

## **The Massacre of Helm's Deep**

The USS Vycellen cut through choppy seas, proudly propelling itself directly towards the bruised and blackening skies ahead. Petty Officer Jay Oland watched from the deck, his concern growing with every nautical mile closer they got to the storm. His friend and comrade in arms, PO First Class Donovan Crest came up beside him.

"Why're we doin' this again?" Oland grumbled, for the fiftieth time.

Crest sighed and said, "captain says rough weather will help us in training. Simple overseas ocean escort with some buffeting winds and rain. You afraid of a little rain?"

As if on cue, droplets began to patter the deck in little spurts and bursts. Oland peered over at his friend. "I just don't see why we're taking the risk."

"Risk? Come off it man, it's just some wind and rain!"

"No, I mean the chopper. Isn't it like," Oland lowered his voice, "isn't it some sort of army-" a rough wave exploded over the vessel, sending up a spray.

"What?" Crest shouted.

"I said isn't the bird an army prototype of some sort?"

"I still can't hear you Jay, speak up!" Another crash on the ship. The wind whistled and whooshed.

Oland sighed. "Army prototype!" he shouted, and jabbed his finger towards the stern of the ship. "Can't get damaged?"

"The bird?"

"Yeah!"

Crest considered it. "Maybe this is some sort of test designed for-" another explosion of water "- for the bird, y'know?"

Oland looked doubtful. Ever since the sleek black attack helicopter had arrived unannounced (or at least unannounced to him), things had been weird. Officers were all hush-hush about it, and anyone caught staring at it for too long was gruffly asked to move along. The 'copter's crew was equally shady: they bore army insignias and were kept isolated from the rest of the crew. Now, there was this sudden, unplanned exercise that apparently required a nice squall in order to be complete. The Vycellen had two helipads; Oland's boxy UH-1H "Huey" transport chopper occupied one, and until recently, the other had been vacant. Now the jet black mystery bird lived there.

It was unlike any chopper Oland had seen, yet similar in all the important ways. It was longer than it was wide, it had a swept back tail and little wings hold its missiles, a chain gun of some sort poking out of its snout, a seat for the pilot and the gunner... and a little ball that sat atop the centre of the blades, like the Apache. But all the dimensions were just a bit off, just a little... adjusted.

Oland's reverie was broken by a squawk from Crest's walkie-talkie. The other man answered it, then turned to him. "Weather's shitty enough. We're going now!"

"But we weren't supp-"

"Tell it to the captain!" Crest called as he shot towards the rear of the ship. Grumbling, Oland jogged after him.

By the time they were all suited up and had the helicopters cleared for liftoff, the rain was a steady sheet. Oland sat in the Huey along with Crest and four other men. The interior was filled with automatic weapons, ammunition and explosives. Oland remembered without much joy that a crate of grenades was stored in the seat under his ass. The Huey was actually scheduled to deliver the weapons to another ship that was

headed off to the Gulf Sea, but not for another day. Now the story was that they needed to play the role of a transport under duress, and land back on the Vycellen after heading out to sea for a predetermined distance. The army bird was their escort. It made little sense to Oland and he suspected that others felt the same way. But he was pretty far down on the chain of command, so he kept it shut. For now.

The choppers got the go ahead, and the mystery chopper popped off the deck like a cork from a bottle of champagne. The men who were sitting in a spot where they could see gaped in astonishment. The Huey, like most helicopters, took its time lifting itself off the deck. The strong winds rocked it from side to side.

The pilots wrestled the bucking aircraft onto its flight path and geared up the throttle. Oland could see nothing but black and dark grey outside. The wind whistled wildly along with the steady beat of the blades overhead. The rain drummed outside. Crest was sitting opposite and to the right of him. The man flashed him a grin and a thumbs up.

The captain watched the two blips on the radar screen from the bridge. Lightning flickered and teased out on the horizon, welcoming the two helicopters. He looked over at the army scientist who was perched over a complex looking console. It was jet black and contrasted the grey tones of the bridge almost painfully.

“How much longer?” asked the captain.

“Twenty seconds,” came the shaky reply.

“God help us.”

Oland felt the air around him charge. A new colour outside joined the blacks and greys: a dull purple. The other men saw it too, and craned in their seats to see. *Lightning* Oland thought. He glanced at Crest, who was shouting something to the guy next to him. Suddenly, the world became bright purple. Oland felt catapulted into feathery abandon, his vision nothing but a flashbulb of purple and pinwheeling flecks of colour.

When he awoke, he was sitting on grass. His vision remained murky, but that was because it was nighttime. Hard metal formed the back of some sort of seat. He tilted his head and saw the body of the Huey. His head... didn't hurt? Nothing hurt. His nerves felt tingly though, like he had slept on them funny. He blinked and looked out at the sight before him. His jaw muscles suddenly found other places to be.

Mountains. Huge mountains, on either side of him. The arrangement of the rocks gave him the impression there were mountains behind him too. A little niche cut into the bluffs. In front of him, an expanse of land leading out to God knew where. The horizon was screened by a large stone wall that bridged the entire span between the mountains. On the left end of the wall, an enormous stone tower. Dots of light swarmed over this structure like ants. It was covered in people. Or creatures.

Presently, a group of people approached him. One was a man, adorned in fabulous armour. Oland gaped, *is he carrying a sword?* A tall man with shimmering blonde hair and a short lump of a man with an explosion of messy brown hair flanked the swordsman. The others all looked like knights. Oland blinked. And blinked again. The man strode forward and looked at Oland with as much wonder as Oland supposed he was regarding him with. The man stared for a while longer, then took to staring wildly at whatever was behind Oland. *Ah, the Huey*, thought Oland.

The others in the group held similar expressions. The blonde one softly said,

“what devilry is this?”

Seemingly prompted by the inquiry, the swordsman turned his gaze on Oland again. He spoke, “who... what... *are* you?”

Oland let training take over: “Petty Officer Second Class Oland, United States Navy, sir!” The man reeled. The blonde one looked at the swordsman and mouthed a word: ‘sir?’

The swordsman recovered. “From where do you hail, Officer?”

“The USS Vycellen, fourth-”

“What in good FUCK is this?” came a voice from the left. Oland recognized Crest’s voice. The party of weirdos drew weapons. Swords, mostly, but the short stub of a man pulled an axe from his back, and the blonde produced a... Oland goggled at the sleek wooden bow, then followed the aim of the weapon over to where Crest had emerged from somewhere under the helicopter. With him was one of the pilots from the Huey.

“Whoah now, whoah” Crest said, eyeing the sharp points. He noticed Oland, who appeared to be casually relaxing against the side of the helicopter, “these your pals?”

For some reason Oland remembered the service pistol strapped to his belt and found some arrogance. He pulled himself up to a standing position. The attention of the group shifted from him, then back to Crest, then back to him.

“Not my friends, Crest,” he stared at the swordsman, “I told you who I am, who *are you?*”

The swordsman looked uncertain. The stubby man barked a response: “it matters not who he is!”

“Gimli, please,” soothed the swordsman, “my name is Aragorn.”

*Aragorn? Gimli?* Pop culture facts whizzed and bounced around in Oland’s head. He looked over at Crest and the pilot, who wore similar expressions of mixed recognition and utter disbelief.

“Impossible, is this a joke?” barked the pilot.

“I assure, I am who I claim,” said the swordsman calmly, “what I do not understand is how you came to be here.”

Crest pointed at the blonde. “Orlando Bloom?” Then at the swordsman. “Viggo, Morten, Morgen... M...”

Gimli’s eyes widened and he shouted, “listen to that tongue! Are they cursing us? Aragorn!” The pointed weapons all tensed again.

Aragorn spoke, “we don’t have much time to mull over this... this... mystery,” he gestured at the men and the Huey. “Tell us, what is your purpose here? Why have you come to Helm’s Deep?”

*Helm’s Deep?* mused Oland. He piped up, “isn’t that where you fought all the orc guys?”

“You know of our peril?” asked the blonde (Oland allowed himself to think it) elf.

“You must be Legolas,” Crest said while blinking much like Oland did moments ago.

“And you know who we are...” Legolas said glancing to Crest, “Aragorn, they’re either spies or here to help.”

“Spies!” cried Gimli.

“What spy would reveal himself at this moment?” wondered Aragorn, “now, as the Uruk Hai march? Listen.” They quieted. In the distance, beyond the wall, a dull drumming thud could be heard. Aragorn tilted his head at the wall. “They’ll be upon us soon...”

The pilot spoke: "right, then you fight 'em, they blow up the wall, then all hope is lost, then the wizard comes with all the horses and saves the day, right?" Everyone looked at him. "My kid's favourite movie," explained the pilot.

"They what the wall?" asked Legolas.

"No hope?" Gimli said.

"You know of Gandalf?" demanded Aragorn, alert.

"Oh yeah, that's the guy's name," chirped the pilot, "What's his name plays him, uh, he was in Da Vinci Code and--"

"Gandalf sent them!" cried Aragorn interrupted, "allies! Some sort of race with... with..."

"Whoah, hold on," Crest implored, but Oland held up a hand.

"Yes, we're here to help, but we must act quickly," Oland said.

"Of course, what will you have us do?" asked Aragorn.

"Bring thirty of your men. We have powerful weapons in the..." Oland figured *Huey* would be lost on them, "... in here." He patted the chopper's metal side.

Aragorn nodded at one of the knights behind him. The man scampered off.

"What kind of weapons, Officer?" Legolas asked softly.

Oland drew his pistol and flicked off the safety. They all watched. He picked a spot off and to the right where a patch of moss crowned a boulder. He blew the moss to pieces with one shot. Aragorn and company jumped and put hands on their weapons. Oland nodded at the elf. "A thousand times faster than your bow," he looked to Gimli, "and a hundred times harder than your axe." The dwarf stiffened but said nothing. Aragorn stared and nodded. "Gandolf has aided us well..."

Crest and the pilot looked a little lost. Oland's friend moved closer and nudged him. "What're you doing?" he whispered.

Oland turned and met his gaze. "Helping."

"Why? Well, but, this isn't, ...it can't be *real*."

"Why not?"

Crest just shook his head in bewilderment.

The knight returned with a crowd of similarly clad men. Aragorn spoke: "a question before you equip my men, Officer."

Oland turned. "Yes?"

"Is that too one of your devices?"

The three men from the *USS Vycellen* moved to look where Aragorn pointed. Settled neatly beside the *Huey* was the jet black army helicopter.

Oland gave out the fifteen assault rifles that were stored in the *Huey*. He instructed the other fifteen men to carry the ammo and grenade crates closer to the wall. The drumming pound of the advancing terror grew steadily louder. Crest went with the knights to show them how to work the guns and reload them. The task took little time as the men were battle trained and the weapons were not complicated. Crest was extra clear when he showed them how to use the grenades.

Oland and the pilot searched for any other crewmen. There were none. The army attack chopper was deserted as well. The pilot reported that he should be able to fly the thing. Under curious scrutiny from Aragorn (Gimli had gone with Crest; Legolas had gone to report to one they called Theoden), they managed to fire up the bird. The noises coming from it startled the middle-earthers.

"Fuel's topped up!" was the pilot's assessment. Oland checked out the gunner's

controls. They seemed manageable. He settled in and watched the cockpit close over him. Aragorn held up a hand. Oland returned it.

Crest stood on the edge of the wall in a state of minor shock. All around him were very foreign and alien men and smells. He held his M16 at ready along with ten other knights. Three men were sent to guard the drain, on the advice of the pilot. Behind them were ammo boxes and grenades. Ahead of them was black sea of death, decorated with pinpricks of fire and spewing forth a chant of hatred. The skies opened up and dumped rain to add to the drama.

Legolas stood beside him: "I hope these death sticks of yours work on the Uruk-Hai."

Crest nodded, "oh, they will."

The advance of the creatures drew close and halted. They roared and bellowed and shrieked. Crest was not impressed. "Watch this," he said.

The M16 chattered and shook violently, and the people around Crest looked over in shock. Legolas watched as a good fifteen orcs fell in a heap. Then more, and more. The orcs under Crest's fire seemed equally shocked. The M16 stopped firing, and silence answered, expect for some battle cries from the rear of the orc party. It seemed all eyes, both friend and foe was on the little hole dug out of the sea of monsters. Crest swapped out his empty and slammed a new clip in. He cocked the rifle and stared at the other armed men.

"What are you waiting for? OPEN FIRE!"

A calamity of noise. Arrows, guns, orc cries. The entire front line of orcs was torn to shreds by bullets and arrows (mostly bullets). The living orcs swarmed around their fallen soldiers. Slowly, they advanced. Crest heard a scream from the left and saw a large black arrow sticking out of one of the knights. He went back to the slaughter as a dark object thundered overhead.

It was a no-miss situation. Oland felt like he was mowing a lawn. The pilot swept the attack helicopter around in lazy arcs while Oland eased the chain gun downwards. Squeezing the trigger caused a near solid line of searing metal to lance down into the crowd of what he figured were the orcs, reducing them to bleeding sacks. The little firelights they carried winked out of existence as he brushed the line of destruction across them. Twice he shredded what looked like a massive ladder lain flat out in the sea of black.

Every now and then the pilot would line the chopper up and dive while firing a few of the rockets from under the wing. The balloons of fire illuminated a scene from Hell for a few seconds at a time: gnarled humanoids bursting in the air by the hundreds as the rockets exploded, strange wooden devices being disintegrated like sandcastles.

Oland's gun clacked and hissed, and a light on the display told him it needed time to cool down. While he waited, the pilot hovered. Presently, he spoke to Oland from via the transmitter in the helmets they wore. "Use the fly-by!"

Oland grinned and tried to key in the controls for the guided missile. He had seen four of the beasts hanging like bloated stovepipes from the wings of chopper before taking off. He found the right switch and let one drop.

King Theoden watched the fiery magic with the same detached wonder as his comrades. He glanced at the enormous pile of corpses in front of the wall, then at the

abandoned battering ram that lay on the path that led to the Keep's door. And then he glanced skywards, where the invisible force was spewing death and pain effortlessly upon his foes.

The man beside him voiced his thoughts: "it's like the children of Mount Doom are being beckoned to life before us!" he said, gesturing at the most recent series of grenade explosions at the wall. "Arrows and swords, we needn't bother what with this power watching over us!"

Theoden only nodded. A spear of orange appeared in the sky and trailed into the host of Uruk Hai. A plume of fire greater than anyone west of Mordor had ever seen brightened the whole scene, mountainside and all. Amidst the rain of water, wood, flame and orc, Theoden caught a glimpse of the air warrior. It reminded him of the carrion lizards that the ring wraiths were rumoured to be riding. The scene darkened again. Moments later, an ugly tone blasted though the air.

"They're retreating!" called Theoden's guard, "we have won!"

"No," the King said, turning. "Gandolf's warriors have won."

The attack chopper landed as the dark sky began to give way to a purplish tinge. Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli and Crest approached as the cockpit opened. Aragorn called out,

"we are in your debt, mighty fighters." He put a hand on Crest's shoulders, "the people of Rohan are safe thanks to you. Gandolf should return before the sun rises. I look forward to your tales."

Oland glanced back at the pilot and then at Crest. The man wore sheepish grin and shrugged just a bit. *This, thought Oland, is going to be a long day.*