

## **Arc 1 - Chapter 100 - Resonance**

- PoV: Sergeant Doc Knave -

Sergeant Knave's morning ritual had become an exercise in tedium, heightened by the looming threat of the undead hordes clustering at the city's outer wall.

Surrounded by the dreary confines of his office, he was buried under an avalanche of intelligence reports, each detailing the movements and activities of elusive UHF infiltrator squads that had wormed their way into Nova Tertius.

Despite the Stellar Republic's sophisticated defence mechanisms that protected Nova Tertius, the perfect shield against such tactics remained a distant, utopian dream in the chaotic, post-System galaxy.

Tasked with the monumental responsibility of safeguarding the megacity's vital military assets, Knave and his fellow commanding officers were plunged into a ceaseless battle of wits, poring over documents to devise effective countermeasures against potential acts of sabotage.

"At least I won't have to worry whether or not they'll show up here... That much is a given," he quietly mused to himself as he put away another report of a potential sighting from one of the passageways that led underneath the main highway that snaked its way through Nova Tertius' heart.

Where other COs had the issue of trying to anticipate whether or not any infiltrators would even show up, Sergeant Knave didn't have that issue. Being the CO in charge for one of the five control stations that operated the main wall's defences, it was a foregone conclusion that any infiltrator squads would make their way to him at one point or another.

There wasn't really any other reason for infiltrator squads to mass in the city to begin with, if they didn't intend on taking out the control stations.

For him, the question wasn't about "if", but simply "when" and "how".

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Sergeant Knave's routine was abruptly interrupted when the third consecutive report of unusual activity along the main highway landed on his desk. It was different this time, carrying a sense of urgency that couldn't be ignored.

"Sir, we've got another sighting," his aide announced, breaking through the monotonous silence of the office. "Eyewitnesses near the eastern pedestrian tunnel reported a squad of heavily armed individuals making their way through."

"How many?" Sergeant Knave inquired, his voice steady as he entered the details onto his datapad and highlighted the location of the sighting.

"Three, according to the civilian report," the aide responded, his voice tinged with a growing anxiety.

"Do you reckon this could be the prelude to their move on us?" the concern now plainly evident in his question.

Sergeant Knave paused for a moment, his fingers halting their dance on the datapad.

"If it isn't, I'd be genuinely surprised, Clive," he said, meeting his aide's worried gaze with a calmness that belied the gravity of their situation. His matter-of-fact response did little to alleviate Clive's apprehension, instead possibly heightening it.

Sergeant Knave leaned back in his chair, the weight of the intelligence reports pressing against him both physically and metaphorically.

"Consider the facts," he began, his voice a blend of confidence and gravity as he pieced together the puzzle laid out by the day's events. "They've been skulking around the city, ducking our eyes in the sky. And now, suddenly, we've got sightings of them boldly crossing the main thoroughfare. Not exactly the subtlety you'd expect from ghost operatives, is it? They're converging near us," he deduced, his tone suggesting that the pieces were falling into place.

A smile crept onto his face, an instinctive reaction to the realisation of what was coming.

"They're gearing up for something big. Only one thing brings them out of the shadows like this: They're planning to hit us soon."

Standing, he stretched his legs, feeling the confinement of the command centre he'd practically lived in these past days. Approaching Clive, he clapped a reassuring hand on his aide's shoulder, towering slightly as he imparted a mix of reassurance and resolve. "But we'll stand our ground. They underestimate us if they believe a mere handful of infiltrators can dismantle one of our control stations. If that's their entire strategy, then they're more rotten in the head than we ever gave them credit for."

Sergeant Knave left the confines of his command centre, signalling to a pair of soldiers stationed nearby with a stern nod.

"Gather the duty Corporals and have them in the command centre within ten minutes. I need a moment," he announced briskly, pivoting on his heel to take a solitary stroll around the perimeter of the control station. The fresh air and the gravity of the situation combined to clear his mind, readying him for the briefing ahead.

As he walked, a sense of anticipation grew within him, his thoughts racing with strategic possibilities.

'*So they're finally coming,*' he mused, the corners of his mouth twitching upwards into a predatory smile. The frustration of the past few days, the endless stream of reports, the waiting game that tied his hands—it was all coming to a head. '*Idle patrols have never been the answer to stealth infiltrations; all we could do was watch and wait. But now, the stage is set,*' he reflected, his steps measured and purposeful.

The anticipation of confrontation kindled a fire within him, a welcome change from the passive surveillance he had been confined to.

Yet, he knew the importance of tempering his eagerness, understanding that overt excitement could cast shadows of doubt on his leadership. This brief respite of the walk would allow him to compose himself, ensuring he could lead the upcoming meeting with the calculated calm expected of a commanding officer.

Sergeant Knave made his way to the heart of the control station's defences, the main control building.

His eyes scanned the area, ensuring the guards stationed around the perimeter were on high alert, their postures indicating readiness rather than complacency. He also inspected the positioning of the auto-cannons he had specifically ordered to be brought here, confirming they were aligned precisely as he had directed earlier in the week.

It was a routine check, but in his mind, redundancy was a layer of security, especially when the stakes were as high as they were now.

His focus on these preparations stemmed from an acute awareness of the calibre of threat they were likely to face. To the uninitiated, all infiltrator squads might appear similar, but Sergeant Knave had enough experience to know better.

The elite squads—the ones capable of executing missions with almost supernatural efficiency and lethality—were a different breed entirely. These were the squads that could unravel months of strategic planning in a matter of minutes, and he had no intention of underestimating their capabilities.

This was not merely paranoia either.

The loss of a key facility in the abandoned industrial sector just two days prior was a stark reminder of what these elite units could accomplish. That debacle had been a blow to their operations, one that Knave was determined not to let the undead repeat.

A fusion explosion, likely the consequence of a Solarium weapon being overcharged and detonated, had completely destroyed and evaporated their hidden outpost.

The very existence of the Solarium-based weapon itself already proved his point of another elite squad being present; for no mere T1 soldier could even think about licensing one. It required a specific type of Tier-Up Voucher to get, which was only available as an Accomplishment reward, as far as he knew, and also cost quite a lot of System Credits to acquire in the first place.

The outpost they had lost, nestled away and invisible to most, had been intended as more than just a mere fallback; it had been an integral piece of strategic infrastructure designed to bolster the wall's defences through some experimental, technological innovation.

It housed a pioneering system capable of enhancing the autonomous defence mechanisms spanning a significant portion of the wall, thereby reducing the burden on manual oversight and control from the stations themselves.

This facility was not intended to replace the comprehensive protection offered by the control stations but to serve as a crucial support, further enhancing the wall's defensive capabilities once activated.

Its premature destruction, especially before any direct assault on the primary control stations, had sent shockwaves through the command structure.

Such a precise and effective strike against a target whose existence was a closely guarded secret underscored a chilling realisation: The attackers possessed intelligence and capabilities far beyond standard reconnaissance and assault parameters.

This realisation had forced Sergeant Knave and his contemporaries to confront a disturbing possibility: If their adversaries could so effortlessly identify and neutralise strategic assets hidden from the eyes of even their own rank and file, then the Stellar Republic's military was facing an opponent whose tactical acumen and resourcefulness could jeopardise the entire defensive operation.

But such was the nature of war, at least in Sergeant Knave's mind.

Underestimating the enemy was never a smart move; something he utterly detested.

Where others groaned and complained about the destruction of the outpost, he saw intelligence instead.

Markedly, the fact that there were more than two elite squads on his side of the city.

One that had taken out the ammunition depots near the wall and continuously sabotaged their communications via a stolen comms unit and another that had sniffed out and destroyed their redundancy.

In light of this, Sergeant Knave had been proactive, conceptualising layers of contingencies and redundancies, plans to fortify the control station against a coordinated assault, under the assumption that both elite squads might team up to take it out.

Plans that would undoubtedly prove invaluable in the coming hours...

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The fiery spectacle on the south-eastern perimeter of the base marked the commencement of what Sergeant Knave had been anticipating: A full-scale assault.

As he observed the inferno, which seemed to leap with predatory hunger from one fortification to the next, obliterating the base's defences as if they were mere kindling, a recognition flashed through his mind.

"IgT-compound," he remarked under his breath, a note of grudging respect for the attackers' choice of incendiary, known for its ferocity and relentless spread.

The distant echoes of gunfire melded into a continuous roar, signalling the intensity of the conflict continuing to unfold.

Knave's strategic foresight had prepared him for this moment; he had expected the UHF to launch a multifaceted attack and had thus far identified the presence of four distinct infiltration squads that were attacking their position.

Yet, he knew this was merely the opening move in a much larger game of tactical chess being played out.

Turning to his aide, Clive, who stood ready at his side, Knave issued his commands with calm authority. "Deploy two additional squads to reinforce our defences on the south-eastern front immediately. And double the patrols on the northern perimeter. Our intelligence suggests we're dealing with a considerable force. I anticipate we'll be facing at least double the number of squads currently engaging us," he stated, his voice steady amidst the chaos.

Clive nodded and quickly relayed the orders to the squad leaders, mobilising the base's resources to counter the multi-pronged assault.

Despite the effectiveness of the enemy's attacks, he remained unshaken, acutely aware that the true threat had yet to reveal itself.

The initial squads, while surprisingly competent, had not displayed the signature efficiency and devastating impact of the elite units he anticipated. The base had sustained damage, yes, but not the catastrophic losses that would signify the presence of the T1 Prime power-ranked infiltration teams.

Another aide's voice pierced the tense atmosphere, reporting a new development.

A squad had been spotted by one of the hidden drones that Sergeant Knave had setup days ago in anticipation of exactly such an assault, manoeuvring through a residential building nearby, potentially seeking a vantage point or entry into the base's defences.

Sergeant Knave's response was immediate and devoid of any hesitation. "Blow them up," he commanded with an air of finality, assigning the task to Baltro Squad, specialists in long-range explosives. His order was executed with swift efficiency, the aide quickly setting the wheels in motion.

The fact that the enemy infiltration squads were seeking refuge within residential buildings was nothing surprising to him. He would have done the same, after all. Against lesser opponents, he might have cared more, but with the threat of the elite squads looming, he couldn't afford to send too much firepower in that direction, simply to prevent some civilian casualties.

The civilians living near the military bases signed their leases fully knowing that in the event of an attack, their lives were not a priority. As a result, there was nothing to worry about for him.

Sergeant Knave instead returned his focus to the sprawling holographic display, which offered a bird's eye view of the battlefield. It allowed him real-time insights into the movements around the entire perimeter, fed by a network of sensors and reports from the ground.

He knew the relative silence before the storm was deceiving; the elite squads were out there, biding their time, blending into the chaos of the city.

In this intricate dance of cat and mouse, Sergeant Knave found himself playing both roles.

For now, he was the prey, luring out the predators with strategic patience. But he was prepared to switch to the predator the moment his adversaries made their move, leveraging his preparedness and the might of the Stellar Republic's defences.

The ongoing conflict was more than a mere battle; it was a high-stakes game where strategy, anticipation, and adaptability would determine the victor...

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Clive's update resonated with a mix of relief and admiration, reflecting the impact of Sergeant Knave's strategic foresight. "Three enemy squads have been fully neutralised, Sir. And the additional five squads from the north, just as you predicted, were met with significant resistance due to the auto-turrets you deployed. Their advance has been effectively stymied," he relayed, his voice betraying his respect for the sergeant's planning.

Sergeant Knave, while pleased, maintained his focus, well aware that the true challenge had yet to present itself. "Stay vigilant, Clive. The real test is imminent. The elite units we've been anticipating are likely on their move. Be ready to act swiftly," he cautioned, his demeanour a blend of readiness and resolve.

The assault on the control station, although slightly askew from the original expectations, remained within a controllable spectrum of outcomes. The prowess and tenacity of the UHF's infiltration teams had exceeded Sergeant Knave's initial assessments.

Notably, the squad armed with the IgT flamethrower had inflicted severe damage on the southeastern defences before they had been able to be neutralised, decimating a substantial segment of the outer barriers and even turning nearby civilian structures into a chaotic inferno.

The destruction had not only breached vital defensive lines but also brought about unintended havoc within the base, scattering debris and igniting dangerous wildfires that complicated their tactical positioning. The chaos unleashed by the UHF infiltrators had transformed the southeastern quadrant of the base into a nightmare of flames and rubble.

Sergeant Knave couldn't help but express his disdain for their tactics under his breath.

"The sheer recklessness... These undead monsters have no fucking respect for human lives," he grumbled, the frustration evident in his voice over the excessive collateral damage.

However, what caught him off guard the most was the encounter involving Baltro Squad, a team he had dispatched to neutralise what he presumed to be a routine threat.

Expecting an easy demolition with their specialised launchers, Baltro Squad had instead walked into what could only be described as an ambush set by an unexpectedly formidable enemy.

Sniper shots, unnervingly accurate, combined with a relentless barrage from a rotary machine gun, shattered their cover and strategy in moments.

The initial engagement had been disastrous for Baltro Squad, with half of their number quickly killed in the fierce exchange that erupted following them blowing open the stairwell of the building.

The stalemate that ensued as both parties sought new vantage points only highlighted the unexpected prowess of their adversaries.

Fearing the premature loss of his explosive specialists, especially before the anticipated appearance of the UHF's elite units, Doc had quickly ordered additional support to bolster Baltro Squad.

"But they couldn't be one of the elite squads, could they?" he pondered, almost speaking to himself. "An elite squad wouldn't have been spotted by a simple drone scouting..."

Sergeant Knave's strategic contemplations were abruptly interrupted by an unexpected presence that made him startle by letting out a surprised gasp.

"Damn it, Myka! What do you want?!" he exclaimed, more out of surprise than anger at the sudden appearance of his colleague.

Myka, unfazed by his reaction and with a mischievous smile playing on her lips, responded in her usual playful manner, "Thought I'd drop by to see how you're holding up."

Her grin widened, belying the seriousness of her visit. "Actually, I was hoping you'd have something for me to do. But looks like the universe just answered my wish!"

Doc's brow furrowed in concern at her cryptic comment.

"What are you getting at?" he inquired, the tension palpable in his voice. Myka had a reputation for relishing a very specific type of combat situation, one that Knave was not keen on engaging, without being absolute necessity.

Her next words sent a chill down his spine, confirming his apprehensions.

"There's a Psyker among them," Myka declared, her excitement barely containable. "And not just any Psyker, at that! This one's good. They're somewhere to the south, I can barely feel them. Their control over their Gate is superb... I'm itching to find out what they're capable of! Put me in, coach!"

Despite Myka's singular focus on enemy Psykers, Doc was aware that indulging her enthusiasm unchecked was not an option, especially with the presence of two elite UHF squads still unaccounted for.

Nonetheless, the threat posed by a skilled UHF Psyker operating freely was too significant to ignore, compelling him to deploy Myka despite his reservations.

"Go. And take Feldis with you. I want both of you to work together on this; no unnecessary fights! Take out the Psyker and come right back here, I will probably have work for you once you're done," Knave commanded, his voice betraying none of the concern swirling in his mind.

Myka's response, a mix of an irritated groan and mock compliance, came in the form of a grudging salute and a cheeky "Aye, aye, Captain!" before she spun on her heel and dashed off to locate Feldis.

*'Assigning both of my Psykers to this task is a massive gamble,'* Knave conceded internally, weighing the risks.

The prospect of facing a formidable UHF Psyker without using all of the firepower available to him was a risk he was unwilling to take. Yet, the decision still left him uneasy, the shadow of the unknown elite squads and the sheer unpredictability of their number haunting his thoughts.

With his orders given, all Knave could do now was wait, trusting in his base's defences and the soldiers under his command to hold the line.

The path ahead was fraught with uncertainty, yet the game of strategy and anticipation was one he was all too familiar with. Now, it was a matter of playing his cards right and hoping for the best outcome in the tense hours to come...

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Amidst the chaos of crumbling rockcrete and the constant threat of enemy fire, Sovereign Alpha found themselves in a precarious position within the stairwell of a partly demolished building.

The unexpected rocket barrage from the Stellar Republic had torn through the building's north side, effectively cutting off their route of escape and leaving them vulnerable. Trapped three-fourths of the way up, with the stairwell below and above them exposed to enemy sights, their situation was dire.

Despite the adversity, Thea and Isabella had not hesitated to retaliate.

With Thea's precision and Isabella's heavy weaponry, they managed to eliminate several of the Stellar Republic's heavy-weapons soldiers. However, their spirited defence could not change the fact that they were effectively trapped.

Before the catastrophe, Arrow Squad had parted ways with Sovereign Alpha, believing the building would provide an advantageous vantage point for their mid-range combat tactics.

The decision seemed sound until a drone, previously unnoticed as it clung to the building's exterior, facilitated their discovery, leading to the devastating rocket attack that blew a gaping hole in their cover.

In response to their dire circumstances, Lucas had quickly positioned his Stalwart shield to guard the staircase leading down, preventing any surprise attacks from below.

Simultaneously, Desmond had taken similarly swift action, deploying two drones—one to monitor the staircase leading upwards and another to scout through a nearby window, desperately searching for an alternative escape route from their perilous position.

In the tense silence that followed the barrage, Thea's voice cut through with a vital reminder, "Keep out of sight; snipers are probably zeroing in on us." She knew the precariousness of their situation demanded immediate action to secure more room for manoeuvring; a single well-aimed explosive could end their mission disastrously.

"Ela, blow those walls," Thea commanded, pointing towards the closest residential barriers.

"Warn the occupants first," she hastily added, observing as Isabella prepped her Devastator for the task at hand.

Karania was quick to follow up, pulling out several white-foam grenades.

She set about sealing parts of the shattered stairwell wall, aiming to expand their limited operational area ever so slightly.

'*Glad Kara's quick as always,*' Thea silently praised, her mind racing with strategies to counter their disadvantage.

The ambush had completely blindsided them; if not for Thea's last-second psychic premonition, the squad would have likely lost at least half their members by the initial attack.

Recovering from the shock of the rockets' impact, they found themselves amidst a battle for survival. The building segment they occupied had suffered significant structural harm due to the Stellar Republic's ruthless assault, leaving them in a dangerous limbo between stability and potential collapse.

"I can't believe they'd just blow up their own civilian's homes like this! What the fuck is wrong with these freaks?!" Thea exclaimed, her voice laced with anger and disbelief. Briefly risking a glance from her cover to assess their opponents, she aligned her Gram's scope, searching for any sign of the enemy.

However, her heightened Psychic Senses abruptly signalled an incoming threat almost immediately, a precognitive warning that had her darting back behind the relative safety of her cover just as sniper fire whizzed past, striking the wall where she had been moments before.

The realisation hit her; they were significantly outnumbered. "They've got at least three squads focusing on us now... Ela, we need those walls down!"

From her right, Isabella confirmed her readiness, her voice resolute amidst the din of battle. "On it, boss. No response from inside—hopefully, the apartment's empty. Going for it in three, two, one..."

The explosion, precisely calculated, tore through the building's structure, hurling debris and shrouding the area in a thick cloud of dust. The once intact walls and doors of the adjacent apartments were now completely obliterated, leaving behind a chaotic sprawl of what were once people's living spaces.

"Follow me," Thea commanded over the squad comms, hoping that her voice would cut through the temporary deafness induced by the explosion's aftermath. The use of a shaped charge had focused the blast inward, sparing them from the brunt of the explosion, yet the ensuing cacophony was just as disorienting as always.

Leading with determination, Thea navigated the debris-strewn gap between their initial cover and the newfound shelter provided by the breached apartments. The swirling dust served as a makeshift camouflage against the vigilant eyes of enemy snipers still scanning for movement.

Relying on her dual assets—her scout training and her unique Psychic Senses—Thea felt a strong sense of duty, a silent guardian for her team in unpredictable moments like these.

She methodically cleared the apartments, finding them deserted of both foe and innocent alike.

The destruction had merged two distinct living spaces into one larger, yet devastated area.

This expansion of their battleground offered Sovereign Alpha a tactical advantage they were sorely in need of. Cramped in a stairwell that afforded minimal protection, they had been vulnerable. Now, with the wall that once divided the apartments and the hallway also gone, they gained the spatial freedom necessary to strategize and manoeuvre, a small but critical victory in the heat of their ongoing siege.

As Thea manoeuvred her way through the devastated apartments, Lucas's voice, tense and urgent, pierced the chaos from the direction of the stairwell.

"Drop the gun! We don't mean any harm!" he exclaimed, his tone indicating that the standoff didn't involve an enemy combatant.

"Stop that! Drop the gun, please!" Lucas's voice, now edged with desperation, attempted once more to defuse the tension, his plea directed towards an unseen figure below them.

The atmosphere thickened with apprehension as Lucas's next shout, "Don't come up here! What are you doing!" hinted at the situation spiralling out of control.

Thea, sensing the urgency, hastened her steps, darting through the wreckage towards the commotion, only to be met with the deafening blast of Isabella's Devastator. The weapon's distinctive thunderous discharge filled the air, its aim directed ominously down the stairwell.

In the immediate aftermath, Lucas and Karania's voices, laden with shock and disbelief, shattered the brief lull that followed the gunfire. "Isabella?!" they cried out in unison, their words a mixture of anger and confusion. "What the fuck are you doing?! That was a civilian!"

"Get your heads out of your asses!" she roared, her words echoing off the stairwell's battered walls, making every member of the squad jolt in surprise. The squad, taken aback, had never witnessed her lose her composure in such a manner before, and the raw intensity in her tone was enough to send chills down their spines.

"That's not a fucking civilian! If you swing a gun around when soldiers are involved, in the middle of an active warzone, you're not a civilian, you're a fucking *combatant*. Just because they don't wear the enemy's uniform doesn't mean they're neutral. Get your shit together, Lucas. You too, Karania. You're too damn smart to make a fuss over this shit! There are no civilians on the battlefield!"

As Isabella's figure briskly receded into the dust and chaos of the battered apartments, setting to work with a methodical precision that belied the tumult of her emotions on a new set of shaped charges on the far-side walls of the apartments, Thea was left to ponder the weight of the moment. Isabella's raw admonition reverberated through the rubble around them, her words carrying the hard-earned wisdom and scars of urban warfare of her past.

Thea recognized the depth of experience behind Isabella's outburst, acknowledging the grim realities of combat in such complex environments.

*'That sounded a lot more personal than I would've thought... Ela does have practical experience with urban combat, so I guess it's only to be expected that she'd feel more intensely about these things,'* she reflected silently, acknowledging the gravity of Isabella's experience and the brutal pragmatism it necessitated.

Gathering her thoughts, Thea addressed her squad, her voice cutting through the tension with a command that brooked no argument.

"Focus up," she said, her tone deliberate and composed. She chose a path of pragmatic leadership, avoiding taking sides but emphasising the mission's immediate demands. "We can worry about ethics, morals, and points later. For now, keep your head in the game; we have enough challenges as it is. Anyone that isn't UHF and could be a threat is an enemy. That's an order."

Her words were a clear directive in the fog of war, a reminder that in the midst of conflict, survival often hinged on making difficult decisions.

Lucas and Karania's faces tightened, their expressions a clear indicator of their inner turmoil, yet their nods were firm, signalling their reluctant agreement with Thea's directive.

Isabella, undeterred by the recent dispute, was already methodically setting charges within the confines of the apartment. Her actions were precise, each placement a calculated step towards forging a path out of their current predicament.

Thea evaluated the situation with a critical eye, well aware that relying on an alternate staircase for egress was a gamble with high stakes, given the enemy's unchecked heavy weaponry.

"Lucas, position your Stalwart here," Thea commanded, her voice carrying a sense of urgency mixed with strategic foresight.

"I need its protection to scout for the enemy's heavy weapons." Without hesitation, Lucas manoeuvred the formidable shield into place, providing a bastion of defence amidst the uncertainty.

Karania, now tasked with the critical role of securing their rear, acted with her typical and swift efficiency.

She launched a pair of white-foam grenades, the expanding barrier forming a makeshift barricade, a temporary fortification within the stairwell.

The defensive heavy quickly approached the gaping breach in the stairwell, his shield at the ready. He positioned the Stalwart, activating its grav-lock mechanism to secure it against the floor, creating an impromptu, yet downright unbreakable bulwark.

His body served as an additional layer of defence, ready to absorb any sudden onslaught. The moment stretched, tense with anticipation, but when no assault came, he shifted his focus to his Havoc, preparing for engagement.

"Clear on my end, Thea," Lucas signalled with a confident thumbs-up, his readiness reassuring amidst the chaos.

Thea, now poised besides Lucas behind the makeshift cover, braced for a series of calculated risks. Each peek over the Stalwart meant potentially locking eyes with death, given the enemy snipers' vigilance. Yet, her newly found confidence in relying on her Psychic Senses offered a sliver of hope, a chance to outmanoeuvre their unseen foes.

Just as she prepared to exploit this edge, a sudden, inexplicable sensation halted her advance—a deep, resonant tug at her core, unfamiliar and unsettling. This novel sensation, neither pain nor alarm, seemed to emanate from within, leaving her momentarily bewildered.

*'What the fuck is this now?'* she questioned internally, grappling with the mysterious feeling that rooted her to the spot.

It was as though an unseen force sought her attention, compelling her to pause and reconsider her next move.

*'Is this something new... This doesn't feel like the usual warning?'* Thea's thoughts raced, searching for meaning in this uncharted experience, while the battlefield awaited her response.

Thea squeezed her eyes shut, channelling her concentration towards the origin of the unsettling sensation, only to be greeted by a disquieting realisation.

It was emanating from her Psychic Gate.

Panic briefly flickered within her as she internally cursed, *'Now? Of all times?'*

Frustration mounted; the last thing she needed amidst this chaotic skirmish was her Psychic Abilities throwing her another curveball.

"Everything okay, Thea?" Lucas's concern filtered through, his voice oddly distant amidst the tumult of her internal turmoil.

Gathering her wits, she managed a measured response, "Just a momentary check. All good." She aimed to keep Lucas's worry at bay, especially after the unfavourable order she had just made moments earlier.

Refocusing on herself, Thea sought clarity on the unprecedented psychic disturbance. *'This isn't like any previous flare-up. There's something distinctly different this time.'*

The notion was both a relief and a source of new anxiety—relief that it wasn't a malfunction of her Gate, but anxiety from the unknown message it attempted to convey.

Her unease deepened as another, even more complex and powerful resonance layered over the first, draining the colour from her face.

*'I need answers now,'* she thought, desperation creeping in.

She swiftly opened a comm link, hoping against hope that Viladia was still within reach. A wave of relief washed over her as the comm system chirped affirmatively, ready to connect her to the answers she sought so urgently.

Thea's voice was urgent, threading the line between concern and confusion as she relayed the unsettling sensations emanating from her Psychic Gate to Viladia. "Vi, there's this... Weird sensation, right where my Gate is. It's like... Some sort of resonance, maybe? Started with just one, and now there's another. They're pulsing in this odd rhythm, and I can't make heads or tails of it. Any idea what the fuck is going on?" She quickly provided all the information she could, fully knowing that she was revealing things to Viladia that they hadn't really talked about yet, but she didn't have time to be wishy-washy about this.

The silence that followed her hurried explanation stretched on, amplifying Thea's anxiety, until Viladia's voice finally pierced the tense wait.

"Thea, listen carefully: I'm pretty sure that's your Gate warning you of other, nearby Gates," came Viladia's grave and urgent response. "I have no other explanation ready, as I don't really know much about it other than that... What you're feeling is very likely two enemy Psykers coming your way. Be super fucking careful! I wish I could help out, but we're stuck here. If you can, just run!"

Thea felt a chill run through her at Viladia's words, understanding the gravity of her situation with newfound clarity. She managed a terse, "Thanks, Vi," before snapping her comms shut.

She knew that the first thing she had to do was inform the squad.

"There are two Psykers coming our way. Brace yourselves for... Honestly? I have no fucking idea. This will be something entirely new, so... Just brace yourselves for everything, I guess," Thea announced, causing the rest of the squad to stop dead in their tracks.

“I have the highest Resolve out of all of us, so I’ll try to paint myself as their target. The Attribute supposedly helps with staving off Psychic Powers, so... Hopefully it just works and I don’t really need to do anything about it?” She offered, unsurety tainting her voice, despite her best efforts to sound confident.

As their eyes were all trained on Thea after her announcement, she couldn’t help but feel thoroughly out of her depth. This situation had gone from bad, to worse, to absolutely apocalyptic in a matter of mere minutes and she found it hard to fully grasp just what exactly had even happened.

All the while, the two resonances that rhythmically pulsed in her chest became faster and faster, as the two nearby Gates closed in on their position...