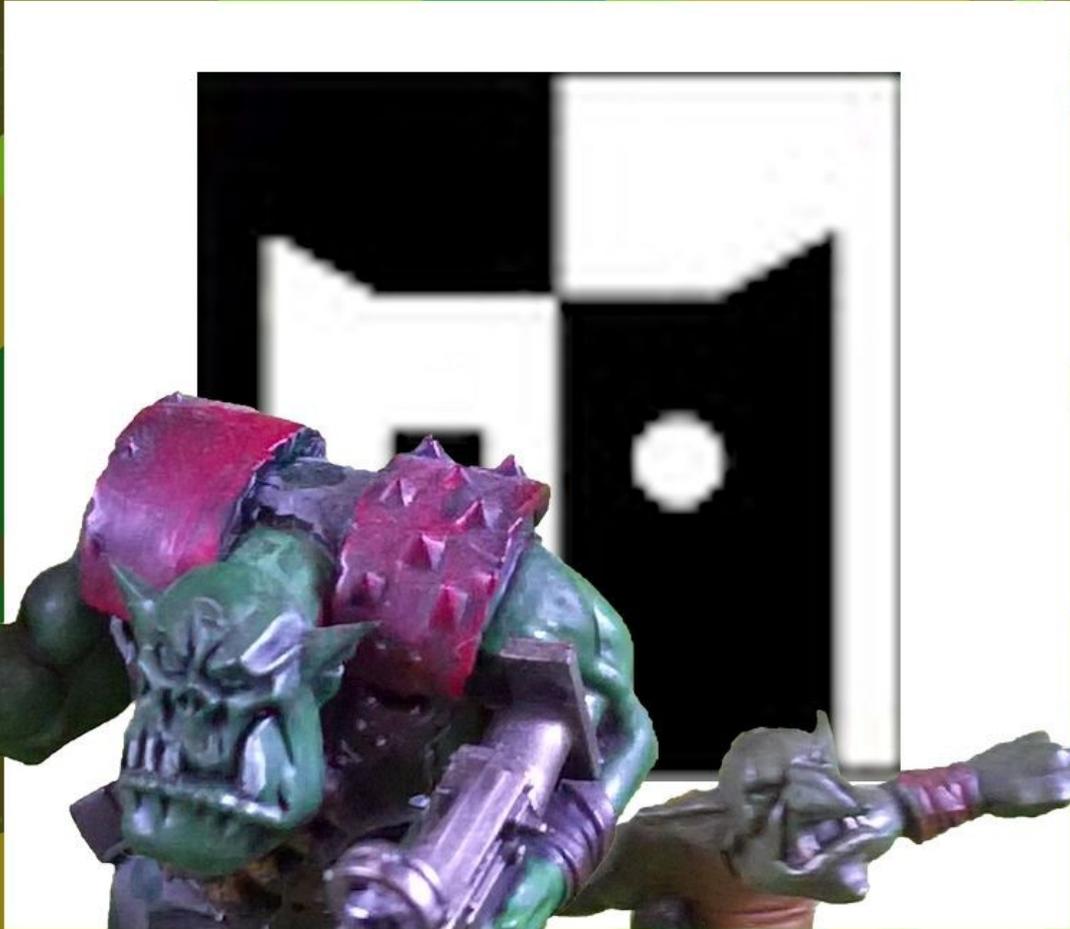


DA CYBORK MENACE



**A HAZUG THROATSLITTER STORY
BY STEPHEN J DUTTON**

In da awesome brightness of da far future dare is loads of

WAAAGH!

Da Cybork Menace

by Stephen J Dutton BSc(hons) BEng(hons)

A quiet evening meal with a friend is rudely interrupted by a rampaging Ork who apparently died some time earlier and was reanimated with the aid of advanced bionics. Hazug Throatlitter must battle the threat posed by da cybork menace.

The Hazug Throatlitter stories:

1. Who Killed Da Dead Lad?
2. Da 'Ole of Death
3. Da Cybork Menace
4. Da Portal of Darkness
5. Da Raiders From da Shadows
6. Da Boss of da Dead
7. Da Isle of Doom
8. Blood and Roks
9. Waaagh! Hazug!

The Hazug Throatlitter short stories:

1. Da Clockwork Grot
2. Da Day of da Runt
3. Da Steel Beast

All available at:

<http://thehazugfiles.uk/Index.htm>

Author's notes.

Ork speech is crude. This has been reflected in the deliberate misspelling of words when spoken by Ork characters.

No squigs were harmed during the writing of this story.

PROLOGUE

“Grot, saw,” the Ork surgeon demanded as he leant over the patient strapped into the chair in front of him and folded back the flesh from the top of his skull. His work was illuminated by a set of electrical lights which, being of Ork manufacture flickered and cast out a poor yellowish glow rather than the clean white light that would have been provided by the human made lights that he had tried unsuccessfully to procure. His diminutive assistant handed him the crude bone saw and in return took the smaller blade that had just been used to cut through the patient’s flesh. There was a grinding sound as the surgeon began to cut through the exposed skull, pausing every so often so that he could reposition himself to cut through a different part of the bone.

When he felt the last part of the skull give way the surgeon dropped the tool to the floor, from where another Gretchin retrieved it. Carefully he grasped the top of the exposed skull in his hands and with a sharp tug he pulled it away, exposing the brain beneath it.

“Small proda,” the surgeon said and the Gretchin handed him a short metal rod that was flattened at one end. At one time it had been a spoon, but now with much of the bowl cut away it served as a surgical implement. The surgeon pressed the flattened end of his tool into his patient’s skull, between the brain and the bone, then he dragged the tool around the inside edge of the skull and made sure that the brain was not catching on anything. Then he used the rod as a lever and slowly prised the brain out of the skull, catching it with his free hand before it could fall to the floor.

Three clusters of nerves extended from the brain, the primary cluster lead to the patient’s spine, while each of the other two smaller ones were the optic nerves that led to the eyes that remained in the skull. Dropping the rod the surgeon called for another tool.

“Small cutta.”

A Gretchin handed his master a small sharp blade with which he cut through each of the nerve clusters close to the brain itself. Then he dropped both the blade and the brain for one of his assistants to pick up.

“Clamp.”

A complicated brass object was passed to the surgeon. It consisted of a metal basket at the centre of four rods that extended outwards at right angles to each other. Each rod was in two parts, with a wider tube over a narrower core that attached to the ring itself. The surgeon lowered the clamp into the empty skull and extended the rods outwards one at a time so that the tips pressed against the inside of the skull, and using small screws set into the tubes he fixed them in position. When he was done with all four rods the clamped sat fixed at the centre of the patient’s skull.

“Donor,” the surgeon said, and a small cart was wheeled to him. On top of the cart was a small squiggly beast pinned to a wooden board, wriggling away. The skull of the creature was open just like the Ork patient’s was, and it brain was exposed.

“Small proda,” the surgeon said and he was given back the tool that he had dropped on the floor earlier.

The surgeon repeated the procedure of prising the tiny brain free of its skull before requesting another tool to sever the nerve clusters that dangled from it. This time however, the clusters were cut further away from the brain. Several seconds after its brain was detached from its body, the squig stopped moving. Then the squig’s brain was placed in the basket at the centre of the clamp so that the nerve clusters dangled down into the skull.

“Cover.”

A brass basket that matched the one at the centre of the clamp was given to the surgeon, who placed it over the brain, enclosing it completely. Then he tightened screws set into the cover to fix it in place. Then the surgeon took hold of the main nerve clusters that extended from the squig’s brain and the Ork’s spine and gripped them together in one hand.

“Small pincers.”

The surgeon was given a small pair of pliers, which he used to squeeze the exposed ends of the nerve clusters together. As the surgeon squeezed the nerve clusters oozed, and the liquid released began to run along the clusters. Seeing this, the surgeon released the pressure from the pliers and let the now fused nerve cluster drop into the skull. The surgeon repeated this procedure with the two optic nerves, taking care to connect the nerves running from the brain to those running to the correct eyes. Then he dropped the pliers to the floor.

“Ead case.”

One of the surgeon’s Gretchin assistants handed the surgeon a steel bowl, which he then proceeded to place over the open skull.

“Nail shoota.”

A bulky pistol shaped device was given to the surgeon and he pressed it against the steel bowl where it overlapped the Ork’s skull. There was a sudden ‘Bang!’ as the surgeon pulled the trigger and a nail was

propelled through both, joining them together. The surgeon moved the gun slightly, and another nail was fired through the bowl and the skull. He continued until there was a ring of nails all around his patient's head, holding its new steel cover securely in place. The surgeon dropped the gun to the floor, and there was another 'Bang!' as the impact caused it to go off, sending a nail through one of the electric lights. "Contact."

The surgeon was given a large metal clip that was fixed to the end of a thick electrical cable and he attached it to one of his patient's ears.

"Other contact."

A second clip, also at the end of a cable was given to him, and he attached this one to the Ork's other ear before he stepped away from his patient. He turned around and faced another Ork who had been standing in the shadows for the duration of the surgery. This Ork carried a great many tools on his belt, and had his hand resting on a large switch mounted on the wall. Next to the switch was a large set of shelves on which lay a vast collection of batteries all connected together and then to the switch.

"Now!" the surgeon yelled, and the other Ork threw the switch.

There was a flash of light as the contacts sparked as the switch closed, and more sparks danced over the Ork that was secured to the chair. The Ork in the chair convulsed as electrical current flowed through it. It continued to convulse randomly until its eyes suddenly opened, it sat upright as much as the straps holding it down would allow and it gave out a cry.

"Waaagh!"

The surgeon threw his arms up into the air and looked upwards as he gave out a yell.

"E's alive!"

I

“Do ya want dat squiggoth sizin’ for an extra tooth?” the Gretchin asked after writing the order down on his slate.

Hazug Throatlitter of the Blood Axe clan frowned.

“Wot does dat mean den?” he asked.

“Ya ‘ave ordered three meals for one tooth each,” the Gretchin began, “so with our special offer for tonight ya can squiggoth size all of ‘em for an extra tooth.”

“Yeah, but wot does ‘squiggoth sizin’ mean?”

“It means dat ya get an extra piece of da squig pie each, plus da beer jug is ‘alf as big again.”

The two headed Ork sat opposite Hazug leaned towards the Gretchin and one of the heads spoke.

“Da jug may be bigger, but is dare any more beer in it?”

“It’s full,” the Gretchin replied nervously, not sure what to make of the giant mutant Ork staring at him.

“Okay den,” Two Head’s other head said, “E’ll pay for it,” and Two Head’s pointed at the head that had spoken first. That head frowned and tried to stare the other in the eyes.

“I’ll get it,” Hazug said, reaching into his money pouch for another tooth. He was eager to eat, and didn’t want the bar destroying by another of Two Heads Smasha Butt Face’s infamous arguments with himself. The Gretchin took the money and rushed off to the kitchen.

“So wot’s dis new place ya is livin’ in like den?” one of Two Heads asked Hazug.

“I got me an entire buildin’,” Hazug replied, “even comes with somewhere to park me truk so no one can nick it. Sophie gets ‘er own room, and dare’s an ‘ole under da stairs where Ratish can sleep in ‘is box, so dey is both out of me way.”

“Ow did ya afford dat?”

“Didn’t need to. Da last nob dat owned it got ‘imself killed when we did in Warboss Zhairad, and Warboss Kromag said dat I could ‘ave it as a reward for ‘elpin’ ‘im out.”

“Dat don’t sound like Kromag,” Two Heads said.

“No it don’t,” the other head agreed, and they both nodded.

“It’s right near Git Town,” Hazug explained, “so no-one else in Kromag’s mob wanted it anyway.”

Both of Two Heads nodded again, more slowly this time, as they took this in.

“So dat’s why we is eatin’ in ‘ere den, rather dan da usual place near where ya used to live.”

At this point the serving Gretchin reappeared with a tray full of food and drink. He placed the tray on the table and while Hazug and Two Heads each took a plate of food and poured themselves some beer he dashed off to take an order from a newly arrived group of orks.

“If Gorrid ain’t ‘ere soon,” one of Two Heads said, “Den I’m avin’ ‘is too,” the other one finished. But as soon as he had finished the sentence, Gorrid appeared at the entrance to the bar.

“Over ‘ere lad,” Hazug called out, waving to Gorrid.

Gorrid came over to the table; he sat down and took the third meal.

“Wot’s up with ‘ow ya is walkin’ lad?” Hazug asked, noticing the new arrival’s awkward gait.

“It’s me new leg,” Gorrid replied. He had lost a leg during a battle with human assassins when Hazug had first dealt with Two Heads and his mob, and it was only recently that he had been able to afford to have another one stitched on.

“Wot’s up with it?” Hazug asked.

“Show ‘im lad,” Two Heads said. Gorrid bent down under the table and undid his boots and lifted both his feet up onto the table.

“Ah,” said Hazug as he saw the two right feet that Gorrid now possessed, “I see da problem. Did ya know dat da leg da painboy was stichin’ on was da same as da one ya still ‘ad before ‘e did it?”

“All dat ‘e said was dat it was cheap,” Gorrid said as he put his boots back on and poured himself a drink, “and den I woke up with both feet da same and ‘is lads chucked me out before I could complain.”

“At least ya don’t ‘ave much walkin’ to do,” one of Two Heads said while the other crammed food into his mouth, “ya can still drive da wagon better dan any of da new lads.”

Gorrid began to eat, but as he did so the attention of everyone in the bar was distracted by a crashing sound from near the entrance. The sound caused the occupants of the bar to look around, many expecting to see a Gretchin busy cleaning up a dropped tray, but instead they saw something far more interesting.

An Ork wearing armour that covered much of his body and consisted of metal plates supported by pistons and motors to offset the weight had burst into the bar by smashing his way through the wall next to the open doorway, and was now attacking the patrons sat at nearest table. A cheer went up across the bar, and orks left their tables and moved closer for a better look at the fight now developing.

“Dis ain’t right,” Hazug said as one of the orks that had been drinking at the table was hurled across the bar room by the newcomer.

“Wot’s up with it?” Two Heads asked over the cheering of the crowd.

“Dat lad’s wearin’ mega armour,” Hazug said, “and not even Warboss Kromag’s got any of dat, so where does a regular lad get it from?”

Before Two Heads could reply there were cries of surprise from crowd members nearer to the fight as the mega-armoured Ork suddenly broke off from attacking the orks at the table by the hole in the wall and lunged into the crowd, lashing out randomly.

“I reckon ya’s right,” Two Heads both said in unison.

“We better do somethin’ den,” Hazug said, and he drew his pistol and blade. Two Heads both grinned and pulled his axe from beneath the table. Then, throwing smaller orks out the way and with Gorrid following close behind, the two nobbs charged towards the heavily armoured Ork.

When Hazug and Two Heads reached the fight itself their opponent had his back to them, and the pair took advantage of this to aim blows from their weapons towards his shoulders and knees, hoping to find weaker points in the thick armour that protected him. None of the blows penetrated however, but the distraction caused the armoured Ork to turn to face them and allowed his previous target to be dragged away by his friends.

Hazug and Two Heads now had a clear view of their opponent. Much of his face was heavily scarred, and a metal cap fixed to his skull had replaced the top of his head. He had not opened his mouth to say a single word since entering the bar, but Hazug was still able see that metal glinted from within his mouth. In fact he could not see any teeth sticking out at all.

The armoured Ork swung an arm that was encased within a massive clawed gauntlet and sent Hazug flying backwards, causing him to drop both his pistol and blade. He landed on a nearby table, which shattered beneath him. Stunned, he lay still for a moment. The blow from a power claw should have smashed his rib cage and turned his internal organs to jelly, but it clearly wasn’t working properly so it was nothing more than a heavy spiked club. Grateful for this small mercy Hazug looked back at the fight where Two Heads and Gorrid were now engaging the armoured Ork without him. Someone threw a chair, which smashed over the back of the armoured Ork and caused it to turn once more and attack in a new direction.

Hazug saw his pistol lying on the floor and scooped it up before firing two rounds at the armoured Ork’s back. The sound of the gunfire was followed by the sound of the bullets bouncing harmlessly off the armour protecting the Ork, and it did not even bother to turn around again. However, Hazug’s use of a firearm had escalated matters and other orks in the bar now also drew what guns they had and began to open fire. Sparks flew from the armour as round after round bounced off without causing any damage, and some orks fell as the ricocheting shots hit them instead.

Hazug returned his pistol to its holster and looked around for a knife. One lay on the floor where it had fallen from a table only a short distance away, and he quickly picked it up. Bullets and combat blades were bouncing off not only the thick armour plating covering most of the mysterious Ork, but also off its exposed head, probably owing the large amount of metal that appeared to now be part of it. The smaller eating utensil may just offer a way of defeating him however, Hazug thought.

With his tiny weapon gripped firmly in his hand, Hazug charged the armoured Ork from behind and jumped onto his back.

“Old ya fire!” Two Heads yelled as he saw his friend now clearly in the line of fire, and most of the guns in the room immediately fell silent, the remainder ceasing fire moments later as their owners realised that the Ork who had given the command to stop was much bigger then they were.

The armoured Ork flailed his arms about, trying to dislodge Hazug from his back, but the bulk of the armour now worked in Hazug’s favour, and he retained his grip with his empty hand. He reached around the armour and pressed the small knife against the Ork’s face. He slid the knife across the Ork’s face until it reached his eye, and then he pressed down hard and pushed the blade through his opponent’s eyeball and the thinner behind it and into his brain cavity.

Hazug released his grip on both the knife and the armoured Ork, expecting his death throws to cease rapidly and for him to lie down and die. But the armoured Ork continued to flail his arms about with the knife still sticking out of his ruined eye and lunged towards another nearby Ork, grasping him by his neck and crushing it.

“Wot in da name of Gork ‘n Mork does it take to kill dis lad?” Hazug said out loud as he got back to his feet and retrieved his blade.

Two Heads and Gorrid were now engaging the armoured Ork once more while most of the bar’s other patrons were making for the exit. Hazug charged again with his blade held out in front of him, yelling as he did so.

“Waaagh!”

The cry caused the armoured Ork to turn in Hazug’s direction, and the blade was now pointing directly at his face. Hazug lowered his weapon slightly as he neared the Ork; just enough for it slip beneath his head and plunge into his throat. There was a spurt of blood as the blade broke through the Ork’s hide, followed

by a crunch as it broke through his spine. The armoured Ork's one remaining eye suddenly opened wide and Hazug withdrew his weapon and stepped aside just in time as his opponent toppled over. The massive bulk of the mega armour fell to the floor with a crash, and its occupant lay still, dead at last.

Two Heads and Gorrid moved to stand beside Hazug as he stared down at the body of their assailant.

"Well," said Two Heads, "we must do this again."

"Next time we get take out," Hazug said, "Ow about my place tomorrow?"

"I'll bring da beer."

As Hazug, Two Heads and Gorrid were leaving the bar a group of Gretchin arrived with a handcart and began to load the bodies of fallen orks onto it for disposal. Hazug stopped outside and looked along the street. As far as he could see there were signs of recent damage, apparently the mega-armoured Ork had been on something of a rampage before he burst into the bar.

"Dis is weird," Hazug said out loud, and Two Heads and Gorrid also stopped and looked along the street.

"One lad did all dat?" Gorrid said, staring at the damaged buildings and vehicles.

"E did 'ave mega-armour," Two Heads pointed out.

"Exactly," Hazug said, "But like I said in da bar, 'ow did 'e get it? Da warboss 'imself don't 'ave any, and dat lad wasn't even a nob."

"I got a nasty feelin' dat ya is about to start pokin' ya nose into somethin' again," Two Heads said.

"Yeah, me too," the other one added.

"Ya is both right," Hazug said, and he went back inside the bar.

There was only a single living Ork remaining inside the bar, the manager who was going through the pockets and mouths of the bodies to recover any valuables that they may have on them to pay for the damage caused, and possibly buy him something else nice if he was lucky. Meanwhile groups of Gretchin were clearing bodies, occasionally pocketing something valuable for themselves while the manager wasn't looking, and fixing furniture.

"We is closed," the Ork said as Hazug entered the bar, then he saw who it was, "Oh its you. Nice work killin' dat lad before 'e wrecked everythin', but da loot is mine. Da sign says so," and the Ork pointed at a sign on the wall that read: ALL DA LOOT FROM FIGHTIN' BELONGS TO KROKA KRUPFANG (DA OWNER!).

"I ain't interested in da loot," Hazug said.

Kroka looked puzzled, but Hazug just strode over to where the corpse of the mega-armoured Ork still lay face down, too heavy for the Gretchin to move. Hazug knelt down by the body, and with a mighty heave, he rolled it over onto its back. Then he opened its mouth and took a look inside.

"Watcha doin'?" Kroka demanded as he came over to look at what Hazug was doing, "Is teeth is mine."

"Wot teeth?" Hazug said, and he pointed into the dead Ork's mouth.

Kroka stopped, and let out a gasp of surprise when he saw that there was not a single tooth in the mouth of the dead Ork. Instead they had all been replaced with sharpened metal spikes.

"Why would 'e 'ave dat done?" the manager said.

There were reasons why and Ork may loose all of his teeth, he could need money quickly, or he could loose a fight and have them stolen, but no Ork would have his teeth replaced with near worthless metal fangs.

"E wouldn't," Hazug stated, "So someone else must 'ave done it to 'im," then he stood up.

"But who? If 'e 'ad no teeth 'e wouldn't be able to pay for it. Or dat armour for dat matter, I bet dat's worth a few teeth."

"I needs ya to keep dis body 'ere and not touch it," Hazug told Kroka.

"For 'ow long?" Kroka asked, "E's taking up a lot of room, and 'e'll start to stink soon. Even grots won't eat near a rottin' body."

"I'll be back before too long," Hazug reassured him, "I need to get someone who knows wot dey is doin' when dey start cuttin' up a body."

"Wot is cuttin' 'im up supposed to do?"

"Tell us wot 'appened to 'im," Hazug said, and with that he left the bar once more.

There were plenty of painboys who kept their surgeries open late. The hours of darkness provided a good income for them to deal with the after effects of the inevitable bar room brawls and pulling teeth for orks who needed money quickly to settle a debt, so Hazug had no trouble in locating one.

"Wot's up with ya?" the Gretchin sat behind the reception table asked.

"Nothin'," Hazug said, "I just need to see da dok."

"Ah, need teeth pullin' den. Da dok charges one tooth for every three 'e pulls."

"I don't want any teeth pullin' either," Hazug replied.

"So wot do ya want den?" the Gretchin demanded.

"I just needs to talk to da dok."

"Talk? I ain't tellin' 'im dat ya just wants to talk. E'll thump me."

“I’ll thump ya if ya don’t go in dare and tell ‘im,” Hazug said, slamming a fist into his palm for emphasis, “and I’ll bet I can thump ya ‘arder dan ‘e can.”

The Gretchin ran into the back room where the painboy saw his patients. There was a deep yell of “Talk?” before the sound of a fist striking bone. Hard. Then the Gretchin reappeared, clutching a hand over an eye. “Da dok will see ya now,” he said.

Dok Brok was larger than most normal orks, but he was barely big enough for him to be called a nob, and Hazug was still taller than him. For Hazug, that made things easier.

“I need ya to come take a look at a body,” Hazug said.

“I don’t do ‘ouse calls,” Dok Brok snapped back.

“Well dat’s just fine,” Hazug replied, “it ain’t in an ‘ouse, its in a bar.”

The painboy paused for a moment, confused by Hazug’s comment.

“Ya’ll be paid,” Hazug said, and Dok Brok grinned.

“I want two teeth,” he stated.

“Deal,” and Hazug took the cash from his pocket and tossed the teeth to Brok. The painboy then took a few moments to gather some of his equipment before he spoke again.

“Rights let’s go,” he said, “ya ‘ad best lead da way,” then as the pair passed through the reception area he spoke to his Gretchin assistant, “I is goin’ out. Anyone who needs me can either wait or sod off,” he said.

Most of the debris had been cleared away by the time Hazug returned to Kroka’s bar, but as Hazug requested the body of the Ork in the mega armour remained untouched. When he saw the corpse Brok paused. Kroka himself was still there, and he welcomed Dok Brok into his bar.

“Da sooner ya finish, da sooner I can open up again,” he said, “so get a bloody move on will ya.”

“Well I reckon ‘e’s dead,” he said, “I can tell on account of ‘is ‘ead is hangin’ off at a funny angle.”

“I know dat,” Hazug said, “I is da one who tried to cut ‘is ‘ead off. For two teeth ya is goin’ to ‘ave to tell me somethin’ I don’t already know.”

Dok Brok set his bag down next to the body and took a closer look. He poked at partially severed head that was the only flesh exposed from inside the heavily armoured suit that encased the Ork.

“Hmm,” the painboy said, poking the dead Ork’s face, “I think ‘e was dead.”

“Ya ‘ave already said dat,” Hazug said, “and ya ain’t getting’ paid if dat’s da best ya can do.”

“I mean dat ‘e was dead before ya killed ‘im, dat’s why e’s got no teeth, cos someone else nicked ‘em already,” Dok Brok said, “but I’m goin’ to ‘ave to get ‘im out of dis suit and cut ‘im up a bit to find out for sure,” and he stood up and walked to the door to the street.

Dok Brok looked outside, and when he saw the group of Gretchin corpse movers nearby he yelled at them. “Oi grots! Get ya selves an empty cart and get back ‘ere with it, dare’s more moving’ to be done!” then he came back inside.

“I’ll ‘ave da body moved to me surgery and cut ‘im open,” Dok Brok told Hazug, “but whoever I find in dare belongs to me. Agreed?”

“Agreed,” Hazug said, “I just need to know wot ya find.”

Hazug left the bar just as the group of Gretchin returned with a cart with which to move the dead Ork and Dok Brok began barking instructions at them. No one noticed another Gretchin watching them from the shadows across the street.

2

"Gone?" the Ork yelled, pulling his surgical mask from his face, "Wot d'ya mean 'e's gone?"

In front of him a group of Gretchin trembled.

"Well," one of the Gretchin began, "we 'ad just given 'em all dare food for da evenin' and we went off to play bubbles..."

"Bubbles?" the Ork bellowed.

"Yeah," said another Gretchin, "its where ya stand in water up past ya waist and whoever makes most bubbles..."

"Without any lumps," another Gretchin added.

"Well yeah, without any lumps obviously," the second Gretchin said, "well dey is da winner."

"So we was playin' bubbles," the first Gretchin interrupted as loudly as he could before, at a lower volume, adding, "and we reckon dat when Flaggit shut da gate 'e didn't do it proper like, and dat's 'ow 'e got out."

"So," the surgeon said, "ya is tellin' me dat one of da lads is missin' and runnin' about in mega armour just because ya were all in a hurry to stand in a puddle fartin'?"

The Gretchin muttered amongst themselves.

"Well yeah," the first one said, "we reckon dat about sums it up. But Flaggit 'as gone off to find 'im, so dat's alright ain't it?"

"Yaaargh!" the surgeon yelled, and he grabbed a large surgical blade from his workbench. Before the first Gretchin had chance to move out of the way, the surgeon swung the blade and sliced through its neck. The Gretchin's head dropped to the floor, landing with a squelch, where the surgeon kicked it across the room.

"Get out of 'ere and don't come back without dat lad," the surgeon bellowed, and the assembled group of Gretchin rushed to get away from their enraged employer.

The group of Gretchin with the cart pulled it behind them, following Dok Brok through the streets of the city to his place of business. As they made their way through the streets numerous orks stopped to watch. Mega armour was unheard of in this system, so to see a corpse clad in it being dragged through the streets caught the interest of many. To defeat an Ork so well protected was no trivial matter, and questions regarding who had been tough enough to manage such a feat began to spread like wild fire.

Several times Dok Brok found himself having to beat away orks who got too close for his liking, or just didn't get out of his way. But for the entire journey, he failed to see that he was being followed. Had he seen his pursuer he would have ignored him anyway because, as far as he was concerned, Gretchin just didn't matter.

Reaching the surgery, Dok Brok found a note stuck to the door with a nail. Crudely scrawled on the note was: DOK'S GONE TIL LATER. SOD OFF, and he ripped it from the door before shoving it open.

"Da dok," he yelled at his assistant who was dosing in his chair, "is back," and he hurled the remains of the note at the Gretchin as, suddenly awoken, he fell to the floor. Picking himself up he saw a group of other Gretchin dragging the corpse of an armoured Ork towards his master's surgery while the Ork looked on.

"I'll get ya tools ready den master," the Gretchin said.

"Make it quick," Dok Brok said, "I'm on a fixed fee 'ere."

The operating table creaked under the weight of the dead Ork and his armour, but Dok Brok was satisfied that it would hold up long enough for him to crack open the thick plating. He sorted through the tools that his assistant had spread out on a second table and found the biggest hammer he had. Gripping it tightly in both hands, Dok Brok braced himself, took a deep breath and swung the hammer.

'Clang!'

The sound of the impact of the hammer on the armour reverberating around the room, and Dok Brok barely kept hold of the tool as vibrations travelled up his arms. His assistant clamped his hands over his ears and shut his eyes, ready for the next blow.

'Clang! Clang! Clang!'

Dok Brok delivered a rapid trio of blows to the same spot, before leaning in for a closer look at the effect it had had on the armour.

"Barely scratched it," he said, disappointed, "I reckon dat dis calls for even more brute force."

"Wot about dat master?" his assistant said having opened one eye and uncovered one ear as he pointed towards a spot on the armour beneath the dead Ork's armpit where the front and rear of the armour appeared to be joined by a single bolt.

"Well obviously dat's wot I was goin' to do," Dok Brok said, even though he had not even thought to look for any fastenings on the armour, "but I is goin' to need some really big pinchers to do it."

Dok Brok dropped his hammer to the floor, and as his assistant rushed to pick it up he began to rummage through his other tools again.

“Ere we go,” he exclaimed as he found an exceptionally large pair of pliers. He strode around the table until he stood next to the bolt holding the armour shut and clamped the pliers around its exposed head. Then, with a single mighty heave, Dok Brok twisted the bolt and yanked it free. He was rewarded with the sound of the two ill-fitting halves of the armour popping open. Dok Brok promptly dropped the pliers to the floor and reached down to the table and gripped the exposed edge of the front of the armour. He took another deep breath and pulled the heavy chest plate of the armour away.

“Well dat’s weird,” he said as he looked down at the body of the Ork within the armoured suit, “I wonder where da rest of ‘im is.”

Dok Brok’s assistant stood on the tips of his toes and peered at the Ork on the table. With the chest plate of the armour removed what remained of his torso was now visible and it was clear that the Ork was in fact an integral part of the armoured suit. Most of his internal organs were visible, held in place by a network of metal struts. Only the lungs were hidden from view, each contained in a sealed metal cylinder and Dok Brok started here by ripping one of the cylinders out of the Ork’s open chest.

“Dis is weird,” he said as he held the cylinder in his hand, “metal shouldn’t be dis light. ‘Ere put it somewhere safe,” and he tossed the cylinder to his assistant, who failed to catch it. Instead the cylinder rolled across the floor and the Gretchin chased after it while Dok Brok continued with his study of the corpse.

For a short time Dok Brok prodded and poked at the exposed innards of the Ork before turning his attention to the head. Following the fight with Hazug the head hung loosely on a few remaining fibres of muscle and skin. But it was the metal plate that replaced the top of the Ork’s skull that interested Dok Brok. While his assistant was trying to retrieve the metal cylinder holding the lung from where it had rolled behind a cabinet, the painboy selected a small set of pliers with sharpened edges. Then, holding the head firmly with one hand he began to prise the nails that held the plate to the dead Ork’s skull loose. When the last of the nails had been removed the plate fell free and clattered to the floor.

“Dis is even weirder,” Dok Brok said to himself as he peered into the open skull and saw the brass frame lodged within and the nerve clusters that hung loosely from it. He pulled the frame out of the skull, the retaining rods scrapping against the bone as he did so. The nerve clusters first stretched, and then snapped as Dok Brok pulled the framework further from the skull. He held the framework up to the light and saw the tiny brain contained within the basket at its centre, briefly he shook what he held.

“Dis ain’t ‘is own brain,” Dok Brok said to himself, then looked for his assistant who had found the lung cylinder and was carrying it out of the room. “Oi grot,” he shouted, “take dis with ya an all,” and he threw the framework at the Gretchin. It landed at his feet and he picked it up on his way out of the surgery into Dok Brok’s cold storage room.

With the two most interesting samples removed from the head and chest of the corpse, Dok Brok turned his attention to its limbs. These remained fully encased in the mega armour, and following his failure to smash open the body, Dok Brok searched for signs of catches that would allow the armour to be removed. Only the thighs and upper arms had any such fastenings and the painboy began to prise them free.

Removing the fastenings from one of the thighs, Dok Brok was able to remove another of the armour plates that had protected the Ork, and just as he had found beneath the chest plate not all of the Ork remained. His leg ended part way down his thigh in a stump that was a mass of scar tissue. To this stump was melded a prosthetic leg that appeared to be fully integrated with his armoured suit. Various wires and pulleys protruded from what remained of the Ork’s own leg and ran down the prosthetic, replacing the nerves that would had controlled the amputated limb and instead allowing the tiny brain that Dok Brok had removed to control the replacement.

“So ya is sure dis is where dey took ‘im?” the Ork asked Gretchin sat next to him in the front of the truck as he stared at the entrance to Dok Brok’s place of business.

“Dis is it master,” the Gretchin answered, “we followed ‘em ‘ere from da bar.”

“Right den, let’s sort dis mess out,” and he climbed down from the truck and walked around to the back.

“Get out,” he commanded the occupants of the truck’s rear compartment, “Dare’s work to be done.”

Dok Brok was about to probe one of the wires in the Ork’s leg further when there was the sound of his waiting room door being pushed open.

“Ang on a mo, I’ll be right out” he yelled as he stood up and walked towards the waiting room, and he opened the door from his surgery to waiting room. Before him stood a pair of orks, both of who had various parts of their bodies replaced with crude Orkish bionics. Both of them had the tops of their heads replaced by metal skullcaps. They stared at the painboy vacantly until a voice in the waiting room outside yelled, “Get ‘im!”

“Ah crap,” Dok Brok said, and he retreated back into his surgery as the two orks charged at him.

Dok Brok slammed the surgery door shut behind him, but it was reduce to splinters when the first of his assailants reached it and burst through into the surgery behind him. With all of his tools laid out ready for the autopsy, Dok Brok had no difficulty in finding something suitable to use as a weapon. He picked up the largest bone saw he could finding and turned to face the orks behind him. He lunged forwards with the saw outstretched, and drove it into the abdomen of the first Ork, but his attacker didn't even slow down as the blade cut deeply into him. Instead he raised a bionic fist and rammed it into Dok Brok's face. There was a crunch as Dok Brok's nose broke, and blood splattered over both his face and his attacker's fist.

Dok Brok staggered backwards, but kept hold his weapon and as the blade withdrew form the Ork it sliced open his abdomen further, and the contents began to spill out. Normally this would be a fatal wound, even for the largest of orks. But instead of dropping out of the gaping hole, the Ork's intestines were instead held back by a web of wires wrapped around them.

Ignoring his own injury, Dok Brok lunged forwards again this time aiming his blade towards his opponent's neck, hoping to decapitate him. But as he moved in the second Ork clambered onto the examination table where the dead Ork in mega armour still lay and kicked the weapon from Dok Brok's hand. Now he paused for a moment while he looked for another weapon. This was enough of a pause for the first Ork to lean forwards, open his mouth and bite down on Dok Brok's outstretched hand with sharpened metal teeth, severing the fingers easily. Dok Brok cried out in pain and clutched at his injured hand. Again this pause gave his enemies time to drive home their attack, and the Ork standing on his surgical table jumped onto the wounded painboy, the pair of them collapsing in a heap on the floor. As they fell they knocked over the bench on which Dok Brok's medical tools were laid out on, and they too were scattered across the floor. Pushing what was left of his injured hand under the Ork's chin, Dok Brok tried to push his attacker off him while with his free hand he felt around for anything else that he might be able to use as a weapon. Just as he felt another of his tools beneath his hand, Dok Brok succeeded in pushing his attacker off him and he scabbled back to his feet, clutching his new weapon.

The Ork with the stomach wound clambered over his companion and advanced steadily on Dok Brok. The painboy tried once more to deliver a blow to the Ork's neck, but this time his attacker was ready and simply reached out and grabbed Dok Brok's wrist as he made his swing, gripping it tight enough for him to drop the tool. Dok Brok kicked at the Ork, aiming for a knee. But although his aim was good the remained standing and kept its grip on him. Though the Ork's trousers covered his legs fully, Dok Brok suspected from his resilience to the kick that at least that leg was bionic.

Dok Brok delivered his next strike with his head, butting the Ork in his face. The blow was strong enough for the Ork to release his grip on Dok Brok's wrist, and he slipped free. But as he reached out to retrieve the tool he had just dropped the second of his assailants struck again, striking the side of the painboy's head with a metal fist. The blow stunned Dok Brok and he dropped to his knees. His two opponents struck him again and again, raining blows from their cybernetically enhanced limbs down onto his head. Dok Brok fell forwards and lay face down on the floor where his assailants continued to strike him, now stamping on him with their feet as well as using their fists. Each impact was accompanied by a snapping sound as another bone was shattered, and the pool of blood that poured from Dok Brok's wounds spread slowly across the floor. The two orks continued with their attack even after the painboy was dead.

In the storage room to the side of the surgery, Dok Brok's Gretchin assistant heard the noise of the battle between his master and the intruders, and by opening the door a crack he was able to watch as his master was killed. Then he heard a voice call out from near the waiting room, where he was unable to see.

"Stop!" the voice called out, and the Gretchin felt that he had heard the voice somewhere before, "Now pick up all of this and get it in the truck."

Clutching both the light metal cylinder and the brass frame close to him, the Gretchin clambered of the storage room's small window into the alleyway at the side of the building and fled.

3

The cellar beneath Hazug's new home had been used by its previous owner as a make shift fighting pit for private sporting events. However, it was cool enough that his human servant Sophie had suggested it would make a good place to store food for future use, and Hazug had promptly set about hunting squigs to be kept there. Of course things weren't as simple as just keeping the dead animals in a heap until they were to be eaten, so Hazug had his Gretchin servant Ratish installing shelves along every available bit of wall space. The task was almost complete, though his master's insistence that all of the shelves be level had made much more work for Ratish, and he was confident that he would be finished today. The sound of footsteps on the stairs from the hall above attracted Ratish's attention, and for a moment he thought that Hazug was coming to inspect his work. But then he noticed that the sound was far too quiet for an Ork the size of his master, which left only one other option.

"Wot do ya want git?" Ratish snapped at Sophie.

"I need to get dinner ready. Two Heads is coming over and Hazug wants me to pick out something special to impress him."

"If ya want to impress 'im, den don't give 'im any of da crap dat ya can cook," Ratish said sarcastically and he got back to his shelf building, hammering on the nails even when they were driven fully into the wood just to annoy Sophie with the sound.

"What's that banging sound?" Sophie said, pausing from her search through the arrayed squigs.

"I'm 'ammerin' ya idiot," Ratish replied, and he struck the shelf he was working on again to make his point.

"No, there's something else banging."

Ratish stopped hammering, and both he and Sophie stood in silence, listening. Sure enough there was a banging sound from the shadows at the far end of the cellar where the light from the single lantern that Ratish had brought down with him did not reach.

"Da 'atch," Ratish said.

When they had first moved into the house, Ratish had informed Hazug that the network of tunnels that ran beneath the Ork city ran close by the cellar and, eager to have an alternative way in and out of the building that could not be observed from the street outside, Hazug had instructed his servant to dig a connecting tunnel from the cellar and fit a heavy door to keep out unwelcome guests. Now someone was definitely trying to gain access through it.

"I'll get Hazug," Sophie said, and she ran up the stairs while Ratish stood watching the door, hammer in hand.

"Urry up," Ratish said as Sophie disappeared, his instinctive Gretchin cowardice taking precedence over his normal unwillingness to show any sign of weakness in front of the young human.

The handle on the hatch shook as someone on the other side tried repeatedly to open it. For a moment Ratish thought he heard a voice muttering something, but the thickness of the hatch rendered it unintelligible. As the banging on the hatch continued, the Gretchin began to wonder whether Sophie would return with Hazug, or if she had just run away and left him to be killed by whatever beast lay beyond. But then there were more footsteps on the stairs, this time from more than one person as Sophie returned with Hazug.

"Right," Hazug said, staring at the door, "Unlock it, and let's see who's tryin' to get in," and he aimed his pistol at the door. Neither Ratish nor Sophie moved as the banging on the door continued.

"Well?" Hazug said, "Wot are ya waitin' for grot?" and he stared at Ratish, "Get dat door open."

Ratish gulped, and advanced on the door, still holding his at the hammer ready.

The key to the door hung on a nail beside it, and Ratish took it from its resting place to unlock the door. At the sound of the key turning in the lock, the banging on the outside stopped. Ratish looked back at Hazug.

"Dey've gone master," he said.

"Open da door grot," Hazug ordered, and he steadied his aim.

The door creaked as Ratish pulled it open, and Hazug stared into the dark tunnel beyond it. Suddenly a small figure dived through the open doorway into the cellar.

"Don't shoot me!" the Gretchin yelled as Hazug prepared to fire.

Hazug stared at the Gretchin cowering on the floor in front of him.

"Shut da door Ratish," he said as he tucked his pistol into his belt, then he spoke to the newly arrived Gretchin, "I knows ya, don't I?"

"Y-Y-Yes lord," the Gretchin stammered, "I wos Dok Brok's helper."

"Wos?"

"E's dead lord, orks killed 'im while 'e wos lookin' at dat boy ya gave 'im. Dey 'ad metal bit in 'em just like da body 'ad," then the Gretchin held up a metal cylinder and a complicated looking brass object, "Da dok took dese out of da lad ya gave 'im, so I brought 'em to ya."

“Ow did ya know about me cellar door?” Hazug asked, a secret door wasn’t much good if everyone knew about it.

“I didn’t lord,” the Gretchin said, “I was just told dat ya lived around ‘ere, and found da nearest door I could, I didn’t know it was in ya ‘ouse, ‘onest.”

“Dat’s alright grot,” Hazug reassured the trembling Gretchin, “now bring dat stuff upstairs and tell us wot ya know. Ratish, get dat door shut again.”

Hazug lead the way up the stairs into his kitchen, followed by Dok Brok’s assistant.

“Put dat stuff on da table,” Hazug said, “and grab a chair.”

Hazug and the Gretchin sat down, the metal objects carried by the Gretchin were put on the table between them.

“Right den, wot’s ya name?” Hazug asked.

“Hoggot,” the Gretchin replied.

“Right Hoggot, now wot’s ‘appened to Dok Brok den?” Hazug asked.

“E’s dead.”

“Yeah, ya said dat, but wot ‘appened?”

“Well, e’d been cutting up wot was left of dat Ork ya gave ‘im, when more like ‘im turned up and killed ‘im. I was ‘idin’ in da store room at da time though, so I didn’t see much.”

Hazug now turned his attention to the objects that Hoggot had brought with him.

“And ya say dat dese things was inside da lad in mega armour den?”

“Dat’s right. Dare was two cylinders in ‘is chest, and da other thing was in ‘is ‘ead.”

“Wos dare anythin’ else?” Hazug enquired as he held up the brass framework.

“Dunno,” Hoggot replied, “Da dok was still cutting ‘im up when ‘e sent me to put dese away for ‘im.”

“Right den,” Hazug said, getting to his feet, “we is goin’ to ya boss’s surgery to take a look around,” then he faced the door to the cellar,” Ratish!” he yelled, “Get up ‘ere, we is goin’ out.”

Mid morning the streets of the city were crowded with orks going about their daily business, and it was only the complete disregard for other road users that all orks possessed that allowed Hazug to drive his truck at anything other than a walking pace. Instead he trusted to the ability of all but the slowest and most dim-witted of orks to be able to dive out of the way when they saw or heard his vehicle bearing down upon them. There were a few shouted insults from both those who had to get out of Hazug’s path, and by those they collided with, but the sight of a nob driving a vehicle with an automatic weapon mounted on it deterred any physical attack between Hazug’s house and the surgery of the late Dok Brok.

“Ratish, watch da truck,” Hazug said as he climbed down from the truck, then added, “Hoggot come with me,” then pistol at the ready Hazug entered the surgery.

Inside he found that he was not the first to come in since Dok Brok’s death. Gretchin were rummaging through everything, searching for anything that they could recycle and sell, already the shelves were empty and now the looters were searching for anything not left in plain sight. Some of the furniture was nailed down, but that would only keep it in place until a Gretchin stole the nails.

“Get out!” Hazug yelled as he batted aside Gretchin in the waiting room and strode towards the surgery itself. There he found more of the same, Gretchin were plundering the tools and supplies left behind by Dok Brok, regardless of their own inability to put the equipment to its intended use. On the window ledge opposite Hazug saw one Gretchin delving into a large ceramic jar and scrapping out the purple paste contained within and shoving it all into his mouth, apparently unaware that his skin was turning the same colour as the paste. Two others were fighting over a medical instrument with a purpose that was unknown to Hazug, and perhaps also to anyone but Dok Brok.

“Stop wot ya is all doin’ now!” Hazug shouted, and a gunshot echoed around the room as he fired his pistol into the ceiling to emphasise his point. Every Gretchin in the room immediately stopped their scavenging and dropped what they were holding to the floor. The jar of purple paste smashed, and its remaining contents began to spread across the floor.

“Hoggot, do ya know any of dese grots?” Hazug asked the Gretchin cowering behind him.

“No lord, dey is strangers.”

“Wots goin’ on?” Hazug shouted, glaring at each of the trembling Gretchin in turn.

“E’s dead,” one of them suddenly said, “everyone round ‘ere ‘eard da fightin’ and we just came to see wot da others didn’t take with ‘em.”

“Wot others?” Hazug demanded.

“Da other Gretchin,” another Gretchin said, “da ones dat came with da boss wot ‘ad ‘is lads kill da dok.”

As Hazug was taking this in the purple Gretchin spoke.

“Ooo,” he groaned, clutching at his stomach, “I don’t feels well,” and then he exploded. Purple flesh promptly splattered across much of the room, while the unfortunate Gretchin’s skeleton collapsed in a heap with the organs within forming a pile of slowly liquefying purple goo.

“Wot was in dat jar?” Hazug asked Hoggot.

“Dok Brok was workin’ on a cure for somethin’.”

“Wot, not turnin’ purple den explodin’?”

“I dunno, maybe.”

Hazug turned his attention back to the Gretchin looters.

“Now tell me about dese other lads,” he said.

“Dey arrived in a covered truk, one of the Gretchin began, “den two of ‘em got out and was ordered to kill da dok.”

“Ordered to?” Hazug said.

“Yeah,” another Gretchin answered, “dey ‘ad a boss in da truk who got out after da fightin’ started. ‘E only went in when it sounded like it was nearly over.”

“And ‘e took some Gretchin with ‘im,” another Gretchin added, “Den dey started bringin’ stuff out.”

“So ya saw all dis from outside in da street?” Hazug asked

“Dat’s right,” the first Gretchin replied, “we was clearin’ up, and when da truk left we decided to come inside and see if dare was anythin’ left to loot.”

“Wot ‘appened to da body?”

“Which one?” the first Gretchin replied again, “Da dok or da one in bits?”

“Da one in bits.”

“Da others took ‘im,” a Gretchin that had not previously spoken responded, “we just got rid of wot was left of da dok. Which wasn’t much, da others ‘ad even pulled out all ‘is teeth.”

“Now wot’s our ‘elp worth?” the first Gretchin said.

“Nothin’,” Hazug replied with a puzzled look on his face.

“Why?” the first Gretchin asked.

“‘Cause ya ‘ave already answered all me questions ya stupid bunch of runts,” Hazug snapped, and he turned to leave the surgery, “Come on Hoggot, dare ain’t nothin’ more for us ‘ere.”

In the street outside, Hazug handed a tooth to Hoggot.

“‘Ere ya go grot,” he said, “ya can bugger off now and find ya self a new boss.”

Grinning, the Gretchin took the tooth and ran off down the street.

“Wot now master?” Ratish asked as Hazug climbed back into his truck.

“All dat we ‘ave left is dem bits wot Dok Brok took out of da cybork,” Hazug said, “So we needs to find out where dey came from. For dat we’ll need a mekboy.”

“Batrug master?”

“Aye grot, dat’s right, Batrug,” and Hazug drove off, oblivious to the Gretchin watching him from an alleyway across the street.

“Wot ‘appened ‘ere?” Hazug asked as he climbed down from his truck to speak with Mek Batrug. The mekboy and his Gretchin staff were searching through the large pile of rubble where Batrug’s workshop had been the last time Hazug had been here. The buildings either side of the workshop had also been destroyed and others nearby badly damaged.

“Ah Hazug,” Batrug said when he saw the Blood Axe nob approach, “if ya wants me to ‘ave another go at makin’ ya a battery for dat alien choppa ya will ‘ave to wait until I gets me self a new workshop. Dis one’s blown up.”

“I can see dat Batrug, but ‘ow?”

“Some thievin’ grot tried to break in last night,” Batrug said, and Hazug knew what was going to be said next, “and ‘e must ‘ave triggered me anti-nickin’ device.”

The device of which Batrug spoke was a large explosive device that he set before leaving each night.

Anyone who tried to force the door without first disabling the bomb would trigger it off. Hazug had seen the bomb several times, and he was somewhat surprised that any part of the street had survived.

“Well I just needs ya to take a look at some stuff wot I found,” Hazug said, “I needs to know who made it.”

Batrug grinned, most of the work Hazug brought to him was of this nature, and it normally involved something interesting and alien.

“Great, four teeth,” Batrug said.

“Two.”

“Three, we ain’t in me workshop so its an ‘ouse call.”

“We ain’t in me ‘ouse either, and ya ain’t got a workshop no more. So two.”

“Okay two, now lets ‘ave a look at wot ya got dis time.”

Hazug beckoned for Ratish to bring him a box from the truck. Inside were the metal cylinder and frame that Dok Brok had been able to remove from the body before his death. Hazug took the box and passed it to Mek Batrug.

“Ere ya go,” he said, “dese wos inside some lad wot I ‘ad to kill yesterday.”

Batrug put the box down and pulled out the brass frame.

“Nought special about dis,” he said, “it’s a bit fiddly, but any mek could make it,” then he shook the frame, “Is dare something inside it?” he asked.

“Could be a brain,” Hazug said, “it wos where ‘is wos supposed to be.”

Mek Batrug nodded slowly, and then he put the frame back in the box and took out the cylinder.

“Now dis is more interestin’,” he said.

“Light innit?” Hazug said, “Yet it feels like metal.”

“Dis is git metal,” Batrug said, “dey ‘ave dis funny metal wot is dead light and ain’t very strong. Dey use it for all sorts of things. Dunno why cos it’s a pain to find and breaks dead easy,” then he looked closely at the centre of the cylinder. “I think dat it opens up,” he said and he twisted both ends. There was a grinding sound as the two halves unscrewed before separating completely. As they did something soft and fleshy fell out. Both orks bent over to take a closer look.

“Dat’s a lung,” Hazug said.

“Ow d’ya know?”

“When ya ‘ave ripped open as many chests as I ‘ave ya gets used to wot da insides of orks look like,” Hazug said. Batrug nodded and took a look inside the two halves of the cylinder.

“Dare’s bellows in dis ‘alf,” he said.

“Wot would dey do?” Hazug asked.

“When dey expand dey would make da inside smaller, den make it bigger again when dey contract.”

“So da lad could breathe,” Hazug said.

“Err, maybe, I don’t know dok stuff,” Batrug replied.

“So do ya know who built it den?” Hazug asked him.

“No mek made dis,” Batrug told him, “da two ‘alves go together and come apart again without any strength needed to force ‘em, and of course I’ve told ya about da metal.”

“So who did make it den?”

“A git of course. Dey still ‘ave several meks of dere own workin’ up dare in Git Town. Dey use a lot of dis sort of metal cos we ‘ave taken most of da good stuff.”

“Well some ‘ow dis got inside of an Ork,” Hazug said, “Do any meks ya know buy stuff off da human meks?”

“Nah,” Batrug said, shaking his head, “we don’t even bother with ‘irin’ ‘em as workers, dey think dey is too good to do things da proper Orky way. If ya wants to find out who made dis, den ya is goin’ to ‘ave to go into git town and try and find ‘em dat way.”

Hazug took a pair of teeth from his pocket and handed them to Batrug, who put the two halves of the cylinder back in the box before taking them. Hazug put the lung in the box also and picked it up.

“Right den Ratish,” he said, “looks like we is off to Git Town.”

“Is dare any other way master? Ratish ‘ates gits,” Ratish replied.

“We is goin’ ‘ome first,” Hazug said as he loaded the box onto his truck, “ya can stay dare if ya wants to, I reckon Sophie will be more use anyway.”

Ratish frowned at the suggestion that Sophie was going to be more helpful than he was.

“Ratish’s place is with master,” he said, “so Ratish will go to Git Town with master.”

“Thought ya would,” Hazug said, “now get in da truk.”

4

“Why do we need help to go to the human area?” Sophie asked as Hazug drove them in the direction of Two Heads’ home rather than directly to Git Town.

“Cos da humans dare may panic,” Hazug explained, “and if dey do dat, dey may try away from us. So I want dare to be more of us to catch ‘em with.”

“Yeah stupid,” Ratish added from the back of the vehicle, “big orks goin’ to catch cowardly gits,” and he added a rude noise. Sophie ignored the Gretchin’s comments and instead pulled her jacket around her tighter against the increasingly cold weather.

“Can Ratish ‘ave a gun master? Ratish could ‘elp control da gits,” Ratish said hopefully.

“Not dis time grot,” Hazug replied, “we is goin’ to be askin’ questions, not shootin’ da place up. Dat’s why left yours and Sophie’s guns at ‘ome. Now sit down and let me concentrate on drivin’.”

Ratish did as he was told, as more pedestrians dived out of the way of the fast moving truck.

Hazug braked sharply when they reached Two Heads’ home, causing both Ratish and Sophie to grab hold of something to prevent them from being propelled forwards out of the truck.

“Right, everybody out,” Hazug said.

Two Heads’ home was a multi level building that consisted of a ground level garage that stored his large, armoured battlewagon with living accommodation on the two levels above that. As Hazug and his servants disembarked from the truck there was a crashing sound followed by laughter from the garage.

“Ya got ‘im now!” someone shouted from within. Hazug drew his blade and pistol and ran towards the open garage door. Ratish and Sophie followed after him.

From the doorway Hazug saw that Two Heads’ Evil Suns mob was clustered around the battlewagon apparently watching something going on beyond them. Hazug returned his weapons to his belt before striding over to join them.

“Wot’s goin’ on ‘ere den lads?” he asked as he reached the group.

“Da boss is fightin’,” one of the Evil Suns replied.

“Who?” Hazug asked, pushing his way to the front of the mob.

“Imself,” Gorrid said, pointing to where Two Heads was trying to prize one of his hands loose from one of his throats.

“Wot ‘appened dis time?” Hazug asked as Two Heads broke his grip and kicked himself in the leg to knock him to the floor.

“One of him took da last squig nibble dat da other wos savin’ for later,” another Ork said, “now dey is both accusin’ each other of bein’ greedy.”

“Ere,” another Ork exclaimed when he saw Sophie, “wot’s dis git doin’ in ‘ere?”

“She’s with me,” Hazug said sternly, “lay a finger on ‘er and I’ll snap it off and stuff it in ya ear ‘ole.”

“Alright,” the Ork said nervously, “I wos just wonderin’.”

Two Heads had picked himself up from the floor and grasped the hair squigs on each of his heads.

“Dis’ll learn ya!” one of him shouted as he slammed the other head into a nearby crate.

“Aye,” the other shouted in return, “well kop dis!” and he slammed the first head into the same crate. The two different heads then began to take turns in yelling insults at each other and banging them into the crate.

“Sod dis,” Hazug said and he drew his pistol and fired a single shot into the ceiling, “Now calm down da pair of ya!” he shouted as everyone stopped and stared at him, “or I’ll just ‘ave to separate ya both.

Permanently.”

“Alright, alright,” both of Two Heads said as he stood up straight and wiped the blood from his face. One of them grinned as he discovered that one of his teeth had been knocked loose and pulled it out.

“Dat’s mine,” the other head spoke, “I knocked it out.”

“Don’t start,” Hazug warned, his hand reaching for his blade.

“Yeah, yeah,” the head said, “We can share it. Now wot does ya want Hazug?”

“Its about dat lad in mega armour from last night,” Hazug said, “da dok reckoned dat ‘e wos dead before he went into dat bar, and when ‘e cut ‘im open ‘e found loads of stuff dat shouldn’t ‘ave been dare. Bionics and da like.”

“Who’d put bionics into a dead lad?” one of Two Heads asked while the other just scratched his forehead.

“Dat’s da thing, I ‘ad Batrug take a look at wot da dok pulled out of da body, and ‘e reckoned dat some of ‘em wos made by humans.”

“And da dok agrees with dis doe ‘e?” Two Heads other head asked while the first was no scratching his forehead instead.

“Dat’s another thing, da dok ‘as snuffed it. ‘Is grot assistant turned up at me ‘ouse dis mornin’ sayin’ dat more lads with bionics turned up at da surgery and killed ‘im. Fortunately, da grot legged it with wot da dok

'ad already pulled out of da body. I've been to da place, and it's cleaned out. Grots got to everythin' dat da killers left behind."

"Dat's weird," both of Two Heads said simultaneously, before one of them had a thought and added, "'ere, dis dok wot's dead. Did ya pay 'im in advance."

"Yeah, two teeth."

"Unlucky."

"Yeah, I know."

"Anyway," the other head spoke, "Wot is it dat ya want from me den?"

"I'm off to try and find out who made one of da bits da dok pulled out of da body, and I reckon dat a wagon load of boys will make it easier to get answers."

Two Heads though for a moment.

"Da last time I gave you a hand me wagon got shot up and most of me boys wound up dead."

"Yeah, I know," Hazug replied.

"Aye," Two Heads added, "so ya can count me in, with any luck dis'll be as much fun as dat was," and then he pushed past Hazug to address his mob, "Right lads listen up!" both of Two Heads shouted together, "load up da wagon, we is rollin' out," then he raised his axe and both heads bellowed, "Waaagh!"

The assembled orks joined in the war cry and then rushed to board their vehicle.

"So wot's da plan den?" Two Heads asked Hazug, "Kill gits until one of 'em talks right?"

"Actually I was plannin' on just askin' 'em," Hazug replied, "Sophie knows where dey meet up to sell stuff, and I figure dat if we go dare den we can see if dare's anyone selling stuff like wot was in da body."

"So no shootin' den?" Two Heads asked, his face falling.

"Only if dey shoots at us first," Hazug answered, and Two Heads both grinned.

"Well dat's somethin' den," he said, slapping Hazug on the back and following his mob into the battlewagon. Hazug and his servants joined Two Heads' mob inside the battlewagon after Hazug had moved his truck inside the garage for safekeeping.

Gorrid, who had been one of the more junior members of the mob Two Heads had taken to the old human capital the last time Hazug had worked with him was now the most senior of the orks he employed, primarily because he was the only to have returned alive from that expedition, and as such he had the right to drive the battlewagon despite of his feet both belonging on the same leg. He revved the engine as Hazug and his servants found somewhere to sit.

"Right den," Two heads said, "now we is all ready. Let's roll!"

Gorrid put his foot down on the gas pedal and the battlewagon lurched forwards, and promptly stalled.

"Wot's up with it?" Hazug asked.

"Just a dodgy fuel pump, dat's all. It got hit when we attacked da tau colony," one of Two Heads replied, then the other added, "it'll be alright once we gets goin'."

Gorrid restarted the engine and accelerated more gently this time, then when the battlewagon was clear of the garage he pushed down harder and the heavily armoured half track sped off through the packed streets causing not only pedestrians but also other drivers to get clear as quickly as they could.

The human enclave, known as Git Town to the orks, lay to the north of the city. Most orks who went there did so looking for trouble, boredom having driven them to seek out someone to fight. So as the battlewagon entered the area the humans that the occupants caught sight of were mainly fleeing in fear.

A flash of light came from an ancient box shaped device attached to a lamp post that had both been overlooked by the orks somehow as the battlewagon sped past it, and one of the orks crewing the machine gun turrets opened fire. The device exploded as the burst of heavy calibre bullets shredded it.

"Quit it!" Two Heads shouted at the gunner, "We ain't doin' no shootin' till we gets shot at first. Alright?"

There was no response.

"I said alright everybody. Alright?" Two heads said, looking around the inside of the battlewagon, staring at as many of his orks as he could make eye contact with.

"Alright boss," the Evil Suns replied in unison.

At Hazug's beckoning, Sophie moved to the front of the battlewagon, supporting herself by holding onto the back of Gorrid's chair. From there she could see through the driver's narrow vision slit and direct him towards the market area.

"You're driving too fast," she protested, "I can't tell where we are."

"Ya 'eard 'er Gorrid lad," two Heads said, "Slow down so da git can see."

Gorrid slammed a foot on the brake and, with a loud screeching; the battlewagon ground to a halt while its occupants struggled to prevent themselves from being thrown about the vehicle's interior.

"Ow's dat for ya?" Gorrid asked as Sophie struggled to get up from where she had fallen beside him.

She looked out through the vision slit again, then turned to Hazug.

"I need to get out and figure out where we are," she said.

“Right den,” Hazug replied, “I reckon dat I could do with stretchin’ me legs an’ all,” and he opened one of the battlewagon’s side hatches.

Sophie followed him out into the street, and began to study the area around them.

“See anythin’ ya recognise?” Hazug asked Sophie.

“No,” she responded, “we’ve driven past the streets I know.”

“We’ll ‘ave to drive around a bit more den,” Hazug said.

“We could try asking for directions,” Sophie suggested, and she pointed to a corner from where a pair of humans watched them.

Hazug turned to look at the humans, and as he did so he caught sight of a flash from an upper storey window at the end of the street, followed by a ‘whoosh’ sound.

“Rokkit!” Hazug yelled, and he pushed Sophie to the ground as the explosive projectile struck the front of the battlewagon and detonated. The armour at the front of the battlewagon was both thick and tough, and the warhead of the missile failed to do anything more than blast some of the vehicle’s red paint from it. The battlewagon’s turrets began to turn towards the building, while orks led by Two Heads began to pour out of it.

“Big shootas let rip up dare!” Hazug shouted, pointing towards the window from which the missile had been fired, “Don’t use da kannon!” and he picked himself up and ran towards the entrance to the building while the Evil Suns fired the battlewagon’s automatic weapons towards the source of the attack.

“Follow ‘im lads!” one of Two Heads yelled, while the other just screamed “Waaagh!” as he ran in pursuit of Hazug.

Hazug swung his blade at the building’s door, and it splintered before him, then he crashed through what remained of it into the building. He waited in the hallway inside when he heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs ahead of him. Turning around he waved to the Evil Suns moving up behind him and shouted, “Stay back a mo!” then he pressed himself up against the wall just out of sight of the bottom of the stairs.

Moments later a human ran past him and turned to run down the hallway towards the back of the building, straight into Hazug who grasped him and lifted him off the floor to look him directly in the eyes.

“Goin’ somewhere lad?” Hazug said in the human language, Gothic, before he head butted the human and heard his nose break. Hazug let go and the human dropped to the floor in heap, clutching at his ruined nose, blood pouring out onto the floor.

Hazug looked round as he heard Two Heads and his troops entering the building.

“Any of da lads ‘urt?” Hazug asked.

“Nah,” Two heads said together, then one continued, “me wagon’s way too tough for any wimpy git rokkit to do anythin’ to it from da front. Is dis ‘im den?”

“I reckon so,” Hazug said, “‘e wos in a right ‘urry to get away.”

“So let’s just kill ‘im and get on with our job ‘ere.”

“I want to take a look at where ‘e fired from first,” Hazug said, “I ain’t ‘eard of humans ‘avin’ rokkits round ‘ere before.”

“Wot about ‘im den?” Two Heads asked, pointing at the human.

Hazug drew his pistol and fired a single round into the human’s chest.

“Dat good enough for ya?” he asked.

“Yeah, dat’ll do,” Two Heads both replied.

Hazug led the way up the stairs, followed by Two Heads and the Evil Suns not crewing the battlewagon. As they ascended they heard few sounds that indicated there were any humans in the building, but occasionally a whimper would be heard behind a door as the occupants silenced youngsters until the orks had passed by their home. Hazug stopped when he found a doorway that was wide open.

“I think dis is it,” he said, and strode into the apartment beyond. The inside of the apartment was filled with the acrid smell of burning, an after effect of the launching of the missile from the poorly ventilated location, and there was a large scorch mark on the wall opposite the window where the weapon’s back blast had damaged it.

“Yep,” he added, “dis is definitely it,” and as Two Heads entered they both stood and stared at the crates that nearly filled the room.

“Wot does dis say Hazug?” Two Head asked, pointing at the labelling on a nearby crate. Sophie had been teaching Hazug to read the human script, and he read it carefully, mouthing words as he did so. It read ‘LAUNCHER, MISSILE, HYROS PATTERN’. Then he looked around the room once more and read the writing on a smaller sized crate, mouthing the words to himself again. ‘LASGUN, MARS PATTERN, x3’ he read.

“Dese are all rokkits,” Hazug said, pointing towards the crates along one side of the apartment, “and I think dat dese each ‘ave three shootas in ‘em,” and he pointed towards the smaller crates.

“Dey any good?” Two Heads asked as his troops tried peering around him at the crates.

“Da rokkit launchers ain't much different to ours,” Hazug told him, “but da shootas are dem weird zappas wot is dead puny. Da meks may be able to use 'em for parts though, and if dare is any batteries with 'em dey is worth somethin'.” At the back of his mind was the alien warscythe he had captured when he battled the Necrons. There was a chance that, with human energy cells, mek Batrug would finally be able to get the weapon working for him again.

”Den dey is worth lootin' den?”

“Oh yeah. Wot do ya say to a third each?”

“A third?” Two Heads repeated, “Wot about da rest?”

“For da warboss,” Hazug explained, “as soon as Kazkal finds out da we got da rokkits, 'e's goin' to want some anyway. So thir'd each, plus a third for da boss sound good?”

“Deal,” Two Heads both spoke together, then stepped away from the door, “Right lads,” one head yelled, “its lootin' time, get dese boxes in da wagon.”

Cheerily, Two Heads' orks began to remove the various crates from the apartment and carried them down to the waiting battlewagon on the street outside.

“Mind out lads!” Two Heads had to yell as one of them was dropped, spilling a human made missile launcher and several rounds of ammunition out onto the stairs, “Dey go bang ya know.”

“Right boss,” an Ork replied as he scooped up the explosives and put them back into the crate. It was then that Two Heads noticed that Hazug had opened one of the smaller crates.

“Wot ya doin'?” he asked the Blood Axe.

“I wants to see exactly wot's in 'em,” Hazug replied as he flipped through a small book he had removed from the crate, “dese look like instructions to me,” and he stuffed the book into a pocket before plucking one of the three guns contained within the crate and a belt of power cells to go with it and he took them down into the street.

Outside he saw Sophie returning from the corner where the humans who had earlier been watching the orks were leaving.

“I know where the market is now,” she said as Hazug approached, then she added, “What are those for?” indicating the gun the power cells.

Hazug passed the weapon and a single power cell to Sophie, then pulled the instruction manual from his pocket and gave that to her also. The remaining power cells he stuffed into his bag.

“Ere ya go,” he told her, “See if ya can work dat.”

“Err, right,” Sophie replied as she tried to keep hold of everything that Hazug had just given to her, before saying, “What's that noise?”

Hazug paused to listen. At first all he could hear was the sound of the battlewagon's engine still running and the conversations of the Evil Suns discussing how they were going to spend their share of the looted weapons. But then he caught something else. It was a wailing sound, made by a machine rather than something living, and it was getting louder. It was getting louder because it was getting closer.

“Look sharp lads!” Hazug shouted, drawing his weapons, “Somethin's comin'!” and as the orks readied themselves a trio of human vehicles rounded the corner.

Each vehicle was similar to a lightweight Ork buggy, but with the customary human regular smooth outline. They all held a pair of humans in an enclosed cabin behind the forward mounted engine, with another five or six in the open rear area. Each vehicle mounted a belt fed weapon and a flashing red light on its roof. The wailing sound seemed to be coming from speakers mounted next to the flashing lights.

Hazug saw the look of surprise on the face of the driver of the first vehicle to round the corner when he saw the large Ork battlewagon and troops ahead, and he instantly slammed on the brakes. The vehicle's tyres squealed and smoked as it came quickly to a halt, meanwhile the following two vehicles both swerved to avoid the now stationary lead vehicle and also came to a rapid halt. The humans riding in the backs of the vehicles all jumped out as soon as they were stationary and took cover behind them. The occupants of the cabins all ducked out of sight before also crawling out and taking cover, only the humans crewing the mounted weapons stayed in place but they did not fire, apparently unsure of what to do.

Hazug knew that these humans outnumbered the orks, but the battlewagon would be able to smash the far lighter human buggies apart with no effort at all. Already its turrets were traversing to face the three vehicles and the humans hiding behind them.

“Steady lads,” Hazug said sternly, “let's wait and see wot dey do.”

As the orks in the street waited for the humans' next move those who had still been in the building, led by Two Heads, spilled out onto the street.

“Careful Two Heads!” Hazug shouted, “We don't know wot dey wants yet,” and two Heads signalled to his troops to stay put for now. Just then he noticed that Ratish had crept out of the battlewagon, and was now standing beside him, staring in the direction of the humans and scowling.

“Master kill 'em now?” Ratish asked, but Hazug ignored him because one of the humans was now doing something.

The human in question was one that Hazug recognised as having ridden in the front of the lead vehicle. He had raised his hands above his head so that Hazug could see that he held nothing in them and was approaching Hazug slowly. He was tall for a human, but barely larger than an average Ork so he was still much shorter than Hazug. His clothing reminded Hazug of a Goff Ork, it being entirely black and it appeared that his was wearing some form of armour that covered his torso. Though he was not acting aggressively, Hazug guessed that this human was well practised in fighting.

"Can you translate for me?" the human called out in Gothic while he looked at Sophie, he kept his hands raised.

"Hazug understands Gothic," she replied, "you can talk to him directly."

"I didn't know," the human said, still looking at Sophie.

"Oi, human," Hazug shouted in fluent but heavily accented gothic, "I'm over 'ere. Now who are ya and wot d'ya all want. 'Urry up cause dese lads is wantin' to fill ya all with 'oles."

"My name is Dariel Thayne, and I am the chief of the constabulary here," the human explained.

"Constabulary?" Hazug repeated slowly, unfamiliar with the word.

"They keep order," Sophie told him.

"Right, I get it," Hazug said to Sophie before addressing Thayne once more, "So wot d'ya want 'ere den?"

"An explosion was reported," Thayne answered, "we came to find out what had happened."

"Well we sorted it," Hazug said, "da lad wot shot at us is dead, and we is takin' all da other rokkits and guns wot 'e 'ad with us."

The human looked surprised, and he lowered his hands.

"Rockets?" he said.

"Dat's right," Hazug replied, "'e 'ad a great stash of 'em, and dey is ours now."

Thayne didn't respond for a moment.

"You say the man who had them is dead?" he said eventually.

"I shot 'im meself, 'e's still in dare," and Hazug pointed to the building behind him, "ya can 'ave a look if ya like, but we is goin' now. Don't try and stop us."

"We won't," Thayne said, and then Hazug turned to Two Heads.

"Ave we got it all now?" he asked in the Ork language.

"Dese are da last boxes," Two Heads replied, indicating the crates that had most recently been brought down from the apartment.

"Well Sophie knows where da market is, so once dey is loaded we can be goin'."

"Ya all 'eard 'im lads," Two Heads shouted, "get dis stuff in da wagon and lets get goin' again."

Watched by the human enforcers the Evil Suns loaded the last few crates onto the battlewagon, lashing those that would not fit inside to the roof and exterior of the main turret, then they boarded the battlewagon and Hazug, Ratish and Sophie followed after them.

Inside the battlewagon, Sophie took up a position next to Gorrid in the driver's seat once more and began to give him directions to the marketplace.

"Stop a bit short of it," Hazug said to Gorrid, then turned to Two Heads and added, "I don't want to panic 'em and set all runnin' off."

Two Heads both nodded in agreement as the battlewagon began to accelerate.

In the street they left behind Chief Constable Dariel Thayne directed his enforcers to investigate the building that Hazug had indicated. Keeping out of earshot of their superior, two of them discussed the arms taken by the orks and the body left in the hallway.

"It's him alright," one of them said, "the idiot tried to take out that battlewagon with one of the missile launchers."

"Yeah," the other responded, "and now the orks have taken the entire stockpile. He's going to be furious."

5

Hazug stood on the turret of the battlewagon and peered over the wall that Gorrid had stopped the vehicle next to.

“Dis is it,” Hazug said, “Dare’s loads of humans with stuff all laid out to sell.”

“So wot now?” Two Heads asked as Hazug climbed down, then the other one asked, “Do we run in and grab ‘em?”

“Nah,” replied Hazug, “I’ll go in dare with Sophie and see if dare’s anyone sellin’ bits of metal. I wants ya all to stay ‘ere and watch for anyone runnin’ out past ya with anythin’ dat looks like dat tube. But ‘ave someone stand up dare on da turret and watch wot’s ‘appenin’. If I gets into a fight den ya can charge in, but make sure ya give out a big yell to scar off as many as ya can first.”

There were murmurings of discontent from most of the orks before Two Heads spoke up.

“Right lads, dis is wot we came ‘ere to do. Morfang, get up on dat turret.”

“Right boss.”

“Wot about Ratish master?” Ratish asked.

“Stay in da wagon,” Hazug told him, “ya will scare da humans if I takes ya in dare.”

“Yes master,” and Ratish ran back into the battlewagon.

Taking Sophie with him, Hazug began to walk around the perimeter of the market until he reached an entrance at the far side. He reasoned that if anyone were to flee from him they would do so directly away from him, and that would take them past Two Heads Smasha Butt Face and his mob.

The sight of an Ork nob entering the market place did prompt some surprised reactions from the humans. Those immediately near him leapt out of the way; fearing that his massive blade would otherwise cut them in two, while those further away just stopped and stared.

Hazug looked around at the goods laid out on the stalls around him. Most of them were common household items and foodstuffs that in an Ork society would be provided by independent Gretchin, though these appeared to be of a much higher quality, while others sold various trinkets and luxuries. Hazug noticed that many of the stallholders with these luxury goods were armed, mainly with projectile pistols but some appeared to have shotguns or carbines behind their stalls.

“Right den,” Hazug said to Sophie, “so where d’ya reckon dat we’ll find someone sellin’ dese tubes?”

“We’ll have to ask,” she replied, and she wandered up to the nearest stall.

Hazug watched as Sophie spoke with the stallholder and pointed at the metal cylinder Hazug held. The stallholder shrugged, then he shook his head as he replied, but Hazug could not make out what was being said.

“He didn’t know anything about the cylinder specifically,” Sophie said when she returned to Hazug, “but he did point me in the direction of some stalls that sell scrap metal and small machine parts. We can try those.” Sophie then began to walk through the crowded marketplace. Hazug followed her, and the crowd promptly parted around them. After they left another female human approached the stallholder that Sophie had just spoken with.

“What did that girl want?” she asked the stallholder.

“That Ork with her is looking for someone selling machined aluminium cylinders,” the stallholder replied while he got on with serving a customer.

“And what did you tell her?”

“That no sells stuff like that here, but the scrap dealers may be able to find someone who does,” and he looked towards the woman to add, “What is it to you anyway?” but she had already gone.

Hazug was becoming frustrated. He and Sophie had spoken with a dozen different stallholders now, and none of them knew anything about a human with the tools needed to work metal to the standard of the cylinder.

“You orks took all of that a long time ago,” one of them said.

“You’d need a reliable power source too,” another added, “and those are rare since your invasion.”

Something about this bothered Hazug, the laser weapons he had discovered had plenty of power cells with them. He pulled the ammunition belt from his bag; it still had four power cells in it.

“What about dese?” he asked.

The humans running this stall stared at him open mouthed.

“Where did you get those?” one said in amazement.

“Found ‘em,” Hazug said, “dey worth somethin’ den is dey?”

The chief stallholder produced a small wooden box and opened it. Inside were numerous small metal disks that Hazug recognised as the human equivalent to money, plus a smaller number of Ork teeth.

“I’ll give you everything I have here for them,” he said, staring at the power cells.

Hazug looked closer at the contents of the box. There were at least a dozen teeth in it, which was the most that he would get from a mek for the four power cells, plus there was the human money, which was metal and so had some value even to orks.

Hazug paused briefly before holding out the ammunition belt.

"Go on den," he said, knowing that his share of the looted arms cache still had many more of the energy cells in it.

The human grabbed at the belt and handed over the box that Hazug promptly stuffed into his bag.

"Come on Sophie," Hazug said, "we is done 'ere."

"So we're just giving up then?" Sophie asked as she followed Hazug back towards the battlewagon.

"Yep. Nothin' more for us 'ere."

"So where do we go from here then? We still don't know who made that Ork the way he was."

"Nobody's actually payin' us to find out anyway," Hazug pointed out, "so I ain't in no special hurry about it. I'll just 'ave to keep an eye out for any more orks with odd bionic bits dat's all. Somethin'll turn up. Trust me."

Returning to the battlewagon, Hazug explained to Two Heads that they were done and it was time to go home. As they boarded the battlewagon once more, none of them noticed that they were being watched by a young human woman standing in the shadows of an alleyway, and by a pair of Gretchin peering out from under a manhole cover.

"They were looking for someone selling machined aluminium cylinders," the woman said to the man sat across the table from her in a secluded corner of the bar.

"What for?" the man replied as he adjusted his jacket. Beneath it, the woman caught a brief glimpse of an armoured vest.

"I don't know," she said, sipping at the warm drink she had purchased.

"So they could have been looking to buy some of them, or they were trying to trace some that someone else bought."

"That sounds a bit complicated for orks."

"This one's different," the man said, "it's a Blood Axe that calls itself Hazug Throatlitter. Apparently it's got the ear of their chieftain. It does its special ops work for it; apparently it was instrumental in the attack that was launched on a rival chieftain in the summer. Infiltrated air defence batteries and destroyed them before the main attack or something like that."

"I didn't know orks were capable of such a thing."

"Blood Axes are. But it sounds like stealing the weapons was just a coincidence; the orks didn't come here looking for them. Now these cylinders they wanted to find, machined aluminium you say?"

"Yes, I got a look at the one it was holding, it was about this big," and the woman held up her hands to indicate the length of the cylinder.

"You speak Orkish, yes?"

"I do," the woman answered, "though not quite fluently."

"That's good enough, because I think I know where these cylinders come from," the man said, "now here's what I want you to do..."



The painboy shook his hand as he accidentally jabbed a needle into it while sewing up an Ork that lay on the table before him.

"E was where?" the dok bellowed as he stood up straight and towered over the assembled Gretchin.

"Well first 'e was at da surgery of dat dok wot ya 'ad killed, and den we followed 'im to git town. But den 'e was with a bunch of Evil Suns," one of the Gretchin answered.

"And one of 'em 'ad two 'eads!" another one added.

"Wot was 'e doin' when ya saw 'im at dese places?" the painboy asked.

"At da dok's surgery 'e was askin' about da body wot we took back," a third Gretchin said.

"And in Git Town 'e got shot at, den looted a bunch of boxes from one of dem places wot loads of gits live in," a fourth one said.

"Yeah," interrupted the first Gretchin, "den 'e spoke with gits and swapped somethin' for another box."

"But dis box was smaller," another Gretchin added.

"Yeah, I was about say dat," the first Gretchin argued.

"Well I think dat dis Ork needs watchin'," the painboy said, "I wants ya to keep followin' 'im all da time, and if 'e's goin' to be a problem den I'll 'ave some of me lads kill 'im just like wot I did to da other dok."

The Gretchin all nodded in agreement with their master.

"Well?" the painboy shouted, "Wot is ya waitin' for? Get out dare and start followin' 'im!" and his swung out his hand and knocked one of the Gretchin across the room. The remaining Gretchin fled.

The previous owner of Hazug's new home was a Bad Moon, and he had used the room that adjoined the master bedroom to store his accumulated wealth. Warboss Kromag had of course, taken that upon his death rather than leaving it for Hazug. Now Hazug had decided to use the room as a storage place for his weapons. A single cupboard had been enough until yesterday, but the looted missile launchers and lasguns required far too much space for that.

Hazug was going through each crate and examining the contents carefully when he heard the sound of running up the stairs. He calmly walked onto the landing just as Ratish and Sophie both reached the top of the stairs.

"There's someone to see you!" they yelled simultaneously, each trying to be the one to deliver the news.

"It's a woman," Sophie added, while Ratish instead said, "It's another stinkin' git like 'er," and pointed at Sophie. Sophie shoved Ratish and he tumbled back down the stairs.

"Ratish is fine master," Ratish called out from the bottom of the stairs, "and da git is still 'ere waitin'."

"Shut da door Ratish, da cold is getting in," Hazug said as he came down the stairs and saw that the front door was open to the street outside.

"Yes master," Ratish responded, and he dashed around the human to close the door.

The human standing in the hall was another female. She was slightly taller than Sophie, and appeared to also be slightly older.

"Well?" demanded Hazug, speaking in gothic, "Wot d'ya want?"

"I heard you were looking for the source of some metal cylinders," she replied in the Ork language.

"And wot is it to you?" Hazug asked, speaking in Orkish now that he knew she understood the language.

"I can take you to where they come from," she said.

Hazug paused and grinned.

"Come dis way," he said, and beckoned the human to follow him into the kitchen.

"Told ya somethin' would turn up," he said to Sophie.

Hazug, Ratish and the woman sat around the kitchen table. Sophie placed a plate of food on the table and joined them.

"Dig in," Hazug said as he helped himself, "and tell me who ya is."

"My name's Rhia," the woman said.

"And wot d'ya know about dese metal cylinders den?" Hazug asked as he chewed his food.

"They come form outside the city," Rhia explained, "Gretchin are digging them up for an Ork."

"Wot Ork?"

"I don't know," Rhia said.

"Stupid git," Ratish interrupted, but was silenced by a slap from Hazug.

"Go on," Hazug said.

"I just saw the Gretchin digging up the cylinders," Rhia continued, "I worked at a nearby farm at the time, and we could see them working sometimes."

"And wot's in it for yer to be tellin' me dis?" Hazug asked.

"I need work," Rhia said, "the farm I worked at was burned down, and I heard that you employ humans."

“Just da one,” Hazug said.

“One too many,” Ratish snapped, and he ducked before Hazug could hit him again.

“And wot makes ya think dat I need another servant?” Hazug asked.

“Because another would make you appear powerful,” Rhia said, “you don’t have a squad of soldiers following you, so having more servants will make other orks respect you more. Especially since most humans cost a lot to hire.”

Hazug grinned, then laughed.

“Ya know orks den,” he said, “but ya don’t know me. I don’t care wot other orks think of me, I never ‘ave.”

Rhia looked back at him silently.

“But I’ll give ya a chance,” Hazug continued, “since dare is more for Ratish and Sophie to do round ‘ere dan at da last place. But if dare ain’t enough for ya to do, or if ya ain’t no good, den ya is out,” then he turned to Sophie, “when we gets back I wants ya to explain to ‘er wot to do around ‘ere.”

“Get back from where?” Sophie asked.

“Didn’t ya ‘ear wot she said?” Hazug responded, “She knows where dem cylinders is comin’ from. Now let’s get goin’.”

Snow had fallen overnight, and while Gretchin had been doing their best to clear as much of it as they could from the city’s streets since daybreak there were still many places where it covered the ground. This was especially true near Hazug’s home near Git Town, where the street clearing teams had not reached yet. For once Sophie was not sat in the front of the truck with Hazug, but he had specifically instructed Rhia to sit in that position to direct him towards the farm where she had once worked and from where she claimed to be able to direct him to the source of the metal cylinders.

“Do I get one of those?” Rhia asked, indicating the handguns that Ratish and Sophie carried.

“No,” Hazug said, “ya only gets a gun when I knows ya can be trusted,” and he started the truck’s engine.

In Git Town the covering of snow on the ground was even thicker, Gretchin would not think to clear it from this area, and the humans did not have the manpower to do it for themselves. Reluctantly, Hazug slowed the truck down to compensate for the worse driving conditions, he remembered the missile attack from the previous day, and would rather not give anyone who had more of the weapons a slower moving target that was easier to hit.

“Keep watch,” he said, “and Ratish...”

“Yes master?”

“Get up dare on da big shoota, if ya see anyone shootin’ at us den I wants ya to shoot back.”

“Yes master,” Ratish replied gleefully, and he climbed up into the cupola turret in the truck’s roll cage and took up a position crewing the large belt-fed weapon mounted there.

Beyond Git Town was the northern fortress, where Warboss Kromag maintained a garrison of orks to keep a watchful eye on who and what was coming into his city. Though as they drove past the heavily fortified building it occurred to Hazug that rather a lot of missiles and lasguns had got into the city under their noses. “So ‘ow far is dis farm den?” Hazug shouted over the noise of the truck engine as the northern fort shrank into the distance.

“About four of five miles,” Rhia shouted back.

Hazug was familiar with the terms used by humans to express distance, and he quickly reasoned that the distance Rhia had stated would not normally take long to travel in the truck, even though they were travelling across open country. But the ground out here had a thick covering of snow, and it was hard going for the truck to get through. Hazug began to wish that he had asked Two Heads to drive them out here; the battlewagon’s reinforced ram would have had no trouble in clearing a path. As it was, the outline of the ruined farm buildings appeared in the distance at about midday.

“This is it!” Rhia shouted, pointing at the ruined buildings, “Stop here!”

Hazug stopped the truck near to the ruined farm and then jumped out onto the snow-covered ground. Rhia and Sophie followed him, but he called out as Ratish began to climb down from the weapon mount of the truck.

“Stay put grot,” he said while he retrieved his rifle from the truck, “I wants ya to keep an eye out form up dare for anyone else sneakin’ around out ‘ere,” and Ratish clambered back to the gun and gripped it at the ready.

“So where do we go from ‘ere?” Hazug asked Rhia.

“This way!” she yelled, and she began to run towards the nearby woods as fast as the snow would allow her to.

“Slow down!” Hazug shouted as he and Sophie followed her from a distance, “Dare could be someone lurkin’ out dare.”

Rhia stopped, and waited for the pair to catch up with her.

"Its an old building just inside the woods," Rhia said as she walked with Hazug and Sophie towards the woods ahead of them.

Sure enough, there were the remains of a human built building just within the woods. Whatever had happened to it had happened along time ago, possibly even before the Ork invasion of this world. But whatever had destroyed the building had left many of its contents intact, and they now lay at least partially buried in the ground all around the ruins, sheltered from the recent snowfall by what remained of the walls and the trees that surrounded the ruins. Bending down, Hazug picked up the first object he came to and pulled it from the ground.

It was a metal cylinder; almost identical to the one that Hoggot had delivered to him the day before. The only difference was that this cylinder lacked the tubing and wiring that had been added to that one.

"Is that what you're looking for?" asked Rhia.

"I reckon so," Hazug responded as he looked around at the remaining cylinders poking out of the ground. Then he kicked at the frozen soil.

"What are you doing?" Sophie asked him as he continued to kick the ground around him.

"Dis is too 'ard to dig quick," he said, "it'll take ages for us to get 'em all out without 'elp. But then again..."

"We can get them out?" Sophie said.

"Nah," Hazug replied, "Like I said dat'll take us ages, we'd need loads of grots to do it. But if da ground is frozen den any tracks in it may be an' all," and he crouched down and began to sweep away the snow from around the ruins.

"What's he doing now?" Rhia asked Sophie.

"Stay still," Hazug said, "I don't want ya crushin' any tracks dat da grots left."

"What Gretchin?" Rhia asked.

"Da Gretchin ya saw diggin' 'ere..." Hazug said, then he paused for a moment, thinking.

"What's the matter?" Sophie asked him.

"Nothin'," Hazug replied as he began sweeping the snow once more, "just lookin' at da lie of da land, dat's all. Ah! Got it!" and he began to quickly clear an area of ground around him. There, in the frozen earth were tracks made by Gretchin before the soil had frozen and preserved them.

"'Elp me with dis," Hazug said, and both Sophie and Rhia crouched down and joined him in clearing the snow from the ground, revealing yet more tracks.

A sudden burst of gunfire made Hazug sit up and listen.

"Da trukk!" he shouted, and he leapt back to his feet and ran off towards the truck where Ratish waited.

Rhia and Sophie looked at one another before they too got up and ran after him.

Hazug paused at the tree line, his rifle at the ready. Ahead of him he could see Ratish still in the truck, pointing the mounted weapon at a point further along the edge of the woods.

"Wots goin' on grot?" Hazug bellowed as he ran out across the open ground towards his vehicle.

"Ratish see somethin' move master, so Ratish shoot at it."

Hearing Rhia and Sophie approach from behind him, Hazug turned around.

"Stay 'ere," he ordered and then he looked up at Ratish, "and ya can keep me covered, I'm goin' to take a look for wot ya was shootin' at."

"Yes master."

Hazug ran in the direction Ratish was pointing the heavy weapon, keeping his gun to his shoulder as he went. Watching him run off, Sophie extended the stock of her own compact automatic weapon and pointed in the same general direction.

Hazug stopped at the tree line and looked around. The undergrowth had died back for the winter, and the bare trees could not conceal the damage caused by the burst of heavy calibre rounds that Ratish had fired into them. Around one of the massive bullet holes Hazug saw what he needed, a bright red splatter of fresh blood. Looking around further, Hazug saw another blood splatter on the snow covered ground ahead of him and then another beyond that. A set of footprints ran between them, Hazug had a trail he could follow.

Moving slowly now, and keeping as low as he could, Hazug moved into the woods and followed the footprints and the blood trail in the snow. He stopped when he heard a whimpering sound from ahead of him, and he aimed his rifle towards the source. Moving closer he saw the diminutive form of a Gretchin leaning against a tree, clutching at a wound to it's side where a bullet had blasted its way straight through him. Even distracted by its injury, the Gretchin's hearing was good enough to alert him to Hazug's cautious approach and it turned to face him.

"Mercy lord!" the Gretchin called out, holding up a blood soaked hand, "Wasn't my idea!"

"Wot wasn't?" Hazug said, moving closer and keeping his rifle trained on the injured Gretchin.

"Followin' ya out 'ere," the Gretchin replied, and it lowered both its hand and its gaze.

"Den who told ya to do it?" Hazug shouted, pushing the muzzle of his gun closer to the Gretchin's head, but there was no reply. Hazug jabbed with his gun, poking the Gretchin in the side of his head. His head

wobbled when pushed but the Gretchin remained silent. Hazug reached out and lifted the Gretchin's head and looked straight into his dead eyes.

"Useless, grot," Hazug said to himself, "can't even take a bullet without dyin' from it."

Then Hazug looked at the ground once more. Two individuals had clearly made the trail that he had followed to this point, and a single set of tracks continued on, further into the woods. A second Gretchin had accompanied this one, and even now was fleeing to report back to whoever had sent it here. Hazug turned back in the direction of his truck and ran.

"Everyone get in!" he shouted as he climbed into the vehicle, "We is getting' out of 'ere!"

"But why?" Sophie asked, "What happened?"

"Dare was grots watchin' us," Hazug explained as he started the truck's engine, "and one of 'em got away. If we ain't out of 'ere soon, den whoever sent 'em may come lookin' for us and we ain't ready for a big fight."

"Aren't we going to do anything about those cylinders in the ruins?" Sophie said while she and Rhia climbed into the truck, "They are what we came here for aren't they?"

"No time," Hazug told her, and he put his foot down on the accelerator pedal before either Rhia or Sophie had had chance to sit down, causing both to fall over as the vehicle sped off in the direction of the Ork city.



"Where's master?" the Gretchin gasped as he ran into the room.

"E's operatin'," one of the assembled Gretchin replied, "ya don't want to disturb 'im now."

"But it's important," the newcomer shouted, "dat Blood Axe 'as found where we get da lung 'olders from!" and he ran off to where his master performed his work.

The painboy was indeed bent over an operating table, and was busy wrapping nerves around the wires that protruded from the end of a cybernetic arm mounting a vicious looking claw in place of a hand.

"Master! Master!" the Gretchin yelled, and the painboy's hand slipped causing the cybernetic arms to twitch and knock several tools to the floor.

"Wot?" the painboy bellowed as he span around. See the Gretchin in front of him, he grabbed it by the neck and lifted it into the air.

"Look wot ya made 'appen!" the painboy shouted, pointing at the tools now lying broken on the floor.

"But master," the Gretchin croaked, his hands trying to loosen his master's grip around his throat before he was strangled.

"But wot?"

"Da Blood Axe..."

The painboy released his grip, and the Gretchin fell to the floor, gasping for breath.

"Come on den, tell about da Blood Axe," he ordered.

"E's been to da ruins master, and 'e's found where we get da metal tubes from."

"Wot?" the painboy shouted, and accompanied by a scream he swung his fist down onto a nearby table and smashed it.

"Ow did 'e find it?"

"Don't know master, but 'e's got another git with 'im dat wasn't dare yesterday."

"Get out!" the painboy shouted.

"Master?"

"I said get out!" the painboy repeated and with a single kick he sent the Gretchin sliding across the floor.

The Gretchin slammed into the wall before picking itself up and dashing out of the room.

The painboy walked to a door on the opposite side of the surgery, opened it and went into the next room.

This room was filled with cybernetic parts for replacing just about any body part on an Ork that could be replaced, which was most of them. Beyond these another Ork sat hunched over a workbench where he was building yet another cybernetic part by the light of a crude electric lamp.

"Badcog," the painboy said, "we 'ave a problem."

"Wot is it now Gutstitch?" the mekboy replied without looking up from his work.

"Dat Blood Axe is becomin' a problem. 'E's managed to find where we is getting' da cylinder's for 'oldin' da lungs from. We'll 'ave to kill 'im now."

Badcog put down his tools and turned to face Gutstitch.

"We ain't got enough lads to take over yet, and if da warboss finds out wot's goin' on 'e'll send an 'ole bunch of mobs after us."

"I knows dat," Gutstitch replied, "but Kromag 'as started listen' to dat Blood Axe git lover, so if 'e goes talkin' to da boss den 'e's goin' to find out anyways. We 'ave to kill 'im."

Badcog got to his feet.

"You keep workin' boss," he said, "I'll take some of da lads an' do it tonight."

The first thing Sophie did when they returned home was light a fire. The weather had taken a turn for the worse on the trip back from the ruins, and though this had meant that the guards at the northern fort had not bothered to stop them, instead staying inside where it was warmer, Hazug had been forced to drive slower and their journey had been made longer because of it. Rhia had suggested that Hazug should have his truck modified to have an enclosed cab and cargo area.

Sophie wasn't sure what to make of the newcomer who was at that moment tidying one of the spare rooms to use as a bedroom for herself. Ratish hated having another human around, which pleased Sophie. But she still didn't know anything about Rhia apart from what she had chosen to tell them.

At least Hazug was expecting her to prove her worth, Sophie thought as she went from the lighting the fire to the various lamps around the room, filling it with a flickering, yellowish light.

"Cor, that feels good," Hazug said from behind Sophie as he entered the room and sat in front of the fire.

"The weapons are packed away then?" Sophie said as she stood up.

"Yeah, aside from dis one," Hazug said patting the pistol he had tucked into his belt, "dat Rhia offered to 'elp, but I can put away a few guns on me own. But I reckon dat idea about coverin' me truk was a good 'un. I'll send Ratish out tomorrow to try and find some metal we can nail on to it."

Sophie finished lighting the lamps in the room, then spoke to Hazug again.

"I'll make a meal now, do you want to eat it here?"

"Nah, da kitchen will be warm enough by da time ya is finished cookin'. Shout me when its ready," then Hazug paused for a moment before speaking again just as Sophie was leaving the room, "Ang on a mo," he said, "ya can just tell dat Rhia wot to do, I wants ya to take a look at dat zap gun instruction book and learn 'ow to work one of 'em, I'll bring ya one down to 'ave a look at."

Soon after, Sophie found herself sat at the kitchen table studying the manual for a human made lasgun, with one of the weapons lying on the table in front of her, while she also watched Rhia preparing a meal.

"So you're just going to sit there while I work?" Rhia asked.

"It's what Hazug wants," Sophie replied, "he wants me to know how to work this gun."

"Will I get one too?"

"Probably," Sophie told Rhia, "I think that Hazug just wants to decide if he's going to keep you around before he gives you a gun."

"Does he have many guns?"

Sophie paused and thought about it.

"Not for an Ork. He has a pistol that he keeps with him all the time, plus a rifle and a machine gun, and then there's a pistol each for me and Ratish."

"What about that?" Rhia asked, pointing at the lasgun.

"Oh, he found a lot of these yesterday, and some rocket launchers too, but he's only got some of what was found."

Rhia sat down.

"What happened to the rest?" she said.

"There was another Ork and his soldiers with Hazug, so they took some as well," Sophie explained, "plus they gave some to Kromag..."

"The warboss?"

"Yes, that's right. Hazug and Two Heads, that's the other Ork I told you about, didn't want him to think they would cheat him, so they gave him a share too. But I think he only took some of the rocket launchers, he wasn't interested in the lasguns."

"I thought orks just took everything they could and wouldn't give anything away."

"Then there's a lot you need to learn about orks," Sophie told her.

Badcog's truck was enclosed, not for protection against the weather, which continued to decline, but to conceal what was held within its cargo area. Behind him sat six orks who, unlike any normal member of the species, sat in silence and motionless. Each of them had received some form of cybernetic enhancement to increase their combat strength, but they lacked the exceptionally thick armour plating of the escaped Ork that Hazug had Two Heads had defeated two nights ago.

He parked the truck opposite to the building that had been identified as Hazug Throatlitter's residence.

From what Badcog could tell there were no special fortifications or weapons emplacements, so this would be a simple smash and kill operation, exactly the type of work his troops were created for.

"Dat buildin' dare," Badcog said, pointing towards Hazug's home, "Kill everyone inside it. Go."

In unison the orks stood up and exited the vehicle, then in two lines they shambled towards Hazug's home.

One line headed straight for the front door, while the other veered off towards the larger garage door.

Badcog grinned as he saw the two groups reach the building and then stop. Then one Ork in each group raised an armoured metal fist high above head and brought it crashing down on the door in front of him.

"What was that?" Rhia exclaimed, dropping the plate of food onto the kitchen floor.

"I don't know," Sophie replied, and as she stood up she picked up the lasgun from the table before her and slammed the energy cell into place.

The two young women crept towards the door that separated the kitchen from the garage. Sophie pushed it open gently and peered into the darkness beyond.

She was instantly hit by a blast of cold air, as the garage door had been destroyed and the room was now open to the elements. Almost immediately she saw the trio of orks lumbering towards her. None of them moved in the way she had gotten used to seeing orks move. Normally they would walk confidently and with purpose, often breaking into a run and charging headlong at something. But the way these orks moved was more of a shuffle, and they all stared blankly straight at her.

"Who are you?" Sophie shouted, but the orks continued to shamble towards her. Sophie raised the lasgun to her shoulder and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

The orks continued to advance as Sophie lowered the weapon and stared at it. Then she saw the safety catch in the position marked 'SAFE' and flicked it via 'SEMI' and 'BURST' to 'FULL' before taking aim again.

The lead Ork was almost upon her now and it raised an arm that ended in a spiked gauntlet. Sophie pulled the trigger again.

This time there was a bright flash; accompanied by a sharp 'crack' as the high-energy beam interacted with the air and a white beam of light appeared between the lasgun's muzzle and the Ork's raised arm, striking it at the elbow. There was another flash, and a shower of sparks as the artificial limb was severed and it crashed to the floor. Sophie let go of the trigger as the beam passed through the Ork's limb and went into the ceiling, burning a hole there also, and the beam of light ceased.

"Run!" she shouted to Rhia as the orks, including the one she had just shot the arm from, continued to advance silently, and the pair turned and ran towards the hallway.

Hazug had been dozing in his chair in front of the fire when the sound of the front door splintering awoke him suddenly. Instinctively he leapt to his feet and drew his pistol before charging towards the hallway. He found his front door lying in pieces in the doorway and saw three orks standing just outside, the snow blowing past them into the hallway.

"Who da bloody 'ell are ya?" Hazug bellowed before he noticed the vacant expression on the faces of all three orks. The same expression as the mega-armoured had worn throughout the battle two nights ago, and there was the glint of metal from within their mouths.

"Ah crap," Hazug exclaimed and he raised his pistol and fired.

The shots echoed around the hallway, and Hazug was frustrated to see them bounce off the metal plate covering the top of the lead Ork's head.

The trio of orks advanced into the doorway, where they became stuck as they all tried to get through it at the time.

Hazug seized the chance to pick up part of the destroyed door, a narrow length of wood now sharp and splintered at each end, and he thrust it up underneath the jaw of the nearest Ork. The force of the impact pushed the Ork's head backwards, but apart from that there was no effect and it just stared back at Hazug with the wood sticking out from beneath its head.

At that moment the kitchen door flew open and Rhia and Sophie ran into the hallway.

"There are three more in the garage!" Sophie shouted as she saw Hazug facing off against the orks still trying to get through the front doorway.

"Upstairs!" Hazug shouted, "And where da 'ell is Ratish?"

Ratish watched from beneath Hazug's truck as the three orks who had forced their way into the garage now pushed through the doorway into the kitchen. He had been recording the dimensions of the vehicle using a length of twine when the garage door had given way, and he had dived beneath it for protection before the intruders had seen him.

With the intruders now out of the garage, Ratish crawled out of his hiding place. He was about to follow them into the kitchen when he looked out through the hole where the garage door had been. Through the falling snow in the street outside Ratish heard the sound of an engine running. Cautiously, he moved towards the ruined door and looked outside. Though it was dark outside, and the weather reduced visibility even further, Ratish could make out the silhouette of a truck parked opposite. Keeping low, he dashed across the street and made his way through the shadows towards the stationary vehicle.

Rhia and Sophie ran up the stairs ahead of Hazug, who went as far as the bottom step backwards. He continued to fire his pistol at the orks forcing their way inside, but he saw no effect on them whatsoever. Reaching the stairs, he turned and ran up them after his servants.

"What now?" Sophie asked as Hazug reached the landing, and there was the sound of the front door frame giving way to the orks pushing against it. Now all six of them were in the building.

"Is dat gun workin'?" Hazug asked Sophie.

"Yes, I've used it," she replied.

"Den give it to 'er," Hazug said, pointing at Rhia. Then he told Rhia, "Shoot 'em if dey tries to come up da stairs while we is gone, but try not to shoot Ratish if 'e turns up."

"Where are you going?" Rhia asked as she took the gun from Sophie.

"For more guns," Hazug said.

Sophie followed Hazug as he ran to the room holding his supply of weapons.

"Get ya self another zappa and some ammo for it," Hazug told Sophie as he picked up his rifle and loaded both the rifle itself and the rocket launcher mounted beneath it.

"What about grenades?" Sophie asked, removing a lasgun and ammunition belt from a crate at the same time.

"Not inside," Hazug replied, "I just got dis place, I don't want it flattenin' already," and he slung a bandolier of extra ammunition over his head. He was about to return to the landing when he spotted the Necron warscythe leaning against the wall in the corner of the room. Though its power source had failed with the

destruction of the Necron tomb complex its blade was still deadly sharp and Hazug plucked it from the corner as he passed it.

“Let’s go,” he said.

As the pair walked back through Hazug’s bedroom there was the sound of Rhia firing her lasgun from the top of the stairs, then she appeared ahead running towards them.

“The gun’s empty,” she said, and the orks are coming up the stairs, it didn’t stop them.”

“Out of da way,” Hazug said, barging past her. He set the warscythe down near the top of stairs and aimed his rifle down them, straight at the chest of the leading Ork. He fired a single shot into its body, and the Ork flinched under the impact, but it remained silent and after only a moments pause it continued to advance on him. Hazug adjusted the fire selector to what mek Batrug had described as the ‘turbo-dakka’ setting. Hazug pointed the weapon back at the oncoming orks and squeezed the trigger.

There was a roar and a blast of flame from the muzzle of his rifle as one round after another shot out in rapid succession. The roar and the blast ceased after just a moment as the magazine was quickly emptied. On the stairs, the leading Ork had fallen backwards under the hail of bullets and were now getting back to their feet.

“Sod dis,” Hazug said, an aiming his weapon once more he reached his hand for the secondary trigger that controlled the under slung rocket launcher.

With a flash, the rocket flew from beneath the rifle and struck the front Ork in the chest, embedding itself in its flesh. For a moment nothing happened, and the orks on the stairs continued to get back to their feet. But then there was a fizzing sound, and a flash of flame from the partially buried rocket.

“Down!” Hazug yelled as he ducked around a corner and pressed himself against the wall next to the warscythe and as Rhia and Sophie threw themselves to the floor the rocket detonated. Hazug stuck his head around the corner to evaluate the damage he had just inflicted, not only on the orks coming up the stairs, but also on his home from the use of such a powerful weapon inside it.

Having detonated partially inside the leading Ork, the rocket had blasted him to pieces and nothing remained of his torso, only his head and limbs now resting where the explosion had thrown them, and blood had been spread over a wide area. The Ork that had been stood immediately behind the one Hazug had just destroyed remained upright and was still climbing the stairs. It was covered in the blood of the destroyed Ork but the blast appeared to have done no more to it than inflict some minor cuts from shrapnel and cover it in the blood of its former comrade. Hazug noticed that its mechanical right arm ended at the elbow, but since there was no sign of a severed arm on the stairs he concluded that Sophie had inflicted this damage earlier with her lasgun.

“Get back!” Hazug shouted to Rhia and Sophie, “I ain’t got time to load another rokkit,” and he slung his rifle over his shoulder, grabbed the warscythe and moved to the door to his bedroom, Rhia and Sophie moving ahead of him.

Watched by the two humans, Hazug stood in the doorway brandishing his warscythe. Beyond him they saw the Ork missing an arm reach the top of the stairs and turn to face them. Hazug pointed the warscythe’s blade at him.

“Come on den!” he shouted, “Come an’ ‘ave a go if ya think ya ‘ard enough!”

Without speaking the Ork charged at Hazug, its remaining arm held high ready to strike. Hazug ducked as he drew near and thrust his warscythe upwards. The blade of the alien weapon pierced the Ork’s throat, and even without the energy field that had allowed it to cut through metal without effort, it was still sharp enough to tear through the preserved flesh of this reanimated corpse and take off its head. The headless body collapsed to the floor in a heap, while the severed head landed next to it. Hazug noticed that its eyes and jaw continued to move as it lay there.

Hazug swung the warscythe again at the next Ork, but this time his opponent reached out and grabbed the shaft of the weapon before the deadly blade could cut him in two. Hazug and his assailant now each struggled to break the other’s grip on the warscythe. Hazug held it firmly with both hands, while the other Ork just grasped it with one of his, a single cybernetic arm giving him a grip far more powerful than Hazug would have one handed. The remaining orks, unable to move past the one currently engaging Hazug, just waited behind him silently.

Sophie ran to Hazug and aimed her lasgun around him. She took aim for the Ork’s head and fired a single shot at it. There was the smell of smouldering flesh as the beam seared through the Ork’s head just above his eye, but aside from charring some flesh the attack did nothing to bother the Ork. Reacting to this new threat the Ork reached out with his free hand to grab for Sophie’s lasgun, and she ducked further back out of reach. But in trying to grab her weapon the Ork had brought his head closer to Hazug’s, and he now responded by head butting the attacking Ork.

The thick bone beneath Hazug’s forehead met the metal plate that covered the top of his opponents head with a dull ‘thump’ and the Ork span around from the powerful blow, just far enough for Hazug to be able to ram the warscythe’s blade into his side without him letting go of it first. The Ork released his grip on the

warscythe, and Hazug withdrew the weapon as he collapsed with his spine severed. But rather than lie dead on the floor, the Ork flailed his arms around and rolled onto his stomach. Then he began to drag himself forwards towards Hazug, his legs following limply behind him.

The Ork took a swing of his arm at Hazug, but the Blood Axe easily dodged the desperate attack, and he brought the warscythe crashing down on his crippled opponent. The blade split open the Ork's head from the top of the skull plate and all the way down to the base of its neck. The squig brain held inside the skull was likewise cut in two and the Ork slumped face down and lay still.

Hazug retreated into his bedroom as the next Ork began to clamber over the corpses of the two killed on the landing, and Hazug saw that this was the one he had stabbed at the front door, the broken spike of wood still jutting out beneath its jawbone.

"Want some more eh?" Hazug said as the Ork cleared its dead comrades. He slid his rifle from his shoulder and tossed it behind him, "Load dat for us while I deal with dis berk," he said over his shoulder. He felt someone remove a spare magazine from his belt as he turned back to face the next oncoming Ork.

The Ork charge Hazug with both arms outstretched, and wrapped them around him in a powerful hug. Hazug cried out momentarily as the Ork squeezed him, unable to swing his warscythe. Instead Hazug pushed against the Ork's chest to increase the room for him to breathe, the warscythe slipped to the floor between them. Then, keeping one hand pushing against his opponent to prevent him from being crushed, Hazug reached one hand up to the wooden spike and gripped it.

"Where's dat brain den?" Hazug said as he moved the spike around inside the other Ork's head. The orks eyes suddenly went wide as the spike cut through the delicate bundles of nerves and blood vessels inside its skull and its relaxed its grip on Hazug. Hazug gave the spike another twist, and the Ork went limp and fell.

"Where's me shoota?" Hazug shouted, and Rhia passed him the weapon she had reloaded with a fresh magazine. He aimed at the orks chest.

"All together!" he shouted, "Let rip!" and he emptied the full magazine into the Ork, flashes of light and the crackling sound that Hazug knew indicated human laser fire from both sides indicated that both Rhia and Sophie were also firing on the Ork.

The combination of bullets and energy beams at point blank range struck the Ork straight in the chest. Bullets ricocheted off the armour plate covering the orks chest, but as the heating effect of the laser fire made it more brittle, the plate shattered and the remaining bullets punched into the Ork's chest itself, accompanied by the laser beams. The Ork's heart, lungs and spine were complete destroyed and he fell dead at Hazug's feet.

"Out da window!" Hazug shouted as he dropped his empty rifle and picked up the warscythe once more.

"What do you mean out of the window?" Rhia screamed.

"The garage roof is out there," Sophie shouted as she opened the shuttered window to give access to the flat, snow covered roof outside.

Sophie went first, followed rapidly by Rhia. Hazug backed to wards the open window, keeping the warscythe between him and the final remaining Ork intruder. He felt his foot hit the wall and climbed up onto the windowsill and stepped out onto the garage roof, brandishing the warscythe one handed as he did so. The Ork followed, walking right up to the window, but as Hazug prepared to engage him, the Ork just stopped and starred at him through the window.

"What's it doing now?" Sophie asked, "Why doesn't t come out here after us?"

"I don't know," Hazug said, "But it gives me a chance top do dis," and he thrust the warscythe two handed into the Ork's neck and neatly decapitated it.

Even as the Ork inside the window was still falling there was the sharp 'crack' of gunfire from the street below, and a bullet hitting it chipped a piece of the corner of Hazug's house away. There were more gunshots and Hazug, Rhia and Sophie all retreated away from the front of the roof.

"Who's shooting at us?" Sophie cried.

"I'm guessin' whoever was bossin' dem cyborks about," Hazug said as he tried to get a look at their new assailant, "Dare," he said, pointing at the truck parked opposite the front of the house, "Dare's someone 'idin' behind it." He drew his pistol and fired a quick succession of shots towards the stationary truck. Sparks flew as the rounds bounced off the truck's structure and Hazug saw a figure duck down behind it.

With this new attack interrupted, Sophie got up and aimed at the truck herself, the scope built into the lasgun improving her ability to see through the darkness and poor weather. Rhia followed her example, aiming at the truck and looking for a target.

There was another gunshot that passed overhead, and Hazug and the two women returned fire without a clear view of the shooter.

"He's getting in the truck, Rhia said as she saw and Ork clambering into the driver's seat of the vehicle, and moments later the truck's engine started up. An arm brandishing a pistol appeared from the truck window and there was another shot as the truck began to pull away.

“Wait ‘ere a mo,” Hazug said as he leapt from the roof into the street below, scattering snow as he landed. From there he dashed into his garage through the ruined door and started his own truck. Quickly, he backed the vehicle into the street, and then pulled up next to his house right outside the gaping hole that had been the garage door.

“Jump down!” Hazug shouted up to Rhia and Sophie, “And ‘urry up about it, ‘e’s getting away.” The truck shuddered as Sophie jumped into the back, and when it shuddered again as Rhia landed Hazug put his foot down on the gas pedal and set off after the fleeing truck.



Badcog was furious. Somehow a single Blood Axe and a pair of small humans had defeated half a dozen of the cyborks carefully constructed by himself and Gutstitch. To make matters worse at least one of them had just stood still while Hazug chopped off its head just because they had left the house. Once outside the cybork, who had been told to 'kill everyone inside,' had just waited for further orders. He decided that he wouldn't mention the wording of the order to Gutstitch, just in case he blamed him for the fiasco.

He drove at speed through the darkened streets. Normally at this time the streets would still be full of orks out drinking and fighting, but the snow had convinced most of them to remain indoors tonight so Badcog was able to keep up a better pace. This made the sudden lurch of the truck as it was rammed by another vehicle all the more surprising.

Badcog kept his foot on the gas as he looked over his shoulder to see what had just hit him and was shocked to see another truck driven by Hazug Throatlitter immediately behind him. Hazug took one hand off his steering wheel, produced a pistol and fired at Badcog. Then there were flashes in the darkness as his two human passengers joined in.

Badcog put his foot down harder on the gas, he ignored the few other road users and pedestrians and instead concentrated on putting as much distance between himself and Hazug as he could. There was a crash as he drove through a stack of wooden crates stacked at the side of the road and the squigs that had been held inside them were scattered over the road behind him. Hazug also ignored the confused creatures now wandering about between the two fast moving vehicles and ran over any that failed get out of his way of their own accord, but Hazug could see that the truck he was pursuing was getting further ahead of him now. Then he grinned as it turned off the street they were on, he kept his foot down hard on the gas pedal and sped past the turning.

"He went that way!" Sophie shouted.

"I knows dat!" Hazug replied, "But dat street meets up again with dis one ahead, we can cut 'im off dare!"

The two streets did indeed join up once more further along as Hazug had stated, and they all saw their quarry race out of the side street only a short distance ahead of them now.

"Gotcha!" Hazug shouted as his truck drew level with his target, and he swerved violently, ramming the fleeing vehicle again.

Badcog's truck lurched again as Hazug sideswiped it for a second time. Badcog drew his pistol and pointed to the side of his truck, aiming for Hazug as he sat in his driver's seat. He fired a single shot, but it went wide and Badcog dropped his gun as his vehicle was rammed yet again.

He decided to fight fire with fire, and there was a crashing sound as Badcog swerved into Hazug's truck.

The two vehicles sped along the street, sparks flying as their speeds alter slightly and their metal structures ground against one another. Trying to concentrate on both his own driving, and the presence of Hazug alongside him, Badcog failed to notice as a small figure coated in dirt clambered up from where it had been hanging on to the underside of his vehicle.

The repeated lurching of the truck convinced Ratish that he would be better off riding inside it than holding on beneath in the hope that it would lead him where ever to their enemy's home base was located. He dragged himself up from under the back of the truck, holding onto the enclosed superstructure as he did so. The rear cargo and passenger compartment featured several windows in its construction, each of which was blocked only by a fabric curtain mounted on the inside. Ratish clambered up to one of these windows and carefully he pushed the curtain aside and looked into the vehicle.

The rear area was completely empty, clearly all of the passengers who had rode in the vehicle had exited it to attack Hazug's home, while to the front he could make out a single Ork sat in the driver's seat. He could hear a grinding sound coming from the far side of the vehicle, but could not identify what was causing it from here. Ratish dragged himself through the small window and lowered himself to the floor of the cargo area as quietly as he could manage. He grabbed one of the benches to steady himself as the vehicle lurched once more. Silently he crossed the vehicle to one of the windows opposite, and drew back the curtain to look outside. There he saw his master's truck right along side this one, with Hazug driving it and the two humans he hated more than any others riding along with him. His master was trying to stop this vehicle, and Ratish knew that he was the only one who could help him.

The driver's of both trucks continued to race along with their vehicles jammed up against one another, trying to force each other off the road. Badcog grinned as he saw the road ahead narrow suddenly where a building jutted out into it. He realised that Hazug would be force to brake to avoid driving straight into the wall, while he could continue straight on.

“Let’s see ya follow me down ‘ere den!” he yelled at Hazug over the noise of both of the truck engines as they rapidly approached where the street narrowed.

Hazug too had seen the wall, and he knew that his quarry was about to slip away from his grasp. He braked hard, and with another shower of sparks the two trucks were pulled away from one another. Part of the superstructure of Badcog’s truck clipped Hazug’s front tyre as they pulled apart, and it shredded as it was pierced by the rough metal edge. Hazug braked harder, desperate to keep control of his vehicle and avoid the wall ahead.

Badcog laughed as he heard Hazug’s tyre give out, followed by the squeal as he was forced to brake. The loss of the tyre meant that he had escaped; there was no way that Hazug could replace the tyre in time to catch him. Then he heard something move in the cargo area behind him.

“Gotcha!” Ratish yelled as he leapt at Badcog, and he wrapped his arms around the mek’s throat and held on for all his worth.

Choking, Badcog let go of the steering wheel and tried to pull Ratish away from him, but he kept his foot on the gas pedal. One of the truck’s wheels struck a rock on the road, and the impact, though small, pushed the truck off course and it ploughed into the crates and barrels that lined this section of the road. Badcog reached for the steering wheel again, and slammed his foot down on the break before his truck could crash into the buildings along side him.

The force of the truck’s sudden deceleration broke Ratish’s grip on Badcog’s throat and he was thrown forwards into the front cabin, landing at the Ork’s feet near the pedals. Ratish reached out and pushed down on the gas pedal while simultaneously biting as hard as he could into one of Badcog’s legs.

“Arrrgh!” Badcog yelled as he was bitten. He tried keeping his foot on the brake pedal, but even this did not prevent the truck from lurching forwards once more and crashing into the wall alongside it. Badcog formed a fist and delivered a punch strong enough to release Ratish’s bite, knocking out a pair of his teeth at the same time.

Badcog jumped down from the truck, wincing as he landed on his injured leg. Ratish had bitten as far as the bone, and Badcog was bleeding continuously from the wound, Gutstitch would have to patch that up for him. He was just thinking about retrieving his pistol when he saw Ratish’s arm appear wielding the weapon himself. Instead Badcog ran from the truck, disappearing into the darkness before Ratish could fire on him. Still somewhat dazed, Ratish crawled out of the crashed truck and landed in a heap on the ground just as Hazug came charging up with his pistol drawn.

“Where da bleedin’ ‘ell ‘ave ya been grot?” he demanded.

“Ratish wanted to follow ‘im to ‘is base master,” Ratish replied, “But ‘e go away, I still got ‘is slugga though master,” and Ratish held up the pistol.

“Finders keepers in dis case grot,” Hazug said, “ya can keep da slugga, but ya can only use when I says so, understand?”

“Yes master,” Ratish replied, grinning and exposing the gap in his teeth from where he had been struck.

“Good, now get all da tyres off dis truck,” Hazug ordered, “Replace da busted one on mine and put da rest in da back. Dey is ours now.”

“Yes master.”

“Wot d’ya mean ‘e’s still alive?” Gutstitch yelled when Badcog relayed to him the evening’s events, “Ya ‘ad ‘alf a dozen of me cyborks, ‘ow come dey couldn’t kill a single git lovin’ Blood Axe?”

“I reckon dat ‘e tricked ‘em so ‘e could ‘em one at a time,” Badcog explained, “if ya ‘ad just let me use some of da lads wot is in mega armour dey would ‘ave squashed ‘im flat.”

“And ‘ow would ya ‘ave got ‘em to where ‘e lives?” Gutstitch asked rhetorically, “Dey is too big to fit in ya truck, and where is ya truck now anyway?”

“Dat got smashed up too, I ‘ad to leave it behind. Don’t worry I can make us another in a couple of days.”

“Well we ain’t got a couple of days ‘ave we? Dat Blood Axe now as the bodies of our cyborks, and if ‘e shows ‘em to Warboss Kromag den ‘e’ll ‘ave ‘is lads tearin’ da planet apart lookin’ for us won’t ‘e?”

“So wot are we goin’ to do den?” Badcog asked.

“We ain’t goin’ to do anythin’,” Gutstitch replied, “I’m goin’ to ‘ave to ‘andle dis myself.”

“Ow?”

“I is goin’ to pin da blame on someone else, dat’s wot. I’ll make sure dat da Warboss reckons dat dare are no more cyborks, and dat da Ork wot made is dead. For dat all I need is a few suitable bodies.”

“Well we got plenty of dem stored I suppose,” Badcog said

“Actually I was thinkin’ of usin’ yours for one of ‘em Badcog,” and Gutstitch turned to the two hulking figures that had been standing motionless in the shadows behind him, “Kill ‘im,” he said, and the two mega armoured orks lumbered towards Badcog.



Warboss Kazkal Kromag stared at the bodies laid out in front of him in his throne room. Hazug had delivered the six corpses early that morning, along with a dire warning that they somehow presented some sort of threat even though, according to Hazug, they had now been killed twice each. Kromag had therefore assembled his council of nobs and brought in a professional examiner.

“Well?” he said, staring at his senior painboy who was crouched over the body parts, poking and prodding them with an assortment of tools.

“Hazug is right boss,” the painboy replied, “besides all da bionics which are obvious, dey ‘ave all ‘ad dare brains replaced with dem wot is normally found in squigs.”

Beyond the bodies Hazug grinned as his statements were confirmed.

“Ow is dat possible?” Kromag asked.

“Well ya scoop out da brain wot used to be in dare, and just stick in one dat ya ‘ave cut out of a squig,” the painboy explained, “so long as da squig’s brain is fresh enough den da nerves will fuse together and da brain can control da Ork body as if it were its own. It may take a bit of runnin’ in, getting’ it to walk upright and such, but it can work quite well, as we see right ‘ere. We is definitely dealin’ with a bad dok ‘ere, no sane painboy would attempt it mind you.”

There was a pause as the assembled crowd contemplated for a moment the sanity of any painboy they had encountered. Warboss Kromag himself broke the silence.

“So wot does dat mean den?”

The painboy stood up and faced the warboss.

“Well as I’m sure ya know boss, certain types of squig can be trained to follow simple commands like ‘stay’, ‘come ‘ere’ and of course ‘kill and eat dat’.”

“Yes Fangpulla I knew dat, but ‘ow does dat relate to puttin’ squig brains in Ork lads?”

“If an Ork ‘as da brain of a squig, den ya can train ‘im to do the same stuff.”

Warboss Kromag thought about this before he looked at Hazug and spoke to him.

“So why would someone want to use lads with squig brains instead of proper Ork brains?”

“Because if dey still ‘ad Ork brains den dey would still be as smart as orks,” Hazug explained, “so ya would ‘ave to pay ‘em to jobs for ya, and ya couldn’t keep wot ya wos doin’ a secret.”

“Why keep it secret?” another of the assembled Ork nobs asked, “Who cares wot orks do so long as dey do wot we tell ‘em to as well?”

“Because if an Ork ‘as an army of dese squig brained orks, den ‘e doesn’t ‘ave to do wot ya tell ‘im to do,” Hazug replied, “E probably wants to be da one givin’ da orders,” then he turned to face Warboss Kromag,

“Which means killin’ you.”

“Da Blood Axe is right boss,” the painboy concurred, “Whoever controls an army of dese cyborks could tell ‘em to kill ya without worryin’ about ‘em bein’ loyal to ya instead of ‘im.”

“Can dat work den?” Kromag asked.

“Sure it can boss,” Dok Fangpulla answered, “I ‘eard dat da great Mad Dok Grotsnik ‘imself ‘as built an army dat way.”

“Den we needs to find who’s makin’ ‘em,” Kromag said at the mention of one of the most infamous Ork renegades.

“Ya is lookin’ for a painboy,” Hazug said, “only dey can put bionik bits into an Ork like dat.”

“Ya should also look for a mekboy,” Dok Fangpulla added, “A painboy couldn’t make da bioniks, so ‘e’d ‘ave to get a mek to make ‘em for ‘im.”

Hazug nodded in agreement as Warboss Kromag looked back at him.

“Makes sense boss,” Hazug said, “da first one I saw wos in mega armour, and dare ain’t no meks wot sell dat around ‘ere, so ‘e must be workin’ with da dok wot is doin’ da surgery.”

There were general murmurs of agreement from around the room as the Ork nobs all nodded, pretending that they understood what Hazug and Dok Fangpulla were talking about. All that really mattered to them was that there was probably going to be some fighting to be done, and they wanted to make sure that they got their fair share of the violence.

“Mega armour?” Kromag asked, “Is ya sure?”

“Yeah boss, it was mega armour alright.”

“Den let me make dis clear,” Kromag said looking around the room at all of the assembled orks, “anyone wot gets ‘old of any more mega armour ‘ad better makes sure dat dey gives it to me, cos if dey don’t den even mega armour ain’t goin’ to be thick enough to protect ya from me. Got it?”

The assembled orks indicated that they understood.

Gretchin swarmed around the burning workshop fighting the fire with an assortment of different equipment ranging from simple buckets of water and snow to more complicated pumps and hoses attached to tanks of water on carts. Further back from the Gretchin fire fighters a crowd of orks was also building up, watching the smaller creatures as they tried to put the fire out. Here and there mekboys also joined in the fire fighting efforts, they did so under the pretence of not wanting the fire to spread to their own nearby workshops, but in reality they were more interested in grabbing hold of any technology not yet destroyed by the fire and taking it for themselves.

“Wait ‘ere da lot of ya,” Hazug said to the other occupants of the battlegon in which he was riding, “I is goin’ to find out wot’s up.”

Hazug clambered down from the vehicle and approached the crowd, the heat of the flames in contrast to the otherwise cold air around him. Recognising Mek Batrug he pushed his way through the crowd towards him.

“Oi Batrug!” Hazug shouted, and as the mek turned he hid a slightly charred piece of machinery behind his back.

“I was just ‘elpin’ fight da fire,” Batrug said, “I didn’t want it spreadin’ to me own workshop and burin’ it down an’ all.”

“Ya own workshop is a pile of rubble,” Hazug said, “Ya own burglar alarm blew it up.”

“Yeah,” Batrug replied, “but I don’t want da rubble burnin’ down do I?”

Hazug pondered that for a moment, but opted not to get into that subject further.

“Wot ‘appened ‘ere den?” Hazug asked, indicating the burning workshop.

“A fire started a bit ago,” Batrug replied.

Before Hazug could say anything further there was a ‘whoosh’ and he turned to see a rocket shoot out of the burning workshop and fly straight upwards before detonating in mid air.

“Down!” Hazug shouted, and he dived to the ground and dragged Mek Batrug down with him a moment before there was the crack of gunfire as the ammunition stored inside the workshop began to cook off.

The Gretchin fire fighters fled as the projectiles flew in all directions, while the watching orks ducked for cover. A large explosion followed the random hail of bullets, sending a ball of flame high into the air and spreading small chunks of the building over a large area. Then the sound of bullets detonating ceased.

“I reckon dat was da last of ‘em,” Hazug said as he got back to his feet.

Batrug stood up himself, as did most of the assembled crowd. Only those hit by the bullets remained on the ground, and nearby orks helped themselves to whatever valuable were on the bodies. The Gretchin reappeared from their hiding places and returned to combating the blaze.

“Wots with da ‘eavy mob?” Batrug asked, noticing the open topped battlegon full of orks wearing heavy metal plates of armour and helmets parked a short distance away, “Are dey with ya?”

“Yeah,” Hazug replied, “Warboss Kromag lent me Maggort and ‘is lads for searchin’ da workshops.”

“Is dis related to dat cybork ya was askin’ about?”

“Yeah, I is lookin’ for da mek and dok wot built ‘im. Dey tried sendin’ a mob of ‘em to do me in last night but dey wasn’t tough enough for da job, so ‘ere I am. Now I got a nasty feelin’ dat dat dare burnin’ workshop is where I wants to be lookin’. I think dat I’ll wait ‘ere until da fire is out.”

Hazug had the armoured orks accompanying him form a perimeter around the burning workshop to prevent the continued looting, with only the Gretchin fire fighters being allowed through.

“Sod off! Dare’s nought to see ‘ere!” Maggort yelled as a small group of meks tried to get closer, and with a few well-placed shots at them the meks withdrew carrying away their wounded.

The Gretchin extinguished the fire when the sun was high in the sky, and Hazug had Maggort’s mob waste no time in clearing them away before they too could try and loot what remained at the site.

“Get lookin’ lads,” Hazug shouted, “we is tryin’ to find anythin’ dat looks like it was an Ork once.”

Most Ork workshops are messy places, with half finished projects scattered around until the mekboy who began them can remember what they were intended for and finish them, but the combination of fire, explosion and the fire fighting efforts of the Gretchin made this one worse than any Hazug had previously seen. The orks moved carefully through the wreckage, looking for any sign of bodies or anything small enough to slip into their pockets unnoticed.

Standing with Maggort by the main entrance, Hazug watched them and took a deep breath.

“Dare was definitely someone in ‘ere when it burned,” he said, “I can smell ‘em.”

“Over ‘ere boss!” an Ork shouted, “I found an arm. Wait, no, its metal.”

“Metal?” Hazug repeated, “Let me see it lad,” and he made his way to the Ork. The Ork had plucked the limb from the surrounding wreckage by the time Hazug reached him, and he took it from the Ork when he held it out.

The artificial arm was larger than an ordinary Ork’s arm, almost as big as one of Warboss Kromag’s in fact, and each of the two fingers and thumb were tipped in vicious looking blades.

“Dis is it lads,” he said, “Keep lookin’ for whoever was ‘ere.”

“Dey is over ‘ere!” another Ork shouted, “Loads of ‘em!”

Hazug went to take a look at the discovery, and saw that the Ork had indeed found the burnt corpses of several orks.

“Pick ‘em up and get ‘em outside,” Hazug said, “but be careful with ‘em, and keep everythin’ dey ‘ave on ‘em together with ‘em, we needs find out who dey wos.”

Maggort’s troops cleared the wreckage away from the burned bodies and carried them out into the street where they lay them down in a line in the snow. As each corpse was laid down, Hazug inspected it paying particular attention to the cybernetic modifications carried out on each. After the eighth body was removed Maggort approached him.

“So wot ya doin’ now?” the Goff nob asked.

“I is tryin’ to figure out who wos who,” Hazug replied, “It looks like we da mek and da painboy ‘ere and dare,” he said pointing at two of the corpses, “da mek’s got a big bite mark where Ratish me grot bit ‘im in da leg.”

“Wot about da others?”

“Dey all ‘ave metal plates on da tops of dare ‘eads, so dey was probably da cyborks.”

“So dis is it den?” Maggort asked, “Dey all burned up before we arrived.”

“Looks like it,” Hazug said, “Da mek probably blew somethin’ up, ‘is body looks like it was near an explosion. Or maybe one of ‘is grots caused it,” then Hazug paused, “Ang on a mo, ‘ave we not found any grot bodies.”

“Nah,” Maggort told him, “but grots would ‘ave legged it as a fire started.”

“Suppose so,” Hazug said, “in any case grots ain’t capable of doin’ ought without an Ork to tell ‘em ‘ow.”

“Well if we is done ‘ere, can I pull da teeth from dat mek?” Maggort asked, “E’s da only one wots got any.”

“Wot?”

“Da mek, ‘e’s da only one with any teeth,” Maggort repeated.

Hazug dashed to the body that he had identified as being the painboy and crouched down beside it. Sure enough it had the apron and tool harness that a painboy would be expected to possess, although the flames had damaged them, and the tools attached to him looked like those Hazug had seen painboys carry openly. But as Hazug used his fingers to pry open the charred body’s mouth he saw that there indeed no teeth present.

“Dis ain’t ‘im,” Hazug said, “dis Ork was dead before da fire started.”

“So wot?” Maggort asked.

“So it means dat da painboy we is really lookin’ for ain’t ‘ere, and dat means dat ‘e is still runnin’ about somewhere with Gork’n’Mork knows ‘ow many more cyborks. Get ya lads to go round all da other workshops in dis street, I need all da meks and dare grot bringin’ ‘ere now.”

“Tell me about da fire,” Hazug said to the group of mekboys standing before him.

“It burned down Badcog’s workshop,” one of them shouted back, “Wot more is there to say?”

“I wants to know who saw it first,” Hazug said.

“Dat was one of me grots,” another mekboy replied, “tell ‘im Snokki.”

“Yes master,” Snokki said, “I was goin’ for somethin’ for breakfast when I saw da flames. Den I got da other Gretchin and we put da fire out.”

“So ya didn’t see da fire actually start then? Or who started it?”

“No lord, when we broke in most of da buildin’ was already burnin’ and da was no one left alive inside.”

“Wot do ya mean ya broke in?” Hazug asked.

“Da front door was bolted from da inside,” Snokki explained, “so a Gretchin ‘ad to go in through da window first to open it.”

“Ya can all go,” Hazug said to the crowd, and he turned and walked back towards the burnt out remains of the workshop. Maggort ran after him.

“Wot ya doin’?” he asked

“Da grots ‘ad to force dare way inside to put out da fire,” Hazug said, “and dat Snokki said dat da door was locked from da inside.”

“Yeah, so wot?”

“So ow did whoever started da fire get out?” Hazug said, and Maggort stopped.

“Its true wot dey say about ya isn’t it?” he said.

“And wots dat?”

“Dat ya is da sneakiest git lovin’ Ork dare is,” Maggort answered, but Hazug didn’t reply.

Now that the cordon of armed orks was gone, Gretchin had begun to go through everything that was left inside the workshop. Any scrap of metal, no matter how small was picked up and removed so that it could

be sold on to another mekboy. This time Hazug wasn't interested in looters, he just wanted to find out how someone could leave a burning building after locking it's only door from the inside.

He stood still in the doorway and looked around the blackened interior of the workshop, trying to detect another exit, but aside from the stairs that led up to the next floor there were none. But then he heard something that attracted his attention.

One of the Gretchin had discovered a half built bike engine and was dragging it towards the door, a find like that would earn the Gretchin two or three teeth from another mekboy. The small creature dragged the heavy engine a few paces before letting it drop to the floor. Then he paused for breath before lifting one side once more, dragging it another few paces and dropping it again. It was the sound of it hitting the floor that Hazug noticed, the dull 'thump' had sounded hollow the last time the Gretchin dropped the engine and that could only mean that there was a hidden chamber beneath the workshop.

"Out of me way!" Hazug shouted to the Gretchin as he strode to where the floor sounded hollow. Once there he stamped on the charred floorboards, and sure enough he was rewarded with a hollow sounding 'clump'.

He crouched down and began to brush away debris from around his feet. Then he saw what he was looking for, a crack in the wooden floor that ran across multiple wooden boards, Hazug grinned and drew his blade. He then forced the blade down into the crack and pushed it to one side. There was a groaning sound as the blade rubbed against the floorboards before a section of the floor about an Ork's pace long in each direction popped up away from the rest of it. Hazug kicked the loose section away and looked into the darkness beneath it.

"So dat's where ya went," he said to himself, "into da grot tunnels."

10

“Maggort Deathgiva lord,” the human servant to Warboss Kazkal Kromag announced.

The warboss didn't like having his lunch interrupted, especially for someone to bring him bad news. So for Maggort to bring him the news that the only lead available to the origin of the cybork army that a mysterious painboy was making in an apparent attempt to overthrow his rule took a significant amount of courage. The Goff decided to lay the blame for the interruption on Hazug instead.

“Boss, da Blood Axe sent me to speak to ya,” he said out loud as he entered the warboss's throne room. In response Kromag just grunted and took another bite out of his lunch. Maggort continued, “We found da workshop of da mek wot was makin' da cyborks boss,” this got the warboss's attention and he stopped chewing stared at Maggort. Maggort paused for a moment.

“Da place was on fire when we got dare. We waited while grots put out da fire and den 'ad a look at wot was left. Hazug reckoned dat da painboy 'ad started da fire to make us think dat 'e was dead.”

“Ow d'ya know 'e ain't?” Kromag asked.

“Well its like dis boss,” Maggort began, “I saw dat da body wot we thought was da painboy 'ad no teeth, and da Blood Axe said dat all of da cyborks was like dat. Den 'e found a way into da grot tunnels 'idden inside da workshop, so 'e thinks dat da dok got out dat way.”

“Wot about da mek ya was lookin' for?” Kromag asked.

“E really wos dead boss, da Blood Axe's grot 'ad bitten 'im, and we saw da bite mark in da right place.”

“So 'ow come Hazug ain't 'ere to tell me dis? Where is 'e now?”

“E said dat 'e 'was goin' to look for where da dok 'ad gone, and for dat 'e needed to go 'ome and get somethin'.”

The sound of something heavy hitting the floor upstairs attracted the attention of both Rhia and Sophie. They had been watching the group of orks fitting the new thick metal garage and front doors when they heard the sound from upstairs. Agreeing that it was not a good sound, and aware that it was not unknown for orks workers to sneak off and steal things, they both went to investigate. From the stairs they could hear someone rummaging through the contents of one of the rooms used purely for storage, upon reaching the doorway to the room they saw Ratish watching Hazug as he went through the contents of one crate after another.

“Most of dis stuff ain't even mine,” Hazug commented when he saw the two humans no watching him in addition to Ratish, “where did it come form, and why is it in 'ere?”

“It belonged to the last Ork who lived here,” Sophie said, “its all the things that Kazkal Kromag didn't want. I moved it in here just in case you decided any of it was something that you wanted.”

“Well I suppose some of it is useful,” Hazug said, grinning as he found a tooth at the bottom of one of the crates and he put it in his pocket.

“What are you looking for anyway?” Rhia asked.

“I got a tau map somewhere,” Hazug said, “it shows da entrances to grot tunnels on it.”

“That's over here,” Sophie said, and she crossed the room to where a long wooden tube rested against the wall, “I rolled up all sorts of maps and put them in this,” then she picked up the tube and shook it, causing several rolls of paper to slide out. Hazug took the maps and went through them, dropping them on the floor until he found the one that he wanted.

The map was clearly not of Ork origin, though it showed the Ork city and the associated human populated area in great detail. Hazug had taken it from a tau base where he had discovered it pinned to a wall. The image of the city was annotated in numerous places at locations Ratish had informed Hazug were all access points to the Gretchin tunnel networks beneath the city.

“Does anyone 'ave a writin' stick?” Hazug asked.

“I do,” Sophie said, and she produced a short, narrow stick of charcoal and passed it to Hazug.

“Right Ratish,” Hazug said handing both the map and the charcoal to Ratish, “mark on all da other ways in and out of da tunnels wot ya know of.”

“Yes master, Ratish do it now,” and the Gretchin began to scribble on the map, marking every tunnel access point that wasn't already shown with a crude 'X'.

“Good work grot,” Hazug said, then he turned to Rhia and Sophie, “and you two clean dis room up, it's a right bleedin' mess.”

Hazug drew another cross on the map laid out on the kitchen table while his servants stood watching him. “I found a way in from Badcog's workshop dis mornin',” he said, and then he glanced at the other crosses and printed markings.

“Dis is da closest one to da bar where da cybork in da mega armour was,” he said, so dis is where we’ll start.”

“Start what?” Sophie asked.

“Stupid gits,” Ratish said, “master ‘as an idea.”

“Well you tell us then,” Rhia added.

Ratish paused.

“Erm, Ratish let master do it,” the Gretchin said quietly.

“You don’t know either!” Sophie shouted, pointing at Ratish, “Hazug, he’s just being nasty!”

“Shut up da lot of ya!” Hazug bellowed, “Now I reckon dat da painboy wot made dese cyborks is still alive, but ‘e wants to think ‘e’s dead. Dat tells me dat ‘e’s still up to somethin’ and I reckon dat ‘e’s bin usin’ da grot tunnels to move about. DA way in wot I found at Badcog’s workshop was way too small for an Ork in mega armour to fit down, so dare must be somewhere else where da cyborks is bein’ kept. I reckon it’s got a way into da tunnels an all, so we is goin’ to take a look down in ‘em.”

“Can Ratish bring his new slugga?” Ratish asked.

“I reckon dat’ll be a good idea, and bring a lantern an all, it’ll be dark down dare,” Hazug replied, causing Ratish to break into a massive grin before darting off to collect his weapon. Then Hazug looked to Rhia and Sophie, “And you pair better get one of dem zappas each,” he said, “we is all goin’ tooled proper like up for dis job.”

Hazug had Rhia and Sophie carefully wrap the lasguns to disguise their shapes for the walk from his house to the bar where he had encountered the mega-armoured Ork. While orks would just about tolerate humans in public, even carrying an axe or knife, the sight of any armed with laser weapons would be considered a just excuse to attack them, and Hazug didn’t want to have to fight their way to their destination.

“Why couldn’t we bring the truck?” Rhia asked while they stood outside the bar as Hazug compared their surroundings to the map he held.

“Because we can’t take it into the tunnels,” Sophie said, “and if we leave it here someone will probably try and steal it.”

Before Rhia could speak further, Hazug interrupted.

“Dis looks right,” he said, “da way into da tunnels is just up dare,” and he pointed along the street where signs of recent repairs to the damage caused by the cybork were still visible, “so let’s go take a look.”

The tunnel entrance was located in a narrow alleyway between two buildings. It had once featured a simple wooden door covering a large hole in the ground that was the end of one of the many tunnels that ran beneath the city. Now however, there was just a gaping hole, the smashed remains of the covering door itself could just about be made out through the snow that covered them. The width of the alleyway would have barely provided enough room for the cybork in mega-armour to exit the tunnels and get to the street, and Hazug pointed at the gouges in each of the structures.

“‘E definitely came from ‘ere,” he said, “‘e smashed ‘is way out of da tunnels and den ‘e practically ‘ad to smash ‘is way to da street,” then he put the map away and unslung his rifle.

“Right den, unwrap dem zappas,” he told Rhia and Sophie, who both promptly began to remove the covers from their weapons, “and Ratish, I wants ya to light da lantern.”

Hazug lead the way into the tunnel before them, with Ratish following close behind with the lantern and Rhia and Sophie bringing up the rear. The destruction of the entrance’s cover had allowed the recent snowfall to cover the floor of the tunnel near to the entrance, but after a few paces Hazug found himself walking on the hardened soil floor of the tunnel itself.

“Dare,” Hazug said, pointing to the tunnel floor. There, in the frozen soil were the footprints left behind by the recent users of he tunnel. Most of them were the small, barefooted tracks of Gretchin, but clearly visible amongst them was a set of massive rectangular tracks that dug deep into the floor.

“Da Ork in mega armour made dose,” Hazug said, “we follow dem, and dey’ll lead us to where ‘e came from.”

Slowly, and with his servants following him, Hazug walked further into the tunnel.

Dok Gutstitch watched as a pair of his Gretchin servants led away the latest cybork to join his growing army of the creatures. In spite of the necessary death of Mek Badcog he still had enough parts stored to build several dozen more, but it was what would happen after that which concerned him now. He could reanimate as many Ork corpses using squig brains as he wanted, but in order to make them effective in combat he had to upgrade their bodies using the best cybernetics available. Involving Mek Badcog in the plot to take over from Warboss Kromag had not only given him a confidential supply of such equipment, but it had also been free of charge. If he were to buy the cybernetics openly he would not only run the risk of someone in authority questioning what he was up to, but also he would need to find enough money to pay for them. The

few corpses that had come to him with their teeth still present had not yielded anything like enough cash to pay for what he would need. There was only one choice left open to him now, outright theft.

“So,” the painboy said, becoming aware of the other Gretchin gathering behind him, “tell me wot ya found.” Nervous, none of the Gretchin replied. Instead they whispered and pointed to each other as they tried to determine who would have to be the first to speak to their master. Rapidly tiring of the delay, Dok Gutstitch broke the deadlock.

“You first!” he shouted, pointing at a random Gretchin.

“Y-Y-Yes m-m-master,” the Gretchin replied, “I ‘ad a look in da surgeries of doks, and I made a list of wot bioniks dey ‘ad,” and the creature handed his master a handwritten list of painboy’s names and amounts of bionics.

“Nice,” Dok Gutstitch said as he glanced over the list, “Now wot about da rest of ya den?”

One by one the Gretchin handed over lists of cybernetic parts they had discovered by spying on the surgeries of other painboys. One of them remained still and did not hand over his list.

“Wot are ya waitin’ for?” Dok Gutstitch asked, “Wot ‘ave ya been doin’ all mornin’?”

“Stoggi didn’t even bother goin’ to any of da dokshops,” another Gretchin commented, “‘e’s bin skivin’ all day.”

“I ain’t!” Stoggi protested, “I got a list from somewhere else.”

“Where?” Dok Gutstitch demanded, “I told ya to go and look for bionik bits I can use for more cyborks. Where other dan a dokshop would ‘ave any?”

“I went to look around da mek shops instead,” the Gretchin replied, “I figured dat dat was where da bionics as made, and dat dare may be some dare waitin’ for da doks to pay for ‘em, and dat’s where I found dis stuff,” and he handed over his own list.

Dok Gutstitch took the piece of paper and read what was written on it. The list was shorter than any of the others, but what was on it made Dok Gutstitch smile. Then he laughed. He reached into his pocket and took out a tooth, which he threw to Stoggi.

“Nice work grot,” he said, “dis’ll do just fine.”

Holding his tooth, Stoggi smiled while the other Gretchin looked on jealously.

“Ang on a mo,” Gutstitch said suddenly, “dare’s still some of ya missin.”

11

In the tunnels beneath the Ork city, Hazug and his servants heard the sound of movement in the darkness ahead.

"Is this it? The place we're looking for?" Rhia whispered.

"Not necessarily," Sophie whispered back, "any Gretchin could come down here."

"Yeah," Ratish added, "dese tunnels is ours git."

"Dare could be more dan just grots about. Wild squigs can wander in sometimes, or orks may decide to take a short cut down 'ere. Now either of dem could decide to attack us, especially you humans, so watch out," warned Hazug. Then as Rhia and Sophie readied their own weapons, he advanced towards the source of the sound with his rifle held at the ready.

"Keep up grot," Hazug said as he moved ahead of the group, "I need dat light."

"Yes master."

There was the sound of splintering wood from the tunnel ahead, followed by a scream and cursing in the Ork language from more than one voice. Hazug stopped, the voices had been higher pitched and not as loud as he would expect from orks.

"Come out where I can see ya grots!" he yelled into the darkness. There was the sound of voices again; barely audible as if the speakers were trying to remain hidden, then there was silence once more.

Hazug snatched the trigger of his rifle twice, and the booming of the gunfire echoed down the tunnel.

"I said come out where I can ya!" he yelled, "Or I'll make ya pay for makin' me come get ya meself!"

A pair of Gretchin suddenly ran out of the darkness into the area illuminated by the torch carried by Ratish.

"Don't shoot us!" one of them yelled as they dropped to their knees in front of Hazug.

"Dare just da two of ya den?" Hazug asked.

"Yes lord, just us," one of the cowering creatures replied, "we is alone."

"Good," Hazug said, "cos for every one still 'idin' back dare I'm goin' to kill ya, which is especially bad if dare's more dan one cos I can't kill ya more dan once so I'll 'ave to make it slow instead," and he thrust the muzzle of his rifle closer to the Gretchin.

"Oo wait," one of them said, "dare's still Nokki, but 'e's stuck under da box."

"Right," Hazug said, "let's take a look at dis box den," and he advanced down the tunnel, kicking at the prone Gretchin as he did, "Get up ya grots!" he snapped, and they scabbled back to their feet.

Further down the tunnel was a long wooden crate, broken open at one end. Beside the crate lay a Gretchin whose leg was caught beneath it, and blood was seeping out from under the crate, forming a puddle in a nearby dip in the tunnel floor.

Hazug looked at the open end of the crate. Visible through the gaping hole and the straw used for packing was a large metal claw.

"Wot's dis den?" he asked.

"It belongs to our master," a Gretchin replied, "we was takin' it to 'im when we dropped it."

"Ya dropped it on me on purpose an' all!" Nokki shouted from his prone position.

Cradling his rifle with just one hand, Hazug reached down and pulled the claw from the crate. With most of the weight pinning him in place released, Nokki swiftly pulled his leg free and began to pull splinters of wood from his wound.

The claw was attached to a cybernetic arm that, by Ork standards, was very well built and was probably worth twenty teeth or more.

"Where did ya get dis?" Hazug demanded.

For a moment none of the Gretchin replied, but when Hazug turned around to face the two cowering behind him one of them broke his silence.

"Err, it belongs to our master," he said, "we wos carryin' it to 'im."

Hazug studied the mechanical arm for a moment, then he spoke again, "So who's ya master den?" he snapped.

"Err, Dok Gutstitch," the same Gretchin answered, while the second one just trembled and lost control of his bladder. Rhia and Sophie both winced and stepped back as a strong smell of fresh urine filled the tunnel.

"Ya wasn't supposed to tell dat," the urine soaked Gretchin whispered as he elbowed the one who had spoken.

"Well dat's very interestin'," Hazug said, "cos dare's writin' on dis arm wot says it was made by Mek Krudger Bighammer for Dok Hukka. Now where did ya get it?"

The two Gretchin just stood trembling, not sure of whether to be more afraid their master's wrath if they answered Hazug's questions, or of Hazug's wrath if they kept silent.

“Sod dis,” Hazug said as he grew impatient, and he placed the muzzle of his rifle between the eyes of the Gretchin who had wet himself and fired. The shot echoed about the tunnel as the unfortunate creature's skull burst open, spraying blood and flesh around the immediate area.

Rhia and Sophie both squealed and leapt backwards in an attempt to avoid the spray, while Ratish just grinned.

“Nice shot master,” Ratish said, “kill ‘em all.”

Wide eyed, the other two Gretchin just looked on in terror as the headless body of their associate fell to the floor. Hazug swung his rifle towards the other Gretchin standing in front of him. But before he could question him further, the creature also lost control of his bodily functions and fainted. Disgusted, Hazug fired a shot into the chest of the unconscious Gretchin.

“Well,” Hazug said as he turned to face Nokki, “I guess dat just leaves you den.”

“If ya kill me I can't tell ya anythin'!” Nokki shouted.

“I ain't askin' ya to tell me anythin',” Hazug said, “but I reckon dat Warboss Kromag's goin' to 'ave plenty of questions for ya,” and he knocked the Gretchin out cold with a single blow.

Nokki awoke when the bucket of icy water was hurled into his face. He spluttered and waved his arms around for a moment before taking in his surroundings. What he saw confused him, he was not alone in the room but it appeared that he was the only one not standing upside down on the ceiling. Then Nokki noticed the pressure around his ankles and belatedly realised that he was in fact hanging upside down from the ceiling. The rope around his ankles passed through a pulley and to a hook on the floor where it was tied in place. Nokki saw that he was dangling over a large, empty pit in the floor and in front of him stood a group of orks of various sizes plus a pair of humans. He recognised one of the orks a Gretchin and the humans as those he had encountered in the tunnel beneath the city, while the largest of the orks was obviously Warboss Kazkal Kromag himself. Nokki knew he was in real trouble now.

“E's awake boss,” one of the orks in front of Nokki said to Kazkal.

“Good,” Warboss Kromag said, then he gave an order, “Fill da pit,” he said.

Nokki did his best to look around as he heard the sound of movement behind him. He could just make out several other Gretchin opening barrels and tipping the contents into the pit beneath him. Each of the barrels contained a large number of small squigs, that when they were tipped into the pit leapt up towards Nokki with their mouths wide open to reveal vicious looking teeth.

“It looks like me jumpin' squigs likes ya,” Warboss Kromag said, “and if ya don't tell me wot I wants to know den I'll make sure dat ya gets a closer look at 'em.”

“I ain't to say anythin'!” Nokki yelled as a squig came close to biting the top of his head.

“Dat's a shame,” Kazkal said before nodding to one of the orks beside him. The Ork walked to the end of the rope holding Nokki over the pit and untied it from the hook. Keeping hold of the rope he lowered Nokki slightly. The Gretchin screamed as a squig was able to leap high enough to graze him.

“Lift 'im up a bit,” Warboss Kromag told the Ork holding the rope, “I don't wants 'im eaten before 'e talks,” then he turned back to Nokki.

“Now Hazug 'ere tells me dat ya claim to be workin' for Dok Gutstitch,” he said, “is dat true?”

Aware of the squigs leaping up at him from the pit below Nokki answered.

“I supposed to say!”

“Well den I suppose me pets is goin' to get fed now den,” Warboss Kromag said, and he turned to face the Ork holding the rope.

“Alright!” Nokki yelled, “It's true! 'E sent us to find 'im some bionics cos 'e killed Mek Badcog wot was makin' 'em for 'im. We saw a box with an arm in it with no one around so we took all fair and square!”

“That's better,” Warboss Kromag said, and he waved his arm to indicate that the Ork with the rope was to lift the Gretchin higher. As Nokki was lifted further from the pit Kromag spoke with some of the other assembled orks.

“So does anyone know dis Dok Gutstitch den?”

Most of the orks just shook their heads, but Dok Fangpulla answered the warboss.

“'E was with us when we did in Zhalrad boss,” he said, “but after dat 'e cleared out of 'is surgery and buggered off somewhere. I ain't seen 'im since.”

“I reckon dat 'e's outside of da city,” Hazug said, “Rhia saw 'is grots diggin' stuff up near 'er farm, and I reckon dat dey wouldn't want to travel very far, grots is too lazy.”

At this comment Sophie glanced at Ratish and smirked. Ratish scowled back and stuck out his tongue at her.

“Dat's right,” Nokki said, hearing Hazug's comment.

“I know dat grots is lazy,” Warboss Kromag replied.

“Not dat, about where Dok Gutstitch is. ‘Im and Badcog found a bunch of old git buildings wot is underground in da woods. Da gits ‘ad left loads of stuff dare, but da dok chucked most of it out. I don’t remember no farms though, all da buildings above ground was ruined already.”

“‘Ow many of dese lads with squig brains ‘as da dok got out dare?” Warboss Kromag asked, staring Nokki straight in the eyes. For any Ork to make eye contact with a Gretchin was unusual, and for the warboss himself to stare directly at the much smaller Nokki would have made him uneasy even without his hanging over a pit full of ravenous flesh eating squigs, and he didn’t answer.

“Lower ‘im down a bit,” Kromag said, and the rope holder let out a bit of rope. This brought Nokki rapidly back to his senses.

“Wait!” he yelled as a squig leapt past his head, “Pull me up and I’ll tell ya!”

Warboss Kromag nodded at the Ork with the rope and Nokki was pulled higher once more.

“Now answer da question grot, and den we can let ya go.”

“Da dok’s put squig brains in loads of orks,” Nokki said, “‘e’s been doin’ it since we got back from fightin’ Zhalrad. But dare’s still some of ‘em wot ain’t got enough bionics to make ‘em work right.”

“And ‘ow many are in mega armour?” Hazug asked, remembering how difficult to kill the first cybork he had encountered had been.

“Just a few,” Nokki said, “Mek Badcog ‘ad never made any before, and it took ‘im ages to make enough suits for a single mob.”

“Well dat’s somethin’ at least,” Hazug said to Kromag, “Dem cyborks is tough enough even without it, if ‘e ‘ad a large force in mega armour e’d be unstoppable.”

“So ya know where dese underground buildin’s are den?” Warboss Kromag asked Hazug.

“I know where da ruins are near ‘em,” Hazug said, “and it shouldn’t be too ‘ard to find da one’s underground if ya give me enough lads.”

“I ain’t givin’ ya any,” Warboss Kromag said, “dis dok reckons dat ‘e can take me down, I is goin’ dare meself.”

“Wot about me?” Nokki asked, “Ya said ya would let me go.”

“Yeah I did didn’t I?” Kromag said, and he looked at the Ork holding the rope holding, “Let go lad,” he said, and the Ork let go of the rope.

12

Further snowfall had made the snow was deeper than it had been when Hazug had driven his truck out of the city to the ruins so recently, and he was glad that the force rapidly put together by Warboss Kromag was mounted entirely in battlewagons and other heavy half and fully tracked vehicles that could plough through the thick drifts with little difficulty. Where vehicles did become stuck, groups of Gretchin that clung to their hulls leapt down from them and either dug the snow away, or attached chains to other vehicles that could pull them free.

Both Warboss Kromag and Hazug would have preferred to bring along air support also, but the poor weather was keeping all of the aircraft normally at the warboss's disposal grounded. Kazkal had had two of the meks responsible for maintaining his air group decapitated as an incentive to the others to get the runways cleared and aircraft warmed up. He would have killed more, but Hazug had reminded him that the more time they wasted in finding Dok Gutstitch, the more likely he could discover that they were coming for him and slip away.

Hazug's standing association with Two Heads Smasha Butt Face had gained the mutant Ork's vehicle the lead position in the convoy, and Hazug rode with him, standing with his head sticking out of a cupola that let him better determine the direction in which they had to travel. Ratish rode in the battlewagon also, the Gretchin hoped that this would be an opportunity to make use of the pistol he had taken from the late Mek Badcog, even if he didn't Ratish still took comfort from the fact that Warboss Kromag had forbidden Hazug from bringing either Rhia or Sophie on this expedition on the grounds that they were humans, and would just take up space better used for another Ork. That Two Heads' battlewagon still had ample room for more passengers in it hadn't entered into it and the Hazug's two human servants had therefore been left behind. "Oi! Hazug!"

Hazug heard the warboss's yell from the vehicle immediately behind his and turned to face it.

"Wot d'ya want boss?" he yelled back over the noise of almost a dozen powerful but highly inefficient engines.

"Are we nearly dare yet?" Warboss Kromag shouted.

"Its right 'ere boss," Hazug answered, pointing to the tree line ahead and the remains of the farm that lay just outside of the wooded area. Then he ducked back down into the battlewagon and shouted at Gorrid in the driver's seat, "Ya can stop 'ere lad."

The battlewagon shuddered as Gorrid applied the brakes sharply. From outside the battlewagon there came the sound of collisions as each vehicle in the convoy braked at a different rate to the one in front and behind it.

"Right lads," Two Heads both shouted, "everybody out."

The doors to the battlewagon were thrown open and its occupants made their way out of the vehicle.

Normally orks would rush to get outside and closer to battle, but today the cold weather made them more reluctant, and there was not the slightest hint of shoving to be first.

Outside Hazug saw that the other vehicles were also disgorging the troops that they carried. He recognised Maggort among them, and noticed his mob of heavily armoured orks following close behind.

"So dis is it den?" Warboss Kromag said to Hazug as he strode through the snow with Dok Fangpulla following close behind him, scattering the white powder about them as they did so.

"Dat's right boss," Hazug answered, "Dis place used to be Rhia's farm, and da place where she saw Dok Gutstitch's grots diggin' is in da woods over dare, just over dat 'ill," and he pointed to a rise in the ground just beyond the tree line.

For a moment something occurred to him. Rhia's farm was here, while the other ruins were...

"'Ere Hazug," Kromag said, "is ya alright? Ya looks like ya brain just popped for a bit dare."

"Nah boss, I'm alright, I was just thinkin'," Hazug answered, forgetting what he had just thought of.

"Well be careful lad, ya thinks far too much than is good for ya. Now let's tell da lads wot dey is to do."

Hazug and Kazkal both stood facing the crowd of orks that had now fully disembarked from their transports. As would be expected of orks the mobs stood in irregular clumps talking amongst themselves. Meanwhile the handful of runtherds that had been brought along were gathering up those Gretchin that had not been accidentally crushed during the journey and forming them into vaguely organised mobs of their own.

"Shut up!" Warboss Kromag yelled, and every greenskin present fell silent and looked at their leader, "Dat's better," he said, "now Hazug 'ere is goin' to tell ya all wot we is doin' out 'ere so ya better listen to 'im."

Warboss Kromag turned to face Hazug and waved him forwards.

"Somewhere in dese woods," Hazug began, "are some buildin's dat da humans made before we came to dis world. Dese buildin's is bein' used by a bad Dok wot is buildin' an army by puttin' da brains of squigs into da 'eads of lads so 'e can control 'em."

Many orks began to mutter amongst themselves as Hazug described Dok Gutstitch's scheme.

“I said shut up!” Kromag yelled, then he looked at Hazug, “Go on lad,” he said.

“As I was sayin’, da bad dok is usin’ some underground buildin’s as ‘is base, so we needs to find where dey is. So everyone needs to get walkin’ through da woods and yell out ya see where dey is.”

The Ork force remained where it was, Hazug wasn’t larger than the nobs that lead the individual mobs of orks, and they didn’t like the idea of taking orders from a Blood Axe no bigger than themselves.

“Wot is waitin’ for?” Warboss Kromag bellowed, “Get movin’!”

An order from Warboss Kromag was different, he was the biggest and meanest Ork in the system and all of the nobs knew it. When he said do something, it was done, even if he had to kill someone as an example first, so when he gave the order to move out the orks began to move. With a liberal use of their whips, the runtherds drove their Gretchin to the front of the force where they could assume their traditional role of defensive screen against attack. A handful of Gretchin were not included in this screen, like Ratish they were individuals who served as personal assistants to Ork nobs, and here and there they followed their larger masters carrying essentials such as extra ammunition and grenades. Behind the screen of Gretchin the orks advanced in their mobs, with Warboss Kazkal Kromag at their fore.

It did not take long for the complaints to start. Despite the sheltering trees, the ground had a thick covering of snow that had to be kicked or swept aside in order to reveal whatever lay beneath it. To the orks, this was work for Gretchin alone, but there were too few of the smaller greenskins available for the horde to make good time in searching the forest without the orks also clearing the ground. This problem was exacerbated when some of the Gretchin decided that the cover of the woods gave them the chance to slip away from the runtherds and their whips. In addition, a large part of the horde was made up of orks from the Evil Suns clan, their love of speed meant that they had possessed the vehicles necessary to bring them here rapidly, and they resented having to leave their vehicles behind and walk. So increasingly the runtherds and nobs were being obliged to control their subordinates violently.

Suddenly there was a yell from one of the Ork troops.

“Boss! Look at dat!” he shouted, and he pointed not at the snow covered ground, but at a hill just visible through the bare trees.

Set into the hill was a massive metal door with a thick concrete frame. The neat, regular lines of its construction proved that it was of human rather than Ork construction, while its size suggested that it was intended to allow access to a large underground structure. Of the doors had a smaller human sized doorway set into it, obviously to allow individuals access without needing to open the massive main doors themselves.

The orks began to run towards the door, eager to get stuck into a fight even before they knew exactly what lay beyond.

“Stop!” Hazug shouted, and some of the orks halted. Hazug fired a shot into the air from his rifle and the remaining orks also halted their charge.

“Wot’re ya doin’ lad?” Warboss Kromag asked Hazug, “ain’t dis wot we is lookin’ for?”

“Yeah probably, but I reckon dat I should get a closer look before we all go chargin’ in.”

Warboss Kromag was sceptical about halting the horde while Hazug went sneaking around, but he had done right by the warboss so far, so he allowed the Blood Axe some latitude.

“Go on den,” he said to Hazug, “but I don’t reckon dat dis lot is goin’ to wait long.”

Hazug grinned and began to make his way towards the massive doorway, with Ratish following close behind him.

“Shout out if ya see anythin’ grot,” Hazug said, and Ratish nodded.

“Ratish tell master wot ‘e sees,” he replied.

The doorway lay within a clearing in the forest, and as Hazug approached the edge of the trees he spotted something just above the ground between two trees.

“Look at dat,” he said to Ratish, pointing towards what he saw, “wot does dat look like to ya?”

Ratish stared at where Hazug was pointing, and he saw it too. It appeared to be a row of tiny clumps of snow suspended in mid-air. Following the row to its end he saw a bulge in the snow at the base of a tree, about the size and shape of an Ork grenade.

“A booby trap master?”

“I reckon so grot,” Hazug said, “and no-one ever just sets up one booby trap out side, so we ‘ad best be careful.”

Hazug and Ratish continued to make their way towards the doorway, carefully stepping over the tripwire.

The snow in the clearing had been disturbed by many sets of tracks leading to and from the doorway. Not only footprints but also the unmistakable trail left by a tracked vehicle that had either arrived from, or left by a human built road that lead from the clearing through the forest. Carefully, Hazug made his way towards the nearest set of imprints in the snow.

"We'll follow dese footprints," he told Ratish, "dat way we ain't goin' to tread on anythin' nasty dat ain't been trod on before," Ratish just nodded and followed his master through the snow.

In the forest behind Hazug, the rest of the Ork force watched impatiently as he advanced on their target.

"Dis is crap boss," an Ork said to his mob's leader, "dat git lover is goin' to be dare first."

The nob remained silent for a moment, then after looking around at where the other orks were he answered.

"No 'e ain't lad," he said quietly, "we is goin' in now, I don't care wot Kromag says," then he leapt to his feet and ran forwards. Seeing this, the orks in his mob followed him, and in a heartbeat there were twenty orks dashing through the forest and yelling.

"Waaagh!"

"Stay where ya is ya berks!" Kromag yelled at the orks who had refused his first order to stay put, but it was too late. The Ork mob charged through the tree line into the clearing. As the first Ork past between the trees at the edge of the forest there was an explosion, followed a moment later by another as a second Ork ran between two other trees.

The blasts sent fragments of metal and wood through the entire charging mob. The rest of the Ork horde reacted in the only way they knew how. They opened fire. Unsure of the source of the attack on them, different mobs fired randomly in different directions, and bullets and rockets tore through the forest, splintering wood and blasting clouds of snow into the air.

Warboss Kromag joined in the shooting, firing bursts from his custom rifle in all directions until he saw Hazug standing in the clearing and waving his arms in the air with Ratish jumping up and down beside him.

"Quit shootin and shut up!" the warboss shouted at the top of his voice. At first only the orks closest to him heard his order and ceased firing, but as other noticed that the force was beginning to stop shooting they followed suit. Once more the Ork force just stood in the forest, waiting.

"Wot's 'appenin'?" Warboss Kromag shouted at Hazug.

"Dare's bomms strung up between da trees!" Hazug shouted back, "Means someone doesn't want us comin' 'ere!"

"Get ready lads!" Warboss Kromag shouted, "ain't no way dat no-one 'eard da blasts and da shootin'. Dey'll be comin' any mo."

The entire horde turned to face the doorway with their weapons raised. Meanwhile Hazug crouched down and brought his rifle to his shoulder. Beside him Ratish also pointed his gun towards the door.

But the doors remained shut, and the expected charge from whoever lay within the underground building did not take place.

The horde remained silent for a short while, but the natural impatience of all greenskins soon got the better of them.

"Ow long 'ave we to sit in da snow boss? My arse is freezin' off!" an Ork yelled. He was crouched in the snow next to his mob's leader, and the larger Ork responded simply by hitting him around the head. But the sentiment had been expressed, and Warboss Kromag heard mutterings from other orks too.

"Oi Hazug!" he shouted.

"Wot?"

"Where are dey?"

Hazug looked back at the doors in front of him. There was still no sign of anyone coming out to meet the approaching horde, even merely to take a look at what had triggered their carefully set booby traps.

"Ang on a mo!" Hazug shouted and, followed closely by Ratish and ignoring whether or not he was treading in the tracks already in the snow, he darted towards the smaller door.

He stopped running only when he reached the massive doors, his body slamming into the metal as he pressed himself against them next to the smaller door.

"Ow!" Ratish called out as he too slammed up against the doors, but did so far too quickly and struck it with his head. Hazug ignored both his assistant's cry and his rubbing of his head; instead he reached out his hand towards the smaller door and gave it a gentle shove. The door creaked as it moved inwards slightly, but it stopped opening while it was still merely ajar.

"Okay grot," Hazug said turning to Ratish, "I is goin' to give dis door a big kick, and when I does I wants ya to dive through and take a look at wot's inside. Got it?"

"Ratish understand master," Ratish responded, nodding.

"Good, now go!"

Hazug took a step away from the massive door he was still pressed up against before quickly turning around and delivering a strong kick to the centre of the smaller one. As the smaller door swung open Hazug dived away, aware that he would present an easy target to anyone inside as it opened, while Ratish followed his master's order and leapt through the doorway. There was a splash as Ratish disappeared into the darkness.

Hazug waited for a few moments.

“Grot?” he whispered, “Wot can ya see?”

“Ratish not see much master,” Ratish called back through the doorway, “its too dark in ‘ere.”

“Well wot can ya see?”

“Just dis puddle by da door master, Ratish landed in it.”

“Ang on,” Hazug said, no longer whispering, “I is comin’ in,” then he called back towards the horde of greenskins waiting in the forest.

“I reckon dey’ve gone,” he shouted, “so come on over ‘ere, but watch for da bomms in da trees,” and then he stepped through the small door.

All adult orks are bulkier than humans, and nobs like Hazug are even more massive, towering head and shoulders over most full grown men, so Hazug could pass through the doorway only slowly by crouching down. This had been his reasoning for sending Ratish in first, the much smaller Gretchin did not need to be worried about being framed in the doorway for anywhere near as long while any occupants of the building shot at him. But now that it appeared there was no one inside to attack him while he was vulnerable, Hazug could take his time.

The only light in the underground room was coming from outside through the open doorway, so Hazug stepped away from it to allow more in and let him get a better view.

In the partial darkness Hazug could see that the room he and Ratish were standing in was massive, but he could discern few details other than those in close proximity to where he stood. His main sensory input now came through his nose; there was the smell of something rotten in the still air of the room, though he could not make out its source in the gloom. He did, however, make out the shape of a lever set into a box mounted on the wall next to the massive doors behind him.

“Let’s see wot dis does den,” he said and walked over to the lever, grabbed it and pulled it down.

There was a clunk as the lever was pulled followed by a rumble as the massive doors began to slide apart. Light flooded into the room as the doors disappeared into recesses in the walls either side of the doorway. For a moment Hazug thought that the mechanism would jam when the small open door reached one of these recesses, but because of the way it swung open it was just pushed closed by the movement of the larger door in which it was mounted.

Now that the massive room was illuminated, Hazug could see that areas of it had been partitioned off with wooden fences, creating pens much like those used to hold squigs. On the floor of these pens Hazug could now see what looked like chunks of flesh and mushrooms that had been left to decay. Clearly, these were the source of the odour that he had smelt when he first entered the room.

Hazug then heard the sound of many footfalls in the snow behind him, and he turned to see the Ork horde approaching across the clearing, having apparently successfully got passed the tree line without triggering off any more grenades that were wired up there.

“Right den,” Warboss Kromag said as he reached the now wide open doorway, “wot ‘ave we got den?”

“I reckon dat dey’ve sodded off somewhere,” Hazug answered, extending his arm out as if to point at the emptiness of the room, “though dare may still be some ‘idin’ in other rooms.”

“Wot other rooms?”

Hazug pointed again, this time more specifically at the man sized doors spaced irregularly along each side of the room.

“Dare,” he said, “it looks to me like dare’s an ‘ole load of rooms under dis ‘ill, and we ‘ad better search ‘em all just in case dare’s ought been left in any of ‘em.”

“Right lads,” Warboss Kromag shouted over his shoulder to the mass of greenskins behind him, “go take a look, and call out if ya find anythin’ interestin’.”

The horde surged forwards through the entrance to the underground complex and made their way to the doors that led deeper into it.

“Don’t touch anythin’ though!” Hazug shouted, “Let Dok Fangpulla take a look at wot ya find before ya do any lootin’.”

“Wot about finders keepers?” an Ork yelled from the back of the horde.

“Ya can still keep wotever ya finds,” Hazug reassured the orks, “we just need to see everythin’ first.”

“I still get my cut though,” Warboss Kromag said in a serious tone, “and don’t any of ya forget it.”

The horde mumbled its acceptance of the terms.

“Well?” Warboss Kromag said “Get movin’!” and the horde began to spread out and search the complex.

“Of course,” Hazug said as he stood with Warboss Kromag and Dok Fangpulla watching the horde disappear through the various doorways, “if Dok Gutstitch ain’t ‘ere, den ‘e must be somewhere else.”

13

Mek Morbog Shafftender was obsessed with the armoured walking machines known to humans as dreadnoughts. Orks on the other hand referred to them simply as 'kans' to match their appearance. Most were quite literally large metal canisters fitted with legs and arms with built in weapons. The only problem was that Morbog could never bring himself to sell any of his creations. Every dreadnought that he had built, from the small 'killa-kans' meant for Gretchin up to the massive 'mega-dreads' that could rip apart the heaviest of armoured vehicles and thickest building walls was here in his combined workshop and warehouse. Morbog himself was unable to operate the deadly fighting machines himself, that required that a greenskin be permanently wired into them, and that required the skills of a painboy. Early on he, like many meks, had attempted to just nail a pilot in place, but they tended to bleed to death rather quickly. Unwilling to let anyone else near the inner workings of his precious dreadnoughts he had instead left them to stand empty and kept their existence secret from everyone other than his Gretchin, and they knew better than to risk their masters ire by talking about his collection. The secret was thus kept safe. At least until the day when Stoggi discovered a window he could prise open and crawl through.

Dok Gutstitch's instructions had been to seek out new sources of bionics for his army, and the other Gretchin had all rushed off to see if any of the other painboys had left any lying around. Stoggi on the other hand had gone to what he reasoned was the original source, the meks who made them. What he hadn't expected to find was an army of empty dreadnoughts just waiting for a painboy to place pilots inside them. As Stoggi crawled once more through the unsecured window he could see Mek Morbog working. Whether he was creating yet another dreadnought for his collection, or was carrying out one of the jobs he took on to pay for his hobby, Stoggi neither knew nor cared. All he cared about was getting inside the workshop without being noticed. If the mekboy spotted him, Stoggi would probably wind up dead.

Carefully, Stoggi lowered himself down from the window and crawled under the nearest workbench. Peering out from his hiding place, Stoggi could see the mek still busy at his task, unaware of his presence. Stoggi looked around the entire workshop for the mek's assistants, but there was no sign of any of them. That was good. What Dok Gutstitch had planned would go easier if they didn't have to worry about preventing an unknown number of Gretchin from fleeing. Stoggi crawled out from under the workbench and crept towards the front door.

The hammering from Mek Morbog suddenly stopped, and Stoggi feared that the Ork had become aware of his presence. The Gretchin froze in terror, but turning to face the Ork, he saw that the mek was still engrossed in his work. His heart still pounding, Stoggi continued to sneak towards the door.

Dok Gutstitch had parked the large tracked vehicle immediately outside the door to the workshop of Mek Morbog. The vehicle was open topped, and he knew that the squig-brained orks filling its rear area were visible to passers by. However, while these particular orks had been surgically modified, he had not had enough bionics available to give these orks the benefit of them. Thus to the few orks actually wandering the orks in the vehicle appeared to be nothing more than battled scared veterans. They were un-naturally quiet for orks, and all of them had metal plates fitted to the tops of their heads, but there were few greenskins who would be capable of noticing that, especially in the fading light available, and so Dok Gutstitch did not fear attracting any unwanted attention.

Gutstitch decided that he had given Stoggi enough time to get inside and climbed down from the vehicle. He took a look around, and seeing that the street was empty he determined that it was time to move. "Right grots," he said to the Gretchin assistants that had brought with him in addition to the orks, "lets get da lads down from da trakk."

The squig-brained orks had all been conditioned to follow the orders of Dok Gutstitch so when he told them to get down from the vehicle they instinctively obeyed him. After they jumped down to the snow covered street his Gretchin guided the orks towards the workshop door where Dok Gutstitch ordered them to halt. Right on cue, with Dok Gutstitch standing at the front of the assembled mob of orks, the workshop door was opened from the inside.

Mek Morbog heard the sound of the bolt being drawn back from the front door and stopped what he was doing. Spinning rapidly around he saw a Gretchin dragging open his front door, and he knew that it wasn't one of his.

"Ere!" he yelled, picking up the nearest tool that he had to hand and rushing towards the intruder, "Wot da bleedin 'ell do ya think ya doin' 'ere?"

Ignoring him, Stoggi continued to pull the door open. Taking careful aim, Mek Morbog hurled the tool he held towards the Gretchin, and Stoggi squealed and fell, clutching at his knee as it fell low and struck him hard.

Mek Morgob strode forcefully across his clutter workshop, knocking various tools and components out of his way as he did so. Some of them broke as they fell to the floor with a clatter, but the Ork ignored this. As he came close to getting within arms reach of the Gretchin lying on his floor the door was pushed fully open from the outside.

There in the doorway Mek Morgob saw Dok Gutstitch standing at the front of a tightly packed group of heavily scarred orks and he came to a sudden halt. Dok Gutstitch raised his arm and pointed at the mekboy.

“Kill ‘im,” he said, and the orks began to move.

Mek Morgob picked up the first thing that came to hand, a sharpened tool he had long since forgotten the reason for building, and hurled it at the nearest Ork. It struck him just above the eye, and his head jerked backwards as it punched through his skull. But where Mek Morgob would have normally expected there to be a spurt of blood and for the Ork to drop to the floor screaming before he died, the Ork kept on coming towards him without even bothering to pull the tool out.

Mek Morgob grabbed the workbench nearest to him and, heaving, he tipped it over to create a barrier between him and the steadily advancing mob of orks. Tools and parts that had been heaped on the workbench were thus scattered across the floor only to be trampled underfoot by the approaching horde while Mek Morgob turned to retreat further into his workshop.

He ran as far as a welding torch driven by a gas cylinder. Quickly, he activated the flow of gas and struck the nozzle of the torch against a tinder block attached to the cylinder specifically to create a spark that ignited the gas now flowing from the cylinder. He placed a hand around the front of the torch and, ignoring the pain of the hot metal against his skin he twisted the nozzle hard and opened it up. The small blue cutting flame promptly became a much larger orange one that he held up towards his opponents.

“Come den!” he yelled, “Who’s first to get cooked den?”

The group that had been advancing towards him suddenly halted, the primitive squig brains implanted in their skulls driven by their primal fear of fire rather than the conditioning put into them to obey Dok Gutstitch. Seeing the advance falter Dok Gutstitch modified his instructions.

“Spread out a bit!” he shouted, “Surround ‘im!”

As Mek Morgob stood waving the torch the squig-brained orks moved both around and over the clutter of the workshop and formed a ring several orks deep around Mek Morgob. Each time he turned to wave his weapon towards one particular part of the ring it would take a step backwards and give him more room, but at the same time the orks now behind him would take advantage of the chance to move closer.

Mek Morgob suddenly lunged forwards, and the flame caught one of the orks surrounding him. The Ork was suddenly engulfed in fire as his clothing caught alight. The tiny brain implanted by Dok Gutstitch panicked as it found itself unable to escape the flames surrounding it but it remained eerily silent as it burned. Instead the brain just flailed the orks arms it now controlled and tried to flee, but in its state of confusion it moved closer to Mek Morgob.

The flailing limbs of the burning Ork struck Mek Morgob, first across his head and then on his arm, causing the welding torch that had been his only weapon to drop from his grip. The ring of orks parted as their burning comrade barged through to try and escape his predicament, and then closed up again around the now defenceless Mek Morgob.

The mek reached out to try and retrieve his lost weapon, but with the grip of the welding torch just out of his reach he felt the hands of the orks behind him grab his neck and pull him towards them. Mek Morgob cried out in pain as the first foot stomped down on his leg and broke it with a loud ‘crunch’. The next blow came from a fist that smashed his nose, followed by another kick to the side of his head that knocked him out cold.

Mek Morgob remained unconscious as the mob surrounding him tore his body to pieces.

From his position in the doorway Dok Gutstitch watched as the squig-brained orks continued beating the corpse of Mek Morgob and turned to the Gretchin standing beside him.

“Ya better put ‘im out quick, before ‘e sets fire to anythin’ important,” he said, pointing at the still burning Ork. Then he heard a groan from nearby, and he saw Stoggi still lying on the floor clutching at his ruined knee. Then he looked across the workshop at the various dreadnoughts arrayed there.

“Don’t worry grot,” Dok Gutstitch said to Stoggi, “ya did good, and I got just da reward in mind for ya,” and then he grinned.

The next morning Hazug awoke to the sound of more gunfire than was usual for so early, and from the sound of it some was heavier than the expected small arms. He got out of bed and went to the window, then, throwing open the shutters he looked out onto the snow covered city beyond. To look at it, there was nothing out of the ordinary until he caught sight of a flash followed by the dull ‘crump’ of an explosion coming from the area of the city favoured by orks of the Death Skulls clan.

"I needs me breakfast quick!" he shouted looking back over his shoulder, "I reckon dat somethin's goin' on," then he collected his blade, pistol, rifle and some extra ammunition from his armoury and headed downstairs.

In the kitchen Rhia and Sophie had already had Hazug's breakfast waiting for him. He set his rifle down on the table, picked up the plate of mushrooms and tipped them into his mouth.

"What's happening?" Sophie asked him.

"Dunno," Hazug replied, spitting mushrooms across the table as he did so before he swallowed what remained in his mouth, "but it ain't normal for dare to be so much shootin' at dis time. Most lads should still be in bed. So everyone needs to get into da truk because we is goin' to see if da boss knows wot's goin' on." Ratish pricked his ears up.

"Ratish get 'is gun master," he said excitedly.

"Just 'urry up," Hazug said, "and that goes for you two an' all," he added staring at Rhia and Sophie, "get wot ya needs quickly and get in da truk or I is leavin' without ya."

While his servants dashed off to collect whatever belongings they thought they needed Hazug went into the garage and started up his truck, there being a couple of false starts in the cold weather before the engine fired correctly.

Though the snow on the roofs of the buildings had looked clean and white when Hazug had looked from his window that morning, on the streets it was different. As Gretchin had cleared the snow from the roads it had become mixed with dirt and piled in alleyways and the sides of the streets, so instead of the being a white covering over the ground there were instead piles of dirty looking snow and ice scattered randomly. With the roads at least clear of snow, and there being few greenskins about at this time of day, Hazug was able to make good time through the city, and they soon arrived at Warboss Kromag's palace.

Climbing down from the truck after he parked it immediately outside, Hazug noticed Rhia staring up at the massive building, in particular at the double headed eagle of the Imperial Aquila that was still just visible from behind the Ork glyphs that had been stuck over it.

"Wot's up?" he asked, but Rhia didn't answer before another human, a man that Hazug had seen here several times before in the service of Kazkal Kromag approached them flanked by a pair of orks in the traditional black garb of the Goffs clan.

"Ah Hazug," he said, "it appears that there have been several disturbances in the city overnight, his excellence Lord Kromag will be glad to see you."

The idea that Kazkal Kromag would ever be glad to see anyone who wasn't bringing him food or the opportunity to kill someone was somewhat ludicrous to Hazug, but he let the comment pass.

"Den ya better take us straight to 'im," he replied instead and, still escorted by the Goffs, the human led Hazug and his servants into the presence of Kazkal Kromag.

The warboss did not look happy. His group of advisors and lackeys were not awake yet, and aside from Hazug there was only one other nob in the room beside the warboss himself. Hazug didn't recognise this Ork, but the blue face paint he wore marked him as a Death Skull. He stood facing the warboss with a slightly smaller Ork wearing the apron of a painboy beside him and a mob of Goffs immediately behind them both.

"Hazug Throatlitter of the Blood Axe clan and party sire," the human announced as they entered the throne room, and Hazug was surprised to see that the warboss actually did smile as though he were pleased to see him when he looked towards them.

"Ah Hazug me lad," Warboss Kromag said loudly, getting up to greet Hazug, "come and 'ave a listen to dis," and he waved Hazug forwards as he sat down again.

As Hazug approached closer to the warboss's throne Kromag pointed to the pair of orks standing before him.

"Dese two is da one's dat started all da trouble late last night," he said, then he looked back at the other two orks, "Go on, tell Hazug wot ya told me."

"Well," the painboy began, "I found dat some of me bionik bits was missin' from me surgery, and when I asked around loads of other painboys said dat da same thing 'ad 'appened to dem too. Now everyone knows dat Death Skulls is da biggest load of thieves dare is, so we went round to see 'em and get me property back, and dat's when 'e started it all," and the painboy pointed at the Death Skull.

"I didn't start it," Death Skull argued, "I just pointed out dat dare's no such thing as stealin' cos da idea of private property is an artificial creation of a self appointed elite designed to undermine da ancient tradition of finders keepers. Den 'e started it."

"All I did was 'it ya in da gob for talkin' crap," the painboy replied.

"Let me guess," Hazug said, "den it all just spiralled out of control from dare."

"Dare's been loads of shootin' and quite a few buildin's 'ave been wrecked," Kromag said, "I 'ad da Goff's bash enough 'eads together to quieten stuff down to normal now, but dat don't change wot's already

'appened," and then he stared directly at the painboy and the Death Skull, "It's me wot says when dare's serious killin' to be done, not either of you, so I is finin' ya both all ya teeth, includin' wot's in ya mouths. Ya can do da job of pullin' 'em out ya self," he adding looking at the painboy," now get out me sight." The Goff guards dragged the two orks out of the throne room and Kromag turned his attention back to Hazug.

"Da Goffs tell me dat no one's found any of da missin' bionics yet," he said," and dey 'ave 'ad a good in a lot of da Death Skulls mob 'uts. So it don't look like it was dem."

"It was Gutstitch," Hazug said, "we caught some of 'is grots after dey 'ad nicked dat arm, 'e must 'ave sent da rest out to nick some more."

"Dat's wot I was thinkin'," Warboss Kromag replied, "so we needs to find 'im quick. Do ya reckon dat ya can follow dem tracks we saw yesterday no dat its light again?"

"I could," Hazug said, "but I reckon dat it'd be a waste of time."

"Ow come?"

"Well cause 'e's been gone from dare for ages, a full day I reckon. Besides I reckon dat I know where 'e is."

"Where?" Kromag asked, leaning towards Hazug in anticipation.

"E's 'ere."

"Wot do ya mean 'ere?"

"E's in da city," Hazug said.

"Wot makes ya think dat den?"

"Cause 'e's obviously sendin' out lots of grots to nick da stuff wot 'e needs to make more cyborks, and dey would 'ave to be able to carry it to 'im before anyone noticed dat it was gone and started lookin' for it."

"So 'ow do we find 'im in da city?" Warboss Kromag asked.

Hazug thought for a moment and scratched his head.

"Dare might be a way," Hazug said cautiously.

"Go on," Warboss Kromag urged him.

"But it'll cost."

"Ow much?" Warboss Kromag asked, suddenly not sure about whatever Hazug's idea was.

"Not mush," Hazug answered, and Warboss Kromag gave a sigh of relief," about five teeth should do it, and I'll need somethin' dat belonged to Gutstitch an' all, somethin' dat was looted yesterday should do fine."

Hazug parked his truck on the street near the weird huts. Each of the wooden huts was mounted high atop a copper pole that served to safely discharge the psychic energies of their occupants into the ground where it rendered harmless, if much less interesting. It was the nearest hut that Hazug was interested in and, leaving his servants in the truck, he walked straight towards it.

Getting closer he saw that the pole on which this hut was mounted still bore the damage inflicted when a buggy driven by Mek Batrug had crashed into it owing to a combination of poor steering and non-existent brakes.

"Drazzok!" Hazug shouted upwards when he reached the ladder leading up to the hut itself. There was no reply, so Hazug shouted again, "Drazzok wake up ya lazy sod!"

"Wot d'ya want?" came a voice from above, but it wasn't from Drazzok's hut.

Looking around, Hazug saw that another weird boy was leaning out of his hut and looking back down at him.

"I is lookin' for Drazzok," Hazug shouted at the weirdboy.

"Well 'e ain't in," the weirdboy answered, "'e's gone to work already."

"Work?" Hazug asked, stunned, "Wot d'ya mean work?"

"'E reckoned dat 'e needed more teeth so dese last few day's 'e's been goin' to da job poles each day."

Hazug was puzzled. The job poles were simple wooden poles that orks pinned notices to when they needed to hire someone to help them with something. But no one in their right mind would ever hire a weirdboy for anything. Weirdboys were kept away from normal orks for the good reason that it prevented heads exploding randomly. Anyone who really needed a weirdboy came here to find one; otherwise they tended to stay as far away from them as possible.

"Wot da 'ell is 'e doin' at da job poles?" Hazug asked.

"Like I said, 'e's workin'," the weirdboy replied, "don't ya listen?"

"But workin' at wot?"

"I dunno dat, 'e ain't said. But wotever 'e's doin' 'e's makin' loads of money."

Hazug returned to the nearby truck.

"Where's Drazzok?" Sophie asked when she saw him alone.

"Not 'ere obviously," Ratish snapped, but everyone ignored him.

"Apparently 'e's got 'imself a job," Hazug said as he got back into the truck.

14

The job poles were scattered about the city in clusters located in wide-open spaces that allowed orks to freely move between them. Hazug drove from the weird huts to the nearest cluster. As the vehicle approached the space that held the job poles, Hazug saw that there were already a large number of orks present.

"Everybody out," Hazug said as he brought the vehicle to a halt, "and everyone keep an eye out for Drazzok."

"I don't know what he looks like," Rhia said as everyone disembarked from Hazug's truck.

"Tell 'er someone," Hazug said.

"Stupid git," Ratish said, "everyone knows wot weird boys look like."

"I've never seen a weirdboy," Rhia protested, "how am I supposed to know what one looks like?"

"They're covered in charms and bells," Sophie said as the group began to walk from the truck, "and they carry a big metal staff to drain away their power. Plus the other orks will be keeping as far from him as possible, in fact he'll probably have Gretchin around him warning them off."

"Why would they want to stay away from him?" Rhia asked.

"It's got something to do with the way they get their power," Sophie told her, "they collect it from other orks and if they loose control of it they can explode."

"Explode? Have you every seen that happen?"

"No," Sophie admitted, "but I think Hazug may have."

"Course 'e 'as," Ratish said, "master 'as seen everythin' dare is to see. Ratish is right isn't 'e master."

"Well I 'ave seen a weirdo explode once, but dat was a long time ago," Hazug replied.

"What's going on over there?" Sophie suddenly asked, pointing towards a tightly packed group of orks to the side of the job poles.

"Dat ain't normal," Hazug replied, "just like it ain't normal for a weirdboy to be 'ere, so I reckon it could 'ave somethin' to do with Drazzok."

"But why would orks cluster around a weirdboy if what you've told me is true?" Rhia asked.

"She called ya a liar master!" Ratish yelled.

"I didn't mean it that way," Rhia protested.

"Quiet da pair of ya," Hazug said, "and ya can all get back to da truk and wait while I go check dis out. Ya will all probably be squashed if ya go into dat lot," and with that Hazug left his servants where they stood and walked in the direction of the tight huddle of orks.

Reaching the crowd, Hazug began to push his way towards the centre. Some of the orks making up the crowd took offence at this, but when they saw that Hazug was by far the largest Ork present, they opted not to challenge his authority, bigger was better after all.

As he got nearer to the centre of the crowd, Hazug saw that it had indeed formed around his old acquaintance Drazzok. The weirdboy was sat at a small flimsy looking table with another Ork sat opposite him. Hazug watched as Drazzok dropped a handful of small bones onto the table and then stared at them.

"Well?" the Ork sat opposite him, "Wot d'ya see?"

"I sees...", Drazzok replied, "I sees..., I sees ya gettin' 'it around da 'ead."

"Wot crap," the Ork replied, "gives back me tooth."

There was a 'crack' as Drazzok swung his staff at the other Ork and struck him on his head, causing him to fall form his chair, clutching at a bloody gash above his eye.

"Core blimey!" the Ork exclaimed as he dragged himself back to his feet, blood still pouring form the wound Drazzok had inflicted, "Ow did ya know dat was goin' to 'appen?"

There were murmurs from the assembled crowd expressing amazement that Drazzok seemed able to predict the future with amazing clarity.

"E's great," an beside Hazug told him, "'e predicted dat Loffag would get a limp, and it 'appened!"

"E didn't kick 'im in da shin by any chance did 'e?" Hazug asked.

"Yeah," the Ork replied, "but 'ow did 'e know dat is was goin' to 'appen before 'e did it?"

Hazug ignored the Ork and continued to push his way towards Drazzok, when he got to the front of the crowd the Ork sat opposite the weirdboy had his hand over his eye where Drazzok had just jabbed his finger.

"Next!" Drazzok shouted as the Ork got up, still rubbing his eye.

"I'm next," Hazug stated as another Ork began to move towards the table, and he pushed him back into the crowd.

"Hazug!" Drazzok exclaimed, "'As da boss fired ya or somethin'?"

"Nah, I is still working' for Kromag."

Den why is ya at da job poles?"

"I came 'ere lookin' for ya," Hazug answered, "I got a job for ya, dare's three teeth in it for ya."

"I make more dan dat tellin' da future."

"It's for da boss," Hazug explained, knowing that no one turned down a job for Warboss Kromag if they knew what was good for them.

"Alright den," Drazzok said, getting up from his table, "let's get it over with."

There was a collective groan from the crowd.

"Ya can't take 'im!" an Ork shouted after making sure that Hazug was not looking in his direction, and following this Ork's example, more of the crowd began to protest at Drazzok's removal.

"I'll get rid of 'em for an extra tooth," Drazzok whispered to Hazug.

"Fine, do it," Hazug replied and Drazzok promptly slapped his hand to his forehead.

"Oo me 'ead 'urts!" he yelled.

"E's gonna blow!" an Ork in the crowd shouted, and fearing an explosion the orks surrounding Drazzok and Hazug ran for cover.

"Easy when ya knows 'ow," Drazzok said, "no give us an 'and with dis stuff," he added, indicating the table and chairs.

Picking up the lightweight furniture, Hazug then led Drazzok back towards his truck when his servants all waited for them. Drazzok halted when he saw Rhia.

"Another one? Is ya collectin' gits now Hazug?" he exclaimed.

"I got a bigger 'ome dat needs cleanin' and she turned up lookin' for work," Hazug answered as he tossed the furniture into the back of the truck.

"Get in da back grot," Drazzok said as he clambered into the front of the truck next to the driver's seat, and Ratish had to scramble out of the way before the Ork sat on him.

"Ya is getting' soft Drazzok," Hazug said as he too got into the truck, "time was ya would 'ave sat on 'im for da 'ell of it."

"Soft! Bah!" Drazzok retorted, "I just didn't want to 'ave to pay ya back for a squashed grot."

"So," Drazzok said as he sat down at Hazug's kitchen table, "wot's dis job, and wot's an Ork got to do to get fed around 'ere?"

Hazug signalled to Rhia and Sophie to get them some food, and the two young women began to prepare a meal while the orks talked.

"I needs to find someone wot doesn't want me to find 'em," Hazug explained to Drazzok, "I reckon dat 'e's somewhere in ad city, but 'e'll be keepin' out of sight. Can ya do it?"

"Wot find someone? Easy, but I'll need somethin' wot belongs to 'em, somethin' dat dey kept close for a long time preferably."

Hazug grinned and reaching into a pouch he produced a short blade of the sort used by painboys to slice open an Ork without deliberately killing them.

"Will dis do?" Hazug asked, setting the blade down on the table.

"Aye, dat'll do nicely," Drazzok said, taking the blade, "now I'll need a bit of string an all."

"Ratish," Hazug said, "string, now."

Ratish went to a drawer and returned with a ball of rough string that he deposited on the table in front of Hazug. Drazzok reached out and took the string before using the small blade to cut off a piece the length of his forearm which he then tied around the end of the blade's handle. Then Drazzok gripped the blade by pressing his hands flat together with it pressed between them. He closed his eyes tightly, and sat in silence.

"Done it!" he announced suddenly.

"Done wot?" Hazug asked.

"Dis," Drazzok replied, and he held up the blade by the piece of string he had tied to the handle.

Hazug was amazed to see the blade not hang straight down as it should have done, but instead rise up so that it hovered horizontally.

"Da blade points da way," Drazzok announced, then added, "ah good, grub," as a plate of food was placed in front of him by Rhia.

Drazzok put the blade down on the table and began to eat. While he did this Hazug picked up the blade by the string, but rather than pointing horizontally, the blade just hung downwards from it's string.

"It's bust already," Hazug said, "dis ain't no good."

Drazzok sighed.

"Give it 'ere," he said and he snatched the blade away from Hazug. Immediately the blade leapt into a horizontal position again and spun to point in the same direction as it had done when Drazzok last held it.

"See, it works just fine," Drazzok said, "its just dat it only points da way when I is 'oldin' onto it. Ya can't use it cos ya brain ain't sufficiently..., sufficiently.."

While Drazzok tried to think of the word he wanted Sophie made a suggestion.

"Unhinged?" she said in Gothic so that Drazzok could not understand her. Hazug smirked.

"If I ever finds out wot ya just said," Drazzok told Sophie, "and I don't likes it, den I is goin' to give ya a damn good kickin'," then he turned to Hazug and said, "Us Snake Bites 'as a sayin'. It goes 'gits should be seen and shot.'"

"Dey 'ave dare uses," Hazug replied before returning to the subject of the psychically attuned blade, "So if I gets wot ya is sayin', den ya will 'ave to come with us so dat da blade can keep pointin' da way."

"Dat's right," Drazzok said between mouthfuls.

"Den we best get goin'," Hazug said, standing up before looking in the direction of his servants," and I reckon dat ya 'ad all better carry a shoota each."

"Ang on a mo," Drazzok said, putting the blade down, "wot's with givin' da gits shootas? Who is we lookin' for exactly?"

"A bad dok by the name of Gutstitch," Hazug answered, "we reckon 'e's buildin' 'imself an army by puttin' squig brains in dead lads so dat dey do wotever 'e tells 'em to. Dey is well 'ard."

"So dare's likely to be some killin' den is dare?"

"Definitely."

"Oh good, cause I was getting' sick of fortune tellin'."

With the means to locate Dok Gutstitch now at hand Hazug returned to the palace of Warboss Kromag. Finding the renegade painboy was one thing, but Hazug knew that he didn't have the ability to deal with him and his zombie cybork army with nothing but a weirdboy, Gretchin and a pair of small humans as his backup. He needed to hire some more help, and it seemed only fair that the warboss was the one to pay.

"Fifty?" Warboss Kromag said in amazement, "Wot da bleedin' 'ell do ya need fifty teeth for?"

"I needs to 'ire some 'elp," Hazug explained, "and I needs lads wot 'ave big guns and wagons if I is to take out all dem cyborks."

Warboss Kromag waved one of his servants forwards, the human advanced holding a wooden box that he opened as he drew close to the warboss. Kromag leaned over and began to remove teeth from the box, his lips moving as he counted them silently.

"Ere's ten," he said, holding up a fistful of teeth, "dat should be enough for dat Evil Sun with da spare 'ead, and I'll send Maggort with ya an' all. When ya finds da bad dok ya just 'as to keep da bugga from getting' away. Send me a grot and I'll come finish 'im off, after all I is da boss. Right?"

"Right boss," Hazug answered as he took the money, then he looked around the room until he caught sight of Maggort making his way to the front of the assembled group of nobs and oddboy special advisers.

Two Heads Smasha Butt Face took the five teeth Hazug offered him eagerly.

"Mount up lads!" one of him yelled, before the other added, "Let's roll!"

While Two Heads' mob began to dash about the garage, gathering up weapons and supplies, Two Heads himself turned back to Hazug.

"So wot's da job anyways?" one asked while the other nodded in anticipation.

"It's dat bad dok again," Hazug told him, "I reckon dat 'e's 'ere in da city and Drazzok's come up with a way for us to track 'im. I'll lead da way with Drazzok in me truck, and ya can follow behind me with Maggort's lot in dare wagon an all," and he pointed back over his shoulder to Maggort's black painted battlewagon that was parked behind his own vehicle across the street.

"Gotcha," Two Heads said, and with that he followed his mob onboard his battlewagon. Then the heavily armoured vehicle shuddered as its engine was started. Hazug grinned and returned to his truck.

"Is we goin' now?" Drazzok asked him as he clambered back into the driver's seat.

"We is," Hazug answered him, "point da way Drazzok."

While Hazug started up the truck's engine, Drazzok held up the blade on its string and waited for it to settle.

"Datta way," the weirdboy said, pointing his free hand in the same direction as the blade.

"Right," Hazug said and he put his foot down on the accelerator.

Almost immediately there was the sound of shouting from behind the truck as both Gorrid driving Two Heads' battlewagon, and the driver of Maggort's vehicle tried to be the next one in line.

"Let 'em sort it out between 'em," Hazug said to no one in particular, "dey'll be just fine."

Driving at the typical Orkish pace of as fast as possible proved problematic. Ork road surfaces were poorly maintained at the best of times, and added to that, the ramshackle construction of Hazug's truck made for a bumpy ride.

"Which way is it pointin' now?" Hazug shouted over the sound of his engine.

"If ya could keep da truck still for a mo, I'd tell ya," Drazzok yelled back at him.

Hazug braked, and the occupants of the truck grabbed on as it slowed to a rapid halt. The pair of battlewagons following close behind also braked sharply as they noticed Hazug decelerate.

"Are we dare yet?" Maggort shouted from a cupola on his battlewagon.

"Not yet," Hazug replied before he turned to Drazzok, "So can ya tell me da way now?" he asked.

The blade settled, pointing diagonally ahead of the truck.

“Keep goin’,” Drazzok told Hazug, “but try and keep it steady will ya?”

Hazug started his truck moving again, but this time, much to the surprise of his passengers he did so gently, doing his best to avoid causing the vehicle to lurch around. The battlewagons followed them once more, also keeping their speed low to match Hazug’s.

“Get a bleedin’ move on!” both of Two Heads shouted from his vehicle, “We wants speed!”

“Ignore ‘im, if ya go any faster ya will just wind up ‘avin’ to stop for directions again.”

Without saying anything, Hazug followed Drazzok’s advice and continued to drive at a slow crawl with the larger battlewagons behind him. Fats moving vehicles were a fact of life in the Ork city, so the sight of the slow moving convoy was unusual enough to attract the attention of the greenskins present. Both Ork and Gretchin stopped whatever they were doing to stare at the bizarre column of fighting vehicles making their way slowly through the streets.

“Try putting’ it in gear ya old fart!” an Ork shouted at Hazug as he ran alongside his truck, just to prove to his friends that he could.

Hazug sat up straight in his seat, and the running Ork suddenly realised that Hazug was much larger than he was. His mouth fell open as he stared at Hazug, but he kept on running. With one swift motion, Hazug reached out his arm and slapped the Ork around his head, knocking him to the ground. There was laughter from the Ork’s friends as he picked himself up.

“Learn some bleedin’ manners!” Hazug shouted back at the Ork as he picked himself up. Just as the Ork got back to his feet the next vehicle in the convoy, Two Heads’ battlewagon, drove past him and Two Heads hurled an empty food can at him.

“Ow!” the Ork cried out as the can struck him, causing his friends to laugh once more. Next came Maggort’s vehicle, and the mob of Goffs was hanging out of its side. As they drove past the Ork they jeered at him and waved their arms towards him in an attempt to hit him as well, but much to their disappointment he was just out of reach.

The convoy wove its way slowly through the city, Hazug doing his utmost to keep the blade pointing straight ahead of his vehicle. When the convoy entered one of the areas of the city populated primarily by mekboys the blade began to move more rapidly.

“Looks like we is getting’ closer,” Drazzok said, “da direction is changin’ quicker.”

“Either dat or ‘e’s not stayin’ put,” Hazug answered, and he brought the truck to a halt once more and looked at the blade.

Hovering on the end of the piece of string, the small tool remained steady, pointing ahead of the truck.

“Good, ‘e ain’t movin’,” Hazug said, then he set the truck in motion once more.

As Hazug drove past one mekboy’s workshop after another, he kept the speed of the truck as low as he had for most of the journey, periodically glancing between the road and the blade that Drazzok held up.

Suddenly the blade turned to face first along side the truck, then behind it and Hazug braked. He looked around and saw a large open topped tracked vehicle parked outside a large workshop across the street.

“Dis is it!” he exclaimed, and he jumped down from the truck and ran towards the battlewagons following him. Reaching Two Heads’ battlewagon, Hazug saw that the Evil Sun was still sticking his heads out of the top of his vehicle.

“We’re ‘ere,” Hazug said, “get ya lads out and keep it quiet.”

Two Heads both nodded and he ducked back down into the battlewagon as Hazug ran on to Maggort’s vehicle behind it.

15

“Stoggi? Stoggi can ya ‘ear me?” Dok Gutstitch asked as he finished the surgery and set the staple gun aside.

“Uhhh,” came the reply. It had a deeper tone to it than was normal for a Gretchin.

“Try movin’ ya arm grot.”

Stoggi murmured something unintelligible in the same voice, and with a whirring of gears a massive arm ending a vicious looking pair of pincers was raised into the air.

“Dat’s it grot, now try takin’ a step,” Dok Gutstitch said and, newly encased in his own armoured walking machine, Stoggi the dreadnought pilot took a step forwards.

Dok Gutstitch smiled as he saw the result of his work. Stoggi was just the last of the greenskins that he had implanted into the armoured fighting machines that the late Mek Morgob had constructed. Stoggi was the only Gretchin that he had implanted, and given that the other servants that Dok Gutstitch had witnessed the process of implantation, he doubted that any of them would volunteer to be next.

Still, Dok Gutstitch thought, the dreadnoughts built for Gretchin were smaller and far less powerful than those built for Ork pilots, and Dok Gutstitch had fitted more than twenty of his squig brained orks into these larger fighting machines.

As he admired his day’s work, Dok Gutstitch felt a tug on his apron.

“Master! Master!” the Gretchin servant shouted, “Come quick and look at this!”

Dok Gutstitch followed his servant to the front of the workshop, where the Gretchin pointed out of a narrow window to where orks were disembarking from battlewagons.

“Look master!” he exclaimed, “Dat’s da nob we’ve been seein’ all over da place!” he added, his finger pointed directly at Hazug.

Dok Gutstitch drew himself up to his full height.

“Grab wot weapons ya can, we got company,” he ordered, “I’m goin’ to get a surprise ready for ‘em.”

“We’ll need some lads around the back,” Hazug told Two Heads and Maggort as the three nobbs stood between the two battlewagons while their troops disembarked, “jut in case dare’s a way dat ‘e can make run for it dat way.”

Maggort nodded and waved over some of his orks.

“Go wait round da back,” he ordered, “start shootin’ if anyone tries makin’ a run for it dat way,” and the orks dashed away.

Meanwhile Hazug returned to his truck to give his instructions to its occupants

“Now listen carefully grot,” he said to Ratish, “I is goin’ over dare with da lads to get a closer look. If I waves at ya den it means dat ‘e’s in dare. If dat ‘appens den I wants ya to leg it back to Kromag and let ‘im know to get ‘ere as quick as ‘e can. Understand?”

“Yes master, Ratish understand,” the Gretchin replied, nodding his head up and down eagerly.

“Good, now Drazzok I wants ya to stay put behind da truk with Sophie and Rhia, I don’t want to tip Gutstitch off if ‘e’s in dare, and ‘e may figure it out if ya start makin’ stuff float by accident. Now if any shootin’ does start, den ya all feel free to take part, but only Drazzok is to come closer dan dis. Ya all got dat?”

Drazzok and the two humans indicated that they understood and got out of the truck, then Hazug made his way back to the other two nobbs.

“Right,” he said to them confidently, “let’s get closer. But keep it quiet, right?”

The orks began to walk across the street en masse, with Hazug at the front of the group, but as they approached the workshop with the tracked vehicle parked outside, the wooden doors to the workshop exploded outwards.

“Kan!” Hazug yelled as the massive metal walking machine strode through the wrecked doorway, two pincer tipped arms waving in the air as it advanced. The assembled orks opened fire and the roar of gunfire filled the air.

With a volume of fire so great, and such a prominent target, even the poor marksmanship common to the Ork species could not prevent the dreadnought being hit repeatedly. Sparks flew as the bullets struck the thick armoured shell of the dreadnought and promptly bounced off harmlessly. The cacophony of small arms fire was then joined by the deeper sound of the machine guns mounted on the battlewagons, but this too was ineffectual against the armour of the dreadnought.

There was more gunfire, but this time it came from the dreadnought itself. The two heavy machine guns mounted in addition to its claws raked fire through the assembled orks, and even the heavier armour plates that Maggort’s orks wore were not enough to protect them.

As orks fell to the ground, both dead and seriously injured Hazug raised his rifle and reached for its secondary trigger. There was a flash as the rocket motor ignited, and the armour-piercing projectile flew towards the dreadnought.

Hazug's aim was good, and the rocket hit the dreadnought at one of its shoulders. Unfortunately the detonation that Hazug expected did not occur, the rocket was a dud and it instead lodged itself in the joint connecting one of the dreadnoughts clawed arms to its body. The rocket motor continued to burn, however, and a jet of flame poured from the rear of the projectile for a few seconds until its fuel was exhausted.

"Get back!" Hazug yelled.

"Ya 'eard 'im!" both of Two Heads added, "Get behind da wagons!"

The remaining orks fell back across the street, with the dreadnought advancing steadily behind them.

Suddenly Two Heads halted, "Down!" he yelled as he saw the main turret on his battlegon turning to face the dreadnought behind him.

The orks dived to the ground as there was a massive boom and a flash from the turret mounted cannon as it fired a heavy shell at the dreadnought, followed by a crash as it tore off the arm that still had Hazug's rocket lodged at its shoulder.

The dreadnought span around under the impact as its limb was torn free and the rocket fell to the ground.

Recovering quickly, the dreadnought turned to face the orks once more. But as it put its foot forwards it stood on the faulty rocket. The weight of the dreadnought crushed the projectile against the frozen dirt of the road beneath it, and the excessive pressure finally triggered its detonator. The dreadnought rocked as the rocket detonated beneath its foot, and the shrapnel from the explosion cut into the hoses and cables that allowed it to retain control of its leg. The limb collapsed suddenly, and the machine toppled over and fell to the ground.

"It's down!" Maggort shouted, "Get it!"

Maggort and his remaining uninjured orks in the street began to get back up.

"No! Wait!" Hazug shouted, but it was too late. The damaged dreadnought opened fire once more, and only the limited arc of fire it had available while lying prone prevented it from cutting down them all. Maggort himself took a hit to his leg, and he dropped his rifle and fell clutching at the bleeding limb.

Behind Hazug's truck, Sophie observed the battle by peering underneath the vehicle. Rhia took a quick look around the truck for herself.

"It going to kill us all!" she shouted in Gothic.

"Nop its not!" Sophie shouted back at her, also in Gothic, "Hazug will think of something. He always does."

"Well it looks like his luck's run out," Rhia added. Then she saw Drazzok, "What's happening to him?" she asked, pointing at the weirdboy.

Sophie turned to look at Drazzok herself. The weirdboy was sat with his back against the truck, gripping his staff tightly as his whole body shook. Sophie had seen the glow in his eyes before.

"Get him up!" she yelled, and she tried to drag the Ork to his feet. "Help me!" she shouted at Rhia as he proved too heavy for her to lift on her own.

Rhia put down her gun and assisted Sophie in lifting Drazzok to his feet.

"Now turn him around and get him away from the truck," Sophie said.

"What are we doing?" Rhia asked as the two young women positioned the weirdboy between them.

"Just watch," Sophie answered when Drazzok was clear of the metal of the truck's chassis and facing the flailing dreadnought, and then she pulled the weirdboy's staff away from him.

"Keep hold of him!" Sophie shouted as Drazzok's shaking grew stronger and the light from his eyes brighter.

Rhia almost let go of Drazzok as he opened his mouth and screamed. With the scream came a blast of light from his mouth that flew towards the dreadnought lying in the street. The beam of channelled psychic energy struck the machine just below the slit provided for the pilot to see out, and its metal shell glowed as it heated up rapidly. The energy spread across the dreadnought's surface until it reached the ammunition for its machine guns. The propellant for all of the remaining bullets exploded at once, ripping apart the weapons, but the dreadnought continued to flail about helpless as the psychic attack persisted.

The body of the dreadnought continued to heat up, and inside even the pilot with his implanted squig brain was quite literally feeling the heat. He squirmed with the narrow confines of the dreadnought, pulling the wires that joined him to his machine's systems loose as he did. The dreadnought stopped its flailing as the pilot lost the ability to control it and its remaining limbs fell limply beside it. This was when the armour of the dreadnought's body finally gave way, and the beam of energy burnt the flesh of its pilot away to nothing before finally halting.

"Woah," Rhia said in amazement, staring at the damage inflicted by the psychic blast

"It's what happens when orks get excited near him," Sophie explained as Drazzok slumped limply in hers and Rhia's arms, "he collects his power from them, and unless he can drain it away with his staff, or anything else metal, he either explodes, or it comes shooting out of him like that."

As the orks began to pick themselves up now the dreadnought had been destroyed Ratish leapt out from behind the truck and ran to Hazug.

“Ya didn’t wave master, do ya still want Ratish to go tell da warboss?” he said. Hazug just frowned and gave his Gretchin servant a good hard slap.

Inside the workshop, Dok Gutstitch had witnessed the destruction of the dreadnought. He had expected it to be destroyed; though he was surprised that it’s demise had occurred so quickly. The presence of a weirdboy was something he hadn’t counted on. Turning around he walked quickly back into the workshop to where some of his Gretchin servants were digging into the floor with an assortment of improvised digging tools.

“How close are you now?” he demanded.

“Nearly dare master,” one of the Gretchin replied just as there was the sound of earth and stones falling, “Dat’s it!” the Gretchin exclaimed, “We ‘as broken into da tunnel,” and as Dok Gutstitch peered into the hole his servants had dug he saw the Gretchin tunnel that ran beneath it.

“Right, everyone into da ‘ole,” Dok Gutstitch ordered.

“But wot about da kans master?” another Gretchin asked, “Dey won’t fit.”

“Dey don’t ‘ave to, I’ll take care of da kans while ya all just garb wotever ammo and bioniks ya can and get in da ‘ole.”

While his servants disappeared into the tunnel below, Dok Gutstitch stood in front of the small dreadnought that held Stoggi.

“Stoggi, I got a job for ya. Ya understand?” he said, looking into the vision slit.

The dreadnought bowed forwards slightly.

“Yes master,” came the reply.

“Good, now I wants ya to lead all dese other kans to our camp. Right?”

“Yes master.”

“Dat’s me lad,” Dok Gutstitch said with a grin, then he spoke to the remaining dreadnoughts with their squig-brained crew, “Follow da grot in da killa-kan,” he said slowly and clearly, “and keep ‘im safe. ‘E’s goin’ to take ya back to me camp. Understand?”

There was a mass of whirring and clunking sounds as, in unison, the dreadnoughts all bowed to signal their understanding.

“Good,” Dok Gutstitch said, and then he turned back to Stoggi, “Now get goin’ grot,” he said, and he slapped the side of Stoggi’s dreadnought and headed back to the hole.

Outside, the orks were picking themselves up. The sound of the battle had attracted the attention of most of the nearby meks, and a crowd was starting to form around them. Then, from inside the gloom of the workshop from which the dreadnought had just burst, there came a steady ‘clump’, ‘clump’, ‘clump’.

“Kan!” one of Two Heads’ orks shouted.

“Get back behind da wagons!” Hazug shouted, and the remaining orks from Two Heads and Maggort’s mobs quickly fell back into cover. Then, Stoggi emerged from the workshop in his miniature dreadnought.

“Aha ha ha!” an Ork in the crowd laughed out loud, pointing at Stoggi, “Look! Dey is afraid of a grot killa-kan!”

The laughter spread through the crowd, and some of the orks behind the battleg wagons began to make their way out of cover. Right as the wall of the workshop was smashed apart from the inside.

The massive machine that strode out of the cloud of dust was far larger than the dreadnought that Drazzok’s psychic blast had destroyed. Unlike that machine, this one possessed only two arms rather than four. One tipped with an enormous claw, the other sporting a huge cannon. A pair of missile launchers mounted at its waist completed the formidable weapons load out of the machine.

“Mega-kan!” a voice in the crowd yelled moments before the machine’s cannon boomed and sent an explosive shell into it.

The force of the blast sent orks and Gretchin alike flying, and the remaining crowd scattered before it could fire again. After the sound of the explosion, there was a steady clatter as the orks opened fire from behind the battleg wagons that sheltered them. The mega-dreadnought ignored this; its armour was thick enough that the orks may as well have been throwing fistfuls of sands as shooting at it with their rifles. It took a step forwards, emerging fully from the dust cloud that was all that was left of the wall it had demolished in its exit from the workshop, and as it did a trio of dreadnoughts emerged beside it, followed moments later by a second massive mega-dreadnought.

“Ah crap!” Hazug exclaimed as he saw the dreadnoughts pouring out of the workshop, both through the ruined door and the hole in the wall.

“Get another shell in da kannon!” Two Heads both ordered, yelling the command through the opening of the rear access ramp to his battleg wagon.

The vehicle's turret turned as the gunner took aim at the first of the mega-dreadnoughts to have emerged. There followed a flash and a boom as he fired a shell at the massive target. The orks let out a cheer as the shell struck the machine centrally and detonated on impact. But the celebration was cut short as the explosion cleared and revealed that the mega-dreadnoughts formidable armour plating had resisted the attack. Only a patch of missing paint and a dent served to indicate that it had been hit at all.

Almost as one the emerging dreadnoughts opened fire. A hail of bullets, missiles and jets of flame shot from their arm mount weapons towards the battlewagons, and the orks ducked behind their vehicles for cover.

"Fire again!" Two Heads yelled.

"It's stuck!" his gunner replied as he tried to clear the casing from his previous shot out of the orks' heaviest available gun.

The dreadnoughts advanced closer to the battlewagons, and the first mega-dreadnought fired its main gun once more. The powerful shell struck the ground beneath Maggort's battlewagon, and the orks using it for cover tried jumping aside as the heavy vehicle was flipped over. Slowed by their injuries, some of the orks, including Maggort himself, were not quick enough, and they died crushed under the wreck of their own transport.

Suddenly there was a blast of energy from further down the street, and Hazug saw that some of the crowd that had fled was now returning, and they were armed.

Many of the orks that had made up the crowd were, of course, meks from the neighbouring workshops, and when they had fled from the mega-dreadnought they had done so just that they could fetch their most powerful weapons to use against it. Now they were planning to get their own back.

There was another bright beam of light as the mek fired his custom energy weapon again.

"Ow d'ya like dat den?" the mek shouted as he missed for a second time. The mek then activated his weapon again to fire a third blast, and he died as the weapon's coolant system malfunctioned and he was swiftly incinerated by his own weapon.

Inside his own dreadnought, Stoggi was laughing at the destruction being wrought, and he watched with glee as a rocket fired by the mega-dreadnought smashed into one of the battlewagons and blew off a track. But while it was amusing to watch the orks facing him dying, he knew that it would only be a matter of time before they could bring in heavier weapons or expert tank hunters and destroy all of the dreadnoughts, and his master wanted the fighting machines to be taken back to his camp.

"Follow me!" he shouted, and he began to walk down the street.

The sound of his command was drowned out entirely by the battle raging around him, and it was only when the dreadnoughts nearest to Stoggi noticed that the Gretchin was moving that the larger Ork piloted machines began to follow him.

16

Behind his truck, Hazug fumbled with a rocket as he reloaded the under slung launcher on his rifle. He heard a hiss and felt the truck shift as gunfire from the dreadnoughts shredded the tyres on the side exposed to them.

“At least I got spares,” he said to himself and he jumped up to fire the freshly loaded rocket. The weapon struck one of the dreadnoughts, but it just clipped it rather than scoring a clean hit, and it bounced off before the warhead could detonate.

Hazug was about to duck for cover once more when he saw the dreadnoughts begin to turn. At first it was just the first one to have emerged, the one designed for a Gretchin pilot. But the others soon began to follow its lead, and it was not long before the entire force of dreadnoughts was striding down the street, still firing as targets presented themselves.

“Dey is runnin’!” someone shouted.

Hazug ran into the road and aimed his rifle after the dreadnoughts. Switching the selector to the ‘turbo-dakka’ mode he rapidly emptied the magazine at the rearmost dreadnought in the hope that at least one of the bullets would penetrate the thinner armour to the machine’s rear, but the dreadnought kept on moving, oblivious to Hazug’s attack.

“Dey ain’t runnin’,” Hazug said as he lowered his rifle, “dey just got somewhere else to be.”

“ain’t we goin’ after ‘em?” Two Heads asked as he ran up to Hazug.

“With wot?” Hazug responded waving his arm at the destruction wrought by the dreadnoughts as they had burst out of the workshop. Of the three vehicles they had bought with them two had been disabled while Maggort’s battlewagon had been wrecked, “Nah, we needs to check out da workshop,” and with that he began to sprint towards what remained of the workshop followed closely by his servants.

Compared to the destruction on the street outside, the workshop was in comparatively good order. The dreadnoughts had smashed through furniture and the main front wall on their way out, but at least nothing in here had exploded. Having been large enough to hold the entire force of dreadnoughts, the workshop was much larger than any Hazug had been in before, and a large portion of it appeared to have been used purely for storage. A handful of the smaller Gretchin sized dreadnoughts, and one standard Ork sized walking machine remained here, but the rest had been taken by Gutstitch’s cyborks.

“So where’s Gutstitch?” Two Heads asked as he followed Hazug into the workshop, “E couldn’t ‘ave been in one of dem kans could ‘e?”

Hazug shook his head, “Dare’d be no one to wire ‘im in,” he responded, “and since ‘e don’t appear to be in ‘ere still, dare must be another way out.”

“Ya ‘eard ‘im lads,” Two Heads shouted to his remaining troops, plus the two orks of Maggort’s mob to have survived the battle in the street, “spread out and search dis place.”

“Oh great more lookin’,” one of Two Heads’ orks commented, “seems like all we is doin’ now is lookin’.

When we goin’ to ‘ave a decent scrap.”

Two Heads hit the Ork.

“As ya brain gone soft or somethin’? Wot d’ya call wot just ‘appened out in da street?”

“Oh yeah,” the Ork replied, his face brightening up, and he joined in the search of the workshop satisfied that his Orkish desire for conflict was being met.

Hazug’s attention was suddenly caught by a tapping sound from the back of the workshop, where he saw a door. Unlike the massive front door, this one looked just big enough for an Ork to use it to come and go. Beside the door was a small window through which was visible the face of one of the orks Maggort had sent around the back of the workshop to cut off any escape that way.

“Can we come in yet?” the Ork shouted through the glass, “We is bored out ‘ere.”

“Hazug come quick!” Sophie suddenly shouted as she clambered over the ruined furniture with Rhia,

“There’s a dead body here!”

Hazug moved as quickly as he could across the workshop, pushing both furniture and orks out of his way.

He stopped when he saw what the two humans had found. The body had once been an Ork, or possible more than one, it would take a painboy some time to put all of the bits back together to make sure of that.

“Is it the Ork we came here for?” Rhia asked, holding her hand over her mouth.

“I don’t think so,” Hazug answered as he leant in for a closer look, “look dare’s bionik bits in wot’s left of ‘is ‘ead. I reckon dat dis wos da mek wot owned dis place before Gutstitch came ‘ere. ‘Is cyborks must ‘ave killed ‘im.”

“‘Ere Hazug!” one of Two Heads suddenly shouted, “come and ‘ave a look at dis.”

Pushing his way through the debris again, Hazug made his way over to where Two Heads and several other orks were gathered around a large hole that had been dug in the floor.

“Well dat explains ‘ow ‘e got away without us seein’ ‘im,” Hazug said, staring down into the darkness of the hole, “I suppose dat we ‘ad better get after ‘im,” and he jumped down into the hole.

The orks in the workshop heard the sound of Hazug landing below them, and then some unintelligible muttering. Then there was silence.

“D’ya see anythin’?” Two Heads shouted into the hole.

“Nothin’,” Hazug shouted back up, “someone pass us a light down ‘ere would ya?”

Two Heads saw an oil lamp that had resisted being smashed on the floor nearby.

“Chuck dat down da ‘ole,” he said to one of his orks, pointing at the lamp, and the lamp was promptly thrown down to Hazug. Moments later there was a glow from the darkness below as Hazug caught and then lit the lamp.

Now able to see his surroundings more clearly, Hazug had a good look around. Unfortunately it appeared that Dok Gutstitch had left the workshop in the company of a number of Gretchin, and while there were a couple of his footprints remaining directly below the hole, those he had made when he left the scene had been obscured by those of his Gretchin, and with there also being many other tracks running in both directions, there was no way to tell in which direction the painboy had fled.

“See ‘ought yet?” Two Heads shouted into the hole.

“Nah,” Hazug shouted back up from the tunnel below, “dare’s too much other crap down ‘ere for me to be able to anythin’ out. ‘E could ‘ave gone either way from ‘ere. Chuck us down a rope and I’ll come back up.” Hazug climbed up the lowered rope and out of the hole just in time to hear his name being called from the direction of the massive hole in the workshop’s front wall.

“Hazug? Hazug is ya in ‘ere?” Mek Batrug called out, “I saw ya truck outside with dat bleedin’ weirdo sleepin’ next to it.”

“E’s ‘ere Batrug,” one of Two Heads shouted back as he helped Hazug out of the hole, “Wot d’ya want?”

“Wot’s goin’ on ‘ere?” Batrug asked as he made his way through the wreckage of the workshop.

“Da dok makin’ da cyborks killed da mek ‘ere and nicked most of ‘is kans,” Hazug replied.

“So ya mean dat dare’s no one’s usin’ dis place now den?”

“Dat’s right.”

“Good,” Batrug answered before he turned to one his own Gretchin assistants, “Get a move on grots,” he shouted at them, “I wants me new workshop ready and dis ‘ole ain’t goin’ to fix itself!”

Stoggi laughed as he made his way through the city. He had spent his entire life dodging out of the way of orks, but now things were different. The process to implant him into his dreadnought had been unpleasant to say the least, and all of his future meals would be consumed with the use of a straw poked through his vision slit, not to mention that the interior had smelt bad even before he had been wired into it, but he now had a body larger and tougher than any Ork could aspire to have without also being implanted into a dreadnought. So he was making the most of it.

Instead of keeping to the edges of streets and the tunnels that ran beneath them, Stoggi was striding straight down the middle of the busy streets and it was orks that were being forced to get out of his way for once. Some didn’t move quickly or far enough away of course, and Stoggi delighted in swinging the massive pincer-tipped arm he now possessed at them. The deadly limb was capable of tearing even the biggest of orks in half, and more than one Ork had now been reduced to a collection of bloody parts scattered behind him.

On his own, Stoggi was formidable enough, but sooner or later he would run into an Ork carrying something heavier than a pistol or rifle and they would be able to harm him even inside his dreadnought, fortunately for Stoggi he wasn’t alone. Behind him marched a small army of dreadnoughts piloted by his master’s squig-brained warriors that advanced without any fear for their own safety. All they cared about was following the orders of his master, and he had ordered them to follow and protect Stoggi. The crude intelligence of the squig brains implanted into the orks allowed them to quantify threats posed to them based on their size and the amount of noise they made, while the weapons they carried did not require the same hand eye coordination that had prevented his master from teaching them to use basic small arms. Instead the weapons of the dreadnoughts were extensions of the pilot’s own body. Extensions that they were making good use of.

The force of dreadnoughts smashed its way through a row of stalls and the lightweight vehicles down each side of the street Stoggi had lead them to without slowing down at all, and this gave Stoggi an idea. So far he had thought the same way as he had always done when selecting a route to follow through the streets of the city, following the roads laid out and selecting the best option when he came to junctions. But it suddenly occurred to him that with the strength and resilience given to him by his dreadnought, and those of the orks following him, he didn’t need to worry about where the roads were, he could just make his own where he needed them. Stoggi stopped his dreadnought and considered his location. Behind him the other dreadnoughts also halted, and Stoggi could hear the sound of their weapons firing at any orks who had not

yet been able to flee from the street. Stoggi figured out where he thought he was in relation to Dok Gutstitch's camp and turned to face in that direction, then he just ran forwards as fast as the machine he was piloting would allow him.

The wall ahead of Stoggi gave way as he charged headlong into it. The orks inside the building began to scatter as Stoggi came through their wall, laughing as he did, but the larger dreadnoughts that followed Stoggi, making their own larger holes as they did so, left them with no where to run, and they were trampled beneath the rampaging mechanical monstrosities.

Battering their way through one building after another appealed to the primal instincts of the squig-brained orks, and rather than just following behind Stoggi's dreadnought they began to charge ahead on their own. This didn't concern Stoggi so long as they remained travelling in the same direction, and fortunately the squig brains lacked the imagination to consider changing course away from the one that Stoggi had set them on. So Stoggi was only too happy to let the other dreadnoughts continue to run ahead of him, after all they were bigger, stronger and more heavily armed than he was so it seemed a sensible idea if they were the first to run into any trouble.

The rampage continued uninterrupted until the dreadnoughts reached the outer reaches of the city, there they came upon one of the crude shanty towns populated by Gretchin. Stoggi halted when he saw these simple hovels, more reluctant to crush his fellow Gretchin than the orks he was subservient to. The other dreadnoughts however, continued to rush ahead, scattering panic stricken Gretchin in all directions. Fortunately for the smaller creatures, smashing apart their tiny homes did not excite the squig brains implanted into the dreadnought pilots as much as smashing their way through the much larger and better built Ork structures had done, and they soon realised that Stoggi was no longer leading them. The dreadnoughts halted their charge almost as one before they tried to find Stoggi. The Gretchin moved his dreadnought through the path of destroyed homes until he reached the other dreadnoughts, and then began to carefully pick his way through the remaining shacks and lean-tos of the shanty town. The dreadnoughts followed him, not caring about the buildings they crushed as they did so, but at least now they were moving slowly enough that their occupants had enough time to escape.

Stoggi continued to lead the dreadnoughts in this manner until he was sure that the last of them was clear of the shanty town, where he once more broke into a run towards the camp.

17

Warboss Kromag was not impressed with Hazug's report.

"Ya let 'im away?" the enormous Ork yelled after Hazug told him of Dok Gutstitch's escape, "Why didn't ya send for me like ya was supposed to?"

"E saw us before we saw 'im boss," Hazug replied, "den 'e set an 'ole load of kans on us while 'e made a run for it."

"Dese would be da same kans wot 'ave just smashed dare way out da city right?"

"I reckon so," Hazug said, after the dreadnoughts had withdrawn from the battle in the mekboys' neighbourhood he had lost track of them. But it seemed unlikely that there would be more than one rampaging mob of dreadnoughts in the city.

"So just 'ow many kans are we talkin' about den?" Kromag asked.

"I ain't sure boss," Hazug admitted, "but I know 'e's got two real big 'uns, and at least one grot killa kan. I reckon dat dare's about a couple of dozen other kans."

"And dis news is already all over da city," Kromag said, "and some is sayin' dat it's my fault for trustin' a git lovin' Blood Axe."

"Maybe dey is right," came a shout from amongst assembled Ork nobs in Warboss Kromag's throne room. There was a sudden hush before the warboss responded.

"What?" he bellowed as he got to his feet as strode towards the nobs.

The group parted as the warboss approached them, unwilling to risk getting in his way as he sought out the culprit.

The Ork who had made the offending comment looked around as Kromag closed in on him and the other nobs all moved away from him.

"Well?" Warboss Kromag shouted as he drew close, "D'ya reckon dat ya could do it better den?" he asked.

The correct reply would of course have been 'no' and to put his outburst down to a simple error. But unfortunately the Ork nob suffered a sudden failure of intelligence.

"Better dan 'im and you," he said, and he smirked.

The smile stayed on his face as the warboss reached his out his hand and grasped the nob by the throat.

Then he lifted him off the floor and held him in mid air. His smile now gone from his face, the nob kicked his legs and tried to pry Kazkal Kromag's vice-like grip from his throat.

Kazkal himself just watched as the nob struggled while he choked the life out of him, tightening his grip. The nob suddenly ceased trying to claw his way free of the warboss's grip, and instead reached for his waist where he had a large knife tucked into his belt.

Kazkal saw what the nob was doing just as the weapon was pulled from his belt. He instantly released his grip and let the nob drop to the floor. Landing in a heap, the nob let go of his knife and it skid across the floor out of reach. He scrambled to get close enough o grab the knife again, but the nob was suddenly lifted up again as Kazkal delivered a strong kick to his stomach. Doubled up in pain the nob was helpless against the next blow, a strong punch aimed straight into his face, and there was a splatter of blood as his nose collapsed under the attack.

Stunned, the nob could no longer resist, but to Warboss Kazkal Kromag that meant nothing. His judgement and authority had been challenged openly in his throne room, and he intended to make an example of the dissident. He grabbed the nob by his collar, and delivered punch after punch to the nob's face. He let go only when the nob's corpse was limp in his grip and he let it fall back to the floor.

"Now where were we?" he asked as he returned to his throne, oblivious to the corpse lying in a pool of its own blood, "Ah yeah, dis bad dok just got away with a big bunch of kans, and everybody knows about it."

"E 'asn't ever beaten ya though, each time 'e's done a runner before ya could get near 'im," Hazug pointed out, "but I reckon dat dat's about to change."

"Ow come?" one of the other nobs asked before the warboss could ask himself.

"Because 'e ain't goin' to get any stronger dan 'e already is," Hazug answered, "and 'e can't 'ide all dem kans for long, so 'e's got to beat ya quick and get nobs to start backin' 'im as da boss. Can ya get some flyboys up yet?"

"Wot for?"

"To see where Gutstitch is takin' da kans."

Warboss Kazkal looked into the midst of the assembled orks.

"Corgut!" he shouted, "Come 'ere!" and an Ork mekboy made his way out of the crowd and towards the warboss's throne. His clothing consisted mainly of red, indicating that he was a member of the Evil Suns clan.

"Dis is Corgut," Warboss Kromag said to Hazug, "'e's taken over lookin' after me planes and other flyin' wotnot," then he turned to the mek and asked, "So are any of me planes workin' yet?"

“We was close last time checked boss,” Corgut answered, doing his best to conceal his nervousness, his predecessor had been killed for failing to get any aircraft airborne after all, “and we may ‘ave a couple of fightas ready now.”

“Den go and find out,” Warboss Kromag ordered him, “quickly,” he added and the mekboy ran from the room.

“We should ask da ship bosses to ‘elp an’ all,” Hazug suggested, “dey should be able to see all dem kans if dey is still together.”

Kaglord Skyburna checked his cockpit’s rear view mirrors before he ignited his aircraft’s engine. He wanted to be sure that there was at least one of the Gretchin ground crew directly behind him when he did.

The engine ignited first with a bang, then followed by a roar, and a blast of flame erupted from the tail of his fighter. Kaglord grinned as he heard, not one, but two distinct screams from Gretchin caught in the exhaust fire. Then, when his fighter did not explode for any reason he increased the power and felt a slight bump as he ran over a third Gretchin who was trying to remove the wooden blocks that stopped the plane from just rolling away on its own. Kaglord’s grin widened, he hadn’t even got to the runway yet, and he already had three kills.

Two other fighters made it to the start of the runway and lined up side by side, the engine on a fourth failing to ignite at all. Impatiently the three fighter pilots waited for clearance to launch. There was a ‘pop’ barely audible over the noise of his engine, but Kaglord saw the bright red flare in the sky next to the airbase’s command post that was the signal to go and he, along with the other two pilots, increased their engine power to maximum.

Kaglord felt himself being pressed back into his thickly padded seat as his fighter accelerated along the runway. The fighter shook as its speed increased, and pulling back on the control column, Kaglord laughed as he felt it lift clear of the ground and take to the sky. Beside him, another of the fighters was airborne, though the third stalled as it tried to take off. Its landing gear collapsed as it fell back to the ground, and it skidded along the runway, barely avoiding complete destruction when the missiles it carried were ripped free and exploded nearby.

Safely in the air now, Kaglord looked at the map he had been given, gripping his control column with just one hand as he held up the map with the other. The map was a crude sketch of the city below, with several key points identified. He turned the map until it appeared that his current heading was towards the top of the map as he viewed it. Then he shifted his attention towards the large arrow that had been drawn on it also, this was the direction in which he was to fly. His orders were quite simple, search for a mob of dreadnoughts last seen heading that way, follow them to wherever they were going and report back their location. Kaglord looked out of his cockpit in the direction of the arrow and saw that the other fighter was already banking off in that direction.

“Bugger it! ‘E’ll find ‘em first!” Kaglord shouted to himself. He set off after the other fighter, and was soon rewarded with the resounding boom as his aircraft punched its way through the sound barrier.

Stoggi was enjoying himself. Normally orks only let Gretchin go first to use them as a shield from incoming fire, or to make sure that it would be their smaller and weaker cousins that would blunder into minefields before they did. But right now he was a leader, and the squig-brained orks were his troops to command. Admittedly, he was only following orders that had been given to him by his master, but he felt good anyway. Then he heard the roar.

Encased inside his dreadnought, Stoggi was unable to identify the direction that the noise had come from, and the slit at the front of his dreadnought allowed him only a narrow field of vision. Fearing a wild squiggoth was about to charge him, he initially tried searching at ground level for the source of the noise. When Stoggi stopped to look around him, the Ork piloted vehicles also halted and mimicked his actions by turning from side to side as though they too were searching for something. Stoggi ignored this behaviour. Then Stoggi heard the roar again, but this time it was different. Rather than a brief but loud noise, this time it was more drawn out, and it seemed to alter its volume. Then Stoggi caught sight of an unusual pattern in the clouds on the horizon. Instead of the dark random shape there were two clouds that appeared as lines drawn straight across the sky. He tilted his dreadnought back and looked up as much as the machine would allow and he saw the pair of jet aircraft circling back around towards him.

“Dis is Kaglord,” Kaglord said having activated his fighter’s radio, “We ‘ave seen ‘em. We is followin’ ‘em now.”

Followed by the Ork piloted dreadnoughts, Stoggi moved his own machine as fast as he could, expecting death to strike out at him from the sky at any moment. But the attack never came. Instead the sound of the planes faded as they passed over him without shooting and then gained altitude.

Stoggi didn't question his luck, and he pressed on towards the camp oblivious to the jets now loitering high above.

Kaglord was getting seriously bored now. He was an Evil Sun, and as such he loved speed, that was why he became a pilot in the first place. While bikers and wagon drivers were boasting about how far they could travel in day, he could better them all. But right now he was flying in circles, his speed kept deliberately low to enable him to keep an eye on the cumbersome dreadnoughts below as they ran through the countryside towards the coast. To make matters worse, he and the other jet pilot had been specifically told that they were not allowed to attack the dreadnoughts.

Something caught his eye ahead of the dreadnoughts. The light was starting to fade now, but even from his altitude, Kaglord could make out crowds of orks standing near the coastline ahead of him. Beside them was a row of buildings that jutted out into the water and he decided that he'd better call this in.

"Master!" Stoggi yelled as he approached the camp at the head of the force of dreadnoughts, "Master!"

Several Gretchin ran into the nearest of the sheds, returning with Dok Gutstitch himself.

"Good lad Stoggi," Gutstitch said, smiling when he saw that the Gretchin had successfully led the dreadnoughts here without losing a single one. Then, over the sound of the dreadnoughts' engines he heard another sound and he looked up and his face fell.

"Dare's fightas up dare! Ya was followed!" he yelled, then he looked around, "Right grots, get all da cyborks and kans aboard, we gotta move now!"

Corgut reached Warboss Kromag's palace shortly after dark, and was shown straight into the war room while a servant went to fetch the warboss himself.

"So wot d'ya want?" Warboss Kromag said when he entered the room, accompanied by a Goff nob.

"One of me lads reckons 'e's found Gutstitch," Corgut told him before pointing at a spot on the map of the continent that occupied the table which occupied much of the room's floor space, "'e's about 'ere."

"Wot did 'e see?" Kromag asked, joining Corgut beside the map.

"Da mob of kans came 'ere, where dare was an 'ole bunch of lads just standin' about by some sheds doin' nought."

"Den we got 'im," Kromag said, grinning. Then he turned to face the Goff, "Go round up some lads, and get some transport. I is goin' to finish dis off now."

The nob grinned back at his warboss and left the room. Corgut began to move also.

"'Ang on a mo," Kromag told him, "I ain't said dat ya can leave yet."

"Wot else d'ya want boss?"

"I ain't givin' Gutstitch da chance to do a runner before I can get to 'im," he said, "so I wants ya to figure out which of me kroozers is closest to dis place and I wants ya to tell 'em to blast it. By da time I gets dare meself I just wants to be pickin' over wots left in da rubble. Goddit?"

"Goddit boss," Corgut answered, and he left the war room.

18

“Move quicker grots!” the runtherd bellowed at his charges as they hauled the massive torpedo into position and pushed it into the tube. There was a barely audible scream as one of them was caught in front of it and squashed flat against the inside of the tube. “Now shut da door!” the runtherd shouted, whipping the nearest of the Gretchin for no other reason than they were close enough for him to be able to do so.

The torpedo tube hatch slammed shut, and a Gretchin standing on a platform beside the hatch secured it with a large bolt before waving a brightly coloured flag. Seeing the flag, another Gretchin standing at the back of the torpedo room yelled into a small hole beside him.

“Rokkits ready!” he shouted. The Gretchin’s voice was carried down the hole until it reached another Gretchin listening at the other end. He in turn shouted the same message into a different hole for another Gretchin to hear. In this way the message was carried through the warship for almost half its length to the bridge over a mile away where it was heard by another Gretchin.

“Da rokkits is ready boss,” the Gretchin told the ship’s captain.

“Is we on target?” the captain asked a mekboy who stood with his eyes pressed up to what looked like a microscope mounted on one of the control consoles.

“We is now,” the mekboy answered as he adjusted a dial next to his targeting system.

“Good,” the captain said, then to one of the Gretchin on the bridge he said, “I want all da gunners ready to shoot at da explosion when dey see it,” and the Gretchin passed his order.

The captain nodded at the mekboy, and he jabbed his thumb down on a large red button prominently labelled ‘FIRE DA ROKKITS’.

The torpedo salvo blasted away from the cruiser. Most of them successfully cleared the ship without failing, but by the time that they reached the atmosphere a full third of them had lost control, shut down or detonated prematurely.

The remaining torpedoes continued on their path towards the site identified by mek Corgut. Their passage through the atmosphere appearing as a swarm of fiery streaks in the sky over the Ork city below that caused many of its inhabitants to stop what they were doing and gaze skywards.

“Hazug, come and see!” Sophie said excitedly as she burst into the room where he sat snoozing by the fire.

“Wot?” he asked startled as he awoke.

“Come and look at the sky,” Sophie said to him, pulling his arm to get him out of the chair.

“Let go,” he said as he got up, “I is getting’ up. Now lets see wots so important.”

Sophie led him outside where Rhia was already staring up at the sky as a cluster of balls of fire streaked across it. Hazug turned his head to follow the lights until they disappeared over the horizon. Moments later there was a flash from the point where they had disappeared and the sky on the horizon there turned orange.

“It looked like what happened when that spaceship was shot down,” Sophie said, referring to the recent destruction of an Ork cruiser that had taken them on a journey across the planet, “has another one been destroyed?”

“Nah,” Hazug replied, “dare’s wasn’t enough junk for dat. I reckon dey was rokkits.”

As Hazug spoke the sky was once more lit up by smaller bright flashes of light that followed the path of the torpedoes over the horizon.

“I reckon dat I better go see da boss about dis,” he said, “everyone get in da truck.”

“E’s not in,” the guard told Hazug when he pulled up to Warboss Kromag’s palace.

“I needs to see ‘im,” Hazug said, “where’d ‘e go?”

“Dunno, dat mek wot runs da flyboys for ‘im turned up after ya left and den da boss got together an ‘ole bunch of lads in wagons and went off with ‘em. Dey looked well chuffed to be goin’ so I reckon dey was expectin’ a good scrap.”

“Did ‘e take Corgut with ‘im?”

“Who?”

“Da mek.”

“Oh ‘im, nah. ‘E buggered off back to ‘is planes.”

Hazug drove off.

“Where are we going now?” Sophie asked.

“To find Corgut. Looks like da boss ordered da cruiser to shoot at somethin’ and I want to know wot.”

They found Corgut in one of the hangars, he and his Gretchin were still working on getting the air wing based in the city back up and running in the cold weather.

"I'm busy," the mek said as soon as he saw Hazug getting out of his truck.

"Den ya better answer me questions quick den," Hazug told him, "Now where's da boss gone?"

"To deal with dat bad dok," Corgut answered, "if 'e even still alive. I'm bettin' dat da kroozer will 'ave killed 'im and all 'is cyborks an all."

"So da boss did order a kroozer to blast somethin' den?"

"Yeah, 'e didn't want da bad dok getting' away again."

"And 'ow did 'e know where to go?"

"I got some fightas workin' and two of 'em followed dem kans back to sheds by da water. Now can if I don't get more of 'em workin' den da boss is goin' to do wot 'e did to da last mek dat ran dis place."

"I is done," Hazug said, "But who's pilot wot told ya where da dok was ad where is 'e now?"

"'E's called Kaglort, and 'e is drinkin' in da bar by da gate. But dey won't let in, it for speed freaks only, so no git lovers is allowed."

Hazug returned to his truck.

"I can't go where da da lad I'm lookin' for is," Hazug said as he started the vehicle's engine.

"So where are we going then?" Sophie asked him.

"To get someone wot can."

Only a few of the orks in the bar, mainly those nearest to the main entrance, bothered to look up when the wooden door shattered as the guard placed outside to make sure that only the speed freaks of the Evil Suns were admitted was thrown through it.

"See!" Two Heads Smasha Butt Face both yelled as the stepped through the splintered remains of the door, "I told ya I could make ya go fasta dan da flyboys in 'ere!"

At the sound of this the bar fell silent and the occupants all stared at the newcomer, scowling at him. Any suggestion that there was anyone faster than them was a mortal insult to the Ork pilots gathered together, and under normal circumstances they would have torn the culprit limb from limb until he learned some manners. But Two Heads was a special case.

Firstly he was much bigger than the assembled pilots. Their obsession with speed had lead them to pursue a way of life that did not involve enough of the close combat that triggered muscle growth in orks to allowed them to get large enough to be considered nobbs like Two Heads, hence their leaders instead being the meks who built and maintained their precious aircraft. Secondly, even though they had never met Two Heads, they had all heard of him and would rather someone else hit him first so that he would be too busy killing them to notice someone else sticking a blade in him, and finally there were the half dozen orks with rifles now entering the bar behind him.

"Right," one of Two Heads said calmly, "Which one of ya flyboys is Kaglort?" the other continued.

The bar's occupants just stared back at Two Heads in silence. Two Heads looked either side of him and nodded at his troops and gunfire echoed around the room as Two Heads mob fired over the heads of the bar's customers. In unison, they ducked for cover.

"It's 'im! 'E's Kaglort!" one of the Gretchin waiters cried out from beneath the table he had sought cover under and he pointed at a nearby Ork.

Two Heads pushed his way across the bar and grabbed the Ork pointed at by his collar and lifted him back to his feet.

"So is ya Kaglort den?" one of Two Heads asked the Ork, as the other looked him up and down.

"I is," the Ork replied, followed by a gulp. The he smiled at Two Heads and added, "Ow can I 'elp ya?"

"Dare's someone outside wants a word," Two Heads replied, and he dragged Kaglort from the bar.

Outside Hazug and his servants waited by Hazug's truck.

"Dis is 'im," Two Heads said to Hazug and he let go of Kaglort.

"So Kaglort, Corgut tells me dat ya followed a bunch of kans today," Hazug said.

"Dat's right," Kaglort replied, "I followed 'em to da ocean, and den I was told to get back 'ere after I called in wot I seen."

"And wot was dat?"

"Just an 'ole load of lads standin' around," Kaglort said.

"Wot, dey was just out in da open?"

"Yeah, dare was some big long sheds near 'em, but dey was outside where I could see 'em."

Hazug frowned.

"Tell me abut dese sheds," he said.

"I dunno," Kaglort said and he shrugged, "dey was just big long sheds wot went into da water."

"Into da water?" Hazug repeated.

"Yeah, into da water, and some of 'em 'ad doors open into it."

"Doors? 'Ow big was dey?"

"Big enough for a wagon I reckon."

“Boats,” Hazug said suddenly, “da sheds was for boats.”

Wot does dat mean?” one of Two Heads asked while they both scratched his heads.

“It means dat if Gutstitch saw ‘is fighta,” Hazug said, indicating Kaglort, “den ‘e probably got away before da kroozer blasted where dey was.”

“So where is ‘e now den?” Two Heads asked.

“I got a feelin’ ‘e’s on ‘is way ‘ere,” Hazug said.

19

Sat at Hazug's kitchen table, Two Heads and Kaglort ate while they listened to the sounds of Hazug searching through the room containing all of his unpacked possessions. Following the random bumps and crashes there was the rapid pounding of feet as he rushed downstairs and into the kitchen holding one of his maps.

"Budge up," Hazug said, rolling the map out on the table.

The map showed a large area of the continent they were on and clearly indicated their city.

"Now show us where dese sheds was," Hazug said to Kaglort, and with his mouth still full of food the Ork pilot pointed to a location on the coast.

"Ere," he said as best he could, and Hazug produced a piece of charcoal and marked the location with a small circle.

"Now we is 'ere," Hazug then said, indicating the city that was already marked on the map along with glyphs representing Warboss Kromag, "so if Gutstitch 'as some boats den 'e can come along da coast," and he drew a line from the circle along the coastline in the direction of the city, "and den 'e can come up dis river wot our own boats use to 'ere," and he continued the line up the river, stopping when he reached the symbol of the city.

"But wot's da point?" Kaglort asked, "It didn't look like 'e 'ad enough lads to take over da entire city to me."

"'E doesn't need 'em," Hazug replied, "'e's gamblin' on da boss not bein' 'ere, so dare's no one dat can order all da lads in da city to fight 'im. All 'e needs to do is take over da palace and den tell everyone dat 'e's da new boss. Den 'e can get 'is cyborks to bash a few nobs before Kazkal gets back and 'e'll convince enough others to follow 'is orders instead of da boss's."

"So when da real boss gets back," one of Two Heads said while the other chewed, "Gutstitch can get our own lads to fight 'im."

"Dat's right," Hazug said.

"So wot do we do?" Two Heads asked.

"We'll 'ave to fight 'im ourselves," Hazug answered, "dare ain't no one else to do it."

"With wot?" one of Two Heads said as the other just snorted, "Me wagon's still bust, and I only got seven lads left after dat scrap with da kans. Da other nobs ain't goin' to join in on our say so, and by da time dey decide to do somethin' Gutstitch will already 'ave da palace."

"Dare's still a few of Maggort's lads left," Hazug replied, "I reckon dey'll want some payback after fightin' da kans. All we 'as to do is find 'em."

"Dat still leaves us with..." one of Two Heads began before pausing to add up the number of orks Hazug was discussing. "Less than twenty," the other added, "and dat ain't enough to defend an entire city."

"I know dat," Hazug said, "but we don't need to defend da entire city from Gutstitch's cyborks."

"Why not?" Kaglort interrupted.

"Because dare's a couple of places where we know 'e's got to be. First 'e's got to get all 'is cyborks and kans off 'is boats, which means dat 'e's got to land at da docks, and den 'e's got to go to Kazkal's palace. So we can wait for 'im by da docks, and den move to da palace if we can't stop 'im dare."

"But 'ow is ya goin' to take out all dem lads?" Kaglort asked, "Dare was loads of 'em."

"Easy," Hazug replied, "we sink da boats before da lads can get off 'em."

"Ow ya goin' to do dat?" Kaglort exclaimed.

"I know wot ya is thinkin'" one of Two Heads responded while the other grinned, "We is goin' to use dem rokkits we found in git town ain't we?"

"Got a better idea?" Hazug answered, Two Heads shook his heads.

"Right den," Hazug said, rolling up the map, "we'll gather up as many others as we can and meet up at da docks. Two Heads, ya 'ad best send ya lads dare right now with da rokkits and tell 'em dat if Gutstitch turns up before us dey is to let 'im 'ave it."

Concerned about how long it would be before Dok Gutstitch arrived with his force, Hazug had the orks split up following the impromptu meeting in his kitchen. Kaglort returned to the airbase to see if there were any pilots interested in joining the fight, while Two Heads returned home with his troops to fetch their share of the missile launchers seized days earlier. It was agreed that Two Heads would order his orks to the docks under Gorrid's command while he went to seek out what remained of Maggort's orks.

Hazug himself headed for the mek workshops again, taking with him his servants, some of his share of the missile launchers and an extra lasgun.

"Why are we bringing all these?" Rhia asked him about the human made weapons they were loading into his truck, "Do you think it a good idea to waste so many?"

“Dey ain’t bein’ wasted,” Hazug replied, “we need da rokkits to take out da kans, and I reckon dat I can get some more ‘elp from Batrug if I give ‘im one of dese zapppas.”

“Yeah so stop just standin’ about and ‘elp loadin’ ‘em git,” Ratish added.

Mek Batrug stood in the doorway of his workshop, holding the human weapon in his hands.

“Well it ain’t as good as a proper Ork shoota,” he said, “but I’ll ‘elp ya out in exchange for one of ‘em. Dey’ve got batteries right?”

“Dat’s right,” Hazug told the mekboy, “dare’s four batteries for each of ‘em. Ya can ‘ave the full four. Now wot about da wagon?” and he nodded in the direction of Two Heads damaged battlewagon that still sat opposite Batrug’s new workshop.

“I ain’t looked at it yet,” Batrug admitted, “I ‘as been too busy fixin’ up me workshop after ya put dat big ‘ole in it today,” and he pointed at the place where the mega dreadnought had burst through the wall earlier on in the day, “and dare ain’t no way dat I can get it runnin’ in anythin’ less dan a couple of days.”

“Fair enough,” Hazug said, disappointed, but not entirely surprised given the extent of the damage inflicted on the vehicle, “Wot else ya got den?”

“I just got wot I’ve found in ‘ere. I ‘ad loads of stuff in me old place, but its all been bust up,” Batrug replied, then his ears suddenly twitched as he remembered something else, “Dare’s always Gutstitch’s big trukkk,” he added, “it was just left outside and I took it around dat back. I reckon dat I can shove a big gun or two on it.”

“Ow long will it take?”

“I’ll ‘ave it done tonight.”

“Do it, den meet us at da docks,” Hazug told him before returning to his truck and driving away.

“This isn’t the way to the docks,” Sophie commented then added, “Wait a minute, we’re heading towards the weird huts!”

Though not exactly thrilled at being disturbed just as he was going to bed, Drazzok readily agreed to help out against Dok Gutstitch when Hazug pressed a pair of teeth into his outstretched hand. From there, Hazug drove directly to the docks by the river. They arrived just after Two Heads had joined his own troops with the survivors of Maggort’s orks, though there was not yet any sign of Kaglort arriving.

The docks were quiet at this time of night, only a handful of orks remained to stand guard over the watercraft of various sizes from tiny row boats to large ocean going vessels were on the scene, and they eyed Hazug and the other heavily armed orks with suspicion, and attempts to get them to join the fight that they expected were unsuccessful, the guards being unwilling to leave their boats. The best Hazug could get was a promise that they would join in if they could do so while still aboard them. The majority of the greenskins at the docks were, as at any time, Gretchin. The orks smaller cousins carried out much of the manual labour during the day, except for operating the various cranes that predated the Ork invasion which were still run by humans, and when the docks shut down each evening many of them stayed to rummage through whatever was discarded during the day in case there was anything among it that was useful to them.

“Dey’ll come from dat way,” Hazug said, pointing downriver as the orks stood with Hazug and his servants at the end of the closest empty pier, “we needs to be as far as possible down dare. Dat way Gutstitch’ll ‘ave to come past us before ‘e can unload ‘is cyborks. We all find somewhere to ‘ide and shoot rokkits at ‘is boats when dey turn up.”

Now with a plan to carry out, the motley warband made its way down river until they reached a loading area at the very end of the docks.

“Dis is perfect,” Hazug said as he looked around. The loading area was littered with empty crates of various sizes, and under the direction of Two Heads the warband arranged them to provide places from which they could not only fire on passing boats, but also defend against any cyborks or dreadnoughts that made it ashore while Hazug went to retrieve his truck. Then, with their defences in place, the warband took cover behind them and readied their weapons.

Taking up a position behind the defensive barricade closest to where Dok Gutstitch was expected to approach from, Hazug removed an alien device from a pouch on his belt. Anyone who knew Hazug would have seen the device often, he had first come into possession of it when he had investigated the death of an Ork killed by tau warriors in the old human capital city, it was an advanced camera that Hazug had discovered had several uses, one of which was the ability to see in the dark without hindrance.

“I’ll keep watch for ‘em,” he said loudly so that the entire warband could hear him, “and I’ll tell ya all when they is comin’. When I do, I wants ya to shoot ya rokkits at da boats. Goddit?”

The warband indicated that they understood, and Hazug lifted the alien optical device to his eye and began to stare down the river.

“I still think this is a bad idea,” Rhia whispered to Sophie in Gothic as they readied the lasguns Hazug had given them for the battle he expected, “Hazug shouldn’t be using so many of those missiles in one go. They’re irreplaceable.”

“Hazug knows what he’s doing,” Sophie responded, “You should trust him to take care of these things.”

Suddenly both Rhia and Sophie cried out as Drazzok slapped them both.

“Stop talkin’ dat git talk,” he said, “if ya got somethin’ to say, den say it proper.”

Then there were more voices, coming from behind the warband.

“Hazug? Two Heads?” Kaglort’s voice called out in the darkness, “Is ya ‘ere? I brung some extra lads to ‘elp out.”

“Over ‘ere!” Two Heads shouted, “Get behind da boxes and wait for Hazug to tell ya when to shoot.”

The newly arrived orks split up and joined the others behind the barricades just as there was the sound of engines coming from down the river.

20

Dok Gutstitch watched from the barge at the rear of the convoy while one of his Gretchin piloted it through the water, just as others were doing in the other barges. He and his Gretchin had completed the evacuation of his camp in enough time to get away with his entire army before the orbital bombardment had lit up the sky overhead. Unsurprisingly the jets that he had spotted overhead when Stoggi had arrived at the camp with his new dreadnought force had not hung around long enough to witness the evacuation and he had been able to make it all the way around the coast and up the river without seeing a single greenskin along the way. Now, he thought, Kazkal Kromag was likely rushing off to investigate the destroyed camp and see if there was anything left worth taking. While he was gone, Dok Gutstitch planned to take his throne. Of all the barges in the convoy, Dok Gutstitch's own vessel rode the lowest in the water. All of the others had cargo holds filled with his cybork warriors, well over a hundred in total, while five or six dreadnoughts were loaded onto each of their decks. His vessel carried only two dreadnoughts, but the lower weight that would have caused his barge to ride higher in the water was forgone owing to the greater size of the two mega dreadnoughts and the special nature of the cyborks carried in its hold. The warriors that Dok Gutstitch had selected to accompany him on his own vessel were, in his opinion, his finest creations. Each of the twenty cyborks sitting in the hold of his barge, motionless aside from the swaying caused by the motion of the water in they travelled had not only been augmented with crude Ork cybernetics, their bodies had been integrated into suits of mega armour fitted with vicious power claws that could rip apart not only orks, but the most heavily armoured of vehicles and fortifications. With a score of them surrounding him, Dok Gutstitch believed himself unstoppable.

Up ahead, still in front of the lead barge, Dok Gutstitch could just about make out the silhouette of the Ork city against the night sky, and with no other sources of noise closer to him, he could the usual sounds of an Ork settlement at night as its inhabitants marked the ending of another day with eating, drinking and fighting. Dok Gutstitch grinned to himself. With any luck he would be able to march his entire army right up to Kazkal Kromag's palace without anyone trying to stop him.

"Master look!" a Gretchin suddenly yelled at him excitedly, and he saw that the Gretchin was pointing at a spot on the river bank up ahead where a pair of massive concrete barriers stuck out into the river from each side while further concrete pillars were set into the river sufficiently far apart to allow even ocean going ships enough room to pass between them. The structures were just a few of many left over from the time when the human Imperium controlled this world, and the complicated metal gates that had been mounted between each of the pillars and allowed the rest of the river's great width to be sealed off had long since been removed and used by the orks to make something more to their tastes, leaving only the concrete sections behind. What purpose the humans had intended the barrier to perform, Dok Gutstitch neither knew nor cared, but he knew exactly what passing it would mean. Beyond it lay the city dockyards.

"Signal da other boats," Gutstitch ordered his Gretchin, "tell 'em we is nearly dare, and dey is to pull into da first empty spot on da docks wot dey find."

The Gretchin at the front of Dok Gutstitch's barge repeated his order to be ready to dock as soon as possible, adding the words 'pass it on' at the end so that the order would be carried along to the lead boat in the convoy.

Passing through the one of the gaps between the concrete structures, Dok Gutstitch decided that Gork and Mork were smiling on him. Apart from a few small, flimsy row boats, the nearest pier was empty, and there was no sign of any movement among the boxes piled on the shore. This meant that there would be no guards to raise the alarm while his Gretchin unloaded his army from the barges. Dok Gutstitch watched as, the lead barge began to turn towards the pier and the others behind it followed.

Then there was a flash from the shore, and a whoosh as a missile shot towards the lead barge and struck it head on.

"Get ready," Hazug said softly as he observed the boat approach through his viewing device. The vessel was simple narrow barge that was common among orks. But what made this one stand out were the dreadnoughts standing on its deck, he counted five of them. Then another barge appeared, also with dreadnoughts standing motionless on it, then a third and a fourth.

"Dis is it," Hazug said, putting the viewer away and picking up his rifle. He aimed at the lead barge, lifting the muzzle to take account of the distance between him and the approaching watercraft. Then, just as the barges were turning to face directly towards him, Hazug fired the rocket mounted beneath his rifle.

"Let rip!" Hazug shouted as he watched his rocket smash into the barge. Unfortunately it struck its target too high, and the barge continued to approach the pier.

There was another flash from beside Hazug as one of Two Head's orks fired a human built missile launcher towards the barge. The projectile slammed into the dreadnought standing nearest to the barge's prow. Around Hazug orks cheered as the fighting machine toppled off the barge into the water.

"Da boats! Shoot da bloody boats!" Hazug shouted, "Den all da kans'll sink!"

Another pair of missiles shot across the water. One flew straight over the first barge, and instead hit the bank on the far side of the river. The other missile, however, struck the barge just above the waterline and blew a massive hole in it. The barge began to tip towards the hole as water flooded into it. The remaining dreadnoughts standing on it toppled over as the slant of the deck became too much and they followed the first dreadnought into the river.

Dok Gutstitch watched in horror as the Gretchin crew of the lead barge leapt into the water, abandoning all of the precious cyborks it carried within its hold. As the barge continued to disappear beneath the water, Dok Gutstitch saw more missiles coming from the shore.

"Faster! Go faster!" he bellowed, waving his arms in the air, "Get to da shore and get me cyborks off da boats!"

There was a crashing sound from ahead as the second barge tried to move past the lead vessel as it disappeared beneath the surface, but succeeded only in striking the sinking vessel as it went under. Now holed beneath the water line this barge also began to take on water as it continued to move forwards and, because the hole in its hull was far larger than the one inflicted on the other barge by the missile attack, it did so at a rate far faster than the first barge.

The crew of the third barge reacted quicker, however, and they steered their vessel towards the pier so that the second barge was between them and the shore for as long as possible to provide a shield from attack as it sank. The barge did not completely escape attack though. But when the second barge had sunk enough to allow the third to be engaged from the shore, it was much closer to its destination.

While Hazug fit another rocket under his rifle, he saw another two missiles skim across the water and strike a barge that had been forced further away from the pier by the two that were now rapidly disappearing from view. But as the pair of stricken vessels disappeared they revealed another barge that had used them as cover while it moved closer.

"Dat one!" Hazug shouted, pointing at the rapidly closing barge, "Shoot dat one!" and he fired his rocket at it.

The explosive projectile landed in the water beside the barge before detonating. Aside from a plume of water that drenched the deck, his attack had no effect. Another missile passed above the dreadnoughts standing on the barge's deck as it closed on the pier, and the fighting machines pivoted to face the direction of attack before returning fire.

The volley of rockets, energy blasts and large calibre bullets tore through the stack of empty crates that concealed a pair of Two Heads' orks and one of the pilots and when the cloud of smoke and debris settled down Hazug saw that they were all dead.

"Rokkit!" he shouted to Ratish, and the Gretchin handed his master a fresh rocket for his weapon. As Hazug loaded the rocket and prepared to fire again, there was another crash. Hazug ignored the noise at first, such sounds were common in battle, but as he got back into position to attack the nearest barge he saw that its crew had rammed it into the pier and now dreadnoughts were walking off its deck and along the pier, firing as they strode forwards. Hazug saw that one of them was the smaller Gretchin-piloted machine that had led the larger ones away from the workshop.

Hazug shifted his aim from the barge to the nearest dreadnought and fired. His rocket hit the dreadnought just below the vision slit, and the machine collapsed and fell into the water as its pilot was engulfed in the explosion and his body ripped apart by the shrapnel from his machine's armour plating.

Two of his barges had sunk, and a third began burning badly in the centre of the river when the missile attack from the shore was followed up by a storm of green lightning conjured up by a weirdboy that Dok Gutstitch caught sight of when he briefly appeared from his hiding place to channel his collected psychic energy across the water. But in spite of his rapidly increasing losses, Dok Gutstitch's mood was lifted when he saw that another barge had reached the pier and was unloading its deadly cargo. The barge had rammed the pier and would most likely sink before long, but there would be plenty of time for his cyborks to be disembarked. In spite of his losses, Dok Gutstitch still had half his force remaining, including all of his best troops and dreadnoughts. More than enough to deal with the paltry force that faced him on the shore. The missile fire had ceased for now, evidently the dreadnoughts about to over run whoever was shooting at his barges were of much greater concern.

“Go faster!” Gutstitch ordered, he knew that the more troops he got ashore, the lighter his losses were likely to be at this early stage but more importantly he was eager to get in close and witness the deaths of his enemies.

“Let rip!” Two Heads yelled in unison when he saw the cyborks begin to clamber off the barge and shamble along the pier towards his position. Those orks that were sharing his hiding place promptly dropped the missile launchers they had been given and instead picked up the rifles they were more used to. Rapidly they brought their guns to bear on the slowly moving cyborks, pulled their fingers back on their triggers and held them there.

The cyborks jerked as the bullets impacted on them, but their bodies were reinforced by the cybernetic components that Dok Gutstitch had implanted in them, and they withstood the attack.

“Reload and do it again!” Two Heads ordered when the orks’ magazines were emptied. As quickly as they could the orks reloaded their weapons and took aim once more. There was another roar of gunfire as Two Heads and his orks opened fire.

Two Heads, remembering how the cybork in the bar had been stopped by hacking off its head, aimed high and he smiled both his mouths when he saw two of the cyborks drop as bullets punched into their skulls and bounced around inside. The fire from the orks with him was more random, though this time it was more effect than the first volley and another three cyborks were brought down as their bionics were damaged and they could no longer keep moving.

Flashes of light erupted from Hazug’s hiding place as Rhia and Sophie joined in the attack on the cyborks. Neither of the humans were professional soldiers, but their weapons were better built and inherently more accurate than the orks’ crude firearms, and their shots hit their targets more often than not. Unfortunately, the lasguns they wielded lacked the stopping power to bring down any more of the cyborks and they continued their advance.

Most of the orks, meanwhile, were more concerned with the remaining dreadnoughts. Not only were they larger than the cyborks, they were also closer, and like Hazug they fired their next volley of missiles at the approaching war machines. Hazug himself was just getting ready to launch another rocket when he witnessed a volley of missiles from one of the other Ork positions pass close by the advancing dreadnoughts. One of the missiles was aimed too low, and it ploughed into the thick timbers of the pier itself, blasting a chunk out of the wood, and Hazug suddenly had an idea.

“Shoot da planks!” he yelled as loudly as he could, and he fired his own rocket at the pier in front of the dreadnoughts. With a deep sense of satisfaction Hazug watched as the next volley of missiles was directed at the pier rather than the advancing dreadnoughts.

All around him, Stoggi felt the shock waves of the missile impacts on the pier, but he could tell that every single one of the shots had missed him and the larger dreadnoughts behind him. His first reaction was to grin; then he yelled, “Ha! Ya missed me!” But then he heard something else, a creaking sound. It was quiet at first, but it grew louder and Stoggi realised that it was coming from beneath him. Stoggi bent his dreadnought forwards slightly, and he saw what the missiles had done to the pier.

Massive holes had been blasted in the planks, and those that remained were badly damaged. Each time a dreadnought put its foot down the impact caused another split to appear.

Stoggi broke into a run, pushing his dreadnought to go as fast as it could. He heard the sound of the pier collapsing, and he expected to hit the river beneath at any moment. He brought his dreadnought to a halt and closed his eyes tightly, waiting for the water to flood into it and drown him. But then he realised that he wasn’t falling and he opened them again. Forgetting for a moment that he was in the midst of a battle, Stoggi turned around to look back down the pier and saw the massive gap where a section had collapsed behind him and sent the larger Ork piloted dreadnoughts plummeting into the river and cutting him off from the cyborks. Suddenly the sound of bullets hitting the rear of his dreadnought brought Stoggi back to his senses and he turned around once more.

Hazug ducked back behind the barricade to reload his rifle after emptying the magazine into the smaller dreadnought when it foolishly turned its back on him.

“Just like a grot,” he said to no one in particular, “always forgettin’ wot dey is doin’.”

Hearing this, Sophie looked at Ratish and smirked. Ratish just scowled back at her.

Hazug stood up again and fired another full magazine into the dreadnought now heading towards his position, but the thicker frontal armour of the machine was too tough for his relatively puny bullets to do more than scratch. More gunshots rang out as the other orks began to shoot at the dreadnought, and Hazug noticed that none of them were firing their missiles at it. For a moment Hazug considered the possibility that they were conserving their ammunition for the larger dreadnoughts on the remaining barges. But Hazug was the only Blood Axe left in the system, and orks from any of the other clans would have little,

if any, understanding of the concept of conserving ammunition. This meant only one thing; they were out of missiles.

“Ow many rokkits I got left grot?” Hazug said to Ratish as he ducked down out of sight once more.

“None master,” Ratish replied as he stuck his hand into the bag he carried Hazug’s extra ammunition in and rummaged around inside it. Hazug turned to Drazzok instead.

“Wot about ya givin’ us an ‘and den?” he asked, “Ow about another blast?”

“Give us a chance,” Drazzok replied, breathing heavily, “I needs some time to rest after dat last one.”

“Den dare’s only one other way to do dis,” Hazug said and he leant his rifle up against the crates and drew his pistol and blade. Then he leapt up onto the crates he had been using for cover and he charged straight at the dreadnought screaming.

“Waaagh!”

Seeing the Ork nob charging directly to him, Stoggi aimed his machine gun and fired. From inside his dreadnought, he heard the automatic weapon until there was a sudden ‘click’ as it ran out of ammunition.

Caught in the open, Hazug did not even try to avoid the burst of fire from the dreadnought. But while a Gretchin’s marksmanship is generally better than that of an Ork only one of Stoggi’s bullets hit him, just clipping his arm. Hazug ignored the pain and continued his charge.

Stoggi raised his pincer tipped arm to meet Hazug’s charge just as the Blood Axe brought his blade crashing down. There were sparks as the blade scraped against the mechanical limb, and Hazug jumped backwards to avoid the snapping pincer.

There was a double cry of “Waaagh!” as Two Heads rushed out from behind his barricade with his rifle held high and rushed to join the fight.

Stoggi swung his pincer at the new threat, but as he did so Hazug lunged forwards again and aimed his blade at the control cables clustered near to the elbow of the arm on which the weapon was mounted. Oil spurted from a ruptured tube as Hazug sliced through the vital control lines driving the dreadnought’s close combat weapon.

Inside the machine, Stoggi howled in pain as the damage inflicted sent a sudden uncontrolled electrical surge into his body, and he spun the dreadnought around to face Hazug once more. Right as Two Heads reached him. The Evil Sun nob swung his rifle and the combat blade attached to its muzzle scraped across the engine mounted on the dreadnought’s back until it caught on a loose pipe and ripped through it.

Stoggi heard his engine start to splutter. He had no control over his dreadnought’s pincer, but its arm was otherwise still just about functional, and he swung it towards Two Heads, pushing the nob to the ground. Hazug swung his own blade again, but without the additional momentum of his charge he did little more than scratch the body of the dreadnought.

The blow disorientated Stoggi slightly as the sound of the blade’s impact echoed inside his dreadnought. Coming rapidly to his sense, however, the Gretchin simply stepped towards Hazug, and he was likewise pushed over by the bulk of the armoured walking machine.

Still lying prone, Two Heads fired his rifle at the exposed rear of the dreadnought, emptying his magazine. There were sparks as the rounds for the most part bounced off the heavy armour plating, but in places it was thin enough for some of the sustained burst to punch through. Inside the dreadnought, Stoggi felt a bullet whizz past him from behind before the now heavily deformed projectile embedded itself in the armour plating in front of him, and he felt the already damaged pincer arm go completely limp and drop to the side of the dreadnought’s body.

Stoggi turned the dreadnought around again, and charged towards Two Heads, intending to trample while he still lay on the ground. But the two-headed Ork was too quick for him, and he rolled out of the way before he could be crushed.

Meanwhile, Hazug had picked himself up, and he ran after the dreadnought and leapt up onto its back. Stoggi tried his best to shake the Ork off him, but Hazug had wrapped his arms firmly around the machine and all Stoggi succeeded in doing was forcing Hazug to drop his blade in order to be able to keep hanging on.

Doing his best to keep from falling off the dreadnought as Stoggi continued to move about wildly, Hazug pulled himself up onto the roof of the machine. If he had still had his blade he would have tried to prise open the hatch on the roof through which the pilot had been implanted, but without it he had to look for another weak point somewhere else. He found it on the front of the dreadnought, the vision slit through which Stoggi viewed the outside world. Human dreadnoughts used advance sensor systems to provide the pilot with visual data, but orks eschewed such extravagances in favour of a simple opening cut into the front at head height.

Pistol in hand, Hazug reached in front of the dreadnought and pressed the muzzle of his gun up against the narrow opening and pulled the trigger. After the shot rang out, he pulled the trigger again, and again, and again. He kept on pulling the trigger until he heard the weapon ‘click’ as the firing pin fell on an empty chamber instead of a bullet.

The first bullet just clipped Stoggi's ear, and the Gretchin cried out in pain as he felt the bullet strike him. The next missed him on its first pass, but bounced off the inside of the dreadnoughts armour and struck him near the base of his spine. Normally such an injury would cause a greenskin to fall to the ground, but being implanted into a dreadnought the only immediate effect was the agony of the bullet smashing bone as it entered him and Stoggi cried out even more. The third round had no need to bounce, however, Hazug pulling the trigger just as his pistol swung to point directly at Stoggi's head, and the bullet hit him between the eyes, silencing his cries immediately and permanently.

Suddenly without any control from Stoggi's brain, the dreadnought lost its balance and fell to the ground, sending Hazug tumbling from on top of it.

Gunfire still filled the air as Hazug stood up and looking around he saw that aside from himself and Two Heads, the warband remained behind the barricades they had constructed and were all firing along the pier. Hazug turned around and raised his pistol to point it in the same direction as the warband was firing. There he saw the gap in the pier created by the missiles fired into its timbers and beyond it stood the remaining cyborks.

The squig-brained creatures had advanced as far as the gap and then simply halted. The simple brains implanted in the heads of the leading cyborks recognised that they would fall if they advanced any further, and unable to think of a way to bypass the hole they simply stopped and awaited further instructions. The cyborks behind them just advanced as far as those that stood by the gap obstructing their path before they too halted and waited to be told what to do.

Meanwhile the warband continued to fire on the tightly packed group of cyborks, emptying whole magazines into them before reloading and firing again. No longer firing at moving targets spaced apart, the warband scored hit after hit. Individually the bullets and lasblasts inflicted little damage on the cybernetically enhanced bodies of the cyborks, but the cumulative effects of the repeated hits took their toll and the cyborks began to fall, plunging from the pier into the water below. As gaps appeared in the front row of cyborks, those standing behind them simply stepped forwards to fill it and were thus exposed to the same gunfire as their fallen comrades.

Reloading his pistol, Hazug joined in the shooting, watching with satisfaction as the bullets from his pistol blasted chunks out the cyborks. At least he did until he saw another of the barge sailing up alongside the pier.

While the cyborks and dreadnoughts that had already made it ashore had distracted the warband, this other barge had sailed around the pier and past the gap blown in it so that the cargo it would begin unloading at any moment would be on the near side of the gap.

Instinctively, Hazug fired at the barge and watched as one of the Gretchin crew rushing about to secure the barge to the pier fell into the water with most of his head blown away by the bullet.

"Fire in da 'ole!" Two Heads both yelled in unison as, dropping his rifle to the ground, he plucked one of the stick grenades he carried from his belt. The Evil Sun nob pulled out the pin and hurled the explosive for all he was worth, and Hazug watched as it spun end over end through the air until it landed on the deck of the barge near the steering wheel located at the vessel's stern. Hazug and Two Heads both averted their gaze just in time as the grenade detonated with a brilliant flash and a dull boom that sent fragments of wood and metal flying in all directions.

The rearmost dreadnought on the deck took the brunt of the blast, and the thick cloud of shrapnel severed the exposed cables and oil pipes running along its limbs. Suddenly devoid of the control signals needed for the machine to function it first collapsed in a heap and then rolled off the deck and struck the pier, crushing a Gretchin unable to move out of the way fast enough to avoid it. The weight of the dreadnought pushed against the pier, and the barge slipped away from it until the dreadnought was able to drop through the gap between barge and pier and fall into the river below, the impact of the heavy machine on the surface of the water enough to create a wave that rocked the barge.

The remaining Gretchin crew scrambled to get the barge back against the pier while they came under fire from Hazug and Two Heads, he having picked his rifle up once more.

"Forget da cyborks!" Hazug shouted, "Shoot da grots!" and the rest of the warband turned their fire away from the remaining cyborks standing beyond the gap in the pier and instead also fired at the Gretchin trying their best to secure their vessel. Had the warband been able to attack the barge in this manner unopposed then it would have most likely drifted away from the pier and trapped its cargo of cyborks and dreadnoughts onboard it, but one of the crew had other ideas.

It was one of Two Heads that caught sight of the creature as it crawled from a hole blasted in the deck by the grenade and made its way to one of the dreadnoughts that still motionless on the deck. Standing beside the walking machine that towered over it, the Gretchin waved an arm towards the warband's hiding place and shouted something that Two Heads didn't quite hear before he shot the Gretchin in the chest.

The dreadnought suddenly spun and a jet of fire erupted from one of its four limbs towards the nearest of the barricades.

Kaglord and three of the survivors of Maggort's orks were using that particular barricade as cover, and they screamed as the thick burning liquid launched by the dreadnought flowed around it and stuck to their clothing and flesh. His arms waving wildly, one of the burning orks ran from his hiding place and dove into the river. Cut off from the oxygen it needed, the fire engulfing the Ork was extinguished, but its work was already done and the body of the Ork, weighed down by its armour, did not come back to the surface. Only one of Maggort's orks behind the barricade survived the fire, he was fortunate enough to be on the edge of the inferno rather than engulfed by it as the others were. He too ran, the sleeve of his jacket burning until he ripped it away and dropped it to the ground. Unfortunately for him the dreadnought did not settle for using only one of its weapons. In addition to the flamethrower, it also carried a heavy machine gun that promptly began to rake the dockside with automatic fire. Caught in the open, both Hazug and Two Heads dove to the ground and lay flat while the bullets flew overhead, but eh Ork who had narrowly survived the fire was nearly cut in half as the rounds tore through his body. Forced to take cover, the warband ceased its fire on the remaining crew of the barge long enough for them to secure it against the side of the pier. There was the sound of gears moving and the dreadnoughts carried by the barge stepped onto the pier while the Gretchin crew began to coax the cyborks from its hold. The dreadnoughts began to advance, stepping from the pier onto the dockside, and both Hazug and Two Heads picked themselves up and ran back behind their barricades. "So now wot?" one of Two Heads shouted from his position towards Hazug's. "Give us a chance to come up with somethin'," Hazug shouted back, "until den everyone just keep shootin'!" As instructed, the concealed orks stood up behind their barricades and fired on the advancing dreadnoughts. Bullets and lasblasts impacted harmlessly on the thick armour plating that protected the machines, however, and they continued to advance. The first dreadnought, having seen which way Hazug had run, chose to follow him there and, undeterred by the gunfire coming from his position, it was soon looming over it. Rhia and Sophie both screamed as the dreadnought raised both of its close combat arms and brought them swinging downwards.

21

In a flash of green light, the air was sucked from their lungs.

Dazed by the teleport, it took Hazug a few moments to realise that he, along with his servants and Drazzok were now all beside his truck. Rhia and Sophie were both curled up on the ground, gasping for breath.

“What happened?” Rhia gasped, looking at Hazug.

“Im,” Hazug replied, pointing to Drazzok, “of course it would be nice to get some warnin’ da next time ya is goin’ to telly-port us.”

“Dare didn’t seem to be time,” Drazzok answered back.

“Dat’s alright den,” Hazug said as he clambered into the back of his truck.

“We’re not leaving are we?” Sophie asked, “What about the others?”

“Master ain’t no coward like gits,” Ratish snapped at Sophie, “we ain’t goin’ is we master?”

“Course we ain’t leavin’,” Hazug said, “I just reckon dat dis’ll ‘elp us out a bit,” and he pulled the cover from the machine gun mounted on top of his vehicle.

Pointing the heavy automatic weapon towards the nearest of the dreadnoughts, Hazug aimed for the vision slit and fired. He held the trigger down as the stream of powerful rounds flew over the heads of the intervening orks and struck the dreadnought dead on. But unfortunately, Hazug’s aim was off and, rather than passing through the vulnerable vision slit and killing the Ork inside, the bullets instead bounced off the shell of the armoured metal beast until the weapon suddenly stopped shooting. Looking down at the gun, Hazug saw that the last bullet case had not ejected properly and the weapon was jammed. He was about to try and clear the weapon when Sophie suddenly cried out.

“Hazug! Look out!” she yelled, and Hazug looked up to see the dreadnought he had attacked had turned to face him and was lifting its own range weapon arms in his direction.

Hazug jumped down behind the truck just as the dreadnought opened fire with its own pair of machine guns and he heard the bullets whizzing above him as his servants and Drazzok joined him behind the truck.

“Ere Hazug,” the weirdboy said, “when did ya start ya engine?”

“Wot?” Hazug replied, “Me engine ain’t runnin’.”

“Well where’s dat sound comin’ from den?”

“E’s right master,” Ratish added, “Ratish ‘ears a truck an all.”

“Da kans,” Hazug suggested.

“No master, wrong way,” Ratish said, and he lifted his arm to point along the dock, “It’s comin’ form dat way.”

Hazug looked in the direction Ratish was pointing in, and then he heard it too. There was definitely a vehicle approaching from further along the docks, but the noise of its engine was distorted somehow by the presence of another sound. As the sound grew louder Hazug realised that the distortion was caused by the means by which the vehicle travelled, it was on tracks, and the hard concrete surface of the docks was being torn up by its passage.

“It’s Batrug!” Hazug shouted as the mekboy came into view through the darkness at the controls of the tracked flatbed vehicle he had recovered from outside his new workshop.

As Batrug drove closer, Hazug saw that the vehicle had been extensively modified since he had last seen it, an incredible feat considering how much time Batrug had had to undertake the work. The open cargo area of the vehicle was now dominated by an enormous weapon mounted on a swivel mount, while a pair of fuel drums had been bolted to either side of the vehicle’s chassis and used as hard points for mounting heavy machine guns. All of the rapidly added on armaments were crewed by Batrug’s own Gretchin servants. The Gretchin in the cargo area pushed the larger weapon around until it faced towards the dreadnought still firing over Hazug’s head and then ducked.

“Down!” Hazug bellowed, aware that most of the warband would not know about the approach of reinforcements, and a split second later there was a clap of thunder and a brilliant beam of light shot from the muzzle of Batrug’s heavy weapon.

The energy beam hit the dreadnought directly and sliced straight through it. The machine’s destruction was confirmed when its volatile fuel and ammunition stores were ignited by the beam, and it exploded in a ball of flame.

The orks of the warband cheered as pieces of the destroyed dreadnought fell from the air, landing all around them.

“Again!” Hazug shouted towards Batrug’s approaching vehicle, “Dare’s still three more of ‘em!” and he saw the mekboy gesturing to his gunners.

The next beam sheared off the upper arm of a dreadnought. The gun crew kept the weapon active and lowered the beam, slicing of the lower arm next, followed by the leg. The dreadnought fell, and as it did so the still active energy weapon sliced it and its pilot in half.

The two remaining dreadnoughts had reached barricade behind which Two Heads and Gorrid were located, and they were smashing their way through it as the two orks fell back. The destruction of the other dreadnoughts suddenly made them stop and turn towards this new, greater, threat and each of them raised their ranged weapons. But Batrug's gun crew was quicker off the mark, and before either of the dreadnoughts could fire the Gretchin had pointed their weapon towards the dreadnoughts and unleashed another energy blast. The beam hit the leg of one of the dreadnoughts causing it to fall just as it attempted to launch a volley of rockets back at Batrug's vehicle. The rockets instead slammed into the side of the other dreadnought and blew it to pieces, the flames from the explosion engulfed the stricken machine, pouring in through the vision slit and reducing the pilot inside to a charred hulk of meat. "I told ya I'd get it done I time!" mek Batrug shouted as he drove his vehicle onwards.

Dok Gutstitch's face fell, he had watched as the dreadnoughts had come so close to over running the positions of the orks on the docks. But now they had suddenly received unexpected reinforcements in the shape of a vehicle mounting an energy weapon powerful enough to destroy all of the dreadnoughts in such a short time. To make matters worse, the vehicle carrying this weapon was his, the very same one he had abandoned outside the mek's workshop where he had acquired the dreadnoughts. He watched as the vehicle advanced and took up a position alongside the barricades behind which the orks were located. From his position on his barge Dok Gutstitch heard the rattle of small arms fire as the vehicle and the nearby orks turned their weapons on the cyborks attempting to close on them. Lacking any ranged weapons on their own, and not having the ability to operate them even they had possessed any anyway, the cyborks were being cut down by the concentrated fire. Flashes from energy weapons much smaller than the heavy weapon mounted on Dok Gutstitch's old vehicle suggested that there were humans among those firing on the cyborks, and Dok Gutstitch let out a scream of anger. While he certainly retained human servants, Kazkal Kromag did not employ them in any military capacity, so the force facing him wasn't even a properly organised Ork unit deployed by the warboss to protect the docks. Instead it was apparently a hastily improvised warband that had already destroyed most of the army he had spent so long, quite literally, putting together.

"Wot do we do master?" the Gretchin steering his barge asked as the vessel began to near the end of the pier.

Dok Gutstitch took a moment to collect his thoughts. Most of his army was gone, either burned, drowned or shot, but he still had a pair of mega-dreadnoughts and twenty cyborks in mega armour. This was enough for him to be able to take over the warboss's palace if he was able to bypass the force now facing him on the shore.

"Keep on goin'," he ordered, "don't stop 'ere, we'll 'ave to find somewhere else to get ashore."

The Gretchin pilot nodded, then he carefully steered his vessel around the burning barge that still drifted in the river, putting it between him and the heavy weapon on the shore, and then increased his speed to take them away from here faster.

Hazug rushed to recover his rifle before he joined in shooting at the cyborks who had disembarked from the barge after the now destroyed dreadnoughts. Though resilient, Hazug knew the cyborks were not impervious to attack, especially against a well-aimed shot to the head that would destroy the squig brain implanted there. Additionally the heavy firepower now provided by the weapons mounted on mek Batrug's vehicle chewed through both organic and bionic parts, and the number of cyborks was rapidly decreasing. Then, over the gunfire, Hazug heard a scream coming from the direction of the river. He looked around, fearing that more cyborks and dreadnoughts were coming ashore. Instead he saw that the scream came from another barge that remained further out in the water. There, standing beside the much smaller Gretchin pilot he saw an Ork. Quickly, Hazug pulled the tau viewing device from his pocket and raised it to his eye for a better look. In its night vision mode the device turned the dark silhouette of the Ork into a clear, if black and white, image of a painboy, his surgical tools adorning his body. This could only be the bad dok himself, now Hazug could finally put a face to his enemy. Hazug pressed the button that would store the image he now looked at, preserving Dok Gutstitch's image for future use.

"Where are they going?" Sophie asked, suddenly appearing beside Hazug along with Ratish and Rhia.

"I dunno," Hazug said as the barge disappeared behind a much larger ship moored at the next pier along and he lowered the viewing device, "but I reckon dat it would be best if we goes after 'em."

Hazug ran back towards his truck.

"Everyone get on a wagon!" he shouted as he ran, "Gutstitch is getting' away!"

The remaining orks, most of them Evil Suns with a natural affinity for fighting from vehicles, picked up their weapons and wounded and carried them to the two vehicles present. Two Heads climbed onboard Hazug's truck into the seat beside his.

“Get on da gun lad,” Two Heads said to Gorrid as he followed him aboard the vehicle.

“It’s jammed,” Hazug stated, starting the engine, “ya’ll ‘ave to clear it before ya can shoot it.”

Already familiar with such things from those he had used on Two Heads’ battlewagon, Gorrid stood behind the automatic weapon and began to make it ready for use once more. Hazug threw a glance behind him and, seeing that the back of the truck was now filled he drove off down the docks in the direction that Dok Gutstitch’s barge had gone. Behind Hazug’s truck, mek Batrug waited while the remaining orks got aboard his vehicle and then drove off after Hazug, sating simply “Ang on lads,” as he put his foot down on the accelerator.

22

“Dey is comin’ after us master,” one of Dok Gutstitch’s Gretchin exclaimed as he leaned over the side of the barge, “I can ‘ear da engines of da trucks.”

Frustrated, Dok Gutstitch let out a grunt and then turned to the barge’s pilot.

“Just keep on goin’,” he ordered, “we’ll ‘ave to go past da docks and find somewhere else to land.”

The Gretchin pilot nodded, and he guided the barge further out into the river, away from the clutter of the various vessels moored all along the dockyard.

“So wot now?” Two Heads asked Hazug as the truck came to a halt at the far end of the docks. They had driven the whole length of the dockyard complex looking for where Dok Gutstitch was going to attempt to come ashore next but, in spite of finding numerous empty berths where his barge could have been docked, they had found nothing. Now only the crudely constructed dwellings of the riverside Gretchin shanty town lay ahead of them.

“Ang on a mo,” Hazug responded to Two Heads’ question, “I’ll ‘ave to ask.”

“Stop? Ask?” Two Heads said, taken aback. Evil Suns weren’t known for stopping long enough to ask for directions. The journey was often more important to them than the actual destination.

“Oi! Grot!” Hazug yelled out when he caught sight of something moving in the darkness between the simple buildings, “‘Ave ya seen a boat come past ‘ere just now?” and he held up a tooth.

“Yes lord,” the Gretchin replied excitedly, “A biggun too, it ‘ad kans standin’ on top of it and it went dataway,” and the Gretchin pointed further up the river.

“Bugger it,” Hazug exclaimed, tossing the tooth to the Gretchin, “Gutstitch could just come ashore anywhere dat ‘e can beach ‘is boat. We’ll just ‘ave to keep on drivin’ by da river till we find ‘im.”

“Wot’s ‘appenin’?” mek Batrug yelled from his own vehicle as he grew impatient.

“We’s off!” Hazug shouted back at the mek as he put his truck in gear, “Just keep followin’ me!” and then as he began to drive off he yelled down to the Gretchin ahead, “Mind out grot!” just in time for the creature to jump aside and avoid being run over by either Hazug or Batrug.

“Ya know,” Drazzok said from the back of the truck as they drove through the shanty town, keeping the river beside them, “if ya ‘ad squished dat grot, ya could ‘ave got ya tooth back.”

“Well?” Dok Gutstitch asked the Gretchin, “Can ya still ‘ear ‘em?”

“Yes master,” the Gretchin answered, “But dey is well behind us now.”

This didn’t entirely satisfy Dok Gutstitch. The darkness of the riverbank made it difficult to identify a suitable landing site, and at this rate they would end up sailing as far as Git Town without finding anywhere to unload.

“Sod it!” Dok Gutstitch cried out, “Just take us in ‘ere.”

“But master...” the Gretchin pilot began to say before Dok Gutstitch reached out his hand and slapped him.

“Just do as I say grot!” he yelled, “We ain’t goin’ to be needin’ da boat again anyways.”

Picking himself up from the deck where he had fallen, the Gretchin pilot turned the wheel and directed the barge towards the shore.

“Faster! Get us further up da bank!” Dok Gutstitch shouted and the pilot increased speed as much as he could.

“Right, ‘ang on,” Dok Gutstitch warned as the shadowy riverbank loomed ahead of the barge.

There was a crash and the sound of wood splintering, accompanied by a sudden and violent lurch as the barge rammed the riverbank and the combination of its momentum and engine pushed it up the bank, ripping away the timbers of its hull. The noise was joined by terrified screams from the Gretchin unfortunate enough to have built their homes at this location on the riverbank. They, along with their homes were promptly crushed beneath the massive bulk of the rapidly disintegrating barge.

“Dat’s it!” Dok Gutstitch shouted when the ruined barge finally came to a stop, “Now get all da lads out! We’ll ‘ave to ‘urry,” and he ran to the front of the barge and jumped down to the ground, landing square on top of what was left of a Gretchin already crushed by the barge.

“Ukk!” he commented, “Now look wot I’ve trodden in. Someone get me a cloth to clean dis off me boots.”

While Dok Gutstitch wiped his boots, replacing the splattered blood and gore with oil and grease from the barge’s engine, his Gretchin unloaded the barge’s cargo. The pair of massive mega dreadnoughts came first, followed by the twenty mega-armoured cyborks from in the hold. They stood motionless on the shore amongst the remains of the tiny crude structures that they smashed their way through as they came off the barge.

“Right,” Dok Gutstitch said, proudly staring at what remained of his cybork army, “Follow me den,” and he turned and strode defiantly through the shanty town. One by one, the cyborks behind him also began to move, the sound of the mechanical suits of armour they wore filling the otherwise quiet night air.

“Dare!” Hazug shouted when he spotted the wrecked barge, and he pointed at the remains of the vessel as he slammed on the brakes. Behind him he heard mek Batrug curse as he was forced to brake rapidly also to avoid driving straight into the back of Hazug’s truck.

Hazug leapt down from his truck, followed rapidly by his passengers and, gun in hand he strode between what remained of the buildings here to the wrecked barge.

The barge was covered in Gretchin, tearing at what was left of it and removing anything they took a liking to.

“Wot ‘appened to dem wot was on da boat?” Hazug shouted at the Gretchin.

“Wasn’t us!” one replied.

“Yeah, it was like dis when we found it!” another added.

Two Heads fired a shot into the air, and all of the Gretchin scavengers immediately stopped what they were doing and stared at the orks.

“Now,” Hazug said slowly and clearly, “wot ‘appened to dem wot was on dis boat?” and he held his swept his own rifle over the Gretchin, his finger on the trigger.

“Dey all ran off. Dey went dat way,” a Gretchin responded, pointing in the direction that Dok Gutstitch had gone, followed by his cyborks. Though the painboy had not run through any of the Gretchin buildings himself, some of the cyborks that followed him had been oblivious to the fragile structures, and many of them to either side of the trail taken by Dok Gutstitch showed signs of damage.

“Right, everyone back in da truk,” Hazug said.

“In da truk, out da truk, back in da truk,” Drazzok complained as he clambered back into the vehicle, “I’d expect it from ‘im,” he said pointing at Two Heads, “but can’t ya just make ya git lovin’ mind up?” but Hazug ignored his outburst and drove after Dok Gutstitch.

Reaching the edge of the shanty town., Dok Gutstitch led his army onto the streets of the Ork city itself. Now in the early hours of the morning, many orks were making their way back to their homes following the night’s drinking and brawling. The sight of an Ork leading a large mob of mega-armoured troops along with a massive pair of dreadnoughts was enough to attract attention from other passers by, but no one gave a thought to the possibility of doing anything to stop him. After all, if he was up to no good then the warboss would sort him out, and if he couldn’t then he wasn’t up to being the boss was he?

So Dok Gutstitch was able to march through the streets unimpeded, pedestrians moving out of his way and drivers either putting up with the delay of the lumbering troops and dreadnoughts marching in front of them or just deciding that the road blocked by the oncoming force marching down it was not the one they needed to drive down after all.

“Well if ya is gettin’ out again, I is stayin’ put,” Drazzok said when Hazug stopped his truck at the edge of the shanty town. and searched for any sign of the direction taken by Dok Gutstitch’s force.

“So which way did ‘e go?” Two Heads said.

“I dunno,” Hazug answered him, then after a pause he added, “we’ll just ‘ave to ‘ope dat I’m right about where ‘e’ll be ‘eadin’ towards.”

“Wot, da boss’s place?” Two Heads said.

“Dat’s right, we’ll go straight dare and since ‘e’s walkin’ maybe we’ll get dare sooner.”

“Not in dis,” Two heads said, shaking both his heads, “we somethin’ dat’ll make lads get out of da way.”

“Oh we got dat,” Hazug said, turning to look into the back of the truck, grinning. Two Heads turned around and looked in the same direction. Then he both grinned also.

“Wot d’ya want now?” Drazzok said when he realised that everyone in the truck was staring at him.

“Just come and stand up ‘ere in da front,” Two Heads said as he got up to move into the truck’s rear area.

“Weirdo!” an Ork yelled when he saw the vehicle approaching with the weirdboy standing up in the front passenger seat, hanging on to the vehicle tightly.

“Weirdo!” the cry was repeated, and the throng of other road users, both on foot and other drivers parted to allow the fast moving truck passage. Mek Batrug kept his own vehicle close enough behind that he was able to take advantage of the space created before it was once again filled in by the orks who had rushed to get out of Drazzok’s way.

Thus Hazug was able to drive through the Ork filled streets of the city much faster than other drivers who had to slow down for crowds too thick to simply drive straight through. This continued until Hazug heard the

pounding of many heavily armoured footsteps close by and the shapes of Dok Gutstitch's mega dreadnoughts came into view over some of the lower buildings.

"There they are!" Sophie yelled out, waving towards the hulking machines when she first caught sight of them.

The others in the truck turned to wards where Sophie pointed, even Hazug taking his eyes off the road to risk a glance, and they too caught sight of the massive dreadnoughts moving along on a road parallel to them. Hazug braked sharply, very nearly causing Drazzok to fly over the engine of the truck as he was forced to hold on even tighter.

"Watch wot ya doin'!" the weirdboy shouted as he stood up straight again. More cursing from mek Batrug as he also braked sharply then followed this.

"Dare dey are!" Hazug shouted to Batrug, pointing at the dreadnoughts, "Let's get 'em!"

Batrug ceased his insults and instead began to bark orders to his gun crew. Meanwhile the rest of the warband got ready for battle. Hazug turned his truck around and drove rapidly down a side street that connected the two roads.

"Ang on everyone!" he shouted as he continued moving at speed as the mega-armoured cyborks marching behind the dreadnoughts came into view up ahead. Hazug aimed the truck straight at them.

"Waaagh!" he yelled as he pressed his foot down on the accelerator as far as it would go.

23

The sound of the orks natural war cry caused every greenskin within earshot to stop what they were doing and look for its source. Even Dok Gutstitch halted and looked around just in time to see Hazug's truck burst from the side street and plough into his cyborks.

As heavily armoured as these cyborks were, the mass and speed of the truck was more than they could withstand, and the four of them at the back of the mob were caught in the path of the vehicle and thrown aside as if they were mere Snotlings. The truck did not escape unscathed, however, and it rapidly lost speed and stalled as the multiple impacts dented the reinforced front plate and slowed it down.

Quick to react, Gorrid swivelled the automatic weapon mounted on top of the truck around and fired it into the rear of the nearest of the mega dreadnoughts. Sparks flew as most the bullets simply bounced off the machine, but the armour plating of the engine block mounted on the dreadnought's back was thin enough in places for the heavy bullets to punch through and there was the sound of tearing metal as one of the mega-dreadnought's shoulders was damaged enough for the weight of its pincer-tipped arm to rip itself away from the dreadnought's body.

Furious, Dok Gutstitch pointed at Hazug's truck, and at the top of his voice he bellowed, "Kill 'em all!" right as mek Batrug's truck pulled up behind Hazug's.

Dok Gutstitch had no time to modify his order before the passengers crammed onto the back of mek Batrug's vehicle leapt down and gave the crew of the powerful gun mounted there the room they needed to turn it to face the already damaged mega-dreadnought and open fire just as it was turning to face them.

The beam of energy played across the exceptionally thick armour plating at the front of the dreadnought, but even this heavy armour was insufficient to prevent the beam from burning through and reaching the pilot behind it. The gun crew cut off the beam as the dreadnought began to topple forwards, crushing two more of the mega-armoured cyborks as it crashed to the ground on top of them.

Seeing the remaining cyborks shambling towards the stationary vehicles, Gorrid lowered the heavy machinegun's point of aim and, keeping his finger firmly pressed down on the trigger, he sprayed bullets into them. At such close range, and against such a densely packed group he could not fail to hit a cybork with nearly every shot. But even the powerful rounds fired by the truck mounted gun were not up to the task of defeating mega armour, and nearly every round just bounced straight off. Only a single cybork fell, one of the bionic legs replacing its own limbs damaged and leaving it unable to stand. But though down, the cybork was not out of the fight yet, and its tiny implanted squig brain instead used its grafted on bionic arms to drag itself towards the warband its master had ordered it to kill. Then the gun clicked empty, and Gorrid let go of it and picked up his rifle instead.

"Let rip!" yelled one of Two Heads as the other took aim and fired several shots at the crawling cybork, attempting to put a round into the head that was exposed through the thick armour that covered the rest of its body.

The remaining mega-dreadnought opened fire as it advanced, spraying bullets through the air. With so many potential targets, the simple squig brain of its pilot became confused, and rather than select a target and then fire at it, it instead just fired its machine guns down the street until they ran out of ammunition.

By this time the cyborks were getting within arms reach of the warband's vehicles, and they swung out with their massive metal-clawed arms. Still in the front of Hazug's truck, Drazzok jabbed at an approaching cybork with his staff, and the moment it made contact with the creature he allowed the sum total of the psychic energy he had built up so far to discharge down his staff. Lightning played across the cybork's armour as it shook uncontrollably, and there was the smell of burning flesh as the cybork's remaining organic parts were roasted inside its armour. Drazzok pulled his staff away when he saw smoke begin to emerge from inside the armour, and the cybork dropped to the ground.

"ain't ya got it yet?" one of Two Heads asked the other one while he continued firing at the crawling Ork, still unable to hit its head.

"Ere git, Sophie or wotever ya name is," the other one of Two Heads said to Sophie, "see if dat pansy zappa can get dat Ork in da 'ead."

Sophie and Rhia both swung their lasguns towards the crawling orks and fired. The hail of lasblasts peppered the mega-armoured body of the crippled creature without effect until one of them eventually hit its head. The energy bolt punched through the cybork's now mostly empty skull and severed the connections of its implanted brain, and finally the cybork slumped lifeless to the ground.

"See?" Two Heads said to the one that had questioned his own marksmanship, "Job done."

"Dat don't count," the other one replied, "Ya 'ad to get a git to do it."

"Is ya startin' somethin'?"

"Not now!" Hazug shouted between the bursts he was firing from his own rifle at the cyborks who were almost on top of them, "Do I 'ave to separate da two of ya?"

By virtue of its much longer stride, the remaining mega-dreadnought reached the warband ahead of the mega-armoured cyborks and it brought its massive pincer crashing down on the heavy energy weapon mounted on mek Batrug's truck as the gunners of the vehicle's other weapons fired at it desperately, but unable to pierce its armour.

Then everyone still on the truck leapt aside as the pincer smashed into the energy weapon and destroyed it with a single blow. But the dreadnought did not stop with just that blow, and it brought the pincer down again on the wrecked weapon.

"It's gonna blow!" mek Batrug shouted as the pincer was thrust into the weapon's somewhat unstable power source. The warband, along with many of the orks who had just happened to be in the street when the battle began and were now watching it, as well as wagering on the likely outcome, threw themselves to the ground just as the energy cell was breached.

There was a flash of light that consumed both mek Batrug's truck and the mega-dreadnought and, when it subsided the scorched dreadnought, its electrical systems overloaded and burnt out, collapsed on top of the wrecked truck. Caught at the edge of the blast from the self-destructing energy cell, several of the mega-armoured cyborks were knocked backwards, but were otherwise unharmed thanks to the protection given them by their heavy armoured suits. As they got back to their feet their fellow cyborks reached their targets. Firing from point blank range the warband succeeded in placing shots into the heads of two of the cyborks before they could strike, and they fell dead.

Squigs are just animals, but they form part of the same ecosystem as orks and to a certain extent they behave in the same way. So when the squig-brained cyborks attacked the warband they did so by targeting the biggest and strongest first, and that meant Hazug and Two Heads.

"Kop dis!" one of Two Heads shouted as the other one head butted the first cybork to charge him, and the stunned creature took a step backwards.

Meanwhile Hazug ducked out of the way before a cybork was able to strike at him with its massive claws that crackled with electricity. He spun round as he heard a second cybork approach and, ramming his rifle under this new opponents chin; he blew off its head with a burst of gunfire.

Having operated the heavy machine gun on Hazug's truck also marked Gorrid out as a priority target for the cyborks, and a pair of them attempted to climb up onto the vehicle to attack him. Gorrid fired on the cyborks as they climbed, and as one of them reached out towards him, he saw Drazzok's staff swinging and it struck the cybork. There was another flash of psychic energy being released through the staff into the cybork, but the weirdboy had not had the opportunity to build up enough power to blast through its armour, and he achieved nothing more than to knock the cybork off the truck and to the ground. Gorrid kicked at the other cybork, but with the help of the claws on its bionic arms, this one kept its grip on the truck and began to pull itself into the cargo area.

Then Gorrid received help from an unexpected source. Ignored by the cyborks because of his tiny size, Ratish was able to leap into the truck unnoticed, and as the cybork raised its head over the side of the truck the Gretchin pushed his pistol against its face and pulled the trigger repeatedly. The cybork's head jerked backwards as the bullets from Ratish's pistol slammed into it. The first two rounds passed straight through the empty parts of the cybork's skull, but the third hit the tiny squig brain at its centre and the dead cybork slumped to its knees. It did not drop to the ground however, its claws locked shut when the signals from its brain were cut off and it kept its grip on the side of the truck, hanging there with its arms over its head still clamped onto the vehicle.

The cyborks knocked over by the destruction of mek Batrug's truck and the last mega-dreadnought were now getting back on their feet, while the former occupants of the truck now lined up behind the wreckage of both their own vehicle and the dreadnought to fire on them. As had happened previously, the small arms fire had little effect on the cyborks, but it at least slowed some of them down as they closed in on the warband.

Engaged against a pair of cyborks, Hazug was joined by a pair of the pilots who had accompanied Kaglort to the docks. One of them was batted away as if were nothing more than an insect, his chest caving in when the cybork's power claw smashed into it. The remaining Ork, the speed of his attack distracting the cyborks away from Hazug dodged as the lumbering creatures both decided to lash out at this new threat rather than the nob. The distraction was just enough for Hazug to drop his rifle and draw his blade. The cyborks caught the unfortunate Evil Sun Ork between them, and a pair of blows from their claws ended his life in an instant. But the time taken to kill him provided Hazug with enough time to raise his blade and stab it into the side of one of the cyborks' necks. Forcing the blade in deeper, Hazug severed the cybork's spine, and it fell forwards. For a moment the weight of the cybork looked as if it were about to drag Hazug down with it, but with an almighty pull, he wrenched his blade free and stepped backwards.

As Hazug was positioning himself to fight his other opponent, Two Heads and a pair of his troops were ganging up on the last cybork facing Two Heads. The trio of Evil Suns struck at the cybork with their rifles, swinging them like clubs in an attempt to beat him with the butts. Then, when the cybork swung its massive

bulk around to face an Ork, it would jump back out of the way while the other two struck at it from a different direction.

One of the orks was a fraction too slow with his dodge, and one of the cybork's power claws slammed into his head. The Ork crumpled to the ground and, apparently not realising that he was already dead, the cybork lifted a foot to stomp on his body.

Two Heads saw his chance, and placing the muzzle of his rifle against the leg now supporting the cybork, he shot the knee joint of his mega-armour. Suddenly unable to support the weight of the armour, the joint gave way and the cybork's leg was snapped off at the knee. The cybork overbalanced and toppled to the ground. Now it was Two Heads that raised a foot, and he brought it down on the cybork's exposed head. There was a crunch as Two Heads' boot broke what was left of the cybork's nose. The next blow broke off the metal cap that served in place of the top of his skull. It slid away and exposed the brass cage inside his head. Reaching down, Two Heads grabbed hold of the cage and pulled. The rods that held it in place bent as Two Heads ripped the cage free and snapped the nerve endings that allowed it to control its Ork body, killing it instantly.

Dok Gutstitch watched from under an archway where he had taken cover with several other orks as the battle raged while the warband destroyed his finest cyborks one by one. Barely a quarter of his elite troops now remained and as he watched another one fell, shot in the head as it tried to climb over the wreckage of the mega-dreadnought that had been destroyed along with the truck it had attacked. Meanwhile another cybork was now flailing its arms about wildly, trying to dislodge the trio of orks that had leapt from behind the remains of the truck and appeared to be attempting to simply hold the cybork still. One Ork was hanging onto the cybork's back, while the others each held onto one of the swinging arms. All three had been able to keep clear of the power claws fitted to the mega-armour and the cybork appeared unable to dislodge them. It was the same story elsewhere too. The members of the warband were using their speed advantage to keep out of the way of his cyborks, while firing at them from a distance knowing that they could not shoot back. Dok Gutstitch had always known that his cyborks could not be taught to operate small arms, the brains he implanted just didn't have enough fine control over their fingers to work the relatively complicated mechanisms of firearms, so he had settled for an assortment of blades and claws to arm his troops. It had always been his intention to fight room to room where his opponents would not be able to maintain the gap between them and his troops that the warband was capable of in the street.

The he saw that another cybork was engaged against a pair of nob. The cybork faced an Ork in the strange clothing worn by Blood Axes, dull colours that blended in with their background rather than proclaiming their presence to their enemies, while a two-headed mutant Ork in the bright red livery of the Evil Suns was charging up behind it. The Gretchin he had used for surveillance had described these two repeatedly over the last few days, and it seemed that they were the driving force behind the efforts to stop him. Focusing his anger at these two, Dok Gutstitch looked around for a suitable weapon.

He caught sight of a pistol tucked into the belt of an Ork stood beside him watching the fight. Dok Gutstitch slammed his fist into the Ork's face and wrenched the gun from his belt as he collapsed and pointed it towards the Blood Axe.

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Normally when an Ork's throat is cut it will collapse almost immediately, but Hazug's swing with his blade apparently did not cut deep enough for the squig brain to notice the injury to its neck, and instead it raised both sets of massive claws over its head to strike back at him as blood spurted from the wound. Hazug expected the claws to come crashing down on him at any moment, but before the cybork could strike Two Heads slammed into the cybork from behind, pushing it to the ground beside Hazug.

"Stab 'im again, quick!" one of Two Heads shouted at Hazug, while the other concentrate on preventing the cybork from regaining his footing.

Hazug swung his blade again, and chipped the cybork's metal skullcap. Swiftly, he brought his weapon down again, and this time he struck the cybork's head just beneath the metal plate and smashed through the thick bone of his skull and struck the brain inside. The cybork stopped fighting against Two Heads and lay still, and just at that moment a bullet narrowly past Hazug by.

Hazug turned around and saw a painboy pointing a pistol towards him from an archway. He recognised Dok Gutstitch instantly.

"Dare's Gutstitch!" he yelled, pointing towards the painboy, "Don't let 'im get away!"

"Ya go after 'im den!" Drazzok shouted as he swung his staff at the cybork still attempting to shake itself free of the three orks holding on to it, "we'll deal with dis lot!"

Hazug didn't need to be told twice, and he ran towards Dok Gutstitch, blade in hand. The painboy reacted by turning and running through the crowd of orks still observing the battle. Initially Hazug gained on him as he ran through the area of the street cleared by the battle while Dok Gutstitch was forced to push himself through the crowd.

As Hazug came closer one of the watching orks directly in front of him turned to his fellows and said, "watch dis, I'm gonna trip da git lover up," and stuck out his foot where he expected Hazug to run.

But unluckily for the Ork, Hazug saw the limb stretch out, and as the Ork turned around to face him again, a wide grin on his face, he saw Hazug's clenched fist hurtling towards him. There was a loud 'crack' as Hazug struck the Ork, and his friends exploded with laughter as he fell to the ground with blood pouring from his flattened nose while Hazug just leapt over him and began to barge his way through the crowd of orks generally much smaller than himself.

Dok Gutstitch chanced turning around and saw Hazug getting nearer, so the painboy fired a couple of shots at him. He would have fired more, but it appeared that the Ork whose pistol Dok Gutstitch had stolen had not kept its magazine full and it was out of ammunition. Dok Gutstitch dropped the empty weapon and continued to run.

Hazug heard the shots. Normally he would have ducked, but the crowd pressing on him from all sides prevented him from doing so. In any case both shots missed, instead hitting two other orks in the crowd. Hazug pushed on because, quite frankly, he just didn't care about whoever it was that had been shot. It was their own problem, not his, he just needed to catch up with Dok Gutstitch before he could escape.

Ahead of him, Hazug saw the painboy reach the back of the crowd and start running through the more open street beyond.

"Get out of me damn way!" he shouted, and rather than just pushing his way through the crowd, Hazug began to strike at those in front of him instead. Even without using the sharp edge of his blade he was able to get the message across that it was a good idea to let him pass, and Hazug was able to force his way through the crowd while Dok Gutstitch was still just about visible up ahead.

Hazug drew his pistol and aimed at Dok Gutstitch, firing a single shot towards him. In the dimness of the street, lit only by whatever light escaped from the businesses still open at this time, the shot went wide and, rather than waste more ammunition on such a difficult shot, Hazug instead began to chase after Dok Gutstitch once more.

Breathing heavily, Dok Gutstitch turned into a side street, aware that Hazug was still after him and likely closing the gap between them. He was about to run down the street when he noticed a dark alcove nearby. He knew that Hazug would have seen him turn into this side street and would surely pursue him down here, and it occurred to Dok Gutstitch that if he hid himself in the alcove he would have the opportunity to strike at Hazug as he passed. So, pulling one of his larger surgical blades from his belt, he pressed himself up against the back of the alcove and waited.

He did not have to wait for long, Hazug was faster than him over open ground, and he soon rounded the corner into the side street. But instead of just running straight on he stopped and stared down the street. Hazug knew that he had seen the painboy turn down here moments before him, but now he was nowhere to be seen. That could only mean that he had found somewhere else along this street to either turn off again or conceal himself. So moving more cautiously now, Hazug began to walk rather than run down the

street. He took only a few steps before he remembered the tau viewing device. Its night vision mode would allow him to search the entire street from here. He tucked his pistol back into his belt and reached for the device, and that was when he felt the blade stab into his side.

“Gotcha!” Dok Gutstitch shouted as he withdrew his surgical knife, and he watched Hazug stagger forwards and drop his own blade to the floor.

Raising his knife over his head, Dok Gutstitch moved in for the kill, but a wounded Ork is still deadly, and Hazug reacted quickly to this attack. He kicked out, aiming for one of Dok Gutstitch’s knees, and he was rewarded with a crunch as he struck the joint dead on, shattering the kneecap.

Dok Gutstitch cried out in pain as his leg gave way beneath him. He tried to keep the knife moving towards Hazug, but even with one hand clamped over the wound at his side the nob was able to roll out of the way, and both of the orks lay on the ground bleeding.

Hazug reached for his pistol, but the weapon had dropped from his belt when he fell, and aside from a pair of grenades he was now unarmed. Hazug had no intention of using an explosive weapon while fighting hand-to-hand, but the stick design and bulk of Ork grenades gave him another option instead. So Hazug pulled one of the grenades from his belt and swung it like a club.

The metal can that held the explosive connected with Dok Gutstitch’s jaw from the side, and even in the dim light Hazug saw a splatter of blood and a pair of his teeth come loose.

Dragging his injured leg behind him, Dok Gutstitch pulled himself closer to Hazug and slashed at him with his knife again. The blade caught Hazug across the back of his hand, and the grenade slipped from his grip and rolled away. One hand still clamped firmly over the bleeding wound on his side, Hazug scabbled back away from Dok Gutstitch and tried to kick him again, but this time the painboy avoided his attack.

Dok Gutstitch reached out to pull himself after Hazug and he felt something beneath his hand, it was Hazug’s pistol. He picked up the weapon and pointed it at Hazug. In spite of the darkness Hazug saw Dok Gutstitch raise the weapon and recognised it immediately. He let go of his side and dived at Gutstitch before he could fire the gun, grabbing hold of the hand that held the weapon and pushing it aside. Dok Gutstitch struggled against Hazug’s grip, trying to point the pistol back towards him, but the nob was far stronger than him. Dok Gutstitch reached out with his other hand and jabbed his fingers into the wound he had inflicted on Hazug’s side.

Hazug screamed, but he didn’t let go of Dok Gutstitch’s wrist. Instead he looked the painboy straight in the face and yelled, “Kop dis!” and he head butted Dok Gutstitch.

The painboy’s head jerked backwards as Hazug’s head smashed into his face. He dropped the pistol and his other hand fell away from Hazug’s wound as the nob butted him once more. Dazed by the blow, Dok Gutstitch went limp and Hazug went in for the kill. He released his grip on Dok Gutstitch’s wrist and instead gripped the painboy by his collar. Straining, Hazug stood up and slammed Dok Gutstitch’s head into the nearest wall. There was a crack as Dok Gutstitch’s skull fractured, and then another as Hazug slammed his head against the wall again. Then Hazug roared as he raised he threw his opponent to the ground and brought his boot down on the back of his neck. Hazug heard Dok Gutstitch’s neck snap beneath his foot and then he staggered backwards before collapsing to the ground himself and he lay still.

For a while there was just the sound of his own breathing, but then Hazug heard a voice call out his name. “Hazug! Hazug where are you?” Sophie shouted.

“Over ‘ere,” Hazug called out as he lay on the ground. Then he heard footsteps and he saw Two Heads appear at the end of the street accompanied by Drazzok, Ratish, Rhia and Sophie. Seeing Hazug on the ground they ran to him and Sophie knelt beside him.

“Throne!” she exclaimed, “You’re hurt.”

“Wot dis?” Hazug said, raising his hand to his side, “Its just a scratch. Now give us ‘an ‘and up and I’ll walk it off.”

Hazug’s servants assisted him to his feet. He swayed for a moment before he found his balance and retrieved his weapons from where they had fallen.

“Where’s everyone else?” he asked, “Is dey dead?”

“Nah,” Two Heads responded, “but after we finished off dem cyborks we left da rest of da lads with Batrug to keep an eye on all da loot until ‘e could figure out a way of getting’ it back to ‘is workshop.”

“E don’t expect us to let ‘im keep it all does ‘e?” Hazug asked as he put his weapons away.

“Nah, we is splittin’ it evenly.”

“Fine” Hazug said, “but Gutstitch’s teeth is mine. I’m da one wot knocked ‘em out.”

EPILOGUE

The man watched as Rhia walked to the bar and bought herself a drink before she came and sat opposite him in the same private booth where he had instructed her to seek out the Blood Axe Ork.

“So,” he began as she sat down, “you managed to get away then?”

“Easily,” Rhia said, “Hazug even gave me some money to spend when I told him I wanted to go out.”

“What about that thing you’re wearing?” the man asked her, indicating a brightly coloured vest like garment Rhia wore over her jacket that was marked with orks glyphs.

“Its to protect me when I go out alone,” Rhia answered, “The words mean ‘I belong to Hazug Throatlitter’. Its to deter other orks from harassing me.”

“It sounds like it trusts you. Now what about the missiles? They are important to us you know.”

“I know they’re important, you’ve made that quite clear already, but I don’t have them yet.”

“That’s obvious,” the man said, “but what you need to explain is why not?”

“Some of them have been used. I tried to talk Hazug out of it, but he needed them to knock out some barges and dreadnoughts down at the docks.”

“Yes we’ve heard about that. But our information is that only a third of the missiles were actually used in that fight, so what about the rest of them?”

“Hazug has some of them, and Two Heads has some more.”

“Two Heads?” the man interrupted.

“Yes, that’s the two-headed Ork mutant. But most of the remaining missiles were given to the local warlord, so they’re probably somewhere in the old administration building.”

“He’s not going to be happy about that.”

“Yes, well you can tell him that that’s just the way it is and he’ll just have to wait.”

Actually you can tell him yourself.”

Rhia froze.

“He’s here?” she asked.

“Yes he is,” the man told her, “and he would like to have a little word with you,” and he stood up.

Rhia got up and followed the man across the bar. He nodded at the barman, who nodded back at him, before he disappeared into a back room and Rhia followed him. The man then led her down a flight of stairs into the bar’s large basement. At the foot of the stairs a large man in body armour and holding a shotgun observed them as they descended.

“He’s in there,” the guard said, nodding towards a door beside him and the man led Rhia through it.

Inside the room were a large number of people carrying out an assortment of tasks, some studied maps, while others cleaned weapons and other military equipment. The man walked to the far side of the room where an older human with grey hair sat in a chair surrounded by other humans, including another two well-armed bodyguards.

“Your Excellency,” the man said, kneeling before the man in the chair and bowing his head, “I have brought her.”

“Good,” the older man said, “bring her forwards.”

A bodyguard shoved Rhia forwards and she knelt beside the man who had brought her here and lowered her head also.

“You don’t have the missiles do you my dear?” the man in the chair said.

“No Your Excellency, but I am trying.”

“Well try harder, because we are going to need them very soon now.”

“We are ready?” Rhia asked, raising her head without thinking, then lowering it again when she realised what she had just done.

“Indeed we are. In the last day we have received the help I have long requested be sent here. Look for yourself,” and the man in the chair pointed towards an adjoining basement room.

Rhia turned her head and she saw gasped at what she saw. At first glance they looked like men, but they were all giants. The giants wore plain deep red tabards over the suits of powered armour of matching red that covered their entire bodies apart from their heads where they had removed their helmets and placed them on the floor in front of them as they knelt in prayer, led by another giant in red power armour.

“Before the orks came here I was the governor of this world,” the man sat in the chair said as Rhia stared at the soldiers, “It’s absolute ruler. And with the help of these holy warriors I shall reclaim my rightful place once more.”