

RICH BOY

Kevlin knew what fear was. Fear was one of the most effective political instruments, his father had taught him that. His father was an influential member of one of Hive Primus' Noble Houses and used fear on a daily basis to both consolidate and improve his position. The fear that the Noble Houses themselves commanded extended even down into the Underhive. Although the Nobles rarely interfered with the day to day affairs of the Underhivers, it was there that they sent their offspring. Down into the gang-infested labyrinths, to learn about self sufficiency. To learn about fear.

Kevlin never thought of himself as spoilt, he simply accepted that, as the youngest son of a Noble House, he could have whatever he wanted. He had greeted the news that it was his turn to travel from the Spyre to the depths of the Hive with enthusiasm. He had felt secure in the knowledge that the superior technology he would take with him could take care of any little problems that the unwashed masses might present. He had not been at all daunted by the possibility of running into one of the gangs who practically ran the Underhive. On the contrary, he knew that the Spyre Hunters, as he and his siblings were known, were greatly feared by the gangs. And rightly so - a Spyrer's hunting rig, his self sustaining armoured body suit, contained some of the most deadly weaponry forged in the Imperium and turned its young wearer into a killing machine.

Kevlin had luxuriated in the feeling of power as he descended into the depths, he had felt no fear. Until now.

Three hours ago he had met his first gangers. A group of the most ferocious looking women Kevlin had ever seen. In their almost identical skimpy costumes and thigh-length boots they looked like something from the dark recesses of his own adolescent imagination. Kevlin had felt reluctant to kill the females but, at that moment, the thrill of the hunt and his sense of duty had been stronger than his libido.

In his Malcadon hunting rig the young noble resembled a giant, four-limbed, bio-mechanical spider. This was no coincidence, the suit was equipt with web spinners designed to immobilise a victim before the Spyrer moved in for the kill. Just like an arachnid stalking its prey, Kevlin had secretly observed his quarries for some time before attacking. Finally he selected the youngest of the gangers, she had been taken completely by surprise as the Malcadon web ensnared her lithe body.

Kevlin had assumed that the sight of his chitinous armoured form emerging from the shadows would cause the rest of the girls to panic and flee. He had been gravely mistaken.

Eight pairs of lethal, long-lashed eyes had locked onto his position, as coldly efficient as targetters. Pistols leapt from holsters and suddenly the air was alive with searing las-beams and explosive projectiles. Only his booster-enhanced reflexes had prevented him from being blown to pieces. He had used his spinerettes to propel him to the safety of one of the upper levels. Then he had fled for his life.

As he ran, he cursed himself for underestimating his quarry. He had assumed that their wild, raunchy style was just a front - little girls playing at being warriors. Of course he could not have known that he been stalking Maskarra's Sirens, one of the most feared Escher gangs of the Underhive.

He had been running for over an hour, using his web spinners and all his subterfuge skills to put precious distance between himself and the enraged huntresses. Now it seemed he had succeeded in evading them. He selected an uncluttered corner in which to sit down and get his bearings.

Gosh, what a morning! How he would laugh about his first day in the Underhive when he got back together with his old chums in the Spyre. Kevlin wondered what his father was up to right now, he wished that the old buzzard would hurry up and die so that he could take his place on the council. Well, one thing at a time - first he had to contend with the small matter of fulfilling his vows and putting some Underhive scum out of their misery.

He had been so lost in his thoughts that he did not notice the barrel of the meltagun until it was just inches away from his nose. The huge, ventilated nozzle completely filled his vision. He pulled back, startled and found himself looking into the deep blue eyes of the Escher Gang Leader.

Beneath his armoured carapace, Kevlin felt his heart beat faster. At this distance he could see that his adversary was breathtakingly beautiful. He marshalled his self control and gave her one of his boyish grins. When she had been alive, his mother had told him that his smile could melt any girl's heart.

The Escher smiled back, revealing white, even teeth. But when she spoke, her voice was a feral snarl.

"You're a long way from your mommy, little rich boy."

Somewhere Kevlin could hear a mechanical humming. Slowly it dawned on him where it was coming from and, in an instant, he truly understood the nature of fear.

It was the last thing he felt before the superheated blast of energy evaporated his entire upper body.