

The corridor was empty, the Braknaghs having fled upon hearing Petti's entry. Remaining out of sight, the Mancynn slowed to a steady jog. Had he been solid his progress would have been impeded by boxes and crates left randomly throughout the passageway (for whatever reason, Braknaghs could be easily spooked sometimes), but now he could move swiftly past.

But at that moment, further down the corridor, he did come across a lone Braknagh sidling along, perhaps wondering where all of its friends had gone. It even started peering inside some of the boxes. Noah amused himself with the thought that it honestly believed that the other Braknaghs could be hiding in there, maybe to jump up and surprise it. It opened another box, and as if on cue a roar echoed down after Noah, reaching the minion's unsuspecting ears. It sprang up high into the air and, as it came down, slammed into the box, knocking it over. Almost in reply to the roar, the clattering bounced back in Petti's direction. If Noah hadn't had a reason to dislike Braknaghs before...

Mordrin swept into Stark's study. Well, it was meant to be a study, but he didn't think that it had warranted that name in a long time. Revolted by what he was stepping into, the youngest Lord persevered onwards, trying not to think about this squalor. That gluttonous git had rather turned his place of accommodation and strategizing into the filthiest of sties, the carcasses of food discarded left, right and centre in the spaces that had remained between the other sickening examples of food that hadn't reached it to the creature's mouth and belly. As his foot sank into a lagoon of grease, Mordrin's heart sank too. It was such an unnecessary vice. Granted with their corporeal forms it could in fact be of optional benefit to have the smallest of nourishments every so often, but this was an excess of excess for excess' sake.

Stark swivelled in his specially-widened chair to see who the newcomer was, the entrails of a meat-based snack hanging pathetically from his moist lips. His brother gagged; it was a wonder that Stark had heard him come in at all over the sound of his chewing.

Regrettably Stark chose to greet him in an overly enthusiastic manner, releasing some of the meat back into the air, meaning Mordrin had to succumb to the convention of pleasantries, "Yes, hello Stark, I trust you've been keeping up with your assigned duties."

Fearful recollection flashed across the podgy face before it fell back into its usual shape of contentment as he replaced the fallen snack onto his extended tongue, choosing not to confirm or deny his brother's assumption. Little did he gather that it had been meant sarcastically.

"Where's Petti?" Mordrin asked, not feeling much like talking to this disgrace about possible ways to bring the Mancynn back under their wing.

Once again, as if part of some nauseating cycle, flecks of meat were propelled into the air, "There was an alert at one of the other Towers. He went to check it out."

"Which Tower?" Mordrin pressed; he might be needed.

Noah watched as the Braknagh hastily stood up in shock, realising the mistake it'd made, a conclusion reinforced by the now rapid thudding of Petti's feet as he was undoubtedly charging towards them. When logical thought finally overcame shock in the Braknagh's brain it began to run in the opposite direction, inanely trying to save whatever life it had. As Noah's gaze followed the minion he caught sight of what had fallen out of the box. Now he knew that he could continue running or stand and fight.

Petti came around the corner, bouncing off the opposite wall in his uncontrolled pursuit. Shaking his head, he saw to his disappointment what had made the noise. Oh well, he might as well eat.

As Noah had hoped the purpling creature began to flash forwards in the direction of the Braknagh. With its short legs there was no chance that the minion could escape, and in no time at all it was being grasped in the oddly-shaped jaws of the Brethren Lord. But Petti's enjoyment couldn't last, for as soon as he had drawn level with the Mancynn Noah had reappeared and thrust out the welding rod he'd picked up a minute before when he had momentarily come back into *phase*. The rod pierced the scarred hide of the beast, although not as much as he'd have liked it to have done. As any injured animal in this situation would have done, Petti let go of his prey as he gave a strangled yelp, the halved Braknagh falling to the floor upon which it had tried to run. Noah tried in vain to twist the sharp end of the rod inside the wound, to further the damage he was causing his old master. For a second it looked as if he had managed to prevent Petti from moving into a position where he could bite him, but before Noah could realise this glorious victory Petti snapped the rod in two. Now free from the crude weapon, the Lord rose up on his bowing hind legs, the Mancynn clasped tightly in his hands. His plan of attack going backwards, Noah was slammed against the wall, uneven claws squeezing their way into his skin. Blood rushing in his ears, Noah did the first thing that sprung to mind.

Petti's only warning was that he felt his claws suddenly falling through the man's flesh, the resistance he'd been fighting gone, as if the arms were hollow. And just as Noah had not been able to comprehend his supposed triumph over him, Petti did not put two and two together, not before the Mancynn had pushed away from the wall with his newly muscular legs, making himself and the Lord fly into the air. The entwined pair hurtled towards the vertex of the ceiling and the wall, the hard surface approaching fast. Still clinging on to his opponent, Noah went out of *phase*.

The chamber was so large as to stretch out of sight. The majority was obscured by the poorly-built hodgepodge of a metalwork column that was the home of the Braknaghs when they were off duty. Younglings scuttled on the rusting girders that poked out into the abyss, daring each other to go further towards the edge in full knowledge that they weren't supposed to. Yet this time one youngster in particular, who had always been the most eager to prove herself brave, saw something very unusual indeed as she trod on the

crumbling metal tip: a ball of writhing flesh appearing in mid-air and tumbling into the column. As she stared more intently at the object, she spied a thing her parents had warned her of.

“Myrrahin!” she cried, sprinting back towards her friends.

It was definitely Myrrahin, which was the name they’d given the demon of disease when they’d first witnessed his mutated form, mistaking him for some hitherto unidentified monster that had got loose on the Towers (then even after they’d realised he was actually one of their many masters the Braknaghs had continued to use the name amongst their own company in reference to him). There was no doubt in her mind; her parents, as did the parents of all Braknagh children, had drawn pictures of the purpling creature from hell.

She was not one to joke, so when her friends saw the fear in her eyes they too ran in all directions, shouting at anyone they saw that Myrrahin was coming.

It was pure chance that neither of the duelling pair were impaled on an oddly angled girder but instead landed on a small platform which lay invitingly beneath them, as if placed there in expectation of their arrival. The moment they’d steadied themselves they were back on their feet, claw to claw. Noah knew that he could not keep this up forever, that without outside interference he would lose. And as if by divine intervention someone did arrive.

One moment Petti was striking at his former acolyte, the next he was being manhandled down to the ground by countless tiny hands. Usually Braknaghs would not have been an issue, but for some reason they all seemed to be ganging up on him at once. Their combined strength and weight was just enough to pull him down to the floor at the shocked Mancynn’s feet. Rage fuelled his muscles as he tried desperately to overpower the little annoyances and make fatal examples of them for their mutinous acts. But it was no use, he couldn’t throw off this many workers, when he flung away one group another took its place.

The next second Petti was over the edge of the platform. The countless Braknaghs of various ages stood back to watch their oppressor fall away, disappearing into the blackness below. The group stepped away from the precipice once the Lord was out of sight and turned to the Mancynn expectantly.

When he didn’t do anything, one of them spoke up in rapid...whatever their language was called, Noah certainly didn’t know, “You’ll probably want to come with us, Man of the Dark Blood, we can help you get better. You are hurt, are you not?”

It had been many decades since Noah had had to speak in their tongue, and he really didn’t want to have to go with them, but if they could help him hide...

“Okay, I’ll come,” he replied in an awkwardly-pronounced attempt at the same language.