

The Silver Lining

*“Personally I’m always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught.” —
Winston Churchill*

When Knights Fell down on Paradise

A cool warm air penetrated the senses, digging under the veins but with warmth, something like the soul of this place itself. It was the year 3020, on the grassy plains of the planet Triumph 2, a distant British space colony which was charged with the production of textiles, augmented interfaces and writers. A tall dark, broad shouldered and gruff man with a stubble beard stood stared out at the factories, trees and fields before him, looking down.

He thought to himself “is this anything other than paradise?” the wind in my hair, the grass below me, the sky above, a perfect gradient of blue, life, love and the din below.

He slept and in dreams he saw what dreams may come. As his muse came to visit him in fever dreams of vision. Shaping the world before his eyes, like a sorceress of time. She would always be there on the edge of the precipice to guide him, her hand in his.

The man was Winston Grigori, Half English, Half Russian. A man half in the earth and half in the soul.

As he dreamt Winston saw a brutal table of the North, red brick and love emanating from each corner - “Oh you do no half dream of escape young Winston” the women said, her wise old green eyes lit with a greeny swamp like hue, as if some Medusa herself had challenged young Winston to a battle of wits, and a battle that Winston being possessed of some rather crushing powers of wit, was rather glad to meet on an even playing field.

“I do Mum, for what is life but an escape from death?” Winston retorted, having just learnt the truth about death from his father, consoling him recently on the death of their dog Charlie, a lovely little scamp who would run around full of beans, laughing and dancing in his doggy way - “Its ok boy, part of being a man is knowing how to negotiate with death” his Russian Father had said in his dullish slightly broken ol’ Albion tongue.

“Oh Winston” Winston's mum said, as she sensed the tears behind his composure, “Oh come here Winston, give your Mother a hug”. and Winston, like water melting into a river, relented, hugging his mother and crying deeper than he had ever cried before as he said goodbye to his friend Charlie.

The room disappeared, vanishing into the wind and Winston awoke to another day. The year 3043 and all was dust, Winston, now aged 42 looked out on another day in the barren landscape that lay before him with his friend Jack Dorsey, a slight and dishevelled man with thin and round glasses and a shimmering red hair and beard giving him the appearance of a scientist whose soul was crushed by the present, instead of dreaming about the future as it should of been.

An excess of the putrid stench of rust and death surrounded them, it was war, protracted and pointless, their souls both burnt to a crisp, cooking in the black sun. Winston thought 'Another day without her, without my family, my friends, the idleness of tea with my ma'.

His jacket was worn with dust and his steps were faltering, his strength and willingness to carry on crushed by the shells that rained down daily from above, the basement lives they all now lead, dutifully defending 'something' though few of them could put their fingers on what that 'something' was anymore, though Winston was investigating, reading the Protocol readily, even buying a black market copy of 'that damned book' as his Mother had described it on her last message to him before heading off for the nearby safety of Terra Prime.

How did it begin? If Winston could answer that he would have an inch of hope left, and that was what he needed, he felt he did not want to die for nothing and the big push was coming soon, the battle to end all battles, a behemoth of destruction way in waste before him.

He was battle hardened already, himself being a member along with Jack of the elite LasSniper division, every face he erased now imprinted on his memory forever like a photograph burning over and over again in his mind, poisoning the purity of his soul.

But he and Jack, they had a job to do and the cybernetic hordes of the Nationalist Guard of Azeral were many, building as they had an economy based around cybernetic enhancement, eyes and ears replaced with military precision, their soldiers now broken husks of men, insane with battle rage and anger, pure agents of testosterone chained to a dead metallic humming husk of blinking death named Hextor.

Poor souls ultimately, it's how he keeps his dark power over them thought Winston.

'They were truly fearsome to behold, Nietzschean in only the way only a beleagherd 20th century Nazi would truly understand' thought Winston, and of course he recalled how Nietzsche was to die himself an insane imbecile from his years of studying armchair philosophy, and now his posthuman children were like babies, stones crucified to their visions, pouring excrement over his memory, the babies encased in armies of metal behemoths shitting their pants all over our two souls from above thought Winston, looking at Jack as he took a puff on his large grey vaping device, with a pained expression, green smoke shimmering from his mouth.

Winston looked out the window again and was distant in thought again.

They were Driven by that insane and broken creature - the aborted foetus that was Hextor, his stupid face and stupid crossed eyes glaring from a nearby edition of the Daily Protocol, a military hologram paper made for distribution for the working men and women of the pits. His eyes that looked like hollowed out holes, his bald and direct glance never shifting, focused as if it burned into the very soul, shifting and following you around the room like an apparition, some demon from the underworld.

"Aye the feckin tea here tastes like warmed up shite." Jack almost lamented in his deadpan Scottish accent, like something akin to the upper northern regions of the mother colony back

on Prime Terra from where they both ancestrally rooted from generations ago as a cold wind blew outside the window, and hail began to distort the gaiety of their mood.

Winston Chuckled quietly at his friend.

“I just hope we can get enough of them before the drone support comes in” he continued, with a tone of worry present in his languid warrior poet tones. “We will have a lot to write about anyway aye, after a wave of this epic level hey old pal?!”

“Yes, well yes indeed” said Winston in his refined way, lost in the mire of his own web of thoughts, his eyes looking far away hiding in his thick rimmed glasses under his patchy scrawny hair.

“So we begin patrol in 30 mins Winston, lets make our peace with ourselves”

They clinked their glasses and drank their terrible tea. This was war and they were men that had a job to do and that was all there was to it. The Radio transmissions suggested another wave in two hours, so they had a little time to rest and reflect.

Winston's Diary

Time for a bath, as Winston entered the grim rusting bath in the factory in which they had crawled some minutes ago. He got into the bath, running a nearby battered kettle with one of the energy packs he and Jack carried around in their rucksacks. The old factory was without power, the enemy having cut off the power generator a few months ago at least.

Winston whipped his diary out from under his thick green coat and opened it up to a new page, so far he had scrawled in it mostly just images and notes, words, recollections and images of all he had seen here.

He surveyed the poems he had written like a ghost sick of sin on the days after his first sight of conflict, of the fear, the smell of it, men falling and dying like flies swatted all around him when the great city was taken, he had managed to escape with a battalion of 2nd class officers to the tunnel network below Old Albion, the capital city of Triumph 2, its very name soaked in hubris like most of the towns and cities in this land.

The sights he saw there now distant in his mind, the lives he took never left like ghosts as he was an uncommonly skilled sniper, precision and speed being his calling card. He took them all out like a ruthless killer, one shot to the brainbox was all it would usually take, then a scout of the next area, it drove him on to think of his mother escaping to safety along with his family, all safe now at least.

It all ended when, running through old network tunnels and bunkers, the soot and dust of ages falling down on them from below, women and children screaming and crying a scene of devastation. They were on the defensive. Hundreds of years of Culture and history wiped out in 2 months.

Winston had managed to capture a minion of Hextor as a prisoner of war for miles, a young recruit / scout, probably a hatchling of one of their obscene clone vats, common sense dictated a swift bullet to the brain, and yet took pity on the young scout, hoping he could be somehow reprogrammed by the technocrats in the chamber of science and industry to whom he dumped the poor man as a prisoner of war - they were getting more clever now after all with their cognitive sciences and neurological methods that they could often restore even a clone to original thought, to some sort of soul.

A far better fate than being the automation of some half dead dictator, insane like an epileptic wolf with blood lust for sacrifice and 'duty'.

Winston had actually done the leaden duty of actually reading Hextor's terrible autobiographical essay and rant 'Why I should be Emperor' after his imprisonment post the infamous trial of the Azeral 5, it was a mixture of a angst-ridden teenager's rambling and megalomaniacal insanity and the stink of that penetrated each sense upon reading.

Azeral had once been a bustling market based economy, a metropolis of activity and vice, a place of liberalism and excess with a free market and even freer morals. Hextor as Winston had come to understand, came from modest means, a man who was in every sense of Azeral culture and society a 'Lower Man' as the roughly translated copy he had on his smooth tablet had translated from the Old Germanic tongue to the old Albion of his native tongue (perhaps he thought incorrectly).

Language was a slippery thing, but Hextor had learned how he could use it to his advantage to build his place in society, as he tricked, schemed and plotted to create his world, his new world, a world which would be built on strength, power, the will, and the willingness to fight for a world based on duty and valour as he saw it.

Then the revolution and the civil war on the planet of New Germania broke out and Hextor was never the same, swept up in his revolutionary fervour he signed up for 4 years to one of the defence fortresses as a cannon gunner, an experience which after 4 years had rendered him a shell of a human being.

His megalomaniacal will unleashed an unsuspecting world. He climbed the ranks with his sociopathy. He did not believe in humanity, only Iron, only that he wanted to be the knight with the hardest armour of all.

He was a warrior but a warrior full of fear, as all true warriors are. But rather than use this fear as a way to conquer death, he instead turned his hatred on mankind, viewing them as vermin and rats, turning first on the foreigners he condemned and thus closing down the markets, then those who would seek to limit him - the press, the journalists, then his megalomania turned finally on itself as he consumed party official after party official, beginning to adapt himself and his body with more and more augmentations, becoming a horrific hybrid of man and machine, who though by conventional standards was 140 years old looked more like a living apparition of a rotting corpse, a being kept alive by nothing more than pulsing monitors and the apparatus of the psychosis state cannibalising itself.

His dream was of a 1000 years reign, to rule the entire universe for a thousand years in his suit of armour.

He was a truly lamentable human being, but Winston could not help but feel a little bit sorry for him. Sometimes time just puts you in the wrong spot at the wrong time. Still we had a job to do, and a bullet to put into a brain. To save the billion lives at stake on Triumph 2, well how could it not be a fair trade he thought

And the wind knew it too as Jack, aiming with his steady eye, ginger beard pointed out, his eyes focused and sharp, his breath steady and unshaking, took aim out of the window.

Winston with a nod to his good friend from above nodded and assumed the position. This was their moment. Rest time was over, but Winston was at least clean and freshly focused on the task at hand.

And The death of one Will be measured across the aeons

Jack looked out of his rifle as he patrolled the Eastern wing and began to think

'I wish Winston would be a little more with it sometimes, though he is a good lad, a little detached and head in the clouds aye, but is it such a bad thing after all? He is a good lad down within, as hidden as that may be, perhaps a little too kind for his own good, but if my mother Hen taught me owt it's to protect, always protect the weak, and the strong when they are weak.'

Winston ran up the steps and tripped a little on the bottom step. "Jack I got a transmission through on the comms network, I managed to plug it in, they are coming Jack, our reinforcements, it's Time Jack, it's time." Winston said, shivering a little as the sounds of shells began to rain down on the buildings around them, each one hurting Winston inside.

Jack looked at Winston with a deep set stare and softly whispered "Do not worry lad, I shall protect ye, and we two shall fight like poets, like warriors, as men, as equals, Let's..." before Winston had a chance to extend out his arm to do their usual fist pump a tremendous boom had exploded to their right hand side.

An Azeral shell had crashed down before them and the industrial grinder sound of a horrendous Azral abomination loomed above the hole in the ceiling, the true horror that was their enemy meeting them again as the machine man, half insane with bloodlust screaming at them with butchers eyes began firing huge artillery shells out from its obscene cannons, Jack had rolled for cover after the blast, his experience in the field was enough to know it well, as he took a few potshots at the insane bastard before him "Fucking have this you wee bastard" Jack screamed, his eyes lighting up with the pulses of lasfire as his warriors cry echoed through the dim lit factory.

He had aimed right for the eye, his sharp las blast ripping through the torrid flesh of the creature before him, as it fell dead and slumped on the floor, a horrendous cackling scream ringing throughout the walls of this hell they found themselves in, and like a beast heavy

with the burden of sin, Jack released it from its unholy prison. Its death mask eyes rolling back in its corpse's leaden skull.

"Jack" a murmur from the corner of the room, as Jack looked around searching for his friend amongst the rubble.

"Jack" again the voice reached out with a whimper

Jack took a deep breath and sighed, as he beheld the ruined body of his friend, his mate, his companion in arms. Still clutching his LasRifle, Winston looked into Jack's eyes and began to weep.

"Mum, Mum Mum"

His body ruined, shrapnel had cut into a large part of his upper torso, leaving him a ruin, Jack knew there was no coming back from it, he'd seen it before, as had Winston, who had seen enough to know too.

"It's ok lad"

"Don't yer worry boy"

"Jack where did it get me exactly Jack please, where?"

"It's alright Winston, your Mother will see yer again"

"I will make sure that she sees you"

"Jack, am I dying?"

Jack looked down at his friend, his friend for 5 long years of hell and said "I canner lie to you, it dunner look good" as tears began to well in his eyes also.

"It's ok, it's like when my Dog Charlie died" Winston said, a sweet smile forming on his broken face, the stiff lip faltering, my Dad told me to be strong, it happens to us all..."

"The end, это правда." He looked above to the ceiling imagining a bright sun as he began to slip.

"Yer are no dog, you are a man, make your peace with God and let's be done with it" cried Jack, the tears running down his stubbly thick red beard as he saw his friend pass from this life, frozen with a wee sweet smile. He kissed Winston on the forehead, his best friend when paradise turned to ash.

And Jack was alone again.

Part 3 **Archived**

He gathered up Winstons belongings and found a diary book full to the brim with poems, writings and essays. Posting them on his downtime postal duties back to Terra Prime.

"Jack Dorsey returned to central command and posted them to his mother, a selection of which we have presented today at the institute of Culture and Information

Here in this virtual museum of the first great galaxy wide war. On the display below you can read a selection of them preserved for eternity in our archives on his digital gravestone.” He is remembered today in history as a great working class hero, and as a great writer, poet and observer of the horrors of war.

Warning us for eternity with the simple words -
Never again.

Winston Grigori
(b. 3000 ad died 3042 aged 43)

Loved by his Mother
Loved by his Father
The greatest warrior poet I ever
knew in the field.
Sleep easy pal.
- Jack.

Inscription taken from the gravestone of Winston Grigori
Cut down by shrapnel at the Defence
of the Art and Culture Sector of Triumph 2 3042 ad

Selected War poems of Winston Grigori

Neon Abstraction Hums

The hum of my ghost -
Vibrates in neon abstractions in the distance
I hear the melody grow as I enter a trance
The wires descend, plugging her in -
As she looks at me bewitched and sad.

A cybernetic nest, an eternity
The light shines down in rainbow spectrums
As the tesseracting cubes above our heads
rotate in and out pulsating. Swirling.

We stare
See beyond
Realise the magic of technology
Transcending into the dim neon lights
Of the nethernet.

Romance in the Commie Blocks

There is romance in the Commie Blocks
Cigarette stains on the walls,

flowers in the windows,
cockroaches crawling,
all Filth, beautifully human filth.

Drunk men, and empty women,
True Love and sweet kisses,
old ladies walking with the air of saints,
There is romance in the Commie Blocks-
It's true.

Dancing drunk on the sidewalk,
the fire outside, the boarded up windows
broken panes of glass-
communist cubist collage.

The dream came true?
Alas, No.
How could it?
But those who could dream, found themselves
buried deep in their concrete, thicker than lead.
Their own cosmos of imagination,
and please take off your shoes.

Romance isn't dead.
It just goes on holiday to Russia
under the warmth of a thick blanket, coiled.
All embrace, as the demivoy smiles and lights his pipe.

We spoke through forked tongues of Love
Goodnight for I,
dwell too long in your electric dreams,
The ghost in the corner,
The god in the machine -
More wolf than man
More child than grandfather.

Neon lights blind us in the end.
Relentless burning souls, heated
Red.

Hum hum hum

Will we wither from the root?
My eyed shine like polygon diamonds
on a gloomy night, and you are far away.

Winked.

Shaped silhouette.
An illusion.
Such a wonderful illusion -
Love.

Thus spoke Zarathustra.