

*I was floating, weightless in a black void. I saw nothing, no stars, no moon, not even my own hands. I could hear nothing either, not my heartbeat nor my breath. 'Is this death?' I asked myself, 'It's nice here' I thought. For some reason my foot felt wet and sticky, but I didn't think too hard about it at the time. I felt, dimly, like there was something happening somewhere, but it seemed very far away, was someone calling my name? I tried to turn my head but I still couldn't see anything. I don't know how long I floated there, hours? Minutes? Days? It seemed like time had lost all meaning. An immense feeling of pain came over me and I opened my eyes; the sky overhead was a dreary grey but the light hurt nonetheless. I snapped my eyes shut again and waited a moment before trying a second time, a small yellow winged insect flitted to and fro, wait, a butterfly? At this time of year?*

*It was at that moment I suddenly remembered I was in an active warzone, I abruptly rolled over, dislodging a small pile of rubble in the process and tried to remember what had happened. Small cuts had shredded most of my uniform and I was bleeding a lot, a large diamond shaped piece of shrapnel was lodged in my snout, I took a second to dig it out with my claws and looked around for my gun. The ringing in my ears drowned out all other noise as I gazed around the ruined room, spotting my lost 'papasha' half buried under more rubble. A sharp pain shot through my leg as I tried to stand, a wet squelching feeling in my boot, I pitched forward onto my face and lay there for a moment before opting to crawl instead.*

*The ringing slowly faded as I pulled myself hand over hand to the gun, replaced by the sharp crack of rifle fire, the distant thunder of artillery strikes and the screams of the dying; the by now familiar soundscape of Besargrad at war. I wrapped a shaking hand around my lost gun and tried to pull it free, straining against the weight of fallen bricks and mortar. I dimly heard the heavy footfalls of running men somewhere nearby, spurred on by fear I managed to get two hands on the gun and pulled harder, tugging it free centimeter by centimeter.*

*Glancing over my shoulder I spotted one of them, desperately hoping for friendlies, my heart sank as I recognized the navy blue uniform and black helmet of the Sokath and I threw all my weight into twisting my gun free as several soldiers ran past the building I was in. With a final heave I managed to pull the gun free, flipping again onto my back. Mercifully the charging handle pulled back freely and I ripped it back, clearing the chamber and bringing the papasha up just as the Sokath came through the ruined doorway.*

*My gun spat death, automatic fire making up for what I lacked in precision with rate of fire and controlled recoil. The first Sokathi never knew what hit him, catching the burst in the chest and pitching forward. His comrade behind him tried to catch himself and jump backwards but I kept holding the trigger down, two bullets hit his gasmask and sent him spiraling backwards. A third appeared in the window and leveled his rifle at me, I swung the gun towards him, stitching rounds across the wall; he missed, I got lucky.*

*I could feel my heart pounding out my chest as my gun stopped firing, glancing down I realized I had emptied the magazine, cursing my stupidity I ripped the pancake shaped hunk of steel free and began desperately searching my pockets for a replacement, unable to even remember how many I had in my panic. I couldn't get my hands to stop shaking as I pulled a fresh mag from my chest pouch, I dropped it twice trying to load it. Thankfully the dead Sokathi seemed to have gone unnoticed in the chaos of the battle elsewhere, I could hear the roar of a machine gun somewhere down the street.*

*I'm not sure how long I sat there, long enough that the blood pooling in my boot had begun to puddle under my leg, before I heard an odd sound that sent a chill down my spine. The turning of metal gears and the crunch of debris crushed beneath a massive weight, it has been oft theorized by*

*military thinkers what the most terrifying sound a soldier can hear is; the sharp whistle of incoming artillery, the wet roar of a flamethrower, the click-boing of a mine detonator, for whatever my thoughts are worth I think they're hissing up the wrong tunnel; it's not what you can hear that's truly terrifying, it's the things you can't; like the electric engines of Sokathi tanks.*

*The steel beast crept slowly into view, eerily silent, I sat there, praying to the Twin Dragons for absolution in my final moments as the machine came to a halt in front of the building, it's turret slowly adjusting to bring its machinegun to bear through the window. I was just about finished praying when my life was saved by the sharp boom and loud ping of an anti-tank rifle punching through the side of the tank's turret. The tank abruptly began reversing as the rifle fired again and again, emptying the entire clip into the retreating vehicle.*

*A few minutes later I heard a voice from outside "138th Rifles!"*

*Immense relief flooded every fiber of my being, I struggled to reply with a dry throat and cracked lips.*  
*"142nd! Thank the Twins."*

*A blue-scaled Kobold ducked through the doorway. "You look like shit comrade."*

*"Thanks for noticing, help me up." He pulled me to my feet and steadied me, giving me his canteen.*

*"We're gonna have to make a run for it, damned Sokathi are everywhere."*

*"Better than sitting here waiting for them to come back," I growled between sips of water. "Svok Drakespur."*

*"Lin Torshed, let's get you out of here." Lin threw my arm over his shoulder and helped steady me.*  
*"It's only a 200 meter sprint back to friendly lines." He joked cheerfully.*

*"Piece of cake." I groaned.*