

WARHAMMER
40,000



ADEPTUS TITANICUS
VENGEANCE OF
THE IMMORTAL
GAU THORPE

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VENGEANCE OF THE IMMORTAL

Gav Thorpe

The air swirled with a thick purple smoke from a hundred censers as Sythika ascended the gantry to the head of *Evocatus*. Each tread of the princeps maximus on the metal steps was accompanied by the crash of metal drums on the loading deck below so that it seemed her footsteps were as mighty as those of the Warlord Titan she was about to board.

She looked over to the head of the giant war machine, staring ahead through the locking pins of the docking superstructure. It was fashioned like the helm of a knight of ancient Earth. The viewers of the main bridge had dark blue lenses in the eyes, rivets the size of fists lining the overlapping plates. She gave the silent engine a slight nod of respect inside the hood of her robe and continued up the steps to the bridge that linked the stair to the open access door in the carapace.

Behind Sythika came the moderati, Scanntor and Pharus, left and right hands, then Dolco and Gasia, left and right carapace respectively. Their MIU cables trailed behind them like plaits, as did Sythika's, carried by small servocherubs with thrumming wings.

Ten steps behind the piloting crew came the engineers, four in total, headed by Kauath Sahsu, the engineer dominatus. They broke away from the short procession to head into the bowels of *Evocatus* where they would finish the preparations to awaken the beast of war.

Chanting drifted up from the choir behind the line of censer-bearing tech-priests below, praising the history and victories of the Warlord. Battlefields and worlds dating back thousands of years, to conflicts that pre-dated even the Imperium by a millennium.

The names of the many princeps was not mentioned – the roll of honour of past commanders held in the archives was too long for such recital, numbering as it

did seven hundred and twenty-eight individuals. Such fleeting individuals were unimportant in the schemes of the Cult Mechanicus, a necessary fleshy component required for the running of the god of war they had raised up for the glory of the Ommissiah.

Sythika knew her place well enough. *Evocatus* would, Machine-God willing, outlast her tenure even if she lived long enough to die of natural causes. Such was the drain on a princeps body and mind she could hope for at most three decades service in total, a blink in the timeless life of a Titan.

Even so, her rank accorded her some respect and she halted at the metal door before stepping into the ruddily lit interior. She looked down to acknowledge the banners of the Legio Praesagius raised by three companies of skitarii assembled in her honour, the standards of the True Messengers black and gold like the machines that made up their ranks.

Ducking inside, she moved from the heady, rarefied atmosphere of the docking temple to the unadorned, functional corridors and bulkheads of the Titan's interior. Sythika could feel the gentle vibrations of the idling reactor, the sense of it causing a frisson of excitement to run through her.

She made her way quickly along the passages to the bridge, and took up position in the command throne at the centre of the Titan's head. Below and in front of the princeps maximus, the moderati settled at their stations.

'Requesting MIU interface,' they chorused, having spent so much time in each other's company that their thoughts ran to the same rhythm even before they were bound together with the spirit of *Evocatus*.

Together they slid their cables into the waiting circuitry, fingers hovering above the activation runes. Sythika did the same, plugging the wire hanging from the back of her neck into the neural socket in the arm of the command chair. She met the looks of each moderati in turn and nodded, as she had done forty-eight times before, the routine as much a ritual as the censer-swinging and chants that continued outside and were being carried out in the engine rooms.

'Blessed Machine-God,' she said quietly, intoning the prescribed words of the *Archaia Titanicus*. 'Grant us this day the grace of your favours. Gift us the boon of knowledge so that we might learn of your will. Hear our thoughts and carry them upon the beam of wire-light to the mind of our great protector.'

She took a breath, anticipation and expectation vying with anxiety for several seconds.

'Let's wake up the old beast,' she told the others, and touched the Rune of Activation.

In the darkness of the cave the beast waited for Sythika. She felt the heat of its breath radiating from the blackness. She heard the rumble of a heartbeat throbbing. A rasp of flexed claws. A growl. Two points of light grew brighter, eyes opened to bring the stare of the immortal beast full upon her.

She muttered placating verses, soothing the angry mood of the beast. Sythika ventured into the darkness a little further, knowing the way though blinded, screwing up every iota of her being to confront the monster that lies just out of sight. The princeps maximus was aware of the huge bulk just beyond the scope of her senses, the dormant power that could crush her at any moment.

Still Sythika advanced closer, daring its wrath. There was no other way to waken the beast but to prod it into life with her proximity. Her thoughts would become its thoughts. Its body would become her body...

In their wisdom, the ancient primogenitors of the Collegia Titanicus had seen fit to pattern the spirits of their war machines upon ferocious Terran animals. Perfect for a war machine, possessed of the instinct to hunt and kill. Frightening and deadly.

It made it no easier that she was fully aware the entire scene was a construct of her subconscious. Just like that moment in a dream when one wonders if one is dreaming, she was both inside and separated from the beast, connected via the MIU but not yet wholly cohabiting the circuitry of its artificial thoughts.

She was careful not to goad, to threaten, but instead coaxed and gently cajoled. While she awakened the dormant thought patterns of the Titan she could feel its strength returning as the ancient reactor was stirred into vigour by the attentions of the engineers. Energy flowed through conduits into the systems and sub-systems of the massive waking engine, bringing light and heat and awareness. Stoked by the activations and prayers of the tech-priests, *Evocatus* roused from its slumber, its mind flashing with predatory thoughts.

Like a veteran stable hand approaching a troublesome steed she knew the precise moment to act. Sythika leapt into the unfolding pattern-wave of *Evocatus*' growing mental pulses, letting her thought-forms weave into its own sentient matrix. Sythika eased herself along the troughs and peaks, aligning her thoughts to that of the beast.

When the roar came, when the claws and fangs flashed, they were the voice and the claws and fangs of Sythika.

At the moment of connectivity, she became aware of the others taking up their places around her, reactive nerve bundles connected to the brain stem node. She was the thought, they were the deed. The senses of the Titan flooded through her,

visual, aural and impossible mechanical inputs her brain had learned to interpret as touch and smell.

Sythika wakened the beast and stretched, letting plasma and electricity flow through its limbs, charging weapons decks and locomotive servos.

‘Animus animatus. Princeps online,’ she told the others. The statement was redundant, the moderati were well aware of her position of control. Nevertheless there was a form to follow lest the beast become recalcitrant again.

‘Sinister animatus. Power fist online,’ Scanntor said out loud, though his words echoed through the MIU for a moment after.

‘Dexter animatus. Volcano cannon online,’ Pharuis told them.

Gasia and Dolco spoke together, their vox-filtered voices initially discordant before becoming unified.

‘*Sinister minoris animatus. Gatling blaster online.*’

‘*Dexter minoris animatus. Gatling blaster online.*’

With a thought, Sythika sent a message-pulse to the docking template systems. Monstrous gears ground into life, shaking the walls as they drew back the boarding gantry and the main doors of the dropship rumbled open. Daylight flooded in, blanketing the Titan’s senses with their crimson taint. Warning sirens blared and hazard lights strobed yellow while the princeps maximus and temple command exchanged flash-dumps of data regarding the Titan’s status and the full mission brief. Sythika absorbed the information without fully processing it, the memory-core of the Titan archiving the details for later retrieval.

She received the permission-flare through the MIU connection, confirmed by vox-cast from the control booth.

‘*Evocatus* is cleared for battle. Set forth and crush the enemies of the Machine-God, Warlord of the True Messengers.’

At her thought-command, *Evocatus* took a step, and another. Three strides brought them clear of the docking temple and into the bright sunshine and clean air of Placia Mundus. The beast surged forth and Sythika let free its roar.

The deafening bass-note of the Titan’s war-horn sounded across the valley in challenge to the waiting foe.

Battle Group Indictus formed on their princeps maximus thirty kilometres from the last enemy sighting. Alongside *Evocatus* strode the other Warlord, *Iron Brother*, and the Reaver Titans *Glorious* and *Conqueror*. Several kilometres ahead of them, the Warhounds *Tempestum* and *Wolf Runner* scouted for the foe. The last contact had been near the White Rift oil refineries on the edge of the

Capacia Massif – a tortured range of steep gorges and vertiginous cliffs that would be a death-trap for any Imperial Titan battle group. The war assets of the Adeptus Mechanicus were stretched thin enough already without wasting lives and engines trying to prise the renegades grip from the mountains.

Covering the kilometres of wilderness with long strides, the war machines advanced in echelon, *Evocatus* at the leading end of the line, the *Iron Brother* anchoring the other two kilometres to the right, the Reavers between them. The plains were marked by the ancient lines of long-forgotten highways – roads all but reclaimed by forest and scrub.

The Capacia Massif was open dust country, barely a shack or bush for cover, a perfect killing ground for Titans but a graveyard for tanks and infantry. Divested of the usual drama of an accompanying battalion of skitarii, the Titans of Battle Group Indictus forged on into a growing storm, intent on engaging the enemy at all costs.

Flickers of recollection collided inside Sythika's thoughts. Not memories, not as a human would reckon it. Mimetic engrams, laid into the circuits of *Evocatus* over thousands of years, like well-worn tracks left across the ground. Images of battlefields past, of worlds trodden ten millennia before she had been born. Grey skies that flashed with lightning over a desert of red oxide. Wastelands carved by hundreds of dustdevils that swept through the puny squads of infantry, tossing them about like insects while the Titans of the Legio Praesagius strode through the tempest. Ancient seabeds littered with bones of massive prehistoric creatures laid bare by oceans retreating beneath the burning heat of blazing twin suns.

While she experienced these not-memories, Sythika analysed the incoming stream of augur data, from both *Evocatus*' scanning arrays and the telemetric feeds from the rest of the battle group. The Warhound hunting pair went deeper into the growing storm, visibility reduced to a few hundred metres, aural scans wiped out by the howling winds and scratching whisper of tonnes of grey airborne dust.

'Cyclone speed increasing, princeps maximus,' reported Taithan of the *Wolf Runner*. *'Footing stable, but energy readings are spiking off the scale. Something in the bedrock, perhaps.'*

'Or enemy Titans,' Sythika replied. *'Hold position and await our arrival. There is a traitor battle group somewhere near here, we could be right on top of them and not know it in this filthy storm.'*

'Orders received, princeps maximus. Maintaining picket patrol until your arrival.'

The beast that lurked in the heart of the Warlord Titan sensed the princeps' apprehension and responded with contempt. Sythika could feel its desire to fight, its longing to be free of the weak fleshy yoke that had been placed around its neck. It took effort to suppress the resurgent animal personality to focus on the datastream and the mission at hand.

'Engage and destroy,' she reminded her crew and the commanders of the other Titans. 'We cannot afford to allow a breakthrough here. Reinforcements will be in orbit in a matter of days, but until then, we are all that stands against the traitor war engines. We are likely outnumbered. Our strategy must be to isolate and annihilate.'

Evocatus' anger rumbled at the back of her thoughts, waiting to be unleashed as Sythika led the Titans further into the storm.

Encased within the metres-thick metal skin of their engines, the crews of the Titans paid no heed to the deadly nature of the elements screeching around their war machines. Wind-driven sand that would strip flesh from bone swirled and ebbed around the huge limbs of the walkers, settling in the thick weave of kill banners hanging from the gigantic weapons, creating trembling drifts against the gun mounts of their carapaces. Underfoot, the ground sank beneath their heavy tread, leaving a trail of compressed craters to mark their progress swiftly filling with freshly blown dust. Above, the sky was a uniform pale grey but for a wavering disc of white that marked the position of Placia Mundus' post-noon sun.

Evocatus' scanners blinked with the location transponders of the two Warhounds, zigzagging on their patrols ahead, some two kilometres distant. The vox-link crackled with interference from the storm.

'*Erratic contact, princeps maximus,*' reported the princeps of *Tempestum*, Targilio. '*Could be radioactive deposits, could be an enemy reactor.*'

'*It's an enemy,*' cut in Taithan, '*unless your deposit is moving closer.*'

'Number, distance,' snapped Sythika. 'Battle group, power to void shields.'

As she gave the command, she shunted the power flow of *Evocatus* from the locomotive actuators to the void shield generators. In the systems chambers at the Titan's heart, the engineer oversaw the transition, monitoring the power output of the reactor and adjusting their coolant stream accordingly. Around the Warlord Titan banks of warp energy shimmered into existence, flaring white and purple as they crackled through the sweeping sandstorm.

'*That will slow us down, princeps maximus,*' replied Dorfana of *Conqueror*.

The poor quality of the vox did not mask her disapproval.

‘You would prefer that we ran headlong into the enemy without our shields raised?’

‘No, princeps maximus. But our scout pair are vulnerable.’

‘Taithan and Targilio know their role today, *Conqueror*.’

‘The feint,’ said Targilio.

‘That’s an odd way of pronouncing “bait”, hunt-brother,’ Taithan replied with a laugh.

‘I have a second– No, wait...’ Targilio showed no signs of humour as he relayed his scan results. *Tempestum* was the further forward of the two Warhounds, just in sight two hundred metres from its companions. *‘Three definite readings, estimate Battle Titan size.’*

‘Reavers or Warlords?’ asked Taithan.

‘Alas, the Machine-God did not bless me with magical eyes to guess the nature of a plasma reactor from a blurry dot on a screen.’

‘Confirmed – I have fresh readings also, princeps maximus,’ said Taithan *‘To the left, north-east. Two definite energy signatures.’*

‘Five so far,’ replied Sythika.

‘Eight, princeps maximus,’ Targilio corrected her. *‘Now we have eight readings, all within two kilometres of my position.’*

‘Time to withdraw, hunt-pair,’ Sythika told her Warhounds. ‘The enemy must have seen you by now.’

‘There might be more,’ protested Taithan. *‘I swear there’s another reading directly north. Another thirty seconds to make sure...’*

‘Now!’ growled the princeps. ‘We fight as one today. This is not a raid on a supply column, this is pitched battle. Concentration of force means everything we have against a single target at a time. That includes both of you. The enemy are coming from the left and ahead – fade south-east and bring them to us. That should give us a flank to work against. We take the fight to them and hit before they know our strength. Battle group, attack speed.’

It was impossible for Sythika’s flesh-and-bone body to feel the way *Evocatus* felt – if the MIU-patterned programming and sensory augur inputs could be deemed feelings at all. Neurons and synapses could only learn and re-learn so much, so it was that the energy signatures of the converging enemy Titans came to the princeps maximus in a conflation of touch and smell. Like a scent carried on a wind, the energy output of the enemy Titans left unique traces across

Evocatus' multi-spectral arrays.

A kilometre distant, almost directly north, she could feel the ponderous approach of another Warlord – she had dubbed it '*Abomination*'. A second Warlord was further east, a kilometre and half from contact, nothing more than a swirl of heat in the raging storm. This one she had named '*Abhorrent*'. A trio of Reavers completed the enemy battle group within striking distance – several other unidentified enemy signatures flittered through the storm at greater distances, a few more minutes from engagement.

Had it not been for the dust cloud, the battle would have already begun.

Less than two kilometres apart, the battle groups were well within the range of the support weapons they carried – in the case of *Indictus* that was the rocket launchers of *Glorious* and *Conqueror*. Yet without a solid targeting contact, such longer-ranged weapons were rendered no more useful than the gatling blasters and las-blasters that would come into play soon enough.

Indictus formed up closely to each other, the Warlords flanking the Reavers to mask their reactor signatures while the two Warhounds criss-crossed ahead, feinting and retreating, threatening to dart around a flank, keeping the enemy battle group occupied like a pugilist throwing out jabs while waiting for the moment to land a more punishing blow.

The input from *Abomination* was getting stronger, only seven hundred and fifty metres away. Sythika could feel the pulse of void shields throbbing through the storm cloud. In her visual feed from *Tempestum* – a crude, detached interaction compared to the MIU impulses of *Evocatus* – the princeps maximus saw glimmers of blue in the grey, the merest hint of energy shields.

'Weapons ready,' she told the moderati and received their affirmatives. From the reactor bay the engineers sent their reports: all systems optimal and stable.

'*Detecting a locking beam, princeps maximus,*' warned Dorfana in *Conqueror*. '*Second Titan advancing in the energy wake of Abomination.*'

More than one, it quickly transpired. So close their void shields had merged, two Reaver Titans had used the much larger Warlord to screen their advance.

'The plan is the same,' Sythika quickly told the other princeps. 'Target locks, full bombardment of the Warlord. We'll deal with the Reavers when it has been crippled. Hunt-pair, start stripping their shields.'

The Warhounds sent their acknowledgements and surged forward, disappearing into the storm. Sythika slowed the advance of *Evocatus*, directing more power to the scanning arrays and targeting cogitators. A few seconds later, the tactic paid off as the Warlord Titan shuddered with momentary pleasure – it had found its

prey. On the visual displays, targeting reticules danced across the wavering image of *Abomination*, flickering between amber partial-locks and red full-locks.

'Feedback,' snarled Dolco. 'I'm getting a judder from the mounting pins, *Sahsu*. No target lock.'

From the console of the other moderati came the whine of lock-beams finding their mark. A moment before the princeps gave the order to open fire a spark of plasma erupted from the cannon of *Conqueror* to her right, a miniature star that seared into the bank of roiling sand. The energy bolt splashed against the void shields of *Abomination*, momentarily lighting the sphere of energy with an orange glow.

'Hold fire for a hull shot,' Sythika admonished her fellow princeps. 'Shields are still active.'

'Apologies, princeps maximus – our heat exchangers are malfunctioning. Containment was weakening.'

Sythika thought to order to open fire and *Evocatus* responded, flooding its systems with power to the moderati's systems. One gatling blaster roared forth a fusillade of shells, throwing ripples into the dust cloud that turned into shimmering explosions of power from the enemy Warlord's void shields. A las-blaster snapped in response, coursing white beams over the shields of *Glorious*, engulfing the Reaver in a dome of coruscating purple.

The second gatling blaster burst into life, its ailment rectified by the attentions of the tech-priests and their orderlies. More heavy shells screamed into *Abomination*'s defensive fields with showers of sparks and forks of black lightning.

The Warhounds had manoeuvred into position with their short-ranged but rapid-firing mega-bolters, scouring the shields of the lead enemy engine. Thousands of explosive shells ripped at the void shields, a blaze of fluctuating light amid a corona of energies, dust particles that lashed like tentacles. More fire from *Conqueror* descended on the traitor machine, rockets and plasma slammed into the exposed metalwork of its hull as the final void shield generator sparked and spasmed its last efforts. Fully revealed for the first time, *Abomination* was an ancient machine, easily as old as *Evocatus*, its carapace scarred by millennia of repairs, the livery of black enamel decorated with yellow flames pocked and cracked from uncountable battles.

Sythika recognised the markings immediately. The enemy came from a Legio made infamous during the schism of the Horus Heresy, who had betrayed the Machine God and, more pointedly, nearly wiped out the Legio Praesagius. The

Fire Masters.

The traitor did not submit meekly to this rude attention; continuing volleys from its paired lasblasters hammered at *Glorious*, ripping away the last of the Reaver's void shields moments after *Abomination*'s defences were down. Triumph filled Sythika from the beast's thoughts, urging her to deliver the killing blow to the wounded prey.

'*Targeting*,' Pharuius declared an instant before Sythika was going to call for the volcano cannon.

Activity aboard *Evocatus* paused while power siphoned from secondary chambers to the massive energy weapon slung upon the right arm. Activation runes lit up in sequence around the moderati, bathing his face with amber and then green.

Abomination opened fire in the gap between *Glorious*' shields failing and the volcano cannon unleashing a sun-bright lance of power. Tank-sized quake cannon shells smashed into the Reaver, splintering metres-thick ceramite and metal, twisting the reinforced skeleton beneath. The beam of the volcano cannon hit *Abomination* high across the carapace – too high for Sythika, whose irritation surged through the MIU and caused *Evocatus* to sound its war-horns in response. One of the macro-cannons exploded at the touch of the beam, its mounting sheared through, but the traitor Warlord was otherwise unharmed.

Conqueror moved to interpose itself between *Abomination* and *Glorious*, fully active void shields gleaming like moonlight in the swirls of dust and laser. The enemy Reavers were now clear of the Warlord that had masked them; pencil-thin targeting beams flickered in the darkness, their weapons searching for a solid lock.

'Keep on *Abomination*, fire for full effect,' Sythika urged her battle group, trusting their void shields to weather the fire about to erupt from the pair of Reavers. Plasma and rockets burst in red and blue fire over the beleaguered traitor, turning exposed infrastructure to slag, honour banners set ablaze.

Crossfire from the Fire Masters Reavers drove the Warhounds back, even together no match for a full Battle Titan bombardment. With the line of fire open on *Conqueror*, the Reavers turned their attention on Dorfana's war engine.

'*We can handle this*,' the princeps of *Conqueror* assured her companions. '*Finish the Warlord, then we'll let these traitors have a taste of our wrath.*'

The volcano cannon was seconds from recharging but the continued advance of both sides had brought them almost to closing distance – within minimum range of the Titan-killing weapon.

‘Scanntor, get ready.’

‘Always ready, princeps,’ the moderati of the power fist replied. At his thought, the immense energy-wreathed gauntlet flexed in anticipation of the combat.

‘Moving to melee range, cover our back,’ Sythika told the rest of the battle group.

The very moment that she thought to engage *Abomination* in close combat, the beast latched its thoughts onto the other enemy Warlord. The princeps maximus had not been ignoring it, but had reasoned that *Abhorrent* would wait its turn after *Abomination* was destroyed. *Evocatus* fixed upon the signal of the approaching war engine, dragging her thoughts with it.

The sense of it – the smell of the plasma reactor as Sythika felt it – was familiar.

Too familiar.

She felt the beast in the heart of *Evocatus* rebelling against her command. New images flooded her thoughts, more powerful than anything she had encountered from the Titan before. These were not random mimetic-engrams, these were fixed processor patterns, all but ingrained into the hardware with continued playback...

She watched stars fall from the sky and a city burn. Evocatus had no name for this place, no words for what was happening other than rage – a deep-seated hatred and a thirst for revenge that overpowered all other consideration.

Sythika knew well what she experienced, though she had never before seen it, and the events witnessed had taken place ten thousand years before.

Calth. The great betrayal, when Titan had turned against Titan even as the legios had embarked to take the Great Crusade into the furthest stretches of the Eastern Fringe.

That had been the treachery of the Fire Masters, when the other Legio had turned its guns on the defenceless True Messengers in the cause of Horus.

Sythika was powerless to resist as *Evocatus* swung away from *Abomination*, all sensors and weapons turned towards *Abhorrent*. Another flare of recollection came – *of the other Titan raking gunfire across Evocatus’ carapace from the flank, setting fires in its gut with pinpoint strikes...*

Pain.

The closest a Titan felt to pain was pulses through the damage control systems, but to Sythika it came as mortal pain, in her chest and heart. Worse still was the sense of incomprehension, the dull but living thoughts of *Evocatus* quickly becoming a mass of hurt and confusion that its ally would harm it in this way.

‘Princeps, what are your orders?’

‘Evocatus, *designate new target?*’

‘Target lock lost, volcano cannon off-line.’

‘*Void shield failing! Princeps majoris, we must respond!*’

Sythika felt the alarm of her moderati, heard the protests of her fellow princeps. She had to regain control of the beast. She had to master *Evocatus* and finish *Abomination*, or the battle was surely lost.

She took a torch into the cave with her, hoping that the light would shine into the heart of the beast, to show it the way out of the darkness. Its growls and snarls betrayed a fury held in check for thousands of years, now on the verge of breaking free. She knew its desires. She shared the will to rend and tear and bite and slash and trample every part of its foe. The animal rage consumed her, and just as the fear threatened to overwhelm her, so the ire of the beast swamped every sensation.

She tried to ride it, to soothe the roaring that raged as wailing war-horns. She tried to calm nerves afire with thoughts of vengeance, data displays and warning lights red across the board as *Evocatus* dragged on its power reserves to fuel its strides towards the hated enemy, pushing the plasma reactor to overdrive.

The void shields flickered, falling away like shucked skin, a weight discarded so that the beast could break into a charge.

Defenceless, they would surely be broken upon the guns of *Abhorrent*, which she could feel now as a malign gaze upon her, its targeting arrays fixing upon the Warlord that so recklessly hurtled toward it.

She tried again, but the beast lashed at her, carving open her thoughts with a snarl and swipe.

Sythika retreated, trying all she could to emanate calm, to pour stillness into the turmoil of the beast’s thoughts. She was water on the fire, the stillness of night against the raging sun of noon.

The hatred and rage went unquenched. Her thoughts buffeted and stretched, she almost lost contact through the MIU. She narrowly averted total disaster – mindlock, or worse, a full reality divorce – and gripped onto the metaphorical hide of the beast as it rampaged around its cave, lashing out at random.

‘You have to take control, princeps!’ Dolco sounded like he was giving her an order, but she realised it was a plea.

Take control.

Sythika was not sure how. For all the years she had ridden with the beast they

had fought together, a partnership, not mistress and slave. Mutual respect had bound them together.

Yet the thing that now burned her thoughts with searing lashes of ire was not the beast unleashed, the animal that had never really been tamed. It was the feral spirit of *Evocatus* as laid down by the ancients, and it cared nothing for the desires and fears of fleeting mortal lives.

Control.

There was no other option. Sythika had to dare the whirlwind of the beast's thoughts, risk having her persona shredded by the bellowing, storming incarnation of fury that had erupted through the MIU.

Her thoughts swelled as her own failings came back to haunt her. Every time she had appeased the beast, she had never really been in control. She was a disgrace to her rank.

Fuelled by this, her anger rose, but she did not allow it to break free like the beast. Instead she channelled it into ball of disdain for the creature that had cowed her for so long.

Sythika asserted herself, striding into the cave alight with flame from head to foot, a whip of fire in her hand. She stared the beast in the eye, lash ready to strike.

'You are mine,' she growled. 'I am the lord here. I am the princeps.'

The beast roared, but there was uncertainty in its rage.

'Submit!' roared Sythika, the command like the boom of a detonation, a white star of indignation that filled the cave with light, leaving no shadow for the beast to dwell within.

Exposed, confronted, no longer the unseen dread, the beast fled from her unyielding gaze.

In an instant, green lights flickered into life across the consoles and displays. A chorus of relief and triumph from the moderati acknowledged that the systems were back under their control.

A check of the chronometer revealed that the confrontation had taken a matter of seconds, though it had felt like hours. Sythika felt calmer than ever before as she eased her thoughts through the massive war machine's systems, guiding limbs as though they were her own, feeling the burn of the plasma reactor like the heart in her chest. For the first time since she had come to *Evocatus* she felt truly one with the machine, no longer scared of it, of the responsibility and the risks.

She turned the Titan back, ponderously coming upon *Abomination*. As Scanntor

readied the power fist and *Evocatus* picked up speed for the charge, Sythika let a reassuring thought flow through the MIU link.

‘Together, we will right the ancient wrongs,’ she assured the Titan. ‘Together, vengeance will be ours.’

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gav Thorpe is the author of the Horus Heresy novels *Deliverance Lost*, *Angels of Caliban* and *Corax*, as well as the novella *The Lion*, which formed part of the *New York Times* bestselling collection *The Primarchs*. He is particularly well-known for his Dark Angels stories, including the Legacy of Caliban series. His Warhammer 40,000 repertoire further includes the Path of the Eldar series, the The Beast Arises novels *The Emperor Expects* and *The Beast Must Die*, Horus Heresy audio dramas *Raven's Flight*, *Honour to the Dead* and *Raptor*, and a multiplicity of short stories. For Warhammer, Gav has penned the End Times novel *The Curse of Khaine*, the Time of Legends trilogy, *The Sundering*, and much more besides. He lives and works in Nottingham.

The crew of the Baneblade *Mars Triumphant* wage bitter war against the orks – but old rivalries threaten to doom them all.



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