



The Art of Provocation

A Space Wolfes Audio Drama (2016)

Written by Josh Reynolds

What was left of the xenos crashed grating of the central control chamber to join the remains of its fellows.

(low-pitch alarm howling in the air)

Lucas had left a trail of broken green bodies stretching back to his entry point into the vox relay station, after being deposited on the outer hall by Stormfang gunship. The wailing of the structure alarm echoed through the chamber and he could hear emergency bulkheads grinding into place as the station's autonomous systems acted to seal the breach. The vibrations resonated with the rhythmic pulse of the stasis bomb grafted in place of one of his hearts. He didn't know which. He'd never had occasion to find out.

The station set high in the atmosphere, far above the industrial world of Polix Tertius. An atmospheric photon tether tended by a crew of servitors and Transmechanics held it aloft at the center of an invisible web of communication signals. The orks had a fascination for technology. Their Meks had intended to loot it for their own purposes, hijacking the planetary vox net even as Polix Tertius burned. And Lucas the Trickster, Lucas the Laughing one, the Bane9 Wolf, had come to teach those greenskins the error of their ways.

(two orks approaching Lukas in a heavy tread, snarling and speaking orkish)

There were two orks left. They squinted at him in the flickering haze. The chameleonic Doppelgangrel pelt he wore over his power armor bent the light in odd ways making his form indistinct and hard to focus on. To the greenskins there might appear to be three of him or something even more confusing.

Lucas chuckled again.

Lukas the Trickster (laughing): "Ahahahah.... Who's' first?"

The orks eyed him wearily. They glanced at one another. Then one gave a roar and barreled towards him, its crude axe raised.

(ork roaring and charging)

Lukas the Trickster: "Decisive, I like that".

Lukas stood forwards and caught the haft of the axe, his power talons piercing the ork's chest. The greenskin slumped and Lukas swept it aside.

(dead ork collapsing to the floor)

Lukas the Trickster: "And then there was one".

(the last ork roaring and charging)

The last ork thudded towards him, snarling in fury. He couldn't fault the creature's courage.

Lukas the Trickster: "No lack of bravery, but a distinct absence of brains".

He didn't rush to meet this one. No point when it was coming to him. He shot it in the head, vaporizing the skull with the liquid hiss. The ork's body kept coming and Lukas stepped aside to let it stumble past calling after.

Lukas the Trickster: "Mind how you go".

It tripped over the remains of the others and tumbled to the deck. Lukas tutted looking around.

Lukas the Trickster (laughing): "Huh, I warned you!"

The wall panels were daubed with crude glyphs and blood stains. The air stank of cooked ork and other worse things, but then the greenskins had held the station for weeks now. It was bound to reek a little.

(LuKas going elsewhere)

Lukas didn't have much time. His arrival had not gone unnoticed. Between the trail of corpses and the alarm he wouldn't be hard to find when reinforcements came looking. He was almost looking forward to that. Orks weren't good for much, but killing them was an excellent way of relieving frustration. He studied the cogitator panels.

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): "Are you still alive, Strifeson?"

Ah, his current if begrudging master's voice growling across the com frequencies. Lukas smirked.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): "Did you doubt me, lord Grimblood?"

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): "Always and at length. Have you succeeded?"

Kjarl Grimblood, the Fire Wolf, lord and commander of one of the twelve Great Companies of the Space Wolves Chapter. Last cycle Bran Redmaw had been the unlucky recipient of the Jackalwolf's leash. Lukas's services were passed from Company to Company on an almost

insultingly regular basis. As if he were equal parts burden and responsibility. It was not his fault that the Wolf Lords were more lord than wolf and inclined to their dignity over much. Just as it was not his fault that they took his harmless jests so seriously.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Has your famed foresight deserted you, Grimblood? Would we be speaking now if I hadn’t succeeded?”

Grimblood snarled with impatience and Lukas grinned. The Fire Wolf burned hot and it took only the littlest bit of fuel to renew the blaze. A jest here, a bit of bloated venom there, it all laded up. His brothers though him a fool, an annoyance at best, a threat to their sanity at worst. But provocation was an art and Lukas an artist. Like all artists he took pride in his work. What they did not understand only proved the validity of it.

He counted the seconds letting Grimblood’s impatience build. Then just as the Wolf Lord was about to speak he replied.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Yes, Grimblood, I’ve reached the central control chamber, but I won’t be able to hold it, not by myself”.

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): “You don’t have to. Destroy it and the communication’s grate with it. I want that planet dark when we arrive, Strifeson”.

Lukas removed his helmet and set it aside, eager to taste something other than recycled air.

(Lukas taking a deep breath)

His senses stretched. He could smell burnt metal and spoiled meat and he could hear more than just alarms. Grimblood’s pack was loping across the void towards Polix Tertius even now. They would arrive in three hours by his estimate. Already the Company’s gunships were dueling with orks’ vessels in the upper stratosphere to ensure a safe insertion window for the ground assault.

Lukas the Trickster (sighing): “That doesn’t seem very entertaining. But that is probably the point, yes?”

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): “What was that?”

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Nothing, it will take some time”.

Lukas had been sent ahead of the Great Company, ostensibly to take the vox relay and prevent the ors from organizing any sort of unified

defense. In reality his mission was a punishment. The Stormfangs could have easily destroyed the station from a safe distance. But this way Lukas would remain on the station until someone bothered to retrieve him. Most likely after all of the glory was won and the fighting ended. Grimblood certainly knew how to hold a grudge and a baseless one at that. Dosing the Wolf Lord's mjod with green weed had been a harmless prank, nothing more. But as his name implied, Grimblood lacked even the barest micron of a sense of humor.

Lukas sealed the control chamber. The bulkhead locked into place with the grinding hiss. He gave it a knock and satisfied turned back to the vox systems.

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): "You have a plasma pistol, use it".

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): "As you say, my lord. But my pistol is still recharging".

He ran his hands over the cogitator panels tweaking the frequencies rising up from the planet's surface. A squall of feedback caused him to wince. Ork voices snapped into focus accompanied by a distortion echo. Their voices were like rocks in the steel drum or hot nod poured over broken glass. Nasty, but distinctive. He was familiar with the ork tongue enough to understand their insults and reply in kind. That was all their language was really. Insults. It was crude and unsubtle, but potent.

Lukas the Trickster: "One, two, three".

He twisted the controls isolating the voices. There were as many dialects as were clans. He didn't recognize these, though it made little difference. The root logographic system was the same whatever the permutation. A forth signal intruded.

(Ork roaring on the vox)

Lukas the Trickster: "And you'll make four. Interesting".

He activated the hololith set above the vox system and studied it. The flickering image showed that Polix Tertius was divided into four quadrants and the ork WAAAGH! had splintered accordingly. He listened to the relayed frequencies scanning back and forth, noting the corresponding areas on the map. The orks were using the vox relay station to bounce their own primitive signals. They would already be spoiling for a fight, they were always spoiling for a fight. Lukas took note of the names that cropped up, as something approaching regularity.

Those would be the ones in charge. An idea began to take shape and he chuckled.

(Lukas laughing)

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): "I heard that. Stop wasting time and do as I ordered, Strifeson".

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): "I fully intend to fulfill my mission objectives".

He began to isolate and modulate certain signals. While his understanding of such technologies was limited, he picked up a few tricks from obliging Engineers and Lexmechanics in his time. He smiled, remembering one last and the way she had paled when he bared his fangs at her.

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): "The mission is... Wait, are you smiling?"

Lukas the Trickster (laughing over vox): "Hehe, no!"

Kjarl Grimblood (angry over vox): "You are smiling. I can hear you smiling!"

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): "I am merely pleased at the thought of slaughtering xenos filth".

Grimblood growled.

Kjarl Grimblood (growling over vox): "Are you laughing at me, Jackalwolf?"

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): "I laugh with you, Wolf Lord, at the thought of the carnage we shall unleash upon these creatures. We shall rip and tear them and leave not one intact".

Kjarl Grimblood (angry over vox): "Are you laughing at me! Those are my words you spit back at me like poison".

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): "Are they? Perhaps! You use so many words. It is impossible not to borrow a few".

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): "You know damn well those were my exact words to you. What are you up to?"

Lukas didn't answer. He was opening a general communication's channel to broadcast across all frequencies. He cleared his throat. It was best to start small and build on the response. The art of provocation was one of letters.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Bosnik Tuff says og orts snog zog scab!”

He racked his brain for the words as he went. He didn't have to be right, just close. Ork language was a thing of approximation, more than precision.

Kjarl Grimblood (infuriated over vox): “What did you call me?”

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Not you”.

Lukas winced as the channel crackled with the blistering response. Queries mostly, a few insults. Quicker than he'd expected, but that was good. He cycled through the channels and picked another one at random. An isolated frequency this time.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Disgar says snik Tuff ognaf grot ognaf boss!”

(orks roaring in fury over the vox)

The insults were childish, but those were the best kind. He cycled again, another general broadcast.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Bogya og guts grim zod!”

That one got the best reaction. So he repeated it several times across several isolated frequencies to ensure maximum reach.

(Lukas changing the channel)

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Bogya og guts grim zod! Bogya og guts grim zod!”

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): “What are you up to? This isn't the time for your usual mischief, Blood Claw!”

Lukas's smile went into a frown as the Wolf Lord emphasized his rank. Grimblood liked to remind Lukas of his lack of advancement. He thought of it as a punishment. Then perhaps it was. Lukas however had found freedom of a sort. Little was expected of him and he made the most of it. What more could any true son of Russ ask for than the freedom to run as he wished? But that didn't stop the constant reminders of his status from being irksome.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “You sound just like your mother, Wolf Lord”.

Kjarl Grimblood (infuriated over vox): “What?”

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Or was it your sister? I get them confused”.

It was dangerous to prod in such a fashion, but he couldn't help himself. There was an element of truth in the jibe, however small. He'd shared many beds and had many... acquaintances prior to enduring the procedures and rituals of becoming a Space Marine. It was entirely possible that he'd known Grimblood's kin in his past life. Even better, the Wolf Lord knew it.

Kjarl Grimblood (infuriated and snarling over vox): “Repeat yourself. I must have misheard you”.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Do you even have a sister? Am I thinking of someone else?”

(‘dead’ ork standing and charging Lukas)

So pleased was Lukas with this game, he almost missed the sound of the not quite dead ork rising up behind him. The smell of xenos blood washed over him and he turned at last moment. A wide blade with a jagged edge slashed down, sheering away one of his braids. He snatched up his helmet and smashed the head across the jaw with it.

Lukas the Trickster: “Quite a trick! It will be your last”.

He thought he'd killed the creature, but orks were nothing if not durable. The greenskin had recovered its wits after Lukas had felled it, while he had been distracted. Dark blood stained its torso and arms. Its skull was cracked but it had plenty of fight left in it. It hacked at him and he was forced to roll aside. He slugged it, rocking it on its heels.

Lukas the Trickster (breathing hard): “Is that all you've got?”

The ork grunted trying to focus on him.

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): “What was that? What's happening?”

The blade came down again splitting a panel as Lukas stepped aside. Sparks sprayed up to cascade across the floor. Lukas drove the creature back with a sweep of his wolf claw.

Lukas the Trickster: “You seem to be having a bit of trouble, my green skinned adversary. Perhaps I should just wait here until you kill over”.

The wounded ork reeled, eyes bulging in rage. He wondered if it could understand him. He hoped so. It bellowed again and lunged. Its momentum drove him back against the cogitator back. He swatted its

blade aside embedding it in the hololith projector which gave a whine of protest and fizzled into darkness.

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): “Strifeson, report! What are you playing at?”

The ork’s bloodied head came down against his with a solid strike. Lukas slumped, dazed. It was like being punched in the skull by an ice bear. Stunned he couldn’t stop it from catching him in a powerful grapple. His lightning claw was pinned to his side and he couldn’t draw his plasma pistol. The ork roared at him spattering his hair and beard with reeking saliva and blood. He heard the ceramite plinths of his armor creek.

Lukas the Trickster (groaning): “Well, what now? Going to yell me to death?”

Kjarl Grimblood (infuriated over vox): “Jackalwolf, answer me! Damn you!”

(ork roaring)

Lukas struggled to free himself but lacked the leverage. The ork was big and strong, strong enough to lift a power-armored warrior up off the ground and hold him there.

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): “Strifeson, what’s going on? Report!”

Lukas the Trickster (groaning): “Nothing, it’s all fine! Ohhhhhh... Just... give me a moment”.

Lukas’s head snapped down meeting the ork’s rounded cranium. There was a sound like two stones colliding and Lukas’s world spun. He blinked blood out of his eyes and did it again. Two could play this game. The ork staggered back gurgling. A third time and its weakened skull gave way completely with a wet crack. Still it refused to release him but its grip had slackened noticeably. Lukas activated the lightning claw and twisted, driving the talons into the ork’s side. The greenskin screamed in pain and suddenly Lukas was free. He swept the claw out and silenced the xenos for good.

(ork’s dead body collapsing to the floor)

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): “What’s going on? I demand you answer me”.

Lukas swayed and shook his head. He kicked the ork.

Lukas the Trickster (breathing hard): “That’s for having such a hard head”.

He stumbled back to the com panel. Despite the blade embedded in it, the vox caster was still functioning. He leaned over it broadcasting across all frequencies.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Luk gog wizet drak dur ogt scum. Ugz nos la”.

(orks blowing off with fury and hatred)

The vox crackled with orkish voices, bellowing contradicting orders. He recognized the words for attack and kill among them.

(explosions)

The entire relay station shuddered, proximity alarm sounded. Lukas laughed, but it sounded more like a snarl. As he’d hoped he’d set something in motion. He tapped at the shuttered hololith trying to get it to work as Grimblood raged on the other end of the link.

Kjarl Grimblood (snarling over vox): “What have you done? The Stormfangs are reporting that the greenskins are turning against one another”.

Lukas the Trickster (laughing): “Ahahahahahahah! Hehehehehe! I interrupted enemy communications prior to an assault. Fairly standard”.

Frequencies crackled. A channel went dead abruptly, then another. He heard the boom of the weapons somewhere close by. Some of the orks aboard the relay station had obviously heard his last broadcast and taken it to heart. Greenskins were always spoiled for a fight and he’d given them an excuse. It was happening quicker than he’d expected, but then that was ork’s fault. Always full of surprises. He kicked the body of the ork he just killed again just to make sure.

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): “You have set them at each other’s throats. I wanted them blind and deaf, not at war”.

Grimblood sounded angry. Good.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “Consider it my gift to you”.

Kjarl Grimblood (angry over vox): “If they exterminate each other before we arrive, I am holding you personally responsible, Trickster”.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): “All credit for the victory goes to you, my lord”.

Kjarl Grimblood (infuriated over vox): "It's not a victory if they kill each other before I can do it".

Lukas smiled.

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): "Oh no, better hurry then".

Kjarl Grimblood (over vox): "This is not a worthy deed, Strifeson! You..."

Lukas the Trickster (over vox): "You are the one who consider future, Grimblood! It's not my fault if your flames of portent didn't warn you of this".

Kjarl Grimblood (insanely crazy infuriated over vox): "Arrrrrrrrrrgh!!!!"

Grimblood roared causing a signal to crackle with static.

Kjarl Grimblood (infuriated over vox): "Stop smiling! I can hear you smiling!"

Lukas the Trickster (laughing over vox): "Never!"

Lukas closed the link. He could almost hear Grimblood's howl of rage and his smile widened in satisfaction. He looked down at one of the dead orks.

Lukas the Trickster: "Not that he'll end. They never do. I suppose it wouldn't be as much fun if they did".

He stepped back and fired his pistol melting the cogitators to slag. He heard the thud of hot-nailed boots and the bellicose cries of greenskins closing in on the control chamber. He scraped the air with his wolf claw leaving contrails of hazy energy in its wake.

(Lukas laughing louder and louder)

He wondered how many of them would be killed before Grimblood arrived. Enough to feed the fires of the Wolf Lord's wrath, but not so many as to make it blaze out of control. That will come later, when Lukas reminded him of the glories lost and victories snatched from his grasp by his own hand. In a song, perhaps. It will take time to compose it, but he had plenty of that, bought with the orks mostly busy killing each other.

Provocation was an art and all great art took time.

(orks roaring)