



Anchor of Flesh



by: Joshua Gracey

A violent thunderstorm roared over a small, quiet village where three members of a law enforcement team known as GlobaCorp had gathered in front of the large doors to a local church. Speculation has been that a group of beings known as Dreadnoughts have taken residence within the church, and this trio was sent to solve the issue by the only means necessary. Dreadnoughts were outcasts by law and were to be executed on sight.

“It’s no good,” Katsu said as he turned to face the pair. “The door won’t open unless Doren blows it.” Although a genius when it came to firearms, Katsu did not know the first thing about explosives. “Which means I can relax,” he continued with a wide grin. “I’ll be right over here.” He moved away from the door and took a seat against the hard stonewall.

“Everything’s a joke to you, isn’t it?” Sky inquired as she turned to face the Chinaman. Katsu wore a heavy black trench coat that concealed his personnel vest and leather leggings. Strapped to his belt on either side were a pair of automatic pistols, large weapons that fired larger-than-average rounds; they had been custom built for Katsu. A chain of ammunition was draped over one shoulder for quick access in combat.

“Not everything,” Katsu replied with the same grin. “Just most things.” He ran one leather-encased hand across his generally bald head, the only hair on it tied back in a single, black tail. Sky was a contrast to the man she stood over. Being petite in all manners, a trait she abused often, she made the perfect recon agent for the trio. Her knowledge with computers helped greatly as well, her ability to slip into an area, get the information they needed, and escape in a very short time always a valuable asset. She had gone for casual dress this operation, the light blue tunic and jogging pants she wore fluttering in the wind of the current rainstorm. She shivered slightly and Doren draped his own coat over her shoulders.


“We can’t have our little genius getting a cold,” he mused. Doren was the largest of the group in terms of muscle and height. A giant of a man, he was nearly twice as tall as Sky who consequently stood under the coat as though it was a cloak. Doren wore generally the same clothes as Katsu with the exception of the trench coat and the large, brown leather straps that encased his torso and matched his mess of hair. Not the quietest of men, Doren’s general ability in combat revolved around the use of brute strength and anything that made a lot of noise.

Katsu shook his head as he watched the two. He knew there was a mutual attraction between them, though he did not understand how such a thing could be. Drumming against his knees he looked up at the contrasting soldiers and cleared his throat. “Can we move this along? I’d like to get out of the rain.” Thunder clapped far above the small village of New Fellazae, an out-of-the-way settlement with little to offer a person like Katsu.

Doren looked around, the few buildings at least thirty yards from the church minute in comparison. There were no lights on inside the buildings or people out on the streets. It had to be shortly after midnight. “If we blow the door open we’ll wake everyone,” he said as he juggled a small bundle of explosives between both hands. “The last thing we need is to let everyone know we screwed up.”

“What the hell do you mean, screwed up?” Katsu snapped as he rose to his feet. “We haven’t screwed up anything.” The original plan was to hit the church while it was open, in broad daylight where there would be no problem hunting down the suspected Dreadnoughts within. The plan had gone very wrong and they had been forced to delay their arrival several hours. “Do you blame us for the storm?”

“Not the storm,” Sky spoke in place of her more vertical companion. “He means that if we wake everyone in the middle of



the night and there are no Dreadnoughts inside the church we'll be a joke." She was indeed the best of the three at mediating. With another shiver she went silent again, her small, blue eyes on a rather excited Katsu.

"Just get the damn thing open," the leader of the group replied as he fingered his pistols. "If they're in there, we'll be famed for catching them. If they aren't, we can blame the villagers and their false accusations." If there was anything Katsu did well it was place the blame on others. He could drop a bomb on some defenseless hamlet and still find an excuse. He pointed to the door, the endless sheet of rain parting at his arm as he repeated himself. "Get it open."

Doren nodded and moved forward. "Remember what she said," he spoke as he readied the explosive. He placed the small bundled at the foot of the door and sighed. "I can't believe there might be a shootout in a church." He straightened and backed away, the bomb's trigger in hand.

Sky and Katsu joined him, the latter speaking up. "The Dreadnoughts have no shame, Doren. They would hide out in a nursery if they had to." He looked away as the door vanished in a brilliant if small explosion then moved beside its frame, back against the wall. His companions followed with haste, hiding themselves along the wall in case there were hostiles within the holy building. A few lights flickered on moments later within the distant homes.

"They're in there," Katsu pointed out as a series of heavy, animalistic barks rang out. The Dreadnoughts could not speak any human language, being devoid of a working tongue, but rather devised a system of grunts to relay orders with. Katsu leaned over and peered in the door, cold metal brushing against the side of his head. Before he had time to react the gunshot was heard, his head snapping to the side as a black fluid spurted from the wound. As he spun to the ground he heard Sky cry out.

Doren moved into the doorway, his gauss cannon being retrieved from the large holster on his back as he went. With a single squeeze of the trigger the Dreadnought was sent tumbling back into the church, coming to a stop as its rotted skull crashed against a pew. The Dreadnoughts were more or less cybernetic zombies, machinery and flesh intertwined to create an effective soldier. Their machine half consisted of technology stolen during the recent colonial war whereas their human half consisted of the salvaged recently dead. He then turned to see Katsu on his feet once more, both pistols on hand.


Katsu stepped forward and into the doorway as he crushed both triggers under his powerful grip, guns held high. A large piece of his crown was missing, circuitry sparking in an unfavorable reaction to the oil that leaked over it. Sky had forgotten that Katsu was a machine. The artificial warrior stepped into the church as he fired, all corners of the room falling prey to the hail of bullets his efforts produced. Several guns returned fire, the bullets ricocheting off his armor and general structure. Sky and Doren slipped in behind him, their own weapons adding to the chaos as they took cover behind the pews.

Katsu did not follow them but simply made his way up the aisle, occasionally turning to either side to put down one of the Dreadnoughts that were foolish enough to reveal themselves. This continued for a moment before a particularly large impact threw Katsu to the ground, shards of his armor and body fleeing from the bullet's path. A Dreadnought, most likely their leader, had stepped out from a small door at the back of the room. In one hand it held a pistol similar to those the machine he had just shot at wielded and in the other was the torso of the local priest.

The creature barked as it pushed the end of its weapon to the terrified man's head, the gun clicking as the safety was disabled. "Help!" The priest screamed, his small, plump figure shaking rather violently against the large combat suit his captor wore. The three of them remained still, waiting for their opponents' next move. After a moment Sky climbed out from behind her hiding place and moved a few steps closer to the Dreadnoughts. "Let him go," she said as she held up both hands. "He doesn't need to die."

Misunderstanding and taking her words as a threat, the cybernetic terror barked again and pulled the trigger. The man fell to the floor in a heap devoid of a skull, the remains twitching slightly. Sky gave a wild scream and ducked behind another row of benches as the Dreadnoughts began firing upon her and her companions again. The Dreadnought weapons were fairly weak, their bullets only getting through the thinnest points of the pews. Katsu had only managed to regain his composure when a new voice caused the turmoil to cease.

"Enough! This is my church and I demand that you take this conflict elsewhere!" The voice belonged to a tall, hooded figure that had come down the stairway leading up to the sleeping quarters. "How does a man get his rest when you all feel the need to disrupt him with such foolish disputes?" Its voice was cold, as though a ghost resided within the long robe. The figure turned to face



the remains of the priest and shook its head. “He was quite good when it came to giving sermons.”

“Who are you?” Doren asked as he got to his feet, all thoughts of combat lost. The figure now turned to him and shook its head. “Does it matter who I am? You have disrupted me. Apologize.” Doren remained still for a moment, not quite sure what to do then spoke. “I’m sorry?”

“It is quite all right. Now you,” it replied as it turned back to the Dreadnought leader. The creature observed the speaker for a moment before lifting its gun with a grunt. Quicker than anyone could have imagined the hooded figure brought out a once concealed sidearm and put a single round through the zombie’s head. It swayed for a moment before it fell back, the floorboards quaking under its weight. “I do not approve of such ignorance. I suggest you all leave.” The figure turned away and ascended the stairs once more.

Katsu looked around, observing the remaining Dreadnoughts for a moment. What would they do now? To answer his questions they all roared and pounded their way up the stairs, their bulky frames forcing them to go one at a time as they attempted to avenge their leader. The stairway lit up a few times as shots were fired and the bodies of the creatures came tumbling back down. A few confused moments later the figure returned to the sermon room and shook its head. “I thought I told you three to leave,” it spoke. Its voice sounded almost as if it was speaking through a tunnel. “My name is Llaxas.”

Sky froze, her eyes widening in obvious fright. “Llaxas?” She repeated, her hands shaking as she began a slow retreat toward the remains of the door. “Oh no...” she whimpered. Doren turned to Sky and raised a brow. “Who’s Llaxas?”

“Llaxas,” Katsu began, “Is an outlaw to end all outlaws. A wraith of his former self, Llaxas has reached a level of evil where he no longer needs his body to kill. Not much more is known about him than that.” Katsu looked from Sky to Doren as he spoke, the exposed circuitry in his head sparking as he did. “But why are you in a place like this, Llaxas?”

The hooded figure chuckled; the smoking pistol in its hand was far out of place amongst the worn stonewalls of the church. “It is very simple, really. The people here need a leader and I have come to convert them. They will all be like me in time. There is one problem, however,” Llaxas stated as he tore his robe off. As the robe disappeared thin air took its place, the gun held up of its own accord. “You come to dispose of me? How do you plan defeat that which has no corporeal form?” The three GlobaCorp representatives dove for cover as bullets tore across the large room.


Katsu gave a violent, mechanical roar as he pulled himself to his feet and returned fire. The metal shards passed through what would have been the specter’s body without falter and, noticing this, Doren pulled him back to the floor. Doren had not been quick enough and several of the specter’s shots tore through Katsu’s left shoulder, consequently rendered it useless. “Stop shooting at it!” Doren roared as he dropped his own weapon to the floor, “we have to get the hell out of here! He thinks we’re after him!”

Sky gave a cry of pain somewhere to their left, a thud sounding as she fell to the floor. “Sky!” Doren cried as he began towards her. Splinters littered the air as Llaxas attempted to stop Doren in his tracks. Doren rounded another pew and gasped as he saw Sky lying on the floor, several bullet wounds in her torso bleeding profusely. “Sky, hang on.”

“She’s going to die,” Katsu yelled over the blare of their foe’s gun. The mechanical man narrowed his eyes as he listened to Llaxas’s continued fire and cursed. “Doesn’t he have to reload that thing?” His opponent gave an icy laugh before responding. “Reload? Do you honestly think a killer such as I would have such an inefficient weapon? No, these are not even bullets but pure, superheated burst of air.” Llaxas’s voice was barely audible above his own fire.

Doren gave a ragged cry and crawled back to his gun, pews splintering in his wake. If things kept at the rate they were going the church would be destroyed. The towering man lifted his gun and stood, a large shell passing through the air and crashing into the opposite wall without any effect on his enemy. The rain of death shifted direction and fell on Doren, tearing him to literal shreds within seconds. Eyes decorated the lit up windows of the distant homes, the people they belonged to desiring to get a better view of the conflict without entering the rain.

Katsu rolled away from Doren’s remains and kept low to the ground, hidden behind the ruined wooden benches. All went silent for a few moments and Katsu assumed that Llaxas believed he had destroyed them all. “Friend!” Llaxas cried, obviously near Katsu as the floating pistol rounded the pew. “Why is it that you hide from me? You are no man, you can not die. We have much in common!”



Katsu snarled as he rose to his knees, eyes on the floating gun that he perceived to be in the hands of the infamous outlaw. “I am more man now than you have ever been!” Katsu jumped to his feet and turned away, running for the nearest window. He had planned to dive through the fragile stained glass, yet as before his plans went wrong. A single shot rang out, something hard hitting him in the back and throwing him to the floor.

“Stupid, stupid machine,” the specter’s voice taunted from somewhere behind. Katsu felt something heavy press on the back of his head, forcing his face into the cold floorboards. The end of Llaxas’s gun. “If only you could see yourself. Why did you ever think that this human flesh could make you any better than the cold, empty husk you are? If you had only forgot about trying to fit in to the human world, accepted yourself for the machine you are and opted for a decent shell instead of this disgusting skin. You are anchored by your need to be indifferent.”

Katsu grunted against the floor, the flesh on his metal face grinding off against the boards as the weight pushed harder. “See you in hell, Llaxas.” He felt the weight lift off for a second, then return violently as his internal systems shut down.

