

Volume 2 - Chapter 17 - Excitatio Veritas II

Still staring at the empty seat, Thea barely registered the Rune priest's voice at first.

"You mentioned that the Marine was antagonizing you, Thea?" he asked, cupping his chin thoughtfully. "Calling you a Cyan, despite having no real way of knowing you were?"

It took a second for her mind to catch up. The realization clicked, and she nodded, piecing together what he was referring to.

"Ah... yes. He was... definitely antagonistic, as you've described, Rune priest." Her voice was a little distant, still half-way busy with trying to make sense of the missing Marine.

The Rune priest hummed in thought before turning his attention to the unseen presence around them.

"Sovereign," he addressed, his tone firm, "would any of the other Marines aboard the transport have been aware of Recruit McKay's origin? Specifically regarding her connection to the Cyan Solution, given the circumstances?"

As always, the Sovereign responded immediately.

"There is a vanishingly small chance that any of the Marines aboard the transport would have been aware of her condition. They were all Recruits or Privates who had been entirely separate from Recruit McKay since the beginning of the Assessment."

Thea's brow furrowed.

"As a result of her post-mission coma, she had not participated in any further operations beyond day one," the Sovereign continued. "No one inside the transporter should have had any possible connection or knowledge of her existence as a whole."

Thea's confusion only deepened, a quiet unease creeping into her thoughts.

But the Sovereign wasn't finished.

"The only individual aboard the transporter who was aware of Recruit McKay's condition was Recruit Faulkner. However, Recruit Faulkner has neither shared nor discussed McKay's status with any other Marines throughout the entire duration of the Assessment, including their shared time within the transporter in question."

A short pause.

"There is a 99.9999987% probability that nobody aboard the transporter should have been aware of Recruit McKay's origin."

A chill ran down Thea's spine.

That didn't make *any* sense.

*'If that's true, then... Who the fuck was the Marine that spoke to me? That I **killed** in my vision...?'*

She was painfully aware of how ridiculous her claim must have sounded to the Rune priest.

He had just received empirical evidence—clear, undeniable proof—that the Marine she remembered had never existed. And yet, she *knew* what she had seen. She remembered the sneer in his voice, the way his words had cut through her dazed confusion, the disgust laced in the way he had called her a Cyan.

It had happened. It was real.

But the ship's AI said otherwise.

Her throat tightened as she turned toward the Rune priest, ready to defend herself, to insist that she wasn't mistaken—that she couldn't be.

But before she could even open her mouth, he raised a hand, stopping her.

"I believe you," he said simply.

His voice was calm, certain. There wasn't the slightest trace of doubt in it.

Thea blinked, caught completely off guard.

"The Awakening is a thoroughly traumatic event—but one that burns itself into a Psyker's memory, permanently." His tone was measured, careful, as if making sure she understood the weight of his words. "Many Psykers wish they could forget it. Some would give anything to erase even a *piece* of it. But they can't."

He met her gaze.

"So, I have no doubts that what you're saying is true," he continued. "That this Marine truly did exist—inside your vision."

A massive weight lifted off her shoulders.

She hadn't even realized how tense she had been until that very moment.

Being believed—just like that—without argument, without skepticism, despite the overwhelming contradiction from the Sovereign's records... it was strange.

Strange, but deeply relieving.

She inhaled slowly, exhaling some of the lingering tension in her chest.

"The real question now, however," the Rune priest mused, once more bringing a hand to his chin in deep thought, "is *how* your Awakening could have possibly shown something that had no right to be there."

His eyes narrowed slightly.

“Especially considering your Inheritance being in the mix...”

His words trailed off as he slowly paced up and down the length of the transporter, his boots making faint, rhythmic thuds against the metal floor. His gaze flickered around the space, scanning the simulated Marines, his eyes shifting between them as if they might somehow hold the answers to his growing questions.

"This makes no sense..." he muttered under his breath, his pacing slowing as his brows furrowed in deep thought.

Thea had no idea what to do with this situation.

She had spent the entirety of her Awakening feeling like she was drowning in confusion, like nothing around her followed any kind of logical structure. But now, seeing the Rune priest—an actual expert, if not *the* expert, on the subject—stumped by what she had described, was both frightening and oddly reassuring at the same time.

Because if *he* didn't understand it either...

Then maybe she wasn't as completely hopeless as she had thought.

From the very beginning, the Awakening had felt like something impossible to grasp for her—an experience that simply defied understanding. But now, watching the Rune priest struggle to piece things together, she realized that this wasn't just a *her* problem.

Because it wasn't *just* her being overwhelmed by the sheer absurdity of it all.

This entire situation was something that pushed past the boundaries of what *anyone* understood.

She watched as the Rune priest continued to mutter and mumble to himself, his pacing slow and deliberate as he worked through whatever thoughts were racing in his mind.

Thea wasn't sure what to do—whether to wait, interrupt, or let him figure things out on his own—until, suddenly, he stilled.

His entire posture shifted in an instant, his head snapping up as if something had clicked into place.

"Unless...!" he muttered, his tone sharpening with sudden realization.

Then, he whipped around toward Thea, a wide, toothy grin spreading across his face.

"Unless your visions *already* have a penchant for being antagonistic in nature!"

Before she could respond, he closed the distance between them in a few long strides, stopping just a few steps away.

"You told me earlier that your visions had been antagonistic toward the *end* of the Assessment, correct?"

Thea nodded immediately, still trying to catch up to whatever had just sparked in his mind.

"Then what if..." He trailed off again, his eyes flickering with thought, his mind clearly running through a dozen different possibilities at once.

"What if the Marine that we're missing—" he gestured toward the empty seat, "—wasn't ever real in the first place? What if they were just a part of how your visions manifest? What if, for whatever reason, your visions naturally create antagonistic elements?"

He began nodding to himself, faster now, as if things were starting to fall into place.

"That would mean," he continued, voice gaining momentum, "that your visions didn't *suddenly* become antagonistic toward the end of the Assessment—they were *always* antagonistic. Even during your Awakening."

Thea's stomach twisted slightly and thought, '*That... Doesn't sound particularly useful?*'

"If that's the case," the Rune priest went on, interrupting her thoughts, "then the whole antagonistic vision thing suddenly becomes a lot less strange. It would mean that this isn't a random quirk that developed after your Powers stabilized—no, this is something that was there from the very beginning. And that makes sense, considering..."

He tilted his head slightly, his hands now gesturing animatedly as he spoke.

"The Awakening is when most of your Powers settle into a specific gradient—a flavor, if you will. No two Psykers will have the *exact* same style of visions when it comes to precognition. Some will see more detail, others will get broader impressions. Some only receive cryptic riddles they have to decipher. Each Psyker's Awakening shapes the way their Powers manifest. While Intent can shape and unify them somewhat, the baseline is unique."

He clapped his hands together once, as if sealing the thought in place.

"And that means you, my dear pupil," he said, pointing directly at Thea with a big grin, "have a very odd style of vision!"

She didn't know how to feel about that.

"But it shouldn't really impact much. Now that you know this is just how your visions present themselves, you can account for it."

Then, his expression shifted. He cocked his head slightly, his grin fading just a little.

"That said..." His tone dropped into something more thoughtful. "I'm still going to do some research on this topic. It's not exactly common for precognitive visions to be hostile like this. It kind of defeats their purpose, in a way, if you always have to second-guess if what you're seeing is actually a real threat or just an antagonistic vision..."

He narrowed his eyes slightly, rubbing his chin in thought.

"I feel like there's something else going on. Something I just can't quite put my finger on..."

His voice trailed off again—but this time, he caught himself quickly, shaking his head before waving a hand toward her.

"Either way!" he said, his energy returning in an instant. "Let's continue looking through your Awakening and see if we find any more oddities."

He smirked. "This is turning out to be *far* more engaging than I thought it would be."

Thea was still trying to catch up to the Rune priest's rapid-fire explanations when she realized he was already gesturing for her to continue.

She inhaled, steadying herself, then turned her gaze back toward the empty seat.

"Ehh... yeah. So..." she started, her voice slower as she tried to pull the memory together. "There was a Marine there..."

The Sovereign, ever attentive, immediately generated a simulated Marine, placing them exactly where Thea had indicated. It sent a strange chill down her spine.

"And then," she continued, her voice unconsciously dropping in volume, "I heard the Call."

Her eyes flickered toward the Rune priest, who simply nodded confidently, encouraging her to keep going.

"And then... there was another *thrum*. Like the previous ones. Everything shifted, and suddenly—"

She hesitated. "I was holding my Icicle... ehh, my sidearm."

The moment she said it, the Sovereign's simulation mirrored her words exactly, the replicated Thea appearing with her gun already raised, the barrel aimed directly at the Marine.

"I had... shot the Marine." She swallowed. "Or the antagonistic vision, I guess...?"

The shot rang out.

The simulated Marine's head snapped back, a clean hole punched straight through his skull. His body slumped against the transporter wall, leaving a dark smear of simulated blood behind.

Thea tensed instinctively.

Even knowing it wasn't real, seeing it—watching the moment play out in front of her, when she hadn't even seen it in her Awakening—made something deep inside her twist.

"The rest of the Marines inside the transporter were up in arms immediately," she continued, her voice quieter now, as if hearing the scene replay made it harder to get the words out.

"With only Kara..."

She trailed off for a second, her eyes lingering on Karania's simulated form—right where she had been, exactly as she had moved that day.

Karania had stepped between her and the rest of the Marines inside the transporter in an instant, blocking their line of sight, arms spread wide, imposing herself between Thea and the barrel of far too many rifles.

She had done it without hesitation.

Thea exhaled sharply, shaking her head as if to dispel the thought.

'She's always so quick... Always knows exactly what to do...'

But now wasn't the time to dwell on it.

"Kara immediately jumped between me and the rest of the Marines." She tried to refocus. "They were yelling—telling me to drop the weapon, trying to figure out if we were under attack, demanding to know what the fuck was going on... It was pure chaos."

Her brows furrowed as she tried to find the right words.

"I heard myself think..." she said slowly, struggling to explain what had happened in that moment. "Not like... I didn't *think*, think. But I *heard* myself think. Like... my own inner voice was narrating my thoughts—except I couldn't tell where they were coming from. Like they weren't mine, exactly, but they were at the same time."

She glanced toward the Rune priest, half-expecting him to look confused, or ask her to clarify. But he just nodded, unbothered, like this was completely normal—completely expected.

That wasn't exactly reassuring.

"The scene kept shifting," she continued. "I kept trying to figure out what was happening—kept trying to ground myself—but then the Call came back. Stronger."

The transporter around her seemed smaller all of a sudden.

"It told me that I could take out half the transport before anyone could stop me."

She felt her stomach twist.

"Then it shifted again, and suddenly I was certain I could take out *all* of them."

Her voice had dropped to nearly a whisper.

The simulated Marines shifted, just as they had in her Awakening, their movements playing out with an eerie accuracy. The chaos of the moment pressed in on her—the shouting, the drawn weapons, the tension so thick it felt suffocating.

Even knowing it was just a recreation, it still felt too real.

The Sovereign's simulation had replicated the scene perfectly, down to the smallest details.

Maybe a Marine's movement here, or a slightly different phrasing of a yell there, but... the *feeling* of it. The weight of it pressing onto her psyche.

That was identical. And it felt like it was trying to crush her, just like it had back then.

The Rune priest remained silent, letting Thea process her thoughts at her own pace. He didn't press, didn't interrupt—just waited, giving her space to continue when she was ready.

She swallowed, forcing herself to push forward.

"At some point... I think they shot me?" The words came slowly, uncertain, like she was pulling them out of something half-buried. "I remember... not being able to stay upright. Falling. I remember bullet holes."

Her breathing hitched slightly.

"But then... everything just froze over."

The memory pressed down on her. The sheer, unnatural cold—how it had swallowed the entire transporter in an instant.

"Everyone inside was dead." Her voice was quiet now. "Except me and Kara..."

The simulated transporter shifted to match her words.

Marines who had been shouting moments ago now lay slumped against their seats, frozen in place—some mid-motion, some collapsed on the floor, some shattered entirely.

"There was ice everywhere." Thea exhaled, rubbing her arms as if that same cold was still lingering on her skin. "And this... *cold*..."

She trailed off, unable to find the right words to describe it.

A silence stretched between them before the Rune priest finally let out a thoughtful hmm.

She looked up at him, hoping—pleading—for him to take over the conversation, just for a moment. As if sensing her unease, he gave a curt nod before saying, "The ice and cold... I'm very interested in those. Particularly in regards to *you*, Thea."

She blinked.

He began pacing, his boots making soft thuds against the transporter's floor. There wasn't much room, but enough for him to take a few steps in either direction as he spoke.

"You're a Short-Term Precog," the Rune priest said, his tone shifting into something measured, deliberate. "That's been established beyond any shadow of a doubt—multiple times. Major Quinn, the Sovereign, myself—we've all confirmed this. And on top of that, your actions during the Assessment and the Cube Trial were unquestionably those of a Precog."

He stopped, turning to face her fully.

"So my question now is this: Why is there a connection to ice and cold with you, in so many instances?"

Thea's brows furrowed.

She hadn't thought about it before. But now that he mentioned it...

The cold, the ice—it had kept showing up. Not just in her Awakening either.

She thought back to those odd patches of frozen metal on her weapons whenever she tapped into her Psychic side more than usual. She remembered the strange frosted edges on her gear, the way it felt like a sudden chill would creep over her body in those moments.

Even Zach's recounting of her near-death experience with the Gate—He had said the knock-out injector had frozen. That it had straight-up exploded in his hands.

And then, of course, there was the psychologist's office after the Assessment, with Selene.

The utter devastation she had accidentally caused inside the room, freezing everything over... It had *definitely* been cold and ice related.

Thea hesitated before offering, "I... I figured it's just something that happens when a Psyker uses a lot of Psychic Energy...?"

She wanted him to nod and confirm it. To tell her she was right so they could just move on.

But she already knew the answer.

If it were that simple, the Rune priest wouldn't have been confused or intrigued about it at all.

And judging by the thoughtful but skeptical look on the Rune priest's face... that was definitely not the case.

As if to confirm it, he gently shook his head.

"No, Thea," he said, his voice firm yet calm. "It's definitely not normal. There are a few basic Powers every Psyker gets at some point, but none of them are elemental. Ice, cold, frost, whatever you want to call it... that's a distinct Path of its own—just like Short-Term Precognition is. Which makes all of this extremely intriguing..."

He watched her closely, like he expected some small reaction, some hint from her expression to help him understand what was happening.

"This *should* be impossible," he continued thoughtfully. "You haven't Delved yet; that much is obvious. Without unlocking the Psychic Attribute first, you'd never survive an attempt. That's not just unlikely, it's an absolute guarantee."

The Rune priest tapped a finger against his chin as he continued, "And besides, you had no idea about Delving in the first place, so you couldn't even accidentally have come close to

unlocking another Path. So the real question here is—why are you causing these phenomena? Why are you showing clear signs of an entirely separate Path and Power set seemingly at random... especially one you shouldn't have access to in the first place?"

His voice trailed off as he began pacing the short length of the transporter again, slow steps echoing softly against the metal floor, clearly deep in thought as he tried to unravel yet another unexpected mystery in regards to her.

Thea stared down at the transporter's metal floor, her mind working in circles as she tried to piece together what the Rune priest had just said.

'None of this makes any sense...' she thought helplessly.

She felt like the Rune priest had just handed her a puzzle, but had forgotten to give her half of the pieces. She'd come here hoping for clear answers—explanations that could finally help her understand the strange things happening around her.

Instead, she was left even more confused than before.

She glanced over at the Rune priest again, looking for some sign of clarity. But even he was pacing back and forth, quietly mumbling to himself and clearly unsure of the answer.

After another minute of uneasy silence, the Rune priest suddenly chuckled, interrupting Thea's tangled thoughts.

"Well, it seems we have yet another thing for me to research," he said, sounding strangely delighted about it.

Thea blinked, caught off guard by his reaction.

He was acting like he'd just received good news, rather than another confusing mystery. She was half inclined to ask him about it, but the Rune priest simply clapped his hands once and gestured for her to keep going.

"Come, Thea, let's continue your recounting. Who knows? Perhaps we'll uncover even more fascinating oddities," he said with far too much enthusiasm for her liking.

Thea sighed internally, her shoulders sagging slightly. *'Great. Just what I needed. Even more oddities to deal with...'*

She'd entered this Psychic Lesson desperately wanting answers. But as it turned out, all she'd gotten so far was a growing list of new questions—each one more confusing than the last.

Focusing back on the task at hand, Thea took a slow breath and glanced around the transporter, trying to figure out exactly where she'd left off. Her eyes landed on the frozen, shattered bodies of the simulated Marines, and the memories rushed back.

"I was out of control," she began softly, a bit hesitant. "Everything was shifting so fast, and I was so scared and confused. Then suddenly I was on the ground, and Kara had a gun

pointed at me. She looked just as terrified and confused as I felt. And then... she shot me? I think she killed me.”

Thea recounted the strange sensation of being shot in the head, describing how she'd suddenly felt completely disconnected from what had happened.

"But... I didn't really die," she continued cautiously. "The 'me' in my vision did, but somehow, I still saw everything afterward. I watched Kara turn the gun on herself, and then it all just... ended. It was like I'd been experiencing it directly, and then suddenly I was just watching it unfold from somewhere else. Like I was just... observing?"

She glanced at the Rune priest, who nodded encouragingly, clearly signaling that she was doing well in putting words to the bizarre experience.

"That sort of thing is known to happen to precogs—especially during their Awakening," he explained calmly. "It's certainly a strange phenomenon, but there's a logical explanation. Precognition, at its core, is about looking at events from the outside. Even when you're part of the vision itself, you're still technically observing from an external point of view."

He gestured in the air as if to emphasize his point. "When the Psychic Energy you're channeling spikes high enough—like during the Awakening—your connection to the 'you' inside the vision can suddenly break. That shifts your perspective from a personal, first-person viewpoint to something more distant, like watching it from the outside."

The Rune priest chuckled softly. "After all, you're peering into the Void. You're not truly experiencing these visions yourself, but seeing them through the eyes of another version of you who's already lived those moments."

That explanation made sense to Thea—or at least, as much sense as anything could when it came to the bizarre things they'd been talking about. She nodded slowly, feeling somewhat reassured by his words, before continuing her explanation.

"That... was the first vision. Mostly confusion, then two Calls of the Void, and then it was over," she summarized simply, fishing for a bit of a summarized explanation from him.

The Rune priest nodded thoughtfully, an easy smile spreading across his face.

"That makes sense," he began. "That would've been one of the ways your Awakening could've ended—giving in to the Call of the Void. The first Call created the conditions necessary for the second, stronger one to actually affect you. Notice, though, it wasn't the Call itself that killed you; you were stopped by one of your own squadmates. This is exactly what makes the Call so dangerous—it rarely finishes the job itself. Instead, it pushes you into situations that force others around you to act."

He paused, letting Thea process what he'd said.

After a moment, he signaled for the Sovereign to reset the simulation, and suddenly the scene reverted, clearing away the frozen Marines, returning to a calm transport.

“You mentioned that was the first vision, Thea. How about the second one?” the Rune priest asked gently, yet eagerly, guiding her back into recounting the next memory.

Taking a deep breath to steady herself, Thea tried to focus on recalling the second vision.

Just as the Rune priest had promised, remembering was much easier than she'd expected.

Even though it felt like years had passed since that day—given how much had happened—every detail was still vividly clear. The Awakening really *had* burned itself into her memory, exactly as he'd described.

“The second vision didn't even include me directly,” Thea began softly. “It was like I was just a floating observer, watching everything unfold. It started very suddenly, inside the driver cabin of the transporter. It followed the driver, a Marine named Ryan.”

The Sovereign immediately adjusted their surroundings to match her words, reconstructing the transporter's interior and placing Thea and the Rune priest right behind Ryan and his co-driver Jona. Both Marines seemed completely normal, quietly driving the Sidoreno as if nothing unusual was about to happen.

“They were just chatting about regular stuff, nothing important,” Thea continued, “until suddenly, everything changed. The whole world turned... violet?”

Right on cue, a deep violet hue spread across the entire scene, coating everything in a strange, unsettling light.

“They were confused at first, wondering aloud what was going on, when suddenly Ryan received a Prime Criticality Mission from the UHF. I think it must've appeared directly in his HUD, since I never actually got to see it myself. I'm not even sure what it said, exactly.”

The Rune priest suddenly raised a hand, signaling her to pause.

“You said it was a Prime Criticality Mission?” he asked, eyebrows raised in genuine surprise.

When Thea nodded, the Rune priest's expression turned more serious, clearly deep in thought. “That's... *interesting*, to say the least.”

Seeing Thea's obvious confusion, he quickly clarified, “Prime Criticality is the second-highest possible level of mission urgency. More importantly, it's not something a commander in the field can assign. To send a Prime Criticality Mission into an ongoing Assessment means someone high up in the UHF—someone *outside* the Assessment entirely—spent an enormous amount of Merit and Credits to bypass the strict rules against outside interference.”

Thea's eyes widened, understanding starting to sink in.

“The cost alone is astronomical,” the Rune priest continued gravely. “The fact that the UHF was willing to do this shows how important they consider you. To put it into perspective, we're talking about tens of thousands of Merit at minimum. I've never personally seen a

Prime Criticality Mission sent into an Assessment, so I can only guess the exact cost, but it's undoubtedly massive."

"Tens... of thousands...?" Thea repeated slowly, stunned.

That number felt impossibly high. To spend such an absurd amount of Merit just to send a single mission to a T1 Private seemed utterly insane.

"The System does not like rulebreakers," the Rune priest explained with a casual shrug. "It allows it, because it values participation and merit above everything else—but it definitely doesn't make it easy for anyone. If you want to break the System's rules, you'll have to pay a price—a *very* steep one."

He then gestured for her to continue, clearly considering the brief explanation finished.

Thea quickly made a mental note of this information, certain that it might come in handy for Alpha Squad in the future, before she picked up the thread of her story again.

"Ryan left the cabin after sending out an all-stop signal to the rest of the convoy. But... I never actually saw any other vehicles or personnel, so I'm not even sure if anyone actually received it," she admitted, uncertainty clear in her voice. "Anyway, he left and walked toward the back of the transporter. But he got stopped by this weird sun. It was... like an eclipse, but not really? It was glowing in this vivid violet color, and there was this straight violet beam going down towards the planet. I'm not exactly sure how to describe—"

The Rune priest raised his hand once more, gently stopping her from struggling further.

"Sovereign," he ordered calmly, "replace the sun with a Void Rift Eclipse."

Immediately, the bright yellow sun vanished, replaced by exactly the strange celestial phenomenon Thea had struggled to describe. The sky turned dark, overshadowed by a massive violet sun, ringed by swirling dark shadows. A stark violet beam extended down toward the planet's surface, exactly as she'd seen before.

Thea stared up at the eclipse, her mouth slightly open, completely stunned at the perfect recreation.

"Judging by your reaction, I'd say this is spot-on?" the Rune priest asked gently.

Thea simply nodded, unable to find words.

"This," he continued calmly, "is a Void Rift Eclipse. It's a celestial event caused when a Void Rift is active—or about to become active. Unfortunately, it's something that tends to appear in many Awakenings. Void Rifts are basically Psykers exploding in the worst way imaginable."

He sighed heavily, leaning against the transporter's exterior with his arms crossed, clearly troubled by what he was explaining.

“When a Psyker overstresses their Gate, there are a few possible outcomes. The worst outcome by far is a Void Rift. That’s because a Void Rift acts like a direct gateway from the Void into our universe, allowing Void Daemons to freely enter or leave our world whenever they want. And once created, these rifts require massive amounts of energy to close again, which makes them extremely dangerous... Sort of like a runaway cascade of issues.”

He shook his head slowly, his voice grave. “Literally *any* other outcome is preferable to a Void Rift.”

Thea could only tentatively nod, feeling a cold dread settle deep in her chest.

‘*An active gateway into the Void itself?*’ she thought, swallowing hard. ‘*No wonder it’s such a huge problem...*’

“What happened after that?” the Rune priest gently asked, urging her to continue.

“Ryan went to the back of the Sidoreno and opened the door...” Thea began hesitantly, her voice quiet as the transporter’s heavy rear door began to open slowly, exactly as she remembered. The quiet hissing sound sent chills down her spine as memories flooded back, making her stomach turn with unease.

She had seen terrible things during the attack on Nova Tertius’ Wall—thousands of bodies piled high, crushed and torn apart by weapons and explosions, human destruction at its worst.

But what she’d seen inside the transporter was far worse.

It wasn’t just battlefield chaos, it was something completely *unnatural*.

“There was a creature inside,” she continued quietly, swallowing hard to keep her stomach steady. “It had killed everyone... brutally. The Marines were ripped apart, shredded... It was like the thing had *feasted* on them.”

She shivered, the vivid images from the vision pushing at the edges of her mind, threatening to overwhelm her.

“Ryan had been looking for me. He started saying my name, or tried to, before he saw the creature. It was like... some kind of massive dog-like thing. It had seven legs and three arms coming out of its back, each ending in these long claws...”

Once more, the Rune priest raised a hand to gently stop her.

“Sovereign, simulate a Canidae-type Void Daemon,” he ordered firmly.

Instantly, a monstrous creature appeared before them—exactly as Thea had tried to describe.

It stood huge and menacing in the transporter’s doorway, towering over the simulated bodies of the Marines scattered around it. Its thick, muscular body was hunched forward, dark skin stretched tightly over powerful muscles.

Three twisted, clawed arms emerged from its back, each clawed limb flexing restlessly. Its seven legs spread around it in an unsettling pattern, supporting its heavy frame.

Thea's breath caught in her throat at seeing the monster so clearly again.

"Ex...*Exactly like that*," Thea managed, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Except it was in the back corner, right there." She pointed at the far-right corner of the transporter. Immediately, the Sovereign moved the creature to match her words precisely.

"After that, everything happened fast," she continued, her voice tightening with the memory. "Ryan tried to call for help, but the radio wasn't working—it just crackled static."

In front of her, the simulation played out the exact events she described.

Ryan urgently pressed the comm button on his helmet, shouting silently into it, but nothing happened. His voice was frantic, desperate, but no sound came through.

"And then the creature attacked," Thea whispered, her eyes fixed on the disturbing scene as it replayed right in front of her. "Ryan didn't stand a chance..."

She watched as the Canidae sprang forward with terrifying speed, its three clawed arms whipping down onto Ryan, tearing through his armor as if it were paper. He tried to scream, but the creature was too fast, too vicious, as it pulled him apart limb by limb. The sounds of tearing metal and snapping bones were horrifyingly realistic, echoing sharply in her ears.

The Rune priest nodded gravely, his eyes narrowed at the gruesome scene.

"That's the way the Canidae operate, unfortunately," he explained calmly, even as the creature continued its grisly work. "They thrive on suffering and pain, causing as much brutality as possible. It's their whole reason for existing, really."

Thea could hardly tear her eyes away from the monstrous creature in front of her. Its unnatural movements and brutal actions deeply unsettled her. Finally, she couldn't keep quiet, the words slipping out despite herself. "Why are they like that...? What even makes something want to do this...? What *are* Void Daemons...?"

The Rune priest met her gaze, his expression solemn. "Nobody really knows for certain. Void Daemons don't exactly follow the rules of our universe. They're drawn to chaos, pain, and intense emotions. Canidae in particular are known to deliberately prolong suffering, feeding off the fear and agony they cause. It strengthens them—makes them even more dangerous."

Thea swallowed hard, turning her gaze away from the disturbing scene. She felt sick again, and part of her deeply regretted having asked.

"As for Void Daemons in general," the Rune priest said thoughtfully, shaking his head slightly as if deciding against something, "that's probably a topic we shouldn't dive into today. It would take hours just to cover the basic types, their behaviours, and why exactly they exist. Let's save that particular nightmare for another lesson—one where we're not already short on time."

Thea nodded slowly, relieved but also strangely disappointed.

The topic was frightening, but she couldn't deny that she was curious.

Just knowing more about these creatures might make her feel a bit less helpless if she ever encountered one.

The Rune priest seemed to sense her curiosity, because his lips curled into a knowing smirk. "Don't worry, Thea, I won't leave you completely in the dark. There is one thing you should definitely know before we end today's session."

His eyes grew suddenly serious, a quiet intensity taking over his expression. "Some Void Daemons are mindless monsters, driven by instinct alone. But others... others have intelligence, cunning, even a perceived purpose, at times. Some have goals far beyond simple destruction or feeding on pain..."

He hesitated, clearly choosing his words carefully before continuing, his voice growing quieter as if he was sharing a dangerous secret.

"And some of those Daemons have an intellect so vast, so completely alien, that we cannot begin to understand their motives or their true purpose. They exist far beyond anything our simple human minds can grasp. These entities dwell so deep in the Void that we might never fully know what drives them. They simply exist—and through their influence, direct countless lesser Void creatures toward goals we cannot even begin to imagine, for purposes known only to themselves and perhaps the Emperor himself..."