

[J_lekIrrian]

Hey, Ace,

How you doing, *alor'ad*? Well I hope. Elequin and Jasper's visit was nice, don't be too hard on her when she gets home for whatever she did. Mentioned you two had a fight but wouldn't tell me what, and I figure, with you, if it's a fight at all it must have been hell. Just know I've got your backs, whatever it is.

Life with the *Voidbreaker* crew is...well. I'm not dead yet? We'll see how this next op goes. I got pulled for special assignment on this deploy because they need more demo experts and commanders. It's some karking mess. Ingrained Collective forces, recruiting from the nearby population or bombing the roads and rigging the hyperlanes with explosives, the works. Command doesn't want to share what we're after here, or what they're after, but it's enough to go to ground warfare and prepare for a siege.

I'm going to be gone for who knows how long, so I wanted to let you know. Comms blackout, but I'll still be writing you every day I'm there, because I'll be thinking of you every day like always. *Oya manda, alor'ad*.

I'll see you on the other side.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

Things are complicated. Really karking complicated. My squad and I haven't even gotten boots on ground yet because the fleet can't get past the enemy's without tripping over some mine or another. We're sitting mynocks out here. They want to get one of the Users here to guide us blind while a fighter screen gets themselves blown to pieces.

Have to go.

[J_lektrian]

Ace,

This may be the single worst battlefield I have ever been on.

They're making history, here. Ops predict the conflict to be one hundred days out at least, so for all I know, way these things go, I won't see the end of this for another couple years standard. Got trenches for klicks, explosives coming down by the hour, and there isn't even a no-man's-land because the damn cyborgs that the Technocrat barbarians have made out of people don't care about charging over mines and into blasterfire.

I'm going to suggest we break camp and go guerrilla. There's forests that haven't been burned yet in the northern hemisphere. But we've already got too many deployed here to make any kind of full evac. It'd just be splitting forces.

I need more time. And more maps.

And more goddamn bombs.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

Remind me why punching a superior officer in the mouth is a bad idea.

This *shabuir* of a Captain won't listen to a word I say. Doesn't care I've been at this kark since before his mum thought of him, just that we're here now. And sure, normally, I'd bend to rank, I get it, I'm not here to be some old man clinging to his pride and shouting at the sky, but—

Ace, he's a karking mongoloid. And if he doesn't kill us, I'm going to strangle him.

Why did I never take a damn promotion.

-J

[J_LeKlrian]

Ace,

Enemy line is damned near unbreakable. Four frakking years of this war and I still don't know how the Collective has managed this much force— ships, guns, soldiers, all of it. It's insane. The Users can't even do much, thanks to all their anti-Force tactics and death squads, and the Technos quite literally can saw through our ranks. With saws. On their arms, or what's replaced them.

Good thing I have the *Resol'nare*. I'll show them unbreakable. Take our bodies, you *shabs*. We'll still be here spitting in your faces until every one of us is gone.

-J

[J_lekIrrian]

Ace,

We've talked about the enemy psychology a hundred times before, it seems, but Oligard and all his people really are men and women obsessed. And the thing is...I understand that. I haven't just seen that, I have lived that. I still do. You recognize it, see? That kind of hate. It eats you alive and one day it will kill you, and acting with it only makes it grow stronger.

I had those demons every day on Zygerria. They took my heart first, and then my arm, and then my leg, and I suspect my soul. They took my mothers, my friends, my brothers, my comrades. They took everything. And I gave it, to see those "masters" burn too.

I think Oligard just wants the galaxy to burn. Any politician can spew speeches about freedom, but nothing is an excuse for genocide, and nothing but hate drives hate like that in turn.

Whatever he wants, whatever they all want...this isn't about Users or Nulls. It's just about hurting too much to do anything else.

I have to go. Mess is up and not much chance to eat. Hope you're safe.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

It's only been a week but it feels like an eternity. I don't think I've actually slept yet. Watch rotations, and meetings, briefs, field ops, supply runs, you name it. I spent my off hour talking some kid down from the blaster in his teeth and then got called up right after I closed my eyes by ion cannons on the flank saying hello to our AT-ATs.

I hope you're sleeping better than I am.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

Raiding patrol went by the city today. They got this nice gateway that reminds me of Ryl architecture. I took a holo for you. I know buildings aren't really your thing but I could imagine my mums walking under it and that was a nice thought, and I like sharing those with you most. First one in awhile.

Check in tomorrow.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

Today was a fighting day.

Had actual contact instead of just bombs. Company went up over the west approach. Bridge there, too much a choke point, they've got it covered, but we could take the ravine below. Detonated the bridge, then it was mostly covering fire and clean up on the retreat. Pretty sure I pulled something on the climb back down with my squad. My shoulder hurts.

The death count was high when I landed, and it's climbing fast. I'm praying to Kikalekki for anything other than a massacre.

Think that sometimes I shouldn't be. Fast and brutal might be better than this slow dying.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

Not much opportunity to write today. Bridge up success has captain pushing for advance. Have to move. Could be walking onto mines. Will definitely be exposed. But orders, right?

Bad feeling.

Liked it better when I got to disobey your orders. Brig was comfier.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Thirty-three percent of our forces are dead.

They're going to send more.

I've got more letters to write.

My condolences.

[J_LeKlrian]

Ace,

We've relocated our position at great cost, like I said. I told the Captain he was dead wrong to move the whole battalion like that. Screamed in his face, really.

He had me arrested. I'm writing this under watch. Least the privates slipped me my pad, but I gotta give it back before they get in trouble.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

Day two of grounding. Think I get my court marshall tomorrow. We'll see. I'm getting a lot of enlisted coming by and telling me they think of running away, or mutiny, or kark like that. I tell them to shut up. Hold the line. Respect the order. We don't have that and we'll fall apart.

Been playing sabaac with them between rotations. They're good kids. They don't deserve to die out here.

None of them ever do. *Aay'han*. I will remember them.

-J

[J_LeKlrian]

Ace,

My trial was today. Short and sweet. The Captain, Quartermaster, Security Officer, and Captain's Commander. They essentially told the Cap to piss off and get back to the war on. He wanted me to at least dig trenches. I waved my stump at him.

The damn *hut'uun*.

I'm back on duty, regardless. Commander pulled me aside to talk ops. Gave him my thoughts. We move again in thirty six hours. He'll consider dispensation of a line company to me.

Talk later.

-J

[J_lekIrrian]

Ace,

I know you're not actually getting these, because I'm not actually sending them, but— but I still feel like asking, anyway. Isn't that the dumbest, most curious, human thing? How we reach out for each other, or even just the idea of each other? It's a lie but it's comforting anyway, seeking solace like this. I can imagine it pretty easily. Me going on and on and on to you like always and if it's bad, real bad, that you feel moved enough or maybe generous enough that day, and you'll send that little dot. Just that damn dot, and I just feel so much better. Because it doesn't have to be *anything*, it's already *everything* to me, it means what it means to us, and you know that, so...so it's enough.

I put a dot on the top of my tent in marker, above my pillow. I pretend it's you waving back.

-Jax

[J_LeKlrian]

You know that kid I mentioned? The one that wanted to off himself on day two. His name is Keefer. He's taken a liking to me, probably on account of the support system, and possibly on account of some misplaced hero worship. He and the others in his unit think I'm more worth following than the Cap. Can't shake them off the idea either.

No excuses, I think I'm adopting another one. Again. I sometimes think, why do I keep doing this when chances are none of us are getting out? But my answer is in the question. It's before the question at all.

What do we owe to each other?

This much, at least.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

Mixed news. I did get that company, so I'm back in my Sergeant stripes.

On the other hand, Cap's first assignment to us is a suicide run. Straight charge on the enemy flank, diversion for setting up some artillery. He's going to get vengeance on me by getting all these kids killed.

I'm going to shoot him.

-J

[J_lekIrian]

Arcia Cortel, I love you. Please know that. Without doubt, without expectation, without condition or want. I love you, *alor'ad*.

If I meet my mothers and Kikalekki today, I will tell them about you.

-Irian

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

Keefer is dead. So is a quarter of the company. We did our damndest.

Command got a call again.

I finished helping carry the wounded back from our march and shot the Cap in his knees.

Nobody seems torn up.

Now if I could just karking stop crying.

[J_LeKlrian]

Ace,

On bad days like this, I think of my mothers, and I think of you.

I know how hurt you have been, to be like you are. I don't have to know *how*, just that there was pain. We've always been alike that way. We are soldiers. We cannot be anything else. I don't think either of us even knows how. We've been running and fighting and not stopping for so long, sprinting for one crusade to the next, and that's all we know.

You asked me once, why I still call you *alor'ad* when you were an Admiral by the time you left Dajorra for Kias. Serious answer? Ranks do not mean the same thing in Mando'a. You were my captain when we met. Literally, captain, your officer position, but also chief, leader...guiding principle, true north. To me you were *inspiring*. Worth following, committing to. That has not changed, so why call you any different? It was never about rank. Not once you stuck me in the brig, anyway. Discharge meant I was not under your command anymore. Just in your orbit. And no place I would rather be.

Most parts of me fight for them. My mothers, that is. For what they meant. And for everyone else. But part of me fights for you, because we are soldiers, and I haven't slept in so long, in decades, and I dream of drowning sometimes, or a bolt or bomb that just ends it for me, and you— you have always felt like a place to lay my head down as much as a reason to get up again.

-J

[J_LeKlrian]

Ace,

Never again, I said that, I *said that*, and I am a karking liar.

Cap is in medical, Command is done, and I'm in charge of this battalion now. So much for going quietly to the *Voidbreaker* to keep my head and horns down and try to help a couple *ade*.

I'm going to spend the night memorizing another two hundred and eight names and specialities and pray they don't all end up under folded flags.

-J

[J_lekIrrian]

Ace,

Had a scramble today, getting our comms back online. Enemy took out an array back at our last coordinates and it karked up the lines. Otherwise it's been, a little literally, quiet.

I've been organizing the troops into assault companies, artillery companies, and scouts. Got my demo crew and ops and comms at hand too. Medical is sparser than I'd like so I sent a request for more. Watch it get approved in a hundred years, nevermind a hundred days.

Twenty-two in. Month's past on Kiast, right? Good one for you, I hope. Remember to rest a little. Let Elequin nag you for me. The universe is better when you laugh with your eyes and a scowl you don't mean.

-J

[J_lekIrian]

Ace,

Another failed op today. Assault line couldn't breach, had to retreat. I'm considering something creative with sustained electromagnetic pulse detonations. Would knock out our tech too, but enough exposure in an ion field will eventually fry even non-standard cybernetic shielding, and if we can kill their cybers, we have a door.

Kids are brave. I'll be brave for them too and light this whole place up.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

OYA, ACE, WE GOT THOSE SHABUIRS.

The biggest karkload of consecutively detonated EMPs I've ever had the pleasure setting off worked. We punched through and mowed down these Techs when they stalled. Overran a camp of less enhanced Liberation Front and reestablished ground. Holding it for now.

First advancement yet. Take that!

Got to go. Not safe. Can't get stupid after one foothold.

-J

[J_lekIran]

Busy today. Just reminding you you're stunning. You can take that as beautiful, or as in "I will stun a *di'kut* with this blaster if he does not get back to work" but I personally prefer it in every possible sense of the word.

Thinking of you always, Ace.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Hey, Ace,

I am sorry to have not written much, beautiful. I lost my pad in an explosion – I'm intact this time, promise – and there was just too much going on to build myself a new one for awhile.

More skirmishes, more battles. We lost the southern half of the continent and have relocated to the northern hemisphere in the jungles like I had suggested...months ago, now. It's humid and hot and we have trench foot without even having trenches, in this climate. Never so glad to have a metal leg. Only half the bad.

Should be more regular letters soon. We're pushing on with hit and run attacks. Won't give up. Not until I'm back to you. You know, metaphorically speaking.

-J

[J_lekIrrian]

Ace,

We have an advantage for once, alor'ad. Their biggest Techno soldiers can't fit between the jungle trees without a lot of deforesting first, and that kark is loud. Gives away their positions if they want to use a frontal assault, so they're left as big ass targets or stuck sending in Lib troops. Meanwhile we're set up nice in this bush and dropping fire from the treetops.

Little bit of hope. Makes it better. And harder.

-J

[J_LeKrian]

Ace,

Reality of the situation must have finally sunk in for command, or maybe they got what they wanted, finally pulling the Collective forces far enough out of their initial position at the city staging. Artifact? POW? I don't know. But we've got orders. Scatter and Recall.

It's been more than a hundred damn days, I think, but I love count. Doesn't matter to me.

We might make it out.

-J

[J_lektrian]

In my head, I like to imagine I'd get back and I'd see Elequin there waiting for me. Probably with Jasper. Maybe Atts, if she's up for it, so that means Marick would be with her. Probably some of the Voidbreaker crew, they've been real friendly despite just meeting me.

I know you wouldn't come, so I don't imagine that, because the appeal is more in just... The possibility, you know? But I know you'd KNOW I was back. You'd be thinking. You'd care.

I don't know if I tell you enough how grateful I am that we're friends. I know that isn't easy for you. And I appreciate the space I do get in your life.

With you, I just imagine getting home finally, and I'll get to fall into bed and check my messages, and you'll be there waiting for me with a dot. And that's just the best thing I can think of right now.

See you soon,

-J

[CORTEL.1313]

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[CORTEL.1313]

It seems I have some reading to do. It is good your withdrawal was successful and that you are back on your current assignment.

[CORTEL.1313]

What I mean is that I am glad you are back.

[J_LeKtrian]

Kikalekki, I missed you.

Heya, *alor'ad*.