

The Aftermath

By Conor Laidler

5th Class, Castleknock National School

Now

Stacy Temple walked through the doors of the old veterans' nursing home. Looking around the area, all she could see was a clean comfortable lounge with a bunch of old men and women exchanging stories of war. Then she spotted a desk with a receptionist at it. Even he looked like something ancient.

Stacy approached and spoke to the old man behind the desk. "Hello, I am Stacy Temple, I believe I have an appointment with John Roger?" The old man got out a terminal and browsed through something before speaking to Stacy. "Yes I believe you do, he's at wing B-1, Room 6." The man smiled then and pointed at a wide open door, which seemed to lead to a hall with two other corridors near the end.

Stacy thanked the man and then walked through the hall.

...

Stacy was a journalist who had been born in 2050, ten years after the Mudhorn war had ended. She was in fact, going to see a veteran of that particular war. John Roger was a F.I.R.E soldier during the war, and one of the last survivors of one of the most brutal battles of the war – the battle of Odiss.

She was not in fact here to get this story to the news. She was here to get answers to the death of her grandfather, Robin Pines.

Stacy never met her grandfather, but his shadow cast down on her family before she was born, and afterwards. He had been a decorated soldier, famous for his courage and known as a great war strategist. Everyone had told her was that this John Roger had been responsible for her grandfather's death during the battle of Odiss. She had just believed what they said, but recently Stacy had been asking herself the same question over and over again - was John Roger actually responsible?

Now she is going to finally find out. The old veteran is probably going to let something slip. Just maybe, he'll tell her what really happened.

...

Stacy had finally found wing B-1 in the confusing complex of the building, as it appeared the old man had given her the wrong directions. She found her way to Room 6 and opened the door.

When Stacy walked in, it felt more like some cozy apartment than some veteran nursing home cell, like the ones she had seen everywhere else. She looked around for a moment but then heard a rough sounding voice, he seemed to be humming a tune. Stacy walked further in and found an old man sitting by an artificial fireplace.

The man was bald, and seemed to still carry the strength he had built up while training to fight. Something worth noting was the fact he had a rather large scar visible on the side of his head. Something very ugly must have happened to leave him with that.

“Ah, an unexpected visitor. Have a seat will you?” the old man said to Stacy, Stacy did indeed have a seat and then introduced herself. “Hello, I’m Stacy Temple, a journalist. I would like to know about the battle of Odiss.”

The old man’s face seemed to become more troubled as she said those words, but then he seemed to just shrug to himself about something and he answered. “Journalists have been coming to me for nearly forty years asking about that, I’m afraid they will do so until I am dead, and then they will likely pillage my home and my relatives’ homes as well. So I might as well get it off my chest now.” Stacy was a bit shocked at this, yet she continued on. “Could you please tell me the story then?” Stacy realized how rude that might have sounded but the man did not seem to care. “Yes yes, for all stories you need to start at the beginning, or else there will be too many holes in them.”

...

Then

John ran through the corridors of the Dreadnought as sirens blared. He needed to get to the hangar - if he didn't he could very well die. So he ran through the corridors and listened to the blaring sirens as the Dreadnought took hit after hit from other Capital ships.

John finally made it after a few minutes or so of running and panting to the hangar. Waiting right in front there were rows of troops and multiple choppers, each bolted to the ground. Jess was waiting by one of the choppers for him, and helping to set it up. Meanwhile rows of orange troops just like them busied themselves with other tasks.

Jess and John had been fighting against the P-A-F (Protectors-Armed-Forces) for thirteen months. Their commander was Robin Pines, a famous war hero, who had led many battles in the Mudhorn war and in the past. John respected Robin – he was honest and courageous with a talent for battle tactics.

A squad leader approached John and said “Hey, I want you to help with that fuel tank on your left. Get a pump and connect it to it, then Jess will set the console up.” The squad leader then pointed to the console, before turning away to talk to another soldier. John realized suddenly that this soldier was actually Robin Pines. Robin was known to be a hands-on leader.

John nodded to Jess, he then walked to the pump and dragged it along, connecting it to the fuel tank. “Honestly, I’m surprised nothing went wrong over there, from what I can tell all the other Dreadnoughts are going haywire.” Jess responded “Well I’m sure that’s because we have the power of good old plo-” Suddenly the ship seemed to hit something huge and it seemed to drop a little, the suddenly it felt as if the Dreadnought was going sideways. Jess and John both grabbed one of the large poles which lit up to direct the choppers to landing spaces, saving themselves from falling.

Suddenly the sirens blared even louder in John’s ears. He watched as the rows of troops fell back to the back walls of the hangar, most probably breaking bones on contact with the metal wall. Screams of alarm and pain were already being heard.

“I could use some help here,” said a voice below them. Robin Pines was basically stuck lying on the console right next to the fuel tank. John moved to help him. With his arms clinging to the pole, all he could do was use his leg – stretching it out for Robin to hold on to. Then disaster happened. The Dreadnought was hit by a missile that was most likely some EMP technology scammer. All the consoles around the place powered off, but then the fuel tanks connected to the panels burst into flames. Next thing John knew, part of this leg was on fire. Panicking, he kicked his leg to try to extinguish the flames. However in doing this he also kicked away Robin’s hand, leading to him falling backwards into a ball of flames on the console.

Robin started to scream at the top of his lungs as he burned alive. “No!” Jess cried. John cursed and looked away, as fire consumed Robin’s body. However his screams were still heard.

John then heard a voice below them. “Get inside that chopper now, this whole place is going down!” John turned and saw the squad leader holding onto one of the panels that had shut down. Suddenly the Dreadnought was hit with another missile and the hangar doors opened, revealing the great storm outside. Fire from other capital ships and planes that were suffering the same fate as they were. Rain poured in.

“I said get into that chopper, dammit!” the squad leader practically screamed at them. Both John and Jess were frozen for a moment but then followed his orders. Jess went first, managing to balance herself on the side of the pole they were clinging onto, the red light flashing in his eyes. She then jumped into the thing and John did what she did. They both strapped themselves to a seat, They then noticed there were two other men in other seats, both soldiers as well. Neither of them spoke. They looked out the pilot’s window and saw it. An enemy plane about to go down in flames. The pilot was intentionally flying the plummeting plane into the hangar doors. He flew in at a great speed and collided with the chopper to the left. John looked out of the chopper and saw a piece of it land on the squad leader, pinning him down.

They lay in the chopper for a few moments until the next horror occurred. Suddenly it felt like the Dreadnought had just collided with something in the air. The Dreadnought slowly plummeted to the ground. Gravity switched again. Now the troops that were still screaming at the walls of the hangar were now falling out of the hangar and through the storm. Likely then plummeting to their deaths. Hitting the ground. For a split second, John thought he could see Robin’s corpse falling out of the hangar door, still on fire.

It took only a matter of two minutes for the Dreadnought to the make contact with the ground.

John felt like everything around him was being thrown upside down. Up again, then sideways. Suddenly the chopper seemed to split. He plummeted for a short amount of time before hitting something.

He felt a stab of pain on the side of his head. Then it all went black.

...

Now

“My understanding now is that something slashed me on the side of the head, never found out what” the veteran continued. “I remember waking up a bit afterwards and having the feeling of being carried, and I was. I fell back into sleep in pain.”

Stacy was completely shocked. She had not expected the man to actually talk about Robin’s death. He had never done so when he was interviewed by forces after the battle. Her mouth had been open for a while, stunned. The old man raised a brow. She nodded to him. “Continue, please.”

He started talking again, as Stacy took more notes.

...

Then

John woke up and looked at his surroundings, suspicious. He was in a tent of sorts. He then heard a beep and suddenly mechanical arms swung into view, grabbing him.

“*Congrats, you survived a battle and a wound to the head.*” Suddenly the head of a surgeon and a surgical machine were in view.

John was about to say something when the pain attacked. Suddenly he felt as if he was in a world of it. He tried not to scream. His vision went blurry and the surgeon seemed to be looking at him with a posture of mild annoyance. Then suddenly everything went blurry and his consciousness switched off.

John woke up and found himself in the same tent. Except it was more bloody. He managed to find the strength to get up and noticed that the surgical machine was deactivated. He looked at the bed he had slept in. Where his left side of his head had been, was a large amount of blood. Suddenly the pain came back, less powerful. When he put his hand to his head, he discovered traces of blood on it.

John was shocked by this, but then the memories of what happened earlier crept in like a bad dream. He shook his head, then decided not to shake his head again. He walked to the machine and looked at the clean metal of it. He found his reflection in it now.

His left side of his head was wrapped almost completely in bandages, some more bloodier than others. His uniform had been ripped and the knee caps to it had been lost on the way getting here. His vision was a bit blurry but he managed to get out of the tent.

He looked at his surroundings in horror.

It might as well have been a graveyard for hundreds, if not thousands.

All around on the ground the signs of a brutal battle were noticeable. Bodies could be visible everywhere. Broken vehicles and trenches, some flooded were dotted around. He looked further and saw capital ships scattered around, destroyed. His eyes settled on what must have been the Dreadnought. A state of the art ship. Now a wreck of parts. He squinted and saw a blurry vision of what used to be the hangar. Bodies were visible everywhere.

John on seeing all this, threw up. He then looked at Fort Odiss in the distance. It was the whole reason the battle had been started. A territorial bonus for either side in the Mudhorn war.

The thing had been wrecked.

Half the building seemed to be destroyed and smoke was still coming from it. Around it had been a mote. That was now filled with the aftermath of the battle. Trenches piled with bodies. Blood and guns were scattered across them. However piles of enemy and soldier bodies were arranged in it. It also appeared like someone put the bodies there, a feeble attempt at a body count.

John, discovering this, fainted. It was like his brain couldn't process what he was seeing.

...

Now

Stacy at this point was only writing down some of what she heard. She was completely mesmerized by John's story. In her mind she could imagine it all quite clearly. She still had unanswered questions, but was unsure how to ask them.

"Now, I've pretty much told you everything... time to wrap things up. When I'm done here, there will hopefully be no unanswered questions. So let's continue."

...

Then

John woke up after a short while and noticed that in the distance people were hurrying around. He spotted multiple dirty tents packed with stuff. Most of the tents were a bit transparent. He could see the shadows of soldiers and medics hurrying about attempting to save wounded people. He turned right and he looked left. He shuddered, looking at the trenches.

“Great job on surviving the aftermath, seem a little lost” a voice stated from behind him. He turned and he found a wounded Jess, who seemed to be struggling with standing. Her wound was located on the left leg, the whole thing was wrapped in some bandages. It wasn’t enough to stop it bleeding however.

“What? Its just a bloody scratch, literally.”

John spoke. “I’m glad you’re alright, is there any chance a chopper is going to pick us up?” Jess answered. “Yes actually, they sent three of them down here an hour ago, all the critically wounded were moved onto them with as many medics as possible. You know if you had just stayed unconscious you could be at a med-center right now, actually.” John asked another question. “Are they coming back?” Jess answered this one with a small grin to her face. “Obviously, in about one or two hours.”

They then walked over to the center of camp. Three pads had been arranged and sitting around them were a bunch of tired soldiers, some wounded. They walked over to a large man waving a piece of cloth at them. They sat down with a group of tired soldiers and waited for what seemed like ages.

Two hours later and they were still waiting, wounded tired and hungry. It was now almost dark. Finally a surgeon pointed at the sky “Honestly, they took long enough.” A broken choir of voices sang. It reminded John of a group of drunken teenagers attempting to sing to impress someone.

The choppers landed, the doors opened and a team of armed soldiers burst out. They were not of any side that had participated in the battle, they were in fact part of the N.C.O.P (Neutral-Coalition-Of-Peace.) The men jumped from the chopper and helped everyone on board, in their blue uniforms they were easy to spot.

After getting on board John told Jess that he felt responsible for Robin’s death. She shrugged it off, telling him that he had no choice but to try to kick those flames away. It was not John’s fault that Robin died. It was either going to be two dead or one. John wasn’t sure, and neither were the two men at the back of the chopper who overheard the entire conversation.

John and Jess and the other tired soldiers flew back to a Med-center. Where perhaps they could forget this tragedy and move on with their lives.

Unfortunately for John, the aftermath of the situation would not be kind to him. Those two soldiers decided to report what they had heard.

John Roger was now forever to be known by many as the killer of the famous Robin Pines.

...

Now

“I was suddenly public enemy number one for a while, then the media found another chew toy to attack. There was talk of charging me with the murder of a fellow officer but nothing happened. They didn’t have any evidence besides these two soldiers and whatever the media said about me.”

The old man said this and seemed to take a break from talking, as if he was remembering something unpleasant. Stacy herself was in a mood just like that. His story had been told and she still had not recovered from the news of how her grandfather died.

They both seemed to want to say something for a bit, and then gave in to silence. Stacy didn’t know how to put into words what she felt. So she didn’t even try.

“Anyway, thank you for your time, are you sure you want me to write an article about this?” Stacy asked.

“I’m completely fine about it”, said John.

Stacy nodded got up and left the room, with something put to rest in her mind and a story to be told, a story with answers rather than mere speculation.

...

John Roger

John got up after she left. He heard the door closing and went to his small kitchen. He got a glass of whiskey from the bottle in the cupboard, and before he drank he thought to himself something a bit peculiar. That journalist seemed to look like someone he used to know, his mind scanned for people who she could be but found nothing. He shrugged to himself and poured the drink down his throat.

He sat down and thought about something depressing he had found out years ago.

The aftermath of a conflict does not simply go away, it stays. It has an everlasting impact on the world, even when the world no longer remembers the details of what went on. So in that way, the aftermath of the battle of Odiss is still going on. With this new story being published, the aftermath will likely continue for even longer.

Knowing this, he sighed. And closed his eyes to sleep.

...

(Written by Conor Laidler)