

# Are You Alright?

Max spotted Thosl as she sauntered past the command tent. He gave a short sharp whistled and then beckoned her over. He ushered her into the tent. She dipped her neck lower than usual to avoid the top of the tent's door. Chris welcomed her, trying to be more sociable than usual. She nodded slightly and lazily slitted her eyes. She took a seat on a metal box and crossed her legs demurely. Max sat down as well. He was about to say something when Thosl said, "Something must be done about those cyborgs. A menace!"

Chris asked, "What cyborgs? I don't remember any recent run-ins."

She told him, "They are out there. Very dangerous. I would have the Juicer keep an eye out for them. Warn the Recon Squad. They are mechanical Death."

Chris and Max looked at each other. There was a whirl of movement and the two men saw that Thosl was gone. The tent's door closed down slowly. They exchanged another look. Max picked his radio. "Rad, come in."

After a moment the radio crackled. Rad answered, "Rad, over."

"You got any suspicious activity?"

"Nothing. It's quiet. There was a bit of a skirmish off in the distance. I monitored the comms and it seemed to

be Deadboys getting their helmets handed to them."

"Okay, Rad. Max, over and out."

Max sat the radio down and then looked at Chris. Chris shrugged his shoulders. Max picked up the radio again and contacted Shisen, telling him to come in. They waited for the living scarecrow to arrive. There was a bit of a wait and then they heard the sound of hooves on hard ground and a loud neigh. The longer Shisen had the horse the more and more it acted like a real animal. He entered the tent and tipped his brim to them. Max asked him, "You know Thosl better than any of us. Is she doing alright?"

Shisen wiped some dust off of one of his button eyes and said, "Her health is good to the best of what I know. Dragon's don't scar, even lesser ones. Boy, she'd have my soft parts for that one if I had any she could steal."

Chris tried to put a finer point on it. "Shisen, is Thosl coping with her near death encounter with those CS borgs?"

"Coping? Does pretending it never happened count as coping?"

Max laughed, "It does in my book, but she sure wasn't ignoring it in here."

Shisen somehow managed to look puzzled, something about the way the canvas crinkled heavier around one button than the other. As if conscious of it his mouth unravelled. He pushed it up with his glove hand and said, "You're kidding right?"

Max said, "Could you have a word with her? She seemed quite distraught. I think that was distraught."

Chris nodded and said, "Seemed so."

"Alright, I'll see what the skinny is with our fave lizard. I'm no psychomologogist. Stuffing in here, you know."

Shisen left the tent. He sought out Thosl and she was working on a summoning circle. "Are you lonesome tonight?" he asked.

"What am I? Chopped human?" asked Bratsy.

"Bratsy." Thosl said.

She turned to Shisen, "Would you like your own companion? Furry or incorporeal are the choices if you extend to me some power. The furry you can call my boon."

Shisen stroked his chin in imitation of Max and told Thosl, "I could have my own dog and pony show..."

Thosl shook her head and said, "What do you require, Shisen?"

He asked, "Are you feeling okay?"

"My health has never been a concern of yours before. On behalf of whom are you enquiring?" she cut to the chase.

Clutching his chest he said, "Sharp. I feel the cuts already."

"My preparations are complete," Thosl started, "Give me your hand and your blessing or leave."

Shisen shrugged his shoulders and stepped carefully into the circle. Thosl held out her clawed hand and he took it. She began to chant and he gave himself over to the sound of her voice as it cracked and rumbled like a shower of boulders. Thosl's head swayed back and forth. Bratsy watched with nothing but amazement on his caprine features. When the circle began to glow he let out an all too human sounding bleat and held his hand in front of his face.

Thosl completed the spell and the wolves she wanted were summoned into the centre of the circle, seven of them in all. She beckoned them out of the circle and turning to Shisen told him, "Have your pick of the litter. I know that you will not sacrifice it so I will tell it you are its friend and it should go with you and do as you will. It will do my bidding for a little more than half of a day."

Shisen looked them over. They were all dark black furred this time. One of them had a white patch on one of its ears. He pointed it out. Thosl spoke to the beast and it padded over to Shisen and stood at his side. The living scarecrow bent over and patted its head. He said to Thosl, "Have you ever thought that you might gain the loyalty of these canines? You know, man's best friend is a dog. You obviously have a rapport with Kleese beyond your influence over him."

She asked him, "What spell do you intend to use on the wolf?"

Shisen wrapped his arms across his chest and

laughed. He said, "And she develops a sense of humour. <He stops laughing.> You mean it. Oh, Thosl. (laughter) I'm not talking about spells. Is it only a spell that keeps Kleese around? This little goat fellow isn't here on just a spell, are you?"

Bratsy shook his head briskly. Shisen nodded and said, "Is it me or is he kinda skittish?"

Thosl told him, "Eager."

Shisen didn't believe it but he let it drop. He was getting well away from the purpose he'd been given by General Max. He came right out and asked, "You're not still mad about them borg? Or worried about them coming back, are you?"

Thosl's eyes flashed crimson. She said, "Who propagates such propaganda against me?"

Shisen said, "You have been different, milady. I doubt you're homesick for General Gran."

"If I were to stone your hat would the rest of you turn with it?" she asked him.

He told her, "Consider the question withdrawn. You are obviously unaffected by your encounter with the great beyond. <He turned to the wolf.> Come on boy, let's go. Auntie Thosl has things to do no doubt."

Shisen took the wolf and left. Bratsy looked expectantly at Thosl. She told him, "I should have stoned his wolf for such insolence."

Bratsy asked, "Can we go inside now?"

Thosl nodded. She told the wolves to follow Bratsy.

He headed straight for her tent. As they went she told him, "I am in no mood to summon the entity at this time. We'll proceed with that ritual later."