

Consequences

By Andy Clark

'Apprehend these traitors.'

The command was so shocking, so horribly incongruous that Knight-Centura Dessima could not immediately obey. She tried to reconcile what she had just learned, what it meant, with the order Shield-Captain Tyvar had given.

The entire bridge crew of the *Lux-Imperatus* shared a moment of frozen horror as they stared at the holo-projection floating in the air before them.

The world of Khassedur had been their destination through long months of toil and trial, across blazing battlefields and amidst the teeth of ferocious warp storms. Their duty had been to reach it, to deliver the two full companies of Brazen Drakes Greyshields to their newly adopted home world, and to see that Chapter Master Kaslyn accepted the gift of Cawl's Miracle.

Now, there hung Khassedur, revolving as a grainy three-dimensional image before their eyes.

War-torn.

Ravaged.

Beside it, inescapable, scrolled spools of low gothic strategic reports, warnings and cries for aid. They told a story of heresy, of rebellion, betrayal and destruction. They engulfed Dessima's vision, making a mockery of all that she and her comrades had endured to get to this point, rendering hollow the hope they had thought to bestow.

All this the Knight-Centura absorbed and processed in a scant span of heartbeats. Still, Tyvar was ahead of her, ahead of all the Human crew and armsmen who staffed the bridge, ahead of Shipmistress Kachorkyn and of the Null Maidens who stood at Dessima's side.

Ahead, even, of Captain Gerion. The Greyshields' leader was turning, eyes widening even as Tyvar raised his guardian spear. The three Brazen Drakes who flanked him moved almost as fast, but not even the post-Human Space Marines had the preternatural swiftness of thought and body possessed by the Adeptus Custodes.

Whether they sought to reach for their weapons or raise their hands in gestures of placation was

unclear; whatever the case, they froze as they found themselves staring into the cavernous barrel of the bolter built into Tyvar's spear.

'Shield-Captain...' began Gerion.

The voice of a man who finds himself suddenly attempting to defuse a bomb, thought Dessima, sliding her own hand down to the pommel of her executioner greatblade. In her peripheral vision, she saw her sisters following her lead.

'You do not address me, Gerion,' said Tyvar, his voice cold and hard as adamantite. 'You do not look at me, nor at any of these faithful servants of the Emperor. You are tainted by heresy and you will be detained, along with all of your battle-brothers, until an appropriate fate can be determined.'

A spasm of anger passed across Gerion's blunt features, but was swiftly hidden behind his usual guarded mask.

'Shield-Captain, we do not know the Chapter has truly turned,' he said. 'This may be a mistake, some machination of the enemy. We may have brethren even now fighting to restore the honour of the Brazen Drakes on that world. We should aid them, not abandon them! You ask us to condemn our comrades, even ourselves without recourse to proof. I am not in the habit of betraying my battle-brothers.'

'And I am not in the habit of repeating myself,' Tyvar replied. 'Disarm. Command your brothers throughout the fleet to do likewise. Understand the lenience I show you in this, for your Chapter is confirmed Hereticus Diabolus Extremis.'

The designation scrolled across the hololith, repeating beneath the damning seal of the Ordo Hereticus. It could not be an error. They all knew it, even Gerion.

This is wrong, Dessima thought, pushing down her extreme frustration and bitterness. *We set out with a purpose. A mission. We were to strengthen the Imperium's defenders against their foes. Instead, we find yet more corruption and betrayal. More supposed champions unworthy of the trust the Emperor has extended them.*

The air in the bridge thickened with tension. Captain Gerion stared at Tyvar, making no move to obey his

instructions. Around Dessima, bridge crew watched the exchange with the fearful expressions of those still struggling to grasp the danger they have found themselves in. They did not dare move, though she could see that many of them wished to flee, or at least to duck down behind their slab-like metal consoles in order to shield themselves. Dessima did not share their fear – the Sisters of Silence were made of far sterner stuff – but she understood it.

‘You give us no chance to speak in our defence!’ cried one of Gerion’s brothers, no longer able to hold his silence. ‘These sins are not ours to account for! We have fought loyally and done no wrong, and now–’

The gunshots rang out across the bridge, their thunder in the silence like a hammer taken to a pane of glass. The Brazen Drake who had spoken was thrown flat on his back by the tight burst of mass-reactive bolts. At so close a range, even power armour could not resist their fury. Blood sprayed Greyshields, deck crew and consoles alike.

The storm broke, sudden and violent. Ballistic alarms howled from cherub-faced speakers. Crimson tactical lumen engaged, bathing the bridge in a charnel hue. Dessima’s blade was already singing from its sheath, even as Captain Gerion’s face contorted in fury and he snatched his heavy bolt pistol from his belt.

The bridge crew and armsmen reacted more slowly, despite all their training and years of expertise. They could not hope to do otherwise, for the fight erupting in their midst was one between demigods and angels, not mere mortals.

Screams of fear and shock mingled with blaring alarms. Robed figures dove for cover or cowered, trapped in place by paralysing fear. Armsmen blinked and half-raised their weapons, unsure of how to react to a situation that would never have entered into even their darkest dreams.

‘I will not have weapons fire upon my bridge!’ barked Shipmistress Kachorkyn, and Dessima admired the courage of the sentiment even as she recognised its futility.

Might as well command the stars to stop burning, or the warp to cease its turmoil, she thought as she stepped into battle.

Gerion had raised his pistol and squeezed its trigger, but even as the gun fired, Tyvar crossed the gap between them and swatted the weapon’s barrel aside. The bolt shells flew wide, one cratering the astrogation console, the other hitting a fleeing rating in the back and blowing him apart in a visceral spray.

Tyvar’s follow-up thrust was so quick that Dessima could barely track it. Somehow, Gerion managed to weave aside, though not fast enough to avoid losing half his ear to the spear’s crackling blade. The skin of his cheek was flayed by its power field, and Gerion snarled.

‘Brothers, we are betrayed!’ he roared into his gorget’s vox mic, throwing himself sideways as he reached for his own drake-embossed power sword. ‘Consider all outside our Chapter hostile! Seize the fleet!’

That was a mistake, thought Dessima, as her blade whipped out and opened the throat of one of Gerion’s remaining brothers; the Space Marine had barely raised his weapons before she felled him. The other swung a clubbing blow that broke the neck of one of Dessima’s sisters and threw her body backwards into her fellows.

He then raised his bolt rifle and let fly at Shield-Captain Tyvar.

The Shield-Captain moved with light speed that belied his towering stature and armoured bulk. He took the shells on his pauldron, weathering their explosive impacts, then fired back in return, pummelling the Brazen Drake with ammunition as he strode swiftly forward.

One shot blew a ragged crater in the Space Marine’s right greave and Tyvar’s spear-blade swept down in an arc intended to bifurcate the warrior’s helm. It met Gerion’s own sword with a crack of power, and the wounded battle-brother seized his chance to duck back and put a runic console between himself and danger.

‘You have torn this fleet in two, traitor!’ spat Gerion at Tyvar, as the two warriors pressed against one another’s blades. ‘You have turned on the Emperor’s loyal servants. You have slain my brothers and forced my hand!’

‘The heretical gene-seed within your bodies is its own condemnation,’ Tyvar replied. ‘I am Custodes.’

I speak with the Emperor's voice. Were you loyal, you would set down your weapons and accept your guilt. But you side with your brothers before your Emperor, as the Adeptus Astartes always have.'

Gerion twisted his blade, attempting to force Tyvar's spear aside. The Shield-Captain was too canny, however, and far too skilled; he allowed his weapon's point to swing outward, feeding the momentum into a vicious upward swing with the weapon's haft. It connected with Gerion's midriff hard enough to crack the ceramite there and drive the air from the Captain's lungs.

Gerion reeled back, and Dessima seized her chance to advance on his flank and allow her stifling null-aura to enfold him. He was no psyker, but still, proximity to a Silent Sister could sap any enemy's will and strength, and cloud their thinking when they most required clarity.

Dessima swung her blade at Gerion, and he just managed to parry the blow. She immediately whipped around and aimed a cut at his legs, which he barely evaded. He was less fortunate with her next strike, which plunged straight through his chest-plate, placed perfectly to pierce Gerion's primary heart.

The traitor Captain stiffened in shock and pain as Dessima's blade slid home. Bright blood welled from the wound as she ripped her executioner greatblade clear and prepared to deliver the killing blow.

Before she could, a hail of bolt shells filled the air around her. Instinct and training took over, and Dessima dropped into the lee of a cogitator bank. Explosions shook the ancient machine, causing its affronted spirit to spit sparks of indignation down upon her.

Tyvar was forced back by the fusillade, shells ricocheting from his auramite armour as he raised his guardian spear and fired back. Ruptured bodies hit the floor around Dessima, bridge crew and armsmen butchered by the furious crossfire.

She rolled sideways and came up in a crouch behind an adjoining nav-shrine. From here, Dessima could see half a dozen Brazen Drakes who had spilled through the bridge's bulkhead door to support their Captain.

Wounded and ashen-faced, Gerion and his surviving battle-brother were falling back towards the living bulwark of their comrades. A few armsmen bravely fired their shotguns at the Space Marines. Their reward was swift and violent death as bolt shells

tore them apart. Dessima shot Battlemark signs to her three surviving Prosecutors, who crouched in cover nearby.

Outflank. Keep to cover. Close on the Space Marines and surprise them.

Her sisters nodded their understanding and began to move, dashing and rolling between the bridge's consoles, ignoring the terrified or maimed crew they passed.

Gunfire thundered continually, and Dessima realised, to her amazement, that Shield-Captain Tyvar still hadn't sought cover nor been slain by the massed fire of the foe. Instead, he was advancing, storm bolter booming, blood running from a wound in his side and a savage gash in his cheek. His expression was terrifying in its focused calm. Only his eyes showed the fury that the Shield-Captain felt.

She would not leave him to battle the traitors alone. Dessima rose and ran forward, seeking to draw the enemy's fire. Bolt shells streaked toward her but, swift and agile, she evaded each one. She was bare paces behind Gerion and his wounded brother, preparing to strike them down, when a fresh explosion of violence erupted around the doorway.

Dessima had a fleeting impression of huge, golden-armoured figures and crackling energised blades, then the Space Marines were turning, crying out, falling as their heads and limbs were hacked off, their bodies laid open by punishing blows. At the same moment, Dessima's Prosecutors struck. They added their own flashing blades to the storm of violence engulfing the Brazen Drakes.

'Emperor, no!' yelled Gerion, raising his heavy bolt pistol. Before the Captain could fire, Dessima was upon him. She span and sliced, taking the head of Gerion's limping comrade. She then lunged low, a disembowelling strike at the traitor Captain that he batted wildly aside. Gerion lashed out in return, the point of his blade cutting so close to Dessima's face that she felt the hot wind of its passing. She dropped back en garde, but need not have bothered. Suddenly, Shield-Captain Tyvar was there, his guardian spear plunging into one side of Gerion's torso and tearing out through the other.

Blood exploded from the catastrophic wounds, and the traitor Captain barely had time to gurgle in shock before his eyes glazed over in death.

Contemptuous, Tyvar placed one foot against the Captain's corpse and shoved it off his blade. He saluted his fellow Custodians and the Null Maidens

who stood over Gerion's butchered brethren, then turned to Dessima.

Breathing hard, the Knight-Centura flicked blood from her blade and slid it back into its sheath. Over the vox net, she could hear reports flowing in of violent clashes between Greyshields and other Imperial forces throughout the fleet.

What did we start here? She signed to Tyvar.

'We started nothing, Knight-Centura,' he replied, with a baleful glance at the hololith still spinning above the butchered bodies of several dozen bridge

crew. Robed ratings and officers were emerging from hiding, blinking in shock or praying fervently to the Emperor. 'We started nothing,' he repeated, 'but we will finish it. We will not rest until every Brazen Drakes Space Marine, old or new, lies dead.'

Dessima considered the Shield-Captain for a moment, then nodded.

A new mission then, she signed. A new purpose. One they cannot corrupt.

'Just so, sister,' Tyvar replied. 'It is time that they faced the consequences of their actions.'

