

Target sighted.

Steady.

Aim.

Fire.

Another figure drops in the mists, the red-oranges of its thermal signatures slowly bleeding into yellows, then greens, then cyanotic blues that match the ambient temperature around it.

It joins the expanse of many, many rotting or dry bodies, bones, and various detritus and viscera.

Foxen laid supine, perched flat atop the desiccated, blackened remains of a massive crystalline skull that hours before had spewed miasma and monstrosities. Now, one bombing strafe later, it is a husk, and a barely suitable sniper's perch. He would not have ever considered it normally, but in the mostly level plains of the battlefield past the shattered plateaus, there is no elevation save for the piled high corpses.

Which do, indeed, make their own convenient perch at points. His body blends with other bodies. However, they are fraking disgusting, and no. Not when there's other options.

There aren't a lot of options. The situation is absolute insanity. They are fighting an entrenched, superior, superpowered enemy in the heart of the enemy's own territory that they barely understand. Something is *happening* with that Chain in the sky, and no one is prepared for whatever the hell it is.

Pure. Fraking. Lunacy.

But his family had come, and that meant so had he.

Others were advancing. Reconnaissance teams, vanguard, etc. Flyndt had had a feeling, sensed something with that Chain. Something there, pulling him. What he'd found had been one of many corpses in this field, but an important one. Now, he recovered below with the rest of their small team, sheltered inside the depowered skull. And Foxen watched.

Another figure in the mind-altering mists that they were now very much avoiding. His scope optics revealed the lifeform without issue. He had no idea of it was one of the Brotherhood forces or one of the Children's.

It didn't matter.

It dropped all the same.

Steady.

Aim.

Fire.

Red bled to blue.

The Mandalorian exhaled, rolled his shoulders and flexed his calves to prevent stiffness from setting in, and set his eye back to the sights. The scope burn was an annoyance, but it was too low light in this "realm" for his goggles, and night vision wasn't optimal with those pyres burning out there to distort it. So he suffered the recoil, his rifle having steadily gouged a bleeding, bruised crescent under his eye and into his septum as the hours wore on.

Movement.

Foxen aimed.

But this one was not deep in the mists, luring various unfortunate Brotherhood mooks to their demise. It was growing larger, coming closer. The mists barely shrouded it.

The figure exits the mists. Male, Human or adjacent, approximately 1.83 m and 79 kg by build. The mind supplies files from memory of the face, from intel packages: this is the leader of one of three Mortis factions, branch: Truthwarden (ugh, gauche a name as the others), designation: P'sum, Loremi.

Walking out of cover like it's a Life Day surprise.

Okay, then.

Steady.

Aim.

Fire—

The male looks right at him.

Not in his direction, not as if spotting a sniper. That is different. No, he *looks directly at him. Meets the eyes, as if through the scope.*

Impossible.

Even with all other memory files, including intel and empirical evidence from previous combat, nothing like this has ever occurred. It is impossible. He is positioned over 2.8 km away. Even the most advanced of *jediit* senses should not be able to pinpoint more than his direction or, allegedly, the intent of his harm.

But Foxen knows. He *knows* P'sum is looking at him, not at the scope.

The male raised a hand. Foxen tensed, expecting some sort of electrical discharge called with equal impossibility from on high, or to be lifted into the air and crushed into component atoms. Instead, the figure beckoned.

What.

He beckoned again, harder, face displaying: expectation, impatience.

What. What no frak you.

He can't be serious.

At this point, the head of assholes calling themselves guardians of reality and justice and ethics etc. actually fraking waves both arms, *really* beckoning. Foxen reads his lips through the scope as he toggles it to a normal view.

"*Come here!*" the male is shouting, silent at this distance. "*Face me!*"

The Nautolan hybrid pulled his face back, feeling his eye twitch, not from pain but pure disbelief.

Does he actually think I would go over there.

Morons. Morons for days.

Exhaling *hard*, he aimed and fired.

And fraking *missed*.

The bullet drummed into another corpse just centimeters from P'sum. He saw it impact. Exhaling, he fired again.

Missed.

Aimed.

Fired.

Missed.

Aimed.

Fired.

Missed.

Fraking missed!

Foxen growled, watching, and saw this time the flutter of the male's robes resettle. No, Foxen wasn't missing.

The Human was *dodging*.

Dodging high caliber rifle bullets shot with perfect precision from 2.8 km away. While watching him, perfectly. As if he knew where he was, and where each bullet would be, and when it was coming.

Goddamn fraking *jediit* shit—

Yeah as if he was going *out there*.

Foxen was about to shoot again when P'sum spoke. His mouth made the words, "*Do I really need to come to you?*"

The Nautolan froze, calculating. That. That monstrosity out there wearing a skin suit. Coming over here. Where the half wounded team and, most of all, Flyndt was.

Absolutely the *frak* not.

Hissing silently, he sat up and slung his rifle over his shoulders, drawing his pistol and loosening knives in their holsters. The Nautolan checked all around his position, then quietly climbed down from the top of the crystal skull and set off across the battlefield.

Walk into a trap.

Yippie.

There were a few other combatants as he made his crossing. They fell quickly, and he reloaded on the move, unwilling to leave any possible *jediit* without *multiple* bullets in the skull and a pulse check. Traversal over the contested terrain full of decay, bacteria, monsters, and troops took him the better part of half an hour.

And yet, still, P'sum was there where he had last been standing, at the edge of the mists. This close, Foxen could determine his eye color. The male watched him approach, despite every stealth tactic he had. His long, narrow face made an expression that crinkled.

When the Nautolan was a paltry 11 m away and chambering two bullets, the Human spoke.

"There you are. I had wondered when you would be arriving. I've been waiting for you. We all have a part to play, you see. I have seen it."

First of all, pal, I'm not *here* for you.

Second of all.

Foxen aimed and fired.

P'sum jerked to the side. It was much more obvious now, this close, his age-streaked hair whipping as he sucked with preternatural alacrity.

"You're supposed to do better than this," the male said, and the tone was disappointed, almost, now.

Foxen stuck up his middle finger with his off-hand and fired again. And again.

The Human sidestepped, bent, turned to profile. Small, staccato movements, like dancing. It was beautiful and infuriating.

And it was not like dodging. It was like— omnipresence. Like he knew where the bullets would be before they even came.

There was only one method to accommodate that against a *jediit*.

Overwhelming fire.

Foxen lifted his pistol again, fired, and then *charged*.

P'sum spun away from the salvo, and his eyes widened only slightly as the massive Mandalorian barreled towards him. He dipped around the first thrown knife, then jerked his arm up as Foxen was suddenly upon him, slashing with his *Kal* dagger. A sleeve fell away, tangling for a moment about the Human's wrist as fabric crumpled, his bare arm unscathed. He flapped his hand to get it off, and Foxen used the opportunity to grip and yank, twisting with crushing force at the wrist.

The other male yelled, but the damage was done, and Foxen was already retreating, shooting again. His enemy was forced to resume dodging, even as he clutched his arm closer to his

body. Hopefully, it would be the dominant hand, and would hamper him when he went to draw that lightsaber at his belt—

The lightsaber floated into the air and activated into a blade of light.

Motherfraker—

The stench of his own skin bubbling and frying filled his nostrils as plasma carved towards him. Foxen caught the blade on his *beskar* bracer, but it didn't protect his upper arm as the saber touched over it, cooking him instantly. It recoiled, then struck again and again, slicing through the tip of one headtail, skimming over his hip. A silent soundless shriek escaped the Nautolan's broken throat as he stumbled back over the uneven footing of corpses, setting the horrible, horrible burning agony to ignore and lifting his blistered arm.

He fired again, emptying the clip. P'sum dodged each, but that was fine; it was distractionary.

A tap of his finger unleashed a hailstorm of silvery needles from the vambrace, whistling high and sharp through the air.

bmbmboomboOMOOMBObOOOOM!

The birds exploded one after another, arcing around in smoke trails, seeking their target. P'sum's lightsaber returned to his side in an eyeblink, trying to swat the miniature rockets from the sky. He avoided several, but with so many, even the ones going off *near* him were enough explosive force to trip the man. He went down, catching himself on that snapped wrist and shouting again.

The saber fell from the air and winked out.

Foxen darted in.

P'sum threw up his broken hand.

An invisible force slammed into the Nautolan, holding him back. He snarled, baring double rows of teeth, and struggled closer. The Human's other hand joined the first, and the pressure seemed to double. Foxen was pushed back a meter, shoving bodies on the ground along with him. His pistol ripped out of his grip. His headtails went back like he was standing in a windstorm. He growled and leaned forward into it, fighting to take a step.

Then another.

And another.

Sweat trickled down his brow, and P'sum's too. The Human rose from where he'd fallen, backing up even as Foxen advanced slowly but inevitably, an avalanche.

Backing up into the mists.

If he got in there, this fight was over. They made the enemy stronger, somehow, and poisoned the Brotherhood forces. They'd nearly died to that already. He was bleeding badly at those ripped open, half-cauterized wounds.

The Nautolan drew another knife and threw.

It wasn't pushed back like Foxen was. It flew true.

P'sum dodged.

Red eyes narrowed. Foxen aimed.

He threw again.

Dodge.

Aim.

Throw.

Dodge.

Aim.

Throw.

Dodge.

Three points, metal glinting from their positions buried in corpses, creating the array he needed.

"I saw better, from you," P'sum said, mists curling at his heels. "Again and again, you came, these visions...I don't understand why...it's happening, all of it, finally, the Chain...we'll be free...but you. You were supposed to be better. And if I'm wrong about that, then..."

Foxen didn't respond. He stopped trying to advance, felt himself slide backwards, chambered his arm. Threw two more knives, as hard as he could.

Pingpingpingping, echoed double, half seconds apart, a steel symphony.

Ipsium jerked twice, subtle movements of impact. They were not hard, after so much momentum being used to redirect, but they were precise. Two knives lodged in his lower back, embedded 12 cm at 44° and 13 cm at 46° respectively, having bounced off the others.

He coughed, and blood sprayed out of his mouth.

P'sum dropped to his knees, sagging forward, as if to catch himself as he fell. There were tears in his eyes. He made a noise of pain. The red on his lips was bright life against skin that has gone cyanotic blue in 47 seconds.

Foxen aimed for the renal arteries. Severing: successful. Estimated time to death due to major hemorrhage: 132 seconds. Too long for a Force-User. Possibility of healing.

The Nautolan took off at a sprint.

"I...I'm sorry, Dolori," the man said the name like Foxen says Flyndt's name in a whisper as they lie together, like love, "I...hrk...I di-didn't...want t' be... Right this t-ime, d...dear..."

The words had barely come before Foxen was slicing his throat, *beskar* slipping through sinew, veins, and cartilage of trachea. More blood, but less a spray, more a weeping flow, too weakly pumped. His chest rattled, breathless from lack of oxygenated blood, and he could no longer speak. He slumped forward, revealing the dark red carpet of his lower robe skirts, pristine above the knives, soaked below. His face smushed into the heel of another corpse. His gray eyes stared unblinking, still, drying already. Crystalline dust stuck to them and films.

150 seconds have passed. Estimate exceeded.

In the stillness of that moment, Foxen breathed. His nerves screamed with the pain of the burns, feeling as if they were still on fire. He stared at P'sum and felt...

"Dolori...Right this time..."

"...you were supposed..."

"...seen it..."

Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

Why.

Why was it like this.

Why did he feel used?

Again.

His hands wiped at the blood on them, as if to remove it on the armor. The weaker hand trembled.

No.

It has not. Killing has not felt like this since the first year in the pit. The only other thing he felt then besides rage, anger at his enslaver, anger at himself for failing to escape. It is. Violation.

Used.

No. No no no. Deny.

Deny.

But wiping the blood off does not change it.

The Foxen— the body begins to shake. Respirations: elevated. Heart rate: elevated. No. Deny. Not here not now. The body cannot panic now. It is a battlefield.

Not safe. Insecure.

There is mission to be done.

Protect Flyndt secure retreat kill the frakers this is the mission.

Stop.

He sets the pain of wounds, the panic, the *violated* to ignore. All of it. Set status: ignore ignore ignore.

Ignore.

Ignore!

Set self: ignore.

Confirm.

Confirm.

The asset is a body with a mission. It advances, retrieves the knives from the corpse. Retrieves the other knives. Detects motion from the eyes in the peripheral. Raises pistol 186°, aims, fires.

A body drops in the mist.

This body moves.

Set task: return to defensive position and continue the killing of enemy. Drop any thing that comes near. Continue the mission.

Do not think about the man who looks at you and says—

"I've been waiting for you—"

"Good job, pet."

"Well done."

"I knew you'd come..."

Do not.

Think.

Ignore.

The body climbs corpse piles, reaches the skull, assumes its position, and aims at the mists, ignoring the glow of periodic bonfires as the sights adjust. Ignoring pain. Ignoring it all.

Awaiting: next target.