

Night Hunter

Nightfall

Another batch of recruits—oh, what a terrible batch this one is. More of the dregs of society from Nostramo, more criminals and other failures.

Those who lived in the lowest rungs that I had crawled out of. It was beyond common at this point for every batch of recruits that came from Nostramo to be this level of failure. In fact, it started as soon as I had left Nostramo. My initial batch of Marines had been good; men filled with honor, men who had served in my forces to bring order and justice to the galaxy. But ever since then, each batch of Marines has been filled with more criminals than the last.

They were an effective tool in some instances, but they were not up to the levels of the original Terran stock of my legion, let alone of the lawmen that had originally made up my first recruits. The only good thing about them was that they were effective with the tactics I used; bringing terror to the enemy was a legitimate use of my Space Marines. It was necessary; after all only through fear could a society be ruled, benevolence only led to decadence and excess. Of course there were those within the Imperium that believed my methods were far too brutal and that I should be stopped, but in the end they could not argue with the results nor would they raise their voice when the Emperor himself remained silent on the matter.

Shaking my head, I looked away from the new recruits with disgust, and turned my gaze towards the men who had already served under me for some time. I'd put them through their paces, taught them what they needed to know, and trained them on how to fight the enemy out there. Unfortunately in this world's case the enemy were proving more difficult to break.

The main crux of the issue was the support they were receiving from the two neighboring realms the Gray Worlds and the Hunderax Autonomy, at first it was merely material aid but as time went on I was certain that those realms were reinforcing this world with their own troops.

I had no clear proof, just suspicions based on the equipment I'd seen on some of the bodies my men had brought back as trophies. It was not standard to this planet and I could make assumptions from there about where they were coming from. Plus, there had been obvious efforts to pay off local mercenaries to join this conflict. Several Ork clans had landed and caused issues for my Legion in its efforts to destroy them.

That being said, things were now progressing somewhat stably. All that was left to do was to capture the last remaining strongholds on this planet, and pass judgment on the civilians of this world that sided with the mutants. As much as the Imperium wanted to reunite humanity, there were always going to be segments of humanity that fell short, and if this group was so enamored and concerned with the mutants of this world over their own survival, then so be it. There would be new colonists. The Administratum had plenty of individuals willing to settle on freshly integrated worlds.

All this conquest made me wish I could throw the majority of my army at Nostramo, to cleanse it of the corruption that was obviously taking it over so slowly and steadily. But what point would that serve? The people would forget to fear my judgement, if I was not there as Nostramo's arbiter, the world would slowly degenerate into what it had been before I'd come around, taking what had been a very lawful, ordered place into nothing but a criminal society once again.

I had run Nostramo for decades, and it only took a few years for its people to return to corruption. What was even the point in trying to fix that? It was obvious that the people of my so-called homeworld were unstable; they were nothing but criminals. The only solution for Nostramo at this point would be for the entire populace to be condemned to death. Or perhaps Nostramo itself was so cursed that the very planet should be put out of its misery.

I shook my head, banishing those thoughts. My nihilism was growing again. But it didn't matter as long as they obeyed the Administratum, it didn't matter that they were falling to corruption. However, it was only a matter of time before Nostramo and its people failed in delivering what little was expected of them from the Administratum, and hopefully, I would be given the honor of cleansing Nostramo of its filth.

And that day, I would bring my reckoning on them, using the very tools they had given me.

But those were thoughts for another day. Making my way through the halls of my Gloriana-class, the Nightfall, I made for a transport ship that would take me over to the recently arrived ship of the Wolves of Fenris the Hrafinkel to meet with their Primarch. They should be deploying their troops directly to the planet and assisting in capturing the last strongholds, but

apparently, they wanted me to give them a debrief and have a meeting beforehand. I was not looking forward to it. Visions of their doom would most likely appear to me. I would have to hide the pain I saw as I looked into their eyes and saw what fate awaited them, what ultimately came to those who served alongside me.

It would be an experience I would wish to forget. But then again, I could never forget those visions, the dark fate of each Primarchs I saw before me, were undeniably events that were set in stone, and I could not forget how they would come to pass as I saw them.

Shaking my head, I stepped down into the cargo area, watching a few Night Lords, some of my first generations, those who had been trained to be the humorless lawgivers needed to bring order to the Galaxy, keeping an eye on some of the later generations as they kept an eye on the human support staff.

This was a concern I had been having over the last few years. Some of the later generations, those that came from Nostramo, had criminal histories so soaked in blood and violence that they had problems with other humans.

That was to say some of the Marines enjoyed ‘training’ their ability to inflict terror by killing and torturing the humans aboard my own ships, disposing of their bodies so that they would never be found and so that no one could ever call them out on the crime. It made the position of being aboard my ship an unenviable position. There was not much I could do. I needed these men to complete the missions I was given, bringing order to worlds that needed order. Not to mention, simply having me enter a region and commit terror attacks on some offending world would often bring other worlds into compliance. The stories alone did the job, something I shared with the Primarch of the Wolves. From what I understood about the propaganda put out about them, they were quite good at causing their own version of terror on the enemy, a Legion infamous for their near feral ruthlessness in warfare, ridding the empire of its issues before it began. Perhaps we would get along well just based on that, though I doubted we would. Other stories reported a nobleness to their character, and well, nobleness was based on some high ideals. High ideals were not necessary for the mission; order was necessary.

Shaking my head, I boarded the transport, "Take me to the vessel of my sibling."

The Night Lord pilot looked back from their seat and nodded. "Of course, Father," and the ship slowly took off. I didn't bother bringing a security attachment. I didn't need a security attachment; they were siblings, and I doubted they would try to kill me.

That, and I didn't trust some people on my ship. It would be better for those that I did trust to be on the Nightfall, watching them, than to be on another ship.

As my shuttle left my ship, I watched the other Gloriana-class coming into view. It was a hulking brute of a ship, as one would expect, though I noticed it apparently had a paint job of a sort of grayish-blue, a strange coloration. But then again, I couldn't hold colors against them.

Shaking my head, I watched as our vessel moved swiftly through the space between our two vehicles, and as my pilot negotiated a landing zone, I looked towards the area that should be where the captain sits.

Perhaps I would get a view of the Primarch of the Wolves of Fenris if I could manage that. Maybe I'd be able to get the vision that was never going to come. Unfortunately, I did not have such luck. Damn, I thought, shaking my head, knowing that I would still have to suffer from whatever vision when I finally met this Primarch.

Turning back towards the ship we came alongside before entering a side port and came to a landing, nodding to the pilot. "Wait here for my return," which only got an approving sound from them. I wasn't aware of what generation they were. Could they be old Terran stock, my first generations, or the later failures? Didn't matter for this, I thought, shaking my head.

Stepping out of the shuttle, I looked around, noticing how clean this vessel was, and a few other things. It was very richly decorated compared to my own, which was more on the utilitarian side when you didn't find skulls everywhere. That was one of the few things I allowed to be taken from our enemies, their bones, since they served to increase the fear in the enemy.

Beyond that, there were also—well, several things that were not atypical from what I'd seen. There were the typical Space Marines preparing vehicles for combat, at least a hundred in this bay, all wearing gray or gray-blue armor. But there were also humans, detachments of human soldiers preparing for combat, wearing the finest combat armor I'd seen for an Imperial Army unit, also colored in the same coloration as the men. There was also a detachment of solely female soldiers working on tanks, wearing what appeared to be power armor of some type. There were less of them, but they looked like they needed to train to the peak physical condition with how their armor showed them off.

Something about the females was having an effect on the males, since I saw many eyes wandering over to them from both the regular human infantry, and a few from the Space Marine units, which was confusing. From what I knew about the process to make a Space Marine, usually those urges that made up the simple existence of man to procreate were removed so that you could focus on actual combat. They seemed to be different, perhaps a genetic flaw.

Hmm, a minor genetic flaw if that was it. I would have to note this down and report it to the Emperor at a later date. He would definitely like to know about this and see if it informed him about why some things were the way they were when it came to Space Marines. Didn't want the Space Marines to become a wholly separate genetic race, and if they still had the capability for procreation, that was a concern, one that broke the order of things as the Emperor deemed it.

Shaking my head, I turned as a Marine stepped forward, offering the Aquila in salute before saying, "Primarch Russ is waiting for you in the Throne Hall. She would like to come here and meet you for herself, but she is preparing the room for your conversation; she had not expected you to arrive so quickly."

"Understandable, lead on." I said with a nod to the Marine before letting him lead me to the throne hall to meet my sibling.

"Of course, milord," the Space Marine said, turning and leading the way as I fell in behind them, watching the other Marines, humans, and such look at me. Was that fear or disgust in their eyes? I couldn't tell, though I wasn't surprised. I did adorn my armor with the bones of my enemies, after all, in order to add fear to my attacks. It seemed to work, so I did it. But of course, amongst those who were not part of my legion or forces, I didn't quite fit the standard expected look of a Primarch.

Ignoring them, I pushed on, following the smaller Marine through the grand halls, finely decorated with carved wooden furnishings. The ship bore no familiarity to my own as we passed some animal skulls; there were a lot of wolf skulls. I would have expected perhaps a bit more honor to their namesake, considering I saw them roaming around as well. But interestingly enough, the Wolves did not seem to mind that they were wearing their pelts and bones.

Strange oddity, really, when you thought about it. Did it not count as some sort of taboo to wear the skin and bones of your friendly beasts? Or was it some way of honoring them they considered? I wasn't one for delving too deep, but it was an interesting subject.

Pushing onward, we came to a grand doorway made of wood, by the looks of it, though I did see a slot at the top and bottom that could be closed with two metal plates. The Marine pushed them open and announced, "Primarch Tanya of the Wolves of Fenris, I present, Primarch Konrad Curze of the Night Lords."

My eyes twitched at the mention of my proper name, the one the Emperor had given me. It wasn't my true name, though, no matter what he said. My true name was the Night Hunter. But if they didn't want to use it, so be it. Taking a deep breath, I stepped into the room and

looked, spotting a woman ten feet tall with blonde hair. She must be the Primarch, since "Tanya" was a female name. I blinked, though. Something was off.

Well, the fact that this Primarch was female was not out of the realm of possibility. I had met a female Primarch before, so it was well within the Emperor's ability to make them. No, that wasn't what was off. What was it? Where was the vision?

Tanya Russ

Standing to my full height at the end of the table, I smiled as I looked upon my brother, who appeared to be confused. To be expected, I thought, as my grin grew wider. "To answer your first question brother, yes I am a woman. And to answer your second one: The Emperor enjoys keeping these minor details a secret. You're not the only Primarch who's reacted like this when meeting one of their sisters; it's an old joke that I think is on its way out. Afterall I believe the Emperor is going to rescind the command to keep the details of our identities a secret from each other until we meet."

"Ah, right, that," Konrad said, seeming confused as he stepped into the room, looking at me as if he expected something more. Not unexpected. I did have a reputation; he probably heard stories about me, as I heard stories about him. Even if we didn't know all the context behind said stories. Waving him forward, I had Yrsa, my favorite adjutant and leader of the Valkyrie, carry forward a few drinks, placing them on the end of the table before my brother, before stepping back.

Still looking somewhat confused, he looked at it before I said, "Well, don't just stand there, brother. Take a drink. Nothing settles your nerves before a warm meeting like a good drink. This one is a particularly good brew."

Konrad looked confused before reaching out and taking the drink, drinking it a bit before saying, "This is pretty good. Is this the rumored Fenrisian ale? I've heard rumors about the drink that says that it will leave you blind if you weren't a Space Marine."

I shook my head before saying with a smile, "No, but we can get you some of that next. This is beer, made from hops from Barbarus, Mortarion's homeworld. A planet with a toxic near inhospitable atmosphere, which in turn caused some interesting and varied adaptations from the local flora that inevitably led to the creation of this particular brew.." Sipping my own beer, savoring the flavor before continuing, "I talked with Mortarion many years ago about producing alcohol for space marines. I'm glad they decided to venture into that field given the quality of what they've managed to produce in such a short time. There'll now be two producers of alcoholic beverages for Space Marines in the Imperium. Competition."

I chuckled, enjoying the thought of it. This was one of those things that I was glad was happening. It was good to show off, and though perhaps I was showing off a little bit more than necessary. I mean, we were supposed to be having a conversation about the conquest of this planet, but here I was getting as excited as a schoolgirl that my brother was engaging in a competition I had put forward. Great alcohol and showing off to another brother. Perhaps Barbarusian beer was stronger than I thought; I'd only had Fenrisian ale to drink for many decades, so having something different was something I was not used to. Oh well. Downing the rest of my cup, I put it down before saying, "Now, I know you're not here for that. I just wanted to show what Primarchs can do in civilian life. When this conflict is over, when the Crusade comes to an end, we are going to improve the galaxy in so many ways and have great retirements."

"Retirement?" Konrad said, somewhat confused, looking at me as if I was growing a second head.

Chuckling, I said, "Don't worry about it. Just enjoying the moment." Anyways, putting the cup down on the counter so that Miss Yrsa could pour me another, I looked at my Primarch sibling. "That's enough about me and my thoughts brother, tell me about this campaign. I've come a long way to take part in it. I will not make any judgments, but from what I've been able to gather from the reports, is that the people here should be nothing more than a minor civilization, something easily defeated by a few Space Marines."

Konrad cleared his throat before saying, "That's what you would assume, yes, but the matter is not as simple as the reports make it out to be. The main issue is that this civilisation is being supported by neighboring realms in terms of arms, military equipment and most recently men. As long as this planet stands, these neighboring realms are outside our effective range."

I raised an eyebrow before saying, "I mean, nothing is outside your range if you're willing to cut your logistics line for a little bit, but I will take your recommendation that we cannot temporarily overextend the fleet. Do they have their own naval assets?"

"Correct, my sister. They have their own naval assets, as well as mercenaries from various Xenos species in the region willing to fight for them, primarily Orks. There's been this particular troublemaker that has grown very bold in their efforts to prevent the expansion of the Imperium."

"Hmm, does this troublemaker go around spouting ridiculous monologues beyond that of the common Ork and has a penchant for escaping the inescapable?" I said with a shrug.

"Correct ," Konrad said, seeming still confused as he looked at me as if he was expecting something.

"... I see." sighing in commiseration for Konrad's poor fortune, before continuing, "Moving on from that topic, do you know the reason for what started this conflict in the first place?"

"The Imperium's Administratum told me mutants are to be removed from the planet. The population did not take kindly to that action and started fighting back. And from there it escalated into a bloody campaign. We have the upperhand at the moment, but unfortunately, I haven't been able to break them enough that the terror overtakes their will to fight."

I tilted my head before saying, "Why are you doing the job of the Administratum?"

"What?" Konrad asked, looking at me confused.

"If the Administratum wants to separate the mutants from the normal humans, they can do it. All that matters to us Primarchs is that the planet is brought into compliance, which means under Imperial control."

"That leaves the job half-done," he said, and I waved that away, saying, "The job is just compliance. We need to unite humanity, figuring out what parts of humanity are human enough for the Administratum. Besides, four times out of ten, the so-called mutants are stable enough that they could be considered an abhuman, which means the only way we'll know for sure if a mutant is an abhuman is to let the Mechanicum do their job. Which will only happen after the Administratum is given access to the planet after compliance has been made on the population. Which cannot be done when you're fighting a guerrilla war over an action that belongs to someone else."

Konrad shook his head, saying, "I've given a planet over without having the population cleansed before and had to go back and deal with it in the past because the Administratum ordered me to do it."

"Wonderful for them," I said. "You're a Primarch; you can tell them to use Imperial Army troops and not your forces. You're busy."

Konrad looked very confused, which made me sigh as I realized what I was dealing with. The worst possible outcome in a Primarch: one who was devoted to the rules. As he was no different than my old second-in-command of the 203rd, Weiss. A good man, but he had been a

bit too by-the-book a few times. But with a little bit of training and digging at his abilities, I shaped him into the perfect officer that was needed for the 203rd.

Shaking my head, I chuckled before saying, "The Administratum can make orders all they want. Technically speaking, the War Council under the Emperor is in control over where you go. They probably were just using the fact that you weren't aware of that to their compliance play. Attempted something similar a while back with the leader of the Iron Warriors."

"As for you, you can go wherever you want to. As Primarchs we sit high in the Imperiums hierarchy. There are very few people who can order us around, and they tend to be the Emperor and Malcador; everyone else is just giving you suggestions."

"Those suggestions aren't exactly how I interpret things," he said, sounding annoyed. I shrugged before saying, "Well, you either interpret it as suggestions or you get sent on some bad missions because they'd rather use the assets of the Space Marines. Then yes, it's that they do have full command over such elements of the Imperial Army and local PDF forces."

"Hmm," he shook his head before saying, "I will need to do research on this. There's no concrete laws on how these situations should be handled."

"And there can never be," before saying, "War is not concrete. War is a confusing mess that extorts lives in exchange for near meaningless gains."

Konrad looked at me with interest before shaking his head, saying, "Interesting point of view, but saying the world is shades of gray doesn't exactly clean up the fact the world is black and white. There are good things and bad things, and nothing matters in the end. We all return to primordial dust when we come to the end of our lives. That is the fate we all come to."

"Sure we do," I said with a chuckle. Unfortunately I'm used to the fact that my life proved an exception to that rule, at least three times. Hit by a train, reincarnated as a little girl during an alternate? World War I, thrown into said war, died in said war, then reincarnated into a Primarch roughly thirty millennia later.

Whatever fate Konrad was on about hadn't exactly caught up on me now, did it? Though I could just be the exception that proves the rule. I would have to assume that there had to be similar circumstances with many of the other Primarchs when one thought about it. If my soul was reused from the Warp, it was very likely that Konrad's and the others were reused as well. Shaking my head, I said, "But let's get back on point. So going off the information from the reports I received, there's basically two forces down on the planet: the civilians that hate you

because you're getting rid of the mutants and the civilians that don't care for the fate of the mutants but hate you because you're on this planet, correct?"

"Correct, and they often switch sides very often, so they're possibly all just a problem as far as I'm concerned."

I nodded before saying, "Then why don't we ignore them? Get rid of all the mutants then leave the civilians for the Administratum to sort out while we deal with the enemy military forces."

"We can't do that; they have already shown themselves to be the enemies of the Imperium."

"No, they've shown themselves to be enemies of one particular element of the Imperium. Enemies that have allies outside their realm willing to support them. If we can defeat them militarily and get them docile enough to work with the Administratum and then focus entirely on their external allies, then we don't have to worry about dealing with the civilians and any guerilla tactics. It also means we take fewer losses since the civilians would not have to fight like they are battling against their own extinction."

Konrad shook his head, saying, "You're too easy on them, sister. They are criminals, and as all criminals should be, they should be put down."

"You're too harsh on them, brother," I said before adding, "I understand, though. You have a reputation that you've been building out here. I've read the reports on it. One of the most terrifying military operations out here, bringing planets into compliance simply with the notion that they'll come in the range. You, me, and Jaghatai Khan, have all used terror tactics for the better of the Imperium, but you are doing a very good job of making it the cornerstone of your legion. So, I say reign command on this operation, and I will take the hits on the reputation of terror."

Konrad raised an eyebrow, saying, "You would take a reputational hit in order to bring this conflict over as quickly as possible? You would let these criminals escape their proper judgment."

I tilted my head. Something about the way that he said that went a little bit further than I thought Weiss would ever do. Need to be more mindful of who I was talking to and perhaps look more into their history. Clearing my throat, I said, "Well, if you want to see yourself as the judge of this planet, yes. You've lost men to this conflict, I think, and it has created a bias, one that is blinding you to the other options you could use to end this campaign quickly."

Konrad looked down into his drink and deepened thought for a bit, seeming to be wondering what would be the best answer. I waited; it was a suggestion after all. It wasn't an order, and it would be up to him if he would be willing to let me take control of the operation. It would also be up to me to try and make my version of the operation come true. "No, I believe with the proper use of my Wolves of Fenris, the Fenrisian Guard, and most importantly the Valkyrie, I could bring the planet into compliance rather quickly."

It really looked like Konrad was suffering from just a bad mindset on how to handle war. And the best way to show him that there was a better mindset was to take the lead. But the question was, would he be willing to give me that lead? After all, Primarchs are known for keeping control over their own operations.

Konrad Kurze finally brought up the drink to his lips, drinking it all down before putting it down hard on the table, looking at me directly in the eyes and saying, "All right then, I'll let you have control of this operation. Prove to me that you can bring it under compliance quickly with minimal casualties."

Smiling, I said, "Well, minimal casualties, I'm not sure about, but I will bring it to an end quickly."

Kori Bretakollrsson

The shuttle rattled as we came in for a landing, the squad one of many coming to deal with the situation on the planet's surface.

There were eight strategic bases producing or distributing weapons for the population to fight against imperial control, and it was our job to destroy at least one of them. There were other squads and companies moving against the other ones, mixed with forces from the Fenris Guard, Valkyrie, Imperial Army, and our allies for this campaign, the Night Lords.

I hadn't heard good things about them. There were more rumors than facts hanging about the VIIIth Legion's name, from them being prolific killers to monsters born from the shadows of a dark world. Assuming this operation went well, I'd probably have a better understanding of them and their mentality. But then again, it could go the other way; I could be left even more confused. It wasn't really on my radar as something I needed to care about. Getting my men through this operation and out was all that mattered.

The question was, how challenging of a fight would this be? Most we'd heard about these enemies was that they were mutants armed with advanced technology. How advanced? What

kind of mutants? Nothing had been clarified. I hoped it would not be anything too insane, but the galaxy did tend to enjoy throwing curveballs at me. So, I was half-expecting to step out of the shuttle and be shot at by a flying little girl. Hopefully, my expectations would not be met, and I'd be met with something a lot less horrifying.

But then again, perhaps I'd step out of the shuttle and be host to something absolutely horrific. It was really hard to say what would be revealed when we broke through the orbital clouds and landed. Only time would tell.

Shaking my head, I looked over at Bjorn, who was joking with some of the other guys. Apparently, they were making joke bets about what the Night Lords looked like. I shook my head, as taking bets about war was a bad idea.

Bjorn had a certain luck with bets, as far as I was concerned. He wasn't always right, but him sporting an average win rate of 70% of the time was not good odds in my opinion. He was saying they were very pale and had sharp canines, which sounded like a mix of our own genetics and the Death Guards, as they were also known for being very pale.

Shaking my head, I chuckled. It sounded impossible. Space Marines did technically seem to come with some odd genetic quirks; just look at the Salamanders and their coal-black skin. However, the population of their planet had coal-black skin, so perhaps that wasn't exactly a genetic issue with the Space Marines. Then again, their Primarch also had the same skin tone, which was odd. You know, when you start thinking too deeply about the Primarchs, you start getting into these weird things that seem odd. I'd heard the story that the Primarchs had apparently been flung into the Warp accidentally, for some reason, separated and spread out across the galaxy where they grew up into strong leaders of men on their own.

But then you had incidents like the fact that Tanya had developed canine teeth in her first years living on Fenris. A story I heard retold many times by skalds in taverns back on Fenris, with some versions even claiming that she arrived originally as a man, ridiculous. You had the incident of Vulkan adopting the same skin tone after only spending a few years on Nocturne. And I imagined if I spent some time looking around, I would find similar stories about the other Primarchs. Why were they primed to develop and evolve to survive on other worlds? Weren't they meant to live on Terra with the Emperor for the first few years before the Great Crusade began?

It was a strange bit of questioning that rolled around in my head. If you were to poke at it too much, you'd come to one very uncomfortable conclusion: they were never supposed to be growing up on Terra from the beginning. They were meant to be thrown out to the wider galaxy, which was a hell of a thing to say the least when you thought about it.

The idea that the Emperor would sacrifice years of training to his children and just throw them out there to see what they managed... The implications did not speak well of the Emperor. It's hard to think about it though. I couldn't imagine a father doing that to their children. Perhaps I was biased; my father had died when I was young, leaving me the ruler of a kingdom without the support that I needed to build up a proper safety network. But if not for Tanya coming with the armies of Russ to change the situation in my favor, the situation would have devolved into a state where I had been deposed and left to die on the street.

So, when I got older and had a wife and kids, I had done the best I could to make sure that my children had a good network of retainers and people that I respected and trusted to look after them if they were to ever face the same situation. And come to think of it, it had been a long time since I'd spoken to my children. I had left my oldest in charge of what could pass for a kingdom, really, with how the government of Fenris had developed. We were just a tool amongst the many other tools that held control over the main island and I'd gone into the Wolves of Fenris fully expecting to either die or make myself covered in glory. So far, I have acquired plenty of glory.

As for my kids, my oldest had died ten years ago, getting a little too close to a krakens mouth during a hunt and was lost at sea. My second oldest had assumed the throne and, from what I understood, had done the best to improve the economy of the other side of the island, trying to rival the main part of the island where the Kingdom of Russ stood.

As for the twins, I didn't know too much about them since they were born just as I was being shipped out during the crusade. I actually talked to them and then years went by without communication. I wasn't sure if they were alive or dead. The boy seemed to have vanished off the face of Fenris when he turned 15; the girl had done the same not too long after. I suspected, though I had no proof, that they may have gone into the military, dropping their real names so that they could have a chance to make their own glory before revealing who they were. But if so, I didn't know where.

I assumed my son would have joined the Wolves of Fenris like me, though I hadn't run into him yet, so who knows? Maybe he had joined a colonial endeavor in the years since, or perhaps joined the Fenrisian Guard. As for my daughter, I looked at the Valkyries every once in a while just to see if I spotted anyone who resembled my wife. No luck so far, so she most likely did not join the Valkyrie. But I couldn't tell for sure.

Perhaps I should try and swing things in my favor to find out what was going on. I had served the King of Russ for many years, and we had a pre-established relationship back from

when I had simply been a noble supported by her army. Or if she'd be willing to spare some resources from Fenris to try and find out what happened to my youngest children.

It was worth a thought, probably more than a thought, really. After all, what was a Wolf of Fenris without his family? Most of the old hands like me, first generation, had been warriors with families after all. Although later generations had slowly moved away from the effort of taking elderly warriors and turning them into Space Marines, from what I've seen.

From what I heard, by two Wolf Priests over the years, I had learned that there had been an effort to try and get people of an older age, preferably, the government had slowly started using those of a younger age, ten, as the material for creating Space Marines.

Technically, Bjorn was amongst that group. He'd been sixteen, trained up to a Space Marine, and joined right around the same time as me.

The free age range had lowered over the years as testing continued, because it was found that the rejection markers that allowed for the Tanya face, as I'm called it, as well as the issues with Wolfens Syndrome, the odds of developing said conditions lowered the younger you were when you began the process.

Of course when Tanya heard about it she was livid to say the least. Originally Tanya had set up a prerequisite for each recruit to sire a minimum of three children before they could be allowed to join the Legion. However things didn't pan out as our Primarch expected as Fenris's population skyrocketed. Normally this would not be considered a bad thing, but with how much the population had grown, it placed a considerable amount of strain on Fenris and its developing infrastructure. Cities that were planned to be built in the next decade were forced to be constructed in the coming months, with hastily put together labor and security forces being sent out across Fenris to secure the construction sites.

Fenris in comparison to other worlds in the Imperium would not be considered industrious. It did have some production thanks to the Iron Priests, but nothing before required this much in labour and resources, but the main issue was the lack of skilled local tradesmen. Sure we could have brought on members of the Mechanicum to assist us, and we did when it was absolutely necessary, but in this case they would ruin Tanya's vision of Fenris.

My thoughts were finally interrupted as the shuttle became horizontal and started to slowly lower itself, telling me that we were only a few feet above the ground. Smashing the button above me on the top of the shuttle, I yelled, "All right, boys, time for a fight."

Immediately, Marines started gathering their gear and getting off onto their feet, preparing to charge out of the shuttle. We didn't know what kind of combat we'd be dropped into. The fact we weren't getting shot at yet was a good sign. Perhaps we caught them unaware.

Whatever the case was, I was ready for the fight as the doors finally opened, and the ramp lowered, revealing the sights of the planet. Letting go of the top of the ship, I stepped forward, bringing my volkite gun up as I pushed into ankle-deep water.

Looking around, letting the sensors on my helmet do their job, I quickly determined that we landed in a marsh, which would complicate traversal and supplies.

Signaling with my hand to my squad, they started spreading out, and we started moving forward. Data from up above told us that the enemy held positions due north of our landing zone, so all we had to do was keep a line and move onto our target. Two other shuttles had landed to our left and right and disgorged similar amounts of troops, putting our forces at about half a company. The other half of the company was further north, hitting the next compound. We would meet up with them when we moved on to the main fortress, which was to our west.

Sloshing through the water at a steady pace, we made our way forward, finally coming to comparably drier terrain. Though the ground still felt too waterlogged for my taste as I pushed up into it, my mass was not helping me as my foot sank a few inches into the earth.. Pulling my leg out with a squelch I resolved myself for the slog I was about to endure for the coming days. Turning to Bjorn, I said, "Come across conditions like this before?"

Bjorn took another step before saying, "Yeah, yeah, I have. The tropical swamp planet the pompous Eldar assholes lived on, you know? The one that we burned to the ground. They had conditions like this at some of their outlying camps."

"Might be better to go around," I mused before taking another step, noting it was a little bit firmer here.

"Maybe, but it looks like we have some contacts up ahead by that campfire, possibly civilians, so this is where we've got to be."

Nodding, I pushed forward to get a visual on the contacts, before breaking through the underbrush surrounding the campfire. The civilians were, to put it mildly, quite shocked to see me. Immediately pulling up bladed weapons that would do nothing against my armor, I didn't fire back at them, as they couldn't really harm me. Raising my hand, I called out in the lowest Gothic I knew, "Good evening, people of this world. We're here to end this conflict. Do not resist us, and we will not fire on you."

There was silence before several of the people started to flee, which while understandable was not the desired effect I was going for. They may go warn the main enemy compound that we were pushing towards. A sign that I was about to open fire before one of them came forward, an elderly woman who immediately hit the side of my helmet with her staff.

"You look nothing like the last giants came through here. Who are you?" she said in somewhat understandable Low Gothic.

"We're Wolves of Fenris. We've arrived to end this conflict," I said before adding, "Tell your people not to go warn the mutant compound to the west."

She shook her head before saying, "They're going; nothing. They'll go hide in the bush and hope that they won't be slaughtered by the Night Lords."

I raised an eyebrow before saying, "Slaughtered? That's a heavy word for this military operation."

"Once you see what they do, you'll realize they're murderers and nothing more," she said with a shake of her head before adding, "So many people have died for this foolhardy conflict that they instigated."

"You don't seem to be that scared of us," Bjorn asked as he stepped forward.

"Me? Scared? My life was good. Next generation will be sad, but they'll get over it. If I die here, I die. If I don't, maybe I will do some good before I leave this life, giving them a chance to run."

Bjorn chuckled before saying, "You remind me of some of the old ladies back home on Fenris, an attitude like old leather." Stepping forward, he reached into a side satchel and pulled out something, offering it to her, saying, "Want a drink?"

She looked at the drink with a scrutinizing gaze before taking a small sip, her face scrunched up in consternation, "Ack taste like burnt piss, but is good for nights like these"

I looked at Bjorn, asking, "Isn't most alcohol we have poisonous to normals?"

Bjorn shrugged before saying, "I keep some of the weaker ale around for moments like this. Nothing brings peace between two people like sharing a good drink of alcohol. At least, that's what I've been reading in some of the books Tanya's been shipping in. Although it only

seems to lead to some sort of conclusion that people without alcohol tolerance get screwed over by traders and shouldn't be done."

"Huh... thanks," I said before saying, "Well, we're not here to do any trading. We're here to try and settle this conflict." Turning back to her, I said, "What exactly do you mean by 'slaughter' and 'murderers'?"

"Come, come," she said, slowly waddling away. I looked at Bjorn, who shrugged, following after her.

It didn't take long to come to where she wanted to show us. On the other side of the island, in the bog, someone had driven stakes into the ground. On said stakes were bodies, stripped of all flesh, posed in rather gruesome displays. In a few cases, their chest cavities were open, their organs visible. It appeared they had been dead for a while and desiccated by the weather and animals picking at them.

Looking at them, the old woman said, "Crime of sedition. The Night Lords said all they did was take care of an injured mutant's arm."

She shook her head before saying, "The Night Lords don't see the world for what it is. They only see the world for how they want it to be and do not tolerate kindness to their enemy."

Shaking her head, she said, "Us and the mutants have been at conflict before. Normally, it ends with some good grace. This is why us and the Night Lords do not get along, and why this conflict will not end with anything but bones left on this planet," she said, looking at the dead bodies.

"Okay, that is concerning," I said with a nod, looking towards Bjorn before saying, "Make sure to write all this down. We need to send a report of this to Tanya. Brutalization of the civilian population is not going to make her happy."

Bjorn nodded before I looked at her again, asking, "These mutants, what kind of aberrations are they exactly?"

She shrugged before saying, "They adapted to this planet long ago. I'm not even sure you can call them mutants anymore, but they are fierce. They are brutal, but they are few." She stepped a few feet over and pointed to a third individual that I had not spotted mixed amongst all the civilian casualties. This individual also had their skin removed, but there were obviously some major differences. They were more muscular, heavier-built, with clawed fingers and hands,

and what looked like a tail coming out of their spinal column. Their head was flat, would be the best way to say it, with two massive jaws with rows of teeth on either side.

Bjorn tilted his head before saying, "Is that some kind of wyvern?"

I shook my head, saying, "Too small, definitely human-sized." Turning to her, I asked, "Is this what the mutants on this planet look like, or is this uncommon?"

She shook her head before saying, "Common. This is what they all look like, every single one."

Bjorn sighed before saying, "So it's not mutants, it's Abhumans. Oh, that's going to be a hell of a form to fill out."

I nodded in agreement. I was about to ask the woman something before I heard a splash. Turning towards the river, I saw nothing, but I raised my volkite just in case. For a brief moment, I saw a pair of beady eyes floating in the water, and then what looked like some sort of stick poked out. There was a flash of light, and I was sent stumbling back as some sort of heavy round ripped my shoulder plate right off my armor and threw me to the ground.

"For Cortonis! For freedom!" cried something with a voice that sounded like it belonged to a wild beast. Turning, I saw Bjorn and several other Marines already firing as creatures rushed forward out of the water. Animals with thick skin, scales that seemed more like armor, wearing armor that was obviously designed by someone more advanced than them. They came rushing out, their weapons firing in a slow heavy pattern, our armor doing its best to dampen and absorb the rounds though judging from how some marines fell it seems the rounds managed to strike where our armor was thinnest.

"Bring them down!" I called, bringing up my volkite and firing at the first one, the scorching lance striking true. It screamed before jumping back into the water, which was a pointless endeavour; the damage was already done before they even reached the water all they managed to accomplish was to slow down their demise. After a few minutes, I briefly saw the creature float to the surface and before the body washed away downstream during the ongoing firefight. There were somewhere between twenty and forty of them, big, powerful brutes. Using their heavy guns, I guessed, to blast away pieces of our armor before closing range and using their claws and the guns as clubs to attack. Quickly, it devolved into a melee, and though these creatures were not Space Marines, they were tough bastards.

Turning around quickly I blocked an attack from one creature with my volkite gun; the impact bending the weapon in a way that would make a Techpriest cry in anguish but so did his,

restricting us both in the melee. Quickly I drew my knife; with my opponent doing the same. I stabbed into what I thought was a weak point hearing a sharp snap; while he returned the favor thrusting his blade into the pit of my arm where my armor was damaged. I was lucky; the blade barely missed anything vital. Drawing back from the creature my worry was founded as my knife had snapped on the creature's leathery hide. So, my other hand went to my bolt pistol and just fired off a few rounds at extremely close range as the creature rushed in with its blade.

The creature jerked as the rounds impacted it, before it fell over dead clutching at its guts as best it could.

Turning, I saw another one of the creatures rushing at me, its jaws wide. I brought up my arm and attempted to block it, as it ended up clamping down on my arm, its teeth not strong enough to pierce through my armor. However before I could fire my bolt pistol, in a feat of acrobatics the creature contorted its body and kicked off the ground, spinning its body mid-air and wrenching my lower arm out of its joint. Pain immediately radiated up from my elbow, while at the same time rendering everything below limp. Bringing my pistol up, I fired shots off into the jaw of the creature, forcing it to release, then turned my body to fire off a few more shots as I protected my wounded arm.

The monster fell back, rolling away before dying after a few more shots.

The fighting slowly came to a crescendo of fire, then died quickly as the remaining monsters, no more than ten, I'd estimated, rushed back into the water, disappearing beneath the water and using them as protection against incoming fire.

Turning, I did a quick survey, finding that the majority of my men were fine, though some of them were as bad as me, having been wounded in various ways or had limbs pulled out of their position through the strength of the monsters' melee-like capabilities. Bjorn came over to look at me, shaking his head before saying, "That doesn't look great."

Looking at the twisted arm, I said, "Doesn't feel great either. I'm going to need to go have a Wolf Priest look at this."

"Na, just have it cut off and put on a bionic, and you get to return to combat within the day," Bjorn suggested.

I gave him a look through my helmet that said 'no,' before stating, "I think I prefer the capability to choose my weapons, thank you very much."

"Ah, whatever," he said, looking around before adding, "I don't see the old lady around here anymore."

I followed his eyes, doing my own search before surmising, "Either she led us into a trap, or these monsters don't give a damn about the civilian population that sides with their enemies."

"Damn, I was just starting to like her," Bjorn said with a shake of his head before adding, "Well, at least we have firsthand experience with the enemies we are facing now."

"Yeah, I'm not sure how we're going to negotiate with something that just ambushes you and kills people for no reason," I mused.

Bjorn chuckled apprehensively before looking over at the dead bodies, saying, "I think it might be a bit of tit for tat there, thanks to the Night Lords."

I nodded in agreement before saying, "All right, Bjorn, you're in command. I'll take the wounded back to the shuttles and head back to orbit for checkups."

"Nice, don't get any chances to be the guy in command of these operations. I won't let you down," Bjorn said, giving me a quick salute, which put a worry in my mind.

Shaking my head, I said, "Don't get killed."

"I won't die unless it's glorious," Bjorn responded, getting another nod from me.

Asta Bretakollrsson

"Don't screw up, don't screw up in front of the boss," I mentally told myself as I carefully navigated through the halls of the fortress watchtower inside the Ark Reach system.

How had I ended up here? Some may say it's because I was a fool, acting like I was a teenager; others may say I was just plain stupid.

Reality was, technology intrigued me. Learning about how it worked, how it was built, and how it could reshape the world was beautiful. But what fascinated me the most was the story of Fenris and its technology and how we as a people fell from that technological golden age. When I was a teenager, I had left the lands my family ruled and made my way to the Iron Islands, the only industrial place on the entire planet of Fenris. There, I had learned much from the Iron Priests and briefly joined their order.

From there, I had learned more and had then been scouted by the Priests of Mars, leaving Fenris for the moon of Svellgard, where I had been inducted into the Order and got my first experience with them.

Losing a few limbs wasn't what I expected, but I will admit, there was a certainty to the strength of steel that flesh could not match that gave me the ability to do work that would require two to three people.

From there, I had worked on various mechanical systems over the last few decades, enjoying the benefits of the technology to its fullest and slowly losing more and more of what made me weak, making me stronger and capable of doing what was necessary for Fenris, Mars, and humanity.

Which is how I had ended up here in the Ark Reach sector. Members of our order had been shipped out here to study and catalog books that had yet to be transferred to the rest, and we were also here at this little fortress on Ark Reach III to work with the leader of the Valkyrie Order, or at least one of their leaders, and the rather wild scientist Miss Osfe.

Turning a corner, I saw them having one of their arguments, and I stayed low and tried to keep out of it.

"What do you mean the last sample may have unintended consequences?" yelled Lord Wolfen as she tried to glower over the other Mechanicum girl.

"I mean exactly what I said. I want to experiment with the biological necessities of a human," responded Osfe, looking up to her with no issue.

"Yes, I understand that, but you haven't explained why you're worried about what might happen with the sample. It's just blood; it's not going to get up and run around."

"It's blood mixed with deteriorated Space Marine Gene-Seed from a Psyker. I'm not sure what could happen but it pays to err on the side of caution when working with such materials."

Lord Wolfen sighed before saying, "Fine, fine, I'll get you more guards. Just tell me when we can run an actual experiment."

"Oh, that's no problem. I can tell you that right now," she said matter-of-factly before pulling out a clipboard with some paper on it. Moving a few pages around, she finally said, "Let's see here, ahh yes. This time next month, yes, we should be able to run an experiment. I have been building a new staff attachment, and we should be able to measure Warp flow, depending on if it works all right, as well as a few other things."

"A few other things?" Lord Wolfen asked, seeming to stand up taller, which was amazing considering she was rather short. Both of them were short compared to me, at least, and I was only five-eight.

"Well, I mean, I want to measure exactly how the connection with the Warp works. After all, it's not very often that we get to see, as your people describe, channeling through a world spirit. There are no other world spirits as far as the Imperium is aware, though there are some beliefs about a few planets we have yet to be able to gain access to, one that isn't violently protected by the Eldar inhabitants."

There was a heavy sigh before she said, "Fine, fine. Have it your way, as long as we try and find out what alterations we can do with the Gene-Seed towards our favor."

"Yes, of course. By the way, how have those books you've been reading going? The ones that came from the library on Ark Reach One."

"They're going fine. Haven't found anything evil as Tanya declares them, but I have been keeping an eye out."

"Hmm, well, if you sign anything of interest, let me know," the Techpriest said, turning away from her before spotting me as I tried to navigate around them.

"Oh, Ms. Bretakollrsson, there you are. You know it's time for your tune-up next week, right?"

"Ah, everything's fine, Miss Osfe," I said, while smiling. My face was hidden behind the mask and dark shadows of my robe.

"Nonsense, nonsense. A proper tune-up is needed every month to make sure that nothing has gone wrong. You will need to report for the oil baths and proper cleaning. Don't be late; I will have the Valkyrie chase you down."

I sighed, not happy to be around Miss Osfe for the cleaning. She was a little bit too touchy in my opinion, but I nodded and said, "All right, all right. I will be there."

Writers note: And here we have chapter 65 we're putting these things out and I think I'll be writing a new chapter soon lot of things happening a lot of moving pieces sure nothing will go wrong So glad that this is an editorial debt it's just slow to come out

Please comment, review, and generally enjoy yourselves...

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