology your people have found?”

I shook my head before saying, “I'm not aware but that doesn't mean that you do not make it quite apparent that it has quite a lot of value. What is this thing?”

The Forgemaster paused and thought, before finally saying “This is an STC, a Standard Template Construct. These were created during the golden age to help mankind spread along the Stars, each one carrying who knows how many designs of all kinds of equipment that could be used for rebuilding on a world.

I nodded my thanks. “Technology vaults with a lot of data then? Okay I can see how this would be useful to your people.“

“Incredibly useful, my Primarch. I... This could... “ The Forgemaster shook his head, seeming to have been taken aback by this turn of events. However I was not exactly going to let this pass without looking for the benefits for me and those who work for me.

“Interesting, if my memory serves there's a treaty on this sort of thing that we're supposed to hand them over to Mars. Am I correct in that?”

The Forgemaster nodded his head in affirmative, seeming to just be listening at this part.

Nodding my head back, I said, “Well then I am willing to turn this over, on the condition that if there's anything of interest found my request for the creation of a Forge World in the Fenris system to support military production be accelerated and that a copy of any designs found be given over to said Forge world. Otherwise it might stay here on my ship until I visit Mars again.”

The Forgemaster seemed to pause for a second, calculating this, before saying, “I will need to speak with the Forgemasters of Mars on this negotiation that you're putting forward. The treaty does stipulate that we have to hand these over but looking into pushing a request like this along with the handover would be reasonable, I believe. The creation of a Forge world would be something they may be willing to sanction as a thank you for finding such an object.”

“However your request for the designs are... Well, I'm not sure about that one. The Forgemasters of Mars will have to decide on that, I think you may not find that to be approved but anything is possible. After all who would have foreseen that such an item would be found on the planet of Nova Borilia? As far as I'm aware this planet was not founded during the Golden age but quite some period after.”

So a planet that was unlikely to have an STC originally had one? Interesting, I would have to keep my eyes open on every planet we visit then, who knows what else we might find. “Miss Adelheid?” I said, looking at her. She immediately jumped up from where she had still been looking at the STC. “Can you arrange a sketch of an STC to be delivered to every commander of the Wolves of Fenris? Perhaps there are more of these down there that need to be discovered, it would be better for my men to know what they're looking for rather than just stumble across these things and take them at a guess.”

“Yes, my Primarch!” she replied with a happy mechanical tone, immediately pulling out a dataslate and starting to sketch out the general shape and size of an STC.

Turning back to the Forgemaster I asked, “How long do you think it will take for this STC to be looked through once it's sent to Mars? I'm quite interested in finding out what's inside of it.”

The Forgemaster shrugged before saying “It will probably be at the top of the list as soon as it arrives. Knowing Mars though it could be a bit of a wait, there might be other STCs they are trying to decode. I would say within the decade we'll know what's inside of it.”

“That's a long period but I'll just have to bear it,” I said as I leaned back in my chair. I would just have to put a note on there to tell them to inform me as soon as they knew anything about it. “I'm quite interested in finding out if perhaps the Noman had stolen their technology for their exosuits from humanity.”

“I've actually given a look across their technology, my Primarch.”

That raised an eyebrow. I leaned forward, “You have? Well don't keep us waiting, be interesting to know what our enemy has been working on and how their technology works so we can defeat it more easily”.

The Forgemaster nodded his head before saying, “I can give you quite a good lesson on their technology. It is Xeno in construction but it is also of Terran design, most likely they have perverted some ancient suits of Titan armor and miniaturized it for their needs, a quite perverse form of technology in my mind.”

I nodded slightly, answering, “Yes, that would make sense. Their mechs do somewhat resemble those machines of war you brought along.”

Titans, giant robots meant for fighting... I had seen them for the first time a few days ago when the Mechanicus started showing up with them. They were taking up part in the line and well... they could cover a lot of the line with their massive guns and good range. Part of me wanted to be impressed with how large they were, after all no self-respecting Japanese man could completely lack interest in *giant fighting robots*.

The other part of me hated how they looked because they looked, for the most part, Goofy! Very blocky and angular sometimes, they looked like they had been built to look like buildings. It was impressive, to some extent, but in all others aspects it just made me think that BattleTech probably had better-designed giant mechs.

They were basically battleships and not really mechs when you actually looked at them, all the benefits of a Mech had fundamentally been destroyed by making them the size of large buildings as you could almost see them coming from miles away. There was a benefit for that kind of weapon system, that benefit was fear, but it also made them the largest moving Target in the field. This was useful for distracting fire from the infantry but what if the enemy managed to overwhelm the shields? Now that piece of walking iron was slowly getting destroyed, dropping chunks of equipment on said infantry until it exploded. And I'd hate to be the infantry around it when it exploded.

Well obviously the equipment that the aliens, the Noman, were using may be based on that technology but it was definitely a lesser version of it. After all there weren't shields on them and their guns were reasonably sized, often just variance of equipment we used ourselves. If they had used our technology in the construction of these suits of armor that they wore it made me wonder how they had gained access to it. Had they been given it during the Golden Age, using it against humanity during the Long Night? Or had they salvaged it from the ruins of the Long Night and used it to conquer this world and others?

Whatever the reason though it probably didn't matter. Nodding my head I simply said, “That's a good Intel report to begin with, Forgemaster Thu Arcalosion. I will give you control of this STC and charge you to look after it while we figure out how to get it back to Mars, if that's all right with you.”

Almost before I finished he nodded immediately, saying, “Yes, that would be perfect option! Yes I'll have this Skitarii guarding it, 24/7!” He pointed to one of the Skitarii who immediately stepped forward to take it, picking it up as if it had no weight at all and lifting it above his shoulder before walking back to lean against the wall.

Nodding my head in approval, I said, “Good, good.” Then, looking back towards the crowd, I added, “Well we've had our moment of excitement for the day, back to the celebration folks!” There was a roar of approval from the gathered Space Marines and others as everyone went back to their seats.

I was about to sit down and get back to drinking when a thought occurred to me and I added, “In fact, to celebrate this find, let's bring out the good stuff.” There was a roar of even louder approval and several Wolves and Valkyries immediately ran towards an elevator that went down to the storage facilities, in search of some of the best alcohol we had managed to acquire from Fenris and a few other locations we visited along the way. One of the benefits of being Heroes of the Imperium: you could get alcohol at a very cheap price. We might have abused it a bit.

Of course since I think I've seen some Marines basically run on alcohol I was not exactly against getting it a cheap price. It was good, it was a morale booster at all times, and because the Marines never got so drunk that it was going to impair them in combat I was more than willing to let them have their fun.

Not too long later barrels started coming up the elevator and were getting rolled out and quickly pushed into place along the wall where other barrels had already been nearly emptied. From there the Valkyries started to pass out large containers of alcohol to each and every Marine and put aside a few bowls for the wolves who enjoyed the alcohol as much as the Marines themselves.

Heck, I watched a pair of ravens land on an unattended container of alcohol and start sipping at it. Everyone here was a heavy drinker and it probably would be terrible if we had livers that could give out under this amount of alcohol. But for as far as I can tell from the biology I looked over this would barely tickle it.

Sitting back in my chair I smiled, enjoying the sounds and atmosphere of a successful army on the March. Much as I disliked war this was... This was nice, being here with all the Space Marines who pushed their way through the Wheel of Fire and now were on the march across the Galaxy, hunting down the horrors that would see the end of humanity as I would prefer it to stay. I hated war for no good cause but the cause of saving humanity from these monsters was well worth it in my opinion.

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**Tanya Russ**

I entered the Great Hall, still feeling nice and relaxed from a great shower. Today was an easy-going day as it had been the conquest of Nova Borilia was over and we were on our way back to Fenris. y some calculations we would be there within the month, of course that depended on things not going absolutely insane in the Warp and life being rather normal.

It was always a possibility that something would happen that would prevent an easy trip, a storm within the Warp, some sort of Eldritch being that decided to try and poke at the ship's Gellar fields, or any other possibilities.

I heard rumors that some ships had to deal with what they called Xeno invasions where creatures of the Warp had found their way inside the vessels. Thankfully these seemed to be older models, vessels ships that had been in service for longer than the Imperium had existed, so it was most likely just due to Gellar Fields wearing out or having been badly maintained. Ships that were brand new like my Hrafnkel didn't have to deal with that as often or, so far, at all.

Though it was always a possibility it could happen. After all the Warp entities, the false gods, or as I was instructed to call them by Malcador the Warped Xenos. It still seemed like a foolish way to describe these creatures but I could get behind the main idea, they still could attempt to invade which was why I did keep some troops on prep and ready to fight at all times.

But that being said everything was going rather easy on this trip and we should reach Fenris rather quickly on time. I would find out how the ministers I'd left to control the planet had functioned, evaluate their work, and see what needed to be done to help the planet grow some more.

But those were issues for the future me. Today's issues had to do with why I had been called directly from my shower and barely had time to pull on some decent clothing that were in fact still wet as I walked in, seeing the Squat and Miss Adelheid arguing with each other.

“I tell you we've been helping with this campaign since the start! If anyone should deserve a copy of those plans it's us.” came the voice of general Grimmark, seeming extremely agitated.

“Treaties state that those plans must go to the Mechanicus first, they will then decide if they wish to part with a copy of them to you.” answered the soft voice of Ms. Adelheid as she overlooked him with an air of disdain.

“Are you nuts? Your cogboy Masters are some of the slowest people I think I've ever run into when it comes to dealing with new tech and we need a copy of those plans yesterday.”

“I don't care that you have opinions on this matter, the copies I was given are to be only be used if it is determined that a Forge World within the center systems is to be created and they will be given such copies if the Forgemasters determinate it is right.”

“We need those plans, lady. I don't know what your Folgers think is the best way to handle shit like this but those plans could be indispensable for the survival of the human race in the core.”

I feigned a cough before saying, “I hate to be the one to burst into whatever conversation you two are having but several Space Marines were so worried about the goings on in here that they asked me to come in here and visit you two. I intend to find out what this argument is all about and why you are using my great hall to have it.”

“The damn tech boys don't want to share their toys and I feel they should share *this* toy rather quickly, if you ask me.” General Grimmark said, pointing his hand at Ms. Adelheid.

“General Grimmark, I will have you know that it is of utmost importance that these plans not be spread around so willy-nilly. I only shared the knowledge of what's in them as a common courtesy to those working with the Primarch. When these plans are officially sealed as stable they will be released to Forge worlds across the Galaxy under the control of Mars, then and only then will you be granted access to their designs.”

I coughed at that and asked, “What plans? Has something developed with that STC that I have not been informed about?”

Miss Adelheid turned to me and gave a nod before answering, “The STC has been decoded and one of the templates in its the banks was one item that was brand new, a tank of tremendous versatility and ease of construction.”

“So what, you guys found the Sherman?” I asked, making a joke at their expense. Though really any mid-war tank of World War II who had quite a lot of versatility and could easily be altered for specific needs would fit.

“Sherman?” Ms. Adelheid said slowly, sounding the word out before shaking her head. “I have never heard of this vehicle, is this some sort of indigenous design found on Fenris?”

Thinking quickly I said “No, no, it was something the Emperor told me about a long time ago, some sort of ancient vehicle that was very good at being altered at need.”

“Hmm, I'll have to look into this vehicle. Perhaps it is related to the one we have found.”

Well I would hope not, I thought. A Sherman on a battlefield of the 30k would probably be a dead tank in rather quick fashion. To try and confirm that this wasn't a Sherman, I said. "He described it to me, if you have images of this new tank I could confirm it for you if you like."

Miss Adelheid seemed to think for a bit before deciding. "As a Primarch it would be fitting for you to see it, I guess. After all once this is officially recognized by the forges of Mars they will most likely be widely distributed to the national guards of many planets, including Fenris."

Moving over to a panel built into the raised platform my throne was on she pressed a few buttons. A central map pillar sprung forth from the floor, the set of metal doors that kept it hidden sliding back so it could spring up. It was a bit wasteful since there basically had to be a floor beneath this floor to keep things in but I would admit being able to change some aspects of the room by a couple presses of a button had been rather useful, especially when meeting with various dignitaries over the years.

Miss Adelheid approached the central map thing and pulled a cable out of her... Wrist, I think? It was hard to see exactly where it was coming from since she wore red robes that hid most of her body but the cable definitely came out of her right robe arm, so unless there was a cable going all the way up her body I was suspecting that she might have a bit of augmentation underneath those robes that I had yet to discern.

Either way she plugged herself in and said a few things in binary before turning on the screen again, showing the tank that I had been informed of.

And immediately I was left aghast at this monstrosity. For some reason I had expected something along the lines of an M1 Abrams, after all most tanks tended to end up looking like the M1 Abrams in general design as the years had gone on. Yes the Russian tanks had their own little tweaks and such but it was still basically that kind of low-to-the-ground platform with as much space sideways as possible and as little up.

My reference to this being a Sherman was not too far off as it probably was as tall or taller than a Sherman, but that's where the similarities had been ended. This beast looked more like something that belonged out of the World War I battle days, as shown by the fact that there were design implementations for using rivets. Rivets, for economy's sake!

Yes a riveted tank was easier to construct but it also meant there was a lot more things that could go wrong and could easily be taken apart by a couple shots even if it had the strongest possible armor .

Amongst the holographic things before me I noticed several other things. The crew compartment had two doors on the side, those were obviously not real doors but there was holographic schemas showing how they could put, and this was the most horrifying thing, *sponsons* on the sides. Sponsons had gone out of use at the end of World War ONE for goodness sake. I guess I should be counting my blessings that the thing in front of me only had one turret with riveted armor on it and not five like some of the interwar models had attempted to do.

Not to mention that the World-War-I-looking style of the tank did not end there as the treads literally encircled the entire sides of the tank, what benefit that would have I couldn't not say. Unless maybe it was possible for the crew to get in between those treads to repair them from the inside? I could not see any way that that would not end terribly for people as it would be too much work to try and repair it in the field.

There were however quite a number of options for weapons on the platform itself and that's what it was: a platform for weapons. This was not my understanding of tanks, this was early World War I style tanks, obviously meant for acting as mobile bunkers instead of fast-moving forces meant to cut off the enemy.

Which I had to admit... If they were meant for the Planetary Guards and Imperial Army, they might do well. After all they were meant for holding positions, all the problems that I saw with the tank wouldn't be as critical if they were just meant for holding a position, holding the line so that faster more mobile forces could strike a killing blow against the enemy.

And then once you started appraising it with that in mind, that it was meant for a defensive purpose, some of the issues I saw were not as bad. If it was not meant to get far in front of the repair lines it could operate rather fine and there were designs listed here for at least going up to welding level of strength. Not to mention, from what I was seeing, it was a cheap tank that would not break the bank compared to some of the models that I had acquired for my own legion since starting my part of the Crusade. Even my tanks had had the problem with sponsons and I hadn't actually been as annoyed with those when I first saw them. Rhinos and their variants tended to be well able to change parts quickly so adding on some sponsons to armored personnel carriers and giving them a bit more shooting ability was not a big problem, not to mention they weren't true sponsons like these but more guns hanging off the side of an arm allowing movements almost in 360 degree while the crew remained protected inside the hull. If those guns were shot up they were shot up without compromising the vehicle.

Letting out a sigh, I said, "Well this is an interesting design but this is not the Sherman. I don't know what design this is but I think I can see how it can be of use for the goals that you stated," I added, nodding my approval before saying, "Now why this in conflict here? Why do you need them, general Grimmark?"

General Grimmark looked towards the doors before saying, “There's been a bit of debate within the Leagues over joining the Imperium, nothing too great yet but there are indications that there might be a bit of a conflict brewing between those towards the Maelstrom and those on the outer sides of the Maelstrom.”

I raised an eyebrow at that, before saying, “What kind of conflict? Isolationists versus those who want to open up?” I took a guess based on the position of the conflict zones and I was rewarded with a nod of approval.

“t the moment those who live closer to the Maelstrom tend to think that we should not get involved with the Imperium of Man. They are not the majority but they do have quite a lot of good machines and factories that can produce enough equipment to equip many an army if they so decided to do so.”

“Ah.” I nodded my understanding as this reminded me a little bit of when the Americans had shown up at Japan. That made me commodore Perry, I guess. After all I had been the one to bring Malcador to negotiate the agreement. Strange and small universe if that was a reenactment of that in some ways but a thought occurred to me. If they were worried about some sort of conflict brewing between the Leagues then why did they send reinforcements to my campaign, I wondered. The answer was self-apparent: send troops to a friendly power in hopes they'll send troops when the conflict springs forth. Obviously they didn't care about what it would look like to those who lived in the Maelstrom, otherwise they would have gone out of their way to avoid such an implication.

“And you believe these cheap tanks will help you possibly win this conflict when it comes about.”

He hesitated but finally said, “From what Miss Adelheid has described I think it will be important that we have some sort of weapon like this in the field at the time of the conflict. A lot of our heavier equipments are located within the core and easily taken by those in the core of our territory. But if we can produce something cheaper and easy to reproduce and repair... Well, it won't matter how good our older equipment is we'll wear it down eventually.”

I nodded my head as I took this information in, before asking Miss Adelheid, “You are meant to hold those copies of records for me, correct?”

“Yes, my Primarch. I'm the only one allowed to hold these things until the Mechanicus says otherwise.”

“And how long would it take to set up a factory to produce those tanks?”

She had to stop for a moment before saying, “I think, with their level of development... It would probably take only a month to set up one factory. They already produce tank-like vehicles at much larger scales so producing vehicles of this nature would not be impossible.”

“And, to protect our allies and the Leagues’ territory, if I asked you to hand over these design as it is needed for the defense of imperial allies? Would the Mechanicus sanction this?”

I watched miss Adelheid's hand go up to her chin, one of the few things I could see inside the robes, before there was a nod of approval and she concluded, “It would be looked upon with some annoyance but as it would be explained as a necessary release of information for our allies to maintain control over a section of space... Yes, it would gain approval rather quickly.”

Nodding my head I turned it back to general Grimmark and said, “Well as you heard if such a conflict were to spring forth I could easily get access to these tanks for you at a moment's notice. It would probably take half a year or so to get from wherever I am in the galaxy to the front line but I'm sure the other Primarchs will intercede in your favor.”

Grimmark shook his head before admitting, “Yeah, I guess I just would really like to have the design in production now. Sooner we can have these things in production the more likely the other Leagues will warm up to the idea of being part of the Imperium and stop being such sticks in the mud about the whole isolationism aspect of our history.”

Nodding my head I went back to Miss Adelheid and asked, “Is there any way we can fast forward this process of getting these tanks approved and ready for production? The sooner they're out, the better. It is for the Imperium after all.”

Miss Blake shook her head, saying “We don't even have a name for this tank yet and as it is it's just a vehicle that was found while searching the Galaxy, important but it will be behind several other proposals that have been in the queue for some time.”

Hmm there was a thought, because it didn't have a name it wasn't important enough? Names had power in the Mechanicus in some fashion so what if I were to give it a name that was important? That might speed them up, right? I might as well ask. “What if I was to ask for it to be named after me?”

Miss Adelheid paused before saying, “A tank that a Primarch has declared theirs by naming it so would probably go to the top of the list, yes. Though I don't know what Mars would decide that's what I would believe.”

I nodded before saying, “Then let them know that I have decided that, since I was the one to find the tank, I would like it named after me.”

Miss Blake nodded, “I will add this to the next communication I send to the Mechanicus. I don't know what will happen but perhaps your plan will work.”

“Good, good, then this argument is settled,” I said to the two who nodded their agreement, “Then I am going to go enjoy the rest of the day. You two should do the same, we'll be returning to Fenris by the end of the month. I believe I need to be ready for that, to see what changes have happened and to see the planet for the first time I believe for you two.”

The pair nodded and I added, “Wonderful, you're going to enjoy it I think! It's a little cold but you'll get used to it.”

Miss Adelheid muttered something about antifreeze while general Grimmark nodded his agreement, saying, “I think I'll be fine, a lot of planets in the leagues are a lot colder but then again they're not really planets, they're just asteroids we mined out and built cities inside of.”

“Oh? That's rather interesting, I would like to see that one day.”

General Blake nodded before replying, “You're welcome to visit anytime.”

“I think I'll take you up on that, hopefully before any conflict springs up between the two sides that are developing. Sounds like the place is rather interesting.”

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## **Kori Bretakollrsson**

### **Fenris**

The city was absolutely destroyed, there was no other way to describe the chaos in front of me. Bodies were laying everywhere, several hundred people were severely injured and probably the next generation of Fenrisian children was now on the way.

All in all to be expected of a Fenrisian party, though I didn't believe we'd ever had one as massive as we'd had the night before. 24 hours ago our ship had arrived in orbit and though we were at expected to arrive without fanfare apparently the Stewards of Fenris, a group of nobles who were put in power under Primarch Tanya, had been alerted to our coming by a member of the Mechanicus talking a few weeks ago about how we were making good time.

Being that it was dead of winter they had apparently decided now would be a great time to put together and store up for the most massive party in Fenrissian history and by the Alfather did they deliver on that promise.

We had arrived expecting to simply set down outside the capital city of the Russ and slowly make our way across the continent to visit old friends and families for about 3 to 4 weeks of rest. The next step would have been to return to the newly built fortress of The Fang, the name having been determined while we were gone. Instead several of the Stewards came out and said they had prepared a parade route for us straight through the Capitol and to the old Palace that had apparently been refurbished a dozen times since we had been gone. It had only been... what, maybe 15 years since we left, but apparently the Mechanicus is and Stewarts had been busy.

What had once been a provincial capital on this side of the continent had grown into a massive City, three-story buildings made of some of the finest materials I think I'd ever seen, bricks, woods, and so forth. The streets, which had been dirt when we left, were now well paved and though I doubted they could take the weight of our tanks they could definitely take a large column of Space Marines marching across them in full battle armor.

I would know as we had been within the first soldiers to March through the gates of the massive walls that now kept out the Fenrisian creatures of the wilds.

Unfortunately my attempt to get me and Bjorn into the Royal Guard of Tanya had not exactly gone off as well as I would have liked, otherwise we would have been at the front of it. We did get transferred to the third chapter, or what was now being called a great company since 'chapter' came off as a little bit too impersonal in several debates between our leaders. I wasn't there for the whole conversation but from what I understood the chapter leaders had been having a meeting with Tanya on the matter, discussing how there was not a lot of personality to the term chapter. She had agreed and not only accepted that they may change the name to Great Company, which had been one of the major suggestions pushed forward, but also declared they would be allowed to personalize those companies to some extent.

But that was for the future and not my level of interest right now I was just part of the third company with the possibility to join up with the main royal guard as the years went on something I would do the best to actually accomplish.

Picking up a glass of coffee I gave it a sip, enjoying the stimulant as I watched both Marines, wolves, and regular humans struggle out of wherever they had fallen the night before during the party. It has been a hell of a thing to watch really. We had come up to a stop we knew, the Primarch had made herself known as she walked at the front of the column, giving waves from what I had heard from some people and smiles, playing up her role as the leader of the people.

And once we reached the central area of the city the Stewarts of Fenris had unveiled a statue and declared that today was a party. Immediately members of the Fenrisian guard had popped out of alleyways all along the city street that we were on, carrying large tables of food and drink from the side areas.

Beyond that it had been a rather standard affair: a celebratory party, drinking, a few fights and a few other things that the Valkyries enjoyed I'm sure.

It was quite apparent that there had been some sort of population boom while we had been gone, as I think I had seen more people in this one city than I'd seen in my entire life on Fenris beforehand. I wondered what had caused that but if they were able to support the people I didn't see a reason to worry about it.

I also wondered how far this population boom had spread, was the entire continent of Fenris now a more urbanized place like I'd seen on some of our campaigns? It was unusual for the planet to have more than a few houses and other places outside of major towns. Most minor towns had been only about five or six buildings, could they be more now? It would be an adventure to go find out and I had to make a long trip through the mountains anyways once this was over, see if I could find out what my kids had gotten up to while I was gone.

My thoughts were interrupted as I felt Bjorn slap my shoulder, saying, "Good morning, Kori! What do you think of the new Statue that they put up?" his head pointing towards the thing that now graced the skyline of the city.

Looking at it I could only chuckle at it, before saying, "I think they may have gotten her bust a *little* too big."

I got a laugh from Bjorn as he looked back at the Statue. "Yeah, perhaps so. It is rather impressive a size, perhaps it's actually smaller and we just are given an impression it's bigger by the size of the statue?"

I had to laugh at that as I looked back at the Statue. It was big. Most buildings in the city besides the castle at the central area that predated the recent construction were about three stories. The statue was at least four and generally attempted to depict the arrival of Tanya to the Russ. From what I'd seen of it it had a pretty good sculpture of her face and most of her body. "No, I think the accounts of exactly what it looked like may have been exaggerated from the stories I heard from herself when she got a little bit too tipsy and talked about her arrival."

The Tanya standing four stories tall was wearing basically nothing but a loincloth and was wearing a wolf's head on her own, with a wolf fur's cloak covering up most of her body. There

seemed to have been a lot of care taken in making sure she looked as good as possible, in my opinion almost like some sort of fertility goddess really. I'd bet on that, In one hand she held a spear and in the other a scroll, possibly implying her war-like but yet negotiating nature. She held them out as some sort of offering to whoever came forward.

“I wish I'd been there when they unveiled that for her. I imagine that probably did not go over well for her,” Bjorn said as he shook his head.

“I imagine so as well, she's not one for big things like this. She probably would have been happier with something a little bit more sedate and less noticeable, also maybe with more clothes” I commented, shaking my head.

“Ha! Probably,” Born said with a laugh as he looked at the Statue.

Any more thoughts of having a little bit of a laugh at our Primarch's expense was stopped by a scream as a young boy came running down the street, yelling about a monster at the front Gates.

Both of us looked at each other and smiled. I carefully put down the cup with my coffee, deciding I'd come back and finish it later as I and Bjorn quickly hustled our way forward, running down the long boulevard that made up the Central Street of the city of Russ.

There were a couple other Marines pulling themselves out of whatever they had been doing, some of them looking rather annoyed, others looking drunk off their ass as they stumbled in behind us or were already slowly moving in the general direction to see what monster had panicked the boy. We were kind of still pretty much at full capacity, I had always been less of a drinker and Bjorn had been part of the guard detail so we were able to quickly make our way forward, soon finding ourselves just in sight of the front gate.

There, at the gates, were about two dozen Fenrissian Guards on the ground, obviously beaten half unconscious, the rest crawling away like they had come face to face with a monster that they could not handle. which I could say with some certainty they certainly had. Standing in the middle of the gate, surrounded by the unconscious and the injured was a small figure of no more than five-six leaning heavily on a gnarled staff that seemed to have been carved from the trees out in the wild. They were wearing a Wolf pelt cloak made from several different animals that covered up their identity.

There was a feeling in the air that didn't feel right as if something horrible was in front of me and I didn't understand it. Instinctually I grabbed my bolter off my belt but in reality that wouldn't do me any good, Tanya had had us drop off our rounds of ammunition before we even entered the city to make sure that any chaos that broke out wouldn't be too devastating to the local economy.

Aiming my useless weapon at the unknown entity I said, “Hold, wild one! Reveal thyself and surrender your weapons.”

Because of the cloak which was a wolf face turned to look at me and I could just barely see a pair of blue eyes seeming to Glow underneath the darkness the hood showed me.

“Wild One? Well that's a new name, one I've never been called before,” came a somewhat familiar female voice. Before I could puzzle out what that was about they did reveal their face, causing my gun to go down in confusion.

It was Tanya. The face was Tanya and though the hair was dark it was definitely Tanya's but shorter. And her eyes were glowing a shade of blue that somewhat resembled Tanya's own when she was using her Warp abilities.

The woman banged the staff on the ground and said, “I will not give up my weapons to a mere warrior of Fenris. I am Lord Wulfen and demand to see King Russ, my Genesire and the one who promised me a glorious death in a battle against the enemies of Mankind.” On that proclamation a crow landed on her shoulder and cawed at us.

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**Writers note: ah well would you look at that after nearly decades or so on campaign tanya returned home, to the return of Lord Wolfen... who saw that coming ahaha, as well we get to seem political sitation developping when comes to the squats and deap core squats, and of course the ad mech are still around. Hope everyone enjoy! Let me know what you all thing of this turn of events?**

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