

Traikill shoved a few coins across the bar at Fort Trinity's best excuse for a tavern, then dragged the heavy pewter mug closer, and took a drink. She grunted, shrugging. It would do. She stalked over to a quiet corner, and collapsed onto the sturdy bench there, leaning forward against the table.

"Alright, gunner, let's see what you have to say," she muttered, pulling the small notebook from a pocket in her armor. Opening it, she read the inscription of ownership, neatly lettered on the inside cover: 'Legionnaire Shawrun Hillmount / Hill warband / Iron Legion'

### **Zephyr 30, 1330**

*"A new book, a new knife, a new deployment! Things keep looking up!"* There was a little sketch of a paw giving a thumbs up, beside the clean, sharp print on the first page. *"Good thing, the old book was getting tattered. We've fired a LOT of rounds over the last six months! And now we're field testing the revised version of the Charr-portable multipurpose heavy gun. Pity we couldn't come up with a good acronym for CHUMP. And we get to do it in Orr, no less. Volley's favorite place!"*

Traikill snorted, and paused to take a drink. "Ev'body's fav'rit place," she muttered, glancing around the tavern. Still only a paw-full of other patrons, still mostly human. She gave a slight nod to the Norn who noticed her look up, and he gave a sullen nod in reply.

*"Right now we're just enjoying a couple of days home, loading up. Meeting with Centurion Snarlyface went as well as it usually does, quick and to the point."* Traikill smiled faintly at the comically snarling Charr face, sketched in support of the comment. *"We're allocated 60 shells of the new artillery ammo, and three of the guns. We're expected to support ground operations, and interdict pirate, separatist and Inquest shipping. It should be a good chance to see how they perform in real operations, instead of the proofs out on the range. Barring complications, should ship out Zephyr 32."*

### **Zephyr 31, 1330**

*"Well, Turp 'Barefoot' Hilltooth found a novel way of getting out of this! Damn fool picked up a crate by the sides, instead of by the bottom, like was clearly marked. So the bottom detached, and now he's in the infirmary with a paw about three times as wide and half as tall as it should be. Medic says he'll be cleared for desk duty in a week, short marches in two or three, depending. Actually was good he wasn't wearing proper footgear, or it would have smashed the boot flat on him, and they would have had to cut it off. The boot, not the foot. Gredara says he did it on purpose, because he knew he'd lose their headcount competition."*

Accompanying the entry was a cartoon of a extremely agitated Charr with a crate dropped on one paw.

### **Zephyr 32, 1330**

*"Argh! Since Turp is out, we only get two of the guns! Volimnu is happy because it means he and Gredara each get more firetime. Then I told him that means they get to carry 30 shells each, instead of 20. Not so grinning now! I'll actually break Barefoot's load out between Rurmok and Vodtour."*

There was a broad horizontal line, which she had to interpret as a break in time.

*"Well, more happy news, we actually got 80 rounds! We're settled in at Lion's Arch right now, we start the march South tomorrow at first light. Cent. Snarlyface (he'll kill me if he ever reads these, but I know he never does!) wants this to be a proper deployment field test, so we're to march the whole way, and do a set-up and break-down at every single stop. I think he's just jealous. Anyway, he got us an extra 20 rounds, so I'm happy. I'll actually get to fire these suckers a few times. Time to go, 'band is yelling they got a table at that place with the parrots and the good beer!"*

The rest of the page was filled with what seemed to be sketches of Charr drinking. Most were comical, a couple seemed like something closer to portraits.

Traikill frowned, taking a slow drink. She knew that place, she'd eaten there more than a few times. Her warband had stopped there. It wasn't as good as before the razing, but it was still probably the best the Arch had to offer. She had to agree with 'Snarlyface': for a proper field test of new gear it was important to abuse it, and show up any shortcomings early.

### **Zephyr 33, 1330**

*"Got a late start, but after that night, no surprise! First stopover a little after noon, near a big troll camp. Locals call it Mudflat. Not sure why, it's not flat, all the mud is West of here. Humans really don't make much sense. Guns deployed & stowed w/o issue. 0 shells fired. 0 rounds fired. Lunch was leftovers from yesterday, mostly fish and some weird fruit. Tasty!"*

*"Stopping for night near a place they call Gleaner's Arch. Minor encounters with aggressive wildlife, already starting to see a few Risen. Supported small caravan against Risen. Suller spotted probable bandits, but they faded out before we could engage. 0 artillery shells fired, est. 40 rifle rounds fired. Rurmok slugged one of the Scutters so hard it flew up in the air, and landed in a tree!"* There was a tiny cartoon of a burly Charr punching a Cavern Scutter up into the air.

*"Guns deployed, shells loaded. Volimnu & Vodtour have first watch, Gredara and I take second, Rurmok & Suller take third."*

### **Zephyr 34, 1330**

*"Guns stowed w/o issue. Breakfast of something Suller shot this morning. He says it was a deer, couldn't prove it by me. Whatever it was, it eats like meats."*

*"Stopover for lunch couple of hours after noon. Guns deployed & stowed w/o issue." ... Traikill skimmed over the next few days, noting the regular accountings of issues with wildlife, Risen, occasional encounters with bandits and pirates. Always a careful accounting of ammo consumed, and almost always some little image to accompany notable moments. In line with her own experiences, things got more interesting the further south they travelled.*

### **Zephyr 37, 1330**

*"Vodtour saw a human skulking outside perimeter during night, but was unable to confirm identity without giving away position. Sending Suller and Vodtour out to recon. Suller, Vodtour report pirate camp appx quarter-mile West, in swamp. Suller corrects me, exactly 1,438 feet bearing 240. Shifted guns accordingly, adjusted to mortar configuration. Deployed Suller, Vodtour, Rurmok forward a few hundred feet, then ordered the firing of 2 shells, 10 seconds apart. Mop-up operations were quick. Accuracy of shells high, well within norms. Gredara complained ground is soft, soaked up energy, made her round fall 10' short of a tent she didn't even know was there. Volimnu and I reminded her she's a cub and should have compensated. She chased him around the fire a few times, I think Rurmok hurt himself laughing. 9 pirates killed, usable supplies acquired, remainder destroyed on site. 2 artillery shells fired, 27 rifle rounds. Packing up now, guns stowed w/o issue."*

On the opposite page was a detailed top-down sketch of the pirate camp, with the shell impacts noted. Traikill frowned as she examined it, admiring the clarity, growing deeply envious of this Legionnaire's skill. And then she felt a dark twist in her gut, remembering his fate.

*"Lunch. Volimnu and Gredara agree the guns are awkward for long carry. Discussion over meal (std issue rats) about possible improvements." Again, a detailed drawing showing how the carry strap could be improved for Charr physique.*

*"Making good time, despite burden of guns. Again speaks well for faster deployment. Expect to make Trinity by nightfall tomorrow. Can already smell Orr on the wind."*

*"Had hard time finding good position for night. There is a Sylvari camp, but none of us trust them right now. Feels very open here. Shifting guard duty to rotate w/ 3 up at all times. Guns deployed in ballistic mode, chambers loaded."*

### **Zephyr 38, 1330**

*"Early start, no-one slept easy. Had minor issue with Volimnu's gun on stow - bipod jammed when he collapsed it. Didn't take long to fix, seems minor."*

She started to skip forward, when a striking image further down the page caught her eye. It was a lightly shaded line drawing of Charr. Just the face, from the side, looking somber. The horns looked familiar, a lower one broken near the tip with a metal cap on the end. She remembered the two half-eaten bodies Grimm had hauled up onto the beach.

She swallowed with difficulty, then snapped the book closed and drained her tankard. "Fuck this shit," she hissed, surprising herself with her vehemence, and stalked to the bar, pushing her way close to it. Apparently more people had showed up while she was reading. "Another," she snarled, shoving the mug across the counter.

"Hey. You keep a civil tongue in your head, Charr," the human next to her demanded, drawing himself up to full height in what she had to think was an attempt to intimidate her. "You may have..." he started to say, and jammed a finger against her chest. He was on the floor before she was even really aware she had swung her fist.

"Oh, shit, sorry," she started to say, realizing just how bad a mistake that might have been, and leaned forward to help him up. And then she realized he had friends. Several friends.

"You're GOING to be sorry!" one of those friends snarled, rising up from his chair.

She felt better, by the time the MPs arrived. A good fight always helped clear her head. Buying a round of drinks for the humans rankled a little, but it helped reassure the MPs it had all just been a little good natured fun, blowing off some steam. It helped that one of the MPs was Charr, and understood. After all, there were no broken bones.

With a bloodied nose and refilled ale, she retired to her corner again. The first drink stung a bit, and she realized she had a split lip as well. She grinned a little. Probably would sport a good shiner in the morning too. She took a deep breath, and pulled the small book from her pocket again, and laid it on the table in front of her.

She drank slowly, glaring at the logbook as if she half expected it to do something unpleasant. The events of the day before played over and over again in her head, and she tried to make sense of it all. Tried to build a timeline of how it had all played out - how it had ended with an entire warband dead. With this Legionnaire and two of his soldiers huddled in ancient wreckage, making a last stand against the implacable Orrian Risen. How they had fought a running battle, retreating. How at least two had fallen at the beach. How... how had her mug gotten empty?

She sighed, and picked up the book, making her way to the bar again. "Another," she rumbled, more quietly this time. She looked over at the humans, nursing their own wounds as they talked together, and frowned, her ears drooping. Realizing they likely had their own losses to deal with. Even as the Dragon's power faded slowly from the region, this place tended to tear at the living in every way imaginable. And even if they were just mice, they were all fighting against it, together. "And for them," she added, more quietly still, pushing more coins across the scarred wood.

Back at her corner again, she leafed through the book until she found that image. She skipped past what she had read of Zephyr 38, and found what inspired the picture.

*"Not long after lunch, once we got into Bramble Pass, noticed Rurmok had gotten quiet. We took a short breather, I pressed him on it, because I knew he'd lost his first warband in Orr. He said they fell not far from where we were. Suller suggested we go and pay respects. Rurmok resisted, said he didn't want to delay us. The rest of the warband summarily outvoted him. I think it did him good to be there again. I hope so. He seemed grateful for the respect we paid."*

"Fuck," Traikill sighed, closing her eyes for a long moment. If that was Rurmok, she still had the recovered tags in her pocket. On impulse, she pulled his, and the other one, and laid them on the table before her. Leaning over them, she continued to read.

### **Zephyr 39, 1330**

*"Made Trinity last night. We were all too beat to do more than find a bunk and fall in it. We'll take the day and catch up with the local action and reports, clean up, and get some good hot chow in us. Volimnu reports his gun was sticky unchambering the round this AM, he'll strip, clean and lube."*

*"Pact leadership here is glad to have fresh paws hitting the muck. Briefing on current situation was thorough and well presented, and when I explained our orders, they integrated our planned movements into their own. Wish it could always go this smoothly! They pointed out several likely vantage points with FOV or indirect fire arcs at their planned strikes. We'll take a look when we get on-site, and let the regionals know our AO. I expect we'll still largely operate independently, but we've always been a force multiplier. Orrian forces are largely disorganized, but sporadically develop great focus and aggression. Originally they thought the Eyes were responsible, but does not always seem true. Also some renewed Inquest activity, and more shipping traffic than usual - largely suspected to be pirates reflagging captured vessels, maybe in support of Mantle operations? Apparently they pay really well."*

*"Good chow tonight! Stayed up late swapping stories with some of the Pact and Vigil soldiers, then another warband drifted by, with a couple of Norn in tow, and the tales got taller. Learned an incredibly lewd joke about their Bear Spirit and trees. Probably should not write that one down, but I'm still grinning."*

### **Zephyr 40, 1330**

*"We were all dragging a bit after last night, and nobody was eager to leave the fort, but we should hit the gate by the crack of noon."*

Traikill paused, and rubbed her muzzle tiredly. Her snout ached, and her eye was starting to swell. She skimmed the next few pages, taking in the simple, silly cartoons and the carefully drawn renditions of mechanical parts. Apparently Volimnu continued to have minor problems with the breech sticking, but only when manually unloading.

Then there was a sketched map of the area around the Hunter's Table. She flicked back a page.

### **Zephyr 46, 1330**

*"Last few days pretty productive, but reluctant to spend more than 2-3 days in any one spot. Shifting camp again today, expect brief stopover in Pact camp. Shells fired overnight: 1. Rifle rounds: 7. Uncertain how many enemy downed - 5 hit for certain, but no bodies present in the morning. I hate this place."*

*"Reached Vigil camp mid-afternoon. They had been nearly over-run a couple of days ago, and were still recovering. We helped as best we could with cleanup. I talked with the surviving leadership, we'll move up onto a mount fairly near here, and use our scouts to identify any follow-on attack, and rain indirect fire on them. Situation here is grim, but reinforcements are expected within a few days. We'll buy them that time. He argued for direct support, but we're more effective at range, and against those odds, it's just smarter. However, we'll overnite here, and reinforce their perimeter, give their guards a little break."*

*"Nightfall. Volimnu and Gredara each assigned as support watch, at each main entrance, with guns in direct fire configuration. Already had two minor incursions, easily repulsed. 4 shells fired, estimate 18 rounds. Expect count will be higher by morning."*

### **Zephyr 47, 1330**

*"Only had one more attack during the night, much lighter than I expected. While it was fortunate for the moment, past experience shows they are just gathering forces. We're eating breakfast now, will move out soon. I'll probably order forced march, so we get to the next site early. Want to make sure they have time to rest. Volimnu and Gredara were both pretty beat this morning. We all are. Orr isn't known for being a restful spot. 1 more shell, 9 rounds overnight."*

*"On station now. Not as bad a march as I feared, the weather actually held clear for a bit. Very little resistance by Risen or wildlife. Nice location - one good path down toward mainland, a rough but navigable path down toward the ocean. Rest of the area is broken and steep, even if anything attacked, they couldn't get numbers up here in a hurry, we'd have plenty of warning. Shadecloth set up, troops are asleep while I take first watch. It's weirdly pretty from here. Wish I could have seen this place before the fall, what it must have been like."*

"Hey! Charr! You deaf? Get those four ears cleaned out!"

Traikill blinked in confusion, lifting her head. "What?"

The bartender standing at her table gestured at the empty bar. "We're closing, and you're not kippin' here."

Squinting, she rubbed her eyes, then nodded. "Alright, uh... sure..." she muttered, wondering where the time had gone. She never was a fast reader, and she had re-read some of the passages several times, but it just seemed like the hours had escaped her somehow. She pushed the empty mug across the table, scooped up the tags, and made her way outside.

It was still oppressively humid and hot, and the black sky hung heavy over the fort, the gloom defeating any attempts to push it back with lights and lanterns scattered about. She wandered aimlessly for awhile, eventually finding herself down on the docks. She climbed up onto a stack of crates nestled under a light, leaned back, and opened the book again.

There were so few pages with writing still on them. She looked out over the black waters, slowly rising and falling, slapping against the stonework. Learning the story of this warband made this all far too real. Made their deaths feel ... more dreadful, somehow. She was no stranger to death, but this was different. As if... maybe if she didn't read on, perhaps it wouldn't happen.

But she knew different.

*"Had a little breeze for a while, helped cool things a little. Both guns configured for mortar fire, set on hard stone, aimed at expected attack paths against Vigil camp. Gredara wanted to fire a ranging shot, but I rejected. I don't want to draw attention, especially late in the day. Plus we're down to 34 rounds. Tomorrow AM, if nothing happens today, I'll OK a ranging shot. Vodtour has been watching the ocean, has seen a few ships. Mostly Pact, or Krytan, heading north. One looked really suspicious, did not follow the same course as the others. One headed south was clearly Inquest by the flags and structure, but it was out of range. Volimnu really wanted to take the shot. I said he'd get to try for the next pirate in range."*

*"Volimnu got his chance! Suller spotted un-flagged ship moving South, putting on sail, with apparent intent to intercept a cargo ship headed North. Authorised two rounds direct fire from one gun. Shift from mortar to direct configuration was quick. First round went short appx 5 yards. Second round glancing hit - light damage to upper deck. Pirate immediately diverted, headed for open sea."*

*"Standard watch tonight. 6 rounds fired, 2 shells fired. 3 Risen and 1 spider killed. 1 Inquest vessel damaged."*

### **Zephyr 48, 1330**

*"I would say it was a quiet night, but it was only quiet for us. There was a big fight somewhere west, we heard explosions and gunfire for a long time. The variety of weapons says it was a Pact operation. There's a big fort over there somewhere, but it was all out of our view. Suller bagged a lizard down by the shore, it'll stretch our rations nicely. Smells good cooking."*

Traikill smiled faintly at the little cartoon of a Charr holding a lizard aloft, with big Xs for eyes.

*"A little before noon, saw smoke on the horizon, west of here. No obvious source. Spotted a small mixed group doing recon to the South. 1 Charr, 1 Asura, 2 Humans. Posted Volimnu in charge, while I went down to chat. Rurmok as escort, Suller and Vodtour had their scopes on us, I know. Group turned out to be Whispers team, said they were investigating report of Inquest drop point on the beach. I don't believe anything the Whispers say. But I told them about the*

*Inquest vessel we spotted yesterday. And indicated our position, so they wouldn't waste time trying to sneak up on us. I hope. Maybe they will anyway. Who knows."*

*"This day is dragging! So glad we set up the shade. Late afternoon, and absolutely nothing moving on land. Maybe the fight West drew off the Risen here? Suller spotted another suspicious vessel moving North. Was running under Krytan flag, but inverted. Suller says that means trouble or danger, that it probably meant the ship had been captured, and the surviving crew used that as distress signal. Ship also following reverse course of pirate yesterday. Authorized two rounds, Volley bet his dinner she'd miss it clean. She made the first round count - outstanding shot, just above waterline, near bow! Should be minimal loss of life, and an easy capture. They limped out of view, Northbound. She crowed and danced around... she's never going to let Volley live it down!"*

There was a cartoon of one Charr dancing triumphantly on a sad-faced partner, with a smoking gun and a sinking ship in the background.

*"So much for it being a slow day! Early evening finally saw Risen massing, and movement on Vigil base. Gave open fire order. Nice groupings between the two guns, calibration seems to have held well. 6 rounds from Gredara, 5 from Volimnu. His breech stuck again, but was still able to cycle with a little Iron Encouragement. Excellent damage to enemy, fully dispersed. Not sure they even got in visual range of the Vigil troops. I expect beer for all of us, when we get back there."*

*"Standard watch. 0 rounds fired. 12 shells fired. 1 presumed-pirate ship damaged, unknown Risen turned into paste. Squall line to the West, moving East, expect to get wet tonight."*

Traikill sighed, closing her eyes and rubbing her muzzle slowly, letting the pain of it drag her back into the here and now. She could feel the rattle in her chest growing heavier, and cursed losing that inhaler during the scrambled escape from the wreckage. "That had to be it," she muttered to herself, checking the date again. "They were the ones who fired. Had to be." She tried to remember how the flag had looked when they boarded the wreckage, but it was all just a blur. Her focus had been on getting her people safely out of the water!

### **Zephyr 49, 1330**

*"Nasty night! Even with the shelter, everybody got drenched. I think the rain went sideways as much as down. But it helped clear some of the stink out of the air for a little while at least. Volley & Gredara working on his gun. Still light rainfall."*

*"Rain stopped, finally. Volimnu's gun re-assembled. Assessment is breech is slightly out of true, and continued fire warped the slide enough to bind on eject. Not a hazard, but needs addressing. They suggest slightly thicker lining.*

*"Vodtour spotted movement in cliffs nearby, but says it was just something small.*

*Suller just confirmed, 2 Asura moving in the rockline, confirmed Inquest. I ordered hold fire, observe."*



*"Late afternoon. Hah! We never saw the Asura again, but now there's growing sounds of Risen from most likely path of Asura retreat. Hope they got eaten." A picture of a distressed Asura being eaten by a pair of massive jaws complimented the thought.*

The rest of the page was blank, but the next page had a series of hastily written entries, with smeared ink.

*"Position over-run. Many Risen. Two waves. Fighting retreat down back of hill, toward shore. Suller down, lost. Vodtour wounded, Rurmok supporting. Risen slowed by grenades, taking brief halt to regroup. Volimnu says beach looks clear ahead. Something big coming down hill at us."*

*"Made some distance along shore, caught again. Volley says will delay at pinch on shore. Wrecks provide cover. Vodtour support."*

*"Moved inland, sheltered in wreckage. We can hear them gathering again. We end it here."*

Numb, she mindlessly flicked through the empty pages that followed, riffling them past her claw. A glimpse of writing near the end made her stop, and page back.

About ten pages before the end of the book was a simple note, in Legionnaire Shawrun Hillmount's tidy print: *"Hey, dummy! This time, remember to go get another book now, before this one is full!"*

She curled up and howled her misery into clutched claws.

-fin-

## Context and backstory:

Iron legion warband Shard, led by Legionnaire Traikill Stormshard, was ordered south into Orr to assist in the rescue & recovery of Order of Whispers agents from a shipwreck. There were accusations that the ship had been shelled by an Iron Legion light artillery group, while it was flying a Krytan flag, So there was potential political backlash.

However, the ship was also running cargo for White Mantle, which turned out to be crates and barrels full of Bloodstone fragments. To further complicate the issue, quite a few of the crew of the wrecked vessel were Whispers agents, trying to further infiltrate the Mantle.

Another Whispers group is going to handle the actual Search & Rescue, while Shard provides security, muscle, and hopefully gains some political goodwill. Because Shard is so good at politics. Hah. Yeah. So the Whispers pick Shard up in a small sloop, and make the run down to Orr.

The wrecked ship is spotted aground on a reef, a mile or so offshore, with a big ol' hole in the front. In a daring/stupid/foolhardy maneuver Shard swims across to secure it, while the sloop stays on station a short distance away. It turns out only a single Whispers agent is left alive, everyone else is dead and/or missing. Then a Risen Megalodon, hopped up on some phatt Bloodstone, completely obliterates the sloop. Most of the Whispers agents make it across to the reef, but some do not. The Shark stays in the area, hungry for more of the Bloodstone cargo that's left in the wreck's hold.

Quick investigation by Shard confirms the ship was indeed shelled, but it's impossible to confirm by who. They dispatch the shark via glorious improvised explosion, fight their way to shore and a Pact camp nearby, and deliver the survivors safely. That done, they try to figure out where the Iron artillery group responsible was.

One of Shard goes all AshTrashy and skips out overnight to scout the likely spots an artillery band might have fired from. He finds the spot they likely used, but it had clearly been over-run by Risen several days previous. He tracks their path for a bit, then encounters heavy Risen activity and scoots back to camp. The next day the warband as a whole then retraced the scout's path, and on closer investigation discovered the mobile artillery group had fought a running battle in retreat, before finally being completely wiped out. Members of the warband dug 'dogtags' off what was left of the bodies they could find, and Trai found a gunnery log on one of them. Finally back at Fort Trinity, she gets a chance to read it. Trai is not a very fast reader.

Leg. - M Legionnaire - Shawrun Hillmount  
G1 - M Gunner - Volimnu "Volley" Hillbreaker  
G2 - F Gunner - Gredara Hillcrush  
G3 - M Gunner - at citadel w/ injury - Turp "Barefoot" Hilltooth  
H1 - M Heavy, close support. - Rurmok Hillspire  
S1 - M Spotter, Sniper. - Suller Hillsnap  
S2 - M Spotter, Close Support - Vodtour Hillreave