Snapshots From The Dzaqtlas

III. The Machinist’s Grandson

I remembered, when I was a small child, coming to the Machine Shop with my grandfather. It had been filled, as it was now, with the hulking forms of the ‘machines’. Back then they hummed with power, smelling of ozone and hot metal and the oily smells of cutting fluid and coolant. People worked on and around them, a dance of careful but intense activity, in the bright light from the fixtures on the ceiling far above. Carts full of raw material came in, and ones with finished articles got pushed away, full of wonders. I wanted to be one of the machinists, making the things that made the World work.

But I found different interests later, and went off to study . . .things that make no matter now that the Horribleness has wrecked the World. Some of the things from the Machine Shop helped people go all of the way to Viepchakl, and everyone was amazed by what was found there on The Moon. They praised my family for helping it come to pass, a wonder in an Age of true wonders. I studied marketing and resource allocation, and thus I helped the articles made in the Machine Shop become available for even grander projects.

Then the Horribleness came, from some said Gods made angry by our violation of Holy Viepchakl. Others said the travelers who’d gone to Viepchakl brought the Horribleness back with them. It killed off all of the little funny winged Qiknavrats, and the eerily similar Viepchaklats found on The Moon, and then it began to consume the People. Soon thereafter people came to curse the name of my family, the Machinists, for helping to bring the Horribleness down upon us . . .

‘Old man,’ the ‘King’ said, poking me with the barrel of his rifle. ‘Old man, pay attention! Where are the tools?’ The two mean, strong lads who held me shook me roughly.

I wanted to say, *All around you, you uncouth fool*, but he would just have his lads slap me around again. ‘Over there, in that room to the side. Files, cutters, hammers, riveters, hand tools, gages.’ I sighed. ‘The raw material is past that room, in the bay to the side. Tube stock, bar stock, sheet metal, chain, wire, cable. Steel, aluminum, titanium, plastic. All your’ *so-called* ‘smiths will ever need, for weapons or what you would have them make.’

The ‘smiths’ who’d come with us to this dark, dusty cavern, now dark and half-buried in the debris from collapsed buildings, ran over to the riches and then began exclaiming in joy. *Miserable mother-lovers*, these Baz gangsters, I thought. Ignorant children of the Horribleness who had done as much to break the World That Was as the Horribleness itself had, once unleashed upon it.

‘Your grandchildren will live, Old man. Though like you they will ever serve Us. For I am The King, and what we have found here will ensure My rule over these lands forever!’ His deep, maniacal laughter echoed through the darkened space like the call of a death-bird.