

Archangel (PJO in 40k AU)

[The Sanctum Imperialis](#)

Summary:

Interrogator Piper McLean, a hardened veteran, serves in an Inquisitorial retinue in a war-torn city. Tasked with a critical investigation, Piper navigates perilous streets under constant threat, but the enemy's relentless advance begins to overwhelm the defenders.

With the situation rapidly deteriorating, Piper is ordered to ensure the safe extraction of Inquisitor Chase. What was once a routine mission turns into a desperate race against time. They must dodge sniper fire, outmaneuver enemy patrols, and reach the extraction point.

Realizing too late that they've lingered beyond the point of no return, Piper and her team find themselves surrounded. Every moment counts as they fight through waves of enemy soldiers. Piper's primary objective is clear: protect the Inquisitor at all costs.

In a city consumed by chaos, Piper faces her greatest challenge. Can she secure the Inquisitor's escape and survive the onslaught, or will the besieged city become her final stand?

[Chapter 1](#)

Chapter Text

Piper Mclean

Piper leaned against the wall of what had once been a residential hab unit with an inner courtyard. The playground had been reduced to a pile of scrap metal and wood, by the two quad-barreled Hydra anti-air tanks. The parking lot that once held family motor vehicles now served as a vehicle pool and was filled with staff limousines, armored Transports, and even a few chimeras.

Piper stared up into the night sky. The light clouds were bathed dark orange by the burning metropolis below. She ignored the Company's worth of soldiers guarding the facility.

Bright flashes from violent explosions lit up the clouds every few seconds.

It was a warm night, only spoiled by the biting scent of smoke that seemed to cling to everything and the thunderclap of heavy artillery and explosions, rolling over the city every few seconds. Every few minutes or so the roar of turbofans filled the air as fighter bombers and interceptors briefly participated in the battle.

It had been seven years now, she realized. Seven years since she had been forcefully conscripted into the guard after being arrested for partaking in an unsanctioned

demonstration over the heavy-handed approach of the Arbites and corrupt officials. Seven years since she had been dragged onto that bus with recruits.

Her las carbine rested across her chest and a las pistol rested holstered on her right thigh. She wore a chest rig over her flack vest, filled with power cells, grenades, and other tools of war. A bayonet and her ballistic helmet hung on an arming belt from her left hip. It was a setup that she hadn't changed since her time in the guard.

Listening to the chatter on the operations channel in her earpiece she grimaced she pulled out a glow stick. After lighting it she inhaled the smoke deeply, trying to force down her anxiety and that off feeling in her stomach. It had gotten better over the years. Back when she had just started as a simple guardsman she had even thrown up and wet herself before going over the top of her first trench. Today she knew that was a physiological response to stress, her body preparing itself for combat.

"That stuff will kill you, you know," a familiar voice greeted her and a woman with a dark pixie cut stepped from the open doorway and walked towards her. Servos whined quietly as the woman's power armor moved with her. She had her bolter snapped to her belt.

"Thalia," Piper greeted the battle sister and held out the glimmering cigarette which the Celestinian accepted with a grin.

"Didn't know you smoked," Thalia grunted and inhaled a lung full of smoke.

She didn't normally, only sometimes, in hours like these.

"Still going shit?" she asked.

"Not great, let us pull it that way," Thalia admitted and they stood in silence. The worst part in Piper's opinion was that she couldn't participate in the battle like she would have done only a few years ago. "Got the Cadian 45th Armored staging about five clicks west of here, once they are formed up they'll try to cut the northern pincer," she offered.

Piper wasn't too hopeful. The Imperial Guard, her former employer, had spent the past two pounding the enemy positions with heavy artillery, and precious little to show for apart from thousands of dead and wounded, and terribly little ground gained in return. It was just their sector of the front line that went through the shattered city. While their line held she knew that northwest and southeast for them, the enemy was conducting a pincer movement that threatened to encircle them.

On the bright side, Piper thought to herself, if they got encircled Piper might get a few more combat hours under her belt. In the one month they had been here they had conducted only one raid, and hadn't even fired in anger once."

"You heard anything from Jason?" Thalia asked.

Piper stayed silent. She did not wish to talk about her love life on the job. Especially because she was still trying to be accepted by the Captain and his stormtroopers. Spreading her legs for the pilot in her off time would not help her reputation.

"Loosen up Agent McLean," Thalia chided her.

Piper only shrugged and watched as two large trucks rumbled onto the plaza from the access tunnel and stopped in the loading area after being waved through by the guardsmen watching the gate.

Deciding that she had enough, she tossed the glow stick aside and ground it out under her boot before heading back inside and made her way to the strategium on the first floor. The hallways were busy with guard and munitorum personnel hurrying back and forth between offices.

An inquisitorial badge pinned to her belt and Thalia's power armor, bolter, and power sword guaranteed that none of the guards challenged them, even when they entered the command post itself. The walls were lined with fox units, plotting tables, and cogitators, and filled with hushed chatter. The main holographic table in the center was surrounded by staff officers. Lord General Mars, her own former Colonel, Reyna Ramirez Arellano, of the 12th Aventine Infantry. There was the Colonel of the Valhallan 29th Armored and his adjutant, and her own liege.

The tall, and strikingly beautiful blond stared at the holographic representation of the battlefield with hard gray eyes. A broken city, with allied and enemy positions represented by blue and red icons.

"Third company reporting that they have finished mining hab-zone twenty," Reyna reported after one of her aids whispered something into her ear.

"Very good," the general reported. "Have them retrograde to phase line two and fortify in depth from the phase line back to the Saint Livian road, and link the flanks up with the PDFs there and on the other side with the Valhallans. Have them expect an enemy push within the next twenty-four hours. I want those heretics like fish in a barrel for the Earth Shakers"

"Yes, sir," Reyna replied and snapped at a vox operator from her own regiment. "Specialist, stand by to pass on orders via dispatch."

The general had already continued on to the next task. After making sure her mistress was unoccupied Piper hurried around the Strategium and stood at the woman's side.

"Inquisitor," she greeted Annabeth.

"Back already, I see," she observed, her eyes not leaving the Strategium.

"Has anything changed?" she asked quietly.

"Yeah," Annabeth said. "Just got word that we have strong enemy formations engaging our northern flank," Annabeth summarized. "We are talking division strength here. The line is holding for now, but we are taking heavy casualties," she explained, pointing at the units in question.

Piper whistled. "Yeah, that would explain that mild increase in arty," she muttered. "You think they will manage to encircle us?"

Annabeth shrugged. "Hard to say, though admittedly attrition rates do not seem to be in our favor."

"Do you think we should pull out?" she asked and Annabeth offered her a sideways glare. "Oh don't you start too, Percy has been nagging me for the past two days."

It took a heartbeat to realize whom she was talking about. Then, there were only two people she knew about who called him by his given name, both were present.

"Not that I would ever wish to agree with anything my cousin says," Thalia cut in helpfully. "But we have been here a month now with nothing to show for it."

Annabeth sighed. "Fine," she muttered and keyed her earpiece. "Archangel to Spartan, do you read?" she announced. Piper heard the voice twice, both in her earpiece and from the woman herself.

"Reading you loud and clear Archangel. Over." the deep voice replied.

"Stand by to move out, have the staff pack their things. Be ready to move out at short notice," Annabeth continued, breaking the proper vox protocol that had been drilled into Piper in the guard almost instantly, then technically Annabeth was a civilian.

"Understood Archangel. Should I arrange the extraction of the asset? Over?" the deep voice asked.

"Negative, I have decided on a different arrangement," she decided. "We have lost too much time on this little side quest."

"Affirmative, Spartan out," came the reply, and the channel fell silent.

Then the Inquisitor pulled a datapad from her coat, typed a few things into it, and then pressed her signet ring to the receiver and handed it to Piper. "Take Sister Thalia here and execute this death warrant for our guest," she ordered, her attention already returning to the battlefield itself. "I fear this line of inquiry has come to its conclusion."

Piper almost sighed in relief. "By the grace of the Emperor," Piper replied and both Piper and Thalia signed the aquilla, a salute that Annabeth answered in kind.

The two women hurried out of the command center and took a four-by-four with a canvas roof and sped off the compound and into the stream of military vehicles and fleeing civilians, past checkpoints manned by weary men. tank traps, and rows of Constantine wire. It was a three-minute drive to the stockade, where they were stopped by a brutish woman of a Commissar, a handful of Provosts, and heavily armed Arbitrators.

"Who are you, name and business," the Commissar growled, eyeing Piper and the Battlesister suspiciously as if they might be deserters themselves.

Piper pulled out her wallet and opened it. A dark Iron I was superimposed on a highly polished skull. After a heartbeat, the hidden holographic projects kicked in and the same simple appeared mid-air, spinning slowly as a green projection.

"Imperial Inquisition, we are here to execute a death warrant," Piper announced and held out the datapad from Annabeth.

"Very well," the Commissar growled and waved at the men who pulled the barricade aside and let them park behind the gate.

"I am Commissar Clarisse LaRu," she announced grimly and signed the Aquilla.

Being a former guardswoman Piper snapped to attention and crisply signed the aquilla, a gesture the Commissar in her trench coat and pointed cap, returned gravely. Even Thalia signed the Aquilla, probably uncomfortable not partaking in this display of martial respect.

"I have a firing squad scheduled in fifteen minutes, a bunch of prisoners, two deserts, and one rapist. Do you want to add your charge to the number?" she asked.

"It won't be necessary," Piper assured her.

"Provost Collins," she yelled at one trooper.

"Escort these women to prisoner one twenty-three, they are here to bring her the Emperor's mercy," she barked and a young, pale-looking provost hastily joined them.

"Yes, Commissar," he replied hastily and led them into the building, through even more guarded checkpoints, and then passed endless rows of cells, many filled with glum and sulking creatures.

Their charge was interred in a higher security interrogation chamber, stripped of all clothes and dignity, and strapped down to a surgical table with medical restraints that allowed her to move little more than mere inches. Medical apparatuses were assembled around the prisoner, and a dozen tubes and probes disappeared into her skin.

She had been a beautiful woman once, Piper had to admit, before falling into the hands of the Inquisition. Now her body was covered in blood, strips of her skin having been removed, and neural stimulators driven into her nerves. Her body was reduced to a faintly trembling wreck, her consciousness only maintained by the drugs. The only clothing she wore was a clunky pycher's collar, that had four shaped charges set into it. The moment the woman tried to fall back on Psykana, sensors would pick it up and blow her brains out. Powerful wards were drawn onto the floor around the table.

As they entered the three Interrogators paused their ministrations as they entered.

"This interrogation is concluded," Thalia announced and Piper handed the head interrogator the death warrant once he had pulled off his bloodied gloves.

"I see," he said quietly and without another word the three hooded men left.

"Freaks," Thalia muttered once they had left the room.

The air was filled with the frantic beeping of a heart monitor, as stimulants forced the prisoner to stay conscious.

She had a tube forced down her throat and looked up at them with the wide panicked eyes of a trapped and tormented animal. The tube served to silence whatever she had to say, she would be forced to endure and would be invited to share her secrets on the interrogator's timetable.

"Medea of the Great Sea," Piper began. "By the will of the God-Emperor and the grace of the golden throne, the Emperor's Holy Inquisition hereby declares you Excommunicate Traitoris and a heretic by intent, action, and association."

At this, the woman's eyes widened even further. It impressed Piper, she had to admit, that after days of torture, she still wished to live. Weaker souls would have begged for death a while ago.

"I have been commanded to execute your death warrant and bring you the Emperor's mercy," Piper continued and pulled her las-pistol and pointed at the prisoner's face. "Due to time constraints, your last words cannot be documented in the archives of the Inquisition. May Imperial Justice account in all balances. The Emperor Protects."

Loud, panicked moans filled the cell, abruptly silenced by a loud bang and a flash of crimson light. A moment later the prisoner's brain exploded out of the top of her skull and splattered across the breathing apparatus and the wall behind it.

"Well, I hereby confirm that she is dead," Thalia replied grimly and promptly sent a progress report back to Annabeth.

The two women left the cell without looking back. They had wasted too much time on this matter already and hastily left the stockade. The night began to go wrong just after they turned the first corner.

They stopped at a cross-section, despite the green light, and let a column of a dozen or so Leman Russ tanks and Chimera's thundering by in the general direction of the front line, and then almost were run over by a medical chimera speeding past them in the direction of the field hospital with lights and sirens.

Finally, they passed the cross-section, and just as the command post was almost in view the world lit up around them with thunder and fury as a high explosive shell struck the ground much too close behind them, a heartbeat before dozens of shells flattened the buildings around them in violent explosions, and tore up the road around them.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2

Chapter Text

Piper McLean

"McLean, wake up!" someone yelled.

Piper woke up hanging in her seating belt.

She groaned and found herself staring out of the cracked armor glass windshield up at the pavement. Small fires were burning around her and smoke stung her throat. The buildings on either side of the road that hadn't been destroyed or damaged yet now stood ablaze.

"Fuck," she grunted and looked around, still dazed. Thalia hung in her own belt next to her, the servos in her black power armor humming as she moved.

"You awake?" Thalia asked. "We need to move!"

"Yeah," Piper confirmed.

"Hey, you guys okay?" someone asked, and a pair of polished combat boots appeared next to Piper's window. A moment later a guardsman knelt down next to her and peaked in.

"Yeah," Piper confirmed, her ears still ringing.

"Hey, I got a few live ones here," the trooper yelled over his shoulder.

"Corperal Aston Timins," he introduced himself.

"Saw the hammer coming down on you guys, still one piece?" asked what she realized was a surprisingly young trooper. She felt like she was barely out of school, and this guy looked like a kid to her.

"Yes, thank you," Thalia groaned, trying to free herself from her belt. For once, her power armor was more a liability than an asset.

"Holy sister," he said, realizing that Thalia was a woman of the faith.

"Boys, give these ladies a hand," an older voice from the family of boots approaching them ordered. "Sivs, look them over before we break anything. Ringer, signal the Lt and inform him of our holdup."

Once the Corpssman Mills had cleared them, the squad of troopers helped them out of the wreck and Piper rose to unsteady feet, dusting herself off.

"What unit are you from, Trooper?" the unit's Commissar, a young woman that had hung back previously, clearly not bothering to ask Piper the same.

"I am an Agent of the Throne," she said hastily, preferring that title rather than invoking the name of the Inquisition itself which in her experience closed more doors than it opened. Despite having graduated from the guard, the site of that trenchcoat, cap, and bolt gun still let her heart race with anxiety. After flashing her rosette the Commissar relaxed, while the platoon that had saved them in return grew nervous.

She wiped some blood from her nose and signed the Aquilla. "Thanks for the assistance," Piper quickly said and then flashed the men her most charming smile. "What are you guys up to?"

The Commissar stepped forward, clearly taking the informal question as a formal inquiry, and presented their orders.

"Our Company is patrolling behind the second Phase Line between Well's Street, and Faith's Park for deserters, looters, and raiders," the Commissar explained grimly. "keeping the roads clear for supplies. Those Munitorium drivers lack any common sense, shot two of them earlier for causing a convoy to bunch up."

"Thanks, boys, we need to get back to Sector-" she was cut off mid-sentence by the Sergeant's brain blowing out of the side of her skull by a pail streak of red light.

Piper and Thalia dove forward before the body hit the dirt behind their overturned car just. "Sniper!" the Commissar yelled, the second shot missing her head by what seemed like a hairsbreadth. The thermal radiation blistered her skin from sheer proximity.

"Shot came from the north, high!" Thalia yelled, loading a round into her Bolter's chamber while the troopers around her dove in cover whatever cover they could find while dragging their Sergeant into cover, chased by the sniper's scope as they did. Two didn't make it.

"North high," the Commissar yelled back and Piper risked a peak north, over the flattened ruins of what looked like once had been a small shop. A habitation building, over a dozen floors tall with countless dark windows, pockmarked by impact craters, stood dark and menacing a few hundred meters away.

Piper pulled her head back into cover almost instantly, and not a moment too soon as another energy bolt struck the wrecked vehicle mere inches from where her head would have been and pulled on her helmet.

She saw the radioman barking into his vox-beed and decided to do the same.

"Sentinel to Archangel Actual, Sentinel to Archangel Actual, do you read? Over," Piper snapped, slipping back into the safety of proper vox protocol.

"Good Copy Sentinel this is Archangel Actual. Reading you Over." The female Imperial Guard signals officer who had the great misfortune of being temporarily sequestered to Annabeth's staff promptly replied while Piper hastily pulled her datapad from her thigh pocket and opened the map.

Piper sighed in frustration, "We are pinned Archangel, Artillery fire on our position and sniper fire on our immediate exits. ETA to HQ is extended. Copy? Over."

As the woman on the other side of her vox-set had replied the Commissar, a Corporal, and the Guard signals officer dove into cover with them behind the truck while what remained of the squad started taking potshots at the building.

"Status?" she asked.

"Two KIA, Sarge in bad shape," the Corporal reported. "Called it in, LT is pushing up two fireteams to our position, and elements of the twenty-ninth armored have been diverted to our location, approaching from the east, no joy on Arty at this point in time," the Corporal summarized just.

Just then Thalia poked out cover and enthusiastically sent a burst of mass reactive rounds in the general vicinity of where she hoped the sniper has almost had her head blown off for her trouble.

"We need to move before that fucker calls in more bad news!" the Commissar growled. "We are out in the open, let us close and kill."

Just then Piper's earpiece went live again.

"Archangel Actual to Sentinel, confirm maintained contact? Do you require reinforcements? Over!" the operator asked and for a moment Piper asked herself if Signals officer's suffered from collective amnesia or something.

Piper rolled her eyes, "Affirm Archangel, contact maintained. Requesting permission to close and kill. Over!" Piper reported and took another peak at the building just as one of the

guardsmen sent a tread feather into the building's top floor only to have her head blown off from a window on the fifth floor, setting the entire room behind ablaze.

Suddenly a new, much deeper voice, cut in on the frequency. "Spartan to Spectre! Spartan to Spectre. Permission denied, the situation has changed. Disengage ASAP and stand by for exfil. Do not engage. Do you copy? Over!" Stormtrooper Captain Percy Jackso ordered grimly.

For a moment she contemplated arguing or even having technical problems with her vox set and she could tell Thalia did not like the idea of leaving the fight unfinished either. It went against the grain. That and while Thalia might be excentric for a member of her order, she was still a bloody fanatic who considered a game of pop the heretic a favorite pastime.

Just then though, two Chimeras can thundering around the corner, their metal tracks striking up a shower of sparks on the asphalt.

Her conscience now satisfied now that reinforcements had arrived she confirmed the order and turned her attention to actually complying with said orders which was usually easier said than done.

The IFVs came to a skidding halt mere meters from her, and their las-cannon armed turrets began to traverse in the direction of the tower, just as a squadron of four Leman Rus main battle tanks, armed with Vanquisher Cannon, began to charge down from the road from the other sides.

Fireteams of soldiers hastily dismounted just as the two IFVs opened up with their las-cannon, and spit bright red beams of death at the hab-building. The thundering roar of the energy weapons sounded the much quieter whining snap of the carbines.

The emerging soldiers set up their support weapons and rifles and began to put fire into the suspected sniper's nest while others dragged injured and dead into cover.

They had to disengage, Piper thought to herself. But clearly breaking contact while under sniper fire was negligent. She flicked her carbine safety off and the holographic sites on and then took aim at the window she had seen the shot coming from and opened up herself, though having no illusions that the fucker would still be there. He had either gotten the heck out of dodge or was in for a world of hurt right now.

As if to underline her point a rapid stacato of muzzle flashes lit up the night as the tank's salvo fired.

Four heavy High Explosive rounds struck the side of the building to devastating effect. A part of the building's facade gave away and collapsed down onto the road beneath in a large cloud of smoke, dust, and debris as fireballs rose into the night sky.

In some disappointment, Piper lowered her carbine again and glanced over at Thalia who was staring at the now-growing inferno with wide, depraved eyes.

It seemed their reinforcements had better things to do aswell. With the sniper presumably taken care of the troops hastily remounted. When Piper inquired, she learned they had already been dispatched to patch up some hole in their front line.

"So," Thalia mused. "Should I transmit our location before Percy gets an aneurysm?" Thalia asked, showing off that habit of her's to call him by his name.

"Already have. You hear that?" she asked as they hastily moved into the shadows. From the sound of it, the battle had moved considerably closer and she could hear a military convoy heading in the direction of the battle one street over. The city was covered by a thick blanket of smoke, bursts of double and triple A batteries lighting up the smoky canopy as squadrons of fighters met overhead in an intense aeronautical clash. The entire city shook with the sound of dozens of turbofans.

"That does not sound good," Thalia remarked.

Percy Jackson was true to his word. Not even five minutes later a green Chimera came to a stop next to them with screeching tracks and the rear loading ramp was lowered and Lt. Malcolm Pace, the Inquisitor's half-brother, poked his head out and waved at her. She only recognized him by his voice "Come on, we are leaving!" he yelled. The Fireteam of Stormtroopers was fully kitted out, their faces were hidden away under balaclavas. One was armed with a plasma rifle and backup carbine, one with a Hellgun, while Malcolm and the remaining two all backed carbines, grenades, and their sidearms.

The two of them hastily climbed into the red-lit interior and the armored ramp rose again and sealed them in and the two women hastily sat down in the back free seats.

"What's going on, Pace?" Thalia asked Malcolm once the Chimera's started moving again.

"Looks like the fuckers broke through and might cut us off. Airspace is too hot for Valkery's so we will have to get out of here the hard way," Malcolm replied.

Piper bit back a curse and double checked the power cell in her carbine. "Fuck!"

The Chimera turned and swerved and finally keep to a screeching stop and they hastily disembarked. The command post was now buzzing with activity. Dozens of soldiers were rushing around and loading equipment.

She saw a large bonfire burning in the center of the courtyard where clerks and guardsmen alike were feeding bundles of files and documents to the flames under the watchful supervision of a Commissar. Others were dumping documents in the back of an armored personal carrier. She spotted some of the retinues none combatants members, even though they now wore flack vests and bore sidearms.

"Report to the Inquisitor, I have duties to attend to," Malcolm announced and waved at his men to disembark.

She spotted the Inquisitor standing close to the motor pool, observing a Guard Major and Stormtrooper Captain Perseus, a tall man with dark hair and the most striking sea-green eyes, standing in the center of the courtyard organizing the withdrawal. The Stormtrooper had a carbine slung across his chest. At his side stood the Inquisitor. At first glance, it would be impossible to pick her out from the crowd of non-combatants like analysts and munitorum functionaries. Then, that was probably the point.

Piper and Thalia casually made their way across the controlled chaos and approached the Inquisitor.

"McLean? Do you need a medic?" Annabeth asked, looking up from her datapad.

"Huh?" Piper asked, perplexed.

"You look like a Bainblade rolled over you," the Inquisitor explained.

"Oh," she said and glanced down at her hands, hidden away in half gloves. They were covered in a thin film of dust and blood. Then, after the artillery strike, flip-over, and the following firefight she probably looked like she had seen better days.

"I am fine," she assured Annabeth.

"I heard they broke through somewhere..." Piper began.

"Yes, in two places. Sector fifteen and seventeen. The Guard is attempting a staggered retreat to the fallback line but it looks more like the Castaforian regiments fighting a retrograde might turn into a rout at any time."

Piper bit back a groan. Just then from the shadows, Lord General Militant Ares stepped from the shadows. His own Stormtrooper guards stood a few feet back, clearly not happy about being parted from their charge in such a situation.

Piper almost instinctively snapped to attention and stopped herself mid-motion.

"About our situation here, I am sorry Inquisitor if this has impeded your efforts," he announced gruffly, "I take full responsibility for this mess."

"This theatre of operations has been mismanaged from the beginning," Annabeth said, her usually well-measured neutral voice taking on a cold edge.

The general met her gaze head-on and held it, a hint of imagination on his face.

"I do not hold you at fault," Annabeth assured him. "I have observed you for weeks now. Both your tactics and strategic approach were sound. Sometimes battles are simply lost. However resources that should have been available weren't, and supplies that should have been provided also weren't. This negligence cost lives, Lord General. It cost lives and frustrated my own investigations. I assure you, I will find out who messed up here."

The thought of some scheming bureaucrat having to answer Annabeth a few awkward questions seemed to brighten the mood because he grunted and signed the Aquila. Especially because those questions were likely to be asked in a rather unfriendly manner, and end with a firing squad at best, or public immolation at worse.

The three women returned the greeting stiffly.

"I must return my attention to the war, Inquisitor," he announced. "You should leave soon. We are getting word of enemy units operating behind our lines and I am moving my banner once your lot are out of the way." Then he hurried off.

Piper noticed something had changed. The retinue was climbing into the backs of trucks and Chimeras and Percy and two of his Stormtroopers were hurrying over to them.

"Inquisitor, we are leaving. Specter, Thalia you are riding with us. I already had your gear loaded," he announced, pulling out a helmet with night optics attached to them.

Then without asking they forced an oversized-looking helmet on Annabeth's head while the other two men wrestled her into a heavy, awkward, and looking flack vest.

All of the Stormtroopers were large men, so it reminded her a bit of adults trying to get a stubborn child into its jacket in the winter.

Annabeth scowled even deeper when the three men began to half guide, half drag her towards the Command Chimera, leaving Piper and Thalia to hurry after them, She and Thalia exchanged a grim, both amused at how the most powerful person on the planet was now being handled by her bodyguards despite being a rather skilled fighter herself.

Piper knew that the SOPs dictated that if push came to shove, Captain Jackson and his men would ensure the Inquisitor's safety regardless of how she might feel about it at that moment but seeing it happen did have some entertainment value.

It said quite a lot about Annabeth's relationship with her personal forces and the confidence she had in them.

Annabeth was strapped into one of the Chimera's crash seats and promptly pulled out her pad again to monitor the situation.

"Spartan to all callsigns. Be advised, we are leaving in five," he barked into his vox-set. Two more stormtroopers and a Cadian Guard captain, his aid, and a signals man also climbed in.

The passenger seats were cramped in the back to make space for additional vox sets, and multiple pict screens to show anything from surveillance footage to reports. The Command Chimera's back compartment was also open to the front where the gunner and driver were sitting. Captain Nigelius of the Guard claimed the Commander's seat and flicked on his own pict screens and instruments.

"All aboard?" he yelled as the Chimera's powerful engine roared to life

"Affirm," Perseus replied though Piper could not imagine how anyone else could possibly fit in now.

Suddenly, Malcolm, his helmet clutched under one shoulder. "All personal accounted for," he reported.

Outside dozens of engines were roaring to life as armored vehicles began to line up.

"Then let's go. Stay behind us Pace, if our ride is compromised you take over custody of Archangel and leave," he replied, and after signing the aquila Maclom hurried off. Percy hit a button and the ramp closed with a pneumatic hiss.

He then held his vox set out to the vox operator. "Hook me up, please," Percy ordered and the operator offered him a cord that Percy hooked into a slot on his set, letting him now transmit via the Chimera's much more powerful antenna.

"Spartan to Faithful Companion Actual. Spartan too Faithful Companion Actual, do you copy? Over!"

"Reading you five by five, Spartan. Over!" the cool and detached voice of a Naval Officer replied.

"Be advised Faithful Companion, Archangel is moving. Exfil via Sigma. Over!" Percy reported.

"Copy Spartan, Archangel is moving. Efxfil via Sigma. Transports on route, ETA forty minutes. Over."

The engine roared and with a rough lurch, they were off.

Piper met Annabeth's eye and the Inquisitor winked, clearly enjoying the change of tact after spending so much time trapped behind a desk and Jackson and his band making sure she stayed as far away from anything remotely fun as they could possibly get away with.

[Chapter 3](#)

Chapter Text

Piper Mclean

They were packed like sardines in a can, Piper thought to herself. Like the Stormtroopers, Piper had her carbine pinned between her knees. If it weren't for the small pict screens showing footage from the vehicle's night optics, she would haven't had the faintest idea of what was going on outside.

"Inquisitor, with Medea liquidated, what are we going to do next?" Piper asked quietly. "She was our main vector of inquiry. With her brain being washed down a drain, we are back to square one."

Annabeth's eyes had that cold glitter in them that she got when she was already planning five steps again. "Oh, I would not go that far. This endeavor has served its purpose," she announced.

"Let me guess, you were working some other angle?" Piper groaned. "I mean apart from bagging a heretic."

Annabeth winked and looked rather pleased with herself. "First things first," the Inquisitor replied. "Let us get back into orbit."

"We did torch a few heretics though," Thalia cut in helpfully.

"Cut the chatter," Jackson snapped at them, earning himself a scowl from the Inquisitor. "Sterile comms," he insisted and Annabeth visibly swallowed her retort, and then grinned up at the Stormtrooper, clearly accepting that at this point in time, she wasn't the one calling the shots. Piper had previously noted that Annabeth tended to respond very well when Stormtrooper Captain Jackson struck a more commanding tone with her. Make of that what you will. Working for the Inquisition, Piper certainly did.

Piper listened to the convoy's chatter as they rattled through the night and closed her eyes. Suddenly the pitch of voices on the radio changed spiked noticeably.

"Hammer two, take point. Keep your head on a swivel. Turn next left and head south down that freight way," the convoy commander barked into his order.

"Copy Hammer One, Hammer Two taking point," came the clipped reply.

As if sensing the Stormtrooper's questioning look he explained. "Yeah, I know the Freight Way doesn't offer much cover but I want to get out of these alleyways! Too much smoke!"

Just then she heard the unmistakable ping of high-velocity projectiles bouncing off the Chimera's armored hide.

"Contact left side. Hammer Four, put fire on that first floor. I want-"

They would never find out what he wanted because just then his legs spasmed and a moment later the lower half of his torso fell out of the chair, the upper half, and everything blew away by something high caliber round.

Fuck!" the Stormtrooper next to Annabeth complained when blood and entrails spilled out over her shoes.

"McLean, get in that turret," Jackson ordered.

She was well aware that it wasn't the safest place out there, especially since the last occupant had just kicked the bucket. But you just didn't argue with ill-tempered Stormtrooper Captains.

She squeezed herself past Jackson and then pulled herself into the turret, snapping her sound-protective ear muffers into place as she did. Piper emerged into an inferno, the city around her was in flames. The air was thick with smoke and the heat was so intense she felt like she was sitting in a microwave.

Somehow she had missed that small part. She sat the commander of Hammer One spitting tracer rounds into the smoke as they hurled down the street.

A crimson steak of light struck the armor plating right next to her hatch from a pile of rubble at the left side of the road. A moment later a spear of crimson light lanced past less than a foot behind her ear.

Suddenly she saw them, two outlines. One trooper shooting at her, and another brought what looked suspiciously like Tread Feather to bare on their Chimera.

Just as a third las-bolt snapped past her with an earsplitting crack Piper hauled around the pintle-mounted autocannon, and keyed the twin triggers on each handle.

The heavy support weapon roared, sending a combat mix of armor-piercing and tracer rounds toward the two men just as the man with the rocket launcher sent his missile hurling toward her. Somehow, it missed the Chimera entirely. Before the missile past them, the two men had already come apart in a cloud of pink mist.

A heartbeat later they had already thundered past it and Piper brushed aside the still-hot and smoking brass casings. She heard Percy trying to reestablish a chain of command around him and instead glanced down at the gunner sitting at her left, inside the turret. He was staring through his optics, though what he could actually see was beyond her.

A moment later the chimera in front of her burst out into a bridge crossing the long, wide Freight Way and was just about to turn onto the onramp when a dull flash of white-yellow light lit up an alleyway on the other side of the bridge. Hammer one came to a skidding halt, as its entire turret was blown clean off as the ammunition inside cooked off. The poor bastards inside almost were vaporized before Piper even realized what had happened.

"Armor, twelve o'clock!" she screamed down into the turret. "Hammer one is cooked!"

"I see it!" the gunner screamed back, the turret traversing in the direction the shot had come from and spewing a lance of iridescent red energy at where he clearly hoped the tank was from.

She heard Percy passing on a quick series of orders though could not understand what. She too brought her autocannon up and sent a hail of rounds into the alleyway.

Just then the alleyway lit up again and for half a heartbeat Piper actually thought they had killed something, right up until an armored piercing shell tore through her Chimera's left track as it followed Hammer One onto the bridge at full speed.

Its left tracks were torn to shreds, the armored vehicle slewed off course, and suddenly with a violent lurch, she felt herself being torn out of the turret as the Chimera skidded sideways and finally flipped over.

A moment later Piper hit the pavement hard and found herself rolling over a few times until she slammed into the back of an abandoned car.

For a moment her vision blacked out and all she heard from the world was the roar of las cannons, the chatter of automatic weapons firing, metal screaming across the pavement, and blood rushing through her ears. She was quite sure that if she hadn't already been wearing body armor, she would have probably not gotten up again at all.

After what couldn't be more than a few moments Piper rolled over onto her stomach, every single bone in her body protesting. Ignoring her pain, her teeth gritted, she pushed herself up to her knees and looked around. They had run right into an ambush. The convoy had come to a violent halt, with the first Chimera ablaze, the second turned over, and a third had clearly taken a hit, with crew and passengers bailing out.

A streak of angry red light missed her by mere inches. Small arms fire, Piper thought to herself, realizing that enemy infantry had joined the battle. Instinctively Piper threw herself flat and rolled behind the car she had slammed into.

Staying in cover, the young woman pulled an injector from one of her chest rig pouches. Dr. Will Solace, the retinue Medicae had provided each of them an exact dose to which they were to set their injector based on their body weight and metabolism. Piper, being the good soldier she was, applied the conventional wisdom that if something worked well, more would be better. Almost instinctively she set the injector at twenty percent over the recommended dose, pressed the injector to her thigh, and pressed the button on the other side.

She grunted in pain as the injector pumped the drug cocktail into her thigh muscle.

At first, she thought she had done something wrong, and already began to consider a second injection when she felt the pain beginning to be drowned out just as the pain began

to recede, replaced by an odd dullness. It was as if breaking the surface of a pool, and returning to reality.

Endorphins flooded her system, her at this point poor temper suddenly replaced by a sense of exhilaration and she was violently torn from her daze.

The battle had picked up the pace, with now the Imperial side having dismounted as well, and brought up their crew-served weapons. A mad storm of tracers and energy beams cut through the loud. The noise level was deafening, even through her ear muffers.

Suddenly she broke out of her stupor. The Inquisitor! Piper looked around and spotted the overturned Chimera not too far away. Her carbine lay only a few steps away on the ground and she clambered towards it and picked it up before sprinting towards the next car, chased by laser fire.

A squad of Stormtroopers were moving up in a line abreast, sending strobes of energy beams into the enemy position as they advanced towards the overturned Chimera.

Using the moment where she wasn't the most interesting target Piper burst out of cover herself and sprinted towards the overturned Chimera. One of the enemy tanks fired again, the armored piercing shell tore through an abandoned delivery truck just left of her. Finally, she reached the Chimera, just as the rear doors were kicked open and Piper found herself looking down the barrel of the Stormtrooper's sidearm until he recognized her.

Piper skidded to a halt in front of him.

"Status of the Inquisitor!" Piper yelled over the battle and knelt down at the Chimera's corner to cover the exit.

"Alive!" the Stormtrooper replied, clambering out as well with her help. She could tell from how he moved that he was injured. The commando didn't complain though and stacked up behind her.

Piper glanced around the corner and spotted a mob of dozens of enemy troopers rushing towards them across the bridge. They weren't very high-tech infantry, she knew that. Most were only armed with whatever they could get their hands on, clubs, and knives, though some held some ranged weapons. She knew though that if those raving fanatics got too close, they were in deep trouble,

Piper raised her carbine, flicking the safety into single fire mode, aimed at the closest of them. Then she squeezed the trigger. The laser bolt struck the man in the chest. The heretic stumbled over his own legs and didn't rise again.

"Incoming!" she warned and then began to systematically shoot into the crowd. Someone was paying attention behind her because the support weapons fire and laser bolts tore into the mob of charging heretics.

Piper just continued. How many she killed? She had no idea, it had to be a few though those few seconds would only stay in her memory as a blur. A stormtrooper suddenly appeared next to her, and then a second, and they then added their Hellguns fire into the mix. Only for a moment though, the second taking a shot in the face a moment later. He toppled backward out of her peripheral view.

"Medic!" she screamed over her shoulder but didn't take her eyes off the engagement. Suddenly someone struck her in the chest with the force of a sledgehammer, knocking her down on her back. She felt a strong hand grabbing her by the straps of her chest rig, and haul her into cover, and found Perseus standing over her.

"You okay, McLean!" he yelled. He was bruised and battered.

"I'm hit!" she yelled, searching her chest.

"Mills! Augustus! Take the right!" he yelled and leaned back into the Chimera to pull a limp and motionless Annabeth out of view.

"McLean, call in a fire mission!" he yelled. "I need heavy Arty on the other side of that bridge now. Level the entire fucking block if you have to!"

Piper was still searching herself for holes when she found the red hot slug wedged inside her chest plate.

"Vox fucked!" she yelled back, realizing why she hadn't been getting any chatter.

"Then look after the Inquisitor!" he yelled and then promptly barking orders into his vox-beed. "Spartan to all callsigns. Spartan to all callsigns. Be advised. Archangel down! I repeat, Archangel down! Gray two one. Call in Artillery support on those buildings. Copy?" He continued yelling into his vox-beed, leaving her free to try to be helpful.

She joined one of the Stormtroopers that had moved up with her at the blond woman's side. "Status!" she asked.

"She's out cold!" he yelled. "But alive. Left arm broken!"

All of the Stormtroopers had some medical training, so confident that someone more qualified than her was on the task Piper proceeded to help the gunner and the last Stormtrooper out of the back of the flipped-over vehicle.

Suddenly Percy appeared at their side while more Stormtroopers linked up with them and both the gunner and driver came climbing out.

"They have armor down there, it's what hit us!" Piper yelled. "We need to move!"

Perseus cursed and glanced in the direction of where a wall of fire was coming at them.

"Doesn't change anything. Just called in heavy Arty on the end of that bridge. We will have rounds coming in any moment now!" he retorted. Percy grabbed the unconscious Annabeth by the flack vest and unceremoniously threw her over his shoulders as if she weighed no more than a child.

"Pace!" he yelled at one of the Stormtroopers and suddenly Piper realized that it was Malcolm and his team that had rushed to their aid. It shouldn't have come as a surprise, being Annabeth's younger half-brother. Every one of her men would lay their lives down for Annabeth, he would be even more willing to do so. "We have the hammer coming down, retrograde now!"

As if to underline his point a loud echoing whistle announced the first heavy artillery shell that struck a moment later. A brilliant flash of yellow light lit up the red night, and an instant later the thunderclap struck them, as one of the buildings on the other side of the road blew up. A moment later a second grenade, then a third struck as well, sending balls of fire and debris up in the night sky.

"Move!" he yelled and started sprinting back towards their own lines, with two of the Stormtroopers at his heels, trying to cover their charge with their bodies. Piper was close on their heels. The rest of them, retreated in staggered lines. While half of their number pulled back, the other half would provide covering fire. Then the next row would catch up while the first half provided covering fire. They probably wouldn't have needed to. Shell after shell blasted apart the buildings, collapsing a few entirely.

The moment they reached the safety of their lines they were led around the next street corner where Will Solace and two of his senior medics came out to meet them.

"Is she alive?" he asked when Perseus jogged over. "Last I checked," Percy replied gruffly.

"With me, now!"

"You okay, that shoulder looks nasty Captain," Will asked.

He was right. Percy had a deep laceration across his left shoulder that looked like it went down to the muscle.

"Huh, oh. Just the shoulder, I'm okay. Focus on the Inquisitor!"

Piper had to admit, she was a bit impressed at that level of contempt for his own health.

They lead her back to the medical Chimera and put her down on one of the stretchers. "You have this?" he asked. "I have a battle to run."

Will nodded impatiently, he and his assistant already stripping off Annabeth's flack vest and helmet.

Before leaving he paused next to Piper. "Stay with her," he whispered, clapping her shoulder gently. "Keep an eye on her for me, will you."

Then he was gone, leaving behind the two Stormtroopers that had escorted them behind to stand watch with their weapons at a low ready.

Piper looked back at Will's progress. They had already cut the clothes off Annabeth's body, leaving her completely naked. Her toned, athletic body was covered in bruises and scrapes, and in the improved light she could now tell that Annabeth's golden blond hair was drenched in blood. While one of the medics performed a body check, the other hooked her up to a monitor. Simultaneously Will already started pushing in IV lines. When she had joined the guard, she had been very squeamish about nudity. Now she herself hardly cared, and didn't bat an eye when it came to hitting the showers with the boys after training. She doubted Annabeth would mind either. Dr Solace had seen both of them naked in the past and would do so again. That and she had a very high degree of trust in his abilities. You didn't get to work as the combat surgeon in an outfit like theirs if your abilities weren't extraordinary. Not only did you have to be a very skilled surgeon, but you also needed to pass Percy's ruthless selection process.

"Is she okay?" Piper asked.

"Probably," Will commented. "Okay, confirmed humerus fracture left. Third and fourth rib probably fractured," the medic doing the body check reported. "Got a major laceration to the skull, it's bleeding and will need suturing."

"Blood pressure one seventy over ninety, the frequency at ninety-two, O2 level at ninety-seven percent," the second one reported.

Just then one of the Stormtroopers poked his head in. "Doc, we have more wounded coming in."

Will Solace sighed. It might sound harsh, but Annabeth was the priority. Protecting her was the job. They were all expendable, Annabeth simply was less expendable than they were. "Mick, help them outside. I will finish up here!" he ordered and one of the orderlies hurried outside. "Tims, you too. Mclean, you up to giving me a hand?" he asked.

She nodded and took over for the second medic after pulling on a set of bright blue surgical gloves.

"You okay!" he asked, glancing over at her. "Peachy!" Piper replied, her hands shaking slightly as she helped Will fully immobilize Annabeth on a spine board before covering her in a blanket.

"You look like shit," he commented as he swiftly put a cast on Annabeth's arm, and then filled her up with analgesics. Piper quickly summarized what had happened, with her being tossed out of the turret.

Will gave her a long, hard look. "You know, you should probably be lying right next to her right now?"

"I am fine!" she assured him.

"You young lady are staying in his Chimera. I want you on the first bird out, after that you are heading straight for the infirmary."

"Yes, doc!" she agreed dutifully.