

Mementos

Shisen walked through the forest. It was another dull down time while General Max awaited for new orders. It was the third week in a row that it hadn't snowed. The winter might finally be over. The snow laid about everywhere and didn't look like it would ever leave. Not that Shisen cared one way or the other. He kicked at a mound of snow and hit something hard. A black object went flying with the puff of snow. It rolled end for end and then came to a halt.

Shisen walked over and picked it up. It was a helmet from a Coalition soldier, but not one of the faceless ones that were all they had ever seen. This one was all black. It had eyeholes and fake teeth. The back of it was covered in spikes. He opened it. It was clean within and the unpadded rim was free of any foreign matter. It hadn't been ripped off of the soldier. There were no burns either, so it hadn't been shot off somehow. Shisen turned it to face him again and looked into the empty lenses. He concentrated.

The woods melted away and Shisen stood in front of the soldier to whom the helmet belonged. Actually the man was not standing in front of him. He was standing in front of a mirror looking out through the helmet. A hand touched his armoured arm and a voice asked, "How does it fit, Sergeant?"

A voice echoed in his ears, caught in the helmet, "It's a tad tight in places."

"Part of it's the new design, part of it is that it's new. Once you wear the padding in a bit it should be okay."

In the mirror he reached up and took the helmet off. Underneath, staring back at him was a man's face: blue eyes, light brown hair, a narrow nose on the narrow face. The man turned and grinned at a woman. She had dark brown eyes and black hair tied up behind her head. She wore a black cloth uniform that brought out the paleness of her skin. Her mouth was a deep red colour that drew his attention, or more likely that of the man whose eyes he was seeing out through. The image began to blur and then it faded away. He tried to make it continue.

The helmet was in his hands, or rather the man's. There was a red stain on the side of the jaw. It was a familiar shape. The hand rubbed away the stain and Shisen was flooded with a warm feeling tinged with guilt. The man's voice--free of the helmet and sounding less deep--said, "Better not let the 1st Lieutenant see that."

That too faded. Shisen concentrated and came up with nothing. His mouth unravelled and he asked, "Where is he now?" then concentrated again. This time he was looking down on the man. He was holding another man, a d-bee with green skin and no hair, by the scruff of the neck of his travelling cloak. In the soldier's hand was a vibro-knife. Its hum was the only sound. Shisen struggled to pull back and widen his view. As he

did it faded away from him. He had an idea of where that was.

Shisen took off at a run. It was too close to waste the TW-horse on, but he worried that it was too far on foot. If only he hadn't wasted that teleporting talisman. Some distance away, Shisen could see the soldier and his victim. As Shisen watched helplessly the soldier drove the knife into the d-bees stomach. Sound made its way to Shisen's ears. It was the soldier screaming, not the hapless d-bee. Shisen drew his Battle Fury claymore as he ran. The d-bee dropped to his knees, the front of his cloak turning a wet murky blue.

As he drew near the soldier looked ready to slit the d-bee's throat. Then suddenly he stopped and reversed the blade. The man lifted the knife toward his own throat. His hand trembled a little then began to shake violently as his arm jerked back and forth. Shisen readied to slash at the man when he got close enough. The soldier turned the knife around again and slit the d-bee's throat. Shisen came into range and swung the sword. It bit into the back of the man's armour and knocked him forward to sprawl over the body of the d-bee.

Shisen waited for the soldier to get to his feet and turn to face him. The man did and he stumbled back barely keeping upright. He screamed at Shisen, "Stay out of my mind monster or I'll kill you just like this one!"

Shisen found that he still had the soldier's helmet in

his other hand. He lowered his sword a bit and offered it to the man as he told him, "You won't have much of a chance without this."

The man looked at the helmet and recoiled. He shouted as if Shisen were deaf, "Keep that bug infested thing!"

Shisen looked inside of it. There was nothing. He said, "There are no insects in this helmet, I assure you."

"You'll use your wicked powers and teleport them in like that other d-bee scum! Drek-eating double-crosser!"

Shisen lowered his sword and held it at his side. "You sure you don't want your helmet? I don't think your ears are supposed to be that colour of red. There are no insects and I lack the ability to make them appear inside."

Shisen held the helmet out and winced as another impression gripped him. A high-pitched nasal voice said, "I need another day or two to get you that information you wanted. It must be terrible to find all those nasty poisonous bugs in your helmet."

Shisen shook his head. The soldier said to Shisen, "You don't come after me, I won't gut you like a fish."

He backed away moving his vibro-knife to his side. Shisen told him, "You have my word of honour that if you turn your back on me I will not slay you. You may go, though I really do suggest taking your helmet, Sergeant. The angry look on the soldier's face turned into one more crazed. He lunged at Shisen shouting, "Mind

melting monster!"

Shisen deftly blocked the sergeant's blow. He turned his sword slightly and smacked the soldier's hand. The man dropped the vibro knife in the snow. He backed away from Shisen who pointed his sword at the man. Holding the sword as steady as possible he leaned over and picked the knife out of the snow. He looked at the man's belt. There was no sidearm on it. He told the man to turn around slowly. The man did so. When he faced him again Shisen lowered his sword, and turning it off held the knife out to the man. "You're unarmed without this."

"I'm dead if I take it. You shockers taint everything you touch!"

He turned and walked away. Shisen watched him for a moment then loudly told him, "You'll die without this stuff."

The man kept walking. Shisen looked around. There didn't appear to be any sign of the sergeant's side arm or any other weapon. Shisen looked at the dead d-bee. He didn't know if the fellow had really been a traitor or just stringing the Coalition man along.

Shisen sheathed his sword and pulled the d-bee's cloak away from his body. Slung over his armoured shoulder was a Twiz rifle of some kind. He turned the body over and lifted the cloak. At the d-bee's back was a shiny CS pistol. Shisen looked up to see where the Coalition man was. He was gone from sight over the

crest of a hill. Shisen pulled the cloak down into place and flipped the d-bee onto his back. He grabbed him by the cooling hand and began to drag the body back to camp. Traitor or not he deserved to be buried.

With him Shisen took the vibro knife and the helmet. He would use the vibro knife rather than let it go to waste in the woods. The helmet he didn't know what to do with, he wasn't even really thinking about it as he carried it along.

Rad called G'lishi on the radio. "G'lishi, I have something for you. Come on back to base and transform into your elf before you find me."

G'lishi answered an affirmative and took wing back to the base. He landed just short of the camp. Thosl was there with her huge bear Kleese. She was brushing the animal's fur as he had frequently seen her do. She didn't say anything, often didn't, content to simply watch. G'lishi transformed in front of her, almost as curious about her reaction as she was curious to see him do it without benefit of a spell. She lowered her head and watched slyly. If she had any reaction it did not show past her usual coy demeanour. Done, G'lishi waved at her. She nodded back as was her apparent custom.

Chris didn't know if the Basilisk's aloofness was because of G'lishi's age or his rank. He had told G'lishi as much. He had said she was not shy, but at the same time did not offer much in any kind of conversation that

wasn't dealing with orders. Chris also said that she might as well be a woman the way she acted and used body language. He had joked that his own girlfriend wasn't nearly as feminine acting.

G'lishi had only really spoken to her when she had come to ask him about the wolf pack attack she had planned out. Then she had been to the point and G'lishi didn't know that the way she moved was anything other than the way a Basilisk moved.

G'lishi headed through the camp. Around the middle he met Max who smiled and jerked his thumb toward the other end of camp. G'lishi saw Rad standing next to the new being, Neodore. The octoman was holding a rifle of some kind and sighting down along its barrel. Neodore was saying, "I don't see how it works without a trigger. I could see if it were hidden somewhere."

He handed it back to Rad who answered, "Well you're not a mage. Oh good, you're here, G'lishi."

Rad handed the weapon to G'lishi.

G'lishi took the weapon and examined it with curiosity. That turned quickly to delight when he realised what it was. Someone had used magic to recreate the sort of weapons Rad used. "Cool!" he said.

He put the stock to his shoulder, imitating how he had seen Rad fire a gun. He intuitively powered the thing up, targeted a tree some distance away and fired, missing completely. Frowning, he took more time to aim

his second shot, but missed again. He looked at Rad, a silent, unvoiced question obvious in his expression.

Rad showed him how to aim and other pointers. G'lishi applied himself diligently, practising until he nearly exhausted his PPE. He then put some ISP into it too, but considered that it was not really meant to work that way so he stopped, akin to not wanting to get the new toy "dirty". At that point he complained about being tired. He closed his eyes to feel around for a ley line. As usual one was nearby.

He suggested to Rad that the training continue there where he could draw from the line for a while to power it up for free. He expressed that he was quite willing to spend hours practising with this new toy, especially since he was informed that it was "his" now. Another thought occurred to him and he asked where the weapon came from. Rad told him that Shisen had recovered it from an enemy. He let it slip that they had almost bought him one.

Things clicked for G'lishi. He became very excited that those otherwise ridiculous credits that people were always talking about were actually useful, like for something this cool. Mostly he'd heard about them buying food, booze, drugs, and time with women, none of which were particularly interesting to him. There were clothes too, but they were only slightly interesting. Of course, Max was always talking about huge repair bills but G'lishi got the feeling that his wages were

nothing compared with that so he ignored the issue except to avoid causing damage to stuff Max owned. In G'lishi's view thus far Max basically owned everything the group had since he was always bitching about having to pay for repairing the stuff.

Another great mystery had been unravelled for him that day.