

WARHAMMER  
40,000

# INQUISITOR



– THE CALIGARI ARCHIVUM –

# Above and Beyond

[ Episode 3 ]

Áron Németh



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## **The Caligari Archivum**

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**The Caligari Archivum**



# **Above and Beyond**

(Episode 3)

by  
**Áron Németh**

'How is he holding up?'

Warren was monitoring the Administrator's vital signs and movement, discreetly listening in to the conversation. As an afterthought, he collected and analysed data about the palace itself, at times muttering helpful suggestions for improved security. Luckily for him, no one heard his remarks – since he was closeted away in an empty room with containers of recaff and stacks of energy bars – or Mercer would have been forced to reveal himself just to save his miserable life.

The murmur of high ranking guests wafted down from the giant dais where they were waiting for the reception to begin in earnest. In the middle of the platform, a huge crystalline structure shone in the light of the system's sun – a natural phenomenon, transported here by specially made servitors upon the completion of the palace. It emitted a pleasant hum as the sun's rays touched it. It was also supposed to knock out microphones through feedback, but the tiny cogitator adept had a way with Machine Spirits.

'Well enough. Heart rate through the roof, but he'll manage.'

Mercer looked up at the throng of nobility, locating Stolde instantly. He was easy to spot: standing by the steps, a black clad, grim, unmoving figure among the rich colours of the Rengrisian highborn. The view was stunning up there, but the Administrator was more interested in the multitude of people vying for his attention.

He was, after all, the first Imperial officer in a long, long time to have dared the immense Warp Surge – everyone wanted to find out why he would risk his very soul on such a perilous voyage.

The Summer Palace of the Governor, with its cloud piercing central tower, was the masterpiece of local manufacturing: harnessing a geothermal well to power itself by a set of ancient turbines, it was built atop the ridge of the breathtaking Nergalos Mountain and was could provide luxurious lodgings for thousands of guests for months. With its thick walls, immense height, barracks and plentiful anti-air batteries the palace was probably one of the safest locations in the system. Everyone worth mentioning was present, and thus, everyone who counted had been checked for signs of Genestealer infection, along with their companions. There already had been some small shifts in power as two minor local nobles had had to be unceremoniously shot in the head. Their subordinates were also executed as a necessary precaution.

These interventions had hardly dented the mood. Rengris VII desperately needed some good news at last, so the successfully averted infiltration was regarded treated as such.

The new planetary governor, Lady Nieslannen, was a deft politician, so she offered the planet's elite a chance to meet someone who represented the Imperium, living proof that their plight had not been forgotten. She also used the occasion to remind everyone that scheming against the rightful governor was heresy. Even if the governor's writ had not yet been undersigned.

The queue of attendees spiralled around the dais. The guests, ordered by the intricate rules of protocol, were still being announced – the inquisitor had lost count at about three hundred names, and there were about as many still in line. Some invited the ones farther back to walk besides them, gaining favours and enemies with the same move.

There had been protestations from the higher ranking attendees about hosting a ball in such uncertain times, but these quickly subsided once word spread that reliable sources believed Stolde to be an inquisitor in disguise. Mercer knew of this, naturally, but decided not to quash the rumours. Suspicions about the presence of the Imperial Inquisition made everyone wary, and wary people concentrating on a particular target opened up a whole range of options.

He had ordered Stolde to tell the truth if asked directly, otherwise to dissemble and act aloof. The Administrator had agreed that it was something his previous duties had prepared him for well.

'Oh, here comes the General,' said Warren through the heavily encrypted vox channel. 'He doesn't look too keen, Captain.'

Mercer took one look at the commander's face and decided that he should reschedule his grand entrance. The Administratum officials had been very thorough and forthcoming about the guests – Mercer had found the amount of data they possessed unnerving – but something must have changed since the last update. The General Honstine they had described was an amicable fellow, for a high ranking officer of the Astra Militarum. The man who was marching toward Stolde was anything but.

'Acknowledged. I'm going in right now.'

Mercer waved at Angelika, who in turn, informed the Master of Ceremonies in a hushed voice. The aristocratic looking old man had been generously bribed earlier – probably by everyone on the guest list, so he was free to do however he pleased – and he apparently took a liking to the psyker, so he immediately made room for the captain of the Stormskipper in the queue.

'It is my honour to present Captain Mercer, independent merchant, by Imperial writ the sole holder of the rights to trade between the Rengris and Andrukhov systems...'

While that might have been a blatant lie, it was one that he needed to avoid being held as an unwilling guest until he coughed up the secrets of the route.

Mercer waited impatiently as the sonorous introduction slowly crawled to an end, and began his ascension. Envious stares followed him as he climbed the stairs at a brisk pace.

Warren quickly diverted a few automated servers on an interception course, with various interesting and luxurious meals on their trays, successfully creating a small but impeccably polite tumult which gave a chance for Mercer to catch up with the commander.

Although Stolde was the guest of honour, there were many who wanted to have a word with the famed captain who had defied the dangers of the Warp and emerged unscathed. They wanted to know the situation of the sector – even though he had sold them the information many times over in orbit. Everyone was elbowing for an advantage. Hiding his disgust, he smiled and bowed and shook hands, exchanging charming pleasantries, but remaining focused on the general. A well-groomed, clearly upper crust adjutant tried to keep up with the officer, inconspicuously proffering a dataslate. Honstine halted in his tracks, staring at Mercer. Mercer was quite sure he heard the grinding of teeth before Honstine sent the adjutant away, actually taking his time to return the salute. Then he deigned to look Mercer up and down. Obviously, he was the kind of man who separated the world into three parts – guardsmen, resources and annoyances – and his assessment was far from flattering. Mercer shrugged it off. He had won a few minutes for Stolde. And he would win more.

As Mercer waded through the guests, Warren perused the security camera feed to thoroughly check Honstine, confirming that the general showed no sign of Genestealer corruption. He had had his right arm exchanged with augmentics, but other than that, he was pure human. Of course, the cogitator adept had wanted to get his hands on a sample and run his own tests. Mercer had approved of his zeal, but he had to signal him no.

The cogitator adept dejectedly added that the general's dataslate contained troop positions, orders and new intelligence as well as a draft order to recruit from the hives of Rengris, which had been torpedoed by the local Munitorum.

Honstine must be quite desperate to even contemplate that one. Guardsmen almost never deployed on the worlds they had been recruited from, and the Administratum was not an organisation famed for its flexible approach.

'General. Enjoying the party?'

'Captain,' Honstine greeted him with a calculated courteousness which he wielded like a power sword. Mercer felt a sudden pang of anger, but controlled himself with no visible effort.

The officer thought for a while – after all, he knew next to nothing of Mercer, nor about his intentions. Dirty looks were one thing, but actual insults would

find an audience, and not even a general of the Guard could disregard the sudden surge of allies who would, no doubt, side with Mercer. Besides, the captain's assumed persona was well-connected with the Administratum. The general nodded at his dataslate.

'It's a waste of time, and without the Governor's not so subtle hints about the Inquisition being here, I would rather be back with my men. Is there anything you need of me, Captain, or are you here to lengthen the list of your potential contractors?'

So he had decided to disregard the Administratum. At least the disguise was working, the inquisitor thought with a hint of sourness. The general was still talking to him because he considered him to be a bit less boring than the rest of the attendants.

'I want you to tell me about the situation on the planet.'

Honstine arched an eyebrow at him.

'And why would I do that? Even though you are a free merchant, that hardly beholds me to answer you.'

Mercer shrugged and grinned.

'Of course not, General, of course not. As the commanding officer of the Stormskipper, I would not dare claim superiority over you. However, as a free merchant, it is well within my rights to offer an exchange of information.'

'What could you possibly offer me?'

This, although arrogant, was an invitation for negotiation. The general could have simply told him no, had he not been interested.

'Other than a status report about the state of the Warp, an answer to your most pressing question. Walk with me for three minutes, if you're curious enough. Worry not, I don't intend to waste your time. There are plenty of professionals for that here.'

The general contemplated his options, looking at the nobles and officials plundering the trays in style and grace, then nodded as if he were making a concession.

'Indeed. Lead the way, Captain.'



'So, what is my pressing question?'

When Warren had approved the relatively secluded location they had found among some indigenous decorative shrubbery, Mercer deployed the anti-

eavesdropping curtain they had used on Andrukhov. The General became wary as Mercer reached into his pocket and took a sideways look at his dataslate that lost connection at the same time.

‘Will this world be subject to Exterminatus?’

Honstine drew a sharp breath, and made a move towards his bolt pistol. He was one of the very few people whom the security personnel had not dared disarm. His sudden snarl showed the righteous anger Mercer had expected of a loyal officer of the Astra Militarum.

‘Even mentioning such a thing is...!’

The commander froze. The insignia of the Inquisition proved his darkest fears true.

‘I decide what is heresy here, General,’ Mercer said in a low, friendly tone. ‘Check it on your dataslate. Warren, let him through.’

‘Got it, Captain.’

The cogitator adept raised the noise curtain for a short while so the dataslate’s signals could once again reach the palace communications centre. His credentials had been masked, but the Administratum did confirm that the bearer of the insignia was, indeed, an inquisitor, conducting an undercover operation. As Honstine moved to comply, Mercer continued.

‘Guard your expression. People are watching, and even though they can’t listen in, I don’t want them to get any ideas. The answer to that question: not for now.’

There was something to be said for Guardsmen, no matter the rank: they did know how to obey. Not even a twitch appeared on the general’s face, not even the tiniest bit of relief that his world was temporarily spared of the irrevocable doom of the Exterminatus.

‘The Genestealer fleet was destroyed within the Warp Storm. You’ve got my permission to relay that information to your subordinates, but be vague about the details. If you feel the need to elaborate, it was a particularly lucky torpedo hit and a cascade reaction. If the Warp Storm fades, it’s an entirely different matter. That means that we’ve got a limited time in which to finish off this infestation.’

The commander waited impassively, but his mind was clearly racing.

‘Now, I require three things of you.’

‘My lord?’

‘That’s the first. I have decided to pose as Captain Mercer for a reason. The last reliable reports about the system are many years old, dating back before the warp storm. The Administratum were helpful, but they are as much part of this sick little game as anyone else. Therefore, you’re to maintain the pretence. You are, however, obliged to take my suggestions to heart.’

‘Understood, Captain.’

‘Second, I need your men to secure the building against intrusion and to be on high alert. I’m quite certain we’re about to get visitors. Not Genestealers but cultists, mercenaries or allies.’

Honstine nodded and sent out a set of instructions which were promptly relayed to Mercer by his ever vigilant cogitator adept. Rydia also chimed in and reported that the guardsmen were getting new orders and had responded with increased activity – also, by looking at the weapons they were breaking out, they had come prepared for an incoming attack.

‘And the third, Captain Mercer?’

‘Give me a rundown of the strategic situation on Rengris VII.’

Honstine thought for a while, staring at his augmentic right arm, and when he looked up, he seemed to have aged years. Based on the dataslate and the worn expression of the general, Mercer was sure that the news would be near disastrous.

‘Truth is, we’re losing the planet. Conventional Guard tactics rely on pressure, pressure we can’t maintain without reinforcements. We’re trying to adapt, but there are limits. And the disarray in the political strata doesn’t help much.’

Mercer offered the general a glass of a highly caffeinated, sour drink, one that he did not know the name of but which was apparently favoured by local Administratum higher-ups. No alcohol, he thought, as he poured himself a generous splash. The man would need his sobriety.

‘The planet’s slightly psychic nature nails us to the hives...’ the general sipped from turquoise refresher, made a face and continued. ‘Every vehicle and building has to be specially manufactured. We can move safely outside, but it’s a crawl. On the plus side that helped contain the infestation... or so we thought.’

The general shook his head.

‘It pains me to say it, but the bugs have outwitted us many times over. That they could infiltrate the Navy, is unprecedented.’

Mercer made a mental note to find out as much as possible about the “slightly psychic nature.” The fact that Warren had not found anything about it was worrying him. If the cogitator adept had not been able to dig it up on his own, there must have been some kind of consensus about keeping it hidden... or masquerading it. Mercer vaguely remembered a report made by another Inquisitor, sealed for internal use only, which claimed that “Warp phenomena” were present, but the document had classified them as inconsequential and deemed its effects to be under control.

An interesting decision, given that it limited troop mobility. Too bad, Mercer thought, that he had no access to the Inquisition’s archives due to the storm. On

the other hand, a working access would have meant a fleet converging on the Rengris system, ready to wipe out all organic life on this world, so he had to do without.

‘They must have turned someone with rank.’

‘My thoughts exactly. The question is whom.’



Warren signalled in, his voice suffused with sudden worry.

‘Captain, we’ve got a problem. Stolde says he’s close to being compromised, but he’s got a plan if you approve.’

‘Patch him through.’

The din of the nobles came in clearly through the vox: no matter the circumstances, these people found a way to gossip and probe for new alliances.

‘I believe I have done nearly all I could,’ said the Administrator. ‘I can buy you a few minutes, but after that, I expect that someone will find the backbone to ask me to identify myself. My guess is that they will pool for one together.’

‘What happened?’

‘I asked some pointed questions about the missing tithes, trying to keep them on edge. Now there is an ad hoc coalition that is quietly demanding that I come clean. They are fearful about going directly against the Administratum, more so against the Inquisition, but if they can corner me...’

‘Not providing the Imperium its due is grounds for summary execution of the planetary governor. And yet she appeared to be relieved when you first mentioned it aboard my ship. This inbred little system has got away with too much, for too long.’

Mercer weighed the risks for a second. He really had to talk to the representatives of the Imperial Navy – if they could not be trusted, the fate of Rengris VII was sealed. He had been favoured enough by the Emperor to stop the first breakout attempt in time; there was nothing he could do against multiple breakaway fleet formations. He had to know whether there had been major changes in the leadership of the naval forces, besides the obvious.

‘Humiliate them publicly, reminding them of their Imperial duty. That should pin their eyes on you. I need to talk to Admiral Hoyal. You might need help with exfiltration thereafter...’

‘That would have been my proposition, Captain. I have a few scathing remarks at the ready.’

‘Very good. Before you begin, give me some names and your data. I bet General Honstine would be more than happy to assist us.’



By the looks the other guests directed towards the pair, their absence had not gone unnoticed. Some were calculating, some emotionless, but at least a dozen attendees set their forcibly nonchalant gaze on them. Of course, everyone present was far too polite to disturb a private conversation. Mercer responded with an enigmatic expression, Honstine with a dour one. In front of them, Stolde was climbing the base of the giant crystalline formation. Expensively clad minders were already in motion to bring him back down before he made a scene, but they had to move carefully to avoid making a ruckus themselves. Besides, guests close to the trophy were already taking notice. In the meantime, some of the Guard officers were quietly taking up positions near the guests who had been less than enthusiastic about their tithes.

Following the general’s lead, and using the diversion Stolde was creating, the inquisitor closed in on Admiral Ignacia Hoyal.

The admiral appeared far too young for her position, lacking the creases and augmentics that decades spent in the Navy inevitably bring, but she had the eyes – hard, unflinching, always seeking danger. Her posture was firm as she stood in a stride, as if expecting the gravity generators to fail after an enemy barrage. Her entourage were among the guests, their immaculate dress uniforms drawing eyes, but she herself was as distant from the throng as Honstine had been.

As they approached, Mercer noticed the tension between the two: the massive failure of the Navy was probably not something Honstine had glossed over, and not something Hoyal would forget. The admiral, however, gave no open sign of hostility, apart from that initial flash of anger in her eyes.

She made the sign of the Aquila to Mercer, demonstrating that she was more inclined to follow common courtesy than the abrasive general. Mercer returned the gesture.

‘What brings you here, General? Here to have another dig at our performance, perhaps?’

‘No, Admiral, although your predecessor certainly made that easier than usual.’ Honstine was rather amused with the situation. ‘I am here to present you Captain Mercer.’

She wasted no time pretending that she was evaluating him now – she had

done that the moment she had laid eyes on him.

‘Good day, Admiral.’

‘Yes, I have seen you becoming fast friends.’

‘It is more of a relationship of mutual respect, Admiral.’

As the admiral was preparing a courteous yet devastating answer, Rydia’s signal came in. Mercer keyed his hidden vocaster. He raised his hand slightly and took a step backward, removing himself from the conversation. As a senior officer of the Imperial Navy, Hoyal was absolutely within her rights to be offended at such discourtesy, but she looked thoughtful instead. Mercer was sure, however, that she made a mental note.

‘Speak.’

‘Captain, we’ve got possible intruders. They’re wearing Nieslannen livery, but they’re trained, and they’ve learnt the layout from a map. Also, they’re armed to the teeth. Hidden weapons, mostly.’

‘How many?’

‘My estimate is that there are at least two teams, five strong each; one is headed to the power conduits, and my guess is that another one is after either the backup, or the comms hub. Without that, we’d be deaf. I’d put the time of attack at twenty minutes from now, tops.’

Well, Mercer thought, it was time to take a risk.

‘General, if you please, could you give me your honest opinion about the esteemed Admiral?’

Honstine gave no sign that the unusual question had caught him off guard.

‘I have no doubts about her reliability – the Navy’s manoeuvres after the... change in leadership are a clear proof of that in my eyes. She hasn’t been in a position to oversee the entire force’s operation, though.’

‘Good enough.’ It had to be. He turned to Hoyal, who was trying to decide whether to call the two insane or not. Mercer showed the rosette in the palm of his hand with a motion that was becoming more familiar to him than he would have liked – his insignia was visible to her, hidden to everyone else. Hoyal nodded as if a lot of things suddenly made sense to her. ‘I want your help in cleansing this planet. This inaction nearly led to our downfall, and it won’t continue.’

He unclenched his fist.

‘I have just made sure that a major incident comes to pass in about three minutes, and my assumed persona would gladly stay to enjoy the fallout, but something has come up.’

On the diagram of the building, he showed the locations of the assumed targets. They were quite far apart: miles in distance, long minutes in time.

‘Admiral, I need you and your escort to remind people that a calm guest is a living guest. Also, it’s your responsibility to keep the Prefectus alive. He’s part of my retinue and many of my plans depend on him. In the meantime, the General’s guardsmen and I will avert a sabotage attempt against the palace. It might be a diversion, but if it succeeds, it will maim us.’



The security personnel of the Nieslannen family appeared to be surprised at their early departure but accepted that Mercer was under the weather. They told him, however, that Lady Nieslannen expected him back for the dance.

Mercer met Rydia and Angelika at the elevator. It was the only route that allowed them to reach the comms centre in time. The noise of merriment had died off minutes earlier as the doors closed behind them. Warren had stayed behind and tapped into the camera signals to provide them with tactical data. The former guardswoman had made use of their time at the Administratum, and, using her position as a member of an inquisitor’s retinue, had obtained new weapons. During their ride to the ninetieth level Mercer distributed her acquisitions – three finely crafted plasma pistols, a plasma gun, flashbang grenades and a menacingly ordinary melta bomb case.

Mercer was worried about having to deal with the comms centre – without it, the reinforced walls would stifle the vox signals, rendering them deaf and blind.

‘Sir, why don’t we let the guardsmen handle it?’ inquired Rydia with her usual directness. She was not exactly fond of idea of throwing the Astra Militarum at a problem – after all, she had experienced that particular honour – but she was quite protective of Mercer when it came to direct combat.

‘Guardsmen perform better if they have a clear idea of who the enemy is. If I had my armsmen here, I would have preferred them, but knowing my crew, most of them would have had got themselves thrown out, probably through the closest window.

‘Do you trust Honstine?’ asked the psyker. She was fiddling around with her new plasma pistol, which made Mercer slightly uncomfortable.

‘To an extent, yes. According to Warren, he is the only one with some results to his name: his men have cleared up two infestations, and nailed some high ranking cultists while doing it, despite the fact that someone was feeding intel to the Genestealers.’

‘Too bad they could never reach the Patriarch,’ said Angelika, and the other

two frowned sagely. Ending a Patriarch did not end the entire brood, but it would have made them a lot more vulnerable.

‘So we’re here to copy the records of the comms centre.’

That was the reason Mercer had decided that he personally should oversee the defences there. Honstine regrouped some of his most trusted subordinates to meet them at level ninety, while his adjutant prepared a neat trap for the assailants at the power plant.

‘Indeed. I’m pretty sure that everything Nieslannen sends bounces back here for safekeeping.’

‘Do you suspect her?’

‘I suspect everyone, but her more than most.’

‘I can see why.’ Angelika looked thoughtful. ‘Not that I’d dare claim that I make the kind of decisions you do.’

The elevator decelerated and shuddered to a halt. The screen indicating the numerals flickered and showed static, then the lighting switched off with a loud clang.

‘By the way, Rydia,’ said Mercer in a conversational tone as he gave a boost for Angelika so she could climb up to search for an emergency exit panel, ‘how did you exactly know what the targets were?’

Rydia let out a long sigh.

‘I eavesdropped.’

‘Figures.’



They were standing atop the elevator cabin, searching for a ladder. There was one, all right, on the other side of the shaft. The only problem was that every time an elevator streaked past them, the vortices it left behind shook their clothes and tested their stance. Guardrails would have been a measure of help, but the ancient builders had been more inclined to put carabiners in the noses of gargoyles, and despised the idea of a measly handrail on every level.

Thinking about the depth was not an option.

‘Okay, here’s what I can do,’ said Warren, after he had stopped snickering. ‘I can initiate a recalibration. That will bring the elevator cars down to find where the zero point is, then return them to their original positions.’

‘That’s a step in the right direction,’ answered Mercer, ‘but we need them to start at a lower level than we are. I wouldn’t want to shorten our window.’

‘I can help with that,’ said Rydia. ‘There’s nothing a guardsman likes more than a bit of stomping around without risk, pressing a button and calling the operation a success.’

‘Hug the walls,’ interjected Angelika, and powered up her plasma rifle. Normally, it would have gone to Rydia, but Angelika’s abilities were uniquely honed to be an absolutely devastating marksman. Rydia started sidling closer: while the psyker was using her innate powers, she was really unlikely to fall, but a little vertigo thereafter could just do the trick.

Angelika’s open third eye stared deep into the Warp, discerning the threads of future timelines, allowing her to pick and choose the outcome of the battle that apparently was coming for them.

The chamber of the rifle began glowing and its ominous hum reverberated in the metal confines of the shaft. Following the muzzle with their eyes, the rest of the team were able to spot the rapidly descending assailants. The strike team had abandoned the liveries: their armour’s matte, greyish surface made them a hard and well protected target. They had lasguns, pointed right at Mercer.

‘Fire!’

At the press of the trigger, the superheated bolt of gas streaked upward, missing every one of the attackers. Mercer began to curse but quickly realised that Angelika had never intended to make a direct hit.

The thing about grav-chutes was that even the Guard found them dangerous and unreliable: they needed nerves of steel or a Commissar’s presence to even consider using one.

Sudden moves are strongly discouraged while making a chute jump, but they are hard to avoid when a plasma bolt misses your comrade in front of you. Navigating is even harder when a miniature sun forms and dies behind you.

The pressure of hot air punched the assailants in the back.

There was an unmistakably female scream as two members of the strike team at the end of the formation collided and began falling, smashing into the walls of the shaft and taking out a third one. If they had had time, they could probably have realigned themselves. Shots from the two plasma pistols made sure that they did not.

The ionised blob of gas hit the first attacker – whose shots punched neat little burnt holes into the elevator car – instantly charring him. The body armour he was wearing probably gave him good protection against las weapons and kinetics, but Mercer’s accurate hit to the neck caused a thermal shockwave that cooked him in his heat resistant garb. There was a hiss of steam. The man slumped and slowly descended, his chute remaining miraculously in balance.

As he sailed past, a whiff of burnt flesh trailed behind him.

Of the three who had crashed into each other, only one had the presence of mind to grab the elevator car, dropping his weapon. The other two fell past the elevator, bawling at each other. Rydia dropped her plasma grenade after them. After a burst of hot air the yelling stopped.

The fifth one, who had managed to get a hold of a carabiner to fasten herself, used the confusion created by her comrades and opened fire.

She really must have wanted to finish off her mark.

A loud bang and a blinding flash later, Angelika slumped near the wall of the shaft.

‘Damnation!’ snarled Mercer and finished off the remaining attacker with a headshot that came a moment too late. ‘Rydia, get that heretic up here!’

‘Yes, Captain.’

Even now she retained enough of her composure. As she moved to obey and ripped the vox cord from his neck, the inquisitor knelt by Angelika’s side.

‘I’m sorry, my lord, but that was the best outcome,’ said the wounded psyker. The las shot had only hit her flimsy shoulder plate, which was just strong enough to withstand that kind of punishment – so she had not lost a limb – but the flash and the sound of the impact had had the effect of a concussion grenade. A few inches the other way and it would have killed her outright, burning through her brain. As it was, she was looking forward to days, if not weeks in the infirmary. ‘Somebody had already tied off the more promising ones.’

‘Another psyker? Duly noted. We’ll talk about this later,’ murmured the inquisitor as he applied a mixture of anaesthetics and curative, far more effective than the ones he could have bought on Andrukhov. The Inquisition knew as much about healing as causing harm.

‘Frag me in the arse! Not a captain, then?’ The assailant’s face paled as Rydia pushed him down on the elevator car and twisted his arm behind his back. The man’s voice carried fear even through his thick accent. ‘This was just a paid hit, my lord, we didn’t know...’

‘Silence.’ Mercer did not fully turn towards him, but the mercenary stopped talking immediately, looking pleadingly at Rydia who was now busy frisking him. The man knew he had no reason to expect mercy, but attacking someone whom his subordinates referred to as lord could very well mean the end of his entire family, and lengthy torture before execution. Some lords were keen on making examples like that.

‘General, change of plans. We ran into an attack, but we pacified the hostiles,’ said Mercer into his vox. ‘There is one survivor, I’m interrogating him. My cogitator adept will send you what I need from the comms centre. Can you help me with that?’

‘I’m sending a squadron to take care of it right away,’ crackled a vox, then fell silent.

‘Priorities, priorities,’ said Mercer to Angelika who had been slightly out of it since the Inquisition-grade anaesthetics had reached her brain.

‘Where is the other team?’ asked Rydia, looking up, searching for the signs of enemy backup.

‘They... they ran into a snag and told us to start the attack without them! I swear by the Throne!’

Mercer stood up and planted himself in front of the prostrate mercenary.

‘Who hired you?’

‘I knew no names, my lord!’

Mercer reached under his longcoat and crouched beside the man. He fished out a tiny, sepia leather case and unpacked several needles along with an obscure looking electrical apparatus.

‘If there’s one thing I hate, it’s a rushed interrogation. It comes with more pain than a well-planned one in a well-stocked facility. Field operations are like that, you know.’

He looked at the needles and after some consideration chose the most menacing looking one and let the dim light of the shaft glint on it.

‘There’s no need, my lord, I’ll tell everything!’

The inquisitor looked at Rydia who nodded: by the reports, the other strike team had been taken out to a man by the Guard.

‘Start talking then. If you stop, I’ll help you.’



The prisoner was a member of a mercenary group that had been employed by one of the many factions on Rengris. Since the death of the previous governor, the system was ripe for such work – the risks were nicely counterbalanced by the rewards, and with the decline of interstellar trade, the other options were so abysmal that anyone with a gun or the guts was eager to sign up. No major purges had been authorised, curfews were selectively upheld – based on political allegiance – by the crony law enforcement officers, but the man had heard about some pinpoint strikes that had taken out various cults full of undesirables. Rumour had it, among the bounty hunters and similar lowlifes, that the nobility was doing as much to destabilise the economy as the Genestealers – the presence of which was strictly controlled information. It was a miracle of co-ordination

and the Emperor's blessing that the entire world had not fallen into the gutter yet. Mercer now understood how Stolde's pointed remarks about the tithes had been like juggling live grenades in a promethium storage facility.

The mercenary did not know for sure whether he was working for the Governor or some other party, but had accepted sabotage and assassination jobs from the same contact person, and these hits had benefited people who were members of, or very close to the Nieslannen family.

They had been tasked now to stand ready for deniable wet works and report anyone who seemed to be snooping around. When they saw Rydia, with her obvious Imperial Guard training, they knew they had found their target. They called it in and received instructions to feed her false information about the two-pronged attack and prepare an ambush. Their employer ordered them to avoid alerting the guardsmen or Nieslannen security.

The employer had used serious modulation on their vox messages so the mercenary was not even sure of their gender, much less of their identity. Mercer concluded that the aim of this diversion was to draw out and identify those who were able to act outside the confines of the ball room.

The assailants had special pass-cards that opened every single door but left an error message which the garbage collector routines picked up and deleted every few minutes. They were also given special voxcasters, located in a conveniently placed rubbish bin. That spoke of the employer having intimate knowledge of the security arrangements and the location. According to Warren, who had used the time to worm his way into the security arrays of the palace, at the moment no one was using such cards.

When the mercenary ran out of solid information to give, he told Mercer so, and waited patiently for his verdict. He was a smart man, too smart to remain a rifle-for-hire.

Mercer knew what was expected of him – after all, he was not entirely without mercy.

'Your family will live,' he told the prisoner before shooting him twice in the chest and once in the head.

The last thing the situation Rengris VII needed was an intelligent man with sensitive information about him.



'Take her to the guardsmen's quarters and tell the medicae that I will

personally oversee that he gets reassigned to a hellworld if her health deteriorates. Is that clear?’

‘Yes, Captain.’

Rydia marched away with the psyker fastened onto her back with a makeshift harness. Mercer looked both ways in the high-walled, grey and red corridor, searching for movement. Servants scurried around – apparently the Nieslannen family were not on good enough terms with the Adeptus Mechanicus for the tech-priests to provide them with servitors – and did their very best to keep out of his way.

‘Let’s see what went wrong while I was away,’ Mercer said to himself.

The general’s report said that the ambush against the backup squad had gone fairly well: a few guardsmen had been injured, suffering only three casualties, and they had managed to get away from the site before the Nieslannen security personnel turned up.

It failed to mention that Stolde had been kidnapped. That information came from Warren. Mercer began trotting to the next stairwell – recent events made him distrustful of elevators.

He keyed his vox.

‘Okay, where is my Administrator?’ he asked as he skidded to a halt in the stairwell. The augmentics-adorned, ancient statues stared at him sternly, their stone eyes radiating silent doubt about his competence. Or at least he felt that way, and sneered back defiantly.

‘The beacon is in stealth mode so I believe that Fredevan is in good health...’ said Warren. ‘He’s on level eighty-three, I’m transmitting the coordinates now.’

‘Tell Rydia to come as fast as she can. Why didn’t the officers tell me about Stolde’s disappearance?’

There was a short pause. Warren had known that he’d ask this.

‘I advised them not to. You were being shot at. I’ve heard that it can be distracting. By the time things got a little calmer they had removed the commbead, so I wanted to wait for you to decide the next course of action, Captain.’

Mercer felt the fury rise in his chest but the cogitator adept’s argument stood to reason. He took a deep breath, shook his head, and began to run.

‘Well done. Have some reinforcements at the ready but I want no direct contact. This might still be salvaged.’

As he ran, he became aware that some parts of the palace, where elevators ordinarily did not stop, had fallen into disuse. Signs of makeshift repairs were visible everywhere, making the palace look more like an Underhive tenement than the residence of a planetary governor. He suspected that the elevator would

not stop here.

‘Understood, Captain.’

He stopped at the level where the beacon pinpointed Stolde’s location. Warren had thought that someone who would stoop so low as to abduct someone who might be with the Inquisition would be careful enough to remove his commbead which had been sitting snugly in one of the Administrator’s rings. The removal of the ring, however, activated the distress beacon, which waited silently somewhere dark and inaccessible, dutifully recording its position, compressing, encrypting and storing it until a delayed timer set it off as a vox burst.

Mercer really hoped that the kidnappers had checked Stolde for listening devices only once, or the Administrator would never live the shame down.

He tried to remain silent, but he was very aware of every little noise he made.

This also was an abandoned floor: it had originally been used for food storage and meal preparation. Hooks, saws, processing lines, limply hanging metal arms, neatly stacked containers, and gigantic old ovens were everywhere. Cold permeated the air – the Machine Spirit of the palace was apparently a frugal one and refused to heat disused levels much above freezing temperature. In the carefully monitored atmosphere of the floor nothing had rusted, everything looked ready to use and fresh, so even the seasoned inquisitor found the place eerie.

In the middle of the echoing, desolate hall a tube hid another, secret elevator that was not present on any of the Palace’s blueprints. Mercer was reasonably sure that the elevator was directly connected to the dais, a forgotten escape route for the former governor.

The sight of Stolde sitting on a preparation table with a tall glass in his hand supported this theory.

Mercer was also aware that the kidnappers were probably watching his approach, so he made sure that he remained visible and his weapons remained in their holsters. His hand hovered by them, however, ready to draw at a moment’s notice.

‘Oh, please do not attempt to channel an “I am quietly menacing” attitude,’ said a quiet voice in passable Low Gothic behind him, then, as he spun and fell to one knee, ready to roll away, it added, ‘and please do not test our patience.’

The lithe, armoured figure could have passed at first glance as a tall, very undernourished human, but the unmistakable forms of the long sniper weapon, the two slim blades and the long, pointy ears under the hood revealed the truth. At least one of the kidnappers – and given their affiliation, most probably all of them – was an Eldar. The officially sanctioned course of action against an uppity

xenos was an immediate and ruthless purge. On the other hand, there was the question of enemy numbers, and their intentions, which gave some leeway for inquisitors to contemplate different options.

Mercer stood up, slowly, to avoid getting perforated by a twitchy sharpshooter.

‘All right, this is a new one,’ he admitted, inclining his head ever so slightly. A little courtesy never hurt anyone.

‘I do not think you understand the severity of the situation.’ The Eldar looked down at him, haughtiness incarnate. A modulator rendered the xenos’ voice as a genderless, raspy whisper, and its face was hidden by a locally made strip of cloth – the fabric was serviceable but far below the Eldars’ discerning taste – and the loose camo-cloak it was wearing hid its form well. Eldar were masters of manipulation and deception, and were not a foe even an inquisitor could underestimate without consequences.

‘I really would not try and kill the Captain,’ said Stolde, sipping from his drink, completely unperturbed by his abduction, ‘unless, of course, you are sure that your shot will actually connect, be immediately fatal and you can run really, really fast.’

The xenos turned toward the Administrator and bowed. Mercer could have sworn that it laughed.

‘Prefectus, while your performance was absolutely endearing and your mettle, for a human, was admirable, I am quite certain that your precious Captain is, in fact, the Inquisitor everyone in this hovel is talking about.’

‘If it pleases the Rangers, they can believe anyone to be an Inquisitor,’ the administrator nodded, and finished his drink. ‘It would not be the first time today.’

Rangers, Mercer thought, mentally commending Stolde for providing him with information even now. The Rangers were a sort of forward scouts, saboteurs, and assassins for the ancient and secretive Eldar race. They were the bane of any unit with a formalised command structure, but – aside from their exploits – not much was known about them. Adept at camouflage, expert marksmen, always with a plan within a plan, they posed a grave threat to any Imperial unit. In a direct confrontation with any of the planet’s guardians, they would stand no chance, so they avoided it. The fact that they showed their presence to him, an inquisitor, was unnerving.

He made a show of heaving a sigh of relief.

‘Thank the Emperor! The routine with the rosette flashing has long since lost its charm.’ Besides, he thought, if the Eldar figured out what the Ordos Xenos on the rosette stood for, that would side-track the negotiation at its inception. ‘Now

that we've established that at this very moment we don't want to kill each other...'

He waited until the Eldar nodded, then pulled out and raised his tiny flask.

'Frostwine? My personal stock, for momentous occasions. Don't worry, I poisoned it myself.'

The Eldar accepted the flask and made no secret of checking the liquid with a sniffer contraption, which, after a short hesitation signalled that the liquid was reasonably safe to drink. The xenos had to remove the cloth mask that had hidden its face, and turned out to be a female. She had an elongated face, short cropped blond hair, a scar on the left cheek that could have been wiped away but probably had been left as a reminder – by Mercer's estimates, she had seen a lot more combat than himself. Her equipment had certainly seen a lot of use – so much that some of it had been replaced by backups made of Rengrisian materials. Given how fussy Eldar were about their weapons and armour, that meant that the Rangers had been operating for a long time without logistics. 'Although it is certainly a select vintage, I would rather pass up on this opportunity,' she said, with impeccable courtesy. She made a face, though.

'Fair enough. So. What's the deal? There must be one, otherwise I would be dead, you would be dead, Stolde would steal my drink, then get shot by your sneaky fellows.'

Your second guess is the Eldar's objective, the voice of his mentor echoed in Mercer's mind. He had had extensive training in interrogating and breaking the xenos' resistance, during his apprenticeship and thereafter. In the end, every one of them had submitted. He had faced them on battlefields, on forlorn worlds, in the dungeon fortresses of the Inquisition – sometimes as enemies, sometimes as subjects. Under rare, unavoidable circumstances, as unwilling and temporary allies.

Such were the duties of the Ordos Xenos, the branch of the Inquisition dedicated to the study and extermination of the alien.

Every single time, when dealing with Eldar, unwavering conviction was the key to victory. He had to know his aim, choose a path and stay true to it, no matter what was offered, no matter what the threat was – to adapt was the beginning of the Eldar game, a game the treacherous xenos had spent millennia perfecting.

By the time they had realised there was no hidden agenda, that none of the convoluted plans they had envisioned actually existed, the Emperor would have given him victory.

As the Guardsmen were fond of saying, if it looked stupid and it worked, it was not stupid.

For now, he wanted to secure Stolde and to enlist the xenos' assistance in his search for the cultists' top leadership. Say what you will about them being knife-eared degenerates, but, given the reports of their bloody battles with the Genestealers and the Tyranids that inevitably followed, there was virtually no chance of them working together. The fabled abilities of the Rangers would come in handy for pinpointing the location of the Patriarch and the purebloods, even in the closed environs of a hive. He was willing to pay a steep price for that; letting the Eldar all live, for starters.

'Let us avoid that,' the Ranger answered. 'I know you have got a Genestealer problem, something you cannot solve in your... traditional way. We want that problem gone. Constant vigilance has limited the cult's growth somewhat, but there is a chance that we will soon face a new... as you call it...Patriarch.'

Mercer noticed the pauses and the significant lack of expressions like mon-keigh, brute and primitives. This must not have been easy for someone who has a chainaxe to grind with the Imperium, but the Ranger had tried her very best not to offend him intentionally. Her inherently smug disposition ruined the effect somewhat, but Mercer appreciated the effort.

Especially so, because it showed him how desperately the Eldar wanted the deal. It was a curious development, and Mercer was sure that it had nothing to do with the well-being of humans. It would have been a shame to have her enthusiasm curbed by telling her that the second Patriarch had already been dealt with – which of course meant that the signal the cult sent had been absorbed by the Warp Storm.

Stolde was carefully inspecting the bottom of his glass to find trace amounts of his drink.

'That would be detrimental,' agreed Mercer. 'The nasty thing about Genestealers is that they can communicate directly with each other, which makes them hard to pinpoint.'

The Eldar smirked at him knowingly.

'It becomes a lot easier if you can make them come to you, Inquisitor. We know of one button you can push, and we can guarantee that it will lure their elite out.'

'And in return? Nothing good ever comes for free.'

The Eldar raised her hand. She strained to listen, apparently into thin air. Mercer found her widening eyes and the sudden change in her mood slightly disconcerting.

'Our time is up, Inquisitor Mercer. If you are interested in further negotiations, take a walk in the rolling hills near the Administratum enclave tomorrow. After all, I cannot force you to deal with vile xenos in front of witnesses. Do not

worry. We will find you.'

With a flourish of her camo cloak, she became practically invisible.

'Do not try to hit us with that crude device. Or do, it doesn't matter either way.'

Hearing her soft laugh, Mercer gave a start, unholstered his plasma pistol and fired off a bolt in her general direction.

A breaching charge went off at the door and guardsmen stormed in.

The palace had gone to full lockdown and the Guard had assumed control.

Honstine was barking orders at his men who dispersed quickly, covering each other, moving from cover to cover. The general had his power sword unsheathed and his bolter pistol was searching for targets – luckily for him, the Eldar had retreated by the time he arrived.

Had the Rangers wanted to cause mayhem, they could have dealt a crushing blow to the Guard.

'Captain, where are the attackers?'

'Gone. They probably got what they wanted from Prefectus Stolde. I recommend you have us checked for Genestealer signatures; then I am ready to discuss what I've learnt.'

'Good idea.'

Mercer still had that annoying feeling that he was missing something, and made a face when he found out what it was.

Stolde grinned at him as the general signalled for the corpsmen, who began unpacking their unwieldy genescanning apparatus.

The Eldar had lifted his frostwine.



The flyer sat, its engines cooling, in the metal forest. One of the major expedition routes was nearby, leading the smelter caravans past the Adeptus Administratum fortress. This gave the tech-priests – who had been sent here as part of an ancient accord between the two Rengrisian branches – an opportunity to examine and make repairs or adjustments to the hulking devices. The ore exhaust had covered the local flora in thick layers of particulate, killing but preserving it. The tiny flakes were crunching under Mercer's boots.

He was alone but he was also being watched.

Rydia watched him through the powerful scope of a long-las, courtesy of the Adeptus Mechanicus. With Angelika recuperating – the Guard's medical officers

were quite adamant and put the alternatives in graphic terms, with descriptions of maladjusted synth-skin rotting off in pus-covered flakes, bringing inflammation that defies all but Astartes-grade disinfectants – it fell to Stolde to cover her from flanking attacks.

He was well within acquisition range, and he had unwavering trust in the former guardswoman's abilities. Of course, one single long-las would not protect him if things went sideways.

He had spent two hours walking around, sipping from his new flask, and looking like a complete idiot with nothing else to do. He could have made himself quite busy, trying to smooth things over: the situation in the palace had deteriorated into controlled mayhem by the time he had left. Blaring klaxons, Guardsmen yelling at everyone, and nobles yelling at Guardsmen – although the latter was a lot less prevalent after General Honstine shot a particularly enthusiastic noblewoman for trying to manhandle his subordinate and began waving his inquisitorial authorisation around. Of course, he had had the name redacted. It had not been easy to sneak out with the strengthened security, but having the nobles restricted to the Summer Palace was well worth the later fallout.

The walk in the metal forest finally gave him time to think about what he had learnt.

Somebody with an intimate knowledge of the Rengrisian power structure must have given information to the Genestealers. Mercer could not even fathom why. Whoever they were, they could not have been infected themselves: a cultist could not have been able to plan an ambush like the one in the palace. The brood did not allow such independent thought, such meticulous action. For a cultist, there was no room for self-interest or one's own volition. That probably meant that the one who made it happen was either someone who was employed to "make things go away" or someone who came into no contact with the corrupting filth but made use of their presence. Whoever they were, whatever their reason was, they were traitors, almost more dangerous than the Genestealers themselves, and Mercer had already condemned them to death by torture. Warren was busy collating data in the Administratum fortress, trying to match patterns to names based on the trove the Guardsmen had lifted from the Summer Palace's comms centre.

There were Eldar on the planet, also interested in removing the infestation. The xenos' conflict with the Genestealers was not one of principle: Eldar, as a rule, had not ever given a second thought about the fate of the "mon-keigh." That meant that they had their own agenda. Something to protect, probably. Something they could not carry away, otherwise they would have had done so

before the warp storm had hit. They had not interfered with the human settlements, so it had to be safe from the occasional scouting parties and the smelter caravans.

The glinting of the tiny scales broke his thought process. That was unusual. It must have been the psychic presence Honstine had mentioned. Mercer had read the standard operating procedure of the local Guard regiment, which stated that one day on foot without protective devices or specially manufactured tents was safe.

That meant that he was probably safe for a few hours, but even so, he intended to risk no more than six hours outside.

‘Anything?’

‘No, Captain. The coast is clear.’

The flakes on the plateau were crunching and clinking beneath the soles of his boots.

Removing the Patriarch was probably just a stopgap for the Eldar – should the Imperium fail with the mop-up, the xenos would call for reinforcements, probably turning the entire world to ashes. No matter what the Eldar were protecting, they could not allow it to fall to the Tyranids, the ever voracious swarm that inevitably followed a successful Genestealer infestation.

He saw a flicker of movement again and instinctively raised his plasma pistol.

‘Don’t.’

He recognised the heavily modulated voice. It was not nearly as friendly as it had been a day earlier, and even back then it had carried the possibility of a sudden turnaround.

‘Feeling like you’re ready to betray me already?’ Mercer asked, staying stock still. He knew Rydia was busy scanning his general area, trying to find the Ranger.

‘I have received new information about you, Inquisitor Mercer.’

She kept moving but she was an unparalleled expert in the art of camouflage, so Rydia still did not have a clear shot. Mercer knew that even a hint of threat would mean he’d end up dead and the Eldar would disappear.

‘And that didn’t strike you as odd. And here I was thinking that I’d finally found someone who would be a match for my vast intellect.’ He infused his voice with just enough sarcasm to make sure he would not come across as entirely serious. ‘Ah well. The search continues.’

He heard something suspiciously similar to a hiss, but no shot followed and he had not been bisected by a xenos blade either. He could sense that it had been a close call, though, so he used the precious few seconds he had won to make an educated guess about the information. It had to be personal, to an extent

verifiable, and it must have stoked the wrath of the xenos to the extent that it overrode reason.

‘Have you told the others what you’ve learnt about me?’

There was a pause.

‘No. Are you not the slightest bit interested in what that information is?’

This was a setup, and a simplistic one at that. Whether he admitted guilt or denied it, the accusation would remain, it would still have relevance, an anchor for the Eldar to return to, should she exhaust all the other options of negotiation.

He decided to dismiss it altogether.

‘Later, to determine who this traitor is. Either it’s a lie, in which case I’m not interested, or it is true, and then I’ve acted by the will of the Emperor and there is no need for me to make excuses. Have you sent them away on some fool’s errand under false pretences? Coming here all alone?’

The Eldar did not answer this one, which was an answer in itself for Mercer. He knew this kind of numbness – he had seen it several times when the folly of an unwitting heretic was revealed, when the fallout of their monumental stupidity and incompetence was laid bare before them.

There was still something wrong, something did not add up: the Eldar, especially the Rangers, almost always kept themselves in check, which was why they were so hard to crack during an interrogation, but once they lost control they immediately succumbed to their emotions. There were no grey zones, there was no middle ground. Yet this Ranger at one moment seemed to burn with hatred toward him, and the next she was calm again.

The moments of calm and calculation worried him a lot more. It was time to anger her again.

He slowly turned around and started counting on his fingers.

‘So you receive this information. It must be something serious because it riles you up enough to consider a change of plans. You try and check its authenticity. It proves to be true to an extent and you rush out here.’

‘Your genetic signature matched! You have tortured countless Eldar to death, and you dared, you had the temerity to offer me a drink, as if everything were forgotten?’

Mercer felt a sharp jab against his mental defences and the air began to smell faintly of ozone. Tiny flashes of static electricity flickered on the nearby trees. He shook his head as a violently oppressive psychic presence weighed against his mind.

There was that anger he needed, and then some, he thought, even before he could see the cold, focussed hatred in the xenos’ eyes. There had been many who wanted to kill him, but few were so intent on it.

So that was why the Eldar witch had accepted the flask, the inquisitor realised. He was pretty sure there was a lesson in that somewhere. All she had needed to be overwhelmed by wrath was the knowledge that he was a member of the Ordos Xenos. That was the entirety of the information, confirmed by the reports of the mercenaries for those who had had eyes and ears in the ball room. The evidence of their betrayal would probably be logged in the comms centre.

Notoriety and half-truths would have been enough. Facts were secondary. Mercer had had extensive experience interrogating uncooperative Eldar, but she could not have known that.

‘You either like me or you need me – I’m going with the latter – so instead of killing me from two miles off, you try and give me a chance to exonerate myself. You’re not sure of yourself, but you’re riding on emotion, you’re prodded by anger, maybe by guilt, by hope – whoever gave you that information had found a big, obvious button and pushed it and you did what they wanted, and met me alone, which is probably...’

When she emerged from hiding, he heard Rydia cursing under her breath through the vox. The Eldar was practically on top of him, right behind his back, well within melee distance. The Ranger did not reach for her weapon, though. She returned to her calculation, and this time, Mercer was more than happy to leave her that way.

‘Trap.’

‘Most likely.’

At Mercer’s order, Rydia’s makeshift sniper team began closing in to the flyer, while Warren tried to rouse the Navy to send in air support.

Given the standing orders, no one was authorised to leave the surface without the say-so of the head medicae of a different vessel, so it would take some time to scrounge up the necessary volunteers. If this really was a ruse, the ones tasked with finishing them off were closer than the help.

Once he finished barking orders into the vox, Mercer turned to the Ranger who was listening with barely concealed interest – experienced as she was, she had probably never had the chance to observe an Inquisitor.

He began rushing back toward the flyer – if they could get it airborne, they might just be able to get out of their predicament. It would not be a trivial task. Whoever sent the Eldar out here had probably ensured that the airspace was quite hostile.

‘Does your erratic behaviour have anything to do with the object you’re here to protect?’

‘You are jumping to a bold conclusion, Inquisitor.’

‘And one that makes sense. Am I right?’

‘Yes.’

‘Let’s make a private deal then. I give you an airlift, and you finally tell me what in the Eye of Terror I am dealing with.’

He had deduced a lot, but the various parts of the picture – the Genestealers, the traitors, and the mysterious item – still did not make sense to him. Besides, shaken as the Eldar was, there was a chance that she might even make another mistake and tell him more than she originally intended.

‘We are in agreement. For now. Until we can get somewhere safe.’

It was a nice plan, too bad it did not last.

*To be continued*



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Áron Németh** is a Hungarian-born civil servant living in Budapest. He is a history enthusiast, but rather a jack of all trades than a true buff. He has been a fan of the Warhammer 40,000 universe since the early nineties. An avid tabletop RPG player. His creative career so far consists of an extensive background of translation (from English to Hungarian) and a sporadic publication history of fantasy short stories.

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