

The juve scuttled like a rat through the darkness of the Underhive, his autopistol slapping against his bloodied thigh in its holster. His breath was coming hard and in ragged gasps, his legs were weary and numb, he wasn't sure how much further he could go. Heavy stubber fire rattled through the night and there was a scream. The juve ignored it. He knew Borthar was alone, he knew that his ammunition was low. He knew all these things, but he could not stop. Borthar let fly another volley and somewhere in the distance the ground was torn up in great chunks and hurled through the air. A grenade went off, blasting a hole the size of a man's fist through the great archeotech dome and the earth rumbled beneath his feet. He knew what would happen next and he dived for cover behind a broken water still of some ancient civilisation as the dome crashed in upon itself and screams echoed into the void. Borthar's sacrifice had been made. He had died, but he had taken more than a few of the Delaques with him to the sump that swirled lazily beneath them like some beast stirring from a deep slumber. The battle was over.

And he was alone

The thought hit him suddenly, like a brilliant flash flare in his mind, and he began to tremble uncontrollably. He remembered, Borthar, his stub gun tearing great steaks of incandescent light through the heavy gloom. He remembered as he pulled the grenade pin with his teeth and lobbed it over-arm into the advancing hordes. He did not see the broken and twisted bodies spiralling into oblivion as he dove for cover and disappeared into the Hive Bottom. Why he had run he did not quite understand, he did not remember fearing the gangers as they advanced upon their position. He did not remember any grief as Rexel, his friend had been gunned down by lasgun fire, the beams of light slicing through soft flesh. Something though, something had told him to run. A voice in the back of his mind had told him to escape the horror and the carnage all about him. So he had fled.

And he was alone.

He pulled the autopistol clumsily and glanced over his shoulder at the destroyed dome. The dome he had found and so eagerly reported to his gang. Rexel hadn't believed he had come across such a find, but he believed him now. They all believed him now, but they couldn't help him. They couldn't help him if the explosion had attracted Ratskins, or another gang, or...

Something shambled through the thick dust, groaning as it stumbled over dud grenades and expelled shotgun cartridges. A crude sort of club swung limply from one hand and the head lolled at a crazy angle. The juve rolled and with a horrified squeal began to race through the darkness, clawing his way through the filth on hands and knees. He glanced back and fired off three rounds. In his panic two went wild, but the third was good, punching a hole through the creature's chest as it fell upon him. He scrambled to his feet, but the beast was at his heels not yet ready to give up the chase. He felt blunt teeth sink into his ankle. He roared and tore his leg free, feeling flesh separate from bone, and he slipped, bouncing down an embankment into the very bowels of the hive.

He could smell rotting flesh and blood, and, as he slipped into oblivion, a face loomed over him. A face like parchment stretched across a bleached white skull. Something began to gnaw at his neck, and the skull spoke to him through the black fog that had descended on his mind.

'Good evening,' it said 'I am Karloth Valois, welcome to my domain.'

*Kevin Outlaw*