



TOTAL WAR
WARHAMMER

ALL TUNNELS LEAD TO SKAVENBLIGHT

- By Andy Hall and Chris Gambold -

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The scribe rehearsed the lines in his head. He stood out of the way, being as unobtrusive as possible, three levels below the dais. Between him and Fleetmaster Vrisk of Clan Skurvy were the clawcaptains of the clan-fleets and the vermin-admirals of the bell-fleets as well as a cadre of black-furred storm-vermarines, Skurvy's own breed of elite warriors. All of whom — including his huddle of scribes, mapwrights and other 'academics' — faced into the grand audience chamber at Spineport. A mass of Clanrats and crew-rats stared back at them. Whiskers twitched uneasily and necks were craned to sniff the air expectantly pending the arrival of their guest. The cavern was large and draped in mouldering banners displaying the claw-mark of Clan Skurvy. In the west wall, a great hole was carved, forming a balcony of sorts where one could stare out at the fetid underground harbour below and see the might of Skurvy's navy in its nest-port. Yet, this time there was only a few vessels moored.



Sneek Scratchett mumbled the words under his breath while he waited.

“But the map-scrawl says...”, he rehearsed, then cursed himself and tried again. “No-no! ... The charts of the water-sea reveal”, he cursed again. Should he say it in pure queekish? “I have discovered...” and quickly corrected, knowing that to give himself any credit would be a fatal mistake. He tried to steady his rapidly beating heart and then whispered again “The chart-map...” He halted and gave out an involuntarily squeak. Luckily it was low enough for none on the upper dais to hear. An agitated voice from behind came close to his ear.

“Shut up, fool-fool! You’ll get us all kill-maimed”, hissed the tail-puller. Before Sneek could react, an indolent toll reverberated around the chamber. For a brief instant, every Skaven stood stock still. Then, whiskers twitched, as thousands of verminous minds frantically tried to calculate how to take advantage of the moment. Sneek was sure a few in the audience would have quickly been murdered — a dagger in the back or throat ripped out — as Clanrats sought advancement in their own small-scale games of rank and politics. The bell chimed six more times, and then, from behind the assembled audience, a horned figure entered the chamber.


The packs quickly separated to allow the grey-furred one a clear path to the dais, where the Fleetmaster and clawcaptains — and Sneek

— waited. Any other Skaven envoy would visit a potentially hostile clan with a large retinue of his best and least-treacherous minions, but Grey Seers are heralds of the Council of Thirteen, prophets of the Horned Rat, and therefore conferred special status in the Under-Empire. This one chose to display such power by being accompanied by only two albino Council Guards — less confident or inferior visitors would have much larger retinues. As the Grey Seer passed, many Clanrats bowed their heads and straightened their tails in abject supplication, some even spraying the musk of fear, to their shame.

Sneek felt his own glands engorge but fought to keep control of his body. A nervous hunger nagged at his being.

The Grey Seer strode down the aisle created by the separating packs, his muzzle held high. He stopped several tail lengths before the raised dais and stared up at Fleetmaster Vrisk Ironscratch. The Warlord of Clan Skurvy wore a self-satisfied grin, and his whiskers twitched excitedly, knowing that he was forcing supplication upon the Grey Seer by sitting in an elevated position.

There were over a thousand ratmen in the cavern, but no chittering. Silence. All present sniffed the air. Tails went erect or flapped about, betraying the thoughts of their owners. The Grey Seer and Lord of Clan Skurvy stared at each other. The silence continued unabated. The storm-vermarines tightened their grips on their halberds.



**“THIRTEEN
RINGS? YOU-YOU
EXPECT DESERVE
TO HAVE MY
BELL TOLL EQUAL
TO THE GREAT
HORNED RAT?
NO-NO, GREY
SEER VULSCREEK,
I THINK
NOT-NOT.”**

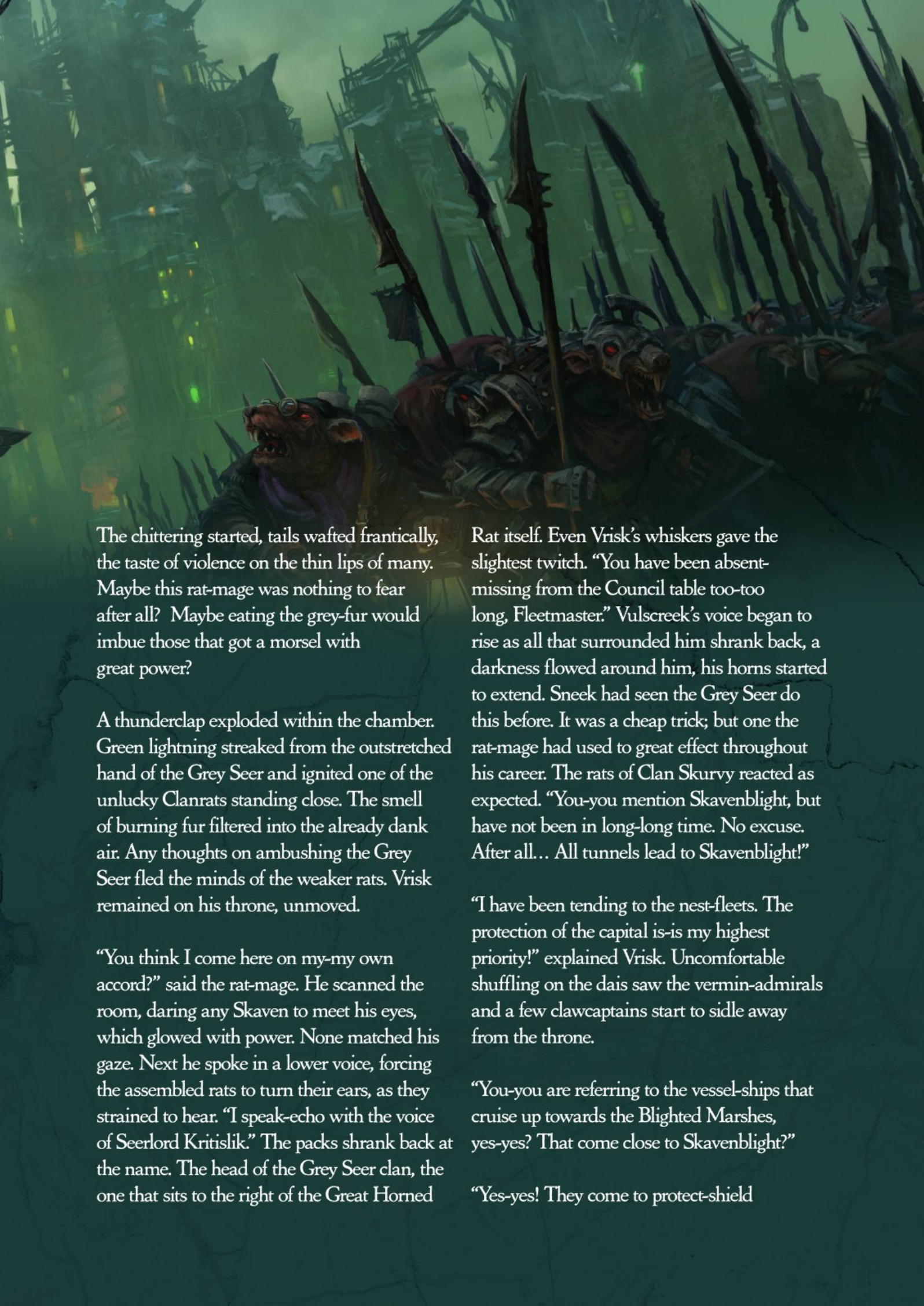
“Seven toll-chimes?” rasped the Grey Seer, breaking the silence. “You announce a Grey Seer, emissary-messenger of the Horned One, enactor of-of the Council, with a mere

seven ring-tolls?”

From behind the Grey Seer, the audience leaned forward, desperate to know how their Clanlord would deal with this accusation. Vrisk rose off the bone-clad throne of Clan Skurvy to his clawed feet, forcing the Grey Seer to look up even further. Vrisk returned the stare with his one good eye, the other being covered in a patch bearing the rune of Skurvy.

“You-you dare decry-belittle an emissary of the Council of Thirteen!” The frisson of nervous energy played across the fur of the assembled Clanrats like warp-power dancing around the condensers of a lightning cannon.

“Vulscreek”, uttered the Fleetmaster, “I am the Council! Do not forget-overlook who sit-squats on the fifth seat in Skavenblight. You-you serve the Lords of Decay — now you stand before one. Disrespect-contempt! Seven tolls!” roared Vrisk. “Seven ring-tolls are all you are worth, yes-yes. Not Thanquol! Not Skrittar! A mere Grey Seer. Important-intimidating to thrall clans, yes-yes, but nothing to Clan Skurvy!” The Fleetmaster sat back down on his throne.



The chittering started, tails wafted frantically, the taste of violence on the thin lips of many. Maybe this rat-mage was nothing to fear after all? Maybe eating the grey-fur would imbue those that got a morsel with great power?

A thunderclap exploded within the chamber. Green lightning streaked from the outstretched hand of the Grey Seer and ignited one of the unlucky Clanrats standing close. The smell of burning fur filtered into the already dank air. Any thoughts on ambushing the Grey Seer fled the minds of the weaker rats. Vrisk remained on his throne, unmoved.

“You think I come here on my-my own accord?” said the rat-mage. He scanned the room, daring any Skaven to meet his eyes, which glowed with power. None matched his gaze. Next he spoke in a lower voice, forcing the assembled rats to turn their ears, as they strained to hear. “I speak-echo with the voice of Seerlord Kritislik.” The packs shrank back at the name. The head of the Grey Seer clan, the one that sits to the right of the Great Horned

Rat itself. Even Vrisk’s whiskers gave the slightest twitch. “You have been absent-missing from the Council table too-too long, Fleetmaster.” Vulscreek’s voice began to rise as all that surrounded him shrank back, a darkness flowed around him, his horns started to extend. Sneek had seen the Grey Seer do this before. It was a cheap trick; but one the rat-mage had used to great effect throughout his career. The rats of Clan Skurvy reacted as expected. “You-you mention Skavenblight, but have not been in long-long time. No excuse. After all... All tunnels lead to Skavenblight!”

“I have been tending to the nest-fleets. The protection of the capital is-is my highest priority!” explained Vrisk. Uncomfortable shuffling on the dais saw the vermin-admirals and a few clawcaptains start to sidle away from the throne.

“You-you are referring to the vessel-ships that cruise up towards the Blighted Marshes, yes-yes? That come close to Skavenblight?”

“Yes-yes! They come to protect-shield

Skavenblight from impending doom. The comet-thing in the sky..." Vuls creek silenced the Fleetmaster with a wave of his staff. "You have missed much-much of latest Council business, Fleetmaster. From another perspective, it looks like Skurvy send fleet to invade, not-not protect?"

"Incorrect-wrong!" said Vrisk. Like any cornered rat, he suddenly sought to attack, to become the aggressor. The Fleetmaster lifted his tail and sprayed a fresh coat of urine over the throne as he spoke. The vermin-admirals' noses twitched as they took in the fresh scent and unsubtle message of dominance. "Careful, Grey Seer. You address the Fleetmaster in his home nest-port. You-you accuse a Lord of Decay. Your life be forfeit-penalty!"

"I do no-no such thing. Make observation-opinion is all. Thinking of your reputation." Vuls creek gave an ungracious smile and proffered a mocking bow. "You have missed many-many conclaves. Ignorant of Council's new scheme. The other twelve demand-request you return to Skavenblight.

The might of Clan Skurvy required."

The Grey Seer's bow, as discourteous as it was, seemed to sate Vrisk. He sat back down on his moist throne. Some of his retinue shuffled back closer to their liege — as furtively as they could. "How can Skurvy serve-aid the Council?" asked Vrisk.

"You are ordered to ferry-take Clan Mors to Southlands. The Council require Warlord Headtaker to enact-execute our-our will in far south." Chittering flooded the chamber. Vrisk rose to his feet once again. "Impossible. No-no! The clan-fleets of Skurvy are not passenger ship-boats! Besides they are unavailable, my-my vessels follow directions of... another."

"Oh? On whose order-instructions? Surely easy to countenance? After all, you-you are a Lord of Decay. And this-this is Council business-demands..." said Vuls creek, in as relaxed way as any Skaven can attain, almost as if he expected this exact response. Vrisk's one eye darted about, his claws opening and closing in an agitated state. Then a thought seemed to strike and he smiled.



“Wasteful-inefficient! Headtaker still in pillar-city? Then much quicker for him to march southwards over land. Go-go through desert, past Dead-things, past Royal-tomb-lurkers and through jungle. Follow Beard-things under-road. No need to deploy clan-fleets, no need for Skurvy involvement, yes-yes?”

The Grey Seer looked thoughtful. A Clanrat came close. One of the The Grey Seer’s Council Guard brought his halberd down and beheaded the creature. No one else moved. The Fleetmaster didn’t even acknowledge it.

“Maybe you-you are right”, said Vulscreek. “This is why you are missed at-at Council meetings, Fleetmaster. Maybe we overlooked a faster-quicker route...” The Grey Seer’s speech petered out, as if waiting for something. The assembled crowd fidgeted, wondering why the Grey Seer had stopped. For the first time in this exchange the Seer’s tail started to waft excitedly. He cleared his harsh throat. “If only we had expert-knowledge close by...” The rat-mage shot a baleful stare towards the gaggle of scribes and mapwrights at the side of dais. Sneek gave a yelp as he jumped out of his reverie. He spluttered, and the scribes around him looked on in abject panic — was this fool about to say something? To interject between two of the most powerful Skaven in the Under-Empire?

“Actually...” he meekly ventured. He was suddenly in a space on his own, as Skaven around the chamber turned their heads and those close by frantically scampered in desperation to not be near him.

“Speak-speak up!” shouted Vulscreek in both rage and relief. From his piss-stained throne, the Fleetmaster turned his head and looked upon Sneek with a single, wrathful eye.

“Actually, the map-scrawls reckon-say that a sea voyage will-will be quicker by no less than three rotation-turns of the Horned Rat’s moon...” The scribe’s glands were so distended with fear musk he was sure he would explode.

“Good-good! Excellent!” chittered the Grey Seer. “Settled then. The clan-fleet will transport Warlord Headtaker to ruins of Yuatek, as ordered by Council.” Vrisk looked at the Grey Seer in palpable rage.



“I SERVE-LOYAL TO THE THIRTEEN”,



He said in a whisper that carried across the whole chamber. Vulscreek nodded. “Then we are done-finished.” He turned but then looked back at the lone, doomed figure of Sneek. “Come scribe-slave. You will inform me-me of best route to chart, yes-yes.” Sneek scampered after the Grey Seer. The rats of Clan Skurvy looked at the scribe with hate and malice as he passed. Sneek daren’t look at the Fleetmaster. He knew if stares could kill — and there were a few Skaven with such powers — then he would be dead already. The Grey Seer, scribe and Council Guard left at a less stately pace than they had entered.

“Quick-fast!” chittered Vulscreek, as they moved into a tunnel beyond the audience chamber. The walk turned into a run. Sneek scampered to Vulscreek’s side. “Merciful master, thank you for saving me-me.” The Grey Seer responded with a vicious flick of his claw to the scribe’s head without breaking step.

attacked. The albino Stormvermin wielded their serrated halberds, making short work of Skurvy’s foot-sloggers, although one managed to get in striking distance of the Grey Seer. Sneek cowered behind his master, even as the rat-mage produced a dagger from under his robes and embedded it into the crew-rat’s face.

“WRONG AS ALWAYS, SERVANT-THRALL. AMBUSH-ATTACK IMMINENT. THE ONLY WAY VRISK CAN STOP ORDERS NOW-NOW IS TO DENY THEY WERE EVER DELIVERED.”

“You are-is a fool. The only reason you still live-breathe is that I have not finished with you. Cost me-me greatly to covertly place you in to Skurvy’s map-scrawler packs. All for that one moment and you-you nearly ruin it!”
“Thirteen-thousand apologies, most masterful of masters.”

“Not enough! I will-will punish you properly when we’re out of this warren.”
“But master-lord, you-you Grey Seer. None would dare-threaten you.”

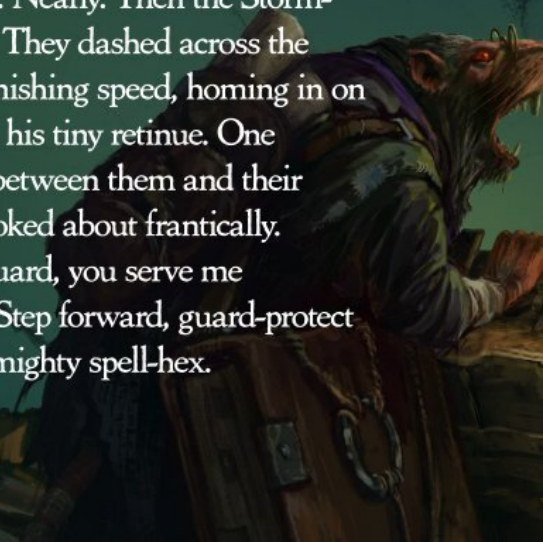
He must kill us-us before we reach Skavenblight! Well, murder-slay me-me. He’ll want to take you-you alive.” Sneek finally sprayed the musk of fear. ****

The rats of Clan Skurvy flooded the chamber. Vulscreek sent scorching green fire roaring down the tunnel, immolating at least thirty and sending the others scampering away. “Come-come!” ordered Vulscreek. The scribe and the pair of Council Guards followed. From above, crew-rats dropped down and

“Do not-not stop.” The small retinue moved on and into a wider chamber.

“Perhaps, a larger-bigger entourage would have been more appropriate?” ventured Sneek. The Grey Seer rounded on him.

“Do not-not doubt my genius!” he hissed. Enemy rats scuttled into the large chamber ahead of them. Vulscreek chittered to himself. Sneek heard words that hurt his ears. The Grey Seer’s chanting grew. “...call for-for a crack!” he spat. The ground heaved. The floor under the Clanrats fell away, and the vermin of Clan Skurvy quickly followed. Thousands fell into the void. Nearly emptying the entire cavern of enemies. Nearly. Then the Stormvermarines came. They dashed across the crevices with astonishing speed, homing in on the Grey Seer and his tiny retinue. One chasm remained between them and their prey. Vulscreek looked about frantically. “Loyal Council Guard, you serve me well-well. Quick! Step forward, guard-protect while I conjure a mighty spell-hex.



You will be invincible. Great rewards shall follow, yes-yes!" The two Council Guards plumped up their chests and leapt towards the advancing Storm-vermarines. Vulscreek turned to the scribe and grabbed him roughly by the arm. Both mage and minion disappeared with a 'bamf!'

Sneek sniffed the tunnel warily. They were in a narrow, roughly-gnawed horizontal shaft and seemed to be alone since their sudden smoke-wreathed appearance. Such was the tunnel's limited space, the Grey Seer had to crouch and struggled to keep his staff upright. A frustration he took out on Sneek by constantly cuffing him. "Halt your nose, scribe-slave! We are-alone. Secret tunnel-passage. All to my-my design."

As they scampered along the cramped tunnel, Sneek knew he was risking further chastisement, but spoke anyway. "Glorious master-sire... I-I have query-question..."

"Should I explain-enlighten how far below your station it is to question me-me?" But instead of issuing a painful admonishment, the Grey Seer's ears flicked forward. Perhaps sensing an opportunity to gloat? "I still need to-to decide your punishment for nearly failing me-me in front of the Fleetmaster. Which clan will you despise-hate being attached to the most, I-I wonder? Pestilens or Mors?" Vulscreek thought for a second, then looked back at Sneek. "Ask your question then, fool-thrall."

"Fleetmaster Vrisk was correct, greatest of mage-lords... it would be faster to have Mors move south on land. Why waste-misuse time on sea?" Vulscreek looked upon his servant with utter contempt.



“Call yourself a scribe? I have known Rat Ogres with more brains-wits. If we not in a rush-hurry I’d have you flay yourself!”

“Very-very sorry, master. You are right-correct. Plan should go ahead.”

“Do not-not presume, wretch! My scheme-plan will force Clan Skurvy and their sponsor-patron to redirect vessel-ships and abandon their ambitions on Skavenblight. It also forces Clan Mors to weaken their hold on the Eight Peaks sending many of-of their hordes south. I please-gain favour with ten Lords of Decay. My status-standing rise higher, yes-yes” gloated Vulsreek.

“Much deserved, master.” Sneek narrowed his eyes and risked a cunning glance. He steeled himself for what he was about to say; the scribe would have been too craven before, but he had just corrected a Lord of Decay — he was a brave rat and knowledge was power!

“It’s a pity my-my master, you do not know who this patron-sponsor of Clan Skurvy is..”

Vulsreek hissed at the scribe in anger.

“I will stretch your tail long-tight for that remark, scribe-slave. Of course, I know who it is..” The Grey Seers anger suddenly turned to a cunning joy. “A long time before Thanquol dare show his whiskers before Council now”, Vulsreek chattered. The pair came to a branch in the passage. Sneek stammered, unsure which way to go. “This way-way.”

The Grey Seer pointed.

“So wise-clever, master. You know all the routes in Under-Empire.” The Grey Seer struck the scribe with his staff.



“YOU REALLY ARE A FOOL. I DO NOT-
NOT, NOR DO I CARE. HAVEN’T YOU
BEEN LISTENING? IT MATTERS NOT
WHICH ROUTE WE TAKE-GO – ALL
TUNNELS LEAD TO SKAVENBLIGHT.”

The End



