

“Evasive Actions of the Mind”

“Son,” The Venator loudly called out through flooded timber. “Quiet yourself! For they are fast approaching.”

Almost immediately, the Tyro -- only about 12 or so years old -- focused his eyes on the meadow passage that bordered the swampy portion in which they sat. He could not help but imagine a great many beasts traversing the grassy plain that lay before them, and he hoped his father -- who rested behind a tree some distance behind -- would not mind if he considered the prospective course of his arrows.

A moment passed, but the Tyro’s desire to prepare himself for the incoming quarry was deadened with the heavy sigh emitted from his father. The boy felt a sense of failure that seemed almost innate to his existence.

“Son,” The Venator spoke in a quieter voice this time, but his tone held all of the rages of a Capital Clansman. “I can feel your anxiety. If you do not silence this conflict of your soul at this very moment, your mother and I may very well be required to tear the flesh from you and your siblings rather than from the lamassu which we seek.”

“Father,” The Tyro began after a panicked attempt to clear his mind, during which he partially swiveled his head to view the tree behind which his parent rested. “I have done as you requested. What more do you suppose I should do?”

Slight ripples in the shining waters of the marsh emerged from behind the mud-stained tree, and the Venator appeared fully from its darkened side. His light blue eyes were wide with incredulity. “Do you truly believe that you have reached the Ataraxic State of Being in the same way that an Agrestic Warlock might?”

The Tyro forced his gaze downward to the ripples as they met his tarred boots. He had never achieved success in any of his father's endeavors. He should have expected this result and reprimand from the start.

"Have you taken *any* of the Matriarch's teachings to heart?" The Venator's voice was even softer this time. The Tyro thought it was eerily similar to the serene atmosphere preceding a storm. "Did you even attend the --"

His father's voice was cut off at the sound of the meadow grasses swaying, and the Tyro quickly lifted his face to see nothing more than the after-effects of the wind. He would have to mark the sigil of the Collective Cause into his quarter's western wall; the gratitude he felt for the distraction of natural forces was great.

Regardless of where their attention rested, though, the father still had an important lesson to impart upon his son. "The beast approaches. Quickly, you must silence yourself in more than a single manner. The mind's methods tend to attract undesired attention from the beast and bureaucrat alike. If we spend too much energy considering the potential courses or outcomes, then we will discover ourselves in the state of simple suffering, which would surely attract every eye in the wood. Ensure that does not occur, son."

"But," The Tyro felt his heart beating heavily as he dug a closed fist into the flesh over it. "How am I to do this? You have said nothing of the mind's method in this regard."

A chuckle found itself exiting from the Venator's red-stained, smirking mouth. "Precisely. Do nothing. Only with the lack of action and subsequent emotion can you become imperceivable to the beast and the bureaucrat. Only with a lack of action and subsequent emotion can you attend to the affairs ahead of you."

"But father--"

In an instant, his father was looming over him. The large waves of marsh water had somehow barely shifted from the swift movement of the Venator's tar-coated legs, yet the hulking man had found himself in an entirely different position. One that was completely advantageous to him, as one hand covered the mouth of his son, and the other clasped the synthetic handle of the stiletto strapped to his upper arm.

The Tyro attempted to speak in a panic but to no avail. For the father's hand was firmly emplaced over nearly half of the boy's face. Only the eyes seemed to communicate, as the large man's electric blue irises displayed a deep concern.

And then they didn't. The Venator's pupils expanded greatly. The irises also seemed to take up a sort of glossy hue to them. This must have been the process he had spoken of moments earlier; the lamassu had probably neared them enough for his father to have sensed its presence and prompted evasive actions of the mind.

The Tyro knew he should attempt to replicate the effort, but he lacked the direction to do so. How had his father willed himself into such a state with such ease?

The question seemed to exponentially increase in its significance as metal scraping against sheath sounded out. Surely this was the reprimand the boy had imagined -- perhaps twenty lacerations this time? He could imagine receiving twice that amount if the lamassu were allowed to escape once again.

Instead, his father's grip loosened, and the Tyro watched as a gathering of dark, yet somehow shiny, figures approached straight toward them from the edge of the meadow clearing.

"Units of the Wood!" One of the figures -- who could now be discerned as donning a dark, metallic armor -- screamed as his fellow beings spread further throughout the grasses. Each one held a staff or pair of batons that seemed to have a spirit of its own, and the Tyro began to

feel an awkward sense of anger. He still did not understand the identities of these people, yet he hated them with such vigor.

Suddenly, the boy felt his body sway violently against the counterforce of his father's arms. What was he doing? If he impacted the water with any individual appendage, then he and his father would certainly be uncovered. Nevertheless, his arms tensed in preparation; he sensed in himself an urge to execute an attack upon his father's restrictive extremities.

"Units of the Wood!" The same figure yelled out again, somehow exuding even more rage than the last time. "If you do not reveal yourself within the next half-cycle, your precious settlement will be burned and your families drawn and quartered. In accordance with the Conventions of the Collective Conscious..."

At this, the Venator's pale irises lost their cloudy shroud.

"...the Orbital Sovereigns have deigned me as..."

The Tyro looked again to the figures and then back to his father's eyes, which still only held blue-rimmed darkness.

"...and so I have been called upon to execute the actions..."

His father's grip loosened as the voices neared the swampy waters, and the boy found himself falling as the harsh voice neared.

"...of abundant mercy."

Fear abounded through the very essence of the Tyro as the entire force of his short body seemed to attract itself to the mud-infused pool below him.

But the resounding splash never arrived. Instead, a wretched voice called out in a tone that radiated malevolence: "Over here!"

Immediately, the figures of black armor were upon them. Some stood idly in the waters in front of the father and son, as if their sole purpose was to prohibit passage away from this suddenly-perilous place. Others found themselves perched in the trees, their metallic chest-plates and shoulder-pieces glistening in the sunlight as the batons they held glowed an intense array of bright colors.

It was only with the closest approach of the leading member of the apparent opposition that the boy noticed the resumption of his father's movement; the Venator's arms almost seemed to go limp as they fell from their grasp on his son.

With this indication of forfeiture, the armored leader began from behind a mask of darkness: "Well done, Venator. Or at least nearly so. Had your child here not exhibited the small degree of fear that he had, we very well might have passed you by. It is so simple to detect a weakling's soul in the ever-chaotic state of nature."

At this, the Venator only grunted. He seemed to hold his gaze slightly above the leader's helmeted head.

"Of course, we would have discovered you in the end."

Another moment of silence resumed as the boy's father remained physically unperturbed by the taunting words, and the leader accordingly turned to view his supposed subordinates behind him.

"For the Capital Clansmen always claim their own."

With a slow upward movement, the leader lifted the dark helmet off of his head and turned to look at the father squarely in the eyes -- eyes that seemed to imitate his own.

"And you are very much one of us, Venator."