

IRONWATCH



**Issue
14**

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ABYSSAL TIDINGS

A Message from the Editor

Welcome back to another thrilling edition of the **IRONWATCH** fan magazine! This time around we have some superb tactica, as well as more of your favorite Deadzone and Warpath ongoing tales.

In addition, this month we’re proud to announce that all of the back issues of the **IRONWATCH** fan magazine are available to order in hard copy format through The Book Patch! Simply visit XYZ.COM and get your copies today! The **IRONWATCH** will always be published for free digitally, but getting an at-cost copy to proudly display on your wargaming shelf never hurts!

Finally, thank you again for being a loyal reader of this magazine, and be sure to submit any articles or images you’d like us to include. Whether a new recruit or a longtime veteran, thanks for reading and Welcome to the Watch!
 -Austin

***Corrections:** We unfortunately misspelled Claudia Zuminich’s name for the superb Goblins on page 20 of last issue! Apologies to Claudia, and thank you again for the wonderful pictures!*

*Cover art by Boris Samec
 Title art by Mark Smith*

*Please note that, while we here at **Ironwatch** attempt to deliver you the best products and ideas we can, we cannot guarantee the balance of any scenarios or special rules presented herein. If you find any errors, grammar mistakes, or rule imbalances, please contact us on the Mantic Forums (Look for the discussion labeled “Ironwatch Issue X Feedback”) and let us know what we could do to improve your fan-produced magazine. If you are interested in writing, illustrating, or editing for our magazine, please let us know on the feedback discussion as well so you can get in on the action!*

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Magic Artefacts



By Daniel—
"Darklord"

Ok the Basilean Legacy is out and we now have double the number of Magic Artefacts we had previously. Here's my views on the new artefacts.:

War-bow of Kaba

Cheap ranged attack, this is a nice way to give you a chance of causing a rout test, which is all you need on a heavily damaged unit. Also good because it allows you to use a nice model with a bow as a hero etc.

Myrddin's Amulet of the Fire-heart

Zap and Breath/Heal/Dark Surge etc in a single turn? Nice, handy use for 5 pts. I predict this will be seen in pretty much every army that uses Wizards.

Kevinar's Flying Hammer

Hammer time! Similar to the War-bow really, nothing stopping you taking both. (on different units of course)

Sukura's All-Seeing Eye

Probably not going to make a difference that often but it's cheap so why not.

Smoke Bombs of Coo-par

Nice, but mostly limited to normal missile fire. (indirect Fire and Piercing 4 ignores cover) Again cheap and cheerful.

Maccwar's Potion of the Caterpillar

This is where things start to get really good, I'd suggest this is a great artefact to have in any list, because undoubtedly the battlefield will have some difficult terrain. This item either allows a defensive unit to sit in the terrain (hopefully on an objective) or for a Cavalry unit etc to sweep the aforementioned unit away.

Wedyllf's Hunter's Orb

Excellent, makes shooters better, enough said.



By Grant Mahoney



By Giuseppe Aquino

Mad Cultist's Runic Missiles

Interesting, these seem pretty good, if probably less powerful than the Hunter's Orb, but hey why not take both?

Orcsbain's Amulet of Thorns

This is very nice, Flyers and Cavalry are both very popular so why not defend against them? Nothing stopping you taking Steedbane Incense/Phalanx troops as well, for an entire army of anti cav/flyers.

Hellebore's Curse of Slow Death

Hmm odds are the enemy will take 2-3 damage from this if applied first turn, it's not bad, but I think the War-bow & Flying

Hammer are better. Still it's thematic for a shaman style character.

Darklord's Onyx Ring

Well what a lovely name it has! I think it's pretty awesome, makes regeneration far more predictable. Ideal for a Regiment of Elohi/Halfbreeds etc.

Crepognon's Scrying Gem of Zellak

I like this, it combo's well with the Rune Stones, note if you have a huge army it's less worthwhile as you can generally wait to deploy important units until your opponent is done anyhow.

Darklord's Helm of Retribution

Great name, but not amazing mostly due to it's low odds of ever doing anything. Course when it does you will laugh!

Forest's Mercy

I can't help but feel I would rather have the Healing Charm, this does combo with regeneration.

Myrddin's Dwarven Rune Stones

Woah major powerful, this is what every Cavalry or Artillery army wants! Trouble is if you both take this then it's wasted points, still at least you've both wasted the points. I can see just about every army that has a Hero with a spare artefact slot taking this, I predict it will be carried by Dwarf Engineers everywhere. ;)

Daedle's Hourglass of Dilation

Very situational, when it works WOW, how often will you get the chance though? (depends on your opponent) Of course even when things are lined up perfectly you can still roll low.

Boots of the Immortal Reaper

Sounds awesome until you read about the unit becoming immune to Dark Surge, could be handy if you want an Endless Zombie Horde as a flanking unit or

similar.

Juddoug's Brew of Truesight

Excellent, practically as good but cheaper than the Brew of Keen-eyeness, and probably better than Jar of the Four Winds to. (depends where the units are placed of course)

Neek's Anti-magic blade

Stick it on something fast and mobile and go artefact hunting! Course not everyone uses artefacts, great if you know in advance your opponent relies on loads of expensive artefacts.

Scarletmaw's Fenulian Amulet

A little expensive, I think if I wanted Zap I'd take the Boomstick. Vicious is alright.



By "ManticFanBoyLAD"



By Boris Samec

Mreb's Grimoire of Unspeakable Darkness

OH YEAH! Mmm Liche's with Dark Surge 14, this is nice. It even allows you to take a Revenant King and boost him to a respectable DS 10. Course Druids will love this to. "Look, the trees! They're moving!"

Wedyelf's Blade of the Beast Slayer

This isn't weedy at all! Makes any character into a monster slayer, most armies will field something this blades likes to slay, so it's a pretty safe bet. Imagine this on a Berserker Lord or Vampire. <shudder> The Ogre's have just come out to play, this may send them scurrying home again!

Kaba's Holy Hand Grenades

Short range but pretty nasty, Could be fun on a Drakon. Obviously if you face good armies a lot it's not so worthwhile.

Hellebore's Mask of Brutal Truth

This is BRUTAL, slap on any unit the enemy will want to charge and it turns the enemy into effectively goblins! Could be a game changer.

Head of the Gorgon

At first glance this appears quite weak until you realise it causes an immediate Nerve check! So hit a unit with some serious shooting, then use this on it, you will get an immediate Nerve check and then if it doesn't rout, you get to test at the end of the round to, that's pretty evil.

Platemail of Tornadoes

Ouch halves movement AND stops shooting? This is very good, it can screw up Wizards, Cannons, Knights, pretty much anything as long as it isn't too close. It's 50/50 to hit

though, so don't assume you will slow down a unit etc. That being said it's VERY powerful, can see this being popular.

Doddsy's Cymbals of Doom

Oh my, Inspiring is such a big deal that being able to negate it is very strong, the bearer of this will get a huge target on their head! Add extra at the double movement as well and we have a winner.

The Totem of Doddsy

Well Doddsy items seem to be synonymous with power! This is crazy, Inspiring 18"?! Erm ok, it is expensive but then it deserves to be. Again this unit gets a big bulls eye on their foreheads. Possibly multiple army standards is a safer proposition, but hey you could take

both. Amusingly this item is negated by Doddsy's Cymbals of Doom, so with Doddsy on Doddsy action we will have a winner!

Crystal Pendant of Retribution

BOOM! Expensive but interesting, throw this onto Gargoyles or similar and then charge them into the front of a block of Knights, it either screws their movement up or they charge and kill the unit and take horrible casualties. Alternatively give it to your Knight block and get them into the enemy safe in the knowledge if anyone dares to countercharge and rout them, they will come to a nasty end.

So there we go, overall the cheap items are a great use for a few left over points, and can



By Matt Gilbert

be surprisingly helpful, others are more expensive but can have huge effects upon the game, it seems to me we do have some power creep here, but we also have some quite varied effects which do add variety and interest. I must saying letting the community take part in this was a good move by Alessio, it's fun to see forum members names in the book!

One thing is for sure KoW isn't quite the same as it was before, I'm looking forward to seeing how things pan out. ▀



By "left64"



Elven Tactics, Part 2

By Jason Flint

Welcome back to Elven tactics! In the last issue we covered the Elven army as a whole, and we went over many of the basic units you can choose from. It's time to cover a few more of the units that an Elven commander has at their disposal, and we will also go over basic army selection.

So lets go over the characters of the Elven army

Prince

The prince is a nice and cheap character you can take. He's not exactly impressive, with just 3 attacks and a Nerve equivalent to a troop, but don't over look his combat

potential. Those 3 attacks hit on 3+, and you have the Elite rule, so you are likely to hit with all 3, or 2 at worst! They also hit at crushing strength(1) so odds are he's going to put a hole in a unit he attacks. Don't expect him to beat off a unit on his own, instead throw him in alongside some palace guard against tough enemy units.

The Prince doesn't have inspiring, so his exact placement isn't always that important to the rest of the army. So this guy is also someone who you can send off on ridiculous war-machine killing missions, as he is as cheap as a typical warmachine, and without inspiring your own army won't miss him. However a good magic item to give him is the Talisman of Inspiration, which will make him a bit more durable with that re-roll, and also he will aid units around him.

Another easy choice of item is the blade of slashing, as his good melee value and crushing strength mean he will likely be able to put that attack to good use! These 2

items are also cheap, meaning you are not over stretching your points on a cheap character.

King

The next step up from the Prince is the King. This guy is far more impressive. He has a higher Nerve, more attacks and importantly, Inspiring as standard. This is a much larger points sink though, at a base of 120 points. With such a high value this isn't a character you can throw away, do not let him get butchered on his own! Keep him with your army so his Inspiring can benefit as many units as possible. Sticking him into combat alongside other units will often sway the combat heavily in your favor, he will hit with most of his attacks and do some damage with his crushing strength.

He is though, a gamble. At such a high points cost, you must consider what else you

can take and protect him from elite units with crushing strength. I've seen a King get torn apart by werewolves and wasted, and in a game later he single handedly butchered 3 Drakons and 60 scouts. Good magic items to give are again, the blade of slashing, giving him an impressive 6 attacks. But beware over doing magic items, it's often simply not worth improving him further.

Mage

This individual will cost you the same as a King, a lot! So you have a direct choice between the 2 here, combat power and leadership, against ranged spells. The Mage has 2 spells, Zap! (5) and Heal (3). Both are very impressive stats, the fact you roll 5 dice for your Zap will often get a raised eyebrow from your opponent if they are not familiar with Elves! The Elite rule really comes into effect here. Every turn your Mage should be doing something, every turn a spell must be





cast in order to be worth their points. So that re-roll will be used again and again, on every spell cast.

Because you will often find that you need to get your Mage out of tricky situations or racing to aid a unit in trouble, paying the 10 points for the horse (increasing speed to 9 but retaining the individual rule) is a good choice! Beware though, Mages have low Nerve and defense, they can brush off a bit of damage, maybe some fool hardy enemy spell caster trying to Zap back at you, but if they get caught in combat then they will often be pulled apart. And even if they do survive, you cannot make a ranged attack the following turn, meaning their worth is wasted. Out of a King and a Mage, I will often choose a Mage over a King because of their versatility.

Army Standard Bearer

Dirt cheap at 30 points, but you will find most armies include at least one of these. They are there simply to give you Inspiring. They are not good in combat and have no ranged value. If you wish for your standard bearer to have another role on the battlefield, consider giving them either a Boomstick or a Healing charm. Either is good, though I would sway towards a Boomstick, as it can be used every turn. Whereas a healing charm is of no use on the very first turn of the game, or if your units run off completely!

Tree Herder

This towering monstrosity is there primarily for intimidation. Your opponent will not be impressed with having to deal with something that has a Nerve of 18/20 and

Defense 6+. Yes that's right, Defense 6+. The Elves have something with a really good defense! The Tree herder can soak up damage but strangely, cannot give it out. With an awesome crushing strength 3, he will pick up and smash repeatedly into the ground anything he can reach in a Hulk vs Loki style rampage.

However against large units his low 5 attacks and lack of Elite mean on his own he will struggle to break them. He has one more trick up his branchy sleeve, Vanguard. This is a monster that will march forward 12" before the game begins. However be careful not to over place him, he's not Nimble like Scouts and if your opponent sees an opening to get a flank charge, he will take it. At 275 points the Tree Herder is slightly over pointed, by about 25 points. But they are still a fun and characterful unit to use. Try running them in pairs to really shake your opponent up!

Elf Lord on Drakon

This is, in effect, an upgrade for your King. For 30 points more you can have him on a Drakon. This increases his speed to 10 and gives him Fly, and ups his crushing strength to 2.

Seems a bargain? Not entirely, be aware that he loses the individual rule, which does mean he will benefit from smashing into the flanks of opponents units, he will become number one target for warmachines who can now bring a cannonball or unpleasantly shaped stone onto him.

Giving him En-scrolled armor may increase his survivability from piercing 2 and 3, but cannons will damage on 2s regardless. The Fog is quite a pricey investment for this so is not something that will fix it. Something to think about if you want a fast moving King, but not an automatic choice.

Elf Lord on Dragon

The most expensive choice of all, at 350 points this is a huge investment. The Dragon





packs a serious punch in combat, and will happily bite the heads off Ogres with 8 crushing strength 3 attacks. With a higher Nerve than a Drakon mounted Lord and Breath Attack 15, this is a much more hardy and versatile unit. A unit this big and important is worth spending points on. The Fog is a massive investment but will save you from warmachines, but not rampaging wannabe-Saint-George Knights. Enscrolled armor will make him almost invincible, except from deadly cannon fire and other powerful creatures.

If you fancy paying for something cheaper, the Boots of Levitation is a good one. It allows your Dragon to fly the full 20" and still unleash its Breath Attack. The Lord on Dragon is still probably over pointed like the Tree Herder, by about 30-50 points. But again it's a great characterful unit to use in larger games.

Well I hope that's helped with deciding who you want leading your army!

Choosing your force

The great thing about Kings of War is you never know exactly what you're going to face, even if you know what force your opponent is using. Every army is versatile and the force selection

process allows you to take pretty much whatever you want! So for this I will go over how to take a small, balanced army to start out with, how to think about what to use so you can decide for yourself. So to begin with lets write out a 1,000 point army, the units we'll pick and why we'll use them, and how they will roughly be deployed.

The first unit an Elf army always starts with is, a unit of Spearmen. Simple because these are such a good unit as discussed earlier and should always make a show in any army. Take a Regiment, and give it a banner to increase its staying power. In fact take 2 because one combat unit is never enough. That's the first 250 points spent and 2 solid unit already in place.

The second thing an Elf army should always have is scouts. Now ideally you should have at least 2, as these will vanguard forward and

unleash the first shots, and ultimately be the first victims of your opponents revenge! Keeping a couple close by each other means they can threaten any small units that move to intercept them, and your opponent will have to send something more hardy to deal with them. Don't waste any upgrades on them. 2 Basic Scout troops for 105 each brings our total to 460.

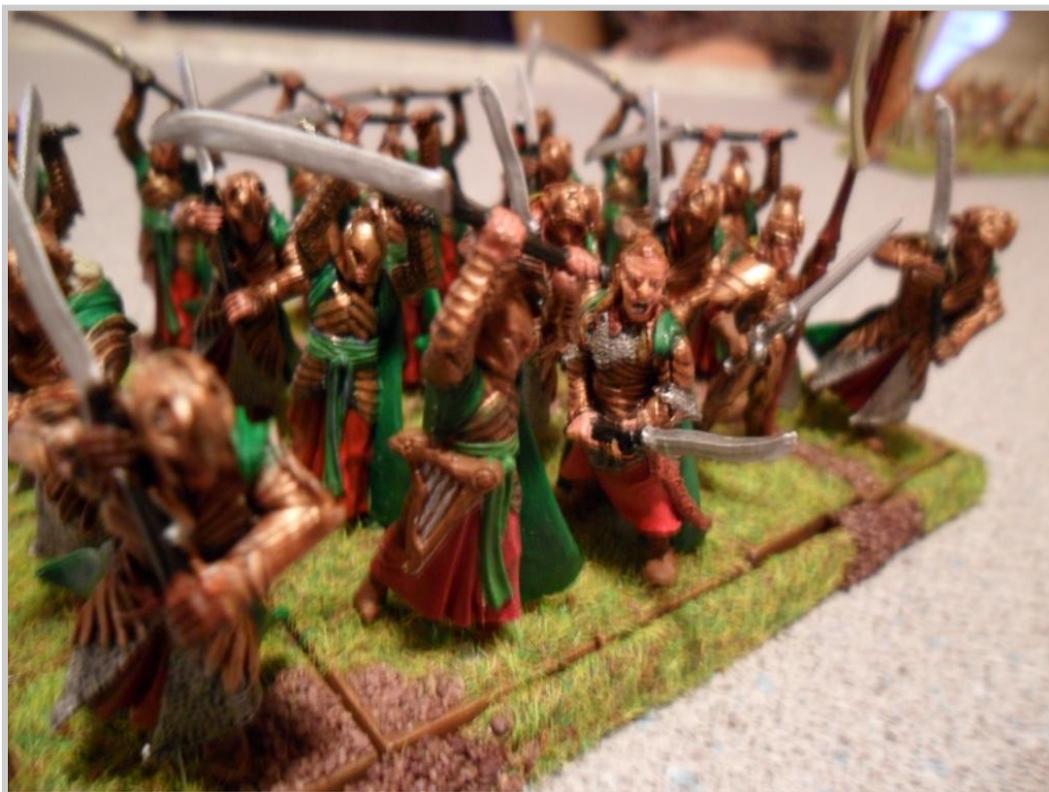
Now who do you want to lead your army? A character is always handy to have and fits well with the idea of Elven warrior Elite. For a small army you could take a Prince to conserve some points, but for this I'd recommend a Mage. They are versatile and can be relied upon to deal with higher defense targets or those warmachines your opponent will hide in woods which your bowmen will struggle to hit. Give the Mage the Talisman of Inspiration for 10 points to increase their own survivability as well as aid

your other units. So that's another 130 points invested bringing it to 590.

Now a dependable Bolt Thrower or 2 should be included, as it gives you the vital piercing you need to deal with tough armies, and some accurate fire power to direct upon the enemy. We have 2 Solid units, so we'll fill both of those slots and take 2 standard Bolt Throwers for 150 points. Our total is now 740.

As it stands our army will deploy 2 spear units side by side, with 2 scout units that will deploy behind. Why deploy ranged units behind the front line? With vanguard, you can make an "At the double" move after deployment, so the scouts can move past the spears, meaning your bow attacks will be in range on turn 1 without having to move them. Behind the Spears are our 2 warmachines, preferably on a hill for maximum visibility, and our humble leader the Mage, will stay between the scouts and spears, firing Zap or healing, and inspiring our units to fight on. So what do we need now? We have the piercing but we lack some crushing strength. We lack a seriously good combat unit. We lack Palace Guard.

A Palace Guard Half regiment will do here, as they will not be on the front line. A half regiment still kicks out 10 attacks



but won't use up the space a full Regiment will. Don't bother with a Banner, they shouldn't be taking any damage, just dealing it! Place them out of sight or obscured behind the Spears to bring them into the fight when needed. We are now at 830, leaving just 170 points to spend!



So at this point we are looking at the last units that we will pick, and at this point I'd go one of 2 ways. Our first choice is to increase the combat output of your army, by adding another Spear Regiment with a Banner. This will create an impressive front line, and cavalry dependant armies will now be regretting their choices. With 45 points remaining, we can still add another character to the mix. Add an Army Standard Bearer for 30 points, to place amongst the spears to keep them fighting. This will free up the Mage to move about freely a bit more. With 15 points left, add a musician and the blade of slashing to the Palace Guard. Meaning they now have 11 attacks with +1 to Nerve checks against enemy units!

The second choice would be adding more bow-fire, by adding another troop of scouts. At 105 points this allows us more to play with afterwards. It also gives us an impressive 'gun' line, 30 bow attacks, 5 Zap

and 4 Bolt attacks a turn, backed up by 3 combat units should the enemy connect (which is likely, some always get through!) is tough to deal with, especially to lightly armored armies. To increase the survivability, we'll add an Army standard again, but this time with the points left we will equip him with the Boomstick, increasing our Zap out put to 8 (with 2 re-rolls!) which further increases our ranged ability. With 5 points left, give the Blade of Slashing to the Palace Guard. Just incase.

That's it for this month, you should now be clued up on most of the choices in the Elf army list and now have a good idea on how to start building your army. Happy gaming and may the dice be kind to you!▪



WIP THE HALF-CAST AND THE SNIVELLING TIDE

By Darren Lysenko

Quickshade to ease the burden of the seemingly countless foot troops, but they were done.

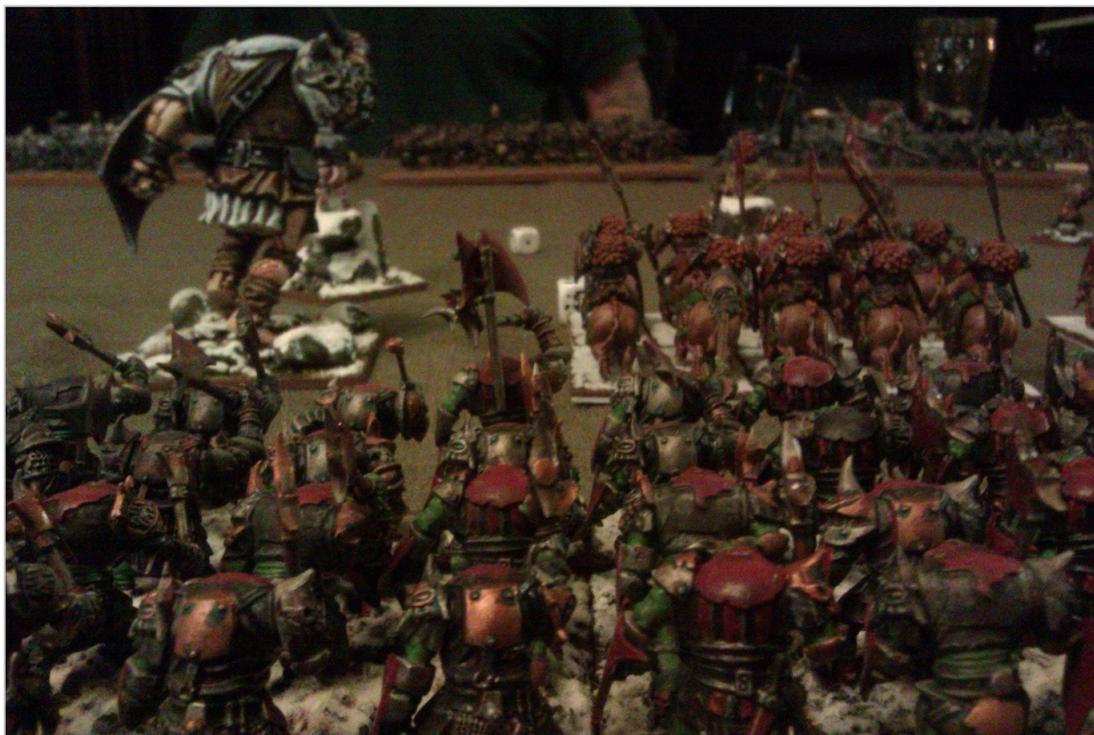
Well, almost.

When the dust had settled and the feverish splatters of green paint on my walls had dried, my 'to-do' box contained nothing but

Painting an Orc army is no mean feat. Seriously. There are hundreds of them! Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying it isn't fun – because it is – but it just takes so long. Last summer, I resolved to get my entire horde painted, every last one of them; Krudgers and Flaggers, Giants and Axes, right down to the lowest of the low, the humble Orclings. And for the most part, I did get them all painted. Admittedly, it took me until February the following year, even with the help of *the Army Painter's* excellent



Just over half of my horde...



Led by Mungo, the army marched to war, but I couldn't help feeling something was missing...

a few bits of old sprue, one *Wip the Half-Cast* miniature and about a hundred plastic Orclings.

I'll be honest, the last thing I felt like doing after painting a hundred and fifty Orcs was doing the same thing, only smaller! For this reason, these last few parts of my army remained in the box and didn't come out for a very long while. But as time went by, every time I played *Kings of War* I had the annoying and nagging feeling that things weren't quite... *complete*.

So, with a fantastic raft of new Mantic miniatures rapidly hurtling towards us on the horizon in the shape of *Dreadball Season 3*, *Deadzone* and – not forgetting, of course – even *more Kings of War* miniatures, I felt it was high time I 'cleared my desk' of these last few pieces.

Now, the Orclings are such a character-full part of the Orc range that I really didn't want to simply glue a few to some 40mm bases and call them 'done'. Instead, I tried to come up with one or two different mini-dioramas instead which would help to bring out their quirkiness.

Last month, you may have seen the first of my army's Orcling bases - *Joffrey, King of*

the Orclings.

Over the next couple of issues, I'd like to take you step-by-step through the creation of my second Orcling base, *Wip the Half-Cast and the Snivelling Tide*.

This month, I'm going to take a look at building the model...





Ready to begin, I laid out my tools and sat down with *Wip the Half-Cast*, a bag full of Orclings and a massive mug of tea. It seems pretty anal to lay out all of my tools like this at the start of a modelling job, but believe me, I've speared my fingers so often on files and blades while rummaging through my

tools that I decided this was a much safer way of working!

The first thing I did was begin to prepare *Wip*.



After the usual clipping and filing off of any flash, I gently sanded the whole of the miniature to remove the sharpness of some of the edges, especially on the flames. I find that the easiest way to do this is simply to close my eyes and roll the miniature around between my fingers. It's very difficult to visually see which edges still contain sharpness, but searching an otherwise smooth model by touch will make any rough edges stand out like – well, like a sore thumb.

Afterwards, so that the undercoat would stick smoothly and evenly, I thoroughly washed the miniature with soapy water and a wide bottle brush. This small step can make a huge difference. Not only will it remove any dust and debris from the sanding and filing which may have settled in the recesses, but it also cleans off any oily residue left over by the casting process.

Finally, I dried the miniature thoroughly with kitchen towel.



The next job was to superglue *Wip* to the base. There are two things which the more astute amongst you may have noticed. Firstly, I have chosen to eschew the longer base which is included with *Wip* in favour of a 40mm square base. Now, in *Kings of War* base size is vital – so technically, were I to use this miniature as *Wip the Half-Cast*, an opponent may well raise an eyebrow – however, I tend not to use named characters all that much in my armies, so I decided to opt for the 40mm square instead as I will be much more likely to use this miniature solely as an Orcling base.

Oh, and of course, the second thing is – HE'S DANGLING OFF THE EDGE!

(But don't worry, I'll sort that out later...)



I coated the base in a thick layer of PVA glue before dipping it into a mixture of sand and stones. I tend to favour natural materials over 'bought' basing supplies, scavenging my supplies on this occasion from a local beach.



The thickness of all that sand and stone and glue had a double purpose, if I'm honest. Firstly, of course, it breathes a lot more life into the base, making it a tangible part of the diorama rather than just a thin scattering of gravel thrown on to 'finish' the miniature. Secondly, I knew that it'd be really helpful to have the miniature firmly attached for the next bit...



...which involved taking a bone-saw to the metal part of *Wip's* base and removing the aforementioned excess overhang.



With *Wip the Half-Cast* cleaned up and sanded and filed and washed and glued and based and all of those other essential (*cough* and boring) things we always have to do before we get to the exciting part of painting the miniature, I was left with the small matter of having about a hundred Orclings at my disposal.

I decided to carefully and sympathetically scatter a few around on the base, just to add a bit of interest...



Starting off with just a single Orcling (Patient Zero, so to speak), I slowly began to build up my 'Snivelling Tide' layer by layer. This actually took quite a lot of time – more time in fact than I had at first expected – because, due to the precariousness of some of the placements, I had to wait for each Orcling to thoroughly dry before I could add the next.

Stage by stage, the wave of blasted Orclings grew and grew. Every time I stepped back and thought 'that's enough', I forced myself

to add more and more until I started to think 'okay, now that's a bit ridiculous...'. Only then, did I know that I'd gotten just the right amount!

Above and below, you can see the finished model. I really like the way that this has turned out so far, but of course this is only half of the work...

...Now I need to find some idiot stupid





enough and mad enough to actually want to paint it and all its snivelling Orclings.

Anyone?

Just me then...▪

Volunteers?



BREACH

By Michael Grey

PART FOUR

```
Containment Protocol  
- Incident Ref#:  
00000370..Time Stamp  
  0 plus 688:47  
//Evol. Phase 030//  
Alert Status 0Red0//
```

Behind them, over the building and in Landing Square, the gunfire continued. It did not come from the same weapons Cole had heard the marines use on the newscast, but from something with a deeper, surer report, and they were unanswered as they swept the Square.

He could only think of one reason for what that could mean. 'Why' was a different question, and one which could wait. Right now he had Jean's arm over his shoulders and his free hand pulled a half-catatonic Cas away from the building they had hidden in. He did not know where he was trying to escape to. He had no destination in mind other than *away*.

The apartment's fire door escaped into an alley. Cole gave a silent thanks to any god listening the alley was empty of everything but the second hand sound of rifle fire. They limped on, gaining speed with each step as their senses returned. Cole thought, *at this rate-*

There was a brief dropping tone in the air, and the end of the alley disappeared in a cloud of dust and flying concrete chips. The



By Mantic Games, Used with Permission

ground shook with a localised tremor, and a pulse in the air knocked them from their feet to land painfully on elbows and backs.

Cole recovered first, rocked into a sitting position, and was the first to see the figure emerging from the cloud. It was armoured like the troopers in the Square, coming from the smoke as if it

could see perfectly. It stalked, holding the massive rifle ahead of it, beneath its feet chunks of shattered bricks crunched flat.

Cole felt his heart stop, and realised too late they had dropped Cas's guns in the apartment. Two more troopers emerged from the smoke, coming down the alley towards them. He wished very much he could apologise to Cas and Jean, but it was too late, and he could only watch as their death came down the alley.

The first trooper reached where they lay, turned its rifle on them. Cole swallowed. The barrel shifted, jumping from one spot on their bodies to another as if it were searching them. And then the trooper was gone, moving on, its rifle making the same movements across the walls and debris as it had on them. The other figures passed without a glance down, moving off and around the corner, leaving them alone with



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the smell of dusty air and dwindling gunfire from the Square.

He became aware he was breathing in racking half sobs, then realised it wasn't him. Jean lay beside him, tears streaking her dusty cheeks as she sucked in air as if she were hyperventilating. He grabbed her shoulder and when she continued to stare forward, shook hard. She blinked, looked at him. He mouthed *OK?*, frightened of calling the trooper's attention back to them. She nodded. At his other side Cas moan and rolled onto her back and coughed a dry hack. She opened her eyes, blinked, and raised a shaking hand to point to the sky.

He looked up to see more contrails burning through the sky to land all over Prime.

"Where are we going?" Jean's voice shook.

She wasn't panicking, not quite, but the tremor in her voice suggesting panic was a future possibility.

When Jean and Cas had come to in the alley he'd told them all of what happened. It had hurt him to see the hope in Jean's face die, but there was no way around it. They moved under his direction, following him as he had moved about Prime for weeks, sticking to cover and alleys. Every so often gunfire would erupt a street or two away, always the needling whine of marine small arms fire, and the heavier reply of the armoured troopers. The exchanges never lasted long, and always ended with just the deeper shots sounding.

They reached the end of another alley. It opened onto what was once a wide boulevard, now chicaned by concrete bollards and torn up by recent gunfire.

"The docks," he said, peering up and down the street.

Cole realised now he'd been subconsciously heading for his apartment and the one piece of security he felt on the planet. The sight of so many drop pods falling across the city robbed him of any sense of safety.

The only option he could think of now was to run, as quickly and far as possible.

The street was empty and waved them to follow.

"Why?"

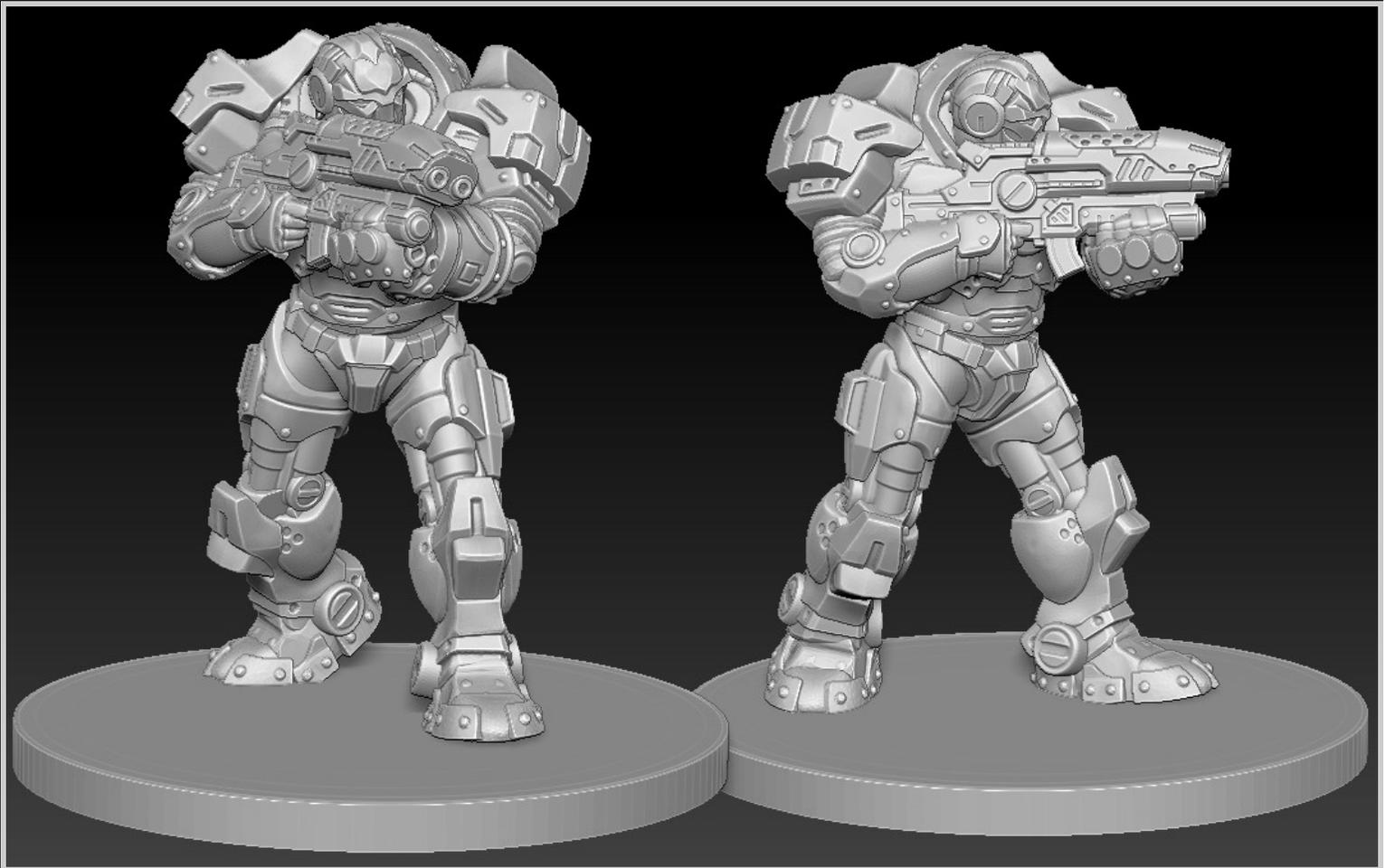
"We need to get offplanet. Whatever those troopers are I don't think they're here for our safety. Between them and whatever's coming through the jungle, I'd rather not be around when they meet."

"But where could we go? The G-Net's down, there's no navigation we--"

The day's shocks, the weeks of hunger and pressure broke and he turned on Jean. "God damn it, do you think I don't know that? What do you want, to stay here so those troopers can shoot us, wait for those things to get here, or go hide in the jungle and let the plants strangle us



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in our sleep? Let's just get off of here and then worry about what's next."

He stopped, breathing hard while the echoes of his last shout reverberated off the empty buildings. Jean's eye's filled with tears and her lips began to tremble. He felt bad. But however bad he felt, he felt even more tired and had no energy to apologise. He turned and walked on.

Jean turned to Cas who trudged behind. She hadn't said anything since the Square. "Cas..."

"He's right," Cas said. "Let's just... let's just go."

Knots of people gathered at street edges, darting across the open ground after many glances up and down streets before huddling for communal cover at the other side. When the groups saw Cole, Jean and Cas they would pause and look at the three of them warily. When they made no moves which could be aggressive these groups ran on, casting furtive looks over their shoulders as they moved off.

"Looks like we weren't the only ones thinking of escape," said Jean as the latest group ran on.

"Then we'll have company on the ship. Let's

keep moving,” said Cole.

They reached the same fence Cas had cut a flap through on the day Cole came to see where the hospital supplies had gone. That day felt like years ago. Others had discovered the makeshift gateway and the chain link had been pulled back even further, the metal bent permanently for easier use.

They slipped through without a word and when they emerged onto the waterfront Cole felt his heart sink; all the ships he had seen at anchor those weeks ago had gone. The bay was empty. Even the ships docked at the wharfs had left.

Worse, any other water craft had also been taken. From super tankers to the smallest aluminium skiff, they had all gone.

His strength left him with all his hope and he dropped to the ground. Were he honest he expected it to be this way. They were too late, but there was always hope. He had always thought there would be hope.

Neither Jean nor Cas said anything. They just stood and looked out to sea, through the hole which was once the only opening in the Bubble and out

across the open water to the spaceport. Its colossal docking towers caught the setting sun, throwing out flashes of pure light, like a beacon in the darkness.

No, he thought. *Not today*.

He stood and began walking.

“Where are you going?” said Cas.

“The spaceport,” he said. “There have got to be some cutting tools left around here somewhere. We’re going outside the Bubble to the coast and we’re going to make a raft. I’ll paddle there if I have to.”

“But that’s got to be ten kilometres,” said Jean.

“Do you see a better way?”



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“No,” she said. “I suppose I don’t.”

He looked up and down the waterfront, looking for something which may look like a machine shed. “As long as we can get offplanet we’ll be in a better position. There’s hope. There’s always hope. Right Cas?”

He looked at Cas, as much for support for his own convictions than to convince Jean, but she wasn’t looking at him. Her face tilted upwards, to a point in the sky above the distant port. She whispered something and it took Cole a moment to realise what; “My god.”

He looked up.

In the darkening sky there was a glint in the air. What he once took as an early star he recognised as a superhauler, the massive cargo vessels used to ship vegetable matter from Gaian to other systems.

It was moving.

It felt wrong. An object so far away, so massive, should shift over imperceptible intervals. Like the moons, you knew they were moving, but they should remain still in the sky.

But the superhauler was moving.



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It banked noticeably, swinging its lumbering prow away from anchor and Gaian, moving into a position where it could break the planet’s gravity.

“It’s moving too fast,” said Cas.

Even with his weak grasp of physics Cole knew she was right. From Gaian Prime’s waterfront it looked sedate, but if they shifted the thousands of kilometres to where the ship lay, the forces exerting themselves on the superstructure would be immense. He could imagine the pained squeal of twisting metal that would be filling the ship as they watched.

The turn put it side on to them, making it appear to be as long as Gaian’s closest moon was wide. A trick of distance which somehow still allowed the larger aspects of the ship’s body to show as grainy texture at the huge distance.

"It's making a break from orbit," said Cas without looking away.

"They're escaping," said Cole.

"They're full already?"

Cole shook his head to answer Jean. "I doubt it. They're getting themselves out of here." He didn't blame them as much as he cursed them. Whoever was piloting that ship would know they were leaving everyone on the surface to die.

He jumped in the air, swung a fist at the unimaginably distant ship and screamed and spat. "You bastards! You goddamn fracking bastards, get back here you selfish sons of bitches!"

The ship exploded. Its mid section flashed twice in quick succession like two short lived suns, strangely merry in their lack of sound.

Cole dropped to the floor and stared, thinking dumbly for a moment he was responsible for the detonation.

He watched the hauler began to drift apart in two even pieces. A series of smaller explosions rippled along the tear's ragged edges, making their way further along the body until petering out as the ship fell silently apart.

"What just happened?" said Jean

Cole didn't answer. Couldn't answer. He could only imagine how many people were aboard that ship. Even a minimum compliment of crew would be measured in the hundreds. They would still be on board now, perhaps frantically running for the escape pods, struggling against the immutable gravity as the hauler fell against Gaian's pull. It was destruction and loss of life on such a huge and impersonal scale he could only view it dispassionately.

"They were shot down," said Cas. "Someone didn't want them leaving."



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“Who? Those soldiers?”

“My guess, yeah.”

The ship’s two halves continued to separate, their angle noticeably taking on a downward arc as, without engines to stabilise its orbit, it succumbed to the planet’s gravity. They were falling towards the western horizon, clearly gaining speed as they fell.

“We’d better go,” said Cas. “It’s getting dark. We should find somewhere to take shelter.”

They moved back into the city. Cas wanted to get away from the docks. She said the ship would crash into the ocean spanning over half of Gaian’s surface, and although

the bay Prime used as a dock was protected by a series of islands between it and the open ocean, she wanted to be on higher ground just in case the ship’s crash caused a tidal wave.

That was why they nearly walked into a checkpoint of the armoured troopers.

Fighting off an exhausted sleep Cole made a cursory look around an alley corner and nearly walked out before a movement

told him to get back. He made a second, more careful look.

The street lighting had long since gone out, but it was a clear night and Gaian’s moons cast enough light that he could see movement down the street.

“What is it?” asked Cas.

He waved his hand down in a frantic *keep quiet* motion and she joined him at the corner. He heard her breath stop as she saw what he did. Three hundred metres away the troopers had positioned themselves between the concrete bollards set up by the marines as checkpoints. They squatted behind the barriers, scanning the street with their massive rifles. As he watched one of the troopers moved from behind a barrier

and kicked over a concrete planter holding an ornamental tree. The planter was big, and filled with heavy Gaian soil, but it he kicked over as if it weighed nothing. The trooper moved back and retook its position.

“Clever,” whispered Cas.

“Huh?”

“The way they’re moving. See?”

Another one of the troopers moved to another piece of cover across the street. When it was in place another shifted to take a spot near its previous position. The way they moved looked wrong to Cole; too light in spite of their armour. A cold thought rose, and he wondered if he could outrun one if it came to it.

“They’re constantly moving, always keep all sectors covered and denying any snipers or ambushers the chance to lock down their positions.” She sounded close to admiration.

“Well whatever they’re doing let them do it the hell away from us.”

They moved back along the alley and emerged onto the

street around the corner. The moment they were in the open Cole heard the low rumble of a big engine being gunned nearby.

“Frack, back!” He pulled Jean’s arm back towards the alley, but Cas shook of his hand.

“I know that sound,” she said, and stepped further into the road.

“Cas, no!”



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She looked up to where the noise approached from. The engine revved and the street was flooded with halogen light. But Cas didn't move, just started waving her arms and shouting, "Hey! Hey, stop!"

"Cas!" Jean pulled from Cole's arms and ran into the street before he could stop her. He cursed, found himself running after them both, reaching Jean as she reached Cas and a truck screeched to a stop in front of them all, bathing them in blinding light.

An amplified cut over the motor's growl, "Halt! Identify yourselves."

Cas raised her hands, showing they were empty, and shouted, "Catherine Alvarez, Private, Second Platoon Gaian 8th."

There was no immediate answer. Words could be heard under the motor's idle rumble but not discerned. The lights rocked as weight moved around the truck, and somewhere a door opened and boots hit the ground. A figure marched into the light, a man in light marine fatigues. His eyes were hunted by shadows, and his clothes looked



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slept in. As if to spite that he walked with a stiff-backed pride.

He marched to them and stopped, crossing his arms at his back. "Captain Ferenz, 5th. Why aren't you in uniform, marine?"

Cas stood to attention and saluted. "Caught off duty, sir. Sir, Landing Square..."

"We know. I don't know who those armoured bastards are, but they hit every barracks in the city simultaneously. We're gathering forces now for a counter attack."

"You're going that way?" said Cole, pointing down the street.

"That's correct."

"Sir," said Cas, "There's a squad of those soldiers down there, dug in behind the

barriers. It looks like they're expecting trouble."

"I see." Ferenz chewed, looked over their shoulders with narrowed eyes, then, "Numbers? How were they armed?"

"Six, sir. Looked like small arms only, we didn't see anything heavy."

"Good. Well, we have to go that way. Now's as good a time as any to make a stand. You armed, marine?"

"No, sir."

"Shame. We have nothing spare. Get yourself to East Gate barracks and report in. We have contact!" The last was to the truck. Voices began shouting and before he knew it Cole was passed by a rush of marines in mismatched fatigues heading to the street corner. The Captain was with them, directing teams to different points and assigning roles. Cole counted two dozen marines as they took up position.

"Come on!" Jean was grabbing at his hand. "Let's get out of here, let's go!" She made a grab for Cas too, but she just walked off after the marines. "Cas, come on!"

She didn't answer, just looked on after the marines.

At an unheard order the assault was launched. Gunfire erupted, filling the street and making him cover his ears and involuntarily duck.

Grenades were thrown, some to explode



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unseen down the street, some fell without noise to emit clouds of smoke.

Shouted orders sent men running out of sight under the fusillade, before the rest of the marines followed with only their second hand noise to tell him what happened. He thought perhaps Jean was right and they should go, but Cas was walking towards the corner, keeping low, but moving quickly.

“Cas!” He shouted but could barely hear his own voice over the chaos

She ignored or couldn’t hear him. When she reached the corner she looked around, only exposing herself as much as she needed to see.

The fire fight’s noise took on a different pitch. The furious automatic fire from the marines was joined by the deeper, more purposeful bark of the other soldiers. With worryingly swiftness the newer noise drowned out the greater weight of marine arms until it was all that was left. And then, not even that.

Cas flipped around to lay against the wall and slid down to the ground, staring forward the

whole way.

Cole was running before the slide finished. When he reached her she didn’t react to his arrival, just continued to stair forward, breathing quick and shallow. He looked over her body and shoulders, only realising when he didn’t see any red stains he had been holding his breath. “Cas?”

She looked up as if she just realised he was there, and grasped his shoulders quickly enough to startle him. “We have to go! We

have to go now!" And she was off, dragging him by the hand when he didn't keep up, and taking Jean's as they passed.

Cole realised Cas was speaking. The words were hissed below her breathing, repeated in a chanted loop, and he stopped listening when he realised what she was saying. "It's like they weren't there. They went through them like they weren't fracking there..."

Cole couldn't think straight. Exhaustion saturated every fibre of his body until his mind could only concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other.

It was hours since the ambush, the darkest part of night. Prime was silent, the unearthly quiet fractured irregularly by sudden fire fights somewhere off in the streets. The exchanges never last long, and Cole had long since stopped taking notice.

If anything Cas was in a worse state. She stumbled after him in a half catatonic stupor, barely cognisant of her surroundings, content to let Cole take the lead. Only Jean was forward thinking enough to say,

"We can't go on like this. We need to find somewhere to sleep."

An hour ago the idea of laying down and closing his eyes with those soldiers in the city would have terrified Cole. But now he was just too tired to care. Probably, he thought slowly, a good sign Jean was right. They were trudging by a municipal office building, its corner opened to the street by some explosion, a rubble pile leading up to the hole.

Cole managed to shift direction and began walking up. Behind he could hear Jean



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talking softly to Cas, leading her after him. Inside the air was dryer, cooler, and Cole's eyes began to close by themselves as he let sleep claim him.

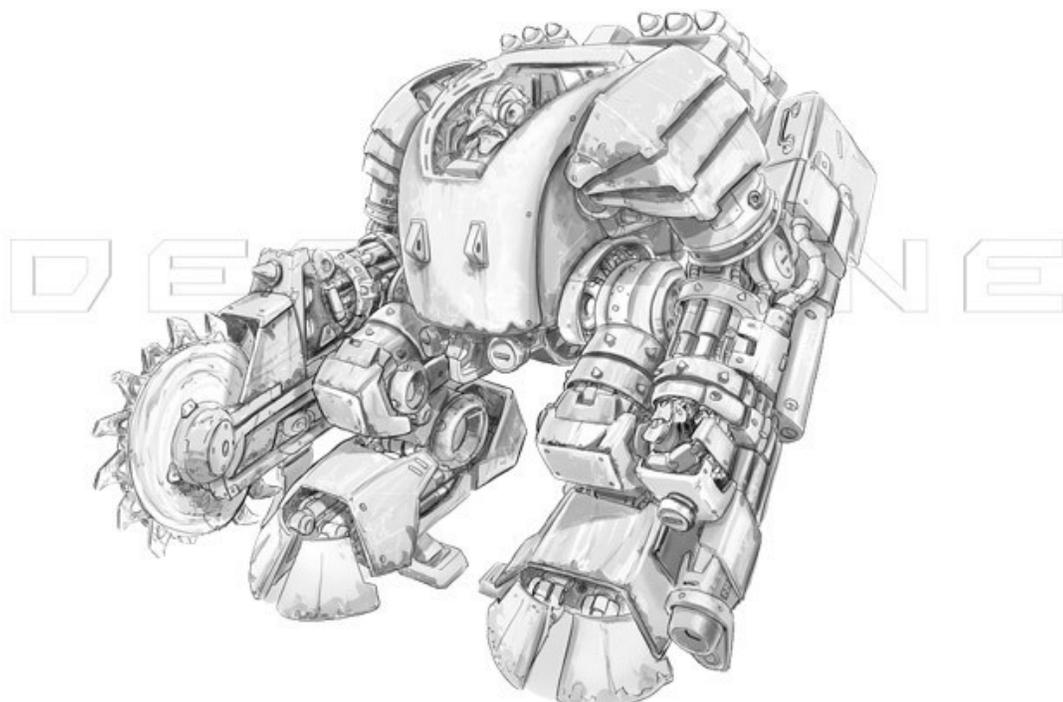
"Boy did you ever choose the wrong building."

His eyes snapped open, and he wondered at how tired he must be to have missed the two people standing in the room. No, he corrected himself. Not two; three. With the third lying on the floor by the lip of the open wall. Cole had walked right by him to get inside. Behind he heard Jean gasp. He was glad when Cas made no movement when he saw the two figures were carrying more weapons than he had ever seen on a single person.

They each carried rifles. Old, but well cared for, and each limb seemed to have either a knife or pistol strapped to it. The figure on the ground was similarly equipped, but armed with a long-barrelled rifle. Cole blinked as he looked. If that was a man his face was covered in what looked like fur, with more hair escaping where one item of clothing met another.

"You said they were walking on, Yndrel," said one of the men.

"Thought they were, boss," said the figure on the floor. His speech had an odd lilt Cole



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had never heard before, stressing the higher pitched letters.

"Well it's too late now, they've seen us. Kill them."

Cole thought he had misheard. He was so shocked he could only stand with his mouth open.

"What? No." That was the second man, further back in the room. He knelt and picked up a barrel-heavy rifle, slinging it over his shoulder as he stood. "Orders were recon, not shooting innocents."

"S'right boss. You're the boss, but you're not the boss boss," said the figure on the floor with its odd inflections.

"So what, we're going to take them with us?" said the first.

“Up to you, but I’m not shooting them.”

“Just wait a minute,” Cole heard someone say, and was only partly surprised to find it was him. He raised his hands palm out as he spoke. “We haven’t seen anything, we’re no trouble. We’ll just keep on walking eh?”

“Too late for that,” said the first man. “You’ve seen Yndrel here.”

Cole wondered what he meant when the figure on the floor stood on recurve legs, knees facing the wrong way. What he took for a flat nose was more a snout.

Cole stopped speaking, all fear gone at the surprise of seeing an alien for the first time. It stared back, and blinked in an oddly mammalian way.

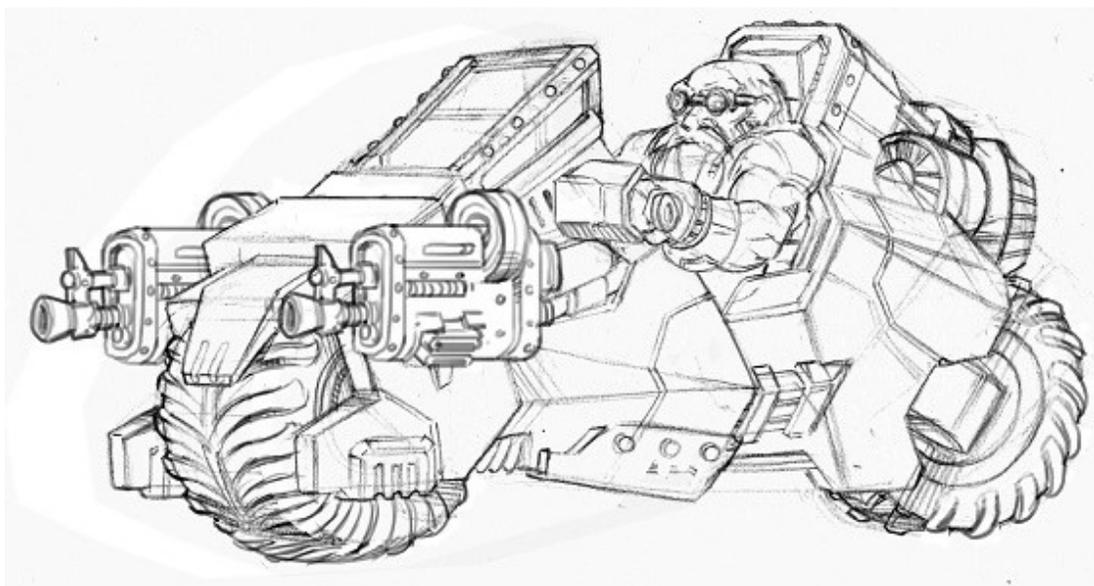
“Aw shit, we don’t have time for this,” said the first man, throwing his arms up. “Bendramin.”

A shadow detached itself from the wall, in the half light the effect was as if the wall came toward Cole. He focused in time to see a figure, much too huge to be a man, coming toward him. He had time to register hairless skin with an orange hue before a fist the size of a football swung at him and everything went black.

There were noises. Voices, the thuds of something heavy and packed tight being dropped onto a concrete floor. The air was as dry as it ever got on Gaian, but cool and still, with only the movement associated with the noises to disturb the air. Cole thought on this and decided to keep his eyes closed. Let them think he was still unconscious. His mouth was dry and throat felt distended, but he forced those feelings away until he could learn more.

Whoever was in the room with him they spoke Sphere, but with a multitude of dialects, most so thick they could be other languages. Individual words were hard to discern. Then a squeal, high pitched and worryingly familiar. He did hear words then; “Stop it, you’re killing me!” Cas’s voice.

He threw off his pretence at sleep and jumped up. He shouted, “Get off of



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His eyes were filmy and watered as the light stung them. He blinked furiously, making the room swim into focus to show a low-ceiling cellar, packed floor wall to wall with boxes and an upturned steel drum in the centre, acting a table for six people sat around it, playing cards and drinking from canteens. One of the people was Cas. She held a set of cards in her hands and stared at him with her one eye.

Cole hadn't known what to expect. A torture rack and a brazier suggested itself in his mind, but not this. In the absence of any obvious torture his prepared attacked faltered, and he stood there breathing hard and wondering what to do next.

Cas began to snort. Her mouth twisted as she tried to hold in what Cole knew was coming. The absurdity of the situation overcame him and when Cas burst out laughing he could not help but join in.

"You just needed to sleep. That's why I didn't wake you."

Cas and Cole were in another room of the cellar, sat against the wall drinking what he was assured was coffee. He recognised none of the people playing cards with Cas, but she held a rapport with them that suggested to him if she didn't know them personally then it was at least spiritually. They had all gone, leaving him and Cas to talk.

"Who are they?" he asked.

her!" as loud as his parched throat would allow.

“Freedom fighters. They don’t agree to Corporation rules, and because of that they’re outcasts.”

“What do you mean *don’t agree*? There is no outside of Corporation rules.”

“There is. I’ve heard rumour, but it’s hard to learn anything when all you’re fed is through the G-Net. Especially in an out of way place like Gaian.”

“But how do they live? No one would trade with them.”

She shrugged. “Stealing, but they do trade. Not everyone likes the Sphere, Cole. You’re one of them.” She sipped her coffee while looking at him. She had lost the rag tied over her face, placing it with purpose made eye patch. He was glad the rest of her face looked unhurt.

“Yeah, but... piracy?”

“We also protect people. People like you.”

A man walked into the room. He was dressed like the other men Cole had seen, but unarmed, and wearing a long brown coat which dusted the floor as he walked. He extended a hand to Cole. “Josep Cabal. I suppose you called

me general of our little band. At ease, Private.” He said to Cas as she stood and saluted.

Cole was surprised to find how easy it was to shake the man’s hand. Cabal had the relaxed smile that was easy to trust.

“The Lieutenant here said you may have some misgivings about us.”

Cole did not know what to say, so went with the first words to come into his head. “You’re all traitors.”

Cas kicked him hard on the ankle, but Cabal smiled. “Some would say, but we’re not the ones leaving you here to die.”

“What do you mean? Do you know what’s



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going on here?”

“Oh yes.” Cabal pulled over a box and sat down. “The parent corporation on Gaian discovered something here. Something Central is very keen it should have.”

“What kind of thing.”

“No one knows. The reports we intercept tend to be garbled and contradictory. Sometimes non-native ore, sometimes something obviously unnatural, such as carved stone or machinery. But in each case the effects are the same.”

“What happened out at Fourthree,” breathed Cole.

“Precisely. Governor McMahan was too greedy for his own good. Protocols said he should have sealed off Fourthree and called for Central aid when he found what he found. Instead he thought he’d see what he had first. See if he could make some profit for himself before anyone else had to be involved.”

“So this has all happened before?”

Cabal nodded.

“Then why haven’t we heard about it? News



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of a planet-wide infection would be all over the G-...”

Cabal smiled as Cole’s words shrank, patted Cole on the shoulder and stood. “I don’t want this to sound offhand, but your government has left you here to die. All trace of Gaian 16 will quietly disappear from Sphere records and anyone who cared to ask after anyone who lived here will have their silence bought or assured by other means. To all intents and purposes from a month ago you never existed, Mister Cole.”

Cole looked at Cas, who tried to look reassuring, failed, and made do with a shrug.

Cole turned back to Cabal. “Then why are you bothering telling me this? Why are we even here at all?”

“The Private here swore loyalty to our cause,

in exchange for us taking you and your friend offplanet. We're always in need of experienced soldiers. As to your second question, there are two reasons. The first is supplies. Mundane, but there you go. The second is to learn."

"Hold on," said Cole, pressing his fingertips to his temples. "Cas works for you now?" Cabal nodded, and Cole looked at Cas who mouthed *you're welcome*. "Okay, she and I will talk about that later, and what is it you're going to learn? Why haven't we left already?"

"The term for the position Gaian 16 finds itself in right now is *deadzone*, Mister Cole. Nothing comes in, nothing gets out. So far Sphere Central has contained such deadzones by firepower and the lack of population. To this point, the highest

population to be placed in a deadzone is twenty thousand. At the last consensus Gaian 16 had a population of three hundred million. I would say there is something to learn here, wouldn't you?"

....END OF PART FOUR...

*For more stories like this, visit
Michael's blog at
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it's a job

part 7

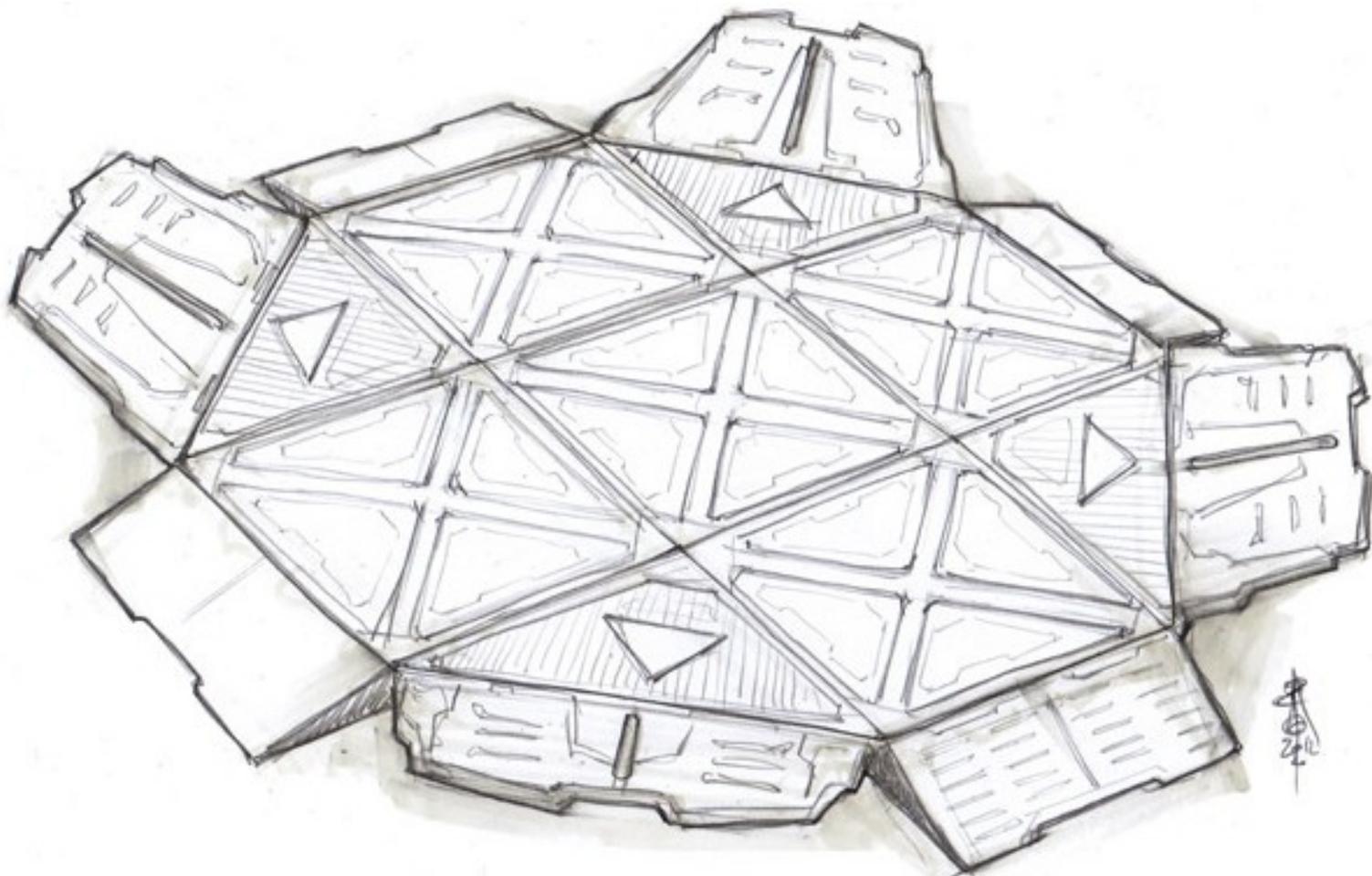
By Aaron Magno

The Anvor System was “discovered” by the Corporation several generations ago and has been a profitable part of the galaxy with mining operations throughout the system. Anvor-5 was especially profitable as it was habitable planet for humans and provided large areas for agriculture. Now, however, there was a problem...

Amongst visitors to this region of Anvor-5

the Country Spring Resort was one of the most popular choices of accommodation. Normally it's grounds would be filled with tourists enjoying the resort's luxurious amenities such as the restaurant or pool area. Various members of the business community would be meeting delegates from any number of different systems that make up the Great Galactic Co-prosperity Sphere in Country Spring's numerous conference rooms.

This was far from Country Spring's current state which had been in place since System Commander Mhauss had commandeered the premises. The restaurant had been converted to a mess hall. The pool area was deserted as could be seen by the system commander as he looked down at it from the



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resort's main conference room. Mhauss had his back to the interior of the room, which contained a large table that could accommodate up to twenty delegates. None of the seats, including the system commander's larger and more ornate seat, were occupied.

Although the conference room was being utilized it was not being used to host some complex business negotiation. In fact there was only one viewpoint to be held in this room and it was being clearly expressed on the opposite side of the table behind Mhauss by Commander Redavnisa.

"Grimmon, you're an idiot!" shouted Redavnisa, "I've never met an individual as incompetent as you."

The sergeant stood there completely still and straight in the face of abuse from his direct superior. Lieutenant Kreesa stood beside his sergeant in the exact same pose. Both men stared directly ahead and out the same window Mhauss was looking. Dealing with two men who had taken on the attributes of statues did not take any spirit away from Redavnisa's angry tirade.

"I should demote you, Grimmon, but you're already at the bottom of the barrel," continued Redavnisa, "If I got rid of you I'd have to promote this fool and then I'd have to demote him and promote one of the



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other clowns you command because nobody wants to transfer into your group of incompetent imbeciles."

The commander took a breath before continuing.

"I should send you out to one of the active war zones. With your record nobody would want you because you're a liability. Who'd want to have you around endangering their lives. I've seen good, brave men die out there while you continue to bumble around bringing disgrace to the service," Redavnisa said as he turned his back on his men, "I should be out there leading men of courage, men with talent, instead of the likes of you."

A smile passed briefly across the System Commander's face as the idea of Redavnisa out on the front lines almost made him laugh. Mhauss knew that the commander of the rat catchers was hardly a prime candidate for a field division. It was the one drawback of taking up the comfortable position of system commander in a safe system, having to deal with the incompetent.

"I can't believe we sent your team to the oldest Veer-myn encounter site, one we assumed was abandoned and you're the first team to come across those vile creatures," said Redavnisa as he raised his hand to his face and placed his thumb and forefinger to his opposing temples, "And then you couldn't even hit one. A squad of marines couldn't even hit a single rat. You managed



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to burn down a building but couldn't even wound one of them."

"Sir, none of my men were wounded either. Sir," interjected Sergeant Grimmon.

"There's a man in hospital who would argue that point," countered Commander Redavnisa.

"Sir, he's not my man. If we hadn't been burdened with looking after non-combatants we could have...," Grimmon began to explain.

"Shut it Grimmon," was the commander's only response.

Before Redavnisa could continue a light flashed on the conference table in front of the system commander's chair. Mhauss turned and pressed the spot on the table from which the light was coming.

"Mhauss," was all the system commander said.

"Sir, Governor Lorry is here with his local delegation. Should I send them up, sir?" asked a voice from a point at the center of the table.

With both of his arms leaning against the table Mhauss looked up at the three marines in front of him and answered, "Yes, send them up. We're almost done here."

"Yes sir," was the response of the disembodied voice emanating from the table.

"Finish this up commander," ordered Mhauss.



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"Yes sir," answered Redavnisa before turning back to his charges, "Grimmon, you're confined to your quarters until further notice. Kreesa, you're in charge of the section. Your new assignment will be monitoring the space port. You'll have the D and D shift. When your section is not on duty you will all be confined to your quarters."

Redavnisa turned his head in Mhauss' direction, "System commander?"

"You two are dismissed," was all Mhauss said.

"Yes sir," was the unified response of the two reprimanded marine before they turned and exited the room.

Both the sergeant and the lieutenant walked towards the elevator without uttering a word between them. As they approached the

elevator the bell signifying it had reached their level sounded. When its doors began to open the sergeant turned to his subordinate and gave him a look that suggested that their luck had started to turn, albeit in a small way.

Emerging from the elevator were two armed marines who were followed by Governor Lorrax and a number of local officials. Grimmon and Kreesa pressed themselves against a wall to allow the group to pass before making it to the elevator. A woman at the

rear of the group of local officials stepped away from the group and turned back to the departing marines.

"Sergeant Grimmon?" asked the woman.

The sergeant turned in the doorway of the elevator and answered despite being unsure why he was being asked to identify himself, "Yes."

This exchange drew the attention of the other officials who paused and watched the woman approach the sergeant. While the woman was relatively tall Grimmon still towered above her, which made her next action all the more shocking as she punched him in the face. Sergeant Grimmon reeled back staggered by both the physical impact and unexpected nature of the blow.

"You degenerate piece of...," yelled the chief inspector as she wound back for a second

swing

"Yvos!" screamed the governor.

Kreesa had placed his body between Chief Inspector Yvos' and his sergeant's and was fortunate that District Commander Reenin was able to hold Yvos back before she could deliver her next strike. The elevator doors closed, which separated Grimmon and Kreesa from the others.

As Grimmon rubbed the sore side of his face

he said, "At least I'm confined to my quarters and the men won't get to see my bruised face."

Both men began to laugh at this statement.▪



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By Paul Scott

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