

The gray cloak whipped against plate-armored legs as the bearer moved quickly through the muddy street. Pouring rain, cutting sleet and mighty gusts of wind were common causes of death in the windy city, at least the blame for causes of death. Kazaroth: the divided city, home of the Mad King and murderous knaves from every race in the world; each of which was determined to exterminate the other. With the Mad King ruling the city for so many years, certain unwritten rules were in place, rules for the rule breakers of the world.

The Human Market was the only place in Kazaroth where the races met on even terms, but the true challenge was getting to it without dying. Most people knew the rules, most people adhered to the rules because no one wanted the Mad King to know them by name. Most people traveled the muddy byways of The Square in large groups to avoid being killed by a larger group, but Borrillinost was no such group.

The Square was where the humans lived. It was impossible to get to the Human Market without passing through The Square, or The Mud, where dwarves lived.

A soft *thwip* sound alerted him.

Borrillinost spun, his cloak flared out as an impossibly wide, sand-colored great sword slashed the air and a crossbow bolt split down the middle.

“He’s fast,” said a voice in the shadows.

“My brother’s faster,” said another voice, slightly louder.

“Yes, I am,” said a third voice.

Borrillinost stood facing the moonlit darkness, his cowl hung low, shading his face. Distant shuffling echoed off the brick walls and Borrillinost knew that the three humans had more friends nearby. They thought he was human, or they would not have whispered so loudly.

“Follow,” whispered the third voice, “we’ll kill him and take that sword before the others get here.”

*Thwip, Thwip.*

Borrillinost moved left and cleaved the two bolts as two long swords spun towards him, held by a remarkably fast human. Borrillinost brought Melkor up to intercept the right weapon as the left dipped down for an arterial strike. He lifted his leg slightly and flat-black knee armor deflected the blow. The twin long swords arced outward then in, a quick-kill double-slice, designed to make two halves of a whole.

*Thwip*

Borrillinost jumped back, a simple dodge for a simple attack, and brought his giant sword downward to his right. Another crossbow bolt split in half down the middle.

“I don’t have time for this human,” stated Borrillinost. His voice grated like a carpenter’s mud spatula.

“Die faster then!” If the attacker was surprised that Borrillinost was not human, it did not reflect in the swordplay. The left sword dove toward the chest as the right went up for a downward stroke.

*Thwip.*

Borrillinost spun towards the human, the left sword sliced through the flapping cloak and altered course to follow the spin. The tug caused Borrillinost’s cowl to fall back and reveal his High Elf heritage. Long, slender ears extended past the top of his head, though they were marred by burn scars. His forehead, cheeks and chin were ruined by similar burns and jagged disfigurements from untold cuts and gouges. Black eyebrows drew down upon moon-reflected yellow eyes.

*Thwip.*

Borrillinost stopped his spin and the human’s left sword clanged against his chest piece. The right sword was following quickly behind but Borrillinost shouldered the human. The crossbow bolt snapped into the human’s collar, just above the thickly studded leather armor he wore. Borrillinost snatched the human’s right hand and yanked the sword free as he fell away. As the human hit the ground, Borrillinost hurled the long sword at the first crossbowman with satisfactory results.

Borrillinost held Melkor over the moaning human and allowed its weight to drop, point first, into the human’s chest. He bent over and picked up the second weapon then turned and looked at the

remaining crossbowman.

“Run,” he grated.

The human obliged. He turned and ran as more humans came into view in the alley behind him. The second sword punched through the second crossbowman’s chest and hurled him face down in the mud, at the feet of the first in the crowd.

“Come Melkor,” Borrillinost tossed his cloak to the muddy ground and placed his hand on the hilt of his sword. “The humans want to fight.” Borrillinost jerked his weapon free of the corpse sheath in the mud at his feet. The Thorns of Chaos could wait a few minutes longer.