



All That Glitters is Told

“No. No! Commander Rhyan your grace, they were not mere bridge tyrants, nor they the wayward brigands of Arlington cursed be his name and honor. They bore arms and armor the like of which I have never seen. They spoke a strange language and wore stranger clothes! They were flamboyant ner’do wells of the worst kind, Commander. Mercenaries! Hired guns whose honor is less than lickspittle under your boot. But deadly. Well practiced. They killed the rest of my squadron despite my own heroic efforts. Now sir, the cowards back in Capital Hill might be displeased if WE address Arlington’s slights, but if- how did I survive? I-well. I made contact with them, and... offered them a small amount of... gold... as a, mere... retainer, for their- no I... 4,000 pounds, sir. No sir, I didn’t mean- sir- SIR!”

- Reserve Colonel Ratwood, AWOL

Beyond Redsector, to the south of the domains of the DRG, in-between the towns and villages that dot the vast expanse of the Shattering, in the deafening quiet that descended after the rumbling at last came to a stop, opportunity began knocking. To survive the Shattering, and instantly seize ahold of the sweeping reorganization it presented, required a will either unbreakable, unholy, or unsatiable. The Tracked Profiteers possess those qualities in great abundance. Great armored divisions from the fifteen or so odd years between the end of World War Two and the Shattering had been stored in great quantities alongside shells and other military provisions, made for another war. Most were destroyed in the devastation, but those that remained intact represented an unbeatable hand, if they could be properly leveraged. The first of these enterprising individuals found the remaining caches, wiped the old symbols and flags off, and quickly took their newfound possessions into protection rackets, escort services, thievery, and outright slaughter. To find these depots, scattered throughout the Shattered East, required cooperation. These groups would typically dissolve after completing the salvage, or fall to backstabbing and internal bickering shortly afterwards. Many of these individuals became independent Bridge Tyrants, lording over a particular route or comfortable plateau, charging food and fuel to unsuspecting travelers.

But another group began something far more dangerous. These remnants of the old world began organizing. Once, they may have called each other enemies, divided over lines on a map and the lines of lineage. Like much of the rest of the world, those molds had been shattered, and out of the falling shards strode a new flag to fly overhead. Deals were struck with independent towns and refining stations. Small things at first, but as the Americans and DRG pressed ever outwards, such contracts became bigger and more complex. Crews and supplies, fuel and ammunition: Little pieces from a hundred hands. In these early days, they called themselves the



Hands of Midas, and emerged as the preeminent band of paramilitary disposition through the reputation of unerring dedication to the contracts they signed, and the near 100% collection rate of all fees, tribute, supplies, and terms of said agreements. Tales of the infamous “Ten Gun salute” execution still send at least a second thought down the spines of potential renegs. The wealth and prestige earned under this reputation made their moniker almost true, in so much that their coffers were bursting with both literal and figurative gold. It would be sorely needed following the Battle at Redsector.

The second group to come to prominence in the eastern Shatter was less of an organization, but rather one man. Betrayed by his companions, a captain somewhere in the West was left to burn alive in his vessel as the devouring ion storm pushed by the Grey swept down on him. Swearing his life, his crew, and his very soul to any god under the sun that would listen, he vowed revenge on every living thing. So the story goes. But the arrival of the char black *Revenge*, alongside a handful of similarly colored hulls, might as well have been such a supernatural threat. The Hands prided themselves on their contractual reputation, and included in virtually every contract they wrote was a Failure Clause, which detailed eye popping compensation should the Hands fall through on their end of the bargain. The infrequency of this occurring was both telling of the Hands effectiveness, and the seeds of the Material War. The *Revenge* was first spotted when it attacked a fuel convoy that had a long-term security contract that spanned nearly a decade with the Hands. The crews guarding the convoy were no green recruits, nor complacent cowards. Assignments to contracts are rotated through, to prevent such sloth from setting in: the men in this fuel convoy had fought in defense of half a dozen townships, as well as the DRG and DMV-9. The *Revenge* killed them all. The convoy was looted, and what wasn't, was burned.

The only reason the Hands knew it was the *Revenge* was that a handful of the convoys crew had survived. They were carried back to their towns, and a solemn transfer of the Failure Clause was handed over. While a dark day, this was not unheard of. What was unheard of, was another convoy being attacked within two days of the first one, with the same result. The force sent to investigate the first convoy had scarcely finished the Failure Clause ceremony when they were alerted of the second attack. To anyone who had ridden the craggy and circuitous terrain of the Shattered lands, such speed between the two convoys beggared belief. But again, it was the *Revenge* that led the assault, and again left only slag and handful of ragged voices to tell of its desolation. This would not be tolerated. An unprovoked attack, on the Hands of Midas own wards? The Clasp's who's contracts were under direct assault personally led the defense of the next convoy departures, hoping to catch this wayward Bridge Tyrant off guard. This proved harder than imagined, when the head of the 9th Clasp's son was killed defending a food crawler as it marched between New Hamburg and the Salt Basin. This began the bloody first weeks of the Material War, as the Hands were hit again and again by the *Revenge*, and could do nothing but die. The weapons the charred tanks used were out of esoteric science fiction, firing beams of red and green. Flashes of lightning danced along them, their speed unmatched by anything in the



Hands of Midas' arsenal. A meeting of the Clasps, the group of 10 senior leaders who led the various bands within the wider organization, was finally called. On the low-set crag of Mount Krenzhov, where the first documents forming the Hand were laid down, color swept its every face. As the 10 Clasps arrived, they brought with them the vast wealth of their accumulated domains. Furs, cloth, jewels, food, dancers and jesters, music and parades all filled the approach of the Clasps as they arrived, the banners of their exploits competing for space above them. The motor pools were filled to capacity as the 10 had brought more vehicles than strictly allowed by the meeting framework. The breaking of these tenets was a sign of the immense stress the Hands were under. All of them expected to be blamed by the others, and were prepping accordingly. As the meeting began, a rocky amphitheater serving as the hall of this occasion, the whole of the Mount could have descended into bloody civil war right then, effectively ending the Hands of Midas forever. The 9th Clasp lambasted the others for not jumping to his defense after the death of his son, while The 3rd demanded a renegotiation of the profit sharing agreement if he was to continue defending in the Western passes. The core problem lay with the Failure Clauses. If the Hands continued violating contracts by failing to defend their clientele, the shared reserve of 'insurance' would run out very soon. The hall was getting very heated about who was going to have to chip in more: the Clasps who had lost the engagements with their new foe, or the untouched Clasps in the East, who hadn't suffered the same losses? At what percentages should these new levy's be raised? Recorded in the minutes of the meeting, here one man stood up. His name is unrecorded, like all of the Ten, but his words that day are, and are now inlaid in gold above the amphitheaters pulpit.

"I shall give it all."

The proclamation stunned the other 9 into silence. The accumulation of wealth and prestige was the heart of the Band. To surrender it all, was a betrayal of his own Clasp, the men and women who followed the mans banners. The man continued, laying out what would become the future of the Hands. One of the Ten would be elected as Midas, his entire fortune and territorial claims put up as collateral in the Failure Clause. The Midas would serve a limited amount of time, as specified in individual contract, but would wield vast control over how the central insurance fund was managed. Their Clasp would man the Mount, and its surrounding supply bases, but could not participate in any other duties: they would be entirely dependent on the contributions of the other Clasps. In exchange, the Clasps would be completely dependent on the contract payouts that had to be sent through the record keepers of the Mount. This proposal required an immense amount of trust. It would require the other Clasps to give up more of their autonomy, and spend more per annum on investments into the insurance fund. But over the next 19 hours, the final contract was hammered out, solidifying the position of Midas, first among equals. His first order of business was to strike back.

Contracts deemed non-essential were canceled. Vehicles in storage were dragged back out into service. Signup bonus were doubled, then doubled again. The vast array of service stations and refurbishment yards that studded the dominion of the Hands were brought under one



central command in an act of supreme administrative skill. When the veteran Hands of the Material War speak of those initial days, they liken it to their namesake, that gold really did flow across the mountains. Men and women walked at its insistence; tanks roared to life at its beckoning: Not since Redsector had such a mustering been seen in the Shattered lands. The now reCOORDINATED Hands launched counter attacks wherever the blackened hulls of the *Revenge*'s war band appeared, pursuing them relentlessly back to the West. The casualties were immense, but the deaths and raids lessened, and clearly damaged craft began appearing in the attacks led by the *Revenge*. The Hands could repair and resupply with relative ease, while it seemed these newcomers could not. But despite this renewed vigor, the *Revenge* fought on. Nothing could bring it down. More and more resources were furiously pulled in by the Midas to destroy it: weapons purchases from across the sea, bargains with the Tunisian outlaws, and even negotiations with the DRG for advanced weapons and shielding. The cost was eye watering. Cracks began forming in the still fresh centralization of the war effort. The Midas had to more and more frequently censure Clasps for breaks in commitment. Shells and fuel began to become scarce, the vast stores of the Clasps running dry. There was extremely little domestic manufacturing in the Hands domains, because they had never needed it. Payment for services rendered and a small amount of trade had been more than enough to both cover the costs of business and a healthy margin on top of it. But this was a war, not a skirmish with a Bridge Tyrant, or a running battle with bandits and pirates. Both sides were deadlocked in what seemed to be mutual self-destruction, drowning each other in the others' blood and metal.

At last, the *Revenge* made a decisive move. The Erdog Bridge, a magnificent construction left over from the mad push of the Bridge Builders in the heady days of the Great Reconnaissance, connected one half of the Hands domains with the other over the Chogrian Drop, a bottomless expanse of ravines and sinkholes that stretched for a hundred miles in either direction. It required months of agonizing travel to traverse without the bridge, and much of the recently formed logistics network the Hands relied upon ran across the Erdog. It was fairly behind the front lines, however, and a failed attack on it would surely see the black-hulled brutes overextended, and hounded down one by one in the ensuing retreat. It was a lone outpost that signaled back to the rest of the Hands that an attack was imminent. Not a raid, or a thrust. The entire host of the *Revenge* was on the way.

The Hands scrambled. The depleted reverses became empty reserves. The front was stripped of everything that could be spared. Erdog Bridge would be the final battle, one way or another. As the sunset, the Grey was absent, a grim omen. When the Bloody Storm abated, it was whispered that it was just holding its breath in anticipation of a tragedy to come. On one side, tanks and crew from every clasp were assembled: the bright blues and yellows of the 3rd "Honey" Clasp, the white checkered 8th Clasp resplendent alongside the crimson and purple of the "Royal" 5th. The 9th Clasp was bedecked in white, still mourning the loss of their heir. Even at this late hour, the Hand dripped with pride. They ruled the eastern apocalypse, not these invaders. Such glowing enthusiasm waned slightly as the dread host came into view. They flew



no banners, and were decorated only with the scars of battle. Every last one of them was coated in what had once been paint, now a blistered, rotting black. Radiation damage, afflicted under immense heat. There had been tales out of the colossal battle of the West, that for a brief moment a weapon that rivaled the wonders of the Shattered lands had made a second sun dawn despite the torrential oppression of the Grey.

To those in the Hand that understood such news, it meant the enemy before them had ridden with the King of the Glass City himself. It was an unpleasant thought. The Midas was there, riding in the *Magyar*. At this time, it was untested, bereft of the long list of honors it would later have. Fresh from the mega-factories of ForgeSun Industrial, the *Magyar* would lead the defense, surrounded by the Midas' 2nd Clasp. It's alloyed frame, of course, gleamed like gold in the red light of the setting sun. Across from him, the *Revenge* ate the dimming light, save for the glowing heat exhausts for its devastating main cannon. Its name, the tarnished outline still visible despite the carnage wreaked on its hull, was a deep crimson, the *Revenge's* lone color. It was wounded, but very much alive. The Erdog bridge was set with massive pillars of stone and metal, almost a mile wide and three times that long. Supporting columns rose out of its otherwise flat surface, dotting the bridge with obtrusions. The *Revenge* would seek to take these, and set high explosive charges shaped to sunder the pillars. With the bridge collapsed, the Hands would have effectively no way to guard the other side of their realm. The *Revenge* would wait, and repair. The Hands couldn't muster this resistance without the vital connections to the West. The Bridge must be held. With a deafening blare of its war horn, the *Magyar* rode onto the bridge, the other Clasps following in its wake, splitting off across the bridge. In eerie silence, the *Revenge's* host did the same.

The battle raged for two days, and two nights. Over and over, the two sides clashed, sudden fire fights that ended as quickly as they began as reinforcements wheeled in and out, fire leaping from hulls while explosions rocked the bridges surface. Plasma discharge suffused the air with wisps of green smoke, sparking as it pooled in the air. Laser flashes dueled among the wreckages of massacred tanks, the deep blue of the dread host contrasted by the crimson of the newly procured Efreeti designs, courtesy of the Tunisian brokers. The number of shells fired was quickly reaching the tens of thousands, the heavy smoke of the discharges pouring off the side of the bridge like great waterfalls. Amidst it all, stalked the *Revenge*. Wherever it appeared, the Hands fell back. Shells glanced off its armor, lasers failed to penetrate. A suicidal charge by the *Dismount*, lieutenant to the 6th Clasp, led to it detonating its entire ammo magazine at point blank range. The *Revenge* rode over its smoking corpse, seemingly no worse for wear. But as the third day dawned, it became clear the Host was bleeding. There was no vessel among their ranks undamaged. Some had become completely immobilized, others firing only sponson weapons. While the *Revenge* fought on, it did so increasingly alone. It wasn't much better for the Hands. Fuel was becoming a critical bottleneck: some vehicles that were in perfectly fine condition were being left abandoned for lack of anything to power them. Shells were down to mere hundreds. But frontline scrapper teams had been working day and night to return damaged vehicles to



service, and it was showing: they'd run out of men and material before they did weapons and hulls. It was at this desperate hour the *Revenge* appeared along the northern edge of the bridge, striking at an exposed scrapper team, and the critical midline support pillar. The *Magyar* rode out to meet it.

Gold against Black. The story has been told a thousand times by those who saw it, and a thousand more by every ear who heard it told. To hear it from some, the Midas stood on the front of the *Magyar*, brandishing a mighty sword against the centaur-like giant that was the *Revenge*. Others tell of the earth-shattering blows they gave each other, weapons capable of pulling down the very mountains themselves: that the *Magyar* rode the Grey and its Bloody Storm against the roiling flames and dust of the unkillable demon. Whatever the truth, one thread finds its way into every retelling, that the two mighty Treads took each other off the side Erdog bridge, blasting each other all the way down.

The loss of the Midas and the Hosts flagships proved too much for both sides. The each retreated to their respective camps as best they could. Finally exhaling, the Grey swept back in, forestalling recovery or another offensive. Both sides were unsure of what to do now. Instead, they waited in the gloom of the torrential downpour.

Such was the state Tonya of the Immortal Forge found the Profiteers in when she arrived from the far east of Europe, further than even the Hands. The Soviet Union has not seen the world stage in over twenty years. Nothing has moved in or out of its borders since the Shattering began. The only ones that might have an inkling of what's caused such a retreat are the DMV-9's Far East division, and they certainly aren't telling. Tonya, and her earth-shaking mount were the first to emerge from the iron curtain that surrounded the U.S.S.R, though since it had departed many of its satellite Republics in the dead of night, perhaps that was an anachronistic name now.

So it came as a surprise that great six-legged leviathan, nearly as tall as eight heavy tanks was approaching from the Lithuanian Crater. Envoys from the Hand were immediately dispatched to see if this was an enemy, a friend, or something else entirely. However, when they arrived, they found the Sinister waiting for them, a name almost as infamous as the *Revenge* itself, though not in ambush. It seemed they too had been sent to reconnoiter the lumbering machine. The Sinister was covered in battle damage and grime. Its treads were worn, its gun barrel slightly twisted from unyielding service. The envoys considered attacking it right then, in such a dire state it was, but their own vessel was in barely better shape. They had a grand total of two shells, and barely enough fuel to make it back to the nearest outpost. At this point, that was considered adequately supplied. With much suspicion and hard-earned hostility, they arrived at this newest twist together.

They were greeted by an imposing woman who called herself Tonya. She spoke a strange language to a machine that, in turn, spoke to the envoys and the captain of the Sinister. She had been watching the Material War play out over the past year, and had come to the following



conclusion: the Hands and the *Revenge*'s followers were going to wipe each other out if it continued. They remained silent at this assessment, because what else was there to say? Instead, Tonya proposed, she would be willing to play the role of Arbitrator between the two sides. The captain of the Sinister said nothing, and the Hands outright laughed. Who was this interloper to think she could be so presumptuous? Both the envoys and the lone captain suddenly changed their tune when Tonya explained that the legged machine she had brought with her was not only a walking fortress, but a mobile mining, refining, and manufacturing plant. Whoever declined the arbitration would be denied the fruits of such activity. Fuels, armor, shells. The unique metals and minerals needed for maintaining plasma reactors and servicing laser banks. The envoys and the captain eyed each other, then Tonya. They both agreed to bring this proposal back to their respective parties. Though they did not know it, the Material War had just ended.

Upon the return of the envoys, a new Midas was elected. He swiftly agreed to the arbitration, and made plans to attend a council of sorts at the Immortal Forge, the leviathan Tonya called home. This council was sparsely attended: on one hand, the Midas and his closest aides, and the other a handful of the Host. The Hands had almost never seen one of the Host in the flesh. They were riven with metal and strange electronics, the visible skin blistered and cracked. Among them was a man wearing a black metal mask, crude and flat. It was burned into his skin, metal melding with flesh where it met at his neck and hair. At this council, he named himself Morgan, Captain of the dread *Revenge*. The arbitration almost devolved in a brawl, until the newly elected Midas intervened. This Midas was young, and possessed a greed rivaling his original namesake. There was no need to avenge the previous Midas, nor the *Magyar*. The Host were ferocious warriors, and already towns and merchants were clamoring for new contracts in the face of an aggressive DMV presence in the West, and security against DRG influence in the North. The blood spilled between the Hands and the *Revenge* were all in service to the new world that now dwelt within the Shattered lands. Security was bought with gold, and gold was the determiner of security. The Hands would need more of it, ever more, and the Dread Host would get it for them. Indeed, this arbitration could see them become a most valuable asset. The gathered attendees settled down just as Tonya arrived.

Though the negotiations would last weeks, the ceasefire held, and the final agreement that was laid down at the conclusion of the many, many back and forths would change the powers of the East forever. A Triumvirate would be created, centered at Mount Krenzhov, consisting of The Hands of Midas, Black-Mask Morgan, and Tonya of the Immortal Forge. Tonya would supply the forces of Morgan and the Hands equally, and they would in turn supply protection and information. They would remain semi-independent of each other, each conducting themselves in the territory of the neutral towns and outposts in the East, save for certain carve outs for Morgans and the Mida's bases of operations. They would be free to engage in whatever trade, diplomacy, or war they wished to, as long as it wasn't involving either of the other two. Nearly a thousand pages of paper were used to document how, when, and where contracts for the most lucrative parts of the Hands would be distributed. In the end, it was very carefully decided



that the insurance fund apparatus established during the war would continue as the central deposit for contract proceeds, where it would then be sent to respective individuals. The only change is that the apparatus would now be overseen by representatives from each of the Triumvirate, though the Hands retained much unofficial influence over this process. This arrangement was called the Profiteer Agreement, and it has remained much unchanged since its signing. Now, the disparate forces of this new agreement are rebuilding, reestablishing routines, and preparing to face the ever-bolder encroachments from the great powers of the continent.