

On Board a God Forsaken Rock

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Compelled by Kind Aston and Allen Schezar after the Destiny War, Dilandau writes a bitinglly sarcastic and witty description of the Vione. Humor. PG. One-shot.

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AN: This short little piece was inspired by Bill Bryson's "In a Sunburned Country". His hilarious wit and sarcasm got me to thinking: what if Dilandau wrote a similar piece about the Vione? This short ficlet is the result. No doubt it is somewhat out of character, and will be viewed overall rather unfavorably. But I am in a sarcastic/humorous mood, having just flipped through the pages of the aforementioned book, and having listened to numerous taped episodes of Garrison Kiellor's (sp?) "Prairie Home Companion". There's only one short conversation that is vaguely similar to Bryson's book, so this is my own original mind for the most.

However, I do appreciate any feedback. Just remember to keep any flames HELPFUL AND INTELLIGENT. Those that aren't will be laughed at and used to heat the freezing library at which I work.

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ON BOARD A GODFORSAKEN ROCK: SMALL DETAILS OF LIFE ON THE VIONE by Feye Morgan

I sit at my desk and curse to find that my inkwell has dried again. This is a recurring problem with inkwells: they are perpetually in a state with a consistency somewhere between slush and granite. Unfortunately, in their old age they seem to choose the latter more than the former. I reckon it's a conspiracy.

Not that I'm complaining. No. Of course not. I never asked to do this in the first place. But ten glasses of vino and a mug of coffee seems to increase the probability for one's mind to make inherently bad decisions.

So here I am, desperately trying to melt my inkwell over a fire while jabbing at it with a toothpick. All this, just to describe the Vione for King Aston, Schezar, and the rest of the curious and oh so ignorant public. Fine. You asked for it.

Yes, I -know- that the Destiny War is over, and that the Vione is currently in a terrible state of disrepair due to Escaflowne and the Palas harbor. I know that Folken is presumed dead from a valiant yet doomed attack on the late Emperor Dornkirk.

I don't care. So, inconsiderate as usual, I will write as if the past were still alive and running smoothly.

Here I will write (when my inkwell is usable) an entirely frank description of what you can expect when you take a tour of the late Vione. So follow along with me, oh not-so-dear reader.

Picture a cross between a rock and something putrid that the dog left behind on your carpet, and you have the basic outside visual of the Vione. Things like that should never be allowed to fly. I feel a sensation somewhere between horrific fascination and disgust, bordering on disbelief, as I approach it.

The inside is better...barely. The place could only have been designed by an office worker or someone REALLY depressed. Or both. Everything in sight is colored a dull monotonous grey. At least the red and blue guymelefs give some relief to my eyes.

A long hallway leads away from the hangar. Let me pause here to note that all hallways in the Vione are long. This is the sole reason why the soldiers are physically fit. No amount of training and running can prepare you for the monstrosity that is a Vione hallway. They stretch on and on until you think that you must either drop dead or desert the army to live as a hermit in Fanelia. Before you can choose either of these options, however, the hallway mercifully and grudgingly gives way to the main hall. This is a large and spacious room containing the floor's main dining hall and common area.

If you were ever to approach the food line with the intent of receiving something edible, you would be sadly disappointed. You would wait in line for an ungodly amount of time, all the while nervously glancing at those already eating to make sure that they don't suddenly drop dead and have to be carried out on stretchers. Then you would finally approach a cheerfully smiling serving lady. She is smiling not because she is friendly, or happy to see you. She is smiling because, secretly, she is thinking 'Ha ha! I don't have to eat this poisonous slop that I am serving and you do! Sucker!' She would then happily toss a disgusting pile of sludge onto your plate, thus indisputably answering the nagging question in your mind of how exactly waste is recycled on the Vione.

If you are lucky, like me, then you will instead proceed past the main hall and into yet another hallway. One of the several doors scattered throughout this ungodly walk harbors the Dragonslayers dining hall, where the food is at least a little better than palatable. I would describe the kitchen which adjoins the Slayers' Hall if I hadn't been banned from all such places shortly after I set Guimel's hair on fire during one of our outdoor training excursions earlier on.

There is a running joke that Folken has placed a fire extinguisher every ten feet on the Vione, just in case I run into any stray matches. I beg the record to show that it is every -twelve- feet, NOT ten. I also have a sneaking suspicion that the Strategos has strapped one underneath that enormous cloak of his. He certainly produced one extremely quickly to help Guimel.

Traveling down the hallway further past the dining hall you come to the Dragonslayers' barracks. Due to the lack of space caused by the monstrously long hallways, the officers do not have separate quarters from their men. Subordinates and soldiers room together. Thus we have four rooms, each housing four men each. I myself stayed with Gatti, Migel, and Shesta.

Let me pause to insert an anecdote. When the four of us first moved into our room, we were shocked at the lack of space. The four beds were squished side by side together and encompassed the entire length of the room, leaving a spare three feet left at the end for our personal belongings. It reminded me uncomfortably of a sardine box. At the time, however, we were too exhausted to particularly care. We crawled into our respective beds and fell helplessly into military-induced comas.

Quite unfortunately, all four of us happened to possess the habit of shifting around in our sleep. Thus, when we finally woke, we found ourselves in a bewildering position. Shesta had Gatti's feet in a arm lock, his other limb dangling over the edge of his bed. Gatti's head was partially stuffed beneath my pillow, the rest of his body sprawled across Migel's bed. My arms were squashed beneath Gatti, and my legs were hopelessly entangled in my covers. After spending several minutes disentangling ourselves,

we noticed that Migel was nowhere to be found. I found him by poking my head over the edge of the beds. The brunette had been tipped off of his own bunk sometime during the night, and was busily lying comatose amongst our discarded uniforms.

I can only assume that the other rooms had been in a similar state. And all because of the obscenely long Vione hallways.

Have I mentioned that these hallways are also terribly -dim-? Well, they are. A valiant attempt to wire automatic motion-sensing lights was one solution to the problem. Unfortunately, due to a military budget deficit*(see footnote), these lights do not work, and are about as helpful as a guymelef without an energist. Of course, I don't blame the military for not having the funds to fix the hallways. Lighting the entire length of them would drain the national treasuries of Zaibach, Fanelia, Asturia, Basram, and Freid together. Recruits learn very quickly to develop their night vision.

Unfortunately, this can take some time. Let me pause once again to insert yet another anecdote.

Once, when I was quite new in training I happened to be walking from the mess hall to the training room, and happened to notice a vague shadow following me in the gloom. I assumed that it was one of my comrades, probably Migel, trying to play a prank on me. Since this had happened once before, it was a natural assumption. The instant I turned a corner, I flattened myself against the wall and waited. When the person turned the corner, I tackled him to the ground.

"HA! Didn't trick me -this- time!" I yelled triumphantly.

Then I noticed that the person I had pinned to the ground was unusually tall and was wearing a large black cloak. I peered at his face.

"Dilandau, what do you think you are doing?" Folken's calm voice asked me. He wore an expression of mingled anger and confusion.

I had no real answer for this question, predictably. So instead of replying, I leaped off the Strategos and ran as fast as I could down the dark hallway.

Between the sleeping quarters and the Dragonslayer mess hall is the training room. Usually training rooms have mats and equipment with which to train. Nope. Not -this- training room. When I first took command and saw this room for the first time, I was appalled. No training mats, no swords, NOTHING. The sole furniture was a throne sporting a growling lion standing menacingly behind it. As if THAT could help me train my men. Right.

Needless to say, the first mission I gave my new charges/old friends was a covert operation. It included training on how to steal enemy supplies while leaving no evidence of their presence, and remaining completely undetected. Folken found it oddly amusing that, while a squad of soldiers sratched their heads curiously about missing supplies, my training room had suddenly become much more well equipped.

"Where did you get the supplies, Dilandau?" the Strategos asked me.

I blinked innocently at him. "We found them."

"Found them?"

I nodded vigorously. "They were just lying neatly in here when I walked in in the morning. Meant just for us, I'm sure."

"I'm sure."

And that was the end of that.

Even further down the thrice damned hallway, Folken has his quarters. I found, having once been called to report to him in his room, that, being Strategos, he had a rather spacious room all to himself, unlike my aforementioned cramped quarters. Needless to say, after the night I had spent I was none too pleased. Neither was he after a nameless four miscreants sabotaged his quarters that night. That is another story, however.

Folken is (or was) a very intimidating person. His habit of wearing an enormous black cloak would have something to do with that. One of the speculations among my men was that he wore that cloak because it is so awfully damned cold in the Vione. And it is. One does not expect a god-forsaken rock floating thousands of feet in the air to be warm in the least. And people wonder why I'm so pale.

Of course, the other speculation has to do with the aforementioned fire extinguishers.

The cloak isn't the sole contributor to Strategos's formidable aura. Oh no. The -real- reason is his complete lack of outward emotion. The man is the epitome of stoic. If Naryia and Eryia cartwheeled into his view and began to dance completely naked, I sincerely doubt if he would even acknowledge them. Of course, the cat-girls aren't much better clothes-wise as it is, which entirely validates my observation.

The main attraction (if one can call it that) of this floor is the huge anteroom in the center, where all the ungodly hallways converge. Inside the anteroom is a very large television screen. Folken uses this screen to communicate with the Emperor Dornkirk.

I admit: during the war I was completely and blindly devoted to the Emperor. No wonder, what with the madoushi fiddling with my head. Looking back, my brains -must- have been addled to have looked upon that face with adoration.

Let it suffice to say that a 200 year-old man wearing what looks like a very bad wig in curlers does NOT make an appealing picture.

Adjacent to the hangar is the command room. It is from here that all the steering, and ordering is done. Folken would stand stoically on a raised platform with a comm link next to him. Occasionally, during military maneuvers in which I am not fighting, I would stand beside him and watch. I suppose I was supposed to look intelligent and intimidating. Maybe I was. In truth, however, I had absolutely no clue what was going on. Technicians would spout off coordinates, Folken would calmly reply and correct them. You might think that, being captain of an elite squad and a guymelef pilot, that I would know all of this nonsense. Think again. There is a very large difference between a guymelef and the Vione. About

5000 tons, and several thousand buttons, actually. So, all I would do was stand imperiously beside the Strategos and stare out the window. My thought process went something like this:

Interesting. That cloud is shaped like Guimel's hair. Oh look! A flock of pretty birdies! I'm hungry. When's lunch?

Not quite what you expected, is it?

And yes, the command room is colored a very oppressive shade of grey.

I am certain that Schezar and Aston will be rather disappointed in how limited my knowledge of the Vione is, as this is really all that I have to tell. Strange as it may seem, the one floor with its numerous ungodly hallways is the only floor on the Vione I have ever been on. I once tried to explore some of the other floors in my spare time, but found the door leading down to be locked. I asked a passing technician about this.

"Oh, that door is -always- locked," she said seriously.

I raised an eyebrow. "Always?"

She nodded gravely, "Always. You -don't- want to go down there."

"Why not?" I asked with morbid curiosity.

She glanced around to make sure we weren't being watched, and then leaned in closer. In a low, quiet voice, she said: "That's where the foot soldiers are." She sent a fearful glance at the locked door, nodded once at me, and continued with her duties.

Needless to say, I have never again harbored the desire to venture to the lower floors.

One that note, I complete my detailing of the Vione. My inkwell is somewhat thawed, enough so that my pen has been able to scribble down the characters that you have just read. I hope that this account has enlightened you somewhat. More likely than not, however, I will have once again wasted my time, thanks to Schezar's insistence that I write this for Aston. No matter that these petty little details are allowing me to stay 'safely' in Schezar's custody without facing war trials. I couldn't care less.

Really.

*Footnote: Despite the terrible budget deficit that had the top officials in conference, wringing their hands, the military oddly found the funds to promote a large-scale bird-watching competition. It was agreed that this would provide stress-relief and would also sharpen the soldier's vision. I personally would rather be able to see when I'm walking down the hallway. But that's just my opinion.