

Life Finds All

By Shawn Carter

Around Persephone, the jungle wildlife sang. She didn't find their song soothing at all. In fact, they aggravated her. The humidity made her want to tear apart her cloak and rip off her skin. Sweat continued to drip off her forehead even after Persephone used her sleeve to wipe it off. She hated how her hair kept the heat in too. Only the clean air made the entire experience tolerable. Beyond that Jungle life didn't suit her at all. Which was why Persephone smiled as she observed several trees come crashing down. The Cranking of her contagion engines overtook the wildlife songs. Their treads crushed animals and plant growth with indifference. The smog from their engines polluted the fresh air. The calming wildlife muses were replaced with the invigorating screams of mechanized death. In no time they would become her loyal servants. Branches cracked around her as her current servants marched behind the engines.

With the little grace, the carriers shambled ahead. The humidity had hastened their decay. Their skin had begun to peel off on some and others crawled, their bones too brittle to walk. Their ranks had thinned since they landed on this rich world a week ago. Persephone thanked her lucky stars that the rumbling of the contagion tank's engine nullified their endless moaning. She would have gone insane by now if it hadn't been for them.

Her Sirens trailed behind them. Their mixture of light and heavy power armor made easy work of the fallen trees. Some didn't even bother to step over and just plowed through the trunks. A few rested their rifles on their arms, others just held it in one and a sword in another. All of them were alert and watching. Persephone found their inhumane silence confronting. At Least something wasn't making a noise.

An engine erupted in flames. Some of the carriers were bisected by the flaming debris, and others just tumbled to the ground. Rain of bullets soon exploded from the treetops. Persephone put up a psychic barrier and watched the shimmer of shells on it. Her Sirens had taken cover and began to return fire. She saw a few had been taken down. Some attempted to get up, but a stray bullet ended their attempt.

Persephone's enemies had used their home field advantage well. Unlike the humans, who always engaged on the ground, the Huskers fought from the trees. Soon their brutes would commit her remaining forces. It would be on her terms, however, not theirs. An animal like roar soon followed. A giant 6 ft lizard crashed down from his branch and with it a muscular monstrosity. The slicer dug its claws into the forearm of the lizard. Its tail wiggled in the air as it waited for an opening. The Husker began to bludgeon the slicer with his free fist. Neither backed down as they tore each other apart. The slicer's tail, at last, found its mark and impaled the husker through his stomach. With its dying breath, the lizard smashed the skull of the slicer.

into the ground. As he did this, the surviving carriers swarmed over him. Each one took a bite, scratched and tore off the skin of the lizard. He had managed throw a few off, but it soon was overwhelmed.

More large thuds happened as the sirens found their marks. Deciding the shooting part of the engagement had concluded. The Huskers leaped from the trees. A few Sirens fixed their bayonets, and some pulled out their powers swords. Persephone did neither. Instead, she just raised her hand and waited for a lizard to make the fatal mistake of charging her.

Her remaining carriers got in the way of the charging Huskers. Some managed to plow through them with relative ease, while others were tar-pitted by her mindless servants. Blood splashed across the ground. Treetops were in flames as the two sides continued to trade shots. The first few Huskers crashed into the Sirens defense line. Fist and blade clashed with a righteous hatred. A Siren impaled a Husker through its throat with a bayonet, only to be ripped apart by the lizard's comrade. A Husker crushed a siren's head with his bare hands, in retaliation the dead sirens comrade used her power fist to shatter the lizard's spine. Neither side dared not to back down.

Limbs, teeth, and blood splashed through the air and littered the ground. Persephone stood in the middle of it all. She deflected several shots and fists. So far none of the Huskers focused their hate on her. Her minions took up most of their attention. She observed a wounded straggler. For pleasure, she raised it in the air. For a few seconds, Persephone watched the lizard struggle for its life as it watched its comrades fight her army. It could see more slicers running through the trees, carriers shambling behind its friends and new sirens sprinting towards the front. Before it could yell out a warning, she flicked her wrist and snapped the lizard's neck. Its body landed with a thud.

"YOU WITCH!" something screamed. Persephone scanned the carnage for the voice. It didn't take her long to find it. The owner charged at her with its fist raised. If the Lieutenant lizard hadn't yelled, it might have gotten her, but alas the idiot did. Just about an inch from her face the Huskers fist and body froze in place. Only its eyes could move. How fast its eyes went from surprise to horror caused to her chuckle. Persephone strolled around the frozen lizard. She ran her hand across its arm and chest.

"You Huskers are so fun to play with. Your strength is indeed frightening. But what are you without it?" Persephone whispered in its ear. A muffled scream was its answer. She had begun to snap each of its fingers with her mind. The bones in its arm also began to twist and crack too. The Husker could only scream as it watched its body crumbled.

Soon the battle died down. The carriers threw the nightmaric dead into piles. Her Sirens lined up the Huskers carcasses together. Persephone sat on a rock and observed them. She waited for her sirens to walk to the sides. As the last one took its place, she stood up from her foundation. With the amount of dead, she could not step up to each one and awaken them. This had only been a scout team, the main attack force would be en route. With a sigh, Persephone placed

her hand on the ground and closed her eyes. A large collective of moans soon followed. She stood up and observed her new army. The Huskers stared back at her with their empty white eyes. One killed by slicers had their skin coated with black goo. With a smile, she pointed them toward their former base. With her new vanguard in tow, Persephone continued her conquest of this godforsaken jungle world.