

NECRON

PART 3

PRETEND
THAT
WE'RE
DEAD



BY OLIVER STRONG

Necron (part 3)
Pretend That We're Dead

By Oliver Strong

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Part I-Necron: Beyond Einstein's Barrier.
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Chapter One

A dark cloud cast its final shadow upon the jungle world of Alpha B. From orbit she had maintained a Cimmerian shade for more than a year. Yet her daunting presence was soon to vanish like melted snow, lifting away from the brightness of the inhabitants' joy.

Aboard Necron, three Blackbirds sprouted six insect legs to bear their weight whilst pulse rockets eased off.

Marines as far as the eye could see lined Necron's main landing deck. Rear ramps lowered, the moment they touched metal every man and woman saluted, besides senior officers.

Captain Gibson emerged, Victor and Bravo one followed, hauling what little property a Necron Marine was permitted.

Sergeant Michaels carried an N-13 rifle in one arm and duffel bag in the other. An old sawn off double barrellled shotgun hung loosely from his Marine issued backpack. He'd bought it on Alpha B from a colonist. Victor thought he was nuts, well, nuttier than usual. But to be fair old faithful had seen off more Clicks than he cared count. And for the first time Michaels was building an intimate relationship.

Gibson saluted, 'At ease Captain,' stated the Commodore.

Bravo one stood at ease, the multitude observed survivors of a tour on Alpha B. It was time for these Marines to take a well-earned break.

'Welcome home Captain.'

'Thank you sir, it's nice to be back.'

Commodore Patterson eyed Michaels' shotgun, 'I had no idea Necron Industries issued a shotgun.'

'That's definitely non-issue sir,' stated Colonel Rockey.

Patterson approached Michaels, 'Explain Sergeant.'

'When you're dirt diving an N-13's difficult to manoeuvre and a pistol doesn't have enough stopping power, sir.'

'Dirt diving?'

'Clicks live in caves and tunnels, daytime we go down and pretend that we're dead. When it scurries past on all fours I give that son of a Click both barrels in the head, reload, then move on to another section, sir.'

Patterson's eyes widened, 'I see, I take it you've had success dirt diving, Sergeant?'

Gibson cut in, 'I apologise sir. The men are fatigued.'

'I'm fascinated by your dirt diving Captain. Perhaps we might discuss this subject at a later date?'

'Certainly sir.'

Patterson glanced at the shotgun, 'Carry on.'

Diana touched the deck along with Mercer and Ting. The platoon were tired, sure regeneration units were shipped to Alpha B but Clicks cut power all the time and regeneration never went smoothly. Diana often woke trapped inside her metal coffin. Techs would prise the thing open, until power could be restored, leaving her mind and body undernourished.

'I can't wait to get some decent regen,' stated Diana.

'Yeh, I'm dead on my feet,' said Ting.

She turned her head and gave a coy look.

'Come on, if you can't laugh what can you do?'

'Urrrrhhhh!' groaned Specialist Zeng stepping out of the hangar, oblivious to men and women saluting her return to Mother.

The three walked through corridors in the direction of the armoury.

Mercer sighed, 'I'm gonna miss Alpha B.'

'More like the hoes are gonna miss YOU. You spent half your paycheque on those disease infested bitches,' said Ting.

Mercer smiled, 'And it was worth every motherfucking penny bro!'

They entered Necron's armoury. Mercer held his mini gun with both hands as another Marine unsecured it from his body, 'Besides I ain't gonna get none here.'

'Why not find yourself a Tech chick? I hear they bang more often than a Tau Ceti volcano and twice as hot!'

'Nah, I don't do it with dead chicks,' he glanced at Diana, 'no offence.'

With a palm print Diana checked her weaponry in at the desk, 'None taken, besides who'd want to sleep with an ignorant narcissist like you?'

'Say what?'

Diana left to get some well-earned regen.

Mercer turned to Ting, 'What the fuck's a narcissist?'

Victor arose from his metallic coffin, nanite mist flowed over its edges. The universe unfolded to his mind by degrees as he stretched his muscles and yawned.

While dressing he noticed that not only had a week passed in normal space time but five years had gone by aboard the Necron, that was odd. Victor looked into a mirror while straightening his beret, in its reflection there was his cabin porthole, a window into the soul of the universe, large enough to see a familiar green blue world and the continent of Asia.

Sky lifts punched out of her atmosphere to meet one of eight rings, each ring circumnavigated the planet from which mankind was born and now took its first steps, colonizing moons, strange worlds and alien systems.

He thought of his family. Victor's heart jumped for a moment until he remembered, no Marines, in fact no staff, were permitted leave on their home world.

Born on mother Earth, died in her arms, raised from the dead to fight vile beasts that would ravish her body and enslave her children, yet he was banished from ever setting foot on her warm moist soil again.

Victor's heart fell with abandonment, yet it leapt a second time sensing the warmth of his new family aboard S.S. Necron. Diana, Gibson, Clarke his platoon and even Colonel Rockey, they were the soil his boots stood upon, propping him up to fight another day, to lead his people into battle against evil and villainy.

Victor's communicator vibrated, pulling his mind away from philosophical reflection. He tapped a device attached to the inside of his wrist. A recording of Captain Gibson's voice played, 'My quarters ten hundred hours, and try not to be late Zellmann.'

Victor had almost tapped the doorbell when a speaker emitted Gibson's voice, 'It's open Lieutenant.'

Victor stepped inside, Gibson motioned to the hatch and he closed it.

'Sit down Lieutenant.'

As Victor sat Gibson tossed a file before him, the Captain preferred hard copies, why was still a mystery, 'What's up?'

'You ever heard of Osamu Shinko?'

'Does it go well with soy sauce?'

Gibson pulled out a pack of cigarettes, 'Smoke?'

Victor took one, Gibson lit it with his white gold lighter, 'Osamu Shinko is the Chairman and owner of Shinko Refineries, ring a bell?'

Vic took a drag then opened his file, a picture of a Japanese man and his family greeted his eyes, 'I remember the name.'

'Shinko are the largest Yeonum refiners in the Terran system, all Terran fleets depend on him for fuel. In short without this man the human species is dead in the water and we're dead in space, no pun intended.'

Victor examined the file page by page coming across a distinctly non-Japanese face, 'What about this guy?'

'That's Manlio Cuoco.'

Victor exhaled a puff of smoke, 'The Cuckoo man?'

'Shinko's daughter disappeared, until a couple of weeks ago,' Gibson tapped his table. A recording previously broadcast over GalNet played out.

'Greetings children of Christ, children of Mohammed, children of Buddha ...' Gibson fast forwarded, 'I Jesus Christ reborn into this mortal coil reach out to you one and all. Do not permit fear to distort your perception of reality, of the truth, God's truth, for I am ...' Gibson fast forwarded again.

'Jesus Christ that guy likes to talk,' noted Victor.

'Yeh and mostly about himself. I had to sit through the whole damn thing so think yourself fortunate Lieutenant.'

The recording began to play again, 'In a historic ceremony to take place this month, I Christ, your Lord, shall take the hand of the thirteenth apostle reborn into the mortal coil of Ophelia Shinko in a ceremony all may witness,' the camera panned out to reveal a Japanese woman in her late teens holding the hand of Manlio Cuoco, 'I and my disciples invite all to witness a merging of flesh and soul the universe has awaited since time began, and in doing so humanity takes another step towards peace in the universe,' Gibson cut the transmission.

'She didn't look like she was being held against her will.'

Gibson pulled a bottle of scotch from a desk drawer along with two glasses, 'Who gives a shit? Shinko's paying us to retrieve her, besides if it was your daughter what would you do?'

Zellmann took a sip of malt whisky recently shipped from the surface, 'When you put it that way.'

'Delta Company will get the job.'

'Fine by me.'

'Not when you find out what Shinko's offering ... fifty thousand Nippon tax rights per Marine, one hundred thousand per junior officer and another hundred grand for the man that brings Manlio in alive.'

'That's a sweet deal, but I don't need the cash.'

'Tell that to your platoon, Lieutenant.'

Victor thought on it, he might not care about the money but they probably did, 'So why won't we get it?'

'It's a boarding action. Bravo Company's been pounding dirt on Alpha B for the last thirteen months, no practical experience.'

'You have.'

'One Captain ain't gonna cut it Lieutenant.'

Victor examined the file, 'Can I keep this for a while sir?'

'Knock yourself out.'

Victor polished off his drink, 'Thanks for the whisky.'

Gibson's eyes widened as Victor sloshed it down, 'Hey that's Scotch!'

'Whatever, can I be dismissed sir?'

'Sure, inform the other platoon leads.'

'Wilco,' Victor saluted.

Gibson returned the salute and replied in an annoyed tone, 'You're welcome.'

Victor visited the Enlisted Mess, Diana sat apart from her comrades drinking a vodka, 'Bravo one,' every Marine made his way to the empty table Victor stood at.

Diana remained alone in her corner, 'Zeng, here now!'

She moved over to sit beside Ruiz.

'Now some of you guys are probably wondering why we're in Earth orbit,' at that moment the entire Mess fell silent, every Marine no matter his Company designation concentrated upon Zellmann.

'Have any of you guys heard of Osamu Shinko?'

There was no reply.

'Shinko Refineries?'

Ting groaned, 'What does that asshole want?'

'Who you talking about?' inquired Mercer.

'Shinko, he's some rich Nip asshole, thinks us Chinese are all sub-humans. He better not be coming aboard this ship or I'll ...'

'You'll what Private?' interjected Victor.

Ting made no reply.

'Mr Shinko has hired the S.S. Necron and her crew, so when he comes aboard just remember, he's paying for the roof over your mother's head and the clothes on your father's back, is that straight Private?'

'Understood sir.'

'Back to Mr Shinko, he's had some family problems ...'

'Urrhhh tell me about it!' snapped Diana.

'Is there something you want to share with us Specialist Zeng?'

'No Sir.'

'Great, does anyone else want to cut me off?'

The room was silent.

'Wonderful, so back to the reason I hauled my ass down here. We're being hired to retrieve Shinko's daughter,' Victor opened his folder and placed her picture on the table, 'take a good look, remember her face.'

Mercer's eyes ran over the image of a beautiful 19 year old girl, 'Mmmm yeh, that's some sweet ass baby!'

Ting examined her features, 'If she wasn't a Nip I'd definitely fuck her.'

Mercer furrowed his grey brow, 'What's the difference?'

'To put it in terms even you can understand. It's say the difference between a nigger and a bro.'

Mercer made that incredulous look born out of ignorance, 'You'd fuck a bro?'

During their conversation Victor had lit a cigarette, 'If you don't mind leaving your intellectual discussion until later, I'll continue.'

Again the men fell silent. Diana had been stoic throughout the entire briefing.

'So the second half is this guy,' he let another picture hit the table, 'anyone recognise him?'

'I recognise him,' stated Ruiz, 'Manlio Cuoco, leader of the redemption cult.'

Ruiz made the sign of the cross over his upper body and muttered, 'In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.'

'Something wrong Ruiz?'

'Nothing sir.'

The platoon medic held onto a cross, it hung around his neck with a set of titanium dog tags.

'We may be required to put this man and his followers down, can you handle that?'

'You cannot kill him sir.'

'Why's that exactly?'

'I know it sounds crazy but a lot of people believe in him, my mother she has his picture in her bedroom.'

'A bullet from an N-13 will stop a Click. I don't foresee any problems with the Cuckoo man.'

'I know but ...'

'You don't buy his shit do you?'

'No, no, but he's a holy man,' Ruiz pulled a strained expression, 'you can't execute a holy man.'

'If he's the good Christian you think he is then there'll be no resistance. Personally I think the man's a hustler and he'll protect what he has with violence.'

The Cuckoo man's holding Miss Shinko aboard his vessel, the Golgotha, along with the rest of his cult, which coincidentally is composed of rich kids rebelling against some form of authority. All of them selling up whatever they can and donating their way into heaven.

We're going to board the Golgotha and grab Miss Shinko, a search and retrieve mission, we're only to engage the enemy when fired upon.

A single Company shall be selected for this task. Each Marine selected will receive fifty thousand Nippon tax rights as a bonus upon successful return of Miss Shinko.'

Diana groaned, 'Urrhhh well that's us out of the running!'

'I'm sorry Specialist?'

'Delta Company do all search and retrieve missions.'

'She's right,' stated Ting, 'we're ground pounders, we'll never get this.'

Sergeant Michaels remained quiet. He never spoke unless he had something to add. Victor took a drag on his smoke, 'Sergeant, what do you think?'

Michaels leant on a grey wall with crossed arms, 'Get me the gig and I'll show the Cuckoo man real crazy.'

Victor felt a chill go down his spine as Michaels whispered those words. He'd witnessed real crazy on Alpha B.

'I have one request Sergeant.'

'Sure.'

'I get us this job and Manlio Cuoco is taken into my custody ALIVE. Do we have an agreement?'

Michaels nodded his head.

Later in his cabin Victor studied a file, not the Shinko file but one concerning a member of his platoon. For the last few days Diana had been depressed, she hardly spoke to him and her visits to his cabin became markedly less frequent.

He'd inquired as to why but Diana remained tight lipped, brushing off his questions. So Victor asked Captain Gibson for a favour. After a tour on Alpha B you get to ask your Captain for favours.

Victor relaxed on his bed reading Diana's mail. It was a sad and pathetic tale. Diana's Necron Industries paycheque had allowed her family to begin a new life. Well it wasn't long before her brother found his way to the nearest casino. Soon afterwards Diana's elderly mother was carrying his gambling debts. By now the entire family worked as slaves against an ever growing debt mountain, pushed higher by a ludicrous interest rate. In one year her brother had turned the fortunes of the Zeng family around.

Perhaps Diana was too ashamed to talk about it? Victor didn't know, but he did know that by retrieving the Cuckoo man he could help the woman he loves. Two hundred grand would be enough to pay off the Zeng family debt, his only problem was getting the mission. Delta Company were sure to be assigned, but Victor was a good study, he and Mr Shinko held common ground, a shared interest.

The hatch opened, Victor quickly hid Diana's file and took the Shinko file as she walked inside, 'Try knocking, I could've been doing something embarrassing.'

Her sullen eyes fixed on the file, 'You swatting up?'

He put the file down, got up and embraced Diana, 'Why've you been so miserable since we got to Earth? Did I say or do something?'

'It's not you Vic.'

'Then what is it?'

'Forget it, you want to drink?'

'You've been drinking a lot.'

'You have a problem with getting me drunk and fucking my brains out?'

'I'd rather you were sober.'

Diana stared out of Victor's small porthole onto Earth. Eight sky rings interconnected to meet space elevators on all continents. She observed China and wondered how it was possible a piece of green and brown, placid as water on a moonlight lake, might contain such torment, torment stretching across the galaxy to stab at her heart, driving her to drink in the hope an alcoholic haze might lessen its pain.

Victor held her shoulders, the desire to speak burnt inside yet he knew Dee, on revealing his knowledge she would explode. Victor maintained a visage of ignorance while plotting with cloak and dagger.

A tear ran down her cheek, a rolling expression of pain kept secret due to family humiliation. The short lady whispered, 'Only the guy who isn't rowing has time to rock the boat.'

Chapter Two

Each Marine stood to attention, squads formed platoons, platoons formed Companies merging to create the Necron Marine Corps. Marines stretched out as ears of wheat populating a farmer's field in summertime. These were the scorned, shunned by men and women of Earth.

In past times innovations always contended with the difficulty that few wished them well. That sentiment had not changed, for humanity despised their creation as much as the Drax feared them. Rejected and ignored by society these were the outcast, in one eye set gold and the other bloody murder, constantly seeking profit and glory, hunting for that which might raise them in the minds of those they protected.

From Alpha to Zulu Marines awaited, lower ranks in service uniform, junior officers and above in dress uniform. Deck A hung in silence, Commodore Patterson wore his braided tunic, Colonel Rockey by his side and Dwight Connley in a flash Versace suit.

Steam poured from the edges as a large hatch creaked aside. A Japanese fellow in his fifties stepped through dissipating mist, flanked by two younger men in expensive European business suits.

'Permission to come aboard.'

'Please do old fellow!'

Shinko stepped onto Deck A before shaking hands with Commodore Patterson, 'It is a pleasure to see you Ranulph. You are acquainted with Horatio,' he motioned to his eldest son.

Horatio bowed to the Commodore.

'My second son, Laertes.'

A younger man in his early twenties bowed.

'I'd like to introduce my first officer and second in command of the S.S. Necron, Colonel Rockey,' Ranulph motion toward the Colonel, attired in a black and scarlet dress uniform with gold sabre by his side.

Osamu bowed his head, 'Colonel Rockey, it is an honour.'

The Colonel looked around awkwardly, he wasn't sure if he should bow, shake hands or dance the tango.

Osamu quickly put doubt to rest, offering his hand which a relieved Colonel shook, 'I'm honoured Mr Shinko.'

'Thank you Colonel.'

Osamu's eyes turned to Dwight, 'Ahh and the notorious Mr Connley, I have been anticipating your presence; the only man to disenfranchise more Chinese than Chairman Mao.'

They exchanged greetings while the Commodore and Colonel swapped confused looks.

Dwight opened his arms in self-congratulation, 'Who could've known Bertrand and Peters was about to dump every single Chinese agrarian bond on one day?'

Osamu laughed with Connley again, his sons even cracked a smile.

'I hope we can speak later Mr Connley.'

'Dwight, please.'

Commodore Patterson broke the pair up, 'I've prepared our Marines for your inspection.'

Osamu turned to his right observing a stream of men in black and scarlet, stretching into the distance.

'I am honoured.'

Starting at Alpha Company the party began to stroll. Shinko observed each and every man and woman. His eye betrayed a deeper fascination than mere uniform or outward appearance.

Slowly he passed Bravo Company, Captain Gibson and Lieutenant Zellmann at the forefront.

Shinko looked Gibson in his cold grey eye, 'Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay ...'

This was Victor's chance, completely against protocol he spoke, 'Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.'

Shinko's gaze instantly fixed upon Victor. Colonel Rockey began to speak yet the Japanese industrialist held his hand in the air halting Clifton. With great intensity Shinko spoke, his voice coming from a place of passion deep within his soul, 'Oh that that earth,' and so Victor recanted along with Shinko as two men spoke words first put down on paper over a thousand

years ago, 'which kept the world in awe, should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw.'

'Lieutenant!' shouted Clifton.

Shinko raised his hand again, the Commodore held Clifton's arm.

'Tell me Mr Zellmann, what are you?'

'I am but a man.'

'A dead man.'

'Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do," sith I have cause and will and strength and means to do it.'

Shinko's stare narrowed, he was considering something. Once again Victor spoke with an air of determination, 'Select Bravo Company and from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!'

Shinko nodded his head, 'Bravo Company shall retrieve my daughter.'

Mumbles broke out along the ranks as if an avalanche had fallen through Deck A from one end to the other.

'SHUT UP!' screamed Clifton.

Patterson spoke to his friend, 'If this were a planetary operation, I would condone your selection. However Colonel Rockey personally recommends Delta Company, considering their experience in similar situations I'm inclined to agree.'

'I choose Bravo Company.'

'I must remind you, Bravo Company have no practical experience come boarding actions.'

'Ranulph, it was not a request. Mr Connley will enlighten you to a clause in our contract which grants to me veto on all command decisions.'

'What the hell?' bellowed Colonel Rockey.

Dwight nodded his head.

'This is bull ...'

Patterson restrained the Colonel once more, 'As you wish, Bravo Company shall retrieve Ophelia. I do apologise for any embarrassment.'

'The very fact I am here is humiliation enough.'

A few hours later Victor stepped into Colonel Rockey's cabin. Rockey sat alone at a desk, the hatch closed and Clifton fired his first broadside, 'Who the fuck do you think you are?'

'First Lieutenant Zellmann, Victor, serial number 02672, sir.'

'Really 'cause I could've sworn you were a fucking General!'

Zellmann stood to attention, he had no choice but to allow Clifton his fire. Victor acted out of turn, breaking protocol, speaking over his superiors. Yet he had secured the job, his Company would rescue Ophelia from the arms of the Cuckoo man and receive a big fat bonus to go with it.

'My God, I must be some asshole that just does all your paper work, is that it Zellmann?'

'No sir.'

'Do I have to check in with you before I make a command decision from now?'

'No sir.'

The Colonel became more and more irate, 'Why you calling me sir? How about asshole? Does that sound right to you?'

'No sir.'

'Maybe I should salute you instead of the Commodore!'

'No sir.'

'You keep calling me sir, as if I got some kind of fucking clue HOW TO RUN A MARINE CORPS!'

'Yes sir.'

'You mean I'm in charge Lieutenant?'

'Yes sir.'

'Could I get that in writing 'cause everyone thinks I'm just a fucking fool with a crown and stars on my shoulder for decoration, you know, like the village idiot who walks about town in a uniform goose stepping to waltzing Matilda!'

Zellmann began to chuckle at the thought of Colonel Rockey goose stepping to the old tune.

'THAT'S IT, LAUGH! 'CAUSE EVERYONE ELSE IS ... AT ME!'

'That's not true sir.'

'Don't bullshit me Lieutenant, damn I should bust your ass down to Private and put you on latrine duty for the NEXT DECADE!'

'Yes sir.'

'You think it's tough making command decisions? You should try doing it when you got an entire Corps full of junior officers who think they know better! Quietly questioning every order, every command, every decision.'

You think you know pressure? Try doing this for a fucking living ... you know what I mean!

'Yes sir.'

'Yes sir, no sir, I wish it were so easy for me, not having to think, just follow orders then bitch about the Colonel afterwards. But for some reason you think you can do a better job than me. Then you gotta make me look a fool in front of every Marine on the Necron! You should've come to me Zellmann!'

'You would have refused my request, sir.'

'Damn right! 'Cause I'd promised this show to Delta Company, now I got Dan ragging on my ass 'cause his boys are all pissed!'

'I'm sorry sir.'

'You will be Zellmann, 'cause if this mission doesn't go as smooth as a seventeen year old stripper's ass I'm gonna roast your balls from here to harvesting, you got that?'

'Understood sir.'

Colonel Rockey poured a single glass of bourbon from a decanter on his desk. He took a gulp and pulled back his lips, 'Ahhhhhhh,' and for a moment Victor was back on the Charon in Major Flatley's cabin.

'So how do you intend to pull this off Lieutenant? Mr Cuckoo a fan of Shakespeare too? Maybe he likes reruns of I Love Lucy?'

'I have yet to confer with Captain Gibson on the subject, sir.'

Colonel Rockey growled as he downed a second swig.

'But I expect this to be a standard boarding followed by search and rescue, sir.'

Rockey smirked, 'Boy, in the real universe these things are never standard.'

'Sir?'

'You think some greener doin' a standard search and destroy on Alpha B's gonna last long before he has a hundred Clicks roasting his ass from all sides?'

'Point taken sir.'

'Good, now get the fuck out, and if you EVER pull that shit again I'll fuck you up so bad you'll wish you never came back from Alpha B, understood?'

'Understood sir.'

Straight after Colonel Rockey's roasting, Victor was in Shinko's cabin with his two sons. The Industrialist examined Victor's grey skin, gazing into those dead eyes as if he beheld the vast unknown.

'Do you know why I selected your Company Lieutenant?'

'Because we both share an appreciation for Shakespeare, sir.'

Shinko's face didn't move, his expression remained hard, as if it were carved into Rushmore beside Roosevelt, 'No Lieutenant, you discovered my weakness and exploited it to your advantage. To an educated soldier with intellect and initiative your actions would be obvious, yet your comrades were dumb stricken.'

'I apologise if you were insulted by my actions.'

'On the contrary Lieutenant, I expect you to do the same with this false messiah who has kidnapped my daughter.'

'With all honesty, I don't believe she was kidnapped, sir.'

Shinko's eldest son said nothing. Yet Laertes failed to control his emotion, 'How dare you dishonour this family!'

Shinko glared at Laertes, 'I had no idea you were family head.'

Laertes went from anger to fear in a second. Victor noted terror in his eyes. Mr Shinko's voice, though soft carried a restrained thunder any intelligent man would balk at unleashing.

'Horatio, please inform your brother of his transgression.'

Horatio bowed before speaking, 'Yes father. A good son must request permission to speak from the family head. Laertes interrupted the family head during an important discussion, this is unacceptable behaviour,' Horatio bowed again.

'Laertes, come here.'

The youngest son stepped forward and offered his left hand, Victor noticed his smallest and ring fingers were different to the rest of his hand, bumpy and mottled as an un-kept dirt road.

Shinko took hold of his son's wrist with one hand, with the other he grabbed both pinky and ring finger. In one sharp move the industrialist yanked the fingers back. A snap of bone went through Victor's frame. He'd seen much worse but the unexpected disposition elevated its intensity.

Laertes barely flinched, his punishment a familiar mistress that an impulsive nature persisted on calling again and again.

'One day I shall be too old to punish you and the duty will pass to Horatio. It is my advice you learn to control your emotion, for I fear your brother shall be less forgiving than I.'

Laertes bowed, 'Yes father.'

'Leave us Laertes.'

Laertes bowed again, 'Thank you father,' then exited the room, probably to the nearest medical facility a deck below.

'I apologise for my son's outburst Lieutenant.'

'Apology accepted.'

'You are correct. Ophelia has eloped with this insane man.'

'So why are we rescuing her?'

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