

Specter-14 — Personal Journal, Entry 7

Location: The Moon

Time since resurrection: Fifteen years, and today every one of them feels useless

Talos is dead.

I have written the sentence seven times.

It does not become easier.

Talos is dead.

Not down. Not waiting on a revive. Not lost in comms. Not buried under rubble with his Ghost scrambling toward him, shell bright, Light ready, voice angry and afraid.

Dead.

Final.

There are words Guardians use because the real ones are too blunt.

“Final death.”

“Light extinguished.”

All of them sound like lies.

Talos is dead.

His Ghost is gone.

There is no coming back.

I keep waiting for the impossible to behave like it always has. For that little flash of Ghost-Light. For Talos to haul himself out of the dirt, laugh with half his armor torn open, and say something stupid like, “That one had teeth,” as if death were just another wall he put his shoulder through.

He has done that before.

Dozens of times.

Hundreds, maybe.

A Knight cut him in half once in a refinery under the Cosmodrome. He came back cursing because his shotgun had landed in waste runoff. A Walker stepped on him in the mothyards and he revived asking if the machine was "done being dramatic." He once took a Cabal slug through the chest, dropped like stone, came back standing, and immediately headbutted the Legionary responsible.

That was Talos.

Death never learned how to hold him.

Until today.

I hate the Moon.

I thought I hated the Hive before. I wrote that once. I remember it. Entry 5. Old Russia. Hera. Tunnels. Bad smell. Bad jokes. A torn cloak. A Warlock with Void in her hands and judgment in her eyes.

I thought I hated the Hive.

I did not understand hatred yet.

Not properly.

Not the kind that has nowhere to go because the thing that caused it is still alive, and the person it should avenge is not.

Crota.

I am writing the name because if I do not, it will sit behind my teeth until I break something.

Crota killed Talos.

Crota broke his Ghost.

And we ran.

That is the part I cannot stop seeing.

Not Talos falling.

Not first.

The running.

The retreat.

The way the tunnels screamed around us. The way the green fire bent toward him. The way every shadow in the Hellmouth seemed to have claws. The way Hera shouted my name and I did not answer because I was still trying to get back to Talos, even after there was no Talos to get back to.

The Moon was supposed to be a campaign.

That is what the Vanguard called it.

A coordinated offensive. A reclamation effort. Push into Hive territory. Break their lines. Map their strongholds. Sever command structures. Drive them back from the surface and out of the old lunar installations.

War language.

Clean language.

Brave language.

We came in with banners, fireteams, gunships, confidence, and just enough ignorance to mistake the first victories for momentum.

The Moon took all of that and opened its mouth.

I have seen Hive nests before. I have burned them out of bunkers and transit tunnels and dead cities. I have watched Hera collapse rituals before they could hatch. I have watched Talos shatter Knights against walls with Arc Light pouring off him like a storm.

But this was not a nest.

This was a kingdom.

The Hellmouth is not a hole in the Moon.

It is a throat.

Everything descends. Corridors. Bridges. Temples. Bone halls. Chasms so deep your Ghost's light vanishes before it finds the bottom. The architecture is not built so much as grown from violence. Every surface has intention. Every chain means something. Every rune feels like it was carved into the world by something that wanted the world to feel it.

We moved with a larger force at first.

Too large, maybe.

Guardians everywhere. Titans taking point. Warlocks maintaining fields. Hunters ranging ahead and returning with bad news none of us had time to process. The comms were constant: position updates, contact reports, casualty calls, extraction requests, names cut off mid-sentence.

Talos hated it.

Not the danger. Never the danger.

The confusion.

He liked clear lines. Hold here. Break there. Protect them. Move now.

The Moon offered no lines, only depths.

Still, he held.

Traveler help me, he held.

We were pushing through a lower bridge structure when the first wave broke us. Thrall from below. Acolytes from the ledges. Knights advancing through their own dead. Wizards screaming curses from behind veils of green fire. The whole chamber became gunfire, Light, Hive rot, and bodies.

Talos went forward because of course he did.

Hera shouted that the left flank was collapsing. I saw it too late. A Knight had climbed up through a broken section of bridge and was cutting through a group of newly risen Guardians who had no business being that deep. Talos saw them.

That was all it took.

He slammed his barricade down between them and the Knight, caught the cleaver on his forearm, and drove his fist into the thing's chest hard enough to crack its armor open.

"Move!" he shouted at them.

They moved.

He bought them room.

That was always Talos. The whole universe could be collapsing, and he would still make sure someone else had a path out.

Hera pulled the flank back together with a Nova so precise it carved a safe lane through the swarm. I went high along a broken rib of stone, burning Acolytes off the ledges with Solar knives, trying to clear her sightline.

Then the chamber changed.

I do not know how else to say it.

The Hive did not stop fighting.

But something passed through them.

A pressure.

A command.

Thrall bowed their heads mid-charge. Knights turned as one. Wizards lowered in the air like curtains drawn around a throne.

Nyx whispered, "Specter."

I felt it before I saw him.

A weight in the Light.

A shadow with a crown.

Crota stepped out of the depths.

I had heard the name by then. Everyone had. The stories were already moving through Guardian channels like fever. Son of Oryx. God-Knight. Eater of hope.

He was enormous, yes, but size was the least of him. Green fire burned around him like worship. His sword looked less forged than declared. Every step made the bridge beneath us feel borrowed. The Hive around him did not seem encouraged by his presence.

They seemed completed by it.

A Titan near the front charged him.

Brave.

Stupid.

Human.

Crota cut him down with one swing.

Just like that.

No ritual.

No grand gesture.

No time to process what we had seen.

A Guardian vanished from the universe, and Crota kept walking.

The line broke.

I do not blame them.

I want to.

I want to be angry at everyone. At the Vanguard. At the fireteams that ran. At the ones who charged. At the pilots who could not reach us. At myself. At Hera. At Talos for being exactly who he was.

But the truth is worse.

Crota entered the fight, and we understood.

Not fear.

Scale.

We understood we had mistaken a war for a hunt.

We were not the hunters.

Talos did not run.

Of course he did not.

Hera screamed at him over comms. "Talos, fall back!"

He did not answer.

I saw him through smoke and green fire, standing near the broken span where the young Guardians had retreated. His barricade flickered in front of him, cracked under pressure from Hive fire. He turned once and looked back.

Not at me.

At Hera.

I saw that.

I will never stop seeing that.

Then he looked at me.

Even from that distance, even through the chaos, I knew what he was about to do.

I started running.

"Talos!" I shouted.

He raised one hand.

Not a wave.

Not goodbye.

A command.

Stay back.

As if I had ever listened to him in my life.

I drew Solar. Too fast. Too much. Golden Gun sparked around my hand, unstable in the panic. The world narrowed but not cleanly. Not like it should. Rain is easy. Ruins are easy. Fallen Captains are easy. Even Hive Knights have the decency to die when shot properly.

Crota turned toward Talos.

Talos charged.

Arc Light gathered around him, fierce and blue-white, crackling across battered armor and old dents and every stupid receipt he refused to buff out. He hit the ground like thunder, fists blazing, and for one impossible second, I believed.

That is the cruelest part.

I believed because Talos had made a career out of making impossible things flinch.

He struck Crota.

Crota moved back one step.

One.

Talos roared and hit him again.

Crota caught him.

Just caught him.

One massive hand around the chestplate, lifting him like the weight of him meant nothing.

I fired.

Golden Gun.

One shot.

It struck Crota's shoulder and burst against him in Solar flame.

He turned his head toward me.

Not hurt. Annoyed.

Hera's Void hit next, a lance of dark Light that would have folded a Walker into scrap. It splashed across Crota's guard, tearing at the green fire, buying seconds.

Only seconds.

Talos fought in Crota's grip. Hammered at his arm. Arc burst from his fists. His Ghost appeared behind him, frantic, bright, darting for an angle, a chance, anything.

I remember Talos's voice over comms, broken by static.

“Get them out.”

Not get me out.

Not help me.

Get them out.

Hera was still casting, still trying to pin Crota in place. Her voice cracked when she shouted, “No!”

Crota raised his sword.

I was still running.

Too far.

Always too far.

The blade came down.

Talos died before he hit the ground.

His Ghost screamed.

I did not know Ghosts could make that sound.

Then Crota turned and closed his hand around him.

Nyx made a noise beside me that I have never heard from him before and never want to hear again.

The shell cracked first.

Light burst between Crota’s fingers.

Talos’s Ghost fought. Actually fought. Little bastard burned brighter than I had ever seen him, lashing out with everything he had, refusing the end with all the fury his Titan deserved.

Crota crushed him.

The Light went out.

I stopped moving.

For maybe half a second.

Maybe less.

Maybe forever.

Then Hera hit me from the side.

Not with Light.

With her shoulder.

She drove me behind a broken pillar just as Crota's sword carved through the place I had been standing. Stone vaporized. The shockwave threw us both across the bridge.

I came up wild.

No control. No plan. Solar burning in both hands, not shaped, not useful. Just rage trying to become a weapon.

Hera grabbed my armor.

"Specter!"

I tried to pull away.

She grabbed harder.

She had tears in her eyes.

That stopped me more than her strength did.

"He's gone," she said.

I shook my head.

I think I did.

I do not remember deciding to.

"No."

Her voice broke. "He's gone."

Crota advanced.

Hive poured around him.

Behind us, survivors were retreating across the bridge. Wounded Guardians. Ghosts carrying dead who might still rise if they made it out. A Titan dragging a Warlock with one arm missing. A Hunter firing blindly into the swarm while shouting for a Ghost who did not answer.

Talos had opened the path.

Talos had died holding it.

Hera looked at the survivors.

Then at me.

There was a plea in her face I did not know how to survive.

"Help me get them out," she said.

That was what did it.

Not reason.

Not fear.

Talos.

Get them out.

I killed everything between us and the retreat.

I do not know how many.

I do not know how.

Golden Gun. Knives. Hand cannon. Blade. Fists. Solar poured out of me in ugly, precise bursts, control shattered and reassembled around the only order left in my head.

Move.

Clear.

Protect.

Do not look back.

Hera became a storm beside me.

Not elegant now. Not controlled in the way I knew. Her Void tore through the tunnels like grief with a shape. She collapsed passages behind us. Sealed doors with gravity wells. Ripped Knights from the floor and broke them against walls. Every time someone fell, she was there, throwing down a rift, dragging them upright, voice raw from shouting commands.

We got twelve out.

Maybe more.

Maybe less.

I hate that I do not know.

I know Talos got none.

That is not true.

Talos got all of them.

He just did not get himself.

Extraction was chaos. Ships screaming low over the surface. Hive fire from the cracks. Guardians running across gray dust under a black sky. The Moon looked almost peaceful above the horizon, which felt obscene.

I remember Hera standing at the edge of the extraction zone, staring back toward the Hellmouth.

I remember taking her arm.

I remember her pulling away.

Not angry.

Empty.

Then she turned and walked onto the ship.

Nyx stayed close to me the entire flight back. Too close. Like he was afraid I would disappear if he drifted farther than arm's reach.

Maybe he was right.

No one spoke in the cabin.

Not really.

There were wounded Guardians. Shell-shocked Ghosts. Armor scorched green. Blood on the floor. Someone praying under their breath. Someone else laughing in that broken way people do when the alternative is screaming.

Hera sat across from me.

Hands folded.

Still as stone.

Talos's blood was on her sleeve.

Or oil.

Or whatever word people use when they want to pretend Exos and Titans and Guardians are categories neat enough for grief to respect.

I kept looking at the empty space beside her.

Talos should have been there.

Too big for the seat. Helmet off. Talking too loudly. Calling the retreat ugly but necessary. Telling Hera she looked like hell and me that my shot almost made Crota blink. Asking Nyx if anyone recorded him moving Crota back one step because "that counts."

One step.

He moved Crota one step.

That is what the Moon gave us for Talos.

One step and twelve survivors.

I would burn the whole place down for less.

Back at the Tower, the debriefing room was too clean.

That is what I remember most.

Clean table. Clean lights. Clean walls. People with clean hands asking us to recount the loss. As if it could be arranged into sequence. As if cause and effect could make it bearable.

Hera gave the report.

I could not.

She stood there in robes still stained from the Moon and spoke in a voice so controlled it scared me.

“Crota entered the engagement zone at approximately—”

No.

No, that is not how he entered.

He came like the end of a sentence.

“Guardian Talos held the retreat corridor—”

No.

Talos stood where no one else could.

“His Ghost was destroyed—”

No.

His Ghost screamed.

“Recovery was impossible—”

No.

I was too far.

When she finished, no one spoke for a long time.

Then someone said, “Your fireteam’s actions saved lives.”

Hera looked at them.

I had never seen her expression so cold.

“Our fireteam is dead,” she said.

Then she left.

I followed.

Not immediately.

I should have.

I sat there for a while with Nyx hovering beside my shoulder and the debriefing officers pretending not to watch me fail to move.

Eventually Nyx said, very quietly, “Specter.”

Just my name.

That was enough.

I found Hera on the Tower overlook.

Of course I did.

The City below was still alive. Lights in windows. Ships crossing the sky. People shouting in the market district. Somewhere, someone was laughing. I hated them for half a second, then hated myself for it.

Hera stood at the railing, both hands gripping the edge hard enough that her gloves creaked.

I came up beside her.

Neither of us spoke.

The Traveler hung above the City, huge and silent and useless in the way only gods can be after they have given you miracles with limits.

Finally, Hera said, “He knew.”

I did not ask what she meant.

Yes.

Talos knew.

He knew Crota would kill him.

He knew we would try to stop him.

He knew we would fail if he let us.

So he made the choice first.

I said, "He bought the retreat."

Hera's jaw tightened.

"I know."

"He saved them."

"I know."

"He moved Crota."

That broke something.

Not loudly.

She inhaled once, sharp and small, and bowed her head.

I did not know what to do.

I have killed gods' servants. Burned Knights in their own churches. Walked through firefights laughing because if I stopped laughing, fear would get ideas. I have died and returned and died again. I have looked into the black architecture of the Hive and told myself hatred was enough to keep me upright.

None of that taught me how to stand beside Hera while she tried not to fall apart.

Nyx hovered behind us, silent.

For once, he did not tell me to write.

I am writing now because if I do not put this somewhere, I will take it back to the Moon and use it badly.

There is a dent in my chestplate from where Hera hit me out of Crota's strike.

There is a crack across my left gauntlet from the bridge.

There is ash ground into my cloak that will not come out.

Talos's mark is in my quarters.

He gave it to me last month after I made fun of the color.

Said he had a spare.

He did not.

I know that now because I looked.

There is no spare.

Stupid Titan.

Stupid, brave, impossible Titan.

I keep thinking about the first time we met. Through a wall, carrying a Captain like punctuation. "Either of you two need a door?" Like the universe had sent us the most literal answer possible to every problem I refused to admit I had.

He was the first person who made the fireteam feel obvious.

Hera was gravity. I was motion.

Talos was the line.

And Crota broke the line.

No.

That is not right.

Crota killed him.

He did not break him.

Talos held.

All the way to the end.

That matters.

It has to matter.

Because if it does not, then the Moon is just a mouth, and we are only things it has not finished chewing.

I refuse that.

I do not know what Hera will do tomorrow.

I do not know what I will do.

I know the Vanguard will call this a disaster. A failed offensive. A massacre. They will count Ghosts lost, Guardians slain, positions abandoned, strategic objectives unreached. They will make charts. They will write names. They will brief commanders. They will bury what can be buried.

They will not understand Talos from the report.

Not really.

I miss him.

There.

There it is.

Ugly little sentence.

I miss him.

Nyx says nothing is useful right now.

He says grief is not a mission.

I hate when he is wise.

I hate that Talos would agree with him.

Crota is still alive.

That thought is dangerous.

I can feel the shape of it in me already. A clean, burning line pretending to be purpose.

Not tonight.

Tonight, I will not go to the hangar.

Tonight, I will not steal a ship.

Tonight, I will not make Hera lose someone else because I cannot survive having lost Talos.

Tonight, I will sit here.

I will write his name.

Talos.

Talos.

Talos.