

Arc 1 - Chapter 120 - Fragor

Wrong.

A perverse feeling of wrongness was the first thing Thea felt as her consciousness returned to her.

Before she could even remember where she was, how she had gotten there or what was going on, the most pressing thought within herself was that something was *thoroughly* wrong with the whole situation.

Her body didn't feel right, as if she was merely riding inside somebody else's skin, with no real connection to it.

It felt like her teeth were threatening to pop out of her mouth, yet they simultaneously felt rock-solid, just as they should. As if her muscles were burning from overuse, yet simultaneously felt bliss from thorough relaxation.

Nothing felt *right*.

Every single neuron in her brain was screaming at her that things weren't adding up; that something was so thoroughly wrong, it would never *be* fixable.

A feeling of disgust and self-loathing raptured through her as she tried moving the limbs that weren't hers, to try and figure out what exactly was going on with that body that didn't feel like she should inhabit.

Her attempts at movement were interrupted by the System's voice echoing in her mind.

[System]: *Soul link with Shell initiated... Soul successfully linked.*

Abruptly, she felt like herself again, and the memory of the wrongness rapidly disintegrated, leaving behind nothing but a hazy feeling of unease.

She found herself sitting in a comfortable chair, wearing her standard-issue UHF uniform just as she would have on the Sovereign.

'*What... What happened? Where am I?*' Thea thought, unable to parse how she got there or where "there" even was.

Flashes of memories raced past her inner eye as she tried to recall what had happened before she blacked out. Hazy images of herself trying to disable a trap surfaced, followed by the sudden appearance of an enemy ambushing her just as she had lowered her guard.

Her eyes widened as the memories became clearer.

"Fuck... I died," she mouthed quietly to herself as realisation set in.

The last thing she remembered was throwing herself to the side and backward in a feeble attempt to dodge a gunshot at nearly point-blank range.

She felt empty, spent, and emotionally exhausted.

“This isn’t fair...” she muttered as she looked around the room, trying to ground herself in anything even remotely familiar within the space she had found herself in. “I tried so hard; I did everything to the best of my ability... I *shouldn’t* lose like this.”

In one corner of the room, a modest wooden bookshelf was filled with an assortment of books on self-improvement, psychology, and a few novels that looked like they had been carefully selected for their ability to provide solace and reassurance.

A small potted plant thrived on top of the bookshelf, its vibrant green leaves a symbol of life and growth amidst the calming surroundings. She noted absent-mindedly that she had only ever seen a plant that looked as lively and invitingly fresh as this one once in her life.

Across from Thea's armchair, past a lowkey glass-top coffee table, a similarly inviting chair was positioned, but it was empty.

Something about the whole setup seemed awfully familiar to her, but she couldn’t quite place her finger on why. It was like a memory stuck at the tip of her tongue, just waiting to burst forth, but she couldn’t quite grasp it.

Moreover, the empty feeling inside her was gradually being replaced by frustration as her idle thoughts roamed and she took in the room.

‘Why did I end up getting killed for something stupid like that? I even used my Psychic Precognition to make sure nothing was around the corner! How could there possibly be someone there when I specifically checked it?! ... It’s another Psychic-related thing that wasn’t explained to me, isn’t it...?’

Thea wasn’t quite sure what she was more frustrated with: Herself, Faux-Thea, or the UHF as a whole.

It felt like the *entire* assessment had been an uphill battle for no reason other than her missing crucial information from the very people in charge of providing exactly that information.

Sure, she had made mistakes—more than just a few.

But many of the most dangerous instances and biggest problems she had faced could easily be put squarely at the UHF’s instructors' feet for failing to inform her of everything she needed to know to perform to the best of her ability.

“What kind of fucking horseshit assessment is this supposed to be, when I can’t even show what I can do, huh?!” she yelled into the empty room, anger rapidly replacing the mounting frustration.

She could understand if not everyone needed to be briefed on Psykers in their first assessment, but at the very least, *she* should have been.

It wasn't much of a stretch to ask for that concession from the brass, considering they had specifically *asked her* to become a Psyker in the first place.

She failed to see how it could possibly be in her best interest to leave these aspects completely unexplained; not even how it would net the UHF any actual benefit to make sure she didn't have the tools necessary to perform in the assessment.

The more she thought about it, the angrier she became, her hands clenching into fists as she glared at the walls around her.

As the anger surged, she felt a strange energy coursing through her, a tingling sensation that seemed to build with her frustration. Her heart pounded in her chest, and she found herself wishing she could unleash this pent-up fury on something, anything, to release the pressure building inside her.

"And now I'm fucking here, which means the assessment's already over, doesn't it?! I didn't get to finish a single fucking main mission because someone out there deemed it unnecessary to actually talk to me for a single fucking second of this entire fucking integration period?!"

Thea jumped up from the chair abruptly, unable to contain her body's instinct to move and use the roiling torrent of energy inside of her any longer. The heavy chair was flung across the room, crashing against the wall behind her and shattering into a dozen pieces.

"I did everything you fucking asked of me! *EVERYTHING!*" she screamed, before kicking the glass-top coffee table in front of her. Her combat boots upended and shattered the entire thing, sending tempered glass spilling everywhere, before the remnants were flung across the room, crashing against a far-wall.

Inarticulate screaming followed as she rushed towards the nearest shelf and ripped it off the wall, tossing the remnants into the heavy bookshelf on the other side of the room.

"I put my fucking points into Resolve and Perception to get you your fucking Class, just like you fucking asked!" she screamed, picking up a nearby piece of broken wood and throwing it with all her might into one of the remaining shelves affixed to the wall, destroying the pots, statues, and books on it in an explosion of shards.

"I risked my fucking life unlocking a Gate I didn't even know about for you, and you didn't even deem it necessary to inform me of it being a real fucking danger beforehand!"

She haphazardly threw the second armchair into the bookshelf with both hands, splintering both the chair and a good portion of the shelf, sending shards of wood, books and paper flying everywhere. Some of the wood shrapnel pierced her uniform, creating cuts and small bruises all over her body, but she did not care.

"Every! Single! Fucking! Thing! And you gave me *NOTHING!*"

She punched the bookshelf with all her might, ripping straight through the solid wooden panels, sending books and paper careening across the room as her fingers broke under the stress.

She barely registered the pain, her mind too consumed with rage and frustration to care about the damage to her hands.

“Not a single fucking explanation for *anything* I was going through!” she shouted, her voice raw with frustration. She punched the bookshelf again, sending more debris flying as her hand started bleeding profusely from cuts, bones peeking through the torn flesh below.

“Not a single fucking thing! Not *ONE!*” With a scream of effort, rage, and frustration, she grabbed the massive bookshelf and ripped it from the wall, sending it crashing onto the floor with a heavy thud and the dry cracking and breaking of wood panels.

“If you want your fucking Class, you better fucking explain yourselves—and you better pray it’s a good fucking explanation, because I’m sick and fucking tired of your shit! Give me a fucking explanation right fucking now!”

Breathing heavily, Thea stood in the middle of the destroyed room, looking around for anyone or anything to take her rage out on—to meet her challenge and demand.

“*Why* wasn’t I informed of anything?! *Why* was I sent in without a single speck of information?! *Why* did I have to lose, through no fault of my fucking own?!”

When only silence met her in the next moment, Thea felt an indescribable feeling bubble through her chest—a feeling of pure, unadulterated frustration and rage so primal, it threatened to drown her.

“*Why?*”

The spoken word barely resembled human speech, but its effect on the surroundings was all the more immediate and profound.

A shockwave erupted from Thea’s core, picking up debris and violently throwing it against the walls of the room, shrapnel, shards and detritus embedding itself into the rock-crete walls.

Then, everything inside the room simply *stopped*.

It was like time itself had simply ceased to exist as a layer of pure frost bathed the entire room in chilling stillness, freezing everything inside the room to the very position it was in at the moment.

Debris that had crashed against the wall simply froze to it, shards of tempered glass that were in the middle of the air simply stopped where they were; suspended in motion. The very air inside the room had become a solid mass in this instance, holding everything within it with an iron grip.

Thea’s breaths came hot and heavy, creating clearly visible trails of ice as they impacted the frozen environment around her. She looked around the utter devastation inside the room, the freezing chill like an antidote to the boiling rage she felt deep inside.

Before she could do anything else, her attention was gripped by a noise.

A creak and crack at the only door leading into the room broke the moment, as glass shards fell; the air returned to its natural, gaseous form and Thea's body spun to meet the person daring to enter her domain...

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PoV: Auxiliary-Legate Selene Calla

Post-assessment time was always the most stressful, Selene very much knew.

Thousands of recruits had just gone through a month of harrowing combat experience, most of them experiencing such an extended campaign for the very first time.

The amount of mental scrubbing the DDS filters could do was limited to emotional attachment, so the brunt of the post-assessment care still fell on auxiliary members of the UHF like her, who specialised in the psychological aspect of medicinal care.

She had already debriefed around a dozen marines today, but her next target was the one she was looking forward to the most.

When she had initially received the summons to be transferred to the Apex for post-assessment care, she had been surprised.

After all, she was an Auxiliary-Legate now, way too high up on the ladder to simply be moved over multiple dozen Systems for your run-of-the-mill post-assessment evaluations.

Yet when she had received the summons and the corresponding information package detailing the exact reason for her being chosen specifically, she could scarcely believe her luck.

Who would have thought that the feisty young girl she had met on a random mid-world for the Cube Trials would cause such a massive ruckus in the UHF's brass?

"Well... me. I did," she muttered to herself with a rueful chuckle. "I *did* tell them to keep a close eye on her and have people on standby to make sure she integrates well into the drive—but who ever listens to the psychologist, huh?"

Going through the information package in her mind one last time as she made her way towards the room where her patient should be waiting, Selene couldn't help but smile.

"Candidate #313, aka Recruit Thea McKay... It's been a while, hasn't it?"

She could still remember, like it was yesterday, how the scrawny-looking girl had absolutely crushed the Cube Trial to a degree that was practically unheard of—and all that in a mid-world. Thea's determination and raw talent had left an indelible mark on her.

Now, with the full weight of the UHF's complex and often brutal integration process behind her, Selene was eager to see how the young recruit had fared.

The after-care for the Cube Trial had been emotionally charged, as one would expect from a young girl being thrown into her first real battlefield, especially on a mid-world that didn't feature any of the UHF's youth training camps. Selene wondered if the girl even remembered her, but she would do her best to provide whatever psychological help she could regardless. She had been only a small part of that girl's biggest day, after all. She wouldn't hold it against Thea if she didn't remember.

Thea had promised to contact her should she join the UHF, but Selene hadn't received any such contact notifications, which suggested Thea might have forgotten. Then again, Thea hadn't exactly had much time to actually do anything as part of the UHF yet. The integration had ended up in a very busy time window, so it might just be a matter of timing rather than forgetting her altogether.

Slapping her cheeks to refocus on the task at hand, Selene called up the specifics of the information package that had caused her to agree to the redeployment in the first place. Reading through them, she couldn't help but chuckle in disbelief and shake her head lightly.

"Potential A-Class Strategic Asset, huh? Just what in the Emperor's light have you been up to, girl?"

Selene didn't have nearly as much information as she would have liked about her patient; a lot of it was simply locked behind a Black-Level clearance, including the Cube-Trial profile.

This seemed kind of odd to her, as she had seen it all, way back when she had initially done the after-care for the girl, but she knew better than to ask questions in regards to classifications such as this.

She was especially curious about the girl supposedly being a potential A-Class Strategic Asset for the UHF, considering that Thea had only been a Recruit for a little over a month.

Whatever had happened in the little over two years since Selene had last seen her had clearly catapulted the girl's importance in the UHF's eyes.

Whatever the reasoning, however, she was not worried.

Dealing with the mental state of Recruits post-assessment had been a large part of the reason she had originally decided to become a psychologist with the auxiliary UHF forces to begin with.

She had guided thousands of Marines by now over the decades, and there was nothing she hadn't seen. She had even debriefed another two potential A-Class Strategic Assets in the past, so there wasn't really anything that could surprise her in this instance either.

One part that *did* worry Selene about the whole thing, however, was that the girl had apparently suffered from some serious mental trauma inside the assessment.

So much so, in fact, that she had been given Mnemorix A23 on at least one occasion.

That, in itself, did not paint a pretty picture of what might have gone down inside the assessment as a whole.

While Selene had perused some of the highlights pertaining to the Recruit, which were extremely impressive—no matter how she sliced it—she hadn't seen anything too worrying in them.

But she was very well aware of how much the UHF's OpSec branch enjoyed their one-sided games of hide and seek—especially with mission-relevant information.

It was something she had always thoroughly despised, as it made her job unnecessarily more difficult when she wasn't told important information pertaining to one of her patients.

The numerous complaints she had filed about the matter had all been shot down before they could really get off the ground.

"Fucking bureaucracy..." she muttered under her breath, her frustration momentarily breaking through her professional facade.

Suddenly, a shiver ran down her spine, and the lights in the corridor flickered briefly.

"What the...?" she muttered, noticing the cold vapour trailing her breath.

The chill was intense, almost biting painful, and as suddenly as it appeared, everything returned to normal.

So abruptly did the moment pass, that Selene briefly wondered if she had hallucinated everything, but she knew better. As a seasoned professional, she understood what hallucinations looked like, and this wasn't one of them.

"Sovereign, what just happened?" she asked aloud, directing her question to the governing AI of this particular DDS instance.

As usual, the AI responded without delay, "An unexpected power spike caused a minor disruption in this section of the DDS environment. The issue has been resolved, and countermeasures have been deployed to prevent similar occurrences in the future. I apologise for this inconvenience, Auxiliary-Legate."

Selene wasn't the biggest fan of the ship AIs that the UHF used.

They always sent a creeping chill down her spine whenever she interacted with them.

Something about the way they responded just didn't sit right with her.

She, intellectually, knew that human psychology didn't apply to AIs, but she couldn't shake the persistent feeling that they were lying through their digital teeth every time they spoke regardless.

Still, she knew better than to question the AI's words.

There had been zero documented instances of a UHF AI reporting lies unless directly ordered to do so.

"Thank you, Sovereign," Selene replied, maintaining her always friendly demeanour.

While the AIs weren't sentient, much less sapient, it never hurt to be seen as agreeable by the entities that essentially housed her very Soul whenever she was aboard one of their ships or inside one of their governed DDS environments.

Shaking off the unease, Selene refocused on her task. The strange incident lingered in her mind, but she had a job to do, and she intended to do it well. The Recruit was counting on it.

As she turned the final corner towards the room where Thea was waiting, her eyes fell on a group of individuals, most of them heavily armoured to a downright frightening degree, and she couldn't, and wouldn't, hide her obvious surprise.

"Major Quinn? What brings you here?" she asked curiously as she approached the leader of the group.

It had been a while since she had directly interacted with the Major responsible for the Kuigon Star Sector, but she definitely remembered their rare interactions as exclusively positive. Meeting her right here, in this very moment, seemed oddly suspect, however, no matter how much Selene tried to justify the Major's presence.

Major Quinn's sharp eyes darted over and met hers, noticeably softening.

"Legate Calla, it is good to see you again. Congratulations on your promotion, by the way. I know it's quite late, but it's better late than never, right?" Major Quinn replied warmly.

Selene was immediately on guard internally.

The outward friendliness seemed genuine—including the respectful manner of address, as she left out the "auxiliary" part of Selene's title. It was seen as a high respect for a "true" officer of the UHF to "elevate" an auxiliary member to the same level. Selene was definitely not one to frown at such flattery, presented in such an obvious and friendly manner.

What worried the psychologist were the things that *hadn't* been said aloud.

The Major's micro-expressions had told an entire book's worth of stories that didn't bode well for Selene's current plans. The instant she had spoken out, Major Quinn had been in combat readiness—not just on the level of basic guard duty, but ready to *kill* at a moment's notice.

As experienced as the Major was, micro-expressions weren't exactly something that officers were taught to hide on the level of a diplomat. Despite the Major's best attempts to school herself, it hadn't been hard for Selene to pick up on the severe tension.

Similarly, when the Major's eyes had met hers and softened markedly, there was a distinct level of relief that went beyond what one would expect of somebody in a tense situation.

It was almost as if the Major had been waiting specifically for *her*, to deal with a situation that she herself could not.

"Likewise, Major. Thank you for your kind words. Don't worry about being a bit late on it all—the galaxy's a big place. I'm honoured by the notion that you were even aware of the promotion to begin with," Selene replied tactfully, a fake-genuine smile plastered on her face.

She kept the conversation neutral, trying to fish for additional tidbits of information—something was definitely not right with this whole situation.

“Putting the pleasantries aside for now, even though I wouldn’t mind exchanging more of those another time if you’d be so inclined, it seems I interrupted something? I hope I’m not in the way of anything?” Selene pushed the conversation forward with a few pointed questions, a sure-fire way to force the Major to show some of her hand, no matter what kind of game was being played here.

Major Quinn’s face turned grim, and she winced as she seemed to remember the situation.

Selene noted the dozens of micro-expressions that flashed over the stern woman’s face, reading her emotions like an open book—the Major felt trapped and embarrassed; a potentially highly dangerous mixture.

“Haa... You are and you aren’t, Legate—Say, can I just call you Selene? I’ve heard you prefer a more personal touch with your patients, and I’m not a big stickler for decorum myself,” Major Quinn answered, an almost pleading look on her face.

She seemed markedly more tired and exhausted than just a moment ago, indicating a vastly more open rapport between the two of them. “Naturally, you can call me Zephyr, or Quinn, whichever you prefer as well.”

Giving a friendly nod to show her agreement, Selene remained silent, forcing the Major to continue talking and reveal her hand or create a situation in which the psychologist would have a massive advantage in the conversational flow.

“Thank you, Selene,” Major Quinn continued with a relieved sigh. “As for what I’m doing here...”

Her words trailed off as she looked at the heavily armoured Marines behind her.

She thought for a second and then ordered them to return to their duties, effectively dismissing them entirely from this conversation. A few moments of awkward, terse silence reigned between them as the Marines disappeared behind the nearest corners or entered DDS portals created by the Sovereign’s AI to transport them back to their original stations.

Once they were alone, Quinn’s demeanour shifted significantly, a complicated blend of professional seriousness, genuine concern, embarrassment, and trepidation colouring her face. “Sovereign, please consider the following conversation with Auxiliary-Legate Selene Calla as an official briefing on the matter.”

Selene’s eyes widened markedly at that, both from genuine surprise and because it was expected of her.

To call upon a ship AI to consider something an official briefing was no idle action—it indicated that there was going to be some serious, mission-critical intel being shared that would have to be redacted; otherwise, she could have simply talked as per usual.

Making it an official briefing, however, allowed Quinn to reveal information that Selene would otherwise not have the clearance level for.

Meeting Selene's eyes, Quinn started to explain, but it was immediately apparent that she hadn't prepared any real words for this situation—it was catching her completely off-guard, just as much as it did Selene. "The issue is with Recruit Thea McKay. She is, as you likely know by now, considered quite an important personage within the UHF as of recently..."

Quinn let her words trail off, implicitly prompting Selene to confirm her assertion.

"A potential A-Class Strategic Asset, yes. I have been made aware of the information package that brought me here," she replied, but immediately caught the most minuscule of expressions hushing over Quinn's face—an expression that blew the whole situation wide open.

'Not an A-Class Strategic Asset then...? It must be higher then, but S-Class...? A Recruit...? Just what in the Emperor's light is going on here?'

"Good to see that *some* intel has been communicated, at the very least," Quinn replied with a pointed inflection on the "some," clearly not happy with the apparently false information provided to Selene. "Regardless, the issue is with the Recruit herself. There have been... *problems*, to put it mildly, that I have no way of rectifying as of right now."

She pointed at the door they were standing in front of. "She's inside the room, but it's been emergency dilated to give me time to figure out how to deal with the unfolding situation appropriately. Luckily, you came around the corner at just the perfect time, Selene. As far as I understand it, you were the one to debrief her after the Cube Trial, about two years back, is that correct?"

Selene nodded, knowing Quinn was well aware of this fact but still giving the confirmation.

"Then you might be able to help us out of this bind after all," Quinn breathed a heavy sigh of relief. "Before I can go any more in-depth, however, I need to inform you that anything regarding this upcoming conversation, as well as your entire debriefing with Recruit McKay, will be classified under a Black-Level clearance. This includes anything spoken about in this corridor right now, anything inside the room, any notes you might take, as well as any recordings created by either participant or the ship's AI. Can I get a verbal confirmation that you have heard and acknowledge this information?"

"I acknowledge the Black-Level lock and its range as you've stated," Selene immediately replied. She had been in a few situations like this before, although not with something as high as a Black-Level lock.

She was aware that it was mostly a formality to ask for her confirmation as well.

The moment Major Quinn indicated that this was a Black-Level clearance requirement, Selene's actions and presence here had already been put under a microscope. The situation was getting more and more intriguing but also exceedingly suffocating.

Quinn's face turned sour, and she looked downright embarrassed as she took a deep breath and continued, "I... We mess—We *fucked* up. Big time."

Selene hid her surprise at the Major's choice of words, noting that Quinn specifically chose the crasser option on purpose, despite it being an official briefing.

Whatever "they" had done was seriously bad, then.

"You see, Recruit McKay is a candidate for becoming a Battlefield Psyker; but not one like we've had before. She's a Wielder, which might shine some light on her performance in the Cube Trial for you, but the most important aspect about her is that her Attribute spread is simply unheard of," Major Quinn elaborated, meeting Selene's eyes directly. "She has the potential to *fully* unlock her Psychic Attribute before she even reaches Tier 1."

This was the first piece of information that truly shocked Selene.

"She... What? *How?*"

"The specifics aren't that important; you can look them up once you get her profile. But the important part is this: The brass made a deal with her, to fully support her and even provide an Echoing Solstice Fruit to bolster her Attributes, in order to make this possible. In return, Recruit McKay will provide information about any and all Classes she will be offered at the end-of-year selection. I trust that you can see how this is important for the UHF, yes?"

Selene nodded immediately.

Information was the key element of System warfare, and the UHF had long been lagging behind the other factions when it came to their Classes database. The missing centuries in which the other factions had operated prior to the UHF's formation had created a lead that seemed downright insurmountable.

But if Thea was truly able to provide intel on the Tier 1 Psyker Classes that the UHF had never seen before... It made sense as to why she was being considered such a vital member of the Faction right now.

"But something didn't go as planned, I take it?" Selene prompted after a moment, as the Major seemed lost in her own thoughts.

"Right. Yeah... That's an understatement if I've ever heard one," Quinn sighed. "You're aware of how close the integration was to the assessment for this drive?"

Confirming with another nod, Selene started to piece together what had likely happened already.

"We had one week to prepare the entire drive for the assessment—slightly less, actually. And don't misunderstand me, Selene: I'm not trying to make excuses here, merely trying to paint a picture of how we got to where we are. The issue is that we missed having Recruit McKay briefed on what it meant to be a Psyker or what the journey to become one even entailed."

That was definitely problematic, considering the potential of an Awakening killing the prospective Recruit. But since Thea was behind the door, that clearly *hadn't* happened.

"Well, I'm sure you can explain it now and—" Selene stopped herself as she saw Major Quinn's face. "Oh..."

"Yeah. "Oh"," Quinn replied with a grimace. "You see, Recruit McKay's unique Attribute setup that allows her to become such a vital part of the UHF just so *happens* to be the very worst possible combination when it comes to not accidentally Awakening your Gate. She did so at Level 6."

Selene involuntarily mouthed "Oh" as she realised the sheer understated gravitas of the sound she had made earlier.

This was slightly more problematic than an "Oh" truly conveyed.

"And she did so without even knowing what a Gate was? Without knowing about the Awakening?!" she asked incredulously, unable to fully comprehend just how colossal of a fuck-up that was.

"Yes. She had *no idea* about anything. As a matter of fact, she nearly *died* on the first day due to a Focus Overdraw too, as it hadn't been mentioned to her either," Quinn confessed while releasing another heartfelt sigh. "When I say we fucked up, I mean we really, fundamentally, fucked up on a downright cosmic scale."

Selene tended to err on the side of realism rather than hyperbole, but she could definitely see where the Major was coming from with her assertion. This whole briefing had just been a complete downward spiral of utter ludicrousness and bad decisions.

"Level 6 for a Recruit in their first assessment is still pretty high... Although not exactly unheard of for an Alpha Squad member. I'm assuming she is one?" Selene asked, despite knowing the answer already. It had been part of the information package, but she needed to verify the information before meeting with Thea, considering the clear disregard for OpSec to hand out the right intel.

"Yeah, naturally. With that Cube Trial result, it was only a formality to put her through the usual process. She was bound to get into Alpha Squad—though I *will* say, the squad she's with is all kinds of irregular. They're all absolute monsters in their own rights... But that's neither here nor there; the issue is with Recruit McKay herself. You see she's not Level 6; that's just when she had her Awakening," Quinn elaborated, giving Selene a pointed stare. "She's Level 10. Right out of the first assessment, a month after integration."

Selene's breath caught as she started to fully grasp the gravity of the situation. She took a step to the side and leaned against the nearby wall, feeling a bout of vertigo threatening to take her legs.

"But the main problem, I haven't actually mentioned yet," Quinn plowed onwards, likely realising that delaying the inevitable wouldn't make it any easier. "She is *pissed*. And justifiably so, I'd say. She thinks the UHF as a whole has broken its deal with her, as she has received essentially *zero* support whatsoever. Any information she managed to claw

together about not accidentally killing herself and everyone around her was basically all gathered by herself inside the assessment.

“She went out of her way to completely suppress her powers, to find an experienced Psyker to ask basic fucking questions like ‘*Can I use my Attribute Points without dying?*’, and ultimately ended up dying to a direct counter of her own Psychic powers because she was never taught about polarities. She missed out on being part of the completion for her main mission objective. Out of the *two* main missions she had, the squad failed the first because they ran into a duo of Psykers and then an enemy Tier 3 Prime Ace, and she missed the second’s completion because she was never made aware of polarities.

“She is absolutely livid... And I can totally understand why: We told her the assessment was basically the most important thing for this entire year and then *thoroughly* handicapped her, to a point she did everything at essentially base-Attributes, without being able to make use of her actual advantages, likely making it feel like it was all a big joke on her costs.”

Major Quinn sighed deeply once more, practically deflating as she did so.

“So essentially: We’ve got a really pissed-off, extremely volatile teenager who also just so happens to be one of the most important assets the UHF has had in centuries—oh, and she’s a *scarily* powerful Psyker for her Level, for reasons that we haven’t been able to figure out yet.”

Silence covered the corridor as Selene tried to wrap her head around everything that had just been revealed to her. She leaned heavily against the wall behind her, struggling to maintain her composure. The complete and utter disaster she was being thrust into was simply too much to bear standing up.

As Selene organised her thoughts and filed away the information for later use, she realised a likely correlation with something else.

“The energy spike earlier, that was her?” she asked, not bothering to elaborate on what specifically she was referring to. She had the distinct feeling that Major Quinn was not going to split hairs with her over something related to the very thing she was being asked to do in the first place.

“Yeah,” Quinn frowned. “She... She was quite *upset*, realising that the assessment was already over.”

Selene realigned her expectations for the fourth time in the past few minutes, realising that she might have underestimated the situation as a whole.

‘*She affected the entire section of the DDS with her outburst? Just how volatile is she? Am I in danger going in there?*’ She thought to herself, running a quick risk analysis using all the information she had at her disposal.

There were very few things that could actually endanger somebody inside the DDS, but an untrained Psyker was definitely among them.

And a volatile, angry one was just about at the very top of that list.

“And you want me to calm her down; help her process everything and hopefully be open for reconciliation, I take it?” she asked, ultimately feeling that the Thea she knew was unlikely to hurt her.

While it had been two years and the girl was angry, Selene believed that Thea, fundamentally, was a good person and would react favourably to someone who genuinely wanted to help.

“That’s correct,” Quinn nodded, before briefly gesturing in the air with her hands. “Here’s the full assessment profile, including all Black-Level incidents and reports for you to look through. That should hopefully provide any and all information that you might require to complete the mission. Note that there is one incident inside the assessment that’s received a Gold-Level Lock, but even Captain Cross has no idea what that is even about.”

Selene would have liked to be surprised at the Gold-Level Lock being mentioned, considering that she had never even heard of that classification level, but it felt so thoroughly irrelevant that she couldn’t muster the emotions for it.

Selene felt utterly exhausted, yet she hadn’t even stepped foot into the room with the Recruit that needed her help. The weight of the situation bore down on her heavily.

“I take it the dilation will last for a while longer?” she asked, her voice barely masking her fatigue.

Quinn nodded and replied, “Yeah, should be about 48 hours. So you should have some time to rest up and read everything that’s relevant—hopefully.”

They stared at each other for a few moments, the silence thick with unspoken worries and responsibilities. Finally, Selene pushed herself off the wall. “Well... better get to it then. I’ll be in touch if there’s anything I need.”

“Thank you, Selene. Sincerely. I’m not made for these kinds of situations, and I’m thoroughly out of my depth here. You’re a lifesaver,” Quinn replied, her voice candid and sincere.

“Please... if possible, let Thea know that I’m sorry? I don’t know if that will even come up or help or whatever but... we really messed up and it wasn’t done maliciously whatsoever. I just...”

Selene held up her hand to stop the Major from continuing, seeing the writing on the wall. “I understand. I’ll let her know if the opportunity presents itself.”

“Thank you... I’ll leave you to it then,” Quinn replied before turning and starting to walk away.

Before she made it too far, however, Selene raised her voice, “Quinn?”

“Hmm?” Quinn turned back around to meet Selene’s gaze.

“Take a break. You’re a complete mess.”

It was thoroughly inappropriate for Selene to say these words, given their respective ranks and their limited familiarity, but she knew it would be okay—she was good at reading people; it was her job, after all.

A small chuckle confirmed her thoughts as Quinn turned around and continued walking away, leaving behind a quiet, “Wish I could, Selene... Wish I could...”