

BLOOD CRIES FOR BLOOD

James Peaty

AS THE CHILL air whipped around the cabin of squad flyer nine-two-four, the pilot couldn't help but smile at how typical it was of life on Persana that something like this could happen on the coldest night of the year.

They'd been leaving the fortress, flying over a crowd that had assembled outside when, from below, someone had fired upon the flyer and shattered the rear shield.

The crowd had been massing nightly outside the imposing building over the last week, protesting at alleged Enforcer brutality in the city's Downside. That in itself made the pilot smile. How could you be anything other than brutal on the streets of the most degenerate slum this side of the Rhuric Nebula, especially with the threat of civil war looming?

But then that was Persana for you.

Not much made sense.

Clearing the Downside, flyer nine-two-four moved towards the power station at the city's southernmost point. Two officers were staking out the station and they needed a full sweep of the surrounding area before they could move in.

It was boring work, made worse by the added ventilation that chilled the pilot and his partner to their bones.

To pass the time they listened to the commercial band transmissions while their spot-lamps swiped around the base of the fossilised diamond that powered the city, fuelled the planet's economy and dominated the southern skyline.

'...spokesman said that no charges would be brought against Merden Jorsted. The Governor's aide is being held after allegations were made linking him to an off-world organised crime ring. The news adds further strain to the already tense relations between the Governor's office and the Enforcers, who are in dispute because of the Governor's reluctance to call in Imperial Guard reinforcements to help deal with the southern secessionist threat...'

‘Boring.’

The pilot spat a lump of phlegm out of the side window as he switched off the transmission. Usually his partner could deal with his dismissive attitude, but today it irritated him.

‘Don’t you ever take an interest in current affairs?’

The pilot snorted.

‘As if I give a shi-‘

The radio crackled back into life.

‘Flyer nine-two-four, do you copy?’

The pilot flicked a switch above his head.

‘This is flyer nine-two-four. We’re in position over the power station.’

‘Nine-two-four, get back to the fortress. We’ve got a full scale riot breaking out here and we need aerial support.’

The pilot turned and shared a look of exasperation with his partner.

‘Confirmed, control, we’re en route.’

As the flyer peeled round, the pilot looked into his aft monitor at the image of two small figures waiting near the south entrance.

‘You’re on your own now, boys.’

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AS THE TAIL lights of the flyer receded into the distance, Enforcer Klimt shivered. The night air was bitter. The cold seemed to be burning him from within. To stave off the growing discomfort he amped up the internal heat on his

body glove. It didn't seem to make much difference.

He rubbed his arms and prayed they'd hurry up and get inside the power plant soon. Unfortunately, he knew they had to wait a while before making their entry.

Damn regulations.

Shifting in the saddle of his bike, he looked over at Yedas.

The older man seemed anxious. It was unlike him but, considering recent events, his distraction was understandable.

As usual, Yedas was railing against the regime of Governor Schaar.

'He knows I know he's dirty. That's why he wants me off of the street.'

Klimt was used to Yedas's' rants, but in the last few weeks they had escalated to a whole new level.

'Personal prejudices aside, I think Schaar's done a good job,' Klimt said.

'You're young,' Yedas snorted. 'I've been on this planet for twenty years. I know what it was like before he came along.'

'And that was?'

Yedas pulled out the necklace he wore under his uniform. It was the only memento he kept from his homeworld and he had a habit of playing with it when he was nervous.

'More disciplined. The scum from the Downside knew their place.' He let the necklace hang outside his uniform.

'The poor like Schaar because he blames us for their problems. The rich tolerate him because they make money and now this "war" will mean that he can tighten his grip on power and line his pockets even more.'

Klimt shrugged his shoulders.

'Things seem to be improving though.'

Yedas bridled. Klimt took this as a bad sign. Even though he was only eighteen months into his posting on Persana he knew his partner's body language intimately.

'Schaar is a passing trend.'

Klimt laughed and tried to make a joke of Yedas's escalating anger.

'Maybe to you, but the rest of us have to get on with the world as it is and the one constant is that everything changes in time.'

Yedas stared at him without blinking.

'That sounds like heresy to me.'

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ONCE INSIDE THE power station the two Enforcers moved stealthily through the cavernous lower hall. As they approached the gang of six who stood near the stairs to the upper gantry Yedas shattered the silence.

'Enforcer! Put down your weapons!'

Klimt's surprise was buried under a hail of fire. The two officers quickly dived behind a pair of adjacent coolant towers as bullets ripped through the metal and gouged up rockrete.

As Yedas returned fire and one of the criminals fell, two of the gang ran for the upper levels. Seeing this, the older Enforcer turned to his younger partner.

'I need you to cover me.'

Klimt nodded and began offering covering fire as Yedas weaved his way from behind the coolant tower to the ladder that led to the upper gantry and the central core.

Continuing to duck, he quickly fired off six shots. The tower took more

rounds into its metallic shell. Hearing the tearing and denting of the metal that protected him, Klimt knew that his haven wouldn't be that for much longer.

Diving into the crossfire, Klimt began to roll along the cold, hard floor. Rockrete chips rose up as he evaded the bullets that buzzed around him.

His body glove softened most of the impact, but it still jarred him from his jaw down to the base of his spine.

There were three gunmen firing at Klimt. They were positioned behind a stack of empty barrels covered with a dirty tarpaulin.

Klimt continued to fire. As he reached a similar vantage point behind a smaller stack of barrels, one of his shots caught the central gunman right between the eyes. A halo of crimson jetted upwards.

Above the gunmen's heads hung a platform suspended by two chains on a pulley. It was used to winch waste to the upper levels to help power the secondary core and was made of wrought iron, about four inches thick and roughly twenty feet wide.

Rising from his crouched position, catching a bullet in his left arm as he moved, Klimt fired off two rounds at the chains securing the platform to the pulley. The chains broke and it fell, crushing the gunman beneath the huge panel of metal. The noise was deafening.

As Klimt emerged from his position. His arm burning from the wound, he assessed the scene. Four lay dead. That left two more on the upper levels being pursued by Yedas.

Klimt heard the gunshot from above.

As he rushed along the upper gantry, Klimt blocked out the sound and fury of the liquid metal core of the central generator.

Stepping out onto the circular platform that surrounded the top of the core, Klimt could see no one. Turning and surveying the scene, he paused when he heard a noise behind him.

Leading with his pistol, he knelt and moved towards a tiny alcove. The source

of the noise was the low moaning of a man. Klimt moved in closer. He was small, feral and dressed shabbily. Blood poured down his face from a head wound that appeared to have been inflicted by a blow from the handle of a pistol or a similar blunt object.

The man recoiled as Klimt pushed his gun into his face.

‘Where’s your partner?’ Klimt shouted.

The man snivelled and pointed at the bubbling core.

‘And the other Enforcer officer?’ Klimt asked desperately.

The man hesitated. His eyes danced and refused to make contact with Klimt’s. The young Enforcer lost his composure. He grabbed the cowering criminal by the throat and pushed his sidearm forcefully at the man’s head.

‘Answer me, or I swear I will shoot you where you sit!’

The shaking criminal finally spoke.

‘He... he struggled with Jonek... They both fell into the core.’

On hearing this Klimt released the man’s arm, which he was gripping like a vice. Klimt fell back on the platform onto his backside.

He let his pistol drop and suddenly felt cold again.

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AS THE GUN barrel pushed tighter against his head, one thought swirled around in Sacris’s mind.

‘I’m an idiot!’

How it had happened, he wasn’t sure. Fatigue after a twenty-four hour crowd control shift? Maybe, but every other member of the Enforcers stationed on

Persana was out doing the same and they weren't being held at gunpoint in the lobby of the fortress.

But then it wasn't everyday that the Planetary Governor was assassinated.

As the only other two officers in the foyer at the time tried to placate the screaming perp, Sacris found it ironic that he should get caught out like a first year cadet on a day when virtually every other Enforcer was out trying to prevent Persana from slipping further into anarchy.

If he hadn't begun to black out from the pressure on his throat, he may even have allowed himself a sardonic smile.

The assailant was young, barely out of adolescence. He was nervous as hell and coming down off of Idea or one of the other low grade chems that the denizens of the Downside frequently used.

'Stay back or I'll shoot!'

As the elevator doors opened and deposited an unusually pre-occupied Enforcer Klimt into the fortress foyer, the last thing he was anticipating was becoming embroiled in a hostage situation.

That his imminent departure to a new posting on Caldana was now on hold, thanks to the fall out from Governor Schaar's assassination, merely compounded the confusion he already felt due to the package that lay open on his bunk upstairs.

All available Enforcers had been placed on active duty until further notice, but Klimt was having a hard time focusing on anything at the present time.

That changed the moment Klimt saw the young officer with the gun pointed at his head. All thoughts of personal distraction became secondary.

All that mattered was the job before him.

The medic and the duty officer turned sharply as they saw Klimt striding towards them. He was dressed in his blue Enforcer uniform and his sidearm was clearly on view.

‘Don’t do anything rash,’ the duty officer squealed. Klimt shot him a look that let him know exactly what he thought of his advice.

The shooter was becoming visibly more agitated. The narcotic euphoria of Idea had made it seem perfectly rational to overpower the tired officer who’d wearily taken off his helmet and left his gun holster unbuckled. But now, without Idea whispering in his ear, the implications of this action were quickly catching up with him.

‘Stay back!’

Klimt said nothing, but continued to move forward until he faced the gunman and Sacris barely ten feet away.

The gunman was perspiring profusely, his hands shaking rhythmically. The gun, growing ever slicker in his palm, was erratically working the circumference of Sacris’s temple.

Sacris remained rigid. His body locked in position so as to not give his captor any sudden cause to fire. Even though his shoulders burned and his concentration was waning, when Klimt nodded, Sacris knew he would be okay.

‘I told you the first time, stay ba-‘

He didn’t know what the object was - an explosive? a knife? - but as it left Klimt’s hand on a trajectory towards his face, he reasoned that he had to shoot it.

Raising the gun from his hostage’s temple to shoot the object in mid-flight gave Sacris the opening he needed. In a second he had shifted his body enough to throw the shooter off balance.

Three shots rang out.

As the medic quickly moved in to examine his neck, Sacris looked up and saw Klimt approaching. He began to formulate an appropriate ‘thank you’, but before he could open his mouth, Klimt walked straight past him.

Kneeling down alongside the gunman’s body, Klimt picked up the bullet-shattered dataplate. Without breaking his stride, Klimt tossed the broken dataplate at the surprised duty officer and continued walking back towards the

elevator.

‘I was going to get you to send that to Caldana for me. Broadcast a personal transmission instead; tell them I won’t be leaving here until the trouble in the city is over.’

As he entered the elevator and turned to face the eerie silence of the foyer, Sacris and Klimt shared a glance.

In the two years he had been stationed on Persana, Sacris had never spoken to Klimt, but his reputation preceded him.

He was a legend among the other officers, forging his formidable reputation on countless cases during the decade of bloody civil strife. Many recent graduates took it on themselves to observe Klimt in action. It was a way of learning how to deal with life on the tinderbox that was Persana, something even other senior officers encouraged.

Sacris had studied Klimt from afar and knew his expression, style and body language as well as he knew his own. It was therefore all the more surprising for Sacris to see Klimt nervously fiddling with his pistol as he waited for the elevator doors to close.

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IT WASN’T UNTIL the medic had checked and discharged him from duty that Sacris realised just how quiet the fortress actually was.

As he stood by the near-indestructible plastiglass window of his quarters and looked down, Sacris thought that - without sound - the violence and movement of the riot in the city below was almost poetic.

Angry oranges and yellows were crowned by thick black smoke. It looked a lot like the ceremonial war paintings that Sacris’s grandfather used to paint back on their homeworld.

Sacris slid his hand across the control panel that was mounted to the left of the window. The plastiglass silently disappeared into its distributor frame. The noise from below was deafening.

The din of breaking glass, gunshots and human screams collided, each of them vying for primacy but merely flattening together into the collective sound of the city tearing itself apart.

Sacris flicked the switch on the control panel and the plastiglass reformed in an instant. Silence returned and the only reminder of the terror below was the acrid smell of smoke and fire that filled the room.

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THE CONTENTS OF the package had deeply unsettled Klimt. Apart from the interlude in the foyer he'd been wrestling with its implications all day. Like some weird code it brought together the ghosts of the past with the twilight of his present, but without any pattern as to its deeper meaning.

As he sat alone, staring at the twisting object hanging from the handlebars, Klimt finally knew what he had to do.

*

THE AIR WAS always cooler in the vehicle pool and many Enforcers used to escape down there when the pressure of law enforcement on Persana got too much. Sacris was usually one of them, but tonight, as he entered the open basement, he was going there to apologise.

He'd approached Klimt's quarters with a certain amount of trepidation and was disappointed when he discovered - after finally mustering the courage to knock on the senior officer's door - that he wasn't there.

As he'd turned to leave, he heard a voice behind him.

'He's in the vehicle pool.'

It was Enforcer Magellan. He was standing in the doorway of his quarters situated across the corridor from Klimt's.

Magellan was recuperating from an incident in the Downside two months previously and leant on crutches as he smiled at Sacris. A street gang peddling liquid Idea had gotten the upper hand on Magellan and his partner. The incident had cost Magellan's partner his life and it had been touch and go as to whether Magellan would follow. Luckily, the medics had managed to save him, albeit at the expense of one of his kidneys.

'When was that?'

'Five minutes ago.'

He thanked Magellan and made his way down the corridor to the turbo shaft at the end of the hall.

Entering the relatively empty vehicle pool, Sacris saw Klimt was sitting on the saddle of his bike. He looked as if he were looking at something suspended on his handlebars.

As he approached, Sacris wasn't sure what he should say. 'Thank you,' was the intention, but he was concerned that he would appear even less substantial than he had when Klimt saved his life.

On reflection, Sacris realised that pride was getting in the way of sense. This was a mistake that Enforcers were encouraged to avoid.

He began to walk over.

*

SETTING TO WITHIN a few feet of the senior Enforcer, Sacris noticed that Klimt appeared to take an object that was hanging from the handlebars and put it in his pocket.

Klimt looked up and stared at the young officer.

‘It’s Sacris, isn’t it?’

Klimt could tell that the younger man was a little awe struck, but he continued to look into Sacris’s eyes without blinking. It was a trick he’d developed over the years that managed to unnerve even the most hardened perp.

Apparently it seemed to work just as well on fellow Enforcers too.

‘Nice work upstairs.’

Sacris felt himself turning red with shame. He knew that this was just a foretaste of the ridicule he would get from the massed ranks of his colleagues. That the first assault came from someone he admired hurt even more.

‘I... I came down here to say thank you.’

Klimt waved Sacris away.

‘Forget it. You survived - that’s all that matters.’

‘Thanks to you.’

Klimt let a small but ironic grin crack his otherwise stern face.

‘Well, let me give you some advice -don’t let it happen again.’

Sacris noticed that despite his calm demeanour, Klimt was nervously moving his hands on the handlebars.

‘Are you going out into the city to help with the pacification?’

Klimt paused long enough to arouse Sacris’s suspicion.

‘No... I’ve got to follow up a lead on the assassination.’

This struck Sacris as odd.

‘And you were going alone?’

Klimt gave the younger man a withering stare.

‘Yes.’

Sacris looked the elder Enforcer directly in the eye.

‘It’s a breach of regulations to go into a potentially life-threatening situation without back-up.’

Klimt held Sacris’s gaze.

‘You think I’m unaware of regulations?’

Sacris smiled and Klimt looked away.

It was true, he needed back-up, and he knew the young Enforcer was angling to come with him. Maybe to get out of the fortress, but more likely to try and make it up to Klimt for saving his life earlier. The reasoning didn’t matter.

The older Enforcer paused. Who else was going to help him? Everyone else was either out in the streets fighting to maintain order, recovering from injury or ass-welded to a desk job. And did he really have to tell this eager, but - from what he’d seen so far - unimpressive, young officer the whole truth?

Klimt looked up and nodded his head in the direction of the exit.

‘Suit up and be back here in five minutes.’

*

THE RIDE INTO the Downside was hard. Burning vehicles lined the streets. Broken glass covered the sidewalks, shop fronts were ablaze and buildings were being ransacked indiscriminately.

It was the worst day on the streets that Klimt had seen. The atmosphere was pure poison and the relationship between the population and the Enforcers which, thanks to Governor Schaar's skilful playing off of these two opposing forces, permanently bubbled somewhere between hostile and hateful was now boiling over in a way that it had always threatened, but somehow just avoided.

Turning off from the main street, the concentration of violence thinned out considerably and the road ahead seemed clear.

Most of the rioting was occurring near the Central Amphitheatre in the heart of the Downside. This was where Schaar had been giving his annual Festival of Light address when two sniper shots from a nearby rooftop turned the world upside down.

It was funny. As Klimt rode through the streets of the Downside, he couldn't help but remember the first time he experienced its degenerate charm.

His first sight of Persana had been from the air. Through the plastiglass window of the transport ship, it appeared to him as a gleaming jewel dwarfed and bracketed by the giant twin structures of the power station and the fortress at either end of the city.

He didn't know then that life inside the 'jewel' was anything but precious.

Klimt had been expecting a squad flyer to take him to the fortress from the spaceport, but was surprised to discover that he would be sharing a bike with the man who had just introduced himself as his partner.

'You want to learn about Persana?' Yedas had asked as they walked to the bike.

'Sure,' Klimt had replied glibly.

The only thing that matched the arrogance of Klimt's response was the shock he received as they hit the Downside.

Sat on the back of the bike, Klimt was rapt at the procession of human and alien life at its rawest that unfolded before him.

The energy on the streets was palpable. Street vendors and musicians rubbed

up against pick-pockets and gang members, all of them trying to scratch a living on the grey, eroded sidewalks, alongside Salvationists who believed that the Emperor himself was coming to take everyone up to the feet of his Golden Throne in one enormous rapture.

It was ugly and beautiful in equal measure.

They stopped in the traffic and Yedas turned to him.

‘Bet you’ve never seen such a collection of freaks, weirdo’s and outcasts?’

Klimt had to agree that he hadn’t.

Yedas began to laugh as the traffic began to move again.

‘And they think that fraud Schaar is going to save them?’

The engine roar drowned out his laughter, but Klimt could feel the vibrations through his partners body as the bike drove on through the night.

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THE TWO ENFORCERS arrived at the grim hab-block on the edge of the downside just after midnight. The building stood four storeys high and its exterior brickwork was half eaten away by the chemical storms that occasionally befell this part of town.

The stairwell was deserted and rain damage stained the walls. Sacris brushed corrosive moisture drops from his uniform as he climbed the steps.

On reaching the fourth floor, the two Enforcers turned left and continued down the dark, peeling corridor until they reached door number four-zero-four.

Klimt nodded at Sacris. Both men drew and cocked their pistols.

The rotten door flew off of its hinges with one kick from Klimt’s right boot. Both Enforcers entered the room crouched, their guns drawn. The apartment was

silent.

As Klimt went off to search the other rooms, Sacris tossed the sitting room. Not only was it dark and dank, but the floor was covered with rotting food and assorted garbage.

In the corner, by a dust-encrusted pict-viewer, were fifteen identical boxes, stacked up like cans of provisions.

Each box contained forty inhalers. They were meant for citizens with respiratory problem but their alternative street use was as a delivery system for a potent vaporised form of the drug Idea.

Sacris was pretty certain that the occupant of the apartment was not a licensed apothecary.

Exiting the main room, Sacris called after the senior officer. There was no response. As he moved through the dark apartment, the younger officer began to realise that he was enjoying himself.

His train of thought was derailed the moment he entered the bedroom.

The corpse that lay atop the unmade bed had been shot in the head, the rear of the skull obliterated by the exit velocity of the bullet. The wall behind the bed was daubed a violent red.

But it wasn't the blood that made the wall striking.

Virtually every inch was papered with a vast collage comprised of images and text relating to the late Planetary Governor Schaar.

'By the Emperor...' Sacris whispered.

Many of the images in the collage had been culled from a variety of news sources, yet some had obviously been taken covertly by stealth camera at various public events.

Different news headlines - detailing Schaar's strained relationship with the Imperium and the Enforcers - bracketed and bordered the images. Judging by the yellowing of much of the central part of the collage, the pictures and articles had

been built up over a substantial period of time.

The most recent article was dated two weeks ago and detailed Schaar's continued resistance to the Imperium's plans to call in the forces once and for all.

It had been a popular move with the general populace of the Downside.

Written through the middle of the collage in fresh, black paint was one word: Heretic!

Klimt stood transfixed by the wall. Sacris couldn't help but look at the body.

The man on the bed was small and feral in appearance and wore threadbare clothes that were in keeping with the general decor of the apartment. His face was contorted. His eyes rolled up inside the lids.

Resting across the body was an AP-24 sniper's rifle. Neither needed to say that it was the same type of gun that had been used to kill the Governor.

Sacris rubbed his hand through his hair before finally speaking.

'Looks like that's the Schaar case closed.'

Klimt raised his head and looked over at Sacris with suspicion.

'Why do you say that?'

Initially Sacris thought his superior was joking, but soon realised he wasn't.

'The shooter obviously came back here after he killed Schaar and sucked down on the barrel.'

Klimt motioned with his head in the direction of the wall.

'Pull the bullet out of the wall.'

Sacris looked over at the hole in the wall where the bullet had entered. Pulling his knife from his gauntlet, he dug into the plaster and extracted the bullet from the wall.

It fell into his palm. Sacris examined it closely.

‘This bullet is from a pistol.’

Klimt nodded. He shifted on the spot, looking down at the corpse on the bed before adding:

‘This man was murdered by Governor Schaar’s assassin.’

Sacris took a moment to check what he’d just heard.

‘How can you be so sure?’

‘Believe me,’ Klimt said.

Sacris sat down on the edge of the bed. He didn’t know what to think.

‘Sir... what’s going on here?’

There was silence in the room, a silence that overpowered the stench of damp and death. The situation was a lot more serious than Klimt had envisaged and Sacris had seen too much already.

He reached into his right side pocket and handed its contents to Sacris.

Sitting in his palm was a ceremonial necklace and a single bullet. The bullet was of the same calibre as that used by the rifle currently lying on top of the corpse.

‘I don’t understand...’

The older officer relaxed his stance and looked down at the floor as he began speaking.

‘Earlier today - before I saved you - I received a package.’

Klimt shifted awkwardly on the spot.

‘Inside was the necklace, the bullet and a printed note with this address.’

Klimt looked over at the corpse wistfully.

‘I didn’t know he lived here.’

‘Who’s he?’

‘He is, or was, Scabus Jenk.’ Klimt paused for a second. ‘He was also the last person to see my partner alive ten years ago.’

Sacris looked down at the necklace and the bullet in his hand.

‘You think he sent you this?’

Klimt smiled weakly.

‘Someone did.’

Closing his fist around the necklace, Sacris took a moment to process what he’d just been told. Klimt stood by the window looking out at the oppressive night sky.

Sacris got up from the bed and walked into the bathroom. He felt dirty and needed to wash his face. Klimt was still staring out of the window when he reentered the bedroom.

‘Someone definitely knew you were coming.’

Klimt turned and saw Sacris standing before him holding a cheap, white envelope.

‘It was taped to the mirror in the bathroom.’

Klimt’s name was written on the envelope in black ink. He took it and opened it hesitantly, scanning the note inside.

He let the envelope and note fall to the floor.

‘We have to leave.’

Before Sacris could reply, Klimt had walked past him and out of the door.

Sacris moved over and picked up the crumpled, printed note from the floor. It read: Ten years asleep. See you at the mausoleum.

*

AS THE BIKES tore through the guts of the Downside on this night of eternal darkness, Klimt couldn't help but conclude that in the last fifteen years - despite the prevailing wisdom of the time - things had gotten worse under Schaar.

A planet ravaged by war, sixty-five per cent unemployment, a forty per cent rise in crime and a population more dependent on handouts than ever before.

This was Governor Schaar's legacy.

As he and Sacris turned down the deserted back streets, Klimt noticed a huge mural, freshly painted on the wall of an abandoned market. The mural read: Blood cries for blood.

The words evoked something in Klimt, his mind wandering back ten long years.

It was just before the incident at the power station and Yedas had recently been informed that the case against Jorsted was about to be dropped. The heat was building and Governor Schaar was openly pushing for Yedas's badge; leaking allegations to the press that Yedas had roughed up Jorsted a little too much during one particular interrogation.

Klimt had been there when this had allegedly occurred and Yedas had treated Jorsted like any Enforcer would have treated any other suspected criminal on Persana.

That was the thing about Yedas. He was always by the book.

At the time, Klimt had naively thought his partner would get a token punishment and that would be it. With the benefit of hindsight and experience, he now knew that Yedas was facing suspension and redeployment to another posting or - as seemed more likely -expulsion from the force.

On this particular night, Klimt had come to see Yedas about some evidence

relating to another case. It was late and Yedas was in his room. As Klimt approached he could see that the door was open.

He peered round the half open doorway of Yedas's quarters. On the bed, Klimt could see his partner sitting, head in hands, weeping softly to himself.

Klimt hesitated. Should he go in or turn and walk away? He took a few moments before finally turning away from the door and moving back towards his own quarters.

He'd thought no more of it until tonight. But now, for the first time, he considered whether Yedas had left the door open on purpose. Perhaps in the hope that someone would find him before it was too late.

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ON ENTERING THE power plant for the first time in ten years, Klimt felt a shiver climb the length of his spine. The bullet holes in the cold floor still remained. The dents in the coolant tower still pock marked its surface.

Climbing the gantry, Klimt was overwhelmed by the heat pouring forth from the central core. For a second it was as if the last decade had never happened. He half-expected to find Scabus Jenk cowering in the same alcove.

The almost familiar voice behind him shattered Klimt's nostalgic interlude.

'You made it then?'

Klimt turned. He recognised the outline of the man before him immediately. He cleared his throat and tried to speak without betraying the emotion in his voice.

'How could I not, old friend?'

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THE EVENING AIR was cold, but inside Sacris was bubbling with rage. Not only had Klimt lied to him, he'd also forced the younger Enforcer to sit outside and wait like an errant child when Sacris reasoned Klimt needed back-up most.

He'd argued this with Klimt, but to no avail. He truly was as stubborn as his reputation suggested, but Sacris was surprised that someone could be so self-defeating in their stubbornness.

The high esteem in which he held the older officer plummeted the colder he got. What was the point of waiting around for Klimt to be brought out in a body bag while he froze to his saddle?

It was in this growing spirit of rebellion and disillusionment that Sacris finally got up from the bike and began the slow walk into the power plant via the south entrance.

I've made one bad decision already today, the young Enforcer thought to himself as he cocked and loaded his sidearm.

What difference is one more going to make?

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AS THE TWO men faced each other across the platform that surrounded the central core, the static in the air was almost audible.

'You look well, for a dead man.'

Yedas laughed. It echoed around the high roof and encircled Klimt until he wasn't sure if it was Yedas laughing after all, but rather himself.

'As droll as ever,' Yedas intoned, barely suppressing his disdain. He'd always

had a way of making Klimt feel inferior and that talent had seemingly remained undiminished in the intervening years.

‘You caught up with our old friend, Mr Jenk?’

‘I found his body, if that’s what you mean.’

Yedas put his hands into the pockets of the duster he wore. Klimt’s body tensed.

‘I’d like to say that he’d improved as a person in the decade I spent with him, but when you’re dealing with Downside scum as thick and recalcitrant as that, you’re deluding yourself if you think they ever rise above what they are.’

Yedas removed his right hand from his pocket and rubbed his face idly.

‘Still, he served his purpose.’

‘And that was?’ Klimt asked icily.

Yedas smiled at his former partner.

‘To help me set Persana on the long road to salvation.’

As he talked, Yedas appeared so perfectly calm and detached it was almost as if he were reciting lines he had learned by rote.

‘The heresy on this planet that the Enforcers have allowed makes me sick to my stomach.’

‘There has been no heresy on Persana.’

Yedas let out a muted laugh.

‘You think those heretics down in the south aren’t in league with Schaar? From the day he took office, everything he has done has been to line his own pocket and to undermine the Enforcers’ authority.’

Looking at Yedas, Klimt realised that the image of Yedas as a raving madman he had constructed in his mind on the drive over from the apartment block was being demolished before his eyes.

Yedas was many things, but mad was not one of them.

‘Why do you think he’s resisted the call for Astartes reinforcements? It would reveal this whole war, this whole abortion of a society he sits atop, as being the abomination it is.’

Klimt breathed deeply, absorbing what his former partner had just said.

‘That’s an interesting theory, but we would have uncovered this a long time ago.’

Yedas slowly slipped his hand back into the pocket of his duster.

‘When have the Enforcers ever seen beyond the end of their nose?’

Klimt’s head was beginning to throb.

‘No, you’re wrong.’

Yedas’s face darkened. It was almost as if his patience in indulging Klimt was visibly at an end.

‘Have you ever considered that it may be you who is wrong?’

Yedas pulled his pistol and fired at his former partner.

Klimt had been watching Yedas’s hand for the last minute. It enabled him to evade the shot. He hit the iron grille floor with a thud.

Drawing his own sidearm from its holster he tried to return fire, but it was kicked from his hand before he could cock or load.

The echo of the pistol smashing against metal took an eternity to die away. When it did, Klimt was faced with the snubbed barrel of Yedas’s pistol pressed into his face.

The older man looked down at Klimt with an expression that seemed peculiarly pained as his grip on the trigger tightened.

Klimt closed his eyes, waiting for the inevitable.

‘Freeze!’

Klimt opened his eyes again and saw Sacris standing behind Yedas. The younger Enforcer had his pistol pointed at the back of Yedas’s head. His face was hard and focused.

‘Put the gun down!’

Yedas threw the pistol to the floor in front of him.

‘I’m arresting you for the murder of Governor Schaar.’

Klimt repositioned himself on his haunches and moved to pick up Yedas’s pistol.

‘Raise your hands above your head,’ Sacris barked loudly.

As the older man raised his arms, he twisted and moved with a speed that Sacris was unprepared for.

Unencumbered by body armour and using his still formidable reflexes, Yedas disarmed Sacris and had the younger Enforcer’s firearm at his head before Klimt could lift the gun from the floor.

Yedas held Sacris tight as he sneered at both Enforcers.

‘And there I was thinking that the quality of recruits had reached an all-time low with your generation, Klimt.’

Klimt looked up from his position on the floor. He held Yedas’s pistol limply at his side. Raising the gun from the shadows, Klimt fired two shots from the pistol in his hand.

Sacris screamed. The bullets tore through both his legs, just above the knee.

Yedas was frozen to the spot.

As Sacris slumped to the floor, it gave Klimt just enough time to fire off another shot.

The bullet tore through Yedas’s left shoulder. The older man was knocked

back onto the floor. Klimt tried to fire again.

Clik!

The clip was empty.

By the time he had scrambled back and found his own pistol in the shadows, Yedas was gone. A trail of blood and his abandoned duster the only sign of his ever having been there.

Klimt - keeping low to the ground - moved over to the downed Sacris. Quickly binding the younger man's wounds with strapping torn from Yedas's duster, Klimt helped Sacris over to the alcove where Scabus Jenk had hidden ten years before.

*

AS HE MOVED through the hungry darkness of the power station, following the trail of blood that Yedas had left behind, Klimt continued to duck as bullets ricocheted against the railings.

Kneeling close to the floor, Klimt heard a familiar clicking sound echo across the cavernous hall.

Yedas's gun was empty.

Klimt slowly rose to his haunches and continued onwards.

Moving along the walkways, Klimt approached the open furnace of the secondary core. The heat from the core was intense and it burned furiously through the grille under his feet.

It was above the core that Klimt finally found Yedas.

He had left the walkway and was clambering across the gap between the north and south gantries. The only link between the gantries was via five parallel

platforms that hung from the plant's roof over the bubbling secondary core. This was the only route to escape via the North Entrance.

Holstering his pistol, Klimt jumped over the side and onto the first unstable platform. The platform moved significantly with his added weight, but he held onto the chains that attached the platforms to the pulleys in the roof and secured his footing.

The two men were half-way across the gap when they met face to face again.

Yedas turned as Klimt lunged for him. Deflecting Klimt's blows with his forearm, the older man knocked his former partner to the floor. As Klimt rose to his feet, Yedas pulled a knife from his boot and slashed him across the chest.

Klimt fell to the floor, bleeding and exhausted.

'You're a disgrace to the Enforcers, just as this planet is a disgrace to the Imperium.'

Klimt looked up at his former partner. He felt pity for him, but as he pulled his own blade from his gauntlet and plunged it into the side of Yedas's knee, he could only think of survival.

He turned it twice before letting go.

Yedas fell backwards in agony, his own knife falling from his hand as he grabbed at the small blade that was embedded almost to the hilt into the side of his knee.

As Yedas lay there, Klimt slowly rose to his feet. He pulled his pistol from its holster and pointed it down at Yedas.

He hesitated for a moment and then lowered the gun.

Leaving Yedas writhing on the floor, Klimt jumped back towards the relative sanctuary of the adjacent platform and raised his pistol to the roof.

Yedas could see his former partner's intention and looked at him with pleading eyes.

Klimt remained firm.

‘Give my regards to Governor Schar.’

He fired twice at the pulley supporting Yedas’s platform and watched as Yedas fell towards the molten core below.

Falling backwards onto the metal platform, for a moment Klimt allowed himself the luxury of closing his eyes.

It had been a strange day.

*

SAFE IN THE alcove, Sacris looked down at the communicator in his hand. As he dialled the fortress’s frequency, Sacris composed an entire transcript for the disciplinary hearing he was convinced he would now be facing.

The phantom hearing concluded with Sacris being found guilty of gross incompetence and sentenced to penal servitude for the rest of his days.

Sacris was already mining with the other Chem-Dogs on the deadmoons of Savlar when he felt a gun barrel press against his cheek.

Not daring to look around, Sacris was convinced that this time he was finished. He was surprised therefore to hear a familiar voice whisper into his ear.

‘Turn that off, or I’ll shoot you.’

It was Klimt.

‘You look terrible,’ Sacris ventured as he switched off the communicator.

Klimt didn’t respond.

It was Sacris who finally broke the silence.

‘Was Yedas telling the truth?’

For the first time in a decade, Klimt didn’t have an answer.

The silence spoke volumes.

*

HIS LEAST FAVOURITE section of the Enforcer fortress had always been the medical bay. Even though it had been remoulded and remodelled twice since he had been stationed here, a change in equipment and decor did not remove the antiseptic smell that Klimt always associated with death.

The one time he’d been required to stay overnight in the bay he’d discharged himself within an hour of his arrival. Yedas had laughed at him then and said...

But that was in the past now.

As Klimt turned the corner into the main ward he was struck by how many Enforcers had been hospitalised during the riots. It was estimated that a quarter of the force had been injured and about one hundred had lost their lives. He didn’t even want to think about how many civilians had been injured or killed, but surveying the scarred and blackened city this morning he knew the prognosis was not good.

‘Hey, Klimt!’

Klimt turned sharply. It was Sacris. The younger Enforcer smiled at him. Considering that he was in traction with two broken legs from the gunshot wounds that the older man had inflicted upon him, Klimt felt that was generous.

Klimt stood at the edge of the bed.

‘How are you?’

‘Well I won’t be joining a dance class anytime soon, but other than that...’

Sacris looked over at the Enforcer in the next bed. Bandages covered him from his head to his feet. He'd been set alight by a group of thugs during the riot. The medics didn't anticipate he'd make it through the night.

'I'm fine.'

Klimt could see that Sacris, despite his upbeat exterior, had been changed by the experiences of the last few days. Where he was once eager and bright eyed, he now carried the dulled colouration of a veteran. For Klimt it was like looking into a mirror.

'How did your meeting with the Majore go?'

'Interesting.'

After Klimt had brought Sacris back to the Fortress he'd demanded a meeting with his superior straight away. The Majore wasn't prone to being ordered around, especially during a crisis, but when Klimt hinted at its nature he quickly found time to see him.

The Majore sat stoney faced as Klimt told him everything. When he'd finished his superior leaned forward on his elbows.

'Never speak of this again.'

The story that had already begun circulating in the press was that Scabus Jenk - a known criminal with links to both organised crime and various loyalist secessionist groups - had acted alone in assassinating Governor Schaar.

Despite this, in some quarters whispers of a conspiracy had already begun to gain currency. There was nothing anyone could do to stop the apocrypha of idle gossip that would grow around this subject. Klimt was glad he wouldn't be around to see it escalate.

'What time does your transport leave?' Sacris enquired.

'In an hour.'

Sacris looked disappointed.

‘After everything, I thought you might stay.’

Klimt shook his head.

‘Well, good luck.’

Klimt smiled. ‘You too.’

He extended his hand to Sacris. The younger man took it and shook it firmly. As he withdrew his hand he felt Klimt slip something into his grasp.

Opening his hand, Sacris looked down and saw Yedas’s necklace sitting in his palm.

He looked up, but Klimt was already gone.

Placing the chain over his head, Sacris lay back onto the pillow. The weight of the necklace around his throat was uncomfortable, but something would not allow him to take it off.

*

AS KLIMT LOOKED down at Persana from the air for the last time he felt a sense of sadness for the planet below and for the future it would have.

Already, transport ships containing battalions of Imperial Guardsmen were massing in the upper stratosphere, preparing to descend upon Persana and begin the liquidation of the secessionist forces once and for all.

Turning away from the window, Klimt tried to settle down for the long journey ahead. He gave up after five minutes.

Staring once more at the eternal blackness of space, one phrase kept echoing through Klimt’s mind. It was, he thought, the only thing of any value he’d learnt from his time on Persana.

Everything changes in time.