

Matter of Facts  
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Bizzix was many things. He called these things The Matter of Facts, or Facts for short. Bizzix was a goblin as many astute observers would point out. Green, squat, barely up to the waist of the average human and with ears that stretched to twice the width of his torso. Bizzix was a scrapper, he noted that many humans would identify others by their profession: Jance the marketeer, Pantalli the bartender, Vokks the enforcer. Bizzix had one friend, and that was Clunk. Most saw Clunk as a bulging leather backpack, but Clunk could feel as much as anyone else, even though they hardly showed it. Biz knew better than that. Bizzix went by Biz sometimes too. Bizzix was tired. Bizzix realized he knew less about himself than he thought at first. In the world up above, a title meant everything. Who you are and what you do is what sets you above, and below sometimes. Especially in his own case. Down here it meant nothing. Bizzix the scrapper was no different from Bizzix the peddler. What mattered was work, pulling your load and earning your keep. It's all you could do after all. He wondered what he could be doing if he lived with the taller folk up above.

As if the lift to the city could pull him out of his station. Despite the whispers that sifted through the junkyard about the city above being the place of dreams: comfort and wealth unlike anything you'd find in the junkyards. He knew this wasn't the time to ruminate on such a fantasy, they'd never accept a goblin like Bizzix as one of their own. Dallip encouraged him to drop it long ago, because believe her, she tried. She told him something like "That takes a cutthroat sort of business which I just can't be a part of."

He believed her. Bizzix never once went near the lift, there was no point. There was work to be done, and no work meant no rations. No rations meant no Bizzix of course. It wasn't that hard to figure out.

Bizzix was sore today, he knew that for sure, not that those above would care. He wasn't careful and caused a pile to collapse, knocked him on his back and covered him in heavy, useless metal. He was able to muster what little strength he had to get out. Clunk wasn't of much help as usual. Even though they did wonders helping Bizzix carry his findings, they were a constant and heavy weight that did little to help Bizzix escape the squishy situations he often found himself in. Rather they poked him in the spine with more sharp bits of metal.

He shook the unpleasant memory out of his head. "What's done is done", he's heard some enforcers say. He apologized to Clunk for holding resentment, it wasn't their fault. He decided they should move onto more important things.

Dallip was missing again. Bizzix stood at their usual meeting spot, waiting. His stomach grumbled in advance, as it certainly knew it might not have its rations for the night. He could already feel the sweat building as the beating sun above mixed with the denser than normal smog to create a feeling that Bizzix could only think to describe as "mushy air". He peered out into the distance as he passed the time, searching for any gleaming curiosities. He couldn't see far through the industrial fog, as the distance faded into the air, the perpetual color of a dirty sunset. This day was already turning out to be miserable, he could tell. Once the first thing went wrong, everything else seemed to as well.

Knowing he needed the food he went on the hunt in the general direction Dallip usually came from, as that's all he had to go on. This small journey started through a

ravine of sorts, a small path with one direction to follow where the trash was cleared enough to see the dirty stone ground below. He crossed under a bridge from the top of one heap to another. Someone spent way too much time making that; there are better things to do around here. He heard some skittering and scattering from up ahead where the path opened up, as a lithe shape darted past him into the mounds nearby. He knew better than to investigate, as that's what would get you killed down here. He crept up to the opening, staying near the heaps to stay as out of sight as possible.

In the middle of the clearing he saw the familiar shape of Dallip, her brownish-green shade of skin and scraggly red hair easily visible from afar. She was splayed out on the ground covered in scratches and bruises, but more concerningly: empty-handed. Her handcart was tipped over and empty besides a few pieces of salvage. The food was gone.

Bizzix quickly scanned the clearing to make sure they were alone before creeping forward. As he approached, he could tell her posture was not one of death but rather defeat, as she still breathed as she stared upwards, brows furrowed in frustration. Bizzix tried to keep quiet but Clunk had other ideas as he knocked a steel rod onto the ground which was sticking out of the nearby trash heap. Dallip turned her head towards the sound of Clunk's ill-timed commotion. She quite audibly sighed and turned her head away.

"No rations today."

Bizzix stopped in his tracks, "But Clunk and I brought things for-"

"Said no rations today."

Her voice was more gravelly than his own, as is common for those who have been in the trash heap longer than most.

“Who took the rations?” he squeaked.

Dallip sat up with a wince and pointed to a scratch on one of her bare arms, “You’re telling me you’ve never had a spindlehound scratch before? They scarfed all the damn rations and ran!” She flopped on her back again, “They took more with them than just that. So that means no rations for Bizzix and Clunk today. No rations for anyone!”

“But what will I eat? What will Clunk and I eat?” Bizzix stepped forward timidly.

“Are you scuffin’ dull? Your damn abomination of a backpack doesn’t need to eat! Go find something yourself, you know how to. After all, you spend *way* more time in these parts than I do. Surely some bighead up above’ll feel an ounce of pity for little ol’ Biz and toss down a scrap for him.”

Bizzix wasn’t used to her being this angry, he knew she had a temper, but had never experienced the brunt of it like now. It’s why he kept their interactions short, out of fear for his already small well of self-esteem.

“Sorry Dallip...”

“Sorry you should be Biz! Get outta here so I can scrounge up something for tomorrow. You better find something good!”

Bizzix knew he didn’t do anything wrong but knew better than to talk back to Dallip, out of fear for another verbal lashing. He shifted Clunk’s weight on his shoulders and turned around without a word, taking Dallip’s advice as close to heart as he could. He was right: the miserable day found a way to make itself worse. To remedy this, Bizzix knew he had to make a big score. As much as he hated to say, he knew just the spot.

It was quieter around here, the western scrapyard was empty. Nothing moved, not a sound was made. For how quiet the junkyards were already, the stillness was

almost terrifying. Footsteps echoed like drums between the cleanly kept junk heaps. In these narrow passageways, the clang of metal was ear piercing and dangerous. These sounds were only made louder by the chasm walls surrounding the west yard, these parts were tucked into a crevasse that stretched down from the city.

Pazko and his gang liked it that way, they kept it that way. The Jagtooths, they called themselves. They set up traps of sorts, bits of metal hanging precariously that a careless wanderer or clumsy animal could knock over. You make a sound and you're dead in minutes.

He had heard the rumors and stories from the occasional eavesdropped ramblings. Pazko wanted to stake a claim on the lawless junkyard, control the goblins, hounds, and rats that refused the claims of civilization.

"Never let power get to their heads," he once heard an enforcer say, "they won't know what to do with it." Pazko was the shining example of that very idea. He amassed a following and immediately found a taste for blood.

Bizzix knew better than to stray past the blood stained spears that marked Jagtooth turf, but he didn't have much of a choice today. He and his gang had little care for the value of what lies in their piles. Pazko takes in the killers and thieves, not the collectors. He knew all too well who's blood stained those spears, he wasn't keen on being next. He and Clunk slipped in as quiet as they could. He took off his boots and emptied Clunk as much as he could, that way his companion wouldn't make as much noise as they like to on their more careless days. He already lectured Clunk on how dangerous this would be, and if they made any sound it could mean pain, torture, death, or worse if such a thing existed. Clunk's straps seemed to tighten, but perhaps Bizzix imagined it, Clunk rarely got scared.

Bizzix moved as fast as he could and as quietly as he could, the happy medium he was well used to. He scanned the piles as he slinked past, something on the surface had got to be worth something. Digging would mean death of course– digging was loud. He skirted around a large plate with stones stacked on top, balanced to topple with a single step. Only a few feet past was a pile, something glowed near the top of it, he could see it. It had to be a plasma core, the bluish hint had to mean it was full, at least a little bit. Bizzix moved as fast as he could, ecstatic. This would do it, this could earn him a year's rations from Dallip! A core with charge meant a lot down here, as half the things in this junkyard preferred not to work without charge. Bizzix began his climb, electing to leave Clunk at the bottom, fearing they would find it funny to make noise. He was meticulous with his handholds and footsteps, testing each jutting piece of metal to make sure it didn't wobble before using it.

In a few careful minutes, he reached the top. Smiling and silently cheering for himself. He was right! It was a core, and nearly halfway full at that! He snatched it quickly and stuffed it in a pocket in his overalls. Up ahead another was another treasure, a charge rifle in almost perfect condition.

Before Bizzix could move towards the rifle, a loud rattle sounded from behind him, as rocks striking metal. Something triggered the trap. Eyes widened, he checked behind him to see the cause of the commotion and felt the pit in his stomach grow. A scraggly canine figure followed his scent, approaching Clunk. The chitin plating along its patchy-furred back rattled as it disregarded the noise it made, its spindly insect-like legs padding silently towards his companion.

In the distance, from multiple directions, sounded shrill cries of voices which were unmistakably goblin. That sound meant bloodlust.

Bizzix slipped to the other side of the pile to keep out of sight of the carnage he knew would ensue. He struggled to breathe as he curled up and dug his fingers into the side of the head. The cries drew closer as they were matched with a maniacal laughter. Clunk was still down there, they were in danger, all alone and unable to care for themselves. Clunk needed Bizzix, but Bizzix couldn't move.

Bizzix didn't want to die.

For what felt like minutes straight, he could hear the goblins descend on the spindlehound. It was a horrible cacophony. Flesh tearing and shell breaking, they laughed and shouted through it all. Only seconds later was the spindlehound dead. Bizzix sat still, breath held and ears sharp.

"Oi what's this?"

"Aw someone left their sack here, must've gotten chased off by the hound."

Bizzix started to panic. They had Clunk, who knows what the goblins would do to them? Bizzix didn't want to find out, but he felt he had no choice but to let it happen. The rifle was too far away for him to take it, and who knows if he could even get a shot off before they kill him too, much less even hit them.

"Ahaha! They left some good stuff in here! Boss might like it."

"Well take it? We could use the leather for some good boots too, eh? Take the hound too, it's gotta have some meat on those bones."

He heard them drag Clunk and the hound away as the goblins judged how to properly brag about their findings to the rest of the gang. Clunk couldn't scream, as much as Bizzix knew they would want to. Once they were out of earshot, he snatched the rifle and ran. He had spoils that could make him rich, yet tears streamed down his face. Bizzix lost his only friend.

“Get rid of that right now, Biz! The enforcers will kill you if they find you with that. You know better!” Dallip rapped her knuckle on Bizzix’s head a few times as he shrunk in on himself in shame. He did know better. There was a reason no one had weapons other than the occasional serrated shiv from time to time. Smaller arms fell down from time to time, but a rifle like this only once in a lifetime.

“Come to think of it, they’ll kill anyone who touches it, and I want nothing to do with the damn thing! Now tell me you have something else, I know you did yesterday.”

“I- I left Clunk in my hollow...” Bizzix stuttered.

“You dull son of a rustrat.” She sighed and paused. Bizzix braced himself, expecting Dallip’s verbal wrath once again. He reached for Clunk, trying to grasp a semblance of comfort, but he was left empty handed. He felt wrong, burdened with the lack of weight. A new and uncomfortable Matter of Fact popped into Bizzix’s head: Bizzix wasn’t sure what he was without Clunk.

“I’ll give you half of today’s share if you bring yesterday’s salvage with you next time I see you.” Dallip grabbed a container of food, enough for one meal, and tossed it in Bizzix’s direction. It thumped against his chest and fell to the ground. He blinked heavily before stooping to the ground to grab it.

“Thanks, Dallip. I won’t let you down.”

“You better not Biz. We both depend on this, you know that. Get rid of that gun, go find your backpack, and get us something good, I know you can.” She turned and wheeled her cart away. Bizzix got the momentary sense of belonging, like Dallip cared for him, just this once.



As he stowed away the rations, Bizzix felt the small weight of the plasma core. He didn't know why he was so hesitant to give it up. He heard Dallip fantasize before, about what a score it would be if they found one. If she didn't trade it, she could power the dead motor on her cart and travel faster, or light up a lamp and take the darker shortcuts in the tunnels beneath the junkyard. He felt guilty that he was letting her down again, and it was his fault this time. But having the core made him feel powerful, he could do so much with it. He felt a rush of adrenaline, the feeling he had only had in times of fear, yet now it accompanied a feeling of power and excitement. If the core is what he needed to save Clunk, he had the tool to do so.

Bizzix stood at the edge of Pazko's territory again, the blood stained spears no longer intimidated him. He hunkered behind a pile of ripped up mesh covering something else unrecognizable, to the point he doubted it would be useful. He stared at the charge rifle, inspecting it closely for defects. It was perfect, it almost scared him; nothing perfect ended up down here. He flipped open the compartment for the plasma core and stuffed the thumb sized battery inside. The rifle began to glow and hum gently. He wanted to test it, but he couldn't waste a single shot, he knew better.

He began his trek inside, searching for the tunnels where he knew the Jagtooths dwelt, under the biggest pile in the chasm. He skirted past traps, gruesome markings, carcasses, and bloodstains. For once his eyes did not drift to the piles of scrap he traveled through, despite the treasure which he knew waited within. He felt a sense of focus, determination, and power with his rifle brandished before him, as he could feel the hum and light vibration comfortably against his bare arms.

Pazko's pile lay before him, an ominous and intimidating sight. The entrance tunnels were marked with firelight. He approached one and stared down, into the dark space below the tunnels. He took a moment to collect himself, and double check the gun. He squeezed the trigger and the hum grew louder alongside the blue glow within the rifle's barrel. He did not pull the trigger all the way back, as he felt a slight bit of resistance before the click that would mean it fires. He let go as the energy dissipated through exhausts at the base of the long barrel. He took a deep breath and stepped inside, the blue glow lighting his way.

As the tunnels spiraled downwards, Bizzix felt the pit in his stomach grow. He could hear the chatter of a dozen voices, the occasional ecstatic shout and scream intermittent. The glow of firelight started to meet and overtake the blue glow Bizzix's rifle gave off. The tunnel opened up into a large room, ringed with torches atop unsteady stands. Patchy rugs scattered the floor, stitched together with pieces of vermin which roamed the junkyards, crude furniture was fashioned or salvaged from what may have been in the junk piles above. The goblins within made a rowdy commotion laughing and howling as two of them seemed to share the tale of their most recent kill: the spindlehound, or so he hoped. He stepped into the open chamber and squeezed the trigger again, the hum grew louder as a dozen sets of large yellowed eyes snapped his way. The chatter died down to murmur, then the murmur died down to silence.

No one dared to move as Bizzix's finger teetered on the edge of death, if it moved a speck further someone would die, either whoever was at the barrel of the rifle, or Bizzix himself if he was careless.

Someone stepped forward: dark green skinned, patchy hair atop his head, ragged and beat up ears, spiked teeth poking out between chapped lips. Pazko. He tapped a

finger rhythmically on a ragged-edged knife tied to his waist, with a sense of carelessness surprising for one on the wrong end of the gun. Bizzix struggled to find the will to squeeze the trigger that one last hair. He was unsure who really was the careless one, which end of the gun was the wrong one.

“You better tell me what ya want before this knife finds its way between ya eyes, Scrappy.” Pazko gestured to his dagger before resuming his tapping, “You’re a Scrappy we can tell, ya better tell me why you thought it was a good idea to come down here, it’s not hard to tell you’re no Jagtooth.”

Pazko tilted his head, seemingly eager for Bizzix to make a wrong move, and he knew he had been dealt the worst possible hand. Bizzix panicked. He had scanned the room for his friend, for the bulging leather shape that signified Clunk. Bizzix could see a small pile of his belongings scattered among a pile of junk in the back of the room, but still no Clunk. Any semblance of confidence he had left escaped him. He wasn’t sure what he was supposed to say. He wasn’t sure what he was supposed to do. He almost wasn’t sure why he came down here in the first place. For the slightest moment he forgot he came down here for a friend, he didn’t come down here to kill. The charge rifle felt heavy now in his arms as he fell back on his Facts, the absolutes that brought him comfort.

Bizzix was a goblin, like everyone else in this room. Lanky, even with the goblin inability to grow much muscle at all. Bizzix was a scrapper, that’s how he got the charge rifle and the plasma charge, that’s how Bizzix found the means to kill. No, the means to save his friend. He was here for Clunk. Bizzix was friends with Clunk, he could never doubt it.

“I’m here for Clunk,” Bizzix said after a moment of silence, “if you hand them over no one has to die.”

Pazko’s tapping broke the monotonous hum of the rifle, Bizzix couldn’t help but feel unsettled. The gang leader chuckled, “Ey now Scrappy, your friend is dead.” He stepped forward, slowly pushing the rifle away with one hand and drawing his knife, putting it to Bizzix’s throat with the other. “You know that no one in these parts comes out alive, don’t ya? You are gonna have to be more specific ‘cuz we killed ten of you big-ears this month!” Pazko tilted his head back as a scraping laughter escaped from his throat. The Jagtooths followed suit, screeching and clanging metal on metal to add to the cacophony.

Bizzix shrunk in on himself as he felt the Jagtooths tower over him, he could almost feel the tips of their daggers and spears poke him from all directions, the edges of their craggy teeth tear into his skin.

“No,” Bizzix squeaked, “My friend isn’t a goblin.”

The laughter continued as only Pazko heard him.

He smiled and bared his jagged teeth, tilting his head. “Oh haha! What’s a Scrappy without their little backpack, their brown sack of sadness?” Pazko stepped back and pointed his dagger at one of his goblins. “This what ya looking for, Scrappy?”

The Jagtooths continued their ravenous laughter as the goblin Pazko pointed to lifted a flat piece of leather. Unmistakable. Straps removed, buttons torn, contents emptied, all life lost. Clunk!

“NO!”

The room flashed blue and suddenly Pazko was dead. A black hole bored in his chest, body sent flying to the back of the room, skull cracking on hard, grimy stone.

A boom shook the tunnel as dust fell from the ceiling as the sound echoed through the tunnels and up the walls of the ravine. Ears rang and vision shook. Bizzix was pushed backwards by the beam of energy that shot from the charge rifle. No one moved for the second which felt stretched to minutes.

Almost immediately, more Facts began to race through his head. Bizzix was really a killer now, no going back from it. Bizzix lost a friend, no going back from that either. Bizzix was a coward, which is why he chose to run. He dropped everything and ran. No thoughts or Facts after that. He did not cry like when he first lost Clunk, his tears felt trapped. He barely had time to think.

Pazko's gang began to shriek with a terrifying excitement. Bizzix killed one of their own and now they had an excuse to kill him. Knives shone and the points of spears stared at him with equal bloodlust. Bizzix's feet carried him up the tunnel he once descended from before he had time to think about it. The shrieks and howls behind him grew louder as the Jagtooths pursued him, he could almost feel the knives nick at his heels, teeth bared to snap at him as he ran.

Night was beginning to fall as he burst out of the tunnel, darting for the junk piles for comfort and cover. The sky had a tint of purple to mix with the dirty orange sunset. The musty smog felt refreshing. Bizzix leapt behind an old plasma converter and into a long steel pipe that fit him just barely. Through the pipe was a small hollow he was lucky enough to squeeze into, even if it hurt his head.

Shouts arose, mixing with the savage cries of the goblin gang. These ones were human. Enforcers no doubt. Bizzix covered his ears and held his breath as the Jagtooths clashed with the enforcers. He did not know how they arrived so quickly, but he didn't care to guess.

A minute passed as the ensuing brawl came to a close. He heard the sounds of human chatter, too muffled for him to make out. The enforcers came out on top, of course. Half of them either dead or escaped to the mazes of junk piles. His goblin kin never stood a chance, neither would Bizzix. So he hid, and he waited. He heard the enforcers mutter between themselves. They complained about having to deal with more goblins it seemed, and cursed out whoever let a charge rifle fall down here. He waited until the sun set and the heavy must cleared from the air.

He slid out of the pipe and back into the open air. It was hard to reflect on what happened, as a lot had happened already. Bizzix took a life, and so did Pazko. He didn't know what he was supposed to do without Clunk, as they had done so much for him that he could never repay, even if he had the chance to. Maybe he could go to Dallip, maybe she would take pity on him. Bizzix knew he wouldn't, because Bizzix knew he was too scared to.

A hollow fear filled his body. Bizzix was nothing now, like he feared he would be without Clunk. He couldn't carry the scrap he needed to trade to live all by himself, his overalls' pockets weren't nearly big enough. A new paranoid Fact set in alongside this loneliness, The Jagtooths weren't the forgiving sort. They may hunt down Bizzix until he's dead, or they may not, now that Pazko is dead. It was a small consolation that he rid the junkyard of him. It was a small Fact though, barely noticeable at all. Or maybe the enforcers would track him down instead? Did they know he was the one who fired the gun? Those Facts clashed with him for a while. He let more Facts pass in and out of his head as he trudged out of the Jagtooth territory.

Bizzix searched for a place to sit, a place to hide away from the dirty blue night sky, to hide away from the world for just a minute. He found a small hollow barely big

enough for Bizzix to fit inside, under a metal plate criss-crossed with steel threaded ropes.

He then took a moment to cry. It was a pitiful sight, he was sure. He let his tears stream down his face and tickle his chin. He sniffled and shook as his ears drooped and wrapped around his head. He held his knees up to his chest and buried his face within himself. The Facts swirled and drained to the back of his mind, as for once he could distract himself from them.

As the tears died away, he tried to think about what to do next. He tried and he tried so hard, yet he couldn't think of a single thing that could get him out of where he found himself. No matter what, things wouldn't end well, Bizzix knew everything would inevitably get worse. The way of things in the junkyard is that things never change for the better. The junkyard was unforgiving, and that was a Fact.