

Volume 2 - Chapter 18 - Excitatio Veritas III

Thea felt a shudder run through her at the Rune priest's ominous words.

The thought of entities so incomprehensible that they defied human understanding was not something she wanted to deal with right now.

The System alone was already overwhelming enough—an omnipresent force that dictated everything, yet remained just out of reach of full comprehension. Even though it operated on structured rules, it was still a complete and utter question mark.

She absolutely did not need to add straight-up cosmic horror to the growing list of existential nightmares today.

Fortunately, it seemed that the Rune priest was on the same page.

He smoothly moved the conversation forward, leaving the disturbing implications behind—at least for now.

"The Void Daemons we *do* understand, however, are much simpler," he said, gesturing toward the simulated Canidae and the grotesque carnage it had left in its wake. "Take this creature, for example. Its primary goal is to consume energy, specifically Souls. There is nothing—*nothing*—in this universe or the Void that holds as much raw energy as a Soul. That makes them the most desirable and valuable source of sustenance for any Void Daemon out there."

His expression darkened slightly, his features tightening as if he disliked what he had to say next. "Unfortunately for *us*, as UHF members, that puts us at a rather severe disadvantage. Our entire existence is tied to the integrity of our Souls. We require them to stay intact for our Faction Trait to work. Void Daemons, however, don't just kill—they *consume*. They erase the very Soul itself. If they get to you, there's no coming back. No respawning. No second chance. And because of that, fighting them is one of the most dangerous things a UHF Marine can do. They are one of the *very* few things in existence that can truly, permanently kill us straight out."

The weight of those words settled over Thea like a lead blanket.

The Rune priest's gaze grew distant, his usual sharpness dulling slightly, as if recalling something he'd rather not. "During the Assessment, there was a freak Void-related event. You've probably heard whispers about it—rumors of something happening aboard the ships."

Thea stiffened slightly.

She had definitely heard things.

The lead-up to the Eastern-Wall assault came to mind, where a vast number of Marines had supposedly suddenly dropped dead and refused to respawn.

“All of the ships connected to the Assessment at the time of the incident experienced Void breaches. Not just one. All of them. Simultaneously.” He let that sink in for a moment before continuing, his tone grim. “We still don’t know why it happened, or how. But we do know what happened *because* of it.”

He sighed, meeting Thea’s eyes directly. “A Void breach is usually contained by ship crews. UHF vessels are designed with designated incursion zones—specific areas where the shielding is weaker, intentionally set up to bait breaches into appearing in controlled environments. It works about ninety-five percent of the time.”

His expression darkened even further.

“These breaches were part of the five.”

Thea swallowed hard, her throat suddenly dry.

She had heard of Void breaches before, at least tangentially. She knew they were bad. And also the fact that there had been some kind of major incident during the Assessment.

The exact incident that had caused all the Marines from one of the Sovereign’s sister ships to abruptly disconnect.

Thea frowned, racking her brain, ‘*What was the name of that ship again...?*’

She dug through her memories, remembering all the whispered conversations between Marines, the half-spoken rumors that had circulated in the aftermath of the Assessment.

And then it clicked.

“The *Monarch*.”

She spoke the name aloud, glancing at the Rune priest for confirmation. “That was the ship that lost contact, right?”

He nodded once.

Thea hesitated, then asked the question that had been hanging at the back of her mind since the moment she had first heard about the *Monarch*’s disappearance. “Did they ever figure out what happened to it? We lost a *ton* of Marines during the Assessment. The assaults on the Wall were a nightmare because of it—our numbers were way lower than they should’ve been.”

For a moment, the Rune priest just looked at her.

Not in a cold way, but as if he was weighing how much he should actually say.

Then, finally, he sighed.

“No. We still don’t know what happened to the *Monarch*.”

His voice was level, but there was an edge of finality to it, as if he already knew this wasn't going to end with answers—only grim conclusions.

"We aren't even sure if the ship itself is still in one piece. It might have been torn apart by a Void Eruption, caught in a Void Storm, or suffered some other catastrophic event." His jaw tightened slightly before he added, "The UHF is working under the assumption that the *Monarch* and everyone aboard are dead."

Thea felt her stomach drop.

"The search and rescue operations are still underway," he continued, "but to be blunt, no one is expecting a happy ending."

She stared at him, processing his words.

Dead.

All of them. Not just missing. Not just *disconnected*. Not stuck in some limbo where they couldn't rejoin the Assessment, waiting for deployment back into the fight.

No. They were gone.

Frankly, she hadn't even considered that possibility.

In her mind, it had been like one of the old Golden Age Arcade games—like when a player got disconnected from a match on those, they became unable to rejoin. She had assumed they'd just been cut off, unable to participate further; forced to forfeit.

But the reality was apparently *far* worse.

"They... they all died?" The words barely left her mouth, her voice hollow.

The Rune priest simply nodded.

She inhaled sharply, trying to shake the growing weight in her chest, but the Rune priest wasn't done.

"The incidents that struck every ship—including the Sovereign—were far worse than a standard Void Breach." He spoke carefully now, his tone more deliberate. "Most breaches involve T0 or T1 Void Daemons. They're, by far, the most common types found within the Void. Occasionally, you might see a few T2s slip through. And in very rare circumstances, even a T3."

Thea's skin prickled. His tone told her everything before he even needed to say it.

"But this wasn't one of those *very rare* circumstances, was it?" she asked quietly.

The Rune priest exhaled through his nose. His eyes met hers, and in that single moment, she knew the answer.

The Rune priest nodded, his expression grim. “On the Sovereign alone, we recovered the bodies of seven T3, nineteen T2, and more than fifty T1 Void Daemons.” He let the words hang for a moment, letting the sheer scale of it settle in. “Other ships reported similar numbers—some more, some less—but they all had one thing in common: The sheer size and location of the Void Breaches were beyond anything we’d consider normal.”

He exhaled, rubbing the bridge of his nose, as if the mere act of recalling the event drained him.

Then, abruptly, he shook his head.

“But that’s neither here nor there,” he said, dismissing the weight of the conversation with a wave of his hand. “I’m sure you’ll learn more about Void Breaches and this particular incident in your future lessons. Let’s not dwell on the specifics too much for now.”

He gestured around as if physically brushing away the subject, before turning his attention back to the simulated transporter.

“What *does* matter, however,” he continued, pointing towards the hulking creature inside, “is that this Canidae? The one you saw in your Awakening?”

His finger stayed locked on the monstrous Void Daemon. “That’s a T3. One of the high-tier Daemons that appeared during the breach. A vast, vast majority of the Marines killed in the incidents aboard the ships were due to them.”

Then, as if something had just clicked in his mind, his eyes widened slightly.

“Ah! That reminds me,” he said suddenly, snapping his fingers. “When we talk about Tiers for Void Daemons, we’re referring to their difficulty grade in repelling. Not *necessarily* in killing them, but more often than not, that’s exactly what it means. A T3 Void Daemon, for instance, would require two T3 Marines to reliably repel. A T2 Void Daemon would require two T2 Marines. And so on.”

Thea’s eyebrows shot up. She turned her gaze back to the creature, suddenly feeling the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end.

“That... that thing requires *two* T3 Marines to beat?!” she blurted out, unconsciously stepping back from the transporter.

The Rune priest nodded sagely, unphased by her reaction. “One Ace candidate of equal Tier could also be enough. And, given a very favorable matchup—or a lot of luck—a single T3 Marine might be able to manage it, but it wouldn’t be reliable.”

He glanced at the simulated creature again, his expression darkening slightly again. “That also assumes the Marines are *prepared* for the fight and aren’t caught off guard...”

His voice dipped slightly, his words trailing off. “Which is exactly what happened aboard all the ships. We *weren’t* prepared. Nobody could have been, considering there was absolutely no warning. Not even the faintest flicker from the defensive fields before the breaches happened...”

For a moment, he went silent, lost in thought, before shaking his head and refocusing.

“Anyway,” he continued, his voice shifting back to its usual cadence. “The reason I’m telling you this, is because this Void Daemon, with a fairly high likelihood, is actually *you*, Thea.”

Thea blinked.

She stared at him, then at the towering, monstrous Canidae inside the transporter.

Then back at him.

Her brain tried—and failed—to process the words he had just said.

‘What the fuck does that even mean...?’

She blinked again, completely at a loss.

“...Huh?”

The Runepriest chuckled at her reaction, the brief amusement flickering across his face before he sobered. “One of the rarest, but still very possible outcomes of an overload for a Psyker is that their very Soul ruptures. Tears itself open and spills out. Like a canteen taking a bullet, it rapidly loses its contents, leaving behind nothing but the shell of what once was.”

He tapped his fingers against his leg as he continued, “And that shell—what remains of a Psyker’s being—is a receptacle for an unimaginable amount of energy. A vessel with nothing inside it... and something that *needs* to be filled again.”

He gestured towards the hulking Canidae inside the transporter, its monstrous form barely shifting as it loomed over the grisly remains of the simulation.

“That’s ultimately what Void Daemons are, or at least, what they’re trying to be,” he explained. “Creatures seeking to become whole again. Or so we *think*.”

His lips pressed together for a moment before he added, “Personally, I don’t believe that’s the whole truth. But I don’t have the evidence to say otherwise, so it’s just a theory.”

He exhaled sharply, rubbing the back of his neck. “I *prefer* to think of them as mindless, evil things rather than as something... *pitiable*. Makes it easier to sleep at night.”

His eyes flicked back toward her, the moment of reflection passing. “Anyway. What I’m saying is that there are only *two* possible explanations for what you saw in your vision.”

He raised a single finger. “First possibility: You just so happened to cause a Void Rift at that exact location you were at. You became both the origin point and originator of the Rift. That means a Canidae could have crossed over into our universe through your rupture, a rare incident in itself as mentioned before, slaughtered everyone inside the transporter, and left you stranded somewhere deep in the Void—like a sort of exchange gone horribly wrong.”

Then he raised a second finger. “Or, your Soul ruptured completely. You died—but instead of just ceasing to exist, you turned into the Canidae itself. And then, as Void Daemons do, you

turned on the Marines inside the transporter in an attempt to fill what had just spilled out... to reclaim enough energy to fill up the receptacle again, piece by piece.”

He said it so plainly, so matter-of-factly, as if he were describing the weather instead of *her own potential transformation into a Void Daemon*.

Thea stared at him.

Then at the Canidae.

Then back at him.

She felt a cold pit settle in her stomach as her thoughts churned. ‘*That’s... me?*’

It wasn’t possible. It *couldn’t* be.

Her eyes drifted back to the creature inside the transporter.

There was nothing—*nothing*—about it that even remotely resembled her.

It was a twisted, alien monstrosity. A gnarled thing of claws, limbs bent in unnatural ways, its body constructed like a grotesque afterthought of nature itself.

But then, she turned her gaze toward the rest of the transporter.

The carnage. The blood-slicked floor.

The shredded remains of Marines, their armours ripped apart and weapons scattered like discarded toys.

And one very particular absence.

There was nothing of hers.

No traces—no strands of hair, no shattered remains of her armor. Even her weapons, which were seemingly still in-tact for the vast majority of Marines—merely discarded—were nowhere to be seen.

Her body wasn’t there. Her gear wasn’t there.

She had disappeared entirely.

“Of those two scenarios,” the Rune priest continued, utterly unbothered by Thea’s momentary existential crisis, “the second one is *vastly* more likely. Probability-wise, that is.”

His tone remained casual, as if he hadn’t just suggested she might have turned into a Void Daemon and slaughtered a transporter full of Marines.

“While it’s *extremely* rare for a T0 Psyker to turn into a T3 Void Daemon, it’s not impossible or entirely unheard of. And given the sheer level of Resolve you possess, it wouldn’t be far-fetched to imagine that your Soul holds some serious weight, even at this early stage.”

He shrugged, as if that single statement wasn't one of the most horrifying things she'd heard all day.

"If *any* T0 Psyker were to turn into a T3 Void Daemon, it'd probably be you. I'd bet a good chunk of Credits on that being what happened in your vision."

Thea opened her mouth, then closed it. She had no idea how to even respond to that.

But the Rune priest, as always, simply barreled on.

"But," he added with a dismissive wave of his hand, "there's no real way to know for sure, and no reason to keep lingering on it."

Before Thea could so much as process the absolute madness of what he'd just said, he clapped his hands together, the sharp sound snapping through the simulated air like a gunshot.

Thea flinched—not because of the sound, but because the world around them immediately dissolved. The transporter, the Canidae, the shredded remains of the Marines—all of it simply faded away into nothingness, leaving them standing in the empty training hall once more.

He winked at her. *Winked*.

"That would be vision number two," he announced with far too much enthusiasm, as if they were simply going down a checklist. "How about we jump right into the third one? We're running out of time for today's lesson, so best keep things moving."

Thea stared at him, her brain struggling to keep up.

In the past few minutes alone, she had been forced to:

Confront the idea that unknowable entities might exist within the Void that were so far beyond human understanding that she'd probably die trying to even wrap her mind around that fact.

Learned that tens of thousands of Marines had died in a catastrophic Void Breach during the Assessment, and that the Sovereign had almost suffered the same fate.

And discovered that *she herself* might have become a Void Daemon, or might become in the future if she failed to control her Gate.

And that was just the highlights.

Now, apparently, it was already time to move on like none of that had happened.

Her thoughts whirled in a chaotic spiral, caught between horror, disbelief, and sheer mental exhaustion.

A part of her—a very loud part—desperately wished he'd be a little more... normal.

A little less erratic.

Maybe even show some empathy for the absolute nightmare he was making her wade through.

But at the same time... She hadn't tuned him out once.

For all his chaotic, unpredictable methods, his style somehow worked for her. He kept her engaged, forced her to think, never letting her sink too deep into any particular horror before yanking her toward the next revelation.

*'In a way... he's definitely doing **something** right,'* she hesitantly admitted to herself.

Taking a deep breath, she pushed everything else to the back of her mind and refocused.

"Alright," she muttered. "Third vision."

She closed her eyes for a second, sorting through the memories, then opened them again.

"This one was... quick," Thea recalled, her voice slightly distant as she pulled the memories back to the surface. "I saw Kara in it. She was working on the Marine, just like before, until she suddenly jerked up and rushed toward me. She was screaming my name... there was this desperate tone in her voice, like she thought I was dying right in front of her."

As she recounted the vision, the world around her shifted again, the Sovereign recreating the scene inside the transporter. The simulated Karania abruptly snapped her head up from tending to the wounded Marine and bolted toward Thea's simulated self, shoving aside anything in her path with the sheer force of unrestrained urgency.

"I was passed out," Thea continued, watching the recreation unfold. "She was trying to figure out what was happening to me. She overrode my armor's locks with the Medic bypass and started a full check-up. I don't know what she was looking for, but... she was moving fast. Desperate. Checking everything. Maybe she thought I had taken a hit somewhere, or that something was happening that she just couldn't see."

The simulated Karania moved with frantic precision, yanking off Thea's gauntlets and moving to unseal the chest plating.

"And then..." Thea swallowed. "Everything turned violet. *Again*. Just like before, in the other vision."

The Sovereign followed her words without hesitation, overlaying the scene with that strange, unnatural violet hue. The sudden color shift cast an eerie glow over everything, deep shadows stretching in places where they hadn't existed before.

"All the Marines inside the transporter started panicking. Comms cut out. Nobody knew what was happening. But Kara—she ignored all of it. She was only focused on me. She moved down to check my legs for injuries, when..." Thea hesitated, frowning slightly as she grasped for the right words.

"I—I started crying...?"

She saw the Rune priest's eyebrows rise slightly, but he said nothing, letting her continue.

"Not normal tears, though. They were... violet." The words felt strange even as she said them, like something she shouldn't even be able to describe. "Luminescent. Like liquid light. They didn't run down my face, they just... detached. They floated upwards. Like gravity didn't matter to them at all."

She exhaled slowly, eyes flicking to the simulated version of herself.

"And then Kara checked my pupils again. But this time... I was awake. At least, my eyes looked awake. I was staring straight at her. No movement, no blinking, just... *watching*."

A deep chill crept up Thea's spine as the moment replayed before her, as vivid as it had been back then. She could still *see* Kara's reaction in her mind—the way she flinched, like she'd seen something wrong, something she wasn't supposed to see.

"She freaked out. Almost fell over, but caught herself." Thea shook her head. "Then she checked me again, as if she didn't believe what she saw the first time. And that's when she really freaked out."

The simulated Karania leaned in closer, scanning the unblinking, violet-lit eyes of Thea's unconscious self.

"My eyes had these... *rings* around them. Like a—like a circle of black and violet specks. Tiny, but moving. Like—like they were orbiting my pupils, but not."

She could still picture them, those impossibly small flecks of something circling in slow, deliberate motions, like planetary bodies bound to an unseen force.

"Kara looked *terrified*," Thea murmured.

A long pause.

"And then the tears hit the ceiling. And then... everything just *disappeared*."

Silence.

Thea turned to the Rune priest, watching him as he processed the information.

A small part of her worried that he might think she was holding back, that she had somehow missed something critical in her retelling, but after a few moments, he simply nodded.

"That sounds about right," he finally said.

Thea let out a breath she hadn't realized she was holding.

"That's a typical Psyker-based Void Eruption," he explained. "If a Psyker's Gate rips open and they can't close it in time, this is what happens. Though... the manifestation through tears is a bit odd."

He tapped his chin in thought. “The exact form and manifestation of a Void Eruption varies from Psyker to Psyker, but the result is always the same—an uncontrolled outpouring of Void Energy, a chain reaction that leads to total annihilation. Those tears?”

He gestured toward the simulated violet drops still hovering midair.

“They were pure, condensed Void Energy. The moment they impacted a solid surface within our universe, they detonated. A miniature implosion of un-reality, erasing everything inside that transporter.”

Thea stared at the flickering image of the transport interior.

“So... everyone died?”

The Rune priest nodded. “Instantaneously.”

He shrugged slightly, as if to say “*it is what it is*”, before adding, “A Psyker-based Void Eruption is actually one of the most common Awakening failures. It’s the default ‘worst-case’ scenario. If a Psyker fails to contain their Gate, it’s almost guaranteed to happen.”

He gave her a pointed look.

“That means this vision in your Awakening wasn’t particularly bad—it was *textbook* bad. A perfectly scripted disaster, just waiting to happen. Or not, in this instance.”

Thea wasn’t sure how to feel about that.

Another pause, then the Rune priest gave her a knowing smile.

“There was one more vision, if I recall the Assessment rundown correctly?” he prodded.

Thea exhaled sharply, rubbing the bridge of her nose.

‘*This guy doesn’t even give me a second to process any of this, huh...?*’

“Yeah,” she muttered. “One more.”

She took a steadying breath, bracing herself for one more recollection.

“For this one, I... I thought I was back in real-space, at least at first,” Thea recalled, her voice carrying an odd weight as the memory settled over her. “I woke up in my seat with a start, adrenaline surging through me like a shock to the system. Everything felt real—so real that for a second, I thought I had actually snapped out of it. But I could still remember the end of the first vision, where Kara shot me. *Vividly*.”

As always, the Sovereign followed her words with exacting precision, reconstructing the scene in meticulous detail. The simulation flickered for a brief second before stabilizing, replaying the moment she described—the sudden jolt, the panicked breath, the way her hands clutched the sides of her seat as if grounding herself.

"I felt my Gate, I think," she continued, slower this time, like she was walking through the sensations step by step. "It was there, somewhere inside me. Something I knew was real, wrong somehow. So I jumped up—instinctively, almost like muscle memory. I was already halfway toward Kara before I stopped myself."

She inhaled sharply, her eyes flicking to the simulated version of herself, frozen mid-motion.

"That's when I *realized*. I remembered—this was exactly what I had done earlier. How I died. How she shot me. The first vision. It felt... different this time. Like I could make a different choice."

The simulated Thea, still locked in that frozen moment of indecision, seemed poised to continue forward, to repeat the past. But the real Thea shook her head.

"I chose not to go to Kara," she said. "It was like... like I was trying not to repeat the same steps, to try and find a different route, that wouldn't end up with me dying."

Her hand drifted toward her chest, pressing lightly over her sternum.

"Instead, I felt this pull, right here. Like the same sense I get when I know a bullet's coming, or when I know I need to move before something explodes. That same Precognition—but louder. Stronger. More certain."

The Sovereign subtly altered the simulation, adjusting the moment to match her words.

"It told me to run. To leave the transporter *immediately*."

The simulated Thea pivoted sharply, dashing for the emergency exit.

"I didn't think. I just moved. Trusting that sensation, as I had always done. I rushed for the emergency release and slammed it hard."

She watched as her past self slammed her hand against the emergency release, the doors blowing outward with a deafening **clang**. The moment they burst open—

"Everything stopped."

She exhaled.

"That violet light... it was everywhere. Just like before, but also... not. It felt more vivid. Somehow, stronger."

The world around them shifted once more, taking on that eerie, otherworldly hue. It coated the Marines, the transporter, the trees lining the road—everything.

"But I wasn't frozen. Only me. Everyone else had simply ceased."

The Rune priest gestured toward the open doors. "Step outside," he instructed.

Thea swallowed but obeyed, stepping into the simulation as it reconstructed what had happened next.

“The outside was... basically the same. The forest. The road. It looked normal. But when I looked up...”

Her voice trailed off, her fingers clenching into fists at her sides.

“There was a Void Rift,” she continued, quieter now. “And... eyes.”

The simulation blurred slightly before correcting itself.

The sky darkened unnaturally, and something shifted in the vast expanse above them.

“Two. Gigantic. Cyan-colored eyes... They weren’t *just* big. That’s... That’s not the right word for it. They were—*everything*. Like the entire sky wasn’t even a sky anymore. Just... them. Like nothing *could* possibly be larger.”

She shuddered, her body tensing instinctively. The memories were slipping, unraveling at the edges, breaking apart the closer she got to describing them.

“I...” She shook her head, struggling. “I was looking at the eyes... but they... I?”

Her thoughts fragmented.

“They were *my* eyes.”

She felt her breath hitch.

“I was looking at myself. From... infinitely high above. But also from the ground, looking up at myself. I was both—at the same time.”

Vertigo slammed into her like a sledgehammer.

Her vision spun, her stomach twisting violently as the sensation returned—that impossible, recursive loop of *being observed* and *observing* herself simultaneously.

She stumbled, her footing giving way beneath her.

A firm grip steadied her immediately.

“Easy now. Take your time.” The Runepriest’s voice was calm, grounding.

She exhaled sharply, gripping his forearm as she fought to steady herself.

“I was... observing myself... observing myself... observing myself...” Her head pounded as the words left her mouth. “An infinite loop. I don’t... I don’t know which one I was. The eyes in the sky? The one on the ground? Both?”

It didn’t make sense.

The sheer wrongness of it curled in her gut, gnawing at the edges of her perception.

She fought through the spiraling sensation, forcing herself to focus.

“And then suddenly—Something *closed*. I think it was my Gate.”

The moment snapped forward. The crushing weight of the vision vanished.

“The eyes. The light. The Rift. Everything just disappeared.”

She clenched her jaw, forcing her voice to stay steady.

“I woke up after that. On the frontlines. Kara was shaking me awake, telling me to stop being lazy,” she recounted with a chuckle.

Thea inhaled deeply, her gaze locking onto the Rune priest’s, “There were no more visions after that.”

The Rune priest exhaled slowly, his eyes gleaming with intrigue as he considered Thea’s words. “Now *that* is an odd vision,” he murmured, his tone shifting into something more analytical. “It doesn’t fit with *anything* I know about Awakenings. Not in the slightest.”

He cupped his chin, his fingers tapping absently against his cheek as he pieced together his thoughts. “Most Awakening visions are fairly straightforward—they represent the ways a Psyker might die when their Gate overloads. The failure to resist the Call and the consequences thereof, an uncontrolled Void Eruption, in rare circumstances even the Psyker’s own turning into a Void Daemon, maybe even the sheer raw destruction of a feedback loop spiraling out of control, or dozens of different, other ways... but *this*? This doesn’t match any of those.”

His gaze flicked upward for a moment, thoughtful.

“The time stopping part, that at least makes sense,” he conceded. “The Void imposing itself on our universe, leading to time momentarily ceasing... That’s normal. But the rest of it...”

He trailed off, shaking his head. “Your vision doesn’t *behave* like an Awakening at all.”

He turned back to Thea, studying her closely. “A Psyker’s Awakening visions are always experienced from a *single* viewpoint. Either first-person or third-person, but never both. And *definitely* not at the same time. That kind of overlapping perspective shouldn’t even be possible. The fact that you felt both sides of it, experienced both simultaneously—”

He exhaled sharply.

“I don’t have an explanation for that. Not one that makes any real sense.”

He caught the way Thea’s fingers tightened slightly at his words, the tension in her posture.

With a small sigh, he waved a hand dismissively.

“But make no mistake, I *believe* you,” he said, voice firm. “That kind of vertigo isn’t something you can fake. The way your stomach dropped, the way your balance gave out—it’s exactly what happens when a mind tries to process something inherently *wrong* or impossible.”

His expression turned wry. “And trust me, I’ve seen enough people struggle through recounting their Awakening to recognize when someone’s *actually* experiencing recall issues. That kind of guttural confusion? The way your words got caught up in themselves? That’s *real*.”

He tilted his head slightly. “But that doesn’t mean I can explain it. Other than...” He let out a breath. “Well, other than it’s the Void.”

Thea blinked at him.

He chuckled. “That’s the answer to half of everything that doesn’t make sense, really. The Void is... strange. A place where logic bends, where meaning shifts, where every Psyker experiences its influence differently. It affects us all, but how it manifests? That’s as varied as people themselves.”

He spread his hands, shrugging. “It might just be that this vision was how your mind decided to process the need to close your Gate. Your subconscious might have built it as a way to push you over that final threshold.”

His lips quirked into a small, lopsided smirk. “*Why* this particular vision would do that, though? I haven’t the faintest clue. But clearly, it worked. So... It seems to know you better than any of us ever could, huh?”

Thea frowned, shifting slightly. “So... you think it was just my brain rationalizing everything in some weird way?”

“More or less,” he admitted. “I wouldn’t worry about this last vision too much—it didn’t represent any of the actual ways a Psyker might die. If anything, I’d wager that by the time you made the decision *not* to follow the first vision’s path, you’d already passed the most dangerous hurdle. Kind of like you had already escaped the Awakening’s main room and were only left in the foyer, waiting to find the exit. The rest? Just your mind working through the process in its own way, figuring out where that exit was actually located.”

She hesitated, mulling it over. It made sense, on a logical level.

But deep down, something about it still bothered her. It felt like there was something *more*—something beyond her grasp; some answer she hadn’t found yet.

Still, she had no better explanation than the Rune priest’s. After all, he was the foremost and absolute expert on this matter, and even he couldn’t make sense of this last one.

Not to mention, the Rune priest having given her plenty to think about already.

“...Alright,” she said at last, nodding reluctantly. “I guess that makes sense.”

“Good.” He clapped his hands together with a satisfied smile on his face, turning toward the empty air. “Sovereign, bring us back.”

Immediately, the world around them dissolved—the transporter, the violet light, the frozen figures of Marines, even the looming Void-Rifted sky—all of it vanished into nothing.

Thea exhaled, her body instinctively bracing for the abrupt shift back into reality.

A heartbeat later, they were standing in the vast emptiness of the Sovereign's training hall once more.

Somehow, the simple shift back into the more industrial space helped Thea center herself again. Despite still being inside the DDS, and knowing that this was all still a simulation, it felt distinctly more “real”, in an odd way...