

Heirs of the Laughing God- Death's Mercy

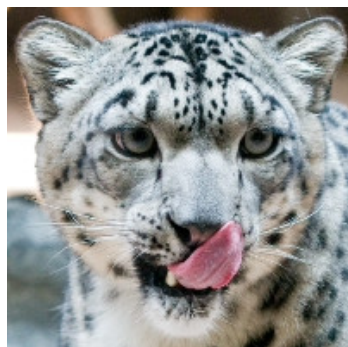
An Aeldari Audio Drama (2019)

Written by Gav Thorpe

Performed by Gareth Armstrong, Tim Bruce, Steve Conlin, Emma Gregory, Matthew Hunt

Scripted by Reverend

Created by



&



LIST OF CHARACTERS:

- * Duruthiel the Red Swan – Great Harlequin of the Masque of the Fading Dawn;
- * Adroniel Bladewish – Death Jester;
- * Echo – Shadowseer;
- * Endorieth – Starweaver pilot;
- * Valencis – Autarch of Yme-Loc.

Since the fall of their galactic dominion the Aeldari have been a splintered people. Scattered by the arrival of She-Who-Thirsts each kindred have clung to survival in their own way. On craft-worlds drifting across the void the Asuryani practiced rigid discipline and self-control to combat the extremes of passion and emotion that led to the Fall. The Drukhari of the dark city of Commoragh feed upon the terrified anguished souls of others to stave off the ever-present hunger of the dark god that craves every Aeldari soul. On primordial maiden worlds the exodites keep in check their raging psyche with puritanical lives of toil and repression.

And then there are others hidden among the stars and traveling the semi-mystical routes of the Aeldari Webway. They are the Cegorachy, wanderers of the hidden paths. The Harlequins, they title themselves, warrior troubadours dedicated to the trickster of Aeldari legend, the fickle god Cegorach. They call no people their own save for the troupes that make up their wandering masques. Their homes are the starships that carry them and the places of chance where they might rest awhile. They are the dancers on the precipice, the players of fate, the heirs of the Laughing God. They have but a single purpose, to fight against the doom of the great enemy with word and deed. From craft-world to maiden world to Cabalite stronghold the Harlequins travel, carrying with them both verse and blade. The first, to bring warnings from the past that are in danger of being forgotten. The second, to bring death to the enemies of the Aeldari.

* * *

(hatch opens)

Duruthiel: “The time is almost upon us to depart your vessel, my dear Autarch Valencis. The Red Swan thanks you for the hospitality of Yme-Loc’s people”.

Valencis: "Sorry, who thanks us?"

Adroniel (smiling): "Ahaha, it is him, Duruthiel. Oh, our Great Harlequin assumes the mantle of the Red Swan when the whim⁷ seizes him".

Duruthiel: "Now, Adroniel, the Red Swan does not deserve this disdain".

Adroniel: "And the specter of the third person tense returns to haunt us once more".

Valencis: "Even for a Harlequin you are quite strange, Duruthiel".

Duruthiel: "The Red Swan must play the role as written by the will of Cegorach. He cannot do otherwise".

Echo: "Yet it is the player that delivers the lines so self-importantly".

Duruthiel: "What is that, my Shadowseer?"

Adroniel: "Echo means that you are an arrogant idiot, Duruthiel".

Valencis: "Perhaps, you would prefer to continue this conversation without an audience?"

Echo: "If a performance has none to witness it, does it become life rather than art?"

Valencis: "I... I have no idea what that means".

Adroniel (smiling): "Ahaha, we are Harlequins, Autarch. We are all players upon the skein⁸ of fate as scripted by Morai-Heg and choreographed by the Laughing God. I cannot tell you where Adroniel ends and the role of the Death Jester begins. Though we do not dance for you at the moment, the performance is always continuing in other ways".

Duruthiel: "And when we descend to this world, the Red Swan's performance will be of the bloodier variety".

Valencis: "So the Masque of the Fading Dawn will fight alongside the war-host of Yme-Loc?"

Duruthiel: "Of course! These mon-keigh usurpers will pay for disturbing the tombs of our forebears".

Valencis: "What do you mean? There are no Aeldari tombs on Nequofendi".

Adroniel (smiling): "Ahaha, that was our last battle when we slew the Rikash at Orathambia. Have you been paying any attention, Duruthiel?"

Duruthiel: "When Cegorach leads the dance, the Red Swan will follow. Does it really matter about the specific steps?"

Valencis: "I spent the great part of this past cycle outlining the war schemes for this coming battle. The part I devised for your troupes, the harmonies of battle I have woven for your participation... Did you listen to nothing of what I told you?"

Echo: "We hasten toward the pivotal⁹ moment. The window upon fate's bounty will be closed soon".

Valencis: "We have no time to recount it. I can provide a crystal with the details of the battle plan embedded".

Duruthiel: "The Red Swan cares not for the strategies of mortals, for he dances to an immortal tune. When Cegorach plays the notes, we all follow the rhythm. Trust in the Laughing God, Valencis".

Adroniel: "Yes, Autarch, commander of this host of mighty engines of Vaul, trust in the embodiment of capriciousness and deceit. Really, Duruthiel, I wonder if there is any connection between your ear, brain and mouth. Do you ever hear what you are saying?"

Duruthiel: "The Red Swan is not to be shackled by the demands of dull mortal necessity. If there is no artistry in our endeavor, then there is no challenge in its achievements, a hollow life to live, full function alone".

Valencis: "We are but moments from departing for the attack. Must I stand down the cruise of my war machines and devise a full new war symphony? Are the warriors of the Fading Dawn going to fight with us or not?"

Adroniel (nervously): "It is amusing to think that any party present has any saying in the matter. Our fates were laid out long ago. We are simply reciting the lines that were given to us. Do not overly tax¹⁰ yourself, Autarch. I assure you that whatever happens, it is as Morai-Heg decreed".

Duruthiel: "Then what is the point at all? We may as well just return to the 'Last Laugh' and make music for the pleasure of it".

Echo: "The war drums speak tempo for us this time, Duruthiel. You must harken¹¹ to their percussive call".

Duruthiel: "None force me..."

Adroniel (interrupting): "Cease the flapping of your lips and give your ears a chance to earn their place upon the sides of your head. Every performance must be treated as the last, for we can tell nothing of what the next cycle brings. Per chance we can leave this place and run upon the

breach in the Webway to be devoured by the specters of the great enemy given form. Would you have the final act of our lives be this descent?"

Duruthiel: "Hm, such a meager¹² finale would be an afterthought¹³ in the tune of Cegorach, unworthy of remembrance".

Echo: "We can make it the overture to a crescendo of magnificent glory in praise of the Laughing God".

Valencis: "Your Seer speaks rightly. We are on the eve of the battle that weighs heavily upon Yme-Loc's strand of fate. If we do not act now, many more Aeldari lives will be lost and who can say if we will save their spirits from that darkness which desires them most".

Duruthiel: "The Red Swan is convinced. The Masque of the Fading Dawn shall raise blade upon the bloody fields of Orathambia ..."

Adroniel (interrupting): "Nequofendi..."

Duruthiel: "Nequofendi! For the glory of the Aeldari and the salvation of Yme-Loc. Let us return to the 'Last Laugh'".

Valencis: "And you will study the battle plans my companions and I have devised?"

Adroniel (leaving): "Cease! Whilst you have accord, Autarch, do not invite further debate".

* * *

Above the world the Aeldari called Nequofendi a hundred human warships crowded close. A stream of smaller vessels met them from the gleaming outer atmosphere, lines of ferry craft each carrying thousands of soldiers. Their holo-fields set to maximum diffraction¹⁴, invisible to the crude sensor arrays of the Imperium's warships. The 'Last Laugh' and the Vault carriers of Yme-Loc ghosted through the cordon.

Echo: "We have come upon Nequofendi, companions. The passages through the Webway are growing ready for our arrival. I hear in the song of the star lock, that white son of fortune shall shine upon our endeavors".

Duruthiel: "Thank you, Echo. Of course, we shall bathe in an even brighter light of glory. The Masque of the Fading Dawn shall live long in the songs of Yme-Loc for what we will achieve".

(Harlequins laugh out loud)

Adroniel: "Hm, do you even remember why we are here, Duruthiel?"

Duruthiel: "Why do you doubt me so much, Adroniel? Valencis herself explained us such doing".

Adroniel: "And?"

Duruthiel: "Saving the... craft-world? From peril?"

Adroniel (laughing): "Ahahahah, how we allowed you to become Great Harlequin? I cannot recall".

Echo: "The call of Cegorach was strongest in our companion. The Laughing God does not judge us, but embraces those that embrace the waywardness¹⁵ of our patron. To be a Harlequin is not to rationalize, but to experience".

Adroniel: "Yes, the journey, the dance, the performance. I know this, but must we follow one so inept¹⁶ at command?"

Duruthiel: "I am not without vision and leadership".

Echo: "I think the Autarch's influence has left a mark upon you, Adroniel. It does not matter where we end up, only the manner of how we travel there".

Adroniel: "I am a Death Jester. I am the embodiment of endings".

Duruthiel: "Yet not joyless, I recall".

Adroniel: "Life and death still provide their amusements and diversions".

Duruthiel: "Such as now when we will strive alongside our Asuryani kindred".

Adroniel: "To prevent the humans launching the offensive for which they are preparing".

Duruthiel: "Yes, to do that".

Adroniel: "Which will mean, their war will not encroach¹⁷ upon star systems important to Yme-Loc".

Duruthiel: "Thus saving the craft-worlds".

Adroniel: "Allowing their fleet free rein¹⁸ to secure routes to Arthuidesh!"

Duruthiel: "Saving the exodites of that maiden world".

Adroniel: "To trade... But important to both Yme-Loc and the folk of Arthuidesh".

Duruthiel: “Yes, of course, to trade. Then it is not in the cause, but the performance that we should take delight. An audience of one is still an audience”.

Echo: “And Cegorach is ever poised to seize these spirits that entertain sufficiently”.

Adroniel: “Is that so? I thought the Laughing God danced to the skein of fate on whim, without purpose”.

Echo: “Cegorach has purpose, as all gods must. The fey¹⁹ one does not answer prayers or grant blessing, but instead carries the seed of hope among hopelessness. If a single spirit can be tricked from the grip of She-Who-Thirsts, it is a victory and to deny the great enemy our brightest souls is a cause of some merit”.

Duruthiel: “You seem more lucid²⁰ than I have known for some time, my Shadowseer”.

Echo: “The combination of dream leaves and spell root I imbibed²¹ earlier does seem to have brought a peculiar focus to my thoughts”.

Adroniel: “Um, it is a welcome change to your riddles and mumbles²²”.

Echo: “Clarity is a false truth, often obscuring the complexities of reality”.

(Harlequins laugh out loud)

Adroniel: “And we are back with our well-known companion. Oh, I did not think the effect would wear off so dramatically”.

Echo: “I am quite focused on the here and now, wicked jester. Save your scorn²³, unless you wish to set free your mind into the dark places where I must seek the wisdom of Cegorach”.

Adroniel: “I shall leave the mystic journeys to you. There is but one destination to which we are all headed and I have no desire to look upon it before my time”.

Duruthiel: “How can you of all of our players be afraid of death?”

Adroniel (giggling): “Ahahahha, I am not afraid. I wish not to spoil the surprise. I have that at least to look forward to”.

Echo: “I sense movements within the skein of fate. Valencis has begun her offensive”.

Duruthiel: “Then we are to join them with haste”.

* * *

(Aeldari vehicles flying overhead unleashing torrents of las fire)

Adroniel (giggling): “Ahahahaha, the orchestra is playing our symphony!”

Duruthiel: “It is overly percussive for my liking, but the stage lighting is very flattering”.

Valencis (over transmission): “Can you hear me, Duruthiel?”

Duruthiel: “Like the voice of Anandeus itself, whispering delights to my ear, Valencis”.

Valencis (over transmission): “To forestall²⁴ the departure of the Imperial retribution fleet we must disrupt the foundations of the expedition”.

(distant explosions, heavy treads of armored machines)

Adroniel: “I wonder why we are not attacking their starships”.

Valencis (over transmission): “They are too numerous. Even if we mastered all Yme-Loc’s fleet and satellite weapons protect them in their orbital births. I have devised a far more effective and less costly scheme with the Seers. We shall wipe out their high command with overwhelming force and then we withdraw into the Webway”.

Duruthiel: “And you wish us to be the assassins?”

Adroniel: “Ahahah!”

Duruthiel: “It is a trifle²⁵ grubby²⁶, but I am sure we can oblige”.

Valencis (over transmission): “That would be ridiculous, the Imperial generals and admirals are in a fortification protected by the layers of defenses. Our Titans and engines of Vaul will punch through to the target and eradicate the complex entirely”.

Adroniel: “It would make more sense to deploy directly into the stronghold from the Webway”.

Valencis (over transmission): “If only the counsels of Yme-Loc were as wise as you, Death Jester. The humans are not without psychic defenses, which deliberately or not prevent the burrowing²⁷ of Webway routes directly into their midst. Our heaviest weapons will make the breach, while you protect this area alongside the craft-world’s guardians and aspect warriors”.

Duruthiel: “Ah, sentry duty?”

Adroniel: “Oh, he was thinking out loud. There is no harm in that”.

Valencis (over transmission): "I am confident we can destroy the stronghold without undue difficulty, but withdrawal is critical. Securing the passages back to the Webway is paramount²⁸ to the success of this endeavor".

Duruthiel: "We shall roam awhile, the first line of defense. My masque is not well suited to remaining in one place, but we shall meet any counter-attack with our fiercest welcome".

Valencis (over transmission): "Fine, that seems a useful deployment. Just stay out of the way of my main assault".

Adroniel (smiling): "Good hunting, Autarch! Ahaha! (more seriously) Hm, I think she left the messenger waves".

Duruthiel: "How rude".

Echo: "The stars turn still. The sun rises. Those that loiter²⁹ affect nothing".

Duruthiel: "That leaf and root combination is definitely wearing off, but the sentiment is well-weighed. Let us be at the full with speed!"

Adroniel (giggling): "Ahahah!"

* * *

Upon skimming³⁰ transports, the Harlequins sped towards the unwary³¹ enemy and came upon them in a sudden blaze of light and violence.

Adroniel (giggling): "Ahahah! For a time, I wondered what it would be like to be human! Ahahaha! All that grainers they must see... The trickle of time through their brains like a river of mud. See that one there?"

(giggling Adroniel opens fire and unleashes two las bolts)

Adroniel's cannon unleashed a hail of lethal disks tearing the human to shreds.

Adroniel: "It did not even see us approaching, Ahahah!"

Duruthiel: "We shall disembark. As much as speed is our ally, our mounts draw more attention".

Adroniel: "I retract my earlier doubts. You possess a sword-sharp military mind".

(Adroniel and Duruthiel engage in melee combat)

Echo: "From the sun shadow comes the threat".

Duruthiel: "From where?"

Adroniel: "There, an opening in the trench wall. Perhaps we should enter".

Duruthiel: "Let us not. Why grub³² in the dank³³ tunnels, when we can dance beneath the eye of the sun?"

Echo: "The fate that fines from afar serves us well".

Adroniel: "The what?"

Duruthiel: "Your shuriken cannon".

Adroniel (seriously): "I understood that. I was offended by the alliteration".

Duruthiel: "Let us move on. Other troupes follow who will defend our backs. There must be foes worthy of remark nearby".

Adroniel: "If they are not worthy of remark, their deaths can still be made so. See that one? Ahahahah! Caught on the wire of its own trench works, howling like a hound!"

Duruthiel: "I spy it, what of it?"

Adroniel: "Watch now!"

(Adroniel shoots at the stuck human)

Duruthiel (laughing with the other Harlequins): "You shot the wire. The human is running away now".

(Adroniel takes the running human down with a precise las shot)

Adroniel: "Ahahahah, and now it is dead, its last thoughts of surging open, disbelief of its good fortune, ahahaha. I gave that as a gift and took life in return".

(Adroniel takes the human down)

Adroniel: "And another, crawling through the mud, its creeping dread ended! (takes another shot) Ahahaha! And what hopes and despairs we weave with our presence. Hard duty and soft anger, the hot fear and the cold truth, all muddled together in their ridiculous human brains".

Duruthiel: "I see why the role of the Death Jester calls to you, Adroniel".

Adroniel: "You thought I just liked dressing in black and bones, perhaps? I am death, the constant. While you take center stage, the lights swirl about you and the audience stand gripped, I stalk the background all the time, ahahaha!"

Duruthiel: “Just as you say and it is time for my exit. Closer encounters with our foes call to me. The Red Swan shall wash his feathers anew”.

Adroniel: “Always an eye on the audience and never on what waits in the whizz, Duruthiel”.

Duruthiel: “Ahahaha, who needs to watch the shadows when the Death Jester prowls there?”

Adroniel: “Ahahaha!”

Echo: “Saddened is the player that never steps into the light”.

Duruthiel: “Indeed, I’ve always thought our companions sad for the one that plays the role of joker”.

Adroniel: “Ahahaha, perhaps Echo has shed something of his more potent concoctions³⁴ with you, Duruthiel. The pair of you babble³⁵ on as though we are warrior-philosophers, not troubadours of death. I take what joy I can from the miserable existence of these humans, but it is only in their deaths that they have any artistry or story about them. I am definition to what comes before. Only the ending does it gain any shape or meaning. Life may mold³⁶ the clay, but my weapon is the cue that fires it to the final form, never to change thereafter, ahahahah”.

Duruthiel (slashing human soldiers): “Is the whole symphony to be summarized in the final note? Does not the play come before the grateful bow?”

Adroniel (slashing human soldiers): “What symphony? A human life is barely a cough to clear the throat before the opening notes are sounded, ahahah”.

* * *

The thunder of the cannons became a constant assault upon the senses. The horizon was lit by scarlet and emerald fire as the Yme-Loc engines of Vault continued their attack, while the sky burned with the shells of the enemy’s retaliation. The shimmer of Titan holo-fields danced upon the ridges and hillsides allowing brief glimpses of the striding war engines within as they marched towards the pinnacle of the fortress on the horizon.

A smaller and more distant threat, perhaps, but concealed by the same technologies, the Masque of the Fading Dawn slew from trench to trench.

Their domino suits blazed with distorting colors while they flipped, cartwheeled³⁷ and pirouetted their deadly dance through the foe.

Duruthiel (sighing): "I am tired".

Echo: "Your sword arm has grown weak? Is it already fatigued?"

Duruthiel: "My spirit, Seer of shadows, my spirit ails with this killing".

Adroniel: "A strange time to embrace the philosophy of the pacifist".

(Duruthiel and Adroniel slash two more enemies)

Duruthiel: "It is boring, scull-faced maiden of misery. I am bored with cutting down these morose³⁸ troopers. Where is the glitter of battle? We should shine like fabulous stars but are skulking³⁹ around in these trenches and barrows⁴⁰".

Adroniel: "Hm, perhaps, Valencis may have a new task for us? It seems her forces are well-established in perimeters about the Webway portals".

Duruthiel: "We do not seek permission to wander where we desire. The thought of it chills my spirit. It is an offence to all that the Laughing God wishes to teach us".

Echo: "The sun moves and the shadows lengthen. We must move into the light if we are to stand glorious in the sight".

Adroniel: "Ahahah, it is barely approaching its zenith. The day is still young".

Duruthiel: "The battle moves on without us. The engines of Yme-Loc have broken through this outer cordon. See how their weapons bear upon the fortress".

Adroniel: "I see and our foes numbers grow thin hereabouts. I fancy we do not rest awhile, but seek fresh challenge".

Duruthiel: "Words spoken as though they fall from my own lips, joker of mortality. But whence shall we marshal our efforts?"

Echo: "Beneath the anvil the insects yet scurry⁴¹ protected from the blows of the hammer".

Duruthiel: "I... No, that one is beyond me".

Adroniel: "I concur⁴². Echo, have you not more of that leaf and root concoction to imbibe? The ship of your thoughts is slipping its mooring⁴³ yet again".

Echo: "The gaze that falls upon the mountains does not see the valleys".

Duruthiel: "Yes, now I have your purpose, friend of wandering visions".

Echo: "Ahahaha".

Duruthiel: "The might of Yme-Loc is set against the distant fa?ons, in their gaze the lesser foes are of no consequence".

(Adroniel unleashes several salvos of las fire)

(moaning guardswoman collapses to the ground)

Adroniel: "Human survivors scattered by the assault, ahahah, are prime target for further attention, and also the swiftest route to our own deaths. Even as the engines of Vault are focused on the stronghold, so they are the center of the enemy's ire⁴⁴. To step into that maelstrom is to seek indiscriminate⁴⁵ end amid the tumult⁴⁶ of the foe's fury".

Duruthiel: "Then idle your time here, safe upon the stage wings while the performance continues".

Adroniel: "Oh, I've said nothing of standing idle. There is a war for which we are matched and it is not to stand beneath a deluge⁴⁷ of explosions directed at our more resilient allies".

(Adroniel kills another human with insane laughter)

Duruthiel: "And what wary some existence we would have without daring? Is it not into the closing grip of She-Who-Thirsts that Cegorach dares? That the Laughing God might snatch freer spirit from time to time? That which is worth most lies behind the greatest risk".

Adroniel: "Out of what worth is it to be found shredded and scattered by an incendiary lobbed⁴⁸ from afar, wise leader? Would you think to achieve what great engines and titans attempt to break open the walls of the citadel with your sword and pistol?"

Echo: "The tempest will follow and hiding beneath the bows⁴⁹ of the forest will only lessen the rainfall for a time".

Duruthiel: "What?"

Adroniel: "What?"

Echo: "But from the thunder cloud one might draw the lightning".

Adroniel: "So we head into that storm of destruction?"

Duruthiel: “Where the Laughing God leads, we follow. Look at the flames, the explosions, the concussive detonations. No greater backdrop⁵⁰ have we performed against in the darkness. We shall be the light”.

Adroniel: “The humans will see the passing of our great engines and think themselves spared death, ahahahah! That is when we shall find them stealing their hopes and replacing it with dread. A flicker of light, a ghosting shadow, a doom unseen that comes as laughter on the wind, ahahah”.

(a nearby explosion)

Adroniel: “Ah, the humans are a clumsy breed, but I would not think they aim so amiss. Their barrage goes array of the Yme-Loc engines by a margin”.

The detonations of the shells erupted far behind the Harlequins falling upon the area where the shimmer of Webway portals lit the broken grasslands. Soon fires blazed from the incendiary bombardment creeping closer and closer to the Aeldari gateways.

Duruthiel: “Their intent has changed. We must consult with Valencis”.

Valencis (over transmission): “Is that Duruthiel?”

Duruthiel: “The enemy rage falls upon the Webway gates”.

Valencis (over transmission): “I am well aware of that fact. Our warriors are dispersing to present no target to the barrage”.

Adroniel: “That leaves the Webway vulnerable to a counter-attack”.

Valencis (over transmission): “An issue with which I am also familiar, Death Jester. Our infantry cannot simply sit beneath the artillery bombardment and hope to weather⁵¹ its ire. The route back to our ships would be equally undefended and also littered with the bodies of my kin”.

Duruthiel: “The guns that roar are not those upon the citadel’s walls. I see the fire that they are issuing upon the hills or around it. Destroy the guns and the threat is ended”.

Valencis (over transmission): “But at the expense of the main attack? I cannot divert my engines away from the stronghold to neutralize the human artillery”.

Duruthiel: “Then the Masque of the Fading Dawn will go then same merry will be the silence that follows”.

Valencis (over transmission): “It is far from the support of my aspect shrine kin and guardians. I cannot ask that of you, Duruthiel”.

Duruthiel: “It is the will of the Red Swan. Your opinion was not asked. I am simply informing you of what will happen next”.

Adroniel: “Then we must return to our masque. There is a considerable distance to cover and I dislike walking through this mire⁵² of blood and mud”.

Duruthiel: “Just as you say, musician of the deadly melody”.

Adroniel (in satisfaction): “Ahahah”.

(Aeldari craft arrives, ramp opens with a swift hiss)

* * *

Duruthiel: “Ahahahah! Boom! Boom! Ahahaha! Boom! Boom! Ahahahaha!”

Adroniel: “What the humans lack in tempo, they may come for enthusiasm”.

Duruthiel: “There is a rough splendor about them I agree. Such wasted violence, the crudest of chemical reactions given destructive purpose. No elegance, no efficiency, just brute power”.

Echo: “The ending comes the same of finest blade or rusted dagger”.

Duruthiel: “Yes, we should not tarry⁵³. Our allies of Yme-Loc’s suffer beneath that anger, brutal or otherwise”.

Adroniel: “Look upon their big guns, defiant⁵⁴ and yet ludicrous, ahahahah. They think that they can sit them behind these false rock walls and protect them. Distance alone is no defense”.

Upon their skimmers the Harlequins swiftly crossed the battlefield, racing past pockets of humans fleeing the attack. They ignored the scattered foe, their thoughts focused on the great cannons that still bombarded their route away from this world. The muzzle flare of the guns lit embrasures cut into a hillside and through brief shadows of the gun cruise onto the walls.

Duruthiel: “I see few stationed to guard them, only those that serve the thunderous weapons”.

Adroniel: “A swift mission then, easily accomplished”.

Duruthiel: "Sometimes the shortest story tells the greatest tale. Though we are presented with plodding⁵⁵ script and turgid⁵⁶ accompaniment, we have the skill to render this into a plateau worthy of Cegorach's applause".

Adroniel: "See them scamper⁵⁷ to safety like vermin before the chaser. So easily the thread of their lives is severed and such a short cord it makes even when not parted, they are almost pointless in the brevity of their existence".

Echo: "Though as the Red Swan says..."

Adroniel: "Do not encourage him..."

Echo (smiling): "The scale of the tale is not in the length, but in the depth".

Adroniel: "As of mass, I agree. These humans have changed the galaxy and not for the better. But as individuals they are a fleeting annoying flicker⁵⁸. Nothing of note can be accomplished in the blink of an eye".

Duruthiel: "I disagree, for in a blink the world changes. A star can be born, a seed spark into life. A miniscule⁵⁹ event can occur that would ripple across the skein of fate for a lifetime".

Adroniel: "Hm, you have a strange fondness for these mon-keigh, Duruthiel".

Duruthiel: "And you have contempt⁶⁰ unworthy of the Laughing God, Adroniel".

Adroniel: "Unworthy? Since when did Cegorach make judgment upon any of us?"

Echo: "In the lesson, perhaps, not the entity".

Adroniel: "And are you feeling sane again, Shadowseer?"

Echo: "Your mockery does not deflect the truth. Even the great enemy is beyond hate. Hate is to succumb to negativity at odds with the carefree creed to which we adhere. If you are to be free from the burden of She-Who-Thirsts, you must be free of the emotions that set loose our living nightmare".

Adroniel: "And is that what we are seeking? Freedom from emotion like the Asuryani that imprison their spirits within inflexible walls?"

Duruthiel: "To be free of something is not to be rid of it, you adduce psycho-pomp. Foul affair those that fall beneath our blades are equal in the eyes of Cegorach. To think otherwise is to be anchored in the reality of

your senses and the confusing torrents of bio-chemistry. We are above that as Harlequins of the Laughing God”.

(Aeldari engage in melee combat)

From gun to gun the Harlequins pounced⁶¹, cutting down the crews with blazing swords and spitting pistols.

Adroniel (finishing the last human): “That is the last of them. And now we can enjoy the tomb silence we have earned. What next, Cegorach’s joyous ray of light?”

Duruthiel: “We have come this way nigh on to the outer walls of the human fortress itself. We dare not that inner sanctum, but I see clearly the outworking⁶² and satellite defenses are yet held”.

Adroniel: “Perhaps, Valencis might have some further deed for us, ahaha?”

Duruthiel: “I would no more shackle myself to the will of the Autarch than perform a duet with an ork”.

Adroniel (laughing out loud): “Ahahah!”

Duruthiel: “What death of you that takes orders from a mortal?”

Adroniel: “Orders? No, say more that where mortals command battle, death is sure to follow”.

Echo: “It is a certainty that when the greater deed is done and the ruin of the fortress made, the withdrawal will be hurried by vengeful forces. To break the sword in its sheathe is to parry a blow before it is ever swung”.

Adroniel: “A preemptive strike? Ahahaha! I can make poetry of that! I am sure, to thwart⁶³ hopes as yet unfold by our enemies! Ahahahah!”

* * *

(Adroniel laughs hysterically slashing human soldiers)

Pressing hard across the contested land towards the main offensive Duruthiel led his masque further into the bunkers and trench-works that lay on the outskirts of the humans’ great citadel, seeking enemies that had hidden themselves from the larger engines. Amongst the craters of plasma hits and deep furrows⁶⁴ scored by the blasts of immense laser weapons they found human leaders rallying their dispirited troops readying for fresh battle. The Harlequins fell upon them with dazzling speed, each encounter a lethal exchange that lasted only a few moments.

Duruthiel (slashing another human): “On and on they know not what scours them from this world!”

Adroniel: “How accommodating to press themselves together in such tight packs. There shall not be a sliver⁶⁵ of ammunition wasted”.

Duruthiel: “The trenches do make them rather predictable. It is very disappointing”.

Adroniel: “You make the argument for quality over quantity”.

Duruthiel (slashing another human): “I always will. A hundred dances without room to move is no performance at all. How does one tease out the story if no character breaks from the mass”.

Adroniel: “Then I’ll indulge you”.

Echo: “If one looks over the precipice, then not be surprised to feel the urge to fall”.

Adroniel: “This day has been one of true highs and lows for you, Shadowseer. Stay with us for a while longer, I beg of you”.

Echo (smiling): “Death is the means not the arbiter, but you are falling into judgment. The purpose of death is not to crush life, but to fan the spark of its existence into a flame that burns bright”.

Adroniel: “There is no spark in the humans, just kindling⁶⁶ that disappears with a puff⁶⁷ in an instant”.

(Adroniel takes another shot)

Echo: “Not so. For those short-lived that flame burns so brightly, it sets the galaxy aflame for long after. The life long-lived drains the spirit, forcing us to seek greater stimuli for our passions to continue”.

Adroniel: “Nice beheading, Duruthiel, but I wager that my next kill is more impressive. Let us bring upon a new instrument and change the tune accordingly”.

(Adroniel takes another shot, moaning soldier collapses to the ground)

Duruthiel: “Shrieker ammunition, ahahah”.

Adroniel: “Ahahah”.

Duruthiel: “You have a cruel humor today, Adroniel”.

(wounded soldier keeps screaming in pain)

Adroniel: “Ahahah, but when they explode, they create such pretty patterns”.

(wounded soldier explodes into pieces, another one starts screaming)

Adroniel: “Ahahah, did you see how that shard of bone blinded the other one? Look, look, it flails at its litter kin, spreading more of the bio-venom”.

Duruthiel: “A lingering⁶⁸ death”.

Adroniel: “I would think the melodrama pleases you”.

Duruthiel: “As long as the chorus players do not upstage the lead”.

Adroniel: “Oh, such a dazzling power, a rainbow whirlwind that leaves body parts in its wake, ahahah. Oh, a delightful finale to slay three at a stroke within a single summersault⁶⁹”.

Duruthiel: “There is a grace in swiftness”.

Adroniel: “Indeed and if it is precision you desire, I shall share with you this delight. See that armored vehicle beyond that?”

Duruthiel: “It comes upon us at some speed. The belching⁷⁰ of its cannon is as unpleasant as the smoke that billows from its engines”.

Adroniel: “Indeed it is an ugly machine with no inherent beauty. Yet now with a single shot...”

(Adroniel takes a shot)

Adroniel: “... and I tear it into a cascade of wondrous destruction, ahahaha”.

(the vehicle collapses in the distance)

Duruthiel: “There is more tragedy than comedy about you today. To kill a driver and send a vehicle into its own companion”.

Adroniel: “Wait for it!”

(the vehicle explodes)

Adroniel: “Ahahahah!”

Duruthiel: “Such finesse⁷¹! And do not think that I have not noticed you are picking targets that might otherwise come at us at an advantage”.

Adroniel: “I am flattered that you notice anything beyond the reach of your blade. Of course, I am watching your backs. Were it not for my presence, you would have been slain some time ago”.

(Adroniel slashes a soldier in melee)

Duruthiel: "Do you really believe that, Adroniel?"

Adroniel: "Now that I have your concern, I shall never tell you".

Duruthiel: "You are the very vexation⁷² of me, Death Jester".

Adroniel: "Then I will lighten your mood. Observe that ridge line to our left!"

Duruthiel: "That looks like one of their officers. He seems to be..."

(Adroniel kills the officer with a precise laser shot)

Duruthiel: "... dead".

Adroniel: "His soldiers are left leaderless, ahahaha. Now see how the troupe of Galatan falls upon them in their disarray".

Duruthiel: "That is exquisite, my dear Adroniel. You have atoned⁷³ for your impotence⁷⁴".

Adroniel: "And consider this a further gift".

(Adroniel takes another soldier down)

Duruthiel (laughing hysterically): "Ahahahah, blinding the gunner, most splendid! To be cut down by their own crude guns. I retract all reservation⁷⁵, Adroniel. You are a comedic genius".

Adroniel: "This script is almost done, I think".

A great fume smeared the sky beyond the emplacements and gun pits of the citadel's defenses. Though its source was yet out of sight, the growl of its anger preceded it.

Adroniel: "Oh, perhaps not?"

Duruthiel: "The new scene begins".

* * *

Echo: "On thunderous cloud doom growls closer".

Adroniel: "Comforting".

Duruthiel: "Valencis, how goes your endeavors?"

Valencis (over telecommunication): "The walls are breached. The scouring has begun".

Duruthiel: "Have you per chance misplaced a foe of considerable size?"

Valencis (over telecommunication): "One of their great machines must have broken away from the defense. There is a counter-attack forming in its wake".

Adroniel: "For all their war craft, aspect warriors and guardians cannot match this brutish giant".

Valencis (over telecommunication): "We are at the apex of commitment. If I dispatch a Titan or an engine of Vault to your aid, it will take all the longer to finish the mission".

Duruthiel: "I wager it better to finish late then not at all".

Valencis (over telecommunication): "The longer we tarry, the more foes converge from further field. This whole world has been mobilized for the human's expedition. We cannot fight a million enemies. Each delay brings further setbacks⁷⁶".

Adroniel: "What do you think, Duruthiel? Is there glory enough in such confrontation?"

Duruthiel: "What causes this sudden blandness of spirit in the face of setback?"

Adroniel: "It is to turn setback into opportunity. Can you not feel the change of the airs? The humans think this is their salvation, the reversal we have feared".

Duruthiel: "And it is not?"

Adroniel: "Only if we allow it. What better evidence of my philosophy that all hope is fleeting than to dash⁷⁷ the optimism of the enemy by destroying their mechanical savior? We shall be the incarnation of fickle fate, sweeping away the fog of hope from their eyes to reveal the ruin that awaits all".

Echo: "It is the power of a squadron of lesser tanks given single mighty form. No slide of shuriken fire will defeat it, no matter the accuracy of the aim".

Adroniel: "I see that you have sobered quickly".

Duruthiel: "We have means, weapons that can pierce armor and scour its crude circuits".

Valencis (over telecommunication): “Fusion blasts and haywire grenades against an enemy of such raw size, such technological superiority will be of no use”.

Adroniel: “We have little choice and less time”.

Duruthiel: “I am of similar mind. Valencis, do not relent in your assault. This wayward⁷⁸ behemoth would not reach the Webway portals. The Masque of the Fading Dawn will not allow it”.

Echo: “Hm, on the swiftest steeds we travel only to hasten to the irresistible fate”.

Adroniel: “It is certain? We will fail?”

Echo: “Hm, nothing is certain”.

Duruthiel: “Then we ride with all speed!”

* * *

Adroniel: “The mighty beast has brought friends”.

Echo: “The blade that slices must do so swiftly and cleanly lest it be stuck in the flesh of the foe”.

Duruthiel: “Exactly. Gunners, cut us a path through this chaff! You too, Adroniel. We are almost at the machine beast. Starweavers, take us closer! Voidweavers, keep the mon-keigh from our backs. Adroniel, do you still doubt me as a commander?”

Adroniel (shooting left and right): “Too busy to talk”.

(sudden gunshot nearly kills Adroniel missing her an inch wide)

Adroniel: “Ooooh!!!”

Echo: “Death Jester!”

Adroniel: “I almost met myself, but the shot missed by the narrowest of margins. My compliments to Endorieth for his piloting”.

Duruthiel: “Skyweavers, draw their fire. Muselethin, take your troupe onto the beast’s front guns and see if you can disable them”.

Echo: “To what aim do we race, Great Harlequin?”

Duruthiel: “The crown, of course. Endorieth, guide us towards the main turret”.

Adroniel: “Oh, perhaps I erred. There is no weakness in its armored skin”.

Duruthiel: “Nonsense, faint⁷⁹ of heart. Follow me! Jump, deadly maiden, jump and be free”.

(Duruthiel jumps upon the Titan)

Echo: “Then jump I must too, safer atop the guns, then before the...”

(Echo follows suite after Duruthiel)

Adroniel: “Endorieth, get me closer! Be ready to return for us”.

(Adroniel jumps and successfully lands on the Titan)

Echo: “The way within is barred”.

Duruthiel: “Then it is fortunate that I have a magic key”.

(Duruthiel slashes a hole in the armor with his blade)

Duruthiel: “Smells like the pits of Kithrumbia”.

Adroniel (coughing): “As Endorieth fired, so too must we deal with the fumes”.

* * *

Duruthiel (jumping inside the Titan): “From inside the beast’s belly we shall cut it open”.

(One of the Titan servants sees the Aeldari and gets slashed by Echo)

Echo: “The warning will not aid them”.

Adroniel: “This is not the environment for the bite of my shuriken cannon. (Adroniel takes a melee weapon) But the joy of death comes in many guises”.

(Adroniel slays a charging Titan servant)

Adroniel: “Slow and clumsy human. Oh, even with my blade in your gut the light of life flickers still in your eyes, mon-keigh. Oh, I would have expected lesser spirit from one that does battle from within the confines of this mobile fortress. (pulling away the sword) I do not need that filth from its lung froth⁸⁰ upon my suit”.

(Titan slowly halts its tread)

Echo: “The beast has stopped”.

Duruthiel: “A natural consequence of the driver’s death, my foresighted warrior bard”.

Adroniel: “Then we are...”

(a laser shot hits Adroniel)

Adroniel: "Oh!"

Echo: "Withdraw, Death Jester".

(Echo sends a torrent of fire after the assailant)

Adroniel: "The wound is shallow! Hunt it down, Echo, before it causes more mischief".

Duruthiel: "The threat to the Webway portals is no more".

Echo: "The drake that still breathes fire, can lay waste to armies".

Adroniel: "Let us not leave opportunity for regret".

(torrents of gunfire)

Adroniel: "Echo?"

(Echo kills the human assailant)

Echo: "All is well".

The human engine was a cluster of tight decks and small passages, no place for the deadly acrobatics of the Harlequins. With grim purpose Adroniel walked her way down to tis mechanical bowels.

Adroniel: "Oh... Eh.... The stench is worse here still... The rancidity⁸¹ of mon-keigh bodies and the fog of their crude machines... There's something else".

Mechanicus (approaching): "011100"

The thing that came at Adroniel was a welter⁸² of mechanical tendrils⁸³ and red robe. Its face had dead lenses for eyes and a steaming grill for a mouth.

Adroniel (engaging in melee combat): "Oh, that much struggling... ah... oh... of a creature of machine... is this... flesh or false... is this blood or lubricants... "

(Adroniel finally takes the Mechanicus down)

Adroniel: "And what part of you leaves now, Sizoph?"

Mechanicus (falling down and shutting down): "001100..."

Duruthiel (over telecommunication): "The task is done. The beast is rendered ductless. It is to move on to a stage anew".

Adroniel: "Yet, even without mon-keigh entrails the behemoth might be resurrected. Let us be sure of the deed being final".

(Adroniel angrily unleashes las fire within the confines of the Titan)

(inner circuitry starts buzzing)

Adroniel: "It is done with greater ease, than I expected".

(siren goes off)

Adroniel: "I erred in haste. It seems the behemoth's death rows my diet in ass".

(Adroniel finally gets out of the Titan into free air)

Adroniel (scared): "By Cegorach! Where are you, Duruthiel? Have you abandoned me?"

Duruthiel: "Ahahaha, behind you, bone-clad, leveler of giants!"

(Adroniel jumps upon the Duruthiel's craft)

Duruthiel: "My hand, be firm with your grip!"

Adroniel: "Pull me up, if you would be so kind".

Duruthiel: "Ahahah, truly hope becomes despair for our foes. In its dying wrath the behemoth slays many of them".

Echo (smiling): "All thought of retaliation will flee their minds. Broken are their plans for vengeance".

Adroniel: "Righteous in our wickedness we can rejoice at their dismay, ahahah!"

* * *

The brutality of war raged on. Yet now so distant that the bloodied ground of Nequofendi seemed almost peaceful. Patches of gray and green moved across the hillsides as the humans retreated falling back as the colorful squads of Yme-Loc pushed into the openings made by the engines of Vaul and the Harlequins.

Duruthiel: "If it is our role, oh seeker of joyful death, to quash⁸⁴ hope from and bring meaning through ending, is it a mercy not spite⁸⁵ to pursue these flagging⁸⁶ mon-keigh?"

Adroniel: "Hm, an interesting question, Duruthiel. There is a new objective, mercy or spite. Such things exist only at the motive of the act. And the motive is wholly dependent on belief of the subject's desire. If I believe the

humans to desire death, it would be a mercy to give it to them. If I believe they wish to live, it is a spite to slay them”.

Duruthiel: “So would you have us chase them down or not?”

Adroniel: “Oh, I am not the leader as Echo choses to remind us frequently”.

Duruthiel: “I did not say we would enact your choice, but I would hear your opinion and arguments”.

Adroniel: “Chase them down! Kill them all, ahahah!”

Echo: “For mercy or spite?”

Adroniel: “In this case it is neither. They are mon-keigh, beneath mercy or spite. Opportunity presents itself for a cull⁸⁷ of their numbers, we should cease it”.

Duruthiel: “A cold reasoning with which I am not in total agreement, but we will pursue”.

Adroniel: “For mercy”.

Duruthiel: “For something to do. I yet have desired to avoid standing sentry at the Webway portals. Onward, Endorieth!”

Those that had poured forth from armored bunkers and sleek-wall revetments⁸⁸ now retreated within them. Finding sanctuary within their defenses, the humans turned to face the Aeldari again. Soon the air was lit by the flash of lasguns and the blaze of heavier weapons.

Echo: “They flee within their armored burrows”.

Adroniel: “We shall prove their sense of security false, ahahaha!”

Echo: “It seems our presence is precipitating⁸⁹ a recovery assault. They are not so unprepared as it might be hoped”.

Duruthiel: “A show of depleted strength. As our skull-masked avenger has said, we should prove its lack of worth”.

Echo: “For what end? To die upon an exploding bolt long after our purpose here has been served?”

Adroniel: “What more to life is there than the performance? I am in accord with our wastrel⁹⁰ leader in that regard. The Laughing God does not care for missions and strategies”.

Echo: "But he is not without purpose. If the stage is bereft of players, the performance ends. The true foe is ever She-Who-Thirsts. All else is but interludes in the grandeur script".

Adroniel: "The purpose is to risk death so that life has meaning. If you did not care for risk, you would not have assured the spirit-stone of Biel-Tan to join us".

Echo: "I swapped the prison of the waystone for a better cause, Adroniel. The bird that flies the cage might yet fall to the arrows of the hunter, but the skies are its home".

Adroniel: "Hah, nonsense!"

Echo: "To last after death, to take glory in the killing itself and not the performance is unbecoming⁹¹ of the followers of Cegorach".

Adroniel: "You think it harkens more to Commoragh, that I have not left behind that predatory path?"

Duruthiel: "Your viciousness does have roots in the dark city".

Echo: "Older still is that desire, to hunt and kill and make grief. It is the extremity of ourselves that is now the spirit of the great enemy. From that urge, out of those unchecked desires we birthed our own doom. Do not think that Cegorach will dare the clutches of She-Who-Thirsts for a spirit thus corrupted".

Adroniel: "It is no offence to the Laughing God to slay".

Echo: "But you must remember that to extend a thread of your fate, different lives, Aeldari or other, must be shortened. You exist at the expense of others. That balance is made so that you might do something with the accumulation of your fate time. To throw away the gift of life for vendetta or amusement, that sullies⁹² the purpose of the Laughing God".

Duruthiel: "Enough philosophy. We come upon their emplacements. We shall be into the midst in moments".

* * *

The interior of the defenses was a barren sterile place. Gun shells and discharged power packs littered the floor, which was muddy with boot prints and sleek with the blood of the wounded. Seeking respite from the sudden assault of the Harlequins, the humans left their dead and retreated further into the complex. Yet the Harlequins were far swifter and cut down the enemy in chambers and corridors as they fled.

Guardisman (spotting the Harlequins, in the distance): “Hey!!”

(Adroniel slays the guardsman)

Adroniel: “Oh, I think you overstate the risk to my spirit, Echo. This is no more stimulating than fasting the clasps on my holo-suit”.

Echo: “And with such complacency⁹³ did the dominions fall”.

Duruthiel: “Oh...”

Adroniel: “Mind the mess”.

Duruthiel: “Perhaps, you should forbid yourself the use of Shrieker bio-ammunition in confined spaces hereafter”.

Adroniel: “But look at pattern on the ceiling, ahahaha. It looks like the vethiew of Vault gate nebula”.

Duruthiel: “There’s scarce a patch of unsullied floor to place my feet. Bodies everywhere”.

Adroniel: “If you’d been precise, you are stepping on parts of bodies, not whole corpses”.

Echo: “And yet in the carnage stirs a soul”.

Duruthiel: “What do you mean?”

Echo: “In the search of fear a spark of hate...”

Adroniel (enthusiastically): “Look! Oh! Oh! This man! I can see it is still breathing, ahahah! (grimly) But not for long”.

(Echo prevents Adroniel from shooting)

Adroniel (angrily): “Ah, what is this, Shadowseer? Do not interrupt me at the moment of releasing death’s mercy”.

Echo: “By your own admission it is spite that moves you”.

Duruthiel: “This conversation bored me the first time. I will have no further part of it again”.

(wounded guardswoman moaning from pain on the floor)

Echo: “Did you see? The eyes desire life and so by your argument it would be spite to end it”.

Adroniel: “Did I ever assert that I was above spite?”

Echo: “The splinter of your past life can never be fully drawn while you harbor⁹⁴ this mood”.

Wounded Guardswoman (moaning in pain): "Oh..."

Echo: "It speaks".

Adroniel: "Oh yet it has nothing worth hearing".

Echo: "Are you afraid that the words will be sparks upon the kindling of your conscience?"

Adroniel (training the weapon at the guardswoman): "Not at all".

Wounded Guardswoman (moaning in pain): "Oh... I am of no weapon-possessed... Please... By the enthroned holy carcass of the human homeworld, I make pleading demands to leave without harassment".

Adroniel: "Oh, it begs for its life. An animal might equally squeal in the trap".

Wounded Guardswoman (pleading): "Animal I am not... A mind of thought and words have spoken, tones past from their thoughts".

Adroniel: "Oh, did not intend to transmit as well as receive! I have no wish to converse with it".

Wounded Guardswoman (angrily): "Filthy being from elsewhere! The patience is lacking for your killing blow. I enquire as to your tardiness⁹⁵ in ending my life".

Adroniel: "Oh! Ahahaha, feisty⁹⁶! Now do you see, Echo, it wants to die!"

Echo: "The blade that hangs is worse than the one that drops swiftly".

(distant explosion)

Adroniel: "Events are moving on without us. It is time to rejoin the company so I must end its miserable life".

Echo: "Or... spare it?"

Adroniel: "Why?"

Echo: "Must there be a reason? Think of possibilities, of endless fates yet unplayed. A simple act, the execution of which costs you nothing, might one day bring great harm to She-Who-Thirsts. It is in your gift to deliver a deadly fate, but equally to grant extended life. Is that not powerful to you?"

(wounded guardswoman sobs on the floor)

Echo: "Act without reason for we are the Harlequins of the Laughing God. As a spirit is snatched at whim from damnation, why not spare this life?"

Adroniel (thinking that over and finally taking the gun away): “Hm, you may go back to your companions. If our paths cross again, you will die”.

(wounded guardswoman stands and runs away)

Echo (smiling): “Is it a sound for the spirit to grant hope as well as crush it?”

Adroniel: “Hm, there might be something to be said in its defense. In moderation, of course. Yet the battle goes on and we must still fight it”.

* * *

After the bloodied confines the open air smelled fresh, though in truth it was clogged⁹⁷ with smoke and the acidic taint of energy weapon discharge.

(distant explosion)

A plume of blue flame lit the horizon, silhouetting the jagged remains of towers and broken walls. Against the glare stood slender Titans and the gliding hulls of the engines of Vault.

Duruthiel: “Ahahahah, the fires of victory burn brighter, I would say”.

Valencis (over telecommunication): “The citadel has been destroyed. The assault contingent will withdraw to the Webway portals. Our infantry will provide support against pockets of resistance along the line of retreat”.

Duruthiel: “Do you think that includes us?”

Echo: “The last spoken lines are oft the most vital. Play the part to its fullest until the performance is done”.

Adroniel: “I have some ammunition left. I can stay a while longer”.

Echo: “And see on the hill where the tattered⁹⁸ human flag still flaps”.

Duruthiel: “They pose no threat to the engines of Yme-Loc. As daring as battle should be, I feel my mood swing towards the quiet tune of the ‘Last Laugh’. There is no more glory to be gained”.

Adroniel: “And see there, scrambling⁹⁹ through the mud? A lone trooper of the foe, the one I spared?”

Echo: “A ripple on the skein set free to the embrace of Morai-Heg once more”.

(Imperial guardsmen rejoice at the arrival of the spared guardswoman)

Duruthiel: “They are pleased for your gift, Adroniel”.

Adroniel: "Indeed, I... Wait, I spy one among them... garbed differently. See the black coat and gold decoration?"

Duruthiel: "A leader of some kind?"

Echo: "The others draw back. I smell fear more than duty".

Adroniel: "Why does it raise its weapon towards its own? Ahahah, do they think it cowardly perhaps?"

Duruthiel: "Or tainted by your mercy".

(distant gunshot)

Duruthiel (angrily): "Kin slayer!"

Echo: "Truly the ways of the mon-keigh are barbaric. What of you, Adroniel? To see your choice made mockery?"

Adroniel: "Ahahah, I hope you see the truth now. I am the Death Jester. There is nothing of me that is turned to life, only its ending. My work shall never cease until I claim myself and another steps up to the role".

Duruthiel: "You are not saddened?"

Adroniel: "Why should I be sad knowing myself, Duruthiel? Does the rampant ego of the Red Swan depress you? And I am glad for fate has guided me to my next target".

Echo: "To avenge the slaying of the one you spared?"

Adroniel: "Do not be so sentimental, Shadowseer. It is merely a glimmer from the skein that has caught my eye. Perhaps, it is a sign, the will of the Laughing God, but probably not! Ahahahaha!"