

Trashtown SECT: XXIX [UL]

by **Bart Brockbank**

The green glow of pulsing night-lights sifts through the smog of a new day. Birds with ragged flesh for wings and distended stomachs chatter as they fly through the dim, hunched alleyways of the city. Over the incessant throbbing noises of the Uber-welt (high above the gnarled corridors of Under-land), a Progenitor is starting up, with a lurching cackle as his rusted engines gain power.

‘It mus’ be toime to move on’ says a pile of rags, sprouting thin limbs. ‘E’ll be aktiv soon, won’ ’e?’

All around me, tattered bundles are unfurling into the skeletal mutants I know and adore. Like the spores of particularly beautiful fungi, they burst into sweet, pungent life. My black-rag band, my diaphanous dear ones, stretch the remainder of their muscles and begin to weave their patchy blankets about themselves, with shivering concentration.

Fuelled by synergy and sickness, I pull myself up from the stones I slept upon and get to my timorous legs, casting my slumber-rocks a parting glance in gratitude of the service they did me. The rest had been almost painless, I recall with pleasure.

‘Todai’s sa day fur you, in’t it, Grimgulp?’ Dwindle-sticks says, his hollowed eye sockets twitching into life, with the tentative flutter of a Lamp-head.

I nod and lick my lips. They are desiccated and feel like great fat worms. I notice my mouth beginning to lactate the hunger-milk, at the thought of some delectable victual.

The Rattler’s emaciated spider-body turns to me. ‘Ar ye no daein’ a thin about it 111!?’ He points at me. ‘Yer jus’ lyin’ doon takin’ it!’

I shrug at him.

‘Fouckin’ metal-mouth!’ He begins to jig around on the spot, his crippled iron back-limbs rattling against each other. ‘110010101110101!!’ he screams.

‘Oh, th-that’s just y-your o-old vi-virus t-t-talking. M-maybe you sh-should c-calm down,’ says Johnny Jitter, searching through some floor cans with his long, fused fingers. ‘I’m s-sure we’ll all b-be very s-sorry t-to see h-him g-g-go.’

‘Ye can gae and 10101011101 yirself, ya fuc-10101- wretch-10111-bastard.’

I pick up a half-empty can of Goon-juice and try to shakily feed a straw through the metal slats of my mouth-muzzle. ‘Mmf shum tashm num?’ I ask the group.

‘Nah, nah, I took ’er lars’ toime,’ moans the beacon-brain in the corner. ‘It’s old Rattles, init?’

‘101110111fuc-101? 10111!!’ The Rattler is vibrating like a galvanised piston.

‘It’s alr-right, I’ll t-take h-her,’ says the jitterbug, stooping towards the bundle of esteemed bandages encasing Old Olga. She wriggles in her sleepless Skrut dreams, foaming slightly and squirming her stumps.

‘Wrap ’er up toight, yea?’ Dwindle-sticks says. ‘She’s ’avin’ anuva one of ’er night-visions.’

Johnny Jitter slings her carrying harness around his arm and points to the spasmodic frame of The Rattler. ‘H-he’s m-making t-too much n-noise.’

The Rattler’s exoskeleton limbs are wildly oscillating, the clang of steel on steel reverberating off the cavern walls.

‘Le’s jus’ get outta ’ere.’

Dwindle-sticks begins to coax the convulsing Rattler out into the sickly alley light with well-aimed stick prods. ‘1011010110001!!’ he screeches in defiance, moving reluctantly.

Outside, on the streets again, the wall-fissure entrance to the cavern is inviting. How good it would be to curl up beside The Rattler's extractor-glands again and sleep off some more of this bone-rot.

We begin moving. Old Olga wakes screaming. *'Bóg metalu jest tutaj!'*

'Wud ya speak flippin' Tramp-talk, woman,' Dwindle-sticks says, his eye-lights throbbing into inexplicable brightness and then bursting black as the bulbs shatter. He howls, cupping his wounded sockets as the enormous metal fist of a Progenitor bats him aside, groping towards us. The alleyway lights up yellow as a glowing eye presses onto the gaps in the corridor roof. The spotlight searches us and then stops on me. The Progenitor's core sounds like churning iron-filings and trapped rats.

A fresh mania assails the Rattler, triggered by the overloading presence of the magnetised colossus. 'K'moaN Th3n YE G10nt Pr1k!' he shrieks, fanning out his back-limbs assertively.

'Scamp-off!' Johnny Jitter shouts to me, over the battle cries and wails from the others. I lurch away from the group but my whittled limbs cannot carry me and I fall. The Progenitor's hands encase me and I am enveloped in darkness. From outside I briefly hear the furious strikes of The Rattler on my prison walls and then nothing.

Mouth of the man-maker

I awake naked in a forest of white trees. The floor is plastic cold and burns my grey flesh. The tree branches quiver, groping towards one another in heartless hunger, a hundred maggot-leaves shimmering, defined in the harsh surgical light.

The treetops are melting together and leaking into canopies of silent sewn skin and pain, screaming black-eyed death-lust and meat-zeal.

Chamber III

I am surrounded by colourless, sullen faces, all scum-suckers like me. Most are still blanked from the first chamber, but it seems my mouth-muzzle has filtered out some of the gas. Nevertheless, the world is becoming dangerously lucid. Some of my kin have already fallen, overwhelmed by the sharpness of this world. They lie rotting in the dirty iron passages as we funnel through, naked and joylessly disgraced.

Forced inside the third chamber, alone, I am ushered into the centre by the noose-necks, their shiny dark eyes glinting like beetle-rind. With faces free of skin-mould, they click-clack along the aluminium floor like gutter-creeps. They take off my face and weave my torn skin into one of their own smile-masks. One flicks a syringe of green liquid labelled '[V]-nity' and empties the contents into my skull. Another ties a black fabric noose about me, telling me I 'look better already'.

They file down my teeth, they fill my mouth with chewed words.

In the haze of hurrying hands, I see a sign hanging in front of me:

'Happy 30th Birthday!'

I choke on a vowel and black out.