

Witless

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#9933

Brown: the very word, which none could deny, described Chute Town perfectly. Dust, thick and clotted, drifted in the shadowed hues of red and gray structures. Old piping twisted like lattice up the sides of durasteel walls, white steam hissing from between the bends in the metal. While this description was Chute Town by definition, it was none more so that its people- waifs and thieves and scum- defined it with a much greater accuracy.

Whit crossed Murder Alley; hardly noticing the rouge-lipped women that beckoned to him as he reached the next, what one might call, street corner. He trudged down the sludge-encrusted road, green gunk sticking desperately to his black threadbare boots. The makeshift metropolis was a wasteland for Goodness now, hardly a lighthearted soul around. Just thugs and guttersnipe. Cesspit is what Chute Town should have been called. After all, that's what it was.

He scowled, shoved his hand deep into his pocket and produced a small slip of durasheet. On it, and fading quickly, was the obscure location of the small store he was searching for. Unfortunately for Whit, Chute Town wasn't a planned city, and thus the streets were nearly impossible to follow.

It wasn't long before the young human found himself lost, wandering alone down overcrowded, cacophonous streets. Three stories of hodgepodge metals rose up above him, towers of rust and warped boards; the air, moist and hazy. He stopped briefly and pulled out his missive again. The rough map the old Lorradian had scrawled on the sheet had almost faded completely. Just as he thought, it was useless. The many stalls and shops of Chute Town almost seemed to drift on their own. The only street sign in sight lay bent on the ground, hidden partially under a metal scrap. He sighed, and crumpled the durasheet, tossing it aside.

"This ain't the cleanest ship, but littering in front of my shop ain't taken so kindly here."

The voice had come so suddenly and clearly into his mind that Whit nearly wheeled around to punch the speaker. Though, he knew better than to hit a fellow Matronite. He turned around slowly, and was surprised at what he saw.

It was a trinket peddler; tall, broad shouldered, his long raven hair tied behind him, yellow-green skin marked all over with intricate designs. For a hawker he seemed very well kempt. Blue eyes pierced through the cloudy air, sending shivers down Whit's spine. The young man coughed and pushed back his own silvery hair. "Oh... sorry," he reached down, picking up the wadded sheet; the hawker turning back into his stall. "Uh, sir! Wait. Could you tell me how to get to, uh, this shop?"

He handed the man the slip, the lines almost gone. The peddler glanced at it and nodded solemnly. "Just go back that way," he pointed at a large hot pink neon sign down the alley. "And then make a sharp left, another left and you should see the long alleyway there. It's the only one with an overhanging." Whit bowed his head graciously and went on his way.

It was just as the man had said. The dimly lit alleyway stank of piss and rotten flesh. It was only a slit between tall durasteel walls stalls; leading down into a quarter of the Town he was sure no one in their right mind would enter.

A shadow of an overhanging leered down the way; the alley illuminated faintly by a glow from the neon lights above. He breathed deeply and carefully walked in, avoiding the body of a decaying, flyblown rat.

The tattered overhanging rustled, the flickering gold sign that read: *Pyromachanic and Expolmatic Specialty Emporium Co.*

“Well that’s a mouthful,” Whit mumbled, as he entered the threshold.

He was slightly surprised by the dimness of the space and had to pause a moment for his eyes to adjust. He glanced about. Yellowed fabric was hung to cover the metal paneled walls, old cargo trunks lined the left of the shop, with make-shift shelves hanging above. The ceiling sagged; floors riddled with cracks, fissures running deep in the panes. Old lamps dimly lit the room, makeshift curtains had been hung crudely over the boarded window.

He approached the front register and cleared his throat. “Anyone home?”

Off to the side, a young Twi’lek female sat at a desk. She looked up, unalarmed and lifted her goggles, setting them just before her lekku. She said nothing.

The man looked down at himself, slapping his black trousers to rid them of dust, “Um... well, yes. You see I was told I could find Mutulua here.” He opened his arms in a friendly gesture.

She tilted her head a bit, and rubbed her red cheek with the back of her gloved-hand, only managing to smudge the dirt there.

“Well ya aren’t gonna find her here.”

She looked past the young man before her as a much taller figure hobbled out from the side room. “Can I help you?”

Whit looked over his shoulders. An old Twi’lek leaned back, rocking on his heels. He had a winsome smile laced across his withered lips and silently scraped the black soot from his nails. The young girl pursed her lips, shifting her shoulders. “Ready to sell to a boney squall like ‘em?” She pointed to the human.

Indignantly, the boy stifled a crass remark. His grey eyes flashed and he adjusted his jacket. The elderly Twi’lek hobbled over to the younglings and set his hand on Whit’s shoulder.

“Please excuse my granddaughter. She’s fond of her work and a tad... over-protective of it.”

“Well, you should know, I didn’t exactly come here to purchase any of your-” he looked over at the girl and grimaced. “Wares.”

A wrinkled pale red lekku twitched, the shopkeeper folded his hands across his belly, the chain around his neck rubbing against a metallic buttons on his shirt. “Then what have you come for?”

“My name is Whit Whyler and I’m a reporter. I’ve come to speak with someone named Mutulua here about the recent murders outside The Sinning Den.”

The young Twi’lek slammed her hands down on the counter. “I told ya she’s not here!”

“Mulua. Quiet,” her grandfather silenced her with a wave of his hand, turning to the man before him.

Mulua watched as her grandfather and the stranger spoke. The young man was a tall, slender human- cleanly shaven. She disliked his jacket, finding it absurdly too big and cut for a woman.

He had very pale skin, unhealthy she thought, and even paler hair, almost too light to be considered blonde. It was wispy, not curly, and was trimmed close to his neck. He wore a odd vest beneath his woman’s coat, and a yellow scarf.

The two men shook hands and Mulua’s concentration broke. She stamped her foot, regaining their attention and then set her hands on her hips, glaring.

“Mulua, this boy is taking part in the investigation of the Sinning Rook Murders. Pack a few rounds and take him straight to your mother down at the Weizber.”

“But why shou-“

“Don’t argue,” Her grandfather gave her a stern look.

She simply brushed it off and glanced up at Whit, “You’re just asking to get hooked dressed like that!” She grabbed his wrist tightly and pulled him to the back of the store.

Slightly startled, and wary of the foreboding room he was standing in, Whit couldn’t help but chuckle to himself. It was a semi-vault packed to the very seams with cargo bins of explosive rigging, metal sheets, scraps and shrapnel, and- as he suspected- questionable bombs and weaponry. He felt a sticky sweat start, his hands growing cold and clammy. He hadn’t exactly signed up for this.

Mulua left him in the threshold and took to digging around in one of the massive cargo trunks. She produced a taupe vest, thickly padded and rough to the touch. She flung several more items into the man’s arms, returning to another cabinet. She moved too quickly, her delicate lekku swaying behind her.

Baffled, he shifted the gear uneasily, “What exactly is all of this for?”

“You wanna go to Mutulua. So we’re going to Mutulua. Ya need these ta keep the Dregs away.” She waited as he slid on the vest and a pair of leather gloves. “Ya know how to work a T.D.?”

“What exactly does T.D. stand for? And what are the Dregs?”

“Thermal Detonators, dumbass. The Dregs are Southside’s new gang.”

“And what do they do?”

“For someone named Whit, you sure got no imagination,” she rolled her eyes as she lifted the belt over his shoulder and strapped six fist-sized spheres to it. “What I say so, ya push this,” she pointed to the small button on the top of the orb. “Then fling the sucker at whatever’s coming.”

The young reporter nodded, gulping nervously. He wasn’t sure what he had just agreed to, but it seemed a lot like murder.