

GRIMDARK
FUTURE

FAITH IN THE HIVE

SHORT STORY

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RULES

Faith in the Hive

by Dillon Olney

Dhruzalth lumbered back and forth within the nerve center of the wounded behemoth that had brought them to this world, his crashed Hiveship. One of his four hands slid along the fleshy wall of the creature which served as his people's vessel.

Within the chamber stood what was left of his commanding force, the Snatcher Lords, Frūlodh, Lōrthulkh, and Okhnarez, as well as the Synapse Floater Ikhaith, all anxiously waiting for him to break the silence.

At last, Okhnarez spoke up, "Why have you called us here?"

Dhruzalth frowned. Slowly, he turned and looked over the assembled group. Their situation was dire, and a level head and strong leader were needed here.

"I want to hear what you have learned of our situation. When our vessel was damaged," He gently touched the cavernous flesh of the great creature surrounding them, "and we crashed here, Ikhaith sent out a distress call telepathically using this synapse chamber, shortly after, we were attacked by the Humans living on this world. What have each of you uncovered since then?"

Ikhaith was the first to speak, the Synapse Floater's tentacles writhing with anxiety, "There has been no reply to our distress signal. It appears we are on our own."

Dhruzalth frowned, the situation was worse than he'd thought.

"That broadcast is what drew the Humans here," Okhnarez spat, "We might have had the element of surprise otherwise."

"That's enough, Okhnarez," Frūlodh hissed, "We have had little luck communicating telepathically with them, all attempts at so far have only distressed them and resulted in hostility."

Dhruzalth nodded, "We must get off-world as soon as possible. How badly hurt is the Hiveship?"

"Not as severe as we had first feared," Lōrthulkh spoke up, "Our Genesmiths are working tirelessly to heal the flesh and nerves that were wounded in our crash, and it is likely that we will be able to leave the world shortly. However, our supplies are low and the Genesmiths need proteins to complete their work. Our scouts did locate a plant, nepenroot, nearby which could be broken down to speed the healing process but..."

"But they are too near the Human position to obtain without a distraction," Dhruzalth finished the Snatcher's thought.

"So, we shall drive the Humans away," Okhnarez cut in, "Teach those petulant creatures a lesson by claw."

Dhruzalth turned and bared his teeth at the over-eager Snatcher Lord, his patience wearing thin, "We lost many in the crash and more since. Your eagerness for glory has no place here. These losses weigh heavy on my heart already, and I would not see more suffer and die if I could save them. The Humans are reacting just as you or I would react to a pathogen invading our Hive or our vessel."

"But," Lōrthulkh replied, bowing his head in deference, "a counterattack may prove necessary."

Dhruzalth drew back, as Okhnarez withdrew his head in fear, "Oh?" The concern was evident in the Hive Lord's voice, this situation just seemed to keep getting worse.

"Yes. Snatcher Scouts have spotted the Human forces moving large craft towards us from the south. Weapons that may be capable of damaging our vessel's carapace."

Dhruzalth touched his chin with one hand as his two left hands instinctively reached out to the vessel. He felt the faint pulsing of its circulation. He had been with this great behemoth for many decades, he did not wish to see further harm come to it.

"We will attack then," Dhruzalth concluded, "Destroy these weapons and drive the Humans back, long enough to harvest what we need. When the sun's light fades, we will send forth a contingent of Soul Snatchers to sow discord among their ranks, which should give us an opening to strike."

"I will lead an assault from the air myself," Dhruzalth continued, "and a contingent of Grunts, Soul Snatchers, and Venom Floaters can aid in destroying the weapons they have brought forth once the first wave has had time to sow discord and distract our foe. The rest of the Hive should move to ensure that we've acquired the necessary resources."

"I shall lead the Grunts on the ground for the assault!" Okhnarez declared, holding a clawed hand to his chest and lifting his head high, "I will earn a glorious victory."

Dhruzalth sighed, turning the impudent Snatcher Lord, and leaning down, he placed two hands on Okhnarez's shoulders.

"We must work as one to achieve this goal Okhnarez. There is no individual in battle, only the Hive, and no glory to be won," Dhruzalth spoke firmly, "We fight to ensure the Hive may live and if we die, we do so to offer our people a chance to live. You must learn to put your faith in the Hive, rather than in dreams of personal glory."

Okhnarez withdrew back, shamed but still determined.

Dhruzalth paused for a moment, studying the young Lord Okhnarez. He had hoped the Snatcher Lord would be ready for leadership but it seemed he would still require guidance.

His gaze lingered on Okhnarez before he turned to the rest of the Lords, "We must make preparations, the sun will soon set, and each of you shall prepare your troops for battle. Ikhaith, send a message to the Soul Snatchers to assemble and prepare to commence the attack, I will join them on the field."

The Snatcher Lords nodded their approval, and each rushed off to assemble the troops Dhruzalth had assigned to their command. They had lost many in the crash, and the remaining Hive members would need the strong leadership, if they were to survive the coming battle.

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With the rest of the commanders sent on their tasks, Dhruzalth placed a final comforting hand on the flesh of his ship before moving down the hall of the vessel, winding through the organic passages until he reached an exit.

Ducking out of the beast, Dhruzalth stared across the battle torn field before him. The area had been greatly affected by their crash, great mounds of dirt and stone flung up to form hills and craters. These would serve as cover, and give the Grunts and Snatchers a chance to approach the human lines more safely.

He could see the Humans moving about behind hastily dug trenches and thrown-up walls. The Hive Lord let out a heavy sigh, if only they had been able to communicate with the Humans, perhaps the lives of many could have been saved. Yet it seemed now there was little choice but to greet them with tooth and claw.

"Such a waste..." Dhruzalth muttered to himself as he waited outside of the ship, watching for the Soul Snatchers to assemble and the rest of his troops to join him.

A scrambling sound came from behind as Okhnarez and his Grunts clambered into position behind him.

The Snatcher Lord rushed to organize his troops, eagerly pacing back and forth in front of them. His commands were haphazard and overeager.

Dhruzalth furrowed his brow in concern.

Perhaps Okhnarez had not been ready to take on a leadership position, but there were few alternatives.

The Grunts formed up into groups, directed by the Snatcher Lords, preparing their attack. The Soul Snatchers emerged next, sneaking through the assembled Grunts behind Lörthulkh.

Dhruzalth nodded at their commander.

The assault would begin with Soul Snatchers using their psychic abilities spreading confusion and chaos within the Human ranks. Then, Dhruzalth would be able to reinforce his lines or lead an assault wherever it was needed.

The Hive teemed with energy and anticipation as the sun dipped below the horizon, and long shadows faded into dark fields through which they would soon charge.

The time had come.

Dhruzalth motioned the Soul Snatchers forward. He held his breath as this first wave crept across the battlefield.

A cloud of fine dust billowed across the landscape, some clumps of dirt picked up in the breeze and for a moment, the Snatchers were impossible to see.

The Hive waited. Each of them watching and listening as the tension grew with each passing second.

Suddenly, a panicked scream echoed across the field.

It was followed shortly after by frantic shouting, and rifle fire began to sound out across the landscape. Soon, the air rang out with the terrified cries of their enemies.

Dhruzalth let out a sigh of relief and afforded himself a smile, looking over at Okhnarez, "Our Hive is strong, they are being routed, now we simply must wait."

Dhruzalth frowned, Okhnarez was not listening to him at all. Okhnarez was pacing in front of his troops had turned into an agitated jittering, bursting with a barely concealed bloodlust.

"Oknar-" Dhruzalth started out, moving towards the zealous Snatcher Lord before he was cut off by Okhnarez's savage call.

"Charge!" Okhnarez shouted, his eyes wide, glistening with fury, the Snatcher Lord scrambled forward in his eagerness, spurring his Grunts on as he rushed across the battlefield.

"No!" Dhruzalth called after him... but it was too late. The roaring of the Grunts and Okhnarez's own battle-hungry calls carried the riotous contingent screeching across the field.

Dhruzalth cursed under his breath. The Soul Snatchers hadn't had enough time to attack and fall back for a second wave. Now, with Okhnarez breaking rank, the other Grunts and Snatcher Lords stared about in confusion.

Dhruzalth took to the air.

There was nothing for it, the attack had to be mounted now, he had planned on calling the Soul Snatchers back and sending in Venom Floaters to weaken the remaining Human forces, but that option was lost now. The confusion would only spread.

The careful teamwork of the Hive, acting with a single unified will, now risked breaking down into chaos.

He took a deep breath as he steeled himself against his frustration and concerns.

He shouted down to Ikhaith, "Launch the assault!"

The Synapse Floater nodded, and a telepathic call was issued to each of the commanders. Soon, Snatcher Lords and Grunts flooded across the battlefield.

The movement was uncoordinated at first, halting, and Dhruzalth and the Snatcher Lords spent precious time ensuring the soldiers stayed in formation as they advanced.

Time where Okhnarez and his troops would be alone and vulnerable in the field.

If he could not pull the Hive together, they were sure to die here. He watched as the troops slowly fell in line, organized, moving as one.

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Dhruzalth nodded, satisfied with their recovery.

He would deal with this.

He soared high above the battlefield, getting a better vantage point to survey the movements of the troops below. He could see a ragged grouping of Grunts battling fiercely outside of what looked like a dirt mound.

Behind it, Human crews had just finished setting up their Heavy Laser Cannons and were already unloading volleys into the exposed Grunts below. Infantry formed up around them, armed with a variety of weapons to keep the Field Artillery safe.

The Grunts had taken heavy casualties but pressed on with the assault regardless, throwing themselves into the enemy's lines. A lone Snatcher Lord, obviously wounded, was limping along the front, trying to rally the Grunts as best he could.

"Okhnarez, you fool..." Dhruzalth muttered.

He looked down at the assembled Hive marching below, then back to the Grunts that had run haphazardly into battle.

Reinforcements would not be able to make it to this group before the Humans firing down at this smaller force wiped them out, but he could reach them first. Thinking fast, he called down to Frulodh, "I will advance ahead of the group. Continue the toward the barricade!"

Frulodh nodded, and Dhruzalth beat his wings savagely, blasting through the air to the aid of the Grunts ahead.

When he was directly above, he tucked his wings in, wind rippled past his face as he dove. The Hive Lord unfurled his leathery appendages to halt his descent, just above the ground.

Okhnarez's riotous troops scurried around him. Some screamed out in pain as they were hit and many others bore grievous wounds. In his bloodlust Okhnarez had rushed his troops directly into the line of fire taking the brunt of the Human retaliation.

"Fall back!" Dhruzalth called down to the disorganized force.

As his feet touched the ground, Dhruzalth heard a loud grating sound, turning, the Hive Lord's eyes grew wide with fear as one of the Heavy Laser Cannon's barrels locked into place.

A concussive burst sounded from the cannon, and Grunts exploded as this weapon's beam made contact, the dirt and stone around them blasting into the air in a geyser of debris.

Dhruzalth ducked behind a large stone laying in the field, looking about to assess the damage. Many of the Grunts lay dead on the shattered ground, flames licking into the air from where the Laser had made impact. Dhruzalth could see Okhnarez limping behind a rocky outcropping similar to the one he himself had ducked behind.

Another laser shot tore through a Grunt and sent a up burst of soil and fire as it cut into the ground below. Bits of dirt and flesh rained down on Dhruzalth who peered around the rock to survey this weapon.

The Heavy Laser Cannons were protected by Humans ready to shoot any that crawled over the makeshift barricade, and even in the air, it would not be easy to reach.

Dhruzalth had not expected the cannons to be as effective at close range, or that their enemies would have them operational when they arrived. His men had given him what intel they could but there was still much they did not know about their foes.

Dhruzalth's mind whirred, what could he do here to save himself and his Grunts from such a weapon? The Grunts would likely be destroyed if they attempted to assault it head on. Perhaps if he could draw the weapon's fire, then the Grunts below might stand a chance in swarming over it.

Dhruzalth stood from his crouched position, calling out in a mighty voice to the Grunts frantically rushing about the field.

"Fall back, I said!" Dhruzalth shouted down to them, "Get to cover! I will deal with this!"

The Grunts obeyed, trusting in their commander who had seen them through many battles before.

Dhruzalth burst into the air once more, his massive wings carrying him quickly across the scorched field, he felt the pull as a laser burst from the Cannon's barrel past him, exploding several yards behind and far away from any of the Grunts.

It was just as he had hoped.

Dhruzalth came to a halt and ducked down behind the outcropping Okhnarez lay behind. The wounded Snatcher Lord had a few burns, and scratches but nothing too severe.

"Lord Dhruzalth... I'm so sorry..."

Dhruzalth looked into Okhnarez's eyes, grasping his shoulders, "You have not failed the Hive yet, Okhnarez. Your foolishness has cost lives, but there is a way in which we can fix this, together, as the Hive."

"Of course...my Lord. What do you will of me?"

"I will distract these cannon crews, drawing the fire away from the Grunts," Dhruzalth replied firmly, "Bring back any survivors that you can, your decision to charge has cost them dearly and they deserve a chance to recover. You are to give the signal for the next wave to begin, and reflect upon your choices this day. Can I trust you to call them?"

"But," Okhnarez replied with some hesitation, "My Lord, you would be facing down their forces alone..."

"I have made my decision, Okhnarez. Put your faith in me as I put my faith in the Hive."

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Okhnarez nodded, limping back the way he had come.

Dhruzalth took to the air, hearing the blast of the cannon being fired below and several others being readied. The Hive Lord expertly twisted, dove, and rose, making himself an almost impossible target. Had it not been for his size, he would have no fear of being hit, but Dhruzalth knew he could not maintain this evasion forever.

Eventually though, the Hive Lord would tire, or make the wrong choice, and a blast from these cannons might send him spiraling down.

His one hope lay with Okhnarez arriving in time to signal the next wave. For now the Grunts below were safe, following Okhnarez away while Dhruzalth drew the enemies' attention.

Dhruzalth beat his wings frantically as blast after blast issued around him. He flew closer to this heavy weapon, hoping that he might get around their barricade by attacking from above.

As he drew close, the contingents of Humans began firing from around it, surrounding the artillery piece.

Dhruzalth felt their weapons connect. He ignored the pain, barreling closer. Seeing their weapons had little effect, the Humans began to scatter.

A smile crossed Dhruzalth face as he swooped down.

Then, he saw a team of humans step forward, more determined than their comrades. Their weapons were strange and as Dhruzalth approached, they didn't fire immediately. It was only once he came close enough that he could see the whites of their eyes, that they shot their volley.

Dhruzalth tried to weave out of the way. He was a moment too late and one of the shots connected. He felt a great searing agony as the membranes of one of his wings split, the Human weapons had torn great holes in his flesh and the wind opened these wounds into grievous tears.

The pain was immense.

Dhruzalth pulled up, retreating back into the air.

The wounded Hive Lord took to the sky, but the damage was done. He wasn't able to move as quickly before and the cannons below were drawing in on him.

Each blast grew closer to finding its mark.

He leveled his Heavy Ravager Cannon, tearing into the barricade that hid the Artillery.

The momentary pause to aim was all that the Human's had needed to line up their shot and the surviving crew fired a return volley into him.

Dhruzalth felt the heat of the laser cut into his flesh and tear his wing. He crashed hard into the ground below.

Dhruzalth lay still for a moment, then laboriously propped himself up into a sitting position, coughing blood as he stared through smoke, a blast from a cannon exploded next to him, and Dhruzalth was hurled sideways, tumbling along the ground.

"This is it then," he thought, "they will easily target me now... at least I bought the Hive a bit of time..."

Dhruzalth struggled to stand as the barrel of one of the cannons readjusted, moving to aim toward him yet again.

A battle cry sounded behind him, and Dhruzalth turned to see Hive troops rushing forward, a host of Grunts sprinting past him to clamber towards the Human lines. Venom Floaters and Soul Snatchers followed behind the onslaught of Grunts, their forces swarming over the barricades.

He swelled with pride, as he watched his troops, his Hive, surging forward to protect their ship, their commander, their fellow Hive members.

He took one shuddering step forward, then another, and another, he grabbed his fallen rifle from the ground, holding it high in the air and bellowing for his troops to move forward.

Struggling forth, Dhruzalth clambered up the barricade of soil, his wings too badly damaged to hold him aloft. He crested the top to look down upon the Human forces below, teams of infantry scrambled around their Artillery, trying desperately to protect them while others nestled behind barricades.

One of these soldiers appeared to be adjusting the position of the cannon's barrel, hoping to blast the Grunts now streaming over the makeshift trench. Dhruzalth leveled his weapon, tearing the Field Artillery to shreds with the force of the shot.

He strode on, adrenaline fueling his movements. To the Humans, he was a terror to behold. Arm dangling at his side, covered in blood and dragging wings marred by bullet holes and torn asunder, the Hive Lord screamed a battle cry and his troops rallied around him.

Dhruzalth fired shot after shot into the Human lines, forcing them to scatter. His blades made quick work of their Field Artillery, slicing through the armour. Grunts rushed in after him, pursuing human crews and driving them away from the remaining Heavy Laser Cannons.

"Commander" Ikhaith's voice sounded in his head. "Our troops have located the nepenroot we require, our forces are extracting it as we speak."

Dhruzalth clambered atop one of the mound, tearing into its armour with his blade. He looked around him, the battle was won, the Human's Field Artillery overrun or broken.

In the distance, he could see Okhnarez lead a group of still capable grunts, as they foraged for nepenroot.

There was hope yet for the future of the Hive.

Grimdark Future - Faith in the Hive

Mission Background

A strike force has crashed near the enemy battle-lines, and their damaged ship is now within range of the enemy artillery. The strike force must penetrate the opposing trenches and destroy the artillery before they are stranded.

The Battlefield

For this mission you'll need a 6'x4' table with at least 10-15 pieces of terrain on it.

Attack & Defend

Before the game, the players roll-off, with the winner picking to be either the attacker or the defender.

The Armies

For this mission you'll need two armies of equal point cost.

Deployment

The defender must first deploy their entire army in zone A, and afterwards the attacking player must deploy their entire army in zone B.

Special Set-Up

After deployment, place the ship model in the centre of zone A and the artillery model in the centre of zone B.

First Turn

The attacker gets the first turn.

Objectives

Before deployment, place a ship marker at the centre of zone B, and an artillery marker at the centre of zone A.

At the end of each round, if an attacking/defending unit is within 3" of the artillery/ship marker whilst enemies aren't, then the objective is removed.

Before the game begins, count the total number of units in each player's army, with combined units and heroes joining units counting as one.

At the end of each round players get 1 VP if they destroyed at least one enemy unit, plus 2 VP if no friendly unit was destroyed this round.

At the end of the game players get 5 VPs for removing either the ship or the artillery, as well as 1 VP for destroying at least half of the units in the enemy army.

The game ends after 6 rounds, and the player that scored most VPs wins.

Special Rules

Trench Warfare: Units get Entrenched whilst they are fully within deployment zone A (both attackers and defenders).

No Man's Land: Whenever a unit ends its activation in neither deployment zone, if they move 6" or less, they count as being in Cover until their next activation.

Downed Ship: The ship has Qua 4+, Def 2+, Immobile, and Tough(9). It may not be activated.

Field Artillery: At the beginning of each round, if the artillery marker has not been removed, the defending player may pick one enemy unit within 30" of it, and roll one die. On a 4+ the target takes D3+3 hits with AP(2).

Special Equipment

Virus Grenades: Before the game begins, the attacker may provide D3+3 units with virus grenades. Once per game, units with grenades may pick one enemy unit within 6", and roll one die. On a 4+ the unit is shaken, and you may pick another enemy unit within 6", roll one die, and repeat the process until there are no more targets. Note that units may not be targeted more than once by virus grenades per round.

