

Arc 1 - Chapter 104 - Opprimo

- PoV: Viladia Cassiopeia Sortal -

Just before the catastrophic moment that silenced Thea forever, Viladia sensed a chilling premonition of danger.

This wasn't the result of any Psychic Abilities or some kind of Passive-type Ability from the System; it was simply the hard-earned intuition of a seasoned infiltrator and stealth specialist, honed over countless missions, that signalled the unseen danger.

As Viladia's instincts flared in warning, coinciding with Thea's reveal of the enemy Ace's precise location, she understood the grave danger they were all in.

Without a moment's hesitation, she tapped into her extensive combat experience, activating two of her critical Abilities instinctively, trying to get herself out of harm's way and preparing to counter whatever threat loomed just beyond the squad's awareness.

'Shadow Step.'

'Umbra's Veil.'

As Viladia utilised the instant-travel of her [Shadow Step] Ability to merge with a set of shadows roughly a dozen metres away, the clamour of the world diminished under the cloak of her veil, rendering her invisible just as she witnessed the horrific disintegration of Thea's upper torso into a bloody mist.

Her swift reaction wasn't solitary; the pervasive sense of imminent peril, a charged atmosphere hinting at the brink of catastrophe, had alerted the entire squad.

Johnsen, with instincts similarly sharpened by countless engagements, had already adopted a protective posture even before the fatal shot was executed, ducking down and away from Thea, who he had been wanting to check-up on just a mere instant ago.

Moirah had dropped to one knee, her eyes already scanning through her sniper scope, eager to pinpoint and neutralise the source of the threat somewhere to the south.

Morin was already in the middle of summoning the protective embrace of [Gaia's Word], conjuring a formidable barrier of earth to shield the rest of the squad from the entire southern direction.

Crusher, too, had reacted with a deep-seated instinct to protect, managing to take a single step and shifting his stance ever so slightly. Yet, that minor adjustment was enough, positioning him as a human shield to intercept any further threats aimed at Johnsen.

In the fractions of a second that followed, Morin's earth wall rose too slowly, allowing two lethal projectiles to hit their marks.

The first bullet struck Crusher squarely in the back of the head, its impact undeniable, while the second exploded upon contact with the robust armour encasing his neck.

The force was enough to shatter the durable plates and helmet, scattering fragments as the formidable defensive heavy crumpled forward, the parts of his armour that were hit disintegrating into pieces as he hit the ground.

Viladia, amidst the chaos, had no time for reflection. The message was clear: The enemy Ace was not playing around, signalling that there was no room for hesitation on their part either.

‘Shadow Step.’

‘Shadow Step.’

Zippering through shadows with her Ability, Viladia navigated the expanse between the control station's perimeter and the suspect apartment buildings with unparalleled speed, despite the considerable drain on her Focus and Stamina. This method of movement, though demanding, allowed her to close the distance in virtually no time at all.

However, upon reaching her destination, beneath the towering residential apartment buildings, Viladia's focus was shattered by an unexpected intrusion—a voice that reverberated through her head.

It wasn't like a mental communication, as she was more than used to those by now as a result of Arrow Squad using those types of Abilities as their main communication method in the middle of an active battle, but rather something else entirely.

The voice, cold and clinical, bore the detachment of a surgeon performing a routine operation, devoid of any emotional resonance.

"Looks like I've found the elusive squad... Your actions have caused us considerable heartache; more than you might realise," the voice conveyed with chilling precision. "You will all die here, and I would prefer it if you didn't complicate matters further. The Wielder's interference has already disrupted my plans enough. It would be in your best interest to simply surrender and face your demise with honour; if undead like you are even capable of that."

Stunned by the audacity and sheer absurdity of the demand, Viladia's initial reaction was disbelief.

'Who in their right mind would willingly follow such a request? Is this some kind of fucked-up joke?' she thought, momentarily thrown off balance by the brazenness of the command.

The Ace's voice was quickly replaced by Morin's, resonating through her skull. It was their main form of communication, solicited by System Abilities of both Morin and Moira. A sort of mental connection was formed instantly with the rest of the squad, creating a shared space for their intended thoughts to be shared with one another.

Morin, serving as the primary host of this mental network, with Moira designated as the alternate in case of his incapacitation, reached out to Viladia urgently.

His tone, laden with tension, betrayed the criticality of the moment.

"Vi! Your take?!" The urgency in Morin's thought-voice pressed Viladia for an immediate decision.

She thoroughly understood the import of her next decisions.

The sudden appearance of the enemy Ace, which had turned out to be a Psyker of considerable power, placed them at a significant disadvantage. Such an adversary represented the worst case scenario for them; especially given Arrow Squad's current lack of a Psyker.

Faced with the enormity of the decision, Viladia weighed their options.

Thea's crucial, albeit final, warning had spared them from the immediate decimation that would have undoubtedly blindsided them, suffering catastrophic losses before they had even recognized the presence of the enemy Ace.

Among Arrow Squad, Viladia had always harboured the deepest fascination with the Psychic disciplines, rendering her the squad's unofficial psychic counter-strategy specialist.

"Take your Serum's immediately," Viladia commanded, certain that her squad mates would heed her instruction without delay. As they acted, she swiftly accessed her own T1 Null-Serum, consuming it while piecing together the intelligence they had on their adversary.

Their current predicament involved a first-time engagement with a Psychic Ace, however—a situation teeming with unknowns and dangers that they had no way of anticipating. "He used [Voice Projection] earlier, indicating he's at minimum a Lambda-rank. Yet, based on Thea's extreme reaction when she opened her Gate, we're more likely dealing with a Theta or even Zeta-rank Psyker." Consuming the Serum, Viladia outlined their dire circumstances through the squad's psychic link, enabling her to convey plans while physically preparing.

"If he truly is Zeta-rank, we're all going to die; just as he said," she admitted, allowing the weight of her words to sink in. "Our priority for now—and our best chance to kill him—is pinpointing his location immediately. If Crusher can still act, an explosive assault might be our best bet. Otherwise, we need to position Moira for a decisive sniper shot. Morin and I stand little chance of a direct confrontation, especially at Theta-level, barring any critical errors on his part. Unfortunately, I can't discern anything about his Psychic Path or Inheritance so far, so we'll need Moira and Crusher to do their thing."

She concluded her tactical assessment, her senses starting to dull as the Null-Serum took full effect, enveloping her in a protective, albeit desensitized, bubble. The world seemed to fade into a less vibrant version of itself, a necessary sacrifice to level the playing field against a formidable psychic opponent.

'I hate this fucking stuff...' Disdain for the Null-Serum lingered in Viladia's mind as she refrained from voicing her thoughts, maintaining the mental link with her squad.

The [Mental-Bond], while invaluable for communication, came with its limitation of allowing only one speaker at a time.

The Null-Serum's taste was revolting, but its effects were far more concerning.

By dampening their connection to the Allbright System, it impaired the regeneration of vital resources such as Focus and Stamina and increased the likelihood of errors when utilising Abilities.

However, these drawbacks were a necessary evil, given that the Serum's primary function was to diminish their connection to the Void, thereby offering crucial protection against Psychic attacks.

For Viladia and her squad, particularly Moira, who possessed the squad's weakest Resolve, the Null-Serum was a mandatory lifeline, offering a fighting chance against the potent threat of enemy Psykers.

Now that the bitter concoction had been consumed, Viladia, her Shooting Star at the ready, began surveying their surroundings with renewed focus. Her task was clear: Identify the enemy Ace's location and devise a strategy to neutralise this dangerous enemy.

Viladia's thoughts darted around as she pieced together the clues about the enemy Ace's location and tactics. *'Based on Thea's last words, he's somewhere to the south, possibly southwest of her final position. The trajectory of the shots that hit Thea and Crusher suggests he's close, but not a sniper—Crusher's T2 armour would've been irrelevant against a high-calibre sniper round at this distance; and the bullets were too small to match a sniper's usual choice to begin with.'*

Her mind was racing as she tried to build a rough profile of the enemy Ace to relay to the rest of the squad, but the sheer number of unknowns was far too high to have anything useful for them just yet.

'Fighting Psykers is fucking bullshit...' she mused, understanding the limitations of their current situation.

To avoid detection, Viladia remained motionless, shrouded under the cover of her [Umbra's Veil].

Although this Ability rendered her invisible and inaudible to most, she was acutely aware of quite a number of Abilities that could pierce through her veil, not to mention multiple different Psychic Powers being able to do so as well.

Hence, she adopted a cautious stance, minimising any unnecessary movement to stay undetected. Eagerly, she awaited a response from Crusher and Moira.

Their actions could potentially provoke the enemy Psyker into revealing more about their capabilities, allowing Viladia to update the squad with any new intelligence that might tip the scales in their favour.

When it came to fighting Psykers in particular, Viladia knew that there was nothing they could do, even as a squad, if they couldn't figure out their basic set of capabilities.

Unlike regular soldiers who relied on the Abilities provided by the Allbright System, Psykers had an additional layer of complexity with their Psychic Paths and Inheritances, enabling them to manipulate their powers in highly specialised and often unpredictable ways.

Understanding the enemy Psyker's toolkit was critical; a direct assault without this knowledge was tantamount to literal suicide.

For instance, a Psyker with the Perditio Inheritance could disintegrate opponents on approach if they possessed the right Path to create physical or semi-physical constructs.

Given the enemy was at least a T3, possibly even a T3 Prime, the likelihood of encountering such devastating power was alarmingly high.

And while she didn't have an exhaustive knowledge of *all* the Psychic Paths and Inheritances—given their vast and varied nature—she *was* familiar with the ones posing the greatest threat to them.

Among the Psychic Inheritances, Perditio and Obscuritas stood as the most formidable threats for Arrow Squad.

Perditio represented the aspect of destruction and obliteration within the Void.

Any Psychic Power influenced by Perditio would inevitably lead to catastrophic outcomes, magnifying the destructive potential of any Path a Psyker might follow. The mere presence of a Perditio Psyker meant that anyone within their reach risked being obliterated in an instant—something that even the Null-Serum wouldn't save them from; merely slightly delay at best.

On the other end of the spectrum, Obscuritas embodied the aspect of darkness and the unseen within the Void, serving as the direct antithesis to the Veritas Inheritance.

Psychic Powers filtered through Obscuritas became nearly impossible to detect, often rendering them invisible to the unaware. An individual's Resolve played a crucial role in detecting these powers; a lack thereof meant one could unknowingly walk into a lethal trap, realising that the knife they had unknowingly walked into only after they had already died to it.

These two Inheritances posed the greatest risk in any encounter with a Psyker for their squad, drawing Viladia's main focus and concern.

The primary challenge they now faced lay in their inability to ascertain the specific Inheritance of the enemy Psyker without first having to directly confront their powers—a necessary risk that, if handled poorly, would easily end their mission here and now.

“Crusher is hurt pretty badly, but he'll make it,” Johnsen's words coming through the [Mental-Bond] let Viladia breathe a quiet sigh of relief. Without their defensive heavy, it would be downright impossible to bait the enemy Ace into revealing parts of their toolkit without

suffering extremely heavy losses. "His helmet and back-armour is completely broken, so he's extremely vulnerable. He won't last, but he can do his job. Morin, lower the wall at their location on my mark."

Viladia readied herself, knowing the crucial role her observations would play in the unfolding situation.

She pictured their strategic formation vividly, having seen it hundreds of times already: Morin and Johnsen positioned off to one side for optimal support, while Moira used Crusher's full-cover shield and his defensive Abilities as a secure-ish bait position to counter-snipe attackers from.

The plan was to lower Morin's protective wall at just the right moment, allowing Moira to take her shot as Crusher deployed what was left of his defensive capabilities to shield her.

This approach, though fraught with tremendous risk, capitalised on their combined strengths.

It wasn't an entirely fool-proof method, but the two of them could take a serious beating. Moira's heavy armour, a rarity for snipers like her, combined with Crusher's Abilities and the cover from his shield had helped them weather quite a number of storms in the past already.

Johnsen's cue signalled the strategic withdrawal of Morin's earth-wall into the ground, revealing Moira and Crusher prepared in their defensive stance.

Viladia, stationed to the south, had a clear line of sight to their meticulously arranged defence.

Moira swivelled her weapon, rapidly scouring the environment for the faintest hint of the enemy Ace's whereabouts. Crusher, though battered, exerted his strength to stabilise the full-cover shield, anticipating an imminent strike.

The tense silence was shattered by three distinct shots echoing out.

Viladia's eyes were locked onto the scene, witnessing Crusher's remarkable defensive Ability spring into action against the impending threat.

His shield underwent a transformation, adopting the guise of a formidable five-headed hydra, each head poised and ready to intercept the incoming projectiles as they snapped and coiled through the air above them. As the first of the bullets came close, it was met immediately by the animated defence, the hydra heads lunging forward in a display of both defiance and protection.

Viladia's eyes were wide with alarm as she observed the erratic behaviour of two bullets, which seemed to dart and weave through the air, as if manipulated by some unseen hand.

They dodged the defensive manoeuvres of the hydra heads with unnatural agility.

"He's using smart bullets!" She quickly relayed to her team via the [Mental-Bond], the urgency clear in her mental voice.

Immediately dropping to a knee herself, she rummaged through her backpack to retrieve her ASB-Hood, a necessary countermeasure against such advanced weaponry.

Smart bullets, with their ability to alter trajectory mid-flight and independently aim for specific parts of an enemy, posed a significant threat on the battlefield.

Some higher-Tier versions even had the capacity to pause momentarily in *mid-air*, resuming their lethal path with calculated precision.

The ASB-Hood, designed to disrupt the targeting mechanisms of these smart bullets, were their best defence, albeit offering no physical protection beyond that.

While Moira's armour was already equipped with ASB technology, ensuring her relative safety from such threats, Viladia was aware that the rest of the squad wasn't as fortunate. Their armour module slots had been allocated to other enhancements, deemed more universally beneficial.

Thus, for the rest of them, donning the ASB-Hoods was the only way to escape the almost guaranteed kill-shots of smart bullets.

As Viladia watched, she saw Crusher make a desperate attempt to take cover behind the remnants of his shield, while the hydra heads frantically snapped at the elusive smart bullets zipping through the air.

Time had long seemed to slow down to a crawl, a common phenomenon in the heat of combat, where seconds stretched into seemingly endless moments.

One of the hydra heads, lunging with precision mere centimetres near Moira and Crusher, managed to intercept another bullet, plucking it from its deadly trajectory.

However, the final bullet eluded capture.

Viladia's heart sank; she had anticipated the tragic conclusion the moment she realised they were dealing with smart bullets. Crusher's defensive manoeuvre was tragically too slow to adapt to the unforeseen angles of attack; too slow to adjust to the bobbing and weaving bullets.

With his helmet already broken and fallen off from the initial assault, Crusher was vulnerably exposed. The bullet found its target with merciless accuracy, penetrating his skull.

The giant of a man crumpled, lifeless before he even hit the ground, his once-vigilant shield and its hydra guardians collapsing into inanimate metal beside him.

Moira found herself abruptly alone as Crusher's massive frame fell, leaving her dangerously exposed. In a split second of realisation, she dove towards the safety of Morin's rapidly ascending earthen wall, hoping it could shield her from the enemy Ace's lethal focus.

Yet, the timing betrayed them, and Viladia's heart sank as she witnessed the scene unfold with a mix of horror and helplessness.

A sudden, inexplicable force lifted a vast section of the battlefield into the air.

Moira, along with the lifeless form of Crusher, the remains of his hydra-guarded shield, and debris from their surroundings, was caught in an invisible maelic vortex.

'He's a fucking Aurae Psyker,' Viladia understood instantly, recognizing the sheer scope and of the Psychic onslaught as being far beyond the norm.

Hanging suspended, thirty metres above the ground, Moira was ensnared in a nightmarish tableau of levitation, unable to break free from the Psyker's anti-gravitational grip. Then, as abruptly as it had lifted, the force inverted, hurling everything downwards with catastrophic intensity.

The sound of their impact echoed, a grim portent to the enemy Psyker's power, as Moira and the inanimate objects around her crashed into the asphalt with bone-shattering force.

In the fleeting moment before the inevitable collision, Moira's voice pierced through the [Mental-Bond] with a calmness that belied her situation.

"He's two buildings further south, Vi. Good luck."

Despite the disorienting effects of the gravity manipulation, Moira had somehow discerned the Ace's location, imparting this critical piece of intelligence with her final breath.

Without wasting a single moment, Viladia sprang into action.

'Shadow Step.'

'Shadow Step.'

'Shadow Step.'

With three quick, back-to-back activations of her Ability, she covered the roughly four-hundred metres to the apartment that Moira had pointed out to her.

"He's an Aurae Psyker. That means large-radius attacks; so try and stick together, as strange as that sounds. He seems to be going down the Gravity-Path. As a non-physical construct, it will make it a lot harder for him to hit you if you're next to somebody else," she relayed through the [Mental-Bond] as she made her way up the stairwell inside the building with hasty steps.

'Without Moira and Crusher, we're really in deep now... I have no idea how we're supposed to beat this guy,' Viladia thought to herself, opting not to relay this part of her thoughts over the [Mental-Bond]. It was her job, as the squad's Psychic expert, to find a way; so hearing her state that she had no idea what to do was not going to be great for morale.

Ascending the stairs, she kept in mind the trajectories of the bullets fired, both the ones that had taken out Thea and Crusher's helmet, as well as the ones fired during the second salvo that had ultimately killed Crusher.

'He can't be below the 9th floor and not above the 14th...'

As she got closer to the 9th floor, she slowed down drastically, returning to a more stealthy-approach as she inched her way forward, checking for traps, tripwires or any other form of alarm that might give her away.

While her [Umbral Veil] made her invisible and unhearable for anyone not inside it, it didn't actually remove her physical influence on the world. So stepping onto a mine was still very much possible and a danger she couldn't ignore.

"Johnsen is dead. I'm badly hurt; the Ace is still in the same spot," she suddenly heard the strained voice of Morin come through the [Mental-Bond]. "I think he's got another Path. We got hit by some kind of concentrated air or something. Johnsen got completely ripped apart; I barely got away. I can't move, so it's all on you now, Vi. Sorry about that."

Viladia exhaled a burdened sigh, the gravity of their situation weighing down on her.

"So he's a Zeta rank, then... We never stood a chance, huh?" She murmured, a mix of defiance and resignation in her voice. "I'll try my best. See you on the other side, Morin."

With that, she focused entirely on the task ahead of her: Taking out a Zeta-rank Psyker all by herself.

As Viladia advanced through the building, each step was taken with meticulous care, her senses sharpened to their utmost. Approaching each new floor, Viladia exercised extreme levels of caution, acutely aware that the hardest tasks of fighting a Psyker—locating, closing in and identifying the powers of the enemy—had mostly already been accomplished, thanks to her fallen comrades.

Utilising her [Shadow Step] Ability with unprecedented liberality, she flitted from one shadow to the next, a ghost navigating through the dim corridors. This Ability allowed her to traverse potentially hazardous zones, circumventing traps or clutter that could betray her presence.

In normal circumstances, Viladia would conserve her Focus and Stamina, but the gravity of her mission compelled her to expend her resources without reservation. After all, if she wasn't spending all of her Focus and Stamina on killing an enemy Ace, then what exactly was she saving it for?

Each teleportation was a calculated risk, placing her either closer to her target or potentially within the enemy's reach. Yet, the dangers of being spotted due to an accidental misstep left no room for such frugality.

Floor by floor, she ascended, her anticipation building.

Her mind remained vigilant throughout, ready to react at a moment's notice to any sign of the Psyker or the deadly powers he wielded.

Then, finally, she heard the faintest of movements as somebody shuffled around on the spot in a doorway to her left.

She was now on the 12th floor of the apartment and was rapidly running out of Resources, but she finally had tracked down the enemy Ace.

“Morin, if you’re still around... I’m gonna need him to be distracted. Just for an instant, if you can,” she tried voicing through the [Mental-Bond], hoping that it was still active and Morin hadn’t succumbed to his injuries yet.

Cautiously approaching the room, Viladia's movements were a symphony of stealth, each step meticulously calculated to avoid any noise that might give her away.

She drew her knives, their abyss-black blades blending seamlessly with the shadows she commanded. Understanding the limitations of her Shooting Star in this scenario, she opted for a more direct approach.

An experienced Aurae Psyker could potentially sense and evade a projectile, making her preferred ranged method too risky to employ.

Comfort found its way into her grip on the knives, weapons that had served as extensions of her will in countless encounters.

She was an assassin, first and foremost. She had killed countless enemies with the combination of Abilities she was now relying on, [Umbra’s Veil] and [Shadow Step], but never an enemy Ace Psyker.

‘If I had a high-power laser weapon, this wouldn’t be an issue... I might have to pick up a sidearm for the future, for instances like this,’ she thought as she crept up to the very edge of the doorframe.

Then, Morin's strained voice pierced through the [Mental-Bond], sparking a flicker of hope within her, “On your mark.”

Not entirely alone, she had support, albeit from a distance.

With a deep, steadying breath, Viladia readied herself for the confrontation ahead.

“I’m in position, do it,” she communicated back, her tone laced with a determined calm.

She trusted Morin to create the diversion needed, his exact plan unknown to her but irrelevant.

Her faith in his abilities was unwavering.

Swiftly rounding the doorframe, she caught sight of the enemy Psyker for the first time, his focus on the silenced rifle in his hands, likely targeting Morin. Viladia wasted no moment in hesitation, her experience and instincts guiding her forward.

‘Shadow Step.’

Suddenly, Viladia's perspective shifted dramatically, utilising the shadow of the enemy Psyker as her entrance from the ethereal to the tangible.

In a fluid motion, initiated even before she fully emerged from her shadowy conduit, her knives found their mark.

They sliced through the air with precision, slipping past the armour at the Psyker's neck, severing flesh, sinew, and bone in a swift, decisive action that left the Psyker decapitated before her full presence materialised.

As his body collapsed beneath her, a fleeting moment of relief washed over her.

Yet, it was promptly interrupted by a sinking feeling, a premonition that danger was far from over.

‘Shadow Ste—’

Mid-activation, her body was suddenly wrenched violently upwards, caught in the invisible clutches of an unthinkable powerful force.

Her Resolve flared in desperation, fighting against what felt like an unyielding grip of molasses, an oppressive, expanding sea attempting to engulf her.

Despite her strenuous efforts, pushing her Resolve to its brink, the unseen force seemed to only grow, tightening painfully around her.

Then, a voice, calm and detached, broke the silence.

"I'm honestly impressed that you managed to get my clone... They cost a lot of Merit, you know?" The enemy Ace's voice came from behind her, his footsteps echoing lightly as he approached the room's doorway. "I see how you made such a mess of everything beyond the wall now. Your squad truly was an elite one, huh?"

Caught in a struggle for freedom, Viladia's attempts grew more desperate, yet increasingly futile. The suffocating grasp of the Psyker's power was relentless. As her vision began to blur from exertion, the reality of her predicament settled in; the Psyker had her firmly in his grasp.

Viladia exerted herself further, momentarily freeing an arm, but it was swiftly ensnared again by a fresh surge of psychic energy, rendering her immobilised in midair.

The enemy Ace's voice filled the room, tinged with a mixture of admiration and annoyance.

"I'd appreciate if you ceased these futile efforts... It's quite rare to find someone without Psychic Abilities so challenging to secure. Quite bothersome, indeed," he stated as he made his way into the room.

A sudden burst of blood from her nose marked the physical toll of her resistance, signalling every capillary's rupture under the strain she put her body under.

‘Fuck... If I push any further, I'll overdraw,’ conceding to the relentless force, Viladia finally ceased her struggle, a mix of frustration and resignation clouding her thoughts.

The realisation of her approaching doom was palpable. *'If only I had been more thorough with the other rooms... His decoy strategy mirrored our own, baiting us, just as we were baiting him...'*

Unexpectedly, the Ace continued to engage in conversation, not seizing the immediate opportunity to eliminate her. "You might be ruminating on potential oversights, imagining 'What if I had been more diligent?' or something like that. However, let me offer you a piece of insight: It would have made no difference," he disclosed, his voice carrying a cold certainty.

Drawing a combat knife with deliberate slowness from his intricate, likely Tier 3 Psyker-augmenting armour, he approached the helpless Viladia. Despite the imminent threat, his choice to prolong the encounter suggested he found some kind of value in this final exchange.

"You see, I thoroughly detest you undead monstrosities. You're an abomination, endlessly resurrecting like some grotesque, unkillable vermin. No matter how many times we exterminate you, you just crawl back from your pods, mocking death itself. It's an *affront*, utterly infuriating," his voice, now utterly laced with venom, shifted dramatically from detached professional to vehemently spiteful.

"I've dedicated an obscene amount of time to discovering a method to erase your kind *permanently*, yet a definitive solution eludes me. Nevertheless, I find a certain... satisfaction, in capturing one of your loathsome kind, experimenting in search of that elusive permanence," he hissed, his blade making quick work of Viladia's armour, slicing through it as effortlessly as if it were mere cloth, his T3 knife an extension of his malice.

"Unfortunately, my endeavours haven't yet borne fruit. So, I'm left to extract my joy from ensuring you endure an existence so wretched, you'll instead *plead* for the oblivion you so arrogantly dodge," he sneered, bringing the knife to hover ominously over Viladia's eye, the glint of the blade reflecting a promise of torment.

With a slow, deliberate movement, he pressed the knife into her eye socket, each millimetre deeper a crescendo of agony for Viladia.

Her consciousness was besieged by an overwhelming tide of pain, a grim gratitude for her fallen squad members' swift deaths fleetingly crossing her mind. The hours to come promised an ordeal of such magnitude, she wouldn't wish it upon even her fiercest enemy.

"Ah, yes, squirm, UHF trash... Scream for me! Beg for the mercy of death that you so vehemently deny! Implore your vaunted Faction Leaders to abandon their futile efforts at bringing you back again! Your suffering is the only testament to your existence I'll permit," he taunted, a twisted joy suffusing his words as he indulged in the infliction of pain...