

StarCraft - Last man standing

by Benjamin C. Bächle

I am Kyle Franklin, a mercenary. I have survived the Battle of New Gettysburg. However, if I think back of this battle, sometimes I wish I hadn't.

I sat in the cantina of the battle cruiser 'Hyperion', drinking an "Scotty Bolger's Old Number Eight" whiskey and listening to the jukebox, which played an old heavy metal song from earth. Some weeks ago, I had been hired by the rebel group called "The Sons of Korhal", who wanted to overthrow the Terran Confederacy. Now Tarsonis, the homeworld of the Confederacy was under attack by millions of Zerg and near its end. But a few moments ago the shadowy aliens called Protoss had arrived to fight the Zerg. Arcturus Mengsk the leader of the "Sons of Korhal" had ordered his second-in-command Lt. Sarah Kerrigan to engage the Protoss on New Gettysburg, so that the Zerg could destroy the Confederate forces without any interruption from the Protoss. Not that this inscrutable shit would really draw my interest. The reason I joined Lt. Kerrigan's task force was the same reason all mercenaries fight for: money. Although they were just rebels, the "Sons of Korhal" didn't pay badly.

I wanted to light a cigarette, but as always, my lighter didn't work. "Need a light?" I turned aside where the mysterious voice came from. A big and thin man with great shoulders and strangely formed, hairless head, which sometimes reminded me of a lemon, stood in front of me: Leonard Coleman, one of my oldest and best friends. "Lemonhead!" I said (yes, I gave him his nickname), "What the hell are you doing here?" While he was lighting my cigarette, he began to answer, with his rough, hardly understandable voice. "Ask me, what I'm doing here? Same as you, I guess. Drinkin' a drink, eatin' a eat, smokin' a smoke and waitin' for my old friend, Mr. Death, who wants to meet me in a few hours, Bwah!" Lemonhead often used very strange, not really existing words and spoke in a dialect, I never was able to identify. Indeed, nobody was and if you asked him, you never got a serious answer. "You have a rendezvous with death?", I asked. "Yulf", he answered, a word he sometimes used instead of 'yes'. "But don't know whether to accept this date. There are a lot of girls waiting for my big ..." "You aren't going down there, are you? You aren't going to New Gettysburg?" "Yulf", he mumbled, " 'n you?" "Er, yes. I'm one of the very few ... 'volunteers' joining Lt. Kerrigan task force to fight the Protoss in New Gettysburg." "So you're an idiot. Like' me." "Not just an idiot. I'm going to be a rich idiot." He laughs. "...ll be a damn suicide mission, bwah, but damn good paid. Cheers". We clinked our glasses.

It was god to see Lemonhead again. Many years ago we both worked for a criminal organization on Deadman's Port. We lost contact, but a few years later we met again, fighting as mercenaries in the Guild Wars. We saved each others butt many times. They say war makes strangers brothers. Well, after everything both of us went through, we were even more than brothers. Lemonhead told me that he was hired by the "Sons of Korhal" some days ago and did just arrive on the 'Hyperion'. When he was asked to support Lt. Kerrigan's task force it was the money that convinced him to. "Hey Kyle", he asked me now " Have you ever fought against the 'toss?". "The Protoss? No and I don't know, if someone ever has. Of course, the confederate fleet attacked them over Chau Sara, but I think no Terran ever fought the Protoss face to face." There was a moment of silence. Suddenly, Lemonhead began to laugh. "Gwaha, do you remember when were under attack by Kel-Morian Artillery and you had a damn bad hangover ..." Instead of speaking of the mission which lay ahead of us, we spoke of the days, which had passed. I think people often do when they are looking into a dark, unknown future. We talked a lot of nonsense and told stories, each of us had heard a thousand times. "Oh, Dude", Lemonhead said after a while "feels like old times already".

"... O. K, ladies and gentlemen , here's the plan", sergeant Jan van der Stock began to explain. "Gwah", Coleman mumbled "sergeant Dutch really has a plan!" Sergeant van der Stock often was called 'the Dutch' or 'sergeant Dutch', because his name originally came from the Dutchmen called people from earth. Not that the sarge really liked his nickname but it was much easier to pronounce. "Shut up 'n listen", sergeant Dutch continued, "Lt. Kerrigan is preparing the main assault on the last Protoss base, right now. Heavy artillery and air forces are supporting Kerrigan and her infantry-troop." "And what exactly are we going to do?", I asked. "We are going to land with our dropships in the western part of the base. Our scouts reported only weak air defenses, so most of our ... so our dropships should be able to land without problems. Our whole operation is nothing else than a diversionary tactic. We hope, the Protoss will send most of their troops against us, so that the assault of Kerrigan and the main forces can succeed. Just stay together and concentrate on defending yourself and your team. Or in one word: survive!" "What a great, intelligent plan", Coleman commented. "Thought Kerrigan is a ghost. Can't she just walk inside the Protoss base and use ... her psionic superpowers, making the Protoss go insane?" "You get paid well for this operation, mercenary", sergeant Dutch said, pronouncing the word mercenary. "So just do your job, O. K.?" "Come on, Lemonhead", I said, " we survived worse than that." Indeed, we did. We have fought in so many battles, that, statistically, we should have been killed about ten times. Why we were still alive? Because we always cared for each other – and for no one else. This may sound brutal, but if you take unnecessary risks to save your comrades, the chance you die increases rapidly. We were mercenaries. Hired hands. We were here for the money.

"Go, go go!", sergeant van der Stock shouted. The last marines left the surviving dropships - not all did make it! Sitting in a dropship was the worst part of the operation. You can't do anything than wait. Wait until your ship will land or wait until your ship will be shot down. When you wait, your mind starts to go crazy. You think of your mission and its complications, you think of your enemy, you think of the brutality of war and you think of the Grim Reaper, waiting for you on the battlefield. You wonder, if things really will happen as planned. Seldom they do.

After we had left the ship, Lemonhead, the sarge I and about twenty space marines hid in the ruins of an old bunker, awaiting the Protoss, which didn't take long to engage us. "Here they come", one of the marine shouted. Protoss warriors ran square to our position. Although they were outnumbered, seeing these strange, about three meters tall aliens with their glowing eyes was just terrible. But we had a mission to accomplish. Our opponents came in range of our weapons. "Bwah, they are not equipped with any kind of guns, I think", Coleman laughed, "they only use melee weapons!" "Fire, fire", sergeant Dutch shouted – as if this order would have been necessary. We took our C-14 rifles, aimed at the enemy and started to shoot. We hit the Protoss many times, but they didn't care about it. It seemed they couldn't be harmed a lot by our weapons, but something strange happened with them: a blue glow surrounded the Protoss warriors every time, they got hit. Sergeant van der Stock grunted: "They've plasma shields. Keep firing!" So we did. The first Protoss fell. The second. "Kyle, grenade!", Coleman shouted. I took a THX-1138 gas grenade and threw it to the incoming enemy. The grenade detonated and a deadly gas turned out. But not deadly for the Protoss, it seemed. "You idiots!", sergeant Dutch shouted, "Protoss can't breath! They don't have a nose, a mouth or anything else, like that.". "What the ..." Lemonhead was not able to finish the sentence, because the Protoss now were in front of us. They used mysterious, blue glowing blades, coming from their arms. I still don't know, how these weapons work, but they worked efficiently and took down the marines within seconds. Even their heavy combat suits weren't able to save them. I kept firing and firing and killed one of our opponents, when another warrior suddenly was standing eye to eye with me. I turned aside, as the deadly energy blade from my enemy almost cut off my head. Without thinking, I used the bayonet of my gun and trusted it to the Protoss head – the only place, he wasn't covered (always use the weakness of your enemy to your advantage). The warrior fell down, but another one tried to cut me into pieces. I tried to avoid his blade. Successfully - for the first time and also the second time. But then his energy blade hit my left arm, cut my combat suit like paper. But I wouldn't have survived so many battles, if I wouldn't know

how to fight. Ignoring the heavy pain, which almost made me insane, I used all my strength and putted my right fist in my opponents face. Soon after that, while the Protoss was tumbling for a very short time, I took my C-7 pistol – I must have lost my C-14 rifle during the battle – and shot. But my enemy used his arm to cover himself and my bullets were absorbed by his plasma shield. Frustrated, I threw my pistol to my opponents head. Without thinking I then used my heavy boots to kick the Protoss in his stomach – not knowing, if he had something like that – without any satisfying effect. But now, the Protoss warrior took the offensive and beard me down. Unable to react efficiently I saw my death coming – but at that moment the Protoss suddenly was fell down, Colemans knife in his back. "You damn bastard", I laughed, " what took you so long?" Lemonhead answered: "Gwah, I wanted to smoke a cigarette, while fighting six 'Toss , but, gwah, just couldn't find my lighter." Coleman helped me to stand up, and we both couldn't stop laughing – until we realized, that sergeant Jan van der Stock and all Marines were dead - as the Protoss also were.

We heard loud noises like artillery fire from the other side of the base. The assault of Lt. Kerrigans main forces seemed to be successful – as our diversionary tactic was. Lemonhead grunted: "Hmpfh, nobody's left here. Why not just waiting 'till the battle's over or someone gives us a new order?". "Right", I agreed, "We were just to distract the enemy – with success. Sergeant Dutch told us, our task is to survive!". That indeed was nothing new for us. Coleman and I, we were survivors. We fought the most terrible battles just for the money – not because we had to or for idealistic reasons. Always we survived and that was the only important thing – that and the payment. So many men and women fighting with us are dead now, but does it matter to us? We didn't kill them and we didn't want them to die, but if they die – well, that's war! War has no rules.

"Hey Lemonhead", I said, "thanks for saving my life." He didn't answer. The Protoss had retreated, the main forces had successfully conquered the hostile base and we – once again – had survived. "Its over" Coleman said after a while, "and when we are back on the Hyperion, we'll be paid." "Yeah!", I agreed, "We're not going to fight for a longer time. Although Mengsk is a damn rebel leader, he pays well – if he will pay, what he'd promised!" "Hey Kyle, lets make a trip, when this is over. There are so many drinks and girls in this damn sector, I've never tasted!" While we were dreaming of the days to come, a mysterious, strange sounding voice, started to speak to us. Well, it was not a real voice and there was no one talking but inside our minds someone ... communicated with us. "Why are you defending the Zerg, Terrans? They killed so many of your race! By the light of all stars, this doesn't make any sense." We looked at each other, wondering where this 'voice' came from, when we suddenly were hearing another voice – a real voice, a human voice, a female voice, speaking from the communicators of our helmets. " .. is Lt. Kerrigan. We've neutralized the Protoss, but there's a wave of Zerg advancing on this position. We need immediate ... Chhzzk". We couldn't understand anything else for a while. Some minutes later, we heard Kerrigan speaking again through our communicators. We weren't able to understand much. "... Commander? Jim? What the hell is going on up there?". Silence.

There are no rules in war. If we would live in a computer game, were we and our enemy had little soldier figures, all battles would be played by rules. We would move our figures and order them to attack, to hold their position and defend themselves or to retreat. Our figures would do a concrete number of damage to the enemy figures and if one figure would be out of hit points, it would be destroyed. Just everything would follow logical, mathematic rules. Probably, to win the game, you'd have a special task to complete, for example destroying or conquering something special of your enemy. If the battle of New Gettysburg was a game, we would have won, after we defeated the Protoss. But in a real war there are only a few real victories or defeats – the rest are just battles. And too often most battles are completely senseless for the people, fighting it. So New Gettysburg was. We were ordered to defeat the Protoss while defending the Zerg, so they could kill all men, women and children on Tarsonis. As soon as we had defeated the Protoss, the Zerg started their assault against us, while the 'Sons of Korhal'-fleet left us all alone in darkness and death. This all of course fit into Mengsk's plans and he turned the truth to his advantage, later. But for the

soldiers fighting in New Gettysburg, there was nothing to be gained in this battle. They just fought, because they were told to and they died, because they had no real chance to win this battles. I and Coleman, we just fought for the money. Now I wonder, whether I am better than Mengsk, when he left his troops alone on New Gettysburg. How many men did I leave alone, to survive a battle and to get paid? But as I said: There are no rules in war.

The wound on my my left arm, inflicted from the energy blade of the Protoss warrior, hurt terribly and my combat suit was so full of scars and bumps, that it looked like a squashed can. Lemonhead wasn't better off. As he had been bitten in his left leg by one of these crazy Zergling (a smaller type of Zerg), he limped. His combat suit also had taken serious, serious damage. We had tried to escape from the Zerg, but they had followed us. On our attempted escape we had met some survivors, who had fought with us - until they all were killed. We were the last men standing - and we didn't stop fighting!

Imagine the most horrible creature, that you can: a demon from hell, a super battle robot with four rocket launchers, your mother in law or the devil in person. They all never can be as horrifying as the sadistic Zerg creatures called 'hydralisks', which attacked us. While the brain of one of these hydralisks, hit by Coleman's gun, was splitting in dozens of pieces, and alien blood was squirting all over us, I shot down another hydralisk with the last bullet of a C-7 pistol, I'd taken from a dead marine. While we were fighting for our lives, I saw a strange figure, not too far away, running to our position and killing the last two hydralisks quickly and efficiently. I thought I was dreaming, when I was realizing, that our savior was a Protoss! I, Lemonhead and the mysterious Protoss warrior looked at each other, than the same 'voice', we had heard in the last battle against the Protoss, began to speak in our minds, once again: "You and your brothers are all going to be killed by the Zerg! By all black holes in the universe, I still wonder, why you defended this nightmare-like creatures!". "Gwaah", Coleman answered, " this is the same Protoss guy, who ... ehmm ... 'spoke' to us earlier." "I'm Ajax, warrior of the templar cast, one of the leader of executor Tassadars ground forces and defender of our homeworld and our race, called the Protoss!". "Nice to meet you", Lemonhead introduced us, "we are Leonard Coleman and Kyle Franklin, mercenaries. We get paid well, so we follow the orders of our superior. 'Was not our idea to defend this slimy Zerg bastards.'" "I understand." Ajax answered, "but the reward promised to you only leads you to the deepest darkness. As I said, no one of us will survive!" "Yes, we will", I shouted angrily. "We were in many battles and in many hopeless situations, in the past." "As I were, too", Ajax answered. "But you can not avoid the inevitable. Destiny has spoken." Coleman said: "Man forges his own destiny!" That indeed what the only wise sentence I'd ever heard from Lemonhead. He wanted to engage more, when we all suddenly were hearing a loud alien screaming. Then we saw them: dozens of Zerglings, far away, but fast moving to our position. "You may be right, Terran", Ajax now said, "And so I will choose. I will forge my own destiny, now and here. Although, I know, I'm going to die, I'm not escaping. I am fighting with glory, even if the number of my enemy is countless like the stars. I will reach the Khala's end! En taro, Adun!" Before we were able to react or think about, what 'En taro, Adun!' was supposed to mean, Ajax had run right into the Zerg. "So what destiny do we choose?", Coleman asked me, "being beaten to death by this damn slimy creatures?" "I think, we choose life", I answered. " This Protoss probably will distract the Zerg long enough for us to escape." And so, we ran.

Without Ajax distracting the Zerg from us by scarifying himself – on purpose or without – we would have been killed. He gave us time, he saved our lives, while we left him alone with these deadly creatures. But he was a Protoss and the Protoss were our enemy in this battles, weren't they? Well, if Ajax would have been a human, we would have made the same decision. We never would have done, what he had done to us. No doubt, Ajax was a hero. No doubt, Ajax is a dead hero, now. I am none of both.

We had reached a dead end. A landing platform with only one entrance, an entrance, now blocked by the Zerg, who followed us, after they had killed Ajax. Coleman was in a really, really bad mood. "Where the hell is our great, stupid fleet? Why can't they move there fat butts down here to save us?" " 'cause they are like

us", I answered. "Why rescue someone, if you know, you are going to die?" "We're mercenaries, aren't we?", Lemonhead shouted. "But this stupid Arcturus Mengsk and his stupid 'Sons of Korhal' are always talking of their stupid bullshit ideals, like 'saving lives' and 'fighting for stupid humanity'. Why do they leave us all alone in this nightmare? Gwaah!". I didn't know, what to answer. The Zerg, blocking the entrance to the landing platform, now began to attack us. We had no opportunity to escape. We also weren't able to communicate with someone, because our communication devices had been damaged too much during the last battle with the Zerg. We were trapped. It was over.

I have never really believed in god, until this moment. I have never really believed in wonders, until this moment. I have never believed in anything. But when I first heard and then saw the very badly damaged dropship over my head, I wondered, if there was any force in the universe, who wanted to keep me alive. I didn't even know, one of our dropships had survived. Maybe this was the only one. Now, I heard a voice from the loudspeakers of the ship: "We're going to land, but not for long. If you want to live, take your butts inside the ship – and hurry!". "Lemonhead," I shouted. Through the chaos of our last desperate fight, we had been separated. Coleman was surrounded by Zerglings. I just had killed the last Zerg attacking me, but more of these ugly creatures were on their way to me. "Can't make it alone, bwah!" Coleman shouted desperately. "Need your help!".

That was the moment of truth. I had to make a decision. I had to choose. I never will forget this moment, not in a thousand years. In front of me, Leonard Coleman, my oldest and best and perhaps my only real friend in the whole stupid galaxy, the man, who saved my butt so many times - for example in the last battle against the Protoss - is desperately trying to defend himself from the Zerg. He isn't able to save himself. He is going to die. Perhaps I am able to rescue him and myself. Perhaps not. No one could say. Behind me, the dropship is landing. I only have a few moments to go on board, before it will leave. If I will go immediately, I probably will survive. If I will try to rescue Coleman, my chance to survive would decrease a lot.

I made my decision. Man forges his own destiny.

We are who we choose to be. I am Kyle Franklin, a former mercenary. I have survived the Battle of New Gettysburg. Leonard Coleman hasn't.