



THE INTERROGATION OF SALVOR LERMENTOV (2018)

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LIST OF CHARACTERS:

- * Salvor Lermentov - Astra Militarum officer;
- * Inquisitor Erasmus Crawl

(clock ticking, while Inquisitor slowly approaches the cell door)
(cell door opening)

(prisoner breathing hard)

(Inquisitor closing the door, approaching the prisoner, moving a chair and sitting behind a desk)

Inquisitor Crowl (sighing and leafing through pages):

- "Salvor Lermentov. Say nothing. Listen with uttermost care. You are a guest of His Imperial majesty's holy Inquisition. You are an intelligent man, you know what that means. You have heard stories of what happens now. You will have your fears, that is natural. You are right to be afraid. Only the guilty find themselves here. Our remaining task is to establish what species of guilt you possess".

Salvor Lermentov: - "Lord Inquisitor..."

Inquisitor Crowl: - "Say nothing, not yet".

(Inquisitor keeps leafing through pages)

Inquisitor Crowl:

- "The facts... You are a traitor to the Imperium. You deserted your regiment. You founded a renegade organization within the precincts¹ of Holy Terra. You resisted the just investigations of the Adeptus Arbites and committed crimes of insurrections against the populace. You preached seditions against the rule of the Holy Throne and encouraged others to do likewise. Do you admit these charges?"

Salvor Lermentov: - "Does it make any difference?"

Inquisitor Crowl: - "It makes every difference. It is why you are here".

Salvor Lermentov: - "But you have already decided my guilt. What is there left to discuss?"

Inquisitor Crowl: - "The truth".

Salvor Lermentov (laughing tiredly):

- "The truth? Very well, I am no traitor to the Throne. To the Imperium, maybe... To the fat lords that presides over our suffering, maybe... The world looks different when you are starving. You can love the Emperor but hate his servants".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "You know the catechisms. Sin against even the least of his adepts and you sin against Him".

Salvor Lermentov: - "You do not believe that".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "It matters not, what I believe. I am not under interrogation".

Salvor Lermantov:

- "Then I will confess this. I took a pounce against those who hunted my people because those who should have protected us did nothing. I fought when I had to just as I was trained. I prayed to the Emperor every time I went into battle for the enemies we faced were the foulest creatures imaginable. I spared the life of your acolyte when she fell into my power and together we fought against the xenos who haunted⁶ the underhive. You know all this for you were there".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "Yes, Spinoza gave me her report".

Salvor Lermantov: - "Did you read it?"

Inquisitor Crowl: - "I read everything".

Salvor Lermantov: - "Then what am I doing here?"

(clock chiming)

Salvor Lermantov: - "What was that?"

Inquisitor Crowl: - "The measure of time, all the time you have".

(Inquisitor standing up and approaching the prisoner)

Inquisitor Crowl: - "You have two chimes left".

(Inquisitor pouring some water into the glass)

Inquisitor Crowl: - "Drink?"

Salvor Lermantov: - "Why not? Large as you like".

(Inquisitor filling the second glass)

Inquisitor Crowl (walking along the cell):

- "You are not wrong of course. There is corruption on Terra. There are corrupt men and corrupt women and many of them have great power. Most would not care if the whole planet perished from hunger, just so long as they receive their coin, their pleasures, their status. I have met these people often. I've heard their pieties⁷ and listened to their justifications. Some of them even ended up in this room".

Salvor Lermantov: - "Then you understand what I..."

Inquisitor Crowl (interrupting):

- "Let me tell you about this place, the place you are in now. It is called Corvidae. It was built a long time ago and its structure is rotting. The iron skeleton that keeps it upright is corroding into nothing, little by little, every minute, every hour.

If nothing is done, one day it will collapse. But what can be done? The rot runs deep. We would have to take apart every stone in the place to get to the root of it. In which case we would have destroyed what we seek to save. So we do what we can around the edges, knowing that it is not enough.

Small things, subtle things. We let the rot linger⁸ because removing it would bring down everything else”.

Salvor Lermantov: - “So nothing can be changed?”

Inquisitor Crowl: - “We live in an imperfect age”.

Salvor Lermantov: - “He cannot have intended that!”

Inquisitor Crowl: - “The Emperor? Do not presume to judge”.

Salvor Lermantov: - “He cannot and you cannot fight for this... situation either, not if you know the truth of it”.

Inquisitor Crowl: - “But you have fought for it all your life”.

Salvor Lermantov:

- “I was proud to... I’ve seen many worlds, more than you maybe. I joined as a conscript⁹ and worked my way up. Sergeant, then Lieutenant, then Captain, learning how my troops thought, what they needed. I saw things that would make your stomach turn. We were in the vanguard of the Pellax Crusade, did you know that? Surely that counts for something even here. See, I learned to slaughter in His name. I learned to do it well and not to mind the wounds nor the losses of my squads. For we were doing the work of the just. We fought greenskins on Barrigath and learned how to hold a line against those monsters. We fought the faithless on Ilium and learned how to use their hatred against them. We killed so many: xenos, heretics. We torched¹⁰ them all. I lived to see them burn. We laughed when the heavy armor went in, not through spy but with righteous joy. We were his hammer, his instrument to smite¹¹ the unbeliever... Ahhahaha! Oh, I led them well, Inquisitor Crowl. They gave me medals. They showered us with accolades¹². I was so fervent¹³ that when it was over, they sent me here. My only request was a pilgrimage to Terra. I wanted to see it, just to see it on even a single day. But that was years ago. I cannot live it back again. This world has swallowed you up. It makes you mad. It gnawed¹⁴ at me and then it opened my eyes. I

finally saw what we'd been fighting for and what's that seeming. Mind you I couldn't go back, but I could still fight just the way I'd been trained to. I still had that".

Inquisitor Crowl (taking a sip from the glass):

- "No one doubts your courage. Only a brave man would have done what you have done (taking another sip and putting the glass on the desk). But they all come here: the brave, the cowardly, the mighty, the weak. In this place, in this room none of that matters".

Salvor Lermontov: - "You know, Inquisitor, don't you? You didn't bring me here to confess anything. You've already have whatever you need. What is this then? You want to listen to my stories?"

Inquisitor Crowl: - "You cannot tell me anything I do not already know".

Salvor Lermontov: - "Ah, the arrogance¹⁵, you have that too".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "Not arrogance".

Salvor Lermontov: - "No, of course not".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "Certainty, experience, a knowledge of how things must play out and when".

Salvor Lermontov: - "You know nothing".

(clock chiming)

Salvor Lermontov: - "This is just a game for you".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "No, I do not play games. To the extent I can remember I was always a serious child. I have become an even more serious man".

(Inquisitor putting his gun on the desk)

Inquisitor Crowl:

- "But... this gun here... this weapon... The emblem of what we live by. Unlike you I never learned to enjoy using it. It's been necessary, but never loved. It is a tool with only the outward¹⁶ appearance of craft to mask its true nature".

Salvor Lermontov: - "You are not asking me any questions?"

Inquisitor Crowl (smiling): - "So keen to get back to them".

Salvor Lermontov:

- "You do not ask because there is nothing more to discover. You know what I say is true. You know what you protect is rotten. Let it fall, let it all fall and save your soul".

Inquisitor Crowl: - “And that is all that needs to be done...”

Salvor Lermantov: - “If you were not blind, you would see it”.

Inquisitor Crowl (laughing):

- “Ahahahah, if I were not blind... That is an accusation. Borgeas, my tamed skull might agree with you, but his judgment is not entirely reliable either. Here’s the truth. You know nothing of blindness nor of sight. You see the physical world around you and think that it is all there is to see. How could you think otherwise? That was the way we trained you. If you had ever reached beyond that training, one of us would have come for you sooner. But there is more, much more out there. There is a horror you cannot even begin to imagine and it thirsts for every soul in this world and every soul on every other world and will not rest until it has devoured them all”.

(Inquisitor taking a pause)

Inquisitor Crowl:

- “Let it fall, you say... Let it all be destroyed so that the decay and corruption can be excised¹⁷ and we could all lead lives of spotless purity. There are powers dwelling beyond the void and they laugh to hear that. They witness every demagogue like you, every rabble-rouser¹⁸ with fire in his soul and clarity in his heart, and they laugh harder. For they know as I know that if this rotten carcass of an Imperium is brought down by you or me or by anyone else, then there’s nothing else left. Nothing left but the horror”.

(Inquisitor taking a pause)

Inquisitor Crowl:

- “Do you think we are winning this war? Does this world feel like a victorious world? I do not know. I am not a High Lord, but neither am I a fool. There are few weapons left. We cannot throw any aside now even if they do not meet your exacting¹⁹ standards of purity. And if you knew even for a second what losing meant, you could not stand the terror of it. The malice of all eternity is waiting for us, never resting, never pausing, probing for any weakness it can claw its way into”.

(Inquisitor taking a pause)

Inquisitor Crowl:

- "Look at these rusting walls, look at these decaying blocks. They are all that keeps the terror out. We are in a fight for survival, for our bodies, for our minds. In that fight I will take any weapon I can find no matter how foul or how unjust. And I will preserve it with every fiber of my dying body".

(Inquisitor taking a pause)

Inquisitor Crowl:

- "You are an honorable man, Salvor Lermontov. I regret to say it, but the galaxy spits on honorable men".

(clock ticking)

Salvor Lermontov: - "You say these things... They sound like wisdom but they are lies".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "Oh, yes?"

Salvor Lermontov:

- "You are an actor, a good one, you have to be. You pretend not to be disgusted by what you serve but you are. Deep down, perhaps, you are even honorable too, just like me".

Inquisitor Crowl:

- "Ah, so now you will try to convince me that we are cut from the same cloth, you and me. You will tell me that I am too good for the Inquisition, that its secrets have spoiled my soul".

Salvor Lermontov:

- "You do the Militarum a disservice. We were never as ignorant as we were supposed to be. And you never asked me what I was trying to do back before your interrogator found us. No one ever asks, they just hunt us down".

Inquisitor Crowl (angrily): - "Tell me now then".

Salvor Lermontov:

- "We were an army, a faithful army. We would have slit the High Lords throats if we'd been able to, but we would have fought for every other citizen of those hives. We were giving them hope. That was the dangerous thing. For the first time in living memory they were not informing on one another, stealing from one another, trying to kill their neighbor to claim med ration. Suppose you are right and we are losing this war. Now imagine this army raised from the masses. The ones

who were always told the Emperor cares most for. Imagine if the billions living here could all be made into fighters. Among them half-starved and wretched²⁰, but strong and determined and full of belief. That was my vision. They were afraid when we started. They did not stay afraid. There was a thing of beauty to see them fighting in those tunnels and they died far better than they had ever lived”.

Inquisitor Crowl: - “And you would have been their General?”

Salvor Lermantov: - “They followed me”.

Inquisitor Crowl: - “And you would be wise and uncorrupted and lead them into glory?”

Salvor Lermantov: - “I never wanted glory”.

Inquisitor Crowl (angrily):

- “Yes, you did. You still do. It always starts this way. You all say the same things. (sarcastically) I know the dangers, Inquisitor, but I will conquer them. Others have fallen into temptation, but I will resist. Others may succumb²¹ to hubris²², but I will remain pious²³. Give me power, just a little power and I will show you the truth of it. (seriously) There are entire worlds bled of life turning like tombstones in the void that are testament to what happens when those worlds earned the benefit of the doubt. List every name of infamy in the history of our species. Vangoridge, Vandire even Horus himself... And at the beginning of their story you will find a single soul pleading that I will be different. You still do not see the danger. You still do not see the crime”.

Salvor Lermantov: - “One that you are immune from”.

Inquisitor Crowl (smiling):

- “Far from it. Even now members of my own order are planning to bring me to a cell just like this one. It goes, so to say, with the territory”.

Salvor Lermantov: - “But still you are trusted with knowledge”.

Inquisitor Crowl: - “Someone has to be”.

Salvor Lermantov: - “Then tell me more of it”.

Inquisitor Crowl: “Your pardon?”

Salvor Lermantov:

- “You have warriors in your retinue²⁴. You will need more now. You will need those who know the underhives, who

have the trust of those who live there. Your interrogator will vouch²⁵ for me. We fought at one another's shoulder and she will not forget that".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "I am not sure you know Spinoza very well. She urged your destruction quite vehemently²⁶".

Salvor Lermontov: - "But you didn't grant her request. Is this your purpose? Not a game, but a test. That's why you are telling me these things".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "Be wary now".

Salvor Lermontov: - "It would be a waste to kill me, a stupid waste. I can still serve".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "You are a traitor".

Salvor Lermontov: "You do not wish to kill me".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "Do not tell me what I may or may not..."

Salvor Lermontov (interrupting): "You said you'd never learned to enjoy it, I believe you".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "It matters not what..."

Salvor Lermontov (interrupting): - "You hate this work".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "No more..."

Salvor Lermontov (interrupting): - "The stupidity, the waste... You hate it all".

Inquisitor Crowl (crying): - "Of course I do!"

(clock chiming)

Inquisitor Crowl (standing up): - "Enough! All that could be done has been done".

Salvor Lermontov: - "I can still fight".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "But you cannot listen".

Salvor Lermontov:

- "You are a judge of character, Spinoza told me that. You could see the pointlessness of this. You know I am loyal. You know I wish to serve. You know what led my people to do what they did".

Inquisitor Crowl (taking his gun): - "I do".

Salvor Lermontov: - "Then what purpose does this serve? To uphold the law? You are beyond the law".

Inquisitor Crowl: - "None of us are beyond the law".

Salvor Lermontov (angrily):

- “End it then, end this waste of time. For a moment you convinced me. You convinced me you might not be a slave, that you are a man in command of your own soul. Now I see that you are no different to the rest. You are as decayed as the Imperium itself. You are a part of it. Just another ruined part of it”.

(uneasy pause)

Salvor Lermantov:

- “Why do you hesitate? I am not afraid. Do it! I did just as you asked. Everything I told you was true”.

(Inquisitor making a shot, prisoner falling to the ground with a moan)

Inquisitor Crowl:

- “I know it was. As was everything I told you”.

(Inquisitor putting away his gun, striding towards the cell door, opening and leaving with dissatisfied sigh)

(cell door closing with a bang)

(clock ticking)