

The war at the river Zitar Nuo

By

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One

The Zitar Nuo was the great river set winding between a valley and two mountain ranges. It sat strategically between the battle-lines of two corporations whom lusted after it. Each company's employees were set to fight the other, their machines grinding through the dirt of the riverbanks while sinking ever deeper into its muck and mire. The soldier's boots sinking into the mud, sucking on them as they struggled to break free. Each company's soldiers running from the massive machines pounding the muddy ground even more. The men of the Nenthar Corporation set against the Xelon Dru Company. One must hold the land, power, and only one. The Xelon Dru Corporation slung fire right in the water of the Nuo pounding the Nenthar Corporation's loyal soldiers with heavy mortars, fire mortars and then the gas bombs. The Nenthar's shrunk from the withering fire, digging into the mud forming a deep defensive trench line using machines and monster equipment's straight from the factories, the silicon and steel machine factories.

The Nenthar soldiers sucked precious filtered air in their sealed suits, their air conditioners strapped to each of their backs, their helmets protecting their face and lungs from the noxious gases. Their suits also tapped with computer electronics and antenna. Another wave of gas streamed from the splintering shells as they sank into the muck, plasma shooters and rifles, useless as they dangled from straps about the Nenthar soldier's shoulders. Abreon in his suit was a trained Nenthar buried deep into the pits riding upon the platform of a machine which task was to drill forward and underneath their defensive line and under no man's land. The machines drilling auger was steaming hot punching vertically down under the muddy ground. Abreon turned the machine about, the machine bogging in the thick mud, as he spoke into a helmet speaker, "Drean, the driller is choking in the muck, it's not drilling down any further."

A mortar flew overhead reaching the location of another Nenthar trench, blowing up soldiers and equipment. The commander of the corporate unit of 1 Beta, Drean swearing at the blast and yelling at the struggling Abreon, the driller and Abreon caked in thick brown mud, "Keep drilling! We need the trench deeper to prepare for the final assault," referring to an assault over the Zitar Nuo, which would later prove to be fruitless.

Abreon yanking at the driller controls, but the driller seizing up completely consumed by mud packed in all around it. He struggled, breathing heavily, sweat pouring down his face, behind his mask as a mortar hit the ground nearby, throwing muck up everywhere. Most of the Nenthar soldiers began to pull back from the unfinished forward trenches to rearward previous dug in older and deeper bunkers. They scurried back timidly awaiting the offensive cease-fire that still had yet to occur. Abreon cursing to himself, giving up on the driller, jumping off as his suit warned him that it was now running off emergency power. Abreon leaped off the machine into the mud, forcing himself back, through perpendicular front line tunnels, like a sewer rat. Abreon struggled as a display within his helmet began flailing red as he pulled himself along, past others and their suits, the mist of poison gas thick. Abreon yelling to his commander, "Drean help me, damn you!"

Drean hiding in a well-placed bunker, the guns of the Nentharr in the distance and rear of their positions, barking back into his suit microphone, "Abreon, I'm in authority over you!"

Abreon pushing himself through the mud, screaming, "I'm going to die!"

Drean, "I am your superior officer! Hold your position, dig!"

Abreon falling into the mud, standing as the flashing red helmet indicator grew even more urgent. Once power shut off he would not be able to filter the poisoned air. He would suffocate to death. Abreon wiped his mask off with a muddy forehead, soaked in thick, brown mud, water from the river seeping into the corporations defensive line trenches. Abreon struggled into still another trench, the computer within his suit whispering more subtle warnings:

"Warning, you have twenty seconds of remaining power."

Abreon screaming to his commander, "You used me and you're going to let me die!"

Drean, "No! You wasted yourself! You're a Nentharr soldier!"

"You have ten seconds of remaining power."

Abreon finding a bunker, "Come on!" pulling the airlock door open and grinding it closed behind him. Abreon punched in the detox codes on its key panel the airlock drawing any residual air remaining inside then refilling it with a fog of cleansers.

Abreon, "Please!"

The airlock cycled through the cleansing procedure, pulling back out the cleansers, finally depressurizing the unit with clean purified oxygen.

Abreon's suit shut down, now without power. He gasped for breath while snapping his helmet off. He fell back to the floor of the airlock choking but recovering as he took deep breaths of fresh air. Through those gasps, he spoke into his helmet, "Drean?" You deserve all the hell you get! You know that! I'm alive, damn you!" He pulled himself up, opening the second internal door open as he looked at the outside door's portal window. He could see several other men, outside clawing at the door. He closed the second door behind him, as one of the eight men grabbing Abreon and his helmet. One yelled into it, "Save us! Save us! There is no food or water here!"

Another one snatching the helmet, as Abreon stood, then fell back to a bunker wall, the other one screaming into his helmet microphone, "We're all going to die! The gas is thick outside! The mortars push us down further, every day!"

Finally, Drean speaking through Abreon's helmet, "I am your commander. You will speak to me with respect! Have patience, your time will come."

Abreon standing there amongst them, shaking, "Let me see that!" stumbling over, taking the helmet back, the words of Drean reverberating as the bunker shuttered and as a mortar impacted the

ground nearby, Dreon continuing "Listen to me! We need new tranches and shafts under the 23rd quadrant... HQ wants us..." Abreon turned the communicator off line, shaking his head in disgust. He looked at those around him, a rag bunch. He sat down next to the closed air lock noticing they were in shambles and the fact that they still had their plasma rifles over their shoulders, "We need to conserve the battery life of the helmet transceiver. My suit is out, but my helmet has its own draw."

All eight of them sat on the floor of the bunker. They looked like a morally and physically destroyed group of men most with their suits half off or simply naked. They seemed hungry and thirsty but at the ready to murder, with their guns slung. One of them who was sitting, hunched over, "Your name?"

"Abreon is my name. I need the helmet switched off because we need to know when the gas and mortars have stopped, so that we can continue through the trenches. We will send out a communique every six hours."

A second: "Do you have any water?"

"I have some water rations hooked into my suit."

A third looking up, "Do you have any food?"

"I have none."

They hunkered down near the airlock, waiting.

The second night of Abreon's imprisonment within the bunker the fire light flashes from the gun battery's outside launching mortars no longer streamed through the six-inch acrylic plate that formed the internal and external airlock windows. He looked around, now just the pale overhead lights illuminating the inside of their bunker. One of the surrounding eight began to shake, then after a few more hours he broke, screaming out to them all, "Let me out! Let me out! I'm going to die! We are going to die in here!"

Abreon pulling him away from the airlock, "If you leave we'll all die!"

The bunker shaken by another mortar and another causing the internal lights to flicker off, putting them in near total darkness.

Another one screaming, "I can't see! I'm blind!"

A second naked soldier, "Shut up! Shut up!"

Abreon struggling with them, "Listen! Stop it, all of you!"

"I can't see!"

The second soldier grabbing the one who could not see, "Shut up!"

The first "Let me out! Let me out!"

The soldier who grabbed the third soldier beating the one who could not see, "Shut up!" punching the poor man, "I'll show you about seeing!"

Abreon letting the soldier he detained slump to the ground pulling the third soldier off the second, punching him then shaking him in a bear hug till he was exhausted and finally dropping him to the ground. The soldier slunk back into a corner and began to cry. Abreon wiped the sweat from his head and sat back down sipping on some of his suit water. He closed his eyes, the other soldiers, sobbing or whimpering returning to their fitful sleep.

That night came and went. The next day passed and as the night grew long, Abreon decided it was time to send out a broadcast. He flicked on the power to his helmet transceiver ready to send out another status update. He upended his helmet with its power indicator glowing red in the darkness. He spoke into its microphone, "Drean, Drean? When are the gas mortars going to end? Drean? Is anyone there? When are they going to end?"

Another of the eight in the dark yelling at Abreon, "They'll end when we die, of thirst!"

A second whispering, "Soon."

Drean from Abreon's helmet, "Any moment now! If our calculations are correct, the battle should end soon!"

One of the soldiers in the bunker with Abreon, "Shut up, everyone stop crying!"

Drean, "Then we can fight again."

The second soldier again, "I can't see you!" coughing, "I still can't"

Drean squawking from inside Drean's helmet, "Then we can dig again."

Another crying, others scratching, some words, others with only tired primal fears. Drean now livid, "Just shut up!" The first soldier as Abreon's eyes widened, "Kill him!" as the soldier snatched his gun, the second unknowing, firing in the general direction of the crying voice, the clear plasma melting into the chest of that man eating a hole the size of two fists through his flesh. Abreon yelled, "No!"

The crazed soldier holding his rifle out, finding Abreon, through the glare of the gun's light. Abreon dared not breath, the soldier, "I'll kill you too." as the crush of sound from inside the bunker ceased. The now hysterical soldiers became silent as the mortaring outside ceased and all was quiet. Drean yelled from Abreon's helmet, "What the hell is going on in there!"

One of the soldiers, "They stopped shelling!"

Another, "Soon we will be able to leave the bunker!"

Then all of them began to push, obtaining a view through the airlocks windows and out toward the field, to watch and see when the haze of gas would lift. Dreon, "See of course! Our calculations were correct!"

Abreon disgusted switching his helmet off and waiting for the poison clouds to break. They cycled through the airlock and stepped out into the war torn barren world around them. They looked around, all brown with mud and ash. Abreon took a deep breath of the fresh air. They took the time to look up at the sun, the horizon, for they were between moments of war, bombs, gas, mortars and firebombs. Many had died from the gas, as they're suited bodies lay everywhere, but the corporation would be pleased.

Abreon was stuck inside the machine and the machine drove him on toward his mark. Now the Nenthlar Corporation's heavy cannons and launchers began to work and flex their muscles of steel and grease, as they cyded between fire and rest. Each moment after grinding moment those turrets began to launch their steel shells directly at the Xelon Dru first across the Zitar Nuo into their trenches and in to their bunkers, smashing them. The Xelon soldiers seizing a break in the onslaught dimbed up and out of their muddy trenches and charged from where they were most safe onto water craft the Nenthlar guns lowering their sites to continue firing on the closing water craft. They followed the encroaching Dru, the mortars hitting the water with impact, the shock waves overcoming their boats in great gulps of liquid and shards of metal. Many soldiers were thrown into the air, ripping them and their boats to pieces.

As the Nenthlar cannons fired ruthlessly on their encroaching targets, a significant quantity of boats and surfing jeeps still were able break onto the Nenthlar beachhead territory. The generals of the Nenthlar Corporation called a limited withdrawal their men struggling to free themselves of the dirt and muck surrounding them, all of them dimbing up and out of their trenches to flee from the pushing Dru. Abreon seeing the retreat dragged several bodies to the foremost trench wall, stacking them, standing upon them as they sunk into the mud, other soldiers shored up his flanks, some stacking bodies in like fashion, "We have to fight hard for the Nenthlar Corporation!"

Another near to him, gun ready over the waft of the iron and steel, "We are the people's soldiers!" The soldier thumbing up to him then firing his weapon at the onslaught of Xelon soldiers making their way over the beachhead and into no man's land. Abreon lowering his weapon and overtop the waft of stacked bodies, firing bursts of molten rounds at the charging Xelon Dru. Abreon screamed as they began to fall from the hot accelerated plasma ejecting out from his gun and others, the charge of the Xelon slowing as they returned their fire from their own laser rifles. The momentum ground down but it continued. They were nearing the Nenthlar trenches.

Abreon, "They're gaining!"

Another Xelon Corporate solider, "What are we to do!"

Still another, "Have no fear!"

Abreon critically sized up the situation as the enemy pushed forward from the badlands of the Nenthar Corporation, up from the shell shocked no man's land, up from the thick mud and corpses, to the front trenches of the Nenthar Corporate front lines, needing to act. Abreon yelling out to one of his loyal soldiers, "Soldier, aim for their torsos! Aim for those with the rank of B4."

The soldier rotating in a wide angle scope, the view port finding his keyed targets, the face of the loyalist full of sweat dripping from his head onto his face and down his chest, "Yes, sir!"

Others men or crying in the background, as Abreon switched from semi-automatic to automatic, Abreon squeezing the trigger, the fine line of plasma warping the air about as the Dru fell, but it was too late as one lunged at him grabbing the barrel of his the weapon. Abreon fell back. Abreon clawed back, releasing the trigger, depressing a thumb-slide upon the weapon, a knife releasing from the stock of the weapon. Abreon screamed in terror, "Die!" grabbing the uniform of the Dru, pulling him down, stabbing him in the throat, throwing him over, as he snatched his gun, firing in a long line of heat, killing those Dru who were now in the trenches with him. He did not want this.

Another leaping onto Abreon, struggling with him, Abreon fearing his own mortality gripping his knife tight, turning the blade and ramming the knife into the abdomen of the Xelon Dru then pulling it out. In tears, Abreon rammed the blade back into the man tearing it out of the other side, turning as he saw yet another soldier upon him, this one with her own held above her head ready to plunge it into him, as another Nenthar shot her with a plasma burst right into her back. She fell, Abreon wiping the tears from his eyes, trying to be proud toward him: "Good shot soldier."

The Nenthar soldier, "We need to head to the rearward trenches!"

Abreon running from the Dru soldiers, leaping over dead Nenthar's some from the gas while others from the Dru Corporation. As Abreon ran, his boots sucked down into the mud, pulling him, he could hear men screaming, others fighting. He passed a Dru as he ran toward the rearward trenches, banked toward a closer one, tripped over a soldier and fell into the mud. He struggled as a Xelon Dru found him, putting him up from the muck, the Xelon strong and angry, "You're going to die!" The Xelon shook Abreon punching him in his head, Abreon then falling back into the mud from the blow. He rolled, unable to grab his knife deep in the mire or a gun, as the Dru angled his rifle, to the chest of Abreon from above him. The Dru grinned a toothy grin, ready to pull the trigger, as his chest exploded over Abreon, as a long hot line of plasma streaked over from another Nenthar in the distance hitting the Xelon. He fell ripped apart. Abreon wiped his face again, full of blood and mud, grabbing the Dru's rifle. Abreon pushed himself up with the rifle and continued his retreat.

From the other side of the river the Dru Corporation aimed their artillery just beyond the approaching Dru charging soldiers. They list the sky with shells, which rained back down on Nenthar territory. Abreon heard the high-pitched screech of an incoming shell. He leapt, timing it, as the shell hit the ground behind him the blast blowing a gaping pit into the ground, bucking Abreon in the process. The shell impact threw Abreon to the ground, covering him in mud, fire from plasma rifles streaking over his head. A soldier cried out, grabbing him as he stood up. Abreon fell again, kicking the soldier away from him. He found a gun and fired at him, the soldier falling. Abreon looking back at still more soldiers

firing at him and other retreating Nenthar's. He ran and leaped onto the surface wall of a second defensive trench line. Abreon climbed over the wall and down into the trench. He found a tunnel, crouched down and snaked his way down it, leaving the Dru behind, leaving most of the remaining Nenthar's behind. He scurried down the tunnel, took another and then hit his head on a steel supporting ring knocking himself unconscious.

Two

“Drean, why must we bore the tunnels deeper and longer?”

The Nenthar were hit hard by the Xelon Dru's offensive. It was strong and effective at eliminating over twenty-two percent of the Nenthar's forces, but they managed a counter offensive, which pushed the Xelon back to their own shores. Now they needed to work on their tunnels again, their small but extensive connecting crawl-ways and on extending their excavations right under the Zitar Nuo itself. The Nenthar were continuing in that struggle, in order to reach under the banks of the Dru. If they could do this, they could attack the Xelon Dru from the shore itself without mounting a sea assault. They could swarm the Dru with soldiers from their own corporation right from the tunnels themselves and overtake them. Each tunnel was torso high, so that you had to crawl to enter or leave the channel, each supported by metal O-rings. The metal rings supported the soft earth above from caving in and from the earth below.

Abreon knew the answer, from his helmet, which was in his hands, “We must bore them deeper so that we can attack the Xelon Dru and crush them and their corporation!”

The Xelon Dru was a mining company. Their desire was to seize, envelope and destroy the Nenthar Corporation while in the process taking its land for strip mining. The Nenthar Corporation was a data and network facility, supporting other corporations and governments. Without its existence, other companies could not exist. A pause from Drean and from Abreon's helmet, “You must take one of the drillers from depot 33E and continue excavating tunnel 33, commander Uewno will assist you further.”

Uewno was there in his suit, lesser soldiers standing and waiting with equipment for use in the process of elongating the tunnel 33. Abreon sat on the tunnel floor next to his driller, a small belted treaded device, made to fit into the channel and drill forward while self-propelling itself. The rear was equipped with a sled with controls on the handles. Abreon could lay headfirst on the saddle and control the drill by its handles. Abreon talking with one of the soldiers next to him, “I was in the bunker and one soldier stood up, just blowing the other away.” That soldier, “Hell is what you make of it.”

Abreon, “I see, but...”

Uewno, “Each one of you had a job, and that job is to further the cause of the Nenthar Corporation. You are here to preserve your way of life. You left your wives, husbands, your children, your families, your homes; your possessions at the company controlled and regulated living barracks. You are soldiers, citizens of this corporation. You worked and toiled for us, slaved for us. We honor your dedication to the corporation, but now more than ever you must realize they are the threat to us and our society. Those Xelon corporate raiders, without souls seek to take your stock options and your common shares! You must fight back for what you own and what you will pass on to your children. In so doing, you will follow my orders and from your senior commander Drean. We are your managers and we are corporate. In the end, I follow my orders too. We all answer to the Chief Executive Officer and President of the company.”

Abreon to that solider in tired futility, "But, he died."

Uewno retorted angrily, "So, what of it? You're stepping on a corpse right now solider and there is another one next to you. Look about you can see them all along this trench, buried in mud, flesh and bone torn apart."

Abreon capitulating, "Yes, I see."

Uewno proud he had broken the remorse of his soldiers, "Abreon, you take the first drill shift, which shall last eight hours. Censar will take the second drill shift."

Abreon's mind began to wander into a haze. He looked up at the clouds above them collecting. It was going to rain.

It did rain. It rained hard. The greasy polluted rain fell on no man's land, the river swelling it and filling the trenches both companies dug on opposite sides of the river. The rain collected in the trenches and began to fill the tunnel he was drilling deeper. Crawling out of tunnel 33, he wiped the oily rain from his face, his helmet in hand. Someone, or some solider was handing out food rations and plastic water canteens to the soldier, which happened about once per day. Abreon held out his hands to the female soldier. The woman kept her helmet on to protect her head from the rain. It grew progressively darker, the sun seemingly setting earlier because of the dark cloud cover. He took what she gave him, which were two nutritional bars and a canteen of water.

Another worker within the tunnel escaped from the deep shaft with his helmet light still activated and bright, sitting in the mud, pushing a corpse away. He grabbed a couple nutritional bars and a canteen of water from the distribution soldier and began eating it. They tasted of meat and fiber. The solider switched his helmet light off and removed it from his head placing on the corpse next to him. Abreon looked at him oddly. They wiped the grease from their faces. The soldier asked Abreon, "Are we going to survive?"

Abreon finishing one of the calorie bars, "I will, I feel it."

"What of me, do you know? Do you think I will survive?"

Abreon drinking, "Nothing, I don't know if you will survive. But, I will live."

The rain continued as a downpour, burdening the earth with its cold, drenching tides. The torrent of rain, breaking the ground, the dirt under them crumbling into still more muck and mire. The muck and mire deepened still further, filling the trenches, saturating everything, the water collecting into a shimmering layer above me muck. The layer trembling, shimmering, as the rain fell into it. The waters swelled the massive river, the Zitar Nuo, drowning any hopes of another attack by the Xelon Dru or in that matter one from the Nenthar. Unfortunately, the drilling of the tunnels continued and especially tunnel number 33.

Three

Abreon was at the northern most edge of the tunnel, a hell of dark mire and smoke from the drills. He was splayed right in the mud, laying down on his stomach and head first in the crawlway they had created. He clenched his teeth as he took filtered air from inside his helmet, taking to his drill as others behind him wedged in metal O-rings keeping the tunnel from falling on them. The small bucket sized tractors took the dirt from behind him, pushing rearward to the entrance. In the dirt and in the dark he thought. Abreon thought to himself there must be another way than to work and fight for the corporation. The tunnel began to leak water, oozing out from the walls of what they had dug. Several soldiers moved an O-ring into place behind him but the ceiling began to crumble. They quickly removed it, repositioning the ring in another place. He drilled further, water now causing chunks of dirt and rock to collapse around the drill. Abreon let go of the drill throttle, the machine stopping. He removed his suit helmet, releasing the seal between it and his suit. Abreon clicked on his helmet transmitter, wiping the mud from his shoulders, "Drean?"

Abreon looking about, uncertain as Drean answered, "High Commander Drean status, rank A9."

"It is Abreon, rank B4."

"Drean, I'm having trouble with the tunnel, tunnel number 33."

Drean squawking from within Abreon's helmet, "What is the trouble with tunnel 33?"

"The walls are saturated with water from the swollen river. The pressure is causing the ceiling and walls to crumble with water."

Drean from his helmet, "You shall continue as ordered soldier."

The ceiling falling onto the face of Abreon, as he looked up at it, wiping his face, pulling close to his helmet, "This shaft is going to collapse if not now then soon. You must let your workers evacuate, or I shall go to Commander Uewno with these findings."

"He is a rank of A2 and he will say no in this matter."

"But..."

"You will continue until your shift is completed, the boring of tunnels and of shaft 33 will continue."

Abreon now so very concerned, angry and afraid, "Yes."

Abreon continued to drill into through the night and into the early morning, sweating and crying because he knew he and many others would die. Another soldier crawled up to him, pulled up beside him with his suit ripped and muddy, with a hat and light instead of a helmet, which was what Abreon was wearing. Abreon wiped the thick mud that had caked up on his visor and then turning on his external speaker he spit at his microphone, "We are in trouble my friend."

The soldier behind him trying to wedge a metal O-ring in place, "The walls are liquefying."

Others were crying around him, "Among the wrong already produced."

"What'?" The soldier next to him yelled.

Abreon listening to the sounds around him and the shaking before him, "What could it be?" Abreon peering out into the darkness before him while his drill lights illuminated the wall before him, which was crumbling from the inside out. Abreon yelling, "Everyone, pull back!" while waving behind him.

The soldier next to Abreon again yelling, "What!" the machines and the ground tremors creating a roar he could not hear above.

Then the wall of rock and dirt collapsing in front of Abreon and his driller, revealing spotlights a massive driller and hot green laser blasts. All of them covering, Abreon flicking his transponder to a longer-range secure band, "The Dru are all around us! Dreaan!" yelling, flicking to wideband as he ducked a blast from a Dru soldier before him, "Pull back! Everyone, pull back!"

A mass of Dru soldiers before him and his Nenthar diggers as the front collapsed. Dru soldiers with suits, lamps and lasers began to fire over the mound of dirt left from the collapse before them. A Nenthar soldier yelling out, "Escape! Run!" another yelling, "Get weapons!" as the Dru rushed into the Nenthar side of the tunnel, aiming at the defenseless Nenthar's as they struggled to flee the Xelon's. The Dru shot their lasers, the blasts burning into the drill as they climbed over it, following their corporate enemies. Their lasers searing the cold wet tunnel, other blasts burning into the Nenthar's who were caught, or slow, or unlucky, killing them or wounding them only to finish them with another blast, the darkness lit by the helmet lamps of both corporations. Later, it was found that the Xelon Dru knew of the Nenthar's tunnel expansions and so bored their own to intercept their enemy and to defend their territory.

Abreon crawled away from the ruin behind him, struggling to keep himself before others and thus, unfortunately utilize them as rearward shields as the Xelon pursued them out of the Nenthar tunnel, "We need weapons!" another soldier crying as he was shot from behind. He ducked his stomach falling into a heap of other soldiers, a laser beam narrowly missing the side of Abreon's face. The Xelon pouring out of the tunnel, Abreon yelling out again, "I need a weapon!" a Nenthar from before him with two weapons, "Here!" Abreon grabbing it and checking the weapons charge.

The other soldier nodding and firing back at the Dru, "Fight!"

Abreon pulled himself up from the mud, turned fired a few shots from his rifle and reached to climb up and into another bunker. Other Nenthar's turning as they found weapons, firing and retreating into tunnel 33, their enemy perusing them over the bunker and down into the new tunnel as well. The blasts from behind the retreating Nenthar's licking at their heels, the missed shots kicking up the muck from the floor of the tunnel, the mire from the walls of the tunnel. Abreon knew they were out matched without heavy weapons, but unfortunately, they had been caught off guard while digging. Abreon

having an idea, yelling out to his fellow soldiers, "Shoot the walls! Blast the ceilings!" The Nenthar aimed their rifles at the tunnel, the plasma bursts crumbling the tunnel behind them.

A Xelon soldier outfitted with a flame thrower, crawled up and over the dead bodies, Abreon screaming, "Get back, chemical flames!" escaping, seeing the soldier who gave him the rifle again, "Will all bum! Come on! Get out of the tunnel!"

Abreon aiming his rifle at the enemy with his flamethrower, "Fire at his tanks!"

Another Nenthar fired at the Dru's tanks, then another, the tanks of the flamethrower exploding. The blast shaking the tunnel, ripping soldiers about. The explosion hitting the tunnel with such force that it bent the tunnels supporting O-rings, tearing at the walls and the ceiling. Soldiers crying out, "The tunnel is collapsing!" Abreon struggling as the tunnel began to liquefy from above, the tunnel degenerating over them, the O-rings covered and sinking, the tunnel sealing itself from the rear. Soldiers of both companies buried alive.

The rain continued, pooled and drained into many of the tunnels and the trenches of both lines. The rains pounded the ground, slurring the blast pits into a muddy slurry, swelling the Zitar Nuo River until it roared and frothed in anger. The rain grayed out the sky, washing everything to pale hues while every man and machine hunkered down and waited. Abreon ate what little rations he had, alone in a bombed out pit, as the rains ended, and the sun began to shine down upon him and others. It had been several days and keeping his feet dry had been near impossible. He looked up at the sun and squinted. He had gotten every used to suffering. Abreon had forgotten what it was to see the light. He climbed out of his pit onto the muddy ground and watched the front lines. He drank his remaining water and felt a drop of rain on his head. Abreon looked up again, to see the sun sink behind the clouds once more, the rain coming again. Abreon looked at his empty ration can, tossed it and rolled back into his pit. Another day came and went. Abreon began to suffer from dehydration. He thought it was ironic that all around him was water, but he did not dare drink it. He kicked around in his pit full of water. There seemed to be something decomposing below the water, in the pit with him. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep. On the third day, a soldier on a supply sled was seen in the distance. Abreon eagerly attempted to flag him over. The soldier saw Abreon in the distance and worked his way over to him. The sled slowed and spun in the mud before Abreon. It kicked up the mire, the mud flying over Abreon's head. The soldier took off his helmet, placed it on his sled and opened the sleds packs, "Muck and mire everywhere."

Abreon climbed up his pit and onto the soaked ground, looking down at his muddy suit, "Yes... I need food and water."

The soldier took out and handed him his nutritional bars and a disposable plastic water thermos, "Long range sensors indicate clear skies tomorrow. The shelling will begin at dawn, in earnest for another ground assault."

Abreon took the food and water, drinking the water, "Can I have more?"

The soldier closing his packs saying, "No." as he drove off again on his sled to serve other Nenthar soldiers.

Abreon looked up at the sky. A strobe on his helmet, partially submerged in the pit began to flicker. It was a communication signature. He took his helmet, switched on his transceiver and looked at the frequency it displayed. It was still on the secure channel. The transceiver showed him the incoming signal was also on the secure channel. There was no need to match channels. Unfortunately, he also knew who was attempting to contact him. He spoke into the helmet, "Abreon."

"Abreon, Drean here. You are summoned to meet with me for a formal reprimand."

"Why!"

Drean angrily, "You know very well what you did was wrong."

Abreon began to walk. He needed to find the field headquarters before the shelling began, "I know what I did! I know the truth!"

"You collapsed two tunnels and many died!"

Abreon could not believe what he was hearing. He snapped his helmet on and coded in a string of numbers unlocking the directions to the nearest field headquarters, "I saved many more and you know we should not have been digging that deep under the river!"

Abreon walking through the drying tunnels, tearing a nutritional bar, foil wrapper with his teeth, eating, it and yelling at the same time, "I did what was right!"

"You killed your own!"

They walked toward the company field headquarters, one of several, "I killed to survive! It is the same whether I killed a Nenthar or a Xelon Dru! Death is death and they all have mothers and wives. This war is a farce and I kill to survive in your warped corporate dreams."

Drean: "No"

"Yes! This is sick! In war, you fight for survival! Those who survive win, you're not out there! You know it as well as I know it. I did not sign up for this war. I was working as an engineer in your multinational a thousand kilometers from here with a wife and two children!" them more solemnly Abreon added, "You made me a killer Drean, your company did."

"You got yourself a fine and a reduction in your stock options! If you keep ongoing you will also be headed for a formal inquiry!"

Abreon held back his continuing rage. They entered the bunker, other officers there and many guards. Abreon found a seat at a nearby table, "The truth hurts, Drean, Commander?"

“Good! Let the truth out! Let our high commanders know that whether you’re a DM or a Nenthar we are all are equal!” They will hang you for it!”

Abreon in dismay, “You’re twisting the truth!”

Drean smiled devilishly, “You think you know, don’t you?”

Abreon sat in the spacious bunker, with its white walls and two tables. One table was wider than the other. Drean sat next to him. There were a couple of Majors sitting at the second table. All of them sat under the behind bright overhead lights. Abreon put his helmet upon the floor, which was steel gray, the walls cold steel as well. A soldier came from an office toward the rear of the bunker with a carafe and coffee cups. He placed the cups next to each soldier and poured them all a strong cup of hot coffee. Abreon took the first sip; he had not had hot fresh coffee in quite a while. Before him from right to left were: Uewno, and another whom he would be introduced named Maven. For some time all of them were quiet were quiet. Then Uewno asked Abreon, “Abreon, this is not a formal inquiry but you do know why we are all here, don’t you?”

Abreon clasping his hands together, upon his table, watching Drean, her black hair cut close to the scalp, but not to the point of non-control, her hair smeared down, over her disheveled bangs, her small frame apparent under her suit. Abreon rubbed his thick, heavy brown hair, mostly falling back over his face, his muscular body concealed under his thick suit. He was tired, “I am here because I ran tunnel number 33 into the enemy’s line, indirectly caused the deaths of many on both sides of the conflict, caused the indirect destruction of heavy equipment, caused the failure of a significant number of O-rings and caused the detonation of flammable liquids which produced the collapse of a second main tunnel.”

Uewno to Abreon, “Well, in essence you are correct.”

Abreon, “Then what is the inquiry for?” noticing Drean staring at him, Abreon breaking eye contact with her.

Uewno correcting Abreon, “No, remember it’s not a formal inquiry.”

Maven now speaking, “My name is Maven. We are just concerned that you fled the tunnels, which had the cascading effect of producing the rest.”

Abreon shook his head and sipping more coffee, “No, digging when we should not and against my concerns caused the results that we observed.” He knew they cared very little for the men or the lost soldiers, but more for the tunnels and equipment and the fact he disobeyed orders, questioning them in general.

Uewno: “Now we are here to correct what has occurred. We already know of the truth and the gray areas. We are here just to outline a path to redemption and get you ready for combat again.”

Drean nodded, “What are we to do with him?”

Uewno, rubbed his head and drank more coffee, "Well, Abreon, you questioned the validity of direct orders from your superior officer. Then you disobeyed them. We can't have our officers doing that of course. If we did we would not have a unified army, would we? We cannot fight coherently if everyone ran separate ways."

Maven looked over at Drean and Uewno, "The death you caused by your actions was high, never mind the fact that you did save just as many with his heroism, fighting Sis Xelon Dru, pouring into that tunnel number 33."

Uewno, "Well your actions so some wisdom and yet much foolishness. Maybe you have learned too much, but it has not been tempered with a heavy enough weight of responsibility."

Drean thinking, "Are you thinking of another work duty?"

Uewno: "Something different perhaps."

Maven to them, as he was leaning over their table, "He has a fighter's spirit. He has a will to survive and from what you have told me Drean, he has the ability to drive others to surpass what was previously their limit."

Drean: "I believe he needs to be corrected in a way which will benefit all of us in a greater way."

Uewno, "What, Drean do you suggest?"

Abreon looked back at the guards, at the inquiry board, then at Drean who looked back at him and at the other Majors, "We could promote him."

Abreon surprised though hushed, "What?"

Drean smiling, "He is a unifier or divider depending on how we cull him. If we place him in charge of ten or twenty he might strike at a most crucial vanguard. Our soldiers would benefit and of course we would benefit."

Abreon subsequently was promoted to level B2 or a commander of ten and sent to the front lines for the last main Nentharr Corporation's assault against the Xelon Dru. Abreon had the feeling deep down that he would surely die.

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