

# WARPTONE

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## CULTIST SCUM A short Story by Francis Plunder

"..scum who seek our downfall. We cannot rest until they are all dead and gone. No tears for them. None at all."

Hans was always there for me. When Mother died he went to work on the docks, shifting crates and barrels. He would go down to Magnusplatz every morning and wait to be picked out. Those first few days he would come home with bleeding hands, rubbed right through. He couldn't afford gloves and the rags he wrapped around his hands would slip apart. But we could eat. He bought fresh beef that first day. It tasted wonderful without the salt and I didn't realise until later that he ate none himself.

It ended when the guild found he wasn't one of them. They beat him and left him in the alley, blood everywhere. The Sisters looked after him at the Temple until he was better. I stayed there too when Kurter took back the house, taking all our possessions. I worked for the Sisters, running errands and doing chores. Hans wasn't the same after that. Physically, his nose was broken, his teeth shattered but that wasn't all.

He would go missing for days and return home with lots of shillings and even a crown occasionally. He had taken to wearing a sword and was nearly always drunk. He would shout about the injustice of it all and how it wasn't fair they lived in luxury while we fought like rats for the scraps they threw us. The Sisters spoke like this sometimes, but without Hans' bitterness. They would talk to him but would always end up arguing. Sometimes I cried to hear him so angry.

It had been a year since I last saw him. He was sober and handed me the most beautiful necklace. We talked about Mother and he told me that I was right about joining the Temple, that Shallya was good and kind. "Join too, Hans." I said. He looked sad and fingered his sword (or do I just imagine that now) "I cannot my sister. I cannot... But things must change. Tonight I start on a new road. One that will make the great and good look to us as equals." He would say no more and was soon gone.

Next morning, Sister Elisabeth took my hand and told me to leave my chores. She put a cloak over my initiates' robe and lead me into the streets. She did not speak as we walked through the streets until we came upon the crowd. Pushing our way through to the front, we stopped at the scaffold. The Sigmarain priest shouted and raved, the spit flying from his mouth as the four bodies dressed in purple robes swung in the wind behind him. Elisabeth gripped my hand tighter and then I saw Hans, his eyes bulging from his sockets, dried blood on his lips. The priest saw me cry and screamed in anger, "Shallya should not have mercy for these. Spawn of the forbidden ones, bringers of disorder, warpers of the mind, slayers of children, rapers of women, these cultist....."