



WARHAMMER

40,000

LOSS

A RAVEN GUARD AUDIO DRAMA

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LOSS

(heavy rain)

We stood vigil for a fallen brother. Silence shrouded us, wrapping us in shared melancholic memories of a sword that would never guard our backs and a voice we'd never hear again.

Severax: "Do you remember?"

I knew the trails of Severax's thoughts nearly as well as my own. A voice I was trying to forget whispering from the darkness laughed in the shadowed corners of my mind. The quiet soul and the unquiet dead.

Jewel: "What did we call him?"

Artillery rumbled in the distance, a stark herald of the resumed offensive. War would not grant us enough time to grieve. Already thousands of Astra Militarum were streaming towards enemy trenches, ready to die beneath their guns. And our skills were needed elsewhere on this world. But for a moment war was ignored, another duty to precedence.

Severax: "The Primarch's second shadow".

A half smile curled Severax's lips as we prepared to honor our brother's memory, to honor our loss.

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(distant explosions and sirens, heavy rain, slow footsteps)

The ambush that led to our brother's death was one that neither side had planned for. In the endless rain that now defined Homindara's climate, in the dark forests

of that once perfect world, death came shrieking out of the night. It was one of those moments so common in war, when fate twists, when the future changes. A shout across the vox was the only warning we had.

Vendral (over vox): "Contact!"

(two gunshots, weird screams)

Sergeant Vendral's black eyes were wide with anger, fury and surprise. His shotgun erupted into violent life a moment later pounding away into the murk in the darkness. A broken body flew backwards caught in the middle of its mass. Pain pulsed through the night and whickering streaks of black crystal thudded into my armor. Shotguns boomed. Aliens cried out in their murderous tongue. Stars danced in my vision, my eyes unused to the sudden light. Lukaj shoved me out of the way. Blood dripped from my nose.

Lukaj: "Look alive, Ethgos".

His words were light, but I could taste his unease. He racked his shotgun.

Lukaj: "Where is Corvin?"

Jewel: "The Sergeant sent him ahead. He was to scout through this, find us a path".

(multiple gunshots)

My own shotgun spoke into the darkness, trace around stabbing through the night, hunting for targets. Shapes came screaming at us, shrieking alien words in voices like shards of glass slipping through deep ocean. The Eldar spouted their mocking venom as they fell amongst us. Shotguns barked in ragged unison, punching into trees, into darkness seeking alien flesh. Bodies flew, beetle dark shapes in jagged carapace screaming in terror as they died. Bones crunched as Eldar flew into trees shattering back and breaking armor.

Lukaj: "Is there fear in their voices? What are they afraid of?"

An alien jumped close to Lukaj as he spoke, lights flickering down a spear carved from obsidian and shadows. A roar from my shotgun ripped the creature's

head clean from its body, pulverizing it into shards of bone and meat. My fellow Scouts stumbled backwards coated in alien gore.

Vendral: "Ignore it, the mind of the xenos is unknowable".

Sergeant Vendral sounded so wise, so old. I remember that most about him, how old he seemed. His face framed by black whiskers, his eyes giving nothing away. In truth he was only nearing his 100th year.

(Eldar saying something incomprehensibly)

One of the aliens jabbered at Lukaj, muttering threats or perhaps offers, who truly knew?

(Lukaj screaming)

Gauntlets of darkling flame punched for the Scout's body. Smoke curled from my brother, wisping out as his flesh burned.

(shotgun gunshot)

The alien fell back with a wordless cry, boundlessly flopping into the underbrush, a hole drilled onto its forehead.

(Eldar screaming commands)

The aliens fell back startled by our resistance, not willing to spend their lives against us. They cursed at us in words like quick silver and knives, voices filled with poison.

(sudden silence)

We stood alone, bodies heaving with fatigue, with adrenaline, with excitement. None of us had fallen, none of us had failed. Our eyes shone in the darkness, filled with the triumph of youth.

Vendral: "Be ready, we are not done here".

The rain-filled night of Homindara enclosed us, cradled us even as it misled us.

Trees towered everywhere, reaching for a sky that would never see true sunlight again.

(Eldar screaming again)

Eldar fell on us from above, angular knives needling, poison dripping. Their faces were as jagged as their voices, sharp and utterly inhuman. Loathsome humor bled from their dark eyes. Hunger curled their lips into pointed smiles. I could hear words barely on the edge of understanding. My mind strained search, I sought meaning in their taunts. Somehow the alien spoke without their lips moving.

I fell back, a migraine forcing its way into my skull. I was unfocused, confused, not yet come into the power I now wield almost effortlessly. I fell back, a knife ripping for my neck. Quladis hurled his own combat blade, skewering the alien's head. It flopped to the ground, falling in a scraping pile of spiked armor.

Jewel: "My thanks, brother!"

(two bolter rounds)

He provided no answer, already moving, already firing his bolt pistol. To tell it true I'd never expected a response from him. He rarely spoke, rarely wasted words. His was a quiet soul. Lukaj stood beside, his left arm cradled against his body. Viscous black fluid wept from the crystal that studded his flesh. He fired his shotgun one-handed, hammering an alien that stalked towards us.

Lukaj: "By the Primarch's watching eyes! This is glorious, Ethgos!"

I ignored him, ignored his words. Glory had no place in war. I knew it then as I know it now. Worry filled me. A tree fell to our right, crackling down so neatly in half by the fury of our combat. As if at some unheard command the Eldar melted away into the darkness. They left silence in their wake.

(silence)

Black bodies shimmering in the wet marked the ground around us, bleeding alien blood into the sodden dirt of Homindara. Our first victory as a Scout squad. Joy and triumph filled me.

Sergeant Vendral's voice took it away.

Vendral: "Where is Quladis?"

Lukaj: "I don't know"

None of us knew. Our brother was missing. The one we called the Primarch's second shadow was gone, as if he had never existed.

(distant laughter)

Something called out of the night and into my mind. A burst of memory clawed at me. The hand, reaching out, pale, bloody. Near silent laughter. Thoughts and fragments of thoughts, desperation, anger, emotions that were blunted, quiet, reserved, now flaring into violent life.

(distant human scream)

Blades flashed, silver and onyx. Fluids splattered. A calm voice spoke in an alien tongue. Pain... So much pain, I almost fell. My vision went dark. These were not my memories.

It was in that moment I knew that the visions that haunted me, the thoughts in the shadows and the headaches were not my body adjusting to my father's geneseed and I knew that my future would not be as I wished. My contented yearning to be a simple battle-brother, to serve with pride and honor, fled. I did not want this.

Jewel: "The Eldar have taken him".

Vendral: "Oh, curse..."

Soft curses fell from Sergeant's lips.

Vendral: "Curse it..."

He never asked how I knew, never questioned. He must have known, advised by the Librarian that I was likely a psyker.

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(heavy rain)

I was the one who found Quladis, his broken body chained to a gnarled tree. Alien runes stood out against his pale skin. Blood still wept from the corpse, flowing from great gashes in the dead Scout's flesh. His eyes were wide, staring. It was the most horrifying thing I had ever seen. The other Scouts surrounded me, their own black eyes wide and disgusted.

Vendral: "Take him down! Harvest the progenoids!"

None of us moved, we were shocked. Our invincibility was revealed as a lie. Dark thoughts flashed through me. Grief boiled up. This was loss, this was death. The fate that likely awaited us all. I lacked the words to give it voice, lacked the words that honor my brothers fallen in service to the Raven Guard and the Imperium. It ate at my thoughts, dulled my senses.

Quladis had never been a welcoming soul, never been one to consider a friend. The young man had been aloof, quiet, brooding. But he was a brother to us all and now he was dead. I could feel Vendral's own frustration, his own grief, his anger at losing of one of his charges. Before he could speak Lukaj began hurling Quladis' corpse from its perch.

(Eldar whispering voices)

A body twitched, it danced. Blood and other fluids poured from the Scout's staring eyes. On the edge of my hearing a voice whispered from the canopy.

Eldar: "Hell hou".

Something pale crawled down the tree headfirst, wet eyes staring from its vaguely humanoid back. Six arms grasped at the rough bark, a grotesque grin split its face. It spoke, but the words came from Quladis' mouth.

Quladis: "Mon-keigh".

Lukaj recoiled. We fell back. Quladis' corpse swayed, half removed, dangling from barbed chains.

(several gunshots)

Our shotguns roared at the xenos thing, but it was gone, flickering off the tree, dancing through us. A scalpel slipped through the flesh below my left eye. A staring face framed by lanky hair, stitched and stapled and utterly inhuman flashed before my eyes. I shoved my shotgun into its chest, fired.

(gunshot, Eldar screaming)

Flesh flew, purple and green blood gutted... It moved, irritation flashing across features that had no right to exist in Mankind's galaxy.

(Raven Guard legionaries starting to cry)

Apprehension broke as this thing moved through our midst, cutting and sawing with flashing arms and bite pain.

The xenos came for Vendral next, tiny knives flashing in the night. Arms pumped and blood spurted, six neat puncture wounds stippled the Sergeant's body.

Something broke in my mind. Shadows flowed from my outstretched hand. Three of the xenos's arms shriveled and blackened. Its head turned toward my with disconcerting slowness and spat an alien syllable.

Eldar: "Nou!"

(gunshot, Space Marine crying)

It flung me back and down, crashing into a tree's massive root systems. Its mouth yearned wide, poison dripping from needle fangs.

(barely heard gunshot)

A crack through its head to the side, blood and brain matter flew. Severax emerged from the shadows, smoke curling from his sniper rifle. His features were drawn, serious, eyes down-turned.

Vendral: "Corvin".

My brother waved him aside. He pulled his combat knife from its sheathe and severed the Eldar thing's head from its neck. His eyes never left Quladis' forlorn corpse.

Severax: "I led them here. I brought them. Thought we could kill them. Thought we could... (moaning). Thought we could handle them. It's my fault. This... is my fault".

The Sergeant said nothing, his dark eyes judging.

Vendral: "Remember this, Severax! But do not let it consume you. You have survived where Quladis has not. Honor that gift, honor that sacrifice, honor our loss!"