

Brood Wars

Lieutenant Jack Lafuer ran as fast as his power armor would allow through the darkened trenches. The gray landscape was a nightmare of demonic figures lit by the fires of the burning buildings reflecting off the thick cloud and smoke cover. Slipping through the mud his armor vibrated his vision with every heavy metallic footfall, gunfire and screams competing with the pounding of his own heartbeats. He could hear the zerglings closing in on him, their shrill screams getting closer as they bound down the trench after him. His adrenaline caused the arteries in his neck to constricting against his throat with every heartbeat, choking him as he gasped for breath, willing the servos in his armor to move faster. From just outside the trench he could hear the screams of his fellow marines and the hissing of their Zerg attackers.

Panic welled up in him as he raised his weapon and turned to face his pursuers. The two beasts stopped cold, their forelegs digging into the wet mud as they began stalking him, calculating their attack. The zerglings were the smallest of the Zerg, their quadruped metal like exoskeletons strung together with thick muscular tissue. Raising the rifle to firing position, Jack let loose with brut fire power. The gun jumped in his hand, and the read out counter of his ammunition spun down rapidly his last few hundred remaining shells ripped out of the gun's barrel at an alarming rate, filling the acrid air with the hot stench of burned propellant. The hardened armor piercing projectiles bounced off the beasts' skulls, keeping them at bay but doing little else. Suddenly there was an eerie silence and the weapon began to beep, the counter flashing at zero. A sudden calmness fell over Jack as he realized his fate; he was going to die. The zerglings shook their heads as if to clear them, assessing the few wounds some of the bullets had created. The two of them quickly resumed their stalking, Jack lowering his weapon and preparing for the onslaught. The two predators crouched, poised to launch themselves at him. He took a deep breath and held it, fighting the urge to close his eyes and starring one of the beasts straight in it's black eyes.

The zergling on the right leapt. It's feet had barely left the ground when Jack felt an intense, bright heat flash past the right side of his head with a hiss. The airborne predator exploded into a puddle of blood and ichor. Both Jack and the remaining zergling stared with surprise at the bloody puddle and then back at each other, neither beast nor man seeming to understand. Another flash streaked past him on his opposite site and struck the remaining zergling with deafening force, its body turned into a fine red mist,

dark red blood spraying across Jack's armor. Releasing the breath that had become trapped in his chest, he turned to look behind him.

Through the thick smoke of the trench Jack could see another marine sitting in front of a fire pit, wearing a pair of sunglasses and headphones. The larger, dark skinned soldier rocked back and forth to music Jack could not hear, red lines painted across his cheeks like something kind of war paint. The end of the marine's rocket launcher produced wisps of smoke, explaining the attacker's violent demise. Jack moved toward him, dragging his empty rifle along behind him his knees feeling extremely weak and his body shaking with post adrenaline rush.

"Who's in charge here?" Jack yelled, his voice coming much weaker than he had intended.

The dark skinned marine continued to rock back and forth seeming to ignore him or simply not hearing him through the loud music.

"Where is the air support?" Jack yelled again.

The silent marine raised his right hand and pointed upward just as a battle cruiser lumbered into view above the trench. The "T" shaped head of the craft swept over them, its mighty flood lights snapping on. Jack felt a sense of hope return as he waited to see the mighty cannon rain fire down on their Zerg attackers. In that instant he realized he had never been so happy to see the Navy pukes in his entire life. A smile crossed his face as he watched the battle cruiser take up a stationary position. Glancing back down the trench toward the direction he had just come he saw no sign of anymore of the insect like aliens. The sound of gunfire was becoming less and less, but the distant zerg cries continued. The mighty starship's searchlights began sweeping across the battlefield as Jack looked skyward wondering what the hell the Battle Cruiser's captain was waiting for.

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The UEDS *Novasgrad*, hung above the battle field of the ashen world of *Yagar Minor*. Her Captain Alexia Strotovich took a long drag on his cigar as he watched his friend and supreme commander Admiral Gerard Stukov glared out over the shattered Colonial base. The Zerg attack had been fierce and unsuspected, their best intelligence had placed the closest Zerg infestation some three sectors away, and yet

they were here, killing and destroying everything in their path. Alexia, felt helpless waiting for Gerard to order their attack, wondering why his old friend was delaying.

“Look at them Alexia.” Stukov croaked, his English thick with his Russian accent.

Alexia wondered why Gerard was not using their mother tongue. The Admiral had been using English since they had committed to reclaiming the colony worlds from the self appointed emperor Acturus Mengst.

“I know all about the Zerg, Gerard.” Alexia replied, his accent much lighter than the admiral’s.

“It is one thing to fight the Zerg, it is another thing to use them against men in battle, Alexia! I need to know you are willing to go the distance!” Gerard’s voice was cool, his eyes scanning the carnage below.

There was a long pause between the them, the hum of the might ship around them seeming to be the only sound able to penetrate the silence.

“I am with you, Admiral.” Alexia said with extra formality as he took another long drag on his cigar.

A young lieutenant walked up to Alexia’s chair and stood rigidly at attention. Taking yet another drag on his cigar, Alexia blew the smoke toward the bridge’s ceiling.

“Yes, Lieutenant.”

“Sir, large Zerg force is closing on the base’s position. Colony ground forces will be overrun in the next five minutes. Shall I sound battle stations and prepare to cover their withdrawal?” The lieutenant was eager anticipating Alexia’s orders.

“Tell the helm to take us into high orbit, we will be leaving immediately.” Stukov’s voice ordered flatly from his position at the front of the bridge.

The lieutenant’s eyes widened slightly with surprise, reflecting the emotion in Alexia’s heart. Looking down at Alexia from his otherwise perfect attention, Alexia could only stare back, not allowing his thoughts to be seen in his glare.

“Yes, sir.” The lieutenant stuttered.

Snapping a salute the lieutenant and made his way back to read of the bridge. Suddenly Alexia felt the ship lurch under him and the landscape began to move outside the view port and began to fall

slowly away. Alexia stared hard at the back of his friend's head, wondering what in the name of God Gerard was doing.

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Jack watched the Battle Cruiser rise slowly away as the ground began to rumble beneath him, sending vibrations up through his armor. He craned his neck higher and higher watching it rise away into the ashen sky, the steady roar of its engines fading slowly as it climbed. Jack looked down at his fellow marine, the man continued to rock back and forth to the music on his headphones. Looking back skyward he watched the engines of the Battle Cruiser disappear into the thick, volcanically ashen clouds of *Yaga Minor*. The roar all but faded, replaced by the distant, high pitch screams of Zerg warriors. Their cries grew louder and the rumbling of the ground increased, but Jack simply stood motionless in disbelief.

It was another full three minutes before four of the Zerg Hydralisks found them, their snake like lower bodies propelling them through the trench toward Jack and his silent compatriot. Their heavy jawed heads crooked as they approached, hissing and growling as they came. Their arms raised, ending in sharp steel like spikes, preparing to open his armor like an aluminum can and rip his flesh and bones into a shapeless gore. Glancing skyward one last time in hopes that the Battle Cruiser would swoop from the clouds and redeem him, Jack thought of his wife back on Earth, and how he wished he had told her he loved her more than he had.

Then they were on him, slamming his armored body to the ground, his rifle flying. Jack heard the rocket launcher go off one last time and saw the rocket streak over his head, missing its target. The loud thump of the other marine going down came with a wet bone crunching smack. The Hydralisk's spiked claws stabbed through Jack's body over and over, bringing a level of pain Jack had never dreamed the human body could experience or endure. The taste of blood filled his mouth his screams beginning to gurgle in his throat. He could smell the Zerg attackers' rotten breath as they cried out with battle like rage, seeming to mock his pain. The world began to fade, his vision narrowing into a black tunnel, the pain turning into a dull warm tingle. He looked skyward one last time and wondered nothing other than "why."