

The still, silence of the night was suddenly broken by the call of one of the machines. The sound shook the ground. No one could sleep through that sound.

The sound always filled me with fear, but it wasn't unusual. The sounds that followed were.

A few seconds after the machines call, the ground shook and the air was filled with the sounds of things breaking, wood, stone and metal. Then the machine called again, but this this was not the normal call of the machines. It sounded like it was in pain. The call was long and forlorn. The call faded and then broke up in to strange, grating harmonies.

What ever was happening out in the darkness it was not normal. The machines had not been anywhere near the village the previous day, one must have approached quickly in the night and then...something had happened.

We dare not venture out in the darkness. If there was a large machine close then there were sure to be small machines. They could still easily lift a man and take him...to where ever the machines took people.

Marta, me and mother all huddled together in the darkness of the room. Only the dimly glowing embers of the fire cast any light. Father checked at the windows. If there was a machine heading for the village we would have to flee.

But this didn't sound like a machine doing it's processing. This was an entirely different sound. In the seconds after the long broken call of the machines our ears rang, but there was no sound coming from the machine. It must have been very close, but we heard none of the sounds which could spell doom for the village.

We sat together in the darkness, not daring to sleep again, until the first light of the dawn signaled the start of a new day.

As soon as it was light everybody went outside. The whole village needed to know just what had happened the night before.

In the fields to the north we saw the source of sounds last night.

There was a machine sitting on the edge of the forest. Part of one corner lay over the ford and was now resting in the fields. The machine was on the ground!

I had never seen a machine on the ground, even when they were processing they never touched the ground, some hidden force lifted the things beneath the machine in to the huge scopes and funnels. They never needed

to touch the land.

But this one had buried one its corners in to fields.

It was not one of the big machines, but it was still bigger than anything man could build. It was a pyramid of intricate metal piping and machinery maybe 200 yards along each side.

And it was sitting on the edge of our fields, still and silent. The machines never stayed still and there was always some sound coming from them.

Was it dead? Could a machine die?

It looked dead. Some small fires burnt around the edges of it. And from here, on the slight rise that the village was built on I could see that it cut a path through the forest. This was not the clean clear path normally left by a machine when it was processing. Broken trees littered the path.

The machine had crashed in to the ground and had died. I was sure of it. "Father, is it dead?" I asked.

He looked unsure and then with a nervous smile said, "No machines don't die. They go on forever"

It looked dead to me.

Some of the men had started to walk slowly down the hill to get a closer look at the machine. It was dangerous even to be this close to one, but I was now sure it was dead or at least dying. There where none of the little machines flying around it, there was no sound. The machine had died.

What did this mean? A dead machine. I looked around for Michael, if any one was going to know if a machine had died before it would be him. He was the village techomancer. He didn't like me much, he didn't think it was good for a girl to do much thinking, but he would know if this had happened before.

The men where now getting very close to the machine, a few yards away. They where moving very slowly, unsure, getting ready to run if any of the small machines should appear. But the machine was still and silent.

Michael was standing by the village wall looking at the machine through his viewing glass. This tube made images of disatant objects look much closer than they where. That was Michael's way. He was not a brave man, but he was very clever. Maybe being brave was just being stupid? I didn't have time for such things now, I had to ask about the machine. I ran over to him.

"Michael, Michael" I called to him. He looked my way briefly and then

returned to looking through the viewing glass.

"Has you ever heard of this happening before a machine dying? You must know if this has happened".

"Dying! Machines don't die, my dear. Now please leave me alone. I have far to much work to do, with out having to talk to you today". He didn't even look at me.

"What's happened then? I mean if it's not dead, then what is doing?"

Michael shook his head. "I don't know. But we don't know what the machines do or why they don't process all of the time, or even why they are here. So I don't have any answers or any more time to talk to silly little girls. Leave me alone!"

He was annoyingly right. Pretty much all we knew about the machines was that they where very dangerous.

"Artemis, come on leave Michael to his work" Mother called.

I headed back to her. The men had reached the machine and where now actually touching it. Still I did nothing. Father was walking forward to the machine as well now. Most of the men of the village where. It seemed to be safe. I started to head towards it as well.

"Artemis, no! Come here" Mother called. She knew me to well. I walked back to her side. I had to be content with looking at the dead machine from afar.

It was surely dead. The men where now touching it, if the machine where alive and working it would have never let them do that.

How had it died? Did machines grow old like we did? What would happen to it now?

I wanted to know, but there was no way I was going to find out anything just standing here watching like Michael was. He might pretend he was learning something from this but I was sure he was just staying back in case this was just some sort of trap.

"Nothing is going to happen" I told mother as I turned and headed back for our hut.

"What are you going do Artemis?" She asked.

"Oh I'm just going to get my chores do for the day. Nothing is going to happen with the machine now".

"Your so sure are you. Very well go on with the chores, I'll be there in while to". Mother said with a knowing smile. I wasn't fair! She always knew when I was going to try and do something different or something that a girl

shouldn't be doing.

I headed towards our hut, but I had no intension of going there just yet. I didn't know what I was going do, but our hut was not part of it just yet.

As I walked something caught my eye. Movement. Something moved in the fields. I just caught it in the corner of my eye.

There was a man laying in the field, he had started to stand up but fell back down again. He couldn't be from the village, I was sure. Every one in the village was watching he machine, apart from me. He was not a villager, I could see that now, he was wereing armour, no one in the village had armour.

Again he tried to stand up, but again he couldn't make it. He must have been hurt. Maybe he had been here last night when the machine crashed and had been hurt then! I had to find out. This was going to be my discovery, the rest of the village wouldn't be able to see him, so I would get to him first. Maybe he saw what happened.

I ran quickly over to him.

He looked up at me as I arrived breathlessly. He was a very large man and his metal armour made him look even larger. I'd only ever seen men in armour like this at the fair. The Dukes men at arms wore armour like this, but I didn't think he looked like one of the dukes men.

"Ah hello" He said with board smile that quickly turned in to a whince. He tried to stand up again, I offered him my hand. He smiled again. "I don't think you'll much help some how" he told me, but I still offered my hand. He whincd again then took my hand and I pulled as he stood. He was very heavy.

I'm not sure I was any help to him, but this time he got to his feet. He goarned loudly. "Ah..aaah. Thank you little lady". He looked around. "So can you tell me where I have found my self?"

I frowned. "This is the village of Grendor, sir"

"Grendor...grendor". He scratched his long unkempt black hair. "No I don't know it I'm afrid and I'm not a sir. My name is Ivan and yours is?"

"Artemis. So how did you come to be in this fi eld and not knowing where you are? Did you get lost in the dark?"

The man, Ivan grinned again. "Lost in the night, you could say that". Suddenly he looked around again. As he did he stumbled but still managed to stay standing. "You haven't found any one else like me laying in the fi elds have you?"

The man must have seen the machine laying in the woods, but he didn't seem to take any notice of it. "Err.."

"Hey you" A call came from the distance. It was some of the villagers, they had spotted me and Ivan now. Seeing that nothing else was happening they must have started back to there daily tasks. The three men started to run towards us.

"Freinds of yours?" Ivan asked. I shrugged, I didn't know, I couldn't see there faces from here.

One of them might have been my father. It was father. "Artemis" He called. I waved to him.

The two other men slowed when they saw Ivan's armour and the sword which I had just noticed hanging from his belt.

Father grabbed me and held me close. "Are you okay?" He asked quietly.

"Yes I'm fine. This is Ivan he got lost last night..."

I pulled away from Father and turned back to face Ivan. "If you got lost in the night you must have seen the machine fall from the sky"

Ivan grinned. "Oh your a sharp one aren't you? Don't miss a thing hey. Yes we saw the machine fall. We had a great view of the thing fall. We where on it!"

The other two men where now approaching slowly and cautiously.

"What!"

"Thats impossible. No one has ever survived being pick up by a machine" I looked at father. I was sure this was true, but Father would know.

"Well that might be true, but we didn't get picked up we boarded the thing our selves"

The other men had now arrived. Others where following them as well now. The machine was not the only thing of interest this morning.

"But why would you get on a machine?" Father asked.

Ivan sighed. "A very good question, one I should have asked before we did it. It wasn't my idea, some friends suggested it and well I went along with it". Ivan looked around again. "Maybe they didn't make it off the machine" He said almost to him self.

"Your friends?"

He nodded and then kneeled down in front of me. "Well not really my friends. I knew them, but they where paying me to come along. If they got them selves killed...well it was their choice. It was a silly idea. And I'm

paying for it now". He grimaced as he stood up again. "Still if they are out there, I really should look for them. Could you help?" Ivan looked at Father.

Father was about to say something, when one of the other men cut in. "Why would you want to get on a machine?"

"Ah, one of my...er friends is a technomancer and well you know what they are like. He just had to see one of them up close. Real close".

"Well if you know technomancers you should talk to the technomancer in the village. He will know what to do".

"Well I know what to do, see if any of the other silly buggers survived and drag them back home so they can pay me. But if this will help, I'll speak to your technomancer, but I know nothing of the machines".

The others lead Ivan towards the village. I followed too, but I was sure I would not be allowed to hear what he had to say to Michael. I made way way up to the front of the little group.

"So what was it like on the machine?" I asked. It seemed a very sensible and obvious question to me but the others seemed to be worried about me asking it.

"Now come on Arteims you can't ask such things. Let the poor man get his bearings back".

"But it's what Michael will ask. Why can't I ask the same thing?"

Ivan smiled a toothy grin at me and then father. "Ah your daughter? You should be proud of such a young lady. She asks canny questions. We such people".

Ivan looked back to me. "Well what can I you? It looks much the same from the inside as the out. Lots of pipes, glass, iron and strange flickering lights. Our technonmancer was so excited by everything he saw. He was constantly babbling about this and that. Truth be told I only understood 1 word in 10 he said".

Ivan sighed. "It was an amazing and terrible place. We should have never boarded the thing".

"What happened?" I asked, there had to be more he wasn't telling me. Ivan stopped and slowly knelled down in front of me. It looked like this hurt him quite a bit.

"Never, ever be afraid to ask questions. But please don't be offended if I decide not to answer that one". He stood up and we walked on. We where in the village now

"It was very silly of us to get on the thing. I must have been very drunk

when I agreed to help them. Of course the gold they offered me helped as well. But it seems they didn't plan a way to get off once they were on. So we had to...er improvise a bit. Stopping the machine was so stupid. I..."

"You talk total nonsense". It was Michael's voice. He stood before our little group, his arms folded on his chest. One of the other men had run on ahead and must have told him Ivan's story. "No man has ever survived being picked up by a machine and the idea that you could do anything to a machine just shows how little you understand them".

Ivan shrugged. "Oh I know I don't understand them. There I think is the difference between us. You think you do, I know I do not".

Michael turned away from us. "I have no time for this nonsense. I have a machine to observe closer than has ever been seen before".

"Well observe then. Climb all over it. It is safe now. It's dead".

I knew it! The machine was dead.

Michael shook his head and turned back to face us. "It is not dead. Machines don't die. It is not safe to get too close to it"

This time Ivan turned away. "Well you had better tell your people that. They were getting pretty close to it".

"I touched it" A voice came from the crowd that was gathering around us. "So did I" Another voice shouted out. Ivan stopped and looked back at Michael. He seemed confused for a moment, torn between two things. Ivan seemed to be enjoying this, I thought. He and Michael exchanged glances. What was going on between these two?

"No one is to go near the machine. We must learn what we can from a distance. It is still not safe. We must summon other techonomancers to study this machine.

Ivan smiled, it seemed that he thought he had won, and then turned and started to walk off.

"And you" Michael called after him. "The man that stopped the machine, must be held and punished!". Ivan stopped and turned to face Michael once more.

"Well seize him then". Michael shouted to the crowd. Father grabbed my hand.

Ivan looked around. No one seemed to be moving towards him. He took a step forward, most of the crowd took a step back. Ivan, I was sure winked at me.

"Grab him!" Michael shouted. Two men stepped towards Ivan. Father

started to pull me away, but I slipped my hand out of his and moved back to Ivan's side.

This man had been on a machine, he had killed it. How many people had been killed by these things? We had lived in terror under them for so many generations now and this man had at last done something about it.

Ivan looked at me and then the two men slowly approaching him. He shook his head and stepped away from me. Father grabbed my hand again.

"Come on, it's not safe". He said. This time he held my hand tight. I could not get free. He pulled me from Ivan and the crowd.

"So you want to hold me then" Ivan shouted. "What for? What have I done wrong?"

"You by your own admission killed a machine".

"Ha! You said I couldn't even have got on to the machine. Now you say I could have killed it".

Father stopped. Every one was looking at Michael now. It seemed Michael had nothing to say. Ivan took another step forward, Michael took a tiny step back.

Ivan turned to face the crowd. "So what if I did kill the machine. If I hadn't you would have probably all been dead by now. The machine was coming this way. Would your village have survived such a close shave with a machine?"

"It only came our way because of your interference" Michael snarled. "You are the one that has put us in harms way. There will be other machines coming now. They will destroy us all. And it's all your fault!" Michael stepped forward and jabbed his finger at Ivan. "Kill him!"

A man stepped forward, Ivan put his hand on his sword. "I don't want to fight any one here. So I'm going to walk out of here" Ivan looked at the man who had stepped forward. "Please don't do anything stupid like try to attack me".

The crowd parted in front of Ivan as he walked towards them.

"Don't just stand there..." Michael spluttered. Father released my hand and walked over to him. He spoke to him for a few moments.

I headed over to Ivan. "Sorry" I told him.

"No it's okay. I should really be saying sorry to you. Your techomancer could be right, other machines might come to investigate what's happened here. Sorry but it might be wise for your village to move".

I thought about this for a moment. "But if you have killed one machine,

couldn't you do it again?" I asked.

"Not with out our techonomancer. He knew where to hit the machine..." Ivan looked at the mountain of metal that now cast a shadow over the village. "Just one little sword was all it took. Sorry. It was a stupid thing to do and now that mistake could cost you your village. I had better leave".

He walked on. A few of the others watched him leave, but my Father and Michael seemed to be center of attention now. I walked on beside Ivan. He was limping quite heavily now.

I walked along side him. For a a few moments he looked lost in his thoughts, then he stumbled and fell.

"Ah, dammit". He tried to get to his feet again. Clearly he was in pain. I offered my hand to help but he refused it.

"See this what happens to you when you let greed get the better of your brain. You wind up, sitting in the mud in some backwater village that no one has every herd of". He shouted as he hit the ground angry, I took a step back. He looked at me. "Sorry. I didn't mean to offend you". His voice was back to it's normal deep soft tone. "It's just I'm a city boy. Your village is very nice, I'm sure". He started to get to his feet again. He struggled and winced as he did.

"Uh oh". He whispered. "This isn't good". I turned around to look behind me.

Some of the men where heading towards us, they didn't look happy.

"You'd better go now". Ivan told me. There was hard edge to his voice now that I not heard before.

Father ran on ahead of the men. "I can..."

"Go. Now!" Ivan shouted. He tried to stand again.

"Artemis!" Father called. He was gesturing for me to get away from Ivan. I tried to pull Ivan up by his arm.

"Go little girl! Get away from me". Ivan shouted. He pushed me away.

"Come on Artemis. We have to go, now". Father had reached us now. "Sorry I did all I could" he told Ivan. Ivan nodded grimly. Father grabbed my hand. I knew what was going to happen here, I couldn't let it happen. It was not Ivan's fault, it was Michael, he had made these men in to the monsters that where coming to get Ivan. I wasn't going to let it happen.

"Father! We can't leave Ivan here. He can't stand properly. They will kill him".

"They can try" Ivan said standing, shakily at last.

The men were almost on us now. "It's not fair". I shouted at Father as he pulled me away. I tried to pull free of his grip but he wasn't letting me go now. "Stop. You idiots" I shouted at the men. "He's not hurt us". But it made no difference they had reached him now and they hit him with staffs and jabbed him with pitch forks. Ivan used his sword to block the blows, but there were too many of them. The blows started falling on him and he staggered under them.

"Stop it, stop it, stop it!" I screamed at the crowd.

Ivan fell and the crowd cheered. More men gathered around now. One was within reach of me now. I lashed out at him with one hand. "Stupid, stupid man". The man caught by surprise stumbled and fell. I went to kick him, suddenly filled with a strange savage glee at the pain I was about to inflict. Father pulled me away.

"We are leaving now" There was a iron in that voice. This brought me back to my senses.

Then the sound hit us.

I was the call of a machine. Every one stopped.

The call was not loud so it can't have been close. But the call of machine was never ignored.

Every one scanned the horizon and there in the distance was a hill that had not been there before. It was a machine. It was still along way off but for us to see it now, the machine must have been huge.

Some of the men around Ivan ran, others just stood there mouth open. I gazed at the machine for a few seconds before realizing that Father had released his grip on my hand. I took my chance and slid through the crowd of men to Ivan.

He was laying there blood stained and splattered in mud by still trying to get up. His armor looked very battered now, but he was still alive. More of the men were running now. They would be heading for Michael, asking what to do.

"Aarrghh" He grunted as he turned to face me. "Ah lassie, you shouldn't be here. What's going on?"

"A machine is coming" I told him as I tried to pull him up.

"Artemis" Father called. "Over here" I shouted back.

There were only two men standing by me and Ivan now. One looked down at me gave Ivan a kick and then ran off. The other saw Father approaching and ran too.

"Sorry las, I've bought this down on all you now".

"We have to help Father". He nodded and helped me get Ivan on his feet again. "Lets get you inside before the mod decides to return".

"Och, no, You can't no that, I don't want put you and your family in any more danger than I already have".

Father just smiled at him and we headed for our hut.

Father sent me straight back out to find out what Michael was saying about the machine. I wanted to stay and help Mother with Ivan, but Fathers voice told me there was no arguing with this.

I didn't get to his hut. I didn't need to know what was happening. Some men where already starting to take down the huts, while others went in to the fields to gather the flocks and herds.

The village was moving.

I could see Michael was also getting ready for the move. As I had expected he had several other men helping him move his stuff. They should be moving there own families!

I knew there was no point in trying to talk to him. He probably wouldn't talk to me and I was sure I say something that I might regret later on. So instead I headed for one of the men watching the machine. I wanted to know how close was the machine going to pass and was it processing?

The watcher told me that the machine was probably heading straight for us and it wasn't, yet, processing.

This was both good and bad news. If it where processing it would be moving more slowly giving us time to get out of the way. If it was then that meant there would be no return for us to this green and lush bit of land. A processing machine would leave nothing but ash and dust.

The machine was therefore moving quickly and it was probably at best a day and half away.

I ran back to our hut.

"We must get ready to leave". Father told us. "We need to be ready by first light"

I looked at Marta, Father, Mother and then Ivan. I couldn't remember the last time the village moved. I would have been 2 at the time. This place was home to me. It was a good place to live, the soils where rich and fertile, the water's where clean.

Ivan shook his head ever so slightly. "I'm sorry. I have brought this all down upon you. I need to do something to help". He started to get up. This was clearly an effort, his face creased with a grimace.

"No your not" Mother said forcefully. "You are in no condition to be helping anyone right now"

"I can help". He tried to get up again. "There is something I can try, I just need to get to the machine".

"You are not going out of this hut". Father told him. "It's not safe out there. The other villagers are still angry, you are in no condition to fight and I can ill afford the time to dig you out from another fight".

"So I can't stay here and bring more trouble down on you".

"The village is moving. No one will bother us now, but if you where outside...that might be to much of a temptation. No you stay here and help with what you can. I've got to gather the animals now". Father and Mother exchanged a look and he left. Mother, me and Marta started to pack up our things from around the hut. It had been so long since we moved last that it seemed we had built up a lot of things. A lot them where no use at all, they would have to stay.

Ivan helped too, he could stand and move slowly and with difficulty. He packed our things in animal skin bags as we found them. Marta and Mother worked outside.

"So what where you going to try with the machine?" I asked him as passed him a cooking pot.

"Oh, I was going to see if I could undo what we did, get the machine going again".

"Would that help?"

"It might. The machine might just move on and leave us alone"

"It might, but what if it where angry at being hurt"

Ivan looked at me and smiled. "You think these things are like people? Maybe they are who knows. It might help, it might not, but if you are abandoning the village anyway what would you have to lose?"

"The machine wasn't processing when it was heading for us" I said, mostly to my self.

"No. We where stupid not insane. If the machine had been processing we would have not been able to get close enough to it" Ivan got up slowly.

"So I've got to give it a go"

"But if it starts up now and starts processing, we lose everything. You

can't" I pleaded.

Ivan smiled. "Don't worry I wasn't going to pull the sword out till the village was on the move".

"A sword! That's what stopped the machine".

"Yes. I didn't think it would work either, but the technomancer said that was all it needed. He didn't have the nerve to do it, no he left that to me. I take that sword out, if the machine is still alive it might just leave you alone. If the machine is dead then there is nothing we can do anyway".

Ivan slowly headed for the door. "Thank you Father for his help and thank you. You are good people, I only hope I can do something to help you".

"You can't..."

Mother opened the door. She stood there for a few moments. She knew what was going on, Mother always knew. "How are things going with the packing" She asked knowingly.

"Ah fine. Almost done...I think" Ivan answered for me.

"Good we will need to make an early start tomorrow morning. So we will need all of the rest we can get tonight".

We ate our final meal in this place. It was a sad event, we didn't talk much. After that there was nothing else to do but to get some sleep. I wanted to sleep, but I couldn't. Too much had happened today. I watched Ivan carefully. I knew he was going to leave some time before morning and I had decided I was going to go with him.

I did sleep a little, but it was a light, fitful sleep and when Ivan got up I awoke.

In the dying light of the embers he turned to face me and started to say something. I silently put my finger to my lips. He nodded and headed for the door. I followed him out.

The morning air was clear and cold. There was the first hints of dawn starting to show on the horizon. It was just enough to see by. And on the opposite horizon, the mountain of metal which was the approaching machine was lit by some blue flickering light coming from within.

"Come to say good bye then?" He whispered.

I shook my head. "I'm coming with you".

"Oh no your not! My life is my own to do stupid things with. I'm not going to play with yours as well".

"It's only just light enough to see, you can't make your way across unfamiliar land in this. Not in your state. And anyway you do have a choice I could call out and wake everyone up".

Ivan smiled. "You are a canny one, for sure, but you won't call out, not if I'm any judge".

He was right, of course, I wouldn't. But I was still coming with him, no matter what he did. For a few moments we just stood, still and silent. "I'm still coming with you".

Ivan sighed. "Very well, but this is not some game this is very dangerous".

I nodded. "Right. We will be off then" Ivan headed down the track. "It's this way" I called after him.

"Oh yes...right".

As the sky lightened we could see the massive shape of the machine rising up before us like a mountain. The base of the machine was like a wall of metal, yards tall. In the dim light Ivan felt his way along it.

I touched the surface too. I was still warm and it was textured. Intricate patterns had been carved in to it's surface.

"Ah here we are" Ivan said from the darkness ahead of me.

I could see he was standing slightly off the ground. His feet where in some holes in the wall of metal. "This is how we got on before". He stepped back to the ground. I looked closely and saw that there was a series of triangular holes running up the metal wall. Almost like hand and foot holes. A ladder! A person sized ladder. Why would a machine have these?

"They lead straight up. It's not a long or hard climb. You should be able to make it". In the darkness Ivan couldn't see my frown. "You go first then you can only fall on to me".

I was going to say that I could probably climb better than him at the moment, but actually I was happy that he would be right behind me.

I started to climb up this strange ladder. Ivan was right behind me, I could feel the warmth of his breath on my ankles. I could hear him grunting with each step, he was still hurt. It was a hard climb for me and by the time I reached the top my limbs were shaking from effort and my breath was quick and shallow.

I sat down on the metal 'ground'. The pyramid of the machine rose above me. Unlike the base of the machine, this part was not smooth or

regular. The shape was basically a pyramid, but where large sections of pipes a tubes which stuck out from the metal walls. The area of wall by the ladder we had just climbed was a smooth metal wall. There was no carving on this metal, it was completely smooth and flat. The little walkway on which I sat seemed to go all of the way around the base of the machine.

Ivan stood on the walkway. "Tired already?" He asked.

I shook my head "No!...well actually yes, but I'm ready to go again".

"Your sure about that then?" Ivan asked with a grin. I nodded "Where now?"

"There is a small gap we can get in through somewhere around here... lets see" Ivan looked in both directions down the walk way. "This way". He didn't sound at all sure.

He took the lead this time. I followed him closely. What I was doing was starting to sink in. I'd actually touched a machine and lived to tell the tail. More than that I was walking on it. With this thought fear stirred in me. What happens if we remove this sword and the machine comes to life. We will still be on it and if it starts to fly again then what. How would we get off?

"Ah here it is" Ivan stopped by a narrow split which seemed to run right the way to the the top of pyramid. It looked like we where standing in the dead center of this face of the machine.

The sun was now rising and it cast it's gentle yellow glow on the face of the machine. I looked out over the land call home. Down in Grendor my family would be getting ready to leave now. With me and Ivan gone, they would know where I had gone, I was sure. They would be worrying about me I knew. It wasn't fair of me to do this, I knew now.

Suddenly I wanted to turn back. This was silly, there was no guarantee it would revive the machine, even if it did the machine could then take revenge and destroy the village anyway and what if the other machine didn't stop? Then how where we going to get off a working machine?

I wanted to get off this thing and go home.

"Ready then?" Ivan asked. I looked at him and then back at the village. I couldn't let this happen to my home, I had to try something. It may be silly, but I'd started this now, I wasn't going to turn back and leave Ivan here.

"Yes"

"Your sure. Things get dangerous from here on in".

"Yes, I know. So the less time we stay here the better".

Ivan nodded with a smile and we walked in to the machine it's self.

The split was only just wide enough for Ivan to fit though. Oddly it seemed to widen some feet above our heads. Also, despite the fact that the split was a straight line on the outside, inside it followed a jagged path upwards, lots of sharp turns and angles stopped us from seeing to the top. The path in to the machine was however completely straight. At the end of this path I could see a dull red glow. The walls either side of us where made of an intricate tangle of pipes, strange glass shapes, gears and leavers. Michael would love to be here, but I was sure he would be to afraid to come this far.

We headed towards the glow.

"Should that be glowing if this is dead?" I asked.

Ivan shrugged. "How should I know. It was a bright blue light before we...I stuck the sword in the thing. I hope it still means that it's alive. If not all of this is a waste of time".

"Sorry, silly question".

Ivan stopped and turned, with difficulty in the small space. "Remember never be afraid to ask questions, even the silly one's. Which of course don't seem silly till you ask them. If you didn't ask that question it wouldn't seem silly to you now, would it".

I nodded and Ivan grinned again. We carried on towards the glow.

"The machine let you get in this far when it was running?"

"Yes, I was surprised too, but one of the technomancers said that the machines never expected to find people inside them, so didn't bother stopping people when they where inside.

"Almost like they expect to find us there" I said to my self.

"Mmm yes, one the other technomancers was saying things like that. He even said that our forefathers could have built these things".

Why would we do that? How could we do that? More questions that I should ask. But what was the point? Was there any one alive that could answer them? Asking questions that no one can answer. Maybe no one can answer them, because the question hasn't been asked before?

Ivan stopped. "This is it" His voice echoed in the huge space that the narrow gap had opened in to.

The space was not wide, but it was high. It must have reached right up to the top of the machine. Floating above us in the middle of the space was a dully glowing red sphere. "That machines hart" Ivan said "Maybe, who

knows".

Directly below this glowing sphere some large glass pipes, they ran from the edge of the space to right underneath the sphere. When under the sphere the pipes turned upward to face it and then ended. The glass walls showed the pipes held some sort of glowing mist. It had the same red colour as the sphere.

Ivan walked over to where the pipes turned upwards. "Here we are". He said, standing by a sword. The sword floated in mid air with nothing to support it. I walked over and took a closer look. There where four of these glass pipes and where the pipes ended, the red glowing mist they carried did not. It was much fainter than it had been when in the pipes, but I could see a column of the stuff coming from the end of the pipe right up to sphere. It was almost as if the sphere where being supported by this glowing mist. The same mist came from all of the pipes, bar the one that sword floated over. There was only the faintest of traces of mist from this pipe, even though the was easily wider than Ivan's armored body and the sword was, well just a normal short sword. It seemed to be blocking the flow of what ever it was.

"So you just put that sword there and the whole thing stopped?"

"Yes. I mean it didn't just stop straight away, but you could tell it wasn't doing it any good with the sword there. Lots of sparks, bangs and groans and then the thing started to drop to the ground. That was when the real nose started".

"So when you take it out we will have some time to get off?"

Ivan nodded. "Well at least I hope we do. You'd better get ready to run and it's probably a good idea to get a head start on me. I don't want to slow you down".

"I'm not going to leave you on this thing". I told him.

Ivan looked surprised at the forcefulness of my voice. I was surprised at it too. "Oh don't worry I have very definite plans about what to do with the rest of the day and none of them involve dying" Ivan put is hand on the swords handle. "In fact most of them involve lots of sleeping and malt bear". He added with his characteristic toothy grin. "Go on get started then. I won't pull this thing until your by that gap".

I stood by the entry to the gap we had come in through. Ivan pulled at the sword.

It looked very strange, this huge and powerful man pulling with all of his strength at a small sword floating with nothing holding it. It looked like the

sword was stuck fast. He wasn't moving it. Maybe the little extra weight I could add would help.

I put my arms around Ivan's armor and pulled as hard as I could.

"What are you doing!?" He shouted. "I told you..."

"You need all of the help you can get" I told him.

Ivan pulled again. "It wasn't...this hard to get...the dam thing in". He forced the words out as he strained.

Suddenly the sword slipped a little and then it came free. We both fell backwards.

Ivan stood up quickly and pulled me up with him. We both looked around for a few moments.

Nothing had changed. The machine was still silent, the sphere still glowed a dull red, the red mist still seemed to support the sphere. But slowly more of the red mist seemed to be flowing from the pipe that was blocked by the sword. More was coming from all of the pipes. Suddenly one of the glass pipes lit with a much brighter orange light.

"That's more like it". Ivan said as he started to run. As I started to run the other pipes lit up with the same light and the machine started make noises. Huge, loud noises started coming from the depths of the machine. Nothing like the machines call, but they where machine noses. The machine was coming back to life!

I caught up with Ivan easily. He was still slowed by his armor and injuries. All around us now, there where new noises and lights coming from the machine. Behind us the dull red glow had become a fierce blue white light which, even from here was uncomfortably warm.

We reached the end of the split in the machine and where out on to the walkway again. As we got there, the machine called. This was the sound that I knew and had feared. But now I knew it was a good sound. The machine was alive again it was calling to it's fellows to tell them. I had never been so close to the sound before.

The sound when beyond just a sound, it was force, it knocked the wind from me and I fell. Ivan picked me up and kept on running. After that call I could hear nothing.

We reached the ladder down and Ivan said something, I didn't hear it, but I knew he wanted me to go first.

As I started to climb down the ladder. The machine shuddered.

Ivan was right behind me. I was a few steps from the bottom, when the

machine shook again. It was starting to move, I was sure. Very slowly but it was moving again.

It was alive, the village was safe! But I was still on it.

I reached the end of the ladder and there was already a small drop the ground. I jumped off. Once on the ground I quickly moved away. When Ivan reached the bottom of the ladder, the machine was a few feet off the ground. He jumped and landed heavily.

With obvious pain he got up slowly. I tried to help, but he was too heavy. He said something to me, but I heard nothing. I tired again. The machine now was at the tops of the trees and was starting to move sideways. We were clear, just but if it started processing we were way too close.

Ivan started to take off his heavy armor. He got up with my help and we struggled away from the machine's edge.

I kept on looking back, I couldn't hear a thing, so I didn't know if the machine was processing or not. If it did we were probably dead already, no one had ever been this close to a processing machine and survived.

We were still alive and still moving, just. I felt the machine call again. The force of it was less now, but I still stumbled.

The machine's back corner passed behind us.

The machine was continuing on in the same direction as before. It would pass close to the village, but not over it. The village was safe! Well from that machine but what about the other? I needed to get on to the hill so I could see.

We stumbled up the hill slowly. I could see the people of the village were running for the edge of the forest and that the machine was still not processing. The other machine was still there, looming large over the land. It was moving slowly. It wasn't processing either and yes, it was turning, ever so slightly. It was turning away from us. Going back to where it had come from.

We stood there on the hill for a long time just to make sure the two machines were leaving us. As I watched I started to hear things again. First the machines, but then other more normal sounds, the wind, the birds, all started to fade back.

Looking down at the village some people were starting to head back from the forest. Mother and Father!

I wanted to run back to the village, but Ivan still needed my help, so we slowly headed back.

I spotted Marta first. Forgetting my self for a moment I ran to and hugged her, leaving Ivan standing. We then made our way back to our hut. I told every one I saw that Ivan had saved us. There where no angry faces. Every one was just to relieved, out home was safe for now. The machines had gone.

Ivan didn't want to take all of the credit, but I told him, that hero's are not normally girls and that he needed this, I didn't.

The whole village had a feast that night to toast the new hero. We where safe from the machines now, but I knew as I always had that the machines could return at any time. I'd seen inside one now, I knew how easy they where to stop, if you could get on to on. I'd asked those questions that maybe no one had asked before. Questions like who built the machines? How did they build them? Why did they build them?

Questions that needed to be answered, even if no one yet knew those answers. If some one did I would find them, if no one did then I would be the first person to discover the answers.

I'd deiced now, I was going to become a technomancer.