



The Emperor's Judgement

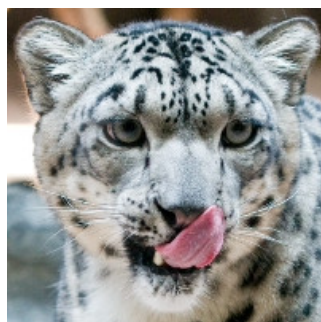
An Assassinorum Audio Drama (2015)

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gloom that consumed this world a massive crowd gathered and waited. Raindrops slipped from the grey skies, splashing down against gold vestments⁴ and pilgrim hairshirts⁵.

Adamta: "Which Primarch are you supposed to be?"

Klara wore silver and black while white wings stood proud from her shoulders. The feathers ruffled⁶ quietly as gusts⁷ of wind drifted through the vast plaza. Klara Rhasc wore the body of a man disguised as an angel, a Primarch, one of the Emperor's own sons.

Klara: "The Iron Gorgon, I think. From the black and silver".

With the divergent⁸ fates of the Imperial Ecclesiarchy it was hard to tell. The crowd jostled⁹ with barely held anticipation. There was something wrong with the prayers that drifted across the plaza, something subtly¹⁰ off. Rhasc ignored it. The details of the heresy that had gripped this world, were irrelevant. Her target was all that mattered. She waited here, on the shrine world of Tevrat to take the life of a man whose death was ordained. She never questioned the reasons or motives for her work. She simply acted. Weapons did not question the hand that wielded them.

Her mark basked in the adulation¹¹ of the crowd. He was broad and heavily muscled, garbed¹² in the elaborate robes of the Ecclesiarchy. His name was Urian, Principus Urian, the 22nd. A florid¹³ man Urian was approaching his second century of age. In the flesh he seemed every inch the saint he claimed to be. His words had gone at interest drawing attention in circles that listened for such things. Shadows had tailed him searching for the truth of this man's thoughts and deeds. He was found wanting. He was found to be a risk.

Urian spoke. His words - great declamations to a crowd that could barely hear him - were inspiring, delivered in a deep bass tone, that demanded attention.

Urian: "The end is coming. The Emperor corpse flesh writhing¹⁴ on a destitute¹⁵ throne is dead. The end comes. It comes for you. It comes for me. The Great Eye opens and the warriors of righteousness stride forth once more".

He preached heresy.

Urian: "We must prepare the way, open the path, so that they might not sully¹⁶ their steps with the pagan filth that afflicts our species. The

Imperium teaches that the Emperor had nine sons, nine holy protectors to act as his servants and intercede¹⁷ on our behalf. I have preached such for much of my life. You have been deceived. I have deceived you".

His voice boomed speaking to some other worldly yearning¹⁸ in the human soul.

Urian: "The Emperor had more than nine sons. Once there were eighteen. Nine stood loyal to the great lie. Others gave way to truth accepting a brighter path, a righteous path for humanity's future. Even now their own sons watch us, judge us for our worthiness. They are coming. They are bound to hear our pleas for salvation and bring us aid".

Such heresy... Such utter complete and unrepentant heresy. Every word dripped with the vile vehement¹⁹ that consumed those sworn to the Ruinous Powers. Rhasc resisted the urge to yearn.

Adamta: "Always the same, isn't it?"

The assassins had heard variations on the same theme countless times before. Traitors loved to hear the sounds of their own voice, to vent²⁰ the heresy that polluted their minds and draw more into their corrupt webs.

Klara: "Funny how they all speak 'the truth'".

Rhasc knew in her heart that they lied.

Klara: "The God-Emperor only had nine sons. All the records agree".

Adamta: "Well, you know how records can be manipulated".

Such manipulations were amongst the Vanus assassins tools. Adamta's mind and body had been sculpted into a tool for understanding and utilizing data, as Rhasc's had been for infiltration and deception. His current assignment was to help Rhasc, to find her targets and how best to end them.

In this case she was waiting for the height of the speech. Rhasc wanted to cause the maximum spectacle of Imperial retribution. Urian was almost making it too easy. In his zeal for pomp²¹ and circumstance this would-be saint had engineered the perfect opportunity. Rhasc stood assembled with representations of the Emperor's nine sons there to add legitimacy and credence to the weight of Urian's words, a reminder that

the throne approved of all this holy man would say. But he was no saint and he would be dead within the next three minutes.

Rhasc counted the seconds ticking them away within her head, subvocally broadcasting them to orbit above. Adamta listened as he always listened. Rhasc could hear his heavy breathing, his chain smoker's wheeze²² in her ear. It had long ceased to be irritating, blending into the background noise of her life. It merely was.

Adamta: "Based on captures of his previous speeches it might be about time to strike, Rhasc".

Klara: "Almost... Just a few moments".

Everything she knew about the Vanus assassin was guess work, a blend of intuition and inference²³. In the time they had spent on the same missions Rhasc had never seen him in the flesh. Aboard the cramped²⁴ halls of the Traduceum he avoided her, locked in a private wing. Where he was from she only guessed at. He had an accent but what world it emerged from she would likely never know. Every word the Vanus spoke was uttered with the assurance of a sniper's bullet. She winced²⁵ at the metaphor, felt the pain carve into her side, but it was true and honest. Each of the Officio Assassinorum's temples had its methods of slaying the Emperor's foes.

Urian, the would-be saint, raised his arms, gesturing to the great disk of the sun that hid behind its chain of grey cloud.

(fireworks, people exclaiming and cheering)

The crowd roared taking Urian's upraised arms as a sign that they were now invited to participate. Streamers²⁶ showered from above - purple, gold and green. Fires streaked through the sky. Urian was, Rhasc reflected, her favorite type of mark. The Ecclesiarchy always brought with it such ceremony and when its servants died, it was always with confusion and fear marring their features. Such hubris²⁷ pointed those who preached the Imperial Creed.

(distant barely heard gunshots and explosions)

Another sound, familiar and unexpected came from the distance. Gunshots... The echoing reports of a bolt pistol. Ripples of unease and fear lanced through the mob of zealots.

(crowd starting to scream in fear)

Rhasc watched as people jostled, then bodies flew.

Klara: "Adamta! What's happening? I hear gunshots".

Adamta: "I was going to ask you that. I'll check the local vox nets".

Adamta's voice was puzzled. It was rare to hear that, but Rhasc had no time to enjoy it. She kept her focus on her mark who had lowered his arms and was peering into the crowd in confusion. This was her chance. Rhasc licked her lips beneath her mask, the gesture subconscious and loathsome, a holdover²⁸ trait from the genetic memory of the man her body currently mimicked.

(Klara unsheathing a tiny blade)

At her wrist a blade of dark green metal sliced through the skin. She took a step forward. The other angels around her jostled. Their masks carved to resemble the Emperor's other eight sons betrayed no expression.

Klara: "You are in my way".

(Klara slicing an angel)

The blade spoke through flesh. The man dressed as the Blood Angel Sanguinius hissed as cold steel punched through his gullet²⁹ with a wet broken sound of meat and bone. Blood flowed.

Klara: "Too slow... How boring it must be to be normal, to be so slow and unresponsive".

The other Primarchs began to turn. Ceremonial blades leapt into hands unused to their weight, gilded things carried by gilded men. They turned on her, the traitor in their midst. Rhasc smiled beneath her heavy mask.

(slicing sound, man screaming in pain)

The guard dressed as the Avenging Son or perhaps the Praetorian, she was not sure which, crumpled and fell as a small dagger caressed³⁰ his neck. The silver blade wet with poison cut through makeup, skin, flesh and bone.

(another man shrieking, charging, getting sliced and screaming from pain)

Another of the other would-be angels lunged at her. His decorative sword aimed at her neck. Rhasc stepped aside out of the blow and stabbed him, blade lancing into his liver. He fell with a muffled³¹ cry. The others - all members of Urian's personal guard - attacked. Rhasc's movements were poetry and death. Barely slowed by the old wound on

her side she danced through the godly-clad guards and blood followed in her wake. Wherever her face sword struck, body parts severed and twitching fell like rain. Rhasc was untouchable, unstained by the massacre she wreaked. When it was over and the only living things on the balcony were her and her mark, she spoke.

Klara: "Principus Urian the 22nd".

Urian turned, alarm wreaked comically large against his paling flesh. He saw Rhasc garbed in the guise of the Iron Gorgon. His eyes drifted to the sword hanging from her wrist and the corpses that littered the balcony.

Urian (crying): "Guards!"

He began to back away, fear flowing from him in waves.

Urian (screaming): "Guards! I am under attack!"

Klara: "No, Urian. You are dead. I and the Emperor's judgment made manifest".

The light of piety³² slipped from his gaze. Something ugly took its place. Heresy lurked beneath his saintly surface, dark and malignant like a cancer. Sudden stress and fear brought its snarling into the light. His features shifted, his skin splitting and wet rancid³³ meat glared at her.

(Urian shifting, bones cracking)

The thing that had been Urian took a step towards Rhasc and a needle struck it in the raw flesh of its neck.

(Urian groaning from pain)

Its eyes glazed and it toppled to its knees.

Klara: "Adamta, someone just shot my mark! What is going on?"

Adamta: "Someone what?"

The faint gunfire in the crowd rose in staccato bursts of popping³⁴ noise. Whoever was firing was coming closer. People screamed in terror. Beneath their fear-act cries Rhasc could hear a deepened ghoul³⁵ laughter.

(someone laughing in the distance)

Adamta: "Is that laughter? What's going on down there?"

Guards lined up at the lip of the balcony firing volleys of las bolts into the wailing³⁶ crowd, trying to kill whatever was approaching. On the balcony the Urian mutant swayed still on its knees.

(Urian groaning from pain)

The would-be saint murmured, voice slipping to a language mankind was never meant to utter and speaking words that itched at the edges of Rhasc's consciousness. She ignored them. She ignored the spines that erupted from his body, the rampant³⁷ mutation that revealed itself.

Klara: "I don't know, but I'm ending this now".

Adamta: "Acknowledged".

Rhasc flew towards him. Her every movement, her every step was beyond economy. It was artistry, her faction sublime. She was the Emperor's judgment, rendered manifest in the form of one of his own sons. The symbolism was beautiful. Her phase sword was outstretched, ready to deliver the traitor's end. The blow never landed.

(bolt explosion)

Rhasc heard a single bolt pistol report and Urian's body fell forward, dark blood gouting³⁸ from what had been his head.

(mysterious assassin approaching, slicing numerous victims in his wake)

She pulled back and her eyes locked on alive figure moving through the crowd, casually lashing out to the power sword and clawed gauntlet. Its face was a skull, a red glow coming from the eye sockets.

Adamta: "Rhasc, is it done? Is the target down?"

Klara: "Yes, but it wasn't me. There's another agent here, Adamta. Another assassin".

Adamta: "Another? That's impossible. I doubt that Officio have sent another agent".

Rhasc watched as the black-clad figure leapt up onto the balcony. She took a step backwards as its leering death's head turned towards her.

Klara: "I don't know, but it's standing right in front of me".

Adamta: "Is it..."

Klara: "No, not a Vindicare. Not this time. Adamta, it's an Eversor".

The Eversor raised its pistol and fired.

(single bolt round)

A bolt shell glanced off Rhasc's mask, the detonation nearly shattering the heavy steel. Needles flew from the weapon's other barrel. She raised her phase sword and desperately deflected them.

Eversor (grunting): "Secondary stress identified".

Klara: "Why are you here? This was my mission! My kill!"

She had been tasked with this execution. Her professionalism dictated that her blade must be the one to claim the would-be saint's life. She had never failed a mission before.

Eversor (grunting): "My mission".

The Eversor reached for her with his neuro-gauntlet, knife-like fingers curling.

Eversor (grunting): "My kill".

She could hear a flash of pain in his voice, beneath the heavy slur³⁹ of whatever combat drugs coursed through his system. His mind was addled⁴⁰, perhaps gone. The Eversor were never the most reliable tools. Drugs defined them, made them an inconstant weapon that lacked precision and lacked discipline. They were kept sedated or frozen between missions and unleashed on enemy where terror was the goal. If Rhasc was a dagger slipping between ribs, an Eversor was a bomb.

Urian's body writhed between them, flesh dancing somehow still alive. Spikes of bones split from the saint's flesh, bursting through meat. The spines lashed out dripping some vile pale fluid. The Eversor cut through one and grabbed the edge of the saint's robe.

Eversor (grunting): "My kill. What are you?"

Surprise rippled through her composure. Did he even know she was a fellow assassin?

Adamta: "You are still disguised, Rhasc. He thinks you are a god. Show him who you really are".

Adamta was right. She was still wearing the body of the guard who had portrayed the Gorgon.

(Klara shifting her disguise, weird noises)

She concentrated and her form shifted, bones cracking and flesh remolding as her body reverted back to its natural feminine shape.

Klara: "I am an agent of the Officio as well".

The Eversor ignored her, staring down at the mutating body on the ground. Mouths opened along the curve of its spine and snapped at the Eversor with jagged teeth. He snatched back his hand. The creature that had been Urian stumbled up onto stalked⁴¹ legs. A rippling⁴² face frowned⁴³ from its torso, with a mouth filled with brown and rotten teeth.

Urian (growling): "Face... the judgment... of the righteous!"

His voice grotesquely was the same.

(bolt round, Urian moaning from pain)

The mutant lashed out with claw-bladed appendages. The Eversor raised his pistol and shot it through the mouth.

(second bolt round)

He fell back to the ground and writhed in agony.

Eversor (grunting): "Enough! Die!"

As he reached for the saint again the Eversor pointed his executioner pistol at Rhasc, quivering⁴⁴ with unreleased anger. The weapon coughed and needles stitched at her, flying through the air in barely visible blurs. Rhasc flung herself to the ground, rolled and threw a poisoned dagger. A small blade, thin and topped with a skull to match the Eversor's own, tore the mutant's robe and pinned the Eversor's hand to a marble pillar. Rhasc danced backwards waiting for the poison to take effect. The Eversor stared at the blade that impaled his hand. Head cocked in curiosity. He pulled fast almost gently, then with growing heaves of brute strength.

Klara: "Soon the poison will overwhelm you".

Eversor (grunting): "No! No, it will not! My kill!"

(Eversor tearing out the knife)

The Eversor tore the scrap of robe and the blade with a sharp crack from the marble.

Adamta (insistently): "What in name the Emperor's golden throne is going on down there, Rhasc?"

She ignored Adamta and stabbed forwards. The Eversor parried, batting her phase sword aside with his power blade and raising his pistol again.

(pistol shooting)

Needles stitched towards Rhasc, but she was already moving. She jiggled⁴⁵ to the side and threw herself behind a marble pillar. Eversor followed. He moved like lightning but with none of Rhasc's poetic grace.

Eversor (approaching and grunting): "My kill! My target!"

He was monstrously fast and monstrously strong. He holstered his pistol as he charged her. Poisoned blades studded into him, flung with the effortless perfection bred of long practice. He didn't even slow. A right hook flew for her head. She ducked but he caught her mane of hair. She reached up and grabbed his hand. A needle slid through the flesh of her finger and punched through the Eversor's body glove.

(Eversor screaming)

Genetic material flooded into her, her bones creaked aching with sudden changing pain. The muscles in her face flexed, then shifted. She felt a faint vibration pulse through her chest, unwanted energy piercing her movements. The Eversor pulled and Rhasc flew over his head, but she turned the motion into a flip landing on her feet. She pulled her neuro-shredder from its sheathe, ready to fire and liquefy his brain.

(Eversor punching, the weapon falling to the ground)

He knocked it out of her hand.

Eversor (grunting): "No! You don't get to shoot me, false face! Callidus witch!"

Adamta: "Talk to me, Klara. What is going on down there?"

Klara: "I have the situation under control".

Rhasc barely ducked a punch that could have torn off her head.

Adamta: "How?"

Klara: "Poison!"

She stabbed another blade through the Eversor's body glove. Green toxins and blue shine of blood leaked out.

Adamta (crying angrily): "Poison? On an Eversor? Are you mad? You'll disrupt the other toxins running through his blood stream. He could trigger his suicide clause and take you with him".

She hesitated for a moment, sweat suddenly beating her body. The Eversor skull mask grinned at her, almost knowing.

Eversor (grunting): "My kill!"

He balled forwards knocking into Rhasc, driving her over the bodies of the dead guards. The Callidus operative cracked into a marble pillar. Stars shone in her eyes and dancing visions of skulls pulsed in time with her labored heart. She glanced at the thing that had once been Urian. It tried to stand again. Fragile wings had sprouted from its back. Pain lanced through her side.

Klara: "I think the wound from Ymber has reopened, Adamta. Why does this keep happening? Why do assassins from the other temples keep attacking me?"

(heavy rain and thunder)

She caught an echo of the Eversor's mind, the wreck of his personality from her genetic sampling of him. He was broken by chemicals and drugs, the jagged edges of insanity eating into him.

(approaching footsteps)

The Eversor stood over the saint still for a moment as he stared down at the retched⁴⁶ thing. Thunder cracked through the sky and the assassin flinched⁴⁷. Rain hammered down from leaden clouds pounding into the marble and stone soaking the bodies of the fallen. With an almost casual gesture the Eversor stamped on Urian's mutating body. A sharp crack echoed across the balcony cutting through the fog that roiled⁴⁸ in Rhasc's mind.

Eversor (grunting and running away): "Secondly targets marked. Moving to engage!"

Rhasc couldn't begin to guess who the assassin spoke to as he turned and jumped from the balcony disappearing into the plaza below.

Adamta: "Rhasc!"

She thought he heard a voice calling her name.

Adamta (crying): "Rhasc!"

Definitely a voice.

Adamta (screaming): "Rhasc!!!"

The fog lifted. She pulled herself shakily to her feet. She became aware that Adamta had been calling her name for seconds, repeating it over and over in a litany of concern.

Klara: "Ah... Adamta... What's going on?"

At her feet lay the ruined and broken body of the would-be saint. Her target. Where there should have flickered a hololithic death code, her mark of pride, the symbol she left on her kills, instead there was just blood-stained cloth and mutated flesh.

Adamta: "I don't know, Rhasc. I don't know..."

(screams in the distance, thunder and downpour)

Troops flooded in from the plaza's entrance. Boots splashed through puddles of rainwater and blood. Water vapor formed a fog from the violent impacts. It swirled and wove forming strange patterns. Rhasc thought she could almost read it. Cries of fear erupted from the huddled49 remnants of the crowd.

Klara: "What's the plan here, Adamta?"

Rhasc shifted her balance from foot to foot, clenching her hands into fists as she tested her muscles. Fury blazed through her mind, unwelcome and foreign.

Klara (moaning): "Something's wrong with me, Vanus".

Adamta: "Your adrenaline levels are spiking. There's something going on with your genetic coding, Rhasc. Did you touch the Eversor?"

Klara: "Briefly... (understanding) Oh... By the God-Emperor... Is this what an Eversor feels like? No wonder he tried to kill me..."

Adamta: "Wait, Rhasc. I am getting something new. A primary communication. Oh, by the Emperor's eyes and ears, this isn't good, Klara. Very-very not good. We have our next mission and this one isn't over".

Rhasc practiced her flesh shaping, touching corpses and assuming their forms, while she waited for Adamta to continue. Distant echoes of other lives flashed through her memory. Pain brief and sharp crackled along her muscles as they reshaped. Her skin felt tight, ill-fitted. With every change the pain lessened, grew easier as her muscles stretched.

Adamta: "Not going to like this. That Eversor, operative Torq... You are to bring him to the Traduceum. We'll need him for what's coming".

Klara: "What's coming?"

She settled on a body, a guard whose face stared sightlessly at her from the ground. She could hear weapons fire off in the distance.

Adamta: "The apocalypse..."

She frowned at the hyperbole.

Klara: "Explain, Kurei..."

Adamta: "Later... For now we have to find Torq".

(distant sirens and screams)

A dull orange glow split the sky glaring fitfully against the swiftly gathering darkness. Fires were raging across the city despite the downpour. Alarm claxons, old sirens standing on carved metal poles erupted into wailing noise. Stylites⁵⁰ that had been taking advantage of the heights to commune with the God-Emperor or whatever blasphemy held this shrine world in corruption, had tumbled and fallen to their deaths in explosions of meat and gore.

Klara: "I am following the body trail here. The Eversor is racking⁵¹ up quite a kill count".

Eversor assassins were brutes, blunt instruments. No discipline kept them caged. Through chemicals and drugs the Eversor temples sought strength and fury to accomplish their kills. It was altogether too messy, too imprecise. Now some of that fury echoed through Rhasc and she was restless.

Klara: "Have you found him through any of the city's security systems?"

Adamta: "Still looking. Any ideas where he'd be headed?"

Klara: "He mentioned something about secondary targets, but there was only the one".

Adamta: "Only the one for you, yes. There were no others that you were assigned to. There might have been more critical supporters of this benighted saint, that's why the Eversor is here, I think. What district are you in?"

Klara: "Still the central. Why would the Officio send an Eversor after Urian's supporters and where's his handler?"

Rhasc examined the buildings, noted the marble and gold that adorned every surface. Mosaics studded the walls gleaming in the wet night.

Adamta: "Same reason you pose as a Primarch. It's a powerful message. As for his handler, probably dead".

Klara: "Dead?"

Adamta: "It's one of the Officio's most dangerous jobs. Once the drugs are in their systems Eversors are... unpredictable".

Rhasc absorbed this information stepping around the ruptured bodies. People mobbed the street: citizens, pilgrims and others ran to and fro with little regard. Panic gripped them in the wake of the lord's death. A woman dressed in a throne garbed officer's uniform stood before a shadowed chapel door. She declaimed to the passing crowds.

Female officer: "Tevrat is blessed in the eyes of the gods. The profane rule of the false Emperor ends tonight. The saint has made good his promise - the end comes. Our new masters rise!"

Her words were ignored. Her exaltations fell on ears deaf to the so called New Order.

Klara: "Bear with me, Adamta!"

(breaking glass)

Rhasc slipped into the chapel shattering a window with a tinkle of broken glass that went unheard under the clamor of the sirens and the crowds. Rhasc cracked the heavy wooden door open from the inside. She watched for a moment ensuring that none in the streaming crowd were paying attention to the soldier. Rhasc slipped her hand over the woman's mouth, cut off her blasphemy and pulled her inside. The needle dipped into the soldier's flesh and unlocked her genetic code. A quick flash of the phase sword ended the soldier's life. A moment's polymorphing use stole her identity.

Her stolen body and uniform bought Rhasc easy passage through the streets. She shifted her gaze to the disciplined marching of the soldier. Burdened with authority and a purpose that would brook52 no questions.

(thunder and distant sirens)

Lightning splashed across the sky granting the cityscape a thunderous counterpoint to the drumming rain. Someone screamed in the distance, then fell disturbingly silent. Rhasc ignored the noises and followed the bodies torn and ripped, brutally drawn to pieces by a mind barely cognoscente of its own actions. They lay in the middle of the streets,

their blood mingling⁵³ with the rain water. The blood drew her eye, soothed the boiling in her thoughts.

Klara: "Adamta, what drugs do the Eversor take? How long do they last? How do I counteract them?"

Adamta: "Honestly I don't know. The temples aren't known for sharing information".

Klara (in fury): "Useless Vanus! You are useless!"

Lumen staves⁵⁴ gleamed ahead cutting through the falling rain and half-dark streets with their failing gas lamps. Tiled mosaics gleamed with precious metal and gems suggesting half-form effigies⁵⁵ of some obscure image of ecclesiarchical significance.

A voice called from the darkness.

Female guard: "Hey, you there! Your business?"

(Klara approaching)

Klara Rhasc let her stolen uniform speak for her as she stepped to the broad outlines of the shrine square. A squad of ten throne guards shriveled onto her gaze.

Klara: "Oh, begging your pardon, madam. I didn't see your uniform".

The woman sketched a salute as did her comrades.

Female guard: "Do you... Do you know what's going on?"

Her voice searched for any information that made sense of the madness that afflicted her world.

Female guard: "Is the saint dead?"

The squad leader's eyebrow was arched, her lips pursed and her brow furrowed. Rhasc watched her work through the question before she asked it.

Female guard: "Are you wounded? Your uniform is covered in blood".

Klara: "I am fine...".

As soon as the words left her mouth Rhasc knew she was in trouble. Her accent gave her away. While she could mimic other forms, steal their body shapes and expressions, she could not accommodate such a drastic shift in accent so quickly. It took some time and the echo of the Eversor's fury had robbed her voice of its chameleon nature.

Rhasc called her neuro-shredder from its sheathe and extended her phase sword. She cut through one soldier's throat before he could raise his lasrifle. She cuddled over another soldier, neuro-shredder firing with a muffled whine. The woman screamed as her nerves and brain were liquefied and fluid dripped from her ruptured eye sockets, nose and mouth. Rhasc slid through the knot⁵⁶ of soldiers throwing her comb outwards, cracking through the squad leader's spine with one blow. The Callidus assassin leapt at another man. As she moved over him, she wrapped her legs around his neck and turned with the motion. Bones cracked as she completed the flip, flinging the body into two other throne guards. Her hands splayed against the wet uneven cobblestones⁵⁷ for balance. She felt rather than saw the rifles take aim for this traitor in their midst. A spinning kick cracked into the jaw of one of the men menacing her, almost tearing it free from the throne guard's skull. Her other arm reached forward phase sword out, plunging it into a woman's chest, reaching for her heart. The sword ripped free drawing blood that blinded another attacker. He depressed his trigger and a thrown knife pushed his aim away from her and into his fellows. A lasrifle cracked as if fired producing puffs of steam as the beam superheated the rain. The poison ended him seconds later, his flesh necrotizing⁵⁸ and his body collapsing into a twitching heap.

(soldiers dropping their weapons and trying to run away)

Lasguns clattered to the ground as the remaining assailants abandoned the fight. None were anywhere near fast enough to avoid Klara Rhasc and none could be allowed to live after witnessing her in action. Her neuro-shredder whined once again. Two fleeing men collapsed, hands flung up to their ears to try to stop the noise. Their central nerve systems liquefied and they died in agony. Poison knives flew from Rhasc's hand studding into the backs of more of the fleeing soldiers unerringly finding their spinal columns⁵⁹. Their bodies collapsed to the ground with boneless finality. Rhasc moved on.

Adamta: "Here we go... Two potential targets. I have to tell you how lucky you are, Callidus".

Klara: "All the time, Vanus".

She stepped over the broken body of a throne guard. She almost managed to not make Adamta's temple name sound like an insult.

Adamta: "This is how much the Emperor smiles on you. There's a target nearby. Tevratine throne guard commander frequents a bathhouse near here. Goes there to unwind⁶⁰. Signs point to him being there tonight. If that's all the Eversor's tracking, that's where he'll go. Sending you the relevant details now".

(beeping sound of loaded data)

A green flash scrolled over her left eye, data in-loaded from Adamta's records. A map superimposed⁶¹ across her vision, detailing the surrounding area. Her mind enhanced and honed⁶² by her order read and memorized the layout. Next came a portrait, name, rank, information, everything that could possibly be used in the hunt for this target.

Adamta: "He's called Harvin Mesa, not native to Tevrat. Commander of the throne guard. (laughing) God-Emperor, what a name for the local militia! For fifty years no record of heretical or seditious⁶³ actions. That could mean he's been marked either due to assumed complicity⁶⁴ or someone merely wising to clean house. My bets on a careful pruning⁶⁵ of the planet's ruling caste by someone in the Inquisition".

Klara: "Harvin Mesa..."

She tasted the name, whispered it, considered it, savored⁶⁶ it. It was like a promise, a bond forming between killer and target.

Klara: "I'll find him".

* * *

The bathhouse loomed from the darkness. Thick columns supported a glowering portico⁶⁷ covered in tiles⁶⁸ depicting some victory of lord Solar Macharius. Steam curled from the bathhouse's ill-set windows. Soldiers patrolled the entrances, the light of hanging lumen glows painting them as tall as giants. They were nervous, spooked. Rhasc could see it in their movements. The soldiers darted at every noise, jumped at every shifting shadow, but the plaza they watched was empty, devoid of the riots Rhasc had seen as she had slipped through the streets of the city.

(thunder and downpour)

Rhasc watched them from the darkness offered by the abandoned reliquary⁶⁹ court. She learned their patterns, their quirks⁷⁰ of personality. The click of vox conversations was a near constant

background noise. They were chattering, trying to reassure one another with their voices, acting as a reminder that they were not alone. Rhasc sprinted across the plaza avoiding puddles and refused⁷¹. Then she was among the fog billowing from the bathhouse, ducking behind a pillar. She passed a meter behind one of the guards. The trooper was never even aware of her presence.

(Rhasc slicing down the first guardsman)

A single scrape, a small slice along the back of his calf and he fell. She pulled the body into an alcove and began to scale the building. She jumped from handhold⁷² to handhold pulling herself up the textured mosaic and through one of the propped windows that stood out from the walls.

Met with silence Rhasc felt eerily alone. There was only the steady drip-drop of water. Fiery torches studded the walls at uneven intervals, granting an ancient air to the granite bathhouse. Every surface was slick, wet with condensed vapor. Statues stood guarding over the interior space. Grand things that appeared to be weeping and sweating. Water flowed down carved robes and gathered in the hollows of silent faces.

Adamta: "What are you seeing, Rhasc?"

Klara: "Nothing and no one. Where is the commander? Or he's gone?"

Adamta: "I don't know. He might not be there at all".

She padded through the marble halls finding no evidence of life. Towels lay draped across wood-slug chairs. She pushed back the curtain into the steam heat of a sauna. There was a scent on the air, an iron note that floated through the roiling vapor. Like everything else in the building it was muffled, hesitant as a whisper.

Klara (walking): "I smell blood".

It grew stronger the deeper she went. The whiff⁷³ became a reek⁷⁴. The salty mineral taint of blood overwhelmed the sweet incense that billowed from sensors set along the walls. Pools of bubbling water untended shun pink. Blood curled⁷⁵ through them in lazy currents. It splattered the walls giving voice to the massacre that had consumed the bathhouse. Water and blood dripped from the ceiling turning her stolen uniform into a stained and sodden⁷⁶ mess. She felt an itch between her shoulder-blades and a spasm of pain from the wound in her flank. Her

phase sword was at the ready waiting for a knife to strike from the darkness, ready to catch a glimpse of the leering skull mask.

Adamta: "Any sign of the Eversor? Have you found his trail yet?"

Klara: "I have definitely found his trail, but not the target. He has done something to the commander, of that I am certain. The bathhouse is a mess. There's blood everywhere, but there are no bodies".

There was no sign of the people whose blood clotted⁷⁷ everything.

Adamta: "Fear... A fear tactic, a psychological shriveling⁷⁸ meant to make a bald statement to the would-be traitors and heretics".

Rhasc almost admired that. This was the sign of the Emperor's judgment. This was a statement made to keep those who would step out of line cowed⁷⁹ and obedient.

Adamta: "He is trying to teach a lesson".

Klara: "Of course he is. I do the same... But he has been here. Perhaps he's already left".

She kept the plans of the building floating across the surface of her eye. There were only a few chambers of note that she hadn't already checked.

(with gentle steps Rhasc keeping the search)

The great bathing pool lay in a vast communal chamber. It was the nearest. It beckoned through a doorway braced by caryatides⁸⁰ artfully painted in chipped pigment. Over the doorway pounded a waterfall meant to serve as a bracing⁸¹ introduction to the heat and the warmth of the room beyond. The lumen globes were gone here. No fires flickered in alcoves. No warmth stirred this area. No heat bloomed against Rhasc's thermal vision.

She passed through the curtain buffeted by the waterfall, phase sword held before her ready to guard, to act. It barely saved her, as shards of hooked metal slid from the darkness, grabbed her wrist and pulled her through into the chamber.

Eversor: "My kill! This snake is sneaking, is sneaking, is sneaking..."

The Eversor released Rhasc's arm and she stumbled, correcting and turning it into a run. She used the water sleek floor to her advantage and skidded, turned. She pulled a knife from her belt and threw it. The Eversor flicked it away with his middle finger.

Eversor: "No!"

The Eversor shook his head slowly.

Eversor: "Why... Why do you follow? Why are you still?"

Klara: "The Throne needs you".

She sprinted forward, each step a shore⁸² despite the wet ground. He readied to meet her whipping out his power sword. Muscles bunched along his arms. His legs were wide, his stance ready. He half-crouched holding the sword to block her own blade. His other hand - each finger ending in a needle-sharp knife - twitched and danced with metallic clicks. He would parry any sword strike Rhasc offered, so she didn't offer. Instead as leapt as she neared spinning.

(Rhasc kicking Eversor, Torq crying)

Her heel smashed into his skull mask cracking his head to the side. The mask caved in⁸³, shards of bone-like material crunching into his cheek. Her other foot followed through the spin hammering into the same place.

(Rhasc kicking Eversor for the second time, Torq screaming)

Blood oozed from the wound, thick and wet with an oily shine. Torq lashed out and Rhasc let momentum carry her, ducking beneath his sword with boneless fluidity⁸⁴. Her phase sword flickered up to block. Pain bloomed as his blow struck with a terrible drug-fuelled strength, breaking her guard and nearly wrenching her shoulder from its socket.

(Rhasc groaning from pain)

Eversor: "I do the Throne's work now. Throne says come, Throne says kill!"

Klara: "Then kill something else. This world doesn't matter. Something else is coming. The High Lords of Terra call for us, Eversor".

Eversor: "You lie".

His knife hand darted out trying to grab her hair. She leaned back and deflected the blow. Knife tips slid across the wet marble with a squeal. The Eversor barely even slowed. He swung his power sword and a clenched fist wildly. There was a feral grace in his movements beneath the fury. Each swing was wild, each punch thrown with all the force the Eversor could master, but he had a savage hoist to him, a skill and training that bled through the haze of his mind. He fought like some

barbarian tribesman insane on hallucinogenics except he did not bellow⁸⁵ and scream dire implications. Rhasc's muscles burned with fatigue and sweat soaked her. She voxed Adamta.

Klara (breathing hard): "I can't take much more of this. Any ideas?"

Adamta: "Your bio signs are... unusual. I think when you sampled his DNA, you were affected by whatever is coursing through him".

Klara (breathing hard): "Are you saying I'm count downed from a drug high?"

Adamta: "Essentially and so will he in time. You need to wear him out, Klara".

Klara (breathing hard): "Oh... Easier said than done".

She danced and flowed dodging rather than striking. She fought for his exhaustion trying to ignore her own. Her body's wearing has threatened to overcome her augmentations. This fight was such as she had rarely known. She had battled Eldar and Genestealers xenos breeds. They had been hard and fast fights with the speed and grace that was expected from such beings. But this... against one trained by the temples was beyond that. Two warriors crafted since birth to serve as the deadliest weapons in mankind's arsenal fought and bled. Their swords met and parted in showers of sparks. Fists and feet flew in displays of breathtaking martial splendor. Torq fought because his bruised mind demanded it. Rhasc - to subdue him in the name of unification, of a new purpose in service to the throne of Terra and the agency they both answered to. Wounds stippled⁸⁶ the Eversor's black body glove, red lines tearing through material, thick blood dripping and oozing. The battle had taken them back out into the antechamber⁸⁷.

Klara (breathing hard): "This isn't working. I need to subdue him, Adamta".

Eversor: "Who do you speak to, Callidus?"

Torq's blade-fingered hand swept for her head, angry and wild. She could hear the claws slice through the air, monomolecular knives carving through fog and water vapor. Light bounced from them, the flickering glow of real firelight. They screamed for her head.

Adamta: "I don't know... There isn't really a precedent for this. At least not in any records I can access. You need to tire him out".

His words were calm, infuriatingly so. Here own were labored, pushed past lips that trembled with fatigue.

Klara (breathing hard): "I am trying that. As I say... it doesn't seem to be working".

Adamta: "Sorry... If we knew the cocktail of drugs they have put him on, we might be able to counter that. But we don't, so we can't".

Klara (ironically and angrily): "That's very useful... Thank you so much".

Adamta: "Tire him out or knock him out, that's the only advice I have".

Klara (ironically): "Perfect! (suddenly) Wait! What is he...".

The Eversor paused. For a long moment he stood still. No takes marred the stillness. No twitches, no gasps of tired breath. He just stood and stared. Utterly silent. Rhasc circled warily⁸⁸, ready for the trap. Certain that Torq was preparing to erupt into violent motion.

Klara: "He is not moving..."

Adamta: "Maybe you did exhaust him".

(Eversor making unsteady steps)

Slowly the Eversor turned his back on her.

Eversor (tired): "Secondary target identified".

His head was cocked to the side as if he were listening. He turned sharply towards Rhasc again and she raised her phase sword.

Eversor (angrily): "Done with you!"

He jumped scrambling off one of the statues. She hurled knives at him. None connected. He moved too fast. She hold herself up after him, burning muscles protesting. She jumped from handhold to handhold crawling up mosaics and bath reliefs. She reached up hands stretched and grabbed the Eversor by the ankle. More of his fury flowed into her and left her mind racing. His foot lashed out and hooked under her chin cracking up. She held on despite the pain pulling, trying to stop his escape. She failed. The Eversor kicked again and the force of the blow knocked Rhasc backwards. She flicked in midair and landed on her feet looking up to see Torq leap through a window.

(Eversor jumping off the window, glass breaking)

Broken glass tinkled and the Eversor was gone into the Tevratian night. Klara Rhasc stood alone in the blood-soaked emptiness of the bathhouse amidst the fog and flickering torches.

Klara (breathing hard): "Emperor's blood, Adamta! He's gone. Again... He has another target. I need the details and I need them now".

Frustration bled from every syllable. Not only was Rhasc's body wounded, but also her pride. To be outdone by another agent of the temples was utterly galling⁸⁹ and after Ymber and the Vindicare increasingly, frustratingly common. Almost before she had finished the demand Adamta was sending data to her. It streamed across her vision. The Vanus assassin held his tongue presumably knowing better than debate Rhasc right now. The rich details of a woman's life flashed across the Callidus assassin's eyes.

Adamta: "His likely target's name is Lyola Zamral. A native Tevratine who has served the Administratum with distinction for nearly one hundred years. Her record speaks of tedious⁹⁰ loyalty and a boring life spent in the service of efficiency numbers and tie percentages".

Klara: "Why her?"

Adamta: "I don't know. Zamral seems as boring, grey and as faceless as the organization she serves. She is as nondescript as any Administratum drone. No evidence of falsehood, no recorded predilection⁹¹ for heresy or blasphemy. She is plain, loyal and unassuming⁹²".

And yet Lyola Zamral was marked as a potential target by Rhasc's masters in the Officio.

Klara: "Why doesn't matter. I need to get to her before Torq".

Zamral's offices, located in the headquarters of the Administratum presence on Tevrat, were relatively nearby. If she was the Eversor's target and Adamta was rarely wrong, he would be there soon.

(fast footsteps)

Rhasc exited the bathhouse through the front door. Soldiers turned to question her. Blood pounded in her ears. Restless energy burned away the fatigue in her muscles. They died with broken necks.

Adamta: "Care for, Rhasc. You touched him again, didn't you? Don't give in to the rage! Fight it, stay sharp!"

Rhasc ignored him already running through the maddened shrine city. The blood fury of the Eversor focused her on her mission, on revenge. She passed hastily shuttered⁹³ windows and caught the faint light reflecting from fearful eyes.

(crowd roaring and rioting)

She slipped down an alley and into an avenue where a mass of men and women in zealot's robes blocked her path. Their voices rose in glorification of the saint - blessed Urian - seemingly unaware that he had died an hour before. Bottles of alcohol swapped between swaddled⁹⁴ hands. One of them noticed her.

Man from the crowd: "Hey, you! What are you doing here? I'm talking to you. Are you with us? Are you part of Urian's army ready to take Tevrat back from the false Imperium? Eh?"

(man suddenly groaning and collapsing to the ground)

Rhasc punched the man as she passed. He spun and fell. The zealots were far too slow, far too clumsy to react and Rhasc pushed through them. Even without their alcoholic impairment⁹⁵ none of them would have been able to lay a hand on her. She moved through the center of the group.

(grenade pin falling down, immense explosion, screams of the crowd)

She left something behind. A little object unnoticed rolled at their feet. When she was thirty paces away an explosion split the night at her back. The grenade she had left behind consumed the crowd of cultists, tore up the street and shattered windows.

Adamta: "That was excessive".

Klara (angrily): "They have denied their loyalty to the Throne World. They have cast off their shackles of the Imperium. Their lives were forfeit anyway. Whether by my hand or the retribution fleet of the Astra Militarum. And they were in my way".

Adamta: "That's not like you, Rhasc. It's the Eversor's influence. You need to clear your head. You can't beat him if you become him".

She stepped into another street and hesitated. Another crowd of robed people. Images of blood and broken bodies flashed through her mind. She gripped her phase sword tightly.

Adamta: "Rhasc, why are you stopping?"

Klara (angrily): "I need to kill the heretics".

Adamta: "That's not you talking, Callidus. Focus! Ignore the edges! The mission - find the Eversor".

The Callidus assassin shook her head. The rage faded.

Klara (gasping): "You... You are right. I need to get to Zamral".

* * *

The great hall of the Administratum, resplendent⁹⁶ with light, stood before Rhasc. The bulk of the building sheer-sided was graced only with the aquila and the symbol of the Administratum. No windows marred the walls. The symbolism was clear and loud. This was a fortress of faceless Imperial bureaucracy and it was under siege. A huge crowd gathered around it, torches held high. Stones and rotten vegetables clattered off the building's facade. Only a feign cordon of throne guard kept the crowd from storming the building as a sign of resistance against Imperial rule.

Rhasc's bloody uniform was gone, replaced by the vestments of a mendicant⁹⁷ priest, who had been unfortunate enough to cross her path. The robes stank but the opportunity they offered was priceless. Zealots, their faces masks of fury and mourning, parted as she approached offering prayers and holy gestures. The Callidus assassin ignored them and kept her eyes downcast. She spoke quietly hoping that the cultists would take her words for prayers. They were not.

Klara: "Any sign of the Eversor?"

Adamta: "I am watching, but I don't see him. Maybe he gave in to the surges and is butchering his way there".

Rhasc winced at the reminder of her actions.

Klara: "We can only hope".

She passed through the crowd noticed but unremarked. Her robes, her faith and certainty in this disguise bought her passage. When people looked at her they caught only the surface of her disguise. They saw only as she appeared to be, not the assassin beneath. She kept her arms folded, weapons hidden. Around her men and women cast their grief and fury into the skies as they were pelted⁹⁸ with rain.

Youngster: "The gods themselves weep for the passing of our savior!"

Old fanatic: "It was them... The Imperium... They killed him!"

(Administratum guardsmen opening lasfire)

The crowd surged⁹⁹ angrily against the cordon of throne guard soldiers. The sharp whip cracked noise of firing lasguns pushed them back. Then came screams of fury and loss. The crowd sprinted forward pushing and jostling. The whip cracks came again thundering in a volley¹⁰⁰. Rhasc watched as dozens fell, smoking holes carved into filthy bodies. But hundreds pushed forward... Thousands... The sounds of lasguns ceased as the throne guard troopers were overwhelmed.

Rhasc used the riot to her advantage. As chaos erupted around her she pushed through the crowd, passed the spot where soldiers' bodies were being brutally desecrated and into the halls of the Administratum building. The interior was dusty, dry and hot, bereft of any comforts such as an internal cooling system. It smelled of sweat and toil¹⁰¹. She moved quickly. Behind her zealots pushed inside. Startled scribes swaddled in grey robes fell with strangled cries as knives and shards of glass flashed.

Old fanatic: "Death to unbelievers!"

The mob wanted blood, demanded blood and so they sought to slake¹⁰² that unholy thirst on the fluids of those who toiled in the name of the Imperial bureaucracy.

Old fanatic and youngster: "Death to unbelievers!"

Rhasc ignored them and pressed on. Work slogans covered the walls. Assurances that a happy mind was a productive mind and that calm efficiency brought the love of the God-Emperor. Off a secluded hallway in the depths of the building the Callidus cornered a hunched man, back misshapen by endless hours huddled over a desk.

(Rhasc slicing, man screaming)

Her dagger flashed once and arterial blood sprayed from his slit throat. Rhasc adopted the robes and identity of the unlucky Administratum functionary. Her flesh rippled as she adopted the unwholesome pattern of a person who never saw the sun. Her skin took on the sallow¹⁰³ and jaundice¹⁰⁴ tone that betrayed vitamin deficiencies. Slack watery eyes completed the disguise.

She roamed the hallways. The corridor she followed terminated at Zamral's office. The door resembled every other in the building. Marked in flaking gold paint on the door was the title of Adept Console. It stood

slightly ajar¹⁰⁵, dim yellow light flickering from within. Worry flashed through Rhasc's consciousness. Was she too late?

(door hinges squeaking)

She pushed the door open. Inside waited the Adapt Console. The woman did not even glance up from her books, pen darting from one to another as ledgers¹⁰⁶ were crosschecked and adjusted. A chronometer clicked away in the background. Rhasc watched her for a moment, memorizing Zamral's mannerisms, her posture, her facial expressions. The assassin's features were already blurring as she approached the Adapt Console. The woman glanced up from her ledger books, annoyance flickering across her bland¹⁰⁷ face, turning to a long when she saw that Rhasc's features mirrored her own.

Klara: "I am sorry".

(Rhasc killing Zamral, victim groaning)

Rhasc's wrist twitched as she launched a poisoned dagger. Zamral fell back and her chair clattered against the bare floor. Her heels drummed against the ground as the poison raced through her blood stream. Frothing¹⁰⁸ liquid oozed from between her lips. Rhasc hold the body away hiding it behind the door and lifted the chair. Then she took up station at Zamral's desk.

Klara: "I am in position, Adamta, awaiting the target".

* * *

(door getting slammed from outside)

The door flew off its hinges, wood splintering. The Eversor assassin was all menace, his cracked skull mask and glowing red eye lenses - the vision of death incarnate. His pistol was leveled, aimed straight for Rhasc's head. The Callidus watched his finger depress the trigger with a click. Then her sword was there blocking the bolt with the pinning squeal of metal on metal.

(bolt ricocheting and exploding)

The round slammed into the wall and detonated. Shrapnel sliced through her stolen robes cutting more bloody ribbons into the Eversor's black body glove.

Eversor (infuriated): "Oh... You again! Little sneak! My kill!"

Rhasc wasted no breath on a reply. Flipping over the desk she flung the ledger books at him ruining the carefully scrolled notes that lay within. He moved just as he was supposed to.

Klara (breathing hard): "Adamta was right. I can't beat you by being you and I probably can't outfight you or outlast you, but I can outthink you".

The flat of her sword caught his temple¹⁰⁹ knocking him back, arresting his dodge. He recovered quickly. His left hook caught her knee with a sickening crack of catligeon bone. She almost fell. She gritted her teeth with the immense pain. Her sword ripped into Torq's shoulder blade punching through the bone, severing the tendon¹¹⁰. The Eversor growled taken aback. His left arm hung uselessly at his side. Her orders were to bring the assassin back to the Traduceum. They said nothing about him being uninjured.

Eversor (groaning from pain): "Claws of you down!"

Klara (suffering from pain): "You are needed. The temples call for us. We have a new target. One that requires both our skills".

He advanced on her trying to pull her down. Strength and threat were his weapons. Tubes gurgled¹¹¹ on his shoulders pushing his rage to greater heights. Rhasc flung a handful of daggers bursting tubes in sprays of acrid¹¹² chemicals. Their scent filled the air, brought the rage resurging.

Eversor (screaming): "Oh.... No.... You lie!"

He scrabbled¹¹³ at the punctured tubes trying to contain the liquid that spilled out. He failed. His right arm thundered for her in a heavy haymaker¹¹⁴. She flowed beneath it. Already the Eversor was slowing. A slight pause betrayed his actions, a hesitation. Still he came on, slower but still full of lethal intent. He punched again. She met it with her left palm. Pain thundered up her arm but she gripped his fist and held it while her right hand grabbed his forearm. She pulled. The Eversor grunted as his elbow popped from its socket.

(Torq groaning from pain, bone cracking)

He staggered sucking in deep astonished breaths. Her foot spinning into the side of his head stole all thoughts from him, dropping the Eversor into unconsciousness.

She stared at the fallen assassin and whispered into the vox.

Klara: "Adamta, I am going to need help getting his back aboard the Traduceum".

* * *

Things were calm aboard the Traduceum. Endangered servants of Officio Assassinorum, rendered blind and deaf to maintain the secrecy of the temples, scurried¹¹⁵ through its black halls. The ship was not a large one, but was deadly nonetheless. The whole thing barely shook as it left orbit around the fallen shrine world.

Rhasc stood in the Medicae deck watching the Eversor who was strapped to a gurney¹¹⁶. The assassin's features free of his skull mask were a knot of scars and chemical intake pods. Hairless and gruesome they were nevertheless at peace. Filters and tubes brought calming adjuvant¹¹⁷ into the assassin's blood stream suppressing the killing urge. His eyes, a striking shade of green, were bright, almost feverish. A slight smile curled his lips.

Eversor (calmly): "A little snake..."

His voice was free from the slurring¹¹⁸.

Eversor (seriously): "What do you want?"

Klara: "To talk. How much of what I told you on the shrine world do you remember?"

The Eversor shrugged. Tubes popped free from his shoulder dripping a sweet smelling fluid onto the ground. Medicae servitors clustered around the assassin.

Eversor (gasping): "Little... The drugs... They don't allow for much remembrance".

Klara (gasping): "Oh..."

A mechanical whirring ¹¹⁹ filled the sterile air of the Medicae. Treads grated¹²⁰ over steel mesh as a trundling¹²¹ servitor clutching a hololith disk arrived.

Klara: "Kurei".

The hololith flickered into life at her greeting. The Eversor said nothing but merely watched with bright eyes. A world appeared surrounded by rings of fire and smoke. Adamta's voice crackled out from vox emitters embedded under the servitor's arms. The sharp intake of lho smoke colored his words as he said.

Adamta: "Klara, Torq".

Rhasc imagined him inclining his head as he said their names.

Eversor (almost surprised): "Oh... So that's my name".

Adamta: "You a looking at Achyllus".

Eversor: "That where we are going?"

The servitor's head wobbled to face the Eversor.

Adamta: "Yes".

The hololith shifted with a brief buzz of static. Now instead of the planet an atrocity glimmered. At its center wielding snakes of fire like whips was a monster in red and gold, armored in the Terminator warplate of the Adeptus Astartes. Horns curled above its head while runes shivered in the air around it.

Adamta: "This creature assails Achyllus Prime. It has violated the domain of man and its presence there demands the Emperor's judgment".

Klara: "How did we come by this intelligence?"

Adamta: "A Cadian battle psyker from Achyllus Prime brought the word out. Agents of the High Lords or perhaps the Inquisition verified it".

Eversor: "And we are to kill that thing".

Adamta: "Yes".

Klara: "And we needed assassins from Callidus, Eversor and Vanus temples to do this?"

Adamta: "And more. A Vindicare will be meeting us in the deep void outside Achyllus".

Klara: "A Vindicare?"

Bright pain folded into her wounded flank. Memories uncoiled¹²² in her mind. Klara Rhasc felt the chill of premonition¹²³ dance up her spine.